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(1872-1963)

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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

John Cowper Powys

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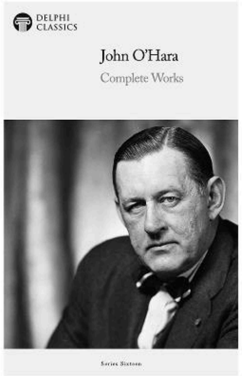
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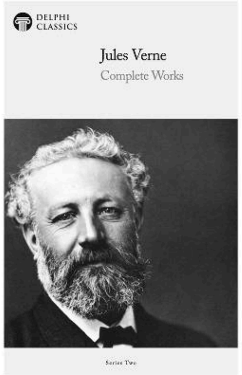
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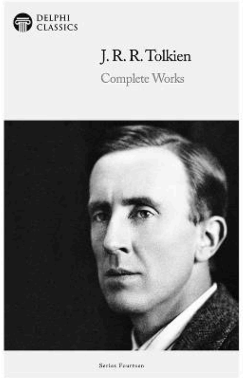
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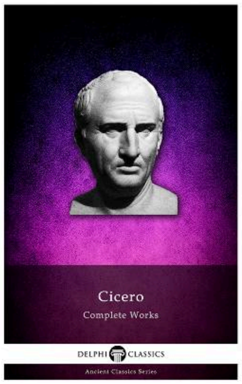
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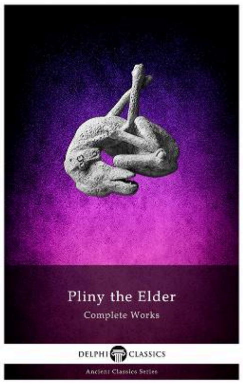
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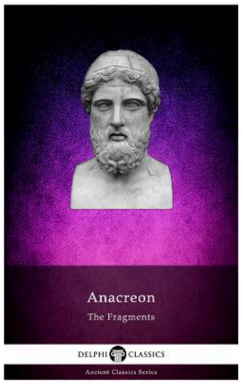
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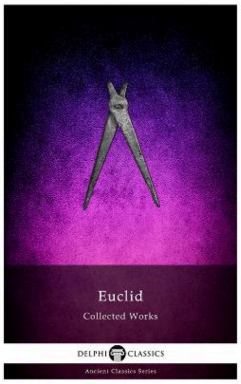
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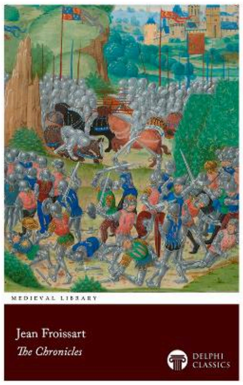
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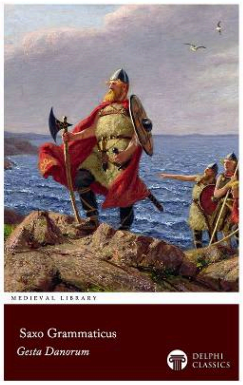
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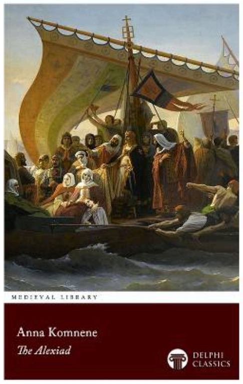
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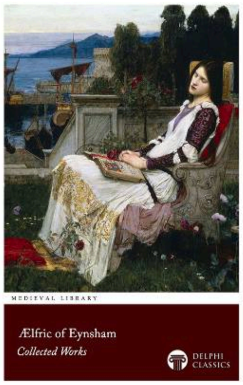
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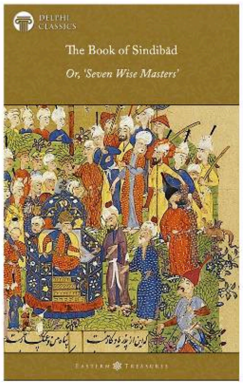
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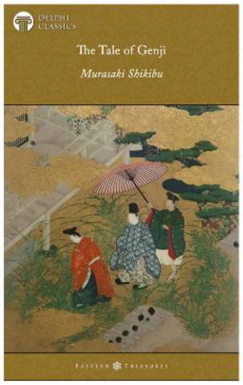
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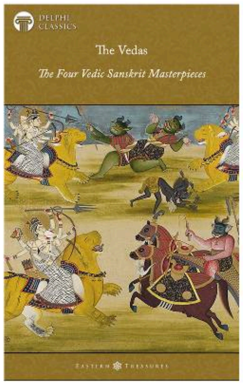
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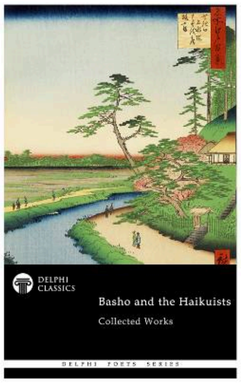
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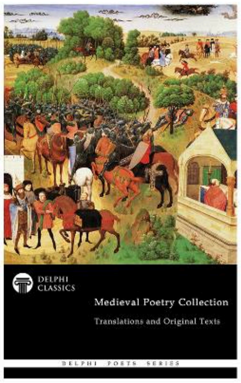
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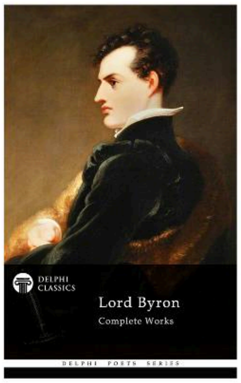
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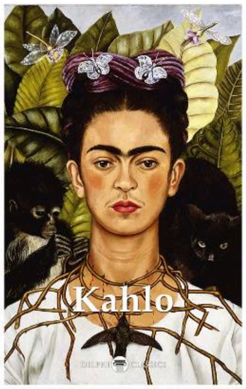
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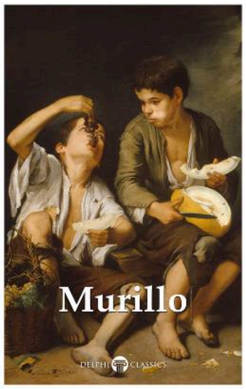
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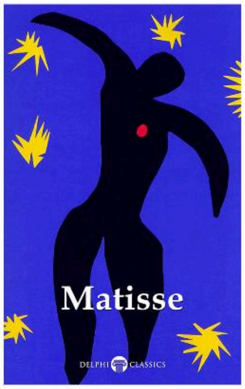
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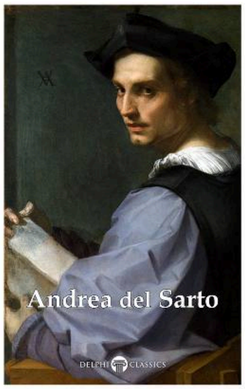
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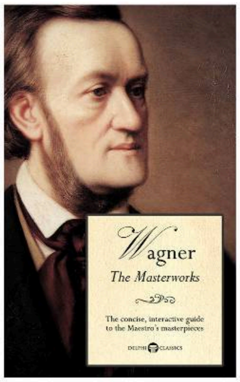
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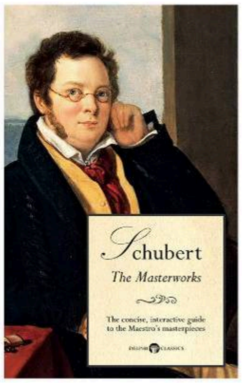
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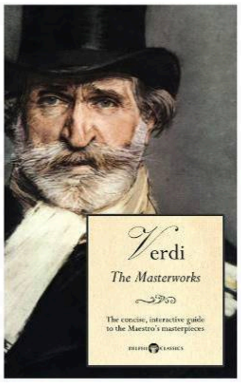
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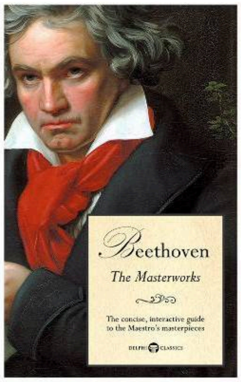
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The Complete Works of

JOHN COWPER POWYS

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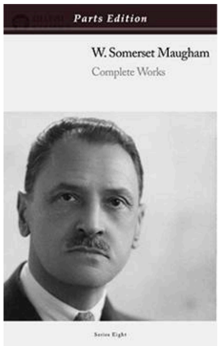
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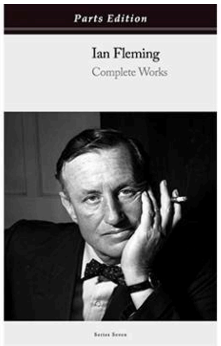
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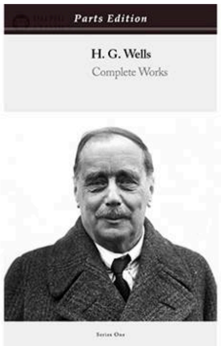
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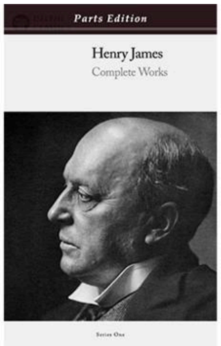
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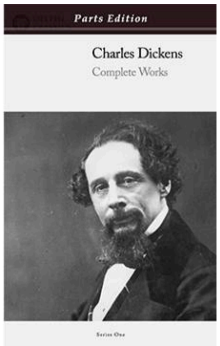
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The Wessex Novels

Hollington
Longford
Ednaston
Ashbourne

Shirley, a small village in Derbyshire — John Cowper Powys' birthplace

St Michael’s Church, Shirley — where the author’s father, Rev. Charles Francis Powys, served as vicar

Wolf Solent (1929)

Wolf Solent was first published in New York by Simon and Schuster in the spring of 1929, followed by a British edition released two months later by Jonathan Cape. It was the author's fourth published novel and his first commercial success as a writer. It sold well in America and Britain and was translated into multiple European languages in the early 1930's. Powys began writing the novel at the start of 1925 while working as a lecturer in America. He had commenced his long teaching career in the mid-1890's at a girls' school in Hove, Sussex before being appointed a lecturer for Oxford University Extension at the turn of the century. In 1905, he moved to America, where he would remain for more than twenty-five years.

The first of Powys' 'Wessex Novels', *Wolf Solent* forms part of a series of books inspired by the changing culture and landscape of rural southwest England in the twentieth century. The novel centres on the eponymous Wolf Solent, a thirty-five-year-old teacher in London, who at the start of the narrative returns to the small fictional town of Ramsgard in Dorset, having suffered a nervous breakdown. He is despondent about modern life and hopes to find solace and refuge in an environment that will shield him from the complexities of human society. However, his inner struggles only intensify as circumstances violently encroach on his personal 'mythology' and attempts to escape the realities of the external world.

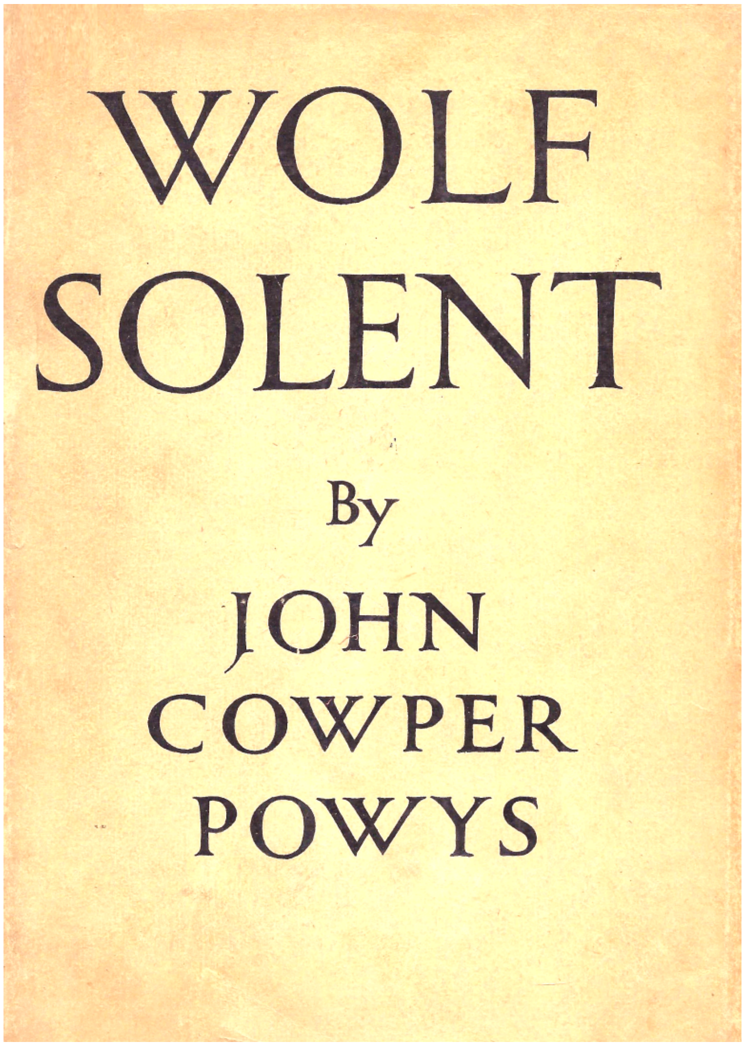
WOLF
SOLENT
By
JOHN
COWPER
POWYS

The first edition

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Sherborne. Cheap Street.
DURRANT

Sherborne, a market town in north west Dorset, c. 1900 — the model for the fictional town of Ramsgard

VOLUME I.

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

TO

FATHER HAMILTON COWPER JOHNSON

THE FACE ON THE WATERLOO STEPS

FROM WATERLOO STATION to the small country town of Ramsgard in Dorset is a journey of not more than three or four hours, but having by good luck found a compartment to himself, Wolf Solent was able to indulge in such an orgy of concentrated thought, that these three or four hours lengthened themselves out into something beyond all human measurement.

A bluebottle fly buzzed up and down above his head, every now and then settling on one of the coloured advertisements of seaside resorts — Weymouth, Swanage, Lulworth, and Poole — cleaning its front legs upon the masts of painted ships or upon the sands of impossibly cerulean waters.

Through the open window near which he sat, facing the engine, the sweet airs of an unusually relaxed March morning visited his nostrils, carrying fragrances of young green shoots, of wet muddy ditches, of hazel-copses full of damp moss, and of primroses on warm grassy hedge-banks.

Solent was not an ill-favoured man; but on the other hand he was not a prepossessing one. His short stubbly hair was of a bleached tow-colour. His forehead as well as his rather shapeless chin had a tendency to slope backward, a peculiarity which had the effect of throwing the weight of his character upon the curve of his hooked nose and upon the rough, thick eyebrows that overarched his deeply sunken grey eyes.

He was tall and lean; and as he stretched out his legs and clasped his hands in front of him and bowed his head over his bony wrists, it would have been difficult to tell whether the goblinish grimaces that occasionally wrinkled his physiognomy were fits of sardonic chuckling or spasms of reckless desperation.

His mood, whatever its elements may have been, was obviously connected with a crumpled letter which he more than once drew forth from his side-pocket, rapidly glanced over, and replaced, only to relapse into the same pose as before.

The letter which thus affected him was written in a meticulously small hand and ran as follows:

My Dear Sir: —

Will you be so kind as to arrive at Ramsgard on Thursday in time to meet my friend Mr. Darnley Otter about five o'clock in the tea-room of the Lovelace Hotel? He will be driving over to King's Barton that afternoon and will convey you to his mother's house, where for the present you will have your room. If it is convenient I would regard it as a favour if you will come up and dine with me on the night of your arrival. I dine at eight o'clock; and we shall be able to talk things over.

I must again express my pleasure at your so prompt acceptance of my poor offer.

Yours faithfully,

John Urquhart.

He re-invoked the extraordinary incident which had led to his "prompt acceptance" of Mr. Urquhart's "poor offer."

He was now thirty-five and for ten years he had laboriously taught History at a small institution in the city of London, living peacefully under the despotic affection of his mother, with whom, when he was only a child of ten, he had left Dorsetshire, and along with Dorsetshire all the agitating memories of his dead father.

As it happened, his new post, as literary assistant to the Squire of King's Barton, brought him to the very scene of these disturbing memories; for it was from a respectable position as History Master in Ramsgard School that his father had descended, by a series of mysterious headlong plunges, until he lay dead in the cemetery of that town, a byword of scandalous depravity.

It was only the fact that the Squire of King's Barton was a relative of Lord Carfax, a cousin of Wolf's mother, that had made it possible for him to find a retreat, suitable to his not very comprehensive abilities, after the astounding *dénouement* of his London life.

He could visualize now, as if it had occurred that very day instead of two months ago, the outraged anger upon his mother's face, when he communicated to her what had happened. He had danced his "malice-dance" — that is how he himself expressed it — in the middle of an innocent discourse on the reign of Queen Anne. He was telling his pupils quite quietly about Dean Swift; and all of a sudden some mental screen or lid or dam in his own mind completely collapsed and he found himself pouring forth a torrent of wild, indecent invectives upon every aspect of modern civilization.

He had, in fact, so at least he told his mother, danced his "malice-dance" on that quiet platform to so abandoned a tune, that no "authorities," in so far as they retained their natural instincts at all, could possibly condone it.

And now, with that event behind him, he was escaping from the weight of maternal disapproval into the very region where the grand disaster of his mother's life had occurred.

They had had some very turbulent scenes after the receipt of Mr. Urquhart's first answer to his appeal. But as she had no income and only very limited savings, the sheer weight of economic necessity drove her into submission.

"You shall come down to me there when I've got a cottage," he had flung out; and her agitated, handsome face, beneath its disordered mass of wavy, grey hair, had hardened itself under the impact of those words, as if he had taken up her most precious tea-set and dashed it into fragments at her feet.

One of the suppressed emotions that had burst forth on that January afternoon had had to do with the appalling misery of so many of his fellow Londoners. He recalled the figure of a man he had seen on the steps outside Waterloo Station. The inert despair upon the face that this figure had turned towards him came between him now and a hillside covered with budding beeches. The face was repeated many times among those great curving masses of emerald-clear foliage. It was an English face; and it was also a Chinese face, a Russian face, an Indian face. It had the variableness of that Protean wine of the priestess Bacbuc. It was just the face of a man, of a mortal man against whom Providence had grown as malignant as a mad dog. And the woe upon the face was of such a character that Wolf knew at once that no conceivable social readjustments or ameliorative revolutions could ever atone for it — could ever make up for the simple irremediable fact that it *had* been as it had been!

By the time the hill of beeches had disappeared, he caught sight of a powerful motor-lorry clanging its way along a narrow road, leaving a cloud of dust behind it, and the sight of this thing gave his thought a new direction. There arose before him, complicated and inhuman, like a moving tower of instruments and appliances, the monstrous Apparition of Modern Invention.

He felt as though, with aeroplanes spying down upon every retreat like ubiquitous vultures, with the lanes invaded by iron-clad motors like colossal beetles, with no sea, no lake, no river, free from throbbing, thudding engines, the one thing most precious of all in the world was being steadily assassinated.

In the dusty, sunlit space of that small tobacco-stained carriage, he seemed to see, floating and helpless, an image of the whole round earth! And he saw it bleeding and victimized, like a smooth-bellied, vivisected frog. He saw it scooped and gouged and scraped and harrowed. He saw it hawked at out of the humming air. He saw it netted in a quivering entanglement of vibrations, heaving and shuddering under the weight of iron and stone.

Where, he asked himself, as for the twentieth time he took out and put back Mr. Urquhart's letter — where, in such a vivisected frog's-belly of a world, would there be a place left for a person to think any single thought that was leisurely and easy? And, as he asked himself this and mentally formed a visual image of what he considered "thought," such "thought" took the form of slowly stirring, vegetable leaves, big as elephants' feet, hanging from succulent and cold stalks on the edges of woodland swamps.

And then, stretching out his legs still further and leaning back against the dusty cushions, he set himself to measure the resources of his spirit against these accursed mechanisms. He did this quite gravely, with no comic uneasiness at the arrogance of such a proceeding. Why should he not pit his individual magnetic strength against the tyrannous machinery invented by other men?

In fact, the thrill of malicious exultation that passed through his nerves as he thought of these things had a curious resemblance to the strange ecstasy he used to derive from certain godlike mythological legends. He would never have confessed to any living person the intoxicating enlargement of personality that used to come to him from imagining himself a sort of demiurgic force, drawing its power from the heart of Nature herself.

And it was just that sort of enlargement he experienced now, when he felt the mysterious depths of his soul stirred and excited by his defiance of these modern inventions. It was not as though he fell back on any traditional archaic obstinacy. What he fell back upon was a crafty, elusive cunning of his own, a cunning both slippery and serpentine, a cunning that could flow like air, sink like rain-water, rise like green sap, root itself like invisible spores of moss, float like filmy pond-scum, yield and retreat, retreat and yield, yet remain unconquered and inviolable!

As he stared out the open window and watched each span of telegraph-wires sink slowly down till the next telegraph-post pulled them upward with a jerk, he indulged himself in a sensation which always gave him a peculiar pleasure, the sensation of imagining himself to be a prehistoric giant who with an effortless ease ran along by the side of the train, leaping over hedges, ditches, lanes, and ponds, and easily rivalled, in natural-born silent speed, the noisy mechanism of all those pistons and cog-wheels!

He felt himself watching this other-self, this leaping giant, with the positive satisfaction of a hooded snake, thrusting out a flickering forked tongue from coils that shimmered in the sun. And yet as the train rushed forward, it seemed to him as if his real self were neither giant nor snake; but rather that black-budded ash-tree, still in the rearward of its leafy companions, whose hushed grey branches threw so contorted a shadow upon the railway bank.

Soon the train that carried him ran rapidly past the queer-looking tower of Basingstoke church, and his thoughts took yet another turn. There was a tethered cow eating grass in the churchyard; and as for the space of a quarter of a minute he watched this cow, it gathered to itself such an inviolable placidity that its feet seemed planted in a green pool of quietness that was older than life itself.

But the Basingstoke church-tower substituted itself for the image of the cow; and it seemed to Solent as though all the religions in the world were nothing but so many creaking and splashing barges, whereon the souls of men ferried themselves over those lakes of primal silence, disturbing the swaying water-plants that grew there and driving away the shy water-fowl!

He told himself that every church-tower in the land overlooked a graveyard, and that in every graveyard was a vast empty grave waiting for the "Jealous Father of Men" who lived in the church. He knew there was just such a church-tower at King's Barton, and another one at Ramsgard, and yet another at Blacksod, the town on the further side of Mr. Urquhart's village.

He sat very upright now, as the train approached Andover; and the idea came into his head, as he fixed his gaze on his fellow traveller, the bluebottle fly, who was cleaning his front legs on a picture of Swanage pier, that from tower to tower of these West Country churches there might be sent, one gusty November night, a long-drawn melancholy cry, a cry heard only by dogs and horses and geese and cattle and village-idiots, the real death-cry of a god — dead at last of extreme old age!

"Christ is different from God," he said to himself. "Only when God is really dead will Christ be known for what He is. Christ will take the place of God then."

As a sort of deliberate retort to these wild fancies, the tall spire of Salisbury Cathedral rose suddenly before him. Here the train stopped; and though even here — possibly because his absorption in his thoughts gave him a morose and uncongenial appearance — no one entered his third-class carriage, the stream of his cogitations began to grow less turbid, less violent, less destructive. The austerity of Salisbury Plain yielded now to the glamour of Blackmore Vale. Dairy-farms took the place of sheep-farms; lush pastures, of bare chalk-downs; enclosed orchards, of open cornfields; and park-like moss-grown oaks, of wind-swept naked thorn-bushes.

The green, heavily-grassed meadows through which the train moved now, the slow, brown, alder-shaded streams, the tall hedgerows, the pollarded elms — all these things made Solent realize how completely he had passed from the sphere of his mother's energetic ambitions into the more relaxed world, rich and soft and vaporous as the airs that hung over those mossy ditches, that had been the native land of the man in the Ramsgard cemetery.

His mother's grievances, posthumous and belated, but full of an undying vigour, had never really made him hate his father; and somehow the outburst that had ended his scholastic career had released certain latent instincts in him which now turned, with a fling of rebellious satisfaction, to the wavering image of his sinister begetter.

Children, he knew, were often completely different from both their progenitors, but Wolf had a shrewd suspicion that there was very little in him that did not revert, on one side or the other, to his two parents. He was now thirty-five, a grim, harassed-looking, clean-shaven man, with sunken eye-sockets; but he felt his heart beating with keen excitement, as, after an absence of a quarter of a century, he returned to his native pastures.

What would he find in that house of "Darnley Otter's mother?" Who was this Darnley Otter? What had he to do with Mr. Urquhart? And what would Mr. Urquhart reveal that evening as to the form his own services were to take?

As the train drew up at Semley, he read the words, "For Shaftesbury," upon the notice-board; and very soon the high grassy battlements of the great heathen fortress loomed against the sky-line.

Staring at those turf-covered bastions, and drawing into his lungs lovely breathings from damp moss and cold primroses — breathings that seemed to float up and down that valley on airy journeys of their own — he found himself gathering his mental resources together so as to face with a concentrated spirit whatever awaited him in these pleasant places.... "Christ is not a man; He never *was* a man," he thought. "And He will be more than a god when God is dead.... Three church-towers... three. Ramsgard... King's Barton... Blacksod... it's quaint to think that I've absolutely no idea what I shall be feeling when I touch with my hand the masonry of those three towers... or what people I shall know! I hope I shall find some girl who'll let me make love to her... tall and slim and white! I'd like her to be *very* white... with a tiny little mole, like Imogen's, upon her left breast.... I'd like to make love to her out-of-doors... among elder-bushes... among elder-bushes and herb-Robert...."

He pulled in his legs and clasped his hands over his knees, leaning forward, frowning and intent. "I don't care whether I make money. I don't care whether I get fame. I don't care whether I leave any work behind me when I die. All I want is certain sensations!" And with all the power of his wits he set himself to try and analyze what these sensations were that he wanted beyond everything.

The first thing he did was to attempt to analyze a mental device he was in the habit of resorting to — a device that supplied him with the secret substratum of his whole life. This was a certain trick he had of doing what he called "sinking into his soul." This trick had been a furtive custom with him from very early days. In his childhood his mother had often rallied him about it in her light-hearted way, and had applied to these trances, or these fits of absent-mindedness, an amusing but rather indecent nursery name. His father, on the other hand, had encouraged him in these moods — taking them very gravely, and treating him, when under their spell, as if he were a sort of infant magician.

It was, however, when staying in his grandmother’s house at Weymouth, that the word had come to him which he now always used in his own mind to describe these obsessions. It was the word “mythology”; and he used it entirely in a private sense of his own. He could remember very well where he first came upon the word. It was in a curious room, called “the ante-room,” which was connected by folding-doors with his grandmother’s drawing-room, and which was filled with the sort of ornamental débris that middle-class people were in the habit of acquiring in the early years of Queen Victoria. The window of his grandmother’s room opened upon the sea; and Wolf, carrying the word “mythology” into this bow-window, allowed it to become his own secret name for his own secret habit.

This “sinking into his soul” — this sensation which he called “mythology” — consisted of a certain summoning-up, to the surface of his mind, of a subconscious magnetic power which from those very early Weymouth days, as he watched the glitter of sun and moon upon the waters from that bow-window, had seemed prepared to answer such a summons.

This secret practice was always accompanied by an arrogant mental idea — the idea, namely, that he was taking part in some occult cosmic struggle — some struggle between what he liked to think of as “good” and what he liked to think of as “evil” in those remote depths.

How it came about that the mere indulgence in a sensation that was as thrilling as a secret vice should have the power of rousing so bold an arrogance. Wolf himself was never able to explain; for his “mythology,” as he called it, had no outlet in any sort of action. It was limited entirely to a secret sensation in his own mind, such as he would have been hard put to it to explain in intelligible words to any living person.

But such as it was, his profoundest personal pride — what might be called his dominant *life-illusion* — depended entirely upon it.

Not only had he no ambition for action; he had no ambition for any sort of literary or intellectual achievement. He hid, deep down in his being, a contempt that was actually *malicious* in its pride for all the human phenomena of worldly success. It was as if he had been some changeling from a different planet, a planet where the issues of life — the great dualistic struggles between life and death — never emerged from the charmed circle of the individual's private consciousness.

Wolf himself, if pressed to describe it, would have used some simple earthly metaphor. He would have said that his magnetic impulses resembled the expanding of great vegetable leaves over a still pool — leaves nourished by hushed noons, by liquid transparent nights, by all the movements of the elements — but making some inexplicable difference, merely by their spontaneous expansion, to the great hidden struggle always going on in Nature between the good and the evil forces.

Outward things, such as that terrible face on the Waterloo steps or that tethered cow he had seen at Basingstoke, were to him like faintly limned images in a mirror, the true reality of which lay all the while in his mind — in these hushed expanding leaves — in this secret vegetation — the roots of whose being hid themselves beneath the dark waters of his consciousness.

What he experienced now was a vague wonder as to whether the events that awaited him — these new scenes — these unknown people — would be able to do what no outward events had yet done — break up this mirror of half-reality and drop great stones of real reality — drop them and lodge them — hard, brutal, material stones — down there among those dark waters and that mental foliage.

"Perhaps I've never known reality as other human beings know it," he thought. "My life has been industrious, monotonous, patient. I've carried my load like a camel. And I’ve been able to do this because it hasn’t been my real life at all! My ‘mythology’ has been my real life.”

The bluebottle fly moved slowly and cautiously across Weymouth Bay, apparently seeking some invisible atom of sustenance, seeking it now off Redcliff, now off Ringstead, now off White Nore.

A sudden nervousness came upon him and he shivered a little. “What if this new reality, when it does come, smashes up my whole secret life? But perhaps it won’t be like a rock or stone... perhaps it won’t be like a tank or lorry or an aeroplane...”

He clasped his bony fingers tightly together. “Some girl who’ll let me make love to her... ‘white as a peeled willow-wand’... make love to her in the middle of a hazel wood... green moss... primroses... moschatel... whiteness....” He unclasped his fingers; and then clasped them again, this time with the left hand above the right hand.

It was nearly twelve o’clock when the train drew up at Longborne Port, a village which he knew was the last stop before he reached Ramsgard.

He rose from his seat and took down his things from the rack, causing, as he did so, so much agitation to his only travelling-companion, the bluebottle fly, that it escaped with an indignant humming through the window into the unfamiliar air-fields of Dorsetshire.

A young, lanky, bareheaded porter, with a countenance of whimsical inanity, bawled out at the top of his voice, as he rattled his milk-cans: “Longborne Port! Longborne Port!”

Nobody issued from the train. Nothing was put out of the train except empty milk-cans. The young man’s voice, harsh as a corncrake’s, seemed unable to disturb the impenetrable security which hung, like yellow pollen upon a drooping catkin, over those ancient orchards and muddy lanes.

And there suddenly broke in upon the traveller, as he resumed his seat, with his coat and stick and bag spread out before him, the thought of how those particular syllables— “Longborne Port!” — mingling with the clatter of milk-cans, would reproduce to some long-dead human skull, roused to sudden consciousness after centuries of non-existence, the very essence of the familiar life upon earth!

What dark November twilights, what drowsy August noons, what squirtings of white milk into shining pails, would those homely syllables summon forth!

He lay back, breathing rather quickly, as the train moved out of that small station. For the last time he took from his pocket Mr. Urquhart’s letter. “Darnley Otter!” he said to himself. “It’s odd to think how little that name means now, and how much it may mean tomorrow!” Why was it that, when the future was very likely all there already, stretched out like the great Wessex Fosse-way in front of him, he didn’t get some sort of second-sight about it by merely reading those words in Mr. Urquhart’s neat hand? What kind of man was Darnley Otter? Was he a plain, middle-aged man like himself or was he a beautiful youth? The idea of beautiful youths made his mind once more revert to “peeled willow-wands,” but he easily suppressed this thought in the excitement of the moment.

Ay! There were the ruins of the great Elizabethan’s castle. And *there* was the wide grassy expanse where the town held its Annual Agricultural Show, and where the Ramsgard schoolboys were wont in old days to run their Steeplechase!

How it all came back! Twenty-five years it was, since he left it, frightened and bewildered by his parents’ separation; and how little it had changed!

He let his gaze wander over the high tops of the park beech-trees till it lost itself in the blue sky.

Millions of miles of blue sky; and beyond that, millions of miles of sky that could scarcely be called blue or any other colour — pure unalloyed emptiness, stretching outwards from where he sat — with his stick and coat opposite him — to no conceivable boundary or end! Didn't that almost prove that the whole affair was a matter of thought?

Suppose he were now, at this moment, some Ramsgard boy returning to school? Suppose he were Solent Major instead of Wolf Solent? And suppose some genial house-master, meeting him on the platform, were to say to him: "Well, Solent, and what have *you* made of your twenty-five years' holiday?" What would he answer to that?

As the train began to lessen its pace by the muddy banks of the river Lunt, he hurriedly, and as if from fear of that imaginary master, formulated his reply.

"I've learnt, Sir, to get my happiness out of sensation. I've learnt, Sir, when to think and when not to think. I've learnt..."

But at this point his excitement at catching sight of the familiar shape of the Lovelace Hotel, across the Public Gardens, was so overwhelming, that the imaginary catechism came to an end in mid-air.

"I shall send my things over in the bus," he thought, standing up and grasping his bag. "And then I shall go and see if Selena Gault is still alive!"

“CHRIST! I’VE HAD A HAPPY LIFE!”

HIS EXCITEMENT GREW rather than diminished as he got out of the train.

He gave up his ticket to an elderly station-master, whose air, at once fussily inquisitive and mildly deferential, suggested the manner of a cathedral verger. He watched his luggage being deposited on the Lovelace Bus; and there came over him a vague recollection of some incident of those early years, wherein his mother, standing by that same shabby vehicle, or one exactly resembling it, with a look of contemptuous derision on her formidable face, said something hard and ironical to him which lashed his self-love like a whip.

Opposite the station were the railed-in Public Gardens. These also brought to his mind certain isolated trivial occurrences of his childish days; and it struck him, even in his excitement, just then as being strange that what he remembered were things that had hurt his feelings rather than things that had thrilled him.

In place of following the bus round the west of the Gardens, where the road led to the Hotel, and then on past the police-station to the Abbey, he turned to the east and made his way across a small river-bridge. Here, again, the look of a certain old wall against the water, and certain patches of arrow-head leaves within the water, stirred his memory with a sudden unexpected agitation.

It was over this very bridge that twenty-five years ago he had leaned with his father while William Solent showed him the difference between loach and gudgeon, and in a funny, rambling, querulous voice deplored the number of castaway tins that lay in the muddy stream.

But Wolf did not lean over the bridge this time. He heard the Abbey clock striking one, and he hurried on up Saint Aldhelm’s Street. Newly-budded plane-trees cast curious little shadows, like deformed butterflies, upon the yellowish paving-stones; and over the top of an uneven wall at his side protruded occasional branch-ends of pear-blossom.

He came at last to a green door in the wall.

“Is it possible,” he wondered uneasily, “that Selena Gault lives here still?”

He allowed a baker’s cart to rattle negligently past him while he made two separate hesitating movements of his hand towards the handle of the green door.

It was queer that he should have had an instinct to look sharply both up and down the street before he brought himself to turn that handle. It was almost as though he felt himself to be a hunted criminal, taking refuge with Selena Gault! But the street was quite deserted now, and with a quick movement he boldly opened the gate and entered the garden.

A narrow stone path led up to the door of the house, which resembled a doll’s house, brilliantly painted with blues and greens. Blue and white hyacinths grew in masses on either side of the path; and their scent, caught and suspended in that enclosed space, had a fainting, ecstatic voluptuousness which was at variance with the prim neatness around them. A diminutive servant, very old but very alert, with the nervous outward-staring eyes of a yellow-hammer, opened the door to him, and without demur ushered him into the drawing-room.

He gave his name and waited. Almost immediately the little servant came back and begged him to take a chair and make himself comfortable. Miss Gault would see him in a few minutes. Those few minutes lengthened themselves into a quarter of an hour, and he had time to meditate on all the possibilities of this strange encounter. Miss Gault was the daughter of the late Headmaster of Ramsgard; and Wolf had heard his mother for twenty-five years utter airy sarcasms at her expense. It appeared she had had some tender relation with his father; had even attended William Solent's death-bed in the workhouse and seen him buried in the cemetery.

Wolf sat on Miss Gault's sofa and set himself to wonder what this rival of his mother's would look like when she entered the room. The servant had not quite closed the door; and when fifteen minutes had elapsed, it opened silently; and Wolf, rising quickly to greet his hostess, found himself confronted by three cats, who walked gravely and gingerly, one after another, into the centre of the apartment. He made some awkward gesture of welcome to these animals, who resembled one another in shape, size, breed, and temperament — in everything except colour, being respectively white, black, and grey; but instead of responding to his advances they each leapt into a separate chair, coiled themselves up, and surveyed, with half-closed languid eyes, the door through which they had entered. He felt as if he were in the house of the Marquis of Carabas and that the three cats were three Lord Chamberlains.

He sank back upon the sofa and stared morosely at each cat in turn. He decided that he liked the black one best and the grey one least. He decided that the white one was its mistress's favourite.

He was occupied in this harmless manner when Selena Gault herself came in. He rose and advanced towards her with outstretched hand. But it was impossible for him to eliminate from his expression the shock that her appearance gave him; and it did not lessen his surprise when she received his gesture with a formal bow and a stiff rejection of his hand.

She was a tall, bony woman, with a face so strikingly ugly that it was impossible to avoid an immediate consciousness of its ugliness; and it was borne in upon him, as their conversation proceeded, that if only he *had* been able to contemplate her countenance with unconcern, she would have enjoyed one of the happiest moments of her life.

She made a sign for him to resume his seat; but as she herself stood erect in front of the fire, which in spite of the warmth of the day still burned on the hearth, he preferred to remain on his feet. Like a flash he thought to himself, “Can my father have actually embraced this extraordinary person?” And then he thought to himself: “The poor woman! Why, she can’t be able to meet a single stranger anywhere without giving them a shock like this.” But he had already begun speaking quietly and naturally to her, even while he was thinking these things.

“I knew you would know who I was,” he said gently. “I’ve just been invited down here. I’m going to do some work — I can’t tell you quite what it is — out at King’s Barton. I’m going to drive over there this afternoon; but I thought I would come and see you first.”

While she listened to him, he noticed that she kept pulling her white woollen shawl tighter and tighter round her black silk dress. The effect of this was to give her the appearance of someone caught unawares in some sort of fancy costume — some costume that rendered her ashamed and even ridiculous.

“And so I just came straight in,” he went on, beginning to feel a very odd sensation, a sensation as if he were addressing someone who was listening all the time in a kind of panic to a third person’s voice— “straight in through your little green door and between those hyacinths.”

She still made no observation and he noticed that one marked quality of her ugliness was the dusky sallowness of her cheeks combined with the ghastly pallor of her upper lip, which projected from her face very much as certain funguses project from the brown bark of a dead tree.

"I've decided that your favourite cat is the white one," he brought out after an uncomfortable pause.

She did relax at this, and, moving to the chair occupied by the grey cat, took up the animal in her arms and sat down, holding it on her lap.

"You're wrong, wrong, wrong!" she whispered hoarsely. "Isn't he wrong, Matthew?"

The cat took not the least notice of this remark or of the fingers that caressed him; but it did impinge upon the consciousness of Miss Gault's visitor that this singular woman's hands were of a surprising beauty.

"What are the names of the others?" Solent enquired.

"The black one is Mark," replied the lady.

"And the white one Luke?" he hazarded.

She nodded; and then, quite suddenly, with an effort as though a gust of wind had swept aside a mass of dead leaves, uncovering the fresh verdure below, her whole face relaxed into a smile of disarming sweetness.

"I've never had a John," she said. "And I never will."

Wolf Solent was quick enough to take advantage of this change of mood. He moved across to her, bent down over her chair, and scratched Matthew's head. "I thought I'd like to go over and see where the grave is." His words were low-pitched but without any emotional stress. His intonation could hardly have been different if he had said, "I think I'll go to the Abbey presently."

Selena Gault gave a deep sigh, but it seemed to Solent like a sigh of relief rather than sadness.

"Quite right, quite proper," he heard her murmur, with her head held low and her hands occupied in smoothing out the shawl beneath the body of the somnolent cat.

"The best thing you could do," she added.

Since she said nothing more and persisted in keeping her head lowered — a position which accentuated the enormity of her upper lip and the dark sallowness of her face — Wolf began to feel as if he were an impertinent intruder stroking the pet animal of some proud, secretive being whose peculiarity it was to prefer beasts to men.

He straightened himself and squared his shoulders with a sigh. Then he moved across to the sofa and laid his hand on his hat and stick, which he was rather surprised to notice he had brought with him into the room.

“I suppose,” he said, as he turned round with these objects in the hand, “there’ll be someone out there at the cemetery, some gardener or caretaker, who’ll know where the grave is? I shouldn’t like to get out there and not be able to find it. But I don’t want to let this day pass without trying to find it.”

Selena Gault tossed the grey cat from her lap and rose to her feet.

“I’ll come with you,” she said.

She uttered the words quite quietly, but he noticed that she avoided looking him in the face.

She stood for a time staring out of the window, motionless and abstracted.

“If it would be a bother to you — —” he began.

But she suddenly turned her distorted countenance full upon him.

“Sit down, boy,” she rapped out. “Do you think I’d let you go there alone, if there were fifty gardeners?”

She stared at him for a second after this with a look that seemed to turn his bodily presence into the frame of a doorway through which she gazed into the remote past.

“Sit down, sit down,” she said more gently. “I’ll be ready soon.”

The door had not closed behind her for many minutes when the elderly servant entered, carrying a silver tray, upon which was a plate of Huntley and Palmer’s oaten biscuits and a decanter of sherry. Wolf had poured himself out as many as three glasses of this excellent wine and had swallowed nearly all the biscuits before Miss Gault returned. She found him stroking Mark, the black cat.

Her appearance in hat and cloak was just as peculiar as before, but more distinguished; and Wolf soon found out, when presently they passed the front of the Abbey, where several townspeople greeted her, that the power of her personality was fully appreciated in Ramsgard.

Their way to the cemetery took them straight past the workhouse. This building was on the further side of the road; but Solent was unable to restrain an impulse to turn his head towards it. The edifice was rather less gloomy than such erections usually are, owing to the fact that some indulgent authority had permitted its façade to be overgrown with Virginia creeper.

He found himself reducing his pace so that he might familiarize himself with every aspect of that heavy, sombre building behind iron gates. As he lingered he became suddenly aware that his companion had slipped her gloved hand upon his arm. This natural gesture, instead of pleasing him or rousing his sympathy, made him feel curiously irritable. He quickened his pace; and her hand fell away so quickly that he might easily have supposed that light pressure to have been a pure accident.

They walked side by side now, with such swinging steps that it was not long before they were beyond the houses and out into what was almost open country. It annoyed him that she remained so silent. Did she suppose he had come to see his father’s grave in a vein of sentimental commiseration?

“What’s *that*?” he exclaimed, pointing to a ramshackle group of sheds that seemed fenced off from the road with some unnatural and sinister precaution.

Selena Gault's reply made his touchiness seem captious and misplaced.

"Can't you see what that is, boy? It's the slaughter-house! You've only to take the shadiest, quietest road to find 'em in any town!"

They were soon skirting the edge of the neat oak palings that ran along the leafy purlieus of Ramsgard Cemetery.

"I let them bury him at the pauper's end," she remarked gravely. "It's nearer. It's quieter. It's hardly ever disturbed. This is the way I generally go in." With a sly, quick glance up and down the road, a glance that gave an emphasis to the whites of her eyes such as made her companion think of a crafty dray-horse edging into a field of clover, Miss Gault stooped down and propelled herself under a rough obstruction that blocked a gap in the oak palings.

Solent followed her, confused, a little surly, but no longer hostile.

She did not wait for him, but made her way with long, rapid strides to the extreme corner of the enclosure. Her swinging arms, her gaunt figure, her erratic gait, set the man's mind thinking once more of various non-human animals.

He came up to her just as she reached her goal. "William Solent," he read, on the upright slab of sandstone; and then, under the date of birth and death, the words, "*Mors est mihi vita*."

Wolf had no difficulty in recognizing the particular hyacinths that stood in an earthenware pot. "She must have come here for twenty-five years!" he thought, with a gasp of astonishment; and he gave her a hurried, furtive, prying look from under his bushy eyebrows.

She certainly did nothing on this occasion to cause him any discomfort. She just muttered in quite a conventional tone, "I never like to see plantains in the grass"; and bending down, she proceeded to pull up certain small weeds, making a little pile of them behind the headstone.

Swaying thus above the mound and scrabbling with outstretched arms among the grass-blades, her figure in the misty afternoon sunshine took on, as Wolf stood there, a kind of portentous unreality. There was something outlandish in the whole scene, something monstrous and bizarre that destroyed all ordinary pathos. Twenty-five years? If she had come here regularly for all that time, how could there be any "plantains," or any clover, or any moss either, left upon his father's grave? He was so conscious of the personality of this woman, so amazed at a tenacity of feeling that seemed to pass all limits of what was due, that his own sensibility became hard and rigid.

But though his emotions were cold, his imagination worked freely. The few feet of Dorsetshire clay, the half-inch of brittle West Country elm-wood, that separated him from the up-turned skull of his begetter, were like so much transparent glass. He looked down into William Solent's empty eye-sockets, and the empty eye-sockets looked back at him. Steadily, patiently, indifferently they looked back; and between the head without a nose looking up and the head with so prominent a nose looking down there passed a sardonic wordless dialogue. "So be it," the son said to himself. "I won't forget. Whether there are plantains or whether there aren't plantains, the universe shan't fool me." "Fool me; fool me," echoed the fleshless skull from below.

"There!" sighed Selena Gault, rising to her natural perpendicular position. "There! There won't be any more of *them* for a fortnight. Shall we go back now, boy?"

When they were once more in the road, Miss Gault became a little more talkative.

"You're not like him, of course — not in any way. He really was uncommonly handsome. Not that *that* had any weight with *me*. But it had with some. It had with Mr. Urquhart!” She paused and glanced almost mischievously at her companion. “I’m sure I don’t know,” she remarked, with a funny little laugh, “what Mr. Urquhart will make of *you*!”

“The idea seems to be,” said Wolf gravely, while his estimate of his new friend’s perspicacity became more respectful, “that I should help him with some historical researches. It appears he is writing a ‘History of Dorset.’ ”

“History of fiddlestick!” snapped the lady. And then in a more amiable tone, “But he’s no idiot. He *has* read a little. You’ll enjoy going through his library.”

Wolf felt himself experiencing a rather cowardly hope that his companion would pass the slaughter-house this time without comment. The hope was not fulfilled.

“I suppose *you* eat them?” she asked in a hoarse whisper; and Wolf, turning towards her a startled face, was struck by an expression of actual *animal fear* upon her extraordinary physiognomy. But she did not linger; and it was not long before they were once more opposite the workhouse.

“Do you know what he said when he was dying?” she began suddenly. “He didn’t say it particularly to me. I just happened to be there. He said it to everyone in general. He said, ‘Christ! I’ve enjoyed my life!’ He used the word ‘Christ’ just in that way, as an exclamation. There was a young clergyman there, straight down from Cambridge, an athlete of some sort; and when your father cried out ‘Christ!’ like that — and he was dead the next second — I heard him mutter, ‘Good for you, Sir!’ as if it had been a fine hit at a cricket-match.”

Wolf would have been entirely responsive now if Miss Gault had touched his arm or even taken his arm, but she walked forward without making any sign.

“I expect your mother has abused me pretty thoroughly to you since you were a child,” she said presently. “Ann and I were never fond of each other. We were enemies even before your father came. She cut me out, of course, at every turn; but that didn’t bring her round! She couldn’t forgive me for being the headmaster’s daughter. You’ve no idea of the savage jealousies that go on in a place like this. But wherever *we* were we should have hated each other. Ann is flippant where I’m serious, and I’m flippant where Ann is serious.”

Wolf tried in vain to imagine on what occasions Miss Gault would display flippancy, but he knew well enough what that word meant in regard to his mother. He was seized at that moment with an irresistible temptation to reveal to this woman the picture of her character with which he had been regaled for the last twenty-five years. It was a picture so extraordinarily different from the reality, that it made him wonder if all women, whether flippant or otherwise, were personal to the point of insanity in their judgments of one another. What his mother had told him was not even a caricature of Selena Gault. It referred to another person altogether.

“My mother has a lot of friends in town,” he began, rather lamely. Miss Gault cut him short.

“Of course she has! She’s a brave, high-spirited, ambitious woman. Of course she has!” And then, in a low, meditative voice that seemed to float wistfully over the years, “She was very much in love with your father.”

This last remark, coming at the moment when the Abbey clock above their heads struck four, produced considerable bewilderment in Wolf’s mind. The idea of his estranged parents having been “in love” with each other made him feel curiously in the cold, and strangely alien to both of them. In some obscure way he felt as if Selena Gault were practising an indecent treachery, but a treachery so subtle that he couldn't lay his finger upon it!

"Let's go in here for a minute!" he said. "And then I must keep my appointment with Mr. Otter."

They entered the great nave of the Abbey-church and sat down. The high, cool, vaulted roof, with its famous fan-tracery, seemed to offer itself to his mind as if it were some "branch-charmèd" vista of verdurous silence, along which his spirit might drift and float at large, a leaf among leaves!

There was a faint greenish mist in that high roof, the effect of some cavernous contrast with the mellow warmth of the horizontal sun pouring through the coloured windows below; and into that world of undulating carving and greenish dimness, Wolf now permitted his mind to wander, till he began to feel once again that mysterious sensation which he called his "mythology."

He felt free of his mother, and yet tender and indulgent towards her. He felt bound up in some strange affiliation with that skeleton in the cemetery. He felt in whimsical and easy harmony with the queer lady seated by his side. The only thing that troubled him at all just then was a faint doubt as to what effect this return to the land of his birth would have upon his furtive, private, hidden existence. Would he be crafty enough to keep that secretive life-illusion out of the reach of danger? Would his inner world of hushed Cimmerian ecstasies remain uninvaded by these Otters and Urquharts?

He felt as though he were tightening his muscles for a plunge into very treacherous waters. All manner of unknown voices seemed calling to him out of this warm Spring air; mocking voices, beguiling voices, insidious voices — voices that threatened unguessed-at disturbances to that underground life of his which was like a cherished vice. It was not as though he heard the tones of these voices so that he could have recognized them again. It was as though a wavering crowd of featureless human figures on the further side of some thick opaque latticework were conferring together in conspiring awareness of his immediate appearance among them!

The atmosphere was cooler when they came out of the church. Its taste was the taste of an air that has been blown over leagues and leagues of green stalks full of chilly sap. It made Solent think of water-buttercups in windy ponds, and the splash of moor-hens over dark gurgling weirs.

He parted from his companion by a grotesque little statue under the lime-trees representing the debonair ancestor of the Lovelaces whose name, though intimately associated with Ramsgard, had slipped into something legendary and remote. Selena Gault gave him her hand with a stately inclination of her unlovely head.

"You'll come in and see me and my cats before long and tell me your impressions of all those people?"

"I certainly will, Miss Gault," he answered. "You've been very good to me."

"Tut, tut, boy! Good is not the word! When I come to think of it, standing like that with your hat off, you *have* a kind of look — —"

"That's under *your* influence, Miss Gault," he hurriedly said; and they took their separate ways.

There was far less embarrassment for Wolf in his encounter with Mr. Darnley Otter than he had expected. They were the only men in that massive old-world sitting-room, decorated with hunting-scenes and large solemn prints of Conservative statesmen, and they found it easy and natural to sit down opposite each other at a round table and to enjoy an excellent tea. Wolf was hungry. The bread-and-butter was fresh and plentiful. The solidity of the teapot was matched by the thinness of the cups; and the waiter, who seemed to know Mr. Otter well, treated them both with a dignified obsequiousness which had about it the mellow beauty of centuries of feudal service.

He was a clean-shaven man, this waiter, with an aristocratic stoop and a face that resembled that of Lord Shaftesbury, the great philanthropist; and Wolf felt an obscure longing to sit opposite him in his own snug parlour — wherever that was — and draw out of him the hidden sources of that superb respectfulness — to be the object of which, even for a brief hour's tea-drinking, was to be reconciled not only to oneself but also in some curious way to the whole human race!

"We haven't seen Mr. Urquhart down here lately," the waiter was saying to Wolf's new acquaintance. "His health keeps up, I hope, Sir?"

"Perfectly," responded Mr. Otter. "Perfectly, Stalbridge. I hope you yourself are all right, Stalbridge?"

Wolf had never seen a physical human movement more expressive, more adjusted, more appropriate, than the gesture with which the elderly servant balanced the back of his hand against the edge of their table and leaned forward to reply to this personal question. He noticed this gesture all the more vividly because of a curiously shaped white scar that crossed the back of the man's hand. But he now became aware of something else about this waiter — something that surprised and rather disturbed him. The fellow's countenance did not only remind him of Lord Shaftesbury. It reminded him of that face by the Waterloo steps!

"I've nothing to complain of, Sir, thank you Sir, since I settled that little legal trouble of mine. It's the mind, Sir, that keeps us up; and except for the malice and mischief that comes to all, I've no grievance against the Almighty."

The air of courteous magnanimity with which the old waiter exonerated Providence made Wolf feel ashamed of every peevishness he had ever indulged. But why did he make him think of that Waterloo-steps face?

When Mr. Stalbridge had left them, to look after some other guests, both the men, as they finished their tea and lit their cigarettes, began to feel more comfortable and reassured in their attitude to each other.

Darnley Otter was in every respect more of a classified "gentleman" than Solent. He had a trim, pointed, Van Dyck beard of a light-chestnut colour. His fingernails were exquisitely clean. His necktie, of a dark-blue shade, had evidently been very carefully chosen. His grey tweed suit, neither too faded nor too new, fitted his slender figure to a nicety. His features were sharply-cut and very delicately moulded, his hands thin and firm and nervous. When he smiled, his rather grave countenance wrinkled itself into a thousand amiable wrinkles; but he very rarely smiled, and for some reason it was impossible for Solent to imagine him laughing. One facial trick he had which Wolf found a little disconcerting — since his own method was to stare so very steadily from under his bushy eyebrows — a trick of hanging his head and letting his eyelids droop over his eyes as he talked. This habit was so constant with him that it wasn't until the dialogue with the waiter occurred that Wolf realized what his eyes were like. They were of a tint that Wolf had never seen before in any human face. They were like the blue markings upon the sides of freshly caught mackerel.

But what struck Wolf most deeply was not the colour of Mr. Otter's eyes. It was their look. He had never in the whole course of his life seen anything so harassed, so anxious, as the expression in those eyes, when their owner was unable any longer to avoid giving a direct glance. Nor was it just simply that the man was of a worrying turn of mind. The curious thing about the anxiety in Mr. Otter's eyes was that it was unnatural. There was a sort of puzzled surprise in it, a sort of indignant moral bewilderment, quite different from any constitutional nervousness. His expression seemed to protest against something that had been inflicted on him, something unexpected, something that struck his natural acceptance of life as both monstrous and inexplicable.

It was when he spoke to the waiter that this unhappy expression was caught most off-guard, and Wolf explained this to himself on the theory that the waiter's abysmal tact unconsciously relieved his interlocutor from the strain of habitual reticence.

Their meal once over, it did not take them long to get mounted, with all Wolf Solent's luggage, in Mr. Urquhart's dog-cart. That afternoon's drive from Ramsgard to King's Barton was a memorable event in Wolf's life. He had come already to feel a definite attraction toward this scrupulously-dressed, punctilious gentleman with the troubled mackerel-dark eyes; and as they sat side by side in that dog-cart, jogging leisurely along behind an ancient dapple-grey horse, he made up his mind that if it was to be in Darnley Otter's company that his free hours were to pass, they would pass very harmoniously indeed.

The evening itself, through which they drove, following a road parallel to and a little to the right of that one which had ended with the cemetery, was beautiful with an exceptional kind of beauty. It was one of those Spring evenings which are neither golden from the direct rays of the sinking sun, nor opalescent from their indirect diffused reflection. A chilly wind had arisen, covering the western sky, into which they were driving, with a thick bank of clouds. The result of this complete extinction of the sunset was that the world became a world in which every green thing upon its surface received a fivefold addition to its greenness. It was as if an enormous green tidal wave, composed of a substance more translucent than water, had flowed over the whole earth; or rather as if some diaphanous essence of all the greenness created by long days of rain had evaporated during this one noon, only to fall down, with the approach of twilight, in a cold, dark, emerald-coloured dew. The road they thus followed, heading for that rain-heavy western horizon, was a road that ran along the southern slope of an arable upland — an upland that lay midway between the pastoral Dorset valley which was terminated by the hills and woods of High Stoy and the yet wider Somersetshire valley that spread away into the marshes of Sedgemoor.

Solent learned from a few courteous but very abrupt explanations interjected by his companions, that the only other occupants of the house to which they were proceeding were Darnley's elder brother, Jason, and his mother, Mrs. Otter. He also gathered that Darnley himself, except on Saturdays and Sundays, worked as a classical under-master in a small grammar-school in Blacksod. By one means and another — Wolf was quick at such surmises — he obtained an impression that this work in Blacksod was anything but congenial to his reserved companion. He also began to divine, though certainly with no help from his well-bred friend, that these scholastic activities of his were almost the sole financial support of the family at Pond Cottage.

"I do wish I could persuade you," Solent began, when they were still some two and a half miles from their destination, "to give me some sort of notion of what Mr. Urquhart really expects from me. I've never made any historical researches in my life. I've only compiled wretched summaries from books that everyone can get. What will he want me to do? Go searching round in parish-registers and so on?"

The driver's gaze, directed obstinately to the grey tail of their slow-moving horse, remained unresponsive to the querulousness of this appeal.

"I have a notion, Solent," he remarked, "that you'll get light on a great many things as soon as you've seen Mr. Urquhart."

Wolf pulled down the corners of his mouth and lifted his thick eyebrows.

"The devil!" he thought. "That's just about what my friend Miss Gault hinted."

He raised his voice and gave it a more serious tone.

"Tell me, Otter, is Mr. Urquhart what you might call eccentric — queer, in fact?"

Darnley did turn his bearded profile at this. "That depends," he said, "what you mean by 'queer.' I've always found him very civil. My brother can't bear the sight of him."

Wolf made his favourite grimace again at this.

"I hope your brother will approve of *me*," he said. "I confess I begin to be a bit frightened."

"Jason is a poet," remarked Mr. Otter gravely, and his tone had enough of a rebuke in it to rouse a flicker of malice in his companion.

"I hope Mr. Urquhart isn't a poet too," he said.

Mr. Otter took no notice of this retort except to fall into a deeper silence than ever; and Wolf's attention reverted to what he could see of the famous Vale of Blackmore. Every time the hedge grew low, as they jogged along, every time a gate or a gap interrupted its green undulating rampart, he caught a glimpse of that great valley, gathering the twilight about it as a dying god might gather to his heart the cold, wet ashes of his last holocaust.

More and more did the feeling grow upon him that he was entering into a new world where he must leave behind the customs, the grooves, the habits of fifteen long years of his life. "There's one thing," he thought to himself, while a sudden chilliness struck his face as their road drew nearer the course of the river, "that I'll never give up... not even for the sake of the slenderest 'peeled willow-wand' in Dorset." As this thought crossed his mind he actually tightened his two bony hands tenaciously over his legs just above his knees, as if he were fortifying himself against some unknown threat to his treasured vice. And then in a kind of self-protective reassembling of his memories, as if by the erection of a great barrier of mental earthworks he could ward off any attack upon his secret, he set himself to recall certain notable landmarks among his experiences of the world up to the hour of this exciting plunge into the unknown.

He recalled various agitating and shameful scenes between his high-spirited mother and his drifting unscrupulous father. He summoned up, as opposed to these, his own delicious memories of long, irresponsible holidays, lovely uninterrupted weeks of idleness, by the sea at Weymouth, when he read so many thrilling books in the sunlit bow-window at Brunswick Terrace. How clearly he could see now the Jubilee clock on the Esplanade, the pompous statue of George the Third, the White Nore, the White Horse, the wave-washed outline of Portland breakwater! How he could recall his childish preference for the great shimmering expanse of wet sand, out beyond the bathing-machines, over the hot, dry sand under the sea-wall, where the donkeys stood and Punch and Judy was played!

"I am within twenty miles of Weymouth here," he thought. "*That's* where my real life began... *that's* the place I love... in spite of its lack of hedges and trees!"

Then he recalled his tedious uninspired youth in London, the hateful day-school, the hateful overcrowded college, the interminable routine of his ten years of teaching. "A double life! A double life!" he muttered under his breath, staring at the grey rump of Mr. Urquhart's nag, as it swayed before him, and moving his own body a little forward, as he tightened his grip still more fiercely upon his own bony thighs.

Was he going to be plunged now into another world of commonplace tedium, full of the same flat, conventional ambitions, the same sickening clevernesses? It couldn’t be so! It couldn’t... it couldn’t... with this enchanted springtime stirring in all these leaves and grasses....

What a country this was!

To his right, as they drove along, the ground sloped upwards — cornfield after cornfield of young green shoots — to the great main ridge between Dorset and Somerset, along which — only a mile or so away, his companion told him — lay the main highway, famous in West Country history, between Ramsgard and Blacksod, and also between — so Mr. Otter assured him — Salisbury and Exeter!

To his left the Vale of Blackmore beckoned to him out of its meadows — meadows that were full of faint grassy odours which carried a vague taste of river-mud in their savour because of the nearness of the banks of the Lunt. From Shaftesbury, on the north, to the isolated eminence of Melbury Bub, to the south, that valley stretched away, whispering, so it seemed, some inexplicable prophetic greeting to its returned native-born.

As he listened to the noise of the horse’s hooves steadily clicking, clicking, clicking, with every now and then a bluish spark rising in the dusk of the road, as iron struck against flint; as he watched the horizon in front of him grow each moment more fluid, more wavering; as he saw detached fragments of the earth’s surface — hill-curves, copses, far-away fields and hedges — blend with fragments of cloud and fragments of cloudless space, it came over him with a mounting confidence that this wonderful country must surely deepen, intensify, enrich his furtive inner life, rather than threaten or destroy it.

Thus clutching his legs as if to assure himself of his own identity, thus leaning eagerly forward by his companion’s side, his eyebrows contracted into a fixed frown and his nostrils twitching, Wolf felt the familiar mystic sensation surging up even now from its hidden retreat. Up, up it rose, like some great moonlight-coloured fish from fathomless watery depths, like some wide-winged marsh-bird from dark untraversed pools! The airs of this new world that met its rising were full of the coolness of mosses, full of the faint unsheathing of fern-fronds. Whatever this mysterious emotion was, it leaped forward now towards the new element as if conscious that it carried with it a power as formidable, as incalculable, as anything that it could encounter there.

A DORSET CHRONICLE

"So this is to be your room," said Mrs. Otter. "I knew you'd want to see it at once; as you have to dress, of course, for dining at the House? It's not large, but I think it's rather comfortable. My son Jason said only just now that he felt quite envious of it. His own room is just opposite, looking on the back garden, as yours does on the front. I think we might show him Jason's room, don't you, Darnley? It's so very characteristic! At least we try to keep it so, don't we, Darnley? Darnley and I do it ourselves, when he's out." Her voice, as the two men stood in the doorway staring at Solent's pieces of shabby luggage, which they had just carried in, sank into a confidential whisper. "He's out now," she added. They both moved aside as she proceeded to make her way across the small passage. "There!" she exclaimed, opening a door; and Wolf peered into complete and rather stuffy darkness. "There! Perhaps you have a match, Darnley?"

Darnley obediently struck a match and proceeded to set alight two ornate candles that stood on a chest of drawers. The whole look of the chamber thus revealed, was detestable to the visitor.

Above the bed hung an enormous Arundel print of a richly gilded picture by Benozzo Gozzoli; and above the fireplace, where a few red coals still smouldered, was a morbidly sanctimonious Holy Family by Filipino Lippi.

"I'd better open the window a little, mother, hadn't I?" said Darnley, moving across the room.

"No — no, dear!" cried the lady hurriedly. "He feels the draught so terribly when he's indoors. It's only cigarette-smoke — and a little incense," she added, turning to Wolf. "He finds incense refreshing. We order it from the Stores. Darnley and I don't care for it. So a little lasts a long time."

"He must have gone to Blacksod again," remarked the son grimly, glancing at his watch and looking very significantly at his mother.

"If he has, I'm sure I hope they'll be nicer to him than they were last time," murmured the lady.

"At the Three Peewits?" retorted her son drily. "Too nice, I daresay! I wish he'd stick to Farmer's Rest."

"We are referring to the inns in this neighbourhood where my son meets his friends," remarked the mother; and Wolf, contemplating the thin, peaked face, the smooth, high forehead, the neatly brushed pale hair, the nun-like dress of the little woman, felt ashamed of the first rush of inconsiderate contempt that her manner of speech had provoked in him.

"There's something funny about all this," he thought to himself. "I'll be interested to see this confounded incense-burner."

Left to himself to unpack his things, he looked round with anxious concern at the room that was to be his base of operations, his secret fox's hole, for so prolonged a time. There was a Leighton over the mantelpiece, and a huge Alma-Tadema between the two windows; and he divined at once that the spare-bedroom was used as a depository by this household for mid-Victorian works of art.

He leaned out of one of the windows. A sharp scent of jonquils was wafted up from some flower-bed below; but the night was so dark he could see nothing except a row of what looked like poplar-trees and a clump of thick bushes.

He quickly unpacked his clothes and put them away in easily-opening, agreeably-papered drawers. There was a vase of rust-tinted polyanthuses on the dressing-table; and he thought to himself, “The poet’s mother knows how to manage things!”

He decided at first to confine himself to a dinner-jacket; but realizing that he had only one pair of black trousers, and that these went best with the tail-coat, he changed his mind and put on full evening-dress.

As he finally tied his white tie into a bow at the small mahogany-framed looking-glass, he could not help thinking of the many unknown events that would occupy his thoughts as he stood just there in future days — events that were only now so many airy images, floating, drifting, upon the sea of the unborn.

“How will Mr. Urquhart receive me?” his thoughts ran on. “This brother of Otter’s doesn’t like him; but that’s nothing.... I’ll deal with these awful pictures later!” And he carefully extinguished his candles and stepped out on the landing.

The little dining-room of Pond Cottage faced the drawing-room at the foot of the stairs; and when he stood in the hall, hesitating over which room to enter, he was surprised to find himself beckoned to, eagerly and surreptitiously, by a bent old woman in a blue apron, laying the dinner. He crossed the threshold in answer to this appeal.

“I know’d yer,” the crone whispered. “I know’d ’twas none o’ they, soon as I did hear yer feet. Looksy here, Mister! Master Darnley’ll want to go up to Squire’s with ‘ee. Don’t ‘ee let ‘un go! That’s what I’ve got to say to ‘ee. Don’t ‘ee let ‘un go! ’Tis no walk up to House. ’Tis straight along Pond Lane and down Lenty, and there ‘a be! Just ‘ee go off now, quiet-like, afore they be comed downstairs. I’ll certify to Missus that I telled ‘ee the way to House. Don’t ‘ee stand staring at a person toad-struck and pondering! Off with ‘ee now! Be an angel of a sweet young gent! There! Don’t ‘ee wait a minute. They’ll be down, afore ‘ee can holler yer own name. Out wi’ ‘ee, and God bless ‘ee. Straight to the end of Pond, and then down Lenty!”

It was the nature of Wolf Solent, when other things were equal, to be easy, flexible, obliging. So without asking any questions he silently and expeditiously obeyed the old servant. He snatched up his hat and his overcoat, and vanished into the darkness of the night.

“I suppose this is Pond Lane,” he said to himself, as he made his way in the direction pointed out by the old woman. “But if it isn’t, I can’t help it. They’re all on the jump about that chap’s coming home. She wanted to keep Otter in the house to deal with the beggar.”

Fortune favoured him more than he might have expected. Just where Pond Lane turned into Lenty, he met a group of children, and under their direction he had no difficulty in finding the drive-entrance to King’s Barton Manor.

It was not a long drive and it did not lead to a big house. Built in the reign of James the First, Barton Manor had always remained a small and unimportant dwelling. Its chief glory was its large and rambling garden — a garden that needed more hands to keep it in order than the present owner was able to afford.

And, standing on the top of the weather-stained, lichen-spotted stone steps, after he had rung the bell, Wolf Solent had time, before anyone answered his ring, to imbibe something of the beauty of this new surrounding. The sky had cleared a little, and from a few open spaces, crowded with small faint stars, a pallid luminosity revealed the outlines of several wide, velvety lawns, intersected by box-hedges, themselves divided by stone-flagged paths. Wolf could see at one end of these lawns a long, high yew-hedge, looking in that uncertain light so mysterious and ill-omened that it was easy to imagine that on the further side of it all manner of phantasmal figures moved, ready to vanish at cockcrow!

For one moment he had a queer sensation that that wretched human face he had seen on the Waterloo steps hung there — there also, between the branches of a tall obscure tree that grew at the end of that yew-hedge. But even as he looked, the face faded; and instead of it, so wrought-upon were his nerves at that moment, there appeared to him the worried, anxious, mackerel-coloured eyes of Darnley Otter.

He was disturbed in these fancies by the opening of the carved Jacobean door. The man-servant who admitted him was, to his surprise, dressed in rough working-clothes. He was an extremely powerful man, and had a swarthy, gipsy-like complexion and coal-black hair.

"Excuse me, Sir," he said with a melancholy smile, as he took the visitor's coat and laid it on a great oak chest that stood in the hall. "Excuse me, Mr. Solent, but I've been working till a few minutes ago in the stable. He never likes me to apologize to gentlemen who come; but that's the way I am; and I hope you'll excuse me, Sir."

Even at the very moment he was muttering an appropriate reply to this somewhat unusual greeting, and allowing his thoughts, below the surface of his words, to reflect how oddly the servants in King's Barton behaved, Wolf became aware of the approach of an imposing personage coming down the long hallway towards them. This figure, limping very much and leaning upon a stick, was in evening-dress; and as he approached he muttered, over and over again, in a low, soft, satiny voice: "What's this I hear, eh? What's this I hear, eh? What's this I hear, eh?"

The tall coachman, or gardener, or whatever he was, did not wait for his master's arrival. With one quick glance at Solent and a final "Excuse me, Sir!" he vanished through a side-door, leaving Wolf to face his host without any official announcement.

"Mr. Solent? Very good. Mr. Wolf Solent? Very, very good. You received my letter and you came at once? Excellent. Very, very good."

Uttering these words in the same low voice that made Wolf think of the unrolling of some great, rich bundle of Chinese silk, he offered his left hand to his visitor and kept his right still leaning upon the handle of the stick that supported him.

The impression Wolf got from Mr. Urquhart's face was extremely complicated. Heavy eyelids, and pendulous, baggy foldings below the eyes, made one aspect of it. Greenish-blackness in the eyes themselves, and something profoundly suspicious in their intense questioning gaze, made another. An air of agitated restlessness, amounting to something that might have been described as a hunted look, made yet a third. The features of the face, taken in their general outlines, were massive and refined. It was in the expression that flitted across them that Wolf detected something that puzzled and perturbed him. One thing was certain. Both Mr. Urquhart's head and Mr. Urquhart's stomach were unnaturally large — far too large for his feeble legs. His hair, which was almost as black as that of his man-servant, caused Wolf to wonder whether or not he wore a wig.

Dropping his visitor's hand, he suddenly stood stock-still, in the attitude of one who listens. Wolf had no idea whether he was arrested by sounds in the garden outside or sounds in the kitchen inside. He himself heard nothing but the ticking of the hall-clock.

Presently the squire spoke again. "They didn't come with you then? They didn't bring you to the door then?" He spoke with what Wolf fancied was a tone of nervous relief.

"I found my way very easily," was all the visitor could reply.

"What's that? You came alone? They let you come alone?" The man gave him a quick, suspicious glance, and limped a step or two towards the front-door. Wolf received an impression that he wasn't believed, and that Mr. Urquhart thought that, if the door were opened and he called loud enough, someone would respond at once out of the darkness.

"Didn't Darnley come *any* of the way with you?" This was said with such a querulous, suspicious accent that Wolf looked him straight in the face.

"They didn't even know I had left the house," he remarked sternly.

Mr. Urquhart glanced at the door through which the servant had vanished.

"I told him to lay three places," he remarked. "I made sure they wouldn't let you come alone."

Wolf, at this, lifted one of his thick eyebrows; and a flicker of a smile crossed his mouth.

"Would you like me to run over and fetch him?" he said.

"What's that, eh? Fetch him? Did you say fetch him? Of course not! Come, come. Let's go in. Monk will have everything ready by now. Come along. This is the way."

He led his visitor down the hall and into a small oak-panelled room. The table *was* laid for three; and no sooner were they seated, than Roger Monk, re-garbed as if by magic in a plain dark suit, and accompanied by a young maid in cap and apron, brought in two steaming soup-plates. The dinner that followed was an exceptionally good one, and so also was the wine. Both host and guest drank quite freely; so that by the time the servants left them to their own devices, there had emerged not only a fairly complete understanding as to the character of the work which Wolf was to undertake in that remarkable establishment, but also a certain *rapport* between their personalities.

Staring contentedly at a large monumental landscape by Gainsborough, where what might have been called the spiritual idea of a Country Road lost itself between avenues of park-like trees and vistas of mysterious terrace-walks, Wolf began to experience, as he sipped his port wine and listened to his host's mellow discourse, a more delicious sense of actual physical well-being than he had known for many a long year.

He soon discovered that he was to labour at his particular share of their grandiose enterprise in a window-seat of the big library of the house, while Mr. Urquhart pursued independent researches in a room he called "the study." This was excellent news to the new secretary. Very vividly he conjured up an image of that window-seat, ensconced behind mullion-panes of armorial glass, and opening upon an umbrageous vista resembling that picture by Gainsborough!

"Our history will be an entirely new *genre*," Mr. Urquhart was saying. "What I want to do is to isolate the particular portion of the earth's surface called 'Dorset'; as if it were possible to decipher there a palimpsest of successive strata, one inscribed below another, of human impression. Such impressions are forever being made and forever being obliterated in the ebb and flow of events; and the chronicle of them should be continuous, not episodic." He paused in his discourse to light a cigarette; which, when it was lit, he waved to and fro, forming curves and squares and patterns. His hand holding the cigarette was white and plump, like the hand of a priest; and, as he wrote on the air, a trail of filmy smoke followed the movements of his arm.

"Of course, a genuine continuity," he went on, "would occupy several lifetimes in the telling of it. What's to be done then, eh? D'ye see the problem? Eh? What’s to be done?”

Solent indicated as well as he could by discreet facial signs that he did see the problem, but left its solution to the profound intelligence in front of him.

Mr. Urquhart proceeded. “We must select, my friend. We must select. All history lies in selection. We can’t put in everything. We must put in only what’s got pith and sap and salt. Things like adulteries, murders, and fornications.”

“Are we to have any method of selection?” Wolf enquired.

Mr. Urquhart chuckled. “Do you know what I’ve thought?” he said. “I’ve thought that I’d like to get the sort of perspective on human occurrences that the bedposts in brothels must come to possess — and the counters of bar-rooms — and the butlers’ pantries in old houses — and the muddy ditches in long-frequented lovers’ lanes.”

“It’s in fact a sort of Rabelaisian chronicle you wish to write?” threw in Wolf.

Mr. Urquhart smiled and leant back in his chair. He drained his wine-cup to the dregs, and with half-shut malignant eyes, full of a strange inward unction, he squinnied at his interlocutor. The lines of his face, as he sat there contemplating his imaginary History, took to themselves the emphatic dignity of a picture by Holbein. The parchment-like skin stretched itself tightly and firmly round the bony structure of the cheeks, as though it had been vellum over a mysterious folio. A veil of almost sacerdotal cunning hovered, like a drooping gonfalon, over the man’s heavy eyelids and the loose wrinkles that gathered beneath his eyes. What still puzzled Wolf more than anything else was the youthful glossiness of his host’s hair, which contrasted very oddly not only with the extreme pallor of his flesh, but also with the deeply indented contours of his Holbein-like countenance. Mr.

Urquhart's coiffure seemed, in fact, an obtrusive and unnatural ornament designed to set off quite a different type of face from the one it actually surmounted.

"Is it or isn't it a wig?" Wolf caught himself wondering again. But each furtive glance he took at the raven-black cranium opposite him made such a supposition less and less credible; for by the flicker of the candles he seemed to detect the presence of actual individual hairs, coarsely and strongly growing, on either side of the "parting" in the centre of that massive skull. While he was considering this phenomenon, he became conscious that Mr. Urquhart had left the matter of Dorset Chronicles and was speaking of religion.

"I was brought up an Anglican and I shall die an Anglican," he was saying. "That doesn't in the least mean that I believe in the Christian religion."

There was a pause at this point, while the squire refilled his own glass and that of his visitor.

"I like the altar," the man continued. "The altar, Mr. Solent, is the one absolutely satisfactory object of worship left in our degenerate days." There came into Mr. Urquhart's face, as he uttered these words, an expression that struck Wolf as nothing less than Satanic.

"It — does — not — matter — to you then, Sir," threw out Wolf cautiously, "what the altar represents?"

Mr. Urquhart smiled. "Eh?" he muttered. "Represents — did you say?" And then in a vague, dreamy, detached manner he repeated the word "represents" several times, as if he were mentally examining it, as a connoisseur might examine some small object; but his voice, as he did this, grew fainter and fainter, and presently died away altogether.

The new secretary bowed discreetly over his plate of almonds and raisins. He suspected that if it had not been for the excellence of the wine, the great swaying pontifical head in front of him would have been more reserved in its unusual credo.

“Is the church in King’s Barton ritualistic enough for your taste, Sir?” he enquired.

And then straight out of the air there came into his mind the image of Mr. John Urquhart, stark naked, with a protuberant belly like Punch or Napoleon, kneeling in the dead of night, while a storm of rain lashed the windows, before the altar of a small, dark, unfrequented edifice.

“Eh? What’s that?” grumbled his entertainer. “The church here? Oh, Tilly-Valley’s all right. Tilly-Valley’s as docile as a ewe-lamb.” He leaned forward with a sardonic leer, lowering his head between the candles as if he possessed a pair of sacred horns. “Tilly-Valley’s afraid of me; just simply afraid.” His voice sank into a whisper. “I make him say Mass every morning. D’ye hear? I make him say Mass whether there’s anyone there or not.”

The tone in which Mr. Urquhart uttered these words roused a definite hostility in Wolf’s nerves. There came over him a feeling as if he had been permitted, on an airless night, to catch a glimpse of monstrous human lineaments behind the heavy rumble of a particular clap of thunder. There was something abominably menacing in this great wrinkled white face, with its glossy, carefully parted hair, its pendulous eyelids, its baggy eye-folds, butting at him between the candle-flames.

It presented itself to his mind as a clear issue, that he had now really come across a person who, in that mysterious mythopœic world in which his own imagination insisted on moving, was a serious antagonist — an antagonist who embodied a depth of actual evil such as was a completely new experience in his life. This idea, as it slowly dawned upon his wine-befogged brain, was at once an agitating threat and an exciting challenge. He deliberately stiffened the muscles of his body to meet this menace. He straightened his shoulders and glanced carelessly round the room. He composed his countenance into an expression of cautious reserve. He stretched out his legs. He threw one of his arms over the back of his chair. He clenched together the fingers of his other hand, as it lay on his knee beneath the table. He knew well enough that what Mr. Urquhart saw in these manifestations was an access of casual *bonhomie* in his new secretary, a *bonhomie* amounting to something almost like youthful bravado. He knew that what he did not see was a furtive gathering together of the forces of an alien soul, a soul composed of metaphysical chemicals directly antipodal to those out of which his own was compounded.

What Wolf felt in his own mind just then summed itself up in vague half-articulated words uttered in that margin of his consciousness where the rational fades away into the irrational. “This Dorsetshire adventure is going to be serious,” he said to himself. And then he became suddenly aware that though quite ignorant of all that was occurring in the mind and nerves of his visitor, the squire of King’s Barton had grown alive to the fact that his remarks were not meeting with the same magnetic response that they had met with at first. After a minute or two of silence, Mr. Urquhart rose and limped towards the door of the dining-room. He opened the door for Wolf and they both went out into the hall.

“I think,” he said, as they stood at the foot of the stately Jacobean staircase, “I think I will not show you the library tonight. You have had a tiring day, and if I take you upstairs there’s no knowing when we shall separate! By Jove” — and he glanced at the hall-clock— “it’s past ten already! Better say good-night before we start talking again, eh? You’ve got a walk before you, too. Better say good-night before we get too interested in each other, eh? What? Where'd that idiot put your things? Oh, good! Very good. Well, come again by ten o'clock tomorrow morning and we'll settle everything. I am very relieved to find how much we've got in common. My History will not be betrayed by *your* assistance as it was by my last helper."

Wolf walked to the place where his coat had been laid down by the man-servant, and after he had put it on, and picked up his hat and stick, he turned to his host, who kept uttering meaningless monosyllables in a silky, propitiatory whisper, as if he were ushering out a madman or a policeman; and asked him point-blank who this ill-advised predecessor of his was, turning as he did so the handle of the front-door. The question seemed to disturb Mr. Urquhart's mental equanimity, as much as the chilly March wind that blew in with a gust when the door was opened, disturbed his physical balance.

"Eh? What? What's that? Didn't Darnley tell you? The boy ruined my History at the start. I had to tear up every scrap. He dropped it and went — all in a minute. Eh? What? Didn't Darnley tell you? He left it in chaos. He played hop-scotch with it!"

Struggling with the heavy door and the gusty wind, Solent muttered a propitiatory reply.

"Very annoying — I hope, indeed, I shall do better, Sir! You had to get rid of him, then?"

The wind whistled past him as he spoke, so that his host's final word was scarcely audible. In fact, the last thing he saw of Mr. Urquhart was a feeble attempt the man seemed to be making to cover his rotund stomach with the flaps of his dress-suit.

When at last the great door had really closed between them and he was striding down the stone steps, he found his mind full of the impression which that inarticulate final word had made upon him; and before he reached the end of the drive and passed through the iron gates into Lenty Lane, he had come to the startling conclusion that his predecessor in the study of Dorset Chronicles had died, as they say in that county, "in the het of his job."

"Good Lord!" he thought, as he turned into Pond Lane. "If all he feels for his assistants when they die at their post is anger like that, he must be a queer chap to deal with. Or did he mean something quite different? Dead? Dead? But that wasn't the word he used. What *was* the word he used?" And he continued worrying over the wind-blown sarcasm he had caught in the doorway, without coming to any solution of the riddle. "If it wasn't that he meant the fellow was dead, what *did* he mean?"

His mind was so full of this problem that he arrived at the gate into the small garden of Pond Cottage before he was aware of it. There was a faint reddish light in the window of what he knew was his own bedroom. "She's given me a fire!" he thought to himself; and he looked forward with keen anticipation to his first night in Dorset after twenty-five years.

Opening the door quietly, he lit a match as soon as he was inside, and turned the key in the lock. He then took the precaution of taking off his shoes; and lightly and stealthily he slipped upstairs and entered his room.

He had no sooner done so than a figure rose up from a chair by the fire and stumbled towards him. It was a middle-aged man, in a long, white, old-fashioned nightshirt, with a woollen shawl wrapped about his shoulders. There was no light but the firelight in the room; and the man's countenance was a mere blur above the folded shawl.

"Was writing poetry... let my fire out... came before expected... humbly apologize... hope you'll sleep well..." Without further explanation the man pushed past him and went out, leaving these broken sentences humming in the air like the murmurs of some thick, muffled, mechanical instrument. Once more Wolf found himself alone with the Landseer and the Alma-Tadema pictures.

“This is too much!” he muttered furiously. “If I can’t have my room to myself I’ll go somewhere else,” he thought. “Does this incense-burner suppose that everyone in the world must humour his whimsies?” He opened both windows wide and lit the candles on his dressing-table.

Apparently Jason Otter had retired quietly to his bedroom, for the house was now as silent as the darkness outside it. He began slowly undressing. For a while his irritation was prolonged by the way the wind kept making the candles flare; but gradually, in the freshness of the cool garden-smells, his accustomed equanimity returned. After all, there would be plenty of time to adjust all these things! He must propitiate these people to the limit at present, and feel his way. It would be silly to show touchiness and cantankerousness at the very start.

By the time he had blown out the flickering candles and was safe in bed, his habitual mood had quite reasserted itself. He went over in his mind his conversation with Mr. Urquhart, and wondered how far his imagination had led him on to exaggerate the sinister element in the man. He wished intensely that he had caught the drift of that final word about his predecessor. Was he dead? Or was it only that he had been ignominiously dismissed?

As he grew sleepy, all manner of trivial occurrences and objects of this adventurous day began rising up before him, emphasizing themselves, out of all proportion to the rest, in a strange half-feverish panorama. The long, enchanted road revealed in that Gainsborough picture hovered before him and beckoned him to follow it. The abrupt apologies of Roger Monk melted into the furtive exhortations of the old woman in the blue apron. Framed in the darkness that closed in upon him, the coarse black hairs, that had refused to be reduced to a wig, metamorphosed themselves into similar hairs, growing, as he knew they *could* grow, upon a long-dead human skull! The jogging grey haunches of the mare that had brought him from Ramsgard confused themselves with the grey paws of the cat upon Selena Gault's knees.

Very vividly, more vividly than anything else, he saw the waiter at the Lovelace, as he leaned heavily upon their tea-table. He remembered now both the queer whitish scar on the back of that hand and the resemblance to the Waterloo-steps face.

And then, all suddenly, it seemed that he could think of nothing else but the completely unknown personality — apparently that of the clergyman of the place — referred to so contemptuously by Mr. Urquhart as "Tilly-Valley." While the syllables "Tilly-Valley" repeated themselves in his brain, the person concealed behind that odd appellation ceased to be a man. He became some queer-shaped floating object that could not be put into words, and yet was of the utmost importance. What was of importance was that an obstinate bend in that floating object should be straightened out. Something was preventing it from being straightened out, something that emanated from a black wig and a woollen shawl, and was extremely thick and heavy, and had a taste like port wine!

But there was another thing, far down, far off, covered up, as if by masses of dead leaves, a thing that was stirring, gathering, rising, a thing that, in a minute more, would give him illimitable reassurance and strength. When this thing rose to the surface, the bent twig would be straightened out — and all would be well! This "all being well" implied that that calm, placid cow which was eating plantain-leaves under Basingstoke church-tower, should stop eating and lie down. The cow lying down would be a beautiful green mound covered with plantains — plantains that grew larger and larger, till they became enormous succulent leaves as big as elephants' ears; but the cow couldn't quite lie down. Something thick and heavy and sticky, like port wine, impeded its movements....

Everything in the world was material now. Thoughts were material. Feelings were material. It was a world of material objects, of which his mind was one. His mind was a little bluish-coloured thing, soft, fluffy, like blue cotton-wool; and what was rising out of the dead leaves was blue too, but the sticky impeding thing was brown, and the bent twig was brown....

It was as if in that slow sinking into sleep his soul had to pass all the long, previous, evolutionary stages of planetary life, and be conscious with the consciousness of vegetable things and mineral things. This is what made every material substance of such supernal importance to him — of an importance which perhaps material substances really *did* possess, if all were known.

GERDA

THE FIRST SENSATION to which Wolf awoke in a morning of rainy wind and drifting clouds, was a sensation of discomfort. As his mind began concentrating on this discomfort, he realized it proceeded from those two heavily-framed pictures which gave to his chamber a sort of reading-room or club-room aspect. Harmless enough in themselves had they awaited him in the parlour of an hotel, they seemed no less than an outrage upon his senses when associated with this simple and quiet bedroom. He resolved to issue an ultimatum at once. He hadn't come to Dorsetshire to be oppressed by the ponderous labours of Royal Academicians. And he would also make it clear that his bedroom was to be his sanctuary. No night-shirted intruder should run in and out at his pleasure!

He leapt from the bed and proceeded to turn to the wall both of the mid-Victorian masterpieces. That done, he lay down again and gave himself up to the rainy air, full of the smell of young leaves and wet garden-mould. Lying stretched out upon his back, he set himself with a deliberate effort to gather up his recent impressions and relate them as well as he could to the mood of yesterday's drive. With clear awareness of most of the things that had happened to him since he left his mother at the door of their little flat in Hammersmith, he was oddly conscious that all his deepest instincts were still passive, expectant, waiting. He was like a man who recovers from the shock of a shipwreck, and who, drying himself in the security of some alien beach, hesitates, in a grateful placid lethargy, to begin his hunt for berries or fruits or fresh water.

Detail by detail he reviewed the events of the previous day; and as the images of all these people — of Miss Gault, of Darnley, of Mr. Urquhart — passed in procession before him, he was surprised at the light in which he saw them, so different from the way in which they had appeared only some eight or nine hours ago. The importance of material objects — their mystical importance — had been his last impression before sleeping; but now everything appeared in a cold, unmystical light. It was always thus when he awoke from sleep; but the fact that he recognized the transitoriness of the mood did not diminish its power. He was never more cynically clairvoyant than on these occasions. He surveyed at such times his dearest friends through a sort of unsympathetic magnifying-glass in which there was not one of their frailties that did not stand out in exaggerated relief. The port-hole, so to speak, of the malign consciousness through which he saw them was at the same time telescopic and microscopic. It was surrounded, too, by a thick, circular obscurity. He was abnormally sensitive at such times, but with a curtailed and reduced sensibility. Each particular thing as it presented itself dominated the whole field of vision. Nor was this sensitiveness itself an altogether normal receptivity. It was primarily physiological. It had few nervous chords; and no spiritual or psychic ones. Everything that approached it approached it on the bodily plane, as something — even if it were a mental image — to be actually grasped with the five senses.

And so, as he lay there, knowing that a long while must pass before he would have any chance of breakfast or even of a cup of tea, he made a stronger effort than usual to get his thoughts into focus. The wet airs blowing in through the open windows helped him in this attempt. It was as if he stole away from that little round port-hole and shuffled off to some upper deck, where he could feel the wide horizons. His mind kept reverting to what he had felt during the drive with Darnley, and he tried to analyze what sort of philosophy it was that remained with him during all the normal hours when his “mythology” — his secret spiritual vice — lay quiescent. He fumbled about in his mind for some clue to his normal attitude to life — some clue-word that he could use to describe it, if any of his new friends began questioning him; and the word he hit upon at last was the word *fetish-worship*. That was it! His normal attitude to life was just that — or nearer that than anything else!

It was a worship of all the separate, mysterious, living souls he approached: “souls” of grass, trees, stones, animals, birds, fish; “souls” of planetary bodies and of the bodies of men and women; the “souls,” even, of all manner of inanimate little things; the “souls” of all those strange, chemical groupings that give a living identity to houses, towns, places, countrysides....

“Am I inhuman in some appallingly incurable manner?” he thought. “Is the affection I have for human beings less important to me than the shadows of leaves and the flowing of waters?”

He gazed intently at the window-sills of his open windows, above which the tassels of the blinds swayed to and fro in the damp gusts of wind. He thought of the grotesque and obsessed figure of Selena Gault, as she pulled up plantains from his father’s grave. No! Whatever this fetish-worship might be, it certainly was different from “love.” Love was a possessive, feverish, exacting emotion. It demanded a response. It called for mutual activity. It entailed responsibility. The thrilling delight with which he was wont to contemplate his mother’s face under certain conditions, the deep satisfaction he derived from the sight of Miss Gault and her cats, the pleasure with which he had surveyed the blue eyes and pointed beard of Darnley Otter — these things had nothing in them that was either possessive or responsible. And yet he lost all thought of himself in watching these things, just as he used to do in watching the mossy roots of the chestnuts and sycamores in the avenues at Hampton Court! It seemed then that what he felt for both things and people, as he saw them under certain lights, was a kind of exultant blending of vision and sympathy. Their beauty held him in a magical enchantment; and between his soul and the "soul," as it were, of whatever it was he happened to be regarding, there seemed to be established a tremulous and subtle reciprocity.

He was pleased at having thought of the word "fetish-worship" in this connection. And it was in the pleasure of this thought that he now leapt out of bed and, putting on his overcoat, began hurriedly to shave himself, using as he did so the cold water in his jug.

He had not got very far with this, however, when there was a sound in the passage outside that reminded him of the rattle of the milk-cans on the Longborne Port platform. This was followed by a gentle knock at his door. Opening it cautiously, he was surprised to see Mrs. Otter herself standing there, while beside her was a wide tin bath and a can of hot water.

"I was waiting till I heard you move," she said. "Darnley has had his breakfast and gone. He goes to Blacksod early. Jason does not get up till late. Dimity and I will be ready for you when you come down."

Wolf hovered at the door, his face lathered, his safety-razor in his hand. He suddenly felt no better than a lout in the presence of this faded old lady.

She smiled at him pleasantly. "I hope you'll be happy with us," she said. "You'll get used to us soon. Poor Mr. Redfern got quite used to us before he died."

"Mr. Redfern?"

"The gentleman who helped the Squire with his book. But you must have your bath now. Do you think you can be ready in about half-an-hour?"

Wolf bowed his lathered face and she went off. While he was dragging the bath into his room, she turned at the head of the stairs.

"Would you like a cup of tea at once, Mr. Solent, or will you wait till you come down?"

"I'll wait, thank you! Thank you *very* much!" he shouted; and jerking both bath and can into his fortress, he shut the door and prepared to wash and dress.

The whole process of his ablution and his dressing was now a mechanical accompaniment to absent-minded fantastic thoughts on the subject of the dead Mr. Redfern.

"This was the fellow's room, no doubt," he said to himself. "I suppose he died here. A nice death, with those monstrous pictures lying like lead on his consciousness!"

It was on Mr. Redfern's behalf now that Wolf scowled at the backs of these pictures, as he sponged himself in the tin bath. Mr. Redfern dominated that half-hour, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Wolf saw him lying stone-dead on the pillows he himself had just quitted. He saw him as a pale, emaciated youth, with beautifully moulded features. He wondered if he had been buried by the person Mr. Urquhart called "Tilly-Valley." He decided he would look for his grave in the King's Barton churchyard. His dead face took during that half-hour the most curious forms. It became the soap. It became the sponge. It became the spilt water upon the floor. It became the slop-pail. It became the untidy heap of Wolf's dress-clothes. Wolf was not relieved from it, in fact, till he found himself drinking delicious cups of tea and eating incredibly fresh eggs under the care of his hostess in their pleasant dining-room. The pictures here were of the kind that no philosopher could quarrel with. Old-fashioned prints, old-fashioned pastels, old-fashioned engravings, gave the room a spirit that seemed to emerge from centuries of placidity and stretch out consolatory hands to every kind of wayfarer.

"This is *my* room," said Mrs. Otter, looking very pleased when Wolf explained to her what he felt about it. "These things came from my own home in Cornwall. The best things in the house belonged to my husband. They're in the drawing-room; very valuable things. But I like this room myself and I'm glad you do. Mr. Redfern used to love to read and write at this table. I believe if he'd done all his work here he'd never have got that terrible illness. That library of Mr. Urquhart's was too learned for him, poor, dear, young man! And he *was* so good-looking! My son Jason used to call him by the names of all the heathen gods, one after another! Jason was extremely upset when he died so suddenly."

The visitor to King's Barton found his attention wandering several times after this. Mrs. Otter began to drift into rambling stories about her native Cornwall, and it was only Wolf's power of automatically putting a convincing animation into his heavy countenance that prevented her from realizing how far away his thoughts had flown.

Hostess and guest were interrupted in their rather one-sided tête-à-tête by the sound of footsteps descending the stairs. Mrs. Otter jumped up at once.

"It's Jason!" she cried. "We must have disturbed him. I was talking too much. I'll go and tell Dimity she need not clear away. I expect Jason will like to have a smoke with you."

She disappeared through the door into the kitchen at the very moment when her elder son entered the room. Wolf was astonished at the difference between the figure he had seen the night before and the figure he rose to shake hands with now. Dressed in neat, dark-blue serge, Jason Otter had the quiet, self-composed air of a much-travelled man of the world. His clean-shaven face, framed by prematurely grey hair, was massively and yet abnormally expressive. Forehead and chin were imposing and commanding; but this effect was diminished and almost negated by the peculiar kind of restless misery displayed in the lines of the mouth. The man's eyes were large and grey; and instead of glancing aside in the way Darnley's did, they seemed to cry out for help without cessation or intermission.

He and Wolf sat opposite each other at Mr. Redfern's favourite table, and, lighting their cigarettes, looked each other up and down in silence. Jason Otter was decidedly nervous. Wolf saw his hand shaking as he lit a match.

There was, indeed, something almost indecent about the sensitiveness of this man's lined and indented face. It made Wolf feel as though at all costs the possessor of such a countenance must be protected from nervous shocks. Was it in taking care of him that Darnley's blue eyes had acquired their curious expression? Jason's own eyes were not tragic. They were something worse. They were exposed; they were stripped bare; they seemed to peer forth helplessly from the human skull behind them, as though some protective filaments that ought to have been there were *not* there!

"I saw you'd turned our pictures to the wall," he began, fixing his pleading eyes upon Wolf's face as if asking for permission to humble himself to the ground. "I'll have them taken away. I'll have them put in the privy or in the passage."

"Oh, it's all right, Mr. Otter," returned Wolf. "It's only that I never can sleep in a room with large pictures. It's a peculiarity of mine."

No sooner had Jason heard this expression, "a peculiarity of mine," than his whole visage changed. A childish mischievousness illuminated his pallid physiognomy, and he chuckled audibly, nodding his head.

"A peculiarity? That's excellent. That's what Bluebeard used to say. 'It's a peculiarity of mine.' I think that's one of the prettiest excuses I've ever heard.”

This explosion was so surprising to Wolf that all he could do was to open his mouth and stare at the man. But the humour passed as quickly as it had come. The face unwrinkled itself. The eyes became supplicatory. The mouth tightened in solemn misery.

“I don’t want anyone to be bothered about the moving of those pictures, Mr. Otter,” said Wolf; for he seemed to see with terrible distinctness the devoted lady of the house struggling alone with those heavy frames. “You must allow me to do it myself. In fact,” he went on, in what he tried to make a casual, airy tone, “I’m going to beg Mrs. Otter to let me treat that room as if it were an unfurnished flat of my own.”

The head opposite him was so grey that he felt as if he were addressing this hint to Mrs. Otter’s husband rather than to her son.

Very gently, moving delicately, like Agag before Samuel, Jason rose to his feet. “I think we’d better get those pictures changed now,” he whispered earnestly, in a grave, conspiring voice.

Wolf tried to retain his airy, casual manner in the face of this gravity.

“I’ll do it like a shot,” he said, rising and moving towards the door. “Just tell me where to put them!”

The two men went up together, and under Jason’s directions the Landseer and the Alma-Tadema were deposited in a vacant room at the back of the pantry.

“Come upstairs for a minute,” said Mr. Otter, when this transaction was completed; and stepping softly and quietly, as if there were a dead person somewhere in the house, he led the way into his own room.

Wolf felt the same uneasy sensations in this chamber as he had experienced the evening before. Sinking into a luxurious armchair and accepting a cigarette, he found himself bold enough to make a faint protest against his host's Arundel prints, whose ceremonious piety he found so distasteful.

"I couldn't work in this room," he murmured — and felt as he spoke that his tone was cantankerous and impolite.

But Jason Otter showed not the least annoyance or even surprise at his guest's rudeness.

"I expect not! I expect not!" he cried cheerfully. "There are few people who *could*. I myself could work in a church or in a museum. I welcome anything that acts as a shield. It's like having a band of retainers, a sort of papal guard, to keep the populace at bay."

As he spoke, he looked proudly and complacently round the room, as if conscious of the protection of the antique French chair in which he had ensconced himself. There was a Boule table at his side, and he proceeded to dust it with a large silk handkerchief.

"I suppose you've never read any books on Hindoo mythology?" he said suddenly.

The word "mythology" gave Wolf an uncomfortable shock. He felt as a Catholic might feel if he heard a Methodist refer to the Virgin Mary.

He shook his head.

"I've only read one myself," went on the poet, with a chuckle; "so you needn't feel a fool. It was by that man who went to Thibet. But in it he mentions Mukalog, the god of rain."

"The god of rain?" responded Wolf, beginning to feel reassured.

"That's what the man says," continued the other. "Of course, we know what these travellers are; but he had a lot of letters after his name, so I suppose he passed some examination." Jason put his hand in front of his mouth as he said this; and his face was wrinkled with amusement. "He knows Latin, anyway. He brings it in on the first page," he added.

“It sounds like a real idol... Mukalog, the god of rain...” murmured Wolf.

Jason’s countenance suddenly grew solemn and confidential. “I’ve got it here,” he whispered. “I bought it for thirty shillings from Mr. Malakite, the bookseller. *He* bought it at a sale from some fool who thought it was nothing.... It’s brought me all my luck....” He lowered his voice still further, so that Wolf could scarcely hear him. “These priests look for God in the clouds, but I never do that.... I look for Him...”

“I beg your pardon?” questioned Wolf, leaning attentively forward. “You say you look for Him...?”

There was a pause; and the expression of the man changed from extreme gravity to hobgoblinish humour.

“*In the mud!*” he shouted.

Then, once more grave, he rose to his feet and fetched from its pedestal a hideous East Indian idol, about six inches high, and placed it in the middle of the Boule table, just opposite Wolf.

“It’s his stomach that makes him so shocking,” said Jason Otter; “but the ways of God aren’t as dainty as those of the Bishop of Salisbury. In this world Truth flies downward, not upward!”

Hardly aware of what he was doing, so occupied was his mind with the whole problem of his host’s personality, Wolf rose, and, leaning over the table, picked up Mukalog, the god of rain. Holding it absent-mindedly in his fingers for a while, he finally made a foolish schoolboy-like attempt to balance it upside-down on the flat skull of its monstrous head.

This proceeding brought a flash of real anger into Jason’s eyes. He snatched the thing away with a nervous clutch, and, hurrying to the back of the room, replaced it on its jade pedestal, which Wolf noticed now, with no great surprise, was standing near a carved brazier containing some still-smouldering ashes — doubtless the ashes of that very incense which had to be “ordered from the Stores”!

While his host returned in silence to his French chair and in profound dejection took out his cigarette-case, Wolf, still staring in a sort of hypnotized trance at the “god of rain,” set himself to wonder why it was that the kind of evil which emanated from this idol should be so much more distasteful than the kind of evil that emanated from Mr. Urquhart.

He came to the conclusion that although it is impossible for any living human being to obliterate all elements of good from itself, it is possible for an artist, or for a writer, or even for the anonymous creative energy of the race itself, to create an image of evil that should be *entirely evil*.

But why should this Hindoo idol seem so much more sinister than any Chinese or Japanese monster? Was it because in India the cult of spirituality, both for good and evil, had been carried to a greater length than anywhere else in the world?

“You’d better not listen to any tales about me that old Urquhart tells you,” said the poet suddenly, fixing his sorrowful eyes upon the visitor.

The name of his employer made Wolf rise hurriedly from his armchair.

“Certainly not,” he said brusquely, moving to the door. As he placed his hand on the door-handle, he felt as though the evil spirit of Mukalog were serpentining towards him over the poet’s shoulders and over the smooth Boule table.

“I’m not one to listen to tales from anyone, Mr. Otter,” he said as he went out.

He crossed the landing and entered his own room. Now that he was alone, he fell into a very grave meditation, as he slowly laced up his boots. “No wonder,” he said to himself, “that poor chap Redfern committed suicide! What with this man’s demon and Mr. Urquhart’s devilish History, this place doesn't seem a paradisal retreat. Well! Well! We shall see what we shall see."

He carried his coat and hat quietly downstairs and managed to get out of the house unobserved by either Mrs. Otter or the old servant.

The current of his mood was running more normally and gently by the time he found himself being escorted by his eccentric employer to the great isolated library which was now to be the scene of his labours. His dream of the writing-table by a mullioned window "blushing with the blood of kings and queens" turned out to be a literal presentiment. The view he got from his seat at that window surpassed the Gainsborough itself. The manor-garden melted away into herbaceous terraces and shadowy orchards. These in their turn faded into a green pasture-land, on the further side of which, faint in the distance, he could make out the high ridge of ploughed fields along the top of which ran the main road from Blacksod to Ramsgard.

Mr. Urquhart, however, seemed in a fussy, preoccupied, fidgetty mood that morning. He kept bringing books from the shelves and placing them on his secretary's table; and then, after he had opened them and read a passage or two, muttering "That's good, isn't it? That's the kind of thing we want, isn't it?" he would return them to the shelves and bring back others. Wolf was not very much helped by these manœuvres. In fact, he was teased and nonplussed. He was anxious to find out exactly how much of a free hand he was going to be allowed, and he was also anxious to find out what definite ideas the Squire of King's Barton already had. This erratic tumbling about of old folios, this hunting for nothing but whimsical and scandalous passages, seemed waste of time on that first morning.

"Have you any plan, any synopsis made out, Sir, such as I could enlarge upon?"

These words greeted Mr. Urquhart, when, with a satyrish leer on his face and a thick folio pressed against his stomach, he came limping up to the table for the fourth or fifth time.

“Eh? What’s that? ‘Plan’ did you say? ‘Synopsis’ did you say? By Jove! my young friend, I mustn’t make such a tosspot of ‘ee again the night before we set to work. Didn’t I make it clear to you that our book was going to develop along organic lines, not along logical lines? Didn’t I make it clear that what we had to aim at was something quite new, an altogether new *genre*; and that it was to represent the pell-mell of life? It’s a sort of Diary of the Dead we’re aiming at, Solent. Your plans and your skeletons would spoil it utterly. What I want you to do is to saturate yourself with Dorset Chronicles, especially the more scandalous of them — the old houses, Solent, the old houses! — and then, when you’ve got the drift of it in your blood, what we’ll aim at shall be a sort of West Country ‘Comédie Humaine.’ Do you get my meaning? What you’ve got to do now, Solent, is to help me collect material and to take notes. I’ll show you my notes tomorrow. They’ll make my meaning clearer. The *last* thing we must think of is arrangement. My book must grow like a living thing, till it frightens us by its reality.”

Wolf listened patiently and dutifully to this discourse. What he thought in his mind was: “This whole business is evidently just an old man’s hobby. I must give up any idea of taking it seriously. I must play with it, just as he’s playing with it.”

With this intention in his mind, as soon as he was alone in his window, he spread open before him that monument of scurrilous scandal, “The History of the Abbotsbury Family,” and gave himself up to leisurely note-making. He transcribed in as lively a way as he could the most outrageous of the misdeeds of this remarkable race, as they are narrated by the sly

Doctor Tarrant. He exaggerated, where it was possible, the Doctor's unctuous commentaries, and he added a few of his own. He began before long to think that the Squire was not so devoid of all sagacity in this unusual method as he had at first supposed.

Half the morning had already passed in this way when Mr. Urquhart came limping in in a state of impetuous excitement.

"I must send you off at once to Blacksod," he began. "Eh? What? You don't mind walking a few miles, eh? Roger says he can't spare the trap. You can lunch in the town at my expense. I've got a bill at the Three Peewits; and you can come back at your leisure. You don't object, eh? It's nothing for a young man like you, and there's very good ale at the Peewits."

Wolf folded up his notes and replaced Doctor Tarrant's History. He expressed himself as more than delighted to walk to Blacksod, and he enquired what it was that Mr. Urquhart wanted done.

"Well, there are two things that have come up, both of them rather important. I've just heard from my bookseller down there. You'll easily find him. His name's Malakite. He's in Cerne Street. He says he's got hold of the Evershot Letters. That's the book for us, Solent! Privately printed and full of allusions to the Brambledown Case! He says there's a man in London after it already. That may be a lie. You'll have to find out. Sometimes Malakite's let me have the use of a book and then sold it afterwards. You'll have to find out, Solent. Eh? What? You'll have to be a diplomatist, a Talleyrand, and that sort of thing, eh?"

Wolf composed his countenance as intelligently as he could and enquired what the other thing was.

Mr. Urquhart lifted his eyebrows, as if the question had been impertinent.

"The other thing?" he murmured dreamily.

But the next moment, as Wolf leaned back against the arm of his chair and looked straight into the man's eyes, there was a startling change in that supercilious face. A flicker, a shadow, a nothing, passed from one to the other; one of those exposures of secret thoughts that seem to bring together levels of consciousness beyond rational thought. It was all over in a moment; and with a quick alteration of his position, and a shuffling of his stick, the lame man recovered his composure.

"Ah yes," he murmured, with a smiling inclination of his head that resembled the bow of a great gentleman confessing a lapse of memory. "Ah yes, you are perfectly right, Solent. There *was* another little thing that you might as well attend to while you're about it. It's not of any pressing importance; but, as I say, if you have time, and feel energetic, it might be a good thing to jolt the memory of Mr. Torp. Eh? What's that? Torp, the stone-cutter. Torp of Chequers Street. You'll easily find the fellow. He's a jack-of-all-trades — does undertaking and grave-digging as well as stone-cutting."

Mr. Urquhart became silent, but the expression upon his face was like that of some courtly prince-prelate of old times, who desired his subordinate to obey instructions that he was unwilling to put into vulgar speech.

"Mr. Torp?" repeated Wolf, patiently and interrogatively.

"Just a little matter of a headstone," went on the other. "Tilly-Valley's quarrelled with our sexton here. So I've had to use Torp as both sexton and undertaker. He has been disgracefully dilatory." Mr. Urquhart shuffled to the bookcase, leaning heavily on his stick. He changed the position of one or two of the books; and as he did so, with his back to his secretary, he finished his sentence. "He's been as dilatory about Redfern's headstone as he was about digging his grave."

Once more there was a silence in the library of King’s Barton Manor. But when the Squire turned round, he seemed in the best of spirits. “It’s not your job, of course, this kind of thing. But I’m an old man and I don’t think you’re touchy about trifles. Jog the memory of the good Torp, then, will you? What? Jolt the torpid Torp. That’s the word, eh? Tell the beggar in good clear English that I’ll go to Dorchester for that stone if he doesn’t set it up within the week. You can do that for me, Solent? But it’s not important. If it’s a bother, let it go! But have a good luncheon at the Three Peewits anyway! Make ’em give ‘ee their own ale. It’s good. It’s excellent. That individual down at Pond Cottage gets drunk on it every night, Monk tells me.”

Turning again to the bookcase, Mr. Urquhart made as though the conversation had terminated; and Wolf, after a moment or two of that awkward hesitation which a subordinate feels when he is uncertain as to what particular gesture of parting is required, went straight out of the room, without a word, and ran downstairs.

He had found his hat and stick, and was on the point of letting himself out of the house, when the little side-door leading to the kitchen hurriedly opened, and Roger Monk made himself visible. He did this with the precipitation of a man reckless with anxiety, and he plunged at once into rapid speech.

“You’ll excuse me, Mr. Solent, for troubling you, but the truth of the matter is, Sir, that this house will be upset by breakfast-time tomorrow, unless you — unless you — would be so kind, Sir, as to help Mrs. Martin and myself.”

“What on earth is coming now?” thought Wolf. “These King’s Barton servants seem pretty hard put to it.”

“ ’Tisn’t as though I didn’t know that it’s above my province to speak,” went on the agitated man. “But speak I must; and if you’re the kind of young gentleman I think you are, you’ll listen to my words.”

Wolf contemplated the swarthy giant, who, dressed in his gardener’s-clothes, with bare throat and bare arms, had the torso of a classical athlete. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and his great sunburnt hands made weak fumbling gestures in the air.

“Certainly, Roger. By all means, Roger. I shall be delighted to help you and Mrs. Martin in any way I can. What is it I can do for you?”

The tall servant’s face relaxed instantaneously, and he smiled sweetly. His smile was like the smile of some melancholy slave in a Greek play. His voice sank into a confidential whisper.

“It’s sausages, Sir, asking you to excuse me, it’s sausages. Mr. Urquhart *has* to have ’em these days for breakfast, and there ain’t none of ’em in the house; and I am too set out, what with horses to clean and artichokes to plant and pigs in the yard to feed, to go to town myself.”

Wolf smiled in as grave and well-bred a manner as he could. “I’ll be very glad to bring you home some sausages, Monk,” he said amiably.

“At Weevil’s,” cried the other, full of relief and joy. “At Weevil’s in High Street. And be sure you get fresh ones, Mr. Solent. Tell Bob Weevil they’re for me. He knows me and I know him. Don’t mention Squire. Say they’re for Mr. Monk. He’ll know! Two pounds of sausages; and you can tell Weevil to put ’em down. Thank ‘ee more than I can say, Sir, for doing this. It eases a man’s mind. I was downright distraught in thinking of it. Squire’s like that. What he puts his heart on he puts his heart on, and none can turn him. I’ve been with other gentlemen — mostly in stable-work you understand — but I’ve never worked for one like Squire. Doesn’t do to contravene Squire when his heart is fixed, and so I thank ‘ee kindly, Mr.

Solent.” And the man vanished with the same precipitation with which he appeared.

Wolf set out down the drive in extremely good spirits. Nothing suited him better than to have the day to himself. It seemed to extend before him, this day, and gather volume and freedom, as if it were many days rolled into one. It didn’t worry him that it was Friday. The nature of the day, its cloudiness, its gustiness, its greyness, suited his mood completely. It seemed to carry his mind far, far back — back beyond any definite recollections. The look of the oak palings; the look of the mud; the look of the branches, with their scarcely budded embryo leaves swaying in the wind — all these things hit his imagination with a sudden accumulated force. He rubbed his hands; he prodded the ground with his stick; he strode forward with great strides.

This melancholy day, with its gustily blown elm-branches, seemed to extend itself before him along a road that was something more than an ordinary road. Fragmentary images, made up out of fantastic names — the name of Torp, the name of Malakite — hovered in front of him, mingled with the foam of dark-brown ale and the peculiar, bare, smooth look of uncooked sausages. And over and above such images floated the ambiguous presence of his father, William Solent. He felt as if everything that might chance to happen on this grey phantom-like day would happen under the direct influence of this dead man. He loved his father at that moment, not with any idealistic emotion, but with an earthy, sensual, heathen piety which allowed for much equivocal indulgence.

At the foot of the drive he turned into Lenty Lane, passing at the corner a trim little cottage, whose garden of rich black earth was full of daffodils. He stopped for a moment to stare at the window of this neat lodge — thinking in his mind, “That must be where Roger Monk lives” — and without being seriously disturbed, he was a little startled when, by reason of some impish trick of light and shade, it seemed to him that he saw an image of himself standing just inside one of the lower windows.

But he walked on in undiminished good spirits, and in about a quarter of an hour found himself in the centre of the village of King's Barton.

All the cottages he saw here had protective cornices, carved above windows and doors, chiselled and moulded with as much elaboration as if they were ornamenting some noble mansion or abbey. Many of these cottage-doors stood ajar, as Wolf passed by, and it was easy for him to observe their quaintly furnished interiors: the china dogs upon the mantelpieces, the grandfather's-clocks, the highly-coloured lithographs of war and religion, the shining pots and pans, the well-scrubbed deal tables, the deeply indented wooden steps leading to the rooms above. Almost all of them had large flagstones, of the same mellow, yellowish tint, laid between the doorstep and the path; and in many cases this stone was as deeply hollowed out, under the passing feet of the generations, as was the actual doorstep which rose above it.

Beyond these cottages his road led him past the low wall of the parish-church. Here he stopped for a while to view the graves and to enjoy the look of that solid and yet proud edifice whose massive masonry and tall square tower gathered up into themselves so many of the characteristics of that countryside.

Wolf wondered vaguely in what part of the churchyard his predecessor's body lay — that hiding-place without a headstone! He also wondered whether by some stroke of good luck he should get a glimpse of that submissive clergyman, satirically styled "Tilly-Valley," pottering about the place.

But the church remained lonely and unfrequented at that mid-morning hour. Nothing moved there but a heavy rack of dark-grey, wind-blown clouds, sailing swiftly above the four foliated pinnacles that rose from the corners of the tower. Close to the church he perceived what was evidently the parsonage; but there was no sign of life there either.

The cottages grew more scattered now. Some of them were really small dairy-farms, through the gates of whose muddy yards he could see pigs and poultry, and sometimes a young bull or an excited flock of geese.

At last he had passed the last house of the village and was drifting leisurely along a lonely country road. The hedges were already in full leaf; but many of the trees, especially the oaks and ashes, were yet quite bare. The ditches on both sides of the road contained gleaming patches of celandines.

As Wolf walked along, an extraordinary happiness took possession of him. He seemed to derive satisfaction from the mere mechanical achievement of putting one foot in front of the other. It seemed a delicious privilege to him merely to feel his boots sinking in the wet mud — merely to feel the gusts of cold air blowing upon his face.

He asked himself lazily why it was that he found nature, especially this simple pastoral nature that made no attempt to be grandiose or even picturesque, so much more thrilling than any human society he had ever met. He felt as if he enjoyed at that hour some primitive life-feeling that was identical with what these pollarded elms felt, against whose ribbed trunks the gusts of wind were blowing, or with what these shiny celandine-leaves felt, whose world was limited to tree-roots and fern-fronds and damp, dark mud!

The town of Blacksod stands in the midst of a richly green valley, at the point where the Dorsetshire Blackmore Vale, following the loamy banks of the river Lunt, carries its umbrageous fertility into the great Somersetshire plain. Blacksod is not only the centre of a large agricultural district; it is the energetic and bustling emporium of many small but enterprising factories. Cheeses are made here and also shoes. Sausages are made here and also leather gloves. Ironmongers, saddlers, shops dealing in every sort of farm-implement and farm-produce, abound in the streets of Blacksod side by side with haberdashers, grocers, fishmongers; and up and down its narrow pavements farmers and labourers jostle with factory-hands and burgesses.

After walking for about two miles, Wolf became conscious that this lively agglomeration of West Country trade was about to reveal itself. The hedges became lower, the ditches shallower, the blackbirds and thrushes less voluble. Neat little villas began to appear at the roadside, with trim but rather exposed gardens, where daffodils nodded with a splendid negligence, as if ready in their royal largesse to do what they could for the patient clerks and humble shop-assistants who had weeded the earth about their proud stems.

Soon there began to be manifested certain signs of borough traffic. Motor-cars showed themselves and even motor-lorries. Bakers' carts and butchers' carts came swiftly past him. He overtook maids and mothers returning from shopping, with perambulators where the infant riders were almost lost beneath the heaps of parcels piled up around them. He observed a couple of tramps taking off their boots under the hedge, their long brown peevish fingers untwisting dirty linen, their furtive suspicious eyes watching the passers-by with the look of sick jackals.

And then he found himself in an actual street. It was a new street, composed of spick-and-span jerry-built houses, each exactly like the other. But it gave Wolf a mysterious satisfaction. The neatness, the abnormal cleanliness of the brickwork and of the wretched sham-Gothic ornamentation did not displease him. The little gardens, behind low, brightly painted, wooden palings, were delicious to him, with their crocuses and jonquils and budding polyanthuses.

He surveyed these little houses and gardens — doubtless the homes of artisans and factory-hands — with a feeling of almost maudlin delight. He imagined himself as living in one of these places, and he realized exactly with what deep sensual pleasure he would enjoy the rain and the intermittent sunshine. There would be nothing artistic or over-cluttered there, to prevent every delicate vibration of air and sky from reaching the skin of his very soul. He loved the muslin curtains over the parlour-windows, and the ferns and flowerpots on the window-sills. He loved the quaint names of these little toy houses — names like Rosecot, Woodbine, Bankside, Primrose Villa. He tried to fancy what it would be like to sit in the bow-window of any one of these, drinking tea and eating bread-and-honey, while the Spring afternoon slowly darkened towards twilight.

He roused himself presently from these imaginations to observe that some of the real business of the town was becoming manifest. The little houses began to be interspersed with wood-sheds and timber-yards, by grocers' shops and coal-yards. He became alert now — that faint sort of "second-sight," which almost all contemplative people possess, warning him that Mr. Torp's establishment was not far off. He knew he was in Chequers Street. It only remained for him to keep his eyes open. He walked very slowly now, peering at the yards and shops on both sides of the road; and as he walked, a curious trance-like sensation came over him, the nature of which was very complicated, though no doubt it had something to do with the emptiness of his stomach. But it took the form of making him feel as if he were retracing some sequence of events through which long ago he had already passed.

Ah! There it was! “Torp, Stone-Cutter.” He gazed with interest at the various monuments for the dead, which lay about on the ground or stood erect and challenging against the wall. It produced a queer impression, this crowd of anonymous tombstones, the owners and possessors whereof even now cheerfully walking about the earth.

“I must get this Torp to show me what he’s done for poor Redfern,” he thought, as he passed on to the door of the house.

He knocked at the door and was so instantaneously admitted that it was with a certain degree of confusion that he found himself in the very heart of the stone-cutter’s household.

They had evidently just finished their midday meal. Mrs. Torp, a lean, cadaverous woman, was clearing the table. The stone-cutter himself, a plump, lethargic man, with a whimsical eye, was smoking his pipe by the fire. A handsome boy of about eleven, who had evidently just opened the door to let himself out, fell back now and stared at the stranger with a bold impertinence.

“What can I do for ‘ee, Sir?” said Mr. Torp, not making any attempt to rise, but smiling amiably at the intruder.

“Get on! Get off! Don’t worry the gentleman, Lob!” murmured the woman to the spellbound boy.

And then it was that Wolf became aware of another member of the family.

No sooner was he conscious of her presence than he felt himself becoming as speechless with astonishment as the boy was at his own appearance. She sat on a stool opposite her father, leaning her shoulders against the edge of a high-backed settle. She was a young girl of about eighteen, and her beauty was so startling that it seemed to destroy in a moment all ordinary human relations. Her wide-open grey eyes were fringed with long, dark eyelashes. Her voluptuous throat resembled an arum lily before it has unsheathed its petals. She wore a simple close-fitting dress, more suited to the summer than to a chilly day in spring; but the peculiarity of this dress lay in the way it emphasized the extraordinary suppleness of her shoulders and the delicate Artemis-like beauty of her young breasts.

"I've come from King's Barton," began Wolf, moving towards the stone-cutter. "I believe I have the honour to have taken the place of the gentleman for whom you have just designed one of your monuments."

"Sit 'ee down, Mister. Sit 'ee down, Sir!" cried the man cheerfully. "Give the gentleman a chair, Missus!" He spoke in a tone that implied that his own obesity must be accepted as a pleasant excuse for his retaining a sitting-posture.

But Mrs. Torp had already left the room with a tray; and Wolf, as he seated himself with his face to the girl, could hear the woman muttering viciously to herself and clattering angrily with the plates behind the kitchen-door — a door she seemed to have left open on purpose, so that she might combine the pleasure of listening to the conversation with the pleasure of disturbing it.

"Missus be cantiferous wi' I 'cos them 'taties be so terrible rotted," remarked the man, in a loud, hoarse whisper, leaning forward towards his guest and confidentially tapping his knee with his pipe. "And them onions what she been and cooked all morning, she've a-boiled all taste out o' they. Them onions might as well be hog-roots for all the Christian juice what be left in 'un."

Wolf, who had found it difficult to keep his eyes away from the girl by the settle, now suddenly became aware that she was fully conscious of his agitation and was regarding him with grave amusement.

"I suppose *you* don't do any of the cooking?" he said, rather faintly, meeting her gaze.

She changed her position into one that emphasized her beauty with a kind of innocent wantonness, smiled straight into his eyes, but remained silent.

"She?" put in her father. "Save us and help us! Gerda do the cooking? Why, Mister, that girl ain't got the gumption to comb her own hair. That's the Lord's own truth, Mister, what I'm telling 'ee. She ain't got the durned consideration to comb her own hair; and it be mighty silky, too, when it be combed out. But her mother have to do it. There ain't nothing in this blessed house what that poor woman hasn't to do; and her own daughter sitting round, strong as a May-pole. — Now you be off to school, Lob Torp! Don't yer trouble the gentleman."

This last remark was due to the fact that the handsome boy had edged himself quite close to Wolf and was gazing at him with a mixture of admiration and insolence.

"What be that on your chain?" he enquired. "Be that a real girt seal, like what King John throwed into the Wash?"

Wolf put his arm round the child's waist; but as he did so, he looked steadily at Gerda. At that moment Mrs. Torp re-entered the room.

"Well, John?" she said. "Aren't yer going into the yard? That stone for Mr. Manley's mother's been waiting since Sunday. He comes to see 'un five times a day. He'll be a crazed-man like, if 'tisn't up afore tomorrow."

Wolf rose to his feet.

"What shall I tell Mr. Urquhart about the headstone for Mr. Redfern?"

He uttered these words in a more decided and less propitiatory tone than he had yet used, and all the family stared at him with placid surprise.

"Oh, that!" cried Mr. Torp. "So you came about that, did yer? I had thought maybe you knowed some wealthy folk out in country what had a waiting corpse. Do 'ee come from these parts, Mister, or be 'ee from Lunnon, as this 'ere Redfern were?... Lunnon, eh? Well, 'tis strange that two young men same as you be should come to Blacksod; and both be Lunnoners! But that's what I tells our Gerda here. Maids what won't help their mothers in house, maids what do nought but walk out wi' lads, had best be in Lunnon their own selves! That there Metropolis must be summat wonderful to look at, I reckon. I expect they makes their own moniments in them parts?"

Wolf nodded, with a shrug of his shoulders, to imply that there was little need at present for Mr. Torp to think of extending his activities.

"Could you show me what you've done for Redfern?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, there ain't no harm in that, is there, Missus?" said the stone-cutter, looking appealingly at his wife.

"Best show him," said the lady briefly. "Best show him. But let 'un understand that Mr. Manley's mother is what comes first."

The obese stone-cutter rose with an effort and led the way into the yard. Wolf stepped aside to permit the girl to follow her father; and as she passed him, she gave him a glance that resembled the sudden trembling of a white-lilac branch, heavy with rain and sweetness. Her languorous personality dominated the whole occasion for him; and as he watched her swaying body moving between those oblong stones in that cold enclosure, the thought rose within him that if his subterranean vice couldn't find a place for loveliness like this, there must be something really inhuman in its exactions.

With an incredible rapidity he began laying plots to see this girl again. Did Mr. Urquhart know of her existence? Had Darnley Otter ever seen her?... He was roused from his amorous thoughts by an abrupt gesture of Mr. Torp.

“There ‘a be!” said the carver. “ ’Tis Ham Hill stone, as Squire Urquhart said for’n to be. I does better jobs in marble; and marble’s what most of ’em likes. But that’s the order; and the young gent what it’s chipped for can’t help ‘isself.”

Wolf regarded the upright yellow slab, upon the top of which was a vigorous “Here Lies,” and at the foot of which was an even more vigorous “John Torp, Monument-Maker.”

“You haven’t got very far, Mr. Torp,” he remarked drily.

“Won’t take me more’n a couple o’ afternoons to finish it up,” replied the other. “And you can tell Mr. Urquhart that as soon as Mr. Manley be satisfied — Mr. Manley of Willum’s Mill, tell ‘un! — I’ll get to work on his young friend and make a clean job of he.”

There did not seem any excuse just then for prolonging this interview. Wolf’s mind hurried backwards and forwards like a rat trying to find a hole into a pantry. He thought, “Would they let her show me the way to the Three Peewits?” and then immediately afterwards he thought, “They’ll send the boy, and I’ll never get rid of him!”

In the end he went off with an abruptness that was almost rude. He patted Lob on the head, nodded at the stone-cutter, plunged into the eyes of Gerda as a diver plunges into water, and strode away down Chequers Street.

It was not long before he was seated at a spotless white cloth in the commercial dining-room of the famous West Country inn. In front of him rose a massive mahogany sideboard, which served as a sort of sacred pedestal for the ancient silver plate of three generations of sagacious landlords. In the centre of this silver were two symbolic objects — an immense uncut ham, adorned with a white paper frill, and a large half-eaten apple-tart.

Wolf was so late for luncheon that he and a solitary waiter had the whole dusky, sober room entirely to themselves. They were, however, looked down upon by the ferocious eye of a stuffed pike and by the supercilious eye of Queen Victoria, who, wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter, conveyed, but only by the flicker of an eyelid, her ineffable disdain for all members of the human race who were not subjects of the House of Hanover.

And as he lingered over his meal, drinking that dark, foamy liquor that seemed the dedicated antidote to a grey March day, he permitted his fancy to run riot with the loveliness of Gerda Torp. How remarkable that she had never once opened her lips! And yet in her silence she had compelled both that room and that yard to serve as mere frames to her personality. He tilted back in his chair, and pressed the palms of his hands against the edge of the table, revolving every detail of that queer scene, and becoming so absorbed that it was only after a perceptible interval that he began to taste the cigarettes which he went on unconsciously smoking.

The girl was not the particular physical type that appealed to him most, or that had, whenever he had come across it, the most provocative effect upon his senses; but the effect upon him of a beauty so overpowering, so absolute in its flawlessness, was great enough to sweep out of sight all previous predilections. And now, as he conjured up the vision of what she was like, it seemed that nothing more desirable could possibly happen to him than to enjoy such beauty.

He made up his mind that by hook or by crook he would possess her. He knew perfectly well that he could not, properly speaking, be said to have fallen in love with her. He was like a man who suddenly finds out that he has suffered all his life from thirst, and simultaneously with this discovery stumbles upon a cool cellar of the rarest wine. To have caught sight of her at all was to be dominated by an insatiable craving for her — a craving that made him feel as if he had some sixth sense, some sense that *must* be satisfied by the possession of her, and that nothing but the possession of her *could* satisfy.

Drugged and dazed with the Three Peewits' ale and with these amorous contemplations, Wolf sat on beneath that picture of Queen Victoria in a species of erotic trance. His rugged face, with its high cheek-bones and hawk-like nose, nodded over his plate with half-shut lecherous eyes. Every now and then he ran his fingers through his short, stiff, fair hair, till it stood up erect upon his head.

"Well, well," he said to himself at last, "this won't do!" And rising abruptly from his chair, he gave the waiter, who, in his preoccupation had been to him a mere white blur above a black coat, an extravagant tip — half-a-crown, in fact — and, taking up his hat and stick, told them to put down his meal to Mr. Urquhart's account, and stepped out into the street.

The cold, gusty wind, when he got outside, cleared his brain at once. He made up his mind that he would leave the bookseller to the last; and, stopping one of the passers-by, he enquired the way to Weevil's grocery.

Never did he forget that first lingering stroll through the centre of Blacksod! The country people seemed to be doing their shopping as if it were some special *fête*. Parsons, squires, farmers, villagers — all were receiving obsequious and yet quizzical welcome from the sly shopkeepers and their irresponsible assistants. The image of Gerda Torp moved with him as he drifted slowly through this animated scene. Her sweetness flowed through his senses and flowed out around him, heightening his interest in everything he looked at, making everything seem rich and mellow, as if it were seen through a diffused golden light, like that of the pictures of Claude Lorraine.

And all the while over the slate roofs the great grey clouds rushed upon their arbitrary way. His spirit, drunk with the sweetness of Gerda and the fumes of the Three Peewits' ale, rose in exultation to follow those clouds.

Whirling along with them in this exultant freedom of his spirit, while his human figure with its oak walking-stick tapped the edge of the pavement, he felt a queer need, now, to carry this maddeningly sweet burden of his to that mound in the Ramsgard cemetery.

"*He* would chuckle over this," thought Wolf, as he recalled that profane death-bed cry. "*He* would push me on to snatch most scandalously at this girl, let the result be as it may!"

His mind dropped now like a leaden plummet into all manner of erotic thoughts. Would her silence go on... with its indrawing magnetic secrecy... even if he were making love to her? Would that glaucous greyness in her eyes darken, or grow more luminous, as he caressed her? Gerda certainly couldn't be called a "peeled willow-wand," for her limbs were rounded and voluptuous, just as her face had something of that lethargic sulkiness that is seen sometimes in ancient Greek sculpture.

It was just at this point that, looking round for a suitable person to enquire of again concerning the sausage-shop, he felt himself jerked by the elbow; and there, in front of him, smiling up into his face, was the handsome, mischievous countenance of Lob Torp.

"I see'd 'ee, Mister!" burst out the boy breathlessly. "I see'd 'ee long afore 'ee could see I! Say now, Mister, have 'ee any cigarette-pictures on 'ee?"

Wolf surveyed the excited child thoughtfully. Surely the gods were on his side this day!

"If I haven't, I soon *will* have," he brought out with a nervous smile, searching hurriedly in his pockets.

It appeared that he did have a couple of half-used packages, containing the desired little bits of stiff, shiny paper.

"There, there's two, at any rate!" he said, handing them over.

Lob Torp scrutinized the two cards with a disappointed eye. "They ain't Three Castles," he said sadly. "Them others bain't as pretty as they Three Castles be." He meditated for a moment, with his hands in his pockets. "Say, Mister," he began eagerly, with radiant eyes. "Tell 'ee what I'll do for 'ee. I'll sell 'ee the photo of Sis what I be taking down to Bob Weevil's. He were a-going to gie I summat for'n, but like enough it'll be worth more to a gent like yourself. Come now, mister, gie I a sixpence and I'll gie 'ee the picture and say nought to Bob."

The ingratiating smile with which Lob uttered these words would have been worthy of an Algerian street-arab. Wolf made a humorous grimace at him, under the mask of which he hid annoyance, uneasiness, curiosity.

The boy continued: " 'Tis a wonderful pretty picture, Mister. I tooked it me own self. She be ridin' astride one of them wold tombstones in Dad's yard, just the same as 'twere a girt 'oss."

"I don't mind looking at it," said Wolf, after a pause, pulling the boy into the door of a shop. But Lob Torp was evidently an adept in the ways of infatuated gentlemen.

"Threepence for a look, Mister, and sixpence for to keep," he said resolutely.

It was on the tip of Wolf's tongue to cry, "Hand it over, boy. I'll keep it!" But an instinct of suspicious dignity restrained him, and he assumed a non-committal, negligent air. But under this air the ancient, sly cunning of the predatory demon began to fumble at the springs of his intention. "I'll get

Bob Weevil to show it to me," the Machiavellian monitor whispered. "I shall have it in my hands then without being indebted to this rascally little blackmailer!"

He turned to the boy and took him by the arm. "Come on, youngster!" he said. "Never mind about the picture. Much better give it to your friend! I'm going to Weevil's shop now myself, and you can show me the way. I'll give you your sixpence for *that*!" He pulled the child forward with him and made him walk by his side, his arm thrown lightly and casually round Lobbie's neck. But all this sagacious hypocrisy no more deceived the cynical intelligence of Gerda's brother than did the unction of that arm about his shoulder!

The child slipped out of his grasp like a little eel. "Don't 'ee hold on to I, Mister. I ain't going to rin nowhere. I ain't a-gived school the go-by for to play marbles. I be goin' fishing with Bob Weevil, present. He lets I hold his net for'n."

"Oh, is there any fishing about here?" enquired Wolf blandly, accepting his defeat. The boy skipped a pace or two like a young rabbit.

" 'Tain't what *you'd* call fishing, Mister. Nought but minnies and stickles, 'cept when us do go to Willum s Mill. Woops-I! But them girt chub be hard to hook. And Mister Manley he likes to keep *them* for the gentry. 'Tis when us be down to Willum's of an evening, when farmer be feeding 'isself, that Bob and me do a bit of real fishing."

Wolf surveyed the good-looking urchin with benevolent irony. "Have you ever landed any of those big chub?" he asked. And then he suddenly became conscious that the nervous, hunted eye of a very shabby clergyman was observing them both, with startled interest, from the edge of the pavement.

“We’re near where us wants to go now, Sir,” was the boy’s irrelevant response, uttered in a surprisingly loud voice.

When they had advanced a little further, the child turned round to his companion and whispered furtively. “Yon Parson were the Reverend T. E. Valley, Mister, from King’s Barton. ‘Ee do talk to I sometimes about helping he with them holy services up to church; but Dad he says all them things be gammon. He’s what you might call blasphemious, my Dad is; and I be blasphemious, too, I reckon; though Bob says that High Church be a religion what lets a person play cricket on Sundays. But I takes no stock o’ that, being as cricket and such-like ain’t nought to I.”

“Tilly-Valley! Tilly-Valley!” muttered Wolf under his breath, recalling the contemptuous allusion of Mr. Urquhart.

“Here we be, Mister!” cried Lobbie Torp, pausing before a capacious old-fashioned shop, over which was written in dignified lettering, “Robert Weevil and Son.”

They entered together, and the boy was at once greeted by a young man behind the counter, a young man with black hair and a pasty complexion.

“Hullo, Lob! Come to see if there’s fishing tonight?”

Wolf advanced in as easy and natural a manner as he could assume. “I must propitiate my rival,” he said grimly to himself. “My name is Solent, Mr. Weevil,” he said aloud, “and I come on behalf of Mr. Urquhart of King’s Barton.”

“Yes, Sir, quite so, Sir; and what can I do for you, Sir?” said the young man politely, bowing with a professional smirk over the polished counter.

“The gentleman’s been to see Dad,” put in Lobbie, in his high treble. “And he saw Sis, too, and Sis seed him, too; and I rinned after him and showed him the way!”

“And what can I do for you, Sir, or for Mr. Urquhart, Sir?” repeated the young grocer.

“To tell you the truth, Mr. Weevil, it was Monk, the man up there, who asked me to come to you. It appears he’s run out of sausages — your especial sausages — and he begged me to take back a pound or two for him.”

“I’ll do them up at once for you,” said the grocer benignantly. “I’ve just had a new lot in.”

It was not very surprising to Wolf to notice that his young guide hurriedly followed Mr. Weevil into the recesses of the shop. From where he stood he could see the two of them quite clearly through an open door, the dark head and the fair head close together, poring over some object that certainly was not sausages!

A shameless and scandalous curiosity seized him to share in that colloquy. The various paraphernalia of the shop, the piled-up tins of Reading Biscuits, the great copper canisters of Indian teas, the noble erections of Blacksod cheeses — all melted — all grew vague and indistinct.

“Mounted astride of a girt tombstone,” he repeated to himself; and the thought of the cool whiteness of that girl’s skin and its contact with that chiselled marble reduced everything else in the world to a kind of irrelevance, to something that fell into the category of the tedious and the negligible.

There came at last an outburst of merriment from the back of the shop that actually caused him to make a few hurried steps in that direction; but he stopped short, interdicted by his sense of personal dignity. “I really can’t join in libidinous jesting with the Blacksod populace *just* at present!” he thought to himself. “But there’s plenty of time. I’ve no doubt *William*

Solent would have had no such hesitation!” And the thought came over him how ridiculous these dignified withdrawings of his would appear to that grinning skull in the cemetery.

But the youth and the boy came back again now gravely enough to the front of the shop.

“There you are, sir!” said Bob Weevil, handing him a lusty package, and puffing out his cheeks as he did so. “I think Mr. Urquhart will find those to his taste.” He paused and gave Wolf’s companion a glance of complicated significance. “Don’t tell Gerdie what I said about that picture, Lob, will you?” he added.

There was a tone in this remark that caused Wolf’s face to stiffen and his eyebrows to rise. “And now perhaps you can tell me,” he said, “where I can find Malakite’s, the book-shop?”

The two friends exchanged a puzzled and baffled glance, not unmixed with disapproval. Books were evidently something for which they both entertained a hostile suspicion. But the young grocer gave him detailed instructions, to which Lob Torp listened with satiric condescension. “See you both again soon!” murmured Wolf, with dignified amiability, as he left the shop.

He walked very slowly this time along the Blacksod pavements, and he found himself buttoning his overcoat tightly and turning up his collar; for the wind had veered from northwest to due north, and the air that blew against his face now had whistled across the sheep-tracks of Salisbury Plain.

Ah! *There* was the second-hand book-shop, with the single curious word, “Malakite,” written above it. He paused for a second to gaze in at the window, and was both surprised and delighted by the number and rarity of the works exposed there for sale. The house itself was a solidly constructed, sturdily built Mid-Victorian erection, with a grey slate roof; and there was a little open passage at one side of it, leading, he could see, into a small walled-in garden at the back.

He pushed open the door and entered the shop. At first he found it difficult to see clearly; for it was already nearly four o'clock, the sky heavily overcast, the place ill-lighted, the gas-jets unlit. But after a moment of suspense, he made out a tall, gaunt, bearded, old man, with sunken cheeks, hollow eye-sockets, closely cropped grizzled hair, seated in a corner of the shop upon a rough, faded horse-hair chair, with a little round table in front of him, carefully gumming together the loose leaves of a large folio which he held upon his knee. The old man's head was bent low over his work, and he made no sign of having heard anyone enter.

"Mr. Malakite?" said Wolf quietly, advancing towards him between rows of books. His approach was so easy and natural in that dim light, that his astonishment may be imagined when the old man let the folio fall to the ground, and stumbled to his feet with such agitated violence that the round table collapsed also, tossing the glue-pot upon the floor. In that twilit place it was almost spectral to see the eyes in that old furrowed face staring forth like black holes burnt in a wooden panel.

"I startled you, Sir," muttered Wolf gently, drawing back a little. "It's a dark, cold afternoon. I'm afraid I disturbed you. I am very sorry."

For one second the old bookseller seemed to totter and sway, as if to follow his folio to the ground; but he mastered himself, and, leaning against the arm of his horse-hair chair, spoke in a dry, collected voice. His words were as unexpected to his visitor as his agitation had been.

"Who *are* you, young man?" he said sternly. "Who were your parents?"

Not Dante himself, when in the Inferno he heard a similar question from that proud tomb, could have been more startled than Wolf was at this extraordinary enquiry.

"My name is Wolf Solent, Mr. Malakite," he answered humbly. "My father's name was William Solent. He was a master at Ramsgard School. My mother lives in London. I am acting now as Secretary for Mr. Urquhart."

The old man, hearing these words, gave vent to a curious rattling sigh, deep down in his throat, like the sound of the wind through a patch of dead thistle-heads. He made a feeble gesture with one of his long, bony hands, half apologetic, half sorrowful, and sank back again upon his chair.

"You must forgive me, Sir," he said after a pause. "You must forgive me, Mr. Solent. The truth is, your voice, coming suddenly upon me like that, reminded me of things that ought to be — reminded me of — of too many things." The old man's voice rose at the words "too many," but his next remark was quiet and natural. "I knew your father quite well, sir. We were intimate friends. His death was a great blow to me. Your father, Mr. Solent, was a very remarkable man."

Wolf, on hearing these words, moved up to the bookseller's side, and with an easy and spontaneous gesture laid his hand upon the hand of the old man as it rested upon the arm of his chair.

"You are the second friend of my father's that I have met lately," said he. "The other was Miss Selena Gault."

The old man hardly seemed to listen to these words. He kept staring at him, out of his sunken eye-sockets, with deprecatory intensity.

Wolf, beginning to feel a little uncomfortable, bent down and occupied himself by picking up the fallen table, the glue-pot, and the folio. As he did this he began to grow aware of a sensation resembling that which he had felt in Mr. Urquhart's library — the sensation of the presence of forms of human obliquity completely new in his experience.

He had no sooner got the folio safe back upon the table, than the shop-door swung open behind him and closed with a resounding noise. He glanced round; and there, to his surprise, stood Darnley Otter. This quiet gentleman brought in with him such an air of ease and orderliness, that Wolf felt a wave of very agreeable reassurance pass through his nerves. He was, in fact, thoroughly relieved to see that yellow beard and gracious reticence. The man's reserved manner and courtly smile gave him a comfortable sense of a return to those normal and natural conventions from which he felt as if he had departed very far since he left the tea-room of the Lovelace Hotel yesterday.

The two young men exchanged greetings, while the owner of the book-shop observed them with a sort of patient bewilderment. He then rose slowly to his feet.

"It's time for tea," he said, in a carefully measured voice. "I generally lock the place up now and go upstairs. I don't know — —" He hesitated, looking from one to the other. "I don't know whether it would be asking too much — if I asked you both to come upstairs with me?"

Wolf and Mr. Otter simultaneously expressed their extreme desire to drink a cup of tea with him.

"I'll go and warn my daughter, then," he said eagerly. "You know, Mr. Otter, I feel as if this young gentleman and myself were already old friends. By the way, this folio, Sir" — and he turned to Solent— "is the book I wrote to Mr. Urquhart about. I think I shall have to trust it with you. It's a treasure. But Mr. Urquhart is a good customer of mine. I don't think he'll want to purchase it though. Its price is higher than he usually cares to give. Will you excuse me, then, gentlemen?"

So saying, he opened a door at the rear of the shop and vanished from view. The two men looked at each other with that particular look which normal people exchange when an extraordinary person has suddenly left them.

“A remarkable old chap,” observed Wolf quietly.

Darnley shrugged his shoulders and looked round the shop.

“You don’t think so?” pursued Solent.

“Oh, he’s all right,” admitted the other.

“You don’t like him, then?”

The only reply to this was an almost Gallic gesture, implying avoidance of an unpleasant subject.

“Why, what’s wrong?” said Solent, pressing him.

“Oh, well,” responded the Latin-teacher, driven to make himself more explicit. “There’s a rather sinister legend attached to Mr. Malakite, in regard to his wife.”

“His wife?” echoed Wolf.

“He is said to have killed her with shame.”

“Shame? Do people die of shame?”

“They have been known to do so,” said the schoolmaster, drily, “at least in classical times. You’ve probably heard of Œdipus, Solent?”

“But Œdipus *didn’t* die. That was the whole point. The gods carried him away.”

“Well, perhaps the gods will carry Mr. Malakite away.”

“What do you mean?” enquired Wolf, with great interest, lowering his voice.

“Oh, I daresay we make too much of these things. But there was a quarrel between this man and his wife, connected with his fondness for their daughter, this young Christie’s elder sister... and... well... there was a child born, too.”

“And the wife died?”

"The wife died. The girl was packed off to Australia. It seems she couldn't bear the sight of her child, and it was taken away from her. I can't tell you whether the case got as far as the law-courts, or whether it was hushed up. Your friend Miss Gault knows all about it."

Wolf was silent, meditating upon all this.

"Not a very pleasant background for the other daughter!" he brought out at last.

"Oh, she's a funny little thing," said Darnley, smiling. "She lives so completely in books, that I don't think she takes anything that happens in the real world very seriously. She always seems to me, when I meet her, as if she'd just come out of a deep trance and wanted to return to it. She and I get on splendidly. Well, you'll see her in a minute, and can judge for yourself."

Wolf was silent again. He was thinking of the friendship between this old man and his father. He pondered in his mind whether or not to reveal to Darnley the unexpected agitation which his appearance had excited. For some reason he felt reluctant to do this. He felt vaguely that his new closeness to his cynical progenitor committed him to a certain caution. He was on the edge of all manner of dark entanglements. Well! He would use what discernment he had; but at any rate he would keep the whole problem to himself.

"I went to Torp's yard," he remarked, anxious to change the subject. "The fellow doesn't seem to have got very far with Redfern's headstone."

Darnley Otter lifted his heavy eyelids and fixed upon him a sudden piercing look from his mackerel-blue eyes.

"Did Urquhart talk to you about Redfern?" he asked.

"Only to grumble at him for doing something about the book that didn't suit his ideas. Did *you* know him? Did he die suddenly?"

Mr. Otter, instead of replying, turned his back, put his hands in his pockets, and began pacing up and down the floor of the shop, which seemed to get darker and darker around them.

He stopped suddenly and pulled at his trim beard.

“I cursed my wretched school-work to you yesterday,” he said. “But when I think of the misery that human beings cause one another in this world, I am thankful that I can teach Latin, and let it all go. But I daresay I exaggerate; I daresay I exaggerate.”

At that moment the door at the back of the shop opened, and the old bookseller, standing in the entrance, called out to them in a calm, well-bred voice.

“Will you come, gentlemen? Will you come?”

They followed him in silence into a little unlit passage. Preceding them with a slow, careful shuffle, he led them up a flight of steps to a landing above, where there were several closed doors and one open door. At this open door he stood aside and beckoned them to enter.

The room, when they found themselves within it, was lighted by a pleasant, green-shaded lamp. There was a warm fire burning in the grate, in front of which was a dainty tea-table with an old-fashioned urn, a silver teapot, some cups and saucers of Dresden china, and a large plate of thin bread-and-butter.

From beside this table a fragile-looking girl who might have been anything between twenty and twenty-five rose to welcome them. Darnley Otter greeted this young person in the manner of a benevolent uncle, and while Wolf and she were shaking hands, retained her left hand affectionately in his own.

Solent had received, since he left King’s Barton, so many disturbing impressions, that he was glad enough to yield himself up now, in this peaceful room, to what was really a vague, formless anodyne of almost Quakerish serenity. What he felt was undoubtedly due to the personality of Christie Malakite; but as he sank down in an armchair by her side, the impression he received of her appearance was confined to an awareness of smoothly parted hair, of a quaint pointed chin, and of a figure so slight and sexless that it resembled those meagre, androgynous forms that can be seen sometimes in early Italian pictures.

For several minutes Wolf permitted the conversation to pass lightly and easily between Darnley and Christie, while he occupied himself in enjoying his tea. He did not, however, hesitate to cast every now and then surreptitious glances at the extraordinary countenance of the old man, who, at a little distance from the table, was reposing in a kind of abstracted coma, his bony hands clasped around one of his thin knees, and his eyes half-closed.

Then, all in a moment, Wolf found himself describing his visit to the stone-cutter's yard, and without the least embarrassment enlarging upon the hypnotic charm that had been cast upon him by the loveliness of Gerda.

It appeared, for some mysterious reason, that he could talk more freely to these two people than he had ever talked in his life.

He had come, little as he had yet seen of him, to have a genuine regard for Darnley Otter, a regard that he had reason to feel was quite as strongly reciprocated. And in addition to this there seemed to be something about the pale, indefinite profile of the girl by his side, the patient slenderness of her neck, the cool detachment of her whole attitude, that unloosed the flow of his speech and threw around him an unforced consciousness of being at one with himself and at one with the general stream of life.

Darnley rallied him with a dry shamelessness about his confessed infatuation for the stone-cutter's daughter; and Christie, turning every now and then an almost elfish smile toward his voluble talk, actually offered, as she filled his cup for the third or fourth time, to help him in his adventure by inviting the young woman herself, whom she said she knew perfectly well, to have tea with him any afternoon he liked to name!

"She *is* beautiful," the girl repeated. "I love to watch her. But I warn you, Mr. Solent, you'll have many rivals."

"She's worse than a flirt," remarked Darnley, gravely. "She's got something in her that I have always fancied Helen of Troy must have had — a sort of terrible passivity. I know for a fact that she's had three lovers already. One of them was a young Oxonian who, they tell me, was a terrific rake. Another, so they say, was your predecessor, young Redfern. But none of them — forgive me, Christie dear! — seems to have, as they say down here, 'got her into trouble.' None of them seems to have made the least impression upon her! I doubt if she possesses what you call a heart. Certainly not a heart that you, Solent" — he smiled one of his gentlest ironic smiles— "are likely to break. So go ahead, my friend! We shall watch the course of your 'furtivos amores,' as Catullus would say, with the most cold-blooded interest. Shan't we, Christie?"

The young girl turned upon Wolf her steady, unprovocative, indulgent gaze. "Perhaps," she said quietly, after a moment in which Wolf felt as though his mind had encountered her mind like two bodiless shadows in a flowing river— "perhaps in this case it will be different. Would you marry her if it were different?" These words were added in a tone that had the sort of faint aqueous mischief in it, such as a water-nymph might have indulged in, contemplating the rather heavy earth-loves of a pair of mortals.

"Oh, confound it, *that's* going a little too fast, even for me!" Wolf protested. And, in the silence that followed, it seemed to him as if these two people, this Darnley and this Christie, had managed between them, in some sort of subtle conspiracy, to take off the delicious edge of his furtive obsession.

“Damn them!” he muttered to himself. “I was a fool to talk about it. But there it is! None of their chatter can make the sweetness of Gerda less entrancing.” But even as he formulated this revolt with a half-humorous irritation, he was aware that his mood *had* in some imperceptible way changed. Under cover of the friendly badinage that was going on between Darnley and Christie, he once or twice encountered the silent observation of the old bookseller, who had now lighted his pipe and was watching them all with a cloudy intentness; and it occurred to him that it was quite as much due to the shock of what he had heard about the old man that this change had come, as to anything that these two had said.

“But to the devil with them all!” he muttered to himself, as he and Darnley rose to go. “I’ve never seen anything as desirable as that girl’s body and I’m not going to be teased into giving it up.”

Before he left the house, the old bookseller wrapped the folio in paper and cardboard and placed it in his hands, making, as he did so, an automatic reference to his professional concern about its well-being. But the expression in Mr. Malakite’s hollow eyes, as this transaction took place, seemed to Wolf to have some quite different significance — some significance in no way connected with the History of the Evershot Family.

All the way back to King’s Barton, as the two men walked side by side in friendly fragmentary speech, Wolf kept making spasmodic attempts to adjust the folio and the sausages so as to leave his right hand free for his oak-stick. He rejected all offers of assistance from his companion with a kind of obstinate pride, declaring that he “liked” carrying parcels; but the physical difficulty of these adjustments had the effect of diminishing his response both to the influence of the night and to the conversation of his friend.

It was quite dark now; and the north wind, whistling through the blackthorn-hedges, sighing through the tops of the trees, whimpering in the telegraph-wires, had begun to acquire that peculiar burden of impersonal sadness, which seems to combine the natural sorrows of the human generations with some strange planetary grief whose character is unrevealed.

The influence of this dirge-like wind did by degrees, in spite of the numbness of his obstinate clutch upon his packages, come to affect Wolf's mind. He seemed to rush backward on the wings of this wind, to the two human heads — to the fleshless head of William Solent buried in the earth and to the despairing head of that son of perdition crouching at Waterloo Station.

He mentally compared, as he shouted his replies to his companion's remarks against the blustering gusts, the sardonic aplomb of the skull under the clay with that ghastly despair of the living, and he flung over the thornhedge a savage comment upon the ways of God.

The trim beard of Darnley Otter might wag on... like a brave bowsprit "stemming nightly to the pole"... but the keel of every human vessel had a leak... it was only a question of chance... just pure chance... how far that leak would go... any wagging beard... any brave chin might have to cry, at any moment, "Hold, enough!"...

And suddenly, in the covering darkness, Wolf took off his hat and stretched back his head, straining his neck as far as it would go, so that without relaxing the movement of walking, his up-turned face might become horizontal. In this position he made a hideous grimace into infinity — a grimace directed at the Governing Power of the Universe. What he desired to express in this grimace was an announcement that his own secret happiness had not “squared” him....

His mind rushed upwards like a rocket among those distant stars. He imagined himself standing on some incredible promontory on the faintest star he could see. Even from that vantage he wanted to repeat his defiance — not “squared” yet, O crafty universe! — not “squared” yet!

THE BLACKBIRD'S SONG

THE DESTINIES CERTAINLY did appear anxious to "square" him; for when that evening, after dinner with the Otters, he repaired to the Manor House with his packages, Mr. Urquhart turned out to be so delighted with the book, that he commissioned him to return to the bookseller the very next morning and make the old man a liberal offer.

Wolf awoke, therefore, on this day of Saturn, in that vague delicious mood wherein the sense of happiness-to-come seems, like a great melted pearl, to cover every immediate object and person with a liquid glamour.

He took his bath with unalloyed satisfaction between the four bare walls, whereon certain dimly outlined squares in the extended whiteness indicated the exile of all art except that of the air, the sun, and the wind.

He saw nothing of either of the brothers. Jason had not yet appeared; and though there had been some vague reference to his accompanying Darnley in his early start, it was now clear that the younger Otter wished his morning walk to be free of human intercourse.

This was all agreeable enough to Wolf, who, like most conspirators, had a furtive desire to be left to his own devices; and he resolved, without putting his resolution into any formal shape, that as soon as his business with Malakite was settled, he would make his way to the stone-cutter's yard.

From his conversation at breakfast with Mrs. Otter, he learnt that it was possible to reach the portion of the town where the bookseller lived without following the whole length of Chequers Street. This suited him well, as he wished to time his appearance at the Torp ménage so as to be certain of finding the girl at home.

He had discovered, laid carefully at the edge of his plate, a letter from his mother, and another letter, with a Ramsgard postmark, that he suspected to be from Selena Gault. Both these epistles he hurriedly thrust into his coat-pocket, afraid of any ill-omened side-tracking of his plans for that auspicious day.

It lacked about an hour of noon, when, armed with permission to bid as high as five pounds for the Evershot chronicle, Wolf entered for the second time the establishment of Mr. John Malakite.

The old man received him without the remotest trace of the emotion of the preceding day. He agreed so quickly to accept Mr. Urquhart's offer, that Wolf felt a little ashamed of his own skill as a business intermediary. But he was glad to escape the tedium of haggling, and was preparing to bid the bookseller farewell, when the man asked in a blank and neutral voice, as if the proposal were a mechanical form of politeness, "Will you come upstairs with me, Mr. Solent, and have a glass of something?"

Knowing that there was no immediate hurry, if he were to time his visit to the Torps so as to catch them at their midday meal, Wolf assented to this suggestion, and, as on the former occasion, followed the man up the dark stairway with unquestioning docility.

He found Christie in a long blue apron, dusting the little sitting-room. Wolf was touched by the grave awkwardness with which she pulled this garment over her head and flung it down before offering him her hand. The dress she now appeared in was of a sombre brown, and so tightly fitting that it not only enhanced her slenderness, but also gave her an almost hieratic look. With her smoothly parted hair and abstracted brown eyes she resembled some withdrawn priestess of Artemis, interrupted in some sacred rite.

No sooner was the guest seated, than Mr. Malakite muttered some inarticulate apology and went down to his shop.

The girl stood for a while in silence, looking down upon her visitor, who returned her scrutiny without embarrassment. A delicious sense of age-long intimacy and ease flowed over him.

“Well, Mr. Solent,” she murmured, “I suppose you’re not going to leave Blacksod without seeing Gerda?”

“I thought of waiting till their dinner-time,” he said, “when I would be certain of finding her. Redfern’s headstone can be dragged in again as an excuse.”

Christie nodded gravely. “I wrote to her yesterday,” she said, “after you went. If I’d known you were coming in today I might have asked her to tea. But I daresay she’ll come anyway. She often does pay me visits.”

While the girl uttered these words, Wolf became aware for the first time of the extraordinary key in which her voice was pitched. It was a key so faint and so unresonant as to suggest some actual deficiency in her vocal cords. As soon as he became conscious of this peculiarity, he found his attention wandering from the meaning of her speech and focussing itself upon her curious intonation.

But she moved to the fireplace now and bent her back over it, striking a little lump of coal with an extremely large silver poker.

“That girl must be sick of admiration,” observed Wolf, “wouldn’t you think so? Her mother must have an anxious time.”

“I expect her mother knows how well she can take care of herself,” retorted Christie, glancing sideways at him while she rested on the handle of the poker. A couple of thin loose tresses of silky brown hair hung down across her brow, her nose, her mouth, her chin, giving the impression that she was peering out at him through the drooping tendrils of some sort of wild vegetation.

Her remark, as may well be imagined, was not received with any great ardour by her guest.

“What an expression!” he cried petulantly. “Take care of herself! Why the devil *shouldn’t* she take care of herself?” And it occurred to him to wonder how it was that this sophisticated young lady had ever made friends with the stone-cutter’s daughter. Christie’s manners were so well-bred that it was difficult to associate her with a family like the Torps.

The girl smiled as she replaced the silver poker by the side of the hearth. “Gerda knows well enough that *I* don’t worry about her,” she said. “Pardon me a minute,” she added, slipping past him into an alcove that adjoined the room.

Wolf took advantage of her absence to move across to a bookshelf which already had attracted his attention. What first arrested his interest now was an edition of Sir Thomas Browne’s “Hydriotaphia, or Urn-Burial.” He took this book down from the shelf, and was dreamily turning its pages, when the girl returned with a glass of claret in her hand. Hurriedly replacing the book in its place and raising the wine to his lips, he could not resist commenting upon some other, more abstruse volumes that her bookshelf contained.

“I see you read Leibnitz, Miss Malakite,” he said. “Don’t you find those ‘monads’ of his hard to understand? You’ve got Hegel there, too, I notice. I’ve always been rather attracted to *him* — though just why, I’d be puzzled to tell you.”

He settled himself again in his wicker-chair, wine-glass in hand.

"You're fond of philosophy?" he added, scowling amiably at her. His thick eyebrows contracted as he did this, and his eyes grew narrow and small.

She seated herself near him upon the sofa and smoothed out her brown skirt thoughtfully with her fingers. She was evidently anxious to answer this important question with a becoming scrupulousness.

With this new gravity upon the features of its mistress, it seemed to Wolf as if the little sitting-room itself awoke from somnolence and asserted its individuality. He observed the unadulterated mid-century style of its cut-glass chandeliers, of its antimacassars, of its rosewood chairs, of its Geneva clock, and of the heavy gold frames of its water-colour pictures. The room, as the morning light fell upon these things across the grey slate roofs and the yellow pansies in the window-box, certainly did possess a charming character of its own, a character to which the thick, dusky carpet and the great mahogany curtain-rod across the window gave the final touches.

"I don't understand half of what I read," Christie began, speaking with extreme precision. "All I know is that every one of those old books has its own atmosphere for me."

"Atmosphere?" questioned Wolf.

"I suppose it's funny to talk in such a way," she went on, "but all these queer non-human abstractions, like Spinoza's 'substance' and Leibnitz's 'monads' and Hegel's 'idea,' don't stay hard and logical to me. They seem to melt."

She stopped and looked at Wolf with a faint smile, as if deprecating her extravagant pedantry.

"What do you mean — melt?" he murmured.

"I mean as I say," she answered, with a shade of querulousness, as if the physical utterance of words were difficult to her and she expected her interlocutor to get her meaning independently of them. “I mean they turn into what I call ‘atmosphere.’ ”

“The tone of thought,” he threw in, “that suits you best, I suppose?”

She looked at him as if she had been blowing soap-bubbles and he had thrown his stick at one of them.

“I’m afraid I’m hopeless at expressing myself,” she said. “I don’t think I regard philosophy in the light of ‘truth’ at all.”

“How do you regard it then?”

Christie Malakite sighed. “There are so many of them!” she murmured irrelevantly.

“So many?”

“So many truths. But don’t tease yourself trying to follow my awkward ways of putting things, Mr. Solent.”

“I’m following you with the greatest interest,” said Wolf.

“What I mean to say *is*,” she went on, with a little gasp, flinging out the words almost fiercely, “I regard each philosophy, not as the ‘truth,’ but just as a particular country, in which I can go about — countries with their own peculiar light, their Gothic buildings, their pointed roofs, their avenues of trees —— But I’m afraid I’m tiring you with all this!”

“Go on, for heaven’s sake!” he pleaded. “It’s just what I want to hear.”

“I mean that it’s like the way you feel about things,” she explained, “when you hear the rain outside, while you’re reading a book. You know what I mean? Oh, I can’t put it into words! When you get a sudden feeling of life going on outside... far away from where you sit... over wide tracts of country... as if you were driving in a carriage and all the things you passed were.. life itself... parapets of bridges, with dead leaves blowing over them... trees at crossroads... park-railings... lamp-lights on ponds.... I don’t mean, of course,” she went on, “that philosophy is the same as life... but

—— Oh! Can't you *see* what I mean?" She broke off with an angry gesture of impatience.

Wolf bit his lip to suppress a smile. At that moment he could have hugged the nervous little figure before him.

"I know perfectly well what you mean," he said eagerly. "Philosophy to you, and to me, too, isn't science at all! It's life winnowed and heightened. It's the essence of life caught on the wing. It's life *framed*... framed in room-windows... in carriage-windows... in mirrors... in our 'brown-studies,' when we look up from absorbing books... in waking-dreams —— I do know perfectly well what you mean!"

Christie drew up her feet beneath her on the sofa and turned her head, so that all he could see of her face was its delicate profile, a profile which, in that particular position, reminded him of a portrait of the philosopher Descartes!

He changed the conversation back to himself. "It's queer," he remarked, "that I can confide in you so completely about Gerda."

"Why?" she threw out.

"Don't you see that what I'm admitting is an unscrupulous desire to make love to your young friend?"

"Oh!" She uttered this exclamation in a faint, meditative sigh, like a wistful little wind sinking down among feathery reeds. "You mean that you might make her unhappy?"

He gave a deprecatory shake of the head.

"But you leave out so many things in all this," she went on. "You leave out the character of Gerda; and you leave out your own character, which, for all I know" — she spoke in a tone whose irony was barely perceptible— "may be so interesting that the advantage of contact with it might even counterbalance — your lack of scruple!"

Wolf withdrew his hands, which were clasped so close to Christie's elbows as almost to touch them. He interlocked his fingers now, round the back of his head, tilting his chair a little. "Forgive me, Miss Malakite," he said ruefully. "I do blunder into unpardonable lapses sometimes. I oughtn't to have said *that* to you... so bluntly. It's because I seem to have... a sort of... curiosity. At least I *think* it's curiosity!"

"It's all right. Don't you mind!" She spoke these words with a tenderness that was as gentle as a caress — a caress which might have been given to a disgraced animal that required reassuring; and as she spoke she leaned forward and made a little movement of her hand towards him. It was the faintest of gestures. Her fingers immediately afterwards lay clasped on her lap. But he did not miss the movement, and it pleased him well. Another thing he did not miss was that under any stress of emotion a certain wavering shapelessness in her countenance disappeared. Mouth, nose, cheeks, chin, all these features, chaotic and inchoate when left to themselves, at such moments attained a harmony of expression which approached, if it did not actually reach, the verge of the beautiful.

Wolf brought down his tilted chair upon the floor with a jerk.

"I'm forgiven then?" he said, and paused for a second, searching gravely in her brown eyes for a clue to her secret thoughts. "It must be all those books you read," he went on, "that makes you take my scandalous confessions so calmly." He stopped once more. "I suppose," he flung out, "the most amazing perversities wouldn't shock you in the least!" As soon as he had uttered these words he remembered what Darnley had told him, and he caught his breath in dismay. But Christie Malakite gave no sign of being distressed. She even smiled faintly.

"I don't know," she said, "that it's my readings that have made me what I am. In a sense I *am* conventional. You're wrong there. But in another sense

I am... what you might call... *outside the pale*."

"Do you mean... inhuman?"

She turned this over gravely.

"I certainly don't like it when things get too human," she said. "That's probably why I can't *bear* the Bible. I like to be able to escape into parts of Nature that are lovely and cool, untouched and free."

Wolf nodded sympathetically; but he got up now to take his leave, and allowed these words of hers to float away unanswered. He allowed them, as he moved to the door, to sink down among the old-fashioned furniture about her, as if they were a chilly, moonlight dew mingling with warm, dusty sun-motes. His final impression was that the ancient objects in her room were pondering mutely and disapprovingly upon this fragile heathen challenge to the anthropomorphism of the Scriptures!

Once out in the street — and strangely enough before his mind reverted to Gerda at all — Wolf found himself recalling something he had hardly noticed at the time, but which now assumed a curious importance. Between the pages of the volume of the "Urn-Burial" which he had taken down from Christie's shelf, there had lain a grey feather. "Her marker, I suppose!" he said to himself, as he made his way back to the High Street.

But soon enough, now, in the hard metallic sunshine and the sharp wind, his obsession for the stone-cutter's daughter rose up again and dominated his consciousness. With rapid strides he made his way through the chief thoroughfares of the town, witnessing on every side all manner of bustling lively preparations for the Saturday afternoon's marketing.

When he was within a few hundred yards of the Torp yard, he glanced at his watch and realized that he was still a good deal too early. It would be, he felt, a great blunder to present himself at that house, and find no Gerda! Looking around for a resting-place, he espied a small patch of grass behind some ricketty palings, in the centre of which was a stone water-trough. He clambered through the palings and sat down on the ground, with his back to this object. It was then, as he lit a cigarette, that he remembered that he had not yet read his letters.

He opened them one by one. They were both short. Miss Gault's ran as follows —

My dear boy:

If I were not so eccentric a person and *striking*, I may say, in more senses than one, I should take for granted that you had forgotten all about me — but since I know that both my manners and my cats *must* have made *some* impression upon you, I am not at all afraid of this! I am writing to ask you whether you will care to come over to tea with me on Sunday afternoon? I will not reveal in advance whether there will be only myself and my cats...

Yrs. affectionately,

Selena Gault.

Mrs. Solent's letter was even more laconic.

My dearest Wolf:

Carter has begun to fuss about the rent. What does he think we are? And why did you run up that bill at Walpole's? That's the one kind of luxury which ought always to be paid for in cash. I have refused to pay till the Summer. Better let it be understood that you're away on a holiday! I think I shall join you at King's Barton quite soon; in fact, as soon as you can assure me that you've discovered a clean, small cottage, with a neat, small garden. I think it will do me good to do a little gardening. How lovely, my dear, it will be to see you again!

Your loving mother,

Ann Haggard Solent.

Wolf pushed out his under-lip and drew down the corners of his mouth, as he replaced these two documents in his pocket. Then he got up upon his feet and shivered. He looked at his watch again. “I’ll go in,” he said to himself, “when it’s five minutes to one.”

He pulled his greatcoat tighter around him, and, removing his cloth-cap, sat down upon it very gravely, as if it had been a wishing-carpet.

The passers-by upon the pavement hardly turned to notice the bareheaded man with an oak-stick across his knees. They were Blacksod burgesses and had their own affairs to attend to. A tuft of vividly green grass grew between some uneven bricks in front of him; and he regarded its sturdy, transparent blades with concentrated interest.

“Grass and clay!” he thought to himself. “From clay to grass and then from grass to clay!” And once more that peculiar kind of shivering ran through him, which a coincidence of physical cold with amorous excitement is apt to produce, especially when some fatal step of unknown consequence is trembling in suspension.

And with extraordinary clearness he realized that particular moment in the passing of time, as he sat there, a hunched-up gaunt figure, wrapped in a faded brown overcoat, waiting with a beating heart his entrance to the yard of Mr. Torp.

His mind, after his fashion, conjured up in geographical simultaneousness all the scenes around him. He saw the long, low ridge of upland, on the east slope of which lay the village of King’s Barton, and along the top of which ran the highroad linking together the scholastic retreats of Ramsgard with the shops and tanneries of Blacksod. He saw the rich, pastoral Dorsetshire valley on his right. He saw the willows and the reeds of the Somerset salt-marshes away there on his left. And it came into his mind how strange it was that while he at this moment was shivering with amorous expectation at the idea of entering that yard of half-made tombstones, far off in the Blackmore Vale many old ploughmen, weather-stained as the gates they were even now leisurely setting open, were moving their horses from one furrowed field to another after their midday's rest and meal. And probably almost all of them had relations who would come to Mr. Torp's yard on their behalf one day.

"I'll go to Miss Gault on Sunday," he said to himself, "and I'll look around for a place for mother."

Swinging his mind from these resolutions with an abrupt turn, emphasized by a dagger-like thrust into the earth with the end of his stick, he now struggled to his feet, and without glancing again at his watch, clambered over the palings and strode down the road.

The appearance of Torp's yard seemed to have changed in the night. It looked smaller, less imposing. The headstones themselves looked second-rate; but Wolf, as he made for the door, wondered which of them it was that had served the girl for a hobby-horse, and this doubt once more lent them dignity.

He knocked boldly at the door; but he had time, while the vibrations of the sound were dying down, to notice that there was a crack in one of the door-panels, and in the middle of this crack a tiny globule of dirty paint.

The door was opened by Mrs. Torp. There they all were, just beginning their meal! Gerda was evidently disposing of no small helping of Yorkshire pudding. But she swallowed her mouthful at one gallant gulp and regarded her admirer with a smile of pleasure.

The first words uttered by Wolf, when Mrs. Torp had shut the door behind him, were directed at the head of the family, whose mouth and eyes were simultaneously so wide open as to suggest sheer panic.

"I haven't come about business today. I only happened to be passing and I thought I'd look in. Mr. Urquhart was very pleased to hear how well you're getting on with that monument. I saw him last night."

Mr. Torp turned his countenance toward his wife, a proceeding which seemed to announce to everyone round the table that he was too cautious even to commit himself to a word, until reassured as to what was expected of him.

"Just passing, and thought to look in," repeated Mrs. Torp, avoiding her husband's appeal.

"We seed three girt woppers down to Willum's Mill. We dursn't pull 'em out, cos Mr. Manley his own self were casting. He were fishing proper, he were. But Bob says maybe Mr. Manley won't be at the job, come Monday. So then us'll try again."

These hurried words from young Lob eased the atmosphere a little.

Mrs. Torp looked at the sirloin in front of her husband and at the Yorkshire pudding in front of herself.

"Thought to look in," she repeated, resuming her seat.

Wolf began to feel something of a fool. He also began to feel extremely hungry. He laid his hand on the shoulder of the boy, and was on the point of saying something about perch and chub, to cover his embarrassment, when he detected a quick interchange of glances between mother and daughter, followed by the appearance of a faint flush on the girl's cheeks.

"Since you *were* passing, you'd be best to sit 'ee down and take a bit of summat," said the woman reluctantly. "Father, cut the young gentleman a slice. Get a plate from the dresser, Lob." Thus speaking, she thrust a chair beneath the table, with more violence than was necessary, and having added a very moderate portion of Yorkshire pudding to the immense slice of beef carved by the monument-maker, she caught up her own empty plate and retired into the scullery.

When once his guest was seated at the table, between the silent Gerda and himself, the obese stone-cutter relaxed into most free pleasantry.

“Injoy theeself like the wheel at the cistern, be my text, Mr. Redfern, I beg pardon, Mr. Solent. The Lord gives beef, but us must go to the Devil for sauce, as my granddad used to murmur. I warrant this meat were well fed and well killed, as you might say. ‘Tain’t always so wi’ they Darset farmers.”

Wolf listened in silence to these and other similar remarks while he ate his meal. He was so close to Gerda that he could catch the faint susurration of her deep, even breathing.

“I’m glad she doesn’t speak,” he thought to himself, in that sensualized level of consciousness which is just below the threshold of mental words; “for unless I could talk to her alone — —”

“And so thik beast went to the hammer.” The thread of Mr. Torp’s carnivorous discourse had begun to pass Wolf by, when the foregoing sentence fell like a veritable pole-axe upon his ear. Like a flash he recalled Selena Gault’s words outside the slaughter-house. “Damn it!” he said to himself. “The woman’s right.”

“Be there any apple-tart, Mammie?” cried Lob, in a shrill voice.

The door of the scullery was opened about three inches, in which space the beckoning forefinger of Joan Torp summoned her son to her side.

Very slowly the beautiful profile on Wolf’s right turned towards her father.

“ ’Tisn’t no use your coaxing of I, Missie,” responded the stone-cutter. “What yer Mummie says, yer Mummie says. I reckon she’s just got enough o’ that there pasty to comfort Lob. Us and Mr. Redfern must swetten our bellies by talking sweet; and what's more, my pet, if I don't get out in thik yard afore I gets to sleep, there'll be no pleasing Squire *or* Mr. Manley!"

Saying this, the man rose from his chair, glanced at Wolf with a leer like the famous uncle of Cressid, and shuffled out of the house, closing the door behind him.

Wolf and Gerda were left alone, seated side by side in uncomfortable silence. He moved his chair back a little and glanced toward the scullery-door. The voice of the woman and her son reached him in an obscure murmur. His eye caught the devastated piece of meat at the end of the table and it brought to his mind the terrifying story of how the flesh of the Oxen of the Sun uttered articulate murmurs as the companions of Odysseus roasted it at their impious camp-fire.

"I *must* say something," he thought. "This silence is beginning to grow comic."

He began to search his pockets for cigarettes. It seemed absurd to ask leave of this young girl, and yet it was likely enough that her shrewish mother detested tobacco.

"You don't mind if I smoke?" he said.

Gerda smilingly shook her head.

"I suppose you've often been told that you're as lovely as the girl who was the cause of the Trojan War?"

"What a way of breaking the ice!" he thought to himself, and felt a pang of mental humiliation. "If the wench is going to dull my wits to this extent, I'll miss my chance and be just where I was yesterday." Under cover of what Darnley had called the girl's terrible passivity, which was indeed just then like the quiescence of a great unpicked white phlox in a sun-warmed garden, he lit his cigarette and ransacked his brain for a line of action.

Desperately he hit upon the most obvious one. “Have you got anything to put on within reach?” he whispered rapidly. “I want to see something more of you. Let’s step out while we’ve got the chance and go for a stroll somewhere!”

The girl remained for a moment in motionless indecision, listening intently to the murmuring voices in the scullery. Then, with a grave nod, she rose to her feet and stepped lightly to a curtained recess, behind which she vanished. Returning in less than a minute she presented herself in hat and cloak.

Wolf, trembling with a nervous excitement that made his stomach feel sick, seized his own coat and stick and moved boldly to the door.

“Come on!” he whispered. “Come on!”

They slipped out together and the girl closed the door behind them with cautious celerity.

The stone-cutter’s chisel could be heard in his open shed; but his back must have been turned to them, and they did not cast a glance in his direction. Into the street they passed, Wolf taking care not to let the latch of the gate click. Instinctively he led his captive to the right, away from the town. They walked rapidly side by side, and Wolf noted with surprise the absence of finery in the things worn by his silent companion. The hat was of cream-coloured felt surrounded by a blue band; the cloak of some soft plain stuff, also cream-coloured. Wolf kept walking a good deal faster than circumstances seemed to demand, but he repeatedly fancied he heard the light steps of the intrusive Lob running in pursuit of them.

Before long they reached a place where a broad road branched to the left at the foot of a considerable hill. Wolf had not remembered passing this turn on the preceding day; but his attention must have been occupied with the row of little villas on the other side.

Following his instinct again, he turned up this road and slackened his pace. Still his companion remained perfectly silent; but she appeared quite untroubled by the rapidity of their movement, and she swung along by his side lightly and easily, every now and then brushing the budding hedge on her right with her bare hand.

For about half a mile they advanced up the long, steady hill, meeting no one and seeing nothing but snatches of sloping meadow-land as they passed various five-barred gates.

Then there came a turn to the left, and all of a sudden, over a well-worn wooden stile, the top bar of which was shiny as a piece of old furniture, they found themselves overlooking the whole town of Blacksod, and, away beyond that, the pollard-bordered course of the sluggish Lunt, as it crossed the invisible border-line between Dorset and Somerset.

"What do you call this hill, Missie?" he murmured, as he recovered his breath. It seemed impertinent to use her Christian name quite so quickly; but no stretch of politeness could have induced him just then to utter the syllable Torp.

"Babylon Hill," she replied quite naturally and easily; for she was less out of breath than he.

"Babylon? What an extraordinary name!" he cried. "Why Babylon?"

But at that she shrugged her young shoulders and contemplated the blue distances of Somersetshire. To her mind the extraordinary thing evidently was that anyone could be surprised that Babylon Hill was called Babylon Hill!

From the stile over which they were leaning a little field-path ran along the sloping greensward and lost itself in a small hazel-copse that overshadowed one end of a rounded table-land of turf-covered earthworks.

"Come on," he cried. "Skip over, child; and let's see where *that* leads!"

She swung herself across without any assistance, and Wolf noticed that in the open country the movements of her body were entirely free from languor or voluptuousness. They became the swift, unconscious movements of a very healthy young animal.

"Has *this* got any name?" he remarked, as they clambered up the turfy slope of the grassy rampart.

"Poll's Camp," she answered. And then, after a pause,

"When Poll his rain-cap has got on
They'll get their drink at Dunderton!"

She repeated this in the peculiar sing-song drawl of a children's game.

There was something in her intonation that struck Wolf as queerly touching. It didn't harmonize with her ladylike attire. It suggested the simple finery of a thousand West Country fairs.

"Poll-Poll-Poll," he repeated. And there came over him a deep wonder about the origin of this laborious piece of human toil. Were they Celts or Romans who actually, with their blunt primitive spades, had changed the face of this hill? Was this silent beautiful girl beside him the descendant of some Ionian soldier who had come in the train of the legionaries?

Dallying with these thoughts — which probably would never have come into his head at all, if a certain childishness in the girl hadn't, in a very subtle manner, lessened the bite of his lust — Wolf was slower than she in reaching the top of the ridge. When he did reach the top, and looked down into the rounded hollow below, he was astonished to see no sign of his companion.

"Good Lord!" he thought, "has she gone round to the right or to the left?"

He ran down into the bottom of the little artificial valley and stood hesitating.

How like a child, to play him a trick of this kind!

His thoughts shaped themselves quickly now. His hope of finding her depended on how far he could sound her basic instincts. If she were of a hare-like nature she would double on her tracks, which in this case would mean turning to the left or right; if she were of the feline tribe she would pursue her course, which in this case would mean climbing the opposing earthwork. Wolf turned to the right and followed the narrow green hollow as it wound round the hill.

Ah, there she was!

Gerda lay supine, her arms outstretched, her cream-coloured hat clutched tight in one of her hands, her knees bare.

She waited till Wolf was so close that he could see that her eyes were shut. Then, catching the vibration of his tread upon the turf, she leapt to her feet and was off again, running like Atalanta, and soon vanishing from sight. Wolf pursued her; but he thought to himself, “I won’t run *quite* as fast as I could! She’ll better enjoy being caught if she has had a good race.”

As a matter of fact, so swift-footed was the damsel that by following this method of leisurely pursuit he soon lost her altogether. The hollow trench ran straight into the heart of a thick coppice which from this point outwards had overgrown the whole of the camp. Here, in the heavy undergrowth, composed of brambles, elder-bushes, dead bracken, stunted sycamores, and newly-budded hazels, all ordinary paths disappeared completely. All he could have done was to have followed obstinately the bottom of the trench; and that was so overgrown that it was unbelievable she should have forced a way there. But if he didn’t follow the trench, where the devil should he go? Where, under the sky, had *she* gone? “The earth hath bubbles as the water hath,” he quoted to himself, amused, irritated, and completely nonplussed. Teased into doing what he knew was the last thing calculated to bring her back, he began calling her name; at first gently and hesitatingly; at last loudly and indignantly. The girl, no doubt panting like a hunted fawn somewhere quite close to him, must have been especially delighted by this issue to the affair; for one of the peculiarities of Poll's Camp was the presence of an echo; and now, over and over again, this echo taunted him. "Ger-da — Ger-da!" it flung across the valley.

He would have been more philosophical at this juncture if he hadn't, at that brief moment of overtaking her, caught sight of those incredibly white knees. But the impatience in his senses was at least mitigated by his appreciation of the immemorial quality of his pursuit! He looked round helplessly and whimsically at the thick undergrowth and sturdy hazel-twigs; and he played with the fancy that, like another Daphne or Syrinx, his maid might have undergone some miraculous vegetable transformation.

"Ger — da! Ger — da!" The echo returned to him again; whereupon once more, the image of those bare knees destroyed the spirit of philosophical patience.

But he sat down then, with his back against a young sycamore, and lit a cigarette, wrapping his overcoat carefully round him and resolving to make the best of a bad job.

"If she *has* run away from me," he thought, "and just gone back to Chequers Street, there's no doubt she'll come out with me again. She certainly seemed at ease with me." Thus spoke one voice within him. Another voice said: "She thinks you're the father of all fools. You'll never have the gall to ask her to go out with you again." And then as he extinguished his third cigarette against a piece of chalk, moving aside the tiny green buds of an infinitesimal spray of milkwort, he became aware that a blackbird, in the dark twilight of hazel-stems, was uttering notes of an extraordinary purity and poignance.

He listened, fascinated. That particular intonation of the blackbird's note, more full of the spirits of air and of water than any sound upon earth, had always possessed a mysterious attraction for him. It seemed to hold, in the sphere of sound, what amber-paved pools surrounded by hart's-tongue ferns contain in the sphere of substance. It seemed to embrace in it all the sadness that it is possible to experience without crossing the subtle line into the region where sadness becomes misery.

He listened, spellbound, forgetting hamadryads, Daphne's pearl-white knees and everything.

The delicious notes hovered through the wood — hovered over the scented turf where he lay — and went wavering down the hollow valley. It was like the voice of the very spirit of Poll's Camp, unseduced by Roman or by Saxon, pouring forth to a sky whose peculiar tint of indescribable greyness exactly suited the essence of its identity, the happiness of that sorrow which knows nothing of misery. Wolf sat entranced, just giving himself up to listen; forgetting all else. He was utterly unmusical; and it may have been for that very reason that the quality of certain sounds in the world melted the very core of his soul. Certain sounds could do it; not very many. But the blackbird's note was one of them. And then it was that without rising from the ground he straightened his back against the sycamore-tree and got furiously red under his rugged cheeks. Even his tow-coloured hair, protruding from the front of his cap, seemed conscious of his humiliation. Waves of electricity shivered through it; while beads of perspiration ran down his forehead into his scowling eyebrows.

For he realized, in one rush of shame, that Gerda was the blackbird!

He realized this before she made a sound other than that long-sustained tremulous whistle. He realized it instantaneously by a kind of sudden absolute knowledge, like a slap in the face.

And then, immediately afterwards, she came forward, quite calmly and coolly, pushing aside the hazels and the elder-bushes.

He found her a different being, when she stood there in front of him, smiling down upon him and removing bits of moss and twigs from her hair. She had lost something from the outermost sheath of her habitual reserve; and like a plant that has unloosed its perianth she displayed some inner petal of her personality that had, until that moment, been quite concealed from him.

"*Gerda!*" he exclaimed reproachfully, too disordered to assume any sagacious reticence; "how on earth did you learn to whistle like that?"

She continued placidly to clear the wood-rubble out of her fair hair; and the only reply she vouchsafed to his question was to toss down her cream-coloured hat at his feet.

Very deliberately, when her hair was in order, she proceeded to lift up the hem of her skirt and pick out the burs from that. Then she quickly turned away from him. "Brush my back, will you?" she said.

He had to get up upon his feet at this; but he obeyed her with all patience, carefully removing from the cream-coloured jacket every vestige of her escapade.

"There!" he said, when he had finished; and taking her by the shoulders, he swung her around.

In the very act of doing this he had determined to kiss her; but something about the extraordinary loveliness of her face, when she did confront him, deterred him.

This was a surprise to himself at the moment; but later, analyzing it, he came to the conclusion that although beauty, up to a certain point, is provocative of lust, beyond a certain point it is destructive of lust; and it is this, whether the possessor of such beauty be in a chaste mood or not.

If only — so he thought to himself later — Gerda’s face had been a little less flawless in its beauty, the beauty of her body would have remained as maddening to his senses as it was at the beginning. But the more he had seen of her the more beautiful her face had grown; until it had now reached that magical level of loveliness which absorbs with a kind of absoluteness the whole æsthetic sense, paralyzing the erotic sensibility.

Instead of kissing her he sat down again with his back to the sycamore; while Gerda, lying on her stomach at his feet, her chin propped upon the palms of her hands, began to talk to him in unconscious, easy, almost boyish freedom.

“I wouldn’t have run away,” she said, “so you needn’t scold. I *would* have if it had been anyone else. I always *do* run away. I hide first and then slip off. Father’s quite tired of seeing me come back into the yard after I’ve started for a walk with someone. That’s because I always like people at the beginning, when they’re frightened of me and don’t try to touch me. But when they stop being frightened, and get familiar, I just hate them. Can you understand what I mean, or can’t you?”

Wolf surveyed the beautiful face in front of him and recalled what Darnley had said about the three lovers.

“But, Gerda — —” he began.

“Well?” she said, smiling. “Say it out! I know it’s something bad.”

“You must have had *some* love-affairs, being the sort of girl you are. You can’t make me believe you’ve always run away.”

She nodded her head vigorously.

“I have,” she said. “I have, always. Though the boys I know never will believe it. Directly they touch me I run away. I want them to want me. It’s a lovely feeling to be wanted like that. It’s like floating on a wave. But when they try any of their games, messing a person about and rumpling a person's clothes, I can't bear it. I *won't* bear it, either!"

Wolf lifted his thick eyebrows and let them fall again, wrinkling them so that a great puckered fold established itself above his hooked nose. His ruddy face, under its rough crop of coarse, bleached hair, resembled a red sandstone cliff on the top of which a whitish-yellow patch of withered grass bowed before the wind.

The girl clambered to her feet, and, smoothing out her skirt beneath her, sat down on the ground by his side, hugging her knees.

"I found out I could whistle like that," she began again, this time in a slow, meditative voice, "when I used to play with Bob in the Lunt ditches, down Longmead. I fooled him endless times doing different birds. Listen to this. Do you know what this is?" And with her mouth pursed up into the form of a crimson sea-anemone, she imitated the cry of the female plover when any strange foot, of man or beast, approaches her nest on the ground.

"Wonderful!" cried Wolf, enraptured by that long-drawn familiar scream borne away upon the wind. "How *did* you learn to do it?"

"I fooled Bob with that; but I fooled Dick — he was an Oxford gentleman — with a silly owl's-hooting which old Bob would have known at once."

"Did you let the Oxford gentleman make love to you, Gerda?"

As soon as he had uttered the words, he felt a sense of shame that was like a pricking sore lodged under the cell-lobes in the front of his brain.

"There — don't answer!" he whispered hurriedly. "That was a gross remark of mine."

But the half-profile which she had turned upon him showed no traces of anger.

“I told you, didn’t I?” was all she said. “I ran away. I hid. I hid in the hedge under Ramsbottom. Dick was furious. He went past me several times. I heard him damning me like a serjeant — Ramsbottom’s miles away. We’d taken our lunch. He had to go home without me and he told mother. Mother hit me with the broom when I got back. Dick was an ‘honourable’; so Mother wanted me to marry him.”

Wolf was reduced to silence. He watched the flutterings of a greenfinch over some young elder-bush saplings. Then he turned towards her and spoke with solemn emphasis.

“I wish you’d make that blackbird-noise for me now, Gerda.”

He detected from her expression that this was a crisis between them. Her smile was suspended and hung like a faltering wraith over every feature of her face. She seemed to hesitate; and her hesitation brought a depth into her eyes that darkened their colour so that they became a deep violet.

“I’ve never *once* whistled for anybody,” she said slowly.

Wolf sent a wordless cry of appeal down into the abysses of his consciousness. They were ready to help him, those powers in the hidden levels of his being. They responded to his cry and he knew that they responded. In the repetition of his request there was a magnetic tone of power that reassured himself.

“Come on, Gerda!” he said. “That’s all the more reason. Come on! Whistle that song!”

Turning her face away from him, so that he could see nothing of her mouth, she began at once.

He could hardly believe his ears. It was like a miracle. It was as if she had swiftly summoned one of those yellow-beaked birds out of its leafy retreat. It seemed easier that a bird should be decoyed out of a wood than that a human throat should utter actual unmistakable bird-notes.

“Go on! Go on!” cried Wolf, in an ecstasy of pleasure, the moment there was any cessation of this stream of cool, liquid, tremulous melody.

Over the turf-ramparts of Poll’s Camp it swelled and sank, that wistful, immortal strain. Away down the grassy slopes it floated forth upon the March wind. No conceivable sky but one of that particular greyness could have formed the right kind of roof for the utterance of this sound. Wolf cared nothing that the whistler kept her face turned aside as she whistled. He gave himself up so completely to the voice, that the girl Gerda became no more than a voice herself. At length it did really cease, and silence seemed to fall down upon that place like large grey feathers from some inaccessible height.

Both the man and the girl remained absolutely motionless for a while.

Then Gerda leapt to her feet.

“Let’s go down to Longmead and watch the water-rats swim the Lunt!” she cried. “We can get down there from here easily. There’s a lovely little field-path I know. And we shan’t meet anyone; for Bob and Lobbie are going to Willum’s Mill.”

Wolf rose stiffly. He had sat so long in petrified delight that he was a little cramped. His mind felt drugged and cramped too, and felicitously stupid.

“Wherever you like, Gerda dear,” he said, looking at her with hypnotized admiration.

She took him by the hand, and together they climbed the embankment.

The wind was gentler now, and a very curious diffusion of thin, watery, greenish light seemed to have melted into the grey stretches of sky above their heads. The immense Somersetshire plain, with patches of olive-green marsh-land and patches of moss-green meadow-land, lost itself in a pale, sad horizon, where, like a king’s sepulchre, rose the hill-ruin of

Glastonbury. The path by which Gerda guided him down to the valley was indeed an ideal one for two companions who desired no interruption. Starting from a pheasants' "drive" in the lower half of the hazel-copse, it wound its way down the incline along a series of grassy terraces dotted by patches of young bracken-fronds that had only very recently sprouted up among the great dead brown leaves.

Arrived at the foot of the hill, they struck a narrow cattle-drove where the deep winter-ditches were still full of water and where huge half-fallen willow-trunks lay across old lichen-covered palings.

Advancing up this lane hand in hand with his companion, Wolf felt his soul invaded by that peculiar kind of melancholy which emanates, at the end of a spring day, from all the elements of earth and water. It is a sadness unlike all others, and has perhaps some mysterious connection with the swift, sudden recognition, by myriads and myriads of growing things, of the strange fatality that pursues all earthly life, whether clothed in flesh or clothed in vegetable fibre. It is a sadness accentuated by grey skies, grey water, and grey horizons; but it does not seem to attain its most significant meaning until the pressure of the Spring adds to these elemental wraiths the intense wistfulness of young new life.

It seemed to Wolf, as they plodded along side by side through that muddy lane, that the light-green buds of those aged willow-trunks were framed in a more appropriate setting under that cold forlorn sky than any sunshine could give to them. Later seasons would warm them and cherish them. November rains would turn them yellow and bring them down into the mud.

But no other sky would hang above them with the cold floating weight of sadness as this one did — a weight like a mass of grey seaweed beneath a silent sea. No other sky would be cold enough and motionless enough to actually *listen* to the rising of the green sap within them, that infinitesimal flowing, flowing, flowing, that for non-human ears must have made strange low gurglings and susurrations all day long.

At last they came to the bank of the river Lunt.

“Hush!” whispered Gerda. “Don’t make a noise! It’s so lovely when you can make a water-rat flop in and see it swim across.”

It was along the edge of a small tributary full of marsh-marigolds that they approached the river-bank. Gerda was so impatient to hear a water-rat splash that she scarcely glanced at these great yellow orbs rising from thick, moist, mud-stained stalks and burnished leaves; but to Wolf, as he passed them by, there came rushing headlong out of that ditch, like an invisible company of tossing-maned air-horses, a whole wild herd of ancient memories! Indescribable! Indescribable! They had to do with wild rain-drenched escapes beneath banks of sombre clouds, of escapes along old backwaters and by forsaken sea-estuaries, of escapes along wet, deserted moor-paths and by sighing pond-reeds; along melancholy quarry-pools and by quagmires of livid moss. Indescribable! Indescribable! But memories of this kind were — and he had long known it! — the very essence of his life. They were more important to him than any outward event. They were more sacred to him than any living person. They were his friends, his gods, his secret religion. Like a mad botanist, like a crazed butterfly-collector, he hunted these filmy growths, these wild wanderers, and stored them up in his mind. For what purpose did he store them up? For *no* purpose! And yet these things were connected in some mysterious way with that mythopœic fatality which drove him on and on and on.

“There’s one! There’s one! There’s one! Oh, throw something to make it go faster. Throw something! Quick! Quick! Quick! No — I don’t mean to *hit* it. I don’t mean to *hurt* it. To make it swim faster! There! I *can’t* throw straight. Oh, do look at its head breathing and puffing! Oh, what ripples it makes!”

Conjured in this way to join in this sport, Wolf did pick up an enormous piece of wet mud and hurled it in the trail of the swimming rat.

The muddy ripples from this missile came rushing up behind that pointed little head, came splashing against those pointed little ears. Gerda clasped her hands. “Swim! Swim! Swim!” she called out; and then in her excitement she pouted her mouth into a reed-mouth and uttered a long, strange, low, liquid cry that was like no sound Wolf had ever heard in his life.

“It’s gone! It’s done it!” she sighed at last, when the rat, emerging from the water without so much as one shake of its sleek sides, slid off along its mud-channel to its bed in the reed-roots. “It’s gone! And you *did* make it swim! I liked to see it. Let’s go rat-swimming often. It’s wonderful!”

She began walking along the river-bank in the direction leading away from Blacksod, gazing intently and rapturously at the sluggish brown stream.

Wolf followed her, but he surreptitiously glanced at his watch, and discovered, as he suspected, that it was already late in the afternoon.

“You can’t tell when twilight begins,” he thought to himself, “when the sky is *all* twilight.”

“Hush!” The sound reached him rather by implication than by ear. But the girl had crouched down under an overhanging alder and was staring at the water, her long cream-coloured arms supporting half the weight of her body.

He sat down himself and waited patiently. It satisfied his nature with an ineffable satisfaction to watch that steady flow of the brown water, gurgling round the willow-roots and the muddy concavities of the bank. He felt glad that the Lunt, where he was now watching it, had left the town behind and was now to meet with nothing else really contaminating until it mingled with the Bristol Channel. He had already begun to feel a peculiar personal friendliness toward this patient muddy stream; and it gave him pleasure to think that its troubles were really over, when itself might so easily be fearing another Blacksod somewhere between these green meadows and the salt sea to which it ran! Looking quite as intently at these brown waters as Gerda herself was doing, it occurred to him how different a thing the personality of a river is from the personality of a sea. The water of the sea, though broken up into tides and waves, really remains the same identical mass of waters; whereas the water of a river is at every succeeding moment a completely different body. No particles of it are ever the same, unless they get waylaid in some side-stream or ditch or weir.

Wolf tried to visualize the whole course of the Lunt, so as to win for it some sort of coherent personality. By thinking *of all its waters together*, from start to finish, this unity could be achieved; for between the actual water before him now, into which he could thrust his hand, and the water of that tiny streamlet among the mid-Dorset hills from which it sprung, there was no spacial gap. The one flowed continuously into the other. They were as completely united as the head and tail of a snake! The more he stared at the Lunt the more he liked the Lunt. He liked its infinite variety; the extraordinary number of its curves and hollows and shelving ledges and pools and currents; the extraordinary variety of organic patterns in the roots and twigs and branches and land-plants and water-plants which diversified its course.

While he was thinking all this he had turned his attention away from Gerda; but now, glancing up the river, he was struck by a gleam of living whiteness amid the greenery. The huntress of water-rats had slipped off her shoes and stockings and was dabbling her bare feet in the chilly brown water. Her face was bent down. She was not being provocative this time. He felt sure of that. Or, if so, the provocation was directed to something older and less rational than the senses of man. She was giving way to some immemorial girlish desire to expose warm, naked limbs to the cold embraces of the elements.

He rose to his feet, and, moving slowly up to her side, sat down by her. He was struck by the fact that she made no movement to pull her skirts down over her knees. But once again he was made aware, he could not quite tell how, that there was no provocation in this. She had indeed, as Darnley had said, something of the "terrible passivity" of the famous daughter of Leda. Certainly Wolf had never seen, in picture, in marble, or in life, anything as flawless as the loveliness thus revealed to him. It was amazing to him that she did not shiver with the cold. The whole scene, as the hour of twilight grew near, had that kind of unblurred enamelled distinctness such as one sees in the work of certain old English painters. The leaf-buds of the alder under which she sat were of that shade of green that seems to have something almost unnatural in its metallic opacity; and the line of southern sky against which the opposite bank was outlined was of that livid steel-grey which seems to hold within it a suppressed whiteness, like the whiteness of a sword that lies in shadow.

"You're sure you're not cold?" Wolf asked.

"Of course I'm cold, silly! I'm doing this *to* feel cold!"

"What a sensualist you are!"

"Better say nothing if you can't say anything nicer than that."

"Gerda."

"Well?"

"Have you enjoyed yourself today?"

"What do you mean?"

"Have you been happy today?"

She did not answer.

All about those white ankles and those white knees the greenness of the earth gathered — the greyness of the sky descended. It was as if such vague non-human powers, made up of green shadows and grey shadows, drew the girl back and away — back and away from all his human words, back and away from all his personal desires.

Commonplace and irrelevant seemed both his sentiment and his cunning in the face of these two great silent Presences — that of the earth and that of the sky — which were closing in upon her and upon himself.

But it was getting too cold. He must make her put on her things and come home.

"That's enough now," he said. "On with your stockings, like a good girl. I don't know when your people expect you back; but anyhow I mustn't keep Mrs. Otter waiting."

He took her by the wrist and pulled her up the bank. Then he began vigorously rubbing her ice-cold ankles with his hands.

"You do take care of me nicely," she said, when finally he pulled her frock over her knees and smoothed out the wrinkles from her cream-coloured coat. "Bob never used to stop for a minute. He was always doing up his tackle or washing his fish or something. And if I *did* ask him to stop he thought I wanted him to mess me about — you know? — when it was only, like now, that I just *couldn't* get my boots on! They get so stiff and funny when you take them off. I never understand why."

But Wolf's mind was in no mood to deal with the abstract problem of damp leather. He was wondering in his heart whether Gerda's mania for water-rats had anything to do with the close resemblance between Mr. Weevil and these harmless rodents.

“What we’ve got to think about now,” he said, “is the shortest way to Blacksod.”

“Oh, don’t worry! We can be at my house in three-quarters of an hour and then you can take the short-cut to Barton.”

Wolf was very much struck by the competent geographical skill with which she now proceeded to guide him, over hedge and over ditch, until they reached a navigable lane.

“We’ll be home in half an hour now,” she said, and the two walked rapidly side by side between the cold, fresh shoots of the hawthorn-hedges and the dark sheen of the celandine-leaves.

“I think I’d be all right now, married to *you*,” said Gerda, suddenly.

She made the remark in as unemotional and matter-of-fact a tone as if she had said, “I think I’d be all right now if I used low-heeled boots.”

In that chilly twilight, with the white mist rising around them, everything seemed so phantasmal, that this surprising observation gave him no kind of shock. But he did remember how startled he had felt when Christie Malakite introduced the same idea.

“I wonder how I should feel married to *you*!” murmured Wolf in response, deliberately putting a nuance of irresponsible lightness into his tone.

“I think we’d get on splendidly,” she retorted, with an emphasis that was more boyish than girlish. They walked for a while in silence after this, and Wolf became vividly aware how completely a definite responsible project of such a kind tended to break the delicious spell of care-free intimacy. It broke it for him, anyway. But it must have been just the reverse with her.

The beauty of the situation with her evidently had to find its justification in some continuity of events beyond the mere pleasure of the passing moment.

But it was impossible to prevent his thoughts hovering round this bold idea, now it *had* been flung into the air. Christie Malakite had been the first to toss the fatal little puffball upon the wind. *She* had done it with the utmost gravity, the gravity of some remote being altogether outside the stream of events. He remembered the peculiar steady look of her brown eyes as she uttered the words. But that this airy nothing of speculation should have received a new impetus from Gerda herself was another matter. He began to wonder what kind of relations existed between these two young girls.

Splashing up the water from a puddle on his right with the end of his stick, he hazarded a direct question on this point.

"I had tea yesterday with Christie Malakite," he said, "and she told me she was a friend of yours. I liked her so very much."

"Oh, I shan't ever be jealous of Christie!" was his companion's reply to this. "I don't care if you have tea with Christie every day of your life. *She's for no man*, as the game says."

"What game, Gerda?"

"Oh, don't you know? That old game! Kids play it together. *We* called it 'Boys and Girls'; but likely enough where you come from they call it something else! But it's the same old game, I reckon."

"Why do you say Christie Malakite's 'for no man,' Gerda?"

"Don't ask so many questions, Mr. Wolf Solent. *That's* your fault — asking questions! *That's* what'll make me cross when we're married, more than anything else."

"But it's such a queer expression— 'She's for no man.' Does it mean she's got lovers who aren't human? Does it mean she's got demon lovers?"

He spoke in a mocking, exaggerated manner, and his tone was irritating to his companion.

"Men think too much of themselves," she replied laconically. "I like Christie very much and she likes me very much."

This silenced Wolf; and they walked together in less harmony than at any previous moment in that afternoon.

They hit the town by a narrow alley between the town-hall and Chequers Street. Wolf looked at his watch and compared it with the town-hall clock. It was a quarter past six. There was still plenty of time for him to reach Pond Cottage before eight, when the Otters dined.

They drifted slowly down Chequers Street, Gerda making all manner of quaint, humorous remarks about the people and things they passed; and yet, through it all, Wolf was perfectly aware that she had not forgiven him the hard, frivolous tone he had adopted about her friend. That she was able to chatter and delay as she was now doing had something magnanimously pathetic and even boyish about it. Most girls, as he well knew, would have punished him for the little discordance between them by hurrying home in silence and shutting him out without the comfort of any further appointments. To act in any other way would have seemed to such minds to be lacking in proper pride. But Gerda appeared to have no pride at all in this sense. Or was it that her pride was really something that actually did resemble that high, passive nonchalance which permitted the old classical women to speak of themselves quite calmly, as if they were external to themselves; as if they saw their life as an irresponsible fate upon which they could, as it were, lie back without incurring any human blame?

They said good-bye at the gate of Torp's yard; and when Wolf enquired how soon he could see her again, "Oh, any day you like, except tomorrow and Monday," she replied. "I've enjoyed myself very much," she added, as she held out her hand. "I'm glad you made me go."

Wolf was on the point of asking her what her engagements were on Sunday and Monday; but he thought better of it in time, and taking off his cap and waving his stick he turned and strode away.

It was very nearly dark when the last little villa on the King's Barton road was left behind.

He walked slowly forward under a starless sky, revolving his adventure. He recognized clearly enough that his first infatuation had changed its quality not a little. Gerda was now not only a maddeningly desirable girl. She was a girl with a definite personality of her own. That bird-like whistling! Never had he known such a thing was possible! It accounted as nothing else could do for her queer, unembarrassed silences. In fact, it was the expression of her silences — and not only of hers! It was, as he recalled its full effect upon him, the expression of just those mysterious silences in Nature which all his life long he had, so to speak, waited upon and worshipped. That strange whistling was the voice of those green pastures and those blackthorn-hedges, not as they were when human beings were conscious of them, but as they were in that indescribable hour just before dawn, when they awoke in the darkness to hear the faint, faint stirrings — upon the air — of the departing of the non-human powers of the night!

He was so absorbed in his thoughts that it was with quite a startled leap of the heart that he became conscious of hurried, uneven steps behind him. What kind of steps were they? They didn't sound like the steps of a grown-up person — either man or woman — they were so light in the dark road. And yet somehow they didn't resemble the footsteps of a child. Wolf became aware of an odd feeling of uneasiness. With all his habitual mysticism he was a man little subject to what are called *psychic* impressions. Yet on this occasion he could not help a somewhat discomfortable beating of his heart. The last thing he desired was to be overtaken by something unearthly on that pleasant Dorset road! Had the extraordinary phenomenon of the girl’s whistling unsettled his nerves more than he realized?

His first simple and cowardly instinct was to quicken his own steps. In fact, it was with a quite definite effort that he prevented himself from setting off at a run! What was it? Who was it? He listened intently as he walked; and this listening in itself induced him to diminish his speed rather than to increase it.

At last the mysterious maker of this uncertain wavering series of footsteps arrived close at his heels.

Wolf swung round, grasping his stick tightly. Nothing on earth could have prevented a certain strained unnaturalness in his voice as he challenged this pursuer.

“Hullo!” he cried.

There was no answer, and the figure came steadily along till it was parallel with him.

Then he did, in a rush of relief, recognize this nightwalker’s identity.

Even in the darkness he recognized that shabby, derelict personality he had seen in the street with Lob Torp the day before. It was the Vicar of King’s Barton!

He was surprised afterwards at this sudden recognition; though it was not the only occasion in his life when he had used a kind of sixth sense.

But whatever may have been its cause, Wolf’s clairvoyance on this occasion was not shared by his overtaker.

“It... is... very... dark... tonight,” said the clergyman, in a voice so husky and hoarse that it resembled the voice attributed to the discomposed visage of the King of Chaos by the poet Milton.

Wolf’s own voice was quite natural now.

“So dark that I took *you* for some kind of ghost,” he said grimly.

“Hee! Hee! Hee!” The Vicar laughed with the laugh of a man who makes a mechanical, appreciative noise. This hollow sound would doubtless have passed harmlessly enough in the daylight. In the darkness it was ghastly.

“You came up very quickly,” remarked Wolf. “You must be a good walker, Mr. Valley.”

“Who... are... you... if... you... don’t... mind... my... asking?”

“Not at all, Mr. Valley. I am the new secretary at the Squire’s.”

The man stopped dead-still in the road; and, in natural politeness, Wolf stopped too.

“You are... the... other... one... Then... I... must... see you later... I buried him.... I said prayers for him every day... He... was... very kind to me. I must see you... later....” Having uttered these words, the Vicar seemed to gather up out of the dark some new kind of strength; for he moved forward by Wolf’s side with a firmer step.

For nearly half a mile they walked side by side in silence.

Then the quavering voice out of the obscurity began again.

“Valley... is my name.... You’ve got it quite right. T. E. Valley.... I... drink more than’s good for me.... I’m a little drunk tonight... but you’ll excuse me. In the dark it isn’t noticeable. But you’re quite right. T. E. Valley is quite right. I was in the Eleven at Ramsgard.... I play still.... I play with the boys....”

Once more there was no sound but that of the two men’s feet in the road and the thud — thud — thud of Wolf’s stick.

Then the voice recommenced. “The poor people here are very kind to me... very kind to T. E. Valley. But for the rest...”

He again stopped dead-still in the road and Wolf stopped with him.

"For the rest... except... Darnley... they are all... You won't tell them, will you? They are all devils! Devils! Devils!" His voice rose in a kind of helpless fury. Then, after a moment's pause: "But they can't hurt T. E. Valley. None of 'em can... drunk or sober... and that's because I'm God's Priest in this place.... God's Priest, Sir! However you like to take it!"

This final outburst seemed to restore the shadowy little man to his senses; for until Wolf brought him to the gate of the Vicarage and bade him farewell there, his words became steadily more coherent — his intonation more normal and more sober.

The door of Pond Cottage was opened for Wolf by Dimity Stone.

"I've kept dinner back till it's as good as ruined," grumbled the old woman.

"Where are — —" Wolf began.

"In there... waiting!" she answered, as she moved off.

He opened the drawing-room door.

"I am so very sorry, Mrs. Otter," he said humbly.

They all rose from their seats; but it was Jason who spoke first.

"*Everything's* only waiting," he chuckled grimly. "That sofa is a better place for waiting than a headmaster's study!"

"My son doesn't mean that you've kept us a minute," said Mrs. Otter. "Dimity's only just ready. But we'll sit down at the table while you wash your hands; so that you can feel quite happy."

"Don't be long, Solent!" cried Darnley, as Wolf turned to go upstairs. "Mother won't let us touch a morsel till you come."

As he entered his bedroom he heard Mrs. Otter's voice. "Dimity! Dimity! We're quite ready!" And then, just as he was closing the door, he caught something about "these secretaries" from Jason.

BAR SINISTER

Breakfast in Pond Cottage on that Sunday morning proved to be the pleasantest meal that Wolf had yet enjoyed under the Otter roof.

Mrs. Otter, dressed in stiff puce-coloured silk, and happy to have both her sons at the table, spoke at some length to their guest about the morning service in the church to which she and Darnley were presently to go. She explained to him how much she liked the quiet, reverent manner in which Mr. Valley conducted the worship of the parish.

“He makes me sad at other times,” she said. “He’s an unhappy little man; and everyone knows how he drinks. He ought to have a wife to look after him, or at least a housekeeper. He’s got no one in the house. How he gets enough to eat I can’t imagine.”

“Mother thinks no household can get on for a day without a woman in it,” said Darnley.

Jason Otter’s pallid face reddened a little. “Of course, we know he wants to be the only man that any of the village-boys admire. It’s human nature — that’s what it is. These country clergymen are all the same.”

“There are the bells!” cried Mrs. Otter, thankful for the opportunity of staving off discord between the brothers. They all four listened in silence, while the faint notes from the Henry the Seventh tower penetrated the walls of Pond Cottage.

“That means it’s ten o’clock,” said Darnley. “They ring again at half-past, don’t they, Mother?”

Wolf felt an extraordinary sense of peacefulness in the air that morning. The sound of the bells accentuated it; and he wondered vaguely to himself whether he wouldn’t offer to go to church with the mother and the son.

“By the way,” he remarked, “may I ask you people a question, while I think of it?”

They all three awoke from their individual meditations and gave him their undivided attention. Mrs. Otter did this with serene complacency, evidently assuming that the nature of his remark would prove harmless and agreeable. Jason did it with nervous concern, touched with a flicker of what looked like personal fear. Darnley did it with an expression of weary politeness, as much as to say, “Oh, God! Oh, God! Am I not going to have even Sunday free from other people’s problems?”

“It’s a simple enough thing,” Wolf said quickly, realizing that he had made more stir than he intended. “I only wanted to know why this house of yours is called Pond Cottage, when there’s no trace of a pond.”

There was an instantaneous sign of startled agitation all the way round the table.

“The pond is there all right,” said Darnley, quietly. “It’s over that hedge, just outside our gate, the other side of the lane. It’s rather an uncomfortable topic with us, Solent; because at least three times James Redfern thought of drowning himself in it. He may have thought of it more times than that. Jason found him there three times. We don’t like the pond for that reason. That’s all!”

Jason Otter got up from his chair. “I’ll go and put on my boots,” he remarked to Wolf, “and we’ll go and visit the pond. You ought to see it. And there are other things I can show you, too, while mother and Darnley are in church. You’ve got your boots on, I think? Well! I won’t keep you very long.”

He left the room as he spoke and Mrs. Otter looked appealingly at her younger son.

“Don’t worry, Mother dear,” said Darnley, gravely, laying his hand upon her knees.

He turned to Wolf. “You must help us in keeping my brother in good spirits, Solent,” he said. “But I know I can trust you.”

When Wolf and Jason did finally cross the lane together and enter the opposite field — which they achieved by climbing up a steep bank and pushing their way through a gap in the hedge — the sense of peacefulness in the whole air of the place had intensified to a degree that was so enchanting to Wolf that nothing seemed able to disturb his contentment.

The field he found himself in was a very large one, and only a broken, wavering line of willows and poplars at the further end of it gave any indication of the presence of water. The atmosphere was deliciously hushed and misty; no wind was stirring; and the placid morning sun fell upon the grass and the trees with a sort of largeness of indifference, as if it were too happy, in some secretive way of its own, to care whether its warmth gave pleasure or the reverse to the lives that thrived under its influence. It seemed to possess the secret of complete detachment, this sunshine; but it seemed also to possess the secret of projecting the clue to such detachment into the heart of every living existence that its vaporous warmth approached.

Wolf was suddenly aware of a rising to the surface of his mind of that trance-like “mythology” of his. All the little outward things that met his gaze seemed to form so many material moulds into which this magnetic current set itself to run.

He surveyed a patch of sun-dried cattle-dung upon which the abstracted Jason had inadvertently planted his foot and across which was slowly moving with exquisite precaution a brilliantly green beetle. He surveyed a group of small crimson-topped daisies over which a sturdy, flowerless thistle threw a faint and patient shadow. He surveyed the disordered flight of a flock of starlings, heading away from the pond towards the village. But of all these things what arrested him most was the least obvious, the least noticeable. It was, in fact, no more than a certain ridge of rough unevenness in the ground at his feet; a nameless unevenness, which assumed, as the misty sunlight wavered over it, the predominant place in this accidental pattern of impressions.

Jason said nothing at all as they walked together slowly across the field. The man had ostentatiously avoided any approach to Sunday clothes that morning; and, without hat or stick, in a very shabby overcoat, he presented rather a lamentable figure, as he led the way forward towards Lenty Pond.

They reached the willows and poplars at last; and Wolf stared in astonishment at what he saw. He found himself standing on the brink of an expanse of water that was nearly as large as a small lake. The opposite side of it was entirely covered with a bed of thick reeds, among which he could see the little red-and-black shapes of several moor-hens moving; but from where he stood, under these willows, right away to the pond's centre, the water was deep and dark, and even on that placid Sunday a little menacing.

"He could have done it easily if he'd wanted to, couldn't he?" said Jason, gazing at the water. "The truth is he *didn't* want to! Darnley's a sentimental fool. Redfern *didn't* want to drown himself. Not a bit of it. What did he come here for, then? He came to rouse pity, to make people's minds go crazy with pity."

"The man must have been thinking of saying just this to me all the way across the field," thought Wolf. But Jason jerked out now a much more disturbing sentence.

"The boy did upset *one* person's mind. He made one person's mind feel like a weed in this water! And you'd be surprised to hear who that person was."

But Wolf just then felt it very hard to give him his complete attention. For although the mystical ecstasy he had just experienced had faded, everything about the day had become momentous in his hidden secretive life; and he felt detached, remote, disembodied, for all his Sunday clothes. He could hear the cawing of a couple of rooks high up in the sky; and even when they ceased cawing, the creaking of their wings seemed like the indolence of the very day itself. “A weed in the water,” he echoed mechanically; while his mind, voyaging over those hushed West Country pastures, followed the creaking wings.

“Who was it, Mr. Otter, who was so upset by Redfern?”

The appeal in Jason’s miserable eyes grew still more disturbing. The man’s soul seemed to come waveringly forward, like a grey vapour, out of its eye-sockets, till it formed itself into a shadowy double of the person who stood by Wolf’s side.

“Can’t you guess?” murmured Jason Otter. “It was I... I... I... You’re surprised. Well, anyone *would* be. You wouldn’t have thought of that, though you are Mr. Urquhart’s secretary and *have* come from a college! But you needn’t look like that; for it’s true! Darnley sentimentalizes about his death, which was unfortunate, of course, but perfectly natural — he died of pneumonia, as any of us might! — but what drove me to distraction was this playing upon a person’s pity. He always did it — from the very first day. Darnley yielded to it at once, though he never liked the boy. I resisted it. I am of iron in these things. I know too much. But by degrees, can’t you understand, though I didn’t yield to it, it began to bother my mind. Pity’s the most cruel trap ever invented. You can see that, I suppose? Take it that there were only one unhappy person left, why, it might spoil all the delight in the world! That is why I’d like to kill pity — why I’d like to make people see what madness it is.”

Wolf drew away from him a step or two, till he stood at the very edge of the pond, and then he remarked abruptly, “Your mother told me that Redfern was one of the most good-looking young men she has ever seen.”

Having flung out these words, he began flicking the dark, brimming water with the end of his stick, watching the ripples which he caused spreading far out towards the centre. Exactly why he made that remark just then he would have found it hard to explain. The wraith-like phantom-soul that had emerged from Jason’s eye-sockets drew back instantaneously, like a puppet pulled by a string; and over the two apertures into which it withdrew there formed a glacial film of guarded suspicion.

“*I* have seen better-looking ones,” said Jason Otter drily. “He used to help that fool Valley in his High Church services. I don’t know whether the Virgin Mary ever appeared to him; but I know he used to take her flowers, because he used to steal them out of our garden! My mother let him steal because it was —— Hullo! What’s up now? Who’s this?”

Wolf swung round and observed to his surprise the tall figure of Roger Monk advancing towards them across the field.

“It’s something for you. It’s something about you,” said Jason, hurriedly. “I think I’ll walk round the pond.”

“Why do that?” protested Wolf. “There’ll be no secret about it, even if it *is* for me.”

“He’ll like to find you alone best. These servants of these landowners always do,” replied the other. “Besides, Mr. Urquhart hates me. He knows I know what he is. He’s not a common kind of fool. He likes having good meals and good wine, but he’s ready to risk all that for I don’t know what!”

“I tell you I have no secrets with Urquhart,” rejoined Wolf. “There’s absolutely no need for you to leave us.”

“This gardener looked at me very suspiciously yesterday,” whispered Jason. “I saw him through the hedge, in his garden. He was planting something, but he kept looking at the hedge. He must have known I was there. He must have been wondering whether he dared shoot at me with a shotgun. So good-bye! I’m going to walk round the pond very slowly.”

Wolf moved toward Mr. Monk, leaving his companion to shuffle off as he pleased. The gigantic servant looked like a respectable prize-fighter in his Sunday clothes. When the two men met he took from his pocket a telegram and handed it to Wolf, touching his hat politely as he did so.

“This came early,” he said. “But there was no one else to send; and I had to tend to things before I could bring it myself. If there’s any answer, ‘twill have to go by way of Blacksod, for our office shuts at noon.”

Wolf opened the telegram. It was from his mother, and ran as follows:

“ARRIVE RAMSGARD SEVEN O’CLOCK SUNDAY NIGHT TRADESMEN HAVE NO SENSE COULD SLEEP AT LOVELACE.”

“There’s no answer, Monk,” he said gravely; and then, after prodding the ground thoughtfully with his stick, and looking at the figure of Jason Otter, which was now stationary behind a poplar-tree, “This is from my mother,” he added. “She is coming down from town tonight.”

“Very nice for you, Sir, I’m sure,” murmured the man. “ ’Tain’t every gentleman has *got* a mother.”

“But the difficulty is, Monk,” Wolf went on, “that my mother wants to stay down here. You don’t happen to know of any cottage or any rooms in a cottage that we could get for a time, do you?”

Roger Monk looked at him thoughtfully. “Not that I knows of, Sir,” he began, his gipsy-like eyes wandering from Wolf’s face to the landscape in front of him, a portion of which landscape included the figure of Mr. Otter, hiding behind the poplar-tree.

“That is to say, Sir, unless by any chance... but that ain’t likely, Sir....”

“What do you mean, Monk?” enquired the other, eagerly.

“ ’Twere only that I myself live lonesome-like in me own place... and seeing you’re helping Squire with his writings... and Lenty Cottage be neat set up, I were just thinking — —”

Wolf swung his stick. “The very thing!” he cried excitedly. In a flash his imagination became abnormally active. He visualized this gardener’s house in all its details. He saw himself, as well as his mother, snugly ensconced there for years and years... perhaps for the rest of their lives!

"But we should be a nuisance to you, Monk, even if the Squire *were* amenable, shouldn't we?"

The man shook his head.

"Well, I'll come straight home with you now, Monk, if I may," said Wolf impatiently. "Were you going home now?"

"I was."

"Well, I'll just run and tell Mr. Otter; and then I'll come with you."

He left the man standing where they had been talking, and hurried round the edge of the pond. There was something peculiarly appealing to him in the idea of this cottage. How pleasant it would be, he thought, when he and his mother were living together there some five years hence, if he happened to say to her, as he came in to tea from his Sunday walk, with a bunch of primroses in his hand, "I came past Lenty Pond today, Mother, where I first heard about the chance of our settling here!"

He found Jason sitting on the roots of the poplar, leaning his back against the tree-trunk and holding the tails of his overcoat stretched tightly over his knees, so that he should be entirely concealed from view.

"That man hasn't gone," was his greeting to Wolf. "He's standing there still."

"I know he is, Otter. He's brought a telegram for me. My mother's coming down tonight. Monk says he doesn't see any reason why she and I shouldn't take rooms in his cottage."

Jason looked up at him from where he sat upon the poplar-root, and the whimsical manner in which he hugged his coat-tails was accentuated by a smile of hobgoblinish merriment.

"You mean to live in it?" he remarked. "You and your mother? I don't believe old Urquhart would consider such a thing for a moment! These squires like to show off their servants' quarters. They like to take their guests round and say: ‘That’s where my head-gardener lives. He works at *his* garden when he’s finished with mine! Those are “Boule de neige” roses!’ But when it comes to honest people lodging in places like that — goodness! Urquhart wouldn’t consider it. But you can try. But my advice to you is to be very careful in this matter. You never know what troubles you’ll have when you deal with people like this Monk. But you can try. There! you’d better go off with him. He’s peeping and spying at this moment. He’s thinking I’m holding you back because of the money you pay us.”

Wolf shook his head and made a movement to be gone, but the other bent forward a little and whispered up at him: “I’ll walk slowly round the pond; *then* if he looks back he won’t think you ought to wait for me.”

With this complicated and obscure sentence floating on the surface of his mind, Wolf left his companion to his own devices and rejoined Roger Monk.

Not more than twenty minutes’ walking brought them to the gardener’s cottage. To Wolf’s great satisfaction the place proved to be quite out of sight of the manorhouse on the Ramsgard side of the orchards and the kitchen-gardens. It stood, indeed, in Lenty Lane, a little east of the drive-gates, and turned out to be a solid little cottage, pleasantly coated with white paint, and approached from the lane by a neat gravel-path, on either side of which was a row of carefully whitewashed small round stones. Wolf for some reason didn’t like the look of those white stones. Once more he regarded Lenty Cottage. The idea of its excessive neatness and tidiness, combined with the idea of its being so long empty except for this one man, troubled his nerves in some odd way. What *did* it suggest to him? Ah, he had it! It suggested the peculiar lonely trimness... so extraordinarily forbidding... of a gaoler’s house outside a prison-gate, or a keeper’s house outside a lunatic-asylum.

“Well, let’s see the inside,” he said, turning to his companion. “Mr. Urquhart might as well have put me up here at first.”

The other gave him one of his equivocal glances. “ ’Twere the matter of meals, I expect, Sir,” he said cautiously. “But if the lady comes, things will be different, no doubt.”

“Then you’d be pleased to have us here?”

This time the gardener’s look was direct and eager.

“I’d be glad enough to have a gent like yourself sleeping under this here roof,” he cried.

They entered the house together and the matter was soon arranged between them. When things were settled, Wolf observed the man rubbing one of his hands up and down the back of a chair. “I’d give a hundred pounds to get a place in them Shires again!” he burst out suddenly.

Wolf looked at him in astonishment. “You don’t like it here, Monk,” he murmured.

“Like it?” The man’s voice sank to a whisper. “ ’Tis easier to enter a gentleman’s service than to leave it, Sir, when that gentleman be the sort of Nebuchadnezzar my master be!”

“You aren’t a Dorset man, then?” enquired Wolf.

“I were born here,” replied the other, “but I left home when I were a kiddie, and worked in they Shires.”

This remark made clear to Wolf a great deal about Roger Monk. The upper layers of the man’s mind were sophisticated by travel. The deeper ones retained their indigenous imprint.

“Well, I must go back to Pond Cottage now,” Wolf said calmly. “Mrs. Otter and Mr. Darnley ought to be back from church by this time, and I must talk to them. We’ll arrange about terms, Monk, after I’ve seen Mr.

Urquhart. Do you suppose I should find him at home now, if I looked in on my way to the cottage?”

A frown of concentrated concern clouded the countenance of the man in front of him.

“It certainly would be best,” he remarked, “if it could be done. What he’ll say to it, I don’t know, I’m sure.”

With these words ringing in his ears, Wolf, some fifteen minutes later, found himself admitted to Mr. Urquhart’s presence. He discovered his employer in his study, reading with fascinated interest the book which his new secretary had brought him.

“These Evershotts will be the making of our history,” he chuckled, in high glee. “You did well with old Malakite. Five pounds for this? I tell you, it’s worth twenty! You’re a capital ambassador, Mr. Solent!... Eh? What’s that? Your mother coming here?... Monk’s front-rooms?”

He straightened out his legs and smoothed back his glossy hair from each side of that carefully brushed parting. With his great white face drooping a little on one side, with the flabby folds under his eyelids pulsing as if they possessed an independent life of their own, he made an unpleasant impression on Wolf’s mind.

Mr. Urquhart’s study was a small, dingy room, the walls of which were entirely covered by eighteenth-century prints. The Squire sat in a low, leather chair, with the Evershott chronicle on his knees; and as Wolf settled himself opposite him in a similar chair, he began to feel that, after all, he was probably exaggerating the peculiarities of King’s Barton Manor.

“It’s my nervous imagination, I expect,” he said to himself. “Urquhart’s no doubt like hundreds of other eccentric men of leisure. And as for the gardener’s chatter — I suppose servants are always glad to grumble to a stranger.”

“Didn’t my predecessor live in Monk’s house?” he found himself saying.

The squire lifted his hand from the book he held and half raised it to his well-shaven chin. “Redfern? A little while, perhaps. I really forget. Not long, anyway. That drunken individual at Pond Cottage persuaded him to go to them. It was with them he died. They told you *that*, I suppose?”

Mr. Urquhart’s voice was so placid and casual as he made these remarks that Wolf was seized with a sort of shame for letting his imagination run riot so among all these new acquaintances. “It’s the difference from London! That’s what explains it,” he thought to himself.

Mr. Urquhart now stopped scratching his chin with his delicate finger-tips, and, bowing his head a little, fumbled once more with the pages of the book upon his knee. Wolf sank back into his deep armchair and stared at the man’s tweed trousers and shiny patent-leather shoes.

He drew a long breath that was something between a sigh of weariness and a sigh of relief. His recent interviews with Jason and Monk had given him the feeling of being on the edge of a psychic maelstrom of morbid conflicts. The comfort of this remote room and the ease of this leather chair made him at once weary of agitations and glad that he still could feel like a spectator rather than a combatant.

After all, why should he worry himself? As the philosophical Duke of Albany murmured in *King Lear*: “The event! Well... The event!”

“How will your mother appreciate sharing her kitchen with my man?” said Mr. Urquhart suddenly.

The remark irritated Wolf. What did this easy gentleman know about the shifts of poverty? He was himself so bent upon the arrangement that these little matters seemed quite unimportant.

“Oh, she won’t mind that!” he responded carelessly.

"What put all this into Roger's great, stupid, silly head?" the squire went on, in his silkiest voice. "Is he tired of my company? Does he want to leave my service and enter your mother's? What's up with the man? It isn't the money. I know *that* much. Roger cares less for money than any man I've ever dealt with. What can he be up to now?"

Wolf remained silent, letting him run on. But in his mind he set himself once more to wonder how far he really *had* exaggerated the sinister element in his employer's character.

But Mr. Urquhart leaned forward now and regarded him intently. "You won't play me a trick, will you, like the other one? But you're not tricky, Mr. Solent, I can see that! On my soul, I think you're an honest young man. Your face shows it. It has its faults *as* a face; but it isn't tricky.... Well... well... well!... When does your mother arrive? I shall be interested to have the honor of meeting her again. My cousin Carfax was at one time — you know, I suppose? — excessively in love with her.... Not tonight, eh? Well, perhaps that's as well. Mrs. Martin shall go over there and make everything straight."

Wolf rose to his feet at this point, anxious to take his leave before the man had time to read him any passages from the Evershott Diary. Once outside the house, he took stock of the situation. He had settled matters with the occupier and with the owner of his new abode. The final arrangement he had to make was with Mrs. Otter. Therefore, off he hurried to Pond Cottage, where he found his hostess just returned from church.

But here he met with nothing but sympathy — whether, in her secret heart she was glad to get rid of him, Wolf could not say. She may have all the while regretted the loss to her eldest son of that chamber whose walls Wolf had so arbitrarily denuded. Well! They could put those pictures back on those walls now! And he mentally resolved to pay as few visits as possible to the bedroom of Mr. Jason Otter. He had no wish to behold the countenance of that "god of rain" again!

He left Pond Cottage soon after lunch, explaining that he would return that night, but would have supper in Ramsgard with his mother. The afternoon proved to be as misty and warm as the earlier hours of the day; and as he retraced the track of Thursday's drive with Darnley, he did not permit the various agitations into which he had been plunged to destroy his delight in that relaxed and caressing weather. He found that travelling on foot in full daylight revealed to him many tokens of the Spring that he had missed on his evening drive.

Once or twice he descended into the ditches on either side of the road, where the limp whitish-pink stalks of half-hidden primroses drooped above their crinkled leaves, and, with hands and knees embedded in the warm-scented earth, pressed his face against those fragile apparitions.

The sweet, faint odour of these pale flowers made him think of Gerda Torp, and he began worrying his mind a good deal as to the effect of his mother's arrival upon the progress of his adventure.

Long before he reached the outskirts of Ramsgard he was reminded of his approach to the famous West Country School by the various groups of straw-hatted boys — tall, reserved, disdainful — who seemed exploring, like young Norman invaders, these humble pasture-lands of the West Saxons.

One or two of the boys, as they passed him by, made hesitating half-gestures of respectful recognition. One of them actually lifted his straw-hat. Wolf became a little embarrassed by these encounters. He wondered what kind of a master these polite neophytes — for it must have been the newcomers at the place who blundered in this way — mistook him for! Did he look like a teacher of French? Or did they take him for one of that high, remote, aristocratic company — not masters at all, but Governors of the ancient School?

When he got closer to the town, he had no difficulty in espying both cemetery and workhouse across an expanse of market-gardens and small enclosed fields. The look of these objects, combined, as they were, with outlying sheds and untidy isolated hovels, gave him a sensation that he was always thrilled to receive — the peculiar sensation that is evoked by any transitional ground lying between town and country.

He had never approached any town, however insignificant, across such a margin, without experiencing a queer and quite special sense of romance. Was it that there was aroused in him some subtle memory of all the intangible sensations that his ancestors had felt, each one of them in his day, as, with so much of the unknown before them, they approached or left, in their West Country wandering, any of these historic places? Did, in fact, some floating "emanation" of human regrets and human hopes hover inevitably about such marginal tracts — redolent of so many welcomes and so many farewells?

When he arrived at last in the centre of the town and came to the gate of the Abbey, it was a few minutes to four o'clock. There was a languid afternoon service ebbing to its end in the eastern portion of the dusky nave; and, without entering the building, but lingering in the Norman entrance, Wolf contemplated once more that famous fan-tracery roof.

Those lovely organic lines and curves, up there in the greenish dimness, challenged something in his soul that was hardly ever stirred by any work of art; something that was repelled and rendered actually hostile by the kind of thing he had seen in that bedroom of Jason Otter.

This high fan-tracery roof, into whose creation so much calm, quiet mysticism must have been thrown, seemed to appeal with an almost personal sympathy to Wolf's deepest mind. Uplifted there, in the immense stillness of that enclosed space, above the dust and stir of all passing transactions, is seemed to fling forth, like some great ancient fountain in a walled garden, eternal arches of enchanted water that sustained, comforted, and healed. The amplitude of the beauty around him had indeed just then a curious and interesting psychic effect. In place of giving him the sensation that his soul had melted into these high-arched shadows, it gave him the feeling that the core of his being was a little, hard, opaque round crystal!

Soothed, beyond all expectation, by this experience, and fortified with a resolute strength by thinking of his soul after this fashion, Wolf had nearly reached Selena Gault's door, when he remembered that he ought to make sure of a room for his mother at the Lovelace Hotel before he did anything else.

Hurrying round by the station, therefore, where he verified the time of the London train, he entered the office-hall of the famous hostelry. No backwater of rural leisure could have been more pulseless and placid than that mellow interior, with its stuffed fox-heads and mid-Victorian mahogany chairs. But it was with a shock of dismay that he learned from the dignified lady in charge of the hotel-books that owing to the approach of the annual Spring Fair every room in the place was already occupied. Wolf cursed the Fair and those horse-loving magnates. But there was nothing for him but to return to Miss Gault's; for the smaller Ramsgard Inn was at the further end of the town, and it was now five o'clock.

He crossed the public gardens. He struck St. Aldhelm's Street just above the bridge and moved westward under the long wall. He pushed open the green door and entered the garden of hyacinths. The mechanical act of opening that little gate, for no other reason than that it was a gate from a street into a private enclosure, brought suddenly into his mind his similar entrance into the Torp yard; and the vein of amorousness in him, like a velvet-padded panther in a blind night, slipped wickedly past all the magic of yesterday's walk and caused his heart to beat at the imaginary image — for he had never actually seen that provocative picture — of the young girl astride the tombstone!

No sooner had the mute servant admitted him into Selena's drawing-room and closed the door behind him, than he realized that his hostess was not alone. Not only were all the cats there, but playing wildly with the cats, like a young Bassarid with young tigers, was a curly-headed, passionate little girl, of olive complexion, who, even before Miss Gault had finished uttering the syllables of her name, seized him by both hands and held up an excited, magnetic mouth to be kissed. Off she went again, however, to her play with the cats, which seemed to arouse her to the limit of her nervous endurance, for her cheeks were feverishly vivid and her dark eyes gleamed like two great gems in the handle of a dagger — a dagger that someone keeps furtively moving backwards and forwards between a red flame and a window open to the night.

As she pulled the cats to and fro and tumbled over them and among them, on sofa and hearth-rug, she kept up an incessant, excitable chatter; a chatter that struck Wolf's mind as resembling, in some odd manner, a substance rather than a *sound*, for it seemed to supply a part of the warm, dusky atmosphere in which she played, and indeed seemed to require no vocal response from the other persons in the room. It was like the swirl of a swollen brook in a picture of Nicolas Poussin, in the foreground of which a young brown goatherd plays for ever with his goats.

"Olwen Smith!" broke in Miss Gault, when she and Wolf had seated themselves, after their first exchange of greetings, and he had hurriedly given her a description of Mr. Urquhart and Mr. Urquhart's library. "Olwen Smith!"

The little girl got up from the floor in a moment, and came and stood by her friend's knee.

"You mustn't be noisy when a gentleman's here; and, besides, you've got on your Sunday frock. Tell Mr. Solent your name and where you live. Mr. Solent doesn't like noisy little girls, or little girls that talk all the time and interrupt people."

"I live at Number Eighty-Five North Street Ramsgard," repeated the child hurriedly. "I was eleven last Thursday. Grandfather keeps the school hat-shop. Mother went away when I was born. Miss Gault is my greatest friend. Aunt Mattie is my mother now. I like the white cat best!"

The child uttered these sentences as if they had been a lesson which she had learned by heart. She stood obediently by Selena Gault's side; but her dark eyes fixed themselves upon Wolf with an expression that he never afterwards forgot, so wild, so mocking, so rebellious, and yet so appealing did it seem.

"Olwen loves my cats; but not nearly so much as my cats love *her*," said Selena Gault tenderly.

The little girl cuddled up to the black-gowned figure and laid her head against the old maid's sleeve. Her wild spirit seemed to have ebbed away from every portion of her body except her eyes. These refused to remove themselves from those of the visitor; and, as his own mood changed this way and that, these dusky mirrors changed with it, reflecting thoughts that no child's conscious brain could possibly have understood.

"But you know you love your Aunt Mattie as if she *were* your mother," said Selena Gault. "She's been so good to you that you'd be a very ungrateful little girl if you didn't love her."

"I heard grandfather tell Aunt Mattie the other night that she was no more *his* child than I was *her* child," responded Olwen Smith, mechanically stroking Miss Gault's hand like an affectionate little automaton, while her feverish mocking eyes seemed to say to Wolf, "There, watch the effect of *that*!"

"Mattie's mother died about twenty-five years ago, child," expostulated Miss Gault. "Her name was Lorna. She and your grandfather used to have dreadful quarrels before she died. That's why Mr. Smith, when he gets angry, says things like that. Of course Mattie is his daughter; and it's very wrong of him to say such things."

"Aunt Mattie's *funny*," murmured the little girl.

"Hush, child!"

"But she is, *rather*! Just a tiny little bit funny, isn't she, Miss Gault?"

Selena smiled at Wolf — that peculiar hypnotized smile with which older people, who have given their souls into children's keeping, transform their pets' worst faults into qualities that are irresistibly engaging.

"Aunt Mattie's got a nose like yours," said Olwen Smith.

"Like mine?" murmured Selena Gault, reproachfully. "You mustn't be rude, Olwen dear. That's one thing I *can't* have in my house."

The brown head was buried closer in the black silk gown, but the child's voice sounded clear enough.

"Not like yours, Miss Gault — like *his*! Exactly like his!"

Selena Gault had occasion at that moment to turn clean away from both her visitors; for the mute servant entered the room carrying the tea-tray. The arrangement of this tray was evidently a matter of meticulous ritual in this house, and Wolf surveyed it with silent satisfaction, especially as the turbulent little girl ran off to play with the cats and left Miss Gault free not only to fill his cup, but also to attend unreservedly to his remarks.

The tea-tray was placed upon a round table at Miss Gault's side. A black kitchen-kettle — Miss Gault declared that no other kind boiled *good* water — was placed upon the hearth. The servant herself did not retire, as most servants are wont to do at such a juncture, but remained to assist at the ceremony of "pouring out," a ceremony which was so deftly accomplished that Wolf soon found all his difficulties and annoyances melting away in the fragrance of the most perfect cup of tea he had ever tasted.

The general effect of Miss Gault's drawing-room, in the pleasant mingling of twilight and firelight, began to take on for his imagination the particular atmosphere that he was wont, in his own mind, to think of as "the Penn House atmosphere." This implied that there was something about this room which made him recall that old bow-window in Brunswick Terrace, Weymouth, where in his childhood he used to indulge in those queer, secretive pleasures. There was not a single piece of furniture in this room of Miss Gault's which did not project some essence of the past, tender and mellow as the smell of potpourri.

He broke the silence now by a reference to his conversation with Darnley in the Blacksod book-shop. "Otter said — —" he began.

"Hush!" cried Selena Gault; and then in a completely different tone, addressing the silent child, who was listening intently: "Olwen dear, you can go on playing! You can make as much noise as you like now! We've finished our conversation."

"I don't want to play any more, Miss Gault. I hate all your cats except this one! I want to hear Mr. Solent tell you what Otter said!"

"I'll have to send you home, Olwen, if you don't behave better. It's rude to interfere with grown-up people's conversation."

"I wasn't interfering; I was listening. I'd never have known about Aunt Mattie not being grandfather's real daughter if I hadn't listened...."

"Be quiet, child!" cried Selena Gault. But the passionate little girl's shrill voice rose to a defiant shriek as she jumped up from the sofa, flung the cat upon the floor, shook back her tangled curls, and screamed aloud. "And I'd never have known about Aunt Mattie not being my real mother if I hadn't listened!"...

If Miss Gault had not managed the child with perfect tact before, she rose to the occasion now.

"It's all right, Olwen dear," she said in the calmest and most matter-of-fact voice. "I daresay it's because grown-up people talk such a lot of nonsense that they get so cross when children listen. There! Look! You've frightened your own favourite!"

It was when matters were at this point of psychic equilibrium that Wolf decided that no more moments must elapse before he informed his hostess of his mother's arrival. The nervous electricity with which the air of the room was already vibrating, encouraged rather than deterred him.

"Miss Gault!" he began suddenly when the tall black figure had subsided into some kind of peace in her green chair. "I've just had some rather serious news which I'd better tell you at once."

Like a weary caryatid, sick of the burden of life, but unyielding in her resolution to bear it without reproach and without complaint, Selena Gault leaned forward toward him.

"You needn't tell me, boy; I can guess it. Ann Haggard's coming down here."

He nodded in assent to her words, but a look of irritation crossed his face.

"My mother and I have the same name," he protested.

"When's she coming? Oh, what a mistake you'll make if you let her come! What a mistake you'll make!"

"I've not had much choice," remarked Wolf drily. "She's due now in a few minutes."

"*What?*" gasped the lady, her deformed lip twitching like some curious aquarium-specimen that has been prodded by a visitor's stick.

"She's due at seven o'clock."

"In Ramsgard again — after twenty-seven years! What a thing! What a thing to happen!" gasped Selena Gault.

"I don't know where the deuce I'm going to put her! That's where I want your advice. The Lovelace is all filled up with people come in for the Spring Show."

Miss Gault's face was like an ancient amphitheatre full of dusky gladiators. She took firm hold of the arms of her chair to steady herself.

But at that moment a diversion offered itself which distracted the attention of both of them. Olwen Smith, who had been listening with fascinated intensity to what they were saying, now burst in upon them.

"O Mr. Solent!" she cried. "*Do* let your mother have our front-room for the night. Aunt Mattie takes lodgers, though grandfather does sell the School hats! I *know* Aunt Mattie would love to have your mother. Wouldn't she, Miss Gault? Do tell him she must come to us. Do tell him, Miss Gault! He'll let her come if you'll only say so!" And with that the child sidled up against their hostess's knees with such beguiling cajolery that Wolf was surprised at the coldness with which the woman received her appeal.

She made a very faint movement with her two hands, just as if the child had not been at her side at all — a movement as if she were pressing down a load of invisible earth over the roots of an invisible plant.

"Hush, child!" she said irritably. "You mustn't interrupt us like that. I've told you so often you mustn't. I'm sure your Aunt Mattie wouldn't wish to have a guest for only one night. No one likes an arrangement of that sort."

But the child, who had been watching her face with intense scrutiny till this moment, now flung herself down upon the floor and burst into furious crying. “I — want — her — to — come — to us!” she wailed. “I want her to come! It’s always like this when anything nice happens. You’re unkind, Miss Gault! You’re very unkind!”

And then quite suddenly her tears stopped, her sobs ceased; and, very solemnly, sitting upon the floor, hugging her knees, looking up at the figure above her with a tragic, lamentable face, “You are *prejudiced* against me!” she said.

The word “prejudiced” sounded so unexpected and so queer out of her mouth that it charmed away the old maid’s agitation. “It’s all right, my dear,” she murmured, stooping down and lifting her up, and covering her hot forehead with kisses. “It’s all right, Olwen. Mr. Solent shall bring his mother to your house.”

She fell into a deep reverie, staring into vacancy. Past the child’s curly head, which she held pressed against her, she stared, past the puzzled and rather sulky profile of Wolf, past the thick green curtains bordered with red-and-gold braid, out into the gathering night, out into many nights lost and gone.

Wolf now rather impatiently looked at his watch and compared it with the clock upon the mantelpiece.

“It’s half-past six,” he said brusquely, interrupting Miss Gault’s thoughts.

The lady nodded gravely, and rising to her feet with the child’s hand still in hers, “I’ll tell Emma to take Olwen home,” she said, “and then she can tell Mattie Smith to expect you. Say good-bye to Mr. Solent, little one.”

Olwen held out her hand with one of the most complicated looks he had ever seen on a child’s face. It was repentant, and yet it was triumphant. It was mocking and mischievous, and yet it was, in a queer way, appealing and wistful.

“Well, I’ll see you again,” said Wolf, stooping down and kissing the child’s feverishly hot little fingers, “unless they send you off to bed before we get to the house.”

Olwen was obviously immensely relieved that he had refrained from hugging her or kissing her face.

Very sedate and dignified was the curtsey she now gave him, turning round to manœuvre it as Miss Gault opened the door; and he was left with that honourable glow of satisfaction with which clumsy people are sometimes rewarded who have been self-controlled enough to respect the nervous individuality of a child.

When Miss Gault returned and had closed the door, she stood for a space regarding her visitor with the sort of grave, concentrated look, not unmixed with misgiving, that a commander in an involved campaign might give to a trusty but over-impetuous subordinate whose limitations of mind prohibit complete confidence.

“It will be awkward for her to go straight to these Smiths, you know. But she’d have to meet them, I suppose, sooner or later; and it *may* be all right. It’s like taking the bull by the horns, anyway; which is what Ann always did.”

Wolf was silent. He was watching the hands of the clock.

“Why did you let her come down here?” the old maid broke out. “Are you her shadow? Are you tied to her apron-strings? Can’t you see what it means to me, and to others who remember *him*, to have to see her, to have to speak to her? Haven’t you felt yourself that this is *his* country, his corner of the world, his possession? Haven’t you felt that? And yet you let his enemy, his vindictive enemy, invade his very burying-ground!”...

Wolf’s only retort to this impassioned speech was to snatch at the lady’s hand and give it a hurried kiss. “You mustn’t take it too seriously,” were his parting words.

When he reached the station, he was met by the news that the train was to be about an hour late.

“This will worry our little Olwen!” he thought in dismay. “They’ll send her to bed for a certainty. They’ll think we’re not coming at all. They’ll think we’ve changed our minds. And where shall we get supper when we *are* there? Damn these teasing problems! I wish Mother had waited till tomorrow.”

The station was not a very pleasant place to spend an hour in; so Wolf mounted the hill which rose behind the parallel tracks of the railroad and the river. Here there was a sort of terrace-road, perched high above the town and itself overshadowed by the grassy eminence known as “The Slopes,” beyond the summit of which lay the wide-stretching deer-park of the lord of the manor.

Feeling sure that, if the train came sooner than it was expected, he would hear it in time, as soon as he reached the terrace-road below “The Slopes” he began pacing to and fro along its level security, gazing down on the lights of the town as they twinkled intermittently through the darkened valley beneath him. The sky was overcast; so that these scattered points of light resembled the phantasmal reproduction of a sidereal firmament that had already ceased to exist. Mists that in the darkness were only waftures of chillier air rose up from the muddy banks of the Lunt and brought to his nostrils on this Spring night odours that suggested the Autumn. As he paced that terrace, inhaling these damp airs, his mind seemed to detach itself from the realistic actualities he was experiencing. It seemed to float off and away on a dark stream of something that was neither air nor water. What he desired at that moment, as he had never desired it before, was a support in which he could lose himself completely — lose himself without obligation or effort! He, the mortal creation of Chance, craved for some immortal creation of Chance, such as he could worship, wilfully, capriciously, blindly. But he stretched out his arms into that darkness in vain. His voice might have been the voice of a belated rook on its way to Babylon Hill, or the scraping of one alder-branch against another above the waters of the Lunt, or the faint infinitesimal slide of tiny grains of gravel, as some minute earthworm in the midst of the empty little path at the top of "The Slopes" came forth to inhale the Spring night! A bubble of airy vibration, his appeal was lost as absolutely as any single drop of water that rolled at that moment down the green back of a frog emerging from the cold surface of Lenty Pond.

He kept visualizing the mud-scented darkness in which he seemed to be floating as a vast banked-up aqueduct composed of granite slabs covered with slippery black moss. Out of the spiritual tide that carried him along, there whirled up, in spurts of phosphorescent illumination, various distorted physical aspects of the people he had met these last few days. But these aspects were all ill-assorted, incongruous, maladjusted.... All these morbid evocations culminated finally in the thought of his mother; for what dispersed them and shook them indeed into nothingness now, with an abrupt materialistic shock, was the clear, sharp sound of the clattering gates of the level-crossing.

Wolf slid with a jerk into the normal world as he heard this sound, like a man falling plumb-down from a skylight upon a creaking floor.

He grasped his stick firmly by its handle, digging it into the ground at every step, and hurried with long strides down the little descent.

Nothing in the world seemed important to him now but to see his mother's face and hear her high-pitched familiar voice....

Standing on the platform, before the train drew in, he found that his heart was beating with excitement.

"I'm simply at an *impasse*," he thought to himself, "about what I feel for Mother. I don't really want her down here... interfering with Gerda... interfering with everything.... It's odd... it's funny... it's just like the spouting up of a great white whale... spouting up, when no one's thinking of whales... when everyone's thinking of the course of the ship!"

When the train actually came in, and he held her at arm's length with both his hands, clutching her wrists almost fiercely, looking her up and down almost irritably, he recognized in a flash that existence without her, however adventurous it might be, would always be half-real... just as those famous Ramsgard "Slopes" up there had seemed half-real a few minutes ago!

It was she alone who could give the bitter-sweet tang of reality to his phantasmal life and make the ground under his feet firm.

Her coming, now, as of old, had done, at this moment, just this very thing!

As he looked upon her now — that gallant, ruddy, handsome face, those proud lips, those strong, white teeth, that wavy mass of splendid, grey hair — he felt that, though he might love other persons for other reasons, it was she alone who made the world he lived in solid and resistant to the touch. He felt that without her the whole thing might split and tear — as if it had been made of thin paper!

"Oh, it was awful, my dabchick!" the lady cried, kissing him on both cheeks in an exaggerated foreign manner. "They were all down on us. I never knew what wretches tradesmen could be! They'll be nicely fooled when they find the house shut up. But they deserved it. They behaved abominably....” She caught herself up with a gasp, and turned, full of despotic abruptness, towards the patient Ramsgard porter. “Those are all mine! Three big ones and three little ones! You can come back for the other people’s when you’ve taken mine out! Is that bus there? It always used to be.”

Wolf took from her a basket she carried, which appeared full of the oddest assortment of objects; and they both followed the loaded little truck, pushed by the docile porter to the front of the station.

“There it is,” cried Mrs. Solent, “the old Ramsgard bus! Put them in... carefully now! Carefully now!”

The porter retired, recompensed by a shilling, which Wolf hurriedly produced from his pocket while his mother was opening her purse. When he had helped her into the interior of the stuffy little vehicle, he gave his order to the man on the box.

“Number Eighty-Five North Street!”

“Where are you taking me?” Mrs. Solent asked, as the bus rumbled off.

“To a room in the town for one night, Mother. The Lovelace was full. But I’ve got a lovely cottage for us at King’s Barton, near Mr. Urquhart’s drive-gate.”

“Where is this room? I remember every house in North Street.”

“It’s at Mr. Smith’s, the hatter’s.”

Mrs. Solent’s dark-brown eyes glowed like the eyes of some excited wood-animal.

“*That* man! Not *that* house, of all houses. You don’t mean — —” She broke off and stared at him intently, while an indescribable smile began to touch the corners of her mouth.

Then she leaned forward and rubbed her gloved hands together, while her cheeks glowed with mischief.

"Has the good man by any chance got a daughter called Mattie?"

"*Aunt* Mattie?" murmured Wolf, feeling as if he were struggling to catch two ropes, which, at the same time, dangled before him. "That *is* what the child called her."

"The child?" It was his mother's turn to look puzzled now.

"Little Olwen Smith."

Mrs. Solent's smile died away.

"It can't be the same," she said. "Unless Lorna's child's got married."

"It's the same, all right, Mother. It's your man, all right. He was the hatter, wasn't he?"

She nodded.

"Well! It's the same, Mother."

Her inscrutable smile began to return and she leaned back with a sigh.

"To go straight to Albert's house —— But it'll be fun. It'll be sport! I'm not going to take it seriously.... Aunt Mattie?... little Olwen?... goodness! But they must have come down in the world, if he lets out rooms to visitors... or did he invite me? Am I destined to be Albert Smith's guest the first night I set foot in this place?"

"Did you and Father know him well?" enquired Wolf, as the bus swung round the corner by the ancient conduit.

"Your father knew Lorna well — Albert's minx of a wife. Lorna was even sillier about him than that idiot Selena."

"What happened, Mother?"

"Never mind now, Wolf! I'm in a mood to be amused by *everything*. Don't look so sulky! I tell you I'm going to amuse myself here. You don't seem to realize that I lived in this town for ten years."

“Listen, Mother,” said Wolf hurriedly, “I know what you mean when you talk of ‘amusing’ yourself. Now look here, Mother, I won’t have you getting into any rows down here! I’ve got my job here; and you’ve *got* to be nice to everybody. Do you understand?” In his excitement he laid his heavy hand upon her knee. “You’ve got to be nice to everybody — to everybody!”

The flickering oil-lamp which lit the inside of the bus shone down upon those shining wood-animal eyes. They glowed with excitement. They positively gleamed as the jolting of the vehicle jogged both mother and son up and down on their seats.

“Your father taught me to be unconventional,” she said. “And I’m not going to be all sugar-and-spice in my old haunts.”

The rambling old conveyance was drawing up now outside Number Eighty-Five.

“Mother, you *must* be good, and let bygones be bygones.”

She turned upon him then, while the bus-man ran up the steps of the house to ring the bell.

“Your father never gave up his amusement for me, and I’m not going to give up my amusement for you! I m going to be just myself with all our old acquaintances. I’m going to begin with Albert! There! Don’t be silly! Get out and help me out. We *can’t* go anywhere else now.... Who’s that at the door? Is *that* Lorna’s child?...”

Just half-an-hour later Wolf and his mother were seated at a massive mahogany table in the hatter’s dining-room, sharing the Smiths’ Sunday supper. Olwen was *not* in bed. With feverish cheeks and enormous dark eyes she stood at the elbow of her grandfather, listening to every word of the talk and scanning every detail of Mrs. Solent’s appearance.

“I would never have believed it possible,” the grey-haired lady was saying with radiant glances at them all, “that you should have changed so much, Albert, and that Lorna should have come to life in Mattie. You're not so pretty as your mother, my dear. Of course, we must allow that! But goodness! You've got her figure and her look. How does it feel to be so like someone else? It must be queer — almost as if you inherited their feelings, their troubles, everything! But I *am* glad to see you, Mattie. It gives me — even me — a rather queer feeling. No, you're not as pretty as your mother; but Albert mustn't be hurt if I say I think you're much nicer! You needn't scowl at me, Wolf. Mattie doesn't mind, do you? And Albert knows me too well to be surprised at *anything* I say."

"Times change, Mrs. Solent — times change!" murmured the master of the house, in a low voice. "I was all shaky when little Olwen said you were coming. It seemed like the dead coming to life. But I feel all right now, as I set eyes upon you." And he helped himself to a lingering sip of the glass of mild whiskey-and-water that stood in front of him.

He was a sad, lean, commonplace little man, with a deprecatory bend of the head and a mingling of rustic cunning and weary obsequiousness in his watery, spectacled eyes. He looked as if he had been spending the day in long Low Church services. The smell of hassocks and stuffy vestries hung about his clothes, and the furtive unction of an official who had collected many threepenny bits in an embroidered bag weighed upon his stooping shoulders.

While Mrs. Solent ate her cold mutton and hot caper-sauce with hungry relish and rallied the nervous churchwarden, Wolf took the opportunity of studying in quiet self-effacement the expressive countenance of Mr. Smith's daughter. Mattie turned out to be a girl with a fine figure, but an unappealing face. She looked about twenty-five. She was not pretty in any sense at all, in spite of what Mrs. Solent had said. Her thick, prominent nose was out of all proportion to the rest of her face. Her chin, her forehead, her eyes, were all rendered insignificant by the size of this dominant and uncomely feature.

But though Aunt Mattie's eyes were small and of a colour that varied between grey and green, they possessed a certain formidable power. A person gazing into them for the second or third time found himself looking hastily away, as if he had been caught trespassing in a very rigidly preserved estate.

Wolf was surprised how completely at ease the girl showed herself. He had expected her to be extremely disconcerted by this intrusion. But not at all. She replied calmly and with quite the appropriate nuance of humour to his mother's rather exaggerated badinage; and with himself she seemed perfectly natural and unaffected. All this was astonishing to him; though why it should have been so, he would have been ashamed to explain. Perhaps he had expected the Smith family to display social tendencies at variance with those of the upper middle-class to which he himself belonged. If so, he was certainly guilty of unjustifiable snobbishness. For though the hatter of Ramsgard School did not behave like a nobleman, he behaved with quite as much dignity and ease as most of the professional gentlemen with whom Wolf was acquainted! This unpremeditated supper-party in that dingy high-ceilinged dining-room, with its great cut-glass chandelier hanging over their heads and its gold-framed picture of some ancestral Mr. Smith gazing down upon them, was neither awkward nor embarrassed. Mrs. Solent's evident recklessness found no rocks or reefs in the behaviour of the others upon which its mischief could lash itself into foam!

Before the evening was over and it was time for him to start for his night-walk back to King's Barton, Wolf had begged more than once for a definite promise from Mattie Smith that she would bring Olwen over to see them when they were established in their new abode at Lenty Cottage. The girl was complaisant and gracious over this invitation, to which the child responded breathlessly; but Wolf knew enough of the ways of women to know that there were subtle withdrawings and qualifications under that heavy, benevolent mask, into which it would have been unwise to probe.

"Which day does the Spring Fair begin, Father?" Mattie said suddenly to the old gentleman.

"The Fair, my dear?" responded the hatter. "Tomorrow, I believe; and it lasts till the end of the week; but someone told me after church — no! it was *before* church — that Thursday is the horse-show."

"Oh, that completes it all!" cried Mrs. Solent. "That's the one last touch. *Don't* I remember the Fair! I'd like to go tomorrow, the moment the gates are open! I'd like to go every day."

"We'll go on Thursday, Mother," said Wolf. "Everyone will be there then and you'll be able to see how many of 'em remember you."

"The horse-show *is* the great day," said Mattie Smith acquiescingly.

"I haven't changed very much, then, Albert?" murmured Mrs. Solent in response to a furtive appraising glance from the discreet churchwarden.

Mr. Smith looked a little embarrassed at having been caught observing her.

"No, you haven't changed! You haven't changed!" sighed the weary little man; and the tone in which he uttered these plaintive words seemed drawn from a vast warehouse of accumulated school-hats — shelves upon shelves of hats — the burden of which seemed weighing him down in a Dead Sea of diurnal desolation.

"*Your* mother is your *real* mother, isn't she?" interrupted Olwen in a shrill voice, gazing at Wolf from the protection of Mattie's knees.

Providence came to his rescue with an answer that was really quite an inspiration.

"Mothers *are* as mothers *do*," he responded.

But he caught, all the same, a reddening of Mattie's cheeks and a hurried turning away of the churchwarden's eyes. Mr. Albert Smith kept pouring out whiskey for himself and for Wolf; but though Mrs. Solent drank only a little coffee, she was the one who held the evening together by her high spirits. Wolf watched Mattie whispering to the child about going to bed; but as he knew well enough that Olwen wouldn't go to bed till the party broke up, he began to look from one to another, waiting till a lapse in the conversation should give him a chance to bid them good-night and start on his walk home.

But Mrs. Solent's excitement was unsubduable; and there seemed something about this unusual supper-party that made him reluctant to bring it to an end. The dark old furniture, the dark old wall-paper, the dark old great-grandfather in his heavy frame, projected some kind of hypnotism upon the sliding moments, that made it as hard for him to move as if he were under a spell.

No sound came from the street outside. No sound came from the rest of the house. Like a group of enchanted people they continued to sit there, facing one another across the table, listening to Mrs. Solent's rich, voluble voice.

Wolf had long begun, in his insatiable manner, to drink up every peculiarity of the room in which they sat — of the furniture upon which the heavily-globed gas-jets of the candelabra shed so mellow a glow. As he grew tired of smoking cigarettes, he became aware of a faint scent of apples. Where this scent originated he could not detect. It seemed to proceed equally from every portion of the apartment. And as he gave himself up to it, it brought to his mind a kind of distilled essence of all the fruit and the flowers that had ever been spread out upon that massive brown table; spread out upon former editions of “The Western Gazette”; editions old enough to contain news of the death of Queen Adelaide or of Queen Charlotte!

“I *must* go now,” he thought. “I *must* go now.” And he began to suspect that what really held him back from making a start upon his walk was not any attraction in the Smith ménage, but simply the great invisible struggle that had already begun between that dead man in the cemetery and this woman who was so extraordinarily alive!

She had come prepared to avenge herself in her own magnificent way — not basely, but still with formidable success. She had not come to Ramsgard to efface herself. And now, being here, being encamped, as Miss Gault said, on the very edge of his burying-ground, she could not refrain, just out of pure, suppressed high spirits, from stirring up the mud of the ambiguous past. Well! The event must work itself out. In *no sense* was he responsible....

He did manage to rise at last and to kiss his mother good-night. He would have kissed Olwen, too, but she impatiently drew away. His final appeal to Mattie to come over and see them, “any day but Thursday, when we’ll all be at the horse-show,” was received with more warmth and cordiality than this girl had yet displayed.

What *were* the thoughts, day after day, year after year, that beat about in the secretive brain behind that heavily-featured face? What was this queer attraction which he felt for her, so different from the interest excited in him by her father and by the little girl?

Wolf couldn’t help pondering on these things as he made his way out of the silent town, accompanied by hardly any mortal sound except the creak of his own heavy boots and the thud of his own heavy stick.

It was not until he was clear of the last houses of Ramsgard, clear of both workhouse and cemetery, that the Smith house, the Smith daughter, the Smith granddaughter, faded from his brain.

Then, as the grass-scented mists grew cooler against his face, rolling up towards the arable lands from the hushed Blackmore meadows, the old serpent of lecherous desire lifted once more its head in that spacious night. Once more his mind reverted to Gerda Torp — not to Gerda as she was when she sent her bird-call so far over Poll's Camp, but to Gerda as she was to his wicked imagination when he listened to the lewd whisperings of Lobbie Torp and Bob Weevil, to the Gerda he had never seen and perhaps would never see — the Gerda who used a tombstone for a hobby-horse in that littered monument-yard in Chequers Street!

YELLOW BRACKEN

Wolf took good care not to reveal to his mother his own secret reservations as to the desirability of Lenty Cottage. But that first impression of something uncannily neat and trim about it still obstinately persisted in his own mind after the stir of their arrival was over.

There was no word spoken about their keeping a servant; but Mrs. Martin, the Squire’s housekeeper, promised that their maid, Bessie, should come in two or three times a week to clean up. But how far his mother — who, as Wolf knew, disliked cooking — would be able to deal with their meals, remained to be seen.

On the morning of Wednesday, after their first two nights in their new abode, it struck Wolf that it would be amusing, before entering on his labours with Mr. Urquhart, to pay a visit to King’s Barton Vicarage.

He found the clergyman working in his garden, and followed him into his forlorn house, the whitewashed exterior of which was stained with faint yellows, greens, and browns by the varied moods of the weather. He followed him up an uncarpeted staircase and across an uncarpeted landing.

The rooms downstairs, the doors of which stood wide open, were evidently used as religious classrooms; for the only furniture they contained was a miserable collection of wooden forms and battered cane-bottom chairs. Of the rooms at the top of the staircase, the doors of which stood open too, one appeared to be the vicar’s bedroom — the bed was unmade and the floor was littered with tattered magazines — and another the priest’s sitting-room or study.

The whole house looked as though its owner had long since relinquished every kind of effort to get that personal happiness out of life which is the inheritance of the meanest. Its shabby desolation seemed to project, in opposition to every human instinct, a forlorn emptiness that was worse than squalor. Its effect upon Wolf's senses was ghastly. No one could conceive a return to such a house as a return "home"! What it meant was simply that this wretched little priest *had no home*. The basic human necessity for some degree of cheerfulness in one's lair was outraged and violated.

The room into which Wolf was now led had at least the redemption of a small fire of red coals. But except for this, it was not a place where a stranger would wish to prolong his stay. It was littered from end to end with cheap novels. Chairs, tables, and even the floor, were piled up with these vulgarly-bound volumes. The vaporous March light filtering in through dingy muslin curtains threw a watery pallor upon these abortions of human mediocrity.

"You seem to be fond of reading," remarked Wolf to his host, as he sat down on the only chair that was not in use.

"Mostly stories," responded T. E. Valley, turning his head round with a whimsical grimace, as he fumbled at the lock of a small cupboard hanging against the wall. "Mostly stories," he repeated. Having cleared a chair and the fragment of a table, he sat down opposite his guest with a bottle of brandy between them and two glasses.

"*You*, are not unhappy, then," remarked Wolf, trying to overcome his discomfort. "Books and brandy... and a fire for chilly days.... You might be much worse off than you are, Vicar... much worse off."

T. E. Valley smiled wanly. "Much worse off," he repeated, refilling his glass. "But you know those stories are hardly literature, Solent — hardly theology, Solent. It *is* curious," he went on, meditatively, resting his chin upon his clenched hands and supporting his elbows on the table. “It *is* curious that with Urquhart and Jason Otter always working against me, and with most of the parish despising me, I am not more often in despair. Especially as I have so poor a conceit of myself. I know myself through and through, Solent; and I am the weakest, feeblest character alive! And yet, as you say, I really am not, *not at bottom, I mean*, an unhappy person. It is curious. I can’t understand it.”

He was silent for a space; while Wolf found himself giving way to a strange, almost sensual spasm of nervous sympathy. There was something about the man’s abject humility that excited him in a way he could not have explained.

“It doesn’t matter what T. E. Valley does,” he began again, his voice rising to a shrill squeal, like the voice of a prophet among mice. “It doesn’t matter whether I drink or whether I stay sober! The blessed Sacrament remains the same, whatever happens to T. E. Valley!”

Wolf looked at him and exulted in the man’s exultation. “He’s got hold of it,” he thought, “whatever he likes to call it. He’s got hold of it. This awful house might be a prison, an asylum, a slave-galley. The fellow’s a saint! He’s got hold of it!”

But it was his practical reason rather than his nervous sympathy that dictated his next words. “You don’t worry yourself about conduct, then, or about duty?”

The little man’s disordered El Greco eyes grew bright within their hollow sockets. “Not a bit!” he cried. “Not a bit!”

“And morality?” enquired Wolf.

There was a pause at this; and the light in those animated eyes went out suddenly, just as if Wolf had put an extinguisher over them.

“You mean the matter of unholy love,” murmured T. E. Valley.

“If you call it so,” said Wolf.

“That *is* another question,” the man admitted, and he gave vent to a sigh of infinite sadness. “Why it should be so, it’s hard to tell; but every kind of love, even the most insane and depraved — even incest, for instance — is connected with religion and touches religion. When I get drunk it’s a matter of chemistry. When I get angry it’s a matter of nerves. But when I love *in the wrong way* — —”

The priest of King’s Barton rose to his feet. With a shaky hand he deliberately poured back into the decanter his unfinished drink. Then, with awkward shuffling steps, steps that made Wolf aware for the first time that instead of boots he wore large, ragged, leather slippers, he came round the table to his guest’s side.

“I’m nothing,” he mumbled almost incoherently. “I’m nothing. But don’t you know,” he said, seizing Wolf’s hand in his dirty, feverish fingers, “don’t you know that love sinks down into the roots of the whole world? Don’t you know that there are... levels... in life... that... that... defy Nature?”

Wolf’s brain became suddenly clearer than it had been all day since he first got out of bed that morning. It seemed to him that between this confessed “morality” of Tilly-Valley and what he had already divined as the unconfessed “immorality” of Mr. Urquhart, there was a ghastly reciprocity. He suddenly felt a reaction in favour of the most simple earth-born heathenism. He deliberately finished his glass of brandy, and stood up.

“I don’t think any of us knows very much about love,” he mumbled. And then he went on rather lamely: “I think there are a great many different kinds of love, just as there are a great many different kinds of malice.” He stopped again, his mind struggling with the difficulty of expression. “I don’t think,” he blurted out, “that most of the kinds of love we run across sink down to the bottom of the universe!”

Having said this, he uttered a short, uncomfortable schoolboy-chuckle. “Well, well,” he added gently, “I’m not so certain about any of this as to be rude to anyone over it! Well, good-bye, Valley,” and he held out his hand. “By the by, my mother will expect a call from you soon. You *will* come, won’t you? Drop in at tea-time. I’m generally in then; only don’t let it be tomorrow, because we’re going to the Show. Shall we see you there?” And he shook the priest’s hand with affectionate cordiality, searching his mind with his eyes....

It was just lunch-time when he returned to Lenty Cottage. His mother had been weeding in the garden all the morning; and she brought into the small front-room, where they had their light meal, a breath of earth-mould that was very acceptable after his recent conversation.

“You look very well pleased with yourself, Wolf,” she said, as they sat down opposite each other. “What have you been doing to make you feel so complacent?”

“Acting as oil and wine, Mother,” he answered, “between the squire and the vicar.”

She threw back her head and laughed wickedly.

“You’re a nice one to settle quarrels! But I suppose you settled this one by shouting them both down, and that’s what’s given your dear face — as grandmamma used to say — that ‘beyond yourself’ look! There’s a letter for you under that book; but you shan’t have it till I’ve finished this good meal and drunk my coffee.”

Wolf looked at the book in question, which was a large edition of Young’s “Night Thoughts” bound like a school-prize.

“It’s a child’s hand,” said his mother, watching his face with gleaming brown eyes. “Is it from that little Smith girl, do you think? Or have those people you stayed with, those funny Otter people, got any children?”

Wolf shook his head. Could it be from Olwen Smith? It appeared unlikely; but the child did seem to have taken a fancy to him. It was possible. But then, in one of those sudden clairvoyances that emanate so strangely from unopened letters, he felt certain that it wasn't from a child at all. It was from Gerda!

"You're mad to read it, Wolf, I can see that. But I won't have my good lunch spoilt. I think it would be nice if we had our coffee at once, don't you? *Do* go and bring it in! It's on the kitchen-stove."

He obeyed with alacrity, as he always did in these caprices of his mother's, and they sipped their coffee in suspended excitement, their eyes shining across the table like the eyes of two animals.

"Oh, it'll be so amusing, going to the Horse Show," she cried. "I wonder how many of them I shall recognize? Albert used to be ever so embarrassed when I made a fuss over him in public. And I did, you know, I often did; just to show I didn't care a fig about Lorna's silliness!"

Obscurely irritated by the flippancy of this allusion to his father's misconduct, and definitely impatient at the enforced delay about the letter, Wolf suddenly burst out: "I've been to tea with Selena Gault, Mother. She wrote and invited me." He did not say that he had been the first to take the initiative in this affair. He felt it to be revenge enough without that. But Mrs. Solent was a match for him.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Wolf, that you went to cheer up that old monster. That *was* sweet of you! Think of it! My son sitting down to tea with all the Ramsgard old ladies! I'm sure she invited every one of the masters' wives and mothers to meet you. 'The son of my old friend, William Solent.' I can hear her say it! Well — do tell me, Wolf! For this is really getting interesting. What *did* you think of the great Gault? Of course, you know how it is with me. I never *can* endure deformity! I feel sorry and so forth;

but I just can't see it about. It was over the Gault that your father and I had our final quarrel. No, you *must* listen to me! He was as insensitive about things like that as in everything else. He had absolutely no fastidiousness. The Gault had never before met any man who could even look at her. I mean — you know! — look at her as men *do* look at us. And it just went to her poor, dear head. She fell madly in love — if you can call it love, in a monster like that — and the extraordinary thing about it was that it didn't horrify your father. I don't want to be catty; but really — you know! — with a deformity like that —— You'd have thought he'd have run to the end of the world. But not at all! What are you doing, Wolf? Take your hands from your head!"

But Wolf, with his long, bony middle fingers pressed against his ears, contented himself with making a shameless grimace at the woman who had given him birth.

Quick as lightning Mrs. Solent ran to the side-table, and snatching up the letter that was beneath the book, made as though she would throw it in the fire.

This manœuvre was entirely successful. Her son rushed upon her; and the half-playful, half-serious struggle that ensued between them ended in his wresting the letter out of her clenched fingers.

He then pushed her down by main force into an armchair and hurriedly handed her a cigarette and a lighted match.

"Now *please* be good, Mother darling!" he pleaded. "I'll tell you everything when I've read it."

He sat down in the opposite chair and tore open the letter. His mother puffed great rings of smoke into the air between them and surveyed him with glittering eyes — with eyes that had in their brown depths an almost maudlin passion of affection.

Miss Selena Gault was forgotten.

The letter was written in pencil and in a handwriting as straggling and unformed as that of a little girl of ten. “Olwen would have composed a much more grown-up production,” he thought, as he read the following words:

My dear Mr. Solent:

I am going out water-rat hunting with a basket for marigolds and to see if there are any moor-hens down there. I’m going to start directly after dinner with Lob and go down stream just like we did before. Miss Malakite wants us to have tea with her about five. So do come there if you can’t come to the Lunt.

This is from your little friend, Gerda.

“It *is* from a child,” he said as casually as he could, stepping up to his mother’s side and waving the letter in front of her. He felt a tremendous reluctance to let her read it; and yet, being the woman she was, he dared not put it straight into his pocket. Nothing of this was hidden from Mrs. Solent; but she had had her little victory in the matter of Miss Gault, and she was in a mood to be indulgent now.

“All right, Wolf, put it into your pocket. I don’t want to see it. I expect you’ll find much nicer barmaids in Blacksod than you ever did in Hammersmith. I won’t interfere with your light-o’-loves. I never *have*, have I?”

“No, you never have, Mother darling,” he responded, with a rush of affection born of immense relief. And slipping Gerda’s note into his coat-pocket, he leaned forward and took her handsome, ruddy face between the palms of his hands.

“But I’m off, now, my treasure; and don’t expect me back till late tonight!” He hesitated for a moment, and then added: “You’d better not stay awake; though I know you *will*; but I shall be coming home with the Otters, and I'll let myself in quietly."

He kissed her quickly and placed both his hands for a moment upon the rough mass of her grey hair. She smiled back at him gaily enough, but he wondered if that little sound he seemed conscious of in the cavity of her strong throat was an evidence of some other emotion. If it was, she swallowed it as completely and effectively as if it had been a little silver minnow swallowed by a watchful pike.

"I shall just go to bed, then, and read in bed," she cried jestingly, when he let her go. "I'm in the middle of a thrilling story about a young man who has every vice there is! I'm sure he's got *some* vices that even Selena Gault's never heard of. I'll go on with that; and if I want a little variety, I'll read the book Cousin Carfax gave me about Chinese Rugs; and if *that* doesn't satisfy me, I'll read Casanova's Memoirs. No, I won't! I'll read Canon Pusey's Sermons or something of that sort... something that just rambles on and isn't modern or clever! So run off, and don't worry about me. By the way, I had my first caller this morning, when you were over at the Manor."

"Who was that, Mother?" enquired Wolf, flicking his stick against his boot and thinking of the tombstone in Mr. Torp's yard.

"Mrs. Otter!" she cried gaily. "And I believe we'll get on splendidly. She told me how fond you and her son Jason were of each other."

"Jason?" muttered Wolf. "Well, take care of yourself, darling! Don't work too hard in the garden. Remember tomorrow!" And he opened the door hastily and let himself out. "Jason?" he muttered once more, as he strode down Lenty Lane.

His walk to Blacksod that early afternoon was one long orgy of amorous evocations. He skirted the town in such an absorbed trance that he found himself in the river-meadow before he realized that he’d left the streets behind. Nothing could have been more congruous with his mood that afternoon than this slow following of the waters of the Lunt! Past poplars and willows, past muddy ditches and wooden dams, past deserted cow-sheds and old decrepit barges half-drowned in water, past tall hedges of white-flowering blackthorn, past low thick hedges of scarcely budded hawthorn, past stupid large-bodied cattle with shiny red hides and enormous horns, past tender, melancholy cattle with liquid eyes and silky brown-and-white flanks, he made his way through those pleasant pastures.

So beautiful was the relaxed Spring atmosphere, that by degrees the excitement of his sensuality ebbed a little; and the magic of Nature became of equal importance with the thrill of amorous pursuit.

Though the sky was overcast, it was overcast with such a heavenly “congregation of vapours” that Wolf would not have had it otherwise. There were filmy clouds floating there that seemed to be drifting like the scattered feathers of enormous albatrosses in a pearl-white sea; and behind these feathery travellers was the milky ocean on which they floated. But even that was not all; for the very ocean seemed broken here and there into hollow spaces, ethereal gulfs in the fleecy whiteness; and through these gulfs was visible a pale yellowish mist, as if the universal air were reflecting millions of primrose-buds! Nor was even this vaporous luminosity the final revelation of those veiled heavens. Like the entrance to some great highway of the ether, whose air-spun pavement was not the colour of dust, but the colour of turquoise, there, at one single point above the horizon, the vast blue sky showed through. Transcending both the filmy whiteness and the vaporous yellowness, hovering there above the marshes of Sedgemoor, this celestial Toll-Pike of the Infinite seemed to Wolf, as he walked towards it, like some entrance into an unknown dimension, into which it was not impossible to pass! Though in reality it was the background of all the clouds that surrounded it, it seemed in some mysterious way nearer than they were. It seemed like a harbour into which the very waters of the Lunt might flow. That incredible patch of blue seemed something into which he could plunge his hands and draw them forth again, filled like overflowing cups with the very ichor of happiness. Ah! That was the word. It was *pure happiness*, that blue patch! It was the very thing he had tried so clumsily to explain to that poor Tilly-Valley, that both he and Mr. Urquhart so woefully lacked! And this was the thing, he thought, as he walked slowly on through the green, damp grass, after which his whole life was one obstinate quest. Ay! Where did it grow, this happiness? Where did it bubble up free and unspoiled? Not, at any rate, in such "love" — half sex, half reaction from sex — that these two disordered people were pursuing!

Not in asceticism, nor in vice! Where then? He began to stride forward with all his mind and all his soul fixed on that blue patch over Sedgemoor. Not in any human struggle of that kind! Rather in some large, free, unrestricted recognition of something actually in Nature, something that came and went, something that the mind could evoke, something that required nothing save earth and sky for its fulfilment!

Between himself and that blue patch there stretched now the great trunk of a bending willow, covered, as if by a liquid green mist, with its countless newly-budded twigs. The trunk seemed attracted down to the waters of the Lunt; and the waters of the Lunt seemed to rise a little, as they flowed on, in reciprocal attraction. And through the green buds of this bending trunk the patch of blue looked closer than ever. It was not any opening highway, not any ethereal road, as he had imagined at first. It was actually a pool of unfathomable blue water; a pool in space! As he looked at it now, those green willow-buds became living moss around its blue edge; and a great yellowish fragment of sky that leaned towards it became a tawny-skinned centaur, who, bending down his human head from his animal body, quenched his thirst in its purity. A yellow man-beast drinking draughts of blue water!

Wolf stopped dead-still and gazed at what he saw, as ever more nearly and more nearly what he saw became what he imagined. This was what he wanted! This was what he sought! The brown earth was that tawny-skinned centaur; and the reason why the world was all so green about him was because all living souls — the souls of grass-blades and tree-roots and river-reeds — shared, after their kind, in the drinking up of that blue immensity by the great mouth of clay!

He moved on now again and slowly passed the bent tree. His thoughts relaxed and grew limp after his moment of ecstasy; but such as they were, like languid-winged herons, they flapped heavily over the dykes and ditches of his life.

He felt obstinately glad that through all those detestable London years — the weight of which, like chains that are thrown away, he had never realized till they were over — he had just ploughed through his work at that college, his head bent, his shoulders hunched, his spirit concentrated, stoical, unyielding! What had it been in him that had kept him, for twelve heavy years, stubbornly at work on all that unbelievable drudgery? What had it been in him that had saved him from love-affairs, from marriage — that had made it horrible for him to satisfy his sexual instincts with casual light-o'-loves from tap-rooms and music-halls? What had it been? He looked at a great alder-root that curved snakelike over the brown mud beneath the bank; and in the tenacious flexibility of that smooth phallic serpent of vegetation he seemed to detect an image of his own secretive life, craftily forcing its way forward, through a thousand obstacles, towards the liberation which it craved.

And what was this liberation?

Happiness! But not *any* kind of happiness; not just the happiness of making love to Gerda Torp.

He looked closely at the manner in which the alder-root dipped so adroitly and yet so naturally into the river. Yes! It was a kind of ecstasy he aimed at; the kind that loses itself, that merges itself; the kind that demands nothing in return!

How could this ecstasy be called love? It was more than love. It was the coming to the surface of something unutterable.

And then, like an automatic wheel that revolved in his brain, a wheel from one of whose spokes hung a bodiless human head, his thoughts brought him back to that Living Despair on the Waterloo steps. And he recalled what Jason Otter had said about pity: how if you had pity and there was one miserable consciousness left in the universe, you had no right to be happy. Oh, that was a wicked thought! You had, on the contrary, a desperately punctilious reason to be happy.

That face upon the Waterloo steps *gave* you your happiness. It was the only gift it could give. Between your happiness and that face there was an umbilical cord. All suffering was a martyr’s suffering, all happiness was a martyr’s happiness, when once you got a glimpse of that cord! It was the existence in the world of those two gross vulgar parodies of life, *ennui* and *pleasure*, that confused the issues, that blighted the distinctions.

For about half a mile he walked steadily forward, letting the violence of this last thought be smoothed away by the feel of the damp soil under his feet, and the cool touch, imperceptible in detail, through his leather boots —

of all the anonymous weeds and grasses that were beginning to feel the release of Spring.

Ah, there they were!

He came upon them quite suddenly, as he clambered over a wooden paling between the end of a thickset hedge and the river-bank, the wooden boards of which, worm-eaten and grey with lichen, jutted out over the water.

They were seated side by side on a fallen elm-tree, arranging the contents of a great wicker-basket that lay on the ground between them.

“Hullo!” cried Lob, jumping to his feet.

Wolf took the boy in his arms and began a sort of genial horse-play with him, tumbling him over in the grass and holding him down by force as he kicked and struggled. But Lob soon wearied of this, and, lying quietly under the man’s hands, turned his mud-flicked, grass-stained face towards his sister.

“You see I be right, Sis! So hand over thik ninepence. He *be* come, same as I said ‘a would. So hand over what I’ve won!”

Wolf became aware that a fit of sudden shyness had fallen upon both himself and Gerda. He continued to kneel above the prostrate Lob, pinioning the child’s arms and putting off the moment when he must rise and face her. Gerda, too, seemed to prolong with unnecessary punctiliousness her fumbling with the ragged recesses of her faded little purse, as she emptied pennies and bits of silver into her lap.

“Ninepence! It was ninepence!” the boy kept shouting, as he sought in vain to lift up his eager grass-stained face high enough to see what the girl was doing: “It was sixpence if he went to Malakite’s! It was ninepence if he came here!”

Wolf, bending over his prisoner, found himself watching the progress of a minute ladybird who with infinite precaution was climbing the bent stalk of a small grass-blade close to the boy's head. But he was so conscious of Gerda's presence that a slow, sweet, shivering sensation ran through his nerves, as if in the midst of a great heat his body had been plunged into the cool air of a cavern.

"There, Lob!" said Gerda suddenly, holding out sixpence and three pennies.

Wolf let the child go and stood up.

Their eyes met through the boy's violent scramble and snatching clutch. They met through his cry of "Finding's keepings, losing's seekings! Bet me enough to make a shilling! I be a prime grand better, *I* be!"

And, as their eyes met, the shyness that they had felt before changed into a thrilling solemnity. For one quick moment they held each other's gaze; and it was as if they had been overtaken simultaneously by an awe-struck recognition of some great unknown Immortal, who had suddenly appeared between them, with a hand upon each.

Then the girl turned to her brother.

"I bet you, Lob," she said, "you won't find a blackbird's nest round here with eggs in it!"

"How much?" the boy responded, standing in front of her with his hands behind his head, in the pose of a young, indolent conqueror.

"How much! — how much!" mocked Wolf, with heavy humour, seating himself on the tree-trunk by Gerda's side. "What a young miser we are!" As he took his place by her side, the floating barge upon which it seemed to him they were embarked rocked with a motion that gave him a sense of sweet dizziness.

Lob looked at his sister gravely, weighing the matter in his mind.

"You won't hunt rats with *him* when I'm not there?" he bargained.

She shook her head.

" 'Tis early for them nesties; but I do know for three o'n already; up along Babylon Hill. They be all hipsy-hor hedges, looks-like, in *this* here field; and blackbirds be fonder o' holly-trees and bramble-bushes. But they bain't so sly, the bloody old yellow-beaks, as them thrushes be. I think I'll do it, Sis."

"I think I may take her bond," muttered Wolf under his breath.

"I haven't heard one of them since we came," said Gerda cunningly. "They like the hills better than down here on the flat. I wouldn't have betted so much if I wasn't sure I'd win."

"*I* ain't betted nothink," said Lob quickly, "so you can't win anyways. It's either us both loses, or it's me what wins."

Gerda nodded assent to this unchivalrous issue.

"Well, I may as well have a look round," decided the boy; "only mind — no tricks! If you rat-hunt with *him* when I ain't there, 'twill be threepence whatsoever."

She indicated assent to this also.

Lob began to swagger slowly away.

"I knows why you wants me to shog off," he called back; and he added an outrageous expression in shrewd Dorset dialect which had the effect of bringing an angry flush to Gerda's cheeks.

"Be off, you rogue," cried Wolf, "or you'll get more than you've bargained for!"

But there came flying through the air, from the child's impudent hand, a well-aimed puffball, which burst as it touched Gerda's knee, covering her dress with a thin, powdery brown dust.

Neither she nor Wolf moved a muscle in response to this attack; and Lobbie wandered slowly off till he was lost to sight. Then the girl got up and began shaking her skirt. The cream-coloured cloak hung loose and open, and Wolf saw that she was dressed in an old, tight-fitting, olive-green frock.

When she had finished brushing the puffball-powder from her clothes, she took off her hat and laid it carefully, absent-mindedly, upon the tree-trunk by his side.

He instantaneously threw his arms round her and held her lightly against him, while in the silence between them he felt his heart beating like an invisible underground water-pump.

But she unloosed his hands with deft, cool fingers. “Not now,” she said. “Let’s talk now.”

In some mysterious way he was grateful to her for this. The last thing he wanted was to spoil the strange, lovely solemnity that had fallen upon them like the falling of slow, thin, noiseless rain.

He rose and took her hand, and they began moving away from the log.

“Wait! I’ll leave a signal for that little rascal,” he said, putting his stick and his cloth-cap by the side of the cream-coloured hat. But he did not give up her hand; and together they walked carelessly and aimlessly across that wide field, taking a course at right angles to the course taken by her brother. Wolf had hitherto, in his attitude to the girls he had approached, been dominated by an impersonal lust; but what he now felt stealing over him like a sweet, insidious essence, was the actual, inmost identity of this young human animal. And the strange thing was that this conscious presence, this deep-breathing Gerda, moving silently beside him under her cloak, under her olive-green frock, under everything she wore, was not just a girl, not just a white, flexible body, with lovely breasts, slender hips, and a gallant swinging stride, but a living conscious soul, different in its entire being from his own identity.

What he felt at that moment was that, hovering in some way around this tangible form, was another form, impalpable and delicate, thrilling him with a kind of mystical awe. It changed everything around him, this new mysterious being at his side, whose physical loveliness was only its outward sheath! It added something to every tiniest detail of that enchanted walk which they took together now over one green field after another. The little earth-thrown mole-hills were different. The reddish leaves of the newly-sprung sorrel were different. The droppings of the cattle, the clumps of dark-green meadow-rushes, all were different! And something in the cold, low-hung clouds themselves seemed to conspire, like a great stretched-out grey wing, to separate Gerda and himself from the peering intrusion of the outer world.

And if the greyness above and the greenness beneath enhanced his consciousness of the virginal beauty of the girl, her own nature at that hour seemed to gather into itself all that most resembled it in that Spring twilight.

Gate after gate leading from one darkening field into another they opened and passed through, walking unconsciously westward, towards the vast yellowish bank of clouds that had swallowed up that sky-road into space. It was so far only the beginning of twilight, but the undried rains that hung still in motionless water-drops upon millions of grass-blades seemed to welcome the coming on of night — seemed to render the whole surface of the earth less opaque.

Over this cold surface they moved hand in hand, between the unfallen mist of rain in the sky and the diffused mist of rain in the grass, until the man began to feel that they two were left alone alive, of all the people of the earth — that they two, careless of past and future, protected from the very ghosts of the dead by these tutelary vapours, were moving forward, themselves like ghosts, to some vague imponderable sanctuary where none could disturb or trouble them!

They had advanced for more than a mile in this enchanted mood, and were leaning against a wooden gate which they had just shut behind them, when Wolf pointed to an open shed, about a stone's throw away, the floor of which he could make out, from where they stood, to be strewn with a carpet of yellow bracken.

"Shall we try *that* as a shelter?" he asked. The words were simple enough. But Gerda detected in them the old, equivocal challenge of the male pursuer; and as he pulled at her wrist, trying to lead her towards the shed, she stiffened her body, snatched her hand away, and drew back against the protective bars of the gate. Very quickly then, so as to smooth away any hurt to his pride, she began to speak; and since silence rather than words had hitherto been the link between them, the mere utterance of any speech from her at all was a shock strong enough to quell his impetuousness.

"Did you like me directly you saw me, that day in our house?"

He looked at her attentively, as, with her fair head bare and her arms spread out along the top bar of the gate, she asked this naïve question.

It suddenly came over him that she had not really the remotest conception as to how rare her beauty was. She regarded herself, of course, as a "pretty" girl, but she had no notion that she moved through Blacksod like one of those women of antiquity about whose loveliness the noblest legends of the world were made! A certain vein of predatory roguery in him led him to play up to this simplicity.

"I liked you best when you were whistling to me," he said. But in his senses he thought: "I should be a madman not to snatch at her!" And in his soul he thought: “I shall marry her. As sure as tomorrow follows today, I shall marry her!”

“I liked *you* best when you were hunting for me at Poll’s Camp,” said Gerda. “But I can’t understand — —”

“What can’t you understand, Gerda?”

“I can’t understand why I don’t want you to touch me just now. But oh! if you only knew what things they say in the town about girls and men!”

She looked him straight in the face with an ambiguous tilt of her soft, rounded chin. Something had come between them — something that troubled him seriously, though not with the sense of any unscalable barrier.

“What things do they say in the town?” he asked.

At this she clapped her hands to her cheeks, and a look of troubled bewilderment crossed her fixed gaze.

He began to wonder if the girl, for all her coquetries, was not abnormally innocent. Perhaps the extreme lewdness of lads like Bob Weevil had, in some of those furtive conclaves between young people that are always so complete a mystery to older persons, given her some kind of startled shock.

Slowly her hands fell to her sides, and the troubled look faded; but she still faced him with a faint, tremulous frown, while the delicate curves about her eyes took on that expression of monumental beseeching, such as one sees sometimes in antique marbles.

His craving to take her in his arms was checked by a wave of overpowering tenderness.

As she stood there, with her back to the gate, her personality struck home to him with such a sharp, sudden pang of reality, that it made certain tiny little blossoms of the blackthorn-hedge become strangely important, as if they had been an apparition of wonderful white swans.

"Well, never mind what they say in the town! You and I are by ourselves now. It's only you and I that count today. And I won't tease you, Gerda, you darling — no, not with one least thing you don't like!"

He was silent, and they remained motionless, staring at each other like two stone pillars bearing the solemn weight of the unknown future. Then he possessed himself of one of her hands, and it was a new shock to him to feel how ice-cold her fingers had grown.

"Don't act as if we're strangers, Gerda!" he pleaded. "I do understand you — much more than you think I do. And I'll take care of you for ever! It isn't as if time mattered one bit. I feel as if I'd known you all my life. I feel as if everything here" — and he glanced round at those strangely important white blossoms— "were an old story already. It's funny, Gerda, isn't it, how natural and yet how weird it is, that we should have met at all? Only a week ago I was in London, with no remotest idea that you were in the world — or this gate, or this blackthorn-hedge, or that shed over there!"

Her cold fingers did respond a little to his pressure now, and her eyes fell and searched the ground at her feet. Without a sigh, without a breath, she pondered, floating upon some inner sea of feeling, of which no one, not even herself, would ever know the depths.

"You *are* glad we've met, Gerda, dear?" he asked.

She raised her eyes. They had the tension of a sudden, difficult resolution in them.

"Do men ever leave girls alone after they've married them?"

The words were so unexpected that he could only press her cold fingers and glance away from those troubled eyes. What his own gaze encountered was a single tarnished celandine, whose bent stalk lay almost flat on a wisp of rain-sodden grass.

"When we're married," he responded gravely, after a pause, during which he felt as if with his own hands he were launching a rigged ship into a misty sea, "I'll leave you alone just as much as you want!"

"A girl I know said once that my whistling was only whistling for a lover. *You* don't think that, do you?"

"Good God! I should think not! Your whistling's a wonderful thing. It's your genius. It's your way of expressing what we all want to express."

"What do we all want to express?"

He chuckled right out at this, and, forgetting all vows and pledges, flung his arms round her shoulders and hugged her tightly to his heart. "Oh, Gerda, Gerda!" he cried breathlessly, as he let her go, "you'll be soon making me so damnably fond of you, that I'll be completely at your mercy!"

"But what do we all want to express?" she repeated.

He felt such a rush of happiness at the change in her voice that he could only answer at random.

"God! my dear, *I* don't know! Recognition, I suppose. No! not exactly that! Gratitude, perhaps. But that's not quite it. You've asked a hard question, sweetheart, and I'm damned if I can give you the answer." He drew her towards him as he spoke, and this time she seemed to yield herself as she had never done before. But the warmth of her body, as he pressed it to him, dissolved his tender consideration so quickly that once more she drew back.

Hurriedly anxious to rush in between her thoughts and herself, he began saying the first thing that came into his head.

"I think what we all want to express is... something... addressed... to... to the gods... some kind of... acknowledgement — —"

He stopped abruptly; for she had once more fixed upon him that wild, bewildered look.

“You’re not angry with me, Gerda, darling?” he blurted out.

She did not take any notice of these words of his, but the look he dreaded began to fade away under the genuine concern of his tone.

She now pulled her cream-coloured cloak tightly across her olive-green frock; and instead of relinquishing the garment when she’d done this, she kept her arms crossed against her breast, holding the gathered folds of the woollen stuff. Then her lips moved, and, looking away from him, sideways, over the wide field, she said very quietly:

“If you feel it’s no good, and you couldn’t think of marrying a girl like me, you’d better let me go home now.”

He never forgot the solemn fatality she put into those words; and he answered in the only way he could. He took her head gently between his hands and kissed her upon the forehead. This action, in its grave tenderness and its freedom from any fever of the blood, did seem to reassure her.

But the attraction of her sweetness soon excited his senses again and he began caressing her in spite of himself. She did not resist him any more; but the reaction from the former tenseness of her nerves broke down her self-control, and he soon became aware of the salt taste of tears upon his lips. She did not cry aloud. She cried silently; but the sobs that shook her showed, in the very power they had over her, the richness and vitality of her youthful blood.

The fact that he had launched his boat and hoisted his sail — the fact that he had already resolved to marry her, come what might — was something that in itself dispelled his scruples.

“It’s cold here,” he murmured, when at last she had lifted up her tear-stained face and they had exchanged some long kisses; “it’s cold here, Gerda, darling. Lets just *see* what that shed over there's like! We needn't stay a minute there if it's not a nice sort of place."

A species of deep, lethargic numbness to everything except the immediate suggestions of his voice and touch seemed to have taken possession of her.

His arm round her, her cream-coloured cloak hanging loose, her cheeks pale, she let herself be led across the intervening tract of grass to the open door of the little shed.

Before they reached it, however, she turned her face round and glanced shyly at him. "You know I'm quite stupid and ignorant," she said. "I know nothing about anything."

Wolf did not pause to enquire whether this hurried confession referred to what might be named "the ritual of love" or just simply to her lack of book-learning. His senses were by this time in such a whirl of excitement that the girl's clear-toned voice sounded like the vague humming of a sea-shell in his ears.

"Gerda?" he murmured huskily, with a faint, a very faint interrogation in his tone.

Emotions, feelings, desires, some exalted, some brutal, whirled up from the bottom of his nature, like stormdriven eels roused and stirred from the ooze of a muddy river!

Together they stood at the entrance to that little shed and surveyed the interior in a silence that was like the hovering of some great falcon of fate, suspended between past and future. The place was an empty cow-barn, its roof thatched with river-reeds and its floor thickly strewn with a clean, dry bed of last Autumn's yellow bracken.

The queer thing was that as he drew her across that threshold his conscious soul seemed to slip out of his body and to watch them both from the high upper air as if it were itself that falcon of fate. But when, with their feet upon that bracken-floor, they faced each other, there suddenly floated into Wolf's mind, like the fluttering of a whirling leaf upon disturbed water, an old Dorset ditty that he had read somewhere, with a refrain about Shaftesbury-town.

"I know nothing about anything," repeated the girl in a low voice; but as he held her tightly against his beating heart, it was not her words but the words of that old song which hummed through his brain.

There'll be yellow bracken beneath your head;
There'll be yellow bracken about your feet.
For the lass Long Thomas lays in's bed
Will have no blanket, will have no sheet.

My mother has sheets of linen white,
My father has blankets of purple dye.
But to my true-love have I come tonight
And in yellow bracken I'll surely lie:

In the yellow bracken he laid her down,
While the wind blew shrill and the river ran;
And never again she saw Shaftesbury-town,
Whom Long Thomas had taken for his leman!

The smell of the bracken rose up from that bed and took the words of this old song and turned them into the wild beating of the very pulse of love.

To the end of his days he associated that moment with these dried-up aromatic leaves and with that remembered rhyme. The sweetness of his paramour, her courage, her confiding trust, her "fatal passivity," were blended with the fragrance of those withered ferns and with that old ballad.

Meanwhile the chilly March airs floated in and out of the bare shed where they were lying; and the shades of twilight grew deeper and deeper. Those twilight shades, as they settled down about their heads, became like veritable sentinels of love — wraith-like, reverential, patient. They seemed to be holding back the day, so that it should not peer into their faces. They seemed to be holding back the darkness, so that it should not separate them, the one from the other!

And as they lay — happy and oblivious at last — just as if they were really lying on the deck of some full-sailed ship which a great dark-green wave was uplifting, Wolf found himself unaccountably recalling certain casual little things that he had seen that day — seen without knowing that he had seen them! He recalled the underside of the bark of a torn-off willow-branch that he had caught sight of in his walk by the Lunt. He recalled the peculiar whitish-yellowness hidden in the curves of an opening fern-frond which he had passed somewhere on the road from King's Barton. He recalled the sturdy beauty, full of a rich, harsh, acrid power, of a single chestnut-bud, which he had unconsciously noted in the outskirts of Blacksod. He recalled certain tiny snail-shells clinging to the stalk of some new-grown dock-leaf whose appearance had struck his mind somewhere in those meadows....

When, after the slow ebbing of what really was a very brief passage of time, but what seemed to Wolf something more than time and different from time, they stood together again outside the hut, there came over him a vague feeling, as if he had actually invaded and possessed something of the virginal aloofness of the now darkened fields.

With his hand over Gerda's shoulder he drank up a great mystery from those cool, wide spaces. His fingers clutched the soft collar of the girl's cloak. He was conscious of her breathing — so steady, so gently, and yet so *living* — like the breath of a warm, soft animal in the velvet darkness. He was conscious of her personality as something quivering and quick, and yet as something solitary, unapproachable.

Suddenly she broke the silence.

“Do you want me to whistle for you?” she asked, in a low, docile voice.

The words reached his ears from an enormous distance. They came travelling to him over rivers, over mountains, over forests; and as they took shape in his consciousness, something quite different from what he had felt for her swelled up in his throat. He took her head between his hands and kissed her as he had never in his life kissed any woman.

“Lob will hear it,” he said with a rough, happy laugh. “But let him hear it! What does it matter now?”

But she moved a few paces away and he watched her whitish shadowily-blurred face as if it had been the face of an immortal.

And he knew, without *seeing* that it was so, that her expression as she whistled was like the expression of a child asleep, or of a child happily, peacefully dead.

And, though it was into the night that she now poured those liquid notes, the tone of their drawn-out music was a tone full of the peculiar feeling of one hour alone of all the hours of night and day. It was the tone of the hour just before dawn, the tone of that life which is not sound, but only withheld breath, the breath of cold buds not yet green, of earth-bound bulbs not yet loosed from their sheaths, the tone of the flight of swallows across chilly seas as yet far off from the warm pebbled beaches towards which they are steering their way.

Gerda’s whistling died away now into a silence that seemed to come surging back with a palpable increase of visible darkness in its train.

But the girl remained standing just where she was, quite motionless, about ten paces away from him.

He also remained motionless, where he was, without sign or word.

And just as two straight poplar-trees that in some continuous storm had been bent down so that their branches have mingled, when the storm is over rise up erect and are once more completely separate and completely themselves, so this man and this girl, whose relation to each other could never be quite the same again, remained distinct, removed, aloof, each standing like a silent bivouac-watcher, guarding the smouldering camp-fire of their own hidden thoughts.

Thus, and not otherwise, had stood, in the green dews of some umbrageous Thessalian valley at the very dawn of time, Orion and Merope, joined and yet so mysteriously divided by this sweet fatality! So in the same green dews had stood Deucalion and Pyrrha, while the earth waited for its new offspring. They also, those primeval lovers, had pondered thus, content and happy, bewildered and sad, while over their heads the darkness descended upon Mount Pelion, or the white moonlight flooded with silver the precipices of Ossa!

As he thought of these things, he made up his mind that he would refrain from any sentimental attempt to bridge the impassable gulf between what Gerda was feeling then and what he was feeling.... No casual words of easy tenderness should spoil the classical simplicity of their rare encounter! For classical it had been, in its arbitrariness, in its abruptness, in its heroic defiance of so many obstacles; as he had always prayed that any great love-affair of his might be.

Their words to each other, when at length they did break the spell and wander back hand in hand to where they had separated from Lob, were simple and natural — reduced, in fact, to the plain level of prosaic, practical anxieties.

"It's the devil!" grumbled Wolf; "but there it is, sweetheart, and we've got to face it. It's not only *my* mother, but *your* mother we shall have to deal with. I know only too well that I've never been to Oxford. I know I have no 'honourable' in front of my name and I know that what Mr. Urquhart gives me will be barely enough for three people to live upon. There it is, my sweet, and we've got to face it."

"I don't think your mother will want to live with us," said the girl quietly.

Wolf winced at this. Somehow or other he had grown so used to thinking of his mother and himself as one person, that it gave him a very queer feeling — as if Gerda had inserted a tiny needle of ice into his heart — to think of the two of them under separate roofs.

A moment later, however, and the feeling passed, crushed under the logic of his reason. It was, of course, inevitable — so he said to himself — that Gerda, young girl though she was, should want a hearth of her own.

"No," he answered, emphatically enough. "We must live by ourselves."

"Father won't give us anything," said Gerda.

"That's all right," he chuckled, laughing surlily but not maliciously. "I've no desire to be supported out of tomb-making! No, no, sweetheart; what we've got to find is some tiny shanty of our own, almost as small as our cow-shed, where neither your mother nor my mother can interfere with us."

"Do you think Mrs. Solent will be *very* angry?" she enquired.

This time her words produced a more serious shock. He felt as if one of his arms or legs had been amputated and was stuck up as a ninepin for Gerda to throw things at, not knowing what she did.

"I'll deal with her, anyway," he replied.

“We’ll have to have our banns read out in church,” said Gerda.

“We shall!” he conceded, bringing out the syllables like pistol-shots; “but all that part of it will be awful.”

Gerda snatched her fingers from him and clapped her hands together. “Don’t let’s be married!” she cried gaily. “It’ll be far more fun not to be; and if I have a child it’ll be a bastard, like the kings in history!”

But Wolf had already formed a very definite image in his mind of the enchanted hovel where he would live with this unparalleled being, free from all care.

“We can’t manage it without being married, Gerda; and as for bastards — —”

“Hush!” she cried. “We’re talking nonsense. Gipoo Cooper told me I should never have a child.”

Wolf was silenced by this; and then, after a pause, “I don’t believe Urquhart would make any fuss,” he said meditatively. “It wouldn’t interfere with my work.”

“What you don’t realize,” she protested in a low voice, “is how completely different my family is from yours. Why, Father never says a word like he’d been educated or been to School.”

But Wolf refused to let this pass.

“Perhaps *you* don’t realize, Missy,” he flung out, in a clear, emphatic voice, “that my father died in Ramsgard Workhouse!”

Her commentary upon this information was to snatch his hand and raise it to her lips.

“Tisn’t where a gentleman dies,” she responded, “that makes the difference. ’Tis where he’s born.”

“Oh, damn all this!” he cried abruptly. “I don’t care if your father talks his head off with Dorset talk; and all Blacksod knows that my father threw himself to the dogs. I’m going to live for the rest of my life in Dorsetshire, and I’m going to live alone with my sweet Gerda!”

He hugged her to his heart as he spoke.

“I’m very thankful that you like my whistling,” she said, rather breathlessly, when he let her go. “I don’t know what I should have done if you hadn’t.”

“Like it!” he cried. “Oh, Gerda, my Gerda, I can’t tell you what it’s like. I’ve never heard anything to touch it and never shall; and that’s the long and short of it!”

Thus discoursing, the lovers arrived at the prostrate elm-trunk where they had left their belongings. It looked so familiar and yet so different now, as they stumbled upon it in the darkness, that Wolf received the kind of shock that people get when, after some world-changing adventure, they encounter the reproachful sameness of some well-known aspect of hearth and home. And there was Lob! The boy was crouched in a posture like that of a reproachful goblin. He was engaged in cutting with his pocket-knife — in spite of the darkness — deep, jagged incisions in the handle of Wolf’s stick! Much time was to pass before those unevennesses in the handle of that oak cudgel ceased to compel its owner to recall with bitter-sweet vividness the events of that incredible March Wednesday!

“I know’d you’d go rat-hunting,” was his sulky greeting. Evidently to Lob’s mind no other occupation than this could account for their protracted absence from his side. “I know’d you’d do it. Girls is never to be trusted, girls isn’t. ’Tis in their constitution to betray.”

“Good Lord, Lob!” cried Wolf. “Where did you get that sentence? Have you been composing that speech ever since we left?”

“Look here, Sis,” declared the boy, standing in front of her with the air of a robber-chief. “You’ve got to fork out! You’ve got to give threepence to I, or never no more will I take your word!"

But the girl's tone was now the self-composed, elder sister's tone.

"I hope you only took one egg, Lob; like I always tell you to."

"I won," he repeated obstinately. "I won; so you pays."

"Show me the egg," said Gerda. "Where is it? I hope it *wasn't* the only one. Have you blown it without making that silly big hole you always make? Show it to me, Lob!"

"I can't show it to 'ee, for I ain't got it," grumbled the boy. "I got a nest, all right; and I got a egg all right. There were four on 'em — all wonderful specks — in thik nest; and I minded what you always says to I, and I only took one."

"Where is it, then? Show it to us, Lob!"

Lob moved nearer to Wolf. "You won't let she cheat I of thik threepence," he pleaded querulously.

"Where is that egg, Lob?" repeated the young girl. "He's up to something; you mark my words!" she added.

"They girls be never to be trusted, be they?" grumbled the boy, sidling up still closer to Wolf.

"You know perfectly well you can always trust me, Lob!" protested Gerda indignantly. "It's you who we can't trust now; isn't it, Mr. Solent?"

The man looked from one to the other. It amused him to listen to such contending voices from these two blurred spots of whiteness in the dark; while he himself, full of an unutterably sweet indolence, acted as their languid umpire. He was delighted, too, as well as amazed, by the intense gravity with which Gerda took this trifling disagreement. How quaint girls were! If he had caught Lob stealing his very watch in the darkness and transferring it to his own pocket, he felt, just then, that he would hardly have noticed the incident!

“Haven’t I won over she, Mr. Solent?” whined the child. “I found thik nestie fields and fields away from where us be now. ‘Twere in monstrous girt hedge, thik nestie, and I scratched myself cruel getting my hand in.”

“Why haven’t you got the egg, then?” insisted the girl, in a hard, accusing voice.

“ ’Cos I broke the bloody thing!” wailed the boy desperately. “I were crossing one of they darned fields and I treadit in a girt rabbit-gin and came near to breaking me neck, let alone thik bloody egg.”

“Lob, I’m right-down ashamed of you!” cried Gerda, in a voice quivering with moral indignation.

“What be up to now, then?” responded the boy. “What be all this hullabaloo about, when a person tells straight out what a person gone and done? If it be so turble hard to ‘ee to lose threepence, why did ‘ee go rat-hunting with *him* here and leave anyone all lonesome-like? For all *you* care, a chap might have been tossed, this here dark night, by some o’ they girt bullicks!”

His voice grew plaintive; but Gerda was unmoved.

“You never found any nest at all, Lob, and you know you didn’t.”

Lobbie’s voice sounded now as if he very soon might burst into tears.

“I shan’t have no shilling! I shan’t have no shilling without I gets the threepence you betted wi’ I!”

Wolf began fumbling in his pocket; but the girl stopped him with a quick movement.

“Lob,” she said sternly, “you’ve never lied to me before, in all the rat-hunts, and nuttings, and blackberryings, and mushroomings we’ve ever had together. What’s come over you, Lob? Oh, I *am* ashamed of you! ’Tisn’t as if I were Mother or Dad. ’Tisn’t as if we hadn’t always done everything together. You’re not nice company, any more, Lob, for people to go about with! I shall always have to say to anyone in the future, 'Take care, now, you can never depend upon what Lob Torp says!' "

Wolf, seating himself in the darkness upon the fallen tree-trunk, listened in amazement to this dialogue. The moods of women, except for those of his mother, were a phenomenon the ebbings and flowings of which had hardly presented themselves to his deeper consciousness. He obtained now, in listening to Gerda's righteous anger, an inkling of the supernatural power which these beings have of bringing to bear upon the male conscience exactly that one accusation, of all others, which will pierce it to its heart's core!

He had no conception of how Gerda had found out that the boy was lying, and he felt at that moment a faint and perhaps scandalous wave of sympathy pass through him for Lobbie Torp.

Lob himself felt this at once with a child's clairvoyance.

"She's cross about the threepence," he whispered, leaning against the man's knee, "but you'll pay it, won't you, Mr. Solent?"

Wolf had grown weary by this time of the whole discussion. He took advantage of the darkness to transfer from his own pocket to that of this fellow wrong-doer at least twice as much as he was demanding.

"Come on," he said, when the clandestine transaction was accomplished, "let's get back to the Blacksod road before we're completely benighted!"

He rose and moved on between them, Lob in penitent and rather shamefaced silence carrying the great wicker-basket, at the bottom of which reposed a few fading marigolds and some handfuls of watercress.

The excitement of climbing over the railings at the very edge of the river-bank, and the pride she took in being able to show her power of guiding her lover through the darkened fields, quickly restored Gerda's good-humour.

“We’ll drop Lob at the beginning of Chequers Street,” Wolf said, when they at last felt the hard road from Nevilton to Blacksod under their feet. “Do you think,” he went on, “that Miss Malakite will expect us still, so long after tea-time?”

“I was going to stay to supper with her,” said Gerda; “so I don’t think it’ll matter. She’ll give us tea, though, late as we are! She won’t have noticed the time at all, very likely. She never does, when her father’s away and she’s reading.”

With the sister and brother leaning against him naturally and familiarly, each on one of his arms, Wolf with his oak-stick held firmly in the hand adjoining the now somewhat dragging and tired bird’s-nester, strode along towards the lights of the town, in a deep, diffused warmth of unalloyed happiness. The days of his life seemed to stretch out before him in a lovely Spring-scented perspective.

The few misgivings that remained to him about his marriage fell away in that hedge-scented darkness — a darkness that seemed to separate the earth from the sky with the formless presence of some tremendous but friendly deity, under whose protection he bore those two along. And as he felt Gerda press his arm softly and lightly against her young body, the sensation came over him that he had only to walk on and on... on and on... just like this... in order to bring that secret “mythology” of his into relation with the whole world.

“Whom Long Thomas has taken for his leman,” he repeated in his heart; and it seemed to him as if the lights of the town, which now began to welcome them, were the lights of a certain imaginary city which from his early childhood had appeared and disappeared on the margin of his mind. It was wont to appear in strange places, this city of his fancy... at the bottom of teacups... or the window-panes of privies... in the soapy water of baths...

in the dirty marks on wall-papers... in the bleak coals of dead Summer-grates... between the rusty railings of deserted burying-grounds... above the miserable patterns of faded carpets... among the nameless litter of pavement-gutters.... But whenever he had seen it, it was always associated with the first lighting up of lamps, and with the existence, but not necessarily the presence, of someone... some girl... some boy... some unknown... whose place in his life would resemble that first lighting of lamps... that sense of arriving out of the cold darkness of empty fields and lost ways into the rich, warm, glowing security of that mysterious town....

“Whom Long Thomas has taken for his leman,” he repeated once more. And he thought to himself, “It’s all in that word... in that word; and in coming along a dark road to where lamps are lit!”

THE THREE PEEWITS

THEY GOT RID of Lobbie at the corner of Chequers Street, and moved on, side by side, past the lighted shop-windows. It was a further revelation to him of the ways of girls, to notice that Gerda repeatedly stopped him, with a childish clutch at his coat-sleeve, before some trifle in those lighted windows that attracted her attention. Her eyes were dreamy with a soft languorous happiness; while her little cries of pleasure at what she saw made ripples in the surface of her mental trance like the rising of a darting shoal of minnows to the top of deep water.

As for his own mood, the lights of the town, its traffic and its crowds, threw him upon a rich, dark, incredible intimacy with her, whose sweetness reduced everything to a vague reassuring stage-play. Everything became a play whose living puppets seemed so touchingly lovable that he could have wept to behold them, and to know that she was beholding them with him!

When they reached the door of the Malakite book-shop, however, he became conscious of so deep an unwillingness to face the look of Christie's steady brown eyes that he impetuously begged off.

"I can't do it tonight," he said; "so don't 'ee press me, my precious!"

Their farewell was grave and tender; but he left her without looking back.

It was then that hunger came upon him; and making his way to the Three Peewits, he ordered a substantial supper, beneath the not altogether sympathetic gaze of Queen Victoria.

He remained for nearly two hours lingering over this meal, while at the back of his mind the ditty about Shaftesbury-town and Yellow Bracken mingled with the fragrance of the old hostelry's old wine. When at last he rose from the table, it occurred to him that Darnley Otter had mentioned on the previous day that both the brothers might be here this night. Led by a mysterious desire, just then — not quite understood by himself — for masculine society, he entered the little inner parlour of the Three Peewits. Here he found himself in a thick cloud of tobacco-smoke and a still thicker murmur of men's voices. The change from his erotic musings into so social and crude an atmosphere was more bewildering to his mind than he had expected. He gazed round him, befogged and blinking.

But Darnley Otter rose at once to greet him, leading him to an aperture in the wall, where drinks were served. Standing there by Darnley's side, he made polite, hurried bows to the different members of the company, as his friend mentioned their names, and while his glass was filled and refilled with brandy, he found his eyes turning inevitably to the place where Jason sat — sat as if he had been doing nothing else since he came into that room but wait for Wolf's arrival. The man was watching him intently now, and without a trace of that whimsical humour with which he had departed from him to walk round the edge of Lenty Pond.

Wolf began at once summoning up from the recesses of his own nature all the psychic power he could bring to bear, to cope with this new situation. As he chatted at that little counter with Darnley, in the midst of a rambling, incoherent flow of talk from all parts of the room, he deliberately drank glass after glass of brandy, amused at the nervousness with which Darnley observed this proceeding, and growing more and more determined to fathom the mystery of that self-lacerated being on the other side of the room.

It seemed to him now that Jason's head, as he saw it across that smoke-filled space, resembled that of some lost spirit in Dante's Inferno, swirling up out of the pit and crying, “Help! Help! Help!” It was curious to himself how ready he felt just then to respond to that cry. “I must have drunk up this new strength from possessing Gerda,” he thought to himself.

Darnley’s trim beard continued to wag with gentlemanly urbanity, as he laughed and jested with various people in different parts of the room, but Wolf could see that he was growing more and more nervous about his brother. Nor was this nervousness without justification. Jason had turned his face to his neighbour, who was a grim farmer from Nevilton, and was uttering words that evidently seemed to startle the man, if not to shock him; for his face grew grimmer than ever, and he kept shifting his chair a little further away.

Things were at this pass when the door opened with a violent swing, and there came in together Mr. Torp, Mr. T. E. Valley, and a tall handsome browbeating individual, who was presently introduced to Wolf as Mr. Manley of Willum’s Mill.

The vicar of King’s Barton seemed to have been drinking already; for he staggered straight up to the counter, pulling the plump stone-cutter unceremoniously after him by the lapel of his coat. The heavy-jowled Mr. Manley moved across the room and seated himself by the side of the farmer from Nevilton, whom he addressed loudly and familiarly as Josh Beard. Wolf noticed that Mr. Beard, in a very sour and malicious manner, began at once repeating to this newcomer whatever it had been that Jason Otter had just said to him; while Mr. Manley of Willum’s Mill proceeded with equal promptness to cast looks of jocose and jeering brutality at the unfortunate poet.

“My friend Mr. Torp was in the bar-room; so I brought him in,” said T. E. Valley, shaking hands with Wolf as if he had not seen him for years.

“ ’Tis no impertinence, I hope, for I to come in,” said the stone-cutter, humbly; and it struck Wolf’s mind as a kind of mad dream — not a nightmare, but just one of those dreams where men and houses and animals and trees are all involved and interchanged — that this grotesque figure of a man should be the father of Gerda!

“Mr. Torp and I are old friends,” said Wolf, with cordial emphasis, “and I can’t tell you how glad I am to see you again, Vicar! Will you let me order you something? The brandy here seems to me uncommonly good.”

In answer to Wolf’s appeal, the barmaid, whose personality, as she appeared and disappeared at that square orifice, grew more and more dreamlike, brought three large glasses of the drink he demanded, two of which he promptly handed to Valley and Torp, while the third he appropriated for himself.

“ ’Tis wondrous,” remarked Mr. Torp, receiving his glass with unsteady hand; “ ’tis wondrous for a man what works with chisel and hammer all day, to sit and see what folks be like who never do a stroke. I bain’t one o’ they myself who do blame the gentry. What I do say be this, and I don’t care who hears it. I do say that a man be a man while he lives; and a gent be a gent while he lives. Durn me if that ain’t the truth.”

“But when we’re dead, Mr. Torp,” called out the voice of Jason from the further end of the room, “what are we when we’re dead?”

“Evenin’, Mr. Otter, evenin’ to ‘ee, Sir! Dead, say ‘ee? I be the man to answer that conundrum. Us be as our tombstones be! Them as has ‘Torp’ writ on ‘um in clean, good marble, be with the Lord. They others be with wold Horny.”

Several mellow guffaws greeted this speech, for Gerda’s parent was evidently a privileged jester among them; but to the dismay of his brother, who was now talking in a quiet whisper to Wolf, the hollow voice of Jason floated once more across the room.

“Ask that drunk priest over there why he took young Redfern from a good job and turned him into a pious zany.”

There was a vibration in his tone that at once quieted the general clatter of tongues, and everyone looked at Mr. Valley.

“I don’t... quite... understand your... question... Mr. Otter,” stammered the little man.

The bull-like voice of Mr. Manley of Willum’s Mill broke in then.

“His reverence may be hard of hearing. Shall *I* do the asking of him?” And the great bully-boy hesitated not to roar out in thundering tones: “Mister Otter here be asking of ‘ee, and this whole company be waiting to know from ‘ee, what god-darned trick you played on young Redfern afore he died.”

“I must beg you, Mr. Manley,” said Darnley Otter, whose face, as Wolf watched it, had become stiff as a mask, “I must beg you not to make a scene tonight.”

“I am still quite... quite... at a loss... a loss to understand,” began the agitated clergyman, moving forward a step or two towards his aggressor.

But Mr. Torp interrupted him. “Ask thee bloody questions of thee wone bloody millpond and don’t lift up thee’s roaring voice among thee’s betters!”

There was a considerable hum of applause among the company at this; for Mr. Manley of Willum’s Mill was universally disliked.

But the farmer took no heed of this manifestation of public opinion.

“Do ‘ee hear what Jack Torp be saying?” he jeered, stretching out his long legs and emptying his glass of gin-and-bitters. “He’s sick as Satan wi’ I; and I’ll tell ‘ee the cause for’t.”

There was a general stir in the room and a craning forward of necks. The seasoned cronies of the Three Peewits had long ago discovered that the most delectable of all social delights was a quarrel that just stopped short of physical violence.

"The cause for't be," went on the master of Willum's Mill, "that I ordered me mother's grave proper-like from Weymouth, 'stead of ferretting round his dog-gone yard, where there bain't naught but litter and rubbish and paupers' monuments."

Having thrown out this challenge, the farmer drew in his legs, placed his great hands upon his knees, and leaned forward. There was a dead silence in that ale-embrowned atmosphere, as if the "private bar" itself, the very walls of which must have been yellow with old leisurely disputes, were aware of something exceptional in that spurt of human venom.

Mr. Torp gave a quick sideways glance to see how the "gentry" were behaving. But Wolf was discreetly occupied in ordering more drinks — he had already had to tell the barmaid to "put down" what he ordered, for his pockets were empty — and Darnley was merely pulling at his beard and keeping his eye on the Vicar.

"Thee's mother's stone!" snorted the monument-maker, with resonant contempt. " 'Twere ready and beauteous, gents all, 'twere ready and beauteous, thik stone! All what passed down street did stop for to see 'un, and did say to theyselves, 'Thik fine stone be too good for a farmer's old woman! Thik fine stone be a titled lady's stone!' "

The farmer's gin-dazed wits could only reply to this by a repeated, " 'Twere a pauper's throw-away; 'twere a workhouse six-foot and nothing!"

Mr. Torp's voice rose higher still. "This Manley here were afeared to leave his mother in ground for a day without a stone on her. He were afeared the poor woman would come out on's grave to tell tales on him, the old goat-sucker! So while thik fine stone were lying in yard getting weathered-like, as is good for they foreign marbles, this girt vool of a nag's head what must 'a do but drive hay-wagon to Chesil, and bring whoam a silly block o' Portland, same as they fish-folk do cover their bones wi', what have never seed a bit o' marble!"

Under the impact of this eloquent indictment, which excited immense hilarity throughout all the company, Mr. Manley rose unsteadily to his feet and moved towards his enemy. But Mr. Torp, ensconced between Darnley Otter and T. E. Valley, awaited his approach unmoved.

To the surprise of all, the big bully skirted this little group, and, joining Wolf at the liquor-stained counter, bellowed harmlessly for more gin.

It was at this point in the proceedings that more serious trouble began; for Jason Otter, pointing with a shaky forefinger at the Reverend Valley, screamed out in a paroxysm of fury:

"It's you who talk about me to Urquhart and Monk.... I've found it out now.... It's you who do it!"

The Peewit cronies must have felt that this unexpected clash between two of their "gentry" rose from more subtle depths than those to which they were accustomed; for they were stricken into a silence, at this juncture, which was by no means a comfortable one.

"Mr. Otter here," broke in the owner of Willum's Mill, "Mr. Otter here have been telling pretty little tales of the high doings what go on up at King's Barton. Mr. Otter says Squire Urquhart have sold his soul to that black son-of-a-gun who works in's garden, and that 'tis bookseller Malakite here in Blacksod whose books do larn 'em their deviltries!"

"I think... there... is... some great... mistake... in your... in your mind, Mr. Manley."

The words were uttered by T. E. Valley in such shaky tones that Wolf was relieved when he saw Darnley take the parson reassuringly by the arm.

"Mistake?" roared the farmer. "I bain't one for to say what I ain't got chapter nor text for saying! My friend, Josh Beard here, of Nevilton, County of Somerset, be as good a breeder of short-horns as any in Darset; and 'a do say 'a have heerd such things tonight such as no man's lips should utter; and heerd them, too, from one as we all do know." And he turned round and leered at Jason Otter with the leer of a tipsy hangman.

"Hold thee's tongue in thee's bullick's-head!" cried the indignant monument-maker. "A gent's a gent, I tell 'ee; and when a quiet gent, like what's with us tonight, be moderate wambly in's head, owing to liquor, 'tisn't for a girt bull-frog like thee to lift up voice."

"Bull-frog be — —" grumbled the big farmer, hiding his inability to contend in repartee with Mr. Torp under an increased grossness of speech. "What do a son-of-a-bitch like thee know of the ways of the gentry?"

"Malakite?" muttered the breeder of short-horns. "Bain't Malakite the old beggar what got into trouble with the police some ten years since?"

"So 'twere," agreed the grateful tenant of Willum's Mill, "so 'twere, brother Beard. 'A did, as thee dost say, get into the devil's own trouble. 'Twere along of his gals; so some folks said. 'A was one of they hoary wold sinners what Bible do tell of."

" 'Twere even so, neighbour; 'twere even so," echoed Mr. Beard. "And I *have* heerd that old Bert Smith up at Ramsgard could tell a fine story about thik little job."

Wolf's mind was too flustered with brandy just then to receive more than a vague shock of confused ambiguity from this startling hint; but the next remark of the man from Nevilton cleared his brains with the violence of a bucket of ice-cold water.

"Bert Smith may sell his grand school-hats all he will; but they do tell out our way — though I know nought of that, seeing I were living at Stamford Orcus in them days — that thik same poor wisp o' bedstraw dursn't call his own gal by his own name, whether 'a be in shop or in church."

"That's God's own truth you've a-heerd, Josh Beard," echoed the triumphant Mr. Manley. " 'Tisn't safe for that poor man to call his own daughter daughter, in the light o' what folks, as knows, do report. If I didn't respect any *real* gentleman" — and to Wolf's consternation the gin-bemused stare of the farmer was turned upon himself— "and if I weren't churchwarden and hadn't voted Conservative for nigh thirty years, I would show this here stone-chipper the kind of gallimaufry these educated gents will cook for theyselves, afore they're done!"

Wolf's wits, moving now, in spite of the fumes of smoke and alcohol, with restored clarity, achieved a momentous orientation of many obscure matters. He recalled certain complicated hints and hesitations of Selena Gault. He recalled the reckless and embittered gaiety of his mother. With a shaky hand he finished his last glass and laid it down on the counter. Then he looked across the room at the two farmers.

"I don't know whose feelings you are so careful of, Mr. Manley," he said. "But since I happen to be myself one of these unfortunate 'educated' people, and since Mr. Solent, my father, came to grief in this neighbourhood, I should be very glad indeed to hear anything else you may be anxious to tell us."

His voice, heard now by the whole company for the first time, had a disquieting tone; and everyone was silent. But Jason Otter rose to his feet, and, in the midst of that silence and under the startled attention of all eyes in the room, walked with short quick steps across the floor till he came close up to Farmer Manley, who was leaning his back against the little counter and who had his hands in his pockets; and there he stopped, facing him. No one but Wolf could see the expression on his countenance; and there were all kinds of different versions afterwards as to what actually happened. But what Wolf himself knew was that the excited man was no longer under the restraint of his natural timidity.

His own intelligence was so clairvoyantly aroused at that moment, that he could recall later every flicker of the conflicting impulses that shot through him. The one that dominated the rest was a categorical certainty that some immediate drastic action was necessary. What he did was to take Jason by the shoulders and fling him backwards into an old beer-stained chair that stood unoccupied against the neighbouring wall. In the violence of this action an earthenware jug of water — and Wolf had time to notice the mellow varnish of its surface — fell with a crash upon the floor. There was a hush now throughout the room, and most of the company leaned excitedly forward. Jason himself, huddled limply in a great wooden chair, turned his devastated white face and lamentable eyes full upon his aggressor.

“I... I... I didn’t mean...” he gasped.

“It’s all right, Solent,” whispered Darnley, accepting a chair by Jason’s side, which its owner willingly vacated. “You couldn’t have done anything else.”

“I don’t know about that, Otter,” Wolf whispered back. “I expect we’re all a little fuddled. Sit down, won’t you, and when he’s rested we’ll clear out, eh? I’ve had enough of this.”

All the patrons of the private bar were gathered now in little groups about the room; and before long, with sly inquisitive glances and many secretive nudges and nods, the bulk of the company drifted out, leaving the room nearly empty.

"I can't... understand.... I didn't see.... Was he going to *bite* you?"

The words were from T. E. Valley; and Wolf was so astonished at the expression he used, that he answered with a good deal of irritation:

"Do *you* bite people, Mr. Valley?"

The priest's feelings were evidently outraged by this. "What do you mean?" he protested querulously.

"I mean," began Wolf. "Oh, I don't know! But to a stranger down here there does seem a good deal that's funny about you all! You must forgive me, Mr. Valley; but, on my soul, you brought it on yourself. *Bite?* It's rather an odd idea, isn't it? You did say *bite*, didn't you?"

They were interrupted by Mr. Manley of Willum's Mill, who, with Mr. Joshua Beard in tow, was steering for the door.

"Did you hurt the gentleman, Sir?" said Mr. Manley to Wolf, in the grave, cautious voice of a drunkard anxious to prove his sobriety.

"You drove the gentleman into fold, seems so!" echoed Mr. Beard.

In thus approaching Wolf it was inevitable that the two worthies should jostle the portly frame of Mr. Torp, who, leaning against the back of a chair, with an empty pewter beer-mug trailing by its handle from one of his plump fingers, had fallen into an interlude of peaceful coma.

"Who the bloody hell be 'ee barging into?" murmured Mr. Torp, aroused thus suddenly to normal consciousness.

"Paupers' moniments!" jeered the farmer. "Nought but paupers' moniments in's yard; and 'a can still talk grand and mighty!"

The stone-cutter struggled to gather his wandering wits together. In his confusion the only friendly shape he could visualize was the form of Mr. Valley, and he promptly made all the use he could of that.

"The Reverend here," he said, "can bear witness to I, in the face of all thee's bloody millponds and hay-wagons. The Reverend here do know what they words, 'Torp, Moniment-Maker, Blacksod,' do signify. The Reverend here did see, for his own self, thik girt stone what I did put up over first young man." He now removed his bewildered little pig's-eyes from Mr. Valley and fixed them upon Wolf. "And here be second young man who can bear witness to I; and, darn it, thee'd best do as I do say, Mr. Redfern Number Two, for thee's been clipping and cuddling our Gerda, 'sknow, and I be only to tell Missus on 'ee, and fat be in fire."

Had not the whole scene become to him by this time incredibly phantasmal, such an unexpected introduction of Gerda's name, on this night of all nights, might have struck a villainous blow at his life-illusion. As it was, however, he could only wonder at the perspicacity of drunken fathers, and pull himself together for an adequate retort.

"My name is Solent, my good sir, as you ought to know," he said. And then he turned to the two farmers, who were nudging each other and leering at him like a couple of schoolboy bullies. "Mr. Torp and I are the best of friends," he remarked sternly.

"Friend of Torp," chuckled Mr. Manley.

"Torp's friend," echoed Mr. Beard.

"Thee'd best keep thee's daughter in house, Jack!" continued Mr. Manley. "Lest t'other one rumple her, same as first one did," concluded Mr. Beard.

Wolf, beyond his conscious intention, clenched the fingers of his right hand savagely; but his wits were clear now, and he mastered the impulse. "Whatever happens, I mustn't make an ass of myself tonight," he thought.

"You'd better go out into the air, gentlemen," he said quietly, "and cool your heads, or you'll get into trouble. Come, Mr. Torp. You and I must have a last glass together; and you, too, Vicar." And he led them away towards the little counter.

The farmers moved slowly toward the door.

"Redfern Number Two, 'a called un," Wolf heard Mr. Beard saying. "Now what be the meaning o' *that*, me boy?" He couldn't hear the big farmer's answer; but whatever it was, it ended in a sort of bawdy rhyme, of which all he could catch was the chanted refrain, "Jimmie Redfern, *he* were there!" And with that the door swung behind them.

He had just time to obtain three more drinks from the barmaid before she pulled down the little wooden slide and indicated in no equivocal manner that eleven o'clock had struck.

Simultaneously with this a serving-boy entered and began to turn down the lights. "We ought to be starting for home," said Darnley Otter, from where he sat by his brother, whose great melancholy eyes were fixed upon vacancy. "And it's none too soon, either!"

"I'll be getting home-along me own self, now this here lad be meddling with they lights;" remarked Mr. Torp, emptying his glass. "Good-night to 'ee all," he added, taking down his coat and hat from a peg; "and if I've exceeded in speech to any gent here" — and he glanced anxiously at Wolf and Mr. Valley— "it be contrary to me nature and contrary to me profession."

"I... suppose... you won't mind..." murmured the voice of T. E. Valley, who had remained at the counter, sipping the drink, to which Wolf had treated him, as if it were the first he had tasted that night, "if I come with you? I don't want to get on anybody's nerves" — and he looked at Jason Otter, who without being asleep seemed to have drifted off into another world— "but I don't like that walk alone at night."

“Of course you must come with us, Valley,” said Darnley. “Though what you can find so frightening in that quiet lane I can’t imagine.” Saying this he pulled his brother up upon his feet and helped him into his overcoat.

Half-an-hour later they were all four making their way past the last houses of Blacksod. Darnley and Jason were walking in front; Wolf and T. E. Valley about six paces to the rear. They were all silent, as if the contrast between the noisy scene they had just left and the hushed quietness of the way were a rebuke to their souls.

In one of the smaller houses, where for some reason neither curtain nor blind had been drawn, Wolf could see two candles burning on a small table at which someone was still reading.

He touched Mr. Valley’s arm, and both the men stood for a time looking at that unconscious reader. It was an elderly woman who read there by those two candles, her chin propped upon one arm and the other arm lying extended across the table. The woman’s face had nothing remarkable about it. The book she read was obviously, from its shape and appearance, a cheap story; but as Wolf stared in upon her, sitting there in that commonplace room at midnight, an indescribable sense of the drama of human life passed through him. For leagues and leagues in every direction the great pastoral fields lay quiet in their muffled dew-drenched aloofness. But there, by those two pointed flames, one isolated consciousness kept up the old familiar interest, in love, in birth, in death, all the turbulent chances of mortal events. That simple, pallid, spectacled head became for him at that moment a little island of warm human awareness in the midst of the vast non-human night.

He thought to himself how, in some future time, when these formidable scientific inventions would have changed the face of the earth, some wayward philosopher like himself would still perhaps watch through a window a human head *reading by candlelight*, and find such a sight touching beyond words. Mentally he resolved once more, while to Mr. Valley's surprise he still lingered, staring in at that candle-lit window, that while he lived he would never allow the beauty of things of this sort to be overpowered for him by anything that science could do.

He submitted at last to his companion's uneasiness and walked on. But in his heart he thought: "That old woman in there might be reading a story about my own life! She might be reading about Shaftesbury-town and yellow bracken and Gerda's whistling! She might be reading about Christie and the Malakite book-shop. She might be reading about Mattie — —" His thoughts veered suddenly. "Mattie? Mattie Smith?" And a wavering suspicion that had been gathering weight for some while in his mind suddenly took to itself an irrefutable shape. "Lorna and my father.... The little girl said we were alike.... That's what it is!"

He did not formulate the word "sister" in any portion of his consciousness where ideas express themselves in words, but across some shadowy mental landscape within him floated and drifted that heavy-faced girl with a new and richly-charged identity! All the vague fragments of association that had gathered here and there in his life around the word "sister," hastened now to attach themselves to the personality of Mattie Smith and to give it their peculiar glamour.

"How unreal my life seems to be growing," he thought. "London seemed fantastic to me when I lived there, like a tissue of filmy threads; but... good Lord!... compared with this! — It would be curious if that old woman reading that book were really reading my history and has now perhaps come to my death. Well, as long as old women like that read books by candlelight there'll be *some* romance left!"

His mind withdrew into itself with a jerk at this point, trying to push away a certain image of things that rose discomfortably upon him — the image of a countryside covered from sea to sea by illuminated stations for airships, overspread from sea to sea by thousands of humming aeroplanes!

What would ever become of Tilly-Valley's religion in *that* world, with head-lights flashing along cemented highways, and all existence dominated by electricity. What would become of old women reading by candlelight? What would become of his own life-illusion, his secret "mythology," in such a world?

Stubbornly he pushed this vision away. "I'll live in my own world to the end," he said to himself. "Nothing shall make me yield."

And while a gasping susurration at his side indicated that he was, in his excitement, walking too fast for Mr. Valley, he discovered that that grey feather of Christie's which served her as a marker in the "Urn Burial" had risen up again in his mind.

And as he walked along, adapting his steps to his companion's shambling progress, he indulged in the fancy that his soul was like a vast cloudy serpent of writhing vapour that had the power of over-reaching every kind of human invention. "All inventions," he thought, "come from man's brains. And man's soul can escape from them and even while using them treat them with contempt — treat them *as if they were not*! It can slip through them like a snake, float over them like a mist, burrow under them like a mole!"

He swung his stick excitedly in the darkness, while he gave his arm to Mr. Valley to help him along. He felt as though he were entering upon some desperate, invisible struggle to safeguard everything that was sacred to him against modern inventions. "It's queer," he thought to himself, "what the sight of that grey feather in the book, and that old woman with the candle, have done to my mind. I've made love to the limit; I've brawled in a tavern to the limit; and here I am, with a tipsy priest on my arm, thinking of nothing but defending I don’t know what against motor-cars and aeroplanes!”

He continued vaguely to puzzle himself, as they lurched forward in the darkness, as to what it was in his nature that made his seduction of Gerda, his encounter with Jason, his discovery of Mattie, thus fall away from his consciousness in comparison with that feather and that candle; and he came finally to the conclusion, before they reached King’s Barton, that there must be something queer and inhuman in him. “But there it is,” he finally concluded. “If I’m like that... I *am* like that! We must see what comes of it!”

THE HORSE-FAIR

THE FIRST PERSON of their acquaintance they encountered, when Wolf and Mrs. Solent mingled with the lively crowd that filled Ramsgard's famous Castle Field that afternoon, was none other than Mr. Albert Smith. Wolf was amazed at the cordiality of his mother's greeting; and so quite evidently was the worthy hatter himself.

Mrs. Solent was fashionably dressed; but what struck her son more than her clothes at that moment was the incredible power of her haughty profile, as she flung out her light badinage, like so many shining javelins, at the nervous tradesman.

The thought rushed across his brain, as he watched her: "She's never had her chance in life! She was made for large transactions and stirring events!" Letting his gaze wander over the groups about them, Wolf caught sight of Mr. Urquhart's figure in the distance; and he decided that, since sooner or later he would have to greet the man, the best thing he could do was to get it over as soon as possible, so as to be prepared to face his Blacksod friends free of responsibility.

Leaving his companions to themselves, therefore, with a nod at his mother, he plunged into the heart of that motley scene. The day obviously was the culmination of the Wessex Fair. The large expanse of meadow-land lying between the castle-ruins and the railway was encircled by booths, stalls, roundabouts, fortune-tellers' tents, toy circuses — all the entertainments, in fact, which the annual horde of migratory peddlers of amusement offered, according to age-old tradition, to their rustic clients.

But the centre portion of this spacious fair-ground was carefully roped off; and it was here that the riding and driving competitions took place that gave so special an interest to this particular afternoon.

One segment of this roped-off circle had been converted into a sort of privileged paddock, corresponding to a race-course grand-stand, where the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, whose carriages were drawn up under the railway bank, could watch the proceedings in undisturbed security.

The opportunity Wolf had seized of approaching Mr. Urquhart was given him by the fact that the Squire of King's Barton was standing alone, close to the rope, at some little distance from the privileged spot where most of his compeers were gathered.

He was watching with absorbed interest a stately parade of prize-stallions, who, adorned with ribbons and other marks of distinction, ambled ponderously by, one after another, as if they were parading in some gigantic super-equine festival that ought to have had super-human spectators! The creatures looked so powerful and so contemptuous beside the stablemen who led them, that Wolf, as he approached this procession, saw for a moment the whole human race in an inferior and ignominious light — saw them as some breed of diabolically clever monkeys, who, by a debased trick of cunning, had been able to reduce to servitude, though not to servility, animals far nobler and more godlike than themselves.

"It makes you feel like a Yahoo, Sir," said Wolf, as he shook hands with Mr. Urquhart. "I mean it makes *me* feel like a Yahoo. Good Lord! Look at that beast! Don't you get the sensation that those hooves are really making the earth tremble?"

But Mr. Urquhart, though he had grasped his secretary's hand warmly and had seemed pleased to see him, took no more notice of this remark than if it had been some negligible banality uttered by a complete stranger. Wolf, standing by his side, said no more till the procession had passed. His attention began to wander from the great stallions to a mental consideration that made him straighten his own shoulders.

He had suddenly become aware of the felicitous appropriateness of Mr. Urquhart's clothes; and although his own overcoat was a good one and his cloth-hat new, he felt somehow badly dressed in the man's company, a feeling that caused him considerable annoyance.

"Damn this accursed snobbishness!" he said to himself, as he contemplated the vast grey flanks of the winner of the third prize. "Why can't I detach myself absolutely from these things and see them as a visitor from Saturn or Uranus would see them?"

Mr. Urquhart turned to him when the last stallion had passed by. "Do 'ee know who my man brought with him over here?" he said, smiling.

Wolf could only lift his thick eyebrows interrogatively. He continued to feel uncomfortable under his employer's quizzical gaze. "He looks me up and down," he thought to himself, "as if I were a horse that had disappointed him by not winning even a third prize."

"You mean Monk?" he said. "I can't guess whom he brought with him. I thought he was driving *you*."

"He put her on the box by his side," went on the squire. "It was that old servant of our good Otters. I was compelled to look at the flowers in her bonnet and the tassels on her cape all the way here."

"You don't mean Dimity Stone?" murmured Wolf; and he contemplated in a rapid inward vision that sly, misogynistic eye fixed sardonically on the old woman's wizened back, and the chivalrous grand air with which the coachman must have conversed with her, as he held the reins.

"I couldn't let her walk," went on the squire. "And the Otters had left her behind. I suppose they hadn't room. They came in a wretched conveyance. I suppose they got it from the hotel.” He swung about and surveyed the crowd with indulgent arrogance. “I can just see the good Darnley from here,” he said. “There! — can’t you? I wonder where that terrible person who’s always drunk has hidden himself! I saw *him*, too, a moment ago. And, by gad, there’s Tilly-Valley! Let’s go and stir him up. He won’t expect me to speak to him. You watch his face, my boy, when I nudge his elbow. Eh? What? Come on.” And greatly to Wolf’s annoyance he found himself compelled to support his limping employer on his arm, while the two of them pushed their way towards the clergyman.

“Tally ho! Run to earth!” was the squire’s greeting, as, with Wolf at his elbow, he came up unobserved to where the little priest was standing. “Afternoon, Valley! Should have thought this sort of thing wasn’t in your line; eh? what? Too many horsey rascals about? Too many rowdy young men, eh?”

If Wolf was astonished at Mr. Urquhart’s familiar tone, he was still more astonished at the expression on the face of the nervous clergyman.

Stammeringly Mr. Valley found his tongue.

“Fine horses... more of them than usual... did you see that grey one?... the Otters are here... they drove over... I walked... so did others... many others... it would be nice if there were seats here... don’t you think so?... seats?”

Wolf could hardly bear to listen to these broken utterances of the poor Vicar. There was something about his pinched face, his shapeless nose, his thin neck, his frightened eyes, that produced a profoundly pitiful feeling. This sensation was accentuated by the way a certain vein in the man’s throat stood out. Not only did it stand out, it pulsed and vibrated. All the panic that Mr. Urquhart’s presence provoked seemed concentrated in that pulsing vein.

“Seats, did you say?” chuckled the squire. “*You* don’t need a seat at your age.” And leaning heavily on his companion’s arm, he tapped the priest with the end of his stick with an air of playful familiarity.

It came over Wolf then, with a rush of sheer rage, that he must get his employer away from this man at all costs. Never had he liked Mr. Urquhart less. There was something in his wrinkled white face, at that moment, which suggested an out-rush of incredible evil — of evil emerging, like some abominable vapour, from a level of consciousness not often revealed.

Wolf was tolerant enough of the various forms of normal and abnormal sensuality; but what at that instant he got a glimpse of, beneath this man’s gentlemanly mask, was something different from viciousness. It was as if some abysmal ooze from the slime of *that which underlies all evil* had been projected to the surface.

“Come along, Sir. We must get back to the rope,” Wolf found himself saying in a stern, dry voice. “They’re starting the driving-match and I can’t let you miss *that*!”

Mr. Urquhart’s hilarity seemed to sink fathom-deep at the sound of his secretary’s voice. He permitted himself to be pulled away. But Wolf noticed a perceptible increase in his lameness as he drew him along; and glancing sideways at his face, he was startled by the look of almost imbecile vacuity that had replaced what had been there before.

The crowd had thickened perceptibly now; and Wolf realized that he was seeing the most characteristic gathering for that portion of the countryside that he was ever likely to see. Here were smart, self-satisfied young tradesmen from Ramsgard with their wives and their girls. Here were weather-stained carters from Blackmore; cider-makers and cattle-dealers from Sedgemoor; stalwart melancholy-looking shepherds from the high Quantocks; a sprinkling of well-to-do farmers from the far-off valley of the

Frome; sly, whimsical dairymen from the rich pastures of the Stour; and, moving among them all, slow-voiced and slow-footed, but with an infinite zest for enjoyment, the local rustic labourers that tilled the heavy fields watered by the Lunt.

The two men pushed their way back to the taut vibrating rope, beyond which the driving-contest was now proceeding; and as they rested there, Wolf's mind felt liberated from all its agitations, and he drank in the scene before him with unruffled delight. The peculiar smells that came to his nostrils — leather, and straw, and horse-dung, and tobacco-smoke, and cider-sour human breath, and paint, and tar, and half-devoured apples — were all caught up and overpowered by one grand dominant odour, the unique smell of the trodden grass of a fair-field. Let the sun shine as it would from the cold blue heaven! Let the chariots of white clouds race as they pleased under that airy tent! It was from the solid ground under human feet, under equine hooves, that this Dorsetshire world gave forth its autochthonous essence, its bitter-sweet, rank, harsh, terrestrial sweat, comforting beyond conscious knowledge to the heart of man and beast.

Nothing could have been more symbolic of the inmost nature of that countryside than the humorous gravity with which these lean yeomen and plump farmers drove their brightly painted gigs and high dog-carts round that hoof-trodden paddock! The obvious reciprocity between the men who drove and the animals driven, the magnetic currents of sympathy between the persons looking on and the persons showing off, the way the whole scene was characterized by something casual, non-official, nonchalant — all this produced an effect that only England, and perhaps only that portion of England, could have brought into being. Behind Wolf and his companion surged a pushing, jostling, heterogeneous crowd, giving vent to a low, monotonous murmur; and behind them again could be heard the raucous cries and clangings and whistlings from the noisy whirligigs.

Wolf could make out, here and there among the people round him, the well-known straw-hats — manufactured by Mr. Albert Smith — of the boys of Ramsgard School. “They must be having a ‘half’ today,” he thought; and his mind ran upon the various queer, unathletic, unpopular boys among the rest, who must be feeling, just then, so indescribably thankful for this blessed interlude in their hateful life! The thought of the unknown, undiscovered bullies that probably existed in Ramsgard School at that very moment made him feel sick at the pit of his stomach. “I put my curse on them,” he thought. “If I have a vestige of occult power I put my curse upon them!”

A short, stocky man, with powerful wrists, driving a lively but not particularly handsome horse, passed them at that moment inside the paddock. Wolf was wondering why the voices round him were discreetly lowered as this person trolled by, when he noted that the man exchanged a familiar nod with Mr. Urquhart.

“Not a bad turnout for a Lovelace,” muttered this latter, when the equipage had passed; “but they never can quite do it!”

Once again Wolf felt a prick of shame at the curious interest which this occurrence excited in him. What was Lord Lovelace to him? He glanced furtively at the squire of King’s Barton. The man’s baggy eye-wrinkles had, just then, a look that was almost saurian. From one corner of his twitching mouth a trickle of saliva descended, towards which a small fly persistently darted....

Wolf turned away his eyes. The magic of the scene had completely vanished. The smell of the trodden earth was stale in his nostrils. A loathing of the whole spectacle of life took possession of him. And under his breath he repealed that strange classical lament, a tag in his memory from his school-days, a mere catchword now; but it gave him a certain relief to pronounce the queer-sounding syllables.

“Ailinon! Ailinon!” he muttered to himself, as he leaned his stomach against that vibrant rope. “Ailinon! Ailinon!” And the very utterance of this tragic cry from the old Greek dramas soothed his mind as if it had been a talisman. But the disgust he felt at the pressure of things at that moment extended itself to this whole fair-ground, extended itself even to the prospect of seeing Gerda again. “How can I face her in the midst of all this?” he thought; and he recalled the outline of his mother’s profile, so contemptuously lifted towards Albert Smith. “What will she think of the Torp family?” he said to himself, in miserable discomfort.

Struggling against this wretched mood, he straightened his back and clutched the rope with both his hands. Savagely he tried to summon up out of the depths of his spirit some current of defiant magnetism. But the presence of Mr. Urquhart, taciturn and pensive though the squire had become, seemed to cut off all help from these furtive resources.

So he sought to steady himself by pure reason.

“After all,” he argued, “those gulfs of watery blue up there are such an unthinkable background to all this, that they... that they... a trickle of saliva more or less... a woman’s profile more or less...” And then, as he watched those painted gigs come swinging once more round the enclosure, and heard the exclamations of malicious delight, as a chestnut-coloured mare showed a vicious tendency to back her driver against the rope, a sense of terrified loneliness came upon him. What could Gerda, or his mother, or anyone else — man or woman — really feel toward him so that this loneliness should be eased? Emptiness leered at him, emptiness yawned at him, out of that watery blue; and what pointed spikes of misunderstanding he had to throw himself upon before this bustling day was over!

He ran his fingers along the swaying rope, sticky from the innumerable human hands that had clutched it. His mind seemed to hover above the form of Gerda and above the form of his mother, as if it had been a floating mist gathered about two sundered headlands. That familiar grey head, with those mocking brown eyes, and this other, this new strange head, with its sea-grey gaze and its wild, pursed-up, whistling mouth — what would happen when he brought them together?

It would mean he would have to leave his mother. That's what it would mean. Where was Gerda now, in this confused medley? She must be somewhere about; and perhaps Christie, too!

"You won't care if I go off to look for my mother, Sir?" he found himself saying. And the words quite startled him, as if he had spoken in his sleep; for he had made up his mind that he would never speak of his private affairs to this egoistic gentleman.

"Eh? What's that? Tired of the old man, ha? Want to gad after the petticoats? Well! Take me to the enclosure, out of this crowd, and I'll let you go. I suppose it's hopeless to find Monk in this hurly? He was to have come back for me. But Lord! he's got his own little affairs, as well as another. There! That's better. You needn't go at a snail's pace for me. There! That's all right. I'll find Lovelace in the enclosure, I daresay. He'll wait to see the cart-horses."

Wolf steered the squire as well as he could through the jostling mob of people, and left him at the entrance to the privileged circle.

"You and I know more about some of these good folks than they know themselves," remarked Mr. Urquhart, grimly. "Our History'll make 'em sit up a bit; eh? what? Well, off with 'ee, me boy; and if you want to find your mother, I'd look for her in the refreshment-tent, if I were you. Never know'd but one woman who could see a horse-show out to the end — and she was a tart of Lord Tintinhull's. 'Sack' they used to call her; and 'sacked' she was, at the finish, poor bitch! Well, good luck to 'ee. We'll do some solid work tomorrow, please God!"

Wolf mumbled some inadequate reply to this and strode away. What struck him just then was the contrast between the silky *tone* of his employer's voice and the toll-pike jocularity of his language. "Neither tone nor words are the real man," he thought. "What seething malice, what fermenting misanthropy, that mask of his does cover!"

Crossing the fair-field to the northward, leaving the paddock to his left and the whirligigs to his right, Wolf speedily found his way to the entrance of the great refreshment-tent.

The place was packed with people, some taking their stimulant at little deal-board tables, others eating and drinking as they stood, others again crowding about the massive serving-counter at the end of the tent, where great silvery receptacles, kept hot by oil-flames, were disgorging into earthenware cups a quality of tea that seemed to meet the taste alike of the Lovelaces and of the Torps, so varied were the human types now eagerly swallowing it!

Wolf speedily became aware that Mr. Urquhart's jibe about few petticoats being able to endure a horse-show to the end was not without justification. About three-quarters of the persons filling this huge canvas-space were women.

The first familiar form he encountered as he pushed his way in was that of Selena Gault. This lady was seated alone at a small table placed against the canvas-wall, where she was drinking her tea and eating her bread-and-butter in sublime indifference to the crowd that surged about her. Wolf hurried to her, snatched an unoccupied chair, and sat down at her side.

He felt, for some reason, a sense of profound physical exhaustion; and underneath the pleasant badinage with which he returned his friend's greetings he found himself positively clinging to this lonely woman.

The lady's costume, to which she had given a vague sporting-touch suitable to the occasion, enhanced her grotesque hideousness. But from her deformed visage her eyes gleamed such irresistible affection that his ebbing courage began steadily to revive.

Their complete isolation in the midst of the crowd — for the people jostling past their table gave them little heed — soon led Wolf to plunge shamelessly into what was nearest his heart. Selena Gault's ghastly upper-lip quivered perceptibly as he told her of his affair with Gerda and his resolve to get married without delay.

"Why, she's here!" she cried. "The child's here! She came in with her father a quarter of an hour ago. She certainly is one of the loveliest girls I've ever set eyes upon. I hadn't seen her since she's grown up. I was amazed at her beauty. Well! You *have* made hay while the sun shone. No! it's no use! You can't possibly see her from where you are. Now turn round and look at me; and let's talk about all this, quietly and sensibly. It's as serious as it could be; and I don't know what's to be done about it."

"There's nothing to be done, I'm afraid, Miss Gault," said Wolf gravely, forcing himself to accept the situation; "nothing except to make some money by hook or by crook! Do you think if I put the case to Urquhart, he'd give me a little more? We're getting on first-rate with the History."

Never were human eyelids lifted more whimsically than were those of Wolf's interlocutor at this mild suggestion.

"Oh, my dear boy!" she chuckled. "You don't know how funny you are. To ask *that* man for money to get married on."

"No good, eh?" he murmured. "No, I suppose not. But you don't think he'll show me the door, do you?"

Miss Gault shook her head. "If he does, we'll put all our wits together and get you something in Ramsgard. There *are* jobs — —" she added, thoughtfully puckering her brows.

But Wolf, having twice twisted his head back into its normal position from a hopeless attempt to see further than a few yards in front of him, felt an irresistible impulse to reveal to this woman certain rather sinister deductions that he found he had been involuntarily making from recent glimpses and hints. Composed originally of the veriest wisps and wefts of fluctuating suspicion, they seemed now to have solidified themselves in unabashed tangibility. What they now amounted to was that Mattie was not Mr. Smith's daughter at all but William Solent's; and that Olwen, the girl's little protegée, was actually the incestuous child of old Malakite, the bookseller, and of some vanished sister of Christie's. It was the startling nature of these conclusions that tempted him to fire them off point-blank at the lady by his side, whose morbid receptivity made her a dedicated target for such a shock.

"Is it true that I have a sister in this town?" he enquired boldly, looking straight into Miss Gault's eyes.

The appalling upper-lip vibrated like the end of a tapir's proboscis, and the grey eyes blinked as if he had shot off a pistol.

"What?" she cried, letting her hands fall heavily upon her knees, like the hands of a flabbergasted sorceress, palms downward and fingers outspread. "*What's* that you're saying, boy?"

“I am saying that I’ve come to a shrewd certainty,” said Wolf firmly, “that Mattie Smith and I have the same father.”

Miss Gault astonished him by putting her elbows on to the table and covering her face with her extended fingers; through which her eyes now regarded him. She was not weeping — he could see that. Was she laughing at him? There was something so queer in this gesture, that he felt an uneasy discomfort. It was as if she had suddenly turned into a different person, as different from the Miss Gault he knew, as the new Mattie they were talking about was different from the one he had met in that Victorian dining-room.

He wished she would remove those fingers and stop staring at him so discomfortably. When at last she did so, it was to reveal a countenance whose expression he was at a loss to read. Her face certainly wasn’t blubbered with crying; but it was flushed and disturbed. The impression he really got from it was of something... almost indecent!

He glanced furtively round, and, hurriedly extending his arm, touched one of her wrists.

“You must have known I’d find out sooner or later,” he said. “It doesn’t matter, my knowing, does it? *He* couldn’t mind. He’d be glad, I should think.” And he gave an awkward little chuckle, as he released her hand and began fumbling for a cigarette.

He had only just succeeded in finding the small packet for which he was searching, when he caught Miss Gault’s eyes lit up in excited recognition.

He swung round. Ah! there they were — making their way straight towards them — the portly figure of Mr. Torp, with Gerda leaning lightly on his arm!

He did not hesitate a moment, but leaping up from his chair with an incoherent apology to his companion, he advanced to meet them, his heart beating fast, but his brain in full command of the situation.

Gerda flushed crimson when she saw him, disengaged her arm from her father’s, and, coming to meet him with charming impetuosity, held out her hand.

She was dressed in plain navy-blue serge, and wore a dark, soft hat low down over her fair hair. This unassuming attire heightened her beauty; and the embarrassed, yet illuminated look with which she greeted her lover, brought back to his mind so vividly the events of yesterday, that for a moment he was struck with a kind of dizziness that reduced everyone in that crowded tent to a floating and eddying mist.

He caught at her hand without a word and held it tightly for a moment, hurting her a little.

He soon dropped it, however, and said very hurriedly and quietly: “Gerda... forgive me... but I want to introduce you to my friend, Miss Gault.”

Gerda’s eyes must have already encountered those of that lady, for he saw her face stiffen to a conventional and rather strained smile. But at this moment Mr. Torp intervened, coming up very close to Wolf and touching the latter’s hand with his plump finger before he could lift it to greet him.

“So you and darter have fixed it up, have ‘ee?” he whispered, in a confidential, almost funereal tone. “Don’t ‘ee be fretted about I nor the missus, Mister. Us be glad in advance, I tell ‘ee; and so it be.” He caught hold of Wolf’s sleeve and put his face close to his face, while Wolf, with a sidelong glance, became aware that Miss Gault had approached them and had been met half-way by Gerda.

“ ’Tis they wimming’s whimsies what us have got to mind, hasn’t?” whispered Mr. Torp. “What they do reckon’ll happen to we, ’tis what *will* happen to we, looks so! Don’t ‘ee take on, Mister, about us being poor folks like. Darter’s different from we and allus has been, since her were a babe.

She’s had grand courtiers ere now, though I shouldn’t say it. But Gerdie be a good girl, though turble lazy about house. Her mother once did think it ‘ud be young Bob Weevil what ‘ud get her; but I knewed a thing or two beyond that, I did! I knewed she were one for the gentry, as you might say. ‘Twere barn in her, I reckon! I be a climbing man, me wone self. It’s like enough she gets it from I!” And before he withdrew his rubicund face to a discreet distance, the stone-cutter gave him a shrewd wink.

It was then that Miss Gault took the opportunity of bringing Gerda up to them. She had evidently said something very gracious to the girl; for Gerda’s quaint society-manner had left her, and she looked pleased, though a little bewildered.

“We’ve made friends already,” said Miss Gault to Wolf, “and I’ve told her I knew her well by sight. How do you do, Mr. Torp! I was telling Mr. Solent that I knew your daughter already, though I’ve never spoken to her; but she’s not a young lady one can forget!”

What Mr. Torp’s reply to this was Wolf did not hear. Aware that the situation had arranged itself, he found as he kept looking at Gerda’s face, as she listened to Miss Gault and her father, that he was beginning to grow nervously hostile to all these explanations. Why couldn’t he and Gerda go straight off now, out of this hurly-burly, out anywhere... so as to be at peace and alone?

“Well, good-bye,” Gerda was saying. “Perhaps we’ll see you again later; but Father and I haven’t half gone the round yet, have we, Father?”

“Gone the round! I should think us hadn’t!” said Mr. Torp. “Bain’t what used to be, this here fair! I do mind when ‘twere so thick wi’ gipoos and such-like, that a person could scarce move. But Gerdie and I will see summat, don’t ‘ee fear! They whirligigs... why there ain’t a blessed season since her was a mommet that we ain't rid in they things; is there, my chuck?"

"No, there isn't, Father. Good-bye, Miss Gault!" she added, with a straight, confiding, grateful glance at her friend's friend. "I'll be at home all tomorrow afternoon, Wolf," she murmured, as she smoothed out her gloves and buttoned her jacket.

Mr. Torp caught the word. "So she *shall* be!" he cried emphatically. "I be a turble stern man, for ordering they to do what they've set their hearts on doing! Well, good-bye to 'ee, Sir! Good-bye to 'ee, Marm! If all and sundry here were to fling at they coceenuts, there'd be few left, I reckon!"

Watching that quaintly assorted couple moving away out of the tent, Wolf felt a glow of almost conceited satisfaction in the discovery that whatever vein of snobbishness it was in him that had made so much of Mr. Urquhart's clothes and Lord Lovelace's appearance, it fell away completely where Gerda was concerned. "I'm glad the old man is as he is!" he thought, as his eyes followed them into the open air.

"Let's sit down again, shall we?" he said to Miss Gault.

His spirits were a little dashed, however, when he regarded the lady opposite him, as they resumed their seats; for her face seemed to have grown stiff and somewhat remote.

"This is very serious," she said gravely. And then, with an almost plaintive tone, "Why is it that men are so ridiculous?"

"But I thought you liked her, Miss Gault! You were so especially sweet to her."

She sighed and gave him a glance that seemed to say irritably, "And to cap everything you are an incredible fool!"

"You *did* like her, didn't you?"

"So childish that they think of nothing... *nothing*... when their desire is aroused."

"Why is it so serious, Miss Gault?" he said. And then he added rather maliciously, "My mother would see in a second how refined she is!"

Miss Gault lifted her eyebrows. "I'm not only thinking of your mother," she said. "There's no reason, that I know of, why I should fuss about *her*. I'm thinking of you and the girl herself, and — and of *all* your friends. Listen, boy" — and she bent on him one of the most tender and reproachful looks he had ever seen— "all this is pure madness — selfish, greedy madness! You *can't* make a girl like that happy — no! not for half a year! Good heavens, child, you're as blind as a —— You're as selfish as one of my cats! It's the girl I'm thinking of, I tell you. You'll make her miserable, you and your mother. She's sweet to look at; but Wolf, Wolf! she and you will talk completely different languages! You can't do these things — not in *our* country, anyhow. I've seen it again and again — these things bring misery — just misery. And how are you going to support her, I'd like to know?"

"She has indeed a different language," cried Wolf, irrelevantly; and his mind reverted to the blackbird of Poll's Camp. And then, as he saw her face droop wearily and her fingers tap the table: "Why did you take it all so nicely just now. Why did you talk of getting me work in Ramsgard?"

She made no reply to this. But after a moment she burst out: "Your father would laugh at you... he would!... He'd just laugh at you!"

"Well, we'd better not talk of it any more," said Wolf sulkily.

He cast about in the depths of his consciousness, however, with the vindictiveness of defeat, for some line of attack that would disturb and agitate her.

“Miss Gault,” he began, while with her gaze fixed upon vacancy she stared through him and past him into the interior of the great tent, “do you mind if I ask you a direct question? I know that Mattie Smith is my father’s child; but what I want to ask you now is — whose child is Olwen?”

A faint brownish flush ran like a stream of muddy water beneath the surface of the skin of her face. She bent her head over the table; and like a great ruffled bird, in a cage, that has been shaken from the top, she began picking up and lifting to her mouth every crumb of bread in sight. Then, with a shaky hand, she poured some spilt drops of cold tea from her saucer into her cup.

“What I want to know,” repeated Wolf, “is why my sister Mattie has this child Olwen to look after. Is she a foundling? Is she adopted? Where did she spring from?”

But the daughter of the late headmaster of Ramsgard School remained obstinately silent. She folded her hands mechanically over the heavy teacup and sat straight in her chair, staring into her lap like an image of Atropos.

“Don’t you want to tell me, Miss Gault? Is it something you *can’t* tell me?”

Still the lady remained silent, her fingers tightly clenched over the cup.

“I knew there was something queer from the start,” he went on. “What’s the matter with you all? Who *is* this child?”

Then very slowly Miss Gault rose to her feet.

“Come out into the air,” she said brusquely. “I can’t talk to you here.”

They made their way together out of the tent; but they had hardly gone a stone’s throw into the cold March sunshine, when they encountered, without a possibility of retreat or evasion, Mrs. Solent and Mr. Smith advancing resolutely and blamelessly towards the place they were quitting.

The hatter of Ramsgard School looked pinched and withered in the hard, glaring light. Wolf received a sudden, inexplicable inkling that the man was wretchedly miserable. The look he got from him as they approached seemed grey with weariness. Mrs. Solent was, however, talking gaily. Her brown eyes were shining with mischief. Her cheeks were flushed. And now, at the very moment of salutation, he could see that proud face toss its chin and that sturdy, well-dressed figure gather itself together for battle. Once more it came over him with a queer kind of remorse, as if he were responsible for it: "She's had no life at all; and she's made for great, stirring events!"

But it was many days before he forgot the manner in which those two ancient rivals faced each other. It had, this encounter between them, the queer effect upon him of making him recall, as he had once or twice already in Dorsetshire, that passage in "Hamlet" where the ghost cries out from beneath the earth. A piece of horse-dung at his feet, as he instinctively looked away while the two came together, grew large and white and round.

"He can't have a shred of flesh left on him down there," he thought to himself, with a kind of sullen anger against both the women. But what puzzled him now was that Miss Gault did not rise to the occasion as he had supposed she would have done. To his own personal taste she looked more formidable in her black satin gown than his mother did in her finery; but it was clear to him, as he watched them shaking hands, that his mother's spirit was poised and adjusted to the nicest point of the encounter, whereas Miss Gault's inmost being just then seemed disorganized, disjointed, helpless, unwieldy.

That they shook hands at all, he could see, was owing to his mother. Miss Gault's hands hung down at her sides, like the hands of a large, stuffed doll that has been set up with difficulty in an erect position. And they remained like this until Mrs. Solent's arm had been extended for quite a perceptible passage of time. When Selena *did* raise her wrist and take her enemy's fingers, it was to retain them all the while the two were speaking. But Mrs. Solent told Wolf afterwards that there was no warmth or life in that cold pressure....

"Well, Selena, so it's really you! And I couldn't have believed there'd be so little change. You are at your old tricks again, I see, running off with my son!"

"I hope you are well, Ann," said Miss Gault. "You look as handsome as ever."

"I'd look handsomer still, if my son wasn't so unambitious and lazy," replied the other, giving Wolf a glance of glowing possessiveness.

"Men can be too ambitious, Ann," said Miss Gault slowly, speaking as if she were in some kind of trance.

"We passed a *really* pretty girl a minute or two ago," cried Mrs. Solent suddenly; "and Albert here says he knows who she is. You ought to go over to the roundabouts, Wolf, and try and find her! She was with a labouring-man of some sort, a stocky plump little man; but she was pretty as a picture!"

"Do you mean that Dorset labourers *sell* their daughters, Mother? Or do you mean that all beauty can be had for the asking? All right; I'll hunt for her through all the tents!"

He felt himself speaking in such a strained, queer voice that he was not surprised to observe Miss Gault glancing nervously at Mrs. Solent to see if she had detected it. But Mrs. Solent was too excited just then to notice so slight a thing as a change of tone. As he spoke with his mother in this way about Gerda, something seemed to rise up in his throat that was like a serpent of fury. He rebelled against the look of his mother's face, the proud outline of her scornful profile. “I am glad... I am glad...” he said to himself, “that Gerda *isn’t* a lady, and that her father *is* a stone-cutter!”

And it came over him that it was an imbecility that any human soul should have the power over another soul that his mother had over him. As he looked at her now, he was aware of an angry revolt at the massive resistance which her personality offered.

It did not make it easier for him at this moment that he recognized clearly enough that the very strength in his mother which had been such security to him in his childhood was the thing now with which he had to struggle to gain his liberty — that protective, maternal strength, the most formidable of all psychic forces!

She was like a witch — his mother — on the wrong side in the fairy-story of life. She was on the side of fate against chance, and of destiny against random fortune. “I don’t care how she feels when I tell her about Gerda,” he said to himself; and in a flash, looking all the while at his mother’s dress, he thought of the yielded loveliness of Gerda’s body, and he decided that he would shake off this resistance without the least remorse. “Shake it off! Pass over it; disregard it!” he said to himself.

“I shall come and see you, Selena, whether you like it or not,” his mother was now saying. “After twenty-five years people as old as we are ought to be sensible, oughtn’t we, Mr. Smith?” she added.

But Mr. Smith had managed to remove himself a pace or two from their company, under cover of a sudden interest in a torn and flapping “Western Gazette,” which he proceeded to push into a trampled mole-hill with the end of his stick.

Mrs. Solent glanced at her son shrewdly and scrutinizingly. “You look as if you were enjoying yourself, I *must* say! What’s come over you? Are you wishing yourself back in London? Well, come on, Albert Smith! I'm longing for a cup of tea. These people have had theirs."

She was already carrying off her companion, after a nod to Miss Gault, which was received without a sign of response, when Wolf stopped her. "Where shall we meet, Mother, when you're ready to go?"

"Oh, anywhere, child! We can't lose ourselves here."

"Say over there, then? By the roundabouts, in about an hour?"

"All right; very good! Mr. Smith shall escort me there when we've had our tea. It's strange, Albert, isn't it, that in this place of my whole married life, you're the only friend I've got left?"

Wolf was aware of an expression in her brown eyes, a droop of her straight shoulders, that made him realize that there were strange emotions stirring under the surface of that airy manner.

"The roundabouts, then!" he repeated.

"All right — in an hour or so!" she flung back. "And why don't you and Selena have a turn at the swings?" she added, as she went off.

Her disappearance seemed to make no difference to Selena Gault. In absolute immobility the poor lady remained standing there, staring at the grass. It was as if she'd put her foot upon an adder that struck her with sudden paralysis, so that at a touch she would topple over and fall.

Wolf came close to her. "Don't worry about my mother, Miss Gault, darling," he whispered earnestly. "She's not as flippant as she sounds... really she's not! She's like that with everyone. She's like that with me."

Miss Gault looked at him as if his words meant nothing. Her vacant stare seemed to be fixed on something at a remote distance.

"I know; I quite understand," she murmured; and her hands, coming, as it were, slowly to life, began to pick at the little cloth buttons of the braided jacket she wore over her satin gown. The stiffness of these old-fashioned garments seemed to hold her up. Without their support it looked as if she would have fallen down just where she was — close to the newspaper buried through the nervousness of Mr. Smith!

She seemed to Wolf, as he stood helplessly before her, like a classic image of outrage in grotesque modern clothes. “She’s like an elderly Io,” he thought, “driven mad by the gadfly of the goddess.”

“Dear Miss Gault! Don’t you worry about it any more! I swear to you she isn’t as malicious as she seems. You must remember that all this isn’t as easy for her as she makes out. She’s hard; but she can be really magnanimous... you’ll see! She doesn’t realize people’s feelings, that’s what it is. She was the same about Gerda. Fancy her noticing her like that!” In his desire to soothe his companion he seized one of the black-gloved hands. As he did so he looked round nervously; for he began to be aware that various persons among the groups who passed them stopped to stare at her perturbed figure.

But his touch brought a flood of colour to the woman’s swarthy cheeks. She clasped his hand tightly with both her own, holding it for a moment before she let it fall.

“I can’t help it, boy,” she said in a low tone. “Seeing her brings it all back.” She paused for a moment. “No one else ever treated me as a woman,” she added, her mouth twitching.

Wolf wrinkled his bushy eyebrows.

“You must let me be as fond of you as he was,” he muttered. “You must look after me as you looked after him.”

She nodded and smiled a little at that, rearranged the great black hat upon her head, and, after a moment’s hesitation, placed her hand on his arm. “Come,” she said, “let’s go to the roundabouts.”

They moved slowly together across the field. It occurred to him now that he could distract her mind and at the same time satisfy his own curiosity by renewing their interrupted conversation.

"I don't want to tease you with questions," he began presently. "But you promised you'd tell me — you know? — about Mattie and Olwen."

"It's not easy, boy," said Miss Gault with a sigh.

"I know it isn't. That's why I want *you* to tell me and not anyone else."

She walked by his side in silence for a while, evidently collecting her thoughts. "It's the sort of thing one finds so difficult to tell," she said, looking guardedly round them.

"Well! Let me tell *you*!" he retorted, "and you correct me, if I'm wrong."

Miss Gault nodded gravely.

"Mattie's my father's child," he muttered in a low, clear voice, "and Olwen is — —"

Miss Gault had managed to turn her face so far away from him that he couldn't see her expression.

"Who told you all this, boy? Who told you?" she interrupted, in such a peevish tone that two solemn-faced members of the Sixth Form of the School, with blue ribbons round their straw-hats and sticks in their hands, glanced furtively at her as they passed.

"Olwen's father was old Malakite," Wolf went on; "and Olwen's mother was Christie Malakite's sister."

Miss Gault still kept her face removed from his steady gaze.

"Aren't I right?" he repeated. "But you needn't tell me. I *know* I am right." He paused, and they continued to cross the field.

"What's become of the mother?" he continued. "Is she still alive?"

Miss Gault did turn at this.

"Australia," she whispered.

“Alive or dead?”

She almost shouted her reply to this, as if with a spasm of savage relief.

“Dead!” she cried.

Wolf held his peace for a moment or two, while his brain worked at top speed.

“What Christie must have gone through!” he murmured audibly, but in a tone as if talking to himself rather than to her. “What she must have gone through!”

Miss Gault’s comment upon this was drowned by the brazen noise issuing from the engine of one of the roundabouts which they were now approaching.

“What did you say?” he shouted in her ear.

“I said that Christie Malakite has no heart!” cried Miss Gault; and her voice was almost as harsh as the raucous whistle that saluted them.

He stopped at this, and they both stood motionless, looking at each other covertly, while a magnetic current of inexplicable antagonism flickered between them.

“It wasn’t *her* he loved!” Miss Gault shouted suddenly — so suddenly that Wolf moved backwards, as if she had lifted her hand to hit him.

“Who didn’t love whom?” he vociferated in response; while two small boys of the Ramsgard Preparatory School nudged each other and peered at them inquisitively.

“What are you staring for? *Urchins!*” cried Miss Gault.

“All the same they’re nice boys,” she muttered. “Look! I’ve hurt their feelings now; and they really *are* very polite. Here, children, come here!”

The two little boys, their heads covered with enormous and very new examples of the art of Mr. Albert Smith, pretended not to hear her appeal.

They remained in fixed contemplation of a counter of glaring cakes and sweets.

“Come here, you two!” repeated the lady.

They did, at that, sheepishly turn round and begin moving towards her, with an air as if it were a complete accident that their feet carried them in that particular direction rather than in any other.

“I won’t hurt you,” she said, as softly as she could in the midst of the terrific noise that whirled round them. “What are your names, my dears?”

“Stepney Major,” murmured one of the little boys.

“Trelawney Minor,” gasped the other.

“Well, Stepney Major and Trelawney Minor, here’s half-a-crown for you. Only, when you next meet queer-looking people at the Fair, don’t stare at them as if they were part of the Show.”

When the two little boys had decamped, radiantly reverential, Miss Gault turned to Wolf.

“Didn’t they take off their hats prettily? They *do* bring ’em up well. Little gentlemen they are!”

She seemed glad of the interruption. But Wolf began speaking again.

“What’s that, boy?” she rejoined. “Terrible, this noise! Isn’t it?”

“Miss Gault!”

“You needn’t shout, Wolf. I can hear you. There... like that... that’s better!” And she shifted her position.

“Who didn’t love whom? We were talking of the Malakites.”

“My dear boy” — and, as she spoke, a smile of the most complicated humour came into her strange countenance, transforming it into something almost beautiful— “my dear boy, I wasn’t talking of the Malakites! I was talking of your father and Lorna Smith.”

“Mattie’s mother, eh? But why did you say — oh, damn that noise! — that Christie had no heart?”

Miss Gault stared at him.

“Haven’t you seen her? Didn’t you see what she was? Reading the books of that old wretch, keeping house for that old wretch? How can she look the man in the face, I should like to know? They tell me Olwen can’t bear the sight of her; and I don’t wonder.”

“But Miss Gault, my dear Miss Gault, what has Christie done? I should think she was the one most to be pitied.”

Wolf bent his shaggy eyebrows almost fiercely upon his companion; and after a moment’s encounter with his gaze Miss Gault glanced away and contemplated the sweet-stall.

“What has Christie Malakite done to *you*?” asked Wolf sternly.

“Oh, if you must have it, boy, you *shall* have it! Listen. I went over there when all that trouble happened. I had some sort of official position; and things like this, unspeakable things like this, were what I had to deal with. The Society sent me, in fact.”

Wolf lifted his eyebrows very high at this. He began to detect an aspect of Miss Selena Gault’s character that hitherto had been concealed from him.

“What society?” he asked.

“The Society for the Care of Delinquent Girls. And I found Miss Christie, let me tell you, both obstinate and impertinent. She actually defended that abominable old wretch! She wanted to keep Olwen in their house. Fortunately the child can’t bear the sight of her... or of that old monster either. It’s instinct, I expect.”

“It doesn’t happen to be anything you or Mattie may have let fall?” shouted Wolf in her ear.

“Why, you’re defending them now!” Miss Gault retorted, her face dark with anger. “If you knew all, boy, you wouldn’t dare!”

Wolf felt extreme discomfort and distaste.

“What else *is* there for me to know, Miss Gault?” he demanded aloud and in a quieter voice; for there had come a pause in the whistling of the engine.

“That old man was one of the most evil influences in your father’s life.”

“Does Mattie know that?” he enquired.

“Oh, Mattie!” she cried contemptuously. “Mattie knows just as much as we’ve considered it wise to tell her.”

“Who are we?” said Wolf drily.

“Mr. Smith and myself. Don’t you see, boy, we had to make ourselves responsible *to the police* for Olwen’s bringing up? It’s been an unholy business, the whole affair! It gives me a kind of nausea to talk about it.”

Wolf found that his protective instincts were thoroughly aroused by this time; and Miss Gault’s figure assumed an unattractive shape.

“It’s this accursed sex-suppression,” he said to himself; and he suddenly thought with immense relief of his mother, and of her scandalously light touch in the presence of every conceivable human obliquity. “I must be cautious,” he said to himself. “I mustn’t show my hand. But who would have thought she was like this!” He looked Miss Gault straight in the face.

“Does Mr. Urquhart know the history of my sister and the history of Olwen?” he asked abruptly, leaning so heavily on his stick that it sank deep into the turf.

A flicker of relief crossed the woman’s agitated features.

“Mr. Urquhart? Oh, you may be sure he has *his* version, just as all the neighbourhood has! It’s been the great scandal of the country.”

The use of this particular word made Wolf explode.

“Greater than the doings of Mattie’s father?” he rapped out.

He regretted his maliciousness as soon as the words were uttered. That scene in the cemetery came back to his mind.

“I didn’t mean that, dear Miss Gault!” he cried, pulling his stick violently out of the sod. But she had turned her face away from him, and for a little while they stood silently there, side by side, while the crowd jostled them and the engine renewed its whistling. At last she did turn round, and her face was sad and gentle.

“We won’t quarrel, will we, Wolf?” she murmured, bending close to his ear so that he shouldn’t lose her words. It was the first time she had dropped that rather annoying “boy”; and the use of his name did much to restore his good-temper.

“It’s all right,” he whispered back. “Let’s go on now, eh?”

The merry-go-round in front of which they had passed was isolated from the rest. They proceeded to push their way through the crowds towards the next one, which was some three hundred yards further on.

Suddenly they saw before them the anxious little figure of Mrs. Otter, leaning on Darnley’s arm; while Jason, his melancholy gaze surveying the scene as if he were a Gaulish captive in a Roman triumph, was standing apart, like one who had no earthly link with his relations — or with anyone else.

Wolf felt singularly disinclined to cope with these people at that moment. He had received of late so many contradictory impressions, that his brain felt like an overcrowded stage. But he gathered his wits together as well as he could, and for a while they all five stood talking rather wearily, exchanging commonplaces as if they had been at a garden-party rather than a fair.

By degrees Wolf managed to edge away from the two ladies, who were listening to Darnley's criticism of the horse-show, and began to exchange more piquant remarks with the dilapidated poet.

"Did you see our clergyman?" said Jason.

"Mr. Valley?"

The man nodded.

"Certainly I did. I talked to him when I first got here."

"Making a fool of himself as usual — —"

"Come, Mr. Otter — —"

"Well, I daresay it's no affair of ours. It's best to mind one's own business. That's what God's so good at... minding His own business! Seen Urquhart anywhere?"

"I was with him just now. Monk drove him over."

Jason Otter's face expressed panic.

"Is *that* man here?" he whispered.

Wolf had already remarked how oddly Jason's fits of mortal terror assorted with the monumental dignity of his grim and massive countenance.

"Why not? I understand he gave a lift to your old Mrs. Stone. You ought to be grateful to him."

"Urquhart pays him to spy on me, and one day he'll beat me like a black dog!"

"Incredible, Mr. Otter!" It became more and more difficult for Wolf to take seriously the man's morbid timorousness. It was impossible to make sport of him; but he could not prevent a faint vein of raillery from entering into his reply. "He looks a powerfully built fellow."

"I tell you this, Solent, I tell you this" — and Jason clutched Wolf's arm and glanced round to make sure that the others were out of hearing— "one day I shall be picked up unconscious in a ditch, beaten half-dead by that man!”

But Wolf’s mind had wandered.

“By the way, Mr. Otter, if you ever want to sell that Hindoo idol of yours, I’ll buy it from you!”

The poet stared at him blankly.

“I’ll give five times whatever it cost you!”

“It cost me a pound,” said Jason grimly.

“Very well; I’ll buy it for five pounds. Is that agreed?”

Jason pondered a little.

“Why do you want that thing? To bury it?”

“Perhaps that’s it! How discerning you are!” And Wolf smiled genially at him.

“Very well, I’ll sell it to you.” He paused for a moment. “And if you could let me have that five pounds tomorrow, I should be very much obliged.”

“Good Lord!” thought Wolf to himself. “I’ve done it now! Probably they keep the poor wretch without a penny, to stop him from drinking.”

“I’m not sure that I can manage it tomorrow,” he said affably, “but you shall have it, Mr. Otter; and I’m sure I’m very grateful to you.”

“Shall you bury it?” whispered Jason again, in a voice as sly and furtive as a wicked schoolboy.

“I don’t want *you* to have it any longer, anyhow,” said Wolf laughing.

Jason put his hand to his mouth and chuckled.

“By the way,” Wolf went on, “I’ve never yet read a line of your poetry, Mr. Otter.”

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he stared at the man in bewildered amazement. It was as if a mask had fallen from his face, revealing a totally different human countenance.

“Will you really read something? Will you really?”

The tone in which he said this was so childlike in its eagerness that Wolf felt a sudden unexpected tenderness for the queer man, quite different from his previous amused indulgence. “How they must have outraged his life-illusion among them all!” he thought.

“But your mother adores your poetry; and your brother likes it too, doesn’t he?”

Jason gave him one deep, slow, penetrating look that was like the opening of a sluice-gate.

“My mother... my brother...” And the man shrugged his shoulders as if Wolf had referred to the activities of water-flies in relation to human affairs.

“They don’t understand it, you mean? They don’t get its significance, for all their devotion? Well, I think I realize what you suffer from. But I don’t suppose I shall understand it either.”

“I’ve written lately... very lately... last night, in fact — a poem to him.”

“To whom?”

“To him... to Mukalog.”

Wolf wrinkled his eyebrows and stared intently at him for a moment. “You’ll be altogether happier when you’ve sold that thing to me, Mr. Otter,” he said.

“You’d like to bury him in your garden,” Jason muttered. And then quite unexpectedly he smiled so disarmingly that Wolf once again experienced that wave of affection.

“I expect lots of people wish I were dead,” he added, with a queer chuckle.

“I don’t wish you were dead,” said Wolf, looking into his eyes. “But I wish you *would* let me throw away that demon!”

A gleam of nervous irritation flashed from Jason's eyes, and his upper lip trembled.

"He's myself!" he murmured. "He's what I am!" Then after a pause he jerked his thumb towards his brother. "Darnley's a funny one," he whispered, nudging Wolf's arm. "Listen to him talking to the ladies! He ought to have been a member of Parliament. He loves to behave like a grand gentleman."

"He *is* a grand gentleman!" said Wolf drily.

"And as for that great bully of yours, Squire Urquhart," Jason went on, raising his voice, "*he'll* die without any demon to help him. *He's on that road now!*"

These last words were uttered with such concentrated vindictiveness that Wolf opened his eyes wide.

"Did you see how he looked," went on Jason, "when those stallions passed him? He had to hang on to the rope to keep himself from falling.... I can tell you what crossed his mind then!"

"What?" enquired Wolf.

"To throw himself under their hooves! To be trodden into the ground by fifty stallions!"

"Are ye talking of stallions, gentlemen?" said a well-known voice; and Roger Monk, accompanied by the waiter of the Lovelace Hotel, stood before them, touching his hat politely.

Darnley and Miss Gault moved forward now, and Mrs. Otter began asking Monk about Dimity Stone and thanking him for picking up the old woman.

"Come on," whispered Jason in Wolf's ear. "Let's clear out of this! You see what *he* is... a great lubberly catchpole, not fit for anything except horse-racing! He's got rid of Dimity and joined up with that waiter with the idea of annoying someone. He wouldn't dare to insult anyone alone; but with that sly dog of a waiter — you know what waiters are — —" He paused and glanced back furtively at his mother and at the two serving-men. "I'd like," he added, "to see Valley well fooled by those rascals. He'd have to go home alone then; and a good thing, too!"

"You've got your knife into us all, Mr. Otter," said Wolf slowly. "And I think it's a mistake. It's a waste of energy to hate people at the rate you do."

But Jason's attention was still so absorbed in watching Monk and the waiter, that he listened to him only with half an ear; and, indeed, shortly afterwards he shuffled off with barely a word of farewell.

Shrugging his shoulders, under this rebuff, Wolf strode away in pursuit of Darnley and Miss Gault.

When he reached these two, he held out his hand and raised his hat.

"I think I'll leave you now in Mr. Otter's care," he said to Miss Gault. "It's about time I began to look for my mother."

Selena appeared a little disconcerted at his abrupt departure, but Darnley gave him his usual gentle and indulgent smile.

"You always seem to bring me luck, Solent," he said. "But *au revoir*! We may meet on the road; for I expect *my* mother will be tired of this soon."

Wolf shogged off by himself; and as soon as the crowd concealed him from the sight of his friends, he began waving his stick in the air. This was an old trick of his, and he invariably gave way to it when, after any prolonged period of human intercourse, he found himself alone and in the open.

He made his way rapidly to the extreme western corner of the great fair-field, where there were certain small swings patronized rather by children than by grown-up people.

As he threaded his way through all those excitable West Country folk he did his best to reduce to some sort of order the various jolts and jars he had received. So many confused impressions besieged his consciousness that he wished devoutly he were going to return to King’s Barton on foot instead of driving.

His thoughts became complicated just at this moment by the teasing necessity of finding some place among those tents where he could make water. Drifting about with this in view, he found himself recalling all manner of former occasions when he had been driven to this kind of search. It took him so long to find what he wanted, that when he *had* found it and had re-emerged into the sunshine, he experienced an extraordinary heightening of his spirits.

The acrid, ammoniacal smell of that casual retreat brought back to his mind the public lavatory on the esplanade at Weymouth, into which, from the sun-warmed sands, he used to descend by a flight of spittle-stained steps. This memory, combined with an access of pervading physical comfort, drew his mind like a magnet toward his secretive mystical vice. Once more, as he gave himself up to this psychic abandonment, he felt as if he were engaged in some mysterious world-conflict, where the good and the evil ranged themselves on opposite sides.

He rubbed his hands together in the old reckless way, as he walked along; and it seemed to him as if all these new impressions of his took their place in this mysterious struggle. That ravaged face of the Waterloo steps mingled its hurt with what Jason, Valley, Christie, were all suffering; while the sinister magnetism that emanated from Mr. Urquhart fused its influence with that of Jason’s idol, and the cruelty of Miss Gault to Christie, and of his mother to Miss Gault!

When this orgy of mystic emotion passed away, as it presently did, leaving him as limp and relaxed as if he had been walking for hours instead of minutes, he became aware that there were two irritating perplexities still fretting his mind, like stranded jelly-fish left high and dry on a bank of pebbles.

He found himself steering his consciousness with extreme care, as he walked along, so as to avoid contact with these two problems. But, as generally happens, he had not gone far before he was plunged into both of them, mingled confusedly together.

All about him was the smell of trodden grass, of horse-dung, of tar, of paint, of cider, of roasted chestnuts, of boys' new clothes, of rustic sweat, of girls' cheap perfumes, of fried sausages, of brassy machinery, of stale tobacco; and these accumulated odours seemed to resolve themselves into one single odour that became a wavering curtain, behind which these two dangerous thoughts were moving — moving and stirring the curtain into bulging folds — as concealed figures might do on a theatre-stage, between the acts of a play.

The first of these thoughts was about his ill-assorted parents. He felt as if there were going on in his spirit an unappeasable rivalry between these two. He felt as if it were that grinning skull in the cemetery, with his "Christ! I've had a happy life!" that had made him snatch at Gerda so recklessly, with the express purpose of separating him from his mother! It was just what that man would have done had he been alive. How he would have rejoiced in an irresponsible chance-driven offspring!

And then, before he had finished untying this knot of his parents' hostility, he was plunged into the second dangerous thought. This was more troubling to his peace than the other. It was about that grey feather which he had found in that book of Christie's! Why did it rouse such peculiar interest in him, to think of Christie and of Christie's fondness for the works of Sir Thomas Browne? What was Christie to him with her books and her queer tastes? What stability could there be in his love for Gerda when this troubling curiosity stirred within him at the idea of Gerda's friend?

As he thought of all this, his eyes caught sight of the golden face of a little dandelion in the midst of the trodden grass. He touched the edge of its petals rather wearily with the end of his stick, thinking to himself, "If I leave it there it'll probably be trodden by these people into the mud in a few minutes; and if I pick it up it'll be dead before I get home!"

He decided to give the dandelion a chance to survive. "After all, it *may* survive," he thought; "and if it doesn't — Ailinon! Ailinon! What does it matter?"

Moving on again at random, burdened with perplexities, he suddenly found himself in the midst of a circle of children who were gazing in envious rapture at a gaily decorated swing that was whirling up and down in full, crowded activity. It was a boat-swing, and the boats were painted azure and scarlet and olive-green....

And there, among the children in the swing, was Olwen, and there, by the side of it, watching Olwen swinging, was Mattie Smith herself! To come bolt-up upon her like this, in the midst of so many agitating thoughts, was a shock. He experienced that sort of mental desperation that one feels when one forces oneself awake from a dream that grows unendurable. And in his knowledge that she was his sister he saw her now as a totally different Mattie. But — what a sad face she had! She was so nervous about Olwen that he could regard her for several long seconds unobserved. What heavy ill-complexioned cheeks! What a disproportioned nose! What a clouded apathetic brow, and what patient eyes! "She's had a pretty hard life," he thought. "I wonder if she knows or doesn't know?"

Olwen was the first to catch sight of him; and her excited waving made Mattie hurriedly glance round.

She recognized him at once, too, and a flood of colour came into her pale cheeks. Wolf felt a curious embarrassment as they shook hands; and it was almost a relief to him to be forced to take his eyes off her in order to respond to Olwen, who was now waving to him frantically from her flying seat.

The child could not of course stop the machinery of the swing; and when she saw that he had answered her signal, she contented herself with just sweeping him into that rapturous topsy-turvy world — of people, grass, horses, trees, ruins, and hills — which rose and fell around her as she rushed through the air!

The cries of the children, the clang of the machinery, the voices of the showmen, covered Wolf and Mattie with a protective screen of undisturbed privacy. In the light of subsequent events they both looked back upon this moment with peculiar and romantic tenderness.

Directly she gave him her hand — even while he still held it — he had begun to talk to her of their relationship.

“I’ve known it since I was fifteen,” she said; “and I’m twenty-five this month. That was what made it so awkward when you and your mother came to our house. *She* knows it, of course; and she let me see that she knew it. But I saw she had kept it from you. Has she told you about it since? What I *cannot* make out is whether Father knows. He knows about Olwen, of course. In fact, he and Miss Gault were the ones who took Olwen away from Mr. Malakite.”

She paused, and gave Wolf a quick, furtive look; but what she saw in his face appeared to reassure her, for she smiled faintly.

"It's all so hard to talk about," she said in a low voice. "I'd never have thought I could talk to *you* about it. But it seems easy, now I'm actually doing it! I was young then, you see... only fifteen; and Father and Miss Gault thought I knew nothing. But I'd heard the servants talking; and I read about it in the 'Western Gazette.' Why do you think it was I wasn't more shocked... Wolf?"

The hesitancy with which she brought out his name enchanted him. He snatched at her hand and made a movement as if he would kiss her; but she glanced hurriedly at the swing and drew back.

"I'm pretty hard to shock, too, Mattie dear," he said. "I expect we inherit *that*!" he added lightly.

"It was when they brought me to see Olwen at the 'Home,' " the girl continued, "that I made Father have her at our house, for Nanny... she was my nurse then... and me to take care of! I knew she was at the 'Home,'... oh, Wolf, she was such a sweet little thing!... for I heard them talking about her. And I made Father take me to see her, and we were friends in a second."

"So it was you that persuaded Mr. Smith to take her into his house?" said Wolf. "And you were only a child yourself."

Mattie gave a quaint little chuckle. "I was a pretty obstinate child, I'm afraid," she said. "Besides, Olwen and I both cried terribly and hugged each other. I was mad about children," she added gravely; "just mad about them, when I was young."

"Was your father hard to persuade?" enquired Wolf.

The girl gave him one of her lowering sulkily-humorous glances.

"I made a fuss, you see," she said solemnly. "I cried and cried, till he agreed. It was Miss Gault who opposed it most. Oh, Wolf, it's terrible how Miss Gault has made the child hate Christie. Christie has seen her several times. I managed *that* for her! But Miss Gault must have said something. I don't know what. But the last time Olwen would hardly speak to her."

Wolf frowned. "Of course, it's possible, I suppose, that it's some kind of instinct in the little girl — —" he began ponderingly.

"No! No!" cried Mattie. "It's Miss Gault. I know it's Miss Gault!"

"Christie told me she might be here this afternoon," said Wolf, looking about him from group to group of the noisy young people around them.

"Did she?" said Mattie, with a nervous start. "Did she really, Wolf?" And she, too, threw an anxious glance round the field. "I wouldn't like her feelings to be hurt," she added. "They *would* be, I know, if she tried to speak to Olwen."

Wolf's mind reverted violently to the solitary grey feather in the "Urn Burial." At that moment he felt as though not anyone... not Gerda herself... could stop him from following that fragile figure if he caught sight of it in this crowd!

But Mattie was now waving her hand to Olwen, whose airy boat had begun to slacken its speed.

They moved together towards the swing; and Wolf rushed forward to help the child to the ground. As he lifted her out, he felt his forehead brushed by the floating ends of her loosened hair.

She put her thin arms round him and hugged him tight as soon as he set her down.

"Oh, I love swinging so! I love swinging so!" she gasped.

"Would you like to have another one?" he said gravely, looking down at that glowing little face.

Her eyes shone with infinite gratitude. "Aunt Mattie's spent every penny Grandfather gave her," she whispered. "Would you really give me one more? There! You pay it to that man over there; the one with the funny eyes!"

Wolf handed over the coin and lifted the child back into the painted boat. He waited at her side till the machinery started again and then returned to Mattie.

"Didn't you have the least guess about you and me?" the girl said; and it gave him a thrill of pleasure to see what animation had come into her stolid countenance.

"Not exactly a guess," he answered. "But I did have some kind of an odd feeling; as though I understood you and followed your thoughts, even when you were silent. Heavens! Mattie, dear; and you were silent almost all the time!"

"Your mother wasn't very nice to me."

"Well, one can hardly blame her for that, can one? People do feel rather odd in these situations."

"But I was nice to *you*, wasn't I?" the girl went on. "And yet I couldn't bear to think that Father wasn't my real father," she added faintly.

Mattie's face had such a touching expression at that moment — an expression at once so thrilled and so puzzled — that with a quick and sudden movement he flung his arm round her neck and gave her a brusque kiss, full on the mouth.

"Mr. Solent! Wolf!" she protested feebly. "You mustn't! What will *she* think?"

"Oh, *she'll* think you've found a young man," he replied, laughing; "and so you *have*, my dear," he added affectionately.

But though he laughed at her embarrassment, and though she laughed faintly with him, it was clear enough to his mind, as he glanced at the face of the child in the swing, that their kiss had not been received very happily up there.

Two burning eyes flashed down at him like two quivering poniards, and two fierce little hands clutched the sides of the olive-green boat as if they had been the sides of a war-chariot.

“That child of yours is jealous,” he whispered hurriedly in his companion’s ear. “But don’t you worry,” he added. “It won’t last, when she knows me better.”

He moved up to the swing and remained watching the little girl as she whirled past him like a small angry-eyed comet.

By degrees his steady matter-of-fact attention disarmed that jealous heart; and when the swing stopped, and he had gravely kissed her and handed her back to Mattie, all was once more well.

“We must go now and find your grandfather,” said Mattie to Olwen.

“I’ll come with you,” said Wolf. “I left my mother with Mr. Smith; so we’ll kill two birds with one stone!”

They moved off together; but suddenly, crossing a gap among the people, Wolf caught sight of Bob Weevil and Lobbie Torp.

“You go on, you two — do you mind? We’ll meet later. There’s someone I *must* run after.”

Both of his companions looked a little hurt at this brusque departure; but with a repeated “We’ll meet later! Good-bye!” he swung off in clumsy haste, pushing his way so impetuously through the crowd, that he aroused both anger and derision.

For a time he was afraid that he had lost his quarry completely, so dense had the medley become around the booths; but at last, with a sigh of relief, he came upon them. They were both watching with unashamed delight a young short-skirted gipsy who was dancing wildly to a tambourine. As she danced, she beat her knees and threw bold, provocative glances at her audience.

Wolf approached the two boys unobserved and was conscious of a passing spasm of shameless sympathy when he caught the expression of entranced lechery in the concentrated eyes of the young grocer. Lobbie Torp's interest was evidently distracted by the audacious leaps and bounds of the gipsy-wench and by her jangling music; but Mr. Weevil could contemplate nothing but her legs. These moving objects seemed to be on the point of causing him to howl aloud some obscene "Evoe!" For his mouth was wide open and great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

The girl stopped breathless at last, but without a moment's delay began to collect money, holding out her musical instrument with long, bare arms, and indulging in liberal and challenging smiles.

It tickled Wolf's fancy at this juncture to note the beaten-dog expression in Mr. Weevil's countenance as he pulled Lobbie away with him and tried to shuffle off unobserved. In their hurried and rather ignominious retreat they ran straight into Wolf's arms.

"Lordie! Hullo!" stammered Lob. "It's Mr. Redfern — I mean, Mr. Solent, ain't it?" said Bob Weevil.

Wolf gravely shook hands with them both.

"It's not easy to keep one's money in one's pocket on a day like this," he remarked casually.

Mr. Weevil gave him a furtive water-rat glance; and Wolf would not have been surprised had the young man taken incontinently to his heels.

"Bob knows all about they gipoos when they do zither like moskitties," observed Lob slyly.

"Shut up, you kid!" retorted the other, "or I'll tell Mr. Solent how I caught you kissing a tree."

"I never kissed no tree," muttered Lob sulkily.

"*What?*" cried his friend indignantly.

"If I did, 'twere along o' they loveyers us seed in Willum's Lane ditch. 'Twere enough to make a person kiss his wone self, what us did see; and 'twere ye what showed 'em to I."

"I hope you have both enjoyed yourselves this afternoon," began Wolf again. "Christie can't have come," he thought to himself; and he wondered if he should ask Mr. Weevil point-blank about her.

But Mr. Weevil was bent upon his silly, obstinate bullying of Lobbie. He kept trying to inveigle Wolf in this unamiable game.

"Lob thinks we're all as simple as his Mummy in Chequers Street!" continued the youth, with an unpleasant leer.

"Don't 'ee listen to him!" cried Lob. "Everyone knows what *his* Mummy were, afore old man Weevil paid Lawyer Pipe to write 'Whereas' in his girt book!"

"Listen, you two — —" expostulated Wolf. "I want to ask you both a question."

"He'll answer 'ee, same as my dad answered Mr. Manley when 'a cussed about his mother's gravestone. 'Bless us!' said my dad, 'and do 'ee take I for King Pharaoh?' "

"What was it you wanted to ask us, Sir?" enquired the elder youth, pompously interrupting Lobbie.

"Oh, quite a simple thing, Mr. Weevil. I was only wondering if Miss Malakite was out here today."

"Certainly she's here, Sir. Certainly she is."

"Us came along o' she, on our bicycles," threw in Lobbie.

"Where is she now, then?" Wolf insisted.

"She went castle-way, I think, Mr. Solent," said Bob Weevil.

"She said to we," interjected Lobbie, "that her reckoned she'd have a quiet stroll-like, long o' they ruings."

Wolf looked from one to the other. "So, in plain words, you deserted Miss Malakite?" he said sternly.

"Lob knows what I said when she was gone," mumbled Mr. Weevil.

"When she were gone," echoed the boy. "I should say so!"

"What *did* you say?" asked Wolf.

"He said her walked like a lame hare," threw in Lobbie.

"I didn't, you little liar! Don't believe him, Mr. Solent! I said she walked lonesome-like with her head hanging down."

"That weren't *all* you said, Bob Weevil! Don't you remember what you said when us were looking at thik man-monkey? No! 'twere when us seed they girt cannibals all covered with blue stripes. That's when 'twere! Dursn't thee mind how thee said 'twas because Miss Malakite hadn't got no young man that she went loppiting off to they ruings 'stead of buying fairings like the rest of they?"

Wolf suddenly found himself losing his temper. "I think you both behaved abominably," he cried, "leaving a young lady, like that, to go off by herself! Well, I'm going after her; and I'll tell her what I think of you two when I've found her!"

He strode off in the direction indicated by the boys' words. It was towards the southern extremity of the fair-field that he now made his way, where a dilapidated hedge and a forlorn little lane separated the castle-field from the castle-ruins. He hadn't gotten far, however, when, glancing at a row of motionless human backs, transfixed into attitudes of petrified wonder by the gesticulations of a couple of clowns, he became aware that two of those backs were obscurely familiar to him. He approached them sideways, and his first glance at their concentrated profiles revealed the fact that they were Mrs. Torp and old Dimity Stone.

It gave him a queer shock to think that this tatterdemalion shrew in rusty black was actually Gerda's mother. For the least fragment of a second he was aware of a shiver of animal panic, like a man who hears the ice he is crossing bend and groan under him; but he forced himself to walk straight up to them and salute them by name.

"I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Torp," he said cheerfully. "How do you do, Dimity? You and I haven't met for several long days."

"Hark at him, Mrs. Stone," gasped Gerda's mother. "Hark at him, how 'ee do coax a body! He do look and speak just as I was telling 'ee, don't 'ee, now? If I hadn't told 'ee, honest to God, how the gentleman spoke, ye'd have never known it, would 'ee, Mrs. Stone?"

The withered face of Mrs. Torp remained turned toward her companion as she uttered this ambiguous welcome. She seemed unable to give Wolf so much as one single glance from her little vixen eyes, over which two artificial pansies, hanging from the battered bonnet on her head, jiggled disconcertingly.

But old Dimity retained Wolf's fingers quite a long while in her bony hand; and with absorbed and searching interest, as if she had been a fortune-teller, she peered into his countenance.

"The gentleman be far from what thee or any others have reckoned," repeated the crone slowly. "I've always known you were a deep one, Mr. Solent," she added.

"I'm glad you think better of me than Mrs. Torp does, Dimity," threw in Wolf, and he glanced anxiously over their heads toward the boundary of the field, his mind full of the deserted Christie.

“I think of ‘ee as one what *speaks* fair enough,” grumbled Gerda’s mother, “but ’tis deeds *I* waits for. As I said to Torp this very mornin’... ‘Thy fair-spoken young gent,’ I said, ‘be only another Redfern; and all the country do know how daft *he* were!’ Squire Urquhart must have ’em daft! Daft must they be for he, as I said to Torp. And that’s because it’s only the daft ‘uns what’ll serve for his cantrips — the girt bog-wuzzel ‘ee is!”

Wolf detected a very sagacious expression in old Dimity’s eye as she dropped his fingers at this.

“This gent bain’t no more a Redfern, Jane Torp, than a pond-pike be a gudgeon. What I’ve a-said to ee in neighbour-fashion I’d say now to ‘ee on Bible-oath.”

There was a dead silence for a moment between the three of them, broken only by the gibberish of the two clowns, which sounded like the chatter of a pair of impudent parakeets amid the slow, rich Dorsetshire speech about them.

Without pausing to think of the effect of his words on Gerda’s mother, Wolf could not restrain himself from uttering at this juncture the question which so occupied his mind. “By the way, Mrs. Torp, have you, by any chance, seen Miss Malakite here this afternoon? I wanted to find her.”

Mrs. Torp nudged her companion with the handle of her umbrella.

“So ye’re after her, too, are ye, Mister? What do ‘ee make o’ that, Dimity Stone? Hee! Hee! Hee! The gentleman from London must have a sweetheart for Wednesday and a sweetheart for Thursday. But you have a care, Mr. Solent! Our Gerda bain’t one for sharing her fairings; and she’ll let ‘ee know it! Won’t she, Dimity Stone?”

Wolf felt unable to decide whether this outburst, under the pressure of which the thin cheeks of Mrs. Torp tightened over their bones till they were as white as the skin of a toad-stool, was just ordinary Blacksod humour or was malignity. He contented himself with taking off his hat, wishing them a pleasant evening, and hurrying away.

As he moved towards the southern boundary of the field, he found his mind beset with a burden of tumultuous misgiving. Mrs. Torp's malicious "Hee! Hee! Hee!" continued to croak like a devil's frog in the pit of his stomach; and he remembered with hardly less discomfort the queer look that the old Dimity had given him. He *must* find Christie! That was the one essential necessity. Every step he took towards that ragged little hedge increased his nervous agitation.

"Why did chance throw them both in my way at this same moment?" he thought, as he walked automatically forward. And then a still more furtive and dangerous whisper entered his mind. "*Why didn't I meet Christie first?*"

The ghastly treachery of this final speculation, coming to him on the very morrow of the "yellow bracken," only made him shake his head, as if freeing himself from a thicket of brambles, and stride forward with more reckless resolution than ever.

Long afterwards he could recall every slightest sensation that he had as he crossed that empty portion of the fair-field. One of these sensations was a vivid awareness of the sardonic grimacing of that man in the churchyard. The perversity of his father seemed physically to weigh upon him. He had the feeling that he was himself reproducing some precise piece of paternal misdoing. He felt shamelessly like him! He felt as though his arms were swinging as *his* arms used to... his legs striding the very stride of *his* legs!

He had now left the last tent far behind, and was approaching the low thickset hedge that separated the castle-field from the castle-lane.

As he came up to the hedge, he nearly stumbled over a half-skinned, half-eaten rabbit, one of whose glazed wide-open eyes fixed itself upon him from the ground with a protesting appeal.

Mechanically he stooped down, and, lifting the thing up by its ears, placed it among the young dock-leaves and the new shoots of hedge-parsley.

Then he leaned both his arms over the top of the brambles, and, raising himself on tiptoe, peered into the lane beyond.

Ah! He had not then come to no purpose!

A little way down the lane, under a closed and carefully wired gate leading to the castle-ruins, crouched the unmistakable figure of Christie Malakite.

The girl was on her knees, her legs crooked under her and her hands clasped on her lap. By her side, fallen to the ground, were her hat and some sort of paper parcel. She lifted her head and saw him there; but remained motionless, just staring at him without a sign. Wolf tightened his long overcoat round his knees and forced his way straight through the thick brambles. A couple of minutes later he was kneeling by her side on the grass, hugging her tear-stained face against his ribs and stroking her hair with his hands. “I’ve had a hunt for you... a hunt for you!” he panted. “What did you come to this damned place for? Well! I’ve got you now, anyway. I don’t know what I should have done if I hadn’t found you. But I’ve hunted you down... like a hare, my dear... just like a hare!”

“I’m... a... little... fool!” she gasped faintly. “I’ll be all right in a minute. I ought... to have... known better than... to have come here! The boys were kind... but, of course, they wanted... to enjoy themselves. I was a burden on them... and then I felt... I felt I couldn’t... bear it!”

She pressed her face against his coat, struggling to hold back her tears.

Moving his hands to her shoulders, and bending down, he touched the top of her head with his lips. Her hair, neatly divided by a carefully brushed parting, was so silky and fine that he felt as if his kiss had penetrated to the very centre of her skull. But she did not draw away from him. She only buried her forehead deeper in the folds of his heavy coat.

There was a tuft of loosely-growing stitchwort in the hedge by the gale-post; and this frail plant, as he surveyed it across her crouching form, mingled with his wild thoughts. Had anything like this ever happened to a man before... that on the day after such an ecstasy he should feel as he felt now? “I must be a monster!” he said to himself. “Am I going to begin snatching at the soul and body of every girl I meet down here?” With the cluster of stitchwort still illuminating his thought, as a flower-scroll illuminates a monkish script, he now struggled desperately to justify himself.

“This feeling,” he protested, “is a different thing altogether. It’s pity... that’s what it is! And, of course, Gerda being so beautiful, pity doesn’t...”

Christie lifted up her head now, and sat back, hugging her knees and staring at him. He, too, changed his position, so that his shoulders leant against the lower bars of the gate. “It’s queer how natural it seems to be... to be with you like this,” he said slowly.

She gave a little nod. “I used to tell myself stories...” she began, searching his face intently as if what she wanted to say lay hidden in its lines. “I feel so different now,” she went on, “that it would be easy to tell you....” Once more her voice sank into silence.

“It’s better to be alone,” he echoed, “unless you can think aloud. I’ve been walking about this fair-field all the afternoon and talking to everyone; but I couldn’t think aloud until this moment.”

They were both silent, staring helplessly at each other.

“I wish you were a boy, Christie!” he brought out abruptly.

Something in the peevish gravity of this must have tickled her fancy, for she smiled at him with a free, unrestrained, schoolgirlish smile.

"I used to wish that myself," she murmured gently; and then she sighed, her smile fading as quickly as it had come.

He knitted his heavy eyebrows and scowled at her in deep thought.

Two persistent sounds forced their identities into his drugged consciousness. The first was the brazen clamour of the whirligig engines. The second was the whistling of a blackbird. This latter sound had already assumed that peculiar mellowness which meant that the sunrays were falling horizontally upon that spot, and that the long March afternoon was drawing to its close.

It was impossible that this bird's voice could fail to bring to his mind the events of yesterday's twilight and that up-turned face at which he had gazed so exultantly in the gathering river-mists. To drown the blackbird's notes, he began hurriedly telling her one thing after another of his afternoon's adventures. When he came to his conversation with Miss Gault, they both instinctively shifted their position; and he found himself helping her to adjust the loosened belt of her old-fashioned cloak with a gesture that was almost paternal.

"One thing I cannot understand," he said.

"Well?" she murmured.

"I cannot understand how Olwen should feel towards you as they tell me she does."

The girl's forehead wrinkled itself into a strained, pinched intensity; but all she said was, "I could never take care of any child as well as Mattie Smith."

"I don't believe you," he retorted bluntly.

He avoided her eyes now; and, as he looked away into the great elm-tree that grew near the gate, he caught sight of a large nest up there.

"Is that a rook's nest?" he asked, pointing it out to her with upraised arm.

Christie turned and peered upwards.

“A missel-thrush’s, I think,” she said, after a second’s hesitation. “Rooks’ nests are all sticks... and they’re higher up, too.”

With lifted heads they both stared into, the elm-tree, and, beyond the tree, into the cold March sky.

“Why not take us as we are,” he said slowly, apparently addressing the missel-thrush’s nest, “as two hunted, harassed consciousnesses, meeting by pure chance in endless blue space and finding out that they have the same kind of mind?”

Their heads sank down after this, and Wolf automatically fumbled for his cigarettes and then consciously let them go.

“I’ve never felt as much at ease with anyone as with you, Christie... except perhaps my mother. No, not even except her.”

“I think we *are* alike,” she said quietly. And then, with the same schoolgirlish simple amusement that had struck him before, “We’re too alike, I think, to do much harm to anyone!”

Her face grew suddenly grave, and she stretched out her thin arm and touched Wolf lightly on the knee. “You must be prepared for one thing,” she said. “You must be prepared to find that I haven’t a trace of what people call the ‘moral sense.’ ”

“I’ll risk that danger!” he retorted lightly. “Besides, if you’ve got *no* conscience, I’m worse off still. I’ve got a diseased conscience!”

She didn’t even smile at this sally. With a quick wrinkling of her brow, as if under a twinge of physical discomfort, she scrambled to her feet.

“I must get my bicycle,” she said, with a little shiver. “Father will be waiting for his supper.”

Wolf rose too; and they stood rather awkwardly side by side, while the blackbird flew off with an angry scream.

"Where is your bicycle?" he asked lamely; and as he saw her and felt her, standing there by his side, so pitfully devoid of all physical magnetism, he could not resist a chilly recognition that something of the mysterious appeal that had drawn him to her had slipped away and got lost.

He felt in that second that it had been a piece of pure madness to have wished that all this had happened before yesterday's "yellow bracken."

She glanced up at him with a quick, searching look. Then she tightened her cloak resolutely round her. "It's in the Lovelace stables," she said. "I can easily find it. You needn't come."

"Of course I'll come! I'll go with you and put you on it; and then I'll come back for my mother."

"It's pity I feel," he said to himself. "I've got Gerda for good and all. It's just pity I feel."

They followed the lane westward, skirting the edge of the fair-field. When they reached the foot of "The Slopes," they saw the whole of Ramsgard outspread before them. The sunset-mist, rising up from the River Lunt, threw over the little town the sort of glamour that cities wear in old fantastic prints. Vaguely, under the anæsthesia of this diffused glory in the chilly air, he marvelled at the mad chance that had plunged him into these two girls' lives with this disturbing simultaneousness. He began furtively trying to annihilate with his imagination first one life and then the other from his obstinate preoccupation. But the effort proved hopelessly futile! To conceive of the future without Gerda's loveliness was impossible. But equally was it impossible to cover up this strange new feeling. Only "pity,"... but a pity that had a quivering sweetness in it!

"You're all right now?" he enquired abruptly, as they crossed the railway-track.

“Absolutely,” she answered firmly, evidently recognizing that this allusion to her original trouble was a sign of a certain withdrawal in her companion. “And please, please, believe me when I tell you that I hardly ever... no, practically never... give way like that.”

“What do you think did it?” he blurted out clumsily. “Those silly boys deserting you?”

She made no reply at all to this; and he experienced a wave of embarrassment that brought a hot prickling sensation into his cheeks.

“You’ve been very kind to me,” she said unexpectedly, in a clear emphatic voice. And then she added very slowly, pronouncing the words as if each of them were a heavy bar of silver and she were an exhausted stevedore emptying the hold of a ship, “Kinder... to me... than anyone’s... ever been... in the whole of my life.”

These words of hers, healing his momentary discomfort, gave him such happiness, that, as they entered the Lovelace stables and she moved in front of him across the cobblestones, he furtively rubbed his hands together, just as he would have done if he had been alone.

“What a good thing you came over here this afternoon,” he said, as he wheeled her bicycle out of the yard.

“I don’t know about that!” she answered promptly, with a flicker of her peculiar elfish humour; and it turned out to be the tone of these words beyond all others, that remained with him when she was gone. They had the tone of some sort of half-human personality... some changeling out of the purer elements... upon whose nature whatever impressions fell would always fall with a certain mitigation, with a certain lenient tenuity, like the fall of water upon water, or of air upon air!

CHRISTIE

THE CHEAP WOODEN clock on the mantelpiece of his small parlour made itself audible to the ears of Wolf across the little passageway as he stood above his kitchen-stove. Eight times the clock struck; and the old vivid consciousness of what time was and was not caught his mind and held it. It was not a consciousness of the passing of time as it affected his own life that arrested him. Of that kind of individual awareness he had scarcely any trace. To himself he always seemed neither young nor old. Indeed, of bodily self-consciousness — that weather-eye, kept open to the addition of years and months upon his personal head — he had nothing at all. What he lived in was not any compact, continuous sense of personal identity, but rather *a series of disembodied sensations*, some physical, some mental, in which his identity was absolutely merged and lost. He was vividly aware of these momentary sensations in relation to other feelings of the same kind, some long past and some anticipated in his imagination; but he was accustomed to regard all these not from out of the skin, so to speak, of a living organism, but from a detachment so remote and far away as to seem almost outside both the flowing of time and the compactness of personality.

Eight o'clock in the morning of the first day of June was what that timepiece said to him now; and his mind paused upon the recognition of the vast company of clocks and watches all the world over, ticking, ticking, ticking — sending up, in tiny metallic beats, vibrations of human computation into the depths of unthinkable space.

He pushed open the iron cover of the stove and jabbed with his poker at the fire inside. Then he took up a wooden spoon and stirred the contents of an enamelled pot of porridge that stood there, moving it aside from the heat. A thrill of satisfaction ran through him when he had done this, and he rubbed his hands together and made a “face,” drawing back his under-lip in the manner of a gargoyle, and constricting the muscles of his chin.

In less than half-an-hour, he thought, he would be enjoying his breakfast at that kitchen-table with Gerda, lovely and sulky as a young animal after her abrupt awakening.

He ran up the short flight of creaking stairs, carpeted with new linoleum; and with the merest pretence of a tap at the door entered their bedroom. The girl was lying on her back fast asleep, her fair hair spread out, loose and bright in the sunshine, across the indented pillow of her recent bedfellow. Her arms were outstretched above the coverlet, and one of her hands was hanging down over the side of the bed. His entrance did not arouse her, and he stood for a while at her side, meditating on the mysterious simplicity of her especial kind of loveliness.

Then he bent down, kissed her into consciousness, laughed at her scolding, and with one resolute swing of his arms lifted her bodily from the bed, set her on her feet on the floor, and hugged her to his heart, struggling and indignant. The warmth of her body under the childish white night-gown she wore, buttoned close up to her chin, gave him a rough, earthy, animal ecstasy. He had already discovered that it was more delicious to hold her like this, he himself fully awake and dressed, and she as she was, than under any other circumstances. A pleasant element of the unhabitual and the predatory sweetened for him that particular embrace. “Don’t!” she cried, struggling to push him away. “Don’t, Wolf! Let me go, I tell you!” But he went on kissing her and caressing her as if it had been the first time he had ever taken her in his arms.

At last, lifting her clean off her feet, with both arms under her body, he put her back upon the bed and drew the bedclothes over her.

"There!" he cried. "How does *that* feel?"

But the girl turned round with her face to the wall and refused to speak.

"Eight o'clock, young lady," he cried brusquely. "Breakfast will be ready in a quarter of an hour."

For answer she only pulled the bedclothes more tightly round her neck.

"If you haven't time to wash or do your hair, you must come down as you are. Where's your dressing-gown?" And he looked vaguely round the room. "Hurry up, now!" he added. "Remember all that's going to happen today."

There was a movement under the twisted sheet.

"You're a wretch!" she gasped, in a muffled voice.

"Never mind what I am. Keep your scoldings till you get downstairs. I've got an exciting piece of news for you."

This brought her round with a jerk.

"What are you hiding up in your mind now? Tell me quick! Tell me, Wolf!"

But he only laughed at her, waved his hand, and went out.

Running downstairs again, he returned to the kitchen, moved the steaming kettle to the side of the stove, turned the spoon in the oatmeal, and then, crossing the little passage where his own grey overcoat and Gerda's cream-coloured cloak, hanging side by side on their adjoining pegs, regarded him with equivocal intentness, he opened the front-door and went out into the road.

In one warm inrushing wave the fragrance of the whole West Country seemed to flow through him as he came forth. Sap-sweet emanations from the leafy recesses of all the Dorset woods on that side of High Stoy seemed to mingle at that moment with the rank, grassy breath of all the meadowlands of Somerset.

The iron railings in front of that row of meagre, nondescript houses opened upon the airy confluence of two vast provinces of leafiness and sunshine — to the right Melbury Bub, with its orchards and dairies; to the left Glastonbury, with its pastures and fens — while the umbrageous "auras" of these two regions, blending together in the air above the roofs of Blacksod, merged into yet a third essence, an essence sweeter than either — the very soul of the whole wide land lying between the English Channel and the Bristol Channel.

Number Thirty-Seven Preston Lane was the last house in a row of small workmen's cottages at the extreme western limit of the town of Blacksod. What met Wolf's actual eyes as he clicked the little gate in the iron railings and emerged upon the road, was only a small portion of the secret causes of his happiness that June morning. He had long craved to establish himself in just such a nondescript row of unpretentious dwellings on the outskirts of a town. He had always had a feeling that the magic of simple delights came with purer impact upon the mind when unalloyed by the "artistic" or the "picturesque." Large houses and large gardens, pretty houses and pretty gardens, seemed to intrude themselves, with all their responsibilities of possession, between his senses and the free, clear flow of unconfined, unpersonalized beauty. His feeling about the matter had something in common with the instinct that has created the monk's cell — only the cell that Wolf preferred was a lath-and-plaster workman's villa, a place possessed of no single æsthetic quality, except perhaps that of being easily kept very neat and clean.

The fact of living here with Gerda under conditions identical with those of the Blacksod carpenters, bricklayers, and shop-assistants, threw into beautiful relief every incident of his life’s routine. Preparing food, preparing fires, the very floor-scrubbing wherein he shared, took on for him, just because of this absence of the deliberately “artistic,” a rarefied poetical glamour.

He moved out now into the middle of the road and surveyed the landscape. As he did so, two very distinct and contradictory odours assailed his nostrils. There were no houses across the way, nothing but a foul-smelling ditch, the recipient of sewage from an adjoining pig-yard; and beyond that, an enormously high hedge, on the top of which, where no child could reach, grew clumps of honeysuckle and sprays of wild roses. The smell of these flowers contended oddly enough with the smell of pigs’ dung; and the two odours, thus subtly mingled, had become for him a constant accompaniment to the thoughts that passed through his mind as he went in and out of his tiny front-garden.

The pigsty was on his right as he stood facing the ditch; but on his left there grew in the meadow just beyond the hedge a large ash-tree — a tree from among whose grey upcurving branches a thrush was wont to sing, always increasing the vehemence of its ecstasy till the moment when the road grew quite dark. The bird began singing now, and its thrush-notes made Wolf think of those wild blackbird-notes of Gerda, as they flooded the meadows on the day when she lost her virginity.

Thinking of Gerda as he stared up into the ash-tree, he began to meditate on the extraordinary good luck he had had ever since he had come to the West Country. “I must be born under a lucky star,” he thought; and his mind set itself to review the most recent examples of this good fortune.

He recalled the satisfactory manner in which his iron-willed mother had suddenly receded from all her opposition to his union with Gerda. He recalled the equally satisfactory generosity of Mr. Urquhart, who had come forward with an offer to let her go on living at Lenty Cottage free of rent as long as Wolf himself remained his secretary.

He recalled the extraordinary kindness displayed toward him by Darnley Otter, who had not only lent him the fifty pounds necessary to buy furniture, but had also introduced him to the authorities of the Blacksod Grammar School, where he was now earning a pound a week by giving lessons every morning in English and History.

“Luck! luck! luck!” he said in his heart, rubbing his hands together. Through his thin indoor shoes the magnetism of the earth seemed at that moment pouring into every nerve of his body. Happiness, such as he had rarely experienced, flooded his being; and the fantastic idea came into his head that if he were to die now he would in some subtle way cheat death.

“I must remember this moment,” he said to himself. “Whatever happens to me henceforth, I must remember this moment, and be grateful to the gods!”

Just as he opened the iron gate and glanced at the two or three newly-budded plants that were coming out in his little patch of garden, the owner of the pigsty, a ruffianly curmudgeon who earned his living in more than one disreputable way, took it into his head to pour out a great bucket of swill into the pig-trough, an action that caused so ear-piercing a volley of bestial shrieks, that Wolf stopped aghast, his heart almost ceasing to beat, and, turning his head, threw an agitated glance toward that sinister little erection of tarred boardings.

His first idea was that one of the animals was being slaughtered; but the sound of voracious gobbling which now reached his ears reassured him.

“He’s only feeding them,” he said to himself, and entered the house. In the kitchen he found Gerda already beginning her bowl of porridge.

"What's the news, Wolf?" she enquired, with the indistinct voice of a greedy child, turning, as she did so, her cream-clogged spoon upside-down in her mouth, so as to lick it clean. "What's this you were going to tell me?"

"Guess, sweetheart!" he said contentedly, emptying what was left of the cream-jug over his own oatmeal. "Nothing, in fact, could be better. Urquhart announced last night that he has decided to go slow with our History. You know what a hurry he's been in? But he now says he's decided to make a complete job of it, even if it takes five years to finish."

The infantile sulkiness in Gerda's face only deepened at his words, and with an impatient gesture she stretched out her arms and tossed back her head. Then she tightened the green ribbon with which she had fastened her locks, and fixed upon him a cloudy, satiric frown. She appeared so enchanting in her crossness, that Wolf forgot everything as he watched these movements, and for a moment he just looked at her in silence.

"You don't think much of my news, then?" he said presently. "But you don't realize how awkward it would have been if this confounded book had come to an end this Autumn. Where would we have got another hundred pounds from, eh, sweetheart? Tell me that!"

"A hundred pounds!" the girl muttered sarcastically.

"Yes, a hundred pounds," he retorted. "Two-thirds of our income."

He rose and moved to the stove, to get the kettle to refill their teapot.

"But that's not all; so you needn't look sour. There's something much more amusing than that." She waited impatiently now, and he went on. "Urquhart doesn't want me over there this afternoon and Mother's coming to tea."

The girl's sulkiness changed in a moment to something like pitiful dismay.

"Oh, Wolf!" she exclaimed. "This is the first time."

“She’s been twice to lunch,” he said.

But Gerda’s eyes remained troubled and very wide open, and the corners of her under-lip drooped.

“Darnley was here, too — both times!” she gasped. “We’ve never had her alone, and I’ve got no clothes for an afternoon.”

“No clothes?”

“You know what I mean, perfectly well,” she went on peevishly. “People like your mother don’t have the same things on in the morning as they do in the afternoon.”

Wolf watched her with narrowing eyelids. He recalled that first walk with her up the slope of Babylon Hill, and his pursuit of her among the earthworks of Poll’s Camp. Why did all girls introduce into life an element of the conventional — into that life of which they themselves were the most mysterious expression? He became suddenly aware of the existence, in the beautiful head opposite him, of a whole region of interests and values that had nothing to do with love-making and nothing to do with romance. Was love itself, then, and all its mysteries, only a kind of magic gate leading into a land full of alien growths and unfamiliar soils?

“Gerda, my sweet Gerda!” he cried reproachfully. “How absurd! What does it matter? It’s only my mother. She must take us as she finds us.”

The girl pouted and smiled scornfully.

“That’s all you know!” she retorted. “Your mother’s a woman, isn’t she?”

Wolf stared at her. Was there then some queer inner world, parallel to the one that was important to him, wherein women encountered one another, and without whose ritual life was completely unreal to them? “God!” he thought to himself. “If this *is* so, the sooner I get the secret of this ‘other reality,’ the better for both Gerda and me!”

“Well, I only beg one thing of you, sweetheart,” he went on aloud, “and that is that you don’t try and make those funny scones again that you made for Christie. I’ll get some halfpenny buns or tea-cakes at Pimpernel’s.”

“Halfpenny buns!” she repeated contemptuously.

He began to raise his voice. “They’re the very nicest things! How silly you are! But I don’t care what you get, as long as there’s plenty of thin bread-and-butter.”

“I can’t cut it! I never could cut it!” she cried helplessly, her enormous grey eyes beginning to fill with tears.

It was then that Wolf began to realize that it was necessary to be as indulgent to the “realities” of this alien array of feelings as if they had been those of a being of a different planet. He got up from his seat and walked round their square kitchen-table, a table that according to his own caprice had been left bare of any covering. Standing over the girl, he bent her head back with both his hands and kissed her many times.

It seemed to him, as he did this, that he had done this very same thing in another room, and even in another country. He remained motionless behind her for a moment when he had released her, and lifted his head. Where had all this occurred before? A queer feeling came over him as if she and he were acting a part in some fantastic dream-world, and that he had only to make one enormous effort, to find he had destroyed for both of them the whole shadow-scenery of their life.

But Gerda, knowing nothing of what was passing in his mind, turned round in her chair and pushed him away with all the strength of her young arm.

“Don’t be so annoying, Wolf!” she cried. “There! I’m hungry, I tell you. Haven’t you got any eggs for us?”

He moved away obediently to the stove, made his arrangements for boiling three eggs — two for himself and one for her — and remained there on guard, his watch in his hand.

The audible ticking of his watch, as he concentrated his mind upon it, answered the louder ticking of the clock in the parlour across the passage. “Time again!” he sighed. And then he thought, “But I’ve got the power to deal with far more serious jolts to my happiness than this finding out that a girl’s ‘reality’ is not my ‘reality’!”

In a minute or two, when he had set a china egg-cup in front of each of them and had placed a brown egg within hers and a white one in his own, and had resumed his seat, he found that his quick adjustment of the wheels and cogs of his mind had proved successful. “It doesn’t matter in the least,” he thought, “whether we understand each other or not. My existence is necessary to her, just as hers is to me. Neither of us can really spoil anything as long as that’s the case.”

Whatever secret ways Gerda had of adjusting the machinery of *her* mind, seemed to have been as successful as his own; for when she had satisfied her hunger and filled her teacup with strong, sweet tea, she lifted her head quite cheerfully.

“I’ll go to Pimpernel’s myself,” she said. “I saw something there yesterday that I’m sure your mother would like. And I’ll make toast. That’ll be just as nice as bread-and-butter.”

Wolf declared himself completely satisfied at this prospect.

“You go up now, sweetheart,” he said, “and finish dressing, and make the bed. I’ll wash up. I’ll just have time for that. There, do go quick! I don’t want anyone to knock at the door and find you like that. We’ve got to keep up the prestige of Preston Lane!”

He spoke jestingly, but there was an element of concern at the back of his mind. He had had some uncomfortable moments now and again, when tradesmen's boys had come to the door at an early hour. He hated to think of their ménage being a laughing-stock to all the Lob Torps and Bob Weevils of the town.

It was a complete puzzle to him the way in which Gerda made such a fuss about the conventions where his mother was concerned, while to the Bob Weevils of the place she let down every barrier as completely as if she'd drifted into Blacksod from the primeval woods of Arcady.

As he watched her now, rushing upstairs like a young Mænad, he remembered how the fancy had come into his mind, that afternoon at Poll's Camp, that the West-Saxon Torp blood in her had been crossed at some very early stage with an altogether different strain.

Hurriedly gathering the dishes together on the edge of the sink, he proceeded to do what would certainly not have passed unobserved by a more practical mistress of the house. He proceeded to hold cups, saucers, plates, bowls, knives, forks, and pots and pans under a tap of perfectly cold water, rubbing them and scraping them with his bare fingers, and then drying them violently — greasy as most of them were — with the kitchen-towel. As he did this, he caught a glimpse out of the window of a stunted little laburnum-tree, which grew in their back-yard; and he noticed, as he had often noticed before, how one of its boughs was leafless and seemed to be stretching out, in a sorrowful, fumbling sort of way, towards their neighbour's fence, above which grew a sturdy lilac-bush, covered now with glossy heart-shaped leaves.

On this occasion, however, for some unaccountable reason, the sight of this forlorn branch brought vividly to his mind the figure of Christie Malakite, as he had seen her that day, crouched in the castle-lane. And with that image there came to him — as if a door had unexpectedly opened in the remotest wall of his mind’s fortress — a deep, sickening craving, it was hard to tell for what — a craving that pierced him like the actual thrust of a spear. The bareness and tension of that extended branch had won his sympathy before; but today, as he rubbed the porridge-pot furiously with the greasy towel and emptied the hot kettle-water into it, the sight of the thing seemed to disturb the complacency of his whole being.

A minute or two later, when he saw it again from the window of their small privy, which abutted upon the same back-yard, he got a sense of being hemmed in, burdened, besieged, while some vague, indistinct appeal, hard to define, was calling upon him for aid.

He moved out to the foot of the staircase, and, with his hand upon the bannister, stood motionless, lost in strange thoughts. These glimpses of certain fixed objects, seen daily, yet always differently, through bedroom-windows, scullery-windows, privy-windows, had, from his childhood, possessed a curious interest for him. It was as if he got from them a sort of runic handwriting, the “little language” of Chance itself, commenting upon what was, and is, and was to come. As he stood there, he could hear Gerda moving about upstairs, and he hesitated as to whether to run up and speak to her, or to go out, as he generally did, without further farewell.

He decided finally upon the latter course; something at the bottom of his mind, just then, making anything else seem strained and unnatural. Snatching up his oak-stick, therefore, he let himself out of the house with deliberate quietness, and walked with rapid steps down the road.

His way to the Grammar School led him past the confectioner’s shop; and at the sight of the name “Pimpernel” over the door, he decided to run in for a moment and see for himself if the particular tea-cakes that he had in mind were available that day.

Not finding what he wanted, he was on the point of going out again, when he heard a familiar voice proceeding from the interior part of the shop. It was too late to retreat. He was already recognized; and in another second he found himself face to face with Mrs. Torp. Gerda's mother had been engaged in persuading old Ruth Pimpernel to sell her a loaf of yesterday's bread at half-price.

Shaking hands vigorously with this uncongenial apparition, whose shrewish aspect was not modified by the dirty black bonnet she wore balanced on the top of her head, Wolf found himself propitiating the woman to the extreme limit of a somewhat unctuous geniality.

He had often noticed that when his blood had been quickened by rapid walking, he had a tendency to exaggerate his natural *bonhomie* to a degree that was almost fatuous.

"You haven't come to see us for such a long while, Mrs. Torp," he cried. "Gerda and I can't get on without seeing something of you. It's too ridiculous" — so he blundered on, in complete disregard of the sly expression in Mrs. Torp's eyes, like the expression of a tethered dog leering at a hutch of tame hares— "it's too ridiculous to have you in the same place and to see so little of you!"

It was impossible even for the perspicacity of Joan Torp to put down this blustering friendliness to its true account — to the pleasant glow, namely, diffused through Wolf's veins by his rapid walk; and so, with a nearer approach to a benevolent grimace than he had ever seen on her grim features, she assured him with unhesitating emphasis that she would, "as sure as us be standing here, Mr. Solent," drop in for tea that very afternoon at Preston Lane.

The appearance of the shop-girl with the stale loaf destined for the monument-maker's table — Mr. Torp abominated stale bread — prevented the woman from detecting the cloud that descended on Wolf's brow on receipt of this prompt acceptance of his hospitality. It was, indeed, only when he was hurrying out of the confectioner's shop that he had the wit to turn round and fling back a suggestion that if Mrs. Torp went over there, now at once, her daughter would be very pleased to see her.

"I'll leave it to Gerda," he thought to himself. "She'll manage it somehow."

His mind, however, remained all that morning, as he sat at his desk in the Grammar School fourth-form room, asking questions about Edward Longshanks, teasingly preoccupied with this encounter.

"She may not go there at all," he thought. "It isn't her way to go there in the morning. They're so funny, those two, about their houses. Well, we must chance it and hope for the best!"

And then, as he enlarged to his class upon that formidable black sarcophagus in Westminster Abbey, with its grim inscription, the under-flow of his mind kept fretting against all the little incidents that had led to this annoying issue.

"If I hadn't stayed so long at that confounded privy-window, I should have got out of Pimpernel's before she came in. And if I'd stopped to say good-bye to Gerda, she'd have gone before I got there at all. Damn! It's like the rope, the water, the fire, the dog, and the old woman getting home from market."

When his class was let out and he himself escaped into the street at half-past twelve, it occurred to him that it was curious how faint an impact upon his consciousness this business of teaching history made. He was clever enough to do the whole job with the surface of his mind. "What the devil do those boys think of me?" he wondered grimly. "I forget their existence as soon as I'm out of sight of them."

He met Darnley Otter, at that moment, issuing forth from his Latin lesson with a pile of papers in his hand.

Darnley greeted him with more than his usual cordiality; and as Wolf looked into his friend’s strangely-coloured eyes, he felt that peculiar sensation of relief which men are wont to feel when they encounter each other after the confusion of sex-conflicts.

Darnley laid his free hand on his friend’s arm, and they moved down the street together; but for a while Wolf heard nothing of what he was saying, so occupied was he with a sudden question, gaping like a crack in a hot stubble-field in the very floor of his mind, that had just then obtruded itself. Was he really “in love,” in the proper sense of that word, with his sweet bedfellow? “But very likely I could never be ‘in love’ in *that* sense with anyone,” he said to himself as they walked along.

And then he became aware that Darnley had been speaking to him for some while.

“I don’t see why I shouldn’t take you,” he was saying now. “I *would*, like a shot, if she hadn’t been so funny the other day when I talked about you. But I expect there’s nothing in that! Perhaps you hurt her feelings in some way. She’s a queer little oddity. I found that out long ago. One has to be awfully careful.”

These words, and other words before them, now began to penetrate Wolf’s consciousness, as they might have done with a person recovering from an anæsthetic.

“Sorry,” he muttered apologetically, standing stock-still on the pavement. “I wasn’t listening.”

Darnley stroked his pointed beard and looked him up and down.

“You’re boy-drunk, poor devil,” he murmured sympathetically. “It does take time to wear off. You’re repeating to yourself what you’d like to have retorted to Rintoul Minor when he made you feel a fool. I’m often like that myself.”

“No, I’m not,” protested the other. “But what *were* you saying?”

“Nothing very startling,” said Darnley quietly, pulling him forward by the arm. “It’s only I thought I’d take you with me to Christie’s to lunch. Gerda won’t mind, once in a way, will she?”

Wolf drew his heavy eyebrows down so low that his startled gaze gleamed out at his companion like lantern-light from a thatched shed. “I... don’t... suppose so,” he muttered hesitatingly.

The truth was that Darnley’s suggestion had set something vibrating violently deep down within him, like the thuds of a buried drum played by an earth-gnome. So this was what things had been tending to since he had caught sight of that laburnum-branch?

Darnley smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

“Don’t say any more,” he cried. “I see you don’t want to come. Well! Off with you, then... back to your Saxon beauty. Christie’s expecting me, anyway.”

But Wolf held him with an appeal in his eye.

“It’s only that Gerda and I have got special things to do today,” he said. “Under ordinary conditions I’d have loved to come.”

Darnley looked at him gravely. “No bad news, I hope?” he said.

Wolf was silent. All manner of queer fancies passed, like the shadows of rooks over a pond, across the surface of his brain. One thing particularly he found himself dwelling upon. “Didn’t seem friendly to me, eh?” And he recalled the only two occasions on which he had seen Christie alone since his marriage.

On both those occasions she had avoided all allusion to the day of the horse-show. But she had been self-possessed and natural, had laughed at his jests, had talked freely with him about Mattie, had not even drawn back from a passing reference to Olwen. And though her allusions to Gerda were faint and slight, they were friendly and sympathetic. But Wolf remembered well how he had experienced a profound astonishment at the abysses of pride and reserve into which this frail being had the power of retreating.

"Gerda has been a bit surprised," he said at last, observing that Darnley was growing impatient to be off, "that a friend like Christie hasn't been in to see us more often."

His companion freed his sleeve from the nervous clutch with which Wolf quite unconsciously had seized it.

"That's silly of Gerda," he said curtly. "She ought to understand Christie better than that. Christie never goes out to see people. People have to come and see *her*. Look here, Solent" — and as he spoke, a gleam of boyish eagerness came into his face— "why don't you run back home now, have a bit of lunch, and then both you and Gerda come round to Christie's? I'll tell her you're coming. She'll keep some hot chocolate for you. She makes splendid hot chocolate."

Wolf hesitated. "We've got my mother coming to tea," he said. "And perhaps someone else too," he added, thinking of Mrs. Torp.

"That's all right. There'll be plenty of time for that. It's not half-past two, anyway. Do go off now, there's a good chap; and be sure you bring Gerda."

Wolf remained silent, uncertain, ill at ease, tapping the ground with his stick.

"All right," he said at last. "I'll do as you say. We shan't be long over our lunch, that's certain. But make it plain to Christie that we're only coming for a very short time. Tell her we've got to get back to tea. That'll reassure her," he added sardonically, "if we get on her nerves."

“Don’t be an ass, Solent,” was his friend’s farewell-remark as they turned to go their different ways.

It took Wolf as a rule exactly twenty minutes to walk from the Grammar School gate to his own door; but this time he lengthened the way by debouching into Monmouth Street, where there were no shops and scarcely any traffic.

The hot June sun was shining down almost perpendicularly on the warm, uneven cobblestones of this quiet alley, stones that left room for the occasional out-cropping of thin moss-soft blades of grass. Wolf walked along slowly, under the high brick wall which enclosed the pleasant garden of a certain Lawyer Gault, a remote relative of Selena’s. He came to a spot where the branches of a tall lime-tree just inside the lawyer’s garden threw a dreamy pattern of motionless shadows upon the stones at his feet. There he stood still, while those dark patterns upon the sunlit ground made that portion of the earth seem porous and insubstantial. And then again that drum-like beating in the depths of his heart brought up the vision of Christie Malakite, huddled and crouched, as he had seen her on the day of the Fair.

Making no attempt this time to restrain his thoughts, he discovered, as he gave himself up to his mental disloyalty, a curious emotional phenomenon. He discovered that the peculiar glamour which had always hovered for him like a diaphanous cloud round the impersonal idea of girlhood, had concentrated itself upon the image of Christie. He plunged into a very strange aspect of his feelings, as he stood on those cobblestones and stared at those dark shadows. The thought of Gerda’s warmth gave him a voluptuous thrill, direct, earthy, full of honest and natural desire. But he recognized now that there hovered over the personality of this other girl something more subtle than this — nothing less, in fact, than that evasive aura of mysterious girlishness — the platonic idea, so to speak, of the mystery of all young girls, which was to him the most magical thing in the whole world. What had drawn him from the beginning to Gerda had been her wonderful beauty, and after that her original personality, her childish character. He could see Gerda's face now, at this moment, before him — he could catch the tones of her voice. He could feel how lovely she was, as he held her and caressed her. Christie's face, on the contrary, was all vague in his memory; her voice was vague; the touch of her hand was vague. It was hard to believe that he had ever had his arms about her. And yet it was Christie who had drawn into herself all those floating intimations of the mystery of a girl's soul, gathered here and there, like cowslips in green valleys, which were above everything so precious to him.

The chatter of a couple of starlings that sank to the ground behind the wall, quarrelling and scolding, brought him at last to himself. He pulled down his straw-hat over his eyes and moved off homewards.

When he opened the door of Number Thirty-Seven, he found Gerda covered from head to foot in a print apron, her head bound up in a green scarf, brushing the floor of their parlour.

"You can't come in now," she said, "unless you want to sit in the bedroom. I'll be doing the kitchen presently. It's no good your going in there."

"Good Lord, child!" he expostulated, coughing and sneezing with exaggerated emphasis, as he propped up his stick in its accustomed corner. "The place will be covered with dust! Why can't you let things alone? My mother would never have noticed whether the room was brushed or not. It'll take hours for all this to settle!"

She rested on her great broom and surveyed him through her cloud of sun-illumined dust-motes. Under her gaze Wolf felt his actual body stiffen into a pose of clumsy awkwardness. He experienced a sense of humiliating self-consciousness. He felt like a fool, and a treacherous fool. The gaze she fixed upon him was the kind of gaze the Olympian dawn-goddess might have fixed upon her human lover at the moment when he first betrayed the tricky and shifty mortality of his race. He never altogether forgot that experience. It made a hole in his armour which never, to the end of his life, quite closed up. Henceforth, in all his thoughts of himself, he had to allow for a weak and shaky spot in the very groundwork of his character — a weakness that nothing short of the clairvoyance of a woman could ever have laid bare!

“All right,” he murmured stupidly. “I’ll go wherever you want me to go, my dear.” And when he found that she still watched him with a sort of pondering detachment, he made a hopeless effort to read her thoughts.

Her look seemed to express resentment, superiority, irony; and yet there was tenderness in it too, and a sort of pitiful indulgence. It was one of those looks in which everything that is most obscure in the relation between two people rises to the surface and can find no expression in human words. All he knew was that this look of hers let him off and did not let him off; though what she could know of the vague, secret thoughts that had been his that day, he could not conceive!

“I’ll go anywhere you like, Gerda,” he repeated lamely; and in order to break this spell, he took up a cloth duster she had laid on the back of a chair, and made a motion to dust the chimneypiece.

She relaxed her reverie at this, and resumed her work without taking further notice of him. This enabled him to turn round again, and, with the duster still in his hand, watch furtively every one of her gestures. The apron she’d twisted so tightly about her body, the bit of green muslin she had tied so quaintly around her head, threw the whiteness of her skin and the softness of her flesh into extraordinary relief. She went on vigorously wielding the broom with her rounded arms, the movements which she made displaying the loveliness of her shoulders and the suppleness of her flanks, till Wolf began to forget everything except the voluptuous fascination of looking at her.

This had not gone on very long before he became aware that she knew perfectly well exactly in what mood he was watching her. Every now and then she would straighten her body to rest her muscles, and then, as she lifted her hands to readjust the green muslin at the back of her head, the contours of her young breasts under the tight-fitting apron assumed the nobility of Pheidian sculpture. Whenever she did this she glanced at him under dreamy, abstracted eyelids, and she seemed to know well that what of all things he wanted most at that moment was just to make rough, reckless, self-obliterating love to her. And she seemed to know, too, that if she let him do that, just then, some indescribable advantage she had won over him would be altogether lost. Across an unfathomable gulf she shot these glances at him, the thick dust-gendered sun-motes flashing and gyrating between them like the spilled golden sands of some great overturned hour-glass.

Under the pressure of his conflicting feelings, Wolf's heart contracted within him; and the pride of his threatened life-illusion gathered about it, like broken bubbles of quicksilver gathering against the sides of a globe of crystal.

At last, throwing down the duster, he sprang towards her, driven by the blind, unconscious cunning of a predatory animal and by sheer, exasperated desire. But the girl slipped away from him, laughing like a hunted oread, and, lifting her great broom between them, escaped round the edge of the parlour-table, from which she had removed the cloth. Red in the face now, and breathing hard and fast, he pursued her obstinately; and they both ran, panting and hot, round and round that polished expanse of wood, that mocked him like a shining shield. In her flight she dropped the broom, and he in his clumsy pursuit stumbled and almost fell over it.

Then he gave up; because, in a single flash of the dark-lantern of his self-esteem, he saw this whole incident between them just as Bob Weevil would have seen it, had he been pressing his inquisitive face against their window-pane. But as they stood there, stock-still, panting like two animals and staring at each other across the polished wood, it came into his head that if there had been nothing more subtle than that table between them, this game of theirs would have been full of a rich delight for both of them, Bob Weevil or no Bob Weevil!

Heavily he drew his breath, watching the tiny drops of perspiration on her forehead, and her panting bosom. “She’s a complete stranger to me!” he said to himself, with a puzzled sigh.

“You’ll never catch me like that, Wolf,” gasped Gerda, with a melodious chuckle; “so you’d better give up and admit you’re beaten.”

But he thought to himself: “She thinks she’s acting the naughty child. She thinks she’s ruffled my dignity. She thinks I’m a pompous ass, who can’t play naturally with a girl in that sort of way.” He moved from the table, and, throwing himself into a wicker-chair, lit a cigarette. “But I could, I could,” he thought, “*if only* — oh, damn all this business of loving girls! It’s getting out of my control; it’s getting too much for me!”

Through their open window came the clear, ringing notes of the thrush in the ash-tree, along with that curious scent of honeysuckle mixed with pigs’ dung which was their familiar atmosphere. She, too, heard the thrush, and, balancing the broom against a chair, walked to the window and leaned against the side of it, her profile toward him.

“What would I feel,” he said to himself, “if she started whistling her blackbird-song now?”

But Gerda displayed no desire for whistling. Her face looked pale and a little sad; and leaning there, with her forehead resting upon one of her bare arms as it lay along the woodwork of the window, she seemed to be lost in concentrated thought.

Wolf felt a sudden longing to go across to her and comfort her — comfort her about those errant feelings of his own that it was impossible to believe she had intercepted in their secret passage through his brain! He couldn’t, surely, at that moment, announce to her Darnley’s plan?

What he actually did was neither to go up to her nor to tell her about the projected visit. He rose to his feet, and said abruptly: “Well! What about lunch, my dear?”

At this remark she lifted up her head from her arm with a jerk, dropped her hand to her side, and, giving him one quick look of unspeakable reproach, went out without a word into the kitchen.

“Damn!” he thought to himself. “She can’t be a witch! She *can’t* have the power to read a person’s thoughts! Besides, what *did* I think? Nothing beyond what everyone thinks sometimes; wild, crazy, outrageous nonsense! It must be her mother. That old trot must have come round, after all.”

He resumed his seat in the wicker-chair; but he felt too miserable even to light a cigarette.

His obscure distress swathed every one of the thrush’s notes with a thick soot-coloured wrapping, so that they flapped at him like so many black flags. On the gusts of hedge-scent and ditch-scent his discomfort rose and fell, rocking him up and down in swart desolation.

“I wish I’d gone straight up to her at the window just now,” he said to himself. “I can’t bear to have her looking like that. Christ saw a man under a fig-tree, or whatever it was; and I suppose a girl can see a man under a lime-tree and read his thoughts like a map!"

He threw off his gloom as well as he could, and walked slowly into the kitchen. There he found her absent-mindedly laying the table for a meal of bread and cheese. He mechanically started helping her, getting out the knives and forks from the dresser-drawer and uncorking a bottle of beer.

When the meal was ready she untied her apron, removed the muslin from her head, washed her hands at the sink, and then, instead of taking her place opposite him, stood wavering and helpless in the middle of the room.

"I think I'll go out for a breath of air," she announced. "I must have swallowed too much dust. I'm not hungry."

Wolf had already taken his seat; and, as she spoke, instead of moving away from him, as her remark suggested, she made a queer little helpless movement towards him. This time he *did* know what to do. He jumped up and sprang towards her, and hugged her tightly to his heart, overcoming her weak resistance, pressing her cheek, now quickly wet with tears, against his own. They remained thus for some seconds, with their arms round each other, but without a word, leaving the parlour-clock and the incorrigible thrush to deal as they pleased with the passing of time.

At length he withdrew his clasp, and, making her sit down at the table, filled her glass with foaming ale.

The mellowness of the drink, combined with the obvious sincerity of his embrace, seemed to drive away the unhappy mood that obsessed her. She turned to the meal before them and began eating with relish. As they ate they talked quietly of what they would prepare for his mother's tea. Wolf found it wise at present to say nothing of Mrs. Torp.

When they were satisfied, however, and after he had handed her a cigarette — for it always amused him to see the childishly incompetent way

Gerda smoked — he plunged boldly into the matter of their visit to the bookseller's shop. With one part of his heart he wished this project at the devil; but he said to himself it would be absurd to disappoint Darnley.

"If you're willing not to wash up and not to dress till we get back, we could easily go for just an hour. We really owe Christie a visit; and Darnley's being there makes an excuse."

"Why ought we to go to Christie's? She ought to come and see us!"

"Gerda, you know how it is! You know what she's like. Besides, we've only asked her that once, when Bob and Lobbie were here. Let's go now; there's a dear girl! We'll have plenty of time to get cleaned up before tea."

Gerda seemed to struggle with herself for a moment; and then she yielded with the most charming grace. "All right," she said, getting up; "only we must run in to Pimpernel's on the way."

Wolf's spirits rose high as they left the house. He chuckled sardonically in his heart at his own elation. "The truth must be," he said to himself, "that I'm simply infatuated with both of them — that I want to snatch at Christie and yet not lose my hold on my sweet Gerda."

The sight of the shop-girl in Pimpernel's, however, brought down his happiness a great many pegs. He had completely forgotten Mrs. Torp.

But he said nothing till they were well out of the shop, and well on their way down High Street. Then he began: "Oh, I met your mother this morning, Gerda. We talked a bit, and I can't remember how it came about, but she went off finally with the idea that I'd asked her to tea this afternoon. And I'm afraid I didn't mention to her that my mother's coming; so we'd better be prepared for her turning up."

The effect of this information was startling. Gerda drew her arm away from him and stopped dead-still where they were, which was in front of a butcher’s shop; and they let the afternoon marketers jostle past them unheeded.

“You... have asked... Mother... to tea!” she gasped; and he was staggered at the dismay upon her face.

“Well?” he said, pulling her into the butcher’s porch to avoid the crowd. “It won’t be so very awful, will it? My mother can be adaptable and decent enough at a pinch.”

Gerda looked at him with such flashing eyes that he drew back as if she had hit him.

“Are you mad, Wolf?” she whispered hoarsely. “I can’t understand you today! What’s the matter with you? You rush off without a word this morning. You come back looking as if you’d met a ghost. You drag me out here to see your friend, who wants me no more than a cat! And now *this*, on the top of everything! It’s too much! I tell you it’s too much! I’m going home.” And suiting her action to her words, she broke away from him and began rapidly retracing her steps.

Wolf ran after her and caught her by the arm.

“Gerda! Gerda darling!” he cried, regardless of the people who were passing them. “I can’t bear this. Let me come back with you. I don’t care a damn about seeing Christie!”

“I won’t have you come with me, Wolf. I won’t! I won’t! Do you want me to make a scene in the street? Go to Christie’s, I tell you! That’s where you belong. I’ve known you wanted to go to her ever since she came that day with the boys. Go! Go! Go! I *won’t* have you with me!” And she started off almost at a run, her face white and her eyes dazed and staring.

Wolf remained motionless and stood watching her while long minutes passed over his head. It seemed impossible that that should be his Gerda, going off in a rage! But even as he stood hesitating, her figure disappeared among the people.

He turned wearily round then and resumed his walk down the street in absent-minded gloom. He hardly knew what he was doing; but he had a vague idea of wandering about the streets for a time, and then returning to Preston Lane. His feet carried him, however, steadily on till he found himself opposite the bookseller's shop.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," he said to himself. And then the thoughts which he believed at that moment were what dominated his action formed themselves in his brain into some such words as these: "I've absolutely no heart for seeing Christie now, or Darnley either! But I suppose it would be an absurd piling up of misunderstandings if I disappointed them."

Grasping the handle of his stick tightly in his hand, and seeing Gerda's stricken face and wild, tearless stare in the very midst of the doorway, he entered the shop.

He found the old man amidst a pile of books, murmuring with bent head over a volume bound in vellum, which he was showing to a customer, evidently a stranger to the place. Mr. Malakite did not hear him enter, and Wolf found himself looking with a queer interest at that bowed back and grizzled head. What did it feel like, as the days went on, to know that one possessed, only five miles away, a child like Olwen, the daughter of a daughter? Did the old man ever see Olwen? Did he know anything of the child's thoughts? Did he want to know anything? A chance movement made by the customer brought Wolf now into the bookseller's vision. A startled look passed for a second over the old man's face, but he betrayed no other sign of embarrassment.

“Good-afternoon, Mr. Solent,” he said quietly. “Have you come to see me or to see Miss Malakite?” And then, without waiting for an answer: “You’ll find her in the room upstairs. Mr. Otter has just gone.”

Wolf passed through the shop, and, hurriedly running up the little staircase, knocked at Christie’s door. The effect upon him of this unexpected news of Darnley’s departure was something beyond what he could possibly have foreseen. The stricken face of Gerda vanished completely, and Gerda herself became what his mother was, or what Miss Gault was, or what his father’s grave was — one of the fixed landmarks in his life’s landscape, but no longer the centre of his life. That hidden drum, which was neither exactly in his heart nor exactly in the pit of his stomach, beat so loudly as he waited at Christie’s door, that it seemed as if that oblong shape of discoloured wood, the very markings of which were voluble, were ready to open now upon something completely new to his experience. That word of the old man, “Mr. Otter has gone,” kept repeating itself in his mind as he waited. “Mr. Otter has gone. Mr. Otter has gone.” The phrase became a floating cloud of tremulous expectation.

When Christie did open the door, and they had taken each other’s hand, Wolf felt as if he had been doing nothing all his life but wait for this moment. He had the feeling that the man and girl who now proceeded to utter broken and fragmentary commonplaces to each other were acting as automatic figures behind whose gestures two long-separated spirits were rushing together.

Several seconds passed before Christie had the power to make a move to find a chair for herself or to give a sign for him to be seated; but when he did sink down at last, still talking of anything that came into his head, a sense of such relief swept into his soul that it was as if some spear-head, that had been in his flesh without his knowing it, for days and weeks, had suddenly been pulled out.

And then, without the least disturbance of the atmosphere of that small room, he suddenly found that those two nodding masks had vanished into thin air, and that there was no barrier of any sort left between the real Wolf and the real Christie. Naturally and easily he found himself taking for granted this strange new discovery of what was between them. He thought within himself: “She knows everything. I’ll leave everything to her.” And he suddenly discovered that he was talking freely and openly about all the people of his life, and about Gerda, too. He discovered that to talk to Christie was like talking to himself or thinking aloud. And he recalled how he had been struck, the very first time they met, by this ease and naturalness with which the lightest thought flowed back and forth between them.

And all the while, even as he was whimsically telling her about the unlucky tea-party arranged for that afternoon, the contour of her half-averted face bending over a piece of needlework she had blindly taken up, and the way her instep looked with the thin leather strap of her shoe across it, gave him a sensation completely different from anything he had ever known before. What he really felt was that this was the first feminine creature with whom he had ever been left alone. In comparison with this diffused and thrilling feeling, permeating everything around them, his amorousness for Gerda seemed like playful lust, directed toward some beautiful statue. The slender little figure before him, with those thin hands and those touchingly thin legs, drew into her personality, at that moment, every secret of girlhood that had ever troubled him. Coming to him like the fragrance of wood-mosses to a city-dweller, the consciousness that this dreamlike figure was really alive and tangible seemed to melt his bones within him. Those mystic syllables, “a girl,” “a young girl,” had always remained at the back of his mind like a precious well-watered flower-bed, but a bed empty of any living growth. Nothing, he now knew, in his life with Gerda had stirred the earth of that mystic bed. But here, in the centre of that bed, was a living, breathing plant, making everything around it enchanted and transparent by the diffused loveliness of its presence. This passive entity in front of him, with her honey-pale oval face, her long eyelashes, her thin legs, her faintly outlined childish figure, was the only true, real, actual living girl in all the earth.

The minutes slipped by, and Wolf found himself, to his surprise, even talking to her about Olwen. So far from this extraordinary topic agitating her, she seemed to find a deep relief in speaking of it.

"Were you old enough to realize what was going on between them?" Wolf asked her at last.

Christie nodded her head and smiled a little. "The odd thing is," she said gently, "that there never seemed to me anything strangely unnatural in it. I don't think Mother ever was the right person for Father. I think from her earliest childhood there was a peculiar link between him and my sister."

"But it killed your mother, didn't it?" murmured Wolf.

Christie was silent for a moment, a queer, pondering frown on her face.

"I don't think so," she said in a low voice. "Everyone said so; but I don't believe it. I think it had begun long before that. It wasn't *she* who did it."

These last words were hardly audible.

Wolf pressed her.

"Who did it, then?"

Christie looked at him gravely.

"Do you believe in spirits?" she asked.

He laughed a little.

"Oh, no more than in anything else!" he said.

"My mother was Welsh," she went on. "She used to tell us the wildest stories about her ancestors. Once she actually told us she was descended from Merlin. Merlin's mother was a nun. Did you know that, Wolf?"

"No wonder you're a bit inhuman," he said. And then, after a pause: "Did you and your sister write to each other after they sent her away? Was she unhappy about Olwen?"

Christie's brown eyes became for a minute fixed upon vacancy, as if she were scrutinizing some far-away mental image. When she turned them upon him, however, they had an angry and yet humorous gleam.

"I sent her money to come back," she said. "I would have had her here in spite of them. Her last letter — I'll show it to you one day — was full of excitement. If I'd been as old as I am now, they should never have sent her away."

"Did Selena Gault do it?" asked Wolf.

The girl nodded. "She and Mr. Smith. They had the law on their side." She paused and drew a long breath. "Law or no law," she cried, passionately, with flushed cheeks, "if I'd been older I'd have stopped them! I was too young," she added.

Wolf got up from his seat and stood regarding her. Every aspect of her figure, every flicker upon her face, gave him the feeling that he was regarding a young aspen-tree, porous to wind-blown alternations of light and shadow.

"It's wonderful to be able to talk freely to anyone as I can with you... now we're alone."

"I sent Darnley away," was all she said.

These words of hers hung suspended in the air between them. They were so sweet to Wolf that he felt unwilling to make the least response. He just allowed them to evaporate, syllable by syllable, into the midsummer warmth of that pleasant room. Christie’s eyelids drooped over the piece of sewing she held in her hands, and he noticed that she was turning this strip of muslin over and over between her fingers, smoothing it out upon her lap, first one side and then the other. The poignancy of her shyness increased his awareness of the suspense between them; and to loosen the spell he turned his head a little and glanced at the mantelpiece, on which was a china bowl, full of bluebells, late, long-stalked primroses, and pink campions and meadow-orchids. His own mind kept beating itself against the unknown against that fatal *next moment* which drew to itself the dust-motes of the air, the scent of the wild-flowers, the warm wind blowing in through the open window.

“Will she let me make love to her? Will she let me?” was the burden of his thought; and as he stared at that bunch of flowers, especially at one solitary bluebell that hung down over the brim of the white bowl and had gathered a tinge of faint rose-carmine upon its hyacinthine bloom, he felt as though the “to be or not to be” of that tense moment depended upon chance as inscrutable, as fluctuating, as the light, falling this way, falling that way — light and shadow wavering together — upon that purple-blue at the bowl’s edge.

Never had he been more aware of the miracle of flower-petals, of the absolute wonder of this filmy vegetable fabric, so much older, just as it is so much more lovely, in the history of our planet than the flesh of beasts or the feathers of birds or the scales of fishes!

The girl’s words, “I sent Darnley away,” seemed to melt into that wild-flower bunch she had picked and placed there; and the pallor of the primroses, the perilous, arrowy faintness of their smell, became his desire for her; and the rough earth-mould freedom of the campion-stalks, with their wood-sturdy pink buds, became the lucky solitude she had made for him!

"Will she let me make love to her?" The longing to risk the first movement toward his purpose struggled now in his mind with that mysterious restraint, so tenuous and yet so strong, of the girl's obscure embarrassment.

"Did you pick those flowers yesterday?" he broke out suddenly; and he was secretly surprised at the loudness of his own voice.

"The day before," she murmured; and then, without closing her mouth, which, with the droop of her under-lip, took on an almost vacant look, she frowned a little, as she fixed her steady gaze full upon him.

His own eyes plunged once more into the green-shadowed depths of that midsummer nosegay. Its pale primroses seemed to sway, in the wind, over their crumpled leaves, as they would have done where she had actually picked them among the wood-rubble and the fungus-growths of their birthplace. The moist bluebell-stalks, so full of liquid greenness beneath their heavy blooms, seemed to carry his mind straight into the hazel-darkened spaces where she had found them. These also belonged to the embarrassment of that figure beside him. These also, with the cool greenery of the sturdy campions, were the very secret of that "next moment," which floated now, with the mocking sun-motes, untouched and virginal in the air about them.

Wolf knew well enough the peculiar limitations of his own nature. He knew well enough that any great surge of what is called "passion" was as impossible to him as was any real remorse about making love. What he felt was an excitement that trembled on the margin — on the fluctuating fine edge — between amorous desire for the slim frame of this mysterious girl and the thrilling attraction of unexplored regions in her soul.

His feeling was like a brimming stream between reedy banks, where a wooden moss-covered dam prevents any spring-flood, but where the water, making its way round the edge of the obstacle, bends the long, submerged grasses before it, as it sweeps forward.

Two images troubled him just a little — Gerda’s white, tense face as it had looked when she left him on the street, and, with this, a vague uncomfortable memory of the figure on the Waterloo steps. But, in his intensely heightened consciousness of this “suspended” moment, he deliberately steered the skiff of his thought away from both those reefs.

Suddenly he found himself risen from his seat and standing against the mantelpiece! He lifted the flowers to his face; and then, putting down the bowl, he inserted his fingers in it, pressing them down between the stalks into the water. He noticed that the water felt warm to his touch, like the water of a sun-warmed pool; and the fantastic idea came into his head that by making this gesture he was in some occult way invading the very soul of the girl who had arranged them there. Christie may or may not have read his thoughts. At any rate, he now became aware that she was standing beside him, and with deft, swift touches was correcting the rough confusion he had made in her nosegay.

“The bluebell-scent is the one that dominates,” he murmured. “You smell them, and see if I’m not right!”

As she leaned forward, he allowed his hand to slide caressingly down her side, drawing her slender body, with a scarcely perceptible pressure, against his own.

His heart was beating fast now, and a delicious predatory thrill was shivering through his nerves. Christie made not the least attempt to extricate herself from his caresses. She permitted him to bend her slim body this way and that way in his wanton excitement. But when he kissed her, she bent her neck so far round that it was her cheek and not her lips he kissed; and soon after that she slipped away from him and sank down exhausted in her former seat.

The look she gave him now, as they stared at each other, confused and out of breath, was completely inscrutable to him.

“You’re not annoyed with me, Christie?” he panted.

There was a flicker of anger in her eyes at this.

“Of course not,” she answered, “What do you take me for? I’m not as mean as that. I’m not a puritanical fool.”

“Well, then... well, then?” he muttered, approaching her chair and standing over her.

“I’m not one least bit annoyed with you,” she repeated.

The faint flush that had now appeared in her cheeks, and the complicated wistfulness of her expression, disarmed and enchanted him. He stooped down to her and stroked with the tips of his fingers the white blue-veined skin under her lace wristbands; but as he looked at her now, there was a certain virginal detachment about her thin ankles and about those lace-ruffled hands which irritated and provoked him by its inhuman remoteness.

“You puzzle me completely,” he remarked, returning rather awkwardly to his former seat and surveying her with a humorous frown.

She lifted up her head from her work. “Well? Why not? We haven’t known each other very long.”

Her words released his pent-up irritation.

“You make me feel funny, Christie,” he said. “As if we’d lost each other in a wood.”

She held her head very high at this and her eyes grew defiant.

“I know I’m no good at these things, Wolf. I never have been. Girls are supposed to carry off moments like this. I don’t know how they do it. I seem to be completely lacking in that sort of tact."

His irritation increased as he found it impossible to follow her thought.

"Tact?" he re-echoed sarcastically. "Good Lord! Tact is the last thing I want from *you*."

She spoke gravely now, but with evident vexation.

"What's the use of talking like this, Wolf? It's growing only too clear that we don't understand each other."

His only retort to this was once more to murmur the word "tact" with a grim iteration.

Her brown eyes looked really angry now.

"Why are men so stupid?" she cried. "When I said *that*, I meant pretending something that wasn't my real self. It's because I've been absolutely natural with you that you've got angry with me."

They were both silent after this, and Wolf stared at the half-open window, through which the summer wind was blowing into the room in little, eddying gusts. Christie took up her sewing; and the stir of her thin fingers and the waving of the light curtains were the only movements in that flower-scented air.

By slow degrees, as he surreptitiously watched her, the harmony of his mind began to come back; and with this harmony there came in upon him from all that green West Country landscape stretching away toward the Severn on one side and toward the Channel on the other, a sort of dumb, inarticulate reproach. What were they doing, he and this girl, who were, as he well divined, so exquisitely adapted to understand each other, letting themselves be divided by such straws, such puffballs of difference?

From fading cuckoo-flowers by the banks of the Lunt, from brittle mother-of-pearl shells, wet and glittering, on the Weymouth sands, from the orange-speckled bellies of great newts in Lenty Pond, there came to him, between those waving curtains, a speechless protest. Brief was his life... brief was Christie Malakite's life.... Times like this at best would be rare. He could see himself returning to his tea-party and letting it all go! He could see Christie pouring out tea for her father and letting it all go! Perhaps — such was his pride and such was hers — this June afternoon, which might have been, but for this trivial discord, as perfect as a green bough, would stand out in his memory peeled and jagged, its sap all running out, its leaves drooping.

"Forgive me, Christie," he said gravely. "Please forgive me and don't think any more about it."

The girl looked up from her work, her hands folded in her lap.

"You don't mean," she said slowly, "because of *that*?"

Her nod of the head in the direction of the mantelpiece, where he had first caressed her, made clear to him what her words implied.

He got up from his chair and stood in front of her, looking down at her lifted face.

"No," he said. "I didn't mean because of 'that.' I meant because we misunderstood each other; which was all my fault."

Christie began to smile. "I'm not prudish or unfeeling in things like that," she said. "But I've a queer nature, Wolf. I love the romance of being in love, and I like you, Wolf, better than anyone I've ever met; and I like you to make love to me. It's only... it's only that — with the life I've had and the mother I had — I seem to have none of an ordinary girl's feelings in these things."

Wolf began pacing up and down the room.

"I'm queer myself, Christie," he said after a pause, stopping once more in front of her. "So there we are! It appears that we're a fair pair! And if you want to know what I feel at this moment, I'll tell you. I feel deliciously happy. You are a witch, Christie, and I don't wonder your mother maintained she was descended from Merlin. I feel I could tell you every secret thought I have in the world. And so, by God, I will! It's an incredible chance that I should have found you."

He threw his cigarette into the fire and walked to the window.

"What a view you've got here!" he said. "That's the corner of Babylon Hill, isn't it?"

The window was already open at the top; but he pulled it down as far as it would go, and leaned out of it, looking across the entanglement of slate roofs to the green incline beyond.

"The wind's northeast, isn't it?" he remarked.

She got up and came over to him and stood beside him, and presently he felt her fingers slip into his own.

"North-northeast," she said; and these words, when he thought of them afterwards, brought back every flicker of his feelings, as he stood stiffly there clutching her hand.

"Where does that lane go?" he asked. "Do you see what I mean? That narrow little one below those Scotch firs."

"Over there?" the girl questioned. "To the left of Poll's Camp, do you mean?"

"Yes... there... just there... where that clump of bushes is!"

"That's Gwent Lane," she answered. "And it leads to a whole maze of lanes further on. I'm fond of going to the Gwent Lanes. You hardly ever meet anyone there. It's as if they had been designed to keep traffic away and strangers away. Sometimes on Summer days when Father doesn't want me, I take my lunch and a book and stay in the Gwent Lanes all day. I often never meet a soul."

She was silent for a second or two; and he realized that a crowded mass of personal memories was flowing through her mind.

“Some lovely afternoons I’ve had,” she went on, “sitting with my back to a gate and looking at the hedge-parsley. When the corn’s yellow and the poppies are out, I always sit inside the field, with my parasol over my book. I can smell the peculiar bitter smell now of the elder-leaves behind me.”

She drew her fingers away from him and made of her two hands a support for her chin upon the woodwork of the open window. Wolf thought this chin of hers was the smallest he had ever seen. He, too, remained silent, thinking of similar memories of his own, secret and solitary and personal; and he was astonished to note how natural it seemed to both of them, this deliberate indulgence in egoistic recollections.

“North-northeast, did you say?” His voice sounded irrelevant even to his own ears. In some queer way he felt as if he had been sharing these furtive physical memories with the girl at his side. He even felt as if their having shared them had been a kind of love-making more subtle and delicate than any erotic dalliance.

He felt as if he could share with this elfin creature a thousand feelings that no other person could possibly understand — share with her all those profoundly physical sensations — and yet mystical, too — that made up the real undercurrent of his whole life.

“She would understand my ‘mythology,’ ” he said to himself. “No one but she would; no one!” And then he thought: “I believe my life is going to open out now, as if I really had some invisible tutelary Power directing me!”

They turned away simultaneously from the window, and once more sat down.

"Do you ever feel," he said, "as if one part of your soul belonged to a world altogether different from this world — as if it were completely disillusioned about all the things that people make such a fuss over and yet were involved in something that was very important?"

She looked straight into his face. "I wouldn't put it like that," she said. "But I've always known what it was to accept an enormous emptiness round me, echoing and echoing, and I sitting there in the middle, like a paper-doll reflected in hundreds of mirrors."

Wolf screwed up his eyes and bit his under-lip.

"You haven't been as happy in your mind as I've been in *my* mind," he said with a kind of wistfulness; "but I often feel as if I were unfairly privileged... as if some invisible god were unjustly favouring me... quite beyond my deserts."

"I don't think you're as favoured as you fancy you are," said Christie, with the ghost of a smile. But Wolf went on:

"Do you know, Chris, I think I'm especially favoured in my scepticism. I'm sceptical about the reality of everything; even about the reality of Nature. Sometimes I think that there are several 'Natures'... several 'Universes,' in fact... one inside the other... like Chinese boxes...."

"I know what you mean," said the young girl hurriedly; and her eyes, as she looked at him, grew luminous with that indescribable excitement of mental sympathy that can bring tears from something deeper than passion.

Wolf, as he received this intimation, said to himself: "I can think aloud with her. Perhaps one day I'll tell her about my 'mythology'!" And there came over him, like a warm enveloping under-tide in which great crimson seaweeds were swaying, an unutterable sense of happiness. "Oh, I hope Gerda is all right!" he thought. And then, with a concentrated effort of his will, as if he were addressing a host of servile genii: “I *command* that Gerda shall be all right!”

It occurred to him at that moment, with a humorous force, that his father wouldn’t have been a man to allow such scruples as these to impinge upon his mind at such a juncture.

“Had you any idea,” he said suddenly, “that Mattie wasn’t Albert Smith’s child?”

“I soon saw the likeness to you, anyway,” Christie replied evasively, “the first day Father brought you to see me.”

“I like Mattie so much,” he went on; “but her resemblance to me can’t be said to improve her looks. Has anyone ever made love to her, do you think?”

Christie laughed. “Well, *you* must be nice to her, anyway, Wolf dear, to make up in case they haven’t.”

“I should be afraid of Miss Gault’s sending her off to Australia!” he said with a chuckle, and then felt curiously relieved to find that the grossness of this rather clumsy jest did not shock his companion. “Nothing shocks her,” he said to himself; and his mind took a long flight to his years in London, where, except for his mother, there was no one to whom he could have talked as he had done this afternoon.

“Well, I must be off,” he said, rather wearily, when these thoughts had finished their circle and had sunk down in the manner of birds on a bough. “I’ve got an uncomfortable home-coming before me, what with one thing and another.”

“Don’t make too much of it,” she said, opening the door for him and holding both handles of it with her hands, so as to avoid any definite farewell. “Gerda will be so thankful to have got through it, that when your two mothers leave she’ll be radiant again.”

"I hope she won't be too radiant *before* they leave," retorted Wolf grimly. "I don't want many repetitions of this particular tea-party."

She kept the door open till he was half-way downstairs, and they nodded rather dolorously at each other across the banisters. He heard the door shut as he entered the shop below, and a pang passed through him.

As he walked rapidly home, he found himself engaged in an imaginary dialogue with his father.

The skeleton under those obstinate plantains kept grinning mockingly in reply to every argument. "Life is short," said the skeleton, "and the love of girls is the only escape from its miseries."

"It's not so short as all that," retorted the son, "and in every Paradise there is a snake!"

THE TEA-PARTY

He found on his arrival that his mother had already appeared. To his great surprise he discovered her standing by their kitchen-stove, with Gerda's apron over her dress, helping to make the toast. He was still more surprised at the way Gerda received him. She was flushed and happy — laughing and jesting as if they had parted the very best of friends.

"How's Christie?" she asked casually. "What do you think, Mrs. Solent, of his going off to see Miss Malakite when I've got company? I'm sure that's not what you'd approve of."

"I don't approve of his saying nothing about that pretty frock you've got on! What do you think of it, Wolf? Do you know, when I got here, she was upstairs, crying her lovely eyes out? And all because she thought she hadn't a proper dress to welcome her grand mother-in-law in! We soon settled *that* little job, didn't we, my dear?" And Wolf beheld, to his amazement, his mother putting one of her strong arms caressingly about Gerda's waist, and Gerda responding to this with a lingering, provocative glance, such as he himself was wont to receive when the girl was in her most docile mood.

"I heard her crying up there in her room," went on the elder woman, "and I ran straight up, and there she was, pretty as a picture in her white shift, and all the bed covered with frocks! She says she's had this one since she was sixteen; but it suits her perfectly, doesn't it, Wolf?"

Wolf surveyed the girl gravely. She wore a long, straight muslin dress, with short sleeves, creamy-white and covered with pale little roses. Never had she looked so enchanting.

"You're certainly a good lady's-maid, Mother," he said solemnly.

"She's told me you're expecting another mother this afternoon," continued Mrs. Solent, releasing Gerda and proceeding to arrange the slices of toast upon a plate. "Now then, where's that loaf? I'll cut the bread-and-butter."

It became Wolf's destiny to stand for the next quarter of an hour, figuratively speaking, "upon one leg," while he watched what seemed to resemble the most piquant of flirtations going on between these two.

The tea-tray was "laid" at last, in the most approved manner, on that very parlour-table round which he had pursued the girl in such troubled agitation so short a time before; and Mrs. Solent, Gerda's apron removed, showed herself in the most fashionable of all her garden-party gowns. Gerda seemed unable to keep her eyes off her, and kept touching with the tips of her fingers first one elegant frill and then another, hovering about her like a slim white butterfly round a purple orchid.

"There's Mother!" she cried at length. "Fetch the kettle, Wolf!"

The countenance of Mrs. Torp was as a book in which one could "read strange matters," as she contemplated the scene before her. Wolf, with the teapot in one hand and the kettle in the other, vociferated a boisterous welcome, drowning the politer words of his mother.

Gerda, having removed Mrs. Torp's tasselled cloak, sat her plumb-down at the table, straightening with a familiarly affectionate jerk the ribboned bonnet which adorned her head.

"Don't 'ee fidget wi' me old hat, Gerdie," murmured the visitor. " 'Tis a very good hat, though maybe 'tain't as aleet as some folks can afford. So thee be Mr. Solent's mummy, be 'ee? Well, and 'a favour'n about the cheeks, 'sknow! A body could reason there was some blood twixt ye; though in these which-way times 'tis hard to speak for sure."

“Well, we must do our best not to quarrel, Mrs. Torp, as they say all mothers do,” threw out Mrs. Solent briskly, watching with some anxiety the unusual amount of sugar that Gerda was placing at the bottom of all the teacups.

“How much milk, Mrs. Solent?” enquired the girl lightly. “I don’t expect our Blacksod milk is as good as yours at King’s Barton.”

This society-tone was so obviously put on to impress the young lady’s mother, that Mrs. Solent hadn’t the heart to explain, till the time for her second cup, that she couldn’t bear sugar. She swallowed the sweet mixture in hurried gulps; and Wolf chuckled to see her trying to take away the taste by rapid mouthfuls of bread-and-butter.

“How be thee’s schoolmasterin’ getting along, Mr. Solent? My old man — that be our Gerdie’s Dad, ma’am — do always say them Grammar boys be above theyselves, what with one thing and t’other. He cotchit two on ’em, the last buryin’ ‘ee had, stealing of they bones. Not that they were proper human-like bones... if ‘ee understand... for ‘ee do always bury *them* religious-deep. They were hosses’ bones, seems so, from what ‘ee do calculate. But they were more impident, them Grammar boys, when ‘ee were arter they, than if they’d been the bones of King Balaam.”

“What’s Lobbie been doing lately, Mother?” enquired Gerda, feeling vaguely conscious that the subject of bones, whether human or otherwise, was inappropriate at that moment.

“Lob, do ‘ee say? Thee may well ask what Lob be doing, the young pert-mouthed limb! He be bringing his Dad’s hoar hairs down to bedlam, and mine wi ’em, that’s what the owl’s pellet be doing!”

Gerda hurriedly enquired in a ringing voice whether Mrs. Solent wanted any cake. “Pimpernel hadn’t any fresh kinds except this. I expect you are so used to London confectionery, Mrs. Solent — —”

But the visitor seemed more interested in her fellow parent’s conversation than in anything else just then.

“Sons are troublesome beings, Mrs. Torp,” she said, “but it’s nice to have them.”

“What *has* Lobbie been doing?” enquired Wolf, heedless of Gerda’s frowns.

“He’s been going over with that imp of Satan, Bob Weevil, to Parson Valley’s. His Dad told ‘en he’d lift the skin from’s backside if he did it; but he was see’d, only last night, out there again.”

“It sounds very innocent, Mrs. Torp, visiting a clergyman,” remarked the lady.

“Innocent!” cried Gerda’s mother indignantly. “Innocent thee own self, though I do say it! ’Tis pagan deviltries, worse nor Paul on Corinthians. I tell ‘ee, they do play blasphemous play-actings out there, same as Lot’s wife were salted for.”

“Miracle-plays, is it?” asked Wolf.

“How do I know what they call ‘en? ’Tis small matter for the name. Wold Dimity, up to Otters’, told I that one girt gummuk of a lad dressed ‘isself up as Virgin Mary. If that hain’t a blasphemous cantrip, I’d like to know what be!”

“I expect Mrs. Solent knows better than any of us, Mother, what’s going on out at King’s Barton,” put in Gerda diplomatically.

“I did hear something about a miracle-play,” said the visitor lightly; “but if the subject’s a teasing one, for heaven’s sake let’s drop it! I think it was Mr. Urquhart who mentioned it to me; and if I remember right he took rather the same view of it as Mrs. Torp.”

“Squire Urquhart ain’t got so much standing his own self wi’ decent folk for *him* to be top-lofty,” remarked the other. “They do tell down our way

’twas that man’s wicked tempers and sech-like, what drove poor young Redfern into’s grave; but maybe, as darter says, you know more’n we, ma’am, about King’s Barton ways. I be glad for my part that I lives in a God-fearing daily-bread town like Blacksod.”

“By the way, Wolf,” said Mrs. Solent, speaking in her most high-pitched voice, “I met your friend Jason the other day in Lenty Lane, and we had quite a walk together. We went as far as the ridge-road to Ramsgard... you know?... by one of those little fieldpaths.”

“Mr. Jason, ma’am?” commented Mrs. Torp. “*I* do know he. I’d a-seen he, many a fine evenin’, a-traipsin home from Three Peewits.”

“I hope you enjoyed your walk,” said Gerda, gravely and politely, frowning at her mother.

“How did you and Jason get on?” asked Wolf. “I somehow can’t imagine you two together.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Solent, “I can’t quite tell whether my company pleased him or not. He talked most of the time about my neighbour, Roger Monk. He seems to have got into his head that the poor man spies upon him. I tried at first to disabuse him of that idea; but he got so agitated that I just let him go on. In the end he became quite charming. He recited to me a poem about a woodpecker, which I thought very pretty. He has such a nice voice when he recites, and the evening was so lovely after the rain that I really enjoyed it all very much.”

“No doubt Mr. Otter were sober as a jackdaw when ‘a walked with ‘ee, ma’am. I’m not saying he isn’t a nice-spoken gentleman, for he is. It’s not so much the drink they talk of, along of he, down where I do live, it’s ——”

“Oh, Mother, please!” interrupted Gerda. “Do look, Mother, how nicely Mrs. Solent tied my sash!”

The girl got up from her chair and turned herself round. This gesture was evidently adored by Mrs. Solent, for she stretched out her arms and caught her by the waist and pulled her down upon her knee.

“I shall spoil your lovely dress,” Gerda cried nervously.

“You’re light as a feather, you sweet thing! You’re soft as swan’s-down.”

“She weren’t that light, ma’am, when she made herself stiff as pikestaff, on the day us bundled she down church-aisle for christening,” said Mrs. Torp. “But she were light enough, God-sakes, when she did play carry-me-over wi’ the lads!”

All this while, Wolf was pondering in his soul how it was that Nature had placed in the minds of all mothers, refined or unrefined, so large a measure of the heart of a procuress.

“And she were light enough — —” Mrs. Torp was beginning again, when Gerda, jumping up in haste, ran round the table and clapped her hand over her mouth.

“Hush, Mummy, I won’t have it!” she cried.

At that moment there was a loud knocking at the front-door, and Wolf went across the passage and opened it.

Bob Weevil and Lobbie hurried into the room together, their caps in their hands. The young grocer looked a little embarrassed at the scene before him, and made a stiff bow to Mrs. Solent.

“Afternoon, marm,” he muttered.

But Lobbie was quite unperturbed.

“Dad’s comed home afore his time,” he cried, “and ‘a be mumbling about his supper.”

“Shake hands with Mrs. Solent, Lob,” said Gerda severely.

But the boy had turned to his own parent.

“Mr. Valley said I was to ask you proper and right for promission,” he said eagerly, “promission for — —”

“For *what*, ye staring toad?”

“Promission,” the boy went on, “for thik girt play next Thursday. The day arter tomorrow ’tis; and all the gentry be coming. And I be John the Baptist, what lived upon honey and the honeycomb!”

“Ye’ll live upon cabbage and the cabbage-stalk, ye impident sprout! I’ve a-heerd too much of your Mr. Valley and his goings-on.”

“Mother... Mother!” protested the unabashed Lob. But Mrs. Solent interrupted them.

“Don’t you worry, Mrs. Torp. I’m going to that entertainment myself, and I’ll see that this young man comes to no harm. I understand just what you feel. These clerical junketings are sometimes incredibly silly. But you can trust me. We’ll keep each other in sight, won’t we, Lobbie?” And she put her hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Well, of course, if you answer for him, ma’am, I reckon I must be satisfied,” grumbled the monument-maker’s wife.

“Oh, I’ll look after him. Won’t I, Lobbie? And if Mr. Valley keeps us all up till midnight, you shall sleep at Lenty Cottage.”

Lob looked a little nervous at this prospect, but he expressed his thanks politely, and the incident appeared closed.

Meanwhile Wolf overheard the following conversation going on between Mr. Weevil and Gerda.

“Why, if that isn’t the very frock you wore, Gerdie, when we went to Weymouth, that grand excursion-day, years ago!”

“Yes, it is, Bob. Fancy your remembering! Mrs. Solent made me put it on.”

"And to think of that! And to think how we climbed down those slippery steps at the ferry, and how frightened you were of the green seaweed getting on you, and how we saw sea-anemones in the pools by Sandsfoot Castle, and you couldn't abide the gun-firing out Portland-way. Think of that, Gerdie, the very same dress!"

"Do you think I'm too old to wear it now, Bob?"

"Ask me another, Gerdie! But it do make anyone feel sort of queer to see you like this. You know? It's all the things it brings up, what a person's clean forgotten."

"You got no more memory than a pig, Bob Weevil."

"Depends who and what and when," was the grocer's retort.

"Well, don't you worry any more about it, Mrs. Torp," repeated the lady in purple. "I promise to keep Mr. Valley in order. Or if I can't, I'll get someone who can. Lob shan't make a fool of himself, or disgrace either John the Baptist or you. I quite look forward to it. We'll have a fine bit of sport together, Lobbie, you and I, flirting across the footlights!"

"How did you get over today, Mrs. Solent?" enquired Gerda, cutting short Mr. Weevil's memories with a furtive little movement of her hand — a movement that came as rather a surprise to Wolf, as he noted it in passing.

"Oh, Roger Monk drove me," exclaimed Wolf's mother. "And that reminds me... what's the time, my son?... Good Lord! I've kept the man waiting already! I must go at once. I'm to meet him at the Three Peewits."

"I'll walk down with you, Mother," said Wolf, glad enough to get a chance of escape. "Good-bye, Mrs. Torp. I know you'll excuse me. Don't hurry off, Bob. Why don't you keep him for supper, Gerda? And Lobbie, too, if Mrs. Torp will let him stay?"

Mother and son walked leisurely down the clattering High Street.

“She’s certainly beautiful, your Gerda!” exclaimed the lady, after prolonged silence.

“She is,” admitted Wolf.

“But oh, dear! What an awful woman! Does she worry you much, my dabchick?”

“Worry me, Mother? Not one little bit! I very rarely see her, you know.”

There was another long pause between them.

“What’s going to happen when the History’s done, Wolf?”

“It may never be done, Mother! He’s got really interested in it at last, thank the Lord!”

“Wolf, dear — —”

“Well, Mother?”

“I wouldn’t let Gerda have a child for quite a long while yet.”

“No, Mother.”

“I didn’t know that she and this Weevil boy were such old friends.”

Wolf swung his stick. Something about the inflexible determination of his mother’s profile, especially of her clear-cut chin, at that moment, roused an obscure feeling of rebellion in him.

“Why the devil not?” he cried. “Bob’s a mere kid. Gerda treats him exactly as she treats her brother.”

His voice had become high-pitched. That curious, furtive little movement of the hand, full of old familiarities, returned to him most teasingly.

“Don’t talk too loud,” murmured his mother. “We’re not in Lenty Lane.”

“Why did you say that?” he asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said lightly. “Don’t take it too seriously. I only know from old experience that men never can be made to realize how susceptible women are except where they themselves are concerned.”

"Even when they love a person?" he enquired.

"What *is* love?" said Mrs. Solent.

He was silent; and the conversation between them took a less personal tone, till he saw her safely mounted in Mr. Urquhart's dog-cart, beside the tall man-servant.

Instead of going straight home, he walked meditatively and slowly past the Malakite book-shop, and then at a more rapid pace followed the road that led up Babylon Hill. He did not turn, till, in the slanting rays of the sinking sun, he reached that corner of the ascent which he had noted from Christie's window.

Could he distinguish her house among the rest? He was not sure. The rays of the great June sun were almost horizontal, as it sank down towards Glastonbury; and it was all he could do, even with his eyes shaded by his hand, to identify the portion of the town where the book-shop was. As to seeing Christie's window, it was impossible.

Annoyed by this refusal of Nature to humour his mood, he advanced obstinately still further up the road, and finally reached the stile into the field-path that led to the turfy ramparts of Poll's Camp.

There he sat down among the tall, uncut grasses of the wayside, and allowed the double stream of memories — those connected with Poll's Camp and those connected with that invisible window below him — to contend for the mastery in his thoughts. The extraordinary thing was that all that poetry of his first encounter with Gerda seemed like something that had happened to some external portion of his nature, whereas this strange new understanding with Christie sank so deep into his being that it invaded regions of which he himself had hardly been aware.

He soon found out, as he sat there, with his back against that stile and the pungent smell of herb-Robert in his nostrils, how far this new feeling had gone.

His life had become so agitated since his arrival at Ramsgard, that now, at this moment, he felt he had more on his mind than he could disentangle. The spirit of the evening fell upon him with a burden that was mysteriously sad — sad with a multitude of gathering omens and indistinct threats. With all the evening noises around him — noises, some of them faint as the sighing of invisible reeds — he became once more conscious that between the iron-ribbed gaiety of his mother and the fixed grin of that paternal skull in the churchyard there was an ambiguous struggle going on, the issues of which remained dubious as life itself.

He found himself crying out to that irresponsible skull under the plantains; but the skull answered him with nothing but cynical mockery. He found himself turning restlessly towards his mother; but he felt that just at the point where he needed her sympathy most the very basic rock of her nature flung him contemptuously back.

On and on he sat, with that sinking sun growing redder and redder before him, and the evening murmurs gathering in his ears; and as he sat, an immense solitude descended upon him, and he began to realize, as he had never realized before, how profoundly alone upon this planet each individual soul really is.

And with this feeling there came over him a deep, disturbing craving for Christie — a craving so intense that the vision of all the length of all the days of his life without her seemed more than he could bear. “Only one life,” he thought to himself. “Only one life, between two eternities of non-existence... and I am proposing deliberately to sacrifice in it the one thing that I really want!” He hugged his knees with tightly clasped fingers, and stared at the red orb before him, sinking now over Christie’s very roof.

For the first time in his mortal days this great diurnal spectacle seemed to his mind half-fantastic; as if this were not the real sun, the sun he had known all his life, that was descending; nor the earth he had known all his life that was thus hiding it from his eyes. “If I do give up Christie for Gerda,” he thought, “it will simply mean that the one unique experience destined for me out of all others by the eternal gods, has been deliberately thrown away.”

He bowed his head over his knees and watched the climbing of a tiny beetle up a bending stalk of grass. “To the universe,” he thought, “it matters no more whether I leave Gerda for Christie than whether that beetle reaches the top of that stalk! Gerda?... Christie?... What are they? Two skeletons covered with flesh; one richly and flexibly covered... one sparsely and meagrely covered! Two of them... that is all... just two of them!” And then, bowing his head still lower, so that the beetle and its grass-stalk almost filled up his whole vision, he began to imagine what it would be like if he *did* make some wild, desperate move. What would happen, for instance, if he were to carry Christie to London and get some job to support them both there, hidden from all the world? Gerda would return to her parents’ house. Old Malakite would get on somehow or other. His mother would... Well! What would his mother do? She had scarcely anything in the bank. Mr. Urquhart could hardly be expected to support her. No, it was unthinkable, impossible! The existence of his mother, her complete dependence on him, tied his hands fast and tight!

And then, with an overpowering surrender, there came upon him all his old childish clinging to that woman whose heart the licentiousness of his father had been unable to quell. He knew his own nature to be tough enough, but compared with his mother he was like an oak-sapling growing in the cleft of a rock. The woman was adamant, where he was merely obstinate. Rock-smooth she was, where he was merely gnarled and knotted and earth-rooted.

“Damn!” he muttered to himself, as he watched the beetle turn back resignedly within an inch of the stalk’s point, and begin a patient descent. “Damn! It’s just pure weakness and habit!”

But, oh, dear! How could he desert Gerda... how could he do it... after three lovely happy months; and without cause or reason save his own fickle madness?

Why had he married her at all? That was the whole blunder! He had married her because he had seduced her. But girls were always being seduced! *That* was no reason. No! He couldn’t get out of it. He had married her because he had mistaken a mixture of lust and romance for love; and if he hadn’t found Christie, he might, to the end of his days, never have discovered his mistake! Affection would have superseded lust; tenderness would have superseded romance. All would have been well. It was Christie’s appearance that had changed everything; and there it was! Christie and he were bound together now, come good, come ill. But as things were, so they must remain! If his soul was Christie’s, his life must go on being his mother’s and Gerda’s. There was no other issue.

Abruptly he lifted up his head. The sun was so low now that he could look straight into its great red circle suspended above the roofs of the town. It resembled, as he looked at it, a vast fiery tunnel, the mouth of some colossal piece of artillery, directed full against him. With screwed-up eyelids he returned the stare of this blood-red cannon-mouth; and as he fronted it, it seemed to him that a dusky figure took shape within it, a figure resembling Jason Otter’s abominable idol.

There was something so atrocious in the idea of this dusky demon being there at all — being, so to say, the great orb’s final *expression* as it went down — that he leaped to his feet in indignant protest. His movement brought the blood from his head, and the phantasm vanished. Slowly and inevitably, with a visible sliding descent, the red globe sank out of sight; and Wolf picked up his hat and stick. “It must be long after eight,” he thought. “I must get home to Gerda.”

THE SLOW-WORM OF LENTY

THE NEXT TWO months brought no outward change in the existence of Wolf and the various people of his life; but when August arrived, all manner of strange developments, long prepared for under the surface, began to manifest themselves.

The trend of these developments began for the first time to grow clear to Wolf himself on the occasion of a small garden-party given by Mrs. Otter in her little front-garden. He had exhausted a great deal of energy in an attempt to entangle his mother in a more or less harmonious conversation with Selena Gault; and it was with a queer feeling of triumph that he left these old antagonists drinking tea side by side, in their low chairs, on Mrs. Otter's lawn, to cross the grass so that he might speak to Jason.

He came upon him in the back garden, in converse with old Dimity Stone, who fled precipitately into her kitchen at his approach.

Wolf was as careful not to disturb the poet's equilibrium as if he had been a leopard cajoling a nervous eland. He shuffled by his side into a narrow passage between two cucumber-frames, where they both sat down. A solitary wood-pigeon kept repeating its diapason of languid rapture from somewhere high up in the neighbouring trees. In the gravel-path, quite close to where they sat, a thrush, unruffled by their presence, cracked a snail upon a broken piece of brick; and as Wolf made one desultory remark after another, to set his companion at ease, he found himself complacently squeezing with the tips of his fingers certain sticky little bubbles of tar that the heat of the afternoon sun drew forth from the warm wooden planks of the frame.

"I composed a poem last night," said Jason Otter. "And since you're the only person who takes the least interest in what I do, I'll repeat it to you, if no one comes round the corner."

"I'd love to hear it," said Wolf.

"It begins like this." And in a voice almost as modulated as the wood-pigeon's own, the drooping head by Wolf's side swayed slowly to the rhythm of the following stanza:

The Slow-Worm of Lenty curses God;
He lifts his head from the heavy sod;
He lifts his head where the Lenty willow
Weeps green tears o'er the rain-elf's pillow;
For the rain-elf's lover is fled and gone,
And none curseth God but the Slow-Worm alone.

"It's about the pond," said Jason gravely. "I go there sometimes in the evening. When it's misty you can easily imagine an elf or a nymph floating on its surface."

"Is that all?" enquired Wolf.

"Not quite," replied the other; "but you probably won't like the way it ends. It'll seem funny to you; too remote from your way of thinking; and it *is* rather funny; but Lenty Pond is a funny place."

"Do go on," said Wolf.

And once more in his delicately modulated voice the poet began intoning:

For the newts and the tadpoles at their play
Laugh at the rain-elf's tear-wet pillow;

Laugh that her lover has fled away.
Little care they for elf or willow.
They flash their tails to a mocking cry —
“Slow-Worm of Lenty, prophesy!”

“That’s not the end, is it?” said Wolf.

The man’s head turned slightly towards him; and the one grey eye which was visible from where Wolf sat, passed through some extraordinary change, as if a glassy film separating the outward world from an inward abyss of desolation had suddenly melted away.

“Do you want to hear the end?” said Jason Otter.

Wolf nodded, and the voice went on:

But never again can God look down
As He did of old upon country and town!
In His huge heart, hidden all Space beyond,
There bides the curse of Lenty Pond;
The curse of the Slow-Worm, by Lenty willow,
Who pitied the elf on her tear-wet pillow,
Her pillow woven of pond-weeds green
Where the willow’s twigs made a leafy screen;
And the purple loosestrife and watercress
Whisper above her sorrowfulness.

Once more the voice paused and Wolf listened to those two persistent summer sounds, the tapping of the thrush’s beak and the indescribable contentment of the wood-pigeon.

“Is there any more?” he asked. “I like this style of writing better than what you used to read to me a month ago.”

“A person can’t do more than he can,” remarked Jason Otter, while the flickering ghost of a smile came and went at the corners of his mouth. It seemed that even this indication of normal feeling was distasteful to him; for he hurriedly raised his hand in order to conceal it.

This movement of his arm made Wolf aware of the scent of incense.

“The chap’s clothes must be saturated with the stuff,” he thought. “Oh, damn!” he thought again. “I *must* get that idol away from him.”

“By the way, Otter,” he began, “while I think of it, don’t forget what you promised on the fair-ground!”

Jason turned his head away.

“She’ll be out again presently,” he remarked.

Whether this referred to the thrush that had just then flown away, or to Dimity Stone, Wolf could not tell.

“I can give you two pounds of that five pounds straight off,” he said, “if you’ll let me come in with you now and put the thing in my pocket.”

“And the other three?” cried the man, rising to his feet between the cucumber-frames and rubbing the back of his trousers with his hand.

“The other three next week,” said Wolf, thinking to himself, “I don’t care what happens, as long as I dispose of Mukalog.”

“Come on then, quick, before anyone sees!”

They hurried into the house together; and no sooner were they in the poet’s room than Wolf boldly snatched at the little demon on the jade pedestal, and shoved it unceremoniously into his side-pocket. Jason made a queer, stiff, formal movement of his hand towards this pocket; but when Wolf had thrown his arm roughly off, an expression of something like relief rippled down over his agitated countenance. His lips seemed to be muttering; and Wolf fancied that they were explaining to the object in the stranger's pocket that its devotee had only yielded to sheer force.

Hurriedly Wolf put down two golden sovereigns on the table. He refrained from placing them upon the empty jade pedestal. He placed them side by side, close to an edition of the works of Vaughan the Silurist.

"And now," he cried, "let's hear the end of that Slow-Worm poem!"

"Not here, not here," murmured the other, glancing, so Wolf imagined, with lamentable anxiety at the empty pedestal, as if at any moment seven other devils, worse than Mukalog, might take possession of it.

No sooner were they safe back at the cucumber-frame than Wolf resumed his request for the end of the Slow-Worm. Leaning back with his hands clasped meekly in front of him, like a child reciting a hymn, the astonishing man obeyed him with docility.

And the Lenty Slow-Worm curses God
For the sake of the rain-elf's pitifulness.
He lifts his head from the watercress,
He lifts his head from the quaker-grass,
From the hoof-marks where the cattle pass,
He lifts his head from the heavy sod,
And under the loosestrife he curses God!
And the newts and the tadpoles who where she lay
Mocked her from bellies white, orange, and grey,
Cry now to willow and water and weed,
"Lenty Pond has a prophet indeed!"
For the rain-elf weeps no more to her pillow
Woven of twigs of the weeping-willow;

But her lover, come back to the laughing rain-elf,
Cries, "The Slow-Worm of Lenty is God Himself!"

"Bravo!" cried Wolf. "Thank the Lord you managed to comfort that poor girl!"

"She wasn't a girl," said Jason, colouring a little.

"Eh? What's that?" ejaculated the other. "How could she have a lover then?"

The poet was protected, however, from having to answer this objection by a sudden, happily-timed interruption.

Mr. Urquhart, escorting Selena Gault, came shuffling amiably towards them.

"Our two young friends in the kitchen-garden, ha?" was the Squire's greeting. "I've just been telling Miss Gault, haven't I, lady, how well you and I, Solent, get on together as fellow authors. I never got on so well with our poor dear Redfern, did I, Mr. Otter?"

Wolf was aghast at the complicated significance of the look that his employer fixed upon the agitated Jason.

"Your boots have got something nasty on them," the poet hurriedly rapped out to Miss Gault; and before the lady could stop him, he was down on his knees on the gravel, wiping one of her shoes with a handful of grass.

"It's only manure," he said presently, rising with a flushed face.

"Thank you, Mr. Otter, thank you very much," said Selena Gault. "I must have trodden on something."

"I hope you found my mother in her best mood," said Wolf.

Miss Gault frowned a little and then smiled on him graciously.

"Thank you for helping us to renew our old acquaintance, boy," she said. "But it's really Mr. Urquhart who ought to be thanked by everybody for bringing you down to us at all."

"Thank Redfern, not me," said the Squire, in his silkiest tone. "It's quite an art, isn't it, Otter, this business of leaving the world conveniently?"

But Jason was occupied in picking up the bits of empty snail-shell left by the thrush.

"What do they do where there aren't any stones to break 'em on?" commented the Squire as he watched him.

Miss Gault swept them both with her formidable gaze.

"Throw those things away, Mr. Otter, please. When the life's gone that's the end."

"Not always," murmured the Squire. "Not always, ha? What?"

Miss Gault lifted her eyebrows, and her distorted upper-lip twitched. "For the dead, it's the end," she repeated sternly; "but it's better to be dead in death than dead in life."

"I think I'd better go and see if my mother wants me," murmured Jason uneasily.

"I'll come with you, Otter," said Mr. Urquhart, making a deprecating little gesture with his hand, as if brushing away Miss Gault's indiscretion.

Then he turned to Wolf. "Be in good time tomorrow, Solent. I've got a book for you that's more racy than anything we've found yet. Malakite sent it over. The old rogue knows exactly what suits us."

Wolf felt it hard to believe the word "Malakite" was something that he had heard many times before quite calmly and casually. It teased his mind now that it should even be uttered by this man, whose pendulous cheek-folds seemed to him, as he looked at them, to resemble the crumpled rattles of a rattlesnake.

Conversing sympathetically with Miss Gault, now, on the harmless topic of Emma and the three cats, he led the lady back into the front-garden.

Here he was presently much amused by observing Miss Gault, with the graciousness of a ducal personage, offer to drive Mrs. Solent as far as Lenty Cottage — an offer that was promptly accepted. When both women were gone, and Wolf himself had bidden his hostess good-night, he was surprised to hear Jason offering to walk a little way with him towards Blacksod.

Wolf instinctively kept his hand in his side-pocket as they walked, with an obstinate determination that nothing should induce him to return Mukalog to his idolater. But the poet's thoughts seemed running in a quite different direction.

"It's very difficult not to curse anyone," Jason began, hesitating, and reddening a little, "when a person expects you to do it. But I've got the power of joining in, so as not to annoy; while really I'm thinking just the opposite!"

To himself Wolf explained this ambiguous remark by assuming that Mr. Urquhart had been secretly propitiating "the drunken individual at Pond Cottage" by disparaging to him his new secretary.

But the poet began again. "I don't like the way some people egg on that young fool Weevil to boast so grandly of what lecherous things he's done. When people encourage an idiot like that, it's bad for everybody. It puts it into his head to play tricks he'd never dare to think out for himself."

"Ho! Ho!" thought Wolf. "What's up now? Now we're beginning to learn something really curious!"

And the poet continued, in an excited voice: "You married people think you know everything. But no man ever knows what these girls are after; and I doubt if they know it themselves! It's like a gadfly, that first tickles them and then stings them."

"What's like a gadfly?" enquired Wolf.

"The lust of your excellent young men, such as this worthy Bob Weevil."

"Ah!" thought Wolf in his heart. "Now it's coming!"

"I never myself talk of lechery to anyone," went on the poet; "but this Squire of yours enjoys his little jest, whether it's with a young man or a boy. I expect he's a bit afraid of you, Solent."

"I should have supposed," said Wolf, "that Mr. Urquhart was too snobbish to treat a Blacksod tradesman like an equal, whatever his age was!"

"There is only one class," said the poet, with an air of benign authority, "where these matters are concerned."

"So you think Mr. Urquhart has been at work encouraging our friend Weevil in some pretty little bit of mischief, eh?" said Wolf.

A look of sheer pain came into Mr. Otter's face. "What put that into your head?" he cried. "I've not been talking about anyone *you* know, or anyone *I* know. I've been talking about the general mass of people. A person is allowed to talk about *them*."

"You're afraid that Roger Monk might be hiding behind that wall?"

The poet turned toward him his sorrowful grey eyes. "I don't like to be upbraided," he said gravely.

"I'm not upbraiding you," protested Wolf. "Look! There are none but very harmless people in there!"

The wall by which they were now walking was indeed the wall of the churchyard; and the idea of Death, like a flying, sharded beetle, struck them simultaneously in the face.

"I think I'll cancel our bargain, Solent," said Jason suddenly, "and give you back that money, and take back my piece of jade!"

It was a transformed countenance that the poet turned now to his companion. Abysmal desolation had descended upon him, and he almost whimpered as he implored Wolf to return his idol.

"It's no use, man. I tell you it's no use. If you went straight down on your knees to me I wouldn't give it up!"

Jason Otter pushed his hat back from his forehead and stood for a moment with his eyes tight shut. Wolf, who had no idea what thoughts were passing through that heavy head, clutched tightly the handle of his stick, thinking within himself: "He's capable of anything. He's like a drug-addict, and I've got his drug in my pocket!"

For a perceptible passage of time, though it may have been no more than a few seconds, they remained thus facing each other, while a group of King's Barton children, running with noisy shouts down the road, stopped and stared at them open-mouthed.

Then Wolf was aware that the man's lips, out of the middle of that eyeless mask of misery, were muttering something — something that sounded like an incantation.

"I'd better sheer off!" he thought; and as he tightened his fingers round the handle of his stick, he overheard one of the children who were looking on say to another in a whisper: "It be only thik poor Mr. Otter, took wi' one o' they fits, look-see! T'other gent be a-going to hit he, present, long-side the ear-hole!"

"Well, good-night, Otter!" he called out to him. "If you don't mind I'll shog on! I've got to walk fast now, or Gerda will be worrying."

The figure in front of him made a blind step forward like a somnambulist; and in a rapid mental vision as definite as if it were a reality, Wolf saw him fallen prone in the white dust, crying aloud for the return of the image.

“Well, good-night!” he repeated brusquely; and turning on his heel, he strode off at a pace which it was not easy to keep from becoming a run.

For some distance he had an uncomfortable sensation in the back of his spine; but nothing happened. With his left hand fiercely clutching the thing in his pocket, and his right hand swinging his stick, he achieved an inglorious but effective retreat.

It was not, however, till he was nearly a mile from King’s Barton that he dared to reduce his speed and take his mental bearings. Even then his disturbed fancy mistook the faint thudding of some tethered animal’s hooves on the floor of a shed for the patter of Jason’s steps in pursuit.

It must have been half-past six before he began to recover himself and to look about him. There was hardly a breath of wind stirring. There had fallen upon that portion of the West Country one of those luminous late-summer evenings, such as must have soothed the nerves of Romans and Cymri, of Saxons and Northmen, after wild pell-mells of advances and retreats, of alarums and excursions, now as completely forgotten as the death-struggles of mediæval hernshaws in the talons of goshawks.

The fields of wheat and barley, pearl-like and opalescent in the swimming haze, sloped upwards to the high treeless ridge along which ran the main road from Ramsgard to Blacksod. On his left, lying dim and misty, yet in some strange way lustrous with an inner light of their own, as if all the earth had become one vast phosphorescent glow-worm, rolled away from beneath that narrow lane the dew-soaked pastures of the Blackmore Vale, rising again in the distance to the uplands of High Stoy.

Wolf was tempted to rest for a while, so as to gather into some kind of focus the confused impressions of that crowded afternoon; but he found, when he paused for a moment, leaning over a gate, that the dew-wet herbage brought to his mind nothing but one persistent image, an image calm and peaceful enough, but full of a most perilous relaxation of heart and will and spirit — the image, in fact, of a young man lying dead in a bedroom at Pond Cottage, a young man with a shrouded face, and long, thin legs. Who was it who had told him that young Redfern was tall and thin?

He moved on, with a wave of his stick, as if to dispel this phantom; and it was not long before the first houses of Blacksod began to appear, some of them with windows already displaying lamplight, which mingled queerly enough with the strange luminosity such as still emanated from earth and sky. Wolf noted how different such spots of artificial light appeared, when they thus remained mere specks of yellow colour surrounded by pale greyness, from what they would be in a brief while, when they broke up the complete darkness.

And as he began to encounter the evening stir of the town's precincts, and the heavy breath of the Blackmore pastures ceased to drug his senses, he found that what he had gone through that day was now slowly sifting itself out in the various layers of his consciousness. "Either Urquhart *is* up to something," he thought, "or Jason has just invented the whole thing to satisfy his own strange mind! God help us! What a crazy set they all are! I'm thankful I'm out of it down here. Blacksod doesn't lend itself to such whimsies."

Thus did the outer surface of his mind report on the situation, making use of the artificially acquired genial optimism of many a forgotten mental *tour de force*.

But another — a deeper — layer in his mind made quite a different report.

"There's something up, over there, that's hostile to me and to my life. They seem to have nothing else to do, these King's Barton people, but plot with one another against someone. Good Lord! No wonder they finished off

Redfern among them all! I can see I'm going to have to defend myself. And easily could I do it, too, if it weren't for mother. Damn! It's mother being up there that's the rub; so dependent on Urquhart. If it weren't for her, I'd laugh at the whole lot of them. I've got my job at the school, thanks to Darnley. What a man Darnley is, compared with these madmen! They've worried *him* a lot though. Anyone can see that."

This second layer of his consciousness seemed so crowded with thoughts and surmises that he found himself standing stock-still outside a little greengrocer's shop, the better to get things clear.

A small ornament, perched in the lighted window, among the oranges and lettuces, made him recall the idol in his pocket; and from Mukalog his mind rushed back to Jason.

"I can't understand him," he said to himself. "Valley, I know, is a good man. Urquhart is a demon. But Jason baffles me. The Slow-Worm of Lenty! That's about what he is. I had a feeling just now, when he stood with his eyes shut and his mouth gibbering, that he belonged to some primeval order of things, existing before good and evil appeared at all. But it's clear that Urquhart's cajoled him somehow. And yet I don't know! I'm tempted to think he'd be a match even for him — very much in the way some cold wet rain from the aboriginal chaos would discomfort the Devil!"

He turned from the shop-window and moved on. Soon he came to where two crossroads branched off from the one he followed, the road to the right leading up Babylon Hill, the road to the left leading to that portion of the town where Christie's house was. Should he turn to the left and return home that way? Or should he go straight on, past his father-in-law's yard?

The hesitation into which he now fell left an empty space in his mind; and at once there rose to fill it, from the invisible depths of his being, quite a new report upon the events of that day. Was there something more than those old sea-beach afternoons, those Lovers' Lane naughtinesses, between Gerda and Bob Weevil? He could not help remembering the exciting photograph of the girl astride of the tombstone which he had seen the two lads enjoying so much, that day he bought the sausages for Roger Monk.

The more rational layers of Wolf's consciousness now began a derisive criticism of this new mood. Had he the instincts of the lord of a seraglio? Did he demand that both Gerda and Christie should be faithful to him... while he himself was... as he was? No, it was different from that! After his fashion he *was* being faithful to Gerda. It was the nature of this particular case. It was, in fact, Mr. Weevil! To be cuckolded by Bob, the scamp of Blacksod, was not any way a very soothing destiny; but to be cuckolded by Bob as a sort of schoolboy-lark, a lark set in motion by the sardonic Mr. Urquhart, was a fantastic outrage.

Still he hesitated at these crossroads, teased beyond his wont by the difficulty of deciding which way to go. He was so pulled at in both directions, that as he wavered he seemed actually to see before him the objects he would meet under either choice, and to feel the sensations he would experience under either.

In the end a motive simpler than love or jealousy decided the point. He took the shorter way, the way by Mr. Torp's yard, because of a secret craving for food in the recesses of his stomach. But though this was his real motive, what he *thought* was his motive was jealousy over Bob Weevil. And the idea of this, that he should have such a feeling at all, in connection with the romance of passing close to Christie's room, at once puzzled and shamed him.

He walked on with rapid strides now; and as he passed the familiar Torp yard, which lay in a hushed and rather ghastly pool of twilight, he thought how little he had foreseen, that March day when he turned into this enclosure, what occurrences would be the result of it! Bound by intimate habit to the one he had married — in love, for good and all, with the one he had *not* married — his situation just then was sufficiently complicated, without all this bewildering turmoil of personalities in King's Barton!

It was with an accumulated measure of sheer animal relief that he found himself entering his own house at last. This was increased by a delicious abandonment to unhindered amorousness when he discovered that Gerda was waiting for him at the kitchen-stove in her nightdress and dressing-gown. The girl had certain very quaint and pretty ways of expressing her desire to be made love to; and she had seldom been more excitable or more whimsically provocative than she was that night.

Though hunger had brought him so quickly home, it was more than an hour after his return that they sat down to their supper; and during the lingered-out and shameless caresses which he enjoyed before he would let her approach the stove, Wolf was compelled to come to the conclusion that erotic delight has in itself the power of becoming a kind of *absolute*. He felt as if it became a sort of ultimate essence into which the merely relative emotions of the two preoccupied ones sank — indeed were so utterly lost that a new identity dominated the field of their united consciousness, the admirable identity of *amorousness in itself*, the actual spiritual form, or "psychic being," of the god Eros!

What Wolf found to his no small content was that when this spiritual emanation of sweet delight had vanished away he was entirely free from any feeling of having committed sacrilege against his love for Christie. Whether this would have been the case had Christie been different from what she was, he found it difficult to decide; though in the intervals of pleasant discourse with Gerda, as they sat over their supper, he pondered deeply upon that nice point.

Another side-issue that had a curious interest for him was the question whether the accident of his having remembered that wicked tombstone-picture on his way home had had anything to do with the completeness of his pleasure! He had noted before in himself the peculiar rôle played by queer out-of-the-way imaginations in all these things! And finally — but *this* thought did not come to him till their meal was over — he caught himself at least once that night in a grim wondering as to how far the sweet desirability of his companion had been enhanced for him by those sinister rumours of a rival in the field, even though that rival was this water-rat-featured seller of sausages!

Gerda was the first to go to sleep that night as they lay side by side, with the familiar odours of summer grass and pigsty drainage floating in upon them. Wolf had arrived, not without many mental adjustments, during the last two months, at a more or less satisfactory compromise between what he felt for this girl, thus lying with his arm stretched out beneath her, and what he felt for the other one. Christie's inflexible pride and the faint, hardly-stirred pulse of her subnormal senses, made it much easier for him. An instinctive unwillingness, too, in his own nature, to introduce any strain of harsh idealism, led him to get all the contentment he could out of his life with his lovely bedfellow. As he listened to her evenly-drawn breathing, and felt, through all his nerves, the delicious relaxation of her love-exhausted limbs, he was conscious now more than ever that it was completely unthinkable that he should be guilty of making her unhappy by any drastic change. In a sense what he had said to Selena Gault was true. He *was* happy. But he knew in his heart perfectly well that he was only happy because the deepest emotion he was capable of was satisfied by his nearness to Christie. Profoundly self-conscious as he was, Wolf was never oblivious of his lack of what people have agreed to call by the name of "passion."

Luckily enough Christie, too, seemed, as far as he was able to tell, devoid of this exigency; so that by their resemblance in this peculiarity the strange intensity of their love was not disturbed by his easy dalliance with Gerda.

What Wolf at this moment felt, as he listened to the girl's soft breathing and held her in his arms, was a delicious, diffused tenderness — a tenderness which, like the earth itself, with the cool night-airs blowing over it, was touched by rumours and intimations belonging to another region. His sensual nature tranquillized, satisfied, appeased, permitted his spirit to wander off freely towards that other girlish form, more elusive, less tangible, hardly realizable to any concrete imagination, which now lay — sleeping or waking, he knew not which — in the room that looked out upon Poll's Camp! There, above the books of that incestuous old man's shop, that other one was lying alone. Was *she* satisfied in this ambiguous love of his? He preferred not to let himself dwell upon that aspect of the matter just then; and holding Gerda fast, and inhaling the mingled night-airs, he let his mind sink into the plenary absolution of a deep, dreamless sleep.

HOME FOR BASTARDS

The next day proved to be, as far as the weather was concerned, even more pleasant than its predecessor.

Event followed event in harmonious and easy sequence. Gerda's morning crossness was tempered by an enchanting aftermath of petulant willingness to be caressed. His boys at the Grammar School, whom he had laboriously anchored in the reign of the first Tudor, were too occupied with thoughts of examinations and the approaching summer holidays to be as troublesome as usual. His afternoon at King's Barton was devoted to a concentrated perusal of the history of the unfortunate Lady Wyke of Abbotsbury; and Mr. Urquhart, crouching at his elbow like a great silky Angora tom-cat, was too absorbed in their researches to indulge in more than a very few of his sidelong malignities.

So well-pleased with their progress was the Squire, that while he and his secretary drank their tea at the library-window he asked Wolf if it would be any help to his mother if Roger Monk were to drive her to Ramsgard and back before dinner.

"Roger declares he wants to go over there," he said. "What he's up to I don't know. He never tells me anything. But if your mother or you care for the drive, you can tell him to call for you."

Wolf knew that Mrs. Solent had in her mind the notion of paying a formal call upon Miss Gault as a sign of their reconciliation; so he hurriedly accepted this offer and went off at once.

"I think I'll go too," he announced to the big darkbrowed servant; "so, if it won't weigh down your gig, you might put in the back-seat for me."

He found his mother lingering over her tea in the parlour of the trim cottage. He caught a glimpse of her unobserved as he approached the window, and it was rather a shock to him to observe a look in her face which he had never seen before. She was sitting motionless, with her outstretched hands pressed against the edge of the table and her gaze fixed upon emptiness. Her brown eyes, from the angle at which he caught her, had a defeated, weary, helpless expression, and even the contours of her formidable chin were relaxed, crumpled, desolate.

He had a queer feeling of shame for having caught her thus, as though in the indecent exposure of some secret deformity; and he hurriedly and noisily entered the little house.

At his appearance her whole manner changed. She seemed delighted to have the chance of driving to Ramsgard with him, and they chatted gaily till she went upstairs to get ready.

Roger Monk did not keep them waiting; and while he was at the garden-gate, holding the horse till the lady came down, Wolf had a word or two with him.

"Mr. Urquhart didn't seem to know what you were up to in Ramsgard," he remarked, indiscreetly enough, but with no ulterior motive.

"He knew right and fine, Mr. Solent! Don't you make no mistake. There isn't much that goes on up at House — or out of House either, for that matter — that *he* doesn't know!"

"That must be rather uncomfortable sometimes, eh? What?"

This rather ungentlemanly imitation of the Squire's favourite phrase tickled the swarthy giant's fancy, and he smiled broadly. But a minute later his face grew grave and worried.

" 'Tis a good place with Squire," he whispered, bending down towards Wolf. "But I tell 'ee straight, Mr. Solent, Sir, if I knew for sure he wouldn't play some dog's trick on me I'd do a bunk tomorrow!"

Wolf stared at him blankly.

"I would," he repeated. And then, with the scowl of a righteous executioner, "I'll tap the top of his black head for him one of these days if God Almighty doesn't do it first!"

In spite of this somewhat ominous beginning, their drive into Ramsgard was a great success. Roger Monk quickly recovered his good-humour under Mrs. Solent's blandishments; and by the time they reached the schoolgate they were all three in the best of spirits.

Here they separated, the servant driving Mrs. Solent towards Miss Gault's house, while Wolf turned up the street with the intention of paying a visit to the Smiths.

The door was opened for him by Mattie herself; and the brother and sister embraced affectionately, as soon as they were alone in the cool, dark, musty hall.

"Dad is out," she whispered, "and we've only one servant now."

"One servant?" he echoed, as she led him, with her finger on her lip, into the empty dining-room.

"Olwen's upstairs playing," she said in a low voice.

It was clear to him that she was anxious that the child should not hear his voice; so he shut the door very quietly and they sat down together on two red leather chairs.

"What's the trouble, Mattie dear?" he murmured, holding her hand tightly.

"It's Dad," she said. "He's been queer the last few days."

It was difficult for Wolf to repress a smile; for the idea of Mr. Albert Smith, the great Hatter of Ramsgard School, the sedate Churchwarden of the Abbey, being in any kind of way "queer" struck him as grotesque.

“What’s up with him? Business bad?”

Mattie sighed, and, releasing her hand from his clasp, folded her fingers tightly together.

“It’s worse than bad,” she said slowly. “Do you know, Wolf, I believe Dad’s ruined.”

“Good Lord, child!” he cried. “He can’t be! I can’t believe it. Mr. Smith? Why, he’s been at this job here for as long as I can remember. He must have made a lot! He may have got some mania, my dear, about money. You ought to make him sell out and retire!”

“I tell you, Wolf,” she said emphatically, and with a certain irritation, “it’s true! Can’t you believe I know what I’m talking about? He’s been investing in some silly way. He’s never been as sensible as people think; and now he’s hit, knocked over. I believe he’s already taken the first step, whatever that is, to being bankrupt.”

“Bankrupt?” repeated Wolf helplessly.

“So that’s the state of *our* affairs!” she cried in a lighter tone. “And now tell me about yourself and your pretty Gerda.”

As she spoke she rose to her feet and flung her hands behind her head, straightening her frame to its full height.

“She’s got a fine figure,” thought Wolf. “What a shame that her nose is so large!”

Mattie’s countenance did indeed seem, as he looked at her staring steadily down at him out of her deep-set grey eyes, even less presentable than when he had seen her a few weeks ago.

“She’s been having a bad time, poor girl!” he thought. “How damnable that the gods didn’t mould her face just a little more carefully!”

He looked at her as she fixed her eyes on the floor, frowning; and then he glanced away at the mahogany sideboard, where Mr. Smith’s heavy pieces of polished silver met his gaze, with the peculiar detached phlegm of old, worn possessions that have seen so many family-troubles that they have grown professionally callous, after the manner of undertakers and sextons.

Something about that silver on the sideboard, combined with his sister's news, threw a grey shadow over his own life. His mind sank down into a desolate acceptance of long years of stark endurance, the sort of endurance that wind-blown trees have to acquire when their branches become at last permanently bent, from bowing sideways, away from the north or the east.

"Well, now you know the worst!" his sister murmured at last.

"It might be worse still," he said lamely.

Her eyes unexpectedly flashed and she gave vent to a queer little laugh.

"I don't care! I don't care! I don't care!" she cried. "In fact, if it weren't for Olwen, I believe I'd be almost glad!"

Wolf screwed up his eyes and regarded her closely. He suddenly became aware that this daughter of his father had something in her nature that he understood well enough.

"Listen, Mattie," he said quietly. "I have an idea that things are going to work out all right — work out better for you, in fact, than they've been doing for a long time."

She looked straight into his face and smiled, while one of her eyebrows rose humorously and twitched a little.

"You and I are a funny pair, Wolf," she said. "I believe we actually *like* to be driven and hunted."

They exchanged a long, confused look. Then he protruded his under-lip and drew down the corners of his mouth.

"If so, we know where we get it," he said. And then, in a sudden afterthought: "Look here, we must slip off one day together and visit his grave. I don't see why Madame Selena should have a monopoly of that spot!"

She made a somewhat brusque and ungracious movement.

“I don’t like graves,” she said. “But come on, Wolf, we mustn’t stay down here any more. Let’s go up and see Olwen. She’ll never forgive me even now for keeping you.”

He opened the door for her and they went up softly together. As he followed her form up the dim staircase, the thought came shamelessly into his head that had she been as lovely in face as she was flexible in figure she would have had a sensual attraction for him.

“But I understand her well,” he said to himself. “And I’ll do what I can to make her life happier.”

Mattie paused, when she reached the first landing, till he was at her side. Then she called out: “Olwen! Olwen! Here’s a visitor for you!”

“Olwen! Olwen!” echoed Wolf.

There was a scream and a scramble, and a door was flung wide. The little girl ran out with her hair flying and rushed into her friend’s arms.

When at last he disentangled himself from her clinging hands, he held her at a distance from him, pushing her into the stream of light that had come with her through the open door. Holding her in this way he searched her face with a stern scrutiny. “After all,” he thought, “she’s more nearly related to Christie than I am to Mattie. We might all be in Mr. Urquhart’s book!”

But the child pulled him into her room, and, disregarding Mattie completely, began hurriedly displaying before him every one of her treasures.

The summer night was already chilly, and over the half-opened window the muslin curtains swelled and receded, receded and swelled, as if they were sails on an invisible sea. Crouching upon a low straight-backed nursery-chair — the very chair, in fact, upon which her mother had sat to suckle her in her infancy — Mattie sat with her hands clasped round her knees, watching the shadows of their three forms, thrown by the candlelight, waver and hover against the old-fashioned wall-paper.

Wolf began to detach himself, as the three of them sat there, from the pressure of the actual situation, from the awareness even of his own personality. He seemed to slip away, out of his human skin, out of that old Ramsgard house, out of the very confines of life itself. He had the sensation that he was outside life — that he was outside death too; that he was floating in some airy region, where forms and shapes and sounds had been left behind — had changed into *something else*.

Attenuated by the influence of these bodiless fancies, the palpable shapes of Mattie and Olwen seemed to thin themselves out into something more filmy than the stuff of dreams. Mechanically he responded to Olwen's intense preoccupations, mechanically he smiled at his sister across the little girl's flushed face. But he felt that his senses were no longer available, no longer to be trusted. He had slid away somehow into some level of existence where human vision and human contact meant nothing at all. It was as if these two girls had become as unreal as his own intangible thoughts — those thoughts like tiny twilight insects — which passed without leaving a trace!

"No! Didn't you hear me telling you? That's not Gipsy... that's Antoinette!" scolded the little girl, as she snatched a miniature pillow from under one waxen head to insert it violently beneath another.

"Dolls — dolls — dolls!" thought Wolf. "If we can slip out of reality, why can't they slip into it?" He began automatically swinging both Gipsy and Antoinette from one hand to the other, a proceeding which delighted their little mistress.

"What," he thought, as he contemplated Mattie's heavy, clouded, patient features, her corrugated brow, her thick nose, "what am I aiming at, meddling with these people's lives? I do it with the same voracity with which I eat honey or trample over grass. I'm driven to it as if I were an omophagous demon! Is this the sort of thing my father did — that scoundrel with his 'happy life'?"

He was interrupted in his thoughts by the sound of a bell downstairs, followed by the opening of a door and by unsteady steps in the hall.

Mattie jumped to her feet and stood listening, intent and anxious.

"I believe that's Father!" she cried. "But why did he ring? He never rings. Excuse me, Wolf, I must run down."

She opened the door, but remained still listening, as also did Olwen, with wide-open startled eyes, a thin arm thrown round Wolf's neck.

There was a muttering and a shuffling downstairs, followed by the clang of a heavy stick falling on a tiled floor. Then a chair creaked ominously and there was a sort of groan. Then all was silent.

Mattie, with her hand on the door, turned round to them; and in spite of the flickering of the candles he could see that her face had gone white.

"It's Father!" she whispered. "He's ill. I *must* go down."

Still hesitating, however, and evidently struck by some sort of panic, she continued to waver in the doorway. Wolf remembered afterwards every smallest incident of that occasion. Olwen's little arm had a pulse in it that beat against his cheek like a tiny clock as she held him tighter and tighter. He replaced Gipsy and Antoinette on a chair by his side, half-consciously smoothing down their ruffled dresses. Both dolls' eyes, one pair blue and one black, stared up at him. Antoinette's arm stuck out awkwardly, absurdly. He pushed it down by her side with one of his fingers and it creaked as he did so.

"Stay where you are, both of you! I must go!" cried Mattie; and she ran hastily down the stairs.

Then there was a sudden scream that echoed sharply through the whole silent house. "Wolf! Wolf!" came her voice.

"Stay here, sweetheart!" he cried, freeing himself and rushing to the door. "Stay where you are!" But the little girl followed him like a shadow and was there by his side when he reached the hall.

They had left the door of the dining-room open, and by the light thus flung into the passage he saw Mattie on her knees before one of the hall-chairs, on which sprawled the stiff, collapsed form of Mr. Smith. His eyes were open and conscious under his black felt hat, which, tilted sideways, gave him a grotesque, drunken appearance. Mattie was chafing his hands with her own and murmuring wild endearments.

Wolf hurriedly closed the front-door, which had been left ajar, and then, with Olwen still clinging to him, proceeded to strike a match, so as to light the hall-lamp.

"What are you doing, Wolf? Go away, Olwen. He'll be better in a minute. Father! Darling Father, what's the matter? What is it, Father? You're safe at home. You're all right now. Father dearest, what is it?" Mattie kept crying out in this way all manner of contradictory commands and appeals, as she went on rubbing Mr. Smith's impassive hands.

Wolf removed the man's hat and hung it carefully on a peg. He remembered afterwards the look of this hat, hanging side by side with his own, calm and a little supercilious, as hats in that position always are.

"Mattie," he said, "do you want me to go and find a doctor?"

But at the word "doctor" the man in the chair found his voice.

"No — no — no! No doctor. I won't have one. I won't! Off! Off! Off!"

“What is it, Father dear?” cried Mattie, rising to her feet and pressing her hand against his forehead. “No, you don’t want a doctor. I’m here — your Mattie. You’re better now, Father, aren’t you?”

Mr. Smith stared at her with a heavy confused stare.

“All thieves,” he muttered.

Wolf tried to catch his sister’s eye for permission to disobey the sick man, but the girl seemed to have forgotten his existence. It was clear to him that Mr. Smith had had some kind of stroke. His face wore now an unnatural reddish tint, and his head kept drooping sideways, as if the muscles of his neck no longer responded to his will.

Suddenly he astonished them by calling out “Lorna! Lorna!” in a loud voice.

“Oh, he’s dying!” sobbed Mattie. “That’s Mother he wants. It’s your Mattie. It’s your dear Mattie,” she repeated, bending over him. But Mr. Smith had begun mumbling now, incoherently, but not inarticulately.

“Home... home for bastards....” Wolf was sure those were the words he used; and he was relieved that Mattie, fallen on her knees again now, was sobbing so violently as to make it unlikely that she could catch what he said.

“Hats... hats for bastards....” Mr. Smith went on. “No, no, Lorna! It was to Longburton he took you. But never mind.... Albert Smith, home for bastards. Albert Smith, Ramsgard, Dorset, Draper and Hat-Dealer. To the school, I tell ‘ee! No — no — no! She’ll never, never, never confess.... Longburton barn... hay and straw... hay and straw in your hair, my dear... and long past eleven.... What? You pricked your finger? A very pretty hat! Hats for bastards.... Home. *My* home. Albert Smith of Ramsgard come home.”

His head had sunk so low now as to be almost resting on Mattie's shoulder, as she sobbed against his knees. Suddenly he lifted it with a spasmodic jerk.

"I'll pay for the child! I've got the money. I'll pay for them all and say nothing. Albert Smith, Draper and Hatter.... To the school, I tell 'ee!... Pay... pay all... pay...."

This was really the end now. His body fell forward over the stooping girl, and Wolf was hard put to it to pull her away from between the prone forehead and the stiff, protruding knees. For the moment he feared she would collapse; but he saw the quick, protective glance she cast at Olwen, who stood motionless, staring at the dead man like a fairy in a pantomime at the chief clown, and he knew then that she was mistress of herself. She helped him, without shrinking and without any more tears, to carry the body of Mr. Smith up the staircase and into his bedroom....

It was about two hours after this that Wolf entered the room again with Mattie. Here, lying on his own high pillow, the head of the dead man had already assumed an expression of exhausted indifference. Close by his side, on a little table by the bed, as Wolf cast a final glance at him, was a picture of a young woman in the chaste costume of the mid-Victorian epoch. "Madam Lorna, I suppose," he thought; and he would have looked more closely at his father's sweetheart, but the presence of Mattie restrained him.

"I'll come over tomorrow evening, my dear," he said, "after my work with the Squire. Don't commit yourself to any arrangements or any plans till we've seen how the land lies. You won't, will you, Mattie?" he repeated emphatically. "I'll be really angry if you make any move that we haven't discussed together."

They were out on the landing by this time, and the little girl heard them speaking and called out to them from her room.

“Go to sleep, Olwen!” cried Mattie.

“I want him to see Gipsy and Antoinette! I want him to see them!” the child repeated.

“Only for a minute, Wolf, *please*!” whispered his sister. “She’s so terribly excited I shall never get her to sleep.”

They opened the door and went in. There was a tray, with milk and biscuits upon it, on the chest of drawers by Olwen’s bed and near the tray a small night-light burning. By this faint flicker Wolf could see the little girl’s dark eyes shining with awe-struck intensity, though she was immobile as an image.

“Come nearer! Come quite near! They’re as awake as I am.”

He went up to the bed; and there, lying on opposite sides of Olwen’s pillow, were the two dolls, with black ribbons twisted tightly round them and their hair brushed smooth and straight.

“They are going to grandfather’s funeral tomorrow,” she whispered. “Don’t they look sorry and good?”

A minute or two later he bade his sister farewell at the front-door.

“You’re sure you don’t want me to stay the night with you?” he asked.

Mattie shook her head.

“I shall sleep with Olwen,” she replied quietly. “We shall be all right.”

“Well, remember you’ve had no supper. You’ll never get through the night if you don’t eat something.”

“What about you, Wolf? How stupid I am!”

“Oh, I’ll get a drink at the Lovelace on my way,” he said. “But remember — no plans of any kind till I’ve seen you again!”

He was indeed only just in time to get into the Lovelace bar before the Abbey clock struck ten. He enquired about the King’s Barton coachman and found that Mrs. Solent had left a message at the hotel-office earlier in the evening, saying that they could not wait for him, but that they had heard of Mr. Smith's death and would Mr. Solent come and see her tomorrow.

"I wonder," he thought, "how the devil she heard? They must have actually come to the door and been told by the maid about it when we were all upstairs. Well, it'll give her some kind of a shock, I daresay — but not very much!"

He left the Lovelace after drinking a pint of Dorchester ale. The night was cool and fragrant. The sky was covered now by a grey film of feathery clouds, through which neither moon nor stars were visible except as a faint diffused luminosity, which lifted the weight of darkness from the earth, but turned the world into a place of phantoms and shadows.

Wolf decided to follow the shorter and easier way home. This was the highroad to Blacksod that ran along the top of the ridge dividing Dorset from Somerset; and as he strode between the phantasmal wheat-fields of that exposed upland, his thoughts took many a queer turn. So Mattie and Olwen were left penniless! That was evidently going to be the upshot of the hatter's death. And the question was, what was to become of them? If it had not been for the child's insane hostility to Christie, the natural course would have been for Olwen to return to her father's dwelling. The chances were that the local authorities, unless Miss Gault took upon herself to meddle again, would not interfere. Then his mind reverted to his mother.

Would his mother take them in? Roger Monk's house was certainly big enough, and it seemed unlikely that the Squire would object if no one else did. But — good Lord! — he couldn't visualize his mother living with another woman, or indeed putting up with the waywardness and excitability of Olwen. Who would educate her? It was impossible to contemplate Olwen at school!

The problem seemed well-nigh insoluble, as he pondered on it. Then, all in a moment, he thought of Selena Gault. There, no doubt, was the obvious solution! Selena was passionately fond of the little girl, and Selena had a servant. He stared at a fantastic thorn-tree, whose largest branch, bare of leaves and apparently quite dead, stretched out a semi-human hand across the tangled foliage of the roadside. As was his wont when confronted by a mental dilemma, he stood stock-still and regarded this silent monitor.

Nature was always prolific of signs and omens to his mind; and it had become a custom with him to keep a region of his intelligence alert and passive for a thousand whispers, hints, obscure intimations that came to him in this way. Why was it that a deep, obstinate resistance somewhere in his consciousness opposed itself to such a solution? He tried to analyze what he felt. Selena was a good woman, a passionately protective woman; but there it was! That interference in the case of the Malakites had lodged a deep distaste in his mind. She might love Olwen; but she probably hated Mattie as much as she did Christie.

Damn! Why had Mr. Smith fooled away his money and shuffled himself off in this awkward manner? "Home for bastards" — what gross outbursting of the literal truth that was! Well, it was *his* business now to take the hatter's place and find just such a home! That incorrigibly complacent and grinning skull in the cemetery had certainly managed to bequeath burdens to its legitimate offspring which were not easy to fulfill!

Wolf stuck out his under-lip at the oracular thorn-tree and strode on. What he asked now, of that grey luminosity above him and of those diaphanous wraith-like corn-shocks, was why there should be, between his deepest desire and his complicated activity, such an unbridged gulf?

He had only one life. That was a basic and relentless fact. An eternity of "something or other" lay behind him, and an equally obscure eternity of "something or other" lay in front of him. Meanwhile, here he was, with only one single, simple, and world-deep craving — the craving to spend his days and his nights with that other mysterious and mortal consciousness, entitled Christie Malakite! And yet, for reasons comparatively superficial, reasons comparatively external to his secret life-current, he was steadily, day by day, month by month, building up barriers between himself and Christie, struggling to build them up, moving men and women like bricks and mortar to build them up!

A villainously evil thought assailed him as he walked along. Were all his better actions only so many Pharisaic sops thrown one by one into the mouth of a Cerberus of selfishness, monstrous and insane? Was his "mythology" itself only a projection of such selfishness? He carried this sardonic thought like a demon-fox pressed against the pit of his stomach, for nearly a mile; and it was just as if the hard, opaque crystal-circle of his inmost identity were, under that fox's black saliva, turning into something shapeless and nauseating, something that resembled a mass of floating frog-spawn.

"Come, you demon," he said to himself at last, "my soul is going to remain intact, or it's going to dissolve into air!"

He had reached the summit of Babylon Hill now; and precisely where he had first crossed that stile with Gerda, he stood at this moment, rending his nature in a desperate inward struggle.

When, in the middle of the night, lying in his bed by Gerda's side, he recalled this evil experience, he found the explanation of it in a sort of dissolution-hypnosis, or corruption-sympathy, linking him with the actual dead body of Albert Smith!

What he experienced was strange enough. He found himself very soon clutching with his fingers one of the posts of that stile, while with his other hand he dug his stick savagely into the sun-baked earth. And it seemed to him that every revolting or secretive instinct he had ever had took on a material shape and became as an actual portion of his physical body.

He became, in fact, a living human head, emerging from a monstrous agglomeration of all repulsiveness. And this gross mass was not only foul and excremental; it was in some mysterious way *comic*. He, the head of this unspeakable body, was the joke of the abyss; the smug charlatan-prig at which the devils shrieked with laughter.

The queer thing was that his brain moved at this moment with incredible rapidity. His brain debated, for example, as it had never done before, the insoluble problem of free-will, the problem of the very existence of the mystery called "will." And then, all in a moment, with a crouching-wild-animal movement of his consciousness, he flung a savage defiance to all these doubts. He laid hold of his will as if it had been a lightning-conductor, and, shaking it clear of his body, thrust it forth into space, into a space that was below and yet above, within and yet beyond Poll's Camp and Babylon Hill. And then, in a second, in less than a second, so it seemed, as he recalled it afterwards, there came flowing in upon him, out of those secret depths of which he was always more or less conscious, a greater flood of liberating peace than he had ever known before!

He had the sensation, as he came down the slope, of having left behind, on the top of Babylon Hill, some actual physical body — a body that had been troubling him, like a great repulsive protuberance, both by its appearance and by its weight. He felt lighter, freer, liberated from the malice of matter. Above all he felt once more that his inmost identity was a hard, round, opaque crystal, which had the power of forcing itself through any substance, organic, inorganic, magnetic, or psychic, that might obstruct its way.

There were a few lights twinkling still among the Blacksod roofs. But he had no notion whether Christie's was among them; and at this moment it seemed unimportant. A new fragrance filled the air as he descended; which he defined to himself as the actual smell of Somersetshire, as distinct from the smell of Dorsetshire — the far-off fragrance, in fact, full of the exhalations of brackish mosses, amber-coloured peat-tussocks, and arrow-pointed water-plants, of the salt-marshes of Sedgemoor.

Once in the town, he took without any hesitation — though he did not forget that long vigil of the night in June — the particular way that led past the Torp monument-yard. As he approached Preston Lane through the deserted streets, he found himself thinking shamelessly and contentedly of the pleasure of making love to Gerda before he went to sleep.

His mind, after the experience he had gone through, seemed to float lightly and carelessly over every aspect of his existence. The personality of Christie remained the same through everything. It was as if to everything he did, even to making love to Gerda, Christie set her proud and careless seal. This indeed — so he said to himself — was the solution of that dilemma on which he had been impaled. Christie did remain the great aim and purpose of his life; but these innumerable other people were part of the body of that life itself. They were what *he was*, his ways, his habits, his customs, his manias, his impulses, his instincts; and *with all that he was* he had now been drawn to Christie as if by a magnet strong enough to move a great slave-galleon of manias and superstitions, *en masse* across the deep!

Airy and light as it now was, his soul seemed to have been liberated in some secret way from all that clogged and burdened it. The slave-galleon of his manias rocked and tossed on a smooth tide; but his soul, like a careless albatross, rode on the masthead. There was a strange humming and singing from the galleon itself, as if the immense peace of that summer night had turned it into a trireme of deliverance, carrying liberated pilgrims to the harbour where they would be. Something unutterable, some clue, some signal, had touched the dark bulkheads of this night-voyager; so that hereafter all might be different. What was this clue? All he knew about it now was that it meant the *acceptance* of something monstrously comic in his inmost being, something comic and stupid, together with something as grotesquely non-human as the sensations of an ichthyosaurus! But once having accepted all this, everything was magically well. “Christie! Christie!” he cried in his heart, longing to tell her about it.

He stopped when he was opposite the familiar pigsty, and lifted his head, breathing deeply. At that moment Fate seemed so kind to him that its kindness was almost too great. His love for Christie seemed to touch with a kind of transparency everything that he looked at. Rapidly he crossed the road, entered his house, and ran upstairs.

He found the room dark; but when he had lit a candle he saw that the girl was lying wide-awake, her head propped high on the two pillows. He was in such an exalted mood that he was hardly surprised at her first words.

“Oh, Wolf, Wolf,” she said, “I’m almost sorry you’ve come so soon. I’ve been looking through that window for hours and hours. What’s happened to me I don’t know; but I’ve not felt like this since that evening when you first loved me in the river-fields.”

He stooped and kissed her without attempting an answer; and when he held her presently in his arms, and the room was again dark, it was as if they each found an opportunity in their embraces wherein to express an accumulated tide of feelings that spread out wide and far — spread out beyond all that he could feel for her, and beyond — so it seemed to him, as he tasted tears on her cheek — all that she could feel for him.

And now, as their dalliance sank into quiescence, one of Wolf’s final thoughts before he slept was of the vast tracts of unknown country that every human consciousness includes in its scope. Here, to the superficial eye, were two skulls, lying side by side; but, in reality, here were two far-extending continents, each with its own sky, its own land and water, its own strange-blowing winds. And it was only because his own soul had been, so to speak, washed clean of its body that day, that he was able to feel as he felt at this moment. But — even so — what those thoughts of hers had been, that he had interrupted by his return, he knew no better now, than when first he had entered her room and had blown out her candle.

CROOKED SMOKE

It was with a fairly untroubled mind that Wolf set off the following afternoon for King’s Barton. And it was with a peculiar sense of recovery that he found himself seated side by side with Mr. Urquhart at the littered table in the great library-window.

Incredibly fragrant were the garden-scents that flowed in upon him, past the Squire’s pendulous eye-folds, Napoleonic paunch, and withered pantaloon-legs. The old rogue had discovered a completely new stratum of obscene Dorset legends. He had got on the track now of accounting for certain local cases of misbehaviour, on the grounds of libidinous customs reverting to very remote times. He was, in fact, at this moment gathering all the material he could find about the famous “Cerne Giant,” whose phallic shamelessness seemed by no means confined to its harmless representation upon a chalkhill.

As he looked down, past Mr. Urquhart’s profile, upon the lawn below, and contemplated the rich mingling of asters, lobelias, and salpiglossis in Roger Monk’s favourite flower-bed, it seemed to Wolf that certain prematurely fallen leaves which he caught sight of down there upon the grass had struck his consciousness long ago with a tremendous significance. Those sultry glowing purples... those dead leaves... what *was* that significance? “This day is going to be a queer day for me,” he thought. For he had become aware that some screen, some casement, at the back of his mind, behind which his most secret impressions lived and moved in their twilight, had swung open a little....

He kept staring down out of that library-window past his employer’s profile. That purple glow from the flower-bed... those dead leaves... why was there no dew down there? It was autumn dew he was thinking about that August day... silvery mist upon purple flowers.... “The most important things in my life,” he said to himself, “are what come back to me from forgotten walks, when I’ve been alone.... Dark grass with purplish flowers... dead leaves with dew on them.... I wonder,” he thought, “how much room those undertakers left between old Smith’s face and his coffin-lid?”

And then he thought, “I wonder if old Smith ever noticed the look of dew upon dead leaves?” and he shifted his position a little, as a cold shiver went through him.

But Mr. Urquhart now broke silence. Some telepathic wave must have passed from his secretary’s wandering mind into his own.

“What’s this news I hear,” he said, “about Albert Smith? The old chap’s kicked the bucket, eh? Lovelace was over here this morning, and he tells me the fellow died last night and left nothing but debts. A bad lookout for those two girls, what? Lovelace even hints at suicide.”

The Squire paused, and a very curious expression came into his face.

“They talked of suicide when Redfern died,” he went on. “I’d like to know what *you* think, Solent, about this business of shuffling off without a word to anyone? D’ye think it’s easy for ’em? D’ye think they do it with their brains cool and clear? D’ye think they have some pretty awful moments or not, ha? Come, tell me, tell me! I hate not to know these things. Do they go through the devil of a time before they bring themselves to it, eh? Or do they sneak off like constipated beagles, to eat the long ditch-grass and ha’ done with it?”

Wolf tried in vain to catch his employer’s equivocal eye as he listened to all this. Never in his acquaintance with Mr. Urquhart had he felt so baffled by the drift of the man’s mind. Something in himself, rising up from very hidden depths, gave him a hurried danger-signal; but what possible danger there could be to him from the man’s words he was unable to see.

“Do they mind it or don’t they?” repeated the Squire. “People pity ’em; but what does anyone know? Perhaps the only completely happy moments of a man’s life are when he’s decided on it. Things must look different then — different and much nicer, eh, Solent? But different, anyway; very different. Don’t ‘ee think so, Solent? Quite different.... Little things, I mean. Things like the handles of doors, and bits of soap in soap-dishes, and sponges on washing-stands! Wouldn’t you want to squeeze out your sponge, Solent, and pick up the matches off the floor, when you’d decided on it?”

Wolf was spared the necessity of any retort to this by the appearance of Roger Monk. The man came in without knocking and walked straight up to their table.

Wolf peered at him with quizzical screwed-up eyes. He couldn’t help recalling that explosion of homicidal hatred which he had listened to outside Lenty Cottage. But the gardener’s countenance was impassive now as a human-faced rock.

“Eh? What’s that, Monk? Speak up. Mr. Solent will not mind.”

“Weevil and young Torp, Sir, round at the back, Sir; asking for leave to fish in Lenty Pond, Sir.”

Monk uttered the words in a low, discreet, colourless voice.

Mr. Urquhart at once assumed a blustering great man’s tone of genial condescension, as if he were addressing himself to the youths in question.

“Sporting young men, ha? Gay young truants, ha? Well, we mustn’t be too strict. Do ’em good, I daresay, on a fine afternoon. Probably catch nothing but a perch or two! Certainly, Roger. I’ve no objection, Roger.”

But the man still remained where he was.

“They *did* say, Sir, that you said something the other night to them, Sir, about — —”

But Mr. Urquhart interrupted him.

“I’ve no time now. I’m busy with Mr. Solent. Tell ’em to clear off and fish all they like. There’s nothing more, Roger, thank you. Tell ’em to fish the pond from end to end, but not to trample down the rushes. Tell ’em to be careful of the rushes, Roger. That’s all, Roger.”

His last words were uttered in such a final and dismissing tone, that the man, having given him one quick interrogative look, swung round on his heels and left the room.

The Squire turned to Wolf.

“A little sport for the populace, eh, Solent? Do ’em good, what? Doesn’t pay to be too strict these days. Seignorial rights and that sort o’ thing grown a bit old-fashioned, ha?”

The conversation lapsed after this, and they returned to their investigations concerning the Cerne Giant.

It was Mr. Urquhart’s part to select, from the mass of their material, the particular aspects of Dorset history which lent themselves to their work. It was Wolf’s business to purge and winnow and heighten these to the general level of the style which they had adopted.

“Every bibliophile in England’ll have this book on his shelves one day, Solent,” remarked the Squire, after about half-an-hour’s work.

Wolf did not reply. For some reason he lacked the faintest flicker of an author’s pride in what they were doing.

They worked on for nearly a whole hour after this. Then Mr. Urquhart suddenly uttered these strange words.

“It would be wonderful to see one’s sponge and one’s hair-brush as they’d look just then.”

Wolf hurriedly gathered his wits together.

“You mean after you’d decided upon it?” he said.

Mr. Urquhart nodded.

“You’d see ’em in a sort of fairy-story light, I fancy,” he went on, “much as infants see ’em, when they’re so damned well-pleased with themselves that they chirp like grass-hoppers. It would be nice to see things like that, Solent, don’t you think so? Stripped clear of the mischief of custom? It... would... be... very... nice... to see... anything... like that!”

His voice assumed a languid and dreamy tone, full of an infinite weariness.

Wolf found it difficult to make any intelligent comment. His own mind was worrying about many teasing details just then, such as what he was to say to his mother with regard to Mattie and Olwen, and whether he should go to Ramsgard between tea and dinner or wait till later in the evening.

Mr. Urquhart suddenly rose to his feet.

“Let’s stroll round to Lenty Pond, Solent, and tell those lads they can bathe if they want to. It’s bathing they really like,” he added emphatically, “much more than fishing. Good for the rabble, too, don’t you think so, Solent, to learn to swim?”

Wolf could only patiently acquiesce. He did, however, snatch a brief glance at his watch.

“It’s nearly four, Sir,” he said. “You won’t mind if I leave you, after we’ve been over there, and run round to my mother’s?”

The man waved his hand with a negligent, indifferent gesture. It was a mere nothing, this gesture; but in some queer way it rather chilled Wolf’s blood. “It must have been,” he thought to himself, “exactly in that way that the high-priest waved his hand when he uttered the memorable expression, ‘What is that to *us*? See *thou* to that!’ ”

They went out together, and Wolf was almost irritated by the unnecessary speed with which Mr. Urquhart walked.

They did not, for all this hurry, reach Lenty Pond uninterrupted. Just as they were entering the field above the Otters' house, they came unexpectedly upon Jason. The poet had — as far as Wolf could make out — been sitting in the ditch, both for coolness and for seclusion; but he emerged from his retreat in comparative self-possession, and accepted Mr. Urquhart's rather curt invitation to join them with quiet acquiescence.

They all proceeded therefore across the field, Wolf forgetting his personal anxieties in his interest in the way his two companions treated each other.

"Your peaches are very fine this year," said Jason to the Squire. "And it was a very good idea of yours to put netting over them. Thieves are afraid of touching netting. It's like the Latin words at the beginning of a psalm. It makes fruit seem more than fruit — something sacred, I mean."

"You must make my gardener pick you some of the sacred fruit when you next explore my garden," said Mr. Urquhart.

"You've put your garden-seats in such a very well-chosen place," went on the poet, in an eager, propitiatory manner. "None of these country fools understand why your garden-seats are between the yew-hedges and the privet-hedges. They've no more idea of how garden-seats should be arranged — I mean, with regard to shadows — than a Sturminster goose has of the taste of Tangerine oranges."

"I hope," said Mr. Urquhart drily, "that you will not fail to take advantage of *all* the shadows in my garden when you happen to be there."

Wolf glanced at the Squire's face as he spoke, and was startled by its look of agitated annoyance. But Jason went on rapidly, his cheeks growing more and more flushed, and a queer dark glow showing itself in his eyes.

“There are idiots who can’t enjoy that shrubbery of yours, Mr. Urquhart, just because the bushes aren’t trimmed. Untrimmed shrubberies are by far the best. Children and fairies are safe there. Silly old women can’t walk about in them and God can’t get into them.”

“I hope you’ll never hurt *yourself*, Otter, when you happen to be walking about in my shrubberies.”

The tone in which his employer uttered these words did not altogether surprise Wolf. In his earlier conclusions about these two men he had taken for granted that Jason was helpless in Mr. Urquhart’s hands. He had already begun to waver a little in this view.

They now arrived at the edge of Lenty Pond, and Wolf was amused by the sight of two naked figures, splashing, gesticulating, and clinging to the branches of a submerged willow. It was clear that Mr. Urquhart’s “populace” had not waited for any formal permission to substitute bathing for fishing.

“Hullo, lads! You’ve done very wisely, I see,” said the lord of the manor, approaching the edge of the water and leaning on his cane.

“Take care of the leeches, you two!” cried Jason with benevolent unction.

If Wolf had been previously struck by the unrestrained manner in which the poet had rallied the great man, he was still more arrested by the change that now came over Mr. Otter’s expressive face. It had been stonily self-centred when he came out of the ditch. It had been twitching with mischief as he talked. It now became suddenly suffused with a kind of abandoned sentimentality. Every trace of nervousness passed out of it and every shadow of misery. It seemed to be illuminated by some soft inner light, not a radiant light, but a pallid, phosphorescent nebulosity, such as might have accompanied the religious ecstasy of a worshipper of will-o’-the-wisps.

Lobbie Torp, his thin white figure streaked with green pond-weed, staggered out of the water and sat down by the side of Jason on the bank, beating the flies away from his legs with a muddy willow-branch.

Wolf noticed that the poet's expression assumed a look of almost beatific contentment as he proceeded to enter upon a whispered conversation with the small boy, who himself, as far as Wolf could see, was too occupied in casting awe-struck glances at the Squire to give the least attention to what was being said to him.

"It's not too warm, gentlemen," called out Bob Weevil, with a forced shiver, pulling himself up, rather foolishly and self-consciously, by the tree-trunk in front of him.

"Why don't you take a swim, Weevil?" enquired Mr. Urquhart blandly.

"He dursn't, Sir. He's afeared of they girt water-snakes," cried Lobbie Torp.

Bob Weevil's reply to this taunt was to drop his hold upon the tree, swing himself round, and strike out boldly for the centre of the pond.

"Well done, Weevil! Well done!" cried out the Squire in high delight, watching the flexible muscles and slim back of the swimmer, as the muddy ripples eddied round him.

"Float now, Weevil!" he went on. "Let's see you float!"

The youthful dealer in sausages turned upon his back and beat the surface of the pond with arms and heels, causing a solitary moor-hen, that hitherto had remained in terrified concealment, to rise and flap away through the thick reeds.

There passed rapidly through Wolf's mind, while all this went on, a hurried mental estimate of his own feelings. He felt — and he frankly confessed it to himself — in some queer way definitely uncomfortable and embarrassed. The air of excited well-being around him jarred upon his nerves as if there were actually present, hovering with the gnats and midges above that pond, some species of electricity to which he was completely insensitive. He felt awkward, ill at ease, and even something of a fool.

What puzzled him, too, profoundly and annoyingly, was the fact that the psychic "aura" of the situation seemed entirely natural and harmless. The presence of those two lads seemed to have drawn out of both his equivocal companions every ounce of black bile or complicated evil.

The Squire had the air of an innocent, energetic schoolmaster, superintending some species of athletic sports. Jason had the look of an enraptured saint, liberated from earthly persecution and awakening to the pure ecstasies of Paradise.

He himself began vaguely wondering, as Bob Weevil reversed his position and with vigorous strokes approached the willow-tree, whether the numerous intimations of peril he had been receiving lately had any reality in them.

He had been, he knew well, taking for granted for many months, that between himself and Mr. Urquhart there existed some sort of subterranean struggle that ultimately would articulate itself in some volcanic explosion. But at this moment, half-hypnotized by the heavy sunshine, by the disturbed waters of Lenty Pond, by the classic nakedness of the two youths, he found himself beginning to wonder if the whole idea of this psychic struggle were not a fancy of his brain.

The sense that this might be the case had an extremely disconcerting effect upon him, and seemed to menace with doubt and confusion one of the dominant motive-powers of his identity.

He knew very well why it had this effect. His whole philosophy had been for years and years a deliberately subjective thing. It was one of the fatalities of his temperament that he completely distrusted what is called “objective truth.” He had come more and more to regard “reality” as a mere name given to the most lasting and most vivid among all the various impressions of life which each individual experiences. It might seem an insubstantial view of so solid a thing as what is called “truth”; but such was the way he felt, and he thought he would never cease to feel like that. At any rate, one of his own most permanent impressions had always been of the nature of an extreme dualism, a dualism descending to the profoundest gulfs of being, a dualism in which every living thing was compelled to take part. The essence of this invisible struggle he was content to leave vague and obscure. He was not rigid in his definitions. But it was profoundly necessary to his life-illusion to feel the impact of this mysterious struggle and to feel that he was taking part in it. What had come over him now as he watched the shining body of Mr. Weevil, surmounted by his impudent water-rat face, as the self-conscious youth once more began his gymnastics with the willow-tree, was a sort of moral atrophy. Sitting on the bank, hugging his knees, at a little distance from Jason and Lobbie, he had time to watch the Squire, and he was struck by the purged and almost hieratic look which the man now wore, as he stood leaning upon his cane, encouraging the silly manœuvres of the sausage-seller. “He looks like a mediæval bishop watching a tournament,” Wolf said to himself. And the placid sunburnt sympathy he felt for the man’s amiable passivity seemed seeping in upon him like a warm salt-tide — a tide that was outside any “dualism” — a tide that was threatening the banked-up discriminations of his whole life.

Then all in a moment he asked himself a very searching question.

“What would I feel at this moment,” he said to himself, “if Weevil were a girl and Lobbie a little girl? Should I in that case be quite untroubled by this Giorgione-like *fête-champêtre*? No!” — so he answered his own question— “I should feel just as uncomfortable even then at my complicity.

It isn't a question of the sex... it's a question of something else... it's a question of — —" A noisy splash made by Lob as he darted into the water, and a still louder splash made by Mr. Weevil as he plunged to meet him, interrupted Wolf's train of ideas.

He glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to five. He scrambled to his feet and picked up his stick. "I must rush off," he cried. "You'll excuse me, Sir? We'll meet again soon, Otter. Good-bye, Weevil! Good-bye, Lobbie! Don't stay in too long or you'll catch a chill, and I shall get into trouble with the family."

Mr. Urquhart and Jason seemed as indifferent to his departure as if he had been an inquisitive Guernsey cow who had approached them and then gone off with a flick of her tail. As he walked across the field he had an uneasy sense that he was retreating from some occult arena where he had suffered an irreversible defeat. The stirring of the waters of Lenty was evidently perilous to him!

He found his mother sitting over the tea-table in Roger Monk's trim house, sewing artificial poppies round her hat.

During their tea together he related all he chose to relate of the hatter's death. His mother, however, with her accustomed airy directness, like the swoop of a kestrel, pounced at once on the main issue.

"That's what I wanted to discuss with you," she said. "What's going to happen to those Smith girls?"

She gave him one of her sharp, quick looks, full of worldly sagacity and yet full of a kind of humorous recklessness.

"No one has the least idea," he responded. "I wish I could do something for them. But I don't see how I can."

His mother looked mischievously and affectionately at him.

Suddenly, coming round the table, she kissed him with a series of little bird-like pecks. “There’s no one like my Lambkin,” she said lightly, “for being too good to live!”

Having thus given him the feeling — how well he knew it! — that the very deepest stretch of his spirit only appeared as a pretty little pet-dog trick to her cynical maternal eroticism, she went back again, round the table, to her seat.

She drank more tea after that and ate more bread-and-butter, and Wolf received the impression that his obvious concern over Mattie and Olwen had for some reason given her a deep sense of satisfaction.

It was certainly a relief to him that this was so; and yet, as he met her warm, ironical, half-mischievous glance, a glance full of a sort of gloating tenderness that laughed at both itself and its object, he felt obscurely uneasy.

“I hope,” he said at last, “that I shan’t inflict my philanthropies on Gerda. Fortunately she’s got a very sweet nature.”

A somewhat grim look passed over Mrs. Solent’s face. Her adamantine chin was pushed forward; and her under-lip, like the under-lip of a carnivore, protruded itself in an extremely formidable manner.

“I don’t see your pretty Gerda putting herself out for anybody,” she said.

Wolf began instantaneously to grow angry — far more angry than he could himself account for.

“She’s as anxious about them as I am,” he retorted hotly.

“She knows you too well, Wolf, to dare to thwart you,” remarked Mrs. Solent.

“It’s her generous nature!” he cried, with a trembling lip. “It’s pure-and-simple magnanimity, such as not another girl in the world would show!”

His mother's massive face, under her weight of silver hair, darkened to a dull red.

"I'm afraid you spoil us all, Lambkin," she said, with a wicked, airy little laugh. "But your Gerda knows how to play her cards."

She had never spoken to him in this tone before. The magnetic current of his anger had touched an evil chord in her own nature, and her laugh was sardonic.

"Play her cards!" he cried in high indignation. "She's utterly incapable of such a thing! I wish you'd learn the same sweet generosity, Mother! It's you who 'play your cards,' as you call it."

Mrs. Solent rose to her feet, her face pale now and hard-set as flint.

"You'd have done better to have gone back to Blacksod this afternoon, Wolf," she said, "if that's how you feel about me!"

"Mother, you are absolutely unfair!" he cried. "And you've always been unfair about Gerda. You hate her for some unknown absurd reason. Pure snobbishness most likely! And you'd like to hurt her, to make her suffer, to spoil her life. That's why — oh, I see it now! — you're so glad I'm fussed up about Mattie. You think that will spoil everything for Gerda; and you are glad that it should!"

She came again round the table now, but with a very different purpose from her previous gesture; and yet, as Wolf knew well, it was the same savage eroticism that dominated both these movements.

"I care nothing, not one crow's-feather, for your pretty, brainless Gerda!" she cried, standing quite close to him, her left hand on the handle of the silver cake-basket which formed the centre of the tea-table, and her right hand opening and shutting as if it were galvanized. "I've been good to her, to please you; and I've been made a fool of for my trouble. Don't you think I don't know how little I count any more in your life, Wolf? Nothing...

nothing... nothing! You just come and see me. You flatter me and cajole me. But you never stay! Do you realize you haven't stayed one night under the same roof with me, since you married? Oh, it's all right! I don't complain. I'm growing an old woman; and old women aren't such pleasant companions as brainless little girls! Oh, it's all right! But it's a funny experience, this being shelved and superannuated while your feelings are just as young as anyone's!"

Her voice, as she let herself be overwhelmed by a blind rush of accumulated self-pity, began to break and choke; and then, all in a moment, it rose to a terrible, ringing intensity, like the sound of a great sea-bell in a violent storm....

"It's all right! I can stand it!" she cried. "I had plenty of practice with your father, and now I'm going to have the same thing with you.... Oh, it's a cruel thing to be a woman!"

She pushed back her grey hair from her forehead with one hand, while the other twitched frantically at her waist-band. Never had her handsome features looked more noble; never had her whole personality projected such magnificent, such primeval passion.

Wolf, as he watched her, felt weak, despicable, faltering. He felt like a finical attendant watching the splendid fury of some Sophoclean heroine. He became aware that her anger leaped up from some incalculable crevasse in the rock-crust of the universe, such as he himself had never approached. The nature of her feeling, its directness, its primordial simplicity, reduced his own emotion to something ridiculous. She towered above him there with that grand convulsed face and those expanded breasts; while her fine hands, clutching at her belt, seemed to display a wild desire to strip herself naked before him, to overwhelm him with the wrath of her naked maternal body, bare to the outrage of his impiety.

In the storm of her abandonment, the light irony that was her personal armour against life seemed to drop from her, piece by glittering piece, and fall tinkling upon the floor. Something impersonal rose up in its place, an image of all the stricken maternal nerves that had vibrated and endured through long centuries; so that it became no longer just a struggle between Wolf Solent and Ann Solent — it became a struggle between the body of Maternity itself and the bone of its bone!

She broke now into desperate sobs and flung herself face-down upon the sofa. But the demon that tore at her vitals was not yet content. Turning half-round towards Wolf, and lifting herself up by her arms, she raised a long, pitiful howl like a trapped leopard in the jungle. “Women... women... women!” she cried aloud; and then, to Wolf’s consternation, propping herself upon one of her arms, she held out the other with her first-finger extended, menacing, prophetic, straight towards him.

“It’s he who’s doing all this to me! You needn’t think that you could do it alone! It’s both of you. It’s both! But, oh, you great, heavy, stupid, clumsy lumps of selfishness..... Something, some day, will make you... I don’t know what.... Something, one day... will make you.... Something will do it... one day... and I shall be glad.... Don’t expect anything else. I shall be glad!”

She drew in her arm and buried her face in the sofa, her body heaving with long, dry, husky sobs.

Wolf surveyed her form as she lay there, one strong leg exposed as high as the knee, and one disarranged tress of wavy grey hair hanging across her cheek. And it came over him with a wave of remorseful shame that this formidable being, so grotesquely reduced, was the actual human animal out of whose entrails he had been dragged into light and air.

His remorse, however, was not a pure or simple emotion. It was complicated by a kind of sulky indignation and by a bitter sense of injustice.

The physical shamelessness, too, of her abandonment shocked something in him, some vein of fastidious reverence. But his mother's cynicism had always shocked this element in his nature; and what he felt now he had felt a thousand times before — felt in the earliest dawn of consciousness. What he would have liked to do at that moment was just to slip out of the room and out of the house. Her paroxysm roused something in him which, had she known it, she would have recognized as more dangerous than any responsive anger. But this feeling did not destroy his pity; so that, as he now sombrely contemplated those grey hairs, and that exposed knee, he felt a more poignant consciousness of what she was, than he had ever felt at the times when he admired her most and loved her most.

He let himself sink down in his chair and covered his mouth with his hand as if to hide a yawn. But he was not yawning. This was an old automatic gesture of his: perhaps originally induced by his consciousness that his mouth was his weakest and most sensitive feature and the one by which the sufferings of his mind were most quickly betrayed.

Then he suddenly became aware that the sobs had ceased; and a second later he received a most queer impression, the impression, namely, that one warm, glowing, ironical brown eye was fixed upon him and was steadily regarding him — regarding him through the disordered tress of ruffled hair that lay across it.

He drew his hand from his mouth, rose to his feet quickly, and, bending down above his mother, pulled her up from a recumbent into a sitting posture.

"Mother, don't!" he cried. "You're laughing at me; you're pretending! And I might have done I don't know what, because you scared me so. You've just been teasing your poor son, and frightening him out of his wits; and now you're laughing at me!"

He fell on his knees in front of her and she let her touzled forehead sink down till it rested against his; and there they remained for a while, their two skulls in a happy trance of relaxed contact, full of unspoken reciprocities, like the skulls of two animals out at pasture, or the branches of two trees exhausted by a storm.

Wolf was conscious of abandoning himself to a vast undisturbed peace — a peace without thought, aim, or desire — a peace that flowed over him from the dim reservoirs of prenatal life, lulling him, soothing him, hypnotizing him — obliterating everything from his consciousness except a faint delicious feeling that everything *had* been obliterated.

It was his mother herself who broke the spell. She raised her hands to his head and held it back by his stubbly straw-coloured hair, pressing, as she did so, her own glowing tear-stained cheeks against his chin, and finally kissing him with a hot, intense, tyrannous kiss.

He rose to his feet after that and so did she; and, moved by a simultaneous impulse, they both sat down again at the deserted tea-table, emptied the teapot into their cups, and began spreading for themselves large mouthfuls of bread-and-butter with overflowing spoonfuls of red-currant jam.

Wolf felt as if this were in some way a kind of sacramental feast; and he even received a queer sensation, as though their mutual enjoyment of the sweet morsels they swallowed so greedily were an obscure reversion to those forgotten diurnal nourishments which he must have shared with her long before his flesh was separated from hers.

Half-an-hour later he was walking leisurely towards Ramsgard along that now so familiar road. He recalled his first acquaintance with this road, that day he drove over by the side of Darnley Otter; and as he began to approach the town, he found himself glancing across the fields to his right, toward the lane that led to the cemetery, and then across the fields to the left, toward the broader highway which he had followed on the preceding night, his head full of Mr. Smith's death.

Roads and lanes! Lanes and roads! What a part these tracks for the feet of men and beasts, dusty in Summer, muddy in Winter, had played in his mental consciousness! The thrill that this idea of roadways gave him was a proof to him that his mind was returning to its independent orbit, after its plunge into that maternal hypnosis. His spirit felt indeed deliciously free just then, and expanded its wings to its heart's content, like a great flapping rook. Every object of the way took on an especial glamour; and never had he enjoyed so deeply one peculiar trick of his mind. This was a certain queer, sensuous sympathy he could feel sometimes for completely unknown people's lives, as he passed by their dwellings. He enjoyed it now with especial satisfaction, thinking of the people in each cottage he came to, and gathering their experiences together as one might gather a bunch of ragwort or hemp-agrimony out of the dusty hedges.

Well enough did he know how many of these experiences were bitter and grotesque; but what he enjoyed now, along with all these unknown people, was their moments of simple, sensuous well-being.

Such a moment he himself felt presently, as he leaned over a gate to rest, just before the road he traversed entered the outskirts of Ramsgard. Through the warm, misty evening, full of what seemed to him a veritable diffused essence of gold-dust, there came some quick wandering breaths of cooler air; and these breaths of air, brushing against his face and passing swiftly upon their way, carried a peculiar fragrance with them, a fragrance that made him think of a certain little garden of old-fashioned pinks that he used to pass, on his way to the place where he gave his lectures, down a narrow West London alley. If in Mr. Urquhart's library he had been stirred by Roger

Monk's flower-beds, he was more stirred now by this far-off impression. The pinks were meagre enough in themselves. But the thought of them in their sun-baked little garden, so close to the hot pavement, touched some chord of seminal memory that gave him just then a transporting thrill.

Where did it come from, this emotion? Was it an inherited feeling, reverting to days when some remote ancestor of his, in cloister or market-place, used to inhale day by day that particular sweetness? Or was it something larger and more general than this? Certainly what he felt just now, as these cool-wafted airs came over the yellow stubble, was not confined to the pinks in that hot little garden behind iron railings. It was much more as if he were enabled to enter, by a lucky psychic sensitiveness, into some continuous stream of human awareness — awareness of a beauty in the world that travelled lightly from place to place, stopping here and stopping there, like a bird of passage, but never valued at its true worth until it had vanished away.

"There *must* be," he thought, "some deep race-memory in which these things are stored up, to be drawn upon by those who seek for them through the world — a memory that has the power of obliterating infinite débris, while it retains all these frail essences, these emanations from plants and trees, roadsides and gardens, as if such things actually possessed immortal souls!" He turned from the gate and pursued his road, swinging his stick from side to side like a madman, and repeating aloud, as he strode along, the words "immortal souls."

Certain human expressions, meaning one thing to the philosopher and quite another thing to the populace, were always fascinating to Wolf. His mind began to dwell now upon the actual syllables of this phrase, "immortal souls," until by a familiar transformation those formidable sounds took on a shadowy personality of their own — took on the shape, in fact, of Christie

Malakite — and in that shape went wavering away over the fields like a thin spiral cloud! "These quaint words, used by the men of old time," he said to himself, "to describe what we all feel, have more in them than people have any idea of. I must tell Christie that!" And then it occurred to him how impossible it would be to explain to any living intelligence the faltering thoughts that had ended by his invocation of the "soul" of a tiny London garden and his embodying it in the wraith of the daughter of Mr. Malakite!

It still kept hovering in front of his mind, however — this phrase, "immortal souls" — even after it had slipped like a boat from its moorings. There seemed a noble and defiant challenge in it to all that petered out, to all that flagged, that wilted, that scattered, that became nothing, in the melancholy drift of the world!

With the cool airs of that summer evening wafted about him, he felt, as he passed now under the vast shadow of the Abbey-church, that there were immense resources of renewal, of restoration, spread abroad over the face of the earth, such as had hardly been drawn upon at all by the sons and daughters of men. "Why is it," he thought, "that this particular expression, 'immortal souls,' should act upon my mind in this way?" And as he moved slowly along now between the sculptured entrance to the School-House and the little low-roofed shop where the straw-hatted boys of the School bought their confectionery, it occurred to him as curiously significant that the syllable "God," so talismanic to most people, had never, from his childhood, possessed the faintest magic for him! "It must be," he thought, as, passing under a carved archway, he came bolt upon the old monastic conduit, "that anything suggestive of metaphysical unity is distasteful to me. It must be that my world is essentially a manifold world, and my religion, if I have any, essentially polytheistic! And yet, in matters of good and evil" — and he recalled his sensations at Lenty Pond— "I'm what they'd call a dualist, I suppose. Ay! It's funny. Directly one comes to putting feelings into words, one is compelled to accept hopeless contradictions in the very depths of one's being!"

He moved right in, under the carved roof of the old conduit, between the Late Gothic pillars, and laid his hand on the edge of the water-trough. The traffic of the high-street passed him by, and groups of tall straw-hatted schoolboys brushed past him, cold, remote, haughty, discreet, like young Romans in some Ionian market-place.

A barrel-organ was being played where the pavement widened, under the out-jutting gables of a mediæval hostelry; and Wolf couldn't help noticing how the abstracted, impassive expression of the old man who played it contrasted with a couple of ragged little children, glowing-cheeked and intent, who danced to its jigging tune.

"Polytheism... dualism," he repeated, trying to retain the philosophical distinctions which he felt crumbling to bits and drifting away. But as he fumbled with his fingers at that conduit-trough and turned automatically a leaden faucet so that water gushed out over his hand, his mind seemed to reject every single one of those traditional human catchwords.

"I just told him it was all bloody rot!" The words fell upon his ears from the lips of a pale-faced, quiet lad, who, with an arm round the neck of another, swung past Wolf's retreat; and they served to give his thoughts an edge.

"All bloody rot!" he mumbled, turning off the water and throwing a nervous glance round him, lest his proceedings should have attracted attention. "But there's more in all this, all the same, than any of these words implies. That's the whole thing. Not less, but more! More; though more of *what*, I don't suppose I shall ever discover! But more of something."

And as he left the conduit and made his way up the street, he had the feeling that his real self was engaged in an exciting maze of transactions, completely different from those which just now occupied his senses and his will.

He found the Smith ménage, when Mattie's little maid, smiling and radiant at the presence of so much drama, admitted him after a long wait upon the doorstep, burdened by the presence of two portly and extremely loquacious undertakers. Contrary to custom, but due to the nature of his illness and the heat of the weather, it had become advisable to place the Hatter of Ramsgard in his elm-wood coffin without further delay.

Mattie had brought Olwen down into the dining-room, so as to remove her from the sound of the hammering; but the child was nervous and preoccupied, and it was with but a languid interest that she busied herself with the black ribbons of Gipsy and Antoinette, laid side by side on the great mahogany table, with the cushion from Mr. Smith's chair under their waxen heads. Even Wolf's arrival did not really distract her; and he would have given much to know what the thoughts actually were that gave to her little oval face that sombre pallor and frowning intensity.

Mattie herself seemed strangely lethargic as she drew up one of the straight-backed leather-covered chairs and sat down by his side; and Wolf found it difficult, as they both stared at the unsympathetic silver on the sideboard, to broach the subject of her future, with which his mind was so full.

"Knock... knock... knock," went the hammer in the room above, accompanied by the low-toned rumble of conversation from the two intruders.

"Death is a queer thing," thought Wolf, while the weary indifference of Mr. Smith's white face dominated the slow passing of the minutes. "Would anyone know by that sound," he thought, "that those were coffin-nails? There'll be another sound when they put him into the hole," so his mind ran on; "there'll be that peculiar sound of loose, dry mould flung on the top of a wooden lid. All the world over, those same two sounds. Well, not quite *all* the world over. But how many times had Mr. Smith heard that hammering and that rattle of earth-mould? Did he sit in this very place when they were nailing Lorna in? I must break this uncomfortable silence," he thought. "There! *That* must have been the last! But what the devil are they doing now? This silence is worse than the hammering. Are they having a drink?"

There was a sharp ring at the doorbell; and the three strained faces in that dusky dining-room glanced anxiously at one another, while the patter of the maid's feet on the tiled floor responded to this new sound.

A minute later and they all rose hurriedly, while to their complete surprise Mrs. Otter and Darnley were ushered into the room. The little lady seemed perturbed and embarrassed at the presence of Wolf, but Darnley gave him a quick reassuring nod.

"I heard by chance," began Mrs. Otter rapidly. "We were so sorry for you. I wanted to come. My son was very good. He got me a carriage. I hope you don't mind my coming."

"I am sure it's very nice of you, Mrs. Otter," murmured Mattie. "Sit down, won't you? Sit down, please, Mr. Otter. Thank you, Wolf. No, that's been broken for years." Wolf made a fumbling attempt to replace the piece of carved mahogany that had come off in his hand. This mechanical preoccupation enabled him to notice in silence the manner in which Darnley and Mattie had begun to stare at each other.

"What I had in my mind, in coming to you, my poor child," he heard Mrs. Otter say, "was to ask a great and really rather a difficult favour. What I came to say was this... oh, I don't know whether I ought to worry you now about it!... but my son... I mean Jason... told me I might do just as I liked.... My house is my own, you know!” This last rather unexpected phrase was uttered with such a winning and whimsical smile that Wolf looked hastily at Mattie, very anxious that she should say nothing to hurt this visitor’s feelings. He was surprised to observe that Mattie had only in the vaguest manner caught the drift of this speech.

“Yes, Mrs. Otter, you’ve always been most kind to me,” was all she said in reply.

“My son left everything completely in my hands. Didn’t he, Darnley?” Mrs. Otter went on. There was a perplexed frown on her face now; and she made a feeble little movement of one of her hands towards Darnley, as if appealing to him for help.

“Didn’t he, Darnley?” she repeated.

But Darnley also seemed to have lost the drift of her remarks.

“You were quite right, Mother,” he replied at random. “You’re awfully wise when things are getting serious.... She’s wonderful in a crisis.” He addressed this last remark to no one in particular, and it did little to help forward the general air of cloudiness into which the conversation had fallen.

“She really is... wonderful in a crisis,” he repeated absent-mindedly; and Wolf, as he looked at the lethargic silver on the sideboard, seemed to hear the voice of the cake-basket addressing the biscuit-bowl, “She’s wonderful in a crisis,” in the tone of an ancient play-goer commenting on an oft-repeated play.

“Mattie doesn’t know what ever we shall do.” The words came from Olwen, who now stood close to Wolf’s chair; and the words served to bring matters to a head.

“That’s just what I’m talking about,” said Mrs. Otter, in such an eager tone that everyone turned towards her with full attention.

“What I came to ask you was this,” she said firmly, addressing herself to Mattie. “Our Dimity is getting feeble and old, and I’m not as strong as I was. My son — Jason, I mean — is very particular. You know what he is, my dear? What a poet he is. Mr. Solent thinks he’s a *great* poet, don’t you, Mr. Solent?... Well, what I came to say is this. It would be such a pleasure to us all, my dear” — here she laid her grey-gloved hand lightly on Mattie’s wrist— “if you’d come and live with us and help me — you know? — help me with everything. Now don’t shake your head like that! I know what you mean. Of course, this little one must come, too, and of course we’ve got to think of her lessons.” The little lady drew a long breath, but hurried on before Mattie could utter a word. “It’s her lessons I was thinking about. I’m very fond of teaching children, children that I *like*, I mean; and I’ve got *all* the fairy-stories. I’ve got the one they wouldn’t let me even see the pictures of, when *I* was little.”

Wolf had already screwed his head round so as to snatch a glimpse of Olwen’s face, and he was surprised at the grave glow of unrestrained delight that was now slowly beginning to spread over it. But Mattie still shook her head.

“I couldn’t,” she murmured in a faint voice. “Though it’s very, very kind of you, Mrs. Otter. But I could never think of such a thing. Olwen and I have been talking about it and we’ve made up our minds that I must go to work. Olwen says she’ll be good when I leave her and not fret or be lonely.”

At this moment there was a sound of heavy footsteps descending the stairs, accompanied by a few muffled remarks of a facetious kind. Mrs. Otter glanced at Wolf, who gave her a slight inclination of the head. She turned to Mattie hurriedly.

“Well, my dear,” she said. “I don’t want to rush you against your will into anything. Though I did set my heart upon it and I’ve thought about it from every possible side."

Mattie's answer to this was to stretch forth her hand and press lightly the gloved fingers of the little old lady. But the look which she gave her showed no sign of yielding. It was very tender; but it was firm and resolute.

There was another pause then among them all; and once more Wolf was aware of a most vivid sense of Mr. Smith's white, set face, exhausted, detached, commenting with a kind of desolating equanimity upon the events that were taking place. Those ponderous silver pieces seemed to Wolf now, as he frowned upon them, to be gathering themselves together in that darkening room, to be shaping themselves with shadowy persistence into funereal ornaments heaped up beside the dead hatter.

One of the windows behind Wolf's head was open, and with the noises of the street there entered and circled round him a deliciously cool air, an air like that which he had been conscious of on his approach to Ramsgard, as he leaned over that gate. Once more the scent of pinks came quivering through his brain and he felt a shameless thrill of pleasure. This time, instead of the wraith of Christie Malakite, it was the body of the hatter that associated itself with that remembered scent — not any repulsive odour of mortality emerging from those nailed-up boards, but rather some spiritual essence from the presence of Death itself. And as he breathed this air, the voices of his companions became a vague humming in his ears, and all manner of queer detached memories floated in upon him. He felt himself to be walking alone along some high white road bordered by waving grasses and patches of yellow rock-rose. There was a town far below him, at the bottom of a green valley — a mass of huddled grey roofs among meadows and streams — round which the twilight was darkening. Along with all this he was conscious of the taste of a peculiar kind of baker's bread, such as used to be sold at a shop in Dorchester, where, as a child, they would take him for tea during summer jaunts from Weymouth. The presence of Death seemed to re-create these things and to touch them with a peculiar intensity.

He was roused from his trance by the clear, shrill voice of Olwen arguing desperately with Mattie.

"I *want* to do what she says! Why *can't* we do what she says? I'll be bad if you don't let us! I won't go to sleep. I'll be far worse than Gipsy or Antoinette. I'll tear my hair out! I'll bite my hand!"

"Hush, Olwen!" he heard Mattie reply. "Mrs. Otter will be only too pleased I can't accept her offer if you talk like that."

The little girl gazed at her for a moment with a quaint, solemn scrutiny. Then she laughed, a merry reassured laugh, and, rushing to where Darnley was sitting, slid coaxingly upon his knee.

"You'll tell her what she must do when everyone's gone," she murmured softly; and then, with her eyes fixed upon his face, she stroked his beard with her small, nervous hand.

Mrs. Otter and Wolf smiled at each other; and there came into Wolf's mind those scenes in Homer where girlish suppliants, mortal as well as immortal, lay their hands upon the chins of those they are cajoling!

"Would you tear *my* hair out as well as your own," enquired Darnley, "if she goes on refusing to let you live with us?" Wolf thought he had never seen Darnley's eyes look so deeply luminous as they did while he uttered those words.

Mattie still shook her head; but although there were tears on her cheek, the whole expression of her face was relaxed and at peace. Indeed, as Wolf kept surreptitiously glancing at her, he got the impression that the girl longed to rush away and burst into a flood of crying, but not into unhappy crying. The kindred blood in his veins made him clairvoyant; and he felt convinced that if the Otters refused to accept her rejection of their scheme, she would eventually be persuaded.

"Well, my dear child," he heard Mrs. Otter saying, "you must not answer us in a hurry like this. You see what friends Darnley and your little one have already become; and if only — —"

She stopped suddenly; for there came a second ring at the street-door, followed by the same impetuous rush of the little maid across the hall. This time Wolf looked with dismay into his sister's face when he heard a well-known voice asking in a loud, firm tone for Miss Smith. They all got up when Miss Gault was shown into the room. Olwen hastily snatched her dolls from the table and carried them off to Mr. Smith's big leather chair by the fireplace; and Mrs. Otter, after a hurried bow to the new visitor, followed the child to that retreat and entered into a whispered conversation with her.

The presence of Wolf did not seem to be any surprise to the formidable lady. She nodded at him familiarly, as she embraced Mattie; but her greeting to Darnley was stiff and formal. Darnley himself seemed quite unperturbed by this coldness. His strangely-coloured blue eyes remained fixed upon Mattie; and he stood with his back propped against a bookcase, toying with his watch-chain.

In the darkening twilight of the room — for no one had thought of asking for a lamp — the man's slim figure, as Wolf glanced sideways at him, had the appearance of some old Van Dyck portrait come to life in a Victorian house. Behind his back the great heavily-bound editions of those "Sundays at Home" and "Leisure Hours," whose illustrations must have solaced many a long evening in the far-off childhood of Albert Smith, gathered the summer darkness about them with that peculiar mystical solemnity which old books, like old trees and old hedges, display at the coming on of night. And Wolf, as he listened with amusement to the discourse of Selena Gault, became aware that, with one of her chance-flung felicities, Nature was arranging a singularly appropriate stage for what at any rate was an exciting encounter between Darnley Otter and Mattie Smith.

"Darnley *must* have often met Mattie before," thought Wolf. "But very likely never in her own house and probably never when they could really take in each other's personality. Besides... what do I know about them? All this may have begun years ago... before I came upon the scene at all. If so, what secretive demons they both have been!"

He turned once more to his sister. Oh, he couldn't be mistaken! Why, the girl's heavy countenance, even in that gloom, had a look that he could only describe to himself as transfigured. "There's certainly something up, there," he thought. "Well! She'll be a little fool if she doesn't take the old lady's offer. I'd like to know, though, what Jason *did* say when this scheme was suggested!"

And then, seated a little back from Mattie and Miss Gault, and accepting a cigarette from Darnley, who now took a chair by his side, Wolf began to be conscious of the drift of the amazing discourse which the visitor was directing, like a cannonade of lumbering artillery, across the table into the ears of his sister. Selena's attire was in good taste enough — indeed, it was superlatively ladylike; but it was the "rich, not gaudy" attire of a person quite oblivious of contemporary fashion, and in some queer way it lent itself so well to the quality of that room, that it seemed to bring the furniture itself to life in support of everything she said.

The gathering darkness assisted at this strange play. It was as if all the ponderous objects in that room — including the silver, the chairs, the dark-green curtains, the grotesque portrait of Mr. Smith's father, the leather backs of the “Sundays at Home” and the “Leisure Hours,” the leather back of a draught-board, with the words “History of the World” printed on it, the bronze horses on either side of the mantelpiece, the enormous empty coal-scuttle — combined together to give weight to the opinions of this aggressive woman, whose own childhood, like that of the silent person upstairs, they had ramparted with their massive solemnities!

And Wolf was astounded at the impertinence of what Miss Gault did say. It was an impertinence covered up with bronze and brocade. But it was an indecent impertinence. It resembled the absurd drapery covering the symbolic figure of Mercy, or Truth, or Righteousness, which dominated the great dining-room clock that stood in the middle of the marble chimneypiece. “I confess I first thought,” Miss Gault was now saying, “of having Olwen to live with Emma and me... but I couldn’t have her teasing the cats... or pining for you... so this Home is better. I have made a lot of enquiries about this Home. I made them last year, for another purpose; and it’s lucky I did, because people don’t hear of these things when they really want them. The beautiful thing about it is that they accept mother *and* child... and of course Olwen *is* like your child now. Another great advantage about this plan is that Taunton is so near us all... only a couple of hours by train.” She made a little nod in Wolf’s direction. “Wolf would be able to run over and see you on Sundays,” she added.

Her voice sank; but the darkened room was full of the echoes of it — the whispering of Mrs. Otter, who was evidently telling Olwen a story, being the only force that resisted it. And the dark-green curtains were delighted. “See you on Sundays... see you on Sundays,” they repeated, while the draught-board “History of the World” echoed the word “Sundays,” making it seem like the very voice of that charitable institution which accepted both mother *and* child.

"And the little sum required by the authorities," Miss Gault continued, "I shall be delighted to provide. I do, of course, recognize that it was against my advice that you adopted Olwen. But the child's naturally fond of you now; and I think it would be wrong to separate her from you, as would have to be done if you got employment here... for the child couldn't be left alone all day... and no doubt everything here will be sold. Don't answer me just yet," the lady went on. "I want you, Wolf, too, to hear all I've got to say... for, of course... well! there's no need for me to enter into *that*... but what I thought I would ask you now, Mattie dear, is to tell me what particular things in this house you're especially fond of; and then... well! I hope I should be able to be present at the auction... so that whenever you *do* have a house of your own they'll be... well! they'll be, so to speak, still in the family." She turned more boldly towards Wolf at this point, as if to ensure his recognition of her old-fashioned tact. But Wolf's impulse at that moment resembled the impulse of King Claudius in the play. He felt a desire to cry out in thundering tones, "Lights! lights! lights!" So that it was still left to the draught-board and the bronze clock to appreciate such delicacy and to have the last word.

It was not Wolf, but Darnley, however, who broke the spell thrown upon them by Miss Gault. He walked rapidly over to his mother, whispered something in her ear, took her hand, and brought her to Mattie's side.

"You'll be a dear girl and do what *we* want you to do?" said the old lady clearly and firmly, taking no notice of Miss Gault.

Wolf thought he caught an appealing glance in his direction, though it was so dark now that his sister's face was a mere blur of whiteness. But he rose hurriedly and came up to where they were all grouped. There was just a half-second's pause, which enabled him to catch an impress of the whole queer scene before he spoke, to catch the bewildered anger on Miss Gault's face, to observe that Olwen had possessed herself of Darnley's hand, to remark how Mrs. Otter was so nervous that the chair upon which she had laid her fingers tapped on the floor; and then he himself spoke out with all the weight he could muster.

"I'm sorry, Miss Gault, and I know Mattie's most grateful for your suggestion; but it had all been settled before you came in. They're going to stay for the present with our good friends here. They're going to do what *I* did when I first came to King's Barton. There'll be time enough later for other arrangements; but for the moment Mattie's going to accept Mrs. Otter's invitation, and Olwen too. As to the furniture here, we needn't decide about *that* in any hurry. It may be that Mattie would be happier to get completely rid of it. I know I should, in her case. But it's sweet of you to suggest buying back some of it. I'm sure Mattie appreciates that very much. But the chief point just now is what she and Olwen are going to do; and that has been quite decided — hasn't it, Mattie? They're going to that hospitable Pond Cottage, where I went for my first night in Dorset!"

Wolf's voice became more and more decisive as he brought his declaration to a close; but with an instinct for preventing any further protests from Mattie, he hurriedly rushed out into the hall and began calling for the little maid.

"Constantia!" he shouted. "Constantia! Please bring us the lamp!"

What occurred after his departure from that darkened dining-room he never knew. His words seemed to have had the effect of the letting off of a gun in a soundless wood. For from where he waited at the kitchen-door there came to him an incoherent murmur of many confused voices. When at last he returned with the lamp in his hand and placed it in the centre of the table, Olwen was crying in the leather armchair, where Mattie and Mrs. Otter were bending over her; while Miss Gault, standing erect in the centre of the room, was asking Darnley in a strained, husky voice whether it was true that they had recently discovered in the Abbey-church the actual bones of King Æthelwolf, the brother of Alfred.

"Good-bye, then. Good-bye, all of you! I mustn't be in the way any longer." With this, Miss Gault bowed to Darnley, nodded in the direction of the weeping child, and walked straight into the hall.

From Wolf she kept her eyes averted as she passed; but the expression of her face shocked him, and he followed her to the street-door. As he bent forward to turn the handle before she set her own hand upon it, he caught sight of that deformed lip of hers; and the look of it appalled him. To see such a thing as that was bad enough; but it became worse when the extraordinary visage, that now was face to face with him, contorted itself, there in the doorway before him, into a puckered mask of outrage. He felt a little ashamed of himself for the brutality of his observation at that moment; but he couldn't help noticing that Miss Gault made a much more childish contortion of her face when *she* collapsed than his adamantine mother had done that same afternoon! His mother had "lifted up her voice," as the Scripture says, "and wept"; but Wolf remembered well how, even when she was howling like a lioness with a spear in her side, her fine clear-cut features had retained their dignity. Big tears had fallen, but they had fallen like rain upon a tragic torso. Very different was it with Miss Gault at this moment! Three times she made an attempt to speak to him, and three times her face grew convulsed.

"Wait a minute!" he blurted out at last, and ran back into the dining-room. There he shouted a loud good-bye to them all. "See you tomorrow, Mattie dear!" he cried. "I leave you in good hands, Olwen. Good-night, Mrs. Otter!"

"I'll come back and have dinner with you, if I may," he said, as he caught up Miss Gault on the street-pavement. "Listen! What's that striking now?" He laid his hand on her arm and held her motionless. "Seven o'clock, ay? Well, you don't dine till eight; so do let's have a bit of a walk before going to your house."

"Let's go to the grave, boy," she whispered hoarsely. "We can talk there. My Emma won't mind, even if we *are* late. But how will you get back to Blacksod?" she added with concern.

"Oh, I'll take the ten-o'clock train," he said. "That'll mean that I shan't have any more walking and shan't keep Gerda up. It runs still at that time, doesn't it? Or have they changed it?"

But Miss Gault had already given to practical concerns all the energy she could spare just then.

"How lovely this place is at night!" she said, as they passed under the Abbey-wall. "I wonder if Mr. Otter is right and it is really the coffin of King Æthelwolf that they've found."

They reached the main entrance to the building, and to their surprise they found it open.

"Let's go in for a minute," said Wolf. His companion assented in silence and they entered together.

"I would have liked to have that child to live with me," murmured Miss Gault; "but it would have been cruel to the cats... she's grown so rough to them lately... and she's not always polite to Emma."

Wolf made no reply to this remark; and as they moved slowly up the central aisle, which was feebly illuminated from somewhere between the choir-stalls, he allowed his mind to wander away from Miss Gault and her thwarted philanthropies. The few lights that were burning hardly reached — and then only with a dim, diffused lustre, like the interior of a sand-blurred mother-of-pearl shell — the high fan-tracery of the roof. Wolf felt strongly upon him once again that feeling of mystic exultation which had been hovering over him all day; and when the presence of the light behind the choir was explained by a sudden burst of organ-notes, he felt such a thrill of happiness that it brought with it a reaction of sheer shame.

"Accident!" he muttered to himself. "Pure accident!" he repeated, as they crossed in front of the altar and made their way to the lady-chapel behind it. And he even felt, as he fumbled about in the dim light, looking for some sign of the Saxon king's coffin, a sense of having feloniously stolen his ecstasy from some treasure-house of the human race! "Why should I," he thought, "be singled out by pure chance for this? That Waterloo-steps face — no King Æthelwolf for him, no fan-tracery, no scent of pinks —— Is my gratitude to the gods, then, a base and scurvy feeling?"

Even as this thought crossed his mind he stumbled against some sort of glass framework upon the southern floor of that lady-chapel.

"Here we are, Miss Gault!" he whispered excitedly. "Only, I suppose we shall get into trouble if that organist hears us. Look here, though, for God's sake! This is the king's coffin!"

He went down on his knees and pulled aside in the dim light a piece of carpet that had been carefully spread over the glass frame. The unwieldy form of his companion was promptly now at his side, kneeling too.

"Dare I strike a match, d'ye think?" he whispered.

"No, no, boy! You mustn't do that. Wolf, you mustn't, you really mustn't!" murmured the daughter of the Headmaster of Ramsgard School.

But he disregarded her protest, and, fumbling in his pocket, produced a match-box and struck a wax vesta.

The little yellow flame illuminated the glass-covered aperture in the floor and threw into such weird relief the lineaments of Miss Gault as to almost divest them of their humanity. Only a dim consciousness of this astounding countenance, so near his own, reached Wolf's mind just then. He was too excited. But afterwards, when he recalled the whole incident, it came back distinctly upon him as one of those glimpses into something abominable, ghastly, in Nature's pranks, such as a person were wise to make note of, with the rest, as he went through the world! Here, in the mere possibility of such a vision — for, to say the truth, Miss Gault's face by that match-flare was rendered nothing less than *bestial* — was an experience to be set against those chance-heard organ-notes that had mounted up so triumphantly among the torn battle-flags.

Holding the match aloft with his hand, he bent down until his face actually touched the glass. *Nothing*. Certain interesting chromatic effects... certain flickers and blotches of colour that was no colour, of sparkles that were opaque, of outlines that were no outlines... and then the match burnt his hand and went out. Hurriedly he lit another and held it up, his burnt hand smarting. Down went his face till his hooked nose was pressed against the glass. Sparkles, black, wavering spots, fluctuating blotches of reddish-yellow, little orbs of blackness, rimmed with lunar rings; and then again darkness! *Nothing!* Angrily he scrambled to his feet, and with childish petulance thrust his smarting fingers into his mouth.

"The bones are there!" he whispered huskily. "The bones are there! Æthelwolf himself! But it's no use. We must come again by daylight. It's one of those things that are so damnably annoying. Quick!... while the organ's still playing! I know what these people are... so touchy about their treasures. Let's get out of here!"

He hurried his companion down the great silent nave and out of the open doorway. He felt much more vexed and perturbed than the occasion warranted. The meaningless sparkles from that tricky coffin-lid danced like imps across the back of his eye-sockets.

"I suppose it's too late to go over there now?" he said, turning to her with his hat in one hand and his stick in the other, and a wavering helplessness emanating from his whole figure.

"Not at all, boy — not at all!" pronounced Miss Gault. "Emma must keep supper waiting for us for once. You'll have time for a bite anyway before you catch that train. Come along! You don't know how fast I can walk."

Wolf put on his hat and strode by her side in silence. The air began to smell of rain by the time they reached the slaughter-house. There was a figure with a lantern moving about in the yard of the shed; and Miss Gault dragged heavily on his arm as they went past, struggling with the rising wind.

"You'll get no meat with me, boy," she whispered. "No meat — no meat. It's the only way to help them. But I'd go and be hanged to help 'em... hanged by the neck" — the wind caught her voice and rendered it scarcely audible— "by the neck, boy!"

Wolf pondered to himself upon the contradictory nature of this woman. She would go to the death to put an end to slaughter-houses; and yet she would pack off Mattie and Olwen to God knows what kind of an institution for paupers!

He felt a secret desire to punish her for this inconsistency, and he suddenly said: "It's really amazingly good of the Otters to take in our friends. To find such a generous heart in a nervous old lady like that makes you think better of the whole human race!"

A portion of the impulse that led him to this speech as they passed the slaughter-house was doubtless a throb of his own conscience over this matter of eating meat. The sight of that man with a lantern, like some ghoulish wanderer in a place of execution, impressed itself by no means pleasantly on his mind; and it was the electric vibration of this discomfort that gave his voice, as he uttered these words, a certain quivering pitch of unnecessary emphasis.

The malice in his tone communicated itself like a magnetic current to his companion, and she took her hand from his arm.

"The child has wheedled herself round Darnley. That's all it is. The mother is willing enough, because she sees what a good unpaid servant Mattie will make. I won't talk about it any more, and I didn't mean to refer to it; but I think you're simply mad to let her accept such a humiliating position. But there it is! The girl can't have much pride, or nothing you said or they said could have made her accept such charity!"

His remark having brought about this outburst, he was able to exclaim in his heart, "You rude, ill-bred old woman! You rude, ill-bred old woman!" and, having done this, he felt quite friendly toward her again and quite appeased.

He pretended to be sulking, however, for the whole time they remained in the cemetery; though in reality he was thinking to himself, "What a spirited thing it was, after all, to stick by my father like that, when he was a complete social outcast!"

They walked home in even deeper silence and at a rapid pace. It was twenty-five minutes to ten when they reached Aldhelm Street, only to find Emma in such an agitated temper that Selena had to go herself into the kitchen and bring out to him in the sitting-room a plate of curried eggs and a decanter of sherry.

He sat on her sofa and swallowed this hot dish with hungry relish, eating it in unceremonious fashion with a spoon, and tossing off so many glasses of wine that Selena glanced at him rather nervously as she herself nibbled a biscuit.

"Emma does cook well!" he said at last, as he rose to go. "It's all right, Miss Gault, dear. You needn't look so anxious. I've got a head of iron." And immediately, as if to prove he had such a head, he felt it to be incumbent upon him to say something affectionate and tender. "I believe," he burst out, "I must have just the same sort of feeling for you that *he* had!"

These were his parting words; but it was not until he was sitting in a third-class smoking-carriage of the South-Western train that he began to wonder why it was that Miss Gault's face had such a wry smile upon it as he shook hands with her at her door.

He was alone in the carriage, and, windy though it was, he kept the window open and sat facing the engine. The rush of air sobered him, and he observed with interest the scattered lights of King's Barton as the train jolted along its high embankment between that village and the Evershott meadows. He wondered humorously to himself what Jason would say that evening when he learnt of the new invasion of his privacy.

His mood saddened before the train stopped at Blacksod.

"If I knew I were only going to live five more years," he thought, "I would give away four of them if I were allowed to spend the other one, day and night, with Christie!" And then, as the cold wind made him shiver a little and turn up his coat-collar, "I wonder," he thought, "whether I'm just weak and cowardly in not leaving them all and carrying Christie off to London, let happen what may?"

The train was now following an umbrageous embankment parallel with the river Lunt. The muddy smell of that sluggish water, which the Ramsgard boys irreverently named "the Bog-stream," assailed his nostrils, bringing with it a feeling of obscure misery. A chilliness in his bones, a weariness in his brain, gave now to all the events of the day a sombre colour, like the colour of river-mud.

As the locomotive slowly lessened its speed, he tried in vain to recall those moments of happiness... the vision of the bed of pinks... the sweet emanation from the very body of death. But in place of these things all he could think of was obdurate roots in clinging clay, sparkles and blotches that bore no human meaning, hammering of nails into coffins, men with lanterns in slaughter-house yards, and the pallid loins of Bob Weevil streaked with the green slime of Lenty Pond.

ROUNDED WITH A SLEEP

August was drawing to its end, and, with August, the holidays of the Blacksod Grammar School. The young aristocrats of Ramsgard had several weeks more before *their* new term began, but the humbler pupils whom it was Wolf's destiny to teach were now on the eve of their return to work.

Anxious to make the utmost of these precious mornings of leisure, now so soon to be snatched from him, Wolf had lately got into the habit of persuading Gerda to start out with him, for some sort of rural expedition, directly the breakfast-things had been washed up.

They had explored the country in this way in almost every direction; but he found that the easiest thing to do was to have some sort of picnic-lunch in the direction of King's Barton, so that when they separated he could reach his afternoon's work at the manor without arriving too tired or too late.

Three days before the Grammar School was to reopen he had cajoled Gerda into accompanying him to Poll's Camp. They had brought their provisions in a basket and had made their meal in unusual contentment under the shelter of a group of small sycamores that grew on the western slope of the camp, overlooking the great Somersetshire plain.

Gerda was now fast asleep. Stretched out upon her back, she lay as motionless as the shadows about her, one arm curved beneath her fair head and the other flung upon a bed of moss. Wolf sat with his arms hugging his knees, and his back against a sycamore-trunk.

The weather had been good for the wheat that Summer, and not too scorching to the grass; so that what he looked at now, as he let his eyes wander over that great level expanse towards Glastonbury, was a vast chessboard of small green fields, surrounded by pollarded elms of a yet darker colour, and interspersed by squares of yellow stubble.

The earthworks of Poll’s Camp were not as deeply dug or as loftily raised as many Roman-British ramparts in that portion of the West Country. They were less of a landmark than Cadbury Camp, for instance, away to the northwest. They were less imposing than Maiden Castle, away to the south. But such as they were, Wolf knew that the mysterious movements of King Arthur... *rex quondam rex-que futurus*... had more than once crossed and recrossed, in local legend, this promontory of grassy ridges.

The day was warm; but the fact that the sky was covered with a filmy veil of grey clouds gave to the vast plain before him the appearance of a landscape whose dominant characteristic consisted in a patient effacement of all emphatic or outstanding qualities. The green of the meadows was a shy, watery green. The verdure of the elm-trees was a sombre, blackish monotony. The yellow of the stubble-land was a whitish yellow, pallid and lustreless.

He glanced at the sleeping figure of his companion, and it seemed to him that the milk-white delicacy of Gerda’s face, as she lay there, had never been touched by a more tender bloom than it wore today, under this vaporous, windless sky.

Her breathing was so light as to be almost imperceptible, her lips were just parted in a confiding abandonment to a happy sleep; while the rounded whiteness of the bare arm she had flung out upon the moss had that youthful charm of unconscious trust in the kindness of man and nature, which, whenever he noted it, always struck him as one of the most touching of a young girl’s qualities.

And it was borne in upon him how terrible the responsibility was when a man had once undertaken to “make,” as the phrase runs, one of these fragile beings “happy.” It came upon him, as he watched Gerda asleep, that a girl is much more committed to what is called “happiness” than a man is.

Or is it, he thought, that a man can create happiness by sheer obstinate force out of the machinery of his own mind, while a girl is dependent upon all manner of subtle external forces emanating from nature and returning to nature?

Certainly at this moment Gerda seemed to have most deliciously abandoned herself to the power of the grass, the grey sky, the warm, windless air.

A sad, helpless craving possessed him as he turned from the girl and once more surveyed that undemonstrative, unobtrusive distance. He felt as though he longed to fly across it in some impossible non-human shape — fly across it not with any actual living companion, but with some shadowy essence, light as that dandelion-seed, which at this moment he saw rising high above him and floating away westward — with some shadowy essence that at the same time was and was not Christie Malakite — some essence that was what Christie was to her own inmost self, the bodiless, formless identity in that slim frame, that in confronting infinite space could only utter the mysterious words, “I am I,” and utter nothing else.

If only he could do this now, by some occult manipulation of the laws of nature! Gerda’s sleep was deep and sound. To her at this moment Time was nothing. How mad it was that he couldn’t plunge with Christie, with the inmost soul of Christie, into some region outside these things, where a moment was like a whole year of mortal life!

The vast expanse he looked at, had about it, under this grey sky, something wistful and withdrawn. It resembled those patient, melancholy fields, neither happy nor unhappy, where Dante met the souls of the great intellects in Limbo. With his eyes fixed upon its patient-coloured horizons, it did not seem so crazy a notion that he and Christie might meet and escape, lost, merged, diffused into all this!

And then he turned his gaze upon the beautiful girl lying there outstretched beside him, happy in her timeless dream-world, trusting him, trusting nature, half-smiling in her sleep.

Looking at her lying there, he thought what an appalling risk these lovers of “happiness” take, when they burn their ships and trust their lives to the caprice of men.

As he contemplated the loveliness of her figure, it struck him as infinitely pathetic that even beauty such as hers should be so dependent on the sexual humours of this man or that man for its adequate appreciation.

Beauty like that, he thought, as he looked at her, ought to endow its possessor with super-human happiness, as in the old legends, when the immortal gods made love to the daughters of men. There was a cruel irony in the fact that he of all men had been singled out to possess this beauty — he whose heart of hearts had been given to a different being!

And as he pondered on all this it struck him as strange that such rare loveliness should not protect her, like silver armour, against the shocks and outrages of life. Beauty as unusual as this was a high gift, like a poet’s genius, and ought to have the power of protecting a girl’s heart from the cruel inconstancies of love.

“I suppose it is true,” he thought, “that when they have been a man’s bedfellow, even for a few months, some peculiar link establishes itself which it is as difficult to break as if one tore a grafted sapling from the branch of a tree. I suppose,” so his thoughts drifted on, “that my love is really more important, in this blind primordial way, to Gerda — just because we have now slept together for three months — than it could ever be to Christie, though *she* lives inside my very soul! I suppose it's the old fatality of flesh to flesh, of blind matter, proving itself, after all, the strongest thing on earth."

And then, before he had the least notion that his thoughts would drift in such a direction, he found himself engaged in a passionate dispute with his father. It was as if the dispute were actually going on down at the bottom of that grave; and though he still found himself calling William Solent "Old Truepenny," he felt as if he had become a lean worm down there, in the darkness of that hollow skull, arguing with it, arguing with what remained still conscious and critical, although lost "in the pit."

"This world is not made of bread and honey," cried Wolf, the worm, to the skull of his father, "nor of the sweet flesh of girls. This world is made of clouds and of the shadows of clouds. It is made of mental landscapes, porous as air, where men and women are as trees walking, and as reeds shaken by the wind."

But the skull answered him in haste and spoke roughly to him. "What you have found out today, worm of my folly, I had outgrown when I was in the Sixth at Ramsgard and was seduced by Western Minor in the Headmaster's garden. To turn the world again into mist and vapour is easy and weak. To keep it alive, to keep it real, to hold it at arm's length, is the way of gods and demons."

And Wolf, hearing this, lifted up his worm's-voice within that mocker and cried out upon its lewd clay-cold cunning.

"There is no reality but what the mind fashions out of itself. There is nothing but a mirror opposite a mirror, and a round crystal opposite a round crystal, and a sky in water opposite water in a sky."

“Ho! Ho! You worm of my folly,” laughed the hollow skull. “I am alive still, though I am dead; and you are dead, though you’re alive. For life is beyond your mirrors and your waters. It’s at the bottom of your pond; it’s in the body of your sun; it’s in the dust of your star-spaces; it’s in the eyes of weasels and the noses of rats and the pricks of nettles and the tongues of vipers and the spawn of frogs and the slime of snails. Life’s in *me* still, you worm of my folly, and girls’ flesh is sweet for ever and ever; and honey is sticky and tears are salt and yellow-hammers’ eggs have mischievous crooked scrawls!”

Wolf saw himself rising erect upon his tail as he heard these words.

“You lie to yourself, Truepenny! You lie with the old, hot, shuffling, fever-smitten lie. It’s the foam-bubbles of your life-mania that you think so real. They’re no more real than the dreams of the plantains that grow over your grave!”

A movement of Gerda, though she still remained asleep, broke up the current of his fancies, and he pulled out his watch.

Damn! It was time for him to start now, if he was to reach Mr. Urquhart’s house at the accustomed hour.

“I won’t have tea with *him*,” he thought. “I’ll have tea at the Otters’. Then I’ll find out if Mattie and Olwen are still all right there.”

He rose to his feet. From the hushed indrawn beauty of the hour he gathered up new strength for the burden of human fate he seemed destined to carry.

Fragment by fragment he collected what was over from their lunch and put it back in Gerda’s basket, prodding into the soft earth of a mole-hill, with the end of his stick, the bits of paper in which those things had been tied up.

Then, stretching out his arms and seizing with each hand a branch of a young sycamore, he swung these two pliant limbs backwards and forwards, while his gaze concentrated itself upon the girl at his feet.

But as he did this the transparency ebbed away from the vision of his days, and a fantastic doubt assailed him. Was Gerda's sleep so deep and happy because of some occult affinity between her nerves and this historic hill?

As if to give substance to his fancy, the girl rolled over languidly at that moment and lay prone, burying both her outstretched hands in the soft moss. A deep, shuddering sigh passed through her; and her body visibly quivered under her thin dress.

Was there some strange non-human eroticism, he wondered, in this contact between the heathen soil and that sleeping figure? He smiled to himself and then frowned uneasily. He began to feel obscurely piqued by the girl's remoteness and inaccessibility. He felt as if he were actually looking on at some legendary encounter between the body of Gerda and the crafty super-human desire of some earth-god. He began to feel an insidious jealousy of Poll's Camp, an obstinate hostility to its mossy curves and grassy hollows.

"Very well!" he thought, in his fantastic irritation, as if he actually beheld his companion in the very arms of the hill-god. "If she draws away from me, I can draw away from her!" And his eyes, wandering to the roofs of the town, settled on that quarter where he knew the roof of the book-shop to be. He tightened his hold upon the two saplings; and inhaling deeply that hushed, warm air, he mentally swept off the roof of Christie's house, and lifting the wraith-image of her high into the clouds — he never visualized Christie's actual appearance in any of these cerebral excursions — he whirled her away with him towards that lonely cone-shaped hill, rising out of the plain, that he knew to be Glastonbury.

It was a queer dalliance of the mind that he indulged in just then; for he felt that this airy wraith, that was Christie Malakite, was in some way the child of that mystical plain down there, that "chess-board of King Arthur"; whereas the girl at his feet was in league with whatever more remote and more heathen powers had dominated this embattled hill. King Arthur's strangely involved personality, with the great Merlin at his side, was associated with both. But Christie's "Arthur" belonged to Glastonbury; Gerda's, to a far earlier time.

Wolf's mind now began analyzing in a more rational manner this difference between the hill he stood upon and the landscape stretched out before him. "It must be," he thought, "that this mass of earth is a far older portion of the planet's surface than the plain beneath it. Even if its magnetism is purely chemical and free from anything that reverts to the old religions, it may very well exercise a definite effect upon human nerves! The plain must, within measurable years, have been covered by the sea. Where those elm-trees now grow there must have been shells and sand and swaying seaweeds and great sea-sponges and voyaging shoals of fish. And this recent emerging from the ocean cannot but have given a certain chastened quality, like the quality of old mediæval pictures, to these 'chess-board fields.' "

He stared, frowning intently, at the curves and hollows of Poll's Camp.

"How many men," he wondered, "since the black cormorants and foolish guillemots screamed around these escarpments, have stood still, as I am doing now, and wrestled with the secret of this promontory?" Did any of the serfs of Arthur, or of Merlin the magician, lean here upon their spades and let their souls sink down and down, into motions of primal matter older than any gods? Did any of the Roman legionaries, stark and stoical, making of this hill "a sacred place" for some strange new cult of Mithras, forget both Mithras and Apollo under this terrestrial magnetism — this power that already was spreading abroad its influence long before Saturn was born of Uranus?

"Poll's Camp is heathen through and through," he thought; "and even if the old gods never existed, there's a power here that in some queer way... perhaps just chemically... is at once bewildering and hostile to me. But the valley... this unobtrusive, chastened valley... like some immense sad-coloured flower floating upon hidden water... oh, it is the thing I love best of all!"

He released the two pliable sycamore-branches and let his hands sink down; while the thick, cool leaves of the young trees, so resilient and sturdy on their smooth purplish stalks, flapped against his forehead.

"The spirit of this hill escapes me," he thought. "I have an inkling that it is even now watching me with definite malignity. But I can't understand the nature of what it threatens. There are powers here... powers... though, by God! they may be only chemical. But what is chemical?..."

He turned his eyes almost petulantly to the southwestern limits of the valley, to where Leo's Hill and Nevilton Hill broke the level expanse.

"Those hills are not like this one," he thought; "and as for Glastonbury, it's like the pollen-bearing pistil of the whole lotus-vale! But this place... on my soul, it has something about it that makes me think of Mr. Urquhart. It's watching me. And I believe at this moment it is making love to Gerda!"

He sighed and picked up his hat and oak-stick.

"I must wake Gerda and be off," he said to himself. "I shall be late as it is."

END OF VOLUME I

VOLUME II.

A GAME OF BOWLS

WOLF WAS COMPELLED that particular afternoon to walk a good deal faster than his wont, to reach the manor-house of King's Barton in time for his daily labour. But his work itself was, when he did settle down to it, a great deal pleasanter than usual, owing to the absence of Mr. Urquhart from the scene.

He found it extremely agreeable to sit at leisure in that escutcheoned window, one of whose smaller panes opened to the outside air upon such easy and such smoothly-worked hinges as made it a pleasure to open it or shut it.

The purple asters and blue lobelia-borders in the flower-beds below, had gathered to themselves a much more autumnal atmosphere than when he last observed them. There were more fallen leaves; and upon them, as well as upon the dark velvety grass, he fancied that he could discern the moisture of last night's dew, giving them that peculiar look for which he had been craving.

The actual work he was engaged on lent itself to the breathless peacefulness of that grey afternoon. He had to take the gnomic commentaries and floating fragments of wicked gossip gathered together by his employer, and translate them into a style that had at least some beauty of its own. This style had been his own contribution to the book; and though it had been evoked under external pressure, and in a sense had been a *tour de force*, it was in its essence the expression of Wolf's own soul — the only purely æsthetic expression that Destiny had ever permitted to his deeper nature.

The further he advanced with his book the more interested he became in this aspect of it. He spent hours revising the earlier chapters, written before this style of his had established itself; and he came to value these elaborated pages as things that were precious in themselves — precious independently of whether they were ever printed.

The Cerne Giant was now the subject of his efforts; and his first two renderings seemed to him hopelessly below the level of the rest of his writing.

"She had sat on the knees of the Cerne Giant in her youth, and Sir Walter, robbed of the delectation of prolonged seduction, turned, it seems, in infinite weariness, to the more ambiguous tastes that procured him his famous infamy."

He put his pen through this and wrote in its place:

"Those long, hot summer afternoons spent by her in gathering devil's-bit and hawkweed in perilous proximity to that troubling symbol, had seduced her mind long before Sir Walter seduced her body. It was natural enough, therefore, for this corrupt rogue to come soon to prefer — —"

Here he laid down his pen and contemplated once more the Squire's notes, which ran as follows:

"Cerne Giant — real virginity unknown in Dorset— 'cold maids' a contradiction — Sir Walter's disgust — His erudition — His platonic tastes — How he was misunderstood by a lewd parson — —"

"Good Lord!" said Wolf to himself, "I must be careful what I'm doing just here. The old demon has changed his tune. This isn't garrulous history. This is special pleading."

He took up his pen, erased the words "natural enough, therefore, for this corrupt rogue," and wrote in their place, "natural enough, therefore, for this baffled idolater of innocence to become a misogynist and to turn — —" He stopped abruptly, pushed back his manuscript, and stared out of the window. He would have found it hard to explain this pause in his work, but a vague consciousness of the personality of young Redfern took possession of his mind.

“I’ve never seen a line of that fellow’s writing,” he thought. “I wonder what *he* would have made of this precious Sir Walter?”

The blue lobelias, the dark-green grass-blades leaning sideways against the edge of the brown mould, as if some light faun’s-hoof had trodden them down, came to his consciousness then with such a clear revelation of something in nature purer than anything in man’s mind, that he felt a sense of nausea with regard to these lewd preciosities. What was he doing, to be employed at such a job?

If the book were ever published, none of his own stylistic inventions, such as they were, could offset the general drift of it. And what effect would that drift have? To which side of the gulf between beauty and the opposite of beauty would it draw readers?

Like a drop of ice-cold rain, frozen, accursed, timeless, this abominable doubt fell upon his heart and sank into its depths. The whole subterranean stream of Wolf’s life-illusion had been obsessed, as long as he could remember, by the notion of himself as some kind of a protagonist in a cosmic struggle. He hated the traditional terminology for this primordial dualism; and it was out of his hatred of this, and out of his furtive pride, that he always opposed, in his dialogues with himself, his own secret “mythology” to some equally secret “evil” in the world around him. But because the pressure of circumstances had made him so dependent on Mr. Urquhart’s money, it happened that until this actual moment he had evaded bringing his conscience to bear upon the man’s book, though he had brought it to bear freely enough upon the man himself.

But now — cold, frozen, eternal, malignant — this abominable doubt fell upon him like an accursed rain... drip-drop, drip-drop, drip-drop... each drop sinking out of sight into the dim, unreasoning levels of his being, where it began poisoning the waters.

"How can I struggle with this man when I am exhausting all my ingenuity in trying to make his book an immortal work?" Wolf placed the sheets of his manuscript carefully in order and put a heavy paper-weight on the top of them. Then he set himself to curse the obscurity of his universe as he had never done before.

"Good — evil? Evil — good?" he thought. "Why should these old dilemmas rise up now and spoil my life, just as it is rounding itself off into a solid integrity?"

He surveyed the great shelves of Mr. Urquhart's library much in the same mood as he had recently surveyed the circumvallation-lines of Poll's Camp. "Come out of your grave, you wretched Redfern!" he cried under his breath. "And let's hear what *you* made of it! Was it the drip-drop of this infernal indecision that sent you scampering off to Lenty Pond of an autumn evening? Did you feel a knot in *your* head, tightening, tightening, tightening?"

The thought came to him then, "Suppose I gave up this whole job?" And the image of his mother seeking refuge with Lord Carfax, of Gerda back again in Torp's yard, of himself wandering over the world, far removed from Christie, rose sickening, ghastly, before him.

He lifted the paper-weight from the pile of manuscript. It had its own interest, this paper-weight — a slab of alabaster with a silver eagle upon it. He tilted it up and balanced it sideways, till the eagle looked to him like a fly on a piece of soap.

"Soap?" he thought; and the word put him in mind of what Mr. Urquhart had said about the transfiguration of little things by the decision to commit suicide.

At that moment there was a sharp knock at the door, and Wolf started violently, leaving the paper-weight upside-down upon his manuscript.

"Come in!" he cried, in a loud, irritable tone.

The tall figure of Roger Monk entered and walked gravely up to him. It had always been a speculation to Wolf how this great ostler-gardener managed to move so discreetly across these polished floors. The man moved up to him now as if he had been a supernatural messenger walking upon air.

"I came just to tell you, Mr. Solent, Sir," said Roger Monk, "that there's a bowling-match goin' on at Farmer's Rest. It entered my mind, since Squire's out to Lovelace's tonight, 'twould be a sight you might be sorry to miss, Mr. Solent, Sir."

"Where's Farmer's Rest?" enquired Wolf.

"Why, that's the village pub, Sir! Haven't you ever been into it, Sir? But I expect it's out of your way. It's out of all decent folks' way, I reckon. 'Tis down Lenty Lane, Pond Lane, and Dead Badger Lane. 'Tis no great way; and I'm thinking of going round there myself. So if it's no offense, Mr. Solent, Sir, I thought as maybe ye'd like to have my company."

He stopped, and in the manner of the discreet servant of a wilful master stared impassively at the wall till his gentleman made his decision.

"I'd like to come with you very much, Roger," Wolf replied. "But what about tea? I was thinking of dropping in at Pond Cottage."

"Don't do that, Sir. Come, as I'm telling 'ee, to Farmer's Rest and I'll see to it myself that Miss Bess'll give you as good a cup o' tea, and a better, too, than ye'd ever get from that old Dimity's kitchen. Not but what things be much more decent-like down there, since Miss Smith be living with ’em.”

“How does Dimity put up with Miss Smith, Roger?” enquired Wolf slily.

“Past all expectancy, Mr. Solent,” replied the other. “But she’s a real lady, that young woman, whoever her Dad were.”

“Why, wasn’t Mr. Smith her father, then?”

Roger Monk winked slily.

“There *be* as says he weren’t, Sir. But if you don’t mind, Mr. Solent, we’d best be getting along, down-village.”

He moved towards the door as he spoke, and Wolf got up and followed him.

Lenty Lane and Pond Lane were familiar enough, though under that grey windless sky they assumed the kind of expression that Wolf always imagined such places to assume when some disturbing human event was impending; but Dead Badger Lane led him to completely new ground. It was narrower than either of the others and very much overgrown with grass. This grass grew long and rank on both sides of deep cart-tracks, and amid its greenness there were patches of scabious and knapweed.

“Who’s playing in this bowling-match?” Wolf asked, wondering vaguely what there was about these patches of country weeds that made him think of a certain dusty road beyond the railway-station at Weymouth. “Beyond the backwater it was, too,” he said to himself.

“Mr. Malakite from Blacksod, Sir, be playing against our Mr. Valley.... And I be playing myself, Sir,” the man added, after a pause, in a deprecatory tone.

Wolf prodded the cart-track with his stick, and, unseen by his companion, pulled down the corners of his mouth and worked the muscles of his under-jaw.

“Whom are you playing against?” enquired Wolf in a politely negligent tone.

The man gave him a quick glance.

“Hope ’tis no offense to name the party, Sir, but I be playing against your Missus’s Dad.”

“Against Mr. Torp?” cried Wolf, feeling that the situation in front of him was growing thicker with discomfort every moment.

“None other, Sir. The old gentleman be the best hand at bowls, when ‘ee be sober, if I may say so, that they have anywhere down these ways. I learned the game myself” — these last words were spoken with extraordinary impressiveness— “in the Shires.”

Farmer’s Rest turned out to be a small, whitewashed, thatched cottage, not very well kept up, and displaying no sign, as far as Wolf could see, of its professional use. The place was open and they stepped inside.

They were confronted by a narrow passageway leading into a garden at the back; and there, framed by an open door, he could see the bowling-green, with groups of grave men moving solemnly across it in their shirt-sleeves.

The public bar was on his right, the private parlour on his left; and into this latter room he was ushered by the tall gardener.

“One minute, Sir, and I’ll fetch Miss Bess. I expect some of the other gentlemen will be glad to have a cup of tea. Her name is Round, Sir, if you don’t mind. Miss Elizabeth Round.”

Wolf sat down and waited. Sure enough, in about five minutes a pretty young woman, plump and rosy-cheeked, but in some odd way vacant-looking, brought in a tea-tray and placed it on the table.

Wolf was completely nonplussed by the personality of Miss Round. Superficially she looked clean, fresh, amiable, and a little stupid; but all her movements possessed a queer, automatic quality that made him slightly uncomfortable. He couldn't define it at once; but after watching her carefully for a short space, he came to the conclusion that she was like a pretty doll, or a human mannikin, wound up to perform a given task, but lacking all interior consciousness of what she was doing.

"Mr. Malakite sends his compliments, Sir," she said, "and he hopes to have the honour of a cup of tea with you in a minute. He's just finishing his game."

"Don't hurry him. I'll be all right," murmured Wolf. "Is your father the landlord here?" This he added rather lamely, as she proceeded with rapid movements of her plump hands to arrange the tea-things on the table.

Miss Bess nodded. "He's not Dad," she replied calmly. "He's uncle. Dad's been gone for years."

Whether she meant that Mr. Round, for reasons of his own, had bolted, or whether she meant that he was dead, Wolf could not tell. His interest in Miss Bess was faint; in her father, dead or alive, fainter still. His heart was beating at that moment for quite another cause. His glance, fixed upon the door into the passage, kept visualizing the bookseller's grizzled head. His ears strained themselves to catch the sound of the old man's voice.

But for several seconds all he could hear was the knocking of the bowls against one another on the grass outside.

Then he became aware of quite a different sound, a sound that apparently proceeded from above the ceiling of the private parlour. He glanced at Miss Bess, and, to his surprise, she promptly raised a plump finger and pressed it against her lips.

"It's uncle," she whispered. "He's heard a strange voice and it's set him off."

Wolf and Miss Bess both concentrated their attention upon this new sound. It was a thick human voice, repeating over and over again the same two syllables.

"Jesus... Jesus... Jesus... Jesus."

"Is he ill? Is he suffering? Don't let me keep you if you ought to go up to him."

Miss Bess removed her fingers from her mouth and smiled a little.

"Oh, it's all right *now*," she declared calmly. "It's your voice that started him. He knows every noise for yards and yards round this house. Dogs, cats, pigs, poultry, pigeons, horses, cattle. There isn't a sound he doesn't know. He'll know who's won this match o' bowls afore I tells him a thing."

The voice above the ceiling continued its refrain.

"Jesus... Jesus... Jesus... Jesus."

"That's how he goes on — sometimes for hours. But us who knows him takes no stock in *that*. Now, if I'd heard him starting off on God, same as he does sometimes, you'd have seen me running upstairs like greased lightning! It's all as how he gets started. Whichever way he starts he keeps it up till he's tired. Funny, isn't it? But no one knows what human nature can come to, till ye've seen it and heard it."

"Does he say 'God' over and over again in this same way?"

Miss Bess nodded. "It's *then* I've got to run! It's always the same. I used to let him do it; but one day they found him in a ditch, eating frog-spawn. The ditch were over Lenty-way. I expect you've often seen it. It's where them mare's-tails grows. He had to be pulled out. *That* were one of his 'God' days."

Once more Wolf strained his ears; and, mingled with the clicking of the bowls outside, came that repeated "Jesus... Jesus... Jesus... Jesus" from above the ceiling.

"He'll go to sleep, present; and by supper-time he'll be gay as a lark. It's our Mr. Valley taught him what to do. 'When you feel God coming,' Mr. Valley said to him, 'don't get flustered or anything. Just say "Jesus" and you'll go to sleep like a new-born babe!' "

"What's the matter with him?" enquired Wolf. The girl fetched a blue tea-cosy from the recesses of a cupboard and pulled it down carefully over the teapot. Then she raised her eyes and looked straight at her guest; and for the flicker of a second her brisk, automatic personality displayed the troubled awareness of a conscious soul.

"Worried," she said simply. And then, in the old automatic way: "Excuse me, Sir. There's someone in the bar." And with all the fresh, stupid innocence of her first entrance upon the scene, she hurried across the passage.

Wolf surveyed the admirable preparations for tea that lay spread before him. There were two teacups, two knives, two plates, and two chairs.

"Jesus... Jesus... Jesus... Jesus."

"What on earth shall I talk about with the old man?" he thought. "I wish he'd hurry up. This tea will have stood much too long."

He had not long to wait. There were shuffling steps in the passage, and the bookseller came in. Wolf rose and shook him by the hand.

"Just in time, Mr. Malakite," he said. "I was afraid our tea would get too strong."

The two men sat down opposite each other, and Wolf, removing the blue cosy, filled both their cups and handed the bookseller the bread-and-butter.

"I hope you're ahead in your game," he said emphatically. "It must be an absorbing game, bowls. It must be one of the most absorbing of all."

Mr. Malakite put down his cup and moved a long, slender forefinger round its rim.

"Your father and I had many a game on this green," he said, without raising his eyes.

And Wolf looked at Mr. Malakite with as many confused feelings as he had ever experienced in the presence of one human head. He thought to himself, "Was the man ever ashamed of that white beard when he saw himself in the looking-glass, as he went up to wash his hands between dusting his books and sneaking into his girl's room?"

"You and my father, Mr. Malakite," he said in a low tone, "must have seen quite a lot of each other in those old days."

"One more cup, if you please, Sir. A lot of each other? Well — no. He was a gentleman, you see; and I've never been anything but a tradesman. But still... in a manner of speaking, we *were* friends, I suppose."

He lifted his eyes now, and Wolf was surprised by the devouring intensity of their gaze. It was a fixed, monomaniacal intensity, and it seemed addressed to no particular object. It was impossible to imagine it softening into tenderness, or abandoned to humour, or melting in grief. It did not seem adapted to looking into human eyes. It seemed directed towards some aspect of universal matter that absorbed and fascinated it. It seemed, so to speak, to *eat the air*. Mr. Malakite himself appeared apprehensive of the effect of his gaze upon his interlocutor; for he lowered his eyelids directly his words were out of his mouth, and once more began following the rim of his teacup with the tip of his finger.

"I know that look," thought Wolf. "I've seen it on the streets in London and I've seen it on the esplanade at Weymouth. It's like the passion of a miser. It's horrible, but it's not contemptible."

"Had you many friends in common?" enquired Wolf; and as he spoke, he leant across the table, and, without waiting this time for any request, filled up the old man's cup to the very brim and placed the milk-jug at his side.

"I can't stand that finger-game of his!" he said to himself. "He'll have to stop doing that if he's going to drink his tea."

But not at all! Mr. Malakite bent his furrowed head, but keeping his gaze discreetly lowered, once more commenced circling the vessel's rim with the extreme tip of his long finger.

"Friends in common?" the old man repeated. "You mean, I suppose, Mr. Solent, to ask whether your father and I had any peculiarities in common? That's a natural question, and if I knew you better I think I could interest you a good deal in answering it. But we don't know each other well enough, Sir... not nearly well enough. Besides" — and once more Wolf got the benefit of that fixed, monomaniacal gaze— "I don't approve of exposing a father to his son. It's an impiety, an impiety!"

Wolf finished his tea in silence after this, and handed Mr. Malakite a cigarette. When they were both smoking, and Wolf, at any rate, was enjoying that faint rarification of human thought, like the distilling of an essence, which tea-drinking can induce, he asked Mr. Malakite with grave directness what was the matter with the landlord of Farmer's Rest.

The bookseller's forehead knit in an unpleasant scowl.

"Been hearing him, I suppose? Nobody bothers about *him*, Mr. Solent. Miss Elizabeth is the boss here, and she don't like people who talk too much about family-matters. Why should she? Round's *her* uncle, not yours or mine."

The brutality of this remark destroyed in a moment all the fragrant clarity of Wolf's after-tea sensations. He received the sort of shock from it that always made him seem to himself a priggish fool, devoid of the degree of humorous toughness which this world requires. At the same time it stirred up all his ill-balanced impulses with regard to persecuted people —

impulses that led him to a morbid exaggeration of this particular aspect of life.

He began to indulge in the wildest imaginings about the “worried” Mr. Round; and he obstinately returned to the subject.

“Has this fellow up there,” he said uneasily, jerking his thumb towards the ceiling, “lived in King’s Barton long?”

But Mr. Malakite rose from his chair.

“Come out and see the game, Sir, won’t you? There are people everywhere about us whose existence is no affair of ours. To fuss over them like this clergyman here does is only to share their disease.”

“What disease are you talking about, Mr. Malakite?” asked Wolf, as he followed him into the garden.

The sight of the group of men gathered there so disturbed his attention that he could not be quite sure whether he caught correctly the malignant mumbling that issued from his companion’s lips. “The disease of Life!” was what it sounded like.

A little later, as he watched the bookseller calculating with exquisite nicety the “bias” of his particular bowl, he was conscious of a desire not to encounter again for some while the expression of those deep-sunken eyes.

“What *does* that look of his make me think of?” he wondered, as he nodded to the other players and their absorbed spectators. And it seemed to him that he recalled a sombre light-ship that he had seen once in Portland harbour, which every now and then emitted a long, thin stream of ghastly, livid illumination from the midst of waters desolate and disturbed.

There had apparently been time, while Wolf was having his tea, for Roger Monk to defeat Mr. Torp; for that champion, still in his shirt-sleeves, and extremely hot, was arguing in a plaintive voice with Mr. Valley as to what he might have done and didn’t do.

Wolf shook hands with Mr. Valley and commiserated his father-in-law on his defeat. “It’s a wonder I didn’t lose a lot of money over you,” he said facetiously. “I backed you to the limit to beat our friend Roger, for the honour of the family; and now you’ve let us all down, and the West Country too! Mr. Monk, so he tells me, comes from the Shires.”

“Shires be damned, Mr. Solent!” said the monument-maker. “ ’Tweren’t no shires! ‘Twere me wone bloody cussedness. If I’d ‘a known then what I do know now, ’twould be he and me” — he nodded in the direction of Mr. Malakite— “and not he and *him*, for this here final.”

“How is it that *you* got knocked out so soon, Valley?” enquired Wolf.

But the little clergyman made a sign with his hand, and advanced a step or two, intent with all his mind and soul on Roger Monk’s massive wrist and the bowl which he was poising.

Wolf had to content himself, therefore, with drawing back his father-in-law to a bench under the hedge, where the game could be watched and Mr. Torp’s lamentations listened to in comparative ease and comfort.

“What’s wrong with this Mr. Round?” He hadn’t intended to say anything like this when he searched about in his mind for a suitable topic; but the words rose to his lips as if from some inquisitive demon pricking up its ears in the pit of his stomach.

“Can’t forgive ‘isself, I reckon, for they things he said about young Redfern. ‘Twere summat o’ that, so folks do tell I, what stole the heart out o’ that young gentleman and made ‘un turn to the wall. Leastways there were some folks as told ‘un ‘twere what he did say, down here, at Farmer’s Rest bar, that turned that young man’s poor heart to stone. ’Twould have jostled me wone innards, I tell ‘ee, if any well-thought-of landlord spoke such words of I.”

"What did he say about Redfern?" enquired Wolf, suppressing the absurd image that rose in his mind of a Mr. Torp lacerated by moral disquietude.

His father-in-law, however, at that moment saw fit to display a revived interest in the game of bowls.

"Look-see!" he cried, tapping Wolf on the knee, and leaning forward. "By jiggers, if that girt flunkey from up at House aren't making Mr. Malakite look like nothing!"

Wolf had indeed for some while been admiring the steady play of the big gardener. The old man opposed to him seemed on the contrary to be growing less and less careful of his aim.

"Something's fretting that wold gent, looks so," went on Mr. Torp. "Miss Bess been showing her laces to he, in parlour, like enough! 'Tis a wonderful disposing of Providence, Mr. Solent, when old men can flutter young ladies and make their hands fidget. 'Tis not been allowed to I, such privileges and portions. And yet I be a man, I reckon, what knows the road royal as well as another!"

But Wolf's mind was still hovering about Mr. Round and his remarkable "worries."

"What did this man actually say about Redfern?" he repeated.

Mr. Torp turned his head slowly towards him. "It may be a good world," he remarked sententiously, "and it may be a bad world, but *it's the world*; and us has got to handle 'un with eyes in our heads for landslides. My job mayn't be the job *you'd* choose. It mayn't be the job *I'd* choose, if others offered. But it's my job. And anyone, Mr. Solent, with a job like mine can't afford to stir up trouble among they dead. I were the man who made the headstone for'n. I ask 'ee, should I go spreading trouble about thik quiet lad? They said, when his funeral-day came, that he'd got no relation to mourn for'n. Who, then, I ask 'ee, Mr. Solent, is to hold their tongue, i' the peace of God, about the poor young man, if it bain't me wone self, who chipped the stone what covers him?"

"Is it true, when his conscience troubles him, that Mr. Round wanders about that field where Lenty Pond is?"

"Never ye mind where 'a wanders, Mr. Solent! Nebuchadnezzar were more than he; for kings be more than publicans; and *he* went on all fours in's day."

His father-in-law's poetic prevarications had begun to irritate Wolf.

"I wish you'd tell your wife, Mr. Torp," he burst out, "not to let Lobbie bathe in that damned pond!"

The monument-maker gave a start and opened his eyes wide. Wolf's intonation evidently surprised him.

He smiled as he answered.

"*She* not let him bathe? She don't let him do nothing — not even breathe, I fancy! 'Twould be somebody very different from our Gerda's Mummy, Mr. Solent, what would make Lob Torp bide at whoam. But what ails 'ee, Sir, to speak with such disturbance of a good Darset duck-pond, such as I do mind sliding on, winter come winter, since I were slim as a lath? What's Lenty Pond done to thee, Sir? 'Tis no girt place for perch or pike; and to my belief no wild-geese ever settled on it; but 'tis a good pond. 'Tis a pond that would drown the likes of you and me, maybe. But they boys! Why, they'd bathe in Satan's spittle and come out sweet. Lenty Pond's nothing to Lob Torp, Sir! You can rest peaceful on that."

As Wolf listened to all this, with one eye on the final defeat of Mr. Malakite, and the other on the doll-like briskness of Bess Round, who was now bringing out into the garden more chairs and more tables, he began to be aware of a very odd fancy, which he found it impossible to take seriously, and yet impossible to get rid of.

The fancy had to do with Lenty Pond; and the more he thought of it, the more ridiculously it pressed upon him. It was as if every single person in these three Dorset towns were hiding from him something they knew about Lenty Pond, something that was absurdly simple, that fitted together with mathematical precision, but to which he was himself completely blind.

He got up from the bench and went across the grass, with the intention of congratulating Roger Monk on his victory. On his way, however, and before his approach was detected by the gardener, round whose tall figure all the villagers who had been watching the match were now gathered, he caught sight of Miss Bess ushering into the garden the two Otter brothers.

Towards these two men he directed his steps, leaving Mr. Torp to join the loquacious group in the centre of the bowling-green. As he shook hands with the brothers, he detected Mr. Malakite secretively shuffling off by the elbow of Miss Bess, who, with a tray of empty bottles, was returning into the house.

That disconcerting feeling, as though the whole of his life at the present moment were unreal, weighed upon him still. It hung upon him like a wavering dizziness, as full of meaningless blotches and sparkles as the glass coffin-lid of King Æthelwolf in the Abbey.

Even as he was describing to the two Otters the portion of the bowling-match that he had seen, his eyes remained fixed on a particularly smooth and delicately polished bowl, of a dark-chestnut colour, that lay on the grass close to Darnley's feet.

It seemed to him as if he were reading his fate on the polished surface of this object, a fate laborious, complicated, burdened, but at the same time rolled and tossed about at random by many alien hands! Was there *any* portion of his identity, compact, self-contained, weighted with inward intention, like the "bias" of this bowl?

As he went on talking to the two brothers, he became aware that a small flower-seed had balanced itself, in its aimless flight, on the bowl at Darnley's feet, and he began to feel as if this flower-seed were tickling the skin of his mind, and that he couldn't brush it away. Something was fretting him; something was teasing him. What was it?

Then quite suddenly he knew what it was. It was the memory of old Malakite's obsessed expression — that expression of concentrated erotic insanity, directed toward universal matter, as he had caught it from under the man's wrinkled forehead across the blue tea-cosy. This, then, was why he was answering Jason's remarks in so perfunctory a manner! Then he gave a quick sigh of irrepressible relief; for he became aware that the doll-like young lady was back again at their side, suggesting that they should all sit down before a ricketty garden-table upon which she had placed a fresh tray of mugs.

This they proceeded to do; and while she was supplying them with foaming pints of Dorchester ale, he heard her say to Darnley: "Mr. Malakite's just traipsed off. He made his little joke, like he always does, the funny old man; but anyone could see he weren't best pleased! 'Tis hard for him, I expect, to be beat like this by a fellow who, as you might say, is a foreigner in these parts. He's been playing on this green, that old gentleman, as long as I can mind anything, and there be few enough who've got the best of him!"

She moved away to persuade the winner of the match and his rustic admirers to gather about another wooden table, leaving the "gentry" to their own devices.

Then it was that Wolf's mind completely recovered from its sense of unreality and from its hallucinations about Lenty Pond. From where he lay in a creaky straw-plaited chair between Darnley and Jason, he could take in at his leisure the whole characteristic West Country scene. There was a relaxed jocularity about the men's voices, as they rose in that shadowy garden, between the tall privet-hedge and the sloping thatched roof, that seemed to contain within it all the rich apple-juices that were ripening in the orchards around them, all the cool sap of the mangelwurzel plants in the neighbouring fields, the good white heart of billions of ears of plump wheat-sheaves, awaiting their threshing-day in all the granaries between Parret and Stour!

The sky, as he watched it above that privet-hedge, was still of the same filmy greyness as when he had sat, some five or six hours ago, under the sycamore at Poll's Camp; but the gathered volume of masculine personalities, as it surrounded him now — for Miss Bess was the only woman on the scene, and *her* femininity seemed to have no more weight in it than petticoats on a clothes-line — seemed fast building up about him a sort of battlemented watch-tower, from the isolation and protection of which his days began to fall into a measured, reasonable order, such as he had not known for many a long week.

That chestnut-coloured polished bowl was still within his vision on the smooth turf; but at this moment, in place of giving him a sense of random helplessness, it gave him a sense of reassured control. In this pleasant retreat, with the fumes of the Dorchester ale mounting into his head, he began to feel his hand firm and unbewildered once more upon his life's rudder.

These worthy men, with their work behind them, seemed to have eluded by some secret pressure of their united force the splash and beat of nature's chaotic waves. They seemed to have dragged their "hollow ship" out of the tide that summer afternoon — up, up, up some hidden shelving beach, where all agitations were over.

Everything disturbing and confusing sank away out of sight for Wolf just then. Indeed, his whole life gathered itself together with lovely inevitableness, as if it were a well-composed story that he himself, long ago and time out of mind, had actually composed.

And by degrees while he lazily drank his ale and chatted with Darnley — for Jason had for some unknown reason become suddenly silent — the old fighting-spirit of his inborn life-illusion rose strong and upwelling within him.

And there came to him the vision of one particular rock-pool near Weymouth, to which he had once found his way. He saw the rose-tinged seaweeds sway backwards and forwards... he heard the crying of the gulls....

Oh, that it were possible to gather together a great handful of such memories and pour them forth out of his cupped hands into the brain above that face on the Waterloo steps! But — but what if there should arrive a day, when, by the turning of the terrible engines, he himself should *look like that face*, while some other Wolf, drinking ale on a bowling-green, indulged in benevolent emotions in a creaky wicker-chair?

“Are you sure you couldn’t come back to dinner with us, Solent?” said Darnley at last, in a pause in the midst of their rambling conversation.

“Impossible!” he said, looking at his watch. “It’s seven o’clock now. As it is, I shall be late for Gerda’s supper.”

And then he suddenly remembered that Gerda’s last words to him had been: “Don’t hurry back, Wolf, I like waiting for you. I like sitting at the window and doing nothing. That’s what I like best of all!”

“Those girls of yours will be very annoyed if you don’t come,” said Jason.

“Why, they don’t expect me, do they? Your mother doesn’t expect me, does she?”

"All women," said Jason, with a chuckle, his spirits reviving when he saw Wolf's discomfort and indecision, "expect all men!"

"Well, I must come another time," said Wolf. "I can't leave Gerda like that without telling her. But I hope 'my girls,' as you call them, are all right? I hope you don't find Olwen too much of a handful?"

"Darnley is the one to give advice. Do you think he'd better go home, Darnley; or do you think he'd better come to dinner with us?"

"He must suit himself," said Darnley smiling. "I wouldn't care about leaving Gerda alone if I were in his shoes. But then, I've never had a Gerda... and am never likely to have!"

Mr. Valley at this point drifted up to their table.

"I've got to be getting back now," he said. "Are any of you people coming, or are you going to stay longer?"

The three men all rose. "We were just talking of getting off," said Darnley. "I suppose we all go the same way? At the start, anyhow?"

He beckoned to Bess Round to come to their table, and, drawing a small leather purse out of his pocket, paid for all the drinks they had had except Mr. Valley's. Him Roger Monk had already treated and treated well.

Wolf went across the grass and said good-bye to Mr. Torp and to Roger Monk, congratulating the latter warmly on his victory.

"I've never known the old man to play so badly," said Monk, with a deprecatory shrug of his shoulders. "That cup of tea he had with you in the parlour, Sir, must have gone to his head."

"Give me little darter me love, Mr. Solent," said the monument-maker. "And you may kiss she, too, if ye be so minded, from her old Dad. Not that they turns aught but cold maids' cheeks to their Dad's kisses. But that be all the better for thee, Sir; and ye are more like to mind me message than if 't had been any o' the young gents here assembled."

Roger Monk's victory at bowls had been celebrated by such copious libations that the gardener had no hesitation now about indulging in a piece of ribaldry from which in more sober mood he would certainly have refrained.

"Young and old is the same to that gender — eh, Mr. Solent, Sir? That's what we servants know, maybe, better than you gentlemen. There's not a poor one among that gender, nor a rich one among 'em — eh, Mr. Torp? — that hasn't wished themselves in the bed of somebody that isn't their law-established."

Wolf went off down Dead Badger Lane side by side with Jason, while Darnley walked in front of them with Mr. Valley.

That remark of Roger Monk teased Wolf's mind. The man had worded it in a coarser, drier, cruder manner than such a thing would have been worded by a man of the West Country. The use of the word "gender," for instance, "That's a touch of Sheffield or Birmingham," thought Wolf. And perhaps just because of its coarse wording, the thing hit Wolf with a most unpleasant emphasis. What *would* he feel if there were any serious cause for his being jealous? What he did feel at that moment was an actual sense of physical nausea caused by Roger's words. It wasn't only Gerda. That use of the word "gender" seemed to have stripped the world of a certain decency that belonged to its inherent skin quite as much as to its external conventions.

He experienced at that moment a wave of positive hatred for Roger Monk. "He looked as if he might put his hand on my shoulder or even slap me on the back. There's something horrible about a male servant... especially a big male servant... when he drops his professional discretion.... I could find it in me to pity even Mr. Urquhart if this chap *does* ever turn on him!"

His thoughts were jerked back into focus and into the cart-ruts of Dead Badger Lane by a remark from Jason Otter.

“Look at those two, in front there! Your friend Darnley has no more idea of what Valley’s after, than that stick of yours has! I suppose *you* think that Darnley’s very clever and very gentlemanly. That’s what most people think. It’s all his politeness. Look at their two heads now, bobbing up and down under their hats! I think cows and sheep are better than human beings. Nicer, I mean. Cleaner, too. Cleaner and nicer. What’s wrong with human beings is their minds. Their minds are filthy. The minds of worms are much nicer. Have you ever thought about what really goes on in people’s heads? I suppose not. I never thought you really knew very much. You’re good at writing histories of a lot of bawdy idiots; and you’re good at keeping old Urquhart in a good temper. But I’ve been thinking about you all this afternoon, Solent, and though you’ll probably abuse me for telling you the truth, I think you’re a crazy fool.”

By this time it began to dawn upon Wolf that Jason had no more power of drinking Dorchester ale with impunity than had his *bête noire* Roger Monk. He tried to distract the poet’s attention from personalities by remarking on the insubstantiality and ghostliness of the elm-trees in the hedges. But Jason refused to show any interest in the beauty of that August night.

“Your friend Darnley,” he now began again, “believes in politeness. He thinks he can smooth everything down by that. He doesn’t know what he’s got against him.”

“What has he got against him?” enquired Wolf, wondering at the back of his mind what effect upon this “politeness” the presence of Mattie in Pond Cottage had been having of late.

The reply of Jason was so violent and so abrupt that it had an uncanny effect upon the placidity of those vaporous elm-trees.

“He’s got God against him!” cried the poet. “What he tries to smooth down are the porcupine-quills of God!”

“We’d better walk a little faster,” said Wolf. “They’ll be turning soon, and I’ve got to go the other way.”

“You’re always on the walk, Solent. Walking here, walking there! You’ll walk into a pit one day, with that stick of yours.”

But Wolf lifted his voice.

“Darnley!” he shouted. “Valley! Wait a minute, you two!”

He could see the figures in front of him turn and stand still.

“Your friends over there will say good-night to you, Solent. Were you afraid they wouldn’t? They’ll say good-night. All the world over people say good-night. They think it does something, I suppose. *I* don’t know what it does!”

Wolf could not repress a heavy sigh. For some reason or other the peculiar nature of this man’s pessimism began to affect him as if he had been forced, till his hands were weary, to push away great stalks of deadly nightshade.

Jason caught this sigh upon the air, and it seemed to change his mood.

“I expect, Solent, you poor old devil, that that young lady of yours doesn’t cook a good meal for you very often.”

“Oh, yes, she does, Otter!” replied Wolf, as jocosely as he could. “There’s hardly a day we don’t have meat. But to tell you the truth, I’ve been thinking of giving up eating that sort of thing ever since Miss Gault talked to me the other night.”

“Do you attend to anything that an ugly old woman like that says to you? She only wants to stir things up, because she’s never slept with a man.”

The unkindness of those blunt words roused sheer anger in Wolf.

"Sleeping with people isn't everything in this world, Otter! It isn't even especially wonderful. I should have thought that being a poet you'd know that, and wouldn't go putting such importance on these material accidents!"

His anger, as he recognized clearly enough, was due to the fact that his own erotic feelings were so divided just then. But the tone of his voice was so vibrant with irritation, that its electric current conveyed itself to Jason in a second.

They were now quite close upon the others, however; and there was no time for anything but a swift, bitter, malicious blow, aimed where the opponent was most vulnerable.

"You'll walk into a material accident that'll stir *your* quills, master," the poet growled, "though you *do* think yourself a sort of superior being going about among ordinary people. *You'll* walk into the wood where they pick up horns... clever though you may be!"

The altercation subsided as swiftly as it had risen.

"I didn't want to lose sight of you," said Wolf, "because our ways divide in a minute. I wish you'd won that match, Valley, instead of Monk. I can't tell why, but there was something about Monk that annoyed me this afternoon. Perhaps servants are always annoying when they're neither one thing nor the other."

"I hope you didn't bring *me* into your quarrel," said Jason Otter.

"I'm not as good as any of them," replied Mr. Valley. "Even Torp is better than I am. I never allow enough room for the swing of the bias."

The four men walked on together and soon reached the spot where Dead Badger Lane joined Pond Lane.

"Well, good-night," said Wolf. "You and I will be seeing each other on Monday, eh, Darnley? Won't you come back to lunch with me then? I'll tell

Gerda if you will; and we'll celebrate the beginning of term with some sort of feast."

"Don't get anything out of the way for me, Wolf," the other replied. "You know what I'm like — the most irritating kind of guest. But I'd love to come. It'll make Monday less of a burden to look forward to." He stopped short and then suddenly added. "If it wouldn't be a bother to Gerda, I wish you'd really make it a bit of an occasion and ask little Christie? I've had an idea for the last few weeks... in fact since Olwen came to us... that she wanted cheering up. But don't say anything if it would be too much for Gerda."

"But, Darnley... you and I know... everyone knows... that Christie never goes out anywhere."

"Ask her, my dear man, that's all! I daresay she won't come, but ask her!" He paused for a second. "Everyone likes to be asked," he added gravely.

"Hee! Hee! Hee!"

Wolf swung round. It was Jason chuckling like a goblin in the darkness.

But Mr. Valley threw in his word before the electric current of irritation that still connected the two men's minds had time to explode.

"Let's see," said Mr. Valley. "It's Friday today, isn't it? Don't forget, all of you, that next Wednesday is our School-Treat. It begins at two and goes on till seven. The Squire always comes after tea to watch the sports; so I shall expect *you* with him, Solent. But tell Gerda I want her to come too. Lobbie will be there, and our friend Weevil's sure to come."

A muffled chuckle became audible.

"What's the matter with you, Jason?" expostulated Darnley. "We all enjoy Valley's school-treats. Are you going to have the Kingsbury band over here again?" he added, turning to the clergyman. "What a time we had last year! They wouldn't stop, Solent, until it was pitch-dark. When we did get 'em off, they played the Kingsbury jig out there in Lenty Lane, till Roger Monk hit the drummer into the ditch."

"It was honest of him to do that," said Jason. "We all know why these lecherous young men want the Kingsbury jig. It would be a good thing if your friend Solent used his stick for these young dogs, instead of boasting how many miles he can walk."

"Well, I'm going to walk now, anyway," broke in Wolf, making a violent effort to keep his temper. "Good-night, Valley! Good-night Darnley!..."

He found it impossible to think of anything, either good or bad, except imaginary retorts to Jason, as he made his way westward through that hushed night. The mere fact that Jason had the power to annoy him so much increased his aggravation; and his inability to lay his finger on the exact nature of this power added the last sharp prod to his irritated spirit.

"I wonder if I *am* the conceited fool he thinks me? Well! I don't care if I am. I have my 'mythology,' anyway. He's got the terrible instincts of a child in these things," his thoughts ran on. "He's so appallingly direct."

He meditated for about a quarter of an hour upon Jason's personality; while the man's taunt about his fondness for walking and his fondness for his stick took the heart out of every stride he made.

"What really rouses me," he thought presently, "is his *desire* to annoy. People can get angry with anyone and say outrageous things. But this is different. He *wants* to make me feel a fool. He *wants* to take the life out of my life."

Then Wolf set himself to wonder as to why it was that his mysterious psychic struggle with the Squire left him so free from personal hostility; while in the case of Jason he actually felt a longing to be wrestling with him in that very ditch into which he had said it was "honest" of Monk to hit the Kingsbury drummer!

"It's because he knows by some childish instinct just where my life-illusion is weakest. It's because he sees this weak spot, like a raw scratch in the hide of a bear tied to a pole, and it somehow gets on his nerves, so that he wants to poke at it."

With this hypothesis in his mind he advanced yet another quarter of a mile between the high hedges, where great bunches of old-man's-beard made large whitish blurs against the darkness. The trunks of the elms looked now, as he passed them by, as if they were composed of a vaporous stuff that was absolutely liquid. But he hated to see this particular effect, because it made him think of his recent attempts to distract Jason from poking at the spot in his life's conceit where the skin was so tender.

"*That* is what it is," he thought. Jason has deliberately stripped himself of every consolatory self-protective skin. He must see life continually as we others only see it when our life-illusions are broken through. The point is, "*is* life what Jason sees, or is it what *we* see?"

Trailing his oak-stick now, instead of prodding the ground with it, Wolf lurched forward in that fluid grey-coloured darkness, as if he'd been some forlorn Homeric ghost whose body had been left unburied.

"It *can't* be as he sees it," he thought, "except to him... except to him!"

He now stood stock-still, his stick just held, but no more than just held, from falling to the ground.

"I refuse to believe," he said to himself, "and I never will believe, until the day Nature kills me, that there's such a thing as 'reality,' apart from the mind that looks at it! Jason's stripping himself bare is *his* way... that's all... what he sees when he's like that is no less of an illusion than what I see when I'm plastered with armour. The 'thing in itself' is as fluid and malleable as these trees... I’m a sharded beetle and he’s one of those naked little green things that live in the centre of cuckoo-spit!”

This comparison cheered Wolf’s mind a good deal; and his fingers tightened once more upon the handle of his stick. “These trees, this old-man’s-beard, these dark ditch-plants... they all see what they’ve the nature to see.... No living thing has ever seen reality as it is in itself. By God! there’s probably nothing to see, when you come to that!”

He heard at that moment a slight, dry rustling in the grass by the side of the road. Inquisitive to know what it was, he went over, and, stooping down, fumbled with his hand among the entangled weeds. A scent of camomile hit his nostrils; but then — with an exclamation of distress — he drew his hand away.

“Damn!” he exclaimed. “Thorns!” And he thought vaguely, “How odd that there should be a bramble-bush so low down!”

Once more he heard the rustling; and once more, though with more caution, he stretched out his hand. This time he knew what it was; and repressing an instinct to hook the hedgehog with the handle of his stick and drag it out into the road, he straightened his own back and walked on.

“Another version of reality!” he said to himself. “And a bit more armoured even than mine!” And then he remembered what Jason had said with regard to the prickly quills of God. “I must tell him about this hedgehog,” he thought. “It’s just the sort of thing that’ll please him, especially as it’s made my finger bleed.”

The notion of communicating this occurrence with self-depreciatory humour to the “Slow-Worm of Lenty” completed his restoration to good spirits. By the little device of seeing himself in a humorous and yet not in a ridiculous light, he crossed the moat that separated him from his accustomed stronghold, and pulled up the drawbridge after him.

"I'll tell him about the hedgehog on Wednesday," he thought, "when I meet him at the school-treat." And thinking of Jason's goblinish laughter when he should be telling him the tale, Wolf entirely forgot the sensations he had recently received from that same sound.

With a mind once more adjusted and fortified to deal with existence, he advanced rapidly towards the outskirts of Blacksod. He knew every mark, every sign of the way as he came along. In a darkness far deeper than this darkness he would have known them, those grotesque and insignificant little things that arrest a person's attention for so many unknown reasons, as he follows a familiar road.

But all at once Wolf thought vividly, sharply, disturbingly of Mr. Malakite.

"I hope I'm not going to overtake him!" he said to himself; and then, before this hope was fully registered in his conscious brain, there in the dimness, standing as if she were waiting for him, was Christie herself!

"I knew your step. I knew the tap of your stick," she said hurriedly. "I haven't been here very long. Father came back and told me he'd had tea with you and then went off to get supper in the town; for he knew I hadn't anything for him in the house."

She spoke hurriedly, but quite calmly; and all the while she was speaking, she held one of Wolf's hands tightly with one of her own, and kept rubbing his knuckles with her other hand, as if she were rubbing out some stain left by Time itself, some imprint which the days that had passed since they had last seen each other had left there.

"Do you realize," he said, "that two seconds before I saw you I thought suddenly of your father? That shows something, doesn't it?"

"I've been thinking of him, and of you too, Wolf, all the afternoon. When he told me you were watching that game of bowls, I said to myself in a flash, ‘I’ll go out and meet Wolf coming back!’ — and you see I did meet you.”

She spoke with a wavering happiness that seemed to be lifting the syllables of her voice up and down on the darkness as the undulations of a full-brimmed tide might lift a drifting boat.

“Let’s find a place to sit down for a minute,” said Wolf. “I can’t realize I’ve got you, when we’re just standing up like this.”

He tightened his clasp upon her hand and led her to the hedge. A mass of vague, dark umbrageousness confronted them.

“Stop!” he whispered, “while I see if there’s a ditch.”

He advanced slowly, feeling with his stick among the hemlocks and dock-leaves.

“There’s no water, anyway,” he said, stepping down among the obscure rank-scented growths. “Wait a second,” he cried, “I believe we can get up over this.”

He felt about with his free hand. He could just detect the faint outlines of the branches of some small tree or shrub. It turned out — well did he know that acrid mind-cleansing pungency in his nostrils! — to be an elder-bush; and he pulled himself up by its brittle stalks till he attained the summit of the hedge.

“Come on! Catch hold!” he cried triumphantly, securing a firm position for himself and stretching out the handle of his stick towards her.

It took her a second or two of struggling amid the mass of weeds and of fumbling with upraised arm, before she reached the extended support. But when once she felt it between her fingers she clung tight with both hands, and he soon pulled her up beside him.

They found themselves, by a lucky chance, in a wheat-field that had been cut but not yet carried; and after a step or two across the stubble, they sank down with a mutual cry of satisfaction against the side of a shock of corn.

The weight of the immense vaporous summer darkness covered them there like a waveless ocean. They floated there upon a cool, yielding darkness that had neither substance nor shape, a darkness full of a faint fragrance that was the sweetness neither of clover nor of poppies nor of corn nor of grass, but was rather the breath of the great terrestrial orb itself, a dark, interior, outflowing sweetness between vast-rocking waves of air, where firmament bent down to firmament, and space rose up to meet space.

He kept fast hold of her hand; and her fingers seemed still cold and stiff and impassive, just as they had done when he first took them in the road. She did not bend her head towards him as they sat side by side, nor did he make the least movement to put his arm round her.

Wolf had sunk a little lower in the corn-shock than she, so that their heads were exactly level; and to any inquisitive owl or nightjar hovering across that stubble-field they must have appeared like two well-constructed scarecrows, good enough to frighten the silly daylight rooks, but quite negligible and harmless to all more sagacious nocturnal eyes.

"When I'm with you like this," said Wolf, "I feel as if I'd stripped my mind clean off my spirit; pulled it off as I might pull off my vest when I go to bed! I feel as if I could actually see my mind now, like that terrible flayed skin in the 'Last Judgement,' lying there on the ground. I can see the rents in it and the stains on it and all the insane zigzag creases!"

"I knew I should meet you tonight," said Christie, "just as I really knew, though I wouldn't admit I knew, that you'd come to me that day of the fair. I felt it would be like this the moment my father left the shop. Do you think it's being the daughter of my mother that gives me these feelings, or do you think every girl who's in love has them sometimes?"

The question fell like a ripple of the very sweetness of the night over Wolf's soul, but he went on thinking aloud without replying.

"The odd thing is that when I'm away from you I can hardly call up your face. Mother's face and Gerda's face I know like two books; but it's as if I carried your identity so close to me that I couldn't see a single expression of it."

"I feel unreal," said Christie. "That's how I feel — unreal. I've told myself stories about a lover since I was little. But after Olwen was born — oh, and before that, too — my life was so crushed and inert that I seemed to look at everything from some point outside of myself — as if my mind had been a cold, hard, inert mirror, reflecting what was there, but not feeling anything. But now I've known you it's been all different. My mind has got in touch again. I was a mere husk or shell all those miserable years — without a heart at all. But now the husk has come to life, and my heart with it. But sometimes I think my heart's still partly dead."

"I'm perfectly satisfied with how your heart is," Wolf threw in. "Alive or dead, I've got it now, and I'm never going to let it go! What's so strange is that I don't idealize you one bit; and I don't think you idealize me either. I think it's wonderful how we accept each other just as we are."

"Whether it's being my mother's daughter or not," said Christie, "it's a great comfort to me to have the feelings I have about what you're doing or where you are.... I think if anything happened to you I should know."

"I wonder what it really is in us," said Wolf, "that makes us so happy as we are? All other lovers in our position I know very well would be desperate to make love, to live together, to have a child; but here we are, in this field, perfectly content just to be side by side. *You* don't want anything more than this, Christie, do you?"

"I don't know, Wolf, that I'll always feel as I do now. How can I know? But certainly tonight I don't want anything else."

She stopped; and then, after a little pause, her voice began again in the darkness.

"But you don't think, Wolf" — her tone had in it now a certain half-humorous dismay— "that what we feel for each other could ever be called 'Platonic,' do you? I don't know... perhaps it's because the word's been so misused... but I've always had such an aversion to that idea. The mere possibility of its being applied to the mysterious feeling between us, just because we don't want what people usually do who are in love, reduces everything for me in some way... do you know what I mean?"

"Ay, Christie! Christie!" he cried. "How my father would chuckle if he heard those words of yours! You know how *he* would regard us and the way we behave? As nothing less than stark, staring mad! I'm damned if *I* know what 'Platonic' does mean... but I'm rather inclined... to think... to think... that our way of dealing... with things... with our feeling for each other... is much more mediæval than Platonic."

"Mediæval, Wolf?" protested Christie.

"Don't be cross with me. I know I'm absurd. I suppose I'm more of a slave to philosophical *phrases* than anyone in the whole of England! I love the sound of them. They have something... a sort of magic... I don't know what... that makes life rich and exciting to me."

"Oh, I know what you mean, Wolf!" cried Christie. "That's why I've loved reading those books in our shop... especially Leibnitz and Hegel. I've never been able to follow their real meaning, I suppose; but all the same it's been a great satisfaction to me to read them."

"I don't think it's pedantry or priggishness in either of us," Wolf continued. "I think we're thrilled by the weight of history that lies behind each one of these phrases. It isn't just the word itself, or just its immediate meaning. It's a long, trailing margin of human sensations, life by life, century by century, that gives us this peculiar thrill. Don't you think so, Christie?"

"What I was going to say," the girl murmured, "was that since I've known you I haven't cared so much for these philosophical books."

"Nonsense!" he muttered. But once more there floated over him an undulating tide of happiness that made the mere tone of her voice seem to him like those fluctuating wine-dark shadows on the deep sea, that suggest the presence of cool-swaying fields of submerged seaweeds lying beneath the water.

"I know they're absurd... these phrases..." he went on. "Words like 'pluralism' and 'dualism' and 'monism.' But what they make me think of is just a particular class of vague, delicious, physical sensations! And it's the idea of there having been feelings like these, in far-off, long-buried human nerves, that pleases us both so much. It makes life seem so thick and rich and complicated, if you know what I mean?"

They were both silent, and presently she struggled stiffly to her feet.

"And now, Wolf dear," she said, "I'm sure it's time we went on! I don't like being the one to say it... or being the one to interrupt our thoughts... but Father will be back, and Gerda will be expecting you."

He rose to his feet, too, and they stood awkwardly there, side by side in that windless darkness. Wolf had the feeling for one second as if the world had completely passed them by... gone on its way and forgotten them... so that not a soul knew they existed except themselves. As the shadow of a solitary bird on lonely sands answers the form of the bird's flying, so did he feel at that moment that his spirit answered her spirit.

But the moment passed quickly. A vague, troubling remembrance of that "yellow bracken" down by the Lunt rose up suddenly without cause. "Gerda must be thinking of me," he said to himself. And as this thought came into his head he couldn't resist a savage, secret jibing at his own treachery. "I wonder," he thought, "what Jason would say if he knew everything!"

The girl's figure, close to him as it was, seemed like a pillar of mist. "It's love-making," he thought, "just the relief of love-making, that saves a person's touchy mind from these morbid thoughts. But Christie doesn't depend on that, any more than I do. What *would* Jason say if he saw us now?" And then there came upon him a curious sense of shame that his mind had the power of wandering so far. "Is *her* mind wandering too?" he thought. "What is going on in *her* mind?"

He spoke to her then... to that blur that was her face in the darkness.

"As long as we see each other like this, it'll go on being all right, won't it, Christie?"

Her voice replied to his voice with a sound that might have been a whisper out of his own heart or might have been a cry from the other side of the world.

"But it's hard now. It's hard when it ends," she murmured.

"We might never have met at all," he said resolutely. "We've had all we wanted tonight. It's been as if all the noises of the world had blent into one, and then quite died away. Listen, Christie, there's not a stir or movement. It's silence like this that you and I have always wanted... all our lives."

"But it's hard when it ends," she repeated.

"We mustn't think of that," he said. "Our thoughts will always be able to find this silence. We shall always be able to reach each other with our thoughts, wherever we are. Don't you feel like that, Christie?"

"I try to," she said.

“You *do*. No one else except you could answer a person’s thoughts before they’ve been spoken! You *must* know, Christie, how I go muttering on and on to you, in my heart, day and night, telling you every single feeling I have?”

“I tell you things too, Wolf. I talk to you, too, sometimes... but still, but still...”

Her voice broke in a light sigh that floated away into the stubble, fainter than the falling of a feather.

“I know,” he repeated obstinately. “But don’t let’s be ungrateful to the gods, Christie. Think, how easy for us never to have met at all! Think, how I might have gone on with my life in London, you with your life in Blacksod! But now it’s all different. And there really *is* a sense... don’t you see, Christie?... in which by just knowing each other and being as we are we’ve got outside Time and outside Space! We’ve got into a region where all this — —”

“Stop, Wolf, stop!” the girl cried. “I can’t bear it now. I tell you I can’t — —”

He moved towards her, seeking to touch her; but she drew away from him.

“Forgive me!” she said, in a low, quiet voice. “It isn’t that I don’t understand you. I feel all those things. It’s only that... at the end... when I’ve got to leave you... that all this seems... I mean doesn’t seem...”

The gentleness of her tone softened the reproach, if reproach there was; and Wolf was conscious of nothing but an obscure rebellion within him against this mysterious pride in them both which made it so hard for him to risk the relief of the least caress. It was his turn to sigh now — a heavier sigh than hers — and in a second she caught his change of mood.

"I love you so much, Wolf," she said. "I wouldn't hurt you for anything. It's what I feel for you that makes it so hard when you've got to go and I've got to go. And I know what you mean... I *do* know what you mean... about... about our thoughts!"

As she spoke she moved towards him a little in the darkness. It was an almost imperceptible movement; but it was enough to send a perilous stab of tenderness through his nerves.

"Christie, oh, Christie..." he murmured, involuntarily starting towards her.

But she had already gathered her cloak about her and held it tightly with one hand under her chin.

"It's all right, Wolf! It's all right!" she said quickly, turning as if with a swift impulse for flight towards the hedge.

"It would be mad now, I suppose," he thought, as he followed her through the entangled branches.

Half-an-hour later, and he was walking with a rapid, preoccupied step along the lighted pavement of the Blacksod High Street. His head was so full of Christie, as he strode along, that the people he passed were as much phantoms to him as had been the elm-trees on the road from King's Barton.

Christie had agreed to come on Monday. That was what he was thinking about now; and it was an imaginary dialogue with Gerda, dealing with this project, that he was now occupied in rehearsing, sentence by sentence, as he hurried along.

"If she refuses, she refuses!" he thought. "I shan't press her. I'll just have to tell them the thing's off."

He had just reached the point, close to the marketplace, where Preston Lane debouched from the High Street, when he encountered, without any warning of his approach, for the pavement was crowded, the lean Panurge-like figure of Bob Weevil, hurrying along in a new straw-hat and new flannel trousers.

“Hullo!” said the young grocer, with a shrinking, startled movement; and then he gave a furtive glance around him, as if to ensure public protection from a possible outburst of physical violence.

“Oh, it’s you, is it, Bob?” said Wolf. “Where are *you* going so fast?”

Mr. Weevil stopped and gazed at him with screwed-up eyelids, as he shook him by the hand.

“Home,” he announced, in a loud, unpleasant voice. “Home to Dad. ‘Little Bobbie’s Best at Home,’ ” he went on. “Where’ve *you* been? Pursuing the Necessary over at Barton?”

The forced grin that animated the lad’s features as he indulged in these pleasantries was so obviously embarrassed and uneasy, that Wolf became instantaneously suspicious. Every word of Jason’s innuendoes returned to his mind. There also returned to him that still more sinister hint whispered by the poet on the day of the snatching away of Mukalog.

“Where have *you* been?” he asked abruptly.

He did his best to give his voice a casual tone; but the effect of his question upon Mr. Weevil showed that this effort was unsuccessful.

“You’re not a detective, are you?” jeered the young man, in a boisterously insolent manner. “ ’Little Bobbie’s Best at Home,’ ” he repeated. “Do you know that song? I’ll give you the rest of it some day.”

“Well, good-night to you!” rapped out Wolf, brusquely and almost rudely. “I’ve had a long day. Good-night to you; and don’t stay in the water so long the next time you bathe in Lenty Pond!”

He moved off at that, grimly entertained, in spite of his agitation, by the manner in which the young man’s eyes and mouth opened at the tone of this remark.

“He’s been with Gerda,” he thought, as he hurried on.

“THIS IS REALITY”

As soon as he reached Preston Lane, Wolf looked at his watch under the first of the three lamp-posts which were all the illumination that Blacksod had bestowed on that humble district. It was a quarter past nine. He must have been more than an hour in the cornfield; for he had left the bowling-green at seven.

“He’s been with Gerda.” This single thought had brought him from the centre of the town to where he now stood, without consciousness of anything in the world except one solitary fish’s eye — glazed and staring — that he had caught a glimpse of on a gas-lit counter.

He was too staggered even to experience surprise at his unexpected feelings. No alert self-watchful demon in him cried out, “What is this?” or “What does *this* mean?” He just suffered; and his suffering was such a completely new thing to him that he had no mental apparatus ready with which to deal with it. He was like a man who all his life had stalked leopards, suddenly confronted by a charging rhinoceros! All the blood that was in him seemed to have rushed with blind, irrational violence to a portion of his nervous system which he had supposed atrophied and callous. Vividly he recalled Jason’s warning to him in the road by the churchyard. “Those people must have pushed him to this,” he thought. “Not very nice,” he thought, “to think of the water-rat boasting up there with them and telling tales about her!”

He stood stock-still beneath the lamp-post. He felt as though a mob of Urquharts and Jasons had burst into the inmost sanctuary of his feelings — of his inarticulate physical feelings — and were jeering at them. He felt as though he had been stripped naked — as though he had become a laughing-stock to the human race. These were just the things — these physical feelings — that in his pride he had hidden from everyone. And now they were held up to derision, and he himself with them! He walked slowly across the road and then stopped and looked about him.

Everything was quiet. Most of the windows of those neat little houses displayed shaded gas-jets between the muslin curtains. From where he stood, the dark outline of the pig-dealer's shed was a small huddled blackness against the tall ash-tree further on. Over the top of the shadowy hedge came a faint smell of cattle-trampled grass, a poor antidote to the manure-drain whose stench soon swallowed it up. His own house was still two or three doors off. He could see a thin stream of light emerging from its upper window. Gerda was in her bedroom, then — in her bedroom at a quarter past nine! Had Bob Weevil cajoled her up there, directly they'd finished their supper? "Where did I once read," he thought, "that whatever liberties they allow, they usually fight shy of their man's bed? Good Lord! but what are beds? Beds are nothing. Beds are birth, death, and the morning and evening. But they're nothing when it comes to this! This can take the heart out of any bed."

He recrossed the road to where the lamp-post was. The particular house just there had no light in the front-windows. Instead of this there was a small notice which he could plainly read. "Furnished Room to let. Inquire within. Mrs. Herbert." "I suppose I've seen Mrs. Herbert," he thought, "a hundred times without knowing her. And I shall never know her. I shall die without knowing her."

He tapped Mrs. Herbert's railings with his stick. "It's not that I grudge Gerda any pleasure," he thought. "It's that I don't like spectators at *my* pleasure. She'll be just the same whatever Bob Weevil did. But he'll always be there... hiding behind her thoughts like a rat behind a screen... and watching me when I touch her. He’ll be in her thoughts when I’m holding her. He’ll be always there. I shall be eating with him, sleeping with him. There’ll always be a slit in her thoughts through which his eye will be on me.”

He remembered how his mother had once come home in high spirits to their London flat, after a conversation with her cousin, Lord Carfax, and told him how this nobleman had explained to her his philosophy of free-love, and how barbarous it was to grow jealous and possessive when you were enamoured. “Jealous?” he thought. “Well! He’s more sociable than I am, the good Carfax. I like to be alone in my house... not to be peeped at by a third person from the back of my girl’s head!”

He felt an extreme reluctance to move a step from where he was at the railings of the unknown Mrs. Herbert. “I’ve talked a lot about reality,” he said to himself. “But now I know a little better what *mine* is...”

“*This* is reality,” he thought. “This is the kind of thing that men returning home at a quarter past nine, in Colorado, in Singapore, in Moscow, in Cape-Town, in New Zealand, see in the darkness!... This is reality,” he thought.

He looked down at the tiny gutter at his feet between the asphalted pavement and the road. The lamplight shone upon this gutter, and he observed a torn piece of newspaper lying in it — a headline of the “Western Gazette” — and just tilted against the edge of this headline he saw an empty greenish-coloured tin. He could even read the words upon that torn bit of paper — printed in large, heavy type. “France distr... land.” “France distrusts England,” he repeated to himself; and then “Lyle’s Golden Syrup.” He could read *that*, without reading it! Much sweetness had he, in his time, watched Gerda imbibing from such a greenish-coloured receptacle!

"Does Mattie make 'em give Olwen *her* 'golden syrup' out at Pond Cottage? This is reality," he thought.

Down under his feet, under this asphalt, under this Somerset clay, down to the centre of the globe, went the mystery of solid matter. Up, up above him, beyond all this thick swine-scented darkness, went space, air, emptiness — the mystery of un-solid matter. "France distr... land"— "Lyle's Golden Syrup." Poke them with the end of an oak-stick.... "You'll walk into a pit with your precious stick, master!" — was that what Jason had said?

Pluralism, pantheism, monism!... Phrases... phrases made by men who come home at a quarter past nine. But these sounds too... these large, easy, purring sounds... part of reality!

Did Bob Weevil pull up her clothes? They like to have 'em unhooked better than that... untied... slipping down.... They never lose that sense... They belie 'em when they say they lose that sense. What sense? The beauty of their beauty... the sense of being *beautifully* loved... "This is reality," he thought. "They belie 'em when they say... Up or down, Bob Weevil? That's the question. Up is infinite. Down is infinite. Pantheism, dualism, pluralism! An ounce of civet, good Master Jason!"

He moved on and stood by the little iron gate of his own house. He did not look up, because there suddenly came to him the nervous idea that she was kneeling on the floor in her short "slip," peeping out at him; and he didn't feel in a mood to be peeped at!

What he did was to stare at the latch of the gate, wondering if he could lift it without making any sound. She had so often heard that "click" and come running to welcome him. He felt that to make that particular noise now would be as if he entered her presence with his face blackened all over like a clown....

But now there arose a different question. His mind began tying itself in a knot like a twisting snake. His own voice was in his ears assuring Christie that, all day and all night, he did nothing but live with her in his thoughts, telling her everything! Could he now tell her everything?... She who at this very minute was no doubt standing at *her* window? Why couldn't he tell her everything? Why couldn't he tell her that it wasn't that he grudged Gerda pleasure... that it was only that he grudged Bob Weevil the *sort* of pleasure he had got from that tombstone-picture! Why couldn't he explain all this to Christie; why couldn't he explain to her that it was not the thing itself, but only the way... the way in which Bob Weevil did... whatever it was he did?

He knew perfectly well that Christie understood his attachment to Gerda. He knew perfectly well that she would understand his resentment at the intrusion of Bob Weevil. What he could never, *never* make her understand would be this cold, sickening nausea he felt toward the simple, actual facts of what must have gone on. How *could* Gerda allow it? How could she?

But perhaps she did struggle a little — if only out of pride — when Bob Weevil began fumbling. But soon there could have been no sound at all except their breathing, except their hard breathing... Gerda would suffer, if she knew about Christie, the most secret of feminine sufferings... deeper than "France distr... land"... But a man coming home at a quarter past nine suffered too, the most secret of male sufferings... "An ounce of civet, good Master Jason!" He bent his head low down over the little iron railings, trying to think — to think and get it all clear.

He leaned against the little gate, while some unperturbed portion of his consciousness set itself to wonder whether it were a marigold or a petunia that emitted a faint whitish lustre in the darkness. There were plants of both of them there; but he couldn't remember their position — whether the marigolds were there or *there*! Then a thought came into his head that made him straighten his back, click the latch, open it, and walk boldly to the door.

If Gerda and Mr. Weevil were really fond of each other — if the girl had grown weary of him and his heavy lumpish mind — why couldn't they separate... he *his* way... she *her* way?

To his surprise — in spite of the lighted candle upstairs — Gerda was seated quietly, contentedly, calmly, at a table in their parlour. She was hemming an apron; and before she smilingly rose to greet him, he saw her quickly but carefully fix her needle in her bobbin of white thread. She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him, not passionately or perfunctorily, but affectionately and gaily.

"I had tea late and waited supper. It's all ready in the kitchen," she said, releasing him. And then she stretched herself, with both arms outspread; and her careless air of indolent well-being was accentuated by the childish smile that covered a shameless yawn. Wolf returned to the passage to hang up his hat and place his stick in its accustomed corner. He could not help thinking of Jason as he did this.

When he returned she was folding up her sewing and putting it away in a drawer. She looked at him smilingly over her shoulder. "I've had a visitor for tea, Wolf. Guess who it was."

"It wouldn't be much of a game for me to guess *that*, Gerda," he said with all the lightness he could assume. "Careful! Careful, now!" his fighting-spirit whispered to his excited nerves. "If you make the least false move she'll have you at a disadvantage."

"Why not?" The girl approached him, as she spoke, giving him a long, scrutinizing glance. "What's the matter, Wolf? Is anything wrong?" She laid both her hands on his coat, clutching its unbuttoned flaps and tightening them round him with a gesture that was at once imperative and cajoling.

“I met Bob Weevil just now,” he murmured, trying to give the words a natural tone, and smoothing out every sign of treachery from his face.

But with incredible rapidity, even while she was lifting up her chin and opening her lips, the self-protective demon in him cursed him for a blundering fool. “Why did you blurt *that* out?” said the demon.

“And he told you he’d been here?” Her words were as calm as if she’d said, “And he told you he’d been playing bowls.” She released her hold upon his coat and with easy naturalness ran out into the passage and thence into the kitchen.

Wolf heard her collecting the supper-things. He heard the sound of running water and the sound of metal against earthenware. He looked round the room. Ah! *there* was something he hadn’t noticed before, a draught-board open, with the black and white disks jumbled in casual confusion over its checkered surface.

So they had been playing draughts!

He walked thoughtfully up to this object and began piling up the round wooden counters, one on the top of another, balancing his shaky tower with his fingers as it began to sway. Then he removed his hand, and his tower fell with a crash, and many of the pieces rolled on the floor.

The house was so still that the sudden noise brought Gerda running into the room — to find him standing by the draught-table.

“What’s the matter with you?” she cried peevishly. “Aren’t you going to help me get supper? Aren’t you even going to wash your hands?”

“So you and Bob were playing draughts? I never knew you even knew the game, Gerda,” he said.

“Come and wash your hands,” she replied in a calm, scolding tone. “I’ve got tomato-soup. It’ll be ready in a minute. I’ll tell you every bit of the gossip about Bob when we’ve sat down! Of course I know draughts. Bob taught me years ago, when I was little. Today I won every single game. I was ‘huffing’ him all the time. But *do* come, Wolf. I’m hungry. Never mind picking up those things!”

He followed her into the kitchen and stood there, awkwardly and sulkily, till the meal was ready.

“I’m going to have beer tonight, Gerda,” he said. “I don’t know if *you* are.”

“I certainly am!” she said in her most cheerful tone, seating herself at the table and breaking a piece of bread with one hand, while she dipped her spoon into the soup with the other.

He went to the cupboard and came back with three bottles.

“Wolf... *dear*!” she cried, with her mouth full. “Who’s the third bottle for? Have *you* got somebody coming in?”

“It’s for me,” he remarked laconically. “I’m tired tonight. I’ve had a long day.”

“But, Wolf — isn’t it rather extravagant drinking so much at one meal?”

He didn’t reply to this, but busied himself with opening two of the bottles and with filling her glass and his own.

“It’s good... this soup... isn’t it, Wolf?” she remarked presently, passing the tip of her pink tongue over one corner of her perfectly curved lip and lifting her spoon once more to her mouth.

He poured half his glassful of beer, froth and all, down his throat without a word! Then he began swallowing the soup in rapid gulps.

“Good soup... very *good* soup,” he muttered.

She gave him a quick, penetrating look over her own raised glass, just sipped at the white foam, and then replaced the tumbler on the table. The next spoonful she lifted slowly, meditatively, absent-mindedly, a little puckered frown hovering about her forehead.

Wolf set himself obstinately and resolutely to finish the meal. Eating pieces of crumbled bread, hurriedly, intently, as if the process were something important in itself, leading to some desirable consummation, he kept drinking the beer in long draughts. The moment the first bottle was finished he opened the other, and with the same concentrated, absorbed determination disposed of that also.

"Good soup... very *good* soup," he repeated, as if the words were a sop thrown over his shoulder to some insatiable Cerberus of the river of Time.

"I am the weakest, most gullible fool," he thought, as he watched Gerda spreading a large slice of bread and then very deliberately taking little bites out of it, "ever born into the world. I oughtn't to be called Wolf Solent at all! I ought to be called Mr. Thin Soup or Mr. Weak Beer."

"Aren't you going to give me a cigarette?" asked Gerda.

He got up to obey, and it seemed to him as if the physical effort it required to hand her what she demanded and to hold towards her a lighted match, were the heaviest material task he had ever stretched his muscles to perform.

He lighted one for himself, however, and resumed his seat.

In complete silence now, save for the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, the greyish-blue spirals of smoke rose from each end of the table and floated hesitatingly, fluctuatingly, towards one another, high up above the two human heads.

"It's the weakness of your nature, Beer-Soup," he said to himself. "The weakness and the gullibility." Then he recalled the sudden bold resolve with which he had clicked the latch of their gate; and he compared that flash of inspiration with his wretched feelings now. Didn't he know himself at all? What he felt now was a complete disintegration of desire and will. He felt as if his consciousness were a tiny fitful flame, no, not a flame even, a scarcely visible vapour, hovering over a chaos of conflicting wishes, purposes, desires, hopes, regrets, that were so disorganized as to utterly cancel one another. They felt remote from him, too, these feelings that ought to have been his — remote and infinitely contemptible! The only desire this weak, floating awareness retained was a desire to escape from them altogether. For disorganized though they were, a dull nausea, sickening and paralyzing, ascended from them, troubling that feeble, free consciousness of his, as a putrefying body might trouble some frail "animula vagula" only half-escaped from it.

He struggled to use his brain, his free brain. "What *is* the matter with you, you lump of asininity? Speak up, express yourself, Mr. Wolf Beer-Soup!"

Then he suddenly recalled what he had felt as he drank that Dorchester ale in the bowling-green of Farmer's Rest. He had felt completely master of his destiny then. All these disorganized emotions, all these nervous electric currents, were gathered up then and focussed. Was he perhaps... innately incapable of dealing with women, whether in the way of lust, or in the way of tenderness? Was he only *a man* when confronted with men? Thrown with women, did his whole nature turn lumpish, sapless, porous? He began suddenly to have that appalling sensation which had come to him on Babylon Hill, as if his head... the thing that said "I am I"... were twisting and turning, like an uprisen hooded serpent... above a body of unspeakable decomposition....

Like a drowning man he stretched out his thoughts for help in every direction. To his mother he stretched them out. To his father he stretched them out. Feebly and automatically he carried his thoughts like a basket of dying fish to the threshold of Christie's room. "Christie! I must tell you... I *must*, I *must* tell you!"

But it seemed to him then as if even Christie's mind were shut to his helplessness. He seemed to hear her cry, "Stop, Wolf, stop! I can't bear to hear it!"

"This can't go on," he thought. "I must end this somehow; or I shall go mad."

He rose to his feet and began pacing up and down the kitchen.

Gerda watched him in silence for a moment or two; and then, extinguishing the remains of her cigarette against the edge of her empty soup-plate, she said to him, quite naturally and quietly:

"Wolf darling, just run upstairs, will you, and see if I left my candle burning? I want to wash up before we go to bed."

He stared at her in bewilderment, blinking his eyes. Then he lifted his hand to his mouth and held it there — held it to hide that trick he had, when he was at the limit of his endurance, of working the muscles of his lower jaw.

Gerda calmly rose from her seat and began gathering together the things on the table. "*Do* run up and put out that candle, Wolf," she repeated. "We don't want a fire in our house."

He obeyed her in silence now, and ascended the creaking steps, dragging his feet. He felt as if some completely different person — some docile, harmless, lumpish idiot — had taken the place of the Wolf he knew.

When he entered the room he found that the candle she had left there was low down in its candlestick, burning and guttering sideways, and dropping grease over the cover of the chest of drawers. He bent down mechanically to blow it out, receiving as he did so the full force of the carbonic-acid gas in his face. With no conscious purpose in his mind, he approached the bed, and, in the darkness, passed his hand hesitatingly over both the pillows, as if feeling for something.

Then he stood straight up against the edge of the bed, his knees touching the sheeted mattress, his arms hanging limp at his sides.

Quite externally and objectively, as if it had been this idiotic other person and not himself at all who formulated the thought, he wondered whether it was *after* she had let Bob Weevil make love to her up here, or *before*, that the game of draughts had been brought out. A hideous commentary upon this problem seemed to arise then from the mass of his own disorganized nerves. "Why don't you ask Christie what *she* thinks? Christie is a girl. Christie will be able to tell you whether it was before the draughts or after the draughts!"

He left the bed and went to the open window, hearing, as he did so, the sound of Gerda's clattering with the supper-things as she calmly washed up below.

The window was open at the top, so that to get the coolness of the air he was forced to lean his elbows upon the woodwork and rest his chin upon the back of his folded hands.

He remembered to the end of his life what he felt at that moment, while the bone of his lower jaw met the bones of his knuckles pressed so hard against them. He felt absolutely alone — alone in an emptiness that was different from empty space. He did not pity himself. He did not hate himself. He just endured himself and waited — waited till whatever it was that enclosed him made some sign.

By slow degrees it dawned on him that he had been for the last two or three minutes seeing something without being conscious of what he saw. Now it began to grow slowly plain to him, lineament by lineament, feature by feature, what it was he had been seeing in the darkness of that room, in the darkness of this obscure night.

It was the face of the man on the Waterloo steps! And out of his abominable misery Wolf cried a wordless cry to this face; and the nature of this cry was such that it seemed to break — so desperate it was — some psychic tension in his brain. And it seemed to him that what he was appealing to now was something beyond his mother, beyond his father, beyond Christie herself — something that was the upgathered, incarnated *look*, turned toward life's engines, of every sentient thing, since the beginning of time, that those engines had crushed.

The smell of the pigsty across the way must have been the reason why the *look* he appealed to was only partially human. It was an animal look... it was a bird look... it was the look of the fish's eye that he had seen on a counter as he came along the street that very night; it was the look of a wounded snake's eye that he had had time to mark long ago, out on some country road near London, before he ended its suffering.

It was, in fact, the Life-Eye, looking out on what hurts it, that he now knew he had caught glimpses of, all the days of his existence, in a thousand shapes and forms. From air, earth, water, had he intercepted the appeal of that little round living hole... that hole that went through the wall... straight into something else. Into *what* else? No one knew or would ever know. But into something else. It was upon *this* he was crying out now... upon that eye... upon that little round hole... upon that chink, that cranny, that slit, out of which life protested against its infamous enemy!

"Jesus... Jesus... Jesus... Jesus!"

Was that the heart of Wolf Solent howling a wordless howl in a dark bedroom, or was it the voice of Mr. Round of Farmer's Rest seeking escape from his "worries"?

A sigh of unutterable relief shivered through Wolf's nerves as they relaxed and yielded. He drew back from the window and began with an almost cat-like movement licking his hurt knuckles.

His whole being seemed dissolving into some lovely liquid-floating substance, lighter than human flesh, and he became capable of thinking now with every portion of his identity, easily, freely, spontaneously.

"I've learnt one thing tonight," he thought, as he crossed the room and felt about in the darkness for the handle of the door. "I've learnt that one can't always get help by sinking into one's own soul. It's sometimes necessary to escape from oneself altogether."

He ran down the little staircase with happy agility. He burst into the kitchen, where he found Gerda placidly and abstractedly polishing her knives and forks.

"How long you — —" she began; but the words were stopped upon her mouth by an imprint of impetuous, almost boisterous kisses.

As he held her in his arms, Wolf's thoughts were of the most intense and rapid kind. Why was it that his love for Christie hadn't protected him from all this agitation? Why had he been paralyzed by Gerda's calm? How was it that, in the unbelievable relief he experienced now, he really felt as if it didn't *very much* matter what the water-rat had done or hadn't done?

Releasing Gerda now, he seemed to bewilder her a good deal more by his high spirits than he had done by his moroseness.

"Don't let's go to bed *just* yet," he said. "Let's go for a tiny stroll down the road."

"Why, Wolf, how funny you are tonight! A moment ago you were telling me that you were quite exhausted."

She yielded good-humouredly, however, to his caprice, and they went out together into the narrow road.

Wolf had the strangest feeling as he clicked the latch of the gate to let her through. It was as if he were breaking some law of nature — refuting some inflexible scientific category of cause and effect.

He kept his arm tight about her, and led her up the road, in the direction away from the town, till they came to the place where the immense ash-tree lifted its branches into the dark air high above their heads.

There was a small gap in the hedge at this point, and Wolf pulled her through it, into the meadow on the other side. “For the second time tonight!” whispered his demon. But for some reason the mockery glanced off from Wolf’s present mood of slippery buoyancy, without causing him the slightest discomfort. “Very well, then,” he mentally retorted, “for the second time it *shall* be!”

They found themselves now under the very trunk of the vast tree whose branches they had so often watched from their upper room. One branch bent so low down and stretched out so far that they instinctively put their arms about it and dallied with its cool foliage. Wolf even amused himself by gathering up those great multiform leaf-growths, so different from the foliations of all other trees, and twisting them, without breaking their flexible stalks, about the girl’s bare neck.

Gerda remained passive and yielding under this dalliance. It seemed to him that her mind was a little aloof; but he could see, without seeing it, the faint, docile smile, like that of a sweet-natured child drawn into a game it was ready to play without understanding, with which she submitted to his humour.

All at once there came a sudden coolness upon his face and a quick rustling above their heads. The wind was rising. Oh, this was what he had been craving for, ever since his return to Preston Lane! It had been — he knew it now — something in the heaviness of this windless air that had caused half his trouble. Had this cool wind been blowing when he crossed the threshold, everything would have been different. It was the wind he wanted, the wind, the wind; to blow away all odious eidolons of Bob Weevil's presence out of his "sober house"!

He permitted the leafy ash-twigs that he had been bending to swing back to their natural position; and snatching at Gerda's arm above the wrist, he drew the girl, like a captive, right up to the trunk of the great overshadowing tree. She remained still passive, gentle, unresisting, by his side, her head drooping a little, her whole being — so it seemed — lost in a calm untroubled quiescence. Holding her thus, but turning away from her, he rubbed the palm of his free hand up and down over the hard slightly-indented surface of the ash-trunk, whose bark, thin and tightly fitted, raised no barrier between his human touch and the tree's own firm, hard wood-flesh.

"Human brains! Human knots of confusion!" he thought. "Why can't we steal the calm vegetable clairvoyance of these great rooted lives?"

"I simply can't understand myself," he thought. "Why, after being so happy with Christie, should the idea of Bob Weevil, poor, lecherous little rat, have worried me so? And why didn't I make a scene with Gerda — raise denials, anger, tears, reproaches? Why, instead of that, did I just muddy up my own wits?"

Still retaining his clasp of Gerda's wrist, he leaned forward and pressed his bare forehead against the trunk of the ash-tree.

"What's this, Wolf Solent?... What's this, you lumpish, mock-Platonic, well-cuckolded ass? Ash-tree! Ash-tree!" Why had he been allowed by the justice of things to deny himself a single embrace with Christie, only to come home at a quarter past nine and find a lit candle in Gerda's bedroom? Platonic cuckold! That was just what he was.... Not even Platonic... for Christie despised that word.... Mock-Platonic cuckold! Oh, it was all coming back! The knot in his mind was tying itself up again — tight —

tight — tight! He continued to lean against the tree in the position of an animal that is butting with its skull against some immovable obstacle.

And then the Waterloo-steps' eye, the fish's eye, the snake's eye, the slaughtered pig's eye, the eye of a caged lark he had seen once as a child in St. Mary's Street, Weymouth, all seemed to melt strangely together — all seemed to peer out at him from the heart of the tree-trunk against which he was butting with his skull.

And he thought to himself, "There are ways that I haven't tried at all!" And he thought to himself: "Endless little things are beautiful and wonderful beyond words. And I can love Christie and forgive her for hating 'Platonic'; and I can love Gerda and forgive her for letting Bob Weevil pull up her clothes. And if Christie and Gerda knew what *I* know, they'd forgive *me* for loving both of them! Christie would forgive me for not telling her. Gerda would forgive me for not telling her. There are things a person can't tell. But there's a way of floating like a mist out of my pride and conceit. There's a way of accepting myself as Mr. Promise-Breaking-Beer-Soup, and yet not minding it at all... just becoming a cloud of mist that enjoys this cool wind... a cloud of mist that pities everything and enjoys everything!"

He swung away, back from the tree, at this, and let Gerda go.

"You've hurt me, Wolf!" the girl cried peevishly. "Why did you do that? I haven't done anything to you. I wouldn't have come out with you if I thought you were going to act so funny. Come! Let's go in. What do you think I am, to stand so much silliness? You're drunk — that's what's the matter with you; you're just drunk and acting silly!"

He was so delighted to receive nothing but this very natural piece of scolding, that he only answered by hugging her tightly to his heart. "Little Gerda! Little Gerda!" he kept repeating. And he thought to himself: "I've exaggerated the whole thing. She *can't* have let Weevil play with her and be like she is now!"

And then an idea came into his mind.

"Don't be cross, sweetheart," he said. "If I *was* drunk, I swear I'm all right now. But listen! Do let me lift you up into this tree, just for a minute! I'd so adore to hear your voice out of the leaves above my head and not see hardly a glimpse of you! *Do* get up into it, Gerda, and let me hear your voice from up there. You needn't climb far. I can't climb trees at all. I get dizzy. Or I'd climb it with you."

The girl was still apparently enough of a child to be stirred by this unexpected appeal.

"But I'm so heavy, Wolf; and this branch is so high up."

"Oh, no, it's not — it's not! There — shove yourself up on the palms of your hands. Jump — and lift yourself — you know? Like boys do on walls!"

He bent down and encircled her body with his arms, just above her knees, and lifted her up.

Gerda pressed her hands upon the bough as he had suggested, and after a few struggles was lying prone along it, holding it so closely with her arms and legs that he could hardly distinguish the one living thing from the other.

"Well done, sweetheart!" he cried. "That's right. Now work your way towards the trunk. Careful now! Straddle your legs — you'll scratch your knees like that — straddle your legs and hold with your hands!"

Again she obeyed him with good-humoured docility. And as he watched her shadowy figure riding the swaying branch, he could not help recalling the wicked tombstone-picture; and the thought — the very last thought he expected to cross his mind that night — flitted into his senses, that it would be a desirable moment when he blew out the candle in their room — blew out that candle for the second time!

“That’s it, Gerda, that’s it! Now get hold of the branch above, and pull yourself on to it!”

He came nearer the tree-trunk and gazed up into the darkness.

In a second or two he lost sight of her altogether, for Gerda was an adept at climbing trees. All he could detect was a vague rustling; and even that was very soon swallowed up by the murmur of the whole dark mass of foliage, stirred into movement now by the rising wind.

He waited. He leaned his back against the trunk. He listened to the long-drawn swish — swish — swish of the invisible, rustling leaves.

Then his heart gave a leap within his body and he caught his breath with an indrawn, quivering gasp.

A blackbird was whistling above his head! Faint and low at first, each liquid flute-note went sailing away upon the wind as if it had been a separate pearl-clear bubble of some immortal dew. Then, growing louder and clearer, the notes began following rapidly one upon another; but each one of them still remained distinct from the rest — a trembling water-transparent globe of thrilling sound, purged, inviolable — a drop of translunar melody, floating, floating, far above the world, carrying his very soul with it.

Then the notes changed, varied, overlapped, grew charged with some secret intention, some burden of immeasurable happiness, of sadness sweeter than happiness.

Rising still, freer, stronger, fuller, they began to gather to themselves the resonant volume of some incredible challenge, a challenge from the throat of life itself to all that obstructed it. Tossed forth upon the darkness, wild and sweet and free, this whistled birdsong, answering the voice of the rising wind, took to itself something that was at once so jocund and so wistful, that it seemed to him as though all the defiant acceptance of fate that he had ever found in green grass, in cool-rooted plants, in the valiant bodies of beasts and birds and fishes... "mountains and all hills... fruitful trees and all cedars"... had been distilled, by some miracle, in this one human mouth.

The whistling sank into silence at the very moment when its power over Wolf's soul was at the flood. But without one single second of delay, when the last note had died, Gerda came scrambling down, laughing, rustling the leaves, and giving vent to petulant little outcries as her clothes impeded her descent. Wolf, when she finally fell, all panting and tremulous with wild gaiety, into his arms, felt that it was difficult to believe that this was the same Gerda whom he had watched, that very noon, asleep on the summit of Poll's Camp.

As they returned hand in hand to their house-door, a queer, abashed sense came over him that all the events of this turbulent day had been a sort of feverish delirium. What *was* his mind that it should go through such agitation and remain unaltered — remain the same "I am I" of Wolf Solent?

But once again his self-knowledge received a shock. For no sooner were they inside their small domicile, no sooner had he glanced at the linoleum on the staircase, the wooden clock in the parlour, the familiar kitchen-table, than all these little objects hit his consciousness with a delicious thrilling sense of happy security, as if he had come back to them from some great voyage over desolate and forlorn seas, as if he had come back to them with his clothes drenched with salt-water and his hands wounded by tarred ropes! His mind may have remained unaltered by all this, but it had at any rate been washed very clean!

Upon every tiniest and least-important object he looked, that night, with a purged simplicity, a spontaneous satisfaction. The pine-wood boarding at the edge of the linoleum stair-carpet, the pegs where their coats hung, the handles of the dresser-drawers, the rows of balanced plates, the cups suspended from the little hooks, the metal knobs at the end of their bed, Gerda's comb and brush, the candlestick still covered with grease, and two exposed soap-dishes on the washing-stand, one containing a small piece of Pears' soap and one containing a square lump of common yellow soap — all these things thrilled him, fascinated him, threw him into an ecstasy of well-being.

What was it that Mr. Urquhart had said, that day, about these little inanimates? Suicide *he* was talking about. But this was different....

It was a very quiescent Gerda, lethargic and languorous, who lay down by his side that Friday night. It was a very indulgent Christie, grave and tender, who listened now in her room above the shop to his story about ash-trees and draught-boards — who listened to every thought he had, as she lay there with closed eyes!

No system at all! Only to dissolve into thin, fluctuating vapour; only to flow like a serpentine mist into the grave of his father, into the mocking heart of his mother, into the ash-tree, into the wind, into the sands on Weymouth Beach, into the voice of the landlord of Farmer's Rest. No system at all!

Jesus... Jesus... Jesus... Jesus....

THE SCHOOL-TREAT

GERDA HAD REFUSED point-blank to invite Darnley and Christie to supper on Monday night, thus bringing to nothing Christie's premonition in the stubble-field. And now it was the middle of the long, sunlit afternoon — relaxed, autumnal, mellow — of Mr. Valley's great gala-day.

The *fête* was held in the vicarage-glebe, adjoining that portion of the churchyard-wall behind which rose the now four-months-old tombstone of the youthful Mr. Redfern.

The young men and boys of the village, encouraged at their game by Mr. Urquhart and Darnley Otter, were engaged in an interminable cricket-match, a match played between those who lived west of the church and those who lived east.

When Wolf first left his employer's library, which he did some half-hour later than the squire himself, and entered the school-treat field, he felt nervous and irritable. Everyone he knew in the world seemed to be gathered in that enclosure; and as he stealthily shuffled along the edge of the churchyard, he felt as if he would like to hide himself from them all, down in the silent earth along with young Redfern!

He found himself at a spot where the wall was very low, and, turning his back upon the crowded scene, leaned there for a while unnoticed, gazing at the great perpendicular tower. With the shouts and laughter in his ears, that tower looked incredibly massive and silent. What ebbing and flowing of human lives had it not seen, since unknown hands in the reign of the first Tudor piled it up there, stone upon stone!

Well, at least it was something to face the disquietudes of his own life in the presence of masonry like this, so subdued, so encrusted, rendered so mellow by the passing of the generations! As long as Fate allowed him to eke out his days amid old time-weathered concretions, like this King's Barton Tower, he could never touch certain abysses of misery! Here in these West Country places he was at any rate spared the atrocity of feeling the pinch of life's dilemmas against a background of monstrous modern inventions. The long, cold clutch of scientific discovery, laid, like metallic fingers, upon the human pulse, could not despoil the dignity of existence here; though the invasion by such inhuman forces had already begun!

"Long may this tower stand, so that men like me can touch its stones, its buttresses, its lichen, its moss, and escape from the dragon's-tail of the stinging present!"

He was conscious of a stealthy step behind him, and, turning round, he found Jason Otter at his side.

"You are enjoying yourself looking at his grave," the poet began; "and I don't blame you. I like looking at the graves of people I've known. But you go further than I could go, Solent. You are the clever one, the wise one, the old cunning one! You can enjoy looking at a grave though you never knew the person who's in it."

"You can't expect me not to be interested in Redfern, can you?" retorted Wolf, a little crustily.

"Of course not. That's just it. We all feel an interest — a nice, merry interest — in being alive when someone else is dead. He only came down here for money," he added unexpectedly, "like you!"

"If I came for it, I assure you I don't get it," said Wolf.

Jason chuckled a great deal at this remark. Then he grew grave. "I've got a poem here I'd like to read to you, if it wouldn't spoil your pleasure in looking at this young man's grave. I won't, if it *would*."

"I've looked all I want to look," said Wolf; "so do read me what you've got there. I'm glad of any excuse not to go round the field and hear so much talk."

"Sit down, then, a minute... do you mind?"

The two men sat down at the base of the wall and leaned their backs against it, facing the school-treat meadow. Jason produced from his pocket a small notebook, which he opened very deliberately upon his knee.

"It's about white seaweed," said Jason Otter.

"I didn't know it was ever white," said Wolf.

"Everything is white at one time or another," retorted Jason. "*You*'ll be white enough yourself, one fine day!"

"If it only gets white when it's dead," argued Wolf obstinately, "I don't think it's much of a subject. I like the idea of seaweed being white in the way chalk is white or daisies are white; but if it just fades and bleaches... I don't think much of that."

"It's no good abusing me before you've heard it," said Jason; "but, of course, we know this business of reading our writings is what your friend Darnley would call impolite."

"Go on, man, go on!" cried Wolf. "I'm listening."

And the poet began to read.

"White Seaweed"...

He repeated these words a second time, gathering his energy.

"White Seaweed."

"For God's sake," cried Wolf, "get on with it! They'll catch sight of us in a moment and then it'll all be spoilt."

Jason accepted this impatience with unruffled equanimity, and began in a low voice; but, gathering confidence as he proceeded, he read the poem from beginning to end without a pause.

White as the foam in the track of a whale
As he spouts and sports for a thousand miles
Where the waters slope round the planet's rim,
Beyond the continents and the isles,
White as the foam that follows him
Where there's never a masthead nor a sail.
Drowned and dead from their sunken ships,
Drift the bodies of boys and girls;
White are they as they float and drift,
Their hair like flotsam, their breasts like pearls,
While the grey tides lift them, or cease to lift,
And the green tides gurgle between their lips.
Fishes' eyes in the cold grey deep,
Staring and waiting, waiting and staring,
Seagulls' beaks on the tops of the wave,
The same eternal quest are sharing;
But the dark, wet, purple, slippery grave
Holds safe those bodies in untouched sleep.
And out of the flesh of those bodies light,
In their dark, wet, purple, slippery bed,
A seaweed grows that is soft as silk,
White as the moon on St. Alban's Head,
Moss-like, fern-like, white as milk. —
The fingers of Mary are not more white!
Oh! White as the horn of God's unicorn,
That seaweed lies upon Red-cliff bay,
Lies in the spindrift on Red-cliff sands,

Fling all your wicked thoughts away!
Take off your shoes; anoint your hands!
Than to touch such seaweed with careless scorn
‘Twere better never to have been born!

Jason’s voice sank; and that peculiar silence ensued which is fuller of electric cross-currents than anything else in the world... the silence produced by the falling of the seminal drops of verbal creation... upon an alien mind.

“I like it very much,” murmured Wolf at last. And he thought to himself, “The beggar *has* his own peculiar imagination.”

Then he said aloud: “It’s one of your best poems, Jason. I don’t think it’s quite up to the ‘Slow-Worm of Lenty,’ but it does you credit and I congratulate you. What did you exactly mean by that last verse? Did you mean that there are people in the world whose wicked thoughts are aroused by white seaweed, or did you just mean the ordinary stupidity of human beings?”

“It’s not my business to explain what I mean,” said Jason. “It’s my business to write. I can see what you think. You think that I just string words together as they come into my head! It isn’t as easy to write a poem as you seem to imagine.”

“Why do you write so often about water and about drowned people?” asked Wolf. “Your pond-elf in ‘The Slow-Worm’ gave me a weird feeling; and this seaweed of yours, growing out of drowned bodies — —”

“You needn’t go on!” interrupted Jason. “Of course, I can’t expect anyone to like my poetry who lives by copying out the liquorish thoughts of a doting old fool. We all want to be glorified. My poetry is all I’ve got and I ought never to have read it to you. I ought to have known I’d only get abuse. It’s this wanting to be glorified that’s the mistake. A person ought to be satisfied if he can get his meals three times a day, without having to dance attendance on some silly old man or some ugly old woman!”

Wolf swept this aside. “Do you have in your mind any definite people when you make the newts and tadpoles tease the pond-elf, and when you make these fish and gulls want to eat these youthful bodies?”

Jason’s face wrinkled with delight at this.

“You’re afraid I might bring *you* in!” he chuckled. “I wouldn’t mind not being glorified if I could make your friend Urquhart agitate himself as much as you do over my poems.”

Wolf had no time to reply to this; for, to his considerable surprise, he perceived his mother and Gerda, arm in arm, advancing towards their retreat.

Both he and Jason struggled simultaneously to their feet and moved towards the two women. Mrs. Solent began speaking with her accustomed high-pitched ironical intonation.

“Don’t take it off, Mr. Otter,” she said, when the poet raised his hand to his hat. “I know how you hate the sun; and it *is* hot today; though the hotter it is the more I enjoy it, though I think our pretty Gerda here agrees with *you*.”

Jason, who had succeeded with a certain embarrassment in lifting his straw-hat a few inches from his head in a stiff, perpendicular direction, pulled it down once more over his forehead with grateful relief.

“What’s this?” said Wolf, trying to conceal his discomfort under an airy jauntiness. “What’s this between you two?”

“Your mother and I have had several walks together,” said Jason, “and she knows my ways.”

“So well as to take a great liberty!” exclaimed the handsome lady, whose brown eyes were shining with radiant exultation. And as she spoke she stepped to Jason’s side and poked something, with her light-gloved fingers, into its place under his hat.

While this was proceeding, the expression upon the poet’s face made Wolf astonished. It was the queerest mixture of physical repulsion with pleasurable, masochistic submission. He was amazed at his mother’s audacity.

“What is it that you wear under your hat, Mr. Otter?” asked Gerda innocently.

The strange man looked at her with a very peculiar expression — an expression that baffled Wolf altogether. Then a most beautiful look came into his grey eyes, a look infinitely wistful and sorrowful, the sort of look that a disguised and persecuted god, lost among some savage race that knew him not nor could have comprehended him if it had known him, might have worn; and he replied gently: “I feel the sun, young lady. I find cabbage-leaves a great help. But today” — and here he smiled a disarming smile— “today it’s a rhubarb-leaf.”

Having said this, and with a courtly bend of his body that would have done credit to a royal personage, Jason Otter moved off, making his way, with careful manœuvring to avoid any encounter with the crowd, towards that part of the field where the old men of the village, seated on wooden benches, were partaking of cakes and cider.

“I hope you haven’t offended him, Mother,” muttered Wolf.

“I don’t think so,” cried Gerda. “What a nice man he is, Wolf! I like him ever so much better than Darnley.”

“That’s because Darnley’s my best friend,” said Wolf. “It’s a law of nature, sweetheart, isn’t it, Mother?”

But Mrs. Solent completely disregarded this little passage between them.

"What Gerda and I came for," she said, "was to ask you to show us Mr. Redfern's grave. Gerda's never seen it, though her father made the headstone, and I've never seen it, though I've asked Mr. Urquhart a hundred times to show it to me."

"It's not hard to find," said Wolf drily. "You could have gone any day by yourself."

"What's the sport in *that*?" laughed the lady, still displaying the same undercurrent of secret excitement. "The fun of looking at graves is all in the person you look at them *with*... isn't it, Gerda? I'm sure *you* must have enjoyed yourself watching all the fuss people make!"

"I can't help my father being a monument-maker," said Gerda gravely. "It's a trade, like any other trade."

"I'm not quarrelling with your father's profession, child," Mrs. Solent rapped out. "I'm only saying that there's no sport in looking at graves by oneself; and I *do* want to see this one."

"There it is, then, Mother!" cried Wolf, almost peevishly. "Can't you see?... the tall stone one there... no! over there... nearer the Tower," and he pointed with his stick.

"I want to go up to it," said Mrs. Solent obstinately, "and so does Gerda. She told me so just now. We're both sick to death of swinging long-legged girls. I don't want to see any more frills or garters for the rest of my life."

"Well, come on, then," said Wolf petulantly. "You can climb over this, can't you, Mother? I suppose Bob Weevil's making himself useful at the swings, eh?"

Whatever demon it was that made him indulge in this jocularity, its result was immediate.

Gerda turned on him fiercely. “Don’t be so vulgar, Wolf. Bob’s playing cricket, and so’s Lobbie. You ought to know better than to make remarks like that!”

“Don’t push me, Wolf.” It was his mother speaking, as she began scrambling over the low moss-grown wall. “Give me your hand;... no! give me your hand.”

Soon they were all three standing by Redfern’s grave.

“Poor boy!” sighed Mrs. Solent. “Do you know, Wolf, I heard Roger Monk talking in a queer way last week. I was asking him about this boy’s death, and he spoke in such a funny tone about it. He almost implied that it was a case of suicide. Have you heard anything of that sort?”

“Oh, just rumours, Mother,” replied Wolf casually; “just rumours and village-gossip. I’ve never heard of an inquest, or anything like that. I believe he died in his bed.”

“Father talks queer about it too,” said Gerda. “But do look at that! Is that a mole or a rabbit?”

“*I* don’t know,” said Wolf vaguely. It did not interest him in any particular way that this newly-grown-over mound should have been burrowed into or scraped at. After his many years of London life, the ways of moles, rabbits, dogs, foxes, were all equally arbitrary, equally unpredictable. It was, however, brought home to him now that there *was* something exceptional in this phenomenon; for Gerda, oblivious of the risk of grass-stains upon her summer frock, went down hurriedly on her knees and began fumbling with her bare fingers in the disordered clay, scooping up little handsfuls of dry brown earth with one hand and filtering them thoughtfully into the hollow palm of the other hand.

“Are you looking for Mr. Redfern’s bones?” enquired Mrs. Solent in her most airy manner. “You look like that pretty girl in the poem, leaning over her Pot of Basil; doesn't she, Wolf?" And touching the mound with the tip of her green parasol she put her head a little to one side and began quoting from the poem in question in a mock-sentimental intonation...

"And she forgot the stars, the moon, the sun;
And she forgot the blue above the trees;
And she forgot the dells where waters run;
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze.
She had no knowledge..."

"Don't, Mother," interrupted Wolf crossly, "Gerda knows what she's doing."

The unequalled lines roused their response in him, as independently of the mocking tone in which they were spoken as beautiful limbs under a ridiculous disguise; but this response only annoyed him the more.

"What is it, sweetheart?" he cried. "Is it a rabbit? I didn't know rabbits ever burrowed in churchyards."

"It's a mole," said Mrs. Solent.

It was Wolf's turn to mutter something now...

"Well said, old mole! canst work i' the earth so fast?
A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends."

"What's that? You know perfectly well it's a mole, Gerda," said Mrs. Solent. Gerda remained silent. She lifted some of the loose earth to her face and smelt it. Then she leapt to her feet, shook out her skirt, and rubbed the palms of her hands together. "I give it up," she said. "It isn't a rabbit. There's no smell of a fox either. It *may* have been a dog."

"A mole... a mole!" repeated the older woman.

"A *mole*!" muttered Gerda, with the profound sarcasm of the country-bred; and Wolf caught a little red flush on her cheeks like a crimson shadow on a mother-of-pearl shell. "Well! *we* can't do anything, anyway," she said. "It's silly to fuss ourselves. Bother! I've got some grit in my shoe!"

"It spoils the look of the grave completely, this great mole-hole," said Mrs. Solent. Then her face lit up, and she opened her parasol with an eager click. "This is a bit of sport," she cried. "Let's fill the thing up! Never mind about the school-treat. Where does Valley keep his spade? We only want a spade and a roll of turf. I saw some loose turf lying about in our garden. Come on, Wolf! Let's go over and get it, and ask Valley where he keeps his shovel."

Her face was full of animation now, and her eyes shone. Her grey hair and black Gainsborough hat framed the vivid cheeks of youth. The way she tilted her parasol as she spoke had something adventurous, almost hoydenish.

"Come, Wolf, let's get that turf," said Mrs. Solent. "We must ask Valley where he keeps his spade."

As Wolf turned to follow his mother on this impetuous quest, he caught sight of Gerda, struggling with the strap of her shoe, as she propped herself with one hand upon Redfern's headstone. There was such a look of defiant anger on her face that he halted irresolutely.

"Oh, go, if you want to, Wolf!" she cried. "I'm sure I don't want to keep you. It isn't often, though, that I get a chance of enjoying myself, working like I do in that dark kitchen all the time!"

Mrs. Solent gave her a steady, surprised stare.

"I won't keep him long, if you want him for your game," she said. "I can fill this hole up by myself, if you just get me the spade and the turf, Wolf."

The flush in Gerda's cheeks grew deeper. "I think it's a shame! Why did you bring me here at all, Wolf, if we weren't going to do something nice? I don't want to spend this afternoon doing what I do every day in the week."

Mrs. Solent gave Wolf a quick, surprised look, full of airy pity — a look that said, “You poor boy, how awful for you to be at the beck and call of such a child!” But aloud she remarked:

“It’s all right, Gerda. We won’t spoil your sport. Run along to your friends. I won’t keep him long.”

But Gerda’s suppressed anger had mounted so high by this time that there could be no such easy *dénouement*.

She held up her rounded chin and tossed back her head. Then, clasping her hands behind her, with her heels close together at the edge of the grave, she regarded Mrs. Solent with flashing eyes.

“Of course Wolf’s on your side. Of course he’ll love to fool about with your spades and turf, when it’s my one real treat of the whole summer! You two are both the same. You only think of yourselves and what you want. If it’s the silliest thing, like this nonsense about a mole, and every sensible person knows what a mole-hill is, it must come first, before everything, just because you’ve thought of it! Oh, yes, I saw you smiling at him just now, when my shoe came off. You couldn’t have looked much different if my stockings had been full of holes! Everyone can’t buy high-class London things; but I tell you our Blacksod shops be as good as they be any day in the week!”

“Well, Wolf,” said Mrs. Solent calmly, holding her parasol at a correct garden-party angle and letting her high spirits drop away, “the best thing you can do is to take your pretty young wife back to her friends’ games.”

“My friends’ games!” retorted the indignant girl. “I’m as old as anyone, considering all I put up with!”

“My dear child,” said the elder lady gently. “There’s really no reason for this excitement. Do try and calm yourself, and let’s all go back quietly. I’m sure I’m quite ready to give up my idea if it spoils your pleasure. Don’t, for mercy's sake, make such a mountain out of this mole-hill. I only thought of filling up this hole as a bit of sport, and because school-treats are so boring."

Her words were soothing; but there was something in the tilt of her eyebrows, as she glanced at Wolf, which made him realize that she was less unruffled than she appeared. He knew of old that the one thing in the world she hated was any display of temper or anything resembling a "scene." His own mind at this moment was unable to resist its furtive commentary upon the way Chance had managed to stage this encounter between the two. He had noticed these tricks before. It was as if there were some special æsthetic laws which Chance delighted to obey; and it always gave him a peculiar satisfaction to contemplate this bizarre rhythm. At such moments he found himself sacrificing action, emotion, sympathy, every human attribute, in a sort of ecstatic pondering over what this artistry of Chance was accomplishing. He felt as if he were in the presence of the unrolling of a psychic map. The figures on this map — his mother with her green parasol, Gerda with her grass-stained dress — were a sort of eddying vortex of significance upon a stream that was always rippling itself into mystic diagrams! Chance, in fact, was for ever at work fulfilling its own secret æsthetic laws; but every now and then, as at this fatal moment, its creation became especially vivid, and the whole "psychic map" upon that flowing stream grew violently and intensely agitated. The circle of ripples he was now contemplating with this inhuman detachment had two circumferences, namely, the angry consciousness of Gerda and the supercilious consciousness of his mother; but below them both — down there on the quiet river-floor — was the discolored, decomposed, unrecognizable face of the young Redfern.

"You've never liked my marrying him!" It was Gerda's voice he heard now, as he awoke from his metaphysical trance to realize that part of his mother's last remarks had fallen upon nothing but the surface of his mind.

"I've always been an outsider to both of you," the angry girl went on. "You've always despised me and my family, and done your best to make him despise us."

"I have the greatest respect for your family, my good child. No one who knows your father can possibly help it. Come now! It really won't do for us to make Wolf embarrassed like this. I've the utmost respect for your people, Gerda, and I'm sure my son couldn't have married a lovelier creature than you are, even at this moment! But do come, now, both of you, and let's get back to the field. Mr. Urquhart will be quite lost among those boys without Wolf's help."

She laid her hand with a soothing gesture upon the girl's wrist; but the glance she gave Wolf was full of a mocking resignation that threw a screen round them and railed off this ill-advised proletarian. Gerda's behaviour on the other side of this barrier became so irrational that it could only excite well-bred surprise! But the girl tossed her hand away.

"Mr. Urquhart, indeed!" she cried. "A nice sort you are out here, you King's Barton gentry! Why, I've never cared even to *tell* Wolf all I've heard Dad say about what some folks do in this dirty village." Her voice grew louder, as her long-suppressed feelings burst forth. Wolf had fancied in his simplicity that his mother's airy propitiations had disarmed the girl; but he under-rated both Gerda's perspicacity and her pride.

There was something else on Gerda's mind, too, beyond her personal indignation. What actually, he wondered, *were* these Blacksod gossips saying? He looked at the girl with a kind of paralyzed helplessness, and again the thought struck him how neat a stroke of chance it was that Redfern’s grave should be the background of her outburst.

“Some of you gentry,” she went on fiercely, “don’t lie abed with decent consciences like my folks! Why, they do say down at Farmer’s Rest that landlord Round do keep his bed, and that Squire Urquhart can get no peace by night or by day, because of what do taunt their minds over this poor young man.”

In spite of his discomfort, Wolf couldn’t help feeling faintly amused at Gerda’s struggle to keep the insidious Dorset dialect out of her speech, a struggle that grew less and less availing as her agitation rose.

“And these be the high-class people that you think so superior to respectable plain folk like my dear Dad!” Her voice had a quiver in it at this point that made Wolf cry out, “Gerda! Gerda darling!” But she did not break down. On the contrary, her tone grew stronger and more defiant. “Like my dear Dad,” she went on, “who never in his whole life said an evil word to anyone. But you get your spade and your turf and cover up this hole. Maybe you’ll catch the fox that made it and be surprised!”

“Come on, come on, Gerda,” said Wolf peevishly, stretching out his hand, in his turn, and trying to seize her fingers. “We mustn’t stay here like this. We shall be attracting attention soon. Come on; let’s go back to the field.”

His glance wandered from one to the other of these two figures who held his peace of mind so completely in their power. He could not shake off the profound inertia that had fallen upon him.

“But we *must* go back,” he murmured helplessly. “Come along, Gerda. Please do stop saying these things.”

His voice sounded in his own ears puerile, feeble, futile. It sounded like the petulance of a child, outraged and astonished by the tenacious obstinacy of grown-up people.

He had noticed on other occasions this peculiar psychic phenomenon — that when he was with Gerda and his mother together, his personality shrank and dwindled until he felt his actual body grow limp and lumpish. The supercilious calmness of his mother's face under her green parasol, the angry defiance of Gerda's face under her simple school-treat hat, with its pale watchet-blue ribbons, seemed to paralyze him; so that all he could do was to bow before the storm, like a horse with its rump turned to the wind and its forehead turned to the fence! The male animal in him felt quelled and cowed by these two opposed currents of feminine emotion. Both of them seemed to him completely irrational at that moment. His mother's patronizing irony seemed absurd, in conflict with the direct outburst of the other; and Gerda's violence seemed pitifully uncalled-for. If he could have felt any sort of complacent superiority, he could have endured it more easily. But he felt no such superiority! Irrational though they both seemed to him, their personalities had never struck him as more attractive or more mysterious. Their very irrationality seemed drawn from some reservoir of life-energy that was richer, more real, more strange and vibrant than the lumpish bewilderment with which he confronted it.

As he looked from one to the other, and listened, without listening, to the rising torrent of Gerda's wild words, he felt that it was absolutely impossible for him to take whole-heartedly one side or the other. He felt not only inert and helpless; but he felt as if he were himself torn into two halves by their struggle. He felt as if he incarnated at the same time his mother's ironic detachment and his girl's passionate grievance. All the long nights he had lain by Gerda's side, all their sweet, secret caresses, clung, like a portion of life itself, to what he felt then for that young, troubled face under the watchet-blue ribbons. But in his mangled bifurcated identity it was impossible to feel hostile to the other figure. Longer nights with him had been hers, and closer caresses! How could he, for all the sweetness of his companion's body, turn away from the flesh that was his own flesh?

Reason? Justice? The forces that victimized and paralyzed him now were those that had created the world. Who was he to contend against them?

Gerda came to a pause at last, and without a word to either of them walked off towards the school-treat field.

Then it was that Mrs. Solent turned upon her son with wide-open eyes and gave him a prolonged stare.

"Well!" she exclaimed at last, while her tilted parasol sank down, "there it is!... I think," she resumed, slowly and casually, "I'll go back to the cottage and do a little gardening before tea. If I mustn't tidy up your graveyard, at least I can tidy up my landlord's garden! Digging in the earth for an hour or two will give me an inspiration perhaps about all our affairs. I'm tired of this treat and I've done my share."

"All right, Mother," he said, casting a quick glance after Gerda, whose muslin frock and blue hat were now disappearing over the wall; "I'll take you a little way and then go back."

They walked round the church and out of the main entrance into the road. When they had passed the gate into the field, and were almost at the point where Pond Lane debouched from the village-street, they overtook the furtive figure of Jason Otter, hurrying surreptitiously homewards.

He gave a start of dismay when they came up with him.

"You won't tell Urquhart you saw me," he said hurriedly. "The truth is I can't stand it any longer seeing that great lumbering gardener of his swaggering about at the wicket. No one can get the great fool out. He hits boundaries all the time. They oughtn't to have let him play! He thinks because he won that bowling-match he can do everything. And, of course, with a lot of little boys like that, who consider he's a great batsman — —" A look of dismay covered Jason's face like a frayed shroud, as he spoke these words.

"They think he's a kind of County Player," he added gloomily.

"Were you playing yourself?" enquired Mrs. Solent.

"Any one of the Ramsgard second-eleven could send his bails flying!" continued Jason. "Wilson Minor would have got him out for a duck's-egg."

A faint wrinkling in the lines of the poet's profile indicated that some mental image was exciting his proclivity to roguery.

"I've never heard of Wilson Minor," murmured Wolf.

Jason cast a sidewise glance at him and then looked at Mrs. Solent. He seemed to imply that these intimate affairs of the Second Eleven of Ramsgard School were, where women were concerned, rather to be concealed than revealed.

"Do you know him?" enquired Wolf boldly, taking the bull by the horns.

There was a moment's hesitation.

"He bowls left-handed," Jason threw out. "They twist, too. This stall-fed head-gardener couldn't stand up to them for a moment."

"Is he a nice boy?" persisted Wolf.

"*I* like him," said the other nervously. "I have only seen him three or four times. I took him to tea once at the Lovelace. But that was only because I *wanted tea*; and when I'm alone, that waiter always stares at me so. When I first spoke to him he thought I was a new master."

"What does he think you are now?" said Wolf.

Jason chuckled. "An undertaker perhaps; or a private secretary, like you! But he sees I'm honest; and he knows I know a good bowler." He paused for a second. "We all like to be praised!" he added grimly.

"Jason," said Wolf, feeling a sudden qualm about Gerda, "why don't you take my mother home? She'll give you a splendid cup of tea... better than you could make for yourself at Pond Cottage... and I know there'll be nobody in your house now. Mother, you'd like that, wouldn't you? I know how well you two always get on." He felt so impatient to be off, that he cared nothing for the effect of this suggestion upon either the poet or the lady. But Mrs. Solent looked not altogether displeased at this turn of events.

He hurried away now, avoiding any glance at Jason to discover how this prospect appealed to him. He had no difficulty in finding Gerda when he reached the field. She had not yet joined in any game, and it was quite easy to take her aside. She was in a mood of reserved apathy, neither apologetic nor defiant, just remote from the whole stream of events, and a little sad.

"Did you really hear all that about old Urquhart?" he asked her, anxious to distract her mind.

She smiled faintly; and he was so delighted to welcome that sign of a return to her normal self that he gave scant consideration to the substance of her reply.

"Well — not in those very words, Wolf! But Dad do always tell that there was something queer about this young gentleman's end; and if it weren't the Squire, 'twere at least Landlord Round who folks have seen, mooning and mowling round that grave."

"Come on, Gerda!" — he spoke as energetically and gaily as he could— "let's hear what you really think! You don't *yourself* think that it wasn't an animal that made that hole, eh?"

"Let's not talk about it any more," the girl replied. "I was angry, and you know why; and you know that any girl who wasn't made of rags and straw would have been angry! If I said more than I meant, you must forget it, Wolf, and forgive me."

Together they advanced now, boldly and unhesitatingly, into the midst of the crowded field. They soon came upon Mattie and Olwen, hand in hand, watching a three-legged race, in which the most buxom and spirited of the maids of King's Barton, tied together in couples, were contending for a bag of sugar-candy.

Olwen greeted Wolf with her usual passionate intensity. "Mattie won't race," she cried. "Do make her do it!"

"But *you* can race if you like," Mattie retorted. "That big girl who looks like winning was ready to run with you." Mattie turned to Gerda, as she said this, with something like an appeal.

"I don't like racing," she added. "Besides, I'm not dressed for it, am I?" and she glanced down at her new black frock.

"Oh, that's nothing," mumbled Wolf; and then, observing that Gerda had bent over the child and was diverting her attention, he took his sister's arm and led her aside. "Everyone I've met today seems upset by something or other," he began, as soon as they were well in the rear of the onlookers at the race. "I don't know whether it's because I'm nervous myself; but there's a bad wind blowing from some quarter."

"Do you think there's something the matter with *me*?" she asked. "You're too sympathetic, Wolf dear. To tell you the truth, I do feel rather grim this afternoon. I *ought* to have let them tie Olwen and me together; but I couldn't bring myself to it. I hadn't the heart for it."

Wolf glanced back over the heads of the spectators. He could see that Gerda had possessed herself of the child's hand and that they were both watching the proceedings with absorbed attention.

"They're all right," he whispered. "Let's go for a bit of a stroll."

They moved off together towards a vacant portion of the meadow, midway between the cricket-match and a noisy group of smaller boys.

"Now, what is it, Mattie?" he said, pressing her unmercifully. "I've seen you so little lately that I can't follow your moods. But I've never seen such a depressed look. It's far sadder, your face today, than when Mr. Smith died. It's a different kind of sadness. It makes me wonder."

"Dear Wolf! I assure you, you needn't fret about me. I'm all right. You worry too much about people. You can't take *everyone's* sorrows on yourself. People have to go through things sometimes where no one can help them."

Wolf stood stock-still and laid his hand on her wrist.

"Don't begin those platitudes, Mattie, or you'll make me angry. I don't take anyone's sorrows on myself. But you know... I feel as if..." He stopped short and stood hesitating, wondering how he would dare to broach the various troubled intimations that had been crossing his mind concerning her and Darnley. They moved on again, and his words still hung uncompleted in the air.

To help him out she tentatively repeated, "You feel as if?"

"Well... don't be angry with me if I'm plunging into something too" — he hesitated for a word— "too frail to bear the weight of my clumsiness. But I'm not blind. I've seen that you and Darnley have something between you, some subtle understanding. I was glad to see it. You don't know on what a long road it started my fancy! So now, when I see you looking 'grim,' as you call it, I can't help thinking it must be because of... you know?... something gone wrong between you."

Mattie gazed at him dumbfounded.

"But... Wolf... but..." she gasped. She looked so hopelessly confused and so wretchedly miserable, as she stood there before him, her heavy eyebrows twitching, as she frowned, and her mouth a little open, that Wolf was afraid he had made some gross blunder that might be terribly hurting to her reserved nature.

"But there's nothing in it at all!" she cried pitifully. "Darnley and I are just friends. I've always felt he understood me better than anyone I've known. But that's not much, Wolf. You know how many people *I've* known! There's nothing more that's between us, Wolf. What made you think there was?"

"Oh, all right, Mattie," he muttered, rather sulkily. "I see you have to keep your affairs to yourself, and I'm not the one to force anything on you."

He broke off; for he saw her face assume an expression that was completely new to him and to which he had no clue.

Swinging round, and following the direction of her eyes, he saw Darnley and Mrs. Otter coming straight across the grass towards them.

"I came to find Olwen," the old lady began. "I'm going home now, and I thought it would leave you freer if I took her with me."

"I'd much rather come back with you," said Mattie. "But I expect I ought not to desert Mr. Valley quite as early as this. What is the time, Darnley?" Darnley looked vaguely round. "Oh, of course you haven't your watch with you," the girl went on. "Have you the time, Wolf?" Wolf looked at his watch, one of the few objects in his possession that was of monetary value. His Weymouth grandmother had given it to him as a child; and there were moments when merely to take it out of his pocket brought him a kind of reassurance, as of things quiet, stable, continuous, in the midst of turmoil.

"It's ten minutes past seven," he announced; and as they separated, he caught a look between Mattie and Darnley that made him wonder if, after all, his instinct had not been on the right track.

"Has the Squire gone home yet?" enquired Wolf, as he and Darnley walked slowly towards the cricket-pitch.

“I don’t know. I expect so,” the other answered absent-mindedly; and then, as they came nearer: “No, he’s there still.”

When they reached the outskirts of the game they stood for a while in silence, a little behind the player who was fielding at “point.” Mr. Valley was umpiring on one side and Mr. Urquhart on the other; and it interested Wolf to note that it was his own hand that was instinctively lifted to salute the clergyman, and Darnley’s to salute the squire. One of the batsmen proved to be none other than Bob Weevil; and Wolf was sardonically amused at his own expense when he found that this fact gave him a thrill of unexpected relief. There was little chance, for some while, anyway, for Mr. Weevil and Gerda to pair off, unless the sausage-seller was prepared to sacrifice his reputation as a batsman to his amorous propensities; and, as Wolf watched him now, playing with skill and caution, this seemed the very last thing he was prepared for.

“What would you do, Solent,” began Darnley suddenly; and Wolf, glancing quickly at him, observed that his head was turned away and his gaze fixed intently upon the bowler at the further end of the pitch. “What would you do if you were in love with a girl and had at the same time some peculiarity that made all women repulsive to you?”

Wolf deliberately attuned his voice, as he replied to this, to a flat, dull intonation, as if Darnley had said, “What would you do if you were bowling at Bob Weevil and he had ‘got his eye in’?”

“It would entirely depend on who the girl was,” he said, keeping his gaze on the bare arms of the young grocer, as he balanced his bat in the block and bent his slim body forward.

“That’s all very well,” rejoined the other, “but you can’t go against nature beyond a certain point.”

Wolf raised his voice a little at this, as Bob Weevil, swinging his bat round, slogged the ball vigorously to leg and began to run.

“Nothing is against nature!” he retorted. “That’s the mistake people make; and it causes endless unhappiness.”

Darnley replied in three muttered, disjointed words, stressing each of them with a deliberation that had something ghastly in it. “Patience... pretend... perhaps....”

Wolf paused to join in the loud general clapping that indicated that the batsmen had scored six runs. Then he pointed with his stick. “Come on,” he said, “there’s Miss Gault over there, watching the tug-of-war. Let’s go and speak to her. I particularly want to avoid getting caught in a long conversation; but, at the same time, I *must* speak to her. It would be outrageous not to. But if you come with me, Otter, I shall be safe.”

Darnley smiled and took his friend’s arm.

It was then, as they moved across the field together, that Wolf discovered that the touch of Darnley’s hand on his arm agitated his nerves to a pitch of exasperation. Inexplicable to himself, this mounting anger with the man he loved so well gradually grew so intense that he could hardly endure it. He exerted a superhuman effort to restrain his nervousness; but his friend’s very consciousness of his mood was rapidly making it impossible for him to control himself.

The sunshine made Darnley’s beard glitter, as if it were composed of shining gold; and this effect, though he noticed it calmly enough with one part of his mind, increased Wolf’s irritation. It was all he could do to prevent himself from seizing upon this beard and pulling it viciously. Darnley was now holding Wolf’s arm so tightly that he felt a blind impulse of animal resentment rising up within him — an impulse upon which his nervous irritation rocked like a cork upon a wave.

"Avoid! Avoid!" he suddenly flung out; and with the same spasmodic impulse, as he uttered this strange cry, he tore his arm free. "It's a trick! It's a trick! It's a trick!" He let his voice quiver without restraint, as he hissed out these words, though he knew perfectly well that the ugly contraction of the muscles of his mouth, as much as the word itself, must have been very agitating to his companion. But for this, just then, he cared nothing. If he could have made clear to that anxious face that now gazed at him so concernedly, what he really felt at that moment, it would have resolved itself into something like this: His mother and Gerda had lost their separate identities. They had become the point of a prodding shaft of yellow light that was at the same time the point of Darnley's trim beard! This shaft was now pushing him towards another misery, which took the form of a taste in his mouth, a taste that he especially loathed, though he could only have defined it, even to himself, as the taste of salad and vinegar! But, whatever it was, *this taste was Miss Gault*. The shaft of yellow light that prodded him on had the power of thinning out and bleaching out his whole world, taking the moist sap quite away from it, leaving it like a piece of blown paper on an asphalt pavement. Between these two things — the blighting light and the corrosive taste — he felt an actual indrawn knot of impotence tying itself together within him, a knot that was composed of threads in his stomach, of threads in the pulses of his wrists, and of threads behind his eye-sockets! Everything in the world that was lovely and precious to him was being licked up by a mustard-coloured tongue, while a taste of constricting, devastating sourness began to parch his mouth.

They were now close behind the back-row of spectators. "She was here just now," said Darnley. "She must have gone round to the other side." Wolf knew perfectly well that his friend referred to Miss Gault, but he only murmured, in a weary, drawling voice, “Who’s that you say’s gone over to the other side?”

There was *that* in him that was ashamed of what he was doing... *that* in him that knew well enough that he was only behaving in this childish way because of his profound reliance upon Darnley’s affection and concern; but his nerves were so completely jangled by this time that he was just tinderwood for any casual spark.

The spark soon came; for, emerging from the crowd, and coming straight to meet them, appeared the familiar figure of Mrs. Torp. Of all people in the world, Mrs. Torp was the very last with whom he felt himself capable of dealing just then. This did not prevent her from approaching them with extended hand, her face rigid and yet festive, bearing an expression like a waxen murderer’s in Madame Tussaud’s, while from the top of her bonnet a big purple feather nodded with a diabolic gaiety all its own.

If it had not been for this lively and obtrusive feather, Wolf might have retained his self-control; but this, combined with that rigid, festive smile, proved the last straw.

“Mrs. Torp! Mrs. Torp! Mrs. Torp!” he yelled, at the very top of his lungs.

“Stop that, now! Stop that, Wolf!” said Darnley sternly, seizing him by the elbow, just as he had done before.

“Quarrelling young gents, be ‘ee?” said Mrs. Torp; while, in the hurried rush of his shame, Wolf, hardly knowing what he did, shook her vigorously by the hand. “You be too fine a figure of a man, Mr. Otter, to come to school-treat with brawlings and babblings brewed in pub-bar. Mercy! and what a face upon’s shoulders have our Mr. Solent got! Don’t let my Gerdie see ‘ee with thik face. What be come to, young gents, what be come to?”

At this point Mrs. Torp was side-tracked in her volubility by the appearance of her son Lobbie at her side. “You get back, you limb of Edom, where you belong!” she cried, giving the boy a vigorous push. “What dost want here, dirty-face, ferreting round like the weasel thee be? Get back where ‘ee belong, and don’t plague the gentry!”

But Wolf’s thundering outcry had made other heads turn about; and soon quite a little group began to gather round them. The voice of Mrs. Torp was naturally penetrating; and the nature of her discourse — intermittently caught by inquisitive ears — did not lessen this effect. Wolf and Darnley soon found themselves, in fact, in the unenviable position of a sort of side-show to the main interest of the tug-of-war. It was clear enough, however, that none of these staring rustics had caught the real significance of Wolf’s unpardonable outburst. They must have simply supposed that in some fit of whimsical impatience he had peremptorily summoned his wife’s mother to that particular spot.

Such at least was the impression gathered up for future reference by that unclouded portion of Wolf’s own mind, which, like a calculating demon perched on the top of his head, calmly contemplated the whole scene. Mrs. Torp herself, as far as he could make out, never deviated one second from her preconceived notion of the incident; which was, to put it bluntly and grossly, that the two young gentlemen had had a drunken quarrel!

It was with a very distinct feeling of relief that Wolf, as he moved forward hurriedly now to meet the approach of no less a personage than Selena Gault, recognized that his father’s old friend had no conception of anything unusual in that cry, “Mrs. Torp! Mrs. Torp!” which, resounding across that small arena, had informed her of his presence there.

“Is poor Mrs. Torp to be dragged into this game, then?” said Selena, as she shook his hand.

Wolf muttered some lame jest about tug-of-wars and lean people, and then found it inevitable that he and Miss Gault should wander off together, leaving Darnley to deal with the Torp family.

His nerves were not yet altogether steady; for he found it necessary to reply in nothing but patient monosyllables to what Miss Gault was saying. By degrees, however, her discourse became so personal that these replies began to gather a dangerous intensity, although they still remained abrupt and brief.

"I'm glad to find you, boy. I've been hoping and hoping I should get a word with you."

"Dear Miss Gault!"

"You're not angry with me any more for opposing your plan about Mattie and Olwen? I confess it seems to have worked out better than I ever supposed it would."

"No... no."

"As long as she doesn't meet that terrible old man or that crazy girl ——"

"What's that?"

"Oh, I forgot. They tell me you yourself visit those people, Wolf."

"Who tells you?"

"Of course, you have to go there for books. I understand that. But there are reasons which are hard to explain, boy, why I'd sooner see you enter... enter a workhouse... than go into that house."

"Mr. Malakite was my father's friend."

She raised one of her gloved hands to her mouth at this, as if to restrain the quiverings of her upper-lip. "You don't know what you're saying, Wolf! His friend? That man corrupted his soul; and he did it with his accursed books."

He was saved from making any answer to this by the sound of a familiar but by no means pleasant voice calling him by name.

"Mr. Solent! Mr. Solent!"

He turned on his heel and beheld Bob Weevil, still in his shirt-sleeves, smiling and perspiring after a violent run.

"What's up, Weevil?" he asked.

The young man bowed respectfully to Miss Gault and gasped for breath.

"Mr. Urquhart sent me to find you, sir," he panted. "He says you must umpire now instead of him. He has to go now."

"Mr. Solent is taking care of me, Weevil," said Miss Gault indignantly. "What does the man mean by 'must' umpire? I don't see where the 'must' comes in."

Wolf looked the excited lad up and down. Miss Gault's words had not abashed him in the least. There was even an air of spiteful arrogance in his manner, an air which seemed to say, "As the Squire's emissary to his secretary, I am the most important person here."

"I'm afraid there is a 'must' in this, Miss Gault," Wolf said quietly. "It was agreed between us before we came on the scene that I was to umpire when Mr. Urquhart had to leave. It isn't Mr. Weevil's fault that he happens to be the messenger of ill-fortune!"

The lady drew herself up in high dudgeon. "Well! Run off, both of you, as fast as you can," she said.

The annoyance of Miss Gault, thus expended upon both men, had the natural effect, as they went off together, of closing up in a measure the rift between them.

They passed the swings on their way, and a common masculine weakness for the sight of ruffled skirts held them for a moment behind a group of hobbledehoys who were enjoying this spectacle.

“They love swinging,” remarked Wolf carelessly, as Weevil and he moved away at last; “but those boys being there makes it delicious for them.”

Bob Weevil sighed deeply; and this pitiful sigh, rising up from the young man’s aggravated senses went wavering skyward. Past a high trail of flapping rooks, heading for Nevilton, it went; past the flocks of the white clouds. At last, far beyond all human knowledge, it lost itself in the incredible desirableness of lovely blue space, and mingled, for all we know, with the vast non-human sighing of the planet itself, teased by some monstrous cosmogonic lust!

Hearing this sound, Wolf glanced sideways at his young rival, and an unexpected flicker of sympathy for that water-rat profile ran through him.

They crossed the field in silence; and the thought that he was going to meet Mr. Urquhart recalled to Wolf’s mind that mysterious aperture in the side of Redfern’s grave. Could it be possible that there were in the village people so crazed by remorse for this boy’s death that they actually had been making mad attempts to disinter his bones? Such, at any rate, from what Gerda hinted, would not have struck these Dorsetshire gossips as impossible. But impossible, of course, it was! It was one of those morbidly monstrous fancies that, as he knew well from the Squire’s own collection of weird documents, did sometimes run the round of these West Country villages, passing from tavern to tavern, and growing more and more sinister as it went. Something in this quarter of the land, as soaked with legends as it was with cider-juice, seemed to lend itself to such tales!

“Well, sir!” he said, as he approached the wickets where Mr. Urquhart stood at attention like a sober sentinel on the ramparts of Elsinore, “I’m ready to relieve you.”

The cheerful complacence with which his employer accepted his docile obedience caused his nerves to assert themselves again in a surprising manner.

"If you're going to say good-night to Valley before you leave, sir," he said brusquely, "you might tell him that something or somebody has been scratching a hole in that grave in the churchyard!"

A queer cowardice, or discretion perhaps, prevented him from looking at Mr. Urquhart's face as he tossed out this remark. He followed it up, without a second's pause, by crying out "Right you are!" to the batsman opposite him, and by moving hurriedly aside into his place, a yard or two from the wicket, so that the new "over" might commence.

All that he could take in of the effect of his words was the look of his employer's back, as the man moved away, not at all in the direction of the clergyman's black-coated figure, but straight towards the little group of spectators who surrounded the seated form of Roger Monk, occupied just then in keeping the score.

Mr. Urquhart's back, as Wolf followed it with his eyes at that moment, seemed to him to resemble the back of Judas Iscariot in that popular picture entitled "Pieces of Silver," of which there used to hang a cheaply coloured reprint in his grandmother's house at Weymouth. It did more than stoop with its usual aristocratic bend, this back. It sagged, it lurched, it wilted. It drifted towards that bench of heedless spectators as if it had been the hind-quarters of the Biblical scapegoat, driven forth into a wilderness whose desolation was not material, but psychic. The neat clothes that hung upon it only accentuated the ghastliness of this back's retreat.

It may be believed that Wolf's umpiring was not of the most alert or efficient kind that evening. But it sufficed; it served its purpose. For the game itself was dragging a little tediously now, and most of the lads were weary of it and longing in their hearts for the grand consummation of the eventful day.

This was the hour of the twilight dancing, a celebration that, taking place in a roped-off portion of the meadow furthest removed from the churchyard, was the supreme source of responsibility and concern to the authorities — the thrilling climax and crowning episode to the boys and girls of King's Barton!

Long before the cricket-match was over, all the other sports had drawn to a close. Tired groups of children, disputing about their prizes and gorging themselves with butter-scotch and barley-sugar torn from sticky paper bags, drifted across the hill towards the gate, followed by voluble mothers with overflowing parcels and sleeping babies clutched tightly in their arms. The older men had found themselves seats here and there, and were smoking their pipes with an air of cautious relaxation, an air that stopped short of the complete abandonment of Farmer's Rest and yet had unstiffened beyond the superceremonious atmosphere of the earlier hours of the afternoon.

The youths and the maidens, from all parts of the field, along with a drifting concourse of outsiders attracted by the occasion, gathered now, impatiently and nervously, round the weary cricketers.

The Kingsbury Band, duly stimulated by its full quota of traditional refreshment, was now tuning up for the great moment of that gala-day. At length, to Wolf's infinite relief, the last bails fell; the captains of the two sides pulled up the wickets; the score was proclaimed in indifferent tones and amid lethargic cheers; and the whole company hurried towards the dancing-plot.

Wolf, as he looked about for Gerda, crossed inadvertently the path of the perturbed Mr. Valley.

“It’ll be dark in an hour,” said the anxious Vicar, glancing up at the sky; “but they will hardly have begun then.”

“There’s a nice scent of trodden grass in the air,” remarked Wolf.

“What a time! What a time!” wailed the little priest, disregarding the interruption.

“What’s wrong, my dear man?” sighed Wolf indifferently, searching with his eyes the groups who passed by for a glimpse of Gerda’s white gown. “What’s troubling you? Dancing’s all right. There’s no harm in dancing.”

The little priest laid his hand upon the front of Wolf’s coat. “Dancing!” he muttered peevishly. “Oh, you Londoner, you Londoner! It’s not the dancing I’m thinking about. Do you suppose it’s only for the dancing that all these men are collecting? I tell you I’ve never known one single visit of the Kingsbury Band to this place when there hasn’t been some girl — and they’re always the wrong ones — got into trouble! If I could keep ’em penned up in these ropes, they might dance till dawn!”

Wolf made a grimace and moved away. There seemed to him, at that moment, as he thought of Gerda and his mother, such far worse things in the world than the episodes dreaded by Mr. Valley, that he found it impossible to give him the remotest sympathy. Mr. Valley, without knowing it, however, had his full revenge for this callousness in less than a minute from when they parted. For there was Gerda’s white gown! And there, side by side with it, were Mr. Bob Weevil’s white shirt-sleeves!... As he walked up to them trying to assume his most invulnerable philosophic calm, Wolf thought to himself, “I’ll let her dance one dance with him and then off we’ll go... back to Blacksod!”

They did not observe his approach till he was quite close.

“Hullo, Gerda! Hullo, Bob! Look here, you two.” He paused awkwardly, staring at Gerda’s sash. “I don’t want,” he went on, “I don’t want — —” He

seemed to catch a defiant look on the girl's face. "I don't want to break this up till you've danced once tonight. So go ahead, for heaven's sake, as soon as they start.... Only, listen, Weevil — —" He paused again, and found it necessary to take several long breaths. He had said exactly what he meant to say. He had said it in the tone he meant to adopt. Why, then, were those two staring at him like that, as if he were a ghost? Did his face look funny to them? Was "the form of his visage changed" upon them? "I mean," he went on; but his voice sounded unsure to his own ears now — unsure and queerly mechanical, as if it issued out of a wooden box. "I mean that you'd better have one good dance, or perhaps two... two certainly! Two would be far better than one... one dance is nothing... What's one dance? Nothing at all! And then... and then... what was I going to say? That band's making such a noise!... Oh, then we'll walk home, Gerda; and perhaps Bob will come with us. But I expect not, with Mr. Valley so jumpy."

"What are you talking about, Wolf?" said Gerda abruptly. "What's the matter with you? Is there anything wrong? I thought we'd agreed that I was to stay for the dancing. You've no objection to my dancing with Bob, have you?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Solent," broke in the voice of the young grocer, "but what was that you said about Mr. Valley being 'jumpy'? I couldn't hear what you said; and I don't see, anyway, what it's got to do with me."

"Did we decide that I had to wait till midnight for you, Gerda?" said Wolf sternly, disregarding Mr. Weevil.

"Oh, let me be! Let me be, Wolf!" cried the girl angrily. "I don't know what's come over you tonight... you and your mother! I suppose you've been over there again and she's been talking to you again. I don't know what you take me for! I've danced at King's Barton School-Treat since I was no bigger than Lobbie. I don't know what you've got against it, or against me and Bob. You've been over to Lenty Cottage! That's where you've been; and she's sent you back to punish me for what I said to her. I haven't said I was going to dance with Bob at all. Bob isn't my only friend here. Mother's going to stop to the end. She always does. And I shall go back with her. I don't want either you or Bob, I tell you! You've never treated me like this before and I won't stand it! *You* can walk back with him if you like, Bob. I'll be glad enough to see the last of both of you! I want to enjoy myself tonight." She moved away as she spoke, and Wolf caught a look of miserable consternation upon the water-rat physiognomy at his side. "I don't want any men to dance with!" she flung back at them. "I'll dance with no one but girls. But I *will* enjoy myself in spite of you all! I won't depend on any of you for my pleasure... and I'll go home with Father and Mother!"

She walked off haughtily, her blue-ribboned hat held high, and was speedily lost to sight in the gathering crowd.

Wolf and Mr. Weevil stood staring at each other stonily and awkwardly while the long-awaited music burst triumphantly into the familiar strains of the Kingsbury Jig.

After a few seconds, with an abrupt lifting of his hand, Wolf moved away. He pushed through the crowd with the air of a complete stranger who finds his path impeded by some popular transaction that means nothing to him.

On the outskirts of the field he was arrested by the sight of a figure that seemed familiar to him. Yes! It was the automatic young lady from Farmer's Rest. But there was another girl there — a younger girl — and he recognized her too. She was the maid in the white muslin frock whose shameless manner of swinging had arrested Weevil and him an hour ago. This younger girl's head was turned away; but as he approached them, he caught a full glimpse of the automatic young lady’s face. She was too absorbed, however, in what she was doing — fastening a safety-pin or something in the other’s waistband — to give the least attention to him. But what was this? The look he captured upon her face was a look of unmistakable emotion, rapt, intense emotion, such as a boy would have displayed when he was caressing the object of his desire. Like a flash it came over Wolf, as he wavered there for a second, that he was in the presence of a passionate perversity, kindred to that he had discovered elsewhere in this Dorsetshire village; and he was a little startled to find how the presence of it set his heart beating and his pulses throbbing. Something in him pleaded desperately to be allowed to remain a second longer on this unhallowed ground; but he resisted the temptation, and hurried forward. But what did this mean? How could he explain this in himself? That kindred obliquity, which he had so recently tracked down among the “higher circles” of King’s Barton, had not affected him to anything resembling this degree of vicious sympathy! The vision of those two girls remained like a deadly-sweet drop of delicious fermentation in some vein within him — some vein or nerve that seemed in contact with the very core of his consciousness. Like some virulent berry-juice, insidiously sweet and yet maddeningly bitter, like a drop of that old classic poison distilled from the blood of the enamoured centaur — that look, that gesture of the Farmer’s Rest girl teased and troubled him. The averted head of her muslin-frocked companion, the contour of that soft, conscious, youthful profile, stirred his senses even more.

“Damn!” he thought. “Don’t I yet know the worst of my vicious, secretive nature?”

He felt startled rather than ashamed by what arose within him; but what *did* trouble him, to a kind of inward fury, as he left those preoccupied girls, was the ricochet of this discovery upon his jealousy over Gerda and Bob! Who was he to indulge in sulky jealous heroics, when he himself was capable of a feeling like this? To be angry with those two, to be bitterly hurt, and yet not to be able to indulge in the undertone of his own grievance without knowing himself to be an unphilosophic fool — *that* was the point of the spiritual wedge that now was driven into his disordered life-illusion!

Was Lord Carfax, that whimsical "man of the world," of whom his mother loved to relate the shameless opinions, right after all? Had he always over-rated the connection between sex and that mysterious struggle in the abysses, with which his "mythology" was concerned?

In regard to the perversity of Mr. Urquhart, he had taken for granted that the man's sex-aberration was merely the medium through which unspeakable emanations of evil — beyond sex altogether! — flowed up into the world.

"But what *is* this evil?" he asked himself now letting his mind hover like a hungry cormorant over the heaving waters of his troubled senses. Vague intimations concerning some sort of *inert malice*, that was beyond all viciousness, rose up within him as his mind's deepest response. Hunting irritably for some gap in the hedge by which to escape, he tried to define this inert malice. Was it an atavistic reversion to the primordial "matter," or "world-stuff" — sluggish, reluctant, opaque — out of which, at the beginning of things, life had had to force its way? Was this, and not his attitude to any youthful Redfern, the real secret of Urquhart's harmfulness?

All the while he struggled with these thoughts, he kept feverishly skirting the hedge, striking it every now and then with his stick. If he could only find a gap by which to escape! This hunt of his for a gap into the next field began to assume almost symbolic proportions. Something within him was tugging at him all the while to make him turn his head and cast another furtive glance at those two girls. Were they still together there, just where he had left them? He began to indulge his imagination, letting it tantalize and provoke him with the tremulous intensity of the feeling that sight might have aroused. He knew he could cool his excitement, blunt it, undermine it, stave it off, by analyzing its nature; but the feeling itself was so deadly-sweet to him that it pleaded in "a still, small voice" for a postponement of this invasion of his reason!

Was it his jealousy over Gerda that had made him so porous to this quivering, breath-taking obsession? Indignantly his soul shook itself to and fro in its endeavour to escape. Like a slippery-scaled fish it shook itself, turning sideways, turning belly-up, as it strove to force its way through the strands of the net that encircled it. Why was it that this glimpse of the amorous feeling of one girl for another girl should send this trembling, dissolving, shuddering provocation through him? Was it that the mere importunity of the feeling, so intense, so sterile, emphasized the mysterious quality of desirableness? Did it imply a diffusion of the magic of beauty through the whole identity of the desired one, such as can rarely take place where great creative Nature, contemptuous towards both lover and beloved, shamelessly occupied with her own enormous purposes, is baiting the trap?

What a queer thing it was that the attraction of this muslin-frocked little hoyden should have been barely emphasized for him by Weevil's desire for her, but increased to a point of shivering, electric sweetness, under the emotion of the "automatic young lady"! Oh! it had *that* within it that might lead him upon such a quest that nothing else would matter to him any more! He could feel even now, as he went along this stubborn hedge, the sort of scoriac desolation — all delicate intimations become cinders and ashes in the mouth — that would possess him, as this quest grew more and more concentrated! He felt within him the actual *expression* his face would come to wear, as in his maniacal pursuit he went to and fro over the earth, oblivious of all else.

He had just reached this point in his mental struggle, when he suddenly did find a gap in the obstinate hedge. Forcing his way hurriedly through, careless as to how he pricked his face and hands, he descended from the high hedge-bank into a field of mangelwurzels. Over this field he now strode, while the gathering twilight deepened about him, oblivious of all purpose save to escape — to escape into the peace of his own soul.

The mangelwurzel-field behind him at last, he blindly pushed his way through a second hedge, this time caring not even to find a gap. What next awaited him was a succession of stubble-fields, some of which had patches of purple clover growing amid their corn-stalks, the dark foliage of which, soaked with heavy dew, quickly penetrated his boots. This physical sensation, the sensation of walking barefoot through an endless dew-drenched twilight, gradually soothed and calmed him.

He went obstinately forward, crossing field after field in the falling darkness, forcing his way recklessly through every sort of rank vegetation, through every sort of arable fallowness. He had left the school-treat field for more than an hour now. He had crossed, almost without consciousness of doing so, the main road between Ramsgard and Blacksod. He had threaded his way through the maze of small, grassy lanes that lay between that highway and the village of Gwent. And now, emerging in the scented autumn night into a rondure of sloping hills, he could see, beyond the scattered lights of Gwent, a vast unbounded region, shadow within shadow, vapour within vapour, a region that he knew to be — though all he could actually see was darkness of a thicker, richer quality than the darkness about him — the umbrageous threshold of Somerset, the first leafy estuary of that ocean of greenness out of which rose, like the phallus of an unknown god, the mystical hill of Glastonbury!

He stretched himself out on the grassy slope of this shadowy amphitheatre and gazed long and long into the vaporous obscurity before him. The quarrel between Gerda and his mother became nothing. Nothing and less than nothing became his jealousy over Weevil... his vision of those two girls!

It was as though he had suddenly emerged, by some hidden doorway, into a world entirely composed of vast, cool, silently-growing vegetation, a world where no men, no beasts, no birds, broke the mossy stillness; a world of sap and moisture and drooping ferns; a world of leaves that fell and fell for ever, leaf upon leaf; a world where that which slowly mounted upwards endured eternally the eternal lapse of that which slowly settled downwards; a world that itself was slowly settling down, leaf upon leaf, grass-blade upon grass-blade, towards some cool, wet, dark, unutterable dimension in the secret heart of silence!

Lying upon that rank, drenched grass, he drew a deep sigh of obliterating release. It was not that his troubles were merely assuaged. They were swallowed up. They were lost in the primal dew of the earth’s first twilights. They were absorbed in the chemistry, faint, flowing, and dim, of that strange *vegetable flesh* which is so far older than the flesh of man or beast!

He stretched out one of his hands and touched the cool-scaled stalks of a bed of “mare’s tails.” Ah! how his human consciousness sank down *into that* with which all terrestrial consciousness began!...

He was a leaf among leaves... among large, cool, untroubled leaves.... He had fallen back into the womb of his real mother.... He was drenched through and through with darkness and with peace.

WINE

THE THREE AUTUMN months that followed the School-Treat became for Wolf, as the days shortened and darkened, like a slowly rising tide, that, drawing its mass of waters from distances and gulfs beyond his reach, threatened to leave scant space un-submerged of the rugged rock-front which hitherto he had turned upon the world. Something in the very fall of the leaf, in the slow dissolution of vegetation all about him, made this menace to the integrity of his soul more deadly. He had never realized what the word "autumn" meant until this Wessex autumn gathered its "cloudy trophies" about his ways, and stole, with its sweet rank odours, into the very recesses of his being. Each calamitous event that occurred during those deciduous months seemed to be brewed in the oozy vat of vegetation, as if the muddy lanes and the wet hazel-copses — yes! the very earth-mould of Dorset itself — were conspiring with human circumstances.

It was during many a lonely walk among the red-berried hedges and old orchards, where the rotting cider-apples lay wasp-eaten in the tangled swathes of grass, that these events worked their wills upon him. Sunday after Sunday, as September gave place to October and October gave place to November, he would lean upon some lichen-covered gate and struggle to give intelligible form to these "worries" of his. Threaded in and out of such ponderings were a thousand vivid impressions of those out-of-the-way spots. The peculiar "personality" of certain century-old orchards, of which the grey twisted trunks and the rain-bent grass seemed only the *outward* aspects, grew upon his mind beyond everything else. How heavily the hart's-tongue ferns drooped earthward under the scooped hollows of the wet clay-banks! How heavily the cold raindrops fell — silence falling upon silence — when the frightened yellow-hammers fled from his approach! He felt at such times as though they must be composed of very *old* rain, those shaken showers; each tremulous globe among them having reflected through many a slow dawn nothing but yellow leaves, through many a long night nothing but faint white stars!

He certainly had anxieties enough this Autumn to bring down his happiness to a very muted key. The head and front of these "whips and scorns of time" had been a complete break with Urquhart. The Squire's obsessions had got upon his nerves to such an extent that he had just recklessly revolted — flung up his work on this detestable history of Dorsetshire scandals — and, cutting his coat to suit his cloth, fallen back upon a rigid monotony and economy between Preston Lane and the School.

The results of this quarrel might have been much more serious than they were, if he had not, by Darnley's diplomatic help, obtained both more work and more income at the Grammar School. But this piece of good luck had been followed by a second calamity; for his mother, in her reckless, irresponsible fashion, had also annoyed Urquhart, and had consequently been compelled to give up Lenty Cottage and join him in Blacksod. Twenty-five pounds, therefore, of his increased salary had to go now to pay for a room she had taken a few doors from them in Preston Lane. Here she lodged in the house of that very Mrs. Herbert, whose name was already familiar to him. She had managed to obtain, however, a job for herself in the town, and was highly amused and extremely pleased by her unexpected success in the conduct of it. But this also was attended by an unpleasant consequence, her business being nothing less than the managing of a tea-shop belonging to Mr. Manley of Willum's Mill! Wolf would have been quite resigned to this development, if his mother had not, in her gay, ironic manner, cast a magnetic spell over the bull-necked farmer and entered into some sort of humorous flirtation with him.

As far as those two perturbing figures in the background of their days were concerned — Bob Weevil and Christie — matters relapsed during these long autumn months into a curious state of suspension. He would go to tea with Christie; and once or twice Gerda spoke of a visit from Bob. But as winter set in, and the nights lengthened to the December solstice, it seemed as if the burden of his monotonous work in the classroom, and the rigid economies practised by Gerda in the house, had undermined the spirit of adventure in both their natures.

He was surprise at his own obstinate patience in the tedious routine of teaching history to the Blacksod tradesmen's sons. What supported him were the moments of ecstasy he derived from his long week-end walks. He had the whole of Saturday free, as well as Sunday, and sometimes with Gerda, and sometimes alone, he would follow the wraith-like vapours of autumn as they drifted over the lanes and hills, and give himself up, with a large forgetfulness of everything else, to his sensuous-mystical mythology.

If it had not been for this secret refuge and for the sensations accumulated in these walks, Wolf's first winter in Dorset would have culminated in a miserable inertia, resembling that of the luckless Redfern. For one thing, Gerda seemed completely to have lost her miraculous power of bird-whistling. He caught her making the attempt; but recently, as far as he could tell, she had given the thing up. He suspected, too, that Darnley and Mattie were unhappy; but, ever since that day at the School-Treat, both those reserved beings had remained completely uncommunicative as to their relations with each other, though on all other topics he found them as affectionate and spontaneous as ever.

There had been little frost and no snow before Christmas. Gloomy, damp days had succeeded one another all through the month; and now, on the last Sunday of the old year, it seemed to Wolf, when he awoke in the darkness, that the air smelt of deep pools of rain. He awoke that morning long before his companion; and once awake he lay thinking intensely and excitedly for several hours. It was of his mother he thought. She had dropped a hint, while he was at Mrs. Herbert's on the previous night, that she would like to start a tea-shop of her own, and that she thought of borrowing the money for this project from her present employer. Wolf was startled at the depth of the hurt to his pride that this information dealt him. In the early hours of that rain-smelling morning he made a drastic resolution. *He would go back to Urquhart!* What did it matter how he outraged his conscience over that accursed book, so long as his mother got this help from *him* rather than from the owner of Willum's Mill? Oh! And what pleasure to be able to hand over a little solid money to Gerda after her long, miserable economies! He knew so well the list of desirable purchases in the girl's mind — from the silver sugar-tongs to a grandfather's clock! It always touched him, the way Gerda put things for the house above things for her own person. Yes! That is what he would do: run round to his mother's after breakfast, find out how the land lay with regard to the tea-shop project, and then set off for King's Barton. Urquhart would most certainly be at home on Sunday morning; and he knew exactly how he would deal with the man. He would ask him point-blank for a cheque for two hundred pounds. He would ask for this on the understanding that he should finish the book for him in three months — finish it, in fact, by the anniversary of his first arrival in Dorsetshire!

He was so excited by the idea of this daring move that it was with difficulty he refrained from jumping out of bed; but Gerda being sound asleep, and to wake her a couple of hours before her usual time being likely to make her cross for the whole morning, he restrained his impulse and continued to lie still....

It was early enough, however, when finally he rang the bell of Mrs. Herbert's house; for the landlady, evidently just returning from eight-o'clock Mass, came up to her door at the same moment.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Herbert," he said, as pleasantly as he could. But when the woman had let him in and was proceeding to announce him, a faded picture of "The Bombardment of Alexandria," hanging in her hall, brought to his mind all the lodging-houses he had ever entered! It was as if from each of these places some polished bannister-knob, some vase of dead bulrushes, some dusty ornamental chair, some vague odour of Indian spice or of dried-up seaweed, added its quota to the accumulated memory.

"Oh, it's you, Wolf!" exclaimed his mother, without rising from her antimacassared chair, where, with a volume of "The Trumpet-Major" open on her tea-tray, she was sipping her tea. "How grave you look, my son!"

She gave him a glowing smile as he sat down opposite her. But he plunged at once into the dangerous waters.

"Are you really thinking of borrowing money from that brute, Mother? You know it's been worrying me a lot."

She regarded him with eyes that gleamed with mischief.

"Why not?" she said. "I think the good man has grown quite attached to me. I think he *likes* elderly ladies!"

Wolf was too agitated to keep his seat. He began walking up and down the room. Suddenly he stopped in front of her. "Are you as happy down here, Mother, as you were in London?" he said, looking down on that mocking, invulnerable face.

She settled herself in her chair, stretching out her arms with an almost feline gesture of physical well-being.

"I live in hope of greater happiness yet," she murmured, with a contented yawn. "Your mother's an unregenerate woman," she went on, her words rising on the breath of her yawn like fins on a smooth wave. "She doesn't take life as seriously as her ugly duckling of a son!"

He sighed and sat down again.

"But it's a disgrace I can't support you properly, Mother."

"As well as your wife, Wolf? Sons who have to support wives can't tackle mothers too. You ought to have thought of that six months ago." The shamelessness of her words was relieved by the ironic glint in her eyes. "But you must have come to your mother's defense at any rate over that young lady of yours; for, when I met her on the street three weeks ago, she stopped and talked quite pleasantly to me! She told me you were still friends with that bookseller girl; and I told *her* she was far too pretty to be jealous of that melancholy little shadow."

Wolf frowned, picked up "The Trumpet-Major," put it down again, and began nervously scratching its cover with his fingernails. He thought to himself: "It's absolutely impossible to talk of any woman to another woman without betraying the absent one. They must have blood! Every word you speak is a betrayal. They're not satisfied otherwise."

To turn the conversation from Gerda he launched out at random.

"I wish Darnley would try and support a wife as well as *his* mother! I hate to see anyone as decent as he is, getting so little pleasure."

"Mattie, eh? What a boy you are! Legitimate... illegitimate... you're ready to look after them all! I daresay you're only waiting till my new flame, Mr. Manley, starts me in my own shop, to give my twenty-five pounds to this deserving couple!"

"What's your idea, Mother, of how things are at Pond Cottage? I don't believe I've ever asked you that."

“What do you mean... how they are? A good but very plain young woman and a good but very handsome young man... isn’t that the whole situation? She’s in love with him, of course; and he enjoys it. He’d do more than enjoy it if her nose wasn’t so awfully like yours!”

“Will they marry in the end, do you suppose?”

“Why not? Didn’t we agree he’s a *good* man? What’s the use of a man being good if he can’t make a plain face happy? Besides” — and the brown eyes laughed with the gayest wickedness— “your sister’s got very pretty legs!”

Wolf made a faint grimace and plunged into a different topic.

“Did you really tell Urquhart, Mother, that Monk had threatened to kill him?”

Mrs. Solent laughed aloud. “Don’t start me on those two, Wolf, or I’ll talk all the morning. Why, they set on me as if they’d been a pair of savage goats that I’d tried to separate. Monk was rude. Mr. Urquhart wasn’t rude; but he’ll never forgive me.” She laughed again, the gay, mischievous, rippling laughter of a young girl. “I had the best hit all the same; and I’m glad I did!”

“What did you say, Mother?”

“I told him he ought to set a trap for that fox in the churchyard!”

“Why was that a hit, Mother?”

“Oh, you know! Anything about Redfern.... It bothered him that he couldn’t tell what I’d heard or what I hadn’t heard. As a matter of fact, Roger Monk told me there wasn’t a night he didn’t go rambling about. *I* don’t think anything of that. I like night-walking myself. But I knew it would be a hit!”

Wolf looked at his mother with frowning brows.

“But, Mother, Mother; don’t you ever take anything seriously?”

"I take my tea-shop seriously," she said, with a mock-tragic air.

Wolf sighed. "Sometimes I've fancied, Mother, that you'd got some secret philosophy of your own that made you wiser than anyone... wise as some great sorceress."

"Your father thought me a hard, selfish, conventional woman, without an idea in her head. And that's what I probably am at bottom, Wolf!" She paused, and her face grew flinty. "I can never forgive him for destroying our life. What's the use of that sort of folly? What's the use of tilting against conventions? It's more amusing, it's more interesting, to play with those things. They're as real as anything else."

"What do you actually want out of life, then, Mother?" His tone was naïve and pedantic. And he *felt* naïve and pedantic, as he looked at this woman, the contours of whose countenance were as defiant to ordinary emotions as dark, slippery rocks to the wash of the sea.

She startled him then by suddenly rising to her feet with a movement that seemed to shake off twenty years as if they were nothing. "I want happiness!" she cried. "I want a lovely, thrilling, beautiful life. I want adventures, travel, noble society. Oh, I don't want to be shut up all day long in Preston Lane, Blacksod!"

She turned her back upon him and surveyed her own face in the little plush-framed mirror over the mantelpiece.

"Our friend Selena used to tell me I was a woman of the world... and I am! I am! What else should anyone be, I should like to know?"

She put her fingers to her cheeks and began tracing their lines as if she were an angry sculptor, feeling for the mistakes of her work.

"I want to drive down the streets of Vienna! I want to float down the canals of Venice! I want to see Paris, Amsterdam, Constantinople!"

Wolf stared at the strong back in its neat tailor-made jacket. He stared at the loose coils of wavy grey hair; and an odd sensation went through him, as if this extraordinary person were a complete stranger to him. He began to feel that the moment was tense and even dangerous. What a fool he'd been to disturb such ocean-deep waters!

Presently she swung round upon him. "I suppose you never thought," she cried in a high-pitched voice, "that I wanted anything more than to be the mother of a well-meaning ninny!"

"Mother dear... my dear mother..." he faltered, dominated so completely by the woman's formidable paroxysm as to feel as if she were towering above him in that funny little room, and above the whole of Blacksod.

But she controlled herself now with a suddenness as unexpected as her outburst had been.

"It's all right, Wolf. I only wanted to be petted up a little," she murmured gently, moving to the table and beginning with agile fingers to pile the breakfast-things on her tray. "I expect I've worked myself into a fuss by reading Thomas Hardy! One day you shall take me down to Weymouth and we'll walk over to the White Horse and the Trumpet-Major's village. Yes, and we'll go in and see who's living in Penn House now, where your grandmother was. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Wolf nodded; but he did not smile. "If I give her every penny of what I get from Urquhart, will it be enough?" he thought.

"Listen, Mother," he said aloud. "I'm going to walk over to King's Barton presently to call on the Squire. You'll smile, but I have practically decided to finish that book for him. I can work at it at home with the notes he's made. I could get it done in about three months. It's absurd to be too ——" He stopped abruptly, irritated, in spite of his anticipation of that very thing, by the gleam of sardonic mischief upon his mother's face.

"The truth is, Mother," he went on, "I'd much sooner get this money for you from Urquhart than that you should fall under this brute's thumb!" It was the teasing indulgence in her smile that made him use this crude expression. The sight of the malicious glint still radiating from her eyes drove him to add, "Will two hundred be enough, Mother?"

Her expression became so extremely mock-sentimental at this, that he was completely nonplussed. She even tilted her head a little to one side, just as she had done when she quoted the "Pot of Basil" by Redfern's grave. Then she laid down her tray and rested one of her hands upon the chimneypiece.

"Perhaps... it would... be... enough," she said slowly, giving him a long, hard, penetrating look, out of which all sentiment had fled. Then she added, while a dusky red spot appeared in each of her cheeks, "Don't you see that I've got it in me to make a success of this thing and stand on my own feet?"

She paused and stared into the fire, biting her under-lip in concentrated thought, and drawing two of her finger-tips along the edge of the mantelpiece. Then she suddenly burst out:

"Don't you see it's a life of my own I want, now you've deserted me? I've lived in the thought of something exciting that you'd do for both of us, but" — and she made a dramatic gesture with her strong shoulders— "you won't do anything... any more than *he* did."

"Well, Mother," said Wolf slowly, when her final outburst had spent itself and a tender whimsical smile had settled down upon her face, "I'm off now, anyway, to see Urquhart. That's *something* to have decided upon, at any rate, isn't it? Oh, I shall get more competent and more unscrupulous, if you give me time. Well, I'm off, so good-bye, Mother."

It was at this juncture, after a hurried tap at the door, that Mrs. Herbert appeared upon the scene, to carry off her lodger's tray.

“Can you manage it?” Wolf said politely, balancing a forgotten sugar-bowl among the rest of the things. But his mother came towards him, and, standing with her back to the landlady, made a whimsical grimace. As he bent forward to embrace her, there was a furtive exchange between them of that rapid blood-understanding which human beings share with the animals; but even as she kissed him she whispered in his ear: “Don’t you think any more about the money, Wolf, for I won’t have it! And look me up tomorrow, if you have time, either here or at the shop. Good-bye! Don’t you bother, Mrs. Herbert! I’ll open the door.”

As he made his way through the quiet Sunday morning streets, Wolf found that he had already decided, in the secret places of his mind, to look in at Christie’s before he started for King’s Barton. This decision quickened his steps, but it did not prevent him from being stared at with the usual vapid curiosity by the few lethargic idlers he encountered.

He tried to analyze, as he went along, the cause that intensified this curiosity, in certain particular eye-encounters, to a malignant hostility. He came to the conclusion that this occurred only when his own mind was especially harassed. It must be, he decided, the same psychic instinct that makes a flock of fowls attack the one that happens to be hurt or sick. Mentally, at such times, he *was* hurt — he was actually bleeding invisible blood — and it might easily be that this wounded “aura” excited some mysterious irritation in those who caught it.

When he reached the Malakite shop he determined to ring the side doorbell; and he entered the little alleyway with this purpose. A certain shrinking from the critical moment that would decide whether Christie were in the house or not led him to gain time by strolling forward into the small garden at the alley’s end.

The little enclosure was entirely surrounded by walls; and at that time of year the only greenery visible was a few patches of parsley at the further end. Wolf walked towards those patches, though the soaked earth-mould clung heavily to his boots. Under the wall he did find a couple of dilapidated chrysanthemums, little, drooping, daisy-like blooms, that seemed to have had their very souls washed out of them. Glancing upward above these, he observed a projecting stone in the wall, which was covered by a species of vividly green moss, small and velvety, that seemed enjoying a vernal prime of its own, in the midst of the universal dissolution. In a moment, like a rush of warm summer air, there came sweeping over his mind the memory of certain old pier-posts at Weymouth, covered with small green seaweed... and simultaneously with this he heard a sound that made him turn hurriedly towards the house.

It was the opening of the side-door. And there was Christie, emerging in her out-of-doors attire!

He called her name loudly before he knew what he was doing, and she turned and looked at him.

With the poignance of that vision of pier-post and green seaweed still in his brain, the sight of her figure there, so quaint and pitiful, in her old-fashioned cloak and tightly-pulled-on gloves, stirred in him a sudden sense of something so beautiful in life, that it melted the bones within him. She herself seemed startled and overjoyed at seeing him; and tossing aside her accustomed reserve, she hurried towards him, heedless of the rain-soaked soil under her feet, heedless of any windows that might be overlooking them, her arms impetuously stretched out and her mobile little face working under her tremulous emotion like a ruffled leaf in a gusty wind.

Once in possession of her hand he defiantly retained it; and together they moved close up to the wall at the end of the enclosure, where, on their rain-battered stalks, drooped those miserable chrysanthemums.

“I’ve come to the conclusion, Wolf,” she said, as they stood there side by side, looking down at those forlorn survivals, “that I must be more frank, as well as more philosophical, about what I feel for you.”

His heart began to beat wildly. The fantastic idea flashed through his mind that she was going to suggest — she herself — that he should come to her one of these nights when the old man was asleep!

“What exactly do you mean, Chris?” he asked, as she dropped his arm and faced him with her steady stare.

“I’m going to keep my feminine nature in control after this,” she said. “We know what we are to each other... and what apparently we have to be... so I’ve decided not to allow any insurrection of my feelings. I’ve even thought of a *coup d’état* to keep them in their place!”

Quite unconsciously she had lifted her free hand to his coat and was twisting round and round in her gloved fingers one of its buttons.

An electric vibration of understanding quivered between them like a shivering cord stretched between two boats balanced each on its own wave-crest. And then, with incredible swiftness, a deliciously mocking smile came into her face. “Shall I tell you something, Wolf?” she said. “I’ve started writing a story! I began it at one o’clock last night, when I decided to conquer all feminine equivocations. It’s about someone quite different from me, but... very philosophical. It was the philosophical part I began last night. I wrote page after page... quick as that!” And releasing his coat, she made a characteristically girlish gesture with her fingers.

“I believe you could write a wonderful book,” said Wolf earnestly; and then, almost before he was aware of it, as they stood together, the indescribable entrancement of that green seaweed he had visualized a moment ago, and the salty taste of spray, and the touch of sun-warmed sand that had come with it, associated themselves with the delicious peace into which her presence threw him, and he began to abandon himself to the ecstasy of his “mythology.”

He was stupid enough to dream that he could give himself up unobserved to this egoistic satisfaction. It was therefore with something of a shock that he caught the faint sound of a sigh upon the air.

“I’ve got to go now,” she said. “I’ve got to get something for Father’s dinner that I forgot yesterday, and there’s only one little shop round here that’s open on Sunday morning. But don’t let me drive you away if you’re happy in my garden. Stay as long as you like!”

She was holding out her hand now and upon her face was a candidly humorous smile. He knew perfectly well that she had discovered, without the passage of a sign between them, that his mind had plunged their paradisic moment into some undersea of its own, where she could not follow. But he saw that she accepted this with complete indulgence; just took it for granted as a masculine peculiarity... a different way from hers of being happy!

“When am I to see you again?” he asked. “Our school-holiday will soon be over... and then... well, we know how it goes!”

Christie turned her head away from him, and, with puckered forehead and drooping under-lip, fell into a fit of deep pondering.

“Now’s the time for you to practise your new philosophy, Chris, of being frank with your lover!”

Wolf uttered this lightly, but his heart was beginning to beat again. Something had made him give to her confessed “decision” a meaning directly the reverse of what her words implied. Wicked, satyrish thoughts flashed through his mind like darting fish through disturbed water. Her frown deepened at his speech and her lip drooped still more. Then, with heightened colour, she turned quickly and faced him.

"Will... you... be — —" she began slowly. "I mean, will Gerda be — —" She hesitated; and then, speaking rapidly, and with wide-open eyes fixed steadily upon his: "Will you be free tomorrow night, Wolf? Father is going down to Weymouth tomorrow, on some affair of his own, and is going to stay the night there. So, if you like, I could get you supper, and we'd have everything to ourselves."

It was Wolf's turn now to look away; but he answered her easily and lightly, as if it were quite a small matter. "Why, Chris, that would be wonderful! I'll snatch at such a chance as that, whatever's in the way. Besides, there's no earthly reason why I shouldn't come to supper tomorrow. So let's consider it settled. No, I mustn't stay longer now; and I mustn't try and help you with your Sunday shopping! I'm off to Barton to see if I can't catch Urquhart at home." He paused for a second. "I'm thinking of finishing that book for him, you know... after all... if he'll pay me in advance."

Perhaps never in his life had Wolf's mind moved as rapidly as it moved now. His consciousness at this moment became like a wild horse stung by a gadfly or like an ox driven crazy by the eating of some "insane root." Those words of hers, "Father is going to stay the night there," took to themselves a sweet-shivering identity of their own. But his cheeks were flushed with a queer sense of discord within himself. "What I feel now," he thought, "is not happiness at all. *What is it?*" And then, as the two of them moved away over the wet sods of earth to the alley's entrance: "That green moss... that green seaweed... *was* happiness; but this is something else. This is something that will kill my 'mythology' if I let it."

He was taking her hand now to say good-bye. “What does she care,” he thought, “about my doing Urquhart’s book?” And there came over him, as he looked into her brown eyes, a cold shudder of deadly loneliness. “She would never understand,” he thought, “what I am risking by going back to Urquhart.”

“Well, good-bye, Chris, till tomorrow night!” And then, as they released each other’s hands, “You’re not to look round now!” he added querulously.

“I’ve never looked round in my life!” retorted Christie Malakite, as she gave him her parting nod.

It was still about half-an-hour before church-time when he reached the gate of King’s Barton Vicarage. And there was T. E. Valley himself, in his ragged brown ulster, scraping with a hoe at one side of the drive!

For a moment Wolf found himself enjoying the lot of this little clergyman. *He* had no worries about girls. *He* had no worries about money. *He* had no mother but the Mother of God.

Wolf advanced slowly up the drive. The click of the hoe on the gravel made so much noise that his approach was unobserved.

Mr. Valley’s green-tinted trousers — he thinks nothing of Sunday, thought Wolf — covered such lean flanks, as he stooped, that it was as if the trousers were doing the weeding rather than the man.

“Good-morning, Valley! Not started ringing your bell yet, then?”

A twinge of physical discomfort, as he resumed his upright position, crossed the priest’s face. He rubbed his spine with the back of his left hand, as he offered his right to his visitor.

“Stiff. I feel rather stiff, Solent. You must excuse my being stiff.”

Wolf sighed wearily. “I’ve been envying you, you irresponsible monk.” He turned his head and surveyed the result of Mr. Valley’s labour. A small path had been made free of weeds along the edge of the great overgrown drive.

“People won’t follow your path, Valley, even if you carry it to the gate. They’ll just walk straight up the middle.”

Disregarding this remark, the clergyman screwed up his eyes as if thinking of some important matter. Then he leaned forward and said gravely:

“By the way, Solent, do you know any literary people in London?”

Wolf surveyed him in astonishment.

“Yes, a few,” he said.

A smile like a tiny crack in grey pond-ice crossed Mr. Valley’s pallid features.

“Why don’t you get them to publish Jason’s poems, then? They’re good, aren’t they? He won’t show them to me. You know what he is! He thinks I’d steal the ideas for my sermons. But if your London friends were to see them — —”

Wolf felt sheer amazement at the perspicacity of the little man. What a fool he’d been not to have ever thought of this! Of course, it must be exceedingly difficult to get anything published. Carfax might — he had an interest once in a publishing-house. And they *are* ——

“I’ll talk to Jason about it,” he said gravely. “Well, I must be off now. I’m going to see Urquhart. By the way, Valley, I *am* going to finish that book of his.”

Mr. Valley’s face crumpled into woeful disorder, as if he had received a blow. He turned up his shirt-sleeves and resumed his weeding, without a word.

Wolf experienced extreme discomfort.

“You think I’m making a mistake, Valley?” he said.

There was no answer.

"You think the less I see of Urquhart the better, Valley?"

Still there was no answer.

"Don't work at that job too long, Valley, and forget about the service!"

The man gave him an extraordinary sideways glance without lifting his head or ceasing his work. But not a word did he utter.

"Well, good-bye... and I *will* do something about Jason's poems!"

"I wonder if I *am* making the greatest mistake I ever made in my life!" he said to himself, as he emerged into the road. He began to feel almost startled by the blind desire he had to erect this money as an impassable barrier between his mother and Mr. Manley. "It's only his money. *Of course* it's only his money. She couldn't *like* a brute like that!"

In spite of the lowering clouds hanging like toppling bastions above High Stoy — as if the Cerne Giant himself were heaping up earthworks there — not one single drop fell till Wolf reached the shelter of the Manor. He began to feel there was something uncanny about the way the rain threatened to descend and yet did not descend.

"What's the time, Roger?" he asked, nervously, as he followed Monk up the old Jacobean staircase to the familiar library.

"Must be near church-time, I believe, Sir; though I haven't heard the bells yet. Squire'll be main glad to see 'ee, Sir," the man went on, as he opened the library-door; "glad as a hernshaw Squire'll be!"

"He wants to get his book done, Monk, I suppose?"

" 'Tis all he thinks of, Sir. Night and day, 'tis all he thinks of."

"Why doesn't he advertise for another secretary?"

Roger Monk made a deprecatory grimace and then hurriedly placed his large first-finger upon his lips.

“Squire’s had enough of secretaries,” he whispered, “and so, by Grimey, have I!”

His voice resumed its normal tone when they were well inside the room.

“You’ll find your old seat just as comfortable as it used to be, Sir. Them big logs warms the whole place.”

On the servant’s departure Wolf went over at once to the table by the window. How well he recalled the thrill he used to get from the asters and lobelias, down there in that round flower-bed, so dark and bare today!

There was a book, lying with others upon the table, that caught his attention at once. He picked it up. The particular pencil-marking in the corner of the fly-leaf indicated to him that it had come into Urquhart’s possession through the agency of Mr. Malakite. The volume had no connection at all with the rambling chronicles and scandalous County-Trials out of which Urquhart’s History was being framed. It was the kind of book the debased purpose of which is simply and solely to play upon the morbid erotic nerves of unbalanced sensuality. The Malakite shop had, it appeared, inexhaustible resources of this nature, distinct altogether from any merely bawdy local folk-lore.

He turned over the pages. At once that old wicked shiver, drunken, indescribable, ran through his veins. It was an abominable book! A peculiar tremulousness took possession of the pit of his stomach, and a mist swam before his eyes. The atrocious attraction of a single page that he had encountered drew him towards a region of unspeakable images. Through an iridescent vapour, with the blood rushing to his head, he followed those images. He sank down into the chair, with the book clutched between his trembling fingers. He read voraciously. All those drops of deadly nightshade which, four months ago, had distilled themselves into his nerves as he fled from the school-treat field, began to seethe and ferment again in his secretest veins. Every now and then he was compelled to wipe away the salt sweat that clouded his eyesight. His knees knocked together beneath the table in his absorbed emotion.

It was while he was thus engaged that the library-door opened upon him and Mr. Urquhart presented himself in the doorway. The Squire advanced towards him across the polished oak floor, limping and muttering, his cane striking the echoing boards resoundingly at each step.

Wolf rose and met the man with extended hand; but his flushed cheeks, hot forehead, and excited eyes must have betrayed his preoccupation.

“Glancing at our last purchase, eh? What? Can’t keep these pretty little books out of you young people’s hands! You’ll be snatching, by hook or by crook.... You’ll be snatching, you rogues, eh?” And he dropped Wolf’s fingers, only to nudge him familiarly in the ribs.

Mr. Urquhart looked that morning as if something had inordinately refreshed and cheered him. “Well?” he muttered interrogatively. “Well?”

Wolf retreated a step or two, and mechanically placed the book he had been reading on the top of another volume, adjusting it evenly and neatly. Then, with his clenched hand resting on the table, and leaning a little forward, “I’ve been thinking, Sir,” he began gravely, “a good deal lately about that book of yours; and I’ve thought I’d like to see you again to find out if we could come... if we could come...”

“To business, me boy!” threw in the other. “Quite right. I’m your man. I’m ready to bargain with ‘ee.”

Wolf’s eyes fixed themselves upon the ebony stick upon which his late employer propped himself. “As it happens, Sir,” he began resolutely, “my mother is just now in need of a sum of money... two hundred pounds in fact... to start a new tea-shop in Blacksod. She wants this at once. She’s been thinking of borrowing it from... from a friend. What I had in my mind, Sir, was...” He relaxed the tension of his muscles a little at this point, and, in place of leaning heavily on the table, he found himself scratching with his thumbnail a zigzag pattern upon it in the shape of an architectural ornament. “What I thought was,” he went on, “that if you could see your way to give me a cheque for this sum... now at once... I would pledge myself, in any form you suggest, to get the book finished within the next three months... by March, in fact, when I first began it. What you’ll be doing, Mr. Urquhart, is to pay me in advance for this three months’ work on condition that I finish the job in that time... but I must be free” — his voice became quite steady now, and he found himself looking at last into the Squire’s face— “I must be free to do this work at home and in my own way, using your notes, of course, as my material. I mean, that with my school-teaching I can’t come over here regularly. But if I haven’t finished it by the end of March you’ll have the right to demand the repayment of this two hundred.”

He paused, a little breathlessly; and, as was his wont in any crisis, he put his hand into his side-pocket, produced his cigarettes, and lit one with punctilious deliberation.

“Come over to the fire, Solent,” said Mr. Urquhart. Wolf followed him, as he limped across the room; and they sat down in the two leather chairs against the open hearth, the smouldering logs of which the Squire proceeded to stir up with the end of his stick.

Wolf’s heart was now beating fast. “I shall have the two hundred,” he thought. “I shall have the two hundred!” He became aware that the vision of himself handing over this cheque to his mother was melting now into a vague, delicious sweetness that had nothing to do with either Mrs. Solent or with Mr. Urquhart. It hung quivering — this drop of maddening sweetness — on the edge of those words of Christie’s, “He will stay the night at Weymouth!”

"I'm not a rich man, Solent. You know *that*, I suppose?"

Wolf nodded sympathetically; but he caught no more than the general drift of his companion's words, as the Squire rambled on.

"She's a plucky woman, your mother, and a darned good-looking one still, me boy, if you'll let an old man say so. Shame you had to desert her. But you nympholepts are all crazy. It's beyond me what you can find —— But there! It's a matter of taste. But I don't see why you need have bought the filly as well as ridden her. Torp's a reasonable man; though he *is* such a fool. But there. We all have to pay for our little vices. Well! About the two hundred, me boy — I suppose you must have it. Yes, by Jove, Solent, and you *shall* have it! And what's more, we'll drink a glass of my old Malmsey to wash the business down!"

While these words were reaching him across the smoke of the stirred-up logs, Wolf's own consciousness was sounding the depths of an unexpected mental crisis. Intensely did he realize the relief with which he would fling this cheque into his mother's lap. It was against his conscience; but the moment had come when he must sacrifice his conscience! In an irresistible salt-tide, overcoming all barriers, the idea of sacrificing his conscience rushed in full force now over the portion of his mind where the words, "Mr. Malakite at Weymouth," lay like a drowned sea-reef! And then, as he stared at Mr. Urquhart, it became clear to him in a flash of cruel illumination that these two things — today's bargain with the Squire and tomorrow's visit to Christie — would be the end of his peace of mind. To these two things had he been brought at last. This was the issue; this was the climax of the mounting wave of his life in Dorset. He had to outrage now — and it was too late to retreat — the very core of his nature! That hidden struggle between some mysterious Good and some mysterious Evil, into which all his ecstasies had merged, how could it go on after this?

"Do 'ee hear, me boy?" The Squire's voice came clear and straight now into his agitated consciousness. "Will you do me the favour of ringing the bell? There! Just in front of 'ee!"

Wolf rose and rang the bell, and sank down once more into the depths of the leather chair. As he did so he was aware of a rattling at both the mullioned casements. The wind was rising, then? Let it rise! Let the rain pour down. It would please Mukalog, in his kitchen-drawer over there, to hear this sound.

The tall gardener had his black coat on when he entered the room, and his air was the air of a privileged major-domo in a noble house.

"Get my paper and pens, Roger, and my cheque-book, out of my study, please. Oh, and one thing more! Here, you'll want my keys for that" — and he began fumbling in his pockets.

"A bottle of port, Sir?" suggested the servant.

"Where the devil *are* my keys?" murmured the Squire petulantly.

"In your dressing-gown, I expect, Sir. I'll look for them, Sir. Is it the 1880 port that I'm to get?"

"Listen, Monk," said Mr. Urquhart gravely. "How many bottles of my father's Malmsey have I got left?"

The man straightened his back with a jerk, and Wolf noticed that his eyebrows went up as if some extravagant and very foolish transaction were in the air.

"Some half-a-dozen, Sir. Them what's in the walnut chest are the last. We locked them up, sir, after Candlemas night, when you and young Mr. Redfern looked at they portfolios of antiquities."

Mr. Urquhart gave Wolf a rapid but very complicated glance as he answered the man.

“Never mind about the antiquities, Monk. Mr. Solent doesn’t care for antiquities. Get a bottle of the Malmsey, and bring my cheque-book.”

Half-an-hour later, over the same fireplace, Wolf found himself drinking the most nectareous wine he had ever tasted in his life. A cheque for two hundred pounds on Stuckey’s Bank lay securely in his waistcoat-pocket; and on the silver tray between Mr. Urquhart and himself, a corner of it beneath the decanter to keep it in its place, was his own acknowledgement of the money and of the obligation which it entailed.

“Fifteen chapters would be a good round number, Mr. Urquhart.”

“Fifteen... thirty... fifty!” cried the other. “I don’t care how many! Order it as you please. My *facts*, my little *facts*, are the main thing — that future generations should have all the biting, pricking, itching, salty little facts about our ‘wold Dorset’ that can be put together!”

“I won’t have any of your ‘facts,’ Sir, that I can’t turn into decent English. This book may carry your name, but it will have my soul between its — —”

He broke off abruptly. “What’s amusing you, Mr. Urquhart? By God, I *will* hear what’s amusing you! Have I said anything ridiculous?”

“Not... at... all... me boy!” gasped the Squire, suppressing his chuckling-fit. “Did you say your ‘soul’ between its pages? ‘Soul’ is good. ‘Soul’ is a good word. So you’ve got a soul, have you, Menelaus? Or you *had* before it strayed into my book? By Jove, that’s a pretty fancy, eh? Like a rose-leaf or a bit of white heather, such as the wenches put in their prayer-books!”

Wolf laid his hand on the stem of his wine-glass and stared sombrely at the rich purplish umber of its contents. Never had he tasted such wine! He felt irritated with Urquhart for not letting him enjoy it in silence — savour every drop of it — draw it into his heart, his nerves, his spirit....

"Not one fact left out... Menelaus... that's in the bond, you know!" And Wolf, through that Malmsey-tinctured mist, saw his host tap significantly with his forefinger the sheet of paper that lay under the decanter.

A second gust of rising wind rattled the two window-casements; and this time there came with it the sound of a distant bell ringing.

"It's Tilly-Valley," said the Squire brusquely. "Hand me your glass, Solent."

"Does he have it done when he's saying Mass?" asked Wolf, watching the tilting of the decanter. Then he cried, "I like to hear it!" with a sudden, fierce emphasis. "I think I'll open the window." He rose with meticulous care and moved across the room, lifting his legs with cautious exactitude, as if they were heavy objects totally distinct from his personality.

He pushed open that familiar latched pane of the mullioned window.

"I say, Sir!" he cried excitedly. "It's going to pour with rain. There's an enormous black cloud out there!"

He strode gravely back to his place by the fire; and the wind followed him, making that paper he had signed rise up like a leaf and tap against the side of the decanter.

"It's going to pour in a minute," he repeated, emptying his glass.

But he now became aware that his companion's wits had completely succumbed to the influence of the wine. Mr. Urquhart was engaged in a fatuous attempt to measure out the last few drops of the Malmsey equally between their two glasses. "Empty... quite empty..." he murmured, with a deep sigh; and then he began muttering something that sounded like "Who'll toll the bell? 'I' said the bull, 'because I can pull.' "

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Urquhart?"

His recognition that the man had sunk instantaneously through all the intervening stages and was now hopelessly drunk was a sobering shock to his own fuddled mind.

“It’s ringing still,” he remarked gravely.

“I’m the only magistrate round here,” cried the Squire. “What does Torp know of the law?”

Wolf contemplated with some concern the heavy lips in front of him, which were now gibbering incoherently. Valley’s Mass-bell had ceased. The wind was rattling all the windows. A wild gust, blowing down the chimney, drove a handful of bitter-tasting wood-ashes against both their faces.

“If I told you three feet was enough, what’s that to you? Three feet is deep enough for a boy not twenty-five. They sleep sound then. It’s different later. Three feet is a very good depth. Don’t throw in any more, I tell you! His skin was always soft. Three feet is more than enough. How do we know they don’t feel it falling on ’em? It’s clay, mind you. It’s thick Dorset clay.”

Wolf drew in his breath with a long-drawn sigh. “He’ll tell me everything soon, if only I can keep my wits clear.”

There was a sharp splash of rain against the open casement, and a violent shaking of the window-catch.

The Squire recommenced his mutterings.

“D’ye think it’s an easy thing to walk up and down on the earth with him lying down there? What would it be to stop thinking about it and just do it?... Foulness?... Abomination?... I don’t know about that.... I... don’t... know....”

His voice died away into complete incoherence. But suddenly it rose once more, shrill and strident. “It falls off... it falls off... the sweet flesh!”

Wolf stiffened himself in his chair and leant forward. Big drops of rain were descending the chimney, each one hissing with an angry hiss, as it touched the burning logs.

“The lips... the lips... where are his lips now?”

The man’s voice sank again; but Wolf seemed to catch a low, moaning sound coming from him, a strange, subhuman sound, that was ghastly to listen to.

Then there were more articulate words. “Nothing can make him not to be himself! And if he’s himself, and I’m *myself*, ’twould be like my life hugging my life to do it!”

He fell into a silence then; and lifting one of his arms from where it sprawled upon the table, he wiped the saliva from his mouth with the back of his hand.

“I’ll find out everything in a moment,” Wolf thought. “All I’ve got to do is to keep my brain clear.”

The windows had become so dark with rain that the room was in twilight. The upper portion of his companion’s face was almost invisible. Over the lower part of it, however, the smouldering fire threw a wavering illumination. It was this obscuring of the man’s eyes in the darkened room that made it a surprise to Wolf when, after a long pause, a voice came from him that was pitched in a completely different key — that was, indeed, crafty and foxy in its sobriety!

“Drunk and chattering, eh, me boy? It’s when I think of Torp... that’s what it is... Torp and the mess he made of the grave out there! Couldn’t even dig it deep enough. Said he came upon an old coffin or something. Torp and his stupidity always upset me. A stone-cutter is what the man is. I was a fool to let him meddle with grave-digging. Torp digging graves is absurd. You can see *that* for yourself, tow-pate, can’t you, even though you do go about with Lobbie? What was I saying just now? Oh, I know! That it was all crazy village-gossip when they talk of suicide. Don’t you listen to ’em, tow-pate! Don’t you listen to that ridiculous individual down at Pond Cottage either. He takes drugs, that man. You can smell ’em on his clothes.

Suicide? Nonsense. It was pneumonia. If he'd stayed at Lenty, Tilly-Valley would never have got at him. They moved him against my wishes. D'ye hear, Solent? Against my wishes. That Lenty place of mine... your mother liked it, didn't she?... was just right for that boy. What did they move him for? He wasn't fit to be moved. He might have got well if they'd kept Tilly-Valley away from him and hadn't moved him. That... was... wrong... to move... him."

With these words Mr. Urquhart's heavy head sank down till his chin rested against his chest. The shock of the jerk to his neck aroused him again, however; and with a crafty, wrinkled leer he glanced at the empty bottle.

"Empty... every drop," he muttered. Then, with his elbow resting on the table, he supported his head with his hand.

"Torp's the fellow who upsets me. Why, I can dig a grave better myself! But you must excuse me, Solent. I know you are mixed up with those people. Married the little boy, I mean the little girl, didn't you? Your relative Torp is a prize fool, Solent. Don't defend him! I tell you it's no use. You're... a sensible... boy... Menelaus... though you're *not* as good-looking as your father... and the best thing you can do is to leave Torp to me. Stone-cutter or undertaker, I understand him. I've known individuals of his kind all my life. He's pure Dorset, is the good Torp. Leave him... to me... leave... him..."

His arm sank down upon the table and his head sank down upon his arm. A gust of wind from the open window swept across the room and lifted into a spiral dance the scattered wood-ashes that lay on the silver tray. Some of those ashes, as they subsided, fell upon the man's glossy black hair and lay there where they fell; so that Wolf was reminded of the men of old time, who, in their grief, strewed ashes on their heads.

He rose quietly to his feet. “I’d better hunt for Monk before I go,” he thought, “and tell him to come up and see him.”

With this in his mind he stole across the polished floor, opened the door with the utmost caution, and let himself out.

The rain had stopped when he emerged into the manor-garden; and he decided that the best thing he could do would be to walk off the effects of the Malmsey and remain in the open air until tea-time. Then he would drop in at Pond Cottage, where, no doubt, since it was Sunday, he would find all his friends together.

By the elimination of any lunch he would be all the hungrier to enjoy the home-made bread and flaky Scotch scones and honey-in-the-honeycomb which always made Mrs. Otter’s teas such solid and delicious repasts.

Feeling a longing for absolute solitude, he looked about for some unfrequented path. He had not passed, by more than two hundred yards, the well-known house inhabited by Roger Monk, when he came upon a cattle-drove leading due east, which was completely unfamiliar. This he decided to explore; and when it led him into a narrow, grassy lane, heading towards High Stoy, he made up his mind that he would follow this new direction and see what came of it. Every now and then, as he walked, he found himself thrusting his finger and thumb into his waistcoat-pocket to make sure the precious slip of paper was still safely there.

He had never been quite in the mood in which he struggled now. The thought of Christie’s invitation to him, the tone of her voice as she uttered the words about her father, the expression of her face as she described what she had been writing — all these things fermented in his veins like drops from the sap of a deadly upas-tree. To die without ever having slept with Christie... No! He *couldn’t* submit to such a destiny! His heart beat fast as he gathered up his forces for this challenge to the gods. Between the bare branches of rain-soaked elms and the wet leaves of gleaming holly he strode along now like a centaur maddened by juniper-berries! And yet all the while, below this recklessness, lay a furtive, troubled, ghastly dread. Did not his "mythology" depend upon his inmost life-illusion — upon his taking the side of Good against Evil in the great occult struggle? And if Urquhart's book and "Mr. Malakite at Weymouth" killed his mythology, how could he go on living? What feelings does a man have when his inmost integrity is shattered? "You Dorset!" he murmured aloud, as he trailed his stick through a heap of dead leaves. "You've not beaten me yet, you Dorset! Ay! I'll be a match for you yet, you dark rain-scented earth!"

But even as he spoke, the thought of holding Christie against his limbs, stripped of her clothes, brought him an intolerable spasm. The words, "Mr. Malakite at Weymouth," ceased altogether to be words. They became tiny blue veins just above those slender knees! They became — oh, he couldn't give up such a chance! He couldn't!

He had let Christie become a spirit to him. He himself, with his Pharisaic chatter about "Platonic," had turned her into a spirit. Men of his type make their girls into anything. He had made her what he wanted her. He had satisfied his sensuality with the other one and gone to Christie for mental sympathy. He hadn't considered *her* side of it at all. But now — tomorrow night — he would be a magician! He would turn this Ariel, this Elemental, into a living girl! His mind reverted to Gerda. "How pitiful that she should have lost her blackbird-song! That's what I've done to *her*! I've become too solemn. I've wearied her with my pedantic, ponderous thoughts. She's come to feel that I'm 'heavy weather,' a fellow without humour, without gaiety, a lumbering schoolmaster. That's what it is. She's turned to Weevil, for the simplest of all reasons — for pleasant camaraderie!"

Suddenly, with a cynical frankness, he began comparing his feelings for these two girls. “The truth is,” he said to himself, “I love them both! I love Gerda because she’s so simple, and because I’ve slept with her all these months; and I love Christie because she’s so subtle, and because I’ve never slept with her!”

He paused by the lane-side, and, stepping over some dripping clumps of rank weeds, whose odour seemed like all the vague, anonymous scents that had hit his senses for the last four months, he leaned upon a disused gate and stared northward towards Ramsgard.

“Is that the Abbey?” he thought, as he heard faint chimes upon the heavy air. Hovering about the image of Æthelwolf’s coffin, his mind reverted to the idea of Christ.

“How extraordinary it would be,” he said to himself, “if there really were an incredibly tender and pitiful heart... tender to the craziest sentimentalities as well as to the most tragic dilemmas of humanity... just outside the circle of time and space!” If there *were* such a heart it would certainly turn all modern scientific theories into something trifling and unimportant. But did he want such a Being to exist? Not to want him... not even to *want* him... would seem an outrageous cruelty to all the Tilly-Valleys in the world. And, besides, such a Being would look after Gerda and after Christie... and settle all their dilemmas... ultimately... “And yet I don’t believe I *do* want Him!” he murmured aloud, as a sprinkling of cold raindrops fell upon his clasped hands from a tree above his head.

As he set himself to answer the question, why it was he didn’t “want Him,” there came into his mind one of Gerda’s recent hints, full of her primitive Blacksod mania for gross scandal, implying that the perverse tendencies of Mr. Malakite had not even yet been eradicated by old age.

“If I take her tomorrow night,” he thought, “there’ll exist... something... in common... between the old man and me... yes! if it’s only a... only a... Is that the reason why I don’t really want ‘Him’ to exist? For fear my feeling for Christie should have to be a thing purer even than ‘Platonic’?”

He stared frowningly at the stubble-furrows in front of him. One especial little pool of water caught his attention, between the melancholy stalks, into whose bosom at intervals single drops, from an extended branch above, kept splashing. So this was the inmost law of nature, was it; that if a man had more than one woman in his life he sank of necessity to such base compromises that he *couldn’t* want Christ to exist?

Well, he must content himself with thinking of the coffin of King Æthelwolf when he heard the chimes of Ramsgard!

In his defiantly heathen mood he suddenly found himself chuckling, as he stared at those little periodic water-tongues leaping up in that brown puddle; for he recalled the opinion that Bob Weevil had expressed to him recently, that girls’ legs were the most beautiful thing in the world. “Weevil and I are both lucky in one way,” he thought. “We both have the sort of intense life-illusion that protects human beings from the futility of the commonplace. But, oh God, oh God! I wish I hadn’t taken this two hundred pounds, and I wish Mr. Malakite *wasn’t* going to Weymouth tomorrow!”

He lifted his eyes from the wet stubble and let them roam at large across the green expanse of the great vale. And there swept over him an immense loathing for the furtive indecencies of human life and beast life upon the earth. “It would be so much better,” he thought, “if all men and all beasts were wiped out, and only birds and fishes left! Everything that copulates, everything that carries its young, how good if it vanished in one great catastrophe from the earth, leaving only the feathered and the finned!”

And he tried deliberately, as he moved away from that disused gate and strode further eastward along the lane, to visualize all this patient Sabbath landscape as it would be if it were indeed washed clean of all mammals! He imagined the vast cirque of Poll's Camp, couchant like an heraldic lion, and befouled no more by the rabble of Blacksod. He saw Melbury Bub rising out of the calm rain-drenched fields, free from all the privies and dung-heaps and Farmer's Rests and slaughter-sheds that so profaned its leafy purlieus.

The lane rose a little presently, following a slight undulation of the bed of the vale; and when he reached the top of this small eminence, the expanse of country that stretched before him assumed for his imagination that particular look of a land submerged under fathoms of transparent water, which, from his childhood up, had especially thrilled him.

To his left rose the corrugated trunk of an enormous elm-tree, about whose roots a thick covering of green moss held the fallen rain like a sponge.

The sight of this moss swept his mind back to Christie's garden and thence to those slippery wharf-steps and wave-swept pier-posts that he associated with the first discovery of his mystic ecstasy.

So absolutely did he live in symbols of his mental life, that the two things which now threatened this ecstasy — Urquhart's book and a shy, slender Christie, stripped of her clothes — transformed themselves into the wet, uneven bark of this trunk against which he now pressed his hand. "Two hundred pounds?" he thought. "What is that to spoil a whole life? A thin, bare figure held tight for a second... what is that to change a person's whole idea of himself?"

As he went on pressing his bare palm against the wet corrugations of that inert trunk, it seemed to him imperative to make an attempt then and there to evoke his master-sensation. With a desperate straining of all the energy of his spirit, he struggled to merge his identity in that subaqueous landscape. He had, at that moment, a strange feeling, as if he were seeking to embrace in the very act of love the maternal earth herself! For, as he strained his spirit to the uttermost, the landscape before him ceased to be a mere assemblage of contours and colours. It became one enormous water-plant, of vast, cool, curving, wet-rooted leaves — leaves that unfolded themselves, leaves that finally responded and yielded to the outflung intensity of his magnetic gesture! "Not dead yet!" he muttered aloud, as, with an exhausted sigh, he turned to retrace his steps. "Not dead yet!"

In the reaction from this desperate plunge into his mystic vice, Wolf found that he was beginning to feel extremely hungry. "I don't want to have to wait a minute after I get there," he thought. "I can't cope with Jason till I've had my tea. So it's no use walking too fast!"

His mind began fumbling then, puzzled and weary, around that question which always had such a curious interest for him, as to the inner nature of each person's secret life-illusion — that peculiar consciousness people build up as to their dominant "entelechy" or ultimate life-flowering. Thus it seemed to him now, that while his own life-illusion was his "mythology," Christie's must be those "Platonic essences" about which she was always pondering, Weevil's the mystic beauty of girls' legs, and Urquhart's the idea of his shameless book. He could not help chuckling a little to himself when his exhausted thoughts, like weary gnats that sink down upon water, began hovering round the question as to what Jason's life-illusion was. "He has none! He has none!" he cried aloud; and he found himself so excited by this explanation of Jason's peculiarities that, not thinking what he did, he debouched into a field-path quite different from the one that had led him into this lane.

After walking nearly a mile, this newly discovered path conducted him, to his considerable surprise, into Lenty Great Field — into the opposite side of the field to that of Pond Lane. Indeed, so unfamiliar did the field look from this direction, that it was only by the well-known willow-trees in the centre that he recognized Lenty Pond at all.

"Why, there *is* Jason!" he said to himself; "and the girl with him must be Mattie. Damn! How the devil shall I cope with *this* combination?"

Then in a flash he realized that it was only his mental preoccupation with Jason that had given these complete strangers, sitting on the bank of Lenty Pond, *his* shape and Mattie's. Surely this man and this girl were completely unknown to him! But *were* they? The man certainly was. But the girl? Ah, he knew her! She was the "automatic young lady" of Farmer's Rest! So that wizened old chap in a bowler-hat was her uncle... the unseen invalid he had heard calling out, "Jesus... Jesus... Jesus!"

As soon as he reached the side of the pond that was nearest to him, the two figures, who were seated on the opposite edge, stood up, the girl helping the man to his feet. He could see they were exchanging remarks about him; and knowing the condition of the man, he hesitated and looked away, flicking the dead reed-stalks with the end of his stick.

But as he hesitated there, he gave them a furtive sidelong glance, and he saw they had begun to come slowly along the side of the water, evidently intending to speak to him.

He advanced to meet them, and they met half-way round the circle of the pond.

"How do you do, Mr. Solent," said the girl quietly. "This is my uncle, Mr. Solent." Then she turned and raised her voice, as if speaking to a deaf man. "This is Mr. Solent, uncle; the gentleman I was telling you about."

It gave Wolf a queer sensation to see this equivocal “Miss Bess” again. Was it Gerda who had told him that she was a friend of Bob Weevil’s? Little pleasure Mr. Weevil would get out of her, judging by that evening of the School-Treat!

But as she looked furtively into his eyes now, it was difficult for him to believe that the quiver of chemical attraction which for that single second united their nerves had no normal eroticism in it.

The girl was the first to drop her eyes. “Uncle here takes all the time I’ve got, these days,” she murmured; “uncle and the bar — don’t you, you funny old man?”

Mr. Round’s countenance flickered all over with little wrinkles of complacent pride.

“She looks arter me as if she were paid to do it,” he remarked in a hollow voice.

“I’m sure she does,” Wolf responded absent-mindedly, his gaze wandering to the surface of Lenty Pond. “I think you’re to be congratulated, Mr. Round, on having so capable a niece,” he added after a pause, with a little more emphasis.

Something about the landlord’s disordered physiognomy began to suggest to his mind the head of a decapitated criminal carried on a pole. It was just as he was wondering how he was going to slip away from these two, that there came into his head, as if from the lips of a goblin inside him, that queer tag of bawdy gibberish which Manley — or was it Josh Beard? — had chaunted so derisively that night at the Three Peewits. “Jimmy Redfern... *he* was there!” mocked this jibing voice.

But the man’s face had begun to expand with such maudlin satisfaction that it became absurdly puckered and puffed out, like a toy balloon composed of crocodile-skin.

"One who looks after you so well, Mr. Round — —" continued Wolf.

At that moment, however, he caught the eye of the automatic young lady fixed upon him so quizzically that he felt the colour mounting to his cheeks.

"Curse the baggage!" he said to himself. "She's not one to be propitiated."

"You chose a nice day to bring your uncle out," he remarked humbly, turning his back upon Lenty Pond.

"She brought me out. That's what she done. And she will take me in, present! We comes out and we goes in; but 'tis they what bides."

"You're in the right of it *there*, Mr. Round," said Wolf, meeting the niece's eye as boldly as he could. "But I don't think it was very wise of her to let you sit down after all this rain."

"I brought his shawl," cried the girl, smiling. "Look, uncle! You've left it over there."

The innkeeper turned his head. "Over there," he repeated; and pulling at his niece's sleeve, he began shuffling back. Wolf accompanied them round Lenty Pond, and Miss Bess picked up the shawl. Bits of rush-seed were adhering to it; and she shook it in the air.

"Good-bye!" Wolf brought out at this point. "I'm going to call at Pond Cottage before I walk back to Blacksod."

" 'Tweren't either o' they," the innkeeper murmured hurriedly, "what drove him to it."

Wolf looked questioningly at the girl.

"He's worried," she said laconically. "Here, uncle, lean on my arm and we'll soon be home! Have you forgotten what I've got for your tea?"

The puckers and creases came wrinkling back.

"She's got sardines for me tea," he murmured confidentially.

"Capital!" cried Wolf. "I hope they'll have sardines at Pond Cottage!"

He was on the point of leaving them, when the innkeeper suddenly stretched out his free arm towards the centre of the water.

“That’s where he do bide!” he murmured hoarsely. “Churchyard can’t hold *he*!”

The automatic young lady, to Wolf’s consternation, proceeded to shake her relative by both shoulders.

“Stop that, Uncle!” she cried angrily. “Stop that!”

The corners of Mr. Round’s mouth fell. “Don’t ‘ee take no notice, maidie. I weren’t thinking what ‘ee do reckon I were.”

He lowered his voice and leaned close to Wolf. “She were afeard I were thinking of God,” he whispered.

“No I weren’t, Uncle!” cried Miss Elizabeth. “So don’t tell stories to Mr. Solent.” She looked Wolf straight in the face. “He’s worried,” she repeated.

“I see he is,” Wolf responded feebly. “Well, I hope you’ll enjoy your sardines, Mr. Round.” And he added in a firmer voice, “Good-bye! Good-bye!” and, lifting his hat, moved away from them.

As he crossed the field he tried to think of each particular spot of ground he had come to be so familiar with in this locality... Lenty Pond... Melbury Bub... Poll’s Camp... the Lunt meadows....

“These are the reality. These are what will last,” he thought, “when all those agitated people with their crazy fancies have passed into nothingness!”

At the gate of Pond Cottage garden he glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes past four. “I should have sworn it was five,” he said to himself. “Time’s like a telescope. It compresses itself or lengthens itself according to our feelings.”

The mystery of time continued to tease him as he strode up the path.

His whole past seemed swallowed up by Mr. Urquhart's two hundred pounds and by "Mr. Malakite at Weymouth." "The misery of these decisions assumes time," he thought; "but what if time is itself an illusion?"

After he had rung the bell, he was struck by the curious silence that always falls down on the thresholds of houses, like the feathers of some vast overshadowing bird, when house-bells are rung....

But the door was brusquely flung open now; and there were Darnley and Jason!

"You?" cried the younger brother. "How splendid! Our ladies have gone for a walk; but they'll be back presently. They're sure to be back presently, because it's Dimity's day out. Dimity's gone to tea with Mrs. Martin, up at the House. I've just been making Jason put on a new tie."

He turned and looked affectionately at his brother, while Wolf hung up his coat and hat.

"There!" Darnley cried. "You've been fooling with it again. What a demon you are, Jason, after all my trouble!" And lifting his hands to his brother's throat he set himself to rearrange the tie in question, which was of a brilliant vermilion. Wolf was amazed at the amiable gravity with which the poet submitted to this gesture.

"These young wimming," he mumbled — pronouncing the word more quaintly than Wolf had ever heard Mr. Torp pronounce it— "*like* red ties." And moving to the mirror above the hall-table, he proceeded to regard the improved adornment with whimsical complacency.

They had not been seated many minutes beside the drawing-room fire when Wolf took the bull by the horns.

"Look here, Jason," he began. "Why don't you let me send a selection of your poems up to London, so that we can see what the critics think of them?"

There was an ominous silence. Darnley's hand went up to his beard; while his eyes fixed themselves frowningly upon the coal-scuttle.

Slowly Jason spoke, putting an abysmal malice into his words.

"You think you're God, don't you?" he remarked; while out of a stony countenance his eyes flashed with nervous fury.

Wolf felt a tremor of anger; but he suppressed it resolutely. "Those poems of yours ought to be published," he said.

"For you Londoners to scoff at!" returned the other. "My poems may not be much," Jason went on, "but I don't like their being poked about by you clever dogs, any more than I'd like to have such rogues spit in my porridge."

"My mother has a cousin," continued Wolf obstinately, "who is very good at getting things taken he feels interested in. He happens to be a lord, and had some connection once with a publishing-house. I'd send your poems to him first."

"Will this lord you're boasting about get a share of the money?" asked Jason harshly. "Why don't you introduce Darnley to him? He might give Darnley a place at that — Institution, where you used to teach Latin!"

"Jason! Jason!" protested the young brother indignantly.

But the man went on. "If you're not so much like God as to be angry at everything that isn't praise, I'll give you my advice. My advice is — —"

"Shut up, Jason, can't you?" interrupted Darnley.

"My advice is that you go back to London. This Dorset climate isn't good for you! Those Londoners would very soon give you plenty of money, when they heard that your mother was cousin to that lord you were telling us about just now."

"Jason can't forgive you, Solent," interposed Darnley, "for having heard his poems at all. Years ago he read some to me, and afterwards stopped speaking to me for three days!"

Instead of being annoyed at this remarkable reminiscence, the Slow-Worm of Lenty raised his shoulders and chuckled audibly.

"You schoolmasters!" he cried. "Your holidays have lasted too long! Teachers of Latin, like you, always get fidgetty when you're not with your boys."

"I don't teach Latin," murmured Wolf, in a voice almost as silky as the Squire's own. Anger was mounting up within him like a black wave.

"Do you want to know why I advise you to go back to London?" went on Jason, disregarding this protest. "Not because of Urquhart — though I'm tired of warning you against *him* — but because if you go about with *me* much longer, you'll wake up one fine morning with your merry little ways fallen from you like a snake's skin."

"What ways?" asked Wolf.

"Oh, do shut up, Jason! Do stop making a bloody ass of yourself!" interjected Darnley.

"Those feelings you have when you stretch out your legs in the morning, and when you walk home to tea, swinging your stick, and when you go up those back-stairs of old Malakite's, and when you drink that bottle of gin of yours which I've heard about and forget that it isn't your first night with your young lady, and when you enjoy those books in old Urquhart's library and tell yourself stories about them, and when he brings out his second-best wine and you warm yourself at his fire, and when you look over gates on your walks and think that Nature is something!" He stopped breathlessly, and then added, in the dead silence that followed, "If you go about with me much longer you'll find yourself falling into *reality*, like... like an abortion into the Bog-stream!"

“Jason, if you don’t shut up,” cried Darnley fiercely, “I’ll go straight off to Preston Lane with Solent and leave you alone!”

“It’s all right,” interposed Wolf. “I don’t mind hearing these things. But, if Darnley doesn’t object, I’d like to ask you one question, Otter. What is it about me that annoys you so?”

The poet’s whole frame seemed to hug itself together, to contract, to tighten. Then he said: “I’m not in the least annoyed by anyone’s ways. We’re all beetles in the dung of the earth. If you go about with me, Solent, you won’t be able to think of yourself like you like to do, or about any of your young ladies either! You’ll be glad enough to get three good meals every day and to sleep as long as you can.... You’ll learn from me more about the value of sleep than about courting young ladies.... So my advice is, get back to London, where that lord of yours is, and teach — —”

He was interrupted by the opening of the front-door and the sound of Olwen’s shrill voice rising above those of her companions. As they all hurried out into the hall to greet the newcomers, Wolf thought to himself, “Now we’ll see how three generations of feminine sensibility will take possession of a house!” But things arranged themselves very quietly. Mattie took Olwen upstairs, to tidy her up, while Darnley followed his mother into the kitchen, to help her getting tea. So that soon after their arrival Wolf found himself alone with Jason by the drawing-room fire.

“They’ll be a long time,” said the poet, with grave solemnity. “They always *are* a long time on Sundays.” He then walked gingerly to the door and furtively closed it. Returning to Wolf’s side by the hearth, he drew from his pocket a crumpled piece of paper, which he carefully unfolded.

“When you send my poems to London,” he began quietly, while Wolf, watching him with astonishment, possessed himself of a seat from which he could see the window, “I think it would be a good thing if you didn’t leave out the last one I've written. It's called 'The Owl and Silence.' Do you mind if I read it to you now?"

"I'd like very much to hear it," Wolf responded humbly; but while the man was thus occupied, he allowed a portion of his consciousness to appropriate to itself a lovely bluish light that, with the falling of that winter twilight, began to fill the uncurtained window.

"Does it mean that the horizon is now clear of clouds?" he thought to himself. And then he thought, "It seems early for the twilight to be setting in." The disarming monotony of Jason's voice blended with the impalpable colour that filled the window-frame....

When the mossy vistas call to the rain
To ravish their fern-fronds green,
Thro' the dripping hazels they dart again,
These points of damascene!
And each root holds blood in its amber cup,
Holds blood in its emerald bowl,
While the White Owl covers silence up
As death covers up the soul.
The great White Owl, he passes by
Like a ghost among the guests.
The wood-mice watch him with frightened eys;
The birds crouch in their nests;
And Silence asleep on her lichen bed,
Asleep on her fungus sheet,
Feels those feathers sink on her drooping head,
And fall on her tender feet!
They have known each other so long, so long,
That Owl and that Silence deep!

The mosses and ferns to life belong;
But they belong to sleep.
They belong to the land behind all lands
Where the greenest leaves look grey;
Where the tree of the unknown sorrow stands
Weeping its well-a-way!
For the Owl is old and Silence is old,
And that tree is older yet!
Its tears, malignant, drizzling, cold,
Make their love-pillow wet!
New moss, new ferns, the new spring brings;
New primroses in death
Are soothed by new moth-flutterings
Of euthanasian breath;
But the Owl that over Silence sinks,
With strange and drooping feathers,
Eternal rest-without-end drinks,
Absolved from all life’s weathers.
Each root holds blood in its amber cup,
Holds blood in its emerald bowl,
But the White Owl covers Silence up
As death covers up the soul.

“Oh, I like that *very* much!” he murmured gently, when the man’s voice died away. “Certainly we will include *that* in what we send to London!” It somehow seemed quite natural to him now, in the fleeting loveliness of this blue light, that Jason should, without retracting his spleen, have accepted his offer. As he watched the man crouching there between himself and that unearthly atmosphere, his sombre figure became for him a monumental symbol charged with feelings beyond expression. At how many hearths, that winter afternoon, were human beings watching this strange blueness, flung against their casements like the dreamy breath of the earth itself, caught ere it dissolved into space! That aerial transparency might easily be something that never again in all the days of his life would appear exactly as it did now! Oh, how he longed to scoop it up in great handfuls and pour it forth over every wounded spirit in the world! How he longed to sprinkle it like holy water over that face upon the Waterloo steps! A strange melting happiness began to thrill through him — and then, suddenly, "Mr. Malakite at Weymouth." *No!* He would have supper with Christie; but he would keep his integrity. At eleven o'clock he would go back to Gerda. The idea of this *eleven o'clock* seemed like a penitential offering, heavy to lift, which, by a superhuman effort, he would offer up to his Deus Absconditus. But even now, as he heard Olwen's light steps and bursts of laughter in the room above, the thought of the two-hundred dragged his resolution down. He *couldn't* give up the relief of flinging this cheque into his mother's lap; and by some intricate psychic law it seemed useless to renounce Christie's bed and yet accept Urquhart's money!

Jason's voice interrupted his meditations. But it was not of poetry he spoke. "Tell me, Solent," he said, "would you prophesy from what you know of me that I would outlive you by ten years?"

"Not ten, Jason!"

"Five, then?"

"No."

"Four?"

"No."

"By three years, then?"

"Well, perhaps you *may* outlive me by three! But listen, Jason. I wish you'd let me run up for a minute to your room, before they all come in. May I do that?" And he began to move to the door. Jason rose quickly to his feet and followed him. His expression was grave and extremely perturbed.

"I'd go to Darnley's room if I were you," he said eagerly. "The basin's much grander there than in mine. But, of course, if you're nervous of doing anything in there... and would feel happier in mine... but mine wouldn't suit you... It's not in your style."

"I know very well what style it's in," retorted Wolf, as he opened the door; "but don't be worried. I'll use Darnley's."

It was indeed with a curious relief that he found himself in his friend's room. How refreshingly bare it was! The dressing-gown hanging on a nail upon the door, the three pairs of boots placed in a neat row at the bed's head, the grey schoolmaster's-suit carefully folded upon a chair — all these objects, combined with the faint sea-sand smell that came from the enormous sponge upon the washing-stand, brought to Wolf as he stood among them, washing his hands with Windsor soap, a wholesome and liberating peace.

He, a man, was in a man's fortress, a man's retreat! How cool and quiet did that strip of uncarpeted floor look, with the beautiful blue light lying upon it! How reassuring was the great flat tin bath propped up against the wall!

He couldn't help thinking, as he poured the soap-suds out of the white basin into the white chamber-pot — for evidently Darnley was allowed no slop-pail — how all his agitations had to do with women. "I'm attracted to them," he thought, as he instinctively pressed his friend's great sea-smelling sponge against his face, "but there must be something in my nature that causes them to weary of me... that irritates them, that infuriates them... unless I behave with diabolical cunning over a long stretch of time... and that is difficult... that is almost impossible!”

Half-an-hour later, seated between Olwen and Mrs. Otter, with Darnley and Mattie opposite him, and Jason at the foot of the table, Wolf found that the airy chatter that had been going on, ever since they began their tea, about this and that aspect of the countryside, ended by troubling him with a bitter nostalgia. His brief holiday was already near its close; and how many days and months and years of his life was he destined to spend in that accursed schoolroom! Stirred into magnetic activity by the candlelight and the strong cups of tea, his deepest will set itself to overcome this menace. “I am god of my own mind,” he said to himself; “and when I’m not actually teaching history — or ‘Latin,’ as Jason would say — I can re-create, out of thin air, the essences of earth, grass, rain, wind, valleys, and hills! I’ve only to concentrate my mind on the living eidolons in my mind; and even if they put me into prison — and Blacksod School *is* a prison — I ought still to be able to cry at the end like my father, ‘Christ, I’ve had a happy life!’ ”

And as he continued to bandy jests with first one and then another, in his heart he thought, “Lenty Pond, the Gwent Lanes, the Lunt Meadows... there they remain, all night... all the long windy nights... there they remain; and I can see them, touch them, smell them, yes! and become them, whatever burdens Fate puts upon me!”

It was at this point that he found himself arrested by something Mattie had begun to say. She was speaking of some recent argument she had had with Darnley; and as she murmured the words, “Darnley and I,” Wolf was suddenly struck by the nature of the look she turned upon his friend. It was a glowing, possessive look, full of just that maternal sensuality which he himself hated to receive more than any other look he could think of! But

Darnley seemed to derive satisfaction rather than annoyance from this look of hers; for his eyes darkened to a colour like luminous indigo, as he responded to it.

"Ha!" thought Wolf. "So *that's* how it has worked out! His love for her spirit has been accepted on its own terms; and his inhibition with regard to her body has become a matter of maternal solicitude to her. Ay, what convoluted beings we all are!"

"Go on, my dear," he said cheerfully. "Let's have it! Let's hear everything about it."

Mattie met his eyes with an equivocal response. He knew she was aware of something hostile to her in his mood. There was a flickering half-second of actual contention between them as their grey eyes encountered. Then she said, turning to Mrs. Otter: "It was a long discussion we had... it would be silly to tell it all. I happened to say something about plants having souls inside them... no! trees it was... and Darnley said that the souls of trees and flowers and everything else weren't 'inside' at all, but on the surface... I'm putting it right, aren't I, Darnley?"

"I don't — —" protested the schoolmaster gravely. "I don't quite know what you mean by 'souls'; but if you mean what's most essential to them... colour... scent... expression... appearance... yes, it's certainly on the outside!"

"I don't understand, Darnley," threw in Mrs. Otter, with a face full of nervous concern, "how you can talk like that! We've been taught... haven't we...?" She broke off and looked appealingly at her eldest son. "What do you think about it, Jason?"

But Olwen, who had been keeping up a surreptitious dialogue with Jason during the whole of tea-time, raised her voice at this.

"*He* knows about it, because he's a tree himself... aren't you, Jason? And *I* know about it, because I'm a bird in a tree!"

Jason, who with flushed face had been encouraging her in her mischief — and Wolf fancied that both Mattie and Darnley had been the butts of their roguery — now became gravely sardonic.

"We ought to have Tilly-Valley here," he said, "to tell us what he's learnt from the Bishop of Salisbury about the soul!"

"I agree entirely with Darnley!" Wolf burst out with a violence that astonished himself. His annoyance at Mattie's maternal sensuality must have suddenly mingled with a sharp suspicion that Jason and Olwen had been making sport of him too!

"With Darnley?" murmured Mrs. Otter, still anxiously looking at her elder son to see if he had anything further to say.

"Wolf's not a bird *or* a tree, is he, Jason?" whispered Olwen, with teasing eyes.

"It's absurd," cried Wolf excitedly, while his upper-lip began to protrude and tremble so much that an observer might have been reminded of Miss Gault. "It's absurd to talk of souls being inside things! They're *always* on the outside! They're the glamour of things... the magic... the bloom... the breath. They're the *intention* of things!"

His irritation at this moment was not lessened by a furtive taunt of the demon within himself repeating Mr. Urquhart's biting phrase, "So you *have* a soul, then, Menelaus?"

"But, Wolf," protested Mattie, in an obstinate and sulky tone, "you're contradicting yourself! How can anything be intended and expressed if it isn't there... inside... already?"

Wolf bit his lip to restrain himself from an outburst of anger.

"It's all so confusing to most of us, Mattie dear," murmured Mrs. Otter. "We can only hope and pray that the Judge of all the earth will do right."

The incongruous piety of this expression seemed to act like the old "*Ite missa est*" to the company about that candle-lighted table. As Wolf rose to go, there swept over him a shuddering vision of what such encounters as this might prove to him in the future, when he had lost all his self-respect. As he said good-bye to Mrs. Otter over the child's head, and felt that hot little forehead pressed against the pit of his stomach, and those long, thin arms clasped passionately round his waist, he realized that to assassinate his self-respect in the manner he intended would be to break the luminous interior life-pool that nourished all his happiness with its fleeting reflections! To feel toward himself in a certain way... to recognize himself as a person incapable of doing this or that... such apparently was the "glassy essence" of that ecstasy that was his grand secret.

When at last the garden-gate had closed behind him and he had entered the darkness of Pond Lane, he found that in his mental exhaustion all manner of queer little objects, casually noted during his months in Dorset, were floating in upon him. The bell-handle of Mrs. Herbert's door, the white scar on the hand of that old waiter at the Lovelace, the stunted laburnum-branch in his back-yard — his mind had to make a definite effort to throw off these things.

"I've got a sort of under-life," he thought, "full of morbid hieroglyphics. Something must have died down there, and the blow-flies are laying their eggs in it."

Gathering up all the spiritual strength he possessed, he flung his mind outwards, far over those silent reaches of meadow-grass and fallow land. He imagined as vividly as he could all that was going on in that darkened margin of Blackmore. He followed the skulking of foxes under the hazels, the stirrings of hedgehogs in their hibernating-quiescence, the crouching of birds on leafless boughs, the burrowing of moles under their hillocks, the breathing of cattle in their barns.

He imagined all these things so intensely, one by one, that he began to feel that he shared those nocturnal movements — that he was no stranger among them, but himself a furtive, lonely earth-life among other earth-lives, drawing, as they did, some curative magnetism from the dark greenish-black hide of the great planetary body! And he thought how stoically all these living things — the patient trees most of all — endured those diseased portions of their identities, those morbid under-lives, where the blow-flies of dissolution were at work.

"I can do it!" he thought. "It isn't for ever." And in his necessity he laid hold of those two dark horns of non-existence, from the cold slippery touch of which all flesh shrinks back — the horn of the ages before he was born, the horn of the ages when he would have ceased to be. "I can plough on," he said to himself.

The clock in the mid-Victorian tower of the town-hall was just beginning to strike a quarter to seven when Wolf reached the Blacksod High Street. The words of an unknown farm-labourer he had met on the road repeated themselves in his brain as he turned up his collar against a merciless downpour. "Blowing up for rain, Mister!" and Wolf's mind turned these harmless words into a vast non-human menace, directed against him by some malignancy in the very system of things.

He stopped for a minute at the entrance to Preston Lane, to decide whether to go straight to Mrs. Herbert's and give his mother the cheque, or to let it wait till the following morning.

"If I were a bit more superstitious," he thought, "I'd curse Mukalog for this!"

He stood disconsolately watching the splashing of the water-drops in the puddles by the roadside. “They don’t *dance*!” he said to himself. “Reality’s always different from the way people put it.”

With an obscure instinct to postpone giving the cheque to his mother, he stared intently at those splashing drops, to see what they really *did* do under the flickering lamplight!

No, they didn’t “dance.” Each individual drop, as it fell, seemed to draw up the water of that dark puddle in a tiny pyramid; but there were so many of them that it was hard to focus the attention upon any single one of those minute waterspouts. When, however, he lifted his head, the volume of rain driving eastward along pavement and gutter took a continuity of form, like the identity of some desperate living thing, bent on pursuit or escape.

Against this cold, blind presence he now resolutely pushed on. “If there’s a light in mother’s room,” he said to himself, “I’ll go straight in and give it to her.”

True to the usual caprice of Chance, when it’s invoked as an oracle, there *was* a light, and yet there was *not* a light. It was clear to him, as he approached Mrs. Herbert’s door, that there was a glow in his mother’s room that came from the fire and not from any lamp or candle.

“I’ll have done something for *you*, old Truepenny,” he muttered, “if you care anything what becomes of her!”

He opened the little iron gate and moved stealthily to the door of the house. Before ringing, he peered as closely as he could into the fire-lit room.

“God!” he gasped, in a spasm of irrational fury, “if that brute isn’t with her now.” There was, indeed, no doubt about it. Mr. Manley was snugly ensconced by Mrs. Solent’s fireside, though all Wolf could detect of their two figures was the shoulders of the man, upright in a high-backed chair, and a fragment of his mother's profile as she bent over the fire.

"Oh, the brute! Oh, the brute!" he groaned, as he sneaked back, returning as stealthily as he had come. "If they'd had the lamp lit — —" he added weakly.

He crossed the road; and lurching forward against the torrential rain, he stopped when he reached the pigsty. A fantastic dread lest he should find the same fire-lit glow in Gerda's parlour — with Bob Weevil installed there, like a maggot in an apple — made him reluctant so much as to glance at his own house. Was Christie, too, sitting by *her* fire, acting the devoted daughter to Mr. Malakite?

Three fires and three women — and Mr. Wolf Solent leaning against the pigsty!

The rain now began to find his skin. A little trickle of ice-cold drops descended between his coat-collar and his neck.

As he clung with his hands to the wet railing, he could hear one of the animals rustling in the straw in the interior shed. Was it ill? Was it moving in its sleep? Or was it simply guzzling in there... in warm, dry darkness?

He pushed the outer gate open, hardly knowing what he did. So here he was, standing shivering inside that so-often-observed enclosure, from which the familiar stench emerged that had been the accompaniment of all these eventful months!

"Weevil's with her," he thought. "I know it as well as if I'd seen his Panurge nose! He's with her. She's going to give him supper... or perhaps they're roasting chestnuts! She said once they used to roast chestnuts together."

He fumbled about with his fingers for the latch of the inner door. How soaked with rain the woodwork was! A second pig began to stir now and emitted a feeble grunt. Then he gave up trying to find the latch; and pressing his two hands against the jambs of the door, he bowed down his head until his forehead rested upon the low wooden lintel. At this moment it was given to him to taste those secret dregs of misery, cold as ice and black as pitch, that lie dormant under the lips of every descendant of Adam.

Here he remained perfectly still, while it seemed to him that the wind was whistling a special little tune, composed for his benefit, through the dripping boards of the pigsty.

"Wishaloog!... wishaloog!" whistled the wind.... Then all of a sudden he burst out laughing. "A comic King Lear! That's what I am! There's nothing tragic about this, Wolf, my friend! What you've got to do is to defy omens and fight for your own hand."

He rose up erect, tightened his fingers round his stick, and straightened his shoulders.

"I've got Urquhart's cheque," he thought, "and by this time tomorrow—'Mr. Malakite at Weymouth.' " Once more, while he used these words, what he saw in his mind was the little blue veins under Christie's satiny skin — just above her knees.

It was then — and he had remarked it in himself before — that the constriction of lust endowed his spirit with a recklessness that was alien to his character. "Wishaloog! Wishaloog!" whistled the wind; but mounting up, out of the chill of the nether pit, something in his nature, some savage stirring of his animal will, mocked back now at this impish derision.

"Whi... Hoo! *thee own self!*" he cried aloud, mimicking the tone in which Gerda's father used this West Country retort. Without further delay he left the pigsty, crossed the road, and rushed into his house....

Not a sign of Bob Weevil. But oh, what a relief it was, a relief beyond anything he had expected, when he entered his own kitchen and found

Gerda, arrayed in a spotless print apron, laying the supper.

He could see how pleased the girl was at the obvious genuineness of the emotion with which he greeted her. And genuine indeed his feelings were; though not all of them would have caused her equal satisfaction had they been exposed.

He ran upstairs to change his clothes, bringing the drenched ones down with him a minute or two later to dry them by the stove. The warmth of the kitchen, the steam that came from his wet things, the rank earthy smell of boiling turnips, the affectionate scolding of this beautiful young being, betrayed him quickly enough into that peculiar intimacy where the safety of virtue becomes the voluptuousness of content. The beat of the rain on the roof enhanced this security; while everything outside his four walls seemed a sweet shiver of excluded danger.

"I've agreed to finish Urquhart's book," he said, "and he's paid me in advance. But the chances are that I'll have to lend this money to Mother. Anyhow, I'm not going to think about it tonight. I'll wrap it round Jason's idol for the present... then *you* won't want to meddle with it any more than I do!"

Saying this, he opened the dresser-drawer with a jerk and thrust Mr. Urquhart's cheque under the stomach of the prostrate god of rain.

Though he did all this with an air of careless decision, it was with several anxious side-glances that he scanned Gerda's face as he washed his hands in the little tin basin.

This process of washing his hands before a meal was one that he always prolonged with elaborate punctiliousness; and now, as he played with the iridescent bubbles and squeezed the yellow soap into a foaming lather, he could not help making a grimace into the little square mirror that Gerda had hung above the sink, as the thought crossed his mind that although he had sold half his soul that morning and was intending to sell the other half of it tomorrow night, he could still enjoy with childish satisfaction the pleasure of sitting down to supper, in his own kitchen, opposite his own girl!

As far as he could read her thoughts Gerda had decided to remain entirely non-committal over the matter of the two hundred, postponing, he suspected, any struggle about it until she realized more clearly which way the wind was going to blow. She gave him a lively description, as they sat down to their meal, of a visit she had had that morning from her mother and Lobbie. It transpired that Lob was to start his first term at the Grammar School when the holidays ended, and that Mrs. Torp, in complete ignorance of the ways of such places, was assuming that her son-in-law would be her son's constant and indulgent preceptor!

When their supper was finished Gerda leaned over and reached for an open book that lay on the edge of the dresser. Lighting a cigarette as frowningly and awkwardly as if it had been the first she had ever smoked, she pulled the lamp towards her. “I've got to an exciting part,” she said. And then, a second later, “I think ‘Theodoric the Icelander’ is the nicest book I've ever read!”

Her fair head, for she was a little short-sighted, sank down over the open volume; and Wolf, still seated opposite her on his kitchen-chair, was left to stare at the polished handles of the drawer that contained both Mukalog and the cheque.

His pleasant relapse into the comfort of virtue ebbed and vanished with the girl's absorption in her story.

Tomorrow... tomorrow... what *would* the upshot be? He sat bolt upright in his chair, holding a match-box in one hand and an unlit cigarette in the other. It was as if he were secretly praying for some unexpected external event, like a sudden uncharted reef, to break up the dark-swelling wave upon which he was being carried.

Soon he let both match-box and cigarette slip from his fingers, and, lifting his elbows upon the table, pressed his knuckles against his closed eyeballs. How they throbbed... those eyeballs... and what surprising shapes and colours those were, that appeared before his inner vision!

With a sort of sullen curiosity he watched those floating geometric shapes — green and purple and yellow and violet. "Each of these," he thought, "might be a world. Perhaps it *is*... and from the point of view of the Absolute just as important a world as this of ours!"

And then something completely different from geometric shapes appeared. Well enough he knew what *this* was... even before its lineaments had grown distinct.... The unhappy one of the Waterloo steps!

"Very well, then," he muttered under his breath, taking his hands from his face. "Very well, then, I shall see thee at Philippi!"

And as he folded his hands behind his head, looking across at Gerda and her Icelander, he set himself to curse the misery the human mind can go through because of this wretched necessity for action, for decision, for using what is called "the will." What did a person feel when the hard little crystal of his inmost life lost its integrity? What did food taste like, what did the warmth of fire mean to such a derelict? A Wolf who had gone back to *that book*... a Wolf who had seduced Christie... how could such a Wolf ever swing his stick, ever drink up "the sweet of the morning," ever feel the wind upon his face, with the old thrill?

Among the fragments of their meal his eye now fell upon a chicken-bone upon Gerda's plate, the last surviving relic of their meagre Christmas dinner. It was a "wishing-bone," from which Gerda, as they had pulled it between them, had won the right of "wishing"; and it lay there now, with the library-cover of “Theodoric the Icelander” just touching its forked and bare forlornness. But the sight of it sent Wolf’s mind upon a long, fantastic quest. He seemed compelled, by some hypnosis proceeding from the wishing-bone, to make a Domesday Survey of all the trivial and repulsive objects he had ever passed by. Wolf and the wishing-bone set out together, in fact, upon a pilgrimage through the limbo of the world’s rubbish-heaps.

Some of the objects were commonplace enough; others were fantastic. The scavenging-obsession of the wishing-bone allowed him to omit nothing that he could rake up out of a thousand obscure half-memories. The thumbnail-parings of a nameless old tramp sitting by a milestone on the Bristol road... the amber-coloured drop of rheum in the eye of a one-eyed door-keeper of a house of ill-fame in Soho... the torn-off corner of a butcher’s advertisement lying in a gutter outside St. Paul’s... the left arm of a china doll thrown on an ash-can under the west door of Ely Cathedral... the yellow excrement of a dog, shaped like a dolphin, adhering to the north wall of the Brighton Aquarium... the white spittle of a drunken cabman outside the station at Charing Cross... the hair-clippings from an unknown head, wrapped in a French comic paper and dropped in the public urinal at Eastbourne... such things, and others like them, all parts and parcels of what humanity *sets itself to forget*, did Wolf and the wishing-bone redeem from the limbo of obliterated memory and gather in a heap on the kitchen-table of Number Thirty-Seven Preston Lane!

Was it a sign that his “mythology” was already dying, that his mind became so easily servile to these rakings among the offscourings of the earth?

He struggled to shake off this curious morbidity; and in order to give Gerda a further chance of enjoying “Theodoric” in peace, he rose from the table now, and carrying their plates and dishes to the sink in the corner, he set himself to wash them up with a slow and concentrated nicety. This mechanical task, at which he was inordinately clumsy, acted as an opiate to his mind. He felt, as he proceeded to dry those various objects, as if, with the wet cloth he held, he were obliterating much more than ever the wishing-bone had called up!

Finally, before Gerda and he put out their lamp, he deliberately endeavoured to prolong this pleasant numbness by drinking several stiff glasses of gin. This gin had been their Christmas present from Mr. Torp; and most friendly did Wolf feel to his father-in-law, when under its beneficent influence he slipped into bed beside the already unconscious girl.

"It's the best of all drinks," he thought. "By God, I'll be economical with it! It's a good thing Bob Weevil doesn't like it."

His mind seemed preternaturally clear now, as he lay on his back listening to Gerda's soft breathing and to the intermittent wind-gusts that kept tossing into that darkened room a brackish odour from the far-off Sedgemoor marshes.

"It's the stream of life itself that is important," he thought, "not any particular event or emotion! Just to be thrillingly happy over a crowd of little half-remembered, half-forgotten sensations... that's the whole thing. And it has got in it something much more than that... something more spiritual than anyone knows. It has effects beyond the visible world. It needs an effort of will as great as what saints and artists use! Oh, if only I could find words for this... but I never shall, I never shall."

He stretched himself stiff and tense as he lay there, while like an aerial landscape, luminous and yet minutely distinct, his vision of things gathered, clarified, mounted up, as if out of a transparent sea.

"The stream of life is made of little things," he said to himself. "To forget the disgusting ones and fill yourself with the lovely ones... that's the secret. What a fool I was to try and make my soul into a round, hard crystal! It's a lake... *that's* what it is... with a stream of shadows drifting over it... like so many leaves!"

Instinctively he avoided any definite thought of Urquhart's cheque and of the morrow's supper. But they were both there. They were like a dull throbbing at the back of his closed eyes.

"What people call 'futility,' " so his thoughts ran on, "is just the failure of great emotions. But it's a good thing for them to fail. Let them fail! Only when they fail does the under-tide of life itself rise to the surface. Futility is the transparency of the lake... what makes the shadows fall and float... beautiful... like leaves!"

Before he knew that sleep was anywhere near him, he sank, just as he was, like a drifting log in his own leaf-strewn lake, into the region where the living are as the dead. But the suppressed intention at the back of his brain awoke him into full consciousness again, just before dawn.

There was by this time an indescribable chilliness in the room, different from the chilliness of the rain and the wind as they had been when he had gone to sleep. Lying with hunched shoulders and hooked knees close to Gerda's side, his arm flung across the girl's body, he felt through every nerve this new feeling in the air.

His human soul seemed to leave its body and pass out of that small room into the great air-spaces that suspended themselves above the West Country. The interior chilliness of the darkness as the delaying dawn drew him forth, had that within it which corresponded to the spring of the year; only, *this* was the spring of one winter's night! There was a greenish, wet-growing stir in that dawn's approach; and the whole night about him seemed to shudder and contract like the cramped shuddering of an unborn child.

Not a muscle did he move as he lay there, hunched and inert, his stiff fingers folded around Gerda's right breast like the fingers of an infant around the toy with which it has been soothed to sleep. But within his curved skeleton his mind was lucid with the lucidity of something starkly at bay.

"Mr. Malakite at Weymouth" and that piece of paper wrapped about Mukalog had become part of his very brain... part of the machinery of his brain... but his mind was grappling now with something more than machinery. More? Yes! There was more... somewhere... more... than just this dawn-chilled Space, through which, like a wingless, tail-less, beakless bird's head, with oceans for eyes, the earth he lived upon lurched, darted, oscillated, shivered, spun!

MR. MALAKITE AT WEYMOUTH

WOLF'S INMOST SOUL seemed torn up, like a piece of turf under a sharp ploughshare, as, driven by a power beyond his resistance, he put one foot in front of the other in his obstinate march to the Malakite house.

As he moved on past the shop-windows oblivious of everything but the drama within him, he tried to anticipate the result of what he was projecting. His "mythology" had always implied for him some sort of mystic participation in a deep occult struggle going on in the hidden reservoirs of Nature. Stripped of it, there would be nothing left but a stoical endurance — endurance of his own misery and a few attempts to soften the misery of others! He would be left with a soul that had the power of moving his arms and legs, the power of throwing itself into other people's tortured nerves — and that would be all! He would be able to deny himself this and that for the sake of these people, paying back what he owed, sharing the burden of the cruelty of the ultimate Power — but that would be all! The old Wolf, the old, obsessed medium for lovely, magical, invisible influences, would be gone for ever!

And even now, if he could only stiffen his will to leave Christie early that night, he might save what he was losing. Oh, what cruelty the Power behind life possessed, to transfix him upon such a dilemma! Oh, what cruelty it possessed! Well, he would defy it. That was the word. He would defy it. Whether he chose his "mythology" or whether he chose his satisfaction, this ultimate thing was something so inhuman, that defiance was the only retort! If he chose his "mythology" it would not be in submission to *this cause of all suffering*. It would be a league with invisible forces that resembled himself — compassionate forces, that were also defying this inhuman thing. Dante had said, *“E la sua voluntade è nostra pace*.” He would reverse this saying. The will of the power behind life was clearly that human nerves should be confronted by monstrous, hideous dilemmas. To the end of his days he would protest! He would be the champion of human nerves against this ultimate tormentor. If he kept his self-respect and left Christie in peace, he would use his “mythology” to defy this power. If he seduced Christie and lost his life-illusion, he would still defy this power....

His mechanical advance had brought him now to the turn into the narrower street. In three minutes he would be in Christie’s room! He took off his hat and looked up at the drifting rain-clouds. The gusty rain made it impossible for him to keep his eyes open; but with his eyelids tight shut he cursed the power behind life. “You Mukalog up there!” he muttered. “You scurvy Mukalog up there!”

It was not ten minutes past nine by the small clock upon Christie’s mantelpiece when she and Wolf returned to her sitting-room and closed the door, after washing up the supper-things in the little alcove between that room and the girl’s bedroom.

Wolf sank down in the chair by the fire which faced the window, and leisurely lit a cigarette; while Christie, seated upon a four-legged stool opposite him, a stool embroidered with pale early-Victorian pansies by the hands of her mother, leaned forward towards the bars, and with a thin outstretched bare arm prodded the coals into flame.

This done, she impetuously rose to her feet; and taking a “spill” from one of the blue vases that stood on each side of the clock, she also lit a cigarette. And then, resettling herself upon the stool, one lean arm encircling her knees and the other holding the cigarette, she turned her head round and surveyed the tumbled litter of books, some open and some shut, that covered the lavender-coloured sofa.

"No; I've tired of 'Tristram Shandy,' " she said. "In fact, I've got at present a reaction against all those old books which are so entirely *men's books* — full of masculine prejudices, masculine vices, masculine complacency! You know, Wolf, I think it's such a pity that the best old books should all be written by men. What I'd like to read would be an Elizabethan Jane Austen, a Jacobean Emily Brontë, an eighteenth-century George Eliot. It's so annoying to me that the best women writers all belong to the time when the custom had stopped of calling a spade a spade."

There was something so quaint to his mind in Christie's fragile identity being stirred by the urge of drastic realism, that he looked at her in amazement.

"They're not so reticent now, are they?" he said.

But it was difficult for him to give his full attention to this dialogue between them. Another dialogue, far more important, was going on in his own mind. With concentrated interest he had already noticed that she was wearing brown silk stockings under her thin brown skirt. The sight of her bare arms made him shiver at the thought of her slipping off those stockings! It seemed absurd that he dared not even kneel down and unbutton the straps of her little-girl black slippers! The thought, "She's never had a lover... no one has ever undressed her... she doesn't know what it is to be idolized from head to foot," ran like ravishing little drops of quicksilver through his tingling nerves. "Under that brown dress, under all she's got on, she's as slim and slippery as a bluebell-stalk pulled up by the root!"

"I wouldn't call them reticent today," he repeated aloud. But his mind raced back over the whole course of his life in Dorset as he looked at her now... so virginal... and so free from conscience!

Far more — oh, far more than Gerda, who seemed like a recognized, an *accepted* portion of his destiny — did this evasive little being seem to embody all his hovering, intangible dreams! It was hard to shake off a quivering cloud, beyond the cloud of cigarette-smoke, that dimmed his vision, as he looked at her. How he longed to snatch away that brown dress, wintry-withered as it was, that hid her from him!

“Not reticent, perhaps,” she was saying. “But it’s utterly different in these days, Wolf. They don’t do it for simple, mischievous pleasure. They do it for principle’s sake, for the sake of science, for the sake of a new fashion in art. It’s all premeditated and deliberate.”

He began to feel such an overpowering desire to seize upon her now, that the idea of losing his life-illusion seemed like tearing a mask from his face, a mask that hurt his flesh.

“How does your own writing go, Chris?” he asked in a forced, queer voice.

She reached over to the sofa and piled “Tristram Shandy” on the top of “Humphrey Clinker,” and the “Anatomy of Melancholy” on the top of “Tristram Shandy.” As she did this she smiled sideways at him, while the smoke from her cigarette rose up as if from a hidden crucible of incense pressed against her knees. He had noticed before, that she never said anything important to him except while making some physical movement to distract attention from her words!

Reaching over still further, in order to balance the “Urn-Burial” on the top of the “Anatomy,” “I’ve finished,” she murmured, “my seventh chapter.”

“Is it a real story, then?” he asked, wondering if she would yield to him without a struggle if he took her quickly by the wrists.

Her defensive gesture this time, as she responded to his question, was to flick off a small grey ash upon the cover of "Hydriotaphia." He had long ago observed with an amused interest what a dislike to the use of ash-trays she had.

"I hope it's real!" she murmured, in her most straw-like voice.

"The best thing would be," he thought to himself, "just to take hold of her by her hands and lift her up!" Aloud he said. "What's its title, if you don't mind my asking that?"

"Guess, Wolf!" she said, without a smile. Indeed, she had never looked graver or more concerned than she looked then. "I thought of it when I was out marketing in High Street the other day."

"The Grey Feather?" he flung out, as he rose with a bound from his chair and groped on the floor. He had caught sight of the feather lying there at his feet. It must have fluttered out when she moved the book. As he picked it up, his contact with Christie's floor made him think of Gerda's floor... which had so different a carpet!

There was a moment, as he replaced the feather, when a featherweight decided it. What he fancied made him pause was a sudden memory of the confiding repose of Gerda's expression as she bent so closely over "Theodoric the Icelander"; but when he recalled all this later, the conclusion he came to was that the touch of the feather itself had restrained him!

" 'The Grey Feather'... is your title," he repeated, while Christie managed with fair success to conceal her face in a dense cloud of smoke.

"No," she said, "I've called it 'Slate.' "

The astonishment with which he received this piece of news was quite genuine.

"Because of the view from your window?" he enquired.

"No. Because of — —"

But the creaking of his wicker-chair, as he resumed his seat with a helpless groan, drowned her faint words.

“I didn’t hear, Chris,” he said. But he knew by the way she raised her chin that nothing would induce her to repeat what she had just uttered.

“What I’m trying to do, Wolf,” she went on, in a tone that seemed to him to have in it something like a challenge, “is to express a point of view entirely feminine!”

“It will be the view of a feminine Elemental, then,” he said to himself. “Does she think that she’s like the rest of them? God! It’ll be the view of a sylph in the Lunt mists, or of Jason’s Nymph in Lenty Pond!”

“All the clever ones nowadays just copy men,” she remarked, with the same nuance of defiance, holding her chin high and sitting very straight upon her stool. “And none of the men themselves, or hardly any of them, *enjoy* writing outrageous things. They do it from artistic duty... and that’s why it’s all so different from reality, don’t you think so? And so dull, as well as so disgusting! Just imagine what it would be like, Wolf, to have a Jane Austen ready to write of the most scandalous things! She’d write really mischievously, with zest and satisfaction, not like a solemn scientific journal.”

“Well, I’m sure I wish you luck with your ‘Slate,’ Chris! Don’t sponge out anything, though, I beg you. I mean, don’t tear anything up, however much you revise!”

Even while he was uttering this harmless encouragement, some devilish analytical self-consciousness in him was noting the fact that he didn’t like the thought of Christie’s appreciation of any sort of Rabelaisianism. “Christ! What a selfish, lecherous demon I am!” he said to himself. “I suppose I want her response to *my love-making* to be her one and only awareness of the amorous element in life!”

He became at this moment intensely anxious to clear up certain things in his own mind.

"What feather *is* that, Christie, that you keep in your 'Urn-Burial'?"

She looked at him very straight now, with the eager, level stare of an interested child.

"A heron's," she answered. And then, as if for the mere pleasure of repeating the word: "A heron's, Wolf. I found it just exactly a year ago... two months before I first saw you. I was walking by myself in those Lunt meadows that you see from the lower road to King's Barton. You know where I mean? I was walking by myself along the river-bank."

Wolf continued to listen intently to every word, as the girl went on with her story; but even as he listened, his mind was still struggling with the shock of finding himself so shamefully possessive as to dislike the idea of her encountering any sort of amorousness where it was disassociated from himself. "I really am scandalous," he thought. "I'd like her to be virginal in mind, body, soul, spirit, intellect, nerves, humour!"

His thoughts, before she had finished her story, had wandered a second time from what she was saying. "Is this interest of hers in these shameless books inherited from the old man?" he thought. "Is it a vice in her, like my own?" And his mind recalled the trembling, drunken ecstasy with which he had read that appalling book in the library-window.

"And so I picked up the feather out of the mud and brought it home," she concluded; "but whether the heron caught another minnow, or whether the hawk frightened it away for the rest of the day, I shall never know."

"I wish you'd let me see a page... just a single page of 'Slate,' " he said presently. "Somehow I cannot imagine the manuscript of a real story of yours. I cannot see you writing it, Chris, nor how you would hold your pen."

The colour went to Christie's cheeks. "Oh, Wolf," she cried, "don't... don't ever ask me to let you see what I write! I love to tell you about it; but I think I'd die if you ever saw it."

"Oh, all right... all right, sweetheart," he said soothingly. "You talk as if I asked to see your shift! By the way, Chris, I suppose you don't realize that I never *have* seen that room in there where you spend your nights?"

Christie smiled with intense amusement at this. She rose lightly, without a trace of embarrassment, took a candle from the mantelpiece, threw her cigarette into the fire, and opened the door into the alcove. A second door on the further side of this recess she opened with the same docile unconcern, standing aside to let him enter, while the flame of her candle flickered in the draught.

Her apparent complete freedom from any self-consciousness as she did all this had a complicated effect upon Wolf's mood. It made it possible for him to sit down upon her bed, and to stare in silence at the darkness between the white curtains of her window. It made it possible for him to ponder as to what her feelings and thoughts were, night by night, left to herself in this oblong little room. It made it possible for him to ask her whether she used the green lamp he saw standing on the chest of drawers on one side of the mirror, or contented herself with a couple of candles which, in old-fashioned Dresden candlesticks, stood on a little table by the bed's head. But it also seemed to make any attempt at love-making curiously difficult!

Christie slid down into a chair between the little table and the window; and as she did so she explained to him that she used the lamp till she was actually in bed, and then lit the candles to read by.

"I've often wondered," she said to him, "whether you can see my light as you come home from King's Barton."

"And I've often wondered," he answered, "which of the lights I've seen from the top of Babylon Hill was yours."

"We neither of us know," she said sadly.

"Neither of us," he echoed.

The flame of the candle she had picked up from the parlour-mantelpiece was now blowing sideways, and the grease guttering down. "I'll light the lamp and then you'll see how it looks," she said eagerly. "It's not an ordinary green. It's a peculiar kind of green. I wish we did know whether it could be seen from Babylon Hill!"

Wolf turned half-round on her bed and let his shoulders rest against the woodwork above the pillow. There he watched her as she stood with her back to him at the chest of drawers, busied with the lamp. As the green light slowly awakened into being, there came over him an overpowering sense of this fleeting moment. Christie's small head, dark and dainty in that emerald-coloured glow, the shadowy nape of her little neck, the dusky fall of her straight sepia-brown dress, hovered before him at the end of that white bed, like things seen in a magic crystal. He dared not breathe lest he should break the spell! It may have been that unusual greenish light, glimpsed across the old-fashioned counterpane stretched before him like an expanse of shining water, or it may have been a hovering emanation from some old forgotten dream, unfolding, like an invisible nocturnal flower, from the girl's pillow. He could not explain it. But whatever it was, the sight of her there, bent down over that lamp's wick, enthralled him with a feeling he had never anticipated, with a sense of the possibilities of *new* feelings beyond anything he had known! When his normal consciousness came back to him, it came back with a heavy sigh; and with it came the thought, like the galloping of a black horse against the horizon, that when this girl was dead and he was dead, *that* was the absolute end! Dreams of anything but of such an end were fancies — pitiful human fancies! Moments as perfect as this *required* death as their inevitable counterpoise.

With a furtive movement of his shoulders he suddenly found himself meeting the girl’s steady gaze, as her face looked out at him from the little square looking-glass. With her hand still regulating the newly-lit wick of the green lamp, she was staring directly at him out of this looking-glass, staring with a fixed, calm, dreamy stare, like that of one whose mind is full of the end of some exciting book, just laid down.

“Take down your hair, Christie,” he said in a low voice, as he met this strange gaze. “I’ve never seen you with your hair down.”

She gave him the most whimsical smile at this; but it flickered away as quickly as it came, and a frown appeared between her arched eyebrows.

“I don’t mind,” she murmured, with a sigh, “if you really want me to. But what’s the use of it, Wolf? My hair’s not pretty. It’ll probably spoil your illusion of me.”

But Wolf’s heart had begun to beat now with the old unconquerable beating, the beat of the rise and fall of the sea, drawing close to its destined shore. “Take it down, Christie. I must see you with it down!”

Calmly and quietly, having given the shiny little knob of the lamp its final adjustment, she lifted her thin bare arms to her head and began to take out her hairpins. Her movements as she did this had the obedient docility, humble and submissive, of an Arabian slave.

Wolf’s position, as he sat on the edge of the bed, with his back against the woodwork, had grown extremely uncomfortable. Nothing would have induced him to rest his dirty boots upon that glimmering counterpane; but his body was twisted askew in consequence of this self-denial, and the woodwork hurt his head. This physical discomfort had the effect of destroying what remained of that moment of vision, and of once more rousing in his nerves a spasm of the old tyrannous lust.

From that little oval head by the green lamp the waves of dusky hair slipped down now to the girl's slim waist.

"Oh, Chris, it's beautiful! You look perfectly beautiful!" he cried hoarsely, sitting up straight on the edge of the bed and stretching out one of his hands towards her with a fumbling movement. "Come here, Chris, and let me see you closer!"

Moving calmly, and with perfect self-possession, she came towards him till only a yard of floor divided them. Then she stopped, fixing him with the same dreamy stare as if she had been walking in her sleep.

He got up upon his feet now; and between the light of the candle in the silver candlestick, which she had put down upon the little table at the bed's head, and the light of the green lamp upon the chest of drawers, they stood looking at each other, like two ensorcerized automatons under the power of an invisible magician.

She had pulled the green lamp, after lighting it, to the edge of the chest of drawers, so that its globe was now reflected in the looking-glass, a reflection that seemed to push backwards in some mysterious way everything else reflected there. The whole contents, indeed, of the illuminated mirror seemed to fall into a long, dwindling perspective, like the outlet from a shadowy cave, a tunnel-like outlet, full of mosses and ferns and tree-roots, which were all silhouetted against the round little circle of empty sky at the end.

Contrary to his own will, which would fain have hypnotized her to approach him, he found himself glancing aside from Christie's steady look, very much as a wild animal, hesitating whether to leap or not, might turn aside from the conscious expectancy of its prey.

This avoidance of her eyes gave him a moment's respite, during which his glance plunged into the receding depths of that looking-glass, depths lit up by the lamp as if by the swollen green bud of a luminous water-lily.

Round that green globe little phosphorescent rays flickered and darted. "If I meet her eyes again," he thought, "she will come to me. She will let me undress her."

A strange fear came upon him; and he felt as if he couldn't take his eyes away from the looking-glass. Those darting radiations became like the transparent moons, surrounded by dim haloes, that move along at the bottom of ponds under the sticky feet of skimming water-flies. In the turmoil of his agitation, with the sense upon him that this was the crisis towards which his life had been moving for weeks and months, that mirror seemed no longer to reflect Christie's bedroom. It seemed to him to be reflecting the mysterious depths of Lenty Pond!

His mind felt as if it were being torn asunder, so terrible was the swaying of his tight-rope of indecision! On the one hand he knew that in a moment he must draw down upon the bed this hushed, submissive figure, standing thus patient and docile before him. On the other hand, a mounting fear — a fear that had unspeakable awe in it, that had a supernatural shudder in it — held him back. Beat by beat of his heart it held him back. It tugged at him like a chain fixed to a post.

"Slip off that sad-looking dress, I beg you, Chris! Let me see you all in white!"

Had he whispered those words aloud? Had he only *thought* them?

The form he loved best of all was here by his side... pliant... soft... submissive. This bed was *her* bed. They two were alone, without the faintest risk of interruption. Long ago had the last train from Weymouth come in!

It was Christie herself who made the next move. Naturally and easily she slid down by his side on the edge of the bed... and then... what was this? Had those thin bare arms been raised to her shoulders to untie the fastenings of her dress?

But still he was staring, obstinately, almost rudely — staring past her drooping profile into that devilish mirror!

The thought hit him with a kind of mockery how he had played with that lovely Shakespearean phrase about a white peeled willow-wand on his journey down to Dorset. Well, he was in a world of whiteness now. Phantasmal was the glimmer of her white counterpane... phantasmal the whiteness of her profile against the silky fall of loosened hair. There were white reflections in that mirror too! It was as if a supernatural musician had suddenly begun playing a "White Mass"!

"Slip off that sad-looking dress, Chris!" Had he really uttered those words aloud? Or had it been no more than his heart speaking to his heart? Was one of her fragile shoulders free now of that dress... and become white, as everything else was white, at that fatal moment?

"You're looking at my mirror, Wolf?" Ah! She was speaking to him at last! But why did not the sound of her voice relax the tension? "It's old, that looking-glass. It belonged to my mother."

His eyes seemed to be dimmed now by a film of gauzy mist, which, as it floated before him, made everything vague and fluctuating. And then — without a second's warning — there appeared, at the end of the reflected perspective in that mirror on the chest of drawers, the lamentable countenance of the man on the Waterloo steps!

The pitiful face looked straight into his face, and it was in vain that he struggled to turn away from it.

All the sorrows in the world seemed incarnated in that face, all the oppressions that are done under the sun, all the outrages, all the wrongs! They seemed to cry shame upon him, these things; as if the indecision that tore at his vitals were a portion of whatever it was that caused such suffering. He instinctively lifted his hands to his eyes and pressed his knuckles against his eyeballs. “Chris!” he cried hoarsely... “Little Chris! my little Chris!”... just as if her form were being carried down some receding distance like a lost Eurydice.

She moved up closely to his side then, and touched his clenched hands with her own, not trying to pull them away from his eyes, but just laying her own fingers over them. “What is it, Wolf?” she whispered with vibrating alarm. “What is it?”

He reeled awkwardly to one side, and, snatching his hands away from her, sank down against her pillow. For a second or two the struggle within him gave him a sensation as if the very core of his consciousness — that “hard little crystal” within the nucleus of his soul — were breaking into two halves! Then he felt as if his whole being were flowing away in water, whirling away, like a mist of rain, out upon the night, over the roofs, over the darkened hills! There came a moment’s sinking into nothingness, into a grey gulf of non-existence; and then it was as if a will within him that was beyond thought, gathered itself together in that frozen chaos and rose upwards — rose upwards like a shining-scaled fish, electric, vibrant, taut, and leapt into the greenish-coloured vapour that filled the room!

The part of his consciousness that remained still clouded seemed quivering with a vision of the girl with her hands raised to her shoulders in the act of slipping off her dusky dress; but as his full awareness returned to him he saw that she had left his side and was standing by the green lamp, her eyes fixed reproachfully upon him out of the foreground of that mirror of her mother's — of that woman's who believed in spirits — and her fingers occupied in fastening up her hair.

Automatically, and with a hand that shook, like a man's who has seen a ghost, he took out his packet of cigarettes and lit a match.

His cigarette alight, he got up from the bed; and walking with shaky knees across the room — he felt far more dizzy in the head than under the power of Mr. Urquhart's Malmsey! — he offered his packet to her. But Christie, with eyes whose pupils were so large that they completely dominated her face, refused his offer with a wordless shake of her head.

The girl's hands seemed to him to be shaking too, as she thrust in the last hairpins and pressed her two palms against the sides of her small head.

"Come," she said, "I'll put out the lamp now, and we'll go back to the sitting-room."

When they were back by the fire, they both instinctively drew their chairs close up to the bars and held out their arms towards the warmth. Long-drawn shivers kept running through Wolf's body, as if he had been drenched in floods of ice-cold rain; and he felt certain that the slender form by his side was experiencing an identical sensation.

At the moment of seating herself there — it was in a chair this time, and not upon her four-legged stool — she had given Wolf a look that filled him with self-reproach. "I have hurt her feelings," he said to himself, "in the one unpardonable way."

Listlessly taking up the silver-knobbed poker from the side of the fender, he broke a great smouldering lump of coal into blazing flame.

"Did I," he said to himself, "actually beg her to undress, and then, as soon as she began to do it, act like a madman?"

"I can't have done that," he repeated. "I can't have done that to my little Chris."

"*The rain seems to have cleared off, doesn't it?*"

As he made this remark, he felt as if not he at all, but some sardonic Lord Carfax, were making it, in cold-blooded mockery!

"I hadn't noticed it," she answered faintly; and then, turning her head towards the window, "Yes," she said, "it seems to have cleared up."

"I must be," thought Wolf, "the most heartless, self-centred brute in Dorsetshire. Mr. Manley must be a considerate man of honour compared with me."

"The wind's still blowing," he said aloud. "Wind without rain," he said, "is a different thing altogether from wind *with* rain. Don't you think so, Chris?"

"Very different," murmured the girl, almost inaudibly.

"If I'd made love to her, in there, on her bed," he thought, "would it have meant *everything*? And if it *had*... would we have been miserable like this, or happy?" He turned his chair round and reached over to the sofa, picking up the volume of Sir Thomas Browne.

"Let me read to you a little, Chris dear," he said gently.

"As you like, Wolf," came the faint response, as she propped her chin on the palms of her two hands and stared into the fire.

He turned the pages of the book, sadly and slowly, carefully moving the grey heron's-feather to the middle of the "Religio," where it would not be disturbed.

When he came to one of those majestic, far-echoing passages — passages that had always struck him as superior, after their fashion, to anything else in literature, except certain single lines in Milton — he set himself to intone the familiar cadences in a low, monotonous singsong.

He dared not give more than a furtive glance now and then at the delicate profile beside him; but his impression was — whether a true or a false one he could not be sure — that Christie was not unaffected by those plangent, cosmogonic litanies.

As for himself, as he read on, it seemed to him that the bitterness of their fate did soften a little. These human contrarities, were they not, after all, so much sandalwood, so much cinnamon, burned in the bonfires of chance, but liberating a sweet, strange smoke, purged of the worst misery of despair? "But the iniquity of oblivion," he read, "blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana, he is almost lost that built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal durations, and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon. Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time?... The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live. The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox?... In vain do individuals hope for immortality, or any patent from oblivion, in preservations below the moon; men have been deceived even in their flatteries above the sun, and studied conceits to perpetuate their names in heaven. The various cosmography of that part hath already varied the names of contrived constellations; Nimrod is lost in Orion, and Osyris in the Dog-star."

As he murmured these rhythmical dirges with his lips and got a kind of comfort from them and a doubtful hope that Christie did too, his own mind — like hers no doubt — went circling the bruised ground of their trouble, of this wretched dilemma of his, like a dragon-fly hovering over a stagnant pool.

"I must have," he kept thinking, "the most selfish and heartless soul in Dorsetshire. Mr. Manley of Willum's Mill must be far more aware of other people's feelings than I am! Oh, God, what would Carfax say *now*? He'd say, 'So this is your delicacy — this is your precious consideration — to hurt a girl's feelings by your bloody equivocations far worse than by all the ravishings in the world!' " As little by little the opiate of Sir Thomas's rhythms soothed his remorse, he shook away the thought of Carfax. But Jason's "Lord in London" had no sooner vanished than his father's skull took up the tale. "Your metaphysical virtue, my most moral son, has caused more unhappiness this night to this Love of yours than all my sensuality ever caused to any woman! And what's all the fuss about? Nature can right herself. Nature can justify herself. It's these withdrawings and shirkings that do the harm!"

As he went on intoning the sonorous sentences with half his attention, Wolf seemed to see himself, under those imaginary strictures, reduced to the meanness of a cowardly hypocrite. His mother's hard, gallant voice joined in the chorus. "I have only one word for you, Wolf," he heard her say, "and that is contempt!"

But underneath all these fanciful upbraidings, underneath the real comfort of his chanting of "Hydriotaphia," there steadily went on gathering itself together, in the subsoil of Wolf's being, a certain obstinate recovery of his secret soul.

"It was my snatching at you like that," he whispered to Christie, in an unspoken dialogue, "that was the wicked thing! I should have made you far more unhappy if I hadn't seen that face. That face saved us both, and Gerda too!"

What kept hitting him to the heart as he glanced sideways at Christie's profile was its innocence. "She doesn't look like a grown woman whose deepest self-respect has been outraged," he said to himself. "She looks like a proud little girl whose hidden fairy-tale has been violated by some heavy-footed elder."

Wolf was honest enough with himself, in the midst of all these criss-cross communings, to recognize that there was, somewhere within him, a furtive upwelling of profound gratitude to the gods. His life-illusion *had* been given back to him! He was still the same Wolf Solent who had seen that face on the steps, who had seen that animal feeding in the paddock at Basingstoke, who had heard the milk-cans clattering on the platform at Sandbourne Port. He would not have to return to Preston Lane, to take up his burden, with his soul a shapeless lump of whale's blubber! He was still himself. He was still the old Wolf, whose philosophy — such as it was — kept its hand on the rudder.

"O Christie, O Christie!" he cried to her in his heart, "I couldn't have been any good to you, I couldn't have been myself with you any more, if that face in your glass hadn't stopped me! It would have changed everything, Chris! It would have ruined everything."

The inner voice of self-dialogue died down, as the outer voice of his monotonous intoning sank into silence; and the only sound in the room was the ticking of the clock and the faint, weird whisper of the wind in the chimney.

"Christie," he said aloud; and so deep had been the silence, and so drowned had they both been in their separate thoughts, that the syllables of her name seemed to fall into an invisible stretch of water.

She lifted her head from her hands and sat up straight, fixing her gaze upon him in the old, steady, unfaltering manner.

"Yes, Wolf?" she murmured.

"I want to tell you something, Christie."

As he spoke he couldn’t help recalling the advice he had so often given to Darnley. He had told Darnley to explain everything to Mattie. Ah, it was easier to tell a person to explain everything than to do it oneself!

“I was reckless just now, Chris. I just snatched at the chance! It seemed so wonderful our being alone. But do you know what stopped me? Don’t look like that, my precious! You’ll understand when I tell you.”

“What, Wolf?” she whispered.

“The day I left London from Waterloo Station, I saw a tramp on the steps there.” As he uttered these simple words he experienced a most curious sensation. It was as if he were smashing with his clenched hand one of those glass coverings which on certain express-trains preserve from casual contact the electric bell that has the power of stopping the train. “It was a man,” Wolf went on; “and the look on his face was terrible in its misery. It must have been a look of that kind on the face of someone — though *his* sufferers were children, weren’t they? — that made Ivan Karamazov ‘return the ticket.’ But all this time down here — *that* was March the third — ten months of my life, I have remembered that look. It has become to me like a sort of conscience, a sort of test for everything I — —” He stopped abruptly; for a spasm of ice-cold integrity in his mind whispered suddenly, “Don’t be dramatic now!”

“A test for everything you — —” Christie repeated, showing more spirit in her expression than he had seen there since they returned to her sitting-room.

“Well, a test for tonight, anyway!” he added, with the flicker of a smile.

She pondered for a minute with puckered forehead.

“Enough to make me do up my hair again!” she said, while little wrinkles of amusement began to appear at the corners of her eyes.

He longed to ask her whether she had actually heard him beg her to take off her dress. He felt completely confused about that whole scene in her bedroom — confused as to what he had said and what he had only wished to say. Most of all he felt bewildered as to what *her* feelings had been between that green lamp and that glimmering counterpane! Had she really lifted those cold bare arms, that he looked at now, so calmly, to unfasten that old-fashioned gown?

He decided, as he glanced at her shoulders at this moment, that it *would* have been those particular fastenings she would have to unloose to get off the brown dress.

"I wonder whether our time together tonight," he said bitterly, "will have helped to make your writing more what you want it to be and less of the sort that 'copies men'?"

Christie gave a faint toss of her head and a faint tilt of her arched eyebrows. She got up from her seat and shook out her wide brown skirt with both hands. The combination of these gestures filled Wolf with discomfort; for it was as if he had said to her something so brutal that she had to shake it from her petticoats, like burdock-seed or cuckoo-spit!

"I really was serious, Wolf," she said gravely, "when I told you just now that I'd almost sooner be dead than read to you anything I've written. I'm not even sure" — here she moved to the window and laid her hand on the sash of the closed pane— "that I shan't have to change its title now."

"I'll forget," said Wolf grimly. "It's the one thing I'm good at. I don't know now whether it was 'Slate' or 'Slates'!"

She turned away and lowered the top sash of the window, letting in a great gust of damp night-air.

The flame of the two candles on the chimneypiece blew wildly to the left; and the third one, in the flat silver candlestick, which she had brought back from the bedroom and had put down on her tea-table, began to gutter so extremely that a solid buttress of white grease formed itself against its side. Many loose pieces of paper were swept off their resting-places and were blown across the floor.

“I should think you’d aired your room enough already,” remarked Wolf, pressing his knuckles against the volume of Sir Thomas so that it should not flutter as some of the books were doing.

“It smells of peat-bogs!” cried Christie excitedly, holding her head out of the window.

“It must be a south wind,” he muttered, rising to his feet and moving one of the flickering candles so as to adjust its guttering. “It must be blowing across from High Stoy; so it can’t be peat you smell. I expect it’s Lunt mud,” he added morosely.

“Whatever it is, it smells delicious to me,” she answered. “I wish we were both on the top of Melbury Bub!”

“I wish we were both at the bottom of Lenty Pond!” cried Wolf fiercely.

She turned at that, startled by his tone, and closed the window with a jerk.

“What is it, Wolf? Why did you say that? I should think I’m the one to say that, not you! Everything that’s happened this evening has been exactly as you wanted it to happen, hasn’t it? Why aren’t you satisfied, then?”

The indignation in her tone was in a way a relief to him. “Let’s have the worst,” he thought. “Better in the open, while I’m here, than after I’m gone.”

“Christie,” he began, “I *have*, I know, thought only of myself... and yet I *do* love... you know I *do* love you!”

She looked at him scornfully.

"What you always do, Wolf, is to get out of things by accusing yourself... but if you really *felt* what other people feel, you would — —" She broke off. "Oh, I don't know what you'd do! But at least you wouldn't be having it both ways."

Almost automatically, in spite of his remorse, something seemed to shut up within him like the shutting of a door that closes inwards.

"You're unfair — —" he murmured.

Her eyes flashed. "Everything that happens," she cried passionately, "is only something to be fixed up in your own mind. Once you've got it arranged *there*, the whole thing's settled... all is well. What you never seem to realize, for all your talk about 'good' and 'evil,' is that events are something outside any one person's mind. *Nothing's finished...* until you take in the feelings of everyone concerned! And what's more, Wolf," she went on, "not only do you refuse *really* to understand other people; but I sometimes think there's something in you yourself you're never even aware of, with all your self-accusations. It's this blindness to what you're really doing that *lets you off*, not your gestures, not even your sideway flashes of compassion."

A certain direct and childish humility in Wolf's nature came to the surface now under this attack.

"I expect all that you say is true, Christie dear, and that you are 'letting me off' yourself, in spite of what you say, lightly enough, if all were known. I'm a strange one, I suppose, and there it is!" He smiled ruefully. "But we're a fair pair when it comes to that, aren't we, my dear?" he added. "And all the same, if I hadn't seen that face — —"

All the fire of her indignant arraignment seemed to die out at these words; and as her frail figure sank down on the rose-embroidered sofa, it seemed to be entirely divested of any spirit.

“If that man’s face,” she sighed wearily, “hadn’t appeared to you I should have known tonight — —”

He moved a step towards her.

“What’s that, Christie?”

She leaned forward and her eyes narrowed between her eyelids in an expression he had never seen on her face before. Then she continued, with a peculiar solemnity, almost like a young neophyte repeating a fatal ritual, “I should have known... tonight... what... now... I... shall... never... know!”

Staring at that little oval face, with that strange expression of finality upon it, he muttered huskily: “Christie, Christie, I love you. I love you.” His voice had a groaning intensity, like that of a branch creaking in a storm. “I have been thinking only of myself. But I love you, Christie! I love you more than anyone in the world!”

She looked steadily into his face; and thus they waited, listening as before to the weird wailing sound that the wind was still making in the chimney.

This whistling of the wind brought suddenly to his mind that night at the pigsty when he had gathered together his deepest powers of resistance. He burst out with his favourite quotation from King Lear: “The goujeres shall devour them, flesh and fell, ere they shall make us weep! We’ll see ’em starve first!”

He caught her hands and drew her up to her feet with a flashing look that was almost exultant: “He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven and fire us hence like foxes!”

When he released her, a most whimsical and penetrating smile flickered over her face.

“I believe that something has happened tonight, or has not happened, that has taken some great weight off your mind!” she said. “Is that it? You look relieved and relaxed... different altogether from when we had supper.”... As she spoke she glanced at the clock, and his own eyes followed. Together they realized that it was a quarter to twelve.

“Oh, what will Gerda do?” he cried. “Christ! she’ll be so vexed!” Blankly and irritably he looked at Christie; and in that expression of confused dismay there was — and he knew well enough there was — a faint tinge of reproach. But the girl was apparently too tired to notice this.

He was unable to catch the faintest irony upon her anxious, sympathetic face, as she let him out by the little side-door into the street. It did occur to him, however, as he strode rapidly down the echoing High Street, to wonder a little uneasily what kind of expression her face would wear when, alone in her bedroom, she looked at herself in her mirror. It was not, all the same, till he was opposite Mrs. Herbert’s darkened house that the full poignancy of one of her remarks hit him with its barbed arrow-head. “I wonder if that *will* be her destiny,” he thought.

“She was perfectly right about my selfishness, though. What a brute I am! Oh, my true-love Christie! What I do make you put up with in one way and another!”

He stopped when he reached the pigsty; for there was the light in Gerda’s bedroom!

How different this home-coming was from all that he had expected! Well, that was the way things worked out! Instead of either of the great clear horns of Fate’s dilemma, a sort of blurred and woolly forehead of the wild goat Chance!

He had managed to keep his life-illusion. His precious “mythology” could live still. But at what expense?

“If you hadn’t seen that face, I should have known tonight what now I shall never know!” O fool... fool... fool!

He crossed the road with dragging steps and opened the little iron gate as quietly as he could.

“I have thought only of myself,” he muttered, as he shut the gate behind him; “and yet I love you, Christie. I love you! I love you!”

“SLATE”

All through January and February Wolf lived out his life with obstinate, stoical acceptance. He led his pupils at the Grammar School patiently and thoroughly through the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV.

His interviews with Christie had grown gentler and tenderer, though in some ways sadder, since that night of “Mr. Malakite at Weymouth”; and whatever deception of Gerda they still implied, Gerda herself gave no sign of suspicion with regard to them. His mother’s new tea-shop, furnished with money borrowed at reasonable interest from Mr. Manley, had already proved itself a most promising venture; and Mrs. Solent’s spirits, as the weeks passed by, were steadily rising. Wolf had worked at top-speed during those two months at Mr. Urquhart’s book, writing every day between tea and their late supper at the little card-table by their parlour-fire, while Gerda read a series of romantic tales.

Almost to his own surprise — and certainly to Mr. Urquhart’s — the “History of Dorset” showed signs of drawing to its close. Writing day after day from seven o’clock to ten o’clock, Wolf had come to hit upon a style of chronicling shameful events and disconcerting episodes that cost him less and less effort, as the weeks advanced. What really gave him impetus was a trick he discovered of diffusing his own resentment against the Power behind the universe into his commentaries upon these human aberrations unearthed by his employer! The more disgust he felt for his task, the more saturnine his style became and the faster he wrote! Some of his sentences, when he revised them in cold blood, struck him as possessing quite a Swift-like malignity. He astonished himself by certain misanthropic outbursts. His habitual optimism seemed to fall away at such times, and a ferocious contempt for both men and women lay revealed, like a sullen, evil-looking, drained-out pond!

It was a surprise to him to find that this business of writing "immoral history" lent itself as well as it did to his natural method of expression. Each time he carried his new quota of pages up to King's Barton Manor, Mr. Urquhart seemed more delighted than the time before. "Stick to the facts... yellow Menelaus... stick to the facts... and we'll show 'em for all time... eh, me boy?... what our 'wold Darset' is made of!"

As February drew to an end, it became more and more probable that the anniversary of his reappearance in his native land — the third day of March — would be, as he wished to make it, the date of the book's completion.

As to Mr. Urquhart's cheque for two hundred pounds, it still remained where Wolf had first placed it — under the stomach of Mukalog at the bottom of that unused dresser-drawer in Gerda's kitchen.

Several events of importance occurred during those two months of exhausting work. One of these was the acceptance, under Lord Carfax's patronage, of a small volume of Jason's poetry by a well-known publishing-house. Not only were these poems accepted, but Jason received — so highly were they praised by the inner circles of London taste — the sum of fifty pounds as an advance royalty, an event which, when it occurred, a few weeks after the book was taken, seemed to impress the author himself a great deal more deeply than the many tactful letters that reached Pond Cottage from "that lord of yours in London."

Even more pleasing to Wolf than the success of Mr. Valley's suggestion about Jason's poetry was the upshot of his own advice to Darnley about his relations with Mattie. These two were definitely going to be married on the first Saturday in March, a day that happened to occur just one day after the anniversary of his own appearance on the scene. T. E. Valley had already begun reading their banns in the church; and on the strength of his approaching marriage, Darnley had obtained a small rise of salary at the Blacksod Grammar School.

On Saturday, February the twenty-fifth, Wolf awoke, after writing very late into the night, to a happy consciousness that Mr. Urquhart's finished manuscript lay on the card-table in their parlour!

Saturday was a "whole holiday" for the Blacksod boys, although for Ramsgard it was only a "half," so that Wolf had a solid expanse of forty-eight hours before him of delectable idleness before his work began again on Monday. The following Friday, the third of March, was the eventful day when, just a year ago, he had arrived in Dorset; and on the day after that, a week from this morning, Darnley and Mattie were to be married. Wolf surmised that there must have been some eventful conversation wherein Darnley had "explained everything"; and it was apparently accepted at Pond Cottage that the rise in Darnley's salary — little as it was — would smooth over every new economic strain.

"I shall take the book to Urquhart after breakfast," were the first words Wolf addressed to Gerda when she opened her eyes.

"And then we can change that cheque!" responded the girl, excitedly. "I've not teased you about it, Wolf; because I know what men are like. But now it's done! Now it'll be just the same as if he gave it to you today, won't it? We can change it at Stuckey's this afternoon, if you get back in time. No, I forgot. It's Saturday. Well, we can change it on Monday, anyhow. Oh, Wolf, what a good thing your mother didn't need this money! I'm going to buy a new carpet for the parlour and a set of dinner-plates and a new frying-pan and two pairs of sheets and a set of silver spoons — oh, and something else that I've always wanted, Wolf, and that's a grandfather's clock for the kitchen — same as Mother has!"

Wolf's face clouded. "I'm sorry you brought up that cheque, honey," he said. "I've not made up my mind about it. I've got an odd feeling about it. In fact, I have an idea that we'll all be much happier, much more lucky, if I just tear it up and hand back the pieces to him!"

Gerda jerked herself up on her elbow and looked at him with flashing eyes. "Wolf! How can you think or dream of such nonsense? Of course we must change that cheque! You've worked for it. You've earned it. Do you think I'd have been so good and quiet about it if I'd thought you were going to act like this at the end? I said nothing when you told me it was for your mother. I've got my pride, though you may not think so; and I'd have sooner bitten off my tongue than for her to have said I stopped you from giving her money! But you never *did* give it to her. You just kept it. So I made sure it was only that you didn't want to be paid till you'd finished the job. And now you go and talk like this!"

Wolf's mind was so bewildered and nonplussed by this unexpected outburst, that he just stupidly straightened out the sheet, which had got rolled into a weft under his chin, and slipped slowly out of bed. He certainly *had*, as she said, completely misunderstood her silence about the cheque. Well, here was a new complication. But he must gain time to think. Perhaps, sooner than disappoint her as much as this, he *would* relinquish his idea of "getting even" with his employer.

After all, he would be glad enough, himself, to have two hundred pounds at his disposal! He had already spent a third of all his and Gerda's savings in the purchase of a cut-glass decanter and a set of wine-glasses for Darnley and Mattie. It would be riches to have such a sum as this added to their account in the Post Office! All he knew was that ever since he had wrapped the cheque about the belly of Mukalog he had been profoundly unwilling to touch it. The thing seemed unholy to him... unholy. It was a sort of blood-money for the sale of his "mythology." He had pilfered back this precious possession... desperately, cowardly, meanly done so... by his equivocal behaviour to Christie. To fling down the torn bits of the cheque upon Urquhart's table would be an equivalent for many snake-like turns and twists!

But in spite of these thoughts he felt at that moment an uneasy stirring of self-reproach. He had treated Christie abominably the night before. Was he going to treat Gerda still worse today? "It's all very well," he said in his heart, "to follow these niceties of honour for my own sake. But how arbitrary, how monstrous, to snatch this money from Gerda when it means so much to her!"

"There's something in what you say, sweetheart," he muttered aloud; and he began wrapping himself in his dressing-gown and tightening it round him in the way he liked to do, preparatory to opening the door. "Don't get the idea I'm going to be silly or obstinate!" he added. "We'll discuss it all later."

There seemed to be a cold wind from the east that morning; and Wolf, when he reached the kitchen, was glad enough to find the stove still alight. But just for the sake of getting into the air he unbolted the back-door and shuffled in his slippers across the yard. "I'll fetch two or three pieces of wood," he thought. The shock of the east wind cutting at his lean frame and whistling past it as if it had been the post of a clothes-line, roused a grim and yet an exuberant feeling in him that sent him back to the kitchen in high spirits.

"Ay!" he thought, "how it all depends on these little things! What was that that Mother told me about Carfax? That he used to 'play' with these accidents, like a fisherman with a trout, making ’em serve his sensations!”

Back by the side of the stove he gave himself up to enjoying the flames that came out of that round iron hole. “Jason was certainly right when he said that to have a roof over you, and a fire to get warm by, and three meals a day, was enough to be grateful for in this world.” And what about the straight, sweet, flexible body of Gerda? Wouldn’t he be a fool if he let his craving for Christie kill every element of natural pleasure? And after all, he *had* Christie. Had her, at any rate, in a sense that was as important to his imagination as Gerda’s body was to his senses!

He covered up the iron hole with the bigger of their two kettles. This extra-large kettle was a recent present from Gerda’s mother; and Wolf suspected, perhaps unfairly, that the gift was an insult to their hand-to-mouth household! He ran upstairs after adjusting this kettle, and with his back to Gerda, who still lay supine, with the blankets tight under her throat, he began his slow process of shaving, while a thin inrush of bitter cold through an inch of open window kept alive the taut stoicism of his mood.

“You needn’t think I’ll get up while the room’s as cold as this,” cried Gerda crossly.

“All right, sweetheart,” he said; “don’t get up. It doesn’t matter.” But he thought in his heart: “Unselfish or selfish, we are all forced to fight for our own hands! If I’m selfish in being happy this morning, if I’m heartless in enjoying this heavenly east wind, I can’t help it! If no one were allowed to be thrilled by anything, as long as someone is made wretched by something, the life of the whole planet would perish!”

But his blessedness, whatever its nature was, was brought speedily to an end by Gerda’s voice from the bed behind him.

“If you don’t change that cheque, Wolf,” came her words, “I simply won’t live with you any more! I’m tired of the life we lead... and it seems to me that it gets worse and worse, instead of better!"

At his own image in the glass Wolf made a vicious grimace. But he held his tongue. What a different looking-glass this was from the one inherited from the woman who "believed in spirits"!... But he held his tongue; and by various crafty tricks he turned her thoughts to other channels. It was not till the middle of their breakfast that he deemed it advisable to refer again to the two hundred pounds.

"I'm afraid I must take that cheque back to Urquhart," he remarked abruptly. "I have to live with myself, Gerda, as well as with you; and I couldn't endure myself if I thought I'd been paid for a thing like that book."

She put down her porridge-spoon and stared at him.

"Why did you do it, then, if not for the money... working every night and not speaking a word! Do you think *this* is any life for a girl?"

He made a stupendous effort to put a caressing tone into his voice. The justice of her outcry had, however, hit him pretty shrewdly; and feeling ashamed of himself he began to lose his temper.

"It's hard, I know," he said, "Gerda honey, to make you understand. I felt on my mettle to get the thing done. And I *wanted* to do it. And in the way I've done it, it isn't such an awful thing."

"I don't care what it is!" she cried. "It's not the book I'm thinking about. It's the money. Oh, I do so want to get those plates and that clock! Do be reasonable, Wolf darling!"

She must have made as great an effort as he had done, to take this gentle tone, and he recognized fully the pathetic justice of her appeal; but something obscurely and dangerously obstinate in his nature seemed to rise up against her, something that he could actually feel, like a physical pressure, at the back of his windpipe.

"I won't say I'll tear it up, Gerda, and I won't say I *won't* tear it up. I know you do want those things, and I want you to have them."

The middle of their breakfast seemed likely to be the end of it too; for both of them, with simultaneous instinctive movements, pushed back their empty porridge-bowls and got up from their chairs, facing each other across the table.

"I *do* want you to have them!" he repeated. "And you're not playing fair if you think I don't! It... it goes much deeper than plates or carpets or clocks!"

His voice had risen now, and to his own surprise he found his lip trembling. What he felt was: "How *can* she force my hand when she sees it's so serious to me? How *can* she do it when she sees that it's a matter of life and death to me how I act with Urquhart? How can she care so little whether I'm tortured by this cheque or not?" That particular word "tortured" seemed to form itself into a wicked pellet in his throat, rising up from the nameless pressure at the back of his gullet.

"I never thought," she cried, "that you weren't going to be paid! And I sitting so quietly every night and having no life at all!"

Then, as he only fumbled with his unused knife and stared heavily at her, "It's just what I expected from you, Wolf," she went on, a hard, mocking smile coming to her lips. "I've always known you were the most monstrously selfish man any girl could live with!"

That ugly pellet in his throat became a rough piece of gravel that he *had* to spit out or it would choke him.

"How can you care nothing about my deepest feelings, Gerda?" he cried loudly, while the trembling of his fingers made the knife he held rattle against the porridge-bowl. "Don't you see it's torture to me... torture...

torture... torture... to change that cheque?” The nervous emotion he suffered from had grown to something out of all proportion to the occasion.

Frightened by his outburst, but supported still by her burning sense of just indignation, Gerda — still a practical housewife, even at the moment she felt like rushing from the house — went off to the stove to move aside from the fire the saucepan in which their eggs were boiling. Wolf, still shaking from head to foot, strode round the table, and, advancing to the dresser-drawer, flung it noisily open. His movement brought Gerda flying to his side. What ensued then was all so violent and instinctive that it hardly seemed to register itself as a real occurrence at all in his agitated brain.... Their clock in the parlour had, however, barely ticked two hundred seconds before he found himself standing breathless and shaky on the pavement before Mrs. Herbert’s house-door, the manuscript of Mr. Urquhart’s book clutched tightly in a hand that seemed to be all one single beating wrist-pulse!

“I must see Mother,” a voice seemed to cry out from some long-obliterated bruise in the pit of his stomach — some navel-string nerve of prenatal origin.... “I must see Mother!”

He went to the door, and Mrs. Herbert promptly answered the ring.

“She’s still at breakfast,” whispered the woman confidentially, when she’d closed the door behind him. “She had a visitor last night,” she added. Wolf hung up his coat and hat on one peg in the little hall, and his stick upon another peg. Each of these pegs looked like the head of Mukalog, as he used them. He received a vague impression that the landlady had jerked an insulting and libidinous thumb towards his mother’s room before she went off down the passage!

He knocked, heard his mother’s indolent reply, and entered.

She welcomed him radiantly. She was fully dressed and looked surprisingly young.

"Sit down, my dear one," she said, "and smoke while I finish my coffee."

He felt she must have perceived his agitation, but she made no sign of that knowledge; and as they chatted, easily and freely, about her new tea-shop, his heart and his two wrists began to stop their wild dance.

By degrees, under her hypnotic power, he even began to feel that he had made too much of the whole incident. Mentally he qualified and softened both his own anger and Gerda's anger. "I'll run in and speak to her before I start," he thought. And then: "No! I'd better not begin it all over again! But maybe, after all, I *will* come back with the cheque changed!"

His attention gradually became given up, free-mindedly, to his mother's affairs. But he remained touchy and nervous; and when after a time the talk drifted round to Mr. Manley, this touchiness reached a climax.

"I can't make you out, Mother," he said. "Either that fellow wants to get social prestige by persuading you to marry him, or you are just exploiting him... playing on his infatuation and using him. Whichever way it is, I don't like it."

Instead of replying to him directly, Mrs. Solent glanced at the great manuscript-packet, which he had put down carelessly between her coffee-pot and her loaf of brown bread.

"What's that you've got there, Wolf?" she asked; and, though apparently innocent, her question carried for him a mischievous implication.

"His book, Mother... Urquhart's book. I finished it last night."

Her eyes glittered like those of a triumphant witch, and her bright cheeks glowed like a couple of russet apples.

"A compromise with Satan, little Wolf! Have you forgotten all you told me when you left him? All that about his book being simply naughty scandal? Will you *never* face the facts of life, my son? Can't you accept once for all that we all *have to be bad* sometimes... just as we all *have to be good* sometimes? Where you make your great mistake, Wolf' — here her voice became gentler and her eyes strangely illuminated— "is in not recognizing the loneliness of everyone. We *have* to do outrageous things sometimes, just because we are lonely! It was in a mood like yours when you came in just now that God created the world. What could have been more outrageous than to set such a thing as *this* in motion? But we're in it now; and we've got to move as it moves."

She lifted the cold dregs of her coffee-cup to her lips and drained them with a sigh.

"Go on, Mother," he said.

She smiled at him — a swift, mysterious smile, neither bitter nor ironical, but proud and contemptuous, like the dip of a falcon's wing in a farmyard-tank.

"Every movement we make must be bad or good," she said: "and we've *got* to make movements! We make bad movements anyhow... all of us... outrageous ones... like the creation of the world! Isn't it better, then, to make them with our eyes open... to make them honestly, without any fuss... than just to be pushed, while we turn our heads round and pretend to be looking the other way? That's what you do, Wolf. *You look the other way!* You do that when your feet take you to the Malakite shop. You're doing that now, when you carry this naughty book back to that old rogue. Why do you always try and make out that your motives are good, Wolf? They're often abominable! Just as mine are. There's only one thing required of us in this world, and that's not to be a burden... not to hang round people's necks! My

Manley-man, whom you hate so, at any rate stands on his own feet. He gives nothing for nothing. He keeps his thoughts to himself."

Wolf was listening to his mother at this juncture very much as an unmusical person listens to music, making use of it as a raft whereon his thoughts are free to cross far horizons. It was when he heard her say "your father" that this voyaging stopped abruptly.

"Your father never once," she said, striking a match with so sweeping a stroke to light one of her favourite "Three Castles" cigarettes that he felt as if she'd struck it on that skull itself, "never once stood on his own feet! He clung to me. He clung to the Monster. He clung to Lorna."

Wolf might have interrupted this invective, if a portion of his mind had not slipped off again to Gerda's kitchen. What did she mean by what she said at the end?

"He shirked everything," his mother went on. "He lapped up the cream of those silly women's love like a leering cat. He laughed at people who did anything in life. He wasn't afraid of being broken, because there wasn't anything in him hard enough to break. He oozed and seeped into women's hearts like bad water into leaky pipes. And he justified himself all the time. He never said, 'This is outrageous, but I'm going to do it.' He said — —" But at this point Wolf began wondering why his mother kept her window shut when the wind was in the east.

"East wind is different from all other winds," he thought. "Something to do with the roll of the earth, I suppose." And he imagined his soul shooting like a projectile out of that closed window — shooting, whizzing, darting against the sharp wind, till it reached the wind's home. And he visualized the wind's home as a promontory like St. Alban's Head. But his mother was still going on abusing his father. "How she must have loved him," he thought, "to hate him like this after twenty-five years!"

"There was no hardness in him, Wolf, no ambition, no pride, no independence! *He* didn't know what it was to feel alone! He sucked up women's life-blood like an incubus; and nothing would make him confess it — nothing would make him say, 'Yes... it *is* outrageous!' He justified himself all the time."

Wolf looked away from those fierce brown eyes, out of Mrs. Herbert's front-room window, into the cold iron-coloured sky, a sky swept clean of all softness by the east wind.

"I'm not going to quarrel with you, Mother, about him," he said heavily. "I suppose I'm more like him than like you. But you're wrong if you don't think I feel alone!"

"My dearest one!" she murmured, with a rich gusto of tenderness in her voice; and stretching out her rounded arm, she stroked the back of one of his hands. As she did this her formidable lineaments assumed the warm, amorous playfulness of a dusky-skinned puma, dallying with its first-born in a sunlit glade of the jungle!

"How much healthier-minded she is," he thought, "than I am! But so was *he*, too, after his fashion. It's the mixture of them in me, I suppose, that creates these miseries of indecision!"

"Well, Mother darling," he said aloud, as he got up from his seat, and, taking her head between his hands, kissed her lightly on the forehead. "I won't tease you about Willum's Mill, if you won't tease me about the Malakite shop. We'll agree to be indulgent to each other's outrageous behaviour! I'll try and learn your philosophy and accept my badness as part of the game. Good-bye, dear one! I'll come in sometime tomorrow." And with that he snatched up the manuscript from the table and took himself off.

He looked back at her window, however, when he was in the road — and there her figure was, smiling and kissing her hand to him! "The truth of it is," he thought, as he moved away, "she was intended to be a *grande dame*, with a house and servants and guests, with a *salon*, too, perhaps, where political magnates came that she could chaff and fool and put in their place! It's action she enjoys. I can see it all now like a map! Life's simply tedious to her when she isn't stirring. How I must have disappointed her! How she must have hoped against hope in those London years!"

His mother's personality filled his mind completely, as he passed Pimpernel's and steered his way through the Saturday crowds in High Street. "Her nature's never had its proper fling," he thought. "No wonder she treats people carelessly and ironically. She's like a great lioness whose only food for years has been rats and mice and skimmed milk! The mere brutality of that fellow appeals to her. At least it's something formidable and positive. I wonder" — here he paused on the pavement, just as he debouched into Chequers Street— "whether she lets the brute kiss her." As this thought began to transform itself into an impious, unseemly image, he pushed a sprig of greenery of some kind that someone had dropped there, with the end of his stick, along the pavement, till he got it into an empty little space behind some railings, where a patch of grass was growing. "God!" he said to himself as he recognized this spot; "this is where I read her letter the day I ate Yorkshire pudding at the Torps', and she first spoke about coming down here! If I hadn't sat by Gerda that day and eaten that Yorkshire pudding and taken her up to Poll's Camp... I'd have been free now... to... to — —" At that point he tossed his thought away from him. "It's no good," he said to himself. "When Chance has once started things, a sort of fate sets in that a person *has* to accept!" He moved on again down Chequers Street, observing, as he did so, however, that a small single leaf still lay on the pavement. His consciousness of this leaf worried his mind after he had taken only a few steps. He endowed it — thinking to himself, "I believe it's a myrtle-leaf" — with nerves like his own. He thought of it as being separated from its companions and doomed to be trodden underfoot alone. "Damn my superstition!" he muttered, and forced himself to walk on. But then he thought, "They'll be treading on it just at the time I'm talking to Urquhart!" This brought him to a stand-still, while indecision took him by the throat. He slipped his fingers into his waistcoat-pocket. There was Urquhart's cheque! After that unthinkable scene with Gerda he *had* taken it from under the stomach of Mukalog.

"How can I expect the gods to give me luck," he said to himself, "when I leave living things to be trodden underfoot?" He stood quite still now, paralyzed by as much hesitation over this leaf as if the leaf had been Gerda herself.

"If I go back and pick up that leaf," he said to himself, "I shall be picking up leaves from these Blacksod pavements till next autumn, when there'll be so many that it will be impossible!" He began to suffer serious misery from the struggle in his mind.

"If I force myself to leave it there... with the idea that I *ought* to conquer such superstitions... won't it really be that I'm getting out of rescuing it from mere laziness and making this 'ought' just my excuse to avoid trouble and bother? I'll pick it up now," he concluded, "and think out the principles of the affair later on!" Having made this decision, he hurried back, picked up the leaf, and flung it over the railings after its parent-twig.

But he had forgotten the east wind. That unsympathetic power caught up the leaf, and, whirling it high over Wolf's head, flung it down upon the rear of a butcher's cart that was dashing by.

"*That* wouldn't have happened," he thought, "if I'd left it where it was."

The sight of the butcher's cart made him think of Miss Gault. "I wonder what that woman feels," he said to himself, "now Mattie is to be married instead of going to a Home in Taunton? Does she realize the amount of old bitterness that underlies her meddling? But she *does* think herself into the nerves of animals in slaughter-houses just as I do into the nerves of leaves on pavements."

As he moved on he seemed to see the whole universe crowded with quivering sentiences suffering from untimely mishaps, and nothing done to help. "I don't care if she *is* a bad woman," he thought. "I don't care if she is revengeful without knowing it. The more people become *aware* of what goes on, the fewer living things will be tortured. I hope she'll never stop putting her nerves into animals. I love her for it; even if she *does* want Lorna's child to go to a Home in Taunton, instead of being married to Darnley!"

He arrived now at the Torp yard. It seemed hard at that moment to hurry by, as he usually did when he came that way, for fear of a lengthy delay. He glanced across the yard at the covered shed where the work was done. In a second he met the eyes of Mr. Torp, who was resting from his labours with an air of "*Requiescat in pace*."

His father-in-law beckoned him to come in.

"Well, how be?" was his greeting as they shook hands. " 'Tis long since Mr. Solent has stepped into me yard. Though us have seen 'ee, traipsing by, coat-flying as you might say from hell to wold Horny!"

"Rather a sharp wind today, don't you think so?" said Wolf genially, stroking with his hand the surface of a large uninscribed tombstone hewn from a block of Ham Hill stone.

"May be. May be. But I be wondrous sheltered in yard from they cruel winds. 'Tis het I do fear more'n cold, mister; though I have heard tell that wind be turble rough on pavement out yonder."

Mr. Torp smiled complacently and pulled at his pipe. He talked of "out there" with the superiority of a man who lived, sleek and snug, in the company of aristocratic tombstones. But this slyness and aplomb soon changed, as he led his son-in-law into the interior of his shed; and the two men sat down together on a bench covered with stone-dust.

"Say, mister," John Torp began, " 'twere only yesterday that I thought deep about 'ee, dang me if I didn't! I were out, passing the sweet of the evening, wi' old man Round, to Farmer's Rest, and who should drop in for a game of draughts or summat but that there Monk from up at Squire's. They be a couple o' devil's own, when liquor's aboard, them two; and 'twere good I be the man I be, with a headpiece what no small beer, brewed by the likes o' they, can worrit, if 'ee knows my meaning?"

Wolf nodded sagaciously, resting his manuscript on his knees.

" 'Twere along o' young Redfern them two sly badgers got to talking, and maybe them forgot I were thee's missus's Dad, or maybe they forgot I were there at all, for I sits quiet as stone, 'sknow, when I be out from home. Anyway, they was talking; and what must thik girt bugger from they Shires say but that since you've gone back to Squire, and have took young Redfern's place, that poor lad's sperrit have been quieted down wonderful. He were taunting the life out o' they, seems so, that boy's ghostie! But since you've gone back, Mister, like a dog to's vomit, if you'll excuse the word, thik sperrit have let they three parties sleep soft as babes."

Mr. Torp paused and glanced nervously round him. He then took several long, meditative pulls at his pipe.

" 'Tweren't pretty," he said, looking sideways at Wolf with half-closed eyes; " 'tweren't pretty to hear what they did say about 'ee."

"What *did* they say, Mr. Torp? Come on! You *must* tell me now!"

The stone-cutter looked about for some imaginary spittoon and then spat with extraordinary clumsiness upon the face of the big unlettered headstone in front of him. Wolf watched the white spittle slowly trickling down the yellowish surface, and he thought: "What things there are in the world that have a definite place in Time and Space! There's Mr. Torp's 'gob,' as the Ramsgard boys would say... and there's that big round tear from Gerda's eyes that I saw this morning on the back of my hand as we quarrelled about the cheque... and then there's that leaf on the butcher's cart! Ailinon! Ailinon! What things there are in the world!"

"They said," the stone-cutter proceeded, "that 'twould be thee wone self what would go next. They said the thing what made thik poor lad's sperrit bide where 'a ought to bide were the comfort of another party going his way. 'Tweren't pretty to hear 'un say that, Mister; and 'twere well I *do* sit quiet, in the sweet of me cups, or they never would have spoke such words. But that's what they said; and so now I've told 'ee."

He paused and sighed heavily.

"You've always been what a gentleman *should* be to Gerda's mother and me! But that's what them chaps said." And Mr. Torp fixed a somewhat gloomy eye upon his own spittle as it descended the uninscribed headstone. "A scholar like what you be," resumed the monument-maker, "won't give no credit to the wambling words of plain men like they. But I bain't no scholar; and they notions taunt me mind. 'Tis all very well for gentlemen to put down their thumbs at Providence. Them whose brains be work-sodden have to guard theyselves from He. If 'twere only plagues and pestilences He showered down, it *might* be all one. 'Tis they lightnings, murders, and sudden deaths what send we to cover... same as the poor beasties in field!"

Wolf shifted the manuscript upon his knee into an easier position.

“I confess I *did* notice,” he said gravely, “about New Year, I think, that when I went back to Mr. Urquhart both Round and Monk picked up their spirits. I had thought Round’s wits had gone for good and all. And I had thought Monk was getting much more nervous. But, as I say, I did notice that my going back there seemed to cheer them all up quite astonishingly! So... you see, Mr. Torp, I’m not at all ungrateful for your warning.” He got up as he spoke, and thrust his burden under his arm. “But the point remains,” he concluded, with an hilarity that was a little forced, “the point remains, what ought I to do to propitiate Providence and escape those terrible occurrences?”

Mr. Torp moved slowly to a mason’s shelf at the back of the shed and returned with his chisel. Then, armed with his professional weapon, the good man tapped the great slab of Ham Hill stone.

“ ’Tis no comfort,” he remarked, “though I be the man I be for cossetting they jealous dead, to think that ‘in a time and half a time,’ as Scripture says, I’ll be chipping ‘Rest in the Lord’ on me wone son-in-law’s moniment. But since us *be* talking smug and quiet, mister, on this sorrowful theme” — Mr. Torp’s voice assumed his undertaker’s-tone, which long usage had rendered totally different from his normal one—” ’twould be a mighty help, mister, to I, for a day to come, if ye’d gie us a tip as to what word — out of Book or out of plain speech — ye’d like best for I to put above ‘ee?”

The plump rogue looked up so grave, as he said this, touching the stone with the point of the tool and staring at his interlocutor, that Wolf hadn’t the heart to treat it as the man’s form of humour.

“I’ll leave it entirely to you, Mr. Torp,” he pronounced with equal gravity, as he bade him good-bye. “I’m surprised Redfern hasn’t been content with all you’ve done for him. I assure you *I* shall be! But we’ll hope that empty stone will have to wait a long time yet... for Gerda’s sake! Well, good-bye, Mr. Torp. I won’t forget your warning, though. I’ll fight shy of ‘murders and sudden deaths’!”

He walked off along Chequers Street, chuckling rather grimly. Absurd though it all was, he was superstitious enough not to be able to treat that drunken chatter at Farmer’s Rest with the contempt it deserved.

His mind began now to revert to that final scene with Gerda. She had actually used physical force against him as he took the cheque from under Mukalog, a thing she had never done before. Her last words, from within the open door, as he went off, had been uttered from a countenance streaming with tears. “You’ll be sorry for this, Wolf! You’ll be sorry for this!”

What had she meant by that, he wondered. Bob Weevil again! But he had discounted Bob Weevil altogether. It was just unsatisfied lechery with that boy; and Gerda’s own words, referring to her coldness to him, had had the very ring of truth. But one never knew, in these things! Perhaps at this very moment she was writing a letter summoning Weevil to their home.

He had reached the turn to Babylon Hill now, and for a moment he wondered whether he wouldn’t take this road and turn off to King’s Barton by those larches! But he decided against it and walked on. When he got to the place where the lane leading down to the book-shop was, he found himself stopping again. “What the devil’s the matter with me?” he thought. “I feel as if a lot of invisible wires were pulling me back to this town! Don’t the spirits want me to take Urquhart’s manuscript to him? Am I like William of Deloraine, in Scott’s poem, with the wizard’s volume under my arm?”

He looked at his watch. It was already half-past eleven. It would be after twelve when he got to the Manor; and the squire would undoubtedly want to keep him for lunch. “He’d want to do that all the more if I gave him back his two hundred! He’d be in a royal good temper with me.”

He stood hesitating at this familiar point, where he had so often hesitated before. This, however, was the first time he had done so on *leaving* Blacksod. "I don't think it would seem absurd to Christie," he said to himself, "if I went in for half-an-hour before going out there? I don't suppose it would make her feel that anything was wrong in Preston Lane?" He put these questions to himself while he stood facing the east wind, turning up his collar with one hand, as he clutched stick and manuscript with the other; and as he did so he thought once more of William of Deloraine burdened with the magician's book.

It always gave Wolf a peculiar thrill thus to tighten his grip upon his stick, thus to wrap himself more closely in his faded overcoat. Objects of this kind played a queer part in his secret life-illusion. His stick was like a plough-handle, a ship's rudder, a gun, a spade, a sword, a spear. His threadbare overcoat was like a mediæval jerkin, like a monk's habit, like a classic toga! It gave him a primeval delight merely to move one foot in front of the other, merely to prod the ground with his stick, merely to feel the flapping of his coat about his knees, when this mood predominated. It always associated itself with his consciousness of the historic continuity — so incredibly charged with marvels of dreamy fancy — of human beings moving to and fro across the earth. It associated itself, too, with his deep, obstinate quarrel with modern inventions, with modern machinery, and his resolve, as far as his own life was concerned, to outwit this modernity — not merely to resist it, but to outwit it — by a cunning as subtle as its own!

Damn these indecisions! This accursed difficulty of deciding, of deciding anything at all, seemed to have grown into an obsession with him. To *have* to decide... *that* was the worst misery on earth!

He felt a strong reluctance to see Christie just after he had quarrelled with Gerda. What hit him now most of all was not her streaming face at the end, nor that mysterious threat, which he supposed referred to Weevil, but the single big tear he had glimpsed on the back of his hand when he shut their dresser-drawer.

What he fooled himself now into believing to be his motive when he *did* tear himself from that fatal parting of the ways and hurried down towards the shop, was his unwillingness to be landed for lunch with Urquhart. "I'll catch him about two," he thought. "That's the lowest pulse of the day! And I'll get home to tea and make it up with Gerda at the highest pulse of the day!"

An instinctive desire to avoid setting eyes on Mr. Malakite led him to go straight to the side-door. What was his surprise when he found that little postern wide open! There was the narrow flight of stairs leading straight up to Christie's room!

This time he did not hesitate. Stick in one hand, manuscript in the other, he ran up those stairs. There was Christie's door, also wide open! He entered and called her name, softly and tenderly. No answer! He passed through the alcove into her bedroom. The cold grey light lay upon her counterpane like the first light of the morning upon a smoothed-out winding-sheet.

As he came out, he caught a glimpse of himself in that Merlinish mirror, and the expression upon his face gave him an unpleasant shock. Returning to her room, he softly closed the door. Then he went to the fire and stood in front of it, warming his hands. There was a tiny bowl of white violets on the mantelpiece, with two primroses among them, one fully out, the other in bud.

He bent forward and smelt this fragile bunch of flowers, and it was as if he had inhaled the very fragrance of its owner's soul. Then, led on rather by a nervous restlessness than by curiosity, he began wandering about the room, turning over books and papers. Suddenly, as he ran the tips of his fingers along the familiar books on her shelves, he came upon a large, thin exercise-book wedged in between Spinoza and Hegel. This he pulled out and mechanically opened, his mind still thinking more of Gerda and the two hundred pounds than of what he was doing. But after glancing at a sentence or two in an idle fashion, all at once he began reading furtively and guiltily, standing motionless where he was, and turning the pages with the feverish excitement of a sacrilegious thief.

He had not failed to remark the word "Slate" written in large printed letters on the first page of the exercise-book; but what he was now reading was in the middle of the book, and it was one particular paragraph that caused him to draw in his breath with a faint rasping suction. It read more like notes for a book than anything else; but that might be her style.

"Shame? She felt nothing of the kind! Human tradition meant little to her. Sacred guilt. Forbidden thresholds. Just *custom*! Just old moss-covered milestones of *custom*! But the silence that followed when his footsteps died away? Drops; one, two, three, four... *four drops*. Drops of acid on the grooves of a waxed pattern. A girl's excited senses rousing desire in old age. What a curious thing! Filmy butterfly-wings waving and waving; and old cold lust responding. Curious, not terrible. A chemical phenomenon. Interesting in a special way. The opposite of tedious routine! Something startling and primeval. But how curious that a girl's senses, excited from one direction, should wave signals in another! Unconscious. Totally unconscious. Butterfly-wings quivering. Do thoughts come and go in some strange 'substance' called mind... or are they all there is? Memory. What is memory if there's no 'substance'?... She slid down the old slippery groove into the old deep hole. Forgetting. A girl dissecting memory and forgetting her shame! Why shouldn't she forget? He was a very old man. In a few years, perhaps in less than a year, she would be looking at his dead face. A few years more and somebody else would be looking into *her* dead face. ‘To live so as to regret nothing!’ It must have been a young man who said that. A man, anyway. Remorse as man’s prerogative! Nature. It was in Nature that girls hid themselves and covered their heads. Nature has no remorse. Nature has no ‘substance’ behind her thought. Thoughts without ‘substance.’ One... two... three... Three drops of acid in a grooved, waxed pattern? The girl smiled into her mother’s mirror. Thoughts without ‘substance.’ Butterfly-wings quivering. Unconscious signals. Little fool: The old man meant nothing at all. It was all your — —”

Wolf was interrupted in his reading by the sound of a door slamming below and by quick steps upon the stairs. He closed the exercise-book and thrust it back. In his haste, however, he put it a shelf higher. Not only so, but he left it lying on the top of books instead of among them. Then he went over to the fireplace....

Christie came rushing in, her arms full of packages, her face glowing with the self-satisfaction of a girl who has done some adroit shopping.

“Wolf!... You frightened me!” She panted a little and laid down her parcels on the table. Then she snatched off her hat and dropped it on the top of the books.

“I’m so sorry, my dear!” he said lightly, taking her by the shoulders and kissing her hot forehead; “but I found the door open and came up. You don’t mind, Chris, do you?”

He was dismayed to see her eyes turn, like the needle of a compass, straight to the bookcase.

“You’ve been reading it!” she cried, breaking away from him and rushing to the shelf. Hurriedly she possessed herself of the exercise-book. Twisting the thing in her fingers till it became a veritable trumpet of judgement, she struck the table with the end of it. “Wolf!” she cried, “I’m ashamed of you! I knew I’d left it out! I always put it away because of Father; but I knew I’d left it out! Directly I saw the door was shut, I thought, ‘Father’s in there, and I’ve left it out!’ And now it’s you who’ve done it! Oh, Wolf, how could you, how could you?”

Perhaps never in his life — not even when he had to appear before that College Board in London to be reprimanded for his crazy malice-dance — had he felt so humiliated.

“I’m sorry, Christie!” he blurted out. “It was wrong of me. I did it somehow... I don’t know!... without meaning to.” He made a feeble movement towards her, where she stood by the edge of the table, her chin raised high, her eyes literally flashing, the curved lines of her lips much redder than usual! He had never seen her look so beautiful. But her anger frightened and paralyzed him.

“I only read a word or two, Chris... just one sentence... that’s all.”

She swept the table with her doomsday-trumpet. Backwards and forwards she swung it, as if drawing a furrow in windy sand; and under its stroke the little volume of “Hydriotaphia” went whirling to the floor, where it lay face-downwards at Wolf’s feet.

Wolf shuffled backwards, expecting at any moment to see his own manuscript follow “Urn-Burial.” The thought of the heron’s feather rushed through his mind; but he didn’t dare to move lest he should vex her further. Foolishly he clenched and unclenched his fingers and stared at the band round her waist.

“I’d like to go away from you both!” she cried passionately. “I’d like to go away, far from everyone, where no one could find me!”

“I’m very sorry, Christie,” he repeated helplessly.

“To read it,” she began again, “when I wasn’t there and when you knew what I felt!” Her voice grew husky now and choked in the utterance. Then a shiver went through her and her slight frame stiffened. With a long, scrutinizing look she seemed to stare right through his fumbling, bewildered consciousness.

“I’ll go, Christie,” he murmured. “Don’t be too angry. I say I was wrong to do that. I’ll go now. I only came in for a minute.”

She dropped the exercise-book upon the table; and pressing both hands upon her face, she drew them apart, against her cheeks and eyebrows, stretching the soft skin tight in a grotesque distortion. When her hands fell, after this, he noticed that the anger had gone out of her. Her expression had become gentle and sad.

“What’s that?” she said, in a low voice, pointing to Mr. Urquhart’s manuscript. Wolf hurriedly stooped down and picked up “Hydriotaphia.” He caught sight of the feather, lying safe between the leaves, as he put it on the table.

“The ‘History of Dorset,’ ” he said eagerly. “That awful book, you know.”

He tried to speak facetiously.

“I gave the old chap’s lechery a twist in my own direction. It’s still pretty awful, but it’s not just pure bawdiness any more. In fact, I’d like some people I know to read it. It’s ferocious. It’s like Swift.”

Over Christie’s expressive face, its whiteness blotched by faint red marks from the violent usage she had given it, flitted a tender, ironical smile.

“*You’re* like Swift, Wolf,” she murmured, “coming into people’s rooms and poking among their things.”

“There, Chris! See what you think of it,” he cried, pushing the great parchment-bound book towards her.

But she only mechanically turned over its pages.

"It's nearly a year since I began it, Chris. It'll be a year ago next Friday, when I arrived... going by the *date*, that's to say."

She bent her head above the white parchment-covered book — it was really a form of ledger-book, that he had bought at the stationer's in High Street, but he preferred it to a pile of loose sheets — and when she lifted her face again, she had an expression exactly like a young archaic priestess.

"Next Saturday, then," she said, "isn't only your sister's wedding-day! It's the anniversary of your first coming to this room... of our first meeting."

He made a second rather nervous movement towards her. But she repelled him by taking up the parchment-book again.

"I'm glad you went back to this," she said thoughtfully. "I always had an instinct that Urquhart would do you some harm if you didn't do what he wanted."

Wolf laughed a forced laugh. "You unscrupulous little thing! What if Urquhart *were* the Devil... ought I to go back to him just the same?"

Christie shrugged her thin shoulders. "My mother used to tell me," she said, "that all angels could turn into demons, and all demons could turn into angels."

"Merlin and *his* mother!" he threw out; but his face was as grave as her own. "Christie!" he cried suddenly, after a pause, "why couldn't you and I have a day off together, away from here somewhere? Couldn't we go down to Weymouth, for instance? Say next Sunday, when the wedding's over? Gerda's mother always likes to have her come round sometime on Sunday; so we shouldn't feel she was — —"

He was interrupted by a querulous voice calling Christie's name from the bottom of the stairs.

After what he had read in that exercise-book he had a funny shyness about catching the girl's eye. But she swept this aside with sublime unconsciousness. He couldn't tell whether she even *felt* his embarrassment.

"Good-bye, my dear!" she said with a perfectly candid and affectionate smile. "Father's getting impatient for his dinner. Poor Father! He'll have to wait three-quarters of an hour... well, perhaps forty minutes!" Thus speaking, she drew Wolf by the hand to the door. He had already snatched up all his belongings. "Off with you!" she whispered. "Quick! Quick! Quick! Father would want you to stay; and I don't like dinners *à trois*!"

He could hear her moving the saucepan over her stove in the alcove, as he ran down the shaky back-stairs. His desire to escape from her room without seeing Mr. Malakite was stronger now than it had been to reach her room without seeing him.

Little did he notice of the people or of the things he passed, as he walked away from the book-shop! Once out of Evershot Road, however, his feet dragged slowly. What he had read in "Slate" — those short, compact sentences — passed through his mind like depraved choir-boys in white surplices. "Have I done what she hinted?" he said to himself. "Have I troubled her senses by my advances and retreats, until she's lost something that it's essential for a girl to have?"

He groaned aloud as he walked, and trailed his stick along the ground. "What will the upshot be if that old man *has* begun persecuting her *like that*?"

Bitterly now he reverted to his childish fancy, that his stick was like William of Deloraine's spear. As he shuffled along, he began a deadly interior survey of his mental state. Like a black fly crawling upon walls and ceiling, his consciousness set off to explore its own boundaries. "I have no certainty," he thought. "I don't believe in any reality. I don't believe that this road and sky are real. I don’t believe that the invisible worlds behind this road and sky are any more real than they are! Dreams within dreams! Everything *is* as I myself create it. I am the wretched demiurge of the whole spectacle.... Alone... alone... alone! If I create loveliness, there *is* loveliness. If I create monstrosity, there *is* monstrosity! I’ve got to move this creaking machinery of my mind into the right position; and then all follows. Then I can stop that old man from persecuting Christie. *Then* I can make Gerda happy without the two hundred!”

A bleak, saturnine disgust with the primary conditions of all human life took possession of him. The insane fancy took possession of him that he knew something at this moment of what the guilty, lonely Power behind Life knew, as it drove towards its purpose. Was he himself, then, in league with this merciless thing, that from his deepest heart he cursed? Did he know what It felt, confronted by all these shadow-worlds, dream within dream, each of them unstable as smoke and reflecting only *thought*... nothing but circles of *thought*?

Just as when his “mythology” was upon him he felt life surging with magical streams of sweet green sap, so now it seemed as if he could sink through world after world and find them all blighted, all poisoned, all corroded by some perverse defect. The only comfort was that they were all equally phantasmal! Nothing was real except thoughts in conscious minds; and all thoughts were corrupted.

Had Gerda really meant by those final words that she would renew her relation with Bob Weevil? His mind visualized Bob Weevil now with an obsessed intensity. He saw his face, his clothes, his yellow boots. He saw his heavy gold watch-chain. Did the saints teach that one ought to *love*, as well as pity, every living soul? He could pity Bob Weevil. Bob Weevil had not asked to be born any more than he himself had. But to love the Bob

Weevils of the world? Well! The great saints could do that. *They* could see the tragic necessity of birth branding the forehead of each child of Adam with a ghastly uniqueness! But it was too much to ask of *him*... too much....

It was at this moment in his abstracted progress that Wolf was confronted by nothing less than the entrance to the little driveway — pompously entitled "private lane" — that led to the villa of Bob Weevil's father.

"It must have been *this*," he thought to himself, "that, like a letter at the door, brought the water-rat to my mind!"

Led by a sudden impulse that he made no attempt to explain to himself, he proceeded to walk up this "private lane." The east wind moaned forlornly through the laurel-bushes on either side of the path. "He's invaded my privacy often enough," he thought. "Why shouldn't I invade his for once?"

"Is Mr. Weevil... Mr. *Bob* Weevil... at home?" he enquired of the maid who opened the door. She had friendly blue eyes, this maid, but she looked amused and astonished to see him.

"I'll go and see if Mr. Bob has come in," she said. "Will you take a chair, sir?"

She went off, and Wolf sat down obediently. The place was certainly the coldest, the most cheerless, the most forbidding entrance-hall he had ever waited in. "I prefer the Mrs. Torp kind of house to this!" he thought, as he fidgeted upon his glacial chair and shifted his shoulders to avoid its pseudo-antique mouldings.

Wearily he fixed a lack-lustre eye upon a heavy marble slab that stood opposite him, supported by carved alabaster columns. "I suppose," he thought savagely, as he struggled against a wave of overpowering gloom, "I suppose Bob Weevil hardly extends his interest in ladies' legs to alabaster sphinxes!"

Not a single object in this entrance-hall pleased him. As for the gryphon-clawed feet upon which those alabaster ankles rested, he could feel them raking and combing at his very bowels! He hugged his parchment-book; he clutched his stick; but he no longer felt like William of Deloraine. He felt more like the knight's dwarf, who vanished from sight altogether at last, calling out, "Lost! lost! lost!"

Nothing mellow or friendly, nothing either rustic or urbane, seemed to have touched, even remotely, the devastating pomposity of this furniture. There was a tiny, shapeless curl of dust at the side of one of those gryphon-claws; and he looked at it with positive relief! There was something reassuring about it. It might have been in a cottage, in a shed, in his own parlour! It was a sign that he had not been transported into a place from which there was no outlet.

But even this bit of dust — *dust* being something that at least had an authentic place in human history! — failed to support him just then in what threatened to become a veritable dissolution of his being! The spiritual "aura" emanating from the Weevil mansion attacked him like a miasma of desolation, blending itself with Gerda's anger, with what he had read in Christie's exercise-book, and with the thought of having to face Mr. Urquhart. The strength seemed to ebb out of him. Slowly he rose to his feet; and turning his eyes from the marble slab, he stared now at a gilded table, with a fringed mat upon it, supporting a bronze tray containing a solitary black-edged calling-card.

He leaned upon his stick and contemplated that card in an hypnosis of misery. Life seemed entirely composed of weeping faces, old men sneaking up bedroom-stairs, tombstones with spittle trickling down, and black-edged calling-cards. He felt as if the First Cause of the Universe were a small, malignant grub, radiating a deadly blight in withering, centrifugal air-waves!

He shifted the weight of the book a little. He shifted the balance of his stick. He felt as if, with stick and book, he were journeying through space; while the malicious grub, out of whose ill-humour time and space were born, aimed a sour-smelling squirt at him.

At this moment Bob Weevil himself came hurrying down the staircase. Wolf moved across the hall to meet him, thinking in his heart, "The simpleton must have been tricking himself out all this while!" for certainly the suit, the tie, the collar, the socks, the shoes, worn by the "water-rat" this Saturday afternoon, were at the very top of Blacksod fashion!

The young man hurriedly apologized for keeping his visitor waiting. Mr. Weevil Senior, it appeared, was already eating his midday meal, but Bob had ordered an extra place to be set, and would Mr. Solent honour them with his company?

The lunch or dinner that followed was something that fixed itself indelibly in Wolf's memory. He decided afterwards that it was only his preceding struggle with the inert malice of the inanimate in that appalling hall, that gave him the power to carry the thing through! Carry it through, however, he certainly did, and with an adroitness that amazed himself. For he received a startling shock at the very beginning. The presence of the old dotard at the head of the table, mumbling and spluttering over his food with imbecile gluttony, did not prevent Bob Weevil from laying every one of his "cards," if so they could be called, flat down before his successful rival! It appeared that Lobbie Torp had turned up half-an-hour ago— "when I was with Christie!" thought the visitor — with a note from Gerda inviting Bob to go for a walk with her that afternoon, "as Mr. Solent was away and she felt lonely." Bob Weevil communicated this occurrence shamelessly, as if it were all natural enough. “I suppose,” thought Wolf, “it’s perfectly natural to him. It’s probably not the first time she’s sent for him like this!” It also struck him that Bob Weevil was propitiating him by introducing a note of humorous, masculine camaraderie, while at the same time he was letting it be clearly seen that he regarded this unexpected event as a personal triumph.

“Can it have been, after all,” Wolf thought, “just a piece of incredibly subtle cunning, worthy of the father of all water-rats, that chat about the maddeningness of girls’ legs? And had Gerda too, after her fashion, fooled him, as men have been fooled since the beginning of the world?”

Following Bob Weevil presently into his own “den,” Wolf thought he had never seen so many actresses’ photographs as he now beheld; and it gave him a reaction in favour of Mr. Urquhart’s vice, as he tried to avoid this concentrated feminine ogling from every wall!... However! He was soon stretching himself out in a low deck-chair comfortably enough, while his mind, as he listened to his host’s excited volubility, took its soundings of the situation.

Things were always returning upon him, he thought, in great irrevocable curves. A year ago he had found Gerda and Weevil in close association. A year ago he had been introduced by that old man to his daughter; and now, after all the intervening changes and chances, Mr. Malakite was there still, at Christie’s side, and Mr. Weevil was here still, tricked out in his best, ready for a walk with Gerda! It gave him a disconcerting feeling, all this, as if he had been wasting his time in a maze, that perpetually led him round and round to the same point!

He wondered that it didn’t strike Mr. Weevil as somewhat odd, that Gerda should be talking of “loneliness” and “Mr. Solent being away,” when here was Mr. Solent, drifting casually round, up “private drives,” within half-a-mile of her! But apparently Mr. Weevil felt that Saturday was a day dedicated to the erratic wanderings of desire-driven humanity! At any rate he took it all for granted, with the easiest facetiousness, when Wolf finally shook hands with him in the "private road" and made off towards King's Barton.

It was with many queer sensations that he stood at last under that well-known historic porch, waiting for the answer to his ring. A year ago next Friday he had come to this place! How hard it was to think of it all as only a year! It seemed to him as if something in this Dorset air had the power to elongate the very substance of Time.

Roger Monk opened the door to him. Wolf could see at once that something unusual was in the wind. The eye of the man "from the Shires" was hunted and startled.

"What's wrong, Roger? Has anything happened?" He put all the nonchalance he could muster into this question, but in his heart he felt discomfortable misgivings. Roger Monk carefully and gravely bolted the great door. He had the air of a man who bars out an army of enemies.

"He's up there with him. He's been giving him a bottle of that Malmsey, same as he gave you, Sir, but I don't like it when he drinks with any strange party, saving of course yourself and his lordship."

"Who's with him? Who are you talking about?" enquired Wolf.

Mr. Monk bent his head down a little, so as to bring his face nearer to his interlocutor.

"I don't like the way he's talking to Squire," he whispered. "I'm glad you've a-come, Sir. Maybe you'll be able to do something to stop him."

"Who *is* he?" asked Wolf again.

"Mr. Otter, Sir," said the servant, straightening his back. "Not *your* Mr. Otter, if I may say so... the other gentleman, Sir."

“Jason, you mean?”

The man nodded.

“He’s been using words to Squire such as I never thought to hear spoke to he by a human lip.”

“What’s Jason been saying, Monk? I don’t see that it’s any good my going up there, if they’re both drunk? I know how strong that wine is.”

The man’s face showed consternation.

“Oh, Mr. Solent, you wouldn’t desert us when you’ve come back to us?... come back at the moment we need you as never was! Let me have your coat, sir. I’ll take your parcel, Sir.” And he laid an almost compulsory hand upon the manuscript-book, which Wolf was still clutching.

“I’ve brought this book for Mr. Urquhart,” said Wolf, submitting to have his coat and stick taken away; “but what’s the use, if he’s — —”

“His book, sir? His book? Is *that* his book?” cried the agitated giant, throwing Wolf’s coat down on an oaken chest and approaching him as if he held a precious animal in his arms. “Ghost of Jesus! What a day is this day! Writ and copied by handiwork! Ghost of Jesus! But I’m glad to see this day!”

His excitement was so great that he ran his fingers along the surface of the great ledger, stroking it as if it had a head and a tail!

“Come along upstairs, Mr. Solent! This is what my master has need of. Come along upstairs, Mr. Solent!”

Wolf followed his enormous figure as he strode up the stately Jacobean ascent, his hand on the carved balustrade. When they were outside the library-door, the man paused and whispered in an inaudible voice.

“I beg your pardon?” repeated Wolf; for behind that closed door he began to catch the murmured sound of voices. “I can’t hear what you say, Roger!”

The man raised his voice a little with a nervous sideways glance at the closed door.

"I took the liberty of asking you, Sir, whether you'd step into the kitchen before you leave us. Old Man Round's down there with Miss Elizabeth. They caught some lad or other fishing out o' season in Lenty Pond, and they've come to show Squire a monstrous large perch this lad hooked up. I dursn't say nothing, because of *he* in there" — and the man jerked his thumb towards the door— "but maybe they'd like for you to see the fish. I only mention it, as Miss Martin and our maid be gone to Weymouth for the day... so if you'd walk straight in on us, Sir, afore you leave, 'twould be a kindness!"

"Certainly I will, Roger. I'll be very glad to... as long as I don't have to eat that fish!"

Monk displayed a more earnest gratitude in his gipsy-eyes than the occasion seemed to warrant; and then, opening the door wide with a sudden jerk, he announced in a louder voice than usual, "Mr. Solent to see you, Sir!"

As the door shut behind him Wolf had a momentary feeling that the man was there still, holding fast to the handle, to bar any panic-stricken retreat. But what he saw now swept Monk and his movements completely out of his consciousness.

Hurriedly he moved forward towards the two figures at the fireplace.

They were in the same position as he himself and the squire had been on that memorable day of the contract; but now, with this finished book under his left arm and the two-months-old cheque in his right pocket, the curve of recurrence leered at him with a sly difference.

Between the two men was the same table, with the same empty decanter upon it; and the logs upon the hearth seemed to glow with the same light.

But Jason, instead of being seated, was standing erect, his fingers tapping the table's edge and his eyes burning with a black intensity.

"The Malmsey," thought Wolf, "has loosened his tongue. He looks like an avenging demon."

What gave Wolf an especial shock was the way Mr. Urquhart himself was sitting. He sat, indeed, bolt-upright, but he had twisted himself in some odd fashion to the side of his chair, against the arm of which his back was pressed hard. His thin legs were at an acute angle to his Napoleonic paunch, a distortion that endowed both stomach and legs with a disturbing separate identity.

The final token of abnormality in the man's appearance was not connected with his body, however, but with his head; for to Wolf's consternation the glossy black hair upon his scalp had *moved*, moved about an eighth of an inch, pushing the parting over to the wrong place.

Mr. Urquhart's mouth was open; but this was not all, for his thin lips were inward-drawn over the rims of his gums, and there was a staring intensity of outrage in his face, worthy to be compared with that peculiar expression which the sculptor Scopas used to lay upon the hollow eye-sockets of his figures!

Both men were far too engrossed with what was occurring to do more than turn their eyes towards Wolf as he approached. Mr. Urquhart gave a perceptible shrug with his left shoulder. Jason's cheek flushed duskily. But not another sign did either make to greet him.

"You think you are different from other people," Jason was saying, as Wolf came and stood by Mr. Urquhart's side. "You think you have deeper feelings, because you own this big house and keep these servants! You think your ideas are wonderful, because you've got a great library. You think you have more respect than other people, because you've got money to buy it.

You only asked me here and gave me this wine because those London newspapers praised me. You've always hated me. You've paid your man to spy on me. You're not a bit different from your friend Round. You like good meals. You like watching boys bathe. You like warming your feet by your fire and thinking how great you are because your father left you some foreign wine! You're exactly the same as everyone else, except that you've got an uglier face. You make a mystery of your life, when there's nothing in it to boast about except worrying people with your nasty fancies! You think your life is grand and devilish, when all you are is a silly old man with a boy's death on your conscience. Yes, on your conscience; but no more on *your* conscience than on anyone else's! *He* wasn't upset by you. He hardly gave you a thought. *You* weren't his friend. He used to laugh at you with his real friends! He only thought of you as a silly old man who liked his meals and his glass, just as everyone does. That's all you are. You're no wonderful, mysterious man of evil. You're an ugly-faced pantaloon... just greedy and stupid. That's what *he* thought of you, when he gave you any thought at all! Why did you ask me to come here today? Only because you heard that Lady Lovelace had been to see me, and that there was an essay about me and my art in the Illustrated London News! You think it's grand to have a head-gardener as a servant, so that you can say, 'Ring the bell, if you please! Get me a bottle of foreign wine, if you please!' Everyone knows the real reason you pay that man to hang around. Only because you like to feel gentlemanly and refined in comparison with a great bully like that! Here's your new assistant come to ask for his pay, for copying out your liquorish tales! Do you think he takes any interest in you really, or cares a farthing for your writing? Not a jot; not a jot... not any more than — —"

Wolf interrupted him at this point by flinging down the great white ledger-book on the table. The two glasses tinkled. One of them hit the side of the decanter with a silvery reverberation. Jason turned a stony face towards him. Mr. Urquhart blinked his eyes, moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, closed his mouth, and shot at him a look like that which an experienced trapper, his right arm in the jaws of an infuriated bear, might cast towards a faithful dog!

"There's your book, Sir!" cried Wolf, completely disregarding Jason. "I finished it last night and brought it straight up to you. It's really something... *this*... that we've done together! If we can get it printed I believe it'll make an impression... even on Otter's attention."

"Otter's attention" seemed, certainly at that moment, paralyzed by the great parchment-covered volume, lying on the Malmsey-stained table.

Very slowly he bent down and opened it at random, letting half the pages lean against the decanter. "You write like a person who knows Greek," he said gravely to Wolf. Wolf bowed.

"I know Greek too well," he replied significantly.

"He means he knows what's made you abuse me like this, eh? what, Solent?" And the squire jerked himself into a normal position, straightening out his legs under the table and leaning back with a deep sigh of relief.

Wolf felt an absurd, an almost sentimental desire to lay his hand on his employer's head and adjust that unnatural parting. So it was a wig he wore, after all; at least *some* of it was a wig!

Jason bent down still lower over the book, holding the pages back with two of his fingers while his lips mutely repeated the paragraph he had chanced upon.

"I hope you haven't brought *me* into this history of yours," he remarked, after a pause. "I don't like to be abused any better than Mr. Urquhart does." He straightened himself and placed his hands behind his back. "I expect," he went on, "I wouldn't have talked to you like that, Mr. Urquhart, if you hadn't given me your best wine. For your second-best wine I'd probably have flattered you as much as Solent does!"

The Squire disregarded this completely. With a caressing and rapturous hand he began himself turning the pages, running his forefinger along certain sentences, as if he were blind and the letters stood out in relief.

"Are you tired with your walk?" Jason remarked, addressing Wolf, and politely offering him his chair. "I ought not to have abused anyone like that; especially anyone who has such good wine," he added, in a low meditative voice.

"You'll see how I've managed, Sir, about the way it ends," said Wolf, still itching to play barber to Mr. Urquhart's disorganized poll. "It ends with the Puddletown incident; but I've added a sort of conclusion... rather a bitter one, I fear, but I thought you wouldn't mind?"

"Wanted the last word, eh, me boy? It ain't the first time you've wanted that! No, no, no, no... Gad! *I* have no objection!" As he spoke, the Squire lifted his head and stared haughtily at Jason.

"Otter," he said. And his tone caused dismay to Wolf; for he thought, "They'll burst out again in a moment!" "Otter," he said, "I wish you'd do me the favour of opening that window over there."

To Wolf's surprise Jason made no bones at all about obeying this request. He went off at once with firm, steady steps to one of the great mullioned windows. He went to the nearest one, not the one above Wolf's old place of work, but one much nearer; and when he got to it he turned round, and, with something almost resembling a friendly chuckle, he called out: "I can't work the machinery of these grand windows of yours! Shall I just unfasten it and let it swing out?"

Mr. Urquhart threw a most whimsical look at Wolf... he seemed to have recovered from Jason's tirade very much as a piece of elastic that has been stretched to the breaking-point but has been released in time sinks back comfortably to its former state.

“Unfasten it, my good man!” he cried. “Never mind what happens! Unhook it and let it go!”

Jason shrugged his shoulders, and, seizing the window-catch, did exactly as he was bid. The leaded casement swung heavily on its hinges, was caught by the wind, and was blown wide open.

Into the room rushed such a blast of cutting east wind, that Jason came hurrying back to the fire, chuckling, hunching his back, and making a grimace as if pursued by demons. The pages of the open book upon the table fluttered like burdock-leaves in a storm. Wolf closed the volume and placed the empty decanter on top of it.

“Now’s the moment,” he thought, “to give him back the cheque.”

Jason pulled a third chair towards the fire. Mr. Urquhart settled himself deep in his seat, complacent and imperturbable, crossing his legs and swinging one of his slippered feet up and down in a manner that indicated complete self-assurance.

Wolf looked across the table at him. “Yes, now’s the moment to do it,” he repeated to himself. As he made this decision, he thought of Bob Weevil, dressed in his smart suit, sitting with Gerda in their parlour. “They’ll never go for a walk,” he thought, “in this bitter wind.”

The whole library seemed full just then of a nipping air; and he noticed that both Jason and his host began turning up their coat-collars. But the cold was rapidly sobering them. That was one good thing! It *was* certainly the moment to do it now; for the Squire’s expression had an ironical aplomb that indicated the return of sobriety, and Jason had poured out apparently all his reservoir of black bile.

But, oh, how hard it was to do it! He thought of Gerda's longing for the pots and pans, the silver spoons, the carpet, the kitchen-clock. He thought intensely of his own desire for a dozen bottles of Three Peewits gin. Damn it all! The whole idea of giving it back was fantastic and superstitious. Yes, that's what it was — superstitious. And it was pure selfishness too. Gerda was doing everything for him — what right had he to rob her of their earnings? Those quiet evenings she'd given him for the last two months were what had finished the job.

"They've asked me to send them another volume of my writings," remarked Jason suddenly. "What do you two advise me to say I've got to have, before I send it? Darnley thinks a hundred pounds wouldn't be too much."

"Two hundred," murmured the Squire, with a sly glance at Wolf.

"Let's have your opinion, Solent," continued Jason. "You're one of these cunning dogs who know what's what!"

In a flash Wolf had jumped to his feet.

"Mr. Urquhart," he cried, pulling the bit of paper from his pocket and spreading it out before the squire, "here's that cheque you gave me! I haven't cashed it and I'm not going to cash it. I've done your work for my own pleasure. I don't want a penny for doing it! You see it's the same cheque, don't you? Well... here goes!"

As he spoke he crumpled up the precious slip in his fingers; and, just as if he were retreating to make some tremendous leap, he stepped back a pace or two from the table.

The east wind was whirling round and round the room; and both of the men, sitting huddled by the fire, lifted their heads to look at him over their turned-up collars.

But as Wolf jumped back, crumpling the cheque, what *he* looked at was not the face of the Squire, but the face of Jason.

As he lifted his hand, something at the very bottom of his soul fought for release. Jason's face at that moment was a thing he had to challenge, to defy, to surmount. The man's eternal derision of him had suddenly swollen up, towering, toppling, tremendous... like an ice-wall. It had been gathering weight, this wall, for months and months; and here it was! His impressions moved more rapidly at that moment than light-waves travelling from Betelgeuse or from Algol; and one of these vibrations, flashing through his mind, hinted to him that the menace to his "mythology" which Dorsetshire had brought, came through Jason and not through Mr. Urquhart....

"Well... here goes!" And he flung the crumpled-up bit of paper over the table, between the two men's heads, straight at the blazing logs!

His action would have fulfilled his intention to a nicety, if he had not neglected, for the second time that day, to take into account the power of that east wind.

The little ball of paper was caught midway, whirled in an ellipse, and neatly and accurately — with what might have seemed demonic intent — deposited in the centre of the squire's stomach! Mr. Urquhart secured this unintended missile as it rolled down between his legs, and laid it with a careless gesture upon the table in front of him.

Wolf made a dash forward, but stopped abruptly; and very deliberately the squire unfolded the cheque and smoothed it out before him.

"That's just silly, me boy," he remarked calmly. "No need to insult a person, when you've picked him out of the ditch! That's just rude and uncivil. That's unkind. There you are!" And with a gesture as grandiose and princely as if he were returning a rapier to a disarmed antagonist, he raised his arm and stretched out the thing for Wolf to take back.

Without a word Wolf submitted — received the slip of paper from that outstretched hand and replaced it in the identical pocket where it had lain since morning.

As he did so, he was conscious of two dominant feelings, a sensation of sickening shame, as if he had been caught stealing a piece of silver from the communion-plate, and a puerile thrill of delight to think of Gerda's pleasure over the carpet, the clock, and the new spoons!

As this event occurred, the countenance of Jason Otter relaxed into a thousand wrinkles. Up went his hand to his mouth, to hide a chuckle worthy of Mukalog himself. But the only comment he uttered was a murmured "Boss-eye!"... a preparatory-school expression that had not entered Wolf's ears since his childhood in Ramsgard.

"May I ask you to close that window again, Otter?" said Mr. Urquhart in his silkiest tone, removing, as he did so, with the tip of his finger, a drop of wine that had trickled down from the outside of the decanter upon the cover of the manuscript.

While Jason was fumbling with the window, Wolf had begun a series of preoccupied pacings, up and down, across and back, over the expanse of the room.

When the window was closed he stopped and spoke.

"Monk tells me that Mr. Round is in the kitchen and has brought a fish to show you — a large perch — caught out of season. Do you mind if I run in and see it before I go? I'm afraid I must be off now. I'm glad you're pleased with the look of our book, Sir! And I thank you for this money. It was ridiculous of me to — —" He broke off. "I shall change it at Stuckey's on Monday. It'll keep the pot boiling splendidly, Sir."...

The time that passed between his utterance of that final word "splendidly" and the entrance of all three of them into Mr. Urquhart's kitchen did not present itself to him in the form of the passing of so many minutes. It presented itself as one shattering question, addressed by Wolf Solent *to* Wolf Solent, as to whether this crowning defeat over the cheque had really done at last the thing he dreaded! Would he find, when he took up his life again, that his “mythology” was stone-dead... dead as Jimmy Redfern?

Beautiful in their blue-black intensity, the great dark stripes over the metallic scales of the perch — caught out of season — brought back to Wolf’s mind a certain inland pool, near Weymouth backwater, where he had once hooked a small specimen of this particular fish, which his father had made him throw back again. As it had swum away through the aqueous dimness, between two great branching pickerel-weed stalks, he had had an ecstasy in thinking of that lovely, translucent under-world, completely different from his, in which, however, the pale-blooded inhabitants knew every hill and hollow, just as intimately — nor with such very different associations either — as he knew his own world.

Spacious and noble was the kitchen at Barton Manor; but somehow, as Wolf took that fish into his hands and entered into the overpowering emanation of its dead identity — its pale blood-drops, its sticky iridescent scales, its mud-pungent smell — he was seized with a sudden shock of intense craving for that barren, brackish country around Weymouth where his “mythology” had first been revealed to him. “Which of us five men,” he thought, “is most like a fish? It’s the best symbol of the Unutterable that there is!”

Laying the fish down, while Mr. Round explained to the squire and Jason how his niece had caught the poacher — and it turned out, as the innkeeper went on, that this poacher was none other than Lobbie Torp, who had been over there soon after dawn — Wolf stood aside, conversing with Miss Elizabeth.

"I congratulate you on your uncle's recovery," he said. "I often felt so sorry for you after that day we met at the pond."

The "automatic young lady" wetted her lips with the tip of a little snake-like tongue and whispered something almost inaudibly. Wolf drew back further with her till they were out of hearing of the rest.

"I don't know why I should tell you this, Mr. Solent," she said, with an air of sentimental hesitation.

"I'm afraid I didn't hear," he replied rather coldly.

"I don't often tell strangers anything," she went on. "But seeing your lady's brother, at *that* time in the morning, and finding him with this fish and everything, put it in my head to tell you... and then I heard you were here."

"I am sure I'm much obliged to you, Miss Round," he said, with a lack of curiosity that verged on impoliteness. "It's... very kind of you... to... remember me."

But as he lifted his fingers to brush away a fly from his face, Miss Round, Mr. Urquhart, Jason, Monk — all receded and faded before him, till they became small, insignificant, wavering shadows! The smell of the dead fish, as he caught it from his raised hand, touched that spacious kitchen and turned it into thin air. In its place there appeared the hot, powdery sands by the King's statue at Weymouth, the tethered donkeys, the goat-carriages, the peaked bathing-machines. In its place appeared the grass-green seaweed clinging to the black posts of half-obliterated breakwaters. In its place appeared the bow-window of the drawing-room in Brunswick Terrace, where, in those early mornings, as he watched his grandmother's maid shake the duster over the sill, there always hung a peculiar odour of sun-dried woodwork, mingled with the salt of the open sea!

"Your wife's father was there, Sir," was what he heard now, with at least a quarter of his mind. "But he had been drinking and was all so mazed-like that he couldn't hear what uncle and Monk were saying. But *I* heard them, though they didn't know I heard them. And oh, Mr. Solent, they're all after you; they're all watching you like dogs at a rabbit-hole! They're just pushing you on to it... and that's God's truth!"

She had been whispering all this with flushed cheeks and an intense gaze fixed upon him.

Wolf's attention began to return.

"Pushing me on to what?" he replied, in equally low tones.

"I were born in Barton," the girl whispered. "I know every stick and stone of the place; but I didn't know 'twere as bad as I learned it that day."

"What do you mean?" he murmured.

"They said," she continued rapidly, "that every Urquhart what's lived at House since Noll Cromwell's reign has drove some young man into Lenty Pond! They said 'twere only the Reverend Valley's league with Jesus what made young Redfern die in's bed, stead of drowning hisself! They said for certain *sure* you'd be the one to go next. All the aged folk in village do be watching for it, they said — them as is wise in what was and must be! They said 'twere a good day for King's Barton when you came here, foreign as you be! Uncle said there were Scripture for it. He first knew there were Scripture for it, he said, when Mr. Valley drove his voices away from his poor ears and he stopped worrying. 'Some *must* go that way,' he said, 'while pond be pond. And if it ain't I, 'twill be he,' he said. I knew who 'twere they were talking of by their fleering nods."

The girl paused. Wolf noticed that her eyes had grown liquid and soft. A feeling of undeniable discomfort rose up within him. “What a superstitious idiot I am!” he thought. “The automatic young lady has taken a fancy to me, that’s all it is! This is her way of starting an intimacy.”

“Well, Miss Round,” he said gravely, “I think it’s very nice of you to be so concerned about me. But you can set your mind at rest. All villages have these legends. Besides... who knows?... I may be such a crafty scapegoat that I’ll bear the burden without turning a hair!”

She opened her mouth; she opened her blue eyes wide; she distended her little round nostrils.

“Go back where you came from, Mr. Solent dear!” she whispered. “Go back to London afore anyone can push you to it! I shivered in my breasts, for fear for ‘ee, when I saw how bitter cold that pond were in the horns of dawn! ‘Tweren’t only the sight of Lobbie Torp fishing against the law what made me shake. I’ve thought of you and dreamed of you, Mr. Solent, yes I have; and I’m not ashamed of it, ever since I first set eyes on you!”

Wolf glanced nervously across the kitchen; but what he heard and saw reassured him. His singular interview with Miss Bess seemed totally disregarded by the others. Jason was evidently propitiating Roger Monk with the most fawning civility; while the Squire and the innkeeper were occupied in weighing the perch.

Wolf was impressed more than he could have foreseen by the girl’s manner; nor had he missed that poetical expression of hers— “the horns of dawn.” He began a humble and equivocal answer to her startling outburst, trying to explain to her the subtle manner in which these wild rumours, drawing their sap from the human passion for the supernatural, gathered weight in the countryside. He was a little dismayed, however, by the reckless response in his own fingers, which seemed to be reciprocating the ardent pressure of hers, as he bade her good-bye! Had he lost *all* integrity of emotion, he asked himself, as he went across to take leave of the others? Had his retention of that cheque undermined the whole dignity and self-control of his nature? Or was it that what he had accidentally discovered as to the Lesbianism of this strange girl appealed to something perverse in his imagination?

Once out of the house, however — once clear of the bare raked-over flower-beds, beds whose patches of yellow crocuses and jonquil-buds seemed shrinking back into the earth under that biting wind — he threw those feelings from him and took the shortest way to the Blacksod road! This led him past the churchyard and the vicarage-gate; and he scarcely knew whether his jarred nerves sympathized more vibrantly with the frost-bitten population under the grass, or with the obsessed little priest drinking his brandy amid all the trash in that desolate study!

When he got clear of the village, he struck westward across the fields, so as to hit the upper road; and it was not till he reached Babylon Hill that he paused to take breath. There he decided to skirt the edge of Poll's Camp and avoid the more familiar descent into the town.

"You two down there," the demon within him began muttering, as his glance swept over Blacksod, from Preston Lane to the Malakite shop, "you two down there... when are you going to stop rending me and tearing my vitals?" This was not the first time lately that he caught himself coupling Gerda and Christie together. "These Bess Rounds," he thought, "are a lot easier to manage than *my two*!" Repeating the syllables "my two" with all the more bitter relish because of his realization of their outrageousness, Wolf began descending the westerly slope of Poll's Camp, with the intention of discovering some unorthodox way of striking Preston Lane without having to walk the whole length of the High Street.

When he reached level ground he found he had to cross several enclosed orchards, which he did by scrambling through three successive hedges. Pricked by thorns, stung by nettles, his hands smelling of the bitter sap of elder-twigs, he made his way through those ancient enclosures, noting how their lichen-covered branches reproduced almost exactly the colour of the grey sky. In spite of the bitter wind, he stopped in the middle of one of those orchards to crouch down over a patch of shining celandines. The valiant lustre of those starry petals in the dark-green grass gave him a confused hope. No scent had they in themselves; but, as he pressed his forehead into the cold roots of the grass around them, the smell of the earth, sucked up through mouth and nostrils, entered into the very nerves of his soul with a long, shivering, restorative poignance.

"Is it dead?" he said to himself. "Well, even if it *is*, I've still got *some* sensations left!" When he thought in this way about his "mythology," it was queer how he always endowed it with a visible shape. He thought of it as "it," and this "it" was always compelled to take the shape of large, succulent leaves, the leaves of a water-plant whose roots were hidden beneath fathoms of greenish-coloured water.

"*Some* sensations left, even if it *is* dead!" And he rose heavily to his feet and moved on.

He emerged into a narrow, unused cart-track between overgrown, neglected hedges. As he made his way down this path, treading on young nettles and upon old burdocks, he couldn't help thinking how charged with a secret life of its own, different from all other places, a deserted lane like this was. "What a world it is in itself," he muttered, "any little overgrown path!"

The curious satisfaction which this secluded cart-track gave him caused him to stand still in the middle of the path. The hedges sheltered him from the wind. The spirit of the earth called out to him from the green shoots beneath his feet. Faint bird-notes kept sounding from unseen places. The cold sky prevented them from completing their songs; but the stoicism of life in those feathered hearts refused to be silenced.

His consciousness, as he stood there, seemed to stretch out to all the reborn life in the whole countryside. "Good *is* stronger than Evil," he thought, "if you take it on its simplest terms and set yourself to forget the horror! It's mad to refuse to be happy because there's a poison in the world that bites into every nerve. After all, it's short enough! I know very well that Chance could set me screaming like a wounded baboon — every jot of philosophy gone! Well, until that happens, I must endure what I have to endure."

His mind returned again to the scene about him. "What a world it is, a little overgrown path, especially in the spring, when it isn't choked up!" He tried to imagine what such a place must be to the rabbits, field-mice, hedgehogs, slow-worms, who doubtless inhabited it. "Very much what Lenty Pond is to its frogs and minnows!" he thought. And then his mind, from visualizing those remote backwater-worlds, turned once more to Redfern.

"I'm Redfern Number Two," he thought. "There's no getting over *that*."

The path he followed soon emerged into the back-premises of a small dairy-barton; and these in their turn opened out into one of the outlying streets of the town.

"Redfern must have been an idiot," he thought, as he made his way towards Preston Lane, "to contemplate drowning himself over Urquhart's manias. King's Barton isn't everything. King's Barton isn't a shut-off world, like that deserted path!"

He looked at his watch as he approached the door of his house. Just five o'clock! "Will she have got rid of him? Will she be away and the place empty? She knew I was coming back to tea. It will be the first time she's ever done it, if she is away."

As he fumbled with the latch of the gate, he found that once more he was associating Gerda and Christie together.

There were four purple crocuses and two yellow ones in the flower-bed on his left; and on his right, three impoverished hyacinth-buds, of a pinkish colour; and they all seemed to be doing their best to sink back into the earth out of a world that contained, among its possibilities, such a thing as this wind!

"Is Bob Weevil in there with her?" he thought, staring at the crocuses till they ceased to be crocuses. "He may not be... but one thing is absolutely certain, and that is that Christie and the old man are having tea together! If not now, they will be, soon. What more natural? 'The dear father would with his daughter speak.' "

He did his best to peer into the parlour-window, but the afternoon was so dark that all he could make out was a faint glow from the firelight.

He looked at the closed door and made a step towards it; but a leaden weight seemed to oppress the muscles of his arm. He glanced down now at those wretched hyacinth-buds. How miserable they looked! The strange thing was that he had the feeling now that to open *this* door would be opening the *other* door too!

He stood hesitating, listening to the wind whistling along the rain-gutter upon the roof above him. At last, with a violent effort of his will, he lurched forward, opened the door with a jerk, and walked into the house.

The kitchen-door was open, and from the middle of the hallway he could see the kettle steaming upon the stove. The parlour-door, however, was shut. He hung up his coat and hat, and with a beating heart he opened the parlour-door. There, by a low red fire, with the tea-tray between them on the little card-table, sat Gerda and Bob Weevil, drinking their tea.

He was conscious, as he entered, of an atmospheric density in the room — a density that seemed both material and psychic.

“The place smells of Bob Weevil’s new clothes,” he thought, moving forward towards them.

The young tradesman rose to greet him, but Gerda retained her seat.

“You were so late that I thought I wouldn’t keep Bob waiting for his tea,” she said; “but I’ve got your cup here, and it’s only just made.”

“Bob was good enough to give me lunch,” he remarked; “so you are right to treat him nicely. Sit down, Bob.” And pulling a third chair towards the table for himself, he held out his cup for Gerda to fill.

“Well,” he said, after he had tasted his tea, “I found Urquhart at home, and I met Jason there too... oh, and a friend of yours, too, Bob! Guess who that was!”

As he spoke, he tried to catch Gerda’s eye, but she successfully evaded the attempt.

“I don’t mix with any such swells,” remarked Weevil, with a facetious grimace. “I’ll try another piece of that cake, Mrs. Solent, if you don’t mind.”

The emphasis he laid on the words “Mrs. Solent” was jeering and impudent.

“It was Bess Round,” Wolf brought out grimly; “and the joke of it is she’d come with a great perch that she’d found our Lobbie catching out of season.”

Gerda flashed a glance at him that even in that dim light was like the blade of a knife.

“Bess is no friend of mine,” said Weevil. “She caught that fish herself, I’ve no doubt, and palmed it off on Lob. Lob don’t need to go as far as Barton for his fish... season or no season... does he, Gerdie?”

“*I* don’t know, and none of us here know either,” the girl rapped out. “Lob does what he likes these days when he’s out of school. He’s got to fish early, if he’s to fish at all.”

What came suddenly into Wolf’s head at that moment was an excited wondering why it was that a fish had once been a symbol for Christ. This thought, however, vanished as quickly as it arrived; and he soon found himself trying in vain to exchange an intimate look with Gerda. More and more strongly, as he sat there sipping his one bitter cup of tea — he had no spirit to ask for a second, no spirit to ask for more hot water — was the conviction growing upon him that something really serious had happened. Gerda had a look on her face utterly different from any he had ever seen there. It was a hard, reckless, unhappy look, resolute, reserved, indrawn. She looked five years older than when he had seen her asleep in her bed that morning.

He furtively felt in his pocket, to make sure that the cheque was there still. He had an uneasy feeling, after all those agitating occurrences, that he might have lost it. He longed for the moment of Weevil’s departure, that he might throw it into her lap!

“What did you think of my poor old Dad, Mr. Solent?” enquired the visitor, munching his cake with relish. Wolf was conscious of a ridiculously insistent wonder as to when it was that Gerda had run over to Pimpernel’s for this luxury. “He’s not much to look at when he’s at meals, or to hear from either,” went on this pious offspring; “but he takes notice after supper. Last night, for instance, if you’ll excuse my mentioning it, he began jawing away like a dissenting minister about my having no purpose in life. What's *your* purpose in life, Gerdie?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Bob," replied the girl.

"What's *yours*, Mr. Solent?" pursued the incorrigible young man, while Gerda was bending over the lamp.

Wolf had by this time become so certain that something fatal *had* happened, that in his nervousness it was very hard to restrain himself from a violent outburst.

"Purpose?" he repeated; and the word sounded pure nonsense. "She must have given herself to him," he thought, "out of blind anger, just to spite me! If it isn't that, what is it? Something's happened. She's either given herself to him or promised to!"

"Purpose?" he repeated aloud, turning the word over in his mind as if it were a stone or a shell. "I suppose, to get at reality through experience?... No! How shall I put it?... To enjoy reality through sensation? I expect that's it. Through certain kinds of sensation."

The illuminated lamp threw its light upon Gerda's face as she resumed her seat.

"What would you describe as your purpose, Bob?" he went on, thinking to himself: "She's gone through something that's startled and shocked her... or she's made up her mind to go through it. She's not the same Gerda that I left this morning with her face drenched with crying."

Bob Weevil rose to his feet. "My purpose is to get home to supper," he said. "I told Dad last night that it was to serve my God, and he told me not to be so cheeky... so you see he's not such a fool after all, the funny old chap!"

Gerda displayed no emotion of any kind on Weevil's departure. As soon as the door was shut upon him, Wolf produced Mr. Urquhart's cheque and pressed it into her fingers. “You shall have your clock and your carpet and your spoons; and everything else, honey,” he whispered, clutching her by the wrist.

They were back in the parlour now, and she smoothed out the crumpled piece of paper upon the tea-tray. Then she folded it up, as mechanically as if it had been a napkin, and handed it back to him, looking at his fingers, but not at his face.

“Do you want to wash up these things for me, Wolf?” she remarked coldly to him over her shoulder, as she took up the tray and carried it into the kitchen.

As she passed him again in a couple of seconds, moving with a candle in her hand, he made a tentative caressing gesture. “Don’t, Wolf!” she murmured, pushing his hand away. “I’m tired. I’m going to bed.”

He followed her to the foot of the staircase and looked up at her as she walked upstairs. “You’ll be able to get all those things now, Gerda!” he cried.

Her face, as she held the candle level with her breast and turned to look at him, was white and set. For the first time that evening she stared straight into his eyes.

“It’s too late now,” she said quietly, and passed on into their bedroom.

THE QUICK OR THE DEAD?

GERDA WAS ASLEEP, or pretending to be asleep, when Wolf got into bed beside her that night on February the twenty-fifth. He was physically so exhausted with walking and so drowned by exposure to the wind, that he soon sank into oblivion himself; and all night the two lay side by side, their heads, their hips, their knees frequently touching, but their souls restlessly wandering far apart.

The first feeling he had when he awoke was a faint impression of moss and earth-mould. Then he realized that the sky between the curtains was of a deep blue. He had opened the window wide before getting into bed; and the room was full of a delicious relaxed air that must have blown over leagues of Somersetshire pastures.

"It's impossible," he thought, "that I shouldn't be able to deal with everything, when Nature can produce mornings like this!" He propped himself up on his arm and gazed down upon the figure by his side, struck once again, as he always was, by the freshness of her beauty. She stirred in her sleep and turned her head.

"Her profile is flawless," he thought. "How do these classic faces come to exist in these parts at all?"

He bent down over the sleeping girl as tenderly as he might have done over the first cuckoo-flower of the season. "It's happened at last," he said to himself. "She's let him have her... just to revenge herself about the cheque and about everything else she endures in her life with me! I'm a cuckold at last. I've always wondered what it would feel like; and now I know. I don't feel anything! I'm just a mirror for *her* feelings. It's been so bad for her that it's of *her* I think... entirely... absolutely!"

The girl stirred again, more uneasily than before. There came a frown between her eyebrows, and her nostrils quivered. She turned her head from side to side, like a person in a fever or a person whose limbs and arms are paralyzed. Deep in Wolf's heart, as he stared at her, there gathered a fundamental decision. Formless at first, it rolled together in the recesses of his nature like a rack of clouds on a misty horizon. Then suddenly it tossed forth a coherent resolution. "I won't let the water-rat keep her. Cuckold or no cuckold, I love her. She's been miserable about it. I won't give her up!"

At that moment, disturbed by the magnetism of his look, Gerda opened her eyes. He bent and kissed her; and as he lifted his head again, he saw a lovely smile flicker across her face. "She'd forgotten the whole thing!" he thought, as he watched this smile vanish away and the same rigid, unhappy look come back. She made a movement to extricate her arm from the bedclothes, but the look upon her face was sufficient. He scrambled to his knees and slipped out of bed.

The day being Sunday, there was no need for them to have their breakfast as early as this; but the bright sunshine and the warm, spring-scented air made the hour seem later than it really was.

All that morning they were both like persons on the deck of a becalmed ship, who move restlessly, hurriedly, through familiar tasks, in preparation for some drastic event. Over and over again Wolf was on the point of launching forth into a passionate declaration that what had occurred made no difference... that he loved her just the same... that he blamed himself over the matter of the cheque. But every time he formulated such words and was on the verge of expressing them, that look of hers froze them in the utterance. She held him helpless and mute by that look. It was like a ceremonial death-cloth wrapped round a living head.

When the housework was quite done — and he noticed that she did it much more conscientiously than usual, as though making excuses to prolong it — she announced her intention of going over to Chequers Street. "If Lobbie hasn't gone out yet," she said, "and I'm pretty sure he won't have, I'll get him to go down by the river with me."

"You'll be back for lunch, won't you, honey?" He threw into these words all the supplication he could.

"No, Wolf, I don't think so," she replied slowly. "I think I'll get mother to make up some sandwiches, like she used to in the old days, when Lob and I went down to the Lunt. I'll be back for tea, though. You can put on the kettle at five, if I've not come then. I won't be much later than that."

Wolf's memory rushed away to that March evening by the banks of the river... to the shed in the middle of the wet grass... to the yellow bracken. It struck his mind as ominous, if not tragic, that at this juncture she should instinctively revert to Lobbie and the Lunt. But he made no attempt to dissuade her. "She thinks it's pride in me that I don't," he said to himself. "It isn't that! It's respect for her. It's respect for her life. It's respect for her identity."

"Where will you get *your* dinner?" she said at last, standing between the crocuses and the pink hyacinths, while Wolf still held their front-door open. His heart leaped up at this word. Was it an overture, a motion towards him?

"Oh, I expect I'll find enough in the cupboard, sweetheart," he said lightly; but into these words also he threw a caressing supplication. "If not, I'll see if my mother's in... or Christie," he added.

At the sound of Christie's name she did fumble for a second with her gloved fingers upon the top of the iron gate, while her head sank down in intense thought.

“Wait a minute, Gerda!” he cried, noting this hesitation. He ran back into the hall and returned with his hat and stick. “I’ll come with you as far as their house.”

She made no objection to this; and as he shut the gate behind them, the particular feel of the ironwork and the noise of the latch brought back to his mind some occasion in the past when they had embraced each other, just there, in a rush of happy reconciliation. He glanced at the pigsty across the road. There wasn’t a hint upon the air today of anything but the spring.

“Gerda,” he said, when they were well past the street-corner, a vantage-ground that served the idlers of their quarter in lieu of a tavern-bar, “I don’t want you to think I’m a bit jealous of poor old Bob. It’s only fair you should have a friend you’re fond of, in the sort of way I’m fond of Christie.”

She was silent for a couple of seconds; and his words seemed to make the lines between the paving-stones, as he stared at the ground, turn into the rungs of a ladder upon which it was necessary to place his feet very carefully, because the space between gaped and yawned.

Then she said slowly: “There... would... have... been... a time... for telling me... that, Wolf. Better say no more about it today.”

He held his peace after that, and they reached the monument-maker’s house just as the “five-minutes” bell of the parish-church began to ring, indicating that it was service-time.

The warmth of the day was phenomenal. A light, vaporous mist, balmy and fragrant, as though millions of primrose-buds had opened beneath it and millions of jonquils had poured their sweetness into it, hung over the lintels of the houses and floated in and out of the doorways. Filmy white clouds, so feathery that they faded into the air at their outer edges, swept northwards over the roofs of the town; while the liquid blue of the sky, visible in fluctuating pools and estuaries between those fleecy vapours, seemed to obliterate everything that was hard and opaque from the whole terrestrial globe. So flowing and so diffused was the heaven above, that it seemed to spill and brim over, making the pavements underfoot appear like clouds too, and the patches of grass in that or this little garden like interstices of another, a second sky, whose receding depths were green instead of blue!

Groups of church-goers were moving languidly past the gate of the Torp yard under the urge of their various pious purposes; and in his growing distress at the set, indrawn look on his girl's face, Wolf felt mocked and taunted by the somnolent leisureliness of those people's voices and by the fresh neatness of their clothes.

Not another interchange of real feeling could he obtain with her until they knocked at her father's door; and it was a sharp stab to him to think that this was actually the first time since their marriage that they had presented themselves together at this threshold.

Lobbie himself opened the door to them, and they found the whole family collected in the front-room. Mrs. Torp, having obviously finished making the beds and tidying up the kitchen, for she wore a dirty apron over her Sunday dress, had recently dropped into a chair opposite her husband, from which island of peace she had clearly been flinging abroad volleys of belligerent eloquence; for the plump shirt-sleeved monument-maker had a fixed expression upon his face, at once crushed and protesting — an expression that remained visible even after the stir of their arrival.

"I've only come in for a moment," said Wolf, taking Mrs. Torp's vacated chair, as the lady led her daughter away to pour her troubles into a feminine ear; "but I think Gerda intends to stay. Well, Lobbie, you certainly caught a big fish yesterday! I must congratulate you. Season or no season, it's the biggest perch I've ever seen!"

"My old woman have been skinnin' the poor lad like a fish 'isself, just as you were coming in," said Mr. Torp. "She says I encourage he in they scallywag larks. I don't encourage yer, do I, Lob Torp?"

The boy glanced uneasily at the kitchen-door, from behind which his mother's voice was still audible.

"She were out for mischief, Mister," he whispered solemnly, "else she would never have meddled wi' I! What did she reckon she wanted, walking in they wet fields afore 'twas light? And she spoke to I twice afore I hooked thik girt fish. Be I'd been little, like I were wunst, she'd have made I run home quaking and shaking! Do 'ee know what she said to I, Mister? Her came 'long o' thik hedge-side path what leads from Farmer's Rest to Pond Lane. I saw she coming and I wished myself anywhere; for I reckoned the wold chap had gone and hid 'isself; and her were after he; both on 'em nigh crazy, as you might say! Her came walking straight to where I were, stepping silent, like any wold cow, and when she'd looked at that cold water awhile her kind o' shook. 'Have 'ee seen it?' she said. 'Seen what, Miss Bess?' I said. 'The face under the water,' said she, 'what they all talk of up at Rest.' 'I bain't looking for no faces,' said I. 'I be fishing for perch.' ' 'Twill be seen,' she said, ' 'Twill be seen, till one that be living now be where *it* be... then 'twill fade out.' It were when she were saying 'fade out,' just like that, that I saw me float bob down. You can believe, Mister, that a fellow had no time then for a woman's foolishness! But 'twere naught to she what my float were doing. ' 'Twas thik face in this here water,' said she, 'what worrited uncle. Thik face will be seen by all and sundry,' said she, 'till the time come when — —' "

Lobbie's discourse was interrupted by a sudden movement by his father. Mr. Torp got up from his chair. "You stop that now!" he roared. "You stop that or I'll call you mother to 'ee! Sunday be Sunday, I say, and Mr. Solent be our visitor. If Providence have on's mind to afflict such a gentleman, 'tis his wone concern! This house be my house, Lob Torp; and this morning be Sunday morning. So shut thy mouth about faces in ponds!"

So loud was the voice of Mr. Torp, that no sooner had he resumed his seat than his wife and Gerda burst in.

"What's this about Sunday, John?" said the lady sharply. "Can't you leave that boy in peace for a moment when my back's turned? If it *be* Sunday, what of it? Here's our Gerdie asking for nice meat-sandwiches for to take the lad picnicking. Mr. Solent says he can't stay, so me and you can do what I was telling 'ee just now... go quiet and natural to Nevilton meeting. What do 'ee think I went to the trouble of putting my best dress on for? To hot up yesterday's Yorkshire pudding? If some can eat cold meat, *others* can eat cold meat. There'll never be, all Spring I tell 'ee, such a day for me and you to cover them quiet miles."

Mr. Torp permitted himself a swift, humorous leer at his preoccupied son-in-law.

"What *is* Nevilton meeting, Mrs. Torp?" enquired Wolf, with forced vivacity.

" 'Tis Mother's favourite preacher," interposed Lobbie. "Old Farmer Beard, Mr. Manley's friend, fetches he in dog-cart, from Ilchester. 'A be a Baptist, mister, the kind that washes grown folk all over like babies. Mother goes to hear he, because 'a says all drinking-men, like our Dad, will be burnt cruel, come Judgement. Mother likes for Dad to hear they things; but Dad be a churchman, same as I be, what don't hold with such conclusions. Dad and me be High-Church. Mother be Evangelic."

Mrs. Torp untied her apron and began folding it up. It was clear from her expression that wrath at her offspring's impudence was qualified by pride in his capacity for fine theological distinctions. She began a rambling eulogy upon the preacher from Ilchester, punctuated by irritable exclamations, as she hunted in vain about the room for some tract or hymn-book connected with this celebrity.

But Wolf had no attention just then for anybody but Gerda, whose abstracted look of settled misery, as she sat upright upon a straight-backed chair against the wall, pierced him to the heart.

"She's given herself to that little ass," he thought, "out of pure spite; and it's broken up all her self-respect."

Mrs. Torp's project of making Mr. Torp walk five miles that afternoon to hear himself damned became a desolate background now — like that marble table in the Weevil villa — to this wretched crisis in his life. The idea of some stuffy little room in Nevilton — a village he particularly admired — resounding to the voice of this protégé of Mr. Beard, on a day like this, seemed to paint the whole Dorset landscape with a mud-coloured pigment. A bitter, masculine anger stirred within him at the destructive emotionalism of these women, unable, as they always were, to "leave well alone."

And it did not lessen his agitation to think of Gerda's blind, desperate instinct to take refuge with Lobbie, her old childish companion, down there in those Lunt meadows! Just exactly a year ago since the three of them had come home through the spring twilight... and now she was to carry her sandwiches to the very spot, eat them with Lob on the trunk of that very tree, set eyes, perhaps, on that very shed, and nothing to persuade her to let him join them.

A pitiful craving came upon him to take her in his arms and purge her bedevilled memory of every trace of that lecherous water-rat. And Christie too — why must Christie, in some crazy psychic mood, go and stir up the villainous fires of that old man's smouldering lust? The words that he had read in that fatal exercise-book wrote themselves on the Torp wall as he stared at it. If he hadn't made love to her and then drawn back in the way he did, she'd be still just as she used to be, immune as the flowers on her mantelpiece to that old satyr's approaches.

Gerda's abstraction had by this time become so extreme, her face so sad, that he couldn't bear it any longer. He walked across to her; and in a low, emphatic voice, under cover of Mrs. Torp's voluble hunt for her lost pamphlet, he begged for leave to accompany them on their excursion.

"It's too late, Wolf!" she repeated, looking at him with eyes that seemed five years older than they'd been yesterday. "Haven't I told you it is? Why do you keep teasing me so?"

He bent down above her now and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"It *isn't* too late, Gerda. You're taking everything much too hard! I love you far too much for anything to be too late!"

But the tenderness in his voice only seemed to irritate her. She flashed a look at him of aversion, of contempt. "You are a fool, Wolf," she whispered. "I never supposed you were quite such a fool!"

Then she jumped to her feet. "Come on, Mother! Never mind those Nevilton hymns. Lobbie and I want to start in a minute. Come, both of you, and let's make the sandwiches!"

Her mother and brother followed her into the kitchen, and Wolf was left alone with Mr. Torp.

"Cold meat for me dinner, and hot damnation for me pudding, seems so!" remarked that good man. "Well, if I've got to walk to Nevilton this afternoon, I shall traipsy round to ostler Jim's this morning. He'll be finished cleaning up in Peewits back-yard by now; and him and me can sit snug for a while... 'doors all locked and maids all mum,' as the saying is."

Even while he was still speaking, Mr. Torp was shuffling into his Sunday coat and straightening his Sunday tie. Wolf picked up his hat and stick.

"Well, I'll be moving on too, I think." He spoke louder than was necessary, in order to let Gerda know he was going. But there was no voice or sign from the kitchen.

"Good-bye, Mr. Torp," he said, shaking his father-in-law's hand warmly. "Be careful of that ostler's backroom, or your preacher will catch you on the hop."

"Don't 'ee worry, Mr. Solent," returned the other; "and do 'ee bear in mind thee own self what I told 'ee yesterday. Not a man of us, these shifty times, nor a gentleman neither, can see what bides for'n. 'Tisn't as 'twere when I were young. Life be a wink of the eyelid, these times; and only them as jumps the ditches goes dry to bed!"

Once back again in the sun-warmed quietness of Chequers Street, Wolf, after walking a step or two, paused to take counsel with himself.

"She'll be back for tea," he thought, "and then I'll talk to her. I'll make her take this affair lightly. But no more of Weevil. She must be quit of Weevil. Cuckold I am. Wittold I refuse to be!"

He drew pensive patterns on the sunlit pavement with the end of his stick. All manner of contradictory projects floated through his brain as to how to spend the long, tantalizing hours between this and five o'clock. Of these notions one lodged itself finally in his mind as the very thing indicated by the occasion. He would consult the most cynical of all his oracles! How many months was it since he had last been over there... since he had gazed straight down through the clay to where the skull grinned back at him? Too long... too long! Yes, that is what he would do. He would visit "old Truepenny." Nothing would make the hours pass quicker than that!

He looked at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve; and he knew there was a Sunday train to Ramsgard at twelve-fifteen.

"I'll have hours for walking back... hours and hours," he said to himself. "I'll come by the highroad. I'd like to find a way through the Gwent Lanes, if there be time."

Then suddenly an idea came into his head that brought a rush of blood and a faint, pricking sensation to the flesh that covered his cheek-bones. Why not run in to Christie's for a second, and see if she'd go with him? Damn! — but there might be somebody he knew on the platform or in the train. They'd probably — just because it was such a heavenly day — find Miss Gault at the cemetery!

No, it was too risky. "But I'll run in a second, anyway," he thought, "and see what she says."

A few minutes later he found himself ringing the bell at the Malakite side-door.

All was silent in the little alley. He could see some brilliant patches of green, swimming in pools of sunlight, in the small garden. Then a faint shuffling of feet came along the pavement, outside in the road. That shuffling and the beating of his heart were the only sounds. All Blacksod lay immersed in a golden mist of quiet. He rang the bell again. "In a minute," he thought, "I shall hear her coming down! The old man may sleep late o' Sundays; but she'll be up."

The shuffling steps in the road came to a pause.

"Mister!"

He turned towards the voice. It was a little, old-fashioned maid carrying a prayer-book.

"If it's the Malakites you want, mister, I saw them pass my house, down-street, an hour a-gone. They were dressed for travel; so it did look to me! I reckon they were minded to catch the eleven-three to Weymouth."

Wolf left the door and advanced to meet the speaker. He knew her now as one of the shop-girls in Pimpernel's. He had often bought cakes of her for Gerda. She was reputed to be a Roman Catholic.

"Dressed for an excursion, eh, miss?" he said lightly. "That eleven-three goes straight through to Weymouth, doesn't it? Well, they certainly have a lovely day!"

The little Catholic walked hurriedly on. "She'll miss her great miracle if she's not quick," he thought. "Don't they say the words exactly at noon?"

All the way to the station he tried to concentrate his mind on the mystery of the Mass. "The Christ of these priests," he thought, "is a totally different god from the Jesus of Mr. Beard's preacher. Which of 'em would help me most at this juncture, ha? Which of them?"

It was only when he was sitting alone in a third-class smoking-carriage, staring out of the window at Melbury Bub, that the full bitterness of this last piece of news grew ripe for tasting.

"She ought to have known I'd look in today," he thought. "She ought to have known it." And then he thought: "Natural enough to go to Weymouth on a sunshiny March day! Mr. Malakite... and his daughter... at Weymouth. I expect they'll lie down on those dry sands where the donkeys are. They'll probably have lunch at the 'Dorothy' and then go for a row, or cross over the ferry to the Nothe and walk to Sandsfoot Castle. Perhaps they'll go past Brunswick Terrace and walk across Lodmore."

Oh, it was all natural enough! If only he hadn't come across that exercise-book. But an imaginative girl like Christie might exaggerate a thousand little nothings. Besides, “Slate” was a story. It wasn’t a diary. It revealed nothing... nothing at all... except her thoughts!

Gerda too.... He hadn’t seen anything. He hadn’t caught them at anything... except sitting in the dark. What if *that* also were a fancy of his own? He leaned forward and clasped his hands over his knees. Oh, this was the worst state of all! Not to be quite sure. The train was passing close to King’s Barton now. There was the great perpendicular tower... there was the churchyard! He unclasped his hands and sat sideways against the window, trying to make out Redfern’s headstone; but the train moved too fast. He thought he caught a glimpse of it, but he wasn’t sure. He wasn’t sure of anything!

Hardly anyone else got out when he reached Ramsgard. “If I meet Miss Gault,” he thought, “I shall be rude to her.”

He skirted the Public Gardens and hurried past the Lovelace. “Is that old waiter there still?” he wondered. At the sight of the workhouse, the personality of his father seemed to beckon him, to welcome him; but it was still only as a skull. The skull knew he was coming, though; and it was glad! The skull of old “Truepenny” was the only brain in the world whose thoughts he *could* read! Eyeless sockets deceived no one.

He was passing the slaughter-house now. “I’ve only touched meat once,” he thought, “since she talked to me that day. But if I see her at his grave I shall sheer off and not go near it!”

When he came to the hole in the fence that led to that portion of the cemetery where the paupers were buried, he recalled how startled he’d been when he saw Miss Gault go down on her hands and knees to get through this aperture. So well did he remember that incident as he himself now went down on his hands and knees, that while a clump of dock-weeds struck cold against his face, he became suddenly certain that Miss Gault was there now.

Yes! If she wasn't there, her spirit was most certainly there. He scrambled to his feet, feeling sure that he would see her; and there she was! She was seated upon a grave over against William Solent's. On her lap was a paper of sandwiches, in her hands a book. She was munching and reading at the same time, her hat on the grave by her side, her large black boots emerging from beneath a voluminous skirt, whose stiff folds suggested the "Melancholia" of Albert Dürer.

He had vowed he would bolt if he saw her that day, but instead of that he pulled off his cloth-cap with effusive humility and stepped over the intervening mounds.

"Miss Gault!"

She must have marked him down while he was under the fence, and been merely gathering her wits; for all she did now was to raise her eyes and blink at him.

"So you've come at last, boy!"

He moved up to her, laid his hand upon one of hers, as it still clutched the paper of sandwiches, and sat down.

"Everyone seems eating sandwiches today," he threw out.

"Best thing to do, boy," she replied; "best thing to do! They're lettuce."

"What a day it is, isn't it, Miss Gault?" he murmured vaguely, glancing at the words "William Solent," upon which the sun was pouring its friendliest benediction.

She peered obliquely into his face. "What's the matter with you, boy?" she said earnestly; and then, with a nervous apology in her tone, "It's Emma's day out; so I thought I might as well have a picnic."

"Oh, I'm all right, Miss Gault! Tired of school, perhaps. But we've all got to feel the pinch somewhere."

"Take off your cap, Wolf, and let me look at you."

He threw his cap down on the grass and accepted a sandwich which she held out to him.

"Why, you've got grey hairs!" she cried. "You hadn't one when you came to me a year ago."

"Dorset air," he remarked grimly.

"And you've got lines there; and your mouth is different; and you're a lot thinner!"

"Hard work!" he threw out. "I've done Urquhart's book for him though... and I've been paid for it."

She turned round fully towards him now and laid both book and sandwiches on the ground. He noted that the volume was Palgrave's "Golden Treasury." He also noted an empty medicine-bottle beside her, blurred with the whiteness of milk, upon whose orifice three black flies had settled.

"You're thoroughly unhappy, my dear," said Miss Gault. "I can see it in everything about you. What is it, Wolf? It's ridiculous not to confide in an ugly old woman like me! What is it, Wolf?"

A sound of bells came to them at that moment, carried on a gust of soft air that was like dark, sweet rainwater.

"The Abbey," murmured Miss Gault. "They're out of church; but they always go on ringing those bells."

"I like to hear them," he responded; and then, with a sigh: "I suppose it's the same with everyone. Life doesn't get easier."

A kind of disintegrating softness had fallen upon him. The vaporous sunshine, the dreamy light-blowing air, the imponderable fragrance, seemed to combine to melt some basic resistance in his bones. He felt as if there were arising from that place of mortality a sweet, faint, relaxing breath, full of the deliciousness of luxurious dissolution.

The distant bells suggested the greenish fluidity, flowing and fluctuating, of the fan-tracery under the Abbey-roof. They suggested the centuries of calm, irresponsible repose that weighed on that royal coffin under the Abbey-floor! What did it matter that a girl called Gerda had abandoned her body to a youth called Weevil? What did it matter that a lecherous old bookseller was giving his daughter a day on Weymouth Beach?

So indifferent to all human fates did he feel just then, that, after swallowing the last morsel of his sandwich and wiping his fingers on the grass, he stretched out his feet in front of him, brushed the flies away from the empty bottle, and gave himself up to a physical sensation of being an integral portion of this wide, somnolent landscape!

"I am Poll's Camp," he would have said, if the sensation had articulated itself. "I am Lovelace Park. I am the Gwent Lanes. I am Nevilton Hill. I am Melbury Bub. I am Blackmore Vale and High Stoy. It is over me that Gerda and Lob are now walking, down there by the Lunt."

"Why don't you tell me what's the matter, boy?" repeated Miss Gault. "Don't you care anything about me? Is my friendship of no value to you at all?"

Her words seemed as much a part of the balmy light-fluttering air above him as his own body was a part of the earth-mould below him.

Feebly, with less energy than he had used to brush away the flies from the bottle, he analyzed his inertia. "I have killed my life-illusion," he thought. "I am as dead as William Solent. I've got no pride, no will, no identity left." He fixed his eyes on his father's headstone, across which there kept fluttering the shadow of an unbudded branch from a little tree near the fence. He tried to visualize the skull under that mound. It was still of the skull, rather than of coffin or skeleton, that he thought! But this also seemed to have lost its identity. No cynical grin came back towards him from down there. No sardonic commentary upon his predicament rose to mock him or to reassure him.

Suddenly he was aware that Miss Gault was speaking rapidly, excitedly.

“But you needn’t tell me, boy. I keep my eyes and my ears about me. I know where you’re always going! It’s those Malakites have got hold of you. It’s that Malakite girl that’s the trouble. You’re being unfaithful to that wife of yours. I knew it would end like this. I knew it was all a woeful mistake. These marriages out of one’s class never do succeed and never will. The truth is, boy, that you don’t know yourself, or what you really need, any more than that stick of yours does! You’re making yourself ill with remorse, when neither of those little Blacksod hussies cares a fig about your feelings... or about your faithfulness either. Why, they’ve been brought up to be as indiscriminate as flies! You don’t know our Dorsetshire lower classes, boy. They haven’t the same feelings, they’re not human in the same way as we are. And what’s more, Wolf, let me tell you this” — her voice deepened to a discordant harshness, and she seized the “Golden Treasury” and beat it against the ground— “you’re not really in love with either of them! If you were, you’d choose between them. You’re one of those men like Jason Otter, like Mr. Urquhart, who in their hearts hate women. It was sheer madness your ever picking up this Torp girl. If Ann hadn’t been such a feather-headed fool she’d have stopped you! Ann is so full of her own pranks, that you’re just a pet to her, a great baby-pet! If Ann had been a different sort of person, you’d never have got mixed up with these Malakites. I told her myself what would come of it! I told her in my own drawing-room, while Emma was spoiling the tea-cakes, that day she called on me. I said to her, ‘If you can’t keep your boy from that book-shop he’ll go the way his father went!’ That’s what I said to her. I remember it because I was unkind to Emma afterwards about the tea-cakes! But Ann only laughed. That mother of yours doesn't any more know the difference between good and evil than between — —" The excited woman broke off in a half-humorous chuckle.

But before this diatribe had finished, Wolf had pulled in his legs and straightened his back. Something deeper in him than the grin of that skull down there, deeper than the drowsy deliciousness of the day, twitched, contracted, tightened. The ancient, unconscious tug of the navel-string, or what bound his flesh to the flesh that had conceived it, roused him from his torpor.

He saw that hard, ruddy, ironic face. He saw that gallant chin. He heard those light, reckless, defiant tones.

"I'm with you, Mother!" he thought, while his lip trembled. "I'm with you, whatever any of them say! Good or evil, I'm with you!"

Miss Gault paid no attention to this stiffening of the figure at her side. Her thoughts too, it seemed, had wandered to the roots of the past.

"William! William!" she groaned aloud. "I'd have held you. I'd have peaked and pined to hold you. I'd have slaved for you, watched for you, wasted for you, and always forgiven you!"

Completely unaware of the effect of her words upon her companion, she turned her great wild-horse eyes, the whites of which showed desperate in the sunshine, from Wolf to the grave and back again from the grave to Wolf.

"I only pray, boy," she went on, "that you'll never meet a woman who'll love you as I loved him down there. If you do, you'll kill her with the Ann Haggard in your brain. We're all of us flinty enough, boy — base and flinty; but I've never met a person who gloried in it as your mother does! Oh, love him, boy! Love him, love him, as I've loved him for twenty-five years!"

Wolf lurched to his feet and stood erect. The struggle that had been going on so long within him between his father and his mother had reached a crisis. He had come here to range himself with that skull, to cry to it for a sign in his trouble; but this woman's desperation had wrought a change in him. His mother's words of yesterday rose up in his mind. His father must have lodged himself like an undying snake in Miss Gault's bosom! Would it be with his mother or with his father that he would range himself now, were this accusing creature with the pendulous lip and the vast black lap the very Judgement of God? With which of them? With which of them?

With his mother! Out of that hard, ironic flesh he had been torn. Good or bad, he was on her side. Good or bad, he would be judged with her!

"I've listened long enough," he said sternly. "I came to him alone. I came for my own reasons. I didn't come to side with you against her."

Miss Gault jumped up so impetuously that one of her feet tripped upon the empty bottle. Her intention was apparently to rush over the grave; but this misadventure sent her stumbling towards it, her great body bent forward and her arms outspread, till she fell on her knees against it. Crouched and hunched there like an immense black dog, she emitted a pitiful, hardly human groan. Then she twisted her head round so that one of her troubled eyes was just able to meet Wolf's indignant stare.

From the depths of this eye — as from a water-hole in the crust of nature — a look shot at him that he never forgot. But he moved forward until he faced her; and she sank then into an easier position, yet still remained upon her knees.

"He had you always in his mind," she gasped. "You've never thought about *that*, have you? He was too proud to say a word. Oh, he had a soul worth a dozen Anns!"

The challenge of Miss Gault's spirit, flung at him through that wild-horse look, was a challenge from his mother's enemy.

It was then that anger overcame pity in Wolf's heart. "Do you understand," he burst out, "I happen to care a good deal for my mother? We've lived together more closely than anyone knows. Do you understand? More closely than anyone knows."

The crouching woman jerked out two long, dark-sleeved arms.

"Go back to her, then!" she screamed, waving her hands as if she were driving off a jackal from a dead body. "Take her back to London! Don't let us see either of your faces again!"

Without a word or a gesture in response to this, Wolf wearily picked up his stick from the grass and strode over the graves to the gap in the fence.

"Back to London?" he muttered, as he went down on all fours and butted his way through the opening. "That's what Jason said. They'll get it lodged in my brain before they've done! But I *won't* go. 'There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all.' "

Once outside in the road, there came to him a troublesome stab of remorse. He had always been so indulgent to what Miss Gault had to say about his mother. Why should he have turned on her like that just then?

He was half tempted to drop down on his knees again and crawl back. He stood still, listening attentively; but there was not the faintest sound from in there. The living woman was as quiet as the dead man. Ay! the god of human sorrow is a man; but Love crucifies women.

Grasping his stick below the handle, he hardened his heart and hurried off towards Ramsgard. When he reached the workhouse, he looked at his watch. It was only half-past two. He had two hours and a half before tea-time.

On the side of the road opposite the workhouse was a low stone wall. The garden of some tradesman's house was separated from the pavement by this wall, on the top of which grew thick green moss. The Ramsgard people being all at their noon-meal, he had the pavement to himself; and he stopped and stared at this coping of moss. Hooking his stick on his elbow, he laid both hands upon the top of this wall; and the life of the moss seemed to pass into his nerves. It was at this moment that he heard a boy's shrill scream from an unseen playground behind the house which appertained to this garden. The sound was not repeated; but Wolf clenched his teeth. "It's one of the Houses of the School. It's a bully," he thought. And then he found himself muttering a deadly curse. "You brute! you brute! —— Never, till you die, shall you dare to do that again!"

Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had his back to the workhouse.

"I wonder if my father could see this wall from the room where he died? I expect he could." He walked on into the outskirts of the town. The lane which he followed emerged into a narrow road, where the chilly, newly-budded hedges alternated with small stone houses, standing back from the thoroughfare and approached by little stone paths. He caught sight of an old man, sitting on a trim bench in one of those little gardens, with a look of the most supreme contentment on his face as he smoked his pipe and watched the passers-by. There was a white cat at his feet and a clump of daffodils in the flower-bed beside him; and bathed as he was in the mellow afternoon light, his leathery, secretive, roguish countenance — he might have been the owner of some little shop or a retired gardener — seemed to gather to itself the whole long history of Ramsgard and its famous school, from the time when King Æthelwolf was buried in the Abbey to the time Miss Gault's father became headmaster!

This sly, sagacious, whimsical old man had nothing of the taciturnity of a remote village about him; still less had he the urbanity of a large town. He was as much a product of certain peculiar local traditions — in this case urbane gentility mingling with urbane obsequiousness — as if he had been a rare beetle in the hazel-copses of High Stoy or a specimen of the “Lulworth Skipper” butterfly on the Dorsetshire coast!

Wolf couldn’t resist a spasm of envy as he paused for a second to peer up at this old rascal, sucking his pipe, cogitating upon his savings in Stuckey’s Bank, leering at the lads and lasses who passed his gate.... Free from all remorse, all misgiving, how greatly did that old villain enjoy life! Ay, he was as selfish as his cat — as those yellow daffodils in that flower-bed! Before he left him Wolf had a queer hallucination. He saw this perfectly well-behaved old man in the shape of a plump, blunt-nosed maggot, peering out from a snug little crack in the woodwork of a blistering cross, on which hung, all in her long black skirt the form of Selena Gault!

Wolf walked on, but he couldn’t help pondering on the kind of self-centredness that had enabled this old demon to last so long. What would *he* have made of it if, on some business-trip to London, he had encountered that Waterloo-steps face? Just thought: “That fellow ought to be in the workhouse. They oughtn’t to allow such people here.” Or he would have simply regarded him as part of the station, no more than a door, a post, an iron ornamentation, an advertisement-board!

Very likely this old man was the headmaster’s gardener, and had worked in his day for Miss Gault’s father. Well, which had got the most out of life, Miss Gault, hunched up over there in the pauper’s plot, or this merry old man with his white cat?

Miss Gault loved cats too. Some who loved cats had to eat their sandwiches upon graves. This citizen of Ramsgard had a different destiny....

Wolf moved on up the road, passing an increasing number of lively Sunday-afternoon strollers. What, he wondered, were Gerda and Lobbie doing at that moment? Where were Christie and the old man? He came to a halt just then. Should he, after all, go to Ramsgard station and take the train, instead of walking? No sooner had this idea entered his head than he decided to follow it. He would have plenty of time to change his mind again if there were no train.

"I'll go into the Abbey for a minute," he thought. He turned northward and entered the town by way of a field-path past the massive wall of the Preparatory School. When he got close to the Abbey, he encountered several groups of straw-hatted boys, and the sight of them put him in mind of Mr. Smith. What would *he* have felt about the marriage of Lorna's daughter? From the straw-hats his mind slid to Mattie, like a loaded trunk down a ship's gangway. Would she make Darnley happy? Would she be happy herself?

He caught sight of a pair of immaculately handsome lads, arm in arm, each radiating delight in the touch of his companion. He saw them reject with mechanical indifference the appeal of a dilapidated tramp who had evidently singled them out from the rest, hoping that the happiness which surrounded them like an aura would redound to his advantage.

It was at this moment that he heard himself called by name.

"Wolf! It *is* you! I saw you first!"

He swung round, and there were Mattie and Olwen.

As he responded to the little girl's excited embrace, which was so emphatic that it attracted a glance of haughty disapproval from one of the straw-hatted pair, he had time to note that this was the second time today that a person's presence had communicated itself to him before it appeared in the flesh.

He made no bones about kissing his half-sister very tenderly across Olwen's woollen cap; and the two straw-hatted ones drew away, evidently feeling that the emotions of the populace were a discordant note in that privileged place.

"We walked over, Wolf," the girl said. "That'll do, Olwen! Darnley wanted to have a walk with his mother. Jason's writing poetry in the back-garden. So I said I'd show her the King's tomb. She's been learning about King Æthelwolf — haven't you, Olwen?"

But Olwen displayed scant interest in royal dust. "I want to sit outside with Wolf," she remarked, clutching his fingers with an impatient hand. "I want to talk to Wolf while you go back to church." Mattie took not the least notice of this remark, and they all three moved slowly round the corner of the Abbey towards its front-entrance. The bride's eyes were brilliantly animated. And Wolf felt as if a warm globe of magnetic power were shooting out rays of exaltation from her strong, virginal body. There was that in her excitement that at once irritated Wolf and touched him to the heart.

"I was going to write to you, my dear," she said eagerly, "in case I shouldn't see you before Saturday. We're going to Weymouth, Wolf!"

He looked at her closely. The heavy, sulky face was gleaming. He commented, with shame in his secret heart, upon his lack of spontaneous sympathy. What did it mean, this cold, tightening sensation within him? Was it that the figure of Darnley, urbane, melancholy, unattached, had become a sanctuary of refuge for him? He found himself responding to the clutch of Olwen's feverish fingers with a significant and treacherous pressure.

"I'm glad you're going to Weymouth. What a splendid idea!" he replied, as enthusiastically as he could. "Weymouth has always been — —"

At that moment they reached the wide-open door of the church.

"You go in first, my dear," he said, in a tone of command. "I'll just smoke a cigarette, on that seat, with Olwen, and then we'll come. Don't sit too far in. But we'll find you. It won't be crowded. Oh, we'll easily find you! But Olwen and I have a very important secret we want to talk about."

He gave her a reassuring little push, half-playful, half-paternal, and watched her figure vanish in the cool dimness of the nave.

Olwen positively danced with glee as they moved across to a vacant seat under a yew-tree, not far from the grotesque little statue of the poet-courtier.

"She thought we were going to talk about her *presents*, didn't she?" said the little girl, as they sat down and he lit a cigarette. "But we're not, are we, Wolf?"

"Perhaps *I* am," he replied with a smile. "But how do you like all this marrying, Olwen?"

The child's eyes were fixed upon the hazy outline of "The Slopes," just visible in that shimmery air beyond the Public Gardens and the railway. "Oh, don't talk about it, Wolf! Jason and I never talk about it. Jason says the only nice part of it will be the wine. They're going to have Sauterne."

Wolf began to realize that Mattie's nature was not one that a love-affair expands and widens. It dawned upon him that this little Malakite waif was being thrown more and more upon the indulgence of Jason.

The child's mood this afternoon was evidently wistful. She seemed to take Wolf's sympathy for granted; and now, with her hand in his, after uttering the word "Sauterne," she relapsed into silence.

He too was silent, repeating to himself an imaginary dialogue with Gerda, over their tea in the kitchen. The disagreeable thought came into his head, "Shall I feel any difference when I lie by her side tonight?"

"Wolf!" The little girl's voice had a solemn intensity, and she stared at him with grave eyes.

"Say on, Princess Olwen."

"Do you think people are always treated as they treat *other* people?"

The child's question, directed against the very heart of the universe, disturbed Wolf profoundly. It was the sort of remark that indicates something materially wrong in the person who utters it.

"I can't say I do, Olwen. Life is far more unjust than ever King Æthelwolf was."

"You like Miss Malakite very much, don't you, Wolf?"

He gave a palpable start and flung away his cigarette. What *was* coming now? This warm spring air seemed to be bringing all human troubles to the surface as the hot day brings forth the adders!

"Very much indeed, Olwen. Christie is very nice indeed. She's rather — she's rather like you."

"I want to see her, Wolf. I want to tell her that I'm *sorry* I wouldn't ever speak to her when I was a little girl."

"What made you so unkind, Olwen?"

"Shall I tell you, Wolf? You won't tell anyone, will you, if I tell you?"

He shook his head with all the solemnity he could muster.

"Don't look at me while I tell you!"

"All right. I'm not looking."

"Grand-dad Smith told me when I was very little" — the voice in which the child said this was low and restrained, and her words came slowly— "that... Miss Malakite... was... a... leper." Having overcome the difficulty of her confession, her expression became entirely different. She seemed as relieved to have brought this thing into the light as if she'd pulled a thorn from her hand.

"But, Olwen darling" — Wolf spoke with as much intensity as if he were addressing an intelligence equal to his own— "your grandfather didn't mean a *real* leper! He meant that people shunned Christie because of her father... because of her father's bad character."

The child's eyes opened wide. "Then Miss Malakite is not a leper at all? Not all white and horrid under her clothes?"

"Of course not! She's sweet and lovely under her clothes... just as you are!"

The child looked away again towards "The Slopes," her forehead puckered in concentrated thought. Then she turned to him with flushed cheeks. "Oh, Wolf, I want to see her! I want to see her soon... today... tomorrow! I want to tell her how glad I am she isn't a leper!"

It was Wolf's turn now to look at "The Slopes" with a pondering frown.

Suppose he *did* take Olwen to see Christie? What harm could come of that? He rose from the bench. "Come on, sweetheart," he cried, "Mattie will wonder where we are!"

They met Mattie coming out of the church; and at that same moment the tramp he had observed talking to the two boys drew near. Where had he seen this fellow before? The tramp approached them, and began begging. Good Lord! It was that old, courteous waiter at the Lovelace! Mattie was now pulling Olwen away. "No, no!" she murmured in reply to the man's supplication. But Wolf fumbled in his pocket. He could tell by the feel of the coins that he had half-a-crown and a few halfpence there. That was all he had. At that moment the great clock in the tower above their heads began striking. It must be four o'clock! He must hurry to the station. Like a flash he thought, "If I give him the half-crown I shan't be able to buy a ticket!" He put the few halfpence into the man's hand. As he did so he noticed that very scar which had struck his attention a year ago. The ex-waiter's eyes met his own, but without recognition. "It must be drink," Wolf said to himself, as he hurried away after the two girls.

Half-an-hour later and he was safely ensconced in a crowded carriage, from the windows of which he could see only the blue sky.

“I *might* have given him that half-a-crown,” he thought. “I could have done it.”

The incident taunted and teased his mind so unmercifully that it was not till he had left the train and was nearly at his own door that he could harden his heart against it.

“It’s just pure chance that I’m not in the same boat as that waiter,” he thought. “He’s got a look... it’s a different expression, but he’s got a look of that Waterloo-steps man!”

He rushed into the house, calling Gerda’s name in a low, eager voice. There was no answer. He went into the parlour, the kitchen, the back-yard. He ran upstairs and looked into the bedroom. No one! The familiar furniture wore that peculiar air of desolation that of all things he especially disliked. The beauty of the day seemed to have completely passed it by. It looked cold and unhappy. It looked like a child that has been left indoors when all the world has been out at a festival.

And yet he had to admit there was something dignified, even *spiritual*, about those quaint, cheap objects, waiting there for their absent mistress. “They are the extreme opposite,” he thought, “of that self-satisfied old rascal with the white cat.”

He busied himself with careful preparations for tea, and grew peevishly puzzled at the unexpected difficulties he encountered. “Girls do things so mechanically,” he said to himself, as for the tenth time he walked round their kitchen-table, altering this and that. When all was ready he opened the dresser-drawer, took the cheque from beneath Mukalog, and placed it under Gerda’s plate.

Then he sat down on a hard, high chair and waited, listening to the clock in the parlour. He felt too excited even to smoke a cigarette.

“What *is* it that worries me?” he thought. “Not fear lest she has some crazy love for the fellow. I know very well she hasn’t. Damn! I suppose Carfax wouldn’t believe it if I said I was thinking simply and solely about *her* feelings. But there it is! You can’t sleep with a girl for twelve months and not feel what she feels! I don’t believe his having gone to the limit will change her at all for me. I don’t want to set eyes on the chap again... but that’s another thing. How sleek he looked in that new brown suit! I suppose he hung that brown coat over the bottom of our bed. That’s not a very nice thought!”

Suddenly the idea came to him that perhaps she would never come back — that he would have to eat this meal alone, and all other meals! He hurriedly looked round for something belonging to her wherewith to reassure himself. He saw no sign anywhere of a small work-basket that she was in the habit of using for her occasional young-girl struggles with needle and thread.

Restlessly he got up and began looking about for this. The little work-box became the most important of all objects in the world at that moment. If it were here, why, she would soon be safely home again! Where the devil was it? He went into the parlour. He even went upstairs. Not a sign! “But I’ve seen the thing... I know I’ve seen it... since I came in!”

With a sudden inspiration he opened the dresser-drawer. There it was... and protruding from its edge a ragged glove! He left the drawer open, went to the front-door, and looked out. The light was waning. At the first approach of twilight that lovely day began yielding itself to its death with a precipitate eagerness!

He stood in the doorway listening. Ah, *there* was the sound of her footsteps coming along the pavement! No. It was the slouching form of their neighbour, the owner of the pigsty. Silence again! Then again footsteps! No. This time it was a pair of lovers, returning from their Sunday stroll, the boy's arm round the girl's waist.

He felt unwilling to close the door, and he went back to the kitchen, leaving it wide open.

She was with Lobbie anyway. Surely she would never do anything wild or rash with Lobbie at her side!

Such light wind as there had been during the afternoon had dropped completely now. How still everything was! He and the furniture sat waiting, while this perfect day sank willingly into oblivion.

"Gerda, my precious! Gerda, my darling!" He kept forming words of this kind in his mind, as he fidgeted on his hard chair, facing the hallway. "It was all my fault, Gerda, that you gave yourself to your water-rat!"

He began to long for her coming, as he had never before longed for any human step. He seemed to realize the helpless pathos of her beauty as he had never realized it before. He saw her bending naked over the stove, as he had seen her once, when, for wantonness, he had undressed her downstairs. He saw the calves of her legs, the curves of her thighs. He saw the peculiar loveliness of the back of her neck and the way her eyelid drooped upon her cheek, giving her profile such evasive innocence.

"You *must* come, Gerda! I don't care for anything, except for you to come! If you come in now... safe and sound... you can sulk and scold and cry as much as you like!"

How late it was getting. The clock would be striking six soon! She had never been as late as this before. Something *must* have happened! He got up from his chair and looked round the kitchen. Mukalog lay on his back in the open drawer; and suddenly the sight of the idol's fleering face transported him with fury. The "god of rain" seemed the epitome of everything that was making him suffer. Jason's contempt, Gerda's absence — they were both gloated over in that little monster's abysmal leer!

Recklessly he seized the idol, as he might have seized a dead rat, rushed with it out of the kitchen, out of the house, across the road, and flung it with all the force of his arm high over the pigsty into the darkening field beyond.

The pigs, aroused by his approach, set up a hideous hullabaloo; and the foul smell of their enclosure followed the indrawn panting of his breath. He paused for a minute, with his hands on the fence of the shed, uttering a foolish malediction upon the screeching snouts raised towards him. Then he turned with a groan and shuffled back across the road.

Standing disconsolately by the table, he mechanically lifted up Gerda's plate and surveyed the cheque beneath it. He recalled how she had folded it up with cold, indifferent fingers. He pressed it with his clenched knuckles and re-covered it. Could he do nothing to make her come now, this very moment? "My 'mythology'!" he thought. Up went his hands to his eyes; and pressing his eyeballs lightly, so as to blot out everything, he concentrated his whole nature in one terrific effort to summon up that formidable magnetic mystery.

His will, thus strained to its uttermost, gave him a sensation as if an obstinate, taut rope were tugging at a water-logged bucket. Not a stir, not a vibration, in those dark interior gulfs!

Removing his hands from his face, he swayed a little against the table, dizzy with his mental struggle. It was no use. His "mythology" would never help him again. That ecstasy, that escape from reality was gone. Dorsetshire had done for it!

He subsided into the same chair and waited, his hands outspread, palms-down, upon his knees, his heels together, his head bowed.

A kind of waking-trance took possession of him, in which he had the illusion that the smell of the pigsty and Gerda’s absence were the same thing. “I shall have to go to the Torps’ and ask about her,” he said to himself; but the words only tapped against one another in his brain like dry peas in a sieve.

Then he heard the gate click.

He rushed to the door, out of the house, and, heedless of everything but overwhelming relief, hugged her to his heart.

Her mouth was cold. Her cheek was cold. He pulled her into the hall and slammed the door with a jerk of his shoulder; but not for a second did he let go his tight hold of her. His relief was so great that, as he pressed her against him, he gave vent to several long-drawn breaths that had in them the catch of sobs.

He had felt from the very first touch that she would not resist him, that the barrier between them was broken. When at last he got her into the kitchen and she had taken off her things, he was hit to the heart by the haggardness of her face. Till now she herself had been tearless. Emotions must have done their worst with her all that day, and she had nothing left. But the sight of the carefully-laid tea-table stirred up too many old associations. She stood staring at him, her hands hanging down limply by her sides, her grey eyes fixed upon him. Then, without the least contortion of her face, a torrent of tears descended....

It was after eight o’clock when they got up from their tea-table. Neither of them had said a word about Bob; but Wolf felt convinced that the girl, without using one single articulate syllable about the matter, indicated that henceforth she would close her door to Mr. Weevil.

It was with a strange sensation that he found his thoughts reverting to Christie and her trip to Weymouth — a strange and peculiar sensation. He felt as if Christie had grown thin and frail as a ghost — remote and far-off, too — like that day when he saw her crouched in the Castle lane! She seemed to have become once more what she was in the beginning of their friendship... a disembodied entity, dwelling in his consciousness like a spirit in a cloud, immaterial, unreal... near to him as his own thought and yet far removed in body.

One by one, holding a blue-bordered napkin in his hands, he dried each cup, each saucer, each plate, each knife, each spoon, as Gerda handed them to him out of the wash-pan in the sink. Sometimes in light, sometimes in shadow, as his own figure came between her and the two candles on the table, her face still showed fluctuating signs of uneasiness. But these signs grew fewer and fewer as he told her about Miss Gault and her sandwiches, about the waiter at the Lovelace having become a beggar, about the extreme emptiness of the outgoing train and its crowded state returning, about the crafty old man with a white cat — he suppressed all mention of Mattie and Olwen — until at last an expression came into her face that he knew well, an expression of sleepy, infantile amusement.

He paused in his narration directly he caught sight of that look, and hung up the blue-bordered drying-cloth in its place and proceeded to wash his own hands at the tap.

He got into bed that night some while before she did; and he lay quietly watching her, while she brushed her hair at their chest of drawers between the two half-open windows. This little wooden-framed looking-glass, on this clumsy pine-wood object, had been Gerda’s only toilet-table from the start. “She shall have more of these things,” he thought, “when we’ve cashed that cheque!”

As he watched her candle-flame bend towards her in the faint airs that came wandering out of the night into the room — as he watched the careful gesture with which she pushed back the candlestick as she stood there in her long-sleeved night-gown — he pondered upon the death of his "mythology."

"Perhaps it was an escape from reality," he thought, "that I was *bound* to lose, if reality got hold of me! Dorsetshire, at any rate, seems to have got hold of me. No, no, I am *not* going back to London; and I am *not* going to drown myself in Lenty Pond!"

When Gerda had finished brushing her hair and had tied it with a thin blue ribbon — he had long since remarked that this was one of the few personal peculiarities she never deviated from — she seemed inclined to loiter awhile before coming to bed. She closed the window at the top, opened it at the bottom, and, drawing a chair close to the sill, sat down there, leaning one of her arms on the woodwork.

It was odd how one single gross image annoyed his mind to the exclusion of all others. This was the image of Weevil in his brown suit, with most of the buttons tightly buttoned, making love to her in that white, high-throated night-gown! Of course, it couldn't have been in the night-gown... but still he must have... and his brown suit had so many hard, impudent, shiny, cock-crowing buttons!

"Don't catch cold, sweetheart!" he cried suddenly, while a very disconcerting doubt shot through him. Was it revolting to her feminine life-illusion to slip into his arms, easily, naturally, after the shock of what she had undergone? Did *she* feel Bob Weevil's brown suit, his impudent buttons, too nearly, too closely, to bear the thought of any love-making that night? He longed to call out to her bluntly and directly. "Come on, you sweet little fool, I won't touch you!"... or better still perhaps, "Come on, you beautiful distracted creature, I'll soon make you forget your water-rat!" Instead of uttering a sound, however, what he really did was to jump out of bed, snatch his own warm dressing-gown from the door, and wrap it about her shoulders.

He was very anxious not to bother her with either his sensuality or his sentimentality. His feeling for her at that moment was objective, almost impersonal. He returned to bed, lit a cigarette, propped himself up upon both pillows, and smoked meditatively.

"Christie must be safe back now," he thought; and there moved slowly across his innermost consciousness the evil suggestion that it was because of what he had read in that exercise-book that the girl's thin frame seemed to him so unearthly tonight, her shadowy personality so remote. "She's lodged in my mind, though, come what may," he said to himself. "I *will* take Olwen to see her," he thought. "She *shall* find out she's not a leper!"

From Christie his mind rushed away to that little house in Saint Aldhelm's Street. "I suppose Emma's come home by now and Miss Gault's in bed! I wish I'd gone back and kissed her, huddled up like that on his grave — kissed her right on her deformed lip!"

The night-air was stirring again now, and the flame of the candle upon the chest of drawers flickered up and down, throwing queer shadows about the room. The air was sweet with vague earth-odours — not the least tincture of the pigsty perceptible — and as it blew in upon him, past the motionless figure by the window, it seemed like a host of air-spirits journeying on some errand that had no connection with human affairs.

Suddenly he drew in his breath with a startled, hissing sound, and sat bolt-upright, staring at Gerda in rapt attention.

The girl had fallen upon her knees at the window, and was making little, tentative, whistling sounds. She was trying to catch the notes of her blackbird-song! First one note she would try, and then another; and each one, as she tried it, broke off in mid-air, ineffectual and futile.... Her fingers were clutching the window-sill now, and her head was tossed back. The gown he had thrown over her had fallen away. Her shoulders looked cold and pitiful. Her body trembled and swayed. Her back being turned to him, he could not see that desperately pursed-up whistling mouth; but most vividly he imagined it, and imagined too the piteous contortion of that face against the warm, green-growing darkness outside.

“Gerda... my darling!” This was what he wanted to cry out; but he did not dare to utter a whisper. The room had become enchanted. It was a dedicated place — set apart... and there was he, foolishly propped up on their two pillows, mute, helpless, like a witness at the birth of a still-born child!

Again and again did the girl make desperate, discordant, whistling sounds; but it was all to no purpose!

“Don’t mind, my darling!” murmured Wolf, when, in a troubled pause after these attempts, he noticed her back shaken by weeping. “Come on to bed, honey — to bed, to bed! You’re lucky not to have started a hoot-owl answering you. I fancied I heard one of those demons, when I woke up in the middle of the night last night. Come on, Gerda; there’s a good girl!”

He had never heard a human sigh so deeply drawn as the one he heard now from that open window. But she got up slowly upon her feet and blew out the candle.

He threw back the bedclothes and smoothed out the pillow for her head. Tightly he held her when she stretched herself out by his side.

“Well, there it is!” he thought. “Life has scotched her just as it has me. Urquhart’s cheque has brought me down. Weevil’s brown suit has done the same for her. Well, we must get on somehow. Shall I say good-night to her before I let myself go to sleep? No; better not! Better just hold tight to her... and drift on in our barge — down, down the stream... drift on in our barge!”

LENTY POND

"Don't you ever say 'it's too late' again, Missy!" were his parting words, as he kissed Gerda, a few days later, across their iron gate.

It was Thursday now, only two days before the King's Barton wedding, and events had moved rapidly since that agitating Sunday. He had cajoled his Pond Cottage friends into allowing Olwen to pay a surreptitious visit to what after all was her paternal home; and the child had fallen in love with Christie to such an extent that the visit had been repeated within forty-eight hours. And this very day Darnley was driving her in, as he came to School, with the idea that she should stay a couple of days under the Malakite roof.

"No one will interfere; it's all blown over," Wolf had said. "It would have to be some enemy if any fuss were made. But there won't be any fuss. A little gossip, when Christie goes out with her in the street... nothing more... and perhaps not even that!"

The only opposition to these proceedings came from Jason, who, though he would not confess himself jealous of this new passion in the child, brought forward the darkest suggestions as to the dangerousness of Blacksod as a place for little girls. "These large towns," he had said to them all, speaking as if Blacksod were a second Birmingham, "these large towns are full of disgusting goings-on. These tradesmen think of nothing but their merry little ways. And, of course, if you want Olwen to have her meals with Mr. Malakite — —" But to Wolf's delighted surprise he had received emphatic support in this enterprise from Mrs. Otter. He had, indeed, been quite as astonished at the insight displayed by that timid lady as by her defiance of the protests of her eldest son. "Olwen will only do them good, Jason," she had said. "There's a special providence over a child like that. She'll turn that sad little Christie into a different girl."

It was just after eight o'clock when Wolf swung round to wave a final farewell to Gerda. He had begged her to let him have a very early breakfast that morning; for Mrs. Solent wanted him to see her tea-shop with what she called "clear decks." Everything had always been in confusion, near closing-time, when he came in at the end of the day; but this morning, full of pride that her son should see her shop before her waitresses appeared, Mrs. Solent had unlocked and cleaned up the place herself at an incredibly early hour, and was waiting for him there now.

The new tea-shop was not far from the Grammar School, but it was in a side-street that branched off towards the meadows where the Lunt encircled the town. The town, in fact, melted into the country here even more quickly than it did on the Babylon Hill side or in the direction of Preston Lane. It was a more umbrageous country, at any rate, into which that little side-street led.

Into this quarter of Blacksod, cutting its way through heavy clay hills, diving between tall ferny banks covered with beeches and Scotch firs, following swifter streams than the Lunt, ran the great Exeter Highroad; and it was the tourists from that direction that were now to be waylaid and entertained.

This process had apparently already begun; for when Wolf approached the neat little square building, lying back from the road, with a garden in front of it yellow with daffodils, his feeling was unmistakable that prosperity was in the air. The wind was keen and invigorating this morning, the sky clear; and as he strode up the path between the swaying daffodils, he had a sharp, prophetic sense of his mother's future. He saw this little shop moved to one of the main streets of the town. He saw still more of the savings of that enamoured farmer swept into the business! He saw his mother's grasp upon life growing more drastic, more daring, more debonair. He saw her power over material things increasing, her strange pride and exultant loneliness keeping pace with her power. "She'll leave me far behind," he thought. And there swept over him a wave of bitter shame at his own incompetence.

"She'll be doling out bonuses to Gerda and me," he thought. "We shall be hanging on to her skirts! We shall be a dead weight upon her."

Vividly he recalled the discussion that had taken place in the last few days between himself and Gerda on the subject of how to spend Mr. Urquhart's two hundred pounds. How childish Gerda was, and how reckless he was! The whole thing was ridiculous... with their tiny income to think of spending all this on just smartening up their house!

He knocked lightly now at the tea-shop door and entered without waiting for a response. He was amazed at the neatness and elegance of what he saw.

His mother greeted him in the highest feather. Laughing and jesting, she showed him the kitchen, the scullery, the sanitary arrangements, the furniture. "The rooms are empty upstairs," she said; "but do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to leave Herbert-land, with its dust and its smells, and move over here! I'm going to use one of my waitresses — I've got two, you know — as a maid. She and I will both sleep up there. There are three rooms. And I'll have a regular drawing-room. I'll have the kind of drawing-room I've always wanted — different altogether from that old place in town."

Mother and son were now seated on two immaculate wicker-chairs. Wolf had not yet dared to light a cigarette; but Mrs. Solent, with a quick, radiant gesture, offered him one of her own.

“You won’t get enough exercise, mother, if you live where you work; and your precious drawing-room will always be full of the smell of cooking.”

“Oh, we won’t think of that!” she cried, making a stroke in the air with her cigarette as if condemning to annihilation every trick of hostile chance; and as he watched her, he realized for the first time what a power she had of forcing external events into line with her wishes. Never had he seen her so full of zest for labour and trouble and tension as she was that morning. Wolf himself felt sick with dismay when he thought of this place filled with tourists from Exeter, and the rooms upstairs reeking of culinary odours!

“What are you making that face about?” his mother asked.

“Am I making a face? I was wondering how much spirit you’ll have left for those evening walks you’re so fond of.”

Mrs. Solent laughed gaily. “I had one, last night,” she said, “towards Pendomer. There are lovely fields over there” — she nodded her head towards the west— “and delicious woods. I couldn’t want anything nicer. I went out there last night... up the hill and over the hill... I half-thought of waylaying you at the Grammar School and taking you with me. But you know what I am! I love my Wolf.” Here she extinguished her cigarette and rose from her seat. “But I *have* to be alone for these walks. I tell myself stories; I let myself be as romantic and excited as I can. That time of twilight stirs me up... like a nightjar, I suppose... and I have lovely sensations!”

She moved past him; and as she passed she bent down, took his head between her two hands, and kissed it. Then she went to the door, and, flinging it wide open, inhaled the cool, strong northeast wind. As she stood thus, with her straight, sturdy back turned to him, he seemed to get a supernatural glimpse of the whole power of her personality. This tea-shop and that hill "towards Pendomer" were only little, material symbols of a Napoleonic campaign that she was working out... not necessarily in *this* world at all, but in *some* world, some level of psychic conflict, parallel with his "mythology."

"Well, I've got to be off, Mother!" he cried. And as he extinguished his cigarette by the edge of hers, in one of her new ash-trays, he instinctively squeezed it into an identical perpendicular position. Then, jumping up from the creaking wicker-chair, "I'm late as it is," he murmured. "I suppose Mr. 'Willum's Mill' comes here for his tea every day?" He strode to the door and stood there by her side. Mrs. Solent laughed, with the rich, careless, high-pitched laugh of a Ninon or a Thais.

"Only on market-days, my son. But I'm going to tea with *him*, next Sunday."

Wolf disregarded this confession altogether. "I say, Mother! You're coming to the wedding on Saturday, aren't you? The day after tomorrow. You haven't forgotten that?"

She turned towards him her radiant cheeks and glowing eyes. "Will the monster be there, to see Lorna's child married to your respectable friend? If she's there, I *must* come. What sport it'll be! The monster and I in the same pew, and your sister landing her patient fish!"

Across Wolf's mind flitted the image of that unwieldy figure stumbling over the milk-bottle at the grave.

"I haven't the least idea whether Miss Gault means to come," he said. "But *you* must come, Mother! You must leave your work to your two girls. I'll call for you at Mrs. Herbert's... about half-past nine... and we'll walk over. Well, I must run. Good-bye, Mother."

She met his embrace with a swift, almost greedy kiss, but immediately afterwards whispered with airy mockery: "Mattie Smith must be very grateful to you for giving her her darling! That pointed beard would never have been caught if my Wolf hadn't played matchmaker."

"What the devil are you talking about, Mother? They knew each other years before *we* came down here."

There shone in her brown eyes such a well-spring of satirical mischief, he found it hard to tear himself away. A spasm of vicious sympathy with this dark-spurting jet of malice produced the sensation within him of a nervous twinge that was half a tickling delight to him and half an adder's bite.

His mind reverted in a lightning-flash to his father's skull. Oh, how gentle, oh, how kindly that grin of death seemed, compared with this inhuman glee in the presence of perverse fate! A malign voluptuousness rose up within him, like an intoxicating bubble out of the very abyss, spilling black bile through veins. Ferociously he offered up that poor skull to this radiant sorceress. "You look just as you did, Mother, when you teased Mr. Smith so much, that Horse-Fair day. I hope *his* ghost won't be there on Saturday!" His words were innocent enough; but he knew too well what passed, under their cover, between himself and this woman. For good and evil he had made his choice between the living and the dead.

"I *could* not feel like this," he thought, "if I were the Wolf Solent I used to be. Good-bye!" he repeated. "I must run."...

All that morning, as he faced the Grammar School boys, his mind squeezed out the essence of this scene with his mother. He had gone over to her altogether! He had deserted the "fellow i' the cellarage." He had betrayed his "old Truepenny." All that long morning, while those boys' faces scattered themselves into his mind like grey ashes into a pail, he struggled to make clear what had happened to him.

He had no longer any definite personality, no longer any banked-up integral self. Submission to Urquhart had killed more than self-respect. He could never have gone over to his mother like this if his “mythology” had survived. He could feel now that greedy kiss of hers upon his lips! He had come to Dorset... he knew it well enough now... to escape from her, to mix with the spirit of his father in his own land. But Fate was hunting him “back to London,” and he began to have an inkling as to what the alternative to London was. The alternative to London was the bottom of Lenty Pond!

Wilder and wilder grew his thoughts as he rounded off the destiny of the House of Stuart to those furtive listeners. Rows upon rows of dwarf-men... that is how he saw them now, these boys of his... embryo-men, with a kind of distorted, atrophied intelligence, full of a jeering, idiotic cunning! Oh, how he hated them and the task of teaching them!

Suddenly in the very middle of his lesson he felt his voice changing and becoming strangely vibrant. Good God! What things were on the tip of his tongue to say to them! Was he going to “dance his malice-dance” before them, as he had danced it before that London audience? Life upon this earth began to show itself to him in a most evil light.

This killing of his “mythology,” how could he survive it? His “mythology” had been his escape from life, his escape into a world where machinery could not reach him, his escape into a deep, green, lovely world, where thoughts unfolded themselves like large, beautiful leaves, growing out of fathoms of blue-green water!

What were his sensations to him now? What was the air of a morning like this, without those mysterious emanations from the glimmering depths?

He had comforted Gerda; and the way she was happy now in her childish delight over that two hundred ought to have given a fresh glow to his days. But it didn’t. That startling alliance between Christie and Olwen, which he had plotted in the face of so many difficulties, and which was apparently absorbing both of them in its excitement, ought to have satisfied him. But it only made his thoughts gloomier. The last time he had seen Christie, her mind was so full of Olwen and Olwen's future, that she scarcely listened to what he was telling her!

Through the dizzy foreground of these boys' heads, white collars, sharp elbows, and scratching pens, through the patient "notes" he himself was dictating to them, floated in long procession all the people of his life.

Urquhart was sending his book in instalments to Bristol to be printed. He appeared to be thinking of nothing else. Jason was revising another volume of poetry, which promised to raise him into the innermost circle of modern literature. Darnley, Mattie, Mrs. Otter — they were all happy just then. He found himself sheering off any thought of Miss Gault. But apart from Miss Gault, all his friends were in calm waters. Even T. E. Valley, so Darnley had informed him, was in a state of comparative peace of mind.

He found himself and Miss Gault to be the only unhappy ones. Yes, and they were the only consciousnesses in the whole circle who gave a thought to that cemetery! When he and Miss Gault were dead, not a living soul would remember William Solent. Why, Mattie, the man's own daughter — not even once had Wolf been able to persuade her to visit that grave!

Oh, how he hated his work in that classroom! He did not only know in pitiless detail every map upon the wall... and feel toward it as something removed from every tincture of happiness... he also knew every ink-stain and fly-stain upon the wall. Those dirty marks were of equal importance with the maps. Both the marks and the maps represented a world that was totally bleak... a world of doleful invention, of disconsolate fancy... and yet a world in which he had to spend by far the larger part of his life.

He had just managed to cope with this desolate world by giving himself up to his secret vice the very second he left the school-gate. But those ecstatic sensations were now gone for ever! He might tear his nerves to pieces with his effort to get those feelings back. They would never come back! They were lost. How did human beings go on living, when their life-illusion was destroyed? What did they tinker up and patch up inside of them to rub along with, to shuffle through life with, when they lacked that one grand resource?...

He hurried back to Preston Lane for lunch, and was more than successful in hoodwinking Gerda as to his secret desolation. The girl chatted all the time about the spending of the two-hundred! So far she had bought nothing but one small pair of silver sugar-tongs. The cheque had been deposited in Gerda's name, and the girl was touchingly proud of possessing her first "fortune," as she kept calling it. She apparently intended spending every penny in the next few weeks! At least that was the implication of her excited chatter; and Wolf was quite prepared to submit.

He derived a sardonic amusement from noting the fact that this "spiritual blood-money," which had cost him his secretest happiness, was apparently smoothing away altogether the moral bruise left by the Weevil incident. That "brown coat" might return to *his* mind now and then. Hers it seemingly troubled no more. As for the luckless water-rat, he did not show his face again. Wolf's private inkling was that he had been indignantly dismissed, once for all, in some brief scene to which the girl never alluded. But it may easily have been that the lad himself was frightened by the length to which he had gone. Wolf certainly found, in his own weary introspection into the feelings of a cuckold, that he had a tendency to avoid that part of the town where the sausage-shop was!...

His lunch over, Wolf strode back more dispirited than ever to the scene of his pillory.

He had come to loathe every aspect of that chair and desk which made up his spiritual scaffold. There he talked and fidgeted while those rows of cropped heads and protruding ears nodded and swayed like shocks of ruffled wheat under the conscientious, pitiless repetition of a recurrent winnowing. And this was destined to be his life indefinitely, *sans* the remotest chance of a change for the better, unless his mother, as a successful businesswoman, gave him a pension!

What a mess he had made of his life! As he surveyed those spots and blurs and marks on these odious walls, he began to recognize the fact that until the last two or three days he had never faced reality at all. His heavenly vice, hugged to himself like a fairy bride, had protected him from reality. Here he was, thirty-six years old, and as far as *real reality* was concerned — the reality his mother lived in, the reality Darnley lived in — he was as innocent and preoccupied as a hermit who reads nothing but his breviary.

He had lost his breviary now, his Mass-book, his Mass! He had lost his whole inner world; and the outer world — what was it but rows of puzzled, protruding ears, into which, for an eternity, he had to pump tedious, questionable information?

When he left the classroom that evening, he waited for Darnley outside the building.

“I must see Christie first!” he kept repeating, as he watched the boys file out.

“Will you do something for me, old friend?” he said, as soon as his colleague appeared. Darnley fixed his mackerel-coloured eyes upon him in patient surprise.

"Even unto the third part of my kingdom, Solent!"

"Well, keep Mattie waiting for once, and go to tea with Gerda. Will you do that? Tell her I've got one of my walking-fits upon me and *have* to have some air. Tell her not to be worried, even if I'm late for supper. Of course, I don't mean you to stay all that time. But just tell her I shall be late; and she's not to worry."

"But what on earth's up, Wolf? Where, if a person may ask, are you going to run off to?"

"Oh, it's all right," Wolf said quietly. "I'm not sure yet where I *shall* go. Possibly I'll pay a visit to Mattie and tell her to expect *you*! Don't bother me with any details, my dear! Only, if you love me, go over to Preston Lane and make yourself amusing to Gerda and enjoy her tea. And make her understand that it's all right. That's the great thing... that it's all right!"

Wolf fancied there was a dim expression of disquietude in his friend's face as he nodded to him and hurried off; but he felt as if he would have run a worse risk just then than to disquiet Darnley. Hurriedly he made his way to the Malakite shop. "She's got Olwen in there now," he said to himself. "She won't want to see me."

But while he still kept repeating the words, "She won't want to see me," he rang the bell in the little side-alley.

To his surprise the door was opened immediately, and Christie herself, in cloak and hat, stood before him. "You!" the girl cried. "Well, you'd better come with me! Olwen has begun murmuring something about cake; and I've got none in the house. I've left her with Father, over their tea. They're both slow eaters; so we needn't rush *too* madly. Let's go this way!"

She led him up the quiet incline leading to the King's Barton road. He could guess now which was the actual confectioner's to which she was hurrying him... a little shop he had often passed on his way in and out of the town.

The horizontal sun was shooting its rays through great dark banks of western clouds as they approached this shop; and from its windows the fiery reflections fell upon the road like the reflections of barge-lanterns into an estuary.

“Wolf! I never knew how exciting she was, how intelligent she was! Oh, Wolf, it’s wonderful! We suit each other down to the ground.”

He snatched at her hand and pressed it hard. Never in all his relations with her had he caught such a tone in her voice.

When they turned into the Barton road, there was wafted into their faces one of those wandering winds that seem to carry a burden of earth-mysteries from one unknown spot to another.

“What an evening it is!” she cried. “I smelt primroses then!”

“It’s moss, I expect, and dead leaves,” he said, “from the woods over there.”

They soon reached the little shop; and he entered it with her, and helped her to choose the cake.

“Where are you going, Wolf? Over to Barton? Over to Pond Cottage?”

He held open the door for her in silence. There was a bell fixed upon the top of this door, which rang noisily at he closed it behind them. His nerves were so strained that this harsh jangle above their heads seemed ominous to him — seemed to have a sound of warning, like a reef-bell at sea.

“Yes,” he said dreamily. “Over to Barton... over to Lenty Pond.”

The girl missed this slip of the tongue.

“Is your sister happy, Wolf?” she asked. And then, without waiting for an answer: “Do you know what Olwen said just now? She said she’d like to live with me when Mattie was married!”

Wolf prodded the ground with his stick. “Did she really? What a wise little girl! And what did you answer? I don’t see why you shouldn’t have her! I’m sure it would be all right now.”

Christie sighed deeply, a long breath.

“*Would* they agree to it? Do you think they’d agree to it?”

“I don’t see why not,” he repeated, in a low voice.

“If you see Mattie tonight, Wolf, I wish you’d sound her about it... and Mrs. Otter... just to see how they’d take it.”

He made no reply to this; but drawing under his arm her free hand, and straightening his shoulders, he gazed up the road.

“Do you remember our night in the cornfield, Chris? After that game of bowls?”

She lifted her head and looked sharply at him, and he received the impression that he had struck an unseasonable note.

“I’m not one for forgetting, Wolf. You ought to know *that* by this time.”

“Urquhart gave me two hundred pounds for finishing his book, Chris. I’ve never told you that, have I?”

But she had turned her face away now and was evidently thinking about Olwen, and getting anxious to return.

“Oh, I’m so glad, my dear!” Her voice was sympathetic, but it was the calm sympathy of a friend, not the vibrant sympathy of a lover.

“What a detached little thing she is,” he thought; and the memory came over him, with a rush of wild self-pity, of all they had whispered together in that cornfield. “I’ve never told her about my ‘mythology’... but she ought to know, she ought to know what that two hundred means!”

“Well, I must run back. Olwen will have finished her tea.” And she tightened her hold upon the cake and made a little movement to draw her arm away. But Wolf burst out then with a final impulse of desperation:

“It was a vile job. It’s a vile production to be paid all that for! He’s printing it in Bristol *now*. It’ll just suit your father’s clients! How do you think I’ll appear to myself after this, Christie?”

The girl tossed her head proudly. “Oh, the clients!” she cried. “You’re extremely moral tonight, Wolf! I daresay you thought *my* book would please the clients!”

“I read just a page,” he said. But he released her arm now and only held her there by the grimness of his mood. “To sell my soul to Urquhart!... to do what young Redfern *wouldn’t* do!”

She did look up at him now with a flash of penetration.

“But, Wolf — any deviltry he threatened you with, was to *make* you do it, wasn’t it? Well! You’ve done it. You’ve submitted. He can’t hurt you now, can he?”

“But the book — the book, Chris!”

The girl gave a faint little laugh... the laugh of an air-sprite for whom these human scruples were growing intolerably tedious.... “Well, there are plenty of things Gerda will be glad enough to buy with this money. You’re different from what I thought you were, Wolf, if you let an absurd fancy like this prey on your mind!” She paused a moment and then said gravely, “But Mother would have understood what troubles you.”

She seized the sleeve of his coat with her fingers, and then stood silent, looking fixedly at him. Then she sighed very heavily, and, lifting up his arm to her face, pressed her lips to his wrist. After that she stared at him once more, in intense contemplative scrutiny.

He looked away, across her shoulder, over the scattered Blacksod roofs, over the Lunt meadows. Her sudden gesture of affection and something in the white immobility of her face made him think of the warning he had received in Urquhart’s kitchen from that Farmer’s Rest girl.

"I'll take a look at that pond tonight," he thought grimly. "If that's to be the upshot, I'd better see how it looks of a fine March evening!"...

"Well, give Olwen a kiss for me, Chris; and if I find Mattie at home I'll certainly try her out about that. I believe myself that she'll agree to it. She's so self-absorbed just now that I think she'll be glad to be left free. Well... God bless you, Chris! Don't drop the cake. Good-bye... good-bye!"

He did not look back after they separated, but the sound of her light-running footsteps made his heart feel desolately empty.

His last hope of recovering his old self seemed to sink down like a child's sagging balloon, pricked by a bodkin.

"She doesn't know. She's full of Olwen; and she doesn't know," he said to himself. But could he have *made* her know, even if he'd gone back with her? She didn't ask him to go back. Why should she? But *could* he have made her know, even if she had? He had never told a living soul about his "mythology."

He grasped his stick by the middle now; and in place of William of Deloraine, there came into his head the Homeric description of Hector of Troy, when, with his great spear held in just that way, he imposed a truce upon the combatants!

As he caught himself with this thought in his mind he smiled at his own grandiose self-consciousness. Stoicism! That's what a man needed, made as he was made! Stoical endurance of whatever fate the gods rained down upon his head! No Trojan, no Roman, would blink and whimper at the thought of Lenty Pond.

It was not long before he reached the very spot where on the night of the bowling-match he had climbed over the hedge with Christie, into the cornfield....

Moved to what he did by an obscure sense that this might be “the last time,” he hurriedly scrambled through the thickset hedge. The field was evidently destined to lie fallow that season. He found a rusty barrow, with its wooden shafts protruding into the air like the horns of a buried monster; and upon this he sat down. The sun had disappeared now, and he felt disposed to let the twilight fall about him in that place of memory.

Slowly, as he waited, did the earth swing into greyness, into dusk, into darkness. Cramped and chilly, he felt as if it needed more energy than he possessed to clamber down again into the road! A sort of waking-trance fell upon him as he crouched there, growing more and more cold and numb; and it was almost quite dark when he resumed his walk.

“I am like a ghost that’s been damned,” he thought, as he moved on. And indeed it was just as such a ghost would have felt that he had the sense of being cut off from all the magnetic reservoirs of the planet! He experienced a physical sensation of lightness, of hollowness, as he walked — as if he had been a husk, blown by the faintest of all winds!

When he reached the path that crossed the fields to the main highway, “I suppose,” he thought, “the whole business has been inevitable since the beginning; the sort of thing that *had* to happen, if a nature like mine lost its pride?”

As he began to approach King’s Barton he noticed that the night was going to be one of those clear, vapourless nights, when the sky is velvety dark and the stars exceptionally large and bright. He was walking with his head turned towards a specially luminous constellation, just above the arable uplands, a little to his left. Suddenly he became conscious, as an absolute certainty, that just above the horizon *behind* him, somewhere between Melbury Bub and Blacksod, there was a crescent moon. He swung round on his heel. Yes! There it was... the thinnest, most disembodied new moon that he had ever seen!

He surveyed that fragile-floating illuminated curve, comparable to nothing above or beneath the earth, and there came over him an inexplicable desire to do reverence to this immortal visitant. How had he known with such certainty that there *was* a new moon behind him? He was not yet enough of a countryman to keep any account of these things. Well! whatever perch were left in Lenty Pond would know about this new moon!

When he reached the wall of the churchyard, he noticed that there was a light in one of the lower windows of that great Perpendicular Tower. He paused and contemplated this light. In that vapourless darkness its effect in the middle of a great mass of masonry was singular and arresting. While he leaned upon the low, crumbling wall and surveyed this light, he became aware of the sound of men's voices — voices whispering... whispering furtively and suspiciously. Suddenly, by means of a light much less clear than the light in the window... "It's a lantern!" he thought... he detected the forms of three men, one of them much taller than the others, grouped around the boy's grave. He had no sooner caught sight of this group of noctambulists than the light in the tower went out.

Never had he felt less inquisitive, less concerned. He was tempted to walk forward and let the whole thing go. However, where all motives were equally futile, let a straw turn the scale! He climbed stealthily over the wall and advanced to the church-door.

The door was wide open, and he entered the central aisle, moving as cautiously as he could. Past the christening-font he moved; past the back of the rear pews. All was pitch-dark, and the peculiar smell of the church, suggestive of mildew and worm-eaten woodwork, was like a second darkness within the darkness. He was arrested in his advance by the sudden appearance of a flickering light, which proceeded from the space under the tower where were the stone steps that led up to the belfry.

"Tilly-Valley!" he muttered to himself, as once more — as had been happening to him so often these last few days — he knew without question who this light-bearer was.

Yes! He was right! Descending the belfry-steps, with a flickering candle in his hand, came the figure of the little priest, his thin legs first, then his cassocked body, then his agitated white face, then his bare black scalp!

The expression of the man's face, when he caught sight of Wolf, was an epitome of consternation and relief, the latter emotion rapidly overspreading the former, like a kindly shadow crossing a distorted gargoyle.

"What's up, Valley?" whispered Wolf, taking the vicar's cold, limp fingers in his own. "What are they doing out there? Is it Urquhart? There were three of them. They had a lantern. God, man! You're trembling like a leaf!"

"I was in my garden... I saw them come in... over the hedge.... For a long time I watched them. I ought to have gone down to them... I know I ought... I've betrayed the Sacrament by not going down to them...."

"It's all right," whispered Wolf soothingly. "You couldn't have done anything. They've probably been drinking. Monk's with him out there. I saw him... the great devil! The other one's that fellow Round, no doubt."

The priest broke away from him and began hurrying up the aisle towards the altar, Wolf following at his heels.

"There would have been a time," he said to himself, "when... when..."

Wolf thought the clergyman was going to kneel down or even prostrate himself; but instead of this he placed the candle carefully upon the top of the altar, made a hurried genuflection, and then ran round like a panic-stricken thief to a small window in the side-transept which overlooked the invaded spot.

Here Wolf followed him and peered out too, leaning over his shoulder.

There were only two men to be seen now... and they were both busy filling up the open grave. The lantern was on the ground, and by its light they were seen working hard, stamping down the loose soil with the utmost concentration and scraping away all the tell-tale rubble from the surface of the grass. Not a word did the men speak to one another; but it was easy enough to recognize Monk. The other was undoubtedly the landlord of "Farmer's Rest." Mr. Urquhart had disappeared.

They worked at their job so rapidly that it was not long before the carefully folded rolls of turf-grass were being pressed down upon that oblong heap, concealing the raw clay. Wolf fancied he could even detect a patch of daisies upon this replaced turf. There was a patch of something, at any rate, that showed whitish, as the lantern-rays fell upon it.

Mr. Valley's cassock, as Wolf bent over the little priest, smelt unpleasantly of gin. The wall against which he himself was pressing the palm of his hand, as he leant forward, felt damp and chilly under the touch, like the flesh of a corpse.

"They can't see our light, can they?" groaned the vicar, half-turning his head. "I'll blow it out!" whispered Wolf in reply; and leaving the man's side, he walked over to the altar-steps, extinguished the flame, and came back with the candlestick swinging from one of his fingers, and a fume of carbonic-acid gas floating round his head.

Shifting his stick to the hand from which the smoking candle was swinging, Wolf peered again through the narrow window. He could feel the body of Mr. Valley shivering; and to give the man some reassurance in the darkness, he placed his free hand upon his shoulder. Then, bending down, he laid both the candle and his oak-stick softly on the flagstones.

The two men at the grave seemed resolved to complete their job with the utmost scrupulosity. “I can’t believe they *are* drunk,” he thought. “He must have appealed to their superstition. He must have scared them into it.”

What the man had said over the Malmsey returned to his mind. “He must have forced the coffin open!” he thought. And then, as he stared above Mr. Valley’s head at those two figures beating the turf down, he was surprised to find himself completely indifferent and impassive. Whether Mr. Urquhart had been content to press his perturbed face against the cold featurelessness of Redfern’s mortality, or whether, like Isabella in “The Pot of Basil,” he had carried “so dear a head” back to his secret chamber, seemed at that moment a question that left him utterly incurious!

“There *would* have been a time for such a word,” he said to himself; “but *now* all is equal!” He saw Roger Monk straddle over the grave with his long legs, move the lantern, and whisper something to Mr. Round. From the road outside there came the sound of children laughing and chattering. “I wonder Urquhart didn’t wait till midnight. Anyone might have drifted in here; but I suppose they’d just take ’em for grave-diggers... or be too scared to go near ’em!”

“Thud! Thud! Thud!” went the spades of the two men against the sides of the grave. Valley’s shiverings had stopped now. Wolf heard the little man’s lips moving in the darkness. He was muttering a Latin psalm. Wolf now began to feel like a mute sentinel — a sentinel at the grave of everything that had ever enjoyed the sweet sun! Vast tracts of Dorset earth seemed spread out before him. He could hear a low wind in the sycamores of Poll’s Camp. He could hear the wide expanses of Blackmore Vale sighing in their sleep. He recalled what he had felt at his first encounter with Urquhart... that vague awareness of something new and strange to him in the secret of evil. He seemed totally indifferent to all that now! Good? Evil? It all seemed to belong to something unimportant, irrelevant, remote. What did it matter? This grave those two were stamping down so smoothly... it was only one of thousands under that crescent moon! With the heart of life killed, what did it matter what happened to anyone?

The two men were exchanging whispers now. They were gazing with satisfaction at their work. Wolf recognized that his bare hand, whose outspread fingers were pressed against the cold stone, had grown numb as he leant hard upon it, bending forward over Valley's shoulder. Ay, but what an unpleasant odour... like dissolution itself... emanated from the cold sweat of the little priest! But the man's shivering had subsided. That was a good sign. No doubt the departing of Mr. Urquhart had relieved the situation for him. As for himself, he felt an obscure regret at the squire's withdrawal. So deadly callous had his emotions grown, he experienced at that moment nothing but a weary curiosity. Yes, it would have been interesting to see that convulsed white face bending down over the form in the coffin! The old villain must have crouched on the grass, when they got the lid off, undeterred by the smell! Had Valley seen what happened from up there in the belfry? Probably he *had*; and the shock of it had brought him scrambling down, torn between the outrage of the sacrilege and his fear of the squire.

The two men were standing erect now and staring straight towards him. Of course, they couldn't see anything, now that the church was dark. They must be *feeling* the vibration of his and Valley's intense scrutiny.

How long had his hand been lodged on Valley's shoulder, and why was he gripping the man so hard?

He raised his arm, so that both his palms were pressing now against the coping of that narrow slit in the wall. One of them was numb, but the other was hot and pulsing feverishly. Ah, the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet! But a time will come when there'll be no more lanterns!

"Damn that beggar Monk! He's not satisfied yet. There goes his spade again. Yes, take the lantern away, landlord Round! Yes, nudge the great brute and call him off. Yes, there *are* steps in the road. You'd better clear off, both of you! God! I believe they're going to quarrel! But it's all nothing to me now. What is a quarrel over a boy's grave when the 'hard little crystal' of a person's inmost self has dissolved?

"It'll be a quaint moment, though, when that great beggar gets back to the house and has to answer his master's bell! Will he say, 'Yes, sir... no, sir,' in his usual tone? He talked to me once of killing the man. Why does *that* come into my head at this moment? But no! He'll never do that. He'll carry up the hot drink and turn down the bedclothes, just as usual; and Urquhart'll say, 'The moon has gone down, eh? what?' just in his ordinary tone! They *have* done now... at last.... Oh, that's right! Don't forget the crowbar, Mr. Round! A crowbar? So they did intend to open the coffin!"

Wolf watched the two men make their way, slowly and carefully, between the graves, towards the wall that divided the churchyard from the meadow where the school-treat had been held. Once over this wall, only an occasional flicker of the lantern revealed their path; and soon even that vanished.

He turned from the window, pulling his companion after him. It was like touching something that had no feeling with something else that had no feeling, to tug at Valley's arm with his benumbed fingers.

After three or four futile efforts, he managed, however, to strike a match; and by the aid of this match, moving across to the altar-steps, with his fingers guarding the flame, he relit the priest’s candle. With a cold, weary impassiveness... allowing this impulse to reach Lenty Pond, which was indeed the only definite impulse he retained just then, its fullest sway... he suggested to the silent figure at his side that they might walk over together to Pond Cottage. “It’ll cheer the little beggar up,” he thought, “to have a chat with the bride and bridegroom; and I can drop him at their gate.”

T. E. Valley seemed glad enough to postpone his return to the desolation of his littered study. “But I mustn’t stay long!” he murmured.

During the first part of their walk together some mutual instinct prevented them from referring to the scene they had just witnessed; but at last, when they had reached Pond Lane, Valley burst out:

“I hope you’re right... from a secular point of view... about my not interfering just now, Solent. From my own point of view I shall find it... hard... yes, very hard... no, I don’t mean that... did I say hard? I meant that I shall find it... very... you know, Solent?... very shameful... to... to... forgive myself!”

They were walking now where the hedges were very high and thick. Wolf began to experience a confused exhaustion, that seemed to weigh upon his head as well as upon his arms and legs. It was as though a knot had been tied in the recesses of his being, which interfered with the flow of his blood. A heavy, inert apathy settled down upon him, which he vaguely associated with these high hedges. “It would have been ridiculous to meddle,” he said. “You’d have done no good. Do you know, Valley, I think I’d like to rest for a minute!”

“To rest? Certainly... of course. You mean it would be nice if we sat down? But it’s very dark, isn’t it? There’s usually water in both these ditches; and they are very deep. Hadn’t we better wait till we get to the Otters’?”

“Better wait,” repeated Wolf wearily, feeling as if it would be a heavenly thing to slip gently down now into Lenty Pond and have done with it all; “better wait till we get to the Otters’.”

“You’re not feeling shaky, are you, Solent? I’m rather shaky myself. Take my arm. The air will be better soon. It’s these hedges. I never come here alone, because of these hedges — and — well! you know? because of that pond over there. Don’t mind them, Solent. They’re only high hedges and deep ditches.”

Wolf stopped motionless in the middle of the road. “I really would like to sit down,” he said. “I mean, to lie down! I think I must be, as you say, shaky. I expect it’s from standing so long at that window. Would you mind if I tried, with my stick, to feel if there *is* water in the ditch?”

“If you feel dizzy, Solent, why don’t you lie down where we are — in the road? I’ve often done that myself. Here; lean on me! I’ll help you. That’s right. It’s quite dry, isn’t it? Here; I’ve got a handkerchief in my pocket, a big red one... it’s as big as a scarf. Here; I’ll put it under your head... so... so... so. Do you feel all right now, Solent? You *will* soon, anyway. Do you know, I’ve had some of the happiest moments of my life lying down in the road? The road to Blacksod is very good for lying down on, because there’s grass at the side of it and very few carts go that way. How do you feel now, Solent?”

A relaxation of every muscle and fibre in Wolf’s body seemed to have taken place. He gazed up at the obscure form of the priest and at the shivering stars in the blue-black sky.

“It’s — just — what — I — wanted,” he murmured, with a luxurious sigh.

Mr. Valley was delighted. He hovered over him as if he had ensconced him in his own bed. “I thought you’d like it, Solent,” he murmured.

“Sometimes when I’ve been like this on the Blacksod road I’ve felt as if, with the round earth beneath me carrying me between the constellations... and the Blessed Sacrament waiting my return... I’ve felt as if —— What’s the matter, Solent? Is the road too hard?”

But Wolf had only been fumbling with his hand to make sure he hadn’t lost his stick. He felt extremely unwilling to move or to speak. But he was conscious of a stronger wave of affection for Valley than he had ever known before.

“Does your forehead feel feverish?” his companion enquired now, touching Wolf’s head in the darkness with the tips of his fingers. “Don’t think I’m inquisitive, Solent; but I’m a priest of God, and I... I notice people that are... people that are... disturbed.”

“You’re very nice to me, Valley. Please don’t kneel in the road! I’ll get up in a minute. It does me good lying here.”

“Don’t think I’m inquisitive, Solent; and don’t answer if you don’t want to. But am I right in thinking that you’ve got something on your mind... something that troubles you till you feel dizzy, like you did just now?”

“I’ll get up in a moment, Valley. I’m only lying like this now because it’s such a nice sensation! Why do you think it’s so dark, when the stars look so large?”

“It’s these hedges, Solent. They keep the light out.”

“The moon’s gone down. Do you mean the light from Pond Cottage?”

“Solent! You won’t mind if I say something?”

“No. I’m listening. Please get up. I don’t like your kneeling.”

“Shall I tell you what’s troubling you, what’s made you so dizzy, Solent? It’s because Darnley is going to be married. I know exactly what you feel. I know well what you and Darnley are to each other. Do you know what I think, Solent? I think it’s a shame you two didn’t have the happiness of living together before you both married. It's *that* that's troubling you; aren't I right? It's thinking that your friend's lost to you?"

"Nonsense, my good man!" cried Wolf, scrambling hastily to his feet. "What has been weighing on my mind has nothing to do with this wedding. Come! Let's be getting on! I left Darnley at tea with my wife; I mean, I sent him off there."

His words were casual and careless; but Valley's suggestion hit him hard. It was the same hint that Miss Gault had made last Sunday. Was it possible that the accursed mood he'd fallen into... this mood of miserable apathy... had as much to do with the wedding as with the loss of his great secret?

His companion had difficulty now in keeping up with him, so fast did he walk. Presently he said: "Tell me this, Valley, if you don't mind... did you *see* what Urquhart was doing just now?"

They were close to the Otters' house when he spoke. He could distinguish the light from the drawing-room shining between the branches of the poplars. Valley laid his hand on his arm and clutched it tightly, compelling him to stop. The man's face was a patch of wavering greyness against the blanket of the dark, but he could detect its extreme distress.

"I can't — Solent — you know what I mean? — I can't tell you anything. It's all misery. Yes, I saw him. It was a long way from the tower. The belfry's high up. I think he loved him. *That's* what I *have* to think; but I can only bear it, Solent, by... by a little trick of mine." He paused; and then, to his companion's consternation, he uttered a ghastly little laugh.

"What trick, Valley, are you talking about?" Wolf instinctively swung his arm free, for the priest's fingernails were hurting his flesh. "What trick do you mean?"

His tone was irritable, for he was pondering in his mind how to get rid of the man and slip off. "I *must* set eyes on that pond before I see Mattie," he said to himself.

Valley's reply seemed to come from the darkness that surrounded them, rather than from any localized spot. "If... you... must... know... I have... to pretend... that I *was* Urquhart... myself!"

Wolf made no comment upon this. He looked up at the poplars in that well-known garden. They were illuminated on one side by a faint glimmer coming from his old window, the window of the room where he spent his first night in Dorset.

"What a man-lover you are, Valley! *My* trick is to escape from humanity altogether."

To his dismay the priest's reply to this was a repetition of the same cackling laugh.

"Yes; to escape from it altogether!" Wolf went on. "I don't know why that should amuse you, Valley." As he spoke he became aware of something burning at the back of the house. "Dimity must be burning refuse... some sort of greenery," he thought. "It's like the smell of dead flowers. It's like a bonfire of dead crocuses!"

This aromatic smoke, poignant and penetrating, floating on the air, gave him a very queer twinge. His nerves reached out invisible tendrils to respond to it; but under the disturbed contact between his sensations and his *enjoyment of his sensations*, this motion of response only caused him tantalizing discomfort. It caused him, indeed, a discomfort of so peculiar a kind, that he prolonged his silence almost rudely, while he gave way to it. It was a sharp, thin, long-drawn-out sensation, like some erotic agitation that is motiveless, meaningless, irritating.

What he felt made it more imperative than ever that he should get rid of his companion and hurry across that field! He turned round, tightened his hold on his stick, and spoke with a tone of quiet authority. "Valley," he said, "I can't go in at this moment. I've got to think a bit... out here... by myself. You go in and tell them so, will you? I'll follow you in, in a second or so, when I've thought something out... in my mind. Mattie will understand. She knows my ways. Apologize to Mrs. Otter. No! Why should you do that? Just tell them that Darnley's with Gerda in town and that I'll be in in a minute. That's all that's necessary."

But the priest's fingers only tightened upon his arm.

"In town? With your wife? Darnley?"

"Having tea with her, my good man! Those body-snatchers have upset you completely. There! Go in and tell them!" And with a quick movement of his wrist he released himself from Valley's clutch and rushed off.

He found it an incredible relief to scramble over the familiar gap in that high hedge and run with long, swift strides across the field. It was as if all the rumours in the village about that pond had gathered to themselves invisible arms and were pushing him towards it. What he felt in his own consciousness was not a simple, nor was it a very complicated feeling. It was exactly as if the loss of his spiritual vice had left him inordinately thirsty, and he had an inkling that just to stare at the waters of Lenty Pond would give him some inexplicable satisfaction.

He blundered over the dark expanse of that great field as if Jason's water-nymph herself had been calling to him. Blindly, recklessly, he ran across it, stumbling over the mole-hills, not once glancing up at the starry sky, his stick clutched in his right hand as if it had really been the spear of William of Deloraine, and his panting breath coming in deep gasps. As he ran he did notice one thing, and that was the shadowy leap of a startled hare. The creature rose and dashed away from under his very feet; but instead of disappearing into the darkness, he could see, as he ran, where it had risen erect, a short distance off, and was watching him, motionless and with a frozen intentness.

Ah! There it was — Lenty Pond in the cold starlight!

He moved close up to the edge of the water. He stood with both hands pressed hard upon the handle of his stick. He flung his consciousness, as if it were a heavy stone that all day long he had been carrying in his pocket, down into those silent depths. And then his body — not his mind, but his body — became acquainted with shivering dread. Was his mind going to issue the final mandate now, at this very moment? What was his body doing that it revolted like this? What was his body doing that its foot-soles clung to the mud as if they had been rooted there? It was not only his flesh that now turned sick with fear. The very bones within him began screaming — a low, thin, wire-drawn scream — before what his mind was contemplating. It was not that life — merely to be alive — had suddenly become so precious. It was not fear of Nothingness that made his body quake. *It was Lenty Pond itself!* Yes, what his flesh and his bones shrank from was not eternity. It was immersion in that localized, particular, cubic expanse of starlit oxygen-hydrogen!

He visualized Mr. Urquhart and Jason surveying his dead face. Would someone... the "automatic young lady," perhaps... have closed his staring eyes before those two looked at him? A fish hooked out of season! "He ought to have taken my advice," Jason would say, "and gone back to that lord in London!"

A phosphorescent Redfern began to manifest itself now in that unruffled water... a Redfern with no features left!

"This may be," he thought, "the exact spot where he stood."

A spasm of shame oppressed him, that he should be so preoccupied with himself that the weight of all that boy's sufferings meant so little to him.

Well, clean out of it now was Jimmy Redfern! But that did not erase the invisible pattern of misery traced upon the air at this spot.

"I'll ask Jason how he knew that the boy used to come here. I'll ask him as soon as I get back."

Get back? *Get back where?* So he wasn't going to utter that mandate to his panic-stricken body....

How queer that he had nothing now left to decide! His future was already there, mapped out before him. It was only a matter of following the track. Yes! The track was already there... leading back again! All he had to do was to accept it and follow it from moment to moment, like a moving hand that threw a shadow over an unfolded map!

But where did that map, that track, that diagram come from, across which, like a sneaking shadow, he saw himself returning to Pond Cottage?

His consciousness, hauled up, as if by a string, from the bottom of the pond, began beating now against the dark wall that separated him from the portion of his being which was unrolling that map! Without his life-illusion he was at that moment completely devoid of pride. Afraid to jump in? Afraid of that cold water down there? It was nothing to him if he *were* afraid! There was no "I am I" to worry about; no Wolf Solent, with a mystical philosophy, to look like a cowardly fool! But whose hand was it that was unrolling the map? His own hand? Was he, then, a furtive, secretive, desperate life-lover? Or was it the hand of Chance? But how could Chance unroll a map?

What was left of consciousness within him flapped like a tired bird against the whole dark rondure of the material universe. If only he could find a crack, a cranny in that thick rotundity. But the thickness was his very self! He was no longer Wolf Solent. He was just earth, water, and little, glittering specks of fire!

For the tenth-part of a second there seemed to be a faint cracking in this huge material envelope. But no! All was sealed-up. The monstrous cube of black immensity remained intact... darkness upon darkness. Drawing a heavy breath, he jerked himself upright. He had been leaning forward eagerly, preposterously, over the handle of his stick. But now, with a peevish effort, he tugged the thing out of the mud into which he had been pressing it. His mind had suddenly grown cloudy, lumpish, cloddish. He sighed deeply and let his stick swing loosely in his limp fingers. Then bending down with slack knees over Lenty Pond, he set himself to splash the water, foolishly, aimlessly, with his stick's end. This way and that he splashed it, in the immense stillness, under the flicker of those countless stars. And as he splashed it he began wondering to himself in a heavy logger-headed way why it was, that when all was pitch-dark except for those pin-pricks in the firmament, he could distinguish so clearly between the liquid darkness of the water and the solid darkness of the surrounding earth.

He swung round at last, like a man who turns away from the extinguished footlights of an empty theatre, and began retracing his steps across the field. His dominant sensation, as he performed this retreat, was a singular one. He felt as if his consciousness were already ensconced like Banquo's ghost at the Otters' table, while some quite alien force was dragging across the field a numb, inert, apathetic human body, that raised one leaden foot after the other.

There was such a hubbub of voices issuing from the drawing-room of Pond Cottage, that with a sulky motion of the muscles of his chin, repeated several times as he stumbled over the flower-beds, he went round the house to the back-door. There, at his petulant tap, Dimity Stone let him in. "Mister So-lent!" the old crone exclaimed, in her most quavering voice. "And where, for Lawky’s sake, be Master Darnley? Sit ‘ee down, Mister Solent, while I gets me breath. These goings-on do daunt a body terrible. ’Tis first one thing, ‘sknow; and then be another! First there be talk of a cold bite o’ summat to save I trouble. Then what do Master Jason do but come wambling in about hotting up they wedding-pasties what I’ve hid all day from they since a week a-gone, ‘cept what Miss Olwen coaxed out of I.”

The old woman kept shuffling her utensils about, as she spoke, from one orifice to another of her vast kitchen-stove. A most fragrant steam emerged from more than one lid; and Wolf, as he sat on a hard chair, with one limp hand dangling his stick and the other dangling his hat, was aware of a pang of extreme hunger.

“And then,” she went on, “must Parson come whiffling in, white as a lassie’s petsycut, and Mistress must uncork a sip o’ Scotch for he; and Miss Mattie, all of a tremble with her bride’s-night dependin’, must start crying about Master Darnley, where ‘a be and what’s keeping o’ he.”

“I told Mr. Valley to tell them,” threw in Wolf, in a low voice. “I told him to tell them.” The heat of the kitchen, after the chill night-air, and the stress of his recent experiences were beginning to make him feel dizzy again. “I told him to tell them,” he repeated, trying to concentrate his wits upon the confused voices from the drawing-room.

Dimity looked shrewdly at him. “Why, ye be dodderin’ yourself, Mister Solent! Here” — and she hurried to a cupboard and poured something into a glass— “here... drink this. ’Tis me wone cordial.” And she watched him intently, with a hand on his shoulder, as he drained it off. “That’s better, eh? Why, you be near as white as thik parson! ’Tis beyond I, what be coming to this house, these turnover days.”

“What is it?” he murmured, spluttering and gasping, while the blood surged back to his head; “what is it, Dimity?”

"Nought but a drop o' elder-wine," she said, soothingly, patting him on the head.

The hubbub of voices from the drawing-room of Pond Cottage began to grow more relevant and natural. A moment ago they had sounded in his ears as if he had been a spirit — a spirit whose body was left far behind, under the water with Jason's nymph.

"I told Mr. Valley to tell them," he repeated firmly.

"Missus said thik parson brought such a word," muttered the old woman, returning to her steaming saucepans. At that moment there reached them both the sound of an opening door and a man's steps in the front-hall. "He've a-come! Master Darnley be come!" cried Dimity, hurrying out of the kitchen.

Wolf rose from his chair, hat in one hand, stick in the other, and followed her out.

The sight of his friend's yellow beard against the lamp on the hall-table completed his restoration to normal intelligence.

"Oh, *there* you are!" cried the bridegroom cheerfully. "I told Gerda I knew you'd be here all right. She was a bit nervous about you." He paused to hang up his coat. The sound of their voices brought the drawing-room door open with a fling; and Mattie rushed out, flushed and excited. Even at the moment this occurred, however, Darnley had time to turn a quick sideways glance towards Wolf across the uplifted overcoat. "She's a darling, your wife!" he whispered emphatically.

Mattie's arms were round Darnley's neck before his hands were free. Wolf had never seen the two of them embrace; and when he awoke that night by Gerda's side, before a window pallid with dawn, he recalled the expression of his friend's mackerel-coloured eyes. They were like those of a man who pulls himself together, naked, tense, exultant, on the brink of a rapid torrent.

It was Mrs. Otter herself who took Wolf’s hat and stick away from him now; and as he shook hands with the little lady, he was driven by an unexpected impulse to bend down and give her a hurried kiss.

“It seems the fashion,” he muttered awkwardly, as he turned to greet Jason and T. E. Valley.

“I mustn’t stay for more than this,” he found himself saying presently, as he emptied his soup-plate and lifted his wine-glass to his lips. “Darnley says Gerda won’t touch her supper till I get home.”

“You don’t know, of course, how our little girl is behaving?” said Mrs. Otter. “Miss Malakite isn’t spoiling her too much, I hope?”

Wolf felt very grateful for all the easy implications of this little speech.

“Yes, I do, indeed,” he said, rising to his feet. “I met Christie as I passed the shop... when was it?... oh, about half-past five, I think!... and she said Olwen was perfect.”

He felt himself blushing as he caught Jason’s sardonic eye. Why had he said “perfect”? But Mrs. Otter continued quite naturally:

“It’s rather a test for the little thing. But Miss Malakite, I know, will make it easy for her.” She paused and sighed rather sadly. “It’s strange not to have her here,” she added. “I feel as if she’d been here all her life.”

“Your friend Miss Gault,” said Jason, “would like to send the police after her.”

His words produced an uncomfortable silence. Darnley rose to his feet and began sprinkling salt with his finger and thumb upon a wine-stain he had made on the table-cloth.

“If they want to keep her,” said Jason, “are you going to let them, Mother?”

"It's for Mattie to decide that," murmured Mrs. Otter.

"Your friend Miss Gault would soon decide it," repeated Jason. "She'd like to send her, and Miss Malakite too, to the Ramsgard Workhouse!"

"Things will work themselves out as God sees best, Jason," remarked Mrs. Otter reproachfully. Wolf noticed that as the lady spoke she surreptitiously laid one of her hands on Mattie's knee.

It was at this point that Mattie herself turned to Dimity. "You're tired," she said. "Do sit down now. And listen! I don't want you to do anything more tonight in my room." Wolf had always regarded it as a touching peculiarity of Pond Cottage that the aged servant entered freely into every conversation, as she moved about behind the chairs; but tonight he had a premonition, before the old woman opened her lips to reply, that she would say something unlucky.

"You can't see no corner of Miss Olwen's bed, Miss Mattie," was what she now brought out. "They things what I've been ironing be all spread out over'n."

Her words produced a silence even more disconcerting than Jason's reference to the police.

"You needn't... tell me... *that*... Dimity!" cried Mattie, in a strange, high-pitched tone; and then, snatching her hand away from Mrs. Otter, she suddenly burst out: "You can cover up her bed with all my new things — you can all of you do it... yes, you can all of you do it!"

The girl thrust the back of her hand into her mouth, biting the skin. Her heavy face was distorted, her bosom was heaving. "Oh, I want my mother, I want my mother!" she wailed, clapping both hands over her face and swaying to and fro in her seat.

This unexpected reference to a woman dead so many years — he had no notion even as to where Lorna Smith was buried — gave Wolf a queer shock. Mrs. Otter rose hurriedly and threw her arms round Mattie's swaying head, pressing it to her breast. "My child! My child!" she kept repeating, while Wolf prayed desperately that the girl wouldn't thrust her away.

"I'm all right... I'm sorry, Darnley!" came her muffled voice at last.

Mrs. Otter let her go and slid back into her seat.

"I'll help you with the plates, Dimity," Mattie murmured, rising and straightening her shoulders. Darnley held the door open for her to pass out. She had snatched up Wolf's soup-plate and Jason's, which were the only empty ones.

"I'll say good-night, then," cried Wolf, looking at Mrs. Otter, "and I won't be late at the church!"

He gathered together his belongings in the hall, while Darnley, with his arm held tight round Mattie's shoulder, fixed his eyes gravely on every movement he made.

When Wolf had got his coat on, his friend left Mattie standing there frowningly, with the plates still in her hand, and opened the hall-door.

"Good-night, Wolf," he said quietly. "She'll be all right now. Give my love to Gerda. By the way" — and he lowered his voice so that Mattie shouldn't hear him— "Gerda says your mother wants to come; and for that reason she'd rather come independently of you, with her father. I told her it should be exactly as she wished."

Wolf at that moment found it difficult to concentrate his mind upon this nice point.

"We'll all be with you anyway, Darnley. As long as we're all there, it doesn't matter *how* we turn up, does it? Well, good luck to you!" But he had no sooner got his friend's fingers in his own than he impulsively dropped them. Catching the man's head between his hands, he kissed him rapidly several times on the forehead. "Good luck to you!" he repeated, as he strode off down the garden. “I kissed the mother; why not the son?” he thought, as he reached the gate; but something produced a constriction in his throat that was akin to a sob. “Down, wantons... down!” he murmured audibly, as he fumbled for the latch of the gate.

He had scarcely found it, however, when the house-door behind him opened and a hurly-burly of voices reached him.

“But you’ve not even finished your soup!”... “You’ve only had one glass!”... “You might wait till Dimity has brought — —”

His first idea was that these cries were intended for himself; but as he wavered there, in puzzled indecision, there came hurrying down the path, like a stray dog bolting for home, the agitated figure of T. E. Valley. The little priest was struggling into his overcoat as he ran, and repeating, “I’ve had all I want! I’ve had all I want!”

“Good-night, Wolf! Take care of him, for heaven’s sake!” rang out Darnley’s voice from the door, as the two men emerged into Pond Lane. They saw the light vanish away. They heard the door close. They were once more alone together.

“Well,” said Wolf, “I suppose we go *this* way, eh?” and he made a motion to turn to the right.

“Would... you... mind... Solent,” pleaded the man piteously, “if we went the *other* way? I *could* go alone... but... you know?... I’m feeling a little upset tonight...”

“Right you are, my friend!” said Wolf, with a sigh. “I daresay Gerda will forgive me. But I’m already a bit late; so let’s walk briskly! Why” — he was already moving in the required direction, with the man’s arm in his own — “do you want to go so far round?”

But Valley’s mind had reverted again to the scene at the grave.

"The belfry-window was a long way off. I was fretting so much, too, thinking I ought to go down and stop it. Perhaps it *was* natural.... I should feel like that myself if it weren't for the Sacrament... I mean if... you know?..."

The priest's mutterings rose and fell like a cloud of weakly-humming gnats, over a twilit tow-path. Wolf continued to feel as if he were a wooden puppet galvanized into meaningless activity by a complicated system of wires. "If only they'd let me lie down," he thought, "just lie down for a hundred years, I'd deal with them all!"

Once more alone and striding homewards, he teased his memory about the name of an especially luminous constellation that hung in the west directly over Blacksod. "The most contemptible people are allowed to enjoy the stars," he said to himself; and then he thought: "A lump of cowardice without past or future! But this lump has two legs to carry it, and a stick to prod the ground with. Ailinon! Ailinon! But I'll make Gerda laugh when I tell her about Tilly-Valley."

It gave him one of the first pleasant feelings he had had that evening, to think of making Gerda laugh. "I won't tell her till we're in bed," he thought. And then he thought: "I wonder if Olwen and Christie will sleep together tonight?"

As he moved between the well-known hedges of that road, along which just a year ago he had been driven by Darnley, he experienced a singular sensation. He felt as though he were beginning a *posthumous* life — a life that his own cowardice had snatched from the end intended.

It was as if such an end *had* actually been reached upon some psychic plane; so that now he but "usurped his life." Never would he know what actually happened at that King's Barton grave, any more than he would know what Miss Gault did after he left her in the Ramsgard Cemetery. But such things could not altogether pass. Must there not be some imprint of them left upon space itself? If so, such air-pictures might easily remain intact, even after the planet itself was uninhabited and frozen.

In his agitation he began fumbling at the handle of his stick, and he noted how the deep indents cut by Lob Torp on that night of the "Yellow Bracken" had grown smooth and slippery with handling.

"What I really am is dead," he kept saying to himself. "That's what I am... *dead*." But out of his balanced indifference, like a man astride of a floating log, who by a miracle has escaped a whirlpool, he began to feel conscious of a faint satisfaction in the mere fact of having experienced that rush of the cold air about his ears and that splash of froth upon his cheek.

What he had to do now was to gather his forces together for a daily and nightly dialogue with the Cause of all Life and of all Death! As he came along into the outlying district of Blacksod, he visualized this Cause as an enormous shell-fish placidly breathing in and breathing out on the floor of a sea-like infinity.

He was staring at its fixed, idiotic eyes, and at its long, motionless antennæ, when he passed the turn to the Malakite shop. Then something in him, beyond all reasoning, loosened, stirred, leapt up.... "Oh, Christie! Oh, my little Christie!"

“FORGET”

In the middle of that night Wolf was aroused to consciousness by the voice of Gerda anxiously soothing him; and even in his confusion he was aware at that moment of something exceptionally tender in her tone, something protective, something different altogether from a young creature’s spontaneous alarm at being disturbed in its sleep! It was as if all the agitations of that last fortnight had unfolded some psychic bud or frond within her being, changing her from a capricious child into a full-grown sweet-natured woman.

“What did I say?” he asked, as his head fell back upon the pillow.

“ ’I shall break between you,’ you cried. ‘I shall break between you!’ And then, when I said, ‘*Between who, Wolf?*’ you said, ‘Between *them*! Can’t you see? Between those two men!’ ”

“Men, Gerda? Did I say *men*?” And then suddenly, like a retreating image in a deep mirror, he remembered what his dream had been. He was himself a brittle stick, a piece of dead brushwood. At one end of him was the Waterloo tramp. At the other end of him was that complacent old man with the white cat. He had awakened in terror because he felt himself beginning to crack, as those two antagonists tugged.

After caressing Gerda with an emotional relaxation, such as the self-pitying weakness of a fever might have left, he settled himself again to sleep. His final thoughts were concerned with the meaning of his dream; but beyond a fumbling association of the Waterloo waif with the loss of his “mythology,” and the sleek cat-man with an acceptance of life on its lowest terms, the riddle remained unsolved.

He awakened next morning to a vivid awareness that this Friday was the eve of Darnley's wedding. He recalled his first encounter with his friend in that tea-room of the Lovelace Hotel; and his mind reverted to the waiter who was now a beggar. "Stalbridge," he thought. "A good man. I wish I'd given him that half-a-crown."

As he shaved himself at the familiar looking-glass, he entered upon a cheerful discussion with Gerda as to what they had better decide to do on the following day. Gerda displayed no hostility to Mrs. Solent's company, but indicated that it would please Mr. Torp if she went with him rather than with them; and as for their return to Blacksod after the wedding-feast, *that* could be left to chance!

"There'll be lots of carriages coming and going," she said, "and it'll be fun to see what happens! I shan't mind," she went on, "if we all walk home in a crowd. But I *would* enjoy going with Father. It'll be like the old days, when I used to go to funerals with him. He likes to go to places with me when I'm all dressed up."

"I suppose Darnley will be at school today just as usual," said Wolf; "but they've given him a week off. They're going to Weymouth. Did I tell you that?"

"To lodgings?" enquired Gerda. "We all took lodgings once, Wolf; one Whitsun... in Adelaide Crescent."

"No; it was an hotel, I think," said Wolf.

"The Burden?" she cried excitedly. "Oh, how I'd love to stay at the Burden! I've never stayed in an hotel in my life. I've never been *into* an hotel except the 'Three Peewits.' "

Wolf was silent for a second. Then he said slowly, contemplating his half-shaven face in the mirror with as much detachment as if it had been a cat's saucer of milk, "Well, we might go in to see them next Saturday. They wouldn't be leaving till the afternoon, I suppose. We could all have lunch at the Burden."

"Wolf," she cried, sitting up straight in bed — a movement that brought her head into the square of his mirror— "Wolf! Why can't we spend some of our money in a week-end at the Burden? Not this week, of course; but next week, just as they're coming back! Oh, I would love that so much!"

A wave of sadness swept over him. It was on the tip of his tongue to reply to her in her own words of last Sunday— "It's too late, my dear, it's too late!" For that beach in front of Brunswick Terrace came back to him, with the cries of the fish-sellers, with the dazzling sun-path on the breaking sea, with the wet planks and the painted boats. Ay, how he would love to see it all again — but who was he to see it? Hollow! Hollow! A drifting husk, empty of purpose and hope!

"I don't see why we shouldn't do just as you say, sweetheart. But let's get through tomorrow first, before we decide. But I don't see why we shouldn't stay one night, at any rate, at the Burden."

He caught her eyes in the glass, and they were radiant. She was actually clapping her hands, as she heard him; and the cry of delight she gave seemed to him to have the sound of whistling in it!

Yes, even if he were doomed to drift now like a purposeless automaton, it was something to be able to cause such childish exultation.

Gerda wanted to be free that day from the trouble of preparing a midday meal, so it was arranged that he should get a bread-and-cheese lunch at the Three Peewits. Perhaps Darnley would be ready to share it with him! At any rate Gerda should be left to her own devices until tea-time.

All that morning, as he supervised his boys' lesson, his mind ran upon what she had said about Weymouth. How strange that he had himself proposed to Christie that *they* should go down there this very Sunday...

quite independently of the Burden Hotel! Everything in his life seemed gravitating just then towards Weymouth — towards that birthplace of his murdered "mythology" — but too heartless was he now to care a straw!

"I won't spoil Gerda's happiness by breathing a word about *this* Sunday," he said to himself; "and very likely, anyway, Christie will have forgotten. Olwen has cut me out. That's the long and the short of it. Olwen has cut me out!"

As he stared at the ink-stains on the wall, he found himself selecting one particular stain to serve as a raft in the dead-sea drift of his trouble. This stain was an elongated one; and before he knew what he was doing, he had turned it into a road — a road like that road in the Gainsborough picture.

As one boy after another came up to his desk with some sort of written answer to the tedious historic question he had propounded to them, his mind began to envisage, with a rapid bird's-eye glance, all the years of his life, and the dominant part that had been played in them by this *ideal road*. He seemed to be able, as he stared at that elongated ink-stain, to recall fragments of old memories such as he had not thought of even once during the last twelve months! The longer he stared at that mark upon the wall the more rapidly those memories crowded in upon him. A village-green where a hollow tree had its roots in a duck-pond... two high banks covered with patches of purple clover and yellow rock-rose, where the dusty highway under his feet led to the top of a hill, from which he knew, by a sure instinct, the sea was visible... a deserted garden at the crossing of one thoroughfare with another, outside some cathedral-town, where nettles mingled with currant-bushes and where an old woman was shouting to an old man across a brook full of watercress... images of this kind, like mystical vignettes in the margin of an occult biography, kept passing and repassing along the road of his life — that is to say, along that elongated ink-stain.

So fast did such memories crowd in upon him that he grew consciously surprised at their presence, as a drowning man might be surprised at the concentration of a whole life's experience into a second of time!

He even remembered one particular occasion, in the outskirts of London, when he had made up his mind that those glimpses of things seen under a certain light were the sole purpose of his existence! He recalled the exact spot where he reached that conclusion. It was upon a bench, somewhere beyond Richmond, under some enormous lime-trees. He remembered how he had decided then that these particular episodes, snatched out of the flowing stream of visual impression, were more charged with the furtive secret of life than any contact with men and women. He remembered how he had pulled up a cool dark-green tuft of grass by the root, so excited had that conclusion made him; and how afterwards he had busied himself for some while in a conscientious attempt to replant it, using his stick as a trowel, greatly to the amusement of a flirtatious pair of shop-girls, who regarded him from a recumbent position under one of those trees.

It was ironical that at this very moment, when the power of his enjoyment of it had been killed, he seemed able to articulate his philosophy of the *ideal road* more definitely than he had ever done before. What it really had meant, this philosophy, was a power of seeing things *arranged under a certain light*... a light charged with memories of the past... a light capable of linking his days in flowing continuity! Well, it was all lost now... lost because it implied a certain kind of Wolf who was enjoying it; and *that* kind of Wolf was stone dead.

"Harrison Minor, what are you thinking of? You've cribbed this straight from Martin Major!"...

His voice must have assumed something of the harsh bitterness of his mood; for a lot of heads were raised from the desks, and there was a hurried whispering in Harrison Minor’s corner.

“Reality has beaten me,” he said to himself. “What I feel now must be exactly what religious people feel when they believe themselves to be damned! They can talk of other matters; they can respond when you approach; but while they are chatting with you of this and that, there is always *perdition* lying at the bottom of their thoughts!”

“Every boy whose paper has been marked must go on quietly, please, with the Restoration!”

“Olwen has cut me out. That’s the long and short of it. It was all in vain, that day in the cornfield! ‘Mind touching mind, without need of words,’ did we say? But she’ll be happy with Olwen. Mattie will *have* to let her have Olwen.”...

When he met Darnley, after that heavy morning was over at last, he learnt that Jason too would be at the Three Peewits. Darnley was silent and preoccupied as they walked through the streets; and Wolf set himself to accept the fact that they were destined to go on drudging at this School, side by side, *sans* intermission, to the end of their days! Precisely as they walked through these streets today, between School and Tavern, so would they be found walking twenty, thirty years hence, each meditating his own secret cares!

Chance had ordered it that not only was Jason awaiting them in the Three Peewits dining-room. There, in the best window-seat, with a bottle of Burgundy in front of him, sat Mr. Urquhart himself! Jason was drinking beer from a two-handled pewter flagon and helping himself with relish from a large rook-pie, covered with a crust of flaky pastry, that stood before him.

Both he and Urquhart had an air of having been established in their places for many hours. They were, however, as far removed from each other as two guests in the same dining-room could possibly be! Wolf and Darnley went across to the squire and shook hands with him; and then, sitting down at Jason's table, they both ordered the same brand of Dorchester Ale, but in lesser proportion.

"There's enough for you two," said Jason, referring to the pie before him. "You're allowed second helpings here. I've had mine."

"How did those rogues make 'ee come in to town today, Otter?" remarked Mr. Urquhart, pulling his chair round, but keeping his elbow on his table and his fingers on the stem of his wine-glass.

"They've given me all next week off," replied Darnley.

"I've been saying that *I* ought to have a holiday too, just in his honour," threw in Wolf, feeling as if there were a pail of ashes in his belly that nothing he drank could so much as moisten.

This intercourse between the two ends of the room seemed to displease Jason. His face assumed its most stony expression, and he bent low over his plate.

"They've good custards here," he remarked, after a pause. "Custard's much better than those puddings that your friend Mrs. Stone makes."

"Don't call her Mrs. Stone, Jason," murmured Darnley, with a peevishness unusual to him in addressing his brother. "Wolf's as much a friend of Dimity as any of us."

For half-a-second Jason's brows contracted ominously; and then his whole countenance relaxed into a thousand humorous wrinkles.

"He'll be a better friend to her still, when he's tasted those wedding-pasties of yours, Darnley!" he said, holding up his tankard and making a sly motion with one eyelid and one shoulder in the direction of Mr. Urquhart, to whom his back remained turned.

There was a moment's interruption at this point, while the waiter was laying in front of the newcomers the beer and cheese they had ordered.

"You needn't look like that at my pie," said Jason. "Everyone isn't going to be married tomorrow!"

"Hurry up with your new poems," retorted Darnley, "and then you'll be able to treat us all to these luxuries."

But Jason had turned his sardonic eye upon Wolf.

"Solent can tell you what marriage is. He can tell you! You needn't think a person doesn't know what *you've* got in your head as you see me enjoying myself."

"What have I got in my head, Jason?" asked Wolf. His tone was meek enough; but the black bile of reciprocal malice was seething in the veins of his throat.

"Abuse of me, because of these rooks," chuckled the other. "You're longing to spoil my pleasure by telling everyone about their cawings and their proud nests. But *you'd* like a taste as well as anyone... if there were no one here to see you!"

These words of Jason's, and the look that accompanied them, caused Wolf a discomfort that resembled the squeezing of a person's tongue against a hidden gum-boil. It was impossible for him to help endowing with glossy, outspread wings the unctuous morsel into which the poet just then dug his fork! He felt the blood pricking him under his cheek-bones. He thought of Miss Gault. He began to suffer from that old, miserable sensation that his body was a lump of contemptible putrescence, on the top of which his consciousness floated. This was the sort of occasion when in former days he used to summon up his "mythology." Well, that was all over now. He felt as disintegrated as the remnants on the poet's plate. He *was* those remnants. Dorsetshire had eaten him up!

The voice of Mr. Urquhart became audible to him. The squire was explaining in a querulous voice that the man Monk had been so truculent that morning that he had set the whole household by the ears. “Mrs. Martin came to me like a virago and threatened to give notice,” he said. “I thought it best to beat a retreat. Always beat a retreat when servants mutiny, eh? What?”

As Wolf blinked at him across the foam of his beer-mug, he began to feel as if that vigil of his at the church-window had been a pure hallucination. “Redfern’s grave will look the same as it always has,” he thought, “when I next see it.”

“Did you enjoy your walk this morning, Jason?” enquired Darnley, pulling at his beard. His brother regarded him with a long, sad, intent look.

“The clouds were like gentle spirits,” he repeated slowly. “They were coming from eternity and could not stay. The fields were wet with dew for them. But they could not stay. The hazel-bushes were sobbing with sap for them. But they could not stay. The daisies were white with love for them. But they could not stay.”

As the man spoke, he placed his knife and fork carefully side by side, drank what was left of his great tankard, and replaced it on the table as scrupulously and softly as if it had been a living thing.

“They were going *to* eternity,” he added in a low voice. And then, while his melancholy grey eyes assumed a look of such abysmal sorrow that Wolf wondered to behold it, “God comes and God goes,” he said, “but no one feels Him except moles and worms. And they are blind and can’t see. They are dumb and can’t speak. I thought this morning, Darnley, that my poetry is no better than the tunnels of moles and worms.”

“What’s that your brother’s saying, Otter,” came the voice of Mr. Urquhart across the room. “Is he making rhymes about the waiter? Do ‘ee tell him to be careful! Lovelace says a man was kicked out of his club in town for doing less than that; and besides... in this room, you know... though we've got — —"

He was interrupted by the clatter of a horse's hooves outside the windows, and Wolf could just see, out there, the corner of a nursery-gardener's cart crowded with blue hyacinths.

As Wolf stared at those flowers, he caught Urquhart's eye.

"It's nothing to you, Solent, I suppose," he remarked, "but the proofs of my book came from Bristol this morning!"

Wolf murmured his congratulations; but into his mouth rose the sensation of the colour brown.

"He has got his wish over Redfern," he thought, "and now he's got his book too."

Mr. Urquhart was addressing the young waiter.

"Didn't know I was an author, Johnnie, did you? Mr. Solent there and I have just brought out the very book for a sly rogue like you! I'll send 'ee a copy, me boy! Don't forget, now! Ask me for it, if you don't get it soon!"

What Wolf felt, as he listened to this, was that all the mysterious evil that he had associated with this man was in reality nothing more than senile perversity. Jason was right. But if Jason was right with regard to Urquhart, wasn't he likely to be right with regard to Wolf Solent? To Jason's mind... to Jason's peculiar satisfaction... evil was no more than a thin-drifting, poisonous rain, that seeped through into everything. Nothing was free from it, except perhaps the passionate heart of Olwen! But it was just a slimy rain. It had no spiritual depths. Mr. Urquhart and himself had been playing together a pleasant theatrical drama... all gesture, all illusion! Upon Jason's plate of well-cleaned rook-bones lay the fragments of their high Satanic play!

Mr. Urquhart had called the young waiter to his side now. Darnley and Jason were talking in low voices about the arrangements for tomorrow....

It was then that an incredibly sweet fragrance came in through the open window! It may have been only the hyacinths; but, as Wolf breathed it in, it seemed to him much more than that. It seemed to come from masses of bluebells under undisturbed green hazels!

This happy sensation, however, was not permitted to him for long. In a second there followed a vibrant, penetrating drumming... an aeroplane!... With the beat of a demon's sharded wings this sound drew nearer... steadily nearer and nearer....

Mr. Urquhart turned his head.

"Those young airmen are fine lads," he remarked. "I'd let any one of those chaps carry me to Thibet or Cambodia if he'd give me the chance."

Wolf noticed a strange light of excitement come into Darnley's blue eyes; and it was Darnley who spoke now.

"Yes... to fly!" he cried. "To clear your soul of all the earth-horrors! To wash your mind clean, in a blue bath of air! Think of it! To fly over land and sea till you realize the *roundness* of the earth! To feel your mind changing... becoming a purer instrument... as you leave this cluttered world!"

The drumming of the aeroplane was now accompanied by the harsh snorting and snarling of a large motor-car.

"Whether it's by air or by road," observed Jason, in the tone of a very old hermit, "these young men come down upon us; and it's best to win favour of the Lords of Science." He glanced sideways at the waiter. "They come by sea too, sometimes," he added, hunching his shoulders in mock-alarm. "This young man looks like a chief engineer on a liner," he went on, lowering his voice to a whisper, and glancing at his brother.

Wolf began to feel as if he were stranded alone on a high, exposed platform, hooted and shrieked at by thousands of motors and aeroplanes....

Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. It was as if he searched in vain for any escape into the silences of the earth. No escape was possible any more! He was combed-out, raked-over, drained of all sap! His destiny henceforth must be to groan and creak in the wind of others' speed....

"It's a miracle," repeated Darnley, "to be able to transform the whole bias of the mind by turning away from land and water and making the air our element!"

The man's singular-looking eyes were literally translucent with excitement.

"I'm afraid it's not of Mattie he's thinking," said Wolf to himself.

But Mr. Urquhart had just made some remark to his ex-secretary that Wolf had been too absorbed in his thoughts to hear. "I beg your pardon, Sir!" he murmured.

"That's the value of a book like ours, eh, me boy?" cried the Squire. "It'll be kept on newspaper-stands on the top of great iron landing-stages for people to pick up as they start for Australia or Siberia! It'll tickle their fancy, eh? What? By Jove it will... to learn what lecherous snakes their ancestors were."

"I didn't tell you, did I, Solent," said Darnley innocently, "that when I called at the Malakites' to let Olwen know I'd take her home this evening, the little minx refused to budge? She swears she won't leave Christie for a single night! There'd have been tears if I'd insisted. Well! It'll be... perhaps... easier" — he spoke pensively and slowly now— "if she does remain... where she is."

"Girls are all the same," remarked Jason. "They all like sugar and spice. Old Malakite probably buys more tasty sweets for her in this town than she gets with us." There was something about this speech that was more than Wolf could bear. He rose abruptly to his feet.

"Sorry, Darnley," he said. "I forgot something I have to do before afternoon school! It won't be more than that, will it... what I've had?" and he laid down a shilling and three pennies upon the table. A grotesque consciousness of the way his quivering upper-lip projected and the way his hands shook, filled his brain as he spoke; but he bowed to Mr. Urquhart as he went out, and nodded civilly at Jason. "We'll meet later," he said, giving Darnley one rapid reproachful look as he left the room.

Once in the street, he paused, hesitating. He felt as if he were as much exposed to the gaze of the crowd as if he had been one of the featherless birds of Jason's pie!

Instinctively he began to make his way through the crowd towards the Malakite shop. Recognizing the import of this movement, he mentally confronted the only alternative to it... that of hanging about for half-an-hour in his deserted classroom. No! *That* would be misery too great! But when he reached the shop and had rung the bell in the side-alley, he felt tempted to bolt. The presence of Olwen seemed to change the whole situation. It was as if the little girl were clinging to both Christie's hands, held behind her back; so that she lacked the *power*... whatever her *will* may have been... to help him at this crisis!

He could not recall ever having waited so long at that door as he waited now. What a lovely day it was! But that balmy spring air... and he could see several clumps of pale jonquils in the little back-yard... floated over him as if he had been a dead man, as if he had really been drowned last night in Lenty Pond.

Here she was, running rapidly down the narrow staircase....

“Oh, I’m so glad to see you, Wolf! I’m in such trouble! I’ve been thinking and thinking what to do.... I prayed that *anybody* might come... and now it’s you! Oh, I’m so glad!”

He followed her into the house and she shut the door; and they stood close together in the little, dark entrance. Unaware of any conscious impulse, he hugged her tightly to his heart and held her there... his brain a complete blank to everything except the sense of holding her.

But this relief from reality was not destined to be permitted to him for long. The girl plucked at his wrists, turned her head away from him, struggled to release herself.

“Don’t, Wolf! Not now, Wolf! I want your help... don’t you understand? I don’t want *that* now.”

He sighed heavily, but let her go, and stood by her side, clutching the bannisters.

“What’s the matter, Chris?” he murmured humbly.

“Olwen wants to stay with me... to *live* with me... you knew that, didn’t you? But this morning she’s been fretting about Mattie. Ever since she woke up she’s been fretting. And now she says she’ll be quite happy with me again if only she can go to the wedding and see them married! She wants to go *tonight*, Wolf. That’s what she wants... to have a last night with Mattie... and come back here when they leave for Weymouth; but, you see, I had no way of reaching Darnley. Is Darnley at school today, Wolf? I don’t know what I should have done if you hadn’t — —”

She was interrupted by a sound in the book-shop; and Wolf saw her stiffen and lay her finger on her lip, and turn a tense, concentrated, narrow-lidded stare at the door leading into the shop.

Wolf did not like the manner of this intense listening. He had liked still less the tone in which she had welcomed his appearance, not for his own sake, but as a means of reaching Darnley! The truth began to deepen upon him that between Olwen and the old man Christie's world had never been more occupied, had never promised less free space for him and for his affairs.

The sounds within the shop, whatever their nature, ceased now, and she turned, smiling. She laid two small finger-tips, light as that feather in her "Urn-Burial," upon his coat-sleeve.

"I won't ask you to come up now, Wolf. You always excite her so, and I've just got her quiet." She paused and hesitated; and in the faint light of that little passage he could see she was anxious as to just how he would react under her appeal. "Will you see Darnley?" she murmured. He moved back a step and nodded gravely.

"Well, listen, Wolf dear!" she went on. "Bring him to tea here, will you? And ask him to hire a trap at the hotel, so he can take her out there tonight. You'll be able to bring her back tomorrow, won't you, Wolf... when the wedding's over?"

He promised submissively to do exactly what she wanted; and opening the door to let him out, she closed it quietly behind them both and stood by his side in the narrow alley.

Once more Wolf was aware of the humming of an aeroplane above the roofs of Blacksod! Those aeroplanes were becoming a kind a devilish chorus to his comic tragedy!

The girl lifted her head, trying to get a glimpse of it, while he himself stared obstinately at the narrow velvet band that encircled her waist. "Damn these machines!" he muttered bitterly. "It'll never be the same world again!"

She lowered her chin and looked into his face. The sound of the aeroplane had actually brought — or so he thought to himself in his stubborn resentment — the same gleam into her eyes as into those of Darnley. All were against him now... all, all, all! These demons were ensorcerizing every soul he knew. The Powers of the Air! No, he would *never* yield to them! While a single grass-blade grew out of the deep earth, he would never yield to them!

“Oh, Wolf, you are wrong, my dear!” she cried fervently. “It is a new world! It is! It is! But it’s a beautiful world. It means a new *kind* of beauty: glittering steel, gleaming wings, free spaces — —” She stopped suddenly. He thought afterwards she must have seen something in his expression that troubled and puzzled her.

“I must go to Olwen,” she murmured; and then, just as she had done before, she snatched at his hand and raised it to her lips. “Don’t mind about the machines, Wolf dear. Bring Darnley to tea, won’t you? And tell him to order a trap. She *could* walk, I know. But I don’t want her to get Mattie all tired out. Au revoir, my dear!” And she slipped away into the house, giving him, as she went, one of those especial smiles of hers that were always so baffling.

Back at his desk again, Wolf was compelled to bestow so much attention upon his boys that it was only once in all the afternoon that he fixed his eyes upon the mark on the wall, and gave himself up to his sullen meditations.

“This is the kind of thing,” he thought, “that I’ve got to endure for the rest of my days, unless Mother, with her tea-shop money, pensions me off! I could bear it! I know well enough I could bear it, if only —— It’s nice making Gerda laugh. It’s nice doing what Christie tells me. But it’ll be hard to go on in this room for thirty years.”

He had occasion to denounce a couple of boys, ere the lesson was over, for a flagrant case of cribbing; and the way in which the elder of these boys

— a great hulking lubber-head called Gaffer Barge — took all the blame upon himself, struck his imagination far more than he permitted that poor, sweet-natured lout to discover! When the clock finally struck the hour, and he found himself free, he stopped Gaffer Barge as the lad was slouching off.

“Barge,” he said, “I wonder if you would be so awfully good as to do a little errand for me on your way home?”

There came into the boy’s face, on hearing these words, a smile of such sheer, innate sweetness and goodness, that Wolf was staggered. He had been, if anything, rather abrupt and distant with the fellow in their daily relations, and the pleasure with which the boy responded to this unexpected request struck him in his present mood as no less than astonishing. It was as if in this desert of grim reality upon which he had been dropped from the back of his divine steed, he had heard the most heavy-humped camel utter melodious words.

“How good of you, Gaffer!” he cried eagerly, using the lad’s nickname to indicate his appreciation of this response. “One minute, then; and I’ll write a note.”

He incontinently scribbled a line to Gerda, telling her not to expect him home till after tea. This missive he folded up and directed to “Mrs. Wolf Solent, Thirty-Seven, Preston Lane.”

“Here you are, Barge,” he said, handing it to him. “It’s not much out of your way. But I’m really most extremely grateful to you.” Whereat the lad slipped off, as shyly exultant as if he had made a hundred runs in a cricket-match.

There arose no obstacle, in the sequence of events that now occurred, to upset Christie’s prearranged plan. With the fly from the Three Peewits safely ordered for seven o’clock, Darnley and Wolf took their places at the Malakite tea-table; and a situation that certainly possessed elements of awkwardness flowed forward as smoothly and easily as if the girl had possessed a social genius worthy of the subtlest adepts of high society.

Mr. Malakite was himself unusually voluble during the earlier part of the meal, and Wolf’s attention was thoroughly arrested by the drift of the old man’s loquacity.

“And so Urquhart wrote to him,” the old bookseller was saying, “and I got his reply yesterday... by the second post. Olwen met the postman and brought it to me in the shop. You weren’t afraid of your old granddad, were you, my chick?” He looked round the table, as he said this, with an expression of crafty triumph.

“We mustn’t bore Darnley with our business-affairs, Father,” interrupted Christie, “on the very eve of his wedding-day.”

But Darnley too had caught the unusual quiver of excitement in the old man’s voice, and had fixed his blue eyes intently upon him.

“No, no,” he said. “Please go on, Sir; please go on.”

“It’s a relative of yours, Mr. Solent, as well as of the squire’s, so he tells me,” continued the bookseller. “He knew I wanted to sell out, and he sent this gentleman my catalogue, and now I’ve got his reply... by the afternoon post. Olwen gave it to me while I was on the ladder, didn’t you, my pet? You didn’t know your granddad could climb a ladder, did you, my pretty?”

Wolf experienced an intense distaste for the tone the old man adopted in thus addressing his daughter’s child. He couldn’t resist a furtive glance at Christie. But the girl was staring with one of her fixed, inscrutable looks at Darnley; and all he could interpret of her feelings depended upon a certain disturbing droop of her under-lip. Like a flash there shot through his mind a startled doubt as to the wisdom of the human race in allowing family-life to be so unapproachable, so fortified, so secretive. In spite of what he had often said to Gerda, it came over him now that there *was* something rather ghastly in letting this girl and this child be shut up with this senile nympholept.

"From London, by the afternoon post," insisted Mr. Malakite. And Wolf, nervously receptive of every psychic current just then, felt more uneasy still at this imbecile repetition of so unimportant a detail.

"Is it Lord Carfax you are talking about?" he hazarded — thinking to himself, "How oddly that fellow keeps up his rôle in my life!"

But the bookseller nodded eagerly. "Did *you* write to him too about my stuff?"

Christie turned her head sharply at this. "I've never told Wolf anything at all about your catalogue, Father," she cried. "He doesn't approve of our selling" — she hesitated a moment, and then smiled her most mischievous smile— "the sort of books we *do* sell!"

This identification of herself with the worst aspect of her parent's business was a new shock to Wolf. He looked at her reproachfully; thinking of the nature of that book from Paris compared with which the lewdest court-trials in Dorset history were a mere pinch of honest dirt; but the girl's head was held high, and her eyes were flashing ominously.

"His lordship says he'll take the whole lot!" concluded her father triumphantly. "So *that* means, my pretty ones, that your silly old man has done the best stroke of business of his whole life!" He turned his eye defiantly upon Wolf as he spoke, as if challenging the whole world to interfere with him. "I shall be able to retire from work after this," he added, with an unpleasant complacency, "and we'll go and live at Weymouth, won't we, my treasures? The silly old man will sit on the esplanade all the morning, and play bowls all the afternoon!"

Christie got up at this point and moved round to the little girl's elbow. While she was spreading a slice of bread for her, Wolf muttered something about goat-carriages. The child was all attention at once.

“Did Cinderella’s coach have goats to pull it?” she asked. “Do goats go faster than donkeys?”

“I’ll just run down and see if I can see anything of your fly,” said Christie suddenly. And she slipped from the room with a movement as swift, and almost as imperceptible, as a breath of that day’s soft wind.

The old man took advantage of her absence to begin retailing to Darnley the names, editions, and prices of some of his most curious and expensive volumes. Olwen, at this, left her bread-and-jam, slipped out of her chair, and, coming round to Wolf’s side, scrambled up upon his knees and demanded a story.

Wolf felt sure that, in spite of her ranging herself so definitely on her father’s side, Christie was embarrassed by the old man’s excitement; and he had an inkling that she would remain down there in the doorway, looking for the carriage, until it actually drew up.

“Well, sweetheart,” he whispered, “I’m not very good at stories; but I’ll try.” He clasped the child closely to him and shut his eyes so as to collect his thoughts.

“At the very moment,” he began, “when we were all waiting for the cab to come, you and I saw an enormous swallow... the ancestor of all swallows... big as a golden eagle, hovering close to the window.” Olwen twisted round her head at this, in order to see the window.

“Without a moment’s hesitation,” he went on, “we opened the window together and got on the bird’s back.”

“Leaving everyone, Wolf?”

“Certainly. Leaving everyone! This great swallow carried us then over Poll’s Camp and over the Gwent Lanes toward Cadbury Camp. It let us get down off its back at Cadbury Camp... which really is Camelot... and you and I drank at Arthur's Well there; and the effect of drinking that water was to turn us both into swallows, or into some strange birds like swallows. We sat, all three, in a row, on a sycamore-branch above the valley; and we wondered and wondered where we'd fly to. And a lovely wind, blowing over the dark rain that is held in the hollows of old trees, ruffled our feathers; and we knew, being birds, the language of the wind; and it said to us, 'The cuckoo-flowers have come out down by the Lunt!' And it said to us, 'If you stop chattering, you silly birds, and listen, you will hear the earth murmuring to itself as it sweeps forward through space.' "

"What did I say to it then, Wolf?" whispered the little girl, glancing anxiously at the door.

But he continued to hug her closely to him; and with his eyes still tightly shut, he went on in the same low tone: "You said to it, 'Blow us all towards Weymouth, wind, and be quick about it. I want to dig in the sand!' "...

"Wolf!" It was Darnley who was addressing him across the table.

He opened his eyes, and, as he did so, he became aware that his friend was looking at him with that same appealing glance that had arrested his attention when they first met at the Lovelace Hotel.

"Yes, Darnley?"

"Mr. Malakite was alluding to your father just now; and it just occurred to me that I've never told you what *my* father used to say when I had to go back to school. He used to say to me, 'Man can bear anything, if it only lasts a second!' "

Something behind his friend's mackerel-coloured eyes seemed at that moment of time to be reaching out to his inmost soul and crying to it for some answering signal. The fact that Mattie only yesterday had called upon her mother, so long dead, and that Darnley was now reverting to a father he had never even mentioned before, struck Wolf's mind as an ominous glimpse into the central nerve of life upon earth. He felt at that moment an out-rushing wave of intense affection for Darnley. But what could he do? Olwen refused to let him so much as even smile at the yellow beard across the table. She turned his head towards her with one of her sticky little hands.

“What did the wind say then?” she cried. “What did it say to me when I told it to blow me to Weymouth?”

“It said, ‘You want too much!’ ” he went on. “It said, ‘I’m afraid you’re not a real bird at all! If you were a real bird you wouldn’t care what you did or where you went, as long as you were flying. You’d hover over Dorset, looking at everything — looking at every cuckoo-flower in the Lunt fields, and every nest in the Gwent Lanes. You’d hover — —’”

“Where is Christie?” came the voice of Mr. Malakite from across the table.

Wolf had to reopen his closed eyes at this. “Downstairs, I suppose,” he responded brusquely. And then, catching hold of the child’s hot hand as it clutched at his chin, “The wind,” he went on, “lifted all three birds from off the branch and carried them northeast, where not one of them wanted to go! Over hill and dale it carried them, towards Stonehenge. And when it had let them sink down upon the highest stone of Stonehenge, it said to them — —”

He was interrupted by Christie’s reappearance.

“The fly’s here, Darnley!” she cried. “Come, Olwen; let me put on your things.”

“It said to them,” Wolf concluded, “I can only take one of you to the house of my father. You must decide among yourselves which it is to be!”

There was a general hush in the room as these words fell.

“Don’t let it be me!” whispered Olwen hurriedly, clapping her hand over his mouth.

But Wolf’s half-muffled voice must have been audible to them all.

“ ’Let the one who can best bear to be alone, be the one to go,’ cried the swallow. And as he spoke, he snatched up the trembling Olwen-bird with his beak and claws, and spread his great, pointed wings for flight. Over Wilton he flew, over Semley, over Gillingham, over Templecombe, over Ramsgard, over King’s Barton! And as he flew, the Olwen-bird’s feathers were so ruffled by the speed, that she turned into a little girl again; and when he set her down at last on the window-sill, and she clambered back into the room, and called down the stairs to Christie and Darnley, it seemed as if she had never been out of the house at all.”

Wolf was almost embarrassed by the grave hush that followed his conclusion.

“Heavens! I didn’t know you were such a story-teller,” murmured Darnley, as he picked up his overcoat.

“Did the wind take you to its house?” panted Olwen, flushed and fidgeting now, as Christie buttoned round her a grey-blue jacket with a rabbit-fur collar and proceeded to smooth down her hair under a small, stiff Russian cap; “and did you *like* being taken away from everybody, Wolf?”

He made no answer to the child’s question. A deadly sadness had suddenly descended upon him; and through this sadness, as if through a screen of Mukalog’s most disastrous rain, he fancied he caught an odiously possessive look shot forth upon Christie’s bending figure out of the old man’s narrowed eyelids....

A few minutes later, as the faded vehicle drove off, with Olwen’s thin little arm protruded from its side, like a white stalk out of a black bag, and he turned to Christie in the doorway to bid her good-night, he found an expression upon her face that sent a queer shiver through his nerves.

“I must go, Wolf dear,” she whispered. “Don’t forget all about me in the excitement of tomorrow.”

They remained silent for a second, side by side, as if the physical chemistry of their two frames had its own occult understanding, beyond anything that could be said or done by either. Then she hurriedly touched his hand, turned from him, and entered the house without another sign.

For some mysterious physical reason, the familiar sour smell of the pigsty, when he finally reached Preston Lane, brought to his mind that incredibly beautiful look, of sheer, native goodness, on the face of Gaffer Barge.

That look had surged up from the depths to greet him when he was in his worst danger of being swamped by “reality.” Gaffer Barge was certainly too unimaginative to blow any ideal bubble! Not even that old rascal with the white cat was more embedded in actuality than was this generous lout.

Wolf paused for a moment and ran the end of his stick along the railing of the pigsty as an unmusical man might draw his thumb across the strings of a violin.

He crossed the road and opened the gate into his puny garden. To his surprise, as he moved up to the door, he saw that their front-room was brilliantly illuminated. Hurriedly he let himself in; and he was no sooner in the hall than he was aware of youthful laughter proceeding from the parlour.

He burst in upon them, his hat and stick still in his hand. But it was only Lobbie Torp and Gerda, engaged in a vociferous game of cards!

Gerda’s cheeks were burning and her eyes were brilliant.

“Lobbie’s brought us a real pack, Wolf!” she cried excitedly. “They’ve got pictures on ’em, same as they have at Farmer’s Rest!” shouted Lobbie in an ecstasy, pushing a card into Wolf's hand.

"Why haven't we ever thought of buying such nice ones, Wolf?" echoed Gerda.

"A pretty sort of game for a schoolboy to bring into my sober house," began Wolf smiling; "but you two are certainly enjoying yourselves."

"Well, we must stop now," said Gerda, in her most grave housekeeping tone. "I've got to get supper. He can stay to supper, can't he, Wolf?" she added, throwing into her voice a cajoling little-girl inflexion.

"Oh, don't let's stop, Gerdie! Don't let's stop!" cried Lob Torp. "Why can't we take sides again, with him joining in?"

But Wolf's presence had already produced a certain restraint; and Gerda did not find it difficult to slip away into the kitchen.

Wolf took off his coat, and, throwing it upon a chair, flung his hat and stick on top of it. He noted in his mind that this was the first time he had ever dispensed with his habitual hanging-up of these objects upon the pegs outside.

He lifted the table out of the way, and the two of them sat down by the fire. A couple of cards on the floor made Wolf recall, as he stooped to pick them up, that game of draughts he had intruded upon between Gerda and Bob Weevil.

"How's your friend Weevil?" he asked Lobbie at random.

"Pining for Gerdie," was the boy's startling answer. "I went long o' he to Willum's Mill last Tuesday night when Mr. Manley were out courtin'; but he were too lonesome to put a worm on a hook! He said Gerdie never liked they wriggling worms and he weren't never going to disturb they again. He said he reckoned them had *their* feelings, same as other folk. I told 'e 'twere all a girl's foolishness, and that we were men; but he said he had sworn a girt oath to do everythink what our Gerdie wanted, though he reckoned he'd never set eyes on she again." Lobbie paused, and, feeling about in his pocket, produced a packet of peppermints, one of which he put in his mouth and another he handed to Wolf, who accepted it gravely.

"He made a vow," the boy repeated, staring solemnly into the fire, as if completely weighed down by the strange aberrations of human passion; "a vow like what King Harold did make, on they unknown bones."

"Have you seen him since, Lobbie?" enquired Wolf.

The boy hesitated and glanced rather uneasily at his host.

" 'Tisn't that I haven't seen him," he murmured obscurely. "If you *must* know," he burst out, " 'twas when I asked he to come to Grassy Mound, out Henchford way, where the girls do enjoy theyselves, rolling down thik bank. And do 'ee know what he said to I?" Lobbie fixed a portentously dramatic look upon his hearer, the undissolved peppermint in his cheek increasing rather than diminishing its impressiveness. "He said there weren't no pleasure in 'em! 'Twas upsetting to a person to hear him; but that's what he said... 'no pleasure in 'em'... meaning, *you know what*!"

"Your friend is in love with our Gerda, I'm afraid," said Wolf coldly.

" 'Tisn't Adultery, be it," enquired Lobbie, "for he to carry on so about another man's wife?"

In place of answering this question, Wolf escorted his brother-in-law into the kitchen. There the boy's youthful spirits, as he helped his sister dish up the supper, left Wolf time to slip out into the yard and possess his "soul," such as it was, in five minute's solitude.

Actuated by one of those capricious motions which he habitually obeyed, he moved over to the stunted laburnum-bush by the wall. On one branch only were there any buds; whereas their neighbour's lilac, growing in the pig-man's back-yard, was covered with embryo leaves. He laid his hand on the trunk of this abject tree and looked up at the great velvet-black concavity above him, sprinkled with its minute points of light.

It was then that he distinctly heard, just as if the trunk of that little tree were a telegraphic receiver, “Wolf! Wolf! Wolf!” uttered in Christie’s voice, but with an intonation twisted out of her normal accent by some desperate necessity.

As he heard these words he seemed to see her face, exactly as he had seen it at that open doorway a couple of hours ago, only with a look upon it that forced him to make an immediate drastic decision.

He went back into the kitchen.

“Come on, Wolf!” cried Gerda, “we are ready to begin.”

Not for one single second did he doubt the truth of what he had heard under that tree. “I must get away without upsetting them,” he thought. “I must get away without their guessing that anything’s wrong!” He nodded his head with a forced grimace.

“Sit down and start, my dear! I’ve got to run out for a minute to get something.” By the light of the parlour-fire he pulled on his overcoat. His fingers shook so much, as he tightened the collar round his neck, that it was not easy to button it. Then he went into the kitchen again. The brother and sister were seated at the table now, laughing and jesting with absorbed hilarity. “There’s something important I *have* to get, Gerda! Keep my plate hot for me, will you? And enjoy yourselves till I come back. Don’t wait dessert for me! But I’ll come back all right... before long.” Throwing these words among them in a voice full of exaggerated cheerfulness, he snatched at his stick and was out of the house before they had time to realize what he was doing.

Like a stage-group in a charade, just glimpsed by some hurried messenger through an open doorway, as he rushes on his way, those two laughing faces at the table lined themselves against his agitation. He even retained enough detachment, as he strode along, to note how easily these children of Dorset made a natural circle for their festivity, from which he was inevitably excluded. Still there arose no flicker of doubt in his mind as to the truth of the summons he had received. It tugged at him so hard that before he reached the book-shop he was actually running....

God! There was a man talking to Christie at her door.

He approached them breathless, his heart beating violently. He felt the complete confusion which a person feels when he sees some utterly alien object in possession of a familiar spot!

The stranger was talking in authoritative tones to Christie, who herself stood exactly as he had seen her last.

"I'll be back in a couple of hours," the man was saying. "But if he *should* regain consciousness before that, you must let me know. You've got someone to send, haven't you?" He remained for a moment hesitating, his bowler-hat in one hand and his black bag in the other. His countenance was illuminated by a faint flicker from behind the form of the girl. She must have laid down her candle upon a step of the staircase.

The first impression Wolf received was of an old photograph-album in his grandmother's drawing-room in Brunswick Terrace; the second, one of a certain hospital-entrance in a street in London. It was later that these impressions explained themselves. The man had the drooping mustache and unintelligent wooden forehead of an old-fashioned army-officer. About his person hung a smell of laudanum or chloroform.

"What is it?" cried Wolf as he approached. "Can I help? Can I do anything?"

Dark as it was, Wolf was conscious that the fellow gave him a look of frigid suspicion as he bowed himself off. "You can send for me if anything

— otherwise in a couple of hours," were his final words as he moved away....

Christie led him then up the well-known staircase. "He is dying," she said, as they entered the bedroom of Mr. Malakite, a room whose existence was barely known to him. Then there commenced a strange vigil beside the unconscious form of that old man.

Christie herself sat on a chair on the left of her father's bed; he, on a similar one on the right. In broken whispers the girl told him how her father had fallen backwards, down that narrow staircase, soon after he and she had been left alone.

"I think I lost my head, Wolf. I think I ran crying into the street. Anyway, people came round... a lot of people... and they fetched Doctor Percy. Father's been like this ever since. Doctor Percy examined him. It's some internal injury, he thinks. He says he thinks his spine is hurt in some way; but the worst injury is internal. He thinks" — here the girl spoke in a voice that startled Wolf a good deal more than the meaning of her words— "that he's bleeding to death inside."

Each five minutes that passed in this singular interlude seemed as long as twenty minutes of any ordinary time-flow. Christie was completely different from her ordinary self. She avoided Wolf's eyes. She repelled his touch. She seemed reluctant to resume anything approaching their old intimacy.

He longed to ask her whether she had actually called out his name aloud, or whether that psychic summoning had conveyed its message independently of either of their two conscious minds. But he was too troubled by this unusual look upon her face and this unnatural reserve, to ask any questions. He longed to enquire how the old man had come to have such an accident at all; but he dared not refer to it. There emanated from the girl an ice-cold barrier of inflexible pride, setting him at such a distance that no real exchange of feelings was possible.

Every now and then she would get up and move the bedclothes under the old man's chin, as if fearful lest he should be suffocated. But the particular way she did this struck Wolf as having something unnatural in it, for she did it exactly as if the old man were already dead. She touched him differently from the way she would have done it had he merely been unconscious. Her attitude seemed to display the shrinking abhorrence that living people experience at contact with inanimate flesh.

To Wolf, who was both ignorant and very unobservant in matters of this sort, it did begin to present itself at last, as he watched the old man's face, that he really was dead... had died, in fact, while Christie and he had been watching over him! Incontinently he muttered something to Christie, and, bending over the bed, inserted his hand beneath the clothes and felt for the old man's heart. What he actually said to Christie was, "I'll find his heart, shall I?" But in all the agitation of that moment he was still shockingly aware of the girl's avoidance of his eye.

"I can't feel it. I don't believe he's breathing!" he blurted out. "Look at his lips!"

The girl did not answer him. She bent low down over her father's face; so low, that a loose tress of her hair fell against the old man's closed eyes.

Then she straightened herself up with a jerk, and Wolf pulled his hand away from under the bedclothes. He felt inert, utterly unable to deal with this crisis. Stupidly he watched her across the old man's stiff figure. He had been by degrees noting the aspects of this room which was so completely strange to him. *Mr. Malakite's bedroom!* He had even permitted himself to wonder what kind of spiritual "eidola"... the creation of the thoughts of this singular old man... lived and moved, like invisible homunculi, in this bare room! For the room was absolutely bare. With the exception of a small framed picture, in staring colours, of Raphael’s *Transfiguration*, propped up upon the mantelpiece, there was nothing upon the walls. The only thing to be seen in the room now was death — death upon the bed, and the daughter of death standing at the window!

Mr. Malakite’s bedroom-lamp was of a very different appearance from that old green one in Christie’s room. It was a small ship’s-lantern; and her father was wont to read deep into the night, so Christie had once told him, with this lantern balanced upon his knees as he lay in bed.

The ship’s-lantern did not throw a very strong light; and Wolf, as he laid his fingers on the old man’s forehead, with a vague notion of establishing the fact of life’s extinction, was aware of Christie’s figure at the window as a taut bow-string of quivering feeling.

“He does not breathe. It must be the end, Chris,” he murmured gently.

The girl turned abruptly and came back. Twice, as she crossed that little space between the window and the bed, he saw her straighten herself up, hold back her head, and shut her eyes, clenching her fingers tightly as she did so, and making an odd little indrawn gasp, as if she were swallowing the very dregs of all human bitterness.

“Shall I go and fetch Doctor Percy?” he asked, moving round the foot of the bed.

He caught her eye for a moment then, and it was like the eye of a wild bird imprisoned in a boy’s hand. She huddled herself against the wall at the bed’s head, her head bowed upon her folded arms, her body as rigid as the form on the bed.

Something about the nape of her small neck, as she hung there, with drooping head and tense, taut limbs, hit Wolf through the heart.

"Don't you mind, O my dear true-love! Don't you mind!" he whispered desperately, clasping and unclasping his fingers, but not daring to approach her. His consciousness of her mood was so intense that when he thought of trying to take her in his arms he saw her wild white face and flashing eyes turned upon him — turned against him with terrible words!

"Do you want me to go for that doctor, Chris?" he repeated, in a dull, flat, wooden voice.

A long shiver passed through her body, and she turned round, her arms hanging limp by her sides.

"I'd... rather go... myself," she said, in a low, heavy tone. "Go... myself," she repeated.

With stiff, leaden movements, after that, she went into her own room and came back in her loose winter coat and woollen cap.

"O Chris!" he cried, as he saw her there, hovering in the doorway; "O little Chris!"

But she made a movement with her hands, as he approached her, that was almost peevish — the sort of movement with which a little girl beats down the jumping and barking of an excited dog.

"I'll be back in about twenty minutes, Wolf," she said calmly. But he noticed that not one glance did she cast at the form on the bed, not one glance at him. The words she uttered, natural and commonplace as they were, were addressed to that gaudy rendering of the *Transfiguration* on the mantelpiece.

And then she was gone... melting away, so it seemed to him, as if she had actually been a spirit. The sound of the opening and closing of the street-door affected him like an everlasting farewell. He recognized in that second that something had happened in his own heart that was like a wall falling outwards... outwards... into an unknown dimension.

In addition to the bookseller's ship's-lantern, which stood on a small table, there were two candles on the bare chest of drawers, one on each side of a faded leather case, containing two hair-brushes. Wolf sat down again and watched his own shadow sway, with the flicker of those two candle-flames, across the countenance upon the bed.

Very faintly, from the parlour on the other side of the landing — for the door was still wide open — came the ticking of Christie's clock.

His consciousness, like the man at watch on a ship that has been submerged in some terrific wave and rises to the surface cloudy with salt-foam, turned instinctively to his lost "mythology," turned to it as to something lying dead on the floor of his soul. And it came over him, by slow degrees like a cold glimmer of morning upon a tossing sea, that the abiding continuity of his days lay, after all, in his body, in his skull, in his spine, in his legs, in his clutching anthropoid-ape arms! Yes! that was all he had left... his vegetable-animal identity, isolated, solitary... hovered over by the margins of strange thoughts!

The intense reality of Mr. Malakite's figure beneath those bedclothes, of his beard above them, of his nostrils, his old-man's eyelids, his ugly beast-ears, narrowed the reality of his own life, with its gathered memories, into something as concrete, tangible, compact, as the bony knuckles of his own gaunt hands now resting upon his protruding knees! Thought? It was "thought," of course! But not thought in the abstract. It was the thought of a tree, of a snake, of an ox, of a man, a man begotten, a man conceived, a man like enough to die tomorrow! With what within him had he felt that shrewd thrust just now about his true-love Chris? Not with any "glassy essence." Simply with his vegetable-animal integrity, *with his life*, as a tree would feel the loss of its companion... as a beast the loss of its mate!

His thoughts focussed themselves mechanically upon the white lips of the man on the bed and upon his wrinkled eyelids, but they were no longer occupied with these things. His mind reviewed the loss of his life-illusion. How many chances and casualties, how many little criss-cross patterns, puffs of aimless air, wandering shadows, unpredictable wind-ripples, had combined to disintegrate and destroy it!

"I must not let slip what I found out just now," he thought. And then, as a triangle of tiny wrinkles upon one of Mr. Malakite's closed eyes wove itself into his mental process, "Whatever," he said to himself, "Christie may feel, I know that she, and no other, is my real true-love! Yes, by God! And I know that my 'I am I' is no 'hard, small crystal' inside me, but a cloud, a vapour, a mist, a smoke, hovering round my skull, hovering round my spine, my arms, my legs! *That's what I am* — a 'vegetable-animal' wrapped in a mental cloud, and with the will-power to project this cloud into the consciousness of others!"

As he articulated this thought he gave himself up to a vivid awareness of his body, *particularly of his hands and knees*, and, with this, to a vivid awareness of his mind as a cloudy projection, unimpeded by material obstacles, driven forth in pursuit of Christie.

"I command that she shall be all right!" he muttered audibly, addressing this word to the universe in general.

All these thoughts raced through his head while, for no earthly reason, he transferred his gaze to the bookseller's eyelashes.

"But if I send my mind after her, where is the will that sends it? In my hands and my knees?"

But with the help of Mr. Malakite's eyelashes, which were of a yellowish white, he decided to suppress all those logical ambiguities. "The great thing is to have a *feeling* of my identity that I can strengthen, whatever happens!

Perhaps my will is in my knees and my hands. It doesn't matter *where* it is, as long as it can drive forth my mind to look after Christie!"

At that point he was aware of a cold, sickening doubt with regard to Christie. Strange that he should only discover what love for her meant, at the moment when that closing door rang in his ears!

What a childish optimist he was! Were gorillas like that? *Their* identity, anyhow, was in their hands and knees!

A middle-aged gorilla, watching the dead face of an old gorilla — such was his present situation....

Suddenly the left eye of Mr. Malakite — the one upon which Wolf's gaze had so mechanically been fixed — opened perceptibly and looked at him.

"She'll be back soon, Solent," said Mr. Malakite.

"Do you want anything? Can I do anything for you? Are you suffering, sir?" Wolf found himself on his knees at the side of this awakened eye. The lid kept flickering up and down, raising itself with difficulty and then closing again; but the amount of conscious intelligence revealed by that life-cranny when Wolf was able to peer into it, was terrifying.

"She pushed me down," said Mr. Malakite.

A preposterous nursery-rhyme about an old man "who wouldn't say his prayers" came into Wolf's head. But he murmured gravely, "Can I get you a drink of water or anything?"

"Your father." These two words came very faintly. The flickering eyelid sank down and stirred no more.... "I think I see your father." This time the voice was almost inaudible. But the next word was clearer. "Good," said Mr. Malakite.

Wolf had risen from his knees now and was hanging over the dying man, his face a few inches from his face, his hands, palms-down, pressed into his pillow....

“And great.” These last two syllables seemed uttered rather by the old man’s spirit than by his lips; for the latter were closed as tightly as his eyes.

“He... will... for — —” The sound of this ghastly susurration seemed to come from under the bedclothes, from under the bed, from under the floor, from under the book-shop beneath the floor, from under the clay-bottom of Blacksod....

“For — —” The repetition of the syllable seemed like the echo of an echo; but Wolf became aware of a shocking twitching in the muscles of the old man’s face.

“For — —”...

A wave of atavistic sentiment rose up in Wolf’s throat from countless centuries of Christian unction. He found the word “forgive” quivering on the tip of his tongue, and recklessly he let it descend, like a drop of consecrated oil, on the man’s dying. His idea was that Mr. Malakite was confusing the one person he had ever respected with some obscure First Cause. Then he found himself staggering back.

With a convulsion of his whole frame, the bookseller jerked himself to a sitting-posture. Spasmodically drawing in his legs, like a frog swimming on its back, he kicked off every shred of clothing....

“Forget!” he shrieked; and his voice resembled the tearing of a strip of calico. He was dead when he sank back; and from one of the corners of his mouth a stream of saliva, tinged with a red stain, trickled upon the pillow.

Hurriedly Wolf pressed down those elevated knees and pulled the bedclothes up to the man’s chin. Then, taking out his handkerchief, he wiped the mouth with it, screwed it into a tight ball and wedged it between the blankets and the jaw of the dead. That done, he drew a long breath and stared at Mr. Malakite. But where *was* Mr. Malakite? The face above the stained handkerchief seemed a *new phenomenon* in the world — something that had no connection with the old man he had heard crying the word “forget” just now. It was as if the thing he had known in his experience as Mr. Malakite had completely vanished; and *from somewhere else* had arisen this frozen simulacrum.

“Forget,” he murmured to himself; and then he felt a longing to convey at once to Miss Gault the news that a man upon his death-bed had confused William Solent with God!

But at the image of Miss Gault, tumbling over her milk-bottle upon his father’s grave, a sudden moisture seemed to flow into the cavities behind his eyeballs.

“It’s not for you,” he said grimly to the figure on the bed, as he recognized this tendency to tears. “It’s for Miss Gault.” And actuated by a queer desire *to prove to the corpse* that it was not “for him,” he laid the tips of his fingers on the bookseller’s forehead. “How soon do they get cold?” he said to himself....

At this point he heard the door opening down below, and the sound of voices and footsteps. He hurried out of the room and met Christie on the stairs.

“He’s dead, Chris,” he said. “I couldn’t do anything.” This addition to his news sounded singularly foolish as soon as it was uttered. Even at that inadvertent moment, on the eighth step of those back-stairs, he blushed to have spoken such a banality.

“It’s too late, doctor,” said she, turning her head towards the man behind her.

“I feared so,” said Doctor Percy.

“Poor old gentleman!” repeated Doctor Percy. “He is spared a great deal.” The tone in which this amiable epitaph echoed through that house and penetrated into the shop, with its shelves of perverse erudition, had an irritating effect upon Wolf's nerves.

He felt a malicious desire, as he moved aside to let Christie pass, to catch the man by the sleeve of his neat coat and whisper in his ear something monstrous. "She had to throw him downstairs, you idiot; she had to throw him downstairs!"

Mr. Malakite's daughter was standing by his bed's head when the two men entered the room. Her arms, with the fingers clasped desperately inside the palms, hung down by her sides like torn tree-limbs in a deadly wind. Her head drooped upon her chest. He fancied for a moment that her profile was contorted with crying; but when she raised her head, her brown eyes were dull, abstracted, and completely tearless.

After bustling about the body for a minute or two, as if professional nicety required more evidence of death than nature in decency could afford, Doctor Percy bowed himself off.

"Come into the other room, Chris! No!... Come along! You *must*, my darling." Holding her by one of her clenched hands... and she obeyed him like a somnambulist... he led her into her parlour, where he made her sit down on a chair, over the glowing heap of cinders.

He sat down close to her side; and without looking at her, but still holding tightly that small clenched hand, he began speaking rapidly, emphatically, monotonously.

"Chris, there's nothing about all this that I don't know *as well as you do*... nothing, my darling! It's as if some crust were shattered for a moment and we looked through... into those horrors that are always there! It's the same with us all, Chris! It's the same with the whole world. There's only one thing for us to do if we're to endure life at all, Chris; and... and your father said the word himself before he died. Are you listening, Chris? He became conscious for a minute; and he said it to me like a message for you.... O Chris, little Chris, it was a message to both of us!”

She did not lift her head; but he knew, from the quiver in the fingers he held, that her attention was arrested.

“He said ‘forget,’ Chris... just that one word. O my love, my only love! From now on that is the word for us. We know what we know. We bear it together. Listen, little Chris! You’ve got to go on living, for Olwen’s sake. I’ve got to go on living for Gerda’s sake. When you went away just now, I knew, in one great flash, what you and I are to each other. We shall be *that*, my dear, dear love, till we both are dead! Nothing can change it any more. Nothing can come between us any more. As to everything else... are you listening, little Chris?... we’ve both got to ‘forget’ — just as he said. It’s the only way, my precious. When that crust breaks, as it did just now, it’s madness to dwell upon it. It’s the unbearable. No one can bear it and go on living. And you’ve *got* to live, Chris, for Olwen’s sake, just as I’ve got ——”

He was interrupted in the middle of his speech. The daughter of Mr. Malakite sprang erect upon her feet and uttered a piercing scream. Then she beat the air with her clenched hands.

“Damn you!” she cried. “Damn you! You talking fool! You great, stupid, talking fool! What do *you* know of me or my father? What do *you* know of my real life?”

Wolf drew away from her, his body bent forwards, his hands pressed against the pit of his stomach, his eyes blinking.

For a second he saw himself and his useless words exactly as she described them. He saw all his explanations as if they had been one prolonged windy bellow, covering the impervious grazing of a complacent ox!

But grim terror swallowed up this spasm of personal humiliation. What if this tragedy were to unsettle Christie's wits?

He used his will now as if it had been a master mariner, giving rapid, desperate orders in a deafening storm! He deliberately smoothed out of his face every shade of feeling except a thundering anger.

"Stop that!" he cried, as if he had been speaking to Olwen. "Stop that, Christie!" And he made a step towards her. She had never seen him in such a mood, never heard such a tone from him. His nervous concern gave vibrancy to his pretended anger. Her contorted features relaxed, her clenched hands dropped down; she stood there before him like a solitary pier-post — desolate but unbroken — about whose endurance the last waves of the storm subsided in foamy rings.

Then, to his infinite relief, she burst into a flood of tears. He never afterwards forgot the extremity of those tears. Her face seemed literally to dissolve; it seemed to melt, as if the very stuff of it were changing from moulded flesh into streaming water!

She flung herself down on the sofa and buried her head in its faded embroidered roses. Approaching the back of the sofa, and leaning against it, he watched her huddled form lying on its bed of relief, very much as a master showman might watch the performance of a darling puppet, over whose form and gesture he had worked in secret, by the light of an attic candle, for many a long, starved month!

The lamp Christie always kept on the sewing-table in her parlour must have been burning steadily ever since they had had tea. The chimney was black now with soot; and Wolf moved across and turned the wick down a little. As he performed this small action, he received, to his astonishment, an inrush of furtive, stealthy satisfaction.

This was the first of such feelings that he had enjoyed for many a long day. "*Mr. Malakite is dead.*" Was it *that* particular collocation of words, as his mind visualized them, that gave him this physical thrill of relief? Or was it just the change of the girl's mood?

He could see, even by that diminished lamplight, when he returned to the sofa, that her streaming tears had made a dark, wet stain upon that pink embroidery. Oh, she would be all right now! Whatever had passed between her and the old man — whatever plague-spot of unspeakable remorse had appeared upon some sensitive fibre in her consciousness — these tears would wash out everything!

How could there be so much salt-water in one tiny skull?

The tears of women! How from the beginning of time they had washed away every kind of evil thing, every kind of deviltry! Down the centuries had flowed those tears, clearing our race's conscience from poisons, washing clean the mind of man from the torture of rational logic, washing it clean from the torture of memory, recreating it, fresh, careless, free, like a child new-sprung from the womb! But how could such a wide, dark, wet stain upon those pink roses have come from so small a skull!

He didn't dare to speak to her as he pressed his hands upon the back of that familiar sofa and stared across her form, curved there like a dusky tree-root, into the dying fire.

As had happened once or twice before to him in his life, he fell at this crisis into a kind of waking-trance. That flood of tears became a river, swifter, deeper than the Lunt, and on its breast he was carried, so it seemed to him, into an imaginary landscape, far enough away from the corpse of Mr. Malakite and his ambiguous books! It was that same landscape which the Gainsborough picture had conjured up. But instead of a road there was this river; and the river carried him beyond the terraces and the gardens into less human scenery. There, between high, dark, slippery precipices was he carried, by the water of Christie's weeping; and there he encountered in strange correspondency those same towering basaltic cliffs past which he had drifted in a similar hallucination nearly a year ago, as he waited for his mother's train on the "Slopes" of Ramsgard!

He was brought back from this drugged condition by the sound of the street-door bell; but it was not at once that he realized that he was the one who had to answer this summons! Staring at the curve of Christie's wet eyelashes on her drowned cheek, as that dark stain on the pink roses grew wider, he was startled by the idea that this particular grouping of material substances might be no more than reflections in a mirror. There, below this girl's figure, below these darkened roses, was there not hidden some deep, spiritual transaction? The feeling passed away quickly enough; but as it passed, it left behind it a stabbing, quivering *suspicion*, a suspicion as to the solid reality of what his senses were thus representing, compared with something else, something of far greater moment, both for himself and for her!

All this while the street-door bell continued to ring; and it was ringing now with violent, spasmodic jerks.

He straightened his back, and, moving away from the sofa, stood motionless in the middle of the room, listening.

"I must go down," he thought. "It's most likely that doctor come back, to make sure once more that the old man's dead!"

Again the bell rang, this time with a long, continuous, jerking pull....

Wolf glanced at the back of the sofa. There was no movement there, nor any sign. He went out on the landing and waited for a moment at the door of the dead man's room, which they had left wide open. How different was the immobility of that form from the motionlessness of the one he had just left!

He listened to the silence, waiting for the bell to ring again. “Why is it,” he thought, “that I find it so hard to go down?” He moved to the head of the stairs. “Why do sounds like this,” he thought, “hit corpses in the face and outrage them like an indecency? Does death draw up to the surface some new kind of silence, to disturb which is a monstrous abuse?”

Brought back to reality by the cessation of the ringing, and a little fearful as to what the doctor might do if thwarted in his professional zeal, Wolf ran down the stairs and flung open the street-door.

There, in his Sunday clothes, and with an expression of extravagant decorum upon his whimsical visage, was Mr. John Torp!

“Doctor told I, master — —” he began.

“Come in, Mr. Torp,” said Wolf helplessly, wondering vaguely what new process of pious science that stark figure upstairs was to expect. “Come in and sit down, will you, while I tell Miss Malakite you’re here?” He let his father-in-law into the house and closed the door. It was easier to tell Mr. Torp to sit down than to give him anything to sit upon. “I don’t know,” he began awkwardly. But Mr. Torp caught him by the sleeve with one of his plump hands.

“It came over I,” he whispered, “that Miss Malakite wouldn’t be wanting one of they arrogant death-women with her Dad. And as I were an undertaker meself afore I took to me stone-job, I thought I’d run round and help she out.”

“I’m sure it’s most kind of you, Mr. Torp,” murmured Wolf, noticing now for the first time that his father-in-law was carrying a heavy carpet-bag. “I’ll go up and tell Miss Malakite you’re here. I expect she’ll be very grateful for your help.”

“Don’t ‘ee say more than just that one word, Mister,” replied the other, in a tone of such unctuous slyness that Wolf made a grimace in the darkness. “Some relatives do like to use a common sheet. But I do say ’tis the corpse’s feelings what us have to reason with. These here shrouds” — and he tapped Wolf’s knee with the carpet-bag— “be calculated to lie as soft and light on they, as lamb’s-wool on babes. ’Twas one of these here shrouds that thik bull-frog Manley cheated his wone mother of, by his dunghill ways; and her a woman too what always had a finicky skin. But don’t ‘ee say more than just that one word, mister. Missy up there, ’tis only likely enough, will give no more attention to these here shrouds than if she were tucking her Dad in’s bed. But ‘Leave it to Torp’ is what thik corpse would say, were speech allowed ‘un. They be wonderful touchy, they corpses be, if all were told; and it be worse when folks’ tongues run sharp upon ‘un, as we know they do on he above-stairs. ‘Twere me thoughts of *that*, mister, that made I reckon Miss Malakite would be glad to see I, sooner than they death-nurses, who be all such tittle-tattlers.”

It had by this time begun to dawn upon Wolf that his eccentric father-in-law had been genuinely actuated by a philanthropic impulse in making his appearance at this juncture. With this in mind he caught the man’s hand and shook it warmly. “I’m sure we’re much obliged to you, Mr. Torp,” he said.

“And don’t ‘ee worry about your Gerdie,” concluded the worthy man. “Missus went round to she when I comed away. Our Lob runned in, ‘sknow, with a tale of your leaving your vittles and the Lord knows what! So when doctor told I you was here, I let *she* go to Gerdie, and came round here me wone self. Ye knew, I reckon, that there were trouble in this house? Well... no matter for that! Every man to his wone concerns, be *my* motto.”

The rough tact of this little outburst of indulgent interpretation was the final touch in the winning of Wolf’s gratitude.

"I'll go up and see Miss Malakite," he said. "You wait here, Mr. Torp. I'm sorry there are only the stairs to sit on."

He found Christie putting coal on the grate in the parlour. She had closed the door of her father's room. She turned to him a face flushed by her struggle with the fire, but bearing the impress of her desperate crying in some fashion he could not just then define. At any rate she appeared in full control of herself; and he felt intuitively that as far as remorse went, her reason was clear and unpoisoned.

He shut the parlour-door and hurriedly explained Mr. Torp's mission.

"He knew I was with you. Doctor Percy must have told him. He knew you'd want some undertaker's woman to do what's necessary... to 'lay him out,' as they call it. He knew what gossips these demons are. So he just came himself. It was nice of the old chap, wasn't it?"

The psychic tension between them, as he hurriedly communicated all this, was so great that he found they were both on the verge of a childish giggling-fit. Wolf took advantage of this mood to tell her about the contents of the carpet-bag. "Oh, Chris," he found himself saying, with a queer chuckle in his voice, "when the old man used that particular word, I had such a weird sensation! I thought of the shroud in which Samuel appeared to Saul. I thought of the shroud in which Lazarus came out of his grave. I thought of the shroud that Flora MacIvor made for Fergus before he was executed. And then to see that carpet-bag! It might have been a monstrous thing, eh, Chris? Nobody but this old fellow could have carried it off. Gad! but what a word it is! A *shroud*! Doesn't it make you want to be drowned in water, Chrissie, or burnt into cinders?" He paused for a minute, struggling to keep back from her one of those forbidden thoughts to which he was so hopelessly subject. But their mood was too close. They were like a couple of excited starlings perched on a gallows that sways in the wind.... The love that was between them gave a mad gusto to that incongruous moment, with Mr. Torp waiting below-stairs to wash an incestuous old man with soap and water, and Christie's parlour-door shut for ever to Mr. Malakite!

"Isn't it awful, Chris," he whispered, "to think of what Redfern's shroud must have looked like when they — —" He suddenly remembered that he had never told the girl a word about what he and Valley had seen; and he stopped abruptly.

"When they?" she echoed faintly.

"I'll tell you another time, Chris," he flung out; and he seized her fragile figure in the most self-effacing embrace he had ever bestowed on anyone since he was born.

RIPENESS IS ALL

"You'll be sure to be back for tea!"

These words were uttered by Gerda as she stood in their doorway, with Lobbie Torp at her side.

"Make it fairly late, then," said Wolf. "I don't want to cut short our walk."

"The best part of our walk will be looking forward to our return," remarked Wolf's companion, with a smile that Wolf saw reflected, as if it were a bunch of honeysuckle, in Gerda's delighted face.

"Well, I'll have tea ready for *you*, whether Wolf's home or not!" cried the excited girl.

"And I'll get back from *my* walk as soon as you do," threw in Lobbie Torp. "I'm going down by the Lunt to cut a new walking-stick.... Bob's going with me. He likes the *other* kind... proper shop-sticks... but he's coming all the same. Shall I cut you a stick too, Lord Carfax?"

The visitor turned to the boy with the gravest attention.

"An ash-stick, Lobbie? Could you grub up an ash *root*? No! I suppose it wants a spade for that! But an ash-stick, with its own root for handle, is just what I *am* on the lookout for." He turned round to Gerda with sly, screwed-up eyelids. "You're sure you won't change your mind, Mrs. Solent, and come with us?... and Lobbie too?" he added, with an after-thought that brought wrinkles of roguery into his face.

Wolf had already caught the amorous glances with which their visitor had enwrapped Gerda. It was just as if some drooping "Gloire de Dijon" rose in a deserted garden were enwrapped by a rich slant of August sunshine, full of the heavy poppy-scents of all the yellow cornfields it has crossed, negligent, careless, and yet massively intent! "Why *don't* you and Lobbie come with us?" Wolf feebly muttered; but as he spoke, there surged up within him a flood of black bile. Oh, how he hated just then, as he stood with his fingers on the iron rail of his gate, every one of the people of his life, except Christie! The maliciousness he felt at that moment amounted to a deadly distaste. He hated his mother, he hated Gerda, he hated Carfax, he hated Urquhart, Miss Gault, Jason! He hated them all, except Christie... and, perhaps, old Darnley with his yellow beard.

"We'd help you get tea, Gerda?" he murmured obstinately. "Or we could get it in Ramsgard!"

How queer this malice within him was! It made his pulses literally thud with its crazy violence. It gave him a savage, animal-like desire to dig his chin, in a tumbling, tossing wrestle of hate, into the flesh of Lord Carfax.

"Do come, Gerda!" he repeated, in a stubborn refrain. The girl shook her head; but the radiant expression she had been wearing in the last two hours did not pass from her face. It was evident to Wolf that Lord Carfax had completely won her heart during the short time he had spent under her roof.

"Do you really want to see where he's buried?" he asked, as he conducted his visitor through that grassy lane he had recently discovered, which made it possible to reach Poll's Camp without passing through the town.

"I like all graveyards," replied Lord Carfax, "and I've always been interested in your father."

"It's a cemetery," remarked Wolf sulkily. "He's been there a long time," he added.

The weather-beaten countenance of "the lord from London" wrinkled itself into many genial wrinkles as it glanced indulgently at Wolf's surly profile.

"I was a good deal more interested in him than *she* thought quite decent," he went on. "I used always to tell him I'd visit his grave when he was dead. It was assumed between us, you know, that he *would* die. He always talked of being dead. It seemed to please him in some way. It certainly never gave *me* any great pleasure, that particular thought!" As his visitor said this he fixed upon Wolf a look of such humorous whimsicality that it was almost impossible to see it and remain morose and truculent. It was a look of penetrating sweetness, and yet it was shamelessly cynical. Wolf found himself softening; but this in itself was a thing that increased his secret irritation!

"I'd like to show you his grave," he said bluntly, feeling as if he would be glad to strike that kindly visage, and then to kiss it and ask its pardon for the blow!

He tried to transfer his attention, as they left the lane and entered the first of the orchards, to the beauty of that particular afternoon, the last Saturday in May. It was warm and windless; but a screen of thin, opaque clouds obscured the sunlight, filtering the hot rays, as in some old picture, into a mellow spaciousness of watery gold. In fact, the atmosphere resembled nothing so much, to Wolf's mind, as the look of a great glass jug of cowslip-wine, which about a month ago his mother, in her drastic, picturesque manner — quite shameless about the number of flowers she sacrificed for such a thing — had held up to his lips.

He had plenty of time, as they drifted through the long grass of those three hedged-in orchards that led to the foot of the hill, to note every feature of his visitor's appearance. Lord Carfax was to all intents and purposes an old man; but he held himself so erect, and he walked with so resolute a step, that Wolf would have taken him for a man of fifty. He was in reality rather short — not much taller than Lobbie; but the massiveness of his great square head, combined with the solid sturdiness of his frame, produced the constant illusion that he was of normal height.

He was certainly eccentric in his clothes. His attire on this occasion gave Wolf the impression of a seafaring man. He might have been the elderly skipper of an old-fashioned packet-boat, bound from Weymouth for the Channel Islands! Wolf had been fascinated by many things in him from the very start. Partly owing to his mother's sardonic predilection, but much more owing to the man's own unique personality, he felt completely at ease with him. The fact that it was due to this man's initial intervention — as a relative of both Mr. Urquhart and Mrs. Solent — that he had come to Dorset at all, combined with the part the fellow's shameless opinions had played in his own secret thoughts, gave to this rugged and leathery countenance, now that he saw it at close quarters, an almost legendary glamour.

A flicker of snobbishness entered into his feelings too. But he salved his conscience over this by assuring himself that he would have been in any case attracted to a person of this original character. He smiled grimly to himself, however, as he assisted "Cousin Carfax" in pushing his way through the hedge-gaps, to discover that he was already hoping that Jason would never learn of this prolonged visit! Carfax, he knew, was generally supposed to have left for London on the previous day. His remaining at the Three Peewits last night was a sudden caprice, of which even Mrs. Solent was unaware. Wolf suspected that Gerda's beauty had more to do with it than anything else!

They had hardly got through the last hedge, and were just about to ascend the southern slope of Poll's Camp, when they came upon a shabby-looking man — something between a tramp and a poor workman — who was resting himself on a turf-covered mole-hill.

To Wolf's surprise this man turned out to be none other than Mr. Stalbridge, the ex-waiter of the Lovelace Hotel!

The man rose at their approach; and Wolf, ashamed of his behaviour at their last encounter, greeted him with exaggerated deference, shaking hands with him and introducing him to his companion. The ex-waiter professed a vivid memory of their meeting in the Lovelace Hotel more than a year ago, and explained that he had got a temporary job in Blacksod and was now returning to spend the Sunday in Ramsgard.

Mr. Stalbridge's ceremonious manner offered such a contrast to his shabby attire, that Lord Carfax, who seemed to collect human curiosities as boys collect butterflies, entered into a lively conversation with him, and finally appeared prepared to receive him into their company as a fellow traveller. Wolf felt a little piqued by this; for though he had allowed for Gerda's attractiveness as an element in their visitor's interest, he had assumed that this excursion to the father's grave implied a certain desire on his guest's part to exchange ideas with the son! Apparently he was mistaken; Carfax's attention promised to be totally absorbed by Mr. Stalbridge, whose humorous anecdotes about the Lovelace family and other local magnates continued with small abatement until they reached the summit of Poll's Camp.

Wolf's original sensation of pique at this encounter had increased to a pitch that needed the control of some quite serious effort of mind, when they stood at length on the top of the grassy eminence.

Gerda's radiance under Carfax's admiration returned to him now as an integral portion of the slight he was enduring. "If she sees much more of these sophisticated people," he thought, "she will lose all the simplicity of her nature!"

He flung his gaze round the immense expanse revealed to them, while Lord Carfax drew heavy breaths, leaning on his stick; and Mr. Stalbridge continued the sly process of his courtly seduction. Without being obtrusive in any particular detail, the lavish waves of the season's fertility, feathery grasses, green wheat, new budding honeysuckle, buttercups in their prime, red and white hawthorn, seemed to flow over every field and every hedgerow, between where he stood now on Poll's Camp and the mount of Glastonbury.

He felt at this moment as though humiliation were dripping into his heart, drop by drop, like carefully poured medicine into a tumbler of water. So this "lord from London" took really not the slightest interest in him! Anxious to help his mother, to help Jason, to help Mr. Stalbridge, the great man had evidently found Wolf himself tedious and uninspiring!

"Damn the fellow! What do I care what he thinks of me?" he said to himself; but as Mr. Stalbridge became more and more voluble, and the leathery creases of my Lord's hewn and quarried physiognomy wrinkled themselves in increasing appreciation, he found that his humiliation grew unbearable. That luminous look upon Gerda's face! Why, he had not been able to summon up that look for the last six months! She had become a grown-up woman with him these latter days, tender and considerate; but this man's admiration transformed her back again into an irresponsible little girl!

As soon as the visitor had got his breath, they all moved on, following the outer circle of the camp and heading for Babylon Hill.

Wolf was the last to climb across the stile into the highroad. How rich with the season's over-brimming vegetation that hedge-side was! What intoxicating earth-smells hung about that well-known stile! Trailing dog-roses that carried frail green buds, whose sweetness resembled the fragrance of apples and sunburnt hay, mingled there, as he climbed that stile, with the white blossoms of tangled umbelliferous growths, their stalks full of warm, moist sap.

He glanced at the two men's faces, as they stood, quite oblivious of him, conversing there in the road. Yes! There was a scooped-out misery in the ex-waiter's eyes that reminded him of the man of the Waterloo steps! He was evidently making some personal appeal to Carfax now. Perhaps he hoped to get employment from him. Perhaps he *would* get employment from him! What a thing it was to be possessed of the power that Carfax had! Carfax was now succouring the Waterloo-steps man!

He remained for a minute balanced on the top of the stile, hugging his knees. He would give this poor devil every second he could snatch for him of this lucky chance! Slowly he turned his head and looked down upon the roofs of the town. "Christie! Christie!" And there flowed over him the memory of the day, just three weeks ago, when he had gone down to Weymouth. There he had seen her — seen her with Olwen in their new home by the backwater. Till the last minute of his departure, he and she had sat together on the dry sand under the Jubilee Clock, while Olwen paddled among the other children in a sea that danced and glittered in the jocund sunshine. He could smell the sharp sea-smells now. He could taste the salt. He could feel the living slipperiness of a broad brown ribbon of seaweed that Olwen had picked up, and that both he and Christie had pressed against their mouths. He could see the name "Katie" painted in green on a boat-stern, and the faraway look of the sailor who leaned against it, thinking God knows what!

It was owing to Carfax — owing to his unstinted purchase of all those ambiguous books — that these two had enough to live on. He remembered the night when Christie had yielded to the little girl's mania for the seaside.

"It's our fate, Wolf dear," she had said, as he touched her cold cheek. He remembered those last minutes under the sea-wall; how they had sat so stiff and straight, letting the loose grains of sand run through their fingers, staring into each other's eyes!

There was no book-shop any longer under that roof down there! Someone else, some overworked green-grocer's woman, was at this moment washing her dishes in Christie's little alcove, between that parlour and that bedroom....

"Are you ready, Solent? I promised your wife to keep you alive-o!"

Carfax's voice was friendly. "I'm a fool to feel so touchy," he thought, as he jumped down into the road and joined them.

"He's won his fling," he thought, glancing sideways at the ex-waiter's face, as they moved on together. It was queer to see that film of unspeakable relief forming itself, like "cat-ice" over a pool, above those sockets of despair. Ailinon! but the chap *was* like that Waterloo-steps man. He was at least that man's representative! He had denied him half-a-crown that day outside the Abbey; and now Carfax had stepped in. Everything he would like to have done Carfax had done. And now he was dragging along at Carfax's heels to visit "old Truepenny!" What a humorous fiasco his whole life down here in Dorset had been! He had been defeated by Urquhart... paid off, fixed up, bribed, squared! He had betrayed that skull in the cemetery. He had let his true-love slip through his hands. His "lord in London" had recognized Jason's genius, discovered Gerda's beauty, poured oil and wine into the wounds of Mr. Stalbridge, added a new glory to the tea-shop. Why the devil should he find anything worth bothering about in Mr. Wolf Solent, teacher of history in the Blacksod Grammar School?

As the three men approached a certain group of larches where Wolf had once wondered what it would be like to live with Darnley, it became clear to him that Mr. Stalbridge *was* to leave his present miserable job. Apparently he was to be transformed into some sort of leisurely factotum, or assistant major-domo, in my Lord's London house. What incredible luck for the ex-waiter! Wolf at this point did feel a certain glow of admiration for this rugged collector of human butterflies. "How the devil does he keep that seafaring air," he thought, "among his servants in London? Anyway, the hiring of Mr. Stalbridge is just the kind of thing I'd like to do myself."

The ex-waiter's affair being settled, Wolf began to assume a more prominent place in the attention of the great man.

"How's my crazy cousin Urquhart?" he enquired. "I gave his house a wide berth this time! He's become 'heavy weather' these days, with his fixed ideas. Don't you feel the same?"

"What ideas do you mean?" murmured Wolf.

His companion gave him a slow, quizzical smile. "That book of *yours*, for one thing! And his absurd idea that he killed that boy Redfern. I met Doctor Percy at your mother's last night, and he told me the boy had died of double pneumonia. Percy attended him... saw him die, in fact... had to turn out that precious Vicar of theirs, who was howling like a poisoned jackal. Urquhart himself's going to die, Solent. By Jove! I felt death in his hand a year ago. I like the fellow; but when he idealizes his confounded peculiarities to quite such a tune, you get dead sick of him! I'm all in favour of honest bawdry myself; but why sing such a song about it? Natural or unnatural, it's nature. It's mortal man's one great solace before he's annihilated! But all this bladder-headed fuss about it — about such a simple thing — one way or the other — I don't like it. It's not in my style." Wolf was astonished at the massive four-square tone in which the man uttered these last words... as if he'd been a great admiral-of-the-fleet criticizing some popinjay captain for a frivolous manœuvre.

"What do *you* think?" he enquired of the ex-waiter. "Do *you* agree with Lord Carfax that annihilation is not to be gainsaid?"

The old man appeared to hesitate for a moment. Then he bent his head and took off his hat. "I believe in the Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting," he said gravely, "if it's no offence to his lordship."

"Put on your hat, Stalbridge; put on your hat," said the other. "What do *you* think, Solent? You don't seem to enjoy expressing your views. You're like Ann. She covers everything with such malicious sarcasm that she makes everything equally unimportant. Do *you* believe in a future life, Solent?"

They were now passing one of the numerous cattle-droves that led into that maze of grassy paths, bordered by high hedges, which Wolf had come to know as the Gwent Lanes. Wolf himself was walking on the right of Lord Carfax, the ex-waiter on the left; so that as he turned to answer this historic question, he caught the profiles of both these old men silhouetted against the rich vegetation of this avenue of grass and greenery.

"Sometimes I agree with Mr. Stalbridge," he said, "and sometimes with you. At this moment I think I agree with you; but that is probably due to the fact that I've been rather hard-worked at the school lately."

Carfax made no comment upon this; and presently Wolf heard him begin to give a humorous account to the new servant of what he described as his "open house."

That glimpse of the Gwent lane behind those two faces had brought to Wolf a sickening sense of what he had lost in the disappearance of his "mythology." A year ago, how little would it have mattered that he should have replied so lamely to the great question Carfax had put to him! He would have let it go. He would have fallen back on that sense of huge invisible cosmic transactions, in the midst of which he played his part, a part totally unaffected by any casual mental lapse.

As they walked on, and he listened with a negligent ear to the discourse between this master and this servant, he recognized that the corpse of his life-illusion had received two fresh spadefuls of earth.

The resemblance, faint though it was, of Stalbridge to the Waterloo waif, considered in the light of that unbestowed half-a-crown, gave to this generous caprice of Carfax the quality of something that stepped in "between the election and his hopes."

But worse than this were my Lord's words about Urquhart.

Ailinon! Ailinon! Was all the agitation, all the turmoil, all his consciousness of a supernatural struggle with some abysmal form of evil, reduced now to the paltry level of a feeble old bachelor's fantastic self-deception?

If his imagination had been so moon-struck as to make so much of a pure phantasy, was it any wonder that this sagacious man-of-the-world turned away from him with indifference — turned to his wife's beauty, turned to the ex-waiter's idiosyncrasy, found in him nothing more than a pedantic usher in a provincial school? He had been living in a vain dream all these years of his life — living in it ever since he sat in the sunshine in his grandmother's bow-window, watching those painted boats rock and toss on the glittering Weymouth waves.

"Christie! Christie! O my lost darling, O my true-love!"

They had now arrived at the point where it was necessary to follow a field-path across the pastures in order to reach the cemetery. Mr. Stalbridge proceeded with elaborate ceremony to bid them both farewell, touching his uncovered forehead to his new master and extending his hand to Wolf.

"The seven-o'clock train, at Ramsgard, then," were Carfax's last words to him; "and don't bother about a ticket. Look out for me in a third-class smoking-carriage!"

As they crossed the fields towards the cemetery, Wolf visualized the journey of those two old men that night. In some queer way he felt as if Carfax were a competent actor, naturally assuming the precise rôle in which he himself had failed! Carfax would hear that imbecile youth cry out "Sandbourne Port!" and rattle the milk-cans on that little, deserted platform! Carfax would see the tower of Basingstoke Church. Carfax would see that placid-grazing cow. Carfax would observe, crossing the same coloured picture of Weymouth Bay, the same blue-bottle fly... or his exact representative... in the whirligig of chance!

His companion's feet seemed to drag a little now, as they made their way between a flowering hawthorn-hedge and a field of green barley.

"I expect we'd better take a carriage back," Wolf remarked.

"It's not my boots," growled Carfax. "I always have them made at the same place. It's my socks. A person knits them for me who was my nurse in former days. She's getting old, and her stitches gather into knots that seem dedicated to gall my kibe."

"I wonder if we shall find Miss Gault at the grave," Wolf said, as he lifted up a barbed-wire rail with the handle of his stick for Lord Carfax to crawl under. "I hope we shall. The last time I saw her was when she tripped over a milk-bottle and I got angry with her attitude to my mother."

The deep-set eyes of his companion had a whimsical gleam in them as he struggled to his feet.

"It was your father's affair with Miss Gault," he gasped, "that gave me my chance with Ann. God! how Urquhart used to gird at me for my mania for that sweet creature! I suppose you have no more idea than a leopard's cub, Solent, how enchanting she was in those days!"

Wolf stopped short as they picked their way between the graves. "What was it you said made you want to see where he's buried?" he enquired in a high-pitched voice.

The ancient mariner's visage before him contracted itself into what almost amounted to a gamin's grimace.

"I detect," he said, "a tone in your voice, Solent, and a quiver in your lips, that suggest I'm on dangerous ground. But the truth is I swore to him once that if he caved in before me I'd come and make a signal to his old cadaver. That's twenty-five years ago, Wolf Solent; and I've never done it till this moment."

"One minute!" interrupted Wolf, as the visitor made a motion to advance. His voice certainly had a vibration in it that was a surprise to himself. It was apparently no surprise to Lord Carfax; but the man gave him a quick, penetrating, suspicious glance. Wolf flung a hurried look sideways. It was impossible to see William Solent's headstone from where they stood. No stranger could possibly find the spot unless led to it by an habitué of that place.

"Did you have an exciting love-affair with my mother?"

The remark sounded quite as childish, quite as insolent, to his own ears, as doubtless it did to those of his interlocutor. But he followed it up with a further challenge.

"My mother treated my father abominably!"

His lip *was* trembling now. Violent pulses throbbed in both his wrists, like lilliputian engines. He knitted his eyebrows and glared at the rugged folds of tanned skin that surrounded this man's eyes, giving them the guarded alertness of a kindly, but very wary, deer-stalker.

Carfax squared his shoulders; and then, without removing his gaze from Wolf's face, he proceeded to button his overcoat tightly about his neck. The next thing he did was to fold both his hands — one of them holding his ash-stick — massively behind his back. The measured gravity of this gesture, as Wolf recalled it afterwards, resembled that of some seventeenth-century cavalier accosted by a highwayman!

His compact, sturdy figure, his formidable, level stare, presented themselves to Wolf like the embodiment of every banked-up and buttressed tradition in English social life.

"You were very young at that time, Solent," he remarked in a guarded tone.

"You must have got enormous satisfaction," Wolf went on, "in punishing my father for his rascality. You and my mother must have felt like avenging angels!"

The weather-beaten creases about the man's eyes thickened so shrewdly that no more than two gleaming little slits of menacing roguery confronted Wolf's vibrant nerves.

"I don't think we felt exactly angelic," chuckled Lord Carfax.

The curious thing about what happened then was the ferocious lucidity with which Wolf ransacked his own emotional state.

He recognized that one part of his nature was stirred in an affectionate response toward the rugged face before him. What he felt was that the skull under that mound in the pauper's plot *must* be championed at this crisis, or it would be betrayed beyond recovery.

"You think all scruples are uncivilized bigotry where sex is concerned; isn't that it?"

Carfax merely bowed.

Wolf knew perfectly well that what he was yielding to now was an insane desire to make this man responsible — as if he had been fate itself — for all the convoluted bitterness of his dilemma between Gerda and Christie! Those imaginary dialogues with the fellow, over the kitchen-stove, seethed in his mind like steam under a lid. He knew, too, that he was revenging himself now for Carfax's attraction towards Gerda, for his indifference to himself.

"Come!" he cried in a trembling voice, "Come! There isn't time to hunt about here for the place they used to bury workhouse inmates in, twenty-five years ago!"

Carfax took off his hat and rubbed his corrugated forehead with the palm of one of his hands. When he removed his fingers, Wolf caught a glimpse of a pair of agitated eyes roving in troubled scrutiny over the headstones to his left. The man's eyes had indeed become so much like those of a nervous hunter, that his whole face assumed a disarming and boyish anxiety, as if he were watching for the head of an otter or the fin of a pike in a disturbed stream!

"Come!" repeated Wolf. "I'll put you on the road to the Lovelace, and you can get a carriage or something to take you back to Blacksod. I'm going to walk back; but Gerda won't forgive me if *you're* late, and if you get a cab you'll be with her long before I am! I'm sure she's buying cakes for you at Pimpernel's this very moment!"

Before he had reached the word "Pimpernel" in this speech, at which point the lips of Lord Carfax broke into a smile of roguish gusto, he was aware of a very stern, straight look from the man's grey eyes.

"I've annoyed you for ever now, I suppose," Wolf murmured in a low voice. Lord Carfax surveyed him sternly.

“I don’t like it when people’s nerves get out of control,” he said. “My instinct is to beat them down, as a menace to civilized behaviour! But after all, Solent, here I am, at your father’s request! If you’d rather not show me his grave” — it was at this point that Wolf caught that disarming glint again, like the baffled innocence of a fisherman, emanating from beneath the old man’s eyelids— “I don’t want to annoy you. But don’t be too leisurely over your stroll back, my lad. If you are, there won’t be many of those Pimpernel cakes left!”

“This is your nearest way out,” said Wolf laconically. Stepping carefully, in advance, between the rows of green mounds, upon many of which grew little patches of yellow buttercups and white clover, he guided his mother’s and his wife’s admirer to the main cemetery-entrance. He managed to cast a quick glance in the direction of the grave. No! Miss Gault was not there.

Once in the road, he began giving his companion careful directions how to reach the Lovelace.

As he repeated those directions, he was aware of the man’s attentive countenance, bent a little sideways towards him, wearing something of the expression with which an experienced ostler would attend to the inarticulate language of an erratic horse!

The effort of formulating those practical instructions in that silent spot, while the invisible magnetism of so much death-nourished vegetation permeated his senses, threw Wolf’s brain into a confused stupor. He found, while he was slowly explaining to Carfax how to take the short-cut under the Preparatory School wall, past the Headmaster’s garden and the entrance to the Abbey, that he was *surprised* at having seen nothing of Miss Gault. He kept glancing at the deserted roadway before them, so warm, so opalescent, in the diffused light. He had an obstinate feeling that Miss Gault *must* be upon that road, either coming or going — a feeling that resembled some kind of chemical clairvoyance in the very marrow of his bones.

His mind, preoccupied with Miss Gault, became now most vividly conscious of the slaughter-house. The slaughter-house looked especially harmless at that moment; but he regarded it with sick aversion.

“These deeds must not be thought after these ways; so, it will make us mad.”

Of course, even while he saw her standing there, he knew he was imagining it, and that she had no palpable reality. This phenomenon, this visualizing of a bodily image that was *known* by his reason to be unreal, was one that he had suffered from before.

“You’ll find her,” he was speaking of the sedate lady in the hotel-office, “very stiff but very polite.” But while he was uttering these words, he saw Miss Gault’s figure quite palpably before him. He saw her bony shoulders turned to him, black in the roadway. And there was her arm, with clenched hand, lifted up in prophetic malediction!

“They’re killing something in there,” he thought. And then, for the infinitesimal part of a second, there arose within him an awareness of blinding pain, followed by thick darkness smeared with out-rushing blood. As this sank away, there ensued a murky dizziness in his brain, accompanied by a shocking sense that both his father’s skull and this woman’s arm were appealing to him to do something that he lacked the courage to do. His legs had turned into immovable lead, as happens in nightmares.

“Very stiff... very polite,” he repeated mechanically, perfectly conscious that he was smiling into the man’s face with a forced repulsive smile.

But Carfax had suddenly become an alert, compact man of action. His expression was more mariner-like than ever. Wolf’s eccentric maliciousness might have been a troublesome wave risen from an unexpected reef. Carfax looked curiously at him, his heavy eyelids screwed up, his mouth a little open, his chin set square in his muffler.

"Off with you, lad!" he said in a pleasant voice. "It'll do you good to have that walk back alone! Off with you; and look alive-o now!... if you're going to get home before I finish up those cakes!"

Not Mr. Stalbridge himself could have obeyed his new master more submissively than Wolf obeyed this command. He was well inside the cemetery before Carfax had gone half-a-dozen steps. From behind the hedge he followed his measured and resolute advance up the road, up the warm clover-scented road, past the slaughter-house.

It was through the tangled greenery of a clustered tuft of budding honeysuckle that he watched Lord Carfax. The faint sweetness of that leafiness remained with him, like a covering of ointment round the bloody stump of an amputated limb, when finally he left his vantage-ground and strode over to the pauper's plot.

The first thing he noticed was a pair of white butterflies flying awkwardly together, linked in an ecstasy of love. They seemed to float upon the warm clover-scented air as if their four wings belonged to one single life... an insect-angel of an Apocalypse of the Minute!

"I should not have had the courage to interfere," he thought, "even if an animal was being killed. But Miss Gault would. She'd have rushed straight to the place!"

He dug the end of his stick into the turf by the side of the mound and leaned on the handle, frowning down upon what he visioned six feet below.

"O Christie! O my true-love!"

Stubbornly he set himself to analyze how it was that with the loss of his life-illusion he could yet feel as he did about Christie!

There hung about the idea of her still... yes! still, still, still!... and it was *this* that he must explain to that skull down there... a sweetness as exciting as the wildest fancies of his youth, as those dark, secret fancies where the syllables “a girl” carried with them so yielding an essence that breasts and hips and thighs lost themselves in an unutterable mystery!

“Do you hear me, old Truepenny?” and it seemed to him, as he stared at the grass, that his soul became a sharp-snouted mole, refusing to cease from its burrowing till it had crouched down close beside those empty eyeholes, and had fumbled and ferreted at that impious, unconquerable grin!

His father *must* hear him! Surely, between those bones that had set themselves against his mother’s bones, so that he might be born, and his present living body, there must be something... some sort of link!

That was what he wanted, some ear into which he could pour the whole weight of his seething distress. Where else could he go?

Back once more across the grave floated those interlaced, fluttering wings. The contrast between the clover-scents that his nostrils inhaled and the desperation of his mood seemed to him like a well-aimed shaft of derision.

“If there *is* some monstrous consciousness behind all life,” he thought angrily, “it’s responsible for *all* the horrors! Come on, old Truepenny; let father and son celebrate this meeting with a private little curse at God. Let the worm in your mouth be the tongue shot out at Him! Let the look in the eyes of that Waterloo-steps man be His eternal peace!”

No sooner had Wolf articulated this catapult of malice against the unknown First Cause, than, without any apparent reason, he suddenly bethought himself of the boy Barge.

“Barge would never curse God,” he thought. “Under the worst extremity of suffering he never would! Barge would forgive God instinctively, without an effort." Barge did, no doubt, forgive Him every day! If Barge had the power of causing God to be tortured for all the torture God had caused, Barge would refrain, *as naturally as the wind blows*. Barge would let the great evil Spirit completely off!

As he meditated upon this forgiveness of God by Barge, Wolf found himself pulling his stick out of the earth and wiping the end of it, even as a duellist might wipe a sword, with his bare hand.

"But to forgive *for oneself* is one thing," he thought. "To forgive for others... for innocents... for animals... is another thing! Barge *is* an innocent; so it may be permitted to *him* to forgive. I am not an innocent. I know more than Barge. I know too much."

He remained in deep, fixed, wordless thought, after that, for several minutes. Then he opened and shut the fingers of his left hand with a convulsive movement. Had his father's skull been able to cast a conscious eye upon him, through the intervening mould, it would have supposed he was freeing his fingers from the clay which, a moment ago, he had wiped from the stick; but what he really was doing was getting rid of the contamination, not of clay, but of thought.

He had told himself a story in that brief while! He had imagined himself meeting Jesus Christ in the shape of the man of the Waterloo steps. He had imagined the man stopping him — it was by the stile on Babylon Hill — and asking him what he was doing. His answer had been given with a wild, crazy laugh. "Can't you see I'm living my secret life?" he had said.

"What secret life?" the man had asked.

"Running away from the horrors!" he had cried, in a great screaming voice, that had rung over the roofs of Blacksod. But immediately afterwards he had imagined himself as becoming very calm and very sly. "It's all right. It's absolutely all right," he had whispered furtively in the man's ears. "You needn’t suffer. I let you off. *You are allowed to forget.* It doesn’t matter what your secret life is. I’ve told you what mine is; and I now tell you that it can be borne. So you can stop looking like that! Any secret life can be borne when once you’ve been told that you have the right to forget. And that’s what I’ve told *you* now.”

It was when he was imagining the man’s answer that he had been compelled to practise his own doctrine with violent rapidity; and the next thing he did was to stoop down and dig his fingers into the roots of the grass, where he supposed his father’s head would be. “Good-bye, Father!” he muttered; and straightening his back, with a sigh he turned sharp round, and without further parley moved from the spot.

He began by directing his steps towards the main highroad by which they had come; but he hadn’t gone far when he suddenly swung about and made for the King’s Barton lane.

“I don’t want him to pick me up,” he thought. “They’re sure to take him that way.” As he followed the familiar road to King’s Barton, he recalled his first drive along it, by Darnley’s side, fourteen months ago.

How he had stared into the future then... that future which was now the past! How he had hugged his “mythology” to his soul, during that drive, feeling so confident that nothing in that fertile land could arise to destroy it!

As he went along now, trailing his stick behind him, he became aware that with the approach of the end of the pearl-soft afternoon the voices of countless hidden blackbirds were mounting up, rich and sweet, from the green depths of the hedges.

“She’s lost the power to whistle,” he said to himself, “just as I’ve lost my mythology!” And the identity of Gerda, her excitement about their new silver, their new curtains, their new clock, her radiance in being attractive to Lord Carfax, melted into the sad-gay music poured forth from those invisible yellow beaks, until he felt as if he were walking along a road that passed through her heart, a road the very atmosphere of which was the breath of her young soul!

Those blackbird-notes in the hedges seemed to allay the tension of his nerves as if they had been the touch of the girl’s flesh. His outraged mind, with its grievance against the First Cause, seemed actually to float away from his body as it moved quietly along. Between his body, thus freed from his tormented spirit, and the increasing loveliness of that perfect day, there began to establish itself a strange chemical fusion.

He came upon a certain gate now where he had once wondered what it would be like to live with Darnley. Once more he rested there, leaning his arms on its grey top-bar and staring over the expanse of greenness separating him from Melbury Bub.

Yes, without any conscious motion of his will something was softening within him towards the long future stretch of the days of his life!

He began to grow conscious of how separate his assuaged senses were from that tormented spirit of his that had just cursed God. What was it that had worked this change in him? Those blackbird-notes? Was it merely that his body, hearing those sounds, plunged into the sweetness of Gerda’s body? But now, from the thought of Gerda his mind reverted to Christie. After all, it was the same First Cause which tortured him that had made it possible that such a being as Christie should exist. God must be something that all conscious lives are doomed to curse and to bless in eternal alternation!

After all, Christie *did* belong to him, as she had never belonged, and never *would* belong, to anyone else. So easily might he never have met her — never met the one person he could love with all the worst and all the best in his contradictory nature! Many would be the Saturdays, many the

Sundays, he would walk with her now, along the backwater, along that familiar esplanade! In an upwelling of sad, sweet tenderness, he saw himself as an old grey-headed schoolmaster... still at his job in that ink-stained room... walking, with Christie on one arm and Olwen, grown tall and disdainful, on the other, past the bow-windows of Brunswick Terrace!

Certain little physical tricks Christie had, separating her from everyone else, came back to him now. The way she would turn her face sideways to speak to him when she was poking the fire, the way she swayed her wrists as if over an old-fashioned harpsichord, when she was arranging her teacups, the way she would hitch up her skirt when it hung too loose over her straight hips, the way she would stretch her head out of the window, drinking up the air with a kind of thirsty fury after struggling to express some subtle metaphysical idea that had baffled her power of words — all these things hit him now with no empty finality of loss, but with a sort of mystic consummation. It was as if, utterly beyond his effort — as it was beyond his merit — chance itself had caused the earth to whisper some clue-word into the ears of his flesh, a word that his *body* understood, though his mind was too humiliated to focus itself upon it.

Pondering upon what was happening to him, he turned from that gate and continued his way; but his stick was held firmly by the handle now, and his feet were no longer dragging as they moved.

He began obscurely to feel that he might get *some* happiness out of his life after all... even if he had to work at that school till he died... even if he never were allowed so much as to kiss Christie again!

He became more and more aware that it was just the simple chemistry of his body that, under the beauty of this hour, was coming to its own conclusions! It was as if his flesh were drinking in and soaking up this beauty, while his soul, cut into pieces by his recent humiliation like a worm by a bird's beak, wriggled and squirmed somewhere above his head!

His outward skin luxuriated in all this loveliness. It drenched itself in the pearl-soft air, like a naked swimmer in a glimmering sea. But his mind was still malcontent. It kept wincing under its own recent twinges. But it was divided from him in some way, so that it was no longer able to turn a torturous screw in his living brain! It was just as if some heavenly music were pouring into an entranced ear, while the brain behind the ear was beating about in chaotic misery.

Chaotic indeed! The core of his mind felt as though it were a multiple thing and lacked a centre. It felt as though its disintegrated consciousness resembled that of an amœba, of a zoophyte. It felt envious of the human happiness that had begun to penetrate its attendant body. Wolf knew that the man holding that oak-stick was himself; he knew it was Wolf Solent, on his way home to eat Pimpernel's cakes and to watch his wife flirt with Lord Carfax. But he felt that the identity of his soul and his body was broken. His soul had received such crushing disgraces that like a thousand globules of quicksilver it no longer dwelt where normal souls *ought* to dwell!

It was out of all this chaos within him, that he now set himself, as he strode along, to concentrate his will upon Christie and upon her life by that Weymouth backwater. "Oh, may she be happy!" he cried blindly to the grass and the trees. And then a queer psychic inkling came upon him, an inkling that it would be possible for him, now that he no longer had anything left but certain bodily sensations, now that he had become a depersonalized inhuman force, without hope or aim, to exercise a genuine power, an almost supernatural power, over the future of the entity he loved. The more he pondered on this, the more possible did the thing appear to him! As he surveyed the blossoms of a great lilac-bush in the first King's

Barton garden he reached, he seemed to visualize the demiurge of the universe as so much diffused sub-conscious magnetism submissive to nothing but commands... commands rather than prayers!

The luminous enchantment which this perfect afternoon threw upon those blossoms caused him to stop dead-still in front of them.

“I *command*,” he uttered in a grave, loud tone, “I *command* that she shall be happy!” And then, with a grotesque solemnity, as if for a second of time he had been given the power to destroy all ordinary sense of proportion, he repeated, as though addressing a slow-witted interlocutor, “It’s Christie Malakite I mean, who lives by the Backwater at Weymouth.”

He concluded this fantastic ceremony by an audible chuckle; but his steps, as he strode through the village of King’s Barton at a swinging pace, were freer and stronger than they had been for a very long time.

Still, however, he could not shake off the feeling that his soul had become a drifting multiplicity without any nucleus. There had occurred an actual “resurrection” of his body, which was now giving to his behaviour the aspect, the motions, the gestures of exultant well-being, while his inner nature remained a blur of disgusting confusion.

“Walking is my cure,” he thought. “As long as I can walk I can get my soul into shape! It must have been an instinct of self-preservation that has always driven me to walk!”

He had reached the churchyard-wall now; and he couldn’t resist the temptation of stopping for a minute to visit Redfern’s grave. As he was scrambling over the low rampart of crumbling yellowish stone, he heard the droning of an aeroplane somewhere above his head.

“Mine enemy hath found me out,” he said to himself. “I suppose walking up and down upon the earth will cease altogether soon. Well, I’m going to walk till I die!” And to avoid giving his airy antagonist even the honour of one inquisitive glance, he proceeded to keep his eyes in religious malice rigorously fixed upon the grass beneath his feet.

His method of advance was more conducive to cerebral revenge than to alert vision; and when he did reach his destination he found a wheelbarrow full of grass by the side of the grave, and beyond the wheelbarrow, bending low and armed with a pair of gleaming shears, the figure of Roger Monk.

The peculiarly subtle smell of the green grass in the wheelbarrow gave him a thrill of such strange contentment that his greeting of his old acquaintance was cordial in the extreme.

"How's the squire?" he enquired after a minute or two's discussion of the weather. Roger Monk chuckled grimly.

"There was a time, sir," he replied — and Wolf noticed that the gardener's accent still wavered between the intonation of the Shires and the intonation of Dorset, "when, as you know, sir, I could have given that man his queetus. But he's not what he was, Mr. Solent, and that's the long and short of it."

The word "queetus," in place of "quietus," so tickled Wolf's fancy that he could only make an amiable grimace in response, a grimace that implied that the world had long been aware that Mr. Monk's bark was worse than his bite.

"How does he sleep these days?" he enquired.

"Much better, sir, thank 'ee. In fact, he's slept wonderful sound ever since Master Round and me dug this 'ere grave as 'twere right it should be dug. Old Jack Torp, if I may say so, made a poor job of this burying! Squire was worriting himself over it fearsome. That beer-barrel of a Torp, if you'll excuse such speaking, Mr. Solent, of a party a gentleman like yourself be allied to, ain't no more a sexton than he be an undertaker! Them stonecutters should leave the spade alone. They should leave burying alone, and stick to their own job.”

This plausible and innocent explanation of what he and Valley had witnessed did not by any means convince Wolf. But neither did it lessen his humiliation. He began to feel as if the perversity of Mr. Urquhart, the incest of Mr. Malakite, the lechery of Bob Weevil, the morbidity of Jason, were all of such slight importance, compared with the difference between being alive and being dead, that he had made a fool of himself in making so much of them. Such, at any rate, seemed to be the opinion of his body; and it was his body now that had taken the rudder in its hand! His body? No! It was more than his body! Behind the pulse-beat of his body stirred the unutterable... stirred something that was connected with the strange blueness he had seen long ago over the Lunt meadows and more recently at the window of Pond Cottage... something to that was connected with that heathen goodness that came so naturally to Gaffer Barge.

“How is Mr. Valley, Roger?” he asked. “I haven’t seen him since before the Otter wedding.”

Monk lowered his voice and jerked his thumb in the direction of the vicarage. “Squire’s gone to drink tea with him this very afternoon,” he whispered. “Squire don’t know that I know it. Nor do he know that Mrs. Martin and our maid knows it. He’s a proud old gent, is Squire; and he’s cursed the Reverend so bitter that ’twould be awkward if all were known.”

“Are they friends again, then?” asked Wolf.

Mr. Monk gave a furtive glance at the church and another at Redfern’s grave. He seemed to suspect invisible eavesdroppers from both those directions.

“Squire ain’t, and never has been, what you might call religious,” he said, “but he’s got fixed in his mind, since his sleep returned to him, that our parson have worked a miracle. ’Twould be all my place is worth if he knew I know what he’s up to.” Here the man came extremely close to Wolf and almost touched his face as he whispered in his ear, “He’ve a-been over there three times this week already!”

Wolf drew away as discreetly as he could. Mr. Monk’s breath smelt so strongly of gin that he wondered if the servant hadn’t been drinking with the clergyman in the kitchen prior to the master’s refreshment in the study!

A queer notion seized upon him now, as he looked this man up and down — a fantastic and even obscene notion. He mentally stripped the tall rascal of every rag of clothing! He visualized his heavy chest, his huge knees... he saw them unwashed and dirty.... But suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, he knew for a certainty, beyond all logic, that this astronomical universe, of which the monstrous frame of Mr. Monk occupied the foreground, was merely a filmy, phantasmal screen, separating him from an indrawn reality into which at any moment he might wake — wake despoiled and released. It was the feet of Mr. Monk, or rather the dirty nails of his huge toes, observed with this grotesque maliciousness, that seemed the seal of certainty upon this mystical knowledge!

“Well, I must be emptying this barrow and getting home,” said the innocent Roger.

“Good luck to you!” replied Wolf in a loud, hollow tone, as he recovered from his trance.

When the man had gone off and he was left to himself, he had time to note that not a sign was left now of the grave’s recent disturbance. Redfern’s mound, neatly sheared by the gardener’s shears, looked just the same as all the other graves in the vicinity.

Wolf sighed wearily. That last piece of information about Mr. Urquhart seemed to have landed him on the deepest bed-rock of his self-contempt.

What? Had he seen himself all this while as a great spiritual antagonist to the squire, only to find at the last that the man was paying surreptitious visits to T. E. Valley?

"Probably," he thought, "he's begging Tilly-Valley to let him take the Sacrament!"

He stared at the mound in front of him, wondering, with cynical indifference, whether the body of the boy had been exposed or not. But now, at any rate, he was "free among the dead."

"Christie! Christie!" He tried to visualize that fragile figure at this very moment coming back to tea from a stroll along the backwater where she had gone with Olwen to see the Abbotsbury swans!

Death and Love! In those two alone lay the ultimate dignity of life. Those were the sacraments, those were the assuagements. Death was the great altar where the candles were never extinguished for such as loathed the commonplace.

And it was just this that these accursed inventions were seeking to destroy! They would dissect love, till it became "an itch of the blood and a permission of the will"; they would kill all calm, all peace, all solitude; they would profane the majesty of death till they vulgarized the very background of existence; they would flout the souls of the lonely upon the earth, until there was not one spot left by land or by water where a human being could escape from the brutality of mechanism, from the hard glitter of steel, from the gaudy insolence of electricity!

" 'Jimmy Redfern, — *he* was there!' " he hummed savagely as he moved off; and then, as he scrambled back into the road, he wondered to himself what new mood it was that he had detected in Roger Monk. The man seemed to speak of Mr. Urquhart with a completely different intonation. Wolf's morbid imagination began at once picturing a new Mr. Urquhart, a

Mr. Urquhart in an old age of dotage, fallen entirely into the hands of Mr. Monk and of that precious crony of his that he called “Master Round”!

“I’ll call at the Manor House next Saturday,” he thought, “and find out what Tilly-Valley has done to him.”

He glanced at his watch. Oh, he would be hopelessly late for tea! Well, Gerda wouldn’t mind; and Lord Carfax would be thoroughly delighted!

He soon found that the faster he walked through that unequalled atmosphere, the stronger and calmer grew his mind.

The muscles of his body, his skin, his senses, his nerves, his breath, seemed to be gathering up from the soil a new power, a new endurance. The final stamping-down of the earth upon his old life-illusion was the vision, though it may well have been imaginary, of Mr. Urquhart pleading for the Sacrament with Tilly-Valley. He recognized now that his secret motive of all these months... yes, he had felt it by the banks of the Lunt, the day of the “yellow bracken”... had been his faith in some vast earth-born power within him that was stronger than the Christian miracle! Had Tilly-Valley won, then? Had he beaten them all? Had the absurd little fool mesmerized the soul of the great John Urquhart, even as he had mesmerized the soul of Mr. Round?

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!”

No! He would *not* yield! The inborn goodness of Barge... a thing natural and inevitable as the rising of the sap in the tree... was stronger than all the “white magic” in the world.

Oh, Christie! Oh, Christie! Would Gerda mind if he went down to Weymouth tomorrow week? He felt a longing to ask Christie what *she* thought about the difference between the “goodness” of Barge and the “faith” of Tilly-Valley. Perhaps, now it was dead, he would tell her about his “mythology.”

Quicker and quicker circulated the blood through his veins as he entered Blacksod and reached the familiar parting of the ways. There was no hesitation there now. He had never once gone past the book-shop since she had left it!

He found himself dallying with many happier thoughts as he hurried by the Torp yard. Surely he had fallen as low as he could fall! The loveliness of this day... a gift thrown out to him by Chance, the greatest of all the gods... seemed to have touched his body with a kind of blind new birth. He began to feel conscious again, as he had done over the corpse of old Malakite, of himself as a moving animal, full of a vivid, tingling life that extended into the very fingers with which he clasped his stick. And not only as an animal! The immense vegetable efflorescence by which he had been surrounded seemed to have drawn his nerves back and down, soothing them, healing them, calming them, in a flowing reciprocity with that life that was far older than any animal life.

Ah! His body and his soul were coming together again now! Emanating from his lean, striding form, from his spine, from his legs, from his finger-tips, his spirit extended outwards, dominating this forked “animal-vegetable” which was himself. And with this new awareness as his background, he set himself to face in stoical resolution all the years of his life, as he saw them before him, dusty milestones along a dusty highway!

He said grimly to himself, “No gestures now!” And it was *not* a gesture that he made at this moment, as he gathered himself together to be an usher in Blacksod Grammar School for the remainder of his life! He kept his spirits down on purpose, visualizing the innumerable moments of discomfort, of nervous misery, that lay before him. He stretched out his hand to pluck at those wretched future moments, so that he might appropriate them now and grapple with them now....

"But it isn't all there is!" he said to himself as he approached Preston Lane. "The whole astronomical world is only a phantasm, compared with the circles within circles, the dreams within dreams, of the unknown reality!"

He passed Mrs. Herbert's house and came to the pigsty. Ailinon! The memories! Peering furtively up the street to his own threshold... yes, he could see that the parlour-windows were both open. He came to a pause now, hot and breathless from his rapid walking, and leant upon the pigsty-railing. That smell of pigs' urine, mingled, just as it was a year ago, with the smell of the flowering hedge, gave him a thrill of delicious sadness, and all Dorset seemed gathered up into it! Little wayside cottages, fallen trees, stubble-fields, well-heads, duck-ponds, herds of cattle visioned through the frames of shed-doors — all these things flooded his mind now with a strange sense of occult possession. They were only casual groupings of chance-offered objects; but as they poured pell-mell into his memory, across the reek and the jostling of those uplifted snouts, he felt that something permanent and abiding out of such accidents would give him strength to face the ink-stained classroom — to face the days and days and days — without his "mythology" and without Christie!

He must have been at the cellar-floor of misery when he licked with his mental tongue the filthy toe-nails of Mr. Monk.

And yet it was from that very beastliness that he discovered the fact that beyond all refutation an actual portion of his mind was *outside the whole astronomical spectacle*!

More heavily than ever now did he lean on that railing, while the pigs, to whom all human heads were the same, grunted and squealed for their bucket.

Then he straightened his back, waved his hand to the disappointed pigs, and moved on.

He had hardly taken a step when he suddenly thought of Poll's Camp. What was it? An entrancing bird's note made him stop again and glance up the road to where the great ash-tree extended its cool, glaucous green branches against the pearl-soft sky.

Another yellow-beak! It had been a thrush last year. Were Gerda and Lord Carfax listening to this liquid music as they ate their Pimpernel cakes?

Fool! Fool! Fool! It was not in the tree at all. Oh, he had known it all the while! In the deepest pit of his stomach he had known. It was the girl herself. The blackbird's notes were issuing from that open window. It was Gerda's whistling. That strange power had been given back to her at last!

For a second he just abandoned himself to the beauty of the sound. It was this pearl-soft day itself, consummated, incarnated, in flowing drops of immortal ichor!

Then a queer transformation automatically took place in him. His ripened "soul," that magnetic cloud about him, drew close to his body like a garment of flexible steel. His muscles contracted, like those of a feline animal stalking its prey. His whole personality became a tense, bent bow of cold, vibrant jealousy, the string pressed taut, the arrow quivering.

Hunching his shoulders, his stick held by the middle — but he had no thought of either Hector of Troy or William of Deloraine! — he ran across the road and advanced stealthily and rapidly along the pavement. His gaze was fixed on the dark aperture of the window through which the whistling came. He intended to *see*, at least one good second, before he *was seen*!...

Yes. He had known it. He had known it far down in his consciousness all that long day! His glance, when he reached the window, was swift, decisive, devastating. It lasted less than a third of a second; and then he drew back and shuffled out of sight against their neighbour's railings.

The teacups had been used, the cakes eaten. And there, seated in the low chair by the side of the littered tray, was Lord Carfax, with a look of the most sun-warmed aplomb that he had ever seen on a human countenance; and there, seated on his knee, with her lips pursed-up and the expression of a radiant infant upon her face, was Gerda... whistling... whistling... whistling!...

"Ripeness is all." The words seemed to come into his mind from nowhere... to come into his mind from that region, whatever it was, that was *not* the universe!

They certainly had not their ordinary meaning for him, as he recoiled from what he had seen. They meant that the lords of life had now filled his cup — filled it up to the brim. Little had he known how much this girl's devotion to him had come to mean. Christie was his horizon; but this girl was the solid ground beneath him. And now the ground had moved!

Like a man who sees his foothold cracking between his feet, and, instead of hurrying forward, looks down, in curious interest, one foot on each side of the crevasse, at a disturbed beetle scrambling up one of the edges of the chasm, Wolf stood on the pavement outside the pig-dealer's house and stared at the shed across the way.

If only she hadn't let him take her on his knee! How *interested* all the people of his life would be that she had let him take her upon his knee! He felt as if Carfax had come into his life for this sole purpose alone — to take Gerda upon his knee! How he could see the nodding heads of all the people of his life, as they glanced at one another *displaying their interest* in what had happened!

Carfax had saved the man on the Waterloo steps. At least he had saved Stalbridge! Carfax had paid Christie five times their value for the books in the shop. Carfax had condemned Urquhart to a harmless dotage. And now, with the crumbs of Pimpernel's cakes strewing the tea-table, Carfax had restored to Gerda her unique gift.

Bob Weevil had had to be cajoled into that bedroom before he grew daring. "Lords in London" had none of these Blacksod scruples. To Carfax it was nothing... a trifle, a bagatelle... and yet it was pleasant... to feel the warmth of a girl's body pressed against him, while by his glowing sympathy he gave her back her youth, gave her back the life that she had lost in her twelve months with a priggish schoolmaster!

Wolf found it necessary at that moment to act in an almost jaunty manner. He balanced his stick under his arm — a thing he had never done before; and he thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets — a gesture that was completely unnatural to him. He began moving along the pavement towards the town; but when he found himself opposite Mrs. Herbert's door, he remembered... he must have been instinctively turning to her, like an outraged cub to its dam... that his mother lived now above her grand new shop!

It was at this point that he realized that he must find some immediate purpose... something that it was *imperative* for him to do. As his eyes fixed themselves upon the green hedge opposite him, he became aware, through a small children-made gap, of the amazing gold of the meadow beyond. Why, the field was full to the very brim of golden buttercups! It was literally a floating sea of liquid, shining gold!

He felt drawn towards the meadow by a bodily necessity, as if he had been a sick dog seeking certain particular grass-blades by the side of the road! Nothing at that moment short of physical force could have prevented him from climbing through that gap and entering that field. In the stunned condition of his emotions, his actions were obedient to the crude craving of that bodily necessity. The automatic movements of his muscles necessary to reach those yellow flowers followed one another with the inevitableness of water seeking water.

Once in the field, it was just as if he were wading through golden waves. And then he suddenly remembered that it was into this very field that he had flung Mukalog. What a shining mausoleum for that little demon!

He couldn't resist the distraction of fumbling about at random with his stick among the buttercup-stalks. What if he *should* by some crazy chance, just at this juncture, stumble upon the obscene idol? How would those long weeks of exposure to the weather have affected it?

While all these notions were pursuing one another over the surface of his mind, like criss-cross ripples over a wharf-brimming tide, something else within him was thinking: "In a few minutes I shall be entering that parlour and shaking hands with Carfax. In a few more minutes Carfax will have gone off to his train, and Gerda and I will have been left alone." He suddenly ceased fumbling in that golden sea with the end of his stick. There was nothing else for it but to take up, like a camel with the last straw laid upon his hump, the swaying burden of his life! "Carfax will probably stay over Sunday. He'll be infatuated. Her whistling will hold him like sorcery. But on Monday he'll take his train... and I shall go back to the School; and everything will be as it was before." But then he remembered the visitor's arrangement with Stalbridge — how the ex-waiter was to meet the seven-o'clock train at Ramsgard.

"No! By God, I believe he'll clear off as he said! He's not a fellow to play fast and loose with a hired servant."

He began walking to and fro now, with a firmer step, across that field. Back and forth he walked, while the sun, fallen almost horizontal, made what he walked upon seem unearthly. Buttercup-petals clung to his legs, clung to the sides of his stick; buttercup-dust covered his boots. The plenitude of gold that surrounded him began to invade his mind with strange, far-drawn associations. The golden ornaments, tissue upon tissue, leaf upon leaf, covering the dead in the tomb of Agamemnon, the golden pilasters of the halls of Alcinoüs, the golden shower that ravished Danaë, the golden fleece that ruined Jason, the cloud of gold in which the doomed Titan embraced Hera, the flame of gold in which Zeus embraced Semele, the golden fruit of the Hesperides, the golden sands of the Islands of the Blest — all these things, not in their concrete appearances, but in their Platonic essences, made his mind reel. The thing became a symbol, a mystery, an initiation. It was like that figure of the Absolute seen in the Apocalypse. It became a *super-substance*, sunlight precipitated and petrified, the magnetic heart of the world rendered visible!

Up and down he went, pacing that field. He felt as if he were an appointed emissary, guarding some fragment of Saturn's age flung into the midst of Blacksod!

"Enjoying the sweet light of the sun... deprived of the sweet light of the sun," these phrases from Homer rang in his ears and seemed to express the only thing that was important. Carfax taking Gerda upon his knee, Urquhart begging Tilly-Valley for the Sacrament, his mother borrowing from Mr. Manley, Roger Monk trimming Redfern's grave — all these human gestures presented themselves to him now through a golden mist, a mist that made them at once harmless and negligible, compared with the difference between being alive and being dead!

With his face turned westward, as he stared in his march at the great orb of the horizontal sun, which by reason of the thin screen of clouds that covered it was no more dazzling to his eyes than the periphery of a full moon, he realized that long ago, at Weymouth, he had had an extraordinary ecstasy from the sight of the dancing ripples of the wide bay turned into liquid gold by the straight sun-path.

“Was it sunrise or sunset?” he wondered; but he could not remember anything beyond that dance of gold and the rapture it caused him.

The deeper the enchantment of the moment sank into his being, the clearer became his conclusion with regard to the whole matter.

In the recesses of his consciousness he was aware that a change had taken place within him, a rearrangement, a readjustment of his ultimate vision, from which he could never again altogether recede.

That sense of a supernatural struggle going on in the abysses, with the Good and the Evil so sharply opposed, had vanished from his mind. To the very core of life, things were more involved, more complicated than that! The supernatural itself had vanished from his mind. His “mythology,” whatever it had been, *was dead*. What was left to him now was his body. Like the body of a tree or a fish or an animal it was; and his hands and his knees were like branches or paws or fins! And floating around his body, was his *thought*, the “I am I” against the world. This “I am I” included his new purpose and included his will toward his new purpose. “There is no limit to the power of my will,” he thought, “as long as I use it for two uses only... to forget and to enjoy! Ha, old Truepenny, am I with you at last? Air and earth-mould, clouds and a patch of grass, darkness and the breaking of light... Ay, it is enough! And with this as my background, why can’t I be as heathenly ‘good’ as Gaffer Barge? My will can do *anything*, when I limit it to ‘forget... enjoy.’ ”

And there suddenly came upon him, as he thought of these things, the memory of another blundering mystic, another solitary walker over hill and dale, who in his time, too, discovered that certain “Intimations of Immortality” had to take a narrower, a simpler form, as the years advanced!

“But there’s a tree, of many one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them spoke of something that is gone.”

Increasingly as he stood there, quite motionless now, did the golden sea around him clarify his thoughts. “I must have the courage of my cowardice,” he thought. “I can never be brave like you, old Truepenny; but I can plough on and I can forget.” He dug the end of his stick resolutely into the roots of the grass, into the grave of Mukalog; and there slid into his mind an incident from a visit he had paid long ago to Weymouth... *before Christie had ever gone there....*

He was drinking tea alone, drinking it from a particular china “set” belonging to his grandmother, a “set” called Limoges. Beside him was a book with a little heap of entangled bits of seaweed lying upon it, which he was separating and sorting. There came a moment when he suddenly realized that the book, beside which was his teacup and upon which was the seaweed, was “The Poems of Wordsworth.” A thrilling ecstasy shot through him then. In a flash he associated the heightening of life that came from his tea-drinking both with the magic of the floating rock-pools where he had found the seaweed and with the magic of Wordsworth’s fluctuating inspiration; and there came upon him a sense of such incredible loveliness, “interfused” through existence, that he jumped up from his chair and began rapidly pacing the floor, hunching his shoulders and rubbing his hands together....

That experience came back to his mind now. “If I can’t enjoy life,” he thought, “with absolute childish absorption in its simplest elements, I might as well never have been born!”

And then there came over him a feeling that he could never have expressed in definite words. It was as if an intangible residuum of all the emanations from all the places in town and country through which he had passed, hovered about him now, like the sea-smell of those seaweeds about that book!

From this feeling his mind reverted easily enough to the thought of death. “Death, the sweet sleep; death, the heavenly end,” he repeated. And as though the words had been the burden of an old sentimental song, he felt something within him respond to them with a melting nostalgia....

Then, as he turned eastward, and the yellowness of the buttercups changed from Byzantine gold to Cimmerian gold, he visualized the whole earthly solidity of this fragment of the West Country, this segment of astronomical clay, stretching from Glastonbury to Melbury Bub and from Ramsgard to Blacksod, as if it were itself one of the living personalities of his life. “It is a god!” he cried in his heart; and he felt as if titanic hands, from the horizon of this “field of Saturn,” were being lifted up to salute the mystery of life and the mystery of death!

What he longed to do was to plunge his own hands into this Saturnian gold, and to pour it out, over Mr. Urquhart, over Mattie, over Miss Gault, over Jason, over all the nameless little desolations — broken twigs, tortured branches, wounded reptiles, injured birds, slaughtered beasts — over a lonely stone, on which no moss grew, in the heart of Lovelace park, over a drowned worm, white and flaccid, dropped from the hook of Lobbie Torp into some Lunt pool, over the death-pillow of old Mr. Weevil, deprived now of his last conscious gluttony, over the lechery of the “water-rat” himself, so pitiful in its tantalized frustration! All... all... all would reveal some unspeakable beauty, if only this Saturnian gold were sprinkled upon them!

Reversing the position of his stick in his fingers as if he scrupled to touch this golden sea with anything but its handle, he did his best to turn this new clairvoyance upon the knot of his own identity. Hardly knowing what he was doing, he moved up close to the back of the pigsty; and as he swung his stick by the wrong end, its handle brushed the tall weeds that grew against the shed.

“It’s my body that has saved me,” he thought; and as if to assure these patient senses that his spirit was grateful, he abstractedly pinched his thigh above the knee with his left hand.

Behind the pigsty! It seemed to him odd that he had lived here a whole year and had never seen this familiar shed from the back. It was queer how he always shirked reality, and then suddenly plunged — plunged into its inmost retreat! Behind the pigsty! It was only when he got desperate that he plunged into the nature of human beings — that he got behind *them*!

Ay! How coldly, how maliciously, he *could* dive into the people he knew and see their inmost souls... from behind, from behind! Poison and sting... the furtive coil and the sex-clutch; yes, a spasmodically jerking, quivering ego-nerve, pursuing its own end — that was what was behind everyone!

Behind the pigsty! How often had he visualized every single person of his life, in some treachery of meanness! How often had he caught them in some incredible posture of grotesque indecency! Oh, it was his own mind that was diseased... not Nature. Well, diseased or not, it was all he had! Henceforth he was going to take as the talisman of his days the phrase *endure or escape*. Where had he picked up that phrase? Behind a workhouse? Behind a madhouse?

Between himself and what was “behind” the Universe there should be now a new covenant! The Cause up there could certainly at any minute make him howl like a mad dog. It could make him dance and skip and eat dung. Well, until it *did* that, he was going to endure... follow his “road,” through the ink-stains, and endure!

His eye happened to catch sight of a large grey snail with its horns extended, ascending the tarred boards of the shed. It had just left a pallid dock-leaf that spread itself out against the boarding, and to which its slime still adhered. His mind rushed off to thousands and thousands of quiet spots, behind outhouses, behind stick-houses, behind old haystacks, behind old barns and sheds, where such grey snails lived and died in peace, covering docks, nettles, and silver-weed with their patent slime! How often had he hurried past such places with hardly a glance! And yet their combined memory reconciled him more to life than all Roger Monk’s flower-beds.

By God! He must be crafty in dealing with these modern inventions! He must slide under them, over them, round them, like air, like vapour, like water. *Endure or escape!* A good word, wherever it was he had picked it up.

Well, never mind the motors and the aeroplanes! King Æthelwolf was at rest, staring up at that fan-tracery. It only needed an adjustment... and he could be as much at peace in life as that king was in death!

Was Carfax making love to Gerda now, all soft and yielding and relaxed, after her whistling?

Everyone had to *feel* according to the fatality of his nature; but who was he to make pompous moral scenes?

Alone! That was what he had learnt from the hard woman who had given him birth. That every soul was alone. Alone with that secret bestower of torture and pleasure, the horned snail behind the pigsty!

Endure or escape. He must spread the wisdom of that word over all the miserable moments that were to come.

Oh, Christie! Oh, Christie!

Well, he must go in and face those two now.

He took up his stick firmly and securely by its proper end, and for a few paces moved forward blinking, straight into the circle of the sun, as it aimed itself at him over the rim of the world. Then he swung round, scrambled through the gap, and hurried across the road.

“I wonder if he *is* still here?” he thought as he laid his hand on the latch of the gate. And then he thought, “Well, I shall have a cup of tea.”

THE END

A Glastonbury Romance (1933)

This novel was first published by Simon & Schuster in the USA in 1932 and in Britain by John Lane of The Bodley Head, a year later. It is the second book in the ‘Wessex Novels’ series, which also includes *Wolf Solent* (1929), *Weymouth Sands* (1934) and *Maiden Castle* (1936). After the commercial success of *Wolf Solent*, Powys was able to retire from the relentless and exhausting lecture circuit and buy an old farmhouse in upstate New York, where he could dedicate his time to writing. It was at his beloved ‘Phudd Bottom’ — the name he gave to the farmhouse — that he wrote the lengthy novel over a period of more than a year.

A Glastonbury Romance is set in the town of Glastonbury, Somerset and the surrounding areas. It focuses on the differing and often opposing views of what the characters believe Glastonbury should be or what it should become in the future. There are contrasting visions, many representing the ideological, political and social movements of the period. There are numerous clashes between groups and individuals as they attempt to impose their desires on the town. One prominent and fascinating figure in the novel is the Mayor of Glastonbury, John Geard: a mystic obsessed with exploiting the town’s medieval mythology and connection to the Holy Grail. It is a complex work, brimming with symbolism and myth, conjuring a complex web of people and ideas.

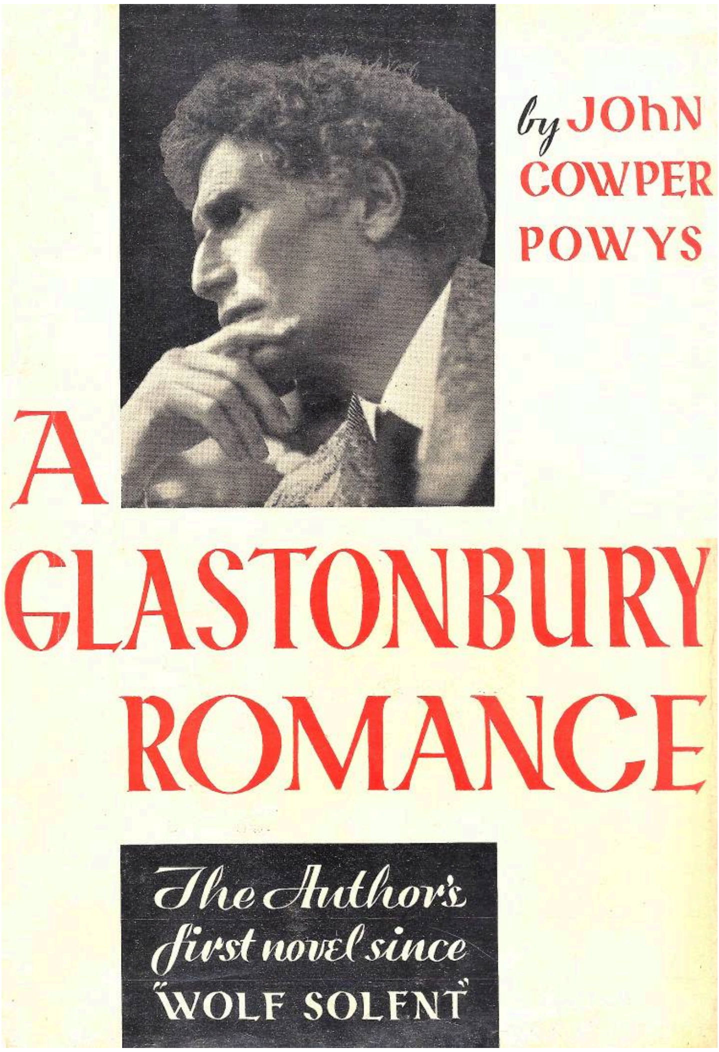
by JOHN
COWPER
POWYS
A
GLASTONBURY
ROMANCE
The Author's
first novel since
"WOLF SOLENT"

The first edition

Glastonbury, c. 1910

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Phudd Bottom, the author's New York state home, where he wrote this novel

TO

My youngest sister and oldest god-daughter

LUCY AMELIA PENNY

“Bet y march, bet y guythur.
bet y gugaun cletyfrut.
anoeth bid bet y arthur.”

“A grave for Mark, a grave for Gwythur,
A grave for Gwgawn of the ruddy Sword,
Not wise (the thought) a grave for Arthur.”

BLACK BOOK OF CARMARTHEN (Trans. JOHN RHYS)

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

It is an exciting and disturbing experience for an old writer to make a serious effort to put into words his long-considered conclusions as to what makes a good romance, or, to express it a little differently, what a properly widened, properly deepened, properly rounded off romance should be; and when these conclusions are brought by him into direct connection with a romance written by himself it is indeed a dive into risky and tricky waters. And at this point a crucial question crops up: What about fashion in literary moods and in their expression? Ought an old writer to try to translate into the conscious movements of his mind as his mind works today what of necessity were the more spontaneous and more instinctive workings of his mind as his mind worked when he was writing this particular romance?

The whole thing is a deeply interesting psychological problem; and I want at once to put to my readers the bold and sweeping question: “Is this ticklish business of ‘translation’ from the mood of my mind when I wrote *A Glastonbury Romance* to the mood of my mind in which I am now re-introducing it necessary at all? Why not defend it, explain it, struggle to justify it, just as if it were now being published for the first time? “Because”, some of you will reply at once, “because you, the author of this lengthy novel, are not the only mind in the world that has changed in this last quarter of a century. The mind of the world has changed. The mind of what we call the ‘Reading Public’ has changed.”

Well, yes! I do admit and confess all that; and as a re-introducer of this tumultuous tale of a quarter of a century ago I must do my utmost to see it and feel it in relation to those lasting characteristics of my whole temperament and nervous system which do not change with the form or expression of passing ideas. What I must try to do now is to hover round this book and dart at it like an extra large specimen of those curious insects we used as boys to call “hoverers”, and which my young Sherborne friend Hugh Hill Bell, who was killed if I am not mistaken in the Boer War, used to “collect” as if they had been butterflies.

O what psychological secrets deep almost as life I keep coming upon more and more richly as I play the part of one of Hugh Hill’s “Hoverers”, and why my Concise Oxford Dictionary doesn’t entomologize that word I cannot understand, but the secrets I discover at once as I play the “hoverer “ have to do with the very pith and quick of this enquiry.

I began by talking about “translating” our mental tone of the past into our mental tone of the present. Well! This playing the part of one of Hugh Hill Bell’s “Hoverers” round *A Glastonbury Romance* has taught me that all attempts at any such “translation” only confuse the issue. In criticising as much as in inventing we have to strip and dive naked into the element in which we are immersing ourselves whether it be earth or air or fire or water. No! I have learnt already in my critical hoverings round *A Glastonbury Romance* that every novelist is almost as different from every other novelist as any man is different from any woman. The style of all writers, worth as we say their salt, differ basically, fundamentally, inherently from one another. And this difference goes down to the marrow of the bones of their character. For instance, I have been assured that both Cardinal Newman and Joseph Conrad suffered pain rather than enjoyed pleasure in polishing their perfect paragraphs: whereas you have only to read half a page of any book of Anatole France to get the feeling that the art of composition was to him an intensely enjoyable undertaking.

Yes, I have already discovered by playing the “hoverer” round *A Glastonbury Romance* that, in the kind of novel into which I fling my whole nature, I work almost unconsciously as far as life and reality and nature and human character are concerned; while I remain most vividly aware of the particular books and particular writers and particular friends who have influenced me in my work. I am in fact — another insect-model you see! — a born book-worm turned novelist or fabulist. As a book-worm I have devoured with a greed beyond what anyone could call critical and with an enchantment and intoxication that was like being drugged all the novels of Scott and Dickens and Dostoievsky and Balzac, and Hardy and Henry James.

These novels I have read over and over again and I know them only a little less well than I know the poetry of Wordsworth and Keats and Matthew Arnold and Edgar Allan Poe, and Paul Verlaine and the essays of Charles Lamb and Walter Pater. Yes, I have discovered by hovering round and round this long romance about Glastonbury and the Grail that my talk about "translating" my mood when I wrote it into my mood as I now re-introduce it is wholly misleading.

I had to plunge then into discovering or inventing the sort of Picture of Life that fascinated and enthralled me the most; a Picture of Life for which I was unconsciously indebted to my own temperament and consciously indebted to books, that is to say to a certain selection of favourite books. What, in writing *A Glastonbury Romance*, I derived from any sort of calculated and deliberate observation of real life is completely negligible. I am as much a doting devotee of fiction as any "Slip-Shoe-Lovey" of the poet Masters or any Dolly-Tearsheet of the poet Shakespeare. In our dormitory at school I always had under my pillow some paper-bound sixpenny Harrison Ainsworth, for the devouring of which I used to wake up long before anyone else. And now as I hover round *A Glastonbury Romance* I can see that it is *not* the work in any sense of "an observer of real life."

What, in fact, does this long book attempt to describe in its somewhat tumultuous and chaotic manner?

Nothing more and nothing less than the effect of a particular legend, a special myth, a unique tradition, from the remotest past in human history, upon a particular spot on the surface of this planet together with its crowd of inhabitants of every age and of every type of character. What has made the tradition of the Grail so absolutely different from all other Christian Legends and Myths is that it is so near, so close, so vibrantly akin to eating and drinking and love-making and even to voiding our excreta. In its long history in contact with our heroic pitiful human life it has succeeded in establishing itself both as a reality touched by the miraculous and as a miracle based on reality. It must also be noted — and this has happened to only a very few other phenomena in this staggering dimension of the multiverse — that of the Grail, now that it has been accepted as an impenetrable mystery, has found its way into that Elysian realm of what we can only call *the poetry of our race;* and being once acclimatised there, and, if I may be permitted the expression, autochthonized there, and indeed become a recognised "resident alien" there, from the international sphere of universal metaphysical magic, it has not only stained, dyed, impregnated the atmosphere of this particular spot but has associated itself with every detail of its local history.

No! It has already become clear to me as I play the part of that encircling and darting insect to whom my concise dictionary has refused the honour of a proper species-name, that my first idea of deliberately trying to translate the "thought-frame" of one epoch of my life into the "thought-frame" of another epoch of my life, or of my "reading public's" life, is a misleading idea. In these delicate and difficult problems, whether literary or psychological, we've just got to plunge and dive and have done with it.

We’ve got to swim like a fish, to burrow like a mole or worm, to fly or to hover like a bird or an insect, and finally to take the substance, as best we can, of a chameleon-like salamander, so as to bathe freely at the risk of our sanity in the most dangerous element of all.

What drew me at first, do you ask, to Glastonbury and to King Arthur and to the Grail? Not, you can imagine any pathetic neophytish craving to copy some pure-hearted Sir Galahad.

My father being Vicar of Montacute whose own wooded “mons-acutus” was in full sight of Glastonbury Tor and only some ten miles away was himself obviously my most natural incentive for undertaking such a quest; but any man, in what you might call youthful middle-age, beginning to exchange the platform for the pen and whose favourite personal enjoyment of books reached a climax of perfect satisfaction only when, mixing together in reckless oratorical disarray treasure-trove from such contrarious magnetic mines as Scott and Dostoievsky, Walt Whitman and Walter Pater, Hardy and Edgar Allan Poe, would I should think by a sort of instinctive obedience to Atropos, the oldest, frailest, yet most inexorable of the Three Fates, have struggled to make the Grail the loadstone he needed to give some sort of rounding off to his scuffled, shuffled, scurried, and somewhat chaotic excursion into the complicated journeyman’s job of composing a long romance. Even the hovering and peering activity of my insect-like alter-ego took a teasingly long time in discovering the simple truth that what really allured me about the Holy Grail were the unholy elements in both its history and its mystery; in other words the unquestionable fact that it was much older than Christianity itself. Christianity instinctively clutched at it as an ideal receptacle for the blood of the Redeemer; but it has other levels of reception in its sacrosanct grillage, and it remain a dedicated symbolic centre for all those primordial cosmic “fetishes” which are the broken, baffled, but ever-returning visions of some sort of conscious identity after death, visions that hint indeed et strange degrees of consciousness in a world which, though as material as you please, remains, with all its offspring, insubstantial as the stuff of dreams.

No, No! All the feverish struggles, all the frantic wrestlings with the mystery of life, such as the obdurate elements of which life is composed forever challenge and forever escape, are inherently of the same spirit. Age does not wither them nor the passing of time stale them. In old Welsh and old Irish and old Highland mythology, ages before any saint or Saviour of our present Faith appeared in Glastonbury or ascended that Tor which my father used to point out to me from the slopes above our home at Montacute, the earth-goddess had her cauldron of the food of life safely guarded in our Island of the West, where Kronos still awaits under forest heaped upon forest and mountain piled upon mountain his final release from the tyranny of Zeus, and where that other cauldron, the cauldron of rebirth, alternates between salvation and destruction as the fatal zodiacal cycle revolves on the pivot of the everlasting mystery.

As I felt about the book when I wrote it so do I feel about it now. Its heroine is the Grail. Its hero is the Life poured into the Grail. Its message is that no one Receptacle of Life and no one Fountain of Life poured into that Receptacle can contain or explain what the world offers us. From the sands and the waters, from the reeds and the waters, of the East Coast, we may pass as my own Norfolk-born mother passed, to the mysterious stones of Stonehenge and the not less mysterious Vale of Avalon.

Born myself midway between the Ouse of *her* county and the Stour of *his* county, I was sufficiently “Derbyshire-bred” till the age of seven to possess and to have deliberately indulged that “weakness in the head” which is absolutely essential to a writer of romances. For you cannot compose an intimately and indigenously exciting romance — as I learnt at school from a clever and fastidious boy called "Squit Harrison", who first introduced me to the author of *The Count of Monte Cristo* — without the presence not only of some sort of chorus of a lively and diverting simplicity, such as a group of children delirious with the delight of *not* being in school, but also of some lonely and extravagant fanatic of a fantastic originality who has something about him of a crazy pantaloon and also something about him of an inspired dervish! For it is essential to weave into the innermost warp and woof of such a tale the tapestry-complication of a Mephistophelean contest Between the Power of Order and the Power of Disorder so that a crack can appear in "the thick rotundity" of the world of convention, through which the terrible possibilities of mortal tragedy are for a moment realised and the "danse macabre" of the chthonian divinities made for a moment audible!

What I aimed at when I wrote this book a quarter of a century ago — though it feels to me as if it were three-quarters of a century ago — was to convey a jumbled-up and squeezed-together epitome of life's various dimensions. Whether they ever are condensed to this tune in *real life* I had not then, and have not now, the remotest idea. The influences that have made it necessary for me to talk and write, and I was just at the bridge over my life-stream between the former and the latter mode of earning my living when I composed this book, can be reduced to two-animal sensations and poetical impressions.

Apart from my parents and my brothers and sisters, I have been all my days so much of a "medium" for so many swarms of invisible things— "medium" is the epithet, if we can turn a noun into an adjective, that my old friend Louis Wilkinson always applies to me — that the dominant human influences in my life are few. There are however two persons, both men, whose influence has affected the whole of my literary life. One of them is the Roman Catholic philosopher, W. J. Williams, author of a book called: *Newman*, *Loisy, and the Catholic Church*. The other is the no less original Doctor of Medicine in Chiswick Bernard Price O'Neill. The personalities of these two men have deeply influenced all my best fictional writing, and from my own point of view the fiction I have written is worth much more than my lay-sermons. But not only apart from my parents, my brothers and sisters, and these two above-mentioned men, I have been especially lucky to have been able to share my brother Theodore's and my brother Llewelyn's friendship with Louis Wilkinson, whose pen-name is Louis Marlow. He was at school with Theodore and at Cambridge with Llewelyn, and is our oldest family friend.

But it remains that of all our Wessex writers I am the most hopelessly and incredulously bookish. Yes, I am an incorrigible bookworm with a desperate mania for trying to write the sort of long romances I have always loved so intensely to read. And after all, unlike my father, I am not a native of Wessex. My native river is neither a Norfolk river, as my mother's was, nor my father's Stour, but the Derbyshire Dove. Returning therefore to this particular romance, what I am attempting to do now in re-introducing it is what I attempted to do when I originally wrote it, namely to catch something, however faint, and whether it be Christian or Heathen, of the flavour and fragrance of the Grail itself. No, no! The Christian Faith, whether Catholic or Anglican or Lutheran or Baptist or Independent, has no monopoly of this mystery. Like Walter Pater's Mona-Lisa-Madonna, it is not only "older than the rocks", or older than all the land and all the sea across which it moves and over which it hovers: it is older than the minds of men, older than the beauty of women, older than the worship of the gods, older than the orbits of the stars.

The Grail has its counterpart in the mythology of Greece and in the oldest heathen legends of Wales and Ireland. There are intimate correspondences between it and the traditions that reach us from both the extreme East and the extreme West. It changes its shape. It changes its contents. It changes its aura. It changes its atmosphere. But its essential nature remains unchanged; and even that nature is only the nature of a symbol. It refers us to things beyond itself and to things beyond words. Only those who have caught the secret which Rabelais more than anyone else reveals to us, the secret of the conjunction of the particular and extreme grossness of our excremental functions in connection with our sexual functions are on the right track to encompass this receding horizon where the beyond-thought loses itself in the beyond-words.

The Grail is older than Christianity as it is older than Glastonbury Tor, Whether we shall find the beyond-life of which it is a symbol when we perish, or whether we shall vanish with it into oblivion, we know not and perhaps will never know. But from reading Homer and Shakespeare, and from that incongruous and disgustingly humorous intermingling of the excremental with the sacramental of which Rabelais makes so much, we can arrive, at least that is the faith which I try to advocate in *A Glastonbury Romance*, at an acceptance of our human life in the spirit of absolutely undogmatic ignorance. Whether death is a waking from one dream to another, or a total snuffing-out and entire obliteration, we simply do not know. In either case the symbolism of the Grail represents a lapping up of one perfect drop of noon-day happiness as Nietzsche in his poignant words would say, or as Nature herself, according to the hint given us by Goethe, whispers to us in more voices than at present we are able to hear, or to understand when we do hear.

JOHN COWPER POWYS,

Corwen, 1953.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE ROMANCE

JOHN GEARD, SECRETARY-VALET to the late Canon William Crow; later Mayor of Glastonbury.

MEGAN, his wife.

CORDELIA and CRUMMIE, their daughters.

PHILIP CROW, Glastonbury industrialist.

TILLY, his wife.

JOHN and MARY CROW, cousins to Philip and to each other.

ELIZABETH CROW, daughter of the late Canon Crow; aunt of Philip, John, Mary and

PERSEPHONE SPEAR, wife of

DAVE SPEAR, half-brother of

NELL ZOYLAND, wife of

WILL ZOYLAND, bastard son of

THE MARQUIS OF P. father of

LADY RACHEL ZOYLAND.

EDWARD ATHLING, yeoman farmer and poet.

EUPHEMIA DREW, elderly spinster and Mary Crow's employer.

TOM BARTER, Philip Crow's manager.

OWEN EVANS, Welsh antiquary.

MAT DEKKER, Vicar of Glastonbury.

SAM DEKKER, his son.

DOCTOR CHARLES MONTAGU FELL, a disciple of Epictetus.

BARBARA, his sister.

TITTIE PETHERTON, a cancer patient.

RED ROBINSON, formerly foreman at the Crow Dye-works.

NANCY ROBINSON, a cousin of Red, Tittie's nurse.

PENNY PITCHES, servant at the Dekkers'.

ABEL TWIG and BARTHOLOMEW JONES ("Number One" and "Number Two"), old cronies.

ISAAC WEATHERWAX, gardener at the Dekkers' and Euphemia Drew's.

LILY and LOUIE ROGERS, sisters; housemaid and cook at Miss Drew's.

TOSSIE STICKLES, Elizabeth Crow's servant.

NANCY STICKLES, a devoted disciple of Mr. Geard.

MOTHER LEGGE, procuress.

YOUNG TEWSY, doorkeeper at Mother Legge's "other house."

BET CHINNOCK, a madwoman.

JENNY MORGAN, Philip Crow's former mistress.

"MORGAN-NELLY," their unrecognised little daughter.

FINN TOLLER, alias Codfin.

ELPHIN CANTLE, a boy-friend of Sam Dekker's.

PAUL TRENT, Solicitor, a philosophical anarchist.

JOHN BEERE, Solicitor.

ANGELA BEERE, his daughter.

JACKIE JONES, SIS, BERT COLE members of "Morgan-Nelly's" robber band.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

NOT A SINGLE scene, or situation, or character, or episode in this book has been drawn in any respect, or in any sense whatsoever, from real life. All are pure invention; and the author is absolutely unacquainted with any living individual or with any existing industry in the Glastonbury of our time. The only two persons, and *they* only misleadingly and remotely, in any way connected with the author's experience, are Canon Crow and the London Architect; and of these the former does not appear till after his death, and the latter only in his buildings, which themselves are entirely imaginary.

The character in this book Philip Crow is an entirely imaginary figure. The author first wrote the book many years ago and was wholly unacquainted with any persons who controlled Wookey Hole Caves. Philip Crow does not represent in any way any person now or at any time connected with the management or ownership of the Caves.

VOLUME ONE

THE WILL

AT THE STRIKING of noon on a certain fifth of March, there occurred within a causal radius of Brandon railway station and yet beyond the deepest pools of emptiness between the uttermost stellar systems one of those infinitesimal ripples in the creative silence of the First Cause which always occur when an exceptional stir of heightened consciousness agitates any living organism in this astronomical universe. Something passed at that moment, a wave, a motion, a vibration, too tenuous to be called magnetic, too subliminal to be called spiritual, between the soul of a particular human being who was emerging from a third-class carriage of the twelve-nineteen train from London and the divine-diabolic soul of the First Cause of all life.

In the soul of the great blazing sun, too, as it poured down its rays upon this man's head, while he settled his black travelling bag comfortably in his left hand and his hazel-stick in his right, there were complicated superhuman vibrations; but these had only the filmiest, faintest, remotest connexion with what the man was feeling. They had more connexion with the feelings of certain primitive tribes of men in the heart of Africa and with the feelings of a few intellectual sages in various places in the world who had enough imagination to recognise the conscious personality of this fiery orb as it flung far and wide its life-giving magnetic forces. Roaring, cresting, heaving, gathering, mounting, advancing, receding, the enormous fire-thoughts of this huge luminary surged resistlessly to and fro, evoking a turbulent aura of psychic activity, corresponding to the physical energy of its colossal chemical body, but affecting this microscopic biped's nerves less than the wind that blew against his face.

Far nearer to the man's conscious and half-conscious feelings, as with his overcoat buttoned under his chin and his fingers tightening upon stick and bag he moved to the station entrance, were the vast, dreamy life-stirrings of the soul of the earth. Aware in a mysterious manner of every single one of all the consciousnesses, human and subhuman, to which she has given birth, the earth might have touched with a vibrant inspiration this particular child of hers, who at twenty minutes after twelve handed up his ticket to the station-master and set out along a narrow dusty March road towards Brandon Heath. That she did not do this was due to the simple fact that the man instead of calling upon her for help called habitually upon the soul of his own dead mother. Jealous and exacting are all the gods, and a divided worship is abhorrent to them.

John Crow had given a hurried, suspicious sideways glance, before he left the platform, at the group of fellow-travellers who were gathered about the heap of luggage flung from the guard's van. They all, without exception, seemed to his agitated mind to be attired in funeral garb. He himself had a large band of crape sewn upon his sleeve and a black tie. "I'm glad I ran in to Monsieur Teste's to buy a black tie," he thought as he met the wind on the open road. "I never would have thought of it if Lisette hadn't pushed me to it at the end."

John Crow was a frail, thin, loosely-built man of thirty-five. He had found himself a penniless orphan at twenty. From that time onward he had picked up his precarious and somewhat squalid livelihood in Paris. Traces of these fifteen years of irregular life could be seen writ large on his gaunt features. Something between the down-drifting weakness of a congenital tramp and the unbalanced idealism of a Don Quixote hovered about his high cheek-bones and about the troubled droop of his mouth. One rather disturbing contradiction existed in his face. There was a constant twitching of his cheeks beneath his sunken eye-sockets; and this peculiarity, combined with a furtive, almost foxy, slant about the contraction of his eyelids, contrasted disconcertingly with the expression in the eyes themselves. This expression resembled one particular look, as of a sea-creature without a human soul, that Scopas gives to his creations.

A cold blue sky and a biting east wind were John Crow's companions now as he took the bare grass-edged road towards Brandon Heath. The raw physical discomfort produced by this wind, and the gathering together of his bodily forces to contend with it, soon brought down by several pegs the emotional excitement in which he had left the train. That magnetic ripple in the divine-diabolic soul of the creative energy beyond space and time which had corresponded to, if not directly caused, his agitated state, sank back in reciprocal quiescence; and the physical tenseness and strain which he now experienced were answered in the far-off First Cause by an indrawn passivity as if some portion of that fount of life fell under the constriction of freezing. The soundless roaring of the great solar furnace up there in the vast ether became, too, at that moment worse than merely indifferent to the motions of this infinitesimal creature advancing into the bracken-grown expanses of the historic Heath, like a black ant into a flowerpot. The man's movements now became weary and slow, even though he caught sight of the words "To Northwold" upon a newly whitewashed signpost. Humming and roaring and whirling in its huge confluent maelstroms of fiery gas, the body of that tornado of paternity concealed at that moment a soul that associated John Crow not only with such beings as neglected to invoke its godhead but with such beings as in their malicious rational impiety positively denied it any consciousness. Among all the greater gods around him it was the soul of the earth, however, that remained most jealous and hostile. It must have dimly been aware of the narrow and concentrated feeling, exclusive, misanthropic, which John experienced as he approached the home of his dead mother. And thus as it shot quivering vibrations through the greenish-yellow buds upon the hawthorn bushes, through the tender white blossoms upon the blackthorn, through the folded tremulousness of the fern fronds and the metallic sheen of the celandines, to John Crow it refused to give that exquisite feeling of primordial well-being which it gave to the rest. Why, thinking of his mother, he felt so sad, was a strange fact beyond this man's analysis. How could he know that mingled with their awareness of wet, green mosses, of dry, scaly lichens, of the heady-sweet odours of prickly gorse, of the cool-rooted fragility of lilac-coloured cuckoo flowers, of the sturdy swelling of the woolly calices of early cowslips, of the embryo lives within the miraculous blue shells of hedge-sparrows' eggs, the thoughts of the earth-mother throbbed with a dull, indefinable, unappeasable jealousy of a human mother?

Bending his head a little above his tightly buttoned greatcoat collar, John Crow began to recall now certain actual moments of his recent nights with young Lisette and old Pierre. These moments as he butted his way against this bitter east wind came to him impregnated with the subtle smells of a Latin Quarter street. He saw the neat frippery of Lisette's front room. He saw the grotesque photograph of himself taken by a photographer in a street booth at Saint-Cloud upon her mantelpiece. He saw her absurd muslin curtains, tied with great bows of green ribbon. He saw the big, cracked mirror with the little, carved Cupids at either corner, from one of which the gilt had been chipped, revealing scars of bare wood, black as if they had been burnt in a fire. He saw these things against the far grey horizon, where as a child he had been so often told to look for the great towers of Ely Cathedral, visible across leagues and leagues of level fens. He saw them against old, stunted, lichen-whitened thorn trees. He saw them against the curved, up-pushing, new-born horns of the sap-yellow bracken, protected from the wind by the dead husks of last year's mature ferns, and crouching low, like the heads of innumerable mottled snakes, the better to leap at the throat of life. He saw them against the reddish gnarled trunks of intermittent clumps of Scotch firs and against the scuttling white tails of the rabbits and the hovering wings of solitary kestrel-hawks. And over and over again he said to himself, "Philip will have had all Grandfather's money, of course. Of course Philip will have had all Grandfather's money."

At one point, when he came to a place where Brandon Heath seemed to gather its personality together and to assume a scrutinising, haughty and inquisitive look, as much as to say, "Who, in the devil's name are you, you dog-faced foreigner?" in reply to this look of Brandon Heath John muttered a sulky defiance and ejaculated aloud, as if to let the place know that he was more than a common tramp: "I shall make Philip give me a berth at Glastonbury." He had been on foot now for about an hour, and he had been walking fast too; for the bite of the cold air seemed to give an energy of demonic malice to his defiance of the wind, of the sun, of the hostility of the earth. He had begun to notice too that the heath scenery was transforming itself by degrees into ordinary farm scenery, when he heard a motor car coming up fast behind him.

He stepped hastily to the grass by the roadside and without the least idea as to why he did so stood stock-still and stared at the approaching machine. "Nothing would induce me to take a lift," he said to himself. "It must be a good two hours still before the time."

The car, however, lessened its pace the moment he stood still; and as soon as it reached him stopped dead.

"Canon Crow's funeral, Sir?"

The driver’s voice had that peculiar up-drawing, up-tilting, devil-may-care intonation, no doubt derived from a long line of Danish ancestors, which renders the Norfolk tongue different from the speech of every other English county.

John Crow looked up at the speaker. There was something in the man’s tone that gave him a totally unexpected emotion. A lump of long-frozen tears began to melt in his throat, a frozen lump twenty years old, composed of all his memories of his childhood; composed of the image of his grandmother, reading to him in the low-ceilinged, old-pictured, old-brocaded Rectory drawingroom; composed of the image of his grandfather with his snow-white hair in short, wavy curls covering his round, brittle-looking skull, and his voice melodious as a great actor’s. Mingled with these came memories of the taste of a certain species of unusual pink-coloured strawberries that grew in the walled garden and the sharp, pure taste of red gooseberries that grew from near the manure heap there; and surrounding all these as if by an atmosphere of something still more intimately felt, there came over him, under the impact of that Norfolk utterance, an impression of acrid smoke, the smoke of burning peat, rising from innumerable cottage hearths.

“The funeral; Northwold; thank you very much,” John Crow replied in broken phrases; and his own voice was to him as the voice of one speaking in a dream. As he uttered the words his eyes glanced in a bewildered daze over the contents of the motor car. The back seats were all piled up with neat and very new travelling bags, canvas hold-alls, and bright rugs, from among which an elderly, gentle, majestic-looking woman smiled at him in an extremely reassuring manner.

“There’s room up here then, Mister,” went on the driver, after a hurried turn in his seat and a glance backward at the lady amid the pile of bags.

“That’s to say,” he added, with an appeal to a figure at his side, whose presence had hitherto escaped John’s notice, “unless you objects to being crowded, Miss.”

The pulse of time that followed this remark was one of the most singular in all John Crow’s experience. It was not, in feet like a pulse of time at all. It was like a perfectly calm and perfectly quiet sinking aside, into a region altogether outside the jeopardies and agitations of time. John and the young girl who was seated on the further side of the driver exchanged a long stare.

“You don’t mind, Miss, do ‘ee?” repeated the man. “ ’Tis a long walk for the gentleman; and the Canon would wish all that come to his burying to be treated proper.”

The nervous mouth of the young person he thus addressed which had mechanically opened, showing a row of long, strong, white teeth, shut abruptly, and her eyes, which had become large and round, became little dark-lashed slits in her sallow face. “Of course not,” she murmured in a low voice, making herself extremely small and pressing close to the man’s elbow.

John Crow walked round the rear of the machine and after a moment’s clumsy fumbling at the handle pulled the door open, clambered up, and sat down by the girl’s side. “All comfortable?” asked the driver. “Very, thank you!” came so simultaneously from both John and the young girl that it sounded incoherent. The man, however, started the car without further parley.

“Is my nephew expecting you to lunch?” came the pleasant voice of the majestic lady from amid the luggage. “I wonder if you are one of the cousins?” she went on. “There are really a terrible lot of us. And we shall all be here.” There was a pause during which the driver remarked that there wouldn’t be many of the local people either who’d stay away. “They respect

Canon Crow in Northwold more’n anyone would suppose, seeing how little he came out towards the end.”

“He speaks as if Grandfather were a snail,” thought the young girl.

“My father liked his books better than visiting,” the lady continued. “But he used to read beautifully at people’s bedsides. I’ve heard him do that often when I was little. Some clergymen have such poor voices.”

“I never heard’n read myself,” replied the driver thoughtfully. “Maybe ’twould have been better if I had. My dad brought me up chapel; and chapel I’ve stayed; though I’ve often thought ‘twere a pity. Chapel be all for salvation but it neglects the King’s Majesty ….”

“That’s where we used to look,” broke in John Crow suddenly, addressing the girl as if he had been completely alone with her, “for the towers of Ely!” He pointed with his hand over the wide horizon; and half rising from his seat strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of what he remembered. “Oh, it’s too late!” he added, and sank by her side. “These cars go quicker than pony carts. Grandfather used to drive a pony called Judy.”

“I’m beginning to think I know who you are,” resumed the elderly lady. “Aren’t you my nephew John who went to live in France?”

It was the girl who replied for him. “Yes, Aunt Elizabeth, he’s Cousin John. I knew him at once. You used to come with us sometimes yourself when John took me down the little river in the old boat. Don’t you remember, Aunt Elizabeth? He was with us that day we went to Oxborough Ferry, when Cousin Percy was there. Cousin Percy wouldn’t fish with worms! You *must* remember that, Aunt Elizabeth. She kept putting bits of purple loosestrife on her hook.” There was a nervous exaltation in the girl’s tone that her aunt did not miss.

“I knew Mary at once too,” John Crow said, turning round to address their relative, “but you used to be very busy when I stayed at the Rectory so it’s no wonder we didn’t know each other. *Dear* Aunt Elizabeth!” And with a rather exaggerated foreign gesture he stretched out his arm, and capturing the stout lady’s hand lifted it up to his lips. “I came every summer to Northwold, you know,” he said, and he remained for a minute leaning sideways and holding the hand he had taken. “And I came when he came,” cried Mary with an abrupt and awkward intensity; and she too turned and leaned back and took possession of her aunt’s other hand. Thus with their faces so close to each other that the girl’s hair brushed his cheek the two cousins, for an appreciable passage of time, clung to the elderly woman as if their mutual contact with her brought them closer.

And thus they entered the outskirts of the village of Northwold. It was Miss Elizabeth Crow who made the motion to release her fingers.

“ ’Tis like old times to see ye all back,” remarked the driver as his two front-seat passengers resumed their normal position. “It makes anyone wish he were brought up to Church. Us chapel-folk are less liable to be gathered together by funerals. When the Lord divides us, He divides us. But Norfolk gentry, all such as I’ve seen, and I’ve seen a deal o’n one way and another, are mighty tender over the family. Me own mother had five of us and I’ve got more nephies than I knows of, yet devil a one would I want to see coming up me steps. ’Tis as nat’ral to me to turn and run from a blood-relation as it is to some folks to hug ‘en to heart.”

“I am afraid human nature is much the same all the world over,” remarked Miss Elizabeth.

“So ’tis, Madam. So ’tis,” said the man, winking at John Crow. “If I were a cousin of the late Canon, not Ameriky itself would keep me from hearing Lawyer Didlington read the old gentleman’s will!”

They had reached the middle of the village at this point and the visitor from France laid his hand on the driver's elbow. "You can set me down here," he said.

"No, no," cried Aunt Elizabeth. "I can't allow that. I'll vouch for it that Philip will be glad to welcome you to lunch. He and my niece Tilly went ahead in the first car, leaving us detached females to follow with the luggage."

But the machine had stopped; and John, holding his bag in his hand, was already out in the road.

"There'll be quite enough of us all without me, Aunt," he said. "Good-bye for a time! As our friend here reminds us, we'll all meet in a few hours, when Lawyer What's-his-name opens Grandfather's will."

But Miss Elizabeth was destined to receive a much severer shock than the escape of her eccentric nephew.

"What are you doing, Mary?" she cried in consternation at the sight of her young niece rapidly following John Crow out of the motor car.

"I'm going to stay with Cousin John," she said. "We'll be at the service. You can tell Philip without fail we'll be at the service."

"But, Mary — you can't do that! What will Tilly say? What will Philip do? Mary — think! We want your help with Persephone and her husband. You know how Philip and Mr. Spear always work each other up. Mary, you really can't do this!"

Mary came close up to the window of the car through which her aunt was protesting. "It's all right, dear," she said. "Tilly will manage. You'll look after Dave Spear yourself and see that he doesn't make Philip *too* angry. You're always doing that sort of thing for all of us. Grandfather's servants are used to entertaining people. *They* won't run away, any more than we shall, before the will is read." The bitter east wind made the girl pull her black woollen scarf tightly round her neck. There was something in the *genius loci* of that Anglo-Danish spot that seemed to evoke all her contrariness. “You’re not Euphemia Drew, darling, so don’t try to be. It was to get rid of Miss ‘Phemia for a bit that I let Philip bring me. *I* know there’s nothing for me in Grandfather’s will! Be the darling you always are, Aunt, and explain to Philip. I swear I’ll bring Cousin John to the service in good time.”

In the startled pause that followed the girl’s appeal Elizabeth Crow’s mind flashed back to those days when she was indeed “busy” as John had said. She had outlived all her generation; and yet she was not even now an old woman. This came from being the youngest by many, many years of William Crow’s children. Ah! How her thoughts ran to her dead father. He would have no flesh and blood of his own to keep him company in that crowded graveyard. Mary’s parents were gone. Persephone’s parents were gone. John had scarcely known *his* parents. And not one of them lay in that place to warm the bones of the old man! Till she herself was brought there he must lie by himself. Their mother had died in a Swiss sanitarium and had been buried out there. Yes, Cousin John was right when he said she had been “busy” in those days. As she stared now at her rebellious niece in a sort of humorous helplessness all that old imbroglio of tragic difficulties patterned itself before her mind’s eye. The Crow family always had had a curious vein of gross, drastic common sense; and when her quarrels with her father reached an intolerable point she had simply cut the knot by leaving him alone and going to live with Philip. Thirty years ago she had gone to Philip, when this proud man was a mere boy, beginning his life at Glastonbury. She had achieved this separation with a secretive suddenness that puzzled everyone who knew her; and it flashed upon her mind now that something of this blind animal-like obstinacy had lodged itself in Mary.

“Better let her go,” she thought. “I don’t blame her for being attracted to this trampish fellow. The extreme opposite of Philip he is; and that’s enough for Mary. I don’t care if she does fall in love with him. Father did his best to shut *me* up and I’m not going to play that game with any other woman.”

Mary thought, “Dear old Aunt Elizabeth! She’s got that queer wrinkle in her cheeks at this moment which always means she’s at war with Philip. She’s *glad* I’m going off with John — just glad.”

The driver thought, “That young fellow will play upsidaisy with that young lady, soon as they’re out of sight! He’ll do it, sure enough. Look at’s eyes all gimletting through the lass. He’ll eat her up, I shouldn’t wonder.”

John Crow thought, “I’ll take her to Harrod’s Mill to see those big fish again. Yes, yes, I hugged her at the bottom of the boat on the ‘little river’ when she was eight and I was ten. Yes, I did! It was a Sunday afternoon I did that. It was drowsy that day; sunny and drowsy. I had rhubarb tart that day with a lot of cream. We went to Harrod’s Mill. We left the boat at the dam. We couldn’t get it over the dam. There were unripe blackberries round the dam that day.” Then all of a sudden a different figure from Mary’s rose up in his mind. “I believe it was Tom at the bottom of the boat,” he thought, “and not Mary at all!”

Such were the thoughts of four human skulls at that moment; but only to one mood out of all these did the great maternal soul of the Earth respond and that was to a sudden exultant sense of peace and deliciousness in Mary’s virginal breasts. Her conscious thoughts were all with Aunt Elizabeth and how that brave woman would deal with Philip’s anger; but as she stepped over to John’s side and kissed her hand at the departing car something seemed to stir within her like a warm wave that was at once fire, air and water and it shivered up from the centre of her being to the tips of her breasts.

As soon as the car was out of sight John and Mary glanced at each other with unembarrassed satisfaction.

"I was puzzling in my mind ever since you all overtook me how I was going to get you to myself, but now that I've got you," said John, "I don't care what we do or where we go."

"I care very much because I want to escape from everyone but you."

"Well, then! The first thing to think of is to find something to eat. Let's buy some bread and cheese at that Inn over there and see if they'll let us carry away a flask of port wine."

They went into the little hostelry and had no difficulty in obtaining exactly what he had visualised. The Inn lacked a signboard and John asked the girl behind the bar what its name was. "Name?" said the girl with that East Anglian rising inflexion that seemed to mount up to the last word of the sentence as if in a kind of optimistic chant or plain-song. "Dew ye come from far, 'tis Northwold Arms. Dew ye live in these parts, 'tis just the New Inn. The beer be the same dew ye be thirsty. 'Tis Patteson's best ale and brewed in Norwich."

It was at this point that John heard a voice in the interior parlour of this repository of Patteson Ale mentioning his grandfather's name. "They say in Rectory kitchen," said the voice, "that old man Crow have left all his money to that bloke from Glastonbury what preaches in Prayer-meeting." The voice became inaudible then. But presently John caught further words among which "Geard of Glastonbury" came clearly to him.

"May I leave my bag here for an hour or so?" enquired John of the barmaid. As the girl seemed unwilling to do more than murmur some further information about the quality of Norwich ale, he boldly got rid of the shabby, black object he was carrying, hoisting it across the counter with an abrupt swing of his long arm and dropping it shamelessly at the young lady's feet. "It's just possible — that I'll be staying the night here," he threw out, with a catch in his breath from this sudden muscular exertion.

"Single or double?" responded the girl, putting her bare elbows on the counter, staring gravely at Mary, and displaying a much livelier interest in her visitors than she had done before.

The cousins glanced triumphantly at each other. Nothing could have pleased them more at that particular moment than such a question. "Single — at present," he answered, giving the questioner the most foxy and whimsical smile she had ever received.

They were just leaving the place — the flask of wine in John's pocket and the bread and cheese in a neat parcel in Mary's hand — when several labouring men, laughing uproariously, pushed past them towards the bar. Norfolk, here too, showed its independent Danish blood. There was no obsequiousness towards "the gentry," such as would have been apparent in Kent or Surrey. One of the newcomers boldly addressed John.

"Relatives arrived for the funeral, I reckon? 'Tis as we all knew 'twould be. Canon were left lonesome enough when he were alive; but anyone would think the man were a Member o' Parliament now he be dead. Never have I see'd so many folk turn into them gates. Old Ben Pod at the lodge, who counts every wheel that passes— 'tis his only joy since he lost the use of his legs — must have broke his 'rithmetic in counting them."

"There won't be so many to count when *we* be put under sod," remarked one of the other men. " 'Tis because there's been Crows in England since King Canute."

"Since when?" cried the other. "There's been Crows in England since earlier than him. He be in History, he be; and this here family goes further back than History. Talking of families," he went on, "I hope your lady won't mind my saying so but it's singular how old customs abide in certain breeds. I don't know how near related to the Canon ye two be; but every man's child born in this place knows one thing about this family." He lowered his voice as he spoke. "There's not one of ye Crows when 'a comes to die, that has a son left to bury 'un. They be all sons' sons that lay 'un in ground. There must be Scripture for't; though why it should be as 'tis is beyond *my* conjecture. Some man of old time, amidst 'en, must have done summat turble … eaten his own offspring like enough, in want of kindlier meat … summat o' that … and ever since such doings they all outlive their sons. 'Tis a kind of Divine Dispensation, I reckon."

John and Mary, who had felt it impolite to desert the threshold where they had been arrested by this discourse, were now enabled to make their escape. For one second the phrase "Geard of Glastonbury" returned upon John's mind; but it was gone as quickly as it came.

"To the Mill, to the Mill!" he cried excitedly, and the two cousins hurried eastward against the sharp wind down the narrow, straight lane.

Harrod's Mill was approached, by its own drive, through a couple of open fields. They entered this drive through a gate leading out of the road to Didlington, just before the bridge over the River Wissey.

The wind was sharp indeed as they crossed these two big meadows; but there was a faint fragrance of sap-filled grass in the air and the sun was hot. Mary's ecstasy of mood increased rather than diminished as she walked by John's side, following his step with her step and even picking up a stick from the ground as she went along. This she did with the conscious desire to have some sensation of her own exactly parallel to that which her cousin enjoyed as he pressed the end of *his* stick into the ground. Mary felt that everything she looked at was bathed in a liquid mist and yet was seen by her for the first time in its real essence. It seemed to her that the souls of all living things flung forth their inmost nature that day in a magical rapture.

All things seemed anxious to let all other living things realise how they loved them. As for herself she felt she could have stroked with her bare fingers everything she looked at. The very wind, so keen, so bitter, that now blew in her face and tugged at her clothes; even towards it she felt a sort of tenderness! She seemed to divine that it felt itself to be hated by all the human beings it encountered; and she longed to disabuse it of this mistake.

At one moment she caught sight of a patch of small plants in the grass of the field whose leaves seemed to have a glossy texture and a greenish-whitish look that was familiar to her. “Aren’t those cowslips over there?” They both hurried to the spot. Yes, they were cowslips; but so early or so stunted were they that the tiny buds were barely yellow. John was immensely relieved that she did not incontinently snatch at these pale, rudimentary, brittle stalks, covered with tiny white hairs, like the forearms of young girls, and hand them to him or keep them in her dress as memorials of this hour. How often, in country excursions with his French friends, had he been railed at by them as a prig, a poseur, *un fou Anglais* for his diseased conscience in refusing to pick flowers.

Before reaching Harrod’s Mill-pond they came upon an old cow-shed, once black with tar, but now blotched with queer patches of a minutely growing moss, which in some places was green and in others the colour of rusty iron. Against the western side of this shed the grass was twice as tall as in the rest of the field and of a much more vivid green. The cousins surveyed this erection in silence for a moment, he leaning on his hazel-stick which was smooth to his hand, she leaning on the rotten bramble-stick she had picked up which was rough to her hand. Their hesitation was so humorously identical, that when they glanced at each other they smiled broadly, their white strong teeth gleaming in the sun.

“Oh, to the devil with it!” he cried. “It’ll get up again as soon as we’ve got up. It does from under the cows and we’re lighter than cows. Gome on, Mary — let’s have our feast!”

He clutched at her skirt from his seated position and almost pulled her off her balance. She slipped down, however, facing him, her legs drawn up under her, and at once began untying the parcel of bread and cheese, holding it carefully on her lap. High above their heads several larks seemed bursting their little bodies with their shrill canticle. Their song was stoical and continuous, with a kind of harshness in its quivering rapture. “Hark at the larks!” said John to Mary, watching the careful way she was dividing their viands. As a distributor of the bread and cheese both the woman in her and the young girl played their part. She made sandwiches for John and herself as if the two of them had stood back to back measuring their difference in size. He meanwhile pulled out the cork of the flask and held it out to her for her to take the first drink. Preoccupied with the sandwiches, she let him hold it till his weary wrist rested upon her knee. But as soon as she had put it to her lips he jumped to his feet again, murmured some kind of abracadabra and poured out what he told her was a libation to the gods.

When they had finished all there was of both food and drink, he produced a packet of Gold Flake cigarettes, and they smoked for a while, contented and at rest. But the larks had come down. The cold wind rendered their exultation intermittent.

“Those men were perfectly right,” said John. “It *has* become almost absurd, the way, from generation to generation of our family the older generation outlives the younger. When you come to think of it it’s quite unnatural that four cousins, Philip, you, myself, and Persephone should all be grown-up orphans; and the only child of Grandfather’s alive should be Aunt Elizabeth. And I’ll tell you another thing that’s queer too; not one of our parents is buried in the churchyard! How do you suppose *that* happened, Mary?"

"How do *you* know they're not buried there, Cousin John, when you've lived all your life in France?"

"Oh, I've watched the family, Mary! Don't you make any mistake. I've watched them like a hawk. I know exactly how much money. Grandfather's got. I know where every one of the uncles and aunts died and where they were buried. I could write a history of the Crows of Norfolk, I tell you, like Ranke's history of the Popes."

"They've never been very much," murmured Mary dreamily, changing her position and stretching herself out on the grass. "You're sitting on your coat, aren't you?"

"Yeomen, I fancy, for about five hundred years," said John. She lifted up her head to smile at him.

"I've never thought much of yeomen." Her next words came with a drowsy, luxurious querulousness as she let her head sink down again. "I wish he had been buried yesterday."

They were both silent for a couple of minutes. Then she pushed herself with her hands a little nearer him and took off her hat, flinging it on the grass a few paces off.

"I like your hair, Mary," he said, boldly twisting a wisp of it back from her forehead, round a couple of his fingers. "It's the nicest hair I've ever touched. It's just the right tinge of brown. I say, it's awfully full of electricity!"

"I expect you're a great authority," she said. Her remark was made as if it were simply a grave statement, free from all irony, and she went on in the same tone. "How many girls have you made love to, John, in your whole life?"

As she spoke she propped herself up a little and this time let her shoulders rest against his knees.

"God! My dear," he muttered, "do you think I count them? I'm not Ben Pod."

"I've never been made love to in my life," said Mary. "So I don't know what it's like. Does a girl get as much pleasure out of it as a man, John, do you think?"

"That's the oldest question, Mary, ever asked of an oracle. In fact it was first asked by the gods themselves."

"Tell me about it," said Mary. "I feel just as I did, asking you such questions when we went in the boat."

"They asked the greatest of all soothsayers," John informed her. "The old Teiresias; and do you know what he said? He said that in the act of love it was the woman who enjoyed it most." All the while he was speaking, he was indulging in a delicious feeling of pleasure because she *had* remembered the boat.

"I expect he was right," commented Mary gravely; and then, after a pause, "I think he was right," she concluded.

"The Queen of Heaven must have *known* he was right," said John, "for she was so angry that she turned him into a woman. Does it strike you that was a queer punishment?"

She fixed her brown eyes upon him. "Not at all, Cousin John. It seems a very natural punishment."

From a meadow remote from where they were and at present concealed by the shed there came to them at that minute the wild familiar cry of the lapwing.

"I've been wanting all the time to ask you, Mary," he recommenced, "whether you remember that day we couldn't get the boat past the dam —

the dam between the big river and the little river? You said just now that you'd never been made love to. Why! my dear, I've had a feeling of longing to see you again all my life since that day I hugged you and so on in the bottom of that boat. Do you remember that too, the way the boat leaked, and how fishy it smelt and the way I held you?" The queer thing was that once more, even as he said these words, the image of the boy Tom Barter rose up.

Mary frowned, struggling desperately to evoke the scene he described. She remembered the day; she remembered the difficulty with the dam; she remembered his pleasure as they leant over the rowlocks to watch the fish; she remembered her grandfather's anger when they came home; she remembered with a peculiar sweet sort of shame having asked him various questions; but the one thing she had completely forgotten was his having hugged her "and so on." A rather sad smile flickered across her face, a smile that she gave way to because her face was invisible to him. "You're sure you remembered right which little girl it was, John," she said, "that you hugged that day?"

Her words arrested his attention. He could not tell whether she was mischievous or grave because he could not see her face. "You mustn't tease me like that, Mary," he said. "You never once teased me in those days and I never once teased you. There's no need for us to be ashamed of being serious now any more than then."

He noticed that one of her hands began to pluck at the grass by her side but she made no reply to his words. "What *do* you remember, Mary," he said, "about that day at the dam?"

The silence that followed his words was like the silence of a field at the bottom of a mountain-valley, when the setting sun touches the flanks of a herd of feeding cattle.

Mary’s thoughts were like a rain of bitterness and a dew of sweetness gathered in the hollows of a tree-root. A brimming over from them all would have escaped and vanished if she had tried to express them in any sort of speech. The shame of those questions she had asked of little Johnny Crow was a sweet shame. That she had forgotten what he remembered was bitter to her. Could he be inventing? Could it really have been another little girl in another boat? How could she have forgotten whatever it was he did to her? “I must have been an imbecile,” she said to herself. “If he were to hug me now, *and so on,* I should not forget!”

His voice continued to murmur on over her head; and what was this? His wrists were under her armpits and his hands covered her breasts. He was holding them very still; but her right breast was beneath one of his hands and her left breast was beneath the other. That up-flowing wave which she had felt before seemed now to encounter a down-flowing wave. Every conscious nerve of her body seemed to be responding to his hands. Her jacket and her dress intervened, or he would have felt her heart beating. He probably did feel it beating! Her mind wandered for a second to the secluded drawing-room of Miss Euphemia Drew in the Abbey House at Glastonbury. Under the pressure of his hands she shut her eyes and leaning back in complete relaxation against his knees she gave herself up to an inner vision of the Abbey Ruins through those great windows. How often had she sat there in the late afternoon light in profound unhappiness watching the rooks gather about the tall elms and the shadow of the great, mutilated tower arch grow longer and longer upon the smooth grass! How she had come to hate Glastonbury and hate the Ruins and above all hate the legend of the Grail! Tom Barter agreed with her in all this. That had been the secret of her friendship with Tom. *That* and his having come from Northwold. “Mary — there’s a rabbit in the asparagus-bed! *Mary,* the ducks are in the garden!" Oh, how she hated Miss Drew sometimes — hated her almost as much as the Ruins. And yet how good the woman had been, putting up with her moods, her sulkiness, her sheer bad temper, treating her always more like a daughter than a companion. "I hope he won't kiss me or anything else," she thought. And then she thought, "I don't want him to take his hands away. I want him to go on like this, without a change, forever."

And John thought, "I'm English and she's English and this is England. It's more lovely to feel her little cold breasts under these stiff clothes, on this chilly grass, than all the Paris devices." And without formulating the thought in words he got the impression of the old anonymous ballads writ in northern dialect and full of cold winds and cold sword-points and cold spades and cold rivers; an impression wherein the chilly green grass and the peewits' cries made a woman's love into a wild, stoical, romantic thing; and yet a thing calling out for bread and bed and candlelight! "Lisette would not have the faintest shadow of the faintest notion of what I'm now feeling. England! England!" How small, how very small Mary's breasts were! Why, as he held them now they seemed like the cold cups of water-lilies, not like a woman's breasts at all! She wasn't a woman, this new-found Love of his. She was an undine out of Harrold's Mill-pond. Yes, this is what he had been secretly craving; so long! so long! In his foxy shifts, in his wanton driftings, in his stormy reactions against the life of a great city, in his pathetic escapes into those whitewashed villages with their orchards, barley fields, and church steeples, in his crazy, reiterated attempts to do something better than the wretchedest literary hackwork, in it all, through it all, he had been pining for a moment like this. Why, this girl was his very "other self." What luck! What incredible luck! He could *feel* her consciousness as he held her like this, holding her where a woman's identity, her very soul, must surely most of all lie hid! And her inmost consciousness was exactly like his own

— he knew it was — exactly like his own. “Oh, I needn’t kiss you or anything, Mary,” his thoughts ran. “We’ve met. We’re together. We’ve got each other now. It’s all done. Once for all it’s all done.” He moved his hands from her breasts and encircled her thin neck with all his fingers. He could feel the luxury of abandonment with which her chin sank on his knuckles and her head fell sideways. She was feeling exactly as he was feeling — only, as was right and proper, the reverse way. Oh, what magical expressions for the only things in love that really counted, were those old ballad phrases. Mary was not pretty. She was not beautiful. She had what the old ballads had. Yes, that was the thing. The best love was not lust; nor was it passion. Still less was it any *ideal.* It was pure Romance! But pure Romance was harsh and grim and stoical and a man must be grim to embrace it. Yes, it went well with cold March wind and cold rain and long chilly grass.

He released her neck and ran his fingers through her brown wavy hair. Mary always parted it in the middle and drew it back, each way. Mary’s forehead always seemed fullest just over each temple where there were little blue veins. Her nose was rather long and very straight; but it had wide, flexible nostrils, the nostrils of an animal who goes by scent. John’s restless fingers now began feeling over all her features, one by one, as if he had been a blind old man and she his unseen guide. It gave him a queer sensation, like touching the exposed belly of some delicate fish or bird, when he felt the pulses of her eyes beating under her tight-closed eyelids. He and she were both of them blind now. By God! And they both of them *felt* blind; and in the blind arms of chance. When he came to her full lips and her rather large mouth he hoped in his heart it would come upon her to bite his fingers. And she *did.* He drew his bitten fingers away and sucked at them dreamily. He struggled to his feet and catching her under the shoulder blades lifted her up. The feeling of her body in his hands excited his senses but he only gave her one savage hug, pressing her fiercely against him, his long bony hands gripping the front of her thighs. Then he let her go with an abruptness that almost flung her on the grass.

“It’s time to see the fish if we’re not going to miss the funeral,” he said.

They both picked up their sticks after that and went forward.

John Crow had forgotten how separated from the farm-house the mill-pond was. He had just begun to feel those fears of dogs and angry farmers common to all tramps and gipsies. But he was to be spared any agitation of this kind. The Mill stood by itself; and the face which it turned to the mill-pond was vacant of windows. It was a queer blind face, under its heavy East Anglian tiles. Mary and he soon found themselves leaning over the low stone parapet and staring into the huge deep pool …. “It’s the same!” “I remember!” “I remember!”

Their voices came simultaneously; and for one flash of a fragment of a second something in them held a wind-blown taper to a scene lost and buried more than twenty years. But from the depths of John Crow’s mind another image suddenly mounted up and another memory. Tom Barter! Tom Barter! It was more than once he had come here with Tom, a boy of his own age, the son of the Squire of Didlington; but the episode came back now with an overwhelming rush. What a heap of information about fish and about fishing Tom had known! And he had got the boat up those shallows and past the dam too … got it right into the “big river,” near Didlington bridge! John became very silent now, staring at the water and thinking of Tom. It seemed very curious, looking back at that far-off day, that there should ever have been any boy so strong, so capable, so extraordinarily nice to him as Tom Barter had been. He and Tom were exactly the same age. What had become of him?

“On one of those days,” he announced now to Mary, “I came here with Tom Barter. Do you remember Tom, Mary? He was probably the best friend I shall ever have!”

Their four hands were pressed against the parapet, palms down, and their two heads were close together. Mary moved one of her hands a little till it just touched one of his.

“Ye … es, I … think … I do,” she replied musingly. In her heart she said to herself, “I won’t tell him now that I know him quite well and that he’s working for Cousin Philip at Glastonbury.”

“Oh, you don’t remember him if you don’t see him *clearly*!” cried John emphatically. “Look at that big one, Mary, look at him rising there! It was that fish that brought him back to my mind. Directly I saw that big one I thought of Tom. He got the boat right up the dam that day, Mary, Tom did.”

“I … don’t … think … *I* was there that day,” said Mary in a low voice. And in her heart she saw two little boys standing exactly where they two were standing at this minute. Could it have been Tom, and not her at all, that he had hugged at the bottom of the boat? Boys no doubt are often shameless on long, hot afternoons!

“Right over the dam …” went on John Crow. “I can see his face now as he pulled at it. He must have taken off his stockings. The dam was all slippery with moss.”

“Damn the dam!” cried Mary in her heart. But she said quietly, “I think I remember him in church, John. He used to sit in the front pew. Or if it wasn’t your friend it was a great, big, strong-looking boy with curly hair and a freckly face. Yes, I think it *must* have been Tom.”

“Tom hadn’t freckles,” said John Crow with a faint touch of peevishness. There arose in his masculine brain an obscure annoyance with himself for having brought that boy into it at all. His vague thought, thus limned in the darkness, was that certain emotions were best kept separate! But this thought vanished as quickly as it came and both the man and the woman instinctively dropped the subject.

They dropped it without any feeling at all on his part and on hers only a faint obscure sense that she would have to confess sooner or later that this boy was now living at Glastonbury. Then they plunged into the deep pool together now with their eyes, their minds, and their souls.

There are few mill-ponds like Harrod's in all Norfolk and the sensation which these two returning natives got from looking into its depths was unforgettable by both of them. On its outer rim the water was of a pale, neutral colour, a sort of ashen grey, but as the eye moved from circumference to centre it got darker and darker; a faint bluish tinge mingled there with the grey and there appeared a sort of mysterious luminosity as if there had been a subterranean light at the bottom of the pool.

But what a thing it was to see those great fish, one after another, rise up slowly from the unseen depths, mount to the surface as if they were going to breathe the air, and then, with a reversion of their slow ellipse, turn back towards the depths again!

To the girl this sight was purely disinteresting — just objectively arresting like a flight of beautiful swallows — but to John, with his boyish memory of fishing-rods and predatory pursuit, there was a spasm of possessiveness in it, intense, disturbing, provocative, erotic. The girl satisfied no sense but that of sight as she watched these mysterious water-denizens, first sub-aqueous clouds, then vague darknesses, then noble fish-shapes, rising up and sinking down as if in the performance of some elaborate court ritual, the rules of which were as strict as in some water palace of the Oceanides! But John's grosser nature was not so easily content. A longing seized him, that seemed to carry with it some primordial phallic tremulousness, to grasp with his hands these slippery creatures, to hold them tight, to feel their fins, their scales, their sliding coolness, their electric livingness.

Making no attempt to analyse why it should have been that the sight of these alien beings, gliding upward, downward, with such intense and yet easy volition, should excite his desire, he moved instinctively behind his companion and slid his arms between her body and the rough fabric of the wall against which they leaned.

"You're like a cormorant," she gasped when she recovered her breath from the disturbance of his protracted embrace.

"Sorry," he muttered. "I couldn't help it. Curse it!" he added. "We've got to go, my dear, and quickly too! So say good-bye trout, or chub, or whatever you are! *I* don't know what you are!"

He caught her hand and pulled her away, as if he feared she might transform herself into one of those cold, slippery fish-shapes, and vanish forever into the bluish-grey twilight. As he led her off, his last glance revealed a gleaming circle of ripples. "There's a rise!" he murmured. "The only one we've seen, but we must hurry! I daren't look at my watch."

The tolling of the bell in the flint tower of the high-roofed Northwold church did indeed begin before they reached the first house of the village. The wind had dropped considerably and the strong sunshine, warming their bodies through all their clothes, combined with the motion of their rapid walk to throw them into a glow of delicious well-being. John felt so well satisfied with what life was offering him that his mind took a leap — unusual for him — into his practical future.

"I'm going to ask Philip to give me a job in Glastonbury," he said.

The girl found a secret vent for the rush of rapturous delight which this news brought to her by clutching the flapping edges of her frayed scarf and pulling them tightly round her neck.

"I'm a companion to an old woman there called 'Phemia Drew," she said eagerly. "Her house is what they call the Abbey House so I can see the Ruins from my bedroom."

"You owe your job to Philip, I suppose?" said John. "I decided before I left the rue Grimoire, that I'd ask him for a job there myself. So my English life will begin side by side with your life."

Her voice was decidedly strained as she asked her next question. "You're not married, are you, John?"

The tolling of the bell in the flint tower fell upon them at that moment like a long, bony arm thrust out of a coffin. He uttered a sardonic chuckle.

"If I *were,* my dear, she'd be a funny kind of Frenchwoman not to have tricked me out better. She *did* buy me this tie—"

He pulled out the object referred to and flapped it between his finger and thumb as they hurried down the street. "No, no — I'm not married. And now I've got hold of you I'm not likely to be—" he cast a foxy glance at her out of the corner of his slanted eyelids; a look such as a thievish schoolboy, with a stolen plum in his fingers, might throw upon the owner's daughter— "unless *you* would marry me!"

She gave him a dreamy, abstracted stare in answer, as though she had not heard his last words at all. Then she bit her lip with a little frown and turned away her head. When she looked at him again her face had cleared. "How lucky that Philip got the idea of bringing me here, John. I don't believe you'd have thought of Glastonbury if we hadn't met."

They had now reached the entrance to the churchyard; and they found they had to push their way through a crowd of villagers to get through the narrow gate. They made their way to where two clergymen were standing above a hole in the ground. The white surplices these wore fluttered a little in the wind, displaying at intervals the black trousers underneath. In front of these white figures, on the other side of the hole, all the relations were mutely assembled, the men in a sort of discreet trance, shamefacedly holding their hats, over which their heads were bowed; the women, much more self-possessed, throwing quick little glances here and there and fidgeting with the umbrellas, prayer-books and handkerchiefs which they held in their black-gloved hands. John and Mary advanced instinctively to the side of Miss Elizabeth Crow, who was the only one of the whole company to be showing any deep emotion. She was sobbing bitterly; and she held both hands, bare and empty, pressed against her face.

Quickly enough, however, when Mary reached her side, she realised who it was, and removing her hands from her face, gave her, through her falling tears and the convulsed twitching of her rugged cheeks, a sympathetic and humorous smile. Those were the only tears, that was the only smile, evoked from any human skull at the funeral of William Crow. This stalwart, stout lady, now so sturdily wiping away her tears with the back of one of her plump hands, was indeed, according to that queer destiny which the man in the New Inn had discoursed upon, the only child of the dead man left alive. All the rest of the company were grandchildren; or they were county neighbours. “She treated ‘un pretty bad in’s lifetime,” murmured one of the village onlookers. “ ’Tis too late to make a hullabaloo, now the poor man’s dead.”

The service had begun some while before John and Mary appeared upon the scene; so it was not very long before it was all over and the company trooping back to the Rectory. This was an easy proceeding for the simple reason that at the side of the churchyard opposite to the public entrance there was a private door leading into a portion of the Rectory garden; and not only so, but into that very portion of it, a walled-in courtyard, which surrounded the front entrance to the house.

It was in the large, old-fashioned drawing-room, that room that had made such a deep impression on the mind of the youthful John, that all the relatives were now gathered to hear Lawyer Didlington read the will. It fell to Philip Crow to act the part of host to everybody and also the part of the natural heir to his grandfather; although, as a matter of fact, no one except the lawyer himself had more than the vaguest speculative guess as to what the will was likely to contain. But Philip had so much nervous domination that he was the sort of person who always takes the lead in any group or on any occasion of importance; nor would an outsider have guessed for a second, watching the man's youthful energy, that in a couple of days from today he would be fifty years old.

The windows opened upon an enormous lawn which itself opened out into a field surrounded by trees. In the middle of the lawn was a great cedar tree. The windows almost reached to the floor of the room; and thus, with the lawn and with the field, entirely secluded from the outer world, the drawing-room itself became the inner sanctuary of "a great good place," a consecrated Arcadia. To the right of anyone standing at these windows and looking out, rose, behind a border of laurel bushes, the high, grey, flint nave of the church. Thus this room possessed that rare delicious quality that certain old chambers come to have that overlook scholastic quadrangles or walled-in college gardens.

It might, however, have appeared to an observer curious in antiquarian lore that compared with similar retreats there was about this scene in spite of the presence of the church something essentially heathen and secular. The disproportioned size of the Rectory and its great lawns compared with both church and village gave an impression of the existence on that spot — at least a *former* existence — of something high-handed and predatory. In other words there was displayed in all this sequestered felicity the same Danish tendency to profane self-assertion that has been noted in the character of the Northwold villagers. “Possess, enjoy, defy” might have been the heraldic motto of both rich and poor in this portion of East Anglia.

While the sexton was lazily and contentedly shovelling into the grave, on the top of the earth-covered coffin, all the good Norfolk clay, so auspicious for the growing of roses, that had been piled up at the foot of the hole — and be it noted that several lobworms and several lively little red worms, which are so irresistible to Wissey perch, went down into that hole with the clay — there hovered round the body in the coffin a phantasmagoria of dreamlike thoughts. These thoughts did not include any distaste for being buried or any physical shrinking, but they included a calm, placid curiosity as to whether this dream-like state was the end of everything, or the beginning of something else. Nerves of enjoyment, nerves of suffering, both were atrophied in this cold, sweet-sickly, stinking corpse; but around and about it, making a diffused “body” for itself out of the ether that penetrated clay and planks and grass-roots and chilly air, all alike, the soul of the dead man was obsessed by confused memories, and deep below these by the vague stirring of an unimpassioned, neutral curiosity.

William Crow was in his ninety-first year but he had never experienced such intense curiosity since his son Philip in *his* twentieth year had run away and married an unknown woman.

Up and down, up and down, these memories kept washing. Backward and forward they washed, they drifted, they eddied. And always, far beneath them, the root of curiosity stirred tremulously, like a lazily swaying seaweed, beneath an ebbing and flowing sea-tide.

The eyelids of the old, dead face under the coffin-lid were tightly closed; and the mouth, that eloquent actor’s mouth, was a little open; but what remained totally unchanged was the beautiful, snow-white hair covering the round skull on every side with curls as silky as those of a child.

The memories of this death-cold skull gravitated always towards the image of his long-dead wife. No emotion did they excite, not one tremulous flicker, either of love or hate; only upon each separate memory that calm curiosity turned its neutral gaze.

“A thoroughly mean man … that’s what you are, William, a thoroughly mean and cruel man! That sad look in your eyes that you always say is sensitiveness is really cruelty! That’s what it is. Just cold-blooded malicious cruelty … and sensual too, oh, wickedly, wickedly sensual!”

With the absolute calm of a botanist observing a plant did the curiosity in the soul of this corpse listen to this whisper of memory.

And again the voice of the proud lady out of her Swiss grave penetrated the Norfolk clay.

“Elizabeth Devereux to William Crow! I was a fool ever to marry such a person as you, William. Mother always said it was marrying beneath me.”

The mouth of the dead face fell open a little further and the terrible, unapproachable silence of decomposition deepened.

“My Philip’s son will be like his father,” the woman’s voice reiterated. “He’ll be all me! He’ll be a true Philip Devereux. He’ll have no touch of the Dane in him.”

The confinement of the coffin-boards was nothing to William Crow. The raw clay, rattling noisily down from the sexton’s spade, was less than nothing to him. To suffer from anything, to enjoy anything — he had forgotten what those words meant. Enjoyment, suffering? What strange, morbid by-issues of human consciousness were these?

But the voice of the woman began again; and that cold, disinterested curiosity stirred placidly to hear her words.

“Yes! You may look at yourself in the looking-glass as long as you like, William. That sad, weary look under your eyebrows, over your eyelids, is nothing but selfish cruelty … such as kills flies and torments people without hitting them! My family has always taken what it wanted. But it never stooped to spiteful tormenting. My father used to say that when Norman families stop ruling England, England will get soft and wordy and mean … just like you, William ….”

With impervious calm, as he listened to all this, did the soul of that passive corpse wonder vaguely whether this Devereux despotism was, or was not, the true secret of dealing with earth-life below the sun. It wondered too, with the same complacent indifference, whether the humming of these confused memories was going to lapse into what they called “eternal rest” or going to prelude some new and surprising change. Whichever it was, it was equally interesting, now that pleasure and pain were both gone. Annihilation — how strange! A new conscious life — how strange! What indeed the soul of the Rector of Northwold experienced, at that moment of his burial, was more like the Homeric view of death than anything else — only with more indifference to love and fame! Everything human in him was, in fact, subsumed in that primeval urge which originally lost us Paradise. The Reverend William, cold and stiff, cared for nothing except to satisfy his curiosity.

Meanwhile in the great Rectory drawing-room another and a far less disinterested curiosity was mounting up, mounting up to a positive suffering of tantalisation, as Mr. Anthony Didlington — looking so much like a character of Sir Walter Scott that you expected him, after every resounding period from his parchment document, to take a vigorous pinch of snuff — read the late Canon's will.

John and Mary had ensconced themselves on a small eighteenth-century sofa, that had the air of being the identical sofa that gave a title to Cowper's poem; and that stood back, behind the more pretentious pieces of furniture, near the furthest window.

In the most important place in the room sat Tilly Crow, Philip's wife, a small, trim, dark, little woman with a high forehead, carefully parted hair, black, beady eyes, and under her chin a colossal wedgwood brooch. Opposite Mrs. Philip, on the further side of the hearth where a warm fire was burning, sat Elizabeth Crow in her mother's little green velvet arm-chair which the great black satin dress of the portly lady filled to overflowing. Her face was weary and wistful rather than unhappy; but above and beneath her firmly modelled cheeks and rugged cheek-bones those quaintly indented creases were extremely marked, whose contractions, according to Mary, were an indication that there was trouble in the wind. Lawyer Didlington with sedate pontifical gravity sat on a high chair with his back to the largest window. Not a glance did *he* give at that gracious lawn, across the smooth surface of which the long afternoon shadows from lime-tree and cedar-tree were already falling.

Close to the lawyer's table, and taking not much more notice of the shadows on the lawn than he did, sat at another table, with writing materials ostentatiously displayed in front of them, Dave Spear and Persephone Spear. It might have been supposed that this young couple were desperately transcribing every detail of the late Rector's will; but this would have been an erroneous supposition. The papers which lay before them had been extracted from a battered leather case which now reposed on the carpet at their feet. The calculations upon which they were so absorbingly engaged, and which entailed the passing across the little table of all manner of pencil scrawls, had not the very remotest connection with what Mr. Didlington was reading with such careful and explanatory unction; unless indeed all human activities of a revolutionary character are to be regarded as having a relation to the rights of property.

Persephone Spear and her husband had in fact just come from a communistic meeting at Leeds and were proceeding to another one at Norwich before returning to Bristol where they lived. This matter of consigning Persephone's grandfather to his native Norfolk clay would not have allured them from a mile off if it had not been for the fact that there was the possibility of a strike just then at one of Philip's Somersetshire factories. Feeling a family interest in this event they had naturally got into touch with the leaders of the strike and were doing their best not only to give the event a communistic turn but also to use the accident of their relationship with him to win concessions from Philip.

It was a faint amusement to Miss Elizabeth, even in the midst of her sad thoughts, to observe how curiously unlike each other these two young revolutionaries were, and yet what a perfect unanimity existed between them. Spear was a short, humorous, broad-faced youth, with closely cropped fair hair and small, merry, blue eyes; while Percy was a tall, lanky maid of a brownish, gipsy-like complexion and with a mop of dusky curls.

Mr. Philip Crow himself had been, until the lawyer actually commenced reading, moving, like the energetic diplomat he was, from one to another of all these relatives; and even now, while everybody else was seated, he stood with alert, polite attention, leaning against the side of the big window with his back to the lawn and keeping his eyes fixed upon the old-world physiognomy of Mr. Anthony Didlington. No one could have denied to Philip Crow the epithet of handsome. He was indeed the only thoroughly good-looking one of all the assembled relatives; but his good looks were attended with so little self-consciousness and were so completely subordinate to his formidable character that they played a very minor part in the effect he produced. The man drove himself — you could see *that* in his hawk's nose, his compressed lips, his narrowed eyelids, his twitching brows — but he drove others yet more inflexibly, as was apparent from the roving intensity of his grey eyes, the eyes of a pilot, a harpooner, a big-game hunter — in a word, of a Norman adventurer who took, kept, organised, constructed; and who moulded *sans pitié* weaker natures to his far-sighted purpose.

John and Mary were so absorbed in whispering to each other as first one memory and then another stole into their minds out of the aura of that old room, some associated with the view outside the window, some with the furniture, some with the figures of their grandparents, that they had little attention to spare for any of the rest of the company. It is true that every now and then John did cast a swift, foxy glance, past the bowed heads of the two revolutionaries, at that great parchment document, with its official red seals, that Mr. Didlington held as reverently as a priest holds the Gospels at Mass. These hungry, furtive glances were the tribute he paid to all those excited expectations of incredible legacies, discussed at so many rue Grimoire suppers with Lisette and Pierre. But these greedy thoughts came quickly and went quickly! The seductive softness of Mary's long limbs, as she sat with crossed legs and clasped hands staring gravely at his face, made his already achieved good luck more precious than any ecclesiastical bequest.

It really seemed interminable, the list of plots and parcels of good English ground, inhabited and uninhabited, which, in various portions of Norfolk, William Crow had inherited from his thrifty yeoman ancestors.

Still it went on drawing itself out, this protracted list; and as yet no hint had appeared as to who was going to be the gainer by all this accumulation of properties, of which apparently the dead man had an undisputed right of free disposal.

The wind had quite dropped now. The shadows on the lawn were darker and colder. The few yellow dandelions that had escaped the gardener's shears had closed themselves up and looked — as dandelions do when near sunset — forlorn, impoverished, empty of all glory. A pallid radiance alternated with velvet-black shadows upon the trunk of the cedar; and over the daffodils in the grass and over the hyacinths in the flower-beds a peculiar chilliness, rising from a large hidden pond beyond the field, and not yet palpable enough to take the form of vapour, moved slowly from the edge of the distant shrubbery towards the house.

Philip's thoughts were like far-flung hooks piercing the gills of some monstrous Fate-Leviathan that he had resolved to harness to his purpose. He visualised his factory at Wookey Hole. He visualised those stalactites and stalagmites in the famous caves there and saw them lit with perpetual electricity. He remembered how he had stood alone there once by the edge of that subterranean river flowing under the Witch's Rock and how he had felt a sensation of power down there beyond anything he had ever known. "These Norwich investments are nothing," he thought, "these over-taxed properties are nothing. The three big mortgages are the thing! Forty thousand they'd sell for. He's left them to me — I feel it, I sense it, I know it. Besides, he promised Grandmother. He confessed that to me himself. What a good thing he died when he did! Never again shall I have to listen to that voice of his reading Lycidas. Old epicure! I can see him now, putting cream into his porridge and looking out so voluptuously across his garden! Living for his sensations! That's what he did, all his days. Putting cream into his porridge, reading his poetry, and living for his sensations. What a life for a grown man! The life of a frog in a lily-pond. Aunt Elizabeth is sorry now he's dead. But she didn't like it when Johnny Geard became the favourite. She very quickly cleared out. He must have fancied himself a lot over that. Must have thought he was converting a Methodist to the true doctrines. Old fantastical-brained, crochety ass! I shall rebuild the Wookey Hole plant entirely. That'll take about ten thousand. *That* will leave thirty thousand to play with. And by God! I'll play with it. Four thousand would take electricity beyond the actual known limits of every one of those caves. I'll do the plant for ten thousand and spend five on the caves. With five thousand I could electrify the bowels of the Mendips!" What Philip felt at that second of time when he imagined himself with all that electric power at his disposal, standing among those prehistoric stalactites, would be hard to put into rational human speech. The drumming of a meteorite travelling through space would best express it. "I … I … I … riding on electricity … I … I … I … grasping electricity … I … I … I … alone … all-powerful … under the Mendips … letting loose my will upon Somerset … my factories above … my electricity beneath …. I … I … Philip Crow … planting my will upon the future … moulding men … dominating Nature." His hard grey eyes began to soften a little and his gaze, leaving Mr. Didlington's face, turned itself towards vacancy.

"I shall have a completely new sort of boat made, to explore that subterranean river," he thought, "flatter than a barge, lighter than a canoe. I'll build an electric engine for it and I'll have myself floated under the Witch's Rock and I'll make them leave me there; and I'll have *that feeling* .... I'll make it work too. I'll have water power for my plant run by the buried river in the heart of the Mendips! I'll electrify the caves of the

Druids. I’ll carry electricity deeper under the earth than anyone’s ever done. How slowly this old ass reads!”

But Miss Elizabeth Crow, staring sometimes into the fire and sometimes out of the big window across the lawn, thought to herself, “I should have had an easier life if I’d put up with Johnny Geard and stayed with Father.” She remembered how she had first seen this Glastonbury ex-preacher whose mystical ideas got such a fatal hold on William Crow’s mind and on William Crow’s heart. She had been visiting her mother in Switzerland; and when she came back there he was — the Somersetshire revivalist, installed in Northwold Rectory! “How his black eyes gleamed as he listened to Father’s morning prayers! The man *was* fascinating in his own way. I can’t blame Father for liking him.” She could hear now her father’s resonant voice repeating the great poetical chapters in Isaiah. “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord’s hands double for all her sin!” And she could hear this charlatan interrupt — an unheard-of thing for a servant to do! — and beg for another chapter of sacred rhetoric.

Tilly Crow’s mind was neither conjuring up large legacies nor brooding over ancient grievances. It was occupied entirely with minute problems connected with the larder, the pantry, the kitchen, in her own home at Glastonbury. There was a certain shelf in the pantry that her housemaid always kept too crowded. Tilly Crow could see now a particular stream of light in which the sun motes were wont to flicker when she entered that pantry after breakfast. This light always fell upon a suspended dishcloth, different from the rest, with a little green border, which she kept for drying her best china cups herself when they had visitors. Then her mind left the pantry and made a journey of about a dozen feet to the larder. Here she saw with abominable vividness a bluebottle fly — she maintained a special and constant warfare against these — walking along the edge of a shelf where the butter and cheese were kept. Not being able to endure this image with equanimity she gave a sharp little shake of her head to drive it away and as Mr. Didlington began a long list of freeholds in the parish of Thorpe her adventurous mind took a daring leap to her Glastonbury drawing-room where it concentrated upon the faded pink ottoman wherein she kept her wools. “I must re-line the ottoman,” she said to herself. “There’s that rent that Elizabeth’s cat made. It always bothers me to see it. How sentimental Elizabeth looks, staring out of the window! Oh, I hope the Canon has left her enough money to go and live by herself in some nice seaside place!” At this point in Tilly Crow’s thoughts there came an image that she would have been very reluctant to put into words; but as a mere image in the void — brought to her by some housemaid of the air upon a silver tray — she gave herself up to it. This was the image of a solitary cup of tea carried up to her, with her letters, by Emma the cook, during a paradisiac holiday, when Philip — such was Tilly’s furthest reach of felicity — had gone to stay for a whole fortnight with Aunt Elizabeth, at that pleasant seaside place!

But what was this? What words of fatal significance had fallen from the lips of Mr. Didlington? By what incantation had this roomful of grown-up people been incontinently jerked upon their feet, protesting, exclaiming, jeering, enquiring, denouncing, arguing; and by no means speaking gently of their Grandfather Crow who, for all that he was one of the chief causes of their being alive upon the earth, seemed to have turned into a deliberate enemy?

“Does it mean that none of us get a penny — not even Philip?” whispered Mary to John.

"Not a penny," the man from Paris answered. "And what's more, Mary, I'll have to borrow ten shillings from you to get to Glastonbury."

"You'll want more than that," she returned gravely.

"No, I shan't. I'm going to walk. Ten shillings is what I want. Not more, not less. But I want it from you and you'd better give it me now if you've got your purse; for they're terribly excited and it's best to be on the safe side."

Mary fixed a very straight look upon him at this. But seeing that he was perfectly serious she moved back a little towards the window and nodded to him to follow her.

"How much money have you got left?" Mary whispered. He searched his pockets thoroughly and produced three shillings and fourpence. This sum he held out to her in his two hands as if she had demanded it of him. She shook her head. "Put it back," she said. "I'd better get some more for you. You can't walk all that way … I'm sure Aunt Elizabeth—"

He pulled her nearer to him, interrupting her words. The massive green curtain on the left of the window — for the winter curtains had not been changed yet — hung in bulging folds against his shoulder. Mary long afterward remembered how exactly like a certain Venetian picture she had seen somewhere his refined rogue's face looked against that background. "I'm not going to take a penny from anybody but you!" he whispered fiercely, with a malicious gleam in his eye. "I'll find you out at Glastonbury in a week or so — not longer than two weeks anyway — and *then* we'll see. I may sponge upon you like the devil *then,"* he added, giving the girl a quick, searching look. "I *have* sponged on girls before. It's a way of life that seems to suit me!"

Mary showed her strong white teeth in a schoolgirl grin. Turning her back to the room she drew out her purse and took from it three half-crowns, a florin and a sixpence. “Miss Drew,” she remarked, “doesn’t pay very much. Philip doesn’t give tips either. Aunt Elizabeth gave me this for pocket-money.”

It would have been clear enough to any close observer that Mary derived an exultant happiness from handing over her pocket-money to John in this childish manner. It would also have been clear that John’s feelings were equally those of a romantic lover and a sly, unscrupulous tramp.

“I’ll ask Aunt Elizabeth if you can’t sleep here tonight,” whispered Mary, as they turned away from the darkening window.

He made a wry face at her. “Don’t you dare!” he breathed. “I’ve got more than three shillings without touching your ten and I’ve left my bag at the Inn. I’ll make them give me a room and breakfast for two nights for that — you’ll see! I want to go with you to the big river tomorrow. We never went there together.”

Mary got red with excitement. “We *did,* John! You’ve forgotten but I remember. We *did* just once!”

Their dialogue was interrupted by Philip’s voice which was not raised, but which was lowered to such a key of indrawn intensity that it compelled attention.

He was now standing with his back to the fire, fronting Mr. Didlington, who, with his fingers inserted between the loose pages of this calamitous will, swayed heavily and limply before him, like an obsequious but surly seneschal whose account has proved faulty.

“The whole of … this … forty thousand … left absolutely to this man … and no chance … of legal action … *that* … in short … is the situation?”

Mr. Didlington began murmuring something in a husky, injured voice; but it was only the word “legacies” that reached the ears of John and Mary.

"Damn your legacies!" said Philip in the same tone. "Two hundred a year from the Norwich property to my aunt; and a hundred in cash to the servants. That's all of your precious legacies there are. The maddening thing is that it was Tilly and I who introduced this sly dog to Grandfather."

His voice changed a little and he looked towards his wife.

Tilly Crow had drawn up her thin legs in the great arm-chair and, with her hands clasped so violently in her lap that the knuckles showed white, stared at him with frightened eyes.

"Where *is* this thief, Tilly?" he said, in a much gentler voice. "Where *is* this holy rascal who has fooled us all?" The fact that he had displayed self-control enough to speak in a half-humorous tone was in itself sufficient to bring about the recovery of his equanimity. "Why," he finally remarked, looking round with the air of a monarch addressing his courtiers after the loss of a battle, "why doesn't someone fetch this good, religious man and let me offer him our united congratulations!"

"The furniture," murmured Tilly. "Did he say the furniture was to be divided equally? Does that mean, Philip, that we can't have the silver with your grandmother's crest on it? Ask them, Philip, ask them now! They *will* give us the silver, won't they? And the linen? We don't want any more furniture, Philip, but these girls *must* let me have the linen! Tell them we don't want any heavy furniture, Philip. Tell them we want the silver and linen."

Aunt Elizabeth herself rose heavily from her seat now. Her thoughts had been wandering away to Glastonbury, where thirty years ago she had been so fond of the youthful Vicar of the place, who had jilted her to marry a maid-servant. She completely disregarded Tilly and addressed herself to her nephew. "You are thinking only of your own affairs, Philip," she said sternly. She looked at him, as she spoke, without a trace of the respectful awe into which he had bullied the others. “Why don’t you and Tilly congratulate me on my two hundred a year?”

There was a weight of character in Aunt Elizabeth when she was on her feet and confronting her nephew that enabled her to reduce his importance and to reduce his loss of forty thousand pounds! Mary pinched John’s arm with delight and whispered to him something he could not catch. It was from the other young couple in the room, however, that the next word came. “Percy and I congratulate you, Aunt,” cried Mr. Spear.

“Yes, yes,” echoed Persephone, straightening her shoulders and tossing her head, “and we hope you’ll come out of the enemy’s camp now and listen to wisdom.”

Miss Crow moved towards them, attracted by something so kind in their tone that it surprised and disarmed her. “I’m in no enemy’s camp, Percy,” she murmured, putting her arm round the tall girl’s waist. “I am an old-fashioned woman, and very fond of my dear nephew and niece. I know nothing about politics — any more than Mary does,” she added, making an instinctive movement to bring the four young people together. John and Mary did approach her.

“If there is to be anybody’s wisdom thrust upon Aunt Elizabeth,” John threw in, “I think *mine* would suit her best.”

“What do you mean by that, Mr. Crow?” said young Spear, in an argumentative tone.

“Yes, what do you mean, John?” repeated Persephone. “You don’t mean that Dave and I would try and browbeat Aunt Elizabeth, to *force* her to see the light, do you?”

“The light, the light, the light, the light!” cried John suddenly with a convulsed face.

Aunt Elizabeth unconsciously started back a pace or two, dragging Persephone, whose waist she still held, back with her; for there was something about Percy's slender figure that provoked people to touch her and made it difficult to let her go.

But John's face smoothed itself out in a second and the humblest apologies flowed from him. "It's my French mischief coming out, Dave Spear," he said. "It's all acquired cynicism. Really, I love to think that there are people with strong convictions, people who know they are right, like you and Cousin Philip."

Philip's own voice broke into their talk at this moment. It had not failed to strike him that Aunt Elizabeth and the four young cousins, in their obvious indifference to the grotesque event of forty thousand pounds passing from the Crow family to the Geard family, had succeeded in ostracising him in a sort of moral solitude. He and his wife might go on quarrelling with Mr. Didlington over this fiasco. The others were civilised people, prepared to take a mere financial blow with becoming urbanity!

"Don't lump me and Dave Spear together," he interrupted, pushing his way between Aunt Elizabeth and Mary with jocular bluster. "Percy would never cook him another meal if she thought we had anything in common. To my pretty Perse I shall never be anything but a bloated capitalist, shall I?" And he also, just as Aunt Elizabeth had done, put his arm round the tall girl's slender waist.

"Cousin Tilly," cried Dave Spear, with a schoolboy grin on his broad countenance, "come and stop Philip from flirting with my wife!"

But Mrs. Crow, who had just rung the bell and had had a long whispered conversation with the maid who answered it, was herself at that moment upbraiding Mr. Didlington in a plaintive but penetrating voice. "She says that horrible man departed yesterday for Glastonbury. I suppose both of you knew that Grandfather had left him everything." She paused, and then turning to her husband, "Tea's ready in the dining-room, Philip," she said.

The lawyer made his way to the group in the centre of the room and allowed his answer to Tilly's shrewish attack to be a general professional reply to them all.

"It is true," he said, "that Mr. Geard was aware, just as I was aware, of the late Canon's intentions; and as his family live in Glastonbury it was natural and indeed suitable that he should proceed there at once to acquaint them with this very considerable bequest."

"Well, Didlington," returned Philip, looking round at the company, "I hope you will do my wife the pleasure of letting her pour out tea for you? Shall we go into the dining-room? Will you follow Mrs. Crow, Didlington?"

He opened the door and they all trooped out into the passage. Down this they moved, past the broad staircase where the walls were hung with some really valuable oil paintings selected by William Crow's great-uncle. Not far from this staircase was the front door, leading — through a pleasant conservatory — out into the courtyard. It was through this door rather than any other that Mr. Didlington now hastened to pass, picking up his hat from a marble table that offered itself conveniently to his attention.

"Have to get home, Crow. The wife expects me, you know, and it's quite a walk. If I stayed to tea with all you good folk I shouldn't be at Methwold till after dark."

Philip had the wit to see that Tilly's tactless outburst had really upset the worthy man. What wild creatures women are! He followed the lawyer out into the conservatory which was fragrant with heliotrope and lemon verbena. "You must forgive Mrs. Crow, Didlington," he said quietly. And then, as the man only nodded with a faint shrug of his shoulders, "The great point you've made clear," he went on, "is that the family has no case against this fellow? We should have no chance — eh? — not the ghost of a chance — of upsetting this will?"

Mr. Didlington gravely bowed and buttoning his overcoat with his free hand pensively picked a leaf from the lemon verbena with the one that held his stick.

"Not the ghost of a chance, eh?" repeated Philip.

The man straightened and looked him in the face.

"I am acting," he said, "for all parties concerned." He paused, and resumed with real dignity. "My position as executor is a difficult one. Mr. Geard recognises its difficulties. His departure for Glastonbury proves that he does so. I hope that there may arise no occasion for the introduction of further advice and Mr. Geard hopes so too."

"I warrant he does," thought Philip. But he only said: "I confess to be startled, Didlington. You must have expected us to be startled."

The lawyer continued crumpling up between his fingers the lemon verbena leaf. "Mr. Geard has been your grandfather's valet," he said, "his secretary, his confidant, and, I might say, if you'll permit the word, his friend, for the last ten years. No opinion you called in would advise you to contest the will."

Philip Crow bent down and smelt a heliotrope. "Won't you change your mind, Didlington, after all, and let my good wife give you a cup of tea? She was over-excited just now. It was a surprise, you know; and ladies always take things hard. I expect if Mr. Geard wasn't … hadn't been … well-known to us in Glastonbury as a rather trying local preacher, she wouldn't have felt—"

The lawyer shook his head. "In case there arose," he said, "in the mind of any of your family, a wish for further advice, I would like to point out that the late Canon's doctor, a good friend of mine, feels as I do, that your grandfather’s mind was never clearer than during the time he made this will. No reputable firm would take up this case, Sir, on the grounds of undue influence. Everybody knows — if you’ll allow me to be quite frank — that his family left the late Canon very much alone; and it is natural enough that under these circumstances—”

“Well — well — I’m afraid I must be getting back to my guests,” interrupted Philip coldly. “I wish you a pleasant walk home, Mr. Didlington.” He opened the door of the conservatory and bowed the man out.

No sooner had he entered the dining-room than Tilly Crow, peering at him round the great copper urn which stood on the table in front of her, with a little blue flame burning below it, cried out to him in a tearful, plaintive voice. “It was our own doing, Philip. That’s what hurts me most. Oh, why, why did we ever let that man go to him?”

“What kind of a man *is* he, this lucky wretch?” Percy Spear enquired, as the head of the family sat down at the end of the table.

“He was an open-air preacher who lived in Glastonbury, Perse,” Philip explained. “He was always out of luck and had a wife and two children. He was a nuisance to the whole town; and when your grandfather wanted a lay-reader, or someone who’d combine the duties of a valet and a curate, we packed him off to him. No one would have dreamed of *this* being the result.”

“Perhaps he isn’t a bad sort of chap after all,” remarked Dave Spear. “Did you ever see him, Mary?”

Mary shook her head.

“I suppose,” said John in a low voice, as if speaking rather to himself than to anyone in particular, “there is no way he could be persuaded to give up *some* of it?”

Philip gave him a swift glance of infinite disgust. “One doesn’t do that sort of thing in England, Mr. Crow,” he said, “not, at any rate, people in our position.”

“A will is a funny thing,” said Dave Spear meditatively. “A dead man arbitrarily gives to some living person the power that he has robbed the community of! The mere existence of a thing like a will is enough to prove the unnaturalness of private property.”

Aunt Elizabeth looked anxiously at Philip. “Don’t start a discussion of politics now, I beg you, Dave Spear,” she said.

“My quarrel with Spear,” interjected Philip in a low voice, “is not confined to politics.”

“What is it confined to?” cried Persephone sharply. “Don’t you begin teasing my Dave,” she went on, and as she spoke, she stretched out a long, delicious, young girl’s arm across the table and taking Philip’s hand in her own gave it a little playful scolding shake.

Philip caught her fingers and held them gravely, while he looked intently into her eyes. John saw the communist’s rather rustic countenance wince sharply while this magnetic vibration passed between the cousins.

“What puzzles *me* about all your theories, Mr. Spear,” began John, speaking rather rapidly, “is that they contradict the deepest instinct in human nature. *To possess* — doesn’t the whole world, for every one of us, turn upon this great pivot? Our philosophy, for instance, what is it but the act by which we possess the Cosmos? Our love? That surely is the quintessence of possession. And isn’t this asceticism which you people practice, this giving up of everything except the ‘bare essentials’ as you call ’em, isn’t it a sort of wet blanket thrown upon human nature, a sort of moral rebuke to the natural pleasures?”

“I think you will agree, Mr. Crow—” began Spear excitedly, but his wife broke in. “Let *me* put it to him, Dave!” she cried. “The point is this, Mr. Crow. We fully agree with you about the importance of a free fling of our whole nature towards happiness. But it’s just this that the capitalistic system interferes with! You are confusing two things. You are confusing natural, instinctive happiness and the artificial social pride that we get from private property. Under a just and scientific arrangement of society such as they have achieved in Russia, our human values begin to change. People feel ashamed of having money. It becomes a disgrace, like the reputation of a thief, to have more than the essentials. But everyone has a right to the pleasures that bring happiness. Everyone has a right to—”

“She means,” interrupted her husband, raising his voice to a very vigorous pitch, “she means, Mr. Crow, that everyone who works honestly and doesn’t live by exploiting others can have enough to enjoy their life on. The exploiting classes, of course,” here he nearly shouted, causing Tilly to give a quick glance at the door, afraid lest the servants should hear him, “must be *starved* out!”

The contrast was so great between the rosy face of this fairhaired youth and the fanaticism of his tone that John stared at him in astonishment. Into the darkening twilight, past all those dim faces sitting round the table, the fierce words “must be starved out” twanged like a bow-string.

Philip Crow from the end of the table cast upon the young revolutionary very much the sort of glance that some Devereux of the Norman Conquest would have cast upon some Saxon Gurth who had dared to challenge him as his horse broke through the brushwood with a raised quarterstaff. “You could starve *me* out, my son, if you won over the army and the air-force, but I assure you you’ll have one bloated capitalist you’ll never starve out.”

“Philip means our friend Mr. Geard, I suppose,” murmured Aunt Elizabeth.

“I mean Nature!”

Persephone gave vent to a rather uncivil whistle. “Nature?” she mocked. “What *are* you talking about, Philip?”

“Don’t you see, my good child,” he said quite gently, “that it’s always been by the brains and the energy of exceptional individuals, fighting for their own hands, that the world has moved on? What you people are doing now is simply sharing out what has already been won. *We* have the future to think of; or, as I say, Nature has the future to think of.”

The blood rushed to the face of Dave Spear and a misty film gathered in front of his eyes, so that what he saw of the room and the people in the room was a swimming blur.

“I can’t argue … with you …” he jerked out as if each word carried with it a streak of his heart’s blood, “but I know that … if the masses … the masses of workers … the real workers … got … got the machinery and the … the land and water … into their hands … a new spirit … not known before in all the history … of … of … of humanity conscious of its fate … would be stronger, greater, more … more … more god … more godlike than anything that your great selfish individuals have … have felt.”

In his emotion the young man had lurched to his feet, and had seized with his fingers a half-cut loaf of bread which he began squeezing spasmodically. Aunt Elizabeth stretched forth her hand and removed this object; but not before that particular gesture in this darkening room, with the damp, green lawn and the sombre cedar outside, had caught John’s attention as something symbolic. Long afterward John remembered that clumsy, bucolic figure leaning forward over the shadowy, unlit table and clutching that bread. With far more force than the slender Percy’s eloquence those awkward, blurted words seemed to carry the seal of prophecy upon them. A green-coloured gust of rainy wind came rushing across that spacious garden, came swishing and swirling through the laurel-bushes, came moaning through the cedar-boughs.

"Just touch the bell, would you, Mary, so that they know we want the lamp?" broke in the voice of Tilly Crow.

The coming of the lamp changed the whole mental atmosphere of that group of people. It brought their minds back from the vibrations of the ideal to the agitations of the real. As the round orb of light was placed in the centre of the great table there entered the devastating reminder that forty thousand pounds' worth of power over the lives of men and women had passed from this comfortable room, from this secluded lawn, into some little shabby domicile at Glastonbury.

"How many children has this lucky person got, Philip?" enquired Mary in a low voice.

"Two," was Philip's laconic answer.

"But didn't you say he was a nuisance?" persisted Mary Crow.

"Two great sprawling girls," sneered Philip. "I suppose they'll buy Chalice House; or try and get the Bishop to sell them Abbey House and turn out Euphemia Drew."

"Oh, I hope they will!" cried Mary.

"You hope they will?"

"I'm tired of Abbey House. I'd like the fun of seeing Miss Drew choose new wall-papers."

"I'm afraid you'll never get that pleasure, Mary," said Aunt Elizabeth. " 'Phemia was born in the Abbey House and she'll die in the Abbey House."

"It's all very well for you, Elizabeth," piped up Tilly Crow in a voice like that of a melancholy meadow-pipit, "you've got your two hundred a year."

"Yes, and I'm going to leave you in peace, too, Tilly, and *live* on my two hundred a year. I shall take one of those little workmen's cottages in Benedict Street that the town-council put up!"

Philip turned upon her with good-humoured bluster. "You'll take nothing of the sort, Aunt," he cried. "Why, those wretched socialistic cardboard toys don't even keep the rain out."

"It's simply disgraceful of you, Philip," threw in Persephone, "the way you do all you can to make the work of that town-council of yours so difficult."

"By the way," exclaimed Philip suddenly, disregarding her protest and speaking in a raised and carefully modulated voice, "where do you intend to sleep tonight, Cousin John?"

"Philip reads all our thoughts, you know," murmured Aunt Elizabeth. "He thinks you've got an eye to that big sofa in the drawing-room."

"There won't be any sleeping on sofas in a house where *I* am!" cried Tilly Crow sharply. Her voice sounded so exactly like the miserable *tweet-tweet* of a bird soaked in a windy rain that John felt disarmed and sorry for her.

"Don't be afraid, Philip," he said, "and don't you fret about the sofa, Cousin Tilly. I've got a room for two nights at the Inn."

Persephone leaned over and whispered something in Philip's ear. It was impossible for John to hazard the least conjecture as to what she said; but a minute later Philip addressed him in a loud if not a very amiable tone.

"I shall be offended, Cousin John, and I'm sure your Cousin Tilly will be terribly hurt if you don't let us pay for your room while you're here. How long a holiday have you allowed yourself? How soon are you returning to Paris?"

"I … I … I haven't — on my soul I haven't thought about it yet," muttered John Crow. "But thanks very much for the room at the Inn." His voice suddenly became unnaturally loud. "Thanks very much, Cousin Philip. I shall be glad to stay two nights at the Inn at your expense. Shall I tell them to send the bill to you up here?"

John's tone, when his voice subsided, left everybody a little uncomfortable.

"Well," Philip said, "well — yes. Yes, of course. Yes, I shall be here a few days more … perhaps …." His voice sank down at that point in a polite but weary sigh. It was plain to them all that he felt no very strong attraction to the wanderer from across the channel. His exact and precise thoughts, in fact, might be expressed thus: "This fellow never expected any legacy. He only came to see what he could get out of me. He's on his beam-ends. He's probably got consumption, diabetes and the pox. If I give him an inch he'll take an ell. At all costs I mustn't let him come to Glastonbury."

Miss Elizabeth turned round towards Tilly Crow now, and in a gentle, unassuming voice asked what time dinner would be.

"I do wish everybody would stop calling it dinner," said Tilly, peevishly. "It'll be just a cold supper. There is so much over from lunch. I thought of it just for the family, you know, and I hoped Mr. Spear would not mind it being cold." She glanced as she spoke, not at Dave, but at John. And it was John who lifted up his voice in answer. "Don't think of me, in your hospitality, Mrs. Crow, I beg. I shall be running up that bill — is it not so, Philip — that we spoke of at the Inn?"

He rose to his feet as he said this. But Philip rose too. "You misunderstood me, Mr. Crow," he said sharply. "It was only a bedroom I was unable to offer you." He paused for a second while a flicker of unconcealed distaste crossed his features. "But of course you are jesting.

Anyway you're free to enjoy which you please … a hot supper at the Inn or a cold supper with us here. Well!" he added in a different tone, "I've got some writing to do; and I think I'll desert you all now and do it in the study."

There was a general movement to leave the table at this point and under the protection of the confusion John whispered to Mary, "Look here, I'm not coming up here again. That beggar hates me *comme le diable!* You come, tomorrow morning, after breakfast, and call for me at the Inn. Ha? I'll find out if we can't get a boat on the 'big river' — Anyway, you tell Aunt Elizabeth that you're off for the day. How long are you going to stay here?"

But, woman-like, Mary went straight to the main issue. "What time shall I call for you, John?"

"Oh, about ten, if that's not too early? That'll give me time to find out about the boat."

She gave him a peculiar look. It was a steady calm look. Above all it was a stripped look. It held his attention for a second; but he missed everything about it that was important. He missed its touching confidence, its bone-to-bone honesty. He missed its unquestioning, little-girl reliance upon him. He missed its weariness, he missed its singleness of heart.

"You won't change your mind, John, and start off for Glastonbury at dawn?"

It was his turn now to reveal, in an eyelid-flicker of self-abandonment, the animal-primitive basis of his nature. It *had* evidently crossed his mind, in his reaction from the pressure of the family, that it would be nice to escape and be upon the road alone! His face betrayed all this; but the newly born maternal tenderness in her tone expressed itself in such a gleam of humorous indulgence that he was lifted up out of the shame of having been caught in such a treachery, on a delicious wave of sheer repose upon her understanding.

"No, I won't change my mind," he whispered, "but don't let anything they say keep *you* from coming, Mary."

"I think I can get you a *little* more money for — for the road, John," she said hurriedly.

He treated this with the decisive gesture of a strong man showing off before a weak girl. "I'll be *very* angry if you do," he said. *"Nothing* would make me take it! So it's better not to waste breath."

Both dining-room and drawing-room and the hall and the passage outside these rooms were now left to themselves. Silent and alone too the now-darkened conservatory listened to the placid sub-human breathings of heliotrope and lemon verbena, the latter with a faint catch in its drowsy susurration, where one of its twigs was bleeding a little from the impact of the fingers of the indignant Mr. Didlington.

Silent and alone the broad staircase fell into that trance of romantic melancholy which was its invariable mood when the hall lamp was first lit. The oil paintings upon its walls looked out from their gilt frames with that peculiar expression of indrawn expectancy — self-centred and yet patiently waiting — of which human passers-by catch only the psychic echo or shadow or after-taste, for a single flicker of a second, as if they had caught them off-guard.

Of all these rooms the one that now fell into the most intense attitude of strained expectancy was the drawing-room …"You ought to have been older than all your brothers, woman, instead of younger." The words emanated from a pale, insubstantial husk upon the air, a husk that resembled the cast-off skin of a snake or the yet more fragile skin of a newt, diaphanous and yet flaccid, a form, a shape, a human transparency, limned upon the darkness above the great chair to the left of the fireplace. The words were almost as faint as the sub-human breathings of the plants in the conservatory. They were like the creakings of chairs after people have left a room for hours. They were like the opening and shutting of a door in an empty house. They were like the groan of a dead branch in an unfrequented shrubbery at the edge of a forsaken garden. They were like the whistle of the wind in a ruined clock-tower, a clock-tower without bell or balustrade, bare to the rainy sky, white with the droppings of jackdaws and starlings, forgetful of its past, without a future save that of anonymous dissolution. They were like words murmured in a ruined court where water from broken cisterns drips disconsolately upon darkening stones, while one shapeless idol talks to another shapeless idol as the night falls. They were like the murmurs of forgotten worm-eaten boards, lying under a dark, swift stream, boards that once were the mossy spokes of some old water-mill and in their day have caught the gleam of many a morning sun but now are hardly noticeable even to swimming water-rats. No sooner were these words uttered, than a simulacrum in human form, seated opposite to the shade of the Rector, returned a bitter response.

"A cruel coward is what you are, William Crow, and what you've always been; but if ever, when I am dead, you leave your money to anyone but Philip's son I will punish you with a punishment *worse than God's*!"

While these words were being uttered the thin wraith from whom they came became lividly accentuated in its facial outlines which were of a ghastly pallor and hideously emaciated; but at the close, while she was actually crying out "worse than God's" not a vestige of her lineaments remained visible.

The other wraith too, in the chair opposite, although a faint film of his identity survived hers by two or three seconds, soon likewise faded. The chairs, the pictures, the ornaments on the mantelpiece were already lost in darkness. The fire was now nearly extinct. The only glimmer it was able to throw, in feebler and feebler jets from a little blue flame that kept racing along a charred bit of burnt wood, fell upon a tall, gilded screen painted with mythological figures. These intermittent flickerings soon died down in a dusky red spot that illuminated nothing and itself became dimmer and dimmer.

One of the big windows had been opened by Tilly Crow "to air the room" while they all went to their tea; and through this window the presence of the night flowed in. Sweet-scented, obliterating, equalising, it flowed in, taking the bitterness from defeat, taking the triumph from victory, and diffusing through the air an essence of something inexplicable, something beyond hope and beyond despair, full of pardon and peace.

THE RIVER

When Mary arrived at the New Inn, punctually at ten o’clock, with their lunch tied up in white paper in a basket, she found John Crow seated on a bench outside the entrance, with two oars and a long boat-hook lying across his knees.

The wind had sheered round to due south and what there was of it was faint-blowing. The sky was covered with an opalescent vapour; the sun was warm; and the wandering odours that were wafted towards the girl from the neighbouring cottages had a sweetness in them beyond the pungency of burning peat; a sweetness that may have come from the new buds in the privet hedges, or from the dug-up earth clods in the little gardens at the back, where the spades and forks of the men still stood fixed in the ground awaiting their return when the day’s work was over.

He rose with alacrity to welcome her, the two oars in one hand, the boat-hook in the other. “I’ve got the key,” he announced triumphantly. “It’s at the end of Alder Dyke on the big river. They say we’d better go there by Foulden Bridge.” He lowered his voice and bent down his head. “Did any of them try to stop you coming? Did Philip say anything?”

She shook her head and stood for a moment without moving, her face averted, looking dreamily down the street. “This will never happen to me again,” she thought. “I am in love with him. He is in love with me. I shall never forget this day and I shall never feel just like this ever again, whatever happens.” She turned towards John. “I don’t care where you take me,” her look said, “or what you do with me, as long as we are together!” But her lips said, “Do you mind going in and getting some more of that wine, John? I didn't want to make my basket too heavy, so I left on the table the bottle of milk that Aunt Elizabeth made me take."

He propped up the oars and the boat-hook against the house and went in. Mary moved away, crossed to the other side of the road and bending over a low brick wall stared at a manure-heap in which three black hens were scratching. The manure-heap with the three black fowls became at that second a sort of extension of her own personality. She felt at that moment, as she rested her basket on the top of the wall and heedless of her sleeves stretched her arms along its surface and ran her bare fingers through the cool stone-crop stalks, as if her soul was scarcely attached to her body. Almost without allowing her happy trance to be broken she took down her basket from the wall, recrossed the road and met John at the instant he emerged. "Sorry to have kept you," he chuckled, "but I've made them give me a flask of brandy as well as a flask of port. That's the best of having a greatcoat on, even on a hot day. Its pockets are so useful."

They walked rapidly now side by side past the churchyard and past the gardener's cottage at the drive-gate where Ben Pod had counted the cars. They came to a narrow foot-way that led them across the little river by a bridge that was scarcely more than a plank, and after that across the fields to the big river. Here at Foulden Bridge, which they did not cross, they debouched from the path; and turning to the left, followed the river bank downstream.

They had not spoken a word since leaving the Inn. Mary grew conscious, just before they got to Foulden Bridge, that she had been repeating to herself as she walked along, "That's the best of a greatcoat on a hot day. Its pockets are so useful." What she had been thinking was, how bony and thin was John's hand as it clutched the boat-hook which swung horizontally between them like an antique spear.

John was delving in his memory for something; something important. There had been several patches of yellow marigolds along the path they had followed and these had excited a tantalising feeling in his mind that he could not fathom. Those gleaming yellow flowers kept leading his memory to the verge of something and then deserting him and turning into a blur of blackness! Tom Barter had to do with it; but it was not Barter. This preoccupation with an obscure past, although it made him grave and silent, did not lessen his delight in his companion's presence. They were indeed, both of them, thrillingly happy, these two flesh-covered skeletons, drifting so lingeringly along the banks of the Wissey, but John's happiness was much more complicated than Mary's. His return to his native land played a part in it; the revival of local memories played a still larger part; and this latter feeling was so intimately associated with Tom Barter that to oust that sturdy figure from its place was impossible. He kept reverting to the marigolds, especially to their stalks in muddy water, and he kept thinking too of the stickiness of certain lumps of flour-dough mixed with cotton-wool and treacle that Tom and he had used for bait for roach and dace. Perch, that more rapacious fish, despised these harmless pellets; and he wondered whether it could be the black stripes of these deep-water fish and their enormous mouths, or the stickiness of this bait for the others, or a certain kind of home-made gingerbeer that their grandfather's cook used to make, and not the marigolds at all, that had been the tap-root to his rapturous sensation. It was not that this tantalising sense of being on the edge of some incredible life-secret interfered with his feeling for Mary. It was that his possession of Mary had become a calm-flowing tidal-stream which released and expanded all the antennae of his nature. These responses leapt up towards the unknown, like those great, slippery fish at Harrod's Mill. Tom Barter, marigold-stalks, fish-scales, dough-pellets — all these, and the secret they held, depended, like the long shining river-weeds upon which his eye now rested, upon the flow of that stream of contentment which was his possession of Mary.

They were walking now very close to the river bank and it was not long before they reached Dye's Hole. This spot was really a series of deep holes in the bed of the Wissey where the stream made a sweeping curve. Over these dark places in the swirling water bent the trunks of several massive willow trees and between these trees and the edge of the stream there was a winding path, too narrow to be trodden by horses and cattle, but interspersed with muddy footholds and beaten-down clearings amid the last year's growths, where it was just possible for two people to stand close together having the willow trunks behind them and the dark water in front.

John stopped when he reached the largest of these little clearings, and standing on the trodden mud balanced the two oars and the boat-hook against the branches of an elder bush which hung over a narrow ditch on the side of their path opposite to the river. Then he turned round and facing Dye's Hole waited for the girl to come up. The back of his head touched the vivid green shoots of a gigantic willow tree whose roots, like great thirsty serpents, plunged below the flowing water. As soon as the girl reached him he took her basket from her and laid it down on the ground, taking care to place it where a fragment of an old post, of dark, rotting wood pierced by three rusty nails, would prevent it from toppling over into the ditch. As he placed it there he chanced to touch, between it and the post, a newly grown shoot of water mint; and at once a wafture of incredible aromatic sweetness reached his brain.

They both stood still and gazed round them. "I wonder if you and I will ever see all this again?" he said.

"It's home to me," she said.

“It’s home to both of us,” concluded John; and the two of them as if they were one flesh drank up in great satisfying draughts the whole essence of that characteristic spot. With the same unspoken understanding that had brought their thoughts together before, the girl’s hat and the man’s cap were now thrown together on the earth at their feet and they gave themselves up to a protracted love-making. What was remarkable about this love-making was that during their embraces, in which the man held her and caressed her, first with her body front to front against his, and then with her face turned towards the river, their male and female sensuality — he “possessing” and she being “possessed” — was, in its earth-deep difference, of exactly the same magnetic quality. This was not due to his experience or to her inexperience; for, in these matters, Nature, the great mother of all loves, equalised them completely. It was due to some abysmal similarity in their nerves which, after making them fall in love, made them “make love” in exactly the same manner! There always remained the unfathomable divergence, in their bodies, in their minds, in their souls, due to their being male and female; but their similarity of feeling was the exciting element sounding the depths of ever-new subtleties in this deliciousness of like-in-unlike.

What John and Mary really did was to make love like vicious children; and this was due to the fact that they were both very nervous and very excitable but not in the faintest degree tempted to the usual gestures of excessive human passion. The rationalism of analytic logic has divided erotic emotion into fixed conventional types, popular opinion offering one set of categories, fashionable psychology offering another. As a matter of fact, each new encounter of two amorists creates a unique universe. No existing generalisation, whether of the wise or of the unwise, covers or ever will cover a tenth part of its thrilling phenomena. In one respect this love-making by Dye’s Hole was the most childlike that the spot had ever witnessed; in another it was the most cerebral. The nervous excitement manifested by these two was so free from traditional sentimentality and normal passion, so dominated by a certain cold-blooded and elemental lechery, that something in the fibrous interstices of the old tree against which they leaned was aroused by it and responded to it.

And so when they forsook that ledge of muddy ground between the confederate tree and the dark water, it was not only with relaxed nerves and an absolute sense of mutual understanding, it was with a dim awareness of some strange virtue having passed into them. Lingering behind the girl for a moment the man pressed his forehead against that indented willow trunk and murmured a certain favourite formula of his, relating to his dead mother. After that, taking up his oars and boat-hook, he followed the girl along the river bank. It did not take them long now to reach Alder Dyke.

Alder Dyke! Alder Dyke! It was not marigold stalks nor the smell of dough. It was alder boughs that brought Tom Barter and that unknown ecstasy into the arteries of his soul! He made a fumbling forward movement with his arms as he touched these alders, as if welcoming a living person, and Mary divined, merely from the look of his lean vagabond’s back, that some new emotion, entirely unconnected with her, had taken possession of him. When he dived into the mass of entangled boughs he plunged his hands into it and only after pressing an armful of rough twigs against his mouth and cheeks did he turn his head towards her. Any ordinary girl would have been disturbed by the nature of the crazy sound he now made to express his feelings and to summon his mate to enjoy Alder Dyke with him! It was more like the whinnying of a wild horse than anything else and yet it was not as loud as that; nor was it really an animal sound any more than it was a human sound. It was the sort of sound that this thick bed of alders itself might have emitted when tossed and rocked and torn by some fierce buffeting of the March winds. Instead of getting angry with him or thinking to herself “Who is this man I have given myself to?”, instead in fact of *thinking* anything at all, Mary simply put down her basket and ran hastily to his side. Without a word she threw her arms round his neck and pressed her lips against his cold leaf-smelling cheek. An alder twig had chanced to scratch his skin and the girl tasted now the saltish taste of spilt blood. John’s cap had been already switched from his head by his dive into the mass of boughs, and Mary instinctively snatched off her own hat. Thus they swayed together for a minute like two wild ponies who in joy bite furiously at each other’s necks. Then, using all his strength, though she was nearly as tall as he, he lifted her up and trampling forward like a centaur with a human burden plunged headlong deeper and deeper among those twisted branches.

When he reached the banks of the deep ditch itself he turned towards its mouth, and after an angry and tender struggle to keep the twigs from striking the girl’s face, emerged triumphantly at a grassy open space where the Dyke ran into the river. There lay the boat he was looking for, moored by a padlocked chain to a stake in the ground, its rudder embedded in mud, its bottom full of dark rain-water. He put the girl down and the two stood side by side staring into the boat.

“It … rather … wants … bailing,” gasped Mary.

John was too much out of breath to make any comment but he glanced at her with a furtive look, half shame, half pride, and his lips twitched into a wry smile.

“I’ll look,” she cried, jumping into the boat. “You stay where you are for a while, John.”

He saw her pass quickly to the stern, stepping from seat to seat. Then she stooped down and began feeling about in the bottom of the boat. “Here we are!" she cried, holding up a big tin cup. "Now don't you move, John, please, till I've got some of this water out."

He sat still, watching her, hugging his knees and his hands.

"It smells very fishy down here!" she cried. He saw her make a sudden face of disgust and scoop with her hands in the bilge-water under the stern seat. "Ugh! It's the head of an eel." She threw something far into the river, where it sank with a splash.

"I'd sooner be an eel than a worm," he muttered, and the soul within him sensitised by love-making flung forth an obscure prayer across the flowing stream. Over the level Norfolk pastures it went; over the wide fens and the deep dykes, until it came to the sea-banks of the North Sea. Here John's prayer left the earth altogether and shooting outward, beyond the earth's atmosphere, beyond the whole stellar system, just as if it had been an arrow shot from the Bow of Sagittarius the Centaur, reached the heart of his dead mother where she dwelt in the invisible world. "Don't let me ever compete with anyone!" his prayer said. "If I'm a worm and no man, let me enjoy my life as a worm. Let me stop showing off to anyone; even to Mary! Let me live my own life free from the opinions, good or bad, of all other people! Now that I've found Mary, let me want nothing else!"

He continued to watch his new-found mate bailing out the dark rain-water from the bottom of the boat. "This is our home," he thought. "With the smell of Alder Dyke in our souls we'll defy Glastonbury and Philip together! Our ancestors got their bread from the fens and we'll get our bread from Glastonbury and then come home, home to Alder Dyke! We won't compete with anyone. We'll live our own life free from them all! If we are Alder Dyke eels, let us remain so! If we're worms of Norfolk mud, let us remain so! Eels and worms can suck the breasts of life as well as any of them. What does anything matter as long as Mary's alive and I'm alive; and we're not divided?"

"Are you feeling all right now, John? I'm not going to bail all day, I can tell you!"

The tone of her voice delighted him. It was an earthy tone, like the sound of a horse's hoof on springy turf. He had a peculiar sensation as if he could mount up on that tone of hers as on a flight of mossy stone steps.

Extracting the key from his pocket he now unlocked the boat and they were soon in midstream. "Don't let's row, John," she said. "I'm tired and you've exhausted yourself carrying me. Let's drift with the tide!"

She seated herself in the stern and took possession of the rudder lines. John, holding the oars in the rowlocks at an upraised angle, placed himself opposite to her. Thus she steered the boat and stared gravely forward past his face; while he, balancing the blades of the oars above the water, watched every flicker of her expression, as a look-out man on a ship watches the horizon of all his hopes.

The river weeds, below the tide that bore them on, gleamed emerald green in the warm sunshine. Across and between the weeds darted shoals of glittering dace, their swaying bodies sometimes silver white and sometimes slippery black as they turned and twisted, rose and sank, hovered and flashed by. Beds of golden marigolds reflected their bright cups in the swift water; and here and there, against the brownish clumps of last year's reeds, they caught passing glimpses of pale, delicate-tinged cuckoo flowers. Every now and then they would come upon a group of hornless Norfolk cattle, their brown and white backs, bent heads, and noble udders giving to the whole scene an air of enchanted passivity through which the boat passed forward on its way, as if the quiet pastures and solemn cattle were the dream of some very old god into which the gleaming river and the darting fish entered by a sort of violence, as the dream of a younger and more restless immortal.

"Don't you think, Mary, that there was something rather touching about the way that young Spear hummed and hawed last night, trying to express his ideas?"

"Look out, John! Look out! Push with your left! No, the other one …. *Damn!*"

He rose to his feet and shoved the prow of the boat round a muddy promontory. "Can't you do it by steering?"

"No, I can't. Keep your oars down a bit. No! Closer to the water! Give a pull now as I tell you."

He took his seat again and tried to obey her.

"With your left, now!" she cried. "Your left! Your left! Don't you know your left hand from your right?" She loved him for being so clumsy. She loved him for not knowing his left hand from his right. And yet these things irritated her so much that she could have boxed his ears. She would have liked to hit him. She would have liked to throw her arms round his neck and kiss him, after she had hit him!

"Don't you think it *was* rather pathetic, the way he talked? I didn't like him at first. I thought he was a bully. But I came round to him in the end."

"You didn't like Cousin Percy much. I could see *that*!" said Mary.

He was silent for a second, frowning. Then he struck the water with the flat of one of his oars. "Only because she's in love with Philip!" he cried. "That young Spear is what you English call a decent chap and that girl is out for making him a cuckold."

"I think Percy is sweet," said Mary. "She can't help being attractive to men. She's attractive to *you,* my dear, or you wouldn't be so cross with her."

"She's a fatal girl," muttered John Crow.

"What did you call her?"

"Fatal. And that's what she is. She's the most dangerous type of all. If *she* goes down to Glastonbury there'll be the devil to pay. I could see Cousin Tilly had her eye on her … and Aunt Elizabeth too."

"It's interesting you should concern yourself so much about Dave," said Mary. "I expect he reminds you of that boy Barter," she added.

John gazed at her in astonishment.

"What a little witch you are! God! I must be careful what thoughts cross my mind when I'm with you."

"Now I must tell him," Mary said to herself. "This is the moment to tell him." It was really beginning to amount to something grotesque, this inability of hers to explain that she knew Tom Barter well and had often been to tea with him in a little tea-shop near the Pilgrims' Inn in the Glastonbury High Street.

She dropped the rudder-lines and clasped her fingers in her lap. "Row now, will you, John? And I'm not going to steer you either. I'm going to have a cigarette."

Her instinct was always to smoke a cigarette at any serious crisis in her life. She lit one now, and out of the midst of a cloud of smoke she made the plunge. "I believe I know your friend Tom Barter," she said. Damn! Why must her voice take that funny tone? "I believe he works in one of Philip's factories. I believe it's your friend; but of course it *may* not be. He's got lodgings next to the Pilgrims' Inn."

Like an experienced fox who hears the dogs in the distance and automatically takes to the hedge, a deep self-preservative instinct in John, a male friend-preservative instinct, made him say hurriedly, "Do you really think it's the same? I don't believe it can be. Tom Barter used to go for endless long walks collecting birds’ eggs. Does yours do that? If he doesn’t go on long walks alone he’s not the same!”

She surrounded her smooth, dark head with smoke that went trailing in spiral wisps down the water-track behind them. “I like Tom very much,” she said, scrupulously weighing her words. “There are few people down there that I like better.”

They both looked away from each other at the darkly massed woods which terminated the shining meadows on their right.

“It’s the aspen poplars that give this scenery its character,” he remarked sententiously. “Those rounded masses of foliage, seen across absolutely level fields, and growing in great wild scattered clumps too; they give the whole place a park-like look; and yet it’s a neglected, untidy park. Woods on flat ground look much larger and more mysterious than woods on hillsides. Don’t you think so?”

He wanted above everything else to keep their conversation away from Tom Barter but the harder he tried to do this the closer to him did the friend of his boyhood come. The darting dace cried out “Tom Barter!” as they flashed through the water. The dazzling sun-gleams upon the surface of the current danced to a jig of that name. The long swaying weeds laughed languishingly and coquettishly, “Tom, Tom! Come back to us, Tom!”

“Yes, my dear,” he continued, “we can’t get away from the fact that we Crows are plain sea-faring Danes, settled for centuries as simple working farmers in the Isle of Ely. We haven’t the goodness of the Saxon, nor the power of the Norman, nor the imagination of the Celt. We are run-down adventurers; that’s what we are; run-down adventurers; who haven’t the gall to steal, nor the stability to work.”

Mary threw her cigarette into the river and resumed her hold of the rudder lines. “Row a bit, John,” she said.

He let his oars sink into the water and commenced pulling with long furious strokes. He began now to feel a longing to make love to her again; and in his vicious cold-blooded manner, like the depravity of a weather-beaten tramp, he began telling himself stories of exactly *how* he would do this as soon as he could create the opportunity.

The girl felt at once glad and sorry that she had told him about Tom Barter. If the sun-sparkles on the water and the shining green weeds were voluble of Tom her girl's heart was heavy with him.

The whole matter of Barter was a grievous wedge in the sweet pith of her peace at that moment. She did so love her companion, as she watched his deep-drawn breathing and noted his pathetic attempts at feathering with his oars. She loved the way his knuckles looked as he pulled. She loved the whiteness of his wrists and even the frayed, travel-stained cuffs of his shirt. She loved the extraordinary faces he made when the oar got entangled in the weeds! She too began, in her girl's way, but quite as subnormal a way as his own, to long to be made love to again. And then at last, so deep was the psychic similarity between them, they both fell silent; and in their silence, set themselves to pray to the First Cause that their love might have a happy future.

They prayed to this unknown Ultimate, out of their hollow boat, above that gleaming current, so simultaneously and so intensely, that the magnetism of their prayer shot like a meteorite out of the earth's planetary atmosphere. Something about its double origin, and something about the swift and translucent water from which it started on its flight, drove it forward beyond the whole astronomical world, and beyond the darkness enclosing that world, till it reached the primal Cause of all life.

What happens when such a wild-goose, heart-furious arrow of human wanting touches that portion of the First Cause's awareness that encircles the atmospheric circumference of the earth? So many other organisms throughout the stellar constellations and throughout the higher dimensions are unceasingly crying out to this Primordial Power, that it can obviously only offer to the supplications of our planet a limited portion of its magnetic receptivity. And again, as all earth dwellers discover only too quickly, it Itself is divided against Itself in those ultimate regions of primal causation. Its primordial goodness warring forever against its primordial evil holds life up only by vast excess of energy and by oceans of lavish waste. Even though the cry of a particular creature may reach the First Cause, there is always a danger of its being intercepted by the evil will of this vast Janus-faced Force. Down through the abysses of ether, away from the central nucleus of this dualistic Being, descend through the darkness that is beyond the world two parallel streams of magnetic force, one good and one evil; and it is these undulating streams of vibration, resembling infinite spider webs blown about upon an eternal wind, that bring luck or ill luck to the creature praying. The best time for any human being to pray to the First Cause if he wants his prayers to have a prosperous issue is one or other of the Two Twilights; either the twilight preceding the dawn or the twilight following the sunset. Human prayers that are offered up at noon are often intercepted by the Sun — for all creative powers are jealous of one another — and those that are offered up at midnight are liable to be waylaid by the Moon in her seasons or by the spirit of some thwarting planet. It is a natural fact that these Two Twilights are propitious to psychic intercourse with the First Cause while other hours are malignant and baleful. It is also a natural fact, known to very few, that many of the prayers offered to the First Cause by living organisms in their desperation are answered by less powerful but much more pitiful divinities. Priests of our race, wise in the art of prayer, are wont to advise us to pray to these lesser powers rather than to the First

Cause; and they are wise in this advice. For whereas the evil in the First Cause is only partially overcome by the good, in some of these “little gods” there is hardly any evil at all. They are all compact of magical pity and vibrant tenderness. It happened by ill luck on this particular occasion that the prayer to their Creator offered up by John Crow and by Mary Crow in their open boat on the Wissey in Norfolk aroused a response not in the good will of this ultimate Personality, but in Its evil will. Neither John nor Mary was aware that if a human being prays at noonday or at midnight it is better to pray to the Sun or the Moon rather than to the First Cause. Chance led them to pray on this occasion almost exactly at twelve o’clock; and although their prayer reached its destination unintercepted by any other power, it lost itself, not in the ultimate good, but in the ultimate evil ….

Was it a dim intimation of this that led John to redouble his furious strokes as he rowed their boat down the Wissey? The sweat began to pour down his face as he tugged at those long oars and his mouth, open now and twisted awry, began to resemble the fixed contorted lineaments of an antique tragic mask.

Mary was divided in her mind whether to call to him to stop or to let him alone until he stopped of his own accord. Assisted by wind and tide as well as propelled by his desperate efforts, the boat shot forward now with an incredible speed. The girl had grown by this time more skilful with the rudder lines. John, in the tension of his rowing, kept more even time than he had done before. Thus, though their speed was much greater, they seemed to avoid the beds of reeds at the river curves, and the shallows opposite the deeper pools, and the floating masses of cut weeds that they overtook, with much greater facility, than when they were casually drifting.

“I’ll make him stop in a minute!” she kept saying to herself; and then something in the very effort they both were making, he to row and she to steer, something almost religious in their united tension, compelled her to concentrate upon what she was doing and to hold her peace. Past deep, muddy estuaries the boat shot forward, where the marigolds grew so thick as to resemble heaps of scattered gold, flung out for largesse from some royal barge, past groups of tall lombardy poplars, their proud tops bowing gently away from the wind, past long-maned and longtailed horses who rushed to look at them as they shot by, their liquid eyes filled with entranced curiosity, past little farm-houses with great, sloping red roofs, past massive cattle-sheds tiled with those large, curved, brick tiles so characteristic of East Anglia, past sunlit gaps in majestic woods through whose clearings tall, flint church towers could be seen in the far distance, past huge black windmills, their great arms glittering in the sun as they turned, grinding white flour for the people of Norfolk, past all these the boat darted forward, rowed, it seemed, by one relentless will-power and steered by another. And as he swung his arms forth and back, repeating his monotonous strokes with grim pantings and with a glazed, unseeing look in his eyes, it seemed to John as if merely by making this blind quixotic effort he was on the way to insure a happy issue for their love.

He had prayed to the First Cause and the superstitious idea took possession of him that the longer he kept up this struggle the more likely he was to get a favourable answer.

He was indeed a good deal more exhausted already than his coxswain had any notion of. If she had not been compelled to concentrate her attention on rounding the river curves she would have marked how pale his lips were growing; but she too was wrought up to a queer hypnosis of blind tension. Every now and then she would cry out, “Right, John!” or “Left, quick! Left! I tell you,” but apart from these brusque words she remained as silent as he.

One effect this nervous madness had. It united them as nothing else could have done. The longer this tension lasted the closer these two beings drew together. Casual amorists have indeed no notion of the world-deep sensuality of united physical labour. More than anything else this can give to a man and a girl a mysterious unity. Nothing in their sweetest and most vicious love-making had brought these two nearer to becoming one flesh than did this ecstatic toil.

It may be that a blind instinct had already warned them that their prayer to the Living God had only stirred up the remorseless malice in that Creator-Destroyer's heart. Whether this were so or not, it is certain now that some obscure and lonely fury in them turned upon that tremendous First Cause, and deliberately and recklessly defied it! The two of them were alone on that Norfolk river, a man and a woman, with the same grandmother and the same grandfather, with the same grandparents in a steady line, going back to Agincourt and Crécy, going back to all the yeomen of England, to all the sturdy wenches of England, to all the John Crows and Mary Crows that fill so many churchyards in the Isle of Ely unto this day.

The silver-scaled dace and red-finned roach that their swift movement disturbed seemed actually to pursue this furiously speeding boat. The quivering poplars seemed to bow down their proud tops to watch these two; the cattle lifted their heads to gaze at them as they swept by; beneath air-region after air-region of tremulous lark-music they flashed and glittered forward; water-rats fled into their mud-burrows or plopped with a gurgling, sucking sound under the swirling eddies that their boat made; moor-hens flapped across their way with weak, harsh cries; small, greenish-coloured, immature pike, motionless like drowned sticks in the sunny shallows, shot blindly into the middle of the river and were lost in the weeds. The prolonged struggle of these two with the boat and with the water became in a very intimate sense their marriage day upon earth. By his salt-tasting sweat and by her wrought-up passion of guiding, these two "run-down adventurers" plighted their troth for the rest of their days. They plighted it in defiance of the whole universe and of whatever was beyond the universe; and they were aware of no idealisation of each other. They clung to each other with a grim, vicious, indignant resolve to enjoy a sensuality of oneness; a sensuality of unity snatched out of the drifting flood of space and time. It was not directed to anything beyond itself, this desire of theirs. It was innocent of any idea of offspring. It was an absolute, fortified and consecrated by the furious efforts they were making, by the diamond-bright sparkles upon the broken water, by the sullen clicking of the rowlocks.

John had begun to count now. "I'll stop after twenty more strokes," he thought. But when the last of the twenty came, and he found in the beating pulse of his exhaustion an undreamed-of nerve of renewal, he did *not* stop. The dazzling spouts of water drops which followed his oars, each time he drew them from the water, mingled now with a renewed counting. "Ten … eleven … twelve … thirteen … fourteen … fifteen …" Those rhythmic, up-flung splashes of dancing crystal, stirred and subsiding amid the long emerald-green weeds, became the thudding reverberation of his own unconquerable heartbeats. These again became triumphant figures of victory, of victory over nature, over custom, over fate. "Sixteen … seventeen … eighteen … nine—"

He never reached his second twenty. Disturbed by the appearance of a living javelin of blue fire, flung forth from a muddy ditch, darting, like a gigantic dragon-fly, down the surface of the river in front of them and vanishing round a bend of the bank, Mary gave a startled pull to her left rudder string; and the prow of the boat, veering in midstream, shot with a queer sound, like a sound of snarling and sobbing, straight into the overhung mouth of the weedy estuary, out of which the kingfisher had flown!

John fell forward over his own knees with a groan. His shoulders heaved silently under his heavy sob-drawn breathing. He was lost to everything except the necessity of finding free and unimpeded breath.

Mary sat quietly on where she was. “I’ll go to him in a minute,” she thought. “Better let him get his breath first.” She could not see his face. She could see nothing but his head and his knees. But she knew, without seeing it, that his face was quite hideously contorted. She noticed that something wet was falling down from his face upon the plank under his feet. She peered forward and stared morbidly into the darkness at his feet. Was blood dripping from his mouth? “Dear God!” she cried in her heart, “have I killed him by my foolishness?” The cry was followed by such a wave of love for him that she could hardly bear it and remain passive any longer. She wanted to throw her arms round him and press his head against her thin chest. This feeling was followed by another one of an egoistic tightness and self-pity. “It would be just like my fate,” she thought, “just like the way everything has happened to me all my life, if he has consumption and this has given him a hemorrhage.”

She remained rigid, her heart beating, holding herself in by an effort of the will. At last his breath became quieter. For a few seconds after that, his head seemed to sink helplessly down. It looked almost as if it would touch the plank between his knees. The oars, still clutched tight in his hands, stood up at a grotesque angle. “Are you all right, John?” she whispered at last.

He did lift his head at that and smiled at her, drawing a deep sigh. “Exhausted,” he murmured. “I was a fool to go on so long.”

“Lean back a bit in the boat,” she said. He tried to obey her and she got up on her feet and crossing over to him took the oars from the rowlocks and laid them side by side. As she did this she thought to herself: “John and I are one now. Nothing in those hateful Ruins will be able to divide us now.”

She helped him to lie down on his back in the prow of the boat with his arms extended along its sides and with his head against the acute angle of its wooden bow. “Give me the flask, my sweet!” he murmured.

His overcoat was in the stern and she had to move once more down the whole length of the boat to get it. As he watched her doing this a most delicious languor rippled through him like a warm tide. Something weak and clinging in his nature derived a special satisfaction at that moment from being tended by this girl. “She is what I’ve waited for all my days.”

After he’d drunk the whiskey Mary began to wonder whether she ought to suggest their having their lunch here in this kingfisher ditch. She was secretly very averse to doing so. In her mind’s eye, all that morning, she had pictured herself spreading out a Virgilian repast on mossy grass and under great trees for herself and her lover. Anyway it would be much nicer to leave this ill-smelling boat for a time and stretch their legs on the land.

“I’m going to explore the neighbourhood,” she said at last, getting up upon the seat where he had been rowing, and seizing a willow branch wherewith to pull the side of the boat nearer the bank. In the glow and relaxation which he enjoyed just then her figure, standing there above him in the flickering shade of the branch she held, gathered to itself that sort of romance which of all things had always stirred him most. Both sun and shadow lay across her brown hair, parted in the middle and drawn back to a rough, simple knot, and upon her plain dress, and upon her sturdy peasant-girl ankles.

“Very good, you beautiful creature!” he murmured. “You might give me a cigarette out of my greatcoat before you go. I’m too comfortable to move.”

She jumped down with alacrity, gave him cigarettes and matches, and then stepping lightly for a second on the side of the boat sprang to the bank. “You won’t go to sleep and let it drift out, will you? It’s fast in the mud; but you don’t think I ought to tie it to the tree?”

“You run off and explore, my pretty one!” he said. “I’ll deal with the boat.” When she was gone he thought to himself, “It’s the way she parts her hair and pulls it back and twists it, that I like so well. Who would have guessed that I’d find her like this the first minute I got to my native land?” He frowned a little and then closed his eyes. Though it was warm enough to be May rather than March, it was too early for that confusing murmur of insects which is the usual background for a hot afternoon. When the rustling of her steps died away an incredible silence descended on the place. The newborn reeds were too young to play with the flowing river. The noon had become afternoon. The larks were silent. The fish had ceased to rise. There were no swallows yet and the few spring flies that hovered over that weedy ditch were safe from attack whether from the firmament above or the firmament below. The only sound that reached his ears was the sound of a faint trickle of water which came from some infinitesimal ledge in the bank above his head and fell down drop by drop into the ditch. Not a breath of wind stirred. Not a leaf-bud quivered. Not a grass-blade swayed. There was only that elfin waterfall and, except for that, the very earth herself seemed to have fallen asleep. “This is Norfolk,” he said to himself, and in that intense, indrawn silence some old atavistic affiliation with fen-ditches and fen-water and fen-peat tugged at his soul and pulled it earthward. And there came to his nostrils, as he lay with his eyes shut, a far-flung, acrid, aromatic smell. It was not the smell of mud, or leaf-buds, or grass-roots, or cattle-droppings, or ditch-water. It was not the smell of last night's rain, or of the sleeping south wind. It reached him independent of the eel slime that still clung about the bottom of the boat. It was the smell of East Anglia itself. It was the smell to greet which, on uncounted spring mornings, his Isle-of-Ely ancestors had left their beds and opened their back doors! It was the smell that had come wandering over the water-meadows on afternoons like this, to the drowsy heads of innumerable John Crows, resting from their ploughing with their ale mugs in their blistered hands, and their minds running on ewes and lambs and on bawdy Cambridge taverns! A fleeting thought of what lay before him in Glastonbury no sooner touched his mind than he flung it away as Mary had flung the eel's head.

He made a feeble attempt to recall the subtle idea which he had had when he prayed to his mother under the alders, but he could only remember the part about never "competing." "Compete?" he thought vaguely. "What does 'compete' mean?" At that moment there seemed nothing in the world comparable to allowing sleep to steal through and become one with him, just as this tinkling rivulet he listened to lost itself in the body of this ditch. But all the while, though he kept yielding to these invasions of sleep, he could not give himself up to it to the point of losing his consciousness. Every now and then, when his eyelids still unclosed a little, he saw a drooping willow shoot trailing in the ditch beside him. Its extremity seen through the water was different from the upper part of it seen through the air; and as something in him refused to yield to unconsciousness, he came by degrees to identify himself with this trailing shoot. There was a queer imperative upon him not to sink any deeper into sweet oblivion. There was an imperative upon him to remember his vow about "competing." This "never competing" became identified with the slow swirl of the ditch stream as it made tiny ripples round the suspended shoot. He was *allowed*, he dimly felt, to enjoy his paradisiac lassitude, as long as he, this being who was partly John Crow and partly a willow shoot, kept these ripples in mind. All these phenomena made up a complete world, and in this world he was fulfilling all his moral obligations and fulfilling them with a delicious sense of virtue merely by keeping these ripples in mind; and the drip-drop, drip-drop of the tinkling rivulet at his elbow was the voice of the queer imperative which he obeyed.

A moor-hen propelling herself in quaint jerks past this willow shoot towards the river was so startled by confronting the face of a man staring with flickering eyelids down into the water that she rose with a scream and flapped off heavily into the rushes. This aroused John, who in a moment forgot altogether the imperative of the tinkling rivulet; and, clutching the edge of the boat with numb sleep-swollen fingers, raised his neck like a turtle and pricked up his ears to listen for his girl's return.

It was under a great ash tree in the centre of a neighbouring field that they finally had their lunch.

"Why didn't you stand up to Philip more if you disliked him so?" she asked when their meal was over and they were recalling last night's gathering. His face worked expressively before the words came out in answer, a curious pulse appearing in his cheeks at the corner of his nostrils and a certain twitching round his cheek-bones. It was a facial peculiarity not quite the same as that of Miss Elizabeth Crow; and yet it was evidently a family trait. Touching in the women, and no doubt often a signal of danger in the men, this facial sign, like a well-worn coin, must have frequently, in the last three or four hundred years, gone to Norwich for the fair, gone to Cambridge to buy books and silk dresses, appeared in the depths of old-fashioned looking-glasses, above mahogany chests of drawers, before the pushing open of innumerable ivy-shadowed front-bedroom windows to watch visitors come over the home-meadows. It must often have been the last of all their possessions that they were forced to leave behind, when, like William Crow on this beautiful March day, they lay with six feet of East Anglian clay above them!

It appeared now indeed more emphatically than Mary had ever seen it in any of her relatives' faces except once when she had asked her grandfather at breakfast, as he dreamily looked out over that smooth secluded lawn, what the word "whore" meant.

"I'll tell you exactly why!" John Crow cried, seizing a clump of soft moss, just beyond where his overcoat extended, with excited fingers. "It's for a reason that I wouldn't tell anyone in the world but you. It's because I've long ago decided always to yield to my cowardice. I was afraid of Philip the moment I saw him. I hated him; but that's another matter. Something in his personality frightens me. I could have struggled against it and made myself say a lot of things. I thought of plenty of them. But it's become a principle with me to yield to my fear of people. I propitiate them, or I'm silent, or I avoid them."

Mary looked at him very earnestly.

"Have you ever loved anyone you were afraid of?"

"You mean a woman?"

She nodded.

"I tell you I've never loved anyone; though of course I've *made* love to endless women. Oh, yes! Yes! It would kill my love to be afraid. Not at once, but by inches and inches. Oh, yes! If I ever got thoroughly afraid of anyone in the end I should stop loving them."

She lowered her eyes and remained silent for a moment. Then she cried with a kind of quivering fierceness, "I won't have you *dare* ever to be afraid of me, *John*!”

He looked at her sharply. There was a note in her voice that he had not heard before. It was the danger-note of the female, beyond reason, *against* reason.

“Why not?” he asked.

She turned away her head and looked across the wide, flat meadow at the Wissey bank, making no reply. A soft gust of south wind stirred the lighter branches of the ash above them. The cold, thin, smooth, grey twigs, with their clean, black buds, moved solemnly up and down like classic dancers.

“Shall I be pleased with Glastonbury?” he asked after a pause.

“I believe you’ll feel just as I do, John, about Glastonbury. You’ll hate the sentimentality that has been spread over everything there, like scented church-lamp oil! You’ll hate the visitors. You’ll hate the tradesmen catering for the visitors; you’ll hate the sickening superstition of the whole thing.”

“I hate it now, quite sufficiently,” he interrupted. “Simply because Philip’s there. Oh, I wish—” He became so pensive that she did not like to break into his thought. “I wish, Mary, that you’d leave Glastonbury and try to find something of … of the same kind … whatever it is … that you do … somewhere round here.”

She smiled a broad, amused smile, showing all her strong white teeth.

“How funny!” she murmured. “Why, my dearest, I can’t do anything! You don’t seem to realize that I’ve only been on my own for a couple of years; and before that I did nothing at all but look after Mother.”

“Where did you live?”

“In Thorpe, near Norwich. Mother’s buried in Thorpe. She couldn’t leave me anything because she lived on her pension.” Mary’s eyes opened very wide as she spoke of her mother. No tears came into them. They just opened very wide, with a curious, self-conscious movement of the facial muscles.

"It was Philip of course who got me the place," she went on. "Miss Drew is some sort of a connection of Tilly's." She leaned forward now, and stretching out her hand caught hold of his foot. "John, my dear John," she said with extreme and childish gravity, "will you really walk all the way to Glastonbury?"

"I shall start very early tomorrow," he replied, "and I expect I'll see you again in ten days. I suppose it will be all right to send you a postcard when I get there? I shall anyway have a penny left to buy that with."

Mary jumped to her feet, and gave her skirts a vigorous shake. His question restored to her with a healthy rush her abrupt woman-of-action quality.

"Yes," she said, "send me a card. Miss Drew, the Abbey House, is the address. You won't forget that? You can think of the Ruins for the Abbey part, and you can think of 'screw' for the rest. 'You,' 'screw,' *Drew*!" and she laughed uneasily.

John slowly pulled up his legs and got upon his feet. The hard, cautious, furtive look of a tramp was upon his face now. "Will … you … really … be able … to help me … keep body and soul together … when I get there?" And then shooting at her a completely impersonal look, as if she were a housemaid hiring him to chop wood, "How often does she pay you?" he asked.

But Mary was totally undisturbed by this revelation of the lower self of her lover. Indeed she looked pleased. "Every month," she replied with shining eyes. "It's my pocket-money, you know."

Her pleasure at the ungentlemanly turn he had given to the conversation brought such a glow to her cheeks and such a smile to her lips that she became for a moment really beautiful. He rushed up to her and caught her in his arms. Long and long did he caress her under that confederate ash tree. “You’re a hamadryad — that’s what you are!” he kept repeating. “You’re a hamadryad!”

Every girl lives so constantly in the imaginative atmosphere of being made love to that even the most ignorant of them is rarely shocked or surprised. It is the material consequences that they dread, not moral remorse or any idea that they are allowing what is wrong. John’s way of love-making might, however, have easily palled on a more passionate nature than Mary’s; for he was not only profoundly corrupt but extremely egoistic, touching her and holding her in the manner that most excited his own childishly fantastic imagination and never asking himself whether this was what suited her, nor for one second forgetting himself in any rush of tempestuous tenderness. But Mary, as though she really *were* a hamadryad, who had known the shamelessness of hundreds of whimsical satyrs, treated the whole thing with grave, sweet, indulgent passivity. Something in her kindred nature, some willow-rooted, fen-country perversity, seemed to need just this protracted cerebral courtship to stir the essential coldness of her blood and nerves. One quaint feeling often came to her, in the oddest moments of his “sweet usage,” namely, that he was one of her old, faded, wooden *dolls*; yes, the most dilapidated and injured of all four which used to belong to her, come to life again, but this time full of queer, hardly human exactions that she would willingly prostitute herself for hours and hours to satisfy, so long as she could hear those wooden joints creak and groan in their joy.

They both knew they were safe from interruption. Children of generations of fen-country life, they were well aware how far safer for lovers is the great, wide, flat expanse of grass-meadows, than any thickly grown copse or spinney, where an enemy can easily approach unseen.

Emanations of sympathy were not lacking from the vast, smooth tree, with its upward-clutching branch-ends, though they were of a different kind from those of that aged denizen of Dye’s Hole. They both knew well that after the heavy effort of getting the boat back against the current to Alder Dyke, there would be little chance for more than a few kisses before they separated for their unknown future; and this made them loath to cease their play. But the role the ash tree served was to bring to them in the midst of their dalliance with incredible vividness the image of their grandfather. Both of them saw clearly in their mind’s eye the well-known head of their grandfather, covered with thick curly hair, “as white as wool,” with his patient servants sitting in a row on the red-leather dining-room chairs and with his life-weary, King-of-Thule eyes in their hollow eye-sockets, lowered over the page, as with his classic-actor’s voice beautifully modulated to the occasion, he intoned one of the poet Cowper’s hymns.

The language of trees is even more remote from human intelligence than the language of beasts or of birds. What to these lovers, for instance, would the singular syllables “wuther-quotle-glug” have signified?

“It is extraordinary that we should ever have met!” These words, uttered by John in a moment of relaxed gratefulness, struck the attention of that solitary ash tree in Water-ditch Field with what in trees corresponds to human irony. Five times in its life of a hundred and thirty years had the ash tree of Water-ditch Field heard those words uttered by living organisms. An old horse had uttered them in its own fashion when it rubbed its nose against a young companion’s polished flanks. An eccentric fisherman had uttered them addressing an exceptionally large chub which he had caught and killed. A mad clergyman had uttered them about a gipsy girl who did not know of his existence. An old maiden lady had uttered them to the spirit of her only lover, dead fifty years before; and finally, but twelve months ago, William Crow himself had uttered them; uttered them in the grateful, attentive and astonished ears of Mr. Geard of Glastonbury!

All this the ash tree noted; but its vegetative comment thereon would only have sounded in human ears like the gibberish: *wuther-quotle-glug*.

The afternoon had by now advanced far. Long, orange-coloured rays of light fell horizontally across the flat meadow. The shadow of the ash tree grew dark and cool as a stone-covered spring. From the ditch where their boat was moored came the sunset melody of a blackbird, full, as that bird's song at that hour always is, of some withheld secret in nature beyond human sorrow and human joy. Sadly they gathered up the remains of their feast and retraced their steps to the boat.

Their row back to Alder Dyke against the current was, as they had anticipated, no light task. Armed with the boat-hook, Mary at first stood upright in the stern and punted with all her strength while John stubbornly rowed; but as time went on she became conscious that they were advancing so slowly that something else would have to be done.

"Let me sit by your side, John," she said at last, "and both of us row."

She came over from the prow of the boat and sat down by him, taking possession of the oar upon his left. In this position, each pulling at a separate oar, but with elbows and shoulders touching and their four feet pressing against the same stretcher, they rowed home.

"What is my address, John?" she said, letting the blade of her oar rest flat upon the water when they reached Alder Dyke.

"Care of Miss Drew, the Abbey House, Glastonbury, Somerset." Thus came his answer quietly and grimly enough; but the girl had a shrewd and bitter knowledge that, if only their hands had not at that moment been clutching those heavy oar-handles, he could easily — when once this simple lesson had been properly repeated — have let his twitching cheek sink against her small cold breasts and burst into a fit of convulsive, childish, unreasonable sobbing.

STONEHENGE

AS HE PLODDED along the hedgeless white road over Salisbury Plain John Crow became acquainted with aspects of bodily and mental suffering till that epoch totally unrevealed to him. He felt very tired, and although he had been lucky, during the whole of his tramp, with regard to rain, he had been unlucky with regard to cold. He had indeed endured eight days of exceptionally cold weather, and now as he moved forward with the idea of reaching Stonehenge before dark the thought of having to sleep again, as he had done ever since he left Didcot, in some sort of draughty cattle-shed or behind an exposed haystack made him shiver through every bone of his exhausted body. A warm bed ran in his mind, a bed like the one to which he had treated himself at Maidenhead, which had one of its brass knobs missing; and an excellent supper ran in his mind of potatoes and cabbage such as he had enjoyed in that Maidenhead tavern before sleeping. His overcoat was heavy, his bag was heavy, and what was worse, one of his heels had got blistered, so that for the last twelve hours, ever since he had left Andover at dawn, walking had been a misery to him. He had only eightpence left. This had to last him till he reached Glastonbury; so bed and supper tonight were quite out of the question. He had got a pot of tea and a roll and butter at Salisbury and he had still a couple of Social biscuits and a piece of cheese wrapped up in his pocket. He also possessed unopened a packet of Navy Cut cigarettes. “I wonder what these Workhouses are like?” he thought. “I suppose the officials are bullies; I suppose a person’s always in danger of getting lice. No, I must find a shed or something; but I’m going to see Stonehenge first.”

John Crow had never in his life known a road more bleak and unfrequented than the one he was now traversing over Salisbury Plain. He knew that the sun had just sunk below the horizon though its actual shape was invisible. It had been totally obscured by clouds for an hour at least before it sank; but soon after its disappearance the north wind which had been his fellow-traveller ever since he left Salisbury dispersed some of these clouds and swept the sky a little clearer. It was clearer, but it was still grey with a greyness that was positively ashen. The difference between the pallor of the road, which was sad with a recognised human sadness and this ashen grey sky overhead was in some way disturbing to his mind. He kept staring at the sky as he dragged his blistered foot forward. Every step he took caused him pain, and if the sadness of the road was congenial to this pain, the appearance of the sky was intimately adjusted to it. The north wind which had followed him from Salisbury and had kept on whistling between his cap and his coat collar was not hateful to him. He had almost got attached to its company. Once or twice when he rested, sitting under walls or under hedges, he found himself missing its sullen monotone. Why the juxtaposition of this particular cap and this particular coat collar should cause the wind to hum and drone and sometimes almost to scream in his ear was a puzzle to him. But this north wind travelling with him over Salisbury Plain had many strange peculiarities, and although it was surly it did not strike him as in the least malignant. Perhaps since he came from the North, from the rough North Sea region, where this wind had its own habitation, it was busy giving him warnings about Glastonbury. Perhaps it was giving him warnings against believing anything that this ashen sky was putting into his head. What the sky made him think of were fleeing hosts of wounded men with broken spears and torn banners and trails of blood and neighing horses. The sky itself carried no token of such far-off events upon its corpse-cold vastness, but such ruinous disasters seemed to rush along beneath it in their viewless essences, wild-tossed fragments of forgotten flights, catastrophic overthrows, huge migrations of defeated peoples. And upon all these things that sky looked down with a ghastly complicity. Two small motor cars, one dog cart, and a queer-looking lorry with soldiers in it, were the only tangible vehicles that passed him that evening as he went along; but the road seemed full of human memories. There was not a signpost or a milestone on that wayside but had gathered to itself some piteous encounter of heart-struck lovers, some long and woeful farewell, some imperishable remorse! Through ancient and twisted thorn trees, whose faint green buds were growing as indistinct in the after-sunset as specks of green weed on the sides of old ships on a darkened tide, that north wind whistled and shrieked. Once as he rested his bad foot on the fallen stones of a ruined sheepfold and stared across the chalky uplands in front of him he caught sight of an embanked circle of turf with broken-down wooden railings on the top. The look of this object so excited his curiosity that he limped over towards it and wearily climbed its side. It was a circular pond full almost to the brim of bluish-grey water from the middle of whose silent depths rose a few water plants but whose edges were quite clear and transparent. All the light that there was in that fatal-brooding sky seemed concentrated on the surface of this water. “I know what this is,” thought John Crow to himself. “This is one of those ponds they call a dew-pond.” He advanced cautiously down the slope, leaving his bag on the top of the bank, and supporting himself upon his stick.

Arrived at the edge of the water, he stirred it a little with his stick’s end. But in a second he hurriedly drew his stick away. There in that blue-grey, motionless transparency hung suspended a dark object. “A newt!” In his boyhood in Norfolk he had loved these minute saurians more than all living things; and to catch sight of one of these, on this day of all days, filled him with an almost sacred reassurance. “All is going to be all right,” he said to himself. “I’m going to get to Glastonbury and to Mary!” He watched the newt with interest. Disturbed by his stick it had sunk down a short distance below the surface; but there it floated at rest, its four feet stretched out, absolutely immobile. Even as he watched it, it gave the faintest flicker to its tail and with its four feet still immovably extended it sank slowly out of sight into the depths of the water.

John Crow scrambled up the bank, picked up his bag, and limped back to the road. For the next mile his mood was a good deal happier. He was pleased by the way every milestone he passed recorded the distance to Stonehenge, just as if it were a habitation of living men, instead of what it was.

“Two miles to Stonehenge,” said the particular one he now reached, just as the after-sunset nebulosity began to turn into twilight. He sat on the ground with his back against this milestone. His blistered foot hurt him abominably. “It looks as if I should have to sleep among those Great Stones,” he thought. “I shall be at the end of my tether when I get there.”

A drowsiness fell upon him now, in spite of the pain in his foot, and his head began to nod over his clasped hands and his tightly hugged knees. Three things, the image of the bed at Maidenhead with one of its brass knobs missing, the image of the Great Stones as he had long ago seen them in pictures, and the image of the newt sinking down into the dew-pond, dominated his mind. He struggled frantically with this obsessing desire to sleep. The wind seemed to have dropped a little. “Perhaps if I see a warm shed,” he thought, “I’ll leave Stonehenge till tomorrow.” He dragged his body into motion again and limped on. A motor car passed him at top speed, sounding its horn savagely. While it went by his one fear was lest it should stop and offer him a lift. Its vicious look, its ugly noise, its mechanical speed, its villainous stench, the hurried glimpse he got of the smart people in it, all combined to make it seem worse to have any contact with such a thing than to die upon the road.

His foot hurt him most evilly. He knew it was not serious. He had not sprained his ankle or even twisted it. It was only a blister. But the blister throbbed and burned, pulsed and ached as if his heel had been struck with a poisoned arrow.

The grey sky had changed a little in character now. It was dimly interspersed with twinkling points of pale luminosity. Most of these points were so blurred and indistinct that it would have been hard to catch them again at a second glance in the same position in the vast ether. They were like nothing on earth; and to nothing on earth could they be compared. They were the stars, not of the night but of the twilight. The sky around those points of light was neither grey nor black. It was a colour for which there is no name among artists' pigments. But the man limping across Salisbury Plain gave this colour a name. He named it Pain. Where it reached the climax of appropriateness was in the west towards which the road was leading him. Here there was one fragment of sky, exactly where the sun had vanished, that to the neutrality of the rest added an obscure tinge — just the faintest dying tinge — of rusty brown. This low-lying wisp of rusty brown was like the throbbing pulse from the pressure of whose living centre pain spread through the firmament. Walking towards the West Country was like walking towards some mysterious celestial Fount wherein pain was transmuted into an unknown element.

First one leg; then the other leg. He had reached the point now of being conscious of the actual physical automatism of walking. That form of peculiar self-consciousness which as an infant had made the art of walking a triumph of self-assertion now returned upon him to make it a necessity of self-preservation. John Crow felt that he was nearing the end of his power over the very simple achievement of putting one leg in front of the other. He struggled forward for about half a mile. Then he stood still. “I must find a place to lie down in,” he thought. “I can’t go on.” The Maidenhead bed, with the one gilt knob missing, had retreated now beyond the horizon of opportunity. The image of cattle-scented straw floated before him.

A dull, beating thud was proceeding from some portion of his body and travelling away from it into the darkness. He felt like a run-down clock which could not be hindered from a meaningless striking. Whether this thudding came from his heel, his heart, or his head he could not tell. It might, for all he knew, come from that rusty-brown place in the western sky.

“I can’t go on,” he repeated aloud. And then, quite as naturally as he had before grown conscious, in that infantile fashion, of the triumph of walking, he grew conscious now of the necessity of praying.

And John Crow prayed, calmly, fervently, simply, to the spirit of his mother.

His mother had died when he was six years old and his devotion to her personality had been, ever since that day, not in the least different from the extreme of superstitious idolatry. The childish weakness of his character was just the sort of thing that would endear an only son, as John was, to the protective maternal instinct. The woman had died in a convulsive spasm of tragic tenderness for the child she had to leave; nor is it difficult to conceive how, even on the most material plane, some formidable magnetic vibration, issuing from that grave in the Yaxham churchyard, might linger upon the chemical substratum of the ether, and prove of genuine supernatural value to the child of her womb, when in his weakness he was most in need of her.

Thus it happened that when he had finished praying John found he could move forward again, although with very slow steps.

His pace indeed was the pace now of an extremely old man who used his stick as a crutch; and anyone listening to his approach might have taken him for a lame man or a blind man. The heavy tap, tap of his stick upon the road was a sound that travelled further than his footsteps.

At last he came in sight of the faint whiteness of another milestone. This ought to carry the token "One mile to Stonehenge." But this time the roadway opposite the milestone was not empty. Under the nebulousness of that rusty-brown horizon-tinge stood a small dark motor car. It had a red spot at the back but no headlights. It obstructed the road, but it did not impinge upon the scene with the crude violence of the car that had recently passed him by.

As John Crow limped up to it a figure that he had not distinguished from the hedge advanced into the road to intercept him.

"You must let me take you on a bit," said a tall, gaunt, ungainly man wearing a dark bowler hat. "You are too lame to be walking like this. I want to stop presently — a mile from here — but only for a minute or two. I am going to Glastonbury."

A shiver of excitement ran through the worn-out frame of John Crow.

"I was done in, dead beat, at … the end … of my … of my tether," gasped John when he found himself safely inside the little car. And then, as they moved on very slowly, what must this impulsive man do but confess to this stranger how he had just prayed in the middle of the road to the spirit of his mother and how he too was bound for Glastonbury. "There is another explanation, my good friend," said the motorist gravely. "My mind was at the moment absorbed in thoughts of Glastonbury — yours was also — what more natural than that I should ask you to let me take you there?"

John now became aware that although a few faint stars were visible the departing day was still dominant. “It will not be dark for half an hour yet,” he thought. “I shall see Stonehenge before night.” They were now reaching a little upward slope of the road. The wide Plain stretched around them, cold and mute, and it was as if the daylight had ceased to perish out of the sky, even while the surface of the earth grew dark. The identity of that great space of downland was indrawn upon itself, neither listening nor seeking articulation, lost in an interior world so much vaster and so much more important than the encounters of man with man, whether evoked by prayer or by chance, that such meetings were like the meetings of ants and beetles upon a twilit terrace that had thoughts and memories of its own altogether outside such infinitesimal lives.

To John’s surprise, the stranger put on his brake and stopped his car. “Can you see that thorn?” asked the man.

John peered forward through the twilight. Yes, he did clearly see the object indicated. It looked to him like a dead tree. “Is it a dead tree?” he enquired.

But the man went on, “From the foot of that thorn there’s a path across the grass leading straight to Stonehenge. You can see Stonehenge from the foot of that thorn.”

“Can anyone go there, at this hour? Someone told me in France that it was guarded after sunset by soldiers.”

“Are you able to come with me or would you like best to stay here till I come back?” said the man, totally disregarding this remark.

“I must come! Of course I must come with you!” insisted John Crow.

They got out of the little car together. The stranger gave John his arm; and although John would have liked to lean on it a great deal more heavily than he did, it was some support. He hobbled along as best he could, leaning the bulk of his real weight upon his own root-handled hazel-stick, and staring forward at the dead thorn tree with dazed curiosity. Deep in his mind he was thinking to himself, “I’ll always pray to her for everything from now on. I’ll pray to her that Mary and I can live together in Norfolk!”

When they reached the thorn tree John stopped and drew a deep breath. He pressed heavily now on his companion’s wrist and stared across the dark strip of downland turf before him, staggered and thunderstruck. Stonehenge! He had never expected anything like this. He had expected the imposing, but *this* was the overpowering. “This is England,” he thought in his heart. “This is my England. This is still alive. This is no dead Ruin like Glastonbury. I am glad I’ve come to this before I died!” “Will you excuse me, Sir,” he said, in a loud, rather rasping voice, the voice he had always assumed when, in the presence of French officials, he wished to assert himself, “will you excuse me if I sit down for a minute?”

“Do you feel queer? Are you ill?”

“I want to look at it from where we are.” They sat down on the ground beside the thorn tree; and even as he did so John observed that from one or two dark twigs upon a twisted branch a few leaves were budding. “It’s not quite dead,” he remarked.

The stranger naturally thought he was speaking of the dark pile in front of them. “You mean its power’s not left it?” He paused and then went on in a low voice. “About four thousand years it’s been here; but, after all, what’s that to some of the antiquities there are in the world? But you’re right — it’s not quite dead.”

“It’s very English,” said John.

The man turned and gave him a strange, indignant glance. “Is it English then to hide your great secret?” he cried excitedly. “Is it English to keep your secret to the very end?”

"I expect you know much more about it, Sir, than I do," said John humbly, "but I don't feel that those stones have anything hidden. They look to me just what they are, neither more nor less. They look simply like stones, enormous stones, lifted up to be worshipped."

His companion swung round and hugged his shins, resting his chin on the top of his knees and balancing himself on the extreme tips of his haunch-bones. He gave his head an angry toss so that his black bowler fell to the ground and rolled a few inches before lying still.

"Could you worship a stone?"

"I … I think … I think so …" stammered John, a little disconcerted by the man's intensity. "He must be a nonconformist preacher," he thought.

"Simply *because* it's a stone?" cried the other, and he hugged his ankles so tightly and tilted himself forward so far that John was reminded of a certain goblinish gargoyle that he knew very well, on an out-of-the-way portion of Notre Dame.

"Certainly. Simply because it's a stone!"

"And you call that English?" the stranger almost groaned.

"*I* could worship that nearest one," John said, "the one that stands by itself over there."

The man jumped to his feet and, picking up his bowler hat, clamped it upon his head. He was a tall man and he looked preternaturally tall as he stood between John and the stone which John had said he could worship. His profile was like a caricature of a Roman Emperor.

"Do you know what that stone's called?" he cried. "Do you know what it's *called?"* In his excitement he bent down and shook John by the shoulders. John thought to himself, "I wish my stick had a heavier handle. This man is evidently a mad dissenting minister."

"Have all these stones got names?" asked John eagerly, making two desperate attempts to rise to his feet.

The man gave him his hand and John stood up. He surreptitiously substituted the handle of his hazel-stick for its ferrule end and grasped it tightly. "If he becomes dangerous," he thought, "I'll step backward and hit him on the head with all my force." He laughed to himself as he swung his stick in the darkness.

The Great Stone Circle had stirred up in him an excitement the like of which he had never felt in all his life before. The pain of his blistered heel became nothing. He lurched forward, pushed the man aside, and stumbled towards the huge, solitary, unhewn monolith which had attracted his attention. The other strode by his side murmuring indignantly, "It's more than that, it's more than that." When he reached the stone John embraced its rough bulk with his arms, his stick still clutched by the wrong end in his fingers. Three times he pressed his face against it and in his heart he said, "Stone of England, guard Mary Crow and make her happy."

The stranger continued his surly protest. "This stone," he said, "is called the Hêle Stone. It's this stone which stands exactly between the sunrise on a certain day and the Altar Stone inside the Circle — Hêle — you can see what *that* is, can't you? It's Helios, the Sun! You've been playing your little game, Sir, with the Sun Stone."

But John, in that fading twilight, with Stonehenge looming up in front of him, was not to be overawed. He felt too far drunken with the magnetism emanating from these prehistoric monoliths and trilithons. He felt no longer afraid of blaspheming against any God, even against the great Sun Himself!

The two men confronted each other. It was not yet too dark for them to see each other's faces. John leaned on his stick in a normal manner now — the sight of the look of his companion's aquiline nose, combined with his last remark, had reassured him. No religious maniac would have referred to Helios. John continued their disputation, “I believe this stone,” he said dogmatically, “is far older than the rest. I believe Stonehenge was built here because of this stone. I think stone-worship is the oldest of all religions and easier to sympathise with than any other religion.”

The stranger made no reply and looked round him with the air of one who listens intently.

“Come!” he said peremptorily, taking hold of John by the upper part of his arm. “Let’s enter the Circle.”

They moved on for a short distance and came upon a large stone lying flat at their feet. The man’s fingers clutched John’s flesh now with a convulsive clutch.

“You know what *that* is, I suppose?” he said.

John’s answer to this was to tear himself loose, go down on his knees, fumble at the stone with his hands, scoop up some seven-days’ old rain-water that he came upon in a hollow concavity there and lap it up noisily with his lips. The stranger’s tall figure hovered over him like a great, agitated dusky bird. He was wearing a long, old-fashioned overcoat, thin at the waist and very baggy round the legs, and the tails of it kept flapping against his ankles as he went circling about John’s crouching figure, gasping forth bewildered protests.

“What are you doing? I’ve been here more times than I can remember, and I’ve never dared do that! That water’s stagnant. It’s worse than stagnant. They’ve killed thousands and thousands of their enemies here. It’s the Slaughtering Stone, I tell you!”

John Crow rose from his feet and drew the back of his hand across his mouth. This childish gesture, visible enough in the twilight, seemed to confound his companion.

"Have you no reverence at all?" he groaned, while the deep-sunken eyes above his Roman nose flashed a disconcerting gleam of anger. John Crow gave vent to a queer animal sound, that was something between a fox-bark and a pig's grunt. Some ancient vein of old Danish profanity seemed to have been aroused in him.

"I've got what I've got, Mister," he said, "but I want to kneel by that Altar Stone in there before it gets too dark." He was already limping forward when the man pulled him back with a jerk.

"How did you know there was an Altar Stone in there?" The words were uttered in such an awed whisper that John gave vent to a gross Isle-of-Ely chuckle.

"Know it? Hee! Hee! Who *doesn't* know it?" Saying this he led the way between two of the perpendicular Cyclopean uprights which bore aloft a third, a horizontal one. Vast, shadowy, terrific, this third stone now took the place of the twilight sky. John leaned his back against the left-hand monolith, digging his stick into the ground, and his companion imitated him, standing erect against the right-hand one. Above their heads, concealing the grey mass of the zenith, hung that monolithic roof-tree. The faint stars, as they gazed up at them, past the monstrous obstacle, seemed less obscure than they had been before. To the northward, by the way they had entered, they could dimly see the form of the Hêle Stone. It emerged out of the obscurity like a gigantic, bare-headed man, wrapped in a skin or a blanket.

"I've been told," remarked John, "that the origin of these Stones is entirely unknown."

"Not true," growled the other, in a tone that seemed to say, You are the most irresponsive vandal that has ever entered Stonehenge and your folly is only equalled by your ignorance. “It is well known,” he continued aloud, “that this is the greatest Temple of the Druids.”

John’s blistered foot caused him at that moment a sharp pang. He lost his self-control and cried aloud in a scandalous voice that rang out far over the silent Plain, “Damn your Druids!” The moment he had uttered the words he knew he had followed the gathering-up and the mounting-up in his nature of an emotion which, unexpressed, would have disgraced him in his own eyes. He moved away towards the centre of the titanic Circle. “He’ll bolt now and leave me in the lurch,” he thought, “but I can’t help it.” He stood still and looked eagerly round, observing how two of the largest monoliths had fallen across the ends of a yet larger one but without concealing the centre of it. “If this isn’t the Altar Stone, it ought to be,” he muttered audibly; and falling down on his knees he tapped his forehead three times against the rough surface of the stone and then continued to hold it there, pressing it against the cold substance with a painful force. This action gave him extraordinary satisfaction. When at last he scrambled to his feet he found his Druidic friend seated on one of the prostrate “foreign stones,” surveying him with fearful curiosity.

“You’ve been here before,” he said severely, and heaved a deep sigh, as a man sighs when he finds an intruder at his hearthstone. John came over to him and sat down by his side. “To what kind of stone,” he enquired politely, “does that Altar Stone belong?”

The man turned gratefully towards him, free of all suspicion. “The best opinions seem to agree,” he said, “that this stone is micaceous sandstone. It no doubt comes from that portion of Wales where the Druids were most powerful; probably from South Wales, like the others; but the others are of a different geological formation.”

John Crow felt at that moment as if he were endowed with some magical gift of becoming inhumanly small and weak. And not only small and weak! He felt that he possessed the power of becoming so nearly nothing at all — a speck, an atom, a drifting seed, a sand-grain, a tiny feather, a wisp of thin smoke — that he was completely liberated from the burden of competing with anyone, or disputing with anyone, or assuming any definite mask or any consistent rôle. He seemed to have been given a sort of exultant protean fluidity. He felt an intense desire to make a fool of himself, to act like a clown, a zany, an imbecile. He longed to dance round the grave personage at his side. He longed to go down on all fours before him and scamper in and out of those enormous trilithons like a gambolling animal. He felt as if all his life until this moment he had been concealing his weakness of character, his lack of every kind of principle, his indifference to men's opinions, and a something that was almost subhuman in him. But now beneath these far-off misty stars and under these huge blocks of immemorial stone he felt a wild ecstatic happiness in being exactly as he was.

"Very few people," he remarked to his companion, "could have told me about that Altar Stone being made of micaceous sandstone or about it having come from Wales. I am deeply in your debt, Sir, and I am overjoyed at having met you. My name is John Crow. May I ask what your name is?"

"My name is Evans," said the other, making a dignified inclination of his body towards John. Had he said "My name is Plantagenet," or "My name is Hapsburg," he could not have uttered those syllables with more self-conscious weight. "*Owen* Evans," he added, with a little sigh; and it was as if he desired by this emphasis on Owen to indicate to his interlocutor that it would have been more proper on general grounds if his Christian name had been Caradoc or Roderick or Constantine or even Taliessin. "My home used to be in Wales," he continued, "in South Wales. I was in fact born in Pembrokeshire where that Altar Stone comes from."

"Are you living in Glastonbury now?" John enquired. As soon as he had asked this question he felt he had said something gross, indecent, ill-advised; something lacking in all delicate intuition.

"Staying there … for the present," Owen Evans answered, "and what's more," he continued, rising from his seat, "if we want to get there before everyone's in bed we must look sharp."

He seemed to have forgotten — as indeed John himself had almost done — the lameness of his protégé, and he strode off hastily now, past the Hêle Stone, back to the thorn tree, taking for granted that the other was just behind him. But John Crow was not just behind him. He had turned as soon as they were a few paces away from the stones and was now gazing at them with an ecstasy that was like a religious trance. It was an ecstasy that totally abolished Time. Not only was Mr. Owen Evans and his motor car obliterated, but everything, past and future, was obliterated! Mary alone remained. But Mary remained as an essence rather than a person. Mary remained as something that he always carried about with him in the inmost core of his being. She was a dye, a stain, a flavour, an atmosphere. Apart from Mary, Stonehenge and John were all that there was. The enormous body of colossal stones wavered, hovered, swayed and rocked before him; so wrought upon was he, so caught up was he. It rocked like the prow of a vast ship before him. He and It were alone in space. Its dark menacing bulk seemed to grow more and more dominating as he stared at it, but even while it threatened it reassured. And it did not only grow calmer and larger. The taciturn enormity of the uplifted horizontal stones seemed to impose themselves upon his mind with an implication more stupendous than the supporting perpendicular ones. These uplifted stones — these upheld nakednesses — that covered nothing less than the breast of the earth and upon which nothing less than the universal sky rested, seemed to have become, by their very uplifting, more formidable and more sacred than the ones that held them up. They were like cyclopean Sabine women upheld by gigantic ravishers. Both those that upheld and those that were upheld loomed portentous in their passivity, but the passivity of the latter, while more pronounced, was much more imposing. What the instinctive heart of John Crow recognized in this great Body of Stones — both in those bearing-up and in those borne-up — was that they themselves, just as they were, had become, by the mute creative action of four thousand years, authentic Divine Beings. They were so old and great, these Stones, that they assumed godhead by their inherent natural right, gathered godhead up, as a lightning conductor gathers up electricity, and refused to delegate it to any mediator, to any interpreter, to any priest! And what enhanced the primeval grandeur of what John Crow gazed at was the condition of the elements at that hour. Had there been no remnants of twilight left, the darkness and Stonehenge would have completely interpenetrated. Had the stars been bright, their eternal remoteness would have derogated from the mystic enormity of this terrestrial portent. The stars were, however, so blurred and so indistinct, and, atmospherically speaking, so far away, that Stonehenge had no rival. John longed to get some impression of this vast Erection from some subhuman observer, unperverted by historic tradition. What would be the feelings of a sea gull, for example, voyaging thus far inland from Studland or from Lulworth in search of newly turned ploughlands, when it suddenly found itself confronted by this temple of the elements? Would it lodge for a moment on the highest impost of the tallest trilithon? Had any of the Wiltshire shepherds, who lived round about here, ever seen a sea gull actually perched upon the Hêle Stone? What did the foxes make of

Stonehenge as they came skulking over the grassy ridges from Normanton Down? Did the sound of their barkings on wild November nights reach the ears of travellers crossing the Plain? Did a power emanating from these stones attract all the adders and grass snakes and blindworms between Amesbury and Warminster, on certain enchanted summer evenings?

Never would Stonehenge look more majestic, more mysterious, than it looked tonight! The wind had almost dropped and yet there was enough left to stir the dead stems of last year's grasses and to make a faint, very faint susurration as it moved among the Stones. The very indistinctness of the dying daylight served also to enhance the impressiveness of the place. Had the night been pitch dark nothing could have been distinguished. On the other hand, had the twilight not advanced so far, the expanding sweep of the surrounding downs would have carried the eye away from the stones themselves and reduced their shadowy immensity. No artificial arrangement of matter, however terrific and unhewn, can compare with the actual hollows and excrescences of the planet itself; but the primeval erection at which John Crow stared now, like the ghost of a neolithic slave at the gods of his masters, was increased in weight and mass by reason of the fact that nothing surrounded it except a vague, neutral, Cimmerian greyness.

"Stonehenge, you great God!" cried John Crow, "I beg you to make Mary a happy girl and I beg you to let me live with her in Norfolk!"

He tore himself away after this and hurried as fast as he could, towards the thorn tree. The voice of Owen Evans increased his speed as he staggered up the slope. "Mr. Crow! Mr. Crow! Mr. Crow!" came that voice from beyond the tree in a high querulous accent. His blister began to hurt him again. He began again to feel famished and faint. Once more he paused and looked around. The effect at this distance had undergone a change. The stones seemed actually to have melted into one another! It was no longer at a series of stones he was looking, but at one stone. Perhaps indeed just then he was seeing Stonehenge as it would have appeared, not to a wild bird or a fox, but to a flock of sheep travelling from their pastures to the shearing-place.

“Mr. Crow! Mr. Crow!” came the voice of the Welshman; and John felt it incumbent upon him now really to turn his back upon Stonehenge. When he reached the car John Crow was surprised at the urbanity and good-temper of Mr. Owen Evans. He had expected that the man from South Wales, even if he didn’t desert him, would reproach him vehemently. Nothing of the sort occurred. John got in and took his seat by the motorist’s side, avoiding with some difficulty, for his legs were long and his foot extremely sore, the mechanism that worked the machine.

“Are you going to stay long in Glastonbury?” enquired Mr. Evans. John was perfectly frank with him in answer to this direct question. Indeed, in the entranced and relaxed condition of his nerves, he was more frank than he need have been. He became, in fact, very voluble. He told him everything; only keeping back the existence of Mary and the existence of Tom Barter. By degrees, as he conversed with the man, while their car reached and passed the lighted streets of Warminster, he became conscious that Mr. Evans’ questions and answers were composed of two levels of intensity, one below another. The upper, more superficial level, was pedantic and a little patronising, but the lower level struck John’s mind as not merely humble and sad but tragically humble and sad. One or two of his remarks were indeed as exciting to John’s curiosity as they were stimulating to his sympathy. And another thing he noticed about the conversation of this man in the large bowler hat and the tight black overcoat was that it was always when the conversation returned to Glastonbury that this secondary tone came into his voice.

“We’ll get a late supper at Frome,” Mr. Evans said at one point; and the idea of this heavenly refreshment spoken of lightly as a “late supper” so preoccupied John’s thoughts that by degrees he contented himself with a drowsy attempt to learn the names of the villages through which they passed and dropped all other conversation.

They skirted the wall of Long Leat Park. They passed Upper Whitbourne; they passed Corsley Heath; they passed Lane End and Gradon Farm; and while still the memory of his mother was lulling him with a security beyond description, they entered the main street of Frome. Mr. Evans seemed to know the place well, and having left their car in the yard of one of the smaller inns, the two men walked slowly down the street. Most of the ordinary teashops were shut, but they found at last a little refreshment-place of a more modest kind, where they were given a cordial welcome and a substantial though simple supper in a small private room. During this meal this strangely assorted pair had the first opportunity they had yet enjoyed to study each other’s physiognomy under illuminated and relaxed conditions. John found that Mr. Evans had already heard rumours of the strange sequence of events by which the lay-preacher Geard had inherited William Crow’s money. Evans himself, he explained, had made the acquaintance of the Geards through the fact of Mrs. Geard being a member of a very ancient South Welsh family called Rhys. The motorist uttered the name Rhys with the most reverential respect. Not that Mrs. Geard’s immediate relatives, he made clear to John, were anything but quite simple people, but all the Rhys family were, as an ordinary person would put it, of the blood royal of Wales.

It did not take any great diplomacy on the part of John Crow to lead the conversation up to a point where he learned the not-unexpected fact that the maternal ancestors of Mr. Evans himself belonged to this same ancient

House of Rhys. After a little further dalliance round and about the subject of the Geards, John found himself possessed of the further information that Mr. Owen Evans was an admirer of one of Mrs. Geard's daughters, a girl in whom "the very spirit of the old Cymric race" had found a notable habitation. It was in his "first manner," the pontifical one, that Owen Evans described this young lady. The foxy John had begun to wonder indeed whether his whole discovery of these two personalities in his patron were not a crazy fancy of his own, when a chance allusion to the Abbey Ruins brought back in a minute that diffident, hesitant, almost *cowering* tone. It was a queer thing and a thing that John never afterward forgot, as he saw a look of positively tragic suffering cross those strongly marked lineaments, that he himself became extremely uncomfortable when this second tone of his friend's utterances thus predominated. It was exactly as if some bombastic masquerader in theatrical armour had suddenly unclasped his sham gorget and revealed a hairshirt stained with authentic blood. He got the impression, the longer this confidential talk over this felicitous "late supper" lasted, that it was to very few persons, and probably least of all to the maiden with the "very spirit of the old Cymric race," that this singular descendant of the House of Rhys revealed his real nature.

Once more sitting by Mr. Evans in the little motor car and moving swiftly through the darkness, John's attention was distracted now by a certain vivid consciousness of being in a part of England completely new to him and heavy with unique qualities. After walking all day over the chalk uplands of Wiltshire this long, enchanted drive into the western valleys was like plunging into an ever-deepening wave of rich, sepia-brown, century-old leaf-mould. From spinneys and copses and ancestral parks, as they drove between dim, moss-scented banks, a chilly sweetness that seemed wet with the life sap of millions of primrose buds came flowing over him ….

As both the men grew more and more dominated, by the motions and stirrings, the silent breathings and floating murmurs, of a spring night in Somersetshire, they seemed to grow steadily more sympathetic to each other.

“Do you believe, Mr. Evans, as so many people do,” said John suddenly, “in always struggling to find a meaning to life?” Very slowly and very carefully did the Welshman reply to this.

“It’s not … it never has been … in my … in my nature,” he murmured, “to … to take life … in that … way … at all. I find meanings everywhere. My …” he hesitated for a long time here, “difficulties,” he went on, “are entirely personal.”

John was delighted with this reply. “My difficulties,” he said, “are personal too. I simply cannot understand what people mean when they talk of life having a purpose. Life to me is simply the experience of living things; and most things I meet seem to me to be living things.”

In the darkness John felt the car crossing a little bridge.

“Nunney Brook,” he heard Mr. Evans murmur. Soon they were moving along the southern wall of Asham Wood, and then came East Cranmore and West Cranmore and then a place called Doulting.

“Look out for Shepton Mallet next,” Mr. Evans said. “I’m afraid all the pubs will be shut, or we’d stop for a drink there to nerve us up for the last lap of our journey.” His words were justified. It was plain that the inn-bars in Shepton Mallet were all fast closed.

“We must put on speed now,” said Mr. Evans, “or everybody will be fast asleep. They go to bed early in Glastonbury.”

John was soon conscious, as they left the last houses of this little Somersetshire town, solidly built houses under the gas-lamps at the street corners with old carved lintels and worn buttresses, that the countryside was again changing its character. A faint reedy, muddy, watery atmosphere visited his East Anglian nostrils. For a mile or two he was puzzled by these damp waftures carried upon the cold night air, so different from that leaf-mould sweetness, that smell of ancient seignorial parklands, through which they had recently passed. He experienced a pang of sadness which it was easy enough to explain. It was a thousand old impressions of Isle-of-Ely dykes, called up, out of deep-buried race memories, by the ditches, or “rhynes,” as they call them, of the Isle-of-Glastonbury.

“I am getting near Mary!” he thought. “She’s lying in bed looking at those Ruins.” And then he thought, “Evans is going to get me a bed somewhere. He knows I’ve got no money. I’ll see her tomorrow by hook or by crook and then everything will work itself out.”

The thoughts of Mr. Evans, as they passed the hamlet of Pilton and crossed the Whitelake River by a small stone bridge, were so absorbing that he instinctively began driving very slowly. Like all thoughts that have tormented a person’s mind for many years, these thoughts had bruised and beaten themselves against the mental walls of habit until they had ceased to be thoughts and had become palpable images. The images in Mr. Evans’ case were of a very peculiar nature. If they could have been revealed to any average human mind — a mind less vicious and depraved than John’s — they would have presented themselves as something so monstrous as to be the creation of an insane person. This they certainly were not, unless all erotic aberrations are insane; and Mr. Evans, apart from these images, was, as John had discovered, a pedantically and even tediously guileless man. They were scenes of sadistic cruelty, these pictures that dwelt in the back chambers of Mr. Evans’ mind; and the extraordinary thing about them was that, in spite of their iniquity, which was indeed abominable, they still produced in him — whenever the least glimpse of them took form again —

an inebriation of erotic excitement that made his pulses beat, his blood dance, his senses swoon, his knees knock together. The taste of the least of these loathsome scenes was so overpowering to him that it reduced all the rest of life — eating, drinking, working, playing, walking, talking — to tedious occurrences, that had to be got through but that were wanting entirely in the electric quiver of real excitement. What Mr. Evans suffered from was a fever of remorse such as cannot very often have taken possession of human minds in the long course of history. To say that the unhappy man wished that he had never been born would be to put his case mildly. Like Othello he longed to bathe in "steep-down gulfs of liquid fire." No one would ever know — unless Mr. Evans confessed to a priest — how many of these abominations had actually been practised, how many of them described in forbidden books, or how many just simply invented by a perverted imagination. If the victim or victims of Mr. Evans' perversion, supposing they really existed and were not phantoms of his imagination, had suffered cruelly, Mr. Evans himself had suffered, for the last five or six years, a torment to which human history can, we must hope, offer few parallels.

His nature was so riddled and saturated with this appalling habit of mind that it became a mania with him — now that he had rejected all practice of it and all pleasure from all thoughts of it — to blame himself for innumerable forms of suffering in the world, of which he was entirely innocent. He walked about as if the ground under his feet was red-hot iron, so fearful was he of hurting so much as the tiniest beetle or the smallest worm. He used deliberately to walk across heavy grass and heavy undergrowth so as to avoid the little half-made paths which always struck his imagination as things that had been hurt. Since a feeling of power, carried to a monstrous intensity, played such a role in his vice, it was natural enough that when, aghast at what he had become, he gave the whole thing up, he should labour under the delusion of being a much more powerful force in the world than he really was. Few modern persons, as intelligent as Owen Evans, believed as intensely as he did in the existence of a personal God. Perhaps there is something in the peculiar nature of this vice which especially lends itself to this belief.

Recovering himself from his secret thoughts, as they came nearer and nearer to the end of their journey, Mr. Evans murmured to his companion such words as “Havyatt” and “Edgarley.” He nodded his head, too, towards a great level expanse of low-lying country which extended southward, on their left, as they approached their destination. In connection with these dark fields he uttered the syllables “Kannard Moor” and “Butt Moor.” He further indicated that Baltonsborough and Keinton Mandeville lay on the other side of these wide-stretching waterlogged pastures, at which John, in his blunt East Anglian way, declared that in *his* country such places would have had names ending in “ham,” not in such finicking sounds as “ville.” He told Mr. Evans that Saxmundham was a much more characteristic English name than Keinton Mandeville!

As they approached the outskirts of the place, John became aware of the dim pyramidal form of Glastonbury Tor, towering above the walls and roofs of the town. The moment he caught sight of this great pointed hill, with the massive deserted church tower on its summit, he felt conscious that here was something that suited his nature better than he expected anything to have done in these parts.

Mr. Evans, speaking in his second manner, told him that it was the tower of St. Michael the Archangel. “I am glad,” said John, “that St. Michael’s tower was the first thing I saw here!” But in his heart he thought, “To the

Devil with St. Michael! That tower is nothing but a tall pile of stones. I like that tower — I shall go up to that tower at the first chance!”

But Mr. Evans in his tormented mind cared nothing whether John liked the tower or not. He was crying, like a lost spirit, “O Cross of Christ! O Cross of Christ! O Cross of Christ!”

Thus did these two, the man from Wales and the man from Norfolk, enter the silent streets of the town of Glastonbury.

HIC JACET

THE REVEREND MAT Dekker, Vicar of Glastonbury, was working in his garden. He was loosening the earth round his long, straight rows of potatoes, while his son Sam was going backward and forward with an old wheelbarrow to a smouldering rubbish heap under the high wall upon which he deposited the weeds which his father pulled up.

Mat Dekker was a man of sixty. A widower from his only child's birth, twenty-five years ago, his powerfully banked-up affections had long concentrated themselves upon two objects: upon Christ, the Redeemer of his soul, and upon Sam, the son of his loins. It was about ten months this March since the lad had taken his degree at Cambridge; and the first serious misunderstanding between father and son was even now, month by month, gathering weight and momentum. It had to do with the young man's profession, and with the young man's first love-affair. Having brought him up with the constant idea of his taking orders, having seen him graduate with a creditable third-class in the Divinity Tripos, it is not difficult to imagine the crushing blow that fell upon the luckless father, when — the question arising as to what particular theological college he was now to enter — the lad gravely and resolutely declined to carry the thing a step further. And at that point the matter had hung fire for more than half a year. Refusing to give up hope of a change of heart in his son, Mat Dekker had followed the policy of complete inertness. Every opening in life, except unskilled manual labour, requiring the expenditure of some initial sum, the older man, without consciously tyrannising, acted on the assumption that economic pressure, negatively exercised, was the best weapon that age possessed in dealing with the wilfulness of youth.

Apart from religion their tastes were unusually congenial. They both loved gardening, they both loved natural history, they both were proud and shy and anti-social. In their secluded Rectory, surrounded by walls fifteen feet high and faced even across the road by nothing more gregarious than the equally high walls of the Abbey House, they were able to follow their hobbies as botanists, entomologists, geologists, ichthyologists, without cessation or interruption.

Mrs. Dekker had been a French Swiss from the city of Geneva. She had indeed been the pretty housemaid in this very house when Mr. Dekker took it over, and the girl with it, when he entered upon his labours in Glastonbury as a young bachelor priest some thirty years ago. But she had died in childbirth; and since that day there had been no more pretty housemaids; indeed it might be said that there had been no more women of any kind, within the Rectory walls.

For Penny Pitches, their one servant, could only be regarded as a woman under what Sir Thomas Browne would have called, in speaking of other difficult questions, “a wide solution.” Penny Pitches had lost her own baby just about the time of Sam’s birth; and since that day she had been as good as a mother to Sam. She had suckled him, taught him his letters, taught him his manners — for she was not one to spare the rod — taught him his morality, his mother-wit, his legends and his superstitions. But with these female attributes, Penny Pitches’ appearance was more gnomelike that anything else. She was undoubtedly the least human-looking anthropoid mammal in the whole county of Somerset. Penny Pitches was not deformed. She was no humpback. What Nature had done was to make her back so broad and her legs so short that she presented the appearance of a Playing-

Card Queen of Spades; a Queen of Spades endowed with the privilege of three dimensions and the power of locomotion, but denied that natural separation of head from shoulders and of bust from hips which is the usual inheritance of female mortality. She was in fact an animated Euclidean Square moving about over the earth. Nature had, however, in order to compensate Penny for these peculiarities, given her a volubility of speech that was womanly and more than womanly. To speak the truth, the tongues of a dozen cantankerous shrews and a dozen loquacious trollops resided in this gnome-like skull.

It was Penny herself who now appeared upon the scene and standing between wheelbarrow and potato row delivered herself of her view of that morning's general oudook. " 'Tis not that I querrel with 'ee for going out to 'lunch,' as they called it. That's as 'ee do please 'eeself about. What I do, and always shall, uphold is that for a person not to know 'inavarst' whether there's to be dinner on table or no dinner on table is a mock to reason."

"Who told you that we were going out today, Penny?" protested Mr. Dekker mildly, leaning upon his fork. He was in his shirtsleeves and his large, rugged cheeks were redder than usual against the clipped grey whiskers that surrounded them. His chin and his upper lip were clean-shaven; and, as if to make up for this, his eyebrows above his formidable grey eyes were so long that they resembled a pair of thatched eaves.

"Wold man Weatherwax," replied the Vicarage servant, "be round to me pantry with sarcy tales enough to turn milk in a pan! He do say that Miss Mary over the way have a cousin come to town what be lodging wi' Mr. Evans, the new Antiquities man who's looking after wold Jones' shop, who's to Hospital again with one of they little cysteses what do trouble he. 'A said 'twere a surprise to 'un — silly wold sinner as 'tis — that Miss Drew allowed of such doings. But I said to 'ee, I said, if Miss Drew thinks enough of Miss Mary's cousin to ask us to meet ‘un, though ‘a *be* a friend of their new Antiquity man, ‘a must be one of they great factory people. Crow ain't no common name. Crow ain't no West-Country name, Crow ain't. And our Miss Mary, as us do know, be related to they rich folks. So I be come straight to ‘ee, Master, to reason wi' ‘ee as to why, when ‘ee be going out for dinner, ye haven't let us so much as hear a word of it."

"I was just this very minute coming to tell you of our invitation, Penny," murmured the clergyman. "It hadn't arrived at breakfast. In fact Weatherwax must have brought it. I suppose there's no excuse for us, eh, Sam?" and he glanced humorously, from above the rim of his spectacles and from beneath his bushy eyebrows, at the lad on the further side of the wheelbarrow.

Young Sam Dekker answered the look with a grin. Then he suddenly got red. "You've not forgotten, Father," he said, "that you promised to have tea at Whitelake Cottage with the Zoylands?"

Before Mr. Dekker could reply to this, Penny Pitches turned angrily on the lad. "And you're dragging the Master out over they girt marshes, are ye, too, then? It's that little white scut of a Missy Zoyland *ye* be after, Sam Dekker; and don't ‘ee forget that I told ‘ee of it! Oh, I do know ‘ee, I do know ‘ee, Sammy, me blessed babe! 'Tis a daffadowndilly day, like this day be, that leads to these unholy doings. On days like this day 'tis hard for young men to bide quiet at home and take their cup of tea with their dad, brought sweet and strong to ‘un by such as knows what a minister's table should be. A lot you care, Master Sam, what poisonous foreign sweetmeats your dad'll have to eat, and what devil's dam drinks he'll have to drink, out there over Splott's Moor. It's thik Missy Zoyland ye be after. Look at's cheeks, Master! Look at's hot cheeks!"

“I didn’t know Mrs. Zoyland had a daughter, Penny,” remarked the Rector gently, looking anywhere except in the direction of his son’s confusion.

“I never said she had, Master,” averred the woman stoutly, glancing at her embarrassed foster-child with a defiant glare.

“Penny’s thinking of that Fair at Hornblotton, Father, when I took Mrs. Zoyland on the merry-go-round with me. You were there yourself. You saw us. I’d be ashamed to say such unkind things of a quiet little lady like that, Penny!”

“I baint said nothing about no quiet lady,” protested Mrs. Pitches. “My words be to do wi’ a young master, what stands afore us, among these here ‘taties.”

“Well, Penny,” said Mr. Dekker with decision, “I’m afraid it looks, anyhow, as if you’d be a lone woman today. Sam’s quite right. I *did* promise the Zoylands to walk over to Whitelake River this afternoon and I did tell Weatherwax that we would come across to lunch. Did Miss Drew send for any brandy as I told her to?”

“Brandy!” cried Penny Pitches in high dungeon. “Ye’ll have plenty of brandy left, ye will, if ye go giving it round to all the old maids in Silver Street!”

“But, my dear Penny,” said Mat Dekker, stretching out his long white-shirted arm across the handles of the wheelbarrow and taking the woman caressingly by the shoulder, “Miss Drew sent Weatherwax for that brandy that we might drink it at lunch, we and Mary’s new cousin; so I do hope you’ve not been crotchety and refused it to him!”

“Refused it!” The words came like a bullfrog’s croak from the geometrical centre of that well-aproned human square that had planted itself before them. “Thik wold Weatherwax be settled in me chair, in me pantry, at me table this blessed minute. *Refused it!* Why, he's been tasting thik brandy for the last hour. He says he be tasting it to see if it be the same as Miss Drew had from 'ee at Christmas. If it *be* the same, he'll take it over, he says, same as she told he to. And I do tell he that if it's not the same there'll be no need to worry about leaving it in bottle; for bottle'll be like thee own stummick, Master, on Sunday morn! Bottle'll be empty and tinklin'!"

"Well! you run off now, Penny, and let Sam and me finish this couple of rows. Tell old Weatherwax it *is* the same. Let Miss Drew have what she wants; and cork up the bottle. I've got to do some work this morning if we're going to Whitelake. Never mind about *those,* Sam! I'll wheel away the rest myself. You go back to the house now with Penny; oh, and if you change the water in the aquarium, do find a bowl of some kind to put that minnow in! It's only been up at the top since yesterday afternoon and I changed the water two days ago." (This expression "up at the top" referred to the habit of minnows when sick or dying of remaining with their heads upslanted at the top of the water breathing heavily.)

Sam Dekker surveyed the retreating form of Penny Pitches. He was of a lankier build than his father; and there was something pathetically animal-like about his shambling limbs. He had a clean-shaven, rather puckered face, with freckles all over it His nose was long and thin, like the nose of some kind of honey-eating bear; and his small, greenish eyes were surrounded by many wrinkles. His upper lip was long, like his father's, but while Mat Dekker had a massive, square chin to support this peculiarity Sam had a weak, retreating chin. Sam's retreating chin was in many ways the most marked portion of his face, for it was creased with all manner of queer corrugations. He had a nervous trick of opening his mouth a little, drawing in his under jaw, and pulling down the corners of his underlip. The effect of these movements was to compel the contours of his chin to fuse themselves with the contours of his long neck. Had his face been anything but what it was, this trick of contorting his chin would have been much more noticeable; but where everything was so much out of proportion no particular lapse could become prominent.

His greenish eyes almost closed as he stood there in a heavy daze, while his father, anxious to finish that long piece of weeding, bent again over his work. Sam Dekker was not one for moralising on the events of his life, nor for analysing his motives. He took for granted that it was just one more trick of Nature that his interest in fossils, in birds' eggs, in fishes, should lose its savour month after month, as he found himself entoiled in the beauty of Nell Zoyland. He took it for granted that in his weakness he should not dare to mention his entanglement to his father, that in his weakness he should lie to the old man as to the real meaning of the long solitary excursions he was always making these days, past Brindham and Splott's Moor, across Whitelake River to Queen's Sedgemoor; he took it for granted that he should be too unpractical and too cowardly to dream of carrying Nell off or of separating her from the formidable William, or of doing anything at all to clarify the situation. All he could do was to go on constantly seeing her, which intensified rather than resolved the dilemma he was in! He loved his father with the deep passive animal intensity with which he loved Nell. It was indeed his love for his father quite as much as his natural timidity that made it absolutely impossible that he should reveal to the older man the real tragedy of the situation. This tragedy was that not only did he love Nell Zoyland, but that Nell loved him, recklessly, shamelessly, and was constantly urging him, cost what it might to both of them, to carry her off! It had been the deepest and the most exciting astonishment of his life, the fact that a girl as lovely as Nell *could* love an ugly, lumpish, uninteresting failure, such as he felt himself to be; Nell, too, who had so original, so surprisingly good-looking a man as Will Zoyland for her mate! William was, it is true, a good deal older than Nell; but what a man he was, with his leonine beard and rolling blue eyes, his enormous courage, his immense physical strength! Under the low forehead of Sam Dekker there stirred strange feelings towards this formidable rival whose power of character was so little to be trifled with. Even Sam's father, no negligible personage himself, showed evident respect for William Zoyland. It was indeed this respect of Mat Dekker's for the bearded man that had brought about the excursion this afternoon, an excursion which, though he had himself reminded his father of it, filled Sam's heart with deep uneasiness.

Now, as he slowly plodded off to refill the aquarium in their play-room, he cursed Penny Pitches for her uncalled-for outburst. What had induced the absurd woman to meddle in his affairs? Never before had she deliberately and wilfully betrayed him to his father. As a rule in any trifling misunderstanding between her two men she took the side of her master's son against her master. The more he thought about it the less he understood it. Penny, he knew, was anything but puritanical. The indecent jokes that passed between her and old Weatherwax were the standing disgrace of Glastonbury Vicarage. "How much does she know?" he asked himself as he entered the house; and the idea that some gossiping crony of the old woman had seen his meetings with Nell on Crannel Moor or in the old barn on Godney Marsh began to taunt his brain.

Left to himself to finish his weeding, Mat Dekker sternly put out of his mind the whole matter of Penny's attack upon Sam. Dekker's nature was a rich, deep, passionate one; but his religion had assisted him in bringing it under a rare and unusual control. One of the chief things he had learnt to do was to obliterate even sexual suspicion. One of Mat's favourite writers was

St. Paul; and he had made a custom of forcing himself *not to think evil*, a characteristic of that divine Agapé which, according to St. Paul, held the magic clue to the universe.

But there was a power now shining down upon Mr. Dekker that cared nothing for St. Paul. The soul of the great burning sun which illuminated that massive, iron-grey, bent head had many times ere this been roused to anger against him. Among the myriads of conscious beings peopling that hemisphere of our planetary orb who refused in that spring solstice to make the sort of grateful gesture towards this great Deity which the Powers of Nature demand of those they favour, this ruddy-faced man in shirtsleeves bending now over his potato bed seemed to that flaming heart the most obdurate and the most sacrilegious. “Let his Christ protect him!” thought (if we can call the titanic motions of super-consciousness in such a Power by the name of “thought”) this great outpourer of life heat. “As for us, we will let loose his own offspring upon him; and the thing he loves most in the world we will rouse up against him!”

It must have been about six hours after their talk with Penny Pitches in the potato garden that Sam Dekker, troubled at heart by what he considered the gross and inexplicable treachery of his foster-mother, sat gloomily by himself on the warm steps of the Abbey House terrace. A little below him, on wooden seats placed side by side, above a low parapet, sat Miss Eupnemia Drew and her other guests. The more Sam meditated upon that afternoon’s excursion to Whitelake, the more troubled he became. Would his father detect anything? Would Nell in her agitation as hostess forget her prudence? Had William Zoyland secretly planned the whole affair in order to nip in the bud this perilous growth whose frail seedling-shoot he had already discerned? “I shall get red,” he thought, “I shall get red as a turkey-cock, just as Penny said. My hand will shake when she gives me my tea. We shan’t dare to look at each other, or speak to each other. Father’s bound to notice something.”

Had Nell Zoyland seen the lad at this moment and watched the puckering of his freckled forehead and the way, as he rose now to offer help to Mary, the muscles of his poor chin contracted, she would have loved him more than ever. Mary’s own face, as she carried a silver tray in one hand and a coffee jug in the other, was drawn and white. It was all over as far as Miss Drew was concerned! She knew *that* already, though the lady had not spoken a word to her on the subject. John had behaved with irretrievable folly at lunch; had talked wildly; had expressed disbelief in the legend of the Holy Thom, had announced that it was a pity that the Danes had been turned back at Havyatt Gap and finally had declared that the discovery of Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb was the mere mummery of the monks! Yes, it was all over for them with Miss Drew. She would never ask him again. She would never let her meet him again. It would be a lucky thing if she didn’t pack her off, then and there, merely for having such a cousin!

When Mary, with Sam helping her, for both Miss Drew’s cook and housemaid, the sisters Rogers, had begun to wash up, joined the rest of the party on the terrace, John had fallen into a more amiable mood. He still remained irresponsive about the Holy Thom, but he had evidently taken a fancy to Mr. Dekker, and he was listening now quite humbly while the Vicar narrated to him in a grave and unaffected tone certain historic facts about the Ruins before them.

“Hic jacet sepultus inclitus Rex Arturus in Insula Avallonia,” recited Mat Dekker in a deep, quiet voice. “The end of the twelfth century it was,” he went on, “when they found the coffin, a great hollowed-out oak trunk, with the bones of the king and queen. Nearly a hundred years later Edward the First buried them before the high altar. The books say that Leland the

Antiquary actually saw them as late as the sixteenth century. Since then they have been lost to sight.” The Vicar of Glastonbury sighed as he ceased speaking, and at the same moment a light wind from the west, rustling across the masses of ruined masonry caught the topmost twigs of the tall elms on the right of the Tower Arch and made them bow before it.

“When I told my good friend Mr. Evans this morning,” began John Crow, “that I had been invited here, it *did* excite him! He quoted what he called a Welsh Triad — something about no one knowing where the grave of Arthur was.”

Miss Euphemia Drew folded her cream-coloured cashmere shawl more tightly round her neck, hiding the gold-mounted moonstone brooch that clasped her bodice; and then, turning her chin above the wrinkled fingers she had thus raised to her throat, “Not *know* where it is?” she said sternly. “Fiddle-de-dee! we *all* know where it is! It’s under that broken arch.”

Mary tried to convey to her cousin by a rapid glance that he must accept the verdict of Miss Drew as to the grave of the great king without further question. But the run-down Danish adventurer refused to be stopped. “My friend Mr. Evans quoted a Latin jingle too. What was it, Sir? I expect you know it. It began with *Hic jacet,* just as yours did.”

Mat Dekker smiled sadly. “You mean ‘*Hic jacet Arturos, rex quondam, rexque futurus’*? Is that what he said? ‘King once and king to be,’ “ he added, with his clerical instinct for making things clear. “Most of our Glastonbury sayings have to do with some sort of ‘*Hic jacet,’* “ he concluded rather wistfully.

“Would you say, Sir,” enquired John, “that King Arthur is really the most deeply rooted superstition that this place represents?” The younger Dekker began to feel seriously angry with the East Anglian. It was all very well to display a lack of antiquarian interest. But here, on this terrace, gazing out at

Edgar’s Chapel, at the great Tower Arch, at St. Mary’s Church, at St. Thomas’ Chapel, at the rich ruins of the most sacred *ecclesia vertusta* in all Britain, to definitely challenge the whole *genius loci* seemed to Sam’s simple mind as much a lapse from Nature’s ways as it would have been to allow a minnow to perish for lack of fresh water.

But the elder Dekker seemed totally unconscious of the insult to the spot he loved. “Well, of course to our old-fashioned Protestant ancestors Glastonbury must have reeked with what you call ‘superstition.’ Three famous Saxon kings are buried here, something like six well-known saints are buried here. All the Holy Grail legends gather to a head here. The Druids played a great part here; and long before the Druids there was a Lake Village” — he gave a grave, characteristically West-country jerk with his head to indicate the northwestern point of the compass— “whose mounds you can still see in the fields. Ancient British *that* probably was; older anyway than History! But I expect the deepest-rooted superstition here, if you could compel Glastonbury Tor to speak, would turn out to be the religion of the people who lived *before* the Ancient Britons; perhaps even before the Neolithic Men. At any rate we have some excuse for being ‘superstitious’ in these parts. Don’t you think so, Miss Drew?”

“I think you are very kind, dear Vicar, to answer Mr. Crow’s question at all,” said the old lady severely. “For myself I would answer it rather differently. I would assure him that what he calls superstition *we* call the Only True Faith.”

This remark produced a complete silence.

“My friend Mr. Evans,” — it was John who broke the spell— “says that it’s neither King Arthur nor Joseph of Arimathea that’s the real hidden force still active in Glastonbury.”

"What does he say it is?" enquired Mary, hoping against hope that John would, even now, redeem himself.

"He won't say. He gets reserved and touchy. It's my own opinion that it has to do with Merlin. But I expect I'm all wrong. When I mentioned Merlin all he did was to quote a lot of Welsh Triads in Welsh. He's a queer character, my friend Evans, but he interests me very much."

"Will you take some more coffee or some more brandy, Vicar?" interrupted Miss Drew in a tone that seemed to say, "When once I have exposed the unpleasantness of a rude young man there is no need for him to make further efforts to reinstate himself in my favour." And then when the Vicar had shaken his head, "Carry the trays away, child, please; and tell Lily and Rogers that you and I will get our own tea today."

The cook's name was Louie Rogers. She was only a year older than Lily and as a rule Miss Drew called her Louie; but when upset by the spectacle of the world's disorder she always called her Rogers. It had been her mother's as well as her grandmother's custom to call their cooks by their surnames and Miss Drew reverted to it as a sort of invocation of these thin-lipped, tenderly stern women, whose miniatures were on her writing-table. The mere utterance of the word "Rogers" seemed to Miss Drew to bring back decency and respect to human intercourse.

John had not the courage nor the wit to rise from his chair and help his cousin carrying her tray into the house; so it worked out that Sam Dekker once more was her companion. But Sam never addressed a single word to her as he walked by her side. His sole thought was his growing dread of the afternoon's encounter. Mary herself pondered bitterly upon the interior meaning of Miss Drew's little speech about their tea. It meant a kind of emotional unbending, an intimacy, a crisis of sympathetic confidence; but it also meant that under no conceivable circumstances would her employer allow her to go on meeting her cousin. Ladies who live together possess these indirect ways of communicating with each other and by the tone in which Mary replied, “Yes, dear, that will be so nice!” Miss Drew knew that while there would be nothing in the nature of a scene between them, the separation of Mary from John would take more than one evening’s dignified protest.

Meanwhile the sun began slanting its rays more and more warmly and mistily upon the group on the terrace. The smooth expanse of grass which separated them from the Ruins bore on its surface now a few dark, fluctuating shadows as the light wind stirred the elmtree tops. The three hills of the place, Wirral Hill, Chalice Hill and the Tor, were all behind them, and beyond the Ruins and beyond the trees and beyond the vaporous roofs of the town, stretched the wide, low valley where flowed the River Brue, and where that Bridge Perilous was, into which, as Dekker was now telling him, Arthur had thrown his sword. Dim and rich and vague the valley stretched, covered with an undulating veil of blue-purple mist. Orchard upon orchard, pasture upon pasture, it sank away, the lowest pastoral country in the land of England, lower than the level of the sea, heavy with its precious relics as the sea bottom with its drowned ships. As he gazed at all this, feeling more and more friendly to Mr. Dekker and more and more hostile to Miss Drew, John began to say to himself that it was nothing else than this very low-lying character of the country that made it such a fatal receptacle for the superstitions of two thousand years! Into this blue-purple vapour, into the bosom of these fields lower than the sea, floated, drifted upon the wind, all those dangerous enervating myths that had taken the heart out of man’s courage and self-reliance upon the earth. The true Faith indeed! Why, the land reeked with the honey lotus of all the superstitions of the world! Here they had come, here they had taken refuge, driven into flight by the great dragon-beaked ships and the long bright spears of his own heathen ancestry! And here, caught by these fatal low-lying flats they had lingered; lingered and clung till they grew rotten and miasmic, full of insidious mind-drugging poison. God! This place must be charged, “thick and slab,” with all the sweet-sickly religious lies that had ever medicined the world! Here like green scum over old stagnant water courses, here like green pond weeds upon castle moats, these tender-false mandragoras lulled to sleep the minds of the generations! No wonder Philip, with his accursed machines, found no manhood to resist his despotism in a place like this!

It was at this point in John Crow’s contemplations that Mary and Sam came slowly back and reseated themselves by his side. They had exchanged only two sentences on the way back from the house. Mary had asked him whether they could spare Mr. Weatherwax, who worked in both their gardens, for the whole day tomorrow, and Sam had replied that he thought they could, as long as the old man “helped Penny to pump before he came across the road.”

John was soon made aware of the miserable depression into which Mary had fallen. Her profile troubled him by its tragic tenseness. He rose abruptly. “Goodbye, Miss Drew,” he said, bowing to her from where he stood. “Thank you so much for having asked me here. Good-bye, Sir, I hope you’ll let me see you again. Cousin Mary, will you show me that short cut to Wirral Hill?”

He swept her off with him so boldly and decisively, actually taking her by the arm, that Miss Drew was nonplussed. “Don’t desert me, Mary!” was all she could cry out after them. They skirted the kitchen garden and reached a little gate in a budding privet-hedge, where old Weatherwax in some wanton mood had planted hyacinths. There was a clump of these heavily fragrant flowers by this gate and a lark high up above them was quivering in the hot sky. Mary put her hand on the latch after giving him minute directions of the way. They could see the whole ridge of Wirral Hill in the distance and the girl knew she ought to leave him at once and return; but it was hard to do so. Mr. Owen Evans was expecting him, he explained, by a lonely tree up there; and as he searched with his eyes the ridge she showed him, he could see clearly a particular tree which stood out in clear relief. He declared he could even see the Welshman's figure propped on the ground against this tree; but the girl contradicted this. "I know that black thing up there well," she said. "I used to take it for a person. It's an old post. I went up there once to make sure."

"What tree is that? Evans said it was a thorn but it doesn't look like a thorn to me."

"It's a sycamore," she answered. "At least I think so. Oh, I don't care what it is!" Her voice trembled. Her lips were quivering.

"What is it, my treasure?"

"*What is it*?" Her tears were swallowed in a sudden gust of anger. She dropped the latch of the little gate and her whole body stiffened. "You know what you've done, I suppose, John, by your silly talk? You've spoilt everything! She'll never ask you again. She'll stop my seeing you again! Oh, how could you do it, *you fool?* How *could* you do it?"

He was so astonished at the flashing eyes and the white face that his eyes and mouth opened with a blank, idiot look. His expression in fact was so exactly like one of those pictures of human beings that school-children draw on their slates, that Mary could not refrain from a faint smile.

"You see, John dear," she said more gently, "it would be very hard for me to get another job. If Miss Drew gave me notice I'd be penniless. I'd have to be a governess or a companion with someone else. *That* would almost certainly mean my leaving Glastonbury. You don't expect to follow me about all over England, do you, while I work in peoples' houses?"

"But I'm going to get work myself, *here*, and soon too," he protested. "Evans knows lots of people. He's going to help me.

He's going to take me this very afternoon to see his cousin, Mrs. Geard. Mrs. Geard and Mr. Evans are both Rhyses; if you know what that means! At any rate you know too well who the Geards are."

Mary did smile outright at that. She shook her head. "They call ditches about here by some funny name like that. No! Rhyne, *that's* it, not Rhys. But won't Philip be furious if you go and see those Geards?"

"I don't care a damn about Philip. I hate the fellow! I'll make this Geard chap give me work. He ought to do something for some of us. *Any* decent man would, after collaring all that. And Evans says he's all right."

"But it would hurt Philip terribly, wouldn't it, and Aunt Elizabeth too, if you really did take money from that person? Does your friend know if this Geard man is going to go on living here?"

"Certainly he is! Mrs. Geard — who's a Rhys; and don't you forget *that*, Mary, for God knows all that that means! — has been three times already to look at a place over there" — he swung round on his heel and pointed to a sloping ridge not far from the Tor— "a place they call Chalice House. So they're going to stay here, don't 'ee fear. I tell you, my treasure, you needn't worry. It's going to be all right. We'll go on meeting in that same place in the Ruins where we did that first time. And as soon as I get work we'll be married — and the devil fly away with your old lady!"

Mary seized his wrist with all her fingers and lifted it to her mouth. "I've a great mind to punish you for behaving so badly," she murmured. There was something about the smell of John's bony hand that made her homesick for Norfolk. "It smells like peat," she thought, and she began licking with the tip of her tongue the little hairs which now tickled her lips. This gave her a sharp tingling sensation that ran through her whole frame. In a flash she imagined herself stretched out in bed by John’s side. “Oh, my dear, oh, my dear!” she sighed.

“Take care, my treasure; they’ll see us,” he whispered. “Wait till tomorrow afternoon! About half-past two, eh? When your old lady is asleep? I’ll wait for you. So don’t you get agitated; even if you can’t get away for hours. I’ll wait there till they close up the whole place! I’ll walk about a bit, you know, and come back. It’s dry in that little chapel, even if it’s raining outside.”

Thus they talked by the gate, unwilling to separate, hugging each other — though they were not actually touching each other now — as tightly as if they were stark naked, but with no wild, irresistible rush of passion. They were Norfolk Crows, Crows from Norwich, from Thorpe, from Yaxham, from Thetford, from East Dereham, from Cringleford, from Methwold. Their love was lust, a healthy, earthy, muddy, weather-washed lust, like the love of water-rats in Alder Dyke or the love of badgers on Brandon Heath. They were shamelessly devoid of any Ideal Love. Born to belong to each other, by the same primordial law that made the Egyptian Ptolemies marry their sisters, they accepted their fatal monogamy as if it were the most casual of sensual attractions.

And in the etheric atmosphere about those two, as they stood there, quivered the immemorial Mystery of Glastonbury. Christians had one name for this Power, the ancient heathen inhabitants of this place had another, and a quite different one. Everyone who came to this spot seemed to draw something from it, attracted by a magnetism too powerful for anyone to resist, but as different people approached it they changed its chemistry, though not its essense, by their own identity, so that upon none of them it had the same psychic effect. This influence was personal and yet impersonal, it was a material centre of force and yet an immaterial fountain of life. It had its own *sui generis* origin in the nature of the Good-Evil First Cause, but it had grown to be more and more an independent entity as the centuries rolled over it. This had doubtless come about by reason of the creative energies pouring into it from the various cults, which, consciously or unconsciously, sucked their lifeblood from its wind-blown, gossamer-light vortex. Older than Christianity, older than the Druids, older than the gods of Norsemen or Romans, older than the gods of the neolithic men, this many-named Mystery had been handed down to subsequent generations by three psychic channels; by the channel of popular renown, by the channel of inspired poetry, and by the channel of individual experience.

Names are magical powers. Names can work miracles. But the traditional name of this entity — the Holy Grail — might easily mislead an intelligent historian of our planet. The reality is one thing; the name; with all its strange associations, is only an outward shell of such reality. Apart from the fabulous stories that have become the burden of this wind-blown “Numen” it must be noted that as these two figures — this man and this woman — longed to make love to each other but were withheld by circumstance, their intense desire — all the more electric for being as vicious as it was — was urged by its own intensity (apart altogether from any consciousness in these two as to what was happening) to the very brink of this floating Fount of Life. The strongest of all psychic forces in the world is unsatisfied desire. And the desire of these two at this moment, gathering electric force out of the atomic air and striving blindly towards each other in despite of the sundering flesh, was so caught up and so heightened by the frustrated desires of two thousand years, which in that valley had pulsed and jetted and spouted, that it did actually draw near to that Secret Thing. Thus the loves of these two people, both of them hostile to all these miraculous forces, both of them rooted in fen-mud and vicious heathenism, did, by reason of the strength of what the old Benedictines would have called their “brutish and carnal purpose” approach the invisible rim of that wind-blown mystery. Approach it, but not touch it! With a heavy heart Mary dragged herself off. Three times she looked back and waved her hand, watching him make his lingering way towards Wirral Hill. Southwest he went; and, each time she turned, the afternoon sun seemed more obscuring, more vaporously concealing, more hopelessly swallowing! He seemed to disappear into that golden haze like “the knight-at-arms” of the poet, “alone and palely loitering.” But darkly, not “palely,” did his figure pass away, vanishing amid the yet darker forms of tree trunks and wall cornices and wooden water butts and clothes lines and garden pumps; all mingling together in dim, fantastic, purplish dream stuff; as if the slanting sun-rays had hollowed out all substance, all solidity, from both them and him!

As, hot and perspiring, John toiled up that dusty ascent, he saw the boyish countenance of Tom Barter before him. He was going to see Tom Barter tomorrow evening. Would he prove a complete stranger when he was face to face with him? Tomorrow evening was Saturday. He hoped Mary would be able to reach that place in the Ruins in good time. Well! if she were late, he would have to keep Tom waiting. But Tom would not mind. Tom was always good-natured. Tom never got angry. No, he never got angry, even when the boat was stranded in the mud, even when the bait was left behind, even when a float was lost, even when an oar got adrift, even when you kept him waiting for hours!

By God! it *was* with Tom, and not with Mary, that he had played that wicked game, that day, at the bottom of the boat. How extraordinary that he should have mixed up those two like that in his mind!

WHITELAKE COTTAGE

WHEN MR. DEKKER and his son set out to walk to Whitelake River they decided to cross that particular region in the environs of Glastonbury to which local usage had come to restrict the romantic name of Avalon. Over the uplands known as Stonedown they directed their way straight to the hamlet of Wick. At this point Mr. Dekker began to take a little surreptitious pleasure in their excursion independent of its troublesome and complicated purpose. He always loved a long walk with Sam and there was not a field or a lane within several miles of their home where some rare plant or bird, or, as the Spring advanced, some butterfly did not arrest their attention.

“I was telling Mr. Crow,” said Sam’s father, “about this hamlet. Do you know, it was the one thing I told him that really interested him. A quaint fellow this Crow seems to be.”

His last words were spoken in a raised voice for Sam had moved a little ahead of him and was standing by the side of an immense oak tree which grew at the edge of the lane. Another tree of the same species, equally enormous, grew a stone’s throw further on; and these two gigantic living creatures, whose topmost branches were already thickly sprinkled with small, gamboge-yellow leaf buds, appeared to be conversing together, in that golden sun-haze, far up above the rest of the vegetable world and where none but birds could play the eavesdropper.

The sight of these two titanic trees, trees that might have witnessed at least a fifth portion of the long historic life of Glastonbury, suggested to the mind of the elder Dekker thoughts quite unconnected with either Vikings or Druids.

“We *must* try again here this summer for those Purple Hair-streaks, Sam, my boy.”

But the lad heard his father’s words without his accustomed sympathy in entomological pursuit. His body was at that moment bowed forward towards the great corrugated trunk, his outstretched arms pressed against it, his fingers extended wide. All this he was doing in complete unawareness.

Was Sam’s gesture, at this moment, destined to prove the existence of an increasing rapprochement in these latter modern days between certain abnormal human beings such as were both Sam and John, and the subhuman organisms in nature? Was it in fact a token, a hint, a prophecy or a catastrophic change imminent in human psychology itself?

Across the soul of that immemorial oak tree, as it flowed upward like an invisible mist from the great roots in the earth to those gamboge-coloured leaf buds, there had passed more wild November rains, more luminous August moons, more desperate March winds whirling and howling over Queen’s Sedgemoor and Wick Hollow, than either Sam Dekker or his father had any notion of. Then why to the troubled heart of the younger man, just then, did there not come from the immense repository of this huge tree’s vast planetary experience, a kind of healing virtue?

Why did Sam Dekker draw back from that oak tree uncomforted, uncounselled, unsoothed, uninspired? Against that great rough trunk many a gipsy donkey had rubbed its grey haunches and got comfort by it, many a stray heifer had butted with her wanton horns and eased her heart, squirrels had scampered and scratched there, and hung suspended, swaying their tails and scolding, wrens had built their large, green, mossy nests there, chaffinches had scraped and pecked at the lichen for *their* nests, so small, so elegant, in the nearby blackthorn bushes. Past that trunk and its great twin brother further down the lane had ridden men in armour, men in Elizabethan ruffles, men with cavalier ringlets, men in eighteenth-century wigs. Many of these no doubt jumped down from their horses, drawn by an indescribable, magnetic pull, and touched that indented bark with their travel-swollen bare hands. And to many it must have brought luck of some sort, some healing wisdom, some wise decisions, some hints of how to deal with their mates, with their offspring, with the tumult of life!

But nothing of this sort came to Sam Dekker. The son was he of the man who refused to worship the sun! That great reddish orb, now sinking down towards the Bristol Channel, had its own strange superhuman consciousness. And this consciousness, roused to anger against this simple priest, had resolved with a mysterious envenoming tenacity, corrosive and deadly, to separate him from the only earthly thing he loved!

The two men walked on in silence now, Mr. Dekker instinctively understanding that his son was on tenterhooks about this encounter, and beginning himself to feel, in his own sturdy consciousness, certain premonitions of danger on the air.

They passed Wick Hollow. They passed Bushey Combe. As they went on, they were sometimes compelled to stop and stare at the hedges for it was weeks since they had been that way and they were astonished at the extraordinary beauty of the celandines this year. The ground was uneven, broken up into many little depressions and small hillocks, and whether because February had been exceptionally wet, or because the winds had been so steadily blowing from the west, not only were the petals of the celandines more glittering than usual, but their leaves were larger and glossier.

“Celandines were my father’s favourite flower,” said Mat Dekker as they moved on again after one of these pauses. It always pleased him to think of his father when he was alone with his son and to speak of him to him. It made him feel that the three of them — three generations of Dekkers — were intimately bound together, and bound together too with that fecund Somersetshire soil. His piety in this classical sense was one of the massive single-hearted motives by which he lived.

The landscape around them changed completely now, for they descended from the verdurous island of Avalon down into a confused series of cattle droves which led across the low-lying water-meadows.

Few, even among the dwellers in Glastonbury, could have found their way as these two did over these fields and ditches. When they had passed the outskirts of Brindham Farm and reached the less-frequented marshes of Splott's Moor, it was even more difficult to proceed; for the cattle droves yielded place then to mere foot-tracks from weir to weir and dam to dam. Wider ditches too, interrupted their way, those great ditches of formidable water called rhynes to which Mary Crow had referred in her conversation with John; and the planks across these deep water courses were, in many places, perilously rotted by rains and floods and needed to be trodden with extreme wariness by two such heavily built men. Whitelake River itself was also no contemptible obstacle to surmount, for there were no bridges anywhere near; but in the end they discovered a willow branch fallen across the little stream, and managed to make use of this as a bridge. It was in the overcoming of little chance difficulties like this in exploring the country that Mat Dekker always showed at his best. On this occasion, with the sun, his heathen enemy, already so near the horizon he forgot completely the annoying nature of their excursion and began chuckling and boasting over this or that achievement of the way, as if they had been crossing the Danube instead of Whitelake River!

They were now actually upon the marshlands of Queen's Sedgemoor; and here they found themselves without the trace of even a footpath to follow, and once again the elder Dekker had an opportunity of displaying to his son his skill as a cross-country guide.

"Whitelake Cottage is on the bank of this stream, my son," he said gravely, "and *we* are on the bank of this stream. All we've got to do is to follow it down."

Sam mechanically obeyed, letting his father move in advance of him by several paces. In his son's silence the elder man had reverted to his natural custom of brooding sluggishly upon every single little natural object they encountered. Nothing was negligible to this despiser of the sun when once he was out-of-doors. There was no weed that lacked thrilling interest for him. But it was not a merely scientific interest; still less was it an aesthetic one. The master-current of the man's passionate West-country nature found in a thousand queer, little, unattractive objects, such as mouldering sticks, casual heaps of stones, discoloured funguses on tree roots, dried-up cattle-droppings, old posts with rusty nailheads, tree stumps with hollow places full of muddy rain-water, an expression of itself that wide-stretching horizons failed to afford.

By approaching their objective this particular afternoon by so rambling and indirect a road, it was a good deal after half-past four — the hour when they had been invited — that they reached Whitelake Cottage at last.

In recognition of the abnormally warm day, Nell Zoyland had arranged to give her guests their tea upon a little grassy terrace overlooking the swollen stream. Here then the father and son sat, munching such exquisite thin bread and butter as Mistress Pitches did not often cut for their delectation and trying to conceal both from each other and from their host, the growing measure of their uneasiness. For, truth to tell, the situation was drifting, moment by moment, more and more out of control. Nell Zoyland's cheeks were hot and her breath came quick. Mat Dekker had certainly never seen a girl with more beautiful, more alluring breasts than hers; nor had he ever seen one who dared to wear a bodice so tightly fitting, so mediaeval-looking, so unfashionably piquant! These beautiful breasts seemed indeed to dominate the whole occasion. Mat Dekker felt that there was something so unusual about their loveliness that they endowed their owner with a sort of privileged fatality; a fatality that might lead to halcyon happiness; or on the other hand, to tragic devastation and destruction. They seemed meant, Mat Dekker thought as his eyes wistfully followed them, for something beyond the suckling of any human infant. At this point the man's ingrained morality pulled him up short. But he could not resist the feeling that there was something in the loveliness of such breasts that carried a person far from ordinary human life, to those old wild legends of immortal creatures of mist, of dawn, of dew that have troubled good men's minds from the beginning.

"It is only children of the elements," he said to himself, "that such breasts ought to suckle!"

It was at this point in this singular tea-party that William Zoyland began to speak his mind.

Sam Dekker soon ceased to drink any more tea or to eat any more bread and butter. He sat now with his shoulders hunched up and his chin sunk into his neck. His elbows rested heavily upon Nell's wicker-work garden table. His eyes were fixed upon the face of William Zoyland as if upon the face of a well-known animal that had suddenly begun uttering surprising sounds, sounds that belonged to an entirely different type of beast.

Nell, on the contrary, had the aspect of a girl desperate and reckless at the close of a day-long struggle with an equal adversary. She fixed upon her husband's leonine head, as he went on speaking, that careless, contemptuous look, which, of all looks in their harem, men dread the most.

Whitelake Cottage was like a little doll's house by the reedy banks of Whitelake River. It only possessed two rooms downstairs and two upstairs, with a little kitchen at the back, above which, under a sloping roof, which had been attached to the rest of the house at a recent date, was a low-ceilinged attic-study devoted to the use of the master. They evidently had no servants nor was there any sign of a flowerbed, although at the edge of the grassy slope where they all now sat, several wild-flower roots, by the look of the disturbed soil and the appearance of the plants, had been lately put in.

Under that flowing torrent of deep-toned revelations, full of startling import, to which they were perforce listening, Mat Dekker was staring at last year's drooping rushes, brown and crumpled, among which several newly green shoots were sprouting up. The sun was quite below the horizon now; and in the early twilight these green reed shoots threw forth a peculiar coolness of their own, a pure, liquid coolness, after that warm day that was like a calm but tragic Finis to some magical play of a great playwright.

Mat Dekker was gathering up his forces to deal with a situation altogether new in his narrow and single experience, and the effort to cope with this was so great that its effect upon him, as Zoyland went on speaking, began to be the very last anyone would have predicted. He began to grow extremely sleepy. This tendency to grow sleepy at a crisis was indeed an old infirmity in his family. The great-grandfather of his father, James Dekker, had grown sleepy when called upon, with other well-known Somersetshire gentlemen, to rise to the support of William of Orange against the last of the Stuarts.

"It's for the wench to decide for herself," Will Zoyland was saying, as, lying back in his wicker arm-chair with his leather-gaitered legs stretched out in front of him and one hand deep in his corduroy breeches' pocket and the other tugging at his great yellow beard, he rolled his blue eyes from

Sam's bowed face to Sam's father's averted face. "I'm a philosopher, Mr. Dekker. I'm not one to let myself suffer, or the girl either, when there's no need for it. But it's too much for her to expect that I'll go on living with her and sleeping in a separate bed. In fact, I refuse to do it! I'm a philosopher, I tell ye; and as such I know that all conventional idealism is puff-ball foolishness. Any girl can love two men if she wants to, just as *we* can love two women. I've no doubt a man like yourself, Mr. Dekker, has frequently loved two women at the same time. It's natural to us. Nell and this silly lad here think they're in love. They've imagined till today, or at any rate Sam has imagined till today, that I was the sort of born cuckold who could be fooled till judgment. Well! I'm not. D'ye hear, Sam, me boy? *I'm not.* I live my own life in my own way and always have. I could live here perfectly well without Nell, though she doesn't think so. She thinks I could live without sleeping with her; but she don't believe I could get my meals for myself or get on without having her to talk to. That's where women are so stupid. They think they're necessary where they're *not* necessary; and they don't know how necessary they are, in another direction! But I'm a philosopher, as I say, Mr. Dekker, my good Sir, and I know very well that my little Nell still loves her old Will (though she doesn't know it herself!) quite as much as she loves this sulky young gentleman here. Now what I say to her, Sir, and to you, my romantic young friend, is simply this. If Nell will stop this foolery of sleeping on the sitting-room sofa, stop, in fact, this foolery of being cross with me and cold to me, I'll be ready — d'ye hear me lad? — I'll be ready to share her with ye. So long as ye don't tumble her 'in me wone bed,' as they say round here, ye can have the lass up hill and down dale — I'm mum. I'm mute. I'm the dumb fish. In fact, to tell ye the truth, Mr. Dekker, I've got ridiculously fond of this great hulking son of yours. I respect the boy. I like talking to the boy. We've had some fine times together, haven't we, Sam? No, no. I agree with that old rogue Voltaire. I'm one who could be quite content to live 'à trois,' as the rascal says. But I'm not one who can live side by side with a girl like Nell and have her cold and cross and savage, like she's been this last month. To Hell with her cooking! I'm as good a cook as she is; and a better, too. Sam would like her to remain my servant and to become his light o' love. Nell wants to run off with Sam and leave everything. Only when I tell her to stop talking about it and do it, she says Sam hasn't the guts to leave his dad. And then when I laugh at her and tell her to try him and see, she just cries and cries at the thought of how her poor old Will is to get on, all alone, without anyone to get him his meals."

He paused and looked round to make sure that his wife had not slipped away and retreated into the house. No; Nell Zoyland was standing exactly where she had been when he began to speak, her hands pressed against the back of an empty chair. It was then that Will Zoyland's eye, as he looked round, caught sight of a kestrel-hawk hovering in the air above some pollarded willows. He clapped his great hand on his mouth with an inarticulate shishing sound.

"Shish! Shish!" he murmured, glancing at the two Dekkers and then at Nell. He rose to his feet, turned his back upon them all, and stepping lightly on tip-toe, like a gamekeeper in pursuit of a poacher, hurried to the side wall of his house.

Following his motions with his eyes, the elder Dekker remembered now, what everybody in Glastonbury knew, namely that Mr. Zoyland was the bastard son of the Marquis of P. the great Somersetshire landowner. He saw the fellow seize upon his gun, where it lay propped against the wall, and glance quickly upward. Like the dedicated naturalist that he was, Mat Dekker hated to see any bird shot; and even though he had been told that in that low-lying ground kestrels had grown to be a nuisance, he still would have protested violently.

Without a second's hesitation he lifted up his voice from where he sat and uttered a resounding, "Hoy! a-hoy! hawk-a-hoy!"

The report of the gun followed almost immediately; but startled by his guest's shout, the bearded bastard of Lord P. missed his bird.

Nell fully expected the roar of a Polyphemus to follow this mischance and a terrible, "Damn your soul, Sir! What do you mean by that?" But neither Mr. Zoyland's voice nor any look in his eyes betrayed a flicker of such emotion.

"Sorry, Sir!" was all he said, as he resumed his seat with his gun across his knees; "I ought to have remembered your penchant for hawks. Sam told me how he used to keep a pair of them when he was at school. I expect it was by taming hawks that he learnt to tame girls. Well, Sam; well, Nell, what are you two romantic children going to decide? Is poor old Will to go on sleeping alone?"

There was something about the man's tone that roused the girl to a level of emotion and a quality of emotion that astonished her lover.

The slow-flowing water beneath them seemed to have taken to itself all the daylight that was left; and between the girl's tense face and its unruffled surface an affinity of whiteness that was almost phosphorescent rose into being, established itself, and became more and more dominant Had the little house, the pollarded willows, the gun on the bearded man's knees, the twitching chin of Sam, been elements of sound in a momentous orchestra, this whiteness of flowing water and of a woman's face would have been the flute note or the oboe note in the symphonic effect.

Here sat together, on the darkening bank of this steel-white water, three formidable men, any one of whom could have crushed out that frail spark of girlish life as the swish of a horse's tail might crush a currant moth. And yet the tension of that single feminine heart reduced all three of them to the negligibleness of three wooden posts in the palings around an agitated heifer.

And just as such a heifer's up-tossed head and lifted voice might bring some farm girl upon the scene who would pass those paling-posts by as if they did not exist, so the suppressed tempest in Nell Zoyland's nerves brought to her rescue nothing less than the great planet of the evening itself. Whiter than the Whitelake stream, whiter even than the girl's face, this celestial luminary, this immortal sign in the heavens "that brings the traveller home by every road," emerged now from the cloudy western lake wherein the sun had vanished.

A long relaxed shiver of nervous relief passed through Nell Zoyland's perfect breasts, and through her ravished but unconceiving womb, and through her thighs and through her trembling knees. Turning her gaze from the evening star she looked, for some reason she could never have explained, *not* into Sam's pathetic bear-eyes that were following her every motion, but into two deep, twilit, granite pools. Into such granite pools — now that his enemy, the Sun, had long since vanished — Mat Dekker's quiet grey eyes under their bristling eyebrows, had been transformed! The man met the girl's gaze; and the mysterious sweetness of her soul — troubled still but no longer convulsed with anger — rested for a second upon the priest's new strength, as if he and not her lover or her husband were her true friend among those three men.

"Well, you two," repeated Will Zoyland, "aren't you going to answer? I am one for living a civilised life in these things. Could any man make a more liberal offer? If Nell will live again with me, as she did when we were married a couple of years ago, I'll let her see as much of our good Sam as she likes. Will’s bed isn’t the only place where young blood can cool itself. There’s my offer. If you two want to go off together and leave Will to look after himself, *go!* For God’s sake, *go!* And good luck to you! I can’t hand you the money for expenses, because I haven’t got it. She knows — none so well as she! — that I haven’t got it. But if you go I won’t trouble ye. I won’t lift a finger to stay ye. Only I won’t take Nell back if she gets sick of it. ‘Once gone, always gone’ is my motto for runaway little girls.

“Well, Sir,” — and he turned quite definitely to Mr. Dekker now, bowing towards him over his gun— “do you feel like treating these frisky lambs to a trip abroad? Or are you prepared to let ’em kiss and clip under our own roofs?”

Mat Dekker rose slowly to his feet.

“May I be allowed a few words alone with Mrs. Zoyland before we talk any more about this?”

The bearded man looked, for one quarter of a second, a little nonplussed; but he quickly recovered himself and waved his hand towards the house.

“You go in with him, Nell, if you want to! Can you light the sitting-room lamp or do you want me to come and do it? You can? Very well, then! Sam and I will stay out-of-doors. Come and see my otter trap, Sam! It’s more likely to catch a water-rat than an otter in this little puddle; but you never can tell. Queer if there should be an otter in it tonight — of all nights — but I don’t suppose there is.”

The man went so far in his blustering bonhomie as actually to take Sam by the arm. Sam was so dazed by all these events that he offered no resistance. His mind seemed to have become incapable of any thought or any decision. What wavered before him just then was the gasping mouth of the sick minnow, at the top of the water in the aquarium, in their play-room. He felt like that minnow himself!

"You know, Sam, the truth is, since we've broken the ice" — Zoyland's voice went booming on in the darkness by the lad's side like a low-toned threshing machine— "our little Nell's not so much in love with you as she's in love with Love. She's as romantic as a child of sixteen. In fact mentally, I often think, she *is* sixteen. That's what it is, Sammy, old friend, mentally sixteen; and with no more idea of the realities of life than a schoolgirl. It's a good thing it was a boy like you who came along. With anyone else she'd have made herself seriously unhappy; but with you she's safe. That's what I've said to her from the beginning. 'You'll never make me angry with you over Sam Dekker,' I've said. 'With that boy, you're safe,' I've said. And you *are* safe, aren't you, Sam?"

He pressed the lad's arm with his free hand as he led him along the bank of the stream. Sam at least had the wit to notice that in his other hand he still held his gun. By degrees Sam became conscious too that he did have one clear and strong wish in his confused brain. He wished that William Zoyland did not live where it was possible for him to trap otters.

"My father doesn't like the idea of trapping otters," he remarked.

After following a kind of tow-path along the bank they came to a small river weir. There was a gurgling sound under the woodwork here, and a low humming and rustling sound; both sounds were evidently being caused by the position of the dam at that hour, but it was too dark to distinguish them exactly.

Out of the darkness of that full-brimmed swishing water there emerged a damp, chilly, but not unpleasant smell, composed of many separate elements. It was composed of wet moss, of old dead leaves, of yet older dead wood, of long-submerged, slime-coated masonry, of clammy river weeds. The gurgling sound and the rushing sound came forth hollowly together, producing upon the ear a kindred effect to that produced upon the sense of smell by the damp wafture.

The idea of a wild otter caught in a trap by his bearded companion suddenly became unbearable to Sam Dekker. For the first time in his life this much-enduring youth found himself trembling from head to foot with a desire to kill. He imaged to himself the precise nature of the sudden, violent shove which would precipitate this burly offspring of the Marquis of P. into the rushing blackness.

“There *may* be one of them in it, you know. There *may* be one of them in it,” William Zoyland kept obstinately repeating. Probably nothing would have happened. Probably some other excuse would have presented itself for refraining from a piece of silly violence that might not even have proved fatal, for it is likely enough that Zoyland was a powerful swimmer. But the excuse he did obey was the hoot of an owl coming from the direction of the cottage, and two or three times repeated. Sam answered the owl’s cry, imitating it exactly, and the thing was repeated again and again.

“He wants us back at your house,” Sam said. “So we’d better go. That’s my father; that’s not an owl.”

“One minute, then — you go ahead, Sam! I’ll be with you in a moment.”

But Sam had not waited for this permission from his host and rival. He was already hurrying back with a shambling speed that nearly broke into a run. He felt he was escaping, not from the bearded man but from his own dark impulse. He was surprised to hear strange voices when he neared the house and as he reached it he observed, in the narrow lane behind it, the lights of a motor car. When he entered the little sitting-room, he found it pleasantly illuminated by the large green-shaded lamp to which his host had recently referred; and there were red coals in the grate.

Talking eagerly to his father and Nell, and all of them standing in an animated group in the centre of the room, were Mr. Philip Crow and Mr. Tom Barter. Sam shook hands awkwardly and mechanically with the newcomers but all his attention was concentrated upon Nell. Ever since the moment when some mysterious vibration had passed between the girl and that white planet in the western sky, Nell's mood had completely changed. The nervous tension that had been growing week by week ever since she refused Will Zoyland his nightly embraces, seemed, at any rate for the present, to have fallen away. In some remote place in her heart, in some hidden chamber there, not far from the spot where she had just now been so grievously wounded by his words, she was, as a matter of fact, experiencing a reaction in his favour. The realisation that she *could* leave him, if only Sam would risk all, satisfied her inordinate mania for romance, while the fact that it was clear that Sam never *would* risk all helped her reaction towards her husband. Like Helen of Troy, upon the high tower of the wall, she permitted Aphrodite to be her guide. And the harlot goddess persuaded her to keep both her man and her lover!

In Sam's simple brain it had been lodged as a ghastly and tragic fact that Zoyland's love-making was odious to her. She had been subtly and gradually impelled to lead him on to this sinister view. And she had done it half-unconsciously; never exactly lying to him; half-believing the fancy herself, as she yielded to his pathetic and inexperienced advances. Men, especially young men, because of something fastidious and idealistic in their own nature, are always prepared to be touched to the heart by the idea of a girl's physical loathing for another man. Indeed it is given to few men, whether old or young, to understand the profound part played by what might be called "the universal prostitute" in every woman's nature. It is indeed always a puzzle to men, the physical passivity which women have the power of summoning up, to endure the inconvenience of an amorous excitement which they do not share. Few men realize the depth of the satisfaction to women's nature in the mere possession of the power to cause such excitement. When a man sees a sensitive girl with what he considers a thick-skinned, brutal mate, he experiences a twinge — perhaps quite uncalled-for — of the sort of imaginative pity which is the inverse side of male sadism.

Whatever passivity it was that Nell Zoyland gave herself up to now, it had something about it of that mysterious passivity of fate which the women of antiquity knew. And doubtless this mood had been fortified in this case by the girl's talk with Sam's father. Mat Dekker had risen to the occasion with a weight and an insight that surprised even himself. To beg her to postpone, to delay, to *think,* had been his intention when he spoke to Nell; but below his grave and practical words there had been such a clairvoyant tenderness, such a direct man-to-woman, as well as priest-to-daughter vibration in his tone, that her nervous revolt against her dilemma mounting up to such a pitch of blind anger, and then soothed by the Planet of Love, ebbed altogether under his influence.

"What I really came for," Philip Crow was saying, "was to see whether there was a chance of Mr. Zoyland's helping me out, over at Wookey Hole, as he did last year when I was in difficulties. I know of course" — this was said with a little stiff bow in Nell's direction— "that the remuneration is nothing to him. But the work is interesting — he found it so last Spring — and I'm prepared to pay him a little more this time."

"You mean you want Zoyland to act as official guide in Wookey Hole?" threw in Mat Dekker. "By Heaven, Crow, if Zoyland won't do it for you, I believe my Sam here would be just the person! He's read everything there is to be read on Wookey, and he's better up on neolithic weapons than anyone round here. You'd help Mr. Crow, wouldn't you, Sam, if Zoyland refused?"

Sam, abashed by his father's words, threw a humble glance like that of a bewildered horse in the direction of Nell but uttered no sound at all.

"William *may* be pleased to do it," the girl said hurriedly, speaking to Philip but replying to Sam's look. "But I think Sam would be just as good a guide in those caves — perhaps better. William's inclined to be flippant and off-handed with people when he doesn't like them and there must be lots of very teasing people who come to visit Wookey."

Philip Crow, whose habit was not to beat about the bush, now looked straight at his business companion. He felt no necessity to propitiate, for any direct purpose of his own, any of these people; and that being the case, his narrow, clear-cut, war-axe consciousness simply eliminated them.

"I wish *you* would do it for me, Tom," he said in a hurried, quick voice. "I'd far sooner not trouble Mr. Zoyland; or anyone else for the matter of that" — and he gave a quick, rather derogatory glance at Sam.

"I don't … know … that I could deal with … Wookey Hole, Father," murmured Sam nervously.

What he really felt at that moment was an extreme reluctance to deal with Mr. Philip Crow.

Tom Barter surveyed his employer with complete aplomb. He was a shortish, squarish man of clear complexion and with a round, fair, bullet-shaped head. He was the only person under that green-shaded lamp who seemed entirely at ease and carefree. He had been gazing at Nell Zoyland with a shameless glance of covetous impersonal lechery.

"Can't leave the office, Phil," he said. "You people never know where your own machine is tricky and jumpy. If I left that office, for Wookey

Hole, even for a fortnight, ’twould take six weeks to get things straightened out.”

Philip Crow made a humorous grimace directed towards Mat Dekker. His gesture said, “You see what a good subordinate I have; and how prettily he plays the role I’ve composed for him.” At that moment Will Zoyland came clattering in, boisterous, burly and jovial, and plumped down his gun against the wall.

“No otter, Sam!” were his first words as he shook hands with his two visitors. “You needn’t tell me what you’ve come for, Crow,” was his next remark, “for I see it in your grasping slave-driving eye! You want to kidnap poor Will as your damned showman! That’s what he’s after, isn’t it, Nell! Isn’t it, Sam?”

“Well, Zoyland,” snapped Philip sharply, evidently disliking intensely the burly giant’s familiar tone, “will you come out there for a couple of months? I’ve got a chap from London, an official antiquary and all that sort of thing, for the summer; but people are beginning to come already and I’ve got no one there now but just my ordinary workmen to show ’em round.”

“Can’t answer off the reel like this, Crow. Can’t do it!”

He leaned heavily upon a sort of mahogany sideboard that stood against the wall. Three silver salvers, bearing the arms of the Marquis of P. clattered down from their propped-up position; and the whole sideboard groaned under his weight. Philip turned instinctively to Nell. How many times had he not been forced to get what he wanted from a rebellious man by wheedling a practical woman!

“By the way, Mrs. Zoyland,” he said, “I hope that wild stepbrother of yours hasn’t heard about the trouble that started last week among my people at Wookey. Don’t you tell him, if he hasn’t! The very last thing I want to see is Dave Spear and his fanatical wife down here at this juncture.”

It was a good thing for Philip at that moment that the suspicious and malicious ears of Cousin John didn't catch this speech. John would certainly have translated these words in the very opposite sense from that which they apparently bore. "Write at once," John would have translated them, "to your step-brother Dave and hold out to him the lure of a possible strike down here, so that he'll bring his wife at once." Nor would John have been greatly mistaken. The truth is that the main motive that brought this Norman conqueror to Whitelake that evening had nothing at all to do with William Zoyland or with Wookey Hole. William was only the official motive. The true dynamo that brought this electrifier of Wookey Hole posthaste to Queen's Sedgemoor was the maddening temptation of Cousin Percy's slender waist.

Astute business man though he was, Philip had, when it came to his passions, a swift-plotting recklessness that stopped at little. Besides, his contempt for the practical ability of Cousin Peresphone and, for the matter of that, of the ability of her husband also, was unbounded. No! He'd get Percy down here and give her all the rope she wanted. Let the sweet creature "agitate" as much as she liked. He'd settle the strikers and cuckold the Communist! It was precisely the kind of dangerous human game that suited his Battle-of-Hastings temperament. Did he divine in some sly diplomatic cranny of his secret heart that either Nell Zoyland or William Zoyland would be certain to tell the Spears the very thing he so arrogantly bade them not to tell? He probably did; but as with all daring and successful men the tricks and devices of his subconscious nature were much more formidable than his rational schemes; and so by a sort of automatic protective instinct he kept them subconscious!

Had Nell's wits not been purged of idealistic vapour by the white rays of the great planet she might have missed the singularity of this request. As it was, she was shrewdly struck by it. With quick feminine craft she concealed her surprise. But in her heart she actually formed the words with which she would comment upon this episode to William Zoyland.

"Manufacturers don't as a rule try and stave off the arrival of agitators by appealing to their relatives, do they, Will?" And she could hear the bellowing "Ha! Ha! Ha!" with which William would receive this sally.

"No, I'll be careful, Mr. Crow," she said. "I'll be careful! Not that I often write to poor Dave. We're only half-brothers, you know."

Tom Barter, his eyes fixed on his own old-fashioned gold watch chain from which hung the good upper-middle-class, county family seal of the Barters of Norfolk, thought to himself, "Think of that funny little Johnny Crow turning up in town! Aye, but I'll be glad to see the little urchin again." And then Tom Barter's mind ceased suddenly to think in definite words. The "little river" and the "big river" at Northwold, the Bridge at Didlington, were more than words. Such memories as they held could not be put even by the practical, cynical, lecherous Tom, into any human sentence. Whitelake Cottage vanished away, as he fumbled with his father's ancestral seal, a tall heron standing on one leg. All these people vanished away. He only felt the presence of little Johnny Crow. He only felt the cold strong wind in the reeds of the Wissey. There was no longer any well-run office, no longer any factory by Wookey Hole. The smell of the bottom of a boat came over him so vividly that if he had not been the practical manager of three factories, he would have walked straight out of that house.

"Tomorrow I shall see little Johnny," he thought. And then he thought, "I'd give a hundred pounds to sleep one night with this girl here!"

Philip himself had now resumed his direct attack upon William Zoyland. Somehow it rather tickled his fancy to be able to say, "My guide at Wookey, related, so everyone maintains, to the Marquis of P."

Meanwhile Nell, seeing him so engaged, had managed to pull Sam out of the open door into the river-scented garden.

“Don’t you mind, little Sam,” she was saying, “don’t you mind the way things are!”

It was fortunate for some of the persons in that small group that the sudden passing of an airplane over Whitelake Cottage completely absorbed the general attention. It was tacitly assumed that it was to watch this illuminated air-equipage that Sam and his hostess had wandered off in the darkness; and soon they were all staring up at it beside the obscure, melancholy shapes of empty chairs, dim tables and shadowy tea-cups upon the chilly lawn.

“Barter! It’s the man from Wells!” cried Philip, with nervous, intense interest. “Or it’s a plane exactly like his. We ought to have stayed in tonight.”

Tom Barter moved in the darkness close to the side of his employer. “All planes look the same, Phil, at night,” he said in a low, emphatic tone. He spoke so quietly that no one but Nell, who chanced to be nearest to Mr. Philip, caught these words and this tone.

“He doesn’t want Mr. Crow to give away something,” the girl thought. “I’ll tell William about his hushing him up so. I shouldn’t wonder if they aren’t buying an airplane.”

When the plane had vanished, Philip and Tom Barter moved off towards their car, Zoyland striding alongside of them and the rest following. They soon formed a loquacious group around the car, uttering those spontaneous and lively genialities which among human beings imply instinctive relief at being able to get rid of one another. It was at this moment that Mat Dekker said, “I sometimes have thought of a queer thing, my friends.”

Sam, who had been in a sullen daze since the episode of the river bank, pricked up his ears at his father's tone. It was very rare for Mr. Dekker to adopt this sermonising manner. Never was a priest less pontifical than he.

"What, Father?" murmured Sam dutifully, when none of the others took the least notice of this remark.

"I've thought that the conquest of the air," Mat Dekker went on, "is such an enormous event in the history of the human race that it is probably responsible for these reckless and chaotic impulses which we all feel nowadays. What do you people think? I'd go even further," he continued, raising his voice in the darkness, "I'd go so far as to say that all these strange spiritualistic occurrences that we hear so much about are the result of Man's having found out how to fly."

"Tom here would give his head to be an airman," threw out Philip with an explosion of motiveless malignity.

"Get into your seat, Phil, and let's start!" was the quick retort.

Barter's words were simple but his tone was black with indignation. Philip Crow, from the very first time his Norfolk friend had used his Christian name, disliked being called "Phil" by his head-manager. In his displeasure now he was prepared to go on teasing him.

"Barter's the most normal person I've ever met," he said, without moving a step, "but when it becomes a question of flying, he's as jumpy as a girl who hears her lover's name."

"Why don't you go in for flying, Mr. Barter? You could so easily take lessons," said William Zoyland with innocent-wicked mischief.

For a second the reserved Norfolk man was quite silent. Then he burst out,

"Get into the car, Phil, can't you? I'm catching cold!"

But Philip suddenly swung round.

“Can’t I take you two home?” he said.

Tom Barter at once echoed this. “Of course we must take them home. There’s easy room for three; and I’ll sit on my heels.”

Philip repeated his invitation. “Please get in, Mr. Dekker; please get in, Sam!”

The husband and wife — his arm had slipped round her waist now, and only peevishly, not with any repulsion, she tossed it from her — joined their persuasions to those of the two motorists.

It took quite a little while for these four men to crowd themselves in so that Philip, who was driving, could use his brakes. But they started at last; and the last word was Philip’s.

“Think over that offer of mine, Zoyland. And remember I can give you a few shillings more than I scraped up for you last year.”

Mat Dekker begged the manufacturer to drop them opposite St. John the Baptist’s Church, and it was an incredible relief to Sam when at last, alone with his father and in complete silence, he walked up the path to the church porch. To their surprise, although it was well after eight o’clock, they heard voices in the nave as soon as they pushed open the door and inhaled the familiar musty smell. The verger had left a gas-jet burning in the vestry under the great tower, and the little red light of the Real Presence was suspended above the altar, but otherwise the church was completely dark. And yet it was not! The father and son, with the easy movements of long usage, opened the door so quietly that they caught the sacrilegious striking of a match in the western aisle. By the little yellow flame of this match shaded between human hands, they perceived that two men were bending over the lidless and empty sarcophagus of Joseph of Arimathea. One of these men was on his knees, evidently tracing out, in concentrated absorption and with his index finger, the famous initials *J. A.* which are so deeply cut upon the northern end of this huge receptacle. Whether it was a visual illusion due to the flickering of the match, or whether it really occurred, Mat Dekker could not be sure, but he fancied he saw this man, the one whose fingers were fumbling at those formidable initials, bow down his head as if praying to this empty tomb!

The priest swerved reverently at the sight of this real or imaginary act of devotion and, followed by Sam, moved hurriedly to the vestry, where with instinctive and discreet disregard of what he felt to be a legitimate gesture of impulsive piety, he proceeded to do what he had come to do. This was to rinse out a small glass chalice and fill it with wine, ready for the morning's consecration. While he did this, Sam sat down on a wooden chair by the vestment cupboard and stared sombrely up through the vestry door at the dimly lit receding pillars of the perpendicular nave. He kept feeling again and again the pressure against him of that beautiful girlish body. With this feeling there returned too the damp and deathly smell of the river weir and the murderous desire he had had at that spot. He lowered his gaze from the dim vista of high carved arches and with his vision still framed by the vestry door he let it rest upon the red altar light, signifying the living presence of the Body of God. He could hear the trickling of water being poured from one glass into another in the preparation for tomorrow's Mass, and he could catch a little faint squeaky sound, like the voice of a new-born mouse, of a cloth being rubbed against the edges of glass vessels. To what precise point did his father carry his belief in the miracle of Transubstantiation? It went much further anyway than his own vague superstitious uneasiness.

"I feel just like a dog barking at the moon," he thought, "when I see that red light." The pit of his stomach suddenly seemed to sink inward then for he thought to himself, "She *is* going to sleep with him again! I could feel it in the air when we came away.” That little, squeaky, rubbing sound behind him seemed to be going on forever. “She’s probably taken off all her clothes now,” he thought, “and she’s holding up her nightgown with her bare arms to slip it over her shoulders. He’s got her now; to work his will upon …. Oh! Oh! Oh! …” Sam tried to push this image away from him but it persistently returned.

“Father! you *must* stop that rubbing!” he suddenly cried out. “When a thing is clean, it *is* clean. It’s no good going on and on like that!”

Mat Dekker stopped what he was doing at once and began putting the sacred vessels away.

“True enough, Sammy,” he said with a sigh. “The truth is I was thinking of something else.” He closed the cupboard, turned out the gas-jet, and they both emerged into the body of the church. It now became necessary to communicate to the worshippers at St. Joseph’s vacant coffin that they were about to lock up the church. They moved to the door and the father held it open while the son crossed the aisle.

Since their appearance on the scene the two intruders had contented themselves with a whispered conversation. They had not dared to strike any more matches.

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” said Sam, “my father wants to lock up the church.”

The man upon his knees struggled stiffly to his feet, emitting a little groan as his bones creaked. They neither of them spoke a word, but began following their dismisser meekly and humbly to the church door. With a mute bow Mat Dekker indicated to them his gratitude for this obedience and moved aside to let them pass out. It was such a dark night that although he thought he had seen both the men before he could not recall their names. When the key was turned and the empty sarcophagus of the Arimathean was once more left alone with that Presence under the red lamp, the father and son followed the strangers down the flagged path, past the miraculous thorn bush, to the gate into the street. Here there was a suspended gas-globe, and here the strangers turned, revealing the black bowler hat and hooked Roman nose of Mr. Owen Evans, and a broad-shouldered, rather fleshy individual, without any hat, whose grizzled head under that suspended light seemed to Sam the largest human head he had ever seen. It was the head of a hydrocephalic dwarf; but in other respects its owner was not dwarfish. In other respects its owner had the normally plump, rather unpleasantly plump figure of any well-to-do-man, whose back has never been bent nor his muscles hardened by the diurnal heroism of manual labour.

"How do you do, Mr. Dekker? How do you do, Mr. Sam Dekker?" The Welshman threw into these words all the Ciceronian ceremoniousness of what John Crow called his "first manner." "I know you two gentlemen, though you don't know me," Owen Evans went on, "but of course you know my relative, Mr. Geard."

Both father and son looked at "my relative, Mr. Geard," with unashamed curiosity. It gave them both indeed a queer sensation to shake hands with this ambiguous person under the gas-lamp in that silent street; for although Mr. Geard's visits to Glastonbury had been few since he had left his family and gone to Northwold, all the air had been recently vibrant with gossip about him. The money that his employer had left him had been doubled and trebled by such gossip. Wherever, since his return, his bare hydrocephalic head had appeared, the envious feeling and the wondering awe had arisen. "There goes a very rich man!" Mr. Geard had become in fact a local celebrity, a fairy-story hero; and the rumours about his purchase of Chalice House, one of the famous show-places of the town, had kept alive a romantic interest, which, if the man had left the vicinity, would have soon died down.

"Of course we've heard of Mr. Geard," said the elder Dekker politely, "and we met only today, at Miss Drew's, a very interesting young man, who told us that he was a friend of yours, Mr. Evans."

"I must not keep you, gentlemen, for I know it's late," went on the Roman-faced Welshman, "but I would like to hear which side you'd take in a dispute Mr. Geard and I have been having, under the aegis of St. Joseph."

"I'd like to hear about it very much, Mr. Evans," said Mat Dekker. "Won't you walk a step with us? For I am a little afraid that our housekeeper will be getting anxious about us."

"Well … perhaps …" murmured the Welshman, hesitating and glancing at his companion, "perhaps my relative, Mr. Geard, is feeling tired."

But they all four set themselves in motion in the direction of the Vicarage; and it was not long before they reached the mediæval front of the Pilgrims' Inn. Although the rest of the street was quiet, there were lights and the sound of raised voices inside the mullioned windows of this old building.

"I was trying," said Mr. Evans, "to convince my relative that the fact that so many visitors come to this spot from all over the world is no proof that it is miraculous; but it *is* a proof that something important can at any moment occur."

"Occur where?" enquired Mr. Dekker.

"*In the mind!*" cried the Welshman, raising his hand to his head and giving his bowler hat such a violent jerk downward that its brim rested on the bridge of his great nose.

Very gravely, as they all four stood still upon the illuminated pavement outside the ancient inn, Mat Dekker extended his hand to this bowler-hatted oracle.

"Good-night, Mr. Evans," he said. "We won't take you further, but it interests me profoundly that you should make that remark, because it's what I've been feeling for several years. I associate it myself, as I told them just now at Whitelake, with the conquest of the air; but as you—" Mr. Evans did not let him finish the sentence. He had already taken the priest's hand and was shaking it vigorously; but he dropped it now as if it had hurt him.

"The air?" he murmured gloomily. "Did you say the air?"

And pushing back the brim of his hat, as if it had been a visor, he snuffed with angry nostrils at the element referred to.

"No, Mr. Dekker, no! What I was referring to was the mind. When the mind is clean, the change we are looking for will come. It's to clean the mind, Mr. Dekker; to purge it, to wash it, to give it a New Birth, that all these people" — he removed his hat altogether now and waved it, without finishing his sentence, towards the illuminated windows.

"You *do* see a little what I mean?" he added then, addressing the enormous cranium of Mr. Geard.

But the beneficiary of William Crow's fortune was engaged just then in a private quest of his own. He had advanced cautiously towards one of the lighted windows and was peering in. His air was so exactly the air of an inquisitive servant, gazing with aloofness and yet respectful curiosity at a remote revel of his masters that Sam was betrayed into a jest.

"Are they behaving decently or indecently in there, Mr. Geard?"

The Canon's friend swung round upon his heel and surveyed the young man. The lad was astonished at the look of affectionate reproach on his large face. Had Sam been an impertinent young Sadducee, addressing an insolent remark to some great Rabbi whose Holy Innocence confounded him, he could hardly have felt more ashamed of himself and more of a flippant fool than he did at that moment. Mr. Geard, however, made no audible reply to these rude words. It was the descendant of the House of Rhys who answered for both of them as they all nodded a final good-night.

“My relative, Mr. Geard,” he said, “intends to bring a great many people to Glastonbury … more than have come since … since the time of the Druids … and we must pray that all who come will be allowed to … to wash … *their minds clean!”*

These singular words, spoken in Mr. Evans’ second manner, kept repeating themselves inside the hollow skulls of all his three listeners, as they walked silently home to their different pillows.

When Mr. Evans took out his latch-key and let himself into his little Antique Shop, he was disturbed by a particular sadistic image that he had not been troubled by since he saw John Crow embrace the Hêle Stone at Stonehenge. This image was concerned with a killing blow delivered by an iron bar. Mechanically he closed the street door; mechanically he lit a candle; mechanically he met the marble gaze of an alabaster bust of Dante; mechanically he ascended the flight of narrow stairs to his bedroom above. Once in his chamber it was with the same automatic movement that he laid the flickering candle down on a rosewood chest of drawers and clicking open the stiff latch of the casement gazed out into the empty street. He saw nothing of the massive chimney across the way. He saw nothing of the carved Gothic doorways. He caught no floating essences of diffused sweetness from the beds of jonquils in the little gardens beyond these houses. The mystical breath of sleep rising from the summit of the Tor and from the pinnacles of Saint John’s Church and from the broken cornices of the ruined Abbey arches passed him by untouched. One single image of homicidal violence, at once a torment of remorse and a living temptation, wiped out completely all these impressions.

Had the soul of that planet of love which had done so much that night for Nell Zoyland been made aware of this figure of a lean, hook-nosed man at a window, with a bowler hat upon an unmade bed behind him, what would its attitude to such a one have been? “He has taken my own violence of ravishment, natural and passionate and sweet,” that planet might have thought, “and has turned it into a crime against nature and against life. Never can he be forgiven!”

But long after that star of the west went down behind Brent Knoll, Mr. Evans’ tormented murmur floated out over the Glastonbury roofs— “If only I could see it once … just once … with my own eyes … what Merlin hid … what Joseph found … the Cauldron of Yr Echwyd … the undying grail … this madness would pass from me … but … but …”

He craned his neck out of the window, pressing the palms of his hands upon the sill. His pose was grotesque. It was as if he were about to address a crowd assembled on the opposite roof.

“But,” Mr. Evans screamed in his twanging, quivering, twitching nerves; and although no sound but a lamentable sigh passed his open lips it would have been hard for anyone watching him not to believe he was shouting, “but … but … I … *don’t ... want* … to see it!”

THE LOOK OF A SAINT

MR. JOHN GEARD lived in a house in Street Road, a road branching westward out of Magdalene Street which itself lies to the west of the Abbey Ruins. In their old sewing-room at the top of their father's ramshackle brick house — a building which seemed completely unaware of the unexpected riches of its owner — there were talking eagerly together, one mid-March day, and with intense absorption in what they were saying, Mr. Geard's two daughters, Cordelia and Crummie. These were "the great sprawling girls" to whom Philip Crow had made such contemptuous reference at the Northwold tea-table.

The sewing-room where they were talking was also Crummie's bedroom, and Crummie, the younger of the two, *was* certainly, at that moment, answering Philip's description. She was lying on her back in the bed, her fair, wavy hair disordered, her violet-coloured eyes full of sleepy petulance, her skirts rumpled, her skin showing white between her drawers and her stockings, her slippered feet kicking peevishly the already crumpled coverlet of the bed.

Cordelia, on the other hand, was in no sort of way fulfilling Philip's unkind picture. A very plain, very dark girl, with nothing lovable in her face except an occasional smile of melancholy amusement and wistful indulgence, and with a thin, awkward, bony figure, Cordelia Geard was an unsympathetic critic of her father, a practical support to her mother, and at once the adviser and the confidante of her lively sister. At the present moment she was sitting bolt upright in front of a little working-table engaged on a piece of embroidery.

"I'm not indiscriminate! How dare you call me indiscriminate, Cordy!"

"Do you want me to count them all for you?"

"I'm talking about, now, now, *now!*" cried Crummie. "There's only Mr. Barter and Red Robinson now. And Red is afraid of me now we are supposed to be rich; so he doesn't count!"

"If by 'now,' you mean *since* we got rich," said Cordelia gravely, "I believe Mr. Barter would marry you tomorrow if you'd have him."

Crummie toyed coquettishly with her skirt; and then began caressing, with the conscious narcissism of a girl inordinately proud of her legs, the soft flesh above one of her knees. "I'd like to marry Mr. Barter — in a way," she said meditatively.

Cordelia shook her head. "He would never be faithful to you. He's too indiscriminate himself."

"I hate the way you say that — every time," protested Crummie. "I could keep him faithful, you'd see! He's never lived with me. So he doesn't know."

"If he's never lived with you, *you've* never lived with him. You'd find it horrid, Crummie, when he went off with other girls!"

"What about yourself?" retorted Crummie. "You know perfectly well what Mr. Evans said the other night to Mother about your being what he calls 'Cymric.' " Cordelia dug her needle into her work and sat up very straight. Her pale cheeks had flushed a little.

"I told you last night, Crummie," she flung out, "I won't hear anything more about Mr. Evans! Mr. Evans is Dad's friend and it's not right to make fun of him."

Crummie removed her soft hand from her satiny flesh and pulled down her skirt with an abrupt jerk. She was a good-natured girl and next to her own rounded limbs she loved Cordy better than anything in the world. But she adored chattering about men; and for Cordelia to rule out of court as a topic for gossip any living man was an annoyance and a vexation.

"You've never stopped me before," said Crummie. "We always discuss Dad's friends. Besides, Owen Evans isn't Dad's friend. He's a cousin of Mother's. He's *our* cousin — so I can say anything about him I like."

Cordelia bit her lip. She felt at that moment that the one thing she could not bear was that her sister should draw her into a discussion of the only man who had ever — in all her virginal life of thirty years — taken any real notice of her. If Crummie loved Cordelia, the elder girl's devotion to Crummie knew no bounds. Megan Geard, their mother, was a reticent woman, even with her children. She was uniformly cold to both and the girls had long ago decided that in her heart she was dissatisfied because neither of them was a boy.

"What … I … think … *is*," went on Crummie, "what … I … think … *is* that Mr. Evans and you—"

"Don't!" cried Cordelia. "I won't have you say it!"

"Well … if I mustn't say … you know what," went on Crummie obstinately; "at least I can say that I think Dad is fonder of Mr. Evans than Mummy is. I believe Mummy thinks that Mr. Evans is after your—"

This was too much for Cordelia. "If you dare once again," she cried, "to talk about Mr. Evans to me, I'll begin talking about you and young Mr. Dekker!"

It was Crummie's turn to be outraged now. And she was evidently quite as much astonished as she was hurt. She rose up on the bed, propped herself on the palms of her hands, and stared open-mouthed at the dark girl before her, whose uncomely features were at that moment rendered almost beautiful by wrath. "*What?*" Crummie cried. "What *can* you mean, Cordelia? Who told you I ever met Sam Dekker — or had anything to do with him? Except at school-treats of course! — and sometimes when I've taken a few cowslips, in cowslip time, for the church — or gone with Red to a cricket match at Street — or maybe at Michaelmas Fair where everybody meets everybody — and if you *dare* to say I'm sweet on Sam Dekker or have ever spoken to Sam Dekker — except of course as a girl naturally *does* speak to a clergyman's son when she's helping the clergyman to distribute prizes or to carry those texts around that have those big red roses on them — I've only one thing to say of you, Cordelia Geard, and that is — you're telling absolute lies!"

At this point Crummie pulled up her legs under her, with the complete abandonment of a very little girl, bent her head till her wavy hair fell in loose wisps and loops upon her lap, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into passionate sobbing.

If Cordelia had intended to use a formidable weapon, she had never expected that it would prove as deadly a one as this. Her unconscious instinct, as often happens with women who want to hurt each other, had gone to the mark quicker and surer than any reasoned attack could have done. In a flash the elder sister recognised the truth. She saw to her confusion how possible it is to live intimately with a person all one's life and at last be absolutely confounded by some revelation as to her secret sexual life.

So Crummie was in love with young Mr. Dekker; really in love; just in the same sort of way as she herself was in love with — but Cordelia pulled her thoughts up with a jerk. *That* was day dreams and speculations too dear even for herself to dwell upon! Little Crummie! Why, this was nothing less than tragic. Gossip had already whispered to the sisters that young Mr. Dekker had been "keeping company with this Zoyland woman out to Splott's Moor." And in any case a marriage between the child of Johnny

Geard — even of a rich Mr. Geard — and the son of the Vicar of St. John's was an unnatural consummation. She laid her embroidery down and went across to her sister's side. "Forgive poor Cordy!" she murmured self-reproachfully. "Of course I know that young Dekker is nothing to you. I was just cross, Crummie darling," — and she laid her hand caressingly on her sister's head and bent down to kiss her— "your Cordy was just cross. But I'm not cross any more, and you mustn't be cross with me!"

Crummie's cheeks were still wet, but her full red lips parted in a faint smile. "We're a silly pair, Cordy!" she murmured as they kissed each other, and she threw her arms tenderly round her sister's neck and drew her close. After a second's tight hug the younger girl swung her legs off the bed and they sat side by side upon the ruffled bed-clothes.

"Better tidy yourself up now, Crummie. Sally will be ringing that bell for tea."

"And Mr. Evans is coming to tea!" laughed the other roguishly.

Cordelia moved now to the table and began folding up her embroidery.

"I must go down and put on my coral necklace," she said to herself, "and brush my hair a bit; but what's the use? If he doesn't like me for myself, he won't care. And if he *does* he won't care, either!" And then the queer thought came into her head— "If a man wants to marry a girl, when he likes her *for her mind alone*, does he get *any* pleasure from kissing her and embracing her?" So deep did this queer and troubling question sink into her consciousness that she let her embroidery lie where it fell, unwrapt in its usual piece of blue tissue paper! She herself sank down on her sewing-chair and stared in front of her. She stared at the particular one of the pictures of "The Four Seasons" which represented Autumn. Quite automatically she read: "We *too* have Autumns, when our leaves fall loosely through the misty air, and all our good is bound in sheaves, and we stand reaped and bare.” She had read these words in their familiar place on the wall of the sewing-room since she could read at all.

Crummie was now clutching tight in her fingers the midstream of her mass of fragrant hair, pulling it round her white neck and passing the comb, with many little cries at the tangles, through its down-shaken wavy curls. To twist it round her head and stick the hairpins into it was a matter of a second or two. Then she slipped off her dress and bending over the chest of drawers sought leisurely for this and the other garment; weighing, rejecting, appraising, selecting. Hovering there, all in white, with bare arms and bare shoulders, she proceeded to smooth down with indolent outspread fingers the creases of her slip, preparatory to pulling her dress over her head.

Like a patient nun in a courtesan’s tiring-room Cordelia watched her, a little twisted smile on her lips. No! Of course Owen Evans couldn’t *love* a person like her. But if he really thought she was “Cymric” in her ideas, and liked her for herself enough to marry her, why! she would marry him.

Crummie was sitting on the bed now, changing her stockings, and if she had looked winsome and alluring before, she looked even more so now.

As Cordelia watched the delicate softness of Crummie’s limbs during this lengthy ritual, and the whiteness of her flesh thrown into tender shadows by the ruffled hem of her garment, there did come over the plain girl’s mind a faint, flickering spasm of revolt. Why should her own poor knees be so bony and rough-textured? Why beneath her bony knees should her legs be like a pair of broom handles? If God had willed everything from the very Beginning of the World, why had He willed that all this exquisite delight in one’s own body — Crummie was at the mirror again now, turning this way and that way, as she tried on her new party dress — should be given to one girl, while another girl felt her body to be a troublesome burden to be carried about? Oh, it didn’t depend on having men to admire one, or to embrace one. “It is the feeling,” thought poor Cordelia, “of being beautiful to one’s own self that matters!”

The younger sister was ready now. “Cordy,” she cried, reluctantly turning her head from the mirror, “aren’t you going to change *anything*?”

But Cordelia, rising to her feet, only gave two contemptuous little pats to her dark hair, only gave a contemptuous shake to her black skirt, only picked off the front of it a few coloured threads left by her embroidery. Instead of glancing at the mirror, she glanced, over her sister’s head, at the coloured representation of Spring, the first of those Four Seasons, hanging on the wall. At the bottom of this picture, which had always been the younger’s favourite of all four, was a little card, stuck in the edge of the frame, carrying on its surface a childish sketch of a small girl, done in crude pinks and blues, the hair just an enormous smudge of chrome-yellow, which bore the inscription “Crummie by Crummie, Aged Six.” “Come on,” she said, “let’s go down and help Sally.”

The presence of Sally in the house — Mrs. Geard would hardly allow her to cross the threshold of her sacred kitchen — was one of the few tokens of domestic grandeur that had appeared in Cardiff Villa, Street Road, since Johnny Geard’s accession to wealth.

And Sally — a daughter of Mrs. Jones of the High Street tea-shop — was anything but a smart or experienced servant. But Cordelia was rather relieved not to be perpetually answering the doorbell; and sometimes, when, in one of her bad moods, she was lying supine on her bed upstairs, she did get a faint, malicious satisfaction in hearing Sally repeat her most difficult lesson — the inhospitable decree, “Not at home.”

“Bloody Johnny,” as the tavern-cronies in Glastonbury loved to call Mr. Geard because of his preachings in the street and his repeated references to the Blood of Christ, was evidently not intending to use William Crow’s money for the embellishing of Cardiff Villa either with new paint, or furniture, or plate, or servants! Cordelia wondered now, as they entered the kitchen and found Sally Jones staring mute and awestruck before Mrs. Geard's preparations, whether Mr. Evans realized yet how unlikely it was that any large portion of this money would come to her — even if she did marry him. "Never, never, did any man want taking care of more than Mr. Evans does!" she thought. Oddly enough she never thought of her antiquarian suitor as anything but "Mr. Evans." She had reached the point — no very easy point, considering the ponderousness of the Welshman's second manner! — of *calling* him Owen. But she never *thought* of him as Owen …

"I really brought Mr. Crow to see you," said Mr. Evans, referring to John Crow, as they all sat around the tea-tray in the front parlour, "because he's in difficulties." At the word "difficulties" Megan Geard's mouth closed tight and she glanced furtively at the preposterously big skull of her reckless husband. She had known too well — and only too recently! — what to be "in difficulties" meant.

But Bloody Johnny seemed to have no such memory. He turned his hydrocephalic head on the pivot of his neck with the slow gravity of the ghost in Punch and Judy and gazed at John across the table. "Your grandfather was a good friend to me," he remarked. "But I served him well. If you'll excuse the word, Mr. Crow, and not think me presumptuous, I believe I can say that I made your grandfather's last years very happy ones."

John reduced his eyes to two narrow slits. Through these apertures he scrutinised Mr. Geard very closely, giving him the appraising glance of a professional beggar surveying a new countenance of a well-known back door.

"What I don't think is understood by any of your family, Mr. Crow," the ex-preacher went on, "is that I regard your grandfather's bequest in the light of a Divine Responsibility."

At the sound of these surprising words from his host and namesake John Crow's eyes almost closed entirely, while the hereditary twitch in his face became like a tiny jumping-jack under the skin of his lean cheek. "You mean you're going to give the oof back to us, Sir?" he said.

Bloody Johnny was the only person at that table who remained completely at ease under the shock of this rude speech. "Well, Mr. Crow," he remarked serenely, "not exactly give it back to *you,* you know, nor to *any* of you; not, that is, *exactly*, as you might say, *give it back*. But I *do* intend — and my friend Mr. Evans agrees entirely with my intention — to spend your dear grandfather's gift, or at least the bulk of it, on a purpose in no way connected with myself or with my family." Mr. Geard's voice raised itself a little as he uttered these final words and his great head seemed to obey an interior command as it swung resolutely round on its pivot. What it faced now under this interior command, and John Crow seemed to hear an audible creaking of its machinery as it turned, was the extremely agitated countenance of Megan Geard whose mouth, at the words "with my family" had become a thinly outlined half-circle whose drooping horns were surrounded by twitching wrinkles.

"Mr. Evans thinks," went on Bloody Johnny, "that it would be wrong of me not to take my wife and my girls, especially my daughter Cordelia, into my confidence, though, as you know, my treasure," — here he fixed an unwinking gaze upon his wife's wide-open eyes— "I am not one to reveal my designs till they have matured." The reverberations of these grand words "designs" and "matured" had scarcely died away when Bloody Johnny followed them by a deprecatory murmur, addressed, not to his family but to his God. “I mean,” he added, “till they have been blessed from Above.”

A lack-lustre film formed over John’s eyes, and he said to himself, “If this fellow turns out to be a superstitious fool, instead of a hypocritical knave, I shall get nothing from him. There goes my easy job, up in smoke!”

“My relative, Mr. Geard,” said Owen Evans, with a respectful glance at Cordelia, “has come to the conclusion that there are ways of bringing to Glastonbury, by the wise expenditure of a little money, shoals and shoals of pilgrims. They will come from France, from Germany, from Russia. They will flock here in such increasing numbers that Glastonbury will once more rival Rome and Jerusalem as a centre of mystic influence. It only remains for” — at this point, to Cordelia’s complete astonishment, though she thought, as she had said to Crummie, that she “knew Mr. Evans through and through,” his gaze dropped from her attentive eyes and sank to her clasped hands which rested on the table, while his voice became broken, spasmodic, intense— “for some … for some … for some event to happen … and a new Religion … different … from any that’s ever been … will … will … will make a crack in the world!” They all turned their eyes upon his contorted face; all except Crummie who glanced wonderingly at her sister.

“What do you mean by ‘a crack in the world’?” enquired John Crow, the film of hopelessness passing from his lineaments and his whole attention aroused.

“A crack in Cause-and-Effect,” cried Owen Evans, his voice rising; “a crack in the Laws of Nature, a crack in Matter! And Something will break out, through that crack, *that will take away our torment!”*

The word “torment” was uttered from such twisted lips that it was as if it really came from a spirit in hell and Cordelia Geard’s heart began to beat. The others, except the profane John, averted their eyes, as if from some apparition that was as obscene as it was tragic. But as Owen Evans slowly recovered himself, the girl unclasped her hands and very lightly, and with a gesture that no gentlewoman in the land could have surpassed for dignity and grace, laid her fingers on the sleeve of his coat.

John, who was intently watching Mr. Evans, could not decide whether the man even noticed this movement of the devoted girl, whose fingers were withdrawn as soon as her friend was master of himself again, but to the sly scrutiny of the "run-down adventurer" the incident was very significant. "He's not out for her money," he thought, "but he's certainly out of her depth. I *must* get at the fellow's secret. He's got *some* devilish spike sticking into his midriff; but *what* it is the Lord only knows!"

As for John Geard, under this explosion from his Welsh ally, what *he* did was slowly and deliberately to turn, not his head, but his eyes, in their hollow motionless sockets, completely away from the agitated man. Mr. Geard had his mouth full of sponge cake, of which he was particularly fond, and his voice sounded blurred and thick. "What we ought to have in Glastonbury," he said, "and Midsummer would be a good time for it — is a Religious Fair or Passion Play, that would attract people. There has not been a Passion Play here for years." He paused and shut his eyes. "Nor a Miracle either," he muttered. "No, not for three hundred years; but the time will come, and the Miracle will come!"

It was at that moment that Crummie, who was much more aware of what Sally was doing than of what any of her father's guests were saying, jumped up from her seat and ran into the kitchen. From the kitchen — for the impulsive girl left the door wide open — everyone could hear her scolding the little maid for inattention. It was clear from the first words that ensued that Crummie found the domestic truant standing in Street Road contemplating the passers-by; but a moment later they heard Crummie's own voice raised in lively salutation. Sally herself came back, shamefacedly enough, into the dining-room and whispered something to Cordelia; but there was such a draught of chilly air entering the room now, that Mr. and Mrs. Geard and their two male guests kept their faces turned and their attention directed towards the two open doors.

"It's young Mr. Dekker," said Cordelia presently, "I know his voice." At the name Dekker there occurred that curious moral stiffening, that gathering together of relaxed social awareness, which always happens in England when an upper middle-class person enters the company of a group of lower middle-class persons. Cordelia had hardly uttered the words, "I know his voice," than Crummie herself came back into the room bringing Sam Dekker with her.

There was a general rising and shuffling and shaking of hands; and in the midst of the confusion, while Sally was pouring lukewarm water upon stale tea-leaves, Cordelia slipped into the kitchen and began to make a fresh pot of tea and to cut fresh bread and butter. Sam Dekker sat down, awkwardly enough, by Crummie's side. Here he was at the end of the table, next Mrs. Geard, but also next the door. He refused to put down his hat and stick and kept protesting that he must not stay and that he had already had tea.

"Oh, Cordy! How nice of you to think of that!" cried the younger sister, when after a few nervous generalities about the balmy mornings and the chilly evenings of this unusual March the ice was broken by the appearance of fresh tea and fresh bread and butter.

Sam *did* now consent to allow Crummie to take his hat and his stick away from him. He had begun to look at John Crow with a stealthy, silent, lowering curiosity, as if John had been a fellow badger in a gathering of foxes.

“May I tell Mr. Dekker,” John now found himself saying, “about the grand plot that you two gentlemen are hatching to make this place a sort of English Oberammergau?”

“I could hardly hope,” remarked Mr. Geard, with an imperceptible nod of approval towards John, “to convert Mr. Dekker to my immature Design; considering the position held by his father.”

“Mr. Geard has the idea,” John went on, addressing himself now to Sam Dekker alone, “of holding a sort of Pageant, a sort of Religious Fair at Midsummer …. I believe he has the twenty-fourth of June in his mind, … in the Tor Fair-field, eh, Sir? His idea is to make this such an event, that people will come to it from France and Germany, as well as from all over England. It will, of course, be entirely friendly to *all* religious bodies. It won’t be a church affair. It won’t be a nonconformist affair. It’ll be … I’m right in this, aren’t I, Mr. Geard? … a Glastonbury Revival, absolutely independent of the churches. I can see you’re interested in the idea, Mr. Dekker; and so will everybody be when we’ve got it advertised a little. Oh, I wish you’d make me your secretary, Sir, or your master of ceremonies — anything of that sort! I know I catch *exactly* what you have in your mind. And it would hush up all gossip too, and look well in the papers, if you had one of us Crows as your chief lieutenant. And incidentally ’twould give me a chance to” — he was going to say “to upset Philip,” but as he surveyed Bloody Johnny’s face he recognised that malice towards an enemy was completely alien to the man’s nature, so he concluded differently— “a chance to marry and settle down. I can see you’re surprised, Mr. Dekker, to see me here at all; considering my family’s grievance against Mr. Geard, and our envy and our jealousy of Mr. Geard; but I’m a black sheep, you know. I don’t mind confessing to all you kind people” — here he raised his voice and glanced at the round, red, hypnotised face of the maid Sally, who, standing behind Mrs. Geard's chair, had long since been hanging upon his lips with as much attention as if he had been the Human Chimpanzee talking in the Magic Booth at Somerton Circus— "that I came here hoping that Mr. Geard would let me help him in some way. I even thought that his employment of me would act as hush-money to all this gossip … a sop to Cerberus, as you might say … but Mr. Geard reads my thoughts … you know you do, Sir! Yes, you really do!"

He stopped now, quite out of breath; and Sam Dekker glowered at him in sulky silence. Sam's attention had been wandering from the beginning to the end of his discourse. He had been saying to himself, "I know what it means, seeing Zoyland going up Wells Road. He's walked in to see Philip! This means that he *is* going to Wookey Hole. He wouldn't come to see him otherwise. He didn't last year; and I fancy he *couldn't* very well … not on a job like that." At this point, hearing the words of John as if they were perfectly meaningless sounds, his mind ceased to think in words. He felt himself sleeping with Nell in William's bed. He felt the pressure of her breasts against his chest. This voluble fellow opposite him, chattering about a Midsummer Pageant was of no more significance to him than a quacking duck in a farm-yard when he was on his way to Queen's Sedgemoor. In fact as he glared at John, John's nose became the road between the two great oaks and the hamlet of Wick, while John's forehead became the path over the water-meadows. "I *must* know the truth, one way or the other," he said to himself. "I *must* know if she's going to be alone out there when he goes to Wookey Hole."

It was touching to Cordelia to watch the way Crummie was behaving. She was no longer the wanton, playful, toying girl, who delighted in tantalising the senses of men. She was a grave maiden, a tender, drooping-eyed, watchful maiden, who did all she could, by a thousand little attentions and tactful considerations, to win favour with her absent-minded lord!

“He’s a gentleman,” Mr. Geard was thinking to himself, “and he’s a clever rogue. Of course he’s an atheist. He doesn’t believe in anything. You can see that with half an eye. But it’s the Blessed Lord who’s brought him to me. He’s the very man for my Design — the very man! A believer would be difficult. A churchman would be impossible. This lad will treat my Design as a masquerade. He’ll have no prejudices. He’s what I’ve been looking for ever since I got bade from Norfolk. And he is *his* grandchild too — yes, he’s perfectly right about the fortune. It’ll make a very good impression on all concerned, for me to have one of these Crows as a sort of partner! He’ll have a share in spending his grandfather’s money. With his help I shall … I shall do … I shall have … I shall be … I shall make … an absolutely New Thing — sobbing happiness — black earth — rain — dew — peace—”

By this time the towers of his New Jerusalem, thus built to the Glory of the Blood, were rising dear and crystalline to his view, piling themselves up, buttress upon buttress, rampart upon rampart, beyond his wife’s windowbox of begonias! Castles of crystal, islands of glass, mirrors and mirages of the invisible, hiding-places of Merlin, horns and urns and wells and cauldrons — hilltops of magic — stones of mystery — all these seemed to Bloody Johnny’s brain at that moment no mere fluctuating, undulating mind-pictures, but real things; real as the cracked wood of the old windowbox, real as the indented frown upon Megan’s forehead! John Crow could clearly see what an impression his words had made upon his host; but he waited patiently till this fit of absent-mindedness should come to an end.

Crummie had by now reached the point of daring to express, in gentle, hesitating tones, her growing absorption in the study of natural history. She was asking Sam if there were not some easy books that she could buy on such things as aquatic plants, water beetles, pond weeds, and so forth; for these, it seemed, had for many years been Crummie's secret delight; though, for the sake of peace in the family, it had been necessary to conceal her obsession.

"Don't you think, John, it would be wiser," burst out Mrs. Geard at last, finding her opportunity in one of those curious long silences that seem especially to fall on groups of human beings of just about the numbers that occupied that room, whereas fewer people or more people would have been free from that embarrassment, "don't you think, John, it would be wiser to wait till we moved into Chalice House before employing anyone else?"

"Mother *dear!"* interrupted Cordelia. "Mr. Crow doesn't mean that he wants to *live* with us! Father will only pay him a small salary for his help. It'll save Father a great deal. It'll save Father taking an office."

At the word "office" Megan Geard crumpled up. She sank back in her chair and gasped. The idea of the golden stream of this great Northwold legacy being deflected into an "office" seemed to her almost the worst that could happen. In the moving pictures which she sometimes attended the word "office" was synonymous with dissipation and deception.

Sam Dekker at this moment rose stiffly to his feet. He had decided upon immediate action. He would go himself that very second — it could only be about half-past five — and call upon the Philip Crows. He shook hands hurriedly with his host and hostess, nodded to John Crow and Mr. Evans, and was escorted by the silent Crummie to the front door where she reluctantly handed him his hat and stick. He was so obsessed with what was in his head to do that he took his things from her with a mere "thank you," gave her an abstracted nod, and hurried off up the street. As he approached St. John's Church, on the way to Wells Road, it occurred to him with extreme vividness that it was likely enough that Nell had walked into town with her husband from Queen's Sedgemoor. He had seen William alone, but that meant little; it was Nell's frequent custom to separate from Zoyland when they were together in Glastonbury, do her shopping in peace, and meet him afterward at the Pilgrims' Inn. Sam well knew this habit of hers and had ere now taken advantage of it, meeting her in the Ruins, and once, even, but that was a dangerous risk, in a field at the foot of the Tor. His heart beat fiercely now, therefore, but more from love than from any startled surprise, when he perceived her figure passing under the iron gas-lamp arch into the churchyard. It had been a grey day; and with the approach of sunset the air was beginning to grow both chilly and dark. He took hurried steps in pursuit and reached the churchyard just in time to see her entering the church porch.

There were several people moving in and out of the church at that hour. There were still more people passing up and down in front of the churchyard entrance; and among these latter, as Sam was about to hurry under the iron arch that held the gas-lamp, was a figure in working-man's clothes who hesitated not to stop him and address him. Sam could hardly endure this delay. The man was polite enough and his general demeanour had the air of a foreman or a master plumber. But Sam's soul was already inside the church. And what on earth was this pale, intense, red-haired young artisan talking about? He had caught hold of Sam by the lappet of his coat. He was agitated about something. "I beg your pardon," Sam blurted out at last, "but I'm in rather a hurry. I've got to go, if you don't mind, into the church. I've *got* to go!" At that moment such a bitter sneer contracted this excitable young man's face that Sam did notice it and stopped. What was the matter with this fellow? Why was he so agitated?

“So you’re the gent she can’t sigh ‘arf enough about,” the man began, in a strong cockney accent. “She sighs you ‘ave the *look of a sighnt.* Well, Crummie, I sighs, the next charnst I gets I’ll tike a good look at ’im. It ain’t every die yer sees a bloomin’ sighnt on ‘Igh Street. But I’ll arst ’im, I sighs, if ‘ee won’t speak up for a poor dog like yours ‘umbly. A sighnt’s word, I’ll tell ’im, ought to go pretty far with a gal if he cares to give a bloke a ‘and-up in ’is courtin’.”

A light for the first time broke upon Sam’s impatient mind. This must be Red Robinson, the cockney Communist, who was always plotting troubles and strikes in Philip’s factories. Sam now remembered the fact that Red Robinson’s mother, with whom he lived, was an old charwoman of the most rigid conservative principles, who worked regularly in the church. Sam knew her well and had often heard her speak sorrowfully and tragically of the wicked opinions of her infidel son. The whole episode was a revelation to him of how poor the Geards had been before they inherited their legacy. It seemed hard to imagine this well-to-do workman aspiring to Crummie’s hand!

“You’ve come to see your mother home?” he murmured feebly, cursing both mother and son, and thinking to himself, “If this chap comes in with me now it’ll be the last straw!” And the last straw it was. For Red Robinson, clapping his workman’s cap firmly on his head, as if to show that a churchyard was no more sacred than any other yard, resolutely followed as Sam moved away, and as he followed continued to talk of Crummie. Sam’s desperation grew worse and worse as they approached the church door. He had never heard a cockney accent carried to such a limit. The truth was that Red’s accent was more cockney than any living Londoner’s. A deep vein of what might be called “philological malice” in him had come to emphasise this way of speaking as a form of spite against the Glastonbury bourgeoisie.

“She sighs you ‘ave the look of a sighnt,” Red kept repeating. “She sighs you ‘ave haltered ’er whole life. She sighs that since she’s known you she’s a different gal. So all you’ve got to do, Mister, is to sigh the word and she’ll marry me tomorrow!”

“Well I don’t see what I can do for you, Mr. Robinson; but I don’t mind speaking to Miss Geard.” These words were automatically jerked out of him, like peas shaken out of a bag. But at this moment they passed into the church and Red Robinson and his exaggerated cockney speech became for Sam’s mind far less important than the dust now being raised by Red’s mother as the old woman swept her brush about between the pews with her long black skirt pinned up above her grey woollen petticoat.

For there before his eyes was Nell Zoyland! The girl was lying back in one of the pews nearest to the font in an attitude not of piety nor of peace, but of apathetic weariness. One of her arms was thrown over the back of the pew. Her face was so shaded by her hat that in the dusk of that interior it was a mere white blur. She did not look unhappy. No one would have taken her for a tragic figure. No one, on the other hand, would have taken her for a care-free visitor to Glastonbury. She might have been a sister of Sam’s, some tired daughter of the priest of this very church, resting after a long country walk.

“Are you ready, Mother?” he heard Red Robinson exclaim. “ ‘Urry now, for I wants my tie! Say good-night to Jesus and hunpin yerself quick!”

Sam went straight to the girl’s side and greeted her in a whisper. She caught up her hand quick to her throat and gave a little gasping cry. Sam was so excited that he did not modulate his voice as he greeted her while she sprang to her feet and faced him. “Has he gone to see Philip?” he asked eagerly.

Nell Zoyland nodded, clutching three paper parcels which she held, tight against her bosom, and not offering him her hand.

"Is he going to Wookey Hole?"

Again she nodded without a word.

He did lower his voice now to a low whisper that she could hardly catch. But well did she know the drift of that desperate question! Had she gone back to him — *since that night?* Her eyes assumed a strange, weary, indifferent look, in that dim light, and they seemed to leave his face and gaze into the far distance. "Have … you … gone … back … to him?" he repeated with almost brutal insistence. For the third time she nodded; and then, moving her feet a little, as if the ground was slippery beneath her, she straightened her body and looked him full in the face; and he thought as she did so that there was a reproachful flash in her eyes.

"Come … this way," he said, pulling at her jacket. They moved out of reach of the ears of Red Robinson and his mother; and Sam soon found that he had led her quite unconsciously to the great empty sarcophagus bearing the initials *J. A.* Here they stood side by side, she with her body pressed against the outside edge of the stone, he with his fingers clutching its inside rim.

"How soon is he going to Wookey Hole?"

"In two or three days," she answered, looking at him with an inscrutable expression. "By Saturday," she murmured, "he's certain to be gone." She paused and then added humbly, poking the end of her umbrella into a crevice between two stones, "I can't understand how either of you can put up with such a weak, uncertain creature as I am. I was telling William *that,* just now, all the way from Wick Hollow to Maidencroft Lane. I know I shall bring a curse upon you both! What I deserve is that you both should go off and leave me alone! Oh, Sammy, Sammy, how much nicer men really are, at bottom, than women!"

Sam sighed. "I'd chance all the badness *you* could call up, Nellie," he said, "if only I could get you to myself."

It was her turn to sigh at this. "Why didn't you just carry me off, Sam dearest, that evening on Queen's Sedgemoor? We'd have managed somehow. I'm not a fool; and you've got such strong arms!"

Sam drew a deep breath; so deep that it shook him from head to foot. He felt a leap in the pit of his stomach, as if a fish had risen there. He felt the blood throb above his cheek-bones. "We … might … still … do it, little Nell," he stammered huskily.

"It's too late *now*, my dearest," she said.

"Why is it?" he groaned.

"Because … because he's made me give myself to him … as I've never done … before this."

Sam was silent, pondering in his brain the inscrutable twists and turns of women's hearts. He thought to himself, "What am I to believe? That day we went to Pomparlès Bridge and looked at the dace in those pools, and she told me about Arthur's sword, she made me believe he had ravished her the first day they met; and now she says this! Do women delight to make themselves out victims? She first says this and then that … I cannot tell what the truth is!"

"But you still love me, Nell?" he pleaded. "You haven't turned against me? You haven't gone over to him completely?"

"I shall always love you beyond all else in the world," she said. He now led her towards the altar and they seated themselves in the very front pew of all and before their pew was an open space of time-worn floor, carrying several quite illegible and absolutely flat tombstones. Beyond these were the altar rails. But the girl kept her eyes fixed on the ground and ceased not to draw her hand up and down the polished edge of the seat. “But to give myself to you after giving myself to him as I’ve done since that night has something” — she spoke even more slowly now, but never seemed to hesitate for a word— “something about it that I can’t bear.” She lifted her eyes from the ground and fixed them shyly and humbly upon Sam’s troubled face. “I wouldn’t blame any woman,” she went on, “who lived with two men, if one was her earthly friend and the other her ideal friend. But you and Will — you mustn’t mind my saying it, Sam! — are both earthly friends. It was because of that … that I … that I made Will sleep alone. I wanted to belong to you altogether.”

Sam spoke hurriedly and eagerly. “But I *must* come over and see you when he’s away. It’ll be madness, Nell, to let such a chance go.”

A spasm of anger crossed her face. “Chances, Sam Dekker? You talk of chances? Why didn’t you carry me off when you had the ‘chance’? No, no! A girl isn’t a bottle of wine for a man to lock up in a cupboard, to take a sip from whenever he wants to! Will’s a genuine man anyway in these things. *He* doesn’t wait for a ‘chance.’ *He* goes right ahead and takes risks.” She stood erect before him, her parcels pressed against her waist, her umbrella clutched crosswise against her bosom.

Her electric flash of anger communicated itself to him in a second and he too got up upon his feet. “If you feel like that,” he grumbled sulkily, “perhaps the best thing would be for me to give up altogether going out to see you.”

He gave a quick glance round the darkening church. But the stone coffin of Joseph of Arimathea lay undisturbed, a vague blur of insubstantial whiteness in the gathering dusk, and the Robinsons, both mother and son, had disappeared. “I never thought a time would come,” he said fiercely, "that we should have a chance like this, only to throw it away! Have you forgotten everything we've done together, and where we've been together? Have you forgotten that reed-hut on Splott's Moor? Have you forgotten Hartlake Railway Bridge? Have you forgotten that withy-bed at Westholme and the Palace Barn at Pilton?"

"I never thought," she said, "that you would ever come to speak of such things in such a tone! I've been a fool to treat you as one of the few men that a girl could trust not to behave like a cad!" This word "cad" she brought out with vibrant relish like a pet dagger from a hidden sheath. She glowed in her indignation to see the twitch of his poor, funny chin as she plunged it in.

"I only spoke of those places to remind you of things," he retorted with flashing eyes. "What you've done in going back to him when you belonged to me was far worse than talking of our little things. It was a kind of … a kind of … well! I won't say *that* to you. But you know what I mean! You've never put him out of your heart — never!"

"How *can* you say that to me after everything?" she interjected.

"Because that's what you're like! Because when you went back to him you were acting *like a whore."* (I've done it now, he thought. I've dropped the last straw on the heap by calling her that!) "Where does he want you to meet him? Can't I take you anywhere?" he said in a toneless mechanical voice. He took her hand. He repeated this hopeless formula. His lips seemed to have gone dry. He dropped her limp fingers, but she held him back for a second by the look on her face.

"You've … made … me … very … happy … Sam," she whispered, while her eyes brimmed with tears. Sam ought to have had the wit to realise at this moment that had he swallowed his pride and changed his tone all would have been well. Apparently a man *can* call his love a whore and be forgiven! But he was at once too aggrieved and too simple-minded to take advantage of the tears that were now pouring down her face.

“Good-bye,” he repeated doggedly; “good-bye, Nell.”

A little later that evening, Red Robinson sat talking to his mother and Sally Jones in Mrs. Robinson’s kitchen in an alley in Bove Town, a district of Glastonbury situated south of Old Wells Road and Edmund Hill Lane. Red was questioning Sally about the tea-party at the Geards’, while his mother, in a clean dress, a clean lace collar, a clean blue apron, was preparing supper. “Why do you torment poor Sal so grievous, sonny?” protested the old lady. “You’ll be the death of me with your hinsurrections. List to a hold ‘ooman, Sal, and leave not the paths of God’s ‘oly Word. Lot of good me son’s ‘Party’ will be to ’im, with ’is Rooshian Spies when ’is ole Mother be dead and gone! And this Crummie Geard ‘ee pines for! Your mother and me, Sal, have known Crummie Geard, and Bloody Johnny ’er dad too, since she were a tot in harms. Could Crummie dish up a nice tighsty dish ‘o liver and ‘am and fried tighties such as ye’ll tighst in a minute? Not on your little loife!”

“But, Mother,” protested Red Robinson, “Crummie’s dad is a rich man now. Since I ‘eard of that I ain’t gone near ’er. I ‘as me own pride, Mother; and dahn’t yer forget it!”

“Pride be ‘anged!” cried the old woman, banging his supper-plate down in front of him and pouring water into the empty frying-pan, “you and ’er were keeping company; or I dunno what helse it were!”

“Well, anyway,” went on Red, hungrily beginning to eat his supper, “whether I get Crummie or not, Crummie’s promised to ‘arst ’er dad — and she can twist the old boy round her little finger — to hinvest ’is cash in ‘elping us bankrupt this Crow concern. She says he told the Almighty ‘Imself at family prayers that Crow was ‘eading for ruin. He ‘ates Crow, ‘ee *must* ‘ate Crow, because of his filling the town with factories; whereas Bloody Johnny wants to preach to the visitors; and visitors don’t like factories. With a little of Geard’s cash to back us up we’ll mike the brute ‘owl and maybe get the Town to tike over his concern. That’s the idea anyway they’ve got at ‘eadquarters.”

“But didn’t you hear what I said?” put in Sally Jones. “Don’t I keep telling you he’s going to employ Crow’s cousin? Crow’s cousin be a tidy lad and a nice-spoken gentleman too; and old man Geard be goin’ to hire he to bring a girt Fair into Tor Field with a grand Roman Circus and a Golden-Jerusalem Theayter and a ‘normous Guy Fawkes Pope, and more o’ they gipoos and Fortune-Tellers than have been seen since the King cut off Abbot Whiting’s head!” Sally’s cheeks flamed and her eyes glittered as she described these wonders.

Red Robinson spat into the stove. “Don’t yer make no mistake, Baby Sal,” he said; “there won’t be no Fair in Glastonbury in our time except the regular Autumn one.”

“Did Mr. Geard really talk like that?” enquired Mrs. Robinson, as she removed her son’s plate and substituted another with a plump piece of pudding thereon. “There’s no telling what a man will do, who’s been poor, when he grows rich. Common folk like that ain’t no notion how to spend money. It tikes the real gentry to spend money as it ought to be spended.”

“You shut yer hold mouth, Mother!” cried Red with a chuckle. It was the cause of endless pleasantries between these two that the revolutionary ideas of the man were countered by the inflexible Toryism of the woman.

“Don’t you go on, then, putting these crazy notions into Sal’s mind. Don’t you ‘eed ’im, Sally, me gurl. Red’s not been as I’ve ‘a been, ‘ousekeeper to the Bishop of Bath and Wells what was a Lord — rest his sweet soul! — in's own right, seeing 'ee was uncle-born to the Marquis of P."

"Is it really true, Mrs. Robinson," asked Sally timidly, "that Mr. Zoyland, out to Queen's Sedgemoor, be thik Markises wicked by-blow?" The two women, the old one and the young one, pulled their kitchen chairs closer to each other; while an identical expression of complacent awe animated their faces.

"That's what I've 'a 'eered from folks what do know, Sal. 'Tis true I've never arst Mr. Zoyland 'isself. 'Tis a thing a gent like that — as I knows from my hexperience with 'is Lordship — be apt to be ticklish about. Not that in 'igh society, Sal, them by-blows be rare. They be common as hidiots be with us. There haint no great family, from on 'igh down, what 'asn't got 'en, Sal. 'Tis nature with they to have 'en."

By this time, in surprisingly few gulps, Red Robinson had dispatched his pudding. He now pushed back his plate and rising to his feet proceeded to light his pipe. That done, he took down his woollen scarf from one nail and his cap from another. "Don't yer sit up for me, Mother," he said. " 'Tis quarterly meeting tonight; and the Comrades from Wells and Wookey will be there and high'm the one delegated for the chief haddress."

"I'll stay and help Mrs. Robinson wash up," said Sally brightly. She made no move, however, to rise from her chair. She was clearly anxious to satisfy at one and the same time her natural kindness of heart and her longing to hear more about the Marquis of P.'s by-blow.

Red was on the point of laying his hand on the door-handle when the door itself opened from without. It opened with the peculiar impetus that inrushing children give, and no fewer than four lively youngsters precipitated themselves into the room. Sally did not rise from her chair now; for the leader of this little gang was her brother Jackie. Jackie was accompanied by Nelly Morgan, a wild, dishevelled little girl of eight. Sis was ten, as old as Jackie himself, and an incorruptible devotee of Jackie's; but being a heavily built and heavily witted child and burdened, furthermore, by the care of her brother Bert, an infant of five, who in placidity and appearance resembled a giant mushroom, Sis was outplayed, outrun, outdared, outjumped, outclimbed, outfought, outpassioned by Nelly Morgan, in spite of her advantage over Nelly of two whole years. Nelly's mother was a charwoman and was always at work; which gave the little girl an independence from parental control envied by all the rest. Jackie had Sally to order him about, in addition to their mother; and the little Coles, although orphans, had a very active and formidable grandmother. Nelly Morgan had no one; for her charwoman-mother, although an incredibly good worker during the day, had the peculiarity, indeed the unusual gift, of being able to drink gin with no bodily ill-effect every night until she was completely fuddled. Every day she would rise again by five o'clock; get her own and Nelly's breakfast, and go off cheerfully to her laborious work. She never uttered an unkind word to Nelly; far less ever struck her. But on the other hand she was wont to fall into a sentimental trance, as soon as she had washed up after supper, from which she never emerged again that evening. During this trance she would shed silent tears, sigh repeatedly, and talk in mumbling tones of Nelly's dead father; but Nelly herself became to her mother at these times as if she were totally invisible, inaudible, and non-existent. For a little girl of eight to become non-existent to her only relation every single day of her life at seven o'clock was an experience likely to have a noticeable effect; and Nelly's nature got steadily more and more self-absorbed and more and more eccentric. Though still only eight, the child had the intelligence of a girl of eleven; and on the few occasions when even the bold Jackie showed the white feather, Nelly — lieutenant of this robber band — played the devil with all strategy and all prudence.

Bert Cole — that titanic mushroom — was at once awed and entranced by Nelly, who, in Sis's occasional absences, dragged him, pushed him, carried him, transported him, upon undertakings of fearful excitement. Bert never cried, never laughed, never smiled, and very rarely uttered a word; but, although the youngest of the robber band, he could not be called the least interested, for of all the people in Glastonbury, including even Mr. Wollop, the draper, who had been three times Mayor, none — I say none — contemplated the Dream of Life with a more concentrated gusto. A little bewildered, but not, even then, profoundly disturbed, when Nelly Morgan insisted on carrying his enormous weight upon her slim back, Bert Cole surveyed the panorama of existence with an unpossessive, grave-eyed relish that would have put Diogenes himself to shame.

The inrush of this hurly-burly of excited children delayed for a moment Red Robinson's departure. Sis and Nelly were both favourites of his; and there was a general hullabaloo in that peaceful kitchen while he " 'unted," as he said, " 'igh and low" for a bag of sweets he had secreted somewhere. Mrs. Robinson had even to move to another place her pile of mending from the stately black-oak hall-chair, which came from the Bishop's Palace and which served her as a work-table. She had to disarrange, too, her reproduction of Constable's "Hay-Wagon" — another relic of the Bishop's Palace — which was balanced on the top of her dresser. All was joyous confusion; with Bert, like some ideal prize boy, surveying life from Sally's knees, his plump legs hanging down, his plump fists clutching together some bits of blue glass he had picked up, and his grave eyes taking in the Platonic Essence of the whole unique scene.

As for Jackie, a slender, fragile-looking but passionately intense little boy, with chestnut-brown hair and hazel eyes, he had begun a dramatic story to his sister Sal, the points of which he had continually to emphasise, when Sally's attention wandered, by tugging at the locket round her neck. Long experience had taught him that the threat of a broken locket was the most attention-provoking of all gestures on the part of a younger brother. "I seed she over Tor and over Wirral. I seed she again over Chalice and over Stonedown. 'Twere a girt big 'un she were; and 'un flew low, like 'twere goin' to turn topsy. 'Twere the biggest flyer ever made, out of Ameriky; and Nelly says she knows for sure 'tis Mr. Tom Barter what be steerin' of 'er. 'Tis Mr. Crow's airplane, Nelly says, and Mr. Barter be pilot on she."

"Didn't I tell you, Mother?" broke in Red Robinson, who had been listening intently to all this. "*That's* what he's doing with the money he takes out of the labouring man's sweat! You're main right, Nelly, you're main right! Barter *is* the pilot. And *that* means that he's letting the office down. And *that* means that the whole business will be a washout. I'll tell 'em at the Quarterly tonight what you've seen, Jackie. You wait, Mr. Crow! You wait! You'll find Red Robinson isn't a fellow to spit upon, little though you *may* think of his dependableness!" This word referred to a personal quarrel which Red had had, just a year before, with Philip Crow. Philip had dismissed him without proper warning and when angrily challenged by the man had coldly told him that he did not find him "dependable." The truth is that Red Robinson — although politically a Communist — was temperamentally a Jacobin. A rankling personal hatred of Philip Crow had grown by degrees to be the dominant passion of his life, stronger even than his devotion to Crummie Geard. That "not dependable" had become a kind of vicious quartering on the great, heraldic blazon of Mr. Robinson's revolutionary faith.

Automatically replacing his mother's basket of mending for the church upon the stately hall-chair, which bore upon its back the episcopal arms of Bath and Wells — God knows how the ex-housekeeper had got hold of it! — Red Robinson picked up for the second time his cap and scarf and let himself out into the little dark street. On his way to the small upper room in Old Jones' Antiquity Shop, which had for years been the Comrades' meeting-place, Robinson found it necessary to pass quite close to a low stone wall, over which — at a single field's distance — he could not escape from seeing in the starlight the richly carved ruin of that oldest and most sacred building in Glastonbury, the Church of St. Mary, usually known as Saint Joseph's Chapel. On this spot stood the original Wattle Church built by Joseph of Arimathea. Here was the stone church erected much later by Saint David of Wales; and here too was discovered, in comparatively modern times, the carefully preserved Well, into which a blood-red stream of magical water once trickled down from the very slope of Chalice Hill. It was to the monkish guardians of this mystical spot, doubtless carrying in its enchanted soil, fed by the bones of untold centuries, the psychic chemistry of religious cults far older than Christianity, far older than the Druids, that King Ina's charter was given, the charter which still exists, an actual piece of material parchment, inscribed by an unknown human hand in the year seven hundred and twenty-five. One of the most familiar of the constellations — was it Cassiopeia? — Red Robinson was weak on the subject of the stars — hung suspended just above this famous fragment of antiquity. Red surveyed this stellar sign with approbation. It was useful; it afforded light — though in a primitive form and not very freely — to the delegate who was to address the Comrades that evening. *There was no nonsense about it.* Those twinkling celestial orbs might have been electric bulbs, inaugurated by some disillusioned Lenin of the Ether. Thus did Red

Robinson set the seal of his revolutionary approval upon the stellar system. But the shadowy Norman arches of St. Mary’s Chapel, as he surveyed them now, filled him with anger and contempt. He went so far as to spit over the low wall in the direction of that Bastille of Superstition. That his spittle only fell on the back of a small snail that was travelling across a dockleaf by the light of those same stars was an incident of small importance. He had expressed his disgust with Saint Joseph, Saint David, Saint Patrick, Saint Dunstan, Saint Indractus, Saint Gildas, Saint Benignus. He had expressed his disapproval of King Edgar the Peace-Maker, of two King Edmunds, and of more Abbots than he could possibly name! As to King Arthur — but he swallowed his wrath now and moved on.

He was soon entering the little shop of Old Jones. Old Jones was still in hospital. The little cyst, referred to by Penny Pitches, had been successfully cut out of Old Jones’ withered frame; but the shock of the operation delayed his recovery. Mr. Evans was still, therefore, playing the role of his representative. It was in a bare room, filled with school-forms, and a little school-platform — for it served on Sunday as a meeting-place for a handful of Plymouth Brethren — that the quarterly gathering of Comrades was held. This room was on the third floor and was just above the bedroom occupied by Mr. Evans.

The Welshman was now seated at his open window finishing for exactly the twenty-fifth time, the “Morte d’Arthur” of Sir Thomas Malory. The indescribable sadness of those final pages was wrapping him round in a delicate melancholy, when he became aware of the bustle and the clatter of the meeting above his head. He tried to render himself oblivious to these intrusive sounds. He even placed his pair of guttering candles upon the broad window-sill and the book between them. But to no avail! The voices of the Comrades, the scraping of their feet, the vigorous clapping of their hands, entered his window, descended his chimney, and came down through the cracks between the creaking boards of his ceiling. The voice of Red Robinson raised in indignant denunciation, lowered in Machiavellian persuasion, clear and incisive in practical suggestion, presently drove the sorrowful piety of the repentant Lancelot completely off the field.

The unfortunate thing was — but such was Mr. Evans' psychic constitution — that he no sooner lost his sacred and sweet melancholy under this downpour of communistic reasoning than his old fatal temptation began to trouble his mind. It attacked him vaguely, mistily, atmospherically, with a sort of deadly diffused sweetness of indescribable poison. And what was the worst thing about the way it attacked him was the fact that it made the project of being married to Cordelia Geard an expectation of such withering *dullness* that it made him groan to think of it. And yet he did genuinely love Cordelia. Not with any kind of physical love. That was impossible. But with a feeling of pity that shook the foundations of his nature. He had never pitied anyone as he had come to pity Cordelia. His pity for her had grown step by step with his admiration for her mental and spiritual qualities. Why then this intolerable sense of dullness — oh, much worse than dullness! — this sense that the very leap of life in his deepest fibres would perish of sapless sterility if he were to live forever by her side, day and night, night and day by her side! How *could* he have permitted this corrosive poison so to soak, with its fatal fungus-juice, every nerve of his being? Struggling with this vague temptation now, he began to dally with the ghastly idea that apart from *some* element of sadistic feeling it would be impossible for him not to shrink away with infinite loathing from any physical contact with Cordelia. He had thought at first, on finding how fond he was getting of Cordelia, that here — in this one single point — he had the advantage over normally amorous people. Since with him the natural urge towards feminine beauty *as* feminine beauty was less than nothing, surely he might be permitted to indulge his pity — this pity, that was the magnetism of his love — to the limit, without fear of feeling repulsion? If, without the sadistic shiver, if, without this infernal Nightshade juice, all flesh was literally grass, why couldn't he "make hay" in human pastures from which normal people would shrink in sick aversion? But the ghastly doubt began assailing him now; suppose he had so drained away every drop of magnetic attraction to natural human flesh that the daily presence of another person would strew his life with the dust of the ultimate boredom to such a degree that everything he felt, everything he saw, everything he tasted, everything he heard, would exude a withering dry-rot?

He began inadvertently to listen to what Red Robinson was saying in the room above. He had been hearing him, it seemed, for hours; but he began to *listen* to him now. He blew out one of his candles and moved the other one, and the volume of Malory with it, back into the room. Sitting at his table, with the candle and book in front of him, he set himself to listen attentively. But it was hard to listen attentively. Oh, it all seemed so unimportant — this problem of what became of mankind in general — compared with what he was feeling in his own solitary being! Well! Anyway that perilous quiver upon the air was drifting away now! What brought it at some moments so much more strongly than at others? Were there really powers of good and evil moving about in the ether and touching us all *at their own* will, not at ours, and at the strangest moments? He closed the book and pushed the candle further from him. Through the open window came the sound of a single, old, cracked bell. He couldn't imagine where that bell hung. In some little neighbouring nonconformist chapel, he supposed!

Still the voice of Red Robinson went on, arguing and proving and denouncing and cajoling and persuading; and it was a curious thing that in his public oratory the man largely succeeded in dropping his cockney accent. “Incorrigible heretic! Curse him with bell, book, and candle!” thought Mr. Evans. The Welshman’s triadic mind dived like a plummet, then, to the sea-bottom of loathing from which he was always trying to escape. How queer that that fainting sweetness, that quivering, shivering, swooning sweetness, that was all about him in the air now, making everything *not touched by itself* an ash-bin of intolerable dullness, should be the thing that led him on and on and on till he incurred this undying Horror!

Owen Evans leaped up upon his feet as if Something far worse than any conceivable hell-torture had come into his head. He stood still for a second and then swung round and faced the window. And by slow degrees it came over him that what he was really seeking from Cordelia was punishment. If he punished himself enough, might not the Horror be disarmed, be repelled? “Christ!” he murmured, staring out at the darkened windows on the opposite side of the street, “if it is *like that* to live with her, why should not that be my punishment? Why should not that save me?” This sudden unmasking of a secret motive in his own action which had hitherto been concealed from him gave Owen Evans such a consoling sensation after his recent self-torture that he lit his second candle again and sitting down once more at his table re-opened Malory. He was careful to open the book this time not at the end, but at the beginning; and he turned over the pages till he came to a particular passage about Merlin which always stirred him profoundly. Everything that he could discover about Merlin sank into Mr. Evans’ mind and took a permanent place there. Scraps and morsels and fragments, mythical, historical, natural, supernatural, as long as they had some bearing, however remote, upon the life of Merlin, filtered down into Mr. Evans’ soul. He had already begun to write a life of Merlin more comprehensive than any in existence. In fact Mr. Evans’ “Life of Merlin” was to include all that has been written of that greatest of enchanters in Welsh, in English, in French, and in Old French. As all Merlin's disciples well know, there is a mysterious word used in one of the Grail Books about his final disappearance. This is the word "Esplumeoir." It is inevitable from the context to interpret this as some "Great Good Place," some mystic Fourth Dimension, or Nirvanic apotheosis, into which the magician deliberately sank, or rose; thus committing a sort of inspired suicide, a mysterious dying in order to live more fully. As he sought for one of his favourite passages — for "Esplumeoir" does not appear in Malory — he kept murmuring that particular invocation under his breath, pondering intently on the occult escape offered by this runic clue from all the pain of the world, an escape so strangely handed down from far-off centuries in these thaumaturgic syllables.

While Mr. Evans was thus occupied, Red Robinson in the room above where the Comrades were assembled to hear his speech was thinking to himself that he must conceal one little fact about his grand message to them and the scheme he intended to lay before them. This was the fact that it was really none other than Persephone Spear, who, through her husband's mouth, had first broached the idea of starting a Municipal Factory in Glastonbury. It needed the wit of a woman to think of such a simple thing. But Red Robinson, like many another masculine politician, was resolved to take all the credit to himself of this flash of feminine inspiration! It was not long before the cockney's penetrating voice began to make itself again audible to the ears of Mr. Evans, lifted up to a yet shriller pitch as Red approached his main argument.

As a propagandist Mr. Robinson always aimed at a disciplined art that resembled that of a Catholic peasant-priest carefully trained in a Seminary; but it often happened that his art broke down. "We have several Comrades," Mr. Evans heard him exclaim now, “who are on the Glastonbury Town Council. I appeal to these Comrades; I beg these Comrades, to use every means at their disposal to familiarize their colleagues with the principles of municipal ownership. These factories depend upon natural resources. The Wookey Hole one depends on the subterranean River Axe which flows beneath the Mendips. The Glastonbury one depends on the waters of the River Brue. Does this man Crow, does this selfish, luxurious rich man, cause these rivers to flow, or create the rains and the springs that fill these rivers? We are all Comrades here; and I may talk freely here. I have come to learn that this religious fanatic we are accustomed to hear called by the name of Bloody Johnny” — here there was a terrific stamping of feet and loud hilarious laughter above Mr. Evans’ head!— “is intending to use his legacy of ill-gotten bourgeois money, of which all the Comrades here have heard, to bring crowds of visitors to the town. You know, Comrades, how such bourgeois visitors dislike everything industrial. But their dislike is not shared by the man I refer to. Now this is what I propose to you, Comrades; I propose that some one among us should be delegated to approach this man Geard, who is evidently prepared to throw his money away, and try and persuade him to lend the Town Council, of which he is now a member, funds large enough to buy out this devil Crow! I propose that this delegate from the Party persuade Geard to buy for himself the factories, if he cannot induce the town to purchase them. Anything is better than leaving them in the hands of such a devilish enemy of the working-man as we know this Crow to be. And they’ll go for a song, I tell you, Comrades. They’ll go for a song; because a really big strike will throw the concern into bankruptcy.

“Don’t interrupt me, Comrades from Wells! This is only half my plans. As you all know this is the year for the election of our Mayor. Geard is a fool. But he is a well-meaning fool. He is sympathetic to our cause. He is almost one of us. He is furthermore the sort of man that could be persuaded into anything! I have myself the entree into his house … I needn't say any more at this moment … and if this Quarterly Meeting of the Comrades of Wells and Glastonbury delegated me to approach him as their representative, I believe there would be a good chance of persuading him. We would have to make his name prominent — that's what all bourgeois philanthropists want — to be talked of, to be heard of! The Comrades on the Town Council would then propose him for Mayor — to succeed that prize ass, Wollop. Nothing would please him better than to be proposed for Mayor. With Geard as Mayor, and the Party behind the Mayor, we might municipalise the water, the gas, the electricity and finally these factories! This, Comrades, is simply common sense. Some Comrades here may object that this is a wild-goose scheme; that in proposing it to them I am departing from practical politics. Let such Comrades bethink themselves a little! Here is this sum of money, inherited by this incredible fool who wants to spend it on being talked about. Why should not we elect him Mayor when the elections come on? No Party but our Party would bother with such a catspaw. But that's just why we *must* win in the end. *Because we despise no means!* The Conservatives of course will oppose him. But the Liberals and Labour men will support us if we take a strong lead. That's the great thing; to take a strong, clear lead! Half the Town Council are sick to death of Wollop. He's been Mayor of Glastonbury so long that everyone wants a change. The drinking men would all vote for Bloody Johnny, just for the sport of it and to stir things up. All the Nonconformists would vote for him. Crow hates the mere thought of the fellow. Crow will get angry and say wild things and make some howling blunder; and then the Town Council, with our Party in the background, will have Glastonbury in their—"

It was clear to Mr. Evans, who had begun at last to grow seriously interested in this discourse when he realized how closely it concerned "his relative, Mr. Geard" that the meeting had called the speaker to order and shouted him down. Some other voice was speaking now in cold, low, sarcastic tones. Evans caught the words "personal ambition," "fancy scheme," "fairytale poppycock," "wasting the Party's funds," "Menshevik-claptrap." He even imagined he heard the name of "Crummie" coupled with a very gross epithet. The Quarterly Meeting evidently regarded itself as free from eavesdroppers and was permitting its speakers untrammelled licence. After a while Red Robinson's voice was audible again. Evans had met him once at the Geards' and was sure he was not mistaken as to his identity.

This time it was clear that the cockney orator was trying to carry the day by an emotional appeal. "We shall never have such a chance again, Comrades," he was saying. "Geard is a fool but Geard has a good heart. By electing Geard as Mayor we shall be electing ourselves into the power behind the throne. And what *could* we not achieve then? Away with all these mediaeval superstitions! Away with all these pious Pilgrimages! Glastonbury is only one town among other towns. There's nothing wonderful about Glastonbury but the health and freedom and happiness of its men, its women, its children! While this fellow Crow exploits the natural resources to his own profit, and while our bourgeois tradesmen exploit all this mediaeval superstition to *their* profit, what becomes of the real men and women, able-bodied Somersetshire men and comely Somersetshire women? They can't afford meat or butter! They can't afford fresh eggs! Their children are underfed. Look at them, Comrades! Look at the children in Beckery and Bove Town. Look at the children in Benignus Alley! and Paradise! There you have the whole issue! On the one hand Crow and Wollop exploiting the people's bodies; on the other these pious mountebanks exploiting their souls! And all these fine bourgeois gentry, Lawyer Beere, Doctor Fell, Parson Dekker and so on; and old Wollop the worst of all; what are they doing? They are burning toy candles to the 'oly Grail! Yes, they are burning incense while women and children haven't enough to eat! I tell you, Comrades, Geard is our man. I've talked to him already … I have already … I needn't go into that … though the Comrade from Wells did use insulting language I scorn to answer him …. I have already a certain influence over Geard through his favourite daughter …. I've already made Geard see the light upon many economic points … I have already made Geard open his mind to many bourgeois tricks. Geard has had the working-class mentality opened up to him. It is the Comrade from Wells, not I, who has departed from the Party's principles in his abuse of me and Geard. The time has come for real action. The election of the Mayor comes on in a few weeks. We can't elect one of ourselves Mayor. The Comrade from Wells knows that perfectly well. But we *could* elect Geard; and then work the Council *through* Geard. My plan is *not* a wild-goose plan; it's a carefully thought-out scheme based upon *psychology.* That is the reason, no doubt, why the Comrade from Wells found it so hard to understand!" Mr. Evans heard uproarious laughter and applause as the speaker ceased. It was evident that that final hit at the opposition was very popular with the Comrades. He himself sneezed violently at this point and the sound must have ascended to the room above, raising the disturbing question as to their conclave having been overheard. After a profound silence he heard the sound of steps descending the stairs and there were whispers outside his door. In order to make clear to the whisperers that he knew what they were up to, Mr. Evans began clattering with his fire-irons among the cold ashes of his grate. No sooner had he done this than the steps receded up the stairs again. All subsequent discussions in the room above were henceforth quite inaudible and it was not long before the Quarterly Meeting broke up.

When Mr. Evans was at length in bed, with the little table and one of his two candles convenient to his hand, he proceeded, while he smoked his final cigarette, to take stock of what he had overheard. “I shall tell Cordelia all they are plotting,” he said to himself. “But I don’t see why they shouldn’t elect my relative Mayor. I think he would make a very good Mayor.” And before the Welshman’s mind, as he squeezed out the fiery embers of his cigarette on a broken china saucer that he had brought up from the shop below, there floated an exciting dream of a communistic Glastonbury, presided over by his relative Geard; a Glastonbury in which he himself would play a sort of court-magician part and with Cordelia — that free spirit of the Cymric race — inaugurating the laws and regulations! As he finally turned over to the wall and shut his eyes, he felt happier, thinking of this, than he had felt for many a long week. “If these working-men decide upon this,” he thought, “I suppose it’ll really happen. I wonder whether it’s the Town Council, or the Church, or the Government that gives a person leave to excavate?” He saw himself possessed of John Crow’s hazel-stick with its queer root-handle. He remembered how John had assured him that with such a stick a person could find anything buried in the earth.

“Hic jacet Arturus ... Hic jacet ... Arturus ... Hic jacet ... hic ...”

CARBONEK

TWO OR THREE days after the Quarterly Meeting above Old Jones’ shop, the Bove Town robber band, that is to say Captain Jackie and his infantile followers, were deploying, if such a word may be used for the movements of so diminutive a troop, in loose marching order up the narrow Godney Road. They had left all the decent houses far behind when they debouched from the Wells Road. They had long ago passed the drive-gates of The Elms where Philip Crow lived. They were now on the edge of what was called Common Moor and were not far from Backwear Farm which is the site of the British Lake Village. The road they followed did not carry much traffic along its hard, tarred surface; but the weather was so warm that the robber band was exhausted. The air would have been dusty if the road had not been so polished and so hard, but wherever the brown earth showed between the clumps of rough grass by the roadside it was dry and sapless and unsympathetic and depressing. The day was one of those early Spring days that for some mysterious reason, very hard to analyse, are felt to be ill-omened and unpleasant. Something was certainly wrong with this day! All animal nerves felt it. All human nerves felt it. All living things were irritable, restless, disturbed; sick without being sick; sad without being sad; annoyed without any apparent cause for annoyance!

Sis was already carrying Bert on her back. “Plo-chuck … plo-chuck …” went her sturdy legs, under the weight of the complacent and impervious infant. Nelly and Jackie were a little in advance; but even *they* were walking in single file, silent and grim. Nothing but the indomitable will of Captain

Jackie could have kept this exhausted cortege on the move; or brought it so far afield on that nervous, touchy, irritable March afternoon.

At last they came to a standstill by a low, ancient, broken iron railing which separated an object from the Godney Road. This object could hardly be called a house. It was a tiny, little, stucco building of two storeys, each with two windows, one looking towards the road and one looking away from the road. The stucco was of a whitish-yellowish colour and was peeling off. It was stained here and there, too, with stains of a rusty brown. Only an expert in the decline of material substance under weather invasions could have interpreted these stains. They were not lichen. They were not moss. They looked like rusty blood; but they could not have really been blood; for no one would have thrown blood against the wall of a house eight or nine feet from the ground? Weather stains they obviously were, of chemical origin; but this did not lessen the strangeness of the fact that these rusty stains upon this stucco house had seen fit to assume the surprising shape of a map of North and South America.

On the left-hand side of this tiny house was an open shed, one portion of which served as the roosting-place for half a dozen white fowls who were now wandering in the adjoining field.

At the back of the house was one of those large dykes or rhynes on the edge of which grew three pollarded willows; and between this little stream and the back door of the one single ground-floor room there was a small vegetable garden, the leafy promise of which was a good deal further advanced above the loamy clay than in either of the grand bourgeois gardens tended by Mr. Weatherwax.

Seated in his shed, sharpening a faggot of sticks for the support of his young peas, crouched the owner of Backwear Hut, a very old man called Abel Twig.

No sooner did Jackie catch sight of Mr. Twig than he caused his lieutenant Nelly to proclaim a halt.

It was not difficult to obtain obedience to this command, so exhausted was the main body of the Alley Gang; and Bert, slipping like a sack of flour from the back of Sis, was soon propped up against the iron railings, through which his round eyes stared in wonder at the map of North and South America.

The small hands of Jackie, Nelly and Sis clung in a row to the topmost railing of Mr. Twig's sole line of defence while the hatless heads of Jackie, Nelly, and Sis looked down in unabashed curiosity upon the interior of Mr. Twig's shed.

"Hullo!" cried Jackie in a shrill voice. "Hullo, Number One!"

In every town of the size of Glastonbury there are produced by great creative Nature certain laughing-stocks, or butts of derision, for the amusement of the rabble. Old Jones of the Antiquity Shop — now in the local hospital — and Old Twig, now before us in his shed, were the butts of Glastonbury. They were bosom cronies, these two old men, and not a child in the poorer district but had not at one time or other followed these queer ones down the street mocking and shouting. They were always called Number One and Number Two; and so widely spread were these nicknames that in some of the bewildered heads of the contemporaries of Young Bert the two great excretory functions of our poor animal organism, so prominent in children's lives, were confusedly associated with these venerable old persons.

"Hullo, Number One!" repeated Jackie.

"Number Two be in Orspital!" echoed Nelly.

"Bert wants a glass o' water, Bert do," added Sis in a less combative voice.

"What did I tell 'ee, eh? What did I tell 'ee, ye young sca-mooches? I told 'ee yesternight I'd set Bumboggle at ye if ye came again. Hi there! Good dog! Hi there! Hi there, Bumboggle! Hi! Bumboggle! Ye girt sleepy beast! Come and eat up these three impidents!"

Captain Jackie did not budge. Lieutenant Nelly did not flinch. It is impossible, however, to conceal the fact that after this alarming invocation there were only five little hands clutching the railings. Sis, concerned for Bert, had thrown one arm round her small brother's neck. Bert himself, however, to the honour of the Alley Gang, replied to the challenge in a momentous sentence.

"I bain't afeard o' no fancy dogs, I baint."

"Bert wants a glass o' water, Number One, Bert do!" repeated Sis in a singsong monotone.

"Oh, he does, does he?" growled Old Twig. "I'll water him. I'll firk him! I'll ferret him! Oh, he does, does he?"

Talking to himself all the time in the manner of a ferocious ogre, Old Twig got up and retired into that square object which went by the name of Backwear Hut. He returned almost immediately with a tin cup, full of water, which he handed to Bert between the railings, not relinquishing it himself, but tilting it up, while the child drank long and deep. No sooner had the old man returned to his shed and his task of whittling his pea-sticks than Nelly lifted up her high-pitched voice.

"Tell us some more about they funny men what lived in Lake Village in your grand-dad's time."

Muttering and chuckling the old man moved up to the railings and leaning over tried to lift Bert across. But Bert, far too heavy for him, was already pushing himself under the lowest bar. The three older children were now scrambling over the top of the railings; and in about three minutes after their first “Hullo” they were all seated at Old Twig’s feet in the front of his shed listening spellbound to what he was saying.

“ ’Twould be in me wone field,” he began, “this here Lake Village if all had their rights. Grand-dad sold ‘un to Lawyer Beere’s father and Lawyer Beere’s father sold ‘un to Mr. Crow up at Elms, and Mr. Crow, they say, is goin’ to turn sheep out and make it a visitors’ field. He’ve a-brought one party here already this season and so have Mr. Barter. Other folks say he be going to turn this wold field into one of they landings for airboats. If this be true ‘twill be terrible disturbing for them old ghosties in Lake Village.”

“Have you ever seed one of they funny men’s ghosties, Mr. Twig?” enquired Sis.

“Don’t interrupt, Sis!” cried Nelly. “Number One ain’t begun his story yet! His story ain’t about Mr. Crow.”

“It ain’t about any of the like of us,” echoed Captain Jackie, taking the cue from his lieutenant. “ ’Tis about they old men theyselves.”

“Be I telling this ’ere tale or be ye telling this ’ere tale?” said Abel Twig. It dawned upon him rather sadly that his listeners envisaged the ancient heroes of Lake Village as so many feeble replicas of Number One.

“Bert be a good boy, Bert be!” ejaculated irrelevantly the owner of that name.

“When I tell this ’ere tale to Bumboggle,” said Mr. Twig, “Bumboggle do prick his girt ears and say nothink.”

There was a complete silence among the Alley Gang at this, and Old Twig went on.

“ ’Twas years and years afore King Arthur that they Ancient British funny men lived in Lake Village. Them funny men were terrible feared of beasties in they days, beasties as big as my house.”

“Your house baint as big as my mummie’s be,” interrupted Jackie.

"Number One's house be a very *nice* house," threw in Sis, evidently feeling for a second as if Mr. Twig were a larger edition of Bert.

"Were it afore your grand-dad sold thik field that they Ancient Britons lived in they reed-houses?"

Nelly looked with astonishment at her gallant captain when he made this unintelligent remark. She began to recognise, as many romantic young women have been forced to do before, that high military achievement is compatible with very crude historical perspective.

But Mr. Twig was rather pleased than otherwise at this reference to his grandfather's hasty disposal of landed property.

" 'Twere a *little* while afore poor old Grand-dad's days," he said, "that they Ancient British lived."

"Bert's got pins and needles," said Sis. "He be waggling wi' his foot."

"Sit ride-a-cock on Number One's knee!" rejoined Old Twig, placing the little boy upon one of his thin legs.

Seated solemn and erect, without moving an eyelid, Bert contemplated the countenance of his host while Sis began rubbing the child's instep.

A faint smile flickered over the little boy's face.

"Bert be pee-ing his trowsies," cried Sis with concern.

"No, I baint," retorted the infant indignantly.

"Why did yer look like that then?" argued his sister.

The child got very red and said nothing.

"You be," the girl reiterated.

"I baint," shrilled the youngster. And driven by the injustice of the world to break his own rule of politeness— "He be like Guy Fawkes!" he brought out, while the corners of his mouth went down.

It was an unusual event for Bert to smile; it was no less than a historic event for him to show signs of tears. Sis lifted him from the old man's knee, took him upon her own little lap and hugged him against her sturdy frame.

“There was one of they funny men in them times,” went on the old man hurriedly, “who killed a girt beastie wi’ a flint arrow. Thik beastie was called Giant What’s-his-name on account of his name bein’ so hard to say; but when the funny man killed it he took off all its skin and made a fire and his sister, who was his wife too, cooked thik girt beastie.”

Bert lifted up his head at this exciting point.

“Sis be Bert’s wife,” he remarked with intense gravity.

Sis slapped him sharply and turned reproachfully to Mr. Twig.

“Those times baint our times,” she protested.

“I wish I lived in those times!” cried Nelly with flashing eyes. “I’d have helped Jackie to shoot thik girt beast. I’d have carried a bundle of they flinties!”

“My grand-dad’s field what he sold to wold Lawyer Beere baint the only field he had. Yon field, over thik dyke, were his ‘n, and it be mine today.”

Into this chorus of boastings it was natural enough that Captain Jackie should fling his contribution.

“When Mr. Barter do fly from this here Lake Village ‘twon’t be with any ghosty, ‘twill be wi’ I!”

The whole robber band regarded their leader with wondering awe.

“I’ll be there to wave to ‘ee!” cried Nelly. “And I’ll throw summat at ‘ee, maybe, for luck!”

“Will you fly above your mother’s chimney, Jackie?” enquired Sis.

“Sis be Bert’s airship,” remarked the wide-eyed infant, glancing obstinately at his sister in full expectation of being slapped again.

But it was old Twig, not Sis, who broke up this happy colloquy. He suddenly clapped his hand to his head and beat on his hard skull.

"Oh, the duck-a-duck!" he cried. "In sense! Out foolishness!" And still beating his old pate he set himself to run with shambling gait into Backwear Hut and up the single flight of stairs.

"Be off! Be off! B'off! Quick! Quick! If ye love Old Twig the price of a bright penny, be off! Out of here! Afore they come!"

These remarks were addressed to the robber band from the upper window of Backwear Hut, out of which the old man's withered neck and grizzled head protruded.

It was clear that Captain Jackie was seized with panic — the bravest are subject to such emotions once or twice in their lives — for forgetting entirely about his little army he scrambled at top speed over the railings and bolted up the road in the opposite direction from the town. It was then that the heart of the band's fiery lieutenant was torn in two; for while both fear and love urged her to follow Jackie, an impulse in her girl's breast stronger than fear and love constrained her to help Sis get Bert out of the shed and over the railings. *Then*, however, she waited not a second, but followed her lord on flying feet!

Poor Sis! The stolid little lass suffered a most evil moment, as under the eyes of the frantic old man leaning out of the window she tried in vain to get the panic-stricken Bert to mount upon her back. Desperately she propped him up upon the lowest bar of the railings and, turning round, clutched wildly at his legs. Each time she seized his legs he toppled back against the railings. In vain she lost her temper. In vain she slapped him. The panic of Jackie and Nelly, the old man's frightened voice out of the window, her own unusual agitation, quite broke down the philosophy of Bert. The little boy, for the first time since he was two years old, burst into a howl of desolate crying.

Two events now occurred simultaneously, while Sis, on her knees by the blubbering child, soothed him with words and caresses. The old man withdrew from the window, stumbled downstairs and rushed into the road. At the same moment two extremely neat young ladies, both in elegant black, one with a blue ribbon round her neck, and the other with a pink ribbon, advancing side by side from the direction of the town, arrived at Mr. Twig's gate.

They surveyed the sobbing Bert, who was making up for the rarity of his departure from philosophic calm by his difficulty in regaining it, with aloof distaste. This was the sort of thing that both Louie and Lily Rogers — for such they were — had become handmaidens to escape. The mere sight of Sis and Bert brought back vividly to their minds their own early experiences. They edged away from the little girl and the little boy and one of them began fumbling rather nervously with the dilapidated latch of the still more dilapidated gate. This gate had not, as a matter of fact, been opened for years — perhaps not since the death of Mr. Twig's grand-dad — and it became apparent to Louie, for in Miss Drew's absence no human creature addressed her or thought of her as "Rogers," that whatever entrance or exit Uncle Abel may have possessed this rusty gate was not it.

Meanwhile Uncle Abel himself, full of the most obsequious apologies, had appeared upon the scene and was now hovering like the bewildered physician at Dunsinane, between the mental trouble of one claimant on his attention and the physical impasse of the other.

" 'Tis here, my dears! 'Tis here I steps over," he cried, waving to his dainty nieces to follow him and hurrying along the edge of his domain till he reached a place where the top rail was nonexistent. "Here's the place, my precious ducks, 'tis only to lift your pretty skirts a trifle so's not to get rust on ‘en. ’Tis here, ’tis here, my sweethearts! Up she goes, and over the hurdle! Here! ’Tis here I goes in and out!”

But the two elegant creatures — for they were really good-hearted girls — had both of them by this time drifted up to where Sis knelt by the prostrate Bert. The philosopher’s sobs were over, but his deep shame remained; and this emotion, as often happens with wise men who have been unwise, displayed itself in irrational anger towards his nearest and dearest. Bert, lying on his face in the grass, kicked obstreperously every time Sis touched him. Matters were further complicated at this moment by the return of Jackie and Nelly. Nelly in a moment jerked Bert upon his feet; and once in a perpendicular position the child’s interest in the surprising scene around him made him forget his disgrace.

“Who *are* these children, Uncle?” enquired Louie of Mr. Twig.

“Hadn’t you better be taking that little boy home to his mother, child?” said Lily to Sis.

“ ’Tis Grannie,” replied Sis. “Mother be dead and buried.”

Abel Twig was now scrutinising with sly interest a paper bag carried by Lily. The girls were accustomed to bring him some casual token of Mr. Weatherwax’s activity and it presented itself very strongly to his mind that here was a providential chance of getting rid of the children.

So he spoke up. “They be *good* children, they be, my rosebuds. ‘Twere the sight of such *good* children, walking quietly along road, while their decent mothers cleaned house, that made Uncle Abel call ’em in. But now be time for ye all” — he turned to Sis as being the one among the group who was most grown-up— “to begin traipsin’ home-along.”

He gave Lily, who carried the paper bag, a little twitch of the sleeve and pulled her a few steps aside.

"Have 'ee brought some o' they sweet apples what old Weatherwax do keep so long in hayloft?" he whispered craftily. "If 'ee have brought they, I be terrible thirsty for 'en. Me stummick be watering to get me teeth into 'en — them nice little firm sweet fruities. Poor old Uncle have a girt fancy to taste, now and quick, what his pretty nieces have brought to he in thik little bag."

"Of course, Uncle Abel," said Lily sweetly. "You shall have them at once. There! I haven't had my kiss yet," and she touched his bristly cheeks with her lips. "Of course they are all for you! Eat them, keep them, cook them — They're yours enirely! Louie and I brought them for you with our love."

She gladly enough handed the paper bag over to him and smoothed out with her cream-coloured, neatly gloved fingers the ruffled front of her black dress.

Once in possession of this great bag of Hesperidean fruit the astute owner of Backwear Hut felt himself to be master of the situation. He took out five beautiful apples, one by one, and began munching with hurried bites, though not without difficulty, for his teeth were few, the first of these. The other four with a cunning leer he handed over to Captain Jackie.

"These apples," he said, "what these young ladies have brought be the cause why them funny men, what I tell 'ee of, called our town Avallonia which be ancient British for orchard." Here the wily old man addressed himself to Lieutenant Nelly. "Ye be a robber band, ye be, same as they fierce invaders what plundered poor old King Avallach. These apples be rich plunder. Robber bands do march, robber bands do, slow and quiet, carrying their plunder, till they be round thik corner of road; then they do eat what they've taken from frightened natives!"

He had said quite enough. Without a second’s hesitation, in the most resolute order and in profound silence, the four children went off hand in hand along the footpath by the roadside in the direction of home.

Louie and Lily, now safely inside the railings, watched with wonder the surprising exhibition of discipline in this well-executed retreat. When the four were near the twist of the road which would take them out of sight, they saw Jackie turn and give one hurried glance round. He then began running. He was followed by Nelly first, then by Sis who carried Bert like a bundle of something precious and heavy, hugged against her body.

As if ashamed of their prolonged observation of this ragamuffin crew, Louie and Lily now devoted themselves to being as ladylike and patronising as they could to their eccentric uncle. They were, however, so attached to the old man that it was not long before they were unburdening their bosoms of a thousand intimate troubles, triumphs and grievances. It appeared they were due in an hour’s time to take tea with Emma, the confidential servant of Tilly Crow; and much that they had to relate had to do with the Philip Crow establishment.

Uncle Abel on his part had a good deal to say about the recent experiences of his ancient crony and ally, Old Jones, in his ward in the hospital. To anything concerning the hospital both the girls lent a curious ear, Louie being especially interested in the culinary economies, which were notoriously generous in this institution, while Lily kept enquiring about the bed-covers, the linen-chests, the nurses’ caps, the doctors’ white coats, the slippery floors; and whether it was from Miss Bibby Fell’s daffodil-beds, or Mrs. Crow’s conservatory, or Mayor Wollop’s greenhouse, that the best gifts of flowers were received.

“Emma says that poor Mrs. Crow is very concerned about all this flying,” observed Louie.

“Yes,” threw in Lily, who being the younger was more romantic than the buxom cook and if possible more ladylike, “yes, Emma says that the mistress cries her poor self to sleep night after night thinking of all the money they’re spending.”

“But they be rich, baint they?” commented Number One, thinking to himself, “I be a wonderful comfortable man — I be! I baint one for envying they rich.” And full of complacency the old man surveyed the tops of the budding willow trees, the brown and white back of the cow Betsy and these two gracious visitors seated side by side on his kitchen chairs.

“Emma says,” went on Louie, whose character it was to give the practical details of life their due proportion, leaving to the more pensive and more romantic Lily the psychological aura of the events under discussion, “that Mr. Crow made certain he was going to have all Canon Crow’s money; and that he’s been spending more than he could afford on Wookey Hole alone.”

“He likes electrifying things,” murmured Lily dreamily. “They tell about the Wookey Hole witch up in Wells. Do you remember, Louie, what that woman said when we were out there on choir-treat day, how that she’d once been down there, where those stalagmites and stalactites grow, and that she ran out in hysterics, thinking she saw the witch?”

“It’s this flying he’s started on now,” went on Louie, holding the topic resolutely down to facts, “that’s the main trouble. Of course on the top of his well-known electric schemes it *does* mean a very considerable expenditure.”

As she uttered this judicial remark Louie crossed her knees, as if her neat shoes were resting upon an embroidered footstool instead of upon Number One’s brick floor, and folding her gloved hands over her knees she began rubbing her right hand very slowly over her left hand.

It must have been with this precise gesture, with these exact words, and with this identical intonation combined with a frowning glance given to some remote object — in the present case, alas! to nothing more dignified than Number One’s swill-pail, turned upside down — that Miss Euphemia Drew had received the town gossip about Philip Crow’s financial state.

“Who was that wild-looking child you had here just now, Uncle?” enquired Louie, dropping her Miss Drew airs.

“Eh? Who? Which on ’em do you mean?” muttered the old man with startled embarrassment. He had been secretly hoping that no more would be said about his previous visitors.

“The thin little girl, with great black eyes, and her hair all uncombed, and her clothes so dirty.”

“As far as I knows that be Nelly,” replied Abel Twig.

“But Nelly what, Uncle?” insisted Louie. “She must have a surname.”

“I talked to my friend Jones in hospital about Nelly,” confessed the old man reluctantly. “I told him all about she, and how she went round with Jackie Jones and Sis Cole; and he did say that her mother’s name was Morgan. So I suppose — though, mind ye, I baint sure — that *her* name be similarwise.” He was silent and then muttered under his breath, “Morgan, Nelly Morgan, Eleanor Morgan,” as if he were wondering how to give to these syllables some special rhythmic secret. At the name “Morgan” he was surprised to notice the two sisters exchanging a swift, significant glance, Louie actually nodded at Lily, as who should say, “You see! That’s just what would happen, that *that* child, of all children, should be picked up by Uncle!”

Full of greater fear than ever, after he had caught this interchange of glances, that by continuing the topic he should bring harm in some way upon his little friend, Number One hurriedly went on.

"I expect Nelly's name isn't Morgan at all. No … no. When I come to think of it, Number — I mean my friend Jones — was sure it wasn't! Jackie calls she Nelly. Sis called she Nelly. There be many well-thought-on women in the world what have only one name." Number One racked his brains to think of some of these famous monosyllabic females. At last his face lit up. He recalled his grand-dad's Lake Village. "The Lady of the Lake," he cried triumphantly, "had only—" He stopped in dismay; for there came into his head a conversation with old Mr. Merry, the Curator of the Glastonbury Museum, from whom he had sought to get information about his grandfather's historic field. This authority had told him that the real Lady of the Lake was none other than Morgan Le Fay, the very ambiguous sister of King Arthur!

"It's Nelly Morgan that was here with Jackie Jones and Sis Cole," said Louie with decision. "You've let your kind heart run away with you again, Uncle. It's lucky no one but Lily and me knows about this. But we've told you now and you *do* know, so you can act according."

"What be talking about, me pretty?" stammered Uncle Abel. Lily meanwhile had assumed a sad, poetic expression. "What *he* feels, 'tis strange to think," she interrupted dreamily, "as he lies pondering on a poor betrayed girl, and on a little child who belongs to him and yet doesn't belong to him."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Louie. "All *he* thinks about is electricity and flying machines and asking Mayor Wollop to drop in to dinner. He doesn't think of anyone's feelings."

"Will it be best to tell Emma about that child being with Jackie and Sis; and about her having been in Uncle's house?" Lily put into this question as much dramatic gravity as if she were taking a personal part in some great *cause célèbre.*

Louie knitted her brows in solemn consideration.

"It will be wisest," she replied, in the very manner of Euphemia Drew, "to leave what we say till we see how things arrange themselves. I would not like to upset Emma; and it might make it harder for Emma too, if she knew what Mrs. Crow *didn't* know."

Number One could stand all this no longer. His awe of his nieces broke down completely under the pressure of his mental bewilderment. He rose up from his chair. "What the holy terror," he cried, "are you gals gabbling about?"

Lily's expression was a masterpiece of refined protest, sentimental relish for the whole situation, and an irresistible desire to be the one permitted to tell him all.

But she was not that one; for that one was Louie.

"Don't get agitated, you poor darling, and do please sit down. It's all very dreadful" — the intonation of Miss Drew was mingled here with a vague mimicry of certain lady-visitors— "but we must be as collected and sensible as we can. The truth is that Emma has found out a very unhappy story. It appears" — here Louie took breath and fidgeted in a modest manner with her ribbon— "that Mr. Crow misconducted himself some eight years ago with Jenny Morgan. Jenny seems to have forgotten herself completely and the result was that she had a baby."

The style in which Louie delivered herself of this grand climax was, it is needless to point out, entirely her own. No one but Louie would have used that derogatory and indeed disagreeable word "misconducted." No one but Louie would have used the expression "forgot herself" for the normal lapse from the virginal state.

"Jenny has taken to drink," Louie went on, "since then, but she works for the child. She couldn't bring herself to dispose of the child. She used to hear such terrible things of those institutions. Emma thinks he sends her a little money every second Wednesday. Emma knows he always goes to the Post Office on that day. That's what Emma *thinks,* mind you, — that he sends her a little regularly. Emma doesn't know for certain whether he does or not, but she is *almost* sure he does."

Number One's countenance had begun to beam with relief and satisfaction. He had feared he knew not what; and now to learn that all this agitation was only about Nelly's illegitimacy completely reassured him.

"Nelly Morgan," he repeated cheerfully. And then, thinking of the Curator's words, "Morgan Nelly," he added.

"Mr. Crow isn't altogether a wicked man," threw in Lily. "He is a strange man though. I believe he lives a wild life unknown to the world." Her voice sank and ceased. She looked away into the distance, far away beyond the pollarded willows. A skilful observer might have read in her face that she felt that shame and even desertion would not have been without their own melancholy compensations if it had been her lot, in place of Jenny Morgan, to "forget herself" with so Byronic a seducer as Philip Crow.

Number One, who had quite recovered his spirits since he had learned that his elegant nieces had nothing against Jackie's lieutenant except her birth, suggested now that before they left Backwear Hut they should see his "garden."

In pursuance of this design he led the way through his back door, past the post to which Betsy was tethered, till he reached a little square plot surrounded by a low, whitewashed fence. Here were several rows of young peas and scarlet-runners and one row of freshly sprouting celery. But at the corner of the garden — a reserved space of about a square yard — waved in the warm air a fragrant patch of pheasant-eyed narcissus. Number One clicked open a little toy gate into his garden and stepping carefully over the young vegetables picked with reckless impetuosity at least half of these lotus-scented flowers. These he divided into two bouquets of exactly the same size; and when, after a few affectionate good-byes — for Louie and Lily felt very protective to their only male relation — the girls went off, up Godney Road to where it joined Wells Road, these white flowers, pinned on their black dresses and matching most felicitously their black and white Easter hats, gave them a really charming appearance.

It must have been about an hour later that the discreet Emma was serving tea in her immaculate kitchen to these pretty wearers of Abel Twig's nosegays. Emma was also dressed in black but over her dress she wore a spotless white apron and upon her head, the most carefully brushed and tidied head in Glastonbury she wore an old-fashioned cap trimmed with handmade lace.

Emma, unlike her visitors, had never made any attempt to copy her mistress' manners or speech. Emma's manners were dignified, but they were those of one, who as she always expressed it, "knew her place," and her speech was as local as a Mendip quarry. She was the kind of servant who in place of losing herself in her employer's fortunes or way of life made of those things the background for her own resolute character. The character of Emma was not eccentric like that of Penny Pitches. Emma detested eccentricity. She was no worshipper of the aristocracy either, like Red Robinson's mother. What she really was was a strict Professional; and her Profession was that of the Perfect Servant. In Tilly Crow she had found what she considered to be the Perfect Mistress. Mrs. Philip's deplorable limitations, obvious to all the rest of the world, were not limitations at all to Emma. They were virtues high and rare; and for the sake of these virtues she was as devoted to this neurotic and shrewish recluse as any old-fashioned lawyer's clerk was ever devoted to a narrow-minded, pettifogging scrivener.

In this great turbulent universe, wherein ships at sea, certain farms on land, certain soldiers' camps, certain outposts of civilisation, conducted under scrupulous authority, become oases of order in the midst of chaos, the miniature polity entitled The Elms, ruled over by Emma and Tilly Crow, was in its own way almost without rival. The kitchen tea-party which was now proceeding would have been as much disturbed by the presence of any of the "gentry" who were contemporaneously taking tea in Tilly's drawing-room as any of Tilly's guests would have been had Emma, in place of answering the bell, sat down on the sofa beside her mistress. But the domestic ritual in the drawing-room under the rule of Mrs. Philip was no less punctilious than the ritual in Mrs. Philip's kitchen under the rule of Emma; and between these two women, on this nice professional point, there was a uniformity of opinion too deep to be expressed in words. Their mutual ideal was, as a matter of fact, as different from the aristocratic way of taking things as it was different from the proletarian way, or from the easy-going, lower-middle-class way of Mr. and Mrs. Geard. It was upper-middle-class. And not for nothing does one note that it has been from houses conducted under the Emmas and the Tillys of life that such characteristically English characters as Charles Darwin and Horatio Nelson have projected their world-shaping opinions and their heroic deeds. Indeed it might with justice be said that two oases of perfect order and peace, and two alone, existed in Glastonbury at that epoch — the draper's shop of Mr. Wollop, the Mayor, and the home of Tilly Crow! Outside these harbours of tenoned and mortised security everything ebbed and flowed. These were, so to speak, the Parmenidean rafts of stillness in the Heraclitean flux of Glastonbury life.

The lights had been lit in both drawing-room and kitchen before the visitors departed. In other houses they would not have been lit! In other houses people would have been too absorbed in talk, too enamoured of the twilight, to have sent for lamps and candles, or thought of closing shutters, drawing curtains, pulling down blinds! This closing out of the twilight was indeed a characteristic Norfolk habit. The great green curtains in Northwold Rectory were always drawn close, had been drawn close for years, when twilight began. So no doubt had the old Vikings, when they landed at Wick, gathered round their bivouac fires and turned their backs to the ghostly Druidic light lingering in the west! This closing of the shutters at The Elms was in fact a Norse custom. All the West-Country servants hated it, except Emma, whose own people in their high Mendip farms had practised the same habit.

Tilly Crow's guests were William Zoyland, who tonight was to be transported to Wookey Hole in Mr. Barter's airplane, and Dave and Persephone Spear, who had arrived that morning from Bristol and had taken lodgings in High Street.

William Zoyland rather enjoyed the thought of a couple of months' showmanship in Wookey Hole. A descendant of a long line of attendants upon kings, there was nothing unpleasant or undignified to Will in the office of lord chamberlain to a subterranean river. Yet another cause of the delicious feeling of wellbeing that flowed through him at this moment was the frank and shameless delight he took in the society of the dark-haired girl now occupied in amusing their hostess. The man he was talking to was Nell's half-brother; so he had every justification in treating the husband as cavalierly and the wife as gallantly as he pleased. There was indeed something piquant about keeping up a conservative argument with a passionate enemy of society while at the same time he played the courtier with his opponent’s lady. The more deeply he got entangled in argument with Dave the more frankly unashamed were the glances of admiration which he bestowed upon Persephone. He experienced at this moment a feeling as if, with that firelight warming his great limbs and the boyish hips of this curly-haired girl warming his proud soul, there was nothing in heaven or hell he wouldn’t enjoy facing! If the cropped skull and patient eyes opposite him were to condemn him to the guillotine at dawn as a cumberer of the earth — he’d still be happy. If this enchanting girl would slip into his bedroom tonight, undress before his eyes, and be off before he touched her — he’d still be happy. If he knew he were to be compelled that very evening to eat a basketful of otter’s dung while Sam Dekker embraced Nell before his eyes and they both mocked at him — he’d still be happy.

“There’s something almost awful,” he said to himself, using those exact words, “about my power of enjoyment. I believe I could enjoy smelling a bunch of violets if I were on the rack.” He began lazily throwing into his retorts to Dave’s careful logic a little spice of this savage aplomb; and as his roving blue eyes caught the fact that the treacherous girl was listening, and even encouraging him, they commenced to darken in the candlelight with feline zest. But the sense of having carried the proletarian gonfalon into the very heart of the enemy’s camp was inspiring Dave Spear that evening beyond his wont, and it was not long before both of the women, as well as the life-loving adventurer, were gazing at him in reluctant respect. It was when he dropped his logic and became oracular that this crop-headed, prosaic young man swept the field.

“Nature is on our side,” he was saying, “and the dark, blind, non-moral creative tidal wave. The inarticulate masses of mankind are only beginning to wake up. The millions of the Orient are only beginning to wake up. We use reason and we are prepared to use force without a shred of compunction. But in reality we are only the 'mediums ' of destiny. Communism is the destined *next phase* of evolutionary, planetary life. Nothing can stop it. That is why the stupidest, the silliest, the clumsiest among us has something that you vainglorious individualists completely lack. We are the still, small voice of the next phase. We may be unimaginative, undistinguished, lacking in all sense of humour. We may even be inhuman. We can afford to be what no one else can afford to be; for the simple reason that we are the solidifying of the *intention of evolution."*

While this argument was going on in the most perfect of upper-middle-class drawing-rooms, in the equally perfect kitchen a somewhat similar discussion was proceeding. Destiny found its voice here, however, in the dreamy, sentimental utterances of Lily Rogers. Louie and Emma both strongly upheld the view that the longer the existence of Nelly Morgan was kept secret from Mrs. Crow the better it would be for all. Lily, on the other hand, advanced the startling and disturbing doctrine that "since things which are hid are fated to become known, and things which are dark are fated to be made clear" — this was the girl's own phraseology— "it would be kinder to make Mrs. Crow acquainted with the sad truth." This "kindness" presented itself to the temporising, Mendip-bred mind of Emma Sly as plain cruelty, and a controversy began between them that almost spoilt the taste of Emma's famous pear-ginger jam in the connoisseur-mouth of Louie. Thus, in both drawing-room and kitchen of The Elms there gathered on the horizon certain clouds of danger to the master of the house. In the one case, these vanguards of evil omen were held off by Lord P.'s bastard; in the other case, by the daughter of Amos Sly, Lord P.'s shepherd, but in neither case, for all the closing of shutters against the blue twilight, were the clouds altogether dispelled. They did not advance; but night fell leaving them undispersed.

Perhaps the two persons in all Glastonbury who caught most fully the essence of this cool blue twilight, falling at the end of so unnaturally warm a day, were Mat Dekker and Miss Elizabeth Crow. The Vicar, upon whose conscience it was to enter every house in the town, had invaded the domain of Doctor Sodbury, the parson of St. Benignus. Miss Elizabeth had already done what she said she would do at the reading of the will in Northwold Rectory. She had taken one of the smallest of all the Town Council's workmen's houses — a tiny little place with a tinier little garden with the word "Rosemary" inscribed on the top of the wooden gate. Here she lived with a little maid of eighteen, called Tossie Stickles, the plumpest as well as the most good-tempered young woman who ever put on an apron. She paid Tossie five shillings a week, and every penny of this Tossie put into the savings bank, "to bide there till she were bedded or buried."

Miss Elizabeth had seen Mat Dekker's tall figure passing down the street and had sent Tossie to call him in to partake of an early tea. No one but Mat Dekker himself knew the effort that it cost him to accept this thoughtful invitation. He particularly wanted to finish his visiting in Benedict Street in one afternoon and Penny expected him back to his own high tea — for they dined early — at half-past six. He was counting on an afternoon quite free from visiting on the morrow, for a treasured walk with Sam over to Butleigh Wood, beyond the village of Street, which was a favourite objective of his; and this summons from Rosemary meant not only the spoiling of his appetite for his evening's meal, which he enjoyed more than any other, but made it likely enough that in place of this excursion he would have to return tomorrow to this row of little houses. Once launched, however, in a deep colloquy with his old friend he began to feel that neither of these sacrifices was wasted. Miss Crow was the only woman he could confide in, in all Glastonbury, on the point where he most wanted feminine advice, and he found himself, as he sat opposite her in the bow-window side by side with boxes of yellow pansies, talking more freely to her than he had done to anyone for years.

Not only did Miss Elizabeth forbid Tossie to touch the window blinds, but she even opened one of the windows when she saw her friend arrested by the beauty of the evening. Thus together they sipped their tea, inhaled the fragrance of the yellow pansies and were soothed by the mystical blueness in the air.

"It's exactly the colour those early Venetians always used," said Miss Crow, "for the Madonna's dress. I shouldn't be surprised if it had some peculiar effect on human nerves, this particular blue."

"I've seen it in many places, Betty," said Mat Dekker, "but never as deep a shade as here in Glastonbury. It's nice to think we live in a place that's famous for its twilights."

Miss Elizabeth adored to be called "Betty," and here, sitting opposite her in her bow-window, was the only person she would have allowed to do it.

"By the way, what's this I hear about Philip turning away some of his hands and threatening to close up one of his mills? Why can't he come to terms with his men? All the old wives I've been talking to in Benedict Street say that their husbands don't want to strike and it's only this Barter fellow who's making the trouble. What's up with Philip, Bett? Is he getting under this fellow's thumb?"

Miss Elizabeth tossed up her head. Every woman, old and young alike, has certain gestures, whether of anger or surprise or sadness or detachment, that only one or two persons in the world are permitted to see, and this smile of hers now with her head held high up and a little back, and her eyes half closed, was one of Miss Crow's gestures that no one in the world, except her mother and Mat Dekker, had *ever* seen.

“It’s no good coming to me again to interfere between Philip and his hands,” she said. “You remember how angry he got when I did it before and how it hurt the men rather than helped them? My advice to both sides would always be — come to terms.”

“Do you think Philip realises what a lot of feeling there is in the town against him?” went on Mat. “They told me today that there’s a movement going on to elect a new Mayor; and, of all people in the world, do you know who it’s to be?” Miss Elizabeth shook her head. “Your father’s Mr. Geard!”

“No, no — Mat! You’re fooling.”

“Yes, I say yes … *Mr. Geard!*”

“Impossible, Mat Dekker!”

“Ask any of your neighbours and you’ll soon see!”

“Does Philip know this? Does Mayor Wollop know this?”

“I can’t tell what Philip knows. Old Wollop certainly knows for he told me himself.”

She made an impatient movement with her hands. “I’m tired of town politics,” she said.

Mat’s face assumed the rather sulky expression that is natural to a man when his interlocutor changes the conversation. But it was then that she soothed this sulkiness away by beginning to talk of Sam.

“Has he been over there lately?” she asked.

“Not since the woman began living with her husband again,” said Mat Dekker; “but now they tell me Zoyland’s going to leave her alone out there while he’s at Wookey Hole.” He sighed deeply. “I like the girl, Betty,” he added gravely.

Miss Elizabeth smiled. “I have seen *that* for a long time,” she said. “But you wouldn’t like her so well if she made him carry her off.”

He frowned and sighed deeply again. “No, I suppose not,” he said, “though one feels ashamed sometimes at interfering with a real love-affair. I’m a believer in love, Bett, my dear. All passion, I know, is *not* love, and lechery, of course, is lechery. But all the same there *is* such a thing as love and I have a fixed and rooted notion that when a man and woman really love each other it becomes, Bett, my dear—” He lowered his voice.

“What does it become, Mat?” she asked, moving his cup a little further from the edge of the tray and brushing off with her fingertips a few crumbs which were adhering to its beautiful pattern of inlaid mother-of-pearl.

“It becomes a transaction … a transaction …” He broke off with a shrug.

“What kind of a transaction?” she enquired in a calm, controlled voice.

“I only meant,” he said, “that just as what I call the Mass is an act that belongs to more than one plane of existence, so any great love between two people may have an importance beyond the world we know.”

Miss Crow’s hands began nervously fidgeting among the objects on the tray. Her portly figure had erected itself very straight as she sat in her chair, but it seemed as if her fingers found it difficult to be as reserved and as dignified as their mistress.

“I cannot imagine what Sam is feeling or thinking these days,” Mat Dekker went on. “His mind is working it all out in its own way, I think, but I am quite in the dark how he’s working it out.”

Miss Elizabeth looked her friend straight in his troubled eyes. “You’ve changed yourself, Mat,” she said, “over all this. You seem prepared to let them go off. Surely it would mean disaster to you if they did?”

He rubbed his great, ruddy face with both his bony hands, as if to rub off the sticky remnants of a discarded mask.

“I thought it was just a wanton child’s caprice, her taking up with him,” he said, letting his hands drop down heavily on the table. “But I soon found, when I talked to her, that it was much more than that."

Elizabeth shot a quick, sharp glance at him. "You've not gone and fallen in love with that woman yourself, Mat, have you?"

He rose from his chair noisily, making the contents of the tray rattle. "Shut up, do, Bett!" he groaned. "I'm worried by all this. It's too serious to jest about. But I must be off now. You know what our Penny is!"

He went over to get his hat and stick from her little parlour sofa. She opened the door for him and held out her hand. "I wasn't jesting, Mat," she said. "I believe you *are* a little bit in love with that girl."

An electric shock of fury made his big frame tremble from head to foot. "I won't … allow … anyone … to talk to me like that!" The words burst from him before he had the remotest idea that he was going to be seized by this rush of blind anger. He experienced a little difficulty in the gathering dusk over the latch of the small gate.

Miss Crow was soon standing by his side. "I didn't mean to tease you, Mat. I ought to have known better," she whispered.

He bowed his head so that she could see only his rough eyebrows sticking out beneath the frontal corrugations, like those of a Neanderthal skull, of his heavy forehead. He regained his composure by staring at a minute ant that was making a dead moth move as if it were alive upon the ground under the gate. He swallowed his saliva in a fierce gulp and raised his head with a jerk. "We are a pair of old fools, Elizabeth," he said, "and that's the long and short of it. You're much too good to me, and don't you ever think I don't know it! Well! Take care of yourself and don't 'ee carry that heavy coal-scuttle any more. Tossie's got twice the strength you've got. I suppose you carry your own water upstairs too?"

"Not always, Mat dear; not often! Good night and God bless you." And she turned and re-entered her door.

While Mat Dekker, the father, was parting from Elizabeth Crow to return to the kingdom ruled over by Penny Pitches, Sam Dekker, the son, was unwillingly tearing himself away from the lodgings of John Crow, Elizabeth's erratic nephew.

It was John, now the salaried secretary of Mr. Geard, who had made the advances. It was part of his new job to make advances in every direction. John had already "approached" nearly a third of the educated citizens of Glastonbury and it had become time to approach the younger Dekker. He had given Sam tea in his new room, and Sam too, like his father, had cursed himself for eating so much bread and butter while the despotic Penny waited for him in the offing. And he had cast a complete glamour over Sam. Sam, unlike his father in this, had no living soul to whom he could tell his troubles. His heavy, brooding nature had been gathering emotional, volcanic lava for three days, and this night — the night of Zoyland's airtrip to Wookey Hole — his whole being was seething and fermenting with contending passions. While the father sat in Miss Crow's bow-window on Benedict Street, the son stood at John's casement-window at the back of Northload Street. The window looked across a level meadow and across Dye House Lane to the fields lying north of the district called "Paradise," and from it could be seen not only the Polden Hills but, rising up against the horizon, beyond the Bridgwater fens, the far-off blue ridge of the Quantocks. The heavy, powerful youth and the lean, emaciated man were standing side by side looking out upon this scene. A cheerful fire was burning in John's little grate and something about his shelves, his chairs, his books, his pots and pans, his gas-stove, his couch-bed with cushions on it, his few cheap prints, his yet cheaper rug, his shining fender, bore witness to the hand and brain of Mary; while the fact that he was there at all, with everything so comfortable round him, bore witness to the liberality of Bloody Johnny.

"I'm not saying I've ever practised or ever *could* practise what I'm talking about," Sam was asseverating in an excited voice. "All I'm saying is that there's no life that frees anyone so completely from unhappiness as does the mystic life. If you give up *possession,* if you give up trying to possess what attracts you, a lovely, thrilling happiness flows through you and you feel you're in touch with the secret of everything. There are only two mortal sins in the world; one of these is to be cruel and the other is *to possess,* and they are both destructive of happiness."

"I agree with you! I agree with you!" cried John. "The only thing is that the opposite of what you say is true too. No, no! There's a great deal in your Christian method, there's *everything* in your Christian method; but it must be applied for heathen ends! That's the great doctrine of the Tao, which no one understands — except me!" A positively diabolic light gleamed in John's glaucous eyes and his sinuous, feeble form seemed actually to curve in tiny ripples of magnetic coils, like the coils of smoke which followed his cigarette.

"You're too subtle for me," growled Sam, extending his grey-stockinged legs and looking down at his enormous dirty boots and at the bright rug, chosen so carefully by Mary at Mayor Wollop's shop.

"I'm only subtle because I'm simple," replied the other. "Listen, Dekker," he went on, "you mustn't think I'm meddling with your private affairs if I give you a piece of advice."

A spasm of annoyance crossed Sam's face and the muscles of his chin contracted. For a second of time the two men regarded each other, like animals of a different species, who have met by accident in a forest glade. The twitch in John's left cheek made its silent signal to Sam's wrinkled chin very much as the quiver of a rat's whiskers might answer the sniff of a badger's snout.

"Lord-a-lord!" ejaculated Sam, beginning to stride up and down his host's room with his hands in his pocket. "So it's come to it, then? Come to what I always feared — that everybody in Glastonbury would know about my troubles. Lord! how I do loathe and hate the human race! That's the 'advice' I'd like you to give me, Crow. I'd like you to say 'escape from it all, Sam, you blundering dizzard, escape from it all and try and imitate those old mediaeval saints!'"

John Crow looked away. It was one of his peculiarities to be able to stare into people's eyes with a shameless, unsympathetic scrutiny, but Sam's emotion gave him a peculiar feeling of shame. To look at Sam's agitated face any longer at that moment seemed like eavesdropping at a confessional-box. So he glanced at the now faintly observable ridge of the Poldens and thought to himself, "There's something in spiritual excitement that makes me uncomfortable. I must have the heart of a stone!"

"My advice would be, Dekker," he said, in an obstinate low voice, still staring out of the window, "my advice would be to do what hares do when they catch sight of something dangerous — that's to say, *freeze.* You know that word? Turn, pro tem. into the inanimate … turn into a stump, a post, a clod of clay. Then, after a while, when things have worked themselves out, you can scamper back to your feeding-place!"

He got up from his chair-arm and stood hovering at the window. As Sam paused in his sentry's march and threw a glance at him out of his screwed-up bear-eyes, his figure at the window seemed made of something less solid than flesh and blood, seemed as if it would need very little to turn it into one of those drifting vapours that floated over the ditches.

"It's like this, Crow," he began; but he felt so much as if that trampish figure at the window, even as he addressed it, might decompose, dissolve, disintegrate, that he couldn't go on. The chemistry of human bodies, even apart from their shape, is an extraverted manifestation of the souls that animate them, and doubtless in all Glastonbury there couldn't have been found souls more different than John's and Sam's.

When he began saying— "It's like this, Crow," Sam could feel his own lanky, lumbering frame gather itself together, to express his new-grown purpose. But to set the seal of his solemn intention upon this feeble and fluid apparition at the window was as hard as if he were to shoot an arrow into a bundle of feathers or write a "credo" upon flowing water! Nevertheless he made one more attempt. "It's like this, Crow. For me the whole thing is dualism. It's a perpetual war between good and evil. Whichever side you take you get inspiration from outside the visible world. But inspiration from the outside evil means in the long run anguish and insanity, while inspiration from the outside good means an ecstasy that grows and grows! To possess is evil. The whole idea of private property is evil. It comes from the devil. What made those mediaeval saints so happy was that they always said to themselves 'Let the beautiful girl go free!'"

"What's that? What's that your saints say?"

It was as if a mild mist-phantom had been transformed into a mocking goblin. Crow slid back into the room, lurched towards the fire, crouched down on a stool by the grate, and leaning forward towards it, as he crouched, struck a match for his cigarette against the bars.

Sam watched him gloomily. The man seemed to be worshipping fire. Sam took his great fist from the mantelpiece and stepped back a pace or two. Damn the fellow! That it had been such a hot, dusty sort of nondescript, unpleasant day made the fact of there being a fire at all in that room a grotesque thing. The chap had seemed to be melting into the twilight outside the window; and now he seemed to be on the point of diving into the flame!

He raised his hand to his chin. "He said she said I had the look of a saint," he thought to himself. And then there came over him the realisation that tonight Zoyland was really off — piloted by Barter or some London crony of Barter's — to Wookey Hole. Everybody in Glastonbury knew it! Everybody in Glastonbury knew that Nell was all alone on Queen's Sedgemoor. "I could bear it," he thought, "if she'd never leant against me with her breasts. Who could bear that and not want to 'possess'; and not *have* to 'possess'?"

The wild idea came surging into his head that he would wait till his father and Penny were asleep; and then let himself out of the house, and hurry over there; even if it were the middle of the night, even if he didn't get there till dawn!

"Well, Crow, I've got to be off," he said. "I'm late as it is. Thanks awfully for the tea. God knows how I'll be able to drink any more. We'll go on with this another time."

The demon by the fire leapt to its feet and became once more the drooping, feeble, nervous beneficiary of the bounty of Mr. Geard.

"Good-bye," he said, "and don't forget to tell your father that I want to see him about the Midsummer Fair. The only person who won't like our Fair will be my precious cousin. And I can promise him we're going to give him a reason for not liking it. We're going to 'larn' him, as we say in Norfolk, to turn Glastonbury into a factory-town! We're going to shake up his capitalistic complacency — you'll see! Well, good-bye, Dekker, and don't forget to 'freeze' like a hare and let chance and destiny fight it out for themselves!"

While father and son were slowly gravitating back to Silver Street, snug in the Vicarage kitchen sat Penny Pitches and Mr. Weatherwax. If Penny was all body, and a very square body too, Weatherwax was all face. He was like one of those absurd political caricatures that represent some familiar physiognomy enlarged to monstrous size and unnaturally balanced upon a manikin's frame. The face of Isaac Weatherwax was a large, flat, sunburnt expanse, like an ancient map of some "Terra Incognita." Arranged at traditional distances in this expanse were eyes and nose and mouth. There were also various excrescences of a, less usual kind, "mountains," one might say, in this sun-scorched moon, to which Mr. Weatherwax was wont sometimes to refer, as "these here bugg-uncles what do grow out of me cheeks."

All the preparations for the Vicarage high tea were awaiting the return of the old and the young master; but meanwhile the two ancient gossips, as if a Square were entertaining a Circle, were enjoying themselves well enough, independent of the teapot. Mr. Weatherwax was tasting in advance a bottle of cognac, so that whenever the Abbey House sideboard should be debtor again to the Vicarage cellar, there should be no abrupt or disconcerting change in the nature of the loan!

"So us be going to have a new Mayor, come election-day, among they councilmen," remarked Mr. Weatherwax dreamily, "all of we work-folks be requested by some as we do know to nudge they councilmen and stir 'em up. 'Tis said by some as we do know that Mr. Wollop and Mr. Crow be out to turn our quiet town into a girt city Borough by increasing the population. But whatever they says, my gal, I holds by authority. I holds by Mr. Crow. 'Tis said this here Geard, a man no different from I, a man what can pray high and drink deep like any common man, will be for letting visitors in and keeping hindustry out; but I holds with Mr. Crow and his hindustries. Do ‘ee want to know, my gal, why I holds wi’ he?”

“Will ‘ee have a taste of me ‘gorlas,’ Isaac?” interrupted Penny. “ ’Tis better than usual today.”

Mr. Weatherwax permitted a faint sign of affirmation to flicker across his political gravity while Penny rose from her chair. She proceeded to make some rapid changes in the relative position of pots and the lids of pots upon her great stove while her visitor finished the brandy. This flat expanse of rusty iron surface with its many round-lidded apertures, was Penny’s Colosseum of Encounters with Brute Matter. It was an older stove than that used by Emma Sly up at The Elms and it was handled in a more primitive manner. The Elm’s stove was always kept well blacked. Like Louie’s stove at The Abbey House it possessed polished knobs and shining ornamentations, whereas the Vicarage stove might have been the stove of a tribe of gipsies. All sorts of things would be spilt on it. Penny didn’t care. Penny was as sylvan in her ways as if she had been the Salvage Man of *The Faery Queen* fresh from some primordial Arcadia.

At the back of her stove there rested a large simmering cauldron that she used for making a particular kind of broth. This cauldron was literally never empty. It was like the cauldron of “the Head of Hades” in the poetry of Taliessin. Penny had a name of her own for this perennial brew of hers. She called it “gorlas.” Whether this extraordinary word had come down to her in some very old Glastonbury tradition and was really a corruption of the word “gorlasser,” which seems to have meant a dark-blue, livid colour, and was used to describe a mysterious “corpse-God” or “Rex Semi-mortuus” in the old Cymric mythology, is a question that Penny, less lucky in her introductions to learned men than Abel Twig, had never had a chance of referring to the Curator of the Museum.

“Do ‘ee know, Penny,” said Mr. Weatherwax, as he partook of his friend’s brew, “what be the pivot of life upon earth?”

Penny smiled the smile of all women at all philosophy, but she shook her head obediently.

“Well, me good soul,” Mr. Weatherwax continued, “I be the one what be tellin’ thee what thik thing be. Thik thing be Authority. When I sees true livin’ Authority I knows vegetables grow, and hens lay, and cattle breed, and poor folk be fed and clothed.” His voice sank into a low, confidential whisper— “There be only one true, livin’ Authority in our town and that Authority be Mr. Crow. If so be as your silly women and your fly-by-night preachers do turn our town from serving Mr. Crow to serving idols, then I says, ‘Look well to it! The end of all things be at hand.’ “ His voice ceased. He lifted up the bowl of gorlas to his capacious mouth and leered tipsily over its brim.

“Folks be queerer than ye wold bachelors do mindy,” retorted Penny enigmatically. “Folks ‘ud rayther brew their own broth theyselves than be fed wi’ all the Milk o’ Paradise.”

When Sam returned to his father’s house it had grown quite dark. He heard old Weatherwax muttering tipsily as he shuffled down the back drive, and he himself, to avoid the gardener, moved on to the front-drive gate. He felt so disturbed in his thoughts that when he laid his hand on the handle of the great iron gate it came over him that it was almost impossible to face his father. Heavily and slowly he drifted on a little way further up the road. He soon came to the end of Silver Street, and wavering there a moment finally turned to his right and followed the outside eastern wall of the Abbey grounds down the ancient road leading to the Tor that bears the historic, but confused, name of Chilkwell Street. When he reached the turning into Bere Lane he saw before him the vast Gothic shape rising rich and dim in the darkness, of the greatest Abbey Barn in England. This edifice is still used as an ordinary farm barn, but Sam knew every lineament of its façade so well that through the darkness, as he now approached it, the four mystic creatures of the Evangelists that protect its ramparts seemed to murmur at him and signal to him. Sam scowled gloomily back at these Apocalyptic Beings. They had watched so many huge wagonloads of hay, of straw, of oats, of wheat, of barley, so many litters of pigs, so many cardoads of turnips and mangels, being carried under that Gothic archway, that they seemed to call upon Sam also to bring them something, to bring them anything! But Sam had only one offering in his heart just then, and that offering he felt he could not offer! Sullenly and heavily he dragged himself a little further along Chilkwell Street, till on his left hand he saw the stone walls of Chalice House — at that time completely unoccupied — and on his right the lighted windows of St. Michael's Inn. Both these buildings were still many hundreds of yards away and the paved footpath he was following was raised about six feet above the level of the road. There were a few small stone houses here abutting upon this footpath and, behind these, several small garden-paths. These paths, ascending between low mossy walls, led up to the lower slopes of Chalice Hill. Sam was unfamiliar with that far-rumoured version of the Grail story which places the enchanted Castle of Carbonek, where the Mystery was guarded, upon the summit of Chalice Hill; and he now turned his abstracted gaze, as one by one these dark ascents between the shadowy lines of masonry came into his scope, upon the Hill's higher reaches as if it had been any ordinary upland. At the base of one of these ascents, however, he was suddenly arrested by the sight of a dusky figure leaning against a low wall. The manner in which the outlines of the figure resolved themselves into what surrounded it, into the soil, into the stones, into the stone-crop, into the darkness, enabled Sam, though he had the eye neither of a Rembrandt nor a Hardy, to recognize it for that of a woman. His poor head was so full of one particular woman that it was natural enough that his first thought was: *"She* has come to *me*!" But he soon realised that the figure was that of a lean, ungainly person, as totally unlike his Nell as a raven is unlike a dove. It then came vaguely over him that he had seen this person before and not very long ago either. Who the devil did she make him think of? He stared sullenly and gloomily at this solitary, motionless form till at last it began to strike his mind that whoever it was it was someone who had no wish to be watched. Then he knew in a flash who it was. It was Cordelia Geard! Simultaneously with this knowledge it came over him that Cordelia had been seated by the side of that queer-looking devil from Old Jones' shop when he met her in that funny Geard room. So that was it! She was waiting for that fellow now. They were keeping company; and he'd left her for a minute for some reason; probably to relieve nature. They were no doubt prowling round the environs of Chalice House. Her father had very likely been buying up these little cottages. The shock of seeing Cordelia when he so little expected it pulled his wits together with a jerk.

"God! how selfish of me to keep old Dad waiting for so long! I must get back at once!"

He disappeared, and Cordelia, who had been watching him from above, far more intently and nervously than he had been watching her, breathed a sigh of relief.

She was alone again. "Shall I go on?" she thought, "or go back? Crummie wants me. Mother wants me. Dad will be fussing about me. If Mr. Evans comes and I'm out, he'll think my feelings were hurt by the way he acted this morning. Oh, let them all want me! I've been considerate to everybody too long. I’ve thought of everybody except myself too long.” She looked round, pondering.

“No, no, I don’t care if they *do* want me!” and she turned resolutely to the dark hillside above her. “I don’t care if they *do* have to wait for me! I don’t care if I never see any of them again; if I never go back, down there, *ever* again!”

She began rapidly ascending the hill. The air seemed to grow fresher as she advanced. What a dusty, colourless, neutral day it had been! But the blue twilight had been strange! And what queer vapours, though there was nothing damp in the air, had kept gathering, separating, rolling away, in confused retreat, over the banks of the Brue and over the gardens of Street Road. It had been partly the strange twilight that had lured her forth — that and this new restlessness in her blood ….

This slope of Chalice Hill had been one of her favourite resorts. When her “bad” moods were upon her she always went off alone to one or other of such places. “It’s one of my resorts,” she would have said, if Crummie had questioned her.

In every little town in England there are probably several eccentric women who habitually break loose from their family and realise their inmost selves by excursions to certain particular spots. Such people often end by becoming half-crazy. Sometimes they end by committing suicide; but it is without question that in the interim between their slavery to their family and this madness or this suicide, as they visit these favourite resorts and carry there their inhuman, *contra-human* thoughts, they experience raptures of a dark, strange quality such as so-called “contented” people may go through a whole life and never know! What a destiny these lonely resorts of these lonely people come to know! There can hardly be a village in England or a small town in England — the great cities of course drown all such things by the washing of their huge tides of humanity — where there are not certain isolated spots loaded with the wild thoughts of these solitary ones. They have a fate like Io, the heifer-maid, these women, driven mad by the gadfly of Hera! Every one of them is a prophetess, a companion of Prometheus! Every one of them has been spiritually ravished by the great unmerciful Father of all Lies! How those lonely spots must be impregnated with these women's rebellious imaginations! How they must carry these strange, rapturous thought-children, watered by floods and deluges of releasing, melting, dissolving obliterating tears, and leave them there to be nourished by the Mother of us all!

The lonely meadows and orchards of this particular hillside and especially certain bare patches of common land, without hedge, or railing, or furrow, or crop, or bush, or tree, had long rendered Chalice Hill one of Cordelia's favourite refuges. These had been her escape years before her father inherited the Rector of Northwold's money. Of late, since the local chatter about their buying Chalice House, she had rather tended to avoid the place and to select others. Tonight, however, she felt that nothing but Chalice Hill would ease her mind. She had fancied that she knew the spot so well that she would attain with ease a certain bare expanse of grass that she held in her thoughts; but she had not allowed, as we seldom do allow, for the psychic pressure of the darkness itself, like a living entity surrounding her. This invasion of the bewildered senses of a day-dweller by the enfolding presence of night is a unique phenomenon in human experience. However frequently it may have been felt it always returns with a shock of disturbing surprise. The darkness becomes a polymorphous amorist, irresistible, not to be stayed! We beat it back with blinded sight, paralysed touch, confused hearing. But there is nothing of us that it does not invade! When it is a woman who is in its grasp it seems to arouse something in the feminine nature corresponding to itself, so that the recessive mystery of darkness in the woman — that underground tide of the old ancestral chaos that ebbs and flows at the bottom of her being — rushes forth to meet this primal sister, this twin daughter of the Aboriginal Abyss, whose incestuous embrace is all about her! Cordelia seemed unable to escape from the apple orchards on Chalice Hill. She was perfectly familiar with these in the daylight and had often lightly and quickly clambered over the low walls that surround them; but tonight they seemed to extend like an enchanted forest. Insula Avallonia! She was certainly wrestling with a soil and with the growths of a soil that were more soaked in legends than any other hillside in Wessex. Legends seemed to thicken around her as she struggled blindly on between these budding apple trees. The fresh spring grass at the feet of these trees seemed in that darkness to be growing out of an earth that yielded to each step she took, an earth that was porous with mystery, an earth that was descending into supernatural dimensions where it had its unrealisable roots. How soft to her touch, as she stretched out her arms and her bare hands, were the branches and the trunks of these apple trees! Would she never escape into the high bare uplands? These apple trunks that she encountered seemed to grow thicker around her as she struggled up the grassy slope. They seemed to respond to her groping hands with a magnetic effluence of dark, rich, inscrutable vitality. They were like a sisterhood of invisible beings about her, full of sympathy with her feeling, impeding her progress with their mute conspiracy of understanding. Her brain was whirling with wild imaginings. Tears were now pouring down her cheeks; not unhappy tears, but sweet, relieving, abandoning, delicious tears. She wanted to free herself from these sister-arms, but the darkness itself was weakening her resistance to them with its own sister-passion, a passion older than the world. The master thought that drove her on was the thought of the unhappiness of her lover. “What is it? What is it?” her brain kept repeating. “He is unhappy; and I know not what it is! I thought I knew him through and through — but oh, I know not what it is!”

Cordelia had almost reached the point of feeling as if she *had* become enchanted, or, in a more realistic sense, as if she had gone crazy and were going round and round in a circle instead of ascending, when she suddenly found herself on the top of the hill and in open ground. Not only was she now in a bare field, but she knew exactly where she was. She was near the place where a footpath over the other side of Chalice Hill led to the lane where the two giant oaks grew. Mr. Evans had talked to her many times about these oaks. He of course associated them with the Druids. But Cordelia had heard quite a different story from her father’s new secretary who had informed her that they had been planted to mark the spot where the Vikings had landed!

Mr. Geard’s daughter now became aware that some large and mysterious release had come to her vexed spirit.

There came a change in the weather too as she made her way across Stonedown and approached the hamlet of Wick. She felt it at once as she swung along, walking so fast and free, sometimes with her hands tightly clenched, and sometimes with her fingers so loosely extended that they trailed amid the chilly umbrageousness on both sides of the little lane. Cold gusts of wind she felt rising. She felt them blowing, not regularly, but intermittently.

They blew over Wick Hollow, over Bulwarks Lane, over Maidencroft Lane, and whenever they reached her body they swirled round it as if they would have washed her, or laved her or exorcised her! Intermittent and erratic as they were and though they veered a little according to the lay of the land, they came on the whole from the northwest. From the Bristol

Channel they came, and from further away than that. They came from Mr. Evans' native country, from the native country of her own ancestors; they came — like those strange stones at Stonehenge — from South Wales.

Cordelia reached the nearest of her great oaks — whether Viking or Druid — in what seemed to her so short a time that she felt as if she had been spirited there in the teeth of these western gusts. She came upon the oaks from the top of the eastern hedge-bank, for she had come, on her wild approach, recklessly across the country. Here on the top of this hedge-bank she rested, clutching a sweet-scented hazel-branch with one hand and a bitter-scented elder-branch with the other. The wind rose about her as she stood there, in wilder and wilder gusts. And then Cordelia, gazing directly into the wide-flung branches of the biggest of the two giant trees, was aware of something else upon the wind. Those enormous branches seemed to have begun an orchestral monotone, composed of the notes of many instruments gathered up into one. It was a cumulative and rustling sigh that came to the woman's ears, as if a group of sorrowful Titans had lifted up their united voices in one lamentable dirge over the downfall of their race. It kept beginning afresh, this solemn moan upon the air — a moan which always mounted to a certain pitch and then sank down Sometimes, such were the vagaries of the wind, before this portentous requiem started afresh, there was a singular humming and droning in those huge branches, as if the tree wished to utter a private secret of its own to Cordelia's ears, before it recommenced its official chant. Yes! the peculiarity of this humming sound was that it shivered and shook with a special intonation for the woman standing upon the bank! And Cordelia knew well what that message was. The great tree was telling the hillside that there was rain upon the wind; but it was telling Cordelia something else! Then all was absolutely still; and in that stillness, a stillness like the terrible stillness of uttermost strain in travail, there came the first cry of birth, the fall of a single drop of rain. That first drop was followed by another and that again by another. Cordelia did not hear them in the same place. One drop would fall upon the roadway beneath her; one upon a dead burdock leaf; one upon a faded hart’s tongue fern of last year’s growth. Then the sound of the falling drops would be drowned in a reawakening of that orchestral dirge. Then the wind would die down over all the upland, and once more an absolute stillness would descend; and in the stillness again — only now in an increased number — the big raindrops would splash to earth, one falling upon a dead leaf, one upon a naked stone, one upon a knot of close-grown twigs, one upon Cordelia’s bare forehead. Her feeling at that moment was that some deep psychic chain had been broken in her inmost being.

Hola — Hola! She could not restrain herself from giving vent to a wild cry of exultant delight as the first bursting deluge followed these premonitory drops. She waited for a minute or two with upturned head and closed eyes, letting the water stream upon her face. Then, slithering down the wet bank she reached the lane; and without a glance in the direction of the oaks, which were now totally invisible, she began, with head bowed down and fingers tightening upon her jacket collar, to make her way back to the town. Only once, on her way back, did she pause and glance upward at the down-pouring blackness. This was when she distinctly heard the drumming of an airplane somewhere above her head. “That’s Philip Crow,” she thought to herself, “travelling like the devil through the black rain! He’s off to Wookey Hole.”

WOOKEY HOLE

THE MAYOR OF Glastonbury had finished his breakfast and was reading the Western Gazette. Mr. Timothy Wollop was an honest man. He had never deliberately cheated a fellow-creature of a farthing. He was a self-controlled man. He had never, since the death of his father, Mr. Constantine Wollop, lost his temper with any living soul. To his father, now in his grave in the cemetery on the Wells Road, Mr. Wollop *had* been irritable on several occasions. But old Constantine's ways towards the end had been past all bearing. A saint would have cursed the old wretch. A philosopher would have done worse. An ordinary man would have murdered him. But Timothy had only been just perceptibly cross! Mr, Wollop had neither wife nor children. His servants were kept at such a respectful distance that they may be said to have been non-existent. They were the hands that kept his house clean and warm and that brought him his moderate meals at reasonable hours. Had they been the Ravens that fed Elisha, or the invisible attendants who waited upon the Prince in the fairy story, they could not have been more dehumanised. Mr. Timothy Wollop lived to himself. To say that because he was lonely he was unhappy would have been to utter the extreme opposite of the truth. Mr. Wollop was one of the happiest men in Somersetshire. He neither smoked, nor drank, nor whored. He never gave way, even in the solitary watches of the night, to the feverish pricks of sensual desire. As soon as his head touched the pillow he fell asleep. Of what did Mayor Wollop dream? He never dreamed; or, if he did, he forgot his dream so completely on awakening, that for a man to say, "I dreamed like Mayor Wollop," would be tantamount to saying "My sleep was dreamless." Of what did Mayor Wollop think as he walked from his house in Wells Road to his shop in High Street? *He thought of what he saw*. In truth it may be said that with the exception of Bert Cole no one in Glastonbury regarded the Panorama of Things and Persons with more absorbing interest than did its Mayor. Not a stick or a stone, not a bit of orange-peel in any gutter, not a sparrow upon any roof, not a crack in any window, not any aspect of the weather, wet or fine, not any old face or any new face, not any familiar suit of clothes or any unexpected suit of clothes, not any dog, or cat, or canary, or pigeon, or horse, or bicycle or motor car, not any new leaf on an old branch, not any old leaf on a new roof — but Timothy Wollop noted it, liked to see it there, and thought about its being there.

The Mayor was one of those rare beings who really *like* the world we all have been born into. More than that; oh, much more than that! The Mayor was obsessed with a trance-like absorption of interest, by the appearance of our world *exactly as it appeared.* What worries some, disconcerts others, agitates others, saddens others, torments others, makes others feel responsibility, sympathy, shame, remorse, had no effect upon the duck's back of Mr. Wollop beyond the peaceful titillation of surface-interest. Below *appearances* Mr. Wollop never went. Below the *surfaces* of appearances he never went! If the unbearable crotchets of his father had been confined to the old man's thoughts, Mr. Wollop would never have been ruffled. People's thoughts were non-existent to the Mayor of Glastonbury; and if there is a level of possibility more non-existent than non-existence itself, such a level was filled (for him) by people's instincts, feelings, impulses, aspirations, intuitions. The servants in his house, as far as any interior personality was concerned, might have been labelled A. B. C. and the assistants in his shop, in the same sense, might have been named

D. E. F. When B. (shall we say?), a female servant in a fit of hysterics, put on her cap back to front, Mr. Wollop was as interested as when on his walk to his shop he mildly observed that a well-known tabby-cat's ear had been bitten off. When E. (shall we say?), a male shop-assistant, appeared one morning tricked up for a funeral, Mr. Wollop enjoyed the same quiet stir as when on his walk down High Street he noticed that a black frost had killed all the petunia's in old Mrs. Cole's window-box. Mr. Wollop had once overheard one of his younger shop-assistants — a young man in whose sleek black hair he had come to take a quiet interest, wondering what hair-wash the lad patronised — refer to something called "Neetchky." From the context Mr. Wollop gathered that "Neetchky" could hardly be the name of a hair-wash. It seemed rather to be some pious formula used by the young man, by which he threw off responsibility for having got some young woman into trouble. At that point Mr. Wollop's interest ceased, just as it had ceased when the question arose as to *how* the tabby-cat had lost its ear. Mr. Wollop had no quarrel with young men who had formulas for dodging responsibility, as long as they did their work in the shop. What he *was* conscious of was a certain puzzled contempt for anyone whose selfishness was so weak and shaky that it required a pious formula! Mr. Wollop needed no formula, pious or otherwse. The appearance of things was the nature of things; and all things, as they presented themselves to his attention, in his house, in the street, and in his shop, fed his mind with slow, agreeable, unruffled ponderings. Mr. Wollop was not greedy at his meals, though he frequently thought of his meals; and, as I have hinted, he was totally devoid of specialised sensuality. No man, no woman, no child could ever have said, if they spoke the truth, that they had caught the Mayor of Glastonbury fixing upon them a lecherous eye. The truth seems to be that the Mayor was exactly like young Bert Cole. Bert and Mayor Wollop diffused the projection of their amorous propensities over the whole surface of their world; and their world was *what they saw.*

Little did the more intelligent inhabitants of Glastonbury realise what a happy life was lived by their Mayor. Mat Dekker pitied him for never taking any exercise (beyond his daily walks to and from the shop) and for not smoking a pipe. The young men in his employment pitied him profoundly, when they thought of him at all, for having no lady to flirt with by day and no lady to sleep with by night. Philip Crow pitied him for having no spirit, no initiative, no adventurousness, no River Axe and no airplane. Mrs. Philip Crow pitied him for having no Emma. Emma herself had announced once to Lily Rogers that of all the houses in Glastonbury that poor lonely Mr. Wollop's "was the unhomeliest she'd ever set eyes on, outside the workhouse."

In his dealings with his fellow-citizens upon the town council the Mayor held his own very well. He did this by the enormous advantage he possessed over people who believed in the reality of thoughts and feelings. Sometimes when a thief or a liar came into conflict with him the offender was bewildered by the Mayor's penetration. In reality it was not penetration. It was common sense. But it was common sense of such prodigious proportions as utterly to confound the victim of its shrewd judgment. Mr. Wollop had only twice, in his life of sixty years, "taken," as they say, "to his bed." On these occasions he had been pitied by every gossip in the place. "Thik poor old gentleman, wi' his silver whiskies and his girt stummick, 'a has no soul to care for 'en, whether 'a lives or dies!" The Vicar of Glastonbury had arrived, on one of these occasions, when the patient had a dangerous attack of pneumonia, to pay an official call upon the Mayor. It was Matt Dekker's notion that the hour had come for the man to think of his immortal soul. In place of such thoughts he found Mr.

Wollop’s placid countenance, his great silver whiskers extended on either side of the pillow, irradiated with absorbed interest in the movements of three wasps upon the ceiling. “They keep going round and round,” he told the Vicar; and the visitor was sadly aware that when he finally uttered the words, “In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” the sick man was still rapt in interest in those three soulless insects.

For two whole days after the rainstorm that Cordelia had watched beginning, by the great oaks of Wick, the rain had fallen almost incessantly. Towards the close of the third day it began to show signs of clearing off; and about four o’clock, although it was getting so near tea-time, quite a number of people drifted into the draper’s shop. Wollop’s was well known all over that part of Somersetshire; and the business did not depend upon local patronage; but since the great, quiet, cavernous place had plenty of seats, both against its broad counters and otherwise, there were often quite a number of ladies, who knew one another well, chatting together there with their parcels in their hands. Since the old shop did not depend altogether on local trade, activity at Wollop’s had the power of languishing without serious loss to its owner. But these idle hours hung heavily on the heads of many of the assistants. The older ones suffered the most. The younger assistants had so many thoughts of love, thoughts hidden away in that non-existing world which Mr. Wollop disregarded, and so much to tell each other about these thoughts, that they did not mind these interims of ebb-tides among the customers. The older assistants — and some of them had acquired a peculiar look, that Mary Crow told John Crow was the Wollop “grievance-look” — not having love-affairs to share, were wont to have the meanest, bitterest, most indurated quarrels among themselves that existed in all Glastonbury. Mr. Wollop being occupied with the apparitional world was certainly not oblivious of these seething recriminations, for Mary’s "grievance-look" was quite apparent; but he must have accepted it as a mysterious ultimate, just as he accepted the fact that Tor Hill was opposite Chalice Hill, and regarded its cause as belonging to that world of non-existent essences which a sensible man ruled out of court. On this particular afternoon Mr. Wollop was seated serenely (as he always was) on a polished swivel-chair in a small iron cage. He had bought this cage from a bankrupt bank in Taunton, bought it at an auction for next to nothing. No living person except the Mayor and Bert Cole would have been as much interested in a man-cage as in a bird-cage. But Mr. Wollop, casting his Bert-like eye round the auction-room, had been agreeably struck by this object, and had promptly bought it. That he bought it for no sinister purpose was soon obvious; for the person he put into it was himself. The Mayor's shop-assistants, especially the younger ones, seemed to have the privilege of wandering all over the place; but once in his cage for the day, the Mayor himself never came out except at such times as nature compelled him to do so. His lunch was brought to him in the cage.

Close to the great man's retreat, a day or two after Cordelia's visit to Chalice Hill, while in his contentment Mr. Wollop was murmuring over his accounts like an amiable sea-elephant, there sat on a stool at one of the counters none other than Mary Crow. She had come to buy a tablecloth for John's room in Northload Street. As the young man who waited upon her was the young man who took hair-wash for his appearance and "Neetchky" for his conscience, it may be believed that the buying of this simple thing was a slow business. The young man and Mary Crow differed in every point of taste and choice where tablecloths were concerned.

"Have you heard the news, Miss Mary?" These words came from the cage. The Mayor was addressing his customer.

"How do you do, Mr. Wollop! I hope you've been well lately?"

“Some folks in this town, Miss Mary,” the man in the cage went on, “are so solicitous for my health that they’ve decided on my retirement from public life.”

“Pardon me — no! Oh no! I don’t like *that* at all.” This was addressed to the young man, who promptly went off, whistling. “Pardon me, Mr. Wollop, did you say your retirement? I don’t quite understand.”

“These folks want for me to stop being Mayor,” explained the caged man. “They want for me to turn into a Hex-Mayor.”

“Why I thought you were Mayor for life, Mr. Wollop,” cried Mary sympathetically.

He shook his head; and then in a lowered voice, bending down towards her so that his forehead touched the bars of his cage— “It’s that Mr. Geard who’s to be the Mayor instead of me, so that I can keep my good ‘ealth hunimpeded.”

Mary had no need to pretend her astonishment at this. She was genuinely amazed. “I can’t believe it, Mr. Wollop. Surely it isn’t true! The councilmen elect the Mayor, don’t they? They’d never, *never* elect Mr. Geard instead of you!”

“That’s what they’re going to do. I can see it as plain as a map, Miss Mary.”

“But it’s a shame! It’s a scandalous shame! Why everybody in Wessex knows the Mayor of Glastonbury. Why! Weren’t you Chairman of that grand Public Meeting when the Bishop bought the Ruins for the Church?”

“It’s what they’re going to do, Miss Mary.”

“But Cousin Philip is on the Council, isn’t he?”

“Only as one among the rest, Miss Mary. And though I don’t want—” he lowered his voice to a penetrating whisper— “though I don’t want to be a Halarmist, what with ’is trouble with ’is workmen and one thing and the other, I'm afraid Mr. Crow is not altogether the Hinfluence in the Borough that he once was."

"But … Mr. Wollop—" she stopped in sudden consternation, remembering John's close association with Mr. Wollop's rival. "But, Mr. Wollop, my cousin, John Crow, would have told me about this if there'd been anything in it. He's working for Mr. Geard now over this tiresome Midsummer Fair they're getting up, and he's never told me a word."

The Mayor of Glastonbury permitted a broad smile to flicker across his face. He pulled back his head from the bars and stretched out his cramped legs as far as they would go. "People don't tell people everything, Miss Mary, even when they *are* engaged to he married."

The word "married" came as a second authentic shock to the sympathetic young lady. She had never guessed that the gossip about her and John had gone so far as to reach the ears of the Mayor. Obstinately she returned to the main issue of the discussion. "They would *never* do it! They would never *dare* to do it!"

"The Liberal and the Labour councilmen, Miss Mary, if they vote with these Bolsheviki, 'ave the majority, and if the majority says so, so it has to be."

The sleek-haired young man now returned with a great pile of tablecloths over his arm. Mary impulsively got up and approaching the cage thrust her arm through the little aperture in front of it. "I can only tell you, Mr. Wollop," she said, "that whatever John thinks, or is bound now to say he thinks, *I* shall always think of you as the Mayor of Glastonbury!"

The white whiskers bowed low over the outstretched hand. For a second Mary had the wild fancy that he was going to kiss it; but instead of that he shook it vigorously. "I expect I'll see you next week, Miss Mary," he said, "at Mrs. Philip's tea-party. Look after Miss Crow well, Booty!"

This remark from his employer had become really necessary; for on her return to her seat at the counter Mary found such an array of highly coloured tablecloths, all after the taste of Mr. Booty and none after her own, that her difficulty recommenced with accumulated weight. She bought something at last, however; and nodding to the Mayor walked away with her parcel down the central aisle of the shop. The "Wollop grievance-look" had left most of the faces she passed, for the clock was moving round towards closing time, but the smell of the place, that peculiar smell of rent fabric, especially of rent-linen fabric, sank like a thin, delicate dust into her nostrils, into her throat, into her consciousness.

"I'm glad I don't work here yet," she thought, "but if Miss Drew turns me out, when I'm married to John, I swear I'll ask the old chap to let me come to him. I could sell tablecloths, anyway, better than that conceited boy." Once on the pavement she hesitated as to whether she had time to take John's tablecloth to his rooms in Northload Street before returning to tea with Miss Drew. Pondering on this point she remained in front of Wollop's shop staring into the window. It happened that the light fell in such a way upon the window-glass as to throw back a reflexion of her face. Mary was startled at its pallor and its haggardness. How many weeks had she been looking like that?

"Girls ought not to have anything to do when they're in love," she thought. "They ought to be let off everything!"

She turned away now from her reflexion in the shop window. "I'll just leave this parcel with the landlady," she said to herself. John was not expecting to see her today at all. She assumed he was spending all his time today with Mr. Geard. "No; I won't go up those stairs," she thought. "I'll leave this with the woman." She hurried down the street, turned to the right by St. John's Church, followed the railings of the cattle-market, turned to the left down George Street, and finally arrived at the door of number fifteen, Northload. She could not find the landlady. Always present when she would have given anything for the woman not to be there, today when she wanted her she was nowhere to be seen. Nor were there any neighbours around. Over the whole of number fifteen hung a sinister and unnatural silence. The street door was wide open, and just inside it was the landlady's door; but all was silent, forbidding, desolate. Three times she rang the bell. Not a sound! She went back upon the doorstep and rang the outside bell. Not a sound!

"Well, I'll just run up and leave it outside," she said to herself and began ascending the stairs. What was her astonishment when she heard voices up there while she paused to take breath on the first landing. At the top of the second flight she could catch actual words. She stopped there hesitating. Yes! He had someone in there with him; and she knew who it was too! It was Tom Barter. She stood for a second, resting herself, with her parcel propped upon the balustrade. She did not pause there to listen; she paused because she felt unable to enter and equally unable to go away. It was one of the most wretched moments of her life in these last agitating weeks.

"I'm going to make a little money," she heard Barter say, "and then I'm going to clear out. That was what Mary and I used to do all the time when we were so thick. We used to curse these superstitions! Your precious boss, Geard, is the greatest humbug of all. But of course you know that! You're out for making a little money, just as I am; and then, Holy Moses! you'll do a bunk just as I shall!" There was a sound of shuffled chairs and the clatter of china. Mary Crow became suddenly conscious that her attitude to Glastonbury had changed of late. It was Tom Barter she hated now, not Glastonbury.

John’s voice uttered the next words, and they did not improve matters. “Where on earth has she put my whiskey?” she heard him cry. “Oh, I wish to God women wouldn’t always tidy things up!”

Then came Barter’s voice again. As far as she could catch his words he seemed to be criticising John’s biscuits: those Huntley and Palmer biscuits that she had bought with such care a week ago! “It’s just as if it were a rough-and-tumble undergraduate’s room in Oxford,” she thought. Yes, Tom was criticising her biscuits. He was strewing her rug with them too, no doubt, and trampling them into it! They had now apparently found the whiskey and were hunting for glasses. Then ensued more clatter and more half-humorous and half-peevish groans. Then when they had seated themselves again, still worse ensued.

“Don’t be later than nine, Tom, will you?” she heard John say. “And I’ll get another bottle of this when the pub’s open again. If they’re funny, where you live, about your coming in late, you can sleep here with me. I’ve got a double bed.”

She was unable to catch Tom’s reply to this, but presently her whole frame stiffened and a cold shiver ran through her.

“I suppose Mary’s often told you what friends we were,” she heard Tom Barter say.

John’s voice was a little indistinct. “Something of the sort,” she thought she heard him murmur.

“I ought perhaps to tell you that I got so fond of her,” went on Tom Barter, “that I once even spoke about our being married. I suppose she never told you *that,* did she?”

“No,” John’s voice replied. And oh how she dreaded the tone he was using now! It was not a frank, single-hearted, trusting lover’s tone. “No,” said John, “she never told me you’d spoken of that.”

"It came to nothing, of course," said the other, "and I changed my mind about it before you came along …. Are *you* going to marry her?"

At this point Mary let the parcel containing the tablecloth slip down to the floor between her body and the balustrade. She thrust her fingers into her ears and ran hurriedly down the stairs. Down both flights of stairs she ran, and it was not till she was out of the house that she realised that she'd dropped her parcel. Her misery of mind rose up now out of all proportion to its cause.

She had come to feel towards that room of John's a peculiarly tender feeling, the feeling that a woman naturally gets towards her first real possession. To find that that room, which had been of late the centre of all her thoughts by day and by night, was being turned into a ramshackle bachelor's rendezvous was an outrage to something so deep in her that her emotion about it puzzled herself. She felt as if she were an outsider — a light-of-love — whose visits to number fifteen were devoid of all lasting significance. And Tom's tone about Glastonbury — how she disliked it! Those many secret meetings with John she had had in St. Mary's ruined Chapel had recently, by a natural process of association, begun to convert her to the ancient place. And this room — her room with John, their ménage together — to have it henceforth associated with Barter's rough cynicism and supercilious brutality was the last straw. For herself she cared nothing about his thinking of her as a girl he had decided against marrying. It was only John's hurt vanity she was nervous about. She herself was only too thankful he *had* decided against her! Besides — *always was she Mary Crow.* Her personal pride was far too deep to be affected by the opinion of her held by any man. No, it was none of these things that rankled now in her heart and made her face so white and tense as she hurried back to the Abbey House. It was something much deeper, something that she had secretly been dreading ever since those two sacred Northwold days. It was in fact a dark, bitter, suspicious, corrosive and yet intangible jealousy of Tom Barter. She knew — none better than she — what a deep vein there was of erotic attraction to men in John's nature. She knew — and she had good cause to know — how little of the normal, passionate lover there was about him. She and he were bound together by imponderable cravings, by inexplicable, magnetic lusts, which were as sterile as they were intense and unsatisfied. Had he already possessed her as men possess women, what would she have to fear, what to be jealous of, in his love for Tom? She would belong to him as Tom never *could* belong to him. It was because she knew that she might never be possessed in that sense, even though they were married by the most apostolical of priestly hands, that she felt the ghastly fingers of cold fear fumbling at her vitals. Not a single tear trickled down her cheek as she walked resolutely home. Home she walked with steady lips and a swift, quiet tread. Home to Miss Euphemia Drew!

When Miss Drew, a quarter of an hour later, asked her, "Was it not a nice, warm day for March," she found she could not remember one single moment when she had been conscious of warmth or of the absence of warmth. That, however, did not prevent her giving the old lady a lively and picturesque account of her visit to Wollop's.

"What did you go in to buy, my pretty?"

"I went in to buy some hairpins, dear."

Miss Drew took up a little piece of one of Louie's most successful tea-cakes and nibbled at it elegantly with her false teeth. There was a physical stir at the bottom of Miss Drew's stomach as she delicately lifted up her tea-cup, her little finger fastidiously extended, to wash down — for otherwise she would have had difficulty in swallowing — this honey-sweet fragment. Well did she know that Mary was lying when she spoke of hairpins. And

Mary, sitting opposite her, every now and then taking a whiff of eau-de-cologne from a little green-edged handkerchief, made for her by Miss Drew, knew that she knew that she had lied. Miss Drew's inmost feelings at the moment when Lily answered the bell and went away, in dreamy sadness, to bring more hot water, might have been described in the following manner: "She is buying things for that male brute to furnish some slum-room in the town. She's either married him already or she's going to live with him *as if* they were married. It's almost more than I can bear, but I must be strong! If I lose her — but I can't think of it, consider it, imagine it — for a minute! I don't know why God has laid this upon me. But I've come to *depend* on her; and if—" Miss Drew, even to herself, was forced to cover up the passion of her love for her companion by the use of the vague word "depend." As a matter of fact, she loved Mary with a love like that which John would have had to content himself with if he had been forbidden by some inexplicable mandate to make love to her. Every movement of Mary's was delicious to Miss Drew. Every word she uttered entranced the poor lady. Every garment she wore was as sacred to her as the paten that held the bread at Holy Communion.

Lily was longer than usual fetching the hot water, and when she finally came in it was with a much quicker movement and a less dreamy gesture than usual that she laid down the little silver jug, a jug whose lid had been soldered once under the régime of Miss Drew's grandmother, and once more under the régime of Miss Drew's mother, beside the silver tea-pot.

"Please, Miss, Louie wants to know if you'd mind if we ran out for a minute to King Edgar's Lawn to see Mr. Crow's airplane. It's passing now, Weatherwax says, and Louie's never seen it close by."

"Certainly; of course; run off; both of you!" replied Miss Drew; and she turned to her companion with the same look of benevolent superiority to the tastes of the lower classes that her grandmother displayed when *her* servants ran out to see the first bicycle and which her mother displayed when *her* servants ran out to see the first motor car. “King Edgar’s Lawn” was a popular name that had locally arisen when a famous modern antiquary — guided, he himself declared, by supernatural agency — had traced the foundations of that great monarch’s chapel.

“Let’s go out, child, and see this wonder ourselves!” said Miss Drew, after filling the tea-pot from the silver jug.

The two ladies left the room together, picked up their cloaks in the hall, descended the terrace-steps, stepped carefully across a thin strip of crocuses and a sunken wall, and joined their maids and old Weatherwax on the smooth-cut expanse of velvety grass beyond which rose the ruins of the Tower Arch. It certainly was a startling sight to see the airplane, like a colossal dragonfly, cross the empty air-spaces above these historic Ruins.

Mr. Weatherwax, however, gave the thing the most brief and cursory glance. “Me broad-beans be going to make a fine show this year. Have ‘ee been round to see ’em, Miss?”

Euphemia Drew took her arm away from the wrist of Mary and turned her eyes from the calm expanse of the sky to the lesser but by no means negligible expanse of the countenance of Isaac Weatherwax. “Are they as high as our good friends’ across the road, Isaac?”

This remark somewhat nonplussed the gardener. Between the two gardens which he presided over he liked to keep up a pretended rivalry. He was “Weatherwax” to the Vicar, and “Isaac” to Miss Drew; and between “Isaac” and “Weatherwax” there was a lively competition. “Well, Miss,” he confessed, after a disdainful glance upward at the stupendous humming of the flying-machine, “Well, Miss, ’tis true they broad-beans across the way may be a miserable couple o’ inches *taller* than ours. ’Tis when us considers the ‘ealth and ‘spansion o’ the plants that ours do take the prize. They be vigorous growers, they beans of ours, and them tall ones can’t hold a candle to ‘en.”

Mary was thinking to herself, “Tom must have left John directly after I ran away, or he couldn’t be piloting this thing now!” The afternoon was slowly turning into evening. A delicate golden glow filled the western and the southern quarters of the firmament. In the midst of this glow a number of rose-coloured clouds, floating filaments of vapour, air, feathery wefts, undulated, fluctuated, thickened, dissolved, as the chance-strewn catafalque of that particular day’s obsequies limned itself in space.

Totally disregarding Tom Barter, who was gravely piloting the machine in the control of which his whole being seemed satisfied, Philip Crow was looking down intently at the moving panorama below them. How unfamiliar those ancient Ruins looked as he saw them now gliding away beneath him — aye! and how unimportant, how negligible! Surely it was the round earth itself that was moving; not the shining, steely projectile in which he was being hurtled through the sky! He snatched a second to stare straight down at St. Michael’s Tower on the top of the Tor as they shot drumming and droning over it. Philip’s thoughts were disturbed at the moment. Three separate dangerous blows had been struck of late at him and his factories. Red Robinson’s machinations had consummated in a formidable movement among the town-councillors to make Geard Mayor. Dave Spear had got twice as long a list of the factory-hands ready to strike than had been expected by either party. And now this crazy ne’er-do-well cousin of his, John Crow, had opened an office near the station and was feverishly advertising some sort of religious hocus-pocus! This last blow struck him the hardest; though it would have been hard to explain exactly why. Perhaps he himself could not have explained why. One thing was clear, all his own activity, all his own effort, all his own prestige were connected with turning Glastonbury from an idle show-place into a prosperous industrial centre. On this particular point he was at one with Red Robinson just as he was at one with Tom Barter. To beat down this pious Glastonbury legend, this piece of monkish mummery, to beat it down and trample it into dust. He longed to do this beyond everything in the world except electrifying the entrails of the Mendips; and he would do it too! He would do it alone if the labour element — short-sighted as it always was in regard to their true interests — betrayed him for this sneak-thief, this crafty hypocrite Geard!

He hoped at this moment that Barter would be minded to extend his circular hovering for hours so as to give him a long hawk’s flight over this idyllic Somersetshire. He would conquer it, this effeminate flower-garden of pretty-pretty superstitions and mediaeval abracadabra! He would plant factory upon factory in it, dynamo upon dynamo! He would have mines beneath it, railways across it, airlines above it!

If Barter had not been a novice at flying and consequently afiaid to remove his attention for a moment from his task, he might have divined his passenger’s mental state and humoured him by staying up longer. But Philip was in no mood openly to confess such feelings. He had told his subordinate laconically enough to take him to Wookey Hole; and to Wookey Hole Barter must take him! There was a good field for landing on the Mendips side of the Hole, away from the direction of Wells; but he decided to make a small détour first. Philip recognised the general lie of the land tonight and its natural landmarks more quickly than most passengers would have done in one of their first ascents. So might some hawk-eye among his Norman ancestors have surveyed the landscape from the high keep of some newly built castle and known it hill by hill, stream by stream, valley by valley, forest by forest, for what it was.

As he looked down upon the earth, that clear March evening, and watched the chess-board fields pass in procession beneath him, and watched the trees fall into strange patterns and watched the villages, some red, some brown, some grey, according as brick or stone or slate predominated, approach or recede, as the plane sank or rose, Philip's spirit felt as if it had wings of its own that were carrying it over this conquered land independent of Barter's piloting. They passed over Havyatt, where the monks on one occasion persuaded the Danes to draw back and refrain from plundering the Abbey; they passed over West Pennard, and over Pylle and Evercreech; they passed over Batcombe and over Wanstraw and over Postlebury Wood; and it was not till they reached Marston Bigot where they could see to the eastward the livid-grey waters of the Somersetshire Frome that Barter swung the plane round and headed west again. Due west, they flew now, over the stone roofs of Shepton Mallet, straight to the city of Wells. When they were above Wells and they could look down on the Cathedral directly beneath them, they turned northwest; and soon, without trouble or mishap, they descended in the precise place they had aimed for, between Wookey Hole and Ebbor Rocks.

The impressions which rioted in Philip's brain as he clambered out of his seat, and stretched his legs upon solid earth in that darkening meadow, resembled the release of a charge of electricity. How small and unimportant Wells Cathedral had looked from up there in the air! It was of the planetary earth, a sensitised round orb circling through space, not of any calm earth-mother, lying back upon her secret life, that his mind was full. It had all passed only too quickly! It seemed only just a minute ago that he had scrambled into his seat on the back of this shining torpedo with dragon-fly wings. But what thoughts, what sensations! His brain whirled with the vision of an earth-life dominated absolutely by Science, of a human race that had shaken off its fearful childhood and looked at things with a clear, unfilmed, unperverted eye. He said to himself, as he walked out of the field with Barter — for they were intending to stay the night at Wookey Hole — that this conquest of air had reduced those Glastonbury Ruins to nothing. And how utterly unimportant and irrelevant all this disputing about capital and labour and private property! Science must soon, he thought, give into the hands of every individual so much power — power of creation, power of destruction — that this dogmatic doctrine about common ownership will cease to have any meaning.

“Don’t wait supper for me,” he said to his companion as they closed the gate leading into the highway. He and Barter had their own particular bedrooms, in a little wayside inn called the Zoyland Arms, close to the entrance to Wookey Hole Cave. The factory there held no accommodation for travellers, for though its wheels were turned by the River Axe as it emerged from its underground caverns, it was not much more than a series of large workshops. The working-people came on foot or by lorry from the Wells suburbs which were only a couple of miles away and people who wished to remain overnight were at the mercy of the landlord of the inn. The two men were expected that evening to supper, and Will Zoyland was already seated at the parlour-table, with an uncorked bottle of wine at his side, enjoying his soup, when they entered the place.

Philip was still in an unusual state of excitement as he ran upstairs to his little room, where the gas had already been lit. His window looked out on the white road, and opposite it in the darkening hedge there was a small ash tree, whose black, sticky buds had already burst here and there into the blurred shapes of embryo leaves, shadowy and indistinct against the livid western sky. A strange exultation still throbbed in his pulses as he found himself alone in this small chamber looking out on the silent road and on that tree. He felt in no hurry to join the others. Let Zoyland entertain Barter as he pleased till he chose to go down! He was their employer. He would dine when he felt inclined. He pushed his way past the heavy, cheap dressing-table with its great, ugly looking-glass and jerked aside the sham-lace curtains that obstructed his view. He made an effort to open the window at the top. In the flare of the gas-lamp suspended from the ceiling he saw a couple of dead flies on the narrow ledge where the window-latch was. Something about these flies, combined with the lace curtains and with the fact that he found difficulty in opening the window, brought his spirits down to earth. When he did jerk the window open, one of the dead flies followed it, but the other one remained upside-down, its legs stiff, its small cuirassed head inert, its body drained of all life-juices, husk-like and hollow. He flicked the dead fly with his fingernail out of the window, and resting his elbows on the woodwork leaned far out. A faint odour of funguses came to him, mingled with that peculiar smell of road-dust that bears upon it the first weight of the falling night. A rustling sound followed by a series of sleepy, peevish clucks and then by more rustling indicated the presence of roosting fowls. The little ash tree against the dying fragments of steely whiteness in the sky stretched out its branches; stretched them out with that particular upward clutch of the twig ends that characterises its tribe.

Philip’s face at that moment would have presented a mask of stony human fanaticism to the senses of that little tree if they could have pierced the dark. From this air-flight, one of the first he had ever taken, he had gathered a momentum that no dead fly, however discouraging, could retard. He used it now to shoot his mind, like a rock-shattering projectile, into those remote caves of Wookey Hole out of which rolled the subterranean river that turned the wheels of his factory. A grim smile crossed his mouth when he recalled how contemptible, how unimportant, the massed towers and buttresses of Wells Cathedral had appeared as he flew above them! His thoughts clanked harshly along the up-curving branch in front of him, like a proud brigade of arrogant tin soldiers. A cold fury of destruction possessed him when he thought of Glastonbury. Arthur and the Holy Grail, Abbey Ruins and Saint Joseph — he was the man to blow them all sky-high! Communism? A thing of mere distribution of spoils! What did a meticulous economy of that kind matter? On, on, on! — destroying the past, creating the future — on, on! The hard light of his electric bulbs on the stalactites in Wookey Hole could not have glittered more fiercely, the steel surface of his new plane could not have shone more coldly than the narrowed eye-slits of Philip Crow as he drew his head back, under the hanging gas-globe, and walked over to the wash-basin.

Damn! Another dead fly in his soap-dish! He tossed out the soap and carried the dish to the window and shook it there with a vindictive sweep of his arm. He felt as if his glittering onrush through the world, engine after engine after engine, and himself yanking them forward with an iron heart, was outraged by the mere existence in the world of dead flies. That fellow, John — damn him, oh damn him! — was a dead fly come to life. Geard was another. Those ridiculous Dekkers were others too. Tilly, in his own house, with her black beady eyes, was yet another! All were buzzing flies, whose existence stung him in life and dispirited him in death. What was that line, in some old poet, that he had had to learn by heart at school and that he'd never forgotten? "Heads without name, no more remembered than summer-flies!" "Heads without name." *His* head had a name, Devereux — that was a name for a man to face life with!

He hurriedly washed his hands and face; plastered down his iron-grey hair over his narrow skull, grinned like a wolf at himself in the ugly looking-glass and ran downstairs. An unexpected shock was awaiting him as he entered the little parlour full of small supper-tables. There were Zoyland and Barter, laughing together, already warmed by Zoyland's wine; but there at another table — and they rose at once to greet him — were Dave and Percy Spear! They must have been agitating all day and collecting names in his Wookey Hole plant. But he could not restrain his pleasure in seeing them there. How perfect she looked in this dim inn-parlour light! He thought Dave looked a trifle embarrassed — and no wonder, the revolutionary rogue! — as they shook hands; but she — she was *his;* her eyes told him she was his! He knew it in the marrow of his bones as she leant towards him, giving him — not only her ungloved hand, but everything! Yes; she was like that long swaying ash-tree branch, just budding, in the night out there.

He hurriedly crossed over to his own place, jested coldly about Zoyland having opened the bottle, murmured something sarcastically to Barter about "propitiating his Bolsheviki relatives" and carried his chair to the Spears' table.

"Have you brought your stiletto for the wicked Capitalist?" cried Will Zoyland.

"Aye, what's that, Will?" threw in Dave.

"I asked Percy if she'd got her dagger hidden away in her underlinen to give Crow his quietus," repeated Lord P.'s bastard, winking at Barter.

Barter's face at that moment was indeed one in which could be read "strange matters." The wine had heated him; otherwise he would have found the whole situation bristling with discomfort. His cautious upper-middle-class respectability had already been outraged to its foundations by

Zoyland's noisy camaraderie. Zoyland and his brother-in-law's wife had by this time exchanged not a few strokes of reckless roguery.

Barter's lecherousness had for years been roused to a fever of aggravation by Percy Spear. He had seen more of her in their Norfolk childhood than he had seen of any of her cousins and he had used her young figure on many a sex-starved occasion for the satisfaction of his amorous thoughts. But Percy had never let him touch her. She disliked him mentally and she loathed him physically. But she was ready enough to chaff him; and when she did this she always bewildered him by her clever modernity.

Barter had felt a horrible sense of social inferiority just now as he had sat sullenly drinking William Zoyland's wine. His family was in reality quite as "good" as that of the Crows; but he totally lacked the suppleness of the Crow mind. He was in fact socially old-fashioned; and to be old-fashioned at this date meant being made a fool of by clever women.

It was still more uncomfortable for him when Philip appeared and began his dinner at the Spears' table. Zoyland had called for a second bottle and had begun to grow slightly tipsy; and with his tipsiness extremely confidential. Even so, he didn't treat Barter — at least so Barter thought — like a real equal. He confided in him blindly, grossly, callously; a good deal as a gentleman would confide in a faithful servant of whose discretion he was sure but towards whose personal reactions to what he confessed he felt complete indifference.

Tom Barter had not one single relative of any kind living. He had never been to the university. His diploma of social position went back to an earlier date; for he had been to Greylands School. He had entered an office at nineteen and since then he had lived for two things, lechery and money. He had seen to it that these two things did not clash by habitually taking his pleasures cheaply. This he did by eschewing harlots and mistresses and by enjoying constantly new adventures with flirtatious middle-class girls. With shopgirls, business-girls, waitresses, barmaids, Barter always won favour, partly by reason of his being a gentleman, partly by his shameless advances, but most of all by a certain direct, unassumed, cynical but very honest interest in all their professional problems. They felt at home with him. They trusted him. And except for depriving them of pretensions to "purity," he really *was* to be trusted.

"She's alone there; and of course he *may* have gone over. He may be over there now, as I clink this glass! But I don't think so. A person has instincts in these things, don't you agree, Barter? Instincts. You know what I mean, Barter? But perhaps you don't! Perhaps you despise instincts! You rather look like some one who despises instincts. What would you do, Barter, if you were married and your wife fell in love with a young chap of her own age? Eh? What would you do? Would you let him pull your nose and say nothing? Have you ever had your nose pulled, Barter? I mean really and truly pulled? Would you let him do it? Tweak your nose, and give it a good pull?"

Tom Barter's fingers itched to give his aristocratic friend what at school was called a bloody nose. Short of hitting him, however (and what chance would he have in fisticuffs with such a fellow?), he could not just then think of any method of putting him to rout.

"That's my way, Barter, and so now you know it. It mayn't be a good way; but it's my way and when it comes to women it's no good unless you're playing your own hand. They don't give a fig for book-learning, Barter. Perhaps you've never seen thro' their pinnies far enough to know that? But that's the truth. Not a fig! What women like is bed-rock-bottom — every time! You can't go wrong with them — from Queen Gargamelle to Maid Marian — if you talk facts and think smut. You seem to me a downright man-to-woman kind of chap, Barter, so I expect you’ve found that out for yourself. But perhaps not. Perhaps you’re puritanical and have never meddled with the hussies. I don’t think so, though — you look to me as if you knew a hawk from a hernshaw!”

Tom Barter could only drink more and more wine, as he did his best to carry off this uncomfortable situation. In his heart he longed to be back at number fifteen Northload Street, drinking whiskey with John. How different John was from this bearded ruffian! If hatred had the power to kill, Lord P.’s bastard would certainly not have played guide again to any more stalactite caves! “Not one of these people cares a fig what becomes of poor Tom,” Barter thought, as he grew more and more sulkily monosyllabic, under Zoyland’s heavy joking. “At this moment, as I sit here, not one single human being is giving me a thought. None of the wenches I make love to in Glastonbury care a tinker’s dam for me really! Mary used to think of me sometimes; a little; just a little; but God! now John’s appeared, I am out of it there, too. Crummie turned on me like a spitfire pussy-cat the last time I saw her. Who *have* I got in the whole bloody world? Nemo, nihil, none! Not a living soul!” And then his mind went back to the Northwold River and the talk he had had with John about those childish times. John *was* something. He was the Past and that was something. “I like old John,” he said to himself. “By God I believe when I’m fooling with old John I don’t feel as if I were quite alone. ’Twas a queer idea of his though — what he hinted at this afternoon — that I should get a job under Geard, when they make him Mayor, and give Philip the go-by! I must talk to John a bit more about that. There’d be nothing permanent in that though. But, by Jiminy, it would be almost worth it, just to watch Philip’s face when I told him!”

“Why do you say ‘yes’ like that, Barter? You think I’m drunk. You’re not listening! I asked you whether you thought I was a fellow who could be cuckolded with impunity. And you said ‘yes’.”

“I meant ‘impunity’ *for a time*, Will; while you led the person on; and let them make a fool of themselves.”

A dangerous gleam shot forth between the candles from Zoyland’s drunken Teutonic eyes. It annoyed him to be called “Will” by Barter, just as it annoyed Philip to be called “Phil.” “Fool be damned! You don’t know what I’m talking about, Barter. When I give up my girl to her lover I’m not revenging myself on anyone; I’m … I’m … I’m acting altogether outside the wretched herd of common human animals! I’m … I’m … *I’m acting like a god*, little man!” His drunken voice was so loud that Dave and Percy and Philip ceased talking among themselves and stared at him. Philip got up and came towards him, followed after an interval by the husband and wife.

“Don’t you start bullying our friend Tom, Zoyland,” said Philip coldly, fixing a Norseman’s eye upon the gigantic toper.

“Oh, you shut up!” growled the other. “For a very little I’d chuck both of ye into the bally road!”

Philip shrugged his shoulders and turned to Spear. “Dave,” he said, while Barter got up sulkily from his seat and went over to Persephone, who stood regarding the whole group with dreamy amusement, “do you mind, Dave, if I took Cousin Percy out for a stroll down this ‘road’ he talks about?”

The girl gave a start and glanced quickly at her husband. A look, quick as lightning, from her dark, languorous eyelids, said, “May I go with him? I’d rather *like* to go with him, Dave. But I won’t if you don’t want me to!” While a look, a little slower to come, replied from Dave’s ruddy face, “Go, by all means, if you want to, my dear; why not?”

“Hullo, Dave, are *you* going to lecture me, too?” drawled Zoyland, as if he had noticed the presence of his brother-in-law for the first time. “*Tu*

Brute, Dave! Then Big Willy must really behave himself and be polite to these solemn money-grubbers."

"Dave will amuse you, William, while Philip and I get a breath of air," said the girl cajolingly. "And mind I'll speak to Nell about you, if you drink any more tonight! I'll be seeing her at Tilly's party, if not before."

Dave obediently sat down by the man with the great beard. He looked, as he did so, just as if he had been some sagacious young clerk-in-holy-orders taking his seat at the dais by the side of an angry Charlemagne.

"I like you, Dave Spear," said the Bastard, "your bloody Communism is all poppycock, but I'm damned if you're not more of a man than any of us here; and you can tell Nell I said so." He stretched out his hand as he spoke, and laid it on Dave's knee, while an effusion of melting German-student sentimentality made his blue eyes moist.

"I think I'll adjourn, if you people don't mind," said Tom Barter, addressing the whole company and making a little nod with his head as he leaned his hand against the back of a chair.

"Philip can bear witness," he glanced furtively at his employer, "that I've got a lot to do at the office tomorrow; so I think bed is the place for me. Good night, Mrs. Spear, you'll excuse me, won't you?" He had isolated himself completely from the rest of them by this time; not exactly by what he said but by the way he looked at them. He might have been a Frenchman in that group, instead of the descendant of a family of Methwold squires who were landowners when the Crows were just Isle-of-Ely farmers.

Some visitor from Venus or Mars, interested in human social differences, would have been puzzled to know what the real psychic cause was of Barter's repeated humiliations. How could such an one know that the sole and simple cause of it was the manner in which, when a boy, he had been bullied at Greylands School? But this *was* the cause and none other. Barter had been so humiliated at Greylands, at Gladman's House there, that in his heart he felt himself to be inferior to every educated man he met. And this feeling in his own mind every educated man he met, without knowing why, was compelled by some invisible urge to take advantage of! "Bullied at Greylands — always bullied" might have been a truth-speaking Wessex proverb. It was only at rare moments, when he lost his temper, that he dared to look Philip straight in the face; and yet, curiously enough, Philip came much nearer being afraid of Barter than of anyone else in Glastonbury. It was that Greylands bullying, those memories of what went on at Gladman's House, that made a neurotic catch-pole of this sturdy descendant of Norfolk fox-hunters.

Philip ran immediately upstairs to his small bedroom. Here he snatched a rough overcoat from a nail and an old sporting cap of the same faded cloth. This latter he instinctively — as if bound for some dark adventure — pulled low down over his narrow forehead. The ugly looking-glass by the window made him think of dead flies. His angry contempt for Barter, "going to bed like that because he'd been insulted by a hulking zany," made him think of "heads without name, no more remembered" — and with this on the mute lips of his mind he turned the gasjet low and hurried down again. Here, in the porch of the little inn, he found Persephone, wrapped, she too, in a long cloth coat, and wearing over her fuzzy, dusky hair a boyish cap. They went out together in silence. In silence he led her up the road, round a turn to the right, till they came to a closed gate in the hedge. This he opened for her, lifting it bodily off its latch and replacing it by the same main force when she had stepped through. He now led her, still in a sort of guilty silence, up a narrow winding hill-path on each side of which grew large, indistinct trees, their roots in the sloping bank. At this point Philip produced an electric flashlight from his overcoat pocket and held it so as to illuminate their way.

Persephone became aware now of the sound of water, down somewhere in the darkness to their right, and it was not long before he made her stop and look between the tree trunks, upon whose rough surface he threw the light of his flashlight.

They went on again, the path they followed growing steadily narrower and steeper. They walked closely side by side and presently Philip without a word possessed himself of her hand. At last she saw before her the upward rise of a precipitous rock, covered with moss and last year's ferns, and right before them, at the base of the rock, a little square doorway. Philip took from his waistcoat pocket a large key, like the key to a drive gate, and using his flashlight turned it in the lock and pushed the door open. When once they were both inside he locked the gate again, put the key in his pocket and drew a deep breath. "Perse, Perse," he whispered, and hugging the girl fiercely to his heart kissed her with a long clinging kiss full on the mouth. She hung limp and yielding in his arms. His kiss was of the kind that needs no response, that could be aware of no response except a desperate resistance. But there was no flicker of resistance in Persephone's yielded mouth and abandoned body. She yielded to him utterly, as dark water yields to the plunge of a diver. When he let her go she appeared so drugged by his embrace that for a second she swayed and staggered. But he caught her, with a strong clutch round the waist, and holding her so led her forward. Up and up they climbed, and then, after stopping to breathe at ease for a moment on a little level platform, down, and again down they went. This was repeated, in spiral curves of progression, several times. The girl seemed still too dazed to realise the curious character of the path he led her by, and though he often flashed his light to the right and the left neither of them breathed a syllable.

They were isolated from human interference as completely as if they had descended into some cavern at the bottom of the sea.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

Mr. Owen Evans, seated by the gas-stove at the back of Old Jones' shop, was enjoying a late breakfast. It was the day following the one wherein Philip Crow conducted Persephone to his subterranean kingdom. Mr. Evans' breakfast differed a great deal from the breakfast partaken by Mayor Wollop on the preceding morning. It lacked the Mayor's invisible attendants. It lacked the Mayor's Dundee Marmalade. It lacked the Mayor's Western Gazette. In place of this latter purveyor of topical items, Mr. Evans' bodily refreshment — consisting of a pot of tea and three stale rolls — was heightened by the presence of an old edition of the *Inferno* in the original Italian, open at the page that describes the blasphemous obstinacy of the heathen giant, Capaneus.

"As I was *then,"* howled this unconscionable rebel against the Emperor of the Universe, "such am I *still*!"

Mr. Evans found no difficulty in translating this passage, even though the lettering of the old book was such a stumbling-block to modern eyes: and in his troubled response to its terrible import he placed no less than half of all the butter he possessed upon the piece of roll-crust which he now proceeded to munch in absent-minded voracity.

He was disturbed by a heavy knock upon Number Two's shop-door. He cursed audibly and glanced angrily at one particular clock, among all the old ticking timepieces, which he had grown accustomed to consulting. He consulted this one not because it kept better time, but because he pitied its woebegone face. He cherished the fancy — in his confused South Wales mind — that he might restore the prestige of this silly old clock among its grander companions if he made this little diurnal preference. But the clock only confirmed the knock. The knock and the clock said the same thing. “Reading done … business begun,” said the clock and the knock.

Mr. Evans angrily opened the shop-door. This proceeding took more time than one would have supposed the stock-in-trade of Number Two justified. Never were there so many or such rusty bolts! But the Welshman got them all drawn at last; and red in the face and panting hard he opened the barricaded door. Into the shop stepped Sam Dekker. Sam’s face, to anyone who saw it less frequently than his father and Penny Pitches, would have displayed a startling change. It had changed from the face of a lad to the face of a man. Sam had come to know something of the terms upon which the happiness of being alive has been offered us.

“How do you do, Mr. Evans,” he said. “Oh, you are having your coffee! I’m awfully sorry I’ve disturbed you.”

He made no motion however to go away; but proceeded to remove his coat and hat, and lay them both, together with his stick, upon one of Number Two’s best specimens of the art of eighteenth-century chair-making. Then he sat down; and Mr. Evans, bringing up his own chair from the rear of the shop, sat down too.

“I’ve come to ask you rather a funny question, Sir,” the visitor began, “but if you knew how few people in Glastonbury have books, or care anything for books, you’d understand my coming to you. By the way, do you people — does Old Jones, I mean — *sell* books as well as antiques? Has he got any old books here? Any old … you know? … any old *theological* books?”

The Welshman’s face assumed a very odd expression. “Yes!” he said with a sort of resigned hesitation. “Oh, yes! There *are* quite a lot here. I’ve been going through them. They’re down in the basement. It was chiefly because of them that I consented to undertake this shop. Oh, yes! There are quite a lot of interesting books down there, Mr. Dekker. But I don't know —"

There was a moment's silence during which the shrill cockney voice of Mrs. Robinson addressing herself to Grandmother Cole, as the ladies moved slowly downtown on their way to St. John's Church, entered through the closed door.

"If 'twere only a rat what gnawed 'en 'twill be a heasy bit o' 'emming; but if what 'ee seed to-die be goin' to be worse tomorrow, *then* 'tis more nor rats! Then 'tis moth. And if 'tis moth, 'twill be 'ell's own job. If 'tis moth, I'd sigh 'No, Mr. Vicar! Not hon your little life will I hundertake sech a 'eart-breakin' job!'"

Sam couldn't restrain a faint grin at this overheard revelation of a labour-revolt in the ecclesiastical sphere; but Mr. Evans lacked all sense of humour in such matters. The man's hooked nose, sardonic eyebrows and long upper lip looked as impenetrable to High Street back-chat as the bust of Dante itself which he was now regarding with a secretive eye. The charwoman and the sewing-woman of St. John's Church passed on down the street; and Sam became as grave as the Welshman.

"I may as well be quite open with you, Sir," Sam said. "For more than a year now my father has been hoping that I'd accept his offer to send me to a theological college. I've refused to go; and I *never* shall go. But I ought to … I want to … read a little more. When I was at Corpus—"

Mr. Evans interrupted him. "Corpus!" he cried, leaping to his feet, "do you mean Corpus Cambridge? I was at Oxford myself, but you Corpus people at Cambridge have got a library … I say you've got a library … that would madden Paracelsus himself. There are folios and quartos there that are—" He lowered his voice and lifting the second finger of his left hand tapped with it the bony knuckle of the first finger of his right hand. “There are Welsh manuscripts there, my good Sir, that are priceless. They are prejudiced against me there; but that’s nothing. I’m nothing. But if they’d let me have those manuscripts and take them to South Wales with me and compare them with — Why! my good man! — They are prejudiced against me there; but that’s nothing. What am I? Nothing. Nothing at all! But they’ve got a number of Bardic Triads there … in an underground chamber … a Welsh bedmaker told me all about it … that give incredible details of Merlin’s life! Think of your being at Corpus! They are prejudiced against me there … a trifle … a little … They mean well … but of course! … but that’s nothing … for what am I? Obviously nothing!”

Sam Dekker watched Mr. Evans’ back as he moved about in that stuffy little shop, looking for something. A cold watery sun filtered into the shop through the street-window. This window was full of an extraordinary assortment of ill-chosen objects. One could hardly have called them objects of art. They were more like a Noah’s Ark or a raft of candidates for Limbo. There was a cracked Chinese vase decorated by a series of she-dragons each of whom was apparently giving birth to, or being suckled by a double-tailed goldfish. Next to this vase there was a pepper-box of unnatural proportions on the top of which, where it was perforated for shaking, gaped the head of a preposterous Punchinello. A rusty faucet, of ornamental brass, serviceable now for no conceivable purpose, was propped up against the pepper-box. At the base of the vase reposed a white-feathered shuttlecock with a vermilion centre; while between the pepper-box and the window-frame was a small croquet-mallet of a kind that had become quite extinct. Resting on the handle of this croquet-mallet was a large Pacific Ocean shell, on the back of which some medculous Miss Drew of a hundred years ago had painted a sad little landscape wherein a diminutive goatherd and a gigantic goat contemplated a sinking ship from a green island. Leaning against the rim of this painted shell was a big, old-fashioned shaving-cup, upon the side of which was sketched a distant view of a castle on the Rhine, seen between two nameless trees and above the back of an overloaded mule.

The watery sun which struggled into Old Jones' shop, through what portion of the window was not obscured by these objects, enabled Sam to watch every movement of Mr. Evans.

The man was standing on tiptoe against a shelf and struggling to open a little china pot which stood there without removing a marble paperweight which rested on its lid.

Sam got hesitatingly up from his seat; but remained with his hand on its arm. There was something distressing, teasing to the nerves, something that set one's teeth on edge, about Mr. Evans' effort to get his fingers into this little oblong pot.

"Ah!" he ejaculated at last, "I feel it now. Ah!"

Sam had never seen the human form stretched to such tension as was the form of Mr. Evans with his fingers in that small receptacle. He couldn't help looking at the man's bare heels, both of which were protruding now, as his feet rose out of his slippers, through large round holes in his knitted socks. His feet came back into their shoes as he uttered this exclamation, and he himself turned with a tiny key in his hand.

"Come," he said. "Come … come … come!"

He led the way to the back of the shop where on the opposite side to the narrow staircase going up was a still narrower staircase going down. At the top of this he paused; and taking a candlestick from a little bracket began fumbling awkwardly with a matchbox.

His helpless struggles with all these inanimate objects had now got on Sam's nerves to such a pitch that he rushed forward to assist him. Between them the tiny key fell upon the floor. Sam picked it up and handed it to him. A faint stream of sunlight from the window, full of little wavering motes, fell upon Mr. Evans' countenance, as, with the key clutched in the palm of his hand, he at last managed to light the candle. Sam was shocked by the nervous trouble upon the man's face. Was it due only to the obduracy of all these little teasing inanimates, vexing like demons the movements of a philosopher? Or was his request for these books the most ill-advised demand with which he could have come upon him?

Once more he had an opportunity of studying Mr. Evans' back as he followed him down that dark little staircase. The lifted candle the man carried caused that hooked nose of his, as he turned to warn Sam of a particular step, to become like the nose of an extremely old miser visiting his hoard of ducats and guilders. The one eye too, which was all Sam could see in that shadowy profile, as he went down after him, was like the eye of a demented goshawk.

They reached the cellar at last. It was small enough. It was tidier than the shop above. It was a little low room lined with tall book-shelves. Sam saw at once that most of the books were of no interest to him. They were almost all of them ancient magazines bound in leather covers and interspersed with tattered school editions of the classics. One shelf, however, had glass over it; and it was to a key-hole in this glass door that Mr. Evans applied his little key.

What was the matter now with the man? His legs were shaking. His knees were knocking together! His fingers must have been shaking too; for the candle grease began dripping over the front of the glass case as he tried to open it with his key.

Sam stepped forward and made as if he would take the candle from him. His gesture was a very natural one under the circumstances. Why then did the Welshman turn upon him a look of contorted fury? But the latter got the glass doors open finally; and Sam, peering over his shoulder, surveyed the exposed books. They were indeed “theological” works! Sam had never seen so many parchment-covered and vellum-covered and leather-covered folios. He read the names. There were Bonaventura, and Duns Scotus, and Thomas Aquinas, and Albertus Magnus, and Avicenna, and Bernard, and Jerome, and Anselm.

Sam could not restrain a weary, disappointed groan. What good were these to him? He was no scholar. What he wanted was something — well! He really didn’t know exactly what he *had* wanted; for in the world of theological books Sam had the simple imagination of a student of minnows and butterflies.

But he saw Mr. Evans’ hand now hurriedly withdrawn from the shelf with a beautifully bound book clutched in his fingers. There was a big gap where he had just removed this work and another book, that had been standing erect by the one he had taken, toppled sideways now across this gap, and lay there diagonally, resting against some thick medieval tome with an obscure Latin title. Towards this book Sam’s attention was at once attracted, for it was different in appearance from the rest. His sharp, observant bear’s eyes caught its title in a second. It was called “The Unpardonable Sin”.

Mr. Evans now turned upon him hurriedly.

“Here’s the one for *your* purposes,” he said, emphasising the “your”. “They didn’t teach you at Corpus to read Church-Latin I’m afraid,” he went on. “But this is the ‘Confessions’ in English … the best modern edition … it’s worth twenty pounds … I don’t know how Jones ever picked it up.”

He was beginning to close the glass doors again when Sam made a motion towards the book fallen across the gap. Mr. Evans jerked his arm away but in such a manner as to make it appear that he did so by accident. He *might* have done it by accident for here he was, fumbling as helplessly as ever, with his precious key!

Sam had grown really impatient by this time — Saint Augustine's "Confessions"! Why his father had got that book on a shelf that Sam had known from his childhood, side by side, not with "The Unpardonable Sin", but with Bewick's "Birds". Whatever it had been that he had in his mind when he came here this morning it certainly had not been Saint Augustine. No! It had been just a vague craving to make one more attempt to find some possible attitude, less sceptical than the one he had grown to adopt, towards his father's creed.

He felt indignant with Mr. Evans for rousing his hopes like that and then presenting him with undecipherable parchment folios and with "The Unpardonable Sin".

But he hadn't lived cheek by jowl with a priest of God for nothing. He had wit enough to know why Mr. Evans' knees had knocked together! Either that book was some monstrous Aphrodisiac of Obscenities or it was some pseudo-Biblical fantasy that had turned, or was in process of turning, this poor lonely devil's head. But what was the astonishing fellow doing now? Mr. Evans had put down his candle upon the floor and was on his knees by a carved chest, on the top of which was something tied up in brown paper. The man was cursing under his breath as he tugged at a knot in the string of this large flat parcel.

Sam received the impression that he was under the guidance of a non-human puppet, for whom the least attempt to cope with the obstinacy of matter was an impossible task.

But Mr. Evans summoned him now to his side. He had completely recovered his equilibrium. He was once again the long-winded antiquary.

“Merlinus Ambrosianus”, Sam proceeded to spell out from the cover of the large volume now presented to his view.

“Is this your own make-up?” he asked, using a word that his foster-mother Penny might have used.

“You mean my own composition?” said Mr. Evans, turning to his interlocutor the bland, bewildered, blinking face of a harmless Dominie Sampson.

“Oh, no! My *Vita Merlini,* when it is finished — I have only just begun my collection of notes — will include elaborate details of the Magician’s life that this blundering idiot here does not seem even aware exist. Oh, no! This is a reprint of an eighteenth-century compendium of excerpts from the Bodleian. It has certain documents that they won’t let you take out of the Bodleian. For instance, it has the famous Pontyprid version of the disappearance of Merlin; proving conclusively that the Turning Castle called Carbonek was not at Bardsey, but here at Glastonbury; probably on what you people call Chalice Hill; but it is not an important book. I would never have purchased it if those Oxford fools — they are worse at Oxford than at Cambridge — hadn’t got suspicious of me. I don’t know why it is, Mr. Dekker” — he now scrambled to his feet, and Sam was relieved to see that he relinquished all attempt to tie up those strings again— “but I seem to excite suspicion when I go about. It’s something to do with my appearance. I don’t inspire confidence.”

He stretched himself up to his full height as he spoke. He had re-possessed himself of the candle and also of the volume of Saint Augustine, worth twenty pounds. He now rose and fell in his loose slippers as if performing some species of gymnastic exercise.

“Have *you* any idea why it is? Is it my nose, do you think?” He lifted his hand, apparently quite forgetting that it held the candle, towards this feature of his face; and as he did so he smiled at Sam with such an ingenious, Don Quixote kind of smile, that Sam felt singularly disarmed.

But Mr. Evans shook his head whimsically and hugging the big volume of Saint Augustine and carrying his candle, he led the way up the stairs, back into the shop.

"Well, I must be off, I suppose," murmured Sam vaguely. "I certainly can't afford twenty pounds." After a pause he added rather sadly: "I can't afford twenty shillings."

"I'll *lend* you the book," cried Mr. Evans. "You'll never find another edition as pleasant to read; and if you haven't read it lately you'll get a lot out of it. It's an interesting book; only rather morbid. But you are morbid yourself, just as I am! I should think it would rather suit you."

Sam remained, for what seemed to him an interminable time, staring at the back of the Punchinello pepper-box in the window.

Mr. Evans was engaged in one of his perennial struggles with the inanimate. He was wrapping up the Saint Augustine in cardboard boards, making as he did so such facial contortions as would have been extravagant in a wrestling bout.

When the Welshman at last handed him the parcel, Sam remarked nervously, "Are you very busy this morning, Mr. Evans?" Number Two's representative looked at him in surprise. "Not especially," he said.

"I only asked you," wavered Sam, laying his fingers on the shop-door handle, "because my father wanted me to go to the station to see your friend Crow, who's sending round all these queer announcements. He's sent you a lot, no doubt."

Mr. Evans nodded. "You want me to go with you?" he asked. "I thought it would be nice," returned Sam.

“All right. Why not?” said Mr. Evans. “I’ve got nothing to do but lock the door! People don’t often drop in in the mornings.”

When the two men reached the little office, down by the station, they found John preparing to sally forth on a private expedition of his own. It was difficult to catch his explanation of the purport of this expedition, because the wooden shanty he occupied was invaded at that moment by a violent outpouring of steam from the engine of a luggage-train that had stopped close behind it.

Geard’s office having been the temporary office of a coal company and consequently situated in the goods-yard of the Great Western station, it had been to the accompaniment of the day-long shunting of trucks, and puffing engines that John Crow had composed his extravagant advertisement of their Midsummer Pageant.

As the three men stood together now at the door of the little office, Sam was unable to avoid a sidelong glance at the majestic proportions and almost personal dignity of the great green engine towering above them. The vast Creature carried its name in clear gold letters upon its belly. It was called “Sedgemoor”. It may well be imagined how the appearance of this particular word, in so unexpected a place, gave to all these polished pistons and cog wheels a symbolic significance to the enamoured heart of Sam!

Just for the sake of that word “Sedgemoor” there floated — like the “disarrayed” Loveliness that so tantalised Spenser’s stern Sir Guyon — the white limbs and the tender bosom of Nell, in and out of the iron entrails of this majestic monster.

“I’ve got to go to Tor Field,” John Crow was saying, “before I can get on with my next set of circulars. I *must* see the lie of the land. Why don’t you two come with me? At any rate as far as the Vicarage? I don’t want to drag you any further; but it’ll be easier to talk if we get away from here.”

Sam and Mr. Evans both signified their willingness to accompany him.

"I really came," said Sam, with a disarming candour, "as my father's plenipotentiary. He's read your first batch of circulars and he's anxious to know more about the whole business. You mustn't think it's just impertinent interfering; but my father could really be an immense help to you if he got interested and liked your ideas — as I'm sure he would!"

"Well, I'll tell you how far we've got," said John, "and then you'll have something definite to tell your father. I ought to have called on him about it long ago and asked his advice, before it got as far as it has. Mr. Geard wanted me to. But these last days have slipped by with such speed that I don't seem to have had time for anything.

"What we propose," he went on, as they all three walked slowly up Benedict Street, "is to have a mixed entertainment. Part of it will be just an ordinary Fair, like what you have here, at Michaelmas, only more lively, I hope! Part of it, though, will be quite different from that. We propose to have" — he peered craftily and furtively into the faces of his companions— "a Glastonbury Passion Play."

John had a suspicion in his Isle-of-Ely mind that the words "Passion Play" would excite annoyance in both these men. He forgot the indelible egoism of human beings! Because his own head was just then so full of this scheme of Geard's, it seemed to him that the mere mention of it would arrest lively attention, and evoke either hostility or sympathy. He was not prepared for casual indifference. But casual indifference, tempered by politeness, was precisely what his grand news received.

Sam's brain was full of Nell and of his struggle with his own passion.

Mr. Evans' head was full of the sinister thoughts which his visit to that bookshelf had stirred up.

Thus John’s mentioning the historic Passion of Jesus passed as lightly over both their heads as if he had been referring to a famine in China.

Twice on their walk through the town, from Benedict Street to Chilkwell Street, Mr. Evans was on the point of leaving them and going back to his shop. When they passed the Vicarage gate in Silver Street, Sam was on the verge of bidding them good-bye.

It was one of those occasions when a casual group of people seems held together by some invisible bond, contrary to the individual desire of every person composing the group. The dreamy passivity of both Mr. Evans and Sam was partly due to the fact that their own fate seemed to them to be hanging in the balance. Sam retained an obstinate clutch upon the edition of Saint Augustine which he had borrowed. This he could sweep into the master-current of his feelings more easily than any vague purpose of John Crow’s in Tor Field.

Mr. Evans was able to get rid of every embodiment of his dark temptation, except one single passage in “The Unpardonable Sin,” which some supernaturally crafty devil might have composed especially to devastate and overwhelm him. Certain images called up by this particular passage were so seductive that his knees grew weak as he thought of them. The worst of these images had to do with a killing blow delivered by an iron bar.

The three men had reached the Abbey Barn at the corner of Bere Lane when things came to the worst with Mr. Evans.

The wild and desperate thought seized him … as it had done only once before since he came to Glastonbury … “Why not fling away every scruple?”

His mind seemed at that second absolutely balanced on a taut and twanging wire between two terrible eternities, an eternity of wilful horror, and an eternity of bleached, arid futility, devoid of all life-sap. He could feel the path to the horror, shivering with deadly phosphorescent sweetness. He could feel the path to the renunciation filling his nostrils with acrid dust, parching his naked feet, withering every human sensation till it was hollow as the shard of a dead beetle! The nature of his temptation was such that it had nothing to redeem it. Such abominable wickedness came straight out of the evil in the heart of the First Cause, travelled through the interlunar spaces, and entered the particular nerve in the erotic organism of Mr. Evans which was predestined to respond to it.

The unhappy man now surveyed with a sick eye those symbols of the Evangelists which endow this ancient barn with such a majestic consecration. He felt a sudden loathing for the human spirit, so hampered by matter as to be driven to shifts like this — to the ransacking of the kingdoms of terrestrial life for their clue to the beyond-life.

Drifting forward up Chilkwell Street went the three men; and it was between the Barn and St. Michael's Inn that the bloody sweat of Mr. Evans' mental struggle poured down till he felt actually faint.

"If I yield," he said to himself, "what then?"

Oh, with what blasting clearness he saw that terrible alternative! He saw himself obsessed again with the old bite, the old itch, the old sting, the old insatiable torture of desire —

"The thing has no end," he thought. "The other way leads to places where you can rest. *This* goes on … and on … and on … without an end. The struggle to renounce it is pain. Each day new pain. The pain of unspeakable dreariness. But if I don't struggle against it, it is worse than that. These men don't know whom they are walking with. They don't know! Oh, why should there be such a thing in the world as *this*?"

His mind recoiled from an attempt to envisage the nature of what it was that had first engendered the poison-seed which had attracted to itself so much kindred evil from the heart of the universe.

"If I yield to it — if I yield to it—" he kept repeating; while the image that worked the madness in him slid again into the fibres of his being and nestled, nestled there, like a soft-winged bird. And his imagination, as they drew near St. Michael's Inn, settled itself like a dung-wasp upon the nature of his conscious life if he *did* yield to it. He saw his soul in the form of an unspeakable worm, writhing in pursuit of new, and ever new mental victims, drinking new, and ever new innocent blood. *And he saw the face of this worm.* And it happened to him now that he obtained what is given to few to obtain, an actual certain knowledge of what thoughts they were, if they could be called thoughts, that would come to stir in the darkness under the mask of that face that was no face!

Absolutely alone except for its consciousness of a certain little, round, red eye — the eye of the Evil in the double-natured First Cause — fixed upon it with a bottomless enjoyment of its suffering, the worst of the thoughts of this creature would be the intolerable effort required of it if it were to struggle to escape its doom. It would know that it *could* escape if it struggled. But the effort would be worse than what it suffered. And it would know its doom. It would see Remorse slowly changing its nature and becoming Something Else in the process of self-torture. It would know that its doom was no crashing annihilation, but a death as slow as the disintegration of certain mineral deposits which under chemical pressure gradually lose their identity and are converted into amorphous dust.

They were now passing the entrance to St. Michael's Inn, a simple little tavern, frequented chiefly by the poorer class, and possessed of only two storeys.

As Mr. Evans cast his eye upon the windows of the upper storey he saw the muslin curtains of one of them pulled aside. They were not pulled far … only a little way … and the hand that pulled them remained clutching them tightly, as if in fear of being interfered with. Between these curtains Mr. Evans saw a face looking out at him, apparently the face of a woman. The head of this apparition shocked Mr. Evans and indeed caused him to feel queasy in the pit of his stomach; for it was totally bald. An ordinary observer would have regarded this face as that of an idiot; but Mr. Evans knew better. It was the face of a remorseful sadist. Yes! it was a face of unspeakable cruelty, but the nature of its cruelty had changed. The mind behind that face was still occupied with devices for causing suffering; but the object of these devices was no longer — by the blessed interposition of chance — external to the woman herself.

He imagined her, or rather he saw her, for the woman looked at him and he looked at the woman, slowly torturing herself to death; and this by a process that Mr. Evans completely understood. It was a process of pleasure-killing. He knew the part played in this process by everything in the woman's room. He saw her refusing to pick up crumbs from the floor, although to remove crumbs from the floor was a pleasure to her. He saw her draw the muslin curtains across the window when it rained — and he knew she liked rain — and drawing them back when the sum shone; and he knew she loathed the sun. He could see the chair she longed to sit upon and never allowed herself to sit upon. He could hear the ticking of the clock which she wound up so carefully every night; although it was the ticking of this clock more than anything else that she found intolerable.

Mr. Evans was well aware of the efforts that the people of the house must be making all the while to persuade the woman to cease this maniacal self-punishment, this slow murdering of all the little diurnal sensations of pleasure. But these efforts were doubtless of no avail. Oh, no! They were wrong to call her an idiot. Mr. Evans knew all about her. He knew how she poured water out of her washing-jug over the red coals in her grate the minute she caught herself getting any pleasure from the warmth.

He knew — but he had already lingered ridiculously long behind John and Sam. He must catch them up.

They arrived now at an old rickety gate on their right which led direct into Tor Field where at Michaelmas for a thousand years the great Glastonbury Fair had been held; although of recent years it had been moved to a meadow on the further side of the town.

Sam opened the gate and they all three entered the field. When Sam turned to his companions, after lifting the gate back into place, he was met by a somewhat bewildered, vaguely appealing stare from both of them. It was entirely instinctive, this movement of theirs. It must have been a deep unconscious impulse. Just in this manner, on countless forgotten pilgrimages, men must have turned to some fate-appointed leader, drawn by what Mr. Weatherwax would have called “nat’rel authority”.

It was as if they both secretly in their hearts expected Sam to say: “Follow me up the hill.”

Sam, however, said nothing of the sort. He laid down his parcel on the grass and began searching about at the side of an ancient fallen tree for a certain kind of moss that he knew grew here, of a rather uncommon variety.

John and Mr. Evans both turned their eyes to St. Michael’s Tower. The Tower upon Glastonbury Tor varies in appearance as much as any hill-erection in Wessex. This is due to the extraordinary variety of atmospheric changes which the climate of that district evokes.

On this particular day the weather conditions had assumed a cloud-pattern, an air-pressure, a perspective of light and shadow, such as dwellers in Glastonbury recognized as more natural and normal than any other. Over the surface of the sky extended a feathery white film of vapour. The effect of this filmy screen upon the sun was to make it seem as if it shone through a roof of water. As a matter of fact, this vaporous film reduced the sun-rays to so mild a diffusion that they ceased to be rays. The sun's orb, thus shorn of its outpouring of radiance, came to resemble the disk of the moon. The great Luminary was so reduced by this film of clouds that, like Agamemnon in the toils of Clytemnestra, it could hardly be said to shine at all. It peered helplessly forth over the green meadows of Avalon; so that stubborn Christian spirits, such as Mat Dekker, had the satisfaction of being able to confiront the great Light-Lord, and stare him full in the face without blinking.

The result of this veiling of the sun was that only a watery suffusion of liquid luminousness flowed over every object that emerged into prominence at all, over every object that had any form or any outline.

All were equally blurred and softened. Thus it came about that a moon-like circle of pallid whiteness looked forth upon a world from which every harsh projection, whether of stone, or wood, or metal, or horn, or scale, or feather, or bone, or rock, had been obliterated; a world of flowing curves and sliding shadows, a world of fluctuating shapes and melting contours.

What this veiling of the sun further did was to heighten the effect of colour. Colour as a phenomenon in the world became doubly important. Every shade, every richness, every variety of colour, lent itself to this colour-invasion of the kingdom of form.

Thus as these three men stood together at the foot of Glastonbury Tor the grass of the hillside seemed of an incredibly rich depth. It was like a mounting wave of palpable greenness into which, if you began to walk, your feet would sink down.

“My idea is,” said John at length, when Sam had risen up from his search for mosses on the underside of the prostrate tree, “my idea is to have the regular Fair down here, on this level ground. But the Miracle Play, or whatever you like to call it, I want to have on the slope of the hill, with that Tower as my background. Do you catch my idea?”

“Let’s sit down a second,” said Sam, taking his seat on the fallen tree.

“What I want to do,” said John, looking around him, “is to try and realise this place with a crowd of people moving about, and booths and tents and bands and so on. I can’t imagine it! But, after all, when you cross any ordinary fair-field at *this* time of the year, it’s impossible to see it as it is when it’s crowded with people.”

He seated himself by Sam’s side as he spoke and Mr. Evans sat down, too. The position of the three men when thus seated was as follows: John was nearest the Tor; that is to say, southward of the others; Mr. Evans was nearest Chalice Hill; that is to say, northward of the others; while Sam had the middle place, opposite that spot in the horizon where the gap called Havyatt breaks the ancient line of trenches, thrown up to repel the Danes.

Mr. Evans sat starkly upright on their log. His black overcoat hung about his thin knees like a priest’s cassock. His black bowler hat was pulled so low down over his forehead as to resemble the hat of a Jewish comedian on a music-hall stage. He leaned forward on a nondescript cane, picked up anywhere, but he bent his head over his folded hands as if he had been a chieftain out of Ossian’s poetry, brooding over some irrevocable doom.

Sam wore a very rough, thick, Norfolk jacket. His knickerbockers were stained, worn threadbare, very faded, his woollen stockings were slipping down, and as they slipped they no longer concealed his heavy woollen drawers. Sam’s cap had been pushed back off his forehead, and his wrinkled, animal physiognomy scowled forth in a puzzled and nonplussed protest at a world that contained both good and evil to a degree beyond the fathoming of his simple spirit.

As for John, he had bought by Mary's advice an overcoat at Wollop's which was really a bargain. Not that this new overcoat destroyed his trampish appearance, but it made him look more like a thief or a rogue or even a furtive-eyed cardsharper than he had done when tidied up for his English adventure by his French grisette. Mary's attempts to give him a gentlemanly air had only given him a shabby-genteel air; an air that was very disconcerting to the girl, and for which she could not quite account.

John looked, in fact, exactly like the tricky showman he was, calculating the possibilities of his Midsummer Circus. The overcoat which Mary had chosen for him hung on his lean figure like a garment he had stolen. It was as if some well-dressed man, passing down a road, had tossed that coat over the wooden crossbeam of a dilapidated Scarecrow. He sat sideways, in a hunched-up posture, prodding the earth with his hazel-stick and looking first at one of his companions and then at the other. Every now and then, however, he glanced stealthily at St. Michael's Tower on the top of the Tor, as if that were a Fourth Person in this colloquy, whose temper, just as incalculable as that of the other two, had to be kept an eye upon, lest it should make trouble.

It was after one of these surreptitious glances that he suddenly broke out — "You see that ledge over there? That's where I'm going to have my Crucifixion."

The terrible word came with a shock to the ears of the other two men.

"Will it be allowed?" asked Mr. Evans.

"How do you mean, 'allowed,' " said John.

"By the police, Mr. Evans means," said Sam, "and by public opinion. You must remember, Crow, this is a Protestant country. You seem to have forgotten how they killed Abbot Whiting on this very hill."

"I really meant by the Glastonbury people themselves," explained Mr. Evans. "But it's true they let that devilish king kill their Abbot here."

"He was a Welshman like you," said John.

Mr. Evans surprised them by the depth of the sigh he gave at this point.

"What a sigh was there!" quoted John. "The heart is sorely charged."

Mr. Evans sighed again.

"Whose is not?" he muttered.

Sam was now lost in heavy ponderings, as he stared at the brown-paper parcel containing Saint Augustine which he had tossed down on the grass when he began searching for that specimen of moss.

His was not a nature to be carried away by any sudden idea. The feelings that had been fomenting within him of late had only been stirred up. They had not been created by his passion for Nell. But the girl's having gone back to Zoyland's bed had been a shock to his deepest pride; and by his new gesture of complete renunciation he was, in some subtle way, recovering his threatened life-illusion.

As for Mr. Evans a most singular idea had just entered that Roman skull under the Jewish-comedian black hat. Why should he himself not play the part of the Crucified in the blasphemous mummery of this mountebank?

In the agitation of this thought Mr. Evans actually took off his bowler hat and standing up on his feet stretched out his arms in the manner of a crucified person. That one of his hands held his hat while he did this was nothing to him. He was startled by the magnetic wave of emotion that poured through him as he made this sudden gesture.

Sam did not notice what he was doing. John thought he had got cramped and was stretching himself.

Mr. Evans let his arms drop and addressed John in an eager voice.

“I’ll go over to your terrace, Crow,” he said, “and play the Crucified for you; so that you can see how it looks.”

John was delighted with this offer.

“Isn’t that splendid!” he cried in a high-pitched tone. “Bravo! That’s the *very* idea! How decent of you, Evans! What a good thought!”

Sam regarded this transaction with a very uneasy eye. If he found it hard to say the Creed with the simplicity of his father, anything that smacked of blasphemy brought an evil taste into his mouth.

Mr. Evans walked up the hill till he reached the grassy terrace. This time he put down both his hat and his cane. He also buttoned up tightly his long black overcoat. In this guise he raised himself to his full height, flung back his head and stretched out his arms.

John leapt to his feet in an ecstasy.

“Wonderful! It’s wonderful!” he cried. He came hurrying up to Mr. Evans.

“Seriously, Sir,” he blurted out, “you’ll *have* to play Christ in my Pageant. You will! You will! You’re not exactly the *type* ... but that doesn’t matter a bit. Oh, you will! You will! Why, you’ll beat that Oberammergau person hollow.”

Mr. Evans picked up his hat and nondescript cane and advanced hurriedly to meet John. In his secret heart he was astonished and even puzzled by the feelings that again poured through him as he made the terrible symbolic gesture.

“I … don’t … mind,” he panted in a hoarse voice. “Only you’ll have to make it as real as you can.”

John regarded his friend through shrewd, screwed-up, meditative eyelids.

“Oh, we’ll make it real enough,” he said. But he was too occupied with an imaginative picture of that future scene to care very much what he was promising Mr. Evans.

“Come on up to the top of the hill, you two, won’t you?” he pleaded now.

“Can I leave this book here?” said Sam, looking first at Saint Augustine and then at Mr. Evans.

The Welshman surveyed the parcel which he had done up so carefully. He evidently remembered that it was worth twenty pounds.

“I’ll carry it,” he said. “Boys might come. You never know.”

The fear of “boys” was one of Mr. Evans’ peculiarities. In fact he was nervously scared of all children.

But Sam tucked the big parcel under his own arm.

“It’s not heavy,” he said.

It must have been about thirty minutes after twelve when they all reached the top of the Tor. They surveyed the great entrance to the hollow tower and John tapped with his stick at the boardings with which it had been closed up.

“Mayor Wollop had *that* done,” he remarked savagely. “Old Shepherd found a boy and girl making love inside; and that was enough for our precious procurator. Boarded up it must be; so that the king should not have to fight his enemies with bastards!”

“Let’s sit down for a minute,” said Sam.

They all obeyed him, sitting side by side on the grass, with their backs leaning against the western flank of the cold, slate-coloured base of the tower. Before them to the westward stretched the green water meadows, among which, a mile or so out of town, could be detected the wide Lake Village Fen and even the little shanty of Abel Twig; while to the southwest, beyond the fens, rose the blue-grey ridge of the low Polden hills. All these were softly suffused by the cloud-latticed vapour-filmed sun; a sun which, though riding at high noon, lacked the potency to dominate what it bathed with that glamorous and watery light.

Here under St. Michael's Tower sat these three figures, the lean shabby-genteel John, the hulking weather-bleached Sam, the black-coated Mr. Evans — all atheists towards the life-giving Sun-God, and all expanding now, in their thoughts, their feelings, their secretest hopes, because of the victory of vapour over light and of dampness over heat!

A landscape of green and grey, a landscape with all hard outlines obliterated, was what just suited these three fantastical human beings. A common relaxation, a common inertia, a common languor descended upon them as they sat there, gazing down on that pastoral scene.

And as they sat there they each thought of a particular girl. They thought of these three feminine identities so intently that by the automatic preoccupation of their feelings the souls of all three girls were drawn towards them; three wraithlike eidola! Ah! How little do the feminine creatures of the human race realise what long journeys they are compelled to take … what long, rapid journeys … swifter than light … under the compulsive magic of their men's imaginations!

To the supernatural eyes of that veiled sun as he dreamed his indescribable planetary thoughts, vaguely hostile and vaguely menacing, one of these feminine forms came naked to the waist — that was Nell; one came naked from the thighs downward — that was Mary; and one came garmented like a nun, from head to foot in black — and that was Cordelia!

Together these three men represented — in Remorse, in Renunciation, in Roguery — everything that separates our race from nature. Their three intelligences floated there, on that hilltop, above their clothed and crouching skeletons, like wild demented birds that had escaped from all normal restraint.

Any student of ancient mythology might well have fancied that Gwyn-ap-Nud, with a host of his elementals, finding these three detached intelligences — Remorse, Renunciation, Roguery — separated from natural human life — had cast his immemorial spell over them; that oldest of supernatural spells against which St. Michael's aid had been so often implored in vain.

"What slaves we all are," remarked Mr. Evans suddenly, "to traditional ideas! People say we ought to be always admiring Nature. God help me! There are endless occasions when I loathe Nature. I think the truth is that God is outside Nature … altogether outside … creator of it … but often loathing it as much as I do! I feel sometimes that Matter is entirely evil … and that to cleanse our minds we must destroy its power … destroy … its power."

He repeated these last words in his most serious tone; that tone which John had noticed when they first met; that tone in which each word seemed torn out of him like the deep-burrowing dock root.

Sam's hulking form swayed like a gnarled thorn bush in a high wind.

"I protest against what you've just said, Evans, with every instinct I have! That's the essence of the Incarnation … that's the …"

He had become so excited that without knowing what he did he was plucking great handfuls of the turf-grass from between his huge thick-soled boots.

"That's what they really killed the Abbot for," he went on, "because he wouldn't let anything come between him and It. It's the whole secret. It's where the most commonplace Christians can refute the greatest sages. Matter must be redeemed; and only Christ can redeem it. *Christ,* I say; not Jesus. *Verbum caro factum est.* Your making Matter evil undoes the whole thing. It's the Incarnation that transforms Nature. It has been done once.

Nothing can reverse it. Something has come into it from outside; from that Outside you talk about. But It's *in it* now! You can't get rid of it. The simplest person has an instinct about this, wiser than the greatest philosophers. Something has taken up Matter into Itself. Two and two can now make five! It's the Thing Outside breaking into our closed circle. And every atom of Matter feels it. Matter is no longer separate from Spirit. It has become the living flesh of Spirit. *Verbum caro factum est*!" Sam stopped. He gazed with confused surprise at the little weeds he had grubbed up in his agitation. He began planting them again in the hole he had made. He squeezed them into the yielding sod. He pressed them down with his strong thumbs; while his retreating chin, with all its quivering muscles, seemed to echo his discourse, in a mute ripple of the Matter whose redemption he had been defending.

John regarded him with intense curiosity, as if he had been Balaam's ass suddenly endowed with the gift of speech. "I suppose," John said, "you would call the Mass this kind of miracle?"

Sam's reply to this was a vague groan.

"Maybe you're right," he muttered. "Maybe you're right."

"I suppose," said John to Sam, "*you* don't want to come to our rehearsals of the Miracle Play? The chap I'd meant for the central figure will be glad enough to give it up to Evans. Shall I make the lad who is doing St. Peter hand that part over to *you?*" Sam felt at that moment as if he were a child whose secretest and most private game, a game he'd never revealed to a living soul, had become the sport of a noisy dormitory of jeering boys. He lowered his freckled face and drew down the corners of his mouth. Three times he swallowed his saliva; and then he said with a forced unnatural chuckle, "I'll pay the entrance-fee and come and see your Circus, Crow. But nothing you could give me, *nothing*; not all the fortune of your Rector of Northwold, would make me take part in it.”

“Oh, don’t say that, Dekker! What makes you say that?”

“We’ll … call … it … shyness … Crow,” said Sam slowly, but in a tone that was decisive.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Mr. Evans rising to his feet, “I’m afraid I must get back to my shop! There’s always a chance of visitors after lunch and it’s half-past one already.”

“Don’t you have lunch yourself, then?” enquired John. “I was just going to suggest that we all have lunch together at that little tea-shop in George Street—”

Mr. Evans pondered. He felt very hungry and there was nothing in his larder except half a roll and a small piece of butter.

Sam had felt so restless that morning that he had told his father not to expect him back to their mid-day dinner. If he hadn’t found Mr. Evans in his shop he would have probably gone off on a long solitary walk — perhaps in the direction of Queen’s Sedgemoor and perhaps not.

He got up slowly upon his feet, as also did John. They were all three erect now under the tower of St. Michael; that same tower against which the murderous Tudor’s executioners had leaned as they prepared for butchering Abbot Whiting.

Sam spoke up boldly.

“You two have given me so much to … to think about … that I … that I shall … have to walk off … my excitement. I wonder …” he hesitated for a second with bowed head and working chin. Then his words came out with a rush. “ … I wonder if you’d mind leaving this book at the Vicarage as you go by?”

There was no difficulty thrown in Sam’s way by either Mr. Evans or John, and he strode off alone down St. Michael’s Hill. In order to leave them abruptly while it was easy for him to do so, he descended the Tor by its eastern slope. He had indeed stated no less than the exact truth when he said he wanted to walk off his excitement.

His gaze swept the countryside as he climbed down into the valley. He glanced at Pennard Hill and Folly Wood and at the fields and hedges round Stony Stratton. He glanced at the low-lying downs near Chesterblade; and thought to himself— “That’s the source of the Alham; and where the Alham runs into the Brue is only a mile south of Hornblotton.”

Thus was the little river Alham compelled to be the bearer of a lover’s memory. For it was at Hornblotton that Sam had ridden with Nell when at that circus, so fatally remembered by Penny Pitches, he had taken her on the roundabout.

When he reached the valley he struck across country heedless as to lanes or paths. His instinct for geography was only second to that of his father; and it was easy for him by following the meadows beyond the town-reservoir, between Norwood Farm and Havyatt, to reach the village of West Pennard without touching any road. Here he turned due north; and still crossing every hedge and ditch with the same animal-like straightness of direction, he made his way over Hearty Moor, across the tracks of the Burnham and Evercreech railroad, till he came to Whitelake River at Whitelake Bridge.

This he reached when the watch in his pocket pointed at seventeen minutes past three. He had no idea what the time was. In fact he did not give the matter a thought. His thoughts followed one another like horses round a treadmill. Anyone reading his thoughts, and contemplating the motion of the hands of his watch in his pocket might have been tempted to an extremely deterministic view of life. The mainspring in the one case was made of metal, and the other case made of the brutish sting of desire; but there was in both cases the same monotonous revolution around predetermined figures of demarcation.

The filmy screen that hid the sun had grown thicker since high noon. The surface of the small river reflected now what appeared to be a very cloudy sky and the willows and alders were not mirrored there at all. Staring at the water, he tried to summon back every link in the dragging chain that had pulled him to this place. He meditated on the curious difference which exists — when you consider the life of a river — between the outlines of reflections in its flow and the outlines of shadows.

He sat down on a willow stump and stared at the river as intently as if it held a secret for him that at all costs must be drawn forth. At what point, since he stood by Mr. Evans' side in that queer basement of Old Jones' shop, had the determination seized upon him to come out here? Was it when he was looking at that surprising volume … he could envisage its dirty-whitish modern binding now … that fell across the gap in the shelf left by the extraction of St. Augustine? Was it when he was looking for that "fairy-cup" moss by the log on which the three of them had sat down? Was it at the very moment when he had that sudden inspiration about the secret of Christianity and the redemption of Matter?

The willow stump on which he sat now had one living sprout; and from this sprout a little cluster of emerald-green buds had burst forth. These buds now became a portion of what he was feeling and thinking. One conclusion certainly had formulated itself in his slowly moving mind, during that ascent of the Tor; the conclusion, namely, that it was unnecessary to trouble himself one way or the other about his father's Creed; since the essence of the thing lay in the conduct of life rather than in any intellectual doctrine.

“She said you had the look of a saint.” What a funny remark that was of Red Robinson’s; and how hard to associate it with any impression he had ever received from Crummie Geard! Well, the look of a saint or the look of a satyr, he knew what he could not help doing now! For good or for evil he must see Nell Zoyland that day.

He got up from the willow stump, crossed the bridge, and began tramping westward, along the opposite bank, which, at that portion of the river’s progress, resembled a natural towpath.

When John and his Welsh companion came out of their tea-shop on George Street, they encountered Tom Barter. John had taken the opportunity of carrying further his sudden inspiration as to using “my good friend Evans” as the central figure of his profane Passion Play. The idea of this appealed to a vein of sheer devilry in his impulsive nature. The less there appeared of the Christ-like in the degenerate Roman physiognomy of his Celtic ally the better pleased and the more tickled did this nerve of roguery in him become!

Having agreed to the wild scheme in his “second manner,” the Welshman was now prepared, it seemed, to throw into the notion all the ponderous, pedantic weight of his “first manner”; and the more he talked about it with John the fuller of dramatic possibilities did the plan seem for John’s lively imagination.

But Mr. Evans went off to his shop now; and the two old friends, of the far-off Northwold days, were left together in that drowsy Glastonbury street. It came back to John, as he drifted by his friend’s side towards the office of Philip’s factory, how full of this man’s personality every glittering, rippling reach of that “big river” had been. It came back to him how he had thought of Tom as he stood with Mary at the mill-pond looking at those great salmon-trout. It came to him how he had recalled, without realising the full import of it, their vicious play that hot Sunday afternoon at the bottom of the boat! Vicious with every sort of East-Anglian sensuality had they both been; and John was surprised at himself, glancing furtively at Tom's stolid profile, to find what an intense thrill it still gave him, what a delicious, voluptuous sensation, to feel himself weak and soft, where Tom was strong and hard!

Their way took them — John knew he ought to return to *his* office but he simply could not tear himself away from his friend — past some of the worst of the Glastonbury slums. These were altogether minor slums compared with those of any big city; but such as they were they were not a pretty sight. Here in these back alleys lived the failures in the merciless struggle of life. At this present moment many of the people who lived in these houses were men and women who would have found employment if Philip Crow's factories had been working full-time.

The sight of the two leisurely men, both of them absolutely sure of two more pleasant meals that day, and of good clean sheets and a quiet bedroom to sleep in, when that day was over, strolling past, did not enhance the peace of mind of such dwellers in "loop'd and windowed raggedness" as chanced to watch them go by.

They had scarcely got past this quarter when they were hailed from behind; and on turning round found Dave Spear hurrying after them. Dave's cheeks were less rosy than usual and there was a dangerous glint in his eye.

"Do you mind if I walk with you a step or two?" he gasped, panting a little, like a dog that has been overtaxed.

"I'm always glad to see you, Spear," said John. "You know Mr. Barter, of course?"

"Why I troubled you, Crow," said Dave, when he had nodded gravely at Tom Barter, and they had moved on together, "was that I've just been reading some of your circulars. They're very good, man. They're topnotch in their way, let me tell you! And I'm a connoisseur, being a Communist, of the art of propaganda."

"I'm glad you like 'em," said John, mightily pleased at this unexpected praise from so experienced an expert.

"But what I want you to do, what *we* want you to do" — it was not clear to John whether this "we" referred to Persephone or to the Bristol headquarters— "is to mention in your circulars that in addition to her *other* interests, your town here is going to try the experiment of running a municipal factory. You might mention it as an important experiment in the economic life of the town and suggest that visitors come to see it."

John's eyes gleamed with malicious delight at hearing these words.

"Certainly, certainly, certainly!" he cried eagerly. "I'll have what you say printed in my new set that I'm getting out next week."

"Would it be a philistine thing, Mr. Spear," put in Tom Barter in a casual and supercilious tone, "if I enquired *where* this municipal factory of yours *is*?"

"We'll have it in working order by the time Mr. Geard's visitors are really here. You'll know where it is *then,* Mr. Barter."

John looked a little glum at this remark.

"At first we *did* think of June the first," he said, "but we decided that it would be better to have more time to prepare. I'm in favour … for reasons of my own … of St. John's Day."

They came in sight of the factory where Barter's office was. There was a wooden gate leading to a narrow lane between high walls here, which was the access to his labours usually employed by this Norfolk manager of a Somerset mill.

The others leaned over this gate with him for a moment out of politeness; for he didn't wish them to come any further. There was a very wretched house adjoining this gate, an old house, probably built during the Wars of the Roses, for its stone buttresses and lintels still carried deeply cut Gothic foliations, and its crumbling walls were thick as those of a castle. But its rafters were rotting, its thatch dilapidated and full of holes, its broken panes stuffed with rags, and so many bricks were missing from the top of its chimney that one interior side, covered with black soot, was open to the air.

Out of the interior of this house there emerged at equal intervals a low moaning sound, a sound that had something in it that was peculiarly disconcerting.

"Hear that?" said Barter in a flat, toneless voice.

"Is anything wrong?" said John.

"Oh, no … all is in order," said Dave Spear. "I heard this noise the other night, Mr. Barter, when I was calling on the people round here. All is quite regular. No one is being tortured. Oh no! nothing is wrong. It's only an old woman who can't afford any comfort, dying of cancer. I can even tell you, gentlemen, her name. Her name is Tittie Petherton. She is not entirely unhappy, in spite of that sound; for her only fear is to die in the hospital. She'd be in the hospital now if the Vicar didn't pay someone to look after her. I've been in there. I've seen her. And though she can't help making that noise her mind is reasonably satisfied. She has no fear of death. All she fears is the hospital. Our good cousin Philip would have sent her there, too, if the Vicar hadn't come to her rescue. Oh, no, gentlemen, all is quite in order."

"Aren't you making rather too much of one sad case, Spear?" said Barter.

Dave Spear gripped the gate with both his hands and began to shake it. This proceeding arrested the full attention of John who was one who always took note of such manifestations of sudden feeling.

“Besides, my good Sir,” Barter went on, “your Communistic State wouldn’t prevent people from getting cancer.”

A curious thing occurred then; … or at least to the insatiable nervous attention of John it was curious … for it was as if this short, broad-shouldered, sturdy, little man, without any overcoat, and in a neat, navy-blue suit of serge, spoke in a voice like the voice of a terrible prophet. John, for his part, never forgot that moment. He was himself standing close to his friend Barter. He even had his arm over Barter’s shoulder and the smell of Barter’s leather coat was in his nostrils. But what he kept his eyes upon, as he stood like that, was a broken corbel that must once have supported some kind of stone shaft, belonging perhaps to a vanished archway between this ruined house and another house. This disfigured fragment of stone came to resemble, as John gazed at it, a face whose eyes were at the end of its snout.

“Maybe it *was* a face once,” he thought, “a gargoyle-face, deliberately carved by some mad workman in those old days to ease his mind of some frightful thing.”

Every time that the moaning sound from the interior of the house came again, an invisible hand upon his twitching cheek seemed to turn his face towards the petrified snout, endowed with eyes.

“Come now, Spear, *that* really is going a bit too far!” were the words that lay, like a tedious meaningless scripture, upon the counter, so to speak, of Tom Barter’s practical mouth. But he could not utter them in a convincing tone.

“Come now, Spear!” he began again. And then he flung out “Going a bit too far!” And then his voice could be heard in a sort of stage aside— “Now, Spear, *that* really *is*—”

“The pleasure we get from chaos,” Spear was saying, “is not a patch upon the pleasure we get in reducing chaos to order. Life will never be really pruned and clipped and trimmed, whatever we do to it. It will always brim over and escape us. The Communistic State is the only way that’s ever been found for using *force* on the side of the weak. The whole system of human life depends on two things; on work and on pain. Communism takes our power of work and our power of bearing pain and puts these two, like the immortal horses of Achilles, into the harness of the State. Politics are intolerable to all sensitive people. But why are they so? Because they don’t touch the real quick, the real nerve, the real ganglia, of the situation! The situation is not political. It’s economic. It isn’t want of a Napoleon. It’s want of a world-machine, run by impersonal force, on behalf of the Weak. When I say ‘weak’ I mean the poor and the children of the poor. Money is strength, power, comfort, leisure, thought, philosophy, art, health, liberty, freedom, faith, hope, peace, rest. Money is sleep. Money is love. Money is ease from pain. Those who deny this are lower than men or higher than men. They are rogues or madmen. They are liars or madmen. They are fools or madmen. Money is the blood of life. Life is created out of work and pain. Life is defended by force. The Communist State is the *organised force* of humanity. Evolution has been fumbling, groping, staggering, through blood, through tears, through torture, to this organising of human force to human ends. Evolution has created money and it has created the Communistic State to monopolise money. Money — the engine of life — is an engine of death when it is in the hands of individuals. Put it in the hands of the Communist State and whatever blunders are committed the whole situation is transformed! The individual has no more right to own money than he has to own earth, air, water, fire. We are all a herd of gibbering monkeys in a madhouse of inherited superstitions; and the maddest and wickedest of all these superstitions is the idea that private people have a right to be rich! *No one* has a right to be rich. It is crime to be rich. It is a perversion, an obscenity, a monstrosity. It is an offence against nature, against intelligence, against good taste. To be rich is to be a moral leper. To be rich is to be on the side of Cancer!"

" — a bit too far, Spear!" came the voice of Barter, like the sound of a rain-gutter dripping on a tin roof.

"I wish Mary could have heard that," thought John; and he found himself taking his arm from his friend's shoulder and feeling a certain nausea from the smell of the leather jacket.

His nerves were so much on edge at that moment, that, as Barter quietly unlatched the gate and let himself through, he burst out as if they had been alone:

"Don't forget, Tom, that, if you get fed up with Philip, Geard would willingly take you over. You've only to say the word! Only to say it, Tom!"

GEARD OF GLASTONBURY

THE TWILIGHT OF that day had turned into darkness before Tom Barter returned to his lodgings in High Street to wash his hands preparatory to his going out to supper. Tom very rarely had a chance to enjoy any tea. His diurnal relaxation was his mid-day dinner at the Pilgrims', which he relished with the appetite of a fox-hunter. The waitresses there, with every one of whom, especially with a girl called Clarissa Smith, he had a separate and complete understanding, rivalled each other in catering to his taste. Tom's taste was all for freshly cooked meats and substantial puddings. Any petticoat fluttering about these solid viands was sauce enough for him; and when he blew off the froth from the top of his pewter flagon of brown Taunton ale and followed with his eyes these buxom attendants, passing in and out of the old red-baize swing-door into the mediæval kitchen, a massive sensual satisfaction, worthy of any of those tall Vikings who grounded their keels at Wick, filled the veins of this short, broad-shouldered man.

Tom was no adventurer like his tyrant vagabond-friend John. He was no devil-may-care swashbuckler like my lord's bastard. He would have made a first-rate sergeant-major of a regiment, a first-rate boatswain of a ship. Something … a certain pride, a certain fling, a certain chivalrous magnanimity … had been knocked out of him forever by those bullies in Gladman's House at Greylands. They had found Tom Barter a frank gentleman — they had left him a secretive cad. It was only with John, whose friendship antedated those Greylands days, that this reserved man let himself go; only with John and with any petticoat of the lower classes!

How often had he stared into the bottom of his pewter-pot, where a little brown liquid made a fairy moat around the bubbles of white froth! “I have not got a soul in the world that really cares,” he would think then, “except John; and he’s nothing much to rely on!” and then he would sigh, put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, where he kept his silver, and place a sixpence beside his plate. Aye! but how he did sympathise with these working-girls: Oh, what kind, sweet creatures! Oh, what pretty ways of making a man feel that he was a man!

As he entered his comfortless room at the top of a saddler’s shop, and poured out the water from the bare white jug and selected the thin little bit of Pears soap, which he had been using for a fortnight, rather than the big new square yellow piece, with such hard edges, that his landlady had put there this morning, it came over him that he really was leading rather a desolate sort of life. “But if I can get Tossie Stickles to undress for me somewhere or other, or even to let me play with her in one of those spinneys beyond Bushey Combe, it’ll make up for a lot! It’s certain that if I were married and had a nice fireside and my books and a garden, I couldn’t enjoy myself with these girls any more. And they are so sweet and unexacting! Oh, they’re so different from these finicking bitches who think themselves ladies!”

He ran down the stairs and out into the street. The remainder of the hours from now on, till he was asleep in his chilly room above the saddler’s, seemed invariably to fall below the average of normal human experience. The day did not become actually miserable, but it was far from gathering any glow or lustre as it waned. It was just a day dying out; of no more interest, of no more importance, than a bonfire of cabbage stalks, over which some one has thrown a bucket of water.

The bruise in his nature never hurt him except when confronted by a man or by a woman of his own class. It was this bruise which Mary, all unwitting, must have struck again and again. It was because of this bruise that he had never dared, in the whole course of their platonic friendship, to attempt to make love to Mary or even to kiss her. “Will you marry me?” he had blurted out one day, on the side of Tor Hill, and Mary — reacting from her morbid slavery to Miss Drew — had murmured a reluctant “Yes, if you want me to, Tom!”

Once in the street today, Barter made his way, as usual, not to the cheerful tea-shop in George Street, where John and Evans had had lunch, nor to the one presided over by Sally’s mother in High Street, but to a common little restaurant called the Abbey Café where a waitress whose name was Joan brought him a plate of fish and potato chips. This overworked attendant resembled that Joan in the song, “While greasy Joan doth keel the pot,” and no other educated man in Somersetshire would have flirted with her as Barter did. But it was but a poor pleasure he got from this — indeed, night after night he would swallow his ill-chosen supper and answer the wench in sulky monosyllables while he stayed on and on; merely putting off the moment when he had to face the sight of his cold bed, his portmanteau on the floor, and the picture of Tel-El-Kebir over his fireless grate. Tonight, he managed, by his extraordinary power of sympathy with the economic side of a waitress’s life, to put off his moment of rising from that hard seat at that dirty table-cloth till nearly nine o’clock.

Again in the lighted street, he was seized with a sudden loathing for that wretched bedroom of his, and something like a spasm of bitter distaste for his whole life in Glastonbury.

“I’ll go and see Mary,” he thought. And then he thought, “What’s the use?” But when he came opposite the darkened windows of the saddler’s and heard, through the open side door, the sound of his landlady's voice scolding her husband, his feet began automatically taking him to the Abbey House.

When Lily Rogers opened the door to his ring, she smiled more pleasantly upon him than she would have done upon any other surprise-visitor at that late hour. Barter had long been the chief favourite, out of all the gentlemen in Glastonbury, with Miss Drew's servants, just as he was a great *persona grata* with Miss Drew herself.

"We've got company in the drawing-room," Lily said. "Mr. Dekker has brought that man Geard here, to see Miss Drew. She never would have seen him if the Vicar hadn't told her it was her duty. They're all in there now! Would you prefer that I called Miss Crow out, Sir, and brought the lamp into the diningroom?"

Barter nodded; but seemed in no hurry to dismiss Lily, who, in the dim hall-light and in her black dress and white apron, looked a sweet picture of domestic security.

"How's Louie?" he asked. "Have you been up to The Elms lately?" he asked. "You two had such pretty hats on last Sunday," he said. "One day I must take you up in the air with me," he said. "Would Louie be frightened?" he asked.

It was with a rosy spot in each of her soft cheeks that the girl finally escaped, and with the utmost discretion ushered Mary into the dining-room, lit the candles there, and closed the door softly upon them. Once back in the kitchen with Louie, she burst out:

"It's that nice-looking Mr. Barter, I declare, that Miss Mary ought to marry! What's the use of her keeping company and acting soft with a queer one like that Mr. Crow? Mr. Barter is a real gentleman, he is. She's gone to

him now — don’t make such a noise, Lou! Maybe if you stopped gollumping round on those creaky shoes we could hear them talk in there.”

The sisters Rogers advanced into the passage and stood listening. Not otherwise might a pair of white doves, perched upon a roof, have watched their young lady’s casement close tight behind an adventurous gallant. Lily had forgotten, in her appreciation of the sly Barter, to fetch the lamp she had referred to, so it was by no brighter light than that of two tall silver candles standing between several vases of daffodils, that the two natives of Norfolk exchanged their confidences over the dying fire. Barter sat in the faded leather arm-chair of Miss Drew’s father, while Mary crouched on the rug at his feet.

The girl was sadder than usual that night. She spread out her strong hands over the fading coals and lifted her chin towards the figure of the man in the arm-chair. The flickering glow irradiated her dusky hair, touched the sad circles under her grey eyes, fell upon her parted lips and made her white teeth shine.

“No, she isn’t as pretty as she was,” thought Barter and a shameless comparison between what it would be like to have Mary “between him and the wall” and Lily Rogers, passed through his mind.

“My goodness!” he thought. “But I suppose Lily would be like a cold flower-stalk; whereas this girl—”

“I’ve come to think I’m one of the biggest fools in town,” he remarked.

“Why, Tom?” she murmured wearily.

“I was an ass not to rush you off, Mary, and get married before old John turned up! You’d have had your friend Tom, wouldn’t you, you lovely creature?”

“What’s wrong with you, Tom?” she asked abruptly. He looked at her sharply.

"Nothing," he said, "what are you talking about? Nothing's wrong with me."

"When I think of your life sometimes," she said, "between the office and that awful room of yours, I can hardly bear it." This she said gravely and intensely, looking in his face; and every syllable of it was true; for this man had become like a brother and more than a brother to her; and yet, as she looked at him now, in that familiar, grey office suit, actually wearing a purple tie she had chosen for him at Wollop's, when John was no more than a name, she could have found in her heart to wish that she had never seen him; never known that such a person as Tom Barter was in the world. It was an odd feeling to look up at him now, sitting there so easy and natural in old Mr. Drew's leather chair, and say to herself— "There's the man who couldn't bring himself to marry me!"

He had been, all along, a fatal apparition in her life. Yes, he was an unconscious nemesis; although their relations had been so innocent.

She remembered an occasion at Thorpe, near Norwich, when, sitting with her mother by the river bank watching a barge go by, the older woman had suddenly said, "You're a deep nature, Mary. Your danger won't come from any little ripples on the tide of your life. It will come from large things bearing down — like that barge."

This man sitting there opposite her now was just like that barge on their native river, which her mother had noticed, coming so strongly and massively forward with the tide.

"It is no good hiding it from each other, Tom," she began now, "we old friends had better be frank with each other. Neither of us are happy in our life. You're sick to death of running Philip's business for him and flying his plane for him. You long to be on your own; to whistle Philip and his affairs down the wind and be your own master. I'm bored to death by Miss Drew and everything in this house. Sometimes I think of leaving John and all the rest of them here, and of getting a place somewhere else. Glastonbury doesn't suit me any better than it suits you; though I *have,* I confess, come to like these ruins a *little* better than we did at the beginning. Do you remember how we hated it all, Tom?"

Her eyes shone so strangely now as she looked up at him, that the wild idea came into Barter's head that if he pressed her in one grand *coup* she might even, out of pique for John's neglect, throw John over and allow herself to be carried off by him, carried back to Norfolk perhaps, if he dared to chance it!

"No," she went on, "no, old friend. You and I are both pretty miserable, this fine Spring! Come, confess to me, Tom, wasn't it because you were feeling lonely that you came to me tonight? I'm feeling lonely myself, to tell you the truth, and it does me good to see your solid, old Norfolk face in this weird place. What would we not give, Tom, you and I, for a breath of real east wind, coming up sharp and salt from the North Sea?"

His face had something about it at this moment so like the face of a reticent school-boy who wants to cry but is ashamed to cry, that, moved by an impulse that surprised herself, she scrambled to her feet and coming up to him sat down on the arm of his leather chair, placing her hand lightly on his shoulder to balance herself, and smiling sadly down upon him.

"A breath from the East Coast is what *we* want, Tom, old friend! Am I not right? This holy earth with its hundreds of saints and its scores of kings is a bit sickly to us sometimes, isn't it? That arch-conjurer Geard has got such a hold on John, that he doesn't seem to feel the oppression, does he? He's got John as fast as he got our grandfather. He's in there now — Lily told you, I expect? Even Miss Drew treats him with — with — But I don't like him. There's something about him that makes me feel shivery and funny — as if he were a great toad. Poor old Tom. This isn’t a very nice world, is it?”

She did a thing then that astonished herself as much as it astonished the object of her gesture — she lightly touched the man’s forehead with the tips of her firm fingers, pushing back his stubbly hair. He made a sort of fumbling movement to take possession of this friendly hand; but the girl slipped quickly then off his chair’s arm, and went over to the mantelpiece against which she leaned her elbow.

“John is fonder of you in one way than he’ll ever be of me — even if we *were* married,” she said gravely.

Barter thought he had never seen grey eyes look so large and dark and appealing as hers looked now.

“She’s getting at me, to make it up between *them*,” he thought; and the idea that all this kindness in her tone was just to cajole him, made something grow rough as a peat-brick beneath his ribs.

“What the deuce are you talking about, Mary?” he said sulkily, rubbing his face with both his hands as an angry, independent, proud boy might do, who had been kissed by a woman who was attempting to play the mother over him.

“You’re not such a fool,” she said, “as not to know that he’s desperately fond of you?”

“Oh, old John’s all right,” he muttered awkwardly, thinking in his mind, “This is the worst of these clever women. They’re always probing people with what they call psychological questions. I’ll never come and see her again! I’ll take Tossie Stickles out to Bushey Combe tomorrow night. It’s no use! I ought to have known it was no use coming to her. She only wants to play some game with me to get at John — John’ll be helpless in her hands if she *does* get hold of him.”

Her next question made him jerk up his back very straight in the leather chair and draw his eyebrows together till they made a continuous line across his brow.

“What made you think you liked me enough to want to marry me, Tom?”

He looked first to the right of her dark-flashing eyes and white cheeks and then to the left. His expression at that moment so exactly resembled that of a great Newfoundland dog, whom she had troubled with her gaze, that she smiled at him with renewed sweetness.

“You’re a dear, Tom; do you know it?” she said, taking her elbow off the chimney-piece. “I like you a lot better than you ever liked me. I could have made you happy, Tom, if I’d married you; a good deal happier, I’m afraid, than I’ll ever make *him.* And yet, my dear, I’d see you dead in your coffin … if … if … if I could pluck out of you … whatever it is” — her heavy, lower lip began trembling a little— “whatever it is that John likes in you so much more than—”

She bit her lip and lifting her head back, stretched out her arms, clenching her hands.

“Oh, dear, it’s a business, isn’t it, old Tom, this affair of being alive?”

She let her arms drop to her sides with a sigh that heaved through her whole body. Tom Barter rose slowly to his feet. He felt now that he had wronged her with his vulgar suspicions. After all, she was laying bare her heart to him. She was a good, honest Norfolk girl. Perhaps what she said *was* true. Perhaps she *could* have made him happy.

He moved up close to her. She could see by his eyes that he was going to touch her.

“No, no! No, no!” she murmured. “You and I are too old for *that*, Tom. Listen, my dear! Why don’t you do what John is always talking to me about? Why don’t you chuck Philip and work with John for a bit? That man wants you; you know he does. He’d jump out of his skin to have you with him!”

They stared at each other with a long, puzzled stare, after these words had left her lips. Both of them, with an unconscious movement, glanced towards the door. Mary had not had the least idea that she was going to suggest what she had just suggested. It was as if the presence of Mr. Geard under the same roof had confused her wits.

“No! Of course you can’t leave Philip,” she said hurriedly. “It’s your work; I know — and there’s your plane, too. I can’t think what made me say that, just then — It was only … it was only … Oh, I feel that both you and I, Tom, want something to change … something to go smash in our life; so that we can start again. Isn’t that true? But, you needn’t speak. I know too well it’s true!”

They looked at each other then with another of their long, heavy-eyed, puzzled, unyielding East-Anglian looks, those old heathen, sullen looks, full of the obduracy of rooted poplars in driving sleet.

They each needed something from the other — something which, in all the world, that other alone could give — but between them there seemed to emerge, emanating like a monstrous offspring from their sterile psychic embraces, a huge, dark *obstacle*, not to be overstepped.

Mary had come out of that room, where the presence of Mr. Geard was so odious to her, and where the whole aura reeked of these Glastonbury morbidities; she had come out with a reckless urge of forlorn hope to get some help from Tom.

He had come from his wretched vigil in that café, at a desperate run and with a blind leap, like a frantic prisoner catching at one chance in a thousand, to get he knew not what from this Norfolk girl. But, their mutual plunge ended here … they both knew it … ended here with this long, sullen, helpless look … ended here with the same baffled frustration with which their friendship had always ended, when it tried to break away from the impeding limits set by the fatality of their own characters!

"Can I get out of here?" he said, when his eyes had drawn up the great empty plummet-net he had let down from the unanswering depths of her eyes. "Out of this place, without meeting anyone?"

She gave a quick sigh as if aroused by his words from a trance that was obscurely baffling into a reality that was labour and struggle.

"Of course, Tom," she said. "Come this way! I'll let you out through the back."

She blew out the two candles on the table and with his nostrils full of the sour taste of carbonic-acid gas he followed her to the door. There was one moment, as she touched the door-handle by the dying flicker of the fire, that the felt a longing … not sensual nor passionate, but simply sad and love-starved … to clasp her well-known form in his arms. But he did not dare. The moment perished forever in the white smoke of those two tall candles, and he followed her on tip-toe through the dim-lighted hall. He was not unaware of the irony of his passing now, with only a silent nod and a casual glance, those two pretty figures seated at the kitchen-table enjoying their supper. Purged he surely was, at that moment, of his wonted lechery!

Mary opened the door into the garden and shivering a little, for she had forgotten to put on any wrap, led him, across the daffodil-bed and the fading crocuses, to the edge of King Edgar's Lawn.

Here she gave him her hand and let him squeeze it in his strong air-pilot's fingers, till it tingled and smarted.

"You know that place in the wall," she called out softly after him, "where it's easy to climb?"

He made no answer. He only turned and lifted his hand to his head, saluting her thus as he would have saluted some superior officer if he had been … what would have suited him so well to be! … the careful sergeant-major of a garrison of besieged soldiers.

She watched his short sturdy figure, after that, as it vanished with never another look round.

A tide of inexpressible sadness flowed through her heart. Tom was gone; and she had got scant comfort from him — and Tom was gone; back to his wretched quarters in High Street! Or would his lonely, unsatisfied mood put into his stubborn head to drift on, past his own door, to that cheerful Northload room, which was her own prepared bridal-chamber?

She glanced up at the great broken tower-columns of the vanished nave of the Abbey Church. Would other girls, all the way down the centuries, she thought, look up at those two stupendous pillars and fill the space between them, in their sad imagination, with the high carved arch full of wafted incense and choir-echoes and deep-voiced prayers? What had she hoped to get from Tom, or he from her? Neither of them had seemed to know! It had all ended anyway, just as so many of their old encounters had done, in a sense of weary frustration.

Ruins! Ruins! It was not only in ancient stone that baffled human hopes held up their broken outlines, their sad skeleton-patterns, as resting places for the birds of the night! She was on the point of turning, of retracing her steps across the dark flowerbeds where fading crocuses and new-sprouting tulips drank in, in silent long-breath’d draughts, the secret influences of the darkness, when she was suddenly caught up, completely caught up, out of herself, as she never in her life had been before by any natural power.

There, very low down in the western sky, about a couple of yards, according to human measurement, above the bounding wall of the enclosure, was the coracle-like crystal shell of the crescent moon in her first quarter.

There was nothing to which it could be compared! Unique, in all the universe of matter, if only by reason of the associations hung about it of twenty-five thousand years of human yearning, it floated there before her, daughter and darling of the dark terrestrial orb, elf-waif of the infinite night! What hands, what arms, had stretched forth to it, out of their human misery — brown arms, white arms, black arms — what heart-cries, “I want! I want! I want!” had been tossed up towards it, from groaning hairy chests and soft-swelling tender breasts and the troubled nerves of bewildered children! And ever, and especially, had it been the comforter and the accomplice, and the confederate of women, gathering their life-streams towards itself, guarding their mystic chastity, nourishing their withdrawals, their reticences, their furtive retreats and denials, companioning them when all else failed!

It would draw the vast, bottomless salt tides towards it — this slender night-waif, this leaf of tender sorrow, this filmy weft of hope against hope — ere it had rounded to its full! Shoals of glittering fins would follow its pathway across the Atlantic … on far-off untraversed moorlands its reflection would turn the ripples to silver. In pools where even the wild geese in their equinoctial migrations, never disturbed the silence, its frail image would rock among the reeds. On no different, on no changed a shape from this, upon which she now gazed and trembled, the great magicians of antiquity had stared and muttered; their predictions confounded, their inspirations perverted, their wits turned! Here floated the virgin-mistress of the tragic madness of maids, the patroness of all defiers of man’s laws! Here was the girl-child from the dim shores of ancient anarchy, at whose bright and horned head the kings and the priests of man-made tradition have always shivered and quaked in their sacred sandals! She has been the tutelary mistress of all sterile passions, of all wild revolts against "the Mothers," that have led the virgins of prophecy to shatter this world's laws. That shapeless conch of dangerous whiteness, tossing herself, through the scudding drifts of ship-swallowing seas, rocking like a sea-mew in the rigging of doomed ships, gleaming in the cold dews of uncounted dawns upon blood-stained Golgothas and lost battlefields, and now shining down, calm and lovely, upon hillside fairy-rings and upon smooth, wide-stretching, glittering sands, has always been the forlorn hope of the impossible; has always been the immortal challenge to What Is, from the wavering margins of What Might Be!

The popular opinion that the moon is a planetary fragment, broken off from the earth or from the sun, is probably a gross and clumsily conceived error! Much more likely is it that she is the last-remaining fragment of some earlier stellar system, a system of material forms and shapes now altogether lost, but in its origin nearer to the beginning of things in the ambiguous imaginings of the Primal Cause.

Surely, not only in the Religions of *this* planet has she played a dominant and inextinguishable role. But she has always been on the side of the weak and the sick against the strong and the well-constituted! With her silvery horns of Mystery gathered in the folds of that blue robe or bearing up those divine feet of the Maid-Mother of the Crucified she has challenged the whole authoritative reign of Cause-and-Effect itself. And it was this whiteness beyond all whiteness; it was this whiteness, like the wet curves of unimaginable sea-shells and like the spray about the prows of fairy ships, that now came with its magical touch to bring healing to Mary Crow.

The girl stood transfixed on the chilly edge of that bed of cold, pale-faced immature tulips. She stared and stared at the celestial visitant, as if she had never before seen the moon, under any sky.

"What does it make me feel?" she thought. "Is there something about it that every woman who has ever lived in Glastonbury must feel? Something that the Lake Village women felt? Something that immured, mediaeval nuns were comforted by?"

Her body as well as her spirit fell now into a wordless prayer to that white, floating, immortal creature. "Bury, oh, bury your strange secret in my breast!" the girl's heart cried out. "Bury it deep, deep in my womb, so that henceforth to the end of my days, something cold and free and uncaught may make me strong!"

As soon as Mat Dekker and Mr. Geard were out of the house, the former explained to the latter that he had an important visit to make that night before he retired, "to a woman dying of cancer near the Crow factory."

Mr. Geard seemed, in spite of this information, very reluctant to part from the Vicar of Glastonbury. He proposed to Mr. Dekker that they should stroll up Chilkwell Street together and take a glance in the darkness at Chalice House. "I'd like to know what you think, Vicar," he said, in his thick, unctuous voice, "about my scheme for altering the old place. If I don't buy it it may fall into the hands of the Papists again. And yet they're asking a fancy price. Just come and take a look, won't you, Sir?"

Mat Dekker permitted himself to be led past the Tithe Barn and up Chilkwell Street.

"What I had in my mind," said Mr. Geard, in a self-satisfied voice, when they had skirted the high blank wall of Chalice House and had reached the particular garden hedge beyond which lay the Sacred Fount, "was to build a wall here that would be worthy of *the Blood."* He uttered this last word in a casual, matter-of-fact way, as if he had said, "worthy of the view" or "worthy of our age," and a certain flavour of unctuous gusto in his tone was especially repellent to Mat Dekker.

"With an entrance, I suppose?" said this latter.

But it now transpired that Mr. Geard had not considered an entrance. What he had been thinking about was guarding, protecting, defending, consecrating "the Blood," as he called this chalybeate spring. He had been so preoccupied in keeping sacrilege out, that he had not considered how to bring devotion in.

Mat Dekker as a professional priest naturally had his flock in mind. "You won't charge any entrance-fee, I hope?" he went on. "Since the place has been empty the caretaker has been taking tips; but I don't like that at all. Everybody ought to be free to drink of this water!"

Mr. Geard approached the thick hedge; and ascending the little bank below it plunged his arms and his face into the early spring freshness — the hedge exhaled a delicate fragrance as he touched it; a fragrance that flowed out into the darkness on all sides.

"No — no," said Bloody Johnny, stepping back into the road, "I'll have a Saxon arch and a heavy door with a bell inside — a loud bell — with a rope hanging down."

"Why a Saxon arch?" remarked Mr. Dekker. "I don't think there *were* any Saxon arches — wasn't it the Normans who—"

"Brought the Devil with 'em," cried Mr. Geard, "and the Devil's gentlemen! No, no. There's going to be one Saxon arch at any rate in Glastonbury. Our oldest charter is a Saxon Charter. Our oldest real Abbots are Saxon Abbots. Our oldest real kings are Saxon kings. If King Arthur comes back — as my wife's cousin says he will — he'll have to ring my Saxon bell in my Saxon wall. My own folk haven't one drop — not one drop — of gentlemen's blood. I'm going to give back Chalice Well to the People, Mr. Dekker!"

The man's hoarse voice had risen to that rich, rolling tone of rhetorical unction that the Glastonbury street corners had come to know so well before he went away to Norfolk.

"Give back Chalice Well to the People," sounded over and over again in Mr. Dekker's ears, as the two men retraced their steps. Outside the Vicarage gate they stopped to say good-night to each other. They instinctively turned round, as they did so, to catch a glimpse of the tall elms growing in the Abbey enclosure between the boundary wall and those foundations of the Chapel of King Edgar that had been discovered by supernatural aid.

The new moon had long ago gone down but the sky was clear; and over their heads stretched the long, faint, whitish track of the Milky Way.

Geard snuffed the night air like a great sick ox, that had been kept too long in its winter-stall. As Mat Dekker looked at him now he got an impression of a reserve of power — of some kind of power — that was actually startling.

"This Religious Fair of mine," said Mr. Geard, "will be something quite different from the Oberammergau Passion Play. Mr. John Crow, who, by the way, is a most intelligent young man," (Mat Dekker smiled in the darkness at this) "with a good deal more religion than he thinks he has — has received so many replies from all over the world, that I really think this occasion is going to be quite an important one in the history of our country."

"That just what I wanted to know, Sir," said Mat Dekker— "only I mustn't keep you now; and my son, if he has come in, will wonder where I am, but I did want to know what your real inmost purpose was. Of course, if you don't care to speak of such things, I would not press you; but I'd be happier if I knew what was really in your mind. But won't you come in for a minute, Mr. Geard? Please do! We can talk quietly in my little museum — if my son *is* at home, I know he'll be delighted to see you; for he has heard so much about you. Indeed, he told me he had been to tea with you. Your second daughter … she *is* your second, isn't she? … has been a great help to us, quite often, in so many ways. Do come in, Mr. Geard. I've got to go out later to see that woman with cancer; but I told her nurse not to come for me till late, so that she would know if the poor thing was going to get any sleep tonight. Please come in now anyway."

The ex-preacher of the gospel hesitated for a moment.

"I don't want to intrude," he murmured; but Mat Dekker swept this aside.

"It *is* really important, Sir," he said emphatically, taking the other by the arm, "that I should hear everything about your scheme. I may be of use to you; more use to you than you realise."

Bloody Johnny permitted himself to be persuaded; and soon found himself seated in a comfortable wicker chair by a warm fire in what the father and son called their "museum." The door of this chamber having been left ajar, the legatee of Canon Crow was enabled to listen to a rather singular conversation in the kitchen-passage.

"Master Sam ain't come in," he heard the voice of Penny Pitches saying, "and Weatherwax were in kitchen just now with a tale of having talked wi' gamekeeper's young man from West Pennard, come in for pheasant-feed, or summat o' that, and Weatherwax said 'a told 'un that 'a seed our Sam walking across Hearty Moor like as the Devil were arter he. 'Twas Tommy Blake, the young man were, what used to live down Bere Lane, so he know'd our Sam as 'twere his own kin; and ye do know, thee wone self, Master, what be beyond Hearty! Whitelake River be beyond Hearty; where thik Missy Zoyland do live. And so, I reckon our Sam be gone to see she; gone to see she while she's old man be out to Wookey Hole."

"He may have been walking in that direction, Penny, without going to that house."

Mr. Geard uncrossed his legs and purposely made his chair creak by shifting his position in it. One of the grand secrets of the man's magnetic power was that he forced himself to see nothing, to hear nothing, to think nothing of other people's affairs.

"Direction be shot!" cried the old woman. "Young men will do it, an' they come to 't! Direction, say ye? He'll direction her, and direct her too; don't 'ee make no mistake, Master."

"Well, I hope she'll give him a good supper anyway, Penny," threw out Mat Dekker, with a forced smile.

"Don't lock the front door, Penny, when you go to bed," he went on, "and will you bring me some brandy into the museum, the very best, you know, one of those bottles you hid from Weatherwax last Christmas?"

He returned to his guest and sat down opposite him. He too had a very creaky wicker chair; and for a little time, while Penny waited on them, in sulky silence, there was nothing audible in that ramshackle room but the creaking of those two chairs under their heavy bodies.

Mat Dekker's mind was away at Whitelake Cottage. A spasm of unreasoning anger against his son kept surging up in the depths of his being and a wild imaginary dialogue between himself and Nell Zoyland began incoherently to shape itself on the tongue of his hidden soul— "She turned to me," he kept thinking, "she turned to me in her trouble. She looked at me more than at either of them. She would do exactly what I told her. She said as much as that with her eyes." The dangerous hidden waters in this man's rock-rooted Quantock nature began now to toss and foam and churn, as he thought of Sam and his sweet adultress.

Mat Dekker repeated to himself now what his old flame, Elizabeth Crow, had said, as he looked at Mr. Geard's greenish-black trousers— "I believe you are in love with that girl yourself." A dusky flush of anger came into his ruddy cheeks as he recalled this. But if it was all nonsense, why did the thought "Sam will probably sleep with her tonight" cause him such singular perturbation? Not because of any moral distress about Sam behaving badly. Mat had absolutely nothing in him of the congenital Puritan; and his long association with birds and beasts and reptiles had given him a very natural and earthy attitude towards erotic emotion — nor had he any particular concern about William Zoyland's feelings! He had always regarded Lord P.'s bastard as something of a ruffian and a bully. Secretly in his heart he was rather proud of Sam for having been able to steal away a girl's heart from a handsome rogue like that.

It may be well imagined that with all these stirrings and upheavings going on in his mind it was very hard for Mat to give any concentrated attention to Mr. Geard and what the bar-rooms of the town called Bloody Johnny's Midsummer Kick-up.

Mr. Geard was not one to miss the preoccupation of his host; but such was his nature that it caused him no particular annoyance. He enjoyed the Vicar's brandy; and kept re-filling his glass and sipping its contents with a quiet relish, while he talked on and on, apparently quite as much for his own edification as for that of his abstracted hearer. His eyes, as he talked, kept wandering about the room, which was more like the play-room of a whole family of young naturalists than a theologian's study, though on one side of the apartment there was a large gloomy bookcase full of standard Anglican works.

What arrested Mr. Geard's attention most was an enormous aquarium standing on a bench in the middle of the room. There was a lamp, not far from this object, on a table littered with magazines, and the light from this, falling on one side of the aquarium, made an illuminated segment of bright water through which some very energetic and very large minnows kept darting and hovering. These lively fish, circumscribed in a luminous void, associated themselves very vividly with what Bloody Johnny was feeling as he rambled on. "Someone must make the start," he was saying, "and why should not I? Life advances by leaps and bounds, and so does Religion. There's no doubt that this is the moment for something drastic … for something" — he hesitated for a word, while a soft-mottled loach, lifting its white belly from the gravel at the bottom of the aquarium, pressed an open mouth against the illuminated glass side of the vessel and fixed upon this singular Prophet a cold fish-eye— "for something … *miraculous.* There are only about half a dozen reservoirs of world-magic on the whole surface of the globe — Jerusalem … Rome … Mecca … Lhassa — and of these Glastonbury has the largest residue of unused power. Generations of mankind, aeons of past races, have — by their concentrated will — made Glastonbury miraculous. But since the time of that incredible fool, Henry the Eighth, the magic of Glastonbury has been unused."

Bloody Johnny permitted his host to re-fill his glass. The bottle was two-thirds empty already. Here was an unexpected rival for poor Mr. Weatherwax! The lower the liquor sank in the bottle, the less water did the visitor mix with it. And the more he drank the more metaphysical he became. Mat Dekker kept replenishing his own pipe from an earthenware jar of Craven Mixture which stood between the lamp and the aquarium. There were no other sources of light in this study-museum beyond the fire and this one lamp, and the two men's massive physiognomies were lit up by this two-fold radiation in a manner that would have delighted any connoisseur in the mystery of lines and contours, of plane surfaces and carved-out hollows. Bloody Johnny did not, apparently, make use of tobacco in any form. This was one of those Nonconformist traits in his curious character that a little disconcerted his host. The brandy-drinking, however, carried to such a surprising length, and producing no sign of tipsiness, was a considerable comfort to the priest's Quantock-bred mind. If only the fellow had smoked too! But with these queer chaps one couldn't have everything. If the man had neither smoked *nor* drank the priest-naturalist would have experienced a positive *physical* distaste for this alien presence in his museum. He would have snuffed the air suspiciously, like a hound who smells a weasel in place of a fox.

"Why shouldn't the Lord have chosen me," Mr. Geard was now saying, as he leaned forward in his wicker chair, hugging his legs and wagging his hydrocephalic head, "to bring back an Age of Faith to our Western World? The way I am doing it will seem heresy to some, blasphemy to others, pure hocus-pocus to most. But that's exactly, my dear, what all new out-spurts of the Real Presence have seemed. Do 'ee think anyone can put a stopper on me?"

Mat Dekker had never, since Sam's mother's death, been called "my dear" by any living soul; but it was such a quaint word for the man to use just then, at such a moment, this word "stopper," that he looked at him with something like real respect. The chap *could not* be a humbug! No humbug would say "put a stopper on me."

Mat Dekker now began scrutinising his guest's great bowed head as Bloody Johnny grew somnolent, and the way his huge, plump, clenched fist lay on the rough little garden-table by the edge of his bottle and glass. "There's the head of a heretic," he thought. "No doubt the great Marcion, with his skull full of spiritual errors, had a head like that. *But it's all wrong*! Christ had chosen to reveal Himself through the traditions of His Church, and in no other way. When the Church's authority is undermined life falls back into chaos … into the blind gropings of Matter or at least of Nature."

"The Lord … has … filled me …" rumbled Bloody Johnny again in his hoarse voice, "with the power of His spirit, my dear, and nothing can stop me from doing His will! I feel His will pouring through me, my dear, by night and by day. Let the glory go to whom He pleases! I am but a reed, a miserable pipe, a wretched conduit, a contemptible sluice. But never mind what I am! Through me, at this moment of time, the Eternal is breaking through. Yes, dear, *dear* Sir, for I admire 'ee and respect 'ee, it's breaking through! I'm going to make Glastonbury the centre of the Religion of all the West. I feel it in me, this power; I feel it, dear, *dear* Mr. Dekker, and nothing can stop me, *Nothing*!" He lifted his heavy fist and emptied the remainder of the bottle into his glass, and tossed it, this time without one drop of water, down his capacious throat. After this, the man's chin sank down again upon his chest and his host had time to abandon himself in peace once more to his troubled thoughts.

Mat Dekker, noticing at last that his guest's eyes had actually closed, brought out his great old-fashioned watch with its blue enamelled back and looked at it with puckered brows. A deep sigh came from his heart as he replaced this timepiece, for he had seen the little hand approaching eleven and the big hand approaching ten. Ten minutes to eleven — and Sam not back. He must be staying with her, sleeping with her. His hands, old clumsy Sam's rough hands, the hands that had hammered together the little garden-table on which that empty bottle rested, must be now caressing her naked satiny limbs. Mat Dekker's face positively contorted itself with suffering as this image or rather as this imaginative projection of his own feelings into those of his son's, went on dominating his senses …. Suddenly there was a loud ring at the front-door bell. Mat Dekker started up upon his feet. John Geard jerked up his head, and pushing away the empty bottle with the back of his knuckles, gathered himself together to face whatever new incursion into the museum this sound portended. The clatter of Penny Pitches' heavy shoes came echoing down the passage.

"Is it your son?" broke in Mr. Geard, but the priest shook his head.

"He'd never ring," he murmured. "The door's always—"

His voice was lost in the noisy opening of the front door while an alarming colloquy, overheard by both of the men, began to take place on the doorstep. "She can't abide the pain one hour longer, and Doctor said she couldn't 'ave no more morphia till he comes tomorrow. I've run near all the way, for I can't bear leaving the pore thing like as she is. She be crazy with pain, and that's the truth."

Mat Dekker was out into the hall now; and Mr. Geard, his deserted chair creaking like an anxious goblin, was in the museum doorway. "This is Nurse Robinson. She is a niece of our Mrs. Robinson whom I expect you know. *Nancy*, I call her," said Mr. Dekker; and, as Penny Pitches retreated down the passage to her own domain, the nurse and Mr. Geard shook hands. The newcomer was certainly more like a "Nancy" than like a nurse. A red-faced lusty creature she appeared, when she threw back her hood, but her face betrayed a natural agitation at this moment that was more humane than it was professional. "But this is outrageous!" cried Mr. Dekker; and by the light of the hall-lamp, hanging from the ceiling, Geard could see a vein in the priest's forehead swell and swell, till it resembled a little thin snake beneath his skin. "This is unbearable! Have you called the doctor up? Have you talked to him?"

Nurse Robinson nodded. " 'Ee says 'tis the law," she responded. " 'Ee says Hi've 'a given 'er already more'n the law allows. 'Ee says if the chemist gave me more for 'er till hate tomorrow, I should be 'eld responsible if anythink 'appened."

"You must excuse me, Mr. Geard," cried Mat Dekker, snatching his coat and hat from a peg. "I'll come straight with you to the doctor's, Nancy, and stir him up. I'll take the responsibility myself. It's outrageous. It's intolerable. *Penny*!" The square servant advanced down the passage at her master's summons. "Don't go to bed till Mr. Sam comes in, Penny, and keep something hot for his supper. He may have been walking miles and miles."

"*We* do know where he have been walking!" grumbled Penny. "*I'll* stay up for he, right and certain, Master, and when he comes in, it'll go hard but I'll give he a piece of me mind, gallumping over they girt moors, to the disturbance of our decent house — and all because of a whey-faced missy what's another man's wife!"

"Hush! Hush, Penny!" commanded her master, nodding towards Mr. Geard to indicate that they were not alone. "Help the gentleman into his coat, Penny, can't you? Our way lies in the same direction, doesn't it, Sir?" he went on. "Ready, Nurse? You've got your breath again? That poor woman … left alone in positive torture … Perhaps you'd prefer to walk more slowly, Mr. Geard? But Nurse and I *must* hurry on!"

Bloody Johnny proved himself able to walk quite as fast as his companions, though it is true he covered the ground in rather an eccentric manner. He walked with a sort of dot-and-go-one step, and in addition to this mode of progression he also had a kind of sailor's lurch, as if he had just landed from a rolling deck. "What doctor are you going to disturb?" he enquired breathlessly when they reached the town.

“Doctor Fell, Sir, Doctor Fell,” replied the nurse. “Doctor Fell be a kind-’earted man, but he lives with ’is old sister Miss Bibby who be reglar devil. And if we ring at Doctor’s door it won’t be the doctor we’ll see. We’ll see old Bibby for sure and Bibby’ll knock our ‘eads off waking of ’er up.”

“I’ll have the doctor out of bed,” muttered Mr. Dekker grimly, “if once you get them to open the door for us, Nurse.”

But at this point Mr. Geard laid his hand on the Vicar’s arm. “Let me go with Miss Robinson and sit up with this woman,” he said. “You can telephone to my family when you return home, so that they won’t be alarmed. I can sleep wherever I am. It’s a trick I possess.”

Mat Dekker showed some impatience at this. “It isn’t a question of sitting up with her, Mr. Geard. It’s a question of stopping the torture she’s enduring. It’s a question of giving *her* sleep! Morphia alone can do that.”

“Christ alone can do that!” cried Bloody Johnny in a voice that sounded like the voice of an angry boatswain, so resonantly did it reverberate through the empty street! “Pardon me, Sir,” he went on. “Pardon me, Miss Robinson. When I said just now that I would sit up with this woman, I meant of course that in the Power of the Blood I would send *her* to sleep. Please take me there quickly, Nurse! There is no reason why we should trouble Mr. Dekker any more tonight. Only don’t forget, Mister, to telephone to Mrs. Geard.”

Nurse Robinson looked from one to the other. They were all three now standing outside Saint John’s Churchyard, in the obscurity of which the Holy Thorn was just visible and the vast bulk of the shadowy tower. But Mat Dekker’s face was clouded with indecision. He kept turning his head, first to the right and then to the left under the pressure of Mr. Geard’s words, exactly as a large dog might have done under a human eye. He seemed unwilling to look at Mr. Geard. He struck the pavement with the end of his stick once or twice, muttering, “Well, I don’t know, on my soul, I really don’t know.” Then, with a deeply drawn breath and a queer, little, fluttering movement of one of his big hands, “Come,” he said, “and see what you can do. But for God’s sake let’s be quick! She may be crazy with the pain.”

Walking fast up George Street they were soon at Tittie Petherton’s ruined Gothic cottage. Nurse Robinson opened the door and went in first. A small oil-lamp was burning on the kitchen-table and a black, sooty kettle simmered feebly upon a coal-stove whose fire had almost gone out. Nurse Robinson had begun to turn up the wick of the little lamp when they were startled by a moan of anguish more horribly acute than Mat Dekker had ever heard in his life. He had heard Tittie’s groans before, under her abominable affliction … but never a sound quite like that. The blood rushed to his face. “Damn these doctors!” he cried. Nurse Robinson glanced at Mr. Geard to see what effect this horrible sound had upon him. She was astonished to see his face twisted in a spasm of physical pain. She was so startled by the twisted mouth of Mr. Geard that she found herself expecting to hear from it the same cry of torment as that which they had just heard from the room above. But the spasm was over in a second of time and she turned to the door which concealed the steps that led to her patient’s bedroom. Up these steps she now climbed, followed first by Mat Dekker and then by Mr. Geard. There was a second little oil-lamp, identical with the one downstairs, upon a table by the bedside, above which the massive eaves of the roof sloped down.

A gaunt woman, propped upon pillows, who had pulled herself up so desperately to a sitting posture that the bed-clothes were clinging in a disordered mass about her knees, was leaning forward with a terribly fixed stare. She began at once an incoherent and piteous pleading. “Have you the stuff? Have you brought the stuff? Oh, for Jesus' sake, give me the stuff! Is it there? Have you got it?" At this point she gasped and struggled for breath, clutching at her body with her fingers. Then she began again. "Give me the stuff, Nurse, give it to me quickly! If I don't have it, this minute, I shall curse Them Above. Oh, the stuff! the stuff! I want nothing but the stuff!"

Mat Dekker was aware of a sleepy twittering above the gutter-pipe outside the window. "Sparrows," he said to himself, "but too early for nesting … a little too early; but they must be thinking of it … they must be pairing." The oil-lamp reeked vilely, and from the tortured woman's bed there emanated a sweetish-sour and very sickly smell, which made Mat Dekker shudder as he stood there mute and helpless. It was as if, beyond and behind the living-room, some unspeakable Entity of Pain writhed in the darkness, and it was from the substance of this thing and not from any human flesh and blood that this abominable smell issued forth.

Nurse Robinson approached the bed. "Lie down now, Mrs. Petherton. It'll be better if you lie down. There! Let me turn your pillows." The woman opened her mouth and drew in her lips. Her expression was that of a despairing animal who would blindly bite at the whole world. But she allowed herself in her weakness to be laid flat upon the pillow by the strong hands of the nurse.

Then Mat Dekker approached the bed and folding his great knuckles together and bowing his grey head began praying: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, give unto this woman, thy poor stricken servant, O God, strength to endure the grievous sufferings which Thou in Thy wisdom hast been pleased—" He got no further, for the woman's eyes, which she had momentarily closed, opened again and a look of renewed torment, combined with wild hatred for the priest, came into her face. Nor was this all. Unable in any other way to express the abyss of her defiance she made the motion of spitting at the worthy man. Her wretched drop of ejected saliva did no more than drip down the wrinkles of her own cheek. But Dekker caught her intention and it froze his heart.

It was at this moment that Mr. Geard came forward. Unobserved by his companions he had removed his coat and waistcoat, and now showed himself in his purple braces and grey shirt. He did not even look at the woman's face. To the astonishment of the others he stretched himself out flat by her side upon the bed, using the little table as a support for one of his great elbows. Mat Dekker could not help noticing that the bulge of his stomach had burst the top button of his trousers. But from this position he rolled his eyes towards the nurse. "Put summat under me head, will 'ee, kindly," he muttered, relapsing into the broadest Somerset. The nurse promptly obeyed him, snatching a faded cushion from a chair on the further side of the attic. "Take thik lamp away, one o' ye, if ye doänt mind. No! No! Put the little bugger on floor, Missus, where woänt shine in our pore eyes." Again the astonished muse obeyed this singular authority, placing the lamp in the centre of the floor, and turning the wick down as low as she dared. "Now, Tittie, old gurl, thee and me be 'a goin' to have some blessed sleep. I be drowsy as a spent bullick, I be. Night to ye both; night to ye all. Tittie and me be all right. Us 'ull be safe and sound till mornin'. And then maybe ye'll bring up a cup o' tea for we to bless the Lord in!" With the lamp placed where it was, it had become impossible now for either Mr. Dekker or Miss Robinson to see anything but two blurred human faces, laid side by side. "Are we really to leave you like this, Mr. Geard?" enquired Mat Dekker. Not a sound, not a movement came from the bed. The priest picked up Mr. Geard's overcoat and his other clothes from where the man had let them fall on the floor. These objects he carefully stretched out over Bloody Johnny's prostrate form. "Come, Nancy," he muttered. "For God's sake let's do exactly what he says. I really think that, by the mercy of God, he's done what I couldn't do; and perhaps" — here he sighed deeply— "what no doctor could do. Come, Nancy! Better leave them just as they are." He led the way down the narrow stairs, and Nurse Robinson followed after him. The nurse looked at a dilapidated arm-chair covered with a big red shawl full of holes which stood by one of the Gothic windows. Mat Dekker lifted up the sooty kettle and peeped into the stove. "Wait a second, Nancy," he said. He opened the back door of the wretched room, from the rafters and walls of which the damp of centuries seemed to emanate. A draught of chilly midnight air entered and made the little lamp flicker and the shadow of Nurse Robinson move portentously across the yellowish strips of torn wallpaper that hung from the opposite wall.

He returned in a minute, carrying a bundle of small pieces of wood pressed against his black waistcoat. These he piled up by the side of the stove, and then threw into the aperture the most auspicious-looking of the pieces. "Well! I'll be getting home, Nance," he said. "You'll be all right, won't 'ee?" He moved up to a small cupboard and shamelessly opened it. "Yes, you've got some tea and some biscuits, I see. Have you got anything to read?" He looked round, but could see nothing except Tittie Petherton's great family Bible. Being the man he was, this particular work seemed in some way inadequate for a night-long vigil. He searched his great overcoat pockets and giving a grunt of satisfaction extracted from one of them a small copy of White's *Selborne.* This he presented to the watcher with many nods and smiles. " 'Twill help 'ee awake or send 'ee to sleep, Nance, just as 'ee do have a mind!" Like Geard of Glastonbury, Mr. Dekker was always ready to revert at a pinch to the West-Country turns of speech. In sheer physical relief at escaping from the strain of Tittie Petherton's suffering the good man now rubbed his big hands together and chuckled benevolently.

For the last quarter of an hour he had forgotten Whitelake Cottage! Thus, in the huge compensatory ebb and flow of great creative Nature, one tension of human feeling has the power of ejecting, or completely cancelling, another strain of feeling. For the emotional tension of a frustrated passion there is no better cure than to spend an hour or two in the presence of terrible bodily anguish. Mat Dekker was not an idealist, but he was a man of a proud and stormy heart, and what he had seen tonight had had the famous Aristotelian effect upon him. As he walked rapidly home, however, down George Street and High Street and Silver Street, this catharsis relaxed its calming force. By the time he reached the gate of his Vicarage, poor Tittie and her heretical hypnotist were forgotten. He found his heart beating, his pulses throbbing, to the old fatal tune. Had Sam come back?

He strode up the winding driveway and burst into the hall of his house. “Penny!” he shouted. “Penny!” The old servant came grumbling and blinking out of her kitchen where she had been asleep in her chair. “Has Sam come home?” he enquired sternly.

“Not that I knows, Master,” the woman answered; “not unless he crept upstairs on his stockinged feet.”

Mat Dekker ran upstairs just as he was, too perturbed in mind to take off either his hat or his coat. He hung open the door of Sam’s bedroom. Empty it was with that indescribable look of desolation that bedrooms of the absent and of the dead so quickly assume; and Sam’s father stood for a second on the dimly lit landing, chewing the bitter cud of remediless loss. Then he went slowly to his own bedroom; and having telephoned to the Geard’s house to tell them what had become of their man, he undressed and sought his pillow.

But the priest’s rest that night was feverish and disturbed. Nor was its Vicar the only troubled sleeper in Glastonbury. Under many of her roofs, from the brick things of the Town Council’s houses in Benedict Street, to the slate roofs of the tradesmen’s villas in Wells Street, outraged and wounded hearts kept human souls awake.

Perhaps in one house alone there was absolute peace, in one house alone a “deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill,” and that was the house in which Bloody Johnny and Tittie Petherton slept on the same bed.

CONSUMMATION

When Sam Dekker reached Whitelake Cottage that day it was nearly four o’clock. He had remained standing motionless once or twice during his rapid walk; standing in that fixed position and in that same abstracted trance into which it is recorded that the philosophic Socrates fell at certain crises in his life; and he had no idea how long these moments of abstraction had lasted. Once at the place, however, he knocked resolutely at the door.

There was a sound inside which made him think that the young mistress of the house was upstairs, cleaning the floor; and when the girl came running down to let him in, this supposition proved the correct one, for she was garbed in a long, green linen over-all, covering the whole of her dress.

“Sam … oh, Sam!” She was in his arms in a moment; and for a brief space of time their simple, unadulterated craving for each other’s presence, satisfied now so deeply, drowned every other consideration. “Sit down, Sam; oh my dear, oh my dear!” And she pulled, with violent tugs, at her linen over-all till she had got it over her head. She tossed the thing down on the sofa first; and then, to make room for them to sit side by side on that piece of furniture, she quickly folded up the garment and flung it across the back of a chair.

They sat side by side, now, his hand clasping hers; too happy, simply to be together, to do anything but drink up each other’s identity. “I thought this morning,” she murmured, “Sam *may* come today! But I never thought you really would.”

“Oh, Nelly, my little, little Nelly!” He lifted up his hands and pushing back her hair from her forehead drew her face towards him. The girl’s lips parted under his passionate kiss; and when he let her go her head dropped forward like a flower whose stem has been broken. Not a flicker, not a ripple of shame, not a shadow of the least awareness of any change in his recent mood swept across his consciousness when he kissed Nell Zoyland like that!

It must be remembered that Sam's idea of what it meant to struggle to live "the life of a saint" was a very different thing from any notion that his father would have entertained, had Mat Dekker aimed at such a state! Not that it would be any easier to be a saint in Sam's way than to be a saint in his father's way. In some respects it would be more difficult. For one thing it would require a casuistry more sharp-edged, more flexible, more searching and yet not less exacting! Sam's whole attitude towards his feelings as he sat on Nell's sofa turned on the point — though he did not analyse it — as to whether this ecstasy he got from the girl was just sensuality or something quite different from sensuality. Without analysing his feelings, he knew in his heart that it *was* very different; and this knowledge, penetrating his whole being, saved him from any pricks of conscience. In his unanalytical way, Sam was not so blinded by passion, as he breathed in and breathed out the paradisiac air of her presence, as not to be vaguely conscious of a delicious surprise. It was a surprise to him to find that he was not torn by any moral conflict. He had pushed back the thought of such a conflict to the furthest margin of his mind. But somewhere in his spirit he had been expecting it; and now it had not come! There was no conflict. His thrilling happiness with Nell, since the girl was as she was, brought him nothing but a great flooding wave of absolute peace. The trouble between them had risen from Nell's nature then, not from his? It was the woman, not the man, whose conscience had been torn? Well! if Nell felt no shame now; if Nell felt no division in her heart, all was well. The personality of Will Zoyland on the moral horizon of Sam's life was no more to him than the willows and poplars of Queen's Sedgemoor on its physical horizon.

As for the girl herself, her recent decision in Zoyland's favour and her return to his bed had been all along of a very special and peculiar nature. The girl's real unconscious motive in this action — an action whose immediate repercussion upon herself had produced that terrible turmoil of mal-ease which had seized upon her in Saint John's Church — had been revenge upon Sam for not taking a bold, drastic and final step in their relations, in other words, for not carrying her off!

It is women's fatal susceptibility to passionate touch that hypnotises them into by far the greater number of their disasters; for under this touch-hypnosis the present transforms itself into the eternal, and their grand sex-defence, their consciousness of continuity, their awareness of the future as an integral portion of the present, is shattered and broken up. The ideal love-affairs for women are when it is easy for them, after these momentary plunges into the eternal, to fall back again upon their realistic sense of continuity; whereas the ideal love-affairs for men are when their feeling for novelty and for adventure is perpetually being re-aroused by the bewildering variability of women's moods.

"I've been thinking of you all the while, Sam," she said now, as Sam leant over her, clutching one of her hands with both his, and pressing it deeply into the fold of her lap. "The other day — was it the day before yesterday? — Yes! I think so … but I seem to have lost all sense of time … I started re-planting some wild-flowers, out there on the bank … meadow orchises they were … and suddenly I couldn't bear it, not seeing you, and I came running in and fell on the sofa and cried and cried. It was this very sofa," she went on in a changed voice and with what was evidently a swift, sudden vision of the vagaries of time, “where we’re now sitting. Oh, my dear, oh, my dear, I never thought it would all come true!”

She cried from pure happiness now, letting the tears fall upon the back of his fingers as he pressed her clenched hand deep into her lap; and she got a wild, exultant pleasure from the very shamelessness of her tears, not attempting to stay them, but letting them roll down her cheeks even while she lifted up her bowed head and looked at him.

“Have you been cooking properly for yourself, Nell?” Sam suddenly enquired. The question mightily amused her; and she laughed out loud as she wiped away her tears.

“Why yes, Sam … yes, I have,” she answered, “only I don’t quite know what you mean by ‘properly.’ I’ve got a large bit of cold boiled bacon. That’s the only meat I’ve been having just now … but I’ve been making myself some cheese omelets and … oh, I don’t know! Why are you so inquisitive?”

Sam didn’t smile. With some reason he felt he had got upon shaky ground. That bacon had been, no doubt, provided to suit the taste of the master of the house! “I went this morning,” he said, “with John Crow and that man Evans, who’s at Old Jones’ shop, to the top of the Tor. Crow’s working for Geard; you know that? They’re going to have some sort of a Passion Play on Midsummer’s Day. Crow asked this fellow Evans to act as the Christ in it. He’s been sending off their circulars far and wide … even abroad, so he says. I am sure I can’t imagine what Father will make of it all.”

“Geard’s working against Philip and his factories, isn’t he?” she responded. “Do you know, Sam, I’m sure there’s something between Philip and my sister-in-law, Percy. My brother sees nothing. He’ll never see anything, till it’s all too late!”

Sam pondered; but not on the misdoings of Percy Spear. “I like what I’ve seen of your brother, Nell,” he said. “But he doesn’t really think there’s a chance of England becoming communistic in our lifetime, does he?”

The girl gave a little sigh. “Oh, I don’t know, my dear! I’ve never thought much about it …. one way or the other. I suppose he does. But I oughtn’t to speak for Dave. I’m afraid he doesn’t find me clever enough to talk to, about things like that. Sam, have *you* heard any gossip in town about Philip and Persephone?”

Sam smiled grimly. “I’ve heard gossip in town about Mrs. Zoyland and Sam Dekker,” he said.

Her eyelashes flickered under his word and she turned her head; but a second later she tore her hands from his grasp and flung them round his neck. “Love me, love me, Sam!” she whispered. They forgot everything then in a much more passionate kiss than their first one.

When they drew apart at last, Sam could not help murmuring a very naive question. “How on earth was it that you ever came to care for me, Nell? Except one poor little town-girl at Cambridge, that I ought never to have meddled with, no woman has ever bothered herself about me. You’re far too beautiful for a clown like me, Nell. You ought to be the pet of the greatest prince on the earth!”

The oldest of all feminine smiles crossed her face. Towards her lover’s high-pitched worship a woman can grow as tenderly humorous as the slyest cynic in the world. His infatuated rapture in her beauty becomes as nothing, in comparison with the desperate sweetness of her surrender to him. There are levels of feminine emotion in the state of love entirely and forever unknown to men. Man’s imaginative recognition of feminine charm, man’s greedy lust, man’s pride in possession, man’s tremulous sense of the pathos of femininity, man’s awe in the presence of an abysmal mystery — all these feelings exist in a curious detachment in his consciousness. They are all separate from the blind subcurrent that sweeps the two together. But with women, when they are really giving themselves up without reserve, a deep underflow of abandonment is reached, where such detachment from Nature ceases completely. At such times the woman does not feel herself to be beautiful or desirable. She does not feel her lover to be handsome or strong or clever or brave. She might be the most abject of the daughters of her race. He might be the least admirable of the sons of his race. His body, his face, might be disfigured, deformed, dirty, derelict; his personality might be contemptible. She has reached a level of emotion where everything about him is accepted and taken for granted; and not only so, but actually seen for what it is, without a flicker of idealism. She has reached a level where in sublime, unconscious humility she takes as her possessor this image, this simulacrum, this poor figure of earth; and as she does so, she accepts in exactly the same way her own most grievous limitations, discounting ironically and tenderly, with an understanding that is deeper than cynicism itself, all his erotic amorous illusions.

There is thus, in a woman's love, when it has sunk to this level, *no illusion left.* He is what he is and she may be what she may be! Infirm, cowardly, conceited, stupid, he is her man. She has given herself to him as a free gift. He is her possessor. She belongs now, not to herself, but to him. The danger implicit in this absoluteness of a woman's love, when she really gives herself up, is that a man should get a glimpse of its sublime realism. Architect of illusion as he is, it is only in the full volume and top crest of his love that a man can bear an inkling of how realistically his woman regards him below the surface of her flattery. His love for her will probably weaken before hers does for him. And this will happen just because his love depends on an exaggerated admiration of her, which, if he is not something of a Don Quixote, will pass away by degrees. The tragic danger of the "absoluteness" of her love will arrive when he has really got tired of her and has come to regard her as a stranger to his mind and a burden upon his spirit. At this point his vanity will soon teach him, and her "crossness" and "sensitiveness" will soon teach him, that she is completely free from every illusion about his personality. And then another element will enter. The slow cooling of his love for her will rouse in the woman a blind anger; an anger directed, not so much against the poor, weak man himself, as against *all men*, and incidentally against all the laws of Nature; and yielding to this anger she will not care how much she hurts his feelings. Let him suffer a little *on the surface* — which is all he understands! — while she is suffering such tortures in the depths! In this mood how can she resist taking advantage of her knowledge of his character? How can she help prodding and stinging him where she knows it will hurt the most?

What in any woman renders a union lasting is the power of letting her man see that *she likes him extremely* in addition to loving him. What in any man renders a union lasting is this element of the rational-irrational "Don Quixote" in his mind and soul. And wherein consists this Don Quixote element? It consists in an act of the *imaginative will*; an act of the man's soul that is actually creative; an act by means of which he sets up his particular Dulcinea del Toboso in an indestructible and imperishable niche. The act of the imaginative will to which I refer gives a man, in fact, the power to treat his woman, in her lifetime, *as if she were dead* … which is the rarest essence of human relationship and the supreme triumph over matter of the human spirit.

It was when Sam looked at her after he had said, "You ought to be the pet of the greatest prince upon earth," that Nell Zoyland knew that if she could belong to him, and to him alone, they two would be constantly and permanently happy. For the girl saw in his look at that moment that deep, obstinate, half-mad *creative* look, the look of the artist, of the saint; the look of Something which the ebb and the flow of her woman's moods would have no power to change; and which nothing in life could change; for it sprang from that Don Quixote element in a man's spirit which transcends the astronomical universe.

The girl became very silent and quiet after she had caught that look on Sam's face. Her realistic woman's mind was now running, like a little ash-coloured mouse, from plank to plank of the drifting barge of their imbroglio, hunting for the least cranny or crack or hole, by which they could slip overboard and change their destiny. Sam naturally mistook her rapid concentrated thinking for the descent of sadness upon her, and to change her mood he asked her what she thought of Tom Barter. He had arrived at this gentleman, as a topic of harmless conversation, by recalling how the man had been present with Philip on the last occasion when he himself was in this room. It seemed a whole year ago, tonight, that feverish encounter, and he had no wish to dwell on it now. But Mr. Barter of the Crow Dye Mills would serve as well as anything eke to distract a sad mistress! She awoke from her abstracted train of thought with a start; but could not help smiling at his question. "He thinks I'm only interested, like all women," she said to herself, "in personal matters."

"I heard Dave talk about him the other day," she remarked, while Sam rose to his feet and stood with his hands in his pockets gazing at her in a peaceful ecstasy. "He said the Corporation of Glastonbury was going to start a factory of their own … a factory belonging to the working-people of the town … to everybody in fact, but of course the poor people are the majority. He says this man Geard is going to be the new Mayor and going to see this through. He says Geard's going to get Mr. Barter to leave Philip, and be the manager of this new concern. He says their Midsummer Pageant will be the opening day of it; and that it'll be a real communistic experiment. He says John Crow has made this man Geard quite enthusiastic about it; and you know how rich *he* is!"

Her words ran on with a lively fluency, but to both of them at that moment they were like the sound of the ripples of the river of fate, on whose calm tide they were being irrevocably carried forward. Behind her words she was thinking to herself, "It's nearly half-past five. It'll soon be dark. I must be alone to think what I'm going to do. I would … like … to give … him … a surprise … a sort of … celebration … of this day." And behind listening to her words — which, to confess the truth, interested him very little — Sam was thinking— "I'm the luckiest man in all Somersetshire. How beautiful she is, that exquisite Being over there … and she's my girl! Yes, you old Sam, you've got a real girl of your very own and one that's worthy to be the pet of princes!"

Slowly, then, she too got up upon her feet. "Sam, darling," she said. "I want to be alone for a little, to collect my thoughts and get things straight. I'm going to get you a nice tea, too, a real high tea, such as I know Penny gets for you and your father. Where did you have your lunch, Sam?"

He stared at her. "Lunch?" be murmured. "They went … they said … I told them … yes," he said, "I believe I *could* eat something presently. Do you want me to go out for a little while, Nell? Is that what you mean?"

As soon as she found that he had caught the drift of her wishes, though still in complete darkness as to her mood, she became calm, competent, radiant. "Run off then, my dear," she said, opening the door for him, "and give me an hour, will you? Have you got your watch?" She gave him a quick, unimpassioned, practical kiss as he went out; but the minute she had shut the door on him she fell on her knees in front of the fire and clasped her hands together in an ecstasy of gratitude to the gods.

Nell now realized, for the first time, how completely her heart belonged to Sam; and with this knowledge all outside things became comparatively unimportant. The portentous figure of her husband loomed, indeed, like a distant mountain range upon the background of her thoughts; but the present hour seemed to be hers with such an absolute benediction, that no fears, no doubts, about the future could assail or spoil it. Yes, she would give herself to Sam; now that at last he had come to her. All the moments that she had endured alone, since Zoyland had gone to Wookey, gathered now, like an airy squadron of strong-winged birds, to push her forward to this consummation. To let this chance go by untaken would be to betray, through weakness and feebleness, the very stride of fate itself.

The first thing she did was to look at the clock to see exactly how much time she had at her disposal. “He’ll be away just as long as I said,” she thought. “Poor old Sam, what a shame to send him off!” Then she retreated into her kitchen and hurriedly filled her kettle with fresh water for their tea, transferring what water there was already in the kettle into an enamelled saucepan for the boiling of their eggs. She glanced then at the fire in her sitting-room to make sure that her lover had not spoiled the glowing redness of it by his absent-minded putting on of more wood. “I’ll make the toast the last thing!” she thought, and returning again into her kitchen she cut up half a loaf into neat slices of bread. She then set to work with rapid, deft fingers to lay the table. This proceeding, swift though it was, gave her as deep a satisfaction as Sam’s father was won’t to derive from his preparations for the Sacrament. She did not precisely think, as she put a teaspoon in each of their two saucers and an egg-spoon by each of their two egg-cups, how over all this darkening quarter of the planet, female forms of the same love-demented race were doing just this same thing at this same moment. But she was fully aware of a delicious atmosphere of romantic sensuality in what she did. Their more dangerous passion hovered like an invisible incense round the sugar-bowl, the slop-basin, the milk-jug, and round all these little silver spoons, some with the great Zoyland Falcon and some with her own Spear crest upon them! She proceeded then to set light in her parlour to candles, bringing a veritable illumination of them from every other part of the house to throw lustre upon her love-feast.

The expression on her face when all this had been done and when she had finally placed two chairs opposite each other, on either side of the little card-table covered with a white cloth, was of the kind that only one of the great early masters could have done justice to. Its dominant note was an earthy, irrational, *almost stupid* complacency; a complacency that doubtless derived, in a long atavistic retrogression, from aeons of passive, brooding female contemplation of the imperishable elements of continuity in the turbid torrent of life! Leaning for a while against the back of the chair she intended for Sam, she allowed herself to fall into the waking trance of a very young girl. Zoyland had destroyed her physical virginity; but he had not touched — no, not so much as ruffled — that virginal dream-state in a young girl's consciousness wherein she awaits her first lover; and the bloom of which she keeps, like a handful of soft, white swans-down, or dandelion-seed, to lull the sleep of Eros when he really does at last come to her and pitch his tent.

The clock on her mantelpiece now struck the half-hour from when she had sent Sam away; and she had other things to do. Leaving the table she stared long and long at the sofa where they had been sitting together. This sofa had no back. It was, in fact, a large-sized, single-bed couch, standing against the wall of the room. With shining eyes she ran upstairs and came down with a great armful of fresh bed-clothes, snatched from her linen-chest. These she stretched out carefully upon the couch, tucking them in between it and the wall. With the gleam in the eyes and the quiver on the lips of one mischievous young girl making sport of another, she brought down, after a second run upstairs, a single pillow and a single pillow-case. When all was ready and she had made the bed she cast the same stupidly happy stare upon this achievement. The next thing she did was to give an anxious glance at the clock and then run upstairs for her final act of preparation. It was almost dark outside the window now; and she had carried downstairs every available candlestick. But her personal preparations were of such classic simplicity that they could be done perfectly well in this grey, perishing light. She kept both the door at the top of her stairs and the door at the bottom wide open, so that up there in her bedroom the dying light of the natural day and the ritualistic light of her Fête d'Amour mingled together with that peculiar and mysterious charm which candlelight and daylight assume when they are associated with each other at either of the two twilights.

Once more she ran downstairs, and filling a small hot-water can from her enamelled saucepan, which had by this time begun to steam a little, she hurried back to her twilit chamber, poured out the water into her basin and stripping herself with eager fingers of every shred of clothing set to work to sponge her bare, soft skin from head to foot. She felt, as she did this, as if her flesh and blood were something entirely apart from the deep consciousness wherewith she loved her lover. It was as if her body — after the tea-table and the bed — were a sort of final and triumphant offering, the last and the dearest thing she could give to him, so that he might take his full pleasure on that sacred night! Violently she rubbed herself after this, all over, with her bath-towel, till her limbs glowed warm and sweet; and then pulling on stockings, slippers, and a night-dress she had never worn before, she threw over herself a long, warm, dark-blue dressing-gown. Snatching up her brush and comb she now descended to her illuminated sitting-room, where, by an old-fashioned mirror, she combed out her hair, and then fastened it back, much more carefully than she had ever done in her life before. She removed carefully the strands of her hair adhering to the comb; and as she threw them into the fire she remembered what an old nurse of her mother's had once told her — not her childhood's nurse, but a very old woman who used to stay with the Spears when she was a little girl — that if a girl's hair makes a sound as it burns — a sound that the girl herself can hear — she will lose her maidenhood within the year. "Mine's gone already," she thought, "but *not really*!"

She was ready for him now; and behold! as she looked at the clock the hour she had given him was all but five minutes used up! She looked anxiously at her bright array of burning candles. Then she looked at herself, in her blue dressing-gown, in the mirror. For a passing second she got a real thrill of pleasure from the shining eyes and bright cheeks which she saw reflected; but a sudden memory of one evening when she had been waiting for Zoyland swept over her and she turned hastily away.

Meanwhile Sam had been walking slowly through the twilight in the same direction as that from which he had come. He was conscious of a vague feeling of fertility in the damp spring air and of the hidden stirrings of vegetable juices in roots and stalks as his feet sank in the soft turf of the river-bank, where thick swaths of last year's grass, lying along the ground and trodden by the feet of cattle, were interspersed with patches of young spring shoots and with the immature foliage of yarrow and bed straw. He felt, as he walked along, that life was at once far more exciting and far more dangerous than he had ever suspected. The freedom of conscience with which he had twice kissed Nell this afternoon, giving full rein to his feelings, was not threatened, even now, by any moral scruple. His heavy, sluggish nature, once roused to the magic of sex, had so little that was vicious in it — in the sense of being isolated and detached from tenderness and pity — that it brought with it no sense of guilt. It justified itself; and he felt pure and simple exultation in it. The strange thing was — and as the twilight darkened about him this was what he found hard to understand in himself — that the renunciation of all "possessiveness," which was his new ideal, did not debar him from snatching at this chance-given moment of love. The real reason was that Sam's devotion to Nell — as his unique true-love — was so unqualified and heart-whole, that his feeling, at this heaven-sent moment, did not carry with it that sense of "taking" which he had set himself to renounce. To love Nell, now that he felt she really loved him, seemed to him quite as much a giving as a taking. What did a little trouble him, as he burst through the river-mists and dug his heels and his stick into that magnetic springtime soil, was the quivering exultation of his own mood. Life seemed to him, just then, almost too exciting, almost too charged with electric dangers and raptures. Sam was no coward, but he was essentially a slow-moving, slow-witted, timid animal. The even tenor of his ways, until Nell appeared, had been so unruffled and so solidly earthy, that he felt scared at this new riot in his nerves, at this new quicksilver, running like an unknown "perilous stuff" through every vein! As he strode blindly on in the grey dampness he actually dared to articulate that word "saint" that was carried in the remotest portion of his consciousness. "I will be a lover *and* a saint!" his heart cried.

He never afterward forgot that hour's walk by the side of Whitelake stream. Carried along upon the cresting wave of his delicious adventure what Sam resembled most nearly was a boy who has "run away to sea"; and who suddenly finds himself in the midst of an overwhelming predicament; a predicament which realizes at the same time all his desire to be “heroic,” and all his craving for romance. At the bottom of his nature Sam had no small modicum of phlegmatic common sense; and in the very whirl and splash of the adventure to which he was responding, he retained a certain background of bewildered surprise that it should be himself — the timid, plodding, unenterprising self he knew so well — that had been given such a disturbing privilege! Compared with what Nell was feeling at this moment of time, Sam’s emotions were pathetically youthful. The Don Quixote in him had been stirred. But that was really the only thing in him upon which the girl could lean. For the rest he was in a mood of such turbulent bewilderment that the occasion with all it brought was only half-real to him. In most love-affairs between men and women this element of “reality” is unequally distributed; but in this case it was especially so; for whereas every aspect of what was happening was vividly clear to Nell, to Sam it was all wrapped in a vague mist. Not exactly in an idealistic mist, however; for the sly Quantock fox in him kept up all the time a sniffing scrutiny of what was going on! Nell’s whole being, on the contrary, was melted into “realism,” on this momentous night. Everything was twice as real to her as usually was the case; and things were always real enough. While Sam kept thinking to himself— “What a puzzling confusion life is! Here am I, longing to be a saint and yet with a chance of spending the night with the sweetest girl in Somersetshire!” — Nell thought simply and solely, “I want to give everything I’ve got to Sam. He has come to me at last. He has come to me at last!”

When Sam paused at last, close by Whitelake Bridge, and lit a match to look at his watch, he saw that he had already allowed forty minutes to pass since he had left the house. This vexed him; for he could hardly traverse in twenty minutes fields that had taken him forty minutes to cross. His chin began to work as he put his watch away and he cursed himself for his absent-minded blundering. The moment he swung round, however, he noticed a faint, dim, filmy light in the western sky. He knew at once what *that* sign hung in the heavens was — the young moon! The mist from the river, and the still more insidious vapours wafted across Queen's Sedgemoor, so obscured this fragmentary luminary that it was no bright object that he stared at. He was standing almost due east of Whitelake Cottage now; so that this dim white blur in the darkness hung directly over the dwelling of his Love. To his excited feelings at that moment that phantasmal object seemed much more than a natural phenomenon.

Eagerly he grasped with one of his hands a tuft of willow sprigs growing out of the head of an old bowed pollard, whose roots were in the wet earth at his feet, and leaning forward raised his stick exultantly in the air. The dark earth beneath him seemed to him then like a vast, wild-maned horse, upon whose broad back he was being borne through space! A poignant smell of musk rose up from where his heavy boots pressed against that huge living creature. Young plants of common water mint must have been growing there to cause this scent; but its aromatic sweetness added yet another element to his enchantment.

From that fragment of white mystery there slid across land and water into the soul of Sam Dekker a thin, long-rippling confederate stream of sweet disturbance. Where John Crow would have subtly reasoned upon the mythical significance of this frail vessel of "furious fancies," Sam just gave himself up to its palpable power. He became a wave in the Bristol Channel, a bracken-frond in the Quantock hills, a crystal in a Mendip stone wall, a black-striped perch in the Brue under Pomparles Bridge. Sam and that old bent pollard, whose youthful sprouts he was clutching with such blind intensity, gave themselves up together so completely to the power of that obscured moon that an identical magnetism poured through the man’s flesh and blood and shivered through the vegetable fibres of the tree. Yes! Sam felt as if he were a reckless rider, awkward and stiff, in his new release, but mounted on the dark equine back and behind the streaming mane of the revolving earth; and carried wildly through the wet mists towards his desire. He little knew what superhuman Naturalists were watching him then, as interested in his present antics (and not less sympathetic) as he himself had so often been over the aquarium in his father’s museum. That shapeless white blur that still delayed to sink below the reedy horizon in the Sedgemoor vapours, was to these watchers like the candle which Sam would hold sometimes above some favourite finned pet! In a universe so thrilling and so aching with teeming consciousness, the man and the bowed pollard tree strained and yearned together towards that misty image in the west. Gold against his clenched fingers were those smooth twigs. Gold against his mouth was the river’s breathing. Wild and yet faint in his ears were the gurgling sobs of the water as it rippled in the darkness around hidden roots and around the hollow stalks of last year’s reeds.

He boldly broke up his trance now, tearing at it as if he were some prehistoric dinosaur, rending its way through a matted entanglement of monstrous moonlit vegetation. Clenching his stick by its centre and closing his fists, he now set himself, in an obstinate jog-trot, to re-cross those long meadow-reaches in less than half the time he had taken to cross them. It was thus only about a quarter of an hour later than the hour his Love had given him when he arrived panting at the door of Whitelake Cottage and gave a series of quick low knocks. She didn’t let him wait out there for one second. She had been sitting on that couch she had turned into his bed, listening and listening! It was not *her* destiny to see the moon that night.

When Sam, all blinking and panting, threw down his hat and stick on an empty chair and hugged her to his heart he thought to himself— "If life goes on like this, my heart will burst from too much joy." But he need not have been afraid! The great suction-process of cosmogonic matter — always waiting to drain up in its huge, blind, clay belly, these rapturous overtones of its foster-children — was soon at work, sucking up the spilt drops of his happiness.

They sat down to their incredible meal. Wise had Nell been to restrict their portion that night to the simplest elements! Tea, eggs, butter, bread, honey, and black-currant jam. The taste of each of these things — and Sam swallowed them all in rapid, boyish gulps of heavenly greediness — carried nothing but the very poetry of mortal sustenance into their amorous blood. She kept pulling the loose front of her blue dressing-gown tightly round her classical breasts; so that Sam remained all through this delicious meal, in complete ignorance of the fact that she had stripped herself naked for him save for her flimsy night-gown.

As to the difference between the sensations of Sam and Nell, as they ate their meal in the midst of this blaze of candlelight and with their bed prepared, the situation was reversed from what it was under former conditions. It was Nell who had become the self-conscious, detached one, savouring every morsel that both she and her lover put into their mouths and lingering out their tea-drinking when their hunger was satisfied. Sam on the other hand, with beating heart, could not keep out of his mind the thought that when their meal was over he would be allowed to embrace her. He had noticed on his entrance the changed aspect of the couch and though with a lover's tact he had avoided any reference to this transformation, it was evident to him that the girl was tacitly assuming he was going to stay the night; and this was a fact in itself enough to stir his senses. Thus, though he ate his food hungrily and with an eager, nervous greed, he found himself far too excited to enjoy with the whole-hearted contentment which the girl experienced the progress of their perfect meal. The Theban prophet may have been right when he said that in the act of love the woman feels a greater thrill than the man; but he would have been wrong if he had said this about the *expectation* of such a consummation. A girl's physical love, except at the moment of actual contact, is much more diffused than a man's. While they were enjoying their tea, therefore, Nell kept saying to herself—"This is my Sam! My Sam has come at last! My Sam belongs to me and I to him! There is no girl in the whole world happier than I. He has come to me at last with a free heart! He loves only me and I love only him! How beautifully those candles shine! What a good thing Sam likes blackcurrant jam. Always, henceforth, when I see black-currant jam, I shall think of him. How glad I am I've put on my blue dressing-gown."

But Sam's felicity was all this while a little marred by the impetuous craving of his tingling senses. "Will she let me embrace her to the uttermost presently? How soon shall I dare to embrace her? Will she sleep with me all the night on this bed she has made up? Or is it *only for me;* and will she insist on going upstairs in the night and leaving me here alone?" He finally got so impatient that he could not wait to give her time to finish her second cigarette. He rose up and came round the table and snatched it from her hand. He threw it into the fire. He lifted her up to her feet. He blew out the brightly burning candles on the chimney-piece even while he still clutched her wrist!

This was the moment, as she felt herself pulled across the room by her wrist, that she knew her first real spasm of *fear of her man;* that delicious fear which is an element in every authentic encounter between the sexes. For all William Zoyland's amorous brutality, though Nell had felt embarrassment and even physical distress when he was embracing her, she had never felt this indescribably delicious quiver of fear. The awkwardness, the material shock of ravishment under Zoyland's violence, had been mitigated by a certain passive inertia, as of the original resistance of matter itself to the stir of blind creation. But now as she felt her blue dressing-gown torn from her body and saw the impersonal glint in Sam's bear-like eyes, she knew a fear much deeper than the mere fear of a girl in the hands of a ravisher. She knew the fear of seeing her Sam, her own well-known Sam, transformed into something unknown and sweetly dreadful! This fear, however, only lasted till he had carried her to that carefully made bed. Then with incredible rapidity it entirely vanished! The cause of its vanishing — though she analysed it not — was that there had been aroused in her, at last and for the first time, the strongest, the most poignant, the most transporting sensation which exists in the world — the sensation of a feminine body abandoned to the man she loves! To the man; not to the man's *body.* For the curious thing is that while at this supreme moment she for him had become absolutely impersonal — a woman's flesh in empty space — he remained for her the *actual*, *personal*, *conscious man she loved.* The extremity of her sensation — that sensation which Teiresias (to his own disaster!) had placed above the man's — implied a vivid consciousness that she, Nell, was being possessed by him, Sam.

But with him it was altogether different. His authentic love for her, his pity, his tenderness, his feeling for her beauty, had simply opened wide the gates of ecstasy. Through these gates there rushed now a rapture of bodiless, mindless, delirious sensation. This sensation, dominating now the whole field of his conscious and unconscious being, was much blinder, simpler, less complicated than anything which she felt. Both their sensations centred in *her* body, not in his. His body was merely the engine of the well-known personality that was now enjoying her. His body might have been ugly, coarse, deformed, grotesque. It might have been made of wood, of iron, of stone, of cement, of peat, of clay. It was her man's dear body; and that was enough! If it had been the body of a leper, it would have been the same. But with him, once again, it was otherwise. His consciousness, even at the beginning of his delight, could only have expressed its rapture by the concept— "She is too sweet." Then there came a further point in his ecstasy when he could not have even articulated as much as that; when he could perhaps have said no more to describe what he felt than some perfectly incoherent gibberish, some subhuman gibberish that would be identical with what a bird, a beast, a reptile, would utter, or try to utter, as it plunged into that sweet oblivion.

In spite of the unnumbered occasions of erotic satisfaction — paroxysms of normal and of abnormal claspings — which are forever reaching their consummation on all sides of us in the great swirling life-tide, it is surprising how few encounters between amorists, whether human or subhuman, attain to the sublime and absolute ecstasy which was reached tonight by these two. Much more is needed for this than mere physical attraction, or mere mental reciprocity — or even both of these things together! It would almost seem as if every one of us hides in the secret recesses of his being a potentiality for this supreme rapture — but a potentiality that can only be roused by one particular person. It may be an illusion, this feeling that lovers so often have, that they have found the one solitary "alter-ego" in the universe whose identity supplements their own, but it is certainly not an illusion, but a tragic fact, that many human beings — and not by any means sex-starved persons either — go down to their graves without ever having known this indescribable transport. Sam and Nell certainly knew it to the full this night of the New Moon! They took such spacious draughts of it; they plunged into it so desperately, so utterly, that in the mingling of their identities there seemed no portion of either of them — body, soul or spirit — *left over*, that was not merged and lost in the other.

What Lord P.'s bastard would have seen if he had flung open that door upon them — a man and a girl struggling to return to a primal platonic unity that some terrestrial curse had interrupted — would have been a poor, false, meagre, crude parody of what their submerged consciousnesses were feeling. It was not in any bodily form that reality presented itself to those two at that moment. Their ecstasy itself was the reality, the truth, the essence of what occurred between them! Yes; the "entelecheia," so to speak, of their desperate claspings upon that couch, was not in the idea of their bodies; was not in the form of their bodies. Such aspects of this event in time and space would have been false if taken as the real reality of that moment. The "reality" of that moment — of that infinite series of moments — was what they felt; and what they felt was beyond all human symbolism. What they felt was more rapturous than a rain of blinding, dazzling meteors falling through eternity. It was an iridescent cloud-burst, rushing down from unknown translunar regions, and meeting a toppling tower of deep-sea waters, flung up from the abyss!

Nell was a natural, simple girl; and as far as her intellect went, a commonplace girl. Sam was a natural, simple man; and as far as his intellect went, a commonplace man. But compared with the projection of delirious ecstasy which their encounter that night lodged in the atmosphere around Whitelake Cottage the neurotic intensity of the attraction between John and Mary Crow — baffled, tantalised, provoked, throbbing with unrealised and perhaps unrealisable cravings for a consummation that mocked them with its nearness only to withdraw from them again — was something as sad as it was sterile.

It was the girl who, when night fell, slipped from his arms and blew out the spluttering wicks of the two dying candles and balanced the fire-guard against the bars of the grate. He hardly awakened when she returned, so drowsy was he. It was not only the happiness of love that made sleep cover him with such swan's-down feathers; it was the excitement of the last two weeks, weeks that had been full of a mental agitation entirely new to his earth-bound nature. Into this heavenly forgetfulness Nell too was soon sucked down as she nestled close against him; and had Lord P.'s bastard rapped loudly at the door which divided these lovers from that hushed spring night, it would have been long seconds of time before their two souls, so deeply involved, yes! involved down into the very profoundest subconsciousness of each of them, had risen up to deal with this fatal intrusion! But no knock at that locked door, no tap at that darkened window, disturbed the peace of those two sleepers. Like poor Tittie Petherton, sleeping now with an expression of felicity such as she had not worn since her disease first attacked her, they slept the sleep of such as are "free among the dead." The sleep of consummated love has indeed nothing in the world comparable to it except the sleep of mother and child.

As these two slept, the shapeless moon sank down over the rim of the Polden Hills. As these two slept, little gusts of midnight air, less noticeable than any wind but breaking the absolute stillness, stirred the pale, green leaf-buds above many a half-finished hedge-sparrow's nest between Queen's Sedgemoor and the Lake Village flats. Here and there, unknown to Sam Dekker or any other naturalist, a few among such nests held one or two cold untimely eggs, over whose brittle blue-tinted rondure moved in stealthy motion these light-borne air-stirrings pursuing their mysterious journeys from one dark horizon to another. Drooping over the rich, black earth in Mr. Weatherwax’s two walled gardens hung motionless the heads of the honey-sweet jonquils and the faint-breath’d narcissi, too heavily asleep in that primordial sleep of green-calyxed vegetation, deeper and older than the sleep of birds or beasts or men, to respond, even by the shiver of the least petal among them, to these light motions of the midnight air. The sensitised earth-nerves of that portion of the maternal planet upon which these beings lived responded, as she swung forward on her orbit, to the sleep of her numerous offspring by a drowsy deliciousness of her own in the arms of the night, enclosing them all in those interstellar spaces and comforting them all with a peace greater than their peace.

THE DOLOROUS BLOW

In the Green Pheasant Inn at Taunton, a little out-of-the-way tavern in a back street of that ancient town on one of the chilliest mornings of this eventful March, Persephone Spear sat on the bed where she and Philip had been spending the night. She sat there in her white slip, her straight Artemis shoulders bare, pulling on her black stockings. Philip had just gone to the end of the passage to take a bath and the girl could detect now amid the other early morning sounds in that small hostelry — such as the bootblack replacing the commercial travellers' boots at their several doors, such as the house-girl bringing cans of shaving-water to their doors and giving bold, shameless knocks, such as the barking of dogs in the cobbled yard, the trampling of an old horse in its stable, the scrubbing of a motor car in an open garage by a whistling boy, the sound of the rush of water from the bath-faucet. The girl's whole nature felt as if it were drawing itself together into a little round ball, tying itself up into a little tight knot, and making itself as small and hard and *unattractive* as it could possibly make itself. She treated her slim boyish legs very roughly as she pulled on her stockings. She thought, "Oh, if I can only get my stockings and skirt on before he comes back he won't touch me any more!" With vicious jerks she *did* get her stockings on; and then, heedless of the dust on the carpet, she stepped into her skirt, allowing it to trail upon the floor. The pattern upon the carpet consisted of big, bunchy roses, each rose encased in a square frame of dull, brown lines. The disgust she felt at seeing her nice grey skirt in contact with this horrible carpet made her prick her fingers as she pinned its black band with a big safety pin. "My waist has never looked so small!"

she thought, and indeed the use of the safety pin had come about because, after the excitement of her experience in Wookey Hole, the band of her skirt had become too wide. Hurriedly she rushed to the chair where her grey jacket was lying and pressed one arm — and then another — breathlessly and violently into its reassuring tailor-made protection.

Artemis-like, she had found that by far the worst part of her affair with Philip — and it had been just the same with Dave — was the fact that she had to undress and be made love to without the defence of her sweet-smelling Harris-tweed jacket and skirt.

"I like driving through the lanes," she thought, "by Philip's side, while he gets fonder and fonder of me, but can't touch me! I like his kissing me and hugging me so hard the moment he gets me alone when the long drive has excited him to such a pitch. I like the way his cheeks smell of the wind and of the fresh dust of the road. I like the dinners we have together in these places with the shy young waitresses at table and the impudent hussies in the bar and the yard-boys touching their cropped foreheads and sneaking a look at my ankles and staring so respectfully at Phil! It's these nights that are so awful. Oh, *why* are men made as they are? Why *are* they made as they are? What's the matter with me that I shrink from these nights with Philip so … and yet enjoy the days with him? Do other women feel what I feel? Is there some deep, secret conspiracy among us to be silent about this loathing of skin to skin, this disgust of the way they are when they have their will of us? Am I betraying some tragic silence that Nature from the beginning has imposed in dark whispers upon her daughters? Is the pain of ravishment only one of the inevitable sufferings of girls … laid upon us since the dawn of time? Is this shrinking, this loathing, something that every girl feels?" She took up the comb to comb out her short, clipped curls. "Damn!" she muttered aloud. Her anger rose up suddenly against all the intolerable things a person had to put up with. Her anger rose against the washing-stand — with the two white basins side by side and the soap-dish into which she had put a piece of lavender soap which Philip had now carried off to the bathroom.

"I wonder," she thought, "whether those double-dyed asses of Glastonbury aldermen, now that they've elected Geard, will do what I suggested to Dave and try and start a real communistic factory … something on a much bigger scale than this silly souvenir business?" She stood in the middle of the room holding the comb in her hands. Impelled by a lurid fascination, she moved to the door and opened it gently … gently … biting her lower lip as she turned the handle. She was met by that combination of curious stuffy smells which a bedroom passage in a small inn always exhales. The passage was full, too, of that particular morning light that seems to have nothing to do with the sun at all, that seems to come from some reservoir of pallid, terrestrial illumination that is neither natural nor artificial, but is a light especially dedicated to inn-passages when only the Boots and the oldest of the house-maids are stirring, and a smell of cigar-smoke and stale cheese pervades the staircase. She continued to hold the door ajar, as she leaned forward listening, her unwashed eyelids still heavy with sleep and her chestnut curls all tumbled and rumpled.

There was the sound of Philip's splashing! It came from behind that door, with a white marble plate upon it carrying the word "Bath." Persephone listened to it with petrified attention. "Do all girls," she thought, "feel these queer sensations of lurid attraction and nervous disgust towards men? How much more conscious a girl is than a man of the relations between men and women! I *know* that at this moment Phil is enjoying his bath, its precise depth, its exact heat, the fact that he brought his big sponge, just as a child might enjoy these things! He's forgotten altogether about my jumping out of bed and staying so long at the window in the middle of the night. He's practically forgotten that I exist!"

She was not far wrong. Extended at full length in the bath, luxuriating in its hot water — for there was no bathroom at The Elms — Philip's thoughts might be expressed as follows: "Warm … nice … soap … nice … stain on wall shaped like Barter's profile … start digging at Wookey … Except for old Merry, not a soul knows … a lot of tin in Wookey … diabolus metallorum … plumbum candidum … Hermes … stream-tin … alluvial deposit … tourmaline … spar … quartz … stannic oxide … cassiterite … stannic chloride … purple precipitate … purple of Cassius … …. tin salt … tin crystal … tin-ash." He began to derive extraordinary satisfaction from taking up his great sponge, filling it with water and squeezing it over his knees with both hands. The sponge became the hill above Wookey where he intended to mine for tin and his knees became jagged fragments of this precious alluvial deposit and the water on either side of his thighs was the subterranean river. "Let Geard have his Pageant," he thought. "Let him dig for Merlin's tomb! I'm going to dig for tin … diabolus metallorum … I'll turn this town into something different from a humbugging showplace! I'll sell my dyes and I'll sell my tin to all the dealers in Europe … What a good thing I'm not responsible for Perse! Let Monsieur Agitator support my sweet Coz, while I enjoy her at my leisure!"

He began to squeeze his sponge with still fiercer pressure and still deeper satisfaction. He found that there was a little window-pane opposite him where the coloured glass had been replaced by ordinary glass and out of this window he could see quite a long way over the roofs of Taunton. He even fancied he could see the ridge of the Polden Hills between two chimneys. He propped himself up in the bath on the palms of his hands. But the ridge vanished then, and in its place rose one of the great Taunton Church Towers celebrated all over Somersetshire and only rivalled by St. John's at Glastonbury. The sight of this religious edifice, so tall and massive, disturbed the current of his thoughts. He sank back in the bath. Once more that little far-off line between the chimneys re-appeared. Automatically he began squeezing his big sponge again, but the water was getting cold and the sight of that tower had broken up his complacency.

"What did she do that for?" he asked himself, thinking, with a frown, of the incident in the night when the girl had jumped out of bed and stayed so long at the window. "I don't believe she'll bear me a child," he said to himself. "There's something about her — No! she's not the maternal type, my sweet Perse, there's no getting over that!" He gave himself up then, as he got out of the bath and began hurriedly drying, to his own peculiar and favourite voluptuous thoughts. Every man has his own set of voluptuous images with which his mind tends to dally at such a moment when his body is glowing and refreshed. Philip's thoughts had to do with Persephone's bare shoulders as they looked — not in her night-gown, for she dreamed like a boy at night and though this would have pleased John it did not suit Philip, but in her slip. It was therefore no little blow to him — for he had anticipated quite the contrary — when, on his entering their room with a quick, sharp knock, he found her fully dressed and seated again by that accursed window.

That moment was indeed a fatal and memorable moment in the history of their relations. It was as if in the process of *his* bath and of *her* combing her hair a deadly gulf had yawned between them. She was seated on the arm of a chair and leaning against the window-sill. Her pose was withdrawn, chaste, reserved, remote, her face cold and pale, her eyelids half closed. She was intently surveying the head of the old carriage horse whose hoofs trampling on its stable floor had drummed a bitter tune into her mind at certain intervals during the night. The old horse was peering out of a small square window and the lad who had been cleaning the motor car was stroking its neck. He was still whistling the same tune, and as Philip paused at their window to follow the girl's gaze he started singing. "I've made up my mind to sail away … sail away … sail away … In the Colonies I mean to try … mean to try …" The lad sang in a silly drawling voice. "He's heard that tune on a roundabout," remarked Percy, drawing in her head and evading the arm with which Philip attempted to capture her. "I used to hear it when I first came to Somerset."

They stood side by side for a moment without touching, watching some pigeons that were fluttering about on the stable roof. Philip felt obscurely angry with these sleek birds whose wings gleamed like the metallic shimmerings in Wookey Hole. Their chucklings and croonings made an orchestral accompaniment to the lad's voice. Persephone said to herself: "Damn! Damn! Damn! How can I get out of having to submit to this sort of thing with him again?" As she turned back into the room their eyes met and both of them knew without the passage of a word between them that a barrier had sprung up which it would be very hard to destroy.

"Well! Well!" he now remarked with forced jocularity, "if you're satisfied with your concern, run down, while I dress, and see how long we've got to wait for breakfast! I'm due at the office by nine this morning. There's a lawyer from Yeovil coming in, by the early train, to see me."

She looked at him coldly and quizzically. "What trouble are you in now, Phil? Have you been found out at last?" She spoke at random, but when she had spoken she wished that she hadn't said just that.

Philip's swarthy cheeks had darkened, and she saw that this "lawyer from Yeovil" *was* coming on some unpleasant errand. As a matter of fact Philip had summoned him because of a paragraph in the Western Gazette that looked extremely like a covert reference to Jenny Morgan and her child Nelly. “Good Lord, Perse!” he cried, pushing her to the door. “Don’t begin inventing reasons for *my* legal interviews. Why, I’ve got a whole series of lawyers coming to the office this week. Today’s is the most harmless of ’em!”

The day that had begun for Philip and Persephone with the croonings of these pigeons and the sing-song tune of “I’ve made up my mind to sail away,” waxed unusually hot for the last fortnight of March when it reached its noon hour.

Sam and his father, having had occasion to visit a house in Hill Head, which is a street leading to the foot of Wirral Hill, happened to be making a short cut home to their early dinner across the grassy expanse of the Abbey Ruins. They had carefully avoided the dangerous topic hitherto that day, being occupied with an attempt to bribe, threaten, cajole, persuade, or terrify, one of their recalcitrant choir-boys into giving up his habit of waylaying the girls of Hill Head as they passed a piece of common land out there on their way home from school. There were several ancient thorn bushes growing on this patch of Waste Land, some of them the merest stumps, which Mr. Evans, in his daily ramblings about the place, had already decided were far older than the more famous one in St. John’s churchyard. Indeed, in the heat of his frenzies and his fancies, Mr. Evans had got so far as to persuade himself that this particular tract of land — which certainly wears even at our epoch a somewhat forlorn look — was the actual site of that Terre Gastee, of the mediaeval romances, which became withered and blighted after the Dolorous Blow delivered by the unlucky Balin upon King Pelleas, the Guardian of the Grail.

Young Chinnock’s “Dolorous Blows” — aimed from the shelter of these desolate thorn stumps — were directed not against any man, king or otherwise, but against anonymous and youthful femininity, and took the form of rudely flung sticks and stones, and still more rudely flung taunts of a kind more grossly obscene than even these sturdy wenches were accustomed to. The mildest of these taunts of which Chinnock was accused was the repetition of the phrase — shouted in the ears of several grown-up young women as well as children: *"I'd like to,* Dolly!" *"I'd like to,* Lettie!" *"I'd like to,* Rosie!" accompanied, on each occasion, by the flinging of some kind of natural missile. It was in a visit from old Mr. Shepherd, the aged Glastonbury policeman, that Mat Dekker was informed that his sweetest-voiced choir-boy was in serious danger of arrest, and in his anxiety to suppress this outburst of barbarity, while he saved the boy from jail, he had begged Sam, whose power over boys — though he did not like them — was always great, to accompany him on this disturbing errand.

In nothing does the grotesque injustice and thoughtless self-righteousness of human beings show itself more blindly than in these matters of sex-abuse. The two Dekkers were certainly justified in their invasion of the retreat of this perverse thrower of sticks and stones in the Terre Gastee of Hill Head Road. But when their own dialogue touched the dangerous topic of Nell Zoyland there was just the same *"I'd like to,* Nell!" at the back of their rugged skulls. And between this "*I'd like to,* Nell!" felt by these two grown men and the *"I'd like to,* Rosie!" shouted by Tom Chinnock, there could have been very little difference in the eyes of that Christ worshipped by Sam who uttered those searching words: "Whoever looketh at … to lust after … *hath* committed … already … in his heart." It was as they were passing the north doorway of St. Mary's ruined church that this dialogue began to take its dangerous *"I'd like to*" form. Confronting this old edifice of the end of the twelfth century the two men paused, their eyes attracted automatically by the lavish blaze of sunshine which fell from that cloudless noon sky upon this richly carved entrance. An arcade or frieze of interlacing arches cut in bold relief, alternately round and pointed as the curves intersect, and decorated with Norman zig-zag ornament, is broken, in the centre of the doorway, by a pyramidal cornice of delicate moulding, which covers, like a high peaked helmet, the interior arch-mouldings. These are in four concentric rings, containing numberless medallions of deeply cut carvings, telling the story of the Nativity and of the Massacre of the Innocents. Only trained experts in such matters can today interpret this dim, confused, obscure entanglement of animals, leaves, flowers, angels and impassioned human figures. Neither of the Dekkers was an expert of this kind, and to their simple naturalist eyes it was comfort enough to contemplate in that rich confusion of organic shapes a general impression of earth-life that resembled some sumptuous entanglement of moss and rubble and lichen, amid the twisted roots of old forest trees.

It would have been better for Mat Dekker, at that moment, if he had been endowed with a little of the analytic irresponsibility which John Crow possessed. He would have known better, then, what was going on in his deep, heavy, massive nature. He would have known better, then, why it was that he burst out upon his only-begotten son, as he did, in such a spasm of blundered, ill-chosen words! Gazing through that richly storied arch into the body of the Virgin’s Chapel and out through a south window into the sunlit branches beyond, Sam listened to his father with lowering astonishment, his chin working frantically, and his little green eyes full of queer lights. In the roaring, raving, towering, cresting, cascading whirl of its huge centrifugal flames the superhuman consciousness of that noon-day sun recognised, amid the billions upon billions of other organisms that floated through its non-human awareness, his brief-lived biped enemy — the stalwart priest of Christ. The sun’s awareness of any particular living creature may be for good and may be for evil, but towards these two men, each of whom, deep in his heart, was crying out — just like poor Tom— "*I'd like to,* Nell!" it was certainly for evil.

The sun indeed blazed down in unusual strength for a Glastonbury March day. It turned all this mass of complicated stone imagery into something as radiant as it was obscure, into something resembling the checquered patterns of dead leaves and dead twigs, mingled with little mosses and funguses, that are suddenly revealed in a forest opening, and yet into something so hot and dry and dusty that it suggested the carved stonework in classical southern countries, across which lizards slide and above which the air seems to droop and gasp and pant. That unique stonework doorway under which for at least seven hundred years human skeletons, clothed in flesh, had been passing, was on this March day a proof of what far-removed opposites in Nature the mind of man can reduce to an imaginative unity. While the hot and dusty texture of these deep mouldings suggested that languorous feeling of burning noons under copper skies when the hot bosom of the air lies sweltering and swooning upon the slabs of shadowless stone thresholds, and where upon the marble brims of dried-up fountains the coiled snake scarce seems even to breathe in its glittering sleep, the actual shapes and forms of this limestone imagery were born of dripping forest boughs and dark rainy moorlands and the wind-swept ramparts of Gothic castles.

As Sam gazed now at these four concentric rings of convoluted sculpture, listening to his father's troubled voice, he could not be called conscious that these sun-warmed intricacies of obscure carving represented the birth of his Man-God … that magical Event which could thus bring together the tents of the South and the chilly ramparts of the North … but a feeling did come over him that he was staring into the very roots of the earth, where the creatures that he so loved were engendered by the minglings of primordial heat and cold.

"We *have* to renounce," the priest was saying with a dangerous quiver of his long, clean-shaven upper lip, "and she is the test given unto you now, my son, as to whether you *can* renounce." His words burst out in a jerky, violent, spasmodic manner, for the force behind them was nothing less than that "*I'd like to! I'd like to!*" which, in Tom Chinnock's case, had been accompanied by sticks and stones. He was secretly proud that this child of his sturdy Quantock loins had made the son of the great Marquis of P. a shamefaced wittol. In those imaginative senses below the senses which create that terrible glamour-world of thrilling illusion wherein all exquisite temptations lie, Mat Dekker had derived a wild and savage joy from the thought that *his* son had lain in bed by the side of those unequalled breasts.

The conventional phrases, "desire of the flesh" … "sins of the flesh" … "lusts of the flesh" are totally at variance with the real phenomena of erotic temptation. In real temptation the "flesh" does not enter at all. There is the generative nerve where like a twisted serpent the scales of the embryo Lust-Dragon simmer and ferment, and there is the brain nerve towards which that quivering forked tongue sends out its cry of confederacy! The repercussions of both these things are mental, spiritual, ethereal, astral, immaterial, psychic and as utterly removed from the "flesh" as they are from "matter." It is a thing of *nerves,* this "brutish sting," this erotic obsession, of nerves and of the psyche, the soul, the self! The flesh is pathetically, beautifully, grotesquely *innocent.* It is in the nerves that all lecheries, all lusts, all passions lie … in the nerves and the imagination. It is the erotic nerve, the tightly coiled snake with the flickering tongue, always waiting to leap, that creates that under-sea of fluctuating images, wherein Matter and Flesh have been reduced to tenuous and filmy wraiths, but from which the "nerve perilous” can feed with its vibrant tantalisations the excited soul! All good springs from the nerves and from the mind. All evil springs from the nerves and from the mind. Innocent, neutral, harmless, beautiful, neither good nor evil, is the mortal flesh of men and of beasts and of the grasses of the field!

“She is the test for you, my son,” went on Mat Dekker while his erotic nerve kept repeating: *“I’d like to, I’d like to!”* like a rat gnawing in a hollow wall, “she is the test for you. You have done what you wanted to do. But it must go on no longer. Any man can give way to physical temptation once. Where a man shows his mettle is where he refuses to *go on* yielding.” As he spoke Mat Dekker took off his hat and wiped his forehead. This gave his superhuman enemy, the sun, his supreme opportunity, and he poured down his burning noon rays upon that bare grey head with redoubled concentration. “Not to go on with a fleshly sin,” continued Mat Dekker, “is the great victory of the spirit over the body. None of us can help yielding *once*. It … is … too … sweet. But after the excess of the first plunge a man with any character must pull himself together and climb back into the trench of the faithful.”

“Don’t, Dad!” muttered Sam sulkily. “I’ve got to think. You only worry me, talking like that.”

They moved away together now out of the Abbey grounds; and by a short cut, permitted only to residents of the town, passed into Silver Street. Sam surprised his parent by his imperviousness to a new appeal. “Sorry, Father,” he muttered presently, “I was thinking of something else … I didn’t hear what you said!”

As the two Dekkers were turning into Silver Street, John Crow, playing truant from his little office by the station, was dawdling in front of the old men’s almshouses and staring up at the bellcot of St. Margaret’s thirteenth-century chapel.

It was part of John’s deep “selfishness,” of this egoism which he deliberately and shamelessly cultivated, that he always preferred to allow his imagination to be stirred by little out-of-the-way buildings of this kind rather than by more famous ancient erections. The aura of “visitors” gathered for him round any notable show-spot, and was enough to turn him against it. But a fragment of old wall, a broken piece of old coping, or, much more, a building like this that had retained its own humble, patient identity throughout so many generations, always held his imagination in a dream-heavy trance of curious felicity. As he now surveyed this old bell-cot of St. Margaret’s Chapel, out of whose stones grew intermittent stone-crop and green moss, the thought of how long this little tower, with its two bells and its statue of the saint, had been mingled with the thoughts of the generations of life-broken, life-weary, life-sated, life-hungry old men, going in and out of these men’s almshouses, gave the selfish John a thrilling rapture of delight. Like a lovely wine, light and dreamy, made out of old, old mosses softer than sleep, this incorrigible and mischievous wanderer drank deep of these ancient men’s long secular lives under St. Margaret’s bell tower. He had drifted now to where Street Road branched off to the west, and instead of walking on to Hill Head and crossing that strip of waste land which was the arena of Tom Chinnock’s erotic activities he turned down Street Road. He had in his mind a little dairy-shop, not far from Cardiff Villa where the new Mayor lived. This meant a furtive and foxy shuffle, for the misanthropic John, along *the other side of the road.* It might indeed be said that the whole of John Crow’s life was a sequence of “other sides”— “other sides” of roads, “other sides” of thoughts, “other sides” of ideas, religions, labours, activities, in the whole great, dusty, bustling panorama of life. It was the same thing, even when he held Mary in his arms, for he liked better to hold her as if he had caught her escaping from him, than as if she had rushed to meet him with outstretched arms.

He pretended to be extremely interested in the small suburban gardens on his right as he advanced hurriedly and surreptitiously along the path. He was seized, however, with such a strong feeling of being waved at and called to and summoned to stop from the single upper window, the window of Crummie's bedroom, visible between the tall bushes, that he raised one quick nervous glance at that dark aperture. But though his fancy filled that small space with the heads of the whole Geard family he knew in his mind that no one was there and he hurried on, trailing the point of his stick along the hedges, the gates, the railings, the walls of "the other side" of Street Road. At last he came to the little isolated dairy-shop. It stood close to the road, this little shop, and occupied the whole ground floor of a small square Jacobean house that made an odd contrast to the Victorian tradesmen's villas that formed its neighbourhood.

The hot sun beat down on the front of this little establishment where the ground before the open door had been strewn with gravel. There were two wooden benches on either side of the entrance, and inside there were several little wooden tables. The spot had an old-fashioned, mellow look, and yet the fact that milk in place of beer was the beverage sold gave a peculiar character to the whole place which it would have been hard to define. John had discovered this innocent refuge several weeks ago and it had grown to be a favourite retreat of his, though so far he had not revealed its whereabouts to Mary. The blending of Jacobean brickwork with warm dusty sunshine and both of these with large, cool, white receptacles full of milk, made of Othery's Creamery in Street Road an oasis of sensuous, West-Country peace for such as did not require the more biblical stimulant of alcohol to bathe them in enchantment. John walked in and ordered a pint of milk and a couple of cheese sandwiches. These he carried himself to a place at the back of the room, from whose cool, dark shelter he could see the hot sunshine outside, not so much lying upon, as absorbing into itself, the gravel, the wooden benches, the strip of road-dust. John had not settled himself for very long enjoying the look of that shimmering picture framed so caressingly in the doorway, a picture whose only background was a tiny space of misty blue between two ramshackle sheds across the road, when he became aware of a stockily built young man with an open countenance correcting a piece of manuscript.

The fingers which held this person's pencil were those of a manual labourer, but the face that alternately bent down and rose to stare into vacancy was that of a refined scholar. Panic seized the misanthropic John and he thought to himself: "All is lost … all is spoilt." He began gobbling his sandwiches and gulping his milk. "I'll clear out of here before he speaks. He's sure to speak if I stay. He's a born hailer of strangers!" But the fair young man, who must have been about ten years younger than John showed no sign of speaking. He continued to stare alternatively at his manuscript and at space. John's mind worked in a most characteristic manner now. "My good meal has been spoilt, my good moment has been ruined. But in for a penny in for a pound. I may as well take the plunge."

"Are you a visitor to Glastonbury, Sir?" he asked in a friendly tone. The young man did not seem surprised at being addressed, nor did he seem to take it in ill part. He laid his glass of milk on the top of his manuscript to prevent the wind from ruffling it and pulled his chair a little nearer John's table.

"In a way I am, and in a way I'm not. I'm Edward Athling, from Middlezoy. I live at Haw Bottom Old Farm out there. But perhaps *you* are a stranger? It's nice on a day like this in Glastonbury, isn't it?"

John, in his easily acquired manner of Pageant Advertiser, began at once talking about the new Mayor and his scheme of a Passion Play. Edward Athling listened with extreme interest.

"I believe I could help you over this if you'll let me," he said. "I helped Mr. King with that Greylands Pageant, in which the Headmaster played Saint Aldhelm."

"We're negotiating," said John, "with two people from the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to come and do the directing for us. What we *are* in want of — though most of the affair will be just pantomime and dumb show — is a little fragment of libretto. Is that a poem you're writing, Sir, may I ask? It looks like poetry from here."

But the young man waved aside the topic of his immediate occupation. "I'd like uncommonly well," he said, "to try my hand at that bit of libretto for you. Is it about Arthur you'll want it?"

So differently do events work out from what we anticipate that the evasive John, who had locked up his office and was looking forward to a couple of hours of solitary mystic-sensuous enjoyment, now found himself confronted by a regular circus master's dilemma — fear of losing a unique talent and fear of fatally committing himself to the untried!

Ned Athling must have read his thoughts. "I know the kind of poetry you want," he said eagerly. "It must be easy to recite; it must be a bit rhetorical; it must be grandiose; but it must have touch, a flavour, somewhere about it, of genuine magic."

John experienced a shock of an extremely unpleasant kind when he heard these words. Deep in his sidelong, shifty, dodging, sheering-off nature there was lodged an invincible distaste for all artistic theories. He could recognise genius *in the raw*; but a certain particular expository tone made him feel as if his stomach was full of grey ashes.

Ned Athling scrutinised this lean, uncomfortable person who was now occupied in making little bread pellets of the crumbs of his meal. With every trace of absent-mindedness gone, the young man had the wit to see that his last remark had made the Mayor's secretary wince. He got up boldly therefore and brought both his manuscript and his chair over to John's table.

"I'm going to take the liberty of reading to you the poem I've just written. Its landscape is an imaginary one, like that of Kubla Khan. I've called it 'Merlin, the Enchanter.'"

"One minute, if you don't mind!" cried John, getting up himself and hurrying to the counter. Here he scrupulously and meticulously paid for his milk and cheese, prolonging this transaction all he could, and commenting in the ears of young Pet Othery — a dreamy maid with a Pansy novelette always on her lap — on the unseasonableness of the day's heat. John rushed to pay his bill at this moment because of the mingling in him of an unalloyed impulse to escape from this lad and an invincible dislike of hurting anyone's feelings. It was his private doctrine, based on constant experience, that if you could postpone a disagreeable event even by three minutes, the chances were in favour of something intervening that might save you from it altogether!

Pet Othery, however, as she laid her novelette down on the counter, between a great bowl of milk and a small bowl of Devonshire cream, closing a pair of scissors within it, and even her thimble and thread, so that her place should not be lost, began to address John in an excited whisper. "Don't 'ee know, Mister, who that gentleman be who's talkin' to 'ee? 'Tis Mr. Athling from Middlezoy, who everybody says be keeping company with Lady Rachel, the Marquis's only girl. Her father won't have none of 'im, so they say, though the Athlings *be* a good Somerset family; but Lady

Rachel, from all accounts, do bide by her own choice and small blame to her, *I* say!" Having uttered her grand piece of communication Miss Othery picked up her novelette again and spread it out luxuriously upon her lap. Her place now proved to have been kept, not only by thimble and thread and scissors, but also by a bit of chocolate, done up in silver paper, which she now proceeded to enjoy. The idea that Mr. Crow might prefer *her* conversation to that of Lady Rachel's young man never for a single second entered her romantic head. Ever afterwards indeed Pet Othery associated this particular volume, which was called "Lizzie Upton's Temptation," with this encounter between the Mayor's secretary and Lady Rachel's lover.

John was compelled therefore to return to his little, round, china-topped table, upon which, heedless of spilt milk, Edward Athling had spread out his poem. The Middlezoy poet read his lines in a low chanting sing-song that mounted up to a quite stirring climax at the end.

Pet Othery lifted her rounded chin from her sewing and from her story, and regarded him with eyes of soft and melting tenderness. The sunlight flooded the gravel outside the open door with such a warm dusty glow that it gave to the interior of this little shop a dim cloistral coolness that lent itself well to this occasion.

"This wind has blown the sun out of his place!
I look towards the West and lo! a vast,
Lost-battle-broken bastion covers up
The natural sky; to what rain-ramparted
Region of huge disaster, do these hills,
Toppling above each other, ridge on ridge,
With trees that in the night are heaped like moss,
With trees that darken into tapestries
Of vaporous moss, with roads that travelling

Thro' terraces of twilight lose themselves
In green-black tumuli of mystery,
In piled-up mounds of moss and mystery,
Lead my soul thro' the silence? Not a stone
But talks in muffled tongue to other stones.
There's not a wild, wet-beaked, night-flying bird
That does not scream upon this tossing wind
To other, darker birds, my cry, my cry,
Of rumours and of runes and reckonings,
Of rain-whirled storm-wrack rolls of malediction!
And I the Enchanter, riding on these hills,
And on the stage that trample on these hills,
And on this twilight and on these heaped mounds
Of mystery and on these wild birds' wings,
Death-runes, death-rumours, ruins and rains of death
And now myself this wind, this wind, this wind,
This wind, that's blown the sun out of his place!"

John Crow's countenance would have been worthy of the stage as it changed from nervous boredom to startled surprise and from surprise to imaginative arrest and from imaginative arrest to a rush of excited resolution. But it was characteristic of him to jump at once — without any intervening steps — to the main issue. "Come on, Mr. Athling, come on, Sir!" he cried, rising to his feet, and, clutching at the poet's modest bill, which was inscribed on a slip of paper with the words "Othery's Dairy" printed on the top of it, he rushed over to the young lady. Unfortunately for this impulsive motion of premature hospitality John's pockets contained no more than a penny half-penny, whereas Athling's debt to the shop was fourpence.

But the farmer-poet produced sixpence, and ignorant of the fact that he was tipping the daughter of the house he left the change, in addition to John's penny half-penny, upon the counter.

"Have you time to come to the Mayor's house?" said John eagerly. "It's quite close. I was going to watch the boys playing rounders on Wirral Hill for a bit, and then go back to the office, but I know Mr. Geard will jump at your help if he hears that poem. It's exactly the sort of thing we want! It's almost as if you were thinking of us when you wrote it. You must come to our first rehearsals. Those Dublin people won't be able to come till we've got pretty far advanced and there are … I don't know quite how to put it … several ways of taking the Grail-Cult … which … which … the Mayor and I … don't want to appear at all! There are … a few things too … that I am very keen to get put in … and if you—"

Never has any cardsharper, never has any pickpocket, never has any scallywag of a circus camp-follower, leered as craftily as John did then, into the open countenance of Edward Athling. The young man himself was struck by the look, and he had penetration enough to detect the fact that this excess of exaggerated cunning was really as transparent as the lying of a child.

"I feel," Athling said to John, as they approached Cardiff Villa, "as if I were the Player King being taught my sprinkling of miching mallecho."

"This Pageant," said John with a quick sidelong glance to see how the youth would take it, "is going to upset a great many people."

"Of course," said Athling, "any original work of art is upsetting to the mob."

John held his peace at this point. It was not his custom to weigh a person's character by anything that he said, least of all by any of these rather sententious remarks that Mr. Athling seemed to have a tendency to utter. John had his own secret and peculiar method of sounding a stranger's intellectual and emotional nature. It was a kind of etheric, psychic embrace, but not necessarily of an amorous character. The truth is that for John the soul of every person he met was something that he was doomed to explore. His own soul was like a vaporous serpent, and it rushed forth from the envelope of his body and wound itself round this other, licking this other's eye-sockets with its forked tongue, peering into its heart and into its brain, and pressing a cold snake-head against its feverish nerves.

The result of the coiling of John's soul round the soul of Athling as he walked by his side along this hot dusty path, towards Cardiff Villa, was that he realised that nothing could conceivably ever make Athling understand the mystical ecstasy of destruction and the deep metaphysical malice with which he longed to undermine the Grail Legend. The whole tone of the lad when he said that original art was upsetting to the mob was distasteful to John. John's instincts were profoundly anti-aesthetic. When he enjoyed anything it was by direct contact, as if the thing were a physical sensation, and the laws, principles, rules, methods, purposes, intentions, and above all the *opinions* that led up to this especial thing, seemed to him nothing but exhausting and tedious pedantry, devoid of all value.

They came now to Cardiff Villa, and John, opening the iron gate with a click, led Edward Athling up the little path between the privet bushes to the front entrance. Sally Jones, who had been watching their approach through the kitchen door, which opened straight upon the street, hurried through the hallway in a fever of excitement to let them in. She too, like Pet Othery, knew Ned Athling, as a local celebrity, and like all the Glastonbury girls had been thrilled by the rumours connecting him with Lady Rachel Zoyland, the daughter of the Marquis of P.

The master of Cardiff Villa gave his visitors a very cordial welcome when he found them in his dining-room, and John lost no time in making his captured poet recite the lines about Merlin.

The Mayor listened with his big head sunk on his chest and his eyes closed; but when Athling had finished it was clear that something in the verses had touched a kindred chord in him, for he clapped his plump hands together and uttered several times a sound which it is impossible to represent in print otherwise than by the syllables “urr-rorr … urr-rorr … urr-rorr!” This sound was eminently satisfactory to John, and apparentiy not less so to the author, for the latter plunged at once into an impassioned description as to what he would do if they gave him a free hand with the libretto.

One of the most practical results that followed from this introduction of young Athling to Mr. Geard — and John was not one to suffer from jealousy — was the fact that a few days later the whole place was placarded with posters announcing a public meeting in the Abbot’s Tribunal to consider “a new scheme for increasing the prestige of our ancient Town.” This public meeting was announced for eight o’clock on the first of the month, and as a result of this choice of date the word circulated among the frivolous that the Mayor-elect was to address his fellow-citizens adorned with a fool’s cap. It was characteristic of the man that in order to gather together his ideas for this momentous oration — the first that it was his destiny to deliver to the general public since those early street-corner harangues — he should make a private visit on the morning of April Fool’s Day to the recesses of Wookey Hole.

Intentionally or not Mr. Geard paid his sixpence at the gate of Wookey Hole at such an early hour that the person who received it was not Will Zoyland but Mr. Lamb, the landlord of the Zoyland Arms, an individual who, though he had heard of the new Mayor of Glastonbury, had never set eyes on him, and had not, therefore, the least idea that he was admitting to his subterranean domain Philip's grand antagonist. Bloody Johnny had never, as it happened, visited the cavernous shrine of the Witch of Wookey since Philip had electrified the famous caves and it was an exciting experience for him to wander down that illuminated pathway, watching the amazing metallic colours which these brilliant globes of light drew forth from the stalactites. He had the whole place to himself, a thing that Zoyland, when he was at the gate, always tried to avoid, being afraid of people losing themselves, and also afraid of the intrusion of tin-mining agents from alien firms; but Mr. Lamb, naturally a very easy-going person, was not one to have his wits about him at nine in the morning. What he ought to have done was to make this early visitor sit down in the little shanty at the entrance and wait till more strangers arrived, before turning on the lights, but Mr. Geard got the full benefit, as he often did in the general drift of things, of this example of human negligence.

He descended slowly between the rows of stalactites till he came to the level floor in the biggest of the caverns where ran that tributary of the subterranean River Axe. Here he saw Philip's boat, pulled up on a shelving bank of sand and left exactly as it was when Persephone had stepped out of it. After a moment's hesitation, for he was no oarsman, Mr. Geard entered this boat, and with a good many blunderings and splashings, contrived at last to row himself to the strip of shingle over which the formidable stone image of the Witch of Wookey held her vigil of immeasurable æons. Here Bloody Johnny awkwardly disembarked, feeling, though he knew nothing of Dante, very much what that mediaeval Harrower of Hell felt, when he, still a man of flesh-and-blood, moved among the infernal wraiths. He advanced under the precipitous wall of the vast cavern, his feet sinking, as he walked, in the loose shingle of that Acherontic shore. Here he seated himself on a strip of dry sand and leaned his back against the wall of stone. He could not help wondering to himself what it would feel like if these electric lights were suddenly to be extinguished!

Staring into the face of that stone image, in that place lighted up by the science of his enemy, Mr. Geard found it easy enough to restore to Wookey Hole the thick, long darkness into which it had fallen after the last human tribe deserted it. It was out of the midst of this long darkness rather than in the new electric light that his nature now expanded. His large hands lay palms down, and with the fingers spread out, like two great, white starfish, on the shingle at both sides of him. No sign of life was there, no grass-blade, no insect, no bird. He was alone with the metallic elements out of which all organic entities are formed.

Mr. Geard was not good at concentrated thinking. His deepest thoughts always came to him, as the author of *Faust* declared *his* did, crying, like happy children, “Here we are!” and the result of this was that a brief half an hour spent in composing his speech for that night exhausted him far more than the most protracted physical exertion would have done. He found himself caught and, as it were, pilloried, in the repetition of certain particular phrases. This happened to him every time he deserted his vague, rich, semi-erotic feelings and tried to condense his scheme into a rational statement, and it became really troublesome when, with his eyes tightly closed, he set himself to call up that audience of people and to imagine their response to what he said. The thought of the audience and of this accursed appeal to reason seemed to throw a thin dust of unpalatable sand over his whole life-purpose.

He continued to sit in the same position, with his fingers outstretched on that subterranean shingle, and his eyes closed; but the rational effort his mind had begun to make brought about him all the unpleasant aspects of his normal life. A certain little piece of lead-piping scrawled with a mark that always looked to him like a crocodile’s snout, and which he invariably caught sight of from the window of the water-closet on the landing of Cardiff Villa, now presented itself before his closed eyes as he began to phrase his speech. A certain stair-rod that had got hopelessly loose and that caused a peculiar rumpling of the stair-carpet obtruded itself before his vision. A certain indescribable familiarity which hung about the old doormat at Cardiff Villa and the scraper — as if these things had been placed at his gate by the Evil One himself, especially to keep down the tempo of his mystical thoughts — came stealing over his mind. The painted metal cover of a certain matchbox which was kept on the diningroom mantelpiece and which always seemed to evoke the sterile aridity of hours of flat, spiritless repletion hove also in sight. Certain physical aspects of his wife and his elder daughter, certain tones of their voices, when they were least sympathetic to him, rushed pell-mell into his head. The gigantic phlegm of Mr. Geard and his massive, lumbering, lubberly passivity seemed to bring it about that these trifles adhered thus viciously to his memory, like burrs and prickles to the fur of some great drowsy beast. With what repulsive clearness too, as he went on struggling to formulate his ideas, a certain glittering and yet curiously insipid light appeared before his fast-shut eyes, the “two o’clock” and “three o’clock” light, falling on the galvanised-iron roof of the unused toolshed in his neglected garden!

Teased to the top of his bent by what he had evoked in his dangerous gesture of damming up the sluices of his feelings by the machinery of reason, Bloody Johnny had recourse now to the grand human panacea for all mental aggravations. He did what he ought to have done at once, before he started worrying his mind about his speech at all; he allowed his chin to sink down upon his burly chest and subsided into a deep and dreamless sleep. Down upon the bowed head of Geard of Glastonbury fell Philip’s electric light. Beneath his feet rolled the swift, silent, metal-gleaming current of that water of Lethe. Noon came upon those Somersetshire spring-meadows above his sleeping-place, with their cuckoo flowers and marsh marigolds, and gave place to an afternoon of rain-threatening cloud-racks that gathered heavily upon the western horizon. But still Mr. Geard slept. Several times he changed his position without awakening, and at last his head and his shoulders actually slid down to the stalagmite base of the Stone Witch, and instinctively sought there a smooth concavity against which to lie at rest.

The long cloudy afternoon of April Fool’s day ebbed slowly away. Those cloud-racks, gathering above the distant Welsh mountains, grew more and more ominous. Long swaying arms, outstretched hooked fingers, hooded shoulders, nodding plumes, far-streaming tattered banners, huge-tilted swords and monstrous axes, towered there over the Western Channel and neither advanced nor dispersed! In this portentous hovering and lingering they resembled those spirits of the departed in the ancient British Isles, of which Plutarch makes mention, quoting from the traveller Demetrius: “Demetrius further said, that of the islands around Britain many were uninhabited …. He went to the island which lay nearest to those uninhabited and found it occupied by few inhabitants … who were, however, sacrosant and inviolable in the eyes of the Britons. Soon after his arrival a great disturbance of the atmosphere took place, accompanied by many portents, by the winds bursting forth into hurricanes and by fiery bolts falling. When it was over, the islanders said that some one of the mighty had passed away … moreover there is there, they said, an island in which Cronos is imprisoned, with Briareus keeping guard over him as he sleeps, for, as they put it, sleep is the bond forged for Cronos. They add that around him are many deities, his henchmen and attendants."

And when that threatened and menaced day drew to a close at last, if Will Zoyland before turning off the electric light had decided to take a stroll down these passages and had got as far as the edge of the subterranean water he would have been astonished to see the still recumbent figure of Mr. Geard.

There was quite a large audience collected together that night to hear the first public speech of the new Mayor. The Abbot's Tribunal did not offer very extensive accommodation nor a very liberal number of seats for those who *did* get in, but, as the entertainment was given gratis, the late-comers to the meeting had no cause for grievance if they found themselves somewhat uncomfortably crowded.

The only representative from The Elms was the redoubtable Emma Sly who came, in a very literal sense, to "spy out the land," for it may well be believed what a shrewd account, and a more succinct one than any other Glastonbury hand-maid could have given, the mistress of The Elms looked forward to receiving while she ordered Philip's dinner on the following day.

Miss Drew, too, refrained from attending "this silly speechifying"; but the Misses Rogers came from the Abbey House just as Penny Pitches, escorted by Isaac Weatherwax, came from the Vicarage.

Both the Dekkers were there, as were also Dr. Fell and his formidable sister, Miss Bibby.

Old Lawyer Beere turned up, rather to John Crow's surprise, bringing with him his daughter Angela, who had never looked paler, colder, more unapproachable, and more completely bored than she looked as she took her seat between her father and Mr. Stilly, the cashier of the bank.

Miss Elizabeth Crow arrived in very good time, escorted, in true old-fashioned style, by her plump maid, Tossie Stickles, who, once in the hall, separated herself from her mistress and became all eyes to get a glimpse of her gentleman-admirer, the nympholeptish Mr. Barter. In this hope, however, the girl was disappointed, for Barter was not present.

Megan Geard was in the front of the hall, taciturn and indifferent, wearing a velvet gown cut and flounced according to the fashion of at least a decade ago, and treating the whole occasion with a withdrawn disdain more worthy of the house of Rhys than of the position of Mayoress. Crummie, in a dress of bewitching simplicity, was turning her beautiful chin all the time to steal hurried and furtive glimpses of Sam Dekker, whose own attention was focused upon the entrance-door, for he was at once hoping and dreading that Zoyland might have taken it into his impulsive head to bring Nell into town for this one occasion!

Among the humbler members of the crowd there were present Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Cole, Sally Jones and her brother Jackie. Jenny Morgan, the once lovely Glastonbury charwoman, had come too, bringing Number One's little friend "Morgan Nelly" with her, but from the manner in which this woman's large tragic eyes kept closing and her sad underlip kept drooping and her shoulder kept leaning against the wall by one of the windows, it looked as if the Mayor's speech would have to be very lively indeed to keep her from falling asleep.

The old cronies, Number One and Number Two, were seated, in anticipatory bliss, side by side. Red Robinson sat at the back of the room, in what he felt to be the precise strategic position for the art of heckling, but he never once looked at Crummie. If he looked at any girl at all, all that evening, it was at the Geard servant, Sally, but even these glances were quickly exhausted. Red's head was so full of politics that he had scant energy left to include love.

Mr. Evans and Cordelia sat at the edge of one of the aisles in the centre of the room. Mr. Evans seemed to be as much withdrawn into his thoughts as Mrs. Geard was withdrawn into the pride of her South Wales blood, for it was only once or twice that he glanced at the platform, although he was seated so near it.

John and Mary, the former arrayed — as the insignia of a Master of Ceremonies — in a neat dinner-jacket, borrowed for the occasion from Tom Barter but which was at once much too short and much too loose for him, were seated in the front row, which was occupied, otherwise, by old Mr. and Mrs. Stilly, the parents of the cashier, by the Reverend Dr. Sodbury, the Rector of St. Benignus, and by Mr. Wollop, the ex-Mayor. It cannot be said that Mr. Wollop looked *quite* as happy seated in the front row of his rival's audience as he looked in his cage, but he looked, all the same, about twice as happy as anyone else in the Tribunal.

Dave Spear and Persephone sat just behind the ex-Mayor; and it gradually became a cause of much suppressed giggling and tittering at the back of the room to notice the manner in which the worthy obese man kept twisting his head round to talk to the beautiful Percy, whose brown boy-curls and white shoulders — for though Dave was in plain ordinary clothes, Percy, for some caprice of her own, appeared in evening dress — seemed of great interest to him.

Towards the roofs of Glastonbury, towards the Gothic roof of the Abbot's Tribunal, advanced that black cloud-rack from the western sea, but although every now and then there was a deep, rolling peal of thunder, not one single drop of rain fell. These heavy jagged clouds, this first of April night, were like the evil clouds spoken of in the Scriptures, for they were “clouds without water.”

But the big church-clock in St. John’s Tower struck eight, which was the hour of the meeting, and there was no sign of the Mayor, nor of any move to supply his place if he did not come. There were three Aldermen in the little waiting-room at the back of the platform, and these worthy men were now beginning to perspire with perturbation. On the empty platform were five empty chairs, one for the Mayor, one for old Mr. Bishop, the Town Clerk, and the others for these anxious and nervous officials who were now growing distressingly conscious of their boots and trousers and socks and were continually retiring to the little lavatory in the rear of their room. There were quite a number of young people at the back of the hall, some seated, some standing, some moving restlessly about, and every now and then there would arise from this turbulent element various cries and laughter and even clappings and hissings, as this or that crude jest was bandied about in connection with the absence of the Mayor.

St. John’s clock now chimed the news laconically and briefly that it was a quarter past eight. The unruly element in that tightly packed little hall began to grow seriously troublesome. The jokes grew grosser and broader. “Mayor be drunk!” cried one. “Better send they Aldermen to look for he in Michael’s Inn!” cried another. “Mayor be making April Fools of us poor dogs, now ‘ee be so rich and so set up!” growled a third. “Mayor be enjoyin’ ‘isself wi’ wold Mother Legge in Paradise!” declared one lad, bolder than the rest. “Shush! Shush!” cried several voices.

Meanwhile Abel Twig and his crony Bart Jones were whispering together in high excitement. “Them Posters said ’twas for Glastn’ ‘ee were holdin’ meetin’. Seems to I ‘twere for to see how much foolin’ Glast’n folk could stand, afore us cast he down, back where he were afore us lifted he up.” Thus spoke Old Jones in the ear of his friend, but Number One was kinder in his interpretation. “Maybe Mayor have been taken wi’ the dizzies, like what woming do suffer from, when ’tis near their time. ’Tis a hard thing for even a Preacher like he to stand up afore such a proud assembling!”

Penny Pitches who had taken her seat without shame by the side of Mr. Weatherwax now addressed a personal appeal to that potentate. “ ’Twould be a moment for thee to strike up wi’ one o’ thee pretty songs, Isaac,” she declared stoutly. “Thik Bloody Johnny baint the only one what can lift up voice.”

“Chut, chut, woman!” murmured the gardener reproachfully. “This be a time for Authority to speak. The man *I* be wantin’ to hear from, be Mr. Philip Crow. He’d be the gent to send all these gabbling geese to the right-about.”

A long rolling thunder-clap responded to the gardener’s words from those slowly gathering clouds above the Tribunal. “Hark to’t!” cried Penny Pitches, “he’ll have to come quick or he’ll be drenched to the skin!”

The sympathetic Sally Jones, seriously concerned about the fate of her master, murmured anxiously in Jackie’s ear: “I can’t keep me eyes from Missuses’ back, I can’t. She must be shiverin’ and shakin’ inside, poor dear! ’Tis turble ‘sponsive to be sittin’ up so straight and Master not here.”

“You don’t think, Sal, do ‘ee,” whispered the excited Jackie, “that the thunder have hit ’im in the eyeball like it used to hit they bad girt men in Bible?”

St. John’s deep-voiced clock now chimed the half hour and its sound died away in the midst of a thick, deep, reverberating peal of sullen thunder.

“Why isn’t there any lightning, Father?” said Angela Beere to Lawyer Beere. “I haven’t seen one single flash all the evening.” The girl let her eyes rest, as she spoke, upon the beautiful nape of Persephone’s neck. Those brown boyish curls were beginning to touch a vein of perilous susceptibility in that reserved nature.

It is, in fact, at moments of this kind, when a company of fellow-townspeople are gathered in close proximity, with nothing to do but to stare at one another, that all sorts of unexpected relationships leap up into being.

“We needn’t have hurried through our dinner after all, it seems,” was her father’s characteristic reply to this question about the lightning.

“Not a drop of rain, Sam,” said the Vicar of Glastonbury to his son.

“I’m glad of it,” murmured Sam, thinking to himself that his Nell might, even yet, be on her way to the Tribunal.

It was at that moment that old Mr. Sheperd, the Glastonbury policeman, moved up to the back of the Town Clerk’s chair. “Hadn’t ‘ee better begin, Sir?” he said earnestly. “Maybe his Worship ain’t coming, and these young rogues will be getting out of hand soon.”

The Town Clerk nodded wearily, got up with difficulty from his creaking chair, for he was past eighty, and made his way down the hall. He paused for a minute by the side of John Crow, with whom he held a brief consultation, watched with intense curiosity by everybody in the place. Then he entered the room at the back of the platform. Here he found the three Aldermen, who advanced to greet him in trepidation and consternation. “Come on, gentlemen,” he said, in the tone of an aged warrior, who has weathered crises far worse than this trifling one in the course of his long life. “On to the stage with ye! I’ll open the meeting and call on the Mayor’s secretary.” Herding the three nervous magnates in front of him, like three reluctant and sulky bullocks, the gallant Mr. Bishop scrambled up the platform steps after them and took his seat in the Mayor’s chair.

The four men were greeted with uproarious applause, and the clapping and shouting continued for at least three solid minutes. “Three cheers for Mr. Bishop!” shouted one young scaramouch who had perched himself upon the high sill of one of the great mullioned windows. The Town Clerk rose to his feet and advanced to the square table in the centre of the platform. Here he raised his hand for silence. The general relief at the presence of someone was so great that he was responded to by an impressive and startling hush.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Mr. Bishop began, “we have come here to listen to our distinguished fellow-citizen, the newly elected Mayor of Glastonbury, Mr. John Geard.”

“ ‘Ear, ‘ear!” came the magnanimous and comfortable voice of Mr. Wollop from his place in the front row.

“But since,” Mr. Bishop went on, “the inclement weather, or some other cause at present unknown, has prevented our much-regretted Mayor from being present at this meeting which he himself called together, it behoves me, as his humble official subordinate, to call upon his secretary, my young friend, Mr. John Crow, to tell us, or read to us, if possible, in the Mayor’s own words, a resoomy” — this was the only long word in the Town Clerk’s repertoire of public speaking that he pronounced incorrectly— “a resoomy of our distinguished friend’s inspiring ideas with regard to the future of our beloved town. I therefore call upon Mr. Crow to—”

There arose at that instant such a curious hubbub at the back of the room that the three Aldermen leaned forward from the edge of their chairs and craned their necks to see round the speaker’s back and under the speaker’s armpits what it was that caused the disturbance. When the worthy men *did* realise what was the cause of the confusion, they gazed at one another and at the back of Mr. Bishop in sheer dumbfounded stupor. The people in front of the audience began themselves turning round now, and some among them when they realised what was occurring began to raise that hoarse, grating susurration which indicates, to any experienced speaker, the complete impossibility of receiving a quiet hearing.

"I therefore call upon Mr. Crow," went on the old Town Clerk, "to—" John Crow, who was on his feet now and facing the back of the room, realised in a flash the bitter humour — as far as he was concerned — of what had occurred, but his first feeling was one of indescribable relief. He felt like a hunted fox, with all the pack at his heels, who unexpectedly finds a hole — and a hole with a second exit! When Mr. Bishop told him he would have to speak he had had a spasm of sick terror and had come near to flatly refusing. Then he had thought: "After all, why not? Geard will probably come in while I'm getting up steam. And there's nothing really to funk in these people!"

But now it wasn't Geard who had come, but Philip!

"I therefore call upon Mr. Crow—" the Town Clerk had said, and some anonymous voice, in the crowd at the rear of the hall, had cried out *"He's here!* Mr. Crow be here!" and everyone who turned round saw Philip standing there, in the leather jacket of a flyer, motionless and with a grim smile on his face. "He's here, Sir; Mr. Crow is here, Sir!" shouted a second voice.

Philip's contemptuous smile changed its nature in a moment. He threw down his leather cap, and stepped rapidly down the centre aisle towards the platform.

The three Aldermen, hypnotised by their inherited West-Country respect for the richest man of their town, rose from their chairs to welcome him. Mr. Bishop, who still stood by the speaker's table, murmured rather feebly: "I am sure that everyone here will be glad to learn if Mr …. if Mr. *Philip*

Crow has any opinions which he would care—” But here his voice was drowned in a resounding and quite unpremeditated salvo of clapping.

Every audience, however hurriedly collected, quickly takes to itself a queer identity of its own and becomes a living organism whose reactions are as spontaneous and incalculable as those of a single human being. There had naturally arisen a certain obscure feeling against the newly elected Mayor for his non-appearance, a feeling that they had been fooled and cheated. This was combined with a hardly conscious sense that Geard, as a man risen from the ranks, demanded less consideration at their hands than the well-known manufacturer. Philip’s unpopularity, too, was much more serious with the poorest and least educated in the town, an element that was hardly represented in the Tribunal tonight.

Thus when, encouraged by the applause with which he was greeted, Philip mounted the platform and advanced to the table, while Mr. Bishop and the three Aldermen sat down, there was given to him — in one of those psychological up-burstings of feeling to which the crowd-organism is subject — a terrific ovation, by far the most spontaneous he had ever received in Glastonbury. It may well be believed that it was the conservative Mr. Weatherwax — excited beyond all measure by the actual appearance of that “authority” he so greatly admired — who now lifted up his manly voice and shouted loudly: “Three cheers for Mr. Crow!” The uproar that followed was deafening. When silence was at last obtained, Philip leaned forward across the table and made one of the cleverest political speeches of his life. When it was over, and Mr. Bishop rose to make a few polite comments, John whispered to Mary: “What a fellow he is! I hate him, but I can’t help being … in some odd way … you know? … our old Norfolk blood … able to … assert itself still … and make … these fools … sit up a bit!”

Philip's hard, cold, clear voice was indeed ringing in the ears of everyone present. "And so," his final words had run, "the best way to make our town the sort of place we would all be proud of living in is to make it independent of these precious visitors from Europe and America. A living wage for every man who wants to do a good honest day's work is what *I* am aiming at. Not old fairy stories but new factories is what *I* want to see; not fake-miracles but solid hard work; not fancy toys and mystical gibberish but smoking chimneys and well-filled larders! Let these visitors, when they come to Glastonbury, find in place of vague chatter about Chalice Hill a prosperous, independent community; a community that does not need to beg or dance or 'sing,' as the old song says, 'for its supper'; a community that can afford to *hire* its theatrical performances; a community that is too busy and too well-employed to have its head turned by crazy preachers and self-appointed Popes!"

It is not contrary to the weakness of human nature to enjoy the spectacle of a crafty blow aimed at an absent adversary, but if it had not been for his audience's obscure sense that their dignity had been outraged by Mr. Geard's non-appearance, Philip's malicious words would not have had the effect they had. He was vociferously applauded as he sat down, and when, after Mr. Bishop's diplomatic closing of the meeting and after everyone had risen up to sing the first verse of "God save the King," there was a general feeling in that audience's mind, intensified rather than diminished by the distant thunder — still unaccompanied by a single drop of rain — that a leader who allowed himself to be betrayed into deserting his post at so crucial a crisis had received no less than his due from this hawk-faced despot in a leather jacket, who advocated *laborem et panem,* rather than any kind of *circenses,* as his panacea for the ills of their town.

Thus in the criss-cross currents of this eventful April Fool's Day, dominated by "clouds without water," Bloody Johnny and his ambiguous Grail received a Dolorous Blow from which it appeared possible that neither of them might recover. In that sequence of spiral recurrences — in which past events are eternally returning, but with momentous difference — the same psychological situation had been produced as when in those long-vanished mysterious days the wistful and audacious Balin wounded the Guardian of the Grail in both his thighs with the terrible Spear of Longinus.

Every person, as that motley audience left the Abbot's Tribunal, was conscious that something deep had been stirred up, ready to respond to Geard of Glastonbury's communication, and that this Something had been suppressed by the malice of superficial human nature, played upon by a practised hand. There was a feeling among them all as they went off as if they had stretched out their arms to grasp a Golden Bough and had been rewarded for their pains with a handful of dust.

It was with a queer, vague, irritated sense of uncomfortable remorse that they went home, with the murmur of that strange spring thunder in their ears that brought neither rain nor lightning. And as the night fell on the roofs of Glastonbury it was as if She Herself, the historic matrix of all these happenings, had been thwarted and fooled at the critical moment of her mystic response.

The generative nerve of Her body had descended into Her womb, but all to no purpose! Cold and hard and pragmatic, the words of the Norfolk iconoclast had cut off the consummation of Her desire. From the forlorn thorn stumps of Tom Chinnock's Terre Gastee at the foot of Wirral Hill the effects of this Dolorous Blow seemed likely to spread over the whole psychic landscape. Let Her labour and let Her eat, but let the Stone of

Merlin remain a stone, and the Fountain of Blood remain a chalybeate spring!

When Mrs. Geard and her daughters reached Cardiff Villa that night they found the master of the house seated alone by the fire in the dining-room, with a glass of gin and water by his side. Above him on the mantelpiece lay, in its accustomed place, the little ornamental matchbox. From the water-closet window on the landing above he had heard the familiar lead-piping give itself to the night once more, with its wonted word— “the unessential shall swallow up the essential!” The well-worn doormat and the rusty scraper outside his door emanated the same spiritless and domesticated monotony. As all these things had looked before he went to Northwold, so they looked now, when, after extricating himself with characteristic phlegm and obstinate patience from a darkened Wookey Hole, he had come straight home to his empty house.

KING ARTHUR'S SWORD

THE FIRST HESITATING sproutings of chilly, dumb, whitish-green vegetation had forced their way into the clear air and established themselves above ground. The mysteriously released saps and life-essences, faint, mute and fitful, had now risen high enough to fill the cold stiff stalks and fling a new smoothness and a new resilience into their upward-striving curves.

The early, perilously sweet blooms, such as those greenish-yellow calyxes of the first daffodils, catching the spouts and jets of the chilly sunshine from between the wind-tossed clouds, and bowing their wet petals to the brown earth under the heavy showers of rain, had given place to the far sturdier, if less poignant, growths of the later spring season. Tulips were now out by the edge of most of the Glastonbury lawns and the heavy waxen towers of the garden hyacinths — purple and pink and white and blue — had already passed their apogee of inebriating sweetness and were sinking down day by day into their rich death. The more innocent and more childlike scent of lilacs too was already on the air; and the renewal of the earth had even advanced far enough for the great drooping sprays of the laburnum trees in Mr. Weatherwax's two old gardens to be bursting out into delicate buds. Peonies also — those unrestricting, unwithholding orbs of lavish wholesomeness — were now to be seen in many warm parterres; while across the old masonry of the smaller gardens where bright-cheeked girls flitting in and out of their houses into the sunshine, like moving flowers themselves in their fresh Easter frocks, kept laughing and challenging one another as they heard that familiar sound, came on the southwest wind, the mocking cry of the cuckoo.

Three weeks had slipped by since Sam Dekker had lain with Nell Zoyland upon that carefully prepared couch by the Whitelake waters — three fecund weeks; and hours sweet as honey, and hours bitter as coloquintida, had slid down the same fatal slope into everlasting oblivion.

Glastonbury had the air, in that halcyon weather, of being some ancient mediaeval city, enclosed in paradisiac green pastures; a city that Fra Angelico might have painted, giving it a foreground of watercresses and long-legged herons.

April was now more than a fortnight old and a late Easter was approaching. On the morning of Maundy Thursday, after a windless night when the moon, already nearly full, had flooded the hazel copses and the withy beds with such liquid radiance that every brittle primrose stalk and every sap-heavy bluebell stalk had cast its own particular shadow on wet clay or cold stone, Cordelia Geard, dressed herself like a blue hyacinth and with her plain face quite illuminated by the regenerative stirrings on all sides of her, opened the street door of Old Jones' shop in the High Street and plunged boldly into its cluttered and century-mellowed obscurity.

The sun was warm upon the High Street pavement outside; but a kind of misty eidolon of the sun — a sort of secondary sun, more golden, just because it was more dimmed, than the first — poured its rich glow, crowded thick with gleaming air-motes, upon all the entanglement of bric-a-brac within the shop walls. This secondary sun, more golden than the first, as if Number Two's shop had been a forest glade in some fairyland where roots were old chairs and where branches were old copper candlesticks, fell in long streaming rays from above the dragon vase and the Pierrot-lidded pepper-pot and the red-feathered shuttlecock and the unfashionable croquet-mallet and the shaving-mug with the Rhine castle upon it and made a thick, dim, rusty glory, full of portentous curves and colours and contours, of the piled-up furniture and twisted brasses of that dim place. It was an arcana of the crazy imaginations of old anonymous craftsmen, this shop of Number Two. Old Bartholomew Jones was not a modern virtuoso or a sophisticated connoisseur. He was a Glastonbury character. But something deeply instinctive in the man had led him for years and years — for something like half a century in fact — to collect his objects with a personal predilection all his own, a predilection which, while neither very learned nor very aesthetic, had a certain pathos of choice peculiar to itself. The shop was in fact a limbo of the characteristic symbols of the life of former times.

Glastonbury here, layer by layer through the centuries, was revealed in certain significant petrifactions, certain frozen gestures of the flowing spirit of life, as it was caught up, waylaid, turned into silk, satin, brass, iron, wood, leather, silver, china, linen, pictured books, printed books, play utensils, kitchen utensils, timepieces, wine decanters, toys, traps, walking-sticks and weapons.

It was not an Aladdin's cave for children; and indeed about many of the objects, warming-pans and bird-cages and fire-dogs and so forth, there was something that suggested besotted and miserly old age rather than youth. But it was a treasure-trove for the type of imagination that loves to brood, a little sardonically and unfastidiously perhaps, upon the wayward whims and caprices of the human spirit.

Mr. Evans had even discovered — for Number Two's system of collecting curiosities was evidently rather philosophic than artistic — certain quaint objects, much more recent than the numerous antimacassars and artificial fruits under glass which he had selected, objects that the owner apparently thought significant of the age of his own early youth, such as rusty bicycle handles and tricycle wheels and parlour games like Lotto and Spelicans.

The thick, golden light seemed to reach the eyes through some indescribably rich medium, like old sherry wine, which hung above all this chaos. And it was as if it had gathered to itself some magical potency that particular morning.

Cordelia Geard, for all her new blue dress and over-ladylike hat, could not resist a queer sensation as she looked round the place as if she had entered a magician's cave, and had exposed herself to some unknown possibility of bodily transmutation. She felt as though Number Two's shop, in the same way as it could make mid-Victorian parlour games look like Roman antiquities, could transform a girl of the second decade of the twentieth century into some platonic symbol of erotic expectation. It had been the southwestern wind and the lilac-scented air that had brought her into her fiancé's domain; but she had not suspected that this leaping up of life outside would be answered reciprocally among the littered simulacra inside! But as she stood waiting now, seeing no one and afraid of lifting her voice, she felt as if she were greeted in that sun-illumined space by a chorus of muted whispers. The carved knobs of an early-Victorian bed murmured extraordinary things to her. A blue vase with big white basketwork handles became still more voluble.

The girl in blue fixed a frowning glance upon this latter object. "He must be upstairs making his bed," she thought. "I would dearly like to make his bed for him!"

And then, gathering up all her forces into one terrific resolve, "I'll *make* him love me like other men love their women," she said to herself. "I'll *make* him love me like Crummie makes Red and Mr. Barter love her.

Women *can* do these things! Women can make themselves like tinder to a match, like filings to a magnet, like straw to a spark!"

Cordelia's dark eyes began to gather a strange, excited light as her heart went on telling her heart what she would do to rouse the desire of Mr. Evans on this Maundy Thursday morning. She set herself to listen intently; and she thought she *did* hear sounds; but oddly enough these faint sounds that she heard seemed to come from under her feet rather than from above her head and they resembled the scraping of a nervous heel against a bare board rather than the rustling of sheets on a bed.

Cordelia had never heard Mr. Evans refer to the chamber below stairs where reposed that curious volume — now separated from the Saint Augustine, its aforetime companion — that was such a danger to the Welshman's peace of mind; but she began to experience a vague sense of feminine uneasiness, totally without any rational cause, about her friend.

"He *ought* to be in the shop by this time," she thought. "It must be nearly ten o'clock."

The sudden opening of the street door made her swing round. It made her heart give a wild jump. The figure who entered was Red Robinson.

The man gave Cordelia a nervous nod; but he neither took off his cap, nor offered her his hand, nor even closed the shop door.

"I'm looking for his Worship," he said, with a sneer upon the syllables "Worship." " 'E's not at 'ome. 'E's not at Town-'All. 'E's not at 'is Hoffice. Where *his* 'is Worship? *That's* what I want to know. I've got somethink himportant to harx 'im."

"Can I give my father any message, Red?" asked Cordelia. "He'll no doubt be home for dinner … our mid-day dinner, you know, Red."

The man hesitated.

"Well! You might tell him that I'll say nothing more to that Morgan woman; since that his 'is Worship's pleasure. Nothing more to 'er, tell 'im; and hall shall be has 'e wishes!"

Cordelia bowed gravely. "Surely, Red, surely! Yes, I'll certainly tell Father that. You'll say no more to the Morgan woman according as my father wishes."

Red nodded, took out his pipe and lit it in the doorway, and then cleared off.

When Cordelia turned round after his departure, there was Mr. Evans standing before her. Mr. Evans looked at her in astonishment; as well he might. She was not only prettier than he had ever seen her; she was much better dressed. Cordelia had in fact gone with Crummie to Wollop's three days before — a thing which she had done only two or three times in their life — and had delighted her good-natured sister by the unusual interest she had shown in the new Easter display. The ex-Mayor himself had come out of his self-appointed cage to wait upon the supposedly rich daughters of his ambiguous successor; and both girls had done all they could to soothe what they felt must be his deeply wounded feelings.

Crummie had positively forced Cordelia to buy a really becoming costume, and since their father had given the girls a hint that he wished them to "deck themselves out well and do credit to their mother," this costume, including a specially graceful and very ladylike hat, now showed Cordelia, as the golden-moted rays surrounded her figure, to an advantage that surprised and bewildered Mr. Evans.

The beautiful April weather — for seldom had Glastonbury known the approach of a more auspicious Easter — had quickened the blood and heightened the colour of Mr. Geard's eldest child. Ever since she had put on this dark-blue, charmingly cut dress, and this neat, grey coat with a gentian-blue lining, the girl had felt as if she were a different person. A faint sense of spiritual shame at her own unexpected pleasure in these new clothes heightened the charm of her manner as she now talked to her fiancé; gave her, in fact, an air of virginal shyness and timorous self-consciousness which Mr. Evans had never seen in her before.

The boniness of her rather haggard face, the height of her rather sullen forehead, the forward-drooping tilt of her awkward shoulders — all these things seemed mitigated to a point where they almost became the interesting characteristics of a woman of original distinction.

For some reason — better understood doubtless by the Nietzschean young man, who was Mr. Wollop's buyer, than by Mr. Evans or the young lady herself — the coat-lining, and the blue dress with its thin braid of Brussels lace, when she threw the coat open, made the skin that covered the girl's collarbones seem as satiny and white as the sweet flesh of any much more favoured daughter of Eve.

Whether from pure shyness or whether some subtle feminine instinct warned her to be careful at this important crisis in her life, Cordelia refused to do more than throw her cloak back as she took the seat in the rear of the shop offered her by her lover. Mr. Evans hovered over her there and exchanged casual unimportant remarks with her about he scarcely knew what, while his burning eyes, flashing forth from beneath his bushy eyebrows, devoured this little expanse of feminine whiteness. Something like a fresh-water stream of quite new feeling towards this quiet girl surged through the man's poisoned and brackish senses. With an interior movement of his will — and the dire necessity of his distorted nature had endowed Mr. Evans' will with engines of iron — he now closed down a formidable mental portcullis upon his dark congenital perversity. Not a trickle, not a drop, from *that* deadly sluice must be allowed to poison this new feeling.

For he recognised in a flash that if he could, at that very moment hustle his guest off to his unmade bed upstairs, it would not be a penance at all but a spontaneous pleasure to embrace her there. This was the first time in Mr. Evans' life that such a normal and natural impulse had ever come upon him. And it remained. Yes! It remained at the background of all the torrent of words which he now poured out, in spasmodic spurts of volcanic agitation, at the back of that sun-illumined shop.

"I've been going on reading Dante, Cordy, — how sweet you *do* look today! — and I tell you, my dear, he's the only one of the great poets who really, to my thinking, understands life. Life's a war-to-the-death, Cordelia, — that's the truth, my precious! — between the Spirits of Good and Evil. These Spirits are everywhere. They are encountering each other in every crevice of consciousness and on every plane of Being. Life springs from their conflict. Life *is* their conflict. If the Spirit of Good conquered entirely — as one day I hope it will — the whole teeming ocean of life would dry up. There would be no more life!"

Cordelia watched him carry off his breakfast things — for he had evidently risen hurriedly, for some purpose, from his tea and rolls — and lay them in a row on a little shelf above the gas-stove. A dedicated stream of sunlight, thick and mellow like sunlight in a monk's cell, kept turning his Roman profile, with its great hooked nose and long upper lip into a dusky bronze image that flickered vaguely before her, first on one hand, then on the other, as she listened and pondered in a passive trance of content.

"This is happiness," she thought to herself. "This is what Crummie must often have known." And a great wave of pity ransacked her heart on behalf of all the old maids in Glastonbury who had *no man;* no hulking, blundering Incompetent, fumbling helplessly with truculent inanimates! Oh, how easily she could have done what he was even now so gropingly trying to do! And how near she had come herself never to have had one of these creatures who could talk so excitingly and — *crash* went one of Mr. Evans' plates upon the floor! — could find the task of clearing a table so pathetically difficult.

He came back to her side now, lugging a great carved armchair after him, and upon this throne-like object he compelled her to sit, while he himself took possession of the small, upright Sheraton chair which she vacated.

"What none of you people in Glastonbury seem to understand," Mr. Evans went on now, "is that this place is charged and soaked with a desperate invisible struggle."

"Isn't there the same confusion," Cordelia dared to remark in a low voice, "in ourselves?"

"Certainly there is!" Mr. Evans cried, leaning forward over the girl's blue dress and pressing the palm of his left hand upon the arm-knob of her antique throne.

"There's the whole pit of Hell in ourselves, fire, smoke, sulphur, pitch, stench, burning! Some souls have a firm floor, Cordelia, that anyone can stamp on and it makes no difference. But other souls have trapdoors in their floors leading down to … to places unthinkable!"

The girl's mouth was a little open and the black pupils of her eyes had grown round and large. She was sitting up very straight in that antique chair with her gloved hands — he hadn't thought of asking her to take her gloves off and she had hesitated to do so lest it should seem a too familiar gesture — holding tight to the wooden arms; but there was a space of several inches, between her hand and his fierce grip upon the arm-knob.

"I'm an unhappy man, Cordelia," he whispered hoarsely.

Her eyelids contracted. A faint return of the exultant strength which had seized her that night on Chalice Hill shivered up through her rigid body.

Now was the moment to let him know how he could depend on her — how she was ready to sacrifice everything for him! But fear and shyness made her numb, mute, helpless.

"Unhappy," he repeated in an almost inaudible voice.

Her bloodless lips moved. She formed the words, "I'm so sorry," but whether they reached him or not she could not tell.

"I've felt things, I've done things," he burst out, "in my life which have put me …" — he drew his hand away from the arm of her big chair and leaned back, making the inlaid woodwork of the delicate piece of carpentry he sat on creak ominously— "put me *outside the pale!"*

Then thrusting his hands deep in his pockets he gave vent to two unpleasant emissions of sound which he meant to be a cynical laugh.

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased, Cordelia?"

The girl responded — it was a sign of more devotion than he realised — by slipping off her new jacket and struggling to pull off her new gloves.

"I am sorry … *Owen*," she murmured.

The way she said "Owen" tickled the fancy of Mr. Evans and he smiled at her grimly.

"I know you are, my dear," he said. "I would have told you about this weeks ago, if I could. There's no earthly reason why I shouldn't tell you everything … except … that I *can't*."

"I am sorry … Owen," she repeated, folding back with frowning intensity the second of the two gloves and finally pulling it off and laying it on the chair by her side.

"Why I should have ever been born like I am," said Mr. Evans, "is what I can't understand. But that's what the worst men who've ever lived might have said."

He got up from his seat and began walking up and down the small space at the end of the shop. Every time he swung round he looked at the handle of the door leading to the room below. How often had he struggled against the irresistible temptation to turn that handle and steal a few feverish moments of reading from *that book!*

"Cordelia, do you think there are forms of evil so horrible that nothing can wash them out?"

The girl was sitting sideways now in her dusky gilded throne. A long quivering stream of reddish sunlight fell full upon her profile and gave to all its eccentricities an emphasis that was startling.

"Wash … them … out?" she repeated stupidly.

"I mean, do you think there are certain things anyone can do … cruel, abominable things … which bring in their train undying remorse? Listen, Cordelia! Do you think when Christ sweated that bloody sweat it talks about, He felt the weight of things like that? Not what He'd done himself, of course; but what, before He died, He had to take on Himself? Shall I tell you something, Cordy? I *can* tell you *that* much anyway … John Crow has asked me to play the Christ in your father's Pageant; and I said I would, if he'd let me be really tied to a Cross. You can see why I said that, Cordelia, can't you. It'll be hard to bear"; he emitted those same unpleasant guttural sounds again that he evidently supposed resembled a brutal guffaw, "it'll probably be more painful than I've any idea of; but I thought I'd realise in that way how He really did take such things on Him."

"It has been terrible for you, Owen, all this that you have gone through," she said. "But I can't believe that there are any things so awful that Christ cannot pardon them."

He stopped in his walk and faced her, his hands still deep in his pockets.

"People … don't … seem … to realise," he said, "what Evil is. They don't … seem … to realise how far it goes down! It has holes … that go down … beyond the mind … beyond the reason … beyond all we can think of! Something comes up from these holes that gives you power when you're in certain … in certain moods … and it's then that you feel things … and … Do Things" — his voice rose here to such a pitch that the girl started up and made a movement of her hand towards him— "which nothing in Nature can forgive!"

He moved backward away from her now with a lurching motion until his shoulder struck against a tall walnut-wood bureau. The shock of this seemed to calm him a little.

"Of course," he murmured, turning his back to her and passing his fingers up and down along the bureau's edge, "Christ is outside Nature; and *that's* my chance! He's outside, isn't he, Cordelia … outside altogether?"

Cordelia did somehow find the courage now to move up close to him and lay a nervous hand on the sleeve of his coat. He started at her touch and the expression of his face frightened her; but he must have pressed at once in the dark machinery of his mind one of those iron engines of his morbidly active will and it was with quite a courtly gesture that he raised her hands to his lips.

"You're sweeter to me than I deserve, my dear," he said gently. "I wish indeed, for your sake, I were a very different person."

"I am quite happy with you as you are, Owen," whispered Cordelia, with a beating heart. "Oh, why," she cried in all her nerves, "oh, why doesn't he take me in his arms?"

While these events were occurring in Number Two's shop, Number Two himself, namely Mr. Bartholomew Jones, already a little recovered from the extraction of what Penny Pitches called a "sisty" in his lower regions, was out of the hospital for a morning's drive. One of the doctors had offered to take the old man with him on a trip to Godney; but had dropped him instead for an hour's visit to the house of his aged crony, Abel Twig. Here at the door of the latter's woodshed, the two old gentlemen were exchanging comments upon life, just as they had been accustomed to do for the last fifty years.

"Me grand-daughter Sally do din me ears with talk about our new Mayor. The gal gives herself as much airs as if she were a she-mayor; and yet 'tis only because of her being their maid-of-all! 'Tis wondrous, Abel, how they pettykits do take on about Public Doings. In them old days, brother, 'twas upon pastles and apple turnovers and sech-like that their mindies tinned." "Fill up thee pipe, Bart; fill up thee pipe and think no more o' such pitiful goings-on," said Mr. Twig firmly. " 'Tis thoughts such as these thoughts what bring poor buggars like we into hospitals and infirmaries. When sun do shine and birds do zing, 'tis best to stretch out legs, brother, and hummy and drummy!"

"But 'tisn't only of thik new Mayor that my grand-darter talks to I of; 'tis of sad, wicked, fleshly doings what would bring some girt folks into trouble if all were known."

The two old heads moved closer to one another now and the two old caked and crusted briar pipes were tapped simultaneously on Abel Twig's wood-chopping stump.

"Be they the fleshly doings of they that be Mayors, or of they that *baint* Mayors?" enquired Number One evasively.

" 'Tis Sally Jones what sez so, Aby, not us, thee knows," murmured Number Two, casting a wary eye up the road and down the road, "but she tells I that thik little gal what plays with our Jackie be an Illegit of Mr. Crow up to Elms. She do say there were hintings and blinkings in the Gazette, about thik little job. ‘Twere in last Wednesday’s number or thereabouts,-she said, and she herself reckons ’twas Red Robinson what put ‘un there.” Two matches were simultaneously held to two charred and blackened orifices; and two thick clouds of blue smoke erupted from beneath a bird-like nose and a dog-like nose.

“Our Midsummer Day Fair, partner, be making this Nation ring and ting, so I hears,” said Abel Twig.

“So it be, brother, so it be,” said the other. “For me wone part, I’ve never been one for they roundabouts and they May-pole junketings and they Aunt Sally throws and they spotted men and pink-headed women. I were born over-modest, the Head-Doctor at hospital told Nurse Robinson, which were a way of saying that me stummick be easy turned. Thik Head-Doctor be all for they spick and span inventions, ‘sknow, and I do seem to be an old-fangled man what were better in grave.”

“Don’t ‘ee say such words, brother Bart,” protested Mr. Twig hurriedly, “don’t ‘ee say ’em! Ye’ll be stretching thee’s legs in me woodshed, this pretty Spring-time, come seven years away, when Head-Doctor be turned to midden-dust.”

“But ’tisn’t only of cock-shys and merry-go-rounds and fat men and cannibals that Mayor Geard be thinking!” went on the other; “Thik young John Crow, what he brought over from France, be teaching all the lads and gals of our town to act in a Play what’ll show God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, walking and talking like common men! ’Tis bloody Blasphemy most folk says. Others say ’tis True Religion brought back to earth! I do shiver and shake sometimes o’ nights in hospital, Aby, when I do think of what be in the air, and what be in the future, for this wold town, and for me and thee’s wold bones.”

“Ye’ve allus been a nervous man of your heart, Bart,” said Abel Twig consolingly, laying his scrawny fist upon the neat Sunday trousers of his friend, from which emanated the extremely musty smell of a ready-made man’s counter, of the days of Mr. Wollop’s father, “but there be nothing in thik Midsummer Fair to worry we.”

Number Two shook his head. He assumed the haughty and melancholy air of a famous pathological case, about whose bed’s head the greatest doctors in Europe had disputed for years in vain.

“I be afeared of what the future will bring to our wold town, Aby,” he said. “There do come to I, of nights, the shaky-shivers, as ye might say, when, as I lies awake in thik girt white ward, where thro’ they cold windies be blowin’ every draught of Heaven; and I do hear they ghosties come out of they Ruings, brother, and go whush, whush, whush over all the roofs, and I feel, for sure, that some girt change be coming over this town.”

“Thee’s talk be silly talk, brother,” said Mr. Twig. “What do ‘ee mean by a girt change?”

“I do mean what the planks and the stones of this town do feel in their wet innards, when night be over they, and all be sleeping! I do mean the shivery-shaky of they wold posties and windies and chimbleys and rafties, when dark be on ‘un. Say what ye will, brother Aby, say what ye will, ’tis the nature of stones and timber to know when changes be coming upon the earth. ’Tis the same with they dumb beasties afore a storm. Thee knows, for thee be a farmer, how it be with they slugs and snails when rain be coming. And yet mortal man, brother, sees naught of it! ’Tis hid from ‘un; and ’tis hid from his women too; — tho’ sometimes ’tis true that one o’ they will talk terrible wise, if so be a man had the patience to listen.”

Abel Twig shifted his position a little to ease himself from the hardness of the wood-bench he sat upon, for being a man of singularly lean flanks his bones were unprotected.

“Have ‘ee ever knowed a day, brother Bart, when these here prophesyings of rafties and chimbleys and wold church-roofs, what ‘ee do hear in hospital, have brought summat to pass that a man could name, summat that newspapers and history books could mention, summat that girt noblemen like our Lord P. could lozey and dozey over, as they sips their cellar wine after their black-cock pasties?”

Number Two contorted his countenance into a hideous caricature of humanity, in the sheer effort of ransacking his memory. Then the outlines of his face relaxed and a tremulous smile curled his lip.

“So I do, Aby; so I do,” he murmured complacently. “I recollect clear as daylight now, when there was three bad harvests in session; yes! and whole factories closed down. They were Hyde’s Dye-Works then, what now be Crow’s, and many sons of bitches were nigh to starving in they days; and vittles was so scarce that even the rich tradesmen could scarce afford sauce to their meat; and these terrible starving times was prophysied, just as I be telling ye now — by creakings and groanings in the wold stones o’ they Ruings! Something be coming upon our town, Aby, sure as my pore side be suffering from Head-Doctor’s whimsies. ’Tis coming, brother, don’t yer make no mistake! ’Tis coming; and all these changes of Mayors, and proclaimings of Fairs, be the outward signs, as Catechism do say, of some Holy Terror. It may be Pestilence and it may be Famine, Aby. I’m not saying it *will* be shortage of bread and the burying of human skeletons; but I’m not saying it *won’t* be they things. But something it will be; for the moanings and groanings in they Ruings be getting worse and worse. They keeps a person awake, brother. Not but what I sleeps well in hospital when I *do* sleep …. Don’t ‘ee let on nothing of *that* to Head-Doctor, Aby, … but

’tis when I *don’t* sleep that they prophesyings do bring death and judgement to me wold ears.”

The relaxed warmth of the April weather that had brought Cordelia into Number Two’s shop and had brought Number Two himself into Mr. Twig’s woodshed, was not devoid of its effect upon the susceptible temperament of John Crow, as he sat in his noisy little office, down by the whistling and creaking luggage trains, composing more and ever more daring advertisements in regard to his Midsummer Pageant. He had been working in this hot, dusty, little room since half-past eight that morning; and it was now five minutes after eleven.

He looked round; he flung open the door of the little office; he snuffed the air. The air tasted so delicious that he did not hesitate for a second. If his thoughts had assembled themselves in words, which they did *not* do on this occasion, the words would have been “Green … sky … air … cool … mud … grass … willows … water … green … air … space … mud.”

He snatched up his plain straw hat surrounded by a black ribbon. He snatched up his hazel-stick with its queer-shaped root-handle. The handle of this stick of John’s resembled the horn of a rhinoceros; and John, with his ineradicable superstition, had already endowed it with as much identity, and perhaps a little more, as any young girl pours out from her own soul upon her sawdust-filled doll.

Armed with his stick and wearing the same clothes that he had worn, at his grandfather’s funeral with the band of crêpe round the arm that his French friend had sewn on some seven weeks ago, he now set out, at a pace as rapid as its direction was motiveless, towards the southwest. He soon found himself following the road which led to the village of Street. The road John followed now may have been as old as the days of the Saxon King Ina, whose charter to the Benedictines of Glastonbury is still extant;

but the chances are that in those early times all cautious travellers leaving Glastonbury for the south followed the Roman Road, the remains of which lie less than a stone's throw away from the one upon the surface of which John's stick was now so sharply and so motivelessly tapping.

But whether he followed a Roman or a Saxon road it is certain that before he arrived at the village of Street John found himself crossing the River Brue at Pomparlès Bridge. Mentioned in a Court Roll of the second decade of the fifteenth century as Pons Periculosus, it was from this spot or near this spot, Pons Perilis, Pontparlous, Pontperlus, Pomparlès, that the mysterious personage known as King Arthur threw away his sword Excalibur.

John leaned against the parapet and surveyed the trickling water of the Brue. There was much mud there, and several extraneous objects carrying little association with Excalibur, rested half-buried in this mud, while a pathetically small stream of tawny-coloured water struggled with weakened impetus to deliver itself of such degrading obstacles. John's eyes, roaming in search of anything that might recover the ambiguous romance that hung about the spot, fell eventually upon a dead cat whose distended belly, almost devoid of fur, presented itself, together with two paws and a shapeless head that was one desperate grin of despair, to the mockery of the sunshine.

Still suffering from a violent reaction against all his mystical praise of Glastonbury, and suffering also from a too vivid memory of a dangerous quarrel he had had with Mary the last time they were together, this encounter with the distorted face and up-blown belly of this poor corpse caused him a diabolical twinge of mental and even physical misery. A strange vibration of malignant revolt against the whole panorama of earth-life took possession of him. What he felt was this— "I would be content to endure a good deal if I could convey to the conscious intelligence of any sort of Deity my contempt for the terms upon which our life has been offered to us."

John's scepticism as to the dogmas of pseudo-scientific materialism was abysmal but he had gone so far in his rôle as a circus-manager retailing all the Glastonbury myths with a twist of his own, that his mood now was one virulent atheistical fury. He pressed his lean stomach against the parapet in a bitter sympathy with that hairless belly in the mud; and he replied to the despairing grin of that scarcely recognisable head with a grin of his own that was not less unredeemed.

Thus across the Bridge Perilous of the old romances a stare of desperation out of Somersetshire mud met a stare of malice out of a Norfolk skull. In the super-consciousness of the blazing sun, now almost at its zenith for that day, the whirling and thundering, the crackling and growling and blasting and exploding of that orbit-revolving body of flame was accompanied by no consciousness of the existence of John Crow. And with the Earth it was the same! Below the mud of the Brue there was a bed of clay; below the clay, the original granite of the planet's skeleton; below the granite an ocean of liquid rock upon which the granite floated; below this again, black gulfs of hollow emptiness full of smouldering gases, and down below these — as the plummet of John's mind dived and sank — this "down" became an "up," and the liquid rock-basis of the "antipodes" of Glastonbury, like the root-sea of Dante's Purgatorial Mount, fumed and seethed and bubbled.

But neither in her granite bones, nor in her fiery entrails; neither in her soft, wet, rank vegetation, nor in her burning sands; neither inwards nor outwards, from centre to circumference, as her diffused super-consciousness accompanied the pulses of her material envelope, and followed the wind of her material revolution, did the mind of the Earth grow aware of the existence of John Crow. Nor finally was there potency enough in the cold fury of the man’s mephistophelian malice, as he answered the mindless despair in that decomposed cat-head in the filthy Brue-mud, to draw the least, remotest flicker of awareness from the double-natured, ultimate First Cause of the world!

On this particular noon-day not one of these great Elemental Powers became aware, for the flicker of a single second, of the existence by Pomparlès Bridge, between the town of Glastonbury and the village of Street, of the entity known as John Crow. But the Great Powers among the natural forces possessed of consciousness no more exhaust or fulfil the innumerable categories of the supernatural than the Great Powers among the nations of the earth exhaust or fulfil the categories of humanity. There are countless supernumerary beings — all sons and daughters of the First Cause — whose meddlings and interferences with the affairs of earth have not received the philosophical attention they deserve.

It must have been by some mental movement of which he was totally unconscious that John Crow, in his present sullen and cynical mood, brought down upon his head a supernatural visitation from one of these lesser potencies in the midst of that warm noon-day sunshine. Yes, it must have been by some unconscious mental gesture; or else it was brought upon him by the whole trend of his activities for the last month!

There undoubtedly appear in every generation certain portentous human beings to whose personalities some mysterious destiny gives abnormal power, abnormal capacity for emotion and finally an abnormal closeness to the secret processes of nature. Such an one must that personage have been whose ghostly figure, gathering to itself so many kinds of occult significance, so many kinds of vital life-sap, as the centuries rise up and fall away about it, passes still, among such as have the least interest in such things, by the familiar name of King Arthur.

In all the old books about these matters it is recorded that from some bridge across the Brue at this spot — some Bridge Perilous corresponding to the Castle Perilous where Merlin concealed that heathen prototype, whatever it may have been, of the Grail, this Arthur of the histories threw away his sword. This particular action of this singular Person must have been one that was accompanied by some intense convulsion of human feeling in his own mind parallel with the shock in Caesar’s mind when he crossed the Rubicon, in Alexander’s mind when he slew his friend Clytus, in Our Lord’s mind when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is doubtless these violent storms of intense feeling in great magnetic human personalities that are responsible for many of the supernatural occurrences vouched for by history and so crudely questioned by scoffing historians.

Pomparlès Bridge, although on the road to Street, is much nearer the town on its north than the village on its south, and it is probable that most of the refuse, such as old cans, old pieces of rusty iron, drowned cats and dogs, human abortions, vegetable garbage, tramps’ discarded boots, heads and entrails of fishes, brick-shards, empty tobacco tins, broken bottles, and so forth, which are to be seen sticking in the Brue-mud, comes from Glastonbury rather than from its smaller neighbour.

An overgrown river-path, on the stream’s northern bank, that once may have been a tow-path but now was only used by casual pedestrians, followed the river northeast where it flowed between Cradle Bridge Farm and Beckery Mill, across Glastonbury Heath, under Cold Harbour Bridge, by Pool Reed Farm, till it reached the village of Meare. The same path, on the Brue’s north bank, followed the river southeast as it flowed under Cow Bridge and across South Moor, Kennard Moor, Butt Moor, then a mile below Baltonsborough, till it reached the villages of West Lydford and East Lydford.

Out of the midst of a dazed condition of his senses, John stared down at the abominable despair in the hollow eye-sockets of that decomposed cat-head. A whitish-yellowish cabbage stalk lay buried in the mud near it; vegetable decomposition and animal decomposition taking place side by side. The man's senses were so drugged by the sunshine that his mind, as happens to anyone awakening from real sleep, narrowed its awareness to one single groove. This groove was the suffering that the dead cat must have undergone to stamp such a ghastliness of despair upon its physiognomy.

In all normal suffering there are certain natural laws such as mitigate what the entity in question is enduring. When these laws are broken an element enters that is monstrous, bestial, obscene. John began to feel that what the First Cause had chosen to inflict upon this cat belonged to this No-Man's-Land of outrage; and an anger rose up within him against whatever Power it was that was responsible for the creation of such sensitive nerves in such a torturing world, an anger that was like a saraband of raving fury.

He felt that the cat-head was exactly sharing his feelings. Its swollen hairless belly … its paws that resembled the claws of a bird … the snarling ecstasy of its curse … something at once bestial and eternal in the protest against the First Cause which it lifted up from the Brue-mud … all these things made John aware that if, like the Pistoian in the Inferno he should "make the fig" at the Emperor of the Universe, this cat-head would be wholly with him.

It was while the bow-string of his malediction was still quivering that John was struck, there, leaning as he was against the sun-warmed parapet, by a sudden rending and blinding shock. He had been thinking about King

Arthur a good deal in the course of his recent advertising but only in a childish and very ignorant way. He had never read the romances. But at this second, in the blaze of Something that afterward seemed to him to resemble what he had heard of the so-called Cosmic Rays, he distinctly saw … literally shearing the sun-lit air with a whiteness like milk, like snow, like birch-bark, like maiden’s flesh, like chalk, like paper, like a dead fish’s eye, like Italian marble, … an object, *resembling a sword*, falling into the mud of the river! When it struck the mud it disappeared. Nor was there any trace … when John looked later … to show where it had disappeared.

Under the stress of the shock, at the moment, John lurched sideways, scraping his hands and knees against the stonework of the parapet. He would certainly have fallen on his side if he had not been clutching tightly the root-handle of his hazel-stick, with which, automatically stabbing the surface of the road as he stumbled, he just saved himself. What he saw at that moment certainly flashed into his brain, in one blinding, deadly shock, as being a supernatural event. Something it was that quivered and gleamed, as it whirled past him, and vanished in the mud of the Brue! To the end of his life he was obstinate in maintaining that he really saw what he felt he saw with his bodily eyes.

When Mary asked him, for he told only Mary and Mr. Evans of this event, how it was that he knew it was Arthur’s sword, he could only say that the same shock that staggered his bodily senses like a bolt of noon-day lightning, staggered his mental consciousness with a rending and crashing certainty.

He whose life was now occupied with turning the whole Glastonbury Legend into a mockery and a popular farce had no reason to offer now as to how he knew what this thing was. But that it was a definite and perhaps a dangerous sign from the supernatural and that it was directed towards himself alone, he never had any doubt. That of all the persons he knew, he never told anyone about it save those two, was itself significant. His choice of Mr. Evans as his confidant was not surprising; for the fact that it was with Mr. Evans that he had visited Stonehenge gave to the quaint figure of the pedantic Welshman a certain disarming glamour.

"What was it like, John?" Mary kept asking him when, for the fiftieth time, he described the occurrence; but all he could tell her was that what he saw was milk-white and that it had a dusky handle. That the handle was dark instead of bright and glittering was certainly a peculiarity of the appearance that did not fit in with the atmosphere of the old stories. All the authorities who spoke of that sword indicated that its handle was shining gold. But then these *famosi favulatores* were poetical romancers; and it was possible that a real weapon with something queer and dark about its handle was thrown into the Brue at this spot by the person who subsequently became known as Arthur, quite independently of what the romancers said.

The object which John saw thrown into the Brue from Pomparlès Bridge was undoubtedly thrown from some point in space that lay behind his back; but it was from the appearance of the thing itself that he staggered away and came near falling; not from any consciousness of a supernatural presence behind him. The first thing he did, when he saved himself from falling by stabbing at the ground with his stick and leaning upon it till he got his balance, was to clamber through some railings by the roadside, climb down the road-bank and standing on the northern tow-path of the Brue, search the river with an intense, disturbed, bewildered curiosity. But nothing could he see except the accustomed rubbish! From this position he could not even see the face of the dead cat. There was one large shiny-leaved marigold growing down there; but its round golden flowers were all gone. They must have been picked long ago by someone or other. He grasped his stock tightly by its curiously moulded handle, that handle which had grown into its shape by the mysterious chances of underground life, and set out with rapid steps northeast following the course of the Brue in the direction of Meare.

Preoccupied with what had happened to him, he rejected totally as he walked along such explanations of this startling occurrence as would have dispensed with the supernatural. The first and the easiest of these explanations was that he had been the solitary witness of the descent of a meteorite or thunderbolt. Another was that his protracted mental playing with all these legends had resulted in some sort of nervous hallucination. But without laying any stress upon Arthur or his Sword, John felt that *something* had touched him from beyond the limits of the known.

As his footpath along the bank wound its way through the low water-meadows, with the red-tiled roof of the workmen's houses of Northover on its right, John's mind began to be invaded by doubts and worries about his whole life. It was as if he had been living for the last five weeks in an enchanted dream. The heady opiate fumes of the Glastonbury legends, even while he misused them and abused them with deliberate irony, had obsessed him to such a point that in all the other affairs of his life he had just drifted. It was this mood of drifting that had been the cause of one sharp quarrel after another that he had had with Mary.

"I'll tell Mary everything at our tea, today," he said to himself, as he stiffened his back and ran the end of his stick up and down through his fingers, to make sure it was clean, "I'll tell her that it won't make any real difference our having to wait to be married till after Midsummer. The truth is we *must* wait till then. Surely Mary will *see* we must! But oh, dear! Girls are so funny in these things."

He set himself to walk faster now, following the Brue across water-meadows that not many centuries ago must have been submerged every spring — and are still submerged in floodtime — by brackish waters from the Bristol Channel. He had crossed the Somerset-and-Dorset railway track and had found himself approaching Lake Village Field, when he came suddenly upon a group of children who apparently were engaged in some extremely violent quarrel. One of these children, a passionate, dark little girl, with bare head and dirty clothes, was balancing herself on a small landing-stage which jutted out into the river, while, on the muddy bank beneath this wooden erection, three other children — a boy, a girl and a much smaller child — were shouting insults at her, and even throwing various missiles, such as dried horses' droppings and handfuls of loose earth, picked up from the shelving bank, which, if they missed her thin little legs, hit very often, as John could see as he drew near, her faded and ragged skirt.

The children on the bank had their backs turned to him and the little girl, though her face was directed towards him, seemed too intent in defying her enemies to take any notice of his approach. Thus John, leaning on his stick and taking breath — for he had been walking fast — had time to listen for a minute or two very closely to what was going on before his presence made any difference at all.

"Thee baint got no proper father, thee baint!" cried the virtuous Jackie, throwing the muddy root of a last year's bulrush at his former lieutenant. "This here robbers' band, of which I be chief, don't want any gals in it what have no proper fathers!"

"What about thee own father, Jackie?" retorted the flushed outlaw from her point of vantage on the shaky wooden promontory. "What about having a father what went to prison all along of his making a nuisince of 'isself?"

The sedate Sis joined in at this point. “Thee’s mother never had no weddin’ ring, and thee’s father have never said, ‘I thee wed.’”

“*You* can’t say nothin’, Sis,” flung back Nelly Morgan fiercely, “when you and Bert have got neither the one nor ‘tother … only Grandmother Cole with a girt wart on her nose! Why, Bert, I be ‘shamed of ‘ee. Oh, yer little fat scrub, what do ‘ee mean by throwing mud at me who’s carried ‘ee so often on me back? What do ‘ee mean by’t, yer little staring owl? Yes! You may well run to Sis to save ‘ee, yer little cry-baby! ’Tis to thee I be talkin’, you Baby Bunting! Aren’t ‘ee ‘shamed of yerself?” Bert did indeed show signs of discomfort when this fusillade of fiery words, from so high above his head, came rattling down like grape-shot upon him. His philosophic gusto at the contemplation of the Visible World had evidently not yet allowed, in its cosmic repertoire, for female wrath when directed quite so bitterly at himself. Like many another male philosopher he now hid both his astonishment and his chagrin in the nearest folds of a kindlier feminine lap. And from this refuge, it must alas! be confessed, there shortly arose the sound of sobs.

But while the mischievous Jackie hunted about for a lump of horses’ dung that would be a better missile than any he had yet found, the sedate Sis, over the head of the weeping Bert, flung out the most dangerous and deadly word yet uttered. “Thee’s mother be a whore, Nelly Morgan, and thee can’t deny it! Thee’s mother let Mr. Crow do it. Yes, she did! She did let Mr. Crow do it, and all the town knows how thee be a Bastie!”

“Oh, you great coward!” cried the little Valkyrie from her plank above their heads. She was addressing Jackie now, who had just missed hitting one of her thin shoulders with his fragment of weather-dried manure. “Oh, you great lumping, common coward! Ye be a pretty robber captain, ye be, to join three to one, and against a girl too! I’ll tell yer Sister Sally on ye. That’s who I’ll tell! And she’ll larn ‘ee to throw shit at anyone, she will, and quickly too! Jackie Jones did run away, run away, from Number One’s dog” — in her genius for invective Nelly was inspired to utter this biting reproach in the form of an impersonal chant— “run away, run away, when there weren’t no dog at all!” The infuriated child, as she chanted her war-song, pointed her fingers at her former leader with such wild and witchlike ferocity that her words sounded to John’s ears like an incantation. He began to feel almost sorry for this young Boadicea’s three enemies, all of whom were now apparently heading for something like complete collapse.

Jackie was indeed spluttering with indignant denials and had grown red in the face, as, with his hands on the edge of her platform, he proceeded to try to shake her down. The daughter of Philip Crow finished *his* discomfiture, in a very summary manner! With the electric rapidity of a born dancer she advanced one of her little untidy feet and trod viciously upon the boy’s exposed knuckles. Jackie, tumbling on the grass and licking his injured hand, howled now like the Homeric Ares wounded by Diomed. Bert’s sobs and Jackie’s howls were at once punctuated by a quick interchange of feminine artillery between Nelly and Sis.

“I’ll tell your mother on ‘ee, ye nasty, ugly, dirty little bitch!” cried the protective maternal heart of the sturdy sister. It was at this point that Nelly began consciously to be aware of John’s presence and she glanced at him almost coquettishly, while she proceeded to chant triumphantly, shooting out her tongue, between the strophe and anti-strophe of her triumph-song, at the fallen Jackie,

“Sissie Jones at Sunday School,
Answered Teacher like a Fool;
Teacher said, ‘you little silly,
Shut your mouth and dilly dilly!’”

As she uttered this dithyramb over her defeated rival, the exultant little girl began to dance up and down upon the shaky plank. It was at this moment that John came forward. He came forward with the same sort of blush upon his twitching cheek that Dante displayed when Virgil caught him taking a wicked pleasure in an obscene and venomous quarrel. But he held out his arms to lift Nelly the Conqueror down from her perch, with a surprised sense that if these children's accusations were true, he and she were blood-relations, both of them drawing their devilish Norman spirit from William Crow's wife, the proud Devereux woman.

Certainly it was with the very gesture of a Devereux now that Philip's little daughter— "Morgan Nelly" as Number One called her — offered her hand, as soon as John placed her on her feet, to help the fallen Jackie to arise. It was a whole psychological drama — a drama beyond the reach of any living European pen — when Jackie's blubbered features came in view, the knuckles of his wounded hand pressed into his mouth and his little black eyes darting furtively backward and forward between John's face and Nelly's.

"Stop that, can't you? — you great baby — stop that now!" Thus did Sis, with an accompanying violent shake, vent her indignation with her successful rival upon the nearest and dearest object of her maternal affection. Bert received this shaking with his accustomed phlegm, and his sobs instantaneously ceased. His round eyes fell upon John's figure and as they surveyed that object the old insatiable gusto came back into them. Exactly as it would have been with poor ex-Mayor Wollop, what interested Bert most about this new human apparition was that it had put its cap upon its head back to front! This accident had no doubt resulted from the shock of the sword-incident at Pomparlès Bridge, but John was now fortunately saved from looking ridiculous when he got into the streets again.

“Bert be telling ‘ee, Mister,” said Sis eagerly, for the situation was one that exactly lent itself to her protective-corrective passion, “that thee’s cap be put on back-to-front. You mid ‘scuse Bert for mentioning it, Mister, but Bert be one, Bert be, for noticing things what’s topsy-turvy. He do notice when Nell or me have left our ribands at whoäm or haven’t got no safety pins. He do notice when his Grandma have forgot her false teeth, or when she’s put she’s best blue cap on when her wanted her common purple. He do notice his Teacher, Mister, so close and thorough that her do punish he for ‘t, like as if he’d misbehaved on school-room floor. ’Tis ‘markable what Bert do notice when people—” Her proud volubility was suddenly broken off by Morgan Nelly, who, while Sis was talking to John, had been whispering to Jackie. She addressed herself sternly to Sis now.

“Jackie says that tomorrow *I* be going to be the Captain of this Robber Band, and he be going to be my Court-Martial. Jackie says that you’ve got to be lower nor a Private, and Bert’s got to be the Band’s Pack-Horse.”

Sis glanced quickly at John’s face as she heard this summary bulletin from the conqueror’s tent. Seeing him smile a little, she planted her sturdy ankles firmly in the grass and bending down, as if they had been playing at daisy-chains rather than at bandits, she picked several of those whitish cuckoo flowers that John had already noticed and with a certain brusque sagacity, acting as she must have acted a thousand times with Jackie and Bert, handed this little nosegay, along with a spray of hedge parsley, for like all neophyte housekeepers she felt that blossoms without leaves — the leaves of cuckoo flowers being very inadequate from this particular point of view — were in some way wanting, to this stranger whose cap, caught so deplorably awry, was now pulled down, as it should be, over his amused and submissive eyebrows.

“Well! Good luck to you all, and many thanks!” cried John, making a feeble effort, almost worthy of Mr. Evans himself, to stick this collection of sap-wet stalks into his buttonhole, “I’ve got to get back to work. How is it you’re not at school?”

It was Jackie who replied to this, taking his wounded knuckles out of his mouth, “Mr. Dekker came yesterday when Teacher were cross, and he said she ought to have more holiday; and she said she’d like to go to Yeovil where her sweetheart be and Mr. Dekker told she to shut up school till after Easter Monday and she did get red as fire when he said that and when Mr. Dekker were gone she made faces behind her hands and then she cried behind her hands; but I did see what she were doing *I* did.”

“And our Bert saw Teacher cry too,” threw in Sis, at this juncture, anxious that the Cole family should have its equal share of drama.

“See Teacher cry, *I* did!” echoed Bert himself.

The faint uprising of a remote sympathy with this unknown woman weeping for joy that she could go to Yeovil on Maundy Thursday instead of Good Friday, gave place now in John’s mind to a curious sensation that he had experienced only once or twice before in his life. He saw this little group of children, outlined against that rickety landing-stage — which must have been built in the days when there were still barges on the Brue — under a sudden illuminated aura. He saw them as a recurrence, a recurrence of a human group of vividly living bodies and minds, with cuckoo flowers and hedge-parsley and dock leaves and river-mud gathered about their forms, as if arranged there by a celebrated artist. The badness of the children, the sweetness and charm of the children, with these spring growths all about them and a solitary invisible lark quivering in the blue, seemed to carry his perturbed spirit beyond some psychic threshold, where the whole pell-mell of the mad torrent of existence took on a different appearance. “Good-bye and good luck!” he called out to them as he went off.

He had hardly time, however, to reach a spot at the curve of the river that was near to his friend Barter’s airplane landing-place — and there, across a field or two, he could see the motionless air-vessel — when he heard a panting breath behind him and the sound of little running feet. He swung round and found Morgan Nelly at his side. The child was too breathless to speak at first, but she caught the flap of his overcoat with her hand and kept pace with him as he walked slowly on. “Going my way, Nelly?” he said. He had heard them call her “Nelly” in their quarrel; but the syllables “Morgan” had escaped him.

“They tease I terrible, Mister, in school-yard,” announced the new captain of the robber band. “They call I ‘Bastie, Bastie.’ They did run after I in dinner-hour yesterday, till I bit Amy Brown’s wrist so she bled awful bad.”

“They mustn’t tease you, Nelly, and you mustn’t bite people’s hands,” murmured John helplessly, thinking to himself that if, when Bloody Johnny got on his nerves, he could bite him, “so he bled awful bad,” it would be an immense clearing of the air.

“Red Robinson made me mother go up Wells Road one time and ring at The Elms’ front door. He told she to ‘Harx’ for the bleeding son of a bitch and make ’im cough up. ‘Harx’ — that’s the way he talks, Mister! ’Tis London language they tell I, though me mother says ’tisn’t as King George do speak. *Do you* think King George do say ‘Harx’ instead of ‘arst’, Mister?”

“Did your mother go?” enquired the inquisitive John, postponing the problem of King’s English till he had learned more of this rich piece of scandal.

“Yes, she went, and I went with her,” explained Morgan Nelly eagerly, “and Emma Sly — that’s one of the servants at The Elms — gave Mother port wine and plum cake, and she gave me lime-juice and Selective biscuits, and I did select they kind what has sugar on ’em and ‘H.P.’ in pink stripes. Emma told me and mother what ‘H.P.’ stands for. She said her Dad who be shepherd for Lord P. up Mendip way did think thik ‘ P ‘ stood for his master’s wone self. But Emma told me and Mother what folks as knows knows what it really be. Do *you* know what it really be, Mister? Sis Cole doesn’t know, ‘cos I baint ‘a told she, and I baint a-going to tell she, nor Bert either, what ‘H.P.’ stand for. *You* wouldn’t, would you, Mister? Ignorant, common, ordinary kids, like what they be!”

“Did your mother ask to see Mr. Crow?” enquired the insatiable John.

“She did say summat about it,” replied Morgan Nelly, “but she never called ‘un no names, as ‘bleeding son of a bitch’ and such like; and she just sat down again, by kitchen-fire and went on drinking thik wine and eating thik cake, when Emma Sly said her master had company that evening.”

“I’ll talk to a cousin of mine who’s in town over the holiday,” pronounced John, thinking in his mind of Dave Spear. “He knows this chap Robinson well, and I’ll tell him to make the fellow stop worrying your mother. Did she say anything to this servant about ‘coughing up’ and so forth?”

“Mother were so thick with Emma Sly when we camed away,” replied Morgan Nelly, “that she hadn’t the tongue — oh, there’s Betsy got loose and Number One running after she!”

The diplomatic John cast his eyes over Lake Village Field towards Backwear Hut and there, sure enough, was the distracted figure of Abel Twig, looking for all the world, like the old man in Mother Goose who had lost his crooked sixpence. Mr. Twig was frantically limping after the mischievous animal, who was tossing up her heels and leaping into the air as she evaded him, in a manner more worthy of a frolicsome heifer than a calm, mature giver of sacred milk.

“He ain’t got no girt dog, really and truly,” Morgan Nelly informed her new friend. “Sis thinks he have, and Bert do dream he have. But he hasn’t, has he, Mister?”

All the way back to his little office John’s thoughts kept hovering around that startling episode of the milk-white sword with the dark handle. “I don’t care what they do; I don’t care what signs and omens they fling down; I don’t care how much I infuriate them. They stopped those old Danes at Havyatt, but by God! they shan’t stop me! I’m going to blow this whole unhealthy business sky-high. And I’m going to do it through this Pageant of Geard’s!”

In the depths of John’s consciousness something very lonely and very cold began to congeal itself into a little, hard, round stone. “I am myself,” he thought, “I am myself alone.” His mood, as he advanced down that narrow little cobble-stone road called Dyehouse Lane, towards the station, became, for some reason, more and more anti-social and more and more inhuman. Miss Drew would have said he showed himself to himself at that moment, as the lecherous, cold-blooded, slippery, heartless, treacherous reptile that he was! “Mary belongs to me,” he thought. “I’m the only man who’ll ever suit her. She couldn’t let Tom touch her finger! *I know her.* And the feeling I get from making love to her is far beyond anything I could ever get from any other human being. But I won’t let Mary think she can rule my whole life. I’m not one to stand that kind of thing. The truth is that though I like making love to her, in my own way, I’m not at all sure that I *would* like sleeping with her every night! She’s an absolute necessity to me. I know *that.* But there’s something about giving up my liberty in that room that worries me. And Tom too — I like to have Tom all to myself! What I really am is a hard, round stone defying the whole universe. And I *can* defy it, and get what I want out of it too! It's a lovely feeling to feel absolutely alone, watching everything from outside, uncommitted to anything. Why should I accept the common view that you have to 'love' other people? Mary belongs to me; but sometimes I wonder whether I 'love' even Mary. I certainly don't 'love' myself! I'm a hard, round, glass ball, that is a mirror of everything, but that has a secret landscape of its own in the centre of it. O great Stones of Stonehenge, you are the only gods for me!"

He caught sight of a little round, light-coloured pebble at that moment half-embedded in the rough cement wall of an old shed that abutted upon the narrow footpath of Dyehouse Lane. He stopped and ran the tips of his fingers over this little object. It had once evidently been a unit, a portion, of some anonymous heap of pebbles taken from a sea-bank, to be used, as it was used here — for there were others like it embedded not far off — with mortar and gravel in building inexpensive walls. It was, however, very unusual to find such pebbles used in this way in Glastonbury, and this was the first in the town that John had set eyes upon. The afternoon sun shone bright and warm upon the shed wall, as John touched this small, round stone, and in a yard behind the building some unseen tame pigeons began making a low, sweet, unctuous cooing full of sensual contentment. But the touch of the pebble carried John's mind far away from this peaceful spot. A dark, wild, atavistic sea-spirit stirred within him, a spirit that reinforced and nourished afresh all the pride of his inmost being. "This morbid religion of renouncement, of penance, of occult purgations and transformations" — so his reckless thoughts ran on— "I'll never yield to this betrayal of life! If I *am* weak and nervous and timid, I'll win by cunning. And I won't compete either! I'll steer my life in a religion of values totally unknown to any of them! I won’t fight them *on their terms.* But I’ll conquer them all the same! I’ll become air, water, fire. I’ll flow through their souls. I’ll flow into their inmost being. I’ll possess them without being possessed *by* them!” He scrutinised the pebble still more closely. It was not exactly round; it was hard to tell its precise shape, because it was so firmly embedded in the mortar. It was of a dull pinkish colour. Where did it come from? From Chesil Beach? John had never seen either of the two coastlines nearest to Glastonbury, but he knew vaguely that the southern coast was steep and rocky, while the shores of the Bristol Channel were flat expanses of tidal mud. That was all he knew. But never mind where it came from! As he stared at this hard opaque object an indescribable rush of nervous maliciousness and vehement destructiveness coursed through his veins. Oh, it would please him, oh, it would satisfy him, if a great wild salt wave coming out of the dark heathen sea, were to sweep over this whole morbid place and wash the earth clean of all these phantasms!

He had now reached the railroad crossing, but he found the gates closed. An interminable luggage train had to jerk, and thud, and rattle, and groan itself by, before those gates would open. He allowed his eyes to wander with a sudden penetrating attention — an almost savage attention — over each one of these lumbering goods trucks as they clattered and clanged past him. “Real!” he muttered viciously. “That’s what you think you are! — Real and true … the only undoubted fact *A luggage train*, taking Philip’s dyes down to Exeter. In old days it would have been a Roman convoy taking tin to the coast from the Mendips. I expect that damned Sword was really made of tin … tin swords! Tin shields! Tin souls!” Clutching one of the bars of the railroad gate and shaking it, he now relinquished all restraint and burst into a childish doggerel:— “In my Midsummer Pageant I’ll mock the Grail; mock the Grail; mock the Grail; in my Midsummer Pageant I’ll mock the

Grail; for Arthur's sword is tin!" When the train had passed at last and the gates were opened he walked very slowly over the dusty, sunny tracks, thinking, thinking, thinking. John's character had altered considerably, and he had begun to realise it himself during these weeks of working with Mr. Geard. A certain chaotic tendency to drift in him — the drifting of the congenital tramp and the recklessness of the antisocial adventurer — had tightened and hardened into a kind of psychic intensity of revolt, of revolt against all the gregarious traditions of the human crowd. "There must be destruction," he said to himself, as he entered the Great Western station-yard, "before any fresh wind from the gods can put new life into a place like this!" So he said to himself in the fierce strength which the pebble from Chesil Beach had poured into his heart; but when he put his hand on the handle of his little office door there came filtering up to the surface of his mind the old chilly sediment of sceptical contempt. "Let these things of gilded vapour," he thought, "these things of tinsel and tin have their day! Let the savage opposites of them have their day too. They are all dreams, all dreams within dreams, and the underlying reality beneath them is something completely different from them all."

MAUNDY THURSDAY

THE PROCESSES OF all creative force are complicated, tortuous and arbitrary. They are also infinitely various. The simple notion of one single vital urge displaying itself in spontaneous generation from inorganic matter and then thrusting forth, in its chemical transmutations, all the astounding forms of evolutionary life, does not cover one-half of the dark continents of real creation. None knoweth the beginning of things; but under the anarchy of present existence are galaxies of warring minds; and the immense future depends upon the wills of multitudinous hosts of minds. But not, alas! upon well-meaning, tender, indulgent, generous, forgiving, considerate, man-loving minds! The mind of the First Cause was twofold, self-contradictory, divided against itself. The multifarious minds that stir up the chemistry of matter today are all descended from the First Cause and share its dualistic nature, its mingling of abominable cruelty with magnanimous consideration. Many of these minds have far more simple goodness in them, more simple pity, more simple tenderness, than the double-edged mind of the First Cause; but none are reliable, none can be trusted. While none of them are entirely evil, none are entirely good. There is no creative energy divorced from some level either high or low of what we call consciousness; and there is no consciousness, whether of demiurge, demon, angel, elf, elemental, planetary spirit, demi-god, wraith, phantasm, sun, moon, earth, or star, which is not composed of both good and evil.

It was about seven o’clock in the evening of this same Maundy Thursday, when John had the vision — if such it were — of Arthur’s sword at Pomparlès Bridge, that a company of cheerful human beings were gathered together, snug and warm, full of chittering gossip, full of lively hummings and buzzings of released roguery, in the kitchen and scullery and museum of Glastonbury Vicarage. Mat Dekker's high-church doctrines had always been of a nature to admit large, generous, and even eccentric undertakings; and on this eve of the anniversary of his Man-God's cruel death he had seen fit to give to the inner circle of his parishioners what he was pleased to denominate as the choir-supper. This name was absurdly inappropriate; for most of the best actual singers in St. John's Church were uninvited to this homely and secular feast. They were uninvited because they would have refused to come. They were of the type of Anglican piety that regards fasting rather than feasting as appropriate to the eve of the Crucifixion. Mat Dekker, although fully as Catholic in his dogmas as his most austere parishioner, had the natural easy-going earthiness of an old-fashioned French curé. There was something in the deepest part of his spirit that the word "homely" could alone describe. He loved little, ordinary, negligible things: little, ordinary events, little, casual objects in Nature. This choir-supper on the eve of Good Friday would not interfere with the humble devotion with which he would labour, patiently and solemnly, through the long invocations and supplications of the morrow's services; but there was something about it that peculiarly satisfied Mat Dekker's whole personality. He took a profound, but perhaps quite unconscious delight in the various degrees of glowing idiosyncrasy which illuminated the physiognomies of his guests. It was indeed a scene worthy of Teniers or Jan Steen or Breughel, this choir-supper at Glastonbury Vicarage. The centre of it was the kitchen, where Penny Pitches, standing at her famous and ancient stove, played the part of the arch-sorceress of the occasion. On an old nursery chair, with a low wicker seat, was seated, next to the stove, the portly form of Mr. Weatherwax. The forehead of Mr. Weatherwax shone with amiability and heat. He had found a corner of the great stove — which was really like a world in itself — where he could deposit his glass of brandy. His enormous face at this low level — and exposed to periodic emissions of extreme heat from the oven — looked larger than human there. He looked like a colossal gnome or goblin present at the cooking of an ogre's meal. Indeed when Penny placed a special morsel from some dainty dish upon a plate on his lap he looked, it must be confessed, like the ogre himself. Moving about with the dishes in support of Penny was quite a phalanx of serving-maids, all of them with their Sunday clothes on, but covered up in big loose overalls. Sally Jones was here and Tossie Stickles. Lily and Louie Rogers were here. Even the redoubtable Emma Sly, as an especial honour to Mr. Dekker, who was her favourite official in the town, was among these amateur and yet these professional ministrants.

Let no humorous adept in the whimsicalities of human manners think that there were any fewer exquisite morsels of class distinction, of character distinction, of distinction in social prestige, in this group of Glastonbury servants, than there would be when Tilly Crow, up at The Elms, gave her next grand tea-party to their mistresses. Emma, of course, was the *grande dame* of the occasion. Lily and Louie did their utmost to monopolise her attention; but this, by reason of Emma's long training in the diplomacy of parties, proved quite an impossible task. The little elderly woman was the only one of the servants there whose dress would have been appropriate if they had all been suddenly summoned to carry tea-trays into the drawing-room. And yet it was not her ordinary service-dress. Its quietness and modesty retained somewhere about it — perhaps in a tiny piece of dark-blue ribbon round Emma's neck — the impression that it was put on to do especial honour to somebody or something outside the routine of her diurnal labours. That touch of blue round Emma's neck was a delicate intimation that the great professional was an amateur that night. It had doubtless been put on partly in honour of tomorrow's being Good Friday and partly in honour of Mat Dekker's being Emma's Vicar. The roguish blue eyes of Sally Jones were always flinging furtive glances of mischievous girlish understanding into the soft, dark-brown, lethargic eyes, constantly growing misty with tender, self-conscious sentiment when her friend teased her about Mr. Barter, or Tossie Stickles. Tossie was undoubtedly the favourite amateur waitress, on this occasion, with the lively crowd of guests assembled round the big trestle-tables set up in the museum. Her plump figure, irradiated by her love for her gentleman-seducer, threw about her, wherever she went, a warm, amorous cloud of magnetic attraction; while her ready jests, as she carried the rabbit pasties and the pigeon pies and the great bowls of Irish stew — which were Penny's particular achievement and which filled the museum with a fragrant onion-heavy steam — from one to the other of the men and women seated round the table, were continually starting fresh guffaws of laughter and causing various old gossips to nudge each other and wink as she pushed her way among them.

The candles on the chimney-piece, as well as on the table, threw over all these faces a soft yellow glow that seemed to draw out something peculiarly individual from their folds and creases and wrinkles and heavy meaningless surfaces of flesh, all of which in daylight might have been inexpressive and insignificant. Every now and then Mat Dekker's eyes wandered to the old-fashioned pictures of his father and mother on the mantelpiece and to the faded, wistful picture of Sam's mother. These faces did not seem as alien to the scene that was going on as one would have suspected. But then all these Vicarage guests, however ugly and deformed, possessed a certain winnowed quality of sensitiveness which had come to them through their ancestors — common or gentle — down the long centuries of Glastonbury's life. Nowhere else indeed in the town that night — certainly not at the Pilgrims' Inn and not even in St. Michael's Inn — was there assembled such a characteristic group of Glastonbury people.

This accounted for the fact that towards the roof of Mat Dekker's house, through the hushed envelope of the earth's moonlit atmosphere, all manner of subhuman and superhuman influences were directed. Gold, mute, silent in the moonlight rose the Tower Arch of the ruined Abbey. From the fluted columns, from the foliated capitals, from the broken stone bases in the hushed grass, indestructible emanations of the wild liturgical calls of the old tune— "Save us from Eternal Death! Save us from Eternal Death!" — that these carved stones had known, vibrated forth over the smooth lawns, over the treetops, and then, floating away upon the moonlight, were attracted, as if by a lodestone composed of living souls, down into that hot, noisy, steamy, candlelighted room. "Save us from Eternal Death! Save us from Eternal Death!" This chant was wailed faintly above them all in that place, drifting through the high trees of King Edgar's lawn, from those myriads of dead, mediaeval throats! And mingled with this faint wailing, of which it was unlikely enough that any one among these revellers would catch the least echo, came a vast shadowy Image. Between the moonlight and the Vicarage roof it came, the Image of the Man-God of the West, the Image of the Being whose death by torture was to be celebrated that next day. It was as if this Image, with those unspeakable eye-sockets wherein quivered the death-cries of all the victims of the cruelty of Man and the cruelty of Life and the cruelty of the First Cause, had been itself created by the unpardonable suffering of all sentient nerves from the zenith to the nadir of the physical universe. It brought with it through that moonlit night, as it floated over the treetops, a terrible smell of pain; a smell that was sweet as burning sticks of cinnamon, a smell that was bitter as burning branches of laurel, a smell as of a sponge soaked in the hyssop of a dead sea of anguish! But as none in that room noticed that cry above the roof— "Save us from Eternal Death!" — none noticed that floating Image, none smelt that indescribable smell. In fact, the good, humble naturalist-priest, who was the entertainer of this noisy gathering and who, in the absence, for the next ten or eleven hours, of his enemy the sun-god, was so sturdily radiating around him his high-spirits that everyone was conscious of some especial reassurance, decided now, while Emma — for that was *her* task — was carrying round numerous little cups of coffee to the more epicurean of the guests, that it would be a good thing to have a little music.

His first thought was of Tossie Stickles who possessed a mandolin upon which she often played various little tunes. Tossie had been so gay and lively during the first part of the evening that it was a shock to the good host when he learned from Sally Jones, whose blue eyes as she came to confess it were themselves blubbered with crying, that Tossie had been "taken funny-like," and been carried upstairs "to rest."

Mr. Dekker's ruddy countenance lost its complacency and an extremely anxious frown gathered about his eyes. Tossie Stickles would never be "taken funny" at choir-supper if there weren't something seriously amiss. "That girl's in trouble," he said to himself, "as sure as I'm a priest.

"Listen, Sally," he said gravely, "tell Tossie from me, when you're alone with her, that I'm not angry with her and I'll talk to her before she goes." He still kept the young woman by his side with a penetrating stare from beneath his bushy eyebrows; but though he had spoken to her in a low whisper their colloquy had not passed unobserved. Several of the older women had stopped sipping their coffee and were watching them intently.

“Run off to her now, Sal; there’s a good girl; and stay with her, will you? And pack all the others out of the room, won’t you?”

But as soon as the girl had left the room he shut his eyes tight and rubbed his face with the palms of his hands, uttering a faint husky sound, that was not exactly a groan, but which was near a groan. When he took his fingers away he sighed heavily, drawing up this long breath from the depths of his broad chest, as if it had been a bucket of water out of a garden well.

Sam Dekker, who had been all this while silently and gravely carving a large joint of hot bacon — fragrant slices of which he placed upon the edges of various people’s plates, already well-filled, while Crummie, seated beside him, added to the same plates certain quotas of pickled walnuts and roast chestnuts — was the only person at the long table who received the real significance of this deep sigh of his father’s. He caught his father’s eye as soon as he could. “Aren’t we going to have any music, Father?” he said. Mat Dekker regarded his son tenderly from the end of the table and with an affectionate narrowing of his great eyebrows answered that he had just sent their mandolin-player on a mission that he feared would prevent her from performing. “But if you think it would be all right, Sam, my boy, we could get old Weatherwax in from the kitchen to sing us one of his catches. I suppose it would be no use trying to persuade Miss Geard” — he smiled at Crummie as he spoke— “to help us out with a song or anything?”

This word from the head of the table attracted the general attention to poor Crummie — who had already taken a certain risk of publicity by assenting to Sam’s courteous request that she should sit by his side — and now she could not stop herself from blushing scarlet. It was one of the most charming signs of Crummie’s essential innocence, amid all her flirtations, that when she was embarrassed she got as red as a little girl of ten.

“I’m afraid I couldn’t possibly — Mr. Dekker; oh, no, I couldn’t possibly,” Crummie murmured. “There! a few more pickles for this one, Lily. Who is it? Oh, Jackie Cole! Yes, I’m sure Jackie likes pickles”; and the girl did her best to distract the public attention away from herself.

“Perhaps you wouldn’t mind, Louie,” said Mat Dekker, “asking Weatherwax to come in and give us a song. He’ll do it if a pretty girl like you asks him.” This remark was greeted with guffaws of laughter from many in the company; for the goatish disposition of the Vicarage gardener had become a popular byword. The silence following Louie’s exit was now interrupted by the opening of the kitchen door at the end of the passage. From that portion of the room came a hubbub of voices, Penny’s witch-like tones rising above the rest and mounting up in shrill spirals of sound above the murmuring growls of Mr. Weatherwax. The old rogue hesitated not to precede Louie into the museum — Louie following after him with an expression of self-conscious pride, as if he’d been a puppet whose strings she was pulling from behind.

Sam, who had cut by now the last slice of bacon that anyone could possibly call for, turned to Crummie and whispered in the girl’s ear, “Isn’t that just like my father? He knows perfectly well that the old villain will shock half the people here and yet he persists in lugging him out from where he’s as happy as a cricket, and where Penny’s there to look after him.”

Crummie expressed the complete identity of her opinions with those just expressed. Her eyes lingered for a moment, clinging timidly to Sam’s, like a goldfinch to a thistle-head, and then, dropping her soft eyelashes till they nearly rested upon her cheek, she looked down at her hands which were clasped very tight upon her lap. She began wondering if there would be any possible chance that he might offer to take her home that night. None of her family was here. She prayed to God that there might be thunder and lightning, so that it would seem a monstrous thing for her to have to go alone! How lucky that Sally Jones lived in the opposite direction and that there was indeed no one here who came from her end of the town! "If he only thinks of it, or if his father thinks of it I believe he will!" But she had no sooner begun to imagine what it would be like walking in the darkness at Sam's side or clinging to his arm amid terrific claps of thunder, than she was seized with a fit of shivering; not violent shivering but a constant recurrence of that sensation of cold shivering which is described as "a goose walking over your grave." Crummie became afraid lest Sam would notice that this queer irresistible shudder kept running through her body. To herself it seemed so terribly apparent that she was intensely grateful to old Weatherwax for not waiting to be seated but commencing his ditty from the middle of the floor between the fireplace and the table. There was a really intense stillness round that candlelit disordered table covered with half-empty cups and wine glasses and with orange skins and nut shells as the great perspiring countenance of the satyrish gardener composed itself into what he felt to be his singing expression. Mr. Weatherwax's singing expression was as a matter of fact little short of maudlin. What might be called a radiant imbecility beamed from that great face, the eyes of which were tightly closed.

In the silence that awaited his first note, Sam Dekker, whose ears were as sharp as the ears of a fox, caught distinctly the sound, from some room on the landing above, of a low-pitched miserable weeping. Sam had been all that evening aware of many things that had been unnoticed even by his father. He alone among them all had not been oblivious of that insubstantial shadow forming in the moonlight, melting away in the moonlight, and then reshaping itself there; swaying and hovering above the Glastonbury roofs, in vaporous convulsed movements, as if the atmosphere of that night contained an element that could gather itself up, condense itself, solidify itself, and take the form of the beams of a vast cross upon which that shadowy figure was hung. But Sam's consciousness of this vaporous shadow, twisting and turning in pain up there, now began to be blent and confused in his mind with a definite human suffering that was going on, below the roof of the Vicarage but above the ceiling of the museum. Old Weatherwax's rumbling bass voice singing the following stave seemed to his ears to be a fit symbol of the world's attitude to both these griefs.

"The Brewer, the Malster, the Miller and I
Had a heifer, had a filly, had a Ding-Dong;
When Daffadowndillies look up at the sky;
Pass along boys! Pass along!
"The Brewer, the Malster, the Miller and I
Lost a heifer, lost a filly, lost a Ding-Dong;
When oak-leaves do fall and when swallows do fly;
Pass along boys! Pass along!
"The Brewer, the Malster, the Miller and me
Found a heifer, found a filly, found a Ding-Dong;
They weren't the same pretties, but what's that to we?
Pass along boys! Pass along!
"The Brewer, the Malster, the Miller and I
Left a heifer, left a filly, left a Ding-Dong;
Down in a grassy green grave for to lie;
Pass along boys! Pass along!"

Many of the older men present seemed to know this ditty well. They must have often heard the old man humming it in the bar of St. Michael's

Inn. Several voices therefore joined in that rather brutal chorus of “Pass along, boys! Pass along!”

Mat Dekker, who himself was so congenitally ignorant of music that he could not distinguish “God Save the King” from “The British Grenadiers,” kept swaying his rugged grey head from side to side, not retaining any sort of time, but with a general idea of helping matters forward by this token. Crummie kept a sly, sideways watch upon Sam’s face; and when she saw that he had begun to work the muscles of his chin up and down, and to lower his head over his plate and over the mutilated joint of bacon in front of him, she too allowed her expression to assume an air of weary melancholy; and instead of looking at old Weatherwax she looked with tender sympathy at the pathetically wagging head of the master of the house at the end of the table. The close of the gardener’s song was greeted with resounding applause. “Hen-cor! Hen-cor!” screamed Mrs. Robinson in a shrill voice. “Give us another, Mister!” cried the Nietzschean young man from Wollop’s. Old Weatherwax cleared his throat, passed his hand over his brow, straddled his gaitered legs more widely, planted his leather boots more firmly, turned his head to wink at the square form of Penny Pitches which was now blocking up the door into the passage, shut his eyes tightly once more, lifted his chin a little, and began: —

“With backside and so ‘gainst they bars, Peggee,
With backside and so ‘gainst they bars,
With a flagon o’ Zomerset ale in me hand,
There baint none as merry as we in the land,
Beneath they twinklin’ stars, Peggee,
Beneath they twinklin’ stars.
Hips and haws; and up and down dale!
And the Devil may fill the wold ‘ooman’s pail!

“With a doxy like thee on me knees, Peggee,
With a doxy like thee on me knees
And his Lordship’s plumpest bird i’ me pot,
And a Sedgemoor-peat-fire to baste ‘un hot,
There be luck in the barrel’s lees, Peggee,
There be luck in the barrel’s lees.
Hips and haws, and up and down dale!
And the Devil may fill the wold ‘ooman’s pail!”

Like the crafty comedian that he was, Isaac Weatherwax paused at the end of this second verse in order to enjoy to the full the exquisite savour of rich response to which he knew himself entitled.

It was at this point that Sam, under cover of the beating of heels on the ground, the knocking of knife-handles on the table, the clapping of hands, the well-satisfied chuckles, the boisterous “bravos” and “hear-hears,” got up from Crummie’s side and began making his way to his father’s end of the table. Crummie followed him with a gaze of intense concern; but she discreetly kept her place, and indeed moved up a little closer to Grandmother Cole, whose seat was on the further edge of Sam’s empty place. She saw him ask some question of his father and caught a surprised look on the older man’s face. This look was followed, however, by a grave nod, as if he said— “Do what you please, but I cannot see any good that can come of it!”

Sam paused at the top of the stairs to ascertain from which of the rooms that sound of crying proceeded — had his father let them take the girl into his mother’s room, the one he always kept unused? — and, as he stood there listening, he became conscious once more, as he had been intermittently conscious all that night, of that vast, outraged shadow, hovering there in the moonlight above the roofs of the town. He also became conscious — as if it were the executioners themselves, at that official assassination, bawling out some bawdy ditty from the Suburra of Rome — of the thick-throated gardener's finale: —

"There be Gammer Death at the sill, Peggee!
There be Gammer Death at the sill!
And the Lord, his wone self, be a-hanging for we;
And Leviathan be coming up out of the sea;
And Behemoth over the hill, Peggee,
And Behemoth over the hill!
Hips and haws, and up and down dale;
But the Devil may have we for wold 'ooman's pail!"

No, it was not from his mother's room; it was from the spare-room that the sound was coming. It was not the sound of crying now, either, it was the sound of several voices, some of them raised quite high. He strode down the passage, knocked sharply at the spare-room door and entered without awaiting a reply.

Tossie Stickles was lying on the great four-poster bed under the curtained canopy. She had not disturbed the embroidered counterpane. She had not disturbed the carefully folded ends of the curtains whose fringes, matching the valances that touched the floor, lay at the outer edges of the two pillows. This bed had come from their ancestral home in the Quantocks. William of Orange had been one of those who had slept under that canopy. Perhaps that wise and indulgent ruler had been, in his hour, as careful as Tossie herself not to disturb those elegantly folded fringes.

"Mr. Dekker said as ye was all to clear out and leave I with 'er and none body else!" was what Sam heard Sally Jones saying as he opened the door. Sally's blue eyes were flashing with indignation on behalf of her friend; but standing immovably before her, not budging an inch, was — or *had* been until Sam entered — the slender and virginal figure of Lily Rogers. Lily's melancholy gusto for romantic situations, her almost maniacal penchant for seduced maidens, as long as their seducers belonged to the class known as gentlefolk, were emotions that had been satisfied this evening as they had never been satisfied in all Lily's conscious life. The fact that the general gossip of the town pointed its finger at Mr. Barter as the Villain in the case was a coincidence that heightened Lily's excitement to fever-pitch. She herself had been kissed more than once by the dissolute East Anglican; and it had been much more the propinquity of Louie — who *also* liked him — than any ice-cold resistance in herself that had kept her relations with this gentleman at such a discreet point.

Sam was not by any means a virtuoso in the delicate entanglements of female quarrels, so that all he did at this moment was to continue holding the door wide open as if he took for granted that Lily would retire. But Lily — who had known "young Master Sam" a good many years and was several years older than he was — showed no sign of retiring. "Penny thought I'd better come up to see—" she began. But Sam cut her short.

"My father told me to amuse these young ladies till he could leave the table," he said. "I wish you'd tell Penny, Lily, not to forget those boxes of sweets that I bought for dessert. Please run down now and tell her — there's a good girl!"

Lily cast a final gloating look at the youthful sufferer stretched out on William the Third's bed, a look that was replied to by a glare of fury from the blubbered face and brown eyes of Tossie. She then gave her graceful head a delicate little toss and went off. Sam came straight over and sat down on the edge of the bed, motioning to Sally to subside into a stately Louis Quatorze chair, whose gilded arms and embroidered roses had hitherto kept this slum-born niece of Number Two at a respectful distance.

"Don't 'ee cry about it, little girl," he said tenderly, laying his hand on one of the plump knees of the prostrate victim of East Anglian incontinence. "Dad'll be up to see you soon. Won't he, Sally? And as long as I've known Dad's ways, and that's as long as I've known the difference between girls and boys, I've never known him not to make everything easy for anyone who's in your trouble."

"I be 'shamed to look 'ee in the face, Mr. Dekker, and that's the truth and Sal do know it. I never thought 'twould come out about me at choir-supper, making a reproach to all present and the singing and speeching scarce begun and all. I never thought 'twould be like it be or I never would—" And the corners of Tossie's mouth dropped into the threat of another burst of crying.

" 'Twere Lily what upset she, Master Sam," threw in Sally spitefully. "Her had stopped yallering and were nigh sweet-asleep, when Penny and Lily came in. Emma Sly sent 'em all away, and told I to go and tell the Master; but Lily Rogers, she come back again, soon as Emma's back were turned; and 'twas more than Toss could bide, being as she be, to see thik whitefaced ninny starin' at she out of her girt owl-eyes."

"Don't you cry, kid," said Sam, quietly patting the plump hands which were now folded in the very style of one of Greuze's ambiguous Innocents, "don't cry, there's a brave girl! Dad'll do everything for you. And what's more he'll not let Miss Fell or Miss Drew or Lily Rogers, or anyone else, say one single nasty thing about you."

"Toss do say what worries she worst nor anythink, be lest your Dad want she to tell on the gent she's kept company with. Be I right, Tossie; or baint I right?"

Tossie snatched her hands away from under Sam's and covered her face. "I won't tell a thing … not if I goes to prison for it! I won't! I won't! I won't!" The girl hung out these words so passionately that both Sam and Sally looked nervously at the door.

"That's all right, little one," said the former soothingly. "Dad doesn't believe in telling tales."

"He ain't so rich as they all say he be! He baint looked after at all. He baint got no girl to be nice to he, 'cept me — and now he'll have no one, he'll have no one … never no more … when I be in workhouse!" The bitter crying that had disturbed Sam's peace in the room below began again now, under those white, short, plump fingers.

"Listen, Tossie Stickles, listen to what I say," quoth Sam sternly. "Take your hands from your face and stop that now! Do you hear? Stop that now, and listen to me!"

Sally Jones was so astonished at this unexpected tone of severity that she found the courage to lay her sticky fingers on the gilded arms of her Louis Quatorze chair as she leaned forward. Tossie permitted Sam to remove her hands from her face and swallowed down her sobs.

"That's right," he said. "Now listen. No one's going to put you in the workhouse. No one's going to separate you from your friend. Dad's not one for forcing people to marry each other when they don't want to, though! You must get that clearly into your head. He'll ask Miss Crow to keep you just as you are; and you can go to the hospital here when your time comes; and then we'll see what's to be done."

"I don't want to go to no horse-pital!" wailed Tossie, beginning to cry again.

"Well! You don't *have* to … *yet* … child," Sam responded with something like a faint smile. "You're going to be all right, anyhow. No one's going to say a word; and you must go on being a good, hard-working girl at Miss Crow's, like you've always been."

"What will I tell Auntie, out to Greylands?" murmured the figure on the big bed.

"She needn't tell her auntie nothink, Sir, need she?" threw in the considerate Sally.

But the problem of "Auntie, out to Greylands" was at that moment a little too complicated for Sam's wits. "Plenty of time, Tossie, plenty of time for all such matters," was all he could say. "And now I must go down; and Sally shall stay with you. You feel much better now, don't you?" He rose to his feet and turned to the girl in the gilded chair. "You can lock the door if you like, Sally, and not open it till my father comes up. Good-bye, Tossie. Everything's going to be all right."

It was nine o'clock when Sam went back to the museum and he found the company grown much more lively than it was when he left the scene. The extreme heat of the room, the guttering of so many candles, the mingling of so many steamy and unctuous smells, the loud boisterousness of the voices, all combined to make him feel a little sick in his stomach. Instead of returning, therefore, to Crummie's side, he went straight up to his father. "I hate to desert you, Dad," he whispered, "but I must get out for a breath of air. I left Sally to look after Tossie and told her to lock the door till you came. They've been bullying her already. It's that chap Barter, I suppose. But it's only beginning — I don't know! She's a nice little thing, but very simple — *very terribly* simple. But he's a fairly decent chap. He won't marry her, of course; but he'll fork up. He won't run away."

"You do look white, me boy," responded Mat Dekker with much concern. "Here — drink a drop of this! Emma rescued it for me from old Weatherwax. This beer and this port together are enough to upset anyone. This is my father's stuff." And he handed his son a wine-glass of richly fragrant, neat brandy.

Sam drank off about half of what his father had offered him. “Finish it yourself, Dad,” he murmured affectionately. “It’ll be our loving cup. I’ll go out for a bit now. I’ll be all right. Louie and Lily are going to stay to help Penny, aren’t they? Yes, I thought so. Well, I’ll be back when the decks are clear, Dad. Don’t worry.” He left the room without a thought of Crummie. In his haste to escape he did not give her so much as a nod.

The girl watched him through the half-open door putting on his overcoat. Her soft cheeks were tightly drawn, her white teeth were biting her underlip; her large eyes were wild and dry and miserable. This was the end of her chance that he might take her home! Where was he going? On what errand had his father sent him? She had watched their conversation just now and had not missed their affectionate look when they pledged each other in the same cup. Probably Mat Dekker had sent him to fetch the doctor to see Tossie Stickles! Crummie had heard of Tossie’s fainting-fit. Indeed she had listened on all sides to many unsympathetic explanations of that event. And where was their own Sally? She must be upstairs with the sick girl. Oh, what a difficult world it was! What a world of harsh, stabbing, scraping, jarring events; when everything *could* be so lovely!

When Sam opened the front door without a thought of his supper companion and walked quickly down the moonlit drive, not a breath of air was stirring. Delicate fragrance rose and sank around him as if they had been aroused and as if they had been suppressed by their own mysterious volition. There were two big lilac bushes and several clumps of white peonies on the edge of the dew-wet grass; and near the drive gate was an ancient red-blossoming hawthorn tree. There must have been scents from all these upon the air; but what Sam felt in his troubled fancy was that the tormented body of his Redeemer Himself, bathed, in its nakedness and its blood, by the waves of the cool moonlight, was diffusing this almost mortal sweetness through the atmosphere of the night. Once out in the road this fancy of his took to itself a more intimate aspect. He began to feel as if this tremendous shadow over Glastonbury of the martyred God-Man were calling upon him to fulfil some purpose, to make some decision. He crossed the road to the base of that high wall of the Abbey Grounds over which hung the tall elm trees that from his earliest childhood had been associated with certain turning-points of his life. He turned to the left now and walking sometimes in the roadway, and sometimes on the uneven grass under the wall, he followed the outskirts of Miss Drew's garden until he reached the entrance to Abbey House. In his mind he thought now: "I'll go as far as Tithe Barn and then swing round to the right, where there are those open fields on the east side of Bere Lane." But just at this point he heard several footsteps and voices behind him and he lessened his pace to let these unknown persons pass.

While so large a group of the respectable proletariat of Glastonbury was listening to the rumbling bass tones of Isaac Weatherwax, John Crow was making love to Mary Crow in his snug room in Northload Street.

Panting hard and fast, in an interval of his absorbed and vicious love-making, while the girl, with dishevelled hair and rumpled garments, leaned back with closed eyes in his leather arm-chair, John Crow opened the window and gazed out over the water-meadows. How he did drink up those damp odours of water-mint and watercress, of reed beds and mossy hatches, of dew-soaked grasses and river mud! The moonlight was flooding everything that night; but it seemed to irradiate with some especial kind of benediction those vast level fields, where the ancient Lake Village had been, and which John had crossed that very morning with little Nelly Morgan at his heels. By leaning far out of his window he could just make out a little red light to the north of the Lake Village Field which may well have shone from the upper window of Backwear Hut where at this very second Abel Twig, seated on his iron bed, was pulling off his trousers. Whether it came from Abel's bedroom or not, there was something in the sight of that little red light, shining across the dew-soaked, moonlit expanse of fields and ditches, that thrilled John with a keen ecstasy. He turned to give a swift glance at the girl behind him, and the look of her figure as she rested there, her dark eyelashes lying softly on her white cheeks, her long legs outstretched from beneath her disarranged and disordered clothes, her slender arms raised up and her sturdy, competent fingers clasped behind her dusky head, increased his sensation of predatory rapture. "I won't compete with anyone," he thought. "I won't fight these monkish phantasms with material weapons. I'll pillage the place with my wits. I'll snatch the beauty of their pastures from them, while I lay bare their hocus-pocus. My girl is enough for me! Her body is more delicious than all their fancies. I'll drain up the magic of this spring night, and of every night, as it sinks down on these pollards and poplars and reedy ditches; but I'll fight these dead saints with a devilish cunning beyond anything they've ever encountered! I'll ransack the beauty of their moons and their marshes. I'll drink it up! I'll drain it to the dregs; I'll penetrate all their secrets too! I'll twist like a serpent into their deepest souls! I'll *become what they are*; and then I'll betray them! And all the while I'll make love to Mary. Mary belongs to me. She belongs to me as much as my hazel-stick belongs to me. Oh, how sweet she looks over there at this moment. Those enchanting knees are my girl's. Those maddeningly sweet ankles are my girl's ankles. That white neck is my girl's neck. From head to foot my girl belongs to me. I've eaten her up tonight! I've eaten her up just as I've drunk up this moonlight floating over Lake Village Field."

As he gazed at Mary, what John noticed now was that one of the ribbons that held up her slip across her shoulders was hanging loose and exposed. This minute and trifling disorder about the girl's person was more provocative to his senses than any drastic disarray could have been. It seemed pathetic that a little thing such as this, so natural to her, and which she had refastened so many times with her needle on its return from the laundress should be so disturbing to him and should excite in him such a triumph of possession. He pressed the palms of his hands against the windowsill and breathed intoxicating draughts of what seemed to him like melted moonlight. "I have possessed her," he thought, "far more completely by making love to her like I have than I ever could by going to the normal extreme. It is her soul I have taken. Yes! her nerves, her veins, her fibres. I have possessed her so completely that henceforth she will be compelled to dwell within my soul. Wherever I go *she* will go! Whatever I hate, she will hate. O great Stones of Stonehenge, let me keep her, let me hold her, let me possess her, for years and years and years as I do at this moment, for this is the secret of life!"

The natural reaction from this ecstasy of his came only too quickly. At an attempt he made to renew his love-making Mary grew touchy and even cold. They drew away from each other and some bitter words passed between them.

John said to himself in his heart:— "This is your girl, this girl will *always* be your girl. What is the use of quarrelling with her?" But although his deeper nature knew that he was making a fool of himself, knew that he would regret it afterward, his superficial nerves seemed to take delight in contending with her and he now proceeded to carry on this tiresome dispute, in a peevish, querulous, grievanced, complaining whine. "You know perfectly well, Mary, that you've been sulky for the last three weeks because I've been forced to put off our marriage."

She really did flash out at him now with a more dangerous glint in her grey eyes than he had ever seen. "You won't … find … me … 'sulky,' " she hissed out between her strong, large, white teeth, "ever again … on … *that* … point … my … friend!"

"You needn't take me up like that," he went on more querulously than ever — although in the lower levels of his nature something kept crying out to him— "Stop that, you fool! Stop that now!"— "It's just like a woman to go and bring up a thing like that and get furious about it! You know perfectly well that what I say is true. Why can't you be generous and considerate to a person, when he's worried like I am now with all I've got to think of?"

"No," she said in a low, hard, cold voice. "I'm an idiot to beg a man to marry me, when he doesn't think enough of our love to stop from calling me sulky when I'm sad at our being separated so long."

"Mary, you are too absurd! And you *know* you're being unfair. I'm not accusing you. You take the words out of my mouth. I'm only saying that something's changed in you lately; so that you don't trust me like you used to. Tom was telling me only yesterday what … what you said about old Geard's having got me under his—"

"Stop there!" the girl cried, snatching her arm from the mantelpiece and clenching both her hands. "Stop just there! And don't bring *other* people into this! Oh, I thought … I thought … oh, I *never* thought," here her voice did really begin to break, "that we'd be bringing *him* into our quarrels with each other!"

"I'm not bringing Tom in," he cried, "and, if I *were,* Tom's a friend of us both, isn't he? But of course that's what you women always do. You can never remain content till a man hasn’t a friend left that he can talk to!”

Mary gave him a terrible glance at that, a glance that was as piercing as if she’d thrown a sharp knife at him. She then swung across to the olive-coloured couch and sat down there, desperately and wearily, resting her chin on the palms of her hands and her elbows on her knees.

John got up from the arm of the leather arm-chair and walking in silence to the window closed it with a bang. He tapped a vicious tattoo with his knuckles upon the very sill that he had gripped so tightly, in a rapture of exultation, so short a time before.

Little did John guess how far from the echoes of their angry quarrel her thoughts had wandered, behind those staring grey eyes, behind that forehead where the dark hair was generally parted so evenly, but where tonight a loose tress of it hung so disorderly. John did at any rate make a *kind* of movement, however, towards relieving the tension, for he walked across the room to where he had pushed their unwashed tea-pot in a hurry among the glasses on the shelf and taking it up in his hand asked her if she wouldn’t help him to wash up before she had to go.

“Why, what on earth’s the time?” she asked with a start.

“Oh, about a quarter—” he began. “Who’s that?” he cried, for heavy and rapid steps were now heard ascending the stairs. He had barely time to put down the tea-pot and she barely time to rise from the couch and smooth back the errant lock from off her forehead when, with a couple of loud, easy knocks, such as those that a young collegian might give at a colleague’s door on any familiar academic staircase, Tom Barter burst into the room.

“Hull … *lo*!” His tone expressed genuine surprise, not unmingled with a certain dismay at finding his two friends together on Maundy Thursday evening. “Well! Isn’t this splendid, you two!” He growled out these words with a certain aplomb as he pulled off his overcoat and cloth cap; but when he added, “By God! I never guessed I’d kill two such birds with one stone!” as he accepted a cigarette from Mary’s case — for he did not shake hands with either of them — there was an unmistakable ring of the hollow, propitiatory bonhomie of the manager of a factory about the sound of his words. Mary herself hurried to the fire and threw on some more coals. John, having made the visitor sit down in the leather arm-chair, began clattering with the tumblers on the shelf so that he could reach a bottle placed behind them, and finally, putting three glasses on the tea-table as well as this bottle, cried out in an excited, high-pitched voice, “Let’s all have a loving-cup. That’s the thing! Let’s all have a loving-cup! Eh, Cousin? Isn’t *that* an inspiration?”

Mary shot a quick glance at him. He’d never called her “cousin” since that first day when they met at their grandfather’s funeral. Was it a token of rejection? Were they to be only *cousins* henceforward?

But John seemed to be seized with an almost unnatural excitement. He filled up two of the glasses with whiskey and cold water but into the third, in place of the water, he poured milk from the milk-jug on the table. “Here are three human beings,” he cried wildly, while Barter watched him with a phlegmatic but indulgent smile, and then turned to Mary with a lift of one of his eyebrows, as much as to say: “We know him, don’t we? He’s not as crazy as anyone would suppose!”

“Here are,” John cried out, “three human beings; what they call in France, a situation *à trois*! Two of us, in this *à trois*, must, the French think, by a law of Nature, be plotting against the third. They need not *consciously* be doing this, you understand. They can’t help doing it! So now you see — Cousin Mary — so now you see — my dear Tom — why I’ve filled up one of these glasses with milk. The one with milk is the weak one. The one with milk is the one that the other two — unconsciously, you understand, always unconsciously — are plotting against. I hope, by the way, that neither of you loathes milk with whiskey: I rather like it myself. *There* are the three glasses … I'll shuffle them a bit … like this …. *Now* do you two, keeping your eyes tight shut, choose a glass … and I'll take the one that's left over."

Such was the hypnotism of John's mood, or such was the affectionate indulgence towards him of his friend and his girl, that they obeyed him literally. They both ran their fingers blindly along the edge of the table till they encountered the glasses; then blindly chose one and held the choice high up in the air. "You see! You see!" John cried triumphantly. They certainly *did* see, when they opened their eyes, that the glass left upon the table was the one with milk in it; but they were both so convinced that John had arranged this result that all the portentousness was taken out of it. John swallowed his whisky and milk in two or three gulps and put down the empty glass. "Come," he said, "if I'm the weak, idiotic fool that you two are plotting against, let me at least enjoy the voluptuousness of it!" And he poured himself out an excessively stiff glass and tossed it off with the same impetuosity.

It soon came to pass that Mary and he were sitting side by side on the olive-green couch, while their guest, with his grey office trousers and striped blue socks very much in evidence, was stretched out in the leather chair.

"I say! But you keep this place pretty hot," said Mr. Barter brusquely.

"Open the window, John, will you?" said Mary. "It's your coming in from outside, Tom; but it *has* got rather warm." There was an awkward pause while John went to the window.

"It's *too* warm … *I* think … to have a fire at all today," said Mr. Barter. "I haven't got one at the office; and I've never *had* one all this winter in my lodging …. Oh, yes, I did once and that was when I had a visitor!" As he said this he smiled significantly at John to indicate that this visitor was none other than Mary. Mary knew from the back of Mr. Barter's head that he and John were exchanging a long look as the latter returned from opening the window.

"They have talked about me," she thought. "They are always talking about me."

She and her lover were now seated again side by side on the couch.

"Your lamp is smoking," said Tom Barter.

"Let it smoke," murmured John.

But Barter rose from the arm-chair, went up to the red-shaded lamp, turned it low, and blowing violently down its funnel extinguished it altogether. "You're too fond of *red*, you two," he blurted out rudely. "This room, as I've told John before, is like a damned Chelsea studio."

"You're fairly bullying us tonight, Tom; aren't you?" said Mary.

"He wants to show that our room is as much his as it is ours," said John. "And so it is, old chap! And so it is! What's ours is our old Tom's, isn't it, Mary?"

"I'm not … quite … so … sure … that … Tom … wants it to be like that," said Mary slowly as she got up from the couch and went to fetch a third candle. There were two burning on the mantelpiece already. She lighted this third one and laid it on the crumb-strewn table. "Three persons," she thought, "and three candle-flames."

There was a long pause; for the same thought had entered all their three heads simultaneously, the awkward, ticklish, embarrassing thought about Barter's leaving Philip. Barter said to himself, "Shall I tell them that I've signed up today with Geard? They both hate Philip; but, after all, they are his cousins; and I'm playing him a dirty trick." Without putting his feelings into definite expression his treachery to Philip remained in his nerves as an unpleasant taste. What Barter craved for at that minute was some humorously cynical talk to encourage him in his betrayal of his employer or at least condone it.

John said to himself, “When is he going to confess he’s come over to Geard? It was a bit funny his doing that at Geard’s word when he wouldn’t do it at mine. Did old Geard bribe him a lot higher than he told me he was going to? Aye! But I’d like to see Philip’s face when he hears about it. I’d like to see his face!”

But Mary thought:— “I hope old Tom hasn’t decided to leave Philip. I don’t believe this municipal factory will last. I’m afraid it’s only a fad of Geard’s, and Geard cannot be Mayor forever. Besides, it will mean that John and Tom will be closer than ever; and my life will never be happy till I’ve got John to myself.”

Their three pairs of eyes were turned simultaneously to the fire now, where at last there had appeared a solitary tongue of orange-coloured flame dancing up and down on the top of the black coals. And there fell upon them all, at that moment, that mysterious, paralysing quiescence, full of inertia and a strange numbness, which sometimes seizes a group of human consciousnesses when conversation flags. It is an inertia made *cubic,* so to speak, by being shared. It was, at that second of time, as if the souls of these three East Anglians had suddenly clung together and plunged down the great backward slide of biological evolution. They had become one vegetative soul, these three consciousnesses, weary of their troublesome misunderstandings.

John was the first to shake himself clear of this inertia. He moved to the window and laid his hand on the sill. “Did you hear that?” he said. “That was a bird’s cry from the banks of the Brue. I’ve never heard that cry before. Listen!” John leaned forward as he spoke and stared out through the oblong window-space, on each side of which Mary's rose-coloured curtains — looking as if the mist had dimmed them — wavered slightly in the night air. But the bird cry, if it were a bird cry, was not repeated.

"It must have been a spirit," said Mary.

"The spirit of one of those old Lake Village men," said John, "come to warn us three heathens not to fuss ourselves about tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow?" questioned Barter, pulling in his legs and yawning, "why tomorrow?"

"Have you forgotten tomorrow's Good Friday, Tom?" said Mary; "and that reminds me," the girl went on, jumping up from the couch, "that it's fully time I was getting back! Euphemia's been expecting me already for an hour and more. I told her I might be out for dinner; but if I don't get back soon, it'll be her bedtime, poor dear."

The two men exchanged glances. Their look said, as plain as any masculine look could say anything, "When she's gone we'll have some more whiskey, and a real good talk about this affair of leaving the dye-works."

But Mary said, "Which of you is going to take me home?" They both rose to their feet. All three were standing now in the centre of the room. The twitch in John's cheek became very active as they stood there. Barter said to himself, "I believe there was something funny about that onion soup I had tonight." Mary said to herself, "Heavens! I hope I'm not going to develop influenza or anything. I feel a bit shivery."

What had happened was this: that with their rising to their feet, the sensation of oneness which their staring together into the fire had generated fell to pieces. They were like children who had erected a house of play-bricks into the hollow space of which their minds had retreated. They were like birds in a nest, warm and snug against each other, their individualities overlapping and interpenetrating, feathers and beaks all confused, till suddenly the nest was torn down and they were astray and agog and accurst, some on the boughs and some on the ground. Any small group of human beings gathered close together acquires a certain warmth of protectiveness against the Outside, against all those unknown angers of which the outside world is full. A curious psychic entity — like a great, fluffy, feathery hen-breast — is evoked at such times, under which these separate beings crouch, into which they merge, beneath which they are fused. Every human creature is a terror to every other human creature. Human minds are like unknown planets, encountering and colliding. Every one of them contains jagged precipices, splintered rock-peaks, ghastly crevasses, smouldering volcanoes, scorched and scorching deserts, blistering sands, evil dungeons from behind whose barred windows mad and terrible faces peer out. Every pair of human eyes is a custom-house gate into a completely foreign port; a port whose palaces and slums, whose insane asylums and hospitals, whose market-places and sacred shrines, represent the terrifying and the menacing as well as the promising and the pleasure-giving! But when once any small group of persons has been together for any reasonable length of time the official warders of these custom-house gates are withdrawn. Each individual in such a group feels he can wander freely through the purlieus of these other enclosed fortresses! He does not necessarily move a step. The point is that the gates into the unknown streets no longer bristle with bayonets, are no longer thronged with “dreadful faces” and “fiery arms.”

What happened, therefore, when John and Barter and Mary stood up, knowing that they were now going to separate, or at least going to leave the psychic shelter of that room, was that they each fell back upon the isolated worries of their individual lives.

Thus it was that Tom Barter began to recognise that he was suffering from indigestion because of the onion soup of that miserable eating-house. Thus it was that John Crow remembered the annoying fact that he had been constipated of late, and should have, that very evening, to do something drastic about it. Thus it was that Mary, as both the men helped her into her cloak, thought to herself, "I believe I *have* caught a chill from that open window." Unable to shake off their selfish preoccupations, they all three went out into Northload Street in a fretful, troubled mood.

"Hullo! Who's that?" murmured Barter as they caught sight of the figure of Sam Dekker advancing along in front of them under the wall of King Edgar's lawn. They soon realised who it was, for Sam, hearing their footsteps, swung round and awaited their approach.

Sam had never got on very well with Mary; though the subtle causes of the coldness between them would offer psychological material enough to fill a volume. Perhaps the basic cause was that Sam's erotic nature was — like his father's — as simple and primitive as a cave-man's, while Mary had enough of the contorted perversity of the Crow temperament to arm herself with invisible spear and shield at his mere approach. Thus as they encountered in the moonlight on this eve of Good Friday, the Mary who shook hands with him was, for Sam, a hard, reserved, contemptuous, designing woman, a woman whose aim, if he had been driven to speak out all he felt, was to inherit old Miss Drew's money and carry on meanwhile, without being found out, a furtive intrigue, devoid of all noble feelings, with her cousin John! And if the Mary who gave a limp, unsympathetic, gloved hand to Sam was a cold-blooded adventuress, the Sam who gave a perfunctory squeeze to Mary's fingers, as he blinked suspiciously with his little bear-eyes at her two companions, was a lazy self-indulgent crank who spent his do-nothing leisure in an attempt to corrupt that silly little fool, Nell Zoyland.

Thus, on the eve of the Crucifixion of the Redeemer of all flesh, did the two noblest hearts in Glastonbury weigh, judge, condemn, and execute each other! They dropped the silent Mary at the drive gate of Abbey House. "Good-night, John!" was all she was allowed to say to the man whose body she would have liked to cling to, with frantic unappeasable desire, all night long.

"Listen, you two!" cried John, when the girl's figure was lost behind the big laurel bushes, each leaf of which shone like a goblin's shield in the moonlight, "I've never been up to the top of Wirral Hill on a moonlit night. Tomorrow's a holiday. Barter's office will be closed tomorrow and so will mine. Let's climb up there together, eh? It'll be exciting on such a night as this!" His eagerness was so intense, and the appeal in his voice so much stronger than any word he used, that the two men consented without demur. They all walked on, still in the middle of the road, while the noise of their footsteps as they walked was mathematically increased by the substitution of Sam's heavy boots for Mary's light ones. They passed the Tithe Barn, where the mystic symbols of the four Evangelists seemed supernaturally large in the moonlight; they turned down Bere Lane and skirted the eastern side of the Abbey Grounds; they turned southwest, not far from the little Catholic chapel; they took a short, backyard cut to gain time; and in less than twenty minutes from the moment John had suggested it they were halfway up Wirral Hill.

"That dead tree by that post, up there," panted John, "is the queerest dead tree I've ever seen! Evans swore it was a thorn … in fact a descendant of the original thorn … but Mary maintains it's a sycamore. When I saw it the other day with Evans I examined it pretty closely and came to the conclusion that it was some tree completely unknown to me."

"I've been puzzled myself," began Sam, "about that dead tree up here. Father said, what Evans said, that it was the Saint's Thom. But, as you say, it's clearly *not* a thorn, whatever else it may be. I'm sometimes inclined to think—" He was interrupted by the raised voices of some other people who were climbing Wirral Hill that eve of the Crucifixion. Two of these were apparently extremely aged men who had only that moment just stopped to address some remark to a grotesque female figure who was seated on one of the municipal iron seats that adorn the slopes of Wirral. Sam, who knew every soul in the town, became instantaneously aware of the identity of each one of this little group of night-wanderers. He realised in a flash that one of the old men must have overtaken the other in this ascent, and that neither of them had any connection with the female they were now so earnestly addressing. Sam, in fact, was sure he knew, what it would have been difficult for either John or Barter to know, that each one of these three wanderers had reached this spot independently of the other two. But they formed, as the new-arrivals slowly approached them, a singular and even a monumental group. Had Mr. Evans been present he would have been reminded of one of those eternal vignettes in his favourite poet's Purgatorio; for the hill was steep at this point; its ascent took the breath of the three men and dulled their apprehension, while the flooding moonlight, giving to all objects both near and far a certain unearthly grandioseness, rendered their visual powers dreamlike and distorted. When they reached the iron seat they also stopped and stood, all three, side by side with the two old men, surveying the solitary female who remained calmly seated in front of all the five of them.

With the same speed with which it had turned upon its axis, millions of years before the event occurred which gave to the immemorial Grail of Glastonbury its new and Christian significance, the old earth turned now, carrying with it Wirral Hill, like the hump of a great sacred dromedary, and upon Wirral Hill these five male bipeds, each with his staff of office decently concealed, each with a wooden walking-stick, cut from the vegetable world, as an additional masculine prerogative, each with his orderly and rationally working skull full of one single thought. This thought might have been summed up in the words which the oldest, and certainly the poorest, of all the five, now addressed to the woman on the seat.

“What be thee doing out o’ bed, Mad Bet? ‘Tain’t Zummer-time, ‘ee seely wold ‘ooman; ’tis cuckoo-time, ‘s know! Bed be the plëace for crazy folks. Wurral Hill, of a shiny night, baint a plëace for thee. Wurral Hill be a plëace for quiet bachelor men, not for a crazy wold ‘ooman like thee!” The speaker was a tall grey-haired man dressed in clothes that looked as if they did not belong to him.

“He’s a good one, he is, to talk to the likes of she,” expostulated the tall man’s recent companion, edging himself as dose as he dared to the newcomers, with evident grateful relief at their appearance upon the scene.

“Why, Mr. Jones,” cried Sam, for the tall man’s companion turned out to be none other than Number Two himself, “what are you doing out of hospital? Have they finished your cure? Are you taking a walk?”

Number Two glanced uneasily at Mr. Barter, whom he recognised with infallible instinct as the official one, the unbending one, the pillar of society, in this little group.

“I be going back … I be going back … I be going back,” he mumbled. “Doorman be a friend of mine. I be going back.”

“What brought you out so far?” enquired Sam.

“Can’t sleep o’ nights, Mr. Dekker, and that’s the truth. If ’tisn’t one thing, ’tis another. ‘Twere they winds and rains ‘afore and now’t be this shining moon. I’ve never knowed such carryings-on as come to me in thik horse-spital. As I were telling Mr. Twig, only this morning, there’s something going to happen in this here town ‘afore long, or my name’s not Bartholomew Jones! What with ghosties coming out of they Ruings on rainy nights, and spirits coming out of they Ruings on shiny nights, that horsespital ain’t a place for a quiet tradesman like I be.”

“You oughtn’t to have climbed up a steep place like this, Mr. Jones,” expostulated Sam.

Number Two came close up to him and whispered in his ear. *“He* helped me. I dursn’t have done it alone. I knew *he* when ‘a were a self-respectin’ tradesman his own self. Don’t ‘ee go spreading no tales, Mr. Dekker, about me and him. ’Tisn’t right I know for he to help a decent person; but I dursn’t have come so far, with my poor innards and all, if I hadn’t met he. Don’t ‘ee worrit about me, Mr. Dekker. He’ll take me back where I came, for a copper or two. He’ll take me back for less than a sixpence and nothing said!”

“Where does he sleep nowadays?” asked Sam.

“He? Young Tewsy? Why, Mother Legge, what bought Miss Kitty Camel’s wold house, lets he sleep next door. He do open next door for she when couples come for a short-time bed or summat ungodly like that, and she gives he a bite, along o’ her girt tabby-cat, what she calls Pretty Maid, though it be as ugly as an abortion. You do know Mother Legge, down in Paradise, Mr. Dekker? Her be a real bad ‘un, her be; but what decent-living party, I’d like to know, would let a scarecrow like Young Tewsy into ’is cellar?”

While Sam was whispering to Number Two a very different conversation was going on between Mr. Barter and Young Tewsy. Young Tewsy was a man of incredible age. Number Two was correct in his statement that he remembered him as a respectable Glastonbury tradesman. He had been, as a matter of fact, a well-established chemist in the days of Mr. Wollop's father. Mr. Wollop's father was another of these "respectable" tradesmen who were always on the verge of coming to grief; but old Wollop had his redoubtable son to keep things going, whereas Tewsy, who had lost his offspring, just as he had apparently lost even his Christian name, came to disaster by frequenting, day in and day out, the "Paradise" of *that* epoch of Glastonbury's history. Young Tewsy's face was more lank and lean than the face of Don Quixote. It was the face of a walking skeleton. And yet it was — strange to say — engraved by no savage lines of revolt. Whether if a human being lives cheek by jowl with utter desperation for half a century he acquires a kind of abnormal resignation resembling that of maggots in carrion no outsider can possibly tell. Probably Young Tewsy would carry the secret of his real attitude to the world hidden behind his cadaverous countenance to the end of his days. But the attitude that he *presented* to the world was a perpetual grin. This grin of Young Tewsy's may have been the grin of the clown of the Pit … always beaten, always trampled on, always derided. On the other hand it may have been the grin of the death-skull itself, revealed during Young Tewsy's lifetime, by reason of the extreme cadaverousness of his face. But, whatever it was, it was with this eternal grin, that now, in the bright moonlight upon Wirral Hill, the aged protégé of Mother Legge turned his face to the dry and cautious questionings of Tom Barter.

There was more in this brief dialogue than the rest of that group could possibly guess, for, as a matter of fact, it had been in Mother Legge's most expensive bedroom that Mr. Barter had come of late to meet Tossie Stickles; and it was a striking evidence of the old gaol-bird's diplomatic self-control that never for one eyelid's flicker of his corpse-like face in that bright moonlight did he betray a recognition of which both of them must have been perfectly aware. Young Tewsy had many a time presented the same inscrutable grin in the presence of the great Philip himself, when he begged of the manufacturer at the street-corner; though Philip, less master of his facial muscles than his manager, had been unable, on several occasions, to refrain from a swift, recognisant glance, before he produced his sixpence. For Mr. Crow of The Elms had also found, in his day and hour, a convenient use for Mother Legge's best bedroom. Young Tewsy with his death skull grin must, in fact, have been known to the tutelary spirits of Glastonbury as a sort of Psychopompus, or inverted Charon, of Limbo. For both Morgan Nelly, and the little nameless embryo now forming in the womb of Tossie, owed their start, in the long human march, to the door-opening and lamp-bearing service of this once "respectable" tradesman of South High Street.

"Did you find her like this?" said Tom Barter to Young Tewsy as they all stood helplessly and rather foolishly before this disconcerting representative of the sex that had conceived them.

"Sure and I did, Mister," replied the grinning old man, "that is *this gentleman* and me did, what I've 'a 'elped up this 'ere 'eavy 'ill. What be doin' of, out of yer bed, ye seely wold bitch, at this time of the bloody night?"

In these words of the old man were hopelessly confused the North London accent of his childhood and the broad Somerset of his youth and later life.

"I've never been up here in full Moon before," said John, addressing Mad Bet.

“ ’Tisn’t full tonight,” said Mad Bet.

“I meant practically full,” said John. “Haven’t you noticed, lady, how the moon *looks* full for almost four days if the sky is free of clouds?”

“I be mighty fond of thik moon,” said the woman, “when it’s new.”

“I agree with you; I certainly agree with you, lady,” asseverated John eagerly. “It’s when it’s neither round like it is tonight, nor new like you describe, but all funny and shapeless, that it’s not nearly so nice.”

“It don’t melt a person’s sorrows away till it be big and round,” said the woman.

“Do you suppose people in all ages have climbed up Wirral Hill in moonlight like this?” enquired John.

“Shouldn’t wonder, young man, shouldn’t wonder,” replied Mad Bet. “You and me be come and that be summat, baint it? And these other folks be come, baint they? But *some* folks do come in they’s bodies but leave they’s souls down in street. Don’t ‘ee be like one o’ they, young man, don’t ‘ee be like one o’ they!”

“I certainly will not, lady,” announced John in the most emphatic tone of malicious finality.

“Gome on, you two,” said Barter addressing his friends. “Let’s go on now! I want to get to the top of the hill. I want to look at that tree you were talking about.”

“But what about this woman?” said Sam.

“Dekker thinks an unknown woman is more interesting than an unknown tree,” remarked John.

“Be it the Tree of Life, you gents are seeking?” threw in Mad Bet.

“Precisely, lady,” said John. “That’s just it! Don’t you want to come on, too, up to the top, with us?”

“Don’t be a fool, Crow,” whispered Mr. Barter. “Can’t you see she’s mad?”

“Mad … mad … mad,” murmured Young Tewsy with his everlasting grin.

“This is Mr. Jones of the old Curiosity Shop,” said Sam, addressing his two friends, in reply to a glance from Number Two which seemed to say—“These gentlemen don’t seem to be very alert to the situation”— “the shop that your Welshman is looking after, Crow. He’s got to go back to the hospital, Barter.”

“It be the Tree of Life what be up there,” reiterated the woman.

“For a silver sixpence I’d take ’er ‘ome myself,” interjected Young Tewsy, “if you gents ‘ud see the Old Party back to ‘orsepital.”

“Gome on, come on,” grumbled Barter. “These people can take care of themselves.”

“Somebody must see this woman home,” said Sam.

“She’d like to come to the top of the hill with us,” said John. “Wouldn’t you, lady? She’s only resting … halfway up … Why *should* she have to go home on such a night as this? Why should anybody have to go home?”

“Mad … mad … mad,” murmured Young Tewsy dreamily, contemplating with a lack-lustre eye the revelation of the woman’s bald head, as her black-beaded, black-feathered hat slipped awry.

“Me niece Sally what works for our new Mayor,” threw in Number Two, “do say that there’ll be no peace in Glastonbury till either Geard or Crow be on top; and me wone thought be that they ghosties from they Ruings, what do worrit I in horsespital, be comed out o’ grave to see which o’ they two ‘twill be.”

“For God’s sake, come on!” expostulated Mr. Barter.

“Shall I dance for ‘ee, me pretty gents all?” cried Mad Bet, rising unexpectedly from the iron seat and catching hold of the heavy flannel skirt which she wore and exposing her wrinkled woollen stockings. “Here we go round the Mulberry Bush!” chanted the old woman, skipping up and down with an expression of childish gravity, while the loose, beaded tassels hanging from her hat bobbed this way and that over her ghastly white skull.

“It’s like seeing moonlight on a gibbet,” thought John. “Well, lady?” he said aloud. “Are you coming up hill with us or going down hill with these men?”

But Mad Bet waved away the arm which John had half-consciously stretched out towards her. “In and out the window,” she now piped in a shrill scream, tossing up her withered shanks and wagging her bald head from which the hat soon fell to the ground, “in and out the window … as you have done before!”

Young Tewsy limped forward now and picked up the woman’s hat from the grass. The effect of the moonlight, the presence of three gentlemen and one tradesman, thus transformed perforce into an embarrassed audience, seemed to go to the head of this Psychopompus of unwanted infants from Limbo, for, waving Mad Bet’s hat in the air, he began to hop up and down on one foot.

“Over the garden-wall,” chanted Young Tewsy as he hopped up and down, “I’ve let the baby fall, and missus came out and gave me a clout, and asked me what the row’s about … over the garden-wall!”

“If you chaps won’t come on with me,” cried Barter, really quite angry now, “I’ll go on alone. These people are all right. These people can take care of themselves. We can’t take all Glastonbury home.”

“You go on with him, Crow,” said Sam. “And don’t forget to tell me what tree you think it is, up there. My father *will* hold to it, through thick and thin, that it's a Levantine thorn tree!"

"And leave you here till we come back?" said John.

"No, no. I'm going to take this woman with me. She lives at St. Michael's Inn. It's on my way to the Vicarage."

"I be going with my sweetheart," cried Mad Bet, suddenly clutching hold of John's arm. "I be going with my dearie to eat o' the Tree of Life!" There was an awkward pause.

"Well, I'm off, anyway," said Barter, "I'm tired of this," and he strode away up the hill without looking back, his shadow accompanying him. His outward shadow! There was, however, as Barter ascended the final slope of Wirral Hill, an interior shadow that also accompanied him. "I am like Judas, though Philip is certainly not like Christ," he said to himself.

John's countenance in the moonlight must have expressed anything but pleasure at the woman's grip on his arm, though, to do him justice, he made no effort to free himself. He even placed his other arm around Mad Bet's shoulder. But either because her woman's instinct had survived her insanity and she caught this look upon his face, or because, as Mr. Evans would explain, she was bent upon forcing herself to do the one thing she didn't want to do, she now flung herself loose from John, pushing him violently away from her with the enigmatic words, "Spit it out, spit it out, or it'll grow into a Death-Tree!" And then crying out, just as King Lear did on the cliffs of Dover when he was crowned with fumitory— "If you get me you'll get me by running!" she started off rushing wildly down the hill.

Sam flung a hurried farewell to the others and set off after her, leaving Young Tewsy, who had now sat down by Number Two's side, so tickled by this spectacle that for a minute or two his death's-head countenance became positively grave. Sam had no difficulty in overtaking Mad Bet and she behaved with exemplary quietness all the way to her home. She was indeed so lost in some particular thought that she allowed Sam to take her not only into the inn but up the stairs to her own chamber above the signboard. Here he left her seated on her bed in a kind of dream, a dream so deep that when he bade her good-night, the only thing she said to him was, “Tis so, ’tis so,” repeated incessantly till he went away. After he had left her and was walking towards the Vicarage his own thoughts began voyaging over strange seas.

He said to himself, “It must be near midnight now,” and the impression came upon him that the actual identity of Christ — like a vast, shadowy, tortured ghost hovering over the moonlit town — was summoning him to make some final inward decision. It would have been impossible for him to put into words what this decision was that he felt he was being inevitably, irretrievably led to make. But it was a decision which, if he made it before midnight, that is to say, before the first minute struck of the day when Christ died, he would never be able to retract.

MARK'S COURT

MR. GEARD WOKE up before dawn on Easter morning. The outer levels of his consciousness were at once assailed by two annoyances proceeding from opposite directions.

The first of these annoyances was connected with Mr. Barter. The teasing memory of Mr. Barter's face, the rankling impression of the man's materialism, the extravagant salary he had been compelled to offer him, the unpleasantness — as if he had touched some sticky and poisonous plant — left in his mind by the fellow's hatred of Philip; all this became something that descended on him like a leaden weight the moment he opened his eyes.

The second vexation that rose up in his mind assumed the shape of a letter, with a peer's coronet on it, which he had received by yesterday's afternoon post. This letter was from the Marquis of P. asking him whether he couldn't manage to "run over" — the great nobleman expressed himself very casually — and "have a bite with me incog." at Mark Moor Court, this very Easter Sunday.

Mark Moor Court was a small but very ancient farmhouse, which this owner of half the Mendips kept as a private pleasure-house of escape; allowing few of his own family and absolutely none of the conventional county people to cross its historic threshold.

Save for the crypt beneath Saint Mary's ruined chapel in Glastonbury and the foundations of the Roman Road between Glastonbury and Street, there was not a fragment of masonry in all Somersetshire older than this little solitary grey farm standing, like Mariana's moated grange, upon a sort of fortified island in the vast expanse of water-meadows that followed the movement of the Brue, as that river flowed northwest towards the sea-flats of Burnham.

Mark Moor Court could be easily reached from Glastonbury. It was exactly seven miles away, beyond Meare Heath, beyond Westhay Level, and beyond the Burnham and Evercreech branch of the Somerset and Dorset Railway. Save for the river and the railway, the only connection between Glastonbury and Mark Moor was this one winding, grass-grown road, a road that no modern traffic ever disturbed; for although it was just possible for initiates in the rhynes and hatches and weirs of these queer flats to reach by its means a path to Highbridge and thence to Burnham, this particular road lost itself completely in the desolate marshes of Made Moor.

The old farm-house called Mark Court, or Mark Moor Court, was, according to a local tradition unbroken for a thousand years, the site of a terrible final encounter between Mark, King of Cornwall, and the Magician Merlin. This particular tradition declares that Merlin — long after he had disappeared with the original heathen Grail into the recesses of Chalice Hill or into the sea-inlets of the Isle of Bardsey — returned once, and once only, to meddle with normal human affairs. This was when he visited King Mark at Mark Moor Court and punished him there for all his misdeeds by reducing him, in the wide low chamber that runs beneath the heavy stone roof, to a pinch of thin grey dust. With this dust … so the legend ran … Merlin, standing at one of the narrow windows between two stone buttresses, and sprinkling it upon the air, fed the eastward-flying herons that came — as indeed they still come — hunting for fish in the ditches of Mark Moor, from their nests in the beech-groves at the foot of Brent Knoll.

The grass-grown road, disused for so long between Glastonbury and Mark Moor, must have witnessed many a strange mediaeval pilgrimage; and, in its long history, worse things than that; for it was along the embankments of this road that the Norse Vikings, following the spring floods up the estuaries of the sea, were wont to push the beaks of their pirate ships as they sought for plunder and rape in the fields of the unknown.

The hurried, informal invitation to lunch this Easter Sunday at Mark Moor Court was only one of a series of such invitations that Bloody Johnny had recently received from the Marquis of P. He owed these remarkable summonses to the fact that in his boyhood he had been a servant at the great Elizabethan House in his native Montacute.

At this house Henry Zoyland, tenth Marquis of P. had frequently been a guest; and the striking originality — and, it must also be confessed, the curious physical magnetism — of the young servant had made an indelible impression upon the peer's mind.

The Marquis had been reminded of this early infatuation by reading in the Western Gazette of Mr. Geard's unexpected fortune; and as he was attached to Glastonbury, and more than attached to his lonely shooting-lodge amid the dykes of Mark Moor, he had become still further interested in his former friend's career, when he heard rumours of his having been elected Mayor.

Mr. Geard now set himself to call upon those deeper levels of his consciousness that would be undisturbed by these various vexations, whether material or immaterial, that were now besieging so viciously his awakened soul.

He turned on his back and stretched out his arm, extending it beneath his sleeping lady's head; while in immediate response to this affectionate movement, the woman, without awakening, nestled down confidingly upon his shoulder. With his free hand he jerked up the bed-clothes till they were tight under both their chins; and from this snug security he watched, in motionless contemplation, the gradual processes of the dawn.

The familiar feeling, unlike all other possible sensations, of his wife's grey head resting on his shoulder was soon further accentuated by the woman's turning towards him still more closely in her sleep so that their bodies came into contact below the sheet that covered them. By giving her shoulder a few little shakes with his left hand Bloody Johnny now changed the rhythm of her breathing to an easy and silent respiration. His power over his own sensations when once he was really aroused was so dominant that although they had slept together for forty years he still was able by saying to himself "this is my woman" to evoke feelings not only of tenderness towards the grey-haired figure he thus held, but even — strange though it may sound — of actual amorousness.

If Mr. Wollop — the ex-Mayor of Glastonbury — was the most childlike of all the dwellers in the town in his simple zest for the visible world, Mr. Geard — the present Mayor — was possessed of a bottomless richness of sensuality that put to shame every frequenter, high and low, who made use of the services of Mother Legge and the attendance of Young Tewsy, in that quarter of the town known as Paradise.

Bloody Johnny's rival, Philip Crow, was undeniably fond of his wife Tilly, a woman at least ten years younger than Megan Geard; but never for one second, for fifteen long years, had Philip experienced a single erotic thrill from contact with her.

As the light grew stronger it became obvious to Mr. Geard that this Easter morning was destined to prove cloudy and windy, if not stormy; but this did not prevent him from discovering somehow a scent of primroses upon the air or even from hearing — and it was almost as if his will-power was so great that he called up this long-tailed grey bird from the orchards beyond the Brue — the cry of the cuckoo upon the blowing gusts.

When he had made up his mind that the sun, although quite concealed by wildly driven clouds, must have arisen beyond the Tor and beyond Havyatt Gap, Bloody Johnny gently lifted his still unconscious lady from his shoulder and proceeded cautiously and silently to get out of bed. Retiring on tiptoe to his dressing-room which adjoined their bedroom he shut himself in with his cold bath and his shaving materials.

Emerging thence in about half an hour he presented to the eye of all observers a figure that might with equal congruity have been described as an undertaker, a head-waiter or a congregational minister. His big white face, which, unlike the countenance of Mr. Weatherwax, looked smaller, if anything, than it really was owing to the unnatural size of the back of his great head, showed whiter than ever in the greyness of this Easter morning by reason of the diabolic intensity of his dark eyes.

The pupils of Mr. Geard's eyes, like those of the author of "Faust," had the power of dilating until they left only a very narrow margin of white. But this white rim, just because it was so reduced, gleamed with an incredible lustre as he rolled his eyes — for this was a trick of his; and a trick shared by many prince-prelates of the Roman Catholic Church — without moving his head.

He now went downstairs, every stair creaking under his heavy weight, and shuffled, in his soft carpet-slippers, into the kitchen.

No sign of Sally Jones at present! Well! he could find what he wanted on Easter morning without any help from any Sally. He did in fact lay his hand upon an uncut loaf of bread. This he conveyed into the dining-room, where the family had all their meals, and placing it on the table, now covered with a tablecloth such as one sees in the illustrations of Dickens, he opened the mahogany sideboard and lifted out therefrom a decanter of port wine. Finding no wine glass — indeed no glass of any description — upon the sideboard, Bloody Johnny uttered a growling expletive that sounded like a single syllable much more condemned in polite society than the word "damn" and retired into the pantry; from which retreat he presently emerged with a large tumbler.

He now stood for a moment in puzzled hesitation. What he muttered under his breath at that second was— "The East … the East … the East!"

Carrying loaf and decanter and tumbler pressed, all together, against his stomach, he now sought the small postern of his suburban villa and drawing a couple of rusty bolts opened it wide.

The East welcomed Mr. Geard with a rush of extremely chilly air; but undeterred by this reception, after listening intently to make sure that Cordelia and Crummie were as fast asleep as their mother, he sank down on his knees in the presence of a little square patch of grass, a few privet bushes, and a tiny round bed with three dead hyacinths in it, and in this position began, with a sort of ravenous greed, tearing open the loaf and gobbling great lumps of crumb from the centre of it. These mouthfuls he washed down with repeated gulps of port wine. As he ate and drank, with the cold wind blowing against his white face, his diabolically dark eyes kept roving about that small garden. So queer a figure must he have presented, and with so formidable a stare must he have raked that small enclosure, that a couple of wagtails who were looking for worms in the grass instead of flying off hopped towards him in hypnotised amazement, while a female chaffinch that had alighted for a second on one of the privet bushes left the bush and joined the two wagtails upon the patch of grass.

The more greedily Mr. Geard ate the flesh of his Master and drank His blood, the nearer and nearer hopped these three birds. What other smaller dwellers upon this clouded earth, such as worms and snails and slugs and beetles and wood lice and shrew mice joined with these feathered creatures to make up the congregation at this heretical Easter Mass, neither the celebrant himself nor anyone else will ever know.

"Christ is risen! Christ is risen!" muttered Bloody Johnny, with his mouth full of the inside of his loaf. "Christ our Passover," he went on, "is sacrificed for us; let us therefore keep the Feast!"

As he uttered these words he tossed off his third tumbler of port wine; and then, emptying the remainder of the decanter upon the gravel outside the threshold where he knelt, he struggled up, heavily and awkwardly, upon his feet and closed the garden door.

He was only just in time; for the voice of Cordelia was heard from the top of the stairs near his own bedroom:— "Is that you, Dad?"

"Come down, Cordy … come down, my pet!" cried Mr. Geard in reply. But without waiting for her appearance he hurriedly conveyed the mutilated loaf and the other things into the kitchen and deposited them on the dresser.

He was just emerging from the kitchen when Cordelia came running downstairs. She was in her dressing-gown and was clearly only just awake.

Mr. Geard, his eyes blazing from out of their deep sockets in his white face, hugged her to his heart.

"Christ is risen!" he mumbled rapturously as he kissed her again and again; surrounding her as he did so with an aura of port wine that was like a purple mist.

"Dear old Dad! Dear old Dad!" was all she could find breath to say.

"Crummie awake?" he asked as soon as he let her go.

"Not yet," she replied, smiling into his burning eyes, "I've come down to get her tray ready; and then I'll wake her and we'll have our cup of tea before she gets up. She wants me to come to the early service at St. John's with her."

"Early service? Crummie?" murmured Mr. Geard in astonishment.

"She's taken a fancy to the Church, Dad, ever since you came back from Northwold. Oh dear! I doubt if either of your daughters will ever get married! You and Mother aren't any good at matchmaking, Dad."

"Well … well … well," muttered Mr. Geard with a heavy sigh.

But as Cordy guessed shrewdly enough it was not the virginity of his children that was worrying him. Her surmise was justified by his next word.

"Well … well … you'll have the Wine and the Bread … you'll have Christ's Blood and His Body. They'll give it to you of course in those silly little biscuits that don't look like bread at all … but it'll be the Master's Body … and that's the chief thing."

He stopped and sighed heavily again.

"Oh, Cordy, my child, my child!" he groaned, while a film like that which would cover the eyes of a dog that saw its master being executed crossed the irises of his dark eyes, "there aren't many Christians who feel Him beside them and yet He's nearer us now than we are to each other!"

"Yes, Dad dear," murmured Cordie.

She always felt extremely embarrassed when her father spoke in this way. The peculiar weight and mass of the man's mystical realism confused and disturbed her. Her own vein of "spirituality," or whatever it was, was invariably associated with aspects of life that were imaginative or at least intellectual.

Mr. Geard's gross and staggering actuality in these things not only disconcerted her, but, to confess the truth, a little disgusted her. It was certainly not in these mystical moods of his that she felt most drawn to her father. *That* happened when she heard him issuing tactical instructions, like some great strategic general, to John Crow; or when she heard him disputing with Owen Evans on some debatable point of Glastonbury mythology.

Mr. Geard followed her into the kitchen now and sitting down upon one of the extremely hard chairs there — Cordy's mother was not one for pampering a wench like Sally Jones — he continued to embarrass her, while she lit the fire in the stove and began preparing the thin bread and butter, by talking about Christ.

"He is with us, of course, all the time," Bloody Johnny said — while the physical accident that this singular evangelist was interrupted now and again by a hiccough increased his daughter's distaste— "but today He is with us more powerfully … much more powerfully … than any other day in the year."

"More powerfully, Dad? I don't quite understand," protested Cordelia, as having poured quite a lot of water out of the kettle, in order to accelerate its boiling, she began spreading the butter upon an oblong, square-edged "tin-loaf," of a different appearance altogether from the one which the master of the house had just ravaged.

As he watched her quick, competent movements, Mr. Geard thought to himself— "Mahomet easily converted *his wife* to his prophesying. Did he have just this same trouble as I have with a daughter?"

Somehow the cutting of that practical tin-loaf, with its sharp edges and uninteresting crust, brought down the ecstasy of Bloody Johnny more effectively than almost anything else could have done.

The Mayor of Glastonbury felt at that moment as if he were disturbing the work, not of a mere daughter, but of all the competent executives in the world.

"I mean by more powerful, Cordy," he went on, the film over his eyes growing thicker and thicker as the kettle began to simmer, "that He has more direct power over *matter* today than on ordinary days. He's always ready to work miracles if you call on Him strongly enough; but today, when He broke loose, He can change everything if you only make a sign."

Getting up from his seat and moving across the room, to his daughter's dismay, Mr. Geard opened the kitchen door and looked out to the westward. As he turned his face towards this quarter where, beyond the terrace of tradesmen's houses, a milk-cart was standing in front of Othery's Dairy, he could see high up in the air a great flock of starlings, tossed up and down in disordered, broken masses, and darkly outlined against the driving grey clouds.

"Do shut the door, Dad!" cried Cordelia crossly, "and either come in, or go out!"

Mr. Geard came in and closed the door with extreme gentleness. He did not say to himself— "How careless of me not to think of the poor girl being in her dressing-gown!" He said to himself— "She must have an instinct that that fellow Evans told me he was engaged for dinner today … or at any rate couldn't come. Poor little girl! It's a shame! The only man she's ever had … a madman like that … with God knows what on his conscience … possibly a murder."

But the tea was made now, the bread and butter cut and the tray ready to be carried upstairs.

"I've put out four cups," said Cordelia; "for I thought I'd get Crummie up and we'd come into Mother's room. Mother loves a cup of tea in bed and never lets herself have one!"

It must be confessed that neither of the girls expressed any great disappointment when they heard of the absence of their father from today's mid-day meal. Cordelia still entertained a hope that Owen Evans was coming. Crummie knew that Red Robinson was *not* coming; but that, on the contrary, Mr. Barter, who had spoken to her on the street yesterday, had said he might call in the early afternoon.

Since Mr. Geard had spoken severely to Mr. Robinson on the subject of his officious activity with regard to “the Morgan woman,” there had been a definite estrangement between Red and Crummie which Crummie’s mood, when she met him after the choir-supper, had not helped to remove.

No, the girls were not sorry to hear of their father’s visit to Lord P. His presence was always a restraint on these occasions and not infrequently a positive embarrassment; so that in their hearts both daughters felt a thrill of gratitude to the Marquis for his eccentric partiality. It was always a puzzle to both of them what the secret was of their father’s success when he went out into the great world; and this particular interest in his personality, displayed by Lord P. was a complete mystery to them.

“He said in his letter that there was no one with him at Mark Moor but Rachel,” announced Mr. Geard.

The three women’s faces lit up at this piece of news. Hitherto they had displayed only the faintest interest in his excursion. But the mention of Rachel brought down on Mr. Geard’s head a volley of questions. How old was she? Why was she at Mark Moor? Was it true that she was very fragile and almost an invalid? Wasn’t Mark Moor Court a rough-and-tumble kind of place for a delicately nurtured young girl to stay in? Did Lord P. bring any servants with him? What did Lady Rachel do with her time when her father was out shooting?

Chuckling over these questions as he lurched heavily out of the room and down the stairs, Mr. Geard was soon making his way, with an old faded semi-ecclesiastical ulster, that had once belonged to Canon Crow, thrown over his black clothes, towards the Pilgrims' Inn.

"I'll go leisurely," he thought to himself. "Lord P. won't be at church anyway … that's certain, but if he can't see me till noon, I'll look about a bit, over there."

Mr. Geard was indeed successful beyond his own private expectations, which were a good deal less optimistic than he had allowed his family to suspect, in his quest for a quiet steed that day. His ostler-friend supplied him with an old roan mare, who had been a famous hunter in her time and was still a very handsome creature.

"Wouldn't trust her," avowed the man, winking, "with anyone but your Worship. But us do all know what a firm hand you has with the females, old *and* young, and Daisy-Queen's got the int'lect of a bitch dawg."

With his canonical ulster buttoned tight under his chin and a heavy riding-crop, lent him by his ex-convertite, clutched in his ungloved fingers, Bloody Johnny mounted upon Daisy-Queen took the road for Mark Moor Court. The wind came from the southeast and he was riding almost due northwest. Directly in front of him, about ten miles away, he could see the strangely shaped protuberance of Brent Knoll, drowsing there in the midst of the level fens like a great sleepy amphibian, whose sea-skin was too tough and slippery to feel the rush of the wind, that was now careering like a host of demons over the reedy expanse.

The only drawback to Mr. Geard's immense feeling of liberation was the flapping of his ulster, which the wind, blowing violently behind his back, kept lifting up and whirling about his ears. But he rode on at a steady pace, every now and then rubbing the thick handle of his crop against his horse's neck, as he leaned forward in the saddle, and murmuring her name with chuckling endearments — such as "That's the time o' day, Daisy-Queen!

Best lass in the stables thee be, Daisy-Queen! Clean straw and a peck of oats, Daisy, when old John and thee gets safe to King Mark's lodge!"

The mad rush of the southeast wind, whistling past the rider's head, lifting the mare's mane and tail and causing her to turn her ears now and again, as if she were listening to invisible and ghostly hoofbeats behind her, gave to the green spring landscape across which they trotted — horse and man, in this turmoil of the elements, grown as close as if they had been one creature — a curiously phantasmal appearance.

The groups of poplars bowing themselves westward were so blown down by the wind that the normal fluttering of their thin-stalked leaves was taken up and absorbed in one long, wild straining, as if each leaf were trying to escape from the burden of clinging any more to its parent twig and as if the whole soul of the tree were trying to escape from its rooted posture and float away, over the dykes and ditches, till it lost itself in the Bristol Channel.

The green, thickly grown tops of the pollards, as they too were blown westward, became the wild heads of armies of girl-witches, while great beds of reeds where the young shoots were mingled with tall dead stalks and brown feathery husks, set up, as the wind swept through them, an accumulated shivering cry, a cry like the cry of the Cranes of Ibycus, that ran from weir to weir, from gate to gate, from dyke to dyke, and kept gathering strength as it ran.

It was hard to restrain Daisy-Queen from breaking into a gallop as this shrieking demon drove them faster and faster towards Mark Moor. But the man and the horse had now become, for Bloody Johnny, in spite of his weight, had the true instincts of a rider, enough of one solid unit on the crest of this raving wind-wave to enable the man's desire not to shorten the ride by any such speed to be strong enough to rule the occasion.

Thus it was nearly eleven o’clock … about the time when the “five-minutes bell” in the towers of all the Somerset churches from the Quantocks to the Mendips was calling the loiterers in porch and purlieu to enter the building and take their places, when John Geard rode into the long avenue of sycamores that led up the steep slope to the eastern entrance of Mark Court.

The old trees were groaning in the great wind as he rode up this slope; and in several places Daisy-Queen had to veer aside to avoid fallen branches. The greenness of these broken boughs, as Geard pulled up to walk his mare past them, had a lividness in the grey light that struck him as startling and unusual. It was extraordinary how that grey light between these massive trunks responded to the wind. It seemed *itself* to be in the process of flying through the air, along with ragged-winged rooks and hoarsely crying jackdaws!

Before he caught sight of the grey walls of Mark Court itself, hidden round the third curve of the leafy ascent, he heard a series of shrill discordant screams from somewhere in front of him, the crying, as he well knew from his old experiences at Montacute, of peacocks wildly excited by the wind.

“Queer that he should keep *them* out here,” he thought to himself. They swung round a bend of the drive now, the mare panting a little from the steepness of the way and from the weight of the man on her back. Then, all suddenly, she plunged and swerved to the right of the path.

There was a high, dark bank just here, out of which the polished roots of some tall white-trunked beeches stretched forth, patched with clumps of emerald-green moss. It was perhaps well that Daisy-Queen was somewhat spent. It certainly was well that her hasty shying brought her bolt up against the clay slope of this steep bank.

Twisting his body round to see what had frightened the mare, Mr. Geard became conscious of the slight figure of a bare-headed young girl watching him with excited brown eyes and a faint smile of nervous concern. As soon as he got his horse under control again and was safely back on the level path quite close to where she stood, he took off his battered felt hat with a sweeping bow. The girl was the sort of figure that a visitor might expect to come upon in a glade at Fontainebleau or Blois or Chantilly.

Mr. Geard had never been out of his native land, but it was with the sort of historic glamour that these names summon up that he at once surrounded this frail apparition.

“Lady Rachel?” he murmured, bending low down over Daisy-Queen’s neck and whispering the words.

The girl smiled up at him, stretched out her arm and touched his fingers. Then she began caressing the roan mare and muttering hurried endearments to her.

“What a lovely horse!” she said, looking up again into the face above her.

There must have been some truth in what his friend the ostler had remarked about Bloody Johnny’s power over females of all kinds, for the reassurance that this slim little creature — she was really eighteen, but she looked no more than fifteen — received from the steady gleam of his dark eyes, was so deep that they became friends at once.

“She came from the Glastonbury stables,” explained Mr. Geard. Obeying some occult instinct in his unconscious nature he continued to address the girl in tones so low as to be practically whispers.

The wind was blowing her clothes, her hair, her scarf, as it whirled, rustling and eddying between the tree-rooted banks of that green glade.

“Let me take you up,” he now found himself saying, raising his voice a little against the swishing and soughing of the wind around them.

“Hold her still and I’ll come!” she said; and thrusting herself between Daisy-Queen’s rump and the high mossy bank she made use of a beech-tree root as one step and the man’s foot in his stirrup as another and in a second was mounted behind him, perched sideways in the rear of his saddle, her thin arms round his waist and her fingers clutching tight to the flaps of Canon Crow’s old ulster.

Daisy-Queen, feeling this new burden on her back, leaped forward with a wild bound; but the path being steep just there, it did not require any great display of horsemanship on Bloody Johnny’s part to bring the mare again under control. They trotted forward now comfortably enough under the swaying archway of the tossing and creaking branches.

It was a wild-blown arcade of newly budded leaves through which they burst, the smooth beech trunks rising up like pillars at each side of them and the fallen twigs and broken branches trodden in the mud below them in Daisy-Queen’s hooves.

In Bloody Johnny’s nostrils was the sweet spring sap of the torn foliage above and beneath them and the fainter sweetness, but not less spring-like and youthful, of the young girl’s chestnut-coloured curls, that were now blowing loose and free, after her struggle to attain her seat.

They were soon in full sight of the grey stone roof and grey buttressed walls of the Cornish King’s hunting lodge. The place resembled one of those Gothic turrets, with low-flanking heavy masonry, that one sees in roughly engraved vignettes of German fairy tales. Its small, compact size rather increased than diminished the Nordic massiveness of its time-battered cornices, its moss-grown ledges with grey carved balustrades, its narrow, foliated window-arches, its lichen-covered battlements. The emerald-green grass blades that were sprouting freshly between the time-worn stones and the torn twigs with soft young leaves upon them that the wind was tossing against the masonry enhanced, like new-plucked petals against an aged skin, the hoary antiquity of this strange building.

The moment they reached the entrance, the young girl slipped lightly from Daisy-Queen's flanks and running up the steps opened the massive door. This she held open, clinging to the iron handle in the wind and calling loudly to someone within, while Mr. Geard slowly got down from his saddle and moved to the mare's head.

Two servants came hurrying out at her call, a nervous little old man with a straggly white beard and a sturdy, soldier-like, middle-aged man with a rugged, solemn face and grave eyes. The ex-soldier took Daisy-Queen's bridle from Mr. Geard's hand, touched his hat politely to Mr. Geard, and led the mare round the corner of the building, while the old man entered into a hurried, low-toned colloquy with Lady Rachel.

Bloody Johnny struck his crumpled black trousers several times with his riding-crop, gazed round him with calm interest, and then removing his hat and wiping his forehead with the back of his hand, came slowly up the time-indented steps.

When they were all three inside the hallway where burned a large open fire and where the visitor became aware of all manner of trophies of hunting and of fishing hung about rough, smoke-begrimed walls, the old man assisted Bloody Johnny to remove his ulster, gave a glance at his feet as if he expected to have to pull off heavy boots as well, and pushed up a great carved chair to the side of the hearth.

"Do you smoke, Mr. Geard?" enquired Lady Rachel, bringing him a box of cigarettes and holding it out to him with one hand while she gathered up her disordered curls with the other. She came close up to the arm of his chair pressing her young body against the side of it with something of the wild-animal's coaxing movement in her gesture and smiled down into his face, as he leaned his big head back, against the escutcheon of the family carved in smoke-darkened oak, and stretched out his feet towards the blaze.

One of Mr. Geard's deepest characteristics, a characteristic wherein his long line of Saxon ancestors, preserving their obstinate identity under centuries of Norman tyranny, had provided the basis, and his own singular psychic aplomb the magnetic poise, was his power of relaxing his whole being and enjoying physical sensations without the least self-consciousness or embarrassment in anyone's presence. This characteristic, this complete absence of nervous self-consciousness, always had a reassuring effect upon women, children and animals, as it doubtless would have had upon savages.

It was this deep secret of physical ease, this curious freedom from bodily self-consciousness, that gave Mr. Geard his advantage with the real aristocracy, who strongly resemble women and savages in their contempt for corporeal uneasiness.

Thus as Rachel Zoyland — whose ancestors in the male line had fought under Charlemagne and in the female line had been Varangian henchmen of Byzantine Emperors — bent over the figure of Bloody Johnny, resting after his ride in that heraldic chair, she felt completely untroubled by his crumpled black trousers, by his absurd tie, that looked like the tie of an undertaker, by his grey flannel shirt, the cuffs of which protruded so far beyond the sleeves of his coat, and by his rumpled woollen socks fallen so low over his boots that the skin of his ankles was clearly visible.

She turned now and spoke to the old servant who was still hovering about the hall.

"Tell Mrs. Bellamy she can begin dishing up, John," she said. "Father's only gone down to the end of the South Drive, to see if Mr. Geard was coming *that* way. He'll be in any minute now."

When the old man had vanished she finished adjusting her hair at a tall gilt-framed mirror between a stuffed fox's head and a stuffed pike.

"We had a bet which way you'd come, Mr. Geard," she said after a pause, seating herself on a footstool close to the fire, and rubbing the palms of her hands slowly up and down over the surface of her brown stockings which were in danger of being scorched.

She became thoughtful then as if a very serious and risky idea had come into her head.

Geard watched her silent profile with the firelight playing upon it and he thought to himself— "It would be a wicked thing if these enchanting looks of girls … these grave looks when their thoughts are lost in the life-stream … should just pass away and be forgotten forever!" He turned his consciousness inward and sent it rattling down like a bucket … down and down and down … into the black, smooth, slippery well of his deeper soul.

But Lady Rachel was not thinking any vague, inarticulate thoughts. She was thinking hard and desperately about a most concrete and practical question. *Should she confide in this man?* She knew her father had an unbounded respect for him. But after all — to speak of such a sacred thing … her whole inner life … the consecration of all her days … to a complete stranger … five minutes after she had met him — was it possible to do such a thing as that? Wouldn't it be like one of those reckless girls in Russian stories who pour out their burning heart-secrets at a touch, at a sign, at a glance? No; not altogether. There was a difference. The difference consisted in Mr. Geard! A young girl is like a horse or a dog. She judges by a man's eye. Mr. Geard's eye inspired confidence. Rachel, staring gravely and dreamily into Mr. Geard's eye, as she turned from the fire, felt she could trust him with her secret life, as she could not have trusted anyone of those she had known from childhood. But if she were going to say the word, she must say it at once! Her father would be in any second now. Old Bellamy would be in, telling her lunch was ready.

Hark? Was that a door opening? No; only the wind in the chimney. Oh, it would be too late in one minute now. Perhaps her whole future … yes! and Ned's whole future depended on her being brave now. It was like putting her horse to a fence!

He *looked* trustworthy. If not for her own sake, for Ned's sake, then, she must do it now … Ned … Ned … Ned …

She leapt to her feet and came up to Mr. Geard's side. She was closer to him now even than she had been before. Her hands were clasped behind her back. Her little-girl breasts tightened and shivered. She pressed herself against the edge of his chair.

"Mr. Geard!"

"Yes, Lady Rachel."

"When my father talks about me to you, about my drinking the waters at Bath or Glastonbury, and about Mr. Edward Athling — he's my friend, you know, and my father doesn't approve of him for me — will you promise to take my side, Mr. Geard? Quick! He'll be back in a second. Will you promise to take my side?"

Bloody Johnny found his cold plump fingers clutched fiercely by two hot, feverish, little hands. He turned his dark eyes towards her, without moving his head. It was exactly as if the eyes of an Aztec idol had followed the gestures of a worshipper.

"All right, child," said Mr. Geard, "I'll take your side; as long as—"

A door at the end of the hall opened and old Mr. Bellamy came shakily in.

The girl was standing upright in a second and as proud as a young Artemis.

"Is my father back?" she flung out.

"Yes, my lady, he's gone upstairs to wash his hands. Luncheon is served, my lady. His lordship said not to wait for him."

They had hardly sat down at the table, and Mr. Geard had barely tasted his soup, when the master of the house came hurrying round the table. He shook hands warmly with Mr. Geard and would not allow him to rise from his seat, pressing his hand on his shoulder to prevent such a movement; although to confess the truth, the phlegmatic Mayor of Glastonbury had shown no very energetic sign of getting up.

The meal did not last long and when it was over Lord P. sent his daughter away. "Don't be cross, child," he said. "I want to talk blood and iron with our good friend."

The girl rose obediently; throwing, however, a quick sideways glance at Mr. Geard from beneath her long eyelashes. The Marquis got up from the table, led her to the door, opened it and dismissed her with a kiss. Seated again at the table he poured out more wine for both of them, cleared his throat with the impressiveness of an ambassador and began to speak frankly.

The Marquis of P. had a high, thin retreating forehead, an enormous nose, not bridged in the Roman way like the nose of Mr. Evans and not thinly curved like a hawk as was the nose of Philip Crow. It was a very massive, bony nose; but it had nostrils that quivered with nervous excitement when the rest of the face was quite calm; nostrils like those of an old war-horse. On his short upper lip Lord P. wore a clipped, grey, military moustache, and on his chin a pointed, grey beard.

“What I really wanted to see you about, Geard,” he said, “was simply this. Rachel, as you know, has no mother. My eldest boy is in the Embassy at Budapest, the other one at Prague. My son William, whom I’d like to legitimise if I dared — for he’s been more to me than both the others put together — is working for this man Crow at Wookey Hole; acting showman, so he tells me, for the British Public there. Anyway his wife, from what I hear, is a flighty little bitch and no possible help. Well! The point is this. My little Rachel has fallen in love with a young farmer, over at Middlezoy, called Ned Athling. Athling’s a good old Saxon name, none better I believe, and the boy’s people are well-to-do yeomen. But, apart from everything else, my girl’s only eighteen; too young for marriage, too young for anything serious or permanent. The women-folk of my family have heard of this lad and they’re all up in arms — jumpy in fact, jumpy and vicious. They want me to pack the kid off to the Continent with some terrible old dragon …. Then another thing, Geard … The child’s health’s not good … not enough red corpuscles in her blood or something … and the doctors say she ought to take the waters at Badi, or some damned place. I’m no doctor, Johnny, my friend, and I’m no psychologist; but I do know *this*, that to tear her away, bag and baggage from any glimpse of this Athling boy would be just to finish her off. My sister Lady Bessie lives at Bath and wants to have her there. But Bess is a positively ferocious old maid. She’d kill the child’s heart in a month! I can see it like a map.

“Now what I was wondering was this. Isn’t there anyone I could send her to in Glastonbury? Those Chalice Hill waters of yours have enough iron in ’em to put red corpuscles into a hundred anæmic little gals. For God’s sake, tell me, Johnny. You’re Mayor of the confounded place! Who could I send the kid to, in your town? Who would look after her and feed her properly and see she didn’t get into trouble? Mind you, it’s a bit of a delicate situation and wants rather nice handling … I want her to go on seeing this young chap; not often, you know, but once in a while. I don't want her to get into her little head that I'm acting the enraged papa and trying to separate 'em! What I'd like, of course, would be for her to get a glimpse of those people of his, out at Middlezoy, *and have her own reaction* — as I'm pretty sure she would; for she's a regular little Zoyland — against the whole tribe of 'em.

"That's my line, you see, Geard; not to bully her, not to play the tyrannical parent; but, if possible, by giving this Athling boy full rope, to let him hang himself with her! These are not the days for acting the feudal baron. These are days when young people *do what they like.* My own feeling is that if my women-folk had not started worrying her about it and insulting young Athling, it would never have got as far as it has. What I was wondering, Johnny, was this … whether … perhaps … you could see your way … to take her into your own house … for a time? You've got an official position in the place. My savage sister in Bath couldn't say you were an irresponsible person to put a young girl with.

" 'My niece is staying with the Mayor of Glastonbury and taking the waters there,' I can hear the old spitfire retailing it to her cronies. 'My brother's put his foot down at last on this Bohemian life of hers at Mark Court.' Well, my boy, what do you say to all this? We could tell the dear ladies that the child was helping you with your Pageant … the rag-doll factory and so on … eh?"

Bloody Johnny's face had been a scroll of flickering enigmas while this surprising discourse flowed from hb entertainer's lips. He had had time to imagine with intense vividness the stir that it would make in his quiet ménage, this sudden introduction of Lady Rachel under his roof. He *was* more than a little tempted to cry out an immediate assent to Lord P.'s complimentary suggestion. How thrilled his faithful Megan would be! How she would murmur about the antiquity of the Rhys family and their connection with the old Welsh princes! Why, before he knew it, the good lady would be discovering some remote cousinship between herself and their noble guest.

But it would never do! He saw awkwardness, difficulties, complications at every turn —

"No, no," he said emphatically, looking straight into the peer's little, piercing, sky-blue eyes. "No, no, Lord P. I cannot take Lady Rachel into my house. Nor do I wish even to talk about it. I beg you to let it rest at that. It would never, never do! But" — and he laid his hand on his host's wrist who had impatiently pushed back his chair and was apparently about to rise— "I can tell you someone who would be the very person to send your child to and leave her with; someone about whom you'd have no reason to worry at all."

"I've no intention of thrusting my daughter on *any* of you good Glastonbury people!" replied the Marquis in a huff. "I would never have talked to you about this at all if I hadn't supposed—"

"Enough, my Lord," interjected Mr. Geard sternly. "I assure you I am serving you well in this. Let me at least talk to the person I have in mind. I believe she would be overjoyed to take Lady Rachel. And I swear to you, she and she only, in all our town, would serve your purpose as I understand it."

"Hum … hum … hum," mumbled the Marquis, allowing himself to melt a little; but still taking a high and mighty tone. "And who is this very kind and condescending lady, if I may take the liberty of asking?"

"It was Miss Elizabeth Crow, Lord P. that I had in mind. She's an aunt of the manufacturer; but she takes after her mother, the wife of my old Norfolk friend, a woman who was a Devereux, a woman who was, Sir, entirely and utterly, if I may say so, a lady in your most intimate Zoyland sense of that word. She is in fact … I whisper this in your ears, Lord P …. the only real lady, in *your* sense of the word, in all Glastonbury. Your sister, Lady Bessie Zoyland, could not take exception to her. Miss Elizabeth talks and feels and acts like a Devereux. You yourself would feel it in a second."

The Marquis smiled grimly.

"But it seems to me, my good Johnny, that you missed the whole drift of my long oration. The point is that I *don't want* a Devereux for my daughter. Your Miss Crow would be just the same as if I sent her to Bessie, in Bath! The child would run away, I tell you. She'd run away; and elope with her Middlezoy farmer!"

Mr. Geard held his own, obstinately and calmly.

"Well, my Lord, we don't know yet that Miss Crow would be willing to take your daughter. This I *do* know; that if she is, she would fill the bill exactly. I *did* get all you implied in what you said just now … *everything* … and I swear to you that in no single point could you do better than Miss Elizabeth. She is — if you'll allow me to say so — a lady after your own heart, Lord P."

The Marquis pulled up his chair to the table again and refilled his own and his guest's wine glass. His fierce, little, blue eyes kept wandering uneasily about the room as if he expected at any moment to learn that Mr. Edward Athling of Middlezoy was waiting to see him.

"Well, Johnny, you go ahead and test your woman out. You know exactly what I want from her. I don't want Rachel *separated* from Athling. But I don't want her affair with him *encouraged.* What I really want is for Rachel herself to get fed up with the boy! If your Miss Crow can catch the nuance of all that, she certainly is, as you say, a woman after my own heart."

The Mayor of Glastonbury had won his little game of chess only just in time; for at this moment the door opened and old Bellamy came shuffling in to announce that “Mr. William” had driven over from Wells and was waiting in the Hall.

“Is Lady Rachel with him?”

“Yes, your Lordship.”

“Tell him we’ll be down at once.”

It was some three hours later that Mr. Geard and Will Zoyland, together with Lady Rachel and her father, were drinking tea by the library fire.

The library at Mark’s Court was a room very seldom used. Indeed Lord P.’s orders to have the fire lit there this Sunday afternoon were received with sheer indignation by Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy. If the persecuted Sergeant Blimp — who pined for London as a tropical animal pines in a Nordic zoo — had not offered to light the fire himself, it may well be that his lordship’s commands would have led to a mutiny in the kitchen. The walls of this room were brown with old folios. There were no modern books in these shelves at all. Folios and quartos of every shade of brown and yellow and dirty-white, but principally brown, combined in some of the upper shelves with a few duodecimos, bound in the same manner, presented to Mr. Geard’s eye and mind a most curious and almost dreamlike impression.

The presence of these books had a peculiar effect upon him as he sat sipping his tea and listening to these three Zoylands talking of their family affairs. He became suddenly conscious, with a grim exaltation, of the long history of the human race. And he felt as if every movement in that history had been a thing of books and would always be a thing of books! He thought of the great books that have moulded history — books like Plato, Rousseau, Marx — and there came over him an overpowering sense of the dramatic pliancy, suggestibility, malleability, of the masses of human beings.

The three Zoyland heads fell, as he looked at them, and looked past them at those huge shadowy brown shelves, into a symbolic group of human countenances. The high thin brow, big nose and pointed beard of the Marquis, the roving blue eyes and great yellow beard of Will Zoyland, the white face, clustering brown curls and long black eyelashes of the young girl, became to him an allegorical picture, rich with Rembrandt-like chiaroscuro, of the three ages of the journeying human psyche.

Their three extended shadows — with a huge toadlike image of watchful detachment, hovering above them, that was himself — became to him the dreamlike epitome of what those silent, brown-backed creators had projected, had manifested in palpable form, from their teeming Limbo of bodiless archetypes.

It was beginning to become for Bloody Johnny, as he drank cup after cup of strong tea and withdrew more and more into his secret thoughts, one of the great ocean-wave crests of his conscious life. Something seemed pouring through him, a strange, unconquerable magnetic force, pouring through him out of that piled-up mystery of printed matter. He seemed to visualise humanity as a great, turbid stream of tumultuous waters, from the surface of which multitudinous faces, upheaved shoulders, out-flung arms, all vaporous and dim, were tossed forth continually.

And he was standing there with wide-straddled legs and deep-planted feet, armed with a colossal spade. And with this spade he was digging the actual river-bed — the *new* river-bed — along which this wild, half-elemental, half-human flood was destined to pour!

And there flowed into Mr. Geard's soul, as he gazed at the brown books above the silver candlesticks and above those three Zoyland heads, a feeling of almost unbounded power. He felt as though he possessed, in that invisible, ethereal Being at his side, a fountain of occult force upon which he could draw without stint. He felt that his own personal will — the will of John Geard — was "free" beyond all limitation, beyond all credibility, beyond all expectation. And it was "free" because he had faith in its freedom.

It was extremely distasteful to Mr. Geard when these three Zoylands began to grow aware that they had been neglecting their guest. Lady Rachel was the first to grow conscious of this and she plunged at once into the most dangerous of all common topics just then; the character of Mr. Philip Crow.

"How do you get on with your boss, Will?" the girl asked during a pause in their talk with a gleam of roguery in her soft, gipsy-like eyes.

"*You* won't like it very much, if I tell you everything I think of Philip Crow," growled the Bastard in his deep base voice, addressing Mr. Geard point-blank.

"Why should *I* mind?" murmured Mr. Geard casually. But he began frowning and turning away his smouldering black eyes rather awkwardly from the careless blue ones of his adversary.

Like all possessors of magical power, Mr. Geard was liable to be thwarted, baffled, frustrated, nonplussed, by the simplest defiances; whereas with complicated and subtle antagonisms he would be all alert. The shameless candour and rough dog-and-gun manners of Will Zoyland had always rather worried Mr. Geard; not exactly frightened him, but confused and discomfited him.

The Bastard now laughed loudly till his great yellow beard wagged.

"Why should *you* mind? Lordy! Lordy! but that's funny! It's as though I were watching two great hound-dogs fighting like mad and when I kicked one of 'em with my foot it tried to make out that it was only playing. Why should you mind? Oh, my dear Sir, only because all the county knows that you and Philip Crow are like a bull and a bull-dog!"

"Which is which?" enquired Lady Rachel. "I mean which is the bull and which is the dog?"

Bloody Johnny turned an almost reproachful look towards the girl; as if she had betrayed him by joining in her half-brother's buffoonery.

But Zoyland had worse bolts than that in his arsenal and he was in a mood to use them all. He turned to the Marquis now.

"I think you're a fool, Father," he said, "if you let our business-like Mayor here entangle you in his grand row with Crow. No, no! hear me out, Father; hear me out! I know very well what old friends you and Mr. Geard are. That's not the point. The point's hard, bed-rock *business.* The point's politics, Father, local politics; of which, if I may say so, you know very little!"

"William's not being offensive to you, Geard, I hope?" broke in the Marquis. "If you *are*, William, I won't have it! I won't have these modern manners at my tea-table. Do you hear, boy?"

"I don't think William meant to be rude to Mr. Geard, Father. I think it was a sort of challenge to him, like those of old days. Wasn't it, William? You feel you are bound to be faithful to Mr. Crow; isn't it that, William?"

All three men stared at the young girl. They stared at her with the puckered foreheads of grown people irritated by a child's simplicity and with the screwed-up eyelids of men wondering what a woman was going to say next.

Rachel had managed somehow, in a manner at once feminine and childish, to take the wind out of all their sails. Mr. Geard looked at her with deep reproach.

The Marquis thought in his heart: “Sensible infant! She won’t let Will bully Johnny. But Johnny’s getting touchy. By God, he is! That’s where *hoipolloi* comes out! Doesn’t know how to deal with a blunt rascal like our William! Damned if his eyes haven’t already got that shifty, resentful, mean look you see in any low-class person when you’ve kicked his shin or hustled him a bit! Gad! I’d have thought old Johnny was above getting that look!”

“It seems to me that I’m doing Mr. Geard a good turn,” went on Will Zoyland obstinately, “by telling you what I think about his quarrel with Crow straight to his face rather than waiting till he’s gone and can’t defend himself. Anyway, I’m one, as you know, Father, for throwing down all the cards.”

The Marquis stroked his little pointed beard pensively. The yellow-haired ruffian was evidently a pet of his and held a role in his house, whenever he turned up, parallel to that of the ancient court-jester; only the Zoyland Bastard was more realistic.

“No doubt you’ve agreed to let him have your name for his Midsummer Fair! No doubt you’ve agreed to take an interest in his communistic factory! But has it occurred to either of you, either to you, Mr. Mayor, or to you, Father, what this struggle really implies?”

The Marquis looked sharply at Bloody Johnny who was now rapidly recovering his usual *sang-froid.*

“Do you want me to shut this lad’s mouth, your Worship?” he said with a chuckle, “or shall we follow the fashion of the hour and give youth its free fling?”

“By all means … its fling,” replied the Mayor of Glastonbury gravely. “Go ahead, Mr. Zoyland! I like your frankness. I’ll repay it, never fear, when you’ve had your say … in the same coin, if I can.”

"Bravo, Geard, bravo!" cried my Lord, his little sharp eyes glancing with relish from one to the other. He began indeed to assume the expression of a virtuoso at a bear-baiting or a cockfight.

Lady Rachel, who knew her father pretty well, began to feel sorry for her rider upon the roan mare. "He has no idea how wicked and wilful Father can be!" she thought.

"Our wily Mayor here has doubtless already committed you, Father — and you too, Rachel, I'll be bound! — to his precious mid-summer antics and to his communistic experiment. All I want to point out, both to him and to you, is simply this." As he spoke the great yellow-bearded swashbuckler shifted his position in his hard-backed library chair and flung one leather-gaitered leg over its arm. "Simply this — that you're both on the losing side! Inevitably, by a law of nature impossible to evade, Philip Crow is going to win. No Midsummer Fairs, no rush of tourists to Glastonbury from overseas, no municipal factories filled with souvenirs, no bribing of dirty cads like Barter, can prevent Philip Crow from winning. You'll only make an ass of yourself before the whole County, Father, if you go into this; just as you will, of *yourself* — if I may say so — Mr. Geard!

"It won't do. You're heading for disaster. This strike that's beginning now, engineered by that little fool of a brother-in-law of mine, will be utterly broken in a month or two. The labouring men of Glastonbury aren't idiots. They'll see, quickly enough, on which side of the bread their butter is.

"Crow has the brains. Crow has the cash. Crow has the banks behind him and the great upper middle class behind him. He has, above everything else, the economic traditions of England behind him. You can't beat Crow, my good Mr. Geard. Hire all the play-actors you please; you can't beat him."

He jerked his leg back, from across his chair arm, and stretched it straight out by the side of the other, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets.

"I'll tell you a secret, Father; a secret of high politics; and you can make all the use of it you please, my good Mr. Geard! Philip Crow doesn't want Glastonbury flooded with visitors from overseas. That's not his taste and I don't blame him. All this demi-semi-religious hocus-pocus doesn't in the end do any good to a town. What does good to a town is to have *plenty of work* — real work, not this sycophantic, parasitic sponging on visitors, not all this poppycock about the Holy Grail. I tell you I can see the whole thing as clearly as if I were a bloody oracle. You can smile as much as you like, Father; what I'm saying is the truth. This strike in Crow's factories will only hurt the people. Dave Spear's a young idealistic fool — a mere bookish doctrinaire. So are you too, my good Mr. Geard, if you'll let me say so, with your Midsummer Fairs. What you've managed to do is simply this. You've divided the place into two camps. On your side are all the faddists and the cranks and the soft heads. On Crow's side is hard common sense. And let me tell you that in our old England, even yet, it'll be common sense that'll win!"

He stopped breathlessly and pouring out all the milk that was left in the milk-jug into the unused slop-basin swallowed it in a couple of gulps.

The Marquis of P. exchanged glances with his daughter. The Mayor of Glastonbury clasped his plump hands on the edge of the table and leant forward as if to speak. Then he changed his mind, unclasped his fingers, and sank back in his chair.

Lady Rachel said: "This new factory of Mr. Geard's is going to manufacture little figures. They are going to be figures of people like Arthur and Merlin. I'd sooner put my faith in these little figures, Will, than in all your common sense!"

William Zoyland emitted a merry laugh.

"Merlin forsooth!" he cried. "Well, Rachel, I suppose this *is* the right place for bringing Merlin in; but I've never yet heard of the Mayor of any modern town who would pin his faith upon Merlin!"

A long silence fell upon this group of four persons; a silence that was only broken by the crying of the wind in the great chimney above their heads. Then the Marquis said: —

"It's all very well for a healthy materialist like you, Will, to scoff at our old superstitions. I've noticed, however, that neither you nor anyone else I've talked to, who've come to this house, will ever agree to sleep the night in King Mark's Gallery here."

"Do you mean the big room, Lord P." enquired Mr. Geard, "that they say extends along the whole top floor of Mark's Court?" He paused for a minute— "I've often heard of this big room," he went on, "but I've never met anyone who's seen it."

Will Zoyland got up upon his feet, with a movement that shook the tea-table, and made the cups and saucers rattle.

"I tell you what, you Mayor of Glastonbury," he muttered in a queer husky voice, "if you'd sleep a whole night in that room up there, I'd — I'd — well! I'd say there was something, *some* bloody spunk at any rate, in this precious Pageant of yours!"

"William!" protested the Marquis, "you're going a bit too far, my boy."

Rachel's face had gone white and her eyes had grown large and very dark.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Will!" she murmured in a tone that was scarcely audible.

But Mr. Geard's aplomb and self-possession had completely come back to him. He looked quietly at his host.

"I don't want to intrude," he said slowly, "or to outstay my welcome; but if there were … any way … of getting … a message to my family … I'd be … honoured … I say honoured … to sleep tonight … in the room you're … talking about."

"Don't let him, Father! Oh, you *mustn't* let him!" cried Lady Rachel with passionate intensity.

Bloody Johnny stretched out one of his plump hands and touched the young girl's knee.

"Listen, child," he said solemnly.

Rachel, still very white, looked him in the face.

"I swear to you, Lady Rachel," said the Mayor of Glastonbury slowly, "that I shall be all right up there."

He was the first, of the two of them, to remove his eyes. As soon as he had done so the girl drew a long breath and smiled, and a rush of blood, flooding her cheeks and even her soft, thin neck with a lovely rose tint, suffused her pale skin. Mr. Geard's own gaze encountered now the bold, restless, unsympathetic stare of Will Zoyland.

The Marquis of P. who, after his fashion, was no mean discerner of spirits, thought to himself, "Hurrah for old Johnny! I'm damned if he hasn't picked himself up. There's nothing of the bounder about him now. He's standing up to Will now."

"I don't … mean … to say," pronounced Mr. Geard emphatically, "that there are not terrors which are beyond my powers to overcome or to exorcise. I'll confess at once, Mr. Zoyland, that if there are bugs and fleas and spiders and dust up there, I here and now retract my pledge. But if your people, my Lord," and he turned to the Marquis, "have cleaned up that room fairly lately, and if you can get your Sergeant to carry up some kind of a bed there, I'd love to spend the night under your roof … only someone must tell my family."

The Marquis gave an imperceptible shrug of his shoulders, as much as to say, "I'm beginning to wish I were alone here with my daughter; as I intended to be!" but he rose stiffly to his feet, went to the mantelpiece and rang the bell.

Sergeant Blimp must have been driven out of the warmth of the kitchen by the spiteful hatred of the old couple; for he answered his master's ring almost as quickly as if he had been standing on the threshold like an old-fashioned man-at-arms. The way he now presented himself within the restricted radiance of the candlelight, and stood erect and silent there, suggested to Bloody Johnny's mind the idea that he carried a hauberk or at least an arquebus.

"Blimp," said the Marquis laconically. "I want you to go up to King Mark's chamber and see if the Bellamys have been dusting it and scrubbing it lately."

"Yes, my Lord. Certainly, my Lord," murmured the Sergeant. "Run off then! … King Mark's chamber," repeated the Marquis peevishly.

But Sergeant Blimp showed no sign of stirring.

"Off with you, man! Are ye deaf?" cried my Lord crossly.

"It's … it's … it's," stammered the powerful-looking henchman.

"It's *what*?" enquired his master grimly. "Speak up, you fool! Don't stand staring like that, you idiot!"

"It's … a long story, your Lordship!" stammered the troubled servant.

"A long story!" cried Lord P. bursting into an unpleasant, sneering laugh. "What on earth are you muttering about? Do what I tell you."

“Your Lordship’s orders were,” burst out the man, with a rush of hasty words, “that I should have the whole place thoroughly cleaned, this time; afore you and my Lady Rachel came down. Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy wouldn’t have a hand in it. They said they’d clean Lady Rachel’s room, they said, but nothing more. So I had the remover’s van men come in and do it … the same as brought down your Lordship’s last load from London … and … and … to be frank with your Lordship, I haven’t been up there since! The men said as how they had cleaned up wonderful clean; and ‘twere a good tidy job, they said; and so, seeing as Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy were not—”

The Marquis of P. jumped incontinently to his feet. Mr. Geard at first fancied he was going to strike the luckless Sergeant. When this did not occur he expected him to burst into a torrent of abuse and order him up to King Mark’s chamber on pain of instant dismissal. But neither did this happen.

To Mr. Geard’s complete astonishment, though not, it seemed, to the astonishment of his son and daughter, the Marquis took not the slightest notice of poor Blimp, but walked hurriedly to the door, opened it, went out, and closed it behind him.

The man turned shamefacedly to Lady Rachel.

“I dursn’t go up there, your Ladyship. I dursn’t do it! I’ve served his Lordship for ten years, come good, come ill; and I’ve always done his bidding, and more than his bidding. But go into that room I dursn’t … not to save my neck from the rope.”

“It’s all right, Blimp,” said Lady Rachel kindly. “Father won’t really mind. Don’t you worry! He knows what he’s got in anyone as devoted as you are. It’ll be perfectly all right. You’d better take away the tray now that you are here.”

“Well,” began Will Zoyland, as soon as the man had departed with the tea-things. “I expect I’d better be seeing that Father doesn’t come to any harm up there.”

He rose from his seat like a great sulky tom-cat, yawning ostentatiously, stretching himself and running his fingers through his yellow beard; and then he strolled heavily and leisurely to the door.

“This all comes of your confounded Pageant, Mr. Mayor,” he rapped out harshly as he left the room.

Left to themselves the young girl got up too, and came over to Mr. Geard’s side. There was no room for her to sit on the arm of his chair; but she leaned against it, bending over him and pressing near to him. This tendency of Lady Rachel’s to nestle up very close to anyone she trusted, to touch them with her warm body, to yield herself to them, was it a sign that the child in her was not yet absorbed or subsumed in the young woman? Or was it simply an indication that no cruel life-experience had as yet warned her against following a natural, almost universal girlish impulse? Possibly the true explanation of her instinctive desire to let Mr. Geard touch her would have been found to have had more to do with him than with her! It is indeed undeniable that had the Mayor of Glastonbury been free to do exactly what he *liked* he would have now pulled her down upon his knees; but he was not at all a man to follow any erotic feeling the moment it appeared, and in place of doing this he contented himself with taking her hand.

The girl’s feelings were far too vague and floating and ephemeral for her to understand why it was that this taking of her hand at this moment gave her something of a cold chill and partook of the nature of a rebuff.

But although Mr. Geard kept an iron lid firmly screwed down upon his erotic feelings, some inner disturbance, evoking a tantalisingly vivid sensation of what he *might* have felt had he not screwed down this iron lid, must have communicated itself to the girl whose hand he held.

"Did you take my side as you promised to?" she murmured tenderly.

He pressed her fingers.

"Not much need, little lady," he said. "Your father has no intention of handing you over to that woman in Bath. I suggested that you should stop with Miss Crow in Glastonbury … Miss Elizabeth Crow … and I think I'll be able to arrange that for you. It's a little house in Benedict Street. You and she will be great friends."

Lady Rachel disengaged her hand.

"I thought *you* would have me … in *your* house … Mr. Geard!" she cried indignantly. "Didn't Father ask you about that?"

But Bloody Johnny was spared the embarrassment of explaining to her how little he desired to stir up the muddy waters of snobbishness in his sober dwelling, by the entrance of the Marquis and Will Zoyland.

"Well, Geard," said my Lord, "it's all arranged. Will has helped me with the bed; and he's told Mrs. Bellamy to do the rest. Poor Blimp is as terrified of ghosts *as you* seem to be of bugs and spiders! But I assure you the place is as clean as our hall. It's cold though. It's cold as the North Pole. I've told her to light a good fire for you. But it's clean. Those furniture chaps of Blimp's must have had step-ladders up there. It's like a church."

"I've got my Ford here," added Will Zoyland, "and I can easily go back to Wookey round by Glastonbury. No, I can't, Father! I tell you I can't!" —The Marquis had begun to press him to stay the night— "Easter Monday's a great day for trippers; one of the greatest; and I've really *got* to be on the job."

Some four or five hours later, after a pleasant supper over the open fire in the great hall, Lord P. and his daughter Escorted the Mayor of Glastonbury up to the chamber of phantoms. They mounted an ancient staircase beyond the landing where the Marquis' bedroom was, and where the old couple, as well as the Sergeant, had their sleeping quarters. Here there was another small landing, from which a door opened upon the steps leading to a high turret-chamber of which Lady Rachel had taken possession.

"Let's show the Mayor my room, Father," cried Rachel eagerly.

The Marquis led the way. He carried in his hand a flat silver candlestick, from which the yellow candle-flames, suddenly grown large and smoky, streamed backward, as the wind, whistling through the arrow-slits of the tower, blew about them as they went slowly up.

A fire was burning in Rachel's chamber and Bloody Johnny, when he caught the glowing essence of this enchanting room, felt a sudden clutch in the pit of his stomach while an outrageous and wild thought seized upon his mind.

Mr. Geard noticed on one side of this vaulted chamber, a subsidiary archway containing a small heavily bolted door.

Lady Rachel intercepted his glance.

"Let's take him over the Bridge of Sighs!" she whispered excitedly to her father.

The Marquis swung round on his heel and glowered for a moment with a cold glint of something worse than animosity at Mr. Geard. Lord P. possessed a peculiarity, inherited from his ancestors, of being subject at times to a savage anti-social spasm, a spasm of dangerous repugnance, dividing him and his, as if by a wedge of boreal ice from the particular specimens of humanity he encountered. This characteristic was one which almost all the intimates of Lord P. — unless they had blood in their veins recognised by himself as equal with his own — sooner or later came into collision with.

It is a sentimental mistake to assume that the real aristocracy is free from snobbishness. It is free from that perturbation of spirit in the presence of social ritual which is an accompaniment of snobbishness in ordinary people; but if any psychologist plays with the illusion that such great gentlemen are simple, natural, and naïve, in their absence of pride, he is making a profound mistake.

The historic House of Zoyland, descended from Charlemagne on the one hand, and from Rollo the Varangian on the other, had certain peculiarities that separated them altogether from the humbler gentlefolk of England. They had qualities that were unique to themselves and will die with them. One of these was this ice-cold, blindly pitiless frenzy of scorn for normal flesh-and-blood when they grew aware of it in a certain condition of their nerves.

This was the first and last occasion, however, in the life of the Marquis of P. when this projectile of frozen scorn for his interlocutor produced absolutely no effect on the person at whom it was directed.

Mr. Geard was in touch with a Presence that had defeated the Principalities and Powers of this proud planet centuries before the Norsemen came to Byzantium or Roland’s horn was heard at Fontarabia!

Thus it was with a slightly weary indulgence, too patient and unperturbed to be even ironical, that Bloody Johnny returned, stare for stare, the withering *œilliade* of his noble host.

Lady Rachel, however, quite oblivious of this psychic episode, had begun to unbolt with girlish impetuosity the great iron bars that secured this archway-door. She pulled it open, inwards into the room, when she had drawn its final bolt; and Mr. Geard, whose eyes, leaving those of the devil-ridden nobleman, had wandered over this warm, virginal, mediaeval room, and now met hers as she held fast to the thing’s iron-wrought handle and kept the door ajar, smiled at her in unembarrassed response. From the girl's face his eyes now wandered again round the various objects in this remote little turret-chamber. There was a queer silence among the three of them while he did this; the reddened smoke from the fireplace, and the long yellow flame from the candle which the Marquis held, moving fitfully to and fro, as the wind rushing in from the stone archway she had uncovered, went eddying querulously round the walls.

Bloody Johnny noticed that the girl's bed — situated in an archway opposite to the one where she was now standing — was covered with a dark green coverlet, upon the centre of which the Zoyland arms, a falcon clutching a bare sword, was worked in dusky crimson. A small shelf of books — they all seemed to be unbound French books whose paper backs looked singularly out of keeping with the rest of that interior — hung at the bed's head, while over the wall space of the corresponding archway opposite the hearth was suspended a strip of faded tapestry, the figures upon which it was impossible to decipher in that flickering light, as the wind, stealing behind it, made it swell and bulge like a heavy sail and then again subside into the level darkness of its obscurity.

But the silence in that room became itself a tapestry of obscure figures that lifted and sank, sank and lifted, each one of those three minds offering its own secret pattern to the occult weaving of that pregnant moment.

The girl alone, woman-like, was aware of the flowingness of time. For the others time was static. For Geard it was a static Eternal, with that wind-shaken piece of old tapestry sinking down with all three of them into other dimensions. For Lord P. it was a static Superficial, with the tension stretched taut, like the leash of a straining dog.

But to the girl, as she held ajar that heavy oaken door, keeping the wild wind out and yet not keeping it quite out, there came just then an exultant feeling of lovely, continuous flowingness. “How strong and mysterious men are,” she thought to herself. “But oh, I’m glad I’m not a man. Ned isn’t a man either. And what a good thing he isn’t. Ned’s only a boy. He couldn’t manage these strong mysterious men like I can.”

It was the Marquis who made the gesture that broke the spell; but even he did not speak in order to do it. He made a sign to his daughter to go ahead and he made a sign to Geard to follow her. He himself followed with his hand over the candle-flame; and indeed it was necessary for him to give the door a vicious kick with his foot to close it before he could cross the covered stoneway after them, and enter King Mark’s death-chamber. This they entered by a similar door to the one he had closed and he managed to get the candle safe into the great empty place without letting the wind annihilate its tender flame.

Once inside King Mark’s room and the little door shut behind him, Lord P. laid the candle down on a vast piece of furniture that looked like a long refectory table in a monastery in South Russia, and, returning to the door through which they had come, closed it with unnecessary violence.

The young girl ran forward now to the hearth-fire which was burning very badly. Huge clouds of smoke kept issuing from it; clouds that rolled across the room and mounted up among the high rafters. Mr. Geard watched her intently for a second as she bent down to select a few more inflammable billets of wood to throw in, on the top of the ones that were smouldering so slowly and unsatisfactorily there. With the smoke rising up in wisps and eddies around her, her figure took on an almost unearthly waveringness; as if she had been a sylph of the elements, a Being that was taking refuge from the wind-demon outside, in the arms of the fire-demon inside.

He then glanced at the couch that Will Zoyland had carried up for him. It was just a boy-scout camp-bed; but they had covered it with a vast, ancient coverlet, like the one that covered Lady Rachel's bed, only this was of a dark purplish colour; and while it had upon it, in faded embroidery, the falcon clutching the sword, an ugly rent in it had rendered the bird headless.

Mr. Geard moved slowly to the fireplace; but he began to cough as the smoke got into his throat.

"There!" cried the girl with a deep breath, prodding the smouldering logs with a thick iron rod, hooked at the end, which looked as if it had served for this purpose in days when iron had only just begun to be used. She let this Homeric utensil fall with a clatter on the stone coping of the hearth.

"If the smoke makes you cough when you're in bed," she said, while a darting red flame lit up her face, "you can lug your couch under the window and leave the window open. That's what *I* do when *my* fire smokes. These old chimneys always smoke when they're first lit." She paused and a spasm of intense concern puckered her brow.

"You don't suppose there were any swallows' nests in the chimney, do you?" she asked.

Her mouth remained open after the words left and her eyes grew round.

The Marquis, who had been fumbling at the latches of one of the windows, got it open now, and as he got it open the wind came in with such a wild rush that he jumped back in dismay. Lady Rachel observed this occurrence with childish interest; and in her fit of momentary nervousness, being wrought up by her anxiety over the possibility of nests in the chimney, she forgot her good breeding and laughed aloud. Her laughter must have been the final issue of a long series of suppressed days; for it burst out through the smoke with the quivering ring of something hysterical.

Through the brain of Mr. Geard there rushed like a frantic swallow, beating its wings to escape, the word "Nimeue"; and with this word, the original of the name Vivian, a spasm of mingled emotions, sweet and troubling.

But the Marquis was really annoyed now. That there should have arisen all this unusual fuss over his old friend Johnny Geard of Montacute was in itself not a little inappropriate. But, after all, he himself had been responsible for it. But the Bastard's words, though rejected at the time, had already begun to work on the subtle old statesman's mind; and he felt as if there was something in the air in King Mark's chamber that night which was unsuitable, incongruous, and out of control. That hysterical note in his daughter's laugh, when the inrush of wind made him leap back, "taunted" his mind, as they say in Somerset. He bit his underlip as he pushed the casement to again with both his hands and clicked the two iron latches.

"Women and—" he muttered under his breath impatiently.

He meant to say "women and conjurers," but instead of "conjurers," the lips within the lips, which people use when they are obsessed in this curious way, uttered the words— "Caer Sidi"; words which an eccentric Oxford scholar, when drunk enough to talk freely to him, had once repeated in his ears with tipsy reiteration.

The Mayor of Glastonbury had himself drawn back from that childish laughing-fit; and coughing quite uncomfortably now from the acrid smoke he had swallowed, sat himself down on his scout bed. But this bed began so to creak and groan under his weight that he turned to his host and said peevishly, "Mr. Zoyland's not been setting a booby-trap for me, I hope?"

"You've not won your bet *yet,* Geard," returned the Marquis laconically. "You understand, I suppose, quite clearly," he went on, taking his daughter by the arm and leading her to a different door from the one they had entered by, "that no one has managed to sleep in this room? Some mediaeval clerk, called Blehis or Bleheris, wrote his histories here, they tell me; but he wouldn't sleep up here."

But Mr. Geard, rising from his creaking bed, dismissed with a wave of his plump hand this nervousness of Messire Bleheris. Placidly he bowed good-night to them both, and was apparently only anxious to get rid of them.

The Marquis, however, with his daughter clinging to his arm, her white face and dark eyes looking wild and scared in the candlelight, was seized with the devil's own malice.

"I met a crazy Oxford scholar, Geard," he said, "not so long ago; who told me that he'd sooner commit murder than sleep in this old place. He said that Merlin—"

"Stop, Father; stop! How can you be so cruel?" cried Lady Rachel, actually clapping her free hand over the man's sneering mouth.

"Hee! Hee! Hee!" chuckled my Lord. "You won't have won your bet with Will, your Worship, till Bellamy lets you out in the morning! I'm to lock you in, Geard, I hope you understand?

And of course the turret-room will be bolted. They say that a man, in the time of Edward the Fourth, spent the whole night out there, on the Bridge of Sighs; and another fellow, only a hundred years ago, was found—" but the girl pulled him hastily and indignantly through the door.

"Good-night, Mr. Geard!" she called out, while the huge mass of oaken boards, bound with hand-wrought iron, groaned as it closed.

Bloody Johnny heard the faint metallic clang, muffled and muted, of the bolts being thrust into place. Then there ensued a tremendous silence. He sat down again on his creaking scout bed and surveyed King Mark's chamber. The tall candle, burning steadily and brightly now on the refectory table, and the red flames that were coming from a pile of wood on the hearth, served to illumine the vast, shadowy expanse. The place was like the interior of an early Norman church and it seemed to the Mayor of Glastonbury that upon many of the enormous rafters above his head there were obscure patches and blotches of what must once have been painted scrolls. He walked to one of the arched windows and gazed out into the night. It was too dark to see more than the faintest outlines of the trees beneath him, but at one spot in the sky the wild-tossed racks of swift-blown clouds had thinned a little, revealing a dim moon that looked sick and giddy; as if she also, even she, were being blown, like a great pale leaf, before this devilish wind.

The chamber was certainly clean. The Marquis had not deceived him on *that* point at any rate. He hesitated a minute or two; and then, quietly and deliberately, took off his coat, waistcoat, shirt and trousers. He experienced, as he always did, a vague, humorous distaste for his plump, unathletic body, as he looked down upon his ungainly legs, encased in grotesque woollen drawers, and upon his protruding belly, like the paunch of a figure upon a beer mug, in its soft, tight-fitting vest.

He walked to the refectory table and took up the candle, placing it on the floor by his bedside. He went across to the chair where he had laid his clothes and took from his coat pocket a box of matches which he placed on the floor by the side of the candle. Then, with heavy deliberation he got down upon his knees by the side of that ridiculous little couch, draped in its ragged armorial coverlet, and shutting his eyes tight and letting his clasped hands rest on his stomach, which at that moment resembled the belly of a wooden Punchinello, he proceeded to murmur his usual evening prayer.

This was a singular one, in that it was addressed to the air on the other side of his bed.

“Master be with me,” prayed Bloody Johnny, “Master be with me! Give me strength to change the whole course of human history upon earth! Give me strength to make Glastonbury the centre of a completely new life! Master be with me! Be with me now and forever, by thy most precious Blood!”

The image he evoked in his imagination did not resemble in the least degree the tortured Figure of Pain worshipped by Sam Dekker, and it did not fade away till he got himself slowly into bed. He did this most carefully and gingerly and though the little couch shivered and creaked lamentably under his weight, it did not let him down. His feet, however, protruded under the coverlet, like the feet of a corpse under a purple pall, almost six inches beyond the end of the bed. He then bent down, picked up the candle, blew it out, and replaced it upon the floor.

He lay flat now upon the bed … on his broad back … his massive skull on the soft white pillow. With his hands he pulled up the heraldic coverlet, till it was thickly disposed beneath his chin. He tucked its heavy folds tight about his shoulders, being totally unable to cope with the smooth compactness in which Mrs. Bellamy had so trimly turned back the sheet over the stiff blankets.

His eyes watched the flickering firelight as it touched with warm, rosy reflections the huge dark rafters and the curved oaken supports of the baronial roof.

A pleasant aromatic smell … the smell of pine wood … began now to comfort his senses. The smoke was no longer bitter. It had become fragrant … soothing as incense but more wholesome and natural, almost forest-like.

“Master be with me!” his lips repeated; “be with me now and forever; by thy most precious Blood!”

Mr. Geard's nature was about ten times as *thick* as most men's. With the seven or eight under layers of this nature he was entirely absorbed, by day and by night, in his contact with Christ, which resembled, though it was not identical with, the physical embrace of an erotic obsession.

Thus it was only now … when things had at last subsided and he was left alone … that the two or three *upper* layers of his thick, phlegmatic nature became really conscious of the difference between going to bed in the chamber where Merlin turned King Mark into dust and going to bed with his faithful Megan. He recalled Lord P.'s malicious "Hee! Hee! Hee!" as he was dragged off by his daughter and the wild, frightened look — both for him and for the imaginary nests in the chimney — with which Rachel had pulled him through the doorway.

It was not with a very deep layer of his being, perhaps not even with the deepest of the two or three uppermost ones, that he meditated for a while upon the virginal provocativeness of that soft, slim, girlish body, that he had so nearly pulled down upon his knees just now. These sensual thoughts were entirely unresisted by Mr. Geard. It was a peculiarity of Bloody Johnny's "thick" nature, that his religious, and what many people might have called his "spiritual" feelings, had absolutely no connection with morality. But although not resisted but rather, on the contrary, *encouraged* by his conscious will, these amorous stirrings within him were so weak and so languid, as very soon to subside into a delicious drowsiness.

The Mayor of Glastonbury's drowsiness, however, soon ceased to be delicious. No sooner had it become an actual sleep, although a very light sleep, than a fantastic philological problem tormented the dreaming man.

Was it "Nineue," or "Nimeue," that Owen Evans had told him was the original version of the popular "Vivian"? These three words, "Nineue," "Nimeue" and "Vivian," became for him now three flying herons with outstretched legs. Bloody Johnny's own heart, escaped somehow from his body, was the sick, giddy moon that he had caught a glimpse of; and it was this accurst philological problem — *which* heron was Merlin's paramour — that made this moon-heart of his, as the wild wind tossed it about, so sick, so yellow, so dizzy.

He suddenly awoke into full consciousness with a violent start. He had heard a voice … Oh, it was unmistakably real! It wasn't in his dream at all! … which cried out from beside the hearth, "Nineue! Nineue!" He listened now, fully awake and with a heart that was most assuredly safe back where it belonged, for it was pounding like a clock with broken machinery.

How the wind was howling! Never had he heard such a wind! It was a sheer, simple, childish terror that Mark Moor Court was going to be blown down that night, which was making his heart beat in this way. Mr. Geard kept telling himself just this. "It's the wind," he repeated firmly and emphatically. "It's the wind that's making my heart beat!"

He craned his neck round, staring at the fire that was now very large and very red. The voice he had heard was that of a man, and it had come from somewhere behind the masonry of the wall, just to the right of that burning blaze. And then, without any ambiguity *this* time, he heard an unmistakable sound clear and distinct, in some room just below his floor. He moved his head back upon his pillow. The sound ceased at once. Again he stretched out his head, like the head of a saurian, over the side of the bed. The sound once more became audible. It was an unmistakable sound; but it was anything but a romantic sound. It was in fact the sound of a man making water.

Mr. Geard could not be mistaken. The man was making water into a metallic chamber-pot; and as he made it he broke wind several times. The Mayor of Glastonbury continued to crane his neck over the side of his bed.

He now became aware of a crack, just in that place, between the bare, dark, oak planks of the floor. A faint, a very faint light was observable through this slit in the floor. He continued to listen with his whole soul. Never had he listened so intently to any sound in his life. He heard the man replace the chamber-pot … it must have been made of tin or perhaps of iron … and then there were steps and gaspings and creakings and low grumbling groans. Soon he heard another sound, similar to the first and yet dissimilar. A second human being was making water. This time the flow was noisier, quicker, sooner over. “It’s a woman,” thought Bloody Johnny.

He tried to make his awkward position, as he hung over the crack in the floor, a more comfortable one. He extended his arm until his fingers touched the floor. Yes! this gave a necessary support to his outstretched head.

There were more shufflings and groanings, more creakings and obscure murmurs, then dead silence. He waited, still stretched out over the crack. He thought to himself, “A man makes water. A woman makes water. These sounds are being heard all over Somersetshire tonight, in thousands and thousands of bedrooms. Other unpleasant sounds are being heard too. The sounds of the teeth of incredibly ravenous rats inside hundreds of slaughterhouses. I wonder,” so the thoughts of the Mayor ran on, “I wonder if there are any ears subtle enough to hear the worms at work in the churchyards? A man making water. A woman making water. Every sound a vibration. Every vibration a radiation, a detonation. Every sound travelling from the earth outward into space. Will the sound of Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy making water in their room at Mark Court go on voyaging through space until it reaches the Milky Way? And not stop even then? No! No! Why should it stop then? Nothing once started can ever stop! It can come back perhaps, if space is round, but that’s the best it can do. Here we go round Tom Tiddler’s ground! The everlasting pissing of Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy.”

But the silence was broken again now; broken just as the Mayor of Glastonbury was going to withdraw his outstretched head. There was a sound of expectoration; and this sound was a good deal more disagreeable to the ears of Mr. Geard than the other had been. And then he heard with appalling distinctness the voice of the old woman saying to the old man, “Spit on the brown paper, John. Spit on the brown paper I did lay out for ‘ee!”

Bloody Johnny drew back his head and once more pulled the purple coverlet tightly round his chin. “Nineue” he murmured aloud, trying to recall what it had been in the intonation of that voice from behind the fireplace that had given his heart such a shock. Had he dreamed of his heart being sick and yellow, like the driven moon, *before* he heard that voice crying out? Yes he had. He most assuredly had. And he had been dreaming of the name “Nineue” before he heard it cried. And he had thought of the word “Nineue” … it had come suddenly into his head in place of something else … *before* he dreamed of it. Or had he dreamed of it and thought of it too *after* he had heard that voice?

“Damn!” said Bloody Johnny to himself, “it must have been that old pantaloon, down there, talking to his wife; and in my dream I made it out to be a voice.”

He had reached this point in his cogitations when he suddenly found himself sitting straight up in the creaking little bed in a grievous fit of pure fear. He knew that voice was going to be lifted up again. He knew it was. Nothing could stop it from being lifted up again. In just one second he would be hearing it again. It would be crying “Nineue” just as it had done before. “If it does,” he thought, “I shall run out on that bridge. I shall knock at that girl’s door. She couldn’t not let me in. She *couldn’t* not!”

But he clenched his hands together stubbornly and stared at the red fire, resolute, in his massive way, to beat down this fear, to beat it down and hold it down, so that it should not grow into panic; so that it should not *get into his legs.* So far it was only in his heart and in his throat. But he could feel it descending. It ran down a funnel … the fear-funnel it was that it ran down … inside his ribs … no, between his spine and his stomach. Tightly, tightly, he clasped his hands together staring at the fire. He thought of various quiet, sturdy people in his life. He thought of Megan sleeping in their familiar room.

And then, in a flash, he thought of Canon Crow. The Canon had been accustomed to read Rabelais to him sometimes of a night, when the servants were in bed. The Canon had laughed at him at such times and called him “Friar John des Entommeures,” “Friar John of the Funnels.” He was all one great Funnel now … waiting till the repetition of that voice pumped fear into him … out of him … through him … pumped … *pumped* .... But all might yet be well if this fear didn’t get into his legs!

Now came a second of time when he actually *wanted* the voice to come again. “When it’s come, it’s come,” he thought. “It’s past then … come and gone.” But it was his own mouth that now opened like a crack in thick ice. It was his own voice that resounded wildly through King Mark’s chamber, till the rafters rang again; “Nineue! Nineue!”

He did feel a certain relief when he had uttered this rending and tearing scream. He found he had sufficient self-control now to ask himself what it had been in the intonation of that voice that had made his heart so sick. The horror he had felt was not precisely fear. What it really was was *pity.* It was pity carried to such a point by the intonation of that reiterated “Nineue!

Nineue!" that it became worse than fear. The relief he experienced when — impelled by a nervous force he was unable to resist — he had himself cried out that name was like the relief which some spectator at the Colosseum might have felt, when unable to endure what he saw, he had jumped down into the arena and was fighting there tooth and nail among the murderers and the murdered.

He now found himself mumbling forth a sort of personal appeal to the Being who had cried "Nineue! Nineue!"

"Why don't you come forth? Why don't you show yourself? Yes, yes, why don't you come forth now, close up to my bed, near me, near me, so that I can touch you, see you, feel you?"

He uttered these words in a low tone, swaying and shivering there in the reddish fire-gleams. If any human eye had been watching him he would have resembled a picture that one could imagine being painted by Rembrandt if Rembrandt had gone mad.

The fire-gleams flickered upon the tight woollen vest that covered the exposed half of his protuberant belly. They flickered upon his great white face. They flickered upon the headless falcon embroidered on the torn rug about his legs. They flickered on his stockinged feet, which stuck out grotesquely beyond the end of his diminutive bed.

"Why don't you let me see you?" he whined again in a voice that was almost wheedling; and he began suddenly nodding his great head in a manner that suggested the impulse of a powerful dog anxious to propitiate a yet more powerful dog by an obsequious fawning and wagging of its great tail.

"Let me see you! Yes, yes; let me touch you with my hands!"

It was as if he were addressing a Being whose presence he felt much more certainly, much more closely than he felt the pressure of that heraldic rug at which he now began twitching; pinching it with his fingers and thumbs, much as a dying man plays with the bedclothes that cover his nakedness. What he felt in all his pulses was that if this desperate lover of Nineue … this great and lost magician … were to come forth now from behind that reddened smoke and approach his bed his heart would have become calm as a saint's.

It was the tone of that cry. He could not bear it. If he heard it again his heart would crack. Pity carried to that point was intolerable …. He ceased his picking at the rug. He bent his great head as a wrestler or a boxer might have done. And he took hold of his heavy, phlegmatic soul in the iron pincers of his massive will and he pressed it down, like a bar of molten metal into those lower levels of his thick nature where he held fast hold of his Christ.

And then Mr. Geard gathered himself together. There were physical movements in his body of which he was quite unconscious. His thick shoulders under his woollen vest heaved and shuddered. His exposed belly went in and out, sinking and expanding; while the stature of his torso from hips to crown palpably distended. Three times he struggled to utter words; but in vain. He attempted it the fourth time; but in vain. Then … the fifth time, of his Atlantean heaving … words came; words mingled with bloody spume came; forcing themselves out of his mouth they came; with a wrench as if they brought his entrails with them.

"Christ have mercy upon you!" gasped Mr. Geard. The words were no sooner out of his mouth than a relaxed shivering fit seized upon him and his head fell forward. His whole body drooped forward, bending at the waist, the arms limp. Had there been anyone to see his face at that moment it would have appeared like the face of a corpse before its fallen chin has been caught up and bandaged.

Perfectly still he remained, his eyelids drooping, his whole frame limp. He was like a person who has been shaken by the convulsions of some terrible fit, till, in the ensuing stillness, his spirit seems to have gone out of him.

He remained, for what seemed to his own dazed consciousness like several hours, in this position. Then, very slowly the life-energy returned to him. All his dread was over now and a great peacefulness descended upon him. Leisurely and comfortably and with an exquisite feeling of sensual contentment he stretched himself out once more in his little bed and pulled the purple coverlet over his shoulders.

He began to feel very sleepy and with his sleepiness there fell upon him a delicious sense of inscrutable, unutterable achievement. But the Mayor of Glastonbury was not allowed just yet to enjoy his hard-earned repose.

There came a very definite sound to his ears at the end of the room, at that place in the wall of King Mark's chamber where was the door leading out upon the Bridge of Sighs. It was the sound of that little door opening inward upon its rusty hinges. With a drowsy and a rather irritable movement he heaved himself up again in his bed.

And the door was closed carefully and gently, there before him; and a slender black figure, holding a flat candlestick in its hand, advanced with bare feet across the floor towards his bed.

Rachel Zoyland did not utter a word till she reached his bedside. Then in a voice that trembled on the edge of a child's passionate crying-fit she said brokenly:

"I heard … I heard … I was listening … I couldn't sleep … I heard …."

The long black cloak she was wearing fell open displaying her white nightgown.

He stretched out his arm. Not for the first time in his life Bloody Johnny became uncomfortably aware of the grotesqueness of his physical appearance. He took hold of her hand and tried to make her sit down at the foot of his bed, but she remained standing there in her naked feet, her long straight night-gown showing white as her cloak swung open. Her brown hair fell in tumbled curls over one of her small bare shoulders. Her childish mouth, twitching in the light of the candle which she clutched, could not utter a word. The candle was so shaken by the way she was trembling that its grease began to drip upon the emblazoned coverlet.

"I heard … I heard you call … and I had to come," she whispered.

Bloody Johnny, blinking with his sleepy eyelids because of the flame of the candle, made a humorous grimace and pointed to the floor at her feet.

"The Bellamys are just below," he whispered hoarsely. "For God's sake don't get me into trouble with the household! If *you* heard me shout, I'm afraid *they* must; and they may be rushing in now any second!"

He uttered these words in so whimsical a manner and smiled at her so naturally and so quietly that the girl swallowed her approaching sobs in a gallant gulp.

"Put down the candle, Lady Rachel," he said gravely, sinking back on his pillow; "you're spilling the grease on your father's rug."

She obeyed him with docility now and sat down on the flimsy couch, which promptly gave vent to an ominous creak.

But he stretched out his arm, in its tight woollen sleeve, and took her hand.

"It'll stand your weight," he said, "if it's stood all my antics."

"Don't make me go to Miss Crow," she whispered. "Let me come and live with you!"

He looked at her through his half-shut eyelids, while the syllables "Nineue" floated dreamily through his soothed consciousness. It was indeed the first time in Bloody Johnny's life that the indescribable magic of a young girl's identity dominated his mind. It floated forth from everything about her, from the soft brown curls resting on her exposed shoulder, where her cloak had slipped, from the fragrant warmth of her light limbs, from the cold virginal curves of her mouth, from the tiny rondures, like water-lilies under her night-gown, of her girl's breasts, from the softness about her childish figure that made it different from what a boy's would have been, and beyond and above all these from a flower-like sweetness which emanated rather from her soul than from her body, troubling the senses of Mr. Geard with an awakened consciousness of the loveliness which all the young leaves and shoots and petals out there in that spring wind must have possessed this Easter night.

It would have been erroneous to say that Mr. Geard experienced any poignant temptation. The appalling struggle he had just been through had left his vital energies at their lowest possible ebb. It would have been possible for the girl to have slid much closer to him than she was, sitting there like a little marble figure at the foot of his couch, and still he would have suffered no carnal stir.

Calmly he allowed himself to drink up her delicate beauty; to drink it up out of the midst of that vast, shadowy chamber; as if he were drinking it from a great basin of cold black basalt.

"Let me come and live with you, Mr. Geard! Please, please let me!" she pleaded in a passionate whisper.

He smiled a little; he sighed a little; he pressed her cold fingers, tightly; but he gave his big head as it rested on the pillow an imperceptible shake.

"Don't 'ee say it, girlie," he murmured. "Don't 'ee say it, my pretty! I dursn't let 'ee. No, no, no; I dursn't let 'ee. But 'ee shall often come to see I; sure 'ee shall; and see me good Mr. Barter, and tell he all about they pretty, pretty images."

The tears came into her eyes again and her mouth began twitching, just as it had done when she first appeared.

"Tell 'ee what, wenchie," continued Mr. Geard, deliberately reverting to his old Montacute Town's End speech, "tell 'ee what. Us 'ull ask that fine lad o' your'n, from Middlezoy, to sup wi' the Missus and me; and ye shall come and meet 'un. Ye'll like *that,* girlie, eh? Ye'll like *that,* won't ye?"

He felt, rather than saw, the hot young blood rush into her cheeks.

"Well, well," he murmured. "We mustn't tease a good, kind, little girl, what's come across the cold stones in her bare feet to save an old man from they ghosties. No, no, we mustn't tease her; but, say what you will, Missy, you'll be monstrous pleased with my Miss Crow. And remember this, Rachel, if it hadn't been that there *was* a person like Miss Crow in our town I could never have pressed your father to let you come to us."

"I wish she was at the Devil!" cried the angry child with a flash of fierce Varangian fury.

"Come, come," he retorted, "for all you know she may be at the Devil; and it'll be the Devil's own kettle of fish when Rachel Zoyland comes to Glastonbury!"

But the girl suddenly stiffened all over.

It was now nearly two o'clock, when the resistant power, not only of young descendants of Charlemagne but of birds and fishes and plants and beasts is at its faintest, the hour when the very seaweeds in the deep salt tides shrink inward upon themselves, when the sap is weak in the forest mosses, when the pine needles in the frozen hills carry their burden of snow most feebly, when the fern fronds on a thousand wide-stretched moors are numb and cold and indrawn.

The girl's nerves were thoroughly jangled. She had been suppressing a fit of bitter crying all that night. This final resistance to her will, this denial of her intense wish, coming at the moment when she had been so brave, coming from the person she had rushed to rescue from God knows what, was for her the breaking-point. Ned Athling, for the moment, passed altogether out of her mind's foreground. She only wanted one thing just then; to live under this man's roof in Glastonbury; and the man himself, lying there so drowsily before her, was calmly denying her this. This, then, was what a girl got for getting out of her warm bed, for crossing the windy flagstones of the Bridge of Sighs, for daring to face the ghost of the Enchanter. This is what she got — an easy, unctuous, humorous, grown-up denial of her natural reward! The indignant Zoyland blood froze in her veins. She slid down from the couch and lay stretched out, face downward, on the floor.

"Oh — oh — oh!" She uttered this "Oh" as if it were a thin, little jet of saliva, spat out from under the darting tongue of a small deadly snake.

Mr. Geard stretched out his head from the side of his bed, like a monster lizard from a primeval mud-ledge and squinnied askance at that motionless heap of white and black, lying on the floor. Then he leaned over and pulled the candle away from beside the edge of her night-gown.

"Oh — oh — oh!" Her prostrate body separated that candle-flame now from the crevice between the oaken boards through which he had seen the light in the room below and heard those peculiar sounds.

In the deep shadow between the girl's back and the edge of the couch, where the folds of the coverlet rested on the floor, he saw this thin aperture; and he saw that there *was* a light in the room below. Mr. Geard did not delay. The last thing he desired, at that crucial moment, was an inrush into King Mark's chamber of Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy! He determined to prevent such a contingency by a decisive move. He got quickly out of bed. The heap of black and white fabrics upon the floor neither stirred nor uttered a moan.

He went hurriedly across the floor to the chair where he had flung his clothes. He pulled on his trousers, buttoning them tightly round his waist without bothering about his braces. He put his coat on over his woollen vest. Then he returned to his bed and snatching up the velvet coverlet stooped down and wrapped it about the figure on the floor.

Rachel's thin arms resisted him.

"I hate you!"

Mr. Geard prayed in his deep heart.

"Christ, don't let her scream! Christ, don't let her scream!"

He rolled her up in the great heraldic coverlet. The wings of the headless falcon were round her waist. Thus bundled up he lifted her in his arms like an infant. A fold of the rug hung over her face. Kneeling down on one knee and supporting her upon the other— "So, you *have* got what you wanted!" something cynically whispered in his ears — he picked up her silver candlestick and then rising to his feet, carried both candle and girl resolutely to the door. Out upon the Bridge of Sighs he carried them, that flaring candle-flame and that pride-broken maid; and he felt upon his forehead the air that comes before the air of dawn and is chilliest of all earthly airs. He felt it under his sleeves and between his coat and his vest. He felt it in the marrow of his bones.

"Holy Christ, don't let her scream!" he prayed.

And then it suddenly occurred to him that the girl couldn't possibly have heard *his* scream … couldn't possibly have heard a sound carried from his chamber to hers … with this stone causeway dividing them. Puzzled by this thought and losing now in this pre-dawn air, so full of a particular sort of dew-heavy fatality, the sharper edges of his anxiety, he made the excuse to himself of re-settling the folds of the rug about her throat and propped her body, all bundled up, all mute and unstruggling, against one of the stone parapets of the bridge.

Far away in the west he could see the large, low-hanging, shapeless moon; no longer sick-looking and yellowish, but steely cold and bright, and sailing scornful and proud in a blue-black gulf that held not a single star. For less than half a second Mr. Geard's warm, thick, Christ-supported nature felt the ice-cold paw upon its throat of the unappeased Cerberus of life-devouring annihilation.

Holding tightly to his living bundle and unconsciously giving it little taps with the rim of the flat candlestick whose flame was being blown sideways so gustily that it was almost extinct, Mr. Geard stared into the cold blue-black emptiness that surrounded that distorted moon. He projected his human consciousness as if it had been a stone slung from a catapult, — such stones no doubt *had* been flung in the days of Bleheris from this very parapet — till it reached the side of that radiant abortion. From that vantage-ground in space he projected it again till it reached the unthinkable circumference of the astronomical universe. From this dizzy point he surveyed the whole sidereal world … the whole inconceivable ensemble of etheric and stellar and telluric Matter. Contemplating this ghastly and mind-bewildering Enormity, Mr. Geard, tapping the dark bundle he held with the now quite extinct candle, thought to himself, "My mind has something in it, some background, some basis of secret truth, that is completely outside the visible world, outside the whole staggering vision of Matter! Without the existence of this something else I could not envisage this immense universe at all. Without this deeper thing there would be no universe!"

His thought at that point suddenly became something that was quite different from thought. He felt as people feel when in the midst of a vivid dream they get the sensation that, if they pleased, they could wake themselves up! This bundle he held, those beech-tree tops down there, that huge stone buttress descending into the moonlit shadows, this sharp-smelling blown-out candle — why, they were all half-insubstantial, half-unreal! But the Christ by his side was wholly real. The Christ within him and about him belonged to a reality that at any minute could reduce all this to a pinch of dust, of thin dust, to feed the *Herons of Eternity!*

He was startled out of his trance by nothing less than an audible murmur from the bundle he carried.

“Please take me in, Mr. Geard.” sighed this muffled sound. “I am good now.”

He raised her incontinently from the perilous edge of that high parapet and bore her over the bridge to the door in the archway. This door he found ajar. It was easy for him to swing it open with his foot and carry her forward. Down one step they went, down another step, then they emerged into her own warm firelit room.

So brightly was her fire burning — she must have fed it with fresh fuel before she left the turret — that the sheets of her bed, rolled up as when she had tossed them back, gleamed white as swans’ down in the rosy glow. He carried her across the floor and laid her gently upon these disordered sheets. With fingers tender as a woman’s he pulled away the coverlet from her face. There were her big, amused eyes; there were her brown curls; there was her tremulous mouth, the lips divided in a reassuring smile!

“Sorry I was cross,” she whispered. “I’ll go to your Miss Crow’s, and you shall ask Ned and me to supper. Did you see the ghost of Merlin, Mr. Geard?”

"How long have you been a good girl like this, Lady Rachel?" he asked.

"Since the moment you picked me up off the floor," she answered. "I thought to myself, it's worth getting into a rage to be carried to bed by the Mayor of Glastonbury; and so I stayed still. I like your carrying me, Mr. Geard. I felt like a doll."

"You'll keep your promise, Rachel, and help Mr. Barter with those little images?"

She made an effort to get her arms free of the purple coverlet; but he laid his hand on its surface and stopped her.

"Good-night," he said. "I'll find my way back. It's moonlight now."

"I believe you *will* make Glastonbury all you want it to be!" she cried with shining eyes.

Her face looked so fragile emerging quaintly from the folds of the rug and resting on the white sheet, that, hardly realising what he was doing, he bent down and kissed her cold cheek.

"Good-night, Lady Rachel," he repeated.

Back once again in King Mark's vast dusky chamber, Mr. Geard set himself seriously to think of his grand design. The girl's words, "You *will* make Glastonbury all you want it to be," had started a train of cogitation that it was hard to bring to a pause. To confess the truth, too, he felt a little chilly now in his flimsy bed without that noble covering! But his mind went back to that vast array of ancient folios in the room where Will Zoyland had challenged him.

"What those old Scholastics aimed at," he thought, "I shall fulfil. All their fine-spun logic is dipped in Christ's Blood; and I shall make of that Blood a living Fountain on Chalice Hill, to which all the nations of the earth shall come for healing!"

He tried to warm himself by rolling the bed-clothes tightly around his body, very much as he had rolled the purple coverlet around … *Ninette.* There it was! The two Beings, the old Magician's paramour, and this sweet young creature who so believed in the power of poor Johnny Geard, had at last merged in each other. Well! That was how it *should* be. There was destiny in it. He had been well-advised to ride over to Mark Moor Court on the day of Christ's Resurrection. The old magic monger had vanished with his heathen Grail — so Mr. Evans said — in the heart of Chalice Hill. Well! He, Bloody Johnny, the new miracle-worker, would show the world, before *he* vanished, that the real Grail still existed in Glastonbury.

Wrapped up, like a great fat chrysalis, in his bed-clothes, with his big white face turned to the dying fire, Mr. Geard now awaited the first approaches of dawn. His long vigil that night seemed to have left his brain pretematurally clear. He began to review in calm retrospect the illumination he had received that night as he clutched his living bundle on the edge of those moonlit gulfs of space.

"I know now," he thought, "what the Grail is. It is something that has been dropped upon our planet, dropped within the earthly atmosphere that surrounds Glastonbury, dropped from Somewhere Else …

"I don't know," he went on thinking, "of what substance this thing is made; or whether it was flung into our material dimension purposely, or by accident, or by … It is evidently possessed of radiations that can affect both our souls and … Everyone who believes in it increases its power. *That,* at least, is clear — where-ever it came from!"

He stared up at the dark, massive rafters, catching desperately at a thought which tantalised him and evaded him.

"Sometimes in dreams," he thought, "some little inanimate thing becomes terrible to us … becomes tremendous and terrible … producing ghastly shiverings and cold sweats … I once woke up,” he thought, “crying out ‘the Twig! the Twig!’ and it *was* a little twig, from off some bush, that I had seen … just a little tiny twig! I think it was of a dark brown colour … sometimes the colour in these things is very important! … it was bent … yes! I’m sure of *that* … it was a little, dark-brown twig and bent at one end.”

He once more felt that he was on the very brink of catching hold of some tremendously important clue.

“Little inanimate things,” he thought, “can become great symbols, and symbols are — No!” he thought, “bugger me black! That’s not what I mean at all! I mean something much deeper, much more living than symbols. Bugger me black! What *do* I mean? Certain material objects can become charged with supernatural power. *That’s* what I mean. They can get filled with a kind of electricity that’s more than electricity, with a kind of magnetism that’s more than magnetism! And this is especially the case when … when … when …”

He heard a half-extinguished brand, in the centre of the dying fire, fall heavily among the red ashes; and for the tick of a second his heart began to beat again, wildly, helplessly, violently, just as it had done when he heard … or dreamed he heard … that terrible voice.

“This is especially the case when a number of people, century after century, has believed …. Thought is a real thing—”

Here Mr. Geard’s own process of thought — as he tugged at his pillow to prop up his head a little — was interrupted by a pricking of his conscience. His effort to get the pillow into a comfortable position conveyed his mind, over the seven miles of moonlit water-meadows, to his sleeping wife. He remembered how the grey head of the descendant of the House of Rhys always lay on her own pillow, at her own side of the bed, leaving *his* all smooth and undisturbed and never removing it. He remembered how astonished he had been to learn from Crummie — who loved to play the role of sentimental ambassador between her mother and father — that all the time he was away in Norfolk with Canon Crow, Megan Geard had left his pillow untouched in its place ….

But he made an effort of his will and dismissed Megan completely from his mind, as completely as if they had never lived together. In these deep interior inhumanities, Mr. Geard was shameless. This devotee of Christ frequently took up his conscience by the heels and hung it clear outside the remotest house-walls of his consciousness. He now worked the interior cogs and pistons of his mind till, like a great gaping engine, with grappling irons held outward, towards those dusky rafters above him, his consciousness adjusted itself to catch a clue that kept teasing and tantalising him.

“Thought is a real thing,” he said to himself. “It is a live thing. It creates; it destroys; it begets; it projects its living offspring. Like certain forms of physical pain thoughts can take organic shapes. They can live and grow and generate, independently of the person in whose being they originated.

“For a thousand years the Grail has been attracting thought to itself, because of the magnetism of Christ’s Blood. The Grail is now an organic nucleus of creation and destruction. Christ’s Blood cries aloud from it by day and by night. Yes, yes,” so his thoughts ran on, “yes, and bugger me black!” — this was a queer original oath peculiar to Mr. Geard— “I know now what the Grail is. It is the desire of the generations mingling like water with the Blood of Christ, and caught in a fragment of Substance that is beyond Matter! It is a little nucleus of Eternity, dropped somehow from the outer spaces upon one particular spot!” Here Mr. Geard stretched out his head, like a mud-turtle, and peered down at the crack in the floor, through which he had heard the old couple in the room below relieving Nature.

“I hope,” said Mr. Geard to himself, “that that extremely nervous Sergeant didn’t forget to give my pretty Daisy-Queen a good feed of oats!”

THE SILVER BOWL

"I WANT A child from you, do you hear? What's the matter with you? I want a child, I tell you!"

It was these words of Will Zoyland — flung out angrily at her as he jumped in his car to drive to Mark Court early on Sunday afternoon — that kept ringing in the ears of Nell as she moved about Whitelake Cottage, cleaning and tidying things up, on Easter Monday.

"What made him think of *that* just now?" she said to herself. "He can't read a person's thoughts. He *can't* know about it … how could he? Oh no, no, no!" The truth was that the girl was pretty sure … although not absolutely sure … that Sam's child had already begun its obscure, embryonic life within her.

She had begged him to come out to see her today, knowing that the popular holiday would keep Will safe at Wookey Hole. She had been longing with a great longing to tell Sam what she hoped for. But now she was teased by this tormenting question — should she tell him what Will had said? And should she raise the agitating point whether or no it was best to pretend to Will that this child, if it *did* really come, was his child?

Oh, if only Sam could gather up the spirit and resolution to carry her off, to find work to do, so that he could support her, her and their child, somewhere, anywhere, so it were far from Glastonbury!

Let Will do what he liked *then*; divorce her; refuse to divorce her! What did she care, as long as Sam and she were together?

She had been living in one long delicious trance since that night. Sam had come out only once to see her since; and on that occasion had seemed absorbed in his own thoughts; but he had been gentle and sweet to her and she had felt so happy, pressing him against her, holding him, hugging him, tight and fast, with this thrilling chance of all chances between them, that she had not inquisitioned him or persecuted him with her problem. But this angry challenge of Will's flung out at her after she had managed to evade any serious love-making, had broken up her radiant dream.

Troubled and anxious and full of nameless fears she went about her work this morning. She had risen early, after waking before dawn, from a disturbed sleep — a sleep in which she dreamed that it really was Will's child and not Sam's at all that had just begun its mysterious life-processes within her — and her mental agitation had been increased rather than diminished by the nature of the day as it grew light.

It was absolutely still after the wind of the previous twenty-four hours; but it was grey and damp, clouds in the sky, heavy mists clinging to the meadows. It looked as if it were going to prove a very gloomy, if not a disastrously wet Bank Holiday.

Nell was startled at the havoc the great wind had done among her wild plants, so carefully tended. Her little grass lawn, sloping down to the river bank, was strewn with twigs and leaves from trees quite far away; and some brick tiles, too, had been blown from the roof. The dead stillness of the air after such a wind-hurricane was itself disturbing.

The day was one of those days when human beings who have anything on their minds, anything on their consciences, cannot refrain from a certain listening. It was a day when guilty people could hear their hearts beating, hear their clocks ticking, hear the faint dripping into sink or barrel of the least drop of water from tap or pipe.

Nell washed up her breakfast things more rapidly than usual. She made her bed and tidied her bedroom quicker than she was wont to do. She dusted her parlour. She went down on her knees and washed with soap and water the chequered linoleum on her kitchen floor. All the time she was doing these things she would glance at the window to see if Sam's figure were approaching and then draw her eyes hurriedly away from the menacing inertness of the weather outside.

But below her trouble over Will's fierce words … so fatally well-timed … and below the preoccupation of her work and her longing for her lover to come … there kept drumming and humming in her deeper ears a low refrain of exultation. "It's begun! It's begun! To me myself, and not another, it has happened! My true love's child inside me … safe inside me … and going to grow and grow and grow!"

She sat down on the sofa-couch and picked up a booklet, bound in paper, that lay there. It was a Marxian pamphlet left by her brother Dave.

Stubbornly she tried to concentrate her thoughts upon the formidable argument this little work unfolded. "Children," she read, "are wards of the State, even in their mother's womb. Motherhood is an occupation as dangerous, as necessary, as important to society, as to be a peasant, a factory-worker, a miner. Religious marriage is a bourgeois superstition, grossly intermingled with the historic iniquity of private property. No human creature has a right to claim possession of the person of another. Children are the creation of Nature, but their well-being is the responsibility of the State. When the life of the foetus is—"

As Nell read these words a sudden panic seized her. Something leapt up from these compact, official, emphatic sentences that was much more formidable than their obvious meaning. Sitting there in her bright, crocus-yellow spring dress, covered with a loose, light-green over-all, she suddenly began to shiver from head to foot. Her teeth began to chatter; and she threw up her hands and pressed them against her ears, as if she heard the marching feet of an army of executioners. She had not really understood at all the impact of what she read but something about the tone of it — its air of irreversible and doom-like finality — filled her with a blind terror.

Her teeth chattered so loudly that she clapped her hands to her mouth. Her shiverings made the skirt of the crocus-yellow gown stir faintly, like the underwing of the moth that boys call Yellow Underwing, when the wind catches it. She got a vision of herself as being caught in a long fatal process of Nature from which there was no outlet, no possible escape. She felt the intimate quality of her own private personality now; she felt the Nell she had lived with all her grown-up life, the Nell with the soft hair, the passionate mouth, the full breasts, the Nell with the mania for planting wild flowers in a flower garden, the Nell who loved scrubbing but hated cooking, the Nell who used to endure a husband and now idolised a lover, the Nell who loathed reading and liked using her needle, the Nell who preferred dreaming by open windows to talking by glowing hearths, the Nell who always found oranges so sweet and marmalade so bitter, and it seemed to her now, as she began crumpling in her fingers this odious pamphlet written by men who knew nothing about women, that this Nell who was so dear to her, whose every expression in the mirror she knew so well, this Nell whose teeth she cleaned, whose hair she brushed, whose little ways were *her* ways, was no longer hers, no longer her private possession. This soft body, every part of which held secret nerves of its own, was now bought and sold. Yes, yes, it was handed over, bound and fettered, to a long inescapable doom that had been prepared, millions of years ago — not for the Nell she knew — but for Females in General; a doom that must needs lead her on, deeper and deeper, into the raw, heavy, monstrous, impersonal mire of brutal creation!

She crumpled the unlucky pamphlet into a tight ball of paper and tossed it into the fire. She felt better after she had done this: but she still felt as if it were more than she could bear to hear any man, even Sam, laying down rules for human life. Blind, and dumb, and inarticulate, she felt something surging up within her, that, if she only could express it, would blow all the institutions in the world sky-high. “My womb has conceived,” was the burden of what she ached to cry aloud, “and I tell you this is something that has broken all your laws. It’s a miracle; do you hear me? A miracle has happened. And I’m the one — not any of you mutterers and starers and examiners and inspectors — I’m the one to tell the world what is the secret of life!”

She went into the kitchen and snatched up an orange from a bowl on her dresser. Into the top of this orange she thrust her forefinger till she had made a deep round hole. Into the hole in the orange she now pushed one, two, three small lumps of sugar; and then clutching the sticky, fragrant, yellow skin tightly in her fingers, she pressed her mouth to the hole and sucked furiously, keeping her teeth sufficiently closed so as to push back the half-melted sugar but drawing up the sweet juice into her mouth. She placed herself in front of the fire and stared down into the red coals squeezing, sucking, swallowing.

She found the warmth of the fire comforting as it reached her legs and her skin; and when the moment came for her to tear open the orange and bury her face in its sugary interior, tearing the sticky pulp from the bitter rind with her teeth, she found that her whole mood had completely changed.

She threw the orange skin into the flames then and gathering her over-all tightly about her she moved still closer to the bars, letting the warmth extend to as much of her person as she possibly could, and snuffing up with luxurious satisfaction the smell of the burning orange skin. She began to grow impatient for Sam now. She thought of how she would kiss him when he held her in his arms. “I’ll kiss his eyes,” she thought. “It’s nice when he shuts his eyes.” And then she thought, “I love him when he works his chin up and down, when he gets worried by anything.”

But Sam did not come. It was half-past one now; and she said to herself, “I ought to get myself something to eat but I shan’t do it.”

She put more coals on the fire and went to the couch and lay down upon it. She could see a fragment of the garden out of the window; and how dark it was, and how frighteningly hushed and still!

She had an abscess in her gum above one of her back teeth; and this began to hurt her a good deal. The orange-sucking must have started it. She searched for it with her tongue. She suddenly began to feel more occupied with this trifling annoyance than with Sam or her child or Zoyland or the strange nature of the weather outside. She shut her eyes. At last as she pressed her tongue against her aching gum a drowsiness stole over her that almost took her consciousness away. The hurting in her mouth became a thing entirely distinct from her personality; and when her drifting thoughts reverted to the embryo life within her, *that* also seemed something quite outside of her and independent of her.

And then before she realised what had happened Sam had come. Before she was fully awake he had given her a fierce, violent hug, too hard and breathless to be called tender, too brief to be called passionate; and there they were, sitting on the couch side by side, staring wildly, confusedly, and helplessly at each other.

She had told him already about the child.

“Are you absolutely sure?” he had murmured.

And she nodded emphatically.

Something in his manner had driven her to go on talking about it in a way she had never intended to do. It was a remoteness in him different from anything she had ever known! It was as if he had been clothed from head to foot in invisible chain armour; and not only so, but had had his vizor down, through which his little, bewildered, bear-eyes gazed out at her, puzzled, ambiguous, and with an obstinate film over them.

Everything was so wretchedly different from what she had expected! Her thoughts as to what he would do had been very vague. But she had in her dreamy way, been feeding herself with the fantastic hope that he would cry out to her at once— "Come then, my true love! Nothing henceforth shall part us!"

But he had done nothing of the kind. And in place of anything like that from him, she had found herself explaining hurriedly that Will Zoyland would naturally think, if she acted with any kind of discretion in so delicate a matter, that the child was his.

"*Would* he?" Sam had asked; as if, even then, his mind was not really grasping the significance of what she was saying. It must have been at that point that the "all-is-equal" wave of drowsy indifference that had swept over her before he came, once more had exercised its fatal numbing power; for she had seemed paralysed, as people are in dreams, and unable to break through the mysterious barrier between them.

She had found herself taking an almost apologetic tone about her condition; as if her lover had a right to be angry with her for it! She had found herself explaining that even if Will Zoyland were not absolutely convinced, the existence of a doubt in his mind would not make him act violently or abruptly, if she did not leave his bed till everything was further advanced.

It was then that Sam had said: "You are sure it *is* ours?"

The brutality of this question had brought tears to her eyes; but she had only looked reproachfully at him and had murmured— "Of course it's ours, you silly!"

But the revolting idea *had* crossed her mind, as he put that point-blank question— "Suppose I didn't know myself which of them it was?"

The relief that she did know — and as far as *that* went — knew beyond all question that it was Sam's, held now, for her dazed intelligence, such a comfort, after that diabolically horrid idea, that she threw still further emphasis into her plausible argument that everything would go on quite naturally and as if it were her husband's.

"But suppose it's like me when it's born?" Sam had scrupled not to interject with an almost comic solemnity.

"Oh, it's not born yet, you wretch!" she had replied in quite a flighty tone.

And there had been an interchange of tender, half-humorous speculation between them, after that, as to whether this unknown offspring of theirs would be a boy or a girl; and Sam had said he hoped it would be a girl; and she had said — her mind all the time thinking, "How different this is from what I thought it would be!" — that if he *really* wanted it to be a girl she would *make* it a girl, by thinking of nothing else all the time!

And then the trouble between them began. Sam started it by talking on and on to her about some startling experience he had recently had … something to do with a mad woman and the old-curiosity-shop man on Maundy Thursday, when he was climbing Wirral Hill with John Crow and Tom Barter; but he was so clumsy at expressing himself, and she was so slow in catching the drift of his thought, that they irritated each other, in the way simple-minded people so easily do, by their mutual misunderstanding long before he even reached the real danger-point of what he was trying to tell her.

"It's something that's been coming over me for some time, Nell," he said, with his hand tightening so fast upon hers, in his anxiety to make himself clear, that he hurt her fingers. “It’s not religion in my father’s sense; for I don’t believe … in anything … at all.”

“I like your father, very, very much,” Nell threw in.

“No, no,” he went on, “it’s not religion in *his* sense, because I don’t believe in one single one of all those things.”

He knew he was expressing himself lamely and badly, in fact childishly; but all he could do was to go on hurting her soft, formless, school-girl fingers in his muscular grip.

Her own mind was so benumbed, that the discourse between them, as the dark, hushed afternoon of Easter Monday wore on, would have seemed to any eavesdropper as incoherent as the talk of a couple of inmates in that State Asylum so much dreaded by Mad Bet.

“It’s not that I’m considering Christ simply as an ordinary man,” affirmed Sam in a high-pitched dialectical tone. “I’m considering Him as a God. But I’m considering Him as a God among Other Gods. I’m considering Him as a God who is *against* the cruelty of the great Creator-God. What has given me such an extraordinary feeling of happiness these last days is the idea that ever since Christ was tortured to death by the Romans to please the Jews there has been a secret company of disciples who have believed in His methods of fighting the cruel Creator-God … these methods of His … simple and yet very hard to catch the drift of … till you get … a sudden illumination … like Saint Paul … only mine came to me on Silver Street, at the bottom of the drive, where you can see the elms over the wall ….”

“Let go my hand, you’re hurting me.” Up went her fingers to her sulky red mouth when he released her. He had certainly left them bloodless.

She began to feel hungry. “I wish,” she thought, “I could just run into the kitchen and put the kettle on without hurting his feelings. How queer men are. He has already completely forgotten that I've made him a father."

"I don't believe in the Church, Nell," Sam went on, "like Father does. I don't believe in the Creed at all. But I believe in the Mass; what in *our* Church we call the Sacrament; I believe as it says in Latin, *Verbum caro factum est*, the Word was made Flesh."

"I think I'll put the kettle on," she murmured, without realising the irony of these last words so apparently unrelated in his mind to the "word-made-flesh" in herself! She had grown so hungry and had come to long so desperately for a cup of tea that when he came to utter the word "Creed" it was on the tip of her tongue to give vent to a quivering, long-drawn-out scream, so that the great Latin syllables fell on deaf ears.

Sam the naturalist had certainly been overlaid by Sam the theologian; but there was a sturdy animal instinct in him that now broke through the spiritual chain-armour that he was wearing like a tight-fitting aura or like an etheric body. It broke through this aura with such a leap that the girl was frightened.

"I'll put it on for you!" he cried suddenly getting up with a bound from her side. He rushed into the kitchen, and she heard him empty and fill the kettle; and then she heard him clattering with the iron cover of the stove as he pushed it aside with the short poker she kept for that purpose and settled the kettle in its place.

"He hasn't even looked to see how the fire is," she thought. With a weary sigh she got up and followed him.

She caught him staring out of the kitchen window as she entered, an ecstatical stare, like the stare of a village boy watching the circus clown.

"What is it?" she asked, putting her arm on his shoulder. She wanted him to fondle her and tell her how wonderful she'd been to make him a father. Instead of this he drew away from her touch.

“Oh, you *will* understand, Nell darling,” he said, “when I’ve told you everything, why I can’t be like I was before?” He turned his broad back upon her and walked out of the kitchen. He made blindly for the couch where they had been sitting when she murmured about the kettle. And she followed him submissively to that familiar couch.

She made a motion as though to sit on his knee, but he warded her off, clutching her wrist with a rough violence and pulling her down by his side.

“That’s what I really came to see you about, Nell; to be absolutely frank with you; as we always are with each other, aren’t we?”

She thought bitterly to herself that if she had been less frank with him this afternoon, never said a single syllable about her condition, he would not have acted the least differently from the way he was acting now!

A faint shivering, like the shivering that had seized her when she read her brother’s pamphlet, came over her now. Was Sam — her dear Sam — going to join that great staring army of men, men, men, men with hairy wrists and hairy chests, men with hard sharp knees, men with brains like printing presses, between whom she had to run the gauntlet … and to take her place … and her child had to take its place … in a regimented State, ordered, not by Nature, but by tyrannical Science? *What was it* that Sam was saying now?

“ — and so, though of course I shall always love you, and you will always be my true love, and we’ll be seeing each other just as much as we do now, I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s wrong for me to make love to you any more. The pleasure I get from that kind of thing is so intense for me — it may not be so with other people but it is so with me — that it kills this new feeling.” Not a tear came to her eyes. They did not open, or shut, or twitch, or blink, or quiver. Her hands remained lying quietly on her lap just as they had been when he first let them go. She did not clasp them now, nor did she fumble with the loose folds of the green apron which covered her crocus-yellow gown.

She forced herself to look into the eyes of this speaking man, into the eyes of this man-mask, whose chin as he uttered his unkind words imitated the familiar contractions of her dear Sam's chin.

Her simplicity of nature was such that the blow itself brought her one recompense. She was not tormented by doubt. Her Sam had changed into someone else. Her Sam had changed into a Being who called himself the lover of a God called Christ and who henceforth would think it wrong to love Nell Zoyland. Nell made absolutely nothing of what he said about loving her still, though it would be wrong to "make love" to her. Such was her character, such was her conception of love, that to "make love" meant simply to love, and not to "make love" meant simply not to love.

"I don't … quite … understand … Sam dear."

He put his arm about her and pressed her to him and they stayed like that for a while in sorrowful silence, while outside their walls nothing stirred except the flowing of the river that was like a channel without a bottom, so darkly it poured its flood, as if the sombreness of the low grey skies and their forlorn depths, had been transferred to it to augment its desolation.

"Sam dearest, did you like me the first time you saw me?" This innocent question which had passed between them, question and answer, so often already, had become like a familiar nosegay by this time which was handed from one to another, to smell at and pass back again, when it was not the moment for more ardent caresses.

Now, when caresses were to be altogether renounced this invisible nosegay gathered to itself a poignant significance.

There were actually tears in Sam's eyes as he lifted her hand to his lips and swore that he had liked her *before* he saw her; that he had dreamed of her, from Penny Pitches' description, when he had first heard her name!

She made a little movement at this, cuddling up yet closer to him so that the warmth of her body flowed into his. Her green pinafore was open at the sides and as she leant against him he could see — oh, and feel too! — the rounded tightness of her yellow bodice as a deep-drawn sigh expanded her lovely breasts.

It was only by forcing himself to think of that tortured Shadow hovering above his father's roof; it was only by forcing himself to visualise the actual prints of the nails in that Shadow's hands; that he had the strength to stiffen himself and not to yield, that he had the strength to hold that clinging sweetness away from him. But so piteously was his whole nature stirred that big tears now rolled slowly down his cheeks; several of them actually reaching his twitching chin. They were tears of miserable pity for himself and for her; and for more than themselves. In the pressure of that dark hour there weighed upon him the whole burden of the round world's tragic grief as it swung on its axis. The loneliness of the cold-gurgling stream outside, with that sorrowful sky reflected in it, the silence of that little house enclosing them amid the larger silence of the wide moors; all these things flowed into Sam's heart till it felt as if it must break. To have been given such quivering sweetness, and to have to push it away with his own hand! He had known that it would be hard; but this was worse than he had imagined. The feeling that their passionate mixing together had created a new life — a life that was the knot of their intertwining — made it seem as if an outrage was being done to them both, a rending, tearing, remorseless outrage, that must make a red wound in Time itself, that slippery-smooth Time, that long black snake, that was gliding away under their feet! She kept making little heart-breaking movements to cling closer to him; and he had to put all his will into the arm that held her back, to keep it stiff, to make it like a sword between them.

"I thought you'd be pleased when you knew I was going to have a child."

"I *am* pleased, Nell. Your child will be the only child I shall ever have now. And I'm glad it's yours! Zoyland may be generous … I mean later on … when things are different."

"I can't believe it … Sam … when I look at you sitting so close to me … that you have stopped loving me … just when I'm sure about our child."

Sam was the extreme opposite of a moral casuist. It would have been better for Nell if his conscience had been more sensitive and his passion less strong. It was the strength of his passion for her that made the issue between her and Christ so deadly clear to him.

In these subtle human relations Sam had the blunt obtuseness of a beast, a beast with far less conscience than a faithful dog. He was indeed a forest bear at this moment, a bear that was rejecting a treasure-trove of wild-honey for the sake of a garden-hive that he had found.

Nell was just then too stunned to feel anything but this fatal change in him; but later — when she had time to think — she found herself amazed at the unscrupulousness with which he was prepared to allow her to deceive Zoyland about the child. Whatever it was that had touched him with its terrible spell it had left him as non-moral as a savage. There was nothing human left in him to which a girl could appeal.

In his mind at that moment there seemed to be only two alternatives; possessing Nell, or being possessed by Christ. A month-old conception, a year-old love, what were these beside the ecstasy, the blind exultation of sharing the sufferings of a God?

"Sam … Sam … Love me again! Love me again!"

He made a funny little gurgling sound in his throat and looked away from her; looked towards the window. At that moment there were steps on the brick path outside and a sharp knock at the door.

They both leapt to their feet; and Nell, after a moment's hesitation and a quick glance round the room, went to the door and opened it.

There stood Persephone Spear!

The tall, equivocal girl entered furtively and quietly, closing the door behind her. Her appearance altered everything in a moment. It caused to surge up in both Nell and Sam that curious blind irritation, unique in life, that the invasion of an outsider evokes in the souls of two people who are in the throes of some nervous dispute.

Persephone wore her usual rough ulster-cape and below this a grey jersey and black skirt. On her head was a tight-fitting, dark woollen cap. She was certainly in an agitated mood and in a dogmatic, tyrannical one. She moved uneasily about the little room, disregarding Nell's entreaties to sit down. She went up to the tiny cottage piano which the Marquis of P. had given the Zoylands on their marriage and ran her fingers over its wistful untuned keys. "What's this?" she said, picking up the loose cover of the pamphlet that Nell had burned. "Did Dave leave it?" Then she came and stood in front of them, staring out of the window. "What's it going to do?" she asked, frowning. "It's the worst day we've had since I've been down here. It's a terrible day." There was a tone in her voice that reduced the weather to a troublesome appendage to human life, to a tiresome dog that was behaving badly. Then she left the window and crossed over to the fire. "Why don't you burn more wood, Nell?" she said. "It gives out much more heat than this wretched coal." Then again, before Nell had time to reply, she was pulling out a book from Will Zoyland's bookshelf. "Does your William read 'Arabia Deserta'? No! I can see he doesn't. It's not cut." She turned the pages irritably. “You know what Doughty would call a little creature like you, Nell, in this Bedouin tent. He’d call you a ‘Bint.’ That’s a good word, isn’t it? To describe a sweet little girl like you!” She returned Doughty to the shelf with a violent shove and hurried again to the window. “It looks as if it wanted to rain black rain today. I’ve never seen anything so miserable — except my life.”

She put into these final words so much bitterness that Nell was startled out of her irritation and out of her own grief.

“What is it, Percy dear? Are things going wrong? Won’t you take off your ulster?”

Sam got up and made several clumsy attempts to help the restless intruder out of her cape. When it was off and she stood before them slim and erect in her jersey and skirt she had a warm, youthful-bodied look like a young skater with tingling veins and bright colour, that completely contradicted her pessimism.

“You look awfully well, Percy,” said Nell. “It isn’t your health that’s wrong, anyway.”

“You’re quite out of it, my dear,” returned the other. “I’ve been feeling dizzy and funny all day. It’s this black devilry in the air, I expect, that won’t come down. I’d like to *tell* this day how I detest it!”

Her childish way of talking about the weather had something that was vaguely reassuring both to Nell and Sam. They had both been feeling an element of fatality in the atmosphere outside; and Percy’s petulant detachment of herself from the elements and her concentration upon her personal quarrel with life brought back that sense that the world was malleable and that anything was possible which they had both lost.

“You two look as if I’d interrupted a lovers’ quarrel!” cried the girl suddenly, with a forced laugh, throwing back her beautiful head.

Persephone herself had had two fierce quarrels that Easter; one with her husband and one with Philip; and her present mood was a furious revolt against all men, combined with a melting tenderness for all women. With a sudden impulse she now went across to Nell's little piano and after aimlessly playing for a few moments plunged into the notes of a wistful song. This after a moment she began to sing as well as to play. Her voice was surprisingly moving as she sang the words:

"Woman's grief for a woman's breast —
The winds howl fierce over Dunkery Beacon!
The heart beats faint in its sad unrest
And the knees weaken.
"Woman's hair for a woman's tying —
The waves break wild upon Lulworth Cove!
Cover your face and quit your crying
And quell your love.
"Woman's womb by Lodmoor water —
The frost bites bitter on White Nose head!
Best for the child, whether son or daughter,
It lay dead.
"Woman's tears for a woman's drying —
The long night lingers on Salisbury Plain!
Love can't reach you where you'll be lying
Nor any pain.
"Woman's bones for a woman's tending —
The wet dawn gathers on Wirral Hill!
No more saving and no more spending,
She lies still.
"Woman's dust for a woman's wonder —

The cold stars shine on the Mendip snows!
A grassy mound — but who lies under
No man knows.”

The song ended; but its spell was not broken for a couple of long minutes.

“Is that an old song?” Sam asked.

“Not at all! Don’t you realise we’ve got a Wessex poet of our own? Haven’t you heard of young Edward Athling of Middlezoy? There’s been enough talk going around about him and Lady Rachel to make him famous if his poetry hasn’t done it.”

Sam glanced at the clock on the chimney-piece. It was already nearly four. “I’ll have to leave them and start walking back,” he said to himself. “I *must* be at that woman’s house by half-past five.”

He rose heavily to his feet. The movement he made roused Nell from the woeful passivity into which she had been thrown by the song.

“You’re not going away, Sam?” she cried piteously. “You *can’t* be going away — and you and I not having had hardly a word yet together!”

Persephone rose to her feet, too, at this juncture. She was as tall as Sam as she stood up in front of him; for his slouching form was bent a little forward and his long arms were hanging loosely down, like those of a gorilla.

She placed one of her own arms protectively round Nell’s neck, caressing the girl’s chin.

“I suppose,” she said slowly, staring defiantly at Sam, “I suppose … you’ve landed her … now … with a child?”

“I didn’t tell her, Sam, I didn’t!” protested Nell.

“She doesn’t know,” he cried in a harsh, loud voice. “You know you don’t know *for certain*, Nell! It’s far too soon. It’s only—” But he finished his sentence by repeating his first words. “It’s much too soon to be so sure!”

“You’ve hurt her feelings abominably anyway,” said Persephone curtly.

“It’s always … better …” said Sam calmly, accepting the girl’s resentful stare with an impassive front, “for people who love each other like Nell and me, to settle our difficulties alone.” He paused and there was something approaching a humorous glint in his little eyes. “Perhaps … you would not mind … going … into the garden or into the … kitchen for a minute or two!”

Persephone jerked herself away and retreated across the room towards the staircase.

“Well, go on, Sam Dekker,” she cried sarcastically. “You’ve only got a ‘bint’ to deal with. Go on *explaining* — without the faintest notion of what Nell’s thinking and feeling.” She turned at the staircase foot and flung her final bolt with uncalled-for vehemence. “The fact remains that you found one of the happiest girls in Somerset; and you’ve made her one of the unhappiest!”

The surly native of Glastonbury, converted into such a singular kind of a saint, with an exercise of self-control that made his jerking lower jaw positively subhuman, answered her quietly.

“Oh, come now, if you think so little of men, aren’t you rather exaggerating my importance?”

“Well, I hope you’ll never *have* a child!” She gave a little cynical laugh that yet had a hysterical note in it. “I hope Nell will have *seven* beautiful girls by Will Zoyland; and not one of them will ever let any man come near them!”

“Percy!” gasped Nell in consternation, but noticing how white Percy looked as she came forward now towards them her tone changed to one of concern. “Percy, you’re ill! What’s the matter?”

Percy held out her hand to Sam. “I apologise, Sam. Don’t take anything I say today seriously. The truth is I’ve had my own troubles and it’s rather upset me. I daresay … you are … all right.”

She sank down on the nearest chair. “Have you any whiskey, Nell?”

Nell made a sign to Sam to get the drink. When he handed her the whiskey his face expressed genuine concern and this Persephone did not miss.

“Oh, I’m all right,” she gasped, choking a little and spilling the drink on her grey jersey. Then she handed him the glass and tilting back her chair stretched out her long arms in a gesture of utter weariness, her fingers clenched.

“Damn it! I’m sorry, you two,” she murmured, letting her arms sink down again. She jerked her chair back now into its natural position and covering her mouth with her hand yawned extravagantly. Then she rose to her feet. “I don’t know what’s the matter with me today,” she said. “No, no, I don’t want to sit down, Nell. I’ve been sitting down too much today. Look here, you two, wouldn’t you like to ride into Glastonbury? I’ll bring you back here … one of you … both of you … just as you want. But it would be a change to get our tea in town. Gome on! I’ll treat you! Let’s go to the Pilgrims’ and have an amusing time.”

Sam indicated his promise to be at Tittie Petherton’s that afternoon at half-past five. “Crummie Geard has been looking after the woman today while the nurse takes a holiday,” he explained. “Ever since the Geards have shown an interest in her she’s been better. She gets up now and comes down, though of course she can’t ever get well, and she still suffers a lot. Mr. Geard can always spirit her pain away; but it’s a conjuring-trick and I *don’t like* the man.”

Sam began walking up and down the room, a puzzled frown on his face. The two girls watched him. A quick, feminine glance passed between them; a glance as old as the camel's hair tents of "Arabia Deserta"; a glance that said— "See how these masculine Prophets of the Lord refuse credit to each other!"

"I can't understand it," Sam went on, mumbling his words as if speaking to himself. "The man talks in an almost jocular fashion of the Blood of Christ. But he does drive Tittie Petherton's pain away. I've seen it! I've seen the woman fall asleep. But there's something evil about him to me. Father doesn't feel like that. Father gave him the Sacrament once. Father rather likes him and is glad for him to visit Tittie. But I'm not so sure! Sometimes I feel as if, when he sends her pain away, he were doing it by the power of the Devil — only," here Sam smiled a rather boyish smile, "only I don't believe in the Devil!"

The two girls had drifted across to the couch now, and were sitting there side by side, Percy's arm about Nell's waist.

"I could help you with that sick woman just as well as Crummie Geard," was Nell's comment upon his discourse.

"I've promised to take Tittie over to her aunt's, old Mrs. Legge," Sam said.

"That woman!" cried Percy. She looked at Nell. "Do *you* know what Mrs. Legge is?"

"Look here, you two," said Sam disregarding her question, "why don't you two come with me to Mrs. Legge's? It's in the slums, you know, but there'll be tea of some sort."

"Oh, I don't want to go at all!" Nell faltered. "I'd much sooner be left alone here."

"I know you would," said Persephone, "and cry your eyes out too. I know *that*! But the point is that's the worst thing you could do. I know I can't persuade you; but perhaps if you get it into your head that if you did it would certainly spoil Sam's evening—"

Half an hour later and they were all three speeding towards Glastonbury; Persephone driving her car at a reckless pace; Nell watching Sam's countenance with intense, puzzled scrutiny; and Sam himself anxiously pulling out his watch every minute or two and exclaiming— "I don't want to hurry you … but if you *could* pass that thing we should be—"

Persephone kept persuading Nell that their accompanying him to Mother Legge's respectable but comprehensive party would make no difference to the lady who was giving it. "If she expects him and Miss Geard," she said, "I don't suppose she'll mind our coming."

Nell was more diffident. "You go with Sam, Percy, and I'll go and see Dave. He's still in the same rooms, isn't he, where you were before? I don't really see how we can invade this woman's place … so many of us … and without a word of invitation."

Percy burst into a wild fit of laughing when she heard this. They were standing on the cobblestones now outside Mrs. Petherton's dilapidated Gothic house; and the tall girl bent herself down over the wooden railings, where John Crow had first broached to Barter the idea of betraying Philip and coming over to Geard. She gave herself up to such a violent laughing-fit in this dingy ramshackle spot of pigsties and puddles, that tears ran down her convulsed cheeks.

"Well! I'll go into the house now," said Sam. "Of course she may be too ill to come out. I expect you two had better wait here till I bring her out. I was going to take her round in a taxi; and even now that may be the best. But I'll go in and see."

He had no sooner disappeared than a taxi drew up beside their car. There was a huddled figure inside this conveyance; but the driver got out, touched his cap and asked them if this was the house where Mr. Dekker was.

" 'Ad a call to come 'ere straight from St. Michael's Inn, ladies," he declared with some embarrassment. Then he hurriedly went back to his cab, peered through its closed window for a second, and returned to their side.

"Is he drunk, do you think?" whispered Nell to her companion.

"I be in awkward case, ladies," the man mumbled. "There be a 'ooman come wi' I, 'gainst all sense. She be wambly in she's poor head. She were in bar wi' I because 'twere holiday, and she likes to bide wi' I on holiday, and have a bite o' summat. But she heard me boss say to I— 'Solly Lew,' says me boss, 'here be a order from Vicarage. 'Tis to pick up Mr. Sam Dekker at Tittie Petherton's and take three o' they out to Mrs. Legge's, to Paradise.' And's soon as this poor crazy 'ooman heard the name Mr. Dekker what must the glimsey body do but climb into taxi; and nought that I could do could get she out! And now I be terrible worried what Mr. Dekker will say to I when I tell he there be a crazy 'ooman in taxi."

Both the ladies glanced nervously at the taxi window. Yes, Solly Lew had spoken no less than the truth! There, just inside, her face actually touching the glass of the window, and her eight bony knuckles pressed against the bottom of the window-frame, was the wild, staring countenance of Mad Bet.

She wore a grander hat than usual, all decorated with artificial forget-me-nots, in honour of Easter Monday; but as she stretched her thin neck forward to stare at the two ladies this appendage tilted a little sideways, betraying to their astonished eyes the fact that her skull was as smooth and white as an uncracked egg.

The girls had moved towards the window of the taxi — Nell with her trembling hand on Percy's wrist — for Mad Bet was now making obscure signs to them both, while Solly Lew was gazing in melancholy interest at Mrs. Spear's car, when three figures came round the corner from the old house. Crummie was supporting the invalid woman on the left while Sam held her up on the right.

The girls hurried to meet them; as did also the agitated taxi-driver. A look of aggrieved bewilderment crossed Sam's face when he learned of this new complication. It had been an effort to deal with Tittie but this was really too much! However, evidently there was nothing for it but to take Mad Bet along. To thwart her now seemed worse than any agitation later on.

"But surely," protested Nell, "we can't, we *can't* all intrude upon Mrs. Legge! It's too much to expect that anyone could welcome so many complete strangers."

Percy intervened again. "You simply don't know Glastonbury, Nell," she whispered eagerly into Nell's ears while Sam was helping the sick woman into the Ford. "Mother Legge's Easter Monday parties are as fixed a custom as the Lord Mayor's show! The fact that she has a house next door full of bedrooms, with Young Tewsy as door-opener, doesn't prevent her from entertaining all the world in her *own* house. It certainly …"

She was interrupted by Sam, who came hurriedly across the dark cobblestones from the Ford to the taxi, anxious to make a start. "I've got the woman into your car, Mrs. Spear," he said. "She's in great pain and I doubt if she ought to go."

No sooner, however, had he opened the taxi door than Mad Bet came scrambling out of it.

“Where be the other gentleman?” she cried wildly, seizing Sam by the arm. “Where be me sly heart, me high heart, me pretty laddie, me pecking sparrow, me proper dilly-darling? Where be the other gentleman? Thee knows who I do mean, Mr. Sam? The one who did dancy and prancy wi’ Bessie when moon were full? The one who wanted to hurt poor Bessie under thik Tree of Life, on Wirral Hill?”

“You mean Mr. John Crow, Bet?” replied Sam with the grave, punctilious consideration of the faithful naturalist, whose specimens must be treated with respect under all conditions. “Well, jump in here, with me and Mrs. Zoyland and perhaps we’ll find Mr. Crow at Mrs. Legge’s party.”

The two conveyances at last were really in motion; Persephone Spear driving Crummie and Mrs. Petherton in her Ford while Solly Lew took Sam and Nell, along with Mad Bet, in his taxi.

In many quarters of Glastonbury, as six o’clock of this holiday Monday drew near, there were searchings of heart as to who should go, and who should not go, to this famous party in Paradise. It was indeed the fantastic opinion of Mr. Evans that there was a non-moral tradition about this part of Somerset that went back to very old days. He declared that this Easter Monday party was the last surviving relic of some ancient Druidic custom of Religious Prostitution; that there was even something of the kind in the Arthurian days; that the Grail itself was always guarded by virgins who were no virgins; and that Arthur’s sister, the famous Morgan Le Fay, was not much better in her time than old Mrs. Legge today.

Mother Legge never *invited* anyone. Her personal relatives in the town, of whom there were many and who were mostly poorer as well as more respectable than she was, flocked naturally there *en masse.* It thrilled them to observe the manners of the gentry who came and the dresses of the ladies, and though Mother Legge was notoriously stingy over the food, she was fairly liberal — perhaps on general professional grounds — over the drink!

Red Robinson together with his pious mother, the ex-episcopal servant, were among those whose minds were focused on Paradise that afternoon. Red was too poor to go to Weymouth or to Weston-super-Mare for the day as so many of the working men did, for the municipal factory, where he was now employed, was not yet able to compete with the Crow Dye-Works in the amount paid their workers. As soon as she had cleared away their midday meal Mrs. Robinson began talking about Mrs. Legge's party. Not being Glastonbury people, both she and her son were thoroughly puzzled, in fact completely nonplussed, in presence of this social phenomenon. This queer mingling of rich and poor, of respectable and disreputable, at a party given by a person who was — as Percy had told Nell — not very different from a "Madame," was an inexplicable thing to this family from London.

Nor had Mrs. Robinson — so she now explained at some length— "ever met the like of it" in her refined experiences at the great moated palace at Wells.

"Naught 'ud mike me go to see such fantastical doings," Mrs. Robinson announced. "When high've rested meself a bit, high'll take a stroll down 'igh Street; and maybe drop in and 'ave a cup o' tie with Mrs. Cole. If it weren't such an 'ellish-looking die high'd sit on one of them 'igh hiron seats on Wirral and watch the sights. This 'ere new Mayor ought to 'ave a band playing on Wirral 'ill, same as they does at 'abitable towns; towns that 'ave theayters and Pictures and 'ave some loife in 'em!"

"Well, Mother, I reckon I'll be getting a move on," said Red Robinson. "I don't sigh as high'll go to this here fandangle in Paradise any more than you. Reckon high'll 'ave tie out somewheres, if you're 'aving it with Granny Cole."

He got up, took his cap and coat — for the afternoon looked decidedly menacing — nodded to his mother and shogged off.

He made his way to a portion of the town that was on the outskirts of Paradise; and moving rapidly and cautiously down a narrow street into a grim-looking dwelling he paid a visit, not altogether an unexpected visit either, to "that Morgan woman," as the Western Gazette always called her, about whose existence he had been trying to worry Philip Crow.

Red Robinson certainly was, at heart, more of a Jacobin than a Communist. That is to say, his revolutionary feelings did not run in a calm, implacable, patient, scientific groove, but were feverishly eager to hurt and cause suffering to the enemies of the people, whether it benefited the cause or not!

Red Robinson's hatred of Philip Crow was indeed rapidly growing to the dimensions of a monomania. It was gall and wormwood to him to be rebuked by the new Mayor and have these secret activities of his exposed and sidetracked. He did not like, he did not understand, Mr. Geard — and it was only the sheer pressure of economic necessity that drove him to accept a job in this municipal work-shop. It was hateful to find Barter once more his boss. He detested the artistic and mythological aspects of the work he had to do. He distrusted the success of the scheme. Deep in his heart he pined for a job that had no idealistic nonsense about it. What brought him to pay these increasing visits to Mrs. Morgan was an emotion that was on the road to become an urge beyond his control.

He was trying to persuade the mother of little Nelly — who was still in her way a beautiful woman — to give herself up to his lust. "Lust" was the true word for it, for Red Robinson's heart had been monopolised by Crummie; and Crummie since his misunderstanding with her father had grown shy of him.

But it was a velvety lust, an orchid-spotted lust, a dark, delicious, quivering, maddening lust, which surprised the man himself by its intensity. In his heart he had said— “To hell with them all! As long as I stick to Blackie” — for such was Red’s playful and tender nickname for his would-be doxy— “I’ll have one day my chance of bringing the bewger down!” But the maniacal and obsessional element in his design soon began to run away with the practical element. Day and night he told himself stories of what it would be like when he persuaded Jenny Morgan to give herself up to him; and these stories were not of a kind that corresponded to any tenderness for the woman. Unfortunately “the Morgan woman” unless she was drunk loathed Red Robinson. And when she was drunk she melted into tearful sentiment over the memory of her dead husband. There was not a chance — drunk or sober — that the Morgan woman would allow Red to enjoy her in her own little flat. His only chance was to take her out somewhere. And it was with the idea of taking her out to that house next door to Mother Legge’s, rumours of which had excited his cockney lasciviousness, that Red was visiting her today.

He was nervous of the adventure; and it was because he vaguely felt that the general stir of the Easter Monday party would make it natural for him to be taking the woman to that locality, that he chose this afternoon for his attempt.

On reaching her flat Red found that Nelly’s mother was only in the early stage of her habitual intoxication. Chance was in his favour so far, anyway! Red was in a feverish state of anticipation. The idea of satisfying his lust upon the body of Philip Crow’s mistress roused something in him the intensity of which carried him beyond his control and altogether out of his normal depths. Red indeed had brooded so long upon his hatred for Philip and had nourished so passionately the thought of hurting him through his child’s mother, that the idea of enjoying the woman herself — even if she *were* tipsy — made him feel literally sick with excitement. His half-engagement to Crummie Geard, now broken off, he hardly knew why, had tantalised his senses while it kept him comparatively chaste. It was an added spice to his purpose this afternoon that he would be — so in his fury he pretended — revenging himself upon Crummie as well as upon Philip if he could only satisfy his tormented desire with this once-handsome drink-confused creature.

The steady aggravation of his hatred for Philip had indeed so mingled with his lust for Philip’s girl that they formed together a completely new passion for which there is at present no name. As he shaved in the morning, as he went to the little wooden privy in his mother’s back-garden, as he paused in his work at the municipal factory, he would mutter to himself half-aloud— “I ‘ate ’im! I ‘ate ’im! I’ll ‘ave ’er! I’ll ‘ave ’er!”

There can be no doubt that when in his cockney fashion, he used the word “ ‘ate” instead of “hate,” this curious difference between two monosyllabic sounds was not without its own faint psychic repercussion upon his nervous organism. Between the human feeling expressed by the word “hate” and the feeling expressed by the same word without the aspirate there may be little difference; and yet there probably *was* some infinitesimal difference, which a new science — halfway between philology and psychology — may one day elucidate. Some would say that when Red muttered to himself, as he washed, as he shaved, as he excreted, as he worked, as he walked, as he lay down, as he rose up, “I ‘ate ’im, I ‘ate ’im!” what he really focused in his mind was the emotional state — symbolised as a sensation in his lower jaw — indicated by the dictionary word “hate”; but it seems as if this were too simple and easy a solution of the problem.

However this may be, it can be imagined how the man’s heart beat as he stood at last, after a prolonged struggle with the girl — Morgan Nelly’s mother was now only about thirty — at the entrance to the house next door to Mrs. Legge’s!

The woman was of a much darker complexion and much more foreign appearance than her daughter. Her face was colourless and so ravaged by hard work and drink that it had the particular kind of haggardness in the day which moonlight sometimes produces on human faces. The remains of her beauty were like a shattered arch whose sculptured figures have been defaced by wind and sand. Grey eyes, so large as to give at moments almost a grotesque effect, looked forth from her face contemplating the world with melancholy vacancy. Red derived a curious satisfaction from his endearing nickname for her, which he only dared to use to her face when she was in that early favourable stage of inebriation in which he had succeeded in catching her this afternoon. Even then he did not pronounce the word as he was wont to do in his lascivious dreams of possessing her when he would cry out, “Yes, Blackie! Yes, Blackie! Yes, Blackie!” over and over again. He now rapped timidly at the knocker of the door in front of him; for there was no bell.

“High know what’s what, Blackie! You ‘old your noise!”

This courtly quietus was delivered at this point because Blackie — even in her tipsy confusion — began to realise, when she saw herself being stared at by several passers-by, that Mr. Robinson, in his ignorance of local customs, had chosen a most unsuitable hour for their “short time” in this place of resort. After a most uncomfortable period of waiting, the door at last opened a little way; and there stood Young Tewsy in the narrow aperture! The old man let them in without a word, following his habitual manner — that is to say using a sort of soft rapidity and opening the door only just wide enough for them to come in and closing it the very second they were inside.

But once in the hallway where there was nothing to calm Red Robinson's nervousness but a small battered bust of an expressionless human head, standing on a rickety table and bearing the word "Peel" upon its pedestal, Young Tewsy became disconcertingly voluble. He began, in fact, explaining, in a hurried apologetic whisper, "that, since it was Missuses party today, the rooms was all being cleaned, and none was to be 'ad; no, not if Lord P. his own self wanted to take one!"

Blackie stared at Young Tewsy in a bewildered daze; while Red, feeling as he looked at the bust of "Peel" that he would like to spit upon it, experienced such a craving for a room, that any room, large, small, cold, warm, carpeted, uncarpeted seemed a dispensation of providence beyond all mortal hope.

Had the half-tipsy Mrs. Morgan been interested in that delicate nerve-region of the human mind, where philology and psychology merge their margins, it would have been fascinating to her to note the minute ways in which the North London bourgeois cockney of Young Tewsy whose bringing up had been in the metropolis differed from the East London proletarian cockney of Red Robinson; but in place of any such observations, all that this sad, old-young woman of thirty felt, as she listened to the prolonged whispering that now went on between these two men in that gloomy and dingy hallway, was a wave of infinite, unspeakable life-weariness. Morgan Nelly's mother, as her dark eyes turned from the bust of Peel to the patched trousers of Young Tewsy, felt indeed just then a very clear and very definite desire to be dead. When a woman was once safely dead there would be no longer any need for bargainings about a room, in which she might be legally and uninterruptedly subjected to indecent usage.

Blackie had at this juncture, however, one great advantage over both these gentlemen from London. She was Glastonbury-born. Too drunk at first for it to occur to her to make use of this advantage she suddenly began to feel, as she became simultaneously more sober and more disgusted, that nothing would induce her, *nothing*, to spend “a short time” in that house alone with Mr. Robinson. But how to escape? For it was becoming clear that Young Tewsy, softened by the transference of half a crown from the pocket of Red’s holiday trousers to that of his own workhouse trousers, was yielding a little. An inspiration seized her. She turned boldly to Young Tewsy and demanded to be taken at once into the presence of his mistress!

Red’s eyes opened wide. Young Tewsy’s eyes, on the contrary, screwed themselves up into little points of confused amusement. He hesitated for a moment, looking from one to the other.

“The gentleman must wait, then,” he mumbled. “ ‘Ee must wait just where ‘ee his, till I brings yer back ’ere.”

Mr. Robinson’s imagination instantaneously pictured a warm, brightly lit bedroom, free from the intrusion of British Statesmen, and blessed, so to speak, especially for his delectation, by the high priestess of lascivious delights.

“High’ll wait with pleasure,” he cried eagerly, thinking to himself, “She can’t charge more than five shillings.”

“You go with ’im, sweet’eart,” he said, “honely don’t be long!”

There was evidently an entrance from the one house to the other, for Young Tewsy now proceeded to escort the lady up the unpromising flight of stairs which loomed dismally in front of them.

Red Robinson set himself to wait.

He waited excitedly for ten minutes, hopefully for ten minutes, patiently for a quarter of an hour. Then he began to experience extreme dismay. He cautiously ascended the dismal stairs to the first landing.

Here he found an uncurtained window, looking out, across the slums of Glastonbury, towards the eastern horizon. It was an extremely gloomy evening; but the background of the view now angrily stared at by Mr. Robinson was filled by the massive and noble up-rising of St. John’s Tower. And Red Robinson set himself to curse this tower. He cursed the men who made it, who prayed under it, who rang the bells. He cursed the imaginary God it rose up there, so massive and so square, to greet in those gloomy menacing heavens. He cursed its rich architecture and the richer Abbots who designed it. He cursed its buttresses, its crochets, its arches, its pinnacles, its finicals!

Could the ghost of a mediaeval builder, with a wicked eye for wild grotesques, have stripped Mr. Robinson then and there of his cockney clothes he would have found him in a state of furious phallic excitement. His frustrated enjoyment of Blackie ran and seethed and fermented through every vein. The image of his grand enemy, Philip Crow, mocked him from St. John’s Tower. The feelings that found their human expression in the monosyllable “ ‘ate” frothed and foamed like an acid poured out upon the stonework of St. John’s Tower. “St. John the Baptist!” he thought. “ ‘Ow I ‘ate them! I ‘ate them all like ‘ell!”

The peculiar mingling of his hate for Philip and his insatiable lust for Philip’s girl stiffened and tightened as he stood at that dingy window till they became a demonic entity. No gargoyle on any gothic tower, certainly not on the tower he was gazing at, equalled in contorted malice, intertwisted with the fury of lust, this psychic demon concealed under the neat holiday clothes of Mr. Robinson. He felt as if the passion that filled him might at any moment rend his clothes, crack open his brittle body, and shoot forth over the roofs of Paradise towards that hateful tower! He swept all

Glastonbury, all its past, all its future, into the foursquare erection that was thickening and darkening there before him against the sombre east.

He imagined himself as the leader of a wild mob of men occupied in destroying with hammers and mallets every old building in the " 'ateful" place.

Then he would blot it out! He would plough up the ground where it had been, and sprinkle it with ashes. He remembered from early lessons in his London board-school that something of this kind used to be done to offensive cities. And this is what *he* would do! Raze it flat. Plough up its earth. Sprinkle it with ashes. Those old peoples knew a thing or two; *they* did!

When he had reduced the place to a heap of ploughed-up earth, when he had sprinkled that earth with ashes — with ashes from all the filthy buckets in his mother's alley — then he would enjoy Blackie in the best room of the Pilgrim's Inn. Then he would cry "Yes, Blackie!" and Blackie would cry, "I loves yer better than 'im, yer 'andsome hangry man!"

Mr. Robinson must have remained for at least twenty minutes at this window, on the first landing of Mother Legge's "next door."

His imaginative orgy was interrupted by the voice of Young Tewsy from the hall below.

"Mister! Be 'ee here, Mister? Where be 'ee, Mister?"

In his surprise at finding no man where he had left a very impatient man, in that house of "rooms" for the delights of men, Young Tewsy forgot his manners — that is to say he forgot his North London accent — and relapsed into his acquired Somersetshire, the language of his long residence in Glastonbury.

"Dang yer! Where be 'ee hiding then? This baint a railway station!"

Red Robinson came hastily downstairs.

"Thee's 'ooman be biding along wi' Missus for thik party, Mister," said Young Tewsy. Thus speaking he moved to the door leading into the street and held it ajar, glancing furtively out to make sure there was no one at the next entrance.

It became evident to Mr. Robinson that he was being politely but firmly ushered forth into a "roomless" world.

" 'Asn't she arst for me? Hain't *high* hinvited, yer blimey hold idiot!"

"I was to tell 'ee, Sir," said Young Tewsy with dignity and reserve, but with a glittering eye, "that they ladies will send for 'ee when they do want 'ee!"

Thus speaking he continued to hold the door open, opening it just wide enough for the passage of a single gentleman whose shoulders were not very broad.

"Give me back that 'alf crown then, you old blighter, and don't you dare to snigger at people who mean no 'arm … or one of these 'ere days somebody'll knock your grinning phiz into bloody beeswax!"

Mr. Robinson's anger was like water beginning to drip from a paper bag. It began with trickling drops— "give me back that half a crown" — it went on with a squirted thin jet of wrath— "snigger at people who mean no 'arm" — and then the paper bag burst outright.

Young Tewsy threw the door open wide. This was the only reprisal that he indulged in, though it was more of a retort than Mr. Robinson realised; for in all his experience as a Cyprian doorkeeper, Young Tewsy had only once before done this; and that was when he ushered out Mr. Wollop's father, that disreputable old haberdasher.

"Out with you, Sir," said Young Tewsy laconically. "Out with you!"

There was nothing else indeed that Mr. Robinson could do but go out. But as he went out he gave the ex-inmate of Wells Workhouse one glance of so much fury that the old man jerked himself backward as if he had received a villainous blow.

Red Robinson walked down the street without looking back. “High’ll make you pay for this! High’ll make you pay for this, my fine bitch!”

But the unfortunate man had now to decide where he would get his tea and how he would spend his evening. He decided to go and see if Sally Jones was at home. Mrs. Jones, he knew, admired him; and there was a pallid pleasure in certain innocent liberties that Sally sometimes permitted. He had received the sort of affront that makes a person’s own society for the next few hours extremely distasteful and so he hurriedly directed his steps towards the Jones ménage, much as a badly bitten tom-cat returns sulkily to the familiar wainscot of his habitual mousehunting.

But he found no one at home except Jackie Jones, who had already had his tea and was gravely studying his geography book at the kitchen table.

“What be a estuary, Red?” enquired Jackie after Robinson had waited there for an hour, hoping against hope for the return of the widow and her daughter.

“Hestuary?” the man repeated. “Hestuary did you say?” He went to the door, opened it, and looked out. “Hestuary,” he announced to the empty alley, “I hain’t got no one!”

Mrs. Legge’s hospitality was both large and varied. Tittie Petherton who was in considerable pain, but not so acute as to make it necessary that she should leave the assembly, sat in an arm-chair by the fire with one of Mrs. Legge’s best rugs over her knees. Here she struggled to suppress her groans and enjoy this memorable occasion.

Mad Bet was behaving with wonderful self-restraint, due entirely to the presence of John Crow, who not only talked to her a good deal; but talked to her more than anyone else in the room.

After the departure of Mr. Robinson from “me little place next door,” which was Mrs. Legge’s polite name for her Temple of Venus, Young Tewsy locked and bolted this dubious annex and returned to the main dwelling to help wait on his mistresses’ guests. All the rooms on the ground floor of this house — the biggest as well as the oldest in Paradise — were crowded with people; and it would have been a significant discrimination among the old residents of Glastonbury to note just who *were* the persons who came.

Mother Legge was, as has been remarked, liberal in drinks but stingy in food. Even the drinks, however, were limited to whiskey and gin and to a concoction of the lady’s own which she called Bridgewater Punch; among the ingredients of which the particular kind of fiery rum used by sailors was most in evidence.

Sam Dekker, actuated by what in his single-hearted simplicity, he regarded as the proper attitude for a neophyte in sanctity, did his utmost to interest Nell Zoyland and Crummie Geard in each other’s personalities. This would have been more difficult — for Nell’s mind was still stunned by the change in him and still preoccupied by the certainty that she *was,* whatever anyone said about it, really with child — if Crummie hadn’t been such an exceptionally good-hearted girl. Crummie caught the secret of her rival’s sadness with a psychic penetration almost worthy of her father and “laid herself out” to be sweet to her. And when Crummie did this there were few women — as there were certainly no men — who could resist her coaxing ways.

Thus Sam’s simple mind was eminently gratified, as if he had achieved this consummation by something akin to a miracle, when he saw the two girls seated at last side by side munching Osborne biscuits and sipping with wry faces the famous Bridgewater Punch, as if they were old friends.

Mother Legge herself, too portly to do much service with her great silver trays, soon settled herself comfortably in an armchair, opposite poor Tittie, from which position of sovereignty she received such obeisance as her dignity, and, it must be confessed, too, her Rabelaisian tongue spontaneously exacted.

She was a vast, dusky, double-chinned mountain of a woman, with astute, little grey eyes; eyes that seemed rather to aim at *not* seeing what she wanted to avoid, than at seeing what she wanted to see. Attracted by both John Crow and Mr. Evans, it was Mother Legge's desire to have both these men at her side. Being the hostess, however, and both these men being occupied with a lady, Mr. Evans with Cordelia and John with Mad Bet, it was some time before Mother Legge obtained her wish. But she got it at last and she got it finally so completely that John was caught on a big footstool between her right elbow and the fire, while Mr. Evans was pilloried on a high-backed chair on her left hand with his profile to the fire.

A fire — and you may be sure that this old sorceress knew this well — is a sure magnet for the magnetism of excitable men, and a sure sedative for the nerves of cantankerous men; and now, with the fire as a second or super-female to give her aid, Mother Legge had her own way with her favourite guests.

All the lights, in the reception room of this huge Priestess of Immorality, hung from the ceiling in the shape of two colossal, cut-glass candelabra, burning gas within enormous figured globes from beneath which hung the heaviest festoons of prismatic pendants that John had ever seen. Squinnying cautiously round the room at those moments when his portentous capturer — who resembled a gigantic Gargamelle seeking information from Ponocrates — was engaged with Mr. Evans, John took occasion to observe that there was nothing in this high-ceilinged chamber which jarred upon his nature except the physical contortions of the poor woman opposite him as her pain, intensified by her inability to move from where she had been placed, grew upon her. These twitchings under that rug, these spasms across that emaciated face, he *did* find it hard to bear, though no one else except Crummie, who now and then got up and went across to her, seemed conscious of her sufferings.

Sam had left the apartment now, feeling it incumbent upon him to be where he least liked to be, namely among the *petit-bourgeois* of the gathering, who were consuming tea and bread and jam at the tables with tablecloths, in the other two rooms.

The sight of Sam's self-conscious unselfishness would have fretted John's heathen mind as much as the tablecloths would have done and the homely tea-drinkers. Here in this great chamber, so brilliantly lit by the flashing candelabra every person and every object seemed to fall into a delicious harmony.

He had drunk enough Bridgewater Punch already to be feeling exceptionally serene and as he watched Nell Zoyland and Crummie, Percy and Blackie, Mr. Wollop and Cordelia, Dave Spear — who to Percy's astonishment had just drifted in — talking to Mad Bet, and Tom Barter who was now lost in a deep colloquy with a pretty waitress from the Pilgrims', the whole scene swam and shimmered before him in an incredible luxury of significance. People and objects as John now looked at them seemed transferred from the confused dynamic scramble of life into something just beneath life; something that was there all the time, but that needed a few glasses of Bridgewater Punch to enable it to steal silently forth and show itself as the eternal essence.

This old house of Mrs. Legge's had belonged in former times, before Paradise was overbuilt, to a famous West-Country family called Camel.

Certain portions of it were older still and associated with that Richard Atwelle who is buried in St. John's Church and of whom it is said: "This Atwelle did much cost in this church and gave fair Housing that he had builded in the Towne onto it." What the grave shades of these old Camels and still older Atwelles would have felt if they could have seen the present company, who can tell? It did not even occur to John Crow, as he hugged his knees on that footstool by the fire or sipped his punch from a glass placed in the polished fender at his side, to wonder what the future denizens of this spacious room, Comrades perhaps of the Glastonbury Commune, would feel if they could look back upon the existing scene!

On John's left, behind his hostess and Mr. Evans, were two high windows, covered now by heavy black curtains that fell from great wooden curtain-rods painted red.

Similar curtains hung over the doorway; but these were now partly drawn.

All round the walls were rough, crudely painted oil pictures of the ancient Recorders of Glastonbury, an office which eventually gave place to that of Mayor. These old worthies now looked down upon this motley assembly with that ineffable complacence which the passing of time combined with crude and faded oil-pigments alone can give.

But their presence gave a touch that was required; as did also the mouldering dark-brown wallpaper, a relic from the days of the Camels; and the black frames out of which these burgesses stared; and the big bare mahogany table in the centre of the room.

As John glanced dreamily into their faces they seemed to look back upon him with a look that said— "When a Glastonbury Recorder dies he passes into a land where men of solid worth are permitted to despise the vulgar, without qualm of conscience or rebuke of priest!"

Thus did old Peter King, whose uncle was John Locke, the philosopher, thus did Fortescue Tuberville, thus did Edward Phellips, Davidge Gould, Henry Bosanquet, Edmund Griffiths and William Dickinson, look down upon John Crow; and it seemed to John as if there were some residual secret of human experience that this particular group of human beings, these living, and those dead, could reveal, if only with one mysteriously wide mouth, like the mouth of some great, wise, pontifical salmon from the River Severn — a veritable Recorder among fishes — they could utter the word! It would, John felt, be a word that allowed for human imperfection, proceeded from human imperfection; yes, and even *exacted* human imperfection. It would be a clue that exacted meanness, weakness, pettiness, ordinariness, conceit, vanity, complacency, commonplaceness, mediocrity, conventionality, smugness, hypocrisy; before the full significance of human life could emerge.

John wondered to himself for a moment to whom in all this gathering of people he could speak about this inspiration of his — this revelation as to the value of inconsistency, complacency, weakness, silliness, conceit — which he now derived from the contemplation of Mother Legge's guests, both living and dead; and he decided that the only one who would understand him would be Mad Bet.

"I must go over to her in a minute," he thought. "She won't be able to stand Cousin Dave's discourses much longer. How her eyes do stare at me! I must go over and tell her what I've just thought before I forget it. Damn! It's going … it's gone! What *was* it? Could it have been that laziness, self-satisfaction, self-deception, — stupidity even — are *necessary* if life is to be grasped in its essence? That sounds quite silly. How her eyes do stare at me!"

He turned his own eyes appealingly to those old Recorders, each one of whom had been collected for Mrs. Legge with patient labour by Number Two. "Recorders of Glastonbury!" he thought. "Is it my destiny to learn the secret of the mystic value of the commonplace from you? No — it can't have been *just* that. It *was* damned near it, though."

His erratic mind now found itself dallying with the monstrous thought of what it would be like to embrace a woman as old and hideous as Mad Bet! He felt a certain surprise because this thought — so queerly were his nerves adjusted — did not cause him any terrible shrinking. Was that because he was congenitally more attracted to men than women? "Is the way I make love to Mary," he thought, "a sign that I am all the time half-thinking of her as a boy?"

"Evans!" he suddenly said aloud, addressing his friend and jerking his stool forward a little so as to see that grotesque Roman profile of the Welshman. "Evans! Do you think it would be possible to make love to a woman who was — I beg your pardon Mrs. Legge, I interrupted you, I'm afraid."

Mrs. Legge stretched out a small plump hand and with a gesture as royal as Queen Victoria herself patted John's shoulder. "Aye, what's that, young man?" she chuckled amiably in her thick throat.

"I was asking Mr. Evans," reiterated John shamelessly, "whether he thought it was possible to make love to a person who was perfectly hideous."

"You don't mean *here*?" purred the preposterous lady, tapping her bosom, which resembled Glastonbury Tor, except that in place of the tower, it held aloft a big golden brooch, with the tips of her fingers. "You mustn't encourage my astrologer to make fun of his old woman in her own house."

Mr. Evans' countenance as he now turned it towards John showed no distaste at being called Mrs. Legge's astrologer. It was animated by a rush of all the learned and recondite folklore that John's question summed up.

"There is a profound esoteric doctrine, Crow," he said solemnly, "in what you've just remarked. Our old Cymric poetry is full of references to it. Ceridwen herself, the Welsh Demeter, appeared frequently in an unpleasing shape; and in the History of the Grail it is recorded again and again that the Grail-Messenger was of striking ugliness. Ugliness seems indeed to have been one of the most common disguises of that Feminine Principle in Nature which—"

"But Evans, Evans!" interrupted John, "Wasn't it a Phorkyad that Goethe in Faust makes Mephistopheles—"

"Chut! Chut! Man-alive!" cried Mother Legge. "Don't 'ee invocate Mr. Orphanage in me Best Parlour. Such devils, as he be, *may* be ones for liking we when us be frights; but *I* baint asking for their hot hugs yet awhile! What do *you* think of these naughty lads' chatter, Tittie, me poor child?" And she leaned forward out of her big chair raising her voice.

"I can't hear … hear … you … very well, Auntie. Me pains be bad."

"These gentlemen say that there be men what 'ud cosset we," shouted Mother Legge, "when us hadn't a tooth left in our head!"

"You were allus one for your bit o' mischie, Aunt," replied the sick woman with a great effort, fumbling at the rug over her knees with her bony hand, "but 'twould be different if... 'twould be different if—" Her voice died away in a moan of pain. The pain took various shapes in Tittie Petherton's consciousness according to its intensity. What it resembled now was a round black iron ball of a rusty blood-colour, covered with spikes. Tittie herself was hugging this ball to her bosom. When she pressed it, the hurt from those iron spikes was intolerable, but she couldn't see its bloodiness any more, which was the thing that turned her stomach most.

"He says no one is going to be allowed to have anythink to theyselves. Be that true, my precious marrow?"

Mad Bet's shrill voice from her seat by the mahogany table rang through the room. She had stretched out her long arm and was pointing to John. There was a general hush.

"It *is* true," pronounced Dave Spear in a firm resolute voice.

"Let my True-Love speak," cried Mad Bet again. "If He says it's true I'll believe you. But if He says it's a lie, I'll never believe you!"

What made John answer this interrogation as to whether, in a hundred years — for so he worded the question to himself — Glastonbury would be communistic, exactly as he did, was due purely and solely to his idea that it would please Mad Bet! He suspected that Mad Bet must be naturally so hostile to the existing system of society that it would give her immense satisfaction to think of any drastic change.

He also — such was his ridiculously weak nature — disliked the idea, after this formidable silence, of hurting the feelings of Dave Spear who took this matter of Communism in such dead earnest.

Thus he lifted up his head, unclosed his eyes, met the intense stare of the madwoman, who was waiting for his response as though it were the verdict of Heaven, and cried out in a queer, husky voice as if he really *had* been seized with the spirit of prophecy— "*Mr. Spear is right!*"

He had no sooner uttered these words, than above the clamour of loosened tongues from all quarters of the room, there came the unmistakable sound of rain, striking heavily against the windows.

Mother Legge struggled to her feet in a moment.

"Tewsy! Tewsy!" she called out in her most deep-throated tones.

The door-opener of "my other house" came hurrying in from where he was superintending the tea-drinkers.

"Run upstairs and shut the window of the Nursery, Tewsy! I left it wide open."

Mr. Evans and John and Barter and Dave, along with Nell and Percy, were the only persons present who heard the word "Nursery" with surprise. Everyone else knew that it was Mrs. Legge's humour to call her own private little sitting-room upstairs by this familiar name.

The big lady herself now walked to the black curtains and pulled them aside. She pulled also aside a pair of gigantic muslin curtains, yellowish from age, which had been there as long as she had, which had, indeed, been her very first purchase after she leased the house from old Miss Kitty Camel; for, said she, "I can't abide Over-lookers!"

Then she looked forth into the night. Many heads were turned towards her as she stood there, with her broad black back to them all; and there came into the mind of John, who kept his eye on her as he went across to Mad Bet, a queer feeling as if this whole great room, under those glittering suspended lights, were a real nursery and he and all the rest of the company frightened children at a disturbed party, with Something more menacing than ordinary rain beating out there at the window!

The old lady came back into the room.

"Well, it's been coming all day," she said, "and now it's come. It's a good thing it's waited till now, for the holiday."

John thought to himself, "How often must those words, *for the holiday,* have been uttered in Glastonbury houses by comfortable people gathered in snug interiors; people whose whole life was one long 'holiday'!"

She had come back to her "children" now, that old black-backed Mother Goose, and her soothing words "for the holiday," went about the room, like an eiderdown coverlet endowed with soft wings, whispering to everybody — “Your frightened soul can tuck itself in bed again, little one. Mother has sent away that Something, so much more terrifying than the rain, that was coming after you!”

The fantastic notion now entered John’s shameless head that this rich old Procuress, who had arranged so long for the unlawful pleasures of Glastonbury, had in very truth been a kind of mystical Mother — like one of the Mothers in Faust — in driving away fear. There were other “queer sons of chaos” than “Mr. Orphanage”; and no escape from cosmic isolation was more complete than that to which Young Tewsy held the candle!

Mother Legge went out now, doubtless to reassure her guests in the other rooms; and to the accompaniment of what was now torrents of lashing rain the general conversation went on.

The men of the party — and even some of the women — began drinking again now. Young Tewsy brought in a colossal Silver Bowl and placed it on the mahogany table. This turned out to be a much stronger concoction of Bridgewater Punch than the previous jugs had contained.

A very curious incident occurred at this point of the evening’s happenings. At the departure of Mrs. Legge followed by the appearance of this great Silver Bowl a general movement had occurred among the guests. Some of the people in the room left it, others entered it, and many changed their seats, their companions, their mood. Mr. Evans for instance vacated his chair by the old lady’s now empty seat and moved hurriedly into the group gathered about the table. As he came forward he passed the pretty waitress towards whom Tom Barter was carefully steering his way holding the first tumbler that anyone had dared to dip into that Silver Bowl.

Against this tumbler Mr. Evans, pushing frantically forward, clumsily, but as it appeared accidentally, propelled himself, knocking it out of

Barter's fingers. Other hands which, following Barter's example, were now ladling liquor out of the Silver Bowl, paused in their pleasant task when Barter's glass fell, while their owners looked about to see whose drink had been spilt.

Mr. Evans, however, hurried quickly to the Silver Bowl, snatched a mug from the table, scooped up some punch with a sweep of his long arm, and rushing to Cordelia's side pressed it upon her.

"Quick," he cried, panting and agitated, "drink quick!"

But Cordelia, vexed by her friend's impetuosity, instead of doing what he told her handed the mug to Nell, to whom she was talking; and Nell, still too preoccupied with her private thoughts to be alert to what was going on, lifted it heedlessly to her lips. Thus, among all that company, Nell Zoyland was the first to drink from Mother Legge's Silver Bowl.

When Mr. Evans perceived that his rude if not violent haste had been in vain, he left Cordelia as brusquely as he had approached her, and returning to where Barter's glass had been broken, began patiently to help that gentleman in collecting the scattered fragments and placing them on the table.

"I'll finish it — now I've begun," he cried to Barter, from his stooping position upon the floor. "You go and get Miss—"

he paused from ignorance of the waitress' name— "another one. I'm sorry I did it."

Barter gave the Welshman's bent back one of his most vindictive scowls. But he went off to do what the man had bidden him. Blackie, who had been observing this scene from the beginning with her wide grey eyes, now turned to Persephone Spear who alone among these people had been talking to her. "Be that Mrs. Zoyland from out Sedgemoor way?" she murmured softly.

Percy smiled, lifting her dark eyebrows. “Yes, that’s Nell. She’s my husband’s sister.”

“She was the first to drink,” rejoined the other, still in a timid whisper.

“Well?” said Percy still smiling. “Why not?”

“It’s the Camel bowl,” murmured Morgan Nelly’s mother. “Mrs. Legge bought it from old Miss Kitty. It’s from the Abbot’s Kitchen they do tell. ’Twas what they old Popish Monks did drink from, afore King Harry’s time.”

“How did Miss Camel get it?” enquired Percy, relieved to see that her husband was deep in conversation with John Crow, while Mad Bet, from her seat at the table which she seemed afraid of leaving, watched the latter’s face with doglike attention.

“Her were descended from they wold Papists,” whispered Blackie. “There be wondrous witchcraft in thik Silver Bowl. I do know, for I’ve done charwork in this here house since I were a young maid.”

Cordelia meanwhile had left Nell’s side and had taken her seat by Mr. Wollop whose experiences as a youth in dealing with his disreputable parent had made him careful to avoid the contents of the Silver Bowl.

“The rain is spitting in the fire,” said the ex-Mayor.

“I thought I heard a funny noise just now,” said Cordelia.

“Is your Dad here tonight?” said Mr. Wollop.

Cordelia glanced anxiously at the sick woman by the fire, at whose knees Crummie was now standing, bending over her.

“Not yet,” she answered, “but I hope he’ll come in soon. Mrs. Petherton’s getting worse.”

“I’ve a’heard about how he can cure folk by laying of his hands on ’em, your Dad.” Mr. Wollop sighed lightly. “Never cured no one in all me life,” he went on, “so I reckon I weren’t the Mayor he be. But I took a interest in the people of this town, rich and poor alike … no distinction! … and they knowed it too."

"I'm *sure* they knew it, Mr. Wollop," said Cordelia kindly, soothing the fallen official, as she might have soothed a deposed king.

Mr. Wollop looked extremely gratified. "They knew it, me dear. They knew it," he muttered, stretching out his arm for an anchovy-paste sandwich, snapping a neat bite out of it with his white false teeth, and then holding it in his finger and thumb like the picture of the Hatter in *Alice.*

"Oh, me God take pity on me! Oh, me God take pity on me!"

Tittie Petherton, with Crummie by her side, was twisting and moaning in a manner that was distressing to see and hear.

"Haven't no one got any o' they pellets handy," whispered Mr. Wollop, "what has mercy and pity in 'un?" He looked closely at the scene by the fire. "Sister's skirt was never bought at me shop," he remarked gravely.

"Crummie told me she's given her already every one of the morphia tablets Nurse left," said Cordelia. "Oh, I wish Father would come!"

"I wish he would come too," echoed Mr. Wollop. " 'Twould be a wondrous sight, with this rain spitting down chimney, to see your Dad stop this poor woman's groans."

Cordelia had an intelligence that was accustomed to wander more than most minds, among the mysteries of life; but she never included her father among these mysteries. For some reason she took her father for granted on the lowest possible level. It seemed, in some way, quite an ordinary thing when her father stopped Mrs. Petherton's cancer from hurting; though if Mr. Evans had done it it would have seemed wonderful.

Barter and the waitress were all this time growing steadily more affectionate and confidential. He had got her to himself at a little table now at the side of the room opposite the windows under the portrait of the seventeenth-century Recorder who was the nephew of John Locke. To this table he kept bringing fresh supplies of Bridgewater Punch and the flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes of Clarissa Smith were an evidence of his success. He had already ascertained the exact amount of her salary, of the income of her father, a taxi-driver in Dorchester, of the expense she had been betrayed into this Easter "over at Wollop's" in the little matter of underclothes and stockings, and even of what she had had to pay for her shoes last Christmas.

He had now reached the stage — his second stage in the process of seduction — of telling her fortune by the lines in her warm palm. It was becoming clear that poor Tossie Stickles, now under ecclesiastical and domestic protection, need not have worried about her gentleman's lack of feminine support. With Tossie rendered *hors-de-combat* it had become the turn of Clarissa. A new girl was a new world to Mr. Barter and his sluggish East Anglian senses stirred in their fen-peat depths, like great crocodiles heaving up out of sun-baked mud, to meet this new world.

The fact that novelty was so irresistible to him in these matters was a proof of something essentially stupid in his nature. It is one of the psychological mistakes that the world makes, to assume that a man whose inclination drives him on to attempt seduction after seduction is a man of more ardent erotic passion than the more constant lover. The very reverse is the case.

The most absorbing and distracting, the most delicately satisfying, of all lovers for a girl, are neither the thick-witted novelty-hunters, nor the sour puritans. They are the vicious monogamists! Such indeed are the triumphant Accomplices of Life; and when you see the pleasures of unsated and natural lust carried on between two elderly people — as, owing to Bloody Johnny's occult wisdom, they were carried on between Mr. and Mrs. Geard — you see a checkmating of Thanatos by Eros such as makes Mr. Barter's brutal approaches and Miss Clarissa's silly yieldings as commonplace as they are uneventful.

"You should hear what the girls down at our place do say about what you rich gentlemen do in this house," giggled Clarissa.

"I must say I think you Glastonbury young ladies haven't much to learn," responded Mr. Barter, whose experience had taught him the exactly correct tone to take.

"They do say that this house be called Camelot," said the girl, drawing back her hand from across the table but grudging in her heart that the conversation — even though she had led it astray herself — should have wandered from her good heart line and promising fate line.

"I didn't know that," said Mr. Barter. "There! Finish up your glass and I'll get you some more. No, I didn't know that. I come from London, you know."

For two reasons did he tell this lie; first because he knew that the word London always had a glamour for provincial young ladies, but secondly because the deepest thing in his nature being his feeling for Norfolk he never referred to it, with any of his light-of-loves, any more than he referred to his passion for airplanes.

If Barter had put the imagination into his love-making that he put into these two integral passions the gross stimulus of novelty would have been less important to him.

"I suppose," said Clarissa Smith sententiously, dropping her Dorset accent to impress her educated admirer, "that in the Dark Ages you gentlemen did what you like with us poor girls."

"I hate the name Camelot," said Mr. Barter; and for a second, even in the salt-tide of his rising lechery, he longed to pour out his feelings to Mary

Crow. How that rain beat on the windows! It must be a wild night outside.

Clarissa didn’t like the change in his voice or the change — momentary though it was — in the expression of his face. She toyed with the sham pearls that adorned her plump white neck and her melting brown eyes wandered to the moaning figure by the fire. “They oughtn’t to bring sick people to parties,” she thought.

“I suppose in them days,” she remarked, the Dorchester accent slipping back, “Camelot was a place where a quiet girl dursn’t show her face.”

“Have you lived here long?” Persephone Spear was saying just then to Blackie Morgan.

“Born here, Mrs. Spear, and me mother before me. Father came from Wales.”

“How soon do a mother’s thoughts begin to influence her child?” thought Nell Zoyland as she listened with sweet attention to what Mr. Evans was now saying to Cordelia.

Cordelia thought she had never met such a nice, unassuming lady as Mrs. Zoyland. It flattered her profoundly to watch the tender interest with which, considering how little she knew either of them, she was now listening to Owen’s words.

Mr. Evans himself had almost forgiven her for being the first to drink from the Silver Bowl!

“What is going to happen to me? Oh, what is going to happen to me and Sam’s child?” Nell thought. “Oh, I wish it wouldn’t rain so hard. It gets on my nerves the way it sounds. I must ask Percy soon what we’d better do if it goes on like this. But I mustn’t fuss and get silly! From now on, till Sam’s child is born, I must be calm and sensible about everything. I wonder why Sam doesn’t come and talk to me.”

The noise of the rain seemed now to be steadily increasing in that room of glittering lights and black curtains. Nor was it only Nell Zoyland who felt aware of it as something coming upon them all from outside — from *far* outside — coming over the wide-drenched moors, over the hissing muddy ditches, over the sobbing reeds, over the salt-marshes; coming from somewhere unearthly, somewhere beyond the natural!

There was a curious instinctive movement in that big room as if all those who were present were seeking to get reassurance from one another and to gather closer together. There was more drinking too. Cups and glasses were dipped again and again in the great Silver Bowl; and the voices rose and rose, as that little group of human consciousnesses — arguing, reproaching, challenging, jesting, sneering, accusing — sought in some subconscious way to outbrave a Presence which they all felt pressing in upon them from that unearthly "outside." Mr. Evans had moved away now from Cordelia and Nell. A strange restlessness had come upon him. He began walking up and down beneath the pictures of the Recorders.

"To let it all go," he thought, "to go home now through the rain and go down those stairs and read that book! Yes, yes, yes, yes, to read that passage, *that* page, which I've avoided since I first found it … to look at *that* picture … to tell myself that story … to remember …"

He stood still, his eyes on the crossed legs of one of the complacent Recorders. And it was allowed to him as he stared at those silver-buckled shoes, so crudely painted, to travel with the speed of lightning along the road that he would have to follow if he did begin all that again. He *became* the terrible craving, he *became* the thing he was doing, he *became* the itch, the bite, the sting, the torment, the horror, he *became* the loathing that refused to stop doing what it loathed to do. He *became* the shapeless mouth that —

Human thoughts, those mysterious projections from the creative nuclei of living organisms, have a way of radiating from the brain that gives them birth. Such emanations, composed of ethereal vibrations, take invisible shapes and forms as they float forth. Thus to any supermaterial eye, endowed with psychic perception, the atmosphere of Mrs. Legge's front parlour that night must have been a strange scene. The secret thoughts of her guests rose and floated, hovered and wavered, formed and reformed, under those glittering candelabra, making as it were a second party, a gathering of thought-shapes, that would remain when all these people had left the room. All thought-eidola are not of the same consistency or of the same endurance. It is the amount of life-energy thrown into them that makes the difference. Some are barely out of the body before they fade away. Others — and this is the cause of many ghostly phenomena — survive long after the organisms that projected them is buried in the earth.

All the while Tom Barter was progressing so prosperously with his seduction of the brown-eyed, white-throated Clarissa, the remorseful thought of himself as the traitor to his late employer took the shape of a shadowy creature bent double under a swollen load, from beneath which its lamentable eyes strained upward, tugging at the strings that held them in their sockets.

Meanwhile Persephone Spear was projecting from her graceful body, whose provocative outward form was at this moment interesting but not exciting the senses of Mr. Wollop as he sat placid and content at the mahogany table, a very queer homuncula of desperation.

"I hate all men," she had kept thinking to herself, "all, all, all! I have found that out *now!* I thought it was because Dave was just Dave that I drew back from him. I thought that if I let Philip take me some new feeling would be born in me. But it *hasn't* been born. I hate the way men are *made*!

I knew it when I first saw Dave naked and now — since yesterday at that inn in Taunton; which was worse, far worse, when Philip — Oh, what shall I do? Where shall I go? Why was I born in this world at all? I want to love, I want to love, but there's no one!"

The moans of Tittie Petherton as she hugged to her tortured entrails those iron spikes of that round globe of pain which was all that *she* could think of — though a hideous reproduction of that engine hung in the air above her for eyes that could see it — had now become so dominant in that room that conversation began to lapse.

"Can't anything be done to ease her?" said John to Dave Spear.

"I'll go and fetch Dekker," replied the practical Communist. "He brought her here. He'd better take her home."

With these words the fair young man hurried away. "Dekker!" John could hear him calling. "Dekker! Dekker!"

John turned to Cordelia. "Have you *ever* heard such rain?" he said. "I'm afraid the Mayor won't come at all on such a night. I think one or other of us ought to call a taxi and take that woman straight to the hospital."

Cordelia looked at him contemptuously. She often felt as if her father had never shown his inherent stupidity more clearly than in his choice of this grotesque individual with a St. Vitus dance in his cheek and the look of a deboshed actor. "I don't believe he ever has a bath either," she said to herself.

There came over Cordelia at that moment a blind physical wave of hatred for John Crow.

"I don't like the way he smells," she thought.

Nothing would have amused John himself more than this particular reaction of Cordelia's. To most human persons a physical repulsion on the part of another to so intimate a thing as *the smell of their skin* would have been an insult never forgiven. But the consciousness of John Crow was so loosely attached to his bodily frame that he would have been capable of meekly retiring from Cordelia's bed — had she been his mistress — and sprinkling himself with Attar of Roses, if it pleased her, without bearing her the least grudge.

"I like my cousin Dave, don't you?" was all he said now. "He's the only really unselfish person I've ever met. And yet, I suppose, if it brought his Communistic State a year nearer, he'd have us all shot tonight without the flicker of an eyelid."

A terrible moan from the woman by the fire interrupted them and they both caught a tearful, helpless appeal in Crummie's eyes as she turned from her patient.

"The hospital—" began John; but Cordelia cut him short.

"She won't go," she said. "They tried it once. They'd have to make her unconscious first."

"I understand exactly what she feels," said John. "I'd much sooner plague everyone with my death-cries — God! I'd *like* to plague 'em with 'em — than go to any of those places. Hospitals, prisons, workhouses — *Mon Dieu!* They make me shudder."

Cordelia thought to herself, " 'That's *just* what a jail-bird like you *would* think. You ought to leave Father's service and be employed by Mrs. Legge along with Young Tewsy!"

John went over to Tittie's side. "Christ! My dear, can't we do anything to stop this?" he whispered to Crummie.

Mad Bet had been watching every movement of John's all the evening from her seat at the table. Mr. Wollop was addressing a few friendly words to her now; but she seemed unable to hear him. She now cried out to John so loudly that everyone stopped talking.

"Why don't 'ee pray to thik Tree o' Life, my king, what us two do know of? If you'd 'a thought 'o praying before, Mr. Geard mid come before!"

In a moment of respite from her pain, and arrested by the silence and by the madwoman's voice, Tittie herself spoke now. "It's began to rain," she said in a dull flat voice.

John stared into the fire across Tittie's fidgety knees. "Bet's right," he thought. "It's absurd that in all this company not a soul has thought of praying. Young Dekker, who is out for living a saintly life, doesn't believe in anything to pray to. God! What we want here is someone to really *pray,* then perhaps old Geard will hurry up and come."

And with his face still towards the fire John dropped down surreptitiously upon one knee. "In Glastonbury," he thought, "it would seem popery or paganism to be caught really kneeling if you aren't in church."

And John secretly prayed in his heart that Mr. Geard might appear during the next five minutes. He prayed to his dead parent, exactly as he had done on his terrible walk to Stonehenge, when Mr. Evans had been sent to his rescue.

Mrs. Legge, accompanied by Sam Dekker and Dave Spear and several other people, now came into the room; but the general attention was distracted from their entrance by Mad Bet who suddenly rose to her feet.

John noticed that Mr. Evans was standing against the wall under one of the Recorders. John had just time to think to himself, after his fashion, "Evans looks as if he were standing against a hedge," when Mad Bet stretched out both her arms towards Mr. Evans and uttered a piercing cry.

Evans himself swung round, his teeth chattering.

"What has he done to that thing? Oh, what has he done to it?" screamed Mad Bet. "Stop him! Stop him! It's too much! Stop him, you people! He's doing it again! Stop him! Can't you stop him?"

The woman’s hands were pointing, and her eyes were fixed, at a spot about a yard above Mr. Evans’ head.

The shock of her words brought Mr. Evans back to his normal frame of mind. He came hurriedly towards the excited woman, mumbling as he did so something in Welsh. He did not stop till he was close up to her, where she had been pulled down to her seat by Cordelia and Mr. Wollop.

He came up to her like a penitential monk approaching his superior for punishment.

The madwoman shrunk away from him at first, trying to free her arms from those of Cordelia, who was holding her tight, as if afraid she would do something violent.

But Mr. Evans, who kept on mumbling in Welsh, set her free from Cordelia’s hold, and as soon as she felt herself free she stopped shrinking away from him.

“It’s not … it’s not,” whispered Mr. Evans to Mad Bet, so that no one heard him but Mr. Wollop and Cordelia. “It’s my devil who does it … but I’m going to drive him out … on Midsummer Day … you shall see … you shall be there … you shall see him driven out … he will never …”

Once more he began mumbling something hurriedly in Welsh.

Then Mad Bet did a very queer thing. She snatched off her black hat from her bald head and stretching out her arms seized Mr. Evans round the neck and drew his head down towards her own. No one but Cordelia and Mr. Wollop saw what happened; but Mr. Wollop’s eyes opened as wide as Bert Cole’s would have done when he beheld Mr. Evans’ great Roman nose pressing against that horrible white rondure and his twisted mouth kissing it.

“The Grail Messenger!” thought Mr. Evans as he straightened his back and helped Mad Bet to straighten her hat and replace it on her head.

"Tewsy!" It was the voice of Mother Legge who had hardly entered the room than she was once more standing at the window. "Tewsy! Go to the front door, there's someone coming."

There had been a general movement meanwhile towards the group that surrounded Mad Bet. Something in the human mind leaps up with rapturous release when some outrageous event is occurring. Most men live but a half-life, dull, tame, monotonous. The occurrence of something that is outrageously startling, upsetting to all proprieties, to all conventions, stirs such people with a primordial satisfaction. The submerged Cro-Magnon in them, or at least the submerged Neolithic man, swims up in them like a rising diver from the bottom of the atavistic sea and they rush forward, or steal forward, towards the spot where the forbidden thing is occurring.

Once more as John watched the broad back of his hostess standing at the window, while with her plump hands, each of which had a wedding ring upon it, she held the black and white curtains apart, he got the feeling that she was protecting a nursery of naughty children from some monstrous invasion … from some unearthly "questing Beast" whose featureless face made of decomposing stuff of darkness was even now pressing against the window.

"It is a wet night," remarked Mr. Wollop to Cordelia; but Cordelia was desperately trying to remember what it was when she was along on Chalice Hill before the rain caught her by the giant oaks, that had made her feel so strong to deal with Mr. Evans. But as she watched him now seated at the mahogany table with an immobile face, like the very face upon that biblical "Penny" that made Christ utter the words— "Render unto Caesar" — she began to question whether it were in her power to help him. "He has got something serious on his conscience," she thought, "or he has got some mania that I can’t understand. Why did he do that to Betsy just now? It was horrible to see him.”

“Yes,” she responded aloud to Mr. Wollop’s mild remark, “but it’s because people aren’t talking so loud that we hear it now. Everyone seems whispering as if something were going to happen. I hope that miserable woman isn’t going to die.”

“She’s kicked off her nice rug,” remarked the ex-Mayor reproachfully.

“Yes,” Dave Spear replied to a question of Barter who had just appeared at the mahogany table to re-fill Clarissa’s glass from Miss Camel’s Silver Bowl, “Yes, my wife and I have received word from Bristol that we’d better stay till June at any rate if we can’t get them to strike till then.”

Mr. Barter felt one of the most grievous pangs of self-reproach that he had ever known when he heard this calm declaration. What a Judas to Philip he had been! Oh, he should never have let these contemptible Somersetshire workmen get so out of hand! What *would* he do without him? And what was *he* doing? Making toys! While a real industry like those Dye-Works was being threatened. Aye! He would like to be flying through this wild rain *now,* with his fingers on the control, heading for Glastonbury from Wookey, through the liquid darkness. Bah! What jumpy idiots these Glastonbury fools were. What the devil— “I can’t bear it! Oh, my God!” Tittie’s voice was hardly the voice of a human being. The iron ball with spikes had changed its shape …

Young Tewsy’s voice rang out so quickly after the woman’s cry as to seem a portion of the same litany of chaos.

“His Worship, the Mayor, Madame!”

Mr. Geard did not stop to take off his dripping overcoat. He pushed Mrs. Legge aside as if she had been a feather’s weight. Everyone stared at him now as shamelessly as did his predecessor in office. The very Recorders on the wall seemed staring at him.

And well they might be!

The heavily built man in his dripping clothes was now pushing his way through them, bent double, and with his hands pressed against his great belly. “Oh, my God! Oh, my God!” he was groaning out, as he stumbled forward.

The man’s whole body seemed undergoing some sort of convulsion. Blindly he stumbled against the mahogany table. The Silver Bowl seemed to catch his attention. He caught it up as he passed. Mr. Barter, who had just dipped Clarissa’s glass in it, drew back hurriedly, spilling the liquor he held.

“Let this cup—” howled Mr. Geard in a tone that made even Mr. Wollop shiver, for it seemed more like the bark of a great Sedgemoor fox than the voice of a man; and even as he cried he flung the thing with all his force upon the ground, flung it just at Crummie’s feet, who was running, laughing and weeping, in wild hysterics towards him. When he reached Tittie, whose voice had now sunk again into moans, he snatched her up in his arms, as a fireman in a whirl of flame might seize a burning woman, sank down in the chair with her on his lap, and began, in his own natural voice, that familiar refrain which had won him his nickname. “Blood of Christ deliver us! Blood of Christ save us! Blood of Christ have mercy upon us!”

His voice got lower and lower as he went on. Then it fell into complete silence. Still he continued hugging the figure in his arms and slowly rocking himself and her, backward and forward, backward and forward. There was such a dead silence in the room all this while, that the voices in the other rooms became like the intrusion of revellers at an execution or at a childbirth.

Then there came a grotesque and even rather an unpleasant sound. It was the stertorous breathing of the sleeping woman.

MAY DAY

It was the First of May, and through the open kitchen window of Elizabeth Crow's little house on Benedict Street floated delicious sun-warmed airs. The house looked to the north, across the outskirts of Paradise. There was a small oblong patch of ground, outside, with a rough wooden fence round it, identical with all the other back-gardens of that street; and as in the case of most of the others this patch of earth was devoted rather to vegetables than to flowers. Beyond the garden was a triangular field where one of Miss Crow's neighbours kept a couple of cows; but beyond this, except for the roofs of a few scattered Paradise hovels, the water-meadows stretched clear away towards the site of the Lake Village, and Philip's landing field, and Number One's Backwear Hut. On the stove in this kitchen stood a sauce-pan of boiling potatoes and a large black pot full of some sort of savoury stew. In the centre of the kitchen was a bare deal table, the well-scrubbed top of which had assumed, so soft and friendly did it look, the whiteness of a pail of rich cream. On this table was a huge glass bowl filled with an immense, tightly packed mass of bluebells. The gorgeous blueness, a deep Prussian blue mingled with blotches of purplish colour, rose up like a thickly packed cloud of almost opaque essence out of this bowl of heavy-drooping blooms and expanded and expanded till its richness of tint attracted towards it and seemed utterly to absorb all other coloured things in the room. It dominated the gleam of the shining pots and pans of that small kitchen as completely as its fragrance overpowered the smell of the cooking. An empty basket with a few torn blossoms, a few long, pallid leaf-spears, and a few sap-oozing stalks, stood on the dresser, indicating that the flowers had been brought here that very morning. They had indeed been picked by Jackie and his little band in Wick Wood, and one could see that they were at their very height of blooming and would not last much longer. The children had found two or three early pink campions on the way to Wick Wood, in the leafy banks of Maidencroft Lane, and these were now protruding, like carmine flags in a purple sea, from the midst of the rest. These bluebells must have been the direct descendants of flowers that had been the background of many a Druidic May Day ritual round those great oaks. They brought with them in their oozy stalks and in their drooping heads the feeling of a thousand springs of English history. They brought too the sense of masses of hazel-branches darkly clustering around these blue spaces in the deep wood and hiding the fluttering chaffinches and blackcaps whose songs issued forth from their entanglement.

Nor had this great bunch lost that imprint of children's fingers that country people recognize so quickly — the stalks plucked off so short under the flower-heads and the blossoms pressed so tightly together! In addition to these flowers there were two girls in Miss Crow's kitchen.

The May-Day feeling in the air, the warm sunshine, the presence of such a quantity of flowers at their full height of blossom, gave to the high spirits of the girls, as they chatted volubly together, that delicious quality of young feminine life which is so fleeting and so easily destroyed. The presence of a man destroys it in a second, introducing a different element altogether. Totally unconscious of what is happening to their young bodies and souls, girls, when they are thus alone together, give themselves up to all manner of little gestures, movements, abandonments, which not only the presence of a man but the presence of an older woman would drive away. Certain filmy and delicate essences in young girls' beings come to the surface only when they are alone like this with one another. When any of them is alone by herself it is different again; for then her own thoughts are apt to play the part of intruders and cause these fragile petals of her identity to draw in and close up.

The two girls I am now speaking of were seated at the table on straw-bottomed chairs. They were Sally Jones and Tossie Stickles, the plump form of the latter enveloped in a capacious white apron, while the former wore a gay spring hat and a bright scarf round her warm young neck. The girls were sipping hot cocoa from big steaming cups, and as they chatted across the mass of bluebells the clock in St. Benignus' Church struck the hour of noon.

"Did her ladyship open the letter her own self?" enquired Sally. " 'Twere 'dressed to her for I read the words meself as I came along. It said 'The Lady Rachel Zoyland, care of John Geard Esquire, Glastonbury, Somerset.' It didn't say our street and it didn't say our number. It said 'Esquire.' Be our Mayor really a Esquire, Tossie, do 'ee reckon, now he be a worshipful?"

"Read it? I should say her *didn't* read it," cried Tossie. "Not with Missus watching she and smiling kind-a patronizing all the while. No, Sally Jones, no, you Simple-Sal! Her took she's letter up to bedroom, same as you nor me might have done and she slammed her door and locked it too — bless her pretty heart! She be a one, she be a one, Sal, and no mistake about it."

"Have you—" whispered Sally gravely, leaning forward, till the broad brim of her straw hat overshadowed the table.

Tossie put down her cup and nodded emphatically, her eyes gleaming. "Told she yesterday," she replied. "She were helping I in kitchen and she talked so natural-like that I just up and told her. I didn't mention no names, you understand, but I told her he weren't no marrying man nor never would be. I told her he were a gentleman; and you should have seen the face she made at that!"

"There have been a kind of trouble, Toss, down our way," threw in Sally. "I allus knew'd 'twould never last between Red and Miss Crummie. I telled 'ee so, didn't I, time and again? Red be a working-man, though 'tis true he baint a common man. But Miss Crummie be quite different. She isn't a lady. We know *that!* But she's different from Red."

"They weren't engaged, were they?" said Tossie.

"Oh, no, it hadn't come to that yet," admitted Sal. "For me own part I think Miss Crummie was so haughty and offish with the pore man that he just up and quit."

Tossie opened her eyes wide. She felt it a little hard to visualise this haughty, obstreperous Crummie!

Both girls lifted their cups to their lips and took a deep drink. They each searched their minds for something startling to say. Their encounter seemed an important occasion in their lives; and they were very unwilling to let it slide by unenjoyed to the full.

"Mr. Philip and Mrs. Philip be coming to tea this afternoon," announced Tossie.

"Mercy on us!" cried Sally, "and what if this letter to her Ladyship be to say that Mr. Athling be coming to see she?"

Tossie had now the opportunity she had been waiting for. She had not seemed to impress her friend sufficiently with the fact of her intimacy with Lady Rachel. It was not very surprising that she should have confessed her troubles to Rachel. But surely it must startle Sal if she revealed that Lady Rachel had mentioned Mr. Athling to *her.*

She finished her cocoa gravely, rose from her chair, prodded the potatoes with a fork, stirred the stew, and then leaning across the table smelt at the bluebells. Straightening herself up she next glanced at the door. Then she looked out of the window. Still upon her feet she stared significantly at Sally. Her expression said: “These are no light matters.”

A thrush was singing in a laburnum bush at the end of the little garden. A faint scent of trodden grass from where the two cows were feeding floated in upon the warm air along with that rich song. Both the girls felt a penetrating thrill of happiness. It was May Day; and the spirit of Romance was abroad upon the air.

“He do write poetry,” said Tossie in a low, awed voice. “There be too much talk in this wold town about she and him. People be awful careless the way they talk.”

“Master said to Missus this morning,” remarked Sally, “that he be a true-blood Saxon.”

“Meaning he over to Middlezoy?” asked Tossie, sliding down upon her chair. How teasing it was when a person didn’t give a person the credit for things! Why didn’t Sally, instead of telling her what Mr. Geard had said to Mrs. Geard, cry out, “Oh, Tossie Stickles, how wonderful it is that Lady Rachel talks to ‘ee so nice and natural!”

“Master said to Missus,” continued Sally, “that Athling be the oldest name round here. He said Zoyland were nothing to it”

“His folks be plain farmer folks,” protested Tossie. Then taking advantage of Sally’s cup being at her lips, “He do write poetry about she.”

“Did she tell you *that?”* cried Sally, really astonished at last. Tossie was abashed. The truth was that it was she herself, and not Lady Rachel, who had referred to Mr. Athling. “A little bird told I,” she murmured evasively.

“Be Mr. Philip *really* coming to tea?” said Sally, beginning to feel — as she listened to that thrush — that there were too many little birds in Benedict Street. One wanted more solid facts. “It’s not often, so people do say, that they Elms folk go out together.”

"There was extra orders gived for they little rock cakes, to Baker, this morning," said Tossie firmly.

It was Sally's turn now to bend forward and inhale the heavy bluebell fragrance. She tilted back the big straw brim of her hat with her fingers as she did so.

"Be 'ee going to hospital when your time comes?" she murmured between her sniffs at the flowers.

"Maybe," said Tossie.

"Do they let 'ee see Mr. Barter these days?" her friend went on.

Tossie's cheeks got red. "What do I want with seeing a bloke that can keep company with they baggages at Pilgrims'."

"Lily Rogers told old Mrs. Robinson," remarked Sally, "that 'Rissa Smith were angling for Mr. Barter to marry she."

Tossie's reply to this was more expressive than polite. She put out her tongue at her friend.

"Master were all worked up this morning," said Sally, content to change the conversation now that she had made mention of Clarissa. "Mr. Philip wrote to he a turble stiff letter about his Midsummer Circus. He said he'd get the Police to stop it."

"Baint our Mayor above all they Police and suchlike?" pondered Tossie Stickles in a wistful tone. A little bell above the dresser began to tinkle.

"Missus want summat," said the girl getting up from her chair.

Lady Rachel did not breathe a word to Miss Crow about the contents of the letter she had received till the two ladies were weeding side by side in the little back-garden.

"I've heard from Ned," she said quietly then, looking across the sweet-pea sticks at her hostess.

"Yes, Rachel," replied Miss Crow.

“He’s coming to tea this afternoon,” said the young girl, “if you’ll let him.”

“Why, my dear, that’s as nice as it can be! You know I’ve only seen him that once, when the Mayor asked us to meet him.”

“He doesn’t expect to find anybody else here,” said Rachel.

“Only my nephew and Tilly,” said Miss Crow, planting her fork in the ground and resting her hand, in her rough gardening gloves, upon its handle. The thrush had flown off into the next little garden, but from there its voice was still audible. The warm air smelt of the disturbed earth-mould, but it smelt too of a more subtle odour than that — it smelt of an odour that came voyaging across the water-meadows from spinneys and copses and withy beds and high uplands and deep lanes and sequestered gulleys and hidden combes and narrow hazel-paths and mossy openings in old woods — the odour of Somersetshire itself! It is only certain days, days under unique conditions of the wind and the weather, that call out from the soil of a particular district that district’s own native, peculiar smell. And this May Day was precisely such an especial day. Had any traveller come back to Glastonbury on this day he would have been aware in a second that it was one of those days when the spirit of that portion of the earth distils itself in a rare unique essence. And of what is this voyaging mystery composed? Chiefly of the smell of primroses! Different from all other essences in the world the smell of primroses has a sweetness that is faint and tremulous, and yet possesses a sort of tragic intensity. There exists in this flower, its soft petals, its cool, crinkled leaves, its pinkish stalk that breaks at a touch, something which seems able to pour its whole self into the scent it flings on the air. Other flowers have petals that are fragrant. The primrose has something more than that. The primrose throws its very life into this essence of itself which travels upon the air. But the odour which floated now over that little garden of Benedict Street and hovered about Miss Crow as she looked at the proud timidity in those grey eyes that faced her so steadily, at that light-poised figure gripping so tightly the long hoe she had been using, had yet another pervading element in it — *the scent of moss.* Not a patch of earth in any of those spinneys, and copses, and withy beds, that edged those water-meadows, not a plank, not a post, in the sluices and weirs and gates of those wide moors, but had its own growth, somewhere about it, of moss "softer than sleep." More delicately, more intricately fashioned than any grasses of the field, more subtle in texture than any seaweed of the sea, more thickly woven, and with a sort of intimate passionate patience, by the creative spirit within it, than any forest leaves or any lichen upon any tree trunk, this sacred moss of Somersetshire would remain as a perfectly satisfying symbol of life if all other vegetation were destroyed out of that country. There is a religious reticence in the nature of moss. It vaunts itself not; it proclaims not its beauty; its infinite variety of minute shapes is not apprehended until you survey it with concentrated care. With a peculiar velvety green, a greenness that seems to spring up like a dark froth from the living skin pores of the earth-mother, this primeval growth covers with its shadowy texture every rock and stone and fragment of masonry, every tree root and hovel roof and ancient boarding, over which the rain can sweep or the dew can fall. The magical softness of its presence gathers about the margins of every human dream that draws its background from life in the West Country. The memories of youth are full of it; the memories of old people who have gone to and fro in West-Country villages wear it like a dim, dark garment against the cold of the grave; and when the thoughts of the bedridden turn with piteous craving to the life outside their walls, it is upon deep, rain-soaked, wet moss, sprinkled with red toadstools or with brown leaves or with drifting gossamer seed, that they most covetously brood!

"You know what to expect from my nephew, Rachel, because you've seen him already," went on Miss Crow. "If he doesn't treat our young poet with proper respect, you and I will squash him. He's not hard to put down, as you've seen, when a woman stands up to him."

Rachel shifted her hoe from one hand to the other, and lifting her young head, inhaled the moss-primrose odour upon those floating airs. She listened to the exultant trillings of the thrush from the unseen bushes in the neighbouring garden.

"You are very kind to me, Miss Crow," she said.

"Oh, and I've asked the Vicar," added Miss Elizabeth apologetically. "But there's not a boy under heaven however sensitive who could mind him. He's as easy to manage as that queer, surly son of his you didn't like — is difficult. But even poor old Sam is nice when you approach him in the right way."

"Your nephew won't abuse Mr. Geard, will he?" said Lady Rachel. "Ned will be rude to him if he does. Ned likes Mr. Geard as much as I do."

"Oh, you and I will see to that, child," laughed Miss Crow. "We'll be three to one; for Tilly doesn't count. The Mayor will be well championed, whatever Philip says!"

A couple of hours later and the little drawing-room facing Benedict Street was full of a lively party drinking tea and eating rock cakes. So strong, although so tactfully diffused, was Elizabeth Crow's protective aura, that not only were troublesome topics warded off, but the demonic influences from the great Powers of earth and air were prevented from touching her little group. Miss Elizabeth Crow not only pulled green-fringed muslin curtains across the little window, but she managed somehow to place her own substantial frame between her old friend and his flaming enemy, so that the Vicar — who was often obscurely worried and fretted in full sunlight — felt unusually happy that afternoon. There was a subtle reason for his happiness, too, in a motion of his consciousness of which he was thoroughly ashamed although its baseness, as he knew, had the grand excuse of so many base human feelings! Try as he might to take a larger, more generous, less professional view of the case, he had not been able to resist a spasm of ignoble jealous relief when he divined, as he soon did, for he and his son were in close accord, that some new twist in the latter's eccentric mind was keeping him apart from Nell Zoyland.

Ned Athling was certainly not the sort of youth that any ordinary girl would have fallen in love with. He was short and very fair, so fair indeed that his eyebrows and eyelashes seemed almost non-existent. He was much more ruggedly built than Dave Spear, another fair Saxon, and his hands, tanned and hardened by farm-work, were as large as they were powerful. A cloud of nervous timidity seemed to hover over him like smoke over burning weeds and he had a trick of casting down his full-lidded, eyebrowless eyes when anyone addressed him and staring intently at some spot, that conveniently besought attention, in the fabric of his trousers.

The May Day sunlight, modified by the green-edged muslin curtains, filtered agreeably into the little room. There was something piquant in the way Miss Crow had arranged her old pieces of furniture in this little working-man's parlour. The eighteenth-century chairs and tables, the seventeenth-century prints, mostly of sea-faring worthies and of old maps of the West Indies inherited from a Crow who had been a Norwich merchant in Cromwell's time, gave the room a rich and intricate look. This was increased by a vast amount of old china of which Miss Crow was particularly fond and the bulk of which had come to her from a Devereux aunt, a venerable maiden lady who had lived for half a century in the same small house, at Cromer in Norfolk.

There were primroses and cowslips and even bluebells about the room, all with much more greenery among them than was possessed by Jackie's bunch in the kitchen. The muslin curtains waved gently in the air that blew in from the street, where the very dust — recently allayed by a blue-painted water-cart inscribed "Town Council" — carried into the house a curious smell that resembled rain and yet was different from rain.

Miss Elizabeth, Tilly Crow and Lady Rachel had all chosen, by that human instinct which follows the weather almost as closely as do the hedge-weeds, especially airy and light-coloured dresses. Philip himself had put on a new fawn-tinted tie which looked well upon his heather-mottled suit, while Edward Athling had a newly budded meadow-orchid in his buttonhole, the first specimen of this flower that any of the rest of them were likely to see for several weeks yet.

There was a liberal supply of thin bread and butter, and Tossie had cut it so carefully that even the lady who had Emma for a servant looked at these two great Dresden platefuls with arrested attention. But the rock cakes were the most daring innovation, most Glastonbury hostesses priding themselves upon not having to go outside their own kitchens for the replenishing of their tea-tables. This bold departure from the norm proved, however, a great success.

"No," Tilly was saying to an enquiry from Mr. Dekker about the rhubarb in her garden. "I cannot say that I like the look of it this year as much as I did last year. It is redder than last year of course. I admit that. But my cook always prefers the stalks that have green streaks mixed with the red. She says they are more succulent."

“They are not so sweet, Madam; they are not so sweet,” affirmed Mat Dekker.

“But my cook has her own way of handling rhubarb,” reiterated Tilly, her black eyes shining. In her mind she resolved to have a whole morning, presently, entirely devoted to making rhubarb jam. The question was what sort of brandy to use for the fastening up of the jam-pots. As she watched Mr. Dekker’s watch-chain and wondered how soon a crumb of rock cake would dislodge itself from between one of its links and one of the good man’s waistcoat buttons — Tilly longed to brush him then and there — she recalled how she used to stand for hours in the kitchen watching her grandmother tie up jam-pots. The smell of brandy always made her think of a certain blue apron she had liked wearing in those days, not because it made her look pretty, but because it made her look grown-up and competent. “Always use the best, Dearie,” the old woman had been wont to say to her hypnotised companion. And little Tilly had vowed to herself that whatever might be her future destiny she would never use, like her slipshod mother did, in the making up of jam-pots, anything but the best brandy. And this vow Tilly had rigorously kept ever since.

“No, it wasn’t exactly yellow from where I saw it.”

Philip had been talking dogmatically about yesterday’s weather and the timid poet had been aroused to assert himself when he heard Philip who had gone to Bath in his airplane — driven now by a pilot from London — praising the sky for its yellowness. “It was green when I saw it,” he cried eagerly. “And that’s by far the most beautiful kind of sky. I call it the fields of the sky.”

Philip stared at the lad. He was in the middle of telling them all about his flight to Bath. The colour of the sky was of minor importance.

“What you say, young man, interests me very much,” said Mr. Dekker. “Most of us don’t give enough attention to these things. When I kept a diary at college—”

“Talking of diaries,” interrupted Tilly, “I wish all of you men would begin ordering diaries at Wollop’s! That impertinent young man there — you know the one I mean, Aunt? — won’t keep diaries. He says there’s no demand for them.”

Aunt Elizabeth burst into a peal of delicious silvery laughter. She did not often laugh. But when she did her laughter was like the clearest of rippling streams.

“Why are you so amused, Aunt?” enquired Tilly; but in no vexed or aggrieved voice. Now that Aunt Elizabeth had a house of her own she felt very friendly to her.

“Do you keep a diary, Tilly?” asked Miss Elizabeth.

“Oh, dear no! What do you suppose? It’s for my cook. You don’t know my cook, Lady Rachel. Her name is Emma.”

“You don’t mean to say that Emma keeps a diary?” threw in Mr. Dekker with a chuckle.

“Tilly!” The way Philip uttered these two syllables was a masterpiece in rich psychological nuances. In the first place his tone protected his wife from Aunt Elizabeth and from all these strangers. In the second place his tone warned his wife that there were proper limits to this fashion of hers of giving herself away. In the third place his tone expressed an indulgent appreciation, a tender recognition, that Tilly *was* Tilly, and that she was the kind of thing in a person’s life that he himself was glad to possess, though it might seem strange, and even absurd, to others!

“No, no,” said Tilly quietly, quite unperturbed at being laughed at by Emma’s favourite clergyman, “she doesn’t want them for *that.* She wants them to keep accounts in. The ordinary tradesmen's books don't suit Emma. She has her own ways of keeping accounts."

"My new pilot's name is Tankerville," said Philip suddenly, seeing in his mind that bird's-eye view of his Dye-Works which had made it impossible for him to be sure whether the sky was green or yellow.

In the general silence that followed this irrelevant observation Lady Rachel remarked that her father would never have a servant whose name was more than one syllable. But Philip's mind had wandered far away from Bob Tankerville. He was saying to himself, "I shan't replace Barter for a while. I shall wait a bit. Those office-lads seem able to scramble on somehow. Yes, I shall wait a little, and get a tight hand on all the reins myself. What I've got to do now is to give Geard more rope — give him all the rope he wants — while I egg him on by talk of the Law. He'll hang himself — if he has rope enough!"

"Seen any otters down your way at Middlezoy this year?" said Mr. Dekker to Ned Athling, whose shyness was so intense in this pause of the conversation he had commenced licking his lips with his tongue just as dogs do when they feel embarrassed. He now glanced quickly and nervously at Lady Rachel.

"No," he replied with a blush. "I mean," he went on, "that I wouldn't say if I had." Everyone looked at him and his colour deepened.

"Oh, I won't tell Will, Ned!" cried Rachel, reading his thoughts.

"I wasn't … I wasn't only thinking of him," he blurted out; and then, with a gallant effort to give the conversation a new turn, "I was telling the Mayor that he ought to hire a real pantomime clown for his show, and have some mummers like they did in the old days."

"He wants to keep it all for the local talent, doesn't he?" said Rachel.

"Those professionals are the best though," went on Athling, while Tilly fixed a nervous eye upon her husband. "To have a real professional, of the sort Dan Leno was, bred up in the theatre or the circus, and to let him play his part like one of those old mummers or mountebanks … don't you think," he spoke hesitatingly, diffidently, brokenly, "don't you think … there would be something … in that kind of thing? I haven't got it quite clear … but I seem to see in my mind a sort of Passion Play — with—" he spoke more eagerly and rapidly now, as he warmed to the subject, "with a real pantomime clown of the Leno tradition — improvising wild Rabelaisian 'gags' … like the Fool in Lear … while Our Lord is before Caiaphas or before Pilate … don't you think there's something in that? The Mayor caught my idea, I think — though whether—"

Philip restrained himself with creditable self-control under this imaginative tirade. He thought in his heart— "This is the only kind of thing our young England is interested in, and it's absolutely futile. It's not only futile, it's destructive. A Dan Leno introduced into a Mystery Play of the Crucifixion — that is exactly the sort of thing that *would* appeal to this new generation! They are never happy until they've given everything — even Religion — an uncomfortable, ironic, disillusioned twist."

Lady Rachel had been watching her friend with a mixture of pride and bewilderment. Her nature was too direct to be altogether satisfied by something as bizarre as a modern clown at the Crucifixion, but she liked to see Mr. Crow nonplussed and Mr. Dekker confused. Their hostess had to come to the rescue of her nephew.

"You've put off your spring cleaning, Tilly, I hear?" she said.

Mrs. Philip Crow fidgeted in her seat and looked reproachfully at her aunt. To interpolate a matter of such primary importance as spring cleaning into this bagatelle about clowns and crucifixions seemed to her mind a sort of wilful outrage to the bed-rock of human seriousness.

"Of course not," Tilly rapped out, "but Philip *may* have to take a holiday when this troublesome strike and this tiresome Pageant are settled, and Emma and I have been thinking that the carpets in the front-rooms had better wait until—"

Lady Rachel gave her a quick glance of appreciation. Why, this little lady, with the beady black eyes, really *was* like a child who had got a doll's house to play with! "I wonder," she thought, "what she'd make of the way the Bellamys manage these things at Mark's Court?"

Ned Athling had begun to grow very restless. He tried not to stare reproachfully at Lady Rachel. Miss Crow's enamelled tray, with its bowl of primroses so carefully interspersed with their heavy green leaves, was the ritual centre of this group of people. The Vicar's gold watch-chain, Philip's fawn-coloured tie, and the gay dresses of the three ladies would have lacked their mirror of platonic essences had the tray been carried off. Athling tried to concentrate his attention upon this tray.

"I sometimes think," said Mr. Dekker, "that we don't realise half enough the influence we all have upon the personality of our town. Don't you feel, Elizabeth, that Glastonbury has a most definite personality of its own?"

Ned's timid eyes under their pale eyebrows gleamed at the clergyman's words but he felt shy of asserting himself again.

"I know a place that's got twice as much of what you call personality than this town has," remarked Philip.

"Tell us!" cried Rachel. "Tell us, Mr. Crow!"

"Wookey Hole!" he announced emphatically, crossing his legs in their neat heather-tinted trousers and surveying with satisfaction his unwrinkled brown socks. “Wookey Hole has more real character in its prehistoric stalactites than all your Ruins.”

In the silence that followed this remark Miss Crow, who was shepherding her little party with as much care as Emma’s father in the Mendips ever guided his flock down to the washing-pool, took the opportunity of handing to Rachel and Ned a veritable May-Day nosegay. She noticed Philip turn to the Vicar and ask *him* for sympathy about Wookey Hole. She noticed that her new cat, a big stray tabby that Tossie had christened Tiger, had come in, as Tossie went out, and had jumped upon Tilly’s lap. Tilly was now absorbed in this cat. She had been watching it ever since it entered, hoping against hope that she would be the preferred one in winning its favour, and now this had happened she was in bliss. So Miss Crow turned to the lovers.

“I want you to take Lady Rachel to Chalice Hill, this afternoon, Mr. Athling,” she said. “There was an antiquary down here yesterday — not the one who found the Edgar Chapel by the help of that spirit, but quite a different one — and he unearthed a stone up there, somewhere to the west of the hill, so they tell me, and near Bulwarks Lane, which has completely puzzled him. You might tell me what *your* opinion of that stone is, Mr. Athling. At any rate, I’d like you to see it before you begin your long drive home. And I want you to have a bite of supper with us, too, before you start.”

Rachel’s cheeks flamed with pleasure at this, and Mr. Athling met his hostess’ eyes without blinking and smiled with childish gratitude.

It was a shame that Tossie had left the room too soon to hear this. As it was, it had been with a deep sigh for the presence of her friend that she had returned to the kitchen without the tray. She could hardly bear to look at the bluebells on the table now, so greatly did she long to tell their absent donor all about what was going on in the drawing-room.

"You don't mind my speaking freely to you, Dekker, do you?" Philip was now saying. "But it really won't do; it simply *won't do* for you to mix yourself up, and your position and everything, with this man Geard. The man's a rascal. That's the long and short of it. He's an extremely cunning rogue and an arrant charlatan. He'd like to play the part of a sort of Abbot in this town. This Pageant of his, or pious circus, or whatever it may be, is getting to be a nuisance. *You* were saying, weren't you, Aunt Elizabeth, that you've been worried by these endless notices from that little fool, John? Geard must learn that in these days to be Mayor of a town like ours means nothing at all. This, and that money he got from my grandfather, seem to have turned his head. He's begun to encroach on *your* domain, Dekker — hasn't he? — with all these rehearsals that I hear are going on."

Lady Rachel glanced quickly at her young farmer, but it was impossible to stop him.

"I like Mr. Geard," he said, with a rush of hot blood to his face. "I think he's done a great deal for Glastonbury. I think this Pageant will bring a lot of people here." He stopped abruptly and glanced apologetically at his hostess. "From abroad," he added, "Germans especially."

Philip glanced at Tilly, but she was oblivious to everything except the cat on her lap. He then sought to exchange with Mat Dekker the particular look with which older people condone the impetuosity of youth.

"The most important thing for any town nowadays," he said calmly, looking not at Athling but at his aunt, "is to give the populace constant employment. That is not done by Pageants. Is it, Aunt Elizabeth?"

"What about the municipal factory, Sir?" threw in young Athling.

"May I ask if you have seen that concern?" said Philip.

"Seen it? No … Yes … I mean I've been to their new shop in George Street and bought some … some little things."

"May we hear what things, Mr. Athling?"

"Charming things!" broke in Rachel. "I've got lots of them in my room upstairs."

"I'm glad you've found something, Lady Rachel, among their toys, that thrills you so much, but I'm afraid Mr. Dekker will agree with me that the men employed in making those toys are being rapidly unfitted for any properly paid job. They hardly give 'em enough to live upon. I expect you did not know that, Mr. Athling."

"They're going to let me design some figures for them, Mr. Crow," said Rachel irrelevantly.

"Who is?" enquired Philip.

"Mr. Barter," the girl answered.

"Barter!" Philip brought out these two syllables as if he had been King James referring to Guy Fawkes. "I suppose you've heard, Dekker, the inside story of that man's leaving me? It had to do with—" He stopped abruptly remembering that the victim in the story had just been handing him those rock cakes he had enjoyed so much. "Well, at all events," he went on, lowering his voice a little, out of respect to Lady Rachel if not to Tossie, "Barter, as we know him, isn't exactly the sort of person that any concern would be proud of. I've never heard, either, that he knows very much about the manufacturing of toys. You can't do these things in that sort of slipshod, amateur, arts-and-crafts way."

"Why do you say 'arts-and-crafts' so disparagingly, Sir?" threw in Edward Athling.

Elizabeth intervened. "I can explain *that"* she said. "When Philip was at Cambridge there was a lot of aesthetic tittle-tattle going on about that sort of thing. It’s all very old-fashioned! You two children are too young to understand the point.”

“I can understand that Mr. Crow, being a manufacturer of machine-made articles, naturally has a dislike of hand-made things,” said Edward Athling, getting very red.

“Just as a farmer,” remarked Philip sternly, “naturally has a dislike of townspeople getting high wages.”

“What about this strike in the Dye-Works then? Isn’t that for better wages?” The young man had scarcely uttered these impetuous words than he gave a curious kind of laugh and stretched out his hand to Philip, touching his sleeve. “Sorry, Sir,” he said. “That was an impertinent thing to say. I’m enough of a farmer to hate the way we ignoramuses rush into arguments. No doubt there’s a lot to be said for your ideas of industry as something that gives the people steady employment, rather than just a dramatic adventure for the moment.”

“But the municipal factory is sure to last, isn’t it?” insisted Rachel, noticing how stiff Philip was in the way he received Ned’s gesture and feeling angry with Ned for making it.

Philip shrugged his shoulders in silence. “What I feel in all this,” said Mat Dekker, “is that Glastonbury needs both its scientific manufacturer and its dramatic Mayor.” Mat Dekker was so happy at this moment, being at once pampered by his ancient love and jealously pleased that his son was separated from Zoyland’s wife, that he uttered this peaceful remark with a certain careless unction, without thinking very much what he was saying.

Lady Rachel looked at him with flashing eyes. That smug antithesis— “its scientific manufacturer and dramatic Mayor” — filled her with contempt.

Simple earthy natures like Mat Dekker, especially when they have, by luck, found themselves in a social position which cannot easily be menaced, frequently allow themselves to be dominated by their physical moods. When Mr. Dekker on this occasion threw out that smug remark about “scientific manufacturers and dramatic Mayors” it was in reality no more than if he had said— “It is May Day. I enjoy rock cakes. I am glad that my unaccountable desire for Nell Zoyland has been quieted by Sam’s separation from her. I like being petted once more by dear old Elizabeth. It’s nice here, now that she has shut the sun out.” Nothing that was being talked about just then touched — for Mat Dekker — the real essential things in life. He did not, in his heart of hearts, think that it mattered very greatly to Glastonbury, or to any immortal soul in Glastonbury, whether it were Mr. Crow or Mr. Geard who was cock of the dung-hill! And since this was the case, it was easy for him, treating Philip as he would have treated a greedy minnow in his aquarium, to give the man a soothing sop with the surface of his mind, and push the whole thing away from him as unimportant. But how was Lady Rachel, trembling with eager excitement in the presence of her first love and full of the intense partisanship of youth, to be tolerant of a hard-working priest’s mental indolence? All that afternoon, as she had surveyed this big red-faced personage drinking so much tea and letting himself be waited upon by a gentle, elderly lady, she had suspected him of being a repulsive time-server and now she knew him for just that.

But Miss Elizabeth Crow was not one to be baffled by any clash of temperament among her guests or by anything as negligible as a flash of anger on the part of the excitable little daughter of Lord P. By the time her elder guests had departed she had beguiled them all into good temper. Indeed, both the young people were found making Tilly laugh with girlish delight by their antics with Tiger in the sunny doorway, when Elizabeth had finished saying good-bye to her other guests.

When Rachel and Ned Athling had reached the top of Chalice Hill they spent a happy quarter of an hour hunting about for that stone of which they had been told. At last, not greatly worried because they had not yet found it, they sat down together on a fallen log with the greenest of new-grown ferns and bracken at their feet and a sweet-smelling gorse bush behind them.

“Do you believe it was really here,” said Rachel, “that Merlin disappeared with the Grail?”

Ned did not reply for a second or two. Then he burst out irrelevantly—“You’re like an Exmoor pony, Rachel, that’s what you’re like.”

“He wasn’t a Christian, — was he, Ned? Merlin, I mean. What was the Grail to *him?* That’s what I can’t imagine.”

“Rachel!”

“Yes, Ned.”

“Did you have a fear when you were little that you’d never meet anyone as exciting as the people in books?”

“Oh, Ned, how curious! How like we are! That’s just what I always felt.” She picked a cowslip within reach of her arm and gave it to him. He smelt at it and held it tight between his finger and thumb, waiting to hide it away in his pocket as soon as her attention wandered.

“May I ask you something, Ned?” was her next speech.

“If it’s not about poetry, Rachel. Since I’ve known you I’ve been changing my ideas about what poetry is and it’s got all confused.”

“No, it’s nothing about poetry, it’s—”

“Well, what is it, Rachel?”

“It’s about people, one’s own people. Don’t you sometimes feel as if you were a changeling? Don’t you sometimes feel that when your own people are talking and telling you this and that — quite ordinary things — that you're all the time living in a different world? I don't mean exactly a different *place.* The same place, only seen in quite a different way?"

"It's in that different way I've seen everything, Rachel, since I've known you. My horses, my cattle, my sheep, aren't the same creatures that they used to be. Of course those fields, down our way at Middlezoy, *look* the same as they always did but they look *more* the same, if you know what I mean. I mean I never knew before how different they are from all other fields and how much like themselves!"

"Could you ever endure to live anywhere else, Ned, than at Middlezoy?"

"I used to think I couldn't, — but *now*—" he paused and plucked at the fern-like leaves of an incipient yarrow, "I believe I could live almost anywhere if I were absolutely sure of one thing."

She refrained from pressing him as to what that "one thing" was.

"I suppose you've sunk your soul into those fields at Middlezoy!"

"Well, even if I *have*, I could pull my soul out again, couldn't I, like anyone might pull out a deep thorn?"

"I didn't want you to say you could. I wanted you to say you couldn't."

The log they were seated upon was not large enough for any space to exist between them. At those moments in the conversation when one or other of them would naturally have indicated a psychic misunderstanding by a physical withdrawal, all they could do was to move their knees or their feet a trifle further away from those of the other. The girl shifted her legs a little now and in this slight movement the profile of her cheek was turned. Ned snatched the opportunity and slipped the cowslip into his waistcoat pocket.

The magic of that moment, the scent of the primroses and the damp moss, the tremulous ecstasy of the birds and insects, the unusual greenness that washed up against their feet like a wave of the primal sap of creation, covered them now as a couple of early violets might be covered, by lush transparent overgrowths that guard and enhance their poignant breath.

“If you and I were ever, by any chance, to marry, Ned, should we live at Middlezoy?”

“*Would* you marry me, Rachel?”

“I *mighty* Ned. But you mustn’t take this as a promise! Besides, what am I saying? I am acting as forwardly as Juliet did! But we must see each other a lot more, lots and lots more, before we can know for certain that we dare do it.”

Edward Athling sighed deeply, a profound sadness took the place of the excitement he had just felt. The way she’d spoken — though anything but frivolous — had not been exactly the kind of ambrosial food that a lover demands.

“Don’t get glum, Ned. Let’s pretend! *Would* we live at Middlezoy?”

“What do you mean?” he asked. “With my parents?”

She didn’t like to tell him — for fear of hurting his feelings — that that had *not* been her dream. Her dream included a thatched cottage at Middlezoy down close by one of those great rhynes where the otters were found.

But she now plunged boldly on— “With them for a while, Ned, perhaps, till we had money enough to have a farm of our own.”

A farm of their own! This phrase of hers was so delicious, so filled with a floating incense of enchantment, that for a second he dallied with it as if it were serious.

But it was *not* serious; none of it was serious! He had against him before he could marry the daughter of the great Wessex nobleman such a solid weight of conventional obstacles that it seemed madness to think about it.

Noblemen’s daughters *had* married commoners before now, but not often — and as far as all accounts went — never a Zoyland! He wasn’t an adventurer, he wasn’t a rascally pilgarlic like one of those lean rogues lambasted in Rabelais who set their scurvy wits to deface, deflower, debauch and abduct, some sweet-blooded noble wench of an ancient breed.

“It would only be for a time,” she began again, “that I’d have to live with your people. We should soon be able to find a place, somewhere *near* Middlezoy anyhow, with a few acres that would suit us.”

“Oh, please stop, Rachel! Please stop!” His voice was really tormented and the girl looked at him in astonishment. “You simply *don’t know* what you’re talking about,” he went on irritably. “It’s impossible to imagine — for one second — your living with my parents; impossible, I tell you; impossible!”

“I don’t understand you,” she said. “Oh, well! Anyhow we haven’t to consider it just yet. We’ll have many a lovely time together, Ned — before we *have* to consider it. So don’t look so sad!” But she herself sighed long and deep, as she looked across at Glastonbury Tor.

Ned moved now. He had been vaguely conscious for several minutes that every time he leaned back his shoulders encountered the prickles of the gorse bush under which lay their log. It occurred to him that his companion, whose clothes were thinner than his, might be suffering from these gorse prickles. He twisted his head round, yes! they must be pricking her shoulders! He jumped up and pulled her to her feet with him.

“Too near the gorse,” he murmured. He had only grasped her arm, but his touch sent an electric vibration through her, a quivering like that which sometimes seizes upon one single tree-twig when everything else is still.

“I wonder how long it’s been lying there,” she said. “It’s very old.”

Both the young people gazed down at their recent seat. The log was certainly very old. Neither of them could tell what sort of a tree it had once been, or even if it had once grown near where it lay. It was covered with dark moss and grey lichen, and at one end of it was a cluster of little yellowish toadstools.

"It may have been here hundreds of years," she whispered. A rush of thoughts, vague and indistinct, but full of a curious pleasure, floated through her mind. How many people, old and young, must have passed this way and glanced at that old log — long before she was born! A sense of the wistful and terrible beauty of life took possession of her — especially of life lived long and quietly in one place.

"I'd like to grow slowly old, day by day, very gradually, older and older," she said.

Ned looked at her with his forehead gathered in great puckers. She looked incredibly childish in her long straight dress and black straw hat.

"I suppose you never know what you mightn't find buried on this hill," he said. "I am glad the Mayor's going to buy the house where the red spring is and build an arch. He talked a lot to me, when you were gone last time, about an arch. He's got into his head that a Saxon arch would be the thing, but someone, the Vicar I think, had told him there weren't such things as Saxon arches."

"I hate that Vicar," said the girl fiercely.

"Oh, come now, Rachel! He's not a bad old codger. He told me, as we were going out of the house, that he collected butterflies."

"Just what he *would* do!" cried Lady Rachel. "Think of killing a thing like that!" And she pointed to a somnolent Meadow Brown that was fluttering over the green bracken.

"I used to collect butterflies when I was young," said Athling gravely.

"All the more shame to you!" She longed to scold him, to agitate him, to make him feel troubled in his mind. Not necessarily about butterflies — about anything! The sun, slanting now from the west, was drawing out every kind of fragrance from that hill-slope, but the wandering airs that stirred the curls under her hat were full of the scent of primroses and moss. Bees kept flying by them; and every now and then a great bluebottle fly drummed past their ears, with that peculiar come-and-gone quiver of tiny wings that holds a whole summer in its sound.

"I sometimes feel," he said, with an evident struggle in his mind to tell her something that was hard to express, "that it's a weakness of mine to go on writing poetry about what I enjoy and what is so easy to describe. New forms are coming into art, drawn from inventions and machinery — well! you know more about that than I do, having been to Paris and so on — and drawn too, anyone can see, from the life of people in masses, working people in masses; and I sometimes feel as if there were something babyish in going on with the old country themes, with the old love and death themes, when the other arts are following the new way."

He had given her her opportunity! With burning cheeks and gesticulating hands, she freely attacked him now, all the stirrings of her love transferred to her argument.

"It's pure snobbishness, what you're talking about," she cried. "You say to yourself, 'I must be modern,' when you ought only to say, ' I want to find out how to express what I feel.'"

He looked at her gravely. "But isn't it important to keep in touch with the World-Spirit? I feel somehow, Rachel, as if all these Grail stories, all this mediaeval mysticism, had grown tiresome and antiquated."

"You'd better ask Philip Crow to give you a ride in his airplane!" Her voice was quivering. Had she come down here from listening to all this talk in London only to find her Ned repeating it? "You'd better go over to Wookey Hole and see the remarkable electricity they've installed there. And if you're interested in machines there are some fine up-to-date ones in Crow's Dye-Works! You'd better go to Phillip Crow and tell him how impressed you are by his great industrial undertaking!"

"What has made you so angry with me, Lady Rachel? What have I done? It was since I've known you that I've grown dissatisfied with my poetry, so full of all the old tags; it's since I've known you that I've wanted to make it more original, more subtle, more in line with our times"

Her face was a picture to see, as she struggled with her contending feelings.

"I don't want you to alter at all; not in anything!" she cried.

"I wish you hadn't made me talk about my poetry," he said. "I had a feeling it would annoy you."

"It hasn't *annoyed* me! Only standing on this hill where Merlin was and everything — I feel as if you were taking the wrong turn. You spoke up so splendidly for Mr. Geard just now in that house and now you seem to be taking the other side."

"What's poetry got to do with taking sides? Poetry is an art."

"Oh, don't use that word, Ned! If you'd heard what I've heard — the talk — the affectations — the boredom—"

"But isn't it an art?"

Her reply was almost screamed at him.

"No! It *isn't*! It's Poetry. Poetry's something entirely different. Oh, I *know* I'm right, Ned! If you go and get hold of this horrible modern idea that poetry is an art, I don't know what—"

She stopped and clasped her hands behind her back.

"Well, anyway, Lady Rachel," he said, "it has nothing to do with this Glastonbury quarrel between Geard and Crow."

"It *has*. It has everything to do with it! Can't you feel, Ned, as we stand here that this place is magical? What's Poetry if it isn't something that has to fight for the unseen against the seen, for the dead against the living, for the mysterious against the obvious? Poetry always takes sides. It's the only Lost Cause we've got left! It fights for the … for the … for the Impossible!"

Young Athling answered in a mumbling, muttering voice. He stooped down and picking up a bent stick that lay on the grass, flicked his boots with it. "It was meeting you that started me thinking of these things; and now you go and ride over me. I tell you, Lady Rachel—"

"Don't be silly. Call me Rachel!"

"I tell you," he went on, "I want my poetry to be a new, living, original thing. I *want* it to deal with machinery and inventions! It's all very well" — he kept flicking his ankles harder and harder with the stick he had picked up — "to go on writing about Middlezoy hedges and ditches and Sedgemoor tombstones, but I want my writing to flow forward, where life is flowing."

The girl's face grew stern and very sad. Not realising what he was doing to her, young Athling had outraged something in her that was almost as deep as her love for him, that was indeed mingled with her love for him, and was one of the causes of it.

"Ned, listen to me," she said. "I've heard all about this quarrel between Mr. Geard and Mr. Crow. It's been mounting up and mounting up till it's become, like the Montagus and Capulets, something you can't escape from. If you and I are to go on seeing each other we must agree about this. It's … it's dangerous not to agree about it." She uttered these last words in a low solemn tone.

Ned Athling looked at her in bewildered astonishment. To his mind it was simply unbelievable that she should take seriously — even to the point of quarrelling with him — these ridiculous local politics of Glastonbury. He did not realise how deep in her inherited Zoyland blood the passion for causes and statecraft and for all the transactions in what is called History went. He suddenly felt that it was incumbent upon him, at all costs, to change their topic of discourse. She herself had called it "dangerous" and it evidently *was* dangerous. He looked down at their log. It was not only invaded by the gorse prickles, but it was now covered by the shadow of the gorse bush.

"Do you say I could lift that log," he said, "or do you say I couldn't?"

"I say you *mustn't,* because it's been there so long, Ned, and has all those funguses on it!" But she now gave him the first smile he had had since they got up from their seat on that log. He threw away the stick he had picked up and his cap after it. He bent down and handled the log, tugging at it first in one direction and then in the other. It only moved a few inches. It was deeply buried in the grass and hundreds of infinitesimal weeds grew at its sides. He knelt down, the better to get purchase, and tugged at it. It moved a few inches and then fell back into its bed of a hundred years.

"You can't, Ned! It's silly to try to do something that you can't do. Let the old thing alone, please, Ned … please … I ask you to!"

But he did not heed her. He now straddled across the log and, bending low down, his feet planted deep upon the grass, he folded his hands under one end of the thing, slipping his fingers carefully through the weeds so as not to disturb the toadstools, scratching his knuckles on various little roots, but at last getting a really strong hold upon it.

The girl was watching him now with riveted attention. Her hands hanging loose at her sides, began plucking nervously at her belt, and with one of her feet she tapped at the ground. Athling possessed the muscles of a farm-labourer. All his life, since he had revolted at leaving home and had only gone to a dame's school in a neighbouring village, he had done heavy manual labour; but he now tugged and strained at this wayward enterprise to no avail. All he could do was just to tilt up the end of the log about half an inch. But he had not *yet* made full use of his shoulders or of the muscles of his flanks. Drawing a deep breath and balancing his feet firmly on each side of the log he grappled with it again. It began to move. It moved. No! Settling itself down again with a weight of gravitation that seemed abnormal, and as it were intentional, the log slipped from his hands and subsiding into its former position lay there inert, motionless, triumphant. *He had failed.*

"Don't 'ee mind, Ned," cried the girl, coming towards him and touching his shoulder with her bare hand. That touch was, as it were, the sweet accolade of the defeated! It was the first time in their experience of each other that she had made such a gesture, and at a good moment did she make it now.

"Avanti!" she said, "we must hunt for that stone! Soon we shall be late for Miss Crow's supper."

Not a word did he speak as he walked by her side across the hill. Humiliation gnawed at his midriff like a rat at a thick sweet-smelling board in an old barn.

She was nice about it. She had said, "Don't 'ee mind, Ned" — and had touched him with her hand; but it was not her *pity* he wanted; he wanted her admiration; he wanted her respect; he wanted her hero-worship.

"It'll be a shame to keep Tossie waiting," she said suddenly. "But listen; if we didn't bother about the stone any more we could go round by the Two

Oaks. There’ll be plenty of time, if we go back by Bove Town and straight down High Street. Oh, let’s do that, Ned.”

At this point, while several invisible blackbirds were answering one another from the purple distance, Lady Rachel offered the boy her hand.

“Let’s run down,” she whispered.

Athling proved to be more skilful in guiding a girl past molehills and rabbit-holes, as they stumbled down that uneven slope, than he had been at lifting logs for her sake. Their speed gathered and gathered till they were racing with dangerous rapidity through bracken and bent, past thorn bushes and gorse thickets, over elm stumps, under red-barked Scotch firs, by little clumps of elder, mingled with holly. He guided her so well that they reached the bottom without mishap.

“Let’s go to the Oaks before we hit the road,” she whispered, slipping her warm ungloved hand out of his and shaking the seeds and straws from her skirt.

He would have gone farther than to the Oaks “before they hit the road” if it meant the prolonging of their day. That holding her hand had given him such oblivious satisfaction that all he wanted now was to remain at her side and forget both grass-grown logs and Ambrosianus Merlinus.

“Oh, there are *people* there!” cried Rachel, “what a pity! Well, we’ll go straight to the road now and get home. We should probably have made ourselves late if we’d gone down there.”

The “people” Lady Rachel had seen were, as a matter of fact, none other than Sam and Nell.

Will Zoyland had been warned of a crowd of sightseers expected at Wookey on this May Day, though it was no official holiday, so he had written to Nell putting off a visit home which he had proposed to make. Nell had promptly communicated with Sam and they had arranged a meeting at this spot. Nell had only just this moment arrived. Had Athling and Rachel scrambled down the hill five minutes sooner they would have found only Sam there.

"Dear Sam, oh, my dear Sam," the girl was saying now. "I *had* to see you again because I must have given you a wrong impression when I came over yesterday. I didn't mean to worry you, Sam, or cling to you when you don't want me, but when you've given a person a wrong impression you feel you have to do something. I couldn't sleep last night with thinking what I'd said. It was wrong of me to get so angry and to say all those wild things. I didn't *really* mean what I said, you know, Sam. A person can say things like that without really meaning them."

Sam took her hand and lifting it to his mouth, kissed it long and hungrily. He had made a rule for himself that he mustn't kiss her on the lips. "I was thinking about you all last night, Nell," he said, "I couldn't sleep till dawn. There's a great deal I want to tell you about."

"Were you really thinking of me, Sam? Oh, Sam," and a look of wild hope came into her eyes, "were you thinking that perhaps—"

"Let's find some place to sit down," he said. "There's a cowshed back there, half full of hay. I noticed it as I came along. Let's go and sit in there for a bit. I mustn't smoke there — that's the only thing — but that doesn't matter."

The look of hope that had come into Nell's face vanished. There was nothing in his tone to suggest any change of purpose. But she let him lead her along the lane. He led her in the opposite direction from that Wick Wood where Jackie and his band had picked the bluebells and into which she had herself gazed this afternoon as she skirted it in her walk to this spot.

He led her to a gap in the hedge through which it was possible to reach a large field that was lying fallow. Across this field he led her, their shadows making long monumental outlines that were scarcely human as the rays of the sinking sun fell on their backs. These two vast shadows moved in front and Nell and Sam followed behind. It was a silent procession in that isolated field full of so much old corn stubble and so many small green weeds; for the two inhuman shadows spoke not nor made any sign and the two solid figures behind them were also silent. The shadows were, however, luckier than the figures, for they had the power of overlapping with each other and merging and mixing with each other, so that they frequently lost themselves in each other. This desirable power was denied the human figures who now followed after them, silent, solemn and tragic, — two Solids following two Shadows across the dead stubble and the green weeds.

Nell felt a spasm of bitter sadness as she watched these elongated shadows intermingling in front of them and then separating again and growing distinct. All over this part of the country, she thought, there are shadows accompanying people, some of them in front, some of them behind. And their appearance is the same whatever is going on in the hearts of the figures that throw them. People going to be executed, people going to deathbeds, people going to bury their dead — their shadows look the same. Shadows, thought Nell, have no hearts. Shadows are like men who have decided to follow Christ and to leave their loves and their loves' children!

He led her into that cowshed which he knew of. Yes! it was, as he had said, half full of last year's hay. He made her sit down on a heap of loose hay with her back to more hay tied in bundles, and he himself sat down by her side. They remained silent for a minute or two, and then, with an instinct to put off their serious talk, he began telling her of various occurrences in town. He told her that there were rumours that Philip Crow was trying to obtain some legal injunction to stop Mr. Geard's Midsummer Pageant. He told her that there had been a fierce quarrel at the new

Municipal Factory between Mr. Barter and some of the Communists, led by Red Robinson.

Nell's heart sank lower and lower as she listened to him. "How can he? Oh, how *can* he?" she thought. "He isn't a cruel man — he isn't doing it to hurt me. How *can* he take me into this place and then talk like this?"

The field they had crossed, with the wide horizon behind it, and with Brent Knoll rising in the distance out of the north west, was framed in the oblong doorway of the shed. The framing turned the scene they now looked upon into a curious "work of art," isolating it from the rest of Nature, and giving it a symbolic significance. The sun was now almost gone. It had become a red, globular excrescence on the horizon. It resembled a Glastonbury Tor from which St. Michael's Tower had been cut by some celestial sword-stroke, soaking the hill with blood redder than human blood. Slowly this bleeding convexity sank down over the edge of the horizon. Apparently it sank into Bridgwater Bay, into the Bristol Channel, into that South Wales from which came Mr. Evans, Mrs. Geard, and the "foreign" stones of Stonehenge; but at any rate it no longer occupied the central position in that arbitrary picture produced by the door-frame of the cowshed. Brent Knoll, however, still remained — remained till the twilight mists arose out of the watery flats of Weston-super-Mare and hid it, and the horizon with it, from the eyes of Nell and Sam.

"Sam, I *must* talk to you about it; I must; I have to. Sam, you can't really mean to go on with your life in Glastonbury as if we had never met — as if we didn't belong to each other — as if we hadn't got … now … a new life … to think about, to consider, to—"

"Dearest, listen — listen to me!" he interrupted. "I've been thinking all the time … all last night I was thinking … till I couldn't think any more … of some way … of something I could do … of something we both could do.

I know I can't make you feel, as I feel it, this — this struggle of mine … but I've come to see … in the last few days … that I've shirked something … in us … in our feeling for each other … in the child."

It was already too obscure in that shed, as they faced a long jagged blood-line in the west fading slowly out, the last of the May-Day journey-prints of the sun, for him to see the faint flickering up of a tantalised hope that these words of his summoned into her face.

"I must confess to you something, Nell, though it's to my shame. Penny Pitches, our servant, my old nurse and foster-mother, followed me up to my bedroom last night and talked about you."

He had the wit to feel that Nell winced at this and he hurriedly added— "You mustn't mind, dearest. I'm only telling you this because I want you to know the very worst of me. It's a penance to *me* to speak of it. But I can't bear—"

"Sam!" She was sitting very straight up now by his side. He could not see her face but he felt the indignant tension of her nerves. "Sam, it's like this. I can put up with what you do to me, and make me bear, when you do it from your own self. But to have to listen — no! you *must* hear me out! — to have to listen to what other women think, of the way you're treating me, it's too much!"

"Little Nell" — he spoke with a vibrancy in his voice that was new to her in him and that awed her a little— "I've come to see that there *is* something queer about me … that I didn't realise. I've come to see that I *have* thought only of my own feelings and *have* been stupid and blind to yours. I've come to see that in the whole thing there's been a lack in me … I don't know how to say it … a lack of power to see things, as they appear — as they *are* — to others … to you. As I lay thinking about it all last night — after Penny had gone away — I felt as if I could see myself as I never have done before. My cowardice … my weakness … seemed to — I don’t know how to put it! — seemed to take an actual shape in the darkness! I shall never forget it. The darkness glittered all about me. It was phosphorescent. Spurts and splashes of light, shootings and jettings of light and there I was in the middle of it … like a great black slug. It wasn’t a nightmare, for I was absolutely wide-awake; I wasn’t even sleepy. But I suddenly knew, when I felt myself to be that black slug, that I was grosser than other human beings. I knew that I had a dead nerve … an atrophied nerve … in me … where certain feelings ought to be.”

He stretched himself out by her side and shifted into a more comfortable position. He mechanically took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, fumbled with them, remembered that he mustn’t smoke, and put them back again.

“I mean by a dead nerve that there are feelings in human beings which save them from acting in a certain way and from doing certain things … and that this nerve has never been touched in me. I knew when I became that slug in the middle of those phosphorescent lights that in the way I’d acted to you I’d behaved blindly, monstrously — without using that nerve!”

He could not have realised how intently her eyes were fixed on him. He could not have realised how her mouth was drawn down and hanging open; how her lower lip was pulled awry, just as if it were imitating in unconscious sympathy the way his own face worked!

But he went on as if she had been some exterior conscience that he was talking to, some conscience to whom he had to confess everything, everything! “It gave me a sudden shock of fear, of ghastly fear, when I realised that I lacked that human nerve which everyone else has. I was afraid of myself, Nell. It was as if I had put my hand to my back and suddenly found that I was growing a tail! It was as if I had looked into the looking-glass, and seen, not my own face, but the face of a beast. I felt alone and set apart, as if I were a pariah, a leper, a half-man."

"Oh, Sam, my dear love, my poor, sweet Sam, come back to me and let me love you again!"

Any onlooker at this scene catching the emotion in her voice would have supposed that he would turn to her now and press her to his heart. He did not do anything of the kind — he went on talking, but he laid his hand on her wrist as it rested in the hay and gripped it tight.

"I loathed myself when I saw how blind I'd been about it all … about you and about our child … and everything. I tried to think out what *kind* of a lack it is in me that makes me so that I can't go straight off with you and leave Glastonbury. For I can't do it, my sweet! I thought of doing it last night just before dawn, hours after Penny had gone away. I thought of making Father give me money, and taking the train with you to London. I imagined us getting into the train. I could even see how that little shanty would look, as the train pulled out, where John Crow works! But when I thought of it I knew — all in a moment — that I couldn't do it. I grew cold and paralysed, like in dreams, when I took the first step … but I want to tell you this, Nell," — his voice dropped to a solemn whisper— "when I thought of us getting into the train *I thought of us as three.* So you see, though I haven't got that 'nerve' I've got something. Oh, Nell, I've been so unhappy these last days! I don't know why I tell you. What's the use of telling you — you who have to bear it all? But I've been more unhappy than I thought I *could* be. I've been torn in two between you and Christ and it's made me very unhappy. I knew I'd have to bear a lot for Him, if I let Him take me, but I never thought it would be anything like this."

"My poor, sweet Sam, come back to me!" the girl whispered, cuddling close up to him in the hay and clinging to his elbow.

“I can’t, Nell,” he groaned, “I can’t. Christ has got me by the throat, by the hair of my head. If you made me come to you tonight He would pull me back to Him. I can’t escape from Him! He’s going to hold me tighter and tighter all my life.” Sam shuddered as he uttered these words. With the warmth of her body against his as they lay side by side in the soft hay, his nature was so stirred within him that a blasphemous fury seized him with the Being who was causing him and his love so much suffering.

“No! He’s got me, my darling, my sweet, my only love. He’s got me and there’s no help for it.”

“Sam, stop! I can’t *let* you talk like this! It’s the Devil you’re talking about, not Christ! Christ would never want to separate people who love each other as we do.”

Sam tore himself from her embrace and scrambled up upon his feet. She saw him outlined dark against the doorway. His figure seemed to contort and to twist, as with frightened eyes she stared at him. “Never want to separate us! You don’t know Him, Nell. He’s a lover, I tell you — a lover … a lover!” He almost shouted these words at her as she lay there on the ground. Then he swung round and stood in the doorway.

The evening of this perfect May Day was of a loveliness comparable with the hours that had preceded it. In certain subtle respects it was even more beautiful, just as in certain ways sleep is more beautiful than waking and death than life. But into the loveliness of this evening Sam Dekker poured the bitterness of his heart. He beat his hands on his head and then stretched out his arms with his fists clenched.

“A lover … that’s what you are, … a lover … a cruel lover!” Nell was not a particularly nervous girl. She took Sam’s excitement for a sort of religious madness — as it very likely may have been — but she felt vibrant concern for him. In fact, she forgot for the moment the brutality of his desertion of her in her anxiety for him. He could not have selected a better psychological trick in order to make his treatment of her tolerable, and it may well be — such is the labyrinthine subtlety of the human mind — that mingled with the genuine anguish of his frustrated passion there was a thin thread of awareness in him that to simulate more than he actually felt was the best way of distracting her from her own suffering.

Beyond the dark figure of her equivocal lover, leaning sullenly now against one of the doorposts of their shed, she caught sight of the evening star. This luminous planet hung low above the place where the sun had sunk; and as when her love was first menaced by Zoyland's outburst, on the evening when father and son had come to Whitelake, this planet had cast its spell upon her, so now once more this great Being, the one which, after the Sun and the Moon, holds the highest place among the heavenly bodies, dominated her troubled consciousness and held her attention; until she was aware of a sort of comfort coming from its beauty as it floated there in that greenish-coloured ocean of space. But although she knew it not, and in all likelihood, the great planet knew it not, there flowed forth from that swimmer in that far-off greenish sea a magical influence which soothed the girl as soon as it touched her, and brought her a faint return of hope. After the Sun and the Moon, but a long way before the other lords of the sky, whether planets or constellations, this great luminary, either as Evening Star or Morning Star, has gathered to itself the worship of the generations. Feeling its power upon her now, though not knowing what it was she was feeling, Nell got up from her hay couch, brushed her clothes mechanically and came over to where Sam was. There they stood together staring at the dying glow in that greenish sky and at the increasing size and brilliance of that solitary star.

She put her hand on his shoulder and he let it remain there. The evening itself gathered them into its own universal and primordial sadness — the sadness of all lost chances and lost causes since history began. Under the power of that moment, of the slow dying of that unequalled day, these two and their child within her did indeed become a conscious three as he had imagined. But the third was more than a child. The liquid immensity of that hushed twilight enlarged that little embryonic identity into something overshadowing and mysterious, something that became the premonitory presence of that unknown future which was before them both. On its soft muffled wings this embodiment of their fate flew across their vision, its silent flight pressing down still more, like the fall of a handful of feathers from the brooding breast of the night itself, the lowered pulse of the earth's huge swing into darkness.

There came over Nell's mind the slow, faint intimation that it would be useless to struggle any more to bind Sam to her side. As she leaned against his shoulder now in her tragic acquiescence she felt that this was the moment in her life when she must gather her forces together and accept her destiny, struggle no more against it but adjust herself to it as best she might. Always would she love this strange man by her side, so much older in his troubled thoughts than he was in inexperienced years. But her love must accept the hint of this largely expanded, fragrant twilight, darkening slowly, tenderly, solemnly before her eyes, smelling vaguely of primroses and moss.

"Sam!" she whispered softly.

He turned his discomforted face towards her, and she seemed in that obscure light to detect upon it a pitiful appeal to her that she should have mercy upon him and not drive him to desperation; not compel him to struggle to do what it was beyond his nature to do.

"Sam," she repeated. "You shall do exactly what you want. Oh, my darling, oh, my poor Sam! It's more than I can bear to see you so troubled. Our love has been very sweet to me," — her voice trembled a little but it did not break— "but it must accept what has come to it; and so it *shall* be. You have changed my life. In my heart I shall be always yours and never anyone else's."

He made no answer but she heard him swallow down a queer sort of half-animal sob.

OMENS AND ORACLES

MAT DEKKER WAS right when he said that a town which has had so long an historic continuity as Glastonbury acquires a personality of its own. And just as in human organisms there are slowly developed changes, sometimes maladies, sometimes regenerations, which take place under the surface and then at a crisis burst out into prominence, so does it happen with any community as old and intricate as this one. Individual agencies help to bring about these upheavals, but the preparation for them is a long, silent, hidden growth, subject quite as much to the influence of non-human forces as to the will of humanity.

Old Dr. Fell and his sister Barbara were to dine at Abbey House one day early in June — to be exact on June the Second — and when this day came there was the usual fuss and stir all over the rambling, untidy dwelling where for some fifty years the brother and sister had lived at the corner of Northload Street and Manor House Road. Though the Fells had lived here so long it was notorious that their successive batches of maids only stayed with them for very limited periods, such was the cantankerous and testy disposition of Miss Barbara Fell. Thus when any day arrived for a real dining out, and this came only some half a dozen times a year, the Doctor's best dress-tie and Miss Barbara's best piece of black lace, and sometimes even her tiger-claw brooch set in opals, were apt to be in the wrong drawer or in the wrong chest of drawers. Dr. Fell took the precaution on this occasion of being dressed a complete hour before it was necessary. He had learned by bitter experience that it was advisable that the dressing difficulties of the two of them should not occur simultaneously! Dr. Fell in this crafty manner took upon himself to outwit the malevolence of Hobbididance, the Demon of curst households. And so now he sat in his receiving room awaiting the forward-glide of events and reading the Enchiridion of Epictetus. Dr. Fell was not unaware that he lived in a town which had a very ancient Christian Church. He had indeed only to ascend the eastern slope of Wirral Hill to discover, set up by the Town Council, when Wollop's predecessor was Mayor, a handsomely inscribed marble slab upon which was recorded the fact that, thirty-one years after the Death of our Saviour, Joseph of Arimathea brought His Blood to this spot. Dr. Fell was also in a position to discover in the guide-books the fact that not only was the church in his town the oldest church, Orbis Terrarum, in the whole earth, but that this fact had been sustained against rival churches at the Council of Pisa in 1409, at the Council of Constance in 1417, at the Council of Siena in 1424, and at the Council of Basle in 1434, establishing beyond refutation that Glastonbury possessed a church that had been founded *statim post passionem Christi*— "immediately after the Passion of Christ." Nevertheless although he denied not that he lived in a town where perhaps an altar still existed that had been used in the original wattle-edifice, built by one who had touched the flesh of the Man-God, Dr. Fell was not a Christian. He was, on the contrary, a Stoic, and when he was not reading for the thousandth time the sturdy *logoi* of the stoical slave, he was reading for the hundredth time the wistful meditations of the stoical Emperor.

"Manny! Manny!" It was Barbara's voice ringing through the house. *He* was Manny. His name was really Charles Montagu. Manny had been a nursery nickname, and since it reduced his dignity more completely than anything else his sister was never tired of using it. He wearily got up and opened the door. "Tell Rosie I want her, Manny!" He made three or four steps to the stairs that went down to the basement where the kitchen was and opened the door. “Rosie!” he called. “Yes, Doctor!” “Your mistress wants you.”

Back he came to his study, and again sat down. This time he closed the Enchiridion and flung it on his desk. Once more in that warm dusty June sunshine his head sank down over his knees; and he thought how his sister had managed to spoil the whole of his life. He thought to himself— “What on earth have I lived for all these years? I’ve not really enjoyed myself, I suppose, on an average, for more than a single hour every day. An hour a day! I wonder how much more than that most people in Glastonbury get, when you add up their pleasant moments? I can’t believe I’d hold back from those morphia tablets for an hour a day! No! It’s the hope that keeps me going on, just going on; for that’s all it is. It’s the hope.” By what he always thought of in his mind as “the hope” the Doctor meant nothing less than the death of his sister Barbara.

“Manny! Manny!” Out of his chair he sprang again and out of his study he flew. Once in the passage he waited for a second, praying that she was only having a row with Rosie, and that this calling for him was a strategic move in a feminine battle. “Manny!”

“Yes, Barbara?”

“Oh, don’t say ‘yes’ in *that* tone” — she was leaning over the banisters — “Come up, quick! Come here, come *here!* You must hook me up. Rosie is too helpless for anything!”

Dr. Fell sighed heavily and began mounting the stairs. Weariness and a great disgust for life weighed upon him. He followed Barbara into her bedroom, even to cross the threshold of which was a purgatorial punishment to him; and as he hooked her up his loathing for her was so intense that the idea of murder came into his mind.

Euphemia Drew’s dining-room had all the windows open; but so still was the atmosphere that the six steady flames above the silver candlesticks — for though the western sun came slanting in from between the columns of the Tower Arch she had made Lily light up the table — preserved their small, blue-burning centres of life undisturbed.

“How nice your candles look!” cried old Lawyer Beere, who with his daughter Angela and Mr. Thomas Barter made up the roll of the guests. The old man’s grizzled head, flaccid cheeks, and thin, spectacled nose bent again over his plate of clear soup, on the surface of which floated minute wafers of white paste.

But Angela, a grave, fair girl, of about twenty-seven summers — an old man’s child — improved upon her father’s observation. “Candlelight by daylight always makes me think of Rome,” she remarked.

“So unnatural, the girl means,” said Barbara Fell, “but you always did have a taste for the artificial, Euphemia.”

Lily Rogers, removing Miss Bibby’s soup plate at that moment, was so arrested by this indictment against her mistress that she touched the lady’s brimming wine glass, and a tiny trickle of claret ran down upon the cloth. “Salt does it! Don’t fret, girl,” cried Miss Fell, covering the red stain with the minute crystals. Lily was not one to fret at such a misfortune while Mr. Barter was looking at her. She plunged, on the contrary, into a prolonged and pensive reverie. But Charles Montagu glanced in surprise at his sister. Why was she so considerate to Lily and so harsh with Rosie?

Was he wrong in disliking that thin, angular, grey face with such heart-burning detestation? She was always amiable to Tom Barter. If Rosie were Lily and *he* were Barter, would peace, love and harmony reign at Old Town Lodge?

Tom Barter spoke up now. He was impatient to throw all his weight upon the side of the Pageant before these formidable women began condemning it. “I’ve got a personal favour,” he said, “to beg of you three ladies,” and he made a gallant little bow in the direction of Angela whom he had only met once or twice before, and of whose cold, chaste, direct glances he was çomewhat afraid. “I want you all to make sure you get good seats at the Pageant by buying your tickets early. There are a lot of foreigners coming — several whole parties of them from Germany — and it won’t look nice if the front rows are vacant. The Mayor has been saving the front rows for the leading ladies of the town. He has not let his agent sell one ticket for those.”

At this reference to the Mayor’s “agent,” Mary, who was sitting next to old Mr. Beere, hesitated not to lift up her voice. “It isn’t whether you approve,” she said eagerly and with a heightened colour, “or disapprove, of the thing as a whole. It’s simply whether you would care to be entirely absent from something that’s likely to be … quite an historical event in the life of … of everybody here.”

Euphemia glanced quickly at her, as she accepted a gold-bordered plate from the dreamy Lily. “Only too historical,” she thought, “in *your* life, my unhappy darling.” But she said to Miss Fell— “I think perhaps Mary is right, Barbara. We all owe a duty to Glastonbury, and whatever we may *personally* think of our new Mayor and his methods, we must admit that the man has the place very much at heart.”

“There won’t be anything Romish about it, will there?” said Miss Fell.

“*I* can answer for that,” cried Barter hastily. “Oh, no! Our fear at first was that, in his Evangelical simplicity, Mr. Geard might be laughed at by some of our cleverer church people. But the Vicar has been talking to him and has made him see—” He stopped abruptly, anxious not to overdo his argument and also, it must be confessed, a little puzzled how to round off this imaginary conversation.

The sun was sinking now and through the open windows floating lightly and gently across the Ruins, came the fragrance of many hayfields. Uncut as yet, the grass had become tall and feathery, and mingled with its vague aroma was a foretaste of something far more intimately sweet, the first breath of budding honeysuckle and dog-roses. Angela Beere — beneath that calm white bosom in the low-cut light-blue frock, under that quiet forehead with the fair hair parted so smoothly — was thinking just then very strange thoughts. She had recently met Persephone, for the first time after a long interval, and the attraction of that equivocal creature had grown upon her night by night, since she had talked with her, into something like a feverish obsession. It had been difficult for her to behave adequately, even politely, in Persephone's presence, so troubling had the girl's personality been. She had wanted to run away from her; she had wanted to toss herself tempestuously, distractedly, into her new friend's arms! "Did she like me," she was thinking now, "did I look well? What did she mean by talking to me as she did, if she didn't want me for a friend? When she said that about life being so difficult, and the love of men being so gross and brutal, and it being so hard to find a person you could love wholeheartedly, did I make her understand how I sympathised?"

"There's going to be a bad strike in this town," announced Mr. Barter, "if those Crow people aren't careful. You'd better give your cousin a hint, Mary. He wouldn't take *my* advice." He paused and looked at old Mr. Beere, anxious to make the lawyer believe that it was over a pure point of industrial politics that he had quarrelled with his late employer.

Mr. Beere, however, as he ate his cutlets at once greedily and daintily with his old wrinkled face close to his plate, was thinking to himself— "It's astonishing how Crow could put up with this fellow so long. He’s an interloper. He’s an intriguer. He’s thoroughly shifty. I hope he doesn’t take a fancy to Angela. No doubt he was feathering his nest in some scurvy way when Crow kicked him out.”

“Who’s this Capporelli they’re talking so much about in the Gazette?” enquired Miss Euphemia Drew.

Since no one else seemed inclined to reply Mary began explaining to her friend how the person in question was one of the famous old French clowns of thirty years ago. “He’s retired for a long time,” she said. “But he comes back occasionally for things of this sort. He’s had an unhappy life. His wife ran away with a Chinaman. Cousin John told Geard about him. He took me to see him at one of the rehearsals. He’s acting Dagonet in their play.”

“Acting *who*, my dear?” enquired Miss Bibby.

“Dagonet, Miss Fell, King Arthur’s Fool.”

Barbara turned to Mr. Barter. “I thought you said that this performance was an Evangelical affair, something like Pilgrim’s Progress?”

Old Mr. Beere lifted up his head. “I expect ’tis pretty well what the boys and girls like best,” he said. “A little incense and a lot of kissing.”

“It cannot of course be true, Mr. Barter,” threw in Miss Drew, “what dear old Wollop told me yesterday, when I talked to him at that cage he’s always shut up in?”

“It’s true, Madam,” threw in Mr. Beere with a humorous grimace. “You can count on it’s being true if Wollop said it.” But Miss Drew shook her head. “What he said was that the part of our Saviour was going to be played by that shabby Welshman who’s looking after old Jones’ shop.”

“Mr. Evans *is* a queer bird to look at,” said Tom Barter gravely, catching the eye of Lily as he spoke, and giving her one of those lightning-quick recognisant glances of his that girls always understood and responded to, "but he was at Jesus, Oxford, he tells me. He certainly knows more about the history of this place than anyone else."

"But to act the part of Our Lord—" reiterated Miss Drew.

"It has always struck me as strange that anyone could do it, even in those old Miracle Plays; but now — and with this French clown you talk of—"

But Mr. Barter's mind had already wandered some distance from Paul Capporelli. He answered vaguely that he felt sure Miss Drew would find nothing objectionable in the Pageant. He thought to himself, "I've been a fool to tie myself up with that designing little bitch at the Pilgrims'. I must edge out of that. I must give her the go-by. She's begun to rate her bloody virtue a trifle too high. I wonder if Lily would — But of course there's her sister! *That's* what has always stopped me. But by God she's a beautiful girl — yes! and a sensible girl too." And the incorrigible imagination of Mr. Barter began calling up such enticing and seductive images that when the real Lily, in her puritanical black dress and apron, came in again, the sight of her gave him quite a shock. She had re-assumed her normal attire with a too-bewildering rapidity!

The dinner drew to its end at last. Lily was now taking the cheese-plates away and placing before the guests Miss Drew's best set of Dresden fruit-plates. The Meissen coffee-cups too were brought in and a silver pot that had belonged to her grandmother. She had even instructed Mary to buy a box of cigarettes for the close of the meal and Mary — knowing the taste of her friend Tom — had bought some first-rate Virginian ones. The conversation began to revolve round the enigmatic figure of the new Mayor.

"Young Robert Stilly at the Bank," said Lawyer Beere, "tells me the fellow's spent thousands on this affair. I should think his family must be feeling it."

Mr. Barter hastened to bring forward an aspect of Mr. Geard that had nothing to do with the expenditure of money. His reward for leaving Philip bit at his conscience like a maggot at a rosy-cheeked apple. “He talks of Our Lord,” he remarked, “as if He were standing close beside him.”

“The man’s always smelt of drink when *I’ve* been close behind him,” said Barbara Fell.

“Rogers tells me,” said Miss Drew, “that he’s been seen making faces at that poor slobbering boy who always stands on the pavement outside the Pilgrims’.”

“I don’t think,” threw in Barter, “that Louie got that story quite right. The version I’ve heard” — and he glanced at Mary, for his informant had been none other than John— “is that he made that boy understand him by signs, and that he always stops when he passes him and that—”

Mary interrupted. “I believe he’s got some weird nervous sympathy … mind you I don’t like him … there’s something unpleasant about him … something frightening … but from all I hear he has some nervous peculiarity which makes him *imitate* every infirmity he meets. That must have been what Louie meant. He must act idiotically whenever he talks to that idiot.”

“All I can say is,” said Miss Bibby, “it’s an outrage for a town like ours to have a Mayor who’s not responsible for his actions.”

“He’s a better doctor than I am in such cases,” muttered her brother crustily.

“Hear how you talk, Manny!” the lady cried. “Anyone would think you were one of his converts. I’ve heard he drinks at the pubs with the worst characters in the town. And they say that last bank holiday he got so drunk at the Legge woman’s party that he took that sick niece of hers — Manny goes to see her — she’s got some frightful disease — on his knees.”

“I’d be ashamed to talk like that, Barbara!”

Everyone looked at Dr. Fell. He had spoken in a low voice, but with bitter distinctness.

Miss Drew intervened. “We’re all of us talking scandal, I’m afraid,” she said. “You’re right to rebuke us, Doctor. What do *you* think about it, Mr. Beere?”

Mr. Beere looked up from his grapes. “Stilly thinks the fellow’s mad,” he said. “He’s been spending money like water this last couple of months.”

Charles Montagu Fell thought to himself— “If it wasn’t for my Mary here, and some of those young girls who come to my Clinic, I swear I’d take those tablets and end it.” He finished his coffee in a gulp and there came over him, as he put the empty cup down, a sensation that he had been suffering from several times lately, a sensation as if his life were merely running on by the mechanism wound up within it, while its heart, its soul, its meaning had fled somewhere else and he had only to cry out in a loud voice: “But it’s all husks and hollowness! But it’s all worm-rot and dust!” and it would crumble to pieces …. The conversation drifted on now to an uneventful exchange of local gossip.

While Miss Drew’s dinner-party ebbed thus to its lame and impotent conclusion, Mr. Philip Crow emerged from the drive gate of The Elms to inspect the appearance of the weather.

Once out in that lovely June evening — it was now only a few minutes after eight — he strolled into the town. In the open space outside St. John’s he encountered Mr. Stilly, the cashier of the Glastonbury bank. Mr. Stilly had himself come out after an early supper — he was a hard-working man of forty who supported a pair of aged parents — to take the air, walk the streets a little, and see what was toward. Mr. Stilly had thin, reddish hair, a still thinner, reddish moustache, and a drooping, melancholic face. But he was not really a melancholy man. Mr. Stilly accepted the pin-pricks of chance and the joltings of time and tide with patient equanimity. He concealed a passion for taking photographs beneath his unruffled demeanour and he was also extremely fond of using a fret-saw. He adored his parents, who were both exacting and tyrannical; and, one of the greatest pleasures of his life was when at this time of the year he went down to the brooks so that the old people might have watercress to their tea. Mr. Stilly had unbounded respect for Philip Crow. When he found himself tonight overtaken by this gentleman his tendency was at once without question to nod to him politely and sheer off. It was with surprise — and even with some misgiving — that Mr. Stilly heard Mr. Crow express a wish that he would accompany him to Tor Field to have a glance at what might be going on out there, on this fine night of the second of June. Mr. Stilly, conscious that he had left his "only father and his only mother," as he was accustomed facetiously to call them, playing at dominoes, acceded to the manufacturer's suggestion.

The two men walked rapidly down Chilkwell Street, past the Vicarage Gate, past Miss Drew's gate, past the Tithe Barn, from which the symbolic creatures of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John regarded them without an eyelid's flicker, past St. Michael's Inn, where Mad Bet made silent faces at them, past Chalice Well where the red water gurgled at them in disregarded neglect, till they came to Tor Field. The gate was open and they went in. It was just like the field of any ordinary Fair, this place tonight, with sail-cloth barriers pegged firmly into the earth and a confusion of lively voices reaching them through the warm twilight. They skirted the barrier and standing behind a crowd of casual intruders, whom the Players had no authority to exclude, they surveyed, with the distasting wonder of grown-up people in the presence of childish nonsense, the bewildering chaos of the unusual scene.

Mr. Stilly opened his mouth twice to utter some suitable comment before he had the courage to speak. Then he said: “It makes one think of what one reads about America.”

“What do you mean?” asked Philip. This natural but not very kind question disturbed the play of Mr. Stilly’s already agitated allegiance.

“They perform … performances … a good deal … don’t they … in the … open air?” muttered the cashier of the bank.

“Do they?” said the other, laconically. “I was never there.”

Mr. Stilly murmured something about Indians and sank into nervous silence. To be standing at this hour with the owner of the Glastonbury Dye-Works and in the presence of such an unusual scene was too much for him. He hoped that his parents had not yet noticed the length of his absence.

It was apparent that it would not be for lack of varied and fantastic costumes or of contradictory and vehement directions, or of excitable crowds of emotional young people, that the Geard Pageant would fail, if it *did* fail. Philip glared at it all with a cold, pinched disdain from beneath his cloth cap. There shot forth into the hurly-burly of that motley assembly, from this man’s concentrated detachment, radiated waves of accumulated contempt. His angry thoughts pursued one another through his brain like marching soldiers. They came and went; they wheeled and counter-wheeled; they obeyed the commands of Philip’s will in much better order than these excitable lads and lasses were obeying their distracted Professionals from Dublin.

“Humanity!” he thought. “As they were two, three, four thousand years ago, so today! To mould them, to drill them, to dominate them — it’s all too sickeningly easy.” And he thought: “How much more worthy a resistance is offered to me by the deep, dark, interior rocks of the Mendips! How much better to struggle with machinery against the inertness of blind matter than to try to make anything of such insects! It won’t be necessary to plot and scheme to defeat Geard. All I shall have to do will be to hold off my hands. This crazy confusion, these bewildered people; these bare legs and riotous dancing, why! it’s a Bacchanalian orgy. He’ll make the town a laughingstock. The thing he’s stirring up here — any fool can see it — is pure religious madness under the mask of theatricals. The man’s a lunatic. This sort of thing never has been, and never will be, tolerated in England.”

“I’m afraid I’ve got to go now, Mr. Crow. I didn’t expect to stay out so long. My … my people will be wondering where … where I am.” It had taken Mr. Stilly a long time to make up his mind to utter this daring ultimatum. His voice when he did utter it was like the voice of an unhappy school-boy murmuring something about cricket or football to a preoccupied headmaster absorbed in a nice point of Thucydidean grammar.

“Eh? What did you say? Oh, all right,” returned Philip. “Wait one minute, Stilly, and I’ll walk back with you.”

They left the field, passing on their way out that fallen trunk on the mossy sides of which Sam Dekker had searched for rare toadstools on the day when Mr. Evans first thought of taking the part of Christ in the pageant.

Meanwhile this same Sam, struggling pitifully with his love for Nell, had entered his favourite shrine in Glastonbury. This was a little chapel dedicated to St. Patrick lying behind the Women’s Almshouse near the entrance to the Ruins, a chapel which still possessed an original stone altar left undisturbed by the Protestant Reformation and carried upon its wall the heraldic arms of St. Joseph, a green cross between two golden cruets.

Never had those Arimathean arms, never had that stone altar, beheld a worshipper such as poor Sam showed himself that night.

He was on his knees at the altar. He was alone in the little chapel. Lower and lower he bowed his head, clenching his fingers as he bent forward.

But it was not in the attitude of prayer that his hands hung by his side. They swung there savagely in the manner of a prize-fighter's fists and, as they swung, the backs of his knuckles kept striking against the front of the stone altar.

There was something about his posture as he knelt — swaying his whole body backward and forward — that was pitiably grotesque. An imaginative observer might have received the impression that an animal was praying.

Was there any portion of Sam's nature that exulted in the atrocious task that he had laid upon himself — the task of doing not his will but what he conceived to be the will of a tragic superhuman Being?

Yes, the soul itself, in this grotesque swaying body with clenched fists, exulted in what it was doing! Sam's soul seemed to be able to gather to itself a peculiar consciousness quite apart from the rest of Sam's sensibility. His soul seemed to be holding his body and his will in a tight leash, as a man might hold a wild-eyed bull, by a ring through its nose.

His soul seemed to be saying to his natural senses and his natural will: "You must go through this because Christ went through it! I care not how you suffer; so long as you go on, day by day, doing His will and not your own!"

And all the while Sam suffered there, swaying in his anguish like a great bleeding animal held by a steel ring through his nose, the Man-God that he invoked was struggling in vain to reach the consciousness of this mad perverter of His secret. In vain! In vain! Against the power-lust in the soul of a man, when it has once tasted the wild delight of taking up its own body and its own will and its own nervous sensibility and forcing them to *act against the grain*, there is only one Deity that can prevail; and that Deity is not Christ. How could Christ as He swept now like a cloud of weed-smoke under the door of St. Patrick's chapel, relax the tension of this soul, that pulled and jerked so remorselessly at the nose of a praying earth-beast?

But Christ was not, on that vaporous Glastonbury afternoon, oblivious of His poor, besotted servant Sam. Although He tried in vain to change by invisible reasoning the incorrigible obstinacy of Sam's perverted *mind*, upon external events He *could* exercise a certain degree of control.

He now put it into the head of young Elphin Cantle, with whom Sam used sometimes to go for walks, to come surreptitiously into the church. Elphin, like many other boys of the town, had a passionate love of Sam. Mother Legge, when in her cups, had recently said to Young Tewsy that Sam Dekker had become a seducer of boys. Nothing could have been more pathetically unjust! Sam did not, in his secret heart, care at all for boys. His walks with the oddest, queerest, and most unhandsome among them — and Elphin was certainly one of these — were part of his general scheme of life. He knew that there were lots of boys in Glastonbury who, hating cricket and football and not caring for girls, were profoundly lonely and unhappy. To these boys he gave a good deal of his attention, which they repaid tenfold, as far as emotional response was concerned; but Sam knew nothing of the strength of the feelings he excited.

When Elphin peeped into St. Patrick's chapel he was thrilled but not surprised to find Sam there. He had looked in before, under similar occasions; but had never dared to approach the object of his passionate adoration. Today, however, pushed forward by the invisible pressure of a Hand upon his shoulder, the thin-legged, pale-faced boy moved shyly up to his idol's side. As he approached, he fancied he caught the sound of a huskily drawn sob in the man's throat. This sound hurt him to the quick.

Well did Elphin Cande know what it was to go into solitary places and utter sounds like that!

The boy went close up to him and still pushed forward by the invisible Hand, whispered his name, doing as he whispered it, what Russian serfs in former times did to their masters, that is to say, kissing him lightly on the shoulder. Anyone but a born naturalist like Sam would have started violently and even uttered a cry; but long training in the woods and fields had given Sam under any nervous shock — and indeed in all these things his nerves were like tough wood — the poise of a Red Indian.

“Oh, it’s you, Elf, is it?” was all he said. And he began rising stiffly to his feet, unceremoniously wiping his eyes with the back of one of his relaxed fists.

Elphin Cantle said not a word.

“Had your tea yet?” enquired Sam, stretching himself and looking round for his cap and stick.

Elphin shook his head.

“Come on then. Let’s see what Penny has got for us today!”

THE PAGEANT

Midsummer Day dawned long before most of the performers destined to take their share in Mr. Geard's religious circus had awakened from sleep. Mary Crow, however, who was to take no part in it save as a spectator, was awake soon after the first glimmer of dawn.

To watch the processes of dawn from a window that faces *west* is in a sense like the contemplation of various excited expressions crossing a human countenance when the cause of such feelings is absent. The girl propped herself up in bed, reached for her dressing-gown which was at her bed's foot, wound it like a shawl round her neck, and watched the slow, stealthy expanding of the grey light. She remembered having heard John once defend the Biblical account of the creation, when Tom Barter criticised it as separating the creation of the sun from the creation of light. John had maintained that light was an entity quite independent of its immediate origin. Certainly it did look to Mary now as if light were an entity free of all connection with the sun.

She could see the great ruined Tower Arch of the Abbey Church as she lay there, and she could see the tops of the elm trees beyond it, very ghostly and phantom-like, their greenness only half-born. The arch, it seemed, assimilated itself to this dawn-light far less easily than the treetops. It isolated itself in some way from this process of dawn and emphasised its own curves and mouldings and masonry, in resistance, as it were, to these atmospheric effects. But the foliage of the treetops was part of it. The foliage of the treetops, as Mary watched it now, seemed to contain within itself the infinite sadness of this grey, half-born, Cimmerian light that was now slowly invading the world and establishing itself in the cold aisles and in the blank corridors of darkness. Filmy wisps of grey mist hung about these treetops, mist that was liker to dewdrops than raindrops and yet did not really suggest water-drops at all. Nor did it suggest clouds! They were things by themselves, *sui generis,* those dawn-mists, and they seemed to have as remote a connection with water in any localised form, as the dim light, in which they dropped and wavered and rose and sank, had with the invisible sun. "Yes," thought Mary, "something in the foliage of those trees flows forth to greet this sad light, that does not seem like sunlight, just as something in me flows out to greet it."

Will it be fine today? That was the next thought that Mary had. She had been to the Northload Street room for a few minutes yesterday evening and had found John and Tom together. They were drinking whiskey and the former was in a state of complete exhaustion. John had told her that the Mayor was resolved to carry the affair through, wet or fine, but that he had somehow convinced himself— "You know the way he talks to his God, as if He were standing by his side?" — that it would not be "allowed" to rain on this day of "Glaston Resurgens." Mary felt full of doubt and anxiety. All manner of troubling thoughts assailed her. Suppose the whole thing were a monstrous failure? Suppose the performers got panic-stricken and that French clown lost his head in some wild antic or improvisation quite out of keeping with the rest? She had seen a fragment of the Passion Play rehearsed and she felt totally unable to conceive how Mr. Evans could even carry his part off, far less be successful in it. Rumours had been running wildly through the town for the last week about the police from Taunton interfering and arresting the principal players, and the last thing Mary had heard before she went to bed last night was news brought into the kitchen by Weatherwax that the expected strike in the Dye-Works had come and that the Glastonbury factory had locked out all its hands that morning. So far, the gardener's story said, the trouble had not extended to the Crow plant at Wookey, but *that* also, so Weatherwax declared, might have a lockout tomorrow. Even the Wookey hands had demanded, and apparently had been given, a holiday today, so that as Mary lay propped up on her pillows, waiting for the first yellow beams to strike the great broken arch in front of her, she seemed to catch trouble on the air, coming from every side. Barter had told her that the town was already filled to overflowing with visitors. Parties of Germans, Dutchmen, Scandinavians — even a few French people — had filled the streets yesterday. She herself had been startled by the crowds as she went to Northload Street.

Mary was of a realistic and practical turn of mind, but her nerves felt thoroughly shaky now. In this cool dawn-air, alone with rooks, elm-tree tops, ruins and wood-pigeons, a thousand alarms and terrors visited her. She imagined all those factory-hands — the strikers from the Glastonbury works, the holidaymakers from Wookey — joining in a great mob and invading the field. She imagined a wild tumult taking place in the midst of the performance, wherein John would be arrested by the police, handcuffed, and carried off in a motor car to Taunton. The pageant itself, she had learned, was not to begin till two in the afternoon, but since a portion of the field had been handed over to the ordinary booth-holders, toy-and-sweet vendors, trinket sellers, fruit-and-nut dealers, and so forth — whirligigs and roundabouts alone being excluded — and since gipsy caravans too were to be allowed in by the Mayor's especial indulgence, there would be festivities going on in Tor Field long before that hour and plenty of opportunities for such a mixed public to work themselves up into a riotous state of mind before the official programme began.

It was with a shock of real amazement, as something that seemed more blood-red than sunlight hit the left-hand column of the great broken arch, that the girl lifted her head now. She let her twisted dressing-gown fall loose about her shoulders and propped herself still higher in the bed, with the palms of her hands pressed against the mattress, for she became aware that the sight of this unnatural light — in reality it was a wine-coloured red, touched with a quite indescribable nuance of purple — was giving her a spasm of irrational happiness. She leaned forward, allowing her dislodged dressing-gown to slide down upon the pillows behind her and quite disregarding the fact that a cool sunrise wind was blowing against her flimsily clad figure. Her soul had come back with a violent spasm, like a rush of blood to her head, and her whole nature seemed to pour itself out towards the reddish light on that tall column. Her pulse of happiness was intense. What she experienced was like a quivering love-ecstasy that had no human object. She could actually feel the small round breasts under her night-gown shiver and distend. Her head instinctively fell back a little, while her chin was lifted up. Her lips parted, and a smile that was a smile of indescribable peace flickered over her face. She would have served at that moment as a model for some primitive Flemish artist painting a passionately concentrated vision of the rape of Danae.

Whatever it was that stirred her so, the effect of it soon passed; but Mary told no one, not even John, of the experience she had had on the dawn of the Baptist’s day. The invisible Watchers however of human life in Glastonbury noted well this event. “She has been allowed to see It,” they said to one another. “Will she be the only one among all these people?”

When two o’clock struck in the belfries and towers of the town there was an expectant stir amid the great company of spectators in the wide sloping field at the foot of the Tor. A surprising number of seats and wooden benches had been procured for the Mayor's great occasion, and upon these seats sat a vast crowd of people, all of them roused at that moment to a pitch of excitement such as had not been experienced in that place since the day when the last Abbot of Glastonbury had met his doom. Like the famous Homeric wind sweeping over a cornfield, this cumulative wave of crowd-hypnosis shivered through these assembled people, straightening their shoulders, lifting their heads, turning their faces towards the grassy terrace on the slope above them. Had Philip Crow's airplane been flying low down then, over this tightly packed crowd who had seats to sit upon and over the equally large crowd at the back of them and at their flanks who had no seats except the grass, it would have been of fascinating interest to note the varieties of human types gathered so close together. Many of those without seats lay sideways on the sward, or sat crouched and hugging their knees, while behind them all, drifting about or standing still, as their vagrant mood dictated, were large stray groups of what might be termed casual transients. Gipsies from the caravans ranged in rows along the hedge, nut-vendors, pedlars with their trays, hawkers with packs strapped to their backs, beggars, tramps, groups of astonished and cautious shepherds from the high Mendips, stray factory-hands from Wookey and Street and the city of Wells, all these, mingled with a number of strikers from the Dye-Works of the town itself, kept circulating and surging, advancing and retreating, jostling, edging, dodging, hovering, spying, mocking, criticising, deriding, applauding, just as the wind of accident and the beckoning of caprice carried them there or here.

The two front rows of seats had been reserved for local magnates, and in spite of all the suspicion, jealousy, distrust, that was about, these seats had very few empty spaces. Miss Elizabeth Crow was there with Lady Rachel. Mrs. Philip Crow ought to have been there, for although Philip had taken the opportunity of flying to Wookey Hole, his wife, under the influence of Emma who was here with Louie and Lily, had decided not to miss what she now spoke of as “something to rest a person’s mind.” But Tilly’s dislike of publicity was so great that she had refused this place of honour and had had to be ensconced in the fourth row. On the other side of Lady Rachel, however, there was an empty chair, for the girl had done all she could to persuade her father to come and there was still a good chance that he might. Ned Athling, who had written a considerable portion of the words of the whole performance, was one of the principal play-actors. Miss Bibby Fell was duly seated by Dr. Fell’s side and next to her were Lawyer Beere and Angela, and beyond them Miss Drew and Mary. By Mary’s side John had found a place for a foreign priest. In the central portion of the second row of seats, behind these personages, were the Vicar and his son, for though Sam had steadily refused to have anything to do with the performance and was now reduced to agitated burnings of heart by the presence of Nell, he had been unwilling to refuse his father when Mat had made an especial appeal to him not to desert him on this occasion. Next to Mat and Sam sat Mr. Wollop and in company with Mr. Wollop almost the whole staff of Wollop’s shop. Being a bachelor, and also having an equal and unfailing interest in all mundane spectacles, Mr. Wollop had felt it incumbent upon him to be found on this occasion “holding up,” as he called it, “his proper end.”

It was a sign of something really grandly democratic in the soul of Glastonbury’s leading tradesman that there never entered his head for a single second a doubt about the staff of Wollop’s — all its “young ladies” and all its “young gentlemen” — being worthy of the second row of the select seats. It *had,* however, several times already entered the head of the Nietzschean young man — whose name was Booty — that he was in a place of embarrassing honour, since just in front of him was the vacant chair reserved for the Marquis and to his right, for he was at the end of the row of his fellows, sat Mr. Stilly of the bank.

In the third row of seats, but some distance from Sam, indeed just behind Mr. Stilly's aged parents, were none others than Will Zoyland and Nell. Nell had her brother Dave on her right, and beyond Dave sat the Vicar of St. Benignus, the eloquent Dr. Sodbury, whose ministrations were so pleasing to Megan Geard. Persephone Spear had been enrolled rather late in the proceedings among the players, but though so late a comer, she had been given a role second to none, having been called upon to play the part of the Virgin Mother.

It was only in the fourth row, just behind Will and Nell Zoyland that seats had been reserved for the family of the Mayor. Here Mrs. Geard sat, between Cordelia and Mr. Bishop, the Town Clerk, for Crummie was to take the important role of the Lady of Shalott in the Arthurian part of the Pageant. Next to the Town Clerk sat Mrs. Philip, and by Mrs. Philip's side was the Curator of the Glastonbury Museum.

The fifth row of these reserved seats had been dedicated — Mr. Tom Barter had been careful to see to this — to the servants of the leading families of the town and all their especial friends and relations. In this row, therefore, there sat a most motley collection of persons, sweet-natured young girls, hypercritical spinsters, nervous old men, complacent old women, and a great many very riotous children. Here were Emma Sly, Louie and Lily Rogers, Sally Jones and her friend Tossie Stickles — this latter, because of her delicate state of health, armed with her mistress's oldest and largest scent-bottle — Miss Bibby's latest two servants, Rose Nicker and Edith Bates, both of whom had twice over "given notice," those formidable connoisseurs of mortal life, Mr. Weatherwax and Penny Pitches, those garrulous supporters of the dignity of the church, Mrs. Robinson and

Grandmother Cole, together with the whole robber band from the alley, Jackie, Nelly Morgan, Sis and Bert — the last-named being planted by a devilish trick of chance just behind the curator of the museum whose devotion to fossils was only rivalled by his maniacal hatred of children.

At the extreme end of the sixth row, flanked by a voluble contingent of Germans from Bremen and Lübeck, sat Mother Legge with her faithful bodyguard, Young Tewsy, by her side, the old lady in her best black silk and the old man in a suit of cast-off broad-cloth, hired from the laundryman, and formerly belonging to a Baptist minister. On the other side of Mrs. Legge sat Blackie Morgan, between whom and the old procuress a curious and quite unprofessional friendship had sprung up.

Mr. Geard had surprised both John and Barter by insisting on remaining completely independent of the whole thing — independent of the actors, independent of the spectators — and the only indication he had given to his family of his present whereabouts was a word he had casually dropped after their early dinner about seeing how the performance looked from the top of the Tor!

The number of foreigners who were present surpassed even John's expectation and they constantly increased. Crowds of them kept entering the field long after the performance had commenced. Every train that arrived brought more of them. They were French, German, Spanish, Bohemian, Dutch, Danish, Scandinavian and Russian. There were even two oriental, long-haired monks from a monastery in the Caucasus. John Crow imagined these two men setting out on this westward instead of eastward pilgrimage at the very first hearing of its possibility, when two and a half months ago he had sent his announcements across Europe.

The only person among all this immense crowd who had bothered about trying to get into personal relations with the organisers of the event was a mysterious-looking priest from Constantinople who called himself Father Paleologue. It was this man to whom John — when he found that he could speak English — had given a place by Mary's side, in the front seats. At the opposite end of the sixth row from where Mrs. Legge and Blackie were seated were Old Jones and Abel Twig. The Ward Matron who had brought them — a handsome buxom woman always spoken of as Aunt Laura — was doing her best to amuse the two old men. In this task she was not assisted very much by her neighbour on the other side, who was an exceedingly caustic French journalist famous for his biting wit. This man, who had come to Glastonbury solely to report on the doings of Paul Capporelli, was alternately scribbling in a notebook what presumedly were light touches of local colour, suitable as a background for the great clown, and stretching his neck to catch more of the profile of Lady Rachel. Every now and then he would turn a ferocious stare upon Abel Twig, who was seated between Aunt Laura and Old Jones. There was something about Number One's physiognomy, not to speak of his Sedgemoor dialect, which this critical Parisian found peculiarly irritating. He was trying to catch stray sentences — characteristic of English phlegm and English snobbishness — from the "aristocracy" in the front rows, among whom rumour had informed him was sitting the daughter of Lord P. who represented one of the oldest Marquisates in the Kingdom, but Number One's expressions of wonder as to what had become of "thik big flock of good South-Downs what old man Chinnock used to turn into this here field," were spoken so loudly that it was hard to hear anything else.

If the critic from Paris had desired to put down in his little book a really significant trait of the English character, he would have noted how respectfully and tactfully the brigade of Taunton constables called in by Philip kept themselves in the background. It was natural enough perhaps that the police-sergeant responsible for this large body of tactful officers had chosen to confine their activity that afternoon to the outskirts of the crowd in the Tor Field, but such strategy unfortunately played into the hands of the really formidable trouble-makers. These were the revolutionary leaders of the strikers at the Dye-Works. Led by Red Robinson, who since his rebuff on Easter Monday, had deserted the primrose-path for blood-and-iron politics, the Dye-Works strikers with as many adherents as they could collect from the Wookey and Wells workshops were even now at this very moment parading the streets with revolutionary banners. By means of a real inspiration of the genius of " 'ate," Red had made a bid for the Nonconformist element among the populace of Glastonbury and side by side with his political insignia he had caused to be displayed at the head of his rapidly growing procession inscriptions denouncing the Mayor's Pageant. "Down with Mediævalism," these crafty scrolls read. "Down with Superstition," "No Lourdes, no Lisieux Here." "Down with Religious Mummery."

Thus while Philip's police force was protecting the morals of Glastonbury from the dangerous pieties of its Mayor, these street-rioters were lumping both capitalist and pietist together as joint-enemies of the people. Up and down the streets tossed and swayed these varied and singular ensigns, gathering numbers as they went and collecting in their train all the roughest elements of the town. At last the cry arose — inspired by the Æolus-breath of Red's genius for action— "To the field!" and the whole turbulent tide of people, the actual strikers far outnumbered by the less orderly elements, began pouring down Chilkwell Street towards the scene of the performance. It soon began to spread, as Lily would put it, "like wildfire," or as Penny would put it, "like Satan's own stink," through the poorer portions of the place that "The Town was up."

Like an animal organism that has taken an emetic, Glastonbury now disembogued from the obscurest recesses of its complex being all manner of queer chemical substances. Such substances, though they were living creatures, needed a shock like this cry, “The Town is up,” to fling them forth from their profound hiding-places. Most of the destitute people and drunken people and half-witted people who now poured forth from the most unexpected quarters were indigenous to the place. Thus for the first time since the Battle of Sedgemoor when that strange cry went about the streets just as it was doing now— “The Town is up” — the real People of Glastonbury emerged and asserted itself. The last time it had asserted itself was on behalf of that sweet, honeysuckle bastard, Monmouth, for it was the “great gentlemen,” like Lord P.’s ancestor and Mat Dekker’s ancestor, who had brought Dutch William in, not the people. And before that, for it had allowed the Abbot to persecute heretics and it had allowed the King to murder the Abbot without interfering, it had responded to the cry “The Town is up” when Jack Cade revolted against every privilege under the sun. It had rioted in honour of Mother Shipton, Jane Shore, Lambert Simnel, John Wycliffe, John Wesley, Lord George Gordon, and had even received and concealed from royal vengeance the crafty Welshman Owen Glendower. In fact the ingrown, inbred, integrated People of Glastonbury had raised their famous cry “The Town is up!” on behalf of every scandal that had worried the well-constituted authorities since under the crazy Arviragus they had defied the gods for the sake of the blood of a mad demigod, and on behalf of the abductor Modred had waylaid the lovely queen of Rex Arturus himself.

These were the people who poured forth now on this historic Midsummer Day from Paradise and Bove Town and Butts Close and Manor House Road to join with the strikers from Philip’s Dye-Works and with the holiday-makers from Wookey Hole. So fantastical did some of this queer crowd look, who thus enlisted themselves under the banner of Red Robinson's " 'ate," that the German and French and Scandinavian visitors — not to speak of the monks from the monastery in the Caucasus and the super-sophisticated Father Paleologue — would almost have been pardoned for taking them as lineal descendants of the dwellers in Abel Twig's Lake Village.

Unfortunately for Red's purpose his impatience for action got himself and his strikers much too quickly upon the scene. His strikers were orderly and respectable Wessex workmen, not easy to excite to acts of violence. Thus although before they reached the entrance they were shrewdly hustled by the strategic Red, over several gaps in the hedge, into the field and thus were enabled to approach the western flank of the crowd of spectators from an unexpected and unconventional quarter, things did not work out as he had hoped. If this heterogeneous mob of invaders had come *en masse*, in one grand rush, there is no doubt they would have stampeded the players and ended Mr. Geard's Pageant. But Red's " 'ate" — directed equally against Mayor and Manufacturer — had, as Number Two would have put it, "stampeded its wone self" and ruined all his skilful strategy. He ought to have waited in Chilkwell Street, opposite St. Michael's Inn — and what a sight for Mad Bet that would have been! — until his ragged camp-followers, descendants of the heroic populace who fought with scythes and bill-hooks against a trained army and a great general, had all reached the spot. It was the lack of these irresponsible pilgarlics that spoilt Red's plan, for his orderly strikers soon found themselves faced by the first five rows of seats occupied by the gentry of the town, and even the "Down with Mummery" banners paused and wavered, if they were not actually lowered, before the indignant glances and the cries of "Order! Order!" that now arose from these seats. To the crowd that were following these patient factory-hands such glances would have meant little. But many of these hands had come to labour in Philip's Dye-Works from Bath and Yeovil and Taunton and Shepton Mallet, and they lacked the recklessness of the true Glastonbury tradition.

There might, however, have been trouble, even then, if Philip's police had appeared on the scene, but fortunately these officers had chosen to remain in that portion of the field devoted to the gipsy caravans, for it was there that the hobbledehoys and riotous young apprentices of the town who regarded this occasion as their grand opportunity for causing annoyance, were shouting, singing, skylarking, making a resounding hullabaloo, and trying to draw the attention of the vast audience to themselves. The moment was a crucial one, for the brightly attired groups of the first part of the Pageant were already hovering about the two mediaeval pavilions on the ledge of the hillside that served for a platform, and Red, well-nigh desperate now and ready to risk anything, was calling upon his banner-holders to ascend the slope and invade this natural stage.

A spirited verbal altercation now began between Miss Drew, who happened to be nearest to the banner which carried the word "Mummery" and the young striker who held one of its poles. In her excitement, for Mary could do nothing to calm her, and Father Paleologue only laughed, the old lady rose to her feet and bandied recriminations with the young striker, who to tell the truth was more sulky and irritable than violent or rude.

There was an extremely large and very decorative canvas pavilion at each end of the grassy stage where the Pageant was now beginning and from these the players emerged and into these they retreated as occasion demanded. These huge tents had been copied from old books of chivalry; from the tops of them floated many bright-coloured streamers and the fluttering canvas that composed them was painted with heraldic symbols. It was from the interior of the western one of these two pavilions that John Crow watched in consternation the march of these hostile banners. He despatched a messenger for Tom Barter who was in the other tent and when Tom arrived, crossing the grassy stage with a great deal of haste and not a little awkwardness, the only thing he could suggest was that they should get the police away from the caravans as speedily as possible.

“But why haven’t they come already?” demanded John.

“They don’t realise what’s up,” cried Tom. “How should they? They think it’s a deputation to the Mayor or something! They’re strangers. They don’t know the town. They think it’s part of the affair … those flags and so on! They think it’s part of *our* performance!”

The two men went to the western entrance of the great heraldic tent and held open the sail-cloth hangings and stared helplessly at the disturbance. They could hear contentious voices from the invaded front rows! They could see figures on their feet among them. John, concerned for Mary, caught sight of the unmistakable figure of Miss Drew brandishing her parasol. “But good God, old man,” cried Barter, “look at them coming across the field! They’re *pouring* through the hedge! We’re being hustled by the populace. There’s no doubt about it! Philip’s been rousing the mob to break things up, since his police are no good.”

“What are you all doing?” John cried now, turning fiercely round on the actors with whom the tent was crowded. It was the moment for the opening dumb show of the Pageant, which consisted of a concourse of people in mediaeval dress gathered to watch the Coronation of Arthur and Gwenevere. The part of Gwenevere was taken by the tallest young lady in Wollop’s, but for the rôle of Arthur, Ned Athling had brought from his own village his father’s foreman, a majestic-looking middle-aged individual, bearded and broad-shouldered, but whose red-stockinged knees at that crisis were knocking together with panic. The thrones of the king and queen were now standing near them, inside the tent, a couple of Mat Dekker's choir-lads, in crimson doublet and hose, waiting the word to drag them out. From the eastern pavilion the knights and ladies of Camelot — Sunday School children from St. John's and St. Benignus' — were already, in the absence of anyone to stop them, gliding nervously forth and presenting themselves before the audience. It was then that the absence of the thrones — delayed by the consternation of the officials in the western tent — proved bewildering to these bedizened youngsters.

John's fury, directing itself blindly towards the Middlezoy King Arthur and towards the equally frightened pages who were to drag out the thrones, was now confronted by the soft protests of the prostrate Crummie, who, lying upon a lathe-and-plaster stretcher, roughly bulwarked to represent a barge, was attended by two lusty youths from the Congregational Chapel who were to carry her in, at the critical moment of the coronation, and lay her at the feet of the king and queen. Across the body of Crummie, who was wrapped in a dark blanket over which her long fair hair fell in dishevelled allurement, a mitred bishop, Bob Carter, from the Godney grocery, who was clinging frantically to the crown of Britain, which an agitated page, Ted Sparks from the bakery at Meare, was trying to take away from him, burst now into angry abuse of Lancelot du Lac. This melancholy Mirror of Courtesy was Billy Pratt of the St. John's Bell-Ringers, and Billy had infuriated Bob by insisting that it was his right to stand at the head of Crummie when the moment came for them all to emerge into public view, whereas Bishop Bob declared that Lancelot's place was near the queen. It was out of the midst of this noisy wrangle of Church and State over the beautiful corpse that the soft voice of the Lady of Shalott herself arose, enquiring of John what for mercy's sake was the matter, and why the performance didn't commence. "It's so stuffy in here," murmured the love-slain damsel.

"There's the devil to pay out here, Miss Geard," cried John, in a state bordering on complete nervous collapse. "There's a mob pouring across the field from the town with flags and sticks and God knows what, and they're now collecting in front of the audience. They're pointing at us too and I believe" — he cast a glance through the tent-hangings— "Christ! They are! They're coming up the hill, and all the front row people are on their feet and the foreigners are beginning to make a row."

John's account of things, however, was a little exaggerated. Only one flag-carrier — the young Communist who had been threatened by Miss Drew's parasol — had begun to ascend the hill, but he had paused when he saw that no one was following him. It was true that the foreign element in the audience — especially the Swedes and Norwegians — were shouting protests in strange tongues, but although matters were critical nothing had yet occurred that was irretrievable.

"Are those Taunton police quiet still?" murmured the caressing voice of the Lady of Shalott.

"Quiet?" cried John, rushing once more to the opening of the tent. When he came back to her side — for this fair creature under the dark blanket seemed just then all the human wisdom he could cling to — he informed her that a body of policemen were even now hastening round between the rear of the audience and the hedge, with an evident intention of cutting off the strikers' retreat.

"Stop them!" commanded Crummie, lifting up her lovely bare shoulders from the black cushions on which they were resting. "Father said that *under no conditions* were those Taunton police to interfere!"

"Tom!" cried poor John, in complete distraction, "Miss Geard says the police must be stopped!"

Barter approached, fixing upon the Lady of Shalott's shoulders an eye of covetous lechery.

"Are you a friend of mine, Mr. Barter?" said the girl. Into these words Crummie threw all that world of erotic appeal of which she was the perfect mistress. Paralysed by her passion for Sam this appeal had been storing up for the last two or three months like a precious wine "cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth," but at this delicate crisis, when the whole success of her father's Pageant was at stake, it poured forth from her voice, her hair, her shoulders, her bosom, like undulant music.

"Yours to command, Miss Geard," said Tom Barter, gloating over her with a drugged, fatuous smile. "She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my whole life," he thought.

"Run down the field, then, Mr. Barter, for mercy's sake, and stop those policemen! Talk to their sergeant, if he's there. Talk to any of them. Tell them these people are friends of the Mayor, and that it's all right."

Barter didn't hesitate for a second. His face changed, however. Action always steadied him. "I'm off!" he cried and disappeared from the tent.

John and the Bishop and Lancelot du Lac and a group of pretty pages with bare legs and tumbled curls watched the process of events from the tent entrance. Edward Athling from the other tent had already saved the situation as far as the Pageant was concerned, for he had himself carried out upon the grassy stage the Arthurian flag, "the Dragon of the great Pendragonship," towards which, as he planted it in the earth, a group of his companions lifted their glittering sword-points in a reverential salute. Then leaving the flag there, midway between the two tents, he had withdrawn his followers from view. Thus from the emblazoned folds of the royal standard of Romanized Britain, the golden Dragon looked forth towards the black heraldic Lions upon one tent and the Sacred Symbols of Saint Joseph upon the other. The spectators had now something to hold their attention.

John suddenly resolved that they should have something else, and he gave a signal to the pages, who were scraping at the golden thrones with their nails to see how deep the gilding went, to carry them out and place them on the left of the Dragon Ensign. Meanwhile he watched with trembling interest Barter's encounter with the Taunton police. He could see his friend talking eagerly and earnestly to the sergeant in command, but he could also see the straggling procession of nondescripts from the town pouring constantly over the hedge and towards their leader's banners that now seemed to be remaining stationary side by side with the no longer protesting occupants of the front seats.

"Begin! Begin!" vociferated some Frenchman from Avignon. "The Play!" shouted some Spanish students from Salamanca. "Hush! Hush!" retorted a German contingent from Weimar, to whose more patient minds, schooled in Faustian mysteries, those two golden thrones with the sunny hillside as a background, held a symbolic if not metaphysical signification.

The situation was still very tense, as John well knew, much more tense than any of these excitable masqueraders in the tent realised. One of the younger mistresses in the Church School — the one who had gone to Yeovil to see her lover on Maundy Thursday — now appeared in much perturbation to say that there was a quarrel going on in the other pavilion between Mr. Athling and the professional directors from Dublin. These people, it transpired, a man and a woman, were great admirers of Monsieur Capporelli and they were indignant now because the famous clown, who had been sitting patiently in a corner of the tent smoking cigarettes for the last hour, was being kept waiting so long for his pantomimic performance.

Made up as Dagonet, in a disguisement learnedly and exquisitely copied from museum specimens of mediaeval costume, Paul Capporelli was now engaged in a lively conversation with Persephone Spear, by whose personality, in her blue robe and red bodice, as the Virgin Mother, he had clearly been fascinated. But the Dubliners were full of annoyance over this protracted conversation between their precious Fool and this very local Madonna.

The conversation between Barter and the Taunton police force had ended in the latter taking their stand all along the hedge to prevent any more of the mob from entering from that unauthorised direction. But there were enough now of the irresponsible element, crowding up behind the assembled strikers, to make things look very threatening. These newcomers were by no means of the sort to be stopped by the waving of Miss Drew's green parasol, and between them and Mother Legge, who was sitting at the end of the sixth row, there had already begun a volley of scurrilous badinage that showed every sign of starting a really unpleasant contretemps. Things indeed had reached that stage — it was already nearly three o'clock and there was nothing to see on the stage but two gilded thrones and the great Pendragon flag — when the smallest spark, like the accident of Mother Legge and her Rabelaisian tongue being on the extreme west of the audience, might have led to a general pandemonium, out of which, with all these foreigners already getting nervous and irritable, it would have been impossible to get back to any sort of order. Such a spark seemed now to have been really struck, not by Mother Legge, but by the arrival upon the scene of the Marquis of P.

It was the manner of this nobleman's approach that started the trouble. Completely unaware of the arrival of the real People of Glastonbury upon the field, my Lord had taken it into his head to have himself driven by

Sergeant Blimp in a light dogcart, over from Mark Court. Taking for granted that his daughter was keeping a seat for him — as indeed she had written to say she would do — Lord P. told Blimp to drive him straight round the field — they entered it from a gate at the town-end — till he reached the front row of seats and there drop him. “You can go,” he had said, “to the Pilgrims’ then, Blimp, and put up. I’ll walk round there later.”

Now Sergeant Blimp, although he would have submitted to torture rather than have slept in Merlin’s room, had no fear of a mob. So when it became obvious that there *was* a mob — and a rather dangerous-looking one, between them and their objective — the Sergeant cracked his whip and trotted his tall black horse all the more resolutely. Then the disturbance which had been on the edge of breaking out for so long really did seem inevitable. Hundreds of angry voices were raised; people who were further off pushed others who were nearer, right into the path of the dogcart; sticks were brandished, and if stones were not thrown it was rather due to the fact that there were none in that grassy field than to any want of a will to throw them! Lord P. though courted by the Wessex bourgeoisie, was — for certain particular reasons — detested by its proletariat; and his appearance at this juncture gave this latter a chance that was not likely to be repeated. In all human communities — indeed in all human groups — there are strange atavistic forces that are held in chains deep down under the surface. Like the imprisoned Titans, these Enceladuses and Sisyphuses and Briareuses, dwell in the nether depths of human nature ready to break forth in blind scoriae fury under a given touch. In these violent upheavals of class against class there is something far deeper than principle or opinion at stake. Skin against skin … blood against blood … nerves against nerves … rise up from incalculable depths.

Lord P. himself was not less than astounded at the intensity of the feeling that his figure in that dog-cart by the side of his placid servant excited in this mob. It was as if everything in these people's lives that they had suffered from … indifference … neglect … contempt … cold malignant distaste … fastidious disgust … everything that had weighed on them, day by day, in a tacit conspiracy to press them down and keep them down, suddenly incarnated itself in that grizzled man with the small pointed grey beard and big wrinkled nose. Lord P. was absolutely startled, and, though by no means a coward, he was even a little frightened, by the looks he caught on some of the women's faces in that surging mass of people.

While his black horse plunged and reared in its harness, while men tugged at its bridle and tried to pull the reins out of Blimp's hands, while there was danger not only of the shafts of the cart being broken but of the whole equipage being upset, he caught on the face of one woman from Paradise — she was a remote cousin, by the way, of Abel Twig — a look of such insane ferocity, free from every other feeling, that a spasm of sheer panic seized upon him. It was one of those moments that are apt to occur in the most carefully regulated communities. My Lord was no longer under the protection of an invisible network of magnetic wires. He was a man, and a man acquainted with fear. But what had frightened him was not the violence of other men. What had frightened him was a glance into a black crater. For that black crater possessed eyes, and the Marquis of P. clinging to his swaying and heaving dog-cart, had looked into those eyes.

People rarely receive these revelations of the underside of life unaccompanied by some funny little triviality which, like a mime or a mommet, goes ever afterward hand in hand with that chimera. The trivial thing on this occasion was some black horse-hairs which lay smeared in a little patch against one of the green shafts now in such eminent danger of being broken. Black horse-hairs, wet with sweat and sticking to painted wood, were henceforth always associated in his mind with this deadly popular fury surging up out of the cracks and crevices of Tor Field.

It was impossible for the Taunton police to remain long in ignorance of the nature of this howling and struggling group of persons who were apparently hustling two men in a painted cart and trying to pull them out; but for the next three or four minutes their official attention was so completely occupied in holding back the crowd which kept pouring down the lane from entering the field that they could not cope with this new trouble. “Even a Zomerset orficer,” as one of them said to Lord P. on a subsequent occasion, “couldn’t be in two carners of the same girt field at the same time.”

It was, however, much easier for Mr. Geard, who *was*, quite simply, as he had told his family he would be, surveying matters from the top of the Tor, to get the full significance of the danger to Lord P. than it was for Taunton policemen. *They* were forced to look up, being fully occupied. He was in a position to look down, having nothing to do. There would certainly have been a rush from the bourgeois portion of the native audience to rescue the hustled nobleman; in fact, his own son, Will Zoyland, would have been at his side in a couple of minutes; if it had not been for two things: first, that there was a rise in the ground to the west of that audience, which prevented them from seeing what was transpiring over there, and secondly that the long-expected Pageant now commenced in real earnest, absorbing everyone’s attention.

A couple of hundred lads and lasses gorgeously attired in mediaeval costume marched forth now from the two heraldic pavilions and grouped themselves round the Dragon Flag and round the two golden thrones. The body of the dead Elaine was carried in — never in her life had Crummie looked so lovely — and the Archbishop of Canterbury accompanied by a Knight carrying the crown of Britain on a green cushion, stood at the feet of the dead. Lancelot du Lac leaned against the side of Queen Gwenevere's throne, while, for those initiated in such matters, the forms of Sir Percival, Sir Galahad, and Sir Gawain, clearly distinguishable from one another by the devices on their shields, could be made out conversing together at the back of Arthur's throne. To the west of the Queen's throne and at a little distance from the rest — as if retaining their own mythical independence — stood Tristram and Iseult, while, in a position of ferocious skulking, spying, and murderously tracking down was King Mark of Cornwall.

In regard to the choice of characters for this first part of the Pageant there had been no difficulty save for one curious exception. This exception was Merlin. John had been very anxious to have a Merlin and so had Edward Athling. Mr. Geard, however, had steadily and — to the mind of the whole company, obstinately — refused to allow Merlin to be represented at all. "But we're going to represent Christ, Daddy," Crummie had pleaded. "You don't meant to say that Merlin's more sacred than Christ." Mr. Geard had smiled and shook his head. "Christ was buried in Jerusalem," was his curious answer; by which John understood him to mean that while for the world at large Christ was by far the more sacred, here, in Glastonbury, where he disappeared from view, Merlin must always be the "numen" or the "Tremendum Mysterium" that can be second to none.

Mr. Geard had reached the top of the hill by a circuitous route long before the Pageant was due to begin. The performance was divided — and the Dubliners had displayed their nicest virtuosity in the way this had been done — into three parts. All three parts had a lot of dumb show, a limited amount of dialogue and a great many choral songs. But the point in which the high technical skill of the Dubliners was most revealed was in the manner in which the Pageant was fused and blended with the Passion Play, the two together forming a trilogy to which a strange and original unity had been given by the rôle played by Arthur’s Fool. The Dubliners, with Irish audacity, had given Capporelli the leading rôle in all three parts, and by an artful reversal of chronology in the interests of symbolism, the things began with the latest epoch of time and worked back to the earliest. Thus the opening dealt with the Arthurian Cycle, the interlude with the Passion of Christ, and the conclusion with the ancient Cymric Mythology, Capporelli being Dagonet in the first, Momus, a comic Roman soldier in the second, and none other than the bard Taliessin in the third.

In the intervals of their violent quarrels with Athling the Dubliners had worked very enthusiastically with him over these mystical effects. Athling had indulged himself with a passionate wistfulness in the kind of poetry he had made up his mind to forsake, but the new note, the modern note that was so obnoxious to Lady Rachel, had forced its way in, and had given a bizarre and even an uncomfortable twist to many scenes of this strange Pageant. This was especially the case with the scenes in which Capporelli entered, and the great clown consenting to use several poignant and mocking apothegms composed by the Middlezoy poet had added to them certain curious touches of his own. There was such a distance between the grassy ledge where the performance took place and the front row of seats that the voices of individual players were liable to be blown away upon the wind. This was, however, compensated for by a printed libretto which the audience could read while they enjoyed the dancing, the studied gestures, the symbolic ritual, of the trilogy.

Mr. Geard had many deep and strange feelings as he watched the gathering crowd from the top of the Tor. He had found quite a large group of noisy lads up there when he reached the top, but, knowing the Mayor by sight, they had hurriedly shogged off, running down the hill at top speed to join in the sport of baiting the policemen where the booths and caravans stood in a line under the hedge and where ginger-pop was to be sold. All except one. This was the small offspring of Solly Lew, the taxi-driver, a grave little boy called Steve, who had manifested for Mr. Geard the moment he appeared the peculiar fascination that a child will sometimes display for a formidable middle-aged man. Mr. Geard, finding himself alone with this child on the summit of the great haunted hill, the hill of Gwyn-ap-Nud, the Welsh Fairy-Demon, the hill where Abbot Whiting had been so bloodily murdered, called Steve to his side and made him sit down with him under the tower.

It was indeed upon a remarkable scene that Mr. Geard and his small companion looked down now as they surveyed the verdurous undulations of those island-valleys — Ynys Witrin, Ynys Avallach, Insula Avallonia the land of Modred, Melwas, Meleagnant, Mellygraunce, Aestiva Regio, Insula Pomorum, Gwlad yr Hav, Insula Vitrea, Isle de Voirre, yr Echwyd, Glast, Glastenic, Glastonia, Glaston — over which the intense sky, that Midsummer Day, seemed actually to be bowing down, bowing and bending and battening upon those lovely green undulations, as if the greatest and most powerful of all created Beings was taking His pleasure with the sweet grass-scented earth.

The crowds of people seated on the chairs and benches in the centre of the bottom of the field resembled a magician’s carpet that Mr. Geard by his incantations from up there under St. Michael’s Tower had caused to be laid down. He himself now, like a modern Gwyn-ap-Nud, surveyed his astonishing evocation with a silent gratitude, with an up-welling feeling of fulfilment, deep as that fount of red water whose flowing he could detect at the foot of the opposite hill. The hats and garments and parasols of the feminine element in his audience — for they were all dressed for summer weather that day — caused the great expectant crowd to resemble, spread out upon the grass, that many-coloured coat which the original nomadic Joseph had received of his father Jacob. Westward of the crowd Mr. Geard could see the roofs of Glastonbury, looking, with all their bright red tiles, as if a great wave of spray from the chalybeate fountain had washed over them. Rising from among these red-tiled roofs he could see the massive tower of St. John's and the lesser tower of St. Benignus'.

These two towers from any distance were, with the one under which he sat, the characteristic land-marks of the place, for the Abbey Ruins, although to a careful scrutiny they were just distinguishable among the trees, were unable to stand out in clear relief.

Mr. Geard now cast his eyes upon a long, low tent, one of the biggest tents that he himself had ever seen, which he had caused to be set up under the hedge, to the northwest of where the audience was seated, and on the opposite side of the entrance from where stood the line of caravans. Inside this big tent, which was really five or six tents thrown into one, Mr. Geard had prepared a substantial tea — and not only a tea. He had used as his caterer the landlord of a Glastonbury Inn that overlooked the cattle-market and had many historic associations, and this man had brought over from his cellar an enormous amount of liquor of every kind. This man, whose name was Dickery Cantle, had the peculiarity of being the weakest and most helpless human creature that Mr. Geard had ever seen. The Cantles had handed down this inn from father to son for no less than four generations. Rumour says that the recruiters for Monmouth's rebellion used to meet here, and that John Locke, uncle of the first Recorder of Glastonbury, used to sit, of a summer evening, on the wooden bench outside, drinking gin and cider, while he meditated upon the pragmatic limitations of the human spirit.

Dickery Cantle would never have succeeded in avoiding ruin if it had not been that his stomach was so weak that the least touch of alcohol made him vomit. His wife was not a woman of much more energy than her husband and it was notorious in the town that while their cellar was celebrated for the rare and high quality of its wines their personal table often lacked meat and they could not afford to buy new shoes for their only child, Elphin. Mr. Geard would never have undertaken to provide such extensive preparations for his audience if he had not been struck one day by the wasted consumptive look of Elphin Cantle. This chance encounter, when he was drinking in their bar, had remained in his mind. “I’ll give those Cantles some business,” he had told Megan; and this big tent was the result.

But the eyes of Mr. Geard now turned westward, and in turning in that direction they caught sight of the mob surrounding the green-wheeled dog-cart; a scene that was visible to him from the Tor’s summit, although quite invisible to the spectators of the Pageant.

“They be pulling they chaps out of thik cart, Mister,” Steve Lew remarked; and Mr. Geard very quickly realised to whom the green dog-cart and the big black hose must belong. Seldom has an elderly man raced down a hill more quickly than Bloody Johnny ran now. “He was only just in time,” Steve said to Elphin Cantle afterwards as he was helping him open bottles and hand round beer-mugs. “Yon Mayor be a good ‘un for a fast sprint, looksee, spite o’ his girt belly! ’Twas all I could do to keep pace wi’ he!”

It is always difficult to disentangle the element of pure chance from the other forces that bring about any startling event, from the pressure, for instance, of that mysterious undertide that we call Destiny, or from the creative energy spontaneously generated, from the central point of its absolute freedom, in the will of a living organism. What happened now seemed to submerge Mr. Geard’s personal prestige among that crowd, his official position as Mayor of the Town, as well as the extraordinary magnetic power that always burned at any dangerous crisis in his unholy eyes. Certainly his advance towards the swaying dog-cart and the plunging horse, when once he approached the scene, was not an easy one. One ruffian from the slums of Street, down by the banks of the Brue, struck him in the face with a stick leaving a bleeding mark across his white, moist, flabby cheek. A woman from Butts Close — she was a sister of Tom Barter’s landlady, but a more reckless sort of character — dragged at his clothes and tore his waistcoat open, so that the grey flannel shirt (that he never would let Megan send to the wash more than once a fortnight and that he insisted wearing summer and winter alike) hung out almost indecently over the front part of his trousers. It must be remembered that between this surging mob around Lord P. and the original crowd of invaders of the field, who had now subsided into quiescence about their banners, there was a protuberant rib of the hillside which prevented both the Dye-Works strikers and the seated audience from seeing what was going on. Red Robinson, whose seething and fermenting “ ‘ate” had, it almost seemed, been paralysed by the mere waving of Miss Drew’s green parasol, was now drifting with baffled fury from one to another of the banner-bearers, cajoling, commanding, imploring, entreating them, like a distracted leader in a lost battle, to rush forward and invade the grassy eminence where the coronation of King Arthur was now triumphantly proceeding, teasing him, mocking him, a veritable charade of Tantalus, with its glittering and fantastical fooling. Lord P.’s fate depended, therefore, as in most physical struggles between bewildered human antagonists, upon the configuration of the ground. If Mr. Geard had not been playing, quite unconsciously, the primeval rôle of Gwyn-ap-Nud, the old Welsh Prince of Darkness, and enjoying the spectacle he had wrought from the summit of Tor, Lord P. would certainly have come to grief and there would have doubtless appeared some modern Judge Jeffreys holding grim inquisition into a popular uprising. As it was, Mr. Geard's desperate struggle to reach the besieged dog-cart created such a hurly-burly of shouts and countershouts, of imprecations and protestations, that the Taunton police guarding the hedge caught the clamour on the wind and came rushing across the grassy hillocks to intervene.

It was the sight of these officers' helmets above the heads of the rioters that, when he recalled his sensations later, remained with Mr. Geard as the most sinister of his impressions. His other impressions, the dazzling sunshine, the blue sky, the trodden grass, the stink of human sweat and foul garments, the taste of his own blood from his bleeding cheek, the sight of the green wheels tipped up on one side and spinning round, the hoofs of the black horse pawing the air, the unmoved countenance of Sergeant Blimp, the panic in the eyes of the Marquis, the confusion of human arms and legs and contorted faces through which he struggled and sweated and fought and tore his way, left upon his mind rather a sense of exhilaration than anything else. Mr. Geard was one of those men whose physical phlegm is so thick and deep that it requires a series of material shocks to rouse the full awareness in them of the taste and tang of life. Something in him — some savage atavistic reversion to his heathen ancestors — had tasted blood in this tossing *mêlée* of sweating, dragging, resisting human bodies. The moments when infuriated women — their bodies forced into contact with his body by pressure from behind — clung to his plump figure, tearing, scratching, clinging, striking, shrieking, were moments of a wild physical exultation. Mr. Geard panted like a dog. The spittle from his thick sensual lips mingling with the blood from his hurt cheek trickled down his chin. With heaving chest, straining limbs, and bare head — for he had now lost his hat — he struggled blindly forward, those spinning green wheels, those almost vertical green shafts, the scared eyes of the Marquis, drawing him forward, like the jutting out of a wharf with a swinging lamp in a turbulent sea. His big mouth was wide open now as he fought his way on, the black fire in his eyes burned with a terrible glee, his pantings became like the pantings of that beast called the Questing Beast in the legends. Guttural noises, different from mere human breathings, rose from his tormented lungs.

The curious thing was, however, that Mr. Geard's mind had never been calmer or clearer in its working than at that moment. "This is Life!" he thought to himself; and something like a sobbed-out chuckle rose up from the pit of his labouring belly. His old refrain— "Blood of Christ — Blood of Christ — Blood of Christ — Blood of Christ" drummed in his throat and blent itself with his bestial groanings and with his Hengist-and-Horsa chucklings. As he beat his way on, reeling, staggering, stumbling, his queer battle-frenzy increased rather than diminished. "This is Life!" he said to himself, with exactly the same clear awareness of the enjoyment he was getting, as if he had been a sturdy swimmer in huge wave-bursts of tossing surf. And there gradually arose in his consciousness a very queer notion, the feeling, namely, that what he was doing now was not rescuing a frightened aristocrat from a mob, but rescuing the Blood of Christ from loss, from destruction, from annihilation. The fancy lodged itself in his brain — quite cool and clear above his pantings — that if he could only touch one of those upheaved green shafts with his hand, if he could only get his fingers on the bridle of that rearing black horse, he would prevent the Blood of Christ from sinking into the deep earth and being lost forever! “Yes, yes, yes,” he thought. “I’ll build a Saxon arch about the Chalice Well — a round Saxon arch!” And then it was that he caught sight of the helmets of Philip Crow’s policemen.

The sight of these officials completely broke up his mood. It was a policeman’s hand — not his hand — that dragged down those green shafts. It was a policeman’s arm — not his arm — that brought to earth the rearing front hoofs of the black horse. It was between a couple of Philip’s policemen, too, that Lady Rachel’s father was now standing, angrily stroking his beard and gazing round vindictively in order to point out to the officials the worst offenders and ring-leaders of the crowd. Not as yet had the officers of the law laid hands upon anyone, but it was clear to the exhausted and disconcerted Mayor that this was what they were now thinking of doing. Many of the crowd were evidently of the same opinion, for they were beginning to sneak off with extraordinary celerity, each of the retreating ones assuming an absent-minded air with regard to immediate phenomena and an intensely interested air with regard to pressing events which demanded their presence upon the far horizon.

Mr. Geard, disappointed though he was, and with no fire left in his eyes, now pulled himself together. He tucked his shirt back into its proper place. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the blood from his cheek. He buttoned his coat tightly under his chin. Then he advanced, although with tottering steps and heaving lungs, and presented himself before Lord P. His Lordship welcomed him warmly. Luckily he took it at once for granted that it was by his anxiety for the safety of the patron of his Pageant that he had caused these officials — like the warriors of Cadmus — to spring out of the earth. “Well, Mr. Mayor,” he began, “this is indeed—” Philip’s policemen, hearing the word “Mayor” and seeing Lord P. shake hands so warmly with this perspiring, panting, hatless member of the crowd, became convinced that they were in the presence of another distinguished victim of this breaking of His Majesty's peace.

Mr. Geard's brain now moved very actively as he shook hands with Sergeant Blimp, a thing which he did quite as warmly as the Sergeant's master had done with himself. He spoke in an authoritative voice, conveying the impression to both the nobleman and the policemen that he was accustomed to order officials about. "One or two of you take his Lordship to his seat. It's the front row. Lady Rachel is keeping it for him. The performance has begun."

"Won't you yourself—" began Lord P.

"No," said Mr. Geard abruptly; and he surprised the owner of the dog-cart by clambering up into the high seat along with Blimp who was already once more in possession of horse and reins. "I presume he's going to put up at the Pilgrims', eh?" he said.

"You're not deserting your own show, Geard?"

"Seen enough of it for a while," replied Mr. Geard. "I may come back before it's finished though. I want to hear how you've enjoyed it."

Blimp's hands were on the reins to pull the vehicle round.

"You won't mind if I use your cart for a minute before he takes it back to town?"

"Not at all, Geard, not at all," Lord P. rejoined, "as long as you don't ask *me* to get up again!" He uttered these last words with a grimace that was clearly intended to make a jest of his recent attack of nerves. Not a soul had seen the fear in his eyes except Mr. Geard and possibly Sergeant Blimp, but it was characteristic of the man to make a point of honour of this humorous confession.

"Yes, the front row, officer," the Mayor added, in answer to one of the policemen. "Lady Rachel is keeping a seat for him." He laid his bare hand on Blimp’s neatly gloved one. “Wait a little,” he murmured. “I want him to get well ahead.”

“Right you are, your Worship,” said the sergeant.

“You two had a near shave,” said Mr. Geard.

“Tut, tut! ‘Twere nothing to the dust I’ve seen kicked up in *my* time,” replied the sergeant. “His Lordship ain’t as young a man as he was ten years ago.”

“A mob’s a nasty thing,” said Mr. Geard, giving the man such an understanding glance that Blimp answered with a wink.

“His nerves ain’t what they were,” he said. The Mayor looked round. It was extraordinary how quickly the crowd had scattered.

“I don’t want any arrests made, nor does Lord P.” he remarked emphatically to a policeman who was holding their horse’s head. The animal was still trembling a little.

The man touched his helmet. “As your Worship wishes.”

“Drive after your master, Sergeant,” Mr. Geard directed, “but not fast. I want to see him safely in his seat.”

The policeman let go of the bridle and the green-wheeled dog-cart set off at a walking pace towards the scene of the Pageant. They soon reached a spot from which it was possible to get a clear view of both audience and performers. “Pull her up a second, Sergeant.” The man obeyed, and they waited till they could observe the figure of Lord P. with the two policemen close behind him, threading their way through the crowd of strikers. When they had disappeared, “Drive over to that tent if you don’t mind,” commanded the Mayor.

Arrived at the entrance to his huge refreshment pavilion, Mr. Geard told Steve Lew, who had now resumed his fascinated attendance, to run in and ask Mr. Cantle to come out. It was now the destiny of Sergeant Blimp to set eyes on the feeblest, weakest, most worried and most bewildered caterer he had ever seen, or ever desired to see. “I’m going to send you some guests of my own straight away, Dickery,” said the Mayor. “Treat ’em well. Don’t let ’em get drunk. And turn ’em out without fail before five o’clock. All out before five o’clock!”

Dickery Cande, whose eyes were a pale, light, moist blue, and whose beard was straggly and thin and like bleached tow, was so surprised at the sight of the green cart and black horse that he could only open his mouth and blink.

“Is Elphin inside?” enquired Mr. Geard. Steve Lew heard this, if Elphin’s parent didn’t, and the young Cantle with his thin legs in black Sunday stockings soon made his appearance. “Tell your mother and her people that I’m going to send her some guests for refreshments in a minute. Tell her ‘beer and wine and sandwiches’ and tell her all out before five, will you, Elphin? All out by five! I don’t want ’em to clash with the other people.”

Elphin Cantle’s blue eyes — not pale blue like his father’s, who was now muttering something quite incoherent about “brands” and “vintages” — but deep blue like the broad sky above them, gleamed with intelligent understanding. “Am I to tell Mother any … any sum … that your Worship wants … would wish … her … to—” he began.

“Tell her— ‘all that’s reasonable,’ “ pronounced Mr. Geard emphatically.

Elphin’s blue eyes deepened in colour till they grew nearly black. Then brushing some dust from his thin legs, thin as matches, — those poor emaciated legs that were the *fans et origo* of this big tent — he lifted up his face. “Mother will understand. Mother thanks you from her heart, your Worship! Come, Father!” he added.

Dickery Gantle followed Elphin into the tent, as did also Steve Lew, bestowing on the Mayor before he departed a final glance of fanatical devotion.

The green-wheeled dog-cart drove off now. It encircled the seated audience from whose throats excited and vociferous applause was now arising as the King and Queen with their great golden crowns upon their heads rose from their thrones and moved to the side of the Lady of Shalott.

The movement of the Dye-Works factory-hands, with their protestant allies and their secular banners, had not been missed by Mr. Geard. All the way down that hillside — as he was racing to the rescue of the Marquis — he was thinking desperately how to cope with this menacing invasion. He could catch, as Blimp trotted his horse along the edge of the vast concourse of people, the constant murmurs of “Order! Order! Hush! Hush!” addressed to these men, who continued to talk loudly among themselves, even though the poles of their banners were now planted in the earth. When they came level with the row of seats at the end of which sat Mother Legge, Mr. Geard called upon Blimp to pull up. Here they waited, watching for the close of the scene on the grassy stage above. It was near the end. After a second or two of waiting, it ended, and the play-actors, well contented with the ovations they had just received, marched off to their respective pavilions.

A general buzz of excited talk ran through the whole mass of people. The dog-cart had drawn up close to where Mrs. Legge and Blackie Morgan were sitting. Between their horse’s head and the ends of the first five rows of seats was the back of a banner, the poles of which rested on the grass, carrying the words, “Down with Mummery!” These words Mr. Geard now contemplated, as he acknowledged the salutations of the people near enough to recognise him. Mother Legge herself made an airy gesture with her black-gloved hand, that was almost as if she kissed the tips of her fingers to the Mayor of Glastonbury, and many of the seated crowd looked towards him and nodded towards him as they continued their boisterous clapping, as if directing their applause to the organiser of the performance as much as to the players.

The crowd of Dye-Works strikers was obviously ill at ease at this juncture. The big audience behind them had time now to concentrate their attention on these men, whose banners, “Down with Religion!” “Down with Capital!” “Down with Mummery!” flapped beside them in the warm summer wind. Several of Philip’s policemen were now standing about, surveying these revolutionary scrolls with humorous detachment, but Mr. Geard observed one of these officers edge himself in front of the knees of the people in the second row, till he came behind Lord P. into whose ear he whispered something, something that made the Marquis turn round and glance at the strikers.

The applause had been prolonged by the foreigners long after it had ceased among the native-born, but it died down now and a general murmur of conversation all over the big audience took its place in the midst of which some very curious and surprising preparations were going on on the stage in front of them all. A big wooden cross was brought out, from which were hanging thick ropes, like those used on shipboard, twisted loosely round its cross-beams, and this object was laid on the ground, where the thrones of Arthur and Gwenevere had formerly been, beside a capacious hole that had been dug to receive it. Across the faces of the audience was blown at intervals the warm sun-sweet smell of trodden grass and mingled with this the pungent smell of nicotine from the short clay pipes which many of the strikers — quiet, patient family-men — had lit to cheer their suspense.

It was at this moment that the voice of Red Robinson was heard in shrill penetrating tones. Red got hold of a chair and had jumped up upon it. From this elevation he began to scream forth a hurried torrent of abuse, raising his hands high into the air and making them tremble there, using in fact that particular gesture which has become almost a convention with street-orators, but which still retains a power that has its own peculiar quality.

Mr. Geard saw two or three policemen pushing their way towards this shouting man. “Give him five minutes, officers, if you please!” This command from the green dog-cart was flung out in those stentorian tones which used to be the delight of the slums in Bloody Johnny’s revivalistic meetings.

The officers stopped, turned, and remained motionless, glancing alternatively at Lord P. seated by his daughter’s side, and at the bare-headed Mayor in Lord P.’s cart.

“You Wessex people who ‘ave come ’ere to ‘ear this folly, listen to me! And you, foreign people, who have come from hover the seas to see this folly, listen to me! And you, Glastonbury comrades, who know what this folly is, listen to me! High ‘ave only one thing to say this harfternoon! The capitalistic system of society is doomed. In a ‘undred years from now, private property in Glastonbury will be hun-known! This ’ere new Mayor of hours is no better than the light one and has for Crow hup there with ’is blasted airpline—” He jumped down hurriedly from his chair and took refuge within the close-packed ranks of his friends, for the enraged Agure of Lord P. standing erect now and calling furiously upon the policemen to stop him had counteracted the command from the green cart and the officers had moved towards him. It was then that Dave Spear jumped up from *his* seat and lifted up his voice.

“This man,” shouted Spear, “may have been too angry to choose his words as he ought. But what he says is true!

Humanity will soon—” At the scholarly intonation of the young philosopher all the Germans in the audience — who were the ones who knew English best — leaned forward, listening gravely and intently. Indeed they cried out in guttural protest against some nasal French voices lifted up in derision of Spear's words, and for a moment it looked as if the old hostility between Gothic blood and Mediterranean blood would burst out that day in Urbs Vitrea under Gwyn-ap-Nud's mischievous rogueries! The particular tone Spear plunged into at once, so earnest and so academic, and his introduction of the word "humanity," beguiled the Russians who were present — all except the monks from the Caucasus who took him for a devilish heretic — and brought them over to his side. The Spanish contingent, which was unusually large, agreed on the contrary very strongly with the French and joined the French in calling angrily upon the young man to sit down.

But Dave Spear, in spite of cries of "Order!", "Silence!", "Turn him out!" refused to sit down. "Humanity will soon," he shouted, "be no longer Germans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Russians! We shall all be men and women — working for ourselves — not for the rich — in one great community of Comrades!" The clamour round him got now so confused that it became impossible to out-shout it, and after calmly surveying the whole crowd with his eyes and watching them as if he were a shepherd counting his sheep, Dave Spear sat down.

The group of strikers from the Crow Works were now thrown into a most awkward and uncomfortable position. The bulk of them had no sympathy with the communistic opinions of their leaders. They were unable to enjoy "thik open air theayter" as they regarded it, because of their near neighbourhood to the gentry. At the same time, being honest Somerset workingmen, they were reluctant to desert their flags. One of the most dignified among them, a certain Josh Witcombe from Queen's Camel, articulated the thoughts of the majority among them when he said to himself

— "What in the name of crikey be I doing here? A danged fool I be, when I might be digging taties, in me bit o' garden, this fine holiday! This ere Crow be a bloody blighter. There ain't two opinions about that, but what be all this high-falutin' palaver got to do wi' I? Crikey! I wish I were sittin' peaceful-like in me back-garden, watching me sweet peas how girt they be grown! This here Glaston will never be a place for quiet folk to enjoy theyselves in, till both this blighter Crow and this blighter Geard be drove out o' town."

Mr. Geard was not oblivious of the growing discomfort of this body of worthy men. Left to themselves now by both agitators and police they were being subjected to the animosity of an increasing number of the audience, who had come to regard their presence at the field at all as a lugubrious spoilsport. Mr. Geard now made Blimp drive my Lord's cart forward, about twice its own length, till it was in the very centre of this sulky and disconcerted crowd. Then he stood up in the cart with his hand on the sergeant's shoulder. "Gentlemen," he began.

All eyes were turned towards him. He managed to temper his voice so that it was only audible to the men he was addressing. It was an immense relief to him to observe that Elphin Cantle had joined his young adherent Steve Lew, and that both the boys were standing now close up to one of the green wheels of his cart. "Gentlemen," he repeated. "I'm sorry that you should have come out today only to find things unsatisfactory. I am the Mayor of this town and I wish all Glastonbury people to enjoy themselves today. I have told Mr. Cantle down there in that tent," — he waved one of his plump hands in the direction of the hedge— "that I wish him to give all you men of the Crow Dye-Works something to eat and drink at my expense. Elphin Cantle I see is here. He'll show you where to go. Take them with you, Elphin!" Then, as an after thought, he added, " 'Twill be a shame on ye all, and a disgrace to your Mayor, if the good liquour that's in yon tent be taken back to cellar!"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then Mr. Burt of Stoke-sub-Ham spoke up. "Three cheers for the Mayor of Glastonbury!" he cried. At once another voice in the crowd was raised, but it was impossible for Mr. Geard to identify him— "Three cheers for Bloody Johnny!" The cheers were somewhat nervously and somewhat shamefacedly given, and the big audience of seated people extending now as far down almost as the hedge craned their necks to see what new thing now was toward.

Suddenly Mat Dekker rose from where he sat by his son's side. "Three cheers for the Mayor of Glastonbury who has given us this—" His voice was drowned in a terrific volley of applause.

In every great audience there is a certain accumulation of magnetic emotion which seems to store itself up, as if in great invisible tanks, above the people's heads. Mat Dekker's words had turned the tap of these psychic reservoirs. The crowd lost its head altogether in its excitement. It had been stirred already by the romance of the Arthurian scene and by the rich, poignant fooling, in amazing dumb-show, of the inspired French clown. Dave Spear's revolutionary speech had increased this tension, and it now broke loose in a whirlwind of excitement. Women waved their handkerchiefs and kissed their hands; men jumped upon their chairs and shouted; children yelled and screamed. The vague rumours that had hovered about the figure of Mr. Geard helped to intensify this demonstration. Those in the front seats who had heard his speech to the striking dye workers and had been hopelessly shocked were swept along on the current. Lady Rachel clapped long and desperately, her cheeks white with excitement, her eyes flashing with girlish ecstasy. The Marquis wore the expression of a far-sighted statesman who has had recourse to some irresponsible prophet. Old

Mother Legge's spacious and maternal bosom — the bosom of an immoral earth-mother — was heaving with unsuppressed sobs. Mrs. Geard too was crying uncontrollably. But Cordelia sat straight up in her chair. Her eyes were fixed in miserable fascination upon that great wooden cross lying upon the grass. When the noise died down a little, Mr. Geard got up upon his feet for the second time that day in Lord P.'s high dog-cart.

"What will he say?" thought Lady Rachel. "What the deuce will old Johnny do now?" thought the Marquis. "I would not be in Geard's shoes for something," whispered Mat Dekker to Sam.

Mr. Geard cleared his throat. Then he bent down over his impassive driver upon whose shoulder he was pressing heavily. "The moment I sit down, you drive off, Sergeant," he whispered, "and make her go too!" Then rising to his full height and throwing back his head he lifted his free arm high into the air. And there fell upon that enormous mass of people one of those tremendous and awe-inspiring silences that seem as if they were supported, like dim catafalques of expectation, by unseen spiritual hands. "Not unto us," he shouted in slow reverberating tones, "not unto us be the Glory of this great Day but unto … unto—" he was enough of a Cagliostro, enough of the charlatan they accused him of being, deliberately to pretend to hesitate at this point. It was a subtle oratorical trick and was not defrauded of its effect— "unto … unto the Christ of Glastonbury!" He sank back in his seat by the side of Sergeant Blimp, who, since there was no question of encountering Merlin's ghost was as cool as he would have been at a Royal garden-party. In a second the green-painted wheels were revolving at a dizzy pace and the dog-cart was whirling off westwards, over the grassy slopes of the great field, as if it had entered a desperate race with some fairy chariot of Gwyn-ap-Nud.

"I hope Blimp will breathe her a bit before the end of the field," whispered the Marquis to his daughter.

"Hush, Father!" rejoined the girl. "Do be quiet. The Passion Play is beginning."

The girl was right. Not oblivious of the dramatic effect of allowing their sacred interlude to follow quickly on the heels of Geard's last words John Crow had taken upon himself — oblivious as to whether the Dubliners or Ned Athling or Paul Capporelli were ready — to give the sign to begin. And the beginning of their elaborately rehearsed "Mystery" was really a very impressive spectacle.

The Dye-Works strikers, however, saw nothing of it. Turning their backs to it altogether and this time followed instead of led, by the banner denouncing "Mummery," they made their way hurriedly down the hill towards the big refreshment tent. Elphin and Steve — this latter delighted to play so prominent a part in the affairs of Mr. Geard — ran on in front of them to warn the Cantles of their arrival.

It was at this point that all eyes were concentrated upon the stage. And there entered upon it first a legion of Roman soldiers marching behind their centurion, then — issuing forth from the other pavilion — the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish people, and finally, approaching by himself, attended only by Momus, the comic Roman soldier who served as his bodyguard, the Procurator of Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate. The part of Pontius Pilate was played by the assistant schoolmaster in St. Benignus' church-school, a man who had been chosen for this part by the eloquent Dr. Sodbury largely on account of his imposing countenance, a countenance which in its juristic dignity might certainly have belonged to the supercilious Procurator of Judea. The Roman legionaries grouped themselves around Pilate who now, accompanied by his bodyguard Momus, ascended the wooden rostrum or judgment-seat.

"It's like a magnified Punch-and-Judy show," whispered Will Zoyland to Nell; nor were the Bastard's words without point, for in their mutual elevation above the soldiers, and above the group of Jewish Elders who stood apart from the soldiers, the figures of Pilate and Momus appeared to be isolated in a grotesque Punchinello-like proscenium.

Nell made no reply. She was wondering what Sam was feeling at this moment while Momus-Capporelli was out-jesting Pontius Pilate in that ridiculous puppet-box, and players and audience alike were awaiting breathlessly the appearance of the condemned God-Man. If she had known what Sam was feeling her heart would have been less heavy than it was. For such was the contradictoriness of human emotion that the soldiers' Roman swords and the elders' turbans made the whole thing so fantastic and unreal to him that in his bitter coldness and deep melancholy his heart turned wistfully to Nell and her child. His father sitting by his side felt the same sort of distaste; only with him it was more positive. Both these big, bare-headed men — for though the sun was smiting them with that mid-afternoon heat which seems hotter than noon, they held their hats in their hands — had something in them that felt deep aversion for this Passion Play. Mat hated it as a silly, frivolous blasphemy. Sam hated it as a lifeless and ghastly parody upon the death of his God.

The two Dekkers had less aesthetic feeling in them for performances of this sort than Mr. Whitcombe of Queen's Camel or Mrs. Legge of Camelot! Such passionate naturalists were they that a profound *realism*, earthy, simple, almost barbarous, reduced any theatrical show to something flimsy and childish. They neither of them could go one psychic inch in sympathy for such things. What to the father seemed gross profanity, to the son seemed pure unqualified trifling. They neither of them could catch any stage-illusion in the whole thing. What they now beheld was simply "old Sodbury's schoolmaster dressed up as a Roman Governor, and that wretched skipping Frenchman, bowing and scraping at his side, and making sacrilegious jokes." And when escorted by more Roman soldiers and with his hands tied behind him and an enormous crown of thorns upon his head, Mr. Evans was led slowly across the grass between the long-robed Jews and the heathen legionaries, Sam turned round to his father with the words—"This is awful, isn't it Dad? It's worse than I expected. How can they all sit quiet and put up with such disgusting tomfoolery?"

But his father was watching a butterfly. "I believe that's a Clifton Blue," he whispered. "Do look at that little fellow, son; there! over by that thistle!"

But the effect of the appearance of this Evans-Christ upon Sam's mind was to assail with one swift, terrible doubt the ascetic ideal of his whole present life and give him a craving for Nell that made his bones melt within him. That she should be sitting near him, now, within a few yards of him, so that by moving his head he could catch a glimpse of her, gave him a feeling of her identity that was as sharp as he had ever known. A new sensation began to lift up its rattlesnake head within him, a torture that he had hitherto been spared, by reason of his dull imagination and that "dead nerve" within him. But they were upon him now, those devil's pincers! They had got him now, by the umbilical cord in the pit of his stomach! Oh, to think that Will Zoyland could hear that voice day by day, and could see her as he had *never* seen her! For what was one blind, rapturous night of passion compared with what *he* had?

"I have never," Sam thought as he watched the Christ-Evans standing before Pilate, *"seen her bare shoulders"*

It often happens that when real love touches with its quivering dart the covetousness of desire, some aspect of a girl's body, not usually associated with amorous dalliance at all, hits her lover's consciousness with a pathos that is well-nigh intolerable. Thus although he had given her a child, there came over him, as the Trial of Christ began before his eyes, a craving that made him heartsick just once to touch her bare shoulders, just to trace with his fingertips the line of her bare spine. Though he had lain with her he had never thought of doing just that. Why hadn't he? Oh, why hadn't he?

The scene that meant so little to the two Dekkers and so little to the two Zoylands appeared to be of absorbing interest to Father Paleologue. Mary was thrilled at his quick, intense, piercing comments. Every movement that Mr. Evans made roused his keenest attention. Every word he caught — though he could catch but few — from Christ, Pilate or Momus or the Chief Priest, became a text for a rapid volley of hurried criticisms. Even Miss Drew grew calm under the compelling intellectual charm of the Byzantine priest and began to feel that there could not be anything very blasphemous going on.

"Has he yet said 'What *is* Truth?' " enquired Mary with shining eyes. She felt infinitely relieved at the triumphant success that John's labours seemed to be winning. She put everything down to John. Athling, the Dublin people, Capporelli, were completely discounted in her mind. *They* might have invented a few details, a few fancies; it was John's imagination that gave the whole thing that strange and curious unity which Father Paleologue was now talking about to Miss Drew.

"No, lady, not yet," answered Father Paleologue, "but they soon will be. There! Didn't you catch *that*?"

And there came to her ears upon the warm June air, scented with honeysuckle, as the girl intently listened, those words that seem to come from some mysterious level of life where the laws of cause-and-effect have no place— "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world*, *that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice"*

"It's extraordinary," whispered Father Paleologue, passionately, while a light gust of wind lifted Pilate's famous retort and carried it over the hill, "how that man acts! He *can't* be a local shop-man. I've seen every Passion Play in Europe worth seeing for the last twenty years. Oberammergau of course isn't the only one. And I tell you I've never seen anything so convincing as this man. And he's *modern* too. He's got that queer modern touch that's so hard to define. He's a strong, *ugly* Christ too; and that's a vast improvement. Do you remember Rembrandt's Christ in 'The Healing of the Sick?' I forget where it is. Rembrandt's idea of Him was just like this. And it's Biblical too!" And the Byzantine father quoted in an intense whisper in Mary's ears, "He hath no comeliness … that men should desire Him."

Athling and the two Dubliners, working together, had managed this world-historical scene in such a way as to mingle Our Lord's trial before Pilate with His trial before the High Priest, and by dispensing with the Scourging and with the Stations of the Cross had made the Crucifixion to follow immediately upon this synthesised condemnation.

"What is that funny man doing, Robert, in the Judge's pulpit?" enquired Mr. Stilly's father of Mr. Stilly. Mr. Stilly hurriedly consulted the printed booklet which John had caused to be placed upon all the seats.

"It says he's Momus, Dad— 'a Roman Soldier attending on the Procurator,' who plays a part like that of the Fool in Shakespeare's 'Lear.'"

Mr. Stilly's mother now lifted up her high-pitched, querulous voice, the voice of a woman who "didn't like servants messing about in her kitchen."

"But isn't this the simple Gospel story, Robert? We don't read of Momus, do we? Or is he in the Apocrypha?"

"*Maria!* how *can* you be so stupid!" whispered Mr. Stilly's father. "There's no New Testament Apocrypha." Mr. Stilly vaguely recalled having once, in Old Jones' shop, been shown something extremely like a New Testament Apocrypha, but out of piety he kept this recollection sealed up in his heart.

"He's talking now, Robert. He's saying such funny things … only I can't hear them quite," said old Mrs. Stilly.

Momus-Capporelli had scampered off now from the Procurator's side and was passing from group to group of the Roman soldiers, among whom he was venting monstrous Aristophanic jests. Some of these jests were improvised in a fantastical mixture of French argot and what might be called dog-English and they were accompanied by gestures of a kind more appropriate to the sawdust floor of a Montparnasse dancing-hall than to the greensward of Glastonbury Tor.

Lily Rogers began to give expression to her discomfort under the tension of this tragical-comical fooling. "I wish those soldiers would arrest that fellow," she murmured in the ear of her sister. "Our Glastonbury policeman would have arrested him before this, only the poor man be so deaf."

"These Taunton officers have no more gumption than a lot of cassowaries," replied Louie.

But the wise Emma Sly put forward a different point of view, worthy of the daughter of a Mendip shepherd. "That's the devil in disguise," she explained. "He's telling all those Romans that if they don't crucify the Good Lord quick they won't be able to crucify Him at all."

"This isn't like what Master tells we to say in Creed," remarked Penny Pitches to Mr. Weatherwax, "when it says 'suffered under Pontius Pilate.' If there'd been a Zany like this on Green-Hill-Far-Away Master'd have spoken of it, wouldn't 'un, in the thirty years I've looked after he?"

" 'Were long agone," remarked the wise gardener. "Maybe Bible itself have forgotten how 'twere. Them hefty lads be Romans, 'sknow, and Romans be heathens, and they heathens baint as reverend as your master, my good gurl. But *'tis* queer, honey, and it do make a man's stomach queasy to see such things. 'Tis like Saturday afternoon in private bar and yet 'tis like Good Friday in Church. It makes a person feel sort o' wobbly in his innards."

The opinion of the Marquis of P. upon the spectacle he was regarding was little different from that of the old gardener and the old servant. "I can't stand much more of this chap Momus," whispered his Lordship to Lady Rachel. "I want to give the little brute a good caning and kick him out! What on earth possessed Geard to allow such a hodge-podge as this?"

"It's my young scaramouch nephew John, Lord P." said Miss Elizabeth Crow with an indulgent smile, "who is responsible for all this. Rachel knows more about it than I do, but it's the new idea, I believe — isn't it, Rachel? — to bring in, what do you call it? a sort of classical chorus … only satirical of course instead of serious."

"I don't … know … quite … what I feel, Miss Crow," whispered Rachel nervously. "I hope … it *was* your nephew … but I'm afraid … there are … others—" In her heart, for she was torn between her romantic idealising of Ned Athling and her dislike of his new methods, she heartily wished that Paul Capporelli had been left in Paris!

"Isn't that young man who's jumping about and playing the giddy goat, Tewsy," Mrs. Legge was now remarking to her aged henchman, "the same one that made fun of poor King Mark just now when he was following his lawful wife?"

“And at Lancelot too, Missus! ‘A cocked some fine snooks at Lancelot when ‘a seen ‘un try to cuddle up ‘gainst Queen Gwenderver’s sweet shanks!”

“Hush Tewsy! Even though it *be* the same, as I think it *be,* haven’t they what pulls the strings the right to choose the poppets? Old folk like you and me, Tewsy, don’t have no idea what young folks have in their heads these days. Why I heard Mr. Tom Barter tell as how there weren’t a wench in Wollop’s — and that’s who Queen Gwently was — who wouldn’t slip off her skirt if a fellow went the right way about it. ‘Twill be bad for *our* trade, Tewsy, if this gets worse. Who’ll give half a sovereign for a private room when every room can tell the same tale? That’s what I say about such performances as this. ’Tis spoiling the trade, Tewsy; ’tis spoiling the trade.”

“You’re one for keeping up the family, Mother, ain’t you?” whispered Blackie wearily.

“Why sure I be, kid, sure I be!” cried the old lady with a wicked leer. “When all be for all without paying a penny what’s to keep the market going?”

Blackie Morgan held her peace. Her enormous grey eyes fixed themselves upon the ubiquitous Momus and upon the thorn-crowned figure, to whose side the clown had now skipped, and the abysmal disillusionment of her gaze seemed to reduce the solid bulk of Glastonbury Tor to insubstantial vapour.

“Why is Pontius Pilate lolling like that now against the side of his rickety platform?” enquired Tilly Crow of the curator of the museum.

“I hadn’t noticed … there’s so much going on at the same time … I was watching that funny soldier wagging his head at Christ … but yes, Pilate *is* lolling as you say. Oh, I see what he’s doing, Mrs. Crow. He’s reading!

That’s a roll of parchment he’s got in his hands. Eh? What’s that? He’s soliloquising now, I think.”

“Could you hear what he said?” asked Tilly anxiously, just as she would have asked Emma if she could hear what the groceryman was saying at the kitchen door.

“Something about Epicurus,” replied the curator in a complacent voice, keeping a shrewd eye upon the libretto in his hand. “That roll he’s reading is the Logoi of Epicurus, Mrs. Crow.”

Tilly was silent. She made a mental note that she would enquire of Emma, later on, what sort of a mariner Epicurus was, that his log-book must needs be dragged in at the Trial of Jesus.

A beautiful Greek slave now appeared upon the scene carrying a silver ewer full of water. “There it is!” cried Mother Legge. “There’s Miss Kitty’s punch bowl! Now I know what Mr. Crow borrowed it for. Don’t ‘ee drop it now, you longhaired baggage! Don’t ‘ee get thinking so much about your bare legs that you go and drop me silver bowl!”

Sis Cole, who had been till now wrapped in a cloud of beautified wonder at all she saw, spoke up when she observed this glittering silver object being carried so carefully towards the pensive Procurator. “Be he feeling sick, Jackie, that King with a coronet on, and all they gold jingle-jangles? Be she bringing he a basin to be sick in?”

Jackie was as proud of his knowledge of the history of the world as the curator had been, as he now replied in his shrill voice just behind that gentleman’s back—” ’Tis Pontius Pilate a-washing of his hands! There’s a picture in school that they must have took it from. Only ’tis a man in picture, not a gal, what holds the soap and water for’n.”

“Be it Pear’s soap, Jackie? I don’t see thik soap, Jackie.”

“I want to pee!” interposed Bert at this grave juncture.

The curator's head twisted round, and a look of fury was launched at the shameless infant. Tilly turned too. "Take him into the field, girl. Take him into the field at once," she said sternly.

Sis looked helplessly round. There was a deep hush over that whole vast audience while the Procurator of Judea dipped his fingers in Mother Legge's silver bowl. "You've gone and done it," murmured Sis after an awkward pause, but she was too honest a little girl to scold the child when from her heart she thanked all the Powers that it was no longer incumbent upon her to obey this great lady who sat so close to them.

The Curator ostentatiously lit an Egyptian cigarette. "They oughtn't bring children to a thing that lasts so long," remarked Tilly. "They can't contain themselves like older people," and the good lady gave Sis, behind the curator's indignant back, a reassuring feminine nod. This nod — the symbol of that secret freemasonry of unfastidious realism that binds all women together — comforted Sis amazingly.

Bert continued his rapturous envisaging of the visible world. The stiff back and protuberant skull of the learned man in front of him was as much a portion of the great general Pageant as was the dragging of our Saviour — for Athling and the Dubliners had altered the details of chronology without the least scruple — before Caiaphas the High Priest. The laws of perspective as well as the facts of chronology had been interfered with by these daring stage-directors until the Passion Play on the terrace of Gwyn-ap-Nud's Hill looked as if it had been designed from various primitive pictures and from pieces of very old tapestry.

It need hardly be said that there was reached through Mr. Wollop's round little pig's eyes no dissimilar vision of ecstasy. All that there was in sight was wonderfully comforting and thrilling to him. The persons in front of him, the deep blue of the sky, the green grass, a tiny little red spider that was now crawling across his own plump hand, were of equal interest to him with Peter denying his Master. For, as in certain primitive pictures, where a great number of memorable scenes are enacted close together, these scenes in the Pageant followed each other in such quick succession and in such close proximity that they produced, or almost produced, a pictorial unity.

Thus, in immediate juxtaposition with Pilate’s prolonged soliloquy and also with the pantomimic fooling of Capporelli, as the clown moved from group to group, Christ was led before Caiaphas and Peter denied Christ. The part of the cock was introduced. This was a too dangerous experiment even for the two Dubliners. They maintained that there was such a deep and primordial poetry about the crowing of cocks, drenched in the dews of ten thousand tragic dawns of human suffering, full of such equivocal, treacherous, and yet Homeric braggadocio, carrying memories of women in travail, of dying soldiers, of millions of tortured, imprisoned and executed victims of Society, memories of insomnia, memories of madness, memories of love — that it would be vulgar, sacrilegious, a blasphemy against the dignity of the human spirit, impious, gross, offensive, ridiculous to introduce a pantomimic cock upon the stage. Besides — the two Dubliners had argued — no human eye ever actually sees the cock that makes its eyelids open. The crowing of the cock brings with it the passionate revolt of all the desperate lovers who like Romeo and Juliet would fain, if they could, hold back the coming of the dawn! It has become — so the Dubliners protested — one of the eternal symbols of the human race, recognized from Ultima Thule to Thibet, from Greenland to the Cape of Good Hope; and to introduce a *visual mockety* of such a thing in any performance would not be merely Aristophanic. It would be diabolic.

But the young poet from Middlezoy countered these arguments by saying that it was the Betrayal of the Christ by Peter that was the outrage upon the primordial mystery of the Cock's Crow, and that by representing the Cock in visual form, this Betrayal was pilloried as it deserved; and that so, and only so, was its full tragical sordidness, baseness, weakness, cowardice, emphasised and felt, as it was meet it should be.

Grandmother Cole it was, who, sitting next to Mrs. Robinson, had a sagacious word to say upon this matter. When she saw appearing suddenly, as if out of the side of the hill, perched upon the steps of Pilate's wooden rostrum, an admirably designed and powerfully conventionalized Cock, the old vestment-cleaner remarked to the ex-servant of the Bishop's Palace—"Thik red-combed bird be come to put all chicken-hearted men to shame. Me old man used allus to say to I when 'a did hear thik noisy bird— 'Ye wiming-folk be all broody hens. It takes a man-bird to call up the bleeding sun!' But I did tell he 'twere all a vaunt and a vanity, for though cock might crow ever so, the sun only rose when it chose to rise of its wone self."

But the only remark that Red's mother made when she heard this and beheld the feathered apparition, was as follows: "Tisn't only to-die that little Ben 'Awker 'as crowed. High've 'a 'eared 'im in our street long afore they pliced all them feathers on 'is pore little 'ead!"

Grandmother Cole expressed astonishment. As a Somerset-born woman, a native of Gwylad yr Hav, she had much more power of accepting illusion than this daughter of the East End. That feathered object, four feet high, with a huge red comb, was to her as real as the tower on the top of the Tor. It disturbed her mind to think of it as concealing little Ben Hawker of her friend's alley. "Be thik bird little Ben then?" she murmured. "What things be coming on the world when little Ben whose birth I do mind, and 'a cost his mother a sore time, should be a-crowing like a cock and making thik bearded man holler and run!"

Saint Peter's remorse of mind did indeed seem so extreme that it almost looked as if he were going to seek refuge from his shame in the arms of Lady Rachel, so far down the hill was he now flying! The Dubliners had told him to run towards the audience and utter his tragic soliloquy so that every word could be heard. Ned Athling had composed one of his best poetical rhapsodies for this Rock of the Apostolic Church, but he had not expected the ringing tones with which — only a few paces from the astonished Lord P. — St. Peter howled out his lines. But Father Paleologue, Mary was relieved to note, seemed well pleased by this episode.

"It's as it used to be in the old Miracle Plays," he whispered, leaning forward with flashing eyes. "I wouldn't have missed this for the Patriarchate! And look at Christ watching him over His shoulder! There's been genius in the invention of this! I wish my Greeks could see it."

The retreat of the errant Saint when he realised how far he had run was even a greater masterpiece of shame. His back, as he slunk off to one of the Arthurian pavilions, was the back of all the deniers of their love since the world began.

"And it's only Billy Bates, the Pilgrims' boot-black!" thought Mary; and she began to tell herself that this triumph of her John was worth all her sacrifices.

And now, according to this strange and primitive Gothic picture that Mr. Geard had caused to be painted upon the slopes of Turris Vitrea like a veritable enchantment of his favourite Merlin, the moment came for the binding of Mr. Evans upon that great cross of wood. It had been the fidgety persistence of the man himself that had got them at last — or rather got Mr. Johnson of the Great Western station timber-yard — to make that cross out of oak. Nothing but oak, and oak too from one of the spinneys of Wick Wood, would satisfy this lover of the Druids.

“Don’t ‘ee look, girlie! Don’t ‘ee look!” whispered Sally Jones to Tossie Stickles. “ ‘Twill upset ‘ee to see they cruel soldiers torment thik poor man.”

“But ’tis only Mr. Evans,” protested the imperturbable Tossie. “And they be only tying of he. They baint nailing of he, nor nothing!”

“Don’t ‘ee look, girlie!” repeated her friend. “Just shut your eyes tight and I’ll report to ‘ee how things be with the man, and how he do bear up under being crucified.”

“They’re lifting of him now! Oh, looksee! looksee. They’re hauling of him up!”

“Shut your eyes, Toss! Mercy on us, shut your eyes!”

But it was the sympathetic Sally, and not the prospective girl-mother, who was now the one to shut her eyes. “You tell I, then, how he be bearing it,” she murmured now.

“ ’Tis nothing to see, Sal, ’tis nothing to take on about so! ‘Twere much worse when I did see a sheep killed, in old man Chinnock’s shed, in this same very field.”

“It says ‘un … were … like a sheep … it says ‘un were … and dumb like a sheep in slaughter!” The tenderhearted Sally was crying now, but Tossie, keeping the palms of her hands pressed against her bowels of compassion, continued to stare at the motionless Figure suspended on the cross.

It was left to the acute Mr. Weatherwax to remark to Penny Pitches that there were no Thieves by the Lord’s side. “This be a poor Crucifixion,” he grumbled. “This be a stingy Crucifixion when they’ve only got one cross to set up!”

“Thee be worse nor Pontius Pilate, Isaac,” replied Penny. “It be the same to the good Lord whether he be hung in company or hung single; and since it be for we sinners anyway—”

"Old 'ooman, old 'ooman," whispered Mr. Weatherwax, "thee don't really think, do 'ee, that the murdering of one honest man could save such beggars and bitches as we be? I baint what you might call a infidel, but there don't seem no justice nor right to my mind in me and you being let off because of people persecuting one good man — like thik poor man over there! Anyway, 'tis not by tormenting folk that good parsnips be growed and good 'taties be dug. What us wants in this here town be more men with Authority, not more o' these here play-actors."

Father Paleologue kept drawing deep breaths of satisfaction all this time. He was interested to observe that the two bearded monks from the Caucasus seemed profoundly impressed. The younger of the two — so he whispered in Mary's ears, but she was too much afraid of staring to corroborate his words — was weeping openly and passionately. How deeply this Byzantine scholar thanked his stars that good luck had thrown one of John's proclamations into his path! He would never forget this stupendous spectacle. Mr. Evans' figure, as it hung there between the two heraldic pavilions — they had carried away Arthur's Dragon Flag — had a dim grandeur that was really startling. The man looked majestic, a real murdered Man-God, hanging there between earth and heaven; and the intense greenness of the hill behind him with that erect, immobile tower, and the gleam of the Roman swords, and the richness of the Hebraic garments, and all this huge gathering of the people, hushed, awe-struck, solemnised, gave to that single Figure, suspended against the grassy steep, a magnitude of importance that was overpowering.

"What are those old men counting up their money for?"

"Mother, Mother!" whispered Mr. Stilly reproachfully, for it was one of his parents who uttered these words, "that's the thirty pieces of silver."

“It’s easy for you, Robert, of course,” retorted the old lady testily. “Your father and I haven’t had your privileges at the bank, but to me it looks more like round bits of wood covered with gilt tinsel.”

It was not given to Mr. Stilly’s parents — much as they loved a quiet game of dominoes — to catch the horrible pathos of the way Judas was now behaving.

Perhaps in that whole vast assembly only Father Paleologue and one other realised the full poignancy of the acting of Judas. That “other” was Morgan Nelly. The little girl uttered no word. She allowed Jackie to explain to Sis that it was Judas who was being repulsed by those old men with the money-bags and that he was now going out to hang himself. Jackie explained that these old men were now saying— “What is that to us? See thou to that!” and that Judas was now going to hunt for a good place to “see to it” from. But Morgan Nelly’s heart leapt up in sympathy as she followed the figure of Judas wandering among some small thorn bushes and a patch of stunted hollies, looking in vain for what he wanted. In the end he disappeared behind the western pavilion, and long before he had disappeared the main interest of the Pageant had shifted from him altogether; but the little girl’s heart was still with him. She knew who it was. While the public knew him as a crazy and good-for-nothing elder brother of the Nietzschean young man at Wollop’s, Nelly Morgan knew him as “old Mr. Booty” who used to read Grimm’s fairy tales on the cricket-field when his side was in.

The Madonna now, all dressed in dusky blood-colour save for her sky-blue robe, was clinging to the foot of the Cross, while near her the Roman soldiers were throwing dice and playing cards in stiff circles upon the green grass. Momus, perched upon the steps of the empty judgment-seat, was idly tossing up a toy-balloon into the air and catching it as it came down; and to give the scene its true character, as some old Flemish painter would have visualised it, as a tragedy, namely, that drew its poignance from the pell-mell of that human life which was so indifferent to its superhuman anguish, either the Dubliners or Athling had brought it about that Pilate and Caiaphas should be playing chess together at a little round table in front of that western pavilion behind which Judas had withdrawn to hang himself.

Persephone's grief at the foot of the cross that bore Mr. Evans was the finest piece of acting in the whole Pageant. Its emotion was so sincere that it swept the whole picture together as nothing else could have done. The girl's monumental gestures were like those of some classic representation of her own namesake, the great Goddess of the Dead. Her sublime suffering gave a strange unity to all the minor groups and personages, their businesses, their occupations, their pastimes. She seemed to gather the diurnal preoccupations of the whole race together and with passionate solicitude to offer it up, like a cup of hyssop, to the lips of the dying. The other Marys, Mary the sister of Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, came now to Our Lady's side, however, and with their approach an unhappy crisis in the directing of the performance came to the surface.

Ned Athling, anxious to try every sort of new experiment, wanted to introduce a tragic dance at this point by the two Marys round the prostrate figure of Christ's Mother. This, in view of their Catholic up-bringing in Ireland, was too much for the Dubliners. They refused to countenance it. Athling, however — and this had happened in other cases as well — insisted on going on with it, with the result that the two girls who were playing the two Marys, Bessie and Lizzie Marsh from Bove Town, were completely confused, and as they bent together over the prostrate form of the Virgin, they made several sinuous movements with their flexible hips and several swaying movements with their bare arms, while at the same time they lifted up their voices and chanted the ballad-like refrain that Athling had written for them.

The nervous blundering of these young and pretty girls was not at all distasteful to the bulk of the foreigners, to some of whom it appeared as the final touch of modern art, to others as a naïve example of English barbarism; but to the feelings of Mary Crow, who recognised at once that someone had made a mistake, it was a harrowing spectacle. She turned hurriedly to catch the eye of Father Paleologue, but he smiled back at her reassuringly, however, and when she murmured her fears, “Oh, of course one can see that!” he whispered. “But chance has favoured these people at every turn, and though to many these dancing gestures — there! they are doing it again! — must seem ridiculous enough and even outrageous, still you must remember that the Magdalene must in her time have danced for her patrons. Why should she not now, poor girl — like the Jongleur of Paris before the altar — dance for the Crucified?”

“But, Father,” she protested, “the other Mary … the type of contemplation … surely—”

“Yes, yes, lady,” he conceded. “It’s a mistake. It’s the only bad mistake they’ve made. But those little girls are sweet creatures and—”

“Father, I believe you’re laughing at us all the time!”

Father Paleologue became in a moment intensely grave. “If I did *that,* dear daughter,” he said earnestly, “I’d deserve to be unfrocked. I’d deserve to be cut in pieces like your last Abbot. I’d deserve anyhow—” and he gave her an irresistibly winning smile that broke through the mask of his stiff archaic face as though a lamp had been lit within his soul— “not to have had the exquisite pleasure I’ve had today.”

“Thank God they’re going — those girls!” cried Miss Drew in a shrill voice. “And they’re dancing away, hand in hand, now, as if it were a may-pole they were leaving, not their dying Saviour." Her words reached the ears of the Marquis of P. who turned and gave her a gracious little bow. It was the first time he had recognised Miss Drew today, but these caustic sentiments of hers met with his entire approval.

"Are those baggages," remarked Miss Barbara Fell, "who have just gone dancing off into that tent, supposed to be camp-followers to those soldiers gambling there?"

Fell returned no answer.

"I asked you, Manny, if those girls—" and she repeated her whole remark.

"One of them is a Saint still invoked in Glastonbury, sister" — the doctor's voice was strained to the breaking-point and in his heart he was saying to himself, "I can't bear it … I can't bear it … I can't bear it"— "and the other is that Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who was such an especial friend of Jesus. I don't know why they swayed about like that. Perhaps they were so unhappy that they took to drink!"

"What's the matter, Angela?" asked Mr. Beere crossly. "You can't sit still a moment. We can't go before the end. I suppose it's getting on for the end now." These extraordinary words that could scarcely have been uttered on the continent of Europe were luckily heard by no one except Angela and to her they were no more than the portentous yawn from the old gentleman that followed them. They were no more than the buzzing of a blue-bottle fly that at that moment flew past her ears. Her face was white and her whole body was trembling with excitement. The soul within her yearned to that beautiful form that now with uplifted arms was embracing the feet of the suspended Figure.

There was another person in that big audience who was as agitated as Angela Beere and that was the Vicar of Glastonbury. Indignation had coloured Mat Dekker’s face a dusky red and his heavy brows were knotted over his bushy eyebrows. The whole business filled him with sick aversion. Why, oh why had he ever allowed such a thing as this to take place in his loved town? For all his High Church practices Mat Dekker at heart was as simple an Evangelical as John Bunyan or John Wesley. He regarded this whole performance as a monstrous and ghastly parody of an historic Event that had changed the life of the cosmos. “I can’t stick it out, son, I can’t stick it out!” he groaned.

Sam laid his large hand on his father’s knee. “It’s the end now, Dad, I think. Those fellows, lugging that step-ladder, are going to take Him down. Ned Athling is with them himself. He’s supposed to be Joseph of Arimathea.”

“Damn Ned Athling!”

It was at that moment that the Christ-Evans uttered the only words he had spoken since he had been lifted up. He cried suddenly in a great voice that rang out across Tor Field and across the gipsy caravans, and across Chilkwell Street, till it reached the blood-red fountain in Chalice Hill: *“Eloi, Eloi*, *Lama*, *Sabachthani!*”

The two Dekkers rose simultaneously to their feet. “That man … that Evans … wasn’t playing *then* … Look, me boy, his head’s really hanging down now, I must see to this!”

“Go slow, Dad! He *may* be all right. It may only be his damned acting. Don’t make a fool of yourself, Dad! No! It’s no joke. They are running out of the tents! They’re breaking up. Something *is* wrong. He *is* ill. He’s hurt. He’s fainted!” They pushed their way together between the rows of seats and began running towards the stage. They were not the first to do this, however. A good distance in front of them Cordelia Geard was rushing wildly towards that great cross of oak-wood. Their movement was a signal for a general uprising. Many others — among them Dr. Fell — were running now up the slope, towards the terrace, where Mr. Evans hung by his armpits. Meanwhile it was the ironical duty of the pretended Saint Joseph to act in real genuine earnest in this unrehearsed Descent from the Cross.

Inside the western pavilion there was now a scene of the utmost confusion. The two Marys, little Bessie and Lizzie, had been both sobbing hysterically in shame over their fiasco. John Crow had been vainly trying to comfort them. “Us have spoilt the Pageant!” Bessie was moaning. “Oh, why did ‘ee let we do it?” “Us’ll never be able to look anyone in the face again!” Lizzie was wailing. “I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead!”

But the little maids’ distress was now broken into by a wild uproar. “Evans have fainted! Evans have burst a blood-vessel! There be blood pouring out of Evans’ mouth!” Both John and Barter — careless now about appearing before the audience in their ordinary clothes — rushed out of the tent and ran to the scene of the trouble. The Roman soldiers had already left their dice and their cards and were engaged in helping the Jewish elders lift the cross bodily out of the ground and lower it down upon the grass. There were so many powerful young farmhands among them that this was not a difficult undertaking.

Capporelli had come up meanwhile and was gesticulating violently, talking so rapidly in French that everyone near him only stared. Some of the Roman soldiers — rough lads from the Sedgemoor farms — nudged each other and made fun of him. “Play over. Play quite done,” they cried to him in pidgin English as if he were a Chinaman.

Cordelia had become cold and calm. She was giving rapid, incisive directions to the lads who were lowering the cross. Ned Athling, in a bewildered trance, perched upon the upper steps of his step-ladder, was contemplating the surging movements which looked for a time like a dangerous panic, that were now rocking the excited audience. He tried to make out the figure of Lady Rachel, but the crowd was too dense.

Barter was one of the few who kept his head at this juncture. “Did you say that those Dublin people had got a megaphone somewhere?” he asked.

John looked at him quickly. “To quieten the audience, you mean?”

“Of course. We can’t let ’em break up without a word.”

“Let’s go and see.”

They crossed over to the eastern tent and there, sure enough, after a word with the Dubliners, whom they found on their knees hurriedly flinging all their private belongings into two black handbags, like passengers in a sinking ship, the megaphone was produced.

“What shall we say? Will *you* do it?” Barter found himself yelling these words into John’s ears as they carried their megaphone past the outskirts of the crowd that was now surging and shouting about the prostrate cross and above the unconscious form of Mr. Evans. It must have been that vision of the Dubliners packing their black bags that compelled him to yell like that when John could perfectly well have heard a whisper!

And what unconscious force was it that made the two friends — like two field-marshals whose army is defeated and in full flight — carry the megaphone back to their own eastern tent instead of using it at once where they had found it? The power of habit with these two men had been more quickly established than one would have believed possible! John and Barter must have hurried with their megaphone to the spot where they were *used* to giving their orders, as instinctively as a dog carries a bone to his kennel. Probably in a boat of starving derelicts who have just killed and torn to pieces one of their companions each man would be driven to convey his portion of the cannibal feast to his own bench, by the side of his own row-lock. At the door of their own tent they encountered Crummie freshly emerged from the ladies' tiring-room and as trim and lovely as ever in an ordinary summer frock.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've got *that* thing!" she cried. "I was just going to ask you if there wasn't something of that sort to quiet them. I suppose if he's only fainted you'll go on with the Pageant?"

John looked at Barter and Barter looked at John. What a girl this was! "I … we … they—" began Barter. "We thought we'd let it end here," said John.

Crummie surveyed the two disconcerted representatives of her father with a puzzled frown. She then turned her eyes upon the audience. Yes! they were all on their feet and most of them pushing and struggling to extricate themselves from the chairs and benches. Soon they would be scattered in all directions. Many were already rushing wildly up the hill towards the pavilions. The girl smiled sweetly. "Better do it now if you're going to do it," she said. "Tell them that the Mayor bids them good-bye and thanks them for coming."

John lifted the megaphone to his mouth. "Do I just shout it out?" he asked her nervously.

Mr. Geard's daughter looked round. The Middlezoy foreman, still dressed up as King Arthur, was standing nearby, quietly lighting his pipe. She called the man by name and he slouched up to them. "Take this," said Crummie. "Run over to Pilate's what-do-you-call-it, will you? Shout out to them that the Mayor bids them good-bye, and tell them to go home quietly, and that Mr. Evans has only fainted!"

King Arthur lost no time in obeying to the letter this clear command of the resuscitated Lady of Shalott. He ascended the wooden rostrum and standing erect there — a majestic and imposing figure — he bellowed forth in a terrific voice— "Ladies and Gentlemen; attention all, please!" His words were audible all over the field. Even the gipsies in their caravans heard them. The Dye-Works strikers came pouring out of Dickery Cantle's tent, well refreshed with meat and wine. Everybody stood still and listened. It was as if the real Rex Arturus himself had suddenly reappeared to restore peace upon earth and fulfil his magician's prophecy.

"What a girl!" whispered Barter to John as they followed Crummie with their eyes as she stood behind the rostrum, prompting the Middlezoy foreman.

"But Evans may be dead," murmured John.

"Not he," returned the other. "But even if he is—"

"The Mayor wishes to assure ye all that the gentleman be only fainted. The Mayor thinks best for Pageant to end here and now. The Mayor thanks ye all for coming, especially those of ye what come from far. The Mayor hopes ye'll all come to Glastonbury again. The Mayor—" There was a pause at this point while King Arthur bent his head to catch his prompter's words. Then raising the megaphone again— "The Mayor gives ye all the Blessing of the Living Christ!" The foreman came carefully down the creaking wooden steps with the megaphone under his arm.

Crummie was watching with delight the surprising effect of these words from the slope of the hill. It was as if, in the very midst of some wild panic under the urge of an earthquake or a volcano, every person had been struck mute and immobile, exactly where they were.

Even John and Barter were silent for a moment staring down at that petrified mass of people. John had time to observe that when the crowd began to move again it was in quite a different manner. There was no longer a tendency to rush up the hill in a dense mob. Everyone seemed to become a separate individual again. The crowd-hypnosis had been entirely dispelled by this invocation of the Redeemer of the Individual.

“What a pity,” thought Ned Athling, as he came out of his trance and scrambled down his step-ladder, tripping awkwardly over his Arimathean robes, “What a pity that they never heard my verses about the Heathen Grail!”

Meanwhile a burly Taunton policeman, under Cordelia’s direction, was pouring brandy down Mr. Evans’ throat. Other policemen were pushing the crowd back, so that the prostrate man might have more air and space round him. Megan Geard, supported by Mr. Bishop, the town clerk, and by Bob Sheperd, the old Glastonbury policeman, was now standing near by, out of breath and very much concerned.

“He’ll come round now, Marm. Don’t ‘ee take on. He’ll come round now. Miss Cordy’ll bring ‘un to’s senses, quick enough, you’ll see, Marm!” Thus did old Bob comfort his Worship’s lady while the equally infirm town clerk made feeble efforts to get down on his knees by the side of the ghastly figure on the ground. But the aged public servant was so “fat and scant of breath” that this gesture remained unfulfilled.

“Oh, Mother, Mother, what shall we do, what shall we do?” moaned Cordelia, losing her nerve at the familiar sound of her mother’s panting breath. “I’ve poured a lot of this stuff down his throat but he doesn’t—”

“Doctor be here! Doctor be come!” This welcome cry arose among a group of Roman soldiers, the smell of whose bare legs, hot and grass-stained, had become a part of that day that lodged itself in Cordelia’s memory. The Taunton policeman now cleared a path for Dr. Fell.

“His heart’s beating, Doctor!” cried Cordelia. “I’ve got my hand on it. It’s beating funnily, but it’s beating still.”

The doctor placed his hat on the grass and knelt down over the prostrate man who lay with his mouth grimly open. There was a great streak of blood on his chest and another on his shirt and his lips were caked with blood.

"He's burst a blood-vessel … of some kind," murmured Dr. Fell. "The question is *what* kind. Did he faint away as soon as he had shouted those words?"

It was to Persephone, who had been sitting all this while upon the fallen cross as it lay on the ground, that the doctor addressed this remark. She leaned forward to answer him, re-arranging as she did so the folds of her sky-blue robe. "Yes, Doctor," she said in a low, rather guttural voice. "It was the strain of that shout. But I think he was uncomfortable before. I think he was in distress before. I believe he was in considerable *pain*, for quite a long time before!" There was a queer hysterical ring in the girl's voice as her words mounted up. When she came to the word "pain" she shouted it with a vibration of anger.

The doctor mechanically wiped off some blood from Mr. Evans' bare chest with the tips of his fingers. "We'll have to get him to the hospital," he said, "and, what's more, get him there as quickly as we can!" He rose on one knee still keeping the tips of his fingers on the unconscious man's chest. "Who's got a car on the field?" he said.

Persephone rose to her feet and came forward, catching up her trailing blue garment round one bare arm, and hitching another fold of it into her belt as she moved. "My car is just over that ridge, Doctor," she said. "It's by itself there, and there are no others nearer than the road. If you don't mind my being *like this,"* and she spread out her long bare arms and gave a toss to her head from which her curls hung in a loose mass, "I'll drive him there in a jiffy! Only he must be carried to my car. I can't get it over that bank!"

Dr. Fell stood up. "Will you carry him, officers?" he said, addressing the nearest policemen.

Three of the men in uniform stepped forward and under the doctor's directions lifted up the unconscious Mr. Evans.

Cordelia turned to Persephone. The last time she had spoken to this girl was in the reception room of Mother Legge and as their eyes met now they both recalled this encounter. It was Cordelia *then* who had been dressed in blue! "Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Spear," she murmured with intense emphasis. "You may be saving his life by this."

The three policemen with Cordelia walking behind them carried their burden where Persephone led. She and Dr. Fell moved on fast in front, talking earnestly. The doctor was explaining to Persephone, in as unprofessional language as he could, just what he feared, just what he hoped, as to the injured man's chances.

"You'd better go home, Mother!" cried Cordelia stopping for a moment to turn her troubled face to Mrs. Geard.

"But you're coming back, aren't you, darling?" cried the descendant of the House of Rhys, extricating her arm from that of old Bob Sheperd. "They'll never have room for *you* in her little car!"

Cordelia waved her hand impatiently at her mother, as much as to say— "You look after yourself, dear!" — but she turned then, and running after the slowly moving bearers joined the melancholy cortege without another word.

Megan Geard sighed deeply. "I wish the Mayor were here," she remarked to the old Glastonbury policeman.

Bob Sheperd cordially endorsed her wish. "If his Worship had been here that poor man would never have died," he said.

Megan Geard gave a start and a sudden shiver ran through her. "You don't think he *is* dead, Mr. Sheperd, do you?" she groaned.

The old policeman wagged his head. "I've 'a seen many a corpse in me time, Marm, and not a one o' them but had blood o' just that colour, dry-like and sticky-like, on they's poor lips."

When they reached the little car it became only too plain that if one of the policemen sat by Persephone's side to help carry him in when they got to the hospital there was only just room for Dr. Fell and his unconscious patient.

"Take care! Go gently! Oh, go gently!" Cordelia cried, clutching the sun-warmed door-frame of the machine as it swung open, while they were lifting Mr. Evans in.

But an intruder now appeared upon the scene whose strange appearance startled and shocked the girl even in her desperate concern. It was none other than Mad Bet, who had persuaded her good friend Solly Lew to conduct her to this particular spot, from which she could observe and not be observed. The kind-hearted taxi-driver had remained here with the woman for quite a long while. Then, watching with the eye of a hungry man the rush of the Dye-Works people into Dickery Cantle's tent, he had gone off, "to get a bite of summat for five minutes." The madwoman had left her hat, trimmed with forget-me-nots, under the hornbeam bush where she had been sitting, and her egg-white cranium was a disturbing object even to Dr. Fell who had known her from his youth up.

To the Taunton policemen as, panting and perspiring, they withdrew from the car's door, this new apparition was still more startling. They thought for a moment that she was one of the players and that this shocking baldness was a mask.

"Only to touch the hem of his garment! Only to touch his coaties or trowsies!" gabbled Mad Bet, pushing Cordelia out of her way and struggling to stretch her arm into the car. "He told I, at Mother Legge's," the woman went on, "to come Midsummer Day, and see he cast out his Devil and I've seed he do it! I've seed that girt Devil flyin' over Tor-top with wings of dragon! He be Jesus, his wone self now, the poor man be. Don't ‘ee drop ‘un in grave, Doctor! Don’t ‘ee let them put stones on his poor bleeding heart. Where be going to lay him then, gents, where be? Where be? Mad Bet’ll come and watch over he. Night and day she will, till he rolls they stones away!”

“Don’t do *that*!” cried Dr. Fell sharply, when one of the Taunton policemen began unceremoniously pulling the woman back. “Let her just touch him once. There! There! That’s enough now. Look … here’s a friend of yours coming!”

The doctor’s words were justified, for hatless as herself and very much the worse for drink, Solly Lew could be observed staggering up the hill and frantically waving his arms. “He thinks the police are taking her,” remarked the doctor laconically, clambering in beside the unconscious man, who was lying limp and heavy across the seat.

Mad Bet caught the word “police” and the word “take”; but her whole soul was so stirred by what she had seen that no fear for her own skin could touch her. She had been allowed to do what she had set her heart on doing, and she drew back now quite quietly and stood immobile, looking like a ghastly wax-work at Madame Tussaud’s.

Dr. Fell’s attention, the moment he had settled himself on the edge of the seat, against the patient’s bare rope-bruised ankles, was attracted by the sight of a little bird deliberately alighting upon the topmost twig of the stunted hornbeam. “It’s a Lesser Whitethroat,” he thought to himself.

Cordelia’s distracted face was thrust into the window of the car. “He won’t die, Doctor, will he?” He could do nothing but shake his head and murmur, “Careful now, careful now!” as the unhappy girl snatched at one of the injured man’s hands and, careless of who saw her, pressed upon it a feverish kiss. “He won’t die, Doctor, will he? He won’t die, Doctor? I couldn’t—” But Persephone had already got her machine in motion.

“He’s in good hands, Miss, in very good hands,” murmured one of the Taunton policemen who had been left behind, as they watched the car descend the rough cattle-track that led round the eastern side of the Tor.

“That clever actress be a first-class driver, Miss,” remarked the other man, “and everybody knows Dr. Fell. I’ve ‘a seed ‘un meself many a time, in Tarnton ‘Firmary, when he were younger than he be now. There aint such a man as old Fell, no! not this side o’ Bristol.”

The policemen were so terrifying to Solly Lew that he had not dared to advance. Mad Bet, however, walked slowly towards him, keeping her eyes on the disappearing car.

As Persephone drove into town with her heavy load that eventful afternoon her nature was undergoing the strangest upheaval. Since her quarrel with Philip she had spoken to him only once. There had been indeed nothing to be said between them. She had “turned,” as people say, “against him.” His particular kind of passion had come to be revolting to her. Her deep riddle now was how she had ever been attracted to him, or let him touch her at all! In her husband’s case she had only arrived at a point of departure towards which she had been steadily moving for months. With him she had no overt rupture, but for the last week or two she had ceased to share his bed. But the sight of this man Evans hanging on that cross had hit something in her that went very deep. A nerve, perhaps it was, rather than anything else, in her weary heart; but it was a dark, strange pull, a rending tug at this queer nerve, an inexplicable feeling, and one to which she yielded now in an abandoned mood of delicious languor. This sudden, melting tender sensation — utterly unexpected and mysterious to herself — did not seem to affect her recognition of Mr. Evans as a queer, impossible person. He might be the most ridiculous person in the world; he might be a madman. It remained that something wild, dark, desperate, in the man, as he hung there, something in his sombre contorted face, with his great Roman nose and massive forehead, something in his lean, extended arms, something in his exposed shoulder-blades, something even in the black hairs on his chest, now caked with crimson blood, had touched a nerve in her being, an organic nerve, that went down to the dark deep knot of erotic mystery in the centre of her woman's nature. She had divined in a way no other soul had done — certainly not Cordelia — the vein of thrilling exultation in Mr. Evans' mood, that had supported him in that atrocious endurance.

There always was in Cordelia's attitude to Mr. Evans — there had been from the start — something at once "old-maidish" and maternal, something of the passion which frustrated, love-starved women feel for cats and dogs and parrots — especially the cantankerous and eccentric among such creatures. To Cordelia this whole business of the Pageant had been a vexation and an annoyance. She regarded it as a mere characteristic whimsy of her father, while Mr. Evans' mania for playing the Crucified she looked upon as an arbitrary madness, a sort of wilful mental indulgence, that she had feared all the time might lead to disaster.

Persephone, on the other hand, had so many neurotic manias in herself that she responded like touchwood to the quiver of Mr. Evans' perverted heroism. As she had embraced that wooden beam beneath his feet she had felt, vibrating through its dense oaken veins the wild triumph of his tense tormented nerves, the savage rapture of his self-immolation. And she had fancied too, in a passionate delusion that had sent an electric wave of reckless confederacy through her woman's flesh, that Mr. Evans was not indifferent to her presence there, was not unaware of the reciprocity of her mood. A strange Virgin-Mother had she been to a singular Saviour of a wounded world! Pressing her flat boy's breasts against that oaken post and straining upward towards her imaginary God-Man and Divine Son, she had allowed herself to yield to the uttermost to this new unexpected tenderness for a man she knew nothing of!

Such and not otherwise had been the feelings of Persephone Spear as she had lifted up her voice and wailed aloud— “My Son and my God! My God and my Son!” — as the Middlezoy young man had instructed her. Little had Ned Athling known, little had those Dubliners known, the wild maenad-like feelings that their gothic dumb-show had evoked in this morbid girl! Had she been aware, as she crouched and moaned at the feet of her madman, of the psychic waves of swooning adoration, flung towards her figure, from the white-cheeked girl seated there by the yawning Mr. Beere? Not consciously aware, of a surety; but such waves of electric passion seldom, like lightning-bolts, lose themselves in the unrestoring earth. Some tremor, some vibrant residue, however faint, reaches, as a rule, the object towards which such feelings are directed, and it may well have been that this shivering, yearning idolatry for her — reckless as some young nun’s worship of the real blue-robed Maid of Heaven — had quickened the pulse-beats of her own passion, as she poured forth her spirit in this strange new tenderness, never felt before.

Such were the feelings of Persephone. But the girl was wrong, wrong as so many other worshippers of gods and men and beasts and demons are wrong. Mr. Evans was totally and entirely unconscious of her presence at the foot of his cross. That oaken beam that had carried the trembling of his emotion to her, and had made it shiver through every channel of her frame till it reached the centre of her organic life, had, for some occult reason, absorbed and not transferred the emotion which she felt. All that wild, dark, lovely sense of being isolated with this hook-nosed, contorted-mouthed victim of his own strange mania, isolated with him on an austere promontory of confederate fate, was in reality a groundless illusion. In this particular case — quite otherwise than in Angela's — there had been a break of contact. Perhaps a girl's nerves respond to the nerves of another girl and send out magnetic currents that can be caught from far off; whereas something in the masculine constitution, something dense, thick, opaque, obtuse, *stupid,* has the power of rejecting such contacts. Or it may be that the erotic emotions, when they brim over from the masculine spirit, extricate themselves, as women's feelings never do, from the bitter-sweet honeycomb of Nature, and shoot off, up, out, and away, into dimensions of non-natural existence, where the nerve-rays of women cannot follow.

Those queer analytic elementals, those inquisitive naturalists that very old places, full of contorted human history, attract by a species of spontaneous selection, must have derived a malignant pleasure from the words they heard spoken by Monsieur Capporelli when both the protagonists of the Passion had disappeared with Dr. Fell. In true French style, reducing every mortal human feeling to a rigid pattern of logical amorousness, the famous clown had uttered to Ned Athling words full of an ironic and blasphemous amusement when the unconscious King of the Jews and his blue-robed Mother had vanished together to the hospital. A touch of jealousy may have mingled too, with his sly tone, for Capporelli had been really and truly caught by Percy's slender hips and her graceless tomboy humour. "An engaging situation," the clown had remarked, as he was changing his clothes in the gentlemen's portion of the eastward-facing pavilion, "and a very piquant one, for those two, it's been, we may be sure, ever since they hoisted him up."

The Middlezoy poet turned upon the laughing brown eyes of the speaker a pair of blue-grey eyes more chilly-cold than the wettest sea-fog that comes up out of Bridgwater Bay. “Do you think so?” he remarked. “It was lucky she had her car so near.”

Capporelli fixed a sentimental and whimsical eye upon the spot where he had been so happy with Percy. “Who knows?” he sighed. “You people are all so peculiar and so — inhuman that it is difficult to say!”

The elemental of Glastonbury — those naturalists that had hovered over the vaporous humours of three thousand years of criss-cross human tangles — must have howled with laughter when they heard this clever Frenchman “explain,” in accents dry and logical, the relations between Mr. Owen Evans and Mrs. Persephone Spear.

Mr. Evans had, as a matter of fact, been caught up into a region of feeling utterly beyond the comprehension of any Latin or any Teutonic mind. This had gone on since he stood before Pilate until the moment when he shouted “*Eloi*, *Eloi!”* It was not, as St. Paul has put it so well — he the one among them all who would really have understood Mr. Evans — it was not with flesh and blood that he was contending, but with mysterious powers of evil upon levels revealed to few. No equivocal perversity gratified by divining the feelings of Persephone entered for a second into the terrible visions with which, as he hung between heaven and earth, his mind was bruised and broken. The perverse girl had detected, as Cordelia never could have done, the *quality* of Mr. Evans’ feelings, but what she had no idea of was the tragic lengths to which he had carried them. The physical pain he suffered before he shouted that “*Eloi! Eloi!”* was more acute than he had ever dreamed of undergoing. Both Athling and the Dubliners were to blame, and indeed still more so was John, for not insisting on Dr. Fell — they could have had confidence in him — being present at one of their rehearsals. Evans had suffered, but not acutely suffered, at these rehearsals, and what he had endured he had kept to himself, for *it was what he wanted.*

It was the prolongation of the scene — drawn out so foolishly by that luckless Dance of Death of the two Marys — that had brought about his collapse, and it was the strain on his arms, bound too tightly by those ropes, and the tension of the muscles of his shoulders, stretched between the cross-bars, that had caused him such anguish. But not since the bloody King put the last Abbot of Glastonbury to death had such physical pain been experienced by anyone upon the slopes of Gwyn-ap-Nud's hill. But it would be a mistake to say that the spirit of Mr. Evans yielded, or weakened, or regretted his undertaking. Right up to the end, till by straining his torso to the breaking-point he lost consciousness, he not only endured this anguish but he exulted in enduring it. His exultation kept mounting and mounting — extreme pain and ecstatic triumph embracing each other in dark mystic copulation.

Mr. Evans became indeed Three Persons as he hung on his self-imposed cross. One person was his body, another was his soul. He felt his soul — or rather his soul felt itself — to be entirely outside of his body. This phenomenon was to him, as he hung alone there, looking down on that vast crowd, as much of a definite, concrete experience as the pain itself. The pain became a Third Person, and the soul of Mr. Evans kept urging on the pain. He felt as if that crowd beneath him was the whole human race and that by the transaction that was now proceeding between these Three Persons, thus suspended in the air above them, this crowd, an immense animal passivity, was in some way re-created, purged, cleansed, transformed. His body, as the pain increased — as his soul deliberately caused the pain to increase — began to overbrim the confines of its human shape. His body projected itself under the pain in great waves of filmy chemical substance. It flung forth this filmy substance in streams, in torrents, in a mighty, rushing rain! And then there arrived a moment when

Mr. Evans knew that his body was the whole hill, the whole field, nay! the whole wide-stretching landscape. Into this landscape, into this earth-bulk that was his body, his soul kept driving the pain, compelling it to bury itself deeper and deeper into this living mass. This continued till his body became more than the mere immediate landscape. It became the whole round earth, swinging on its orbit through space. And above this earth-body hung the master-spirit of Mr. Evans still driving the pain on. He was the Zeus and Prometheus and the Vulture — all three linked indestructibly together! And all the while a triumphant ecstasy poured down from him like a bloody sweat.

Nor must it be supposed that Mr. Evans' rational mind — that portion of his consciousness that indulged its activity apart from pain or pleasure — was paralysed all this while. Those two manners, which John Crow had noted as long ago as their encounter at Stonehenge as peculiar to the man, were not superficial. They represented the workings of his deepest nature. His pedantry, as people called it, was as much heightened by his present suffering as was his imagination. As other men visualise their past lives at the moment of drowning, so Mr. Evans, in the midst of his anguish, — even while he identified the substance of his flesh with the whole round earth from which it was projected — was intensely aware of the peculiar history of the spot beneath him. The pain he endured turned his pedantic acquisitiveness into a living medium, acutely sensitive, quiveringly receptive, through which the whole history of Glastonbury began to pour.

Glastonbury seemed to have waited for the sacrifice of Mr. Evans to exhale upon the air its darkest and most terrible secrets. That no one heard these secrets, except the man himself who was the medium for them, mattered nothing to these singular revenants. They found Mr. Evans' anguished entity suspended above the soil of that historic spot and they seized upon it, just as a horde of wild and gusty winds, blown here, blown there, might seize upon an Æolian harp hung aloft in a lonely place. Thus it came about that another Pageant, — much more grim and much less romantic than the one that had been played that day — passed through Mr. Evans' brain. Kings and Prelates, Saints and Sodomites, Madmen and Monks, Whores and Nuns, People executed and People Imprisoned, together with a woeful procession of common, nameless People upon whose toil and hunger others lived, streamed in a wild torrent of heads and faces and arms and limbs through the tormented consciousness of Mr. Evans. And the crowd was not only human! *There* lay one of the worst horrors of it. Mingled with the human torrent were other living things, animals, birds, and even fish. All the *eyes* that in the long history of this place had looked in vain into those of the killer — all these tormented *eyes* gathered how about Mr. Evans! And it was all connected with his deadly, his irremediable vice. The figures that flooded his brain were all torturers or victims, every one of them; and as the thing grew and grew upon him, as he hung there, all the victims flowed into one and became one, and all the torturers flowed into one and became one. Then it came about that between Mr. Evans as the torturer and this one victim, who yet was all victims, a dialogue arose; so that from their divided localities in space they addressed each other, and from their horrible association in time they answered each other.

"Forgiveness for *you*," cried this voice, rising from all the victims of Glastonbury since the tribes of men had first come there, "can never, never be. For you did this thing, and went on doing it, *knowing what it meant*! Others tortured me from brutality, from insensitiveness, from stupidity. You and those who were like you did it, *knowing what it meant.* It was *that* knowledge, knowing what I felt, and yet not stopping, that has made forgiveness impossible.”

The terror of the voice made Mr. Evans feel like a thing that twisted on the floor of the Pit and yet out of the smoke of his torment he uttered a reply. “In Eternity we are as one!” he cried hoarsely. There was a silence for a moment or — so it seemed to him, as he hung there — for a thousand years.

Then the voice was lifted up again. “Never can we be as one! I have looked into your eyes and you did not stop. Each moment you went on made the difference greater. It can never be crossed now. It is a gulf in eternity now. You could not hear me if I did forgive you.”

And once more as he heaved himself to and fro he replied to the voice. “Christ can forgive me. Christ holds eternity in His hand.” And again there was a silence of a thousand years. “I *am* Christ!” cried the voice, in a tone that made the flesh wrinkle like blown sand upon Mr. Evans’ bones. “Every victim, whether you’ve done it for your science or your ambition or your religion or your lust; whether it be a beaten prisoner, a trapped beast, a dog strapped down for vivisection, a racked heretic, a burnt Negro, a tortured child, *is I;* yes, is I myself! And you are right when you say that I hold Eternity in my hand! These voices come, these voices that are *my* voice! Can you gather them up, these victims of yours, these tortured, hunted, trapped victims, by their thousands upon thousands? Can you gather them up where you have crucified them? Can you cause the earth to yield again to you their black blood? Can you cause the air to return to you their pitiful cries? I have heard the voices of men — yes! and of wise men too — how they have said, ‘All is equal, all is permitted.’ It is I and none other — I, the Christ — who speak thus to you from Eternity, and I say unto you ‘All is *not* equal! All is *not* permitted!’”

Even yet, even after hearing these things — such power hath the spirit of a mortal creature to fight for its life — Mr. Evans was still able to reply to the voice. “I could not answer you,” he murmured hoarsely, “if I were not answering you from the Cross.”

“You forget what you have done,” went on the voice, and it was like the voice of the wind over the sea. “You forget! You forget!”

Mr. Evans’ tone had a terrible veracity now. “Is it *you* who say that to *me?”* he cried out. “No! No! Christ or Devil, you are wrong there! Never have you let me forget, never for one moment!” And it was then that the voice became a vast anonymous voice, gathered up, it seemed, from so much suffering in the world as to be rendered almost inarticulate! It came to Mr. Evans’ ears out of all the gills of fishes, out of the gullets of beasts, out of the shards of insects, out of the throats of birds, out of the wounded coils of slowworms, out of prisons, out of hospitals, out of madhouses and domestic torture-rooms, and as it rose and sank, as it sank and rose, it accused Man — man the cruel, man the blood-fiend, man the voluptuous tormentor, man the rejoicer in pain, man the inventor of pain, man the pain-begetter, the pain-eater, the pain-drinker, the pain-devil! And from the abysses of Mr. Evans’ consciousness leaped up into the day, like an eel, out of fathomless mud, a question for the crucified Man-God. “So evil, so cruel, so base, O Lord, are the generations of men, why dost Thou seek to redeem them with Thy suffering? Why dost Thou not cause a flood to arise — as at the beginning — and drown forever their itching, biting, stinging, scorpion-lusts in smooth, deep fathoms of oblivious water?”

And the voice replied to him again and it was now so low and yet so searching that it was like a wind stirring the horns of snails and touching the hairs in the thoats of nightjars, and moving the antennae of butterflies, and lifting the gold-dust from the cracks of puff-balls, and blowing the grey dust from the droppings of weasels, and rippling the brown rain-fall in the cups of fungi, and fretting the light scurf on the brittle skulls of the newborn, and the rheum-drops on the eyelids of extreme age, and the sweat-drops on the forehead of death. And the voice whispered— "For those that are forgiven there shall be a new heaven and a new earth!" And Mr. Evans groaned forth his retort to this: "But what of those that *cannot* be forgiven? Is that new heaven and that new earth built upon the Golgotha of the Second Death?" The voice at this became so low that the ears of the man, clairaudient as he was through his suffering, could not distinguish words.

"It is God and He is lying to me," thought Mr. Evans. "He is lying to me. People lie to the condemned for whom there is no hope."

And Mr. Evans hanging there in his great anguish hardened his heart against the voice. "We are alone," his soul whispered to his body and to the pain that he was inflicting on his body. "They have left us quite alone."

And it was then that he lost consciousness. This was what only one person afterwards would believe when he told them about it, namely, that he had no recollection of shouting with a great shout that "*Eloi! Eloi!"* which brought the blood from his mouth.

Cordelia would not believe it, nor would Persephone, nor would John, nor would Mr. Barter, nor would Aunt Laura, the matron of the ward where he "came presently" — as the ironic human phrase runs— "to himself." The only person who believed it was Mr. Geard; and the extraordinary thing was, when, a couple of weeks after, the Mayor of Glastonbury was visiting him in the hospital, and he was telling him about this, such must have been the heat of the day, or the distressing sights in that particular ward, that Mr. Geard, after accepting his account without question, fainted dead away!

VOLUME TWO

IDOLATRY

IT WAS NOW already two whole months since the Pageant; and the ebbings and flowings of Glastonbury lives were proceeding under a scorching mid-August sun.

It was a Saturday afternoon; and resting against the warm bank of a high hawthorn hedge, John and Mary Crow were watching the tall pale-gold stalks of a ripe cornfield over against Bulwark’s Lane leading to Bushey Combe.

The girl wore a cream-coloured frock covered with little light-green spots, like the spots upon the inside wings of the butterfly called a Green-veined White. She had on black stockings and very thin shoes, and as she lay between the golden wheat-stalks and the tall hedge-grasses, she allowed one of her outstretched hands to caress the cloudy pink blossoms of a tuft of fumitory. Her white straw hat lay on the ground beside her feet, upside down, and into the place where her head would naturally have been, John was now with meticulous care constructing an imaginary thrush’s nest out of twisted blades of grass and bits of rubble.

Her face was averted from his as she lay on her side but, as they both rested on their elbows, John would vary his preoccupation with her up-turned hat by allowing his long nervous fingers alternately to rumple up and restraighten that green-spotted frock, so warm, as was the form beneath it, in the glowing afternoon sun.

The girl’s whole being responded to these satyrish caresses with a luxurious and delicious contentment of mind and body, such as she had not known for many a long month.

She had been married now to John for exactly two days and she had at last persuaded — or believed she had persuaded — Miss Drew to allow her to live with him in that Northload room, while she continued to spend the bulk of each day in her old employment as that lady’s companion. They had not yet had their first night together; but ever since they had been married, secretly but not surreptitiously, by Mat Dekker in St. John’s Church, the unbedded bride had been transferring her clothes and other private belongings to this happy retreat, the first ménage that she could call her own! Whether it would be tonight that the grand move would be made or tomorrow, Sunday night, she was not quite sure. She had extracted a sort of reluctant half-promise from Miss Drew that it should be tonight; but on that issue she was prepared to be flexible, if, when it came to the point, it *had* to be tomorrow instead!

John also was happier than he had been for months; probably as happy as he had ever been since that day on the Northwold “big river.” This girl by his side seemed on that warm August afternoon to satisfy his whole nature in a way that he had more than once doubted it ever *could* be satisfied.

What a delicious mystery — frond-leaf beneath frond-leaf, shell-whorl beneath shell-whorl, calyx beneath calyx — the identity of a girl was! It seemed to John, as he followed with his electric fingers the delicate curves of this body lying by his side and as he threw out one trifling remark after another, just to hear her voice, just to note what such a being would say, or wouldn’t say, that the renunciation of *all this* made by Sam Dekker was a monstrous outrage upon life.

“I’ll set Mary at him!” he thought to himself, and then he thought, “No! he won’t listen to *any* girl. I must fight it out with him myself. It’s mad what he’s doing. The fellow’s worse than a murderer. He’s got the uttermost mystery of mysteries under his finger-tips, and instead of worshipping it he's starving it to death!"

He had a delicious opportunity for enjoying Mary at this moment with his most intense idolatry and concentrated fetish-worship; for her back being turned to him, she could not distract him by any look.

Both her words and her silences, as he caressed them now, along with the rest, seemed to have about them the very lines and curves of this form that he found so intensely appealing. "What is it," he thought to himself, as he contemplated her long slim legs in their black stockings, "what is it about a girl's shape that excites a person so?"

The girl seemed in such a dreamy and passive state just then that she appeared ready to yield to the least pressure of the hands that caressed her. John took advantage of this to make her lie prone on her face, where she seemed perfectly content to stay quite motionless inhaling the sun-warm aromatic smells of those infinitesimal plants such as tiny yellow pansies, that seem to love wheatfields better than any other place, and idly pushing at the brim of her grass-filled hat with the tips of her shoes.

He began strewing her prone limbs now with little bits of grass taken from the bird's nest he had made. Holding these grasses in the air above her, he let them fall down in showers; and it pleased him to watch which of them would find rest upon her, and which would drift aside into the hedge-weeds, caught by some scarce-perceptible breath of the soft southerly wind. "What *is* it about the way they are made?" he asked himself again; and it seemed to him that the most exquisite thrill came to him — the thrill that was at once most satyrish and most infinitely tender — from the feeling of the piquancy of such desirable limbs being inseparably united *to a conscious mind* — a mind that bore about with it, wherever it went, this sweet provocative burden. "But it's only," he thought to himself as he stopped strewing her with grass and began smoothing down that cream-coloured frock, “because it’s Mary! If this were another girl, instead of what I feel I should feel either savage lust or furious disgust. God! I would not stay here a second with another girl — except of course Lisette; but that’s different. I’d hate for another girl to think to herself, ‘I’ve got him! He likes me!’ I’d hate for another girl to have *that* kind of triumph.”

The maliciousness he now began to feel towards this imaginary other one drew to itself all that natural loathing of the opposite sex felt in certain moods by both men and women; but such was John’s nature that he could take this repulsion, this sex-loathing, which is far more powerful and deep-rooted feeling than any mere sex-hatred, and bury it in the ground; bury it as a dog might bury a piece of offal, knowing that if his maliciousness or his roguery required it, he could dig it up.

The chances are that for pure unmitigated lechery John Crow ranked highest among the whole population of Glastonbury. Others might have far more powerful erotic sensations; but for pure delight derived from lust, John would, with one exception, have carried away the palm. This exception was Angela Beere, the chaste-looking, unapproachable daughter of old Lawyer Beere. Angela lived for nothing else but for erotic dreaming — her mind by night and day was a temple full of “chain-swung censers” to the Cyprian; and in this temple was a sacred niche that was occupied by many different figures, but only by one figure at a time. At present the niche was occupied by the figure of Persephone; and it was before the figure of Persephone that Angela prostrated herself exactly in the same way that John prostrated himself before Mary. Between the pleasure that Angela was enjoying, at this very minute of time, as she sat at her easel — for she dabbled in water colours — sketching among the Abbey Ruins, by calling up Persephone's form, and the pleasure that John derived from the actual presence of Mary's there was no difference at all.

Above every community, above every town, there are invisible Powers hovering, as interested in the minnows, male and female, swimming about in that particular human aquarium, as Mat Dekker was in his fish.

It is only a very few human beings, however, in each community, who are able to slip out of their skins and share this super-mundane observation of themselves. For the most part the inhabitants of a given locality — or aquarium — just go blindly on, unconsciously swimming about, following their affairs, obeying their necessities, pursuing the smaller fry, making their weed-nests or their mud-nurseries. Nor have we any right to assume — rather the contrary — that the few persons, who *have* this power of slipping out of their skins and joining those super mundane naturalists, are nobler, or even wiser, than the rest. Very often they are the extreme weaklings — dwelling on the verge of nervous idiocy.

In Glastonbury at this particular epoch, John Crow, Persephone Spear, and that emaciated son of Dickery Cantle, whose wasted legs so troubled Mr. Geard, were probably the only ones who could attain this detached view. And certainly it would be absurd to maintain that any of these was nobler, or wiser, or nearer the secret of life than Mr. Geard for instance, or than Miss Elizabeth Crow, neither of whom ever *looked down,* so to speak, from above the surface of the aquarium. At this particular moment of the fifteenth of August, that is to say at nine minutes and forty seconds past three o'clock, had any of these supermundane naturalists been studying the physical and psychic movements of the Glastonbury aquarium, they would certainly have come to the conclusion that John Crow, contemplating the real figure of Mary toying with the little wild pansies, and Angela Beere contemplating the imaginary figure of Persephone, first in one aspect and then in another, as she sketched the famous ruin usually known as St. Joseph's Chapel, were the two water-creatures whose amorous excitement was most intense. And quite apart from super-mundane observers it is likely enough that the most desirable of all electric vibrations is just this very sort of erotic desire, neither altogether gratified nor altogether denied.

A small red poppy, such as linger on after their season, with so many other cornfield plants, was dying in front of him and a great black slug was drawing its slime over the pink pea-like petals of a little rest-harrow. But the curious shrivelled blackness of the dying poppy, with a strange *wet* look upon it, as if it wept in its death, or as if it poured forth the most hidden store of all its hoarded nepenthe, for nothing but the voyaging south wind, that needed no anodyne nor any healing, to take and carry away, did not lessen John's emotion.

Into the poppied juices of black death's own veins that perfect sweetness by his side had crept, cozening him, cajoling him, anointing him, with an ointment that was like a Lethe within Lethe, an oblivion within oblivion.

The girl's yieldingness and sweetness as she lay there, bathed in that golden sunshine and in those flickering shadows, seemed to extend itself, like an element of eternal kindness and reassurance, to everything in life.

The little rest-harrow seemed indeed to be holding its breath till the black slug passed on its way; but its leaves were sturdy. The slug had eaten only one pea-shaped petal. And lo! in a moment the small strong plant could breathe again! A scarf of rainbow-glittering slime would wear till night-fall, but even if no dews washed it down there would probably be rain in a day or two and naught left of that trail. What a thing that he had found a creature so sweet, so divinely chiselled by the great Pygmalion of the universe! There had been a long epoch in his life, all those years in France — though Lisette had been generous and tender — when he would have mocked at the idea of finding such absolute content, such fathomless peace of mind, in idolising a girl's body.

It had nothing to do with Glastonbury; that was certain! No, it was in Norfolk they had met, and to Norfolk they would return one day.

Propping himself up upon his left arm and looking across the girl's body, he could see the mouth of a big rabbit-hole; and beyond that, lying close under the hedge, an old disused plough. Upon one of the handles of this plough, which stretched up towards the sky, some child or some tramp had tied a fragment of red flannel, such as might once have been an old woman's petticoat. The sight of this object sent quivering through John's mind a sudden piercing sense of the tragic pell-mell of human life upon the earth. That bit of red petticoat tied to the plough seemed to become a symbol — like a gallant flag held up by the old battered sun-warmed earth — that there yet remained, in spite of everything, a hope, a chance, faint, so faint! but still a chance, that all the hideous miseries beneath the sun might have, down deep underneath them, some issue, some flickering outlet, some remedial hope.

"If there is," thought John, "it's through women that it comes to us now." It seemed to him at that moment as if upon the kindness of women, upon the yieldingness and patience of women, and upon a certain reassurance — the mere absence from their nature of the horns of the male beast — that their presence gives as of the anonymous weeds and hedge-rubble under his fingers, all hope for better things depended. "They all are profoundly immoral," he thought. "This accursed Glastonbury saint-myth that has gone, like bad wine — like wine made of the poison-berries of that Levantine thorn tree in the churchyard — into so many heads in this degenerate town, has never really appealed to women — they have always seen through it — they have always known it for what it is."

John, now finding the hand that clutched at the weeds growing paralysed and numb from supporting him so long as he thus leaned upon it, moved his position and sat up straight, hugging his knees with his wrists.

"As long as I don't move or speak," thought the prostrate girl to herself, "he will go on loving me!" And it indeed seemed as if Mary was not mistaken in this, for it was as if all that earth-born, sun-warmed bread of life, rising from the tops of its millions of golden stalks, had entered into John's being, giving to the thrilling happiness with which he enjoyed her — all untouched as she was — an infinity of protraction. The hum of insects, the shivering music of the larks, as if their very heart-strings were voluble within those little up-borne handfuls of feathers, the distant barking of sheep-dogs, the monotonous refrain of some invisible chiff-chaff in a hedge elm a hundred yards away, the sight of a mountainous ridge, slope upon slope, peak upon peak, of huge white clouds on the southern horizon, and, above all, that delicious appearance known as heat waves which he could see hovering beyond the plough handles, like floating nets, he thought, with which the elemental of the air fish for the amorous dreams of plants and mosses and lichen and stones, as the sun draws them forth — all these things partook of the sweetness of the girl he loved and became part of that sweetness.

"How lucky I am," thought John, "to have had the wit to escape all the traps that the Evil Spirit sets for nervous, excitable, hypnotised men and women. If I were Sam Dekker, I should be saying to myself 'what ought I to be doing *now?* What's my *next* labour and burden, O Lord of Miseries and Sorrows?' If I were poor old Tom I should be rushing madly from wench to wench, trying to forget that I hadn't money enough to live in Norfolk or buy an airplane! If I were Philip I'd be working ten solid hours a day, building up my business. If I were Evans — but it's beyond me to know what goes on behind those Silurian eyebrows. But — O you wheat-stalks and little bindweeds! — I'd like to leave some dint, some signal, some impress upon this very exact spot; so that in future times, when some miserable Philip or Sam or Tom comes groaning along this hedge looking for a branch on that chiff-chaff tree to hang himself on, he may suddenly step into what these air beggars call a pocket of incredible happiness; and think to himself 'God! I'll trick the Devil yet.'"

The moment finally came when John decided that he would arouse his prostrate companion. This was a new delight; for, as he knew by experience, a girl is never so provocative as when she wakes up from a long trance of passivity during which her whole being has been charged to overflowing by the electricity of desire.

He jumped quickly to his feet. "Up with you, my treasure," he cried. "I'm getting restless." Nothing, not a shade, not a flicker, not a glow, not a breath, did he miss of the girl's identity, as he helped her to get upon her feet. Her benumbed, half-unconscious shyness — for she swayed like a drugged creature when first she found herself erect — the way her cheeks smelt of sunshine and moss, the way her lips tasted of the stalks of grass, the way she glanced, with an indrawn "chut-chut" of tongue and teeth, at the untidy state of her dress, the way she half-yawned and half-smiled, all these things doubled the enchantment with which he now embraced her, turning her this way and that, as he pretended to brush the hedge-rubble from her clothes.

The very fact that she was such a grave, self-contained and dignified girl made all her little feminine peculiarities much sweeter to him. Mary indeed had got in John what women so rarely get, a lover who was as conscious *as another girl would have been*, only actively instead of passively so, of the thousand and one little infinitesimal flickerings of physical feeling which create the aura in which the mind functions.

"John!"

"Yes, Mary?"

"I believe it would have been easier, after all, if we'd done the natural and obvious thing and gone straight to the room after we were married."

"Now don't fuss over that, any more," he retorted, picking up her hat for her. "It was to please *her* we did as we did. It was *her* idea. She begged you to wait till Sunday and we promised we would. Nobody knows we're married but her and Tom and Dekker."

"Perhaps … I'll have … to wait … till Sunday," said Mary.

John looked so aghast at this that she kissed him of her own accord.

"Well … I'll do my best. But how shall I let you know whether to come and meet me at the gate or not?" she continued rather wistfully. "She may make such a scene, when it comes to the point, that I'll *have* to put it off till tomorrow."

"Oh, I'll come at nine, my treasure, and hang about there for half an hour, for an hour if you like! And then, if you're not out before St. John's strikes ten, I'll know you can't do it. But you *will* do it — if the woman hasn't fallen into a fit or anything — you will, won't you?"

"I *will,"* said Mary solemnly; and she felt as if she were making a vow before that whole, sacred golden cornfield.

"We ought to have done it as I wanted," he grumbled now, picking up his stick and his own hat. "We ought to have done it directly after the Pageant."

"Now stop!" the girl cried with a flushed cheek. "I absolutely refuse to go over all that again. You know perfectly well why I wouldn't do it then. You know how mixed up everything was and how — but, oh, my dear, don't let's quarrel over that old story now! I'm too happy today. It's all been too lovely today. Don’t let’s go and spoil it now, just at the end. My dearest, my dearest, don’t ‘ee bring up those old grievances now, please, don’t ‘ee!” And she slipped her hand into his with a gesture of intense pleading.

John shrugged his lean shoulders with a gesture learnt in France; but he obeyed her and let the dangerous topic drop.

Hand in hand they soon recovered their equanimity as they moved along the hedge towards the gate leading into Bulwark’s Lane.

John never took Mary’s hand without a dim, delicious feeling that he was holding her — as he never yet *had* held her — undressed and lying by his side.

“Well,” he thought, “tonight … tonight!” and then as he lifted up the heavy gate to close it, when they were safe in the lane, and took a final glance at that shimmering corn, “I must never forget this afternoon; never, never!” Slowly, lingeringly, they drifted down the uneven decline, following the windings of that narrow lane, and he held her fingers tighter and tighter in his clasp. Why, oh, why, had he not kept her there in the cornfield till it was too late for her to go back to the Abbey House; till there was nothing to be done but just let Miss Drew go, and lock themselves into their Northload room for the night!

But it was wiser, always wiser, to accept the appointed end of happy hours! His incorrigible mind set itself wondering now whether this might not be the real solution of the problem of evil, of pain, of deprivation and frustration in the world. Suppose things were so made that there was nothing in life that need interrupt an eternity of August afternoons like this one? Would that not take away from *this* afternoon its perfect thrill, its wonderful essence, its strange and abiding entelechy?

Though he hadn’t thought of such matters *up there*, wasn’t it the awareness, at the back of his mind, of his noisy shanty in the Great Western yard, of old Tom’s cynical troubles, of Miss Drew’s tragic passion, of Geard’s mania about Chalice Well, of Philip’s scornful hostility, of the difficulty of propitiating their landlady, of the way Mad Bet was forever waylaying him, yes! and of the sights and sounds, so many of them disagreeable, that crowded in on his days, as he went back and forth between Northload Street and the railway station, which, like the solid masonry of the bulk of St. John’s Tower, making its rich turrets and pinnacles so much the lovelier, had given the final magic touch to those golden wheat-stalks and those black stockings?

John dug his root-handled hazel-stick viciously into the dry cart-ruts as this thought came to him.

“My sweet!” he cried aloud.

“What is it, John?”

“Do you suppose all our happiness depends on contrast?”

“You mean our having to come down here; and my having to go back for dinner?”

“That *kind* of thing … yes!”

“Better walk alone now,” she said, drawing her hand away and moving it quickly to her hat and then to her waistband. “I know what you mean, John, and I’ve thought of that too — but sometimes I get a feeling that there’s a world, just inside or just outside *this* world, where these opposites that are so hard to understand, lose their difference altogether.”

“But that means death, doesn’t it?”

She turned her head towards him and he was astonished at the softness, the bloom, the glow that suffused her face at that moment.

“Not … necessarily … not always,” she said slowly; and then, before turning her head away, she smiled one of those deep, mysterious, feminine smiles, that only the greatest poets and artists, such as Dante, Leonardo, Blake, have dared to note, depict and comment on, in their troubled search for the absolute.

St. John's clock struck six as they reached the centre of the town. "Too late for tea, John," she said. And then she added, "We'll have *our* tea at midnight and all to ourselves. But, oh, goodness! I do feel so frightened all of a sudden."

"What's the matter, sweetheart?"

"Oh, I don't know! John, I'm afraid, she'll be *terribly* upset. You won't be angry if I don't come, and you've waited and waited?"

"Of course not," he replied hurriedly, "By God, it'll only be what I deserve if I *have* to come back alone. Besides, it's only putting it off till tomorrow!"

The girl stared in front of her, fixing her eyes on that well-preserved Gothic building that is usually called the Abbot's Tribunal. Something had profoundly disturbed her.

"Tomorrow … tomorrow," she murmured vaguely.

"What is it, my sweet? What is it, Mary?"

She gave a quick sigh and a shake of her head.

"Oh, nothing … I expect I'm just nervous. But when you've looked forward to a thing for a *very* long time and it's just—" She bit her lower lip; she pushed back the hair beneath her hat with the unconscious gesture of a woman facing the worst tidily. "Well, my dear," she said resolutely, fighting down a craving to burst into tears and to cry frantically: "Let's go to the room now, straight away, quick — to the room — now!" "Well, my dear, I suppose we'd better part here. I'll just have a comfortable time to see her for a moment or two before we dress for dinner."

"Will you come over … to the room … in your — dress?" John asked, feeling as if he were a tramp making a rendezvous with a princess.

“Of course; I’ve got my warm cloak, haven’t I? I’ll bring my little black bag.”

John looked at her with astonishment. That she should be able — this delicate exquisite provoker of feelings such as could ascend the steps of the ultimate Heaven — to manage such a drastic undertaking as to have a scene with Miss Drew and leave the house with a black bag, seemed to him wonderful. That she was ready to do it, that she was fond of him enough to do it, amazed him. He had never been a man who attracted women, and he exaggerated their coldness towards him. Indeed in regard to the love of women he had a physical humility that was almost a mania. One of the strongest holds that Mary had over him was the simple fact that she, a sweet-looking, intellectual girl, *could* be in love with him at all! Secretly John regarded himself as the most unlovable human creature then living in Glastonbury.

As he continued to hold the hand which she had given him and to stare at her like a person in a trance, Mary had herself to make the move she dreaded.

“Goodbye … till tonight!” she said and tore her hand away. But she was back again before John had left the spot. It was a crowded piece of pavement where they had stopped in front of the mullioned windows of the old Tribunal, and John, following the cream-coloured frock with his eyes, had stepped into the gutter so as not to be jostled.

Here they met as she pushed her way back against the current of the crowd.

“If I don’t come tonight, I’ll come tomorrow morning. You won’t go out till I come, will you?”

“I should say not!”

And she had flown for the second time.

She still had that queer disturbed feeling as, coming down Silver Street, she passed the high Vicarage wall. “It looks like a monastery!” she thought. She was anything but reassured when she caught sight of Sam Dekker at the Vicarage gate, talking to Crummie Geard. Crummie had recently taken to helping old Mrs. Robinson arrange the flowers for the church altar, and she had come — quite naturally that Saturday night — to fetch a bunch of white geraniums from the Vicarage garden.

Sam raised his hat as Mary passed and Crummie nodded; but the impression left by this encounter was an unpleasant one.

“She holds those white flowers like a nun,” Mary thought. “And she used to be such a lovely, merry creature. I believe that man is putting horrible ideas into her head! He’s got a sort of furtive inquisitor’s look. He’ll be making that pretty little thing enter some terrible Order. How she *is* listening to him, drinking in every word! He’s worse than a priest — that young man. And what a shifty sensual look he’s got. He gave me a look as much as to say: ‘Go on and take your pleasure! Go on and break Miss Drew’s heart! A time will come when you too will come here for white geraniums!’”

As Mary hurriedly slipt off her cream-coloured frock — and she felt a desire to crumple that dress between her hands and press it to her face instead of folding it up so carefully — and began taking down her hair, she became conscious that her panic just now went deeper than the struggle with poor Miss Drew and deeper even than the difference between the Tribunal and that golden field. She paused in her task, with her bare arms lifted to her head at the mirror, and stared into her own grey eyes. Mary was as little conceited of her looks (nor, to confess the truth, were they of any startling quality) as her lover-cousin, for he could hardly be called a husband yet, with those bridal sheets still cold, was conceited of his.

Into her grey eyes she looked therefore, as a spirit might look that would fain give pleasure to the man she loved by giving him her body. “The *next* time,” she thought, “I look in the glass will be in our room!” She took the comb now and began combing out her hair, holding her head so far back that she made her long tresses hang straight as seaweed, clinging to a smooth-oval-shaped stone. And she really did forget her anxiety now and Miss Drew and everything; for the electricity in her hair, as she pulled the comb through it, gave her such a delicate, amorous shiver that it made her feel as if butterfly wings were caressing her nipples under her short shift.

And she thought: “What *will* it be like tonight? Shall I feel awkward and ashamed? Will I be able to sleep?”

There came a puckered wrinkle to her forehead now, as she put the comb down and began plaiting her smoothed-out locks. John was funny. John’s manias and fastidiousnesses, where girls were concerned, seemed to be endless. “I’ll be a fool, an idiotic fool, if I let him see me undressed too soon. I’d better put out the lights while I’m slipping on my nightgown.”

Her mind pondered on gravely and intently, thinking to herself, “Well — there you are again, you curious creature!” It was indeed a fierce mania of Mary’s to stare into her own eyes at the looking-glass. She did it as a rule more angrily than with any other feeling; and, when she did it, she always thought of the self that looked back at her there as something quite different from the self she was conscious of really being. Her real self didn’t seem to have eyes at all; didn’t, in some mysterious way, seem to need eyes or nose, or mouth! Her real self seemed compounded out of pure ether and totally independent of bodily form.

“I’ve felt this unsafe feeling somewhere else,” she now told her staring grey eyes; “and I know where it was too! It was the night when I undressed after being in the boat with John, on the Wissey; the night when I was in the room next to Dave and Persephone, and when John was at that inn."

What Mary could not know was that the original cause of this feeling was that the desperate prayer which they had sent up from the boat that day had only reached the malice in the First Cause instead of its beneficence. She tried angrily now to shake off the feeling.

"If I *do* make Miss Drew let me go tonight," she thought, "I'll have it out with you, looking so wild and troubled!" And then, not thinking of herself as beautiful, she set herself to think of the best method of procedure when the great moment came. No young lady from Wollop's, led by Young Tewsy into "my other house," could have meditated more carefully on the diplomacy of provocation. But this grave, true-hearted girl, before she had finished arranging her hair as she wished it to be, *had* smiled once at her own image. It was a flurried, faint, flickering smile, like a watery sun on vaporous ice; but, when she came to kneel before her chest of drawers to take out her best white evening dress — that she had not put on since the night when Tom Barter came — she suddenly fell to laughing aloud. The memory had come into her head of those everlasting Elizabethan bawdy jests about the taking of maidenheads. "I don't fancy I'll be much changed in *that respect*," she thought to herself, as she unfolded her big crimson sash.

But she had no sooner placed dress and sash side by side upon the bed and had begun to wonder what stockings to select, when there came a faint, hesitating knock at the door.

It turned out to be Lily; and Lily with tears running down her cheeks.

"What is it? What's the matter?" she cried. "Come in, Lily! Come in and tell me what it is."

She pulled the girl in and closed the door. “There! There!” she murmured soothingly. “Don’t you cry! You’ll spoil your nice, clean apron. Look! Here’s a new handkerchief; and I’ll *give* it to you, Lily, to *keep.* It’s real Norwich linen.”

“Louie was … I thought … Mr. Weatherwax said …”

“Now, stop, Lily! There’s a good girl. Stop and tell me about it quietly.”

“ ’Twas to do with … ’twas because of … ‘twere about Mr. Barter, Miss Mary.”

Mary was a kind-hearted, generous girl and not devoid of her own queer slant of Norfolk humour; but her attitude to Lily did unconsciously change a little at the introduction of Mr. Barter’s name.

“Well, Lily, what was it?”

“Thank you … ever … so much … Miss … for this love … lovely handkerchief! I shall keep it as … as a keepsake, Miss.”

“But what is it, Lily? What’s upset you so?”

“Mr. Weatherwax said he’d tell Mistress that he’d seen Mr. Barter talking to me in Ruins a week agone come Sunday. He’ve a bad tongue, that old man has; and Louie thought if I told *you,* Miss, what tales he’s going about telling of me, maybe Mistress would … I mean maybe Mistress wouldn’t —”

“But *did* Mr. Barter talk to you last Sunday, Lily?”

“Not *talk* — of course, Miss Mary” — and Lily, folding up the handkerchief into little squares, uplifted a face as innocent of all guile as a wrongfully accused heroine in a story by the author of *The Charmings*— “not talk, of course, Miss — Mr. Barter happened to pass by when I was reading under the wall at Ruins’ End and naturally, being the gentleman he is—”

Mary found her good-temper coming back to her with a rush. The image of the sedate Lily with her book, the expression, “Ruins’ End,” the casual Barter taking a blameless stroll in the Abbey grounds — in the presence of these things it was impossible to nourish grievances. Besides, Lily could take care of herself. Lily was no little goose like Tossie Stickles.

“Tom, Tom,” she thought, “you’d better take care. If I know anything of our Lily you’ll meet your match if you don’t look out!”

“I understand, Lily …. It’s all right. Miss Drew knows how careful you always are of the credit of her house. If I were you I would only laugh when old Weatherwax teases you. Answer him back! Pay him off in his own coin. Above all, don’t make him angry.”

Mary paused for a moment, and then, while she moved to her chest of drawers to finish her dressing, the thought of Crummie and the white geraniums made her burst out scandalously to Lily who was fumbling with the red sash on the bed: “We girls can only be young once, Lily,” she surprised herself by saying. “But we must keep our wits about us, for men are ticklish creatures.”

It may be believed how wide Lily’s eyes opened when she heard these words. “Mr. Barter has always behaved very proper, Miss,” she stammered, “and I’m sure, Miss, you know that I—”

“That’s enough, now, Lily,” said Mary firmly, pushing the astonished maid gently towards the door. “Go and see if Miss Drew wants any help; and if she’s gone down, tell her I won’t be a minute. By the way, Lily, it may interest you to know that I was married the day before yesterday!”

Lily’s face expressed unalloyed dramatic interest; but, a second later, bewildered consternation.

“She thinks it’s to Tom,” passed through Mary’s mind. “Yes,” she went on, “to my cousin, Mr. John Crow, who did so much in the Pageant.”

Lily sighed a deep sigh of relief. “Are you going to … to leave us … Miss … I mean Mam?”

“We’ll see what your mistress says about *that”* replied Mrs. John Crow with a brazen chuckle. “I’ve got two homes now, Lily — one here and one — not here. Now run off, please, there’s a good girl! Oh, and you can tell Louie to send in some of those tartlets she made yesterday. I know there’s rice pudding; but if she wants to give me a treat—”

“May I tell—” murmured Lily from the doorway.

“Of course, of course! Only say it’s a great secret — especially from Mr. Weatherwax!”

It was only eight by the French clock on the mantelpiece when dinner was over and Miss Drew and her rebellious companion were seated opposite each other, with the Dresden coffee-cups between them. Not a sip of her coffee, however, had Miss Drew taken. Her face was tense and white, her nostrils twitching, her fingers fretting with her white shawl, her shoes tapping the ground, her back straight.

“ — like an elopement; that’s what it is … stealing off at night to a man’s room … no! it’s worse than that … it’s like an *assignation.*”

“It’s my husband’s room,” maintained the girl firmly; and she said to herself: “I believe she’s going to let me go.”

Miss Drew visibly shuddered.

“Mary!” she said.

“Yes, dear?”

“Go to the dining-room sideboard, please, and get me half a wine glass of Mr. Dekker’s brandy!”

The girl made haste to obey her and was glad to find that the room was already nearly dark and that Lily had taken away both rice pudding and tartlets.

Miss Drew drank the brandy in two quick gulps.

"Is he coming for you tonight?"

The girl nodded.

"I won't have him cross my threshold! I've told you that already!"

"He's not coming in. I'm to meet him at the gate."

The woman rose from her seat and, moving to the chimney-piece, drew her shawl tight round her shoulders.

There were no flower-pots in the grate tonight. Its cold polished black cavity looked back at her like the ribs of death.

"This moment had to come," she said in a low voice, speaking more to herself than to the girl. "It had to come; and now it's come."

"But I'll be over every day, dear," whispered Mary, wishing bitterly that she had never let John come for her tonight. "It's worse than I expected," she thought.

"You don't know," said Miss Drew, "you simply don't know what you're to me."

"Dear … my dear!" murmured Mary, rising, she also, from her seat, and making a little wavering, fluctuating movement towards her friend.

But Miss Drew continued: "No, you don't know, you never have known! This man … this 'husband' as you call him, this cunning scamp … has less feeling in his whole body than I've got in my little finger!"

She must have caught, just then, an involuntary glance of Mary's towards the door. The younger woman was indeed afraid that Lily might suddenly appear to carry off the coffee.

But to Mary's amazement Miss Drew now rushed to the door and locked it! Such a thing as locking the drawing-room door of the Abbey House to prevent interruption from the servants was as much of a tragic and historic event — if the real proportion of things be considered — as the eviction of the royal spy, before Sedgemoor, from the bar-room of Dickery Cantle's great-great-great-grandfather.

When Miss Drew came back from crossing the room the two women confronted each other between the fragile coffee-table and the fireless grate. The elder wore her usual black silk garment with the heavy brooch securing the old lace frill on her withered neck. Opposed to her gaunt figure, Mary's form, in her low-cut white dress and big crimson sash, looked very young and soft and girlish.

"I'd like you … I'd like you not to …"

Miss Drew was evidently struggling to say something that tore at her vitals.

"I'd like—" she gasped again.

"What is it, oh, what *is* it?" stammered Mary, awed, a little scared and completely bewildered.

"I'd like you not to go to him tonight. I'd like you to stay with me tonight … our last night … as you are!"

"Of course, my dear, if you feel it like that—"

"I mean … not leave me at all … just this once … I mean … let me hold you … all night … close to me—"

Mary's face must have expressed such trouble, such pity, such confused agitation, that the old woman changed her tone to a quieter one. "It would be nothing to you … to watch … to be there … to be near me … just this once … and then" — she swallowed a rasping, dry sob— "tomorrow … you shall go."

"Dear! I must think. He'll be at the gate in a few minutes; I must — I don't know *what* to say. For him to go back alone — through the streets — to that room — oh, I don't know what to do!" She flung herself down on a chair, her red sash trailing to the carpet, lying on the carpet, like a great stream of blood from a stab in her side.

Miss Drew leaned one of her long, tight-sleeved arms upon the mantelpiece and watched her.

The void of her longing for her, of her losing her, throbbed within her like a hollow cave, round the walls of which a bitter stifling smoke was whirling, seeking an exit.

The French clock on the mantelpiece ticked on remorselessly: *tick-tock, tock-tick*, *tick-tock,* as if there were behind its hidden wheels, some demon of the inanimate, that was taking vengeance for all the hammerings and tinkerings it had had at the hands of its man-creators.

Mary glanced hopelessly, helplessly, at the clock. She remembered how it had ticked, just like this, the night she had felt so sad with Tom before the Pageant. Her thoughts kept taking first one road of trouble and then another. “It isn’t fair!” her heart cried. “I belong to John. It isn’t fair!” And then a vast pity for this unloved, childless old woman surged up within her. “After all,” she said to herself, “it’s only for one short night; and how could I be happy, over there, thinking that I’d denied her such a little thing?”

“Let me think,” she whispered, giving Miss Drew a faint smile and a reassuring nod. “Sit down, dear — don’t stand like that! You make me nervous. I only want to think … just to think … a little more.”

But Miss Drew did not show any inclination to sit down. She kept her eyes fixed upon the girl in the chair, as if that red sash were a death warrant. And something from her Isle-of-Ely ancestors now rose up in Mary’s nature; something sturdy, earth-rooted and with a smack of indulgent humour in it, like the taste of peat-smoke.

“The poor heart!” she said to herself. “John and I can surely wait for twenty-four hours. If *I* can — God knows*!* — *he* can.”

To her consternation, Miss Drew now rushed forward and with a heart-rending groan flung herself on her knees at the girl’s feet. “I’m not a bad woman! I’m not a bad woman!” she sobbed out; and then to Mary’s dismay she began pressing the red sash against her lips. “I’m not … I’m not a bad woman!” she groaned again, uplifting to the girl a face contorted with shame and passion.

“Miss Drew! *dear* Miss Drew! Get up, for Christ’s sake. It’s not right for you — it’s not right for either of us! Oh, *what* shall I do? What shall I—”

But the other had buried her face in the girl’s lap and with her arms outstretched was clutching at the sash where it was wound about the young woman’s waist. She was murmuring all sorts of wild things now to which the girl could only helplessly listen, looking distractedly at the clock, which went on with its infernal ticking in exactly the same tone as if its mistress had been pouring out tea for Matthew Dekker.

“Oh, I love you so! Oh, I would give up my life for you! I can’t bear it any more — it’s lasted too long. But you will? My child, my little one, my only one, you will? You *will* be with me, watch with me, let me hold you, just this one single night? I’m not a bad woman! *Say* I’m not, child! It’s … it’s … *it’s this Love* that’s burning my life up!”

The clock selected this particular moment to begin striking nine, the hour when John was to be at the gate! She had done nothing towards putting her day-dress and her night-dress into that black bag she had told him about. The intrusion of Lily at that juncture had left her barely time to get dressed at all.

She had to struggle now with a definite anger against this frantic creature; but her sturdy East-Anglian nature stood her in good stead and she fought that feeling down. She saw in her mind’s eye the drooping forehead, the lowered eyelids of the nun-like Crummie. She saw Sam Dekker’s white geraniums; and she murmured to herself again: “The poor heart! The poor heart!”

“Get up, dear! Get up!” she now cried aloud in a voice not untender but resolute and emphatic. As she spoke, she herself struggled out of the chair. Standing erect now she felt in more control of the situation; and she took hold of Miss Drew’s hands and managed to drag her up from her knees. She was startled as she did this by the burning feverishness in the woman’s fingers. But when she got her safe on her feet the agitated lady fell into a fit of violent shivering as if, in the fever of her emotion, she had been plunged into ice-cold water.

But she resumed her old place by the empty grate; though Mary could see the thin black arm that she extended along the mantelpiece was trembling so much that it made a couple of ornaments that stood there jingle and tinkle against each other.

Miss Drew glanced sideways now at the ticking clock, as if she could have struck out its life with one blow and left it pointing at ten minutes past nine in an eternal paralysis!

“Well,” she whispered huskily, “why don’t you go up and pack your things, if … that man … is waiting for you?”

Mary walked slowly to the window. She was once more in an anguish of indecision. The tragedy of passion often consists in the depths of harsh unlovableness into which it throws its victims. Miss Drew, by the tone in which she said, “Go up … that man is waiting,” had done her utmost to destroy the very pity upon which her fate depended. The “poor heart,” as her red-sashed companion had called her in her thoughts, was indeed in a tragic impasse.

“Well … have you decided against me … against the one thing I’ve ever begged … on my knees … of a living soul?”

Her words seemed to come, not from her own mouth, but from some other Miss Drew — a towering image of devastated frustration — that hung and wavered in the air between them.

But Mary continued obstinately staring out of the window into the round half-circle of trimly weeded gravel, surrounded by thick laurel bushes from which a winding driveway led to the gate. The window was open at the top; but not content with this, she presently pulled aside the muslin curtains and opened it at the bottom. She now stood there motionless, listening intently, while the warm August air stirred her gown and, entering the room, made the candles flicker.

Several little brown moths took the opportunity of flying in past her white figure. Some rushed to perish at the candles on the table, while others beat themselves against the lamp till they fell upon the floor. Neither Miss Drew nor her companion had any margin of consciousness left for these little suicides of blind desire. Miss Drew's thoughts flickered much more wildly than the softly fluttering curtains or the lightly stirred folds of her companion's frock.

They were a strange jumble, these thoughts; a jumble of old, conservative prejudices and passionately covetous longings; longings rendered intensely concrete and circumscribed by reason of their long suppression.

"Mamma … Mamma … never sit on sofas … weakness to sit on sofas … hold your back straight now … straight Euphemia … Betty Newton in hay-loft … kissing … Mamma … angry like God … God sees all … he will hold her all night … a sneak … a tramp … a trickster … a thief … friend of Geard … Geard meddling with Chalice Well … Geard letting loose all the devils … burning … burning … Betty Newton … Mamma … bed all day … bread and water … too long, too long, too long … sweet … so very sweet … and for him, all for a dirty trickster … no one knows how sweet but me … too old now … old … old … never sit on sofas … weakness … hold your back straight, Euphemia … a dirty adventurer must have her … hard she is … hard to me … soft as clay to him … *it burns* … it would be only once … peace, rest … lovely, heavenly peace! … her red sash … *it burns* ... Lily and Rogers in bed … never knocked … never rang … everything changed since that man became Mayor … Chalice Well … blood … her sash … red blood … *it burns* ... never for me … after this … never for me … she'll be gone soon … listening for him out there … gone … gone … a maid no more … *it burns* ... Lily and Rogers in bed … two pillows … slept watching … watching slept … mamma … grand-mamma … crying all night … never came … never heard … it burns and burns and burns."

"I couldn't be happy in our room tonight," thought Mary. "And after all — no! I'll do it. The poor woman! It's better than giving her white geraniums to hold in her hand."

She shut the window with a violent jerk of her strong bare arms. She turned and came slowly, gravely, gently, towards the figure by the mantelpiece. She came close up to Miss Drew and threw her arms round her as she would have thrown them around a wounded animal.

"I'll stay," she whispered softly to her, "I'll stay, dear!"

The rush of wild excitement, relief, passion, shame, the motion of racing blood from heart to nerves, brain, throat, were too much for the wrought-up feelings of the woman.

Her head sank down, like the head of a reed in the water when a sluice is opened, and upon Mary's shoulders her tears fell now without stint, while a queer whimpering, like the crying of a child whose mother has suddenly appeared among a crowd of strangers, showed signs of changing into hysterical laughter.

"Come and lie down, dear … There! I'm not going to leave you … not for one moment … my poor, poor darling! Come and lie down … only just a minute."

Thus murmuring, Mary half-dragged, half-supported her till she got her safe upon the sofa … upon that very sofa where "Mamma" had so often told the little Euphemia that it was "weakness" to recline. Then the girl's practical mind began to work fast. "I *must"* she thought, "run out and tell John. I'd better go and get hold of Lily. Oh, mercy! Her eyes are shutting! I hope she's not going to faint."

Thrusting a pillow under Miss Drew's head, Mary ran to the door, unlocked it and hurried down the passage. She had shut the door carefully behind her; but even so, she did not want the lady to hear her shouting for help.

"Lily!" she called gently.

There was no answer; but she thought she detected the sound of hurried movements and disturbed voices in the far distance.

"Lily! Louie! Where are you?"

Then she heard the unmistakable sound of a man's voice — the voice of Mr. Weatherwax. She opened the kitchen door. "Come here, Lily, come quick, please; I want you! Miss Drew's ill!"

There was bread and cheese upon the kitchen table and also — Mary noted it with a house-wife's indignation, even at this crisis! — the brandy decanter from the dining-room sideboard.

The scullery door opened — just wide enough to allow the entrance of a very slim virgin — and Lily, hurriedly pinning on her white cap, slipped into the kitchen, with eyes very wide and even her pretty mouth a little open.

"Oh, Lily, Miss Drew's unwell — I've made her lie down on the sofa; and I think—"

"La, Miss! — I mean Mam — does Mistress want the brandy? Mr. Weatherwax just dropped in to ask how we was off for vegetables, and Louie thought—"

"Listen, Lily. We must try and help Miss Drew upstairs, and get her into bed. I shall sleep with her tonight; so you can take my pillow and things into her room. One minute, Lily! Just go and tell Mr. Weatherwax not to go for a moment. If she's too heavy for us, he could carry her up."

"Yes, Mam; yes, Mrs. Crow."

Mary hurried back into the drawing-room.

To her astonishment Miss Drew was standing by the mantelpiece again, but her whole manner was changed from what it had been. She was self-possessed now and very quiet.

"Come here, child," she said.

Mary went up to her and she took the girl's head gravely between her hands and kissed her forehead.

"I've changed my mind," she whispered, very dignified and commanding. "I wish you to go after all. Run out now quickly and tell that man to wait for you; and then come back and pack your things. And I shan't expect you back till Monday morning. I *wish* it, Mary! You must do what I tell you. I shall be absolutely all right. I shall get up early and go to St. John's."

The curious thing about this long, hurried speech was that Miss Drew never raised her voice above a whisper. Mary stared at her. The sight of their two untasted coffee-cups brought back so vividly the painful scene she had gone through that night, that this change in her employer’s tone seemed dreamlike and unnatural.

But, before she had time to reply, Lily came quickly in without even a pretence at a knock.

“Lily,” said Miss Drew calmly, raising her voice now, so that it sounded quite as usual, “you know, of course, that Miss Mary is married?”

“Yes’m, Miss Mary told me, Mum.”

“But she’s going to be with us, as before, I’m glad to hear,” Miss Drew went on, making several little movements with her hands among the objects on the coffee-tray— “that is, during the day-time. But I’ve told her we’ll be able to manage without her tomorrow; for we mustn’t be selfish, must we, Lily?”

“Yes’m … no Mum.”

But the lady of the Abbey House now turned to the extremely embarrassed Mrs. John Crow.

“Run out, dear, and tell your — good man, that we’re all helping you pack and that you won’t keep him long.”

Dominated by the authority in her tone and spared any protest by the presence of Lily, Mary had nothing for it but to obey her to the letter. She went to the door, which Lily gravely opened for her, and slipped out into the hall.

She did not soon forget her queer sensation — as if she had been turned into a bit of seaweed on the top of a great cresting wave of compulsion — as she looked hurriedly round for something to throw round her. There was a big, eighteenth-century mirror hanging in the hall; and in a flash of queer detachment as one of her hands mechanically went up to her hair, she thought to herself, “Women must have wrapped things around their white shoulders like this, while arrows were flying, guns firing, torches waving, men shouting, for hundreds and hundreds of years!” She opened the front door and descended the stone steps. Then, with the cloak she’d picked up clutched tight round her — more as a protection from the night, from obscure invasions of her nakedness, than for warmth in that summer air — she ran rapidly down the drive. Yes! There he was.

“No … no! Not now, John!” she panted breathlessly, as he hugged her against him, almost lifting her off the ground in his thankfulness to have got her again. “There … there! Let me go, John!” — and when she was free— “I must go back now for my things … I only came … to tell you I was—” she could hardly get the words out in her agitation— “to tell you I was coming. You wait here, John—”

She was off up the drive again, and out of his sight, almost before his unspeakable relief had found time to flow to his confused brain from the arms which had held her.

He could not remain still. Every pulse in his body was beating and his heart was as voluble as the French clock, still ticking behind Miss Drew, as she talked quietly to Lily. He set himself to pace up and down the road like a sentinel guarding some royal palace.

There were all sorts of vague delicious scents upon the soft air that rustled through the laurel bushes, stirred the wallflowers in the crannies of the grey wall, went sighing off like the breath of an invisible spirit over the tops of the trees. But from some remote cowshed somewhere out towards Havyatt Gap, on the road to West Pennard, he could hear the pitiful cry of a beast in pain.

As this cry went on, tossed forth upon the summer night with woeful persistence, John stood and listened nervously, leaning upon his hazel-root stick.

"Damn!" he thought, "and it must be a pain like that, that this woman's enduring now, only in the heart … in the heart — at my carrying off Mary! What a thing — that not one perfect day can be enjoyed by anyone without hearing something groan or moan! What would young Dekker be doing in my case? Well — it's clear what he'd be doing, by what he's done over Mrs. Zoyland! Cleared out of it … hands off … and spends his time between Paradise and Bove Town, comforting the sick."

He resumed his sentry's march, but his mind was beating now against the blood-stained wedge of the world's pain, and he could not give up himself with absolute assent to his good hour.

He prodded the crumbling stonework of the wall with the end of his stick in angry pity: pity for Miss Drew, pity for that suffering beast on the West Pennard Road, pity for the whole array of anguished nerves upon which the great, blunt thumb of evil was strumming its nightly gamut amid these sweet summer scents.

Once more he listened intently. How hard not to listen! What was the trouble with that beast over there? What were they doing to it? What were he and Mary doing to Miss Drew? If only he knew that there were a God, who *for one second* had an ear open, what things he would pour into that gaping, hairy, stupid orifice. In the old days their gods made them sacrifice their enemies to propitiate the great pain-engine.

"I'll put into old Geard's head," he thought, "to burn an image of God, like a great Guy Fawkes, when he has his Festival of Christ's Blood."

He resumed his sentry's march. The suffering beast was silent now. He prayed that Miss Drew also was either rocking herself to sleep in a fit of hysterics or hardening her heart in pain-killing hate.

"But if everyone waited," he said to himself, "to snatch their hour, till not a cry, a groan, a moan, could be heard in the whole world, who would *ever* be happy?” There! Wasn’t *that* the opening of the front door? No! ’Twas one of those inexplicable noises that are liable to occur in all silent places, as though some ambushed eavesdropper struck something with his foot.

“What an awful mood Tom was in when I saw him yesterday! He doesn’t seem to like it very much our being married. Perhaps I oughtn’t to have asked him to the church. She said not to! Girls are wise in these things … wise … *There*! That surely *was* the door? Yes, there are her steps! Oh, the darling! Oh, the heavenly darling!” He snatched the bag from her hands and laid it on the ground, flinging his hazel stick after it. His whispers of rapture as he welcomed her, touching her, here, there, with his hands, as if to make sure that it was she and none else, drifted off among the other faint sounds of the night and went on their airy voyage eastward. The wind came from the west; so that, long after no human ear could have heard them, those sounds — or those vibrations that would have been sounds to more sensitive ears than man’s — went journeying due east. Over the roofs of West Pennard and East Pennard they went; over Ditcheat and Milton Clevedon; over Cogley Wood and King’s Wood Warren; over Monkton Deverill and Danes’ Bottom; till they left the West-Country altogether; and were resolved into thin air somewhere beyond Stonehenge.

But Mary soon made him pick up her bag and his stick and set off down Silver Street.

“I was within an ace — an ace I tell you — of not coming tonight! In fact I’d told her I *wouldn’t* come; and it was quite decided; when, all suddenly, she changed her mind and became absolutely generous. She just *made* me come, John, just *made* me!

“Poor old thing!” he interjected at this point. And then he caught himself up. “Damn it, my sweet, how self-complacent a person gets, *in a second*, when luck turns — but I can't help it; I've got you! I've got you! I've got you!"

Mary smiled to herself in the warm velvety darkness that hung, like a great priestly alb, around the masonry of St. John's Tower; for she said in her heart: "How different women are from men! I suppose we all accept from our earliest childhood, this tragic division between the happy and the unhappy. Men seem to *discover* it, like a new light on things; and at once want to do something, or at least to make some grand *sign* of doing something!" But she forgot Miss Drew herself when they reached that door in the lamp-lit silence of Northload Street. John produced his latch-key.

"Think if I'd forgotten it!" he whispered. "Think if we'd had to ring and bring that woman down!" And she remembered, as they ascended the two flights of stairs to their top floor, glancing with an almost guilty nervousness at the various doors they passed, how miserable she had been so many times, on these stairs. She recalled the day when she had bought the tablecloth at Wollop's and had found Tom there and came away without even knocking. As she followed John now with her hand on the gas-lit banisters and watched the ends of his grey flannel trousers clinging about his down-trodden heels, she wondered to herself why it was that he loved her now so much more than during those wretched months before the Pageant. Was it Tom's fault in those days? or Geard's? or just the agitation of the Pageant?

"I don't understand him," she said to herself, as they reached their own landing, "but I belong to him, I belong to him! He loves me more today than he's loved me since the boat on the Wissey."

Her feelings were a thrilling mixture of contradictions when they stood in the room at last — alone together — and with the night before them. But they were all happy sensations; though so opposite! It was a delicious sense of a furtive, guilty assignation she had, as she heard him lock the door behind her. But it was also a heavenly sense, as she looked around her, of being in a room she had made according to her own taste; for in Thorpe, at Norwich, it had just been "Mary's bedroom," something she had accepted exactly as she had grown up in it; and of course, at Miss Drew's, everything belonged to the house.

She felt also — and this was totally unexpected — a hot wave of shyness mounting up through her as she hesitated for a second to throw off her cloak. She pressed her knuckles quickly to her face, before she looked round, and prayed he wouldn't notice how burning her cheeks were! But he was snatching off her cloak now; and now he was standing back, for a minute, to gaze at her with adoration in her low white dress and bare arms and shoulders.

"What a … lovely … sash!" he whispered solemnly; and he seemed to be drinking her up with his eyes, just as if he were kneeling at her feet and she were the very cup at the altar. And then his hands, his lips, his very soul, were pressed rapturously against her shoulders, her throat, her shy cold breasts.

The touch of her body began very soon to change this worship of her beauty into a more intense but less sacramental desire. His fingers began feverishly plucking at the fastenings of her bodice. But Mary remembered her carefully-thought-out erotic diplomacy and she slipped away from him.

"No … no … no, John, I'm going to undress behind our screen. That's what I bought it for, at Wollop's! It's my dressing-room behind there — as well as my kitchen! You go and get quite ready for bed … give me my bag, though, my nightgown's in there … yes! get into bed as quick as you like, and I'll turn out the gas!"

When John recalled every conscious moment of all this night, after she had left him on Monday, the thing that remained in his mind as most entrancing was the marbly smoothness of her body when he held her last. Being as queer as he had always been in his amorous peculiarities, and being as frantically fastidious as he was vicious, this smoothness of Mary's flesh was a new experience to him. He hadn't exactly expected her to be as scaly as a gryphon, or even as bony as old Tom was, but this heavenly smoothness was something quite unlooked for!

And she was so docile, too; that was another surprise to him; for he had expected, from what he had read in books, that she would be capricious, nervous, agitated, difficult.

Yes, Mary was indeed "docile." John was right in that! She too had surprises that night; and the greatest of all these was the sense of absolute naturalness and freedom from embarrassment.

When she had felt that first rush of blood to her cheeks she had thought to herself: "Mercy! I'm not going to be silly in that way, am I?" But when once she had turned out that gas-flame … why! it was all as easy and nice as it had been in the wheat-field. It was nicer, in fact; for in place of the great Mother's confederacy with her daughter's psychic ravishing, as she lay on that sun-warmed bank, here, in this Northload bed, with the water-meadow scents coming in through the window almost as if they came from her own Norfolk fens, there was about her an older, deeper, darker protection than even of the earth; here there was about her the protection of the ancient night itself, oldest of all the gods, older than all the Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers that brood over Glastonbury, older than any Holy Grail. And Mary thought to herself: "Because I have found my love and because I have come to belong to my love, I will bear now, without making a fuss, whatever chance may give me to bear! I will think of what I feel now — pure gratitude; and I'll be sweeter to Miss Drew than anyone in all her days has been!"

And John thought to himself: "I wish I could get old Tom's troubles out of my mind! I wish I'd stirred up the Mayor a bit more to make things easier for Tom at the factory. I wish I hadn't asked him to come to the church. I wish I'd seen more of him lately! I've just dropped old Tom, I've just forgot him, neglected him, let him slide out of my mind!"

And as John lay there, discovering in the smoothness of Mary's limbs something that was as surprising to him as if he'd found a white seaweed or a blue wood-anemone, his shame about neglecting Tom became like a bruise, a definite bruise in some back-ledge of his consciousness. "*I must accept it*," he said to himself; and he began to think, as he slowly sank to sleep — the girl was asleep at least an hour before he was — that the only morality he possessed was a feeling of shame whenever he allowed himself to cry out, "I am miserable … I am unhappy …. I am wretched." Not to pity himself whatever happened and not to be miserable whatever happened: such was John's morality. To allow himself to go to sleep feeling distressed about Tom would have been a lapse from his interior code of honour.

As he heard St. John's clock strike two he gathered himself together within himself in a curious habit-gesture of the will. This gesture he always thought of in a particular way, using a special image for it. The image he used for it was a certain kind of black travelling trunk studded with brass nails.

Such a trunk he had once seen on a barge on the Seine. A man — a young working-man — was sitting upon it; and it was from this lad's expression that John had derived this particular symbol of refusing, whatever happened, to be unhappy, which constituted in his own mind the only morality. At the first temptation to such weakness, as at this very moment, when he was tempted to stay awake worrying about old Tom, he would make this habitual gesture of the will and visualise the black trunk with brass knobs!

It was a further proof of how women receive the tragedies of others with a more vegetable-like acceptance than men, that while Mary went to sleep at half-past one full of a delicious sense of fulfilment, John found it very difficult, in spite of his black trunk with brass nails, to get the troubles of Tom Barter out of his mind.

No doubt a large part of this difference between them lay in the fact that Mary was much less nervous about sleeping with John than John was about sleeping with Mary!

Being one layer or one skin, so to say, nearer Nature than he, her love for him saturated her deeper identity more completely than his for her; so that the contact of strange flesh — strange at least under these new conditions — was much less of a nervous shock to her, for all her greater receptivity, than it was to him. His deeper soul had not really yet *accepted,* this new experience, so that while *her* love made it possible for her to fall into a childlike sleep of absolute peace and security, John stayed awake for some while longer, worrying about Tom, and when he did sleep it was a sleep less deep than hers.

But before the church clock had struck another hour, both of the cousins were fast wrapt in unconsciousness in that little Northload room; and the wandering mists from the water-meadows of the Isle of Glass, floating in and out of their open window, renewed their strength as they slept; for these airs carried with them a far-off dim remembrance of the vaporous summer mists that at this very moment were rising from Dye’s Hole and from Oxborough Ferry and from that great pool at Harrod’s Mill where the personality of Tom Barter had first risen up between them.

TIN

IT WAS NOW mid-September. The harvest — a particularly good one that year — had been gathered in, and the apples in those immemorial orchards of Insula Pomorum, those deep-grassed, grey-green orchards with their twisted trunks under which the cuckoo flowers are so dewy-fresh in the spring, and the wasps so drunken-sleepy in the autumn, were beginning to grow yellow and red.

The elderly curator of the little Glastonbury museum was walking up and down between the famous Ancient British boat, over which he had kept guard for forty years, and the almost equally famous Lake Village pottery, much of which, during his long indefatigable régime, he had dug up with his own hands. That old canoe-boat had still a serviceable air. It looked as if it would almost have served the owner of Wookey Hole himself, to push his daring explorations beyond that Stone Witch, up his subterranean river; and the pottery too looked as if it could still hold the milk and honey of Avalon.

But Mr. Merry felt worried at that moment. It was Wednesday — early-closing day in the town — and he had been promised by Mr. Crow that if he could get down to the starting-field by two o’clock he should be taken for his first air-ride.

Bob Tankerville, the pilot, was going to fly to a certain factory town in France that day, one of a series of such expeditions that Philip had been making of late, but today, the master himself being unable to go, he had offered Mr. Merry this unique chance.

“Tankerville can do my business,” he had said. “All he wants is someone to grumble to.”

But it was now a quarter to one and there was no sign of an expected visitor for whom he had been waiting since twelve o'clock.

"It'll be a rush to get my dinner," thought Mr. Merry, as he stroked with his old fingers the edge of the ancient canoe. Being a bachelor, and very rigid in his habits, Mr. Merry made much of his dinner hour at the Pilgrims'. Since the Pageant, he had enjoyed these meals with especial zest, because his *bête noire*, Barter, whose flirtations with the waitresses were a source of perpetual irritation to him, had, since he left the dye works for the municipal factory, ceased to appear.

A rush! If there was one thing in life that Mr. Merry could not abide it was what he called "one of those damned rushes when you don't know what you're eating." And here he was, heading steadily, moment by moment, towards a rush. Partly by disposition, for he was one of those slowly moving persons who savour intensely their own physical functioning as they go to and fro over the earth, and partly from the habit of his profession, which dealt in huge tracts of time, the curator had come to resemble the biblical Creator; for to his erudite and historic mind, "a thousand years were as one day."

He had been pestered now for nearly a fortnight by letters from the foreman of the municipal factory — an individual who signed himself "Radley Robinson" — for permission to talk to him on what the applicant called "affairs of importance."

Did the passionate Red, whose baptismal name was Radley, feel any sense of a psychic-philological shock when he murmured to himself, pen in hand, "haffairs of himportance" and then wrote down the un-aspirated words?

Since the Pageant and since the unsatisfactory compromise — from *his* point of view — that had ended the dye-works strike, Mr. Robinson had been hardening his heart and concentrating his energies. Deep in his soul shone still the illuminating lamp of " 'ate"; but to his Jacobin destructiveness he had had the wit to add a great deal of indomitable cockney patience; and on the strength of this he had been promoted to the position of second-in-command under Barter. He had set himself to propitiate Barter with a ferocity of sly, satiric unction, that made that shrewd East-Anglian positively sick with aversion. But there was nothing else to be done! The manufacturing of souvenirs flourished well under Red's astuteness. He alone seemed able to keep the hot-heads and cranks, of which the works were full, in any sort of order.

Above all, the Mayor, doubtless at his daughter's instigation, was evidently anxious to soothe the man's wounded feelings by giving him material advancement.

Anyone watching old Mr. Merry at this minute, rubbing with a privileged forefinger this precious aquatic relic, under the very nose of his own proclamation against such doings, would have supposed that he was wondering what actual prehistoric human rump once squatted in this frail skiff; but not at all. He was thinking to himself "If he doesn't come soon, I'll have to let the pudding go."

But suddenly the door opened and there, quite unmistakably, was the pestering man.

Red looked like what is called a ticklish customer. He looked like a person capable of employment by Scodand Yard. But he also — with his neat foreman's suit and new cloth cap — looked a little like a master-plumber. He didn't look the kind of person, anyway, that Mr. Merry, from forty years' experience, felt he could dismiss with a well-worn jest about its being "early-closing."

The curator sighed deeply as he requested his vkitor to take a chair and learned that his name was Robinson.

"He's a pesterer," he thought, "but he isn't an arch-pesterer. I *may* have time for pudding."

He was right. Mr. Robinson plunged into business without any beating about the bush.

"What would *you* call this, Sir?" he enquired promptly, taking a stone from his pocket and handing it to the curator.

Mr. Merry took the object in his hand. It resembled a thunderbolt. It also resembled a lump of clay. The old gentleman's face became very animated.

"So *you've* found a bit, have you? Mr. — Robinson — ah! I thought — someone would — would find another — before long."

He jerked out these detached syllables as if he were accepting the object in question for his museum. He *did* lick his finger now and rub violently one corner of it.

"Yes; you've found another, Mr. Robinson. That's the seventh!"

Mr. Robinson, who had a friend among the apothecaries, now uttered a mysterious chemical formula. And then, immediately afterwards, looking Mr. Merry cheerfully in the face, pronounced the single syllable— "*tin*."

"It's the helement, hain't it, Sir, what the Romans used to trade in; them that wore the himperial purple?"

"I've known this was coming for twenty years," thought the distracted curator, his face changing from animation to profound dismay.

He looked sharply at his interrogator. How much did this fellow know? He wasn't a chemist. He wasn't an antiquary. *Could* he be palmed off with a learned lie, or *couldn't* he? But Mr. Merry as a result of his scrutiny decided that lies were useless. "It's begun!" he said to himself. "It's begun! This fellow will take it to Crow; sure as I'm a dizzard. The beauty of Wookey

Hole is departed! Crow will start quarrying the moment he sees this. The wonder is that he has missed it himself; he's always going down there — with his electricity. This is the end; the end of all those lovely stalactite caves that Clement of Alexandria talks about!"

"I can see, Sir," said Mr. Robinson rising to his feet, "that my hinformant was right; and that it *his* the element after which the Corinthians—"

"Not Corinthians, my good man; *Carthaginians*!" cried the curator, "and what you've got there isn't an element you must understand. It's a chemical deposit, precipitated from the subterranean river down there and brought up from some deep mineral pocket in the Mendips."

"O lordy! lordy! lordy!" he thought to himself, "why can't I hold my silly old tongue?"

"It's the hold Roman metal, henny-'ow," said Mr. Robinson with emphatic assurance. "I thought it was myself; but I thought I'd just run in to-die and arst so as to mike sure. I'm not cryzy about telling people what hisn't their business any more nor you be, as I plinely see! But in dies like these dies, it's best to be sife!"

Mr. Robinson buttoned his coat complacently over the inner pocket containing the specimen he had brought.

"A *mineral* the hartical is then, Sir; a nice little mineral! And this sime mineral is what the himperial Romans used? I thought so. I thought there weren't no mistike; but I said to myself, 'tis best to get the word of sich has knows!"

He put on his cap, adjusted it carefully, though with a touch of rakishness, gave a contemptuous glance at the Lake Village pottery — as much as to say: "No himperial metal in your die!" and then, as he said afterwards to his mother, "took me bleedin' 'ook, leaving the old gent, and small blime to 'im, not knowing 'is 'ead from 'is tile."

The next person Red Robinson went to see was a small chemist in High Street of the name of Harry Stickles, a remote relative of Tossie's. He got into the shop just before it closed; and when the last shutter was put up, Mr. Stickles took him out into his little back garden; where they sat down, in that drowsy autumn noonday on a bench beneath the wall. Opposite them was a pear tree and under the pear tree a big yellow cat. Several brooms and mops were propped up against the wall and a broken earthenware bowl lay at their feet.

" 'Ad yer dinner, 'Arry?" said Red.

"What do you suppose, you bloody Londoner? I dines at twelve sharp, I'd have you to know, and what's more I've got as tidy a little missus as any tradesman in town, and don't you forget it — when it comes to the cookery department—"

Red looked at the yellow cat.

"Where is your lidy now, then, 'Arry? Washin' the soup-lidles?"

Mr. Stickles made a gesture with his thumb and a slight motion with one of his eyebrows. This signified that the mistress of the house was upstairs just above their heads, and that if they were to talk blood and iron business it would be wise to lower their voices.

"You've 'it the mark, 'Arry; you've 'it it strite this time! 'Tis that nice, little metal what mide them hemperors so rich. You've got it. You've got it! The honely question now his, 'ow much will you be 'ighbel to soak 'im for."

Red took off his cap and laid it down at his feet, upside down. The joy of his " 'ate," and the thought of "soaking" his enemy had caused drops of sweat to moisten the front of this object; and upon this 'ate-sweat a blue-bottle fly began to feed with such intense avidity that one might have thought there was a nourishing potency in Mr. Robinson's wrath.

Harry Stickles did not reply for a while. Both men now took out their pipes and contented themselves with contemplating the yellow cat, as their smoke ascended in filmy-blue curves into the misty air. The cat stretched out its front paws and yawned voluptuously, displaying a throat as pink as a wild rose. Then Mr. Stickles said, in a carefully modulated voice, so that his wife, even if she was listening at the window above, could hardly have caught his words:

"The number of sixpences I've spent overlooking for this here thing in Wookey would keep me in tobacco for a year. But there's a big lot of it down there — a big lot! It only wants digging for. There be tons and tons, I shouldn't wonder."

Mr. Stickles was a short man, even a dwarfish one, with long muscular arms and a face like a mad baby. His face was a soft, round, roguish face, with pleasant dimples; but into it, as if in some fantastic experimentation, had been thrust a pair of eyes that glittered with insane avarice. The truth was that long before Philip had begun charging sixpences for the privilege of visiting Wookey Hole, Mr. Stickles had been wont to spend Sunday after Sunday among those stalactites.

"Don't yer let 'im horf under a 'undred thousand!" said Red Robinson cheerfully.

"Lucky if I get a hundred quid out of him," whispered the other; "but he can't have found it or 'twould have been in the paper."

"Piper be 'anged!" whispered Red ferociously. "What price *'im* putting 'is gines and 'is tikings in the piper! What *eel* do to-die, we pore dawgs will know tomorrow, and that's hall there's to it!"

Mr. Stickles contemplated his yellow cat with intense and concentrated attention. Suddenly he slapped his hands on his knees.

"I'd catch him just about right — after he's had his lunch and all — if I were to go round and see him *now* — straight off the blooming reel!"

Red Robinson squirmed and fidgeted on hearing his friend's bold utterance. In the secret malice of his heart he had seen *himself* as the one, dedicated by a just providence, to dangle the metal of Carthage and Rome before the eyes of the greedy manufacturer.

"He's been flying all hover Europe; so 'is pilot's landlidy in Butts' Alley told Sally Jones … stealin' secrets from they foreign dye-works; so 'tisn't likely he'll be in The Helms todie."

Mr. Stickles was however already upon his feet, while his yellow cat, as if to give oracular encouragement to his daring master, left the pear tree and rubbed himself against his legs.

"Maybe 'twould be better if someone helse, someone that 'adn't no hinterest in the money, someone who were a good friend o' both parties, some quiet honlooker, you might say, willin' to serve hall and sundry, were to go and talk to 'im, rather than he who's the principal hagent!"

"Meaning?" whispered the gnome-like discoverer of tin, with a leer. "Meaning?"

But Robinson had drawn back in some disquietude; for the dwarfish chemist had suddenly thrust his face very close to *his* face, and was displaying, between his thin lips, the flickering point of a red tongue.

"Well — why not?" said the cautious foreman of the municipal factory. "Why shouldn't you ring 'is bell henny-'ow, and tell the servant you kime? No 'arm in that! Henny gent may ring henny other gent's front door-bell and arst to see 'is collection of bricky-backs. No 'arm in *that*!"

But Mr. Stickles did not feel the same inspiration, or the same sympathy, in his friend's voice that he had felt in the yellow cat's uplifted tail.

"I'm off," he said abruptly. "I don't suppose you want to wait here all the afternoon, till I come back, eh?" he added.

"Oh, you'll come back, quicker nor *that*!" cried the other. *"Eel* not be for arstin' yer to stay and drink fizz with 'im, all the afternoon, hunder 'is shady helms."

No sooner were both men gone than the head of a pretty, fair-haired young woman appeared at the window.

"Goin' to see Mr. Crow, are ye?" she murmured to herself. "Going to surprise your little Nancy with a hundred pounds — I *don't* think!"

And then, kneeling on the floor with her elbows on the windowsill, Nancy Stickles caught sight of young Mrs. Glover and her baby reclining in a wicker chair by the edge of her tiny lawn, while Mr. Glover — the ironmonger — with a large pair of garden scissors was trimming the straggling border of a bed of London Pride.

At once the girl's thoughts ceased to be malicious, or vindictive, or even self-pitiful! She thrust her fingers into her apron pocket and extracted a little, sticky paper bag. Out of this she took a lemon-drop and put it in her mouth.

"He'll be twelve months old, next Thursday, Billy Glover will! It's nice for Betsy Jane the way Mr. Glover do stay at home on closing-days and tidy up garden."

It was as if some great consolatory spirit in things, perfectly indifferent to the blood-and-iron activities of her mate and her mate's ally, now began to pour out upon this head at the window, lemon-drop and all, everything that it had to bestow.

A wood pigeon's voice became audible in the small lime trees at the bottom of Mr. Glover's garden; and in spite of the noise of the traffic in the street in front, it was possible to catch the pleasant sound of a lawn-mower in the garden beyond Mr. Glover’s. That mysterious relaxing of everything hard, everything tense and strung-up, that comes with autumn was all around Nancy as she looked out, breathing a vague cider-sweet smell of apples. If moss and primroses were the dominant spring scent in Glastonbury, apples were the autumn one.

This particular day was indeed as characteristic of autumn in Somerset as any day could be. A blue haze was over everything, so thick and intense, that it was as if the blueness in the sky had fallen upon the earth, leaving only a vague grey hollowness in the upper air. This blue haze invaded everything. It crept through gaps in hedges; it floated over old crumbling walls; it slipped into open stickhouses and haysheds. And though it was blue in colour, it smelled strongly of brown mud and of yellow apples. This blue mist, reeking of cider-juice and ditches, seems to possess a peculiar somnolent power. Travellers from the north, or from the east, coming into Glastonbury by train through Wareham, may be sitting erect and alert as they pass Stalbridge and Templecombe but they will find it difficult to keep their eyes on the landscape when the train has carried them beyond Evercreech and they come into the purlieus of Avalon.

Sleep seems to emanate from this district like a thin, penetrating anaesthetic, possessed of a definite healing power, and it is a sleep full of dreams; not of the gross, violent, repulsive dreams of the night, but of lovely, floating, evasive day-dreams, lighter, more voluptuous, nearer the heart’s desire, than the raw, crude, violent visions of the bed.

Nancy Stickles felt a wave of delicious languor steal over her as she contemplated the Glover family enjoying themselves on their little lawn and as she watched the blue mists floating over the old walls and lying in hollows between the narrow alleys, and hovering in pigsty doors, and privy doors and fowl-run doors, and flowing like the vaporous essence of some great blue apple of the orchards of space over everything she could see. She felt quite friendly to her husband. He never struck her. He never abused her. He always gave her exactly the same sum of money every Saturday, whatever receipts the shop brought in. He didn’t drink. He praised her cooking. But on the other hand — oh, how happy she always was when he was well out of the way and she was left alone!

There must have been something in Nancy of the unconquerable zest for life that the gods had given to old Mother Legge who was her great-aunt. She was an extraordinarily pretty girl; and she had so fair and clear a complexion and such a rounded figure that people turned to look at her as she went by. But Nancy had no self-pity. It never occurred to her that she had been wronged by God or by humanity because her father died in the workhouse and her mother in the county asylum; or because she had been cajoled by the accident of propinquity into marrying the poorest and most miserly of all Glastonbury’s tradesmen.

She did not like it very much when Red Robinson, her husband’s friend, showed a tendency to take liberties with her; but she managed to rebuff him without “making trouble,” and as soon as he was out of sight she had the power of casting him from her thoughts. Nancy Stickles was perhaps more perfectly adjusted to the ways of Nature, and to the terms upon which we all live upon this earth, than any other conscious person in Glastonbury except Mr. Wollop and Bert Cole. But Nancy had a double advantage over both these adherents of the visible world in the fact that she included many undertones and overtones of a psychological character completely out of reach of Bert and the ex-Mayor.

She shared with her great-aunt a certain Rabelaisian habit of mind, or at least a habit of mind that liked life none the worse because of its animal basis.

At this moment, for example, when it became clear that Billy Glover had “forgot where he was” and was being carried kicking and screaming into the house, Nancy Stickles felt no repugnance. If she’d been called upon at this moment to give Billy Glover a bath she would have gone into Billy’s room, without the flicker of a sigh, and been soon looking out of Billy’s window, just as she was now looking out of Harry’s!

When not in acute physical pain, or in the presence of acute physical pain, Nancy Stickles enjoyed every moment of life. She liked to touch life, hear life, smell life, taste life, see life; but she went far beyond Mr. Wollop and Bert, as she did indeed beyond everybody in Glastonbury, except its present Mayor, in the enjoyment of religion. To Nancy Stickles, God was a dignified, well-meaning, but rather helpless Person, like Parson Dekker; Christ was a lovable, but rather disturbing Person, like Sam Dekker; the Holy Spirit was, quite simply and quite reverently, a very large and very voluble Wood Pigeon; but all these Entities moved to and fro in an inner, behind-stage Glastonbury; a Glastonbury with greener fields, a redder Chalice Well, yellower apples and even bluer mists, than the one Nancy knew best, but one — all the same — that she felt frequently conscious of, and towards which her deepest feminine soul expanded in delicious waves of admiration, hope and love.

It was not every woman in Glastonbury for instance, who, running down now to answer a light ring at the closed chemist’s door, and finding her husband’s relative Tossie, obviously pretty far advanced in her pregnancy, standing in the doorway, would have greeted her with the lively hug and kiss of Nancy’s welcome.

Tossie, however, showed no sign of being surprised at these manifestations. Everyone knew that Nancy “were one for kissing and cuddling,” and the younger damsel behaved now with a grave, indulgent toleration, and an air that seemed to say, “We women have a right to be made a fuss of by you girls, but if you’d had *our* experience of life you would be less excited.”

The two of them moved together into the back garden and sat down on the bench under the wall, lately occupied by Harry and Red. The yellow cat was no longer in sight and the young mistress of the house very soon carried off the unsightly scrubbing mops. She even picked up the fragments of the earthenware bowl and carried them in. Tossie, sitting with folded hands, took no notice of these movements.

“I shan’t be going to hospital till after Christmas,” she remarked. “Maybe not till the New Year.”

“Will ye be staying where ye be till your time be come?”

“That’s what Missus do say; but her’ll have to get a girl to help soon in house, me being liable to be taken wi’ dizzies.”

“Do it feel pretty lonesome-like when you do have they dizzies?”

“Not particular,” replied the other carelessly.

As a matter of fact, up to this day, and indeed up to the day of her delivery, Tossie never had a flicker of either dizziness or faintness.

“Who be Miss Crow going to have into house to help ‘ee?”

Tossie proceeded to add to her air of a mother of the generations the air of a bestower of sinecures.

“She have asked I if I know’d of a friend of me own maybe; and I told she, I’ll go round, I said, and see Harry’s wife, Nancy; but of course, I said, being well-to-do people, as you might say, and high-class tradesmen, it’s doubtful if Nancy would come.”

“I *might* come — afternoons and evenings,” said Nancy pensively.

She was thinking to herself — and yet not *thinking* — for it was a less definite process than *that* — *feeling* rather, with every ounce of her flesh, every nerve of her body, every pulse-beat of her blood, that it would be extraordinarily pleasant to walk over to Benedict Street every afternoon and have tea with Tossie instead of at home. “Harry rather *likes* getting his own tea,” she said to herself.

“Could ‘ee cook dinner and help I washing up?” cried Tossie eagerly. “They’d be having nothing to speak of for lunch. Goodness, Nance! but I’d dearly love for ‘ee to come. ’Twould drive all they faintings away to have thee there wi’ I!”

Nancy pondered. “I expect,” she said, “Harry would be pleased for me to go. He’s been making terrible little in shop this last year, owing to competition.”

“Does Harry let ‘ee *see* what he do make,” asked the sagacious Tossie, “or does he take it out of till and tell ‘ee any tale ‘a likes?”

“Men prefers to manage their own business, as a general rule,” replied Nancy cautiously; and then to change the subject, she asked Tossie about Lady Rachel.

Tossie became, in a second, extremely secretive and extremely consequential.

“She’s unhappy. Anyone can see that. But she doesn’t tell things to everyone. She only tells things to folks as she do know very well … folks in house.”

“Does Mr. Athling come over regular to see her?”

The importance printed on Tossie’s countenance as she prepared to reply to this question delighted Nancy. All this was part of the undertones of life that she enjoyed quite as much as the littered surface.

“People can meet people, when they wants to — especially if them be Ladies of Title — without coming to house, can’t they?” Nancy’s eyes sparkled with glee. The idea of being initiated into fashionable intrigue thrilled her.

"Maybe you'd like to walk up wi' I now, and see Miss Crow?" said Tossie casually.

She spoke with the airy negligence of one royal ambassador throwing out a bait to another royal ambassador. Nancy got up from the bench, went to the window of the back room, the chemical dispensing-room, and looked into the house. It was only five minutes to three by the clock in that small back room. The litter in that room, its hand-to-mouth look — not like a real chemist's shop at all; like an extremely humble apothecary's place, where there might be a barber's chair! — made her feel more than ever sure that Harry would agree to her going.

"Yes, if you have rested long enough, Toss, and are sure the walk won't tire you, I'd love to go with you now. I'm not a bit afraid of Miss Crow. She talked to me once on the cricket-field for a long time. I like her. She's nice."

On their way the two young women caught sight of John Crow, hurrying along on the other side of the street.

"Is that there Mr. Crow still working for the Mayor, Toss?" enquired Nancy.

"Sure he is; and what is more he's married his cousin who do live with old Miss Drew out to Abbey House. Missus went to call on 'em one day last week in Mrs. Boul's house in Northload. They ain't only got one room; they ain't; and 'tis all crowded with curtings and cushings and such like oddments. 'Taint' like a real room, Missus did say; 'tis like a Stoodio in Chelsea-town."

"Did she tell *you* that, Toss?"

"Me and Lady Rachel," replied Tossie.

"Be Mr. Crow working for the Mayor still, Toss?"

"Some say he be and some say he baint. *Some* say he be a Roosian Spy. But anyway he be Philip Crow's cousin, though they aren't on speaking terms."

"What's this I hear, Toss, about the Mayor digging great pits in Chalice Hill for to find Jesus Christ's Supper Cup?"

"That's just ignorant talk," explained Tossie from her superior level. "Mr. Geard baint digging pits; he be setting up foundations. He be going to build a girt arch, so they do tell at our place, and make thik red spring run under 'un."

"There be a wonderful lot of they foreigners come to Glaston since Pageant-day."

"Stop a minute, Nance, while I gets me breath. When you be as I be you won't skip as you walks."

Nancy obeyed and they paused by the wall of St. Benignus'. "Sally Jones told I," whispered Tossie, in a tone as pregnant as her own form, "that she heard the Mayor tell his lady there'd be a girt miracle when thik red water do run under his new arch. Sal said he looked like a prophet when he spoke of it. She said he told his wife about some Welshmen of ancient days, with a name what begun with a 'T' like me own name, what writ about this here miracle afore King Arthur's time."

Nancy contemplated the tower of St. Benignus' Church round which several black swifts were cutting the misty air, as they swayed and circled. Her eyes had an entranced faraway look in them.

"These be wondrous exciting times we do live in, Toss. I've always had a mind that I'd live to see a miracle since I were confirmed in cathedral."

As Nancy uttered these words she laid her hand upon the wall of St. Benignus' graveyard, and gently stroked its green cushion of thick moss.

"Think, Toss, what it would be like," she went on in a low, awed voice, "if there *were* a real miracle in Glastonbury!"

Tossie Stickles felt she was deriving more comfort from the gentle pressure of that old wall against her fecund frame than from any conceivable departure from the normal system of things.

"I don't lay no stocks on miracles," she said. "I reckon 'tis because I've got so much on me mind."

Tossie Stickles was not the only person in the town that fine afternoon whose mind was preoccupied. Philip Crow, after an interview with Harry the chemist, looked at the clock in his study. Only half-past three! He'd got rid of that greedy dwarf in double-quick time. What a funny-looking man — his face so round and smooth and his eyes so hungry for bank-notes! He hurried out of the study, where he had been showing Mr. Stickles his own specimens of Wookey Hole tin, and went down the passage. The drawing-room door was open. He looked in. How nice those phloxes smelt! How well Tilly arranged flowers in a room — so different from those untidy wildflower bunches, that Aunt Elizabeth always left about! Dear old Tilly! He closed the door, thinking to himself: "It must be very unpleasant in those countries where the rooms have no doors to shut!"

He stood for a second in the hall, listening. The rich, misty autumn sunlight poured through the lozenge-shaped panes of mid-Victorian coloured glass, inset above the front door, fell upon the hall table, throwing a rosy light upon the tray of calling cards that stood there, upon the top of which Emma, true daughter of Sly the shepherd, had placed the virgin card of Lady Rachel Zoyland, fell upon the stuffed pike, brought, like the famous picture of the poet Cowper's mother, "out of Norfolk," and fell finally upon a leather-bound Bradshaw with a brass paperweight laid upon it.

No! There wasn't a sound in the house. It must be the servants' day out; and Emma must be "lying down," upstairs. His eyes fell by chance — perhaps because it was so rosy from that coloured glass above the door — upon the Bradshaw, and upon that little brassy Lion of Saint Mark which kept it in its place. He sighed — a quick, little, deep-drawn sigh. Persephone had brought him that absurd little brass object from Venice. What a strange girl! What on earth had he done to offend her, to make her so cold to him? He had been tender, considerate, tactful. He had been everything they liked! He couldn't help making love to her when they slept in those places — Taunton, Bath, Exeter, Bristol. What else did she expect? Did she think men and women could lie quietly side by side, like two girls? That was precisely — as far as he could make out — what she did think. Why on earth, else, had she turned against him? Well! *Let her go.* Alone! That was his manifest destiny; to wrestle with this chaotic world alone; without the warm comfort of a girl's faithful sweetness. For the flicker of a second as he stared at that rosy gleam, and the slanting, dust-mote sunglide that led down to it, he thought that it would be nice, *as he got older,* if Tilly would consent to adopt his little Morgan daughter. But her mother would never give her up; and Tilly would never consent. Besides — what a handle to his enemies!

He took down his grey felt hat and chose a stick from half a dozen that stood there, huddling, as if for protection, in their painted stand round Tilly's big umbrella. He never bothered much about sticks. Who was it he'd come across in the last week who made such a fuss of his stick? Oh, that scallywag John! He'd met the scamp only the other day, at Aunt Elizabeth's and, do what he could, he couldn't keep his temper with the fellow.

Well! He must hurry up now and get to the office. But he wished that rosy light on that brass thing hadn't made him think of that sweet waist and those boy's hips! He opened the door and walked with his quick short steps down the drive and into the Wells Road. It didn't take him long — he had often timed it exactly, not more than a quarter of an hour — to get to his office.

"No! It would never have done to fly to the Continent today!" he thought, as he was greeted by a chorus of anxious appeals from his young men and saw the applicants for his attention waiting in his ante-room and the pile of letters, come by the second post, on his desk.

He settled himself in his swivel-chair in front of the big, familiar blotting-pad, covered with neat calculations. He gave one quick glance out of the window at the well-known factory chimney. "Ha!" he said to himself, "There'll be some more of *you*, my fine boys, spouting your smoke, before Philip Crow is done for!"

It took him three-quarters of an hour to dictate his most important answers, and then another twenty minutes to deal with his two most important visitors. Then there came a call for him to go to the telephone.

"That'll be the chap I want," he thought. "That'll be my good Will!"

Will Zoyland indeed it was; and so pressing and crucial was the Bastard's communication, that there was a violent running to and fro in the office of the Crow Dye Works.

"No tea at home today," thought Philip, as he hurriedly set about dispatching the rest of that day's business. He dismissed all his local suppliants now, telling them to come again tomorrow; and he gave just ten minutes apiece to a man from London and a man from Birmingham.

"A busy cove, our gentleman seems to be," said the London man to the Birmingham man as they went off together. "When does your train go? The five o'clock to Bristol? I'm going to take the Somerset and Dorset to Wareham and catch the old six-thirty to town."

“This little hole’s going to look up, I shouldn’t wonder,” said the Birmingham man presently when they were halfway down Benedict Street. “It’s a nice little place.”

“So long as this freak Mayor they’ve elected,” assented the other, “doesn’t ruin things with his damned Socialism! They tell *me* that the bloke’s starting a regular commune down here. They’ll be hoisting the red flag next. But they’ve got a tough customer to deal with, that’s evident, in our friend Crow.”

Philip himself, later that afternoon, was walking rapidly, from where he had left Zoyland, to the exit out of Wookey Hole Wood. “I’ll start contracting at once over that tin,” he thought. “I’ll not draw in one bit with the new Dye Works business. I’ll play ’em off against each other! If the tin *does* come out in good quantities, I’ll begin that piece of road too, straight away. If the Romans had a road there, I can have a road there. The good Will got pretty excited? How his beard wagged.”

Philip’s mind now ceased to adumbrate forth even the most blurred sentences. It ceased to evoke even those mysterious shorthand hieroglyphs, half-word, half-picture, that we so often use. In the orbic emanation from his body, projected like a moving nimbus round his figure as he moved, enormous images built themselves up, and then annihilating themselves as if by the mandate of some interior stage-manager, built themselves up anew, in other, stranger shapes.

His energy as he walked along with those quick, short, commander-of-men steps that were so characteristic of him seemed to be simply limitless! He felt it pouring through him, like some as yet unnamed magnetic fluid. He felt as if he were tapping some immense reservoir of power, stored up in those caverns he was leaving — power that had accumulated there for centuries and centuries, like the metallic deposit he would soon quarry out

— and in the strength of which nothing could balk him, nothing could frustrate him. The curious thing was that as he gave himself up to this intoxicating feeling he felt an excitement that was actually phallic. Nor was there anything unnatural in this. Both the two great forces pouring forth from the double-natured First Cause possess the energy of sex. One is creative, the other destructive; one is good, the other evil; one loves, the other hates. But through both of them pours forth the magnetic energy that moves and disturbs the lethargy of Matter. Both of them have abysmal levels in their being that transcend all that we at present know of the duality of life and death.

There is no *ultimate* mystery! Such a phrase is meaningless, because the reality of Being is forever changing under the primal and arbitrary will of the First Cause. The mystery of mysteries is Personality, a living Person; and there is *that* in Personality which is indetermined, unaccountable, changing at every second! The Hindu philosophies that dream of the One, the Eternal, as an Ultimate behind the arbitrariness of Personal Will are deluded. They are in reality — although they talk of "Spirit" — under the bondage of the idea of the body and under the bondage of the idea of physical matter as an "ultimate."

Apart from Personality, apart from Personal Will, there is no such "ultimate" as Matter, there is no such "ultimate" as Spirit. Beyond Life and beyond Death there is Personality, dominating both Life and Death to its own arbitrary and wilful purposes.

What mortals call Sex is only a manifestation in human life, and in animal and vegetable life, of a certain spasm, a certain delicious shudder, a certain orgasm of a purely psychic nature, which belongs to the Personality of the First Cause.

There are human minds — and they find it easy to hypnotise the shallowly clever — who apply to the primordial mysteries of life and sex certain erudite names, and by this naming, and by the noting of certain sequences, they think things are explained. Nothing is explained. The only causal energy in Nature is the energy of the double-natured First Cause and of the innumerable lesser personalities whose existence is revealed in the unrolling of Time. And the ecstatic quiver of that great cosmic ripple we call Sex runs through the whole universe and functions in every organism independent of external objects of desire!

Parthenogenesis, as Christian clairvoyance has long ago defined it, is a symbol of what the soul constantly achieves. So are the Dragon's Teeth sown by Cadmus; and the pebbles cast behind them by Deucalion and Pyrrha.

The composers of fiction aim at an aesthetic verisimilitude which seldom corresponds to the much more eccentric and chaotic dispositions of Nature. Only rarely are such writers so torn and rent by the Demon within them that they can add their own touch to the wave-crests of *real actuality* as these foam up, bringing wreckage and sea-tangle and living and dead ocean monsters and bloody spume and bottom silt into the rainbow spray!

They intersperse their "comic" and their "tragic" in a manner quite different — so hard is it to throw off the clinging conventions of human tradition! — from the ghastly monotonies and sublime surprises that Nature delights in.

All through, all conscious feelings belonging to living organisms, in a particular spot upon the earth's rondure, mount up and radiate outward from such a spot, overtaking in their ascent the sound-eidola and the sight-eidola which accompany them!

Philip was now pausing for a minute on the path that led to the little gate out of the wood. His hands were deep in his trouser pockets. He wore no hat. He carried no stick. His suit was the same suit of rough heather-coloured tweed that he had worn in the Spring at his aunt’s tea-party. What he could see of the sky above the trees was cloudy. The white mist rising from the Wookey Hole river that issued from the side of the wet green precipice below him soon lost itself in that peculiar Somersetshire blueness which is neither air nor vapour, water nor cloud, but a phenomenon, an entity, unique to itself.

With this atmospheric blueness there came to his nostrils a sweet, pungent, rather morbid odour, an odour which Philip would have simply called “the smell of Autumn”; but which was really composed of the dying of many large sycamore leaves, the emanations from certain rain-sodden, yellow toadstools, the faint fragrance of bowed-down ferns, the wholesome but very musky scent of herb Robert growing amid faded, tangled masses of dog’s mercury and enchanter’s nightshade.

Philip stared at the ground in front of him in a species of trance. There were a few dark-green shiny leaves of heart’s tongue ferns hanging over a muddy ledge just there, and near them the smooth round roots of a beach tree covered with a black, oozy moisture. Cupped within the folds of the beech roots that were nearest the trunk were infinitesimal pools of ink-black rain water, the presence of which reduced the duskiness of the vegetable ooze that trickled near-by, to an indescribable green-black. Across the roots of this tree lay several small, rotten twigs, some of which were covered with a soft, brilliantly green moss out of which protruded those minute fungoid growths which children call fairy-cups.

What Philip would have simply called a “feeling of Autumn” manifested itself also in the clamorous cawing of the rooks above the taller trees and in an obscure smell of damp leaf mould that came drifting by, like a tremulous and voluptuous breath out of the very mouth of Death itself.

When he jumped into his car to drive back to Glastonbury he found that by making this effort to explain things to Will Zoyland, who had a mind which was about as capable of grasping such matters as Cœur de Lion's would have been, he had not only cleared up a great deal in his own head but had made several drastic decisions with regard to immediate action.

Zoyland's careless "desperateness" had not been without its effect upon him, childish though the fellow's notions of business were, and as he swept through the narrow lanes to hit the main road without the necessity of going through Wells, he kept thinking, under the damp, overclouded sky where not a star was visible, that a really important crisis *had* at last arrived in his carefully-laid schemes.

"I'll begin mining at once," he thought, "and I'll fly to Taunton tomorrow and see those road-contractors. Better get well ahead before the frosts begin in earnest. But the weather will stay open till Christmas! It always does in these muggy regions — so different from Norfolk!"

He drove faster and faster through the damp, chilly night, and the earth-scents that rose round him from the deep ditches and the wide fields became so much nourishment to his dominant thoughts. He did not articulate his feelings about life. He was no philosopher. But there came over him just then, like a delicious plunge into ice-cold water, a sense of his absolute loneliness in the world.

As he turned those leafy corners and allowed the low-hanging foliage to brush against his machine, he felt an exultant pride in being thus alone and fighting for his own hand against the whole system of things! Like many another competent statesman, both before and after Signor Machiavelli, the obtuse narrowness of Philip's atheism, dogmatic with the dogmatism of instinct rather than of reason, discounted all possibility of supernatural aid in this crisis of his affairs. He did feel a certain outward-rushing urge, surging up from deep within him; but how was he — with his innate incredulity — to know that this was the umbilical nerve within him vibrating in response to the nerves of the Great Mother?

He did feel a faint, strange, far off intimation of some fount of energy, kindred to *his* energy, outside the dense, damp, autumnal darkness that flowed around him; but how was he to know that this was the eternal movement and counter-movement, in its abysmal pools of being, of the First Cause of all life? He was not even quite oblivious of an obscure something, hostile to him, unappeasably inimical to all his schemes, struggling unweariedly against him in the world. But how was he, with his small, narrow Bayeux Tapestry skull, to know that this something was the underlying Personality of Christ?

When he reached the main road he began to drive faster still.

“This Glastonbury medievalism,” he thought, “won’t stand up long against the crowds of modern workmen I’ll bring into the place. My trouble will always be the same — strikes engineered by these damned Communists.”

Tilly had gone to bed when he got home and so had Emma. He had not slept in the same room with his wife for years; and things were always arranged for him so that he found whiskey and biscuits and butter and cheese left out for him on a black tray on the green tablecloth on the dining-room table; and his bed nicely turned down and a hot-water bottle, usually quite cold when he arrived, but giving a friendly look to the bed where the clothes were uplifted into a little hill near the foot.

All these small things, the particular look of that black tray against the green tablecloth, the particular appearance of the napkin that Emma always placed over the butter and cheese, the welcoming friendliness of that stone hot-water bottle — Philip was old-fashioned in certain matters — gave him a delicious sense of being humoured and considered, not only by one, but by two competent housewives. He found tonight, so careful had Emma been to tuck his towel tightly around the metal hot-water jug in his china basin, that the water was still hot; and as he washed his hands he thought to himself:

“My life is exactly as I like it to be. This year is going to be the crisis of my life.”

No knee did Philip Crow, Esquire, of The Elms, Glastonbury, Somerset, bend to any supernatural power, as he clicked off his electric globe, climbed into bed, and stretched his feet downward, delighted to find there was still warmth in the stone bottle.

“There’s an autumn feeling in the air tonight,” he thought. “It was chilly in those lanes.”

But he did a thing then which proved how excited he was after his resolute conversation with Zoyland. He pressed his knuckles against his closed eyeballs. When he had been quite a little boy — after his Devereux grandmother had repeated over his pillow in her stern and yet doting voice:

“Angels one and two and three guard thy counterpane for thee; While above thy sleeping head be the wings of Michael spread!” —

he had been accustomed to do this; finding that the kaleidoscope of astonishing colours which this pressure made to pass before his vision was curiously soothing to his young mind in the black darkness.

And now as he removed his knuckles he beheld the Glastonbury which his present plans would create. He beheld his heavy lorries tearing along a broad road from Wookey to the outskirts of Lake Village Field. He beheld his good concrete road cutting diagonally over the meadows from this point to the centre of Street. He beheld his great new bridge (making the old Pomparles one — the Bridge Perilous of the Legends — look insignificant and negligible) by which his motor-trucks would cross the Brue. He beheld three tall new factory-chimneys rising up from his dye works in the town. He saw the rows and rows and rows of workpeople's cottages — not silly, fancy ones, but solid serviceable ones — to which labouring men from Bristol and Cardiff, and even farther afield, would be attracted. He saw the sign "To Let!" set up over their precious, socialistic toy-factory, which he would not even bother to purchase from them!

"And I alone shall have done all this," he said to himself.

One quaint and surprising peculiarity Philip had. He always slept — except in the very warmest summer nights — with his window shut. This was a peculiarity that, without his being aware of it, he shared with most of his factory-hands. But it was no doubt one of his old-fashioned early-Victorian habits. Grandmother Devereux used, for instance, always to say, "Beware, children, of the night air!" Thus, as he now turned over upon his left side to compose himself to sleep, the smell in his nostrils had very little of that autumn feeling that had made his stone bottle so welcome. It was a composite smell, a smell composed partly of his quilted eiderdown, partly of the paint of his hot-water jug, partly of his cake of recently used brown Windsor soap, and partly of a large cedar press in which Tilly and Emma kept his winter clothes.

Small physical movements, nay! the scarcely conscious physical positions of human bodies in sleep have at many great crises of history tilted ponderous scales. Had Constantine, for instance, slept on his right, in place of his left side, before his decisive battle, had Cæsar slept on his right side instead of his left before they called him to the senate-house, had Boadicea slept on her back before fighting the Romans, or Cleopatra on her face before sending Antony to fight them, great issues might have fallen out in a changed manner and the upshot of vast events been different.

Philip Crow on this occasion turned over on his left side to sleep. Now when he had slept with his cousin Percy he had always had the girl on his left side and therefore it was natural enough that when the ferment of his schemes had died down and he tried to sleep, instead of sleep coming upon him, love came upon him and began to tantalise him and to torment him.

There is doubtless in certain old, indurated families a deep ineradicable strain of what might be called centripetal eroticism. A tendency to inbreeding is not always a sign of degeneracy in a race. It is often an instinct of ethos-preservation, suspicious of the menace of mixed bloods. Doubtless something of the inordinate individuality of the Crows was due to a constant inter-marriage between cousins among them, doubling and redoubling the peculiarities of their "Gens."

It was Persephone's long slender waist and narrow boyish hips that tormented Philip now. He had often in his life fancied to himself that he was chaster than most men, because of the cold, critical eye with which he was able to regard women. His only passionate love-affair before he met his cousin again, after a long separation, had been with a boy at school, whose figure, girlish for that of a youth, was almost identical with Percy's.

The natural softness, sweetness, submissiveness of normal girls had always been repulsive to him. To quicken his pulse at all there had to be something wilful, evasive, difficult, withdrawn; and since all these qualities were of the very essence of his cousin's nature she had attracted him fatally, the first second she reappeared. She was still in Glastonbury. He knew *that*, though he had not seen her for weeks and weeks, and had not spoken to her for a couple of months. She had apparently left Dave. At any rate, he had returned to Bristol without her after the strike ended. The gossip of the town

— reported to Tilly by Emma and retailed by Tilly to him over some subsequent tea-table — declared that she had become the inseparable companion of Angela Beere.

Philip knew Angela well, of course, as her father, by no means an incompetent lawyer although a besotted glutton, had often done work for him; but her Madonna-like coldness — she certainly was “withdrawn” enough — had somehow repelled him. That a passionate friendship should have come to exist between such a silent, cold-blooded creature and the lively Percy struck him as weird, incongruous, incredible. But then — as he knew well enough — it was the incredible that was always happening in these things.

After the Pageant, when the fellow was well enough to leave the hospital, Tilly had reported the most fantastic tales of “something going on” between that crazy Welshman and Persephone. This he had never believed; but he had thought he understood the cause of the report, knowing only too well his cousin’s passion for the bizarre and the exotic.

Philip stretched out his right arm now as he lay on his left side and seized in the dark the cold rosewood bedpost at his pillow’s head. Out of the dream-dimension which surrounds our visible world the wraith of his Devereux grandmother struggled frantically to give him a warning. To be able to see his small, neat, well-moulded head — for these insubstantial tenants of the etheric envelope of our material plane find physical darkness no hindrance — lying on the pillow and not to be able to attract his attention was an atrocious tantalisation to this proud spirit from beyond our palpable dream-world.

The occasion was indeed only too characteristic of what the First Cause, in its malicious moods, delights to evoke; for while Philip, in a spasm of savage yearning for the slender waist of his cousin, gripped angrily that smooth bar of wood, the wraith of the only woman who had ever passionately loved him wrestled frantically with the laws of the universe to give him a sign, a token, a warning, that he was putting, not a blind hand upon-a bedpost, but a blind foot upon a road that led to desperation and madness.

"Perse! Perse! Oh, Perse, where are you? Come back to me, Perse!"

But Persephone, in a little cheap bedroom she had taken at Dickery Cantle's dilapidated place, was even then, with her flushed cheek resting on her thin arm and her dusky boyish curls making a nimbus of darkness within the darkness, dreaming peacefully of Angela's devotion as they wandered together beneath the ruined carvings, so delicately foliated, so tenderly moulded by long-buried fingers, in Saint Mary's Chapel!

Into that narrow Bayeux Tapestry skull, while:— "Stop thinking that! Stop thinking that!" cries the old ghost-wraith more and more desperately, come scattered memories now of little inn-rooms in Taunton, in Exeter, in Bath, in Bristol, in Dorchester, in Tewkesbury; a curtain from that room, a flapping blind from this, a bedpost from that, a coloured print from this, a cock-crow full of a thousand misty Wessex dawns, a dog's barking, the rattle of early milk-cans — and mingled with all these things those slender hips and the waist like that torso — what the devil was it called? — that she had brought back to show him when she went to Italy!

To lie awake wanting, wanting, and with so little hope; to turn over on the *right* now ("But it's too late now, Philip my grandson; you should have done that at once!"), to turn on your back now, kicking the stone bottle viciously aside; and stretching out so stiff and so straight, till the soles of your feet press against the woodwork; to snuff up nothing but the smell of brown Windsor soap, and eider-down coverlet, and a faint odour of dog's dung from your muddy boots, in place of that maddening fragrance that always made you think of the sun-baked apricots in Canon Crow's walled-garden, the sweetness of those bare sun-burnt shoulders, was all this the result of that "autumn feeling" which you had encountered as you went to your interview with Zoyland at Wookey Hole?

"I could bear it," he thought; "I could bear it if only her hips weren't *just* like they are … yes! yes! … and if only her curls didn't curl so tight against the back of her neck! It's those curls and those hips *together* that torment me so!"

He went to sleep at last, just about three o'clock; and while Emma was dreaming that she was helping old Sly on the Mendips to shear a great black-faced ewe, with a face like the face of her mistress, and while Tilly was dreaming that the new silk lining of her ottoman had *dyed itself* — without the help of her husband's dye works — into an incredible shell-pink, the master of The Elms dreamed that the Mayor of Glastonbury brought him a vast basin made of glittering *tin* and held it before him and cried "Vomit!" and he dreamed that although he retched and retched he could not bring up anything except a little white saliva! But behold! Mr. Geard himself spat into that huge cauldron; and it came to pass that out of the mingling of their spittle there was created in the centre of that glittering vessel of shining tin, a little homuncula … a little dazzling girl-child … and Philip found himself hoping frantically that the face of this homuncula would be Percy's face. But when the dazzlingness of the little creature lessened or when his eyes could bear its brightness better, the features disclosed to him were such as he had never before seen. But Mr. Geard lifted up the cauldron to the full stretch of his arms and cried out with a thundering cry:— "*Who is the Tin-Merchant now*?" and then as Philip looked up at the vessel in the man's hands, behold! the bottom of it became ruddy as blood, and even as he gazed, drops of blood fell from it upon the ground and the ground was dyed purple; and he murmured in his dream:—"The lost dye! The lost purple dye!" and he fell on his knees beneath the vessel and he made his hands into a cup and he thought in his heart: "When he has gone I shall take this to my dye works … and it will go over all the world; and it will be called the Glastonbury Purple!"

It was with his head full of the image of this dye that he finally sank into a dreamless sleep; and when he awoke, long after the birds of his garden had greeted the dawn, of all his dreaming it was only the dye he remembered. Geard, the shining vessel, the girl-child with the unknown features — all these he had completely forgotten.

And the slim waist of Persephone Spear had also receded into the far background of his mind.

WIND AND RAIN

"WE WILL HAVE a grand opening, Crow," said Mr. Geard to his faithful John as they sat talking after supper in the old faded parlour of the Geard house. Not a thing had been done to improve this grotesque room since those times when, as Philip had assured the assembled family after his grandfather's will had been read, Geard had been "a nuisance to everyone, with his two sprawling daughters, his preaching and his poverty."

It was the first of October and a spell of wild stormy weather had set in. As John sat on the sofa by Mrs. Geard's side — for both the girls were out that evening — and watched his employer rubbing his big white hands and nodding his big white face over a warm fire of mixed coal and wood, the rain was streaming down the panes, and every now and then the two gas-flames hanging from the ceiling were caught in a draught of wind (for Mrs. Geard cared more for air than for the protection of curtains), and were blown sideways, in spite of their glass globes, in sinister tongues of blue flame, producing a startling flickering effect all over the room.

"We'll have more than that, Sir," responded John, "if you and I are still alive."

Round that faded old room, in that faded old *petit bourgeois* house, the October wind seemed to howl as if it had been sent from Stonehenge to hunt for Mr. Geard and was rejoicing at having found him.

"Hunt out this Fake Druid," the gods of that Altar Stone must have said, "and put our Terror into him!"

There came into Mrs. Geard's thin, long face, with its mobile eyebrows and queer, troubled, flickering smile, a very curious expression as she looked up from her knitting. A Rhys of Pembrokeshire, as she was, there was something in a night like this that appealed to a deep-buried instinct in her, and in some odd way she relished the spectacle of all her old domestic objects cowering under the storm.

Funny old things they were — Mrs. Geard's possessions — the woollen antimacassars, the sickly yellow pears and blue grapes under a big glass covering, with red plush round its base, the staring picture of her father, the Plymouth Brother, with whiskers like a sailor and a mouth' like a letter-box closed for Sunday; the old, worn, ash-coloured carpet, the black bear rug with broad red-flannel edgings and more mouse-grey skin than black hairs left to view, and all the ancient, stained, blotched, greasy cushions that always were to be, and never *had* been, re-covered; and the rickety little tables with glaring tablecloths, and so many brackets with green and red tassels hanging from photograph frames, containing groups of Geards and Rhyses, the former a good deal less pompous-looking but hardly less stiff and uncomfortable in their photographer's parlours — all these things made up a sort of dusty, cushiony ensemble, like the huge nest of some kind of stuffed bird, now extinct.

And Mrs. Geard derived such a queer, sensual pleasure, as she listened to the wind howling round this room, just as if its ceiling were the roof of the whole house, and its walls the walls of the whole house! She had the feeling that this whole warm, cushiony, greasy, human-smelling place were being carried along through vast spaces of rainy night-air. She put down her knitting, left John's side, bade him "please remain seated, Mr. Crow!" and going to the window opened it yet a little more at the top, so that the gas-flames grew still more agitated and the red curtains bulged into still fuller convexities.

"Always the one for fresh air is my good wife," said Bloody Johnny contentedly, as he watched this move of his lady's, and then returned with a zest to his conversation with John.

But Mrs. Geard, as she took up her knitting again, — thick, grey socks for her man's winter-wear — felt a further increase of voluptuous satisfaction as the draught from the window fumbled about with its blind gusty fingers through that comfortable room. Perhaps her princely South-Wales ancestors had felt something of the same feeling when the arras bulged out from their chilly walls and the smoke blew into the hall from their blackened fireplaces.

In good spirits that night was the Mayoress of Glastonbury, for her eldest daughter had told her, when she and Crummie were putting on their waterproofs and galoshes to go out to Lawyer Beere's party, that Mr. Evans had asked to have their banns read out next Sunday at St. Benignus' Church.

So the flickering smile on the woman's face kept returning, as she knitted, and her eyebrows kept wrinkling up and wrinkling down, as they did when she was listening to Dr. Sodbury's sermons. If at this moment, in her high spirits, she had done *exactly* what she would have liked to do, she would have put on her old, weather-worn cloak, covered her head in her black shawl, snuffed up the whole cosy essence of this adored parlour of hers with one rapturous sniff, and set out to "call for" her two children, doing it just as if she had been a nurse, come to take her little charges home from a children's dance.

Then as they took off their wet things in the hall she would have whispered to Cordelia, "I'll give you my wedding umbrella when you're married, Cordy!" Nor was Mrs. Geard's wedding umbrella a gift to be despised, for it possessed a handle of solid gold carved in the most majestic proportions.

“You’re sure, Sir, that London architect understood your design?” the crafty John was now remarking. “Some of these local people laugh at the idea of a Saxon arch associated with a Byzantine dome.”

“Ain’t Saint Sophia’s got a dome?” said Mr. Geard. “Ain’t there domes in Russia? And ain’t I seen a Saxon arch with me own eyes in a wall at Greylands? ’Tis true it were walled up, that good Saxon arch, but an architect from a place like London can un-wall ‘un, can’t he? I mean, see what ’twould be, if the stones were took out and make one similar to ‘un?”

One quaint and very characteristic peculiarity now manifested by the Mayor of Glastonbury was a strong tendency, since his accession to wealth and power, deliberately to revert to his old South-Somerset dialect, which was a mingling of the purer Somerset speech with a tincture of Dorset.

“Somewhere around Christmas would you have it, Mr. Geard, your grand opening celebration?”

Bloody Johnny smiled.

“Maybe then, and maybe *not* then,” he answered laconically. “It all depends, Crow, and you know it do, on how things work out.”

“As I’ve said before,” remarked John, “you won’t get a real rush of people from the Continent till you’ve had a Miracle performed by this chalybeate spring of yours.”

Mr. Geard threw upon the fire another piece of wood. Most people in Glastonbury kept a wood-box by the side of their coal-scuttle. And then he amused his secretary, but did not at all surprise him, for John was getting used to the man’s little ways, by a sly wink. “They shall have their Miracle all right, Crow; they shall have their Miracle!” he chuckled.

“The man’s a prize charlatan,” thought John, “and yet he isn’t! God knows *what* he is!” But aloud he said, “Well, Sir, supposing it gets into the the English papers, and supposing the Berlin, Paris, Vienna, Warsaw, Brussels, Rome, Madrid, Copenhagen papers report it, and supposing a regular Lourdes and Lisieux kind of a rush begins, how do you propose to stop the Anglicans, or the Roman Catholics, from exploiting such an event?”

“Ah, my boy,” grumbled Bloody Johnny, “you’ve hit our trouble in *those* words of yours, pretty closely, but I have me Blessed Lord at hand, and He’s already begun taking up that matter with me.” The man rubbed his shins meditatively and leaning forward in his low arm-chair, pulled with both hands the shiny black material of one of his trousers close round his leg. This action seemed to give him some kind of spiritual comfort and he continued to enjoy the warmth, gazing into the fire with a curious film over his black eyes, the sort of film that might have covered the ophidian stare of the world-snake, at the bottom of the Northern Sea.

John Crow crossed one of his own scarecrow legs over the other and watched him, listening to the clicking of his companion’s knitting needles and to the moaning of the wind in the chimney.

“The moment has come,” murmured Mr. Geard, thinking aloud, “for a fresh shoot to appear from the Glastonbury Thorn.”

“Why don’t you keep a cat?” burst out John irrelevantly, turning to the lady at his side.

But it was from her husband that the answer came.

“All flesh is a conductor of force, didn’t ‘ee know that, lad? And when thoughts are being born they must be fed. *He* here,” — and the extraordinary man actually made a jerk with his great thumb towards the space in the centre of this snug, cushiony, be-tasselled, be-rugged, be-fringed, be-carpeted interior— *"He* here wants all the force there is about, if I'm to keep Him close!"

John bit his under lip and looked down at those mouse-grey hairless islands in the black bear rug. He thought to himself: "Damn the fellow! He's nothing but a gross, overfed Cagliostro! What the devil am I doing in this muggy hole, selling my soul and swallowing all this tosh?"

"So our Mayoress isn't allowed to keep even a cat?" he brought out in a tone that did not conceal his feelings.

There was rather an uncomfortable silence for a while after that, broken only by the queer *plop … plop … plop* which the curtains made, as they bulged out and then went limp again, answering the gusts. But John thought of his nights with Mary in their Northload room. "It's worth it!" he said to himself. "I never knew a girl *could* be so sweet."

"You'll be more indulgent, laddie, when you've seen a little more of me," said Mr. Geard suddenly, sinking back in his armchair and clasping his plump fingers together over his heavy gold watch-chain. "If you'd been a young Arab in the tent of Mahomet you'd have heard the Prophet break wind once and again!"

"John!" cried Megan Geard, letting her knitting sink upon her lap.

"It's all right, apple of me eye! The old man were only talking." And he cast upon her a glance of such radiant affection, the heavy films vanishing from his black eyes, that John's emotions were once more swung in the opposite direction.

"I believe you've got in your head, Sir," he couldn't help blurting out, "a whole new religion — but what I can't see is, how you're going to graft it upon the old one. These curst Anglicans are bound to give your Miracle their own twist. They'll say it's a proof that Rome hasn't a monopoly, and so on. They'll say it's the Grail of Arthur come back. They'll say—"

“Let ’em,” cried Bloody Johnny, in a hoarse, thick voice. “Let ’em say all they like and the Papists too. I’ve got a little something in store for ’em, lad — a little surprise — that even *you,* sly as you be, you rogue, haven’t guessed yet!”

The ball of grey wool now rolled off Mrs. Geard’s lap and John Crow got up to fetch it for her. He was still standing up holding the ball in his hands and trying to wind the loose thread when above the noise of wind and rain came the sound of the front door opening, and the excited voices of the girls come back. Both their parents rose to their feet and John, handing the woollen ball to Mrs. Geard, hurried out to help them take off their cloaks. He caught sight of Cordelia’s rain-drenched profile as she struggled to shut the front door against the storm.

“She isn’t a bad-looking girl after all,” he thought. “It must be the party!”

Crummie meanwhile had taken a seat on the only hall-chair, a miserably battered upright wicker chair, bought at a sale by her mother before she was born. John bent upon one knee to help her get off her galoshes. Aye! how the rain ran down in little pools from her drenched clothes. Both the parents had appeared now and her father was tugging awkwardly at Crummie’s mackintosh, while Mrs. Geard helped Cordelia to push the bolts to of the closed door. Then she also turned to Crummie. “How nice you do look, child, if I say it myself.”

“She always *was* the prettiest little wench in town, wasn’t she, my chuck?” and Mr. Geard kissed the girl’s wet cheeks.

John hurried to Cordelia and held *her* dripping cloak while she slipped out of it. “You come out, like a Naked Nannie from its calyx!” he whispered. And then, as he held the drenched cloak in his hands, not knowing where to put it, "What's that you were saying to Cordy, Mr. Crow?" threw in her mother.

"Only telling her how well her evening dress suits her, Missus! And so it does; don't you think so, Sir?" and he hung the cloak up on the only peg that was not overcrowded.

"No! Not there!" cried Cordelia sharply. "You're putting it over Mother's."

It was the first remark either of the girls had yet made, but it let loose a flood of chatter from Crummie as they all went into the parlour. "Angela looked sweet, Dad. You'd have *loved* her. She had on that white dress I told you about. Mr. Wollop himself ordered it from London. She had one, little, single moss-rose pinned on the front. She looked bewitching, and she was more animated too than I've ever seen her. Oh, and you *should* have seen Mrs. Spear! She had an old-gold dress on. How she's been keeping it I don't know, in that awful room she's got at Cantle's. It looks out on the yard! She took me up once, when we met down there. It's the worst place for a girl like—" She caught her breath, remembering John's relationship to this present cynosure of delicate scandal. Mrs. Geard broke in at this point as they all stood round the fire; Crummie with her frock folded up above her petticoat crouching on the bear-rug, with her white arms spread out to the blaze.

"May I tell Mr. Crow — for he's such a friend of the family now, and knows us *all* so well — what you told me when you started out tonight, Cordy dear?"

Cordelia's whole body stiffened. Her dislike of John had by no means modified with closer knowledge. The more she knew, the more she disliked! She turned towards him now a pair of the coldest, haughtiest eyes that had ever challenged him.

"It's nothing. Mother makes much too much of it. Besides, you probably know it already, being such a friend of Owen's. It's only that our banns are to be given out next Sunday."

John made a funny little bow. "I'm sure," he said, "I congratulate you — I mean I'm sure I congratulate Mr. Evans."

"You ought to give my daughter a kiss, lad," chuckled Mr. Geard, and he drew Cordy's proud head down with both his hands and kissed her himself on the forehead.

"He'd better kiss Crummie," the tall girl murmured spitefully. "Perhaps it'll bring *her* the same good luck — if it *is* good luck." Her voice had died away to so faint a tone as she breathed these last words that only her father caught them.

"Hush, child!" he whispered, patting her bare shoulders with his plump hand. "You'll feel quite differently by and by."

Mrs. Geard, with a delicacy worthy of the House of Rhys, avoided her daughter's eye as her husband spoke, while Crummie, with the laudable desire of drawing the general attention away from her angry, confused sister, glanced roguishly at John.

"Aren't I going to have that kiss?" she laughed.

John had expected this, and he had made up his mind exactly what he would do. He sprung forward, caught Crummie's fair head in both his bony hands exactly as her father had held Cordy's and gave it a gentle shaking, ending up with the lightest possible brushing of his lips amid her wavy hair.

"You tease! You tease! You tease!" he cried, as he shook her.

Between Crummie and John quite a piquant understanding had arisen. The pretty girl, in her silent, tantalised passion for Sam Dekker, had dropped all association with her other men friends. Red she never spoke to now, and in avoiding Red — for they worked in the same place — she found it easy to avoid Barter. To John, in a sense, she found herself positively clinging, and as Mary seemed, just at present, far too happy to be jealous, and as it was a situation that lent itself perfectly to John's artful nature, Crummie's spirits had revived a little during the last month or two; a little, not very much. Not very much! How often to her hot, tear-soaked pillow had the wretched girl moaned out the madness of her relentless love! What was the use of having a father who could exorcise devils, who could give sleep to the tormented, if he could not heal his own child's wounded heart?

At the very moment when John was tickling his lips with Crummie's shining tresses, the queer object of the girl's unfortunate craving was having a prolonged and distressing argument with his father on the subject of Nell.

"I tell you it only torments the woman the way you treat her! Better never see her at all than sneak off over there every day he's away!" The museum actually echoed to the indignant tone of the Vicar, and the lid of his tobacco-jar that stood adjacent to the aquarium tinkled ominously against the glass.

"But she's gone seven months with our child, Father. And since the end of August he's been at Wookey nearly all the time."

"But Mrs. Pippard's with her, boy! You found Mrs. Pippard for her yourself. She's fond of her, isn't she?"

"But, Father, when a woman's going to have a child she's nervous and sensitive anyway, and when it's your own child she's going to have—"

The Vicar's rugged face had become very red and his formidable little eyes — like Sam's, only much greyer — had ceased to be grey and had become a curious blue colour under his bushy eyebrows.

He rose from his chair and stood with his broad shoulders to the mantelpiece, angrily jerking up the tails of his long black coat and holding his hands beneath them while he warmed his back at the fire.

"It's all wrong," he shouted. "The whole thing's outrageous! If you'd had the spunk of half a man in you you'd have made him divorce her; you'd have—"

He suddenly remembered that divorce was one of the things against which the party in the Church to which he belonged was especially opposed.

"Well, anyway," he added. "You'd have done one thing or the other; not gone about dickering and havering and dodging in the way you have."

Sam was silent for a second or two. His face did not show the faintest trace of any resentment against his father. Then he suddenly said, "Would you like her to leave Zoyland, Father? Would you like her to come and live with us here?"

His father's mouth opened with astonishment and he stared blankly.

"And be divorced, you mean? And you marry her, you mean?"

"No, no! Just live here with us. I'm not going to marry her nor any other woman — just live with us here, I mean."

"As your mistress, after the child is born?"

"Father!"

"Well, isn't that what you mean? But perhaps you don't want to wait till the child is born. Perhaps you'd like to sleep with her, as she is, under my roof!"

If Sam had been endowed with a little more penetration he would have understood better what a surge of suppressed feeling underlay his father's outburst.

As it was he could only sigh helplessly and cast his eyes upon the aquarium. Often and often had the sight of those fish, disturbed by the lamplight and behaving in a manner contrary to their ordinary routine, distracted his mind from weightier troubles. He got up now and placed over them the kitchen dishcloth, which, in the agitation of that night, both he and his father had forgotten.

"I suppose she'll be going into the hospital," he said, as he sat down again, "in another month."

His father let his coat-tails drop and began striding up and down the room. "I can't understand that fellow Zoyland," he flung out, "any better than I can understand you. That sweet little woman between you two rogues! Yes! That's the word for it, — between you *two rogues*!"

He glared at Sam out of eye-sockets that seemed like two deep, livid-blue holes in a rock of red clay.

Sam surveyed him helplessly, not shrinking from his gaze, but looking at him as he would have looked at Wirral Hill if it had suddenly become a volcano. His father's wrath was beginning to affect him like a wild dream out of which he felt he ought to be able to force himself to awake.

"What would you wish me to do, Father; if I did exactly what would please you?"

"Please me, does he say?" roared the exasperated man. "I tell you I *hate* the whole affair; and I've a mind to — a mind to — wash my hands of it!" It was on his tongue to say— "my hands of you!" but he corrected himself in time.

"But what would you *tell* me to do, Father, if I did exactly what you told me?"

This point-blank question did quiet the angry man a little. He put his hands into his trouser-pockets, and walked with a somewhat less assured stride. Sam had nonplussed him a bit by this question. It was much easier to storm and rage at his son than to give him intelligent advice. But he satisfied both his anger and his conscience when he finally came out with his reply.

"I think, if you haven't the guts to act like a man in the matter, you ought to leave this girl alone." This was probably the wickedest thing Mat Dekker had ever done in his life — the utterance of this opinion.

Sam's strange fixed idea of sharing in Christ's sacrifice might quite conceivably have put it into his head that it was his duty to do exactly as his father bade him, in which case Nell would have had the experience of losing her headstrong lover at the precise moment when the sort of companionship he felt *allowed* to give her was exactly the comfort which she craved most to receive, which was indeed all she *could* receive. But Sam was not yet a complete maniac; nor had his father's constant harping upon this string of "being a man" and "having guts," failed altogether to arouse a natural reaction. He rose firmly to his feet. "Well, Father," he said, "if *that's* all the help you can give me, I think we'd better bring the conversation to a close." He paused for a moment, and then, ashamed of the abruptness of his tone, he added more gently, "You've always been good to me, Father. This is the first time in my life that I've — troubled you like this. I daresay we'll both of us see things more … calmly … more … more quietly … later … on." He took a few steps towards the door and then stopped and turned. It had always been their custom, a custom rather unusual among sons and fathers in Glastonbury, and perhaps one that was an emotional legacy left to the atmosphere of that house by Sam's Swiss mother, to kiss each other good-night. On this occasion it needed one of the greatest spiritual efforts he had ever undertaken when Sam forced himself to go up to his father and make the motion of offering to kiss him.

A red-faced, righteously indignant, dignified and outraged man is not an easy objective for such an advance as Sam now made. But the power of habit is great, and Mat Dekker, after all, loved nobody in the world — certainly not this girl whose troubling beauty had so upset him — as much as he loved his son. So now, though in deep and gloomy gravity, he did bend his head and allow his rough, bristly cheek — for he was a man who needed shaving twice a day — to touch, for the tenth part of a second, Sam's up-raised and twitching chin.

"Good-night, Father."

"Good-night, my boy."

Sam's betaking himself to his bedroom that night coincided, after about five minutes' leeway, with the departure to bed of another Glastonbury bachelor, namely, Mr. Thomas Barter. The steps up which this gentleman slowly and wearily climbed were much less pleasant to ascend than those dusted and polished by Penny Pitches. Mr. Barter was no longer in his High Street room. Since his salary at the Municipal, as it was called, was based on the success of the venture under his management and as his task in organising it was a Herculean one, he found himself for the moment with a very meagre income. He had been forced to economise if he were to be able to continue his daily table d'hôtes at the Pilgrims', and *not* to continue these meant the last straw of misery. His adventure with Lily had turned out anything but a success. This dreamy, romantic maiden had unexpectedly proven herself a past mistress in the art of giving nothing for nothing! As much kissing as he liked, where the auspicious Ruins — an entrance-fee every time, for Lily refused to steal into the grounds over the Abbey-House wall! — hid such chaste delinquencies; but beyond kissing, absolutely not one single stolen sweet. Thus, for the last month, for he had long ago quarrelled with the mercenary Clarissa, Mr. Barter had been compelled to be chaste. His sole pleasure during this epoch had been the tender but rather anxious one of snatching difficult assignations with Tossie Stickles.

In default of all other feminine society, for Mary seemed, since her marriage, deliberately to avoid seeing him alone, Mr. Barter clung quite pathetically to his interview with his “ruined” Toss. *Her* sweetness to him knew no bounds. With her, if they could only manage to escape observation, everything was permitted; nothing was forbidden; and all was for pure love. He got fonder and fonder of Tossie. Her ways, in her state of pregnancy, astonished him by their sweetness and quaintness. He even became interested — and this for the first time in his masterful career — in his future progeny. Many were the whimsical colloquies, interspersed with bursts of impious merriment, that they had together over this serious event. The girl had recently got into her head, so big had her belly grown and so violent were the movements within her, that they were destined to be the parents of twins; and even this prospect, conceivably one of humorous horror to an unscrupulous Don Juan, appeared to be by no means distasteful to Mr. Barter. But dear to him as were these happy encounters, they had become so infrequent of late as the girl’s time drew nearer, that they no longer served to remove the gloom which kept gathering deeper and deeper upon him.

Tonight, as he mounted those disgusting stairs in George Street, after a long wretched evening spent in his miserable little restaurant, he really felt as if he were approaching the end of his tether. When he had turned on the gas-jet — the burner had not even got a globe — he sat down on his chilly bed and surveyed his washing-basin and heavy white jug with a nauseated resentment that could see nothing in front of him but a leaden urinal-wall of blank despair.

“God!” he thought, “this won’t do. I’ll go cracked if this goes on. I must get hold of a new girl.” But the worst of it was whenever he tried to think of a new girl, and he knew quite a lot of them — Wollop’s alone had at least half a dozen and only one of these was impossible — he always thought of Toss. What *was* it about Toss that caught him so? It must be the way she laughed. She laughed with such rich merriment. She went off at anything he'd say or do and nothing could stop her. He'd never known a girl before who laughed with such a bubbling chuckle and then such ringing peals. And she used to laugh like that when he was making love to her. God! she would laugh sometimes when really — a girl ought to be grave. But he didn't care. He liked her to laugh. Her laugh was like all the curves of her plump body. Well! Well! She won't laugh, poor little thing, when her time comes. But perhaps she will. Perhaps her child will be born in one prolonged, rich peal of laughter. Her child? Her twins! A boy and a girl. A Toss and a Tom. Yes, her laugh was like her arms between her shoulders and elbows — the inside of them, when she bent them. Her laugh was like those rings above her knees, made by those ridiculous garters.

A new girl? Damn them all! Thin, sour, puritanical, avaricious, cold-blooded hussies!

He turned his miserable gaze upon his one wretched pillow, dirty from his head, for he had grown remiss in having his bath since the weather got so chilly and "the woman down there" made such a fuss about hot water. He unlaced his boots. His socks were a sight! "I must do something about all this," he thought. "I can't go on like this." He took down his pyjamas from a hook behind the door and surveyed the cold thin cotton sheets and the frayed edge of the cheap blanket. "I'm damned if I'll take off my vest and drawers," he thought, "just for tonight!" This "just for tonight" had been repeated ever since the middle of September. Mr. Barter, the sturdy fen-man, was certainly becoming degenerate.

He turned off the light and got into bed. "I can't go on like this," he repeated. And he set himself to do what he disliked extremely to do — to consider his financial position. He had saved up, since his parents died, leaving him nothing, exactly a thousand pounds. He remembered the day when, in his balance-book received from Mr. Robert Stilly, he had first beheld the figures of that sum. It was just before John came. It was when he was going about with Mary. To have saved a thousand pounds, all earned by yourself, when you were only thirty-five — that was something as things went in England nowadays! No! He could not, he must not, break into that thousand. But what could he do if he didn't break into it? Until the factory was really on a production basis he had to get on as best he could. His dinners at the Pilgrims' always cost him five shillings — that is, if he had two bottles of ale. And he must have ale. Ale to his meat. Ale to his pudding. It might not be a gentleman's taste, but it was *his* taste. He had been a fool to leave Philip. But there it was! How was he to know then, what he knew now, that he'd have this brute Robinson to work with?

He tried to imagine himself back again with Philip, but somehow, miserable though he was, those galling, rankling insults — no! they were worse than his present nervousness with Robinson. At any rate he could heartily *despise* Robinson — even while he recognised the man's infernal industry. And he couldn't despise Philip! He hated them both, but it was better to live with what you loathed and despised, than with what you loathed and admired! God! how it was raining tonight and how the wind howled! He remembered the look of the old chimney-stack on this wretched house, as he came just now along those few yards of streaming pavement. It looked damnably shaky as the rain beat against it. He wouldn't wonder if one of these nights it didn't come down. And what room would it hit? *His* of course; *his* room. What a nice death *that* would be. Crushed under that filthy ceiling, covered with bricks, cement and wet mortar. Who would have my thousand then? One of those fourth-removed Warwickshire cousins? "I must certainly make my will," thought Mr. Barter. "And I'll leave every penny of that thousand to Toss. God! these rickety old houses, how they do shake in a storm."

He began to hope that Tossie wasn't frightened by this high wind in her room at the back of that Benedict house. "I suppose if she got scared," he said to himself, "she'd call out and Miss Crow would go to her." And Barter's mind went through the process — it took less than half a second — of summoning up the image of Miss Elizabeth and giving this image his hearty commendation. He did not articulate this in the sort of words he would have *spoken* — such as, "Miss Crow's a decent sort," or "Miss Crow's the only lady in the whole blooming family except Mary," but it was as if towards the portly figure of Miss Crow he gave a sort of mental nod as a man entering the Salon Carré in the Louvre might give a nod towards the Mona Lisa, as much as to say, "So you are there still."

His reflections were interrupted by an unusual noise and his heart gave a most unpleasant jump. Some door on the landing below — the house was let in single and double rooms — had been flung open and a voice was shrieking— "Call the doctor, someone! Who's there? Someone *must* go for a doctor at once!"

Mr. Barter was for a moment tempted to pull that cotton sheet and the two thin blankets tightly over his head. "If a person's fast asleep," he thought, "they can't disturb a person."

"Mrs. Smith! Betsy Burt!" screamed the voice on the landing below.

"It is extraordinary how fast I sleep — I was deep asleep then and never heard a sound." These were the words that passed through Barter's head as his excuse on the following morning. But the curious thing was that even while he was completing this rigmarole he was already out of bed, striking matches, lighting the gas, and pulling on his trousers. Mr. Barter's arms and legs, it appeared, were more benevolent than his thoughts. Not only did he pull on his trousers but he hurriedly began putting on his boots. That done, he went to his door and threw it open. “One minute, down there!” he cried. “One minute, and I’ll go.” He flung on his waistcoat, coat and overcoat, snatched up his cap, shut his door and ran downstairs.

It appeared that the child of a solitary and rather unpleasant woman who lived in the room parallel to his own on the floor below had been taken with some kind of fit. It was a little boy of six and the child was now, as Barter pushed Mrs. Carey and Betsy Burt aside, lying on the bed with a ghastly white face and his eyes tight shut.

“ ’Tis convulsions, Mr. Barter,” said Betsy Burt, when he pushed his way in.

“ ’Tis ‘pocalypse, Mister,” cried old Mrs. Carey, “for I do know how it takes ’em. ‘Twere ‘pocalypse that thee own blood-brother died of, Miss Burt; so you oughtn’t to be the one to talk of convulsions. But I do know! I’ve a seed un and handled un in many a corpsy, and they was all took just as this child be. He’s gone already — looks so to I. First they gets red and then they gets turble white. ‘Pocalypse takes them i’ the heart, ‘s know, and that’s what do make their colour fly!”

The woman whose screams in the middle of the night had brought nobody out of bed but Mr. Barter and these two crones, was kneeling on the floor frantically chafing the hands of her child.

“I’ll bring the doctor here in five minutes,” Barter said, touching her on the shoulder, but the woman did not turn round; did not, as a matter of fact, take any notice at all.

“She were whoam late last night, Mister,” said old Mrs. Carey, tugging at his coat as he hurried out. “Don’t tell doctor I said it! Don’t bring no inquest tales on I!” she called after him, as he went downstairs.

It didn’t take him long, for he ran fast all the way, butting against the deluging rain like a Norfolk gamekeeper, to reach Dr. Fell’s house at the corner of Northload Street. Luckily — though it was long past twelve — the doctor was still “reading” the “Enchiridion” in his study. In other words, his favourite book was open on his knees and his broad low forehead, with the grizzled hair sticking out of it like the bristles of an aged hog, was nodding above the book. He opened the street-door himself and let Mr. Barter in.

He agreed to go at once, but when they opened the door again to make a start the rain was so terrific that he begged his summoner to wait till he got back. “Then I can send anything by you, Barter, that they may want. Besides, no use your getting wetter than you are. It can’t go on like this. I know the house. There’s whiskey on my table, man, and a glass somewhere. Take a good pull. It’ll do ‘ee good.”

It was an incredible comfort to Mr. Barter to pour himself out a half-and-half tumbler of whiskey and water, and to draw in his chair close to the red coals. He made towards his friend, the doctor, the same sort of mental nod of inarticulate approval that he had made towards Miss Crow. A warm glow of the first unadulterated pleasure he had had since he last saw Miss Stickles, ran through his veins as he gulped down the good drink and dried his wet boots at the fire. “I believe I’ll give up my dinners at the Pilgrims’,” he thought, “and buy whiskey with that money! Drink’s better than the best cooking, when a man’s got the doldrums.”

Half an hour passed. Barter went to the doctor’s table and poured himself out half a glass more, which he now proceeded to sip, without putting in any water. He moved to the doctor’s big leather chair and placed his glass upon the floor. A delicious drowsiness began to flow through him like a ripple of warm etherealised honey.

In an hour the doctor entered. “He’ll be all right — the little lad,” he said cheerfully. “It was that kind of mock-epilepsy that children sometimes get. He’s asleep now, and so I hope is the mother. There’s no hurry for you to go, my boy. Wait till the rain’s subsided. Let’s make a night of it. I’ve got plenty more of this stuff. It’s good, isn’t it? … That woman will kill that child with her drunken ways, unless I get the Society to take him away from her,” he went on when they had settled down. “Do you know that I know at this moment one, two — *five* mothers that are killing their children in this town?”

“Well, they’ll be out of it when they’re dead,” said Thomas Barter.

“And do you realise, my good friend, that Tittie Petherton’s cancer is following a track that won’t kill her for months and months — maybe not for six months! I made sure it would finish her off in a week or two, when I examined her in August, but not at all!”

“Well! in a year, anyway, she will be dead and all that pain wiped out.”

“Wiped out, Barter? What are you talking about? Are you such a happy man as really to believe that in the whole sweep and surge and swing of things pain like that is *wiped out?* I read a Russian book once, Barter, by that man whose name begins with D, and a character there says he believes in God but rejects God’s World. Now I feel just the opposite! I think the whole of God’s World is infinitely to be pitied — tortured and torturers alike — but I think that God Himself, the great Living God, responsible for it all, the powerful Creator who deliberately gave such reptiles, such sharks, such hyaenas, such jackals as we are, this accursed gift of Free Will, ought to have *such a Cancer*—” The quiet doctor actually jerked himself forward to the edge of his arm-chair, till, with only the tip of his buttocks — where his erect and angry tail would have been switching if he had possessed one — resting upon its very verge, he drew with his forefinger a crucial outline upon the air— "such a Cancer," he cried, "as would keep him Alive and Howling for a Million Years!"

"I went through Paradise yesterday," remarked Barter. "The poverty's pretty bad down there still, in spite of all this new work that Crow's been giving people."

The doctor, who had now relapsed panting into the depths of his chair, took up the subject with a groan. "I should think it *was* pretty bad! It's few of the natives who get this work. He's brought in a lot of new men from Bristol and Bath, a stronger, better-fed type, and more docile too! There'll be another riot before our folk expect it, and a much more serious one than that little affair at the Pageant, when they mobbed Lord P."

"What do you think, Doctor, will really come of all these diggings and buildings out at that well? Do you think Geard will get a steady crowd down here every year — or only just on the day he opens the thing? John was telling me it would be opened between Christmas and the first of January."

"My good friend," said Charles Montagu Fell, pointing at Barter with the stem of his cherry-wood pipe, "what people forget is *this!* In all these improvements, whether Geard brings them in or Crow, the real pain of mind and body goes on where people haven't the heart or the health to get the benefit of such things. That's the point that's always forgotten. I'm a doctor, and a doctor's profession's naturally with the unfit rather than the fit. And I tell you the tragedy of life is in the rubbish heap. People talk of the sufferings of the strong, and how you ought to help the strong rather than the weak, as if the weak were a type of animal that didn't feel. I tell you suffering is like a fungus that the strong can carry about with them, and still bustle and strut, whereas with the weak the fungus is too heavy. They can't hold it up. It pulls ’em down. But it don’t numb their feeling! They’re nothing else but feeling — feeling and fungus!”

“But aren’t the poor *used to it*?” protested the man from Norfolk.

Dr. Fell sank back in his chair and pushed his fingers through the stubbly grey hairs that stuck out from his low forehead.

“He’s one of the ugliest chaps I’ve ever seen,” thought Barter, “but he has good ideas and good drink.”

“No, Barter, no, no! that’s another pretty, comforting, easy lie! The human consciousness is not confined to what you can see of the body, or of the habits of the body. We all carry about with us something distinct from the body, the thing that says, ‘I am I.’ This something, this soul, never gets *used* to any human situation! It finds itself ‘landed’ or it finds itself riding the waves. It’s never *used* to anything.”

At this point in the conversation both the men started up straight in their chairs and glanced at each other.

“Someone’s moving about, up there,” said Mr. Barter grimly. Dr. Fell’s countenance expressed savage loathing. He listened intently. Then he gave a sigh of relief. “It’s the rats, Barter. It must be the rats. They become lively in the Autumn.”

“I hope so,” remarked the other.

They both listened again. No! that was the sound — to the doctor’s ears quite unmistakable — of heavy woollen slippers, a little too large for the feet that wore them, stumping, *plockety-plock … plockety-plock,* along the landing above.

“It’s her!” whispered the doctor. “My God! It’s Bibby!”

They listened again and once more there was silence. Everything in the house was as still as the centre of a wood covered with new-fallen snow.

And then the sound began again — *plockety-plock* … *plockety plock* … above their heads.

Mr. Barter was not easily disturbed, but he was shocked to see a man he liked as he liked the doctor, give way to his nerves as he did now.

Charles Montagu Fell leapt to his feet and began hitting that low forehead of his with his two fists, hitting it quite hard and repeating as he did so, over and over again, an expressive if not ancient English word of one syllable, which the propriety of learned taste has excluded from the Oxford Dictionary.

"Sorry, Barter," he murmured, with a shame-faced grimace, when this manifestation was over, "but you've never known what it is to live with someone who … with someone who … gets on your nerves to such a pitch." He came up close to his friend now and laying a finger on the man's sleeve, whispered in his ear: "You don't know what the word loathing means, do you, Barter? Loathing … loathing … loathing! It's much worse than hatred. I can tell you *that*, anyway!"

Once more they drew apart and stood listening. And once more those flopping steps inside those loose, soft slippers became audible.

Mr. Barter was of an unimaginative dispostion, but even he became aware of something rather horrible in the sound of those steps, combined with its effect upon the nerves of his friend.

"I don't like going off," he said, looking round uneasily, "and leaving you like this."

"Oh, she'll quiet down as soon as we open the door," returned the doctor. "You note how she does. It's really rather funny; but the joke, as Heine said of something else, is somewhat stale."

He moved to the door as he spoke and opened it, making a sign to the other man to listen. It was exactly as he had said. The steps in the loose slippers retreated, with that peculiarly unpleasant sound, a little accelerated, as they caught the vibration of the closing of a door.

“Gone to earth,” said the doctor grossly, and he proceeded to open the street door. They stood together on the doorstep. The rain had ceased, and there was upon the night a faint taste, like a thin, diffused chemical salt, of that early hour of the morning.

Suddenly there was uplifted into the silence of the sleeping town a premature cock-crow. At once, though it was really just as dark, both of the men seemed to *feel* the approaching dawn, feel it like the smell of some kind of sea-breath brought up on the winding tidal ditches, from Bridgwater Bay. The absolute stillness of the wet pavements and clammy cobblestones and slippery roofs and drenched eaves had a curious effect upon the two men. They both had the same feeling although neither told the other. They both felt as if Glastonbury, at least, in her sleep, were an actual, living Creature!

Barter turned round before he descended the dripping steps to the silent pavement and shook hands with his friend. Very tightly did he grasp the man’s fingers.

“Finish the bottle before you go up!” he said, and the words seemed to fall upon the wet nakedness of Glastonbury like a rattle of shot from a boy’s catapult.

“One of these days I’ll *murder* her,” returned Charles Montagu. “Would you come to the Taunton Jail to see me, Barter?”

“Shut up, you fool, and finish that bottle!” But when he glanced back, before he went down Northload Street towards High Street, he saw that the doctor was standing there still, watching him go. “Maybe I ought to have stayed all night with him,” he thought. He waited for a minute watching his figure at that door and wishing it would go into the house. Something seemed to be holding Thomas Barter back on that spot, and not allowing him to depart and forget Dr. Fell. No situation between human beings is more curious than when, after a separation, two people look back at each other. It is especially curious when, as now, they both seem unable to stop looking at each other, clinging to each other with their eyes! Barter had the feeling that it was not he who was going off — but his friend. He felt as if the doctor were standing on the deck of a liner, and as if he had just one more chance of running down the gangway. But no! The bridge was up now, and a widening gap of wickedly dark water was separating its hull from the wharf!

He waved his hand. He could not resist the impulse to do this. It was indeed the merest chance that he resisted the urge to run back. But the figure on the steps turned now without making any sign and went into the house and the door was shut.

Mr. Barter proceeded slowly down Northload Street. He walked a little faster when he reached the centre of the town, directing his steps towards his George Street room, but, for all the good whiskey he had drunk, his thoughts were heavy, cold and stiff, like a load of staring-eyed dead fish on a blood-stained wheel-barrow. He met no one — not even the old Glastonbury policeman, not even a prowling cat. All the shops had their shutters fast closed. All the houses had their blinds down. He cast an indifferent lack-lustre eye upon these houses as he went along. Here was one a little bigger than the others and even more obstinately closed up. There were iron railings with spikes upon them in front of it and along these railings rows and rows of minute rain-drops hung. The whole place was so silent, under the chill darkness before dawn, so motionless and sepulchral, that these little quivering rain-drops catching specks of faint light from a pallid street-lamp seemed more alive than such water-drops usually are.

Barter, however, cast an unseeing, unappreciative eye upon them. It would be hard to say what natural object at that moment — short of a falling meteorite — would have arrested his attention. Probably even his foreman at the Municipal, an artist in his showing off before Sally Jones, had more of what is called aesthetic appreciation than Mr. Barter. But he *did* observe one object with a faint interest in connection with this particular house, as he moved along by these pallid raindrops, and that was a massive gilded plate, which was also illuminated by the neighbouring lamp, and upon which he read the words "John Beere, Solicitor." He had often been nudged by a loquacious waitress in the Pilgrims' dining-room — this was in Clarissa's day — and told to observe the passionate gluttony of this short-sighted old gentleman. "I'll buy whiskey in future," he thought, "and keep the bottle at the restaurant. That girl would look after it for me. The woman at home would drink it."

His mind called up the alternatives, and he tried to weigh them against each other. The cosiness, the good cooking, the ale, on the one hand, but with hostile wenches, set on to bait him by Clarissa; and on the other, a filthy, dreary little chop house, with wretched cooking, but with a buxom, nice girl, to bring him his bottle, carefully guarded by herself, and with hot water and lemon gratis if he wanted them!

The importance of this dilemma had brought his steps to a momentary stand in front of Lawyer Beere's house, and before going on he glanced up at its mellow Queen Anne facade. There was a night-light, at any rate, some extremely faint lamp-light, burning behind the closed blinds of one of the upper rooms.

"That awful Angela!" he said to himself with a little shudder, as he went on down the street. To a nympholept, of Barter's pragmatic complex, the mere fact of a feminine creature being unresponsive to his advances relegated her to a worse than undesirable category.

Angela Beere, as a matter of fact, — for Barter was right about it being her room — always put out her light when she went to bed, but today, because of the terrific storm of rain that had descended upon the close of her party, she had pressed her friend Persephone to stay the night with her and not to attempt to return to Dickery Cantle's unappealing place, and to this proposal Percy had consented, making the stipulation, however — for she never slept in total darkness — that there should be at least a night-light in the room. At the very moment Mr. Barter was going by, the younger of the two girls, excited and restless, was whispering to the other.

"I can't read *enough* of those books about it," Angela was saying. "He's got the most thrilling ones — every one that's been written, I should think!" She was referring to the heathen Grail of the old Celtic mythology and to her new friend, Mr. Evans.

There was something weird about this whispered conversation in those last hours of that night, before the faint, cold dawn-breath — more like a sigh of something dying than a cry of something newly born — crept over the wet hills, stole along the tow-paths, touched the gateposts and the dams and the stone bridges and the floating weeds in the ditches with its silent approach. Both the girls were sensitised and spiritualised to an unusual pitch of feeling, but nothing could have been more different than the way they felt.

"I love to hear you, Angela! Go on, go on! Tell me more!" Thus did Percy reply; thus did Percy encourage her, but in her heart she drew away. Why was it that nothing seemed to satisfy her, to hold her, to cast a spell upon her that could last? A curious and subtle weariness weighed upon her now. There seemed something mysteriously sad about everything in life, as she saw things now, in the deep silence, only broken by this feverish voice at her ear.

Had Mr. Evans been permitted — like Iachimo in Shakespeare’s play — to pass a vigil in that chamber, his Druidic imagination would certainly have been stirred to the depths by the sight of those two lovely heads under the faint illumination of that flickering night-light in its small crimson glass. How white was the complexion of the younger! How gipsy-brown that of the other! Persephone’s dusky curls lay against her pillow like autumn leaves upon snow, and her face had a faraway, weary look, as if the enchantment she sought were not here … not anywhere in this rain-drenched town … not anywhere in all this Gwlad-yr-Hav of Somerset … perhaps not anywhere in all the round earth! The soft hair of the other head, on the contrary, under that dim light, looked like a heap of scattered autumn crocuses, but her cold eyes and her smooth white cheeks were alive with feverish excitement as she narrated, in her passionate, furtive whispers, the story of the Cauldron of Ceridwen.

“*That* Cauldron was the real Grail, you know, and it was *that* that made Taliessin young!” Then, without a second’s pause, catching her breath in a particular way she had, she plunged into the tale of Math, Son of Mathonwy, which Mr. Evans had shown her in the Mabinogion. “Arianrod — which means Silver Circle — laid a destiny upon her son Llew,” she whispered, “that he shall never have a wife of the race that now inhabits this earth. ‘Well,’ said Math, ‘we will seek, thou and I, by charms and illusion, to form a wife for him out of flowers.’ So they took the blossoms of the oak, and the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, and produced from them a maid, and they baptised her and gave her the name of Blodenwedd.”

As she told this story to Percy, Percy could not help feeling, as she looked at the transparency of this white face by her side, that the girl herself might well have been named Blodenwedd!

Lovely were they both, as they lay there in that glimmering light, but whereas Angela seemed to draw to herself from out of the storm-cleansed darkness everything that was pallid and phantasmal in the rain-soaked meadows, in the dripping hazel-spinneys, in the cold, moss-covered hill slopes, Persephone seemed, as she lay listening to her friend, as if she were an incarnation of all the magic of the brown rain-pools and the smooth-washed beech boughs and the drenched, carved eaves of fragrant woodwork, and the wet reed roofs of the dyke-hovels down there in the marshes of the Brue.

“I believe I know who *you* are in these Grail stories!” Angela was now whispering. “You are Lorie de la Roche Florie, the mistress of Gawain!”

“I’ve not found him yet, anyway,” smiled the other.

“He says,” whispered Angela, “Mr. Evans says, that Mayor Geard is really in league with the old magical Powers, and that the new inscription they’ve found on Chalice Hill has to do with Merlin, and not with Saint Joseph at all!”

The girl’s Madonna-like face had a flaming spot on both her cheeks and her breath came in quick gasps as these hurried syllables left her lips.

But Percy listened languidly. Her lonely, unsettled, restless soul had not yet found what she craved. “Perhaps,” she was thinking now, “what I want is not in this world at all!” Something in her anyway — probably her sceptical Norfolk blood — felt profoundly suspicious of all this chatter about the old gods. She liked flirting — if her ambiguous relations with the Welshman could be called by that name — with Mr. Evans, but his Cymric mythology left her absolutely cold. She fancied she had made the discovery of late that there was a certain type of nature that could not enjoy life in a frankly amorous, or honestly vicious way, but must be always complicating the issue by bringing into it all sorts of half-mystical, half-religious notions.

While the fair girl continued her esoteric whisperings with burning cheeks and eyes growing brighter and brighter, Percy was thinking to herself, “If Dave would do nothing but talk about Communism in his curious way I could live with him for ever. If Philip would go on driving me in his car *sans cesse,* I could live with *him*! And it’s going to be just the same with you, my angel, only the other way round! I like your being fond of me but your ideas wear me out. What a wild, excited way she’s whispering now! God bless me! Owen Evans hasn’t discovered any new sins that aren’t practised every day among people who’ve never heard of his Guardians of the Grail or his Daughters of King Avallach!”

She knew that the dim light from their little night-light fell upon her face, and she knew that the other’s spasmodic outburst of hot, quick, excited words would cease in a second and the girl’s feelings be cruelly wounded if she realised the effect she was having. So, born actress as she was, Percy assumed an expression of exhausted but responsive intentness. But her soul wandered far away.

Ned Athling, who had come to know her quite well during their rehearsals together, had introduced her recently to Lady Rachel, and Rachel’s passionate love of old ballad-poetry and her hatred of everything modern, had amused her not a little. The image of Rachel hovered now very clearly before her mind. Mr. Evans’ pupil in mysticism would have been staggered and her heart stabbed had she been able to read her friend’s thoughts.

Taliessin and Aneurin, Bendigeitvran, or Bran the Blessed, Terre Gastee and Balyn’s Dolorous Stroke, Arawn, King of Hades, Caer Pedryvan, where

Pwyll’s Cauldron was found by the heathen Arthur, the Mwys of Gwydno-Garanhir, without which Kulhwch might never have Olwen on his bed — all these would have sunk down into the sluices of nothingness, into the weirs of oblivion, if the fair girl had known the bitter truth!

So the exhausted and intently smiling brown-skinned mask listened to her friend’s voice, but beneath it the girl’s unsatisfied soul wandered off far into the darkness. Over the head of Mr. Barter it wandered, as he weighed his whiskey against his ale, over the house of Dr. Fell, it wandered, where the word murder had been so lately breathed, over the Mayor’s bedroom it wandered, where Mr. Geard could still derive amorous pleasure from embracing Megan, over the sleeping head of Sam in his Vicarage room, over the tossing, sleepless head of Sam’s begetter, in *his* room, out, far out, away from all these people, away from all these roofs, covering desire and torment and rapture and lechery and despair and paradisiac peace, it wandered free, — free of them all, free even of the body of its own possessor, but still unsatisfied, still wanting something that no flesh and blood could fulfil, — something “that might not be in the world at all,” or at least so hidden that none could find it.

THE MIRACLE

"JUST ONE WORD, Mr. Mayor," said Dr. Fell as he stood with his hand on the window of Solly Lew's taxi. "I must have it completely understood that, as this woman's medical adviser, I refuse to give my consent to your taking her."

"Quite right, Doctor," replied Mr. Geard from inside the vehicle, where he was supporting the groaning Tittie. "I receive your protest. Mr. Crow here and my daughter are your witnesses. I take full responsibility." He raised his voice. "You want to come, don't you, Mrs. Petherton?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, Lord! Anything. Oh, Lord! For to make thee stop; for to make thee stop even for a little while, Lord! Yes, yes. Oh, there thee be again!"

The tortured woman had come recently to talk to her cancer as if it were a living person. She called it "Lord"; for it represented the nearest and most wilful power she knew. It was this peculiarity that had begun to get on the nerves of the worthy Nurse Robinson and was one of the chief reasons why she had asked to be relieved from her task. " 'Twill be better for hevery one concerned, for 'er to 'ave a change," she had said when Mat Dekker who had made himself responsible for the nurse's salary protested at this decision. "She'd be far better horf in the 'orspital," she said. And it was this word, overheard by the patient a week ago, that had now made it essential that there *should* be a change, for, after this, the woman's feeling towards the nurse was like what a heretic would feel towards an Inquisition official. The frightened Tittie would not let her come near her without screaming.

“I’ll bring house down if yer moves a step!” she threatened; and once she *had* begun shrieking and struggling so terribly that the neighbours had run in and made a scene.

“Drive on, Solly!” commanded Mr. Geard.

Crummie and John, sitting opposite the two principals in this strange event, kept up together — under cover of the unhappy creature’s groans — a rapid exchange of comments.

“She’s too far gone,” said John. “That’s what I’m afraid of. If she weren’t so far gone she might help him by her faith in him. But she’s beyond that!”

“He doesn’t care what she thinks, if only he can get her there!” gasped Crummie, wincing with sympathy at every movement the woman made.

“I can’t make him out,” said John. “He doesn’t seem worked up over it. You saw what a good dinner he ate … all that Yorkshire pudding! I’d feel happier about it if he were more stirred up. Could you imagine a worse hour of the day for such an experiment? There’s St. John’s church striking half-past two now.”

“What’s he going to do with her?” asked the girl. “Has he told *you?*” she went on. “He can’t be going to dip her *in* that water! I won’t let him, we *mustn’t* let him, if he tries anything like that.”

“Oh, he’ll be sensible,” said John, “as far as *that’s* concerned. He’s got a head on his shoulders. Better leave him alone.”

It would have been easy to talk like this before Mr. Geard’s face, even if the woman had not been groaning and twitching as she was, for he had a peculiar power of being at once *there* and *not* there, at the same time, under certain conditions.

“Careful!” he shouted out loudly now to the driver. “Don’t go through the Square! Go by Bove Town, and down Silver, into Chilkwell.”

“Right ho, Sir! As your Worship wishes,” replied Mr. Lew. Mr. Geard was certainly at that moment deliberately engaged in breaking a good many natural laws, or at least refuting a good many conventional notions of such laws. With his great belly stuffed with Yorkshire pudding, with the weather around him, hot, moist, muggy and windless, with the sceptical John watching him with the scrutiny of a detached lynx, with the clocks striking that time of day, of all others the most material and when human souls are most drowsy and uninspired, with Crummie full of that particular kind of tender, practical, feminine solicitude, which is of all things most antipathetic to the drastic urge of creative energy, with the subject of his proposed cure so distraught with pain as to be almost out of her mind, it might indeed have seemed that he could not have been more handicapped in his amazing project, unless perhaps if Dr. Fell, still vehemently and professionally in opposition, had accompanied them.

Conditions were worse for their purpose when they finally arrived at the spot, than even John or Crummie had anticipated; for they found the place occupied by a gang of callous workingmen from the slums of Paradise, still lingering, though their dinner-hour had been over a long time, at their jests and boisterous fooling.

Solly Lew stopped his taxi just opposite these men and John, opening the door, gave Crummie his hand. His consciousness of the moment — of the accumulation of impressions that made up what the moment brought — had never been more alive. He was surprised — and ashamed too, so that the blood rushed to his face — when he found that the grasp of Crummie’s warm, electric fingers had given him a disturbing pleasure. “She’s a plump young baggage,” he said to himself, in order to destroy this feeling. “Her legs aren’t like a boy’s, as Mary’s are!” But the truth was — although he hated to acknowledge it — that his sensual happiness with Mary had made him much less impervious to feminine charm than he had ever been in his life. “There’s no depending on my wicked feelings,” he said to himself. “I seem to be just exactly what that Austrian says *all babies* are — polymorphous perverts!”

John had had nothing for lunch himself except a cup of tea and two mouthfuls of a bath-bun; so that although it was only thirty-five minutes past two, his nerves were as alert as if it had been four or even five o’clock. He had had his breakfast early too, so that he felt like a priest who had fasted in preparation for some especial function.

While Solly Lew was helping Mr. Geard get Tittie out of the car John glanced through the great torn gap in the hedge to where the workmen were engaged. They were beginning to work again now, with many suppressed glances and whispers and nudges directed towards the Mayor.

Behind where they were working at this moment, digging a ditch for further foundations, there already might be seen several quite substantial rows of walls — the beginning of Mr. Geard’s Byzantine rotunda and Saxon arch. These walls, now risen to nearly seven feet high, totally concealed from where the men were working all sight of Chalice Well; for the Mayor’s London architect, an expert, it turned out, in the mystical intention of compass-points, had got the entrance arch facing due east, so that visitors to the Well, following in the footsteps of the great Joseph — Agathos-Dikaios, as St. John calls him — might approach its waters, moving, if they were religious, on their knees, and tapping the ground with their foreheads, in a westerly direction.

“Come!” said Mr. Geard now, in a husky, authoritative voice, addressing his daughter and John.

Helped by Solly Lew he half-carried the suffering woman, still keeping up, heedless of where she was, her hysterical dialogue with her tormentor, over the littered hedge-gap and straight among the workmen.

Most of the men touched their caps, some went on working, all glanced at the Mayor of Glastonbury with that mingled familiarity and respect which he always aroused in the populace. He had come so often to watch them work, and had brought with him so many curious companions, that none of them seemed particularly astonished at the sight of Tittie's contorted figure.

He directed Solly to prop Mrs. Petherton up for a minute against an overturned wheelbarrow; and then drew the man aside, beckoning John and Crummie to join them.

"What I want you three," he said emphatically, but speaking in a quite unexcited, natural voice, "to do for me now, if you will, is to stand in line between here and the Well, and not let a soul go up there! No one will probably want to. But if anyone *does* try they must be stopped. *That's all!* If I want you, Crummie, I'll shout. But I probably shan't want anyone. I won't be long. Bless us and keep us!"

Without any further words he moved over to the prostrate woman and lifted her up in his arms, holding her pressed against his chest.

"He be going to christen she, looks so!" said Solly Lew. "Well, Missy, I reckon us had best do what 'a said; but it's sore in me heart to wish poor Bet were wi' I! Thik poor 'ooman would give the eyes out of she's head to see these grand doings!"

John was the only one of Mr. Geard's three singular disciples who had the gall to cast a furtive glance over his shoulder to watch the Mayor's sturdy, cautious steps, as he carried his distracted burden out of sight behind the newly erected masonry. When the twain had vanished from view, however, he also turned round and took up his sentinel's post. Thus John was standing on the extreme west, Solly on the extreme east, and Crummie in a position that might be called east by south. Here they all three settled themselves to wait, as calmly as they could under the circumstances.

It was remarkable how little notice the labouring men, preoccupied with their digging, and anxious to show the Mayor's daughter that they were earning their pay, took of their employer's proceedings. John himself, as he watched the motions of their mattocks and spades, felt a queer trance-like feeling steal over his restless mind. His gaze, travelling over the stooping backs of the men on the level ground and over the heads and swinging picks of those working in the ditches, noted, in this curious dreamlike numbness of his senses — so alert a few minutes ago — that a flock of sheep was being driven up the road. These woolly creatures packed close together, but raising in the damp windless air no cloud of dust and much less than usual of their accustomed bleating, were moving *en masse*, like a river of grey, curly wool, eastward, away from the town.

Three figures, a man, a boy, and a sheep-dog, as grey and woolly as the flock itself, walked patiently and somnolently behind them. As he watched these figures and that moving river of grey backs in front of them his mind was carried away upon a long vista of memories. Various roads where he had encountered such sights, some of them in Norfolk, some of them in France, came drifting through his mind and with these memories came a queer feeling that the whole of his life was but a series of such dream-pictures and that the whole series of these pictures was something from which, if he made a strong enough effort, he could awake, and feel them all dispersing, like wisps of vapour.

Pain was real — that woman crying out upon her cancer and calling it "Lord! Lord!" — but even pain, and all the other indescribable horrors of life seemed, as he stared at the backs of those moving sheep, to be made of a “stuff”, as Shakespeare calls it, that could be compelled to yield, to loosen, to melt, to fade, under the right pressure.

Gone were the sheep now; and a second later, following them in that same dreamlike movement, gone was the man, and the boy, and the dog. John’s mood changed then with an abrupt jerk. Something in his mind seemed to fall with a machine-like click into its normal groove.

Slyly he turned round and glanced at Crummie. The girl had slipped off her cloak, spread it on the ground, and was sitting with part of it wrapped round her knees. She waved to him as he caught her attention and he waved back. None of these workmen had the least desire to spy upon the master. Bloody Johnny was at liberty to perform any crazy ritual he liked behind those walls. “I might just as well be sitting by Crummie’s side,” he thought. He peered round the other way to see what the taxi-man was doing. Solly Lew also was sitting down — on a stone or a log or something — calmly smoking his pipe and contemplating the workmen. But John’s imagination was at work now. What on earth was Geard doing to that woman? Most repulsively — for John’s mind had a Goya-like twist for the monstrous — he saw his employer dipping that poor creature in his precious chalybeate water! He saw the scene with hideous and telescopic minuteness. He saw the filthy underwear of the poor wretch, unchanged for a week no doubt while she beat the nurse away, and all stained with ordure. He saw vermin, frightened by the water, leaving her clothes and scurrying away across the slabs of the fountain where they would undoubtedly perish miserably. He saw the loathsome image of the cancer itself. Geard was bathing it in that reddish water and muttering his grotesque invocations, while the woman — John could see her face — was terrified into forgetting her pain by the cold shock of the water. No doubt it had come into her simple mind that the Mayor had decided to rid Glastonbury of her. John’s imagination after being so dazed by the sheep was now seized with a terrifying clairvoyance. He followed one of Tittie's vermin in its flight from Bloody Johnny's vigorous ablutions. And he saw it encountering a lusty wood louse which had had to turn itself into a leaden-coloured ball to avoid Mr. Geard's feet but which, appearing now in the other's path like an immense Brontosaurus, had uncurled itself to the view of the human louse.

"All is strange to me," said the human louse to the wood louse. He spoke the lice language with its beautiful vowel sounds to perfection.

"On the contrary," said the wood louse, speaking the same ancient tongue but with a rude rural intonation, *"you* are the only strange thing here to me."

"Could you direct me—" the human louse enquired, giving its words a classical resonance, indicative of the fact that its ancestors had lived with the Romans, "to any human skin in this vicinity?"

The wood louse rudely disabused this dainty traveller of his high hope; and reported that the only skin except the bark of trees available in that quarter was the skin of a rabbit that had been caught in a trap a year ago.

"Nothing can save you from dying of starvation that I can see," said the wood louse, "except to be discovered by some bird small enough to snap you up. If you like I will pass the word round that you are in such mental anguish that—"

Here the story John had told himself broke off; but he continued thinking about the monstrous arrogance of the human race in lumping together in one clumsy and ridiculous word— "instinct, instinct, instinct" — all the turbulent drama, full of criss-cross psychic currents and convoluted struggles and desperations of the subhuman world.

The thought of the luckless fate of this miserable vermin in the unchanged clothes of this rebel against Nurse Robinson brought into John's mind just then, under that heavy sky, the real ghastliness of the word relative. “It’s relatively important that those vermin should escape starvation,” he thought. “It’s relatively important that Geard should have his miracle. It’s relatively important that this wretched woman should be eased of her pain. It’s relatively important that my life with Mary should be exquisitely happy. It’s relatively important that this grave ass Philip should get the town council’s leave to make his road over the marshes. God! What a mix-up it all is. I don’t care! I didn’t make the world. I’m not responsible. There could not be a sweeter creature than Mary — no! not from Glastonbury to Jerusalem!”

While these thoughts were passing through John’s mind, Mr. Geard, stark naked in the Grail Fountain, the water of which came up beyond his waist, and watched by the petrified astonishment of Tittie, who reclined with her back against the base of the Saxon arch, was extending his arms in some sort of command. John was utterly wrong in his imagination. Not once did Mr. Geard call upon the Blood of Christ. Not once did he sprinkle with the blood-red water the woman with cancer. Mr. Geard’s clothes lay in a neat heap at Tittie’s side; and the woman, in stupefied amazement, was watching his uplifted fingers as they kept mechanically opening and closing in the tempest of his mental struggle.

Mr. Geard was not praying. That was the difference between this occasion and the other occasions when his therapeutic powers had been used. He was not praying. He was commanding.

If the question were asked, what precisely was Mr. Geard thinking and feeling as he lifted his arms from the Red Fountain, the answer would have to be that he was assuming to himself the role of a supernatural being! As a matter of literal fact — such were the childish limitations of this singular man’s nature — Mr. Geard *had*, for one second, visualised to himself a picture in the Sunday School at Montacute, representing Our Lord in the process of being baptised in the Jordan! There was no conscious blasphemy in this flickering thought, and it had not lasted. Now he was neither thinking nor feeling. Now his whole body and soul were absorbed in an *act.* This act was the act of *commanding* the cancer to come out of the woman; commanding it on his own authority; so that the growth in Tittie's side should wither up!

The truth is that this chalybeate fountain on this particular hillside had been the scene of such a continuous series of mystic rites, going back to the neolithic men of the Lake Village, if not to the still more mysterious race that preceded them, that there had come to hang about it a thick aura of magical vibrations. That rabbit's skin in the trap, referred to by John's wood louse, might lose its virtue owing to rain and frost and bleaching sun; but this psychic aura, charged with the desperate human struggles of five thousand years to break into the arcana of Life, no rains could wash away, no suns could dry up, no frosts could kill.

Immersed to the waist in this ruddy spring which had been the scene for five thousand years of so much passionate credulity, it is not strange that Mr. Geard, whose animal magnetism was double or treble that of an ordinary person, should find himself able to tap a reservoir of miraculous power.

No sacred pool, in Rome, or Jerusalem, or Mecca, or Thibet, has gathered such an historic continuum of psycho-chemical force about it as this spot contained then, and contains still. But Mr. Geard did not confine his reservoir of healing power to what this locality had stored up. He wrestled at that moment with the First Cause Itself. Now it can be understood why he chose a day so damp and dark and windless, so brown, so neutral, so apathetic, so heavy with drowsy mists for his grand experiment. It was because — led by an instinct which he himself could never have explained — he wanted to get into touch with the First Cause Itself uninterrupted by the dynamic energy of the Sun or Earth or any subordinate Power. The man was now like an athlete of some kind as he stretched out his arms and concentrated his massive and mountainous energy.

The curious thing was that his mind remained perfectly calm, clear and quiet. It was always rare for Mr. Geard to lose his *sangfroid*, even at the most culminating crisis; and he was now quite coolly saying to himself— "If I do it, I do it. If I don't do it, I don't do it — and the woman must die. But I *shall* do it. I feel it in me. I feel it in me."

What Mr. Geard kept his mind steadily upon, all this while, was that crack, that cranny, that slit in Time through which the Timeless — known in those parts for five thousand years as a cauldron, a horn, a krater, a mwys, a well, a kernos, a platter, a cup, and even a nameless stone — had broken the laws of Nature! What Mr. Geard really did — being more practical and less scrupulous than Sam Dekker — was to associate this immemorial *Fetish* with the Absolute, with Its creative as distinct from Its destructive energy. Sam, in his passion for the crucified, opposed himself to the First Cause, as Something so evil in Its cruelty that a man ought to resist It, curse It, defy It, and have no dealings with It. Thus in his loathing of the evil in God, Sam, the Saint, refused to make any use of the beneficence in God; and this refusal was constantly handicapping him in his present "all-or-nothing" existence. Mr. Geard on the other hand was prepared to make use of this ambiguous Emperor of the Cosmos without the slightest scruple.

Mr. Geard now happened to catch the sound of a peewit's cry, a sound that was one of his favourite bird calls, for he associated it with certain particular fields on the road from Montacute to Yeovil, and he regarded it, reaching his ears at this crisis, as a most blessed omen. Simultaneously with this cry, which was not repeated, he noticed, to his intense satisfaction, that Tittie Petherton was yawning! *"I've done it,"* he said to himself, and straining every nerve of his nature, body and soul together, he forced himself to envisage that cancer as something towards which he was directing arrow after arrow of blighting, withering, deadly force. "The great thing is to *see* it," he said to himself, while his black eyes now alight with their most burning fury, stripped the poor woman of every stitch of clothing.

His arrows of thought now became a spear — the Bleeding Lance of the oldest legends of Carbonek — and with an actual tremor of his upraised, naked arms, he felt himself to be plunging this formidable weapon into that worst enemy of all women! "I've done it," he repeated, for the second time, as he saw Tittie's eyes begin slowly to close.

And then Mr. Geard shivered and his teeth began to chatter.

Perhaps he wouldn't have succeeded after all if there hadn't come into his head at that moment an actual vision of one tiny living tendril of that murderous octopus under the sleeping woman's flesh. With one terrific upheaval of the whole of his massive frame, its gastric, its pulmonary, its spinal, its phallic force, and even lifting himself up on tiptoe from the gravel at the bottom of the fount, he plunged that Bleeding Lance of his mind into the half-dead cancer.

Then he bowed himself forward, like the trunk of a tree in a great storm, till his forehead touched the surface of the water. From that surface he proceeded to gulp down, in long, panting, gurgling gasps, enough water to satisfy the thirst of the Questing Beast. "Blood of Christ!" he spluttered; and it was the first time during this great struggle that his favourite expression had crossed his lips.

And then his former utterance escaped once more from the depths of his throat, like a veritable grunt of that Questing Beast; and almost inarticulately the words rose from the chalybeate water. “I’ve done it!” sighed Mr. Geard for the third time.

He now scrambled out upon the new stone slabs, took one quick complacent glance at the foundations of the Saxon arch, and began hurriedly drying himself. For this purpose he used, not his grey flannel shirt, as anyone would have expected, but a new black woollen waistcoat which Megan had just finished knitting for him.

When he had got all his clothes on, including his thin black overcoat and a sort of Low Church parson’s hat, which was his favourite headgear and which he now squeezed low down over his forehead, he lifted up the sleeping woman very carefully in his arms and carried her out between the pedestals of his arch. It was Crummie who had dressed Mrs. Petherton for this great excursion — certainly the most important she would ever make, till “the young men,” as the Scriptures would put it, “carried her out for her burial” — and Crummie had found an old purple bonnet in a cardboard box which she had placed on her head, tying the strings round her neck.

From Mr. Geard’s fingers, spread out now under the woman’s back, this hat now dangled by one of its purple strings, flapping against his knees as he carried her down the hillside.

Bloody Johnny’s three attendants hurried anxiously to meet him and great was their relief — shared to the full by Mr. Lew — at the cheerful tone in which he greeted them.

While this momentous event was occurring upon Chalice Hill, a certain young man, who was a newcomer in the town and had only recently opened a lawyer’s office in High Street, was talking to Merry the curator and to Mr.

Sheperd the policeman on a bench in the little gravelly court-yard outside the Museum.

This young man's name was Paul Trent, and the impression he produced upon sensitive people was that he ought to have been endowed with a less brief and less masterful name than this. He was indeed as silky and soft as a moth; and like a moth were his gentle movements. Brown were his eyes, with long lashes; very dark brown was his hair; while his skin was of a delicate ivory-yellow tint with a faint brownish tinge in the cheeks and chin. His lips were red and full, the under lip a good deal larger than the upper; and his mouth, usually a little open, showed beautiful teeth.

Taking him all in all, there was something warm, feline, and caressing about this man, and a certain air, too, for all his gentleness and quietness, of being a tartar, as they say, to meddle with or provoke.

He gave the impression — which was not entirely erroneous — of coming from some region bathed in constant sunshine. He had been called once by an antiquarian friend "Phoenician-looking"; but there seemed to be more of the sun in his composition than of the sea; and an ordinary person would have thought rather of Persia in connection with him than of anything Punic.

Trent was a nephew of old Mr. Merry and it was in consequence of what the curator had been telling him for the last six months in regard to all the new movements in the place that he had decided to come and practise in Glastonbury. He had already made friends with John Crow and Tom Barter and by their means had won for himself an entrance into the Geard household where his original personality had pleased Bloody Johnny so well that he had introduced him to Mr. Bishop, the town clerk. "The Council ought to have its own lawyer," the Mayor had remarked to Mr. Bishop. "Besides Beere is much too conservative."

The Mayor of Glastonbury in the depths of his South-Somerset heart, nourished a profound suspicion of all lawyers; but he had too many definite reasons for distrusting Mr. Beere to allow a few indefinite ones to prejudice him against Paul Trent.

“What I haven’t yet been able to find in your town, Mr. Sheperd,” the sallow-faced young man was now saying, “is a good vegetarian restaurant.”

The Glastonbury policeman opened his left eye wide and half-closed his right eye. This was not a wink, for Mr. Sheperd would have regarded that historic gesture as a confession of confederacy in roguery. Besides he had the peculiarity of being able to retain this particular mask for as long as the precise tone of the conversation required it; namely the narration of something wonderful to the speaker but not wonderful to the hearer. “They eat raw turnips and such-like in them places, don’t ‘un?” Mr. Sheperd said. “I reckon us country folk see so much o’ they things in daily life that us don’t want to see ‘un when us be enjoying ourselves at public house. Us likes to see a bit o’ good meat then; such as a labouring man when *my* father were young, never saw all the year round ‘cept Squire gave a parish dinner at Christmas.”

It had for so long been a recurrent refrain in Mr. Merry’s conversation—“When my nephew Paul comes to practise here” — that when he did come, and even persuaded Grandmother Cole to give up to him her famous front bedroom, looking out on the High Street, everyone was frantic with curiosity. Old Mrs. Cole had retained for twenty years a neat little notice at the door of her High Street house, which contained the words “Front Bedroom To Let for a Single Gentleman” but the old seamstress was so fastidious in her Single Gentleman that this pleasant sunny retreat had become for years a sort of unused state-parlour. Mr. Barter had visited it on his first arrival; but the presence of Sis and Bert in the back room, for Barter had no love of children, would have prejudiced him against the place even if the austere morality of the old lady had not been so apparent. But "my nephew from the Scilly Isles" as Mr. Merry always called Paul Trent, seemed to have no fear of either children or morality! and something about the long-nosed young man, perhaps his mania for elaborate ablutions in absolutely cold water, perhaps his passion for seedlings in window-boxes, perhaps the unbounded respect in which the whole town held his uncle, had induced Mis. Cole, not only to give him her front room on trial, "till I sees where we stands and how we feels," but to let him retain it indefinitely.

But if the old Glastonbury policeman had opened his left eye when he was questioned about the vegetarian restaurant, he positively gasped at the next remark of "my nephew from the Scilly Isles."

"Are there any philosophical anarchists, Uncle, in this town of yours?"

"Bless me! Tut! Tut! You don't mean to say you have *those* notions in your head still, Paul? No, I should say not! I should think *not*! Wouldn't you, Mr. Sheperd?"

But the old policeman was too dumbfounded to do more than open his right eye as wide as his left.

"Of course I'm the same as I always was, Uncle. You ought to know that! I wouldn't have come here if you hadn't told me so much about the new Mayor and his municipal factory."

"But Mr. Geard isn't an anarchist, Paul; is he, Mr. Sheperd?"

The policeman spat on the gravel at his feet. His expression seemed to say— "I can't answer for these harum-scarum officials of recent date; but I know that when I first joined the force young men would not dare to talk so wildly."

"Haven't you ever seen an anarchist before?" Paul Trent enquired point-blank of the horrified officer.

"I heard Dickery Cantle say," replied Mr. Sheperd, "that his grandfather served drink to a Chartist once, and were mentioned by name for such doings, in a sermon at St. John's."

"I met John Beere in the square this morning, Paul," interrupted Mr. Merry, in order to change the topic, "and he asked me about you. I thought he would be crusty about your being made the Council's legal advisor; but he spoke quite nicely about you. He told me that Mr. Spear from Bristol was in town again and staying at Cantle's, though not in the same room as his wife. Angela, he told me, has made great friends with Mrs. Spear." The old policeman looked up sharply. "Thik Spear be a Rooshian spy," he murmured, "leastways that's what they tell I down at Michael's Bar; but I can't vouch for't, ye understands."

"Talk of the devil—" cried Curator Merry, for at that moment Dave Spear, accompanied by Red Robinson, entered the courtyard of the museum. "Ah, Mr. Spear!" cried the old Curator. "We were just talking about you. How do you do, Mr. Robinson! Mr. Robinson here was one of the first to discover this vein of tin in Wookey, Paul, about which the Western Gazette is talking so much. This is my nephew from the Scilly Isles, gentlemen, Mr. Paul Trent."

"Well, Mr. Merry, I think I'll be taking a step round they Ruins," threw in the old policeman at this point, feeling unequal to cope with such an invasion of revolutionary persons.

"Don't get up, Mr. Sheperd," said Dave kindly. "I don't want to disturb you — or you either, Mr. Merry! We were looking for your nephew at Mr. Bishop's office; and he told us we'd probably find him here."

"I'll come, I'll come," murmured the moth-like young man, smoothing down his silky hair with a sun-burnt hand and picking up his felt hat from the gravel. As he went off with them his uncle could not help noticing how well his loose-fitting brown clothes suited his general personality.

“We wanted to see you, Mr. Trent, please,” began Red Robinson, “on a very important High Deer of Mr. Spear’s, an High Deer which kime to ’im in Bristol.”

Dave Spear gave a nervous little laugh. It was part of his training as a good Communist to restrain his personal feelings in the furtherance of the cause; but he had never in his life met with an ally, or a tool, or a confederate, more alien to his spirit than Red Robinson. The man’s vitriolic Jacobinism — reducing everything to a personal hatred of Philip — got on Dave’s nerves. He had small reason himself on *any* account, to be indulgent to Philip, but there was that in Red’s tone whenever he referred to him — a feverish murderous ferocity — which shocked and repelled his whole nature.

“If you two people don’t mind,” said Dave, “I’d like to get a little exercise. It’s lighter than it was. The sun may come out presently. But even if it doesn’t, I’m sure it’s not going to rain. Let’s go to Chalice Hill and see how Geard’s buildings and diggings are getting on? I’ve not seen that new inscription up there, either, that everyone’s talking about.”

Spear’s two companions agreed at once to this suggestion and they set out along Silver Street, past the Vicarage gate, past Miss Drew’s gate, past the ancient Tithe Barn, till they arrived at Chilkwell Street. They did not delay very long contemplating Mr. Geard’s improvements. As they peered between the rudimentary columns of the Saxon arch at the disturbed waters of the well, Red Robinson announced that in his opinion the labourers down there had been “bithing” in the fountain. Dave protested strongly against any such idea. “It’s not the weather for bathing,” he said. “Besides,” he added, “they’re all Glastonbury men; and everyone here respects this place.”

“High’d bithe ’ere if I ‘ad the mind,” muttered Red.

When they reached the top of Chalice Hill they hunted about for the newly discovered inscription but without success.

“It’s either a fike or a bloody superstition,” said Red. “If I ‘ad my way I’d clear out the whole bilin’ ‘eap of these bloomin’ relics.”

“Let’s sit down,” said Dave, “and then we can tell Mr. Trent what we’ve thought of.”

They all three sat down on the already brown and fast-withering bracken and leaned their backs against a hillock of green moss. Red Robinson became silent now, leaving it to Mr. Spear to explain to Paul Trent what their idea was. Although he would never have confessed it and indeed would have been handicapped by his manner of speech in the expression of it, Red felt at that moment, as the sun began to show signs of breaking through the clouds, a vague feeling of sensuous well-being very unusual to him. The personality of Sally Jones presented itself vividly to his mind. He had been seeing a lot of Sally lately and had come to the conclusion that he would ask her to marry him. He knew it was his mother’s notion that he was Sally’s social superior, she being the Geard’s maid-of-all-work and he being foreman of a factory, but he had grown to be so fond of the girl that he was inclined to risk his mother’s social disappointment.

It had been a good deal of a strain upon him, his former aspiration for the hand of Miss Crummie; and it had been worse than a strain the rebuff he had suffered from Blackie Morgan. With Sally he felt, for the first time in his relations with any woman, completely at ease.

Thus he sat between these two gentlemen, conscious enough that they neither of them liked him, conscious enough that he had offended them by his word about “bithing” in Chalice Well, the effect of that faint flicker of sunshine upon the hillside was to throw around the sturdy figure of Sally a consolatory and comfortable warmth, like and yet unlike, what he used to feel for his mother when he was laughed at at his East-London Board-school.

“It’s nice on this hill,” said Paul Trent.

“Yes,” agreed Dave, “and look at the way that shaft of sun — like a Rubens landscape, isn’t it? — falls on Tor Field! It’s peculiar to this place, a day like this, with the sun breaking through in spots, and those golden patches on the side of the Tor, and those workmen’s figures in the haze. How do *you* feel about Glastonbury, Mr. Robinson? Have you come to get fond of it?”

“High hain’t one for these hart and nighture feelin’s,” said Red bluntly; but so paradoxical is human psychology, that the moment after he had made that remark he felt an overpowering longing to have Sally Jones by his side up here, giggling when he tickled her; and crying out, “Oh, Mister Robinson, how cynical you be!” when he denounced “all this fike and ‘umbug!” He didn’t think of Rubens and he didn’t know purple from gold in the diffusion of all these drifting vapours; but by giving himself up to this melting tenderness towards Sally Jones as associated with what he was now looking at, there took place within him a certain blending of the man’s flesh and blood with the chemistry of the elements, such as made that misty October scene really more memorable to him than to either of his companions.

“It’s strange to think,” said Dave, “that when the Mayor has his grand opening ceremony for this new shrine, this whole hillside may be covered with a surging crowd of people from all over Europe.”

“Yes,” said Paul Trent. “But you won’t get a crowd like that unless there’s a miracle; and the time of miracles is past. What I’d like to see in Glastonbury is something very different from any of this miracle-mongering. I’d like to see — but you had something to ask me, hadn’t you? We’d better come to business now — and talk later.”

Paul Trent sat upright upon his rather womanish haunches, with his arms curved tightly round his knees in their soft brown covering, and his delicate hands clasped together. His figure blent harmoniously with the bracken on which he sat, and the misty sunshine seemed to caress his silky brown head as if it were thankful to find some object more amenable to its wooing than the stubbly cranium of Dave or the carrotty poll of the cockney.

He looked, sitting there, like a figure brought to that spot by the far-journeying sun itself, so that it should be sure of at least one whole-hearted devotee in that land of green shadows.

“Well, gentlemen? What did you want to see me for?” repeated this visitor from the Scilly Isles.

Dave looked at Red; and Red looked at Dave. They both were conscious of that curious nervousness which so often descends on people who have an important communication to make. It is at such times as if the piece of news itself stands with its bearers at the closed door of the unwitting recipient’s mind and appears suddenly, to these very attendants, like a bride they have chosen by lamplight and that they feel a little abashed by in the light of full day.

But Dave plunged in boldly and explained how his Bristol organisation, which was the largest in Wessex, had come to the conclusion that with a little skilful local handling a real commune might be established in Glastonbury. Dave confessed that the original idea of this commune had not come from the organisation but from his wife Persephone.

“She’s probably forgotten now what she said,” he explained. “But she *has* these inspirations sometimes; and when I enlarged on her idea to the leaders of the Party in Bristol they were at once struck by it. You see, Mr. Trent, we all feel that Glastonbury may never again have the luck to have a Mayor like Mr. Geard and that we ought to exploit such a great chance.”

The eyes of this moth-like figure grew suddenly lambent with excitement. “Did I … hear … you … correctly?” he cried. “Did I hear you say that your friends thought of starting a *commune* here?”

“*They* didn’t think of it — nor did *I* think of it — it was my—”

But Paul Trent had leapt up from the ground and with his arms behind him was surveying the autumnal contest that was going on between the fitful sun-bursts and the swallowing clouds. He seemed to be staring at this scene in order to associate it forever with the idea of a Glastonbury commune.

“Goodness gracious!” he cried, “what a place this is for mists! A commune … Yes! I would damned well like to see a commune!”

It was quaint to hear the mild feminine expletive of “goodness gracious!” followed by so revolutionary an aspiration.

“Mr. Trent,” cried Dave, his cheeks red with nervousness and his blue eyes blinking, “you’re not by any chance a Communist, are you?”

The voluptuous mouth, with its heavy underlip, broke into an amused smile. He shook his head vigorously and, as he did so, resumed his seat on the bracken.

“No, Mr. Spear,” he cried, laughing lightly, “I’m an anarchist! *My* commune is just the opposite of yours! It’s a voluntary association altogether. But part of its natural habit would be to pool its resources for the common benefit; voluntarily of course; not by compulsion; but it would pool them, Mr. Spear!”

The flush upon Dave’s cheeks died away; and the gleam faded from his blue eyes. He gave vent to the familiar little sigh which everyone who knew him was so used to, the sigh of an honest man forced by the logic of action in a world of expediency to act against his nature.

“Well,” he said, repeating this sigh, “we can work together over *this*, anyway. In the Paris Commune there were Communists and Anarchists; so why not in the Glastonbury one?”

“I won’t be ‘arf glad to see a guillotine set up in this ’ere bloody ‘ole,” threw in Red Robinson pensively.

“You’re confusing your dates, my good man,” chuckled the Phoenician-looking stranger.

“What price dites if I ‘ave the bloody ‘ead of P. Crow hesquire?”

“You’re vindictive, Mr. Robinson,” said Paul Trent, turning his warm brown eyes upon this savage Jacobin.

“Hif you’d ‘ad the hinsults high’ve ‘ad, you’d be the sime, Mister,” rejoined the Cockney touchily.

“I take the liberty to doubt it, Sir,” laughed the other. “Goodness gracious! What’s the point of getting spiteful? Besides personally I don’t like the knife and I don’t like to see blood.” He gave a little shudder and made a grimace.

“You prefers bombs, I suppose,” said Red sulkily. “If I hain’t smart with me dites, and if I *be* ‘spiteful,’ as you call it, high’d never lower myself by throwing them dirty things!”

“Have you never heard of a philosophical anarchist, Mr. Robinson, or of Kropotkin or Tolstoy or Thoreau or Walt Whitman?”

“High’m a workin’ man, high ham,” said Red bitterly. “They don’t teach hus them ‘igh-class continental writers in the Old Kent Road!”

“Come, come, you two,” cried Dave Spear. “This is far too important a meeting to be wasted in discussion. We’ve got to establish our Glastonbury commune, before we begin quarrelling how to govern it! Shall I tell Mr. Paul Trent all we’ve thought of, Red?”

“Has you please, Mister; but I won’t ‘ave none of that dirty foreign bomb-throwing where high be. ‘It the bewger ‘ard is what high says; but don’t go blowin’ up a lot of gals and kiddies!”

And once more, under what he felt to be the contemptuous hostility of both these men, Red recoiled with a delicious slide of his imagination into the soft admiring arms of Sally Jones. He too looked at the sun-smitten vapours on Gwyn-ap-Nud’s hill, and allowed his body — the body of an unwearied, neatly dressed foreman — to mix with the elements; registering a vow that the very next afternoon he had a chance he would coax Sally to come up here with him.

“Well, Mr. Trent,” said Dave, “it’s like this. It appears that the whole of the land on which Glastonbury’s built belongs to Lord P. And it appears that on the first of January all the leases of it come to an end. For the last twenty years, as far as I can make out, old Mr. Beere has collected these rents and renewed these leases; but *this* year, Persephone tells me, the old man is getting very shaky and peculiar. Angela tells Persephone that he thinks of nothing nowadays but his meals. Lord P. of course has no idea of what’s happening. But the truth is his agent is in his dotage.”

While Dave was speaking, Paul Trent’s whole nature was leaping for joy. He was one of those people whose souls do not extend, as some souls do, outside the limits of the body. The soul of this man from the Scilly Islands penetrated his resilient, sensitive flesh and blood as the eddying water in a rock-pool might penetrate a sea-sponge.

He thought to himself, “Can it be true that I’m not in a dream? Can it be true that there’s a real chance here — if it’s only one in a thousand — of trying the great experiment?” His mind whirled back to this and that good omen which had come to him on his journey to Glastonbury. To feel free of all compulsion … to feel the physical caress of air and water and earth upon his life, as he earned his living, a free man among free men, the stupidity of society broken up … if he could only know it for one year! Through every vein in his warm body rushed wave after wave of excited thought. He remembered a hideous phallic scrawl which he had seen on his way to Glastonbury in a public lavatory at Exeter, the sight of which had given him a sudden loathing for the human race. “It’s restraint,” he thought, “that makes people like that. Free them, free them! Free life from every compulsion and people will be naturally kind and gentle and decent.”

Red Robinson, while Dave was speaking, had got quite deep into a dialogue with Sally Jones, as they lay side by side on this patch of bracken. Sally was now beginning to express not only admiration for his mental qualities but in her own sweet roundabout way a wish that their position on the hillside were not so exposed. “Let’s go to Bulwarks Lane,” Sally was just saying with a delicious gleam in her eyes.

“The Party’s idea was,” said Dave Spear, “I mean *my* idea was, or to be absolutely correct Persephone’s idea was, that we should get the town council to offer a bigger rent for the ground where Crow’s new factory is than Crow has ever paid. But it won’t be only *that* land that we’ll offer to take! We’ll get the town council—”

At this point Paul Trent’s excitement at the chance of realising a dream about which he had thought night and day since he lost the fifth form essay on Freedom at Penzance by advocating free love, became so intense that he remembered the name of his first nurse; a name he’d forgotten for twenty years and had tried again and again to recall. The woman was called "Brocklehurst"; and he now repeated to himself this harmless name, several times over, the name of a thirty-year-old corpse buried near Ashbury Gamp in Cornwall and now serving as a Eureka of anarchistic joy upon the top of Chalice Hill.

"We'll get the town council," went on Dave Spear, "and that really means we'll get Geard, for he does just what he likes with them, to rent from Lord P. the whole of his Glastonbury property; and we'll bribe Lord P. into this by giving him a much larger rent than he's been getting from the tradesmen. Why, all High Street belongs to him, except the Abbot's Tribunal, which goes with the Ruins! Once in the position of lease-landlord for the whole of the town, the council could get rid of all opposition and start a co-operative commune. It would have its factories. It would have its own retail shops. Though the Ruins belong to the Nation, or to the Church — I forget which — Chalice Hill, Glastonbury Tor, Wirral Hill, all belong to Lord P.'s estate; and though of course Geard couldn't *buy* the land, if the council got a long lease it would come to the same thing. He'd have the right, that is the council would have the right, to admit visitors, or not to admit them, as it pleased. The Ruins would remain, of course — but they'd remain as church property or national property, whichever they are, in the midst of our commune. They'd be a little island of mediævalism in the most modern city-state in the world!"

Paul Trent sat straight once more upon the extreme tips of his buttocks. He rubbed back his brown hair with both his hands. "Uncle hinted to me that I'd find things pretty interesting down here," he said, "and goodness gracious! I certainly have. Mercy me! What good luck that he told me to come!"

“Of course,” said Dave, “I have not had time to get any definite word from Geard yet. It all depends on Geard. He may have to help the council with money on January first, if they can’t offer Lord P. enough out of their local taxes. Yes! It all depends on Geard; but when I talked to him about it a few days ago he seemed interested. At least I *thought* he was. But I always feel awkward and uneasy with Geard. I don’t know why. I feel as if I were looking down a precipice where ferns and roots and grasses protrude but where you can’t see the bottom. Do you have any feeling of that sort, Red?”

The man from the Scilly Isles took this question addressed to their companion as a deliberate piece of irony; but he was totally wrong.

Red Robinson’s opinion of Crummie’s father, uttered in the attentive ears of his two fellow-conspirators, showed that to him at all events there was no guile in the question.

“Geard’s a ‘oly old ‘umbug. That’s what Geard is. But he’s a harss hover money. No more high-deer of money ‘as Bloody Johnny got than my boot-sole ‘as. ‘Ees strugglin’ to ruin ‘isself as ‘ard as you or high are tryin’ to better ourselves; and that’s sayin’ a lot!” And the foreman leered at Dave, as much as to say: “We know what a good thing *you* mike of being a Communist!”

Did any one of these three conspirators to establish a Glastonbury commune realise their deep psychic luck in having let their idea escape upon the air, *for the first time*, on the summit of Chalice Hill?

Not one of them! And yet to the invisible naturalists of Glastonbury, commenting curiously upon the strange history of the place, it must have been apparent that they were led to select this spot for the inauguration of their wild scheme by some kind of instinct.

It was at any rate in a voice full of solemn intensity that Paul Trent now enquired point-blank of his two companions whether they wanted him to be their intermediary with the great Glastonbury landowner, and Dave and Mr. Robinson delayed not to make it clear to him that this was precisely what they *did* want him to do.

"As a lawyer," Dave said to him, "you'll realise better than we do what arguments to use. But everyone knows how badly Lord P. is in need of money these days; and of course the council has the power to raise the local taxes; and of course the Mayor — in so important a matter — would be prepared to advance a good big sum on the Council's security. We ought to be able to offer him at least half as much again as Philip Crow can afford. The man *must* agree. He can't help agreeing when it's a question of so much money! It may just tide him over these difficult days."

"It mikes a pretty enough tile, Misters," said Red sarcastically, "but *high* think, if you harsts *me,* that when Christmas comes we shall be sitting 'ere on our bloody harses just the sime has now, and that blasted Crow — you must excuse a workingman's feelin's, Mr. Spear — siling 'is airplines just the sime! 'Tain't as heasy, as you misters seem to think, to 'umble these 'ere capitalists. They wants lead put in 'em — that's what *they* want — a few hounces of lead in their tin-digging bellies. *That's* what would settle 'em! Set 'em up against a wall and pump some good lead into 'em!"

"Still feeling spiteful, Mr. Robinson?" said the man from the Scilly Isles. "Well! I'll do my best, Mr. Spear, with this land-owner of yours. When do you want me to see him? Does he live about here? When will you have a definite offer, ready in writing, for me to show him? And when had I better talk to Geard? Shall I go round to his house after dinner tonight?"

Dave nodded eagerly, his blue eyes radiant. "Yes, yes!" he whispered, as if they were already in the ante-room of Lord P. "by all means go round to Geard's tonight. I don't think I'll go myself. He doesn't like a lot of people fussing about him. Better be quite frank with him about your being an anarchist and so on, and about the Comrades in Bristol being so keen. Better tell him, though, that it wasn't *their* idea. Tell him it was my wife's. He's a great feminist, Geard is!" And Dave grinned like a schoolboy.

While this conspiracy against him was going on on the summit of Chalice Hill, Philip Crow, with the Taunton road-contractor and a land-surveyor from Evercreech at his side, was standing between Lake Village Field and the rain-swollen river.

The childish robber band from Red's alley and from Paul Trent's back room had left their friend Number One's garden-fence and had advanced in loose formation, across the big airplane meadow, to see what was going on. While the Evercreech surveyor made his measurements and while the Taunton contractor with notebook and pencil, lost himself in his calculations Philip was left alone with his own thoughts. He was leaning upon one of those many walking-sticks of The Elms' umbrella-stand that lived under the matriarchal rule of Tilly's umbrella. He was following with his eyes the building of the bridge — at present more imaginary than the Eel Bridge or the Sword Bridge of the legend, which was to take his tin across the Brue.

From where he stood he could see dimly through the sun-smitten mists the vague outlines of Pomparlès Bridge on the road to Street, where John had had his vision of the falling sword of the British king. The mist-enveloped sun was luminous enough to cover all the meadows around him with a rich glow. This glow became pure yellow light when Philip, hearing the voices of the children approaching him, turned away from the two men and looked westward. A small lombardy poplar stood up, darkly outlined in the midst of yellow luminousness, and Philip could see a dark bird of some kind — it was really a six months' old rook — perched on a swaying twig on the top of this little tree. The rook was heavy and the twig kept bending under its weight; so that in order to retain its balance it was compelled to flutter with its great wings every now and then. It was Philip's long motionlessness that alone had allowed it to settle so near a human being.

It was at the moment when Philip saw the rook fly off with a terrific flapping of its wings and with an angry caw, that he observed three children, a little boy, and a little girl holding a small child by the hand, standing about three hundred yards away and watching intently the curious movements of another little girl who was apparently approaching him by the furtive method of running from tree to tree.

The child had now reached the poplar from which the rook had just flown and Philip was able to detect her tumbled brown hair and rough grey skirt peeping out from the poplar's trunk. He took a cautious step or two in the direction of the tree "It's all right, child," he called out. "What is it? Is it a game you're playing? Come here and tell me. I won't hurt you!" Thus spoke the instinctive father in Philip; for he had been quick to recognise the little daughter of Blackie Morgan.

The effect of his call was twofold. It sent the three other children scampering off at top-speed towards the safety of Number One's fence, while it caused Morgan Nelly, in order to prevent herself from yielding to a similar panic, to cling tightly to the poplar trunk with both her thin arms.

It was thus that Philip found his only child when he reached the tree. Her forehead was pressed against it and her fingers were frantically clutching its bark. He began to speak caressingly the moment he approached her, for he was touched by the look of those thin arms; and when he reached the tree he did what was perhaps the wisest thing he could have done, he sat down with his shoulders against it, so that the back of his cap almost touched her clasped hands.

Morgan Nelly could have escaped now if she'd wanted to and run straight off to Number One's fence, from behind which Jackie and Sis and Bert, under the protection of Number One himself, were watching with intense interest the development of this exciting drama; but when her father calmly lighted a cigarette and began to talk to her without trying to pull her arms away from the tree she felt at once reassured.

"I know who you are, child," said Philip. "I knew when I saw your friends. For I know the children you go about with."

There was no reply; but he caught a faint sound over his head which indicated that she'd unclasped her fingers.

"If you'll come and sit down here for a minute and talk to me, I'll give you a penny."

There was no reply to this either; but the surface of the poplar tree served so well as a whispering gallery that he could hear her talking in a low murmur to herself. This was an old psychological device of Morgan Nelly's; and it was a way to exchange thoughts without the overt shock to one's shyness of officially addressing a stranger or being addressed. The stranger listened — indeed if he was wise he listened in silence — and Nelly acted as chorus for both.

"Jackie is just the same as Sis and Bert," she rambled on. "He dared me to do it and said he'd follow me and come close when I were talking to Mr. Crow; but he ain't following me. He's talking to Number One. But they're all looking to see if Mr. Crow takes me up and sends me to jail for running after he. If *he* did do that, I'd be glad! I'd be glad to go anywhere that isn't *here* — even if 'twere jail."

Philip puffed on at his cigarette, keeping a sharp eye upon the contractor and upon the surveyor who were now engaged in an earnest colloquy and an alert eye upon the three children and the old man. The only observer of his dialogue with his daughter upon whom Philip cast a relaxed, carefree and devil-may-care eye, the eye of a true begetter of bastards, was Betsy, Number One's brown and white cow, whose neck was stretched beyond all decency and restraint between the rails of her master's fence so as to crop the less familiar grass of Philip's field.

"Perhaps — I say *perhaps* — I might pay for a little girl I know, going to the seaside or to some very *nice* place."

This was a bribe beyond the power of resistance in Philip's daughter. She slipped round the tree and stood in front of him, her hands behind her back.

"Mummy wouldn't let me take no money, for *nothing*," she said emphatically, looking down upon her progenitor with knitted brows. "That is, Mummy wouldn't, unless she were a little squiffy but not too squiffy. When she's *too* squiffy, Mummy do cry for Dad."

"Was your Dad's name … Morgan?" enquired Philip with intent to discover how much the child knew.

Morgan Nelly nodded vigorously. "But you," she added, "be me godfather … and a wicked, miser one; what'll never do me no good if I wait till Judgment Day."

This revelation of the manner in which his name was passed about between mother and daughter was very significant to Philip.

"I mustn't set fire to the grass, must I?" he remarked amiably, extinguishing his cigarette by pressing it into the side of a molehill. He hitched himself up, after this, and fearing dampness in the grass thrust his cap bene'ath him.

"Your hair baint *very* grey!" exclaimed Morgan Nelly.

Philip smiled and instinctively smoothed his hair down with both his hands under this feminine scrutiny.

"Who said it was?" he enquired casually.

“Red said you was a grey-haired bewger,” said the child. “What *be* a bewger, Mister?”

“Red? Oh, you mean that chap Robinson, that I dismissed for cheek. Is *he* a friend of your mother’s?”

“He baint now,” responded Nelly confidentially. “Mummy do loathe the sight of his ugly mug.”

“ ‘I’m glad to hear that,” said Philip grimly. “Your mother and I are in agreement *there*, anyway.”

“Number One says that they wold funny men do walk about when ’tis dark in this here girt field.”

“You mean old Abel over there?” said Philip. “What funny men is he talking about?”

“Them as lived where they moundies be … them as had King Arthur for their king.”

“Your friend’s shaky in his history, Nelly,” said Philip, and he was conscious of an agreeable warmth under his ribs as he called his daughter by her name.

“Weren’t King Arthur king in them days?” she asked.

“Not till much later, Nelly, according to most accounts.”

“Who *were* king in they times when folks lived on hurdles in water?”

“Heavens, child! I don’t know,” groaned her father. A sharp pang at that moment shook some nerve within him. It would be nice to come home of an evening from the office and listen to this child’s chatter. “I wonder if Tilly *would*—” he thought.

But the little girl had become very pensive. She too found it extremely nice to have someone in addition to Number One with whom she could talk on the subjects that filled her mind. Jackie always wanted to *be* the hero of every conversation! What *she* liked was to enjoy prolonged speculation with someone clever enough to know when King Arthur lived but too grown-up to want to *be* King Arthur.

“ ’Tis queer,” she remarked, “to think of they old funny men rowing in their boats where you be sitting now!”

But though Philip had no desire to be King Arthur, or to be any unknown neolithic hero, he resembled Jackie in his inability to brood for more than a minute over the mystery of the passing of time.

“Have you seen that boat in the museum, Nelly?” he enquired now, bringing the subject down to something concrete.

“No, Mister, I ain’t seen ‘un; and don’t want to see ‘un if Mr. Merry be there. He scolded me turble once when us played in museum-yard. He took Jackie’s ball away and never gived it back. He kept Jackie’s ball, he did, for his own self. ‘Tweren’t right of ‘ee. Jackie said he’d tell policeman. But policeman be his friend. Policeman be allus in thik yard talking to he.”

Philip was silent. His daughter’s attitude to these local magnates was so different from his own that he felt at a loss for a suitable comment.

“If you was one of they Lake Village men, Mister, and I were talking to ‘ee, would you have a girt stick with a sharp flint on ‘un and thee-self all naked like, or maybe a few big dock-leaves round thee’s waist?”

Annoyed with himself for not being able to deal better with her rambling talk, which had now become so easy and natural, and was thus very agreeable to him, Philip actually felt his cheeks beginning to burn.

“You’d be glad enough I had a spear with a flint top,” he remarked, “if that cow over there were a sabre-toothed tiger or a mammoth.”

The little girl’s eyes shone. “Would ‘ee go after it now with thik spear and rip its belly open for it?” she enquired with panting eagerness.

Philip began to experience a definite fear that the child would soon want him to play a game with her, and rush off across the field with his stick, pretending that the harmless Betsy were a mammoth.

"Do you learn history at school, Nelly?" he enquired.

"Would you spear 'un under his ugly tail or would you spear 'un in his girt mouth?" said Nelly, disregarding his reference to school and to the study of history.

Philip liked it when she called him "you" instead of "Mister." He stared at the ground beyond his daughter's grey skirt. Yes, it was certainly a queer thing that this grass should have been covered with a brackish expanse of water in those old days; but it was not a thing he cared to think about. In some subtle way it seemed to make his present activities less important. She certainly had a mind, this child; but it was more like her mother's than his! He remembered that it was just this sort of vague and to him rather desolate brooding that the big-eyed char-girl used to indulge in when he talked to her in Mrs. Legge's "other house."

"I'm going to make a new road into Street and a bridge over the Brue," he suddenly announced to her. He had not intended to say these words. He had not intended to refer to his present undertakings at all. It must have been a subconscious desire to boast of *some* great deed before his offspring, so as to make up to her for not going on with that story about mammoth-spearing.

"I don't like roads," said Morgan Nelly. "I likes tow-paths and cattle-droves best. Jackie and me's going to play Indians in Wick Wood when the leaves are all down!"

"What will the gamekeeper say?" said Philip, whose idea of woods was associated with the sporting activities of his friend Zoyland.

"Oh, Jackie do know a gap into they woods! Sis can't get Bert through thik gap, but *I* can. I lifts he and pushes he till he be over. Us get bluebells there — bunches on 'em! And Jackie found a Muggie's nest wi' five eggs when us were there. Do ‘ee hold wi’ taking more’n two eggs, Mister? Sis says ’tisn’t right to take ’em all. She did cry, Sis did, when Jackie took ’em; and I made him put ’em back; all but two. Sis said the mother bird was wailing something pitiful, but Sis be soft over such things.”

“I’m going to make a bridge over there,” repeated Philip. He seemed driven by an impulse he could not resist to try at all costs to impress the child’s mind. “If you don’t like roads, Nelly, you surely like bridges?”

“That’s Pomparlès over there,” she said in an awed whisper, “where King Arthur threw away his sword.”

“I’m going to build a new bridge, another bridge, much bigger than Pomparlès.”

The child looked at him with a look of horror. She was evidently deeply shocked.

“Not anywhere *near* Pomparlès, are you?” she asked; while an expression of aversion and distaste came into her eyes.

“But, Nelly—” he pleaded with her, as if she were a grown-up person, “my bridge will be ever so much bigger and broader, and a great many lorries will pass over it. Pomparlès is a shaky old erection. Probably it’ll have to be taken down. Progress can’t stop because people are sentimental about a heap of old stones. That’s narrowness, Nelly; that’s prejudice, that’s being soft and silly — like you said your friend Sis was!”

But he had shocked the little girl through and through by what he had said; and no special pleading, no references to Sis, could undo the harm he had done.

“Pomparlès taken down? King Arthur’s Bridge taken down? I don’t like you, Mister! I hate you!”

Philip was astonished at the contortion of fury into which her face was convulsed.

"Come, come, come," he said, "don't let's quarrel the moment we've begun to make friends." He jumped up lightly to his feet and made as if he would lay his hands on her shoulders.

"They won't *let* you pull Pomparlès Bridge down!" she cried, skipping back out of his reach. "Mr. Geard won't *let* you!"

"Mr. Geard couldn't stop me if I decided to do it," cried Philip rapidly growing as angry as the child was. It was not a sign of Philip's littleness but of his greatness that he could get so vehement in a dispute with a little girl. Napoleon would have done so; so would Alexander the Great; so would Nelson, so would Achilles. Most modern rulers would have laughed at her and retorted with some quip too ironical for her to understand.

"He could! He could! He could!" cried the little girl and putting out her tongue she shook her small fist violently at him and scampered off at a wild rush towards Number One's cottage.

Philip put on his cap very carefully and gravely, picked up his stick, and walked with leisurely steps towards the two men. "I shall say I scolded her for her bad behaviour," he thought. "She got impatient, like a spoilt child, in a minute, and answered rudely and ran away." Thus would he explain to anyone who had seen their quarrel what it was that had happened.

"You've taken all the steps, I presume, Sir," said the contractor to him a little later, "about getting leave from the county and so on, to have this new road and this new bridge made?"

"Certainly. Of course!" replied Philip. "I've been to the government offices in London about it, as well as to the county offices in Taunton. The only thing that could possibly delay it would be some of these small proprietors — like that old man over there — making difficulties and asking too much. From what you two gentlemen tell me it would really be most advisable to purchase his permission." He raised his voice at this point so as to include the Evercreech surveyor in his audience. “I was saying that I think it *will* be necessary to pay whatever compensation that old Mr. Twig demands. If we brought it through Lake Village Field there *might* be some red-tape difficulties with the National Office and those things always delay matters so.”

“They do, Sir,” said the surveyor.

“That’s what I always says myself, Sir,” said the contractor.

It was at this point that Philip’s eye caught sight of two figures advancing along the tow-path on the high bank of the Brue. They were coming from the direction of Street and following the river in its northwesterly windings. Philip had no difficulty in recognising these figures — for he was as long-sighted as an Isle-of-Ely heron watching for fish — as those of Lady Rachel and Ned Athling.

Ned Athling was making his plans to leave his parents at Middlezoy and take a job which Geard had offered him in the town, the alluring job of editing an official Glastonbury newspaper — to come out every week. Ned was to have a completely free hand as editor of this paper, which was to deal with every aspect, political, economical, social, poetical, mystical, of the life of the town.

Lady Rachel’s feminine relatives, especially the old Lady in Bath, had been pressing her father with every kind of importunity to bring to an end her stay in Glastonbury. Day by day however she had assiduously been drinking those chalybeate waters, several springs of which could be reached in various places in the town much nearer than the hillside where they originated, and her health was obviously making such improvement that Dr. Fell had had little difficulty in persuading Lord P. to disregard his family’s clamourings.

It was a question, however, how far this attitude of his would change — Lady Rachel had now passed her nineteenth birthday — when it reached his ears that Ned Athling was in town and that the girl was assisting him, as she fully intended to do, in his editorial labours. It was about this peril to their exciting project that they were now talking, with their heads close together, as they came drifting along that tow-path, far too engrossed in each other to notice the man and the little girl under the poplar tree or the child's wild escape across the field.

The first number of the Glastonbury paper was to come out in a month from now. The printing presses, the type-setting materials, the machinery and the office furniture were already in working order in a very old building in the outskirts of Paradise, one of the oldest buildings in that neighbourhood and one much easier to adapt to their purpose than anything they could have found in the centre of Glastonbury. The only point where the Mayor had not given his editor a free hand was in the matter of the name of the paper. Mr. Geard wished it to be called *The Wayfarer*.

Philip had no desire just then to encounter "Lady Rachel and her young man," as everyone in Glastonbury called them; but his searching fen-man's eyes, unconsciously combing the landscape on every side for signs of living creatures, was arrested now by the figures of two men advancing along the same tow-path from the opposite direction. Philip recognised one of these men at once as Sam Dekker; but the other puzzled him for a time. At last he decided, and decided correctly, that it was young Jimmy Rake, a subordinate of Mr. Stilly's in the Glastonbury bank.

Sam had begun to make it a custom of his to befriend the friendless in Glastonbury, of which there were, he very quickly discovered, more and queerer specimens than he had ever surmised existed in the days before he was caught in his Vita Nuova. Jimmy Rake was one of the loneliest of all these friendless ones. The other lads persecuted him at the bank. Mr. Stilly found him incompetent. His landlady in George Street regarded him as "not all there."

The truth was that James Rake, an orphan from the little town of Ilchester, was a youth paralysed by shyness. His miserable shyness was indeed his only claim to his landlady's view of him and the principal cause of Mr. Stilly's contempt for him. In other respects his character was simple, colourless and commonplace. If what is called "distinction" by virtuosos in human qualities was the chief hope of the lad's salvation, Jimmy Rake was undoubtedly damned. "Rake is a Fool" was what one of the little boys at the Greylands Preparatory had scrawled in chalk one morning on the headmaster's blackboard; and even that indulgent gentleman, as he wiped these marks away with the duster kept on his desk, made no denial of this popular verdict.

Rake *was* a fool. He was a fool at cricket, a fool at football, a fool at examinations, and the worst fool of all with women and girls. There was an old canal in the marshes some six miles from Glastonbury on the borders of Huntspill Moor and because of a rare kind of water-mint that grew there this was a place where Sam and his father had for two or three seasons, and as late as October too, found specimens of the Large Copper butterfly.

James Rake was interested in butterflies. He was not stirred over them to the passionate intensity of the two Dekkers; but he *was* interested; and he had made a gallant effort to overcome his shyness when Sam invited him to this walk on early-closing day.

They had gone by way of Meare, and Westhay Level, and Catcott Burtle, and the northern fringe of Edington Heath; and they were now returning by way of Meare Heath and Stileway.

Sam had quickly discovered that there was a solid, compact mass of what might be described as “honest wood” in Jimmy Rake’s nature. The lad had the power of walking steadily on, for miles and miles, without uttering a syllable; nor were his remarks, when he did speak, of any very vivid or original character. The most striking observation he had made today in the whole of their ten-mile walk was what he remarked as they were crossing some fallen branches in a spinney near Edington Junction, on the Burnham and Evercreech Railway, “The white ones” — he was speaking of toadstools— “seem to grow on the dead wood; and the black ones on the living wood.” Sam had taken advantage of this remark to expatiate at some length on the toadstools of the neighbourhood, in which he and his father had specialised together for one whole autumn a couple of years ago; but his discourse seemed only to prove that the abundant “woodiness” in the nature of Rake the Fool was not the kind upon which either black or white fungi spontaneously flourished.

At the moment when Phillip’s long-sighted vision was concentrated upon the man and the woman approaching from the south and the two men approaching from the west, Sam himself realised to what an encounter he was leading his shy friend and he looked about him, wondering how to avoid this couple who were directly in their path. Ned Athling too became just then aware of a group of three men standing in the field to the north of them and a couple of men advancing from the northwest. There was a small unimportant bridge over the Brue just at that place, called Cold Harbour Bridge, and it was quite close to this spot that Philip was now standing. A little tributary of the river left the main stream at this point and flowed southeast to Northload Bridge, and thence lost itself among the orchards of the town. This Cold Harbour Bridge formed, in fact, the centre of an imaginary circle on the circumference of which these three groups of human beings were now arrested in a threefold consciousness of one another's presence.

To the surveyor from Evercreech there was nothing in the least remarkable about the fact that two men should be approaching Cold Harbour Bridge from the west, and a man and woman from the south, following the same tow-path. The contractor was wondering whether he would be permitted to bring his own workmen from Taunton for the construction of the new road or whether the town council of Glastonbury would insist on his employing local labourers upon the job. The surveyor from Evercreech was wondering if his wife's father, now suffering from an attack of pleurisy, would leave them his small dairy farm of four Jersey cows, when he came to die.

But there was, as a matter of fact, no geographic section of the environs of Glastonbury that had not been so often the stage of portentous human encounters that chance itself seemed, in the weariness of her long experience, to have found it easier to slide events through the smooth grooves of fate than to shake them into her favourite surprises; for from under Cold Harbour Bridge which was the precise centre of the equilateral triangle formed by these now quite stationary groups of people, all wondering how they should avoid contact with one another, arose the tall lean shape of Mother Legge's aged doorkeeper, Young Tewsy, holding in one hand a large blood-stained fish which he had just killed and in the other a long fishing-rod.

"I've a caught he! I've a caught he!" he kept repeating and gazed round him with the frantic gestures of one demanding an audience.

Philip looked from the surveyor to the contractor with the air of a monarch who asks his courtiers to rid him of an intrusive churl.

"He's a tramp," said the Taunton man.

"He's one of the town's idiots," said the gentleman from Evercreech who was hoping for the death of his father-in-law in order to inherit four Jersey cows.

But Young Tewsy was so anxious to tell the whole world of his successful kill that he climbed up upon Cold Harbour Bridge and held his catch in the air; waving it first in the direction of Sam and Jimmy and then in the direction of Lady Rachel. It was enough for Lady Rachel that an old dilapidated beggar was appealing to her in some way. She ran forward at top-speed to the bridge, followed at a slow and indeed at a sulky pace by Mr. Athling who began to feel extremely uneasy at the presence of so many people. People seemed to be appearing from every quarter of the horizon. Mr. Athling could see Sam and Jimmy in one direction, Philip and his two companions in another, while in addition to these he could perceive in the distance, on the other side of the big field, a group of children, an old man, and a cow with its head outstretched between wooden railings.

The sun was breaking through the clouds in so irregular a manner that one stream of light fell upon the tall beggar waving the fishing-rod and another upon the children and the cow.

If Rachel Zoyland followed her hereditary instinct by rushing to the spot where a flag of appeal or of disturbance had been raised, Sam Dekker followed *his* hereditary instinct by running at top-speed to where so excited a fisherman was brandishing a great fish. Poor Jim Rake, however, though not from pique or sulkiness like Athling, but from a paralysing spasm of nervousness followed Sam at a snail's pace. *He* looked neither to the right or to the left, for fear of being summoned to shake hands with someone, but kept his eyes fixed on the blood-stained fish, whose own eyes, which five minutes before had been searching the vistas of flowing water through the weed stalks of the Brue, had already taken upon them that glazed lidless stare of a dead creature upon a marble slab.

"You *have* caught a *wonderful* fish!" panted Rachel, when she reached Young Tewsy's side upon the narrow bridge.

"Ain't I, your ladyship," — for he knew her well by sight— "ain't I?" gasped the old man. " 'Tis the girt chub of Lydford Mill come upstream for they autumn flies. I've a-dipped for he every mornin' since September and every noon when Missus could spare I to come out — and now I've a-hooked 'un. There 'un be, your ladyship — there 'un be, Mr. Dekker" — for Sam, bowing awkwardly to Rachel, was now on the bridge too— "and 'twere I what hooked 'un! Ain't he summat to see? Looksee what a girt mouth!"

"You've killed it too roughly, Tewsy," said Sam. "You shouldn't have bloodied it so." He took the fish in his hands. "Yes, he's right," he remarked to Rachel. "I've seen you myself, haven't I?" he added, this time addressing the fish, as he lifted up its dorsal fin with his forefinger. "I've seen you, down at Lydford in your own Mill Pool; but I never thought to hold you in my hands on Cold Harbour Bridge."

Philip, Jimmy Rake, and Ned Athling were all standing on the tow-path now, while Young Tewsy, supported by Lady Rachel and Sam, remained above them on the bridge. Philip took off his hat to Lord P.'s daughter and made some laconic remark about the nourishing quality of Brue mud.

"Look, Jimmy!" cried Sam, holding up the fish for his friend's inspection.

"It won't be nourishing much longer, Mr. Crow, if your chemicals begin to get into it," said Ned unkindly, venting his vexation upon the manufacturer.

"My chemicals!" murmured Philip, "I assure you, Athling, that nothing from my—"

"This is Mr. James Rake, Lady Rachel," said Sam, handing back the fish to Young Tewsy.

Mr. Rake tried to remember that it was best to take his cap off by the front rather than to clutch it by the top. The lad's cheeks got very red when Rachel remarked that she had seen him in the bank.

The man from Evercreech, forgetting about the four Jersey cows, now approached the group, while the contractor in order to retain his self-respect began writing in his notebook. His West-Country awareness of the presence of Lord P.'s daughter, however, made him feel so self-conscious that all he could write down were the words "Saunders Brothers, Builders and Contractors, Taunton."

So deep however were the centuries-old grooves, into which fate had moulded the historic atmosphere round Lake Village Field, that chance now, playing at being fate, brought to the lips of Young Tewsy a significant retort, as if to compel someone among these people to take note of what was going on. The contractor from Taunton had just added to the words "Saunders Brothers" the words "Due from Mr. Philip Crow," when Philip, putting his hand into one of his trouser pockets and bringing out a lot of loose silver, said to Young Tewsy, who was endeavouring to take his rod to pieces— "I'll give you ten shillings for that chub, my good fellow!" Philip had been hesitating between mentioning five shillings or ten; but he had decided on this enormous sum, because of the presence of Lady Rachel, to whom, as soon as he had obtained it, he intended to offer the fish as a chivalrous gift.

It was then that Young Tewsy had uttered the following remark.

“ ’Tis for Missus, Sir. Tain’t for sale, Sir. Missus ‘ave been hinterested, Sir,” — Tewsy in his excitement was reverting to his North London accent — “hever since I began fishing for the fish. The fish ‘ave been on Missus’ mind, Sir. She ‘ave dreamed of the fish, Sir. She wants to heat the fish, Sir. She says — yes, my Lidy, ’tis Mrs. Legge I be speaking of — she says, Sir, when she was little, Sir, they ‘ad a sighing in town about the fish. She said they used to sigh:

‘When Chub of Lydford do speak like human
On grass where Joseph has broken bread,
Be it a man or be it a woman,
In the Isle of Glaston they’ll raise the Dead.’

And this ’ere fish” — he had laid the chub down upon the grass while he pulled his rod apart and wound up the line— “this ’ere fish cried ‘Whew! Whew! Whew!’ just like a dying Christian, when I ‘it its ‘ead to stop its floppin’ on grass. Missus ‘as been all wrought-up, Sir, in a manner of speaking, by thinking on this ’ere fish. If I were to sell ‘ee the fish, thanking ‘ee kindly, Sir, all the sime; or sell it to your Lidyship, thanking *you* kindly all the sime, Missus ‘ud be terrible fretted. She do yearn to put ’er ‘ands on this ’ere fish’s tile and to scratch ‘erself with this ’ere fish’s fins, and to thrust ’er thumb down this ’ere fish’s throat. ’Tis meat and marrow to Missus to ‘old this ’ere fish to ’er bosom. So thankin’ you, Sir, all the sime and thankin’ *you*, my Lidy, it ‘ud never do for me to let a living soul ‘ave this ’ere ancient fish, save only Missus.”

Having uttered this diplomatic ultimatum, the old man, leaving behind him in Lady Rachel’s nostrils a mingled odour of sweat and fish-slime, shuffled down the bridge steps muttering: “God-den, gentles, god-den, Lidy!”

Philip could not help following him with a wistful glance as he went off towards Mr. Twig's hut; for he thought to himself— "*She* will like to see that fish!"

The group of persons at Cold Harbour Bridge now began hurriedly to escape from one another; Sam and Jimmy Rake following in the track of Young Tewsy towards the Godney Road, Lady Rachel and Ned turning to their right and pursuing the tributary of the Brue that led to Northload Bridge and the centre of the town.

The great goddess chance, still finding her line of least resistance in the smooth fate-grooves of Glastonbury, now decreed that, as the two lovers passed Number Two's shop they should catch sight of Mr. Evans and old Bartholomew Jones talking in its interior with the door wide open.

Mr. Jones had left the hospital; but finding that his business had increased considerably, owing to the town's curiosity — especially the town's feminine curiosity — with regard to the eccentric Welshman, he had begun to negotiate with Mr. Evans, a slow and infinitely cautious proceeding on the old man's part, on the subject of some sort of partnership. Rachel caught Mr. Evans' eye as they passed and the lovers drifted into the shop.

Ned Athling, his temper now quite recovered, had been discussing with Rachel as they came along the possibility of making this capture of the famous chub of Lydford the subject of his first article for *The Wayfarer*.

Old Jones bowed himself off on the appearance of the two young people; for he said in his sly old heart, "Me pardner will be sprightlier in coaxin' they to buy summat if I baint there."

Athling therefore lost no time in narrating to Mr. Evans the whole adventure of the fish; while Rachel, tired after their long stroll by the river, sank down to rest in one of the big Louis Quatorze chairs. The girl had noticed before that some of her happiest moments came to her when she was feeling exhausted like this. She had noticed it especially since she had come to Glastonbury. She had even spoken of it to Ned. “It’s a delicious feeling,” she had told him. “It’s just as if I sank down through some yielding element, into a world like this one; yes! in every particular like this one, only with all the annoying things left out.”

She took off her hat now and let it lie in her lap while she pushed back her brown curls from her forehead, glancing as she did so at one of Old Jones’ gilt mirrors. “How white I am,” she thought, “and how hot and untidy and funny-looking! I wish I could get the smell of that old man’s clothes out of my nose. How some smells do cling to anyone. And there’s fish-blood on my hands too.” She lay back in the big gilt chair and crossed her legs, clutching the rim of her hat. Yes! It was coming, it was coming, that lovely sensation. It was like sinking through deep water, water of a pale glaucous colour, and seeing everything through water.

“Is that because Glastonbury was an island once?” she thought.

But how perfect it was to sit here, with the sounds of the street and the air-waves of misty sunshine coming in together through the open door! How handsome Ned looked talking to this man; and what passionate interest the man was taking in what he was telling him! But everything was so lovely and tender and wavering to her as she let her head sink back. “There’s something heavenly,” she thought, “about this feeling. It’s just like being dead and yet intensely happy. I’ve had it before, I think, in this shop. Certainly I had it the other day in the souvenir shop. It’s something about this place. I don’t know what it is. I’ll tell Father I *won’t* go to London, whatever Aunt Betsy says!”

The girl was right about Mr. Evans looking passionately interested. He looked as if he were plunged into some interior vision that rendered him totally unaware of what he was doing with his hands, or with his feet, or with his body. For instance, the moment Ned Athling had finished his narration Mr. Evans sank down on a small chair opposite Lady Rachel and stretched out his long legs with their great square-toed boots and grey socks and allowed his long arms to hang down on each side of the chair. His shirt, as well as his coat, was so much too short for him that not only were his bony wrists but perceptible portions of his lean arms nakedly visible to view, as his hands swung there with the long fingers dangling.

Lady Rachel was unable to resist a slight flicker of retreat from the presence of these great boots and rumpled grey socks thus protruded towards her; but being the well-bred girl she was, she restrained this movement at once and did not even draw in her own slender legs. Thus between the boot-soles of Rachel and the boot-soles of Mr. Evans there was not space to drop a feather.

Athling approached the back of his lady's chair and leaned both his elbows upon it so that his knuckles almost touched her head. Thus as Mr. Evans began his commentary upon what he had just heard there was no more distance between the lovers than there was between Mr. Evans and Lady Rachel and the magnetism that accompanied the Welshman's words linked them all three for a space together.

The extraordinary thing about Mr. Evans' face this afternoon, as the lovers watched it, was the rapidity of its changes from a mask of hollow, expressionless desolation into lineaments of prophetic and inspired passion.

"I never thought I would be here … in this Death-Island of my people … for Glastonbury is the Gwlad-yr-Hav, the Elysian Death-Fields of the Cymric tribes … on the day when that fish was killed. Of course I knew about it. Friends of mine, when I was at Jesus, went down to Lydford to see it. They never *did* see it themselves; but they talked to old men and old women who had. It must be fabulously old, that fish! Tewsy ought never to have done it; but if anyone was to do it he was the one. Of course he won't live the year out. But he'll have the happiest year he's ever had in his life; and he'll probably die in his sleep. What I am now telling you two … and you can believe I would not tell everyone these things … is mostly from the Book of Taliessin and from the Triads and from David ap Gwilym and from Lady Charlotte's Mabinogion and from Sir John Rhys, and from the Red Book of Hergest, and from the Vita Gildae and from the Black Book of Carmarthen, but in my own Vita Merlini I've gone further than any of them into these things. Few Glastonbury people realise that they are actually living in *yr Echwyd,* the land of Annwn, the land of twilight and death, where the shores are of Mortuorum Mare, the Sea of the Departed. This place has always been set apart … from the earliest times … Urien the Mysterious, Avallach the Unknown, were Fisher Kings here … and for what did they fish? The Triads only dare to hint at these things … the Englynion only to glance at them … Taliessin himself … did you know that? … was netted with the fish in the weir, by Elphin the son of Gwydno Garanhir … And for what … and for what did this Fisher King …"

Mr. Evans' voice now rose to a tremulous pitch of excitement. Ned Athling's hands crossing the back of Lady Rachel's gilded throne were now actually in contact with the girl's neck, nor did she move her head away. A mutual impulse made it seem desirable that they should touch each other at *some* point while Mr. Evans was talking about "yr Echwyd."

"For what did these mystical Figures … rulers in Ynis-Witrin in the time of my people … seek … when they fished?" The curious thing was that Mr. Evans' body seemed at that moment, while his two young hearers watched him, to grow more and more corpse-like. Those bare hanging wrists, those outstretched feet in their great boots remained absolutely motionless. It was as if his physical form had already sunk into the waters of that Cimmerian sunset-realm which he called "yr Echwyd," while some power from outside of him was making his lips move in his corpse-like face!

"They sought for more than a fish, for more than any great chub of Lydford … they sought for the knot of the opposites, for the clasping of the Two Twilights, for the mingling-place of the waters, for the fusion of the metals, for the bride-bed of the contradictions, for the copulation-cry of the Yes and No, for the amalgam of the Is and Is Not! What they sought … what the Fisher Kings of my people sought, and no other priests of no other race on earth have ever sought it … was not only the Cauldron and the Spear … not only the sheath and the knife, not only the Mwys of Gwyddno and the Sword of Arthur, but that which exists in the moment of timeless time when these two are one! What they sought was creation with-out-generation. What they sought was Parthenogenesis and the Self-Birth of Psyche. What they sought was the Stone without Lichen which the people before my people worshipped, when they set up—"

The voice proceeding from the lips of the corpse-face of Mr. Evans became so hoarse and broken at this point that it hardly seemed like a human voice. Lady Rachel could clearly hear the footsteps on the pavement outside, through the street door which they had left ajar; and these steps sounded to her like the steps of all the generations of men treading down the stammerings of the Inanimate Bottom of the World.

“NATURE SEEMS DEAD”

DURING THE FIRST week in December three new subjects of the King of England entered this world in the little maternity annex of the Glastonbury Hospital. Nell Zoyland was delivered of a boy, while Tossie Stickles — to her immense pride and satisfaction — was delivered of a pair of lusty girl twins. It was conducive of certain curious encounters that these two young women and their children should be lying simultaneously in private rooms opening from the same passage. Tom Barter coming to visit Tossie found himself confronted in that passage one day by Will Zoyland and another day by Sam Dekker, while Miss Elizabeth Crow, who was devoted in her watchfulness over Toss and her twins, met on one and the same evening. Persephone Spear and Dave Spear coming to see Nell, but coming separately on this errand.

Something certainly seemed — at least up to this present date which was now the tenth of December — to be favouring the commune conspirators. Dave and Red and their new ally Paul Trent had evidently been well advised in their choice of a locale that day, wherein to broach their daring plot. Philip Crow, like many another Napoleonic tactician, was weakest in the cautious consideration of all probable and improbable contingencies. Like the impetuous Corsican and like Oliver Cromwell he swept ahead upon his main idea, allowing sleeping dogs to sleep and open stable doors to remain open. Never for one second did it cross his active brain, any more than it crossed the brain of Tilly, absorbed in making her domestic arrangements for the winter, or the brain of Mr. Tankerville, growing more and more energetic in his commercial flights about Europe, that there was the least chance of any difficulty over his factory leases, the rents of which remained still only paid up to the beginning of the New Year. The construction of his new road and his new bridge was for the moment held up by the flat refusal of Mr. Twig to sell any portion of his small patrimony, but the Evercreech man, more anxious than ever to serve this rich employer, since his father-in-law — as obstinate about dying as Number One was about selling — still persisted in milking his four Jersey cows with his own hand, was already in correspondence with the county officials over the possibility of exploiting a section of Lake Village Field. But though handicapped over his road and his bridge, Philip had begun his tin mining under the most promising conditions and already the sound of picks and mattocks and of cranes and engines could be heard proceeding from a big clearing in the hillside under which many unvisited subterranean passages led into the heart of the hill. Half a dozen truckloads of the precious metal had already been despatched from the railway station at Glastonbury; for although this station was further off than the one at Wells it was easier to make use of and Philip had a much stronger "pull" with the railroad officials there. It had been just a month ago, in the middle of November, when the first tin had begun to emerge, nor would Philip ever forget his feelings when he beheld the lorry containing it roll off towards the Great Western station, ready to be taken to Cardiff through the Severn Tunnel. For the last month the tin had been pouring forth with such a steady flow that Philip's spirits had mounted up to a pitch of excitement that was like a kind of diurnal drunkenness. He dreamed of tin every night. The metal in all its stages began to obsess him. He collected specimens of it, of every degree of weight, integrity, purity. He carried bits of it about with him in his pocket. All manner of quaint fancies — not so much imaginative ones as purely childish ones — connected with tin, kept entering and leaving his mind, and he began to feel as if a portion of his innermost being were the actual magnet that drew this long-neglected element out of abysses of prehistoric darkness into the light of day.

Philip got into the habit of walking every day up the steep overgrown hillside above Wookey and posting himself in the heart of a small grove of Scotch firs from which he could observe, without anyone detecting his presence, the lively transactions at the mouth of the big orifice in the earth, where the trees had been cut away and where the cranes and pulleys stood out in such startling relief against the ancient sepia-coloured clumps of hazel and sycamore, still growing around them upon the leafy slopes. Here he would devour the spectacle of all this activity he had set in motion, until he longed to share the physical exertions of every one of his labourers, diggers, machinists, truckmen, carters, stokers, miners, and haulers. He yearned to be himself boring, dynamiting, shovelling, lifting, carrying, driving; and so intensely had he fixed his eyes on every bodily movement these men had made, that by this time — by the tenth of December — he really could have hired himself out, and won commendation from his foreman in the job, at almost every one of these several labours. It must not be supposed that he neglected his office-work or his dye works extensions and increasing European sales during these exciting weeks. He worked steadily at the office from nine to one every day, and always looked in there again about five before he went home to tea. After his tea he had recently acquired the custom of retiring to a room which Emma called the study, Tilly the north room and he himself the play-room. Shut up in this room he used to ponder long and deeply over his affairs, plunging into various mathematical and commercial calculations and making rapid notes in a big, foolscap-size notebook with a white vellum binding. This notebook had been given to him by Persephone when she was quite a little girl.

Illuminated upon its front page was his name and hers united by a gilt border within which were lilac-coloured hearts, strung upon a green string.

On this tenth of December Philip returned to the north room after Tilly had gone to bed, and gave himself up to an orgy of concentrated thought. He had already brought so many new labourers and working people into Glastonbury that it had begun to be difficult to house them, and Philip — little dreaming what a deadly blow was preparing for him from that quarter — had entered into negotiations with the town council relative to his housing these newcomers in some of the newly built "council houses." The fact that there were so many unemployed among the old-established Glastonbury people, who now saw these lively upstarts from Bristol and Cardiff occupying houses provided by their own socialistic government and built out of local taxes, was a fact that did not redound to Philip's popularity with the populace. Glastonbury's populace was — as they proved in their mobbing of Lord P. — not at all inclined to remain passive and patient when they once got a particular grievance lodged in their brain; and Philip had been surprised by the sullen looks with which he was greeted whenever he had occasion to pass through the poorer portions of the town. He had even heard derisive jeering when he recently crossed, in his little open car, one of the outskirts of Paradise. This extreme unpopularity into which he had fallen was another of these possible causes of catastrophe which Philip neglected. It was part of that element of sheer recklessness in him, to which reference has already been made, to hold public opinion in infinite contempt. Humane enough towards those immediately dependent upon him, Philip was absolutely devoid of imagination when it came to be a question of people he had never seen.

His small, hard, oblong head, very protruding at the back, and rather flat at the sides where the ears clung so closely, had that particular look about it that old-fashioned military men's skulls have. As he pulled his chair round now in front of the fire, leaving the vellum-bound notebook open on the table and sprinkled with cigarette ashes which he had not bothered to blow away, he thought to himself quite calmly: "It would be a good thing if the Glastonbury people would simply die off; die off and leave their houses empty to make room for me to fill the town with a different type altogether! But they seem able to live on forever, feeding on mud and mist! Die! Die! Die! Die quickly and have done with it!" It was at this moment that he saw in the red coals of the fire, a heap of dead people, dead heads and arms and legs and feet. It was a totally unreal illustration of the French Revolution, that set him upon conjuring up this romantic spectacle. It was a picture that he had seen in some silly illustration of some cheap story; and the queer thing about it was that these dead people were not disfigured in any way. They were just dead. "How these Christs and Buddhas," he thought to himself, "ever reached the point of feeling that it was worth their while to save the human race is more than I can understand. I don't want to torture anyone" — here Philip's judgment of himself was absolutely correct, for there was less sadism in him than there was in Mr. Stilly or in Jimmy Rake or in Elphin Cantle— "but it's impossible for me to understand this 'value of human life' that some people make so much of." Once more he stared at the coals; and once more he saw in those red recesses that curious, sentimental assembly of neatly dressed corpses with sad, peaceful, composed features, laid out in that artistic morgue. And then there flickered over his hollow eye-sockets and over his hollow cheeks, as he stared at that fire and stretched out his hands to it, a grim smile, for he thought of what Tilly would say if she could read his thoughts at this moment.

Tilly — good housekeeper as she was in her orderings of well-killed meat — could not bring herself to trap the smallest mouse. If kittens had been born in her house by the dozens, it would only have been by the craftiest deception that Emma could have got her to get rid of one of them. “What actually *would* Tilly say,” he wondered, “if she knew that if I could cut off the heads of all the poor of Glastonbury and fill their houses with a picked set of men and women who could really work I’d do it tomorrow? As a matter of fact, if by lifting up my hand now I could destroy those people and get this new population here *tonight*, I’d do it! Yes, and sleep quite soundly afterwards!”

One of the most interesting things about Philip, when he indulged in mental contemplations as he was doing now was the guileless unmaliciousness of his inhumanity. Though it never occurred to him to ask himself by what right could he condemn to death, in his thoughts, a whole section of his fellow-townsmen, he derived no wicked pleasure from the idea of their death. His grey-black, closely cropped skull was as devoid of such notions as one of the mattocks of his workmen at Wookey. He experienced now, in his silent house, with his open figuring-book on the table behind him and these glowing coals in front of him, a delicious sense of soundness, compactness, integrity in solitude. “I am I,” his whole being seemed to say, “and the world is my clay and my mortar.” Leaving these ill-nourished Glastonbury incompetents safe in their neat and artistic death-pile, his thoughts now turned to what he regarded as the superstitions of the place. Yes, he would willingly, if he could, obliterate all these Gothic Ruins, lay a good solid expanse of lead-piping to drain Chalice Well, pull down that old Tower from the Tor and build a water-tank up there, dig out every twig, spring, root and branch of this corrupting thorn bush and really set to work to have the best tin centre in this spot that existed anywhere in the world! Here again, in the matter of superstition, Philip’s destructive desires were astonishingly unmalicious.

John Crow would have derived a most convoluted vandal-thrill, the wanton excitement of a run-down atheistical adventurer, in obliterating all traces of the Great Legend. Red would have gratified incredible levels of “ ‘ate” by so doing. Barter would have done it with the grim unction of a sullen executioner, especially if he could have shogged off afterwards with Tossie and the twins to Norfolk! Even Dave would have done it with a certain self-righteous doctrinaire-austerity. But Philip would have done it absolutely without a single *arrière pensée.* He would have done it by the pure necessity of his nature, as a dog twines himself round on a mat before lying down, or a cat scratches the dust over its excrement. He would have wiped the place clean, both of its under-nourished rebellious populace and of its morbid relics, and then set to work, as inevitably as a beaver returns to its job after a flood, to build up an industrial centre out of the richest tin mine and out of the most scientific dye works anywhere on earth!

It was with his head full of these thoughts — thoughts that sprouted from his hard skull like scaly lichen from a gatepost on Brandon Heath — that Philip finally switched off the electric light in the play-room and went up — carrying his patent-leather shoes in hand — to his stuffy bedroom, his cold hot-water bottle, and the invisible wraith of his well-satisfied grandmother.

All the enemies of the Great Legend happened, that night of December the tenth, to be going to sleep about the same time. Glastonbury indeed, under its windy, moonless winter sky, was like many another town that night in the turbulent history of our earth: it was subject to the psychic tearing down and building up of the most violently diverse energies. But all these Legend-Destroyers were of the same sex! *That* was the interesting and significant thing to note. Not one single feminine wish, from Tossie in the hospital to Mother Legge in what she called her nursery, was lifted up from the bed of sleep in hostility to the immemorial Tradition. But from the bed of Red, and the bed of Dave, and the bed of Paul Trent, and the bed of Mr. Barter, and the bed of Lawyer Beere, and the beds of bank-cashier Stilly, gardener Weatherwax and Will Zoyland and finally from the bed in Northload Street of John Crow, there rose up, along with the destructive will-power of Philip, a cumulative malediction against the Legend. There *had* been a time when Mary would have joined this gang of iconoclasts — she alone among all the feminine shapes in the town — but, since her marriage, Mary had relapsed into a veritable undersea of infinite peace so delicate in its muted dreaming that she would have no more wished to break up any of its dream-scenery, any of its deep-sea arches, its deep-sea columns, its leagues of translucent emerald-coloured floors, than she would have wished to break the heart of Euphemia Drew.

The history of any ancient town is as much the history of its inhabitants' nightly pillows as of any practical activity that they perform by day. Floating on its softly upheaving sea-surface of feminine breasts the island-city of mystery gathered itself together to resist this wedge of rational invasion. Backward and forward, for five thousand years, the great psychic pendulum has swung between belief in the Glastonbury Legend and disbelief. It is curious to think of the pertinacity of the attacks upon this thing and how, like a vapour dispersed by a wind that re-fashions itself again the moment the wind departs, the moss-grown towers and moonlit ramparts of its imperishable enchantment survive and again survive. When the king murdered the last Abbot of this place he was only doing what Philip and Barter and Red and Dave and Paul Trent and John would have liked to do to the indestructible mystery today. In the most ancient times the same fury of the forces of "reason," must have swept across Glastonbury, only to be followed by the same eternal reaction when the forces of mystery returned. The psychic history of a place like Glastonbury is not an easy thing to write down in set terms, for not only does chance play an enormous part in it, but there are many forces at work for which human language has at present no fit terms.

This particular night of the tenth of December was in reality one of the great turning points in the life of Glastonbury, but the issue of the struggle that went on tonight between the Enemies of the Legend and its Lovers would evade all but supernatural narration, however one might struggle to body it forth. Out of John Crow's head, after he had relaxed to sleep that night from his lascivious claspings of Mary's marbly limbs, there leapt up into the darkness the spiritual form of all the suppressed maliciousness from which he had been suffering in his service of Bloody Johnny. This spiritual form was a shape, a presence, an entity. It was, in fact, the essential soul of John Crow, for the vital consciousness of his sleeping body was but a vague, weak diffusion of electric force. What else could the soul of John Crow do when released in sleep from his life of psychic slavery, but join, with an exultant rebound, all those other wandering spirits who were engaged in *killing the Grail.* It was not necessary for any palpable shape to fly out of that window in Northload Street in order to join, in a sort of Warlock's Sabbath, the ill-assorted spirits of Philip Crow and Red Robinson. When I write down the word join, I mean a motion of John's soul that it would be impossible for any scientist to refute, a motion of his whole essential being, now his body was asleep and his diplomacy relaxed, to *kill the Grail*. By joining with Philip, on this night of the tenth of December, to strike this blow at a fragment of the Absolute, the essential soul of John Crow took a considerable risk. For one thing, it was a risk to leave his sly, cautious, saurian neutrality and join his grand enemy. That he did so at all is only one more proof of how deep John's maliciousness went. In his service of Geard, in connexion with the Grail and in connexion with Chalice Well, John was steadily outraging the evasive, trampish, irresponsible essence of his nature. He was taking sides. He was siding with the Grail against its enemies, when all the while, in his heart, he longed to *kill* it! The “something” in Philip and John and Barter that loathed the Grail so deeply was not just simply their Norfolk blood. This fragment of the Absolute was too ticklish a thing not to divide human souls in a disturbing and disconcerting manner, setting brother against brother and friend against friend. All the way down the centuries it had done this, breaking up ordinary normal human relations and exerting whenever it appeared, a startling, shocking, troubling effect.

It was really a monstrous thing now that John and Philip should dislike one another so heartily during the daylight hours but at night rush off together to join in *killing the Grail.* The Grail could not actually be “killed,” for the Thing is a morsel of the Absolute and a broken-off fragment of the First Cause. It could not of course be killed literally; not in the sense of being annihilated. But it *could* be struck at and outraged in a way that was a real injury; real enough, anyhow, to stir up a very ambiguous feeling in the tramp-nerves of John Crow! After all, though there was an unknown “element” in the composition of this broken-off piece of its own substance, that the First Cause had flung down upon this spot, there was also something of the “thought-stuff” of the same ultimate Being in the personality of all its living creatures. Thus, in the psychic war that was going on above the three hills of Glastonbury, the Absolute was, in a manner of speaking, pitted against the Absolute.

On this tenth of December the wind blew directly from the west. Over Mark Moor it blew from the marshes of Highbridge and, beyond that, from the brackish mud-flats of Burnham. The tide had been so high indeed in the Burnham estuaries that many of the more pessimistic fishermen there, whose flat-bottomed boats — as they had done since the Vikings came — explored those muddy reaches, prophesied that the dams were going to burst again, as they had burst in November, five years before, flooding the whole country. Over Bridgewater Bay it blew, and over the Bristol Channel, from the mountains of South Wales. A scattered army of little ragged clouds followed each other eastward all that night, blotting out from the vision of nocturnal wanderers, or from such as kept vigil at lonely windows, first one constellation and then another. Thus the nature of the night of that tenth of December was peculiar and unusual, for no fixed star and no planet was free from sudden, quick, hurried and erratic obscurings by these rags and tatters of flying vapour. Endlessly they blew across the welkin, those tattered wisps of clouds, changing their shapes as they blew into the fitful forms of men and beasts and birds and tossing vessels and whirling hulks and flying promontories, and obscuring first one great zodiacal sign in the heavens and then another. The wind that shepherded these wild flocks was full of the scent of channel seaweed and of channel mud, and as it voyaged eastward its speed kept increasing, so that these cloud-shapes, thus broken into smaller and smaller wefts, now began to fly like gigantic leaves across the Glastonbury hills.

Two human beings, one a woman and one a boy, found themselves too restless to sleep that night in this city of sorceries. These were Nancy Stickles in her attic room on the High Street and Elphin Cantle in his father’s hostelry, the Old Tavern, which stood on the edge of the Cattle Market. Both these persons, this young married woman and this boy, left their beds between one and two that December night and pulling chairs to their windows, looked out upon those flying clouds. Elphin’s room, which was far away from both Persephone’s and Dave’s, in the rambling, faded, old public house, looked out from a sort of stucco tower, added to the main building in the reign of William the Fourth. His window was a large one composed of many small panes and when Elphin in the dead of night threw this open and sat leaning his elbows upon the window-sill he could not only see a high garden wall covered with mossy coping-stones, but he could see a bare larch tree swaying mournfully in the wind, and, beyond this a little tributary of the Brue, irrigating a piece of municipal ground that had been parcelled out into allotment-gardens, and crossed, although its waters were not deep, by several plank bridges. There was a clump of dead stone-crop upon this mossy wall, and near the stone-crop a single faded wall-flower which bowed and swayed in the wind and seemed to emit, as it swayed, at least so Elphin Cantle fancied, a faint dirge-like sighing. The boy spread out his arms upon his window-sill and stared at the pallid waters of the Brue tributary and at the tossing larch-tree top and at the sighing flower-stalks on the wall. His window was unusually large, as often happens with that particular sort of stucco tower, so that there was a dizzy sensation as well as a very chilly one as he looked out upon the night. But Elphin was much more *in the night*, much more mingled with its vague scents and its morbidly disdnct sounds than he would have been in any other room in Glastonbury. His mother had decided to let him sleep in the tower room "till a guest asked for it." Now, as it was unlikely that a guest would even know of the existence of the tower room, Elphin was pretty safe.

He thrust his right arm out of the great window and stroked the stucco wall with his fingers. Something about a stucco wall always fascinated Elphin, and now with this wind wailing in his ears, whistling through the larch tree, moaning across the plank bridges of this Brue ditch, the touch of this material helped him to think. But he was in a blasphemous and a wicked mood that night, for his idol Sam had broken his promise to take him out there, beyond Charlton Mackrell, to the weir at Cary Fitzpaine, on the River Cary, where several tench had been caught this autumn, that queer fish gifted with the gift of healing! Sam had given him no better excuse for the breaking of this promise than that Mrs. Zoyland was all alone, that afternoon, up at the hospital, a state of affairs that by no means seemed to justify such treatment of a friend. Elphin's restless excitement, therefore, in that wet-blowing wind and his queer pleasure in rubbing his hand against that old weather-stained tower wall were mingled with a bitter anger against both women and religion. He associated them together, which was unfair with that particular kind of philosophical unfairness, touched with perverted eroticism, that many famous writers have indulged in. Women were, it is true, now at this very moment, all over this silent city, nourishing the Grail in their sleep, but the great religions of the world were not founded by women. The soul of Elphin Cantle, nevertheless, as, on this tenth of December he leaned out upon the night air, rushed forth to join the souls of Philip and John in their murderous night hunt of the Grail, just as if on this night of the west wind's wild rush through the sky, there really had been a sort of Wizard's Sabbath.

This joining of Philip and John in their orgy of Grail-killing meant no more than that if anyone could have looked down that night upon the mental arena of Glastonbury he would have seen a powerful group of masculine consciousness bent upon completing the work of the bestial King Henry, and destroying, once and for all, all traces of this Cymric superstition.

Elphin's heart yearned for Sam, and his nerves throbbed for Sam. His feverish pillow, left over there alone in the darkness now, as he sat at this huge window, could have told a pretty tale of nightly desperations, as the lad tossed and turned and quivered in his perverted passion, while week followed week, and there seemed no satisfaction for him in sight. And so his fury turned upon Sam's religion, and this the boy mixed up, wildly and blindly, in his crazy unfairness, with the existence of all the feminine persons that Sam was in the habit of meeting these days, but especially with Mrs. Zoyland. "May the curse be on her!" cried Elphin now to the flying clouds. "May the curse be on her!" he cried to the tossing wall-flower, to the bending larch, to the rippled streamlet, and to all the wet, hollow, dark spaces, like the wind-swept corridors of a madhouse, that extended between Chalice Hill and Tor Hill, and between Tor Hill and Wirral Hill. "May the curse be on her, and may she be sorry to death that she ever met him!"

This malediction was a much more singular and significant one than poor Nell would have understood. It was in reality — if the full secret purport of Elphin's thoughts had been revealed — directed quite as much against the Grail as against Nell. For the curious thing was that when presently he began again — whispering the words aloud with intense solemnity — to curse the woman whom his hero was so constantly visiting in the hospital, he extended his curse, as his outstretched fingers fumbled at the chilly stucco wall beneath his tower window, to that consecrated Cup in the hands of his friend's father from which Sam was always receiving the Sacrament. His boy's thoughts were all confused, and not having been yet confirmed by the Bishop of Wells he had only the vaguest notion of the meaning of the Mass. The Cup containing the Wine at those "early services," which, like a faithful dog watching his master, he was wont to gaze upon from the back of St. Patrick's Chapel, was the same to him as this mystic Grail, lost or buried in Chalice Hill, of which he heard his parents talk. Elphin's love for Sam was too passionate to be vicious, but it was also far too intense to be innocent, and with a lover's clairvoyant instinct he was fully aware that Sam's worship of Christ absorbed many feelings in the man which if released would turn to human love. What

Elphin did not realise was that it was this very love of Christ coming between Sam and his mistress that had given him his place, such as it was, in Sam's life. Had this accursed Grail, or this sacramental Cup that the boy confused with the Grail, become nothing to Sam it would certainly not have been to the love of Elphin Cantle that he would have turned! Thus, as so often happens in the coil of human drama, the very power against which, in his blind passion, the unhappy lad was now pouring out his imprecations, was the one thing that kept him in his idol's life! Sam's pity for this lonely child was part of the grand *tour de force* of his life of a saint. To be interested in boys at all was totally against the grain with him.

While Elphin was at the tower window of the Old Tavern, Nancy, having slipped from the unconscious arms of the heavily breathing Harry Stickles, was at her attic window looking on the back gardens of High Street. This west wind, blowing from the Bristol Channel, blowing from the hills of Pembrokeshire, blowing from that Isle of Gresholm off the western shores, where round the Head of Bran the Blessed fluttered that song of the Birds of Rhiannon which brought death to the living and life to the dead, this west wind was more than an ordinary wind that night to Nancy Stickles. It was her sense of this west wind that had drawn her out of her bed. The feeling of it had reached her in her dreams before she awoke. Sitting on her hard bedroom chair at the window which she had managed to open wide without disturbing Harry, she now gave herself up to the power and the rush of it as it swept past her house. In the other houses everyone was asleep. Not a sound reached her from the street in front. There she was, exposed to the far-stretching sky with its whistling cloud-leaves, to the wide, wet hollows of darkness that covered the earth, and above all to that rushing wind! About a quarter of a mile separated her from Elphin at *his* open window. The boy had put on his overcoat which had been covering him in his bed.

The girl wore her rough, thick dressing-gown and also a black woollen shawl. Neither of them had the remotest notion of the presence of the other, although the identity of each, the son of Mr. Cantle of the Old Tavern, and the wife of Mr. Stickles, the chemist, was well-known to each. It was a palpable example of the way in which the desperate wishes of living creatures flung out at random upon the air counter and cancel each other's magnetic force! The boy cursed the religion of Glastonbury and the girl blessed it. Yes, she blessed it, as she gave herself to this wild wind that had been calling to her through her dreams for the last five hours.

Oh, how delicious it was to give herself up to it … to feel it take her completely, as she crouched there, with her strong, firm working-girl's fingers clasped together on the window-sill! "I wish," thought Nancy, "that it was the wind and not men who took girls!" And she fell into a fantastic reverie in which she told herself a story about a bride who gave herself rapturously to an enamoured wind-spirit. "Oh, I am so glad I am alive!" thought Nancy, and the brave, optimistic girl, as she let the wind seek out her responsive breasts under her black shawl, began adding up in her mind all the good aspects of her life. She was always doing this. She found it an excellent antidote to all that she suffered from in her husband — that plump, placid baby with eyes of insane avarice — and it always came back to the same thing, to the one grand privilege she had, that of having been born in Glastonbury! Her employment at Miss Crow's, where she was now aided by another distant relative of Tossie's, a certain Daisy Stickles, was a constant delight to her. The walk alone, through the heart of the town and past St. Benignus' churchyard, was a solid pleasure; and there were times, especially after her work was done and she was returning in the evening, that she could have started skipping down the narrow Benedict Street pavement. She could even have snatched up a certain ragged little boy she was always meeting down there and hugged him to her heart and danced him up and down and made him cry with surprise and offended dignity, and all from a delight in life that, as it poured through her sometimes, seemed to know no bounds. Certain ways of her husband's — certain mean little physical peculiarities, and Nancy was not by nature at all fastidious — made her feel sometimes as if she could not go on living with him. But she had devised all manner of devices to deal with these nasty ways and she never felt hopelessly caught, because she was always telling herself stories of running away from him.

Harry Stickles certainly did possess quite a number of peculiarities which would have been nerve-racking to any less well-constituted girl. These nasty little ways were made worse by the man's preposterous and incredible conceit. But Nancy had been given by Nature one supreme gift — wherein only one other person in Glastonbury rivalled her, and that was John Crow — the gift of forgetting. Harry could do something at one minute that offended her to the quick, something that so scraped, jarred, and raked her nerves that she could have rushed to the window and flung into the road one of those big coloured receptacles, red and green, that mark a chemist's shop; and yet, three minutes later, as she sat sewing in her parlour window, what she called her "fancies" would begin as deliciously as ever! Nancy's fancies were simply her sudden recollection of certain moments of intense realisation of life as they had occurred several years ago. They were nothing more than the look of a particular wall, of a particular tract of hedge, of a particular piece of road, of a certain hay-wagon on a certain hillside, of a particular pond with ducks swimming on it and a red cow stepping very slowly through the mud, of a load of seaweed being pulled up from the beach by struggling horses, of the stone bridge crossing the Yeo at Ilchester, of a little toll-pike at Lodmore that seemed to be made up, as she had seen it from the top of a bus beyond Weymouth once, of nothing but whitewashed stones and tarred planks and tall brackish grasses and clouds of white dust. Nancy could never tell which of her fancies would rise up next like a fish, making a circle of delicious ripples round it, from the depths of her mind, nor did she know whether these mental pictures stored up in her brain were limited in number, and whether, at a certain point, they would begin recurring all over again, or whether they were inexhaustible and need never repeat themselves.

But while Nancy and Elphin kept their vigil, what dreams there were in Glastonbury! Dreams without any beginning, as they were without any end. For who ever *began* a dream? People always find themselves immersed *in the middle* of some dream or other. The essence of sleep does not lie in dreaming; it lies in a certain dying to the surface life and sinking down into the life under the surface, where the *other life* — healing and refreshing — exists like an immortal tide of fresh water flowing beneath the salt water of a turbid sea. It is sufficient to remember the lovely and mysterious feeling of falling asleep compared with the crude, raw, iron spikes of the unpleasant things that happen in dreams to realise the difference. Between the process of going to sleep and the process of dreaming exists a great gulf. They seem to belong to different categories of being. But, however this may be, the fact remains that upon certain nights in the year — when the tide at Burnham begins to rise with a weird persistence — the sleep of Glastonbury is a troubled one. The sturdy northeastern invaders — the ancestors of Philip and John — beat back more than Mr. Evans' people when they swept the Celts into South Wales. They beat back with them their thaumaturgic demigods, the Living Corpse, for instance, of Uther Pendragon, the mysterious Urien, King of yr Echwyd, the Land of Glamour and Illusion, the Land whose vapours are always livid blue, that mystic colour named by the bards *gorlassar*, and Arawn, King of Annwn, they beat back, together with those weird protectors of the heathen Grail, the Fisher King Petchere and the Maimed King Pelles. All these Beings, so many of whom seem to recede and vanish away even as they are named among us, like creatures of a blundered incantation, had the ancestors of Philip and John and the ancestors of Dave driven back westward. And along with Mr. Evans' people, and their dark chthonian gods, these healthy-minded invaders had driven back the very *dreams* of these Cymric and Brythonic tribes.

For today it was Mr. Evans and Mrs. Geard and Blackie Morgan, together with that impoverished and mutinous population in the slums, whose holocaust Philip had seen that night in the "artistic" pictures of his red coals, who were the true aboriginals, and the larger part of *their* blood, like that of the old Lake Village dwellers, was both pre-Celtic and prehistoric. So that on this night of all nights, this night of the tenth of December, a date that always, every year — only none but the witch-wives of Bove Town and Paradise knew about this — was a significant date for Glastonbury, what really came back upon this terrific wind, blowing up out of the western sea and the western isles, were the *dreams* of the conquered, those disordered, extravagant lawbreaking dreams, out of which the Shrines of Glastonbury had originally been built. Nancy Stickles was perfectly right when she whispered to the darkness, as her white breasts expanded under her black shawl in response to that wind, "What a thing sleep is — to be in the world!"

It was only upon those happy heads that did not dream, however, that the true mystery of sleep, carrying those carefree foreheads deep down under the sacred waters of yr Echwyd, really descended. Such was the privilege, that night, of both Lady Rachel and Miss Elizabeth Crow. Such was the privilege of Mr. Wollop and of Bert Cole. Such was the privilege of Young

Tewsy, of Tittie Petherton and Tilly Crow, of Penny Pitches and of old Abel Twig. Among the others the eternal contest went on, as it had gone on for at least five thousand years, between the friends of the Grail — that fragment of Beyond-Time fallen through a crack in the world-ceiling upon the Time-Floor — and its deadly enemies.

The Grail had come to be the magnet-gatherer of all the religions that had ever come near Glastonbury. A piece of the Absolute, it attracted these various cults to itself with an indifference as to their divergency from one another that was almost cruel. Thus the instinct in Philip and John that drove their souls forth tonight to go Grail-killing was as blind and overpowering as that which drove Pellenore to pursue his Questing Beast.

Neither Nancy nor Elphin, these watchers at windows, at the back of High Street and Cattle Market, were aware of this great *mêlée* of warring dreams, tossing and heaving, with the gonfalon of the Grail on one side, and on the other the oriflamme of Reason. Whirled about in that rushing wind, which kept eddying and ricocheting among the three Glastonbury hills, drifted those opposed dream-hosts. Every dreamer under those diverse roofs — from the slate-tiled Elms where Philip lay in his stuffy room to the draughty stable loft at St. Michael’s where Solly Lew slept his tipsy sleep — was forced, that tenth of December, to mingle his own private dream with this great nocturnal tourney.

John Crow dreamed that they found the Grail on Chalice Hill, found it in the earth about six feet north of the Well; but when it was found all the people present turned into a flock of starlings and flew away, leaving only himself and that philosophic wood louse he had imagined encountering the human louse of the woman with cancer. And he himself was now seized with a frantic necessity to make water and yet he knew that if he made water on the earth that wood louse would be drowned. So John Crow made water into the Holy Grail. When he had finished this blasphemous sacrilege he observed that the wood louse had crawled to the rim of the Vessel. “What are you going to do?” John cried in terror. “Drown myself,” replied the louse.

But if that wild wind out of the west disturbed the dreams of men it did not prove less disturbing to the dreams of women. Persephone dreamed that green leaves were growing out of her feet and out of her shoulders and that she was standing stark naked in the centre of a group of silver-barked birch trees who were all, like herself, slim, naked girls with green leaves growing out of their heads and green leaves growing out of their feet. Near this group, where Persephone was standing, there grew that nameless tree from the top of Wirral Hill which Mary had called by one name, Mr. Evans by another, and Mad Bet by another. And Persephone suddenly saw all the girls turn towards this tree and lifting up their hands begin chanting something to it. What they chanted was pure gibberish, but Persephone, when she awoke, remembered this gibberish which was as follows:

“Dominus-Glominus, sow your seed!
Sow your seed, sow your seed!
Glominus-Dominus, rain and dew!
Rain and dew, rain and dew!
We your servants will make your bed!
Make your bed, make your bed!
Some at the foot, and some at the head,
But which of us lies beside you?”

This gibberish was doubtless recalled from some ancient childish jingle, repeated in one of those immemorial games that little girls love to play together, during which they take one another’s hands and advance and retreat in dancing movements that are as mysterious to any casual onlooker as the fantastic words that accompany them. But though recalled to the mind of Persephone from some half-forgotten game of her childhood, there doubtless were words added to it in her dream that could hardly have been present in the original version, and which were certainly more suitable to the nature of this wild night of brackish-smelling Wessex wind than to any harmless ring-of-roses dance upon a Norfolk lawn. The curious thing was that in Persephone's own mind, as she dreamed this dream, there occurred one of those confused metamorphoses which so often make dreams so bewildering and misleading — the confusion, namely, of this ambiguous tree with a Cross.

The Mayor of Glastonbury's dreams on that tenth of December were full for instance of a nightmarish mingling of his daughter Crummie with Merlin's fatal Nineue, and both Nineue and Crummie with Lady Rachel Zoyland.

Nor were the dreams of the Vicar of Glastonbury less disturbing. Mat Dekker dreamed that he was visiting Nell Zoyland at the hospital, where he had, as a matter of fact, visited her already three times, and that he was giving her the Blessed Sacrament, a thing he had often longed to do, but had never dared to suggest doing. He was on the point of raising the Cup to her lips when it grew so heavy in his hands that he could scarcely lift it. The Cup, in fact, transformed itself into Mother Legge's silver bowl — or rather Kitty Camel's silver bowl — with which of course Mat Dekker had been familiar before it passed into its present owner's possession. Whiter and whiter grew this sacramental Cup as the priest struggled with it in his dream. "I must hold it tight," he thought, "I must press it against me." And then there happened a metamorphosis similar to the one that had occurred in Percy's dream, only in the reverse order; for while, with Percy, the tree turned into the Cross, with Mat Dekker the Grail turned into Nell Zoyland.

So deep had been the wrestling of this man's majestic character with his passion for this girl, that until tonight, even in his dreams, he had resisted temptation. But tonight there happened to him one of those occasions when great creative Nature manages to outwit the strongest self-control. Nature achieved her end by lodging in Mat Dekker's mind the feeling that at all costs he must hold this white bowl firm and tight against him, so that it should not spill a drop of Christ's blood. But as he held it in his dream, and as it became the body of the girl he so terribly desired, Nature managed to so numb, drug, dull, confuse, cloud, hypnotise, paralyse and otherwise "metagrabolise" Mat Dekker's implacable conscience, that it allowed him to give way with good heart to a spasm of such exquisite love-making that it was, to the poor ascetic priest, like the opening of the gates of heaven!

Little did Elphin Cantle know, as he clutched his father's old stable coat — now his own bed-cover — tighter and tighter round him at his turret window, that the psychic current of his wrath against the Glastonbury superstition was aided by the austere dream-gesture of Dave Spear from another quarter of the Old Tavern. Dave's thoughts before he had gone to sleep that night had been calm and peaceful. He had dined with his wife at Dickery Cantle's old-fashioned ordinary in the tavern parlour, and Percy had listened so sweetly to his stories about their Bristol comrades that he had been tempted to reveal to her the great scheme he had now on foot. Where communism was concerned, however, Dave was a man of iron; and in spite of the fact that their whole plan was originally her own inspiration, he had thought it wiser — as it certainly was! — to hold his tongue over all that. But to all that he *did* allow to pass, in that expressive Homeric phrase, "the barrier of his teeth," Percy had listened with much more than her usual attention. Something in the rising wind had roused her feelings to a pitch of impersonal tenderness, and her husband happened, by good luck, to be the beneficiary of this soft mood. But once asleep Dave's mind reverted at once to his great conspiracy, and the crying of the wind in his chimney and the flapping of the blind in his window worked into his dreams and made them as disturbed as Percy's own, but to a different issue. For the walls of a real commune rose up in Dave's dream as that wild wind, blowing out of Wales, made the historic house about him creak and groan through all its ancient beams and rafters. Thus had it groaned when the emissaries of Henry hunted out of its seclusion the last faithful servants of the Abbey. Thus had it groaned when the spies of James dragged forth the unhappy preachers who had supported Monmouth. The whole conflicting tenor of Dave Spear's life-struggle with himself would have been revealed had his dream been written down. "For the sake of the future," he kept muttering, when, as dictator of his commune, he gave orders for the Abbey Ruins to be destroyed and the Mayor's new buildings to be levelled with the ground. Clean and fresh rose, in his dream, the new Ynis-Witrin, founded, this time, not on the tricks of kings and priests, but on the equal labours and rewards of workingmen. "For the sake of the future!" he cried in his sleep as he watched the destruction of shrine after shrine.

But if Dave's dreams that night were drastic, the *conduct* of his fellow-conspirator, Red Robinson, who was awake and drinking and making love, in complete imperviousness to this mystical procession of bodiless shapes, was neither very drastic nor very brave. Red had persuaded Sally Jones to sit up with him after closing hours in the back parlour of St. Michael's Inn. This was a proceeding that would have got the good-natured landlord into trouble had it been discovered, but Red had grown so tired of his miserably hurried interviews with the girl, in her mother's home and *his* mother's home, after her day's work at the Geards', that he had broken away from his usual caution. Sally, who had a latch-key of her own, would just have to tell her mother that Miss Cordelia had kept her late that day to help with the preparations for her wedding. They had decided that it was best that Sally when she left St. Michael's near midnight, should walk home alone and should even make a short detour so as to approach her home from the direction of the Geards. "Neighbours be such ones for noticing things," she had said, "and 'tis no good to start a lot of talk when there be no cause for talk." To this sentiment Mr. Robinson had given a cordial assent. He found himself, as a matter of fact, extremely comfortable in the little, seldom-used inn-parlour with half a bottle of gin unfinished on the table and a good fire in the grate. The old lady of the house — Mad Bet's aunt — had been friendly to the Robinsons ever since, owing to Mrs. Robinson's employment in the Palace at Wells, they had first settled in Glastonbury. This friendliness — such is the importance of small matters in small towns — was due to the fact that Mad Bet's aunt had a sister who had married a man "down Richmond way." The man was long dead and so was the sister, but the accent of the Robinsons pleased the landlady. "The way you folks talks," she said, "do mind me of sister's husband."

It would never have done for Red to bring Blackie to this inn, because they knew his mother. Crummie, of course, too, could never have come. But he now began to enjoy the full benefit of having found a girl at once so respectable and so simple-minded as Sally Jones. When Sally was going and they stood talking in the hallway, the landlady pointed upstairs and spoke in a whispering voice. "Er been a sore trial today, 'er been! John had to lock she up in back room. 'Er were so noisy, you understand, in front. 'Er be asleep now, John thinks, and 'a holds 'tis best to let she bide where 'a be. She don't, as general rule, settle down to sleep in back room. Back room ain't what you might call the room anyone would *choose* to sleep in, but Bet ain't as pertikkler as some folks be, owing to her *being as she is*."

Destiny or chance, whichever it was, now decreed that Red Robinson, having supped full of the sweets of love, was to be deprived of the pleasant half hour of luxurious rumination which he had planned for himself. The old landlord went himself "a step of the way" down Chilkwell Street with Sally. "The wind can't hurt a pretty girl," he said, "but it can ruffle and rumple her worse nor *we* would ever be allowed for to do."

There was a stir and a confusion now in the little passage that led from the back of the bar-room to the old cobbled yard. Solly Lew suddenly appeared in sight from these back premises dragging after him into the lamplight an extraordinary figure. "Missus! Missus!" the stableman was crying. "You … must … pardon … me … if—" Mr. Lew was quite out of breath. He was panting "like a hound in summer" as he struggled to hold back the person who emerged with him now. "I've a told Finn Toller that 'a be too boozed to speak to any Christian man, least of all to any friend of the family, but 'a says 'a must speak in private to Mr. Robinson."

"In … private … so I said," repeated the drunken derelict, staggering to an erect position but keeping his hand on Solly Lew's shoulder. "In … private it must be, lookee! And old Finn do know what's in's mind to say to 'un, though 'a *have* had a tidy drop in out-house … but old Finn do know … old Finn do know!"

The lamplight by which the landlady of St. Michael's now watched with an indignant eye this invasion of her premises hung over the back door of the inn. It swayed to and fro in the wind, and through the open door, behind the two lurching men, Red Robinson could catch a glimpse of faintly gleaming cobblestones and dimly illuminated woodpiles and empty beer-bottles. A large rain-filled water-butt showed too in that gusty door frame, while along with the howling wind there came a strong odour of rank straw and sour human urine.

"Yer ain't fit to talk to the Missus nor to her friends!" reiterated Solly. "Yer ain't fit for naught but workus, and to workus ye'll come, yer old rum-drinker, yer old deck-swabbler!"

"Stand straight and answer me at once, Finn Toller," exclaimed the angry landlady. "What were you doing in our yard? Come, come, now. No nonsense! I say, what were you doing there, Finn Toller? Speak up! Can't you understand plain English?"

"I dunno what to say to 'ee, Missus," muttered the helpless ruffian, "but I do know well in me mind that 'tis Mr. Robinson here what I've 'a come for to see … for … to see … for … to …" At this point, so potent was the Bristol rum to which Solly Lew had been rashly treating this fish from the bottom of the Glastonbury Pond, that, disregarding the landlady's indignation the wretch actually began murmuring a lewd catch that had been formerly popular in Bove Town and Beckery.

" 'I've a whisper for you, in your mare's-tail-ear';
Pillicock crowed to Kate,
'I've a whisper for you, me Coney dear,
Your man be away over Hornblotton Mere
And I be at your gate.' "

Mr. Finn Toller in his natural condition was no engaging sight. In his present state he was a revolting object. He was a sandy-haired individual with a loose, straggly, pale-coloured beard. He gave the impression of being completely devoid of both eyebrows and eyelashes, so bleached and whitish in his case were these normal appendages to the human countenance. His mouth was always open and always slobbering, but although his whole expression was furtive and dodging, his teeth were large and strong and wolfish. Mr. Toller looked, in fact, like a man weak to the verge of imbecility who had been ironically endowed with the teeth of a strong beast of prey.

Red Robinson did not at all relish the look of things as this repulsive hang-dog creature shuffled now towards him and fixed upon him a look of revolting confederacy, a look that seemed to say: “Here I am, Mr. Robinson! You’ve called me up and here I am!” The truth was that at the end of one of his most eloquent revolutionary speeches to the Glastonbury Comrades, Mr. Toller had sneaked up to Red and compelled him to write his name down, in the book they kept, as available for any activities required—“and the dirtier the better!” Mr. Toller had added, as he slobbered over the table. Red had got into trouble with the other Comrades for allowing the man to write his name down in their book. They told him that it was enough for him if the filthiest beggar swore he would spit in the road when Mr. Crow passed by! “That’s enough to haul him into the party, eh?” they said. Nor was their sarcasm unjustified. Red took no interest at all in keeping up the quality or integrity of the Comrades. What he was after, as Finn Toller with his wolfish instinct had very quickly detected, were recruits, not to Marxianism, but to ‘ate.

“My husband will be back in a minute,” said the landlady sternly, “and you remember how he got rid of you the other night when you were hanging about so late!”

“What I’ve got … to say, Missus, be for Mr. Robinson’s ear alone. Please allow me, Missus, for all that us poor folks have got left” — he stopped and threw a very sinister leer at Red— “be what be put in our minds by they as be book-larned and glib of tongue, like this clever Mister here, who is foreman of his Worship’s. Us poor dogs hasn’t got anything left in the world, us hasn’t, except they nice, little thoughties, they pretty thoughties, what clever ones, like Mister here, do put into we.” It was clear that the threat of the landlord’s return had sobered “Codfin,” as his neighbours called him, quite a good deal. He seemed able to walk by himself now, for he shook away Solly Lew’s supporting arm. His pale, lidless, blue eyes began peering about, like the eyes of a maggot dislodged from its native habitation and seeking a refuge. “If Mr. Robinson will come in here with me,” he said now, moving towards the pleasant parlour where Red and Sally had been enjoying themselves, “I won’t make no trouble for no one; but if Mister here, what be so clever and so book-larned, won’t let I speak to he, I’ll raise such a trouble that you’ll have to call for the police.”

“What impudence is this?” cried the landlady. “You wait till my husband comes back. He’ll show you whether he has to call for the police to give you the—” But to the good woman’s complete amazement Red himself intervened at this point.

“High’d better ‘ear what ‘ee ‘as to sigh,” he said. “Tis no good disturbing the plice when ‘ee says ‘ee’ll go quiet as a lamb of ’is own self, if I tike ’im in there for a jiffy. That’s so, ain’t it, Codfin?”

Mr. Toller, apparently completely sobered now, bowed to the landlady, made a grimace at Solly Lew, and followed his “clever one” into the parlour where Red shut the door. It would be difficult to explain the subtle cause of Mr. Robinson’s submission to this demand of Mr. Toller to speak with him, but undoubtedly, mingled with other things, there had sprung up, the very second these two men met, that curious psychic *fear*, of which mention has already been made in regard to Lord P.’s attitude to his bastard. Glastonbury was, if the real truth were revealed, just as every small town is, crowded with queer, morbid and even humorous instances of this irrational terror of one personality for another. These fear-links can be grotesquely joined up in a spiritual mathematical and nervous pattern of psychic subordination.

Philip Crow himself had been afraid — in this particular way — of Tom Barter. Indeed these mysterious fear-links brought together — in an ascending and descending scale of fear — the great Lord P. and the gentleman called Codfin. For Lord P. was afraid of Zoyland. Zoyland was afraid of Philip. Philip — though this latter did not know it — was afraid of Barter. Barter was afraid of Red. While Red — and here we reach the convoluted secret as to why he was at this very moment so carefully closing the parlour door — was afraid of Mr. Toller.

They were an interesting and curious pair as they stood facing each other now by that parlour fireplace. Red was determined not to offer Codfin a drink or to ask him to sit down. Mr. Toller's watery blue eyes, blotched, freckly face and tow-coloured beard kept turning, with a sort of feeble insistence, like that of a great, dazed, malignant cockchafer, towards the half-empty bottle.

"What is it?" said Red. "What do you want? Tell me quickly, for he'll be back in a minute. He's only taking Miss Jones a bit of the way home." There was no earthly reason why Red should have informed Codfin that the landlord of St. Michael's was taking Miss Jones anywhere! This excessive, hurried, eager confidence, expressed in a cross and peevish tone, was a beautiful example of psychic link-fear, working in accordance with its nature.

After shutting the door Red walked to the fireplace, leaving Finn Toller standing in the middle of the room. Red glanced at the man hurriedly and then, quite as hurriedly, turned his face away. From the straggly beard, the watery eyes, the ragged clothes, there emanated something that Red found extremely perturbing. It was one of those moments when the pre-birth stirrings of a ghastly idea are huddled and swaddled in an ominous silence. Certain thoughts, that have been long nurtured in deep half-conscious brooding, manifest themselves, when they finally emerge into the light, with a horrid tangibility that is like the impact of something physically shocking. And into this warm, firelit room, full of the aura of a young feminine body that has been so assiduously courted and caressed that its sweet essence pervades the air, there now projected itself a presence that was monstrous, revolting, intolerable.

From each particular hair of Mr. Toller's beard this presence emanated. From the adam's apple in his bare, dirty neck, from the blood-stained rims of his watery eyes, from the yellowish fluff, growing like fungus on cheese from the back of his hands, from a certain beyond-the-pale look of his naked, shirtless wrist-bones, this presence grew and grew and grew in that closed room. It sprang from Toller; but it was distinct from Toller. It seemed to find in the fragrance of the courted body of Sally Jones an air favourable to its monstrous expansion.

Red could not reasonably, normally, have divined the nature of this horrid thought, of this newly born abortion from the broodings of Mr. Toller's brain. There must have been within him some protoplasmic response to it, created by the germinating poisons of his 'ate, of which he himself was unconscious. Violence must have called to violence, like deep calling to deep, between what was unconscious in the one and conscious in the other. Once more he glanced furtively, quickly, at the man standing by the table, and this time their eyes met.

" 'Twas your cleverness what put it first into me head." Had Mr. Toller uttered those words or had he *thought* those words himself? Red felt a peculiar and ghastly unreality stealing over him. The gin-bottle looked unreal. The carpet looked unreal. The low wicker-chair with its flowered cushions where he had so recently held Sally on his lap looked most unreal of all. “What’s that you’re sighing?” His own words seemed unreal now as soon as they left his mouth.

“A bloated capitalist, like ’im, what do hexploit us poor dawgs, ought to lickidated.” It was Mr. Toller undoubtedly who was saying *that;* and Red recognized his own oratorical expression, “liquidated,” the meaning of which, for the word had reached him from Bristol, had always puzzled him — though this had not prevented him from using it in his orations.

“A hairy-stow-crat like *he* be oughter be lickidated!” repeated Mr. Toller; and Red’s discomfort was augmented by the manner in which the man’s mouth dribbled as the words left his throat.

“You’re drunk … that’s what you are … too drunk to know your own nime … and if I weren’t hunwillin’ to disturb this quiet ‘ouse—”

“Lickidated be to tap on’s bloody head, I tell ‘ee … tap on’s head, till’s bloody brains be out!”

It was not the words alone, it was a certain galvanic twitch that accompanied them in Mr. Toller’s *hands*, that made Red begin now to feel sick in the pit of his stomach. He suddenly found himself becoming fascinated by Mr. Toller’s hands. As he looked at these hands he noticed that they were not only short and stubby hands, but — and this was quite unlike most stubby hands — they were hands that tapered at the fingertips and could bend backwards. How patient, harmless, reassuring, most human hands are! But Red realised now that Mr. Toller’s hands were much more disturbing than any expression in the features of his face.

In all minds there are abominable thoughts. We are all potential murderers. But something — some feeling, some motion of the will, some scruple, some principle — intervenes, and we cannot act what we think! But there was a look about Mr. Toller’s hands that seemed like the cry of murder in the night, like the underside of bridges, like shrubberies in public parks, like tin-roofed sheds near madhouses, like gasworks beside foul canals, something that *unravelled the skein*, that broke up the fundamental necessity and substituted a monstrous terrifying chaos … deep, black holes … dangling ropes … the desperate dilemma of the indestructible corpse … the horror of the secret held by one alone ….

Red now began to see those hands of Codfin at the throat of life, at the throat of that life which meant the sweet body of Sally Jones, the carved bishop's chair in his mother's kitchen, the liver-and-bacon in his mother's frying-pan not to speak of his nice, new foreman's clothes! It was part of life that there should be persons like Codfin going harmlessly about … persons that a workingman foreman could pass by, but that the gentry — like that John Crow who had the office in the station yard — were bound in honour to treat to drinks. And those hands were now to be raised against life … the life of a living man! Those hands were tools of "liquidation." No more liver-and-bacon, no more bottles of gin, no more girls on laps, when those hands were lifted up. Unreal! That's what this moment was, and unreal in the way that makes a person feel sick. That straggly beard and slobbering mouth were talking of "lickidation"; but they were thinking of *murder.* The blood began to leave Red's cheeks. Poor people might be hungry, sick people might be sick, weak people might have to carry burdens — but they were all *alive!* And even death, when it came in the natural course of things, had a secret inevitable comfortableness about it! You could talk of such death with a girl on your lap. But *murder* — that was a different thing …

"I couldn't do it with a knife, Mister." The words sank down into the fireplace at which Red was now staring. Red allowed them to sink, like eight black marbles thrown by a wicked child into a particularly red hole.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Toller," he whispered in a low voice.

But the other went on: "Nor with a bullet, Mister, for I be feared o' they little pop-guns." Sharply, after the other eight marbles, went these thirteen simple words, all of them into the same red hole. "One of they iron bars 'ud do to do't with, what his workmen do leave about, up alongside o' Wookey." As he spoke, the man made a feeble and fluctuating movement of his whole person towards the table, on which stood the half-empty bottle of gin, a decanter of water, and a plate of gingerbreads.

Red, as his eyes followed him, remembered with miserable vividness how Sally and he had played a merry London board-school game with those gingerbreads, having a racing match together to see how many they could swallow while the little minute hand of his watch went round the circle.

"Toller!" he rapped out. "What, in 'oly 'ell, are you talking about?"

The individual known as Codfin patted the stopper of the bottle with the palm of one of his hands. Then he threw a long, silent, sidelong glance at Red out of his lidless and lachrymose blue eyes. He said slowly: "Don't 'ee go and get crusty wi' I, Mister. I baint a clever one like you be, but I can look up wondrous long words in dick-shone-ary, I can. They do know I well in public library. A person don't have to write no slip o' paper for to take dick-shone-ary down from shelf!"

"Toller!" snapped Red again. "What in 'old 'arry's name are yer mumbling about?"

"Tirry-aniseed be the word you spoke up, so free and strong, when you made thik girt speech about lickidation, Mister. And 'twere wondrous to I, when I did see thik same girt word writ down in dick-shone-ary! Tirry-aniseed were thik long word, and it do mean a sweet and savoury killing of he that lives on poor men's sweat."

"Toller!" gasped Red in horrified alarm. "You stove that, strite and now! You stove it, I say! Shut yer bleedin' mouth and go to 'ell with your hidiocies! People in speeches may curse these bleedin' capitalists, but people what tike to iron bars are *murderers,* that's what they are, pline, downright *murderers*; and people who even 'ear such things be complexes of murderers; and I tell yer, Toller, I won't so much as 'ear one word more o' this from yer bleedin' mouth. I'll call the Missus strite now, and see what *she* says to your blitherin' hidiocies! Yes, I will. I'll call her strite now!" He moved, as he spoke, towards the door, but instead of displaying the least alarm at his threat, Mr. Toller, with ghastly *sangfroid,* began deliberately to pull the cork from the bottle and pour himself out a glass of raw gin.

Red's hand was actually on the handle of the door when he turned round and contemplated this outrageous spectacle. His face worked convulsively, as he stood there; the mixture of fear and fury in his heart almost choking him.

"Put — that stuff — down!" he spluttered; but instead of opening the door he found himself holding it tight shut with a sort of guilty violence. In a flash he beheld himself in the dock at Taunton, accused of plotting Philip Crow's murder at the hands of this slobbering devil. But Finn Toller coolly and quietly replaced the cork in the bottle.

"Thik iron bar be the best thing, then," he repeated. "I thought a man like you be, Mister, would say nothing less! I couldn't do it wi' a knife, nor yet wi' a bullet. One o' they girt iron bars be the very thing for anyone what feels on his mind, as thee and me does, the sweet savour of tirry-aniseed!"

Red glanced past that pock-marked, freckled face, wherein the weak blue eyes were suffused with a watery rheum, and stared miserably at the gingerbread on the table. How foolish people were, he thought, not to enjoy, with a gratitude to fate beyond expression, every minute of respectable, innocent happiness that was not in danger of the jail or the rope!

His moment of supreme misery was brought to an end by the heavenly sound of the front door opening and the voice of the landlord of St. Michael's Inn, raised in genial badinage. Never was a tiresome old gentleman's voice more welcome.

As Red opened the door, so vivid had been his plunge into crime, condemnation, convict's clothes, picking oakum, warders, jailers, chaplains, executioners, black-caps, drops, and burning lime, that he vowed that never again in his whole life would he introduce into a speech the word "tyrannicide." As Finn Toller sneaked off now, under cover of the lively eulogies of "Miss Jones" that poured from the lips of the blustering old man, Red felt that never again, either, would he boast of heroic bloodshed to his admiring Sally. He had got such a glimpse into the *monstrous*, as he watched the adam's apple in Mr. Toller's throat jerk up and down while he drank that gin, that he thought, as he submitted to the old gentleman's jokes, "Better listen to such old-time stuff to the end of me dyes, rather than 'ave the 'orrible tighst in me mouth what I 'ad just then!"

"Well, if ye baint ashamed of yourself, ye ought to be!" pronounced Solly Lew emphatically as he dismissed his late protégé through the back of the old stables and new garage.

"Us haven't done no harm to they, nor they done no harm to we," protested Toller in a wheedling voice. "That were wondrous fine rum you gived I, Mr. Lew, and if the Lord wills I'll pay the good deed back to 'ee, come Christmas. Good night, Mr. Lew, — don't 'ee trouble to come no further. 'Tis a wild night for wind, looks so, but no token o' rain! I never likes these windy nights, Mr. Lew. They disturbs a person's mind. Yes, I knows me way, thank 'ee kindly, god-den to 'ee."

But when Solly Lew had gone back into the house, Mr. Toller made no hurried departure from the scene. He had long been practising in Glastonbury certain patient, quiet, humble little methods of burglary; of burglary so unassuming, so unpretentious, so easily satisfied, that he had only once been caught at it, and since it was Bloody Johnny who caught him, eating uncooked sausages in his larder one November night, Codfin escaped even on that occasion with an eccentric reprimand.

He now set himself to survey the back premises of St. Michael's Inn. He had long been anxious to find out exactly how the land lay in this establishment, and tonight he felt in very good spirits, having found out all he wanted, and at the same time, by a stroke of what in his own mind he regarded as pure personal superiority, reduced the Mayor's foreman — and how he had done it he himself hardly knew! — to a position of nervous subordination.

He now planted himself under the protection of a big plum-tree that grew against the old stable roof and proceeded with uplifted beard to contemplate pensively the rear of the house. It must not be supposed that all the excited outpourings of human feeling that were whirling off on that west wind from so many dreaming heads — not to mention the two watchers at the open windows — were without their effect upon the nervous organisation of the watery-eyed Mr. Toller. Had Solly Lew, or any other boon-companion, enquired of him how he felt just then, Codfin would have doubtless replied — "I never have liked these here windy nights. These here nights be turble hummy and drummy to me pore head."

As his weak eyes slowly swept over the ramshackle roofs and walls and chimneys before him, Toller's figure suddenly stiffened, like a nocturnal animal conscious of danger. He became aware that one of the back windows of the main structure of the house was wide open and that a human face was intently scrutinising him; and not only scrutinising him, but making signals to attract his attention.

Now Mr. Toller, who had no scruple about using iron bars and who had not the slightest fear of Mr. Sheperd, the old Glastonbury policeman, had from his childhood been awed into humble respect by the personality of Mad Bet. He recognised now that there was nothing for it but that he must do this creature’s bidding. He recognised, in fact, with the same instinctive knowledge which Red had shown in his own case, that when in the presence of Mad Bet he was in the presence of a nature born to dominate him.

The woman was beckoning to him to climb up upon the stable-roof and come to her window; an exploit which, for a person with any agility at all, was not a very difficult task. Mr. Toller accordingly made an obeisance with his head and a sort of salaam with his hands, such as Sinbad the Sailor might have made in the presence of some Grandmother of the Djinn, and set himself to climb. The wind was his chief trouble in this ascent; for the plum tree afforded him a ladder at the beginning; and once on the roof, as far as the actual climbing went, all was easy. But the wind made it difficult for the man to keep his balance; made it very difficult for him to advance. He crawled forward upon his knees as best he could; but many times he was forced to lie prone on his stomach and remain absolutely still while the wind-gusts whirled over him.

What did Codfin think about during these moments when he lay on the cold slate tiles, in considerable peril of being toppled over and rolled down? To translate his thoughts into ordinary speech would cause their tang, their salt, their fine edge, to be lost; but the drift of them was doubtless something like this: “I’ll be glad when Mad Bet lets me go. Mad Bet’s got a message for me. Mad Bet’s message is to some man she’s taken with. I wouldn’t mind, same as some would, if Mad Bet were taken wi’ I! A ‘ooman be a ‘ooman; and when a ‘ooman do smile at I, it do wrinkle up her face, all soft and sweet, even if she be as ugly as sin.”

Such, in rough clumsy short-hand, were some of Codfin’s thoughts as he advanced slowly over the stable roof, lying flat when the gusts were worst, and crawling forward when they subsided.

According to the wise, if somewhat tragic, philosophy of Dr. Fell, the thoughts of this scum-beetle from the Beckery stews were just as important, in the total sum of things, that night of the tenth of December, as the dreams of Parson Dekker or of the Mayor himself. But it must be remembered too that according to Dr. Fell’s philosophy there was a deep importance, perhaps only a *little* less deep, in the feelings of a bewildered flea that Mr. Toller had carried away in his vest with him from his Beckery lodging.

“ ‘Twere sweet as rum and sugar to make that cockney sod take notice!” Such might be a rough translation of yet another of Mr. Toller’s thoughts as he cowered in the wind under the racing clouds and tore his finger-nails in the interstices of the slate tiles. Those old slate tiles, on St. Michael’s stable roof, came from the same part of South Wales as did this great wind and neither they nor it seemed prepared to lend themselves easily to the proceedings of Codfin thus struggling to obey the commands of Mad Bet.

But he reached her window at last and to his dismay found that she intended to descend to the ground in his company! Finn Toller was not the man to shirk; but it must be confessed that if there had been any trace of tipsiness left in him, this command of the madwoman’s — and it was given with the calmest certainty of its being obeyed — would have made him deadly sober.

The woman was warmly dressed and warmly shawled for the adventure when he finally reached her. That was one good thing. Another good thing was that her bonnet was tied with very strong tight strings under her chin.

He could never have got her down in this wind, though he probably would have tried, if she hadn't herself, with the supernatural cunning of the insane, told him exactly what to do. She told him exactly where he could find a ladder and she told him how he could fix the end of this ladder in the projecting leaden rain-pipe and lay it flat along the roof, thus affording a support for her knees in the wind, and, when they finally reached the gutter, an easy way of getting down.

It took so long to make all these moves, especially when he had the woman out upon the roof with him, that by the time he had got the ladder safe down from the leaden gutter and had it firmly fixed in the earth for her final descent, it was about three o'clock.

"Her be a master-sprite, her be!" he thought to himself, as he looked up at the wind-blown shawl and flapping bonnet huddled at the edge of the water-spout; though where he had picked up the phrase "master-sprite" he could not for the life of him have remembered.

She made him take the ladder back when she was once on the ground, to the place where he had found it. Then, for the first time, she told him what she wanted him to do.

An hour later — but still a long way from the approach of the winter's dawn — Finn Toller found himself seated inside St. Michael's Tower on the top of Glastonbury Tor, facing Mad Bet. Mr. Geard's London architect had lately been making a few necessary repairs in the interior of the structure and it was only for this reason that these two had been able to enter. It would have been totally dark within this stone fortress of Mat Dekker's God had not Betsy — who had made, during the long half hour when her liberator was fighting the wind on that stable roof, the cunning preparations of a crazy one with a fixed idea — brought with her two or three candle-ends, extracted from candlesticks left by chance in her place of temporary captivity.

Finn Toller produced matches from his pocket and proceeded to light one of these candle-ends, setting it up, by the help of its own grease, upon a piece of boarding. The flickering little flame soon illuminated — but there were no living eyes except their own to envisage the scene — not only Bet's old-fashioned bonnet and quilted shawl, but the straggly beard, freckled face and watery eyes of the derelict who sat opposite her, and who now filled the blackened stub of a clay pipe and set himself to smoke, as he leaned his back against the eastern wall of their square stone refuge.

The howling and shrieking of the wind, as these two sat there, made about their ears a deafening tumult, so that it was necessary for them to raise their voices to an unnatural pitch if they were to make their meaning audible. So innocently heathen was Finn Toller that when Bet shouted at him: "Archangel's walls be strong 'gainst they Devils!" he had the notion under his tow-coloured poll that Bet was referring to her familiar spirit by some particular pet name.

But Bet was quite right. Gwyn-ap-Nud's Powers of the Air were surely abroad in full force that night; and Michael's great wings needed to be strong indeed to ward off from Glastonbury these rushing hosts.

"Why don't Mayor Geard build up Archangel's Church?" shouted the woman, "instead of dipping folk's bodies in thik wold Well?"

Mad Bet had put an unanswerable conundrum this time before her rescuer. Mat Dekker would have altogether entered into the spirit of this question. Over and over again had he remarked to Sam— "There can't be more than a dozen real Christians in this place, me boy; or instead of these fantastical Pageants I'd be celebrating Mass up there in a great new church!"

But Finn Toller puffed away at his clay pipe in silence. His awe in the presence of his companion was so great that he had actually done what he had never in his life done before: asked a woman's permission to light this pipe of his! And Mad Bet's permission had been given in true hieratic fashion. But it was a different thing when she talked to him of rebuilding churches to St. Michael. A patient, though not a sulky, silence fell on him then.

Finn Toller took off his cap and leaned back his head against the stone wall. He couldn't see the stars at the top of the great funnel in which they sat, because of certain cross-beams which the Mayor's architect had put across that dark hollow space.

He experienced at that moment, however, one of the nearest approaches to religious exultation that he had known since as a child he had been taken to see General Booth pass through town. To be alone with Mad Bet on the top of Glastonbury Tor was something to remember. Burglaries and iron bars were trifles in comparison. But to be alone with a holy 'ooman, as he mentally named his companion, was not destined to be without its penalties. It was with some perturbation that he saw her now bending down over their solitary candle-flame.

"What be doing, Mad Bet?" he enquired nervously, using the epithet mad much as Tossie would have used the word Ladyship in addressing Rachel.

The woman was melting one of her other candle-ends at the lighted candle. Having reduced the wax thereof to the desired softness she rapidly proceeded to mould it into the rough likeness of a human figure.

"Thik be *her!"* she now remarked, holding up this distorted inch of wax.

Then, hurriedly rising, she muttered some devilish incantation, quite inaudible to the dumbfounded Codfin, and proceeded to stamp upon the image she had made, grinding the wax into a shapeless mass of candlegrease and mud and sawdust, under her heavy heel. As she trod, she began muttering again; but this time her words *were* audible to the astonished waif from the Beckery slum:

"Dirt ye was and dirt ye shall be!" screamed the madwoman ferociously. "I've a done for 'ee now, ye bitch! Dirt ye be now, I tell 'ee! Dirt ye be; as ye were afore he picked 'ee up! Dirt! Dirt! Dirt!" and the grinding heel finished its savage job so completely that there was soon nothing left of that fragment of obliterated wax. Then with several long-drawn panting breaths Mad Bet resumed her seat.

"Can 'ee keep a secret, man?" she shouted at the agitated Mr. Toller whose watery eyes were now staring anxiously at the tower door.

It was in Codfin's mind that her familiar spirit, whom he had heard invoked as "Archangel," might at any second take a palpable shape. This was the only moment in that long eventful night when Mr. Toller experienced a real shock of agitation, save for his first sight of the woman at the window.

"I be a grave for they secrets, Mad Bet!" he now remarked, in a resigned voice, puffing furiously at his pipe as if with the intent to evoke a screen of wholesome smoke betweeir himself and the supernatural.

" 'Twere *her* what you seed I stamp into nothing," went on the madwoman. "In Archangel's Tower I stamped on she. Looksee! — how candle do splutter and spit! Now 'tis done. 'Twere *her* I stampit out. Hist! How thik wind do blow! 'Twere me wone heel what stampit she into dirt. Her be dirt now; and her'll stay dirt till Judgment!"

Mr. Toller's eyes became more watery than ever owing to the acrid smoke which he sucked out and blew forth. To his companion's tirade he thought best to make no reply. He had almost as strong a desire to disassociate himself from these proceedings as poor Red had recently had to disassociate himself from "tirry-aniseed" and iron bars.

"If I speak her name, Finn Toller, will ye hold 'un mute and mum in thee's deep soul?"

Mr. Toller's lower lip hung down; and two thin streams of saliva, stained with tobacco-juice, dripped upon his filthy shirt and upon his still filthier vest. The flea which he had brought with him from his Beckery shanty snuggled up to his breastbone, deriving much comfort from the pale-coloured hairs, smelling like those of a dead stoat, which grew on the man's chest.

But he answered, as Homer would say, "from his steadfast heart": "What you do tell to I, Mad Bet, be more hid than they hanging-stones in Wookey. Folk can see they stones for sixpence; but not for twenty pound would I betray thee, 'ooman … no, not for twenty times twenty!"

Thus reassured, Mad Bet spoke her mind freely.

"Her be thik baggage, thik hell's broth piece o' harlotry, what lives wi' wold Miss Drew. Some do say she be married to 'un; others do say she be his light-o'-love. But whether or no for that, she do go to's bed in Northload, every night, weekday and Sunday. She do bless herself for living soft and cosy wi' thik old 'ooman by day, and she do mightily cherish being colled and clipped in's bed, when night do come! Heigh! but she do like being naked to thik man's dear hand, night by night, and all so daffadown-dilly in pretty bed-clothes! I do know she's feelin's by me wone feelin's, Mr. Toller, and I do thinky and thinky, when night do come, how she do lie so snug and warm wi' he."

Mr. Toller's masculine brain began to be totally confused. Mad Bet was talking of her enemy as sympathetically and understanding as if it were her daughter. Codfin could understand bringing down an iron bar on the head of a rich mine-owner; but this sympathising with the feelings of someone you were reducing to dirt under your heel was a subtlety of vengeance beyond his grasp.

"I do know thik lass," he contented himself with saying. "I've a-been inside Missy Drew's fine house wi' Bob Rendle from Ditchett Underleaze. Us never took nothin', for Bob were frightened when Lily Rogers talked in she's sleep; but I've a-been upstairs and downstairs in thik fine house."

Mad Bet pushed back her Sunday bonnet, with its forget-me-not border, till Toller could see the gleaming whiteness of her bare skull by the guttering candle-dip. He fidgeted uneasily under the glance she now fixed upon him.

"I've a-never killed a gal yet, Mad Bet, and I be—" It is probable that no effort of any human will, made in all Glastonbury that night, was more heroic than the effort required from Mr. Toller as he completed this speech — "and I be too old to begin now!"

Having made his stand, Mr. Toller must have felt an overpowering desire to soothe what he supposed would be the madwoman's fury. He had known from the beginning that her present obsession was about Mary; for since Mother Legge's Easter party Bet's mania for John was one of the chief tavern topics. If Finn Toller had in his nervous organisation anything resembling what in popular parlance is called a "complex," such a "complex" consisted in the idea — almost, although not quite, a complete illusion — that people were continually wanting to bribe him to commit some murder.

Was Mr. Toller a homicidal maniac? Any glib answer to this question would be a misleading one. Human character is far more complicated than is suggested by these popular scientific catchwords. Exact and very circumstantial detail would be required just here. Mr. Toller would, as a matter of fact, have found it much harder than Penny Pitches or than Emma Sly to kill a chicken. Cruelty to a child would have been more difficult to Mr. Toller than to anyone in Glastonbury, except perhaps Harry Stickles' wife, or Abel Twig of Backwear Hut. On the other hand, to hide in the bushes with that iron bar; to steal up softly behind Mr. Crow; to crack, with one sweeping horizontal swing of his under-nourished arms, Philip's Norman skull; to beat that unconscious skull into a pulp by hammering it afterwards with the iron bar; these proceedings would undoubtedly have been accompanied by a voluptuous glow of intense sensuality.

Perhaps the strictly correct view of Mr. Toller's nature was that he was a "homicidal maniac" only with regard to the killing of the most powerful personage in his immediate environment. But it is doubtful whether the definitions of tyrannicide, given in the public library dictionary, included the element of voluptuous sensuality in the killing of tyrants. To catch the vibration of *this* element Mr. Toller would have to have looked up other, more modern words; words which, it is quite certain, would have been to him totally unintelligible.

"Six o'clock Solly Lew do open up," remarked Betsy now, pulling down her bonnet into a respectable position. "I reckon it be near five, Mr. Toller. Us better be moving!"

She rose to her feet as she spoke and extinguished the guttering candle, leaving them with no light at all but that which descended from the wind-shaken, cloud-bespattered firmament. This extinguishing of that little yellow pyramid of fire took on a grandiose significance from the austere and deliberate manner in which she did it. It was just as if she were washing her sorceress-hands in that small flame; washing them clean of all further association with such a chicken-hearted "tyrannicide" as Finn Toller.

Thus, when they emerged from St. Michael’s Tower, and began to descend the Tor, without having spoken one single definite word, Mad Bet allowed Finn Toller to feel himself to be a cowardly, effeminate, unreliable, untrustworthy traitor!

It was a melancholy proof of how remorseless a tyrant Eros is, that Mad Bet should have descended Tor Hill without one grateful word to her devoted servant! The invisible Watchers of that Glastonbury Divine Comedy must have recognised something curiously unfair in the fact that while the madwoman had this devouring passion for John, Finn Toller had no blinding, drugging, heart-hardening obsession wherewith to armour himself against misfortune. His pale freckled face and straggly beard drooped together under those windy stars, and his arms and legs moved like those of an automaton, as he wearily followed that forget-me-not bonnet and fluttering shawl.

He resembled a scarecrow that this crazy love-bewitched creature had compelled by her incantations to follow her, up that hill. He did not pity himself; he did not say to himself: “Women’s ingratitude is like the ingratitude of the Arch-Fiend!” He only thought to himself again and again: “Her wants me to kill that gal what lives wi’ old Miss Drew; but I never yet have killed no gal; and I baint going to begin killing gals — no! not even for Mad Bet!”

The most materialistic of human beings must allow that at certain epochs in the life of any history-charged spot there whirls up an abnormal stir and fume and frenzy among the invisible elements or forces that emanate from the soil.

Such a stir, such an invisible air-dance was at its height as this man and this woman descended the hill, between five o’clock and six o’clock, on that dawn of the eleventh of December.

From the poor bones in the town cemetery on the Wells Road — out beyond The Elms — rose up certain faintly stirred and barely perceptible responses to this thaumaturgic wind; but if from *these* bones a dim tremor came, much more did a turmoil of subsconscious reciprocity — to use the Wessex poet's great word — gather about Gwyn-ap-Nud's Hill from the royal and sacrosanct bone-dust buried beneath the Abbey Ruins. The wind arrived at Glastonbury carrying feathers and straws and husks and ditch-vapours with it that it had picked up from Meare Heath and Westhay Level, from Chilton-upon-Polden and Bawdrip, from the banks of the River Parret, from Combwich and Stogursey Brook, from Chantry Kilve and Quantock's Head. But from Glastonbury it could only carry away, along with other wisps and husks and straws and ditch-vapours, such dreams as were the lighter emanations of the place. It could carry away the dreams of Jimmy Rake and Mr. Stilly, of Bartholomew Jones and Jackie Cole, of Mr. Merry and of Emma Sly, of Solly Lew and of his son Steve; but not of the Town's Mayor or of the Town's Vicar.

But even with these, the west wind's burden, as it left Glastonbury, was too heavy. For it must needs enter the open windows of the hospital and burden itself with the dreams of Nell Zoyland's son — a child with the very lineaments of Sam Dekker, even to his curious chin — and also with the dreams of Tossie's girl twins which were of such incredible lustihood as to resemble the sturdy dreams of the winter grass, growing in those low meads where the Evercreech man's father-in-law kept his jersey cattle.

Crude and coarse and wholesale are our psychic judgments about newborn children, compared with the careful discriminations we use in *physical* chemistry. To any scrupulous eye among the supernatural watchers of Glastonbury it would have been clear that the soul of Nell's little boy was already avid with by far the most intense, clutching, insatiable life-greed that existed in the whole town — a greed that made Philip’s egoism seem like courteous absent-mindedness and Red’s inbred hate like the itching of a nettle-sting. It would also have been clear that Tossie’s twins were so easy-going, so sweet-natured, so unselfish, that it was as if all the humour of Tossie herself had been mingled with the wisdom of Tossie’s mistress and with the piety of cousin Nance.

By burdening itself with the greedy dreams of Nell’s little boy, who actually cried in his sleep because the nurse refused to wake his mother so that he might be suckled, and with the vegetative feelings of Tossie’s little girls, who seemed perfectly prepared to let off *their* mother and enjoy any alien nourishment at any moment, the wind seemed to need a greater momentum to carry it away northeast, towards its resting-place on Salisbury Plain, than it possessed. It flagged a little by the time it reached West Pennard. It dropped some of its tiny moss-spores, its infinitesimal lichen-scales, its fungus-odours, its oak-apple dust, its sterile bracken-pollen, its wisps of fluff from the bellies of Sedgemoor wild-fowl, its feathery husks from the rushes of Mark Moor, its salt-weed pungencies from the Bay of Bridgwater.

It dropped fragments and morsels of its burden now, all along the path of its eastern flight. It dropped some at Pylle, some at Evercreech, some at Wanstrow and Witham Friary, some at Great Bradley Wood, some at Long Leat Park. Wisps of what it carried floated down at all those little villages called by the name of Deverill. At Kingston Deverill, at Monkton Deverill, at Hill Deverill and at Longbridge Deverill little fragments were wafted to the ground.

The wind gathered more strength as it reached Old Willoughby Hedge and Chapel Field Barn. But it dropped some more of its burden at Two Mile

Down and yet more of it among the ancient British villages and the high hill-tumuli that surround Great Ridge and Stonehill Copse.

At last it arrived at Salisbury Plain; and it was natural enough that then, in those darkest hours of that long December night, it should sink down and fail.

But for Mr. Evans, at any rate, there would have been something significant that it should thus sink down and fail and find the end of its journey on the very spot where those “foreign stones” were deposited that must have followed, on their mysterious conveyance out of Wales, the self-same path across the heart of Somerset.

It would certainly have been Mr. Evans’ opinion that whatever happened to the seaweed smells, and the dyke-mists, and the wild-fowl feathers, and the oak-apple dust, and the brackish marsh-vapours, the more psychic portion of this wind’s aerial cargo would have been deposited at one place only — at the actual spot where the two great “Sarsen” monoliths have bowed down, during the centuries, and fallen prostrate, across the stone of “foreign origin” that is still the Altar Stone of Stonehenge.

CONSPIRACY

THE MARRIAGE OF Mr. Owen Evans and Miss Cordelia Geard had already taken place; and it was in one of the little new town council houses in Old Wells Road that they had settled down, immediately after this event — Cordelia not being one to press Mr. Evans to spend his savings on a holiday just at the moment when Old Jones was coming to terms over the partnership in the shop.

So it was against a background of roadside hedges and garden bushes, stripping themselves, or being stripped, by wind and rain of their perilous-smelling, morbid umbrageousness that these two singular persons went through the experience of being initiated into each other's withheld identity.

Nowhere in all the fertile and leafy regions of Somerset, so heavy in vegetation, does Winter set in with more definite emphasis than in the regions around Glastonbury. The thicker the foliage, the richer the earth odours, the bluer the apple-scented vapours, the more stark and desolate is the contrast. Then begins a wet, chilly, lamentable nakedness; and the three Glastonbury hills weep together like three titanic mourners over Arthur and Merlin and Lancelot and Gwenevere.

Mr. Evans felt that to the end of his days he would be compelled to associate the approach of Winter with the intense nervous reactions through which he was passing in this first intimacy he had ever had with a woman. All through November, as the man went to and fro from his small house in Wells Old Road, a street that lay northwest of Bove Town, to his shop in the High Street, the gradual unleafing of so many twigs and stalks and branches and trunks coincided with his closer and closer intimacy with Cordelia.

To his surprise he found himself completely spared those shocks of physical disgust and sick aversion which he had been expecting and which indeed — in his fantastic self-punishment — he had assumed as the essence of this new adventure. The situation was indeed a very curious one; for until the time of his living with Cordelia every vestige of sensuality in his nature had been absorbed in his weird and monstrous vice.

Now there occurred a reversion of this; and his sadistic tendency fell into the background for a period. It did not leave him. His own belief that it could, by some contact with the miraculous element in Glastonbury, be *compelled* to leave him still remained; but the moment for that had not yet come. His ghastly and nearly tragic experience at the Midsummer Pageant had not, and he never pretended to himself that it had, worked that healing spell. But it slowly began to present itself to his mind as a strange and unexpected phenomenon, that in his new relations with Cordelia there arose in the essential nature of the case, a situation that lent itself to what might be called a harmless and legitimate sadism, a sadism that was so mitigated and diffused that it was difficult to disassociate it from a delicate and tender attraction.

It was a growing astonishment to Mr. Evans to discover what a world of exquisite and thrilling possibilities the mere difference between the sexes creates. It was a surprise to him to find out what subtleties of receptivity exist in the nerves of a girl who is in love for the first time in her life!

And just here the presence of his suppressed perversion stood him in good stead; for it annihilated totally any possibility of that crude and unimaginative craving for novelty which had led Tom Barter such a dance.

Accustomed, just as was his friend John Crow, to derive his wickedest thrills from his imagination, Mr. Evans found that this strange, dim undersea of feminine self-consciousness, whose ebbings and flowings now receded and advanced around him, was a world so full of dark unexpected storms and of mysterious halcyon calms, caused apparently by a word, a look, a gesture, that in association with it, it was impossible to suffer from that withering ennui and horrible life-weariness which hitherto had been — to take a leaf out of Tom Chinnock's book — the particular Terre Gastée of his destiny. The trend of his mind too — as imaginative in his "unpardonable sin" as it was in his antiquarian fantasies — did both him and Cordelia the unspeakably good turn, of rendering what is usually known as beauty in a woman totally unimportant.

Nature was in a position to supply the place of beauty by her basic insistence upon the fact that this awkward and unbeguiling creature was, after all, endowed with both the form and the susceptibilities of a normal feminine being.

The wise irony of those tutelary spirits which do not desert in our need even the worst of us, destined Mr. Evans to find *his* Glastonbury miracle where he least looked for it; for the presence of the Grail in that spot has the effect of digging deep channels for the amorous life of those who touch its soil.

All lovers who have ever visited the place will know at once what is meant by this. None approach these three Glastonbury hills without an intensification of whatever erotic excitement they are capable of and whatever deepening of the grooves of their sublimated desire falls within the scope of their fate.

Cordelia was a true daughter of Glastonbury; and the magic of the place, as Mr. Evans in his first manner was always explaining, had the power of acting as an aphrodisiac of far more potent force than the famous "sea-holly" of Chesil Beach.

The Grail of Glastonbury — and this is why Mr. Geard was entirely justified in making it the centre of his new religious cult — just because of its timeless association with the First Cause had the peculiarity of exciting human souls to concentrate their eroticism upon one single ideal object, as Sam for instance had done in becoming a mediaeval lover of his tortured God-Man; while it excited others, among whom was John Crow, to concentrate upon one real human being.

As for Cordelia, she had been living, all that windy November, in a state of such wild and wanton excitement that it is doubtful if there was any woman in Somersetshire through the whole Autumn, as drunken as she was with the lavish ichor of Eros.

Mr. Evans was so ignorant of the ways of women and so confused by his new experience that he did not realise the emotional extremity which his caresses were stirring up in Cordelia, nor the frantic tumultuousness of the feelings which his love-making aroused. The girl was passion-drunk. She never missed taking Mr. Evans to the shop. She never missed calling for him at the shop. On all possible occasions when he had a day off, or when the shops were officially closed, she would make him take her for long walks in every direction; but principally to the east which meant beginning with Chalice Hill.

On these walks she would cling to his arm and pour into his ear abrupt, excited, and very often hardly coherent rhapsodies. Love in general was the subject of these spasmodic outbursts, rather than any elaborations of her own feeling; nor was Mr. Evans one to miss their poetic quality. Her words flowed and tossed; and then wavered and sank. They drifted and wilted, only to rise up again, mounting, gathering, rushing forward, to a new climax, to be followed in its turn by a new sinking down to exhausted silence.

One particular walk Mr. Evans never forgot. It was when they were following a little field-track between Havyatt Gap and West Pennard that the girl's eloquence mounted to the climax which so especially impressed him. It was a wild, gusty, rainy day; though the rain was discontinuous and the gusts intermittent; but when it neither rained nor blew there fell upon that stripped landscape a cold paralysed interim of shivering stillness, in the midst of which Mr. Evans felt that he could hear the beat of the wings of the Birds of Rhiannon.

On this particular walk to Pennard, Mr. Evans realised that there were moments when his strange companion gathered up into her uncomely face a spiritual grandeur that was astonishing. Cordelia's face lent itself to windy and rainy weather. She had been herself a little shocked, as well as startled, by the manner in which, in that twilight escape by herself, seven months before, to the Two Oaks, she had been obsessed by a feeling of dominating power.

It was about four o'clock on this early-darkening December day when their field-path — a very small unfrequented cattle-drove on the way to West Pennard — led them past a solitary Scotch fir. The rough, reddish-brown trunk of this great tree was soaked with rain on its western side, and showers of raindrops fell on their heads from a big branch above them which stretched towards the west like a gigantic extended arm.

Cordelia wore an old cloth cap of Mr. Evans'; and he himself had come out bare-headed, fearful of not being able to keep on his head, that gusty afternoon, his familiar bowler hat.

Thus as they paused beneath the tree whose upper branches groaned and creaked to greet them, the man found he could kiss the wet cheeks and cold mouth of his woman without the teasing interruption of either of their hats being knocked off, a thing that was always happening with these two clumsy ones.

“I never knew what it was like to kiss,” said Mr. Evans, “before I had you! I like kissing you at the end of a dark day and under this Scotch fir.”

Their wet cold faces, her shapeless nose and his grotesque hooked nose like the caricature-mask of a Roman soldier, their large, contorted, abnormal mouths, made, it might seem, more for anguished curses against God than for the sweet usage of lovers, were now pressed savagely against each other and, as they kissed, queer sounds came from both their throats, that were answered by the groanings of the tree and by the raindrops as the wind shook it.

A series of long-drawn cawings reached them now, as four black rooks with a faint grinding and grating of their huge wings passed over the tree, aiming for the rookery above Mark Moor Court.

Down somewhere in the southern hedge of the field where this Scotch fir grew, an old holly tree was creaking lamentably in the wind. Uninitiated travellers in that lonely spot would have casually remarked: “What’s that creaking over there in that hedge?” — but each of these two ugly skulls with the anguished distinction of the ancient house of Rhys upon their lineaments thought within themselves: “How lucky I am to be happy when God delights to make even trees suffer!”

As a matter of fact, although neither of these human lovers were aware of this, between that Scotch fir and that ancient holly there had existed for a hundred years a strange attraction. Night by night, since the days when the author of Faust lay dying in Weimar and those two embryo trees were in danger of being eaten by grubs, they had loved each other. The magnetic disturbance of the atmosphere at that spot, while the distorted mouth of Mr. Evans was pressed against the distorted mouth of Cordelia, was an agitation to the old tree in the hedge, so that in its creaking there arose that plaintive yearning of the vegetable world which comes to us more starkly in the winter than in the summer.

In the summer when the wind stirs the trees, there is that rushing, swelling sound of masses of heavy foliage, a sound that drowns, in its full-blossomed, undulating, ocean-like murmur, the individual sorrows of trees. But across this leafless unfrequented field these two evergreens could lift to each other their subhuman voices and cry their ancient vegetation-cry, clear and strong; that cry which always seems to come from some underworld of Being, where tragedy is mitigated by a strange undying acceptance beyond the comprehension of the troubled hearts of men and women.

It is on such gusty, early December afternoons, when darkness falls before people prepare for tea, that the symbolic essence of rain is most deeply felt. And that they should be realised in their essential quiddity, these whirling gusts of grey rain tossed obliquely across the darkening hills, they must not come in a steady, tropic downpour. *Floods* of rain destroy the quality and the significance of rain. Drops they must be, many, many drops; an infinity of drops if you will; but still numberless separate drops, grey or brown or whitish-grey, in order that they may retain that rain-smell, rain-taste, rain-secret, which separates rain from ordinary water.

They were both silent for a space after this embrace, standing under the Scotch fir, and Mr. Evans thought to himself that the look he now caught upon her profile was one of the strangest and most arresting he had ever seen on a human face. And it was no wonder he felt like this; for her face had caught that mysterious secret of the rain which very few faces and very few imaginations are able to catch. But Cordelia’s face had caught it today, and held it there now in all its wild far-horizoned meanings.

There are faces made for moonlight. There are faces created to respond to the wind. There are faces for sandy deserts, for lonely seashores, for solitary headlands, for misty dawns, for frosty midnights. Cordelia's face was *made* for rain. It had nothing in it that was normally beautiful; and yet it became at this moment the living incarnation of all those long hours when rain had mingled with her secretest hopes. Her face was charged with the rain that had streamed down the window-panes at Cardiff Villa, twilight after twilight, while her thoughts had been flying far away; far over dripping forests, far over swollen rivers to green-black castle walls of which she fancied herself the mistress or the captive.

The path they were following now approached a steep incline which led between bare muddy banks and along deeply indented cart-ruts to a small clump of spruce firs at the top of a considerably high hill. They were both familiar with this hill and with this clump of spruce firs. There was indeed for Mr. Evans a special interest in this place, which was some distance out of Glastonbury. He had himself found a deserted sheepfold up there, in a clearing in the centre of this little fir wood, a rough building made entirely of ancient blocks of mossy stone, but quite roofless and windowless.

Pottering about evening after evening, in the environs of Glastonbury, Mr. Evans and Cordelia had made more than one interesting find; but with regard to these old stones, that had been thrown so crudely together here to form a shelter for sheep, our Welshman had a theory that made them the most interesting of all his discoveries. He held very strongly to the opinion — and he had even persuaded Mr. Merry to come round to his view — that these stones originally belonged to the little chantry or hermitage to which Launcelot du Lac retired to die, after the vanishing of Arthur and after Gwenevere's retreat to the nunnery at Amesbury.

It was a long tedious ascent up to this little fir clump; nor had the place any striking aspect or any particular beauty save this ruined sheepfold in the centre of it. And yet as they struggled up the bare slope in the rain, Mr Evans remarked to his bride: “Haven’t you noticed, Cordy, that it’s often some small insignificant place like this that comes back to your mind with a sudden significance, rather than the more famous spots?”

She was not yet so used to being called “Cordy” by Mr. Evans that it did not strike her as queer to hear it now as they made their way up this nameless and rainswept eminence. Names are like clothes to girls. The name Cordelia, especially when uttered by her father, always made her feel as if she were wearing her old, weather-worn tailor-made costume, and beneath it, her winter underwear against her skin; whereas when she heard Mr. Evans call her “Cordy” she felt as if she were wearing her thinnest cotton drawers. Since she had been married she had been “Cordy” almost constantly in spite of the fact that she was now wearing her winter clothes.

Like a tree that had begun to gather moss and lichen before it was old, there was so much untouched soil in the rich levels of this girl’s nature that the green sprouts of passion grew more lavish and luxuriant every day.

Between the Glastonbury trees stripping themselves bare and this Glastonbury native stripping herself day by day of new maidenly reserves for the enchantment of her lover there was a similar parallel. It was to the west wind that the Glastonbury foliage yielded and fell; and it was to the gusty intermittent motions of Mr. Evans’ erratic desires that Cordy’s innate chastity sank away. Not one aspect of her life under those new brick tiles of her little house, fresh from the local brickyard to the north of Bove Town, where the council had bought them, but became associated with her gradual seduction.

The fact that the Welshman cared little for womanly beauty, the fact that behind the concentration of his desire was nothing but the diffused sublimation of his suppressed vice, rendered this girl’s initiation into the nervous excitements of Eros an arena of hidden rapture such as, at that epoch, contained no equal within the purlieus of the whole town.

The two descendants of the House of Rhys were now halfway up the ascent of their hill, their boots and stockings already thoroughly soaked by the wet stalks of the dead bracken. The slope they were ascending was to the northward of West Pennard, whose outskirts in following their winding cattle-path they had already passed. Between the summit of this hill topped by the clump of dwarf spruce firs and by the ruined sheepfold, and the banks of Whitelake River there was nothing but the rough tract of untilled country known as Heart Moor.

It was thus as unfrequented a spot as could well be found within a few miles of Glastonbury; and had a circle been drawn about that town no point upon its circumference save perhaps Crannel Moor to the west of Godney, would have been securer against human invasion. Save for an occasional shepherd-boy, guarding a flock of black-faced ewes from Norwood Farm, no one, even in summer, ever came to this place.

Thus when Mr. Evans suddenly cried out:

“There’s a light in the sheepfold, Cordy!” his voice was as startled as if he had informed her of the presence of a gibbet up there with a figure swinging from it! A steadily burning light, when you are convinced of being several miles from any human habitation, is a thing that naturally makes a person’s pulses beat.

“Is it the Norwood shepherd?” panted Cordelia, trying to keep pace with her companion’s long strides.

“Hush!” was Mr. Evans’ reply as he quickened his pace still more.

She followed him in silence; and together they pressed forward, ascending the hill. The wind struck them with such force as they climbed and the darkness had gathered about them there so suddenly that Cordelia began to experience that natural human nervousness which the approach to a flickering light in a lonely spot can induce even in one not usually subject to common timidities.

She whispered something in her companion's ear that the wind rendered inaudible.

"Hush!" replied Mr. Evans again.

It now became apparent that the light they had seen was brighter than any conceivable shepherd's lantern from Norwood Farm. Cordelia could not resist disobeying him; and for the third time during their approach she spoke.

"Someone's lighted a fire," she whispered. "The ghost of Lancelot!" she added with a wild laugh. Her words and her unrestrained laugh seized upon one portion of Mr. Evans' consciousness and carried it, like a wild goose with ruffled, helpless feathers, to a certain imaginary tract in an ancient dream-landscape of his, where he always placed this ruined chantry from the old legend, surrounding it with the melancholy horses — their long uncut manes full of dead leaves and their burdock-tangled tails sweeping the wet grass — growing older and feebler year after year, as their masters prayed, hoping against hope, the armourless penitents within those stone walls and the armourless steeds without, for the return of the lost King.

It was fortunate for the silence of their approach, as they now, having reached the summit of the little hill, stealthily pushed their way through the spruce clump, that the wind, blowing obliquely across their profiles, carried that hysteric laugh of Cordelia's over the darkened valley towards Laverly and Pilton and Folly Wood.

Mr. Evans possessed himself now of the girl's cold hand and as he drew her after him between the firs, led by that flickering firelight and by a smell of burning fir-cones that now accompanied it, he began to feel, rising up within him, a childish delight in adventure such as he thought his terrible obsession had destroyed forever.

They now heard voices within the walls of the stone sheepfold; and as step by step they cautiously advanced, anxious to get a glimpse of the speakers while they themselves remained unseen, they both recognised the harsh uplifted voice of Mad Bet. The other voice Mr. Evans did not know, though he could tell it was a man's; but Cordelia, being a native of the town, recognised quickly enough who was the madwoman's companion. It was the disreputable Finn Toller; and later, when in bed that same night she told Mr. Evans who it was, she received an obscure shock, like a premonitory warning, when her husband showed an unexpected interest in this sinister figure.

It was through a gap in the stone wall that they saw these two persons now, sitting beside that fire of sticks and dry ferns. They dared not move close enough to catch any definite words of what these two were saying; but the psychic aura of their discussion reached them; and it must have been this, though Cordelia did not suspect it then, that accounted for Mr. Evans' subsequent desire to make Codfin's acquaintance. Just as the gods are said to know one another under any mask so are those whose peculiar vice or perversion separates them from the rest of the world endowed with a sixth sense of recognition.

Retaining his bride's hand in his own, and growing conscious of some appeal to his perilous nerve in what was going on, Mr. Evans compelled her to remain concealed. Concealment was as unsuitable to Mr. Geard's elder daughter as any rôle he could have chosen for her; but she was too happy to be anything but docile; and with their faces brushed by a tall undergrowth of elders they contemplated through its broken wall that ruined sheepfold, whose masonry, at any rate, although not in its present form, had witnessed the death of the noblest of Glastonbury penitents.

The dialogue of which they caught only the psychic vibrations, for the two were speaking in low tones, was as follows: "If so be as thee can't do it to *she*, may-be thee could do it to *he?*"

These words of Mad Bet were a startling surprise to Mr. Toller, for he sat up straight on his log, close to the fire they were feeding, and stretched out his arms to the blaze, clasping and unclasping his fingers in its glowing heat so nervously as to make it obvious he was thinking of something very different from the physical pleasure of warmth. The man's straggly yellow beard wagged in the smoke of the crackling sticks as he turned his watery blue eyes towards his companion. He blinked miserably with his white eyelids beneath his hairless eyebrows and there came a look of panic and even horror into his face.

"But he be your true-love, baint he?" he said, with shocked emphasis and speaking very gravely. "Ye doesn't want me to likidate, as thik Mr. Robinson do call it, your wone true-love, Mad Bet?"

The woman was silent; and what the feelings were that seethed and fermented in her heart it would be hard to put down in words; but after a minute or two she spoke again.

"If he were dead, never would *she* sleep with he again in a pretty night-dress bought for a fairing from Tim Wollop."

But the philosophy of the Glastonbury underworld could not let this idealism pass unchecked.

"But neither would *you* ever sleep long-side of he, Mad Bet. He would be lying in churchyard mould and ye would be yallering in top-room of old

John Chinnock's."

There was a long pause at this point during which Finn Toller pensively stirred the fiery embers with one hand while he flung upon their exposed red heart a handful of dry wood with the other.

"Listen, Finn Toller!"

The smooth and freckled face of the workhouse waif composed itself to receive a painful shock of some kind. Never did Mad Bet open her lips, but she caused her devotee some kind of nervous agitation. But so far from decreasing her servitude this constant state of psychic fear in which she kept him accentuated his devotion. Fear of her kept him in a perpetual ferment of nervous idolatry.

"Listen, Finn Toller; and answer me careful, for I want to have the truth of this from thee. Will thik iron bar, what you knows of, make my young man *feel* afore he dies? I don't want 'un to feel. I'd be feeling it me wone self, if he had any anguish. I don't want 'un to be able to say as much as his patternost, as they papists call it. I want he to be alive, and thinking about his bitchy; and the next tick of the clock I want he to be all blackness; blackness and holy bubbles and dear soul gone!"

Mad Bet was wearing a dark shawl over her poor bald pate; and, as she spoke, she pulled it down over her eyes, as if symbolising this final extinction of her "young man's" consciousness.

"And when 'tis all over," she added from beneath this veil, "and he be safe buried in earth, hour by hour I'll go and sit on's sweet grave! *She* won't be there; for 'twill be in thik graveyard out in Wells New Road that they'll lay 'un; and that will be too far for *she* to wend— 'cept on Sundays and Holy Days! But old Bet will take her meals there; and day and night keep guard; and that's because it's necessary for someone to drive the devils away; and that's because the devils always love a sweet corpse; and that's because sweet corpses same as his'n, always do smell as sweet as new-mown hay!"

Had Mr. Evans been near enough to see Finn Toller's face in that firelight he would have been reminded of a famous folklore professor, whose lectures at one time he used to attend. When some pupil would propound to him a question that was more audacious than behooved the subject, this good man would frown in blank, bewildered confusion and would open his mouth to its utmost stretch.

Thus did Finn Toller look when Mad Bet asked him whether her "young man" would "feel" anything when that iron bar crushed his skull.

"If he *did* feel it *I* should feel it, Finn Toller," repeated that crouching figure, pulling her shawl so far down over her face that the syllables she emitted issued forth in a muffled tone.

Mr. Toller continued to survey this enveloped head. It was hard for him to tell whether the woman's eyes were scrutinising him closely from beneath it or whether they were blinded by the folds of the shawl. But he watched her intently; as a tame wolf might watch its robber master ere they rose to attack a caravanserai of travellers.

From Cordelia's post of observation the madwoman's head, illuminated by those red flames, resembled an old Bible picture of the Witch of Endor. Squatting there on the floor of that ruined chantry she might have been an image of Despair confronted by an image of Murder; the former being conscious of every implication of the deed they discussed, the latter wrapped in a dull, stupid, besotted daze of animal uneasiness.

Resting with their heads pressed against their protecting elder bush, both Mr. Evans and Cordelia experienced many queer sensations as the acrid-smelling smoke from this fire hit their nostrils. Beating down his darker feelings, Mr. Evans set himself to recall a certain melancholy passage in

Malory, the words of which, from constant perusal, he could reproduce in their precise lilt. These, as the damp twigs flapped against his head, and the wind through the ruined walls made a dull moaning in his ears, he repeated under his breath:

" 'Then Sir Launcelot never after ate but little meat, ne drank, till he was dead. For then he sickened more and more, and dried and dwined away. For the Bishop nor none of his fellows might not make him to eat, and little he drank, that he was waxen by a cubit shorter than he was, that the people could not know him. For evermore, day and night he prayed; but sometime he slumbered a broken sleep; ever he was grovelling on the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guenever. So he fell sick and lay in his bed; and then he sent for the Bishop that there was hermit and all his true fellows …. "My fair lords," said Sir Launcelot, "wit you well my careful body will into the earth, I have warning more than now I will say; therefore give me my rites" … Then there was weeping and wringing of hands; and the greatest dole they made that ever made men.' "

But all the while he was repeating these rhythmical words with one portion of his mind and in this task using all the power of his memory, there flitted through the unrecording portion of his consciousness a vague awareness of something going on over that fire that stirred up his suppressed vice. Mr. Evans was clairvoyant in these things and though he did not hear those murderous words spoken, the impression produced on the surrounding air by the mention of Finn Toller's iron bar was so strong that it roused emotions in him that he had not felt since the Pageant. And while Mr. Evans was struggling to drive back his devil by recalling the death of Lancelot, his bride's attention was hypnotised by the extraordinary figure of Mad Bet; and she kept saying to herself:

“If it wasn’t for Owen having come, I’d have soon gone mad just like her!”

There was something so portentous about that head muffled in the black shawl — as if the woman had arrayed herself for some tragic event and were uttering words that could only be spoken from a shrouded face — that the girl found the shocking rags of Finn Toller a relief to look at in comparison.

But what *were* they talking about? These two queer ones had not met in that ruined place for the mere pleasure of meeting! Not from their murmuring voices, not from their dramatic gestures, but from a vibration in the whole atmosphere around them did Cordelia, as well as Mr. Evans, catch, without witting what it was, the revolting smell of a crime against human life.

But now came an interruption. A great fluffy barn-door owl, a galvanised bundle of soft feathers and precipitate alarm, roused by the heat of the fire, suddenly flung itself out of its daylong retreat in one of these old walls, and whirled off with a scream over the elder bush where the two onlookers were hidden.

Catching sight of them there, it flew sideways with a sound so unusual that it caused Mad Bet to snatch the shawl from her head. Hurriedly, Mr. Evans pulled Cordelia back, and following an instinct, the childishness of which was natural to both of them, they retreated at a wild rush through the spruces and at a still faster pace down the slope of the hill!

It was not indeed until they reached their Scotch fir that he let her pause to take breath; and then, when between his laboured gasps he tried to kiss her as he had kissed her before, the same wild, horse-like, hysterical laugh broke from her lips. The sound was disquieting but it had the effect of soothing the nerves of her who uttered it. This queer couple resembled each other in the irrelevant and motiveless way they both were accustomed to burst out laughing. “Those two were up to some mischief, Owen,” murmured the girl. But Mr. Evans hurriedly veered from this grim topic.

“Where the guide books make their great mistake,” he said, as they now turned homeward, “is in treating Glastonbury as a fragment of history, instead of something that’s *making* history. Your father’s absolutely right. It’s the future that’s important.”

Cordelia made no reply. It was always in relation to her father’s ideas that she came nearest to losing her respect for Mr. Evans. As she felt this cool night wind blow against her face, and heard her leather boots creak with their familiar little creakings, and thought of the cake she had made yesterday for their tea today, and fumbled with the handle of Mr. Evans’ stick as the next best thing to holding his hand, it seemed to her that this masculine desire to create some “important” future was one of the dreariest mockeries of human values that existed in the world.

“Keep us alive. Give us food. Give us love. Give us children. But take your ‘important’ Communisms and Capitalisms from around our waists and from about our necks!”

Thus would Cordelia have liked to have expressed herself if she could have found the right words. It would have been a satisfaction to scream out once in her life at the top of her lungs to her father, to her husband, to Dave Spear: “You are all a lot of babies with your curst politics!” She would have liked John Crow to have been there too; and, if the moment had permitted it, she would have liked that odious wretch to have fallen in love with her, beyond measure, beyond restraint, and tried to kiss her, so that she could have slapped his face!

“Our good John said something yesterday that was very true,” Mr. Evans continued, stirred by an unconscious telepathy. “He said that a great many material things had certain little tricks of arranging themselves at certain times, as if they all shared in the process of some secret ritual to which we have lost the clue."

"Do you know what I'd like to do, Owen, when I hear that man talk in that sort of way?"

There was a tone in her voice that Mr. Evans had come to know too well and he had the wit to remain silent.

"I've annoyed her," he said to himself, "by dragging her so fast away from Mad Bet. She doesn't know that I've lost interest in Mad Bet, now that she's stopped torturing herself and is just indulging herself. I'm not sure, after all, that she *is* the Grail Messenger. Cordy is more like the Grail Messenger than *she* is, but there's a tone in their voices that is *very* similar."

He was totally oblivious of the fact that seriously to compare his wife with this lamentable creature had something monstrous about it. But in Mr. Evans' attitude to women there was an obtuseness that was almost ghastly. Certain human souls suffer from the psychic atrophy of a particular sympathy in regard to the opposite sex. Persephone Spear had a similar peculiarity, only in the inverse way. To Persephone no *man* was worthy of the least subtle consideration. Men to Percy were like fish, whose gills, though they could open and shut, had no feeling in them.

The spirits of both Cordelia and Mr. Evans sank to a low ebb when they reached their row of red-tiled roofs, above Bove Town. This depression had something to do with a straggling line of little labouringmen's houses, newer even than their own — indeed not quite finished — which the town council was just now erecting for the workers in its souvenir factory.

Few things are more desolating to certain human moods than new uninhabited houses. In addition to this cause of gloom Mr. and Mrs. Evans were exhausted with their walk and longing for their tea; a refreshment that could not — in the nature of things — be ready for at least half an hour. But deep down below the surface it was not the new houses nor their craving for tea that made them depressed. It was the emanation reaching out towards them from that ruined sheepfold.

Parlour and kitchen were the only rooms on the ground floor of Five, Old Wells Road; and when he had unlocked the front door and entered the house, Mr. Evans went straight into the parlour and sank down in a big, ugly, purple arm-chair which stood there. Cordelia meanwhile hurried into the kitchen and began her preparations for tea before even taking off her hat. It was not indeed till she had laid the table, cut the bread for toast, and got out the butter — they ate all their meals in the kitchen — that she ran upstairs to wash her hands.

The troubled mood which had descended upon them both did not immediately lift, even after they had been within their walls for a quarter of an hour; and this was the first time in their brief experience of Old Wells Road that such a thing had occurred. Never before had Mr. Evans gone into the parlour in this way and plunged into the arm-chair Mr. Geard had given them, without offering to help his wife get the meal! The arm-chair was the biggest that Mr. Wollop had had on sale, and it contrasted oddly with the rest of the furniture of their small house, which was certainly more picturesque than it was comfortable, being in fact almost all the unsalable things in Number Two's shop which had been lent to Mr. Evans by his partner.

The arm-chair was a purple one and a proud-looking one; and it had a lavender-coloured fringe round the bottom of it. It was with the tassels of this fringe that the long nervous fingers of Mr. Evans were now uneasily fumbling. He had lit the gas-jet on entering this room which was only separated from the kitchen by the narrowest of little passages, and he could now see through the open door Cordelia's shadow, thrown by the kitchen-lamp behind her, flickering about upon the floor of this passage.

Mr. Evans' legs were stretched straight out on the new carpet; his muddy boots were resting on their extended heels; while the skin of his ankles exposed above his ruffled black socks looked curiously white and helpless in the glaring gas-light. His great aquiline nose drooped motionless above his chest and his arms hung down at his sides. His face was pale and he kept sucking at his cheeks in some queer manner which emphasised the prominence of his cheek-bones. His thoughts hovered around the forlorn happenings in the olden times that had left Launcelot du Lac to perish so miserably in that little chantry, but these thoughts were affected and the man was not unaware of it, by what he felt, beyond any definite explanation, about that dialogue in the sheepfold.

"Launcelot's death," he said to himself, "was one of the saddest things that have ever happened in this unhappy world." As he went on pondering upon this tall heroic lover's decline and how he lost a cubit of his stature among those flesh-scourging monks, his eyes began to close, and that particular kind of drowsiness that comes to human beings when the pitiableness of all human affairs presses wearily upon them, weighed down his eyelids.

All human minds, as they move about over the face of the earth, are in touch with a dark reservoir of our race's psychic garbage. Just as all the thrilling and vibrating thoughts that have animated human organisms survive the deaths of these organisms, so all the heavy, cloddish, murderous, desolate thoughts, in which free will and faith and happiness perish like asphyxiated gnats, roll themselves in a foul torrent into a great invisible planetary Malebolge. This Malebolge is always present and near, a little way below the surface, for all our human minds; and it only needs certain occurrences, or certain arrangements of matter, to cause an odious and devastating effluvia from its surface-scum to invade the arteries of our consciousness.

Although their ignorance of what that sheepfold talk had been about forbade any discussion of it between them, yet some residue of it floated there above the purple arm-chair and hovered in that little kitchen above the stove, acting as an invoker of those blighting waters of Malebolge, and saturating Number Five, Old Wells Road with that sick and sour undersea of abhorrence which human thoughts in their malice and their weakness have created for their own torment.

By the middle of their tea, however, they both felt more cheerful. The self-protective will to forget licked up with its sorceress tongue all these poisonous emanations squirted forth from this underworld Malebolge. Up and down, like a beautiful coral-tinted tongue, that will to forget moved — as the magic fumes of the tea mounted to their heads — and very soon it had licked up every trace of those waters of hell!

Their conversation became excited, emotional, imaginative, as it usually was at tea-time; and it was with regret that they suddenly heard the sharp tinkle above their heads of the doorbell.

They both got up and moved simultaneously into the little passage. It fell to Cordelia to open the door and she let in, one by one, Dave Spear, Paul Trent, and Red Robinson. All the visitors professed roundly that they had had tea in the town. They even named the tea-shop, which was neither the worst nor the best available, being the little place kept by Mrs. Jones, the mother of Sally and Jackie and the sister of Mr. Evans' partner.

Cordelia did her best to find seats in the parlour for them all. She got Red safely disposed of in the purple chair, with Paul Trent balanced on its arm; and while she and her husband propped themselves up, as well as they could, on Number Two's rickety antiques, Dave sat squarely down on a kitchen chair which he himself had carried in. This little touch of officiousness on Dave's part — she didn't want any of them in the kitchen with the tea-things all about — had an instantaneous effect upon Cordelia's nerves which affected her whole attitude to the business on which the three men came. To the end of his days Dave would never learn the delicacy and charity of not meddling.

"Women ought not," he would have said, "to be fussy about how their rooms look! Rooms are for human beings to sit in, when — protected from wind and darkness — they discuss how to improve the world."

The three conspirators, whose plot, devised originally by Persephone, had become now a quite momentous and possibly even an historic affair, had been visiting so many Glastonbury houses in the last couple of weeks that they had come to use a sort of stage-method in dealing with people. This method had been invented by Paul Trent with a full understanding of the characters of Dave and Red; and what it really amounted to was that while he himself explained the statistics of the plan, he left Red to interject the revolutionary dynamite, and Dave the prophetic austerity. He was the lean Cassius of the plot; Dave the incorruptible Brutus; Red the vindictive Casca.

But of course this method was hardly required on this occasion, because rumours and murmurs and maledictions of the great plan had been rumbling and humming at every meal Cordy and Mr. Evans had recently shared at Cardiff Villa.

But such was the notorious absent-mindedness of Mr. Evans that Paul Trent felt justified in being as explicit with him as if he had never heard the subject discussed.

"We came in really," he said, "only to tell you two that everything is moving according to our scheme."

"Has Father decided to lend the council some money?" enquired Cordelia.

Paul Trent was too much of a diplomatist not to sense far-off the electric flicker of opposition. He made a feline movement on the arm of Red's big chair, as if he were a cat preparing to do battle.

"Nothing is decided yet," he said. "We have only been discussing things."

"What does Mother say?"

For a second this question nonplussed the man from the Scilly Isles; for it pushed him out of his legal world into his philosophical world.

"I quite agree with you that a wife's wishes ought to be carefully considered when it comes to any big investment but … I'm afraid … in this case—"

"You mean she *doesn't* agree?" said Cordelia. "And I don't wonder either," the girl went on; "she hasn't got the least benefit out of Canon Crow's money so far — and now it's all going to be thrown away!"

Paul Trent leant forward with a flush upon his swarthy cheek and a contraction of his arched eyebrows.

"Not thrown away, lady!" he murmured softly, "not thrown away! He'll still be by far the richest man in Glastonbury."

Cordelia uttered a spasmodic little laugh, a laugh which caused Mr. Evans to give her a grave and anxious glance.

"Your father," interjected Dave, " — and your mother knows *that* perfectly well — would never touch a penny of his fortune for anything but the good of—"

“ ‘Ee’ll be the biggest stock-’older in our commune, Miss Cordy,” remarked Red Robinson, “and ’is will be the only nime what’ll be in all the pipers.”

“He never got back half what he spent on the Pageant,” said Cordelia.

At the word Pageant, Mr. Evans gave an involuntary shiver. He thought to himself: “With Cordy as my Grail Messenger, I’m on a better path now!”

“Miss Crummie told me ‘erself,” protested Red, “that ‘twere only the two and a ‘arf hinterest ‘ee got from the bank, ‘ee spent on *that* silliness!”

“That *is* really true, Miss Cor — I mean Mrs. Evans,” murmured Dave, staring at her with puzzled wonder. (Why have women, he thought, so much stronger possessive instincts than men?) “And everybody knows,” he went on, fixing his blue eyes steadily upon her, “that he’s always regarded Canon Crow’s money as a trust for the common good.”

“Damn the common good!” cried Cordelia impatiently, “I don’t see what you people have got to do with our money! The Rector of Northwold left it to Father without the least restriction. He left it to him because he was his best friend. All his own family had deserted him. Father made those last ten years of his life the happiest he ever had.”

“Are you really going to Mark Court today?” enquired Mr. Evans. “I’ve never seen Lord P. Does he appreciate that amazing old house of his?”

“What we came for officially, Evans,” said Paul Trent, thinking to himself, I’ll make this commune the first real anarchist experiment that’s ever been made; and if this moralizing ass Spear is as stupid with men as he seems to be with women, I’ll not have much difficulty with *him*!— “was to tell you that if Lord P. *does* sign over to us the leases of his property, your shop, together with nearly all the shops in High Street, will have to deal with *us* and do your business cooperatively in future. This will mean,” he went on hurriedly, noticing an impatient movement from Cordelia, “that

Glastonbury tradesmen will pool their profits. Not *all* their profits, of course," here he gave a sidelong, cat-like glance at Dave, "for the whole idea will be to have as much complete personal liberty as possible; but enough to enable the commune to deal as a unit with the outside world."

Mr. Evans' attention had been wandering for some while and his face had grown animated with a child-like excitement.

"Glastonbury," he now cried, rising to his feet and beginning to walk up and down the little parlour with long strides, "Glastonbury will be like she was before that Tudor Devil, and all Welshmen know what the Tudors were, ruined her independence! Glastonbury will be a living Entity again. She will draw a magnetic life from her Three Hills strong enough to attract all the world to her side. She will take her place—" he paused and stared gloweringly at Red who was smoking his pipe in the purple chair with a wry, malicious smile. "This pooling of profits is nothing," he went on with a wave of his hand. "We must all earn our living, of course; but *that's* not it. We must free ourselves from Teutonic vandals like this Lord P. of course; but that's not it. We must employ our workers, of course, better than Philip Crow does; but that's not it. The great thing is to revive the old life of Glastonbury Herself — the great thing is to revive the old faith in Glastonbury Herself as an Urbs Beata to which all the … all those who are … all those who have been … all those, I mean, who've put themselves *outside the pale* may be … may be … purged in their minds!"

His voice had risen so vehemently that when he suddenly stopped and plumped down on one of Number Two's shakiest chairs so that its gilded back cracked, everyone stared at him in embarrassment.

There was a nervous silence in the room. Dave thought to himself: "It's the capitalistic system that breeds these eccentrics. When all able-bodied men in Glastonbury work in our municipal dye works no one will have time to think whether they've purged their minds or not! These nervous maniacs are the result of parasitism. We shall see to it that this fellow works with his hands till he's too tired to think about his manias!"

Red Robinson looked round for something to spit into, but seeing nothing except the fireplace, which was too far away, he swallowed his saliva with a gulp and crossed his legs in the purple chair.

"The pint, Mr. Heavens," he remarked grimly, "hain't whether Glastonbury waters can cure the pox, but whether hus working chaps can get 'old of the bewger's factories."

"Father tells me you're an anarchist, Mr. Trent," said Cordelia, attacking with feminine penetration the weak spot in this ambiguous conspiracy.

The old, weary film of cultivated patience descended upon Dave's blue eyes.

Red Robinson struggled to his feet, approached the small coal fire — the parlour of Number Five, Old Wells Road, was decidedly chilly — spat angrily into it and came back to his chair.

" 'Ee doesn't know nothin' of hanarchy 'cept the nime," he jerked out, "nor nobody helse neither! 'Tis a bleedin' fancy of such as 'as never done a stroke of bleedin' work in their bleedin' lives!"

"Mr. Trent's our lawyer, Red," said Dave quietly. "If he's clever enough to make Lord P. sell those leases, we at least must compromise a little when it comes to our commune."

But Paul Trent had turned to Cordelia and was waiting for an opportunity to speak.

"Real anarchy," he began, in the most caressing and beguiling voice, as if he had been a young Bagdad silk merchant displaying his wares in a luxurious harem, "has never yet been put into practice. Mr. Robinson thinks it a mere fairy-tale, but if your town council leases the shops in High Street and takes over the dye works and gives me a chance to make the few laws which—”

“Laws?” cried Red derisively, “ ‘Ee’s been sighing that we’ll all henjoy ourselves and do just what we like; and now ‘ee’s talking about laws!”

Cordelia, who had begun to gloat over the effect of her apple of discord, surveyed with astonishment the movement of self-control with which the man from the Scilly Isles patted Red’s shoulder and joined in the laugh against himself.

“If he can do *that*,” she thought, “he’ll be a match for Lord P. and reduce old Beere to nothing.”

“I cannot … think,” said Mr. Evans gravely, speaking slowly and emphatically and evidently weighing his words, “that an anarchist commune in Glastonbury is a … practical possibility.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Evans,” said Paul Trent, “but perhaps you spoke just then … without … altogether … realising … how dangerous it is to … to clash with a man from the Scillies.”

Mr. Evans’ corrugated countenance broke into a deeply indented smile and he rose up from his creaking chair and crossed the room and shook hands vigorously with the anarchist.

“So you read the authors too?” he cried. “I never knew it! I never knew it! Think of that! And I never knew it!”

When Mr. Evans spoke of “the authors” he always meant one set of authors, those, namely, that dealt with Cymric mythology and Cymric superstition. He dropped the young lawyer’s hand now and turned to his wife.

“Cordelia,” he said, “you may mark my words that Lord P. will sell them his land! Mr. Trent reads the authors. Mr. Trent knows that it was in the Scillies that the oldest of the gods — Cronos himself — was kept in prison!

Mr. Trent knows that since that day it’s dangerous to interfere with a man from the Scillies who’s set his heart on anything.”

“ ‘Ee don’t believe one word, Mister, ‘ee don’t,” put in Red, “of they tiles and fibles what yer pins yer bleedin’ fithe on! ‘Ee thinks they be all my eye!”

Red looked maliciously at Mr. Evans. His reference was obviously to Paul Trent, who once more astonished Cordelia by his self-control.

“Well!” he said, “if our host can’t believe my philosophy, and I can’t follow *his* poetry, we can agree at any rate in enjoying your humour, Mr. Robinson!”

“I don’t know whether you realise, Mrs. Evans,” said Dave Spear, “that your father has decided to put off the opening of his Chalice Hill arch until the end of January, when we hope to have a ceremonious proclamation of the Glastonbury commune.”

But in his heart, as he spoke, Dave thought to himself: “Since the only aspect of this affair of the least historic importance will be its move towards England becoming communist, I must see to it that the Gazette says nothing of Trent’s absurd anarchism.” He sighed heavily. It would have been far easier for him to drill and march and keep step and practise rifle-shooting than to do all this plotting! But the cause demanded it. His dislike of it was part of that bourgeois mentality in him which must be overcome.

“You see, Mrs. Evans,” broke in Paul Trent in a soft, caressing voice, “this commune of ours will be a very harmless adventure. We have no intention of bringing the government down on us; and the fact that your father will naturally be the leading spirit in it all will keep politics in the background. His interest in it is entirely … *religious* … if I can use the word! Our friend Spear, here, thinks of it as an advertisement for communism. I am even more modest. I regard it as a quiet little experiment in philosophical anarchy. Mr. Robinson, whose influence with the labouring element in our town is so great, is less doctrinaire in his notions. He will be content if—"

"If it makes that bewger Crow sit up and take notice! I 'ate the bloke's bleedin' phyz!"

Red added this last remark almost pensively, puffing out such a quantity of smoke that what Cordelia beheld in her purple chair was an artisan's torso, with a head covered in a cloud.

"It is true as he says," remarked Spear — and it was noticeable that all three conspirators, Dave-Brutus, Trent-Cassius and Robinson-Casca, addressed their remarks to Mr. Geard's daughter rather than to her husband — "our commune will be a very tentative movement and with many facets. I wish," here he gave another of his weary sighs, and his blue eyes took on that hopeless film of disillusionment which had such a curious pathos of its own— "I wish your father wasn't *quite* so absorbed in his religious ideas. He would be such a power, if only—"

Cordelia pulled down her muddy skirt hem over her ungainly ankles and let her eyes embrace all the four men in one sweeping and rather contemptuous glance.

"Why don't you make him dismiss that man John Crow?" she threw out harshly. "It's that idiot who urges him on. Father's just putty in his hands. And he doesn't believe in anything himself. He plays with us all. *I* know him, through and through!"

The founders of the Glastonbury commune surveyed their hostess much as a board of directors might have surveyed their office-stenographer if she had suddenly told them that their window-cleaner was the real danger to the firm.

But Mr. Evans, who had returned quietly to his antique chair after his discovery that the lawyer from the Scillies read “the authors,” broke in at this point.

“My wife has got fond of John,” he said gravely. “And so she always punishes him and holds him up to scorn.”

“Owen!” Cordelia’s astonishment at this unexpected attack was so great that her big mouth became as round as the letter O in the “Ora pro nobis” of a missal.

“ ’Tis Miss Crummie — not Miss Cordy — what’s got fond of Crow’s cousin!” interjected Red. “She ‘as divided ’er ‘eart between Crow’s cousin and young Mr. Dekker. Hain’t I right, Mrs. Heavens? ’Tis ’er and not you what ‘ave got soft on Crow’s cousin?”

The insanity of Red’s obsession against Philip was so extreme that it extended itself to every member of Philip’s family. To Red’s mind, Miss Crow of Benedict Street as well as Mr. and Mrs. Crow of Northload Street and even Persephone Spear, at present domiciled at Dickery Cantle’s, had no individuality of their own. They were the bewger’s cousins; and that fact damned them.

“What’s *your* opinion, Evans,” said Dave Spear, anxious to turn the conversation away from these dangerous personalities, “as to what form our commune should take, if we really do get it started in January?”

“ ’Twas yer hone Missus, weren’t it,” interrupted the incorrigible cockney, addressing Dave, “what first thought of upsetting the bewger by this ’ere commoon?”

Mr. Evans rubbed the side of his great hooked nose with his left thumb. Everybody in the room except Red, who now, as he reverted to his pipe, found his thoughts leaving the Crow family and summoning up the more soothing image of Sally Jones, fixed their eyes upon the Welshman.

The little parlour had become as stuffy as it was chilly. The gusty wind, beginning to shake the not very solid architecture of Five, Old Wells Road, seemed to join with the bizarre furniture of that small room in calling upon Merlin's biographer to utter some oracular word. At any rate there occurred just then that kind of pregnant silence to which groups of human beings are liable when their private thoughts differ so completely as to evoke a sort of negative equilibrium.

"I think it won't matter very much," Mr. Evans said gravely, "what form your commune takes. You yourself," and he stared at Dave with a mouth from which a small dribble of saliva was descending, "you yourself will oppose our good friend here," and he nodded at Paul Trent, "and that opposition will bring the whole thing to nothing."

His words were the first words, all this long while, that brought Paul Trent, who had been half-concealed in the smoke of Red's pipe, down from his seat on the arm of the chair. The feminine-complexioned, soft-fleshed anarchist, in his beautifully fitting clothes, now moved to the fireplace where he stood upon the rug and contemplated Mr. Evans with a tender indulgence.

The woman and the other men — for even Red seemed conscious of something unusual in the air — watched these two Celts with a faint uneasiness. For it seemed as if these strangely different aboriginals of the Western Isles stared at one another, as though something was passing between them totally obscure to the other persons in the room.

"I've only read," murmured Paul Trent, in a much softer voice than that in which he discoursed on the commune, "books *upon* the authors."

Then, without a moment's pause, as if it were a fragment of some immemorial ritual of which they both held the mystic clue, Paul Trent began to recite, in a sort of grave sing-song, words that seemed to Cordelia to be madness, to Dave to be devilry, and to Red to be pure gibberish.

" 'Complete was the captivity of Gwair in Caer Sidi,
Lured thither through the emmisary of Pwyll and Pryderi.
Before him no one entered into it,
Into the heavy dark chain that held—' "

Here Paul Trent stopped; but only to give place to Mr. Evans who caught up the refrain; answering him with a sort of antiphony that seemed to their hearers still worse insanity.

" 'The Head of Annwn's Cauldron, what is it like?
A rim of pearls, it has around the edge;
It boils not the food of a coward or perjurer.
The bright sword of Llwch was lifted to it,
And in the hand of Lleminawc it was left,
And before the door of Hell's gate lamps were burning;
Seven alone did we return from the fortress of the Perfect Ones.' "

"Did you compose all that, Owen?" enquired Cordelia.

"Certainly not!" answered Paul Trent, speaking for Mr. Evans. "It's all in the books about the authors. Neither of us invented it. Rhys, Loomis, — they *all* quote it. It's from a very ancient Welsh poem called 'The Harrying of Annwn' and it appears to refer—"

But Mr. Evans interrupted him.

"It obviously *does* refer," he shouted, "to that ancient heathen Grail, far older than Christianity, which redeemed … and always will redeem … everyone who understands it... from … from … from … from the captivity of Gwair in Gaer Sidi!"

He suddenly burst into a spasm of suppressed laughter which had an extremely disconcerting effect upon the ears of his hearers. Mr. Evans was evidently on the edge of a shameless and vociferous laughing-fit caused by some interior vision which struck his mind as a monstrous Rabelaisian jest.

It always has an unpleasant effect when a person of a very dominant physical personality falls into uncontrollable laughter. There is something indecent in the spectacle of it. This indecency seems to be mysteriously increased when there is an ignorance in the hearers — as in this case there certainly was profound ignorance — as to the cause of the explosion.

Swinging his head and his shoulders backward and forward, making the most extraordinary chucklings, growing at the same time very red in the face, he allowed these laughter-tears to run down his cheeks and to fall upon his waistcoat without attempting the least concealment of his emotion. It was as if he had suddenly been permitted by a special dispensation of Providence to catch a glimpse of the monstrous cosmic joke, abominable, heroic, megalomaniacal, into which the whole creation resolved itself!

Cordelia rose from her seat and moving to his side laid her hand on his shoulder. She felt as if her strange mate had suddenly turned into a medium for some huge, earth-cracking supernatural ribaldry, that to her was inscrutable. She looked anxiously at the others to see how this exhibition struck *them.* But under her touch Mr. Evans quickly recovered himself and what had so agitated her womanly nerves seemed quite a natural occurrence to the other men.

Their host's laughing-fit evidently partook of that extra-mundane humour to which all men are subject and which remains a mystery of childishness to their wives and daughters.

Cordelia, surveying the diminishing convulsions of her partner's gaunt frame with an irritable concern, became a symbol of immemorial feminine annoyance in the presence of such a masculine outburst when to a man — quite suddenly — the whole cosmos appears in the light of a monstrous joke. Women never laugh in this sort of way. Their laughter is pure naughtiness and unadulterated mischief, or it springs from physical well-being and is the airy happiness of the innocent earth-bubbles of matter or, finally, it is hysterical, as when Cordelia laughed like the neighing of a horse.

But she went quietly back to her seat now and Mr. Evans remarked gravely: “In this affair of yours, gentlemen, I confess I’m no politician, what I was going to say was … when a person touches” — he rolled his eyes towards Mr. Merry’s nephew— “this basic Secret of Life, that our Bards expressed in poems like The Harrying of Annwn, these external arrangements of Society — capitalism or communism — seem unimportant.”

Dave Spear rose to his feet, stretched himself, sighed heavily, squared his shoulders and with his hands clasped behind his back broke into a low, intense appeal, addressed to Mr. Evans alone.

“If you could see human beings *digging*, as I have lately … up there at Wookey … straining their muscles and going on and on … and if you could realise that this same manual labour is required, all the while, to keep the machinery of our industrial system working … and that the people who do it … upon whose labour we all live … the people who *make* the machines and who *feed* the machines … are robbed by us non-workers of all but their bare living, you would not, my dear Mr. Evans, you *could* not, talk of communism as unimportant. You and I, with our bourgeois mentality, shrink from it as we shrink from slavery! But surely it’s more righteous that we should all, quite openly, be slaves of the State, than that by an evil and crafty trick, and by our hypocritical talk of mental labour being ‘harder’ than manual labour, we should prolong this crime … this unpardonable sin?”

At the words “unpardonable sin,” Mr. Evans, who had been hearing him gravely, gave a guilty start, and automatically looked sideways to the floor, to the place where, if he’d been in the shop, the staircase to the cellar would have been.

“You can’t have either communism or anarchism in one little town,” he said. “It’s the whole country that must go in for it, or it must be let alone. And even if you *were* dictator of all England, Spear, I tell you it isn’t money or position in life that makes the difference between happiness and unhappiness. It’s something else … and when I think of how unimportant all these questions are in comparison with … I could … I could …”

His face which at this moment was a mixture of Don Quixote, the Devil, and Dean Swift, broke into certain deep wrinkles, evidences of another laughing-fit, which contorted it considerably, while he controlled and prevented the outburst.

Paul Trent now looked at his watch.

“Well! gentlemen,” he said, “I’ve decided that I want you two, after all, to come out with me to Mark Moor Court tonight. I only pray we shan’t find Will Zoyland closeted with his father! I’m afraid if Will got on our track at this juncture he’d ruin the whole thing. What a blessing he’s out at Wookey!”

As soon as the visitors were gone, Cordelia said hurriedly to her husband: “Better take your stroll now, hadn’t you, while I do the things?”

“What did you say?” murmured Mr. Evans, giving the back of the purple chair a push to move it towards the fire.

“Better go out and get your evening stroll over, while I wash up,” repeated Cordelia.

Mr. Evans stared blankly at her. The natural movement of any couple, in their own house, when a group of visitors have departed, is to draw up to the hearth with an ebullition of relief, and begin a critical analysis of the evening. This was clearly what Mr. Evans expected; and he was a little nonplussed. He had not much to say to Cordelia about communes and commune-makers; but he had a great deal to say to her about The Harrying of Annwn.

The girl had already left him, however, and crossed the little passage into the kitchen; so he snatched up his long black overcoat from its peg and let himself out without a word.

"She's cross," he said to himself, "because I laughed like that. She thinks I made a fool of myself."

He followed the Old Wells Road till he reached a turn to his left, called Edmund Hill Lane, which led to the clay pits and the tile works of Edmund Hill Pottery. This pottery had played an important part in the modern life of Glastonbury, supplying the town council with those fine large brick tiles of a beautiful orange-red colour with which it had roofed all its new workmen's houses not only in Old Wells Road and Bove Town but also in Benedict Street. It was from under these bright red tiles, made of rich Somersetshire clay, that the hopes and despairs of many generations of Glastonbury people were destined to mount up and follow in its gusts, night by night, this dream-burdened westerly wind.

Mr. Evans got glimpses of a tormented half-moon in the sky, as he walked along, tossed, tumbled, rolled, buffeted by piled-up cloud racks, driven, themselves, across the rain-swept spaces, by this same wind. Edmund Hill Lane was at that hour a lonely place to walk in, as it stretched upward towards those isolated clay pits. Its ruts were clay; its banks were clay; it had been cut out of clay; and it led to the richest clay pit in the West Country. And all this clay, which in time would be moulded and hardened into roofs for the dreams of Glastonbury people; dreams that would be —

so Mr. Evans told himself now as he strode along — *much the same*, whether under Dave Spear's commune or Philip Crow's capitalism! — called out to Mr. Evans and tugged softly at him, with wet, mute, rainy, dumbly murmuring mouths, and straining, coldly heavy, corpse-like fingers.

The glimpses he got of that wildly tossed half-moon stirred the imagination of this man in the tight-waisted black coat and bowler hat. The wet clay stuck more and more clingingly to his boots as he advanced up the windy hill, leaving Glastonbury and its conspirators far behind him, and his mind followed those weird, old, chthonian deities of his race, whose dim personalities, veiled under these Cymric syllables, "Pwyll, Pryderi, Llwch, Lleminawc," called to him out of the wet earth. The very dreams of the people behind him, mounting up alongside of him from under the tiled roofs of the town, fell away from him now and sank down like a flutter of autumn leaves. That iron bar in the brain of Finn Toller, of which he had heard without hearing, sank down. The great lorries, full of hermetic tin — diabolus metallorum — of which Philip, in his house in the New Wells Road, was thinking, fell away and sank down. The Harrying of Annwn! How much more there was of the essential sorrow of things and of the essential exultation of things in that queer phrase than in all this absurd business of buying legal parchments from the Marquis of P.!

As he walked along under the sickly moon and the feverish clouds, Mr. Evans thought to himself how much more real the world of consciousness was than the world of matter.

"In any given spot on the earth's surface," he thought, "the consciousnesses of men are flowing and floating just below the blind material surface! They have the same sun, the same moon, the same stars; but it is with the souls of these things, with their under-essences that the consciousnesses of men have dealings!"

He came to a heap of clumsily thatched turnips, by a wayside barn, that the owner had covered up for winter feed for his cattle, and upon this heap he sat down, pressing the tails of his black coat under his thin flanks against the damp of this dark mound. And sitting there alone under that turbulent sky it came over him that the lives of men upon earth were all subject to the captivity of Gwair in Caer Sidi, lured by the emissary of Pwyll and Pryderi; in other words that they were all held in bond by something alien, by something external to their true, free essence. But he got the feeling that his own deeper nature could take hold of his body, yes! and take hold of all this bodily world around him, and drive them both, as this wind was driving these clouds, upon strange, occult purposes of its own.

Mr. Evans rested upon this thought for a second, holding himself aloof with an austere effort and grasping fate itself, as a man grasps the handle of a plough. But even while he was experiencing this masterful sensation there slid into his erotic nerve the quivering forked tongue of his unpardonable sin.

Something about what he had seen that afternoon in the sheep-fold had broken a barrier in the fortress of his sensual concentration; and through this hole there now slid, or threatened to slide, the electric-tingling body of the undying worm.

"I must make use," he said to himself, "of what Geard is doing with that Grail Spring. The Pageant didn't kill it … but perhaps this water … these crowds … this white magic of old Geard … may kill it!"

So he spoke; but as if in mockery of "old Geard," and all he could do, there moved, there stirred, there awoke, in the remote circles of Being beyond this wild sky, the appalling perilous stuff in the double-natured First Cause. In its primordial Evil, as with its wavering searchlight it fathomed the numberless worlds of its living victims, the First Cause struck straight down now at the responsive nerve of Mr. Evans' vice, and as it stirred that poison it gave itself up to an orgasm of egocentric contemplation. As for Mr. Evans, he saw himself returning to his house with this madness and with this horror upon him; he saw himself mounting the narrow stairs; he saw himself embracing Cordelia … and he felt he could not do it … he felt he could not … go home … just then … with this reptile lifting up its head.

"Complete was the captivity," he muttered to himself, "of Gwair in Caer Sidi!"

Without realising what he was doing he pressed his left hand under the wet thatch of the turnip heap and pulled out a turnip. This, all muddy as it was, he pressed to his face, smelling at it with his hooked nose, and finally biting it with his strong wolfish front teeth.

While the Welshman sat on that damp heap of turnips and bit, with ferocious and yet hardly conscious impulse, into the flesh of one of the rankest and most astringent turnips in the heap, spitting out each mouthful after he had chewed it and once more plunging his teeth into the sharp-smelling substance, it happened that a microscopic creature — all mouth and yet all belly — was enjoying, or suffering from precisely the same twinge of egocentric mania, as were Mr. Evans and the First Cause, as it lay coiled up upon the surface of this same vegetable.

Thus it was fated for this particular turnip heap in Edmund Hill Lane, halfway between Old Wells Road and the Brick-tile Works to be the occasion of the bringing together, at exactly three minutes to nine o'clock on the night of the twelfth of December, of three identical psychic aberrations, that of the infinitesimal, microscopic parasite, that of Mr. Owen Evans, and that of the ultimate First Cause.

Human beings are however more sensitive to interruptions from chance than are gods or insects; and it was Mr. Evans who was the first to be distracted from this obsession of vicious contemplation. He became aware of the approach of voices coming down Edmund Hill Lane from the direction of the brick works.

They were the voices of a man and a boy; and they were amusing themselves by hooting like screech-owls. Apparently some real nocturnal bird of the species they were imitating was following them in the darkness; for Mr. Evans could hear at intervals a cry that was like an echo of the noises that these pedestrians were making, following them at no considerable distance.

He got up hurriedly from his damp seat and threw the turnip away. In its fall the insect feeding upon its surface was brushed off; which meant the death that very night of that microscopic parasite. The First Cause alone continued its unspeakable contemplation; that motion of evil in the ultimate abyss, against which all the good that is in mankind is forever struggling.

Mr. Evans advanced up the lane to meet the newcomers. This he did because he had the peculiarity of always having a nervous dread of people overtaking him in the dark; and yet he felt reluctant to hurry off home! He found himself even now possessed of a morbid fear of their stumbling upon him unwarned; so, — although with something of an effort — he forced himself to cry out “Hullo there!” in an almost menacing voice.

“Good evening, Mr. Evans!” came the reply out of thie darkness; and he found himself shaking hands with Sam Dekker.

“Do you kntow Elphin Cantle?” said Sam.

And the boy, coming sulkily forward, shook hands too.

“I had an idea we’d meet someone we knew if we came back this way,” Sam went on. “Elphin and I have been putting up wild ducks at Decoy Pool and Meare Pool; and we came back by Crannel Moor instead of by the Godney Road. We had our supper at Upper Godney. They gave us half a small pike that Mr. Merry had caught yesterday, when he was over there; in that pond at Lower Crannel. It tasted good, didn't it, Elphin, served with fried parsnips and parsley?"

Mr. Evans peered through the darkness into the boy's face. The name Elphin made him think of Gwydion-Garanhir and of Taliessin.

"I'd have liked to ask you in," he remarked, "but Mrs. Evans may be in bed. What do you make the time, Mr. Dekker?"

Sam looked at his watch and announced that it was after nine.

"You brought back that Saint Augustine I lent you in the spring so faithfully, that you're always welcome to any books you want to take from the shop."

Sam thanked him and then became silent. The two men stood awkwardly side by side; while Elphin, moving to the edge of the fence, set up his owl cry again.

"I'll walk back with you, if I may, as far as my house," said Mr. Evans.

But for some reason — perhaps because the boy Elphin was so occupied with the owls — they neither of them made any move to start forward.

"Your voice sounded just now as if it were bothered by something, Mr. Evans," said Sam at last after an embarrassing pause.

It was in his instinctive recognition of all animals' moods that this patient naturalist, transformed now into the latest Glastonbury saint, exploited his shrewdest wisdom.

"Have you a cigarette, Dekker?" asked Mr. Evans.

Sam gave him one and struck a match. This ancient Promethean act brought the two men together as nothing else could have done just then. On a dark, rainy night even the flicker of a match-flame has a magical power; and the little circle of light extending outward from Sam's concave fingers illuminated not only Mr. Evans' hooked nose, as he bent towards it, not only

Sam's own retreating chin, but the frayed edges of a small duodecimo that the latter carried in his rough tweed-smelling jacket pocket.

"What's your book?" enquired the antiquary with professional curiosity.

"Only a St. John's Gospel," answered Sam nervously, shoving the volume down further into its place, and pulling his pocket-flap over it, to hide it.

"The Mayor's favourite book," remarked Mr. Evans. "He says it's the whole Bible of his new religion."

"Too-whit! Too-who! Too-whit! Too-who!" cried Elphin Cantle from the fence.

"Listen, Evans!"

Sam blurted out the words hurriedly; and it was with a trembling hand that he lit a cigarette for himself now from the one which the other was smoking.

"I've been thinking lately, Evans, that our Glastonbury Christ is like Osiris. They've cut him into fragments; and out of each fragment they've made a different Person. I don't care much for this Fourth Gospel. That's why I read it."

Mr. Evans nodded his complete and entire understanding of such a motive.

"My Christ's utterly different from Geard's," Sam said, "and different from my father's. My Christ's like Lucifer — only he's not evil … at least not what I call evil. But He's the enemy of God. That is, He's the enemy of Creation! He's always struggling against Life, as we know it … this curst, cruel self-assertion … this pricking up of fins, this prodding with horns … this opening of mouths … this clutching, this ravishing, this snatching, this *possessing*."

“Too-whit! Too-who! Too-whit! Too-who!” came Elphin’s voice. The lad was on the other side of the fence now.

Mr. Evans cast his eyes round him. The half-moon was dipping, diving, rearing, tumbling, toppling, under that strong, wet, westerly wind. Some of the clouds closest to it took on every now and then, a momentary yellowness, sickly and unearthly, but most of them were of the colour of cold steel. Mr. Evans snuffed the air like one of the seals of Proteus. He thought he could detect the smell of seaweed on the wind.

“The tide must be high tonight at the Burnham mud-flats,” he thought to himself. “They must be afraid of the sluices breaking over there.”

“Too-whit! Too-who! Too-whit! Too-who!” Elphin and his attendant owl were already across the sloping pasture in the direction of Maidencroft Lane.

Mr. Evans took off his bowler hat, and bending forward tapped Sam on the shoulder with it.

“Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?” he said. “You’re the son of a priest, aren’t you? Can’t you say to the Demon: ‘Come out of him’?”

There was a moment’s pause; only broken by the little monotonous taps — like a man knocking off water-drops against a doorpost — of Mr. Evans’ hat upon Sam’s shoulder.

“There! I was only joking!” cried the Welshman at last. “I expect you don’t believe in miracles, any more than you believe in the Fourth Gospel. You’re listening to that boy … that’s all you’re doing! You’re thinking of owls, as those rascals that came to my house just now were thinking of leases and communes! It makes me laugh, the way you all go on … while all the time … the Harrying of Annwn …”

Here the man’s face distorted itself, not with the coming on of that queer, planetary laughing-fit, which had seized him in the room, but with a similar feeling of isolation.

"You don't even know what Annwn is!" he murmured.

Then with a deep sigh, he replaced his hat on his head.

"Complete is the captivity of Gwair in Caer Sidi!" he groaned inarticulately, buttoning a loosened button of his tight-fitting overcoat.

"Elphin! Hullo, Elphin! I'm going on!" Sam's voice rang out across the fields in the direction of Maidencroft Lane.

"No, I don't believe in miracles," he said gravely, "any more than Christ did. What He did was simply to use His will to *kill* His will."

"Too-whit! Too-who!" Elphin was at the fence again now and his attendant bird of the darkness had apparently left him.

Mr. Evans muttered something in Welsh. The thought that came into his heart was a thought of sick terror.

"This man's Christ is a madman like I am. His will holds the rod over His will. He's all strain and torment. It's with torment He drives out torment! I ought never to have spoken to this man."

Elphin joined them now and they all three moved down Edmund's Hill Lane. Not a word did any of them speak till they turned into Wells Old Road; but all the while, just eluding his conscious mind, there hovered about Mr. Evans' soul the sinister impact of that dialogue he had not heard.

"Will thik iron bar what you knows of make my young man feel before he dies?"

Even before they reached Number Five of Wells Old Road, or Old Wells Road — for both designations are in local use — Mr. Evans could see a light in Cordelia's bedroom. At his gate he hesitated whether to bid his companions good-bye or to accompany them a step further. An instinct in him difficult to analyse — perhaps a desire to test to the dregs the spiritual magic of this disciple of a non-miraculous Christ — made him decide to go on with them for a little way.

"I'll turn back in Bove Town," he said to himself. Sam seemed surprised, and Elphin seemed definitely cross, that they had not been able to get rid of this disturbing intruder even when they passed his own gate.

Once again a dead silence fell upon all three as they turned into Bove Town and walked along the well-worn flagstones of the raised path under the stone wall leading to High Street.

Sam, it turned out, had to go into St. John's Church to make the necessary preparations, which his father usually made for himself, for the morning's Mass.

Elphin Cantle hoped against hope — indeed he actually prayed in his heart — that Mr. Evans would see fit to say good-bye to them at the entrance to the churchyard. The boy repeated under his breath, as they approached the great church tower, a sort of ritualistic incantation:

"This bloke ought to go home! Ought to go home; ought to go home! This bloke ought to go home; when St. John's clock strikes the hour!"

What was Elphin's consternation when this prayer of his was not only *not* answered, but the extreme opposite of it was brought to pass!

"Good-night, Elphin!" said Sam when they reached the lamp, swinging from the arch above the entrance. "We mustn't take you any further out of your way."

The boy stared aghast, his feelings smitten through and through as if by a catapult.

"But Sir!" he gasped, "but Sir … but Mr. Dekker! I allus helps 'ee with they rinsings and rubbings. I be especial good at it; ye said yer wone self, I were!"

"Shake hands with Mr. Evans, Elphin, and run off, there's a good lad. We've had a nice day together; and we'll have some more; but I'm busy now. Run off home to bed, there's a good kid!"

Not a motion did Elphin Cantle make to shake hands with Mr. Evans or indeed to shake hands with Sam. He turned round without a word, without a sign, and taking to his heels ran off at top speed. He dodged between the people on the pavement. He dodged between the vehicles in the street, and making for his room in his stucco tower, as a wounded animal makes for his lair, he never shed a single tear till he threw himself down — coat, cap, muddy boots, just as he was — prone upon his bed and cried like an unhappy girl.

But Mr. Evans, egocentric though he had grown to be, was not one to view a child's tragic discomfiture with equanimity. He felt angry with Sam. Did the fellow think that he couldn't have talked to him before that boy? Well, he certainly wasn't going to talk to him now! The fellow was a prig, a fool, an ass, to send that lad away … a lad called Elphin too; and he had a curious expression under that lamplight … a funny face … an interesting face!

Such were Mr. Evans' thoughts as he followed Sam into the church.

"I know you'll be pleased to see," said Sam, "what Father has done to St. Joseph's tomb!"

He led him to the famous, empty sarcophagus — one of the most moving, if not one of the most authentic ossuaries of our planet's history — where the bones of the man who gave up his own tomb to Jesus are reported to have been laid.

Mr. Evans could not see very clearly in the dim lamplight that radiated down the aisle what Sam's father *had* done; but it evidently was no great matter, for the tomb looked exactly as it had looked to him when he had visited it in the early Spring with the man who was now his father-in-law. But if Mr. Evans thought of his father-in-law as he stood tonight by that great scooped-out concavity, his companion had a much more poignant thought; for the image of Nell, as he had talked to her and quarrelled with her here, before the begetting of their child, came with cruel vividness upon him.

"I may never," Sam forced himself now to say, "have such a good chance to … to tell you, Evans, what I really feel about … all these things."

He leant forward wearily as he spoke, for he was tired and drowsy after his long walk, and he had never felt less clear-headed and less inspired.

"What I feel is this," he went on, pressing both his hands against the rim of the tomb and bowing his head forward above its dusky emptiness. "I feel that the whole Creation is on the wrong track … all scrambling for happiness and the satisfaction of the senses. I feel that the only thing to do is to follow Christ in making the will *kill* the will."

He lifted his ill-moulded beast-like lineaments and darted a quick nervous glance at the tall, black-coated figure standing aloof with his hands behind his back.

"How like *the shirt of Nessus* is this curst vice of mine!" thought Mr. Evans, when, to his loathing, he found that the mere distress of this will-killing Christ-lover had begun to cause him a lively mental shiver of a dark sort of pleasure. "The poor devil, the poor devil!" he said to himself. "I must not *let* myself feel like this!"

Tightly he clasped his long fingers behind his back, squeezing them angrily together so as to suppress his wicked feeling by their discomfort.

"If I let myself feel like this now," he thought, "I'll be creating an atrocious thought-imp that'll drive him from worse to worse. Down with you! Down with you, you living leprosy! I *will* wash you off — if it's in my own blood!"

"Don't 'ee see, Evans," Sam was now murmuring hoarsely, "it's the whole stream of life that's got this possessive instinct, this snatching, scrabbling, scraping, ravishing instinct. What Christ has to do is to deny the whole thing, root and branch! And it's no use saying it's for 'fuller life,' or 'more life,' that He has to do it. It's all poison. It's all one glittering, shining, seething tide of poisonous selfishness! We are all scales, scurf, scab, on the same twisting, cresting dragon of the slime. The tide of *life itself* is evil. That's the great secret of Christ. And what He's aiming at now — the tortured Anti-God that he is! — is the freezing up of the life stream! Christ doesn't give a damn for morality, Evans! *That's* not the point with Him. He's out for something far greater and deeper. He's out for the Beyond-Life! Do you remember what I said to you on Tor Hill, Evans, about His redeeming Matter? I didn't realise then how He redeems Matter. He does it by freezing the life force in it. He knows what the life force is; and he can track it down. He can find it bubbling and seething and horning and pricking and taking and tormenting and triumphing in every direction. And then he touches it with his cross and freezes it up!"

Mr. Evans became aware that old Mrs. Robinson, who had been waiting for Sam's late appearance before going home, had now crept up with her broom and duster till she was within hearing. The ex-servant of the Bishop must have caught some word of their discourse — one of those tragic clue-words of our human Tournament such as old women rejoice to lap up, as cats lap milk — and she probably thought of this scene at the Arimathean's tomb as a sort of moving-picture close-up, which, if she could get a good seat, " 'ud be the sime as the theayter."

“I can’t help thinking, Mr. Dekker,” said the Welshman now, “that your ideas have changed a good deal since you talked to us that spring day on the Tor. It seems to me that *then* your ideas were more orthodox. I seem to remember your quoting the words of the Mass, *Verbum caro factum est,* but from what you say now—”

“Yes, yes, yes, — I *have* changed, Mr. Evans, and everything about me’s changed; and the whole world has changed! The world can’t go on devouring itself, as it’s doing now, snatching, biting, stinging, poisoning, ravishing its flesh, and pressing itself with *its beautiful breasts*” — he threw a very queer expression into these last words, the reason of which was obscure to his chief hearer, but from the way her little rat’s eyes glittered in the dusky aisle, not so obscure to Mrs. Robinson!— “against reality!” Mr. Evans found it very difficult to look at this agitated figure on the other side of the tomb of the great tomb-lender without a stir in the coils of the nerve-snake within him that fed upon such food.

“You are lucky in one thing, Mr. Dekker,” he said. “I mean in your quiet life at the Vicarage with your father.”

“I’m afraid Elphin’s feelings were hurt,” said Sam, looking up and turning his head towards the door.

His eyes fell upon Mrs. Robinson who was dusting the seat of a perfectly spotless oaken pew and edging nearer and nearer.

“Hullo, Mrs. Robinson!” he called out; and his mouth worked convulsively before he could say another word in the irritation of her presence and his desire to get rid of her.

“Will yer be wantin’ me henny more, Mister?” the old woman responded. “Because, if not, I’ll be miking me way ‘ome.”

“Nothing, nothing, thank you!” he replied, impatiently and added in the same tone, “You can go now, Mrs. Robinson.”

(“ ’Twas a shime to ‘ear the way they two were talking,” the old lady said to her son when she got home that night. “Ondecent ‘eathen talk ‘twere such as never ought to be ‘eard hinside of a ‘orspital, least still of a church. Mr. Sammy, ‘ee ‘urried me hout of the door as if I’d catch a palsy by stighin’ a minute in their company!”)

“Boys are very sensitive creatures, Dekker,” announced Mr. Evans sententiously. “When I was young there was an old man in the Pembrokeshire hills, where we lived, that I used to watch milking his goats. I used to catch them for him sometimes. He used to get angry with them and I used to be glad when he got angry with them. But one day he sent me away for throwing stones at them. And — do you know, Dekker, I wouldn’t go home! I stayed out on the hills for a whole summer’s night. I slept in a gully on a heap of heather, and all that night when I thought of the goats—” He stopped abruptly; for he saw that Sam was no longer listening. Sam indeed had only heard a small portion of this speech and that portion not very distinctly. He was keeping his eyes fixed on the retreating form of old Mrs. Robinson; but the eyes of his heart were fixed upon Nell Zoyland.

The girl was back again now from the hospital, and established — with Mrs. Pippard as a nurse for the child — once more at Whitelake Cottage.

Mr. Evans had done more than blush as he told about the goats. A deep swarthiness had actually mounted to his cheeks, his forehead, his neck. For this story was a sacred story. Led on by the hour and by the place he had told one of the important stories of his youth.

But Sam Dekker wasn’t interested enough even to know whether he had been speaking of goats or of rabbits or sheep. Mr. Evans’ black-coated figure had begun to grow misty and faint for Sam; and Mrs. Robinson, issuing forth from the church door, had become for Sam like some fantastical curlicue on the lettering of a tragic volume. Even a saint cannot bear up always; and at that moment, so great was his physical exhaustion that something in him nearly broke down.

Mr. Evans little knew how near this student of the Fourth Gospel, standing over the tomb of the man who had buried Jesus, had come to crying out a wild curse upon the divine Lover.

“She’s my girl! She’s my girl!” Sam moaned in his heart. “What hast Thou given me; what canst Thou *ever* give me, in exchange for my girl?”

When they were all at last out of the church and got home — Sam asleep; Mr. Evans asleep; Mrs. Robinson asleep; but Elphin Cantle still sitting at the window of his stucco tower — there ensued a singular *dialogue without words* between the red light of the Reserved Sacrament and the empty sarcophagus of St. Joseph. This was one of those dialogues which it is never fantastical to interpret in human language, because no one can deny that in some language they must be perpetually occurring.

“Aren’t you tired, red light, of shining so long without a pause in front of this Miracle of the faith?”

Thus, in a cold, flat, toneless voice, enquired the empty Sarcophagus.

“Yes,” answered the red light, “I am very tired.”

“If you could get anyone to move you,” said the Sarcophagus, “you could rest here, within me; for *I* am tired of being empty!” And the echo of the clock in St. John’s Tower, coming down through the belfry into the church, repeated in a voice faint as an old man’s last whisper:

“Tired … tired … tired … tired … tired … tired ... tired ... tired … tired … tired …” as it echoed the striking of the hour of ten over the roofs of Glastonbury.

THE CHRISTENING

TOSSIE STICKLES' LUSTY twin girls were christened by the Vicar of Glastonbury — bastards though they were! — with all due ceremony and at the regular hour for that ritual, after the children's service, on the day following the Evans' visit to the ruined sheepfold. Immediately after this ceremony the young mother and her small daughters were established once again under Miss Elizabeth's roof in Benedict Street. Nancy Stickles still continued to come each day "to help out"; so that Toss was enabled to divide her time between looking after her infants and cooking for the family, which still included — after several battles royal with my Lord's sister in Bath — the independent Lady Rachel, who now went regularly to work with Ned Athling in the little office of the weekly *Wayfarer*.

Deep in Miss Elizabeth's heart was lodged the fixed idea that eventually Mr. Barter would marry Tossie; and with a view to this natural and ethical contingency, she now had begun encouraging the manager of the municipal factory to pay constant visits to his illegitimate family under her roof, going so far as even to give up her drawing-room, whenever that gentleman came, to his conversations with Tossie.

It was one of those fantastic and incredible arrangements that in real life are always occurring; situations which, in premonition, seem absurdly impossible, but which are the very ones that Nature, moulding the prejudices of men to her own views, takes a humorous pleasure in bringing about.

The christening of Nell Zoyland's child was something much less easily dealt with; just as the fate of its mother was in the hands of more eccentric and wayward persons than either Tom Barter or Miss Crow. Will Zoyland had made up his mind that his father, the Marquis, should stand godfather to the little boy, who was to be called Henry after the great man. But the Marquis had a nervous dislike of appearing in public in Glastonbury — a place which he had come heartily to distrust and dislike since he had been mobbed by the rabble on that eventful Pageant-day — and so after long discussions and procrastinations it had been worked out that Nell's child was to be baptised at Whitelake Cottage by Mat Dekker on the fifteenth of December.

Hearing that Lord P. was coming for this occasion, as well as Dave and Persephone who were the little Harry's other godparents, what must the good Mrs. Pippard do — who was related to half Glastonbury — but beg from her mistress the privilege of giving a little christening party of her own to celebrate this auspicious day. Thus the fifteenth of December that year was to be a lively occasion out at Whitelake; and it was a fortunate occurrence, and a good omen too, for babe Harry, that this day, after so much rain, was one of cloudy and intermittent but still of quite perceptible sunshine. Harry was a tragic little boy in certain ways. He clung desperately to his mother; and it was always touching to see the struggle in his small heart between his intense greediness and his hatred of being fed by any other "Mwys," as Mr. Evans would have called it, than his mother's lovely breasts.

The proletarian contingent of Master Harry's party was to include Mother Legge and her now quite convalescent niece, Tittie Petherton, Nancy Stickles, who was also a relative, Sally Jones who had once been in service along with Doxy Pippard, the old woman's daughter, and last, but not least, our old acquaintance Mr. Abel Twig, who was Mrs. Pippard's cousin.

All these persons were to have their tea in Nell's kitchen, while Lord P. together with Mr. and Mrs. Spear and the Vicar, refreshed themselves in her small parlour.

The present dwellers of Whitelake Cottage included not only Mrs. Pippard herself, but her daughter, Eudoxia, a girl who was now acting as the Zoyland's housemaid. Both mother and daughter slept in the ante-room of Will's private retreat at the back of the cottage, while Nell and her child slept in the front bedroom.

Since the show season at Wookey had come to an end Will Zoyland had been employed by Philip in the much more important role of assistant-overseer of the new tin-mining works. The head overseer — an industrious and clever technician — was not good at keeping his subordinates up to the scratch; nor had he much initiative with regard to tracking out new veins of metal-deposit. Thus Zoyland's job at the tin mine was partly a disciplinary one and partly a geological one, neither of which occupations exactly suited his peculiar gifts. But he did not demand much salary; ten times less, in fact, than Philip would have had to give to anyone else; and all the labourers on the works held him in respect because of his name.

Lord P. had announced that he would drive over in his dogcart from Mark Moor Court, picking up Lady Rachel on his way through Glastonbury. The christening was roughly timed for between four and five; and Mat Dekker had told Nell that he would try to come over himself soon after three, so as to enjoy a little talk with her alone before her other guests arrived.

Will Zoyland had come to the secret conclusion, after first setting eyes on his wife's infant, that this was none of his; but he had concealed this certainty so successfully that Nell had not the least suspicion that he had divined the truth; and this secret knowledge of his gave him a great and unfair advantage in the daily struggle for the mastery between them; for he found that to have such a weapon, and *not* to use it, was the strongest weapon he could possibly have; and he took full advantage of this. His position, just then, was in many respects a singular and crucial one. The fact that Nell was suckling the child herself, though old Mrs. Pippard helped her washing and dressing him, made it psychologically difficult for Will to start making love to her again. He had a curious penchant for babies, amounting almost to a mania for these odd little poppets, whose angers are so nerve-racking and whose philosophical calm is so soothing; so that he won Nell's maternal gratitude willy-nilly by his tenderness to her offspring, especially as he consented to sleep on the couch in the parlour and to leave her and child the uninterrupted use of their bedroom. It had given Nell a queer kind of shock when she saw Mrs. Pippard making up that particular couch for the master of the house; that couch which had not been used as a bed by anyone since that day in March!

But Will's passionate devotion to the child disarmed her completely because it was more than she had dreamed would happen, and she took it to imply that he had not the least suspicion that the little Harry was not his.

The baby, on its side, seemed to take to Will with a degree of awareness and attraction unusual at that age. He was a child of colossal egoism and of an immense power of love. He loved Nell with a piquant zest that was delicious to behold; but his love for her was a hot, feverish, violent thing; while his response to Zoyland was a sort of rapturous calm. In his furious fits of temper, which were of a tragic intensity and prophetic of a future that made the girl tremble to think of, Zoyland alone could handle him, quell him, console him. Time and again, old Mrs. Pippard, who could do nothing with him, would say to Nell— "If it weren't for the measter, thik mommet 'ud fling 'isself into convoolsions."

“He *can’t* not think it his own child!” Nell would say to herself; but how he could have been so deceived, when its pathetic little chin was so exactly like Sam’s, she never considered. She was very grateful, too, at being let off all love-making; and this she attributed to Will’s passion for the child; and it made her uneasy, with a sort of shamefaced discomfort, to think that she owed her escape from his amorous advances to this deception. But in this matter, too, as much as over the child, the girl, for all her feminine insight, had been completely outwitted by the crafty huntsman. It was really the sly old Zookey Pippard who engineered this treachery. Perhaps, being a relative of Mother Legge, she had it in her blood to play procuress. But it was she who had persuaded her daughter to come up to Whitelake Cottage from a very good place at a farm near Witham Friary, and her arguments must have been very subtle ones; for the wench received, in return for her work, probably the lowest wage that has ever been paid to a maid, at any rate in a gentlefolk’s house, from Westbury Beacon on the north to Huish Episcopi on the south. But Zookey was — as Mr. Weatherwax, who knew her “up hill and down dale” said to Penny, when those old gossips first “larn’d who ‘twere were looking ‘arter Missy Zoyland”— “the cunningest bitch-badger this side o’ Tarnton.”

Eudoxia Pippard, when she finally appeared in response to her crafty parent’s beguiling hints, completely turned Will Zoyland’s head.

Having lived a chaste life for nearly half a year and having recognised the fact that he had been made the bread-winner for another man’s child, Zoyland found nothing in his passion for Nell’s baby to prevent him from committing delicious adultery with Doxy Pippard. Eudoxia was indeed dedicated, it seemed, to give immoral delight to Lord P.’s bastard.

She was not at all what you would call a pretty girl. Her lips were much too thin, her nose was a little twisted to one side and her neck was decidedly too long; but she had one peculiarity which, as soon as he discovered it, set Zoyland's Varangian senses on fire, and that was the most satiny skin that ever a Glastonbury amorist had clipped, as Malory would say, since the days of the damosel Linet, of the Castle Perilous! It may be easily that, in the category of feminine desirability, such polished flanks, such slippery knees, such satiny hips, and all such other sinuous slendernesses, do not by any means constitute what is called "classical beauty" or even romantic charm; but whatever they constitute, as they slide in or out of a seducer's arms they evoke a ravishing and transporting satisfaction.

Now there was an outside wooden staircase at the back of the house, leading into the ante-room of the "smoking-room"; so that when Nell and Sam's child were fast asleep, in the front of the house, Eudoxia could easily come in through the kitchen door. This door, if Zookey remembered to leave it ajar, had well-oiled hinges; so that when Doxy found herself — at first with agitated surprise, but later with entrancing coquetry — clothed only in her night-gown and in the presence of the master of the house, lying upon his couch bed, there was no danger of surprisal if they spoke in low whispers.

Now Nell, although Zoyland had loved her dearly and had got great enjoyment from her, had never been really responsive to his embraces. Her body had responded faintly, her heart a little, but her inmost imaginative nerve, the crucial chord to the essential quiver of a girl's stirred senses, not at all. The full-blooded bastard, as may well be believed, had had many loves before he became infatuated with Nell Spear, but none of these had been adepts at the art of provocation, none of these had been viciously exciting.

Now Doxy Pippard possessed, among other original characteristics, a curious mania for retaining her virginity. Vicious and inflammable as she was with the feverish, reckless, almost swooning intensity of the pseudo-consumptive type, she had lavished her nervous provocations on all her men and yet had managed matters so skilfully as to be a maiden still. The mere idea of lying in the arms of the son of the Marquis of P. was intoxicating to the romantic yearning in her snake-smooth, leaf-cool body; while the herculean proportions of Zoyland as a human being fulfilled all her secretest girlhood's dreams as to what a real masculine bedfellow should be.

On the eve of the day of the christening Eudoxia had come down to him soon after midnight, entering the kitchen by the door left unlatched by Zookey; and it was after a couple of hours of paradisiac dalliance, wherein her protection of herself from "mortal sin" prolonged her companion's tantalised delight beyond what he would have dreamed possible, that the couple sat up suddenly on that single-pillowed couch-bed under the heavily curtained window and started to listen with all their ears. What had disturbed them was an outburst of crying from the child, followed by Nell's voice calling Will's name. It is probable that no possible re-arrangements of society — not even that most ideal commune pictured by Paul Trent — will ever bring it about that the fear of discovery in erotic infidelities will be abolished. Such "alarums and excursions," such panic-stricken beatings of the heart, seem as deeply implicit in the fatality of human relations as is the indestructibleness of jealousy itself.

Zoyland had already thrown one of his herculean limbs out of bed; and with his heel on the floor was clutching the bedclothes, preparatory to obeying his wife's summons, when Eudoxia, who had curled up her supple slenderness like a frightened grass-snake, close under the window-sill, heard Zookey's voice reassuring both mother and child.

"There's Mother!" she whispered. She was right. For once, it seemed, the old woman's influence had succeeded with the headstrong baby; for they heard its shrill cries die down now; and soon after they could catch the creaking of the heavy shoes she wore and the drag of her lame foot — for Zookey suffered from eczema and the chief ornament on her extemporised toilet-table, which was a big black trunk with Nell’s maiden initials on it, was a great china pot of zinc ointment — as she returned into the anteroom.

Even his herculean capacity for amorous play being exhausted, and this alarm having roused them both to extreme wakefulness, Zoyland and Miss Pippard fell to talking in low whispers.

A luminous half-moon, disencumbered tonight of those eternally eastward-travelling clouds, threw a silvery stream between the brown curtains of their window; a stream which fell on the man’s bushy beard and on the girl’s old-fashioned night-gown and on her slippers tossed down upon the floor. In his rough eagerness, Zoyland had torn away the top button from the front of this gown, and the girl’s long thin neck protruded wantonly and weirdly; sometimes entering that ray of moonlight and sometimes receding from it, like a slender birch-trunk surrounded by swaying bracken. Close beside Miss Pippard’s faded blue slippers Zoyland had thrown down his own muddy boots, one of which lay on its side, contented and at ease, in that little pool of moonlight, while the other, left in the outer darkness, stared sadly at the ceiling.

They were both sitting up in the bed, their backs against the western wall of the cottage, while the stream of moonlight entering on their right hand and illuminating the girl’s neck and the fringe of his beard, left their upraised knees, over which the rumpled bed-clothes extended in confusion, partly in light and partly in shadow. One of his arms was hanging loosely over the edge of the couch while the other, flung round her waist and against her bare side was teasing his tired senses with an aftermath of delicate tantalisation. As he rested there, Will Zoyland felt extremely grateful to Miss Pippaid for the pleasure she had given him and for the pleasure she was still suffusing through every nerve of his deliciously lethargic frame. Sexual gratitude is an emotion much less frequent in modern days than in mediaeval times, owing to the fact that industrialism has cheapened the value of the sex-thrill by lowering the ritual-walls surrounding it. In modern times it needs a profoundly magnanimous and even quixotic nature to feel this emotion to any extreme degree. It is doubtless this absence of sexual gratitude that accounts for the cold-blooded and savage hatred that so many separated couples feel for each other today; and the furious vindictiveness of their disputes over money. But it is a sign of meanness in a man or a woman, and of a certain thinness of character, when such gratitude is so quickly forgotten. A large nature may find it necessary to hit fiercely back; may find it necessary to escape altogether; but even in its retorts, even in its avoidance, it retains a certain fundamental tenderness and indulgence, based upon physical gratitude for the thrilling sensations of the past.

It was largely his over-brimming gratitude to Nell for the thrills which he had got from the touch of her body that had made Zoyland so indulgent in the matter of Sam. Men that sail the sea are as a rule, by reason of their isolation from women, more grateful to them for their favours than landsmen are. A jealous peasant, a jealous tradesman is much more common than a jealous sailor; and though Lord P.'s bastard had never sailed the sea, his Norse ancestors had, and that manner of life lay deep in his blood.

Miss Pippard was a complete stranger to Will Zoyland; and, for this very reason, the fact that the shuffling of life's cards — or as some would say, the machinations of Zookey — had given him the thrilling privilege of enjoying the satiny texture, cool and slippery as the leaves of waterlilies, of the girl's limbs, endowed their moonlit whispers with a piquancy as delicate and exalted as a bird's song or a butterfly's flight in a monastic cloister.

"I'm glad your mother's asked Mother Legge tomorrow," whispered Will, "for I've always had a fancy for that old lady. She's a classic figure, if you know what I mean, my dear. My father used to say she made him think of a whore-mistress in Rome."

"Is it true, Mr. Zoyland," came a faint response from the white figure at his side, "that the Mayor of Glaston cured poor Tittie of a killing cancer?"

"God! my dear, *I* don't know! I've been out at Wookey all the autumn. Perhaps it wasn't cancer at all. You'd better ask her tomorrow and see what she says. *I* wouldn't go to that pious old humbug, if I had the worst cancer ever known. I'd shoot myself first."

"They say there'll be rare doings," went on Miss Pippard, offering as she spoke just the kind of resistance to his caresses that enhanced their value while it did not waylay their direction, "when Mr. Geard opens his new arch on Chalice Hill. They say they foreigners be due to come in trainloads to see 'um. I were out at Moorleaze, by Witham Friary, on Pageant Day. Missus went to it, and so did the childer; but Master kept I by 'un, to—" She interrupted herself with a little click of her tongue against her teeth. This sound usually denotes some gentle disaster when uttered by a young girl. In the case of Miss Pippard it denoted an indulgent awareness of amorous advances.

"To play in the hayloft with him?" whispered Zoyland.

"There were a lot o' new goslings," Eudoxia continued gravely, "out there by Croft Pond; and I were the only maid in Dairy what he trusted wi' they. Old Madge Dill was too rheumatic to cross barton. She be the one I told ‘ee about, Mr. Zoyland, what got the rheumatiz, from picking watercress.”

“I remember, sweetheart,” whispered Zoyland. “She was the one who stinted you in butter till you scared her by that tale of the corpse candles.”

“So she was,” sighed Eudoxia, “and arter that tale I were the richest-nourished woman in Mid-Somerset. I wish often — and sweet Jesus do know I wish it now! — that Mother had never made me leave that good place. Master often would say I were the deftest maid for smelling out mushrooms that he’d ever seen. He often said that when I married he’d give me a solid gold bracelet wi’ filgree lacework on ‘en.” Thus whispered Eudoxia and sighed heavily.

She gave her bed-fellow plenty of time to meditate on the lavish liberality of Moorleaze and upon ways and means of rivalling it. Then she sighed again.

“I’d like Mother to try if the Mayor’s Miracle Spring on Chalice Hill could cure her eczema.” This pious wish was breathed into the moonlight with intense gravity. And then, even at the very moment when her resistance to her seducer’s one-handed caresses perceptibly slackened, she added in a still graver whisper:

“It makes her toes itch terrible — poor Mother! I’d give half a year’s wages to ease her of thiccy devil’s smart!”

Zoyland’s lechery was of a very subdued kind just now, so he could afford to moralise at this moment to any extent. “Sometimes,” he said to himself, “these girls seem to have no nervous system at all. They can respond without responding, and think of God knows what! If anyone asked me what I valued most in a woman I’d say attention! It’s like dealing with a creature that’s half an animal and half an angel. The larger part of your talk, of your love-making, of your ideas, of your thoughts, pass over them like water off a duck's back!" He had arrived at this finale in his meditations when the girl suddenly stiffened herself like a galvanic wire and shrank against the brown curtain, pulling the bed-clothes over her head. Zoyland had time to catch one faint rustle on the staircase leading to the bedroom above, and one slight creaking of the banister; but he had no sooner leapt out of bed and stumbled over the girl's slippers, than the door at the foot of the staircase was flung open, and Nell — in her blue dressing-gown and with a flat silver candlestick in her hand — stepped into the room.

To the end of his days Zoyland remembered the expression of Nell's face. Her eyes were gleaming with a fierce, hard, bright lustre when she first came in; but as she raised her candle one side of her features was blotted out in shadow.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?" she cried in a clear ringing voice, and with a hand that he could see was neither trembling nor shaking she carried the candle into the middle of the room and laid it on the little green card-table, pushing a vase of small-flowering chrysanthemums that stood there out of the way with the candlestick rim.

The bearded man, looking very tall and formidable in the candlelight, held his ground and remained with his massive legs firmly planted on the rug, his bare feet widely apart, his flannel shirt hanging loose over his bare thighs. But Nell came right up to him and with an imperious gesture with her hand made as if she would push him out of the way as she went to the couch to confront Miss Pippard. Not being able to do this and apparently surprised at the man's imperturbable sangfroid, Nell made a step sideways toward the wall on her left and called out to the huddled figure on the couch.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Eudoxia? Aren't you ashamed to treat me like this and your mother upstairs too; and me with little Harry? I can't understand you, Eudoxia. I can't understand how you *could* do such a thing!"

While Nell was thus expressing her indignation to the form on the couch, Zoyland's mind was rapidly considering two alternative lines of action. Should he pick up his clothes, which lay there, piled up on a wicker chair, near the bookcase — that bookcase that contained the massive volumes of Arabia Deserta — and retire with them to his "smoking-room," leaving Eudoxia to the mercy of Nell? Or should he, by hook or by crook, compel his wife to go back to her bedroom and her child? Huntsman as he was, Will had only to decide on the line to take, and he would follow it up recklessly and defiantly. Up to this point, Nell, in her righteous anger, had had the whiphand over both of them. But Zoyland's one clear instinct now was to save Miss Pippard from further humiliation. Lovely though Nell looked in her blue dressing-gown, the banked up righteousness of her indignation seemed to have changed her personality in a very subtle way. Zoyland could not help experiencing a queer shock when he saw how this gross incursion had dragged the beautiful girl into the role of jealous, sport-spoiling domesticity, wherein it is hard for any woman to play an attractive part.

The man's sensations followed one another, like straws on a splashing water-fall, during the few seconds of Nell's words to that tumbled couch from which his own burly form now warded off the candleflame.

"Come on upstairs, Nell," he said, moving toward her. "We'll talk this out better upstairs. It's not Eudoxia's fault."

"Don't come near me — don't touch me!" cried his wife, with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes.

"Come on upstairs, Nell!" he repeated in a quiet voice that was full nevertheless of a formidable resolution. Those invisible naturalists — belonging to regions of Being more powerful, I will not say "higher" than ours — who take a peculiar and doubtless sometimes a decisive interest, as Mat Dekker did with his aquarium, in human dramas as tense as this — must have been impressed by Zoyland's calm and masterful handling of this situation. They would have seen that all his real tenderness was for his wife — they would have seen that he regarded his affair with Miss Pippard as of no more consequence than if he'd been caught stealing cherries. But they would also have noted that he had the rare gift of *using violence in cold blood.* For instead of being in the remotest degree intimidated by Nell's electric fury — and in her fit of blind sex-reaction the gentle girl struggled like a pantheress in his arms — he lifted her up, as Zookey might have lifted little Master Henry, and carried her bodily up the stairs into the room above, when he laid her — Zookey Pippard having discreedy closed the door of the ante-room — upon the bed, by the side of her sleeping first-born.

The aforementioned celestial naturalists would not have been deceived, as certainly the terrified Eudoxia was, into regarding Nell's furious anger as a deep and tragic feeling. They would have commented to one another — over this Whitelake aquarium of anthropoid minnows — to the effect that had Nell been really tragically hurt she would have hugged her baby to her heart where she was, and never come down those stairs so deliberately, so softly, and so bent on righteous retribution!

What Eudoxia beheld when she removed the bedclothes from her head was the wide-open door of the staircase, the flickering candle on the table, the twisted blue girdle of Nell's dressing-gown lying in the same pool of moonlight as her own slippers and her paramour's boot, and the untouched heap of the master's clothes piled up in the wicker chair over by the bookcase.

Sitting up in bed with beating heart, the girl surveyed these objects for a second or two. Then, under her breath, deeply, passionately, concisely — and it must be confessed with no little justification — she cursed “the womb that bore her and the paps that had given her suck.”

“It’s all your fault, Mother!” she wailed in her heart. “This is the last time I’ll listen to ‘ee! I’ll go back to Moorleaze tomorrow, so help me God!” …

The first of the guests to arrive on the following afternoon, which turned out to be a neutral day, as days go, neither wet nor fine, neither windless nor gusty, neither warm nor particularly chill, was the Marquis of P. and the Lady Rachel.

Lord P. arrived in a thoroughly nervous and crusty humour. Zoyland and Nell had barely finished their late lunch, cooked by Zookey in sulky silence — her daughter having gone off to catch the nine o’clock bus to Frome, intending to quit the bus at Wanstrow, and make the best of her way, without even risking a telegram, safe back to her deserted goslings of Croft Pond.

The Marquis went at once for a stroll by the river with his son, leaving Sergeant Blimp to dispose of the green-wheeled dog-cart and the black horse, as best he might.

“I’ve got a piece of news for you, Will,” he declared with an assumed eagerness, as soon as they were out of hearing. The bastard shrugged his great shoulders. He knew his father too well. The long-winded dissimulation of the House of Lords pulled no wool over *his* eyes.

“The Governor’s been making an ass of himself,” he thought grimly. “This is his regular beginning!”

The old man’s profile, as he watched it moving by his side with the scrubby Vandyke beard and prominent nose, seemed to have grown perceptibly sharper since he saw it last. The aged nobleman had a pinched, frustrated, tired look on his old warrior's face, as if he'd been wearing his suit of chain-armour too many years, and would be glad enough to make his will and lie down with his forefathers in Wells Cathedral.

"I shan't have to sell Mark Court," said Lord P. "that's one good thing. I did a good stroke of business last night, me boy. I wish you could have seen how I led 'em on and hustled 'em and rustled 'em and tussled 'em."

"Christ, Dad!" cried the other, in great alarm, snatching at his father's sleeve, and bringing him to a halt, while he swung round to face him. "What have you gone and done now?"

"They came last night," said the old gentleman. "Three of the devils came! One was your wife's brother, the Bolshevist — an honest chap, by the way, that fellow is, — and an agitator of some sort — an impossible individual; and the third bloke was a clever lawyer from the Scilly Isles — called Trent. He very soon realised with whom he had to deal. The other two had seemed inclined to sermonise me. They took the tone that if I didn't let 'em have their way this time now, I'd be far worse caught later on. But I soon let 'em see I wasn't the sort of person they could rush like that! But this fellow Trent seems to have made a pretty close study of all the Glastonbury leases and properties; and he helped me to make your bolshevist relative see my points when I explained the situation."

"For God's sake what *have* you done, Sir?" cried the bastard, mightily alarmed.

The old man straightened his shoulders and leaned forward a little, bowing stiffly from his waist, like a soldier and a courtier, but digging his cane deeply into the tow-path mud.

"Well, I'll tell you, lad," he said, leaning on the handle of his stick. "I've fixed things now so that I shan't have to worry any more about my income, for years to come. I've been looking up the entail and those brothers of yours — damn their souls! A lot *they* care for my troubles! — have no word to speak in this. The Zoyland entail doesn't touch Glastonbury."

"You've gone and sold—" cried the bastard.

"No, I haven't, lad. Don't get excited too soon. All I've *sold* to 'em, and for a good round sum too, I can assure you, is that section of the dye works properties that are on my land. That's the newest section, you know. That Crow fellow will look yellow in the gizzard when I clear him out; and a good thing too. He's been taking things too much for granted, the snappy close-mouthed rogue! But for the rest; for the High Street shops and for the Bove Town and Paradise property; I've let 'em have *those* on a fifty years' lease, and at a thousand pounds higher rent, too, than I got from the tradesmen and the slum-tenants. It's a first-rate piece of business, lad! Old Beere is furious, of course. But that's because I did it over his head. But a lot he's done for me these last years — except eat my pheasants and tell me indecent yarns about his daughter and your wife's sister-in-law, who everybody told *me* was soft on Crow! He's in his dotage, old Beere is. He thinks it's a great glory and a mark of gentility in him that he's got a daughter who don't run after the boys! I told the old fool that *his* sort of gal would murder him for his cash if he wasn't careful."

William Zoyland jerked himself uncivilly away from his father and took a hurried step along the tow-path.

So this was what that slippery lawyer from Cornwall had been up to all these weeks in that new office of his! Had he got round old Beere? No! — impossible. But brother Dave was certainly behind it! Who would have supposed that that funny little man would have had the gumption — But of course the fellow at the back of the whole thing was that wily old humbug, Geard. He was the one! "I must run off and tell Philip," he thought, "this afternoon; as soon as the christening is over. The newest section of the dye works sold! — Why it's a serious blow! Of course he has the others … but it's serious, it's *terribly* serious. How on earth will Philip take it?" He came striding back to his father.

"Well … you *have* gone and done it!" he rapped out brutally. "But let's see if I've got it clear what you've done. You've sold that *newest* piece of factory-land to them? The one north of Manor House Road and southwest of the Burnham and Evercreech Railway? That *other* one, east of the cemetery, doesn't belong to you? Philip Crow is still safe there? But listen — are you sure that the *buildings* on that newest section are yours to sell? I mean the whole plant? Didn't that man — what's-his-name, that Crow bought out — sell him all those buildings with the good-will?"

The Marquis stroked the point of his grey beard.

"Couldn't sell what wasn't his, lad! No, no! That newest section of buildings near the Burnham Railway, was built by the business man of our family, your great-uncle, Lord Edward. That was before the days when you were a baby in petticoats, out there at Limoges. I took your mother to see 'em … had a pretty narrow shave too, that day, of being nabbed … she had the devil's own spirit, that woman, … when it came to skating on thin ice … just like you, me boy!"

While this conversation was going on, Lady Rachel was being introduced to little Master Henry.

Zookey Pippard recovered her temper a little in the excitement of dressing the babe in its christening-robe; and for some reason only known to its own passionate and highly strung spirit the infant took a violent fancy to Rachel, clinging to the finger she gave it and smiling and slobbering in rapture when she received it in her lap.

The next to arrive among the expected guests was none other than Mat Dekker. The tall massive form of the priest was arrayed in his long black Sunday coat, and he had taken a lot of trouble to wipe his thick boots with swathes of grass before presenting himself at the door of Whitelake Cottage. He had forgotten, however, to change his week-day trousers, and these looked more faded and shabby than usual. The man was obviously strung-up and full of seething emotions; but he kept himself well in control, and begged quite naturally for a little tete-a-tete with the mother of this newly enrolled soldier of Christ.

It was a strange moment for both of them when the mother and the grandfather of Henry Sangamore Rollo Zoyland sat opposite each other in that low-ceilinged bedroom, at the top of those stairs down which the girl had carried her candle to such drastic purpose the night before.

She lay now at full length on the bed, propped up on two pillows, while her child, though fast asleep in its cradle between them, did not separate her very far from the priest.

Fortunately or unfortunately, as it may chance to be, the amorous clairvoyance of a woman is lulled, drugged, drowsed, deliciously stupefied, by the magical sensation of giving suck. Although her child was fast asleep now, the feeling of its exacting lips, of its masterful thirst for the fount of her life, was still clinging to her responsive body, and rendering it dull, tranced, entoiled, preoccupied, to all other sensitised awareness! Thus as she allowed Mat Dekker to retain her cold schoolgirl fingers across the counterpane of the sleeping child, resting her hand with his, in fact, upon the wicker edge of the cradle, it never entered her head that this man — her dear love’s father — had anything in his heart toward her except a deep priestly sympathy. She knew she felt no shyness of him; she knew she felt a lovely and relaxed security in his presence; she knew she was deriving from the touch of his rough fingers an inrush of spiritual strength; but beyond this she experienced, or, was conscious of experiencing, no intimate link between them.

There was *one* restraint, however, that did come over her, and that puzzled her a little as she struggled in her mind to overcome it — a singular difficulty in mentioning his son's name to him. She longed to call out to this silent, rugged, friendly supporter: "And now tell me everything about my Sam!" But some inexplicable force always held back the words, just as they slid, like drops of recurrent rain from the smooth stalk of her happy peace, to the tip of her tongue.

"Why can't I ask him how Sam is?" she thought to herself. "It must be because of his religion. He's come to baptise Sam's child — but he doesn't want to think of us together."

With this explanation in her mind, she let herself relax again on her pillows and close her eyes, pressing the hand that held her own in a confiding and trusting clasp. It was Mat himself who broke this silence, at last.

"I've been thinking a great deal lately, Nell," he said, "about this grand consecration day of the Mayor's. It's to be in January they tell me now; and I hear the wildest tales, as I go about among my people, as to what the man is planning." He sighed heavily, as he spoke, and Nell took the opportunity of repossessing herself of her right hand which she promptly made use of to pull her blue robe more tightly about her.

Deeply had Mat Dekker sighed when he spoke of the Mayor of Glastonbury; and the girl, in her maternal atrophy of the sex nerve, had put the sigh down entirely to the delicate professional problem of how to deal with Mr. Geard's wild and fantastic schemes. But, of course, in reality, not more than a thousandth part of this heavy sigh had anything to do with Mr. Geard's activities.

They were interrupted by the appearance of Zookey Pippard who came to tell them that all the other guests had duly arrived and that his Lordship was growing impatient for the ceremony to begin.

Zookey approached the cradle and Mat Dekker stood up.

"I hope this isn't the first time, Zookey," said the priest with a kindly chuckle — he was always a transformed man when he dealt with the native-born, a touch of the old Quantocks' accent entering, so to speak, his very manner as well as his intonation— "that you'll have heard me say a prayer, since — but us won't let the Missus know how well we know each other, shall us?"

Under normal conditions this indulgent indiscretion, referring to an occasion when the worthy man had rescued this tricky old baggage from the clutches of Mr. Sheperd, would have met with a roguish retort. But the naughty old woman was still smarting from Nell's anger over Eudoxia.

"His Lordship said to her Ladyship just now," Mrs. Pippard retorted, humming and murmuring over the baby and giving its tiny red cheeks a fillip with her finger-nail. "What be Dr. Dekker doing upstairs? Be he a-baptising of *she?*"

"Nonsense, Zookey!" cried Nell, "aren't you ashamed to tell such fibs? But you *had* better go and get ready, Mr. Dekker. Tell them Zookey and I will bring Henry down in less than five minutes …."

"And so she said her must go; and Doxy said Mister would be best pleased for *she* to go, her wone self." These exciting words echoed through the kitchen of Whitelake Cottage half an hour later, when the christening was well over and the upper-class portion of its audience was having their tea in the parlour.

“She shouldn’t a-spoke up like that,” said Nancy Stickles reproachfully, putting down a great piece of new bread and black-currant jam, for they were all squarely seated round the kitchen table, and looking with a straight open gaze into the equivocal face of Zookey— “After all it weren’t nice for Mr. Zoyland to be talking to she on sofa in parlour, like you says he were, and she in bed with Master Henry, and house all hushed and still.”

“Will you have another piece of sponge cake, Auntie Legge?” threw in the hospitable Zookey. “Us all do know how ‘spectable and proper *you* be, Nance Stickles, when all the town know of how Red Robinson was turned out of house by your Harry because of the fuss you made of ‘ee and the clipping and colling that went on when your Harry was to bed. I do know for sure how ‘twere, because Mr. Robinson told me of it, his wone self.”

It was at this point that Abel Twig broke in, interrupting this altercation among the women with such a quavering faint voice that it seemed like the voice of Philosophy itself come forth from those old Lake Village mounds.

“Thik Red Robinson were zour, no doubt, when Mistress Nance didn’t let ‘un do what ‘a wanted to do … and so ‘a went and cast up this tale agin’ her, same as thik dirty Potiphar-scrub did agin’ King Joseph in History.”

There was an uncomfortable silence round the kitchen table, during which the more peacefully inclined among the guests turned to Mother Legge for protection. That great provider of Cyprian pleasures had so far hardly uttered a word. She had kept her eyes fixed upon the door which led into the parlour; a door which had been carried bodily to the cottage from Mark Court and was of excessively thick oak.

“Don’t let them get quarrellin’, Auntie,” pleaded Tittie Petherton with her mouth full of buttered scone.

Sally Jones added her voice to that of Tittie, from whose appearance no one certainly would ever have supposed that a few months ago she was screaming so pitiably for morphia.

"Mrs. Legge!" cried Sally, as if the old procuress were very deaf. "Didn't 'ee hear, Mrs. Legge, what Zookey Pippard said to Nance Stickles?"

The mother of Eudoxia was not slow in defending herself.

"Auntie be hard of hearing," she threw in spitefully, "when her eats her tea with poor volk in kitchen, 'stead of with gentry in parlour."

These words hit Mother Legge straight to the heart. For the truth was that the old lady *had* half-thought when she received the invitation to attend the Zoyland christening, that her place would have been with the gentry rather than with her humble relatives. It was indeed in pensive consideration of this unhappy nuance that the portly lady, though they had given her the only chair that had arms and the only tea-cup that wasn't a kitchen-cup and had taken care to help her first to every dainty on the table, now stared gravely at this great oaken door through which the one voice of the people within that was at all articulate — and that only now and again — was the voice of William Zoyland. The other voices were lost in a vague indistinguishable murmur.

Zookey Pippard was among the few women in Glastonbury who ever stood up to the present tenant of Camelot and of "my other house." But there was a majestic dignity in the rebuke that the old lady administered now and an incredible daring too. She actually got up from her chair, walked to the oaken door, opened it wide enough for her person to fill the whole space and said with perfect sangfroid to Nell: "Your servant here, Ma'am, is unwilling to leave us to look after ourselves; but you *must,* please, tell us *the moment* you need her; for we can get on perfectly well without her."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Legge; thank you very much!" cried Nell, half-rising from her chair in that particular flurry of perturbation that young hostesses feel when there are signs of a mutiny below deck. It was the Marquis who saved the situation.

"Why, if that isn't my old friend from Paradise! They never told me they'd got *you* here! Where have they been hiding you? Come over here — is that all right, Nell? — and sit by me." He gave the arm-chair in which Persephone was seated a little jerk with his finger and thumb — he behaved exactly as if he had been Theodoric the Ostrogoth, patronising some harem at Algiers and indicating by the slightest tap upon his Gothic sword-hilt that he would be more amused by the aged story-teller of the tents than by the cleverest young houri.

Persephone as she languidly rose, smiling very sweetly upon Mrs. Legge and extending one of her long arms toward her, gave Lord P. one single quick, flashing, steel-piercing glance that not only succeeded in making the old despot feel uncomfortable, but in making him heartily wish her back; so lovely did she look in her anger.

"She could have stabbed me, the little minx," he thought. "And I must see her again," he thought.

Once settled in this capacious chair, with all her black satin flounces and her voluminous black laces deposited about her, Mother Legge gazed round her with impenetrable aplomb. Under the protection of my Lord she felt ready to be indulgent to her enemies and more than bountiful to her friends. She even felt she owed something to Zookey Pippard for having been the one to give her the final prod that had led to this public recognition of her true status in Glastonbury society.

"He be fast asleep, the pretty babe," she remarked now, glancing upwards at the ceiling. "You splashed 'un well with the holy water, Passon! It put me in mind of me wone Baptism to see how they drops did trickle over 'un."

There arose at this moment a pressing necessity for more hot water in Nell’s best silver tea-pot, which had been a present from her communist brother. To that brother the young mother looked now, for she noticed that Persephone, in her reaction from the rebuff she had received from my Lord, was flirting outrageously with Will.

Dave got up with alacrity, opened the thick oak door and entered the kitchen, allowing a clatter of excited women’s voices, mingled with the husky bass tones of Number One to pour into the parlour.

He returned with the kettle and filled up the tea-pot, which his sister carefully held out to him across the sun-burnt wrists and clean Sunday shirt-cuffs of the Vicar. The door between the two rooms remained open while this transaction went on; and that curious tension that comes over two confronted groups of people, between whom yawns the social gulf, reduced Whitelake Cottage to one complete self-conscious silence. It was through the middle of this silence that Dave, like a young doctor walking down a ward of expectant patients, took the kettle back to the kitchen and returned to his place, closing the oak door behind him.

“I can’t think how we people,” he said, “can be content to go on with this sort of thing. I suppose there isn’t one of us here who casts a thought on all those picks and shovels that are working now, over at Wookey, getting out that tin which Nature put into the Mendips for the benefit of everybody.”

Will Zoyland rolled his amorous blue eyes lazily round from his contemplation of Percy’s supple figure and stared at the speaker, who now took his seat by Lady Rachel.

A splutter of bullying raillery burst from him before his brain had the wit to think of a good retort.

“What is your name?

Elacampaine!

If you ask me again
I'll tell you the same,"

he chanted in an aggravating manner; and then he added:

"You and I and the Vicar, Dave, my friend, are the only ones here who could use those shovels for five minutes; and *we* couldn't use them — at least *I* couldn't — for half an hour without getting exhausted. What are you going to do about *that,* eh? There *must* be division of labour in this world."

"But *we're* not labouring at all!" cried Lady Rachel, making room for Dave to take his seat by her side.

"Not labouring, Rachel? That's a nice thing to say," cried Zoyland in a great voice, "when I've given up my one single holiday for months to entertain all you people and have Henry christened! You should see how I work out there, my good child. Why, I'm often in that draughty little office, hours after Spear's precious shovellers have gone home to their suppers." He shouted all this so loudly that Dave's answer was made the more effective by its extreme quietness.

"We all can't dig, Will. That's true enough; but we'd all dodge it *if we could.* I'd be content if those who did the dirty work got more pay than the rest of us — instead of much less; and being looked down upon by us as well."

Zoyland must have been conscious of the advantage that Spear's quietness gave him. He must have been nourishing a bitter grievance too about Eudoxia and a still deeper one over what his father had just told him with regard to the sale; for he now cried out quite uncivilly:

"Bosh! Rats! All these theories are the merest clap-trap! It's the same all over the world! Wherever you go you see men ordering and men obeying. Would you yourself be found with a pick and shovel, I'd like to know, if you could drill us all into your precious commune tomorrow?"

A humorous smile flickered across Dave's face at the mention of the word commune. "They little guess," he thought to himself, "how near they are to a commune in Glastonbury!"

But before he could reply, Lady Rachel had leaped into the breach.

"The point you entirely slur over, Will," cried the young girl, quoting with a touching faithfulness to her lover a paragraph in next Saturday's *Wayfarer,* "is whether these labourers would prefer working for a single individual like Philip Crow, or *working for themselves* — that's to say for the community."

"Well said, Lady Rachel!" murmured Mr. Spear.

There were actually tears in his eyes as he looked at her, so delighted was he to find how far she had travelled along the path, since he had last talked with her.

"Well said, little traitor!" mimicked Zoyland.

"If you'd think a little more and shout a little less, Will, it would be a good thing," retorted his half-sister with a red flush on her cheeks.

"What she said is unanswerable," remarked Dave Spear sternly.

The Marquis of P. rose to his feet —

"Will," he said in a slow drawling voice, "I wish you'd be so good as to tell the Sergeant to put my horse in and bring him round." He then turned politely to Nell, fumbling for a minute in the pockets of his coat, and finally producing an object tied up in tissue paper.

"I picked up Rachel at the curiosity shop in Glastonbury," he said, "and she helped me to choose this little trifle for the child. That man … that extraordinary individual … who's always there now … took a long time hunting it up … but it's genuine … *he* said it was rather valuable … it's got our arms on it anyway … which I thought was a rather happy coincidence."

However long Mr. Evans may have taken in finding the object referred to, he certainly hadn't taken very long in tying it up; for, as Lord P. brought it out of his pocket, the tissue paper was already in tatters. It was a tiny little cup, but it was apparently made of gold; and there was a general rush of the company to look at it.

Nell made a very pretty, hesitating, upward tilt of her face; and the bastard's father didn't hesitate to take advantage of this. He held her upraised chin gently between his finger and thumb for a second as he brushed her full lips with his grey moustache.

"Bless you, my dear," whispered the old man softly. "After all it's you mothers who are the real workers."

The fuss over the golden cup, which Nell presently, to prevent the portly lady having to struggle to her feet, placed in Mother Legge's lap, occupied the company sufficiently and laid — like the council's water-cart — the cloud of controversial dust, until Sergeant Blimp appeared at the back door with the greenwheeled dog-cart.

The Marquis and his daughter had to pass through the kitchen to reach the vehicle, and Zookey Pippard wisely placed a block of wood against the oak door to keep it open.

The Sergeant and his big horse were soon surrounded by a mingled company from both the two rooms; for a horse is still the one thing in England that obliterates all social embarrassment.

"How be, Sergeant?" said Abel Twig familiarly to the solemn-faced coachman.

"Pretty tidy, Mr. Twig, thank'ee — I'd like it well enough down here and be glad enough — I would — to stay down here, if 'tweren't for they Bellamys. Those two old warlocks, Mr. Twig, were made by Satan, to bother a man's life out of him."

“I can believe it, Sergeant, I can believe it. I only once set eyes on thik wold couple; and that were at Somerton girt Fair; but I seed ‘un haggling wi’ they gippoos in a manner onbefitting decent Christian volk. I were sorry for they gippoos … and that’s the truth, Sergeant … when I heerd how thik pair were carryin’ on,”

Sally Jones now hurried forward to stroke the mane of the black horse.

“How does yer uncle Bert enjoy ’is-sell, Sal, now he be back in shop?”

“He ain’t doing only half what he were, Mr. Twig,” replied Sal, “and ‘ee have gived up his place over shop too. He have taken a room at Dickery Cantle’s where he can see the cattle market from his windy. He says, ‘Them as has had a zysty as bad as my zysty do like to see a bit of the girt world, afore they caves in.’”

When the Marquis and his daughter appeared upon the scene, and were helped into the dog-cart there was quite a little crowd around them.

Though most of these friendly alherents were only women, Lord P. received an old-fashioned feudal ovation as he drove off by Blimp’s side with Lady Rachel perched upon the back seat.

“ ’Tis fine to smell a whiff of good horse’s dung again,” said Abel Twig to Zookey, as they turned back into the house, “in place of this here gasoline.”

“That’s what my darter Doxy said, only this very marnin’, as her went off to get the Frome bus. ‘Mother,’ my darter said, ‘I reckon I’ll go back where people aren’t so finicky and so pertickler, and where they girt cart-horses have silver bells on their necks.’”

Indeed with the departure of the head of the Zoyland family a strange and uncanny irritation seized that whole group of people, an irritation that seemed to flow like an evil electricity from kitchen to parlour, and from parlour back again to kitchen. The little golden christening cup, with the

Zoyland falcon on it, which the Marquis had brought, became now the innocent cause of a violent quarrel between Zookey and Sally Jones.

Nell had brought the cup in to show them, as soon as the dog-cart had driven off, and Sally had said that Uncle Bart had told her long ago about that gold cup and that Miss Crummie had wanted to see it, but Miss Cordy, what's now Mrs. Evans — had said 'tweren't right "to show things to people unless people were thinking of buying things."

It was then that Zookey had rudely remarked:

"Thik wold Number Two do blurt out lies as fast as his lungs do pant. I reckon he thought thik cup were common silver-plate till Mr. Evans told 'un 'twere gold."

To this insult Sally had replied in an incoherent rush of words, the drift of which was that she had heard Mr. Geard tell Mrs. Geard that if he were blessed by Providence to find his dear Lord's cup, there'd be something in Glaston that would divide lies from truth forevermore. "And that," Sally had added fiercely, "that would be the last of *thee*, and of *thee's* devil's tongue!"

"Ye'll be saying next that his Lordship's gold cup," retorted Zookey, "with his Lordship's wone trade-mark on it, be the Mayor's cup. *That* comes of letting Red Robinson take 'ee, where no decent woman *should* be took! I've a seed ye two, sneaking whoam at night down Chilkwell Street and if thee don't mind thee's manners, I'll let the Mayor know thee do go round town, telling tales of what he says to his Missus, when none be by!"

Nell had gone upstairs by this time to suckle little Henry; Zookey was clearing away the tea-things in the parlour; Zoyland and Percy were standing together by the nearest pollard willow in the direction of that deep weir, into the waters of which, on the occasion of Mat Dekker's first appearance here last March, Sam had been so strongly tempted to fling his bearded rival.

Dave Spear, using Percy's little motor car for this purpose, was occupying himself by patiently driving, in two successive trips, first one party and then another of the proletarian guests to their various homes in the town. He took Mother Legge and Tittle first. Then, on his return, he took Abel Twig, Nancy Suckles and Sally Jones, Sally sitting on Nancy's lap. This occupied him altogether, with the inevitable lingering conversations in doorways, nearly a whole hour; and thus it was getting on for seven o'clock when he finally found himself turning out the lights of his machine on that gravel patch at the back door, upon which lay the wholesome-smelling droppings of the black horse from Mark's Court.

Entering the kitchen by that well-oiled outer door that Doxy Pippard had found so serviceable, he discovered Doxy's mother laboriously coping with an enormous pile of dirty dishes. Will had purchased at the last moment, in the china department at Wollop's, a number of cheap tea-cups and plates that Nell had cordially disliked, but that Zookey, hearing the altercation about them, cast an envious eye upon, regarding them as a possible perquisite. These new cups and plates, although not to be compared for intrinsic beauty with Nell's own collection, possessed for Zookey a far greater value than these, just because there hung over them this vague premonitory glamour of future ownership. Without doing it deliberately Zookey broke two of Nell's nicest cups, treasured relics of the quiet Spear family, objects that bore no predatory falcon upon their gilt-bordered whiteness; but not one of these new "Wollop things" did she so much as crack, partly because of their sturdier substance, but also because in her acquisitive mind, they were destined for her own dresser in Bove Town. After standing to chat for a few minutes with Mrs. Pippard, a friendly gesture that was rewarded by several wickedly barbed pieces of information ("Parson can't hang over Missus long enough, when she have child at breast," being one of these, and "Thee's preety lady and the Master do seem to like thik dark river-bank" being another and " 'Twere wondrous to see how Auntie Legge's eyes did shine when gold cup were on lap" being a third) Dave Spear pushed open the door and went into the parlour. Here he found an aura of such forlorn emptiness and hushed sterility that even his vigorous and phlegmatic nerves were affected by it.

Nell — or Mat Dekker when he went up to Nell — had blown out all the candles save one and the first thing Dave did was to light two more. All three at his elbow on the table, he sat down to read and to smoke, taking both book and pipe from his own capacious pocket. A treatise upon the Lost Atlantis it was that Dave produced and it interested him as an imaginative picture of an ancient communistic state.

A certain interior feeling, however, of quite another order than any emotional reaction to wife or sister, refused to be stilled by his reading. This feeling was that of extreme hunger. Dave had had no lunch; and the thin bread and butter and scotch scones of their tea had been devoured so quickly by Zoyland and Mr. Dekker that before their economic dispute began he had had only a nibble at them; and once launched into his argument he had naturally forgotten such a personal thing as a craving for food.

Most of the pathetic scenes in almost everybody's life are scenes unnoted by anyone and totally disregarded by the person in question. Such was this moment in Dave's life; when, with his head full of the signing of those documents at Mark Court, he was pondering on these legends and rumours of Atlantis in connexion with his historic experiment in Glastonbury, and all the time wondering against his will whether Zookey intended to cook them any supper.

He was successful in rigidly keeping out of his mind every image of Dekker bending over Nell in the room above, and of Zoyland bending over Percy in the darkness outside; but as his three candles flickered upon these legends of the drowned continent, he could not prevent his thoughts from running upon baked potatoes and gravy.

Twice, while Dave had been reading his book on Atlantis, and thinking against his will about potatoes and gravy, Percy came straight up to the window outside where those brown curtains were, and peeped in upon him. Being the man's wife, and yet with no essential kindness for him, the girl when she saw him there did not feel the least sense of the pathos of that short flaxenhaired figure, with its schoolboy earnestness, turning the pages of "Atlantis" and every now and then making a pencil-note in the margin of the book. Thinking himself completely alone in that candlelit room Dave gave way to a childish trick, that his dead mother had long ago tried to cure him of — a trick of sucking his upper lip, and pulling it as far as it would go, into his mouth, while he licked it with the tip of his tongue. But Percy, while she had grown so familiar with his ways as to take them all for granted and while she had come to value his opinions so as to accept them for her own, felt toward him not one single kindly human feeling.

"There he is — reading that book!" she had said to herself the first time she peeped in. "How his ears *do* stick out!" And the second time she peeped in, it was much the same.

"There he is — still reading!" she thought. "How insensitive his hands are!"

Will Zoyland had not yet forgiven Nell for his humiliation of last night. He had agreed to the precipitate departure of Eudoxia; but there had been no reconciliation between himself and Nell … in fact very few words of any kind had passed between them since he had carried her bodily up the attic stairs to spare the feelings of Miss Pippard.

Aggravated rather than appeased by his protracted dalliance with Doxy, Zoyland's senses were irritably on edge after his long summer of celibate virtue.

The electric response of Persephone to his careless courtship — for, as we have discovered, to excite a man's desire to the point of desperation was a recurrent aspect of this singular girl's perversity — very quickly heightened this rebellious wantonness into a leaping flame of desire. Nell's unforgivingness over the trifling incident of Eudoxia rankled in the bastard's mind as something extraordinarily unfair. Here was he playing the wittol for Nell's sake and what was she doing in return? He couldn't blame her for being absorbed in her maternity; but she might at least have been indulgent to his natural and pardonable lapse.

As he pulled Percy away from the parlour window after her second spying upon her husband, he glanced up at the window of the attic and noted by the faint light there that she had only lit one of her bedroom candles. He could hear no sound of the Vicar's deep voice either; and he thought to himself, "The Padre is holding her hand and rocking the cradle — a pretty family picture! But where do I come in?"

Will's complaisance over the child was, if he had troubled to analyse it, more for the baby's sake than its mother's. His rich animal nature — the lavish temperament of a born outlaw — responded exuberantly to the helplessness of babyhood. He found Henry sweet to his taste; but if a wandering gipsy-woman had left a foundling on his doorstep he would have made the same kind of pet of it.

The little golden christening-cup, having been handed here and there between parlour and kitchen, and now reposing in peace at the foot of Henry's cradle, had been an added cause of annoyance between Zoyland and Nell. The girl had expressed a desire to have the baby's name engraved on the cup, but this had seemed to William a paltry, middle-class addition. Did not the cup already carry the proud falcon of his race? Thus there had been yet more bitter words between them on this head, which added still further to the rankling score of grievance.

"Come on, sweet one," he now whispered, dragging Persephone away from the house towards the tow-path and this time in an easterly direction. "They don't want us in there. He's plotting revolution, and they're plotting sentiment! We're out of it tonight, you and I; and we'd better make the best of being out of it!"

Percy had always enjoyed flirting with Zoyland, but they were both in a completely different mood tonight …. They were both in the same mood too, by some fatality; which always means a vibration between men and women full of delicious danger.

"Is it *possible*," her incorrigible spirit pondered, "that this man is going to do what Phil and Dave couldn't do? This is a glorious moment anyway. I wish it could last forever!"

The half-moon, looking water-logged and labouring, like a rudderless ship, in the mottled sky, poured down a stream of ambiguous influence upon the swollen river. Too many feminine nerves, of every level of organic life, were draining just then that strange Being's vitality, so that the magic touch that fell upon Percy's relaxed limbs as Zoyland dragged her along by the hand, was a mere accidental overflow; casual, uncalculated. It gave enough light however to guide their steps as they followed the tow-path;

and the whole nature of that night was such that nothing emphatic or arresting in the elements distracted their attention from each other.

“He willing and she willing,” as Homer says, they speedily receded out of all sight of the cottage.

The truth is that women like Nell, absorbed in their motherhood, and men like Dave, absorbed in their politics, will to the end of time throw into each other’s arms reckless, restless, irresponsible, wandering stars, like Percy and Zoyland. It is upon these strangely *neutral* nights, such as was this fifteenth of December, that the real power of darkness as opposed to daylight gathers itself together to assert its essential identity. Complete darkness is usually so empty of all discrimination as to be practically a negation; but darkness faintly touched by a sickly moon has a certain positive character. The absence of high wind or pouring rain, too, enables the mind to receive, in uninterrupted concentration, those simpler emanations of earth-life, such as the leap of a fish, the rustling of a rabbit, the cry of a nocturnal bird the bark of a farm-dog, the lowing of a cow in an isolated barton, the faint soughing of reeds, the creaking of a bough, the fall of a twig into a silent pond, the shy stirrings of aimless little night-winds amid the dead bracken, which are destroyed and obliterated by the more startling play of the elements.

Zoyland paused only once in his predatory stride and that was to make the girl lean on his arm in place of holding his hand. She was indeed following him so gallantly and with such an easy swing over the muddy ground that he felt proud of her as a companion. The truth was that in a rough-and-tumble country walk, Percy, for all her sophistication, would have beaten any woman in Glastonbury except her cousin Mary. It was perhaps the vigorous Norfolk strain in their blood. But whatever it was, no Glastonbury-born girl could have rivalled these two in this. Further and further eastward he led her; for he knew well by this time what he had in his mind.

What he was aiming at, and he found it without any trouble, was a spot that had always made him think of just this very contingency though not necessarily with his present lady! About half a mile from Whitelake Cottage there was a reed-thatched shed where the farmer of those fields kept his dry hay. The fields on both sides of the stream belonged to this man just there; and in order to convey his hay across to his cattle on the opposite bank he kept a flat-bottomed boat tied by a rope to an iron stake, beneath this hayshed. Zoyland had made use of this boat many a time before, and without leave asked either, for the purpose of shooting wild fowl; and it now entered his mind that nothing could be more congruous with the hour and the girl than to embrace his present delicious companion where the waters of the river would be flowing within an inch of their bodies.

Percy laughed aloud — a low, merry, young-girl's laugh of pure mischief — when she found herself laid upon a mattress of hay in this floating bed. Her only desire now — and even that was a languid one — was to put off her final yielding to the bearded man until she had enjoyed to the extreme limit the excited tension of his craving.

"How queer it is, in my life," she thought to herself, "the way the same situation keeps repeating itself! Is it possible that that Bristol Wharf" — she was thinking of her early encounters with Dave— "and Wookey Hole, and Saint Mary's Ruin," — she was thinking of one particular meeting with Angela Beere— "and that room in the hospital" — she was thinking of the last of her morbid visits to Mr. Evans— "were all rehearsals of this breaking of the ice with Will? When a person's life repeats itself — from that shore of Phil's to this boat of Will's! — there's a doom of some sort in it. He *may* be able to do it. He *may*! Will! *Can't* you do it? *Can't* you show poor Percy where her heart is? Oh, find it, oh, find it, darling Will! Touch it, hurt it, bruise it, *break* it! So long as you show her where it is — poor Percy's lost treacherous heart — that she can never, never, never find!"

It may well be believed, with a piratical amorist like Zoyland, that it was not long before Persephone's body, whatever happened to her heart, belonged, as far as it could belong to anyone, to this herculean ravisher.

In the matter of pure lust, Will did not get half the satisfaction from his taking of Percy that he got from his dallying with Eudoxia. But in every other respect — aye! how he did enjoy the unequalled circumstances of these violent embraces!

The gurgling of the water beneath this keel-less vessel, the rubbing of the rope against the bark of a little bush, the drooping down as if in sympathy with his heathen satisfaction, of the whole cloudy heaven, the smell of the river-mud, the glittering slide from the high zenith of a falling star in the direction of North Wooton and Croscombe, and most wonderful of all and actually simultaneous with the apogee of his delight, the sudden rising of a great, broad-winged heron and its heavy retreat over the moonlit marshes towards Westholme and Hearne House — all these things gave to the bastard's sensuality that sort of romantic elemental margin, which was the thing of all things that he relished most in the world. Thus, it may be imagined in what a mood of tender gratitude he took Percy back, holding her hand tight, very tight, and repeatedly kissing it.

As they moved along, he thought to himself— "Girls really ought to be allowed everything they want in this world, when they can give a person such entrancing pleasure!"

He felt in a delicious mood now; at peace with Man and at peace with God; and he would have got home in this mood, if it had not been, as he approached the house, that he caught sight of a particular branch of a particular tree which he had noted — it was blasted by lightning — while the Marquis was telling him of the sale of the factories and of the leasing of the shops.

Quite irrelevantly, and not very discreetly, he burst out, upon catching sight of this branch— “The old man brought bad news, tonight, kid … devilish news. He’s selling I don’t know what of his Glastonbury property to I don’t know who; and leasing, for an ordinary person’s life-term, what he can’t sell! It’s old Geard, of course, who’s at the bottom of it; but it’ll be terribly, *terribly* serious for Philip. I ought really to let Philip know tonight, so that he can take measures, if there *are* any measures to take! He says distinctly that he’s sold at least a third of the Crow dye works. They are only the newest ones — but still! I was perfectly flabbergasted. I knew he owned the land, of course; but I somehow thought Philip had *built* all the dye works. But of course he didn’t! He only improved the old ones out by the cemetery. And it now appears he’s only had these new ones on a lease; and this lease is now up. If these people — Geard and the rest — don’t choose to lease ’em to him again, they can kick him out. And they *will* kick him out! There’s no doubt about it. They all hate him like the devil; and nothing would give ’em more pleasure than to bring him down a few pegs.”

Persephone herself was a little surprised and shocked by what she felt in response to this. For many dark and complicated reasons she actually felt a spasm of pleasure at hearing of this disaster to Philip. She had been deeply piqued, for one thing, by his obvious ability to get on perfectly well without her. For another thing, she had accepted, for good and all, her husband’s views as to the injustice of the capitalist system. But there was a much subtler reason than either of these for Percy’s throb of uncousinly pleasure at hearing this startling news. Philip’s chief hold upon her imagination had been her idea of him as a swift raptorial man of action, competent, unscrupulous, deadly. But this news showed him as outwitted and something of a fool; and this development left the fortress of her heart free for Zoyland. She was in her queer fashion watching with an intense inner interest her feelings about Zoyland. She felt that she was still, though they were far from the boat, under the spell of his portentous magnetism, of his overpowering physique. When Philip had loosened his hold upon her, she had very quickly become mistress of herself. She had shaken off her contact with him as if it had been no more than a kiss. But something surely … deeper than that … *had* been touched by Zoyland's possession of her in the hay-boat. Furtively in the darkness she allowed herself to fondle the man's muscular wrist; and then from his wrist her long slim hand slipped down to his great swaying hips. Here, as her fingers strayed, she found one of the leather straps of his braces hanging loose; for when he had been buying that set of heavy tea-cups at Wollop's, he had been persuaded to purchase a new pair of braces for himself by the youth who read Nietzsche and these articles his powerful fingers found it very difficult to button. When he felt her knuckles against his side the spontaneous intimacy of the gesture tickled his fancy as much as her actual touch tickled his ribs; and with a deep-drawn chuckle he stopped dead.

"Do it up, if you can, kid!" he laughed. "It's beaten *me*, that bit of leather!"

She put both her hands to it and finally — though not without an effort — she got it fastened. This was the first time in Persephone's whole life that she had buttoned a man's button.

It was a quaint little incident, but in its particular kind of intimacy it affected some nerve in her wild, perverse nature that sent a delicious shiver through her whole frame. She felt like some elemental creature of the night, some wandering elfish thing, that was taking care of a primeval earth-giant.

No woman in all Glastonbury had less of the maternal in her composition than this erratic boy-girl; but by thinking of herself as an elf-waif and of her paramour as a fairy-tale giant, she made of this trifling incident, as they stood there in the river-scented darkness, something that was significant and even symbolical.

To their surprise — for human beings are very like animals in their expectation of finding what they have left exactly as it was when they left it — they found, on their re-entrance into the parlour, Nell and Dave and Mat Dekker seated round a small cold supper. Dave rose quickly to get them chairs, for their places at the table had been prepared for them; and while they sat down, they could hear Zookey Pippard crooning and murmuring to the baby in the room above. In the centre of the table, side by side with the vase of small bronze-coloured chrysanthemums, Nell had placed the little golden cup; and this small object at once became again the topic of general conversation.

Although Mat Dekker had made a stubborn struggle with his religious conscience not to allow his overwhelming feeling for his son's mistress to betray itself in any overt manner, his whole being had been so stirred by these long, sweet, lonely hours, in semi-darkness, with her and her child, that he flooded her, saturated her, drowned her in the heady worship of his suppressed passion. It was therefore from an atmosphere of limitless and enfolding idolatry that Nell found herself faced, at first by the bodily absence, and then by the absence of mind, of her husband and her sister-in-law. She had kept Mat Dekker and Dave waiting half an hour for their supper; but then, when the absent ones had not returned, she had told Zookey to bring in "all there was in the house."

Mat Dekker was too excited to eat very much; but half his normal appetite was enough, with the aid of Dave, who was ravenous for food, to dispose of the more substantial viands that Zookey had been able to find, and there was little left for Zoyland and Percy except sponge cake and black-currant jam.

Now, although suppressed desire is destructive of appetite, satisfied desire is creative of extreme hunger, and happy as Zoyland and Percy were in their secret union they both felt a very sharp craving for some kind of solid and substantial nourishment.

Below the surface of the most civilised human beings, the hunger-lust darts and snaps like a fish, snatches and rends like a bird, growls like a wolf, snarls like a panther, buzzes like a hornet, bleats like a sheep and stamps like a bull; and there is nothing so aggravating to hungry stomachs as the sight of dirty plates pushed away from satisfied rival stomachs. Mrs. Pippard was so tired and cross after her party that Nell had not liked to demur at anything she did; and indeed when cold ham, tinned sardines, and scrambled eggs appeared, she knew well enough that the resources of her larder were exhausted.

Unfortunately, nothing looks more tantalizing to hungry eyes than bits of cold toast upon which scrambled eggs have been served, or more offensive to the aesthetic sense of hunger — for hunger *has* its aesthetic sense — than the scales and tails of sardines upon oily plates.

Thus, however happy the two adulterers were in each other’s society, and whatever secrets of this curious neutral night they brought into Whitelake Cottage with them, when they found themselves confronted by the sponge cake, it was very difficult to retain their high spirits.

“Percy would like a couple of boiled eggs and a cup of tea,” cried Zoyland in a casual, airy, jaunty manner.

“I’m sorry,” said Nell, “but the kettle is cold and there are no more eggs.”

"Well … anyway … let's have some cheese," Zoyland's voice had become a good deal less airy. But Mat Dekker broke in:

"I'm so sorry — I told you how it might be—" he muttered, looking anxiously at Nell, for he had finished every bit of her excellent cheddar cheese before he proceeded to light his pipe.

"I'm — afraid — I ate — more than my fair share of the sardines," said Dave anxiously, "but I expect there is—" and he looked at Nell with a pathetic masculine faith in the unlimited resources of feminine providing—"I expect there is *something*."

"Well, I know what I *can* get for Percy, anyway," cried Zoyland angrily, leaping up and rushing into the kitchen.

"Take off your boots if you go up to your room," warned Nell. "He'll be sure to hear; and Zookey has only just this minute got him off to sleep."

But Zoyland took not the slightest notice of this request; and sure enough in a short time they could all hear the creaking sound of his heavy steps as he walked through the attic anteroom into his smoking-room. Nell rose indignantly to her feet, listening intently.

Persephone helped herself to a piece of thin bread and butter, a piece that had already acquired a certain dry consistency, which indicated that it had been left over from tea. From somewhere outside, away to the back of the house, where there was a clump of naked larches, came the barking of a fox; but for once Mat Dekker was oblivious to this exciting sound.

His eyes were fixed with a furious sympathy upon Nell's white face; his long fingers were clenching themselves under the table, their nails pressing into the palms of his hands. As for Dave *he* was occupied in a vain attempt to open a ginger-beer bottle.

"You'd like some of this, *wouldn't you?"* he whispered across the table to his wife. Then he added in a still lower voice, "It won't open though."

In the silence that ensued everybody could catch the audible lifting up of an angry infant’s moan, a moan full of a self-pity that amounted to anguish.

“He’s woke up,” cried Nell, biting her lip, and casting a wild look of blind appeal upon Mat Dekker.

“Hush … listen!” whispered Persephone.

And while in the further distance the heavy tramp of Zoyland’s boots was audible, they all caught the lilt of an esoteric jumble of West-country rhymes, chanted over the cradle.

“Oon, two, dree, vour …
Bells of Girt Sedgemoor!
Who can mëake pancëake
‘Thout fat or vlour?
Zee-Zaw, Harry’s mother,
Sold her bed and laid in clover,
Wadden she a dirty slut
Da zell her bed and lay in dirt?
‘Pon my life an’ honner!
Gwine to Mark’s Tower,
Who should I see,
But Zookey’s Babee?
Ton my life an’ honner!”

In the interior of Whitelake Cottage this singular lullaby was very audible and not devoid of significance. But its effect upon the infant was the reverse of soothing. Something in the sound of the child’s crying, when it burst out again now, made Mat Dekker think of a small vivisected dog he had heard howling once and that he could never get out of his head. Nell’s face became distorted with anger. She felt as if each step Zoyland took, upon those creaking boards up there, was taken upon the outstretched nerves of Sam's child! She could see the way its funny chin, the very replica of Sam's, was wrinkling itself up in its blind suffering!

But she clutched the back of her chair and tried to force herself to remain where she was. "If I go up," she thought, "I'll say something to Will which he'll never forgive — and which I never shall *want* him to forgive!"

But Will had got what he wanted now; and the creaking up there ceased, as he came down the outside steps and entered the kitchen.

"I'll have something really decent for you to drink in a minute, Percy!" he shouted through the oak door, pushing it open for a second with his hand.

Nell sank down mechanically into her chair; but some new thought had entered her head — some desperate thought — and she sat staring into vacancy, disregarding them all.

The child's crying grew louder and louder in the room above — Zookey was scolding it now; but that was even less effective than her "oon, two, dree, vour." Dave had recommenced his attempts to loosen the ginger-beer stopper; and Persephone was swallowing her second piece of dry bread and butter.

"I can't think how—" began Mat Dekker, half-rising from his chair. There were beads of sweat on his forehead and his whole face had darkened to a dusky red. Zoyland came rushing in now from the kitchen, opening the oak door with a heavy kick and letting it close behind him. In one hand he held the bottle; in the other three tumblers.

"Here's something that'll make you forget whether we've starved you in this house or not!" he shouted, pouring out a stiff glass of the stuff for Percy. It was of Percy and Percy alone he thought. Everybody else was non-existent. It was as though he and Percy were still by themselves on the bottom of the hay-boat.

"I can't think why—" stammered Mat Dekker, staring at Nell in helpless, pitiful expectancy.

If Zoyland saw only Persephone just then, Mat Dekker all that evening had seen nothing but Nell!

Dave relinquished the ginger-beer stopper as hopeless. He stared at the smoke which continued to rise from Mat Dekker's lips, in big convulsive puffs, floating away above the candle-flames. Persephone gulped down the whisky and held out her glass for more.

"It's good, Will," she murmured gratefully. "It's better than food." They exchanged a long, entranced look. He filled her glass again; and again she emptied it in a few quick gulps. Her brown eyes had a dazed, ensorcerised film over them as she sank back in her chair. "I do love him. He cares nothing about any thing," she thought. "He's just like me." The drink kept mounting and mounting to her brain.

Zoyland drank out of her glass and then refilled it for her for the third time. He made an automatic motion of passing the bottle to Dave, who shook his head. He had ignored Mat Dekker completely all that evening, since they had first entered, and he continued to ignore him. His eyes were as luminous with excitement now as Percy's were languid with enchantment. They sat opposite each other, and as they drank they stared at each other; and more and more it seemed to both of them that they were each other's true love. They kept drinking out of the same glass, which might have been drugged for them by that same Dame Brisen, who, in the days when love was all, brought Launcelot du Lac to the bed of young Elaine.

Dave as he looked now from one to another of this distracted company, said to himself in his heart— "And this sort of thing is what they call a personal life! These people are thinking of nothing else but their own personal emotions; and they are proud of it. And while they are wasting their time like this, the men from Crow's Dye Works, the men in Bove Town, in Edmund's Hill Road, in Benedict Street, in Paradise, are sleeping soundly and freely, without any fuss.

"If I can keep Trent from spoiling it all with his anarchism, I'll teach these good friends of mine how to be impersonal! These people think that their feelings are the only serious thing in the world. *Their feelings!* When, at this very moment in China, in India, in New York, in Berlin, in Vienna — Good God! … *their feelings!* When, at this moment, if all the pain in the world caused by this accursed personal life, by this accursed individual life were to rise up in one terrific cry … it would—" The little Henry's crying — as if to round off Dave's thoughts — rose to a pitch that was distressing to hear. And yet Nell did not move to go to the child. Her forehead was knitted into an intense frown and her eyes continued to stare straight in front of her.

"Damn that child!" cried Zoyland, jumping suddenly to his feet. "Here! I'll give him his cup. *That* will stop him!" He snatched the little cup of gold from the centre of the table, and flinging open the staircase door, rushed upstairs.

Nell instinctively sprang to her feet too; but sat down again immediately, her head remaining turned towards the staircase and a queer, distorted, rather unnatural smile on her face.

Whatever Zoyland may have done when he reached the top of the stairs, he was evidently completely successful in soothing the child; for the listeners at that candlelit table — and none of them spoke a word — were aware of the baby's cries suddenly dying down. Little gurgling whimperings followed; and then a profound hush; a hush that was broken finally by the voice of Zookey, uttering the words: "God be on us!" —

which was the woman’s favourite commentary upon the ways of Providence, when thoroughly surprised by any curious occurrence.

Apparently satisfied that the personal manias of his troublesome relatives had reached some kind of temporary surcease, and made aware by the look of their countenances that objective conversation was for the moment suspended, Dave Spear slipped his hand into his side pocket and brought out his book on Atlantis. He was too polite to read in company, but the sight of the volume, laid on the table by the side of his plate, gave him a sort of reassurance that speculative thought upon serious matters was not wholly impossible, even in Whitelake Cottage!

Thud … *Thud* … *Thud* … “What on earth,” thought Dave, “is this bearded drunkard doing now?” “Stop! stop, Master Zoyland!” the agitated voice of Mrs. Pippard and her shuffling scramble in pursuit revealed the nature of the bastard’s action. He was carrying the baby downstairs! His appearance with the child in his arms was a signal for them all, except Dave, to rise from their seats. Nell rushed straight up to him, and without a word spoken, snatched the infant from his hands and set herself smoothing its rumpled clothes.

She took it to the couch under the brown curtains by the window and began rocking it on her lap, swaying her body backward and forward, as she did so, and murmuring to the child apologetic whisperings.

“She’d forgotten him … she had! She’d forgotten her baby in her bad, bad thoughts! There … there … there … go to sleep my precious … go to sleep … there … there … there …” Both Zoyland and Persephone were already under the power of what they had drunk; but he now filled their glasses again from the oblong flat-sided bottle he had brought down from his room, and once more they resumed their seats opposite each other. With each drink she took, the tall girl's entrancement increased. Her dark eyes were swimming now with a newly awakened desire for the man's embraces.

She watched every movement he made; and her whole body as she lay back in her chair cried out to him in wordless yearning: "We are yours!" her child-breasts cried. "We are yours!" her long relaxed limbs answered. "We are yours!" whispered her warm neck and her glowing curls. "We are yours!" echoed her sinuous waist and her boy-hips. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pippard had begun to clear away the supper things.

Each time she took anything from the table she threw a disapproving, disgusted glance at the state Persephone was in, and did her best to catch the deep-set sombre eyes of the Vicar of Glastonbury. But Mat Dekker had no eyes for anyone but Nell. The man's inmost nature was seething, fermenting, heaving, upheaving, beyond restraint. Of the bastard and Percy he noticed nothing. They made part of a hateful burden of enemies, all of whom, including even poor Dave with his Atlantis book, the pages of which the indignant revolutionary was now permitting himself to turn, were to his mind persecuting, outraging, tormenting his divinely enduring lady and her sweet child!

When the table was clear of everything except the small golden cup, Zookey Pippard stretched out her hand to seize upon this, so that she might fold up and carry away the tablecloth. But Zoyland intervened.

"Christen little Harry's christening-mug!" he cried in a thick drunken voice; and rising to his feet he snatched the thing up and began pouring raw whiskey into it, out of the bottle. Having achieved this much of sacrilege with his shaky hand, what must the bearded rogue do but forget his first intention — whatever that may have been — and hand the shining mug to Percy, who, without a second's hesitation, raised it in the air, preparatory to pressing it to her lips.

This sight was more than Nell could stand. “Zookey!” she called out in a voice that rang through the room. The old woman, who had been standing like a glaring Phorkyad of secular Judgment in the doorway, hurried to her side.

“Here, take him! Hold him!”

She transferred the child to Mrs. Pippard’s arms and came forward towards the table. “Mr. Dekker!” she murmured, from a mouth that looked like a sword-cut in a linen sheet spread over a scarlet counterpane, “Mr. Dekker!”

It may be believed that the passionate Quantocks nature was uppermost at *that* appeal and that the priest was forgotten.

“Yes, my dear?” he murmured huskily … and then, under his breath, “Oh, my darling!”

But whatever the impulse had been that made her call out to him, it died away now when she saw the fatal devotion burning beneath his bushy eyebrows, and she sank down at the end of the table and covered her face with her hands.

Persephone, who had only just touched the liquor in the golden cup with her lips, pushed the thing impatiently away from her at the sight of Nell covering her face like that. But Mat Dekker had reached the end of his tether. The point had come, as he stood there, while Zoyland, pushing hurriedly past him, began talking wild nonsense to the child in Zookey’s arms, when he must either tear the priest’s mask from him and cover that bowed head with more than a religious consolation, or get away from her … leave her … get home to his son … to his aquarium … to his dead wife — to his God … The heavily built man stood there panting, like a great dog whose mistress has gone one path and his master down another. His greenish-black trousers remained so still above his square-toed muddy boots that to a whimsical eye — only there was no whimsical eye just then in Whitelake Cottage — they became objects quite distinct from his head and shoulders; objects that hung, like a drowned man's trousers, on a post by the wharf.

It was the way her knuckles looked, half-buried in her wavy hair, that he couldn't endure another second. If only she would *speak* to him he could choke down this feeling! He shut his eyes and pressed his clenched hands against the flapping coat-tails which hung down on each side of those baggy trousers.

"If I don't get out of here at once," he thought, "I shall forget myself completely."

Behind his closed eyes he forced himself into a mood in which his feeling for Nell turned into anger against her enemies: "Damn that drunken whore! She drank out of the christening cup!" It was finally by the aid of a self-tyrannous auto-flagellation which it now becomes only too clear his son had inherited from him that he decided to leave Whitelake Cottage at once. "Damn that tipsy bitch!" he said to himself before he made any move; hitting out at poor Percy just as a child, suffering from a nettle-sting, might have beaten the grass.

"Good-night, my dear Nell!"

His words sounded curiously irrelevant in that disturbed room. Indeed, to Nell's ears they sounded as if he had uttered them in an earthquake or a shipwreck. She could not take their meaning seriously.

"You … are … not … *going*?" she said, raising her head and fixing upon his face her large, tear-wet, reproachful eyes. It seemed impossible to her at that moment that she was going to be deserted by her only real friend in that whole house.

“Yes, I *am,* Nell dear,” he answered, looking vaguely around for his coat and hat and stick.

Dave Spear closed his book and jumped up. “I’ll drive you in a jiffy!” he said. “I’ve driven twice into town already tonight … in Percy’s car you know … I like driving … I like it very much.”

His words aroused Persephone from the semi-comatose state into which she had fallen and she fixed upon him a tipsy stare.

“Good Dave!” she murmured — just as if he had been a dog— “good, kind, thoughtful Dave! Yes, you fellows, yes it’s true — he *can* drive. He’s quite right in saying that. He drives very nicely. *I* didn’t teach him. The Comrades in Bristol taught him. They said he *must* learn. He didn’t like it when he first heard that! But he obeyed them — he always obeys them. He’d obey them if they told him to kill Philip!”

There was no reason why she should have brought in Philip; but something very deep in her nature was drowsily comparing the various people to whom she had given herself up to be enjoyed.

“I’ll never … know … what love is!” she thought to herself. This thought came to her with such a strong feeling of having made a momentous discovery, that she fancied she had spoken it out loud; and she looked round the room, in a kind of shamefaced challenge, to justify herself for so doing.

Mat Dekker waved his hand for Dave to sit down.

He disregarded Persephone with studied discourtesy. Nell looked at him aghast.

“You don’t have to *go,* Mr. Dekker?” she cried, beginning to see that he actually was collecting his things. He spoke in a quiet voice now, but a voice that was resolute and final. “Yes, I’ve got to be getting home. But I love the walk … *you* know that — don’t you, Nell? But I’ve got to be getting home; or Penny and Sam will be coming out to look for me, among the rhynes of Splott's Moor."

This allusion to Sam was a wise and crafty one, worthy of any old Quantock shepherd. It brought their two dwellings near each other and it softened his departure by involving her in his consideration for Sam and Sam's anxiety about him. Nell rose to her feet.

"Well, if you must, you must," she said. "I shall never forget your goodness to me today and … and always!"

Zoyland made a mock bow to the priest as the man passed him, carrying his surplice bag in one hand and his stick and hat in the other.

Nell opened the door to let him out.

"Good-night, little girl!" he murmured. "God bless you. God protect you!" he added huskily as he strode off towards the river. She closed the door on his retreating figure and drew a miserable sigh.

Percy still sat on in a tipsy daze. As for Will Zoyland, he seemed unable to stop talking nonsense to the sleepy, but thoroughly placated infant. Little Harry's long-robed body lay contentedly now in Zookey's arms. She swung him to and fro as she leaned against the wall.

"Harry says his christening-cup hasn't been christened yet," cried Zoyland suddenly. With one of those impulsive, irrational angers that sometimes seize on drunkards, he turned fiercely upon Nell. "It's my cup. It's my father's cup," he gabbled. "And *I* say the cup hasn't been christened yet, Harry's little cup. Harry says it *must* be christened!" He moved with unsteady steps to the table. Here he picked up the cup and raising it to his mouth, tossed off its contents.

"That's … not … christening … Will … that's only … that's only …" mumbled Persephone in a drowsy voice.

"You're right … my girl … you're always right! It's wonderful how she's always right, isn't it, little Hal? It's my cup; it's my father's cup. It's got our falcon on it. By God! I'll christen it in the river water!" He ran to the door carrying the cup in his hand.

Nell clung frantically to him, calling out repeatedly: "Are you mad, Will? What are you doing, Will? It's not yours … it's Harry's. It's Harry's, I tell you. Will! It's Harry's cup!"

But he wrenched himself loose from her and managed to get the door open. She followed him into the garden; and a breath of cold night air floated into that whiskey-smelling room.

Dave stood there motionless, hesitating whether to follow them or not. How calm and impersonal looked that little book about Atlantis lying on the table face-down and open!

"Let 'un alone, Mr. Spear," cried Zookey. " 'Twill only vex 'un worse for thee to meddle. Her can quiet him. Him won't hurt his Lordship's golden mug."

Percy looked dreamily at her husband while her eyelids sank down … opened again … and sank down again.

Her lulled and drugged senses had drifted back to the hay-boat. Never had she felt like that before! Never had she given herself up like that before! She had not known the least little thing about "love." No wonder people made so much of it, and priests called it "mortal sin!" "I'm sleepy," she thought— "I'd like to go to sleep in his arms. How strong he is! I'd like to melt away in his arms; and sleep … and sleep … and sleep …"

Meanwhile Nell was following Zoyland down the sloping lawn towards the river.

She was wearing a tight-fitting lavender-coloured dress with loose, beautifully cut sleeves. This particular dress she had seen in Wollop's window and Mr. Wollop’s head-seamstress had worked hard to alter it for her, against the day when she came out of the hospital.

She overtook him long before he reached the river bank and clung to him desperately and they struggled together, trampling upon her wild-flower bed and the last of her marjoram plants that were sinking down into the wet winter mould.

In the struggle between them, for he kept holding the little cup high up in the air and she kept dragging at his arm to reach it, it happened that one of her sleeves got caught in some way as they swayed together and was badly ripped, evoking as the fabric tore, that particular sound which is, of all others, the most agitating to a woman, when she is struggling — whether in love or in hate — with a man. The tearing of her dress and the ease with which Zoyland — even in his drunkenness — held the cup out of her reach caused Nell to lose her self-control completely.

She struck at his face again and again with her clenched hand; a proceeding which astonished him so much that he could only murmur, without attempting to defend himself, “Do it again, darling! Do it again, Nell!”

It is a memorable epoch in a man’s life, the first time a woman strikes him in anger. In most cases a certain subtle link is broken between them that can never be mended. But there are exceptions to this.

In the relations between men and women the taking of virginity is undeniably the symbolic as well as the psychic root of all complications. This act causes pleasure to the one and suffering to the other — therefore, when a woman strikes a man, a deeply hidden, basic relation is broken; and broken in a manner that, as a rule, is dangerous for both.

The Reverend Dr. Sodbury, Rector of St. Benignus’, who was Megan Geard’s favourite among “God’s Ministers” as the lady put it, “in all

Glaston," in an eloquent sermon preached on the occasion when Mrs. Legge of Camelot, then in the prime of her life, was summoned for violently striking the father of Mr. Wollop, spoke of there being something in a woman's striking a man that was monstrous, perverted, unnatural, forbidden, impious, shocking, obscene and — the worthy Doctor in his original manuscript had added the word "bestial"; but in a later version he had modified this into:— "More proper to the insect world than to the world of humanity."

"Do it again, darling! Do it again, Nell!"

Zoyland was debarred from making any serious attempt to defend himself from these blows not only by gallantry but also by his obstinate efforts — natural to the gravity of drunkenness — to keep the cup far out of her reach.

Into her blows Nell threw all the mounting tide of her feelings; feelings that had been gathering and gathering against Zoyland ever since Sam gave up making love to her, ever since her child's conception began. To the end of her life she remembered what she felt as she hit him. It was the sight of his beard in the moonlight, more than anything else, that made her repeat her blows so often. And each blow — as she felt the flesh she struck at yield under her knuckles — seemed to avenge her, and liberate her, and heal some deep hurt in her, and fulfil some profound necessity of her nature.

It was as if she were striking something more than Zoyland. It was as if she was striking at that whole procession of rank, hirsute, brutal, abominable men that she had seen that day, when in the first recognition of her maternity she had burnt up her brother's pamphlet — it was as if she were striking with her schoolgirl hand, all that unfair advantage that men possessed over women in this world; their easy escapes, their light-hearted irresponsibility, their shifting of burdens, their abysmal conceit. How she had hated that “thud … thud … thud …” of her husband’s heavy steps coming down those stairs! Well! It was with another “thud … thud … thud,” of her woman’s knuckles against his bearded face, that she had countered that!

It was not, of course that the girl had time to feel all this in *sequence*; but she did feel the overpowering impetus of all this as she struck her blows.

The tearing of her dress was the raising of the sluice and the flood simply followed. The truth seems to be that the attraction between men and women lets down a drawbridge across a fretting current of hopeless differences that has only to be exposed to lead at once to these wild outbursts.

As long as she had not met Sam, or known that there was a Sam in the world, there was enough sensuality in her to make Zoyland a tolerable partner. But when Sam and Sam’s child came between them, Zoyland was thrust at once into that category of unilluminated maleness towards which it takes a born courtesan to be indulgent.

It was the appearance of Dave Spear’s figure now — for the impersonalist had decided to disobey Zookey — that drove the tipsy giant to his next move.

“I said I’d christen ‘ee, little cup,” he roared, “and so I will. How do ‘ee like *that*?”

So speaking he ran down the slope of the moonlit lawn, treading carelessly on her rain-beaten patch of rosemary, and flung the golden cup clear into the middle of the misty stream.

There was a shriek of astounded dismay from Nell and a cry:— “What on earth—” from the bewildered Communist; and with a much smaller splash than anyone would have expected — in fact with hardly any splash at all — the “Doll’s House Grail” as Mr. Evans had called it when he sold it to Lord P. sank down to the bottom of Whitelake River!

The spasm of her anger all spent now, only a sick disgust at his folly remained in Nell’s mind. But this was enough to give her the final push to what she had been gathering up her courage to do all that agitated evening. She had not missed — no woman *could* have missed, not even one who loved another! — the vibrant aura of infatuation between Zoyland and Percy. It had been her vision of their two faces as they drank that whiskey that had tipped the scale.

“Will,” she said very quietly when the two men, the one approaching her from the house and the other from the river, met at her side, “Will — listen!”

“I *am* listening; and so’s brother Dave listening!” jeered Zoyland.

But she went on in a steady ice-cold voice.

“I … am … going … to … *leave* … you,” she said. “I’m going to leave you … now … tonight. Dave is going to drive baby and me to — where I tell him — but that’s not for you — and yet it *is* for you — yes — I’m going to the Vicarage. Mr. Dekker will take me in. I’ve had enough of this sort of thing, Will. But … but—” she hesitated for a second— “but … I’m sorry I hit you. I oughtn’t to have done that. I don’t know what came over me.”

Lord P.’s bastard drew a deep breath. The light from the drifting half-moon made his great bushy beard look twice as big as it did by day and his figure twice as formidable.

What passed through his mind like a falling star was the thought of Percy’s naked body, alone with him in that little silent house.

“Very well, Nell,” he said, as quiet and composed as a man could be. “Very well, Nell.”

"I shall leave Mrs. Pippard here," she went on, "you can keep her or let her go, just as you like—"

"I'm listening, Nell," he repeated. "Very well, Nell."

But she turned to her brother now. "Dave," she said humbly and gently, "Dear Dave, I'm sorry to drag you into all this … besides I know how you … I know what we both …"

"Oh, it's all right, Nelly," Dave cried hurriedly, anxious, above everything, to stop her from referring to Percy before Zoyland. "We'll get off at once. Don't 'ee fret! We'll get off at once. Dekker's a fast walker. He'll be home before we're there. Don't 'ee fret, Nelly. The Vicarage won't hurt you for one night anyway … and we can see later … we can all talk … reasonably and quietly … later … and try and see things … later … *outside our own skin!"*

This expression "outside our own skin" came suddenly into Dave's head. It was his personal reaction from all this long day spent in stroking the electric skins of so many personalised animals!

"Don't 'ee fret, little Nell!" How many times in her earlier life had this absent-minded half-brother uttered these words! They brought more comfort to her now, in her distress and her shame, than she would have thought possible if she could have foreseen how this day was going to end. Dave put his arm shyly and stiffly round her waist. There were no directions in the Marxian philosophy — nor indeed in his Atlantis book — telling a reformer of society how to comfort a woman. But between his sister's soft waist under her torn sleeve and his own arm, just then, there seemed to be something spontaneously generated which was outside the sphere of reason.

Not more than an hour later Mrs. William Zoyland and Master Henry Sangamore Rollo Zoyland were safely deposited, together with a modicum of luggage, on the steps of the Vicarage front door.

It was the Vicar himself who opened the door to let them in.

The child, disturbed by the ceasing of the movement of the car, began to cry loudly; and in spite of her agitation his mother could not help recalling how, when they left Whitelake Cottage to the tune of Zookey Pippard’s “oon, two, dree, vour,” her husband had said: “I know one person who’ll miss me, Nell, in that monastery of yours!” — and how tenderly he had brushed the baby’s face with his great yellow beard.

As for Dave Spear, he was free that night to read his Atlantis book till the candle in Dickery Cantle’s third back bedroom burnt to the socket. But he read only three pages. It is hard to be impersonal in a cosmos that runs to personality.

THE SAXON ARCH

CHRISTMAS CAME AND went in the usual imperceptible Somersetshire manner.

Mild, open weather prevailed, so that Jackie and his robber band, exploring the Wick Woods for trapped rabbits, used frequently to drag the exhausted, but still enquiring Bert, home to his grandmother, with two or three untimely primrose buds clutched tight in his hot little palm.

But with the appearance of the New Year the barometer fell, and a series of sharp black frosts followed one another, constricting the damp Avalon clay and killing off these premature buddings. The lease of the bulk of his Glastonbury property to the reorganised town council realised for Lord P. so large a sum of ready money that he was able to establish his heavily taxed finances on a new and more satisfactory basis, and Will Zoyland, with his new companion at Whitelake Cottage, got the benefit of this change in several substantial presents of money. The Marquis had never liked his son’s wife and his sympathies were entirely with the bastard in the estrangement from Nell. Persephone on the contrary proved to be an adept at cajoling the great man. As to Bloody Johnny’s fortune, the inroads upon it by these new transactions, were, thanks to the council’s power of borrowing, much less than the Mayor had anticipated; and as the visitors from abroad, attracted by John’s advertisements, poured into the town all that winter in increasing numbers, the new Glastonbury commune, under the dictatorship of the Mayor’s assessors, showed signs of being more than able to keep its proletariat satisfied and its tradesmen active and content.

The business done in Mr. Wollop's shop alone surpassed all the holiday seasons the ex-Mayor could remember, so that although his establishment did not officially come under the new régime, he was willing enough to hand over to the communal purse, sooner than break with the authorities, all the percentage they demanded of these increasing profits. The bank, the railway, Philip's *older* dye works, and his Wookey Hole tin mine, were therefore, as the early weeks of January passed, the only strongholds of individualism left untouched by the new order.

The official opening of Geard's Saxon arch and of a curious building near it which was really a sort of Platonic Academia for his new religion, but which, for want of a better name, was hitherto styled the Rotunda, was to take place on January the twentieth of this new year. So widely had John's clever circulars advertised this event, that by the morning of the great day every available lodging in the place was crowded, and those incorrigible capitalistic railways were running their loaded excursion trains into the town soon after daylight began.

"Are you really off to Wookey now?" enquired Mrs. Crow of her husband at an unusually late breakfast at The Elms. "Emma says there won't be a stroke of work done anywhere in the neighbourhood today."

Tilly was not a little disturbed, for reasons of her own, at the lateness of the hour; but the master of the house had slept heavily that morning.

Philip looked across the table at her with his indulgent smile. How dear she was to him, after all, this quaint little lady for whom he felt no more erotic attraction than if she had been his aunt, like that Aunt Maria who had lived for the last thirty years at Aix-les-Bains! "You wouldn't want me to sit twiddling my thumbs at home, would you" he said, "while Geard has his grand glorification?"

"Emma says she thinks *you ought to be there*!" In all the last decade of their relations Philip's wife had never dared to speak so decisively; but her private nervousness made things leap out that she had not meant to say. But her words troubled him. Had even she, then, joined the increasing circle of their neighbours who were drifting away from his side towards that of the Mayor? He glanced down frowningly at his plate. He began biting his underlip beneath its grey moustache. He felt hedged round by enemies, cornered, run to earth, like a hunted fox.

Paul Trent's *coup d'état* in the matter of Lord P.'s property, his own eviction from his new dye works, a sudden deplorable diminishing of the expected tin ore from his Wookey Hole vein, all these blows, coming together, had driven this grandson of "the Devereux woman" fairly to the wall.

"Ought to be there," he thought bitterly, "ought to be *there,* to help hoist this crazy charlatan, who's ruining me with Grandfather's money, upon the final pinnacle of his folly."

His tin was running out before either his new road or his new bridge was ready to transport it. The *old* dye works which was all that was left him of his special industry, taken over thirty years ago, was devoid of a manager.

Bob Tankerville, entangled with one of those servants of Miss Drew's, was not half the adventurous air-pilot he used to be. The airplane itself had become an impossible expense in the present state of his finances. He had come down finally in the last few days to endure some very humiliating discussions about his bank-loans with the Glastonbury bank-manager. Even the bank itself, flooded with communal money from the huge inrush of visitors, was beginning to turn against him! He had seen too with his own eyes a row of trucks full of his tin ore shunted on a siding to make room for the loads of clay which the council was bringing in as material for their preposterous figurines. And only a year ago, with Barter as his manager, he was in the full flush of his success! Yes, it was the treachery of that accursed Didlington cad that was at the botton of his trouble! He had thought he was going to do better without him and he *had* done better without him at first. But that was before old Beere fell into his dotage and let this smart rascal Trent outwit him at every point.

"Emma thinks" — began the irrepressible Tilly again, and never had the Perfect Servant been consigned to so deep a pit as her master consigned her to now— "that you ought to stand up to that crowd at the opening and tell them what you feel about these fol-de-lols."

He lifted up his face and tried to smile at his wife with his old tender, humorous, superior smile.

"They'd howl me down," he muttered.

"Oh, no they wouldn't, Philip — Oh, no they wouldn't! Not one of them, as Emma says, can speak as well as you do. Not one of them can—"

But there was a look upon Philip's face that she had never seen before, a dangerous, reckless, desperate look; and she began suddenly to feel that it was wiser, with a man who could look like that, not to *dare* him to do hard things.

Tilly subsided into silence; and stretching out her arm, with the tea-pot in her hand, re-filled her husband's cup, which he had mechanically held out to her. She was worried by a little conspiracy of her own at that moment, for the success of which she wanted Philip out of the way that morning. Completely unknown to him, she and Emma had been visiting Jenny Morgan, or Blackie, as Red Robinson called her.

This had been Tilly's own immediate reaction to the disclosure Emma had at last consented to make to her, pushed on by the chattering tongues of the servants from the Abbey House. Even Emma — who thought she knew her mistress well — was surprised by the spirit which the little lady showed under this communication; and thus it was proved — to the astonished interest of the Invisible Naturalists — that the human minnow of the species "Housewife" is liable to act heroically at a great emotional crisis.

Tilly had indeed, in several trying and disconcerting interviews with her husband's ex-mistress, tried to persuade Blackie to give up the child and allow her formally to adopt it. But so far these attempts had proved fruitless.

Though Nelly Morgan went about during all her playtime, with Jackie and Sis and Bert, her mother seemed obstinately unwilling to part with a daughter she hardly ever saw. Since this particular morning however was, by reason of the opening of the arch, a general Glastonbury holiday, Tilly had induced the child to come up to The Elms after breakfast and pay her a formal visit. She had done this on the strength of an assurance from Philip that he would be away all day at Wookey; but she herself was begging him not to go to Wookey!

Tilly's interior nervousness grew so great at last that she felt she must get Philip off her hands, at least as far as that nondescript out-of-the-way room where he kept his geological specimens. But Philip had got up now from the table. He moved over to the fireplace and sat down in one of his grandfather's chairs and proceeded deliberately to light his pipe. Tilly pondered. How could she say to him, "I want to get rid of you so that I can welcome your girl's child!" It was one of those ironic private contingencies that some especially dedicated troop of imps seems to delight to contrive on occasions devoted to important public events.

Tilly thought to herself: "He's bound to hear the child's voice if he stays here. How crazy I was to let her come this morning!" She began piling the breakfast things on a tray, a task which she delighted in — for if Tilly hadn’t been a mistress she would have been a flawless parlour-maid — when there was a bold, loud ring at the front-door, a ring twice repeated, the ring of a child, who enjoys pulling the bell-iron out to its furthest reach! Well! there was nothing to be done. The fat was in the fire and the cat out of the bag.

She went herself to the door and opened it; and Philip, quick to catch something unusual in her manner, followed her into the hall. The worthy Emma, primary cause of this embarrassing contretemps, issued at the same second from the kitchen and advanced firmly, quietly, discreetly down the passage.

“Mummy were dead-asleep,” declared Nelly in her shrill child’s voice. “So I thought I’d come in me week-day clothes. Mummy were turble sick last night.”

“Do you mean *drunk*?” growled Philip grossly, while Emma carefully shut the front door and began dusting with her apron the brass lion upon the hall-table; this last gesture being a symbol of the occasion’s dramatic importance.

“Drunk-sick,” responded the child with a wicked gleam in her dark eyes. “Be you wanting to have me live here,” she added, turning to her sulky and disturbed father.

“Live here, child? I didn’t know—” But he turned sharp round upon Emma, venting his discomfort upon the onlooker. “Don’t stand there like that, woman!” he snapped. “We don’t want any help with this child.”

“You can clear away, Emma,” said Tilly apologetically, making a move to take the child into the drawing-room. But Emma, hurt to the quick, was already retreating towards the kitchen door, when she heard by the sounds behind her (for her ears were like the ears of a mouse in her own domain) exactly where her mistress was going. This knowledge brought her professional tact into play with an automatic force that overcame her injured feelings, for the new house-maid was cleaning the drawing-room and it would not do for her to notice things.

"Ethel is in there'm cleaning'm," she said, indicating that the dining-room was the place for this domestic tragi-comedy.

"You shouldn't have spoken like that to Emma, Philip," said Tilly, as soon as the faithful servant had withdrawn again.

"Damn Emma! Come in here, both of you," and he pushed his wife and his child before him into the dining-room. "What I want to know first of all *is* this," he began, when they were all inside; and he actually turned the lock of the door to make sure of no further invasion; "how long have you two been seeing each other?"

Tilly who had taken her usual place at the table was beginning to reply when the child cut her short. "Her s been seeing Mummy and me since Christmas. Her brought Mummy and me some crystal-ginger, didn't you, Marm? and some Reading biscuits, and some French sardines, and some Spanish olives, and some Turkish delight, and some tangerine oranges and some—"

"Here! hold up, kid!" cried Philip, unable to help smiling at this long enumeration of dainties. It crossed his mind how extraordinarily characteristic it was of Tilly to woo his mistress and his mistress' child with objects from the grocer's.

"I went once *before* Christmas," said Tilly, who through this whole episode had preserved her equanimity perfectly except when Philip called Emma "woman." "You've forgotten to tell him *that*, Nelly!"

"I always knowed," cried the child in a shrill voice, when she interrupted herself by staring frantically at the little blue flame under Tilly's polished hot-water urn, and finally by stretching out a long thin arm towards this strange object, feeling with extended forefinger, to see if that queer flame was hot, "that father weren't me proper father, by mother pushing me away when her cried for he. Be *he* my proper father?" and she sidled up close to Tilly in the most coaxing and ingratiating way, and pointed with her finger at Philip, who now stood with his back to the fire regarding the pair with a bemused scowl. Tilly put one hand round Nelly's waist and with the other began smoothing down the creases of her frock. "Yes, child," she said hurriedly, "I'm afraid he is; though he hasn't been a very *good* father to you, not telling me about you long before this." She kept her eyes on the child's dress and even began putting both hands to a place in the waistband that was held by a safety pin that had got loose.

"How could we know, kid, how could we know," said Philip, addressing the child, "that she would have liked little girls who belong to robber bands and who trespass in Wick Woods and let rabbits out of snares?"

"She likes me!" said Nelly with decision and with one of her sudden impetuous movements she imprinted a quick, hot, excited kiss on Tilly's shoulder.

Tilly bent low down in her efforts to close the safety pin. She was extremely unwilling that Philip should detect that her eyes were swimming with tears. "She likes us both," she said sharply and emphatically, "and she likes Emma too — don't you, Nelly?"

But Nelly had burst away from her hold and had rushed to the window. "There's a bicycle!" she cried, "and he's thrown a paper down! Oh, *may* I see if it's the Gazette? Mummy always lets me see the Gazette. It told about *him* and Mummy once! Mummy said that wicked Red put it in." Without waiting for permission she ran out and brought the paper into the room. While she was gone Tilly and Philip exchanged a long, wordless look, that contained an exhaustive and conclusive commentary upon the whole episode.

He thought, "How ironical that both she and I were visiting Jenny in that house. Suppose we had met one day at the door!"

"May I open it?" asked Morgan Nelly when she was back again.

"It'll be all over town that she's here now," thought Philip. "That paper-boy will tell everyone."

The Gazette contained prominent headlines about the opening of the arch. "Mayor's Speech Eagerly Awaited," Philip could read, from where he stood by the fire. "Jackie's Sally be going to marry Red," announced Morgan Nelly, finding no sign of the pictures she had hoped for in this number and offering her own quota of Glastonbury news. "Mummy says 'tis more than he deserves."

She remained silent for a second, her brows puckered. "What do bewger mean?" she suddenly enquired gravely of the man by the fire. She evidently felt that The Elms' dining-room was a source of supply for certain gaps in her knowledge of the world. "Do bewger mean the Devil?"

But there was heard now a discreet little tap at the locked door, and Tilly sprang to her feet. "I've got to order lunch," she said. "Shall we keep her here for the day?"

Philip nodded without speaking; and then as Tilly's hand was on the door handle, "I think perhaps I *will* go up there presently," he said.

"To the opening?"

"Yes. That's what you said, wasn't it?" This appealing to *her* for advice on so momentous an occasion, on the question of his confronting in public his grand enemy, took the little lady's breath away.

He seemed *different* in some way as she looked at him now, standing over there: and for their mates to look different is extremely disconcerting to women. They prefer the most familiar tempers to anything inexplicable.

"I … wouldn't … care … to … interfere … with your … plans, Phil," she stammered nervously. "But if you *do* go I must tell Emma lunch won't be till after two. The opening is announced to begin at eleven, you know; but it won't be over till after one, I'm sure."

While this memorable encounter was taking place in The Elms' dining-room, for it was already long past ten, an enormous crowd had assembled at the foot of Chalice Hill, where, as the Western Gazette had justly remarked, the Mayor's speech was being "eagerly waited by all Wessex."

It was not only the opening of the Saxon arch and of the Rotunda, but the inauguration of the new Glastonbury commune that this twentieth of January was to see; and the possibility of all manner of exciting clashes between those friendly to the Mayor and those hostile to him, gave the sort of spice to the occasion that always attracts a crowd.

Tom Barter had come across to Northload Street, puzzled as to what he and Tossie were to do that day with the twins, for Toss had left Benedict Street and had taken a furnished room of her own. Mary had made him stay and have a second breakfast with her; for she wanted to talk to him about Tossie and the children.

This other Mr. and Mrs. Crow were indeed as late that morning as the pair at The Elms. John lay in bed still, propped up on his pillows. He had had a feverish night; he felt sick now in his stomach; he was unable to eat a morsel; he declined to smoke a cigarette; he was insatiable only for endless cups of strong tea.

Mary was boldly sounding Tom on the delicate topic of his marrying Tossie; and she was telling him that if they *did* marry, there was an unfurnished room to be let on the floor beneath their own in this same house.

“It would be so nice, Tom,” she said, “for us all four to be together; and I could look after the children sometimes, while you and Toss get away for an afternoon.”

“You … don’t … think,” muttered the cautious Tom who was on his knees by the fire with the toasting-fork, as he glanced furtively round at Mary, afraid of being rushed by a conjunction of feminine influence out of some precious bachelor freedom whose benefits he might be forgetting at this time. “You … don’t … think … that … being married would spoil it all?”

“Spoil it for you, or for *her,* do you mean?” asked Mary, wondering a little, in her own mind, exactly why she was pressing their old friend so hard. “But he used to live so miserably,” she thought, “so squalidly and miserably.”

“For both of us!” murmured Tom. “You don’t want any *more* toast, do you, if *he’s* not going to have any? For both of us! I might feel caught; and she might get — oh, I don’t know — heavy and domestic, and stop laughing and all that!”

“She isn’t so *very* thin, now, Tom, is she?”

“Shut up, Mary! You know what I mean — you know how girls are when they’ve got settled — I couldn’t bear it for Toss to change a single bit!”

“She won’t change, Tom. She won’t change. I’d be ready to bear all your reproaches, old friend, if she did; so well do I know that she *won’t.* And I don’t think … very much … that you will, either,” she added archly; smiling down at him with her hand on the toast she was buttering.

John turned his face away from this scene at the fire between his wife and their friend. He was not at all sure, at the bottom of his mind, that he wanted Tossie and Tom established in the same house.

"What a demon I am," he thought. "I love old Tom when I've got him to myself; but these mixings up — good Lord!"

"How do you feel now?" enquired Mary, turning to him when she and Tom were seated at the table. He refused to meet her eyes. "I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil!" he muttered, without a thought of Barnaby Rudge's raven.

"Don't keep bothering, Mary," he groaned peevishly. "You know what's the matter with me and so does Tom."

"You're not getting jealous, are you, old chap, because I've got your place?" chuckled Barter.

Mary thought to herself: "How dangerously these men fool each other! Doesn't he *know* that when he says a thing like that, he makes John hate him so much that he could strike him dead?"

"I hope you realise, John," she said, "that nothing will induce me to let you go to *that thing* this morning? You've got nervous prostration — that's what's the matter with you; and you're going to stay in bed."

"So that Tom can take you to the Hill, I suppose? I thought something like that was in your mind."

Mary said to herself, "I must be more careful. Oh, these men, these men! Our jealousies are serious or nothing. But with them—" She had already come to the conclusion that under a certain "cannikin-clink" brusqueness, like that of Iago, her husband concealed black holes of malice that went down to the nether pit.

This judgment was not *quite* accurate. John's fits of "miching-mallecho" came and went, like the weather. Often when she thought he was most affectionate, his heart had turned as cold as ice; and again, when she fancied she detected abysses of malicious aloofness, he was merely worrying because he was afraid he was going to have dyspepsia.

"If you can't go," she said emphatically, "*I* shan't go. Tom can take Tossie and leave the babies with us here. Why don't you *do* that, Tom? Toss would love to see the crowds and hear the speeches."

Barter admitted that so far they had been unable to find anyone to leave the twins with. All Glastonbury seemed resolved to be at Chalice Hill this morning.

They finished their meal in silence, John's feverish querulousness exercising a discouraging effect upon them.

"Do you want me to come over with you, Tom, and get the twins?" she asked, as soon as they were done. "It's after ten, and you and Tossie should be starting if you want to get good places."

As soon as Barter and Mary had departed on this errand, John Crow struggled up from his bed and somewhat stiffly and weakly stood erect upon the floor — Yes, he felt pretty wretched; but it tickled his vagabond fancy to trick the two people he loved best in the world; and he set himself obstinately to put on his clothes. When he was dressed, and had his overcoat on, he went to the sink and sponged his face with cold water. This made him feel a little better; and moving to the table, he filled Mary's tea-cup with milk and poured it down his throat.

"Nervous prostration," he said to himself, "what a phrase that is! Well, I certainly have done something for old Geard and his Saxon arch; and I'm damned if they're going to keep me from seeing the sport."

Half an hour later he had succeeded by the exercise of both blandishments and violence in pushing his way through the surging crowd, which already filled the road and spread up the slope of the hill, till he was standing right against the new arch itself.

It was a fine piece of work, this Saxon arch, now it rose uncovered to the watery sunshine of that January day, but little as John knew about architecture he felt sure that the great architect had fooled Mr. Geard, and that this massive stone edifice was a completely new and original work, no more Saxon than Cardiff Villa was Saxon. But it was a noble erection; and John had an inkling that in some very subtle way the architect had actually caught something of the spirit of Mr. Geard's new religion!

It was not easy to define to himself what he felt; but he did feel that if he, John Crow, had had to express in solid stone what he had come to understand of the Mayor's strange notions, it would have been almost exactly in this way that he would have done it. How queer that crowd of human heads looked, as it swayed and undulated beneath him! A line from Homer's description of the pallid ghosts, flocking up from Erebus, came into his mind— "The powerless heads of the dead."

He still felt curiously dizzy and feverish; so much so that between himself and that vast undulating crowd — and how silent and patient they were! They only swayed and moved and eddied and drifted. They really *were* like ghosts from Erebus! Why were they all so spellbound? — Yes, between him and them there seemed to be a cold, grey, clammy, Cimmerian mist.

On the opposite side of the arch from where he was standing, and he was himself inside some sort of rope-barrier — how had he crossed that barrier? He could remember nothing just now — was a broad, empty platform, covered entirely with a heavy black cloth, "God! it looks like a place of execution," he thought; and then it came over him that it was towards this draped platform, though there was no one there, that this vast concourse of people were lifting their hushed, awe-struck, hypnotised heads — the "powerless heads of the dead."

And John began to receive a most uncanny feeling — the feeling namely that Mr. Geard really was standing on that platform now. Either his own brain was too dizzy to see him there, when everybody else saw him, or there was an actual invisible presence up there which everybody in the crowd felt without seeing anything.

But it certainly was, for John, the most extraordinary experience he had ever had, that swaying, shifting, drifting, *undulating* crowd — men, women, and children, young men and young maids, foreigners and natives — all lifting up strained, tense, hushed, white faces, as they surged slowly about, while their vast mass moved, like a sea-flood stirred by tides that could not be seen, here and there about the ribs of the hill.

Feeling too dizzy to stand much longer upon his feet, and yet unwilling to sink down upon the grass, John began examining the great unhewn rock-boulders out of which the architect had constructed this singular monument. While he did this he began to experience the feeling that he was really entirely alone on this hillside, and at any moment this illusion, the mirage of these faces, might melt away. He was aroused from this sensation by a sudden spasm of recognition. Where had he seen this particular type of stone before? The stone was inserted between two blocks of Portland stone — for among the architect's original effects in the Saxon arch was the use of several varieties of material — and as John now leaned his forehead against it, for it was on a level with his face and he had come hatless from Northload Street, he knew well where he had seen its like before. It resembled one of those strange "foreign stones," which Mr. Evans assured him came from South Wales, which he had seen at Stonehenge.

The contact of his skull with this stone — and it is likely enough it would have happened with any stone of a similar texture — put new strength into him and cleared the mists from his brain. He now discovered that he was not by any means alone in this roped-off enclosure. There was in fact quite a large group of people assembled here, though in his dizziness, and his preoccupation with the vast array of faces upraised from the slope below, he had felt as if he were the only person close to the arch.

"It's like the ones at Stonehenge," he remarked to his nearest neighbour, who turned out to be the beautiful wife of Harry Stickles, the chemist. Nancy had indeed traded shamelessly on her unusual good looks to get inside this privileged barrier, and it was only because all the officials were local people that she had attained her desire.

"Where is he now?" she responded to John's remark about the stone.

"Where is who?"

"He; Mr. Geard."

"I don't know," said John. "To tell you the truth, Mrs. Stickles, I feel as if he were standing on that platform now! I seem to *feel* him there … but of course it's empty." He ran his fingers over the stone that interested him so much. "It's like the ones at Stonehenge," he repeated aloud.

"There must be more sacred stones," said Nancy, "in Glastonbury than anywhere else in England. I heard people talking just now about a stone with funny marks on it that's been found quite lately on this Hill."

"So they've got it, have they?" he said. "It must be the one that this new antiquary was after, not the King Edgar Chapel man, but this new fellow who's been about here — but Mr. Geard never told me about this stone."

"That's just what they were saying about the other one with the marks on it," said Nancy. "They were saying he hides these stones where no one can find them."

"Only when he thinks they've got something to do with Merlin!" said John. "He knows nothing really about the Legend. He's never read a word of Malory. It's old Evans who's put all this Merlin business into his head."

"He's a very great man," said Nancy gravely.

"I never said he wasn't!" responded John. "They'll be making a legend out of *him* soon. Geard of Glastonbury — it sounds like history already!"

They were both silent; and John, with his fingers still pressed against that South Wales stone, began to feel again the strange sensation of being quite alone up here under Geard's arch and by the side of Geard's black-draped platform. The touch of this foreign stone seemed to isolate him, along with all the Glastonbury stones. It gave him the power to feel the life of Glastonbury with all its long historic centuries as if it were the mere motions of beetles and earth-worms across the surface of a platform of primordial rock, the rock of the Island of Avalon. That vast crowd of white upturned faces, that were like ghosts from Erebus, seemed to become real ghosts, the ghosts of all the men and women whose little, turbulent earth-lives had disturbed the planetary repose of this rock island in the tide-swept marshes. Yes! He felt them rise up multitudinously about him, *kluta ethnea nekron*, "the glorious tribes of the dead," and he, the worn out Danish adventurer, privileged by a strange fate to be the one to feel them there, with Geard's arch above him and Geard's platform beside him.

He glanced up from that sea of pallid faces to the coping-stone of the arch which had been rudely carved into a rough resemblance of Dunstan of Baltonsborough. Baltonsborough itself was over there, hidden by the Tor, an abode of living people still, and nearer him, beyond Edgarley, was Havyatt Gap, where his own unsuperstitious Danes had been stopped by these mad monks. Mad they were then; mad they were still; and old Geard was the maddest of them all!

This stone, all these stones, how much nobler was their long-enduring life than the follies and fevers of men! Surrounded by the great waters had they once been, by the tossing salt waves of that free sea, over which the Viking ships had swept. Would that some strong new flood might come up from its ocean-bed, and sweep over all these morbid-legended fields! How he hated them, these lies, these frauds, these illusions, which he had been paid to propagate! And yet there was something about old Geard, that seemed as much on *his* side as on the side of these mad monks. Was Geard himself, secretly in his deep heart, as heathen as he was? Was that black-draped empty platform only waiting even now, for the lifting of some huge gonfalon of defiance to all this? Was this opening of the man's Saxon arch into these Latin-Celtic mysteries of Glastonbury, in reality a reversal of that stopping of the Danes at Havyatt?

How well he remembered his own first entrance into the town, more than ten months ago, in Mr. Evans' little motor car. Well! Evans and he were both married men now; married and settled, and far away from Stonehenge!

"I can't *think* where he is!" It was the beautiful Nancy addressing him again.

"How do *I* know," John replied peevishly. "He's probably asleep in Wookey Hole, like he was last time, when Cousin Philip shoved himself into his place. Why! Talk of the devil — if there's not Philip himself, coming over here now!"

Nancy turned round and sure enough there was Philip Crow, pushing through the crowd that gave way before him, and making straight for the platform.

Behind him, as he came, rose a low angry murmur from the natives present. They were evidently already expectant of a second grand anti-climax.

Philip skirted the platform steps, evidently surprised to see no sign of Geard, and passing — a thing no one else had dared to do — right *under* the arch, came up to Nancy and John.

John held out his hand. They had not met many times since that day at Northwold Rectory.

"Come to address us in place of the Mayor?" said John, his cheek twitching with the family twitch and his eyelids blinking under the grip that Philip gave his fingers.

"Perhaps … it will … fall on me," responded Philip with an air of contemptuous nonchalance. "I'm ready for the job … if Lord P. and our good Vicar are dodging it! Has the Mayor got no one to introduce him? How oddly all these things are arranged!"

"Do you know Mrs. Nancy Stickles, Philip?"

Philip took off his hat and bowed. "It's just like the scamp," he thought, "to saddle me with some pretty pick-up at a moment like this."

But before Nancy could do more than return an embarrassed smile to his exaggerated deference, none other than Mr. Geard himself appeared quietly among them, as if materialising out of the air. The Mayor nodded kindly at Nancy, winked at John, and offered his plump hand to Philip. His appearance was so sudden that it was like the appearance of Teiresias at that Cimmerian scene which John had already called up.

John stepped back a little and regarded with concentrated attention the Protagonist and Antagonist of this memorable occasion. Never had the contrast between the two men been more marked.

Philip was dressed in a fawn-coloured overcoat and light soft grey hat. He wore spats beneath his blue-serge trousers and in his hand he carried a cane with a round jasper knob that Persephone had given him. He had a red camellia in his buttonhole and his whole demeanour was composed, debonair, alert.

Bloody Johnny, on the contrary, was really scandalously attired. He had dodged, as his custom was, on public occasions, all attempts of his family to groom him. He was not even picturesquely untidy. He looked like a deboshed verger who had turned billiard-marker in some fifth-rate club.

“He’s been drinking,” thought John, “and that’s why he’s so late.”

John was not in error. From a very early hour that morning, Mr. Geard, on this supreme occasion of his life, had been sipping brandy with that old crony and convertite of his, the ostler at the Pilgrims’.

John now approached a step nearer to these two Glastonbury magnates. He forgot all about his dizziness, in his anxiety to hear what they could possibly be saying to each other on this day of all days. But as often happens when two formidable personalities meet, they each seemed desirous of avoiding any real contact with the other.

Nancy also moved up close to Mr. Geard’s side. She seemed to have an obscure feminine instinct that it would be fatal for her Prophet to have a serious encounter with this enemy at this juncture.

The murmurs that rose from the crowd at Philip’s appearance now changed into shouts and yells when the two men were clearly observed talking together.

“Begin! Begin! Begin! Leave your chattering and begin!”

Such was the burden of a storm of confused cries, not only in English but in every European tongue, that now rose like a howl of demons from the crowded slope of Chalice Hill.

“We are being chaffed by the populace,” said Philip with a bitter smile. “The chap’s half-seas-over,” he thought. “Tilly was right to tell me to come. He’s going to make an absolute zany of himself. This is my chance, if I can keep cool. I wonder if my voice can carry as far as the road. I’ll let these foreigners know that this sham commune and this mountebank Mayor are not the only representatives of Glastonbury.”

Thus did Philip Crow gather his wits together; but what were Mr. Geard's thoughts at this crisis? *He had none at all;* none, that is to say, beyond a lively interest in the camellia in Philip's buttonhole! He was as empty of abstract considerations or even rational considerations as ex-Mayor Wollop himself. But let no one suppose that this physical placidity meant that Mr. Geard was *hors-de-combat.* It only meant that he was in such peace with himself that his whole being moved in harmony to the least stray thought that came into his head. It is true he was drunk. But Philip was a fool to regard that condition as a handicap to Geard of Glastonbury. Not even John — who knew him so much better than Philip — realised the power that resided in the man's complete freedom from self-consciousness.

All that his tipsiness did was to make him five times more his natural self than in normal times. And Mr. Geard's natural self was a thing of mountainous potency. It is likely enough that Nancy's Prophet of the Lord had quite deliberately repaired to the ostler's bar at the Pilgrims', so as to leave no shred of fussy vain human self-thought between his intellect and his world-deep sensations.

"Do you know where the steps are to that platform?" said Mr. Geard. "They'll be quiet enough presently. Do you mind if I sit down for a moment?"

"My chance is coming," thought Philip, "my chance is coming."

Mr. Geard now deliberately sat down on the grass. This performance was almost as disconcerting to John as it was to Nancy; and it was a good deal worse than disconcerting to the officials of the commune in the crowd below. John began to feel it imperative that someone should intervene; for Mr. Geard seemed to have fallen into a trance of imperturbable quiescence.

As he sat there cross-legged, with his plump fingers extended on the grass at either side of him, he looked like some neolithic beast-god, paramour perhaps of the Witch of Wookey!

But quick as lightning Philip accepted this grand chance offered him by the fates and stepping lightly past John and Nancy mounted the steps of the platform and presented himself before the audience.

“You have all come here,” he began, and out of mere curiosity they let him get as far as that, “to show your interest in our great historic town and to learn what we are trying to do to make it not only a beautiful place, worthy of its old traditions, but also a place where the noblest achievements of Progress can be carried—”

But “Progress” was the last word that was audible; for at that point he was simply shouted down. Yes, there was nothing for Philip to do but to descend those platform steps as proudly and contemptuously as he had mounted them. This he accomplished with self-control, dignity and grace. Once on the ground, however, he gave a swift malicious glance at the grotesque person squatting on the grass, over whom Nancy and John were bending, shrugged his shoulders, replaced his hat upon his head, waved his cane, and made his way down the hill.

But with John pulling at one arm and Nancy pulling at the other, Bloody Johnny *was* now raised to his feet. This achievement, every detail of which the crowd watched from below, was grossly and humorously cheered, the *“hoch, hochs”* of the Germanic element and the *“vivas”* of the Italians being especially vehement.

Once on his feet, Mr. Geard smilingly dispensed with Nancy’s help; but permitted John to assist him to mount the platform; and John himself, amid the tumult of applause that greeted the Mayor, slipped down again and took his seat on the lowest stair of the steps, side by side with Bob Sheperd, the old policeman, and Mr. Merry, the old museum curator.

It was at that moment of the proceedings that Miss Barbara Fell was overheard to say that it was a pity dear Mr. Crow should have been shouted down; while Dr. Fell was heard explaining to his neighbours in philosophic language that Mr. Geard was probably not *very* drunk and had probably *staged* the whole episode with the view of arousing in his audience "that particular psychological mood of sympathetic nervous hilarity which can be so quickly changed by a crafty orator into passionate receptivity."

Certainly in its whole long and turbulent history no man in the county of Somerset has ever received an ovation comparable with the ovation that Bloody Johnny received at this moment before he began to speak. And when he did begin, a silence like the silence of fishes in the sea, or of birds at midnight, fell upon that crowd, so that angry heads were turned round when anyone coughed or sneezed or shuffled or struck a match or even turned up his coat collar.

From the point of view of oratory, there was nothing at all remarkable in the way the Mayor's speech began. Many of his later discourses, as they were taken down in the next two months, were far more eloquent. He thanked his hearers for allowing him to speak at all— "under the circumstances." He said that he was sure people would come from all parts of the world to drink of the Grail Spring. He emphasised the historical interest of the new experiment in government that Glastonbury was making. He begged "those who were strange to our system of a just and equitable division of those benefits which human brains and human labour, working in harmony with Nature, give to humanity, to suspend their judgment till they see the thing in working order."

He rambled off at that point into quite a childishly grave recital of early Glastonbury history. He referred to the Lake Village neolithic race. He spoke of the Ancient Britons. He alluded to the importance of the work of the Saxon king, Edgar.

As John watched the faces of the audience from his position by Bob Sheperd's side he was struck by one very curious phenomenon. The fact that the Mayor was blundering along in a quite commonplace way, uttering brief and cursory remarks that were really platitudes, made no difference at all to the extraordinary impression he produced. John found it amusing afterward to notice the various ways in which the great London newspapers handled this striking difference; this discrepancy between the substance of the man's speech and the spellbound *awe* — there was no other word for it — with which his uninspired remarks were received. Once more John began (or was it his dizziness returning upon him?) to feel as if all those upturned faces were thousands and thousands of ghosts, all the *nekuōn ameneena kareena,* "the powerless heads of the dead," of the long Glastonbury history, listening to Mr. Geard.

It was not long, however, before John's ears heard the phrase: "I therefore declare this arch to the Grail Spring of our dear town, *open*, free of charge, to all persons who, who, who care to come!" and he became aware that, in the same droning and uninspired manner, Mr. Geard had begun to allude to various familiar aspects of the Grail story; aspects such as the simplest schoolchild in the place had been acquainted with since infancy.

This preposterous narrating and countenancing, in solemn seriousness, of what John felt to be a mass of fantastic and gruesome fairy-tales, made something stark and dangerous rise up within his East-Anglian soul. He turned his eyes away from these hypnotised ghosts and fixed them upon that stone in the new arch which had made him think of Stonehenge. And it was borne in upon his mind with a frozen certitude that however phantasmal *matter* might be in its interior essence there was something about it *when it hardened into stone* that reduced all organic flesh into the transient, the impermanent, the perishable. He saw the birth and the death of the generations — men and beasts and birds and fishes — their tremulous loves, their wretched tribulations, their vain hopes, their importunate passions, and all swept away by wind and water from the enduring majesty of these stones, that themselves changed not, save by cosmic catastrophe.

"If I could destroy," he thought, "in one overwhelming stroke all this whole maze of delusion; if I could bring the free sea in upon it, and the north wind down upon it, if I could burn it with fire and cleanse it with water, if I could purify the air of it and purge the earth of it, how calm and clean the world-floor would be!"

"And thus," boomed on above him the monotonous voice of Bloody Johnny, "the Grail-worship at Glastonbury has become—"

An impulse of anger too great to be resisted took hold upon John Crow. Leaping to his feet he turned his back to the crowd and looking up at Mr. Geard who was near enough now to the edge of the platform to see his convulsed face, he uttered in a low hissing tone and so that Mr. Geard alone could hear him, the words:— "Lies! Lies! Lies!"

His effort had been so great that his dizziness came back upon him with a rush. So blindingly it came, that everything swam before his eyes and he began swaying to and fro at the foot of the platform, groping at the air with his hands and gurgling in his throat. As he swayed like this, all began to grow dark before him, and he had just time to think to himself, "What have I done? Have I ruined his speech?" when he fell prone on the ground in a dead faint.

The speaker had drawn back a little towards the centre of the platform, so that when old Bob Sheperd and Mr. Merry, with the help of two other younger men, lifted John up and carried him towards the Rotunda, all that crossed Geard's mind was, "Someone has fainted," and it never occurred to him to associate this incident with that convulsed face and the word, "Lies!"

One of the officials produced the key of the Rotunda and here they laid John; but it was not till the Mayor's speech was over and the crowd had dispersed that he really awoke to full consciousness.

"People say these things are lies," shouted Mr. Geard, after a pause, in a voice that rolled away over that hypnotised assembly with such thunderous force that it reached the ears of Mad Bet, as kneeling at her window on the other side of the road she thought of Codfin's iron bar. "People say we must have the naked Truth in place of these lies. Now what the Spirit and the Blood command me to tell you is this—"

An inspiration was reaching him at last from the dark recesses of his being. It seemed to tear itself through him and force its way out, like a dragon escaping from a thunder-split cavern. And Mr. Geard felt himself in full command of this inspiration. Unlike Faust, with his earth-spirit, Mr. Geard held the bridle of this demonic winged creature. This was proved by the dramatic pause he made at this point, quietly taking his breath and, as he did so, glancing towards the Rotunda where they had taken that person who had fainted.

Then, as if he were releasing, in absolute aplomb, this wind-dragon of the abyss, he lifted up his voice again:— *"Any lie"* he shouted, "I tell you, *any lie* as long as a multitude of souls believes it and presses that belief to the cracking point, *creates new life*, while the slavery of what is called truth drags us down to death and to the dead! Lies, magic, illusion — these are names we give to the ripples on the water of our experience when the Spirit of Life blows upon it. I have myself" — here he made another of his dramatic pauses— "I have myself cured a woman of cancer in that spring."

He stretched out his arm towards the Grail Fount. “Miracles are lies; and yet they are happening. Immortality is a lie; and yet we are attaining it. Christ is a lie; and yet I am living in Him. It … is … given … unto … me … to tell you that if any man brought a dead body before me … in the power of what people call a ‘lie’ I would, even now, here and before you all, restore that dead one to life!”

His voice died away in a silence so profound that Nancy Stickles, whose face was distorted with emotion, told Tossie later that she could hear the tinkle of the far-away sheep-bell, on the throat of Tupper, the old fence-breaking ram, in the Edgarley Great Field.

Heavily and awkwardly and all hunched up, his broad back stooping as if a weight beyond what he could bear had been laid upon it, Mr. Geard now began shambling down from the platform. Having reached the ground he stood for a time with his whole massive body bent forward, and his eyes tightly shut. At last, waving his hand every now and then to keep away anyone who approached him, he moved slowly down the slope towards the road.

There were so many conflicting accounts of what now happened, that a compilation of them all, and a comparison of them with one another, would leave upon the mind a feeling that certain great human events do not occur in a direct, clear-cut absolute manner; but include a wavering margin of actuality which changes in accordance with the human medium through which it passes.

As he came down the hill, the bulk of the people remained perfectly motionless, save for an attempt to pursue him with their eyes. He seemed protected, isolated, defended from intrusion by some interior power.

It was not long, however, before a little group of devotees who were now pushing their way towards him made a kind of half-circle round him; but even these did not dare to speak to him or approach him closely. There had been a great many references in European newspapers of late, to the Mayor's desire to make of Glastonbury a sort of English Lourdes, where an atmosphere of miraculous healing is charged with the electricity of Faith, and everyone present felt that something momentous was in the air. But it was not only sick people who were now awaiting this man in the road below.

There always had lingered among the natives of Glastonbury, an obstinate notion that their Grail Spring possessed healing qualities; and no doubt Ned Athling's writings in the *Wayfarer* had played upon this obscure belief and stirred it up. At any rate it is certain that there had spread through Paradise and Bove Town a rumour that the Mayor wanted all the Glastonbury sick people, who could possibly be moved, to come to the Grail Fount that day; and along with these sick people Something Else had been carried to the foot of Chalice Hill, Something that now awaited him there.

Moving straight towards this small dead form, carried upon a stretcher, while the sick people — none of whom was seriously ill — forgot their own condition as they watched him, Mr. Geard followed the example of the prophet in the Old Testament and stretched himself upon the wooden bier, covering the dead child's body with his own. The man's disciples while he did this kept the child's relatives from approaching, all except the mother, whose hands as she knelt pressed the child's feet to her breast …

What sceptics said afterwards was that no doctor had seen the child since he died; and what the parents had mistaken for death was in reality a death-like trance, from which the exceptional animal-magnetism of the Mayor's heavy form naturally aroused him. This was the view taken of the incident by Dr. Fell, who came upon the scene soon after the child revived.

Meanwhile — inside the Rotunda — John Crow was coming to his senses. When he did so he found his friend Tom bending over him, and Tom's overcoat spread out across his legs.

"You're shivering, Tom!" he whispered.

Barter made a wry face at him. "You haven't seen what *I've* just seen, or you wouldn't be surprised if my teeth were chattering."

John sighed. He made a weak motion with his hand. "What's up? What's he doing now?"

Barter realised that he was talking about Geard; and without delay he poured out his extraordinary story.

"It's that little boy who died this morning. They brought him on a stretcher. I saw the kid once myself. His mother's a drunken bitch, who lived in my house. I knew who it was the moment I heard the woman's voice. Two terrible old trots, Betsy Burt and Mrs. Carey, were with her when I saw the child *then;* and they were with her just now. They all lived in my house. I fetched the doctor once for this child myself. Dr. Fell said it was a sort of epilepsy."

"Did he know they'd brought him, before he made his speech?"

Barter cast a hurried glance round the edifice in which they were holding this intense and strange conversation. In his mind there was the dim thought that there is something monstrous and horrible about bringing the dead to life; Something that interferes with Nature and has an obscure and shocking profanity in it. He stared at what, was around them in this queer building. It was crowded with litter and scaffolding, for it was but half finished; but there was a peculiar personal quality in the workmanship and in the materials, that separated it from all the newly erected buildings that he had ever seen.

"It might be something erected *to* Geard," he thought, "rather than *by* Geard!"

"Did he *know* they'd brought him, Tom?"

"How do *I* know what he knew? You know him better than I."

"I don't believe he knew," whispered John.

They were both silent then and something very peculiar passed between them. There are certain topics which resemble certain *substances* in the world, such as blood and semen and the liquefaction of decomposition, in that they trouble some unique nerve in human mortality and produce, even in the naming, a peculiar *frisson.* Such a *frisson* they experienced now, and as they gazed in each other's faces in this dim, littered, empty place, these two cynical East-Anglians felt like dogs who had met an absolutely new smell; dogs, let us say, who are sniffing at a new-fallen meteorite!

"Dead? White and stiff and with *that look,* was he? And did old Geard —"

Barter nodded like a China-mandarin. "Yes, old cock, yes, my sweet cod, Geard did it—"

"Brought it to life?"

"Yes, old top-knot! To life, old white-face!"

"Where's Tossie?"

"She's with Miss Crow and Lady Rachel."

They were both silent then for a while; and during their silence the uttermost mystery of the world, that unspeakable coldness, stiffness, stillness of an organism that has lived and breathed, and now has been *changed into something else* held them by the throat.

"This child," they both thought, "has been *behind life*, and if it could only remember what that Something Else—"

"Where are those two who were here?"

"Sheperd and Mr. Merry?"

"Were *they* here?"

"They've gone to look at the child."

"They'll kill it again, crowding round it."

"Do you know what *I* think, John? I think the whole thing has been—"

Barter was going to say "planned," but once more that shivering took him; and in his mind he saw that ghastly rigor mortis which holds the secret of the universe.

John made a desperate struggle to get up. "I'd like to see that child," he murmured, rising on his elbow, "I'd like to see someone who has really been dead."

"Dead, old cock; but not *buried*! Cataleptic, old man!"

"I can't breathe properly," groaned John. "I feel as weak as a baby. I wish you'd get him to come to *me*."

"Shut up, you fool! *You'll* be all right in a jiffy."

"Water," moaned John. "If I don't have a drop of water, I'll go off again."

"The child was sitting up on the stretcher. They were feeding it!"

"Water," moaned John, "water."

Barter gave one more hurried glance at the strange interior around them. Then he went out quickly into the air. Hurrying under the Saxon arch — the irony of fate thus brought it about that the first two persons to use that new entrance were Philip and his ex-manager — he filled one of the little cups that were kept there and brought it to his friend.

"Chalybeate," he said with a leer, as John satisfied his craving and showed signs of recovery, "or Christ's Precious Blood; you can toss up which it is!"

The prostrate man jerked himself up on his elbow, and stared at the Rotunda door which Tom had left open.

"I'd like to know," he muttered, "what dreams that child had!" Barter gave vent to a quick welcoming shout and ran again to the door.

"What's up now?" sighed John, subsiding into his former position. "Is he coming?"

"He? He's in the town by now. It's Toss, I tell you. Hullo! Hullo! Here he is! Here we are!"

But John Crow was not the only unbeliever in Glastonbury to be confronted with the inexplicable that eventful twentieth of January. The Marquis of P. making his way to the snug little lodging above the offices of the *Wayfarer*, where Ned Athling had his rooms, wondered to himself as he went along whether after all he *was* well advised to pay a surprise visit, at ten o'clock at night, to his daughter's lover. He had dined at the Pilgrims', where Sergeant Blimp had put up as usual the famous green-wheeled dog-cart, and warmed by a bottle of first-rate port, sipped in company with his old servant in the quiet room he always occupied, he had resolved to make a frontal attack upon this troubler of the Zoyland pride.

"If they're not married, I don't care," he said to himself. "Sister will have to swallow it. I'm not going to quarrel with the girl for Betsy's sake."

It was easier to find the place at that hour of the night than to discover how to get into Athling's room when he *had* found it. What a shabby down-and-out location for the Mayor's official newspaper!

But one of the battered doors opened easily to his hand, though there was no bell or knocker. Groping about inside a dark passage Lord P. began to feel more like a nervous burglar than like an indignant peer of the realm pursuing his daughter's seducer.

"Athling! Athling!" he called out in a voice a good deal less authoritative and formidable than he would have liked it to be.

There was no response; and, since he had shut the street door, there was not even light enough to see whether he had to ascend a staircase, or rap at some chamber, in this musty passage.

"Damn the young idiot!" muttered the Marquis. "Why the devil don't he keep a light in this place?"

Annoyance increased the power of his voice.

"Athling! Athling!"

A door did open now, at the top of a straight flight of broad, bare, old-fashioned steps. A bright ray of light, from inside a warm, mellow, glowing room, streamed down the staircase. A girlish figure, obviously in a night-dress and dressing-gown, stood in the entrance of the room.

"Why it's Dad!" cried Lady Rachel in a low, soft, rich voice. "It's Dad, Ned!" she repeated, turning half-round as the amazed peer with an indrawn gasp of his breath and a muttered, "Well, I'll be damned!" gravely ascended the staircase.

"How *sweet* of you to come and see us!" she cried, in the same low, rich-laughing, self-composed manner.

The Marquis bowed to the young man who in a rough tweed suit had clearly just risen up from beside a table covered with sheets of manuscript. The room was lighted by a dim rose-shaded lamp. A pleasant fire burned in the grate; and an open door, leading out of the back of the room, revealed a double-bed, with the white sheets turned down, and a second cheerful fire, in a sort of alcove.

"Sit down, Dad," said Lady Rachel, offering her speechless parent a low wicker chair close to the hearth.

"Get some of that cherry brandy for my father, Ned."

Athling, whose hands were trembling with nervousness, lifted down from a shelf a beautiful little decanter made of fine cut-glass of a greenish tint. He spilled quite a lot of the gleaming cordial as he poured it and it was running down the edge of the tiny glass over his own fingers as he handed it to the Marquis.

Lord P. declined it with a wave of his hand. “Just had a bottle of wine,” he said. “Blimp ferreted it out for me. I’ll have a cigarette though, if you’ve got one anywhere.”

As he spoke he allowed his eyes to roam over the walls of the room. They were adorned with nothing but a great number of striking water-colour sketches, all of them painted in a very peculiar and extremely unusual manner.

Lord P. was something of a virtuoso in this kind; and in spite of the dumbfounded condition of his nerves he mechanically got up and approached some of the more remarkable of these pictures.

“Damned good!” he muttered. “Which of you children did these things?”

“They’re all Ned’s!” cried the girl eagerly. “They’re lovely, aren’t they?”

“I should … say … they are.” He went solemnly round the room, carefully examining each one of these singular productions. As he did so, turning his back to both of them, he thought to himself: “Betsy needn’t know anything about it. They’re not married. She’s sure to get tired of him after a bit. I suppose they understand about contraception.”

And he found himself slipping into an imaginary conversation with his friend Godfrey Bent at his club.

“My daughter’s picked up with an artist-chap, you know the sort of thing, down there in the country. An old family, they tell me, one of the oldest in the county, but not a brass farthing. Can’t you get him a show of some sort, Godfrey, next season? They’re damned good, his things. They really might make a hit if they had half a chance!”

When he turned round and took his place again at the fire he regarded the young man with a very much more sympathetic eye. Lord P. was totally devoid of any poetical taste; but he really was a competent connoisseur in painting, and it pleased him to think that in all his encounters with this lad, the boy had kept this astonishing talent in the background.

Rachel sat down on the arm of her father’s chair enveloping him in the warm sweetness of her glowing happiness.

“Well, Dad?” she said. “So you’re not going to scold, after all?”

He looked whimsically at the fingers she had placed in his. No! There was no sign of a wedding ring.

“You’ve not gone and got married by any chance?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I’m not thinking of marrying for years and years. Ned would like to. But he never teases me about it. Do you, Ned?”

“Wiser not — to tease ’em about anything; eh, lad?” chuckled her father, glancing slyly at the young man. “You understand how to keep — you mustn’t be cross at an old man’s grossness — from getting — into trouble, as the servants say?”

Rachel nodded mischievously, and then smiled gravely and quietly straight into his eyes.

“And what lie do you tell to our worthy Miss Crow, Rachel? I presume you still ostensibly live with her?”

This time the girl blushed scarlet. He had touched the sore spot — the one spot that rankled — in her romantic adventure.

“I tell her I have to work all night in the office,” she whispered. “She sends me to bed for hours!” she added ruefully, and without a smile.

He changed the conversation then, asking Ned some very searching technical questions about his methods of painting. The talk between the three of them flagged and wilted a little after that and he soon rose to go.

"Did you hear old Johnny's speech today?" he asked, as he picked up his coat and hat and gloves.

"Haven't you seen our special edition, Dad?" cried Lady Rachel, placing in the hands of the grey, elderly man, whose figure in that warmly lighted room — a room so full of a radiant atmosphere of youthful happiness — seemed to dwindle at that moment and become old and pinched and rather forlorn, a copy of the *Wayfarer* with the most startling headlines that any human chronicle could conceivably carry, short of the announcement of an approaching Deluge.

"*What's* this, eh? *What's* this? Gad! but he couldn't have been really *dead*! Come now, come now, this is getting a bit too thick. But … of course … if you wild children … are going … to turn this place … into … into … this *will,* I suppose … be the kind of thing — but, good God, Rachel, you don't really think … *yourself* … that my old Johnny Geard could—"

The Marquis stood there in that rosy light, between the girl in her soft night-attire looking like some enamoured nymph out of a Welsh fairy-tale, and the sturdy young poet-painter in his Norfolk jacket, frowning and bewildered. He kept folding up the paper he held, as if to conceal that troublesome word "Miracle" in those big black letters, and then unfolding it again. What *was* the world coming to?

"Good-night, little one," he murmured at last, kissing her tenderly. "You might send over a few of those sketches before I leave Mark Court," he added gravely. "I'll take 'em up to town with me."

He turned to her once more as she held the door open to light him down the staircase.

“Don’t ‘ee do this too often, girlie,” he said. “The good Miss Crow is no fool. Besides, we don’t want any confounded scandal.”

He was at the bottom of the stairs now.

“Remember what long ears your Aunt Betsy has!” he called back, as he turned to go to the street door.

Once in the dark street, buttoning his coat to face a frosty wind, and pulling on his grey gloves, an emotion of miserable depression took hold of him.

His little Rachel, his *little* Rachel! And yet how radiant the wench had looked. But, oh, what a man had to see, and bear, and endure, if, in these days he meant to keep a child’s love and not make her hate him!

“But they’re not out for marrying,” he thought, “that’s one good thing. And she’s playing safe with the Crow woman, I can see *that*, though she hates it like the devil! Well, who can blame her? She’ll never be young again. And the lad’s a decent lad … nothing caddish or tricky about the lad.”

He was moving along now beside a dark row of wretched houses. The pavement was uneven. The wind had got up and had become icy cold. It moaned and whistled over the slate roofs of this poorer portion of the town. Very old and very desolate did Henry Zoyland, Marquis of P. feel as he walked along! Those enchanting, unconventional retreats with his little Rachel at Mark Court all, all over! She had been restless and *distrait,* the last time he had had her with him up there; and those Bellamys! Their quarrels with poor Blimp were becoming intolerable. Yet he hadn’t the heart to turn them out.

“The place is nothing without her,” he thought, and he saw himself sitting by that big, lonely hearth with the ancient staircase leading up and up; and then *her* room, and then that stone causeway, and the Merlin room

— was it during his night in that place that old Johnny had learnt these devil’s tricks of putting life into dead babies?

The man’s desolation grew apace as he approached the outskirts of Paradise. “Old; I’m getting old,” he thought. “And no Merlin cantrips, learnt by any modern Messire Bleheris, could make *me* stir when once I was knocked on the head. No, damn it! I won’t put *anything* in the child’s way. Let her have her fling. Zoyland women always begin with a passionate romance in their teens; and then settle down into savage harridans at forty! Betsy did it; and never married at all! The child’s not half as wild as Betsy was. To hell with middle-class pruderies! The Zoylands always *did what they wanted*; and, by gad, my little girl shall.”

Thus the old diplomatist swaggered in his mood, doing his best to rationalise, as they call it, his doting partiality for that glowing child in her soft night-dress. But the ice-cold wind went shrieking over the roofs and wailing down the cobbled alleyways, and a feeling of bitter desolation chilled the man to the very bone.

The touch of her warmth as she sat just now on the arm of his chair had insinuated into his veins a craving for young blood and feminine softness. It was for her sake he had given up that French woman in Soho, the successor of Will’s German mother. For years he had lived like a monk for the child’s sake and this was his reward! And these curst communists turning Glastonbury into a bedlam of follies, while old Johnny was working miracles!

He’d better get back to town at once, get hold of a good lawyer — Beere was no use any more — and make sure that those ungrateful sons of his couldn’t touch a stiver of what he’d left to Rachel and to Will, of all this new cash.

He was passing Mother Legge's ambiguous domain now and as he glanced at that familiar "other house," which in younger days he had so often entered, he saw the door furtively opened and a man and a woman came out. He stepped into the shadow of a wall-buttress to let them pass and he could not help recognising them. One was Clarissa Smith, the pretty head-waitress at the Pilgrims', and the other was a man he'd seen in the stables there — none other in fact than the converted ostler with whom the miracle-worker had been drinking that very morning.

"What does the old woman make people like that fork out?" he wondered. "She must be hard pressed these days if *those* are her clients!"

But when he emerged from his retreat he actually found himself hesitating for the fraction of a second and imagining himself ringing that Cyprian door-bell!

"I suppose Young Tewsy's there still," he thought. "Who *was* it told me these communists were going to give the old boy a job at the Grail Spring? From Camelot to Chalice Hill! Well … that's how this world wags!"

He could still see the two figures moving along in front of him, Clarissa clinging tenderly to her ostler's arm.

"I hope *he* feels the same," he said to himself. "That sort of thing leaves the girl more loving, but the man — not always! By gad, if that boy of Rachel's plays any games—"

But the sight of that waitress and ostler clinging together so happily troubled the senses of this elderly gentleman as he walked behind them. The girl had the sort of plump figure he used to like; he could see *that* well enough even in this dark street! Garment by garment he undressed the unconscious Clarissa in that ice-cold wind. He was traversing the very pavement that Red Robinson had traversed, that night of the party at Mother Legge's, and precisely the same sort of soul-sick craving for a warm fire and a warm feminine body came over him as had devastated the angry proletarian. Had the ambitious Clarissa only known!

But that young lady continued to cling to her ostler’s arm, whispering amid her endearments, if the truth must be confessed, certain wickedly intimate strictures upon the character of Mr. Thomas Barter. Strange that the guileless warmth of Rachel’s romance should be driving her father on now to undress Clarissa Smith!

Rachel … Clarissa … oh, how cold the wind blew, and how harsh and desolate and comfortless the world was! In the warmth of the bodies of women, in their ways, in their laughter, in their clinging, yes! even in their anger and their mockery there is the only real refuge, he thought.

“Let ’em scold and rave. However cruel their words, their limbs are still satiny to our touch, their souls still free of our curst laws and labours and fuss and fume.”

He slackened his pace, for Clarissa’s arm was now round her companion’s neck. He actually stopped again while his heart, as he imagined himself returning on his steps and ringing that door-bell, began to beat within him in the way it used to do, twenty, thirty years ago! But the Sergeant would be sitting up for him. Besides, what was he thinking of? That “other house” wasn’t a brothel. Young Tewsy would expect — damn it! He was just a fool. The figures in front of him had turned the corner now; and he walked rapidly on.

Tommy Chinnock’s “I’d like to, Clarissa,” ebbed quickly from the life-weary pulses of the Marquis of P. When he reached the lighted lamps of the High Street, a bare-footed boy came rushing past him calling out a late edition of a Yeovil paper.

“*Mir-acle at Glaston-bury!”* the boy shouted. Lord P. smiled a bitter, man-of-the-world’s smile.

“There’s only one miracle in this world,” he muttered aloud, “that can make old men young and that’s not for old men who’ve outlived their time!”

THE GRAIL

As may be easily imagined the situation in Glastonbury Vicarage as the winter passed, with Nell and her child under the same roof as her former lover, although it was not strained to the limit of human endurance, was sufficiently uncomfortable to all the three persons concerned. It was obvious, too, that the little boy, though his expressions of it were obscure, missed the rollicking caresses of his mother's husband.

Mrs. Pippard who took upon herself all through December the role of ambassador — though hardly of peacemaker — between Nell's new sanctuary and her old home, kept them pretty closely informed of what was going on in Whitelake Cottage.

The trend of events seemed to be that Will Zoyland and Persephone were living out there in an irresponsible trance of amorous happiness, completely self-absorbed and self-contained, and prepared to await any deluge that fate might send, with the reckless defiance of their new-found delight in each other.

It struck Nell that it was totally unlike all she had ever known of Will, this ensorcerised interim of moonstruck quiescence. As week followed week at the Vicarage — each week bringing new agitations between the father and the son, and between herself and each of the two men, — she was constantly expecting Zoyland to appear in person, having quarrelled with Percy, and full of angry and despotic demands that his wife and her child should return home. But the New Year came and nothing of the kind happened!

In the end the cantankerous Mrs. Pippard, having played the part of eavesdropper to the infatuated pair at Whitelake till Zoyland nearly threw her out, and having clung desperately to the little Master Henry in the Vicarage, till Penny Pitches actually did throw her out, retired from domestic labours altogether, and took up her abode with the mother of Red Robinson’s bride, as a partner-assistant in the tea-shop business.

Hearing that Sally was leaving Cardiff Villa in order to be married to Red, Mrs. Pippard offered herself as the girl’s successor in the Mayor’s household; but Mrs. Geard, glad enough to return to her old freedom from any servants, very brusquely declined this honour; and thus it was left for the patient visitors to the town to endure the ministrations and be subjected to the all-seeing eye of Eudoxia’s diplomatic parent.

The astounding nature of the scandals which many of these innocent pilgrims carried home, along with Mr. Barter’s and Lady Rachel’s Arthurian figurines, concerning the more intimate life of Glastonbury, can thus be accounted for; but it is hardly necessary in this modest chronicle to state that Zoyland did *not* beat his wife black and blue, and that Nell did *not* live with three men at the same time.

But although the wild tales related by Mrs. Pippard were far from the truth, the two weeks that followed the arrival of Nell under the roof of her child’s father and her child’s grandfather were charged with explosive electricity.

Sam’s attitude was the same as it had always been, since he had decided to trample down and to kill all natural sex pleasure. He didn’t avoid her. On the contrary he snatched every moment he could, when his father was out of sight, to enjoy her society. He helped her with the child, though not proving as skilful as Zoyland in quieting him and distracting him. He kept Penny from intruding into the spare-room, for they had given Nell the William-of-

Orange bed to sleep in. He tried to coax her to give up her awkward and timid habit of retreating into the never-used drawing-room, a room that smelt, not of dust and mustiness for it was the only room in the house where Penny was allowed to scrub and tidy up without let or hindrance, but of the Dead Time itself, like a palpable ghost brooding there inside that locked door, brooding over the heavy, magenta coloured tassels that hung down above the front of the mantelpiece, brooding over the green plush sofa, brooding over the massive marble clock that never ticked, brooding over the footstool, trimmed with tarnished gold thread, brooding over the upstanding wool basket of Sam's mother that had never been touched since that young woman died.

It was a shock to Sam when one morning, a few days after the opening of the arch, he found Nell sitting in this drawingroom with her sewing — which he knew she was shy of his catching her with — on that gold-threaded footstool, over a wretched newly lit fire.

"Good Lord!" he cried, "does Father know you're in the drawing-room? *One* second — I'll be back in *one* second!"

Nell smiled and bending her head down drew her needle rapidly and nervously through the small, white garment she was making for her son. There was already descending upon her that resigned, effortless passivity, patient, docile, unresisting in which, because of some hereditary pliability in her ancestors, or at any rate in the women among her ancestors, though Dave had something of it too, it was easy for her to sink. She was surprised herself at the drowsy weight of this curious passivity. It had come over her the very first morning she had awakened in William-of-Orange's bed. She had cried herself passionately to sleep the night before; but that had been rather because, in a briefly snatched talk she had had alone with Sam, he had nervously disengaged her warm arms from his neck, than because of any culminating wave of self-pity. Yes! not a tear of all those tears of that first night could Zoyland claim to have evoked, nor the treacherous Percy either! It was Sam alone; Sam not pressing her to his heart, Sam not treating her as his love, Sam not crying out, “Let’s take our child and go away from here, away from all of them!” that had broken her down. But she had experienced when she woke up at dawn, a feeling towards Sam that was like the feeling which those sweet persecuted lemans in the old ballads, kept, through weal and woe, for their cruel lords!

Yes, she had been astonished herself, as day followed day and it became clearer and clearer that Sam’s whole nature was set upon this inexorable quest of his, at the apathy with which she accepted it. She came near to accusing herself of having allowed her heart to die within her, so numb, so paralysed, so atrophied did her emotions — after that first night of wild sobbing — seem to have grown. Even a strangely detached amusement had in these last weeks been rising up in her heart; an amusement that was rather schoolgirlish mischief than a maternal humour, at the thought of all these great hulking, blundering men following so crudely the prickings of their desire.

Under the pressure of this mood she had even begun to feel friendly again to Zoyland. Persephone was a totally different matter; and she kept telling herself several malevolent stories of imaginary encounters with Persephone, during which she brought down that young woman very wholesomely to her knees! But to her yellow-bearded Will she *did* begin to feel indulgent again; especially when she noted the contorted tricks and arbitrary devices which religion compels its votaries to undergo, if they are to love and to refrain from loving, as the two Dekkers were now trying to do at one and the same time!

Yes, she was wondering to herself now at this very minute, as she glanced up at the marble clock which had stopped at twenty minutes past two — perhaps the very hour in the night at which Sam's mother had died! — what her Sam, and her Sam's father, in their preposterous attempts not to quarrel savagely over her, would feel if they could read this queer humorous turn that her thoughts had taken of late! What had begun to strike her as specially quaint was the way they seemed to assume that whatever treaty or truce or peace they patched up between themselves about her, she would accede to without any question!

She was like a sack of exciting oats placed in a manger between two champing steeds. Well! she wasn't so sure that she would submit to being a sack of oats! As this thought came upon her once again this morning, the corners of her mouth quivered in the second silent smile in which she had indulged since Sam told her to "wait a second"; and her eyes moved from the marble clock to the green plush sofa.

"What's come over me?" she said to herself. "Am I growing cynical? Am I getting like Percy?"

A slight puckering of her forehead followed this mental question; and as if in proof that her new detachment was a girlish, rather than a maternal emotion, she found herself hoping that her little son — it was about eleven o'clock in the morning — would sleep sound till noon, and allow her to leave him alone for another hour, in his cradle by the big bed.

Mercy! but she did miss her own house! *That* at least was certain. It teased her to think of Percy messing about with her cups and saucers, and forgetting to put the bread in the cake-box and the rolls in the biscuit-tin.

"I'm sure she doesn't wash out the sugar-basin," she thought to herself, "and I *know* she doesn't keep the cheese on a shelf by itself!"

And as she stared at the green plush sofa the incorrigible immorality of her woman's mind sighed just a little for the free, careless swing of the Zoyland attitude to life, compared with the impassioned pieties of this monastic establishment.

"What I really am now," she thought, "in place of being the mistress of a wicked baron, is the petted bone of contention in a hermitage!"

The door which had been left ajar was now kicked open and Sam came in with a coal-scuttle full of coal in one hand and a pile of large bits of wood in the other.

"I've told Penny to make you up a good fire," he said, "next time you want to sit in here; but why you don't stay in the museum, where Father likes to see you sewing in that chair while he's writing his sermon, I can't think!"

He spoke irritably; but he knew in his heart it was because of his own bad humour, when he found her ensconced with his father, that she had invaded this closed-up shrine of the past.

"Sit down, Sam, my dear," she said, when he had made the fire blaze, "I want to talk to you."

He obeyed her. But it was not at her side, but upon the plush sofa that he took his seat.

"You know, my dearest one," she said gravely, folding up her son's night-shirt upon her lap, "that if *you* can stand the way we're living, *I* can't! Now stop, my dear; stop! Don't interrupt, till you've heard what I'm going to say! I'm not going to beg you to do anything you don't want to; so you needn't glower at me as if I were a wicked girl trying to tempt you. It's only this, dear. I was talking to Dave last week and he says that Percy refuses to take a penny of his money. He says that he can't *make* her take it; but nothing will induce him to keep it himself. He says if I won't take it he'll just throw it into the town council fund. I've been thinking about this, Sam dear; and I've decided that I *will* take it. Even if Philip chucks Will out because of Percy they'll be all right. Lord P. won't let them come to grief. He's always been offering to help Will; and with all this money he's getting for this great sale — No! *They'll* be all right. I'm not going to bother my head about *them*."

Sam turned and stretched out his heavy hands over his knees, extending all his fingers. It was as if his hands were yawning with an amorous relaxation unpermitted to the rest of his frame.

His shirt-sleeves disappeared under the frayed edges of his coat-cuffs and his wrists showed hairy and red.

"But Nell? What then?" he murmured. "You're not going to leave Father and me, are you?"

She rubbed one of her ankles automatically with the warm, shapeless, schoolgirl palms of her soft hands. Then she turned her head and surveyed Sam upon the sofa. She surveyed, too, an ironwork stand behind Sam's head, containing several hart's tongue ferns, kept alive for years by Penny, for whom this room represented an everlasting Seventh Day of drowsy and futile piety. A big wastepaper basket with ornamented handles stood at the end of the sofa, into which nothing had been put — except Penny's broom — for twenty-five years. By the side of this basket, resting upon the faded green carpet, lay a large, oblong pebblestone from Chesil Beach, upon which the short-lived Mrs. Dekker had painted, during her confinement, a brightly coloured picture of her native Swiss lake.

From all these things Nell's nostrils inhaled the same curious smell, the smell of inanimate objects left *in status quo* for a quarter of a century. Why, if she were in such an old ballad mood of patient docility, had she ever started this disturbing conversation, worrying Sam about Dave's money, and protesting that she, for her part, *could not* go on as they were? The truth was she happened to be under the moon that particular day, and if another woman had asked her why she was behaving like this, she would have replied that she was “nervous”.

As a matter of fact — though what did the simpleton on the sofa, with the hairy red wrists, know about such things? — the blind creative energy within her was in the vein for troubling, for disturbing, for agitating, for darkening all the unruffled waters it could approach.

“You don’t suppose, Sam, do you, that any girl with any spirit could go on like this?”

Sam pulled in his outstretched arms and thrust them deep into his pockets.

“I don’t see why not, Nell. I don’t see why not!”

Her eyes, that had dark shadows beneath them, narrowed suddenly into little gentian-blue shuttles of darting anger.

“No, I suppose you *don’t* see!” she cried. “I suppose you and your father could go on with your precious aquarium and your precious Holy Grail, till the crack of doom, while a girl ate her heart out in a place like this!”

“Nell — little Nell!” he murmured reproachfully. The gentleness of his tone disconcerted her.

At that moment what her nerves would have liked above everything else was for him to have risen to his feet and roundly scolded her; told her that she was *his,* that she was his chattel, his possession, his slave, his whore, that her child was his child, her body *his* body, her will *his* will.

“Oh, I don’t know!” she breathed wearily, expanding her breasts and clasping her hands behind the back of her head. “I don’t know what I’m saying, Sam. But I know everything is all wrong.”

But his forehead was corrugated now in a heavy frown and his freckled chin was wrinkling itself downwards into his neck.

“Your Holy Grail?” he thought to himself, “O Christ, my Christ, if you would but once, just once, for one minute, give me a sign, only the smallest faintest sign that you are really *there,* behind it all; then I could go on, without aching to have her, to hold her, night and day!”

Because of his heavy unimaginative nature, because of his preference for minnows and stickle-backs and loach over mythical abstractions, Sam had never given much thought to the legend of the Grail. The Christ whose deadly, cruel imperative had come between him and his love had been as much of a Person as Nell herself. Was He a Person still?

How different was Sam’s Christ from Mr. Geard’s! Mr. Geard’s Christ was a Power to be exploited. In his weird gnostic dialogues with *his* Master, the Mayor of Glastonbury addressed Him like a friend, almost like an equal. He was the Mayor’s great magician, his super-Merlin, by whose strength and support he became strong. Never once had it crossed the threshold of Mr. Geard’s consciousness that it was his duty to live a life of self-sacrifice.

“I live *as I like to live,”* he would have retorted to any ascetic protest, “and my Master lives as He likes to live. His Blood is the Water of Life!”

“Christ in His Grail,” repeated Sam to himself, “and Father in his aquarium and Nell in my mother’s room!”

She had turned her face away from him now. She was bending over the fire, prodding it pensively with the poker. As he watched her doing this, the feeling came over him that just behind the physical drama that was going on at the minute, another, a corresponding drama, was going on in the Invisible.

“Aquarium-Grail … Grail-aquarium,” he muttered; and his ichthyological mind visioned a Fish that was a real fish and yet something more than a fish shedding a mystic light out of an enchanted vessel.

Sam lowered his eyes and let his head sink deeper and deeper into his chest, while his hands, that were in his pockets, clenched their fists. He thought of a particular spot on the banks of the Brue where he had often fished with his father as a boy. It was at a turn of the river and it was several fields westward from the wooden bridge where Young Tewsy had caught his recent surprising catch, to the delight of Mother Legge.

"Aquarium-Grail," he repeated, in the dark trans-lunar cave of his consciousness, "Grail-aquarium"; and it came over him, just as if his tormented and tormenting God had whispered it into his ear, that the sacrifice which was laid upon him now was to leave the Vicarage himself.

"If she can't stand Father and me together," he thought, "and I expect we *have* made it too much for her, it's not she that must go … that's unthinkable … how would she get on alone … alone with our child? … it's myself that must go … it's you, Sam, that must go."

He had reached a point in his asceticism when he often felt his imperative soul to be standing over against his reluctant body like an austere slave-driver. Indeed he had come to think of his soul as in some way *external* to his body. There was not much pleasure about this; but there was just the faintest flicker of a strange satisfaction in it. At any rate it gave him a sense that his soul was totally independent of his body and was the proud master of his body. He pulled up his legs with a jerk and removed his hands from his pockets.

"It's you, Sam, that must go!" he repeated grimly in his heart.

Thus what had begun as a pure wanton troubling of the waters, because Nell felt nervous, had become another tragic turning point in the girl's life. Something in her was vaguely aware of this as Sam rose up from the green sofa.

Impulsively, with a movement that was entirely self-forgetful, she leapt to her feet and ran towards him; while he — just because he *had* given his body its implacable orders and because this was perhaps a moment that would never come back again — pressed her so tightly to his heart that she could hardly breathe. She had just time to think: “This is how I’d like to die … crushed to death by Sam,” when the door opened and Mat Dekker came in. They were so tightly clasped that they were like two trees that have grown together, each with its bark eroded by the pressure of the other, each with the same ivy or vine imprisoning its limbs, and when they broke apart and turned to the man at the door it was as if each of them, as they swung into independent life, carried away something of the living texture of the other.

“I thought … I understood …” began Mat Dekker, and he turned with a portentous and passionate solemnity to the door by which he had entered, opening it, looking out into the passage, closing it again, and finally locking it. He seemed prepared to behave towards this door, the drawing-room door of Glastonbury Vicarage, as Diogenes behaved to his tub, venting upon its unfeeling wood emotions excited by the aberrations of human passion.

The truth was that Mat Dekker was seized at that moment with a murderous fury against his son; and it was only by concentrating on the door — was it locked? was Penny listening behind it? — that his better nature was able to steal a moment’s breathing space wherein to gather up its self-control.

The door carried above its handle a decorative panel of prettily flowered porcelain, to protect it from sticky fingers, and over this cool china surface Mat Dekker now passed his thumb as if to see whether those hundred-years-old roses would come off. All this took a very brief time, but it was long enough to restore to him a modicum of his self-control; and turning now towards the two of them, he addressed Nell with a slightly forward-moving inclination of his massive grey head.

"I've been hearing the child crying for quite a few minutes," he remarked. "I came to tell you."

His own words gave him an opportunity to return once more to the redoubtable door, and he tugged at the handle to open it — for he assumed she would rush upstairs at once — forgetting that in his agitation he had turned its key. He unlocked it and held the door open.

The voice of an extremely impatient infant was now quite audible from upstairs. But Nell at first drew back.

"It isn't good for him to be taken up the first minute he cries," she said.

She knew by instinct that Mat Dekker was anxious to avenge himself upon his son for what he had just seen. But the glare of concentrated command that shot out at her from under those bushy eyebrows, as she lingered, was too formidable to be disobeyed. She flung a hurried, tender, guilty, accomplice's look at her ambiguous lover; but Sam seemed to be lost in some deep thought of his own, for he was staring fixedly at the marble clock with its hands pointing to twenty minutes after two.

"You'll make me spoil him," she cried. "You are all on his side, however naughty he is."

With these words and giving Mat Dekker a smile that had something supplicating about it, she passed by him and went out. Evidently a sense that she had been treated more like a little girl than a grown woman irritated her as soon as she was in the hall, for she called back, in quite a defiant voice, "Will was just the same! You'd all spoil him if you could!" But she ran upstairs now, and with the closing of the door behind her the child's angry cries were shut out.

Mat Dekker walked over to where his son stood.

“This sort of thing must stop, my boy.”

It was with a palpable effort to restrain his feelings that he added the two syllables, “my boy.”

“As I’ve been telling you all the time,” he went on, “there are only two things a *gentleman*” — he emphasised the word— “could do in your situation. He could either make her get a divorce from her husband and marry her, or … or … or he could—”

Sam interrupted his father, looking him straight in the eyes: “Or he could clear off himself? Is that what you were going to say?”

The blood had rushed to Sam’s head as he uttered this retort; but in a second he had recovered his equanimity.

“Come along, Father,” he said quietly, “let’s go into the museum. It seems unnatural to talk here. I *can’t* talk here.”

It was Sam’s turn now to open the door with the rose-painted china panel. It was Sam’s turn, too, by the very power of his calmness, to compel the grizzled, ruddy-faced man with the quivering upper lip to go out into the hall. Down the passage they walked together and together they entered the museum. Here in the presence of the familiar aquarium, the familiar iron candle-sticks, the familiar daguerreotypes, the father and son faced each other. Neither of them sat down, and there was indeed little attraction about the few fading coals in the grate — Mat Dekker had evidently been too absorbed in his thoughts to keep his fire up — to lure them to sit down, but the father on the right of the fireplace with his hand on the mantelpiece, and the son on the left with *his* hand on the mantelpiece, confronted each other like two duellists.

“Grail-aquarium … aquarium-Grail,” ran like a refrain through Sam’s head; and he began suddenly to feel again that queer sensation he had felt in the drawing-room, a sensation like that of the presence of a *double world*, every motion and gesture in the first being a symbol of something that was taking place in the second. The sensation was accompanied by an absolute conviction of the boundless importance of every thought that a human being had.

It was also accompanied — strange though it may seem at this tragic moment — by a faint thrill of mysterious happiness — the first authentic leap of spontaneous happiness in him that poor Sam had known for many a month.

He glanced round at the aquarium, as his father began speaking, and Nell's sarcastic cry "your precious aquarium" transmuted itself into a spasm of sweetness that was like a prolongation of what he had felt just now when he pressed her to his heart.

"It's against all I've believed — this damned business of divorce," burst out Mat Dekker fiercely, "but the church has always retained the right to deal with special conditions in special ways; and with that brute, over there, behaving as he is—"

The man's formidable upper lip began quivering again, and Sam noticed that there was a blood-stain upon the white clerical tie that in the old-fashioned evangelical manner this eccentric high-churchman wore round his muscular neck.

"His hand must have shaken when he was shaving," thought Sam. "Jesus give me strength not to get angry!"

"With that brute like he is, and doing it openly — turning her out in fact — I can make short work of him. I shall go and see John Beere this afternoon. It's not a thing" — he made an automatic humorous grimace of disgust— "that I like doing. All lawyers are rogues. But it's what I'm going to do; and I'm going to do it willy-nilly as far as *she's* concerned. *She* shan't be worried with it till I've got the thing well under way!"

He looked so pathetically proud of himself in this display of worldly sagacity before his simple and blundering son, that Sam felt a stab of remorse at having broken up their life and brought all these things down on that grey head.

"I wouldn't do that, Father," he cried. "I wouldn't tell Beere, or anyone else, a word about it unless she asks you to. How do you know that she *wants* to divorce him? Women are funny in these things. Oh, I know, I *know* she wouldn't like it for you to do that, without telling her! Besides, Father, I don't believe that Mr. Beere would even discuss it unless she came herself. They always have to go themselves. That's how it is in the newspapers. They have to go to court. That's why they hate it. They can't bear to go to court."

Mr. Dekker began striding up and down the floor of the museum. He seemed irritated by his clerical dress at this crisis in his life. What he would really have liked to do was to go out to Whitelake and challenge Zoyland to a bout of fisticuffs, then have it out with his son — he could not quite have explained what form this scene would have taken — *and then* — And it was this "and then" that was the whole crux of the situation.

In his passion and in his professional and religious restrictions, this sturdy son of the Quantocks looked like a caged wild animal as he paced back and forth. His feelings were expressed in the way he hitched up his long broadcloth coat-tails so as to thrust his hands into his pockets and the way he let these tails hang, one over each wrist, as he walked up and down.

To ruffle his priest's attire was a small gesture; but it belonged to the same category of gestures as his ordering the girl to go up to her baby and his telling Sam about his resolve to visit Lawyer Beere.

"The best thing *you* can do then," he brought out now, standing still by the edge of the aquarium, into which even as he spoke he could not help giving a sidelong glance, “the best thing you can do is to take her to see Beere yourself. You’ll have to be — what’s their word — co-respondent, of course; that is, if he brings a counter-suit on his side, as I have no doubt the beggar will.”

Once more Sam was aware of a pathetic note of self-complacency in his father’s tone.

“The old man,” he thought to himself, “is proud of his worldly knowledge. He thinks I’ve never heard the words co-respondent or counter-suit. Christ, don’t let me get angry with him!”

The moment had come when he had to tell his father what was in his mind; but it was a fearful wrench to utter the words and it would be a worse thing for his father when he heard them. Aye! he had come to it. He never thought he would; but he had. He had to tell his father that he was going to leave him. Sam knew much better than did this grey-haired man, hunching up his coat-tails, what it would mean to both of them, this separation. “Of course,” he thought, “I shall be still in Glastonbury. But it’ll be the end of our real life together. It’ll be the end of our long evenings in this room. It’ll be the end of our mornings in the potato garden.”

“You know more about the law than I do, Father,” he remarked. But he said it only to gain time. “And I certainly should not draw back from helping her in any way I could.”

His father’s hands came out of his pockets now and one of them was thrust into the aquarium! He had caught sight of something there that Sam, at any rate, had never seen in the aquarium; no! not since as a small child, he had watched his father changing its water and its weeds.

There were now three kinds of weeds in the aquarium, two of them river-weeds, and one of them a pond-weed; and it was in an entanglement of this pond-weed that Mat Dekker had found what was such a shock to him and what, at any other time, would have been an event of the first importance in Glastonbury Vicarage. He had found a dead fish.

"Dead! One of the Meare-Rhyne ones!" muttered Mat Dekker now, holding out the tiny little corpse for Sam to see.

It looked very small indeed in the priest's great brown palm — very small and silvery — like an "animula, vagula, blandula" in the hand of God.

"That's what it is — one of the Meare-Rhyne ones!" echoed Sam.

"We didn't change the water yesterday," said his father.

"Nor the green weed last week," added Sam.

"And we left that duck-weed," said his father, "when we *knew* it ought to come out."

"And we never got that fresh gravel from Keinton Mandeville," sighed Sam.

"Or a trowel-full of that sand we saw at Athelney," groaned his father.

"It's our own fault that this minnow's dead," said Sam.

"We've killed it," echoed the Vicar of Glastonbury, "as surely and certainly as if we'd fished it out and thrown it into the fire."

"Put it here," said Sam, hurriedly bringing from the chimney-piece a little copper plaque with the head of St. Dunstan engraved on it.

Mr. Dekker tipped the little fish from his hand into the centre of this plate where it lay across the sullen brow of the despotic ecclesiastic.

"Let's see what happens to it *now"* murmured Sam, tossing some drops of water out of a tumbler and covering up the fish.

"What'll happen to all of us, my boy!" sighed his father, sinking into one of the creaking wicker chairs, while Sam took possession of the other.

They surveyed each other in silence; and a moment passed during which they knew — those two heavily breathing, staring men — that it would take more than the maddening breasts of that sweet creature upstairs, suckling her child, really to separate them, the one from the other.

But Sam pulled himself together. It was not for the sake of peace with his father that he had to go. It was not even because Nell had said:— "If *you* can stand the way we're living, *I* can't!" It was because, without question, or doubt, or any compromise, his "external soul" had commanded him to leave this house.

He drew in his breath several times before he spoke, inhaling with it that old familiar smell of his father's workroom that seemed as much composed of some wholesome emanation from the priest's massive animal-frame as from the fumes of his pipe and the musty odour of the leather bindings of Dr. Simeon's Sermons.

"I've got something to tell you, Father," he said.

"Eh, boy — speak up; out with it!"

The tone was identical with the tone which Sam had heard from him when, on leaving Cambridge, he had announced that he could not be ordained; but somehow, hearing it now, it put him back into the Eton collar of his first term of the Sherborne Prep. "Don't interrupt me then, Father, please, and I'll tell you." Oh, these deadly pauses, these creakings of chairs, these swallowings of saliva, when the outer coat of the human stomach seems to be inflating and deflating itself like the belly of a frog!

"I've decided to leave this house, Father, and take lodgings for myself in the—" His words came pattering out … *tit-tot* ... *tit-tat* … *tit-tut* … like the tread of the Greylands Cadet Corps when commanded to advance at quick time— "in the town, somewhere, and earn my own living. I want to earn it as a working-man, and I'm pretty sure I can get a job that wouldn't take me much time to learn at this new municipal factory. I understand that — no! don't interrupt me, Father! — that there are several places unfilled there, because they can't find enough people to take such poor wages. This won't mean my becoming a Socialist, or anything like that! They're ready to take anyone; and they know I'm not interested in politics. I'm going round to the Tribunal this afternoon to talk to this new lawyer they've got, this nephew of old Merry's, and when I've got my job, can 'ee guess where I'm going to live, Father? No! Stop! Let me tell you! I'm going to live in the attic of that old warehouse, with the Gothic door, that we've so often noticed when we've started on our walks towards Meare. You spoke of it yourself … don't you remember? … that day we took our lunch and got as far as Bawdrip?"

He stopped breathlessly. Well! it was done now! He had crossed his Rubicon. He had severed that animal-male link, stronger in some ways even than the umbilical cord itself, which had bound him so long, hirsute flesh against hirsute flesh, to his begetter. He didn't dare to look at his father now. He raised his head and stared at the aquarium. It was Nell's chance-word that had suddenly made his path so clear; just as it had been Crummie's chance-word, reported to him by Red Robinson, that had started the whole thing.

"Girls' words, tossed out without thought — they've changed my whole life," he said to himself. "I said good-bye to *her* in Mother's room and now —"

He jumped to his feet, lurched forward and clutching his father's forehead in both his hands, bent down over it and kissed it. "And now," he added, in his deepest heart, "I've said goodbye to *him* in our room."

After kissing his father's bent head — for Mat Dekker, as if under the blinding glare of his enemy the sun, had lowered his face and closed his eyes — Sam walked to the door. As he put out his hand to its handle he seemed to see the whole of his life as nothing but doors — study doors, drawing-room doors, church doors, privy doors, kitchen doors, bedroom doors …

"Sam!" His father was on his feet, straightening his shoulders, tightening his lips, fumbling blindly with his heavy gold watch-chain.

The priest's thoughts and feelings at that moment were incoherent to a point of physical distress. They were like a whirlpool, tossing up opposite things, drowned bodies, ravening sharks, shimmering mother-of-pearl, cowry shells, dogfish, from the bottom of the mind's deep sea.

"Alone in the house with her … going past her bedroom … alone with her … Sam leaving me … Sam going out of my house … Sam's place empty …" Being the man he was, it was natural enough that the distress caused to him by the conflicting nature of his thoughts vented itself in irrational anger.

"Sam!"

"Yes, Father?"

"You shan't sneak off like this! Do you hear me? I say you shan't! Leaving your wench … and your child … and everything. Have you no natural feeling at all? You promised me you'd let her alone until she was properly divorced and you were properly married to her … and what do I find? I find you turning your mother's room into a place to—" The trick had worked. The man's upper lip was once more protruding and trembling with injury and grievance— "into a place to fornicate in!"

The ugly word belched itself forth from the priest's contorted mouth like the dark wine and the gobbets of human flesh from the guts of the drunken Polyphemus. How could Sam know that the secret urge of this anger was a wild, heathen delight at being left alone, alone without a rival, with those suckling breasts upstairs? How could Sam know that it was the man's own *"I'd like to, Susie! I'd like to, Dolly! I'd like to, Nelly!*" of the stone-throwing Tommy Chinnock, that was being lambasted and foul-named by this bewildered priest? Mother Legge would have been the person to have set Sam right upon this riddle of his father's wrath; though doubtless Mr. Evans, who had seen the contents of the Camel Bowl touch Nell's lips before all the rest, might have been able to instruct even the wise Mother Legge about the maddening power of this girl's fatal passivity. A bundle she was — that was it! an aphrodisiac bundle of cloves, cinnamon and aniseed — a fever-raising, fever-allaying *bundle of catnip* for one, two, three, and how many more? prowling, feral carnivores!

And there was, after all, — for Sam was his father's son — a similar introversion of righteous anger on Sam's side. Why else should the word used by his father, and associated by his father with that room of the dumb clock, have made his chin work so, and a spurt of black anger almost choke him? If he *hadn't* forgot everything — even that it was "the last time" — when he hugged Nell so furiously in the drawing-room this word of his father's would doubtless have gone over his head like badly aimed duck-shot.

It was certainly the word "fornication" that led Sam now, for after all he was a very young saint, to close *this* door, of all doors, with so resounding a repercussion throughout the whole house, that Nell, doing up the front of her dress, after nursing her baby, ran quickly to the door of William-of-Orange's room, opened it, and listened in frightened concern.

It was in this manner that Sam Dekker was heard leaving the house of his birth which he had entered, through the body of the servant from Geneva, some twenty-five years ago. And what was the first thing that Mat Dekker did when he heard his son cross the hall, open the front door, and go out?

He moved slowly to the mantelpiece, removed the tumbler that Sam had placed over the little fish from Meare-Rhyne, picked it up from its place upon the surly countenance of St. Dunstan, and, raising it to his nostrils, snuffed at it with inquisitive interest!

Meanwhile Sam himself, arrived in the presence of Paul Trent in the Abbot's Tribunal, soon found that he was completely right about there being no lack of communal jobs as long as he was content with the barest living wage. And since such a wage — just enough to keep body and soul together — was exactly what suited his life-illusion just then, both parties in this transaction were speedily rendered content.

And so before that day was over both Mr. Dekker and Nell received brief notes from this quixotic young man, notes that were delivered in person, for he had no desire that Penny and Mr. Weatherwax should sauce their favourite "gorlas" with his emotional confidences, telling them of his success.

The two devoted boys, Elphin Cantle and Steve Lew, were Sam's messengers. Steve's hero-worship for Elphin had begun during the last few months to reproduce almost exactly Elphin's for Sam, and a mission of this sort being meat and drink to such romantic lads, the recipients of these missives received them privately, separately, faithfully, and in all due secrecy before night fell.

Mat Dekker's note ran:

Dearest Father,

You can always find me in case of necessity at the top of that house I spoke of. They call it the Old Malt House and it is in the middle of Manor House Lane. I'll see you, of course, before long; but for a week or two I want to collect my thoughts.

Give my love to Penny.

Your affectionate son,

Sam

PS. I've got a good job so I am in no need of money.

PPS. Would you mind telling Penny to give the bearer my big sponge.

The note to Nell, which it was Steve's task to deliver — Sam had tact enough to make this quite clear — ran as follows:

Nell, my little Nell,

You must forgive me if I hide away from both you and Father for a week or two. I am all right. I am not unhappy. If I've made *you* unhappy, please, please try and forgive me. I needn't tell you any more about my religion and my new life; but I *have* to tell you this, once and for all, that I love you more than I ever did! *Now* you may smile, in the way you do; but what I say is true; and we both realised it this morning. Father knows where I am living.

Your Sam, spite of all, for ever and always.

PS. Give Henry a lot of kisses from me.

Sam's job at the municipal factory proved the simplest, as it was the heaviest that the whole business offered. The new types of legendary figurines were largely constructed of a certain kind of clay that was brought in trucks from the neighbourhood and Sam's job, which was shared by some of the roughest labouring-men in the town, consisted in emptying trucks of this clay into hand-carts, and these carts again into receptacles outside the factory.

Thus he was kept very busy, and felt, during the first week or so, extremely tired; but his day ended at five o'clock, when he was free to do what he pleased, and these first free evenings in spite of his extreme exhaustion were times of more peace and quiet than he had known for a long while. The heavy physical labour saved him from morbid broodings and made each night an orgy of delicious dreamless sleep; while as his muscles began slowly to adapt themselves to his work — and it must be remembered that Sam was endowed with super-vigorous health — this nightly weariness grew less and less. What *was* a torture to him was the treatment he received, though only at first, from his fellow-labourers. Intrinsically they were men of no exceptional brutality. Among themselves they were friendly enough. But everything about Sam, the fact that he was an educated man, the fact that his father was a priest, and above all the fact that he was trying to live like a saint, excited their bitter hostility. If Sam had not come to this job of clay-hauling and truck-emptying with the direct purpose of sharing the sufferings of his persecuted god he would have been reduced to abject and sullen misery by these men.

"Holy Sam" became his nickname almost at once; and the pleasure with which they tormented him was abominable. It would be erroneous to say that all good and valuable things spring from the individual, and all evil things from the crowd; for everyone is aware on various occasions of a crude and raw warmth, a radiating glow, a lively enthusiasm, that emanates from any group or mass of people. And there springs up from the crowd, too, under certain conditions, a formidable power of magnetic faith. But this faith which is the most striking thing the crowd engenders cannot for one second be compared with the creative faith of the individual. It is by the faith of the individual upon which the crowd feeds like an oil-devouring flame that the latter is able to move mountains, to tear down Bastilles, to destroy inquisitions, to inaugurate revolutions.

Among his fellow-workmen in this clay-hauling job Sam was an individual pitted against a crowd. *He* was not against *them. They* were against him. He was no Coriolanus. He was no aristocrat, answering hate with contempt. It was enough that he lacked their humour, that he did not chew their tobacco, that he could not fling back their particular kind of badinage. In a situation of this kind an upper-middle-class recluse like Sam was at a much worse disadvantage than Will Zoyland would have been. Zoyland's dog-and-gun slang, his Rabelaisian obscenities and roaring guffaws would have won these people's respect. He would have browbeaten the more aggressive and cajoled the others. He would have speedily become a sort of bandit chief among them.

But Sam they totally despised. They regarded him as a softy, as a preacher, as a spy, as a blackleg, as a dark horse up to some tricky game, as a ne'er-do-well with a screw loose, as the idiot son of a canting parson. They amused themselves with him. They mimicked his mannerisms, they hustled him, they put the heaviest work upon him. He was their sport, their quarry, their lawful prey. The fact that he was no weakling gave an added spice to their bullying. It was like bear-baiting; and all day long they worried him, like dogs worrying a great patient beast.

But all this was only for a time. It did not last. Little by little the clumsy sweetness of Sam's nature won its way with them. What actually was at first, it may be, a tinge of priggishness in his attitude towards them, wore off. He came to forget that he was Sam Dekker, the son of Mat Dekker. He became a labouring-man among other labouring-men. And the psychic awareness that he really was ceasing to separate himself from them affected them without their realising it. The manner in which he received their derision changed insensibly too. He began to cease regarding it as directed especially and maliciously towards himself, and he ceased to encourage it and stir it up for his own masochistic satisfaction. Thus the telepathic message from his sub-conscious self to their self-conscious selves which had formerly called out, "I am different from you. It hurts here. Hit me harder here!” began to sing another tune and to call out, “We’re all in the same mill. To hell with differences! All souls at the bottom are equal.”

And this new mood in Sam was no conscious part of his struggle after a holy life. It arose from the innate heathen goodness of his nature, emitting its sweet odour like thyme or mint that has been heavily trodden upon. And so by degrees it came about that the heathen virtue in Holy Sam was responded to by the heathen virtue in these other Glastonbury aboriginals, and the feeling:— “We are all of one blood” — gave to the clay-hauling upon which Mr. Barter’s business depended a certain autochthonous solidity.

For Tom Barter with Red Robinson as his foreman and Lady Rachel as his adviser, was beginning to display his mettle as a manager; and the figurines, statuettes, plaster-of-paris busts, hand-painted vases, plates, crocks and jars, which they were now manufacturing showed signs of spreading Glastonbury wares — with the help of the visitors and pilgrims — all over Europe. Both in the designing and executing portions of his business Barter’s personal limitations in matters of art were an advantage to him. He came upon one young person after another, girls as well as men, who possessed unusual artistic feeling; and encouraged by Lady Rachel, he left these young Glastonbury natives a completely free hand.

The result of this was that there began to spring up — out of the void as it almost seemed — a very exciting and most original school of Glastonbury design, genuinely indigenous and wherein the roughnesses and crudities of drawing, colouring and perspective, and their variations too under so many different hands, possessed the imaginative freshness and childlike appeal of an authentically primitive art, an art which the whole western world seemed especially to thirst for, an art which embodied in it not only the communal spirit of the town’s socialistic rulers but something — a nuance, a tinge, a suspicion — of the new religion of Glastonbury's Mayor! Their earliest output had been confined to toys and souvenirs; but as soon as Lady Rachel became intimate with Barter — and she had an active ally in Tossie — the little clay figurines of the legendary personages of the town's history, from Morgan-le-Fay to St. Joseph, ousted everything else; and the council's timely contract with certain clay-haulers of the neighbourhood changed the whole trend of the business, so that toys were forgotten and a real movement of imaginative art, at once modern and mystical, swept everything before it.

At the end of a week Sam paid a hurried visit to his father and Nell; but so distressing and agitating to all three of them did this visit prove that he did not attempt to repeat it, but henceforth gave himself up completely to the raptures and torments of his *Imitatio Christi.*

It would have been a different story altogether if his labours had been *inside* the municipal factory. There he would have been under Barter's eye, there he would have met Lady Rachel. But except for the first afternoon of his hiring he saw nothing of the art-work of the place. All he saw, all he handled, was truck-loads of this particular clay.

Sam's nature, always rather earthbound and earthdrawn, sank into this clay as into the tomb of his Christ. He washed away his thoughts about Nell and her child in this clay. In this clay he soaked up the subterranean sorrow, scarcely less hurting than what he felt for Nell, of his separation from his father. He was at once bruised along with his God, by his wrestlings with his fellow-workmen, and buried along with his God, in this heavy Somersetshire clay.

What made the task of winning over his companions so slow was the fact that the men around him were always changing. Their pay was so poor and their work so heavy that few of them could stand it for more than a brief time. Then others came — all of them out of the poorest districts of Bove Town and Paradise — and in their turn were tempted to make sport of Sam. None of them had the toughness or the stamina that he had. They were lean and lanky men, descendants by centuries of inbreeding of those heathen aboriginals of the Isle of Glastonbury who resisted St. Joseph, St. David, St. Indractus, St. Gildas, St. Patrick, St. Dunstan, St. Benignus and St. Bridget, in their attempts to spiritualise them, who were forever revolting against both church and state, who seemed inspired in their rebellions by the old chthonian divinities of Tor Hill, whose re-awakened malignity on the day of the Pageant nearly destroyed Lord P. and whom nobody but Bloody Johnny seemed able to manage.

What *did* give Sam a real thrill of natural pleasure was the scrubbing and the whitewashing of his loft floor at the top of the Old Malt House. He had no furniture here at all except a small camp-bed, a kitchen chair, a three-legged table and a white thick water-jug and basin. When he had whitewashed the walls and ceiling, he scrubbed the big bare beams of the oak floor till they were as clean as the cleanest floor-expanse in the town, that is to say, Emma Sly's kitchen at The Elms.

As day followed day in Sam's new life, finding him working from seven to five at clay-hauling and then associating, when his work was over, with the most destitute of his neighbours, the full implication of his abandonment of the normal human desires began to unfold. He was so strong, and his health was so sound, that he very quickly found his day's labour no more exhausting to him than if he had spent the time walking about the fields.

This growing freedom from physical weariness made it possible for him, after he had washed himself and changed his clothes and had his tea, to explore many of the poorer districts of the town of which he already knew a little. He would leave Manor House Road about half-past six and make his way through a small alley, by the side of the house where John and Mary lived, into a section of Paradise that abutted upon the Burnham and Evercreech Railway and stretched as far to the north as the four crossways, where the roads to Meare and Godney met Northload Street and Dye House Lane.

That Holy Sam, as even the children of this quarter already began to call him, had an equanimity of temper beyond what many holy men have had, was proved by the way he let himself be interrupted upon at least three week-days out of his six, as he sat down to his well-earned tea in his whitewashed attic loft. This interruption came from Jimmy Bagge, a semi-imbecile beggar, a little older than Sam, who lived with his father and mother in a one-storied stone house, black with age and smoke, that leaned against the bank of the Evercreech Railway. Sam had found Jimmy scraping and groping in a filthy refuse-heap behind the Northload houses and he had brought him home with him to Manor House Lane and given him a supper of hot tea and bread and treacle. After this Jimmy Bagge soon found out how long Sam worked and the exact hour of his return home; and he used to sit in the malt-yard, hidden behind a row of ancient barrels between which he constantly peeped out.

He was too wise to present himself ere Sam had washed, changed his clothes and made tea; but he had timed these proceedings to such a nicety that it was pretty well almost always just as Sam was lifting his first cup to his lips that Jimmy knocked at his door. Sam accepted the situation as if it were his destiny to spend his life with Jimmy, as indeed perhaps it was, but he displayed one small weakness on all these occasions, which betrayed the difference between an Anglo-Saxon “holy man” and one of Latin or Oriental blood; for he gave up his one chair to his visitor, and himself sat down on his camp-bed; not, it must be confessed out of politeness, but with an irrepressible awareness of the verminous condition of the beggar’s filthy clothes.

It was on the occasion of the fifth visit of Jimmy Bagge to the Malt House loft floor that the obstinate imbecile suggested, after many wavering circumlocutions, that Sam should accompany him to his home beneath the Evercreech railway bank. It was a lovely evening when the two men set out together with this purpose in view, and Sam could not help thinking, as he walked along by his new friend’s side, of a certain curious change that had taken place in his recent responses to the visible world.

The back gardens of Northload Street sloped down into a region of desolate and forlorn litter where those warm and mellow brick tiles for which Glastonbury is famous gave place to an older style of roofing, of dull grey, moss-patched slate. As he glanced about him he felt a slight touch again of this new sensation he had been receiving lately. What he felt was a strange and singular reciprocity between his soul and every little fragment of masonry, of stony ground, of mossy ground, of woodwork, of trodden mud, of clumps of last year’s dusty nettles, of withered dock leaves or of mildewed palings.

It is true that to the intellectual eyes of oriental spirituality, or of Latin devotion, Sam’s attempts at living the ideal life would have seemed like those of an ascetic schoolmaster or a priggish boy scout, childish, and lacking in maturity, dignity, subtlety, and intellectual passion. Sam’s whole system of moral values — his puritanical stress upon sexual restraint, his fidgety preoccupation with isolated acts of benevolence — would have seemed to a Celtic or Latin nature a form of tiresome and Pharisaic fussiness, more akin to the pragmatic virtue of some modern lay-brother than to the sublime heroism of real mediaeval sanctity. Nevertheless, to the

Invisible Observers of the magic-charged atmosphere of Glastonbury this resolute and sturdy descendant of Somersetshire yeomen displayed a certain humble simplicity and a certain stolid good-humoured piety that rendered many more picturesque struggles to live the saintly life appear trickily theatrical and even self-deceiving in comparison!

And certainly on this particular evening as he adapted his pace to the shuffling and shambling gait of Jimmy Bagge, Sam began to be aware that some subtle barrier between his inmost being and certain particular objects in Nature had begun to give way. The truth was that without being in the least conscious of the importance for humanity of the psychic law he had blundered upon or of its rarity in the world, Sam had found out that when a person is liberated from possessiveness, from ambition, from the exigencies of desire, from domestic claims, from every sort of authority over others, he can enjoy sideways and incidentally, as he follows any sort of labour or quest the most exquisite trances of absorption into the mysterious essence of any patch of earth-mould, or any fragment of gravel, or any slab of paving-stone, or any tangle of weeds, or any lump of turf that he may come upon as he goes along.

There is always a peculiar pleasure in arriving suddenly through a narrow aperture between masses of masonry at some wide-open expanse; and this is especially the case in the evening twilight and when such an expanse opens out towards the west. The misty glow, filtering through the smouldering ditch-vapours of this open ground, as Sam saw it tonight, lifted into a grandiose and dusky importance every pigsty, every stickhouse, every pigeon-tower, every hovel-roof; and under a stone arch where the muddy path they followed dived beneath the railway Sam could see, as they approached the dwelling of Jimmy’s aged parents, a great red semi-cirque, like a huge blood-stained mushroom, which was the setting sun!

His father’s arch-enemy was too close upon his own dissolution over the rim of the planet to throw out any magnetic power, whether good or bad; but to see him like this at all, as Sam descending from the ramparted greyness of that gap in Northload Street saw that crimson half-circle, was as if a person saw the sinking head of some titanic invader retreating from a threatened city.

Such is the human mind — or at least such is the mind of a son of Somersetshire clay fumbling towards a holy life — that Sam’s consciousness gave a momentary harbourage to the unsanctified thought that he was glad that his present companion’s rags had not touched his camp-bed; but, like a black fly that lodges for a second upon the shaft of a moving wagon, this thought was quickly lost in the outstretched solemnity of that evening scene.

“Fayther be a turble stark man for a bed-rid,” remarked Jimmy Bagge, “ ‘a do eat and drink, Fayther do, all there be, when there be any! Mum be a thinned-out ghosty compared wi’ he.”

The imbecile paused for a moment and looked at the crimson half-sun as it went down under the moss-wet stone arch, the walls of which seemed to drip with a moisture that was neither rain nor dew, but rather some malady-sweat of its own private enduring.

“Mum do sarve he for nothink and it be a pity to see such sarvice. He do lie and eat; and her do wear ‘erself to bone feeding he! I be afeared of he just as Mum be; but Finn Toller, what be Mum’s nephy, baint afeared of he. Mum do send I to fetch Finn Toller and when Fayther do zee ‘un cooming oop path through chink o’ windy, ‘a do beller and holler, awful vor to hear. ‘A do zay, ‘thik Codfin be come to murder I,’ and ‘a do hide ‘isself under blanket.”

“Does your mother let Mr. Toller come in?” asked Sam.

Jimmy’s countenance, which was as a rule as empty of intelligence as a washed-out signboard, emitted at that point a pallid ray of cunning, as if the wind-blown reflection of a streak of moonlight, caught in a rain tub, had been tossed upward upon that board.

“Mum do allus zay the sëame. She do zay:— ‘Thee’s pore uncle be starvin’, Codfin. Have ‘ee got a bite o’ summat for’n today?’^”

“And what does Mr. Toller do then?”

“ ‘A do empty his wallet on Fayther’s bed and sometimes there be a girt hunk o’ sweet Cheddar in ‘un; but ‘a never sits down for more’n a minute. ‘I must be movin’ on, Auntie,’ ‘a zays, and then ‘a zays to Mum, lookin’ at Fayther, wot’s head be hid under blanket— ‘I’ve ‘a jest coom from settlin’ woon account an’ I be ponderin’ in me mind about settlin’ another. I be a grand settler of accounts, Auntie,’ he says, and ‘a looks, wi’ ’is weepy eyes, at Fayther’s blanket, till bed do creak, Fayther do shake so.”

Once seated in that forlorn stone edifice, built long ago under the railway bank, it came over Sam with a weight like that of the first shovelful of earth thrown into an open grave, what kind of mental aura is projected in a given locality by experience of sheer physical want. Preparations had evidently been made for what in the Bagge ménage passed for supper, for every object in that miserable room — the walls of bare stone, where patches of soot and grease and indecipherable and nameless stains alternated with greenish mould and oozing damp, the small smoky wood-fire under a great iron pot where steamed the most watery concoction ever wrung from the twice-boiled bones of a skinny rabbit, bare wooden chairs with their seats full of holes, a broken water-jug on the smoke-darkened chimney-piece, — seemed to group themselves round a piece of newspaper laid flat upon the table on which rested the half of a loaf and two small salted herrings.

A strong, bony face, angular as the face of a half-starved, over-worked horse, did Mrs. Bagge turn towards the visitor while she settled herself on a wooden stool by the hearth and watched his movements as a hungry fieldfare, that bird of wintry bane, might sit with ruffled feathers, watching an absent-minded tramp in the road-hedge. Her identity too, like that of the damp walls and the rickety chairs and the innutritious liquid in the black pot, and the broken jug on the chimney-piece, seemed, even while she gazed at Sam, to yearn towards the half loaf and the two small fishes upon the outstretched newspaper.

And as for the figure in the bed under a patched blanket — the figure of the bed-ridden Thomas Bagge — *its* woebegone rapacious eyes seemed to point at these objects with the irreversible necessity of a compass needle pointing to the north.

Sam couldn't bear to think he was keeping them from this wretched meal, such as it was, but he, too, seemed to succumb to the hypnotic influence of that half loaf on the table. For nearly a quarter of an hour he murmured various broken comments upon the new Glastonbury government and the chances it offered of monetary advantage to the destitute.

The woman's interruptions were however entirely irrelevant to what he was saying. They seemed more like the feeble echoes of the mechanical chatter of a gipsy at a fair, and they kept referring to him as "the sweet lovely gentleman what be minded to make our Jimmy's fortune." Once she jumped up from her stool and with a billet of wood snatched from the floor killed a large bug upon the sooty wall. But the piece of wood as she threw it down, and her stool as she took her seat again, and another bug observed by Sam that had escaped her gesture, all these things seemed to his mind to be focused upon that half loaf and those wretched herrings.

Gazing at Mrs. Bagge’s hollow cheeks, scoriated neck, cavernous eye-sockets, Sam began to feel as if his attempts to understand the sufferings of a Promethean demi-god had hardly scratched the surface of the sufferings of his own human race; and he seemed to hear his “exterior soul” whispering in his ears that his tortured God was nothing less than a tortured humanity.

As he contemplated the damp stones so sooty and greasy and stained with nameless stains, above the woman’s head, and as he looked at the bread upon the table, the two fundamental concepts — bread and stone — seemed to associate themselves with the concept *suffering*, as forming a sort of ultimate Trinity of Experience towards which he was being conducted. Thankless labour, eternal hunger, the deadening throb of a pain that refused to cease, if these things lived on and on in this room under the Evercreech Railway bank, why should he have been permitted to eat sweet treacle and to look out of his window from the top of the Old Malt House?

From the hollow eye-sockets of this woman his mind reverted to similar eye-sockets, and far worse ones than hers, that were at this very second in other parts of the world opening and contracting under the pressure of the cruelty of the First Cause.

Why didn’t suffering carried to a certain point, why didn’t pain carried to a certain point, simply kill their victims? And since they didn’t, to what point must a person go, in sympathy for these things, who had, by pure accident, been spared their worst scrapings and scoopings?

As he went on mumbling about what the Glastonbury council would soon be doing for its poor, Sam’s under-mind came to the conclusion that the most serious question of all questions was *at what point*, if life was to go on with any degree of endurance, is it necessary to harden our hearts and cease to think of the pain of others? Mathematicians talked of invisible “points,” of formal “points,” that were the pivots of all the vast spirals of reality. Here, in this question — how far must we share suffering? — had he touched the “point of points” round which all sensitised consciences revolved?

The vital common sense in Sam stirred up an interior honesty that told him he must draw back somewhere or the natural selfishness in him would rise like Enceladus and throw off all restraint. Did St. Francis stop in the midst of composing his Hymn to the Sun, to ponder on the problem of how far he ought, in place of giving himself up to such magical ecstasy, to visualise the fate of the tortured in the neighbouring stone tower and to ponder on what man *at that point of time* was doing to man, in Algiers, in London, in Seville, in Trebizond, in Paris, and even in Assisi?

Sam’s sluggish nature had been receiving so many jolts of late and he had been reducing his physical nourishment to so meagre a point of late that his nerves were much more sensitised these days than was usual with him. That is perhaps why he stared so fixedly on that bug on the wall.

“Every locality,” he thought, “has its own midges, its own gnats, its own beetles, its own lice, its own bugs. They may resemble the others of their tribe; but they must be affected — few will dispute this — by the particular climatic conditions which exist around them. This bug was a Glastonbury bug. Had it any message for him, a Glastonbury man? Can’t *you* throw light on this?” he thought, addressing the bug on the wall. But the bug was so extreme an individualist that it regarded the gibberish which reached it from this man’s brain as the same sort of telepathic nonsense that it was accustomed to hear when in her heart Mrs. Bagge cried out:— “How long, O Lordy, O Lordy, how long, how long?” and it proceeded upon its tortuous way with less curiosity — not to speak of sympathy — than even ex-Mayor Wollop would have felt.

Sam, however, while he exchanged a few words now with his friend Jimmy who continued to stand at the foot of his father's bed, — Mr. Bagge himself seemed to be awaiting events in gloomy taciturnity — wrestled stubbornly in the depths of his mind with this problem.

"A limit there must be," thought Sam, "to the sympathy one soul can give to other souls — or all would perish. Absolute sympathy with suffering would mean death. If Christ had sympathised *to the limit* with the pain of the world it would have been hard for him to have lived until the day of his Crucifixion. But what does that mean? Does it mean drawing back from the hell we stare at? Does it mean that every soul has a right to forget if it *can* forget? Sympathy with pain kills happiness. There comes a point when to live at all we *must* forget!"

His conclusion left him with a feeling of unutterable weakness, cowardice, contemptibleness. Submerged in sickening humility he groaned aloud. He had taken the precaution before starting, in anticipation of the penury of his friend's domicile, to put in his pocket several thick slices of bread and treacle and these, wrapped up in paper, he now took out and handed to his hostess. It was then that the truth of Jimmy's words about his parents became most painfully apparent; for his mother, after swallowing two or three hasty bites of one of these sandwiches, presented the rest of them just as they were to the silent man in the bed, who when once they were in his hands neither spoke nor looked up until there was not one crumb left upon the sticky paper in which they had been wrapped.

He was not an ill-looking man either, Sam thought, as those sallow jaws masticated the food and his Adam's apple rose and fell as he swallowed it; but there was something repulsive to the mind — and even a vague sense of something tragic and ghastly — in the way the sunken black eyes of Mrs. Bagge followed every morsel as it disappeared.

"Town council do see us don't starve," said the woman presently, "but they gives us no food, only money; and Mr. Bagge feels money be too precious to be throwed away on victuals; so he puts it where't be safe."

Mr. Bagge's puffy white face — not an unhandsome face — rising out of his filthy open shirt, lit up complacently on hearing this and his expression struck Sam as being the meanest human expression he had ever seen.

"Too precious to be throwed away," he repeated with unctuous satisfaction, "on wittles … so us puts it where't be safe."

Sam was still wondering at the back of his mind what could be done to a bedridden miser who was starving his wife, when Mrs. Bagge, who looked positively transparent from lack of nutrition, though she was a large-framed bony woman, lifted up her voice from where she sat on the stool by the fire, with her discoloured skirts hanging so loosely between her gaunt knees that it looked as though they had been thrown across the handles of a plough, and remarked to Jimmy:

"Did yer arst yer friend, the sweet lovely gen'l'man, whether he could bless this house with half of a silver shilling?"

The wheedling gipsy-like tone of her voice — which yet was not the voice of a real gipsy — grated unpleasantly upon Sam's ears. He felt inclined to cry out, "I'll give you a *whole* shilling if you'll turn it into food and let me see you eat it!" He mentally decided that he would come here on the following day with some pork-pies that he had seen in the window of a little shop in Manor House Lane and give one to each member of the Bagge family and insist upon their eating them before his face.

But the voice of the master of the house became audible now. Mr. Bagge was apparently addressing the smoke-darkened, greasy ceiling.

"When I over'ears folk mention shillinses I zays to meself— 'put 'un where 'un be safe. Too precious be they shillinses to be squandered on wittles!'"

Sam rose to his feet. "I've got no money on me," he said; and then, after a pause, "Well, I'll say good-night now, and go down to the river for a bit, to get a breath of air. I always sleep better after a breath of air. Don't get up, Mrs. Bagge."

Jimmy followed him wistfully with his eyes as he moved to the door. The imbecile's face had a certain blank handsomeness, like the puffy good looks of the man under the blanket, but his expression was submissive and docile, like his mother's. Sam was alarmed lest his own conscience, that merciless and authoritative voice that nowadays always stood by his side, would insist on his allowing Jimmy to accompany him. It was therefore with a certain relief — for which he blamed himself as soon as he was out of the house — that he heard Mrs. Bagge say:— "Ye'll get some wood for I, Jim, won't 'ee, afore 'ee do go to Pilgrims' to arst for coppers? Jim be a good lad, Mister," the woman called after Sam as he went out. "If it 'tweren't for Jim, Mr. Bagge and me would be separated from each other and put in thik Wells wukkus."

"If you're not separated from Mr. Bagge," thought Sam, "you'll certainly get into the Wells Road Cemetery."

But standing in the doorway he threw back a warm and enthusiastic commendation of Jimmy.

"I knew he was a good son," he said, "as soon as he began talking about you both. Well! I hope he'll have good luck tonight at the Pilgrims'."

"Not for to squander!" shouted the handsome, puffy-faced man from his bed, "but for being kept where't be safe!"

And as he went off Sam couldn't help giving vent to a wicked wish that nephew Codfin would discover this "safe" hiding-place!

It was nearly dark when having threaded his way past many scattered hovels and desolate out-houses he finally reached the bank of the Brue. He was in an excited frame of mind, to which his anger at the behaviour of the man in the bed contributed not a little.

As he stood staring at the dark flow of the water he could see that Adam's apple moving up and down as Mr. Bagge swallowed. But Sam nodded his head like one making a resolution that must wait its fulfilment, and began following the bank of the river in a southerly direction. He was now about midway between the wooden Northload Bridge and the stone Pomparlès Bridge and in the obscurity of the twilight he could see rising out of the mud the scaffolding of Philip Crow's unfinished iron bridge.

As has been hinted, for several weeks Sam had begun to notice with a puzzled wonder that certain unpromising and unlikely objects gave him, as he glanced casually at them, thrilling spasms of a quivering happiness. It was only as these sudden seizures or shocks of unaccountable ecstasy increased upon him that he came to give them any particular attention. He was not of an analytic turn of mind; nor was he in any sense what is called "psychic." It might even be maintained that Sam's temperament was rather below than above the normal level of what the world has agreed to name "spiritual." Mystical he certainly was not. There was more mysticism in John Crow's little finger — for all his sceptical perversity — than in Sam's whole body. But he would have been worse than unimaginative; he would have been "duller than the fat weed on Lethe's wharf" not to have noted these recurrences of unaccountable transport in which his whole being seemed caught up and transfigured. What made this phenomenon harder to understand was the fact that the objects that served to evoke this ecstasy were so varied and in themselves so insignificant. Not one of them was important enough to afford any satisfactory clue to the nature of the meaning of these thrilling sensations. It was almost as if some mysterious centre of magnetic force had been actually moving for some while through the thick darkness of the chemical constitution of that Glastonbury mud and those Glastonbury stones towards Sam's sluggish receptivity; seeking in that receptivity a pre-ordained objective.

He came suddenly at this moment, as he stumbled along the river bank under the moonless and cloudy sky, upon yet another of these chance-sent mediums of unaccountable feeling. This was an aged post, with an iron ring attached to it, used formerly for the purpose of mooring the small barges that in the old days brought corn up the Brue. The post was but an obscure landmark by the flow of that dark tide; but Sam knew its exact position and he knew every detail of the landscape from this particular spot. He couldn't really see the iron ring upon the post; but he knew so well that it was there that he saw it without seeing it. But for some reason the mere sight of this post filled him with the most releasing, liberating and exultant of all his recent transports. His mind was so occupied with the idea of pain that he quite consciously began opposing this thrilling sensation with the opacity of pain. It was as if he took up great spadefuls of pain and flung them into the pathway of the delicious current that flowed through him; and in proportion as the current increased, so he threw more spadefuls of pain in front of it. But it swept them away as it flowed on, drank them up, swallowed them all into itself! And yet it would not be true to say that they became identical with the rushing flood of this ecstatic feeling. They were not absorbed as a natural sustenance. They nourished this flood; but the flood existed independently of them and did not depend upon them for its origin or its issue.

Sam found himself on his knees by this old post, so thrilled was he by the transport that poured through him; and, in his exultation, he pressed his forehead against it and ran his fingers up and down its damp sides. And he did begin, quite desperately now, to solve the mystery of all these experiences. He began to realise that the soul of the inanimate, the indwelling breath of life in all these ancient lifeless things, whereof the town was so full, was really moving towards him.

The emotion he experienced now was a good deal stronger than what had been produced in him until tonight by stones, and gates, and paving slabs, and patches of moss, and fragments of old walls, and carved mouldings and dead tree stumps, and ploughed-up furrows, and wayside puddles and gutters; but it was the same kind of mood.

Something in the atomic nature of the inorganic substance of these things must have answered to an inarticulate craving of Sam's, until Matter itself, the old obstinate Protean mystery, moved and stirred to meet him. He could actually feel a magnetic power pouring forth into his fingers from this post against, which he leaned.

Sam had been born in Glastonbury. Glastonbury sights and sounds and smells, the psychic *eidola* that radiate forth from the surface of ancient inanimate substances, had surrounded him from his birth. Having concentrated his sluggish, earthy nature so steadily and so long upon birds and beasts and fishes, he must have accumulated an enormous mass of casually imprinted memories concerning his contact with the inorganic surroundings of these living creatures. By day and by night he must have touched — going up and down the fields, lanes, hillsides, valleys, fenlands, tow-paths, spinneys, rhynes — innumerable gates, weirs, walls, marsh tussocks, mole hills, pond rails, heaps of stones, fallen trees, moss-grown ruins, and all these touches and casual contacts must have established between his inmost being and the mystery of matter in these things, deep correspondencies which were ready to rush forth at any summons.

Where lay the difference between the curious feeling he got as his fingers ran up and down the surface of this old barge post and the other recent sensation of the same nature? The difference was that the feeling he had now associated itself suddenly and strangely with that little dead fish that his father had taken out of the aquarium! The secret of matter had suddenly assumed a definite shape; and this shape was of a living kind — no longer inanimate but electric with animation. “Ichthus, the World-Fish,” — where had he picked up this singular expression? Not from any book he could think of in his father’s shelves; not from the Sermons of Mr. Simeon! That the mystery of matter which had of late shivered through him in so many accidental contacts, should resolve itself in its primal leap, in its slippery quiver, in its up-rising from the pools of silence, into the actual form of a fish would have been an insane fancy for anyone else, but for Sam, with his up-bringing and environment, it bore an organic naturalness. Did he actually see in his mind’s eye, then, the red fins, the greenish markings, the black stripes, the silvery tail, of any *real* fish? No! it was more subtle than this. But he *did* feel as if the solid matter all round him had become porous, so that some essence of life could move swiftly through it. In the mute balancing of this finny life-essence, passing through the primeval watery element that existed in all things, lay the inexplicable clue.

As he knelt in the damp mud of the tow-path beside this post, while the darkness deepened over him and the river flowed beneath him, he was driven forward once more by the honesty of his soul to face the ultimate dilemma. He became vividly conscious of himself as one entity among all the rest, carried along upon the night journey of the voyaging planet, and he seemed able to catch upon the breathing wind, mingled with the gurglings and suckings of the water, the cries of pain which at that second, all over the world, were rising up. There must be a limit to pity or the life-stream would stop; all would grow stagnant, and “Ichthus, the World-Fish,” would float dead upon its back!

The first motive of every living creature must be to realise its own identity — to fight for itself against the cruelty of life, while the second motive of all conscious souls turned about towards the others.

One-two … *One-two* … went the heartbeat of the world! Was there a third pulse there that no one could yet hear? Why was it that Sam suddenly leapt up in great excitement to his feet? His fingers had encountered in the darkness at the foot of the post, an iron chain! This chain was not fastened to the ring, else he would have detected it before. It was fastened round the bottom of the post, so that it lay hidden in the grass. Sam crawled forward on his hands and knees following the course of the chain and he soon became aware of something floating on the water to which it was attached. From what he could discern, down there in the dark flow, it was a small black coal-barge.

This accounted for the constant gurglings and suckings that he had been aware of for some time, and by which his ear, trained to the river sounds as it was, had been obscurely fretted.

Hastily he rose to his feet and scrambling down the bank stepped into the barge. Yes! It still had some coal in it; and Sam could detect from the sharp turpentine smell that it had been newly tarred. There was a half-empty coal sack at one end; and groping with his fingers he turned this over on its side and sat down upon it, with his back against the barge’s stern. The tarry smell was overpowered as he rested here by the smell of the river, and soon the flapping-up of some biggish bird — it wasn’t a moor-hen, he knew *that,* but it wasn’t large enough for a heron — gave him a desire to think out in his mind exactly what his geographical position was; for this would be a help to establishing the identity of that bird.

It was a habit natural to Sam and strengthened by long association with his father to take his bearings, as he called it; but at this juncture it did not seem as easy as usual to grasp the lay of the land as he sat in this barge. But he got it at last to his satisfaction. He was about half a mile northeast of Cradle Bridge Farm and about half a mile southwest of Cold Harbour Bridge where Young Tewsy had showed him that fish. If that bird, which *may* have been a stray wild duck, had flown due west from where he sat, it would have passed over the roofs of the villages of Catcott and Chilton-upon-Polden, and hit the swampy estuaries of the Parrett, somewhere about the centre of Horsey Level where the great Sedgemoor Drain flows into them.

All these places lay behind him as he sat in that barge on the Brue, for his face was turned directly towards the three eminences of the Isle of Glastonbury, Wirral Hill, Chalice Hill, and the Tor. Thus rested Sam Dekker; and then — without a second's warning — the earth and the water and the darkness *cracked* … Whence it came, whether it came of its own volition and whether it was that same transformation of matter, which had been affecting him so of late, carried one degree further, Sam never knew; but he knew what was happening to him, and he knew it without the least doubt or question.

What he saw was at first accompanied by a crashing pain. That was the word Sam himself thought of to express it — the word *crashing.* But as the vision clarified before him and grew distinct this pain died away. But it was dazzling, hurting, blinding, at first, and it was associated in his mind with the sense of a sharp, long-shaped thing piercing his guts. His sensation was indeed strangely definite. The pain was so overwhelming that it was as if the whole of Sam's consciousness became the hidden darkness of his inmost organism; and when this darkness was split, and the whole atmosphere split, and the earth and the air split, what he felt to be a gigantic spear was struck into his bowels and struck *from below.*

He had ceased to be a man sitting on a coal sack at the stern of a barge. He had become a bleeding mass of darkness. His consciousness was a dark surface of water; and up through this water, tearing it, rending it, dividing it, turning it into blood, shivered this crashing stroke, this stroke that was delivered from abysses of the earth, far deeper than the bottom of the Brue.

Whatever this "spear" was that struck him, to his whole animal nature quivering under it, it was as much the shock of something totally unknown, something new to human experience, outrageous in its strangeness, that tore so at his vitals, as the crashing pain that it brought with it.

But when the vision appeared, and it came sailing into the midst of this bleeding darkness that was Sam's consciousness, healing everything, changing everything, each detail of what he saw he saw with a clearness that branded it forever upon his brain. He saw a globular chalice that had two circular handles. The substance it was made of was clearer than crystal; and within it there was dark water streaked with blood, and within the water was a shining fish.

Sam's first thought was: "This is the Grail! This is the Grail! It has come back to Glastonbury!" His second thought was: "I must tell Father and Nell about this." His third thought was more realistic; and it was one so congruous with his deepest being that the mere fact that he had had it — when he remembered the whole thing — put the seal of authenticity upon his vision. He thought in his heart: "What *is* that fish? It is a Tench. Surely it is a Tench!"

So anxious did he become to ascertain, before it vanished away, that this *Ichthus* out of the Absolute was what he thought it was, that Sam actually struggled up to his feet and cried the question aloud— "Christ!" he groaned in a harsh, queer voice that resembled the voice of a priest speaking from a scaffold. “Is it a Tench?”

He had been deriving such transports of late from rubble and mud and stones, that to see Christ in the form of a Tench seemed at that moment perfectly natural. He had read nothing of the Grail legends; so that it was no half-consciousness that all the successful Grail-seers cried out some crucial question, that tore from him these words.

Whole-hearted was Sam’s groan to the Mystery, carried southward against the flowing waters of the Brue and westward across its mud-banks, towards Cradle Bridge Farm. It rose from his pity; it rose from his new insight into pain; it rose from that blood-stained umbel-cord across the gulf between his own ecstasies and the anguish he had glimpsed. It rose from the quick of his being, where life itself was strangling pity lest pity strangled life in the ultimate contest. It was the final desperate cry of humanity to the crushing, torturing universe that had given it birth.

Is it a Tench? Is there a fish of healing, one chance against all chances, at the bottom of the world-tank? *Is it a Tench?* Is cruelty always triumphant, or is there a hope beyond hope, a Something somewhere hid perhaps in the twisted heart of the cruel First Cause itself and able to break in *from outside* and smash to atoms this torturing chain of Cause and Effect?

The crystal goblet with the two curved handles was quite close to him now. He could see the darkness in the throat of the shining fish balanced motionless in its centre, but because of its position he could not see the Creature’s eyes.

“Is it a Tench?” And then all at once it began to fade away. He felt sure afterwards that it was not his leaping to his feet or his raising his voice as he did, that made it vanish, and he stood there in crushed humility like a man

who says to himself: “It cannot be I who have seen this! It is a mistake; it was surely meant for another!”

But after he had remained, pondering upon what he had seen, for the space of five or six minutes, he clambered up out of the barge and with one final glance backward at the waters of the Brue, which looked exactly as they had looked before, he made his way slowly back to Manor House Road and to his room at the top of the Old Malt House.

It was a Saturday when Sam had his vision of the Grail and his first instinct was to take what he had seen and to plunge back with it into the ordinary routine of his new life. He must, however, tell his father and Nell about it. “I’ll go to the Vicarage,” he thought, “tomorrow night, when Father’s mind will be free from his work and ready to listen.” And then he thought: “I must tell everyone about it. It was a pure chance that it appeared to me. It has come back to Glastonbury. Many will see it now!”

He remembered that he had promised to go to Backwear Hut in the course of the next day and help old Abel Twig doctor himself. He had been over there several times of late and had found the old man so grievously afflicted with constipation that he wanted help with an enema. “I’ll do that first,” he thought, “and then we’ll see! It’s lucky tomorrow’s Sunday.”

Too excited to go to bed he spent half that night washing and scrubbing; and completely exhausted, when the work was over, sank down on his camp-bed under the window and slept till the bells of St. John’s roused him in the morning. His window opened due west, and over the roofs of several barns and pigsties he could see the willows of the Brue bordering upon Lake Village Field. He could also see the telegraph posts of the Burnham and Evercreech Railway, and the white, winding road leading to Meare.

He noticed as soon as he was awake by the way St. John’s bells were answered by St. Benignus’ bells, and these again by many chapel bells from outlying districts, that it was for the regular morning service that they were ringing. It was half-past ten then! He had indeed slept long and deep. He gathered his pillow into a tight lump and sat propped up in bed, staring out of the window into a windless atmosphere of delicate haze, where a vague diffusion of sunlight floated upon the undispersed ditch-vapours and a sweet, rather sickly smell of mud came up from the meadows.

It was the sort of Sunday morning he had known so well all his life — the typical Glastonbury Sunday. He could hear the shuffling of the feet of the passers-by, some of them going to church, some of them strolling out to enjoy themselves, many of them just drifting round to some favourite bridge, or low stone wall, or tavern-side bench, where they might meet a crony or two and discuss life.

The absence of the ordinary sounds of week-day work was something much more than a negation. It was a positive essence. It wrapped itself around Sam, soothing, drowsing, lulling him. One after another as he lay there, came memory pictures out of his past.

But full as he was of quite other intentions than the recalling of mere memory pictures, he soon broke the spell and jumped out of bed. Washing himself on his knees by his basin (for he had no washing stand) he made his preparations for breakfast. Over his tea package, his half loaf, his sugar, his butter, his tin of golden syrup, Sam had placed upside-down, a large earthenware bowl. Milk, though he had previously always drunk it with his tea, he had decided to give up altogether; and this resolution simplified his housekeeping a great deal. A small tin receptacle he now placed over a tiny methylated stove and filling it with water from his jug, for he had no water-bottle, he lit the flame beneath it. Then rising from his knees he spread out bread, butter, sugar, tea upon the three-legged table, picking up these objects from the scrubbed floor where they had been covered by the earthenware bowl. From the broad window-sill he now took his knife, his spoon, his cup, his saucer, and his plate, and arranged them with the utmost nicety upon the three-legged table.

No prayer did Sam utter, whether ecclesiastical or traditional, but having made his tea he sat down on his kitchen chair and began pulling his loaf to pieces, crust and crumb, in great untidy lumps, and with a hungry and simple satisfaction; dabbing the butter upon these pieces with his knife and the treacle with his teaspoon.

As he ate, Sam's thoughts concentrated themselves upon what he had resolved to do now that he had seen the Grail. He had resolved to obey that "externalised soul" of his in every least detail, and just see where it led him! If it led him to more and more suffering, well and good. If it led him to some secret revelation of blinding happiness, all the better! But for weal or for woe it was the command of his soul that he intended to follow.

As he went on chewing the sticky, buttery morsels and licking the tips of his fingers, and obscurely wishing that methylated stoves held a little more hot water, he thought about the change that had come over his conception of his tortured God since he had begun his new life on that day he took Mad Bet home from Wirral Hill.

"In those days," he thought, "He was a tangible Person, a Person living in Space and Time, a Person conscious of my identity. But now He is different. I don't quite know what He is now. But I have seen the Grail and I shall find out what He is!"

Rising impatiently from the table, feeling still thirsty, and anxious to wash the sweetness of treacle out of his gullet, he filled his minute tin kettle with cold water from his jug and poured it down his throat. Then he opened a fresh packet of Player's Navy Cut cigarettes — for he was troubled with no ascetic scruples about smoking — and striking a match, which he was careful to throw out of the window rather than upon his newly scrubbed floor, he hung himself down upon his ricketty little couch and continued his meditations.

"I've got to face it," he said to himself. "I've seen the Grail, and I've got to face it. He's been dead and buried for two thousand years."

Two thousand years? But even as he shaped this thought there rose up and stood in the frame of his closed door, as if it were open, the Figure of the personality he denied. Piercing the ice-cold, frozen darkness of more death-levels than a universe of dead suns, this Figure — harder to visualise than Time or Eternity for it contains the essence of both — gazed upon the man on the bed.

"Have it as thou wilt, my child!"

Sam listened to the bells for a moment. "But of course that's not putting it right," he thought. "What He has become is a power in ourselves that sets itself up *contra mundum crudelem*, against the whole bloody world! Everybody feels it, and now that I've seen the Grail, it's got me by the throat! Man buried Him and Man has brought Him out of his Tomb. That's what the Grail means!"

He stared out at the vague, misty, translucent landscape, shot with fluctuating sun-streaks and sun-patches. His thoughts kept contradicting each other. "Christ is in the Stones and in the Water; it is Jesus who is dead and buried. There's something in Nature that has turned against Nature and is escaping from Nature. There's a Christ in matter that is nearer the Grail than the Christ of the Church."

He heaved up from the creaking little bed, his body alert and at attention. His arbitrary soul, standing over his body, told it that it had been enjoying itself long enough at that pleasant window.

"You know perfectly well what you've got to do this morning, Monsieur!" his soul said to his body. "You've got to go over to Backwear Hut and give old Twig his enema."

His body agreed at once to obey this mandate but it craftily intimated that since it was already so late it would be better to start at once upon this excursion rather than make the bed and tidy the room and wash up the breakfast things. But Sam Dekker, although a very youthful "holy man" had not been a priest's assistant so long without knowing something about the cunning devices of what St. Francis calls "my brother the ass." Chuckling to himself at his desire to escape doing his housework, he was soon re-lighting his methylated lamp and running downstairs to refill his jug at the pump in the yard. Even with this delay he was so fast a walker that he reached Backwear Hut not long after Number One had put his pot of onions, potatoes and chicken bones upon his kitchen-stove.

Poor old Abel had been suffering of late from two most vexing physical maladies, either of which would have rendered him miserable, but which together broke down his spirit. One was his villainous constipation, and the other a still worse attack of piles. With the utmost difficulty, under the encouragement of his faithful crony Number Two, the old man had been persuaded to go to the hospital clinic; but the slap-dash methods of the internes, and an interview, in an ether-smelling corridor, with the competent Aunt Laura, had sent him home trembling with nervous indignation, and resolute to confine himself henceforward to his own private remedies — Beecham's Pills for the first trouble and copious Vaseline for the second.

When he reached Backwear Hut, Old Twig ("and small blame for him," thought Sam) was all for putting off the enema for a few minutes. There, however, it was — the kind where you have to pinch an India-rubber ball in order to squirt the water — reposing, unused, in its cardboard box, just as Number One had bought it at the establishment of Harry Stickles.

Mr. Twig, with the proper delicacy of an elderly gentleman buying medical aid, had peeped through the window of the little chemist's shop, till he made sure that the beautiful Nancy was safe upstairs; and it may be taken for granted that the avaricious husband of Nancy made him pay heavily for this engaging shyness! But at this moment the good old man, with the enema lying safe in its box on the table, cajoled his visitor into sitting down for a few minutes in his front room. It was mild enough to have the door open; and as Sam stretched out his Penny-patched knickerbockers and his Penny-darned stockings by the side of the old man's Sunday trousers, and listened to his talk as the fowls clucked and scratched on the threshold, a delicious sensation of calm flowed through him.

Motor cars were few at that hour upon the Godney Road; and from the distant town there came uninterrupted a murmur, a rumour of drowsy life, of a life that was not the life of man or of beast, but of Glastonbury herself, murmuring softly in her long historic trance of the past, of the present and of the future.

Sam thought to himself: "This Christ that is hidden in matter and contradicts all cruelty, can He possibly come from Nature?"

"What I'd-ur-zay consarnin' this here commoon," Mr. Twig was now observing, "is that it be a play-acting of the eddicated. For such as understands them things, 'tis no doubt a very good commoon. But I baint a book-larned man. Conservative be a plain word to I and so be Liberal, in a manner of speaking, though not *so* plain; but I reckon a man must be pretty far along wi' his book-larnin' afore he gets the hang of a commoon."

"Well, Mr. Twig," said Sam sententiously, "my father's got a lot of books in his study; but I remember quite well when the first number of the

Wayfarer came out and there was a long article about Communism in it by Mr. Athling, he said very much what you're saying now."

"Me wold pard, Bart Jones, do zay," went on Mr. Twig, "that it be they noises what he heered in orspital, they rumblings and blearings from they ruings, what have brought such things to pass. But if 'ee 'arst me, Mister, what have called down these wonders to earth, I'd-ud-zay 'tis thik young man from they Silly Isles."

"How are your nieces at Miss Drew's?" enquired Sam.

The old man leaned forward, his hands on his knees and his finger on his lips.

"Lily did tell I, last time they was here, that Louie be keepin' company with young Tankerville, what be Mr. Crow's new pilot.

Lily says it be a tender-'eartedness in dear Louie, seein' Mr. Tankerville be a lone man with a wife in cemetery."

Sam was not enough of a psychologist to catch the full flavour of this "wife in cemetery," in relation to Lily's interest in her sister's good fortune, although there did rise up on the utmost verge of his consciousness like a beautiful apparition at a séance, the pure cold melancholy of the parlour-maid's face.

"And what about Lily herself? Hasn't *she* got a young man yet?"

Number One gave him the queerest look of mischievous gravity, a look that seemed to say: "Lily of course is our Lily — but if any outsider considered her wilfulnesses from the point of view of real common sense, he would be flabbergasted."

"Lily hasn't no young man," Abel Twig replied. "Louie thinks she've aspired, in her tender 'eart, higher than the state of life to which it has pleased God to call her. Louie thinks she be anglin' for Mr. Barter."

The old man leaned back in his chair and surveyed Sam with quizzical gravity.

“What they gals can say of one another to a wold relative passes comprehension.”

“What do you say to them, Mr. Twig?”

“I listens. I chucks ’em under chin. I tells ’em how pretty their ribbings be. I waggles my head.”

Sam could hear the great pot boiling on the kitchen stove and the kettle lid rising and falling beside it.

“Well, Mr. Twig,” he said, “we’d better be getting to business. If I thought that you could hold yourself in, between your bedroom and the end of your garden, I’d say — but I don’t believe you could! Which being so, I fancy it would be wiser to use your chamber-pot.”

Poor Uncle Abel was on his feet now, his knees knocking together, his face pale.

“When … operation … be over,” he stammered, “do ‘ee mean that ‘ee be going to leave I, alone with me burstin’ backside?”

Sam hesitated. In his anticipations of this scene he had visualised every detail of the giving of the enema; but once given, he had imagined himself saying good-bye. To learn that he had to wait upon the old man’s subsequent discomfort — a process which might easily take half an hour — was a shock of some magnitude. But his soul, like a stern corporal, rose up tall and metallic and commanded his body to obey orders.

“All right,” he said aloud. “Don’t you be afraid, Mr. Twig. I’ll see you through to the bitter end.”

Having uttered these words Sam picked up the cardboard box from the table and surveyed its contents.

“I shall want some hot water and some soap,” he said.

The melting of the soap, the conveyance of the hot and cold water upstairs, took a few more minutes; but the wheels of time, as with people condemned to die, moved remorselessly on, and the moment arrived when Sam was following the old man upstairs to get the thing done.

As he went up behind Abel Twig he thought to himself, “It would be a much easier thing if it wasn’t for the piles.” These piles, as he entered the bedroom and glanced at all his careful preparations, presented themselves to his mind as a shocking obstacle.

“Those people would probably hurt you much less in the hospital,” his body weakly murmured.

Poor old Abel with his teeth chattering and his braces and shirt hanging loose, turned upon his man-nurse eyes of such wild terror, eyes so much like that of a bullock before a slaughterer, that Sam hurriedly apologised for mentioning the word hospital. But his cowardly body was still trying to escape. There was a double-edged treachery in the words he uttered now.

“It’s how you take the whole thing,” he said, “that makes the difference. Well, I don’t know what to think, Mr. Twig. It can’t be good to feel — perhaps it might, after all, be better to get the doc—”

But at the merest suggestion of that unlucky word, Mr. Twig looked as if he would willingly let Sam cut off his leg.

“Go ahead, Sir,” he said. “If I hollers you must be patient wi’ I. I be a dodderin’ old man, nigh four-score years old. I baint as strong as I were once and they pains do make I call out. They bloody piles be a worse tribulation than any girt zisty …. Oh, me humpty, me humpty! But I be fearful bad. Be ‘ee tender of I, Mister; be ‘ee tender of I! A man’s backside be a turble squeamy plëace.”

Sam was not, it must be confessed, a born nurse; but he was a born naturalist and an unfastidious countryman. As he struggled with his task, bending over the old gentleman’s rear, the tension of his spirit brought back with a rush the miraculous power of the vision he had seen. The two extremes of his experience, the anus of an aged man and the wavering shaft of an Absolute, piercing his own earthly body, mingled and fused together in his consciousness. Holy Sam felt, as he went on with the business, a strange second sight, an inkling, as to some incredible secret, whereby the whole massed weight of the world’s tormented flesh was labouring towards some release.

As he kept pinching that rubber tube, for which Number One had been so scurvily cheated by the unworthy Mr. Stickles, there came over him a singular clairvoyance about the whole nature of the world. In the silence around him, unbroken save when the old man cried out his queer expletive: “Me humpty! Me humpty!” he seemed conscious of their two figures, cowering there beneath eternity, towards whom he felt directed, in magnetic waves, the influence of the sun, and the influence of the great mysterious ether beyond the sun! He felt as if they were surrounded, there in Backwear Hut, by hosts upon hosts of conscious personalities, some greater, some less, than themselves. A sharp pang took him when — in this extremity of clairvoyance — he realised that his living tortured Christ was now changed to something else. But whatever Sam’s priggishness may have been, it was mercilessly honest, and he said to himself: “If Christ be dead, I still have seen the Grail.”

The anguish he was compelled to give the old man because of the piles, made the process a delicate and difficult one. Beads of perspiration stood out on Sam’s forehead before it was over. When it *was* over — and, as he had foreseen, it took more than half an hour — poor Number One was completely prostrate. Pallid and groaning, when at last Sam helped him up from his seat of purgation, he lay helplessly on his bed. It was all Sam could do to persuade him to get under the bed-clothes.

"Four-score years old I be, four-score years, come Whitsun," he groaned, "and I be a wambly carcass; not fit for a gentleman to op'rate on. I be a burden to king and country, turble weak in me stummick and turble sore in me backside."

Through the open window, there came now a shrill chattering of sparrows.

"Them birds be different nor us be," murmured Abel Twig. "Them birds can scatter, even as them do fly, and all be sweet as clover."

In his weakness and helplessness and in the physical relief he was then experiencing two or three big tears rolled down his cheeks. In some mysterious way the idea of the droppings of sparrows being so clean a thing filled Number One just then with a melting tenderness.

"I'll carry this away," said Sam, "and then I'll bring you up a glass of something hot. I suppose you're not quite equal to your pipe yet?"

"Oh, you prig! Oh, you asinine prig!" Nell's husband would have roared at this point. "Equal to it? No, not quite equal to it yet! Not quite equal! But presently perhaps—"

"I be all right without 'un for a bit, Mister," replied the old man. "I be … thinking … of me chicks and me wold cow; and how glad I'll be to see all they again, after me operation."

Sam said no more, but taking up the chamber-pot he opened the door and carried it downstairs. Stepping gingerly along the stone slabs across the little garden he emptied the thing in the privy, and carrying it back to the house rinsed it out at Number One's out-door tap. Then he went into the kitchen and surveyed the polished sauce-pan wherein the old man had prepared his Sunday stew.

It appeared to him that the contents of this capacious receptacle, judging by the steam which emerged from under its lid, was cooked enough to provide at least a fairly savoury soup; so he took it off the fire, and finding a strainer among Uncle Abel's utensils he filled a small bowl with the onion-smelling liquid and carried it upstairs.

He found Number One nearly asleep, and instead of being pleased at the sight of this refreshment the old gentleman seemed vexed with him for meddling with his culinary arrangements.

"Do you want me to pour this back again, then?" said Sam.

Abel Twig nodded faintly and closed his eyes.

"Me pipe and me baccy be best for I," he murmured.

Sam once more assumed the tone that Zoyland would have howled with contempt to hear.

"A man likes his own tobacco," he said, "or I'd offer you a pipe of my father's. This is what he smokes."

And he displayed before the eyes of the somnolent invalid a tobacco-pouch which he had been keeping in his pocket since he left the Vicarage.

"I be minded to have a wink o' sleep," was Abel Twig's sole comment upon this proceeding.

To Sam's astonishment, when having descended the stairs and having poured back the half-cooked stew into the sauce-pan he returned to the front room of the house, he found himself confronted by a little girl in the doorway, panting and sobbing. Floods of tears were streaming down her cheeks and her voice was hardly audible. Sam knew who she was, though he had had little to do with her.

"What *is* the matter … Nelly? You *are* Nelly, aren't you?"

It gave him a very odd feeling to say the word Nelly at this hour and in this place.

"I … knows … who *you* … be!" gasped the child, struggling for breath and wiping her wet cheeks with the back of her hand, "You be Holy Sam!"

"I see we know each other, Nelly," he said; "but what's the matter? Has Jackie Jones been hitting you again?"

Her tears had not yet ceased pouring down, but, at this word, her eyes flashed so fiercely that it was as if a dark lantern had suddenly been turned upon him out of a torrent of rain.

"I hit Jackie. I hit he into ditch! 'A said 'twas sport to see thik poor … dog … stand on … hind-legs … when that wicked … wicked … *wicked* man beat at he with … beat … at he …"

Her tears fell so desperately, as the image of what she had beheld came over her, that it seemed to Sam as if her thin little form would melt away before him. He had never seen a human countenance so dissolved, so literally *melted* in pitiful crying.

"Where? What? Who?" he cried. "Tell me, Nelly, tell me quick!"

"Will 'ee come and knock that wicked, wicked—"

Again the floods of tears broke her utterance. Sam pulled the child into the house and set her down upon a chair.

"Now stop crying, Nelly, and tell me quick *where* this man is who's hurting this dog."

"Will 'ee … come wi' I … Holy Sam … and kill thik wicked … wicked … *wicked*—"

"*Where* is he? *Where* is it?" cried Sam again.

And then the child explained to him, clearly enough now, through her streaming tears, that it was in that portion of the town between Paradise and the river — a district known as Beckery — that this was going on. As far as Sam could gather from what she said the owner of the dog belonged to a group of small circus people who had been running a solitary merry-go-round in one of those outlying Beckery fields that are called “brides,” a name that reverts to the vanished chapel of Mary Magdalene founded by St. Bridget. The child kept referring to Beckery Mill; and Sam knew that there was a sort of common with a right of way through it near that place. Beckery Mill in fact gave him the clue; and he visualised with instantaneous vividness the spot she referred to; and this time it was quite unnecessary for his despotic soul to issue any categorical commands.

“I’ll go at once, Nelly,” he cried excitedly, “only listen, child! I’ll only go on one condition; and it’s a fair exchange! *You* stay here to look after Mr. Twig; and I’ll go to Beckery. Yes, he’s ill, upstairs! I’ve had to put him to bed; but he’s asleep now. I wouldn’t go upstairs if I were you till you hear him stirring, or till you hear him calling. Do you understand, Nelly dear? He’s ill in bed; but he’s not *very* ill; only a *little* ill.”

A few minutes later Sam was making his way with resolute haste towards the quarter of the town the child had indicated. Yes! Nelly Morgan was right. Near Beckery Mill he soon found the crowd of nondescript loiterers; and there was the dog, a little black cocker spaniel, in the midst of them! When Sam came up to the outskirts of the crowd he could catch at once by the peculiar *timbre* of these young ruffians’ voices that they were still engaged in their cruel sport.

The dog was evidently beginning now to refuse to perform any further tricks and to turn on his tormentors; nor was there any sign of the circus people. They must have gone to their dinner leaving the animal to the mercy of these lads.

“Let that dog alone! What are you doing to him? Who does he belong to?”

His interference was greeted with howls of derision and mocking cries of “Holy Sam! Holy Sam!”

Some of them were throwing stones at the dog who kept running from side to side within their circle seeking refuge but finding none.

“Who does it belong to?” shouted Sam. “Where is its master?”

“He’ve a-gived he to I,” cried one of the boys, whom Sam recognised at once as the stone-thrower of Terre Gastée, the originator of the phrase “I’d like to—”

“He did bite he bad and ‘a did give ‘un to I,” repeated young Chinnock, making a clutch at the dog’s collar which was received with a frightened snarl.

“Tom be feared o’ touching he,” cried one of the other lads.

“Tom did try to pick he up,” explained a third, “but ‘a bit his hand. He be a nasty varmint, thik black dog, … he be a biting dog!”

All this while the wretched little creature, which had a coal-black glossy coat, long flapping ears, feathery legs and a clipped tail held tightly in its frantic fear against its rump, kept making desperate and insane rushes here and there. It seemed to have been hunted and harried quite beyond the stage of barking, and had grown beside itself with terror.

Sam strode forward into the middle of this circle of young demons and uttering various assuaging murmurs endeavoured to catch the black dog. Tom Chinnock who was nearly as tall as Sam barged against him with his shoulders as if in a game of football.

“His master gave ‘un to I,” he cried. “You ain’t got no right to ‘un!”

“Holy Sam! Holy Sam!” shrieked the excited crowd.

“Don’t ‘ee let ‘un have ‘un, lads,” cried an evil-looking man who now appeared from the back of the circle.

“Tony Quart gave ‘un to Tom Chinnock! ’Tis Tony Quart’s dog. ’Tisn’t your’n!”

“Holy Sam! Holy Sam!”

“Take *that*, ye biting cur!” shouted young Chinnock.

These last words were accompanied by a vicious kick. Sam threw the lad aside and pursuing the dog, till it crouched snarling on the ground, bent down and picked it up, clutching its growling form from which emanated a hot, sweet, dog-flesh odour, against his chest. Blindly the panic-stricken spaniel fixed its teeth in one of Sam’s wrists as he strove to prevent its jumping down. Impeded though he was by the struggling creature whose feathery paws scraped furiously against his body as it tried to free itself, Sam managed to fling Tom Chinnock back when he tried to drag the dog away. But the lad came at him again, and this time in such a fury that he hit Sam a nasty blow on the chin.

Sam’s right hand, which was quite free at that minute, instinctively clenched itself to strike back; and he was within an ace of giving the boy a blow that would have bowled him over. But that portion of his consciousness which had come to feel to him like an “external soul” issued, in a flash, one of its most imperative mandates.

“Don’t be a bloody fool!” he said sternly, dropping his arm.

Chinnock gave him one glance of wide-eyed wonder and cringed away.

“Hit ‘un with stones!” he shouted as soon as he was safe back amongst the rest. “Hit ‘un with stones! Stones ‘ull make he give up thik dog! Did yer see the girt clip I give ‘un?”

His advice was seconded by the grown man in the rear of the boys; but having encouraged them to go on with the fray, this individual now began to shog off, evidently feeling that Sam was a ticklish customer and that there are moments in life when the satisfaction of cruelty must yield to the dictates of prudence.

Sam looked about him, his mind moving sluggishly as he hugged the black dog against his stomach. He was surrounded now by a half-circle of stone-throwers.

"It's silly to stay here and make an Aunt Sally of myself," he thought. "The best thing I can do is to break through them and clear off."

He had scarcely formulated this thought when a stone hit the spaniel in his arms, causing it to utter a shrill yelp of pain. This decided him and he made a fierce rush forward, heading straight for young Chinnock. Although so energetic a collector of sharp stones, the nephew of Mad Bet had not been endowed by Providence with the gift of fortitude. At the sight of Sam clutching the growling dog against his ribs and running straight towards him, he took ignominiously to his heels.

"You know where to find me," shouted Sam after him.

The flight of Tom Chinnock quelled the belligerency of the whole crowd and not a single stone was thrown after Sam and his struggling captive.

Now Beckery Mill lies on the outskirts of a certain municipal enclosure known as Wirral Park which borders on the lower slope of Wirral Hill. Sam sank exhausted upon the first public seat he came to in Wirral Park. Placing the black spaniel on the ground but retaining his hold upon it, he began searching his pockets for his handkerchief, till he remembered that he had left it in Number One's bedroom. After a second's hesitation he then took off his necktie, and using this as an extemporary leash he tied it to the dog's collar.

By some curious psychological process no sooner was the dog secured by Sam's tie than it accepted Sam as the liege-lord of its destiny; *and* in quite a symbolic manner, like a feudal servant of some cruel baron transferring his allegiance to a cockle-shell pilgrim, he rose up on his hind legs and licked Sam's bleeding wrist. Having tasted his new master's blood, so desperately shed by himself, nothing could exceed the animal's intense contentment.

He stretched himself out on the ground at Sam's feet, not lying as most dogs do, but with his feathery legs stretched straight out behind him.

Sam had not been long seated on his bench, when a tremulously vibrant feeling, that could only be described as a shiver of exultant ecstasy, flowed through him. "I have seen it! I have seen it!" the heart within him cried; and in a vague, delicious, dreamy reverie he became aware of an important psychic change in his inmost self-consciousness. This change was nothing less than a coming together of his body and soul. Although his soul still felt independent of his body, and free of his body, it no longer felt contemptuous of his body. It had ceased to utter its mandates in the tone of a slave-driver. Its mere presence within his body at this moment seemed to make Sam's flesh feel porous and transparent, as if large, cool, undulating waves were sweeping through it.

Presently, towards the seat where he rested, came a solitary girlish figure; which, as it approached him, assumed the unmistakable form of Miss Angela Beere. What this strange girl was doing in that place, on the edge of Wirral Park, at half-past two on Sunday afternoon, Sam was not inquisitive enough to ask her; but it was clear that even Angela's virginal placidity was a little startled and ruffled by seeing a dishevelled man rise up from the side of a black dog, a dog whom he held fast by means of a bright blue necktie!

"What a beautiful little dog!" was however this imperturbable young lady's greeting, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to encounter the son of Mat Dekker between Wirral Hill and Beckery Mill on a quiet Sunday. "Oh, what a darling little spaniel!"

Sam felt so abysmally happy at that moment that in his confused rapture he raised the small gloved fingers she held out to him to his lips and made way for her to sit down by his side.

The little black dog who had already shown signs of intense nervousness at the approach of this composed figure in her costume of fastidious delicacy, and had even uttered three short barks, became panic-stricken at this. He tugged frantically at the blue tie, lowering his belly almost to the ground and extending his four feathery paws in a wide-straddled flurry of panic. Finding that the blue tie did not yield, and hearing from the tone of the human invader that she was not at present ill-using his new master or belabouring him with sticks and stones, the dog rose to a natural standing position and remained there stationary. But, although his body was motionless, his short tail pressed down in quivering terror over the round black rump, uttered the words, as clear as language could utter them: "Nothing, I say *nothing* could persuade me to look round at the terrifying transactions that are now taking place behind me."

"I'm *so* glad I've met you," Angela Beere observed, rubbing nonchalantly at a tiny red stain that had appeared on her white glove, and glancing coyly round at the stiff back of the little dog, "for I wanted to ask you whether Mrs. Zoyland would like me to call upon her at the Vicarage. Do you think she would? I keep hearing" — here her pale lips displayed her white teeth in a proud smile— *"such* silly gossip about you all! But Father always says, 'Believe *nothing* that you hear, and only *half* of what you see!'"

Sam turned his face full upon her. "If I," he said, "believed only half of what *I've* just seen, I'd be the happiest person ever born in Glastonbury!"

The girl's arched eyebrows lifted a little upon her smooth white forehead.

"Did what you saw hurt your wrist?" she said; and then, in a really charming access of compunction, that brought a rose-petal flush to her white cheeks, "Let me tie it up for you, Mr. Dekker!" She produced a little lace-edged handkerchief; and as she bandaged his hurt, the softening influence of medical tenderness that had made Number One weep to think of the innocuousness of sparrow dung, brought tears to Sam's eyes.

"Will he let me pat him, do you think?" she said, and leaning across Sam's knees she gave a jerk at the straining blue tie. This movement had the result of causing the dog to sink down instantly on his belly, straddle his legs wide apart to gain the necessary purchase, and then tug at his leash with the energy of a frightened alligator.

"All right — don't 'ee mind!" cried Sam to his new pet.

But the girl drew back with flushed cheeks, evidently a little hurt. "Don't *you* mind!" he repeated, turning from the dog, who now stood erect, although still shivering with terror, to his disappointed companion, "he's a rather nervous little beast."

"Rather nervous!" laughed Angela Beere. "He's like I'd feel if I came to see your Nell and she didn't want to see me!"

This "your Nell" ought to have given the stupid Sam an inkling as to how he was regarded by the richer gossips of the town. He very clearly was anything but Holy Sam in the upper circles of Glastonbury! But he answered guilelessly:

"Nell would be overjoyed to see you, I *know"*

"You'd better go home, Mr. Dekker," she said, "and get that Penny of yours to attend to your wrist."

But when he took not the slightest notice of this, "What," she enquired, "did you say just now that you saw?"

The man was far too happy to be squeamish about telling her everything. He would have liked to have stopped every soul in the streets of the town and told them everything. He was in the mood to shout everything to everyone from the top of the Tor.

"But how *can* you go on saying, Mr. Dekker," protested Angela after an interval of silence, when he had talked about it to her for nearly a quarter of an hour, "as you did just now, that there's no God, and no life after death, and no Personal Christ. You *couldn't* have seen the Grail if there wasn't a God; certainly not if there wasn't a Christ. Come now, Mr. Dekker! You *know* you couldn't! I'm afraid it's a man's pride in you that makes you talk like this."

"Listen, Angela Beere! Until a few months ago, though I didn't believe in God or in Immortality, I believed in Christ. I believed in Him as the tortured Enemy of God, as the friend of all the oppressed in the world! And I *still* believe in Him — but not in the same way — do you understand? No! I suppose you don't! — not in the same way, but far *more* than before!"

He stopped and stared at her; and there was a wild light in his little, greenish-coloured, animal eyes that made the calm young lady say to herself: "I must talk to Dr. Fell about him. I believe he's had some terrible mental shock."

"Do you think, Angela Beere," he went on, while the muscles of his chin worked frantically, and without knowing what he did he tugged so hard at the blue tie that he made the dog rear up like a rearing horse, "do you think a person could give up the sweetest happiness in his life — not just *one* great thing, but *the* thing, the *only* thing, if he weren't drawn on by some Reality?"

"You poor darling!" thought Angela to herself. "Don't you know that people have been driven on by the *Unreal* — by lies, and illusions, and fables, and pure madness — to the point of killing the only thing they've ever loved!"

"I can see you think I've gone dotty, my dear," he added with an indulgent smile, laying his bare hand on her gloved ones as they lay clasped in her lap. “And I’ve no doubt you and your friends think I’ve been a devil incarnate to leave Nell. Well, never mind that! What I’d like to know, if you wouldn’t mind telling me — for I know what a friend you are of Percy’s and that—”

His voice broke when he marked the flood of colour that rushed to Angela’s pale cheeks. Never had Sam beheld such a scarlet blush. It literally flooded her under her black hat. It flowed down her white neck. Her very ears seemed to yield themselves to it. Up went both her gloved hands to her face and the fact that she had to make this gesture increased her shyness. She looked to Sam as if she might be going to rise from the bench and run away.

“I didn’t mean—” stammered Sam.

The girl struggled with herself and dropped her hands, staring at him with round blue eyes, while her underlip quivered. Slowly her colour receded, and her face became paler even than its wont.

“You seem to know all about us — about our friendship — Mr. Dekker, or you wouldn’t ask me. So … so I may as well … *tell* you. All Glastonbury will know in a day or two …. Yes. I’ve heard from her. I haven’t seen her … but I’ve heard from her. *She’s gone to Russia!*”

Sam was flabbergasted. He knew so little of the great world outside Glastonbury that there sounded to him a shock of startling finality in this. It was a second before he realised the import of this news in his own life. Zoyland was alone again then!

He looked at the girl by his side. Angela was searching in the same little handbag from which had come the handkerchief that now bound his wrist. She brought out a letter in an envelope now, and snapping the clasp of her bag with an impatient jerk, threw the letter upon Sam’s knee.

“You can read what she says if you like!” she cried.

There was a French stamp upon the envelope and Sam commented upon this.

"Read it! Read it!" she murmured.

The letter was certainly not difficult to read. Written in Persephone's bold boy-like hand it was brief and to the point.

"Darling Angel," it ran, "long before you get this I shall be in Paris, waiting to catch the express to Warsaw, en route for Russia. I couldn't stand it a day longer. I couldn't stand *anything* in our damned country. I must have a complete change or kill myself. I've gone back to politics, my dear, now that I've found love a fizzle. I believe Russia will suit me to a T. When I'm settled I may send for you to join me! if you like me still, that's to say! Tell Mr. Beere that the meals on French trains are adorable. Don't be cross now, for it *had* to be … your hopeless Percy."

Sam handed the letter back to her while the words "He's alone at Whitelake again," formed themselves in his mind.

"I'm sorry you've lost your friend, Miss Beere," he said gravely. "But, as she says, perhaps one day you'll go too — to Russia."

He uttered these last words as if they referred to some region so remote — as indeed they did — from his present world, that it was as if he'd said: "To the Isles of the Blest."

The girl lowered her fair head, in its black hat, over her handbag and replaced the letter with slow deliberation. She seemed to be pondering deeply; for she remained motionless for a minute, her fingers on the envelope within the little silk-lined receptacle. Then she rose slowly to her feet and shook the front of her skirt and passed her fingers quickly over the back of it.

"Well," she said, holding out her hand with a smile, "I've got to prepare my school lesson now, so I won't ask you which way you're going. But if I were you, Mr. Dekker, I'd go and see your Penny at once about your wrist!"

Two hours later, in fact just as St. John's clock was chiming half-past four, Sam left his loft chamber, with the black dog comfortably asleep under his camp-bed, and sallied forth into the street. His face was washed and clean. His step was light. Angela's handkerchief was still round his wrist just as she had tied it. He came out that afternoon impatient to tell all the world what he had seen.

"I'll go to Nell and Father tonight," he thought, "but not till after the evening service."

He was so dazed with his new happiness that he gave no heed at all to the direction in which he was walking. He moved along like a somnambulist. Now and again he talked to himself in low mutterings. For normal persons to talk to themselves is either a sign of great happiness or of great unhappiness or a sign that they know themselves to be surrounded by absolute physical loneliness.

"Is it a Tench?" he kept muttering quite audibly. What he was always reverting to in his thoughts was the necessity he was under to tell everybody in Glastonbury that he had seen the Grail; and several times he stopped various errand boys and tradesmen's wives, whom he knew by sight, and began to tell them, or began to gather himself up to tell them, but by some queer psychological law they seemed inevitably to slip away from him before he had forced them to listen to him. He came by degrees to have that queer sensation that we have sometimes in dreams, that everything we touch eludes us and slides away. He even got the feeling that the pavements were soft under his feet and that the people he passed were like ghosts who moved *without moving their legs.*

At last he found himself walking in the immediate rear of ex-Mayor Wollop whose corporeality did seem to strike him as more emphatic, and

Sam, hurrying to overtake him, entered into conversation as they walked side by side. It seemed much easier to tell Mr. Wollop about his Vision than in these other cases. This was no doubt due to the fact that it was something *seen*; and not something felt, or thought, or imagined, or supposed, that Sam had to relate.

The great haberdasher took him in tow at once, even going so far as to rest two of his plump fingers upon the visionary's arm. Sam's heart so warmed to the man's kind tone that as he talked to him he felt for the second time that day the sensation of tears mounting to his eyes.

Mr. Wollop told him that it was his father's birthday and that in honour of this anniversary he was on his way to take tea with Mrs. Legge.

"You know the house," he said, "it is called Camelot," and he invited Sam to follow him to this auspicious domicile.

"She'll be overjoyed to see you, Sir," he asseverated again and again. "Overjoyed she'll be! And there'll be nobody there but we two. 'Three's company', you know, Sir, 'and two's immorality,' as my old Dad used to say. She'll be ravaged with what you saw, Sir, … just as I am … ravaged."

By degrees, under the redoubtable companionship of the friendly draper, Sam's wits began to grow a little less ensorcerised, and by the time they reached the aged procuress' house his pulses were beating to a rhythm that was nearly normal.

Behold him now, therefore, this girl-betrayer and child-deserter, this — to quote Zoyland's subsequent comments upon Sam's behaviour— "this double-dyed idiot and arch-prig," seated at Mother Legge's mahogany table, under the staring eyes of the smug Recorders, drinking tea — with a touch of Bridgwater punch super-added — and eating buttered scones! He was ravenously hungry; for the black spaniel, refusing to touch the only raw meat he could procure for it, had swallowed with gusto every scrap of bread and treacle he had prepared for himself.

And as he ate and drank, and as the strong and delicately doctored tea warmed his blood, his tongue became unloosed as it had rarely been unloosed in his life before. The rapturous happiness that thrilled him was not, at least not all of it, directly due to his sight of the Holy Grail. It was undoubtedly partly due — but this itself was an indirect result of the vision — to some new adjustment of his soul and his body. For his soul was no longer an "external" soul! Yes! It no longer stood apart, by the side of his flesh, issuing categorical mandates; and indeed he felt now as if Mother Legge's very tea — Bridgwater punch and all — was nourishing both his soul and his body.

As his words flowed on — describing every detail of his great experience — he was surprised to find himself using words and phrases that he had made use of on that occasion on the top of the Tor, when he had defended the Incarnation against the Manichæan doctrines of Mr. Evans. He could even feel under his fingers the grass roots that he had plucked up that morning, nearly a year ago, in that sudden outburst of inspiration. His conception of the thing was very different now — for his Personal Christ had vanished — but with that curious pride in consistency that even "holy men" feel, he began glossing over this difference; as if a gardener, when a viola cornutus came up, where he had planted pansies, were to insist, "It is the same"; and use his ancient rigmarole on the beauty of pansies for this totally new growth!

But there may have entered into his eloquence at this point some slight stammering and hesitation which gave the aged procuress her cue.

"What worrits a simple old bitch like me," protested Mother Legge, "is how an atheist, like you say you are, Holy Sam, could see the Blood o' the

Blessed One, when there ain't, and never 'as been, no Blessed One to bleed!"

Mr. Wollop glanced cautiously round the big apartment and looked with some nervousness at the heavy black curtains.

"What a man do see," he remarked sententiously, "be one thing. What a man do *think* he sees be another. But what a man do say he sees be a proper knock-out! The mistress 'ere 'ave seed me poor old Dad — rest his merry soul! — raised up and a-wisiting 'er for no good purpose in 'er beauty sleep. But that don't mean that the old gent really comes out from's grave; do it, Marin?"

He kept his eyes on those black curtains of the late Kitty Camel's reception-room, as if he greatly preferred that the elder Mr. Wollop should remain quiescent where he had been laid in the Wells Road graveyard.

"Were it like my silver bowl when 'ee seed it, Holy Sam?" enquired the old lady, settling her portentous frame more comfortably in her tall straight-backed chair and raising her tea-cup to her lips.

Sam's little green eyes shone radiantly. "It wasn't like anything on earth," he cried. "And the moment I saw it I knew what it was. Everything will be different from now on, with the Grail come back to Glastonbury! It was a pure accident that I was the one who saw it first; but I'm going all round town today, telling everybody about it; and I expect hundreds of people will see it I expect even the visitors will see it."

"Will that 'andsome young man in me shop what I 'as such trouble with; the one what reads Neetsky to 'arden 'is 'eart when he gets the gals into trouble, see the 'Oly Grail?"

It would be difficult to believe that Mr. Wollop was not being facetious, unless you were seated opposite him and saw the guileless stare in his round eyes. The old procuress was much less guileless. Indeed she was positively clairvoyant in the subtle penetration of her next question.

"Have the Vision what you've been privileged with, Holy Sam, made 'ee forget they torments what the Saviour did bear for we pore sinners?"

This question of the aged woman — and it may well be that in the course of her long life as the purveyor of the sweets of sin she had acquired a diabolical insight — did assuredly hit Sam between the joints of his armour. But the cresting wave of excitement on which he rode was so great that he answered without a second's hesitation.

"If you, or our friend here," he said, "had gone through unspeakable pains for anyone you loved, and these pains had been turned into heavenly wine and heavenly bread, wouldn't you feel it ungrateful in that person not to take and eat, not to take and drink and be filled with gratitude to you?"

It was natural enough, when Sam left the hospitable domain of Mother Legge, that he should find himself inevitably drifting towards the Vicarage. But he restrained himself from entering; and, in place of that, went on a sudden impulse up the drive of the Abbey House. It can be imagined what a shock it was to him when, having rung at the front door, he was informed by Lily that Miss Drew was "not at home."

"But — Lily, my good girl! Where *is* she, if she *isn't* at home? She's *always* at home on Sunday afternoons! She's been at home on Sunday afternoons, reading the *Guardian* before tea and looking at the *Illustrated London News* after tea, from days before you and I were born! Come now, Lily, what is it? What's up? Is she sick? Is she lying down? I've got something to tell her — something very important — something that would interest you and Louie too!"

Prestered in this way by a gentleman she had familiarly known as "Mr. Sam" since the days when she wore even shorter frocks than were the present fashion, Lily broke down, and with tears in her eyes confessed the sorrowful truth; the truth namely that Miss Drew had decided in the interests of public virtue never to have him in her home again.

“She’s been to see Mr. Dekker too,” Lily went on, after a glance over her shoulder to make certain that the drawing-room door was closed, “and Mr. Weatherwax says he heard her, through the study window, storming at your Dad, Mr. Sam, like she was St. Dunstan scolding Satan. Mr. Weatherwax says he heard her tell your Dad that she’d write to the Lord Bishop, in his Palace at Wells, and tell him that Glastonbury Vicarage were become an Asylum for Fallen Women.”

Sam hardly listened to the latter part of this revelation. He was thinking to himself: “Such news as I’ve got for the people of Glastonbury oughtn’t to be confined to masters and mistresses. Lily is a good girl, a romantic girl, and she’ll be thrilled to hear my news. I’ve always thought there was a dreamy expression in her eyes that showed she was—”

“I’ve had a great experience, Lily,” he began, “and that was what I came to talk to Miss Drew about. It was yesterday it happened. I may as well tell *you* if Miss Drew won’t see me. I was down by the river, Lily, and I saw distinctly—”

But Lily interrupted him.

“Another time, Mr. Sam, another time, if you *please*! I’m sure you saw something very nice — but I’ve *got* to shut the door now. Louie wants to go to the Methodist Chapel tonight and she’s going to dress now and I’ve got to lay the supper. Missus have asked Miss Crummie to supper — so *please* excuse me.”

She gave him one of her most dim, beguiling, and tender smiles; a smile that seemed to say, “Life is more full of romance than a simple gentleman like you can possibly know! Even Louie, when she goes to the Methodist Chapel with Bob Tankerville—" but at this point she firmly closed the door.

Although Sam was quite in the dark about Miss Drew's new interest in Crummie, the truth was that as Mary slipped away from her, the lonely woman had begun to find not a little consolation in the spell that the beauty of Mr. Geard's daughter had already cast over her. Sam couldn't help smiling as he mentally envisaged the beautiful Crummie seated opposite her entertainer and listening sweetly to her well-chosen words across the silver candlesticks; but this piece of news set him off in Crummie's direction.

"I'll be with Nell and Father tonight," he thought, "but I'll go to the Geards' now. I'll catch her easily before she starts, if I hurry up."

He retraced his steps down Silver Street and soon reached the High Street near St. John's Church. A small group of people were just coming out from an afternoon's christening, and the first person Sam encountered was Mrs. Philip Crow, who, under the advice of Emma, who assured her that "Mr. Dekker be more 'isself when he be preaching to godfathers and godmothers than when 'tis the common crowd," had attended this brief and pleasant service.

Tilly shook hands with him cordially; for the gossip retailed by Emma was of a much more detailed and much more authentic kind than that conveyed to Miss Drew's ears by Mr. Weatherwax; and it excited Tilly's particular type of sympathy to think of this quiet young man living by himself in the Old Malt House.

"He's made a mistake and he's sorry for it," she thought, and vaguely in her mind she dreamed that it would be nice one day if she and Emma could clean up that top floor for this well-meaning youth who had no wife and no servant.

"You must have heard good news, Mr. Dekker," Tilly said, "for your eyes are shining. They shone like that when you were a boy and Philip and I were giving our first party at The Elms. I recall it clearly, because it was when Emma had just come to us, and I thought she did so well when the dog we had then — we've never had a dog since, Mr. Dekker; but I was weak then and silly about Philip, and Philip was fond of dogs and what was I saying? — made a sad mess in the dining-room."

"Mrs. Crow," said Sam, staring at the lavender fringe of the book-marker which dangled from the large prayer book she carried and then letting his gaze move to their two shadows, which the declining sun caused to extend clean across the street and which resembled a child's drawing of two fantastic dolls, "Mrs. Crow, I have something to tell you that will interest you."

"Oh dear!" she cried, "don't look so wild! And don't tell *me* any of your secrets. I've never said one word to anyone about you and Mrs. Zoyland, and I'd rather not hear anything." There came over Sam just then a desire to laugh aloud. That no one in this town could be brought even to listen to what he had seen seemed like a crazy dream. He felt as if he were living in two worlds at the same time, and one of them, by far the less real and by far the more absurd, was trying to convince him that the other was a fantasy.

"Mrs. Crow," he repeated with a certain irritation in his voice, "what has happened to me has nothing to do with Mrs. Zoyland. It's a vision — yes! it's the *great* vision we've *all* been waiting for! I've … seen … the Holy Grail … Mrs. Crow." Sam felt so light-headed just then that he longed to laugh, or cry, or shout. It would have seemed perfectly natural to him if Tilly Crow had fallen on her knees, there and then, upon the pavement, and offered thanks to God. But the little lady only gave vent to a deep sigh.

"Emma always said," she remarked, looking at him with grave concern, "that if *that woman* didn't manage better for you and your dear father there would be no telling—"

She had said enough. Sam quickly saw that she regarded him as a well-meaning victim of protracted undernourishment. He lifted his hat to take his leave; and as he did so his chin twitched a little and there was a pucker on his brow. His eyes began to roam up and down the street as if he sought for someone whose shadow was less doll-like than Tilly's.

Tilly saw that she had hurt his feelings in some way and she held out her hand to him. When he took it she detained him, as she often detained Philip when she had misunderstood him.

"I'm sure with so good a father," she murmured hurriedly, "you could see anything, even angels, Mr. Dekker," and when Sam smiled at this, she added eagerly, giving to him of her best, "Your floors up there are all oak, aren't they? Aunt Tappity, you know, who was Euphemia Drew's great-aunt, used to have them beeswaxed. Euphemia never likes to talk of that branch of our family, because of the malt business. But we all have a drop of bad blood somewhere, haven't we? But Euphemia can remember sliding on those floors when she was little, so slippery they were!"

When Sam had left her and was wandering down the High Street he felt his spirits a little dashed. "I thought," he said to himself, "that they'd all cry: 'It's impossible! It's too good to be true!' Instead of which they seemed ready to accept it as perfectly true, but in some way — unimportant!"

He had not got very far down High Street, for it was in his mind to reach Street Road, where Cardiff Villa was, by way of Magdalene Street, when he overtook old Bartholomew Jones shuffling slowly along with the aid of a stick. In spite of its being Sunday, Number Two was all agog to attend to something in his shop, probably to attend to his accounts, for he was a great miser, and the financial problems of his partnership with Mr. Evans seemed, sometimes, well-nigh insoluble.

The old man greeted Sam with effusiveness. He had known him from his childhood, and Sam had sold to him many of his Cambridge books. He now took the opportunity of informing Number Two of the feeble state in which he had left Number One that morning.

"I've a-allus told he," said Mr. Jones, "that the 'orspital was the place for we old folk when our innards turn foul on us. Look at my girt zisty! If it weren't for that clever head-doctor, who studied me case with all them European engines, where would I be now? Abe Twig, he be a fool when it comes to taking care of 'isself. He do say trust nature; whereas I do say, 'tis nature what did the damage. Us must go farther afield for the cure of thik damage. Us must go to Science."

While he was thus speaking, Mr. Jones was staring in sorrowful wonder at his interlocutor's bound-up wrist.

"Seems to me, Sir," he remarked, "*you'd* do no harm to go to 'orspital, your own self. That wrist o' your'n be bleedin' into bandage."

Sam instinctively touched Angela's handkerchief with the tip of one of his fingers.

"I'm too excited today to think of hospitals, Mr. Jones," he said. "Do you know what's happened to me, my friend?"

He lowered his voice to an intense and concentrated whisper "You ain't gone and murdered Mr. Zoyland, have 'ee?" cried Number Two, retreating a pace or so from the proximity of this excited adulterer.

"No, no, my good man, Mr. Zoyland and I have never even had a fight and certainly are not likely to now."

As Sam spoke, the thought came into his head— "Alone at Whitelake; alone at Whitelake—"

But Mr. Jones looked up the street and down the street. Then he remarked: “I’ve still got that grand edition of Saint Augustine. I suppose you don’t feel inclined to—”

But Sam interrupted him. “Do you know what my fellow-workers call me these days, Mr. Jones?”

“A darned ninny!” was what leapt up in Number Two’s mind; but he responded soothingly, as if addressing a candidate for the county asylum: “I’ve a-heered, Sir, that down in Paradise they name ‘ee Holy Sam.”

Sam nodded his head, and then began working the muscles of his chin so violently that the old man longed, as he afterwards explained to Mr. Evans, “to catch hold of that monkey-face and quiet ‘un.”

“I want to tell everyone in the town,” cried Sam, “what has happened. For the most important thing has happened that *could* happen; *and I have seen it.”*

The tone in which he said this and the gleaming light in his eyes alarmed Mr. Jones but it occurred to him that it was just in states of mind of this kind that young gentlemen were liable to buy expensive theological books.

“It’s the best Saint Augusdne on the market,” he said.

“I saw Eternity this morning,” remarked Sam. Whether in the long history of Glastonbury, anyone had uttered these simple words before, no one knows, but if anyone *had* done so, the chances are that the remark was received in the same manner then as now.

“It’s a Baskerville edition,” insisted Bartholomew Jones.

Sam bade him good afternoon, and strode off quicker than the old man could follow. He had fully expected to be ridiculed or scoffed at for his revelation; but it had never entered his head that his great difficulty would be to arouse any interest in it. He began to wonder if he were, after all, the only person who had seen the Grail since the ancient days. Perhaps the

Grail had appeared to a great many people and not one of these people had been able to persuade anyone even to attend to what they had to say about it! Perhaps life in Glastonbury was full of such miracles; and yet those who reported them always found their excitement falling on deaf ears.

He soon reached the curiosity shop itself. At the door he met Red Robinson, who was about to attend a meeting of the Comrades in their old meeting-place at the top of the house. Mr. Robinson looked a good deal sprucer and more neatly dressed than when he had accosted Sam last Spring at the gate of St. John's churchyard. He had a white collar on now; but he still wore the same old, brown cloth cap, pulled down rather rakishly over his forehead and tilted a little to one side. This cap, whatever else he wore, brought into the Glastonbury High Street an indescribable air of Whitechapel and the Old Kent Road.

It came over Sam with a rush of emotion how it had been Robinson's speech, reporting Crummie's words, that had started him upon this whole new psychic pilgrimage.

" 'Ee 'as the fice of a sighnt," had been the man's rendering of Crummie's fatal sentence; and it all came back to Sam now, together with Nell's words across the empty tomb of St. Joseph, breaking the news of her return to Zoyland's bed.

"Hullo, Robinson! Are you speaking up there tonight?" said Sam with the affable though rather forced geniality of the parson's son addressing a working-man.

Red gave him a furtive, challenging look, and yet a quizzical look — the sort of look that a terrier caught in the mouth of a rabbit hole would give a setter, as it passed gravely by, on the trail of a covey of partridges.

"We'll be doing something better than speak soon," retorted the man. "There'll be a fine stir in Glastonbury soon — and *some* that I knows on —

some bewgers what doesn’t know what’s coming to ’em will ‘ave to tike notice!”

“I hear that you and young Trent and Mr. Spear have been appointed our new aldermen,” said Sam politely.

“Aldermen, do yer call it?” snorted Red contemptuously. “We’ll be more than aldermen shortly, Mister; just as Bloody Johnny’s more than a Mayor to-die!”

“Yes, I’ve heard something about this,” said Sam. “It’s a kind of independent Commune, they tell me, that you’re setting up. Well, I wish you good luck, Robinson! I’ve nothing against any arrangement that brings more meat into the larders of our poor people.”

But in his inevitable desire to take exception to anything that a Vicar’s son might say, Red now veered round.

“But it’s a bleedin’ farce, hall the sime! That’s what I’m going to tell ’em in a minute. Commune? ‘Ell! This ’ere stunt ‘as its pint, in miking some bewgers we know cough up a bit, but there’ll be no Commune in this ’ere bleedin’ ‘ole till we’ve got ‘old of the bank and the rileway.”

“Well,” repeated Sam, “I’m for you, Robinson. But I wish you could persuade some of the labouring men of this town to be a little less savage when a person works along side of them.” Red eyed him with malevolent glee.

“So yer finds it haint all ‘unny, does yer, doing the jobs you blighters have put on us for hall these years? You’re beginning to know, are yer, what it tighsts like to eat ‘umble pie?”

“But if the working-man has been ill-used, as no doubt he has, why should he take it out on those who wish him well?”

“Tike it out, do yer sigh?” cried Red Robinson indignantly. “That’s just like you virtuous gentlemen. What’s got on our nerves is that very sime tone of yours. It’s your why of tiking things! Is a man a foot-stool, Mister? Is a man a piece of bleedin’ junk, that a bloke should sigh to you: ‘ ’ow kind yer are, Mr. Dekker, Hesquire’ “ — Red’s whole frame quivered with sarcasm —” ‘ ’ow kind yer are to work side by side with us and to use yer own fine ‘ands along of us!’”

He paused for a second and then spoke with such a rush of formidable emotion that Sam, with all his preoccupied excitement, was considerably impressed.

“Don’t yer see … will you hupper-classes *never* see … that you’ve been just sitting, ‘eavy and sife, on the top of us workers? When a man’s been lying on ’is fice, hunder the harse of a great bewger all ’is life long, ’tisn’t heasy when he’s thrown the bewger off to talk sweet to ’im. ’Tisn’t heasy to sigh, ‘Poor rich man, did I ‘urt yer when I threw yer bleedin’ harse off of my fice?’”

Sam was silent. For the first time that day he felt that he couldn’t bring himself to speak of his Vision. And yet what a thing that he couldn’t. Had human beings maltreated one another to such a tune that it was a sort of mockery even to mention that the Holy Grail had come back to earth?

Without breathing a word of what he had seen to this man, he could hear him say: “It’s because you’ve ‘ad your leisure from our sweat that you’ve got any spunk left to fuss with the ‘Oly Grile. We be too dog-gone done-in of a Sunday morning to do anything but sleep in our bleedin’ beds!”

Thus it happened that in spite of his having declared to Mother Legge and Mr. Wollop that he was going to tell everyone he met, he found, when he went on down Magdalene Street, along the southern wall of the Abbey meadow, that not only had he *not* told Robinson, but that when he met Harry Stickles, the chemist, bustling home to his tea and his beautiful Nancy, he made no attempt, although he had bought his Windsor soap of him a day or two ago, to interrupt a busy citizen of his kidney, with news of such a bagatelle!

While Sam was approaching the turn to Street Road, Crummie, left quite alone in Cardiff Villa to prepare for her supper with Miss Drew, for the Mayor and the Mayoress had gone for the evening to the city of Wells, was sitting, as she often was these days, by herself in her childhood's bedroom, where all the pictures on the wall, the little childish sketch entitled "Crummie by Crummie," and the eloquent, if not artistic, Series of the Seasons, jabbered and gibbered at her, languished and lisped at her, with memories of the married Cordelia.

As usual the younger daughter of Geard of Glastonbury sat on the edge of her maiden bed admiring her legs. If it had not been that Crummie's heart, independently of her legs altogether, had fallen in love with Sam, the chances are that from sheer good-nature she would long ago have married one of her innumerable admirers in the town. But if the truth about the girl must be told, Crummie, in reality, was not attracted to men. This is a paradox which poor Cordelia — who *was* strongly attracted to men and was now living a life of intoxicated eroticism with Mr. Evans — would have laughed at, considering how the sight of Crummie's admirers had troubled her. But such was the exact truth! What Crummie was attracted to, was not her men — their personalities, their looks, their ways — but the reflection of herself, and particularly of her incomparable legs, in the mirror of her men's eyes.

It is the greatest mistake in the world to assume that the sort of narcissism in which Crummie indulged was selfish or ungenerous. It is true she derived an exquisite and indescribably voluptuous pleasure from admiring herself, from caressing herself, as she was doing at this moment; but it was a pleasure she longed to share with as many people as possible —

women quite as much as men! Nor was she fastidious. Naturally not, considering that what primarily stirred her was not these alien personalities in their intrinsic qualities but the degree of their excitement in the presence of her own charms.

On the other hand the girl was so essentially humble and so free from malice or spitefulness, that a very small measure of this excitement was enough to satisfy her. But in Sam's case everything was different. Her feeling for Sam was a most delicate, vibrant and totally self-forgetful feeling. Nor would she have been at all anxious for Sam to enter at this moment and see her beautiful bare legs. Sam was the only person in the world before whom Crummie was bashful, shamefaced, super-modest. She would have felt like sinking into the ground with shame — that is how she would have expressed it to herself — if Sam had burst in now and beheld the satiny whiteness of her limbs; soft and tantalising and of maddening loveliness. What she wanted Sam to admire in her was her intellect, her searching intelligence, her ideal sentiment, her religious soul; and the pathetic thing was that Providence had not only refrained from endowing Crummie with these gifts but had not even given her a limited success in the art of pretending to possess them.

Crummie's unique gift from Nature, the most exquisite thighs that had been seen in Glastonbury since those of Merlin's perfidious Nineue, and which to herself, in her orgies of narcissism, were so pleasure-yielding, were, as far as Sam was concerned, something almost to be ashamed of. She would have preferred to appear before Sam in a heavy nun's garment descending to the ground and with her hair covered up by a black hood. How could she have possibly known that it *was* Sam before whom she was now destined to appear, when, hearing the door-bell ring, she hurriedly put on her skirt, wrapped herself in an old woollen dressing-gown, and with her fair hair loose and her bare feet in little tattered slippers ran downstairs.

Her feelings when she saw him standing there were so overwhelming that for a second she swayed in the doorway and nearly fainted away. Had she done so it would have been precisely in the manner of those tender impossible heroines in the only works of art she had ever honestly enjoyed! What she felt was something that no consecutive human language, trying to convey a clear-edged impression, could possibly express. Sam's figure suddenly appearing before her at her own doorstep evoked that bewildering, staggering sense of the very nature of things shifting, altering, transforming, which the Magdalene must have had when the apparent gardener at the Arimathean tomb murmured the magic word "Mary!"

It was not so much a living man she saw, as her whole secret life, all the gathered up and accumulated longings, reserves, broodings, dreams of the last twelve months. He was not a thing of palpable outline at all, of definite contour or of solid substance. He was a cloud of filmy essences, vague yearnings, precious dreams, dear hopes, wild idolatries. It was a shivering anguish as well as a wild ecstasy to see him embodied there, in an ordinary human form, familiar and natural.

So un-selfconscious did this adorer of her own sweet flesh become in her rapture of seeing him, hearing him, touching him, that when she had taken his coat and hat and brought him into the musty drawing-room and put him in her father's chair with the bear rug at his feet, she sank down before the fire without a thought of stirring its dying embers, or of lighting more than one solitary candle with a spill thrust deep into those flickering coals. Across her bare feet, before she realised the necessity of hiding them under her robe, fluttered the rosy fire gleams. Down upon her loosened hair fell the yellow rays of that solitary candle, while from the un-shuttered window, open at the top as her mother had left it, the cool evening air circled round them both, full of the dewy smells of the damp meadows at the road's end.

Even our poor vision-wrought Holy Sam was not so dehumanised as not to feel that there was something about this moment that was charged with portentous issues, something fatal, something totally unforeseen, something that held the future in its quivering crucible.

Crummie was in such a mood of unutterable awe and pent-up ecstasy at having her idol, her more than earthly lover, alone in the house with her, that she found difficulty in uttering a word, and when she did speak it was in a solemn, breathless whisper. So potent however is the concentrated love of the feminine heart, that although this man, sitting there above her, had just beheld — actually in the flesh — that elusive Mystery which was the cause of Glastonbury's being Glastonbury, it was the girl and not the man who dominated that moment, *her* exultation, and not his, that held the thunder-flash of that charged air.

"I never … thought," she whispered with intense emotion, not presuming to raise her eyes above the muddy soles of Sam's boots, "that I'd ever … have you … here alone."

"*Dear* Crummie!" and he made a timid movement of his hand towards her head, but quelled by the intensity of her feeling let his wrist fall back on his knee, where it lay limp, with Angela's handkerchief round it.

"I've got … so much … to say to you … that it's … hard to begin."

She made an effort to lift up her face and smile at him; but down her fair head sank again, as if she had been rehearsing once more her Pageant-part of the Lady of Shalott.

"Dear Crummie!" he repeated in a scarcely more audible voice than her own.

But then, gathering up the happiness within him as if it were a crystal cup that he stretched out to her, "I've had an experience today, Crummie," he said, "that has unsettled all my ideas; that's made me feel as if I'd never lived till today. I told Nell once, Crummie, that I thought I had a dead nerve in me. Well! Well! You don't want to hear about that … but it was true … but—"

"I can understand you," the girl murmured. "You needn't stop telling me for any reason — no! Not for any reason!"

"It wasn't a fancy; it wasn't a madness," he went on, "Crummie dear, I *saw* it! Yes, I saw the Grail Itself."

Now that he had told her, instead of his happiness being less, it became greater. Her long, slow, grave, childish look of absolute faith made him feel that this was the first time he had spoken of it to anyone. To those other people he must have been speaking of something else!

"And the effect it's had on me, Crummie, is to make me feel that I've seen Eternity. So that now I needn't worry myself any more about so many things! Behind the tortured Christ, behind that *other* Christ, behind the people we love and the people we've hurt … behind everything that's sacred to us … is Eternity. Do you know what I mean, little Crummie? I feel now" — there was a poignant tenderness, not so much an affectionate or even human tenderness, as it was something resembling the feeling her father would have shown for a wounded loach, about the tone in which he spoke to her; and it seemed in a sense to be a grotesque tone for that superbly beautiful creature crouching between the candle flame and the dying coals— "I feel now that my life has really finished itself, accomplished itself somehow; and what I want to do now is just to take it as it is and to give it to anyone, to anything, to whatever comes along, following chance and accident, and not bothering very much — do you see what I mean, Crummie? — taking everything as it happens — since I've seen Eternity!"

He needn't have asked her if she understood him. She had been following every word with the absorbed attention with which a prisoner hears his sentence or a gambler watches his throw of the dice. When he had finished she moved away from him a little, and bending down before the high bronze fender pressed her forehead against its top bar, while with her hands she clutched its shining knobs.

It was clear, even to the bemused and bewildered Sam that she was struggling with herself and making some momentous decision. Her decision, whatever it was, was made very quickly. She lifted her head from the fender and rose to her feet, clutching her robe tightly round her and gazing down upon him, where he still lay back at ease in her father's big arm-chair.

"I've got something to tell you, Mr. Sam," she said. All his father's parishioners called him Mr. Sam. Never in her life had she called him Sam.

He gave her at once his full attention. He sat straight up on the extreme edge of the arm-chair; his hands on his elbows, his heels beneath it, his head raised. He looked like a boy whose pockets are full of apples and pears giving polite attention to the conversation of an elder sister.

"There are very few men," she began, "who can live alone as you do, Mr. Sam. But I know you are doing wrong in doing it. Mrs. Zoyland belongs to you; she has given herself completely to you; she has had a child; and I know that I am telling you what's right when I tell you that you two ought not to live separated any more. There are things that a girl knows more about than any man and this is—"

She stopped abruptly. From a portion of her powerful nature — for after all she was Mr. Geard's daughter — that had never been roused by Sam, she suddenly felt a wave of irrational anger against him. Once when she was a little girl and had been caressing a rag doll, for which she nourished, just as she did for Sam, a devoted, idealising love, she caught a look on its face that seemed so unresponsive that, filled with wrath against it, she snatched it up and dashed it upon the floor.

In the midst of her present speech — it was when she reached the words "she has had a child" — she gesticulated with her hands, forgetting to hold the folds of her long dressing-gown. Released from her fingers her robe fell apart, revealing the fact that beneath her skirt her legs and feet were bare.

It was then that she imagined she beheld, mingling with the dazed, indulgent, stupid courtesy of Sam's attention to her that particular look upon his face that women are so quick to catch; the look, namely, of displeasure rather than pleasure at some intimate and revealing gesture they have made. That such a look should have appeared on her idolised Sam's face, on this night of all nights, hurt her to the quick.

It was a swift blinking of the eyelids, a scarcely perceptible twitch of the chin; but she received the impression that the sight of her bare ankles had affected him as something disconcerting. She knew well that normal men have two distinct reactions to a girl's bare legs — the first one of provoked desire, with all its glamour and mystery, and the second, one of fastidious shrinking; and although towards her idealised love she was humble as a child about her beauty, she was also as shy and touchy as a child about any personal exposure.

The fact, therefore, that she had caught, or fancied she had caught, for in reality Sam was not thinking of her legs at all, that particular look upon his face, made her anger leap up furiously against them both; against herself for forgetting to conceal her ankles, and against him for that unconscious flicker of cold-blooded awareness that caused her to feel conscious of them.

Her anger with Holy Sam, like her anger against her old idealised doll, made her totally forget that this dazed well-meaning man sitting up in such an absurd posture of forced attention, with his heels under the chair and his head raised, was her romantic idol, and in one swift ungovernable impulse she seized him by the hair of his head, and shook his skull with all her force backward and forward repeating those interrupted words: “More about than any man … more about than any man …” over and over again.

Sam in his unimaginative simplicity thought the girl was doing this for fun, or at least in amiable irritation. He was so full of her startling words about Nell that to have his hair seized upon and his skull shaken was an interlude of small moment. But when she let him go and flung herself down sobbing upon the bear rug, he realised that it was anything but fun. He realised then that he knew no more about the ways of women than he knew about the philosophy of “Neetsky” in dealing with them. He crouched down by her side on the bear rug and did his best to console her, not daring to snatch her arm away from her eyes, but petting and coaxing her in every way he could think of, and talking endearingly and tenderly to her. But she seemed to come to herself quite independently of his blundering consolation. All at once she scrambled swiftly to her feet. A curious notion had suddenly come into her head.

“Get me your coat,” she said. “I want to put on your coat.”

He obeyed her. He fetched his great coat. He held it for her, while she slipped into it. Very gently, as he stood behind her, he extricated her curls and let them hang free over the collar. She took him by the hand and led him to the sofa. It satisfied something very deep in her to feel that old overcoat she knew so well wrapped about her. It was like covering herself with the finer essence of her love. She was completely mistress of herself now, and of Holy Sam too, as this latter felt in the very marrow of his bones!

Every woman — the most abject as well as the most beautiful — has certain moments in her life when the whole feminine principle in the universe seems to pour through her, and when men, when every man obeys her in helpless enthrallment as if she held the wand of Circe. This was the great hour of Crummie's life, nor was she ignorant of the nature of the magic that now flowed through her veins.

"Mr. Sam," she said when they were seated side by side upon the sofa, "you *must* go back to Mrs. Zoyland; back to her and to your child — no, stop! I've not finished — I don't mean go back to the Vicarage! You're perfectly right in leaving your father. You couldn't live out your new ideas freely without being independent. And, as I say, there are some things women know more about than men; and one is that people who love each other ought to live alone together — *never* with a third one! When you left your Nell, you did it because you thought kissing her and loving her *in that way* was wrong. *She* never thought it was wrong! And now, Mr. Sam, you must live with her again; for I tell you those things are *not* wrong. But not at the Vicarage. She ought never to have gone there! That's the one thing I cannot understand in Mrs. Zoyland, that she ever agreed to stay under the same roof with two men like you and your father." She paused upon this, giving Sam a flash of something more dangerous from her soft grey-blue eyes than he had ever received. She looked so incredibly lovely in the dim light of that solitary candle, with her bright loose curls flowing over his own coat collar that Sam stared at her in humble admiration.

He was not in a mood to take exception to anything she said; and once having broken the ice and having got control of herself, she seemed prepared to say a great deal.

"You are both … very good men," she went on gravely, "but Mr. Dekker cares nothing what people think. He doesn't seem to realise what scandal-makers that old man and that old woman are! You ought at once to take Mrs. Zoyland away. *Then* you and she will be the ones to get into trouble — if there *is* any trouble, and not your father. We're in the middle of great changes here in Glastonbury. Mrs. Zoyland and you, if you're brave enough to despise the Miss Drews and Miss Fells of the town, will have the support of her brother Mr. Spear, and of course of my father and Mr. Trent. I don't know what furniture you've got in your attic in that Old Malt House — you see I know all about you, Mr. Sam! — but if you haven't got enough up there to make a woman and child comfortable you ought to take furnished rooms. Why don't you go to Dickery Cantle's, Mr. Sam? They're not fussy or squeamish there. Besides Mr. Spear lives there now, and he's her brother. He'd help you with your expenses. He gets a good salary since my father's made him one of the big men in Glastonbury."

Sam's whole nature was in a turmoil. As the girl's rapid, practical words followed one another, they carried a shameful conviction with them. Yes, he had been unforgivably selfish in all he had done! Little thought had he given to the passionate torment of his father, tantalized by Nell's sweet presence, and bearing the whole weight of that ambiguous situation. Little had he thought of what Nell might be enduring. He had thought solely of himself, solely of his own soul in relation to his martyred God; and meanwhile he had been cruel to his girl, and if not cruel to his father, at least completely irresponsible, completely careless of his peace of mind. With a lover's instinct combined with the instinct of a son he knew exactly what his father would suffer if he took Nell away; but he knew also — who better? — the deep relief with which the older man left to himself, and free from this daily tantalisation of his darker mood, would revert to his simple, traditional, unquestioning faith. Besides, Nell would go and see him. She could go often and see him. He wouldn't be separating those two. By removing her from the Vicarage he wouldn't be taking her out of his father's life.

Thus as he watched that white face in the dimness, framed in its wavy curls, he gave himself reason upon reason for obeying the competent advice which came so impressively from its lips. But, as he listened, the image of his sweet love's form, the caressing sound of her voice, the whole aura of her personality, rose up in the very heart of his being. It was perhaps an ironic thing, but the truth was that the mood he had been thrown into by his vision of the great Glastonbury mystery had abolished all his ascetic scruples about making love to Nell. Such scruples seemed to him now like a tight, irrelevant, self-inflicted contrariety!

There is no doubt that if ever Sam came to talk of the secret things of his life — which was not very likely — with Mr. Evans, that incorrigible biographer of Merlin would have found this particular effect of the Grail Vision a proof that the thing was a thing of magic, and not of religion; and likely enough — like the Mwys of Gwydion-Garanhir — was an actual symbol of fertility!

"Well, Mr. Sam, I've got to have supper with Miss Drew tonight; and it's now five minutes to the hour she expects me!"

Even as she spoke he was making his great decision.

"I'll take you to her door, little Crummie," he said. "You've been more than a crumb of the loaf to me tonight; and if I do manage to establish myself at Dickery Cantle's, I'll pray to you every day as if you were a god."

So he spoke, recalling a passage in one of the old poignant Homeric scenes, which he had had to read when he was in the sixth form at Greylands School.

“Will you?” she exclaimed, leaping to her feet and rushing to the chimney-piece where their only candle was guttering down. “Will you?” she repeated, occupied with the struggle to light a second flame from the one that was drowning in its own melted wax.

And then he became aware from the heaving of her shoulders under his heavy coat that Crummie was crying — not audibly, as she had done after shaking him, but silently. Having lit that second candle, she seemed to be seized with a mania for lighting candles, and went round the room doing it everywhere, but keeping her face hid from him. She might just as well have spared herself this illumination of her tragedy, for the tears were still running down her cheeks when she turned round.

“I don’t know why I’m doing this,” she said. “It must be thankfulness because you’re going to do what I’ve told you to do.” As she spoke she made an heroic effort to smile. For the beat of a swallow’s wing she could not compass it. Then she did; and the smile which wavered up, lovely and tender, from the very bottom of her soul, made her face, under the upmounting flames of all her candles, more beautiful than any face that Holy Sam had ever seen.

On their way to Miss Drew’s — and they traversed Magdalene Street to its end and then followed Bere Lane to the Tithe Barn, thus avoiding the town — Crummie talked to him unreservedly about her father. “He is fonder of me,” she said in a low voice, when they reached the great mediaeval barn and paused confronting it, “than Mother thinks he ought to be. Mother never has liked it. But I think nothing of it! I think it’s silly to have *those* ideas about it. I suppose I’m queer in things like that; and so is Father, except when it worries Mother. I don’t mind — why should I mind? — his loving me so.”

“The last time I talked to him,” said Sam, “I thought he was rather restless; but that may have been these communistic ways of running the town.”

“I’ve never told this to a living soul,” said Crummie, “but sometimes Father frightens me. Not with his petting and so on; for I don’t care tuppence about that. But once or twice lately he’s talked of death with such an extraordinary look on his face! Almost always he talks of death when he’s been petting me, or has seemed especially fond of me, but not unhappily, mind you! It’s rather as if — it’s so hard to put it, Mr. Sam! — as if there were another me, someone *like* me, only of course much more exciting, down there in Hades. I’ve seen his eyes, Mr. Sam — and you know how dark they are! — shine like funnels of black fire when he’s been talking of death and holding me on his knee.”

“Were you surprised that I should see the Holy Grail?” asked Sam irrelevantly.

“I’ve thought you were seeing it all the time!” said Crummie quickly.

He was looking at the strange apocalyptic creatures on the barn now, and he thought to himself that there was something about them that reminded him of Mr. Geard. In fact it was easy for him to imagine that Mr. Geard’s architect, after the Mayor was dead, might carve a fifth evangelistic symbol for this new Gospel. Sam even began to think of his own “Ichthus — the World-Fish.”

He left Crummie at Miss Drew’s drive gate, and waited there till he heard, by the sound of the opening and closing door, that she was safely in the house. In the confused waves of the exultant happiness which she, the “Crumb of the Loaf,” as he had called her, had given him, soaking up for him and interpreting in practical terms the meaning of his Vision, Holy Sam had blundered again more grossly, more unpardonably, than he had ever done in his life. He had made a clumsy and awkward attempt to kiss Crummie. The girl had turned her head away and he had only brushed her cheek, but the contact of her flesh, at the entrance to that damp and dark shrubbery of the Abbey House, chilled him to the bone, as if he had touched that other, that Cimmerian Crummie, in the realms of Death, of whom her father was so enamoured! As he turned away and crossed the road to enter his father's drive gate Sam had the wit to realize that he had acted grossly in trying to kiss her. He had made the gesture in simple and spontaneous gratitude. She knew *that* as well as he did. Why then had she turned her head away? She turned it away so that the great Love of her life, the secret Ideal of her girlhood, should not kiss her on the lips before he went in to her rival. Would she then have let him kiss her if there had been no question of Nell; but only the fact between them that he did not love her? Oh, still less so, oh, far less so! For it might easily have been that this matter of rivalry would have led her to snatch fiercely, wickedly, maliciously, at his proffered kiss; but nothing would have induced her to let him kiss her on the lips — she loving him and he not loving her — if that malice of rivalry hadn't entered. Crummie being what she was, it had *not* entered, and her lips remained virginal. And yet she had been kissed full upon the mouth, again and again, by many of the men who had been wont to caress her.

Oh, deep beyond understanding is this curious secret! The whole Being of the coldest, plainest, ugliest girl in the world resembles a sensitive plant whereof her reluctant lips are the leaves. Organised for receptivity by the whole structure, substance and nerve-responses of her identity, the electric yieldingness of a girl's body vibrates to the least pressure upon her mouth. Only the craftiest and subtlest of lovers know the preciousness, the tragic, unique, perilous preciousness, of that moment when, under the pressure of a kiss, her lips are parted.

The two greatest Realists that have ever lived, those superhuman delvers into the crook of a knee, or the dimple of a cheek, or the furrow of a brow, or the hollow of an eye-socket, Dante and Leonardo da Vinci, were at one in finding in women's lips the *entelecheia* of all Nature's secretest designs. A man's laugh — what a simple, nondescript "haw! haw! ho! ho!" *that* sound is, half a lion's roar and half an ass's bray, compared with the subtle waxing or waning, the broken ripple of the moon's reflection upon flowing water, of a woman's smile! To Dante a maid's smile meant the latitude of the least little span of a thin eyelash between inexorable Acheron and the mystical circles of the Empyrean; and to Leonardo the wavering beginning of a girl's smile carried, folded within its calyx, the blue veins of her thighs, the wild-rose tips of her nipples, the arch of her instep, the silkiness of her flanks, the unfathomable recessions of her final yielding to the pressure of desire.

Some shamefaced and scattered inkling of all this hovered about Holy Sam's mind as he entered the familiar driveway of his father's home. Oh, he had been brutally selfish in all this whole business of his relations with the people of his life! But he would change it all now. He would take this new happiness of his and lavish it among them!

Sam hurriedly opened the front door of the Vicarage and plunged at once, as a dog into the odour of a familiar kennel, into the well-known smell of his birthplace. He heard the voices of Penny and Mr. Weatherwax raised loudly in the kitchen and he felt glad that some lively interest of their own had prevented them from hearing his entrance. For a second he stood listening and hesitating, "this way and that dividing the swift mind," unable to decide whether to go in to his father first, or run up to Nell.

But it was to his girl and his child that he must betake himself now; *now* and for the rest of his days! That was the mandate of the Grail. That was the dictate of her, whose word, " 'ee 'as the fice of a sighnt," had started him on his quest. As lightly as he could — but he was a heavy man and the stairs creaked woefully — he rushed to the upper landing. He found himself actually forming upon his lips his cry to his Love, “I have come back to you; back to you forever!” and, as people do, outside a door that will reveal, in a second, a dear and familiar form, he hugged her to his heart in his mind with the very cling of reality. He knocked lightly twice — two little sharp, excited raps with his knuckles — and then without waiting for a reply flung open the door.

All was darkness. Faintly between the dark undrawn curtains he could see the dim shapes of the trees outside, outlined against a few pale stars. Empty was the great four-posted bed of the Prince of Orange; cold and desolate in the deserted room.

“Nell, little Nell!” His voice came back to him like the voice of someone who speaks in a place of the dead. With the first sickening catch of his heart he thought to himself: “She’s taken him down to supper with Father!” Leaving the door of the big empty room wide open, he rushed out upon the landing and ran down the stairs. He opened the dining-room door. Pallid in the darkness shone the white tablecloth, laid for their evening meal. It made him think of a cloth upon an altar when they have put out the candles.

Instinctively delaying — because of something ice-cold gathering about his heart — his plunge into the museum, he opened the drawing-room door. Doors, doors, *doors,* always doors — and only emptiness within! With the musty smell of the fireless drawingroom — that room where he had held Nell to his heart on the morning he’d decided to go away — there smote upon his strung-up consciousness a sharp quick death-odour, the sense of the dying woman’s body from which Dr. Fell had torn him into this bitter life, twenty-six years ago!

Well! He must make the plunge. Hearing still the voices of Penny and the gardener from the rear of the house and the noise of chairs being pushed violently about— “They’re *both* drunk,” he thought — he opened the museum door and went in. The lamp was untrimmed and smoking. The place seemed foul with lamp-soot; but this room at any rate was not empty! In his accustomed wicker chair sat his father. But to the son’s surprise, for Sam had never known him do such a thing before, Mat Dekker had pulled his chair close up to the fire; and he was in the act, apparently, of making the brightest blaze he could; for his big hands were fumbling at the grate, and the flames were rising high from the wood he had been piling on, and it looked as if, now that his great solar enemy had done his worst to him, he were making a lonely, sullen, Promethean gesture in defiance of all these cruel gods.

Sam closed the door behind him. For the first time in his life he did *not* give even a glance at the aquarium. “What is it, Father? Where is she? What has happened?” But even while he was asking these questions his heart knew perfectly well; for he remembered what Angela had told him and he recalled that letter with the foreign stamp.

Mat Dekker raised his head from the flames which were throwing all the indents and wrinkles and corrugations of his ruddy face into startling prominence. He spoke no word however. All he did was to make a gesture with his hand towards the table.

Sam went to the table and turned down the smoking lamp. There, between the lamp and the aquarium, lay a folded scrap of paper, with “For Sam” written on it in pencil. He read it, standing by the lamp, while his father went on selecting the most inflammable bits of wood from the wood-box, at each increase in the heat of the blaze giving his chair a jerk still nearer. The pencilled scrawl was of some length, but it was evidently traced in a great hurry. Nell's hand, however, was so schoolgirlish that Sam had no difficulty in making out the words:

Sam, my darling Sam, I shall always love you best of all. Whatever happens to me, whatever anyone says or does, you'll always be my one *Great Love.* But he came and made me go back with him. She's been gone a long time — gone to Russia, he says. He doesn't like her any more. Will and I spoke freely of everything before I would let him take me away. He says he always knew the child was yours, but he says he loves it for my sake and always will. This is true, Sam; and I think baby loves *him* more than either his father or mother! Will has no anger against *you* and I've forgiven him about *her.* Oh, Sam, never, never, never will I forget you. Later (she had crossed out the word "later" and written "soon") we must see each other again. We've got used to seeing each other in your way, haven't we? But Will was *so unhappy*, Sam. He said he'd go to Africa if I didn't come back. I was sad and your father was making himself miserable about us; so I *know* it's the best thing. You'll come back now, Sam, won't you, *now that I'm gone*, and live with him again? My arms are tight round my Sam's neck and always will be.

Your Nell.

P.S. I hadn't time to tidy up my room. Oh, Sam I can't help it. But I love you, I love you!

He folded the letter up and stood motionless for a while, staring at the aquarium, but seeing nothing except Nell's face. Then he moved across to his father and laid his hand on his shoulder.

The older man turned round fiercely upon him, and Sam never forgot the gleam of anger — blind, bewildered, tragic anger — in his deep-set grey eyes. "Go!" he cried hoarsely. "Get out of here! Go back to your clay-hauling. When I want your pity, I'll send for you!" It was clear that the man’s whole mind was completely obsessed at present by his own frustrated passion. His emotions had smouldered and smouldered till they had become like a lump of darkly burning peat, self-scorched, self-fed, self-consumed.

Sam sighed heavily and went to the door. He still held Nell’s letter tightly crumpled up in his hand. “Don’t set the chimney on fire, Father!” he called back as he went out. He walked down the long dark passage and went into the kitchen. Here there were many signs of some recent riotous scene but the two old cronies were at peace again, facing each other by the stove, each with a bowl of the famous “gorlas” on their knees. They were too fuddled to rise from their chairs at Sam’s entrance.

“Why, Penny,” he said, “I thought you never drank with Mr. Weatherwax.”

“Her baint drinking wi’ I. Her be hearing I zing me zongs,” and the enormous countenance of the gardener, radiant with tipsy contentment, burst into his favourite ditty:

“The Miller, the Maister, the Devil and I
Had a heifer, had a filly, had a Ding-Dong,
But now in a grassy green glade she do lie.
Pass along, boys! Pass along!”

But Penny Pitches looked dreamily from one to the other. “Best for ‘un to zing,” she muttered brokenly. “Let ‘un zing, Master Sam, let us all zing and ding! I’d ‘a never drunk wi’ he if thik bare-faced baggage hadn’t called I names to me veäce when I gave she a piece o’ me mind. Yes, you may work your chin at me as much as thee likes, me lad! Her’ve gone back where her hasn’t to sleep single no more. They baggages be all the seame! Master Zoyland had only to ring bell and call ‘Nell,’ and up she picks her baby, and pop goes the weasel! I did me best for to hold she for ‘ee, Mr.

Sam; but her only called I names, and Master Zoyland curst I for a wold bitch."

Seeing that there was nothing better than this to be got tonight out of his foster-mother; and too sick at the heart to be able to endure another stave of "Ding-Dong," Sam wearily went on his way. Slowly, very slowly, as he returned through the crowded Sunday-night streets to Manor House Road, past the calm, familiar tower of St. John's, the influence of his Vision came back a little; and he had regained enough acquiescence in the decree of destiny by the time he reached his top floor, to receive a certain homely comfort from the wild extravagant pleasure with which the black spaniel, emerging from beneath his bed, leaped up to lick his hands.

His conscious mind was sad, even to the verge of a sort of inert despair, from this loss of Nell at the very moment when he was ready to live with her; but, below his conscious mind, stirring still in the depths of his being, was the feeling: "I can endure whatever fate can do to me, for I have seen the Grail!"

THE IRON BAR

It was now the end of February. The newspapers all over England had contained startling headlines for the last week about the Glastonbury commune, most of them calling upon the government to put a stop — by some drastic action — to this scandalous interference with the rights of private property. Nothing, however, was done except what was done by Philip Crow to protect the building of his new cement road leading down from Wookey Hole and his new steel bridge over the Brue on the south side of Lake Village Field; and Philip's action was confined to the introduction of police protection.

There had been so many disputes that year all over the country between town councils and local land-owners that it was difficult for Philip to make the authorities realise that this sudden transforming of Glastonbury into one single co-operative polity was anything more than what the chief of the Taunton police called "another of them sky-larking council tricks."

The government probably would have interfered all the same — for unemployment in all the big neighbouring towns, such as Bristol and Cardiff, was acute just then, and there was a dangerous restlessness throughout the country — if it had not been that the really important fortress of private property, namely the Glastonbury bank, remained untouched by this socialistic experiment.

On the twenty-third of February Mr. Evans came down to his shop in the High Street, in exceptional good spirits. The day was one of unusually delicate atmospheric effects. Grey upon grey abounded, with occasional fragments of what looked almost like mother-of-pearl as the ditch-mists were blown here and there over walled courts and mossy lawns while the sun struggled with the clouds.

"I have got an exciting bit of news for you when you come back, Owen," Cordelia had said to him at the door of their little house as he set off, "but I'll keep it for tea! Only be sure and don't be later than five, will you?"

"No, no, I'll be back by five, *si fractus inlabatur orbis*! I'll be back, Cordy, I swear it," he had replied.

As he hurried down the long, sloping road, flanked by workmen's houses, the black tails of his tight-waisted overcoat flapping like the feathers of an excited jackdaw heading against the wind, he wondered to himself what Cordy's news was. "Something to do with her father," he thought to himself. "Perhaps he's found he's richer than he supposed, after counting up his expenses." When he got to the town he met Finn Toller slouching into Dickery Cantle's tavern. Several encounters of late had Mr. Evans had with Codfin since a certain momentous meeting, a few days after the sheepfold incident, when he had actually challenged the man about his singular encounter with Mad Bet.

Codfin from the start had detected with that extraordinary clairvoyance which imbeciles share with children, that Mr. Evans had a morbid interest in physical violence; not even excluding murder. He felt too that he was absolutely free from any danger that the "curiosity man" — as he called him to his colleagues — would ever betray him to the authorities. "He be a funny one, his wone self," he would say to his friends in the tap-room at Cantle's where all the poorest and shabbiest of Glastonbury's derelicts were wont to gather.

"I … be … going … to do it … tonight … Mister," Codfin whispered to him now, with his hand on the tavern door-handle. The blinds of the place were down. By the law of England it was closed. By the connivance of the

Mayor of Glastonbury people could enter and be served all the morning from the best cellar in Wessex.

"I can't hear you, man. I'm deaf this morning, deaf as an iron bar," said Mr. Evans, giving him a look like that of a malevolent executioner. "If you do anything — anything *really,* you know, I'll come and stop it! You understand *that* I suppose? I'll come, wherever you are, for I can always find you, *and put a stop to it*."

He spoke in a threatening tone and laid his hand with a vicious grip upon Finn Toller's left arm just above the elbow. Codfin, whose right hand was still on the handle of the tap-room, showed not the slightest sign of nervousness.

"Tonight will be the time, Mister, then," he said slowly, "for thee to come and put a stop to it; and I'll be here all morning, 'sknow, if thee wants to come and hear *where* thee'd best come to stop it; and maybe hear too *when* thee'd best come to stop it. There's nothink like being in the know, pard; for then a fellow can please his own self. If so be as thee *does* drop in ere the momin's over, maybe thee'll have a sip of beer wi' I, to christen this pretty day, 'sknow? afore thee comes up hill to *see* what must be stopped."

The man's straw-coloured beard wagged as he spoke and his pale eyes swam with an unholy amusement. Every word he uttered seemed to carry a double meaning, seemed loaded with hints that his leering eyes completed and confirmed. His weak subhuman intelligence seemed to wriggle into the interstices of Mr. Evans' wickedest and secretest thoughts and snuggle and nuzzle and nestle there, as if Mr. Evans' thoughts were the nipples of the many-breasted Diana of the Ephesians.

This encounter between the two men was indeed the culmination of several furtive meetings, in all of which there had been, below the surface of what audibly passed between them, a wordless conspiracy of understanding, mounting higher and higher; just as if their under-consciousness — the worm-snakes within them — had learned the art of an obscene intertwining. Codfin had quickly discovered that his own homicidal instinct, in which the mental image of the iron bar played so lively a part, was responded to by something darker and far more evil, as it was far less simple, in Mr. Evans' nature.

Once he had touched the fringe of this dark knowledge, the tramp was led on — for all his imbecility — to play most subtly upon this obscure chord, recognising that the accident of the sheepfold had helped him to acquire a definite power over this queer "curiosity gent" who took such an interest in talking to him. A potential murderer, going about among supposedly normal people, acts as a perambulating magnet, drawing to himself a cloud of curious tokens; such an one's recklessness in regard to the upshot — the police, the jail, the judge, the gibbet — endows him with the same sort of power over less desperate minds that an Alpine guide, immune to dizziness, acquires over the would-be summit climbers whose faltering steps he supports with his rope.

Codfin had already tasted — in his crafty imbecile manner — this sharp, delicious arctic breath of unexpected power, in his talk with Red Robinson in Mrs. Chinnock's parlour. Robinson, however, had escaped him completely; thereby indicating that emotional 'ate as an urge to crime, cannot compete with the worm-snake of the sexual nerve.

"Well! I've got to get on now," said Mr. Evans. "Good-day to 'ee, Toller! We mustn't carry our joking too far."

"Joking?" thought the tramp as he went in. "That's just the way you *would* talk, my fine gent!" He sighed heavily as he shambled up to the bar counter behind which young Elphin was standing. "If you'd a-heard Mad

Bet tell I last night what she'd do to I, if I didn't kill her beau quick, you wouldna' talk about joking!"

As soon as Mr. Evans turned the corner by the Cattle Market, he saw before him, about three hundred yards away, the familiar figure of Miss Elizabeth Crow, seated on a wooden bench just outside a seldom-used cattlepen.

Over the empty enclosures behind her, where the animals formerly were tethered, over the wooden posts and the asphalt paving, over bits of stray nondescript paper blown in there between the iron railings of the bench where she was sitting, the flickering misty sunlight fell with the same caressing benediction as it would have carried had it fallen upon the dancing waves of Weymouth Bay or upon the mossy stones of Mark Court.

Miss Crow was holding a closed umbrella in her hand, with the ferrule of which she was scrawling vague meaningless marks in the trodden mud at her feet. She was pondering upon an interview she had had that morning, as soon as his clinic opened, with Dr. Fell, and wondering why it was that doctors never come right out with what they know of their patient's case. "Why didn't he say in plain words," she thought, " 'your heart is dangerously affected? Those symptoms you have are an indelible sign that you might go off at any moment. The best thing you can do will be to go to bed as soon as you get home and stay there.' " She had indeed known herself for the last three months that her heart was getting worse and this morning's interview, though Fell had been so cautious, was the convincing blow. She had read the good man's conclusions, shrewd old woman as she was, like a book; and if he had said to her, "You've only three weeks more to live," she could not have received her sentence more definitely than she did from his evasive humming and hawing.

The chief effect upon Elizabeth's mind was to render her enjoyment of the air and the wind of this day more vivid and intense than she could have believed possible. It was as if this verdict condemning her to death had taken away a thin screen between herself and life.

There was a little leafless poplar tree not far from her bench with the bark rubbed off its northern side, the side facing the cattlepens and some dried dogs' excrement fouling its roots on the side facing the street. In the bare branches of this tree chattered and wrangled half a dozen sparrows and upon its trunk, out of reach of cattle or dogs, some tall wastrel had cut with a knife the initials of himself and his girl.

The way the broken misty light fell upon this little tree gave it that special quality of magic that familiar objects often receive, whether there is any human eye to see it or not, under certain effects of the atmosphere.

Elizabeth Crow's feelings were ebbing and flowing just then between a faint, cold, shuddering recoil from the shock of death — it was when she felt this recoil that she made those meaningless marks in the mud with her umbrella — and an intense, lingering, melting, weeping delight in the smallest familiar earth-objects. It was the sight of this poplar tree with its rubbed and disfigured bark and with certain enchanting and almost mystical shadows on some of its branches, as they wavered in the light breeze, which transported her then and thrilled her through and through with a tearful rapture at being still alive.

Mr. Evans took only about two minutes to reach her from the moment when he first came round the corner; but during those two minutes Miss Crow had experienced the eternal alternations, the great antipodal feelings of human experience, the shudder of death and "the pleasure which there is in life itself!" And she was a woman to miss little, though she kept her own counsel of these experiences!

She thought to herself: “There’s that man Evans coming! I’ll get him to send me that St. Augustine Sam talked about; and I’ll give it to Mat. I can afford that now!” How fast the mind moves from margin to margin of these opposite feelings! Mr. Evans was rapidly coming to a point within hearing; and if she wanted to speak to him about St. Augustine she would have to stop him; and yet behind Mr. Evans’ approaching figure and behind the image of that expensive book, and even behind the image of Mat Dekker’s pleasure in the book, that cold, shuddering recoil still possessed her, and that magical light flickering on the poplar tree still possessed her.

The invisible watchers — those scientific collectors of interesting human experiences in this ancient town — communicated to one another the conclusion that certain essences and revelations are caught and appropriated by an old maiden lady, like Miss Crow, which are never touched by turbulent, tormented lives like those of Mr. Evans and Codfin.

How could Mr. Evans, now lifting his hat to greet this dignified figure of voluminous skirts and flounced bosom, become a medium for these calm platonic essences? What could Codfin, who was risking the hangman’s rope for the sake of the mania of a madwoman, know of the deep natural shrinking of a normal heart in the presence of death, or of its rapturous awareness of the enchantment of what it is leaving?

Miss Crow had arranged to meet Lady Rachel and Athling for lunch at the Pilgrims’ that day. She was a little nervous in her heart of hearts about this encounter, because in her growing disapproval — shared it may well be imagined by the girl’s father — of the intimacy in which the lovers now seemed to be living, she had of late avoided seeing Ned Athling. Rachel still officially lived with her; but there had been whole nights when the girl had remained working, so she declared, in the offices of the *Wayfarer*; and gossip had already begun to speak on the pro longed visits she paid to the bachelor attic which the young editor had furnished for himself above these offices.

Lord P. had had recently several grave and diplomatic talks with Miss Crow as to what measures they could take to stop the outbreak of a serious scandal; but neither she nor he had yet dared to risk any drastic ultimatum to the wilful girl for fear of precipitating the very disaster they dreaded.

“I shan’t stay long after lunch,” Miss Crow thought, as she responded to the salute of Mr. Evans, “and I won’t go to their printing-place with them today. I’ll get them to leave me free for the afternoon; and I’ll go to Wirral Hill, if I’m not too exhausted, and sit on that seat where Mat and I used to sit thirty years ago.”

She beckoned now to Mr. Evans and he came up to where she was and stood in front of her. There was something about Miss Crow — her Devereux mother perhaps — that commanded more respect from the Glastonbury tradesmen than any other person in the town.

Mr. Evans, though certainly not a tradesman, was not insensible to this quality, and he stood awkwardly now, but quite deferentially, waiting what she had to say.

“You’ve got rather an expensive edition of St. Augustine among your books, haven’t you, Mr. Evans?” she said quietly.

“Yes, Mam,” admitted Number Two’s partner, “the best on the market.”

It is an old and bitter experience of the human race that when once a gulf-stream of a particular evil has got started, it is always being whipped forward by some new little breeze, or enlarged by some new little stream emptying itself into it. A magnetic power, it seems, in such a gulf-stream of evil, attracts these casual and accidental encouragements.

Why, of all things, should Mr. Evans have been reminded of their collection of books at that juncture, and why, of all their books, of the particular one that was neighbour to “The Unpardonable Sin”?

“I think, if your partner has not sold it yet,” said Miss Crow, “I’d like to have that book.”

“I’ll put it aside for you, Mam,” murmured Mr. Evans. “It *is* expensive, I’m afraid, but if—”

“I’ll be extravagant for once,” cried the lady with a smile.

“So I think you can send it today if you’ve got anyone to send. You know my number in Benedict Street?”

Mr. Evans bowed. Everyone knew Miss Crow’s number. Hadn’t it been the chief topic of the town when she left her nephew’s establishment and went to live in a workman’s cottage?

“I hope Mrs. Evans is well?” enquired the lady.

This simple question caused the brain of the hook-nosed man, bending towards her, to whirl up in an angry revolt against the smoothed-out pigeonhole of public propriety in which a married tradesman lived. It rose to the tip of his tongue, in his nervous state, to ask this quiet embodiment of conventional dignity some outrageous question in return; such as “How does your Tossie feel, married to Mr. Barter?” or “How will you manage about the way Lady Rachel is carrying on with young Athling?”

“*Very* well, Mam, thank you,” he replied. And then he even took upon himself to add, “We’ve got a house that’s quite easy for her to look after.”

Miss Crow smiled. “I’m glad to hear *that.* It’s a mistake for young married women to be overworked.” She made a little movement then with the handle of her umbrella to signify that she had no further need for Mr. Evans’ society.

The Welshman straightened his back, bowed to her in a manner that even Mrs. Geard could not have felt disgraced the House of Rhys, and went off, settling his hat upon his head as he went in little angry jerks and vowing that he would not remove it again till he reached his destination.

He was hardly gone — for Miss Crow had selected a very public place for her matutinal rest — than Comrade Trent, as the populace in their mocking rustic humour always called him, came softly and airily by. Miss Elizabeth only just knew Paul Trent "to speak to," as they say, and she was cordially prejudiced against the man. She had long ago put down, in her heart, this whole wretched business of the new régime to this alien from the Scilly Isles.

It was clearly he who had devised the scheme of buying the leases and the ground-rents from the lord of the manor and doling out, in this pauperising manner, all that the visitors brought in among the town's poor. Neither honest Dave, nor that hotheaded agitator Robinson, and certainly not Mr. Geard with his fancies, would have had the wit to plot such a daring move.

Miss Elizabeth had scant admiration for her nephew Philip, but she felt sorry for him and even sympathetic with him, when she beheld this affected, sly, young lawyer prancing about the town as if he were the master of all. In the relations between human beings it is always natural to attribute the grossest selfish motives to the people we instinctively dislike.

Of the real Paul Trent, who inherited from his mother an idealism passionate as that of the poet Shelley, and who would have perished willingly on a barricade if he could have started an anarchistic revolution, Miss Crow knew absolutely nothing.

"Good morning, Miss Crow," said Paul Trent, "enjoying this beautiful weather?"

"Au contraire, Mr. Trent, I'm doing my accounts! Before plunging into Wollop's, you know, a woman has to think out what she can afford without

ruining herself. I always slip off, in the middle of my shopping day, to do a little solitary thinking."

This allusion to Wollop's was a covert feminine taunt at this arrogant young man; for it was well known in the town that Mr. Wollop owned his shop and the ground it stood on in fee simple. Wollop's, like the Glastonbury bank, remained an obstinate island of capitalism in a socialistic lake.

"What a treasure your Mr. Wollop is!" murmured Paul Trent; and taking advantage of this faint crack in the ice — like a cat rubbing itself against the knees of someone who hates cats — he proceeded to slip down into the seat at her side. "How do *you* like our new Glastonbury constitution?" he asked her in an airy tone.

"I don't meddle with politics, Sir," she replied; and the way she moved away from him as she spoke seemed to add: "And I can't abide politicians!"

"I agree with you entirely," he said; and then, to Miss Crow's horror, he pulled up one of his soft neatly socked legs upon the seat between them and slipped his arm along the back of the bench.

"I'll get up the minute my heart stops thumping," the lady thought. "What *does* this objectionable young man want with me?"

"A woman like you, Miss Crow," he went on, with what she thought was pure impertinence, "can understand better what I am doing in Glastonbury than the most intelligent man could."

Miss Crow tapped the ground with her umbrella. Then she produced a clicking noise between her tongue and her teeth; and having expressed with these physical movements her disapproval of Paul Trent, she made her mock-modest retort to his ambiguous compliment by uttering the syllables "Tut-tut-tut!" But her insidious invader only pulled his rounded feminine knee and his neatly trousered calf a little further along the seat of the bench and slid his delicately moulded hand an inch nearer along its back, till the scrupulously clean nail of his little finger was within the length of a sparrow's beak of Miss Crow's jacket collar. These outward gestures, which gave his companion a tickling sensation down her spine, were methods of approach inherited from his father, a Cornishman who had the suavity of some old Phoenician trader; but below all this there stirred in Paul Trent an intense idealistic longing, inherited from his mother, to convert Miss Crow to his revolutionary ideas.

"I'm very serious, lady," he said. "You mustn't get cross with me. There really aren't so many women one can talk to in Glastonbury. Most of my thoughts are entirely wasted on these people."

"This nice, unusual day seems to make you moralise, Mr. Trent, just as it makes me sit in the sun and wonder about my bills."

"What I've found out is," he went on eagerly, quite oblivious of this snub, "that none of these people, that you quite properly call politicians, Miss Crow, know what liberty is. The capitalists take liberty away from us in the name of liberty, which, under *them*, means liberty to work like a slave, or, to starve. But your relative Mr. Spear isn't much better! He takes liberty away from the individual in the name of the community. So there you are, you see! I am probably the only *man* in Glastonbury who fights for real liberty — which means, of course, a voluntary association of free spirits to enjoy the ideal life — but women understand these things much better. It was my mother who—"

Miss Crow looked at him with surprise. There had stolen into his affectedly genteel intonation a vibration of such authentic emotion that it startled her. She didn't repeat that clicking of her tongue. She allowed her umbrella to lie still, its handle between her knees. She forgot the sinister palpitations of her heart.

"Your mother who?"

"Who taught me what liberty really meant. Who made me an anarchist, lady!"

"But you don't mean to say—"

"Stop, Miss Crow! I know What's coming! You're going to talk about throwing bombs and killing innocent people. No, no. My mother didn't teach me how to throw bombs. What she taught me was — what *every* woman knows in her heart! — that all these man-made institutions only get in the way of real life and have nothing to do with it. It's the policeman in our minds, Miss Crow, that stops us all from being ourselves and letting other people be themselves."

He stopped to take breath and found that he was gesticulating furiously with his free hand right in front of Miss Crow's face, and that Miss Crow had shut her eyes tight, as if she were in the process of being shampooed, and that in his eagerness he actually *had* emitted a small globule of white sputum which now adhered to the black frill of Miss Crow's maternal but maidenly bosom.

Around this anarchistic spittle, a minute yellowish fly, attracted by the smell of humanity and dreaming perhaps that one of the old-fashioned Glastonbury markets was about to commence, hovered with pulsing and heaving desire.

Paul Trent drew out his elegant pocket-handkerchief from his breast-pocket, and therewith wiped his forehead. Then he hesitated for a minute. He would dearly have liked to have wiped away that little bubble from his too voluble mouth which still adhered in annoying prominence to the lady's bosom, but he simply had not the courage to attempt such a deed. It is easier to defy society than to outrage a small propriety; and the man from what Malory calls the country of the Surluse, and what Sir John Rhys calls the

Sorlingues, or Les Isles Lointaines, replaced his dainty handkerchief in his breast-pocket and sank back in his place, with an inward sigh and an outward smile. “No good!” he thought to himself, and a wave of bitter futility swept over him.

During the last four or five weeks he had come to feel as hostile to Glastonbury as any one of the Crows had ever felt. He would have hated the town as much as Tom Barter did, if it had not been for this unique chance of giving an anarchical twist to the policies of the tiny commune. But he had encountered disillusionment after disillusionment.

Simple and direct as Dave Spear’s methods were compared with his, the young Communist defeated him every time their ideas clashed. The cause of this was obvious. Dave had a clear-cut set of adamantine principles, which he combined with a practical and even unscrupulous opportunism that was a perpetual surprise to everyone.

Thus when the dictators of this microscopic state came to loggerheads, it was always the Anarchist whose principles were vague and his practice unbending, who was forced to yield; while the Communist, whose principles were crystal-clear and his practice malleable and flexible, carried the point. Had Paul Trent been more sympathetic to the Mayor’s mysticism he might have won Mr. Geard over to his view. Had he been more personal in his destructiveness, he might have propitiated the emotional Red and plotted with his help some catastrophic blow to Philip’s dye works, or tin mine, or bridge, or road, these wedges of capitalism in this co-operative community; but the truth was that Paul Trent, like the poet Shelley, was far too ideal in his instincts for his instincts to prevail; and in a world where liberty and independence and sweet reasonableness are forced to yield to fanaticism and dominating faith, his curious double nature, wherein his mother’s masculine soul concealed in his father’s effeminate body, divided his energy and confused his purpose, it was easier for him to outwit the Marquis of P. than to turn Glastonbury into a voluntary association of free philosophers. As he now jumped up from Miss Crow's side, made his courtly Carthaginian obeisance and cleared off, directing his steps towards the central offices of the commune, which were in the upper floors of the Abbot's Tribunal, he said to himself that his real difficulty was with the wayward and emotional nature of the Glastonbury natives themselves. "And it's the same," he thought "with Spear and old Geard; yes! and even with the double-dyed fool Robinson.

"Our little society can deal easily enough with these pilgrims and visitors. We can grow rich upon *them*; and we can make them obey our rules or keep them out by our requisitions. It's the natives who'll break this thing up, when it *is* broken up; and I don't give it more than a couple of years, at the best! Yes, it's the natives who'll ruin the whole-thing!"

Thus he pondered; and to the same tune and to the same moan had Avallach and Arthur, Alfred and Edmund, Dunstan and Edgar, Whiting and Monmouth, yes, and Mr. Recorder King! all pondered in their day and in their hour.

He paused for a moment at the gate of the Tribunal, just as Mary Crow had once done and gazed with a sad, disenchanted eye upon that beautiful late-gothic façade.

"Does it need a brute like Judge Jeffreys," he thought, "or does it need a saint like St. Joseph, or like this crazy Sam Dekker, to deal with these Glastonbury autochthones? Old Geard can handle them when he wants to; but he never seems to want to. God knows where that old charlatan's mind is carrying him now. Not to the building up of any possible community that *I* can visualise!"

His hand was upon the handle of the Tribunal's main entrance when two little girls — one of them carrying a sturdy child in her arms — passed close by him.

"Bert can say 'Glastonbury be a commune,' Bert can; just like teacher tells we to," said the little girl who was carrying the child.

"C … O … M … *com* — U … N … E … *oon* … commoon!" murmured Bert proudly, from the arms of a still prouder Sis.

But Morgan Nelly, as usual, dashed this simple glory into a thousand melancholy pieces, to be carried away on an obscure wind. "Glaston baint no such thing," she cried in her shrill, mocking elf-voice. "Glaston be a person, like I be, and persons can't be spelt by no teacher, nor taught by no teacher. 'Twere Mad Bet who told I that Glaston were a person and I arst Holy Sam if such 'un were, and 'a said, 'Sure-*lie*, girlie, sure-*lie.* Glaston be the 'Ooman of Sorrows what holds Christ in lap!' " The children passed on, out of the gloomy triumvir's hearing; but, though anything save superstitious, the young lawyer from Les Isles Lointaines found it hard not to regard Morgan Nelly's curious remark as a significant omen. He gazed down the street at the massive, pinnacled tower of St. John's. It was certainly a peculiar day for lights and shadows! A soft, elusive, fluctuating radiance that seemed *contained* within a delicate sub-aqueous vapour, at once faintly rose-tinged and faintly greenish, hovered like the submerged lamp of a drowned ship, over the roofs and masonry of the ancient town.

Glastonbury a person? Well, perhaps, after all, that *was* the solution of their troubles! These old, obstinate, irrational indigenes of the place understood this wayward and mysterious Personality better than any philosophical triumvirate could do, and had expressed their feeling through the mouth of this wildeyed child!

But if this was the solution, was not he, the man from Malory's Surluse, nearer to the secret than the rest? Or was it, after all, a mistake to make even the wilfulness and the irrationality of Persons into a principle and a doctrine? Was old Geard, in the long run, the one who was the wisest of them all; he for whom all these exciting events were only half-real, the dreams of an absent-minded Wayfarer, "drunk upon the milk" of an unseen Paradise?

The young Anarchist found it difficult to break up this indefinable spell into which Morgan Nelly's casual words had flung him.

He knew so well the trim, prim, fussily orderly look of the communal offices above his head where the depersonalised mind of his colleague Dave dominated the very typing machines and the very postage stamps; making everything seem like those scissored patterns in paper, from which patient seamstresses cut their garments! Why was it that the *real reality* of life always struck a person sideways and incidentally, and seemed just the very thing that no one allowed for?

What Paul Trent felt just then was a dim suspicion that if everybody in Glastonbury — these difficult natives as well as these easy visitors — were only to stop doing anything at all, just stop and listen, just stop and grow porous, something far more important than a "Voluntary Association of Free Spirits" would reveal itself!

A feeling stole over him as if all the way down its long history Glastonbury, the Feminine Person, like Mary at the feet of the Master, had been waiting for the fuss to cease, for the voices to subside, for the dust to sink down.

As when a boy catches upon the face of a girl, as when a man catches upon the face of a woman, that unique feminine look which forever is waiting, watching, listening, dreaming, in a trance of mindless passivity for something that never quite comes, so Paul Trent felt himself now to be watching the Glastonbury atmosphere, on this day of such strange lights and shadows.

Gould it be possible that the secret of ecstatic human happiness only arrived, when all outward machinery of life was suspended, all practical activity held in abeyance? Man must live, of course, and children must be born of women; but was there not something else, something more important than any conceivable organisation for these great necessary ends?

A doubt came into Paul Trent's mind, different from any he had ever felt, as to whether his inmost ideal — this thing that corresponded to the word liberty — was enough to live by. Wasn't it only the gap, the space, the vacuum, the hollow and empty no-man's land, into which the fleeting nameless essence could flow and abide? He felt as if he were on the edge of some thrilling secret, as this thought, this doubt, touched him with its breath. It was as if all the moments of dark, cool, lovely, quiet emptiness that had come to the generations of men living in Glastonbury, had incarnated themselves in this Feminine Emanation of the place, which now seemed brushing him with its overshadowing wings.

Comrade Spear wanted to "liquidate" the Grail Quest on behalf of Communism, Red Robinson wanted to destroy it because of the treacheries and oppressions it had condoned. He himself had wanted to shake it off, as a morbid, mediaeval superstition, hurtful to free spirits, like a clammy miasma! And all this while Old Geard was working his miracles by its aid; but casually, carelessly, almost indifferently; as if he had discovered that the whole Grail Quest were a mere by-product of some vast planetary reservoir of an unknown force.

Oh, dear! His thoughts had become too analytical, too concrete; and his good moment was gone. With a shrug of his shoulders he turned the handle, entered the Tribunal, and ran upstairs to the orderly rooms from which Glastonbury was now ruled.

When Mr. Evans arrived at his shop after his interview with Miss Crow by the railings of the Cattle Market he found his partner, Mr. Jones, extremely excited by the quantity of foreigners there were that day in the town, and bent upon devoting the whole day to a lively concentration upon their business.

“I know better than thee can know what these Continentals require, seeing as I’ve lived in Glaston afore thee was born,” persisted the old man, “and the best thing thee can do is to bring up a pile of they books out of basement and put ’em in windy. Them Germans and Rooshians be more for books than they be for bricky-brack.”

Mr. Evans struggled out of his tight overcoat, making portentous grimaces as he pulled at its sleeves, hung it up on a nail at the back of the shop and rubbing his face with both his hands, prepared to do what his partner bade him. He had taken good care since his marriage to avoid that descent into his Avernus but the human mind is so constructed that when he received this point-blank push from his business confederate, a hundred reasons sprang up like a hundred sly lawyers, each of them full of subtle arguments why he should do what the old man bade him to do. This was the third little breeze that had helped forward that day his gulf-stream of evil!

His high spirits that morning had been largely due to the fact that he had just arrived in his Life of Merlin, at the beginning of the final scene where the Magician passes into that state of Being hinted at in the mysterious word Esplumeoir.

Mr. Evans had been writing, of late, every evening in their small sitting-room in the Edmund’s Hill district above Bove Town. He would sit on a little chair that creaked under his bony figure in front of a flimsy table, covered with publications of various antiquarian and folklore societies, and as he stared at a cheap coloured print in a variegated frame, of a river and a boat and a woman reading — a print that took the heart out of all rivers and all boats and all women! — he would give himself up to the exquisite and sweet pain of weighing every word he was writing, changing it, re-setting it, substituting another, replacing the first, till the particular sort of rhythm he aimed at had at last been caught.

A boat … a river … a woman reading … this incredibly feeble production, in which the blotchy frame and the sentimental picture seemed to melt into each other till they became a weak blur of meaningless twists and curves, had grown to be so dear, so sweet, so familiar to Mr. Evans, whose aesthetic taste was nil, that it not only reminded him of a picture in his parents' farm but it also associated itself with the word Esplumeoir. It was under the spell of this entirely worthless, but to him almost sacred object that Mr. Evans was now considering and weighing in his mind two simple sentences: "And so in the wet vapour that hung in woeful water-drops upon his beard he bowed himself down and stooped right low over the rain-soaked earth where yesterday had been the drawbridge of Caer Sidi. The Dolores Blow had fallen: the Spear of Longinus had done its work; where was he now to hide his forehead and cover his eyelids, who knew too well the causes of all these happenings; their echoes, their ripples, their waxing and waning moons?"

Pleased with the way these paragraphs sounded in his mind and finding in his broodings over the word Esplumeoir a strange vibration of peace, Mr. Evans had emerged from his threshold that morning, — but now all was different. As he traversed that little dark staircase from shop to cellar and from cellar to shop, carrying many enormous armfuls of books, he found his mood of dreamy self-satisfaction changed into something else. Number

Two was scrupulously honest in his handling of their diurnal gains, which, with the increase of foreign visitors, began to grow very considerably. He kept two large collecting-boxes, one of them with the letters "G.C." — Glastonbury Commune — written in pencil on it, and he divided all their increment into two portions and then sub-divided their own share.

During the time that Mr. Evans was bringing up these books, the shop was crowded with people; and old Jones had all he could do to deal with the pushing and jostling that was taking place.

But he was right about the books. Not a German, not a Russian entered, but he began turning over the pages of these books; while not a Frenchman came in, but he wanted to see all the china ornaments that the establishment boasted.

This learned interest in their stock of books — most of which were old parchment folios — kept Mr. Evans at his job; but his mood had completely changed. And in a most subtle way it had changed; for while his broodings were still upon his mystical interpretation of the word Esplumeoir there slipped into his thoughts certain episodes in the earlier life of his magician which led insensibly to his subterranean temptation.

He recalled, for instance, that occasion when Merlin came rushing down in a howling storm from the forest hills driving before him a herd of stags, himself riding upon the back of the hindmost, and rending off one of its great horns, flung this wild weapon at the daring chieftain who was stealing the magician's wife.

The dark and bloody violence of this scene disturbed the current of Mr. Evans' mind. Something in the sinister action of tearing out that branched horn by its roots reminded him of a deadly, a most perilous passage in "The Unpardonable Sin." The evil tide was indeed full upon him now. With trembling knees he put down his candle — for little daylight could enter that cellar — and snatching the book from its place by St. Augustine, he began feverishly turning its pages till he found that abominable and terrible passage.

His hands shook so much and his knees knocked together so violently, as he gloated over this dreadful scene, that anyone beholding him would have supposed him to be the victim of St. Vitus' dance. The man's bones seemed to melt within him as he read on and on now, passing from this passage to another and from that to another, till all sense of place or time was completely lost. The long winter months in which he had lived so happily with Cordelia fell away from him like a cinematograph picture passing across an artificial screen.

Nothing in the world seemed to matter, nothing in the world seemed of the least importance, compared with the overpowering mania that re-possessed him now. It returned upon him with all the more irresistible power because of his long suppression of it. Had anyone been down there watching his face they would have seen that he was biting his lower lip so violently — sucking it indeed into his mouth as well as biting it — that his whole countenance was transfigured. His nostrils kept twitching, opening and shutting like those of a savage stallion, and his eyes burned with so insane a light that one could fancy that they would actually cause the paper upon which these atrocious things were written to smoulder and shrivel like leaves held into a consuming flame.

The man's absorption in his frenzied vice was so horribly complete that when the door at the top of the staircase opened and Number Two's voice called upon him to come up into the shop it was no more than if he had heard a moth beating against the wall. But a moment came — for even in the throes of a cerebral excitement driven to a pitch like this a human being grows aware of that calling horizon that we name the future, those beckoning fluctuating cross-roads, those bridges — Perilous, Pomparlès Bridge, Eel Bridge, Sword Bridge, Water Bridge, that make a person feel that wicked thoughts are not enough — a moment came when Mr. Evans resolved to *do* something. It was no vague thing that he resolved to do; for his imaginative projection was as concrete and palpable as the worst of these silhouettes of horror engraved in the holy excess of sadistic satisfaction, by Dante's rationalized dementia.

He now closed the leaves of the book, letting the page that had overpowered him fall down upon its neighbour as delicately as a person might cover up a wound with its own eroded skin.

He rose to his full height and possessed himself of the candle. His knees ceased to knock together, his pulses ceased their frantic tattoo, the beads of sweat on his forehead began to dry. It was the curious phase in the pitiful evolution of temptation when the insane desire sinks down and sinks in, and the practical resolution of what we are going to do hardens and crystallises in all the veins and fibres.

There is no longer now any localised sensual stir in the person's being. All is diffused, all is spread out through body, soul and spirit. The man does not only want to do this abominable thing with his wrought-up sex-nerve, he wants to do it with his whole nature. That sex-nerve is still at the bottom of it. But that nerve of imaginative evil, now so quietly coiled up — only its little radium-burning eye, of glacier-livid tint, crossed by flickering red levin, remaining alert, only its forked tongue quivering like a compass needle — has projected its dynamic energy through the whole organism, has converted the whole organism into its obedient slave, so that its *immediate* functioning can lie latent.

And the most dangerous aspect of this diffused energy, which now fills the man's whole nature, so that his intellect is inspired by it and his soul is inspired by it and his spirit is inspired by it, is its deadly cunning.

That little coiled-up nerve-snake, now suddenly grown so innocently quiescent that if Mr. Evans were to strip himself naked there would have been nothing indecent in the exposure, gathered the dynamic energy which it spread through his whole being directly from the First Cause.

In the nature of the First Cause there are two windows of manifestation corresponding most precisely to the eyes of such creatures as have no more than two eyes. From one of these slits into the Infinite pours forth good; from the other evil.

When Spinoza taught that the will of God was limited by the nature of God, he was not deducing such doctrine from his intimate experience but from his mathematical reason. Intimate experience of reality — whether it be the experience of the First Cause or of any one of its innumerable creatures — is always reporting “magic, mystery, and miracle” and, along with these, an unbounded faith in the power of the will to *change the nature of the organism.* The whole stream of what is called Evolution depends on this autocreativeness of living things. Nor is there any creature that does not share with the First Cause the power of being good or being evil at its own intrinsic will.

It is the created, not the creator, who so constantly produce good out of evil; and this they do of their absolute free-will. Certain created souls have indeed willed the good rather than the evil so habitually — and these souls are not confined to the human race — that they have rendered themselves impervious to the evil Eye of the First Cause and porous only to the Eye of infinite compassion. The Mr. Evans who now issued forth from Number Two’s basement and blew out his candle at the top of those narrow stairs was a Mr. Evans whose will, for that crisis in his life, was entirely evil and whose cunning craftiness in the achievement of his outrageous intention, was supernatural in its flexibility.

“I forget if I told you, Mr. Jones,” he said, pulling on his tight black overcoat with twenty times the ease with which he had pulled it off, for no overcoats, no fur-tipped jackets either, slip on so quickly as the ones that are destined for a wicked quest, “that I’ve got an appointment this morning with Father Paleologue?”

“Aye? What’s that? Do you mean you’re going, Sir?”

“Father Paleologue. You will remember him if you think a little! He brought a collection of icons to sell for his monastery. A Greek monk he is. Catholic monks are discouraged from coming here — their authorities know, by a secret tradition of scholastic warning, what the Twilight, ‘Yr Echwyd,’ really means, to which the Grail leads.”

Number Two stared at him. “Pardon me, Marm,” he murmured to the lady he was waiting upon.

“I’ve had very few o’ they High Cones in me shop,” he went on speaking quietly and earnestly to Mr. Evans. “Do ‘ee think there’ll be a big enough demand for such things as they, to make it worth our—”

But Mr. Evans was already taking down his bowler hat from the peg where it always rested.

“I’ll bring you back a couple in my pocket to show you, Mr. Jones, and I’m sure you’ll agree—”

The truth was that Number Two, although no bad judge of a portrait of John Locke, when he saw one, had never seen an icon and had not the faintest notion what such a thing looked like.

But Mr. Evans had opened the street door and was gone; while Old Jones, turning to his customer with an air of confiding all the eccentricities of his partner to her intelligent ear, said something about the study of High

Cones being one of those branches of his profession that he'd never aspired to. "Do *you* happen to have picked up a few on 'em, in your travels, Marm?"

While the lady stared at this curious purveyor of rarities, Number Two's partner was some distance down the street, walking very fast towards the Cattle Market. When he reached the entrance to Dickery Cantle's tavern, he opened the door marked "Tap" a little way and peeped in. The tap-room was full of beer drinkers and the air was thick with smoke.

Mrs. Cantle, a pale, worn-out woman, was serving at the bar, assisted by her son Elphin.

Mr. Evans opened the door a little further and remained hesitating.

The small place was so crowded, for it was a favourite resort among those of the Glastonbury unemployed who could lay hands on a penny or two, that neither Mrs. Cantle nor Elphin — nor indeed anyone in the room — noticed that hooked nose, and those gleaming eyes under the bowler hat, snuffing and peering in the entrance like the Devil at Auerbach's Cellar.

Backward and forward went the thin white arm of Mrs. Cantle above the counter; to and fro went the thin, frail figure of Elphin among the little tables in front of the wooden seats. It must have been a scene that with certain trifling differences in cut of costume and tone of voice went back to the time when Glastonbury was a mediaeval town of no small importance.

There was not a man here this morning among those drinking who had not come to *forget his troubles* and there was not a man among all these men who had not already realised that purpose in the thick smoke-filled air with its strong smell of beer and cheese and masculine sweat.

The present dictators of Glastonbury — that is to say, Dave Spear, Paul Trent and Red Robinson — would of a surety never have dared officially to interfere with the national regulations about the closing hours of public houses, but when once the local police-force, represented in this case by Bob Sheperd, had received a hint in favour of greater laxity from the mayor of the town, it became easy for the smaller taverns, like St. Michael's on Chilkwell Street, and Dickery's at the Cattle Market, to admit a group of habitual customers, while keeping their blinds down and their shutters closed. Such a group this morning then, at a time when the public bar at the Pilgrims' was authentically shut, was enjoying itself after the fashion of their ancestors and talking loudly about the new commune. No one took the least notice of the gaunt bowler-hatted individual hesitating in the doorway and searching the room with an eye of wild expectancy. Apparently he found what he wanted for he gave vent to a sudden sound between a laugh and a groan. His hesitation came at once to an end now. Closing the door very softly behind him he moved through the smoke and the noisy crowd, past the little tables and the wooden benches, till he reached the counter. Here he stood in complete silence till he caught the landlady's eye.

"Good morning, Mr. Heavings," said Mrs. Cantle in a faint voice. "Have 'ee come about what Dickery do owe Old Jones, for thik second-'and bed and they 'arf a dozen bedroom chairs?"

"Certainly not, Mam," muttered Mr. Evans. "I've come … I've come for … I've come to … have a drink and look round a bit."

"What are ye taking, Mr. Heavings? Straight Scotch, or a peg of Our Special?"

Since neither she nor her husband ever touched a drop of what they sold this latter alternative was understood by everyone in the room to refer to a brand of liqueur, more potent even than Mother Legge's Bridgwater punch, which had mellowed for generations in a great butt in the famous Cantle cellar.

The truth was that Our Special was a species of old sack that the years had converted into a liquid gold that was heady and heartening to a degree unparalleled save perhaps by the contents of one of the great historic casks at Bremen. Only the boldest visitors paid their half-a-crowns for a sip of this ancestral firewater; and a spot of colour came into the hollow cheeks of the thin lady when Mr. Evans, ignorant of the formality of this offer, murmured his preference for the select beverage.

“Us can’t afford to treat ‘ee to ‘un, Mr. Heavings. Thee dost know that, don’t ‘ee?”

As a reply to this the tall Welshman put his hand into his pocket and produced a big handful of loose silver. “Will that pay for a *double* glass, Mam?” he enquired.

She gave him one of those quick nervous looks that women of all classes are in the habit of giving when in the presence of some striking evidence of masculine extravagance. “ ’Twould pay for a three times over,” she said.

“Give me just that, please, Mrs. Gantle — a ‘three times over.’”

“I baint responsible, Mr. Heavings, if a three times of Our Special sends thee’s stumick into thee’s head!”

The smile, if it could be called a smile, with which the unfortunate man replied to this warning, awed the woman into obedience. “ ‘Twill cost ‘ee the best of ten shillingses,” she said solemnly as she turned to give the order to Elphin. Elphin had been gazing in mute wonder for some while at this unusual customer.

“ ‘Twill be a full tumbler, Mother,” he whispered. “Will Dad be angry?”

“Do as I’m telling ‘ee, Elph! The gentleman knows what it be. ’Tisn’t for we to say naught if he pours a sovereign’s worth down’s throat!”

While Elphin was away on this mission and his mother was once more serving her more normal customers with beer, Mr. Evans moved slowly to a wooden bench at the back of the room where the person was seated for whose presence in that place he had been hoping against hope. This person was none other than Finn Toller. The sandy-haired Codfin was sitting alone with an empty flagon in front of him, gazing vacantly into the smoke-filled atmosphere. Watery as usual were his staring blue eyes within their red circles, and the pale hairs of his eyelashes showed round those rims like the white bristles of a young pig; while his underlip hung down like the lobe of a monstrous purple snapdragon.

"A grey day, Codfin!" remarked Mr. Evans.

"So it be, Mister, I were just thinking there might be rain afore night; but I hopes not. I've a deal to do today one way and the other."

"Do you feel when you have anything to do, Codfin, that everything's unreal, the people and everything, till you've got it done?"

The man gave him a sudden quick look; for the tone of his voice was queer.

"Some people be afraid to sit by I, Mister, but you baint skeered o' little old Coddie, be 'ee?"

"Perhaps you've given them reason to be afraid of you." Again the queer tone! Mr. Toller experienced the uncomfortable sensation that he got sometimes when he woke up at two o'clock in the night. "Red Robinson be death-sick with fear when he do see I coming. Tother day 'a turned clean round and showed 'is bleedin' arse sooner than for we to meet."

"How do you account for his doing that, Codfin?" said Mr. Evans with burning eyes.

"Dunno. I've done nothink to 'un!"

"Oh, yes, you have, Codfin — Oh, yes, you have. As I was telling you in this place before, you and I are linked together in the movements of the stars and when you come to do what you want to do I'll do what *I* want to do!"

Toller's gaze drew itself away from vacancy and became the expression of a rabbit contemplating a weasel.

"What *do you* know about I, Mister?"

"A great deal, Codfin, more than you guess! And that's because we're in the same boat."

"You be laughing at a poor working-man, Mr. Evans."

"Not at all, Codfin. Do you want my hand on it? There … there … good luck to you. In the same boat … that's where we are, Finn Toller, my friend!"

Elph Cantle's eyes nearly started out of his head, when approaching the little table in front of the two men, with the tumbler of pallid gold in his hand, he saw them shaking hands.

"Mother sez 'tis ten shillingses, Sir, if you please," he whispered, as he put Our Special down. It was Mr. Toller's turn to look surprised when he saw the great handful of silver emerge from his companion's trouser-pocket.

"Bring us another glass, my lad," said Owen Evans gravely.

Young Cande went off with the money and returned with the glass. He was too hypnotised by what he saw to turn away till Mr. Evans had poured half the drink into this empty receptacle and pushed it towards the tramp.

"Off with you, lad! This isn't ginger pop, or I'd treat you to some too."

When Elphin's figure was swallowed up in the smoke-obscured crowd of labourers, Mr. Evans lifted his glass and nodded to his companion to do the same. It was not often that what he quaffed made Mr. Codfin choke; but the man gasped and spluttered like a woman in his attempt to despatch Our Special at one gulp. As for Mr. Evans he kept murmuring some queer Welsh syllables of carnal approval as he sipped and sipped and sipped at this ancient sack.

"In … the same … boat … Codfin," he repeated, allowing his eyes, with a terrible gleam in them, to rest upon the other's, over the rim of his glass.

There is a danger-instinct in trampish murderers, imbecile thieves, and rural degenerates, which holds out antennae of warning more responsive than the petal-edges of sensitive plants. Had there been the faintest smell of the official, of the normal-respectable, of the moralistic, of the legal, about Mr. Evans, Codfin would have drawn in his horns and been dumb as a deep-sea fish. There was the devil's own luck too about this encounter in that the noisy buzz of talk around them and the fact that their fellow-topers were all the simplest and roughest type of labouring-men rendered their intercourse as safe and private as if it had been held inside Gwyn-ap-Nud's Stone Tower, on the top of the Tor. It was of this tower that the tramp began soon to murmur, as his wits seethed up into savage confidence under the fumes of the Drink Perilous.

Mr. Evans had already spoken of the iron bar; and the drunken man seemed to have got it lodged in his imbecile brain that this hook-nosed personage with the blazing eyes had been his confederate from the start.

"Her had been better pleased if it had been she rayther nor he, that I were to hit with me bar. But I never struck a 'ooman in me life and never will … no! not for Mad Bet herself."

Mr. Evans listened to his words with the blood boiling in his veins and his wrist-pulses beating so hard that he felt he must press them against the cold hard edge of the table. The passage in the book that had driven him forth that day had to do with an iron bar; and as often happens with the symbolic images of crime, this eidolon of violence, which had been floating in the back of his mind ever since that evening at the sheep-fold, drew to itself like a magnet all the other mental pictures in the book and absorbed them into itself.

"You're certain, Codfin — absolutely certain — that they're going up the hill today?"

"Sartin, Mister! In the twilight. That's what Frenchy Crow — us working-chaps calls he Frenchy — said himself when I were listening. Tossie — that's the maidie Boss Barter's gone and married, since her kids were born — have never been up Tor Hill of a night-time. And as they all jabbered there and I listed to un, they said as they was minded — the whole three on 'em — to meet up there 'in the twilight' so's to show thik gal what a dark night be when it do fall on Hill. 'Only, us must *see* it fall!' Frenchy Crow kept saying. ''Tisn't naught unless us *sees* it fall.'"

"Could … I … be … hid … inside … the tower … with you, and watch while you … while you … do it?" "Sartinly you can be inside tower. There be a chink in thik door; for I've used it many a times to watch for Mad Bet coming and going; and you can see me bring iron bar down on him, snug and pretty — I'se warrant — from inside thik little pussy-crack!"

Mr. Evans in his agitation now began humming a mid-Victorian sentimental catch, that contained the words "In the gloaming, oh, my darling, ere the night begins to fall," and Mr. Toller with Our Special mounting to his head, caught the spirit of this, just as though some ghastly phosphorescence of unholy glee in the contemplation of murder had bubbled up from both their brains, and began to troll a similar stave: "Once I … loved … a-maiden-fair … *and* … she did … de-*ceive* me!" A few labourers glanced towards that sequestered bench, when amid the general confusion of voices these cracked tunes rose up, like the wind in a couple of broken potsherds, and Elph Cantle pulled at his mother's sleeve; but the outburst was followed by a lowering and pregnant silence.

“To see, to see, to see — through that crack — up-down, up-down, the iron bar, up-down, up-down, the iron bar, and the man, up, up, and then down, the iron bar *down.”*

From the livid evil Eye of the First Cause, that evil eye that crieth throughout eternity, “Up-down, up-down, the iron bar and the man!” there shivered through Mr. Evans’ frame a concentrated essence of all the knee-shaking and pulse-beating passages in his Book of Books.

His hooked nose hung low over his empty glass, low over his two clenched hands upon the wooden table; his bowler hat — for he had not removed it — was pushed far back upon his head; and behold! along the rim of it walked, upon its own purpose bent, a small black fly.

As Mr. Evans’ thoughts drove him on, this hat-walker, like a complacent acrobat upon a dizzy ledge, paused in his performance and proceeded to clean his front legs by meticulously rubbing them together.

It has long since been noted how Mr. Evans possessed, in addition to his deeper vision, a furiously precise vein of foreground pedantry.

He now envisaged with infernal exactitude the minutest details of the scene to which his whole body and soul — magnetised by that coiled-up snake-nerve — were rushing forward. And he envisaged too — for instead of being dulled or drugged, his intelligence was quickened and heightened — the issue, the issue of it all.

He felt in advance the sucked-out, scooped out, blood-rusted hollowness of the gap — the eye-tooth of the world wrenched from its nether-place — that would sink down, that rusty-brown gaping hole that was himself, his very life, down to the deepest abyss. This deadly clear envisaging of the issue of today’s business — would it were done and over with now! — drained up every drop of pleasure from the doing of it.

What drove him on to it then? What drove him on to this pleasure-divested horror? The coiled snake-nerve of sex! And the strange thing is that the *insane will to the satisfaction* of this terrible sex-nerve does not demand pleasure. Pleasure? Little do the moralists know! A perverted criminal is called a pleasure-seeker. Great Horns of God! Why, one little tiny drop of the deadly nightshade Mr. Evans was now draining — let it follow the burning path of Our Special down his Cymric gullet! — laid on the tongue of those who talk of pleasure would teach them how feel the sucking lips of the undying Wriggler. No, no, *that* was the curious thing. Mr. Evans was compelled to contemplate with cold-blooded precision the state of being to which this up-and-down iron bar — whatever it did to its victim — would conduct himself.

Pity of Jesus! he was there, even now, as he stared at the tiny golden bubbles in the bottom of his tumbler. He was there and looking *back* at the iron bar, at the blood, at the murdered man. It is a strange fact and a pretty proof of how deep the double nature of the First Cause sinks, that a person could go marching on like this towards the iron bar, and derive not one single half drop of pleasure out of it. Or of satisfaction either! — though it is the will to satisfaction that drives it forward.

If Mr. Evans' thoughts, in spite of Our Special, were far from being frolicsome, the thoughts of Codfin were no less accurst and no less full of "minute particulars."

"I'll *have* to let this gent see it done," he thought, "for he's so crazy-bent on't that, if I dunna let 'un he'll go and give I up to Tarnton Jail. That's where I'll end anyway; and 'twould be Gibbet Hill, only they hangs 'em behind walls now, so us pore buggers can't wave to our aunties. I wouldna' mind Gibbet Hill one 'arf what I minds behind walls. Behind walls makes a person feel like a damned abortion, the kind of nothing-no-more what Dr.

Fell sticks in back garden between pig-house and privy. I never *have* liked behind walls and I never will." What force was it that drove Codfin on to the iron bar; that object which he had already so carefully concealed inside Gwyn-ap-Nud's Tower? It was certainly not any sex-nerve. It was purely and solely his sense of honour. Codfin was honourably committed to do the bidding of Mad Bet, and it had never, for one second, since their talk in the sheepfold, presented itself to his mind as a possibility that he could get out of doing it. All this expectation of ending "behind walls" had been accepted by Codfin at the very start as a Jesuit accepts his superior's command or a revolutionary assassin his sealed orders.

While the two heads of these bewitched slaves of the iron bar drooped thus low over their empty glasses, there was a sudden disturbance in that smoke-filled room to which they both remained totally oblivious. This disturbance was caused by the sudden entrance from the interior of the tavern of Dave Spear.

Dave had quite perceptibly changed since he had become one of the dictators of Glastonbury. His youthful bloom had faded. His pleasant good nature had dried up. His out-going impulsive spontaneity had been replaced by a certain strained reserve, and his honest simplicity had given place to a worried, self-conscious caution. The many-sided struggles he was now engaged upon, his attempt to outwit the incorrigible anarchism of one of his fellow-dictators, to give a rational Marxist turn to the destructive Jacobinism of the other, his constant effort to guide into orthodox Communist channels, the mystic religiosity of their erratic chief, caused a stiff, troubled, harassed look to descend upon his boyish countenance, hardening its disarming contours into something anxious, wistful, and at the same time austere.

His appearance was greeted by a clamour of voices and a rush towards him of a group of puzzled, excited, acquisitive labouring-men, who were all dissatisfied with the arrangements of the new Glastonbury exchequer.

“ ’Tisn’t the money what worries I, Mister,” explained a cadaverous shoemaker from Butts Close, “ ’tis seeing these chaps what wouldn’t work, if they had the chanst, getting the same as I, who’ve worked meself into a bloody consumpty.”

“What I wants to know,” cried a burly street-cleaner, pushing himself forward, “is why a man with seven children, same as I’ve got, only gets five bob more than them as has got two!” “Listen here, Mister,” cried a chimney sweep from the Beckery district, “Didn’t us read in Johnny Geard’s paper last week that Glaston belong to Glaston folk and none else i’ the world? What I’d like to know, and there’s many of us working-chaps who want to know the same, who ‘twere that elected these ’ere Trents and Robinsons to be bosses over we and who ‘twere that gave these ’ere bosses their girt pay? I’ve got a wife in the family way, four big-grown hungry kids; whereas this Robinson has got only his Sall; and I dunno what Trent’s got; no one I reckon! And Trent’s not even a Zoomerset man. They tell I ‘ee do come from the Scilly Isles. I wish to hell ‘ee’d stayed in the Scilly Isles.” (“Hear! Hear!” cried a lot of excited voices.)

“Zoomerset money,” went on the chimney sweep, “ought to go into Zoomerset pockets; and so ’twould if Bloody Johnny had his zay. Who made this here Trent from Scilly Isles and this here Robinson from London bosses over we Glaston folk? Us selected Johnny Geard, ‘cause us knows he; and he be a good drinking man and a good praying man. But us knows naught of this ’ere Trent and this ’ere Robinson. They may be Rooshians, for all us do know!”

Dave Spear was so hustled by all these people that he was driven backward across the room till he was standing close to the table at which Mr. Evans and Finn Toller were seated. He opened his mouth with a gasp of astonishment at seeing Mr. Evans and was on the point of addressing him when a plumber who lived in a little house by the edge of the river and suffered from asthma seized him roughly by the wrist.

“Us be going to keep ‘ee wi’ us, now us has got ‘ee, Mr. Spear,” muttered this man, in a hoarse, unpleasant voice — he had evidently been drinking heavily and had reached the quarrelsome stage.

“Let me go! What do you mean by touching me?” cried the indignant Dave. “You don’t know what you are talking about. None of you do. No, no; none of you do. You are all thinking only of yourselves. You’re all thinking only of getting more money for yourselves — you’re all just as bad as Philip Crow.”

Things began to look nasty after this bold defiance.

“Knock him on the head!” cried one voice. “Tie ’im up and gie ’em summat to remember us by!” cried a second. “Where be you come from, thee wone self?” yelled a voice from the back of the room, “that’s what us wants to know! You baint a Glastonbury man, and us ‘ud like to know what you *be*!” So it had come at last. He who had no thought in his mind but to lift up humanity, now saw humanity as it is and was hated, spurned, rejected by it.

He was standing close to the round table by the wall where Evans and Codfin were drowsing over their empty glasses. Here he swung round with his hands deep in his pockets.

“Comrades!” he began in a clear voice.

The uproar stopped, as such turbulence will sometimes, under the spell of a professional speech.

“I don’t think you realise, Comrades, how difficult it is to give you back what your bourgeois slave-drivers have stolen from you. You can’t get it back for yourselves, because *you* are dis-organised and *they* are organised, because you are without leaders and *they* have trained leaders. The only way things can be changed from top to bottom is by a dictatorship that represents you. Mr. Geard your Mayor—” he was interrupted by shouts at this point: “He’s all right. Bloody Johnny’s no bleedin’ politician. Three cheers for good old Johnny Geard!” — but he went steadily and quietly on: “Mr. Geard, your Mayor — and I’m glad you do justice to him — was elected by your town council; and it is Mr. Geard who has appointed Comrade Robinson and Comrade Trent and myself to act with him in obtaining for you by legal means — for the council has bought up the leases that belong to Lord P. — what Mr. Crow and his shareholders have been keeping from—” here again he was interrupted. Loud shouts arose, “We know all about Lord P. Lord P. be feared to show his ugly phyz in Glast’n! Lord P. can’t sell what isn’t his’n to sell! Go back to Lord P. thee own self, and tell the old blighter we’ll knock his bleedin’ head off and thee’s too!” — but once more Dave struggled to go on quietly with his speech.

“By legal means it is, Comrades, that we, your representatives in this town, are now trying, with your assistance and by your help, to start an experiment that has never yet been—”

“Shut yer bleedin’ jaw! Who be you, we’d like to know, that you should rule over us?”

Violent hands were now laid upon him and clenched hands were raised to strike him. The uproar rose again from every part of the room. Something leapt up within Dave then and he lost all his calm self-possession. His ruddy cheeks went white. He struggled with the men. He flung off the hands that had begun clutching at him in the midst of that smoke-obscured confusion.

Like a normal waking-sound caught through the anguish of an insane dream he heard the feeble voice of Mrs. Cantle calling for her husband. "Dickery! Dickery!" Like a sardonic drum the refrain beat upon his ears:

"Dickery, dickery, dock —!
The mouse ran up the clock!"

He pulled out an empty chair from under the little round table at which Mr. Evans and Mr, Toller sat and scrambled up upon it.

From this position, he cried aloud in a tone so vibrant and so commanding that it brought the room once more to a dead hush.

"Silence!"

"Dickery! Dickery!" echoed the voice of Mrs. Cantle, now reaching that room from some remote place in the rear of the house.

"Oh, brothers, my brothers, you *must* hear me, even though you kill me afterwards. You ask *who* I am? I'll tell you who I am! I am the voice of the Future. I am the voice of what is to come when we are all dead. You talk of your rights; the rights of Glastonbury? Brothers, my brothers! In that Future there'll be no more rights. In that Future there'll be no more Glastonburys against Rome, or English against Russia, or West against East. In that Future there'll be only the human race, sprung from the earth, returning to the earth, loving the earth. In the Future none of us, none, I say none, will want to possess this or possess that! We shall struggle then for one thing alone, fight for one advantage alone, the right to labour for a victory of life over want, over disease, over cruelty, over malice, over wicked, stupid ignorance. Brothers, brothers! Don't let these Christians say that we who break up their altars and close their churches only do it for greed. We do it for the Future. We *are* killing God, the old God, we *are* turning from magic and miracles, those old, outworn, selfish things, but it is for more Life we're doing it. Oh, can't you feel it, brothers? We all have the same heart, below our greeds and our angers and our envies; the same heart, the same heart. We’re all equal before the great spirit of life. Oh, look into your deep hearts, brothers, and feel it. It is the Truth! At this moment, here in this place, we are all one. I am you and you are me! We’re all the same, old and young, men and women, it’s one heart we have in us. Here! you can take me. I’ll come down in a minute and you can tear me to bits; but you’ll be only tearing yourselves! There’s something in us that’s the same, that belongs to us all; and I’ll tell you what it is. It’s the Future being born in us — It’s the Future tearing us, breaking us, bruising us so that it may be born. Brothers, brothers! Even while you kill me I’ll be the same as you are; no different! The same heart I’ll be. For I am Life and you are Life. Life is our child, our precious child, that we’re all perishing for, that we are being torn to bits for. But in the Future it will know what we did. In the Future it will say: ‘They took their happiness and tore it to bits for me. They were the tortured Creators; and I, — I am their offspring.’ The same heart in us all, brothers, and this heart cries, ‘Drop all this furious fighting for your own hands! Slip aside from it, escape from it, give it up, let it go, melt into the calm, cool, universal air!’ Brothers! Don’t ‘ee go on with this eternal, ‘I … I … I … I!’ Let the heart in you speak, let it be felt; for *it is always there!* Slip out of this hard, tight knot, this old evil knot, this old grasping, greedy knot, slip out of it and be free.

“The Life in us, in them, in Glastonbury, in Rome, in Jerusalem, in India, in America, in China, is the same heart! Brothers! Can’t you feel it? Let it melt that stone, that old, hard, wicked stone, that stone which is Christ’s grave. Let it melt it, be it Arthur’s or Caesar’s, so that we can all flow into one, one Sea, one Flood, one great calm … and quiet … and peace. Brothers, you can take me now and tear me to pieces. You cannot kill this heart in me, this heart that they have buried in Glastonbury, in Rome, in

Jerusalem. You cannot kill it because it's in the killer as well as in the killed. It needs nothing, it wants nothing, it asks nothing. It always gives. It never takes. What can it take, when it is Life, God, the universe, the future? Brothers, my brothers, don't 'ee feel it? It is melting in me to you now, and in you to me! It isn't the self any more. It isn't the Stone against other stones anymore. You ask me who I am. You say I'm not a Glastonbury man. I say to you, 'None of *ye* are Glastonbury men!' I say to you, 'Ye are the passing of the present into the future, ye are the motion of life into fuller life — the heart in you melts in tears, in tears, in tears towards me and mine … melts … in … tears … towards you.' Who am I, brothers? I am the voice of the Future out of the heart of the present; and that is why … that is … why … I must be … why I am … a trouble to you … a thing that you would like … would like …"

He did really burst now into a flood of weeping. The tears — big, child's tears — poured down his face. They poured down his face while his face under their stream remained unmoved, the mouth quiet and stern, the features fixed and rigid, the weeping eyes fixed upon some remote spot in space.

For a moment, while he stood there like that, crying in dead silence, crying as if his round boy's head were made of marble and were a figure in a fountain, Mr. Evans slowly lifted up his bowed forehead, with its great hooked nose, and stared at Dave's muddy trouser-bottoms. What Mr. Evans felt now was, "I must go through with this, though I get no pleasure from it." The curious thing, in the mind of this slave of the iron bar, was that it was *the iron bar itself* that now excited in him this relentless, pleasureless necessity to go on. What it was that sank down under the iron bar, a man, an ox, a sheep, a pig, mattered little to Mr. Evans. That it was his old acquaintance John, picked up at Stonehenge, who was the destined victim, hardly reached his intelligence. Nor did he think of the victim as even destined to be killed. It was not *that* at all! Oh, it was something very different from that. It was an anonymous action too. That was the whole point! "The Unpardonable Sin," like all other extreme forms of vice, was totally impersonal. It was motiveless — except for its own single urge — and it was surrounded by a vacuum of anonymity.

If these were Mr. Evans' thoughts as the young Communist closed his appeal by this fit of passionate tears, the thoughts of the crowd who had listened to him were totally submerged in a spellbound fit of stupefied bewilderment. The room remained absolutely hushed, no one lifted a finger to meddle with what he chose to do now.

He stepped down slowly from the chair to the floor. He was in a trance. That is how it felt to himself and that is how it looked to the crowd in the room — a trance and a complete forgetfulness of where he was.

Vaguely and with short shuffling steps, more like those of a convalescent than a somnambulist, he went to the street door, opened it, and just as he was, with an overcoat on, but without hat or stick, walked off towards Street Road. He felt at that moment a strong desire to look into the sympathetic and yet non-human eyes of the head of the Glastonbury commune. He felt purged, relaxed, reduced to an almost feminine softness, and he longed for the sympathy of Mr. Geard as a young girl might have done.

When Mr. Evans awoke from the drowsiness caused by Our Special he no longer perceived in front of him, mounted upon a chair, a pair of grey, ready-made trousers, and in his sudden awakening he leaned towards his nodding companion.

"When had I better meet you up there?" he said.

Finn Toller only let his straggling beard sink still lower over the table. Mr. Evans grew irritable and shook him violently, gripping the lean man's shambly shoulder unnecessarily hard with his bony fingers. Not so very many people in Glastonbury had fallen gently upon sleep that forenoon, — upon sleep softer than the mosses of Maidencroft Lane, tenderer than the blue vapours of Wick Wood — but among these fortunate ones there were certainly only two, Mr. Toller and Owen Evans, whose thoughts, as they gave way to slumber, had run upon murder.

"When … had I … better … meet you … up there?" It was not Mr. Evans who spoke these words. It was a little fork-tongued worm-snake. This worm-snake was jerking and curving and cresting and lifting a head that kept changing colour like a salamander; and it was doing all this inside a human automaton — dead as a corpse — the carcass of what used to be Mr. Evans! Whatever this worm-snake — which kept emitting a poisonous froth, like a snail that has been wounded — ordered this corpse-man, this *homo mortuus,* to do, the corpse-man obeyed. To the excited worm-snake it was a swooning, gasping, fainting ecstasy to think of that iron bar. There was a quivering, dissolving melting sweetness connected with it. The iron bar and the life it was going to blot out were altogether detached from ordinary experience. It was not John Crow who was going to perish. It was simply the man under the bar. The corpselike executioner who obeyed the worm was the galvanized body of the pedantic and highly strung Mr. Evans, who, under normal conditions, could not hurt a daddy-long-legs. Once, when he was very young and seized by a sadistic frenzy — and it is quite possible that the whole thing started from his father's forcing his mother to let him enjoy her long after the child's conception had begun — he had killed something with a piece of iron. After that the little Owen would frantically turn over the pages of all his children's books to find pictures of creatures being killed, especially killed by heavily crushing instruments. It *had* to be a thing of iron and it had to come crashing down, smashing everything, smashing skull and vertebrae together, or the performance, demanded with such a swooning, trembling, fainting orgasm by the worm-snake, would not be a master one! Mr. Evans' tone as he said, "Meet you up there" was like the tone of some Asmodeus whispering to some Baphomet.

"Meet you up there," echoed the sticky surface of their table. "Meet you up there," echoed the dregs of Our Special. "Meet you up there," echoed a little bit of dried-up dog's dung which had been detached from one of the thick-soled boots of Dave Spear and left behind on the chair.

To the worm-snake inside what was once Mr. Evans this harmless sentence "Meet you up there" partook of the nature of an overpowering sexual temptation. The actual sound of the brief syllables … "meet … up … there" was like an erotic provocation of a kind that none could bear and not yield. The fangs of the worm-snake dripped with a frothy milk. In mounted and erected expectancy, in blunt-nosed expectancy, in fork-tongued expectancy, it danced a lust-dance of delirious joy when it found that it could make this slave-corpse, this dead soul, this *rex mortuus,* that *had* been a human being, utter these simple words!

And to what end? To the end of observing how an iron bar, if given a modicum of propulsion from the thin arms of Codfin, would obey the law of gravitation!

The pale blue eyes of Codfin opened now just a little. They were blinking and confused and a moisture trickled from their lids. "Eh? what's that, pard? Meet ye, did ye say?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes," cried the cresting worm through the lips of Mr. Evans. "When shall I meet you up there?"

About five hours later, Mr. Evans was seated on one of the iron seats on the slope of Wirral Hill, watching the little boys play rounders. Now rounders might be defined as the innocent childhood of baseball, of which it is obviously the original source, and it is a game of the simplest and most primitive hit-and-run nature. And Mr. Evans became extremely interested in rounders that afternoon.

Every time one of the boys hit the ball, Mr. Evans could see the lean stooping figure; not of the John he knew, but of an abstract victim whose name was called John, and of a victim so completely dehumanised and depersonalised that all question of "saving" him disappeared. The only thing to do was to stop the horror. As Mad Bet had screamed to Mr. Evans at Mother Legge's party on Easter Monday, the only thing to do was to "stop" and then to wash the sand clean in the mind's fatal Colosseum.

But Mr. Evans could not "stop." He watched this hit-and-run game with peculiar and special interest because it was exactly what he was going to do himself. *He* was going to hit and run or rather to watch, but Christ would say it was the same thing, someone else hit and run.

Was Mr. Evans mad? Not unless all sexual desire, from the satisfaction of which other sentiencies suffer unnecessary suffering, is mad.

If any stranger had approached Mr. Evans on that afternoon, as he sat watching this game of rounders on Wirral Hill, and induced him to enter into conversation, it is extremely unlikely that the faintest notion of the man's being mad would have crossed such a stranger's intelligence. He had, it is true, been totally unable to eat a morsel of anything since breakfast. But he had been drinking again. He had gone into a little nameless beer-house on the way to Wirral Hill and had drunk glass after glass of beer. "I must drink," he had thought grimly to himself as he tossed off the heel-taps of each separate glass. "I must drink to 'render myself stupid'; as Pascal said about believing the Christian faith." But he had not rendered himself stupid. He had, on the contrary, given himself a racking headache; but otherwise nothing could be clearer than Mr. Evans' mind. He was to "go up there" at sunset and wait inside the tower to see — actually in his flesh to see — what he had been telling himself stories about all his life long.

Let no one think that the obedient *rex mortuus* or *deus mortuus* that was Mr. Evans' soul, did not weigh the possible consequences, down to every smallest detail of what he was going to do, making himself, by thus knowing about it beforehand and doing nothing to stop it, an accomplice in a murder. "Undoubtedly, I shall land in jail," he thought. "It's possible enough that it will be worse than that. Why in God's name then, don't I walk straight back to the shop, or home to Cordy, and shake off this monstrous weight? The police? To go to the police? No, no, no, no! The thing to do is" — at this point the invisible worm itself began whispering a subtle self-deception, a cunning compromise— "go up there and get hold of the iron bar myself — yes! yes! yes! That's the thing to do, from every point of view — to go up there *presently* — it's too early yet — and, as soon as Toller appears, just take the thing from him and pack him off; and then tell Crow, or not tell Crow, as I consider best at the time — get hold of that thing from Toller first anyway, and pack *him* off and perhaps it would be better never to tell Crow, or any other living soul, about it — yes, yes, never tell anyone about it — but would Toller try it again? It's some madness of that bald-headed woman — the Grail Messenger — I couldn't follow it when he was telling me — madness of some kind — *damn!"*

His mind called up the image of Mad Bet as she had seemed to him that night when she had made him kiss her naked skull. A wry smile twisted his lips as he thought of that night and he clutched the iron bar — another and a different one — that made the elbow of his present resting place!

A sardonic and tormented chuckle, a veritable damned soul's chuckle, broke from his twisted mouth.

"Hee! Hee! Hee! *My* Grail Messenger! It's all mixed up with Crow. It was Crow who asked me, that night, if I could embrace a woman who was perfectly hideous, and I told him then about the Grail Messenger. Hee! Hee! Malory, you old devil! There's life still in your Norman book! Yes, yes! you understand these little things. Life's not changed. It all comes round — round and back again." What had happened now, as the man sat there clutching the iron elbow of that cold seat, while the little boys kept hitting and running in front of him, was that his first nature — the antiquarian one — was all stirred up into a writhing weft of self-protective fantasy. And this had come about in a very subtle manner; for by saying to himself that what he must do anyway was *to go up there*, even if he snatched the iron bar from the bewitched assassin and confessed everything to John Crow, he had covered with a sort of adhesive plaster the gaping hole of his tormented conscience; and this covering up of the dark, sweet, irresistible twitching of the snake-worm, left his normal upper-consciousness free to deceive him to the limit with accumulated plausibilities; while all the time the worm licked its devouring fangs in the darkness below!

What the worm said to itself was: "Let us only once *go up there*, and the swooning, drowning, dissolving ecstasy of the Dolorous Blow will soon sweep away all these conscientious hesitations!" Calmed and eased a great deal by this crafty compromise with his conscience which rendered his rendezvous with the iron bar a necessity if he were to save John Crow as well as a possibility of playing the ecstatic voyeur at a murder orgy if he decided *against* saving John Crow, his eyes now fell upon the figure of an elderly woman walking heavily and stumblingly up the slope of the hill below the level where he was sitting and the boys were playing.

There was an iron seat, like the one he himself was occupying, a little below the boys and a little above the woman; and it was towards this seat that she was evidently advancing.

She was well dressed and she was using her umbrella as a stick to lean upon; and as he followed her with his eyes, stumbling and exhausted, moving up the slope of the hill, he decided that he knew who she was, and that she was none other than Miss Crow. Miss Crow indeed it was, and a Miss Crow on the verge of a fainting-fit from her bad heart. There were several people passing both ways, both to the north and to the south, along the gravel path below the place where the lady with the umbrella was tottering; but it was a group of complete strangers — strangers to her as well as to him, for they were visitors to Glastonbury from the northeast of Germany — who, when she fell, as he saw her do now, rushed up the slope to her aid: There certainly was a peculiar atmospheric effect abroad, this February day. A soft, light mist, filmy and gossamery as a wet sea-vapour, hung over the town; while the sun, shining between heavy banks of clouds, touched with a curious opalescence, pearly and tender, the portion of the hill upon which he was now seated.

The boys ceased at once playing their game, when they observed the disturbance made by the lady's fall, and calling to each other in shrill, excited cries scrambled down the slope and huddled, as children will, pushing, whispering, jostling to get the clearest view between the burly figures of the Germans. These latter were now talking in vociferous and guttural tones across the body of the prostrate woman. One of them was actually on his knees beside her, loosening the throat of her dress and trying to pull off her gloves.

When Mr. Evans joined the group he was accepted at once as a native of the place and everyone appealed to him as an authority upon what ought to be done with a lady of distinction and refinement who apparently had had a fit.

He was aghast at the spectacle of the poor lady's face as he bent over it. In unqualified concern and pity he surveyed the unnatural redness of her skin, the drops of white froth issuing from her open mouth, and the family twitch, palpitating still, though she was quite unconscious, in her flaccid cheeks. She had been acting recklessly and unwisely all that day after her morning visit to the doctor. She had stopped at Wollop's longer than she should; she had kept her appointment to lunch at the Pilgrims' with Rachel and Athling; and as soon as she could escape from these young people she had made her way, slowly but obstinately, to Wirral Hill, being seized with a passionate desire to rest upon the particular iron seat where, thirty years before, she was accustomed to meet Mat Dekker. As Mr. Evans now surveyed her unconscious form he found that he was not so devoid of natural philosophy as not to be grimly aware of the irony of the fact that he, the insane pervert, was now contemplating with lively concern the blow which heart trouble, that gentlest of all wielders of iron bars, had brought down on this warm mass of corpulent femininity.

It was clear that the players at rounders, as they inserted their small perspiring bodies between the anxious foreigners, thought that Miss Crow was dead: and the words "She has it got, my God!" and "Death her has taken, God in Heaven!" in the thick intonation of the great Mid-European plain, showed that the foreigners laboured under the same delusion. "The woman something to say wishes!" cried the man suddenly who was bending over her on his knees. "To fetch the Herr Doctor it better were!" replied another; and a third — an extremely sturdy little man, planted upon his heels so firmly, as if nothing could ever bowl *him* out — uttered the expressive, the impenetrable, the massively undying word, consonant to all occasions, reassuring under all invasions of disorder, the word "Police"! How fast the mind works and how self-centred the human ego is!

Even as he came forward and knelt down by Miss Crow's side, even as he lowered his ear to Miss Crow's murmuring lips, the Welshman was thinking to himself: "Who's to know — if Codfin doesn't speak when they arrest him — that I wasn't in the tower by chance? No … no … no! I shall never in all my life have another chance of seeing, of drinking up with my very eyes, what I've been telling my pillow about night after night since I first knew what … *what I was!"*

She was murmuring intelligible words now. She was taking Mr. Evans for someone else, for a different tall bony man. But, as he listened to her and smelt upon her grey hair, from which the hat had been torn, a faint scent of eau-de-cologne, he remembered how more than once he had dressed up that pillow of his in his own vest and shirt and had pounded it with the poker from the fender while an orgasm of terrible ecstasy dissolved his very soul.

"I can't let this chance go … no! not if I'm hanged for it … I can't … I can't!" But nothing seemed able to keep away from him — as he heard the sturdy little man, whose feet were so firm in the grass and so wide apart, repeat the word "Police" — a thin ice-cold bodkin-point of ice-cold terror — the police … the police … the police … the police … This is a crime I'm going up there to see … different from any secret vice, however shameful … this is a crime … the worst of crimes … and when I've had *that ecstasy* … to the end of my days all will be exposed … Owen Evans the pervert … Owen Evans the malefactor … Owen Evans the murderer. They'll have me in Madame Tussaud's moulded in wax … my nose, that everyone laughs at so … in wax … "Have you been down to the Chamber of Horrors yet, and seen Owen Evans? Anyone would know from his face what *he* was … the human carnivore!"

Meanwhile from the contorted mouth of the unconscious woman, whose eyelids kept flickering but did not open, the breathing grew louder and less human, and between the great animal gasps, like the flapping of a bellows, broken, incoherent words forced out their way.

The German upon his knees by her side seemed to be dimly acquainted with the sort of attack she was suffering from, for he lifted up her head and began pouring down her throat something from a small flask that he produced. But instead of recovering her from her fit this treatment only had the effect of stopping her attempts at speech and of throwing her back again into complete immobility.

For a moment Mr. Evans thought she was really dead now; but the German with his hand on her heart muttered emphatically: “Life she still has, the poor woman! Life she still has!”

“Has anybody sent for the — police?” Mr. Evans whispered to the German with the flask. He had meant to say— “for the doctor.”

The kneeling man rose to his feet now, shrugged his shoulders and addressed some question to his companions. It appeared from what they said that nobody had gone for anybody. The soul of the obsessed Welshman now made a hurried rush down the corridors of his consciousness, closing the door to the iron bar chamber down there, and opening more normal vestibules of awareness. “I … go … get … Herr Doctor!” he announced, surveying these simple guardians of the unconscious lady. Thus speaking, he raised his bowler hat with a grandiose gesture, both to the woman on the ground and to the strangers round her, and made off at a great pace down the gravel path that led to the town.

In the confusion of his wits, however, it was not to Dr. Fell’s house but to his own house that he directed his way; a secret urge within him driving him now, as in all practical crises, to go at once to Cordelia. But if a beneficent chance moved him to this self-preservative action, a malefic chance willed it that when at last, panting and breathless, he entered his little house in Old Wells Road he found Cordelia deep in conversation in her parlour with her mother, Mrs. Geard.

Mrs. Geard had been confiding to Cordelia her growing worry about the girl's father; how he persisted in spending the bulk of his time over at Chalice Hill, and how he had been several times of late upon some mysterious errands to the Glastonbury bank. " 'Tisn't that he be changed, Cordy, you understand. 'Tis that he be more his own self than I've a ever known him. Crum sees it too. 'Tis as if this commune silliness has wrought on him to let himself go. He talks more about the Blood and the Master and the Water of Life than I've ever known him. He talks every night, Cordy, on and on, after us have put out the gas. I wish he would tell me what he goes to the bank for! Mr. Trent brings him his pay for being Mayor regular enough. There's no reason why he should go to the bank. I don't like, nor I never *have* liked, that young man Robert Stilly. What do you think he goes to the bank for, Cordy?"

If Mr. Evans had caught a glimpse of Mrs. Geard through the window he would have shot off again, but fortunately the two women were seated out of sight of the window, so that it wasn't till he opened the parlour door that he knew she was there. Cordelia recognised at once that something was very wrong with him; for he stood in the doorway muttering about Dr. Fell, Bob Sheperd, Germans, rounders, Miss Elizabeth Crow fainting on Wirral Hill, and his having an appointment at sunset that night … a very important appointment … at sunset … with Father Paleologue … at sunset … about some icons.

The mother and daughter were both of them on their feet, looking at him with an uneasy stare, Cordy with a passionate and frightened stare, Mrs.

Geard with a worried and anxious stare. “I hope *he* has not been going to the bank,” the latter thought to herself; and in her heart she began wondering whether icons were some species of familiar spirits, like her own Pembrokeshire fairies, that this Mr. Paleologue claimed he could conjure up.

“I only came in to tell you, Cordelia,” said Mr. Evans now in a clearer, more intelligible manner, “that I’ve got to send Dr. Fell to Wirral Hill, where Miss Crow lies unconscious. After I’ve been *there,* I’ve got this engagement at … at sunset. Did I say sunset? Yes, at sunset. I hope you are feeling very well, Cousin Megan?”

At this actual moment, towards this man in a disordered state of mind — an iron bar tapping on the inside door of his locked-up intention — and towards two women staring at this man in bewildered uneasiness, the First Cause poured forth its double magnetic streams of white and black vibrations. Out of Nothing, out of pre-existing vortices of energy that themselves issued from Nothing by the creative will of this Being, Mr. Evans, his wife, and his wife’s mother had been created. In them the First Cause reproduced itself, the Macrocosm in these three microcosms; and, like the First Cause, these three persons, Mr. Evans standing in the doorway, Cordelia standing by her husband’s writing desk, and Mrs. Geard standing by the purple chair, had the power of giving themselves up to the good in their nature or to the evil.

For Mr. Evans *could* at that very moment, even as he gazed at that picture of the river, the woman and the boat, which he associated with the word Esplumeoir, have transformed himself into a saint as devoted, as spiritual, as tenderly considerate as Sam Dekker, who in his normal state was a good deal less like a saint than Mr. Evans was! This he *might* have done, even as he stood there, after telling these plain-faced women, while the mother-of-pearl sunlight flickered into the room, those lies about Father Paleologue; and in doing so have rendered himself morally superior to the First Cause, if it had not been that from the word Esplumeoir his mind reverted to Merlin's early life and to that incident of the horn of the stag. "So good-bye, Cordy. So good-bye, Cousin Megan. I *must* get hold of Dr. Fell and I *must* meet Father Paleologue."

This moment was a moment of such a fatal parting of the ways, that the Invisible Watchers who were standing at the brink of the deep Glastonbury Aquarium, watching the motions of its obsessed animalculae, had never crowded more eagerly around their microscope to learn what the issue would be. It all depended upon which of the two vibrations proceeding from the First Cause Cordelia would welcome and which she would reject. The destructive vibration, at this important crisis, willed her to be cold, chaste, inert, irresponsible, absorbed in her own personal condition, which had never been more interesting to her!

The creative vibration, on the contrary, willed her to be warm, alluring, unchaste, and self-forgetful, thinking only of her love for the unhappy man before her! In her earlier relations with Mr. Evans, Cordy had frequently been stupid and remiss; but the "sweet usage" to which her ungainly form had been subjected, and the caresses by which her cold nerves had been quickened, had changed all this. It was not that she had come to understand the nature of his perversion; but she had come to understand, to a nicety, the place in his consciousness where that closed chamber was, and to be an adept in the art of keeping it closed. She had discovered that by certain devices — devices into which it is not necessary just now to follow her — it was possible to give Mr. Evans so much erotic excitement, of an abnormal, but perfectly harmless kind, that his soul could go up and down past that locked-up chamber without a thought of the temptations it contained.

It was lucky for Mr. Evans that at this crisis Cordelia was fully aware that to be inert and irresponsible would have been a devilish sin. The vibration of eternal creative energy which poured down into her nerves from that remote double-natured Force at the root of all life was now deliberately welcomed by the spirited girl and the opposite vibration heroically rejected. She moved up hurriedly to Mr. Evans, got behind him, drew him forward by the sleeve till she got him to the hearth; and then, linking her arm in his, turned emphatically and imperatively to Mrs. Geard.

"Mother!"

"Yes, Cordy."

"I want you to call at Dr. Fell's. It won't take you so very far out of your way if you go by the allotment gardens and that alley I showed you the other day. And just tell him, or Miss Barbara, if he's out, what Owen has said about Miss Crow having fainted — by those seats, wasn't it, Owen? — on Wirral Hill, and those Germans looking after her. I expect she's all right by this time; or someone else has gone for the doctor; but in any case do go quick, Mother, please, because I can see Owen's very worried about it."

There were no doubt some quick private glances between mother and daughter after this, in which the mother said: "What's up, my dear? Has he been drinking?" and the daughter said: "Don't ask me now, but just go! I'll tell you everything another time" — but the upshot was that Mrs. Geard hurried off.

The good lady's lilac-coloured bonnet rose up like a flag of onset from her grey head as she walked down Wells Old Road, and her old-fashioned velvet-sided boots delivered short quick taps on the brick pavement under the railings of those red-tiled houses, and every now and then she automatically unclicked and clicked-up the metal fastening of her purse, as if she were rejecting all assistance from Mr. Robert Stilly in the management of her affairs. “I cannot *think* why John keeps going to the bank,” she kept saying to herself as she crossed the allotments.

Mr. Evans was now alone with Cordelia; and the first thing the girl did was something that at once provoked a faint flicker of natural erotic excitement in the man’s perverted nerves. She began pulling down the parlour’s brown blinds upon that sunset period of the day. Woman-like, she had absolutely no notion of the explosives she was handling, of the volcano-fires under the crater-surface she was stirring up. But woman-like, too, she, who had been virgin so long, was a cunninger adept than a thousand Thaïses in the primeval arts of provocation. Daughter of Bloody Johnny as she was, her own erotic nature, now that it had been once excited was inexhaustible in its amorous devices; and since her moods and her lures were forever changing, Mr. Evans was in the position of the fortunate possessor of a whole harem of ardent play-fellows. In none of her Cyprian disguises could poor Cordy be called pretty; but wanton and freshly blooming she certainly *could* be called; such is the magical power of Eros.

She had a surprise for her man now. Pulling down the blinds of their tiny parlour on the general principle announced so often by Mother Legge, that she “could not abide onlookers,” and throwing her hat and cloak on their big arm-chair she went up to the fireplace where a newly lit flame was making the wood crackle, and leaning against the edge of the mantelpiece, she began a rapid flow of excited words. She was going, she told him, without any doubt, to have a child. She had already gone two months with it. She had been yesterday to see Dr. Fell about it. It would be born sometime in September.

Mr. Evans dropped his bowler hat on the floor and sank down exhausted in his black overcoat on the big purple chair. Half of her jacket and the rim of *her* hat were squeezed under him as he sank down, for she had just come in when her mother arrived; but he did not make the least move to extricate them. Nor indeed did she! Watching him with swimming eyes she waited in silence for what she hoped and prayed would prove to be a rush of natural emotion at what she had told him. And drawn towards them by the intensity of their feeling, drawn towards this embryo grandchild of Geard of Glastonbury, there came floating into that room through the pulled-down blinds a flock of obscure, half-material presences, the sort of etherealised thought-projections that are liable to hover over certain crises in human lives. Like invisible birds these presences gathered, sweeping into the room out of the aqueous mists of that unusual day, gibbering and chittering to one another and circling about Cordelia.

Neither the man nor the woman, he in the purple chair whose tasselled valances swept the floor, and she leaning against the flimsy mantelpiece, could have been conscious at that moment that this embryo in the room with them was beginning to assert itself as an entity with its own contact with the life-mysteries. What they both felt just then as these thought-elementals fluttered round the new life in Cordelia's womb, as blow-flies are attracted to carrion, or as humming-bird moths to the hearts of carnations, was something very different from these ethereal visitors. What they were aware of was the dumb, numb, cold, heavy downward drag of the vast undersea forces that are subhuman; chemical forces, that belong to that formless world of the half-created and the half-organic whereof bodies of lower dimensions than ours are composed and which has a mysterious weight that draws down, a pull, a tug, a centripetal gravitation, against which the soul within us struggles and upon the surface of which it swims, and over which, when the process of decomposition commences, it spreads its contemptuous wings.

This down-dragging sensation in their nerves neutralized and counter-balanced these half-embodied air-presences, the elemental projections of old magical minds upon that sensitised Glastonbury air, floating like a cloud of disturbed river gnats through those lowered brownish-coloured afternoon blinds, out again into that subaqueous mist, out again into the wide water-meadows.

No philosopher has yet appeared who has realised as it should be realised, the creative power of the human mind. Behind these brownish-coloured, pulled-down blinds on the way to St. Edmund's pottery, where all those little town-council houses carried their red-tiled roofs so trim, there emerged from Cordelia's mind as she stood with her staring, swimming, dazed eyes fixed on her mate and her awkward elbow propped on that ridiculous mantelpiece, such an intensity of feeling that it had the power to draw out of the air, although she knew it not, these wandering half-lives. Any clairvoyant sense could have seen them there hovering about her body, and making their weak, chittering signals to the subhuman progeny of her womb, whose embryo consciousness must have been on a level with their own half-created fumblings. But why did this thick, dumb, numb, down-dragging pull of cosmic entropy, this dark gravitation-weight, sinking into decomposition and dissolution, tug at those two just then, at the man in the purple chair, with the tasselled valances trailing upon the floor, and at the woman who had just told him he was a begetter? Was it because — with that iron bar hammering to get out from its locked-up prison — Mr. Evans' fungus-grown mind groped amid after-births and abortions and corpses dead in their travail?

Whatever the cause may have been of what happened to those two behind those drawn blinds, both visitations came and went in no more than a hundred tickings of the watch in the man's pocket. Phenomena that pass so quickly — thought-elementals floating in and floating out, and this death-cold touch of the draught of decomposition — surely they are beneath notice, beneath analysis, beneath explanation? On the contrary, the very essence of life is revealed in such fleeting impressions; and in experiences such as these Eternity itself can be heard moaning and weeping, as its Cimmerian waters advance and recede around the lamplit promontories of Time.

“What shall we call him if he’s a boy, Owen?” Her voice just then was more than he could bear. Nothing makes human nerves dance with such blind fury as a voice piercing the hollow of the ear at the moment when the will is stretched out like a piece of India rubber on the rack of indecision.

“Torture!” he shouted, sitting up in the purple chair and clutching its elbows furiously, while the rim of her hat was now completely crushed beneath him. “We’ll call him Torture; and if she’s a girl we’ll call her Finis, the End. For she’ll *be* the end. And all is the end.”

Cordy’s face went white, white as the surface of the little china pussy-cat which Crummie had given her, and which now fell over sideways as she jerked her arm from the mantelpiece. But she wasn’t the daughter of Geard of Glastonbury for nothing. Incontinently she rushed straight to his side.

“You’re unhappy, Owen; you’re ill; you’re hurt. Something horrible’s troubling you.”

He pushed her arms away. He lurched to his feet. He bent down and picked up his bowler hat which was lying on its smooth crown, its dirty interior uppermost. “It’s nearly sunset,” he muttered. “If I don’t go now I’ll never go.”

“Where are you going, Owen?”

He looked at her wildly. “Well! he must be *stopped*, mustn’t he? It’s one thing or the other, isn’t it?”

“What *are* you talking about, Owen? Are you crazy?”

“Oh, nothing … nothing … nothing … nothing!” he muttered. “You don’t want to see me in the dock, do you? In the dock, woman!” These last words came from him with a wild shout.

Cordy glanced at the brown blinds which were bulging a little. There was a wind blowing up. She went to the door leading into the passage, locked it, and placed her back against it. “You don’t leave this room, Owen,” she gasped.

He was now buttoning up his black overcoat. His hat was on his head, pressed down so low over his eyes that his eyebrows were invisible. This produced a most curious effect as he glared at her from under its shadow. But an unexpected change of mood came upon him. He began wheedling and coaxing and imploring.

“It’s only a little way … just up the hill … it’s necessary too … necessary … very necessary … *Please* move, Cordy, and let me go …. You’ll be sorry if you don’t …. You won’t forgive yourself afterwards … if you don’t.” He almost wept as he beseeched her. In his own mind just then to stop a murder and to taste an appalling sweetness were motives both lost in the wild *necessity* he was in to get out of this room!

But she kept her eyes upon him all the time and she now noticed that he had begun casting a furtive, hurried, crafty look at the window. Nothing indeed would have been easier for him than to lift up that bulging blind and get out of that window! “I must do something to keep him here,” she thought, “and I mustn’t struggle with him … because of the child. Besides, he’d hit me. He’d hit me savagely.” A wild strange thought came to her then; came to her from seeing the look of that lowered blind. Very often in the evening she had undressed for his pleasure, with the blind pulled down like that, and the door locked.

She began feverishly stripping off her clothes. He followed every movement of her hands with those burning eyes, under the shadow of that bowler. His coat was buttoned up tight under his chin. He looked like a man ready to rush out upon pikes or bayonets. Crossing her arms over her chest she pulled her dress over her head and then her slip. Then she unloosed her petticoat and drawers. Stamping with her feet she extricated herself from these objects, letting her stockings and shoes remain. Backing against the door, she bent down and pulled off her vest, dragging it over her head. This final movement, when her head was bent low, and when her face was hidden, and when the garment, dragged forward by her eager hands was caught for a second on one of her hairpins, did stir some deep chord of excited desire in the man with the burning eyes.

He snatched off his hat and flung it in the purple chair. But she rose up to her full height now, her back still to the door, her long arms hanging limp by her sides, her chin lifted high, her head thrown back. Mr. Evans came slowly towards her. Poor Cordy's figure was anything but classical. She resembled a nude of Cranach. But there was such an heroic abandonment about her pose, and her eyes shone with such a lustrous appeal, that something happened within that other locked room, the room containing the iron bar. Not for nothing was this brave girl the child of Geard of Glastonbury. Roused to the uttermost her soul suddenly became a psychic force, a magnet of destruction, an annihilating ray, and the murderous instrument, summoning up page seventy-seven of that fatal book, crumbled into a pinch of dust.

Grotesque and Cranach-like though poor Cordy's naked body was, it was the body of a woman still, it was the ultimate symbol, the uttermost "Gleichnis," of life's wild experiment. Grotesque it might be, as nakedness went, but combined with the look she managed to fling, like a passion of immortal wine over the dark flame of his obsession, it overcame, it triumphed ….

One hour later Mr. Evans and Cordelia might both have been seen jumping with frantic haste out of Solly Lew’s taxi, and to the astonishment of that not easily surprised conveyor of mortal men, racing with desperate impatience up the slope of Gwyn-ap-Nud’shill. “They’re there, Cordy! They’re there! I see them!” panted Mr. Evans, trying in vain to out-distance Mr. Geard’s daughter.

It had been with some reluctance that Tossie Stickles — now for some heavenly months Tossie Barter — had been persuaded to leave her babies and accompany her husband and John Crow on this fanciful excursion to see the night fall upon Glastonbury from the summit of the Tor. Barter himself had been followed by one good piece of luck after another ever since they had been married. He had hired spacious and airy rooms in the same house in Northload Street where John and Mary lived, and between the two ménages there had been unruffled and uninterrupted harmony. With the establishment of the new régime in Glastonbury he had been entirely freed from the annoying presence of Red Robinson at the Factory. Robinson had now become what might be called the third triumvir among the magnates who, under Mr. Geard, dictatorially administered the affairs of the small community; and Barter was at liberty to manage the making of souvenirs entirely at his own discretion.

The one topic of conversation in these days that Barter indulged in and upon which he expatiated at inordinate length to Mary when they were alone was, what had been the psychological reason for the miserable way in which he had lived before he met Tossie. Into Mary’s private thoughts — and they were subtle and ironical enough — as she listened to these discourses, it is not necessary to go; but what she *said* to Barter was, that all unattached men are curiously ignorant of “what things a girl can do” — such was Mary’s expression — to make life pleasant.

Meanwhile, so happy was Tom Barter these days, that in a brief two months his whole expression changed and the whole cast of his countenance was altered. He positively looked fatter, too; and his manner of speech was different. He spoke in a tone much more easy, much more assured. It was their Rabelaisian sense of humour that was one of the greatest links between Tom and Tossie; and morning and night — with the twins sometimes included and sometimes not — their fits of giggling and chuckling and unrestrained laughter, going on and on and on, made the second storey of that gloomy old house sound as if a party of hilarious schoolboys was staying the night with a party of hilarious schoolgirls.

The mention of school is relevant enough in this connection; for what this *vita nuova* of Tom Barter really meant was that Tossie had picked up what might be called the man’s lost flesh-and-blood pride just where he had dropped it in his youth under his unlucky experiences at Gladman’s House at Greylands. Something in him, some psychic organ full of a delicious, animal gusto for simple things, and an invincible desire to giggle at everything in existence, had been restored to him by his contact with Tossie and not only this: for it soon became apparent, even to John and Mary, that Barter was no longer afraid to “stand up,” as Toss would put it, to “they bloomin’ gentry.” This aspect of what the girl had done for him had been brought especially into evidence of late by reason of his association with Lady Rachel, who — still unmarried to young Athling but still constantly at his side — found herself asking Barter, in place of anybody else, to meet her father whenever he came to the Pilgrims’.

Lord P. was constantly coming to the Pilgrims’ now; not because he loved a communistic Glastonbury, for he was still excessively nervous of the mob that had attacked him; but because he had become seriously worried about Rachel's relations with her Ned; and the queer thing was that with his Norfolk youthfulness restored to him, and the Gladman House years erased from his life, by these perpetual giggling fits with Tossie, Barter proved much more a match for the elderly nobleman and a much more agreeable table-companion to him than anyone else that Rachel could have picked up.

Lady Rachel's own genius, too, for these little souvenir figures that his factory was now turning out by the thousands and sending all over the world, had by this time really got Barter interested in his job. The souvenir factory was doing by far the most flourishing business in Glastonbury. More money was being made by it than either by the new dye works that the municipality had communized or by the old dye works that Philip was still running, and far more than by the Crow tin mine at Wookey, which now began to show signs of having exhausted its vein of the precious metal; and Barter's professional pride, as the head of so flourishing a business, being mingled with his new psychological self-respect and his new freedom from the wearisome hunt for erotic novelty, made him just now the happiest and best-balanced *male* animal in the town; although in the intoxication of a pure zest for life in its essence he was probably surpassed not only by his own radiant Tossie but also by Tossie's relative by marriage, the beautiful and mystical Nancy.

" 'Tis a shame," Tossie remarked to Mary as she poured out tea for her and John while awaiting Barter's return from the factory, " 'tis a shame for you to stay and look after the kids. They'd really stay asleep just as they be and no one would disturb 'em if I just locked up the place."

"I wouldn't think of it, Toss dear," said Mary emphatically, "so don't speak of it again. Tom'll be back soon, John; so don't finish the tea-cakes!"

“I wasn’t thinking of finishing them,” protested John indignantly, “but to make sure, I’ll put ’em on the stove, if I may, Toss?” He rose, as he spoke, and replaced the dish in question near the big smoking tea-kettle. As he surveyed the scene at the table, Mary’s dark head and Tossie’s fair one, both bent towards the cradle at its side, and a bowl of snowdrops, their stems protruding from green moss, resting near its edge with a baby’s milk-bottle propped against it, John got a sudden delicious feeling of the continuity of these *domestic vignettes*, as they gather themselves together and take varied patterns all the way down the centuries! He paused for a second, his hand on the dresser shelf above the stove where Tossie kept her pepper-pot and salt-bowl, and the fanciful idea seized him that groups of this sort — the two girls’ heads, the cottage-loaf on the rough linen tablecloth, the two babies’ heads in the cradle on the floor — were all answering and responding as they reappeared down the ages, from the dawn of time, to some invisible pattern of pre-ordained harmony which was forever being struggled after by Nature and forever being just missed, or lost as soon as it came together.

As he stood there watching those four feminine heads, the grown ones and the others, grouped about that cottage-loaf and that bowl of snowdrops, the scene wavered and fluctuated before him, melted, dissolved and changed. Through that Glastonbury room, as he gave himself up to his waking-trance, flowed the big river at Northwold, rose the span of Foulden Bridge, whitish and narrow, deepened and darkened the dim pools of Dye’s Hole, under their ancient willow roots! Why should he wait for old Tom’s return, why should he wait till he and Mary were alone together, to tell her the thrilling news with which his mind was brimming over that afternoon? He had come to this tea-party at Tossie’s to find Mary already there; and except for what his wife could read in his excited face — and he knew she had read something already! — he had had no chance even to whisper to her by herself. Where had John come from on this twenty-fifth of February, this day of such unusual atmospheric effects?

He had found a little note from the Mayor when he reached his office-shanty down by the railway after lunching with Mary at his favourite Othery Dairy in Street Road; and back again to Street Road he had immediately dragged himself, not a little peevish at having to retrace his steps across the whole width of the town. But once inside Cardiff Villa, once ensconced in Mrs. Geard's chair, with the well-known knitted antimacassar of bright coloured wools behind his head, and old Geard nodding his great white face opposite him, he had known, by one of his swift vagabond instincts, that, as far as he was concerned, this day of strange under-water lights was a bringer of incredible, undreamed-of luck. To the end of his days would John Crow remember that interview with his master. The first thing he had noticed — for he had seen little of Mr. Geard since the man had become so much more than the Mayor of Glastonbury — was that Bloody Johnny had got older. Yes, his hair was greyer, his face was whiter, his plump hands were more wrinkled and the stomach over which they were folded was more capacious.

"And that's why, lad," Mr. Geard said, "I can talk to 'ee about things I can't speak of to anyone else. 'Twould make Crummie unhappy, and the sweet lass is unhappy enough over Holy Sam, and 'twould make Cordy nervous; and as for my dear wife — The truth is, lad, I've been telling He, ever since our opening of the arch, that His work for me here be about done. At first He wouldn't give ear to what I said. He thought 'twas laziness, or the Devil in me bosom. But when I went on telling He how 'twere, He came little by little to give heed. 'Tweren't that He were deaf, even afore, ye must understand, sonny; but 'twere that I be such a queer one, and that I had summat in me — yes, laddie, that's the solemn truth — what He couldn't get the hang of!"

John looked at the diabolical black eyes — now gleaming like two fuliginous mine shafts out of some Tartarean tin mine — and he thought to himself: "I don't wonder that Christ finds it hard to understand him. The truth is the old chap's never been more than half a Christian."

"You are not easy to understand, Mr. Geard," he murmured aloud.

The remark seemed to displease the Mayor of Glastonbury. "That's because I'm too simple for 'ee. I be too simple for anything in this clever town. I be a Montagu man, I be."

"I don't call you simple, Mr. Geard!" John was growing excessively bold in this interview with his master. Was it that his drifting tramp's mind had gathered up an inkling that this was the very last time, upon this earth, that he would talk to Mr. Geard face to face? It is not often given to human beings to be able to treat a fragment of time that can never return again with the intense and ritualistic concentration appropriate to a moment irretrievably slipping away into an everlasting impossibility of repetition.

But on this February afternoon John Crow did touch exactly and precisely such an intense concentration. He attained it — and again and again, after it was all over, he thanked his stars he *had* attained it — partly because of his childish and greedy high spirits under the pressure of his instinct about some incredible good fortune and partly because, beneath the semi-hypnotism that Geard's black eyes exercised over him, there was a direct transference of thought between them.

But was it really possible that Christ Himself found it hard to understand in this singular Servant of His, what he, John Crow, the eternal heathen, the Stone-worshipper, the forehead-tapper upon Stones, understood quite easily? What he *did* see was, or at least, what he imagined he saw was that

Geard of Glastonbury, having built his Saxon arch, having worked his Miracle, having inaugurated his new, mystical, Johannine and anti-Pauline cult, had decided that it was an appropriate time — although there was no hurry about it and it was necessary to avoid any unpleasant shocks — to leave this misty, rainy, subaqueous atmosphere of Glastonbury and pay an exploring visit to the Isles of the Dead.

"I believe you are so little of a simple person, Sir," John had the gall to say to him now, "that you are meditating what many people would bluntly call *suicide*, although there might be, I am ready to admit, other and prettier names for it."

Bloody Johnny lifted his left eyebrow at this, a sign with him that he acknowledged the receipt of a palpable hit. He shuffled in his chair, leaned forward a little and smiled. "But I've hardly begun my talks to these foreigners," he said.

"If you'll excuse my saying so, Sir," said John, who now seemed driven on by some demon within him to try and frighten away his good luck even at the moment when it was on the point of falling into his lap, "I think you express your ideas more effectively by just being what you are and talking casually to your friends. Leave it to Athling and Lady Rachel, in your *Wayfarer*, Sir, to make your thoughts reasonable and logical. Christ, if I may be allowed to refer to Him, left it to His followers to round off His ideas."

Mr. Geard leaned back again in his chair. With half-shut eyes and with the tips of his fingers held together in the way old family lawyers hold them, he looked dreamily and a little quizzically at John.

"I … *would* … rather like … to ask you a question, young man," he said slowly.

"Say on, dear my Lord," quoth John.

"Could you conceive anyone, could you, in fact, for there's no need to beat about the bush, conceive *me*, committing suicide out of love of life, instead of out of weariness of it or out of hatred for it?"

"Love of life?" questioned John.

He pulled up his legs under him in Megan's chair and leaning forward with his hands on its elbows allowed his lank frame to relax with a certain voluptuousness and then grow rigid with an eager, intense, magnetic curiosity. "Death and what's beyond death," went on Mr. Geard, "are only what ye might call the unknown aspects of life. What I want to ask you is, do you suppose anyone's ever committed suicide out of an *excess of life*, simply to enjoy the last experience in full consciousness?" John's eyes were now shining with lively curiosity. He had forgotten all about his premonition of his master's benevolence. His whole being quivered with a hyena-like lust for spiritual blood. Curiously enough, it was exactly at that same hour, in this afternoon of sub-aquatic lights and shadows, that Paul Trent pulled up *his* legs, on to the bench by the Cattle Market railings, to reveal his secret feelings to the death-doomed Miss Elizabeth.

It was the privilege of that stricken lady to listen to the confession of a feline idealist. It was the privilege — or the trial — of Mr. Geard to be inquisitioned by a prowling sceptic. In a town of so many "heavy-weather" somnambulists, these light-footed jungle cats and jackals seemed lured, by a necessity in their nature, to rub themselves with excited tails or with panting nostrils against the most formidable characters in their vicinity.

"But, Sir," John protested now. "Don't you think that whatever the minds or spirits of people want to do, their bodies, or the central vital nerve in their bodies must always hold them back at the last? Don't you think, Sir, that though our minds can desire death for many reasons it's a different story when we come actually to try killing ourselves? Don't you think that something automatically leaps up then, that loathes death, and must fight against death, do what you can, until the bitter end?"

Hearing these words from the figure in his wife's chair, Mr. Geard emitted a sound that might be rendered by the syllables "rumti-dum-ti-dum."

"But if this quick-spring-nerve or this jumping-jack-nerve in us, boy," he said, "gets in the way of what we yearn for, can't we pinch its throat, or give its fretful pulse a little tap?"

John sighed and the light died out of his face. He uncurled his long legs and straightened them out. He ceased to be the eager intellectual jackal, and became the helpless, slouching, sunshine-loving tramp. There had suddenly come over him as he looked into the eyes of this man a chilly sense of something so monstrously different from anything he had ever met, that it frightened him. The tone in which Mr. Geard had said "pinch its throat" sounded like the shuddering heave of all the ground underneath all the things that were warm, familiar, natural. What *were* the huge antennae of Bloody Johnny's soul fumbling towards, out of the depths in which it stirred and moved?

"I shouldn't wonder," thought John, "if the old man's not got bored to extinction by all this Grail business and miracle business and new religion business. I shouldn't wonder if what he really wants is that delicious death-to-boredom that I get when I make love to Mary. The old girl upstairs couldn't give him any thrill of *that* kind and he's been snubbing Rachel lately. I *know* that; for I've seen 'em together; and he cares nothing for boys. I believe he's turned against the whole caboodle of this Glastonbury stunt. Sick to death of it he is; and I don't blame him, the poor old beggar! What he wants is a plump little Abishag to cuddle. He's a warm-blooded old rogue and he's gone cold i' the vitals." Thus did John struggle, by the use of the most cynical considerations from his heathen Stone-worshipping nature, to cover up the primordial ice-crack, the glacier-crevasse among his sunlit earth-rocks, which the problem of Mr. Geard perhaps quite erroneously had uncovered before his pessimistic imagination. To an earth-loving vicious East-Anglian it was impossible even to conceive the idea that Geard of Glastonbury might deliberately kill himself in order to gain more life. He could do it to escape from life; *that* was easily imaginable; but not this other.

"No, no," thought John. "There never has been, and there never will be, among all the millions and millions and millions of suicides, since the beginning of the world, one single one like this. It's as impossible as for a man to get out of his own skin. Life itself would fight against it with tooth and nail. The old chap is just fooling himself. What he really wants is a sweet young doxy to his bed … but, heigh-ho! The fellow would never hurt his old woman to *that* tune … so there we are … I wonder if he *is* going to pension me off?"

It was at this point in this memorable interview — the last that John was ever destined to have with his grandfather's friend — that Mr. Geard did turn to practical matters.

He laid before his secretary the whole array of the startling things he had already — though strongly against the advice of Mr. Robert Stilly — arranged with the bank to have done.

It was a sad witness to the difficulty of starting a real independent commune in the midst of an old kingdom like England that the Glastonbury bank remained absolutely untouched by the new regime, save in so far as the large sums of money piled up by the town passed into its hands.

Mr. Geard had bought small annuities for his wife, for Cordelia and for Crummie. He had also — John was perfectly right in his instinct there —

purchased for John himself an annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

He had, in these arrangements, entirely exhausted the whole forty thousand pounds' legacy left by Canon Crow.

And so John was wondering as he stood by Tossie's dresser watching those four feminine heads, whether to wait till tonight to tell Mary, or whether to tell her at once, and obtain her reaction — and Tossie's too — to the exciting news before Tom came in. He recalled exactly how Mr. Geard had looked, as he let him out of his front door only an hour ago, and how the man had abruptly cut short his almost tearful gratitude by the curious words: " 'Tis His Blood-money, lad. 'Tis His Blood-money. And ye must never forget that, none o' ye, when Easter comes round and ye eat and drink the Life in the Death!"

John found himself, when later in that spring twilight they were walking past the Vicarage gate together, sorry he had *not* waited till he got Mary alone to tell her about it, instead of blurting it all out as he had done, and making her jump up from the table with her grey eyes big as saucers.

It was the way Tom had taken it, when he came in, that troubled him now. They hadn't been very considerate of Tom's feelings, chattering together, he and Mary, about how they would clear off to Northwold at once and hunt for a cottage on the Didlington Road.

It was Toss, of course, who had been the one — not he or Mary at all — to notice how Tom was hit. The girl had begun hurriedly talking at once about how Tom and she would have to save up and come and join them in a few years when the twins were bigger.

"But, Toss," Mary had murmured at that point, *"you'd* never bear to leave Glastonbury, would you?" and the words had hung suspended in the air, full of subtle reproach for them both. It was then that he had for the first time caught the grim bitterness of what Tom was feeling and his aching longing for his native soil and his craving to show Tossie the wide waters of Didlington Lake full of pike and perch and waterlilies.

They caught sight of the shirtsleeves of Mr. Weatherwax as they passed the Vicarage gate. The old rogue was pulling up weeds underneath some rhododendron bushes at the edge of the shrubbery; and as he laboured he sang: “The Brewer, the Miller, the Malster and I lost a heifer, lost a filly, lost a Ding-Dong; When Daffadowndillies look up at the sky; Pass along boys! Pass along! The Brewer, the Miller, the Malster and I left a heifer, left a filly, left a Ding-Dong; Down in a grassy green grave for to lie; Pass along boys! Pass along!”

The gardener’s back was turned to them and he did not rise from his stooping position as they passed. Something, however, about the sound of his thick bass voice, muffled and muted by his bending position, was so gross, so earthy, so suggestive of ranksmelling roots, tossed up lob-worms, slug-slime on a pronged fork, and bitter-sweet human sweat, that when Barter, who always relished talking in Rabelaisian fashion to Tossie in front of the fastidious though not exactly squeamish John, made some coarse joke about the fellow’s enormous rump, John got a sudden, quick, spontaneous revulsion from his old friend, which was not lessened when Tossie started off on one of her ringing peals of Benedict Street laughter.

“Oh, how glad I’ll be,” he thought to himself, “when I’m safe back in that boat on the Wissey! By God! I know what I’ll do. I’ll hire that boat in Alder Dyke from that fellow, so that we’ll have it when we want it.”

It suddenly occurred to him that it was in connection with the smell of alders and with the look of their dark sturdy foliage that he had thought of Tom that day he was with Mary and he set himself to recall the boyish figure of his childish memories.

As they debouched into Chilkwell Street and were passing the old Tithe Barn, John heard Tossie, Glastonbury girl as she was, say something about one of the evangelistic creatures. It must have been a remark of more surprising lewdness and more amusing originality than John could quite follow, and it did not win much favour in his ears.

"The truth is," he thought, "I'm not suited for a sociable life, or to make merry with my friends. When once I've got Mary to myself in Northwold, I swear I won't see a single soul; and I won't invite a single soul. We'll live absolutely alone, Mary and I; absolutely alone and to ourselves! This girl's a decent girl, and her kids are nice kids; but I couldn't have stood living in the same house and having everything *à quatre* much longer. This hundred and fifty from the old man is a heavenly escape. It's a windfall out of the air; it's a benediction. *Tonnerre de Dieu!* It's as much one of his miracles as his curing any of those people. Christ! I'd soon be converted to the worship of Geard the Saviour if the old chap *did* kick the bucket. I hope he saw how grateful I was. I *did* kiss his hand. I'm damned glad I did *that*; for I think it pleased him. Perhaps in his whole life, the life I daresay of one of the greatest men who've ever lived, I'm the only person who's ever kissed his hand! And think of the number of ridiculous society-whores whose hands are kissed every day. Oh, damn and blast this human breed!"

They were passing all Mr. Geard's improvements on Chalice Hill now. In the green twilight, in spite of the litter and the presence of many unsightly shanties, the Mayor's Saxon arch stood out nobly and impressively. Beyond the Grail Fount, too, they could see the newly erected Rotunda and this also had a dignity of its own at this hour. It was indeed a sort of heretical temple that Bloody Johnny's architect was building. John surveyed it with infinite disgust.

"The dear old chap," he thought, "ought never to be betrayed into playing the mountebank. If he's anything, he's the founder, not the expounder. He'll spoil it all if he goes on trying to explain."

"Who *were* them Saxons, Tom?" enquired Tossie as they passed these various erections. "Were 'un savages, them Early Christians? Did 'un worship King Arthur?"

Her question seemed to tickle Barter hugely and he at once began chaffing her about her ignorance of history. But John thought to himself, "Evans would say that the real cause of old Geard's getting on the rocks and talking of suicide is his disregard of Arthur and his Welsh Demons. I wonder if it's possible that—" and his mind went back to that inexplicable event that had happened to himself at Pomparlès Bridge. John's hatred of Glastonbury and its traditions was betrayed to the end by his incorrigible interest in psychic problems. Mr. Geard's mysticism had always influenced him more than he was willing to admit; and in any case he was a temperamental heathen rather than a materialist. He was quite as sceptical of materialistic explanations as he was of the occult occurrences that gave rise to them.

The fancy came into his head now that in his daily visits to Chalice Hill and his constant disturbance of that dangerous earth Mr. Geard might have come under some deliberately evil spell prepared long ago by these old Celtic magicians.

"Evans ought to have stopped him," he said to himself as they passed St. Michael's Inn, "from fooling those Welsh fairies by resuscitating a great thundering Saint like Dunstan!"

"Mad Bet's window be shut," said Tossie, "and she's curtain drawn. I be afeared thik means her's peeping out at we and making faces at we."

"Bosh!" muttered Barter crossly.

For some reason this particular fuss that all the Glastonbury girls made about Mad Bet irritated the man's Norfolk stolidity.

"Bosh, Toss! What a baby you are! The window's shut because it's a chilly night. The woman's probably in bed."

"No more in bed than thee be, Tom!" replied his wife with spirit. "Tom don't like I talking about Mad Bet," she added. "He be more afraid of she than I be!"

"I tell you," grumbled Barter, more vehemently than the occasion seemed to demand, "that woman is in bed; or else she's strolling harmlessly up Tor Hill, just as we are, in the cool of the evening. You Somerset people make too much of an old trot's eccentricity. Your Betsy, or whatever you call her, wouldn't excite any attention at all if she lived in Norfolk. You've pampered her down here and petted her till she thinks she's a regular Mother Shipton."

So spoke Tom Barter; and his temper about such a trifle might be considered as a premonitory sign that he was not completely impervious to the distant hum of the catastrophic avalanche.

At that very moment as the three of them reached the gate into Tor Field, the obedient and respectful Codfin was helping Betsy Chinnock to ascend a complicated system of precipitous workmen's ladders which now connected the interior floor of St. Michael's Tower with its ruined belfry, and this again with its airy summit. Here, once more, the Mayor's tireless architect from London had been at work; for the communal council had decided that if a light circular wooden staircase were erected inside from bottom to top, it would be possible to charge a shilling's admission to this magnificent watch-tower, which would greatly increase their weekly revenue. Alone among the council's recent expenditures this invasion of St. Michael's

Tower interested the Vicar of Glastonbury, who regarded it as the beginning of that rebuilding of the old church of which he had been talking so long.

Mr. Dekker had indeed several times of late, before even Penny Pitches was down in her kitchen, slipped out of his lonely house and ascended the hill and climbed all these ladders in order to challenge the sunrise and to think about Nell and about his son. They were not difficult ladders to climb; and being inside so narrow a space, a climber was not so liable to dizziness as would have been the case if they had been propped up on the outside.

Not a soul in Glastonbury, if we rule out the infuriated spirit of Gwyn-ap-Nud as too insubstantial a presence to be called a soul — had beheld the Quantocks man's dark figure, standing erect up there at dawn, defying his ancient enemy as it rose like an enormous red balloon out of Bridgwater Bay, and praying there for his son and for his son's lost girl.

It was not the first time that Codfin had attended Mr. Evans' Grail Messenger upon a climbing adventure, and if overpowering sexual passion had not made the woman's knees shake, very much as Mr. Evans' own knees did when he opened "The Unpardonable Sin," Codfin would have got her to the top very easily.

To the top he did eventually get her, after a long rest at the black worm-eaten Jacobean oak-beams that were all that was left of the ancient belfry; and if Gwyn-ap-Nud *had* been more than an insubstantial presence he would surely have taken these two for a real witch being helped to her pulpit of far-flung curses by her attendant demon. Once at the top and leaning over the edge like two mediaeval gargoyles, Codfin snuffed the pure twilight with aesthetic rapture. The fact that he was, in less than half an hour, going to commit murder, rather enhanced than otherwise this natural ecstasy. How could Codfin contemplate so calmly, as he surveyed this aerial landscape, the idea of putting to death a person who had never done him any harm, simply because he was moved to this maniacal issue by this crazy woman? How could Codfin, when he himself enjoyed in so intense a fashion the physical thrill of breathing this fragrant twilight, deliberately condemn another man to eternal unconsciousness, and himself to an almost certain death in a prison courtyard?

The feelings of hired assassins, and such really was Codfin — though what hired him was religious awe for his witch-queen — must be of a different nature from those of all other murderers.

Completely devoid of any previous personal attitude to their allotted victim they take upon themselves to establish between them the most personal of all attitudes. But how could Codfin risk the gallows for the sake of the frenzy of Mad Bet? Ask the fanatic devotee of some outraged idol how he can risk death to avenge his deity!

Mad Bet had become Codfin's deity. To obey Mad Bet had become Codfin's religion. Between two unpleasant experiences — the hangman's rope which he had never felt, and the look of reproach in Mad Bet's eyes which he *had* felt — he selected, without giving the alternative so much as a second thought, the one that shocked his imagination the less. Compared with the problem of Codfin, however, how easy, how natural, was that of Mad Bet! Mad Bet was actuated, just as Mr. Evans had been, till the nakedness of Mr. Geard's daughter exorcised it, by the nerve-worm of sex.

To be middle-aged, to be of a personal hideousness that was revolting, to be threatened by the county asylum, to be the laughing-stock of the children of several streets, to have a skull under your hat bald as an egg, all these things weigh in the balances as nothing when that little nerve-worm begins to heave and froth and spit.

"There 'un be! Do 'ee see 'un, Missus?" cried Codfin suddenly, lowering his head below the level of the battlements and pressing his companion's shoulder to force her to crouch down.

"Thee be sure 'twon't make 'un suffer, Finn Toller?" she said, as their four eyes watched the three figures entering Tor Field.

Codfin emitted a faint chuckle at this. "Didn't 'ee see thik bar?" he whispered. "Thik bar did make me poor arm ache wi' carrying 'un. Thik bar be enough to stunny a elaphint."

"Oh, me king, oh, me love, oh, me sweet marrow!" cried the madwoman from the bottom of her worm-driven heart.

"Don't 'ee let they see thee's head over edge of Tower," remarked the other calmly. "I be going down now. And don't 'ee scream nor cry out anythink when I do it, and don't 'ee holler if thik Barter catches hold of I. Just 'ee stay where 'ee be till all be quiet; and don't 'ee say nothink either to no one when tomorrow be come and they've a put poor Coddy in canary-cage!"

As Finn Toller scrambled quickly down the long ladders to the belfry and then down the others to the floor, he said to himself: "I knewed Mr. Curiosity wouldn't come after all his talk. They scholards what reads of fornications wouldn't fuggle a fly, nor them as reads of stiff 'uns wouldn't drown a cat. But a' won't tell tales of Coddy neither, for fear of's own skin!"

With these sagacious comments upon human psychology Mr. Toller went calmly to the place where he had propped up his murderous weapon. Chance or fate — or the air-squadrons of Gwyn-ap-Nud — seemed resolved to make Mr. Toller's task as easy as possible that night.

When the three friends reached the top they turned round and stood panting and out of breath on a ledge of grass a yard or so below the threshold stone of the tower.

Tossie quickly turned their attention to the vast, sad, greenish-coloured plain stretched out before them; and even before they had got their breath she entangled them in the absorbing and piquant subject as to exactly at what spot in this airy map their own Northload house was situated. This was where Chance — or the spirit of Gwyn-ap-Nud — was so favourable to Codfin; for unless the girl had started some especially beguiling topic the second they paused, John would, almost certainly, have gone straight to the tower, following the natural human instinct of attaining an objective, and also obeying a personal fondness for touching cold stones with his hand, and thus made it impossible for the assassin to steal forth from that door with the monstrous piece of iron on his shoulder.

This is however exactly what the murderer was permitted now to do. Step by step, as the girl pointed towards one spot and John pointed towards another and Barter protested that both were too far to the south, Finn Toller came softly and quietly, down the slope behind them, with the iron bar now lifted up in both his hands.

Nature the great healer is also the great destroyer; and the tendency to giggle at the same things and at the same second which had wiped out all memories of Gladman's House for Barter now wiped out for him all memories of every kind. For a remark that John now made started off the pair of them uttering such ungovernable peals of laughter that Barter was forced to shift his position a little.

In that shifting of his position he saw in a flash the figure of Codfin standing behind John and he realised in the twinkling of an eyelid that the hideous instrument in the tramp's hands was already trembling in the air.

The inevitable material laws of balance, of rhythm, of gravitation, of dynamics, had already decided that the iron bar was going to descend on John's head. What they had not counted on, or taken into their mechanical consideration, was the automatic swiftness, swifter than the descent of death itself, with which the instinct of a Norfolk gentleman could express itself in action at a deadly crisis.

To ward off this blow, to arrest this descent of the iron bar, Barter now plunged forward, with the natural result that, in place of the thing descending on his friend’s head, it descended on his own, cracking his skull full above the forehead and killing him instantaneously.

Just as twenty-five years ago the young Tom had come so often to John’s rescue when their boat got entangled in the weeds of the Wissey, so the grown-up Tom, father of twins, and husband of Tossie Stickles, now gave up his life for the same friend on this Somersetshire hill. He was killed instantaneously, the front of his skull being bashed in so completely, that bits of bone covered with bloody hair surrounded the deep dent which the iron made. His consciousness, the “I am I” of Tom Barter, shot up into the ether above them like a released fountain-jet and quivering there pulsed forth a spasm of feeling, in which outrage, ecstasy, indignation, recognition, pride, touched a dimension of Being more quick with cosmic life than Tom had ever reached before in his thirty-seven years of conscious existence. This heightened — nay! this quadrupled — awareness dissolved in a few seconds, after its escape from the broken cranium, but whether it passed, with its personal identity intact, into that invisible envelope of rarefied matter which surrounds our astronomic sphere or whether it perished irrecoverably, the present chronicler knows not.

Tossie flung herself on Barter’s body with a piercing scream that rang out over the whole valley. Scream after scream tore itself from that soft mass of clinging female loss till her fair hair was dabbled with Tom’s blood and actually entangled with broken bits of hair-covered bone that had been Tom’s hard skull.

Some said they heard her screams as far down the valley as Tithe Barn. Lily Rogers maintained she heard them as she picked parsley for Miss Drew's dinner in the Abbey House garden.

John made an instinctive movement to pursue the murderer; but the tramp, hearing wild cries from the slope of the hill, and seeing Mr. Evans and Cordelia rushing up the ascent towards him, dashed back into the tower and clambered, swift as a monkey, up the tall ladders inside. For quite the space of a couple of minutes, after his first motion of pursuit, John stood stock-still, his face so contorted with horror that it assumed the appearance of a wooden puppet, listening in spellbound, frozen apathy to the girl's heart-rending screams.

A semi-cirque of flying rooks, just seven in number, flapped with creaking wings across the top of the tower, making their way northwest towards Mark Moor. Little did *they* reck of the cracking of the skull of a man upon a patch of grass! As for a tiny earth beetle that was foraging for its insect prey just there, it scurried away from Tom's blood as if it had been a lake of brimstone.

In addition to this, a panic-stricken hare, fleeing in wild terror from the man and woman who were rushing up the hill, came with its long desperate leaps almost up to John's feet, and then, remaining motionless there for a second, rushed past the tower and away down the slope towards Havyatt Gap. The appearance of this hare aroused John from his paralysis. He ran to the door of the tower and pulled it wide open. The couple of minutes' delay, however, had enabled Finn Toller to ascend, for he climbed like an animal rather than a man, to the top of the last ladder; but here he was met by Mad Bet, in a cold paroxysm of frenzied remorse. Without giving her unfortunate devotee time to reach the stone platform where she knelt to receive him, the woman seized the thin bare wrists that Codfin extended towards her and flung him off the ladder. Finn Toller fell backwards, head downwards; and John, stepping hurriedly from the door at the man's death cry, saw his body crash to the ground in a cloud of dust and heard the ghastly thud upon the ground with which his neck was broken.

Like a great bald-headed vulture that has been shot through the wing, Mad Bet, on the stone summit of the tower, crouched with convulsive shudderings against the parapet. Here she lay, without thought or purpose, moaning in a low voice to herself, and covering the cold slab against which she pressed her face with piteous tears and murmuring endearments, as though it were the mangled body of the man who had roused that terrible nerve-worm that devours hearts. Mad Bet had not seen what had really occurred down there. To her disturbed and tragic consciousness, it was John who lay dead at the foot of the tower with his skull smashed in.

There is that about an uttermost sorrow which levels all distinctions; and not Deianeira for Heracles, not Iseult for Tristram, moaned and murmured to her lost love with more absoluteness of pitiful grief than did this bald-headed creature on the top of the tower to her supposedly dead idol. Round about her crouching form a couple of great swifts, those pointedwinged demons of the high air, flew in narrowing circles, uttering their short shrill cries, and these sharp sounds were answered by the melancholy and more familiar wailings of the peewits in the lower levels of Tor Field, disturbed by Tossie's screams and calling out warnings to one another.

Broken under that bar, Mad Bet envisaged the sweet head of her dear love; while the wild screams of Tossie over Tom's body joined the age-old chorus: "*Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus tam cari capitis*?"

The green twilight was being sucked down now by undulations of the green earth. The invisible dews were falling. A gusty night-wind was rising up from beyond Queen's Sedgemoor. The first cold stars were coming out over the three horizons. Where the sun had gone down in the west, there lingered only a faint dying trace of the livid before-night whiteness. At this actual moment of the earth revolution, although under very different atmospheric conditions, in China, in India, on the banks of the Danube, by the Black Sea and in the tents of the Sahara, in battle, murder, pestilence and shipwreck, in bolted doom sudden death was rushing on the hairy scalps of men.

Did Tossie feel her grief worse than any of those who mourned? Or were the moans of some old Chinese wife on the banks of the Yellow River yet more heart-broken, the terrible silence of some despairing Malay in a Singapore hovel yet more crushing?

As for John, the worst moment of the whole unspeakable nightmare was when he lifted that plump bundle of wild hysteria from off the body of his friend and laying her on the grass dabbed with his handkerchief at her brow and cheeks and actually removed with his finger and thumb a fragment of Tom's smashed skull from her sticky hair. She rolled over — and he was glad she did, for her face was shocking to him — and began smothering her convulsions in the green grass, her fingers plucking and clutching at its cold earthy roots.

It was then, just before Evans and Cordelia reached them, that he snatched off his overcoat and covered Tom's head and shoulders with it.

"Oh, what has happened? What *has* happened?" panted Cordelia. "Has that man gone? Has he hurt you? *Who* is hurt? Is Mr. Barter hurt? Has he *killed* Mr. Barter? Where is he? Have you let him go?"

Mr. Evans spoke not a single word. He did two things. And these he did with the punctual, mechanical precision of a consummate actor performing a long-ago perfectly rehearsed part. He stared round him till he caught sight of the iron bar lying on the ground; and stooping down he lifted up the bloodied end from the earth and deliberately wiped it with a handful of grass. Then he went over to where the body was lying. Hesitating for the flicker of a second, he fell on his knees and removing John's coat from Barter's crushed head, gazed at what was revealed.

The sight had an immediate physical effect upon him. He replaced the coat calmly enough; but rising to his feet and turning his back to the corpse, he began vomiting with cataclysmic heavings of his tall frame. Was the sexual nerve in Mr. Evans, that sadism-drunk Worm of the Pit, stirred to abominable excitement as he went through these motions? Mercy of Jesus forbid! That nerve-worm lay, stretched out in the man's vitals as he vomited there, cold and constricted, limp as the sloughed off skin of a summer snake.

Cordelia, who had showed signs of being more concerned over Mr. Evans as he swayed and retched, and retched and swayed, than over the murder itself, now sat down on the grass by Tossie's side and took her head in her lap. The first time she did this the distracted girl beat her off with her hands and tried to get up and rush over to Barter's body; but the sight of that coat hiding the crushed head brought so sickening a sense of her loss that she hid her face between Cordelia's knees and broke into piteous wailings. These wailings carried no longer, however, that terrifying note in them that her first shrill screams had had, and by degrees they sank down from sheer exhaustion into low moans; till at last the unhappy girl lay quite silent and still.

Mr. Evans, whose paroxysm of vomiting had ceased now, obeyed John with humble docility, as the latter demanded his help in dragging forth the body of the murderer from the tower. This quiet but by no means stupid docility became a fixed habit with Mr. Evans from now on. It was not that the man's sanity was affected by the accumulating shocks of this day. What it seemed to be was a substitution of a definite sense of guilt over Barter's death for the less tangible but far more deadly remorse over his sadistic dreams and fantasies. This new guilt of his the man took calmly, and in a certain sense sanely; but it had a much more disastrous effect upon him from an external and practical point of view than the other. When the twenty-sixth of February dawned poor Cordy was startled to discover that her Owen's hair had turned white. He had indeed become visibly and palpably and in every physical respect, if not an old man, certainly an elderly man.

It was lucky for Cordelia that the tiny annuity, so carefully purchased for her by Mr. Geard, was enough for their bare needs in that little house above Bove Town, on the hill leading up to St. Edmund's Brick Yard; for after this crisis in his days, Mr. Evans found himself quite incapable of going on with his work in Number Two's shop. That *really* elderly and indeed extremely aged gentleman did not feel it incumbent upon him to regard his now sleeping partner as in any way entitled to share the ensuing increment from their more than ever lucrative business; nor, in spite of Cordelia's indignation, could she induce Mr. Evans to make any claims.

Slowly and laboriously — sometimes writing no more than a few pages a day — did Mr. Evans continue working at his life's task, the monumental "Vitus Merlini Ambrosiani"; but luckily for him Cordelia did not extend to the intellectual interests of her husband that impatient contempt which she always felt for her father's religious doctrines.

That culminating scene when she had exorcised, by her heroic gesture behind the brown blinds, the nerve-devil in Mr. Evans, had endeared the man to her in the way mothers are endeared to a deformed or an idiot child; and when her real child perished later after a premature birth she lavished upon its helpless parent all the savage maternal protectiveness that the infant would have claimed if it had lived.

Visitors to Glastonbury can still see, when a little weary perhaps of romantic antiquities they wander up Wells Old Road towards Edmund Hill Lane, with a view of inspecting those famous tile works that have given the town its mellow roofs, a slow-moving, absent-minded, white-haired gentleman, reading a blue-covered book as he walks along or as he leans upon the fence that leads into those suburban fields between Wells Old Road and Maidencroft Lane.

This book, if any passer-by were bold enough to peruse its title, would turn out to be Malory's "Morte D'Arthur," but such a stranger would not be able to guess that what Mr. Evans is searching for there is something not to be found in Malory at all — nor indeed in any Grail Book, since the time of the great Welshman Bleheris — namely the real meaning of the mystical word Esplumeoir.

It was not, as the devoted Codfin had warned her it had best not be, till all was dark and deserted upon Glastonbury Tor that Mad Bet climbed down those long ladders and made her way home to St. Michael's Inn. So great was the hubbub of voices, all relating various and contradictory versions of that evening's tragedy, and so crowded were bar-room, parlour and kitchen, that it was easy for the demented woman to slip back into her unlit room unobserved by old John Chinnock or by his wife. It was indeed Tom Chinnock, her nephew, who found her outstretched on her bed when he came long after closing-time to bring her her supper. She was still alive and perfectly conscious; but she had hurt her heart in some way in climbing alone down those steep ladders, and she never left her bed again.

Not a word did she breathe as to her share in Barter's death. Not a sign did she make that she wanted to see her "Dilly darling gent," her "sweet moon's marrow" again before she died; but Tommy Chinnock reported later (for the Terre Gastée stone-thrower was her best friend at the last, though Solly Lew used to come up and sit by her bed of an evening) that the day before she died, which happened on the first of March, she had asked him to go for Mr. Geard.

No one, save Tommy, till his aunt was safe in the Wells Road Cemetery knew that the woman herself had sent for the Mayor; though they all knew that the Mayor had gone up to her room — after having a stiff glass of ale with old John — and had stayed there for nearly half an hour; but no one at all ever learned from the Mayor what passed between them.

Dr. Fell had been summoned to hurry to Wirral Hill long before Mrs. Geard reached Manor House Road, and he had found Miss Crow already in full possession of her consciousness. He thanked the Germans heartily, especially the one with the flask; and then in spite of her weak state, he took the opportunity of scolding Miss Crow very earnestly and roundly for her foolhardy behaviour that day.

"A woman like you," he said as he carried her home in Solly Lew's taxi, "ought to know better than to act like this! What you've really done, Miss Crow, is to try and commit suicide."

Elizabeth was too weak to defend herself. It did strike her as ironical however, that this doctor, who she knew was in the habit of defending the right of self-killing, and whose death by his own hand Tossie's Mr. Barter was always predicting, should lapse into this mode of speech.

Dr. Fell had the wit to read what lay behind the smile she gave him.

"The wrong of it lies," he said, growing rather red in the face and displaying signs of peevishness at being caught by his old friend in so conventional a vein, "the wrong of it lies in the example that a happy person like you, with so lucky a temperament ought to give to us poor dogs."

She was clever enough to take this chance, when she had disturbed his professional aplomb, of asking him point-blank how long he supposed she had to live.

“Five would astonish me,” he said. “Three would surprise me. From my personal experience, such as it is, I’d give you about two.”

“Years, Dr. Fell?”

“Years, years, years!” he answered querulously. “What else do you think I meant? Love-affairs?”

She peered out of the taxi window at the tower of St. Benignus’. She thought of the thousands of times she had looked up at that solid mass of masonry that shared with St. John’s and the high Tor the distinction of giving its visual character to the town of Glastonbury from all the quarters.

“Is that a shock to you?” he said in a more kindly tone. “I oughtn’t to have told you that, I expect.”

She still continued to look out of the window without replying. Miss Crow’s thoughts, just then, were indeed those wordless thoughts of the Vital Principle itself, when the days of the years of its brief life have had their term set by constituted authority.

“You’re not upset, I hope?”

The simplicity of this question, addressed to her when she might easily, it was clear, have been lying dead on Wirral Hill, tickled Miss Crow’s fancy.

“So upset, Doctor dear,” she replied, “that I hereby invite you to have tea with me in Benedict Street this day *three* years hence! The twenty-fourth, isn’t it?”

Dr. Fell corrected her. “The twenty-fifth,” he said.

“Well? Will you come? And if I’m dead you must come to my grave in the cemetery. Is that a promise, Doctor?”

He lifted her hand courteously to his lips. Both of them turned after that to the dirty windows of Solly Lew's taxi; but not to the same window.

The problem that arose immediately after Barter's death, that arose in both John's and Mary's minds before his body was taken to the police station, was the problem of Tossie and her twins. It was Mary — as she and John lay awake in their room on the floor above, after Dr. Fell had given the stricken girl a sleeping-draught, and Nancy Stickles had been called in to spend the night with her — who first broached the startling suggestion.

"Why don't we take Toss and the children with us to Northwold? Toss could easily get charwork, or laundry-work, or something like that, to do; and I could look after the babies while she was out. Old Tom will be happy in his grave if he knows his children are back again in Norfolk. Nothing would please him more than the thought of our taking them with us on the big river."

"The thought of *your* taking them!" said John.

"Hush! How can you? You know perfectly well," she retorted, "which of us it was that he really cared for."

"I *do* know," he doggedly repeated. "It was you."

"John!" she cried indignantly, pulling her arm from under his head and sitting up in bed. "You've no right to say such a thing. It's you, first and last, that Tom loved! He came to me when he was in trouble and sad; just as I went to him when I was unhappy; but in his heart of hearts it was always you."

So she spoke; but neither of them realised how that ill-fated prayer from the boat on the Wissey had been neutralised by Tom, any more than they thought of those silvery fish and those green weeds as things that the dead man would never see again.

"What I cannot for the life of me understand," said John, for he was too cautious and selfish to commit himself in a hurry to her plan of taking Tossie, "is what motive that man had for murdering him. Old Sheperd said he'd had his eye on him for a long time, and that he suspected him of several burglaries; but what possible grudge could he have against Tom?"

"Why, didn't you hear what Toss was talking about in her hysterics, when Fell gave her that drug?"

"No, I can't say I did. I wasn't listening. I was talking to the policeman and to Mr. Bishop. I didn't come in till you got her quiet again."

Mary stretched out her hand to the little table which was upon John's side of their bed. She stretched it out above John's face, and he caught at it with his hand and playfully, and yet not without malice, bit it sharply.

"What are you doing? You hurt me!" she cried with asperity. He chuckled to himself as the taste of her flesh, that taste he loved so well, hung about him, while she busied herself with matchbox and candle.

When the little yellow flame was mounting up and her red rug and red curtains were coming by leaps and starts into view, she drew back and resumed her own place. But she balanced both her pillows between her shoulders and the head of the bed and sat straight up.

"I've been meaning to tell you this ever since we came upstairs," she said, "but I kept putting it off." As she spoke she remembered another occasion when she had kept putting off — an agitating topic; and that was when she had had to tell him about her friendship with Tom, in that boat on the Wissey.

"To tell me what? Something that Toss cried in her fever? God, Mary! She might have cried out practically anything. You saw what a state she was in? But let's have it. Let's hear the great revelation!"

"Toss spoke as if she'd seen that tramp aiming his iron thing at *you;* and Tom rushing in to take the blow."

John certainly got a queer sensation as he heard this. The odd thing was, however, that while he accepted what Tossie had said without questioning it, he did *not* feel a rush of tender, melting gratitude to his dead friend! The truth was he had so long played the feminine role with Barter, so long leaned upon him, and relied upon his strength that he only felt now as if they had been in some desperate mêlée together, where Tom as he always did, had taken the lead; and for that reason had got hurt … had … got … in fact … killed; but when it came to making Tom's tragic death a sublime act of sacrifice and of sacrifice for him, John dodged that tremendous conclusion with shamefully blinking eyelids.

"But what on earth could the fellow have got against *me?"* said John, "Or do you suppose he meant to kill us both and ravish Tossie?"

He had such a very quaint expression, at once cringing and quizzical, panicky and humorous, as he sat up in bed, his flannel pyjamas, with their pierrot-like black-and-white stripes, showing so fantastical in the candlelight, that Mary could not suppress a smile. She thought, in her heart: "How queer men are! Here he is with his best friend — his boyhood friend — dead to save him; and all he can do is to try and scare himself like a child!" She sighed heavily when her smile died away. "It is in these matters of life and death," she thought, "that men and women are especially different. Women want to suck up to the last dregs every drop of the awful things that happen. They want to soak themselves in their feelings, to swim in them, to float on them, to drown in them, whereas John is squeezing all the love he really feels for Tom into a tight little juggler's ball and throwing it from hand to hand!"

She turned her head towards him from its white pillows. From each side of her cold clear forehead the brown hair was drawn smoothly back; and she had pulled the coil of it from off the nape of her neck and allowed it to fall over her left shoulder in a long single plait. She did not know that John had thought to himself, as in his heart-felt bewilderment he had done what he had never done before in his life, put on his pyjama-trousers over his drawers: "How queer girls are! Mary is looking in the mirror to see whether she has plaited her hair properly. I suppose she'll loosen it with her fingers, over her ears, just in that same careful way, when I'm lying in my coffin as cold as poor Tom!"

"Give me a cigarette, will you?" was what she had apparently turned her head towards him to say. It was his turn now to fumble among the objects on the little table at his side; but they were soon, both of them, smoking in pensive peace.

"What's the time, John dearest?"

He pulled out his watch from under his pillow. "A quarter past three," he told her.

"You don't think that drug's stopped acting, and she's awake again, do you?"

John was silent; trying to catch every least sound in Number Fifteen, Northload Street.

"Could you bear it, dearest, to have Toss and the children with us out there?"

It would have been as impossible for John to have said "no" to this speech as it would have been for him to have got up and gone down to the room below.

"Of course, if *you* could!" he said.

Mary sighed. “Well, that’s settled then. And the sooner we get away, the better for Toss. We could all stay in that Northwold Inn, couldn’t we, till we get our place and get these things out there?”

“Tom must have left … a fair sum … in the … bank,” murmured John in a ruminating voice.

“Now, you stop that!” cried Mary. “Tom’s money must be kept for those little girls. These people here … Spear and Trent and Robinson … will have to get us all out there! It’s the least they can do, with all Tom has done for their factory.”

John relapsed into silence again. It was impossible for him to refrain from thinking how his delectable plan for being left absolutely alone with Mary out there was now smashed to bits.

“Do you hate Glastonbury as much as you ever did?”

Mary was surprised at herself for asking this question. It seemed to have come into her head and rushed to her lips independently of her conscious will.

“No,” said John laconically.

“Why not?” pressed the girl.

“Oh, damn it all!” cried John. “A person never knows *why* he feels these things. It’s old Geard, I think! I’ve got fond of that old rascal in some odd sort of way.” He bent over the little table and extinguished his cigarette.

“I’ll miss Geard like the devil!” he muttered hoarsely.

Mary was conscious of a funny sensation, like the impact of a piece of ice against her bare bosom. Had this queer being to whom she now belonged, body and soul, transferred his disturbing and perverse sexuality from Tom to the Mayor of Glastonbury? To conceal what she felt, “It’s Geard, then,” she said, “not his Grail or his new religion, that interests you?”

"I don't know, Mary, and that's the truth," sighed John. And then, as if continuing some line of thought that he had not revealed, "I wish, my dear, we could all stop on our way at Salisbury and see Stonehenge."

"Well, we can't do that, John, dearest, so it's no use your talking about it. We've got to take Tom with us, you know!" John turned round upon her with a startled swing of his pierrot-like white-and-black figure —

"Take Tom?" he echoed.

"Of course! you don't think Toss is going to leave Tom in Glastonbury, do you? If she did, *I* wouldn't."

"No, I suppose not," he murmured; and it was his turn to feel a funny sensation go shivering through him. He had always been careful to avoid any probing of his feeling about the relations between his wife and his friend.

"Bury him in the Northwold churchyard, eh? Where Grandfather is, and *his* people? Yes, I suppose that *is* the thing to do!"

They both were silent for a while after that; and into that rosy-coloured room, where their two shadows hovered so waveringly and ambiguously over Mr. Wollop's simple furniture, there came the etherealised essence of that road across Brandon Heath where they had met nearly a year ago; came the phantom-faint image of Harrod's mill-pool, of the spacious drawing-room with its low windows opening upon that grey twilit lawn, of their boat carried so fast on the glittering tide above the weeds and the darting fish of the Wissey, and of the great ash tree in that open field, where they said their farewells to their native pastures. Well! they were going back to those pastures again; going back to them to live the life they had dreamed of then but had not dared to hope for, going back to bury her friend and his friend, where that old man lay — his curly hair still fresh and white as the Head in the Apocalypse — who had been the friend of Geard of Glastonbury! Why was it then, that they both felt a curious and irresistible sadness as they thought of their return? Had they been captured in spite of themselves, by the terrible magic of this spot? Was John's clinging to his strange master a sign that something would be gone forever from each of their lives, when they went away, something that their dearest love for each other could only replace in a measure, in a fluctuating substitution? Did Mary recall the dawn of St. John's Day?

"Come back to us, Tom! Come back to us!" the big river and the little river were both calling; and it *was* with Tom that they were going back to the place where they would be; but they were carrying a corpse with them; not only the corpse of Tom Barter but the corpse of their stillborn never-returning opportunity of touching the Eternal in the enchanted soil where the Eternal once sank down into time!

THE FLOOD

THE GREAT WAVES of the far Atlantic, rising from the surface of unusual spring tides, were drawn, during the first two weeks of that particular March, by a moon more magnetic and potent as she approached her luminous rondure than any moon that had been seen on that coast for many a long year. Up the sands and shoals and mudflats, up the inlets and estuaries and backwaters of that channel-shore raced steadily, higher and higher as day followed day, these irresistible hosts of invading waters. Across the far-stretching flats of Bridgwater Bay these moon-drawn death-bringers gathered, stealing, shoaling, rippling, tossing, waves and ground-swells together, cresting billows and unruffled curves of slippery water, rolling in with a volume that increased its momentum with every tide that advanced, till it covered sand-wastes and sand-dunes, grassy shelves and sea-banks, that had not felt the sea for centuries. Out of the misty western horizon they came, rocking, heaving, rising, sinking, and beneath them were shoals of unusual fish and above them were flocks of unusual gulls. There was a strange colour upon them, too, these far-travelled deep-sea waves, and a strange smell rose up from them, a smell that came from the far-off mid-Atlantic for many days. They were like the death mounds of some huge wasteful battlefield carried along by an earthquake and tossed up into millions of hill summits and dragged down into millions of valley hollows as the whole earth heaved. They were not churned into flying spray, these swelling spring tides; they were not lashed into tossing spindrift. Each one of them rolled forward, over the sand and the mud, converting these expanses from a familiar tract of yellow-grey silence into a vast plain of hummings and murmurings that went on all night. Wide, wet reaches of sand, over which for years fishermen had walked in the dawn with wavering lanterns and whispering voices, and where decrepit posts, eaten by centuries of sea-worms and hung with festoons of grass-green seaweed, leaned to the left or leaned to the right, as chance willed it, were now changed into a waste of grey water. Ancient sand-sunk boat skeletons, their very names forgotten, that had caught for years the blood-reflections of sunset in the pools of dead memories and lost disasters, were now totally submerged. Many of these incoming deep-sea waves had curving crest-heads that were smooth and slippery as the purest marble, heads that seemed to grow steadily darker and darker, as they gathered towards the land, till they added something menacing to every dawn and to every twilight.

And as these tides came in, over the brown desolate mudflats, they awoke strange legends and wild half-forgotten memories along that coast. Ancient prophecies seemed to awake and flicker again, prophecies that had perished long ago, like blown-out candles in gusty windows, cold as the torch-flames by which they were chanted and the extinct fires by which they were conceived.

Between the imaginations of men, especially such as are stirred up and made tense by wrestlings with the Unknown, and the geographical pattern of the earth’s surface, are subtle correspondencies that may survive many sunken torch flares and many lost harp notes once heard across the capes and promontories. And the western coast that Spring seemed almost to welcome this sea invasion. Liberated from the frost and ice of winter, a thousand unfrequented backwaters, bordered by dead, windswept rushes, clammy with salt-smelling marsh-lichens and thick-stalked glaucous-grey weeds, seemed actually calling out to the sea to come and cover their brackish pools. Salt amphibious growths, weeds of the terraqueous marshes, they seemed to be yearning, these neutral children of the margin, for the real salt sea to rush over them and ravish them. Little did they dream how soon this ravishment would take place, how soon they would be drowned and with how deep a drowning!

Amid the forlorn and untraversed mudflats in that singular region various patches of cultivated ground appear and inhabited buildings, some of stone, some of wattles and lath-and-plaster cement. It is about these outlying farms and hamlets — in this strange region of sluices and weirs and dams and rhynes — that so many curious Celtic syllables still cling, like the appellative *Gore*, for instance, syllables full of old mythological associations.

It was from these isolated farm-houses, situated among sandy reaches where such old magical names lingered intact, that the first rumours began to spread of a serious sea invasion. These rumours, once started among these outposts of human habitation, excited anxious alarm; and well they might, for that whole district is a very peculiar one. On one side of it lies the great Western Channel of those moon-drawn tides, and on the other so many brackish ditches and inland meres that the dams and dykes, if they once yield to the mounting-up of the waters, are liable to give way in vast numbers. In the memory of the older dwellers in those regions — a queer amphibious race, descended from Norse invaders and from Celticised aboriginals — was a vivid image of the last time the sea-banks had broken and the land had been flooded, an image of drowned cattle and ruined pastures and hurried and tumultuous human flights and escapes. On *that* occasion the waters of the sea had swept so far inland, mingling with the waters of the land, that the configuration of the country had completely changed. Overtopping the banks, breaking the sluices, turning rivers into huge floods and tiny streams into rushing rivers, the sea had come so far that the land — in many cases always lower than sea-level — had reverted to the sea and become part of the sea. With the waning of the moon, on that occasion, the waters retreated, but not before they had left their tribute. Many infinitesimal sea creatures, tiny sea animalculæ and microscopic salt-water beings must have been carried over the land where these unnatural tides pushed their way, and it is likely enough that many of these marine invaders, when the waters receded, were deposited in the rich loam of the Isle of Glastonbury. An island indeed did Glastonbury become in those strange days! Mr. Sheperd, the Glastonbury policeman, and Mr. Merry, the Glastonbury curator, would frequently speak of that epoch with bated breath.

Well! if some of the rumours that ran along those sandy flats and leapt, like living messengers of disaster, from bog-tussock to bog-tussock, were not without cause, there was likely to be this year, ere March ended, an inundation even more serious than that land had known since very ancient days. For these dark-green waves, smooth and slippery, without spray, without spindrift, and smelling so strangely of the mid-Atlantic, brought memories of far-off mysterious disasters. Intimations, they brought, of lost islands and submerged sea-reefs, where, if Plutarch is to be trusted, Demetrius the Traveller, a hundred years before Christ heard tales of superhuman personalities living remote and sea-encircled.

Yes, even before the fifteenth of March these terrific ocean waves had disturbed the cormorants at St. Audrie’s Bay and scattered the gulls at Black Rock, at Blue Ben, and at Quantock’s Head. The dwellers at Kilve Chantry had grown uneasy; and from Benhole to Wick Moor, and from Stert Flats to the mouth of the River Parrett, and over Bridgwater Bar to Gore Sand there were wild gusts of ragged wings and shrieking sea cries and vague sobbings and lappings and murmurs in the night; and all this under a moon that continued growing larger and larger, until it reached a size that seemed pregnant with terrifying events. The mouths of the Parrett and the Brue are not far from each other, opposite Stert Island, and the whole seven miles from Otterhampton to Mark’s Causeway, across Pawlett Level and Huntspill Level, inland from Highbridge and Burnham, are intersected with dams and sluices and weirs, holding back the sea floods. From Huntspill Level to Glastonbury cannot be much more than eight miles’ distance, as the crow flies, and it is across these eight miles that the waters of the Channel would flow — for it is all beneath sea-level — if those dykes, as they had done at least once in the memory of living men, should yield to the rising of the tides.

Of all mortal senses the sense of smell carries the human soul back the farthest in its long psychic pilgrimage; and by these far-drawn channel airs and remote sea odours the inmost souls of many dwellers in northwest Somerset must have been roused, during those weeks of March. It is the old recurrent struggle with the elements, as the sense of these things reaches the spirit by the sharp sudden poignance of smell, that brings one age of human life into contact with another. There is a comfort in these continuities and a feeling of mysterious elation, but strange fore-bodings, too, and uneasy warnings. That hidden wanderer, incarnated in our temporary flesh and blood, that so many times before — centuries and aeons before — has smelt deep-sea seaweed and sun-bleached driftwood and the ice-cold chills of Arctic seas, sinks down upon such far-off memories, as upon the stern of a voyaging ship, and sees, as if in a dream, the harbours and the islands of its old experience.

Thus as these unnatural tides under this unusual moon gathered and rose out of the Western Channel, feelings that had not come to the population of those places for many a long year caught them unawares, as they went to and fro about their business, and disturbed them with thoughts “beyond the reaches of their souls.”

But the people of Glastonbury that year — especially the ones with whom the reader has most to do in this present narration — were so preoccupied with the exciting public events of that epoch that they gave little heed to these “airy syllables.” The humbler people, especially, continued to buy and sell, as the new fashion dictated, much as their fathers had done before in *their* fashion, without paying any attention to these fleeting intimations drawn forth from the recesses of their beings by these ocean smells, smells so soul-piercing and so mysterious, following the waxing of this portentous moon.

Meanwhile the strangely constituted Glastonbury commune — a little microcosmic state within the historic kingdom of England — continued to function in its own queer, unprecedented manner. The London newspapers had grown recently a little weary of this nine days’ wonder and the various protracted lawsuits, evoked by the small commune’s interferences with private property, excited much less attention than they had done a couple of months before, when the thing began.

Philip Crow no longer required the protection of the Taunton police for his non-union labourers, brought into Wookey from Bristol and Birmingham; and all the various legal actions that he had initiated against this new tiny state — this microscopic *imperium in imperio* — were dragging on in the London courts without doing anything to change the curious *status quo* at Glastonbury. Both his new road, however, proudly skirting Mr. Twig’s fields, and his great new bridge, proudly disregarding the ancient Bridge Perilous, were growing towards completion.

Of solid cement the new road was, and the new bridge was of solid steel, and the chief troubles that still spasmodically arose were wordy battles — mounting sometimes to fisticuffs and the throwing of stones — between the Glastonbury mob and the men hired by Philip's Taunton contractor.

The surveyor from Shepton Mallett — whose father-in-law, with demonic longevity, still continued to milk his Jersey cattle — appeared and disappeared at intervals in that debatable ground, replacing his stakes and strings along the edge of the Lake Village Mounds, tokens of private possession which, although watched imperturbably by Number One's inquisitive Betsy, were always being carried off by invaders from Bove Town and Paradise, invaders not unaided, you may be sure, by a familiar robber band.

It was surprising how the new co-operative or collective system of retail trade introduced among the various shops that had been included in the new lease from the lord of the manor, proceeded, running much more smoothly than anyone would have supposed possible. This, however, was largely due to a somewhat extraneous cause, namely the overwhelming influx of religious pilgrims into the little commune from every portion of the inhabited globe.

Not quite three months had passed since the Mayor's notorious opening of his Saxon arch and doubtless there were places in Africa, India and China where pilgrims were only then just setting out for Glastonbury; but the world was so unsettled and there was such a spirit of restlessness abroad, that this new outburst of magic and miracle in a spot so easy of access, had been responded to in a wave of excitement from every country upon the earth. And as all these pilgrims had to be fed, and as all these visitors wanted souvenirs to carry back to their homes, the town began to grow rich. Thus when the Glastonbury council-men — now promoted to be bureaucrats in an independent community — came to divide, as they did on the first day of each week, the profits of the new commune, these profits were found to be so considerable and so far beyond anything that the worthy tradesmen had ever earned for themselves under normal conditions, that their tendency was to make hay while the sun shone and allow the methods and sources of this new increment to pass unquestioned.

They were of course unaware, these good men, for Providence had not endowed many of them with the acquisitive wit of Harry Stickles, how large a portion of what came to the town from the feeding of pilgrims and from the selling of curiosities, both to the religious and to the profane, was divided among the real proletariat of the place; but since this proletariat, in *its* turn not accustomed to such wealth, hurried to spend it in these very shops, there was — as can easily be believed — a sort of revival of those fortunate mediaeval times, when the whole of Glastonbury throve and grew fat upon the Saint Joseph's Pence of religious Christendom.

Mr. Geard himself, in these lucky days, grew more and more indifferent to the practical and economic aspects of his great design. Having, as we have seen, taken measures to get rid of every penny of Canon Crow's large fortune, the Mayor accepted whatever salary, as head of the commune, was set apart for him each week by the energetic assessors and bothered his brains no more about the matter. Had he been "Head of Hades," or Lord of that "Annwn" of which Mr. Evans had so obstinately murmured; had he been a reincarnation of that old Celtic divinity mentioned in the Mabinogi as *Bendigeitvran*, or Brân the Blessed, he could not have worried less about these mundane affairs.

What he was now doing all this time was receiving religious disciples, or, if it is too early in the history of the new Glastonbury Religion to call them by that name, followers, learners, pupils, neophytes. These he received, not in Cardiff Villa — indeed he was seldom to be found in Cardiff Villa now; and Megan had required all her dignified Rhys blood to be reserved and patient over this — but in that solid erection, something between a farm-barn and a collegiate chapel, which his London architect had built for him near his Saxon arch within sound of the trickling of his Fountain of Life and that had come to be called "The Rotunda."

It was with a positive genius for what might be named the *psychic nuances* of building, that this great adept in stone had constructed out of timber, bought in the same woodyard of the worthy Mr. Johnson where Mr. Evans' Cross had been purchased, a sort of Platonic lecture hall. Like the Saxon arch which now rose triumphantly over the Grail Fount, this wooden erection, when Geard first spoke of it, sounded as if it would be something in unbelievably bad taste. But the reverse of this was what developed. By an extensive use of carving — for many of the heavy cross-beams of this edifice were terminated by massive heads of the old Saxon Kings, while a colossal image of Saint Dunstan looked down from above the entrance — this secular hall was made to correspond with the mystical arch which covered the path to the Grail Spring.

The ritual, or, if the reader prefers it, "the procedure," that came to establish itself in this singular hall, originated in so spontaneous and natural a manner as to excite in the architect — who refused to leave the place till he had satisfied himself with what he did — a desire to supply an organic *outward form* for such a repetition of spontaneous religious gestures.

Mr. Geard — growing more and more obsessed by his ideas as he was given a fuller chance to express them — had caused a mysterious altar to be constructed and placed in the centre of this wooden building, an altar dedicated to the worship of his heretical Christ. The bulk of this altar was made of oak, in harmony with the finely chiselled wainscoting that the architect had designed for the lower portion of the walls, but on the top of this wooden base — placed there suddenly in the night, none but Mr. Geard himself knowing its origin — appeared a square slab of about five inches thick, of a substance, colour, texture and polish completely different from any stone that had, until that day, been found in Glastonbury.

Mr. Merry the curator shook his head very knowingly, after he had spent some time examining this stone, which he declared was much older than the one in St. Patrick's chapel, and in private consultation with his nephew, Paul Trent, he maintained the daring opinion that it was an altar stone of the Bronze Age, "probably used in the invocation of some god of fertility." How Mr. Merry deduced this opinion, or what evidence he found for it in his examination of the stone has not become common knowledge; for the curator held the view that there were enough mischief-makers already in the town; and far too much talk about subjects which, in wiser times, were restricted to the learned alone. Our architect from London, however, by no means confined himself to the erection of this altar upon which Bloody Johnny's younger daughter had placed in little vases of clear glass the season's earliest primroses. He also caused to be constructed, in the same solid oak, a hieratic seat for the founder of the new western religion. Few things about this "Hall of Marvels," as John Crow called it, interested the Mayor less than this pontifical throne. Its extreme discomfort was, nevertheless, modified by Megan Geard, as soon as she saw it. She unceremoniously threw over it the familiar threadbare bearskin snatched up from the floor on the Cardiff Villa drawingroom. The architect did make a somewhat wry face when he saw what she had done; but he uttered no overt protest; and from his place in this singular chair of office Mr. Geard continued to expound, day by day — it seemed to be the dominant purpose of his life now, and he pursued it with massive concentration — the doctrines of his new mystical faith.

The strange man never lacked an audience for these uninterrupted discourses. Sometimes indeed that circular hall was packed tightly with people. But whether there were many there, or the merest handful, the Mayor would always be ready to carry further and further his mystical doctrines about the Blood of his Glastonbury Christ. Megan and Crummie brought him his meals once or twice out there; but this soon became unnecessary, because Mrs. Jones, Sally's mother, who through Red Robinson, her son-in-law, possessed an advantage over the other tea-shops of the town, started a refreshment booth just inside the entrance to Chalice Hall.

This ramshackle edifice, run up over-night by some artisan-relative of Mrs. Jones, ruined entirely, from a purely aesthetic point of view, the whole beauty of what the architect had done. But the architect only laughed when this was pointed out to him, declaring that the reason why the gaudy tinsel ornaments in a Roman Church were less irreligious than the collegiate dignity of a London Church, was that they were the expression of the inherent barbarism and crudity of rank human nature with which any genuine Religion — to be really organic — must keep in close touch. "Our communal refreshment-booth," he said to Paul Trent, whose taste was offended by this circus-looking shanty, "is like the crowds of beggars outside St. Peter's, or the guides outside the Mosque of Omar. If Glastonbury is destined to become — as with all these foreigners it looks as if she were — a mystical rival to Rome and Jerusalem, you must expect worse things than a few catch-penny cook-shops!"

And indeed with this concession of the architect — for the man had come to exercise the dominant influence over what was going on in Chalice

Hill — Mrs. Jones' initiative was followed by a rush of enterprising pedlars who set up far more unsightly stalls than hers. They had to turn over their gains to the assessors every evening, but as their bookkeeping was very casual and as private property, in spite of Dave Spear, still existed in Glastonbury, it was an extremely *approximate* sum that was thus poured daily into the community's exchequer.

But the heart of Glastonbury was still the Fountain on Chalice Hill. To this Fountain, passing to and fro under the Saxon arch, came a constant influx of visitors. Mr. Geard had insisted upon one restriction alone, namely, that there should be no sacerdotalism. Women were allowed to come bareheaded. Men were allowed to bring their hats and sticks. Children were allowed to drift in and out at will. At the Fountain itself, dressed in corduroys like a gamekeeper, stood, in the morning, none other than our friend, Young Tewsy, while in the afternoon, when the crowds were much greater, a strapping youth from the upper Mendips who had been "converted" by Bloody Johnny in his street-preaching days and who was too simple in his wits to notice the difference between what the man taught now and what he had taught then, kept the crowd in order. This powerfully built lad had been dismissed for poaching by one of Lord P.'s tenant-farmers, and he had turned up in Glastonbury in his old-fashioned shepherd's smock with an eye to communal flocks and herds. It had been Paul Trent — the only one of the town's rulers who had the faintest artistic feeling — who had advised Geard to let the lad wear this primitive garment when he was about the business of guarding the Grail Spring; and the Mayor, who remembered a highly-coloured picture in his native national school of Our Lord Himself, clothed in a costume resembling that of old Bill Chant, Farmer Manley's head-shepherd, had jumped at this proposal.

Curiously enough it was the eastern-European visitors — or pilgrims, if you will — and indeed there were many of both types, who seemed most impressed by these discourses of the head of the new commune; and among these none were more affected than certain monastic wayfarers from the slopes of Mount Athos. There was no lack of scribes taking serious and copious notes of all the man said; and although the London papers had grown weary of him, "Geard of Glastonbury" was already a legendary figure in Bulgaria, in Bessarabia, and in many a remote religious retreat upon the Black Sea. The main drift of Geard's singular Gospel was that an actual new Revelation had been made in Glastonbury.

The crucial thing for Western humanity at this moment was to concentrate a magnetic flood of desperate faith upon this magic casement, now pushed a little open. "Scientists," explained Mr. Geard, only he used homelier and less abstract language, "are continually finding new cosmic vibrations, totally unknown or only suspected before; and why should not a new element belonging to the Unknown Dimension in which our present dream-life floats, be discovered by *psychic*, in place of physiological experiment? It is all a matter of experience. The miraculous is as much a portion of the experience of our race as is the most thoroughly accepted scientific law. The human soul" — so Mr. Geard in his sublime ignorance of modern phraseology hesitated not to declare— "possesses levels of power and possibilities of experience that have hitherto been tapped only at rare epochs in the world's history. These powers we who live in Glastonbury must now claim as our own; and not only enjoy them for ourselves, but fling them abroad throughout the whole earth."

It was on the fifteenth of March that Mr. Geard's morning discourse — for he was often found in his Heathen Pantheon, as Miss Drew called it, as early as eight o'clock — was interrupted in the startling and dramatic manner that has now become part of Glastonbury's history. There had been disturbing news for the past three days from Burnham and Highbridge. On the twelfth of the month information had come to the town of the flooding of the Parrett Valley as far as Bridgwater and of the complete submerging of such low-lying districts as Horsey Level, Puriton Level, and Pawlett Hams. On the thirteenth the long-stretching clay banks that defended the mouth of the Brue were reported to be down and the Burnham and Evercreech line under water. By the afternoon of the fourteenth there was definite news that a great flood was advancing rapidly, hour by hour, between Tadham Moor and Gatcott Burtle; and that the flats from Moore Pool to Decoy Rhyne, and from Decoy Rhyne to Mudgley, were already one unbroken lake. On the night before the fifteenth many old residents of Glastonbury who realised the danger much better than the younger generation refused to go to bed. In several of the workmen's cottages down by the river on the way to Street and in others in the district called Beckery people carried their more precious belongings into their upper rooms before they dared to sleep; and in not a few of the smaller beer-houses certain among the habitual topers refused to go home that night.

It was not only the pusillanimous among the dwellers along the banks of the Brue and along its tributaries who trembled a little as they pulled up their blinds on that morning of March the fifteenth. The more weather-wise among the inhabitants of these cottages were too restless to await that delayed dawn. For the night seemed as if it would never come to an end; and seldom above the Glastonbury hills had so grey a twilight prolonged itself to so late an hour. Cold and steel-like, when it did come at last, was that dawn; livid and menacing as the stricken light that falls upon a lost battlefield. There were many indications that a heavy rain would shortly add a new burden of waters to the already accumulated volume; but until eight o’clock, the hour when Mr. Geard, with the tattered bear rug pulled over his knees for warmth, usually began his prophetic monologue, no actual rain had fallen.

From the windows of Cardiff Villa itself no view was available of the surrounding country extensive enough to enable the family to get any idea of what was occurring; so that at four o’clock, which was the hour when the last of the neighbouring dams broke and the flood of waters began sweeping through the streets of the town, the Geards were as ignorant of the extent of the disaster as was Red Robinson in his little new house in Bove Town. This ignorance of the authorities of the new commune as to the extent of the flood in the early hours of the fifteenth was brought against them afterwards in the general public criticism of these events; but as a matter of fact both Dave Spear and Paul Trent were up and out of their rooms by half-past four that morning. It was about six o’clock that the railway lines became impassable; but before that hour the early luggage trains that left the town brought news of the coming disaster to Taunton, to Bristol, to Yeovil, to Wareham, to Bournemouth, to Greylands, to Dorchester.

Dave Spear and Paul Trent were doing their utmost to convey warnings to the threatened houses and to get the people out of them; but when officials from Taunton began interfering with them they relinquished their authority and handed over the whole management of affairs to Lord Brent, a cousin of Lord P. who at that time was the High Sheriff of Somersetshire. This energetic gentleman who had a house not far from Middlezoy, had been rendered sleepless by the fact that his own dwelling was on low-lying ground. Lord Brent had kept in close touch with both police and military all through that agitating night and was on the spot at a very early hour. It was he who, before the little commune’s authorities had thought it necessary to make such an appeal, had stirred up the local air-force commanders and caused military aircraft carrying tents and provisions to land at Wirral Hill, and establish an emergency camp up there. Thus before the Mayor of Glastonbury had the least idea that the water was pouring down the High Street and standing at least a foot deep amid the Abbey Ruins, airmen with searchlights and soldiers with lanterns and spades were already established upon the summit of Wirral Hill.

It was from this point of observation, while he rested from his labours of directing rescue-parties, that Dave Spear surveyed the ghastly dawn of that fifteenth of March. By his side as he stood up there was none other than Philip Crow. Philip, like Lord Brent, and for the same reason, had kept his clothes on all that night. The water was already three feet deep in Wells Road, and drowning deep in the Lake Village Great Field. He had soon realised that there was no chance of using *his* airplane, and indeed he felt he would be very lucky if it were not utterly ruined. But what worried him, as he stood by Dave's side now, was not his airplane. It was not his wife, either. Hours ago Tilly and Emma had been driven away by Bob Tankerville, safe to Wells. No; what was worrying Philip as he surveyed through his field-glass that rising expanse of waters was the peril to his half-constructed steel bridge over the river. He felt nervous, too, about his new cement road, leading down from Wookey Hole, though he kept telling himself that a few days' labour would clear away the mud and the silt when the flood sank down. But the half-finished bridge? He had already felt some qualms as he turned his glass upon those cement bases, those wooden scaffolds, those jagged steel uprights; and now, as he gazed at them, it seemed to him that part of the scaffolding had been already washed away.

In his anxiety he handed his glasses to Dave. "Doesn't it seem to you that some of my bridge supports are gone?" he said.

Dave obediently surveyed the objects in question. “The whole thing, Cousin Philip, I’m afraid,” murmured the Communist grimly as he returned the glasses. “The whole business will go in a minute or two. The tide’s terrifically strong just there!”

“Damn it, man. But it *can’t* wash those things away! I saw them put in; and they were—”

“You’d better come over to *us,* Cousin Phil, before you’re ruined! We’d give you the biggest salary of all; and you’d have no more worry or fuss over anything, for the rest of your life!”

But Philip was in no mood even to chuckle over this. “If my bridge goes,” he said, “it’s more money washed away than I would dare to tell anyone! It’ll knock me out. It’ll mean bankruptcy.”

“Haven’t you paid for it then?”

“Paid for it!” The contempt with which the manufacturer rebuked Spear’s ignorance of high finance was an edifying spectacle.

“Well, you’d better say your prayers, Cousin, and prepare for a quiet life; for there won’t be much of your bridge left in a few minutes.” Dave spoke without bitterness, for he felt none. He had been thinking several times that morning: “I hope those people at Whitelake haven’t slept too long and too sound. But probably they’re safe in Wells by now. They’d never try to get across Splott’s Moor.”

“Well, Cousin Phil, I must be off to the boats again. I wish you’d tell that Colonel What’s-his-name, up there, to stop those women from shrieking so. They’ll start a panic, if he’s not careful. Good-bye! Looks to me as if old Pomparlès was standing up to it pretty well.”

Philip bit his lip. It was hard to believe that the innocent Dave hadn’t meant that remark, at least, as a nasty dig at the modern bridge-builder. Damn! It *would* be just like the devilish irony of things for that old stone bridge to survive, while his new steel bridge was washed away! He lifted his glasses again. What a sight it was! The sun had risen now, and though its red orb was hidden by lowering grey clouds, the ghastly expanse of water spread away before him under a light that displayed the full extent of this overwhelming "Act of God," which had reduced the difference between Capitalism and Communism to such a tragic neutrality. By the aid of his glasses Philip could see some very curious details of this appalling panorama of a drowned world. He could see certain birds, for instance, that were obviously blackbirds or thrushes, collected in sheer panic-terror upon a line of telegraph wires that followed the railway and that had not yet been swamped. He could see the bodies of several drowned animals — he could not make out whether they were cows or horses — floating rapidly along the tide of the river, which was differentiated from the mass of waters both by the colour of its waves and the speed of their flow. He could see huddled human figures on the roofs of several houses in the Paradise slums and still more of them along the outlying quarter of the town known as Beckery. He could see the boats of the rescuers moving about among the semi-detached houses and villas in Wells Road, and, as far as he could make out, there was a large crowd of people on the roof of Dickery Cantle's tavern near the Cattle Market. But it was the livid tint of the waters where there were no streets that was so particularly ghastly.

Philip, as we know, was the extreme reverse of an imaginative person; but even he was struck by the lurid effect produced by certain isolated houses, near the sinister rush of the main current of the Brue. The water positively foamed, as it swirled and eddied about these luckless edifices, which hardly looked like houses at all now, but rather resembled ugly and shapeless islands of dark rock, against which the tops of the wretched garden trees were swaying and tossing, as if they were masses of green seaweed. One especial thing that struck his pragmatic and literal mind was the extraordinary difference between this murderous-looking flood-water and all other bodies of water he had ever seen or known. The brownish-grey expanse before him was not like the sea; nor was it like a lake. It was a thing different from every other natural phenomenon. A breath of abominable and shivering chilliness rose up from this moving plain of waters, a chilliness that was more than material, a chilliness that carried with it a wafture of mental horror. It was as if some ultimate cosmogonic catastrophe implying the final extinction of all planetary life had commenced. A wind of death rose from that mounting flood that carried a feeling of water-soaked disfigured corpses!

Philip knew that the actual victims could only at the worst amount to a few score; but that *death-look* upon those livid waters suggested a disaster that could not be estimated in physical numbers. That hard, narrow cranium beneath its grey cloth cap was not stunned or numbed, was not distracted or crazed, was not even bewildered by what it confronted. This might prove the final Waterloo to this furious strategist; but it left his limited, concentrated, fighting intelligence quite unclouded, indeed strung-up and abnormally alert. As far as his emotional response to it was concerned, it was the response of the most average and thick-skinned person; and for that very reason it caught the spectacle of what lay before it in what might be called its primeval *animal-skin* shiver. “Glastonbury is in peril,” is what Ned Athling would have felt; but apart from the fate of his bridge and his road, what Philip was aware of was simply the threat of a down-swallowing, in-sucking enemy.

Let it be noted, here and now, that no living human being who passed through the appalling hours of that fifteenth of March was less *frightened* — in the ordinary sense of that word — than was Philip Crow. It had always been — secretly, exultantly, proudly — with the natural elements, rather than with men and women, that Philip had felt himself contending. Such a skin-to-skin, belly-to-belly contest with Nature was his notion of the whole meaning of existence; so that unlike other minds, who had to see torn away an elaborate psychic complication of social feelings, before they came down to the bedrock issue, he was confused by no marginal qualms.

Its eccentric Mayor was not the only magnate of the little Glastonbury commune who awoke that day to a somewhat belated knowledge of the approaching catastrophe. Red Robinson and his easy-natured bride were so enamoured of each other and so busy in preparing breakfast in their small dwelling on the slope above Bove Town, that they discounted for quite a long while the agitated bustlings to and fro of their less self-centred neighbours.

“There go the people from the end house!” Sally cried out as she left their table and rushed to the little window, “There go them others, Reddy, and they be carrying their pots and pans! Flood be come, me darlin’. But us baint going to run away, carrying no sauce-pans nor no teapots, be us?”

Red put down his knife and fork and joined his wife at the window, pushing aside the muslin curtains and leaning across the girl’s big sewing machine. There certainly was an unusual stir abroad and startling shouts and cries upon the wind! And yet Red could see the three yellow crocuses and the two purple crocuses in their patch of garden that had been there yesterday and the green paint that he had put on their little gate in the afternoon.

“High’d give ten pounds for this ’ere bloomin’ flood to ‘it the bewger’s bloody bridge and soak the cligh till the bewger’s bleedin’ new road falls in! But it’ll be pore men what’ll suffer, girlie; not rich ones like him, if these ’ere waters rise hup and hover.”

Sally put her plump arm affectionately round his neck. “You never loved Miss Crummie like you love me, did you, Red?” she whispered coaxingly.

“Garn!” cried Red.

They were both silent then, Sally thinking to herself, “Shall I ever dare to ask him about Jenny Morgan? And what should I do if Jenny Morgan came to see Mother?” and Red thinking to himself, “High wouldn’t care a wriggle what ‘appened to this bastard commune, has long has the bewger got it in ’is bleedin’ neck!”

This passive trance of Red and Sally at their window was interrupted by the inrush through Red’s green gate of a couple of excited neighbours: “Jenny Morgan be drowned in flood,” they cried, “and little Nelly be clinging, fit to perish, to her mother’s corpsy.”

Sally Robinson turned quickly to her husband. “We must go down there, Red,” she said.

Red sighed heavily, but he did not gainsay her words.

Long before the flood had reached the point at which Red and Sally were called upon to confront it, the Mayor of Glastonbury was making his way dry-shod to his morning lecture at Chalice Hill. Before his wife and Crummie were out of bed and before any sign of the incoming water had reached the end of Street Road, Bloody Johnny was hurrying in blind excitement, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back, to his beloved Rotunda. His own word for all the buildings on Chalice Hill was simply Town’s End — an old Montacute name which helped to make him feel at home there. “I’m off to Town’s End, my precious,” he would say to Mrs. Geard; or “I’ll be back from Town’s End, my sweet, by tea-time today, never fear!”

On this historical morning the Mayor’s head was so full of a new inspiration which he had received, or dreamed he had received, from his

Master that night, that he had not even paused in his kitchen to make himself a cup of tea before setting out: It would be a mistake to assume, as some afterwards did, that Bloody Johnny was oblivious of the perils of the waters that just then threatened Glastonbury. The man was like some desperate mediaeval artist, some frantically inspired craftsman who, even though the enemy is at the gates of his city, *must*, by an urge that endures no withstanding, complete his unfinished statue, his picture, his fresco, his molten cast. To enter into the real heart of what he had been feeling during the last forty-eight hours it would be necessary to remember that the man had for weeks, nay, for a couple of months, dropped all active connection with the administration of that tiny dictatorship of which he was the technical head. What he felt in his mind now was only an intensified awareness of what he had been vaguely feeling ever since that momentous opening of his Saxon Arch. "The Lord's going to let me take my life," he kept saying to himself, "and I must finish my work before I go." What he thought of as his "work" was the rounding off and completion of his *Fifth Gospel*, delivered to all and sundry at Town's End.

Had the flood been accompanied by a fire, had the flood and the fire been accompanied by a murderous uprising of the mob, and that again by signs and portents, by thunderings and lightnings, in air and sky, Bloody Johnny would still have hurried off to his heathen Academia. He had hardly slept at all that night; and now quite heedless of the rumours of the broken dams, heedless of the overcrowded state of the threatened town, heedless of any danger that might be threatening his wife and menacing his daughter, thinking always in his heart: "My end is near and I *must* finish my work before I go" — Mr. Geard arrived at Chalice Hill. He found himself, before he knew what he was doing, helplessly fumbling at the closed door of Mrs. Jones' tea-booth, which stood not far from his Saxon arch. Mrs. Jones, however, like most of the Glastonbury people, was far from sharing the Mayor's indifference to the overwhelming catastrophe that was imminent that fatal day. It began to look as if Bloody Johnny's craving for tea — which his sleepless and rather feverish night had rendered extreme — was not destined to be satisfied. By good luck, however, young Elphin Cantle and his friend Steve Lew had slept together that night in Solly's loft above the St. Michael's Garage. Mat Dekker had shaken his head of late very gravely over what he called "that young degenerate's seduction of such a wholesome lad," but without avail. Elphin was a more slippery customer than Tommy Chinnock! Young Cantle at this moment had the key to his father's little booth among this assemblage of acquisitive wooden shanties and the two boys had already got their kettle boiling in this little shelter, and were just beginning to enjoy their bread and jam when they heard the Mayor thumping at the door of Mrs. Jones' ramshackle storehouse.

Elphin peeped out. "It's Master Geard!" he whispered excitedly to his friend. "And he be all white and shivery. He've a heerd summat. He've a heered the girt flood. He be come to tell Mother Jones she best climb up Tor-top wi' he!"

Steve Lew stood up with wide-open eyes. His mouth was full of bread and jam, but he was too agitated to masticate or even to swallow. The wild and extravagant thought rushed through his head that perhaps Mr. Geard would condescend to share their amateur repast. "It would … be fine, Elph, wouldn't 'un," he blurted out, "if Mayor drank a cup o' tea along wi' we?"

Elphin sighed. He had anticipated the pleasure of uninterrupted colloquy with his young friend when he had strengthened his heart with raspberry jam. He wished the Mayor of Glastonbury at the devil! Why was fate always snatching the few hours of romance which he had in life away from him? It had been like this when he was with Mr. Sam. Someone was always interrupting!

Elphin stood hesitating in the doorway now, one agitated eye upon the obese, bare-headed man, who was now muttering to himself and gazing hopelessly around, and one upon his stuttering and excited friend. But the Mayor of Glastonbury had caught sight of him.

“Do ‘ee know where a man could get a sip of hot tea, me boy?” he enquired humbly, almost in the tone of a thirsty tramp.

Elphin scowled savagely; but his sense of honour compelled him to report the great man’s request to the boy in the hut. “He be asking for summat hot,” he whispered.

Steve swallowed his mouthful so hurriedly that it almost choked him, and rushed to the door. “Please come in here, Sir!” he cried, pushing his friend unceremoniously out of the way, “Me and Elph be having a bite, us be, and us ‘ud be proud to give ‘ee all!”

Bloody Johnny responded to this invitation with alacrity and his gratitude and good temper when he had eaten and drunk were so winning that even the jealous heart of Elphin Cantle was beguiled. Sounds of such lively merriment soon began to emerge from the Cantle beer-shop that the little crowd of early visitors who had already assembled in front of the Saxon arch got the impression that the master — rumour soon told them where he was — had been drinking all night in that shanty. This story, that on the morning of the fifteenth, the day above all others when the man’s wits should have been clearest, he was found hopelessly drunk “in company with two degenerate slum-boys” spread all over Somerset before the end of the week and was mixed up in the most hopeless manner with the official accounts of the Glastonbury flood. But Bloody Johnny thanked his young entertainers with a pure heart and a clear head and made his way into his

Rotunda. He paused for a moment, however, to speak with Young Tewsy whose cadaverous grin above his neat corduroy suit suggested a death's head in the attire of an operatic forester.

"Mother Legge 'ad 'er breakfast upstairs, and her bided upstairs," the old man reported.

It was astonishing how full of people the Rotunda was when Bloody Johnny finally pushed his way to his uncomfortable throne and took up his mystical discourse where he had left it the day before. It was a relief to him on this occasion, when he was obsessed by the idea that he had had a special Revelation, to notice that there were a couple of young men from his own *Wayfarer* in the corner of the Rotunda armed with the most professional-looking notebooks. "He knows his business," he thought, "that Middlezoy lad. I'd 'a never have supposed he'd send 'em to Town's End when flood be rising."

Slowly he let his formidable black eyes glance over his audience. There seemed to be a predominance of Welsh people there this morning, judging from the rising inflexion of the excited murmurs that he caught from many parts of the crowded circle. "I expect being mountaineers they knew nothing of floods!" he thought. "I hope they'll all get safe home." And then he became aware of Young Tewsy standing at his elbow.

"Flood be rushing down 'igh Street, your Wash'p! Town council be meetin' in Church so as to be near tower in case of accidents. Town-crier 'ave been sent round to tell the foreigners to take to the 'ills; and they've a-commanded every boat there be on river, and Mr. Trent and Mr. Spear and Mr. Dekker and the fire-brigade men and the Boy Scout lads be taking folk from their 'ouse-windies and carrying of they to the foot of Wirral. Old Bob Sheperd be waiting outside, your Wash'p, for to take 'ee to where town council be."

“Tell Sheperd not to wait for me, Tewsy,” whispered the Mayor. “Tell him to tell them I’ll come later, when I’ve finished what I have got to do here. Tell him to tell them to telegraph for boats to Taunton and Bridgwater and every town with a river; and do it quickly — before the wires are down. Tell them to *telephone* to Bristol if the wires *aren’t* down and make ’em send a dozen airplanes with bread and wine and milk straight to Wirral Hill; and tell ’em that they *can* make a landing beyond those trees up there, though it’s rather difficult. But I *know* it’s possible — tell ’em — because I’ve seen poor Barter do it when he piloted Crow.” He paused for a moment while the whispering in the audience rose to an agitated pitch. “Are the trains running still, Tewsy?” he enquired.

“They wasn’t when I left ‘un, your Wash’p, and these here waters be mountin’ up hour by hour. No trains ‘ull leave Glaston today, your Wash’p. If I were the council, meeself, I’d send town-crier round to say that all foreigners what has cars of any kind *leave this town at onst* on pain of being shot.”

The Mayor chuckled at this; and the audience looked at each other and smiled. They were evidently thinking to themselves: “He must have heard that the floods are going down, or he *couldn’t* take things so easy.”

Young Tewsy went off to convey his message, or what he could remember of his message, to Bob Sheperd.

Bloody Johnny pulled himself up upon his feet by the carved oaken arms of his great chair. He felt languid, indolent, weighed down by a “whoreson lethargy.” In the manner of a lazy monk, in some perfunctory office that he had repeated so often that his mind can think of other things while his lips utter the sacred incantations, he turned his back to the audience and faced the altar. Candles were burning on the altar, by the side of Crummie’s primroses, and in the chilly light which floated in beneath the majestic, drowsy, heavy-jowled Saxon Kings and Saints — for Geard of Glastonbury had kept his word and it was the Saxon element that predominated in the Rotunda — he shut his eyes tight and repeated the formula: “Christ give strength to our souls, so that we may drink up Life and defy evil. Blood of Christ give us peace. Blood of Christ give us rest. Blood of Christ give us joy forever!” These words Mr. Geard uttered in the mechanical tone of one who has so much faith in the magic of the syllables that he has no need to intellectualise them or to emotionalise them. Some of the audience remained seated while this invocation took place; others stood up, a very few fell upon their knees. But Mr. Geard swung round and now sat down, pulling the bearskin over his thighs for he suddenly felt cold.

It was the man’s extraordinary *sangfroid*, his heavy, languid aplomb that many people found to be so effective. To the Welsh element in this particular audience, itself so highstrung and excitable, this unruffled phlegm of the prophet was profoundly impressive.

“The point I had reached in my argument, my dears,” he began, “had to do with the souls of microscopic insects.” This personal appeal to his hearers as “my dears” always had a very queer effect when people heard it for the first time. The sturdy, virile, moralistic hearers were often so shocked and felt such deep resentment and distaste that the man lost them completely. They became enemies for life, from the moment when the word “dears” left his mouth; but others felt exactly the opposite, felt, in fact, a responsive tenderness towards Mr. Geard. “You often hear people say,” he went on, “that insects have no souls. Now what Christ came and told me this very night is that *every insects* down to the smallest mite, microbe or bacillus, has an immortal soul. It must have been about half-past two last night that the Master told me about insects having souls. I know it was about then, because I’d heard the church clock strike two. And I asked Him if worms, and such things as slugs and snails had souls. ‘Every Jack one o’ them, Sonny,’ he said, ‘every Jack one o’ them.’ All these souls, my dears, the Master explained to me, though perishable in relation to the visible, are imperishable in relation to the invisible. They do not … as the heathen poet says … *die all.* Something in them sinks down and escapes into the undersea of undying Being. Bodies are only one expression of souls; and when the bodies of worms and gnats and zoophytes, yea! of the smallest amœbæ that exist, perish in *this* dimension, something, perduring and indestructible, that has been the living identity of these tiny creatures, escapes into the dream-world whose margins overlap ours. This other world, this invisible dimension, is as much a dream-world as our own. Into this sequence of dream-worlds our souls drive us forward, drinking up Life and struggling with evil; seeking rest and peace. To ask where can there be space, where room, for all the myriads of consciousnesses, spawned by the life-stream since our planet began, is to ask a babyish question! Space and time, such as we know them, have no meaning in this other dream-world into which the undying souls of all dead organisms pass. Christ’s Blood, my dears, is the life-sap that pours forth when any organism, pierced by the thorns of this troublesome dream, paisses into the one that surrounds it. Out of this deeper dream there fell of old upon our Glastonbury Something that bewilders and troubles us unto this day. To approach it gives us a shock, a perturbation, a spasm, a shudder of the life-nerves. None can touch it without a fit of travail-throes, an ecstasy of sweet insanity. None can take it up wholly into themselves and live. To touch this Thing at all is to drink up Life at its source. Such a draught renders us strong as lions. *Fortis imaginatio generat causas*, as the old Schoolman says: and with wills thus fortified we can drink up day and night from all things in the world — from the winds and the rains, from earth and fire and water and air — the Blood of the Eternal! And the Master told me more than this, my dears. Be we men or women, He said, our souls can embrace the sweet bodies of one another till flesh and blood yield up their essences. Only good can come, my dears, from every embrace. It matters not at all from what cups, or from what goblets, we drink, so long as without being cruel, we drink up Life. The sole meaning, purpose, intention, and secret of Christ, my dears, is not to understand Life, or mould it, or change it, or even to love it, but to drink of its undying essence! Drinking up Life in this manner, we become more and more identified with that in us which death cannot kill, with that in us which sinks down, through dream after dream of what passes away, into … into … into something, my dears, that is … something that is … is … the Blood and the Water and the …"

Geard of Glastonbury stopped without finishing his sentence. The two young reporters from the *Wayfarer* received the impression that he might have finished with: "and the mud and the sand, and the sea and the land," or any other indolent and sleepy gibberish. Stretching out his legs, however, he allowed the tattered bearskin to fall away from his knees. Shamelessly then, in front of them all, he lifted himself up a little in his chair and broke wind. Then, with unabashed aplomb and scarcely covering his mouth with his hand he yawned portentously.

"Any question for me, my dears?" he muttered in a voice still half-strangled by his yawning.

An unemployed Welsh miner — tall, lean, starved, tragic — who had worked his passage to Bristol from Fishguard and then had tramped to Glastonbury from Bristol, and who was now subsisting on a special fund that Dave Spear had placed aside for working-class visitors, rose up on his feet at the back of the Rotunda, under the great, placid, comfortable head of King Edgar, the Peacemaker, and said in a low, troubled tone that rang through that assembly like a broken harp-string: "I'd like to know, Mr. Mayor, now that you've finished telling us to enjoy ourselves like the beasts … *when you think King Arthur is going to come back*!"

Instead of waiting for any reply to this question, which was uttered in a voice trembling with indignation, the tall miner, with a contemptuous jerk of his shoulders that expressed deep loathing for the Rotunda and everything in it, pushed his way through the crowd at the back and left the place.

But the bolt he had flung down created a violent disturbance among the audience. High words arose. The Welsh people in the hall began arguing fiercely among themselves, some of them sympathising with the man, some of them denouncing his uncivil outburst.

"Hush! Hush! Let Mr. Geard answer!" These words came from the lips of Nancy Stickles, who from the very beginning of what she called "the Mayor's Ministry" had left her house day after day, the moment she had got her Harry's breakfast, and slipped off to Chalice Hill.

The two young neophytes from Athling's office, who had been nudging each other nervously as they noted how ruffled and disturbed the great man in the big chair seemed to be by what had just transpired, looked at each other excitedly when they heard Nancy's voice. "Quite right, Mrs. Stickles!" one of them could not help crying. "Quite right!" It was these two young men who when their prophet was dead maintained steadily that he committed suicide from pure disappointment over the fiasco of this final discourse. It certainly did seem that the reference to Rex Arturus, just at the climax of what had been revealed that day, hit Bloody Johnny some sort of incalculable blow. The interruption seemed, however, to cause huge delight to his Welsh audience.

The curiously airy and upward-tilting intonation of the Welsh accent began to echo through the Rotunda, drowning everything else. It seemed as if nothing but the inexhaustible complacency of King Edgar and the two King Edmunds kept the Rotunda from complete domination by these excited Celts. Geard of Glastonbury surveyed his disturbed flock, like a bewildered shepherd whose woolly subjects have plunged into a forbidden field. In vain he stared at the calm lineaments of King Edgar. In vain he turned his gaze upon the majestic gravity of Edmund Ironsides. The best he seemed able to do, just then, was to look with a pitiful and wistful appeal into the intent, grey eyes of Nancy Stickles. "What … do … *you* think … Missis," he stammered, "about what our brother has …"

It was a supreme moment in the life of Nancy. If the truth were known, this mystic-minded girl was playing now the historic role of the devoted disciple who, at an unexpected crisis, supports the Master's weakness with a faith greater than his own. Nancy got up upon her feet. All the heads in that circular room were turned upon her; for all could see that the man in the carved chair was waiting anxiously for her to speak.

The Welsh controversy died down; the angry disputants were silent. A few puzzled Germans, not having caught the miner's words about King Arthur, cried, "Hush, hush!" in their own tongue.

"Mr. Geard," began Nancy Stickles. The girl was in her morning print dress with an old faded jacket hanging loose from her shoulders. She was bare-headed. Wet or fine she never stopped to put on a hat for this morning excursion. Her big umbrella with a black curved handle, the only one of her wedding presents that Harry hadn't put away as "too good to use," was propped up against a chair by her side. "Mr. Geard … and kind friends …" She was so sweet-looking, as she stood there, with her back to the oak panelling of the Rotunda, that a low sigh of appreciation rustled, like a faint breath over reed-tops, across the whole audience.

Bloody Johnny's discourses had often closed with questions; and Nancy's modest "kind friends" was a familiar opening at many an Adult School meeting in Pembroke and Glamorgan: "The brother from Wales, who asked your opinion, Sir, about King Arthur's return, seems to me like the Jews who are still waiting for a Messiah. Most of us in Glastonbury feel that God has been kind enough to us already, in sending us a man like you; a man from whose mouth, as we have just heard, the Living Water of Life flows!"

The girl stopped and searched about in her mind for something else she was obscurely anxious to say. "This terrible flood," she went on in a low voice, "that we must all face in a few minutes when we go back to the town, must have been sent as a Sign." She paused again and then went on in a louder voice. "A Sign that all this tin-mining and road-making and bridgebuilding is contrary to God's purpose." She sat down blushing deeply and staring at her lap.

Bloody Johnny was displeased rather than pleased by the girl's reference to his enemy's activities. He sighed heavily, and, sinking back in his carved seat, closed his eyes. He felt weary, disappointed, dispirited. All night long he had been telling himself of the incredible impression that his divine Revelation — for so he felt it to be — would make upon these people; stirred up, excited, panic-stricken as they already were by the rising waters. But in place of one great final outpouring of the Spirit, obliterating all divisions, all quarrels, all maliciousness, and setting him free, they were back again in the old wrangling human arena, Celt against Saxon, Capitalist against Communist, and every Philip against every John! Mr. Geard had come to Town's End that day in the mood of Elijah when he was transported to Heaven in a chariot of fire. But now he began to feel that his Lord had forsaken him and left him alone with the false prophets.

"I cannot quite see," an interested watchmaker from Llandovery was explaining to the meeting, "why the perfectly sensible question of the departed brother from Fishguard should have met with the disapproval it seems to have met with in our honoured chairman. It is natural enough to mix altogether" — his voice now took on that irritating intonation which self-sufficient materialists assume when they indicate their mental superiority to their hearers— "to mix together Arthur's Return and Geard's Water of Life. Both are myths. Both are imaginary. Both belong to that world of fantastic unrealities which—"

"They both are true!" cried one of Athling's reporters. "We've got one of them with us here now," cried the other, "and Arthur will yet come!"

A deplorable hubbub now arose. People argued with one another in every part of the room, some siding with the Llandovery atheist, some repeating the words of Nancy, others putting forward long-winded compromises of their own. Mr. Geard remained quiescent in the midst of all this. He lay back in his carved chair with his eyes half-closed. As upon that occasion when he had been locked into Wookey Hole, he felt that sleep was his only refuge. In this tendency to fall asleep when things were crucial, Bloody Johnny resembled Mat Dekker; the only difference being that Dekker's sleep was lighter and more easily disturbed. There was undoubtedly something in the chemical composition of that climate, in the languorous blue vapour that hovered over Glastonbury most of the year, and that seemed to emanate from all those drooping, heavy-lichen'd apple boughs and from all that green moss, which conduced to sleep, as the grand panacea for the strong characters of the place. What happened now was that in proportion as his crowd of Welsh theologians got more and more absorbed in their complicated arguments the Mayor got more and more sleepy.

Nancy could hardly bear to see him nodding so awkwardly there, with his big head drooping, first on one side and then on the other, while every now and then the sheer weight of that massive skull would wake him up with an unpleasant start. But there was nothing the girl could do; and she had already stayed away from the shop as long as she possibly dared. “God knows,” she thought, “what I shall find when I get back.” She pushed her way between the chairs to the entrance of the Rotunda and hurried out of the door. The majestic and self-satisfied head of St. Dunstan did not give her a glance. With abysmal and unctuous contentment it continued to gaze into space, while it seemed to murmur to itself— “What matter if Arthur never *does* return. *I* am here.” St. Dunstan would have been much more horrified than Nancy herself was, and she was a *little* shocked, at the nature of the thought that just then the devil put into her head; the thought, namely, what a relief it would be, if, when she got back, she found that her husband, Harry the chemist, had been painlessly and peacefully *drowned*!

Young Tewsy had hardly turned away from following Mrs. Stickles’ departure with the eye of a veteran connoisseur of ladies, when a yet more beautiful apparition met his gaze, entering the Rotunda. This was none other than the Mayor of Glastonbury’s younger daughter. Crummie was not altogether surprised to find the place in a state of noisy commotion and her father fast asleep in his chair. “Poor darling!” she said to herself, “I expect he didn’t sleep at all last night. But he *must* come. He *must* come straight home now.” She went up to him and shook him by the shoulder. “It’s me, Father … it’s all right … it’s only me! But Mother says you *must* come home. The water’s quite deep in Magdalene Street, and oh, they’ve got boats there, Father. And it’s coming up Street Road now from both ends!

Mother's afraid she'll be caught in the upper rooms if she goes upstairs. I told her not to wait for us if anyone came by with a boat!"

"How hot and panting you are, my pretty. There, there, get your breath! I'll come. I'll come." He pulled himself up from his chair and stood by Crummie's side for a second, regarding the quarrelsome mystics from the principality with an amused stare. He was still only half awake. His face was puffy with sleep, his eyes blurred and filmy. "Let's go, let's go, my treasure," he murmured, dragging her to the door by the arm.

As they left the Rotunda Crummie saw him turn sideways in a very quaint and casual way and automatically make a hurried inclination of his head towards the altar. Nothing would have induced Crummie to imitate him in this, for Sam's influence was still strong, and he had said: "God knows what sort of a Deity your father's got down there," but it did strike her as a curious thing that Mr. Geard should have already grown so used to this place that he could treat his devil-worship, or whatever it was, in that self-forgetful, careless, *mechanical* fashion. They had hardly reached the road than they met Paul Trent, calm and feline as ever, though he was drenched to the skin from the waist down, and his teeth were chattering.

"Five deaths already, Comrades," he announced grimly, drawing his beautifully curved womanish lips away from his white chattering teeth, in a grin worthy of Young Tewsy. "Two children out in Beckery, and a mother and two children in Dye House Lane. But there are probably lots of others by now; for the water keeps rising every moment! It's sea-water, Mr. Geard; that's what it is; and till this moon wanes the tides will go on keeping at this height."

"Have any boats come?" Have we got enough boats?

"I should think they *have* come! From every direction they've been arriving. A motor-boat, if you please, has come in from Bridgewater. But there aren’t half enough yet. It’s been rowing and wading, rowing and punting, rowing and hauling people out of top-windows, and pulling people off roofs, since six o’clock this morning! My hands are blistered with rowing. We’ve missed you sorely, Sir. I can tell you that. All the poor people in Paradise—” Here Crummie pushed herself between her father and the man from the Scilly Islands and pinched his arm as hard as she could. But Paul Trent was not to be stopped. “All the poor people in Paradise are saying that the Mayor deserted the town and that he left last night by the last train that ran … for Yeovil or somewhere.”

“Did you really hear that said?” Bloody Johnny’s voice was so menacing that Crummie thrust her hand into his, and then turning to Paul Trent cried in vibrant tones: “Stop that now! You only say that to torment him. You *knew* where he was. You could have got him any moment! You’ve always hated Father, Mr. Trent; and now you’ve got your chance, you’re happy to hit him! Yes, you are … you’ve always hated him.”

But Mr. Geard stopped dead in the middle of the road and caught the young lawyer by the sleeve. “*Did you really hear that said?*” His voice was like the rumble of underground thunder.

Paul Trent shrugged his shoulders and looked at Crummie. Under normal conditions the Mayor’s intensity of emotion would have overawed him; but he had seen such sights and had had such experiences in the last few hours that he was in a mood to face anything. “Of course. And not only in Paradise. I was in Butts Close and Beckery and Manor Road and Dye House Lane; and wherever I was I heard the same thing. They don’t care much for our commune, and I don’t blame ’em. That confounded little ass, Spear, has ruined everything with his absurd assessors and his meddling and fumbling with people’s lives. But if our commune ain’t popular, our Mayor — no! I’m *not* going to stop, Miss Geard! Why *should* I stop? I owe nothing to Glastonbury. I’m a Cornishman; and I give you all to the devil, and your drowned town too! — our Mayor is *despisedl* Yes, your poorer fellow-comrades, Mr. Geard, say on all sides, as the police from Bridgewater and the soldiers from Taunton come in to help — it’s eleven o’clock now and they say the whole Cadet-Corps from Sherborne School will be here by noon! — that the only person no one has seen near the water is the Mayor! I’ve been telling ’em that the Mayor was praying for ’em; but they say the Reverend Dekker and the Reverend Dr. Sodbury are hard at work in the boats, and it seems funny that—” The man’s ungovernable spitefulness was brought to a pause at this point by the chattering of his teeth and by a fit of violent shivering that took possession of his whole body.

These physical manifestations were not lost upon Mr. Geard, and, as if an actual hand had smitten the scales from his eyes, his awareness of these things transformed in a second the whole cast of his feelings. “Yes, I ought to have got up earlier, much earlier!” he said. “You are right, Trent. You are quite right. No, no, my precious,” he went on, addressing Crummie now and speaking calmly and sadly. “We do what we can, but we are all weak … all blind and weak. Well! come … come … come … Let us go on and save all we can. One minute, though, *my dears*!” With the familiar expression “my dears” the old dark fire resumed its accustomed glow in Bloody Johnny’s eyes. He dropped Crummie’s hand and began searching in his pockets. Presently he brought out a brandy flask and quickly untwisted its glass stopper. “Here, sonny,” he cried, in a tone he might have used to Elphin Cantle or Steve Lew, “take a swig of this and finish it if you can. You’ll be feverish soon.”

Abashed and uneasy, Paul Trent, instead of putting out his hand to take the proffered liquor, addressed himself nervously to Crummie. “You’d better not come any further, Miss Geard," he said. "They'll have taken your mother off by this time. You'd better make straight for Wirral. Depend on it you'll find her there now. That's just how people come to grief, wading madly through the water to get to their homes."

But Crummie tossed these words aside. "Drink what he gives you, when you have the chance," she said, "and don't be silly."

Under the weight of the combined authority of father and daughter Paul Trent received the brandy from the Mayor and put it to his lips. Deep and long did he drink; and when he returned the flask his voice had a very different tone. "Avanti!" he cried. "Let's get into any boat that can carry us, and do some more roof-climbing!"

The last few hours in the life of Paul Trent had been more stirring and exciting than any he had ever known; and there came now to both father and daughter one of the queerest sensations *they* had ever known when from the raised footpath under the great Tithe Barn they actually encountered those rushing waters. The first sight of that brownish flood, flecked with foam that had ceased to be foam, foam that had become a whitish scum entangled with every sort of floating refuse, was something that no one who saw it could forget until the day of his death. More dramatic sights, more tragic sights might follow, and *did* follow for both Bloody Johnny and his daughter that day, but it was that first impression *of the power of the waters* that sank into the girl's mind and returned to her afterward, again and again, to the last hour of her consciousness. The things that she saw floating upon that turbid flood were what lodged themselves most in Crummie's mind. Dead puppies, dead kittens, dead chickens, children's dolls, children's toys, bits of broken furniture, pieces of furniture that were not broken but were upside down and horribly disfigured — such were some of the objects she caught sight of, as they stood on that stone-flagged curb with the flood swirling at their feet. She saw towel-horses and laundry baskets. She saw wicker cradles, and pitiful wooden chairs with their legs in the air. And these were only a few of the intimate utensils of human life that were exposed in that primeval indecency to the eye of the onlooker as the eddying torrent whirled them forward. Fire is the great devourer; but it is so swift and deadly with its blinding flames and suffocating smoke, that it spreads a kind of vacuum round it, a psychic vacuum, created by the annihilating suction of that Heraclitean force which is the beginning and the end of all life. Water, on the other hand, except in the wildest tempests at sea, kills more calmly, paralyses more slowly; and the terror that it creates does not shrivel up the normal nerves of our human awareness. For this very reason the slow ghastliness of death by water seems more natural to humanity than the swift horror of death by fire.

It was a quaint example of the obstinate self-assertion of human beings that now, as they were waiting there, Paul Trent took upon himself to point out that a flood was the sort of occasion when governments and states showed what frauds they were. “There’ll be a boat this way in a minute,” he said, “but it’ll be rowed by private people, not the soldiers!” The lawyer’s teeth-chatterings and shiverings had ceased after that deep drink from the Mayor’s flask. “It’s like Venice. It’s like waiting for a gondola,” he chuckled with a leer.

Bloody Johnny’s bare head was bent forward a little as he fronted the rushing, swirling torrent at his feet, but his eyes were turned westward in their deep sockets, and were staring intently at the corner of Silver Street, round which the expected boat seemed most likely to appear. Crummie stooped down and turned up several times the bottoms of her father’s black trousers, revealing his loose, bedraggled bootlaces. “There’s a boat! There’s two of ’em!” cried Mr. Geard. Two boats did indeed now appear, shooting round the corner of Silver Street with a great deal of splashing and shouting. Both were rowed, in spite of the anarchist's prediction, by a soldier; but in one of them was a large and huddled group of sobbing children, while in the other, a much bigger boat, save for the figures of Lily and Louie Rogers clinging tightly to each other in the stern, there was nobody at all.

The young soldier who was rowing the large boat was evidently totally unused to handling oars and it was his clumsiness, angrily rebuked by the older man in the crowded boat, that produced the splashing and confusion. Every time his oar slipped, or got caught between the rushing water and the wooden rowlock, Lily would turn an appealing glance, like the gaze of a Christian Martyr in an early Victorian print, towards the older soldier whom the helpless oarsman seemed to be addressing as corporal.

"Tike the lidy aboard, Bill!" now commanded the corporal. "Tike the two gents as well. Blime me! Do 'ee think yer goin' to do nothink but row young lidies? Do 'ee think yer in Wyemouth Bye, of a Satur-die artemoon? Tike the three on 'em aboard at once! Pull with yer other oar, ye bleedin' bibe! The other one, yer prize fool, the other one. Gawd damn yer! Yer'll brike that oar to bits in a jiffy. Stand up, yer fool! Stand up, and pull it out o' the bloody water! Gawd, Almighty! was there ever such a ninny born of man's 'oly seed!"

The martyrised glances of Lily, lovely in her pallor, seemed to increase the bewilderment of the hapless young soldier even more than the abuse of his corporal. Three times the big canal-boat from Bridgewater was carried by the flood past the place where the three stood. At the fourth attempt, when it looked as if the corporal, purple with rage, would soon be upsetting his own load of now screaming children, Paul Trent, wading up to his knees in the brown flood, clambered into the boat. "What have you done with your mistress?" he threw out hurriedly to the sisters Rogers as he regained his balance.

"Miss Drew couldn't leave her things, Sir," murmured Lily faintly. Once inside the unwieldly craft — for there were other oars under the seats — the lawyer had no difficulty in bringing it so close to their vantage ground that both father and daughter could clamber in without entering the water. Both Mr. Geard and Crummie were staggered at the sight that awaited them when the keel of their boat grounded at last in the trodden mud at the foot of Wirral Hill.

All Glastonbury seemed to have taken refuge on this eminence and there were terrific hummings and dronings from the air and frantic screams from the hillside, and wild contradictory cries from both above and below, as several private airplanes and a couple of capacious military aircraft landed and re-started again in a roped-off enclosure. In facet the whole of the southern portion of Wirral Hill had been by that time taken over by the authorities and it was perhaps the best distraction that the terrified children of Glastonbury could possibly have had, the thrill of watching these constant landings and departures and seeing so many soldiers. Army tents had already been put up and sackcloth shelters; and the whole hillside was a tumultuous scene of confusion. Parents with convulsed faces and distracted wits were rushing about looking for children they had lost, and a wildly struggling crowd kept fighting to get to the flood's edge at the arrival of every boatload that reached the hill from the submerged portions of the town. It was the aged town clerk, struggling among the crowd at the water's edge, who was the messenger sent by Mrs. Geard to bring them to the tent the officials had set apart for her, and Crummie was so caught up out of herself by the wild scene before her, that she kissed the old gentleman when he turned to her from some altercation that he was having with a small boy.

“What’s that?” she asked, noticing in Mr. Bishop’s hands a curiously bound book that looked as if it had been floating in the flood for several hours. “A boy here picked it up out of the water,” replied the old man gravely. “It’s about pardoning sin; but I’ve lost my glasses.”

As Bloody Johnny stepped from the boat upon the slope of Wirral Hill he first glanced back at the level expanse of brown water and then turned and surveyed the singular scene of shocking disorder and scrambling confusion which that familiar grassy eminence offered to his view. It was indeed a unique spectacle. Its movement and agitation carried an aura completely different from anything he had ever seen. It was not like a fair at Yeovil. It was not like a military field day at Dorchester. It was not like a scene on Weymouth Beach. On the other hand it was not like a refuge camp in war, famine, or pestilence. A certain minority of the younger people there — especially lads between seventeen and twenty whose relatives were in no danger — were evidently hugely enjoying the excitement. But the queer thing was that everyone seemed to carry some flood-mark about them. Their clothes were wet or they were mud-stained, or some particular article of attire was missing. They would have resembled the inhabitants of a town escaping from a bombardment save that *the fear of water*, the flood-panic, evokes an utterly different atmosphere from the fear of bursting shells or exploding bombs. A flood-panic is a steady and continuous presence lacking in the expectancy of anything crashing or deafening. A flood-panic is essentially a silent thing; and in this respect has nothing of the wild distraction of a shipwreck, or of an ocean-storm, or of a mob-riot.

“Out of the way there, please!” Two men were lifting a woman’s body from a boat to the land. The Mayor recognized Dr. Fell as one of them and he laid his hand on his arm. The doctor greeted him; and addressed by name the man at the dead woman’s feet. “Stop a bit, Dickery, it’s Mr. Geard!”

No one knew better than Dickery Cantle who it was, but he was so dazed and stupefied that all he could do was to tighten his hold upon the ankles of his burden, as if Mr. Geard were a body-snatcher.

“I’ve been trying to revive her for an hour, Geard,” went on Dr. Fell, “but it’s no use. She’s out of it. God! I wish *I* were!”

But Bloody Johnny did not hear him. If he had said “I’ve decided to take those tablets tonight and end the whole thing,” the Mayor would not have heard him. The Mayor’s attention was riveted upon the body in their arms which was of extraordinary beauty, though a bloody scar from a recent fall crossed her forehead.

“Who is she?” asked Geard. “I don’t know her. She has a lovely face. Who is she?”

“She’s Jenny Morgan. She’s the mother of that little girl Nelly. She’s the woman Red Robinson wrote about in the Gazette till you stopped him. She was Mr. Crow’s girl at one time.”

“Is the child drowned too?”

The doctor shook his head. “This poor creature wouldn’t have been drowned if she hadn’t been practically dead-drunk. She was fishing things out of the water at the end of Dye House Lane. Her little girl was with her.”

“Where’s the child now?” As he asked this question Mr. Geard noticed that some small insect, a minute beetle or fly it was, with tiny yellow stripes, was moving gingerly across the dead girl’s face just as it would have done over a leaf or a stone. He flicked it off with his finger-nail. That she couldn’t feel that small tickling seemed stranger than that she couldn’t open her big eyes.

“The child’s with Comrade Robinson and his wife,” replied the doctor. “Nelly knows those two very well; better than she ever knew this beautiful creature, I expect. Well! you died the easiest death, my dear, that anyone *could* die, just as easy as—” Dr. Fell’s mind wandered off from the calm face where the dark-fringed eyelids were covering those eyes that had always seemed *too* wide, as if they were forever seeing the things that normal people dodge, and he was thinking in his heart: “It’s funny … but I believe I’ve got a real idea while I’ve been holding this girl. Why don’t I just simply *leave* Bibby in the house and take lodgings with this chap Dickery? Dave Spear lives there; and why shouldn’t I? I could keep my clinic.”

As he thought of this, and imagined the triumphant way in which he would lock up his consulting room in Manor House Road every time he left it, he suddenly caught upon Mr. Geard’s face the most extraordinary expression he had ever seen on the countenance of any human being. Bloody Johnny had raised his hand again to the dead woman, this time to re-arrange a fold of her dress which her rescuers in their attempts to save her had disarranged. But no sooner had his hand encountered that ice-cold exposed bosom than he left it there, lying like a heavy horse-mushroom on the girl’s breast. And with his hand resting there his face took upon itself the very expression of this dead woman. His eyes closed. His jaw fell open. His nostrils grew pinched and thin. Certain lines disappeared from his face altogether and certain completely new ones showed themselves.

“Are you faint? Are you ill, Mr. Geard?” The doctor could not let go his hold upon Jenny Morgan, but the sound of his quick, anxious voice seemed enough without anything else to deliver the other from this curious sort of fit. His eyes flickered and opened, his nostrils quivered and expanded, his mouth closed tightly.

The doctor and Dickery Cantle moved off now with their burden and Mr. Geard was left standing by the water watching the manœuvres of Paul Trent. But Crummie, who had carried Mr. Bishop off to ask him about her mother and had learned that Lord Brent had put aside one of the officers' tents for the Mayoress, now returned and asked who that woman was and whether she was dead. Her father dodged her questions about the dead girl and told her to thank Paul Trent and say good-bye to him. Paul Trent was still engaged in a struggle to be allowed to keep the big Bridgewater boat, but Crummie noticed that after he'd deposited Lily and Louie safely on the muddy grass he turned out the young soldier too. "Take these young ladies to the top of the hill, my lad," he commanded, "and give them something hot to drink. Hi there! *You* look as if you could row! Come on in here and let's push off!"

His words were addressed to none other than Tommy Chinnock. "Sure I can row, Mister Trent! Sure I can! I larned it down to Bridport when I were wi' uncle. I can row with two oars if I be wanted to!"

Paul Trent was considerate enough, however, to wait for the arrival of the young soldier's superior officer before finally dismissing him.

"Please yourself, Sir," conceded this authority. "Please yourself; and tike them lidies to their famblies, stright now, Thompson; this ain't no bloomin' esplanade."

When they reached the tent that had been allotted to Mrs. Geard, she certainly embraced her husband and daughter with more emotion than she was accustomed to display. Did she feel any premonition of what was coming? There can be no doubt that some curious electric telepathy does sometimes link together the present and the future. Not always, however! That mysterious act of the human will, that resembles creation out of nothing and that every living soul shares with its begetter, the First Cause, has the power of breaking up and completely altering any fatal series in the mysterious streams of causative energy. But so powerful, in Bloody Johnny's case, was his desire to die, so strong was his conviction that his

Master had resolved that he *should* die, that this arbitrary wilful power in his nature could naturally be discounted in advance. This being the case, while for Mrs. Geard and for Fred Thompson, the soldier who could not row, and for Nancy Stickles and for Young Tewsy, the future might be malleable, for Mr. Geard the future was decided — and decided entirely by himself.

"Well, my chicks," he now remarked with an easy sigh. "I can't stay all day with you up here in this elegant tent. Bugger me black, but these officer-lads know how to make themselves comfortable! Is this the sleeping quarters they've given us? 'Tisn't like whoam, ha? … but it's all shipshape. Well! I'm off, my pretties. There'll only be need for one night for 'ee up here. I know *that.* So tomorrow you'll be back in the old bed, Megan."

He looked queerly at his wife as he said this, weighing to himself what she would feel tomorrow night without her John. The man's detachment just then was so abysmal that he could even conjure up the way she would go about the house without him, and how in the midst of her bewildered grief she would get comfort in thinking out every detail of his funeral, including the very smallest matters, such as whether to bury him in one of his old flannel shirts, or to use one of her best linen counterpanes. She would wonder, too, he felt sure, whether to let Crummie wear her new black hat, which *was* black, but not mourning-black, or whether to buy her a real funeral one at Wollop's!

"Well, I'm off," he repeated, but, instead of departing, he took his seat on a shaky camp-stool and pulled Crummie down upon his knees. " 'Tisn't every man o' my age," he murmured, using, as he always did when he was upset, the old Montacute accent, "has a darter as pretty as you be and unmarried, too, and a comfort to thee's wold parents."

"Well, if you be going to go, John, ye best go now," said Megan crossly. She never liked it when Crummie sat on her father's lap and she was afraid now that the soldiers could see into the tent. She was unpacking her old black vanity-bag at that moment, into which she had stuffed all manner of alien objects, and the way she did this, trying to make herself at home under these weird conditions, and glancing at herself in the little mirror she took out, and pushing back her grey hairs with both her hands under her lilac bonnet, struck Bloody Johnny with a sudden rush of overpowering tenderness.

"Don't 'ee forget, my precious," he blurted out, addressing his wife from behind Crummie's white neck, which filled his nostrils with a faint, sweet smell, as of new-mown hay, "don't 'ee forget to go every month now, and draw that monthly annuity I've arranged for Bob Stilly to pay 'ee. I be liable, 'tis a great sin, but so it is with me, to get so lost in me work at Town's End that my memory baint what it used to be."

"What are you talking about, John? There be no need for us to go to bank, as long as these councilmen bring your salary in a chamois-leather case like they've always done. What are you thinking about? You ain't going to try rescuing folk, be 'ee, in one of them tipply boats?"

"No, no. That's all right, my angel. I only meant — I only mentioned — I'm not going to get into any boat — don't 'ee think it! — only I've got things to see to. After all, I *be* Mayor, my treasure; and mayors be like captains of ships; they don't sit in cabins. They go on deck."

Crummie slipped off his knee and faced him. "I won't have you going anywhere, Dad!" she cried with flashing eyes. "Mother's quite right. Your place is with *us* when things be as terrible as they be today."

Bloody Johnny got up slowly and stiffly. His expression was such that Crummie yielded at once. The voices that reached their ears through that tent door were of a kind that he had never thought to hear in Glastonbury. Some woman was now screaming pitifully, someone was dragging her away. “Good-bye till tonight, my chicks,” he said in a low voice. “I suppose,” he added to Crummie, “your mother and I are to sleep in *there* … and you are to sleep *here*? Is that how they’ve fixed it up? Well — the same earth will be under all our beds, I reckon, wherever we sleep. Don’t ‘ee be afeared! I won’t be long.”

He moved aside the flap of the tent and went out. There was no sign of the woman he had heard screaming; but he noticed, as he emerged, that some kind of orderly had been placed at the entrance, with the idea, evidently, of keeping less privileged homeless persons from encroaching upon the Mayor’s privacy.

“A bad business, Sir,” said the man, peering past Bloody Johnny into the interior of the tent. The psychology of refuge camps had already begun to work, and the beauty of Crummie’s person had not been missed by this guardian of her retreat.

“All life’s a funny business, lad,” replied Mr. Geard; and then, fumbling in his pocket, he produced one of the council’s half-pound notes. “Put this in your pocket, boy,” he said, “and don’t let anyone frighten the ladies. I’ll be back soon.”

“Oh, Mother, Mother, what *shall* we do?” cried the girl, when the tent-flap swung back and the two were left alone, “I don’t believe we’ll ever see him again!”

Megan Geard hugged the agitated young woman to her heart, a thing she had not done — not in this solemn way — since Crummie was a small child. “We must pray for him, my pet. Don’t ‘ee take on so; don’t ‘ee, Crum! The good Lord be above all still.” No one took the least notice of the burly bare-headed man in his old greenish-black coat and his turned-up shiny black trousers, as he hurried off down the hillside towards the surging crowd at the flood's edge. There happened to be a very small boat emptying itself of a lanky young labourer from Paradise who was carrying an infant child.

"It's *my* boat," growled the youth sulkily, as Mr. Geard, pushing impetuously through the crowd, snatched up the oars.

"It *was* your boat," replied the Mayor; but he added more kindly, a second after, as he pushed one of the oarblades deep into the grass to steady the little craft while he stepped into it. "If you can't find anyone to take your child, sonny, ask for the Mayor's tent and tell Mrs. Geard that Mr. Geard said—"

His voice was lost in the arrival of a big flat barge, punted by Sam and his father, each armed with an enormous pole. It was a hay-barge from the Brue; and the Dekkers, after having been twice upset out of less solid craft, had at last found a vessel suited to both their weight and their strength. Water dripped from their drenched clothes. Sweat poured from their tired faces. But the impression that Mr. Geard received from them both was that of an exultant happiness.

It is a recurrent phenomenon in the affairs of men that certain emotional conflicts, which no normal events can affect nor any spontaneous efforts alter, are brought to an end, reconciled, harmonised, blotted out, by some startling elemental catastrophe. It was not until they both had been working desperately for some hours at rescuing marooned people that the father and son met, but when once they had met — without a word having been spoken between them of a personal character — it was taken for granted by both of them that they should remain together. Once in possession of this huge hay-barge they began picking up the terrified and stranded people from their flooded houses in far larger numbers than any other rescuers, except, perhaps, those who used the motor-boat from Bridgewater.

It gave Mr. Geard, in the midst of all the conflicting emotions that were surging through him, a feeling of puzzled satisfaction to confront this glowing emanation of primeval life-zest. He looked at the two big men in amused wonder. They seemed drunk with delight at simply being together. Strong and deep love between a father and a son is not rare. But the maudlin, doting, inebriated rapture of these two as they helped their tottering cargo to disembark, for it had been people from the old men's almshouse they had been rescuing, seemed the most extreme example of such a feeling that Mr. Geard had ever encountered.

The Dekkers were both completely exhausted. It was easy to see that. But the passionate surge of life-joy which they revealed, hauling, dragging, heaving, lifting, balancing and wading, was something that carried a curious and special elation to Bloody Johnny's mind. It was no easy task to get their cargo of aged and feeble almshousemen out of their barge and on to the land; and some of the old people looked quite dazed and at the end of their tether. But Mr. Geard, taking hold of one of his own oars with both hands, was able to give the stern of the big barge a most timely propulsion, for which Sam, who was nearest to him, gave him a grateful nod.

"Thank you, Sir! That's *just* right. One more shove and you'll get us in."

Mr. Geard repeated his effort, but being not much more skilful at these manoeuvres than young Private Thompson, there was no small danger of his falling headfront into the water between the boat and the barge. Sam, however, caught at his oar-blade and flung him back. He collapsed across the seat of his tiny skiff, but the little tub righted itself, and all was well.

"Look 'ee here, Mr. Mayor, what my father insisted on putting in!" Taking advantage of Mat Dekker's lifting one of the old men out and wading with him through the water, Sam stooped down in the stern of the barge, and lifted up a rabbit-hutch. “Three lop-ears and one little black one!” he shouted above the uproar. “The Vicarage, you know, is high and dry; and I *think* Miss Drew’s all right, though her servants got panicky. I saw them perched on their drive gate calling to every boat that passed. But I’ll have to hang on to this hutch till Father goes home. We found it in the water near Backwear Hut, where Abel Twig lives. We couldn’t see anything of the old man. We punted far out of our way till we were quite close to his place. But nothing except the chimneys could we see. It’s so near the river. The water’s terribly deep there. All you can see are a few mounds — the Ancient British mounds.” All these remarks Sam shouted to Mr. Geard as the current of the flood swept between them and carried the latter’s little boat away.

Bloody Johnny nodded farewell to him as he took his oars firmly in his hands and set himself to row in the direction of those Ancient British mounds. He rowed directly towards the river which he realised he could easily follow by reason of its swifter current, and which he knew, after it had skirted Beckery and Paradise, would lead him near Lake Village Field. What Sam had said about Abel Twig’s rabbit-hutch and about the old man’s chimneys being all that was visible had been accepted by Bloody Johnny as an omen sent by his Master. “Rescue Abel Twig,” he muttered to himself, “Rescue Abel Twig—”

He was now resolutely set upon dying, set upon dying before night fell. He did not think of this as suicide. The thought of suicide never once crossed even that nimbus of feeling which connects the double horns of the mind, like the old moon within the crescent of the new moon. Mr. Geard had the peculiarity of believing absolutely and without question in the existence of the next world. He also knew for certain, by the evidence of personal experience, that a living Being, who might, or might not, be the Christ the churches worshipped, awaited his presence in what he called "the next dream." Mr. Geard had been made to understand by the mediumship of this Being, that conditions of life after the death of the body were immeasurably superior to those now existing. He had also been promised that this Being would meet him face to face and would satisfy to the full the accumulated erotic desires, at once mystical and sensual, which were the master-craving of his nature.

Not long after Mr. Geard's death, not long after the sifting out of all these dramatic events, one of the cleverest women psychologists of our time brought forward an interpretation of the man's mood on this fatal day that deserves to be recorded. According to this view of his feelings during these last hours of his life, the stress ought to be laid upon the curious pathological necessity, under which he was known to labour, of actually sharing with all his bodily nerves the physical suffering of those around him. This authority hesitated not to point out that in the case of Tittie, and in the case of the idiot-boy outside the Pilgrims', and in the case of Owen Evans in the hospital, the man had been seen to display actual physical signs of suffering exactly parallel to those endured by Mrs. Petherton, and by the boy, and by Mr. Evans as he told his stupendous story. The amazing — but surely not impossible explanation — offered by this penetrating woman is that a violent psychic radiation from all the minds of the twenty-seven people, including children, who were actually drowned during those twelve ghastly hours riddled Mr. Geard's hyper-sensitised and super-porous sympathy with what might be called the *drowning-spasm*, and produced in him a craving for death by drowning that really amounted to a kind of drowning-hypnosis. This brilliant writer points out further, in regard to the mystery of the death of Geard of Glastonbury, that his growing preoccupation with the Grail Fount on Chalice Hill was itself a hydrophiliastic obsession. While many pathological subjects, this writer maintains, seek a pre-natal peace in death, what Mr. Geard in his planetary consciousness desired was a return to that remote and primal element of Water, which was literally the great maternal womb of all organic earth-life. It was this woman's far-fetched pamphlet that with its use of pathological technical terms had such a large share in turning the attention of intellectual people away from the religious aspects of the problem.

What Bloody Johnny was really struggling with, however, as he splashed along in his frail tub, past the outskirts of Beckery and of Paradise till he reached the swirling current of the flood-swamped river, was his love for Megan and Crummie. Of Cordelia he hardly thought at all; though it must be confessed that a faint and clinging sweetness, like a fragrance within a fragrance, drew his mind now and then towards the figure of Lady Rachel.

It *was* painful to him to condemn his wife and daughter — left up there on Wirral Hill in that strange camp tent — to what he knew well enough would be a pitiful if not a rending shock. Over and over again he placed the alternatives before himself — to go on with his life and spare them this blow, or to follow the devouring death-lust which had gathered upon him and ruthlessly plunge them into this human loss.

He was in the river current now, flowing westward in furious angry eddies which the incoming sea tide forced back upon themselves. In spite of the roll of the great flood eastward, as soon as he reached the centre of the river the current swept him westward, rocking his tiny skiff in the most threatening manner and rendering it totally unnecessary for a while even to attempt to use his oars. So he just pulled them in and let them lie across the little boat in front of his big stomach.

Mr. Geard’s character will never be understood — or the monstrous inhumanity of his departure from the visible world condoned — until it is realised that the unruffled amiability and the unfailing indulgence of his attitude to those near and dear to him concealed a hidden detachment from them that had always been an unbridged gulf.

The mass and volume of his being was composed of a weight of cold phlegmatic substance that was always sinking down, by a weird gravitational pull, to a species of preorganic cosmic inertia. His great moments came when this heavy inertness, pulling him down into the silt and slime of the chemical basis of life, was roused to activity by his erotic mysticism. For the truth is that the psychic-sensual life-lust in Mr. Geard was always being lulled to dormant quiescence under the weight of his sluggish physical nature. The spirit within him needed to be roused and stirred up, before it could feel really alive, by some super-formidable and super-dramatic Quest. Such a Quest had been his passion for the Grail Fount; till that Welshman’s question about Arthur had confused his mind.

But he was weary of all that now; and if his nature was not to sink back into its heavier elements of sluggish neutral indifference, he must get into closer contact with his invisible Master than was possible in this “muddy vesture” of earth-life!

He was muttering to himself now as his little boat began whirling round and round in one of these dangerous confluences where the salt flood met the river’s current. Ha! The ocean smell was in his nostrils, and there in the water, whirling round with his cockle-shell boat, was an authentic piece of *white seaweedl* He stretched out one of his plump hands — his left hand it was — to clutch this bit of seaweed, his mind racing back to old childish days on Weymouth Beach. This would have been the end of him; for the water was very deep here, and Mr. Geard had never learnt to swim; but at that moment he began this stretching gesture, which — carried an inch further would have upset his boat — the river current defeated the sea flood, and swept him on, out of the dangerous circle of that vortex, and carried him forward with increasing rapidity towards Lake Village Great Field. He had lost the white seaweed; but he had escaped being drowned *by an accident.* But what was this? Something vast and glittering swept into view in the very midst of the river.

A portion of Philip's new bridge! Torn from its shaft holes in the mud banks, and dragged, steel and scaffolding and crossbeams and all, into the centre of the torrent, this towering symbol of the power of Capital, of the power of Science, was now the sport of what looked like a mocking, mischievous, taunting cuckoo-spit out of Chaos itself!

Mr. Geard neither smiled, nor chuckled, nor congratulated himself at this surprising sight. He just surveyed it with a lively, objective, inquisitive interest, an interest worthy of Bert Cole or of Timothy Wollop.

But the apparition of this costly piece of wreckage served to divert the drifting of the boat that carried him, sweeping it, as the two objects collided, across the submerged northern bank of the Brue towards the middle of Lake Village Field.

Here the water was a little shallower; but still quite deep enough to drown a man whose height was not over six feet, and in special hollows on the edges of the mounds much deeper than that.

Mr. Geard now re-claimed possession of his oars, thrusting them into the row-locks and pulling energetically towards all he could see of the dwelling of Abel Twig.

Yes, Sam Dekker was right. There was not much else than the chimney of Backwear Hut, together with a small fragment of its roof, visible across the surface of a mud-coloured lake, above which its brickwork showed almost black. But several of the bigger mounds of the old Lake Village were still visible, their round tops protruding from the waste of waters like diseased excrescences on the wrinkled surface of a vast brown leaf.

But Mr. Geard found himself confronted now by several objects more exciting to a human brain, lodged in a wooden tub on a brown flood, than mere chimney-tops. He became aware that upon the largest of these Lake Village mounds there were living figures, consisting, as far as he could make out, of a man, a child, and an animal, among whom the man and the child were desperately summoning him to their aid. There was something *floating* in the water too, with a dark object clinging to it that was also waving to him.

So detached was the man's mind at this juncture, with his own life and death held in the balance, that he found himself in the coolest and calmest fashion comparing the scene before him with an old Bible picture of the Flood which used to obsess his mind as a little boy at Town's End in Montacute. Here, again, the difference between water and fire rose up and manifested itself! Had the element that threatened the lives of all these living creatures been *fire,* there would have been such an automatic beat of panic fear in his pulses that such mental detachment as he now felt would have been impossible.

Living spirits they were — he and these two gesticulating figures — each one of them with a whole world of clear-cut feelings, images, memories. And now, against them, this swirling brown mass of water, this enormous entity without consciousness, or purpose, or feeling, or pity, was gathering itself up to obliterate in one swallowing gulp of drowning suction, everything, everyone — until blackness alone remained.

Blackness? But what was he thinking? It was not to gain blackness that he was choosing to die rather than to live this day! Or *was* it? Was what he fancied to be his superhuman mania for heightened life in reality a secret longing to plunge into the dark abyss of non-existence?

Mr. Geard now allowed his oars to rest on the water, which was comparatively calm just here, and hoisting himself up on the palms of his big hands endeavoured to get a clear sense of what confronted him, before he took any action. "Why didn't the Dekkers see those two?" he thought. "That barge of theirs must have come from the other side of the Hut and unless they were so occupied with their rabbit-hutch—"

He could now observe that the ground beyond the Hut, on the further side of Godney Road, rose up well out of the water; and it occurred to him that a strong swimmer, from any of these mound-islands, could reach dry land without much difficulty.

"Bugger me black!" he muttered to himself, "if there isn't a man on that floating thing over there!"

With distended eyes he surveyed this man astride of the outstretched wing of what he now recognized as the Crow airplane. Yes, it was Philip himself! Drawn by an irresistible instinct towards his steel flying machine and his steel bridge, the manufacturer had done exactly what Mr. Geard had been thinking a spirited man *might* do, he had swum from the high ground above Godney Road — which he had managed somehow to reach on foot — and had got hold of the airplane. The unlucky thing was that when he got there he found himself seized with such an evil cramp in both his legs as rendered him totally *hors-de-combat.*

Seeing the man clinging so helplessly to the wing of his submerged machine, Mr. Geard naturally supposed that, like himself, Philip was no swimmer. Without thinking very much about it he vaguely took it for granted that the manufacturer had tried to land from the air in the darkness of last night, and had found water where he had expected to find grass.

"He must have been hours in the water, poor devil!" thought Mr. Geard. "I'll deal with *him* first and let the ones on the mound go for a while." He began — after his curious fashion — to shiver and shake just as he imagined the man in the water must be doing, after so long an immersion! Why it was that he began to experience, as he gazed at him, an extremely unpleasant feeling in his legs, was more than he could explain.

He now proceeded to row straight up to the floating airplane; a movement which evoked cries of disappointment and then a miserable silence from the man and the boy on the mound. But Philip received him with a smile of intense gratitude. The rival kings of Avalon met thus at last on what was certainly a spot — though it could scarcely be called a ground — of undeniable neutrality.

"I don't think she's seriously injured," was Philip's characteristic remark as Mr. Geard clutched at the edge of the great protruding wing and steadied his cockle-shell craft.

"Legs hurt?" panted Mr. Geard, thinking of the man rather than of his machine.

"The bridge is down," went on Philip, his face giving a convulsive, involuntary twinge as he dragged himself a little further out of the water. Being a Crow, this twinge, which was repeated every time he made this least movement, took the form of the twitching nerve in John's face. Mr. Geard thought of John as he saw this twitching face above the water-line.

"I'm glad *he's* safe out of this anyway, the poor lad," he said to himself.

"Legs hurt?" he repeated, refusing to join this builder of bridges in his present straining effort to get a glimpse of that steel wreck.

"I've got a devilish cramp," murmured Philip.

"You swam out here?"

The manufacturer nodded. “Only from just over there,” he said. “From just beyond the road. *I’ve got cramp*,” he repeated.

“We’ll deal with it,” said Mr. Geard, “presently. Only first we must change places. It’s only your legs, eh? Your arms are all right?”

Philip re-assured him about his arms with a feeble smile.

“There are people on those mounds,” went on Mr. Geard. “When we’ve got you safe to land, we’ll cope with *that* trouble. But one thing at a time is my motto — and I daresay it’s yours too. We’re agreed anyway *there.* And I think we’re agreed too, Mr. Crow, whatever folk may say, on one other thing.”

“What’s that, Mr. Mayor?” enquired the twitching white face above the airplane’s wing.

Bloody Johnny noticed that the water had been washing so long in the same place — for the man’s legs hurt him at the slightest move — that it had deposited a sort of windrow of minute bits of scum and weed across Philip’s neck. A bit of green dyke-scum clung, too, to one corner of the man’s moustache, producing an effect that was unpleasantly grotesque. But Mr. Geard’s mind had already forgotten what it was; this second point upon which their characters agreed!

“What we’ve got to do now, Mister,” announced Bloody Johnny from his seat in his coracle — and the jostling in the water of these two vessels, the boat and the aircraft, were like the coming together of two æons of time— “is to change places! *You’ve* got to get into my boat … and *I’ve* got to get into your airplane!”

Philip smiled a rather sickly and tantalised smile.

“You’ve come to mock me, Mr. Mayor! When I first saw you coming I thought, here’s someone who’ll pick me up, but I see now that your little tub couldn’t possibly hold — Well, off with you! And if—”

“That’s just what *I* say,” remarked Geard of Glastonbury, and without more ado, he began divesting himself of his coat, his trousers and his drawers.

Philip, with the green weed hanging from his moustache and his neck surrounded by a windrow of scum, contemplated these movements with astonishment. There was even a faint glint of class-conscious physical distaste in his white flood-dirtied face as he beheld, so shamelessly displayed before him, the private parts of the tenant of Cardiff Villa.

But Mr. Geard now pulled himself close to the wing of the airplane and peered down into the water where the other man’s cramped legs were twisted beneath him.

“Are you standing on anything?” he asked.

Philip did not seem to hear this question. The wrinkles of his forehead as he hoisted himself a little out of the water showed a swift, violent, interior conflict.

“If I take his offer,” he thought, “I’ll get into the town and have him picked up much quicker than he could do it for me. The fellow’s no more good at rowing a boat than he is at spending a fortune! Damn! I suppose the noble thing to do would be to refuse his help. *But what if I get cramp in my belly?* My plane’s ruined. My bridge is down. My road is sunk. Not an ounce of tin in Wookey for the last three weeks. That Birmingham man thought the whole vein’s exhausted. The new dye works — all that these demons have left me — a foot deep in water! What have I got to live for?”

But the hard, narrow, invincible back portion of his skull visualised the new start of his career as if it were a steam-tug in this brown littered water!

“Begin again,” he thought to himself; “and to hell with mock-heroism! Geard and I are two beasts fighting for our lives. *I know it.* He doesn’t know it! His soft, crazy idealisms, his I-am-the-one-to-give-my-life-for-my-enemy, is simply his handicap in our struggle. If the man *does* drown before I get back, it'll only prove that he preferred his ideal gestures to life. I prefer *nothing* to life. Oh, to the devil with these haverings!" In Philip's secret heart was a blind confidence in the airplane as equal to this crisis. He had so closely identified himself with this potent, yet pliable structure, that below all practical reasoning he had a superstitious faith in the spirit of his machine to outmatch the elements.

If any of those invisible Watchers of human psychology in Glastonbury had been overlooking these two just now — the man in the coracle and the man in the water — a lively discussion might have arisen among them as to which of the two was the stronger lover of life.

"Begin over again!" This was the cry of the man in the water, with the yellowish scum adhering to his neck and a weft of dead seaweed — the kind that has on it those slippery blown-out pustules that children love to pinch between their fingers — caught in his hair, and the wisp of green sea-gluten twisted into his moustache. And this "Begin again!" was the out-jetting of the inmost essence of his nature. As he formulated this "Begin again!" the image of a steam-tug crossing this swirling flood, with a resolute *tick* … *tick* … *tick* … of its engines, became the image of his recovery in spite of all opposition.

But Bloody Johnny's exultation as he peered into the water to see what was beneath his rival's cramped legs was of a very different sort.

"So *this* is how I shall do it!" he said to himself, with a convulsive chuckle, a chuckle that caused the pit of his stomach to flutter up and down like sail-cloth on a beach that is held in its place by pebble-stones. "What … could … be … better?"

A huge dark wave of indescribable emotion rose up from a psychic reservoir within him that seemed to reduce all this business of drowning to a mere splash of rain.

"Megan … Crummie … forgive me … my treasures! … I won't be divided from you … I'll be nearer you … but I *must* drink it … the Water … the Water of …"

"Standing on anything under there?" he repeated; but again the muddied hawk-face above that brown tide only twitched with the intensity of its thinking and with the pain of its cramped legs.

The eyes of the man in the coracle lifted themselves away from the eyes of the man in the water. Bloody Johnny was always a person of punctilious scrupulousness when it came to eavesdropping; and to watch this face before him just now was eavesdropping of the worst sort.

"He'll change with me," Geard thought. "But he don't *altogether* relish the situation!"

By the mere mental motion of having chosen death of his own free will the Mayor fancied he had acquired easily, naturally, inevitably, an advantage so great over this desperate life-clinger that he could afford to treat him like a child. Whether in the eyes of those mysterious Watchers, this fancied advantage of the death-lust over the life-lust could really establish itself as a maturer, wiser, superior mood, was a very different question! What is certain is that Bloody Johnny felt himself just then to be like a grown person dealing with a child. And this was something that would have certainly astonished Philip had he realised it.

"Are you standing on anything?"

"I'm astride of her wing," said the other. "I expect I *could* find more of her if I cared to, only I don't want to press her down any further than she is."

"You think of your machine as if she had a soul," whispered Mr. Geard, slipping down over the side of his little craft into the water.

It may be believed how the coracle of this heavily built magician leapt up out of the flood when relieved of his weight! It soon sank again, however, though not as before, to within a few inches of the row-locks, when Philip, actuated now as much by a fear lest their combined weights should sink the plane as by a desire to save himself from drowning, scrambled, groaning and cursing, for his cramp was cruel, into the empty skiff.

"Don't let go!" he cried as he rowed off. "If you'll only hang on to her she'll hold up till I send someone. If I can get that motor-boat—"

As he turned the boat round a shrill cry from the child on the half-submerged hillock arrested his attention. The sight of this small figure made him think of his little daughter whose whereabouts in this disaster had been constantly in his mind during these agitating hours. "This thing would hold a child all right," he thought. But the cramp that contracted his legs was so intense that the idea of any delay seemed more than he could bear. "They're in no danger," he said to himself. "It's Geard who's got to be thought of." He glanced towards the Mayor's large face and black staring eyes which were a good deal lower in the water than his own had ever been. But those black eyes had evidently not missed this moment of indecision; for they flung a look at him that was like a command. "Best take 'un while 'ee have the chance!" came his thick voice out of the water. Philip's cramp was agonising. His face was contorted with what he endured. Most men would have crumpled up, moaning and helpless. But the Norman will in the man — that will that had ruled England since the Conquest — compelled his arms, though his legs were doubled up under him, to perform the motion of rowing, and of rowing with smooth, powerful, calculated strokes. It only needed a little adroit steering to avoid the mounds that were almost submerged and that might have struck the keel of his craft, and a little hard pulling against a wind that was beginning to ruffle the water, to reach the big tumulus upon which were collected these living creatures. They were barely known to Philip Crow; but to many Glastonbury people they would have been absurdly well known; for they were Number One's cow, Betsy, Jackie Jones, and Number One himself.

It was certainly an exciting experience for Jackie Jones when with his slender figure reposing between the cramped feet of Mr. Crow he saw himself being rowed rapidly towards the town. "I'll come back for you," Philip had explained hurriedly to Abel Twig.

"One of they girt barges, Mister, be the thing I wants," had been the reply of Number One, "what'll take me wold cow in 'un!"

"Have you seen Nelly Morgan, Jackie?" enquired that young lady's father with a hesitating shyness as well as an acute anxiety, when they were approaching safety.

"Her were out with her Mummy, Mister, picking up Treasure from where it be washed up."

"Treasure?"

"They things what be washed up, Mister! Us calls 'un Treasure by reason of us being Pirates and Smugglers."

Mr. Geard, low down in the water now, observed his late coracle flying over the flood propelled by Philip's vigorous strokes. Between sheds in the outskirts of Paradise it was just possible for the submerged man to catch sight of the top of Glastonbury Tor. He had very quickly found that the body of the airplane kept sinking deeper and deeper in the water under his heavy weight. He could just rest on it now with his feet, and that was all. Clenching his teeth he gave it a violent kick. It sank immediately out of his reach. He was now propped up solely upon the wing of the machine; but since he was floating in the water and divested of coat and trousers, a very little support was enough to keep him up. “Well,” he said to himself, “I be the same Johnny Geard as used to see West Drive and Drive Gates and Batemoor and Scotch Firs and Yeovil Road. I can see ’em now as clear as I can see this machine wing in this water! And I be the same what used to follow Father up Park Cover and over to Pitt, and back by Woodhouse Lane. I be the same what Mother used to take to Zunday School, longside o’ King’s Arms.” He fumbled with his hands along the surface of the wing that supported him.

“Thee be a-drowning, thee be, Johnny Geard, and airplane be a-drowning, s’know! Thee’s rung Montacute Bells in thee’s time, and airplane have been up so high as a’seed Glaston no bigger nor a waspy’s nest.”

The plane’s wing that supported him now began to sink still lower in the flood. It sank so low that Mr. Geard’s chin was on a level with the water. He gulped down a mouthful; and this mouthful tasted like the cold salt sweat of a corpse. This mouthful gave him the first pang of physical shrinking from what he was doing that he had yet known. This mouthful struck him as not only a forerunner of choking suffocation, but, as carrying with it a sensation of atrocious strangeness, of ghastly unnaturalness, of perfidy, of *the unallowed-for*! He gulped down his second mouthful now; and with the outrage to his whole body that this gulping of salt death brought, the spasm of strangeness shivered through him and hummed in his ears and drummed at his heart. Yes, this was the end.

Bloody Johnny lost. All dark. The bed is deep … Where is Megan’s head? *Gulp* — *gulp* — *gulp* — He was drinking it fast now; and it was going up his nose too. Yes, it was getting into some cavity between his nose and his mouth and doing something there that had the effect of making him gurgle and gargle and choke and spit. If only this deadly coldness hadn’t smelt so vilely! It smelt of vinegar. And this vinegar was getting into his lungs. Not to breathe — when you had to breathe! Not to breathe, but to sink gurgling down; and to see and to touch and to smell and to taste and to become something that gurgled and gargled and gulped!

Sinking, that was what he was doing now, gulping and sinking. That wing had yielded. He had leaned on it with his full weight and it had gone clear down. Nothing to lean upon. Nothing but brown darkness that sank under him and sucked and sucked. He came up to the top now and gasped at the air with heaving indrawing spasms. Physical necessity had him by the throat like the dripping mouth of a dog, of an enormous brown dog. It was the turn for *his* face to carry now those blotches of scum and tidal slime upon it! His black eyes were opened preternaturally wide, staring across the water. What he stared at now was Glastonbury Tor; and on the top of the Tor was the tower; and the tower was like the handle of an enormous cloudy goblet that grew larger and larger and larger — But down he went again — Geard of Glastonbury — dying his chosen death by drowning. Yes, it was all at his own volition; but when the final beating and lashing and threshing with the arms began, and the final gurgling and gulping in the throat began, it seemed as if the man's condemned body ran amok and revolted. Bloody Johnny's body danced, in fact, its own private death-dance, in brute defiance of the spirit that had brought it to this pass.

For the last time he came up to the surface. Again his black eyes opened; opened so wide that anyone would have thought their sockets must crack. He was staring frantically at Glastonbury Tor, but what he was seeing up there now will never be known.

The books say that Arthur saw the Grail in five different shapes; and that what the fifth shape was has never been revealed. Perhaps it was this fifth shape now that caused the black demonic eyes of Bloody Johnny to start out of his head. The feet treading water where there was now nothing for them to rest upon; the big white cheeks sinking down, while the water lapped around them, in the same way as it would have lapped round a log that was sinking; the sensual mouth opening wide, using just the same muscles as it did when he was preaching or yawning; the thick lips with the same abandoned relaxation dividing them, as it did when he used to kiss Crummie; the heavy shoulders, the great belly under its soaked flannel shirt, all engulfed, all going down, all *with nothing to rest upon.*

The little bubbles of brown water that swam so persistently round that open mouth and round those staring eyes, behaved just as they would have done if it had been a waterlogged chamber-pot rather than a living man full of thoughts "that wandered through eternity." They were in such a hurry, those bubbles, to float over the empty space *where his head had been.* They could not wait to float freely over that particular space on the surface of the water. There! They had their will now. Nothing remained now but broken brown bubbles going slowly round and round in reduced circles; and in an incredible silence!

But great creative Nature, working her vast death-magic, beyond the magic of any Merlin, brought it about, in her fathomless inhuman compassion, that all suffering, all struggling, all beating with the arms, all frog-action with the legs, subsided, collapsed, ceased, fell upon an unbelievably delicious calm. Nor was Bloody Johnny's mind clouded any more. His body had made its automatic protest. It was now docile. It was now obedient. Geard of Glastonbury's will to die enjoyed at last its premeditated satisfaction.

In calm, inviolable peace Mr. Geard saw his life, saw his death, and saw also that nameless Object, that fragment of the Absolute, about which all his days he had been murmuring. He was now totally free from remorse about Megan and Crummie. The ruthless element in his leaving them, purely for his own satisfaction, seemed to him justified in these last moments. He was at peace, too, about what should happen in the future to his new Religion. It was as if he had ceased to belong to our world of looking-glass pantomime wherein we are driven to worship we know not what; and had slipped down among the gods and taken his place among those who cast their own mysterious reflections in the Glastonbury of our bewilderment.

The brown flood that drowned him — bitter and cold from the arctic tides of the far Atlantic — stirred up in his consciousness at the last all those buried layers in his nature that were so much greater than his speech, than his theories, than his achievements. In his dying moments, Geard of Glastonbury did actually pass, consciously and peacefully, into those natural elements that he had always treated with a certain careless and unæsthetic aplomb.

He had never been an artistic man. He had never been a fastidious man. He had got pleasure from smelling at dung-hills, from making water in his wife's garden, from snuffing up the sweet sweat of those he loved. He had no cruelty, no culture, no ambition, no breeding, no refinement, no curiosity, no conceit. He believed that there was a borderland of the miraculous round everything that existed and that "everything that lived was holy." Such was the Mr. Geard who was now drowning in the exact space of water that covered the spot where the ancient Lake Villagers had their temple to the neolithic goddess of fertility. He would be dead and past reviving by any charm — charmed they never so wisely — in a few minutes.

For an eternity of time there had been no Mr. Geard of Glastonbury. For an eternity of time there *would* be no Mr. Geard of Glastonbury, though there might well be some mysterious conscious Being in the orbit of whose vast memory that particular Avatar was concealed. This moment, however, along with many infinitesimal animalculae, the Mayor of Glastonbury lived still, though he did not breathe, above Philip’s airplane, below those revolving air-bubbles.

What was he thinking about now? Not of Glastonbury; nor of Death. He was lying in the green spring grass of the Park at Montacute; and an incarnate Sweetness that was his daughter and yet not his daughter was running to meet him with outstretched arms.

That it was in his power to rise up and meet this figure and feel as he embraced her that he was embracing the very Life of Life was doubtless the result of what he had seen — the Grail under its fifth shape — upon the top of Gwyn-ap-Nud’s hill.

Unlike the experience of his patron and friend, the Rector of Northwold, the consciousness of Bloody Johnny’s soul suffered a complete suspension after his body was dead. Whether this suspension outlasted his burial in the Wells Road Cemetery, which happened immediately after the flood, and whether it will outlast the life of this planet, and of all other such bubbles of material substance that the torrent of Life throws up, is unknown to the writer of this book.

It is certain however that Mr. Geard was not mistaken when he decided that to plunge into the bitterness of death in order to gain more life was an action that at least would destroy what he had found so hampering to his spirit in the infirmities of his flesh. Gone now forever, gone like his own breath, were the bubbles that had floated rejoicing across the place where he had sunk.

Over the fragments of Philip’s bridge, over that old Lake Village Mound, with the figures of the crouching old man and the frightened animal, over the great mass of swirling waters, drifted, floated, faded, dissolved, the dying visions of the drowned man.

Above the mounting flood rose still the broken tower arch of the ruined Abbey, rose still the tower of the Baptist, rose still the tower of the Archangel. These remain; enduring this deluge, as they had endured others; but the doomsday of these also must finally come. Towers are they, like those of Rome and Jerusalem, built to storm the Infinite, to besiege the Absolute, but subject like those others to the shocks of time and of chance.

For the great goddess Cybele, whose forehead is crowned with the Turrets of the Impossible, moves through the generations from one twilight to another; and of her long journeying from cult to cult, from shrine to shrine, from revelation to revelation, there is no end. Mountains have rolled down upon many of her temples. The depths of the Atlantic and Pacific have gathered others into their dim silt and monstrous slime at the bottom of the world. The obliterating sand storms of the desert have buried not a few. Some are lost in the untraversed forests of the new hemisphere. The days of the years of men’s lives are like leaves upon the wind and like ripples upon the water; but wherever the Tower-bearing Goddess moves, journeying from one madness of Faith to another, these pinnacles of desperation mount up again.

The builders of Stonehenge have perished; but there are those who worship its stones still. The builders of Glastonbury have perished; but there are people, yet living among us, whose eyes have seen the Grail. The ribs of our ancient earth are riddled with desperate pieties; her hollow caves are scooped out with frantic asseverations; and the end is not yet.

The Towers of Cybele still move in the darkness from cult to cult, from revelation to revelation. Made of a stuff more lasting than granite, older than basalt, harder than marble, and yet as insubstantial as the airiest mystery of thought, these Towers of the journeying Mother still trouble the dreams of men with their tremulous up-rising. Bowed beneath the desolation of futility, eaten by the worm of despair, these tragic Towers still rise from our planet’s surface, still sway disconsolately in the wind of its orbit, still gleam cold and white under its recurrent moons.

The Philip Crows of this world build their new roads and their new bridges; but She, the ancient Tower-Bearer, neither follows the one, nor crosses the other. By different paths she moves than those made for the engines of traffic. The ships of the air turn aside as they approach her. The inventions of men touch her not. About her turreted head blows the breath of what is beyond life and beyond death; and none, but such as are covenanted and sealed as her own, discern her goings and her comings.

The powers of reason and science gather in the strong light of the Sun to beat her down. But evermore she rises again, moving from the mists of dawn to the mists of twilight, passing through the noon-day like the shadow of an eclipse and through the midnight like an unblown trumpet, until she finds the land that has called her and the people whose heart she alone can fill.

For the turrets upon the head of Cybele are made of those strange second thoughts of all the twice-born in the world; the liberated thoughts of men as they return from their labour and the brooding thoughts of women as they pause in the midst of their work. The powers of reason may number the Stones of Stonehenge and guess at the origin of the Grail of Glastonbury; but they cannot explain the mystery of the one, nor ask the required magic question of the other.

No man has seen Our Lady of the Turrets as She moves over the land, from twilight to twilight; but those “topless towers” of hers are the birth-cries of occult generation, raised up in defiance of Matter, in defiance of Fate, and in defiance of cruel knowledge and despairing wisdom.

Men may deride them, deny them, tear them down. They may drive their engines through the ruins of Glastonbury and their airplanes over the Stones of Stonehenge.

Still in the strength of the Unknown Dimension the secret of these places is carried forward to the unborn, their oracles to our children's children.

For She whom the ancients named Cybele is in reality that beautiful and terrible Force by which the Lies of great creative Nature give birth to Truth that is to be.

Out of the Timeless she came down into time. Out of the Un-named she came down into our human symbols.

Through all the stammerings of strange tongues and murmurings of obscure invocations she still upholds her cause; the cause of the unseen against the seen, of the weak against the strong, of that which is not, and yet is, against that which is, and yet is not.

Thus she abides; her Towers forever rising, forever vanishing. Never or Always.

THE END

Weymouth Sands (1934)

Weymouth Sands was first published by Simon & Schuster in the USA in 1934 before being released in the UK by John Lane under the title *Jobber Skald* in 1935. The British title was chosen to avoid potential lawsuits from residents of Weymouth after the author had lost a libel case over *A Glastonbury Romance*. Powys began writing the novel in February 1932 while living at his ‘Phudd Bottom’ farmhouse in rural New York. As was the case with all the ‘Wessex Novels’, he drew inspiration from his childhood memories and recollections of the region and merged them with mysticism, symbolism, mythology and a cast of eccentric and peculiar characters. His paternal grandmother, Amelia Powys, had lived in Weymouth and he had become closely familiar with the town’s landscape and legends, which remained vivid in his mind and creative imagination, while far away in America.

The novel chronicles the lives, desires and oddities of the residents in the seaside town of Weymouth in Dorset. It explores the complexity of relationships and the human psychology and the darker impulses and obsessions that are often hidden from respectable society. The plot is populated with eccentric and unhappy characters: ‘The Jobber’ who is consumed by a violent desire to murder the town’s capitalist; a Latin teacher tormented by unrequited love; a mystic and prophet; and an elderly clown with an unstable wife, as well as many more lonely people trying to navigate through their mundane lives. While the novel was well received by critics, its sales were underwhelming compounding Powys difficult financial position following the large costs of the recent libel suit.

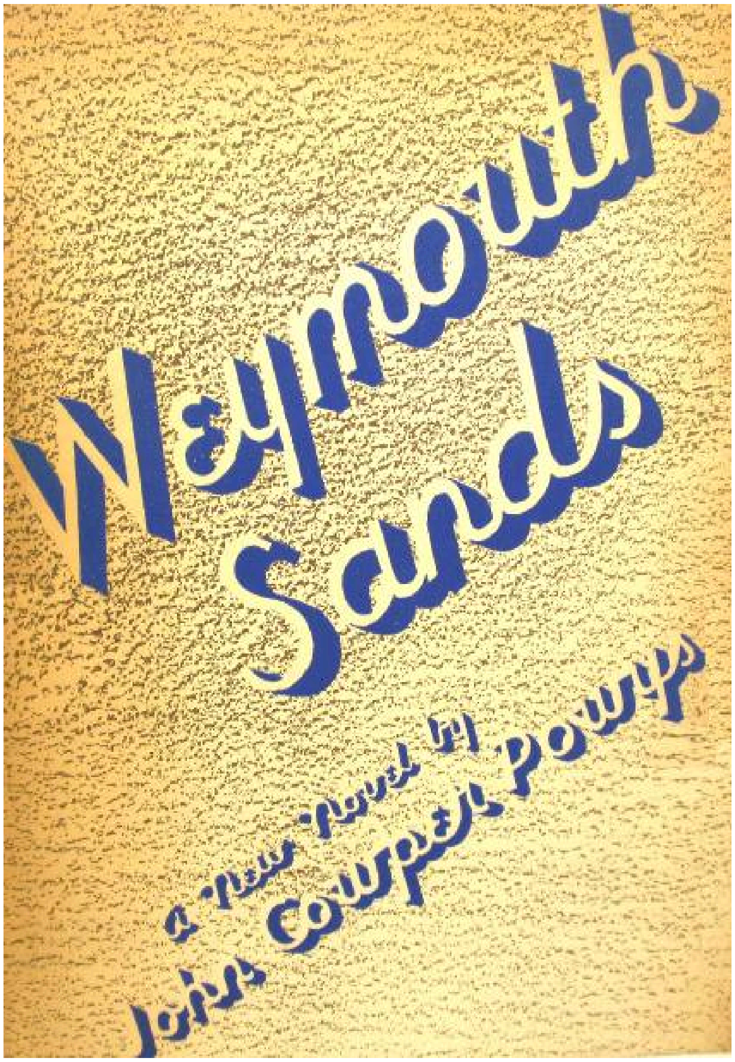
Weymouth Sands
a New Novel by
John Cowper Powys

The first edition

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Weymouth seafront — the inspiration for the novel

TO

GERTRUDE MARY POWYS

REMEMBERING

HER LIFE WITH MY FATHER

AT

GREENHILL TERRACE, WEYMOUTH.

NOTE BY AUTHOR

All the events and characters in this book are pure invention, except in the case of Magnus Muir and of Sylvanus Cobbold, where certain characteristics and peculiarities have been taken from the nature of the author himself. There is, to the author's knowledge, no such Institution as "Hell's Museum" anywhere in Dorset, certainly not near Weymouth, and if the author has used any well-known Wessex names for his imaginary persons, it was purely in order to enhance the verisimilitude of his tale.

MAGNUS MUIR

THE SEA LOST NOTHING OF the swallowing identity of its great outer mass of waters in the emphatic, individual character of each particular wave. Each wave, as it rolled in upon the high-pebbled beach, was an epitome of the whole body of the sea, and carried with it all the vast mysterious quality of the earth's ancient antagonist.

Such at any rate was the impression that Magnus Muir — tutor in Latin to backward boys — received from the waves on Weymouth Beach as in the early twilight of a dark January afternoon, having dismissed his last pupil for the day and hurriedly crossed the road and the esplanade, he stood on the wet pebbles and surveyed the turbulent expanse of water.

Lean, bony and rugged, with hollow cheeks and high cheekbones, the consciousness that looked out from his grey eyes assumed an expression that would have been very difficult for the cleverest onlooker to analyze or define. It was certainly to no easy, relaxed enjoyment of those darkening waves that Magnus was now yielding himself in his release from his day's labour. His face was wrought up rather than relaxed, strained rather than casual, grim rather than complacent; and if he had been a priest, occupied with the rendering of some complicated fragment of ancient liturgy, he could not have appeared more gravely concentrated.

It was with quite a different expression upon his bony face, whose broad nose, anxiously-twitching mouth and deeply-furrowed forehead carried with them a permanent air of physical discomfort, that this middle-aged man in his old but carefully-mended overcoat turned from his broodings by the sea's edge, placed the cap, which he had taken off, resolutely upon his head, pulling it low down over his eyes and regaining the esplanade by a couple of stone steps, began to walk in a westerly direction, moving with an absent-minded speed that was somewhat disconcerting to the people he met or passed in his rapid march.

His face was relaxed now; and yet it was animated by a mental intention which seemed to be moving, like an out-runner, about a hundred yards in front of his hurrying steps. An expression of disturbed surprise appeared in his relaxed features after he had passed the Jubilee Clock, that familiar landmark that always made him think of his father, so decently and self-respectingly did it mark the place where the esplanade curved a little, opposite the road to the station, for he now beheld beneath him on the beach a belated Punch-and-Judy performance going on in contempt of the cold and the gathering dusk under the foot of the stone wall.

A tall thin child with a red plush bag at the end of a pole was collecting money from the few bystanders, mostly children, who were crowding against the rails. The sound of Punch's high-pitched, strident voice crying out "Toby.. Toby.. Toby.. Toby.. Toby!" brought Magnus to a stop.

He moved to the edge of the esplanade and looked down. There were two sets of children's heads below him now, the upper group clinging to the rails beside him and the lower group standing on the beach. An especially violent Punch kept tapping the front of the little stage with his head, and at each blow upon his painted skull he cried "Toby! Toby! Toby!" The tone in which he uttered these words was like nothing else in the world. It was an indecent, insane, brutal tone and yet, Heaven knows, in some indisputable way not devoid of a curious poignance.

"Curly told me it went on in the winter," he thought. "I told her I was sure it stopped. But now I know I've *often* heard it — all through the winter! She said she'd talked to this little girl who's carrying the bag; and here *is* the child! I never noticed her before."

As if reading his thoughts the younger daughter of the Punch-and-Judy man moved her long stick deliberately towards him; and a moment later, while Magnus was searching his pockets for a three-penny bit, she came right in front of him on the beach below and looked up into his face.

"Make it a Bob, Mister," she said coaxingly, holding her bare head, covered with a thick mop of hair, a little on one side. "Make it a Tanner any way, Mister, if you can't spare a Bob."

An elder sister of the child who had accosted him now appeared on the scene, she, too, holding a bag on the end of a pole — for it was evidently one of those desolate epochs in the lives of show-people when methods of collecting are more in evidence than pockets to collect from — and Magnus was struck by the wistful intensity with which this elder girl, while she perfunctorily imitated the gestures of the younger, kept straining her eyes, first to the eastward of the esplanade and then to the westward, as if looking for someone who did not come.

The esplanade was wet with recent rain and swept by a gusty wind, and the few people who passed seemed more surprised than interested to see the little group of children staring at so unseasonable a performance.

He himself beheld the whole episode in that special light with which we look at something that reaches us through a glamour quite extraneous to the nature of the experience itself; for between these shrill-voiced puppets and his search for pennies, as both the girls held their forlorn poles towards him, hovered the enigmatic presence of Curly Wix herself, not so much her actual figure as an emanation of poignant sweetness upon the air.

He had just thrown threepence into the smaller child's bag and twopence halfpenny into the elder one's, when he was aware of a little group of persons advancing along the esplanade from the harbour-end. The group was composed of that heterogeneous mixture of novelty-seekers and nondescript adherents that one is wont to see gathered around a Salvation Army drum; but the man who led them was of totally different type from any conceivable Salvation Army preacher. He was a tall lean man, the pallor of whose cadaverous face and dark, wild-gleaming eyes were emphasized by his hatless condition, by the loose untidiness of a thin black overcoat, whose tails flapped in the wind, and by a long, almost Tartar-like mustache whose ends drooped below his chin.

“Sylvanus Cobbold!” said Magnus to himself; and he drew closer to the rails with that instinctive gesture with which we nervously withdraw when someone we know is attracting unseemly attention.

But the elder of the two girls dropped her pole in wild haste and began running desperately to the nearest flight of stone steps. He soon heard the man’s voice behind him.

“He’s a born prophet,” he thought as he stole a hurried glance round at the scene. There was the Punch-and-Judy girl, standing close to Sylvanus now, and gazing at him with shameless adoration!

When he realized how little aware this singular prophet was of any living person near him Magnus did not turn away as he had done before. It seemed to him that the girl was staring at the man in the rapturous trance of one who was as completely caught out of herself as he was. The man himself — taking advantage of the little group at the rails to turn his discourse in their direction — now fixed an excited, unseeing, inhuman eye upon Magnus and the children and hurled his wild cries towards the sea.

But for some reason, as often happens in a moment of unusual excitement, Magnus’ own mind began teasing itself over a totally insignificant and trivial question. Why had not Curly told him that there were *two* Punch-and-Judy girls? Which of the two was her friend, the religious one, or the little flirtatious one? In spite of his desire to give himself up recklessly and happily to the thrilling sweetness of Curly's identity, he began to fret himself as to what exactly was her relation with these show-people.

But as the Punch performance moved to its lurid dénouement it came over him that there was something pitifully ghastly about the way Sylvanus was going on pouring out spiritual revelations, of which no one understood a word. Magnus began watching him more closely. The man held his hat in his hand as he spoke, and his grizzled hair was cropped so close that his skull had the tight, compact look of a nut neatly removed from its kernel. It made Magnus think of the sort of head that must have emerged from his fantastic helmet when Don Quixote lay unhorsed. Out of his hollow eye-sockets the man's eyes gleamed portentously in the dusk. He looked like a person who should have worn armour and carried an axe.

It was after the Punch-and-Judy show had ended, and while a pallid and spasmodic individual, with a face like a hungry rat, was calling angrily to his elder daughter to come down and help them, that a policeman showed signs of interfering with the prophet.

Magnus felt torn between a desire to escape and a lively curiosity to know what the upshot would be. What interested him now was the curious name by which the white-cheeked girl was summoned so indignantly by her father.

"Marret! Marret! Marret!" he called up to her from the beach; and he kept retreating backwards, as he called, so as to try to get a glimpse of the girl where she clung to the preacher's side; but the esplanade was too high for this. The voices of the two men easily reached each other from where they stood; but Sylvanus was as one talking to angels and nothing could disturb him.

"Marret! Marret! Marret!" the Punch-man kept repeating and after each cry of "Marret" he would stumble yet further down the beach, turn round, and stretch out his neck, straining his frail body upwards in the hope of seeing her, for he suspected that she was doing exactly as she was, forgetting everything in the world while her whole soul hung upon the mysterious lips of the prophet. While he thus struggled to catch a glimpse of her he found presently that he had reached the sea's edge; and there he had to stop.

Meanwhile the policeman had begun addressing the preacher in very angry cockney.

"If I've told yer once, I've told yer a 'undred times! The beach is the proper plice for these 'ere hexortations. Get out of this! Do you 'ear me? It's all right, lady, I ain't going to 'it 'im, but the beach is the plice. No horficer will interfere with 'im if 'e will go down below... Get out of this!"

"Do you know who I am?" said the prophet.

But the policeman did not budge.

"I knows yer well, Mister. We all knows yer! And what's more, *there be some what knows yer* 'as 'ave about enough of this; this hobstructing of 'is Majesty's Hesplanade!"

The preacher, his wild eyes flashing in fury at the policeman, lifted a little cane he was carrying, an old-fashioned soldier's cane, and was on the point — at least so it seemed to Magnus — of using it upon the astonished officer when the girl Marret whose complexion had changed from white to red, as the altercation went on, and then from red to white suddenly cried out some inarticulate words and collapsed in a heap on the ground.

This occurrence changed the whole situation. The Cockney officer showed himself a completely different person as he knelt by the girl's side; and the wrath of the preacher changed to violent remorse as he accused himself of being the cause of this misadventure.

Magnus was now resolved to escape; but before doing so he had the grace to lean over the rails and call out to the Showman to let him know what had happened. This done, he moved away; for he felt extremely disinclined that this man whose identity he knew well should recognize him. They had met more than once in those desolate rooms at the top of High House, where Jerry Cobbold, Sylvanus' famous brother lived, but the last thing he wanted was to renew their acquaintance at this particular juncture.

He felt a little ashamed of his pusillanimity as he quickened his pace along the dark, wet, chilly asphalt of the deserted parade; but the sight of a big steamer with many of its lights already lit — for the twilight was deepening — just outside the harbour, reminded him of the purpose of his walk to the pier's entrance.

He had had tea yesterday with Sylvanus' sister-in-law, Lucinda Cobbold, and she had told him that a young girl from Guernsey who had, in spite of what everyone had predicted, answered her advertisement for a companion, was due tonight on the steamer from Cherbourg and the Channel Isles.

"Is Jerry going to meet her?" Magnus had enquired, picturing to himself the embarrassment of the young woman when confronted by the world-famous clown.

But the eccentric Mrs. Cobbold, who rarely left her upper-floor in High House, had taken advantage of their long acquaintance at that point to beg the Latin teacher to go himself and meet the girl at the dock and in a sudden mood of altruism he had consented to do this.

He paused in his advance now and surveyed the incoming steamer. He set himself to imagine what the feelings would be — pretty miserable ones he supposed! — of the unfortunate companion, whose name Mrs. Cobbold had told him was Miss Wane, as she drew near her unknown destination.

"She'll never stand it!" he said to himself. "Lucinda works upon people so. She wears them out. Jerry ought never have let it go as far as this! Of course there *are* exceptional women who might — But, oh, no! Jerry ought not to have let his happen."

He pulled up the collar of his overcoat and sat down upon an empty bench facing the sea. He knew that as long as the steamer had not passed the little Weymouth breakwater there would be ample time for him to reach the pier before the gangway was down and the people were landing.

He put the unknown Miss Wane out of his mind and gave himself up to long, delicious thoughts about Curly. Some of the passers-by had their umbrellas up, though it was not actually raining, and it struck him as rather a queer thing that the sight of a few open umbrellas should bring back with such a rush the extraordinary delight with which he had held her on his knee that night in the cottage. Five times he had been out to see her at that Upwey Wishing-Well since he first made friends with her.

"Well!" he thought, "I am forty-six; and I have not had my share of love-affairs yet."

Shivering a little he cast a glance on the steamer. No! she was still in that same place by the breakwater.

"I'd marry her tomorrow if she'd agree," he thought. "I can't exactly say she's in love with me. But even if she never is *exactly that,* I believe I could make her happy."

The bench where he now sat, with his coat-collar up, his hands deep in his pockets and his legs stretched out, faced a particular spot where the road crossed the esplanade and descended by a natural slope to a flat expanse of dry sand, an expanse that was rarely, save in terrific storms, invaded by the sea, and where in the summer season the donkeys and goat-carriages were wont to await their patrons. How well he knew this spot! It was one of those geographical points on the surface of the planet that would surely rush into his mind when he came to die, as a concentrated essence of all that life meant! It was on this bench that he had sat five years ago when his father died.

No! The Cherbourg steamer was still in the same place. He could go on thinking of Curly! He now came to the conclusion, and by no means for the first time, that it was the unusual closeness of his link with this unique parent, for he had lost his mother in infancy and never had brother or sister, that had hitherto kept his occasional love-affairs from developing into anything serious.

"But after all," he thought, "I never felt like this for any of those others. Besides, with all my nerves and manias and so on, I don't believe I could ever get on with a girl of my own class."

And he began with a kind of excited, voluptuous ferocity to exaggerate to himself the characteristics in him that made him prefer a girl of the people.

"It's in tune with my whole nature," he said to himself. "What I want out of life is its poetry; and I'm like my father in that. Aye! how he used to cut down on the artificiality of things! He thought of nothing but mathematics and the weather and walking to Redcliff Bay and coming home through the rain to a candle-lit room and a good tea and a good fire. How he used to laugh at the conventionalities that our class makes such a stir about! I'm sure I don't know what he would have thought of my marrying Curly; but I know he considered that the social fussiness of our middle-class women destroyed all the enjoyment and all the dignity of life."

As he said this to himself the idea of his father rose up before him in a peculiar and special way. He felt ashamed of his shivering as he sat on and on there, waiting for the steamer to move. He felt as if the blowing of the wind and the breaking of the waves, nay! the very darkness itself, as it descended now upon land and sea, contained in it the spirit of his father, massive, primeval, and conceding nothing to human weakness and frivolity.

"Miss Wane! Miss Wane!" he muttered aloud. "I'm getting very cold for your sake, Miss Wane!" His impression of the luckless companion, so ignorant of what she was in for, was that of a middle-aged weary-looking spinster of French extraction.

Amid the gusts of wind that made him press his hands deeper into his pockets and drag his coat, as he hugged himself together, yet more closely across his knees, there now came one that lifted up an especially high wave and broke it into a towering mass of spray.

Any stranger who could have caught the look with which Magnus observed this phenomenon would have been surprised by its grimness, by its austere and almost savage delight. The man's bony figure and irregularly-shaped skull lent themselves to this grimness of expression, but it was quite different from his habitual look. In the normal cast of his countenance there was something formless and chaotic; something not exactly amiable, but certainly not stark or austere. It was as if in order to respond to the tension of the elements he had to gather up a power in his nature that came from his father's character and passed beyond his ordinary habit of feeling.

But the sea subsided a little after the breaking of this particular wave; and Magnus, noting that the ship, which he kept his eye upon, still lingered outside the harbour, let his thoughts fall back once more upon his recent encounter.

"I suppose I ought to have spoken to Sylvanus," he said to himself. "But it would have been awkward if he hadn't known me; and it wasn't the moment to make a mad prophet worry his brain with the names of people. I hope that girl came to herself and is all right now. It was the policeman put me off. Father would have gone right up to him and taken control of the whole affair. Curse it! It's my old cowardice again; my fear of any kind of row. I can't think how I ever had the courage to go so far with Curly. I wonder if that *was* the girl she told me about? I must ask her tomorrow when I go over there. But, oh dear! I wish I *had* stood up to that policeman. I wonder if they'll make Sylvanus stop preaching on the esplanade? What will happen if he defies them and goes on doing it? Will they arrest him? He's the very type to get into serious trouble with them. Curse it! I might just as well have gone up to them and said *something.* It wasn't very nice just sneaking away like that."

The vessel he was keeping his eye upon blew a prolonged whistle at this moment. Magnus could never hear that particular sound without a certain gathering together of his mind to meet a crisis, as if some angel of Judgment were blowing a trumpet.

On this occasion that sudden whistle of the Cherbourg steamer produced a very queer impression on his mind. It was an impression as if the whole of Weymouth had suddenly become an insubstantial vapour suspended in space. All the particular aspects of the place known to him so well, the spire of St. John's Church, the rounded stucco-façade of Number One Brunswick Terrace and of Number One St. Mary's Street, the Jubilee Clock, the Nothe, the statue of George the Third, seemed to emerge gigantically from a mass of vapourous unreality. This hallucination, or whatever it was, lasted a very short time. A second blowing of the vessel's whistle dissipated it completely; but not before it had been borne in upon him that if he really was such a coward he would have to sink back upon some philosophy that included and completely allowed for such grotesque treacheries.

"A coward," he thought, "has a right to his own philosophy as well as everybody else; and I must get into the habit of accepting the fact that I am an undistinguished and unworthy person. It's possible to accept your cowardice and even to yield willingly to it, as long as you don't give up your — your pleasure in — your delight in—"

His thoughts stopped at this point; and he began — as he had often done before — to fumble in his mind for the right word to express a certain mental attitude which had become a matter of conscience with him, and to which he resorted as to an automatic, ritualistic gesture. But what he really felt now was a sensation as if St. John's Spire, the statue of George the Third, the rounded ends of Brunswick Terrace and St. Mary's Street, that great stone house on the Preston Road, called High House, where this unfortunate "Companion" was to go tonight, had become a cloudy ridge upon whose peaks the chilly bench on which he was resting was lifted up, and from which he could not descend, until he had found the exact word for this particular mental trick which he practised but could not define! Damn! He must give it up. He could not find the word!

With an impatient hopeless movement he jerked up his knees; and pulling his hands from his pockets, seized the handle of his stick which had been propped against the bench at his side. This stick had been his father's. It was of some hard, heavy foreign wood, of a dusky colour, and possessed a smooth curved handle upon which Magnus loved to lean his full weight till he felt he was leaning upon the undying strength of the formidable old man.

His hands were bare, and his fingers felt cold and stiff as he clutched this support, planted now firmly between his legs.

Still that steamer remained motionless between the pierhead and the Weymouth breakwater! What was the matter with it? It was surely long past the time when Mrs. Cobbold told him it would dock. It didn't need a tug, did it? These Channel Isle steamers always came in on their own steam. He had seen them come in in that way all his life. Well, he must be stirring. He must find some shelter where he could wait, if the ship stayed put there.

The convulsed face of Sylvanus came into his mind again, with the white-cheeked Marret staring at it like a ghost. That man was heroic. There could be no two opinions about that. But he was stark mad. Only a madman would risk arrest by insisting on preaching on Weymouth Esplanade at the end of January.

"I ought not to have sneaked off. I ought not to have sneaked off. I ought not to have sneaked off."

He let go his father's stick for a second, but only in order to pull his cap low down over his eyes.

"But what I've got to do if I'm to keep any self-respect at all," he thought, rising stiffly from the bench, while his teeth chattered, "is to accept my cowardice, take it all for granted, and think of myself as a nervous insignificant book-worm, who can't do anything but teach Latin and be petted by Miss Le Fleau!"

He sighed deeply as he reached this conclusion; but in a flash he recognized that his grand interior moral gesture, this gathering up of his spirit for which he could find no name, *must* be made applicable to an organism devoid of all courage. Mentally he saw again the Church-spire, the King's statue, the Jubilee Clock, the enormous stone house; and though that feeling of being lifted off the earth by these objects had completely passed, he still seemed to hear these inanimate identities — identities that had gathered to themselves all his memories of all his days — calling out to him to accept himself on the lowest terms and still hold on.

He now became aware that he was violently shivering with cold and he started walking rapidly towards the pier, thrusting as he did so not only his chilly hands into his pockets but also, into one of them, into his right-hand pocket, the handle of his stick; so that the stick itself protruded upwards from his side as he walked, making an acute angle with his body.

When he reached the landing-stage at the head of the pier he found quite a number of persons awaiting the arrival of the boat from the Channel Isles. These persons had already assumed that unique look which is always faintly uncomfortable to any new-comer; the peculiar look of human beings whose protracted waiting has given them a malicious uniformity. Any casual group of people who meet in common subjection to the waywardness of chance come to assume certain characteristics which humanity displays at no other time. At first they are totally unaware of one another, even more indifferent than if they passed on the street. But very quickly they become definitely *inter-conscious* and at first this takes the form of a vague, almost indecent awareness of one another. It is *after* this, when they have begun to get used to wondering critically about one another, that it is so especially awkward to be the last new-comer who joins their malignant vigil.

This was the precise rôle that Magnus was now destined to fill; and he very quickly found the situation so intolerable that, having ascertained from a luggage-porter that the boat's delay at the harbour's entrance had something to do with the tide and would probably be protracted for some while yet, he paid his sixpence and entered the enclosed portion of the pleasure-pier, from the end of which he knew that he would be almost able to shout to anyone on the steamer's deck.

“I mustn’t start shouting at Miss Wane,” he thought. “But, good Lord! she little knows what she’s in for, going up to the top of High House, to be a companion to Lucinda Cobbold!”

He advanced along the harbour-side of the pier, passing the desolate closed doors of the summer Theatre, till he reached the end, where, like the wet deck of a ship, under a solitary light the jetty projected itself over the tossing melancholy waters.

The steamer was further off than he had anticipated, lying now with no motion of her screw, but with a long, wind-blown wisp of black smoke just perceptible in the gathering darkness trailing from one of her funnels, under the lee of the little breakwater.

Magnus found that he was still shivering.

“I need my gloves and my scarf,” he said to himself. “Curse it all! I’ll probably catch a deadly chill now and get pneumonia! What on earth did I want to fuss myself for about Miss Wane? No doubt she’s used to looking after herself. But, good God! anyone who knows Mrs. Cobbold would pity a—”

His thoughts were interrupted by the shock of seeing a man’s head, appearing quite close to him above the edge of the rail. The head was followed by a pair of broad, jersey-covered shoulders, and a tall seafaring individual swung himself lightly over the top, and jumped down on the pier.

“Why, Jobber—” Magnus cried in astonished recognition; but the man merely muttered something unintelligible and leaning over the rail began giving hurried directions to someone below.

Magnus himself peered down at the foam flecked darkness where the waves were breaking with heavy ominous sounds against the wooden piles. Close below the pier, pushed in against these piles, was a small, loudly-ticking motor-boat, obviously built for business rather than pleasure, and looking as if it had endured in its time heavier seas than this. Standing in the boat was a round-faced man in rougher garb than the person on the pier. This man was hanging on with some difficulty to a long boat-hook which he had jammed into one of the posts.

“Can ‘ee hold her, Bum? Steady, Bum!” cried the tall man by Magnus’ side. “Careful now, for the Lord’s sake, be careful, man!”

“She be fast, all right, Jobber. Don’t ‘ee worry.”

“Hold on to her then! I won’t keep ‘ee a minute. ’Tis only to tell Mr. Wool he needn’t say anything, now we’re back ourselves. See you again, Mr. Muir!”

The speaker now went off without further parley, running with long, easy, rapid strides, and disappeared behind the gloomy bulk of the closed Theatre.

“How be, Mr. Muir? I do mind ‘ee well, though thee don’t mind I,” murmured the man who had been left behind, breathing hard as he tugged at the boat-hook.

“A bit unsteady, eh? Rather a ticklish business, eh? I hope Mr. Skald won’t keep you waiting too long. It’s not a nice night for—”

As he said this, leaning over the pier’s edge, Magnus felt his teeth chattering again.

“Damn Miss Wane,” he thought to himself. “I really shall be getting pneumonia if I don’t clear off soon. What a fool I was to come!”

And then the excuse struck him that Miss Wane might think it was an impertinence, his arriving at the dock to meet her, a complete stranger! Oh, but *that,* of course, was absurd! How could *she* tell that he wasn’t a much closer friend of the Cobbolds’ than he was? In fact she might have never heard of the great Jerry. She came probably of quite simple people; and Guernsey was very much out of the world.

“I didn’t catch your name,” he shouted down to the man below.

“Trot, sir!” shouted back the man, while the wind whistled through the planks of the pier, and the waves splashed and gurgled. “And they do call I Bum for short. Missus and me do keep house for Jobber Skald.”

“Wouldn’t it be better if you... threw up to me... a rope... or something?”

“No, no, Mr. Muir, thanking ‘ee kind, all the same. Her’s fixed tidy now. ’Tis only me asthmy that makes me breath so short.”

“When’s that ship going to dock, do you suppose?” Magnus asked him.

Mr. Trot glanced over his shoulder at the lights of the steamer, whose outlines — hull, mast, funnel, bridge — were clearly visible against the grey breakwater.

“ ’Tis the new pilot,” shouted Mr. Trot in reply to this. “He be nervous of the tide. Jobber and me would have had she in an hour ago. There! That be her signal. She’s off now, I reckon.”

When the tall man came back Magnus felt so miserably cold that he resolved to take him into his confidence. Perhaps *he* would meet this girl from Guernsey! He had always felt rather drawn to this eccentric Weymouth character, nicknamed “the Jobber”, who earned his living by running his motor-boat between the neighbouring coast-towns and who as a privileged personality was often to be seen at the Cobbolds’.

Adam Skald listened to him with courteous attention. Having got through his business more quickly than he expected he was in good spirits, his taciturnity relaxed, his air jocular.

Magnus was struck by the majestic proportions of the man’s figure, and of his physiognomy, too, as he stood there listening to him under the pier light. His big hooked nose, massive chin, and corrugated brow had something about them that resembled those accidental features that people in a mountainous country come to detect in the lineaments of some jagged eminence. Magnus himself now struggled with a new access of self-accusation with regard to this second dodging of social responsibility; and his very feeling of self-humiliation enhanced his respect for this free-and-easy personage with such emphatic features.

The Jobber agreed without any hesitation at all to undertake the obligation of seeing the new companion safely to High House.

“What shall I tell her?” the big man enquired. “Shall I simply tell her *I was told to meet her?”*

“Oh, she’ll have full confidence in *you* directly she sees you!” said Magnus warmly. “My doubt is — poor, little, unknown woman! — how she’ll ever manage to endure it with our friend Lucinda.”

The Jobber stared at him.

“No, you’re right there, Mr. Muir. I wouldn’t like to be a young girl from Guernsey with the duty of entertaining Mrs. Jerry.” The teacher noticed that this man spoke of Miss Wane as a young girl. Had he any authority for this, he wondered.

The voice of Bum Trot reached them now, informing them that the steamer was moving.

“Hang on a bit longer, Bum!” cried his master. “We’ll let her get a good start of us before we run in.”

He leaned over the edge of the pier and then turned quickly round.

“I must bid you good-night, Mr. Muir,” he said. “It’s Bum’s asthma and this curst boat—”

He broke off at that point, all his own breath being required for the effort of clambering into the boat.

Magnus looked down at him as he took the boat-hook from Mr. Trot and made him sit down to rest himself.

“Don’t worry! I’ll deal with Perdita,” the Jobber shouted as the boat rocked beneath him! and then he said something that, in the noise of the waves, Magnus couldn’t catch.

Perdita? Yes, that was what Lucinda had called her; Perdita Wane.

“What’s that? I couldn’t hear you.”

The Jobber repeated his remark; but again Magnus couldn’t catch it. It was apparently something satirical or sardonic; and it seemed to have to do with someone they both knew. Was it an expression of humorous condemnation applied to Mrs. Cobbold? The big man holding the boat-hook gave him quite an angry look when actually, for the third time, he couldn’t catch his words.

Mr. Trot intervened.

“Jobber be saying,” he shouted, “that he’d like to have Mr. Cattistock along wi’ he, in this here lively sea; and maybe he’d gie’ ‘en a clip with this here spike, along side of’s ear-hole!”

Magnus heard this interpretation with perfect clearness. Nor had he any difficulty in catching its grim significance. All the town knew of the bitter feud between Adam Skald, and Mr. Dogberry Cattistock, known as “Dog Cattistock”, a feud which had gone to such lengths, that they said in the Weymouth public-houses that Mr. Cattistock went in fear of his life, as “the Jobber have sworn he’ll do for he.”

So the shivering teacher opened his mouth in the teeth of the wind and wagged his head, and made a gesture with his hand, in the manner in which aged men on the stage indicate by vigorous signs that they are fully en rapport with what is going on among younger folk.

But afterwards, as he made his way home to Kimmeridge House, Brunswick Terrace, walking as rapidly as he could to get back his frozen circulation, he could not help associating this rough joke about Cattistock with his own unworthy running away from two arduous situations that night. He had left the Punch-and-Judy girl to the care of that policeman and he was now leaving the Guernsey girl to the care of the Jobber.

No! he was no honourable and dependable man of the world. He was a hypochondriacal tutor of backward little boys! It came over him, as he struggled against the buffets of the wind, longing for the warmth of his room and the reassurance of his book-shelves, that he would have been a much nobler figure of manhood, and one much more likely for Curly to fall in love with, if he could have had the sort of a quarrel with Dog Cattistock that the Jobber had.

"There's something contemptible," he thought with exaggerated solemnity as he passed the Jubilee Clock whose hands pointed at five minutes to six, "about the love-affairs of a timid person. In the very marrow of human bones lies the instinct that, if we are to be lucky in love, and to hold our own in love, we must have physical courage."

He set himself now to think of his father as he walked along, glancing sometimes at the foam in the dark sea and sometimes at St. John's spire. The same fear of his father, he thought, that made his love-affairs come to nothing while the old man lived, was still latent in his mind. *He* hadn't been a coward, though he had been a nervous and not at all an adventurous man. But his nature was so massive, his temperament so four-square, that danger itself seemed to growl like a dog and draw back when he advanced.

It was in this shame-faced mood that Magnus permitted his thoughts about his father to seize him by his shoulders as if he had been a prisoner of war, and march him past the Burdon Hotel towards Brunswick Terrace. It was at Penn House, at the end of Brunswick Terrace, the last house but one of the row, that he had lived with his father all those years.

The elder Muir had been a mathematical master of Weymouth College, and had always hoped that his son would ultimately get a job in the same institution. But Magnus had no gift for dealing with high-spirited boys, and he followed the line of least resistance by taking backward pupils in his father's house; not however in mathematics. He selected Latin for this undertaking, although his personal predilection was all for Greek. But it was characteristic of him to take a furtive pride in not allowing the drudgery of teaching to spoil his private pleasure in the subtler and more primitive language, that language which had come to form a sort of invisible barrier for him between his interior world and the world of outer reality.

The elder Muir had been, it is true, not much more adapted to the rough and tumble of life than his sedentary son; but he was one of those men, born — for all their proud and shy withdrawings — with the power of authority, and though never a popular master in the school, he had always been respected by both his colleagues and his students; and thus had grown old in his profession without losing heart.

But Penn House had passed at the schoolmaster's death into the hands of strangers; and Magnus, retaining nothing but his books, had moved into Kimmeridge House, where for years he had been the one and only privileged boarder in the care of an elderly maiden lady and her still older servant.

Miss Le Fleau was an old friend of the elder Muir and she treated Magnus more like a relation than a lodger, though he always insisted on having his meals brought up to his room on the second floor, and contented himself with brief periodic visits to the Le Fleau drawing-room. It was to this room that he now made his way, as soon as he entered the house; and he found the spinster sitting upright and peaceful at her book under her green lamp, waiting, in her neat black dress trimmed with purple, the moment when Martha would call her to her evening meal.

"Would it be giving her too much trouble, Miss Le Fleau," he began, "if I asked Martha for a hot glass of whiskey when she brings up my supper? I feel rather chilly tonight."

"Oh, I hope you've not gone and caught one of your bad colds. I'm so *glad* you asked me! I'll go down and see to it at once. About an equal portion of the spirit will you have, of the whiskey I mean, with the water?"

"Thank you so much, Miss Le Fleau, but let me go down and ask for it! There's no need for you to bother."

"Oh, *that's* nothing! I hope you'll *always* ask me when you need anything. That's what we idle women are *for*. Wait here, please, will you? And I'll bring it up to you myself. It'll do you no good unless you drink it on an empty stomach. And if I bring it myself I shall be sure that it's hot and I shall see that you don't forget it till it's cold, like you did that night when you got so wet, after walking to Upwey."

The long wrinkled face of the old lady contracted into such a sweet and tender smile as she went out that it seemed to Magnus to express a much deeper pity for him than the accident of feeling chilly quite warranted. He felt a faint tremor of alarm, as he bent down to warm his hands over the blazing fire. Had some friend of hers seen him at the Wishing Well with Curly?

"She *can't* have heard anything. No, no! it's impossible. And if anyone she knows *had* seen me standing at the mother's door, they'd have only thought I wanted a cup of tea or a glass of ginger-beer."

He raised himself up and stood with his back to the fire surveying Miss Le Fleau's drawing-room.

"It *is* a brown room, this room," he thought. And he remembered how he had told its owner on one occasion that it was like "a brown study", and with what a wry face she had received that remark. But the effect of it *was,* in some odd way, brown; though except for the round mahogany table, and that was polished till it looked like deep water, there was not an actual brown thing in it. The wall-paper was a pale "Dutch pink", bordering on yellow. The cushions and carpet were a dull, rather muddy plum-colour. The pictures were all old, coloured prints, most of them of that smooth, mellow, *greasy* effect that is so peculiarly soothing — as if a misty, oily film, stolen from many natural twilights, had been spread over sketches in crayon; while the books in the three solid rosewood book-cases were almost all green and gold, their bindings carrying all those quaint curlecues and flourishes so popular in the middle of the nineteenth century.

How well Magnus remembered when as a boy his father brought him to call on Miss Le Fleau, how he had been wont to stare in long, quiet reveries at these bindings, absorbed in those queer interior fancies with which children transform almost any pattern into "worlds not realized" when there is no outlet for their restlessness, but from which they hurriedly turn away when such an outlet is found. Drawn back into his father's domination as he always was in this room, where several of the most characteristic pieces of furniture had been bought by Miss Le Fleau at the Penn House sale, Magnus became conscious that the whole Curly episode, when he lay back like this in pious quiescence upon his secure past, had something about it, like a glimpse of a surgeon's bag of instruments, or the sight of an accident on the street, or a sudden encounter with a hand-cuffed prisoner, that belonged to a region of existence where all manner of agitations took place that were completely outside, and even very shattering to, his enjoyment of Miss Le Fleau's drawing-room.

Was it a fatal mistake he was making, he a man of forty-six, with all the traditions of the professional class in his blood and bones, to contemplate marriage with a girl like Curly, not even a peasant-girl, as he saw only too clearly, but — for all her employment at the Upwey Wishing Well — a true Weymouth shop-girl? It was Miss Le Fleau's fire at his back; it was Miss Le Fleau's rosewood book-cases in front of him; it was this insidious Lethean brownness exhaled from the whole atmosphere of the room, that pushed Curly away; and as the circulation returned to his veins and he comfortably awaited his drink with an anticipatory glow of well-being, he found it impossible to help regarding the whole Curly incident as something frightening, disturbing, and out of control.

Miss Le Fleau brought his drink, as she had promised, boiling-hot and with a slice of lemon floating on it; and while he sipped it and stirred it with a tinkling spoon she herself sat down in a little purple arm-chair and picked up her knitting from beside her book under the green lamp.

"Do you know, Miss Le Fleau," he said, "I think there are two men in Weymouth who are heading for tragic disaster if something or someone doesn't intervene?"

The tall narrow forehead, wrinkled and yet so soft and white, and the proud aquiline nose above the pinched lips — her blue eyes needed no spectacles — remained bent low over her knitting.

Magnus knew well what this silence signified. It signified profound disapproval of the whole topic. Had he told Miss Le Fleau about seagulls or cormorants or a shoal of mackerel she would have greeted his remark with a lifted head and animated sympathy. But there were rumours about Sylvanus, about his immoral life that always made Miss Le Fleau uneasy. She knew it was of Sylvanus he was thinking and from her shining knitting needles to her smoothly-parted white hair she was clearly resolved to have no part or lot in such a discussion.

But the glow produced in his veins by the fire and the whiskey, and the spiritual relaxation produced by the brown room drove Magnus on.

"I saw Sylvanus just now on the esplanade having one of his rows with the police. That man's heading for serious trouble. I could see that the policeman — it was that cockney who stands in summer near the motor-busses and who's generally pretty polite — was at the end of his patience with him. He told him he could do what he liked on the beach. But of course the beach is empty in winter; though, it's true, there was today a Punch-and-Judy — but as a rule it's empty. Wouldn't you say so, Miss Le Fleau?"

Miss Le Fleau's head sank lower and lower over her knitting. There was a certain tone of unnatural emphasis about her guest's voice that made her suspect that her carefully prepared drink had not only warmed his veins but disturbed his discretion.

But Magnus went on talking louder and louder and more and more emphatically.

"The other disaster I see in the wind will be over this Cattistock business. I sympathize entirely with Skald. Don't you, Miss Le Fleau? My father always used to say that Cattistock would come to a bad end by his absolute unscrupulousness. Father couldn't endure him. But I wouldn't care to be in Skald's shoes all the same. I never meet him but he's cursing Cattistock and I can't see Cattistock putting up with it indefinitely. Did you know that at one of those public meetings at the Town Hall Skald went at him so furiously that he had to leave the platform. Something that he's done — and he's always doing dirty tricks — has driven the Jobber, as they call him, to desperation. And I can't see how it's going to end without some serious reckoning. Can *you,* Miss Le Fleau?"

He finished the whiskey as he spoke and advancing to the table, where the lamp stood, laid down his glass and began running one of his fingers round and round its rim. As he did this it was suddenly borne in upon him, like the rolling up of a great theatre-curtain, that a person like his father who had lived to eighty without really encountering the underlying chaos and violence and shame that exist in life was incredibly lucky.

He felt, as he thought of Sylvanus and the Jobber, as though anyone who could go on indefinitely from year to year in this "brown" room was separated from the real chaos of life by some muffled and muted screen. Very slowly, as he paused by that lamp-lit table, Miss Le Fleau stuck her needles into her ball of wool, and raised her eyes from her lap till they rested on his face.

He could not help feeling a vague uneasiness. Had she divined that something was on his mind beyond what he had been telling her of Sylvanus and the Jobber? What would she think if she knew how far he had gone in his mania for Curly? Her eyes met his now: and a long, troubled, inexplicable look was exchanged between them. As he looked away there came a pattering of rain on the window that made him turn round quickly and brought to his mind a renewed sense of the agitating dangers — emotional wrecks as well as physical wrecks — that occurred outside the snug bow-windows of Brunswick Terrace.

"I feel sorry for this woman who's coming from the Channel Islands tonight," he said, making a movement as if to seat himself in a chair near the one occupied by Miss Le Fleau. But the lady herself got up with reproachful abruptness.

"I think we've had enough talk of our neighbours for one night," she said. And then, seeing that he really looked surprised and hurt— "You can call at High House tomorrow, Magnus," she added, "and satisfy your—" she gave him quite a merry young girl's smile as she spoke, "your curiosity. None of us have been as kind as we might to Lucinda," she went on, grown grave again. "Perhaps this person will be very happy with her. Anyway we needn't expect the worst till we know."

Late that night, long after old Martha had removed his supper-tray, Magnus stood staring out of his open window into the darkness. His wide-margined Iliad— "Edidit Guilielmus Dindorf, editio quinta correctior quam curavit, Lipsiae—" was now buried under a heap of youthful exercises in Latin; and the teacher's three candles, for he detested lamps, and never lit the gas, were burning low down in their sockets.

He wondered whether Sylvanus had forgotten the policeman; whether that Punch-and-Judy girl had forgotten Sylvanus; whether the Jobber had forgotten Dog Cattistock: he wondered whether, in those gloomy rooms at the top of High House, Mrs. Cobbold's companion had forgotten the shock of meeting Mrs. Cobbold — all of these people deep-drowned in the ineffable release of sleep!

But for some reason, try as he might, he couldn't visualize Curly's small head, in its cloud of dusky hair, motionless on its pillow. She remained to him in his mind as he had first held her that reckless evening a couple of weeks ago in her mother's parlour; yielding and mischievous, tender and teasing, inscrutable to him as the cat that kept rubbing on that occasion against his legs. His father had once announced to him, in the grave tones of a Pontifex Maximus: "We can see their smiles, my boy" — he was speaking of women— "and we can see their tears, but we cannot see their hearts", and it was with this troubling doubt in his head that he closed the window at the bottom, opened it at the top, and pulled the red curtains a little way across that familiar oblong space of darkness and wet.

He then slowly undressed himself in front of the few crimson coals that remained of his fire, while his candles spluttered themselves into extinction. And as he undressed himself the familiar smell of dead seaweed kept entering his room; and a strange phantasmal Weymouth, a mystical town made of a solemn sadness, gathered itself about him, a town built out of the smell of dead seaweed, a town whose very walls and roofs were composed of flying spindrift and tossing rain. Lying in bed in the faint glimmer from the grate he could hear the waves on the beach, and a great flood of sadness swept over him. Human hearts seemed all so pitifully frustrated! The prophetic frenzy of Sylvanus; the passionate intensity of the white-cheeked Marret; the feelings of the Jobber, tossed forth so automatically, as his boat rocked under those dark pier-posts; that woman whose face he had never seen, crying herself to sleep at the top of the desolate stone house; they all belonged to something fatal in the world that turns to sorrow and grief as inevitably as the compass-needle turns to the north!

For a while he floated helplessly on the tide of this feeling, watching his big red curtains slowly inflate themselves and bulge forward, only to be sucked back, with the retreat of the wind, into hollow answering concavities. Then something in him gathered itself together, as it always did, to resist this hopelessness. And as he felt so preternaturally self-conscious tonight he began once more trying to analyze the precise nature of this power in him upon which at a pinch he seemed always able to call.

But he could no more catch its real nature or even decide whether it was a good or an evil motion of the mind than he had been able to do when he was sitting on that bench in the wind. Whatever it was it was clearly something that he had inherited from his father. It had something to do with seizing upon some dominant or poetical aspect of the physical present, such as this sea-wind now blowing into his room, such as these dying coals, such as that bulge of the red curtains, and drawing from it a fresh, a simple, a childish enchantment — the mystery of life reduced to the most primitive terms — that was able to push back as it were by several mysterious degrees all the emotional and mental troubles of life.

“With father,” he thought as he turned his face to the wall, “it was just pure, massive, heathen childishness; and I am the same; only I have to be always fighting off other things.”

Then while he settled down under the bed-clothes, there came before his eyes once more the spire, the clock, the statue of the king, the outline of the Nothe, as he had felt them when he sat in the cold opposite the deserted donkey-stand. And the impression gathered upon him that these simple things had a significance beyond all explanation; that they were in truth the outward “accidents” of some interior “substance”, that belonged — by a strange law of transubstantiation — to some life of his that was independent of the humiliations of his ordinary experience; independent, for instance, of whether when he went to see Curly tomorrow she made him feel silly and old.

His last waking thought turned these things into a sort of magical abracadabra, devoid of all intelligible meaning, but offering, like some invocation in an unknown tongue, an escape from all his anxieties and shames! They were indeed, these things, in a very definite sense a lasting link with his dead parent; not a link with that parent’s opinions or prejudices, but a link with the underlying continuity of his life — a life that had, after all, been so pathetically inarticulate.

He felt that as long as he could feel the presence of these things *in a certain way* — as a child goes to sleep clutching tightly some fragment of wood or cardboard or twisted tin — it would matter less whether he had or had not the courage to lift the Punch-and-Judy girl from the ground or to meet at the dock the companion of Mrs. Cobbold!

PERDITA WANE

PERDITA WANE, WHEN HER STEAMER FROM THE CHANNEL ISLES DID at last move slowly into the harbour, was as relieved by the end of the delay as Magnus himself would have been had he had the endurance to prolong his chilly vigil.

The girl stood by the ship's rail watching the gradual approach of the blurred shapes of houses, wharves and darkened office-buildings, as the vessel steamed to her moorings beside the entrance to the pier. Staring sadly at the water, which rose and fell amid the flickering lights, she noted with a cold, unhappy meticulousness how each separate wave that touched the ship's side differed from all the others.

A vague hypnosis proceeding from these dark-flowing waters did soothe her a little; for there is almost always, for the troubled human mind, a degree of comfort in the presence of the inanimate, even when it is attended by the sort of shivering forlornness that the look of a dark tide at night-fall necessarily brings. Pure chance dictated the particular forms that the white wisps of floating foam assumed; but there did arise for the girl's desolate heart certain faint motions of distraction as she watched from the deck this random hand-writing of the elements.

What seemed to interest her fellow-passengers the most, in spite of the fact that in that January season they were travelling for necessity rather than pleasure, was the long unobstructed curve of the esplanade's lights; but the girl only lifted her eyes from the moving tide with its red and green reflections to fix them upon an obscure mass of swaying masts and dark bulkheads and bowsprits, beyond which, further up the harbour, she could detect the dim shape of a massive stone bridge stretched across the water from quay to quay.

Mingling confusedly with all this shipping, as her mood thus showed its preference for the old and darkened over the new and illuminated, were the narrowest and most ancient of the Melcombe Regis streets; and just as the hulls and masts and rigging of all these little crafts were confused in the darkness, so the walls and roofs and gables and lofts of the dock-warehouses behind them flowed into each other and were lost in each other, till they became a conglomerate mass of antique masonry and woodwork broken by hollow spaces of velvety blackness and by flickering spots of light both of which seemed as arbitrary in their alternations as were the reflections in the troubled water.

The narrow little harbour, thus carrying the chilling airs and salt smells of the open sea into the heart of so much human intimacy, accentuated, for the girl who watched it all, the difference between the warm safety of the Guernsey home from which she came and the unknown encounters that lay before her. With her gloved hands upon the ship's rail she gazed at these things with melancholy intentness, trying, as we all do at such a pinch, to palliate the grimness of the future by concentrating on the immediate scene.

Perdita was neither a plain girl, nor a pretty girl. She was one of those young people whose physical appearance seems to admit of startlingly different verdicts, according to the degree of interest in their personality felt by the onlooker. Her face now, for anyone who saw it under the vessel's lights, was pitiably sad. Her forehead was contracted into a pucker between her arched eyebrows, which very soon — had she to endure many such experiences as this plunge into the great world — would become a permanent frown. The corners of her mouth, one of those mouths that find it so difficult to remain patiently closed, but must always be expressing some sort of intense feeling by their tremblings, were now drawn down in a woebegone droop. Her chin was undoubtedly the weakest feature in her face; and in the light of that ship's lantern she allowed it to assume a helplessness and a hopelessness that would have disappeared in a moment had anyone addressed her. Then would have become more emphatic, as she raised her head, a certain proud curve in her nose, not to speak of a thoughtful dignity in her clear-cut brow, above which, beneath the rim of her hat, her brown waves, "that this is a winter sea and not a summer sea?"

Again and again as she followed abstractedly with her eyes the melancholy progress of some particular fragment of sea-foam, as it rose and fell on the rocking waves and entered the reflection of a red light or a green light, or got caught by some floating bit of wood or seaweed from which it extricated itself with difficulty, she found herself associating this wisp of whiteness in the dark water with her own fate! She felt pleased when it reached some particularly bright red reflection or green reflection and she could not bear it and had to turn her face away, when it showed signs of being sucked down under some cruel keel.

The keel that did finally suck down the latest of these simulacra of Perdita's life belonged to a motor-boat manned by two men and bearing the name "Cormorant"; but she had no means of knowing that the keen glances with which the taller of these two men swept the vessel's side were directed in search of herself. The little motor-boat, flying a local flag that the custom-officers recognized, ran along the portside of the incoming steamer, crossed her bows, and steering in under the slippery wall of the stone wharf came to rest between two flights of half-submerged stone-steps.

When her own vessel moved alongside the landing-stage, the girl, who was evidently in no haste to set foot on shore, hurried over to the other side of the ship.

"Would anyone know," she pondered idly, as she watched new circles and oblongs and pentagons of sea-scum carried up and down on the waves, "that this is a winter sea and not a summer sea?"

Her gaze wandered in the same weary, procrastinating manner to a picturesque row of old-fashioned houses on the western side of the little harbour. Some of these time-mellowed habitations had lights in their rooms; and the rays from their windows fell upon stone steps leading down into the rushing tide, and upon quite a fleet of small rowing-boats that rocked up and down in the darkness. Above the roofs of these houses rose the grassy promontory known locally as the Nothe; but there was no one to explain to the new-comer that just as everything on this Nothe side of the harbour lay in the ancient borough of Weymouth, so everything in the lively resort now behind her back, belonged, in strict historic continuity, to the ancient sister borough of Melcombe Regis.

Drawing away her eyes with a sigh from the warm lamp-lit squares of human comfort presented by these small houses, every one of which she felt to be a world of homely drama from which in her loneliness she was excluded, the girl stared down again upon the blurs and blotches of floating spray which showed like streaked marble now in their wayward outlines as the waves beneath them grew darker and darker. How *would* anyone know that these waves were winter waves? Was there something in their colour, in their smell, in the look of their foam, that marked the season? Did the crew of the "Great Western" — those men she had avoided much less than she had avoided her fellow-passengers — feel a keener pleasure in reaching home, on these cold January nights, than they did on a sultry August eve?

It was one of these same sailors who now broke into her musings with the information that the gangway was down and she could land whenever she pleased. The steamer had slipped so swiftly into her accustomed harbourage that if it had not been for the cessation of the engines' vibrations, and the fact that the houses on the shore were now stationary instead of being in slow movement, the young passenger would scarcely have believed the man's words; but she followed him across the deck with reluctant steps to a particular spot on the starboard side where she had deposited her bag, a large paper parcel and her umbrella.

Here she found there was still another opportunity for delay, as there was a good-sized crowd waiting to disembark; and so to the accompaniment of the harsh grinding and rattling of the pulleys that swung the luggage to land she tried to forget where she was by pretending that the sea-washed stones of the jetty against which the ship was rocking belonged to a French pier instead of an English one.

"Would that have been better or worse?" she thought.

Slowly she picked up her bag and her paper parcel from the deck and moved towards the gangway.

"She said in her letter she could not meet me, but I was to take a taxi to High House, Greenhill, Preston Road. But I'd much sooner get a man to carry my bag, and walk, if it's not too far.'"

Perdita looked a very fragile and lonely figure now in her black neat clothes, as she stood clinging to her poor belongings on that red-funnelled steamer's deck, waiting her turn to hand over her ticket. She was the last to cross the plank; and as she gave up her ticket she enquired of the man who received it how long it would take her to walk to High House, Greenhill.

At mention of the name "High House" the official glanced quickly at his companion; and across both men's countenances there flitted that particular look which people assume when a complete stranger refers to some familiar spot, full of lively local associations.

“Pardon the question, Miss,” he said, “but which floor in High House are you bound for? There are four or five of them storeys in that big house and different parties have different sets on ’em.”

The stranger murmured the syllables “Cobbold”.

“Cobbold of the Regent is it?” said the officer. “She’s... going — to — Cobbold’s” he repeated with interested emphasis looking at his companion. “ ’Tis nigh the end of the esplanade if you knows what I mean,” he went on, again addressing the young woman. “Mr. and Mrs. Cobbold have the top with all the attics. ’Tis a fine view from the top... clear acrost the bay.”

The other official broke in confidentially at this point.

“He’ve ‘a lived there ‘isself, you know, Miss; so if any can speak, *he* can speak. I’ve a only seed Jerry on the stage myself; but *he* have seed ’im in ’is ‘ouse. Be you a relative of Jerry’s, Miss, if I might be so bold?”

And to the girl’s consternation the first speaker — while he still idly flapped her steamer ticket between his finger and thumb preparatory to placing it with the rest — began making signs to the two men who had just left the “Cormorant” and who were now standing at the end of the gangway looking at her as if they were waiting for her. Impatient at all this publicity the girl seized her bag in one hand, her umbrella and paper parcel in the other, and hurried across the plank without looking round.

“Good evening, Miss Wane!” said the taller of the two men. “I’ve been sent to see you safe up to Mrs. Cobbold’s! This is my friend, Mr. Trot. Give me your things. Would you like to walk?”

It was unusual for Perdita to look so fixedly at anyone with her nervous hare-like eyes as she looked now, under that electric light, into the face of the skipper of the “Cormorant”.

“Can I rely upon you?” her look questioned. *“Can* I trust you?”

She must have been reassured at once; for her critical soul slipped back almost instantaneously into its proud sheath. Letting the Jobber take her bag, her parcel, and even her umbrella, she walked forward with a free step between the two strangers.

"I know Jerry Cobbold very well," said the tall man presently, as they passed the Jubilee Clock. This serviceable monument, so familiar and so full of memories for Magnus Muir, received a most cursory glance from Mrs. Cobbold's companion. Pivot for sightseers, Rendezvous for lovers, Resting-place for beggars, imperishable Association, like that of the lectern in their childhood's churches, to all dwellers in Weymouth who remember Victoria, the clock was just a clock to the girl from Guernsey. Even the ornamental adornments of this grandiose erection, adornments so entirely expressive of the era when it was put up, that like the blessing of a well-constituted, elderly relative they soothe with pompous benevolence the fretted modern mind, did not, though clearly visible, seduce this girl to a second look.

"Yes, I know Cobbold as well, I daresay, as anyone in town. He's not humorous in ordinary life. And yet he's very original. You feel it, you know; though it's hard to say *how* you feel it."

"What's Mrs. Cobbold like?" enquired Perdita. And then she could have bitten her tongue for asking such a question.

"Mrs. Cobbold, do you say? God! but *that's* a stumper! How would *you* describe Mrs. Cobbold to the young lady, Mate?"

But the short man, and to Perdita he looked much shorter than he really was, owing to the Herculean proportions of his companion, was not slow with his reply.

"Her be a snug two-masted's figure-head, lady, that's what her be, what none knows whether it be carved and painted new, or whether it be old as

Shamble’s Light-ship! None knows and none’ll ever know! Mrs. Cobbold, lady, be what yer might call a drinking man’s ‘ooman. Her do walk in, dumb and ‘andsome; and her do walk out dumb and ‘andsome. ‘Eee knows ‘ees cuddled she and ‘ee knows her’s cuddled ‘ee; but what *she* do know passes all comprehension.”

The Jobber chuckled shamelessly. “You see what you’re in for!” he said turning to the girl; and Perdita, wondering to herself why she did not feel annoyed at the familiarity of these two men, laughed aloud.

“I’m to be her companion,” she remarked, feeling under the Jobber’s scrutiny a mysterious release from her accustomed reticence, “so I shall soon find out.”

The lights of the esplanade, as they moved on, kept giving her new opportunities for taking in her companions’ faces under their sea-faring caps. Bum Trot had a most whimsically round face, ruddy and wrinkled, out of which a pair of grey eyes glittered from beneath shrewd eyelids. It was the enormous emphasis of the Jobber’s lineaments that struck her most. The man’s face seemed larger than human in those glimpses of Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro. What colour his eyes were she could not distinguish, for whenever their glances met his pupils became so dilated that it was as if two spots of animated blackness had been turned upon her.

After those words of hers, “I shall soon find out” had hung about all three of them for several seconds the tall man touched her elbow with the edge of the paper parcel he was carrying.

“Lonely, eh, young lady?” he said. “But it’s only for a time. A time and a time and half a time.” He raised his voice to a mocking chant as he uttered these words and the other man gave vent to a guttural whistling, as a kind of accompaniment. “We three must meet again, young lady,” he went on.

“That’s the ticket, that’s the time of day, ain’t it, Mate, and mum about the rest!”

The equivocal jocularity of this speech puzzled Perdita a good deal; and she was still more surprised when a moment later he stooped down, and tucking both parcel and umbrella under the arm that held the bag, picked up something from the stone edge of the esplanade. The girl glanced to see what he had found; and he promptly held out to her a fragment of slippery seaweed, whose roots clung tenaciously with their whitish tendrils to a small round pebble. She took the seaweed into her hand while the man still retained the stone.

“What—” she began. But he jerked it out of her fingers without a word and making a circular sweep with his long arm he flung this pair of inseparable sea-dwellers over the dim bank of shingle into the gloom beyond. They all three stopped and began listening to the noise of the sea. It was impossible to tell in the obscurity whether this composite waif, half-animate and half-inanimate, reached the water. All that they could hear was a long wave breaking, down there in the darkness, whose sound, harsh and distinct where they stood, grew fainter as it died away in both directions.

“Oh why—” stammered the girl.

But “Come on, come on!” was all he said.

She was soon to receive a yet more serious shock from this man’s eccentric behaviour, for when they were passing the wide portion of the roadway near the Burdon Hotel, where the rounded façade of the corner-house of Brunswick Terrace gives to vehicles travelling eastward their first chance of a choice between turning to the left or turning to the right, the Jobber stopped and abruptly remarked:

“I’m anxious to get back to my room early tonight; so if you don’t mind, Miss Wane, I’ll bid you good-bye here, and let Mr. Trot carry your things up to Jerry's. Mr. Trot's feelings will be hurt of course, if you offer him any money. Good-night to you! We're bound to meet soon. Everyone meets here. It's a sort of Limbo. Take care of her, Mate!"

Overpowered by the authority of his personality as he handed over her things to the obedient Mr. Trot, Perdita felt too confused to respond to his departure by anything but a stiff inclination of her head.

There are moments in almost everyone's life when events occur in a special and curious manner that seems to separate that fragment of time from all other fragments.

One peculiarity of such moments is the vividness with which some particular human gesture limns itself on the sensitive-plate of our inmost consciousness, along with certain inanimate objects. It is not with *every* object in the vicinity that it thus surrounds itself, but with a selection of such objects, which, in place of being congruous with the gesture they are accompanying, are often extremely incongruous. Another peculiarity of these moments is a sensation as if there were a spiritual screen, made of a material far more impenetrable than adamant, between our existing world of forms and impressions and *some other world,* and as if this screen had suddenly grown extremely thin, thin as a dark, semi-transparent glass, through which certain faintly adumbrated motions, of a pregnantly symbolic character, are dimly visible.

Such a gesture — to the inner consciousness of this proud girl — was the upraised arm of the man called the Jobber as he flung that seaweed and pebble over the shelving bank into the darkened water; and it was her complete absorption in this occurrence that held her feet for a moment, after he had gone, as if rooted to the spot, though she did not turn her head to watch him go as Bum Trot turned *his,* but kept it hanging down, as if in the humility of a sudden perception of a movement of destiny.

They had not moved on many paces when Mr. Trot enquired, with a screwing up of his eyes that distorted his whole physiognomy, whether she would prefer to follow Preston Road, "back of Brunswick", or go on by the sea and "turn up Greenhill". This enquiry broke the trance into which the departure of the Jobber had thrown her. Perdita gazed round with bewildered hesitation.

"I like the look of Brunswick Terrace," she murmured, "so let's go *that* way."

Obedient to her whim, the worthy Mr. Trot, whose Christian name had been reduced to the single syllable "Bum", led her across the road; and they walked rapidly along the narrow pavement in front of the bow-windows of a row of comfortable little lodging-houses. Some of these had lights in the windows and some not; but they all stood back behind neat little area-gardens whose tiny patches of earth were carefully dug up, and in many cases heaped with manure.

They had gone about half-way along the terrace when they passed a house whose bow-window was brilliantly lit up, revealing the head of a young man writing busily at a circular table. Perdita had just had time to read "Trigonia House", inscribed beside the door-bell of this snug retreat, when Bum Trot amiably prodded her arm with the handle of the umbrella he was carrying.

"That be young Sippy Ballard," he explained proudly when they had passed on. His tone was like the tone of a Londoner pointing to the Mansion House.

"That fair boy at the table?" the girl murmured, glancing back over her shoulder. "He looked very busy."

"He be the new Town Clerk," Mr. Trot eagerly explained. "Dog Cattistock put him in. He's his nephy or summat. Some do say he's his wone flesh and blood; but I don’t gie’ a horse-drop for such babblement.”

Perdita was not interested enough in the young man at the window even to enquire who this “Dog Cattistock” might be whose nepotism was so notable.

There was nothing to arrest their attention about Kimmeridge House, where at that moment Magnus was drinking whiskey in Miss Le Fleau’s drawing-room; and they soon passed Penn House with the same indifference. They were now following a path along a rough stone wall built at the foot of some quite considerable gardens lying along the slope of a steepish incline, from the summit of which rose several stately, solidly-built mansions. Perdita stood up on tiptoe and tried to look over this wall, but it was too high. They came presently, however, upon an iron gate in the austere fortification, and the girl stopped and peered through, clinging to the bars.

“Them be the lights of High House, Miss,” said Bum Trot at her shoulder. “They yeller windies, up at top, be where Jerry lives.”

The girl shivered. All her former dismay, temporarily dispersed by her encounter with the Jobber now came rushing back as her forehead pressed against those cold bars.

Her companion was not oblivious to her change of mood.

“ ’Tis lonesome-like, Missy, when us comes to places unbeknown,” he muttered kindly as they walked on together, “but as the Jobber always do say: ‘Time and a Time and half a Time, and all will be well!’”

The girl controlled herself by an effort, rubbing her cheeks with the back of one of her gloved hands.

The long-drawn descent of an extra big wave receded huskily into the darkness of the sea, scraping the steep pebble-shoal, as if it had been a hoarse musical instrument.

A couple of young sailors from a battle-ship in Portland Harbour drifted by at this point, their arms affectionately thrown round each others' necks and their steps lingering and reluctant.

There was something about these boys as they lurched by, with barely a glance at Perdita that made the girl's sadness feel almost unbearable. Her secret heart, troubled and disconsolate on her own account, melted within her to think of these two young neophytes of life carrying off their feeling for each other and all the dark pressure of their unknown future with this callous air.

"Boys are braver than girls," she thought to herself. And then she thought: "But what nonsense! They're only less aware of things." But as the two sailors pursued their way along Brunswick Terrace, the indescribable pathos of all human life struck her as something almost intolerable.

"Here's the lane, Miss! We'll soon be round at front-door."

The man breathed so heavily as they ascended the little asphalt path that Perdita begged him to let her help him with the bag.

"Nonsense, Lady," he gasped. "'Tis a touch of me asthmy; that be all. What I were born with, I reckon. 'Tis wondrous how a little bit of up-grade do bring it on. I can pull an oar, Miss, in the choppiest sea, for best half-a-day; but a bit of climbin' makes I pant like a wold hoss."

Arrived at the top of Greenhill Lane they turned to the left, and retracing their steps westward for about a hundred yards, stopped in front of a vast stone building that loomed above them with an impressiveness that was startling without being inspiring, and portentous without being sinister. The place looked indeed like an indestructible monument to that imposing epoch in English History when both Gladstone and Disraeli were young, and when Tennyson was writing "In Memoriam".

"Will 'ee ring the bell, Miss?" panted Bum Trot.

Perdita, who was shivering again, pulled out the great metal bell-handle and let it go clattering back. A remote tinkling sound within the huge edifice indicated that her effort had been successful. The door was soon opened by a pale-faced, elderly man who evidently played the rôle of a concierge.

"Top-floor. Cobbold's," murmured Perdita's guide in husky authoritative tones. To the girl's dismay, for she had come to feel a certain protection in the society of her asthmatical friend, Bum Trot handed her over with all her belongings to this attendant. Mindful of the words of the Jobber and unable to think of anything else to do, Perdita held out her hand to her guide.

"Good-night, Mr. Trot," she said, "and thank you, very *very* much!"

The staircase was such a stately and spacious one and so softly carpeted that the ascent to Mr. Cobbold's apartments was much easier than might have been expected. The door leading to the top-floor, when they arrived there at last, was opened by an aged man-servant and once more Perdita's bag and parcel changed hands. The concierge disappeared, and the girl had hardly time to look about her before Mrs. Cobbold herself advanced to give her welcome.

"I must apologize," said the lady, "for my husband's not meeting your boat. The truth is he has to be at the theatre tonight. My husband is — I don't know whether you realized that, Miss Wane — a professional on the stage. He has his reputation over here... but I can't suppose it has got as far as the Channel Isles! This is your room, Miss Wane. No, *this* way — now to your right, and up three steps! Oh, that's right, Fogg; I see you've got Miss Wane a good fire. No! better let Miss Wane unpack for herself. We'll have our little supper by the drawing-room-fire tonight, Fogg. And I expect we'll be ready for it in about half-an-hour. Yes, warm yourself, child! Warm yourself, warm yourself, warm yourself!"

Mr. Fogg glanced round as he approached the door; noted the fact that his mistress intended to remain for a while, and closed the door behind him as he went out.

"That means a good hour," he said to himself. "If she hadn't stayed with 'er 'twould 'd meant three-quarters. I'll go easy wi' they fried soles; and I'll 'old back that apple-charlotte."

While Perdita knelt on the hearth-rug and drew off her gloves in the comfort of the warm blaze, Mrs. Cobbold sat down in a large lavender-covered arm-chair.

When the girl turned her head to reply to what the lady was now saying to her she became aware that the room they had given her was much more like an actor's dressing-room than like a bedroom. Pictures of every kind of theatrical personage adorned the walls; most of them, but not all, framed in thin black frames, but some simply fastened to the wallpaper. Thus the room even in that warm, dim light had an air that was unhomely, transitory, insecure, and a little disconcerting.

Perdita replied nervously, and in broken, abrupt sentences to her employer's questions; but her agitation seemed to have no disquieting effect upon her interlocutor. Indeed Mrs. Cobbold gave expression now and again to quiet sighs of satisfaction, as if her relief was great to find her new companion so free from self-assurance and self-possession.

What Perdita could not get out of her mind as at last, like a bird in a cage making trial of an unaccustomed roosting-place, she rose from her knees and sat down on a gilded embroidered stool, a stool that had something about it that suggested a tarnished theatrical accessory — as if it were part of a throne-set in a conventional court-scene — was the feeling of the vast bleakness and desolateness of the enormous stone edifice all about her, of which these singular Cobbold apartments were the crowning strangeness.

“Warm yourself, warm yourself, warm yourself,” Mrs. Cobbold repeated like an incantation. “I shan’t let you say a word till you’re thawed out.”

Perdita had pictured her employer many times, but the reality was more disturbing than her most lively prognostication. Mrs. Cobbold was dressed in green velvet, bound with black satin. She had a thin gold circlet round her head, under which her glossy, blue-black hair, smoothed down and cropped, displayed a lustre as polished and gleaming as a raven’s wing. Her head was large for her body, which was sturdy and shapely, although below the middle height, but what gave her face its extraordinary character was the extreme pallor of her cheeks, upon which, when she cast down her eyes, her long, dark eyelashes seemed to rest, like the eyelashes of a doll upon a countenance of colourless wax.

What struck Perdita at once about her was her unapproachable dignity. It was much more than the natural dignity of the eccentric wife of a rich actor. It was a dignity that seemed to separate her from ordinary men and women. The more the girl saw of it the more startling seemed its implications.

Before that evening was over — her first in the top-floor of High House — Perdita got the impression that Mrs. Cobbold was what might have been vaguely called a “dedicated” figure; though dedicated exactly to *what,* remained obscure. In fact, during all that first night, the girl’s mind was tantalized by this particular riddle. She seemed once or twice on the very verge of a solution; but just as she touched it — and her feeling was that it was very simple when once it was caught — it slipped away and evaded her. Mrs. Cobbold was clearly set apart from the ordinary run of mortals by some fatality, which, whether for good or evil, endowed her reserved identity with an arresting emphasis.

Perdita wondered if Mr. Fogg was their only servant; but when the man knocked at her door nearly half-an-hour after her hostess had left her, and waited outside till she came out, and discreetly and courteously led her to the drawing-room, she came to the conclusion that this grave personage was quite capable of doing the combined work of the customary number of servants.

Mrs. Cobbold's drawing-room was no less theatrical in its general impression than was the room which Perdita had been given as a bedroom. There was more gilt and more tinsel, however, in the dominant effect of this spacious chamber, whose three large windows looked out over the waters of the bay. Most of the chairs were gilded; while every cushion, every curtain, every bit of upholstery looked as if it belonged to a rather dilapidated stage-set.

Well, here she was, actually in the midst of her first "place"! And it was not so frightening after all, now that it had come to the point, thus to sit so close to this blazing fire, on a low gilded settee, while Mrs. Cobbold sat on the opposite side of the hearth in an equally low arm-chair. It was not frightening even when the lady began talking about what French authors they would read together. It was indeed a mighty comfort to Perdita to know that she wouldn't have to *talk* French; and that she wouldn't have to cope with any of the more scholastic aspects of this classic tongue. Apparently all she would have to do was to read aloud from some volume of fiction while her employer held in her hands another copy of the same work. Mrs. Cobbold's "dignity" stood the girl in good stead over this matter; for it ruled out as disturbing and unbecoming all those aspects of learning a language which suggested school and school-books.

Perdita's heart did begin to beat a little when, drowsy and warm on a fantastical sofa by her hostess' side, she heard the sound of the hall-door opening and caught the voice of Mr. Cobbold speaking to Fogg. But when the great man had divested himself of his overcoat and goloshes, and when

Fogg had ceremoniously opened the drawing-room door, as he did every night of their life, with the words: “The master, Madam!”, and when a slight, unobtrusive figure had approached his wife — who did not rise — and kissed her forehead, and had shaken hands warmly with the new companion — who stood up very straight, and haughty, and shy — she felt that the famous Jerry was going to be the reverse of alarming. As a matter of fact no one could possibly have guessed from the tone in which he chatted to her, that he was the greatest clown upon the music-hall stage; and that it was only because it was his wife’s caprice to live in Weymouth that he had retired from “Cobbold’s Colosseum” in London.

He had bought the well-appointed, old-fashioned Play-House, called the Regent, and there for three nights in the week, and for one matinee, he danced his dance and made his grimaces all the winter long, greatly to the benefit of the lodging-houses and hotels of the town, which had not entertained, or been entertained by, so famous a visitor since the days of George the Third.

Mr. Cobbold had scarcely been talking to them for five minutes before the door opened and Fogg appeared. This time he carried into the room the same little card-table and the same white table-cloth that had served for the earlier meal, and very soon the comedian was enjoying a substantial supper. With perfect naturalness, and in the airiest manner Mr. Cobbold talked to them while he ate his meal and drank two or three glasses of wine. He was voluble upon the nature of the audience to which he had played that evening, commenting in a mischievous manner upon the various local characters — for his wife was a native of the town — whose faces he had caught sight of in various parts of the house.

Perdita was conscious that his liveliness was addressed more to his lady than to herself; though every now and then she fancied she read a look in his eyes which seemed to say: “This is the sort of thing I want you to help me do. Keep her mind distracted. Amuse her, amuse her, for God’s sake! As long as we can do that, together, now that you are here, all will be well.”

There was something about the man’s concern for Mrs. Cobbold and the nervous way he watched her while he made his very harmless jests, that at once puzzled and disturbed Perdita. The drowsy feeling of luxurious relief which had descended upon her as she talked with the lady about French novels was entirely dissipated. She began to be almost distressingly awake now; and with her wakefulness there came over her a new and less pleasing impression of these curious rooms at the top of this formidable stone house. She began to feel as if she had been spirited into an inaccessible fortress, where her duty was to distract some distinguished prisoner and keep her mind occupied by perpetual card-playing.

The famous comedian doled out his lively commentaries — his humour in private, the girl thought, was more like that of a whimsical Abbé than a popular Clown — just as if his words had been cards from a well-considered hand. It struck her now that there was something — it was hard to say just what — something curiously forlorn about all these faded gilt chairs and theatrical hangings. As she noted with a puzzled intensity the expression and manner of her host she felt more strongly every moment that she was in the presence of some kind of desperate game; a game that this man was playing against some unseen antagonist, whose nature and quality hung about these desolate draperies and this unnatural furniture like a ghostly presence.

“We mustn’t keep Miss Wane up, Jerry,” said Mrs. Cobbold, in the first real pause her husband reached in his flow of lively discourse. “She must be tired after her voyage and even—” the lady turned with a graceful and intimate little gesture towards her new companion— “even if she isn’t ready for bed, it’s always nice to have a little time to settle down in a strange room.”

She hesitated a moment, raising one of her shapely hands to her golden circlet, as if to assure herself that her head was carrying that adornment becomingly.

“Jerry breakfasts at nine,” she said, giving Perdita a straight and calmly authoritative look, “and I know he’d love to have your company then. I don’t myself come down till later. Fogg will knock at your door, and leave your hot water outside, at eight; if that’s agreeable to you.”

They were all three standing now, though it would have been difficult for Perdita to isolate the moment when she herself and Jerry rose to their feet. Her whole attention must have been absorbed in watching Mrs. Cobbold. And as they stood there, while Perdita hesitated whether to offer them her hand or just to bow and move to the door, she felt that both she and the comedian were engaged in a joint struggle to keep Mrs. Cobbold’s mask in its place, to prevent her from dropping her appointed rôle, to prompt her with the right cue for the repetition of her habitual part. It was one of those curious moments when the entrance of a new personality into a situation that has become automatic by custom produces a tension, a strain, a nervous expectancy, as of some possible catastrophe.

“I am sure... I shall be... very—” Perdita stammered, feeling as if she were called upon to say something; but her voice sounded unnatural in her own ears, while its faint syllables hung in the air of that theatrical room with the harsh sea-murmur coming up from below; and Mrs. Cobbold — her hands still raised to the gold band across her brow — betrayed under the lowered fringe of her dark eye-lashes a mocking awareness of the embarrassment that held the two of them and a malignant desire to prolong it.

Suddenly she dropped her arms and, lifting her eyelids, gave her husband a quick sidelong glance.

“She’ll go to sleep,” she burst out in a voice quite different from any she had hitherto used. “She’ll go to sleep and forget everything! She’s lucky; isn’t she? Go.. to bed.. and.. go.. to sleep.”

“Good-night, Miss Wane,” said Jerry Cobbold hurriedly; and he stepped quickly to the door and opened it for her. “There’s your room — you remember? — on the left, down that passage. We’ll meet in the morning at breakfast.”

Perdita turned, as she went out, meaning to nod or smile at her hostess; but Mrs. Cobbold had moved to the fire and was standing with her back to them both.

Once safe in her own bedroom, Perdita hurriedly undressed, and, putting on her old faded dressing-gown, a present, years ago, from her father, pulled close to the hearth, where the flames were now mounting up brightly, that same low chair upon which Mrs. Cobbold had sat for their first conversation, and hugging her knees with clasped hands set herself to ponder on all her impressions of this evening. She had pulled the window-curtains aside before crouching at the fire; and from where she sat she could hear the sound of the sea much clearer than in that theatrical room downstairs.

The feelings which that sound roused in her were curiously mixed. It awed her a little. It chilled her consciousness with the ebb and flow of vast non-human forces that cared nothing for human plots and counter-plots. It brought something into that fantastical bed-chamber that was free and uncaught, whose very desolation was a kind of comfort, obliterating with the release of the indifferent elements the unhappy morbidities of her race.

Out of all the impressions that had crowded upon her in the last few hours, since she stood on the deck in the harbour watching the drifting foam, the deepest was the one that it was hardest for her to analyze or define. It had to do with the personality of the man called the Jobber. She had never felt about any man — or indeed about any human being — this curious disturbance of her inmost reserve. It was as if some hidden self, hardly known to her own consciousness, had at last found its recognition, its defence, its security, its refuge.

And this feeling did not seem to depend upon her ever seeing the Jobber again. It seemed to fuse itself — when she tried to call up any definite image of the man — with the lights and scents and murmurs and darknesses of her whole impression of her landing. The Jobber, when she tried to visualize his identity, seemed to melt away from the clasp of her imagination and to lose himself in the sound of breaking waves, the smell of tossed-up sea-drift, the rocking reflections of ships' lanterns.

So abstracted in her thoughts as to be hardly aware of what she was doing, she got up now from her crouching position and going over to the mirror began combing her hair. It was an instinctive movement with her to comb her hair when some subtle and absorbing emotion took possession of her. Once in bed and the gas-flame extinguished, she kept seeing the formidable sweep of the tall man's arm as they stopped on the esplanade and he flung that piece of seaweed into the darkness. She kept imagining the way that seaweed was now being washed, to and fro and lifted up and down, as the stone to which it clung rolled over and over on the ribbed sand under the dark tide.

"I am like that seaweed," she thought, "only I have no stone to cling to."

She lifted up her hand to the pillow behind her head and threw back the dark braid of her hair so that the exposed nape of her small neck should feel neat and free, as she liked to feel it.

But now, pushing aside the tall form of the Jobber, the lineaments of Jerry Cobbold limned themselves on the black square of her open window between the fire-lit curtains. She saw his mobile face with its premeditated animation, his big forehead, straight nose, weak chin and white teeth, all set in play by the intention within his skull, like a puppet's features worked by wires.

"I wonder what he's like on the stage?" she thought. "His face actually collapsed when he exhausted his rigmarole. It was like a candle, inside an Image, being blown out. What a changeable face he must have! I'm not sure now whether his nose *was* so small, or his forehead so big, or his chin so weak! I'm not sure of anything about his face. I only know it gave me a weird feeling, as if he *invented* it afresh at every moment, and as if, in itself, it was made of some ghostly neutral substance."

She now sacrificed all her careful adjustments of her neat braid by violently turning over on the other side. She wanted to catch again that delicious mood of vague romantic feeling which the incident of the seaweed had produced. She did not at all want to go to sleep thinking of Jerry Cobbold.

If a stranger had seen her lying in that flickering firelight, with the theatrical pictures all about her, such a person would have been surprised, noting by her wavy brown hair that she was a girl, to see, though she was lying on her side, how slightly the counterpane was raised! A young boy's hips, in that particular position, could hardly have lifted the clothes less noticeably. She tried to stay motionless now till sleep came; and she did turn over only once more; but that false, lively face pulled by wires seemed to hover over her like a mocking sentinel and refuse to let the Jobber's massive form and swarthy countenance come near her bed.

With the approach of sleep, however, it was not to Weymouth or to any of its people that her thoughts gathered, like roosting-birds settling down on a familiar bough, but to her home in Guernsey. An orphan since her childhood, she had been brought up by her uncle and aunt; and while her uncle lived, although as purser on a big easterly-bound liner he was seldom at home, her life had been in all outward matters peaceful and uneventful.

But with her uncle's death everything had changed. Her aunt was of French extraction, as indeed her own mother had been, and had always treated the girl as her own child; but the woman was an invalid, looked after by an elderly step-sister, and most of her husband's pension went in doctor's bills. Thus when Perdita, who had grown restless and unhappy after her uncle's death, begged that she might go to England and try to earn her own living, the two old ladies gave their consent. Between themselves, for Perdita had already, without anything coming of it, attempted some small jobs at home, they were certain that she would come back in a few weeks; and this certainty, while it lessened their enthusiasm for the project, diminished their anxiety as to how she would get on.

"Let her see for herself what work means, sister," said the ancient relative; and Perdita's aunt had sighed and acquiesced.

Deprived by destiny of all superficial prettiness — though not devoid, in moments of animation, of a loveliness peculiar to herself — Perdita had reached her twenty-fifth year without anything approaching a love-affair. She was proud and nervous and shy; and although she always got on well with older men, and was appreciated by them, her prejudice against lads of her own age — whom she regarded as insufferably conceited — was quickly enough divined by the young men themselves; with the result that they punished her — or fancied they were punishing her — by sheering off and giving her a wide berth.

Nor had she been much luckier with her girl-friends. Conditions of life in the little Guernsey town did not lend themselves harmoniously and easily to girl-friendships. Family life was tenacious and very exclusive. Young girls attended convent-schools, helped their mothers with house-work and married young. It was only the flirtatious ones, with a reputation for fastness, who went about in couples amusing themselves.

Perdita's few friends were older people, friends of her uncle, simple folk who petted and encouraged and wondered at her, as an intellectual prodigy, but made no attempt to understand her, and indeed saw nothing of her real nature. Thus she had been very happy, as a child, but very unhappy and very lonely as a young woman, and this rash and reckless plunge into independence was the result of her desperation.

Her reversion to her Guernsey memories at this moment was not, therefore, though they came to her with all the nostalgia of the familiar and dear, fraught with any sense of peace or tranquillity.

"Oh, how sad life is!" she thought, as she turned once more on her pillow; and there came over her the old hopeless longing to be safe out of it all, and really at peace. These desolate thoughts made her curl herself up in her bed, as she listened to the sea, as if by the mere hugging of her knees between her arms she could return to that unconscious state in which twenty-six years ago she lay, an embryo-mite, before she was born into a world like this; a world in which for a woman not to be beautiful, not to be seductive and appealing, means after all a series of futile desperations, of shifts and make-shifts, of pitiful and sorrowful turnings to the wall.

THE JOBBER

LITTLE AS PERDITA REALIZED IT, IN HER FIXED CONVICTION THAT FATE had made her so totally undesirable, the Jobber's thoughts, though he retreated abruptly from her side, clung to her shy and evasive personality with an obstinate persistence that surprised and troubled him.

"What was there about that girl?" he thought.

But he had hardly begun to follow up this question than his mind swung back again to what had become of late its habitual preoccupation. His hatred of the person he thought of as Dog Cattistock had indeed mounted up within him in the last few months to such a pitch that it came to be nothing less than murderous.

As he strode now along the esplanade he hitched up his thick woollen blue jersey from his hip and thrust his hand into his right pocket where his fingers closed over the smooth, hard surface of a large pebble-stone. A week ago he had visited his parents in Portland and learned from his father who had been an independent quarry-owner, till Cattistock's tricks, as a promoter of companies, had reduced him to poverty, that this remorseless man of affairs was now going to close down the largest quarry in the Island and turn away a score of old Portlanders who had worked there from boyhood, the Jobber that very evening had picked up from Chesil Beach this particular weapon and had kept it in his pocket ever since. As he went along now his fingers closed spasmodically, as they had repeatedly done during these last days, upon this heavy stone, the cold, hard impact of which against his side gave him such deadly satisfaction.

“If I did it,” he thought, “it would be my end as well as his. I should hang; unless I got away in time to drown! And what would be the result? It would kill mother; but he’d be out of the world! There’s not a labouring man in this place but would breathe free. He’d be out of it — the devil!”

Something cold — colder than the stone he clutched in his pocket — struck into his vitals.

“To die, to go none knows where; most likely into nothingness, into the absolute Dark. But to take him with me — aye! there’s the rub — to take that devil with me. No Dog Cattistock any more! Look for him tomorrow. Not there! That dog’s face of his grinning no more. Gone. Quite gone. Weymouth free of him and his brute-tricks for ever and a day! And Miss Guppy at the Weeping Woman pouring out drinks just the same... ‘Have they hanged the Jobber yet?’ ‘No, they’re waiting for the Sheriff. They say ’tis on Monday they’ll finish thik little job!’”

At this point in his imaginations, as often had happened with him of late, he found he could not go on doing what he called *thinking the thing through.* It was like walking into that ice-cold sea over there without a shred of clothing.

“I mustn’t think about it,” he said to himself. “I *must* stop thinking about it. If I do it, I do it — and there it is. He’ll be in black emptiness for ever, and I shall be the same. Both of us as if we’d never been born at all.”

He stopped and swung round. “Thinking is bad,” he said to himself. “Nothing is ever done by thinking. So much added to thinking, so much taken from doing.”

He let his gaze drift back along the esplanade till it reached the beginning of Brunswick Terrace, where it wandered to St. John’s spire and to an obscure blur under a street-lamp which he knew to be the newly erected statue to Queen Victoria.

"That girl — I must see that girl again!" His mind followed Bum Trot and Perdita in their approach to High House. "She doesn't know what she's in for," he thought, "with that woman."

He could not help imagining how thankful "that girl" would be when they at last let her go to bed. He had often been in those rooms of the Cobbolds' and he had no difficulty in visualizing her going to bed in what they called "the Spare Room".

"They *must* be giving her that room," he thought. "The little one, next Fogg's, would be *too* bare and miserable."

He still stood motionless, staring at the vague outline of the church-spire and at the still more obscure figure of Victoria. These two objects — the one of stone and the other of bronze — were both so nebulous in the street-lights that they assumed an almost ghostly appearance. The fantastic notion came into his head that these two erections might well exchange their thoughts as they stood there night after night. This fantasy of the Jobber's as he contemplated them, himself a solitary figure between the lighted houses and the dark sea, was not without its natural congruity. Both these monuments were modern; and though the Spire was half-a-century older than the Statue, there was an historic link between them. Both represented the inmost platonic essence of the Victorian era; for what the Spire had gained in its long experience of the Queen's subjects, as people went Sunday by Sunday to worship the Queen's God, the Statue made up for by being the living image of the Queen Herself. Thus while the elderly Spire respected the brand-new Statue, the Statue looked up to the Spire with solemn confederacy.

"It will be long," they both seemed to say, "before Respectability and Piety lose their importance in Melcombe Regis."

The Jobber glanced at these grave objects under particular conditions; for he was ashamed of following Perdita with his thoughts and at the same time he was reluctant to turn away. He therefore used the Spire and the Statue as objects of his official attention while he let his mind wander. He saw them, in fact, without seeing them. This does not mean that they had no effect upon his mind; for it is a matter of common experience that impressions thus made sink the deepest of all. But it means that their effect upon him at this particular moment was unconscious rather than conscious.

Both these monumental objects receded as he gazed upon them into some remote psychic dimension, while in their places appeared — like a cloud in an air-mirror — not the concrete image of Perdita, but a symbolic projection, composed partly of his unaccountable attraction to her, which was represented by something velvety and alluring in the darkness, partly of the actual contour of one of her cheeks, as he had seen it under the lamp-post when she was holding the sea-weed, with a wisp of her hair, damp from the sea-spray, falling obliquely across her brow.

Ashamed of his moment of weakness he now turned his back to Brunswick Terrace, took his hand from his pocket, and with rapid swinging strides, thinking to himself, “I’ll look in at the Weeping Woman before I cross the ferry”, made his way westward.

But a man’s thoughts — especially when hovering round the figure of a girl — are not dispersed by a few minutes of rapid walking; and the Jobber, when he found himself close to the statue of George the Third, was compelled to come to a second abstracted pause. This older monument, which has stood so many years at the bifurcation of St. Mary’s and St. Thomas’s Streets, was now in its turn destined to be teleported from its pedestal, so that its location in space might be used, as he had used that of those later landmarks, as a material support for his psychic evocations.

Gazing upon this grey object — no remarkable work of art — he soon brought it about, in spite of the fact that there was more light here than in front of St. John's, that the well-meaning monarch, that great patron of the town, should vanish like those other phenomena, into whatever curious Limbo it may be that receives such things when the magic of human abstraction exercises its despotism upon them.

The Jobber's own bodily form disappeared under the tyranny of his thought as completely as did the form of the old king; and in their stead a procession of mental images and intentions filled that hollow gulf in time and space. If the emotional content of his musings at that moment had been put into words, such words would have run roughly like this: "beer-froth bubbling up in pewter; forget her wet cheek; Miss Guppy drawing beer; lull myself to sleep with Middlemarch; finish off Dog Cattistock without thinking about it." And then, as his thoughts ran on Perdita again, he began cursing the disobedient heart, as Homer would say, "within his hairy breast".

"Is it possible," he said to himself, "that I've waited all these years, nipping in the bud every affair that offered itself, only to be hit at last by Mrs. Cobbold's companion?"

The hollow statue of the old King now became a sounding-board for the Jobber's memories of his gross erotic life; a life which he had not scrupled to keep on a very earthy and a very sensual plane. This heathen method of his with the perilous nerve found its epitome in an actual mania he had acquired for never allowing himself to utter the three fatal syllables, "I love you", in any feminine ear. It was indeed in the strength of what had now become an automatic gesture of self-protection that he had made his clumsy excuse, a few minutes ago, and left this disturbing girl to the unromantic care of Bum Trot.

“I’ll just drop in at the Weeping Woman and have a glass of gin and bitters,” was his final conclusion. “That will give Bum a chance to get home first; and Cassy will give him a hot supper.”

For a good many years now the Jobber had lived in a small house, in “Weymouth Proper”, on the other side of the Harbour. The house was his own and he had furnished it after his own fashion, the chief characteristic of which was a fancy for things that were both ample and ancient. For *small* bric-à-brac Adam Skald had a curious dislike. He always said that such delicate things “made the tips of his fingers tickle”. Upholstery and curtains and cushions he held also in detestation; but he had crowded his little house with big wooden arm-chairs, wooden tables, grandfather clocks and enormous brass cauldrons and earthenware jugs, till it resembled a humble lodgement of the giant Gargantua.

Skald’s native home was in the neighbouring promontory of Portland; but for years he had lived an independent bachelor life, served with unsparing devotion by Bum and Cassy Trot. It was the rather original occupation by which he earned his living that had procured him his nickname of the Jobber. What he really was was a sort of amphibious Carrier, conveying in his motor-boat, the Cormorant, and in a Ford Truck that he named the Slug, every conceivable kind of load, from cattle-dung and fresh vegetables, to flour, oil, and salted fish.

The Jobber was a man of thirty-five; a secretive person, living entirely in his own eccentric thoughts, but possessed of a sympathetic magnetism that had brought it about that he had more acquaintances, on both sides of the harbour, than any other person in the community.

The perturbed man now crossed the road and leaving the old King’s statue behind him plunged into the town. He strode so fast along the outside edge of the pavement of St. Mary’s Street, passing the Parish Church and the Guildhall, and, to make quicker progress, stepping frequently into the road to avoid the crowd, that he had scarce time to beat down the image of Perdita before he came among the dark warehouses and narrow alleys and reached the Tap Entrance of the Weeping Woman.

He was warmly welcomed by Miss Guppy, the bar-maid, who paused in her service of other clients to mix his gin and bitters; and he was soon ensconced in his favourite seat at the end of the counter, which indeed Miss Guppy had kept intact, against his arrival, by the simple method of piling up in it, on a large tray, all the dirty glasses. The plump lady herself now looked down maternally and possessively upon him from where she stood, drawing out of him by one shrewd question after another, every detail of the Cormorant's recent trip to Lulworth. It was easier for the Jobber to ward off Miss Guppy's curiosity by enlarging on the business that had taken him to Lulworth than it was to prevent his thoughts, below the surface of his replies, from running upon Mrs. Cobbold's companion.

"Will she keep her up till Jerry gets home?" he wondered. "I suppose they're having their dinner or whatever they call it now, with Fogg dodging about their elbows."

"Good evening, Mr. Skald!"

It was Witchit, a fish-monger from a shop in a neighbouring side-street, who thus addressed him; and Skald cast upon the effusive little man, whose face was polished with affability, a ferocious glare.

"Oh, I'm all right, Witchit. I generally am. How are things in *your* line of life?"

The sociable physiognomy of the fish-monger did not diminish in the least because of his interlocutor's scowl. From the end of his pointed nose to the tips of his big, flapping ears his countenance gleamed with gregarious rapture.

"Fayther be the 'appy one, fayther be," Mr. Witchit's wife was wont to acclaim; and there had been a time when young Jimmy, their son, would boast among the other boys as they watched Punch and Judy on the hot sands in August; "Me fayther can smile more broader than thik poor poppet!"

There was indeed something grotesque about the invincible briskness of Simon Witchit; and yet, if the truth were told, Simon was in reality a profoundly cynical man. The bleeding fish he chopped up and disembowelled on his shining counter had no inkling of this. The lively canary he petted so much, and who used to peck so affectionately at his fishy fingers had no suspicion of such a thing. In direct defiance of the vulgar opinion that an organism's feelings correspond with the expression of its feelings, Simon Witchit had the power of grinning with ecstatic affection like a warm-blooded goblin at the very moment when a deep distaste for all the ways of all living things upon earth chilled his inmost soul.

"Your dear father," Simon went on now, literally bowing and scraping as he pressed himself against the edge of the Jobber's table, but in his heart hating the sight of the Jobber's gigantic physiognomy, his thick, heavy under-lip and sullen dark-lidded eyes, "your dear father, Mr. Skald, was in my shop yesterday, and he told me of all the trouble he's been having with Mr. Cattistock. He said Mr. Cattistock had bought up the last of the large quarries on the Island. It's a bad thing for us all when these big men begin —"

Witchit stopped abruptly. He did not stop because the Jobber scowled; but for the contrary reason. He stopped because the Jobber smiled! The mysterious and profound phenomenon of smiling is curiously emphasized when man, the only animal who smiles, smiles from malice and not from amusement. And Simon, who knew something — few knew more! — about what can be hid under a smile, felt a spasm of uneasiness when he caught this ogrish grimace. Some electric fluid of nervous awareness, below the surface of Mr. Witchit's affable mask, leaped forth at the signal.

"I know what you are feeling," this awareness said. "I know how you hate Dog Cattistock. But has it ever occurred to you that there are people *who hate you both?"*

But the Jobber rose to his feet and took his seaman's cap from beneath his jersey.

"Good-night, Miss," he said. "Good-night, Mr. Witchit. No; I am going straight home by the ferry. I never go by the bridge when I can help it!"

Leaving the Weeping Woman the Jobber now turned down a short dark alley between high warehouses. Several of these buildings possessed open loft-windows, from which iron chains and dangling ropes, used for lowering bundles of hay and sacks of flour, hung suspended above the narrow pavement. Others, rented by some of the smaller ships' chandlers, had windows in them of very thick glass, through which, where they were not yet shuttered for the night, all manner of varieties of rope and twine could be seen, piled up between bundles of sail-cloth and interspersed with old, disused, second-hand, nautical instruments.

As soon as he reached the harbour's edge the man turned to the left and followed the wharf in a seaward direction. He walked slowly and cautiously between the single lines of railway that brought travellers from the station to where the steamers docked. It was muddy and littered between these railway lines; and many of the wooden sleepers, upon which the metals were laid, protruded from the mud in such a manner as to offer stumbling-blocks to unwary pedestrians.

With his mariner's cap at the back of his head and his hands in his pockets the Jobber advanced with cautious strides. The wind blew against him wild and strong just here and the harbour-tide at his feet was running out in gurgling darkness. When he reached the stone coping of the ferry, and was free of the metal rails and the littered mud he pulled his great wrists out of his pockets and rubbed his hands together in a fit of emotional excitement. As he rubbed his hands his face assumed a peculiar expression. His upper lip protruded itself and quivered violently. His nostrils dilated. His corrugated forehead swelled and lumped itself into rounded curves. His shaggy eyebrows twitched. His heavily-lidded eyelids narrowed. His head lowered itself a little and stretched itself forward over his enormous chest. His massive shoulders bowed themselves, as he walked, in a curious rhythm with the rubbing together of his great palms.

What had started this exultation in the Jobber was the sight of the high narrow bows of Perdita's steamer and its tall red funnel. With an irresistible rush, that whirled away all his efforts at suppression, the image of the girl as he had first seen her standing on the deck, was swept into his heart. But his emotion was not due purely to Perdita. It was due to the fact that his first sight of Perdita had taken place on this particular spot.

To all natives of this district — Magnus, for instance, would have confessed to just the same — the sight of the wave-washed steps leading to this ferry, and the experience of being rowed across this strip of tossing water, had a peculiar sentiment of their own, a sentiment that reverted back to earliest childhood. How many elderly people, peacefully awaiting the end of their days in Weymouth parlours, looking out to sea, must have recalled these slippery steps and these rocking boats as their first and perhaps their deepest impression of the unfathomable romance of life.

Crouching over an iron brazier of red-hot coke, as the Jobber came to the first stone-steps, there was only one aged ferry-man left at his post and he was fast asleep. But he knew the owner of the Cormorant well and was not in the least ruffled at being brought back to that gusty night from God knows what miraculous mackerel-catches in halcyon seas. As the old man rowed him with some difficulty across the harbour — but the Jobber understood marine etiquette far too well to put a hand to an oar — his mind, for the tide and the wind prohibited conversation, reverted to what Simon Witchit had told him of his father's words in the fish-shop.

Yes, it was only the bare truth! His father had inherited from *his* father three or four small quarries of the precious Portland stone; but little by little the crafty financier had been getting them into his hands, until, by purchase, by mortgage, by a system of commissions, by bullying and bribing, by leasing what were left of the old Prison Works, by monopolizing the stone-cutting saw-smills, practically all the old hereditary quarry-men of the Island had lost their inheritance and had become mere agents and employees of the Cattistock Company.

As the water dashed over the side of the boat drenching his thighs, the outrage done to the actual *stone* itself of his native promontory tore at his heart. The Dog was an enemy of everything sacred in life! That Portland stone, ever since the far-off Viking invasion that had landed the Skald family among these Celtic stone-slingers, had been something to be handled reverently, piously, and *in fear of the gods.* And now came this brute —

The dark swaying waves, the rocking boat, which shipped a nasty bucket-ful when he rose to search about in his pocket for a silver coin, the look of the interior of the boat under the lights of this Nothe shore, the coiled ropes, the scooper for bailing, the rushing channel of bilge-water following the boat's tilt as he got up, above all the smell of the slippery seaweed, as the waves heaved and sank on the stone steps — all these things became a chorus of his whole life calling on him to strike this blow.

"Good-night, Mate!" he said, handing the old man a double fare.

"Good-night, Mr. Skald, and thank 'ee kindly, sir!"

He stopped before one of the oldest and smallest of the time-mellowed houses, looking on the harbour. The name "Cove House" was written in flourishing characters over its narrow doorway. There was a light in the window — a big bow-window from which it was possible to see the entrance of the harbour — and the Jobber had no sooner begun mounting the brick steps that led to the door than a muslin curtain was dropped down by a bony hand that had been holding it aside.

The man smiled as he took his key from his pocket and inserted it in the keyhole.

"I wonder how late I'd have to be," he thought to himself, "for Cassy not to watch for me?"

A gaunt cadaverous woman of about fifty greeted him in the little hallway.

"Hello, Cass!" he cried affectionately, "keeping guard as usual? Has Bum come in?"

"Half an hour agone, Mr. Skald," she said now in a tone of deep reproach. "And he be eating supper in kitchen. He've a-finished his meat and be nigh to finishing his pudding."

"So sorry, Cassy dear," pleaded the Jobber. "Bring *my* meat in at once, will you? I'll be down in a minute."

He rushed upstairs to wash his hands, while Cassy returned to the kitchen. Cassy Trot lived indeed entirely for her master and her husband, like a fish in an enclosed pond, and though malignant curiosity might be written on her face her heart held nothing but an almost tragic fidelity.

As the Jobber was pouring hot water from a tin can with a big spout, into an old blue-and-white basin, whose accompanying jug he had deposited on the floor, his mind veered away again from Dog Cattistock and rushed off to the top-floor of High House. Had that girl got over her fright by now? He himself was not afraid of Mrs. Cobbold, but he knew well that many were; for there had been the wildest rumours about her in the town, when as Lucinda Poxwell of Old Castle Road, she had married the celebrated clown. They said she had driven old Poxwell into his crazy custom of collecting cowry-shells out of the pools at the foot of Sandsfoot. They said it was because of Lucinda's deviltries that the Captain's younger child Hortensia, with her daughter Daisy, had come to live with him.

"Lucinda's madder than her father," the Jobber said to himself, as following a harmless but extravagant custom of his he went on turning his soap over and over in his hands till he evoked a cloud of lather, "but whether *that* will frighten that girl I can't say."

As he brushed his hair before a mirror framed in old dark mahogany, a mirror so erratic in its tilt that Cassy was always restoring it to the appropriate angle by bits of folded paper, which would fall out the moment the Jobber touched it, he let his eye wander over the walls of his bedroom. It also, like the room downstairs, had a bow-window from which could be seen the mouth of the harbour and a strip of open sea. It also, like the room below, had a couple of gigantic arm-chairs with leather covers. It also had on its walls endless old coloured prints of ships. Some of these were war-ships, some passenger ships, some merchant ships, and the seas in which they sailed were sometimes stormy and sometimes calm; but it was characteristic of a certain vein of obstinate optimism in Adam Skald that not one of these pictures represented a *wreck.*

"Mr. Skald! Mr. Skald! Supper be in!" came the voice of Cassy Trot from the bottom of the stairs.

He went down at once and took his place at an enormous oak table, black with age and polishing. On a second table under a pair of green curtains, that half concealed the big bow-window, was an open library-book with the address of a shop in St. Mary's Street on the cover. The book was George Eliot's "Middlemarch"; and before leaving him with his plate of meat already cut, and with two covered dishes of vegetables of the same blue-and-white pattern as the jug and basin upstairs, Cassy had brought "Middlemarch" from the table by the green curtain where it lay beside a swan's egg which the Jobber had stolen from a pond beyond Chickerel, and had carefully propped it up for him against a candle-stick. Had anyone watched her face as she pressed the cover of the book open and forced back its pages before she balanced it, there would have been caught upon it that particular look of indulgent gravity with which a mother manipulates a favourite toy for a spoilt child.

Dead silence reigned now in the front room of Cove House, for the kitchen at the back was separated from the sitting-room by such a long passage that it was impossible for the Jobber to hear the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Trot when the doors were shut.

He ate slowly, turning over the pages of "Middlemarch" with patient resolutions — one page to about ten mouthfuls — for the satisfaction he got from reading while he ate was not so much in the reading itself — the Jobber could not be called a bookish man — as in the consciousness that he *was* reading. For he genuinely liked the idea of reading a nice solid library-book as he ate his supper in his bachelor parlour. Old Miss Burt, the librarian of that St. Mary's Street Shop, derived extreme pleasure from assisting "Mr. Adam", for she had known him all his life, in the development of his literary taste; and as her own taste ran, or she thought it ran, to works far removed from "this modern realism", the Jobber had lived to see great Liners fed by oil without having followed the course of his country's fiction further than the middle of the nineteenth century.

Like many another lonely and egoistical man he was much more original in his personal philosophy than in his aesthetic taste. His taste was, it must be confessed, anything but his own. It was indeed entirely dependent upon others. In literature it depended upon Miss Burt and in bric-à-brac upon Mr. Martin of the Dairy-Shop in Abbotsbury Road. In his drinks the Jobber bowed to no man, nor to any woman, either; for it was in vain that Miss Guppy explained to him night after night the aristocratic superiority of Whiskey over Gin; but in other refinements his humility was pathetic.

"George Eliot must have been rather like Miss Burt," he thought grimly as he finished his pudding and began to light his pipe; but at this point he was astonished to hear a sharp ring at the door-bell. He swung round and glanced at the small ship's clock which he kept fastened up over the fire-place. It was half-past eight. Who, in God's name, *could* it be, at this time of night? He began to rise; but sat down again, hearing Cassy come along the passage.

"Something she's ordered, maybe," he thought.

There was a momentary pause in the progress of events while Mrs. Trot pushed back the bolts. This bolting of the door, as soon as night fell, was a persistent rule of his own. Neither of the Trots approved of it. Few people in Weymouth would have liked it any better, with their frivolous habits of running in and out. Perhaps it was an austere Portland custom, going back to days when the Islanders suffered invasions that were less insidious than those of Dog Cattistock.

The Jobber, while this unbolting went on, mechanically closed "Middlemarch" and placed the mustard-pot on the top of it. He suddenly found that his heart was beating in an abnormal manner. This was due to a wild notion that this unexpected nightly visit was in some way connected with Mrs. Cobbold's companion. Through the bow-window, which was open at the top, and between the curtains which were only half-drawn, came the sound of the harbour waves, splashing against the row of fishing boats moored outside. This sound made him wonder how much could be heard of the sea from the windows of High House and whether Mrs. Cobbold's companion would keep open the window of her bedroom during the night.

But Cassy had got the front-door unbolted now, and he felt, without actually experiencing it, the breath of salt air that entered into the little passage. Aye! But what was this? He suddenly became aware of a high-pitched young-girl's voice mingling with the whistling of the wind. The front-door closed. Cassy was talking to the visitor within the passage now. He rose to his feet and laid his spoon and fork carefully side by side upon his empty pudding plate. He brushed away some crumbs of bread from the polished oak surface — the Jobber rejected table-cloths — and gave his own woollen jersey several lusty jerks to improve its appearance.

The door opened and Cassy ushered in a young girl of about seventeen.

"Why, Daisy Lily!" he cried hurrying round the table and shaking the visitor's hand with lively and astonished cordiality. "Who would ever have thought of *your* coming here? How's the Captain?"

"Oh, Mr. Skald, *please!*—" the girl cried earnestly. "Mother says, will you come at once! Grandfather's at Sandsfoot Castle and won't come home! Mother and I've been twice over there. The second time Doctor Higginbottom went with us. But the doctor made Grandfather worse. Mother thought of you at once. She said: 'If anyone could get him home quietly it would be Mr. Skald!' And then she said— 'It would be no good getting D—' I mean Mr. Cattistock. She calls him D, you know. 'It would be no good getting D,' she said, 'would it, Daisy? Because Papa hates him so.'"

"What would your friend Cattistock say if he heard that?" grumbled the Jobber; and he began, with a shameless disregard of the young girl's presence, to remove his slippers and put on his boots.

"Grandfather says he'll run away," went on Daisy unblushingly. "He says the day that mother agrees to marry Mr. Cattistock he'll run away and never come back! He says Mr. Cattistock is a man-eater and ought to go and live with cannibals."

"Bravo, Captain!" chuckled the Jobber in a thick, husky voice, as with his head bent down he struggled with the oily, leathery bootlaces.

"Mother's got her car out there, by Trinity Church," remarked the girl. "She said she was sure you'd come at once."

"Is your mother set on marrying Cattistock?" muttered the Jobber, cursing his bootlaces, but deriving, all the same, a dim pleasure from the peculiar smell of the leather.

"Poor mother!" whispered the girl. "I oughtn't to talk about her; but you know it all anyway; so what's the difference?"

It was not, however, till the two of them were hurrying along the edge of the quay towards the bridge that Daisy Lily spoke with real freedom to her Grandfather's friend.

"Mother's in love with Mr. Cattistock," she said. "But he's been a long time making up his mind. I think he'd like to make love to mother without being married. But poor mother's tired of taking care of grandfather. She'll be glad to leave him to Mrs. Matzell and me."

They found Mrs. Lily wrapped up in a big cloth ulster and bowed down over her steering-wheel. She had fallen into a trance of absorbed thinking. From this she rose with a start; but impulsively gave the Jobber her hand, and smiled a tender, grateful smile.

"I knew you'd come," she said.

Settled down close to Mrs. Lily in her little car, with Daisy Lily sitting on one of his knees, the Jobber gave himself up to a procession of the queerest thoughts. It gave him a deliciously soothing and sensual pleasure to hold Daisy like this; but out of the lap of this sensuality his mind kept shooting off in more serious and more poignant directions. To High House it flew, straight and fast, like the wind that was now blowing in their faces; and the girl who balanced herself on his knee had no idea how his contact with her young body was mingling and fusing itself with his romantic feeling for Mrs. Cobbold's companion. But the Jobber was not permitted by destiny to remain long in peace, enjoying this contact with Daisy and these thoughts about Perdita. A casual word from Mrs. Lily, as they drove through Rodwell, referring to the number of new villas that had sprung up in that district, though he replied to it in a friendly manner — and indeed there had always been something piquant to his fancy about having a flirtation with the Dog's fiancée — set him upon his murderous thoughts again. The weight of Daisy's body upon him accentuated the pressure of the hard cold stone from Chesil against his thigh and he thought to himself:

"This silly Mrs. Lily will be the only person in the world who'll be sorry when I *do for* the brute."

It must have been the unusual rôle of being driven through these Weymouth suburbs by Dog Cattistock's woman that gave the Jobber the power to envisage this killing of his enemy as if it were a *dark red bruise* at the back of his consciousness which he could not avoid accepting, but which he could temporarily forget, as he enjoyed himself holding Daisy and thinking of Perdita.

He became aware, as they drove on, and as his mind ran forward to his encounter with his distracted old friend, that Mrs. Cobbold— "Aunt Lucinda" as he had heard Daisy speak of her just now — had come to occupy, when he linked her with Perdita, a position in his thoughts of the same order, though not the same intensity, as his feeling for the Dog. Yes, he thoroughly distrusted Mrs. Cobbold. She was a type he detested. He believed, in his passionate naïve way, that she was the sort of woman who deliberately indulges vicious and heartless selfishness under the disguise of hysteria.

"She's madder than the Captain," he said to himself, "but it's the madness of wickedness. She's like one of those evil women of History. I wish the Dog had got mixed up with *her* instead of this silly Mrs. Lily. What a pair they'd have made!"

But if the Jobber was thinking of Perdita as he held Daisy, Daisy's mother — who was only thirty-five — was thinking of Dog Cattistock.

From this state of things it was brought about that there drove through the hilly suburb of Rodwell towards Sandsfoot Castle, in addition to three visible occupants of a small dark car, two invisible ones, namely Perdita Wane, dressed as she was when she stood waiting on the deck of the steamer, and Dog Cattistock dressed as he was when, three months ago, he declared his love for Mrs. Lily. It was perhaps too fantastic a conjecture — and yet not altogether devoid of analogies in the physical world — to suppose that as these invisible and purely mental passengers rode thus together across that quiet quarter of the suburbs there came to establish itself between these complete strangers some sort of relationship, some link, some magnetic bond, which subsequent events might cause to be materialized. It may be regarded as part of this psychic approach — of which Dog Cattistock and Perdita themselves were so completely ignorant — that after a long silence, as they drove up Franchise Road, Hortensia Lily remarked to the Jobber:

"Have you heard in town, Mr. Skald, whether my sister's new companion *did* really arrive on the Guernsey steamer this afternoon? Everyone in Weymouth seems to know she was expected today; and I thought you might—"

But the Jobber muttered something about having only just returned from a business trip to Lulworth and not having spoken to a soul. An irresistible instinct made him cautious of breathing to the paramour of Dog Cattistock the least word about Perdita. He replied so coldly that Mrs. Lily, anxious to please him tonight at all costs, threw back her heavy coat from her throat, as she held the wheel, and turned quickly to him with a smile into which she threw so much intimacy and sweetness that it quite startled the man. With naïve, masculine simplicity the Jobber welcomed not exactly the thought, but the vibration of the thought: might not this desirable Being be cajoled away from Cattistock? Had the painter Correggio been driving by Mrs. Lily's side, instead of the Jobber, he would have been forever afterwards trying to catch the Ariel-like equivocation of this ambiguous glance wherein all the wanton nymph in a light woman's nature threw provocative arms round the neck of her lover's foe. Her smile was given him as she turned her vehicle round the corner of Franchise Road into Rodwell Road. Few places could have been more difficult to transform into a Correggio picture than this suburban retreat of quiet tradesmen, where the very pavements were kept so neat and even the fluttering eddies of little hard, dead, metallic-coloured privet-leaves were soon caught, scooped up, and carried away; but Mrs. Lily was one of those fair women whose skin is so exquisitely white that any gesture, revealing a fragment of throat, or neck, or bosom, acquires a kind of involuntary seduction, independent of place or time.

Hortensia Lily’s head was as small as her sister’s was large, but her forehead, like that of Mrs. Cobbold’s, was unusually high although it was concealed by a thick fringe of fair hair, trimmed like a child’s and making a clear-cut yellow line, an inch above the blue of her eyes.

It was at this moment that Daisy Lily, whose attention was less distracted than her companions’, suddenly cried out —

“You needn’t go so slow, mother. The road’s clear!”

The young girl’s words were justified. All the way down the declivity leading to the sea-shore they met neither pedestrian nor vehicle.

“Can you not hear the sea?” said the girl again.

The lights of the car now revealed a road that became less and less suburban in character. There were patches of Tamarisk-bushes in the low, straggly, wind-blown hedges, and here and there rose a stunted thorn-tree, that, like a living creature desperately escaping from the tumult of waters, stretched out its arms with frantic panic towards the uninvaded fields. They could certainly hear the sea now. Indeed the sound of its waves, breaking on the rocks far down beneath the uneven ledges and terraces of the cliff’s edge, reduced them to silence. The Jobber was surprised and a little shocked by Mrs. Lily’s sangfroid at this juncture. Daisy kept fidgetting on his knee and straining her neck to catch the first glimpse of the ruined castle, but the mother drove steadily on, going slower indeed, so it seemed to him, than she really need have done, if the Captain was in any actual danger, and letting him feel as she drove a light pressure of her shoulder. Seduced by the warm bodies of both these women and actually courted — for that is how in his masculine vanity he interpreted this pressure — by the elder one, the

Jobber gave himself up, as they went along, to an irresponsible feeling of well-being.

Arrived at the path leading to the ruin, they all three scrambled out, and leaving the car by the roadside hurried down the slope, Daisy a little way in advance. The Jobber and Mrs. Lily overtook her at the entrance to Sandsfoot Castle and they entered the building together. Here they were confronted by the rays from a lantern and by its light the seated figure of the man they sought became distinct. Seated under an old-fashioned ship's lantern on a steamer-rug that he had brought out there early in the afternoon, and with a big woollen shawl wrapped round his shoulders, Captain Poxwell was absorbed in the construction of certain small improvised shell-boxes. He had carried down to this spot that afternoon more than one of these little cardboard receptacles. These he had covered with that species of adhesive clay such as they give children to mould. He was now engaged in fixing into this clay a great number of small shells, which he had fished up with his hands, all through that stormy twilight, in the rock-pools at the Castle's foot.

The old man rose as Daisy ran towards him, crying in a tender quivering voice: "Oh, grand-daddy, you dear! you dear!"

Tightly fitted upon the Captain's closely-cropped, silvery head was a yachtman's cap. This he now took off, making a polite and ceremonious bow first to his grand-daughter and then to his daughter.

"Aye, Skald, my boy! Glad to see 'ee! Glad to see 'ee! You'll be able to bring reason to these crazy women. They think I can do my work just as well in the house as I can up here. They don't understand I *have* to be near the rocks to throw back into their proper pools the ones that have fish in 'em!" He paused and approaching the Jobber whispered in his ear: "I've been quite happy about *Her* — you know? — since you swore on your dying oath she never had a child. I can trust *you,* Skald, but not another living soul!” Apparently satisfied in his mind, he went on in quick, hurried, loud tones, addressing them all. “How could I remember what pool they came from if I had ’em up there in my cabin? And as for letting you, you fussy child” — this was addressed to Mrs. Lily— “how could I trust you with ’em? You’d chuck ’em over the cliff — I know you! But listen, Skald! Do you know what Hortensia did today? Yes, I *will* tell him, girl. So it’s no use your making faces. She brought that old lunatic, Higginbottom, down on me. Did you ever hear such a thing? I knew what he came for, the old spy! He’d heard about my collection of cowries. He supposed I’d got ’em hidden somewhere in the wall and wanted to find ’em. I led him a rare dance; didn’t I, Daisy? I can climb up a wall, can’t I, Daisy? as well as any one. I led him a rich dance, Skald! You’d have laughed yourself weak to see it. In the end I gave him a kick in the belly and he went off threatening to call the police. Didn’t he, Daisy? As if he could set the police on me! It’s a joke; isn’t it, Daisy? Isn’t it, Skald?”

All the time he was speaking the Captain avoided looking at his daughter; and the Jobber who *did* glance at her noticed that she had relapsed into her own thoughts, just as if her Father’s ramblings were of no more significance to her than the moaning of the wind round the thick walls of the ruin. The rays of the ship’s lantern fell upon her cold white face. She wore no hat; and her cloak, fallen back from her head, displayed the clear-cut line of her fair hair lying smoothly upon her brow, from beneath which her large blue eyes stared into vacancy.

Adam Skald, little of a psychologist as he was, found himself conscious of something uncanny in the feverish excitement of the Captain confronted by such contemptuous indifference. He was aware, however, that Daisy was listening to the distracted old man with an intense and troubled concentration. The young girl's figure was quite outside the lantern's rays — just a blurred, wavering, girlish outline — but it was revealed to the Jobber that from her whole being emanated a passionate and desperate interest in the Captain's wild utterances.

Captain Poxwell had a long, lean neck, the muscles of which resembled the flexible cords of some tough ivy-trunk clinging to an emaciated tree. His nose was long and pointed, his chin a knotty, narrow, and retreating one, his forehead, like the foreheads of both his daughters, was abnormally high, while his cropped hair, grizzled and stubbly, covered a skull that receded at the back, in a curiously obstinate manner, like the skull of a cranky and heretical fanatic. His chin was tufted by a very small patch of wiry hair, hair that had not turned grey, like the top of his head, but remained of a straw-like colour, indicating that it was from him that Hortensia inherited her blond tresses. A patch of similar hair scarcely large enough to be dignified by the name of mustache, bristled upon the Captain's upper lip; and when the light fell full on his excited face it revealed eyes of the most vivid blue; eyes that burned with that particular kind of restless energy which, whether in sane or insane men, is of all things the most objectionable to women; for it contains a double quantity of that species of human magnetism that is always rending and tearing at the normal processes of nature.

He was still talking eagerly to the Jobber, explaining, exhorting, appealing, when Skald suddenly saw Mrs. Lily shrug her beautiful shoulders with a gesture of infinite weariness. Her look at that moment made him think of the ship's figure-head to which Bum Trot had compared Mrs. Cobbold. One such image in particular came into his mind, which had belonged to a ramshackle craft, long since gone to the bottom; but her figure-head had always stuck in his memory; and her queer name too. She was called the Medusa.

"I'll walk with you to the house, Captain," said the Jobber, taking advantage of the first real silence into which the excited old man fell, "and then we can let the women-folk ride. I expect your old Mrs. Matzell has kept some supper for you."

Captain Poxwell relapsed now into complete docility. He proceeded to take his shawl carefully from his neck and wrap it very meticulously round the little boxes upon whose clay lids he had been sticking the shells.

The girl Daisy, satisfied that all was well with her grandfather, had turned her attention to the old Castle's walls and the high, deep windows through which the stars began now to be visible.

"The wind's dropping," she remarked. "It's going to be a fine night."

Taught by her grandfather the girl had come to know every cornice and balustrade and window-ledge and rampart and coign of vantage in the old building, and had acquired for the place that especial kind of passionate tenderness that youth acquires for any locality — picturesque or otherwise — that has come to be a background of its long, long thoughts. Daisy had lived in Half-Mile Cottage with her grandfather and her mother for five years now. She had come here when she was twelve; and not one of her vaguest, wildest and most romantic reveries but was associated with Sandsfoot Castle.

The child had a tall flexible figure, like her mother; but her fair hair was far less striking, her nose thicker, her mouth larger, her grey eyes much smaller than Mrs. Lily's. Indeed, it was the kindness and frankness of her expression, combined with the spring-like charm of her fresh young body, that made older people — especially old ladies, who doted upon her — speak of Daisy Lily as "such a sweet, well-mannered, innocent child". Her relations with her mother — if all were known — might have disturbed the lineaments of this ideal image; for there had been occasions, especially within the last six months, since the elder woman's association with Dogberry Cattistock, when Daisy had astonished Hortensia by her fierce outbreaks of rebellious bitterness.

Something of this sort, although tuned to a key of wistful sadness rather than of wild emotion, was upon her now, as she watched a cluster of faint stars through one of the square sea-ward windows. The windows of this Ruin were indeed quite large in spite of the thickness of the walls; for after all Sandsfoot was not a mediaeval building, having been built, as a protection against France in a fit of that cautious nationalism which characterized the Tudors, by Henry the Eighth.

"Why *doesn't* Uncle John come home?" she thought. "If he'd only give up the sea for a year, he'd soon bring grandfather's mind back to itself. Mother torments him almost as much as Aunt Lucinda used to. Oh, how she does hate him! What would she feel if I began to hate *her* just as much as she hates grandfather?"

Such definite thoughts as these now completely failed to express Daisy's feelings. She gave herself up to listening to the faint sighing of the wind — for she had been right that the weather was moderating — as it went round the old Castle, like a ghostly shoal of perturbed flying-fish, uttering a barely audible, high-pitched susurration, that grew thinner and more falsetto as it gradually died away.

When they were all safe back in Half-Mile Cottage, the Jobber found that he was not mistaken when he said that Mrs. Matzell would have a hot supper ready for the old man. That there was no other servant at Half-Mile Cottage than this faithful woman was worse than a mere social grievance to Hortensia. It was a daily series of annoying discomforts. Mrs. Matzell was devoted to the Captain; and her opinion of the Captain's daughters, as she expressed it to her familiar gossips, was as vigorous as it was brief.

"There's not a nail's paring to choose between them. *Ladies* do they call themselves? I calls them 'Arpies!"

Simple-minded men are always being deceived by the verbal outbursts of women; for women have the power of abandoning themselves to the most volcanic revelations of grim truth and then of going on living, in the ordinary illusions of commonplace reality, as if nothing has happened. Thus after all that he had heard and imagined of what went on in Half-Mile Cottage it was amazing to Adam Skald, as he sat opposite the Captain, while the old man ate his supper in what he called his "Cabin", to hear the voices of Mrs. Lily and Mrs. Matzell engaged in what sounded like the jesting of two life-long friends.

It was considerably after nine when the two men sat down to their snug meal — for the Jobber, though he had already had an excellent supper, scrupled not to propitiate the Captain by sharing his little repast — and both Mrs. Lily and Mrs. Matzell, now absorbed in cooking something that could not wait over night, took for granted that Daisy, who had curled herself up on the drawing-room sofa with her book, was fixed happily there for an indefinite time.

But Daisy was not fixed there for an indefinite time. In fact, for the last five minutes, she had not been there at all. With her woollen cap and mackintosh-coat on, and her ungloved hands thrust deep into her side pockets, she was hurrying along Rodwell Road into Wyke Road, and up Wyke Road, past Rodwell Railway Station, to Gipsy Lane. Arrived at Gipsy Lane — and the walk there, so eagerly did she hurry, only took her about seven minutes — she paused by the broken fragment of a loosely-cemented wall. The narrow lane was as dark and silent as if it had been in the heart of the bare Downs instead of a suburb of Weymouth; but in spite of the solitude and the silence the girl glanced nervously round and waited, drawing her breath in quick little pants and fumbling with the belt of her mackintosh. Then, standing on tip-toe close against the rough cement so that her knees brushed its surface, she lifted her arms to the top of the crumbling masonry and began feeling about with excited fingers. She soon lifted up a large flat stone from the coping of the wall and hoisted it out of the way. By doing this she exposed two smaller ones, lying side by side. One of these she also lifted up and with a little gasp of relief snatched from beneath it an unstamped, unaddressed letter. Clutching this tightly in her hand and breathing more easily, she replaced all the stones, under that faint starlight, exactly as they had been before; and moving back from the wall surveyed with intense satisfaction her unopened envelope. In the silence of that dark lane she passionately pressed this opaque blur of whiteness several times to her lips and then, slipping it into her dress, under the mackintosh, proceeded, with even more rapid steps than when she had come to make her way back to Old Castle Road. No one had locked her out. No one had even noticed her absence! When, in about half-an-hour, Mrs. Matzell came into the room to tell her she ought to be going to bed, the woman saw her close her book with such a well-feigned sigh of reluctance that the old lady began murmuring a long discourse upon the danger of too much reading.

“Good-night, mother!” she called out, leaning over the balustrade.

Mrs. Lily pushed open the door at the end of the passage.

“Good-night, Day! Don’t forget to clean your teeth!”

The door closed again; but not before the innocent-eyed maid had put out her tongue at the narrow glint of steamy kitchen light.

“Why need she always say that so loudly?” she thought. “Mr. Skald *must* have heard her. Oh, she is so annoying!”

On the first landing she paused to glance at the Cabin door, from behind which she could hear the murmur of men's voices.

"Why *doesn't* Uncle John come home?" she said to herself. "Grandfather's a different person when he's got a man to talk to."

She ran quickly up the last flight of stairs and entered her own room. Daisy's room opened on the front of the house which was on the inland side of the road; but by standing at the extreme left-hand corner of her window and pressing her cheek against its pane, she could detect, even when the window was shut, a narrow fragment of sea between the opposite houses. This strip of water — a glimpse of Portland Roads — was framed between a segment of Sandsfoot Castle and a segment of Portland itself, and Daisy who knew every curve and contour of its restricted shape — knew it as well as she knew her own childish countenance in the big looking-glass that stood in front of it — was never weary of watching the infinite variety of its moods.

Two gas-jets were burning cheerfully in large cream-coloured globes in Daisy's room; and the sheets of her bed, covered with a white counterpane dotted with faint blue spots, had been carefully turned down.

In the order of Mrs. Matzell's devotion to the people of her life, if Captain Poxwell came by far the first, it was certainly Daisy who came second. Daisy's only rival for this place, was, not her mother, but the absent John Poxwell.

There was a considerable-sized book-case hanging on the wall above the bed, whose crowded shelves had that particular look, at once very faded and very gay, that clings about any collection of childish books, whether they belong to a girl or a boy. Above the mantelpiece was a large photograph of Captain Lily; and in the grate — its blaze pleasantly falling upon a brass fender and a crimson rug — burned a glowing fire, whose sticks had been lighted an hour ago by Mrs. Matzell.

The girl bolted her door and turned up the two gas-jets, making the room as light as it was warm. Then, thrusting her fingers into her dress, she brought out the white, square envelope; once more pressed it to her lips, and then stood it up on the mantelpiece beside the picture of the bearded Captain. Thinking to herself, “I won’t open it till I’m undressed,” she began hurriedly taking off her clothes. She undressed like a child rather than a woman, flinging her things down, hugger-mugger, in one big heap. The chill of her cold night-dress, for Mrs. Matzell had left this on her pillow tonight, instead of hanging it, as she sometimes did, over a chair by the fire, gave her a delicious shivering-fit, and she rubbed herself with her hands, standing with bare feet on the crimson rug.

She snatched at the letter then; but suddenly remembering that she had not brushed her hair, she put it back again on the mantelpiece, taking care to balance it at the precise angle that it had occupied before. With fingers just as feverishly eager as when she undressed she tore put her hair pins, tossed them down anyhow on the dressing table, and shaking out her wavy hair, which was neither as silky in texture, nor as beautiful in colour, as her mother’s, she passed her comb through it several times making faces and crying “Goodness!” when the tangles hurt her, and finally catching at it tightly with one hand she brushed it out hastily in firm, strong sweeps of her arm, and tossing down the brush with a clatter on the table, she extracted a light-blue ribbon from the drawer of the looking-glass and tied it up in a neat bow.

“I wish I were twenty-one, instead of seventeen,” she thought to herself as she came back to the fire-place. Once more she possessed herself of the letter, and this time, seated on the rug close up to the fender, she tore it open and read it with breathless attention.

It ran as follows: —

“Darling Day — Oh, I had such difficulty in fetching your last from our box! And heaven knows when I shall be able to post this! *Father suspects us* — there’s no doubt of it. He *wouldn’t* have, if he hadn’t come in that day when I was dressed up in my Page’s costume. He *wouldn’t* have, if I hadn’t talked to him last year, when we first met, so wildly about you. Father is thicker than ever with Mr. Cattistock and this makes our seeing each other more and more difficult. Oh dear! Sometimes I feel as if we shall have just to bow to fate and give up our friendship. Perhaps, after all, that *would* be better. What do you think, my little Double Flower? It is Mr. Cattistock who really makes it so impossible to go on. I can’t explain quite why in a letter; but it *does* and my Double Flower must just believe me. I’ll be furious if you say again what you said in your last letter about my being tired of you. It’s all Papa’s friendship with Mr. Cattistock that makes it so difficult. I’ll explain when we meet. Let’s plot and plan and tell each other our conclusions. Perhaps we *could* meet in Gipsy Lane as you say. I’ll think it over. *Don’t* write by post. Gipsy Lane is the thing for that. It’s so exciting hiding them there, and your letters are *so* sweet! Here’s a D kiss, and an A kiss, and a Y kiss! Think of me when you go to sleep.

Peg.

P. S. Yes of course you’re right. What a funny child you are! What we read on all the Brewery Carts— ‘Cattistock and Frampton’ — *is* Papa and him. Do you mind your old Peg belonging to ‘Cattistock and Frampton,’ while your People are all in the Navy?”

Daisy allowed both letter and envelope to fall out of her hands for a minute while she stared fixedly at the fire. Very slowly big tears gathered in her eyes and her under-lip quivered and drew down. Tossing her head, however, she knelt in front of the bars and tore both letter and envelope into little tiny pieces, flinging them resolutely into the flames. While she did this she bit her lip and swallowed down her tears. She even tried to smile. Then with her hands clasped behind her back, and her head bowed, she shut her eyes tight and remained motionless for a long time in the attitude of prayer. Strange though it may sound, Daisy Lily *was* praying. It was a peculiarity of hers — due perhaps to her never having been to a boarding-school — to pour out all her troubles to her dead father. Till she was sixteen she always used to add for "Jesus' sake". But from that time on, when she had finished her supplications to Captain Lily, she added no religious conclusions. As so often happens with self-made invocations a heathen change had slipped in. She fell into the habit of praying to the dead Officer as if he had been the only supernatural Being who could possibly be reached. Whatever her conversation with her begetter may have been about, Daisy Lily rose to her feet deeply comforted.

"I'll never write to her again," she said to herself. "She's silly and she's funny. She's *horrid.* She only played with me to amuse herself; and she's found some other kid now and wants to get out of it. Navy indeed! When did I ever talk in that tone to her? Besides, she knows perfectly well that both Grandfather and Uncle John are in the Merchant Service. It was a nasty, affected, horrid letter. It's clear as a pike-staff she's got another kid; and I'm glad she has! That's the last time you fool *me,* Peg Frampton, and the last time I'll have anything to do with you."

Daisy cast a glance at the red coals where the flames had now died down. On the inner edge of the top-bar lingered a scrap of charred paper. The girl seized the poker and pushed this down into the heart of the grate. A look of resolute defiance had settled down over her young face. Her under-lip was indrawn. There were two wrinkles in her smooth forehead between the eyebrows.

A certain element in Peg Frampton, who was a little older than she was, had always jarred upon her, a certain cynicism, a certain wild, fierce bitterness, but in the excitement of their passionate friendship, the edge of which had been kept poignant, by secrecy, she had been seduced into disregarding these discords. In her simplicity she had even allowed herself to be proud of the sophisticated tone her friend loved to adopt. Sometimes, like the young Gretchen under the spell of Faust, she had listened in awe-struck wonder to Peg's daring blasphemies. But this letter hurt her to the quick. Its grown-up cajolery, its obscurity, its weariness, its lack of direct emotion, a certain tone in it that the writer evidently thought was the tone of a disillusioned woman, filled Daisy's soul with a puzzled disgust. She had never cared very much for her friend's fondness for playing upon her surname; and the expression "Double Flower" just now gave her a sickly taste in her mouth. There had been something of an ardent boyishness in her idealizing of Peg; and this letter — though she could hardly have explained how she read such subtleties into it — made her feel that her idol had all the time been despising her, treating her like a child. Something about the letter even reminded Daisy of her own mother! Her very innocence and simplicity made her anger — when she judged anyone as she now judged her friend — sternly implacable.

"I'll never bother any more with her and her tricky ways," she vowed to herself.

She extinguished the two burners and scrambling into bed pulled the clothes tight under her chin.

It was then that the pleasant coolness of the sheets, the relaxation to her whole body of this prone position, the association of this particular moment, when she first turned out the light, with an idealized concentration upon her friendship with Peg, threatened to betray her resolution. Her window had been opened a little at the top by Mrs. Matzell and she could hear the subsiding wind utter faint expostulating murmurs in many different tones as it went zig-zagging down Old Castle Road. Some of these wind-tones she mistook for the sound of the far-off waves; and this thought of the sea intensified her feeling for Peg. She kept seeing against the fire-lit wall — and it was worse still when she closed her eyes tight and pressed her knuckles against them, making the "spangly darkness boil up" in phosphorescent bubbles — that sentence out of Peg's letter about "bowing to fate" and letting their friendship end.

But what was this? Once, twice, three times, just as she was going to sleep she was caught away from her feeling about Peg Frampton and entangled in a teasing curiosity. Daisy's whole being detested and despised curiosity. Young girls often pick up from some man's chance words, or from some chance page of a book, some queer, irrational, superstitious, but very authoritative *principle of avoidance.* This principle of hers about despising curiosity she had imbibed from her father. Captain Lily's abhorrence of this vulgarity was carried to an absurd extreme. He asserted that the *great* men of Science — like Charles Darwin — were totally devoid of this contemptible vice. They pursued truth, not from any base curiosity about the nature of things, but from an aristocratic desire to stamp their own theories upon the plastic clay of the universe.

But three times, ere she slept, Daisy was teased by an intense longing to know how the fact of Mr. Frampton's partner being enamoured of *Mrs.* Lily made any difference to Peg Frampton's relations with *Miss* Lily. The vexation of this riddle was aggravated by a pressure on her nerves that resembled the invisible presence of Dogberry Cattistock himself in her warm fire-lit room! Daisy was not frightened by this phenomenon, which was indeed no more than an intensification of what a human consciousness frequently suffers when a person is alone at night, but it had the effect of exciting her curiosity to a pitch that was certainly aggravating. She knew there was nothing supernatural about the way a powerful personality, like that of Cattistock makes its presence felt, when you call it up from a distance. Daisy's curiosity would, as a matter of fact, very quickly have died down, if chance had not willed it, that, at this very moment of the night, Mr. Cattistock, closeted with Mr. Frampton in the latter's house in Newstead Road, near Radipole Lake, happened himself to be actually speaking and thinking of Daisy. By thinking of Daisy Mr. Frampton's partner threw a projection of his personality so strongly into Daisy's room that before she went to sleep both of her emotions — her attraction to Peg and her indignation with Peg — subsided without her having the least idea of the reason into the automatic, resistant numbness, by which she defended herself from thinking about Mr. Cattistock.

Long before the daughter of Captain Lily was fast asleep in the little room from which it was possible to catch a glimpse of the sea, another girlish figure had hurried furtively to that crumbling cement-wall in Gipsy Lane and deposited another unaddressed envelope under the two stones on the top of it. This transaction was an easier one for Peg Frampton than the obtaining of the first missive had been for her correspondent, for Peg was several inches taller than her friend.

Miss Frampton, however, wore no mackintosh; and the little thin cloth jacket which she did wear was a poor protection against the chilliness of the night. Perhaps this was the reason that led her, after she had crossed the Harbour Bridge, to drift into the brilliantly lighted Palladium Cinema before retracing her steps home along Newstead Road.

To the surprise of the drowsy young woman who sold the tickets — for it was now considerably after ten o'clock and the performance had not much longer to run — Peg Frampton paid her entrance fee and entered the moving-picture building. She passed a tall gilt mirror in the entrance-hall and pausing there for a second adjusted her dusky hair beneath her dark-blue cap. The face that looked into her own as she did this was certainly not a beautiful one. Every feature of it broke the most elemental laws of feminine desirability. Peg's forehead was very low, her small hazel eyes very deeply set, her mouth with its sensual passionate lips hung open, disordered, unhappy, twisted awry, while her hollow white cheeks seemed all the more haggard, for a girl of eighteen, by reason of her high cheek-bones that possessed an almost Mongolian look.

Motherless and friendless, save for a series of passionate and somewhat morbid friendships with younger boys and girls — for Peg could be equally interested in both sexes — the girl had found herself at sixteen mistress of an unattractive, desolate house, an over-worked, slatternly servant, and a father completely absorbed in money-making.

Mr. Frampton took no interest in the amenities of life. In his secret heart he regarded his child as responsible for her mother's death, for the woman had only outlived her daughter's birth by a few months, and though not an unkind man, felt vaguely hostile to her, as if she had wilfully usurped her mother's place. He was a cold, cautious, crafty man of affairs, with so little imagination, even in his business, that it was not until his employer promoted him from the position of a trusted subordinate to that of official partner that his industry and thrift received anything like their merited recognition. Mr. Frampton ate whatever was placed before him and drank whatever was in his decanter. He used the same bed, the same carpets, the same curtains, the same chairs, the same cushions, that he had bought for his wife, of whom he was idolatrously fond, when he was an under-paid clerk in Cattistock's office. Peg had only once in her life seen her father really angry and that was when she had bought at a fancy-work bazaar a brilliant oriental-looking cover for their faded drawing-room sofa. Nor, even then, had his anger been shown in any way except by getting very red. But as he was always extremely sallow, this event was as startling to Peg as would have been the hoisting of a Russian flag by a battle-ship in Portland Harbour. Mr. Frampton removed the rug from the sofa, folded it up very carefully, and hung it over the bottom of the banisters.

After this event — though she used the offensive object as a counterpane in her own large, bare, chilly bedroom — the young mistress of Swan Villa attempted no more domestic improvements.

The girl was old enough to remember the time, before the building of the new Westham Bridge, when Swan Villa had overlooked the tidal Backwater. Some of her happiest childish memories were connected with these muddy, brackish reaches, on the edge of which she used to play for hours, imbibing the sour tidal smells and watching the swans and the wild ducks. But the Backwater had been transformed into an ornamental basin, rendered independent of the sea-tides; and although its smooth expanse of harmless water, like a pond in a Public Park, still stretched away as far as Radipole Village, a couple of miles from the old Harbour Bridge, the charm of the salt mud-pools and the tidal débris remained in her mind as something she missed. Children's aesthetic sense is a deep half-animal feeling and when it is outraged it leaves a wound behind it that never quite heals up. Unsanitary as the old Backwater may have been, and pretty as the new ornamental water doubtless was, these improvements had taken away from the lonely girl in Swan Villa something that left an unsatisfied craving in her nature.

When she was unhappy in her early teens it was always to the Backwater she went for comfort. The old Backwater Bridge itself, unsatisfactory for modern traffic as it probably became, had grown to be associated in her mind with alluring images of romantic continental bridges; and for all the new cleanliness and convenience that had recently appeared she did not find herself seeking refuge any more at her window, when the nostalgia for far horizons and remote places took possession of her.

Swan Villa, Newstead Road, could not be said to have moved with the times as had the view from its windows; for though in actual years it was not an old house — probably it was built about the same time as St. John's spire — its yellowing stucco, its straggling privet-hedges, its cracked, unpainted doors, its wistful, neglected rock-garden resembled one of those old Victorian editions of standard authors, covered with decorative arabesques, but bleached and stained by exposure to the weather. At the same time, since it is harder for a woman than for a man to shake off the deadening and sapping influence of monotonous drabness, Peg could not get the same solace from the old-fashioned qualities of her forlorn home that she used to get from the muddy Backwater and the picturesque bridge.

Since the girl was so late tonight in entering the Palladium Cinema she was compelled to take her seat by the side of a boy of about sixteen who was eating sweets, of more than one variety, out of a striped paper-bag. Peg was in a more than usually reckless mood tonight and it was not long — in the obscurity of that darkened house — before she had established intimate relations with this unknown lad who struck her as an unusual and exceptionally clever boy. At the price of putting into her mouth two or three sticky sweets from his paper-bag, she was able to encourage him to take her hand and to hold it with growing warmth, sometimes pressing it against her lap and sometimes against his own. She took good care to leave the house before the very end; and was not in the least dismayed when the lad followed her out. Here, close beside the big gilt mirror, but in no alarmingly sumptuous foyer, they began whispering eagerly together.

"If 'ee could come on Saturday, the day after tomorrow," the boy said, "I could be here at nine for the opening. Could *you* be here at nine?"

Peg pondered the matter. It was very unlikely that there would be anyone who knew her at this particular Cinema; and on Saturday the crowd would be an especially popular one and not in a mood to notice anything.

"A little *before* nine?" she asked.

He nodded with a glowing face. His cheeks were flaming.

"I be Jimmy Witchit of St. Alban's Lane. What be *your* name?"

"Oh, never mind about *my* name!" she retorted. "You can call me Peggie if you like."

"Do 'ee live in Rodwell or over there by St. John's?"

"Never mind where I live. That's *my* business."

"You baint — on the game, be you? There now! What be laughing at? I weren't being funny. I've a-known some wonderful decent girls what's been on the game."

"You don't go with them, do you, Jimmy? That isn't safe for a kid like you."

He looked at her with dumb indignation. She had deeply hurt his amour propre.

"Lots of girls older than *you* be — you ain't more'n seventeen, be 'ee? — have said I were like a bloke of twenty. I do know all there is, I reckon! No girl in Weymouth on the game or *not* on the game, can tell Jim Witchit nothink."

A crowd of boys, heralding the general exit, rushed wildly past them, shouting and jostling.

Peg's hands went up to her hair again at the big mirror, "Goodbye, kid, till Saturday before nine!" she whispered. And then glancing sideways at him, "Run off now, for mercy's sake!"

Jimmy nodded a temporary forgiveness to her for hurting his feelings on the subject of prostitutes, and slipped obediently away.

As he ran off he said to himself, "She ain't a day older nor I be, and she believes all I do tell to she. Maybe she'll let a bloke take her to Uncle Cob's. She ain't a factory kid, either. Looks to *me* as if she worked at one of them smart photographers."

Peg's lonely life and her mental superiority to social distinctions had given her an air that would have puzzled a much cleverer young man than Jimmy Witchit. He went home therefore to his parent's flat, above the shop in St. Alban's Lane, in a state of glowing elation.

"Peggie", he kept repeating to himself as he undressed. "Peggie be me girl! Sue were all very well, but she were a school-kid. Tisha were all right, but she were a biter and a scratcher when she loved anyone. Peggie be a girl a person could go anywhere with, and she'd tell the tale to anyone, before they meddled with she."

The girl in question now moved away to the edge of the harbour and loitered for a moment on the Quay near the Harbour Bridge. Everything was quiet here and the few ship-lanterns reflected in the darkness showed that the tide, no longer blown into waves, was swiftly running out. The sight of that silent volume of dark water rolling seaward filled her with desolation.

"What a life!" she groaned in her heart. "What a life!"

Behind her back the tall sombre warehouses full of hay and coal and casks of wine and crates of beer-bottles gathered themselves *into* themselves, and grew at once larger and less utilitarian as they accepted the passivity of another night. From a few upper windows on the further side of the water, lights could be seen. One little window especially, in a tall old house near the Bridge's end, caught her attention.

"Perhaps there's a girl going to bed *there"* she thought, "more sick of life even than I am. Think of that boy taking me for a street-walker! Well — why not? Perhaps I *shall* end like that. Father wouldn't care if he never saw me again. Who have I got but my little Daisy? And she doesn't love *me.* She loves someone else in my shape. She no more understands me, that sweet, solemn little thing, than Jimmy Witchit does! Less than he does. For he took me for one of *them.* And that's of course what I am — but not from necessity!"

She mounted the steps to the Harbour Bridge and paused for a minute to lean over the broad stone parapet and gaze down at the water, swirling rapidly now under the stately arches.

"Unhappy girls at night," she mocked bitterly, "leaning over bridges! Why is it that certain situations repeat themselves again and again when you're a girl?"

She thought of certain melodramatic scenes in the fantastic Cinematograph she had just witnessed.

"Clever people laugh at such things," she thought, "and simple people cry at them. But they keep on repeating themselves. Everything repeats itself! Perhaps everything that's happening now, at this minute, in all these houses has happened, exactly the same, through all eternity. Undress; go to bed; sleep; wake up; kiss and get up; dress; kiss and pretend; do the same with the same; and go to bed again!"

She left the bridge, passed the front of Trinity Church, followed the North Quay to Sidney Hall, and then hurried along Newstead Road. She passed the turns into Granville Road, Ilchester Road, and Abbotsbury Road and soon after this crossing arrived at Swan Villa. There was Mr. Cattistock's neat motor-car, still at the door. She opened her purse, took out her latchkey, and, twisting it in the lock as quietly as possible, let herself in.

Yes; just as she supposed! The voices of her father and Mr. Cattistock were droning on in the dining-room exactly as they had been when, a couple of hours ago, she had slipped out.

Did her father think she was in bed? If he heard she'd been fished out of the harbour dead, what would he say?

"Yes," he'd say, "it's *her* all right. If it hadn't been for her, my wife would be alive today."

"Is it pathetic," she said to herself as she stole softly upstairs, "or is it simply comic, the way I live? Not a soul to care, except Double Flower... and what does she know about me *really?"*

Her big, poorly-furnished bedroom resembled a bedroom in a lodging house. She turned up the gas-flame and throwing her hat on the bed stared at herself in the looking-glass.

"Another day over," she thought. "That's one good thing. Took me for a street-walker." She turned away from her staring, troubled eyes in the glass. "I wonder what it feels like to let a man do it to you, in a bed like that?" And she recalled the way Mr. Cattistock had kissed her when he found her alone in the house on a recent evening. "Would I let *him* do it, if he wanted to?" she thought. "Oh, I don't care, I don't care, I don't care! I don't care *what* happens, as long as everything doesn't go on repeating itself!"

HELL'S MUSEUM

AT THE TOP OF THE HOUSE IN BRUNSWICK TERRACE, WHERE MR. BALLARD the young Town Clerk lodged, lived at this time another and very different young man, who, as their mutual landlady Mrs. Monkton would express it, "answered to the name of Richard Gaul". If Mr. Ballard was a daring and dynamic youth, dedicated to grow rich, Mr. Gaul was a dodging and debouching youth, dedicated to remain poor. It was lucky for young Gaul, who was as much alone in the world as if he had been engendered by a Pine-tree upon a Palm-tree, that he had inherited one hundred and twenty-three pounds a year. If it had not been for this piece of good fortune it is really a question whether Mr. Gaul would have been still in the world; for it is impossible to imagine the kind of berth that he could have filled under existing social conditions.

But if it were his good fortune to have an income of a hundred and twenty-three pounds it was not less a lucky chance, five years before this time, when he was only twenty-five, that he noticed the engaging announcement in Mrs. Monkton's window: "Rooms to Let. Gentlemen Preferred." Nor had Mrs. Monkton so much as once regretted, during all these five years, the day when she allowed young Richard Gaul to take the little top bedroom situated above the bow-window of the front bedroom, that spacious chamber where "Sippy" Ballard slept.

Two days after the arrival of Perdita at the Cobbolds', Mr. Gaul was eating his breakfast at his usual hour. His usual hour was eleven o'clock. By a device, of a simplicity that would have escaped the wit of anyone but an authentic philosopher, he had reduced his daily meals to two, having breakfast very late and making his tea, which he enjoyed at six, serve for both tea and supper.

It was a great surprise to the youthful Town Clerk when he observed Mrs. Monkton’s niece, an undersized girl of fifteen, carrying up Mr. Gaul’s breakfast at this unconscionable time. The truth was that in return for this courtesy Mr. Gaul — for it was one of the things that were within his extremely limited powers — helped the little Miss Monkton not only with her English Compositions but also with her English Recitations. He had indeed — as her Aunt who knew “what was what” in education, secretly recognized — given the child, in these five years of his stay in that house, a real start in literature.

Mr. S. P. Ballard, or Sippy, as his friends called him, had twice made an attempt — the first time when he was drunk, and the second time when he had been appointed Secretary to the Council — to get upon speaking terms with the young man in the top-room but neither attempt was crowned with success. Beyond a nervous nod when they met, and Mr. Gaul took good care they didn’t meet often, Miss Monkton’s tutor kept the enterprising official at an implacable distance.

Richard was finishing his breakfast which Betty Monkton had arranged on a large black tray, covered with a white cloth, and placed on a small three-legged table in front of his window. He swallowed with a mild and dreamy satisfaction the last mouthfuls of his daily portion of Dundee marmalade; and when these had vanished he poured himself out his last cup of tea and proceeded, pushing back the table a little, to light his first cigarette.

Between the muslin curtains, yellow, though not with dirt, for they had recently been washed, he could discern the grey level of the sea’s horizon, broken by two small fishing-smacks. The sea was calm, this Saturday morning, but it lay under a low, sad, cloudy sky, neutral and grey as itself. Richard derived, as he alternately sipped his tea and inhaled his cigarette-smoke, a peaceful and soothing pleasure from the faint contrast between the greyness below the horizon-line and the greyness above it. Both these expanses were reduced to the lowest possible level of emphasis to which any material phenomenon *could* be reduced without actually becoming invisible; and sad though these two levels were, with that indescribable line of demarcation separating the horizontal perspective of the one from the perpendicular perspective of the other, their sadness, like two muted notes in a wistful bar of music, was of a kind that had more of peacefulness in it than of sorrow.

Whenever Richard glanced away from the sky and the sea and from those two sails that sometimes seemed to be suspended in the one and sometimes in the other, his eyes rested on his desk which also faced the window and upon which, retained in several separate piles under various sea-shells, which he used as paper-weights, lay quite a number of manuscript-sheets, written in small, rather thick, though singularly clear hand. These sheets, which were already enough to make a considerable book, represented the work of more than five years. It was not only an ambitious work. It was not only a long work. It was one of those works that in the industry and devotion of an intensely concentrated mind seem to win a sort of battle over necessity and death, merely on the strength of having come into being at all! In plain words what Mr. Gaul had been engaged upon for the last seven years was a system of philosophy. Yes! this young man whose desperate hobby it was to read every metaphysical book he could lay his hand upon, old or new, was actually occupied in composing a cosmological system of his own that should offer to those few specialists in such things who could read it — for philosophers write for philosophers —

a simplification of the chaos of life. Young Gaul was totally free from any egoistic desire for fame. He wrote his book solely and entirely to satisfy himself. The pleasure he took in writing it was its own reward.

If Richard’s system could be said to have any really valuable clue to the mystery of things this clue was to be found in his own word “representative”. His idea was that all the exciting concepts of religion, mythology and metaphysics were true; but not *literally* true. He held they were true in a “representative” sense; that is to say, he held that behind every human creed and behind every mythological figure lay a quite definite human craving, a purely emotional and very often a quite irrational craving, a craving old as the hills and apparently springing from something ineradicable in human nature. And just as there could be discovered, if you analyzed far enough a concrete and quite definite human exigency behind every religion and every cult, so you could discover, behind every single one of the great metaphysical systems, precisely the same body of concrete palpable yearnings that existed beneath the cults, only with the stress laid upon first one aspect of them and then another.

The first part of Gaul’s labours upon what he called his “Philosophy of Representation” had to do with the primitive pagan religions, the second part with Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Mohammedanism, the third part with the famous individual metaphysical systems. What Richard was engaged upon now was the fourth portion of his book in which he applied his definite list of concrete, basic, irreducible human yearnings to the objective realities of life. His idea was that instead of being, as the scientists declared, empty of all value, these yearnings when reduced to their dominant motifs were actually “representative” of certain eternal, natural facts; facts that very frequently contradicted the mathematical and chemical hypothesis most prevalent in our age. Gaul had a trick of using, all through his argument, the expression "imaginative reason" by which he apparently meant some super-vision, wherein intuition, instinct, emotion, imagination were in some artful manner synchronized with reason.

Unlike most philosophers who are content to use their one grand, basic inspiration about life and then bolster it up with infinite logical and rationalistic devices, Mr. Gaul by a bold original method of his own kept his argument fluid, flexible and porous; subject in fact to the various *daily* inspirations that came to him as he lived in Brunswick Terrace. What he would argue was that the rigidly *monumental* method of exposition adopted by most philosophers was an unnatural method and was a method, moreover, that sacrificed a great deal of organic flexibility to the dead hand of logical abstraction.

"I must get some more paper-weights," he thought as he lit a second cigarette and struggled with the tip of his tongue to extract a tooth-brush bristle from between his teeth, for it was a peculiarity of Richard's to regard the use of a tooth-pick as a coarse, disgusting, and altogether loathsome habit. It now struck him that in the greyness of those two expanses of unsolid matter, visible from his window, a greyness so neutral and unassuming as to hover on the edge of nonentity, there dwelt the essential mystery of beauty. For what was beauty if not a manifestation in the midst of objective reality of something half-created and half-discovered by the craving of our human organism?

"If I don't feel a melting ecstasy at this moment," he said to himself, "from that horizon-line between sky and sea, it is only that this damned thing that's got stuck between my teeth is so bothering that I can't give myself up. I like this sort of day particularly. Why is it that the line between sea and sky — just a regular, *natural* line, not perfectly straight, nor curved, nor wavy, but with its own peculiar identity, the sea-line, the sky-line, the meeting-line — should give a human animal, an animated skeleton, such a curious thrill?”

He frowned gloomily, rose abruptly from his chair and went up to the window, as if by a closer observation of these phenomena he could catch solutions of their riddle.

“Yes, it certainly *is,”* he thought, “very nearly my favourite kind of day!”

The shock of seeing so much of the sea at one view, the interest of observing that there were now three sails on that grey horizon, and finally the fact that the coming together of these two vast entities, the sky and the sea, was enhanced by the brownish ridge of pebbles, a ridge that vanished altogether at the other end of the town where King George’s statue turned its back to St. Mary’s Street, led Mr. Gaul to forget this worrying thing in his tooth; led him in fact to the verge of a transport of delight in this inimitable greyness; when Nature as though impishly consistent in turning a philosopher’s pleasures into a victory of matter over mind, brought it about that the author of the “Philosophy of Representation” had to hurry off with incontinent haste to the lavatory upon the landing beneath him. This was one of Gaul’s diurnal annoyances, this trip to the floor below his own, not because he felt towards his natural evacuations as he did towards the use of a tooth-pick, but because there was always a danger of encountering Mr. S. P. Ballard in the passage there and even of seeing him emerge from that discreet glazed door. This morning, however, he got back safe to his top-floor without misadventure, and was on the point of sitting down at his desk when he heard the door-bell of the house emit a reverberant ring.

“Someone to see Alcibiades!” he muttered to himself, and going close to the window he tried to peer down on the head of the ringer. This was, as he ought to have known from experience, an impossible procedure, for the bow-windows of both Mr. Ballard’s floors jutted out over the pavement. He had amused himself by calling his fellow-lodger "Alcibiades" ever since he learned from their landlady of the young man's promotion to municipal honours. Unable to settle down to work till he felt certain that this morning call had nothing to do with himself, he stood, in nervous indecision, with his hands on the back of his desk-chair and his eyes fixed on the three fishing-smacks. He was still in this position when he heard steps ascending the last flight of stairs. It *was* himself, then, that this stranger sought!

"Come in!" he called out hurriedly in reply to a knock at his door.

The door opened to admit Magnus Muir.

"Oh, it's you," murmured the young philosopher with something of disappointment in his tone. He had hoped — when the knock came — for he was young enough to long for the unexpected, that some exciting stranger, perhaps someone who had heard of his life's work, would appear on his threshold.

"Yes, it's me," said the Latin teacher; and as he took the chair offered him automatically by the young man, he wearily repeated his ungrammatical greeting. "Yes, it's me. And how is our Richard this grey day?"

Mr. Gaul offered him a cigarette in silence. Magnus glanced at the brand and replaced the packet on the table.

"I can't stay," he said and looked at the young man as if pondering in his mind whether, after all, it was worth while to put his problem before him.

"I had a letter this morning," he burst out now, speaking almost reproachfully, as if Mr. Gaul had been responsible for this annoyance.

"*I* don't often get letters," remarked that sage.

"A letter from Cattistock it was," Magnus went on, with the same faint reproach in his voice. "And he's coming to see me in a little while and take me to lunch. He wants me to tutor his boy."

“Cattistock — with a boy?” cried the other. “I didn’t know that fellow was married.”

“Oh, his wife’s dead. Been dead for years. They say he’s going to marry Hortensia Lily. He says his boy is an incurable fool. That’s the word he uses in this letter — an incurable fool.”

Mr. Gaul took off his spectacles, a gesture of his which always accompanied the reception of anything startling. But he only twisted them in his hands and replaced them carefully. Had the event been more personally arresting he would have cleaned them with his coat-sleeve. Confronted by a shipwreck he might even have rubbed them against his trousers.

“Will you do it, Muir?” he asked.

“I... don’t... know,” replied the agitated scholar. “I... suppose... I’ll have to go and see him.”

“If you see him, you’ll take him,” remarked the young man with decision, “like you did young Zed, when Gipsy May came to you.”

Magnus smiled faintly.

“I didn’t do *him* any good,” he said. “He wouldn’t sit still and he terrified Miss Le Fleau.”

“He *is* incurable,” said the other gravely.

They were both silent, calling up in their minds the red hair and green eyes of the young protégé of Gipsy May.

“You know Cattistock?” enquired Richard abruptly. “I’ve only spoken to him once. He terrifies me.”

“My father never liked him,” remarked Magnus with finality, as if the elder Muir’s opinion put the person in question beyond the pale.

“Then you’ll refuse?” murmured the other, lighting a cigarette and glancing round at his manuscripts.

Magnus shifted in his seat, resumed possession of his stick, and began buttoning his overcoat.

"He wants to get to work," he thought. "What I really came to ask you, Gaul," he blurted out, "was the gross and vulgar question — how much, if I *do* take this boy, I ought to ask. My ordinary pupils pay very little and can't pay more. But Cattistock is the richest man in Weymouth. Ought I to be glad to have his son, simply for the name? Or ought I to ask twice as much as the rest? I've only got six; and three are leaving this spring. It's a chance to save myself from worry for the next couple of years, if I ask enough!"

Magnus clasped his hands on his stick and sat up straight, staring anxiously at his interlocutor. Mr. Gaul raised one hand a little way towards his spectacles, and then dropped it. The problem of his friend's salary did not seem to necessitate an immaculate vision. He found himself guilty of an irresistible spasm of gratitude to providence for his own small but secure income.

"I'd be frank with him, Muir, if I were you," he said firmly. "Tell him that you depend on your tutoring for — for everything. Perhaps" — his hand moved a little again, and again sank on the table— "he'll offer you enough for you to give up all the rest."

Magnus' features cleared. What, as a matter of fact, had really prompted this visit to his young friend, had been the daring thought that, if encouraged a little, he might strike out for enough money from this heaven-sent rich man, to enable him to marry Curly!

"I shall have," he began excitedly, "to see the boy first, of course! Do you think by his using the words 'incurable fool' that the child's not all there? Do you think he's an idiot, Gaul?"

Magnus uttered the word "idiot" with such agitated emphasis that his hearer, whose thoughts, to confess the truth, had wandered away to a delicate point in the “Philosophy of Representation”, drew back his head with a start, as if the other had threatened him.

“An idiot?” he stammered. “No, no; I’m sure we should have heard of it if Mr. Cattistock had an imbecile son. It’s only the way he talks. It’s probably his idea of being funny. These rich people — you know! I expect the child is afraid of his father. Everyone says that Alcibiades, I mean young Ballard down there,” — and Mr. Gaul made a gesture indicative of lower regions in general— “is his natural son. The chances are that he neglects this little boy.”

Magnus leaned forward over his stick and fixed his eyes on a place in the carpet where the pattern revealed a small brown triangle, enclosing a conventionalized tulip upon which lay a fragment of bread. Sunlight fell upon this spot and close to the piece of bread a fly was cleaning her forelegs. The teacher was thinking of the rendezvous which he had at the Wishing Well that afternoon. Would this expedition with Cattistock be over in time for him to get there? And if he was late would Curly wait for him? It was only in the summer that she or her mother had to be there all the while. During the winter they only went to the place to rake the leaves away and keep the fountain clean. But there was a shelter and a seat hard-by; and surely Curly would give him a little grace if he *were* late! It wouldn’t do to hurry Mr. Cattistock in their negotiations. He now became aware that his companion had stretched out his arm and possessed himself of a sheet of his manuscript. Mr. Gaul had done this with a casual, accidental, haphazard air, like a dog who strolls through a kitchen, and gives a nonchalant lick, in passing, at the cat’s saucer.

Magnus grasped his stick and hat and stood up.

“Well, I must be getting back,” he said. “He might arrive before his time and be cross if I wasn’t there. Sorry to have bothered you, Gaul!”

The distance between Trigonia House and Kimmeridge House was only a few steps; but it was long enough for a grim array of dark thoughts to march through his mind.

"Except Gaul I've got no one to go to," he said to himself, "and I've got no *one* to go to about Curly. Miss Le Fleau would nurse me if I got ill; but in everything else—"

And, as he tapped with his stick against the rails of the small patches of earth in front of these familiar Brunswick Terrace houses, the ignoble and cowardly wish flew like a black arrow across the sky of his consciousness that he had never met Curly. If it had not been for the hope of marrying this little shop-girl— "for that's what she is," he thought, "Wishing Well or no Wishing Well," — he would have refused to teach Cattistock's son, simply on the strength of his father's dislike of the man.

"I'm going out of my harbour," he said to himself, "and I see reefs of danger ahead."

At each step he took, along that well-known pavement, life seemed to loom up before him in more portentous array. He felt it now as a menacing engine-house that he was entering — a place full of cogs and pistons and wheels and screws and prodding spikes — and full of people with bleeding limbs. A vague horror, like that of extreme physical pain, oppressed him. He felt as if all the hidden places where sensitive life was tortured had opened their back-doors to him, and the moans from within were groping at his vitals. Yes, something that he had always known was there all the while, there under Miss Le Fleau's brown room, there under the warm seclusion of his study, something raw, grating, jarring, despairing, twisted by pain, menacing him, like the spasms of a skeleton on a gibbet the moment the wind came from a certain quarter. He found himself actually growing cold in the pit of his stomach as he went along; and he hurried into Miss Le

Fleau’s little hall-way, smelling, as it always did, even in the winter, of old, long-forgotten summers by the sea-side, as if he were seeking refuge in the lap of his mother — that mother whose real personality he could barely recall! The peculiar smell of the interior of Kimmeridge House, even when he was ascending the stairs, brought its own assuagement; for a multitude of long peaceful lives at Weymouth seemed condensed there, like ancient flower-petals in some old pot-pourri, lives whose re-vivified exits and entrances were at once cleansed by salt-blowing winds and mellowed by glowing fires and flickering candles.

When he reached his book-lined room and had closed the door, there came over him such a sharp distaste for allowing this alarming intruder to enter his precious fortress, that he decided he would be on the spot downstairs in hat and coat so as to avoid the necessity — if thus it *could* be escaped — of Cattistock’s coming upstairs at all.

He looked at his watch. Yes, he might be here any minute; and it should be at the door, or even on the pavement, that he would meet him!

Neither Miss Le Fleau nor old Martha felt that it was advisable to interfere with their guest’s movements, though the one in her drawing room and the other in her kitchen, found it impossible to do anything but wait and listen in intense participation. He had shown Cattistock’s letter to both these women — for after all they were like near relatives — and there had been a certain vaingloriousness in the response of the whole of Kimmeridge House to the great man’s overture.

But it was a miserable business standing there outside the house, and he had twice been on the point of retreating when the dark-blue car of the financier came to a halt at his side. Hurriedly he removed his hat and was on the point of addressing the car’s driver when it presented itself to his mind that Cattistock had merely sent his chauffeur to fetch him. Full as he was of every kind of aesthetic touchiness, cars like this, and their chauffeurs with them, were intensely distasteful to Magnus. He did not quite share his father's attitude towards these luxuries of the rich; but after his own fashion he was scarcely less prejudiced. The elder Muir, on the strength of the weight of his personality, had the power of making anyone he spoke to feel that to possess a car at all was in some subtle way both a lapse from all good taste and a deviation from all dignity of character; and as his son now sank back and contemplated all the familiar landmarks flying past him, till, crossing the big new bridge over what used to be the Backwater he asked the driver whether he had been long in his master's service, it was with a feeling of condescending to a vulgar necessity rather than of enjoying a genteel privilege, that he allowed himself to be driven towards Chickerel.

As he was carried along in a north-westerly direction, following the ridge of the bare uplands, he could see under the grey sky the broad silvery horizon of the West Bay; and he told himself how, if he could have followed that horizon like a migratory sea-bird, it would have receded and receded before him, until, beyond Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, it led him into the desolate wastes of the North Atlantic.

The driver of the car set him down at a gate in a low wall which ran along the edge of the road on the outskirts of the village of Chickerel. Above this wall was a neatly-cut box hedge indicating by the height to which it had grown that Mr. Cattistock's dwelling was at least a hundred years old. It was a solid, but quite small, Georgian building, covered with a rather desolate frontage of cream-coloured cement. In fact this cement was so weather-stained, and in some places so much of it was peeling off, that it was an agreeable shock to Magnus to find the head of the Cattistock and Frampton Brewery and of the Cattistock Stone Company living in such a place.

A white-faced little old woman in a black dress and apron, but wearing no cap, opened the door to him now; and the moment he was in the passage, taking off his overcoat and laying down his hat and stick, he knew that the inside of Cattistock's house possessed the same curious appeal to his senses as the outside. In what did this appeal lie? When he had been seated for a few minutes in the room that the owner of the house called his study, and had talked for a while with the great man, he came to a very singular conclusion. It was characteristic of Magnus when confronted by a new human presence, especially when surrounded by its own especial background and its own psychic atmosphere, to give himself up, without any ulterior purpose, to a purely disinterested analysis of the whole phenomenon. In the formulation of his verdict now, upon the financier and his home, Magnus decided that the quality which appealed to him so much was due to a very singular cause — or rather to conjunction of two causes — namely, that the astonishing fellow had the concentrated, sleepless obsession about money of an impassioned miser and that the only woman about the place was the old servant who had let him in.

"It is," Magnus thought, "the absence of a dominant imaginative passion that makes the aura of a house so intolerable; and mistresses are like lightning-conductors: they absorb the imaginative passions of men."

Cattistock was in one sense easier to get on with than he had anticipated, while in another sense he was more difficult. Magnus had expected to be treated in a brusque, offhand manner, made to feel in fact his social unimportance, compared with the richest man in Weymouth; but instead of this he found himself, after the first few minutes, being deferred to with a courteous and interested tact, as if his views on the matter of Benny's education were of so complicated a value that they had to be approached delicately, indirectly, tentatively, as a respectful outsider would approach the reserved experience of an acknowledged expert. This attitude was such a change from anything that Magnus had ever known in the tone of his pupils' parents that it very soon completely disarmed him and he found himself talking to the man not only more freely than he was wont to talk about his occupation but with more diffidences, hesitations, waverings, indecisions about the whole thing than he had ever before realized existed in his mind with regard to it.

But all the while this colloquy was proceeding, Magnus was secretly struggling to define more clearly to himself his surprising conclusion that what appealed to him so strongly about this house was due to the fact that it had no mistress, and that its master, for all his daring financial schemes, had something of that romantic intensity of a miser's psychology which like all great passions possesses its own especial dignity.

Answering Cattistock's questions as he sat opposite him by the fire of this shabby room whose bookcases contained as far as he could see little else but leather-bound magazines, directories, dictionaries, and encyclopedias, he had ample opportunity to take in every nuance of the man's personal appearance. And his impression of him became still more significant when, as the talk began to centre upon Benny's difficult disposition, Cattistock got up from his chair and began walking up and down the room. The man looked about forty; but his hair had grown prematurely thin and grey, though it was easy to see from its peculiar shade — he wore what was left of it parted carefully in the middle of his broad low forehead — that it had been in his youth of a light straw-colour. The whole weight of his character lay in his chin, which resembled the pictures of so many of our military leaders, being indicative of immense reserves of massive, stubborn power rather than of any excess of nervous recklessness. Cattistock's chin seemed always bristling with sharp thick light-coloured hairs. He shaved carefully; but nothing seemed able, after a few hours, to prevent this forward-jutting feature from growing rough and hirsute. His chin came near, indeed, to being a deformity: and on the right side of his lower jaw, where it projected a little beyond the upper, was a noticeable mole or birthmark upon which grew a tuft of hair still lighter and still more bristly than the rest. His ears were unusually neat, and grew close to his head; while his eyes which were small and steady had a way of remaining fixed, in a look that was at once a fighting look and a kindly look, upon the person or the object he was regarding. This stare of the man's seemed to conceal a queer abstracted reserve, as if what concerned him was not the character of his interlocutor, or the nature of the object, but some interior "substance" within them both, which he was calculating how to employ for purposes of his own.

As Magnus watched him walking up and down that unstudious study, with its faded carpet, its threadbare rug, its ancestral portraits, so dark and neglected as to be almost indistinguishable, he noticed how the man had a trick of clasping his hands behind his back and thrusting his chin forward as he walked; and he noticed, too, that he walked in jerks, as if consciously pushing his way through serried ranks of antagonists.

It was when, after a while, he rang the bell and ordered the old servant to bring some glasses and biscuits, that Magnus was confirmed in his impression about his having the temperament of a miser; for it was only after closing the door upon that old woman and standing with his chin thrust out and his eyes on the door till the sound of her retreating steps died away, that he produced a bunch of keys from his pocket and carefully selecting one of them went to a bureau-cupboard and cautiously opened it, kneeling down on the carpet the better to investigate its contents. To the nostrils of Magnus was wafted from this dark aperture over the shoulders of the kneeling man a mellow fragrance of ancient liquor; but it was clear that the master of Peninsular Lodge was weighing and calculating down there as to which of the half-empty bottles to bring out.

“The back of his head,” thought Magnus, “is desperately acquisitive; but it isn’t meanly acquisitive. He certainly carries his mania to a pathological extreme. But I like him much better than I ever thought I should. How excited Curly will be to hear about all this!”

The whiskey that was finally brought out to be shared between them was dispensed generously enough. In fact the half-empty bottle was nearly empty before it was returned to the cupboard. Into the cupboard it had gone, however, before there was the sound of the stopping of a car in the road outside followed by a great scrambling and confusion on the garden-path.

“Why, the Doctor’s come here *with* him!” cried Cattistock moving to the door.

But the door was flung open before he reached it and into the room rushed a pale-faced, thin, excited boy clutching in his arms a small yellow dog. Behind the boy came a clean-shaven, unassuming, reserved man, about fifty years old, who produced on Magnus an impression that was very difficult for him to articulate to himself. There was something about the new-comer’s eyes that gave him the feeling that the man was living in another world, but the Doctor’s trick of preserving his dignity by a queer kind of furtive self-depreciation jarred on the teacher’s nerves. The little boy broke off in the mid-rush of an excited speech to his father when he saw Magnus. With his hands still clutching the small dog in his arms he stared at his prospective tutor with wide-open mouth and round astonished eyes.

“This is Mr. Muir, Doctor,” said Cattistock hurriedly, and then to Magnus he added, “and this is my brother-in-law, Dr. Brush, who has been taking Benny off my hands today."

Magnus and the Doctor exchanged polite bows from where they stood while the master of the house, peering into the passage with out-thrust chin, as though to be sure that poor Lizzie Chant, who had been his nurse in the old days and would have given her life for him, was not loitering about for no good, shut the door with emphatic deliberation.

"That's how undertakers shut doors," thought Magnus. "At least that's how the one did, who came to Penn House to measure my father for his coffin."

Benny's flow of nervous explanation was now resumed while Dr. Brush sat down by the fire, a melancholy smile hovering about his thin lips. These weary smiles of this silent man were like those of some priestly autocrat whose executive burden has been increased by some secret mental strain.

It was when Cattistock approached his son and was — as far as Magnus could see — merely attempting to stroke the dog in the child's arms that a flash of blind fury convulsed the boy's face and he kicked the man sharply and malignantly on the shin. Magnus was astonished at his host's behaviour at this moment; for he had caught the thud of that vicious kick and knew it must have hurt him sharply. But Cattistock merely seized the child by the wrists and pulled him to the door which he flung open, calling "Lizzie! Lizzie!" The old woman, who could not have been far off, turned up at once; and there were screams and scoldings and barkings and every kind of hullabaloo as all three of them, the boy, the yellow dog, and Lizzie, struggled and clattered up the echoing staircase to the landing above.

"I expect you can see like a map how all this happened, Dogberry," began the Doctor, as soon as they were alone. "My man Murphy — Benny didn't like the look of him in his white apron — was carrying the dog to the kennels when it got away from him, and as chance would have it, ran right between the legs of our little Ben; when, as you can see how it *would* be, the fat was in the fire.”

The Doctor turned back to the hearth; and Magnus sat down while Cattistock continued pacing the room. There was a moment’s silence in the study of Peninsular Lodge, broken only by the tread of its owner as he strode up and down, his hands behind his back. The casual mention of the assistant “Murphy”, in his “white apron”, had started the imagination of the Latin teacher upon a very sinister train of thought.

“This man is a vivisector,” he said to himself, while a sickening sensation of anger and disgust took possession of him. “It’s all wrong,” he thought. “They ought not to be allowed to touch dogs.”

It would almost seem as if Cattistock had read the tutor’s thoughts, for he presently paused in his perambulation of the room to suggest that when Magnus was driven home by and by he should drop Dr. Brush on his way.

“For the truth is,” he went on, as he saw the look on the teacher’s face, “we people in Weymouth don’t realize what we’ve got here in our Brush Home.”

It occurred to Magnus to wonder how it came about that a man as parsimonious as the owner of Peninsular Lodge clearly was had ever arrived at being a patron of modern pathological institutions. But it was evident that his relative’s flattery was anything but pleasing to the man by the fire; for Magnus now caught upon Daniel Brush’s face the only expression he had yet seen there that pleased him at all. The great Pathologist had suddenly begun to look as abashed and uncomfortable as a youth who is praised in public by his schoolmaster. But in spite of what he felt about this man’s dislike of praise Magnus found it difficult to look at him without an obscure horror.

"It's all wrong," he kept thinking. "They ought not to be allowed to touch dogs."

"It was my brother-in-law," remarked Cattistock, "who first mentioned your name to me. He tells me you did quite a lot for a lad who has been in the Home, a boy called Larry Zed; but you've probably been told that before! Well, Mr. Muir, won't you come upstairs and see whether you think you can make anything of *my* little idiot? Don't run off, Dan! I do so want you to show Mr. Muir the Home. It will impress him, I know."

Magnus felt dazed and confused as he followed his host upstairs. He was accusing himself for not having the courage to speak out all that he felt on the subject of vivisection. He tried now to shake off this feeling as he looked about him. That fascinating inkling he had had when he first entered the house began to be more confirmed than ever. Yes; this man, against whom he had heard the Jobber muttering inarticulate threats out of his wave-tossed boat, *was* a passionate money-saver. And what a curious thing that the violent prejudice against him which he'd accepted from his father and which applied to the fellow as representing the Cattistock and Frampton Brewery and the Cattistock Stone Company should be dissipated almost completely by the sight of this faded, dilapidated, neglected miser's house!

The carpets upon the stairs and upon the landing were what Miss Le Fleau would have called "a sight", and as for the doors and the woodwork and the window-sills, they had lost all trace of the paint and varnish that supposedly must once have adhered to them. And yet the house, although so lamentably faded, was spotlessly clean.

"Lizzie Chant must be perpetually brushing and scrubbing," he thought, as he followed his host's acquisitive skull down a long passage.

"I've brought Mr. Muir to see you, who's going to do your lessons with you, Ben," the man now asseverated, as he opened the door to his son's play-room.

They found Benny standing close up to the shining fire-place — evidently the room had once been the boy's nursery — where, taking some little biscuits from a plate on the mantelpiece, he was tossing them into the air for the amusement and education of his new pet, who was trying in vain, with little barks of excitement, to catch them as they descended. The rug in front of the hearth was littered with broken biscuits, some of which had been trodden into it by the boy's heels. The appearance of the room struck Magnus as very singular; and well it might. What the room contained were, in fact, all the elder Cattistock's school and college possessions; objects retained all these years by this passionate moneymaker with a pathetic intensity of possessiveness, and only lately brought down from the storeroom in the attic — probably under the advice of Dr. Brush — to inspire the little boy with manly instincts and sporting ambitions. Since Cattistock himself had been good at nothing, except algebra and rifle-shooting, at either school or college, there was something quaint, if not touching, to see the proud satisfaction with which he had arranged these memorials of his own youth against every wall of his child's room. There were ancient fishing-rods and air-guns; there were old cricket-bats and hockey-sticks. An extravagantly tall rocking-horse — for it was clear that Mr. Cattistock's parents had spent money freely on such toys — stood with its tail against a broken bagatelle-board which was propped up against the wall; and near it Magnus could see a big archery-target into which had been stuck, in some whim of the little boy, an arrow with vermilion feathers. There was no sign of a bow; but leaning against the side of this target were a pair of rusty foils that looked different from the other things and had an air of holding them all in aristocratic contempt. Save for the blazing fire and the old-fashioned nursery fire-guard the chamber was poorly furnished. On the right of the fire-place, where one would have expected a comfortable chair, stood a brass-studded chest with the lid propped open, inside of which Magnus caught a glimpse of what looked like an ancient tennis-net.

“Well, Benny!” said his father, fixing upon his son that formidable stare which was so characteristic of him, and which seemed to isolate the object of his contemplation from everything else in the vicinity, “I see you’re teaching your pet to catch. You’ll have to give him a name, you know. Every dog has a name.”

“He *can’t* catch,” replied the child peevishly, without answering his father’s look. “He misses every time.”

The financier approached the fire-place and placing his hands on the gilt rail of the tall fire-guard glanced down sideways at the yellow dog. Save for the brightly-burning flames the only light in the room was a small lamp upon a distant desk; and Magnus, who had seated himself upon the arm of one of the few chairs in the place, became the witness now of a curious scene in that flickering glow, where the father tried to coax from the boy some sort of attention by sharing in this game of breaking biscuits at arm’s length above the jumping and snapping animal, who certainly showed himself no adept at catching, and who only snuffed at the pieces he missed as they fell to the floor.

As Magnus watched them together in that warm fire-light there came over him a feeling that he had grown to be very familiar with: the feeling of the impenetrable obscurity of what human beings call “the future”; a feeling that grew so dark and dense that it was like an actual substance of pitch blackness. Somewhere within that blackness, into which an inexorable force was pushing them all forward, waited the groupings, the encounters, the issues and upshots, of what was transpiring now. There, in that thick darkness — not to be pierced, however sharply this, little dog barked —

waited the future, prosperous or tragic, of this man with the prominent chin and of this child with that white nervous face. There, in that darkness, waiting to be revealed, was his own fate with Curly; that very afternoon's meeting with her, if it really came about, and all their subsequent life. How much would he dare to demand of Cattistock? The glimpse he had had into the man's parsimonious habits was anything but promising. But still — and he let his optimistic fantasy run riot now — if this little boy got fond of him, and the child certainly was a much more interesting type than he was accustomed to, who could tell? Why, he might keep this job till Benny was old enough for the university. He certainly didn't seem the kind of boy they could possibly send to a Public School. What was in their minds now, as they fooled with that dog in the flickering fire-light? But who could pierce the dense black darkness that lay across their path and across his own?

"How monotonous," he thought, "my life has been until now! Day after day with father, year after year — and now day after day at Miss Le Fleau's. I suppose I could go on just the same all the rest of my life — as long as I was seeing Curly. He's always with me, father is! My hands, as I rub them now up and down my knees — they're *his* hands; the knuckles the same, the wrinkles the same! What *would* he think if he knew I was going to marry Curly? *Do you really love the young woman, my boy?* That's what he'd say! And I'll tell him the truth. I'd tell him that I can't imagine giving her up. I'd tell him that she's at the back of my thoughts, wherever I go, whatever I do — always there — mixed up with everything. O father, father, I wish you *were* here, for me to explain to you how it is!"

His meditations were interrupted by a decisive move on the part of his host. Cattistock suddenly straightened his back, patted his son on the head, and went to the door.

"Come down in a minute, Muir, will you? I want you to give Dan a lift. He won't keep you at that place. He's too busy. But you ought to see the sort of thing it is." He paused with his hand on the door-handle. "About the matter of hours, Muir? Could you come out to lunch here every day and stay till five? I presume you could crowd your other pupils into the morning — with a little adjustment?"

Magnus murmured an affirmative; but it confused him, being rushed like this. But of course he *could* manage it, if he got up a bit earlier. And the man said "till five"; so he'd be free about his usual time.

"And with regard to salary," went on Cattistock. This word made Magnus' heart beat fast. Would he offer him enough? And, if he didn't, would he dare— "The fairest thing for both of us, as I see it," said Cattistock, "will be to leave this point undecided till the end of the first week — then we shall know better how you and Ben hit it off. See you downstairs in a minute, Mr. Muir!"

With this he was gone; and Magnus was left alone with the boy and the dog. The child's face assumed a completely different expression when the sound of his father's steps died away. He came hurriedly forward, pushing back the little dog impatiently when it went on jumping up. He laid his hand on the lappet of Magnus' coat and pulled it towards him in order to make its wearer lower his head.

"His name is going to be 'Yellow'," he whispered. "That's what I'm going to call him — *Yellow* — only I shan't tell father, for he'd think it a silly name. Now you've come I shan't have to go for drives with Uncle Dan any more, shall I? Wait a moment — Down, Yellow, *down,* I tell you! — I want to ask you something, Mr. Muir."

Thrusting away the dog irritably and violently, the child ran to the door, opened it a little, and peered out. While this went on Magnus experienced a strong revulsion against his whole predicament. As had happened to him earlier in the day a cold shrinking from all this activity shot like a shuttle of dark ice across the depths of his heart.

"What I'd really like," he thought, "would be to go on to the end of my days enjoying Homer and my walks by the sea, and going out to see Curly at Upwey. Of course I want to have her to myself by day and night, but — but—"

The shivering recoil in the depths of his being which accompanied his contemplation of Benny spying for eavesdroppers resembled the tearing of stiff paper in the centre of his stomach. And this sturdy paper, that caused him such a twinge while it was ripped up, *was his father.* Yes, it was the protection of his father, the security of his father, his daily walks with his father, the way his father used to sit so close to the fire-bars at Penn House, warming his old shins and rubbing his legs with his wrinkled fingers, the indescribable safety, like the feeling anyone has who hugs himself in bed on a freezing night, that the sight of his father sitting opposite him drinking his tea always gave him, it was all this that was now being torn in his inmost vitals, and letting in a draught of cold outer space! The child had come back to his side now and was actually whispering something in his ear.

"Don't, Yellow! Lie down when I tell you to! Don't *do* that! When I say lie down I mean lie down!"

"He doesn't understand," murmured Magnus, when Yellow received quite a severe cuff. "He thinks it's still a game."

"He'll soon learn it's *not* a game! Do you hear what I say, Yellow? Lie *down* when I tell you and *stay* lied down!"

But the boy's whispering was more exasperating to Magnus than anything Yellow could do.

"I can't hear you," he said. "I'm a little deaf. You *must* speak right out."

Unabashed by this rebuke — for he seemed to know by an infallible instinct where he was safe with this stranger — the child began a long, hurried, proud, shy, nervous recital about some picture of two girls that he had got hidden away somewhere. Magnus had sunk down by this time into the only arm-chair in the room. This had been the accustomed refuge, by his study-hearth, of Dog Cattistock's father, a silent man from the banks of the Stour, when his family became too much for him, and a certain musty air of a whimsical and scholarly escape from the brawling voices of the world emanated still from its ancient and fragrant leather.

"Hidden, eh? Well, we all have to keep *some* hiding-places and treasure-boxes, Benny! I've got a picture of a girl, too, hidden away in my room. Perhaps I'll show it to you one of these days when your father lets you come and see where I live."

Benny came forward very close and leaning against Magnus' knees pressed a cold little hand over the teacher's eyes.

"Keep them shut," he cried, "while I get it... *tight* shut, mind... on your word and honour!"

The pressure of the eager hand was then removed; and Magnus was left from his contact with the child's clothes with a faint fragrance as of pine-needles. He could hear no sound; and he obediently kept his eyes closed; but he was intensely conscious, as he sat there waiting, of his physical longing for Curly, which embodied itself now in a particular sweetness unlike anything else. He had come to know this vague, delicious feeling well; and whenever it surrounded him he became braver and more adventurous.

"The Brush Home," he thought, "is *somewhere* on the Downs. I've seen it often though I can't recall exactly where. I won't stop today. I'll tell him I'll come another time. I pray she'll wait for me at the Wishing Well."

He was roused from his trance by the renewed pressure of the child's form against him; and that same sense of pine-needles. The touch of the child blended with his craving for the girl and he began to feel that he had exaggerated the dangers of the plunge he was taking into the unknown.

"It's from the Melcombe Circular I cut them out," Benny was explaining to him now, while he unfolded a scrap of paper. "Aren't they nice, Mr. Muir? You see what it says? They're acting in the Regent with Jerry Cobbold. They're dancers; that's why they're showing their legs. They're my greatest secret. So you mustn't tell anyone I've got them. Aren't they nice? They're sisters — Tissty and Tossty! *That's* Tissty and *that's* Tossty. Do you think they'd mind if they knew I had them? No one's ever seen them but you. They're—"

His quick ears had caught his father's step outside the door and he was off in a flash. Magnus got up from his chair and when Cattistock entered he must have been surprised to see teacher and pupil standing on their feet with the width of the floor between them. But he made no comment.

"My brother-in-law's ready for you, Mr. Muir," he remarked, without advancing into the room. "Put your jacket on again, Ben," he added addressing his son. "We'll take your new pet for a stroll presently. If you keep him out of doors enough Lizzie won't mind him."

It was a quarter to one by the mahogany clock in the hall of Peninsular Lodge as Magnus went out with the founder of the Brush Home. He had arranged to meet Curly at half-past twelve at the Well, have a light lunch at the Inn, where they were both well known and accepted as a respectable couple, and then spend the afternoon, if it turned out fine, walking round the prehistoric, grass-covered earth-works called Maiden Castle, whose turfy ramparts rose up on the north of Upwey and were skirted by the Dorchester Road. Since it was Saturday, both he and Curly — who helped in the winter in one of the small village shops — had the whole day at their disposal; and the idea of taking her to Maiden Castle, where, since his childhood, his father had taken *him,* gave him a peculiar satisfaction.

Neither he nor Daniel Brush said very much to each other as they drove along the uplands to the remote place in the heart of The Downs where predecessors of the doctor had erected their sanitarium. The whole expanse of the West Bay could be seen in glimpses between the rounded hills and Magnus noted a change in the weather since he left Brunswick Terrace; for the sun was visible now through the mist, but so softened and blurred that he could gaze at its lemon-coloured orb without any hurt to his eyes. His companion seemed so meek and quiet and courteous, and his own head was so full of optimistic hopes as to what would come of this Cattistock business, that he began to experience, as they drove along, a sensation that he knew well. This was a queer feeling that he had suddenly grown to be of enormous stature, like a giant being borne along that portentous coast-line, with the yellow wintry sun above the Atlantic riding parallel with him. He felt as if he had only to stretch out his hand and clutch this great lemon-coloured orb. He began to rise completely above all those timidities that had so fettered his spirit. He felt strong to cope with his fate, to marry or not marry *as he chose,* and to treat his Father's majestic ghost as an equal, not as a cringing dependent. When, however, they arrived at the group of buildings over which his companion ruled this expansion of his nature was quickly pricked like one of those coloured balloons they sold on the sands at Weymouth.

What was now the Brush Home was hidden away in so out of the world a spot, that very few among what Homer calls "articulately-speaking men" who lived in Weymouth had ever been near it, though most people had heard of it. As its massive structures raised themselves now before his eyes

Magnus could not resist his sick aversion and distaste. Merely to imagine that those red-brick buildings contained animals in the process of being vivisected, and contained also hopelessly insane people whose death would be a comfort and relief to everyone concerned, was something that gave the spot an atmosphere of such horror that he fidgetted in his seat and felt sick in his stomach as if he were going to see an execution.

"But what a thing it is," he thought, "that these Downs should shelter a place so appalling that a normal grown-up person should shiver to approach it!"

"You are looking at my flower-beds?" said Daniel Brush quietly. "Yes, I had ten pounds' worth of bulbs planted on this place this autumn. I'll have in time one of the best gardens for Daffodils east of the Scilly Island. I have specialized in Daffodils, Mr. Muir, ever since I first had a garden of my own."

But all the gentlemanliness in Magnus deserted him now. He could only sit in that car stupefied, confounded, mum. He began to feel like an animal; and he felt that he understood now that shuddering panic-terror which makes the eye of an animal shrink away from the eye of a man. It does not shrink away from that eye's commanding nobility. It shrinks from that eye's cold-blooded rational cruelty.

If Science had chosen a remote valley in the Chalk Downs wherein to build her sanitarium she had chosen one of the most featureless and expressionless of all the valleys in those hills. The place had been so vigorously restored — for the doctor, although he looked much older, was really a younger man than Magnus — that all about it there was a smell of cement and mortar and fresh-cut boardings upon the air. The more solid portions of these additions were of a pale red brick; but what struck the attention of any stranger was the amount of iron work and glass work that had been used. It was doubtless the presence of all this iron and glass, combined with so much whitewash, that gave to the Institution an air of such sanitary immaculateness that it made the very motes in the afternoon sun seem like disorderly intruders; and the very droppings of the starlings on the galvanized roofs seem like an insurrection of Nature.

When the car stopped at the door of Dr. Brush's private house, which was a neat, trim, sham-Gothic villa surrounded by all the marks of a carefully laid-out garden, it seemed as if the man had actually read Magnus' thoughts, for he showed not the slightest sign of asking him into the house. All he did was to shake him warmly by the hand and say in a friendly voice, "I hope we'll meet again at Peninsular Lodge, Mr. Muir; and I hope I'll have to give you the prize for being a better psychiatrist than I've been with young Benny."

Unwilling that Cattistock's servant — honest and sympathetic though he seemed — should be the witness of his meeting with Curly, Magnus waited till the doctor was well out of sight and then told the man that he did not want to be driven back to Brunswick Terrace.

"Where do 'ee want for to go, Sir? Master told me to drive 'ee home. But may-be, since we're so far on the way, you'd like to go to Dorchester? Dorchester be a lively place on Saturday night."

"No, no," said Magnus. "I'll tell you where I want to go. I want you to leave me at the Old Church in Upwey. I've got... to see someone there... and if you'll just take me... to the gate..."

Do what he could, he couldn't say this simple thing in a natural way; and this very inability caused an unpleasant sensation to rush to his cheek-bones.

"Upwey Church? Surely, Mister! I'll have 'ee along o' there in less than an hour; if me old car doesn't turn nasty on me."

They were scarcely out of sight of these modernized buildings, when Magnus, who had taken his seat by the chauffeur's side after the doctor's back was turned, enquired of the man what he himself thought of the Brush Sanitarium.

"Would *you* sooner be sent there," he asked him, "rather than to the ordinary County Asylum?"

The man's brown eyes gleamed at him in a look full of subtle intelligence.

"Round about here," he said, "amongst such as be simple folk — only ye mustn't let on as I told 'ee so — they calls Doctor's place 'Hell's Museum'. Tis their ignorance. But 'tis because of things they hears tell of; and because of catching sight of they lunatics."

Magnus was silent. One of those icy, dark, wedge-like panic-terrors, that seem to visit sedentary people so much more frequently than active people, struck suddenly down into his very vitals. He had seen himself as a patient of Dr. Brush!

"Suppose it *were* my destiny," he thought, "to spend the last twenty years of my life in that place? *Hell's Museum!* Trust our Dorset cottagers to hit the nail on the head! That is the worst of this sort of Science. It feeds a diabolical curiosity. Its passion for pathology is not a passion for healing, but a passion for experiment."

And in his mind, as the car followed the windings of a white Chalk lane through the heart of the Downs, he began to feel how easily he, like poor Sylvanus Cobbold, might develop some anti-social mania that would bring him into trouble with the authorities. He stretched out his body as tight and taut as he could in his cramped quarters, as if by this physical movement to shake away the thought of Hell's Museum, but this irrational dread of being handed over to the Murphys of the Brush Home began to mingle with his nervousness about marrying Curly and presented itself to him as just the very sort of unexpected disaster that he might have predicted would occur, now that by going to Cattistock's he had deliberately broken up his peaceful routine at Miss Le Fleau's.

It had proved to be a rather complicated cross-country route that young Chant had to follow to reach Upwey Church. The valleys in this quarter of the Downs were narrow and winding, and the grassy slopes between them quite inaccessible to motors. It turned out, therefore, that it was a long time after the time Magnus had fixed to meet Curly at the Well, that he finally approached, alone and on his own feet, this legended spot. As he followed the little lane that led to the famous fountain — one of the most popular Wishing Wells in the West of England — his heart began to beat faster. He could see Curly's head vividly in his mind's eye now, with the wavy, flaxen hair crossing her brow, and rippling down by her soft neck, making the delicacy of her skin seem so miraculously transparent. He could see her deep violet-blue eyes with their long dark eyelashes so strangely contrasting with the white shell-like fragility of her cheeks. He began to feel that wave of intoxicating sweetness, as if a cloud of smoke from a bonfire of fragrant leaves had assumed a girl's shape, which always overpowered him when her image excited his senses in a particular way. Magnus concealed somewhere within him an intense and satyrish obsession for Curly's body, an obsession he had never felt before for any feminine form; and with this obsession, that resembled the tantalized craving of the starved senses of a monk, the girl wantonly and deliberately played. Not that Curly Wix was a designing or a cruel young woman; for she was both simple-minded and tender-hearted, but her own senses were left calm and unruffled by Magnus' caresses and it apparently seemed to her the proper, suitable, and traditional method of treating her admirer that she should be always leading him on and never allowing him any sustained satisfaction. It is likely enough that it was this intense vein of satyrishness in him, never aroused by any girl before, that made him feel he *must* marry Curly. He had been full of dreads and fears and alarms from the first hour he had dared to speak to her; but this craving for the way her limbs were moulded and the way her head drooped from her neck, and the way she would sometimes let him, and sometimes refuse to let him, take her on his knee, had been always strong enough to sweep aside these fears. Would she be there still? he thought. Would he find her sitting in that little shelter, as he had seen her do so often, long before he'd had the courage to speak to her?

He didn't even glance at the Well as he came up. For once in their mythical history these waters were totally and utterly ignored by a human consciousness approaching them! The Well was no longer there. Through a space peopled by no Well, but by the rough lintel of a classic arbour and by a laughing Curly, as she jumped up to meet him, he moved hurriedly round the front of the erection — only to find the spot quite deserted! He stood taking breath and looking round with weary hopelessness. Then his eye caught sight of a fragment of white paper pinned to the rustic table where so often last summer — before he dared do anything more than watch her as he sat on the edge of the Well — he had seen her absorbed, or apparently absorbed in her book. He hurriedly unpinned this little missive. It contained the words:

"Tired of waiting! I don't like to go to Public House alone. I shall get some buns at Aunt Phem's and wait for you at Beech-Clump, top-bank, nearest Maiden."

For one beat of a half-second of time, as he crumpled up this paper, the Wishing Well re-filled its place in space; but only for the purpose of reflecting in its sacred waters the image of Curly eating Aunt Phem's buns under those leafless beeches. Not all the wild, desperate, humorous, cynical, furtive, fantastic, scandalous wishes that had been whispered in the ears of those waters could at that second of time endow them, for the only consciousness that gave them just then their human reality, with any other existence than to be the mirror of Curly, eating buns on “top-bank, nearest Maiden.”

He hurried off now, pressing the end of his stick into the soft, sun-thawed mud at the side of the lane and walking with steps that had grown almost fierce in their impatience, as he made for the long, upward-sloping cattle-drove that led, by a couple of miles’ winding detour, to the base of the prehistoric Camp. As soon as he was about half a mile from his objective, he began an eager attempt to distinguish his girl’s shape against that far-off clump of trees. She would be wearing, he knew, a certain long grey jacket which she had often explained to him had been purchased not in Weymouth but at a sale in Dorchester; and he found it strange that she apparently chose to remain concealed among those trees rather than to wave to him from the open hill-side. He knew well that his own approaching form must have been visible to her for the last ten minutes. Why, then, did not she stand where he could see her and wave to him? How well he knew that field-path, up there, leading to the base of Maiden Castle! How often he had climbed that hill with his father! Yes, he knew that ridge, that turf-battlemented ridge, now looming up behind those beech-trees, at every season of the year. Most of all did he people it with Marble Whites and Skippers, those local coast-line butterflies, that always seemed to gather about their wings in the hot summer afternoons, as he caught sight of them fluttering through the aromatic fragrance of the crushed thyme that would rise from his steps, the very breath and spaciousness of the blue sky and the distant sea! But as he stared up impatiently at that ridge now, panting as he climbed, and praying that Curly would stop concealing herself, he could not help, even in his eagerness over the girl, recalling a sensation he always had as he ascended Maiden Castle, a sensation as if he were voyaging through the immense ether upon a fragment of Matter that was not shaped as the ordinary heavenly bodies are, but was just a ribbed and buttressed mass of turf-grown chalk, journeying through space, under the guidance of a super-mundane pilot, with a mysterious end in view.

And all this while, like an evil blood-clot upon his brain, the thought kept coming back to him of the vivisection he felt sure went on in one of those buildings of iron and glass and pale brick, where Dr. Brush studied pathology among the inmates of Hell's Museum, and he suddenly began telling himself a story about the spirits of the old tribes who had raised this huge earth-fortress, and how the captive souls from the Brush Home might at least in the liberation of sleep come flocking out through the night to Maiden Castle and be there protected and safe, along with a great ghostly pack of crouching, whimpering, fawning, cringing, torture-released dogs, all crowding close behind these phantom-warriors, as wave after wave of their enemies poured up the slope, trying in vain to repossess themselves of them.

He was never destined to catch a single glimpse of Curly after all his long climb, till he had made his way between the tall trunks of the beeches, among whose smooth pillars the vaporous yellow sunlight wavered from across the Western Bay; and when he finally did get to her, and when at last he held her in his arms, he discovered to his surprise that her cold cheeks were wet with tears.

"What is it, Curly? What is it, my treasure?" and he began pouring out to her a broken and incoherent account of his adventures that day. "Don't 'ee mind, my Sweet!" he kept repeating, as he took breath in the rush of his jumbled story, “don’t ‘ee mind too much! You know why it was that I snatched at this chance. You *do* know, don’t you? It’ll mean we shall have enough — not much, but enough — for us to get married.”

She was submissive to the ardent embrace in which he held her, and she let him, as they leant against one of those tall tree-trunks, kiss away the tears from her cheeks; but though it was a resigned form that lay against his beating heart, her girl’s breasts were cold and lifeless, her girl’s limbs limp and unresponsive, and her large, dark-fringed eyes, in that wintry light, never once looked directly into his. Over the wide landscape her gaze wandered, over the roofs of Upwey, over the valley of Abbotsbury, over that abrupt cleft in the hills, where to the south-east it was just possible to catch a sight of a fragment of the sea reaching away to St. Alban’s Head. All her accustomed wantonness and mischief, all her teasing provocations seemed to have been driven out of her by those implacable and decisive words, “not much; but enough for us to get married.”

As she had made the long ascent from the village to this spot the girl had set herself to think as she had never thought before in her life. And all the while she was waiting for him she went on thinking. Sitting there under those trees in her grey jacket and grey scarf, hugging her knees with one hand and nibbling her penny bun from the other, her soft shell-like face, with a tremulous shadow thrown across it by her tight-fitting velvet hat, bore an expression of intense, puzzled, troubled, unhappy thinking. Now and then as she watched his dark figure from a mile away, looking like a fly on a thin knife-blade as he followed that chalky cattle-path, she changed her position so as the better to be concealed. At such times she would stand up, and turning her back to the misty yellow sun as it slanted towards her across the West Bay she threw an intensely watchful eye upon a certain strip of the Dorchester Road which at that point was clearly visible. There was a little round pond by the road-hedge just there; and the watery sunlight fell upon this pond, giving it a faint, sad lustre, like the memory of some felicitous occurrence so long since departed as to be almost forgotten.

"I told him it was a piece of silliness," she said in her heart, as she snatched these furtive glimpses of the Dorchester Road. "I told him Mr. Muir and me were as good as married; even if we *have* plighted no troth as yet! O Sip, O my dear, dear love, how could 'ee do such a thing? How could 'ee think to want to trouble my heart by spying on him and me on this day of all days?"

Then Curly would once more retreat to her hiding-place under one of the beeches and once more hug her knees, rumpling up her grey jacket, pressing her grey skirt against her shins, and taking another bite of her bun. And ever and always, like a black fly upon a blade directed towards her heart, this middle-aged stranger who considered himself already married to her, this book-worm with whom she had absolutely nothing in common, kept coming on and on and on!

Well did Curly know that Simon Pym Ballard, or Sippy Ballard, who had found her out and stolen her maidenhead long before Magnus had dared to breathe a word to her, would never, under any conceivable upshot, consent to marry her. To do him justice he made no bones about his reluctance in the matter. From the very start, when he had first swept her off her feet, he had made it clear that she must expect absolutely nothing from him. Sippy Ballard had his own whimsical way of emphasizing this necessity; and some deep feminine impulse in her made her secretly derive — though she would never have admitted this to herself — a self-lacerating delight in feeling herself to be his slave, his plaything, his chattel, to be used for his pleasure without any return.

She had eaten half her bun now; but with nothing to wash it down, and with her heart so agitated — for it would be just what Sippy would be likely to do, put of pure wickedness, to drive out in that little touring-car, simply to spy upon this meeting; and then mock his rival with her when they were next alone — how could she swallow any more of this dry, sticky stuff? And she threw away the rest, with an impatient fling of her arm. "That's for the birds," she said aloud. But the phrase carried no mental or physical image with it, either of birds or of anything else. All that it carried with it was a passionate desire to tell Magnus right out that she could not possibly marry him. And when he asked her why, simply to say, "Because *my boy,* my clever, naughty, reckless, handsome boy, thinks you're too funny-looking, and too queer, and too fussy, for any girl to put up with!"

"Don't 'ee mind too much, my Treasure," Magnus kept murmuring. "I've never seen your face more beautiful than it looks at this moment. *Little* Curly! Oh, please don't turn your head away! Don't be sad any more! I swear I couldn't help it."

Under that long grey jacket, bought in Dorchester at the sale, and under the short grey skirt, put on especially for this walk, the soft pliant form remained passive and unresisting. But the girl had succeeded, by making a few surreptitious steps between his eager claspings, in regaining a position from which, by looking over his shoulder, she could see that strip of road below. The wintry sunlight had left the water of the little pond now, but the white surface of the road was just the same; empty, but heaving with expectation at each long breath she took while the mocking face of her young seducer swam before her gaze.

By reason of the fact that his words about their marriage and his news about Cattistock had set her whole nature in a turmoil, and by reason, too, that at any second she expected to see Sippy Ballard's car cross that strip of road and to hear his familiar horn, so different from other horns, Curly found herself yielding to the caresses of the teacher more submissively than she had ever done before.

Thrilled by this passivity, which on all previous occasions had been so quickly interrupted by some roguish gesture, and mistaking her silent docility for maidenly consent, Magnus let his embraces — though, to say the truth, from the point of view of Mr. Ballard they would have been innocent enough — grow more and more confident. It seemed to him indeed, as his hands moved from one sweet pressure to another, and as his lips played over her cold cheek and warm neck, for she still kept her head turned away, that he had never, in his life before, known what it was to hold an unresisting girl in his arms. His feelings were like those of an escaped monk, who, in his flight from the cloister, finds a friendly country-maid, upon whom he lavishes the pent-up adoration of a life-time. That it should be himself, Magnus Muir, or rather that nameless hidden self, that was the self of all his secretest feelings, who was now actually holding this incredibly lovely being in his hands, seemed to him too exciting to be true. What a miracle! What a mystery! That these soft curves which he pressed under the grey jacket were in very truth a young girl's breasts, such as he was always reading about in his classical poets — Oh, it seemed a thing beyond expectation! That these limbs — what god had moulded them? — a real girl's limbs, warm, alive, and so maddeningly sweet, should be for him to enjoy, even at the double remove of the skirt bought in St. Mary's Street and the jacket bought in Dorchester, was a paradise beyond all belief. And if Curly's body was so ravishing to him, thus protected and thus pressed against him as he leaned against a beech-trunk, what would it be like when she lay in bed with him, lay between him and the wall?

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra! What a queer sound was that coming up from the road? People were always starting new tricks with these noisy motors! Some Saturday folk, probably, going to the Dorchester market.

"Father, Father," his thoughts ran on, as, hugging her close to him still, his eyes wandered to the lowering ridge of Maiden Castle, "this new feeling shall never interfere with *you,* never come between *you* and me, never spoil those things that we have shared and shall always share together."

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra!

"Don't 'ee mind any more, little Curly, my having kept you so long. I couldn't help it! It was only for our marriage-sake I did it."

But the girl's whole being was concentrated now on concealing from him her breathless agitation over her lover's presence down there. She knew perfectly well that it was quite impossible for Sippy to see their two figures up here any more than it had been possible for Mr. Muir to see her while he was climbing the hill. That little pond down there must be, she thought, at least a quarter of a mile away and these beech-trunks made a safe shelter. She could see Sippy only too clearly; but Sippy couldn't possibly see her, and he was waiting now and imagining no doubt, with lively and mischievous intensity, this scene between Magnus and herself! All this while she knew well enough that if she stopped letting the teacher make love to her he might become aware that that car, standing there on the road beside the pond, contained an interested spectator.

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra!

How *could* he go on blowing that horn when he must know that sooner or later it would attract her companion's attention?

"It would be impossible for me," Magnus was thinking, "to feel a greater happiness than I feel now. Why do people make such a talk about consummation, when merely to hold her like this, even in such a thick jacket, is about as great an ecstasy as I could have?”

His eyes kept returning to her shell-transparent face, with its wavy cloud of flaxen hair escaping from beneath the brim of her velvet hat, and it was always with remorse for the long vigil he had given her, up here on this hill, that he caught the agitation in her expression. Holding her like this and attributing her agitation entirely to her anger at his delay, Magnus was suddenly conscious that by some re-shifting of the elements, as the vaporous sun descended into the West Bay, the fragment of that *other* bay, with its far-off glimpse of St. Alban’s Head, had taken on a peculiarly enchanted glow.

“I hadn’t thought,” he said to. himself, “that you could see so far from Maiden Castle; and I don’t believe you used to be able to. I don’t seem to remember Father’s pointing it out, and he’d have surely done that if you *could* see it. There must have been some clump of trees cut down lately or some embankment levelled, that’s made *that* speck of sea-horizon visible.”

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra!

“Everything in my life is reaching a head,” he thought, “and everything in my life has been mixed up with the Sea and with Father — How quiet Curly is. She lets me go on holding her as if she were in a trance! I expect that’s what girls feel when—”

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra!

“What’s wrong with that car down there? Why doesn’t it go away? Everything I feel is connected with the Sea and with Father. And now this ecstasy with this girl is mixed up with the Sea and with him. Those cowrie shells he used to tell me were used as money among savages, those shells — what *did* he call them, that were so transparent and brittle and made of mother-of-pearl? — and those pieces of *white* seaweed that he used to find in the rock-pools near Redcliff Bay, and the white sea-horses that he always used to show me, and say in his peculiar tone, ‘It’s blowing up for stormy weather tonight, Magnus, my boy,’ it is all these things that I’m feeling now as I hold Curly like this, and her hair’s exactly like that light on the sea — if it really *is* the sea over there!”

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra!

“Damn that motor-horn. But I know who’s got one just like that, and that’s Sippy Ballard. But *he* wouldn’t be making a fuss like this if his car broke down. I wonder if that car *has* broken down and they are making that noise for someone to come and help them?”

He let Curly go as this thought came into his head; but catching at her hand now, he clasped it tight in his own, and stood for a while motionless, staring at that strip of road, at that cold metallic-coloured little pond, at that open car with one solitary figure in it. It happened that the sun, although not yet sunk into the Atlantic, was low enough now to be lost behind a rack of clouds which extended along the whole western horizon. This sudden loss of the yellow sunlight, that had been giving its chief element of interest to that neutral winter’s day, had the effect of making it very much more difficult for Magnus — and even for Curly herself — to detect, at that distance, what was going on down there, in connection with that blurred and indistinct object beside that livid, steely-white pond. And something about the dying away of the sunlight, and the immediate chilliness that seemed to rise up from the dead beech-leaves at their feet, brought to Magnus’ mind, as he held her hand, a sharp, horribly clear memory of Benny Cattistock’s yellow dog and of those other dogs at the Brush Home who had no one to save them from the diabolical cruelty of scientific methods. What was happening to them now, those other dogs? *Was it over for the day,* this that they were daily subjected to, without even that remote chance of escape such as hares and foxes had, who are tormented by sportsmen?

“Science is far crueller than sport,” thought Magnus. “I’d far sooner be a Mallard shot by young Ballard when he goes duck-shooting on Lodmoor, than be a dog in the hands of Dr. Brush.”

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra!

“Ought I to — ought we to—” he began, “go down the hill, Curly, and see what’s wrong? I seem to have been hearing that noise for a long time. Look! There’s someone passing. There! They didn’t stop! So it *can’t* be serious.”

He was silent again, pressing the girl’s fingers, while Curly prayed in her heart that Sippy would go away.

“If mother didn’t get on my nerves to such an extent,” she thought, “and if only I *could* go on as we are, I’d tell Mr. Muir” — she still thought of him in her mind as Mr. Muir— “I didn’t like him enough to marry him. But, Oh, dear! — the comfort to be out of mother’s hands; and so quickly, too! It isn’t as if Mr. Muir wasn’t nice. He’s *very* nice. I do like him a lot.. and if I’m careful and not silly I can go on seeing Sip. In fact it’ll be easier to see him when I’m married... for mother hates the sight of him. I wish to goodness she’d never found out about him. That’s why she’s driving me to marry Mr. Muir. She thinks at any moment Sip might get me into trouble. She doesn’t know—” And Curly’s mind, ashamed in this point, as she was otherwise shameless over her treatment of “Mr. Muir”, recalled, with a shock of distaste the contraceptual devices so unblushingly forced upon her by her unscrupulous young lover.

“Because you were hurting me,” she replied sharply, when Magnus asked her why she suddenly pulled her fingers away.

“I didn’t mean — Curly, my Precious — I didn’t know that I — I was thinking of the days long ago when I used to come here with my father.”

Tirra-lirra! Tirra-lirra!

It was then, as he tried to take her hand again, and she refused it to him, that he caught a look on her face, which, for all his simplicity in dealing with women, it was hard to mistake — a look of intense nervous irritation.

“I’m sorry, Curly”, he murmured. “I forgot we could be seen from the road. Come on! Let’s go back now.”

But as she followed him down the hill she wondered if she *would* be able to see as much of Sip when she was married to this solemn, fussy man. And Magnus said to himself, as they began their long walk home, that men who can be thrillingly happy with their girls for more than a couple of hours are men who don’t worry about what these lovely beings have in their heads, or about what goes on in such places as the Brush Home.

Tirra-lirra! sounded triumphantly from the Dorchester Road.

“That car can go all right now, Curly,” he remarked.

“They generally can,” murmured Curly Wix with a sigh.

LODMOOR

THE HIGHWAY THAT STRETCHED OUT OF WEYMOUTH TO the east of Brunswick Terrace, and to the east of that great stone edifice known as High House, a highway that was called by the modest appellation of Preston Road — Preston being the first little hamlet it reached — began its long and stately approach to Winfrith and Wareham and Corfe Castle and Poole by skirting the edge of a wide expanse of salt marshes that had acquired the name of Lodmoor. All visitors to Weymouth remembered Lodmoor as a curious and arresting phenomenon amid their other impressions. Perhaps they did not give it much attention at the time; for the Preston Road is bounded on its southern flank by a picturesque, grey sea-wall and by the pebbly shore; but later it returned to their mind with what Thomas Hardy would call a taciturn congruity, and they then remembered how notably across its level expanse, if they debouched amid its peat-smelling cattle-paths, could be seen seaward, beyond the low roof of the Coast-Guard Station, the towering façade of the great cliff called the White Nose, and landward, above the grassy undulations of the Downs, the far-seen image of the White Horse.

Mid-way between the last houses of the town — of which High House was one — and the sharp turn to the northward that the road took where the Coast-Guard Station nestled between the cliff-path and the rocky shore, there rose on the edge of the highway and on the edge of Lodmoor a very singular little hovel. A hovel it was, a poor enough shelter from the sea-storms, but it presented to an eye accustomed to the West-Country that peculiar sense of the past which a turn-pike cottage, however forlorn and ramshackle, is wont to convey. The melancholy little erection, with its white-washed walls and its black-tarred roof, over-topped by tall bill-boards bearing weather-stained advertisements, was surrounded on the Lodmoor side by its own private enclosure. At this date this enclosure contained a small vegetable garden and a good-sized strip of grass; enough grass in fact to help considerably in the nourishment of a solitary brown-and-white cow, who even in the winter when the weather was not too stormy grazed peacefully there untroubled by either the screams of the gulls from the shore or the cries of the wildfowl from the marshes.

The inhabitants of Lodmoor Hut at this time were two in number, a woman of thirty who went by the name of Gipsy May, and a half-witted orphan-boy called Larry Zed whom the woman had befriended.

A few mornings after Magnus' visit to Maiden Castle, long before the sun rose, indeed while the marshes were still wrapt in a wet and ghostly mist, Larry Zed was standing in a tumble-down wood-shed that served as a receptacle for hay and was peering forth from this, through a crack in the time-worn boards, into a larger and better-preserved barn, where Blotchy the cow was staring back at him, alert in her clean straw-bed.

"Ye be always awake when I do come, Blotchy," murmured Larry Zed. "Don't 'ee *ever* lay head on straw and sleep dead-sweet, and let the Nothing-Girl take 'ee on lap and give 'ee her titties to suck? Don't 'ee *ever* let the Nothing-Girl love 'ee, like her do love I o' nights? No, no, Blotchy! I bain't talking of Gipsy May. Her be a kind one and a cuddly one, but her bain't all there be, Blotchy. There be a wondrous soft place between the Nothing-Girl's titties where she lets I lie; and maybe she'd let thee lie there too, an' a' didn't horn at her side."

The cow knew perfectly well that Larry was bound ere long to bring her the accustomed armful of hay; so she gave her head a few careless tosses and turning her rump to the crack in the wall set herself to observe the door.

"Voices," she thought, "may come from cracks. Hay comes from doors."

Her prediction was well founded; for presently young Zed pushed aside the great wooden fastener of the cow-shed and brought in the expected bundle. With his entrance a breath of the wet dawn came into the shed, together with a strange, almost mystical fragrance from the wide-stretching salt-marsh mud, as if in the night the silent daughters of the Old Man of the Sea had been sleeping upon it. It was not permitted by Nature that Blotchy should derive more than a very vague and very diffused aesthetic pleasure from the sight of that bare-headed human figure standing in the doorway. And yet with the cold, whitish light about him, with the curious dawn-smell entering with him, with the unique chilliness amid the vapours which suggested the slippery motions of great cold-bodied eels in the wet mud, with the sense in every direction of thousands of inert wintry marsh-plants invisible in the mist, Larry's figure had an almost mythical remoteness. Larry himself certainly derived a vivid sensual pleasure from entering the shed. He drew into his nostrils a delicious fragrance of trodden straw, mingled with a cow's sweet breath and a cow's wholesome dung; and mingled too with emanations of a more bitter savour that proceeded from a small heap of turnips piled up behind some rails and covered with a hurdle.

A few minutes later the boy's slender form might have been seen from the highroad — only the hour was so early that the road was empty — bending over the deep ditch that divided Gipsy May's little enclosure from the rest of the marshes. He was now muttering low curses to himself — chanting them indeed in the form of inverted prayers — so that it came to pass that the first human tones to reach that day's Dawn upon Lodmoor were a boy's imprecations.

"May Sippy Ballard be danged in 's belly-guts! May Sippy Ballard be hanged wi' a hemp rope! May Sippy Ballard bear Joby's girt boils! for being minded to turn me May out of her wone house!"

While thus cursing the new Town Clerk, who was carrying the Township's rights where no official had ever before thought of carrying them, Larry began pulling up one by one the eel-lines that he had dropped in that peat-dark water the previous evening. At the end of one of them alone was there any catch; and this turned out to be such a small eel that when he first jerked it out of the water he was tempted to throw it back. But Gipsy May having a customer in Belvedere Crescent, the most fashionable terrace in town, in the shape of a landlady named Mrs. Pengelly, who being at that time in the later months of her pregnancy was covetous of eels' flesh and prepared to pay highly for it, young Zed now took his knife from his pocket and opening it with his thumbnail, cut off the eel's head. Kneeling on the black mud beside the ditch, while the eyes in the bleeding eel-head stared at the convoluted saraband danced by the eel-body, young Zed proceeded to take from off his hook the half-drowned lob-worm that had betrayed those unglazed fish-eyes; and hesitating a second before throwing it away, to ascertain if it still lived, threw it, *not* into the water but upon the mud at his side; where after a faint quiver it lay motionless, aware — in its obscure worm-consciousness — of an indescribable relief from the removal of that iron barb and for all young Zed could tell deriving only comfort from the white mist which wavered driftingly across that ditch-bank. Young Zed thrust his blood-stained fingers into the stalks of a little brackish plant that grew extensively round him and remained on his knees with his face towards the Coast-Guard Station and the far more distant White Nose. The twisting of that eel's body worried him; and the discovery that the worm which had caught the eel was still alive, after a night on the hook, worried him, too, but these were for him but slight emotions compared with a certain lodged hate and intense loathing to which he now gave full rein.

That particular flesh-covered skeleton in Trigonia House, “hanging out” as he would have called it, “at Mother Monkton’s”, was at that moment, as it lay with its head on a couple of snow-white pillows, the object of two antipodal currents of human emotion. For while young Zed knelt by the ditch, Curly Wix in Upwey with her bare arms behind her flaxen head and her dark-fringed eyes staring at the dawn through her cottage window, gave herself up to a protracted orgy of erotic yearning, in the course of which this somnolent Town Clerk, at Mrs. Monkton’s, became endowed with the beauty of the seducer of Helen of Troy.

Larry Zed on the contrary, as he knelt by those convulsed eel-coils, with the wet sea-fog in his red hair, projected towards the sleeping official such a deep and concentrated malediction, that it was enough, if wishes could kill, to have ended his career forever.

It must be admitted that the profile of S. P. Ballard as it lay so peaceful, with the white sheet under its chin, in the front bedroom of Trigonia House, possessed a certain youthful beauty of its own, with the breath coming so softly and tenderly between the delicately-moulded lips, curved, as the saying is, “like Cupid’s bow”; for with the closing of young Ballard’s eyelids something treacherous, something foxy and shifty, vanished altogether, while a look of appealing innocence appeared, resembling the innocence of one of those Florentine angels that we see in the background of so many old Italian pictures. As the waves came up below Brunswick Terrace that morning, under the pressure of the high tide, mounting and receding along the pebbles with hardly a trace of foam, only the faintest sound of the sea penetrated the Town Clerk’s bedroom. But towards that sleeping youth, through his half-open window, came these two intense vibrations of emotion, the invocation of passionate hate from the boy kneeling by that ditch, and the invocation of self-forgetful devotion from the flaxen-haired girl in her Upwey bed.

Jumping to his feet Larry Zed now picked up the still twisting body of the eel and thrust it with some difficulty into his pocket. Throwing the head into the ditch and leaving the eel-line on the bank he now set off with rapid steps across Gipsy May’s forlorn patch of withered cabbages, and going round to the back of the house crossed the highway and scrambled over the sea-wall. Well did he know that particular crunching and scattering under his feet as he climbed the bank of pebbles and went down the other side; and it seemed always to be his destiny to experience this awareness when his mind was particularly disturbed. But he stopped today on the crest of the pebbles and gave a deep groan of wonder; for the dawn-mists from the marshes had broken into troops and squadrons of ghostly figures, who, as they swept away over the sea, dissolved into thinner and thinner vapour, until they melted into nothing at all; and it struck Larry’s mind as if he were contemplating a spiritual suicide, as if some phantom Jesus, followed by all his disciples, had decided to perish in the waves.

But scarcely had these vapour-ghosts vanished from before him than a deep, narrow, crimson streak — as if it had been a bloody scar in an ashen-grey forehead — appeared just above the horizon; and simultaneously with this blood-line which made him think of the decapitated eel, the long saurian neck of St. Alban’s Head, like some antediluvian sea-serpent, manifested itself on the horizon. And even as he looked at it, this red streak on the sea’s rim, that was like a long thin trail of rusty blood that slowly incarnadined as the sun melted it from behind the world, changed its nature, and became crimson, and with it a galaxy of small feathery clouds that had been floating unnoticed in the eastern sky caught this glory and bloomed over the water like a towering cascade of gigantic rose-petals.

Impossible to detect the sliding second of time when the next change came! But as if the boy had been hypnotized into making a leap forward over some time-gulf, he suddenly realized, without catching Nature at her conjuring trick, that the whole eastern sky, and the whole horizon of the sea, too, had lost its crimson and become shining gold. And what was that blinding rondure, curved like a man's head, that now swept up from below the sea's surface, making it impossible for the boy to stare eastward any more; making him blink, and turn his eyes away? It swept up as if it were in pursuit of something, as if it would fain stare at something face to face and deluge it with glory; and Larry had the feeling that what it was glorying over was that same world-snake that it had slain from the other side of the world, drenching the universe in its blood. As he blinked at the sun now, it seemed to him as if it were not a stupendous globe at all, but, on the contrary, a small round hole, like a port-hole in a ship, through which he could see, if he were not driven to turn away his head, into the very furnace-heart of eternity. But Larry *was* driven to turn away his head! He had already stared at that burning orifice — and it had seemed to him of a dazzling levin-blue — a little too long, and as he stumbled down the pebbly slope towards Gipsy May's black-tarred fishing-boat, which he had himself drawn up there and bailed out carefully only yesterday, there seemed to dart forth from his eyes innumerable simulacra of that blue-white hole into heaven; and these blazes kept jumping about, like enormous sand-fleas, over the pebbles, and finally became stationary on the gunwale of the little boat. Pressing the palms of his hands against two of the sturdy wooden pegs that served as rowlocks he leant over and stared at the pebbles on the other side. In this position the livid sun-circles gradually faded away; and Larry was pleased to note that no rain had fallen in the night and the bottom of the small craft was as dry as he had left it.

“She don’t need no tarpaulin today”, he said to himself. “ ’Tis going be one o’ they ‘pet’ days. I best go home-along and tell she her were wrong and I were right; for her made sure ’twould rain afore dawn! No, she be baled out, dry as a life-craft. I bain’t a-goin’ to fret about she today.”

Thus confuting, in one general refutation of feminine errors, both the woman and her boat, Larry gave one more hurried glance at the great luminary in whose rays he and the whole beach were now bathed, and turning his back upon both sun and sea made his way across the road and entered Lodmoor Hut by its front door which now stood wide open to greet the morning. The place had only two rooms downstairs, and only two rooms upstairs; while the staircase, opening out of the parlour, if such it could be called that was everything except scullery, reduced the space in that doll’s-house sitting-room to smaller proportions than Blotchy’s cow-shed.

“Oh, there ‘ee be, Fisherman!” cried Gipsy May. And Larry knew by the use of this appellation, which had for both of them a vague, dim, mystical implication, that the gipsy was in an emotional frame of mind. “Do ‘ee mind washing hands at yard-tap? I’ve a-got the sink pretty full-up looks-so, but all be ready; so don’t ‘ee linger out there, talking to Blotchy no more.”

“I ain’t been talking to Blotchy,” replied young Zed in a reproachful voice as he went out. “And how can I look sharp when Rowena be fussing so? She smells eel-blood. That’s what *she* smells!”

“Rowena, Rowena!” cried Gipsy May; and she made a particular tinkling sound with the metal milk-can that always brought the cat to her side. She was a sacred cat, this great sleek pet, for it had been handed over to May as a tiny little tabby kitten by the famous Romany Princess, Scarletta.

No sooner had the two denizens of Lodmoor Hut sat down at their breakfast-table, which was also their kitchen-table and stood near the shining dresser, than the roving eyes of the red-haired Larry noted that May’s fortune-telling cards — both the ordinary cards and the Tarot cards — were lying, all carefully arranged, on a tall wooden chest which was always devoted to these daring shakings of the veil of Isis. Since she had settled down in Lodmoor Hut — roofless and windowless for years and a prey to all the elements — Gipsy May had forsaken her wandering life.

But it was not only to take care of the orphan Larry that she had patched up this ramshackle refuge and stored it with the treasures of her caravan. For though her care of young Zed was a deep impulse of piety, what really had forced her to break with her tribe was her infatuation for Sylvanus Cobbold whose discourses on the sands at Weymouth she had a passion for frequenting. Popular report, indeed, accused her of having carried her mania for Sylvanus so far as to have domiciled herself with him for a time, in his house on Portland, surrendering to him a good deal more than her instinct for roaming. This was before she saved young Zed from the work-house; a deed that was only done — so gossip hinted — when Sylvanus had begun to weary of her passion. Since then her chief concern had been to keep Larry out of the hands of Dr. Brush, who had found him a fascinating case, and indeed had carried him off for a week to Hell’s Museum; but nothing short of bolts and bars could prevent the boy from wandering back to Lodmoor, and finally — after the signing of various official documents — the ex-gipsy became his lawful guardian.

The woman’s Romany blood was clearly visible at this moment in the bright colours and shining utensils of this kitchen-parlour; and as the two sat opposite each other, eating their bread-and-treacle and drinking their tea, they might almost have been inside a caravan. Two supercilious china dogs, looking as if they had been stolen from the drive-gates of the Earl of Ilchester, and as if nothing short of an Earl, or at least a Baron, would cause them to drop a fraction of their contempt for the generality of mankind, stood at either end of the dresser’s lowest shelf, just above the stove, and if two black noses could possibly be tilted in higher disdain, the conversation now going on between the outlaws whose shelf they honoured seemed to give them that extra tilt.

“Be she coming to ask ‘ee to go back to he?” enquired Larry, with his mouth full of bread-and-treacle.

Gipsy May tossed her head almost as scornfully as the canine aristocrats above her.

“What do the like o’ *she* know of what lies between him and me? How can ye ask such dimsy questions? Me and Mr. Cobbold understand each other like as we were King and Queen of Spades. This Marret girl, I be telling ‘ee of, be the Punch-and-Judy girl who said summat to we once, when us were on esplanade, last August. You was minded to linger and diddle with she, but I dragged ‘ee away from the baggage! Don’t ‘ee mind thik summer night, Fisherman?”

“Ees, I do mind ‘en,” replied young Zed. “Her have black hair, all in twisties and turnies, and her face be chalk-white, like a ghosty’s face. Mar’t that be her name! Oh, I’ve a-seed her many a time when thik Cobbold be a-hollerin’; and her were looking at he out of her chalk face. What have he sent her here for then?”

The woman drew in her breath and then a very curious exclamation burst from her — outlandish syllables, that perhaps reverted to the camels’-hair tents of far Arabia.

“ izadek, Larry! *He* never sent her! When me and *he* feel like saying something to each other we comes and sees each other! We don’t send little sand-girls along shore. What are ye starin’ at me for, Larry Zed?”

“I *weren’t* starin’ at ‘ee, May; I were only looking; but your eyes do glimmy so. And so Mar’t bain’t bringing naught from he? Nothing... nothing... nothing! She be coming to buy an eel, present, same as I got for Mrs. Pengelly? Or maybe she be coming to play ducks-and-drakes with poor Lal? Or, ‘perventure, she be coming to ask ‘ee to tell fortune by they girt Egyptian cards!”

Gipsy May’s dark eyes opened to their widest extent at this last word of his. She had often been visited of late by a secret suspicion that young Zed was in reality “as clever as Sylvanus” and was only supposed to be out of his wits when dunderheads like Dr. Brush and Sippy Ballard mistook his cleverness for lunacy. That queer exclamation with such far-drawn lineage broke from her lips again.

“ izadek!” she exclaimed, resting her chin upon the palms of her hands and propping her elbows on the table, “ izadek! You bain’t a Romany, Larry, be ‘ee, unbeknown to your own parents? How did ‘ee guess she were coming here for me to tell her the cards?”

“Be she coming this morning and bringing no word about he? But if ’tis only for they cards she be coming, May, how is it, that your eyes be shining so, and your bissom be going up and down?”

Gipsy May stared at him in mounting astonishment. Many women caught off-guard like this by a crazy boy, would have flown into a furious temper; but in the depths of her heart she had profound respect — indeed something like awe — for her youthful protégé; and that Larry should have penetrated, at one bold dive, into the bottomless ocean of her feminine ways, and should have divined — for so she supposed he *had* divined — that it was she herself, with the excuse of the fortune-telling, who had lured Marret into coming to see her, gave her a thrill of that delicious consternation that she used to experience when listening to the oracles of the princess, Scarletta.

"You mind thee wone business, Fisherman!" she answered shortly.

Something, all the same, seemed to have broken down what few barriers did exist between these quaint companions, as they busied themselves about their domestic tasks prior to the appearance of the exciting visitor; for May kept putting all manner of nervous questions to Larry, as to how many times he had seen Marret of late, and whether he thought she was pretty, and whether Sylvanus behaved natural with her, and whether she had a nice voice. No one listening to these snatches of talk, as the two went about their affairs would have thought that the red-haired boy was half-witted; or that the woman was so much older than he was. Once, as she was peeling potatoes, Larry found her fallen into a sort of trance out of the midst of which she begged him to swear by the dear heart of Jesus that he had never talked to Marret alone.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before the figure of the Punch-and-Judy girl was actually seen at the door; and when she *was* seen it was with as great a shock as if they had not been waiting for her all that morning.

"Come in, come in!" cried Gipsy May with nervous eagerness. "Where is Larry? Oh, here he is! You know our Larry, don't you, dearie? Our Larry knows *you* if you don't know him. He's been telling me how pretty you are, and you *are* pretty! Doesn't she look pretty in that nice black dress, Larry? How old are you, dearie, if a gipsy may ask? Ready to hear what the mystic cards have got to tell for a sweet, lovely maid?"

Young Zed's expression when he heard — almost for the first time — this wheedling, professional tone in his friend's voice was of a very complicated character. He surveyed Marret from head to foot with fascinated scrutiny; but his green eyes kept glancing sideways at Gipsy May with nervous concern, as if he doubted what these caressing words might be leading up to. But although the repetition of these "dearies" was upsetting to the boy, they seemed to be taken perfectly for granted by the visitor herself. She permitted herself to be led into the caravan-like sitting-room and displayed no embarrassment at being ensconced in the only respectable chair, and placed right under the up-lifted black noses on the dresser; while the chest, with the two packs of cards upon it, was pushed to her side.

"The police be worritting Mr. Cobbold again," was the first sentence that Gipsy May's impulsive greetings permitted her to finish. "They be after he for holding meeting on esplanade."

"Come in, Larry! Don't ‘ee go away. The spirits of the cards can't see no future doings while none but women-folk be around. Now sit ‘ee snug and cosy, dearie, on Scarletta's chair, while I shuffles and deals. 'Twas Scarletta herself who always said: ‘To make the cards speak truth there must be a man's thing near 'em!' Sit ‘ee down, Larry! Sit ‘ee down on table, if thee must. Hearken, dearie, now! While I shuffles, dearie, I shuts me eyes tight, and while I deals, the one we thinks on draws near. Don't ‘ee stare at this pretty girl, Larry, while I shuffles. 'Tis from a far place to the Romany's tent she've ‘a come; and 'tis the heart in her body what brings her the message from they that know."

Larry did as he was bade and sat on the edge of the well-scoured table, swinging his legs. Marret, looking terribly white, kept her gaze fixed intently on her rival's face. Gipsy May closed her eyes; and standing over the chest began shuffling the cards. There was a profound silence in Lodmoor Hut while this went on. Retaining her impassive expression, as if her thoughts were far away from the whole transaction, Marret kept saying to herself: "It's because she be so tricksy that he got so tired of she."

Young Zed, still swinging his legs, as he sat on the well-scoured deal table, holding the edge of it tightly with both hands, watched the rivals with absorbed interest, pondering on the difference between them. For from these two feminine bodies, as they thus leaned towards each other, there emanated a wordless hostility, below and beyond their peaceable attitude and their quiet expectation. And the wayward spirit of the red-haired boy flung itself into the unknown consciousness of the absent Sylvanus, wondering which of them the preacher would be looking at if he were here. That shuffling of the Tarot cards — for the Gipsy had arrived now at the more portentous pack — seemed to him like one of those inanimate accompaniments that had so often been the background of his own emotional dilemmas. Yes, it was like the waving of the willow-branch that hung over his eel-catching pool. It was like the lifting and falling of the tarpaulin cover of their boat on the beach, when the wind blew under it. In his wanton fancy he wondered whether the grizzled head of Sylvanus had really rested upon both these bosoms; the elder woman's almost as girlish as the younger's and both stirring with each excited breath they took. He was not quite sure that he wanted to snuggle down upon either of these, himself, when darkness covered Lodmoor Hut; and yet he kept glancing at Marret and wondering.

"Me Nothing-Girl be best for I", he sighed.

It was not long before the Tarot cards began to cover the surface of that old chest with their upturned images of fantastic doom; and the sunlight streaming through the small-paned window fell on the copper pans, and on the bright-coloured mats, and on the supercilious dogs — who seemed to snuff at the whole business, as if they were saying to each other: "This must be the Heraldry of Rogues!" — and on the shining black of the Gipsy's towselled hair, as the cards trembled in her hands. Marret, her cheeks white as milk, and her pale grey eyes fixed, not on the cards but on the other woman's face, sat with her back to the window.

"She believes in it!" thought Larry in a mood of pitying wonder; for like so many other half-initiates in a famous mystery, his own attitude to fortune-telling had long been one of sceptical indifference.

There were only two cards left now in May's fingers; and it was with a gesture of unconscious ritual, handed down to her very likely from a date when the body of Agamemnon lay still unavenged in its golden tomb at Mycenae that she now opened her eyes wide, surveying that old sea-chest, strewn with ominous hieroglyphics, and the time-worn unrevealing backs of the two cards she held out at arms' length. The silence in that little room now became so intense, that young Zed stopped swinging his legs. He began to feel that the very sun-motes in the thick golden light which streamed down over Marret's dark shoulders and fell upon those occult symbols were as they flickered there a sacrilegious interruption of that moment's indrawn breath! Rowena, trained in a caravan, surveyed from her seat in front of the stove her young mistress' outstretched arms and oracular gesture with the sleek and gnomic look of a centuries-old confederate in such matters; and if it had not been that Blotchy, tethered on a patch of wretched bent-grass at the back of the wood-shed, considered the silence within the hut to be propitious to her own purpose, there would have been a perfect psychic dénouement. But Blotchy's plaintive appeal that she might be moved to another spot broke the spell completely. And it did worse than break the spell. For those three persons, or four persons, if Rowena were included, thus aroused from their trance, acted as if the cow had been possessed by a demon. Gipsy May flung down one of her cards with a careless movement as if Blotchy's protest had taken the heart out of the whole transaction.

“Goodness!” she cried: “The Man with Three Staves!”

Larry jumped from the table and standing beside her threw his arm round her waist. While he did so he was aware that Marret, who had been sitting up very straight in Scarletta’s arm-chair leaned forward over the table, causing a couple of the enigmatic Tarot cards to flutter to the floor. This accident, combined with the boy’s touch, seemed to increase the gipsy’s irritation. She flung the last card down so angrily that it, too, in place of falling on the chest, fell to the ground. It fell close to Marret’s feet; who at once stooped down and began fumbling for it. But either the Punch-and-Judy girl was too short-sighted to find it, or the golden stream of sunshine was so localized that it dazzled and confused her, for there was quite a perceptible moment of delay before she lifted up her low-bent head and laid a card on the table.

Had Larry Zed been forced to tell upon his oath exactly what happened after that, he would have found it extremely hard. His first impression was that both the women, the moment they perceived *what the card was,* made a violent scattering of all the rest; so that the one in question, along with quite a few more, slid down beneath the table. His second impression, however, was that it was Marret who forcibly intervened to prevent Gipsy May — the moment that *she* saw what the card was — from mixing them all up and tossing them on the ground. At any rate the immediate issue was that Gipsy May, her dark eyes roving about the room as if the walls had been wind-tossed bushes of Tinkleton Heath, began fiercely accusing Marret of spoiling the whole event and of trying to cheat the Destinies.

“You saw what it was! You saw what it was!” she shouted; and Larry, who knew her so well, could see by a certain muscular contraction in her shoulders — like the quiver in a cat’s body before it springs — that she was beside herself with anger. But it was characteristic of this singular woman, whose emotions never expressed themselves in the expected way, that she suddenly fell to abusing Sylvanus himself. “What does ‘S. C.’ mean,” she cried — she habitually spoke of the man by his initials— “by aggravating the police? Why can’t he go *his* way and let them go *theirs?* Don’t talk about him; don’t talk about him! He’s just a fool, S. C. is. He’s just a great fool!”

Larry could not help feeling a spasm of admiration for Marret, so calmly did she bear herself under the other’s outburst. She did indeed draw back to one side of that queer-shaped chair, and her pale eyes seemed almost as dark as the gipsy’s compared with the whiteness of her cheeks; but once fully at bay she folded her thin arms in their tight black sleeves, pressed them against her thin bosom, and holding her head high began her defiance.

“I *couldn’t* see what it was! How can ‘ee be so silly? I don’t know one of they crazy cards from another. These bain’t natural cards. These be devil’s cards. If I *did* see a gallows on oon it weren’t spyin’, were it, for ‘ee dropped ’em on floor? And there be other gallowses in world, beyon’ they silly pictures.”

Larry saw Gipsy May’s right elbow give an ominous twitch.

“Don’t ‘ee, May, me precious darlin’, don’t ‘ee,” he gasped.

But at that point a new diversion offered itself in the movements of the big tabby-cat.

“Looksee!” cried Larry, “Looksee! Look at that girt cat!”

In truth, inspired by some occult contrariety, Rowena had actually jumped, at this agitating crisis, upon the lap of the Punch-and-Judy girl; and here she was curled up in her calmest and most inscrutable attitude, loudly purring. Larry Zed contemplated this scene, from behind his friend, in dumb amazement. The white-cheeked girl was bending over the cat now and stroking it; and it was borne in upon the mind of the boy how unaccountable both cats and women can be, in their ambiguous moves towards their desired ends. Suddenly the gipsy made a step forward towards the chair.

“ ’Twas.. *the.. Hanged.. Man..* that.. were.. thik.. last.. card,” she gasped out, in a low, solemn voice, as if the mere mention of this formidable symbol were a sacrilege. “And you knowed it were! Didn’t you hear her say, Larry, that there were other gallowses than what be in my cards? She were talking of thik wold Punch, and of his being hanged for Judy. Hanged for Judy! — when all the time it were *the Hanged Man* of me girt Egyptian cards what fell down... ‘Tweren’t no mommet in no doll’s-house theayter what fell down... ’twas the... Hanged... Man!”

Larry was ashamed of his friend. Unbalanced as he was in his own poor wits, he felt that all this fuss about a card was silly and childish. He was relieved when the gipsy suddenly went over to the side of the room and still muttering something about S.C. began to turn the handle of a music-box. Rowena meanwhile remained on Marret’s lap, in the dead Scarletta’s chair, completely unmoved by the thin, faint, elfin notes that her mistress was grinding out. Larry noticed how quiet Marret herself was, too, just mechanically stroking the cat with one hand, while the other lay inert, as if there were no life in it. The music-box continued its wistful tinkling.

“How black her eyelashes are!” he thought. “Is she pretending to be asleep?”

Marret’s eyelashes did, indeed, as they drooped against her ghastly cheeks, resemble those “earth-forgetting eyelids” that are beyond awakening; but this apparent phenomenon was a complete illusion. Her eyes were open all the time. She was looking down at Rowena and thinking hard.

“Aren’t you going to say *anything?”* cried Gipsy May, putting an end to the music. But since Marret still remained mute, she now began restlessly pulling her hair-pins out of her hair. Zed was so used to these spasmodic outbursts of what could hardly be called vanity, that he only sighed when he saw her stand before their one little mirror and deliberately take down her dark tresses and then with equal deliberateness gather them up again and replace the hair-pins.

"Jerry Cobbold be joined with the world against him," were the words that finally fell from Marret's lips.

"It's that woman," murmured the gipsy. And suddenly to Larry's surprise she took her professional tone again. "I've gone to the Egyptian cards about she, dearie. Nor me, nor you, nor none other girl what loves he, need worrit ourselves about that woman. If ever a person were marked and sealed by the discerners of spirits, 'tis Lucinda Poxwell. How she ever got Jerry to marry she is past surmising. But Jerry'll live, and you mark the gipsy's words, dearie, to marry that little Tossty girl he be so crazy on."

"Yes, 'tis Tossty," replied Marret while Larry sank back against the table, yawning gratefully. "My dad declares all the theayter people say 'tis Tossty he do favour; though whenever I've a seed 'ee 'tis Tissty he were courtin'."

"Well, a man like Jerry, and his brother, too, I fancy," said Gipsy May, fixing a glance of triumphant malignity upon the white face below her, "as long as they have *some* girl to pass the time with don't worry much whether it be Tissty or Tossty. They wants a girl and that's all."

"My dad declares that Tossty forced herself on Jerry whether or no. The theayter people dad goes with say she won't *let* Jerry sleep alone. Dad says if he were him he'd roll her on floor! Dad says Jerry never could bide a dancing-girl till Tossty took up with him whether or no."

Moved by one of her unaccountable impulses Gipsy May opened a drawer of the dresser and, heedless of the supercilious dogs above her, extracted a crimson velvet band, which she now proceeded to tie round her head. There was a triumphant light in her dark eyes as she turned upon Marret now.

“Me and ‘S. C.’,” she brought out, “never tell no one what us’ll do when the world turns against we and they police locks we up. No, us never talks of thik things; but if He were took I’d ‘a know of it, and not by the cards neither; and if I were took He would know of it! He may amuse himself with all the little shore-girls he likes, but if he were took ’twould be his Gipsy May he’d send for, same as if I were took ’twould be He I’d send for — yes I would! — sooner nor even poor Larry here.”

“Mr. Cobbold says Summat New be come into world,” remarked Marret, slowly and solemnly, as if she were repeating a lesson, “and He do say this Summat be the Holy Ghost!”

Gipsy May’s face had never looked more proud and scornful.

“Such sayings,” she cried haughtily, “are what all and sundry do hear from He, when ‘a be preaching on beach; and such sayings are what He do throw out to all they little shore-girls what run after He. But I’d scorn to tell a living soul — no! not even Larry here! — what His real secrets be. There be no Holy Ghost in ’em, Marret, me Dearie. But Him and I thinks best to tell to little gals what little gals can best understand!”

“ Tisn’t fitting nor right,” Marret countered, without a tremor in her voice, “to play with they Devil-Cards about he. They cards can tell of Hangings and Buryings for them as hasn’t talked and walked with God, but when—”

“I do mind what ‘ee be thinking, milk-face!” the gipsy interrupted bitter and low, bending down above the figure in the chair. “Ye be thinking *The Hanged Man* was the last card. Ye be thinking” — here she lowered her voice to an intense whisper— “that ’tis of Him thik card did speak. But it isn’t; it was for others it were meant.”

Marret was silent, lowering her eyelids again and continued obstinately stroking the cat, while her left hand — more expressive perhaps of her feelings during the whole episode than anything else — lay inert, passive, helpless, dead, upon the edge of her lap.

"Why don't you say something, dearie?" the gipsy now asked her in that queer wheedling tone that sounded so unnatural to Larry's ears.

Marret's inert hand suddenly moved, and to the accompaniment of a pitiful mooing from Blotchy which had now become incessant in the rear of the hut the Punch-and-Judy girl looked straight at her rival and uttered, in a low, toneless, neutral voice, words that fell from her as if she, this time, were dealing portentous cards:

"He says he would like to see you again. He told me to tell you that. He said, 'Tell her I want to talk to her before I go to prison.' He meant—" she cleared her throat and lifting up the cat placed her deliberately and carefully on the floor— "that the police were going to take him if he went on speaking on the esplanade."

Gipsy May became, in a second, deadly calm.

"He... sent... *you,"* she whispered hoarsely, "to call me to him? I wouldn't come to him because *you* asked me — no, not if he were going—" her voice quivered in a sort of muted chant— "going to be hanged by the neck... like the man on my Egyptian card!"

Something in the tone of her mistress at this juncture led Rowena to approach the agitated woman and rub her warm sleek body against her legs; but even while the gipsy stooped, in half-conscious response to this appeal, the cat raised her head and turned towards the door of the hut. Yes! Someone had stopped outside. The engine of a car could be heard in the silence. Then it ceased; and as May and the boy looked at each other there came a sharp knocking.

While Larry and May had been excitedly awaiting the appearance of the Punch-and-Judy girl, the self-contained author of the "Philosophy of Representation" had been mounting the high, broad staircase leading to the upper rooms of High House. He mounted these steps with a firm, intent, and yet abstracted resolution.

Mr. Gaul rarely paid such a morning visit, even to his oldest Weymouth friends; but he had had an interview the night before with Magnus Muir which had considerably disturbed him. So disturbed, indeed, had he been by this conversation that he had found the usual serenity of his intelligence totally upset; and being quite unable to go on with his work he had decided to follow a hint of his landlady — whose curiosity was intense with regard to Mrs. Cobbold's companion — and make use of his ruined work-time in what might be called the interest of the gregarious appetite of Trigonia House. It is, however, a pity that the astute Mrs. Monkton, and indeed Mr. Ballard, too, could not have been witnesses of the encounter between the ambassador from Brunswick Terrace and the employer of the new companion; for *they* would have found many more interesting revelations in Lucinda's manner and words than a philosophical recluse had the wit to discover.

"It's all very well to be homesick and that sort of thing," he was now privileged to hear his hostess say, "but to turn away from me altogether, and to sit without a word at the writing-table, as if I were some kind of a criminal — it's what nobody could tolerate."

"Where is Jerry?" enquired the visitor.

"Out," she said laconically. "Always out, when there's trouble brewing! But as a matter of fact Jerry's got his own worries just now. They've sent for him to the Police Station about that brother of his. Jerry is really angry at last... done with that man for good, I hope! If he hadn't the patience of an angel and if *I* hadn't the patience of — I don't know what — we'd have let them shut him up long ago. Jerry says he's mad; but *I* don't believe it. *I* say he only does it to annoy Jerry and me, and make our life here difficult with everybody. I told Jerry I'd never forgive him if he 'went voucher' again or whatever they call it, for him. And I wouldn't, either! I've had enough of the man and all this fuss about him. The sooner he's put away the better. How can we be responsible for him I should like to know, when he delights, yes, positively delights, in making us a laughing-stock to the whole town? I told Jerry to tell them plainly — and I think he will — that this is the end. The sooner they arrest him and put him in an institution the better. If Jerry doesn't like the idea of the County Asylum they could send him to Dr. Brush. The expense will come on us of course. But I'm used to that. If it isn't one thing, it's—"

She stopped abruptly, hearing some sound that altogether escaped the abstracted senses of Mr. Gaul. She stood with her eyebrows lifted a little, staring at the door; and Mr. Gaul, as he clutched his hat and stick, for it was against his principles to leave such important adjuncts of his personality in other people's halls was obscurely reminded — for his scholarship was vague — of Clytemnestra waiting for some signal-fire on some promontory. She was dressed in dark green and looked younger, but at the same time more enigmatic, than when in evening attire, with the circlet round her head. It was perhaps the height of her forehead and the blue-black glossiness of her hair that led her visitor to think of Clytemnestra, but the real enigma, to a more psychological person than Richard, would have been how a person, so occupied as it seemed, with ignoble anxieties, could be wrestling all the while with some dark and terrible fatality.

Blundering now in a way no one else in Weymouth would have done, Mr. Gaul, who must have known better, but who was attracted, as less wise men have often been, by the proximity of the precipice, enquired point-blank how Captain Poxwell was. Two little spots of colour came into the woman's cheeks, as she answered, with a smile like that of a waxwork figure on a pedestal, that her father's health was better than usual.

"It is a pity," she added, "that he is so opposed to my sister's second marriage. Jerry and I both think it would be such a good thing; and so nice for Daisy to have the little Cattistock boy to play with."

Mr. Gaul gave these words a far too literal attention; for Lucinda, swallowed up as she was in her own secrets, was able to speak of Daisy as being the same age as Benny, because both children were totally unreal to her — just names for phantom forms, more neglible than figures painted on a theatrical proscenium when the curtain has lifted.

"I believe," the indiscreet sage found himself blurting out, "I believe that Mr. Cattistock is thinking of finding a tutor for Benny."

Now Mr. Gaul knew perfectly well that he had no right to betray their friend Magnus; and yet he also knew that it was important to help this daughter to forget his unlucky mention of her father. Such were the convoluted responsibilities of human conversation. But he had done the harm; for while she waved him, hat and stick and all, to the nearest chair, she herself remained stationary, slowly rubbing, with the tip of one of her fingers, a large opal she wore on her bosom, and staring blankly into vacancy. And her mind, as if it were a vulture carrying off a reeking morsel of carrion to devour at leisure, pounced on a certain scene in her fatal past and dug sharp, spiritual talons into it, with a self-tormenting ferocity. She saw that detested vein-cord in the long neck of her father, that withered, energetic, super-masculine whip-cord vein, that she so particularly loathed! She saw his restless, electric eye, gleaming with that especial kind of fanatic concentration that always bit into her like a tooth; but she saw these things when she — not he — was the dominator. She saw them paralyzed, that neck-vein, that electric eye, under the corroding spell of what she did. As her fingers went on polishing that opal, and her great head drooped forward a little, she saw the red coals in that familiar room, that room Captain Poxwell called the Cabin, and she saw, Oh, so distinctly! the big lacquer tray he kept there, strewn with shells from the rock-pools below Sandsfoot Castle. She saw those curious little shells they call cowries, that he had such a mania for, and she saw a feeble blue-bottle fly hovering round these shells, longing to settle on them, but repelled by their bitter sea-smell. The red light from those coals was the only light in that room. Strange that her senses should have been so intensely acute — Oh, she was the daughter of that brain-sick maleness! She was the daughter of that loathely whip-cord neck! — to remember after all these years the look of that fly. Yes, it went on buzzing and flying heavily — it was a feeble, half-dead fly — all those long hours that dripped, like the rain dripped, outside the window that night... plud-plop, plop-plud, plud-plop, plop-plud... and it flew into the darkness and out of the darkness; and that was what her thoughts were always doing. It was not only because he had that whip-cord in his neck, not only because he had that maleness, that brain-sick maleness in his eyes, that she had bled him, humiliated him, taken his wits into her fingers and stretched them taut; it was because the house, the road, the old castle, the rock-pools, the rain, the waves, the light-ship, the break-water, had turned into a great, mounting, moaning, pushing darkness that was thick, majestic, irresistible! In and out of that darkness flew that blue-bottle fly weak with the sea-smell of cowrie shells; and in and out of that darkness flew her mind. Shells were curious things. Her sister — Mrs. Cattistock to be — couldn't understand a man collecting shells and sticking them on little boxes. But she could understand perfectly! When you held cowrie shells in your hands you could go in and out of that majestic darkness, that darkness that was like the sea standing up straight, and not get weak, like that fly. He brought everything on himself — everything! He ought to have bled that whip-cord vein and not tormented her with an eye like the light-ship. What he wanted to do to her and dare not, she did to him. But she was always his victim. He could have stopped that light-ship's winking if he'd wanted to. He knew perfectly well what he was doing when he let her draw him out. He could get well tomorrow if he wanted to. He thought it tortured her to know about his sticking cowrie shells on little boxes. But between them the account was absolutely clear. Everyone she talked to knew how clear it was! This fool of a Wane girl was too selfish to listen. Everyone who really listened could see her side; could see that he was much happier torturing her with his little boxes, than she was, living with a man who wouldn't even sleep with her, and who was known to be the slave of that bitch who called herself Tossty.

"You'll tell Jerry that I was sorry to find him out," remarked the visitor at this point.

"Find him out?" she echoed. "Find him out? I beg your pardon, Find Jerry out? Oh, yes; oh, of course!"

She moved a step towards the table and began toying with the waxen petals of a bunch of gardenias that stood there in a green vase. Suddenly she swung round and faced him with a stupefying irrelevant question.

"Have you seen this new act at the Regent's, Dick? I hear it's quite a popular success; and I'd like to know from a man's point of view — a man less prejudiced than Jerry — what there really is in this Tossty's performance. I've only seen them play together, those two, and to tell you the truth I greatly preferred Tissty. Of course, they're neither of them—"

It seemed impossible for Mr. Gaul to take off his spectacles quickly enough. The blurred outlines of a confused vision presented themselves to him as his best escape from such an equivocal topic. But now when he looked at Lucinda standing by those gardenias, her smooth, white forehead, so eminently intellectual and spiritual, that forehead upon which when she was confirmed at Salisbury the great Bishop of South Wessex had laid so unusually a sympathetic hand, appeared to him one of the most shameless objects he had ever beheld!

“Tissty, anyway,” went on Lucinda, still standing by the vase of gardenias, “is much the prettier of the two; and if either of them has a spark of talent she’s the one who has it. *This* woman seems... don’t you think so yourself, Dick... simply what the old Weymouth papers would have called ‘a fetching piece’. She ogles the gallery. She flirts with the pit. But if you’re going to talk of dancing or of acting — but of course, Jerry’s head’s turned, just as the crowd’s. Jerry never did have any taste in his women.”

“Not even when—” Mr. Gaul was chivalrous enough to respond with a quaint, stiff, little bow over the hat he held on his knees.

“Least of all then,” laughed the lady, giving her shoulders a satirical shrug in a foreign manner. “But the unfortunate thing about Jerry is—”

She was interrupted by the appearance of Perdita who came into the room dressed to go out and began speaking at once, even while she was in the act of opening the door, in that particular tone of strained but calm desperation to which nervous people work themselves up as a result of a protracted mental struggle.

“You won’t mind, Mrs. Cobbold, if I—” but catching sight of Richard, she stopped abruptly.

Lucinda transformed herself in a second from a personage who could be confused with Clytemnestra into a gracious and charming hostess introducing a young man to a young woman.

Mr. Gaul thought to himself, as he shook hands with Perdita —

“I must devote a special chapter, when I come to what with us today represents monasticism, to show how it came about that the old monks thought of women in connection with the devil. I believe there’s a deep metaphysical secret here — only it needs working out. How Lucinda has changed from what she was when we were alone! And they’re always changing like that. Little Miss Monkton does it, just the same as her mother. Daisy Lily does it, the same as *her* mother. I can see it’s going to drive poor old Magnus out of his senses over his Miss Wix. It’s *change* that they represent. Those writers are wrong who say they’re the conservative force in life. Every woman is always creating Something out of Nothing. Parthenogenesis is their natural condition! We try to discover the laws of nature and then follow them; but women instinctively resist all law. They’re what Goethe makes the devil say *he* is. They’re the eternal daughters of Chaos.”

While these thoughts flitted through the philosopher’s skull, Lucinda had been introducing him to Perdita as warmly as if the girl were her own daughter: even carrying her cajolery so far as to touch Perdita’s small wrist, in its tight black sleeve and lace cuff, with a caressing hand.

“But you’re going out, my dear?” she remarked tentatively, as if she had nothing in the world to do but to humour the whims of pretty companions.

Perdita having allowed the young man to take her hand, and having given him a quick, searching glance, recovered herself sufficiently so as to be able to murmur, in a less tense manner, that she was anxious to find a chemist’s shop.

“Why, what could be better?” declared Lucinda brightly. “Mr. Gaul’s just the person to help us. You’ll do that for me, won’t you, Dick? The one in the Dorchester Road is the one *I* always go to. But I daresay you'd like to show Miss Wane some of our other shops. She's seen positively *nothing* of the town. Take her as far as St. Mary's Street, if you're free this morning. Why not?"

It transpired, therefore — though Perdita displayed only the barest civility to the young man — that their forms might presently have been seen crossing the street between Queen Victoria's statue and St. John's church, directing their steps towards a chemist's window, in which stood — for it was a long-established pharmacist's — two of the biggest glass vessels, the one containing green liquid and the other purple, that the girl had ever seen. All these various objects as she took them in, became the mere stage-setting of her miserable mood, the heraldic "supporters", as it might be said, of her engrossing wretchedness. Her unhappiness took possession of the tall church spire, whose grey pretentiousness had become such a notable landmark and seamark for miles around; took possession of the embronzed imperial lady; took possession of those two jewel-like symbols of the wonders of chemistry; and made them carry her down a long diminishing perspective of frantic decisions.

"I won't stand it," she said to herself, "a day longer; and I won't go back to Guernsey either. I'll leave that place and get another job here. I wonder if this man—"

They were outside the shop now and she turned round towards him.

"Don't go away, please, Mr. Gaul! I've got something I want very much to ask you."

Mr. Gaul took off his spectacles and made a movement with them as if transcribing some sympathetic word on the air.

"I'll wait for you here," he said, and planted himself in front of the plate-glass window. While he waited he tried to make an orderly arrangement of his somewhat scattered thoughts. “She’s unhappy,” he concluded. “She’s unhappy with Lucinda. I must give her some practical advice.”

That he found it difficult to determine what precise form this sagacious assistance was to take was proved by a vague movement of the hand which still held his spectacles towards those brilliantly coloured objects that shone so purple and so green behind the glass. Aware that he could now obscurely see the slender, dark figure within, standing alone at the counter, he hurriedly turned round to gaze at the back view of Brunswick Terrace.

“I can’t talk to her in the town,” he thought. “I must take her for a walk.”

Mr. Gaul concealed in the secret depths of his guileless mind no small conceit of himself as a practical confessor to unhappy young ladies. He had often told himself a story about the competent manner in which he would act if he found a life-weary street-girl alone at night on an unfrequented part of the beach. Miss Wane was not a street-girl, but she was evidently very unhappy... Having purchased a small bottle of Eau-de-Cologne; for the more troubled she was in her mind the more extravagantly she always used this fragrance, Perdita paused for a moment before leaving the shop, to collect *her* thoughts, which were certainly a great deal more disturbed than Mr. Gaul’s.

“It’s not her being *mad* that’s the worst,” she pondered now, as she read, and yet read not, the chemical abbreviations on the glass jars on the shelves, “and it’s not her forcing herself into my room, in that awful dressing-gown, and keeping me awake every night. I think she is a bit mad; but not in the sort of way... in the sort of way...” and Perdita, as she inhaled the health-giving odours of a cheerful row of various kinds of soap tried to define to herself in what sort of way Mrs. Cobbold’s aberration might conceivably have appealed to her. “The truth is,” her thoughts ran on, for she was deliberately prolonging her sanctuary among all these nepenthes and opiates and palliatives for human distress, "the truth is, there's something about the woman that's deeply and frighteningly *evil;* not merely evil in anything she's done, for I can't make out whether she *has* done anything; but in her attitude to herself all the way through. There's a *falseness* in her; not merely a theatrical pretending. For a thing like that would never have scared me so; but the falseness that the most frightening kind of criminal has: something different from humanity; and yet not in the least animal."

A little less humiliated by her failure at High House now that she had given her reaction a name and analyzed her discomfort, she moved to the door of the shop.

"So sorry for keeping you, Mr. Gaul!" she murmured as she came out, "but there's something I did want to ask you... if I might... could we find a seat somewhere for a moment... in that church perhaps?"

The idea of this foreigner suggesting St. John's church — whether it was locked up or not at the moment he could not tell — as a suitable place for secular conversation tickled Mr. Gaul's fancy; but it made him all the more resolute to take the girl for a proper walk; and it was then that the idea of Lodmoor — which was indeed, unless he took her across the harbour to the Nothe, the nearest place where they could be alone — became a definite decision. He looked at Perdita, while his round face was illuminated by this happy solution of their dilemma.

"I'll show you Lodmoor," he declared, with as much solemnity as if he had said "I'll show you the grave of Caractacus."

" I 'd like to see it," she said gratefully; while the sympathetic gravity of his countenance made her feel so much confidence in him that she did not even bother herself to wonder what sort of a natural phenomenon this "Lodmoor" might be.

"He's nice," she thought. "He's really nice. He may be able to help me."

Thus was it arranged by whatever invisible forces embody themselves in what we call chance, that before so many minutes had elapsed from their leaving the entrance of High House, Perdita Wane and Richard Gaul were once more overlooked by that imposing stone erection. But this time they continued on their way past it; and were soon upon the long level road stretching between Lodmoor and the sea-wall.

"You couldn't have known — no one *could* from a letter or two — what you'd find at the Cobbolds'."

It was when they were walking together by the edge of the low grey wall that he hazarded this bold remark.

"I think," said Perdita, after a moment's hesitation, "that she has got some frightful thing on her mind."

Mr. Gaul was flabbergasted. Had the girl begun already to listen to all the morbid legends that circulated in the town in regard to this lady? He cast about for some prelude to a less personal exchange of views; but all he could think of was the chapter in the "Philosophy of Representation" upon which he had been engaged when Magnus Muir had burst in upon him with his talk about getting married to a shop-girl. It was extraordinary how impossible it was to steer clear of unpleasant events, even if one didn't stir an inch from one's own quiet course.

"I am writing a book," he remarked emphatically.

Perdita glanced at him with some embarrassment.

"A book?" she murmured. "Is it" — and in an instantaneous revolution of her mind she tried to visualize Mr. Gaul as a writer of novels, but simply could not do so— "a book of essays?"

"Not exactly," he replied. "Well! To tell you the truth, it's a System of Philosophy."

Against the background of the dark desolation at her side, which he had told her was Lodmoor, and against the foreground of certain expressions on the face of Mrs. Cobbold, “a System of Philosophy” seemed one of the most reassuring things in this Weymouth scene that she had yet stumbled on.

“I suppose I shouldn’t be able to understand,” she said, “even if you told me, what the leading idea of it was?” And she thought in her heart: “He is nice. I believe I *will* ask him presently where I could get another job.”

“Every system,” replied Mr. Gaul, “can be *made* clear. There is a *clue-word* somewhere. Mine is Representation. When modern people deny the existence of God and of any survival after death and of free will, I answer that there is something in the deep places of life — though doubtless outside the material world— ‘representative’ of such things. I don’t say corresponding exactly, mind you; but sufficiently representative of them to satisfy all those cravings in our nature which half-discovered and half-invented these daring concepts.”

He paused to take breath; but he did not lessen his speed, which for the girl at his side had become uncomfortably fast.

“Yes,” she panted.

But she really did begin to feel a good bit happier; not through any practical advice given her by Mr. Gaul, for at the mere approach to what really was the matter he had shied off, but through the guileless charm of his disarming personality.

“And it can satisfy them not *less* fully,” he went on, while the girl, struggling to keep up with him, wondered hopelessly to what “it” and “them” referred, “but more fully. For instance, take the concept ‘God’. The truth of this concept has nothing in it of that gloomy fear, that solemn servility, that obsequious cringing, that moral cowardice, which human depravity has perpetuated in connection with it.”

“I.. am.. sure.. you.. are.. right, Mr. Gaul.”

“You see what I mean, don’t you?” his voice went on. “The great thing is to put our basic human cravings into a rigorous mental crucible, until we extract their purest essence. This essence, when we actually get it sifted down, will turn out to be much more like the old feelings called up by such words as ‘God’, ‘Immortality’, ‘Free Will’, than it will resemble the sapless formulae of modern scientific catchwords. You see what I mean, don’t you?”

“Yes, Mr. Gaul.” And she thought in her heart: “By the time we have turned to come back he will have grown tired of my stupid answers; and *then* will be the moment for me to ask his advice about a job.”

But even Mr. Gaul’s power of abstracting himself from the pressure of immediate phenomena was now disturbed by the sudden stopping, with a good deal of noise, of a small open motor-car at their side. The occupant of this car blew his horn vigorously as he came to a pause, being apparently of the opinion that to arrest the attention of a peripatetic philosopher, discoursing to a girl-pupil, the *vox humana* alone was insufficient. Then from his seat at the wheel Sippy Ballard addressed the pair. It was the whim of a moment; for he was planning a descent upon Lodmoor Hut in his official rôle as Town Clerk. But Richard’s avoidance of him had excited his pertinacity and here was a chance to gratify his curiosity about the new companion.

“A fine morning, Mr. Gaul!”

The young man turned and surveyed this untimely interloper.

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said it was a fine morning for a walk.”

Mr. Gaul took off his spectacles and looked vaguely round.

“Going as far as the Coast-Guards?”

Mr. Gaul advanced a little, so as to place himself well between Perdita and this young impertinent.

“The old Bay is looking its best this morning, eh?”

This remark was as much addressed to Mr. Gaul’s companion as to himself; but Perdita, acting on the assumption that a casual encounter between two Weymouth men was no concern of hers, stepped lightly to the top of the low sea-wall at her side and pretended to be absorbed in the view. A little nonplussed by this manoeuvre Sippy Ballard also looked sea-ward.

“Wonderfully clear — the White Nore today,” he said.

“The White *Nose”* corrected Richard Gaul drily.

“Well! Nose or Nore, I must be getting on,” said the other briskly, “if I can’t give you a lift?”

Mr. Gaul replaced his spectacles on *his* nose, and replied that cars were nice for getting about, but that he himself preferred his own feet.

“I’m going to pay a visit to that Gipsy-woman,” remarked the intruder, starting his engine. “They keep me busy, our city-fathers!” And with that he drove off.

Gaul glanced at his companion, and seeing that the girl showed signs of preferring to walk along the wall, he obligingly humoured her, moving along by her side upon the narrow path at a slower pace.

“They might just as well have let that woman alone,” he called up to her. “But new brooms sweep clean. He lives in my house,” he added apologetically. “He is a pushing sort of person.”

“So I imagine,” laughed Perdita, who began to feel a childish pleasure in her present position. She even allowed herself, as her spirits rose, to recall the figure of the Jobber throwing back the seaweed. “Perhaps, after all,” she thought, “I *might* give that woman another chance.”

Mr. Ballard had been right about the beauty of the view that morning. In front of them now as they walked in silence — for Richard found it impossible to *shout* his philosophical ideas to a girl on a wall; and indeed he began to experience a mild sensual pleasure from the sight of those slender legs as they moved along above him — there could be discerned the whole expanse of that shining bay, buttressed, on the east, by the most remarkable stretch of cliffs, the most varied in geological formation, the most monumental in the grandeur of its curves, that can be found anywhere round the whole coast of England. This noble line of cliffs, beginning to mount up, as Perdita’s eyes followed it now, behind the black-and-white building familiarly spoken of as “the Coast-Guards”, stretched away in a south-easterly direction, past the majestic promontory of the White Nose, till it ended with St. Alban’s Head.

As the girl moved along this low sea-wall she amused herself by kicking down upon the beach below various isolated pebble-stones that recent storms had deposited upon the grey surface of this rampart. In many places, however, she had to cross, not only a quite heavy sprinkling of pebbles, but patches of loose sand and broken shells. Sometimes her gaze would turn from the line of cliffs in front of her and veering northward would wander over the wide expanse of salt-marshes by which the road was bounded. One object alone, on this inland side of the road, broke the dark monotony of these reedy flats and that was the hovel now occupied by Gipsy May, and now invaded, as the girl could see in the distance, for she had noted the stopping of the car beside its dilapidated boardings and sheds, by the youthful Town Clerk. Save for this little erection the marshes stretched away in just that kind of uninterrupted desolation that had the strongest appeal to Perdita. Rushy bogs, where the brackish mud was hidden beneath tall wavy grasses, alternated with beds of glaucous-leaved, crimson-stalked marsh-plants, small as mosses, and then again there were dark stretches of gloomy peat-sod, that bore little or no vegetation at all. Patches of minute vegetable amphibiums, half-plant, half-seaweed, with oozy, succulent, salty stems, grew along the edge of the broad black ditch that separated Lodmoor from the highway, forming a perceptible contrast to the taller and more astringent sand-shore growths which in spite of their winter hibernation — especially in the case of the bladder-campion and the sea-pink — still braved, with a few withered petals and many unbowed stalks, “the extremity of the skies”.

“I haven’t made it clear enough to her,” thought Mr. Gaul, “how in every human soul there is something that is beyond and outside the astronomical world. It all depends on that point.”

The agreeable glow that the sight of Perdita’s legs gave him — what a happy thought it was of her’s to walk along the top of the wall! — did not seem to disturb the current of his musings. The vague warmth of diffused well-being that it cast over him seemed to reveal with a culminating vividness that all material objects were unreal compared with the mental activity in which they floated, like rocking driftwood on an intangible tide. Being a philosopher, rather than a neophyte in sanctity, Mr. Gaul did not feel it at all incumbent upon him to refrain from contemplating Perdita’s legs. And indeed the harmony with which his thoughts fell into perspective, as he did so, seemed to justify the indulgence.

“The mind is everything,” said Mr. Gaul to himself, and he began to feel the actual flowing expansion of this mental mirror, wherein all these things, the narrow path by the road’s edge, the grey pebble-strewn wall, the girl’s black stockings, the far-away image, several miles off, of the famous White

Horse, cut out of the Chalk Downs, hung suspended, with clear thought-spaces above them and beneath them, all rounded by the same unfathomable mystery.

If her companion's thoughts, save for the pleasure of looking at her legs, were thus idealized, Perdita's own thoughts, as she advanced along the top of that wall had grown to be completely resolved into the separate objects she looked at. She had often practised — even in her childhood — this natural nepenthe for human unhappiness, and she began now to be really successful in substituting the inanimate, as the burden of her mind, for the face of Mrs. Cobbold. Her thoughts became the pebbles; they became the sand; they became the waves; they became the crying of the gulls. Her thoughts became the sharp, bitter, overpowering smell of heaps of ancient seaweed. They became that peculiar dryness, a dryness that resembles a sound that sets your teeth on edge, of the shelving pebble-bank beneath her. They became those curious, indescribable waftures that floated over Lodmoor — as of thousands of years of dissolving vegetation, and, on the top of that, of thousands of years of the solidifying of such dissolution.

Such being the cogitations of this pair, it might almost be said that the two primordial symbols of man's mind and of woman's mind were advancing towards Sippy Ballard's empty car, with the sea on the one hand and Lodmoor on the other! Two aboriginal Silences they were, as they came along, a masculine silence and a feminine silence. And meanwhile this grey sea-wall of Portland stone, with the curved pebble-bank beneath and the recurrent breaking of the waves on the pebbles, went on with its non-human endurance. It was bearing the weight, those grey stones, that grey rampart of aged oolite, of more than a frail girl's slight form. It was bearing the weight, along with those pebbles and along with the flints in the road, taciturn, indrawn, unyielding, the weight of all the in-breathings and outbreathings of the orbic motion of the world, of the systole and diastole of space and time. Bearing the weight, they were, today as yesterday; as when the Jubilee Clock was built for Victoria; as when the great White Horse was cut for Victoria's Grandfather; as when John Keats, sailing for Italy, lay on his ship's deck and stared inland, riddled by sickness, racked by desire. Bearing the weight was that whitish-grey sea-wall, and those shelving pebbles; the weight whose expectancy never is satisfied, the weight of all the matter in the universe, and of all the out-breath and the in-breath of the universe. And the planetary expectancy, which that sea-wall bore, trembled and wavered in a reality that was only relative, hovered like a train of moving, motionless images reflected in an eternal mirage. And the thoughts of the one of this particular pair of human intruders who was a man continued to reduce these stones and pebbles and sea-waves to the insubstantiality of bodiless ideas; while the thoughts of the one who was a woman accepted each "minute particular" as a sort of absolute, *the way things were,* in this world, where a girl could be happy walking on a sea-wall and desperately miserable shut up in High House.

Mr. Gaul and Perdita were both walking quite slowly now — the one three or four feet higher than, and a little in advance of, the other, as if, in spite of an occasional car or truck driving in to Weymouth, they were so solitary there that the place had begun to take notice of them. This is a frequent experience with wayfarers. Leaving a town or a hamlet they chat to one another for a while, and are accosted by others; but let them walk long enough upon the same road; let them walk long enough along the same beach, and the time arrives when that inanimate pathway subdues them to itself, hypnotizes them into silence, into a curious passivity. It is then that under the spell of the simplest forms of matter, a mud-bank, a flint track, a stone wall, they are allowed to listen to a speech too deep for sound; and they become eavesdroppers of the ancient litany of aboriginal matter and grow confederate with the long piety of the cosmos, whose religion is to wait. The whitish-grey sea-wall, under the girl's feet and at the man's side, had the air — as the sunlight fell upon it — of being something that had moved forward just the fraction of an inch towards their conscious souls. It had the air of posing a question to these self-absorbed intelligences. The shelving pebbles — whose surface was like a sound that might set a dinosaur's tooth on edge — seemed to join with the wall in asking them this question.

But the pair still moved on their way in silence, unconscious of an appeal that had been made to sentient organisms endowed with the power of movement for so many millions of years of planetary life. They had now arrived opposite Lodmoor Hut, where the empty car of the young Town Clerk was still stationed. Mr. Gaul threw a nervous glance across the road and cried hurriedly to Perdita:

"Come down now, if you don't mind, and let's get on faster!"

The girl obeyed docilely enough and, taking his hand, jumped down. But they were too late. The door of the hut burst open and S. P. Ballard, followed by Gipsy May and young Zed, rushed out into the highway. Sippy Ballard's sharp eyes caught sight of them in a second, as Richard tried to hurry his companion off.

"Mr. Gaul!" he shouted, "Mr. Gaul!"

His voice was lost in the shrill vituperation that Larry Zed was uttering. He seemed calling down upon him some terrific Romany curse; and Richard, as he fidgetted and hesitated, found the occasion was too dramatic even for *his* power of dodging the agitations of humanity. Drawn, in spite of themselves, towards this group, and it seemed as if young Zed had laid his hand on Mr. Ballard to prevent him ascending into his car, the two pedestrians crossed the road. A volley of violent explanations was at once flung at them by the angry lad and they found themselves — much to Richard's annoyance and Perdita's bewilderment — the centre of a situation that, if the incident had occurred in the town in place of so lonely a spot, would speedily have become an excited crowd.

It was scarce noticed by anyone, Marret's retreat just then, as the shabby, dark figure of the Punch-and-Judy girl slipped quietly away; but Perdita — who, as a stranger, was more detached than the rest from what was going on — followed that figure with an interest she would have found hard to explain as she watched it scrambling over the wall which she herself had just quitted, and disappearing down the pebble-bank towards the sea!

Gipsy May herself had gone to her fowl-run; and here she could be seen bending over a black Minorca Cock as if what was occurring at the moment was no concern of hers.

But Sippy Ballard, freeing himself from the indignant clutch of the boy, jumped incontinently now into his seat and, removing his cap with a whimsical bow to Perdita, set his engine in motion.

"You won't have a ride then?" were his parting words to Gaul, jerked out as his car spluttered off, "I've got another little job out Preston way!" and they could hear him sounding his impertinent horn, as gaily and viciously as some machine-bred Puck, as he overtook a lumbering lorry ahead of him loaded with Cattistock and Frampton beer-barrels. Meanwhile Gipsy May was approaching the hut with the bird in a paralyzed condition in her arms. "Something's bit it," she kept repeating intently to herself.

"Shall we... do you mind?... go in with them... for a moment?" murmured Mr. Gaul.

And Perdita, who was habitually anxious to be as inconspicuous as possible, heard her name mentioned by her companion, and found herself following the Gipsy, who went on repeating, “Something’s bit it!” as if this mysterious disaster in the fowl-run were the only event of a serious nature that had taken place, across the threshold of the hut. On the table of the kitchen, among a number of scattered cards — some of them bearing pictures such as the Guernsey girl had never before set eyes on — lay an imposing legal document with the red seal of the local Town Council; and to this object, when the door had been shut behind them, the attention of Mr. Gaul was indignantly directed by young Zed.

“Take the young lady back of house and show her Blotchy, Larry, while I tend to this bird. Mr. Gaul can’t put mind to thik lawyer’s gibbery when ye be yallerin’ at he!” And once more she muttered to herself “Something’s bit it!”

It thus became Perdita’s destiny, still trying to be as docile and inconspicuous as she could, to follow this red-haired, green-eyed youngster, who looked anything but elated at the prospect of being her entertainer, into the enclosure at the rear. She found herself, however, decidedly impressed by the brown-and-white cow and she very soon, after looking at Larry gravely, as they stood in the shed, and meeting his furtive green eyes with her own steady brown ones, began to disarm his touchy aloofness. She had never been one to care much for boys, or indeed for young men of her own age, but the very thing in Larry — his unsettled wits and erratic movements — that made others shrink from him, stirred a deep reciprocity in her lonely heart.

As for young Zed himself, he had not been with her for five minutes before he began to forget his hatred of Sippy Ballard and his agitation over the Tarot cards.

“She’s like ‘me Nothing-Girl’,” he said to himself, “who do cuddle I to sleep! If only she’d let poor Larry do it, how he’d hold she close!”

Never had young Zed made love to anyone in his life; and only with that presence at night, when his limbs were relaxed and the labours of the day released him, had he ever really known, even in his imagination, what a girl’s body can do to drive away pain and suffering and anger and misery from the mind of mortal man.

“Come!” he suddenly said to her when she had been stroking Blotchy for several minutes. “I’ll show ‘ee me girt Hern!”

To Perdita’s surprise he actually gave her his hand, as a child might have done, and stealing stealthily out of the little enclosure — too ramshackle to be called a barton — he led her softly along the edge of a ditch, where the expanse of the marshes was hidden from her vision by one of those little reed-shanties that sportsmen put up for the purposes of duck-shooting. On one side of this reed-shanty there was a high clump of dead bull-rushes, and on the other a half-prostrate but still living willow. He made her stand perfectly still for a few seconds when they reached this spot, and releasing her hand stole forward, like a limber-footed young savage, towards the tree.

Perdita as she stood there, her feet sinking in the black peat-mud and her nostrils inhaling the faint, sickly aroma of aeons of vegetable dissolution, had time to realize how much she was attracted to this queer lad. Compared with the romantic agitation in her empty heart which the formidable figure of the Jobber had aroused, this was nothing. It was just a gentle protective thrill of interest. But such as it was, it made her, as she watched his stealthy, wild-animal movements, feel that she could have caressed him as she had done Blotchy. She liked everything about him. She liked his green eyes. She liked his blood-red hair, with a matted elf-lock hanging loose over his forehead. She liked his white gleaming teeth. She liked his long bare forearms, as free from hairs as were her own. She liked his brown knees beneath his ragged knickerbockers. She liked his supple waist and his thin slouching body.

Hurriedly and gravely she drew off her gloves and squeezed them under her waist-band.

At last she saw him turn and beckon to her to advance. In silent haste she obeyed him, moving almost as quietly as he had done himself, and crouched down by his side behind the sloping willow-trunk. Here again he possessed himself of her hand and she was aware, as he clutched it tight and pressed it against his side, as they crouched together, that his heart was beating violently. Suddenly he became as rigid, stiff and frozen, as a beast that catches sight of its prey. Then he pulled the girl forward; and they leaned together across the tree-trunk where they could see what was behind the reed-hut.

And Perdita was seized with such a spasm of awe-struck wonder at what she saw there that it was she this time who pressed the lad's hand against her side. For standing there with its back to them on a tussock of grass, with one long leg curled beneath its wing, and its immense beak suspended above a glittering pool of water, stood a great, motionless, grey heron. Breath after breath of incredible pleasure did Perdita draw. She had never seen such a thing in all her days! It was not merely the heron that created the spell that held her. It was the melancholy waste of those dark brackish marshes behind it. It was the pallid cheek and blood-red hair of the lad, across whose profile she gazed at the huge bird, and whose fingers she was pressing against her side. It would have puzzled her to put into words the emotion she felt at that moment; but when the heron, catching the sound, one might almost have thought, of the beating of those two young hearts, spread its enormous wings and flapped away over the ditches, there surged up within her, with a dark delicious trembling, a particular feeling she sometimes had when she thought of death — its release, its finality, its great escape.

"Where do 'ee live?" Larry asked her in a whisper as they walked back to the hut.

Perdita was still holding the boy's hand, but the intense eagerness with which he asked this question, in a tone more like that of a lover than a child, made her feel a sudden sense of uneasiness. How could she tell what might be the effect of exciting emotional feelings in this queer elemental Being? Of course if young Zed felt for her as she felt for the Jobber — so she said to herself as they crossed the paddock — just a vague, delicious quintessence of pure romance, careless of what came of it — all would be well. But who could discern what went on in the mind of a strange youth like this? Thus — in her feelings and impressions rather than in any definite words — Perdita pondered; nor was she mistaken in fancying that her appearance at Lodmoor Hut had roused an emotional tempest in the mind of Larry Zed.

"Don't let's go in yet!" he whispered now, when they reached the back of the hut. "Let me show 'ee me seaweed-book, will 'ee? 'Tis in hay-loft where I do sleep."

Perdita felt a little uneasy at the idea of this excitable lad coaxing her to his sleeping-place; but the inevitable reaction in a nature like hers had already begun; and as she contemplated the wooden steps leading to the hay-loft above Blotchy's shed, she suddenly felt a wave of such desolation of heart, such emptiness, such loneliness, such futility, that all sense of responsibility for her actions seemed to slide away.

"What does it matter?" she thought. "Do, don't do; draw back, go on; be brave, be cowardly; it all comes to the same thing in the end. It's just the purest fancy that that man gave me a thought! Why should I think of him?

Up steps, down steps; in and out; back and forth! ‘We know what we are; but we know not what we may be’.”

With these flotsam thoughts in her heart, and the green eyes of young Zed shining like a cat’s close behind her, she climbed the rickety stair-way — “he can kick it down” she thought, “if he wants to, and keep me up there in the straw forever!”

The tiny loft was certainly bare, when she opened the door and entered; but there was a camp-bed at one side of it and although there *was* a heap of straw, it was all piled close to an orifice in the floor that opened upon the cow’s manger. There was no straw immediately round the bed.

In her present mood the girl sat wearily down on the bed and stared out of the open door across Lodmoor.

“This boy only wants me because I’m a girl,” she said to herself, “and that man didn’t give me a second thought. I’ll die if I go on with that woman, though. I must get out of *that,* anyway; even if I have to be a servant. I wonder where a person goes to get servants’ jobs? But they always ask references; and that woman will be furious. I know one thing, though. I’ll die sooner than go back to Guernsey!”

And all this while young Zed, pretending to hunt for his book of pressed seaweeds, was on his knees in the straw, moving it about with hands that positively shook.

“I’ve got a girl on me bed,” he kept saying to himself, “and she be like all girls be. But she bain’t scornful of poor Lal like them others. She did give hand to poor Lal to stroky and huggy. I’ve got a girl on me bed.”

And then his shaking hands would encounter the old ledger-book he was looking for; but he would push it further under the straw the moment he touched it, afraid lest the figure on the bed would notice it and demand it. And he thought of all the times when he had walked up and down the lonely beach telling himself stories about some stray girl, some tramp-girl, some harlotry-girl even, that he might manage to coax to come up those loft steps — “I’ve got a girl on me bed” — and he thought of how he had waited hours and hours on the Esplanade — unknown to Gipsy May — in hope of exchanging a word with Marret when the Punch-and-Judy show stopped. But Marret never cared about him, whether he was there or not, whether he spoke to her or not, whether he helped her carry the whole Punch-Stage or not! Marret didn’t care whether he was in the world or not — any more nor he’d been a dog-fish— “I’ve got a girl on me bed” — and as for his own precious May, she didn’t seem like a proper, real girl, at all, save now and then, when she cried to him, same as she did when Marret knocked over “the Hanged Man”. But now he’d got a real, proper girl — like what they all be — and there she were on his wone bed— “I’ve got a girl on me bed” — and all he’d got to do was just walk over to her and say:

“ Tisn’t time for seaweed-book yet, me Lovely!” — and put his hand on her knee.

Down on his own knees in the loose straw, he kept flinging little wisps of it through the oblong hole to where Blotchy’s head generally was at night; but the cow was outside now, tethered by the edge of the ditch where Perdita had petted her before spying upon the heron, and he could see every stalk of straw that he dropped touch the smooth, soft-worn edge of the manger, where the sunlight fell in a heavy stream, coming through the half-open door and lying there, yellow and still.

“Why don’t ‘ee go over to she, then, Lal, me boy?”

Thus the quivering imp of desire whispered to his heart. But his heart could only repeat, with inane, monotonous repetition the same old burden; but something — he did not know what it was — just kept him there, dropping straws, fewer and fewer at a time, on that sun-warmed manger’s edge. Presently he put a straw in his mouth; and fell to letting them drop by threes, by twos, and finally only one at a time. But, all the while, his thoughts ran a fantastic round of half-crazed poetical sensuality. He kept thinking of the maddening slenderness and softness of Perdita's body — such as, in a minute, he would be enjoying! Little peculiarities, which he had passionately noticed — and they could have been remarked in any slender girl who was not a skeleton! — swept over his senses now, till they made him tremble. The curves of her flanks, the veins in her neck, the way her hair was drawn back, the extreme littleness of her wrists — Oh, but these were the reasons why he kept drawing a straw through his teeth, and throwing 'em down a hole! She was too lovely for him to *dare* to touch. And yet *there* she was!— "I've got a girl on me bed" — and she was herself, all the time, he knew it, though he durstn't look straight at her, for fear of meeting her glance, staring out of the loft-door; staring with those sad, steady, mysterious brown eyes, like the eyes of the Virgin Mary!

And Perdita, all this while, was saying to herself:

"He never gave me a second thought. That business of the seaweed was some freak of his own and had nothing to do with me. When next I pass him on the esplanade — if I ever do — he won't recognize me. I'm not pretty; I'm not striking-looking. I look insignificant, pitiful, unappealing to all! The only man who could *possibly* ever be interested in me would be some queer, strange, non-human character like — like I *thought* the Jobber was... but I was a fool to think such a thing. He, no doubt, has scores of girls in Weymouth and Portland — yes, and in Lulworth, too! Why should the very first man I meet here be the one — queer, strange, unlike everybody else — that I can tell myself stories about? But I won't go home. No; anything but that! I'd stay at High House if that woman hadn't forced herself into my room. But Oh, dear! it doesn't matter what becomes of me.

I'm nothing of any value. I'm like any one of the thousands and millions of people who might just as well be dead as be alive. I can see how my life will be — like a map! I shall leave this Cobbold woman; I shall find some appalling drudgery; I shall write to Aunt and tell her how happy I am; and I shall go on and on — getting novels out of the Public Library as a drug, to stop my thinking — and then, old before my time, with a passion for Persian Cats and the Works of Henry James, they'll come one day and find me stiff and stark — old Miss Wane of the Back-Attic! — and give me a pauper's funeral and chloroform my cats and sell my Henry Jameses — and that will be my story's end! There's that boy over there, who's probably never — just by unfair destiny — kissed anyone, except his Gipsy, all his life; and here am I, who've never had even a Gipsy to kiss. And the boy's desperately attracted to me and thinks I'm beautiful, and I *know* he's beautiful; and yet—"

And Perdita felt such a bitter contempt for her scruples, that she imagined herself jumping up off the bed, with the hot blood rushing to her cheeks, and running to the boy's side clapping her hands over his eyes and crying out:

"Let's *be* mad—"

Instead of doing this, however, which would certainly have so startled young Zed that it would have scared away every amorous feeling he had, she did — possibly inspired by great creative Nature — something that was much more to the point. She lay down on the boy's bed with her head on his pillow and shut her eyes. Young Zed knelt up in the straw and stared at her in a trance of adoration.

"I'll be cooming over to 'ee, present!" he said to himself. And then he thought, "She be whispering in her heart, 'Here I be, Lal! Here I be! When be 'ee cooming to I, Fisherman?"

But Perdita’s thoughts had flown far away from poor Larry. Lying prone like this, stretched out on the bed, vague emotional feelings that she had had since her earliest girlhood came floating through her nerves. She had always associated whatever romantic sensations she had with the presence of the sea. She had even, in her young-girl fancies, created a sort of vague, indistinct sea-lover, whose identity she would feel bending over her at night, when the wild Channel Island tides were riding high. It was indeed into this half-mythic image of masculine predominance visiting her maiden bed like an enamoured sea-god that in the excitement of her first landing the figure of the Jobber had transformed himself; so that during all these recent nights, when under the stress of her unhappiness at High House she had turned piteously, as soon as her head was on the pillow, to the sea-lover of her girlhood, it was — as happens in the old books of poetry — in the eidolon of the Jobber’s form that her tutelary demi-god consoled her. In her weakness and her melancholy, careless of what happened to her, she let the nerves of her girl’s body cry aloud to the nerves of this boy’s body kneeling in the straw; but the feeling of her heart was all the while with the Jobber; for he, and he alone till the end of her days, would represent that vague sea-presence which had thrilled her childhood.

Young Zed had no idea when he imagined that her silence was calling to him how like his own innocence hers was. Here they were together, both of them waifs and derelicts; but though the boy might mutter “I’ve got a girl on me bed”, and the girl might cry out, “Let’s *be* mad!” — something, the natural shrinking of inexperience and the invisible chasm created by social custom kept them apart. But chance seemed resolute to give them yet another opportunity; for as a result of the dust that was wafted over to her from where he was disturbing the straw she suddenly sneezed— “Amor dextra sternuit approbationem!” — and this broke the spell.

With the quick spontaneous grace of a wild animal young Zed leapt to his feet and went over to her side. Very gently, just as if she had been made of some material more precious than flesh and blood, he stroked one of her bare hands which lay cold on her lap with the tips of his fingers. Perdita had closed her eyes; but in a moment she opened them again, for she felt by his quick breathing that he had fallen on his knees by her side and had tightened his fingers over the hand he had touched. For some minutes they stayed together in this position; and then something deep in the girl, which surprised herself by its sudden strength, stirred within her; and she knew that standing there behind the kneeling lad, in spite of her reckless mood, in spite of her sense of the futility of thinking about him, remained, for all she could do, the great lowering figure of that tall man who threw the seaweed into the sea! But she still went on gazing softly and tenderly into the face of the kneeling boy; nor did she stir, nor did she make the least motion to release her fingers, although, so strong was his feeling, she could feel the burning pulse throbbing within his wrist. Larry's whole soul gleamed in his green eyes as he hung over her. His brain felt dizzy; but it seemed to him as though touching her so, and while she lay there prone and still beneath him, that a veritable consummation of his desire was already taking place. To his fervid imagination it was enough that their eyes clung together and that she knew he was ravishing her in his thought. Her bare hand, round which his fingers burned, was to him then her whole body. For this was the first time in his life that he had held a girl who knew what he felt and did not stop him. His green eyes, as they clung to her soft brown ones, kept saying to her: "I'm taking you! I'm taking you!" and it seemed to him that she yielded more and more, as he bent forward, his body pressed against the side of the couch; and it seemed to him that it pleased her that he should be seeing her bare figure — as he *was* now seeing it in his intense imagination

— and that it pleased her to lie so hushed and still, so that he could the more easily enjoy her; and it seemed to him that this strange passivity, she knowing that he was taking her, was the ultimate essence of her Being offered up to him; and that her lying so still, with her bare hand in his, while he enjoyed her, was the ultimate sign of what it meant to be a real, live, mysterious girl; and that this was the secret of all girls, that they could not know how exciting they were; and that this was their inmost nature that they stayed so quiet while they were loved.

How could he know that it was only possible for Perdita to remain so quiet, and to answer his impassioned gaze so calmly because her own thoughts had once more grown pitifully sad. Weary and hopeless was her whole spirit, as she lay on Larry's bed; and all, all seemed futile to her. The fleeting quiver of response that the boy's beauty and passion had roused in her had been stricken cold by that image of the Jobber lowering above him. Perhaps it had been all the while her feeling for the Jobber — for not a night had passed, since she saw him, but she had gone to sleep thinking about him — that rendered her so sensitive to this boy's infatuation.

It was indeed peculiarly characteristic of Perdita, that fate's best way of making appealing the near and the pressing was to incarnate in them something belonging to the remote and the evasive. Thus while to the ecstatic senses of young Zed there lay exposed before him, yielded willingly up to him, two of the whitest, softest, young girl's breasts that the world contained, behind those breasts the girl's heart had substituted a full-grown man, dark and formidable and full of the magic of the sea, for the boy's red hair and burning fingers. But since such ecstasies, whether spiritual, or physical, after dipping their possessed in Eternity, toss them back all too soon into Time the moment came when young Zed lowered his eyelids, removed his fingers, rose to his feet, and said in an abrupt jerky tone —

“Will ‘ee bide quiet where ‘a be, while I fetches me seaweeds to show ‘ee?”

The girl smiled at him; and, rising from her recumbent position, shook out her dress, put her hands to her hair, picked up her hat from the end of the couch, glanced unconsciously round for some sort of looking-glass, and sat down again on the bed, giving vent to a half-suppressed yawn.

Had these two young people been really disporting themselves in equal rapture, they could not have looked more relaxed or more dragged back to dull reality. Larry crossed the room and wearily lugged out from under the straw an old, great Ledger Book, bound at the back and bearing the inscription in red ink— “Algae”.

The lad placed this heavy volume on Perdita’s lap and sat down by her side. The camp-bed creaked ominously; but they were both so thin that it did no worse than that, and he began showing her the seaweeds. The specimens were so arranged that only one lay upon each page, with a blank page opposite to it; and the result of this was that each of these blank pages bore a deeply indented imprint or natural tracing of this same sea-growth.

Perdita never afterwards forgot what she felt as she watched him turning, one by one, these thick brine-smelling leaves, and saw the beautiful shapes and colours of those sea-plants spread out before her. A strange, half-mystical detachment from all the poignances and confusions of life stole over her; and she thought:

“Oh, if existence could be reduced to this — just looking at seaweeds and letting the world go!”

And when the lad turned one particular page, and she saw before her what must have been a specimen of the very species which had been clinging to the pebble-stone that night on the Esplanade, she bent her head over it, as if enjoying its pungent sea-smell, but in reality to hide from young Zed the fact that her eyes had suddenly filled with tears.

RODNEY LODER

WHEN LUCINDA TOLD MR. GAUL THAT CAPTAIN POXWELL WAS OPPOSED to her sister's second marriage she spoke less than the truth. The Captain so cordially detested Dog Cattistock that Mrs. Lily had to take care they should never meet; not a very easy or pleasant task, unless she became the one to visit her admirer. But Mrs. Lily had taken a natural dislike to be a mere visitor in Peninsular Lodge, a place which was not only forlorn in itself, owing to the financier's miserliness, but was under the complete sway of Lizzie Chant, who viewed her presence there with ill-concealed hostility.

Thus it came about that most of their meetings, which as their marriage drew near occurred more and more frequently, were arranged for the afternoon, when, if not a hopelessly wet day, Captain Poxwell betook himself to his shells in Sandsfoot Castle. Here, since the wintry weather kept excursionists away, the Captain had come to make himself completely at home; and had even gone so far as to devise hiding-places in those ancient walls for the materials of his shell-boxes; the shells themselves being always procurable in the rock-pools at the sea's edge.

Mrs. Lily had at least been persuaded not, as will be seen, without certain secret reservations, to name the twelfth of February as their wedding-day, and so when the second week of that changeable month came round, Dog Cattistock's obtrusive chin and husky, grating voice were in evidence in Half-Way House nearly every afternoon. It was on the ninth of February, only three days before the day appointed for their wedding, that young Daisy Lily, instead of joining her grandfather in the ruins as she usually did while Cattistock was with her mother, decided to walk over to a house called Spy Croft in Belle Vue Road, where lived old Mr. James Loder, the famous Weymouth lawyer, with his unmarried children, Rodney and Ruth.

James Loder had managed the affairs of Daisy's parents, just as he had done those of her grandfather. In addition to this he was her godfather; and feeling an imperative necessity to talk a little about her mother's marriage to some sympathetic feminine ear, she chose, from among all the people she knew, the one who was the quietest, the least excitable and the most likely to keep things to herself. In making this choice Daisy was actuated by a train of long, quiet, sagacious reasons.

"Mother's hopeless," she said to herself. "She does nothing but drift. If I don't look out I shall be living like that myself. She's a warning to anyone; and I'm going to be as different from her as I possibly can!"

In selecting Ruth Loder as her confidante, at this disturbing crisis in her life, Daisy was certainly choosing the one person of all persons in her circle most different from the future Mrs. Cattistock.

While the young girl made her way towards Belle Vue Road, Rodney and Ruth Loder were standing at the window of Spy Croft drawing-room waiting for their father to come down. Drawn up outside the front door Was the old gentleman's bath-chair in which Ruth was presently going to take him for his usual afternoon's airing. The girl had lately — though Daisy Lily had no idea of this change of custom at Spy Croft — substituted herself for her brother as the old man's escort; and today she had the idea, since the weather was mild and windless, of pulling the bath-chair down to a little cove called Bincleaves, on the western side of the Nothe, where there was a strip of beach. As she stood now at the window by her brother's side — and it would have been clear to any observer that they were brother and sister —

Rodney turned his grave pale face and pallid hazel eyes sympathetically upon her.

"Why must you go down the hill to Bincleaves?" he said. "It's such a pull for you getting up again from that beach. When I agreed to your taking him I never meant you to do anything like that. Does he want so *very* much to go down there?"

She smiled and nodded.

"Well, why don't you let *me* take him today? We needn't be rigid in our new regime. Nothing's worth making drastic, unbroken rules about. Let me be the one to do it when he gets a mania for hearing the sea."

She looked Rodney full in the face with an imperceptible tilt of her clearly-marked eye-brows.

"You know what we decided," she said, "and why we decided it. You shall take him whenever I've got shopping to do or am feeling poorly."

A troubled expression, very complicated and indefinable, flitted over her brother's face.

"I can't understand his so disliking my pushing him," he said; and he set himself to stare out at the small lawn, where their black cat Mortmain, a special pet of the old man's, was prowling about, hoping that the sparrows twittering so noisily in the high laurel-hedge might come a little nearer. "Of course," he added, in a faintly querulous tone, "I understand his *preferring* you. Anyone naturally *would* like to be pushed by you rather than by me. But why he should work himself up like this, until—"

"Oh, my dear!" she interrupted, "don't 'ee go on like this! I beg, I beg you not to! We've gone over it all. We've decided what's best to do. And it's *so* upsetting to me to have to go through the whole thing over again. Be good, Rodney, there's a dear, and let what *has* to be, be!"

"Have Father and I *always* disliked each other?" he thought. "Has he despised me all the while for the way I submit to him? Has he been saying to himself, for the last ten years, 'If Rod had any spunk he'd clear out; but since he hasn't, what can you do with such a fool?'"

He turned to Ruth now with a particular smile on his face that, more than any peevish or unhappy words, always stabbed her to the heart.

"Mortmain hasn't caught anything for several days," he said.

The girl did not respond to this remark; but she looked long and long into his countenance.

"That was a shocking smile," her heart was thinking, "to be seen on a man's face."

Nor was Ruth wrong in her feeling; for the mental machinery that caused that smile to be engraved on his face was a gentle form of absolute despair.

Yes, Rodney and Ruth were so much alike that their resemblance, when their life became unbearably monotonous, amounted to something pathetic. Both had the same pale complexion, the same straight nose, the same thin melancholy lips, the same light-coloured chestnut hair, the same faded hazel eyes. Ruth's hair was pulled tight back from her marbly forehead where little blue veins could be seen in any strong light and where the skin itself fitted the skull so closely that wrinkles were impossible. It was a family peculiarity, inherited from James Loder, not to be able to frown; and no doubt this was the *fons et origo* of Rodney's ghastly smile. Rodney had a trick of damping his hair when he brushed it, thus keeping intact the clear white parting on the side of his head which had almost become on organic portion of his appearance. He brushed his hair so smoothly and so closely round his skull that you felt as if it were a thin piece of adhesive paper that could not be removed without drawing blood.

"It breaks my heart to see him smile like that," the girl said to herself; and it came over her that there was some subtle connection between this smile and the familiar furniture of that room, furniture that had been unchanged since their mother's death when he was five and she was three.

But Rodney had had that infinitely forlorn smile from his earliest childhood. Old Ammabel who had been their cook, and who now played the rôle of housekeeper at Spy Croft, always declared that the doctor who helped to bring the child into the world said he was born "triste". There was in reality no necessary connection between Rodney's ghastly unmirthful smile and the furniture around them now. That the chandelier had *that look* for Ruth, combined with the tinkling prismatic pendants that hung down inside their oval glass cases from a pair of gilded candlesticks on the chimney-piece; that the polished ornamental coal-scuttle had it; that the green curtains, with gilt braiding, had it; that the huge pink roses on the carpet and the convoluted pattern of the wall-paper had it, did not really imply that between the solemn unchangeableness of this room and the life-weariness of the son of the woman who designed it there was any link. Had Magnus Muir, for instance, been destined to spend his days, or at least his evenings, in Spy Croft drawing-room, the old-fashioned faded sumptuousness of these objects would have been the cause of a deep, almost sensual content. But when a man and a woman have suffered the same things from the same parent for twenty years even the most dignified furniture becomes an accomplice in the process!

The bedroom door opened now; and the old man began to descend the stairs. Both the young people, if they could be called young any longer, when Rodney was thirty and Ruth was twenty-eight, went out into the hall, so as to be ready to receive him, for such was their immemorial custom, when he got to the bottom.

Sippy Ballard who, in school-boy phrase, spent much energy in “sucking up to” the great Weymouth lawyer, always called him “General” when he came to visit him on business.

“Mr. *Mr.* Sir!” the old gentleman invariably protested. “You mustn’t make fun of an old man.”

But in his handling of the innumerable cases that the Town Clerk would bring up for his consideration Mr. Loder showed no sign of any displeasure at this title. As he came down the big staircase with its soft matted carpet, identical with the drawing-room curtains, he certainly resembled what might easily have been the graceless Sippy’s idea as to what — for he had not seen many — a General was like.

He was extremely thin and extremely tall, and a compact skull well covered with snow-white hair, combined with a clipped military mustache and a back-bone that seemed to grow straighter rather than crookeder, as if the passing of time were seasoning it like a good walking-stick, were all aspects of his appearance that justified S. P. Ballard’s facetious flattery.

As he came down, now, one step after another, James Loder knew perfectly well that they were there waiting for him; but he did not hurry nor did he look at them. He looked sometimes at the banisters upon which he rested his hand and sometimes at the steps upon which he set his feet. This starting out, of a fine afternoon, for his bath-chair ride was an event of importance, perhaps the most important event in his day, and he preferred to savour every second of its only too fleeting joy rather than bother his head with conscious gratitude for punctilious pieties. It would have been a sharp shock to him all the same if in place of finding Ruth in the dark out-of-door coat, and her neat black hat with its blue feather, he had found Rodney in his grey felt hat and light-coloured overcoat. For it was human nature, and it was silly idealism to quarrel with human nature, for a person to like his daughter better than his son. Ruth never said things, or looked things, or thought things, that he couldn't understand and approve of and that did not feel comfortable in his deepest soul; whereas Rod was always thinking something — Oh, he knew *that* well enough! — even if he didn't put it into words, which was critical, unfriendly, and a little contemptuous. The truth was that Rod, poor lad, had never had the pluck to have his fling; and so had grown thoroughly degenerate. Think of having a degenerate son! But that was the truth. Rodney was like a Frenchman.

"Is it going to rain, do you think, Rod?" he asked his son as soon as he got to the bottom.

This was his inveterate habit, to address a remark about the weather to the one of his children who was *not* going to wheel the bath-chair; thus — for that was the way Rodney analyzed it — involving them both in the success or failure of the excursion.

"Quite impossible, Father. Here's your hat, Father."

James Loder was not ignorant of the fact that his hat was there. Indeed it was a custom that went back to the young man's boyhood that at this particular moment he should brush, with a little velvet pad kept on the hall-table, the felt hat on week days and the silk hat on Sundays of his General-like progenitor.

Slowly the old man drew on his gloves, keeping his son waiting. It would be hard to analyze the precise impulse that led him to do this; but the truth was that at this moment he felt more affection for the slight figure with its neatly-parted hair than he had felt since this same occasion just twenty-four hours ago.

"Ready, Father, dear?" said Ruth.

She was herself removing with her gloved fingers a few of Mortmain's black hairs from the blue edging of her jacket; and as her brother watched her he suddenly had a mystical feeling that he had seen her make this precise gesture in some dimension of Time, where neither Spy Croft, nor even Weymouth itself, had any reality. The old man contemplated with satisfaction his daughter's face. Above that blue-trimmed black coat and under that blue feather Ruth's complexion had a charming softness and delicacy, and her pale hazel eyes met his with tender solicitude.

He thought: "I suppose when a man has ulcers of the stomach he's bound to get a *little* touchy. The truth is, even you, my dear, aren't really concerned about me in the way old Belle is!"

Rodney, with the old man's hat still in his hand, stepped forward and opened the door, revealing the bath-chair standing in the gravel-path.

"Thank 'ee, Rod," said James Loder, taking the hat and putting it on his head with a shaky hand.

"Oh, your stick, Father!" cried Ruth.

James Loder looked reproachfully at his son. Had the boy forgotten his fondness for having his stick with him in the bath-chair? No, we must face the truth; a woman's love lasted on even when a person became a feeble pantaloon, but a man's love got worn out. And he recalled his own egoistic dislike of ministering to the physical wants of *his* father in his long decline.

"We come back to the women-folk at the last," he said to himself, and as he received his stick from his son's hand and took his daughter's arm, he thanked the Lord for the blind devotion of his old servant.

Rodney helped her to place him in the chair and get it out into the road. Then, not waiting to see them start, he returned to the house and closed the door. Why was it that the happiest moments in his life, these days, were when he had Spy Croft entirely to himself?

"I hope Ammabel and Lettice *are* out," he thought, as he slowly ascended the stairs.

At the door of his room, which was a comfortable sitting-room as well as a bedroom, he paused for a second, listening. Yes! the house was absolutely quiet.

“This might be my own place in Paris,” he said to himself, recalling a certain little painted dwelling, just big enough for a solitary recluse, that he had noted once near the Seine at St. Cloud. He sank down in his arm-chair by the fire and tried to obliterate from his mind that great odious table, occupying a third of the room, covered with law-papers. In vain! And the sight of those documents made him wonder whether he had been wise to accustom Mr. Crouch, the partner, and old Mr. Titch, the head-clerk, to his habit of only being at the office during the morning.

Gaffer Crouch — as this heavily-built, laborious personage had been called since he was a boy at school — had recently slipped into a way of saying to Mr. Titch “Leave *those* things, Titch, for Mr. Loder to take home.”

Forget the Law, forget his father, forget his fears that his good-looking sister would die unmarried — yes! forget the whole cart-load of life’s burdens, and give himself up to his “essences”! Rodney had never told a living soul about his “essences”, which were, after his interest in his sister, by far the most important thing in his monotonous life. They would not indeed have been very easy to explain to anyone; being in reality nothing less than a certain trick he had of clinging, consciously and intensely, to those floating, drifting, wayward, intangible memories, selected from the dusty pell-mell, which come to us all sometimes and flood the most anxious human minds with a mysterious happiness. These subtle and insubstantial feelings had gradually become, for this sluggish and unambitious young man, a sort of world within the world, or life within life, and he would rest his chin on his hands as he sat at his desk in the office, or at his table in this pleasant room, and fall into a deep day-dream, or vegetative trance, in which all manner of insignificant little scenes, recalled from his walks into the town, or up Wyke Hill, or by the shallow backwater called the Fleet, or along the crest of Chesil Beach, seemed to grow in importance, until they acquired for him a sort of mystical value, as if they were the casual by-paths or hidden postern-gates, leading into aerial landscapes of other and much happier incarnations. Rodney now pulled up his arm-chair to the fire and stretched out his hands to its blaze; not for physical warmth, for it was not a particularly chilly day, but for spiritual comfort.

"It's nice," he thought, "when there's nobody in the house! I wish I lived alone in Weymouth and walked over here to see Ruth. This house, with Ammabel always the same, and father always the same, and with Ruth and me so sorry for each other, is slowly eating out my heart. Even my "essences" don't come as they used to! I feel as if, unless something happens very soon, my power of going on will come to an end. And what... will I... do... then?

He lit a cigarette and blew several clouds of blue smoke up the chimney, still leaning forward. The conformation of his forehead — just as was the case with Ruth — made it difficult for him to frown; but there were beads of perspiration on his forehead, for he remembered when he was younger being taken to see his uncle — his father's brother — who was a patient of Dr. Brush, and how they found this man, he must have been then about sixty, in his bed in the middle of the afternoon, and how one of the attendants of the place told his father who took him, that it was a definite symptom of Uncle Edward's condition that he should refuse to get up save by compulsion.

"You... don't... think," Rodney Loder now found himself saying quite out loud, to a particular little blue flame that was running up and down along a charred log, “you... don’t... think... that I’ll ever *take to my bed...* like Uncle Edward?”

All the reply he got to this question was a small, soft sound of falling ashes, as one end of the log in front of him sank down into the bottom of the grate.

“Well, if there’s anything in compensation,” he thought, “I certainly deserve something to happen.”

It then came over his mind with a funny sort of flap, just as if Ammabel had flicked at him with her duster, that by this “something to happen” he meant nothing less than the old man’s death. Angrily he threw his cigarette at what was left of that charred log and it seemed to him as though that little burning end would sink through all those ashes and all that redness too, sink through the floor, sink through the *next* floor, sink through the foundations, and the rock-bottom and the fire within the rock-bottom; yes! sink through to the antipodal earth-crust on the other side — for that tossed-away cigarette-end was his wish *that something would happen to the old man!* He leant back in his chair and shut his eyes. What did Uncle Edward feel when he turned his face to the wall in that neat bed at Dr. Brush’s; that bed that reminded him of the dormitory beds at school? Did he feel a blind hatred of this tall, healthy, elder brother, standing there and repeating: “How are ye, old chap, how are ye? I’ve brought young Rod to see ye!”

“But I certainly do deserve,” he said to himself, opening his eyes again, “that *something* should change my life — change it, change it! Ruth has no idea how unhappy I am; just as she has no idea how her own life is killing her chances of getting married.”

It was very unusual for Rodney Loder to make any sort of emotional gesture; but something about the warm spring-like air that reached him now through the narrow space where his window was open gave him the kind of twinge which people get when happiness is tantalizing them without flowing through them; and giving a jerk to the gold chain he wore to guard his bunch of keys, he pulled it forth, and began swinging it backwards and forwards. Then with a groan he thrust this object back where it came from, and, rising from his chair, moved over to his law-table, and, snatching up a pencil, proceeded to write, in a big scrawling hand, across a sheet of empty paper: “Rodney Loder — at the end of his tether.”

Having done this almost automatically, he set himself to pace up and down the room.

“What I’d like to find out,” he thought, “is whether what *I* feel is an unusual feeling. Is Reality as prodding, as pinching, as hurting to every living person? And is it simply that I haven’t got the gall to face it? God! I remember that day I went to see Magnus in Brunswick Terrace about young Zed’s case. There was some angry parent down below, in Miss Le Fleau’s room, waiting to see him; and I warned him the woman was there and gave him a chance to escape — but he wouldn’t! I can see his ugly, distracted face now; and how he shook it into shape as if it were a face of clay that he’d been working at for years, and how he marched into that—”

His thoughts were interrupted by the clear, sharp tinkle of the front-door bell. Instinctively he jumped to his feet and looked at himself in the glass. Then he thought:

“Why should I answer it? They’ll suppose everyone’s out.”

But even while he formulated this conjecture he picked up his hairbrush, dipped it in his jug, and began, as his habit was, sleeking back his smooth hair from its straight, immaculate parting at the side of his head. There was a long silence then, during which, even while he kept saying to himself “I shan’t go down”, he was tightening his necktie and tugging at his shirtcuffs.

At last the bell rang again, but with a feeble force, as if the ringer had thought:

"I may as well give it one more last pull, before I go away."

But it was the feebleness of this second appeal, as much as anything, that made him run down the stairs and open the front-door. There stood Daisy Lily! The young girl was wearing a purple jersey and a dark skirt, and on her head was a little round lavender cap of knitted wool.

"Why, Daisy — come in my dear, come in! I *am* glad to see you! Ruth's taken to taking Father out, since you were here last. He enjoys it much more with her than with me — and I don't blame him. Come upstairs to my fire, my dear! She'll be back for tea; and you'll stay for that, won't you?"

He ushered her upstairs so fast that Daisy, who was very slow at answering people and a very deliberate speaker herself, hadn't time to explain to him that she had to go and fetch Captain Poxwell from the Ruins and take him home. But she let him place her in his own chair by the fire; and when Rodney, conscious that the room was too warm for young blood after a brisk walk, offered to open the window wider, she shook her head resolutely. Daisy was so accustomed to living with people more egotistical than herself, and she was instinctively so docile, that it never entered her head to suppose that her own private preferences in the matter of heat and cold were things to be brought forward.

"I like fires," she said gravely, putting her stoutly-shod insteps side by side on the brass fender-bar. "Mrs. Matzell gives *me* a fire. Mother thinks it's wasteful; for she *has* to have one herself because of feeling the climate so damp, and grandfather has to have one in the Cabin; so there are three fires upstairs; and, of course, that *is*—"

While the young girl was speaking, Rodney watched her with a curious intensity. How quickly she'd grown up! He had once bought her a doll's house on one of her birthdays and he could hear now the intonation of her voice as she began wondering at once whether Quinquetta, who was a little china doll with a face like Marie Antoinette, would prefer to have her bedroom upstairs or downstairs.

"Cattistock at your place this afternoon?" he asked casually.

Daisy nodded, and then frowned a little, bending her head and picking with her fingers at the fold of her jersey. She had felt a longing that amounted to a necessity to have a talk with Ruth; and now she would have to return to her grandfather without it. She became aware, too, that she felt dizzy in this hot room and she remembered that things had been so much at sixes and sevens at the house that day that she had had no lunch. She was so little afraid of Rodney, however, though it was with Ruth she wanted to talk, that she asked him whether she might have a glass of water.

"Wouldn't you like milk better, and a bit of cake?"

She admitted she would, and gave him a slowly deepening and extremely grateful smile.

"One of Ammabel's own cakes?" she murmured.

"If there *are* any," he said, and hurried out of the room.

The second he was gone she got up quickly, so as to get away as far as possible from this hot fire, which she felt sure was the chief cause of her giddiness. Moving towards the window, and in all the fibres of her being longing to fling it wide open, she could not help noticing on his big law-table that sheet of paper with the words, "Rodney Loder — at the end of his tether". She stood looking at this with wide-open eyes; and her heart began to beat fast. Her first thought was a wild girlish notion, derived from Peg Frampton's pessimistic outbursts, that she may only have arrived just in time to prevent Rodney from shooting himself through the head. But seeing no sign of a revolver and no sign of any bottle labelled "Poison" she went up close to the window, and in place of opening it pressed her hot forehead against the cool pane. Here she remained, thinking over what she had seen and what it meant, until, hearing Rodney's steps returning, she hurriedly slipped back to her place. It was clear to her that he had remembered the scrawl on the table while he was downstairs, for she was aware of his crossing the room behind her, directly he re-entered; and presently without a word he flung a handful of bits of paper straight into the fire, carrying off this action as if it were a customary and natural one with him. But the girl was deeply thankful that the business of drinking the milk and eating Ammabel's cakes gave her an opportunity of being the one talked to, rather than the one to talk; and in her slow-moving mind she pondered and pondered the meaning of those grim words. So sturdy was the soul of Captain Lily's daughter that never once since she was little had it occurred to her to pity herself or to regard her life as an unlucky one. It had been indeed the secret cause of a certain drawing back from her friend Peg, the way Peg derived such a weird pleasure in abandoning herself to her "sea of troubles"; but this revelation about Rodney was a very different thing. She saw before her now, as she sipped her milk and felt her dizziness departing and the blood coming back to her cheeks, those words "at the end of his tether". She saw the three little dots, like three full-stops, that he had mechanically made after his final "r".

And as she cautiously, and even reluctantly, replied to his questions about Mrs. Lily and Cattistock — for it was not at all Daisy's wish to talk to Rodney about her mother — she stared gravely over the rim of her milk at his smoothly-parted hair, at his pale eyes, at his unruffled forehead; and as she stared at him little by little he was transformed before her to a totally different Rodney from the one that all her life she had been taking for granted. That neat parting of his hair, as he sat opposite her now, kept repeating “at the end”; and she vaguely felt that the word “tether” hung, like a touching and tattered escutcheon, about his neck, the trophy of something high, remote, unapproachable, tragic. There must have been something new to *him,* too, in the look of grave tenderness with which she enquired if he went any more, as he used to do, on those sea-trips with the Jobber.

“It’s nice to go out in the Cormorant — don’t you think so?” she said. “But I wish he wouldn’t look as he does whenever anyone mentions Mr. Cattistock! The other day when he and grandfather were whispering together they stopped suddenly when I came in. He oughtn’t to encourage grandfather like that, ought he?”

“Certainly not,” said Rodney; and then he was aware that the grey eyes regarding him so steadily, as she held her cake to her rosy, unsmiling lips and nibbled at it absent-mindedly, seemed to be the eyes of a woman who knew what was the matter with him; and, from thinking this thought, he fell, even while they continued reminding each other of the different occasions when they had boarded the Cormorant, into a sort of waking trance, in which Daisy Lily’s figure, so fully feminine, as it now showed itself to be under her tight-fitting jersey, flowed obscurely into some earlier image of her, as disembarking between himself and the Jobber on the sunlit beach at Lulworth she formed an intrinsic part of one of his most brooded-over “essences”.

Perhaps it was the fact that as they sat talking in that over-heated room there came through the open chink of the window a sudden harsh crying of sea-gulls that that particular essence, caught and lost, lost and caught again, so many times since that summer day, came back to him now, connected so vividly with this girlish shape under the purple wool. But the sea-gulls of the actual moment he did not hear, so absorbed. was he in this new feeling — this feeling that had suddenly swept in upon him from some open window-chink of pure chance — that a woman's heart had taken pity on him as none had ever done before. It *had* occurred to him, when he was getting her the milk, to fear lest she might have seen that paper on his working-table; but when he found her ensconced so exactly as he had left her and the paper so exactly as he had left it, he did not give *that* possibility a second thought.

"Ei-ar! Ar-ei! Ei-ar! Ar-ei!" came the shrill cry of the gulls through the window; but Rodney heard nothing of it. It was characteristic of the vein of unhappy sluggishness and inertness in him that only when impressions had subsided into the remote past could he be thrilled by them. The reality of the present seemed always weighted with something hurting.

Neither did Daisy — though at Sandsfoot Castle she would listen in rapture to this sound — give it more attention than he. Something within her that nothing had stirred before — certainly not Peg Frampton — was shaken in its obscure fortress as she looked at that smoothly-brushed head before her and saw in her mind those three full-stops after the last letter of "tether". The girl actually felt as if from depths within her that were boundless — depths that began at her breasts, but sank away into a solidity of such strong, calm, competent, pitying flesh and blood as would have needed the stature of some full-bosomed earth-titaness to supply — there rose arms, there rose hands, there rose a mounting up of irresistible protection, into which that forlorn forehead and pale unhappy eyelids might sink and be safe!

Thus while the seagulls, outside that over-heated room, kept on crying: "Ei-ar! Ar-ei! Ei-ar! Ar-ei!" those two pairs of human ears remained completely oblivious.

And the obliviousness of Rodney and Daisy to that crying of the gulls above Spy Croft added a new burden, a new weight, a new quota of insensibility to the age-old indifference of so many human souls of the two Boroughs to the objects and to the sounds that had become the tutelary background of the place. To a mind not grown quite callous to what Mr. Gaul would have called the "representative potentiality of inanimate identities" it might be easily conceived that between St. Alban's Head, the White Nose, the Nothe, Chesil Beach, the Breakwater, the Town Bridge, the White Horse, Hardy's Monument, King George's Statue, St. John's Spire, the Jubilee Clock, and this perpetual crying of sea-gulls and advancing and retreating of sea-tides, there might have arisen, in their long confederacy, a brooding patience, resembling that of an organic Being; a patience that approached, if it never could quite attain, the faint, dim embryonic half-consciousness that brooded in the seaweeds, the sea-shells, the sea-anemones, the star-fish and jelly-fish, that lay submerged along those beaches and among those rock-pools.

But it was at the very moment when these two people were most indifferent to the sea-gulls, by reason of their new-born interest in each other that one of those devils who wait on all the encounters of the *Ying* and the *Yang* put it into the head of Rodney to utter, in that particular tone of a grown-up person addressing a child which is always so teasing, the apparently harmless words:

"How is Quinquetta?"

As a matter of fact it was a far-off glimmering memory from one of his most precious "essences" that put this remark into his head; but how was Daisy to know that? To Daisy it seemed as if, just when she was stretching out towards him the quivering antennae of a feeling she had never had for anyone else, he had got up and gone over to his washing-stand, and, snatching his jug from his basin, had poured the cold water over her beating heart! She had felt all this while with a certain discomfort the presence of this jug and basin; for she had often seen Captain Poxwell roll up his sleeves to wash his hands in *his* basin, and the sight of the rough hairs on the old man's forearms had always shocked her. It was thus an unfortunate chance at this juncture that when he said "How's Quinquetta?" Daisy should have been looking at his jug and basin; for these particular objects were indelibly lodged in her mind as the accompaniments of a certain hirsute grossness and a certain mature maleness; and now it seemed to her as if it were with a rough hairy masculine forearm that Rodney — for all his white, unruffled face — was pouring cold water on her deepest feelings.

"Oh, all right, thanks!" and she rose to her feet at once. "I'm sorry I can't stay to see Ruth," she said. "I wanted to... tell her... several things... and ask her... several things; but I must get back to grandfather before it begins to get dark. Mrs. Matzell was going to give us our tea alone in the Cabin if Mr. Cattistock was still there. Thanks so much for the cakes, Rodney. Do tell Ammabel how much I liked them."

"All right — if you must," murmured Rodney rather gloomily. Then he brightened up. "I'll walk with you to Sandsfoot, my dear! There'll be heaps of time. And it won't matter if father and Ruth *do* begin tea."

Daisy still felt strangely crushed and hurt by his question about Quinquetta. It wasn't so much the words as the tone that offended her. He would never have used that ordinary, uninteresting tone if he weren't *taking her for granted* as a little thing he'd known from infancy. But she was too well-bred and far too reserved to let Rodney have the remotest guess that she had suffered this reaction; and they set off together towards Sandsfoot, in apparent harmony.

It certainly was a peculiarly beautiful spring-like day for that early period of the year, but both the man in his light overcoat and the girl in her purple sweater continued to be absorbed in their personal feelings. The truth was that Daisy's response to the elements had throughout her girlhood been the response of an extremely sturdy and normal child. She was born to deal with people and things in the formidable protective manner of that long procession of pragmatic women who have kept the restless demons of the human soul from ruining human life. Mr. Gaul's thoughts about "the queer daughters of Chaos", though they may have applied to both Captain Poxwell's children, certainly did not apply to his grandchild. And Rodney, though it is likely enough that these windblown pools of dying sunlight, followed so soon by a drift of fiery cloud-petals from beyond Chesil, created for him some indescribable "essence" that he would feel months, or even years, later, was far too much stirred by his discovery that "little Daisy" had been transformed into a woman who had the power of seeing into the bottom of his grief, to look away for a minute from her rounded cheeks, her grave eyes, her full, sweetly-pouted lips. By the time they reached the ruined Tudor Castle, however, a heavy bank of warm dusky twilight, rolling up from over the West Bay, had quite swallowed every trace of the sunset; and a glaucous pallor that carried, all the same, a curious vitality in it, like the greenish spawn of shoals of ethereal fish, lay soft and transparent upon both land and water. Suddenly Daisy clutched the flap of his coat-pocket and stopped.

"Bother!" she whispered. "The Jobber's with him. There's the Slug!"

And sure enough, there by the gate leading from the road, stood the lumbering, antiquated little truck that Adam Skald used when he transformed himself from a sea-animal into a land-animal.

"Grandfather will have worked him up to a frenzy against Mr. Cattistock; now that he's there with mother in the house! Grandfather's just wicked when he does that. And he knows perfectly well that Mr. Cattistock has acted very well in letting me stay with him while they're together. Oh, there!” and Daisy gave vent to a funny little chuckling laugh, “I’ve let the cat out of the bag! But *that* was what I wanted to tell Ruth. Well, you must remember to tell her if you don’t mind. It’s only that mother and I would have argued — Ruth knows! — till Doomsday about it, if Mr. Cattistock hadn’t spoken up quite strong and firm and said of course I must stay with grandfather. They’re not going to have any honeymoon, Rodney.” This remark was made in an awed whisper, while Rodney stared nervously into the Jobber’s fish-smelling truck. “But she’s going straight to Peninsular Lodge after the wedding; and the wedding’s to be in Trinity Church.”

Looking into her face, when her voice ceased, Rodney was caught for a second completely out of his self-pity; for he had the wit, even in that greyish-green twilight, to note that she would have given blood from her veins *not* to have said to him what she had just said. By so much as even referring to her mother, with anyone but Ruth, the girl seemed to outrage some peculiarly sensitive decency in her breast. And Rodney, being the person he was, knew in a second what she felt; for it was what he himself had so often felt when he spoke unsympathetically of his father; and it touched him deeply to see the way she bit her lips and the way the angry tears came into her eyes.

“You must forgive me, my dear,” he said hurriedly, “if I led you on to talk of your family affairs! Don’t say another word; and I’ll act as if I’d been stone deaf! This fishy truck is enough to make anyone sick, not to speak of deaf.”

Out of her swimming eyes Daisy gave him a look, that was the softest look — although Rodney didn’t know it — that he’d had since he asked her how Quinquetta was; and side by side they approached the ruin. As Daisy had predicted they found Captain Poxwell, seated like a lanky demon of malignity upon a pile of fallen stones, on the top of which he had spread out his tartan shawl, contemplating with grim satisfaction the towering figure of Skald who was pacing to and fro in front of him. The Captain appeared to be in unusual possession of his wandering fancies, and though it was too dark within these walls to see that distended vein in his withered neck, or to catch that burning gleam in his restless eye that so roused the morbid love-hate of Mrs. Cobbold, it seemed clear to Rodney that of the two sea-faring cronies it was the owner of the Cormorant who was the more upset. So excited in fact was the Jobber that he had reached the point of being quite unable to greet Daisy with his usual aplomb, though he did extend his hand to her, while to Rodney he gave the sort of sulky little nod that a duellist, on the eve of a fatal affray, might bestow upon an undesired intruder.

"Mrs. Matzell will be waiting for us, grandfather," said the young girl, going straight up to the figure seated on the heap of stones. "Have you finished that box you brought?" And she cast her eyes to the place where the old cowrie-collector usually worked.

So strong a hold upon the Captain's established habits had the girl's affectionate appeal, that he made no attempt to resist her. Scrambling down from his pedestal he stretched himself like an old dog caught with a forbidden bone, shook his long lank body and stiffened limbs, and proceeded, without demur, to gather together his belongings.

The Jobber watched him glumly, his hands in his pockets, his chin sunk low on his chest, his shoulders hunched.

"How's my friend Trot?" enquired Rodney, while Daisy, with her arm in her grandfather's, remarked in his tone that same intonation — as of a grown-up person addressing a child — that had characterized his question about Quinquetta.

The Jobber took not the least notice of this enquiry. He appeared to be buried in some desperately absorbing thoughts of his own. He kept pressing his great wrists further and further down into his loose sailor trousers and hanging his heavy jowl still more broodingly against his chest.

“Has he gone?” asked Captain Poxwell, addressing his grand-daughter.

During this whole interlude he had paid no more attention to Rodney than if he’d been a dog who had casually followed the girl into Sands-foot Castle.

“I don’t know, grandfather,” said Daisy quietly. “Mother hadn’t yet lit the candles when we passed the house. But they may—”

The Jobber raised his head with a jerk, took his hands from his pockets and strode over to young Loder who was feebly trying to light a match, while the wind, blowing through one of the big ruined windows, put it out every time he struck it.

“Want a ride home?” he said. “Those two can look after each other. Better leave ’em to ‘emselves!” Then in a sullen whisper he added the words: “The Dog thinks he’s going to be married on the twelfth... that’s Thursday, me boy... and it’s Monday today.”

Rodney shifted his pale eyes uneasily under the tension of the man’s towering personality. He looked at Daisy’s sturdy yet soft figure supporting the demented Captain, whose wavering form in the gloom resembled a crazy Mephistopheles under the tutelage of some imperturbable angel.

“He’s ruined my father,” the Jobber’s hoarse whisper went on, “just as he’s ruined my father’s mates. And now he’s closing up those quarries that have been open for a thousand years! Don’t ‘ee see, Mr. Rodney, he’s grown to be more than the enemy of flesh and blood? Don’t ‘ee see he’s grown to be an enemy of *the Stone?”*

Rodney Loder became increasingly disconcerted. A strong vein of conventional propriety in him, of sluggish bourgeois common sense, felt irritated against this big, glowering whisperer. Hadn’t everyone in this world got their secret troubles? Why should Adam Skald, the Jobber, be alone permitted to raise the devil? Let him burn his own smoke! He felt inclined to say something to him as cold and crushing as his father the General would have said.

— "What is that to us? See thou to that!" —

And indeed this whole scene, in the greenish-coloured dusk of these crumbling walls, had begun to seem fantastic, unreal, absurd to him. Even if his own job had begun to bore him to the breaking-point he had no wish to exchange it for nocturnal colloquies in Sandsfoot Castle.

"Ruined," went on the Jobber, while Daisy, who had been waiting for this curious dialogue to end, began to lead the old man away, "ruined — that's what father and his mates 'ull be! And today's Monday; and he's going to enjoy that woman on Thursday. What do 'ee make of it, Loder, eh? eh? He'll be tumbling it at Chickerel, while some on the Isle have neither bread nor meat nor stone!"

The word "stone" exploded from the Jobber's lips like a heavy missile from a catapult. The chances are that those flirtatious overtures made towards him by Mrs. Lily when he was last on this spot, though they had been warded off by the memory of Perdita, had impressed the man's senses. At any rate as he thought of Cattistock enjoying this Houri of such a dazzling and satiny-white skin, he felt it was more than he could stand.

"It's Monday today, Loder, and she'll be bedded with the Dog, come Thursday!"

Rodney now began to fancy that he smelt whiskey on the Jobber's breath. The savage growls of homicidal emotion to which he had been listening were a totally new experience, and with the cautious timidity of his class he assumed at once that the man was drunk. He fixed his eyes on the Captain's departing back and noticed that the shawl the old man had been sitting on was again in its usual place round his lean neck. Then his gaze clung to Daisy's form as they crossed the threshold, and he found himself envying the Captain, with a palpable throb of irritable jealousy, the support he was getting from that soft, jersey-clad figure.

"Good-night, Captain!" shouted the Jobber. "Good-night, Missy! I'm giving Mr. Loder a lift; but I expect you'd sooner go ahead. The Slug's a bit fishy this afternoon."

There was a dead silence then, as the two figures receded; but something seemed to expand and contract like a flapping sail inside the pit of Rodney's stomach.

"Good-night, Daisy!" he shouted; and for a second it seemed to him as if she were on a ship's deck leaving the harbour and unless he heard her voice now he might never hear it again. He had only once or twice in his whole life wanted anything as much as he now wanted to hear Daisy's voice. Yes! — oh, thank the Lord! — she had turned round just as they got outside.

"Good-night all!" she cried in a clear, school-girl voice.

"She said 'all'," he thought, "because she didn't want to hurt the Jobber's feelings."

To such a pitch of excitement had this completely new Daisy Lily lifted Rodney's nerves that the owner of the Slug — and the fishy smell subsided when they were in motion — had no difficulty in persuading him to play truant from the Spy Croft tea-table, and come on with him to the harbour.

Not far from the western end of the Town Bridge where the ancient High Street of the Borough of Weymouth began, a district now devoted to warehouses and taverns, there was, at this time, a little cobbled alleyway. About equal distance between Trinity Church it was and the newly-built lecturing-place called Sidney Hall; and unpretentious though it appeared, it possessed no less than three public-houses. It was at the end of this alley, called Corder's Wharf, that a friend of the Jobber's had a large boat-repairing shed and it was here — in spite of a good deal of rattling and spluttering to get it in and get it out — that he kept his truck.

He had got it safely ensconced now and he was coming down the alley with Rodney at his side when they were accosted by a person who rushed out upon them from one of the above-mentioned public-houses. This was none other than Larry Zed, who had been waiting for them, and watching both their entrance and exit, from the bow-window of his retreat. The sight of the son and heir of the great Weymouth lawyer, for young Zed had twice been introduced to Rodney, in connection with the legalities of his adoption, reduced the lad now to a confused and angry silence.

But the Jobber caught him firmly by the hand, and holding his hand — in deliberate defiance of Corder's Wharf etiquette, which did not approve of public marks of affection between man and man — and walking between him and Rodney, he led them both across the front of Trinity Church and along the edge of the water till they reached the stone steps of Cove House. As usual, the curtain in the window was hurriedly dropped, and Mrs. Trot opened the door the second they were at the top of the steps. Both Rodney and young Zed had been in the Jobber's house before — for the man's genius for de-classing himself had made him a *persona nota* if not a *persona grata* with every level of Weymouth society — but this was assuredly the first time they had ever entered it together. They all sat down in the sitting-room — the host's mania for leather arm-chairs being displayed to good purpose — and if Rodney had suspected Adam Skald of being drunk in Sandsfoot Castle he was soon put into a less carping mood by the unusual quality of the Jobber's whiskey when enjoyed in person.

What with the admirable drink, of which Larry partook equally with the others, and the visits that they all three made, in decent succession, to the

Jobber's bedroom, the hour from five to six passed with incredible speed. It passed a good deal faster, it must be confessed, for Rodney in the Jobber's sitting-room than for Daisy in her grandfather's Cabin.

It is perhaps hardly strange that human beings in their abysmal craving for some over-consciousness that shall record and retain in memory events and occurrences and words and deeds and groupings, such as happen simultaneously in any spot on the earth's surface, should have been tempted to attribute a consciousness like this to those symbolic Inanimates in such a spot, that in our partial fancy we conceive of as fumbling their way to some obscure, non-human level of awareness. But it is very hard for the mind to endow a thing like a church-spire or a plaster-statue or a harbour-bridge or an esplanade-clock or a stone-breakwater, or even a far-stretching promontory, with this sort of consciousness. Thus we are compelled — although with the loss of a thousand dear and indelible affiliations — to have recourse, if we are to satisfy this natural craving, to the unhomely gulfs of spiritual invisibility. If any over-consciousness then, or any sub-consciousness, for such omnipresence need not imply superiority, could have looked into the heart of Daisy Lily and of Rodney Loder between the hours of five and six on the afternoon of February the Ninth, it is difficult to suppose it could be a consciousness emanating from the White Nose, from Hardy's Monument, from the White Horse, from the Nothe, from the Breakwater, from the Clock on the Esplanade, from the stone arches of the old Harbour-Bridge; but it is easy to suppose that some invisible entity — such are the possibilities of life — contemplated these two, the man of thirty and the girl of seventeen, in their present attraction to each other.

Rodney's own attention kept wandering from his companions; and although he himself was the most conventional of the three, he was the one, during that whole hour, whose nature was most transported out of its normal course. But wander as his attention might — such is the harsh obduracy of material distance — he could not see what Daisy was doing in Half-Way House.

The girl as a matter of fact was standing on a chair in her bedroom — having barely tasted any tea and escaped as soon as she possibly could — reaching up to a high, wide, cluttered shelf, and struggling to drag down a small, wooden play-box. Clouds of dust descended with the box and got into her eyes and into her mouth, but she stoutly went on pulling at it and finally jumped down from the chair in triumph and, dusting the bottom of it with her pocket-handkerchief, laid it on her bed. Hurriedly she pushed back the lid of the box; and there lay the china doll Quinquetta! Quinquetta was about six inches tall when she stood up; but since Daisy had relinquished playing with her she seldom stood up; but on the contrary lay all day long, as well as all night long, with her blue eyes wide open, staring at the lid of the box with no less earnestness than she would have stared at the ceiling, or, if it had been possible, at the sky.

If we were permitted by the Holy Office of the Exact Sciences to dally with so unprovable a fantasy it were a nice point to speculate as to exactly *when,* in the life of an object adored by a fetish-worshipper, this sacrosanct Inanimate becomes animate. At what point does the idol, the stone, the block of wood, the doll, gather to itself its living identity, and become — as its worshipper certainly feels it *does* become — something more than the inert substance which is all that reason sees in it?

Quinquetta, when Daisy had taken her carefully out of the box and propped her up against her own pillow, was certainly something more than an inanimate china form. This “something more” would have been instantaneously recognized by any savage who had entered Daisy’s room; but the scientific instrument to register it has yet to be invented. Round and about Quinquetta's palpable form there must have extended — like what the theosophists call an astral body — an impalpable emanation, which was a second, or more etherealized, Quinquetta. This second Quinquetta was created out of her young mistress' own warm life and glowing youthful vitality, and although invisible to the eye of reason it must have been very apparent to the clairvoyance of the human heart.

Daisy was far too practical a young woman to let her natural superstition run away with her; and she did *not,* at this juncture, cry out with tears in her eyes: "Forgive me, Quinquetta, for being angry with him for mentioning you!" but in her heart, as she carefully straightened the doll's clothes, she undoubtedly did apologize to the beautiful little image, or at any rate to that invisible eidolon of it which had usurped a living identity.

"You *shall* stay out, Quinquetta," she told the doll, as from its place upon the pillow it saw her clambering on the chair again to put the box away.

There are things, we may suppose, that a grown-up girl's doll does not need to have put into words; and so we may assume there was a perfect reconciliation between them before Daisy, who was too practical — and also too conscious of Mrs. Matzell's appearance presently — to leave her on the bed, balanced her very carefully, in an inconspicuous but comfortable seat, on one of her book-shelves.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bum Trot were called upon to wait upon the three men — if young Zed could be called a man — while they ate their tea-supper beneath the Jobber's immensely tall candle-sticks. Rodney, as has been hinted, was nervous and very absent-minded, while the Jobber, who had never drunk so much whiskey at his own table as he did tonight, kept swinging from one extreme mood to another with disconcerting suddenness. At one moment nothing could exceed his exaggerated cordiality; at another he would fall into spasms of such arctic silence that they were like holes in the air, ice-cold air-pockets, to the devoted Mrs. Trot, as she went round the table changing the plates.

“I knew Larry was coming to see me tonight, Loder,” their host remarked, when the things had been all cleared away and a bowl of fruit and nuts put before them, together with the whiskey. “That’s why I wanted you to look in. Are you and Mr. Crouch so tied up with the Dog, that you wouldn’t dare to defend these Lodmoor folk, if the Town really did try to evict them?”

“ ’Tis that Sippy Ballard — gentlemen — he be the one,” cried young Zed eagerly, “don’t ‘ee let there be no mistake. *He* be the one. Town Council be skeered of he, seeing that he be Cattistock’s nephy or summat o’ that. Me poor May do thinky and thinky how best to answer ‘n and to answer thik girt King’s Writ ‘a plumbed down; but her can reason of naught but being drove back to they Gippoos, and of taking I along o’ she, to bide in caravan.”

When Larry had finished speaking the Jobber gave Rodney a triumphant and almost gloating look; as much as to say, “You see how right I am!” But his only words to young Zed were:

“You and your May ain’t got the hang o’ things correct, lad. Sippy’s nothing. Sippy’s a catch-paw. ’Tis the Dog, I tell ye! First and last, ’tis the Dog. But tell your May to wait a little. Tell her to wait quiet and do naught. Today’s only Monday; and there are two days betwixt Monday and Thursday, when he be thinking to set his teeth in that white skin. Tell her to wait quiet. She shan’t be turned out of Lodmoor Hut nor shall my dad’s mates be turned out of Saxon Quarry. You note what I say, Loder, my gentleman; and you note what I say, Larry, my lad!”

“Be Captain Poxwell’s darter such a white one, Jobber,” threw in young Zed with gleaming eyes. “Be she’s skin white as our Blotchy’s milk? Be it white as yon Chesil foam, when wind blows west?" He suddenly gave a furtive glance at the door, as if afraid of eavesdroppers; and then brought out in a low, solemn, intensely grave whisper: "There were a girl come to Lal's bed. Her came with Mr. Gaul, that time when Town Clerk put King's Writ on we... and her were the beautifullest girl poor Lal ever seed! Her were a lady-girl, her were, but her were minded to lie in the straw with poor Lal. That were when her came to hay-loft, so snug and so warm. 'Twas shown to I who her were, too, later; and do 'ee know who her were, Mr. Loder? Do 'ee know who her were, Jobber? Her were thik girl from the Far Isles, what Mrs. Cobbold sent for, to keep she warm o' nights. And I do know she's name too."

Young Zed uttered this last sentence with an awed and yet formidable gravity. He evidently considered that, as in the case of magicians and their attendant demons, to know a girl's name gave you some special power over her.

The Jobber heaved up his head from an orange he was peeling and gave his red-haired visitor such a look across the table as would have flabbergasted Casanova; only Zed completely missed it, because one of the tall candle-flames was in the way.

" 'Tweren't from Mr. Gaul that she's name came to I," the lad blundered on, while the elf-lock across his forehead gleamed blood-red in the candle-light. " 'Twere May what larned it. May said the cards told she it begin with a P.; and when us took me eels to Belvedere, and when her asked Mrs. Pengelly, *so't, did!* She's name begun with a P. same as May said. And do 'ee know what it were? It were Perd'ta Wane."

Young Zed breathed his heroine's appellation so reverently that to Rodney's ears its syllables were confused with the name of an unfortunate young gentlewoman who had recently committed suicide in the town of

Poole; and he turned his hazel eyes, a little dizzied by the whiskey, with a good deal of bewilderment upon this singular fellow-guest.

"Perd'ta Wane be she's name," went on Larry, uttering the words as if he were a young priest at the altar. "And that's the reason why, when I goes to bed me Nothing-Girl don't come to I no more. They girls don't like to share a person betwixt 'un; so 'tis Perd'ta Wane what I thinks on, now me Nothing-Girl have stupped cuddling I. May do say that when the Man-with-Three-Staves be the last card it means that the man of the house will lie with a stranger; but I mind naught of what them conjuring-cards say when I cuddles me down in me bed and do thinky and thinky of Perd—"

But the Jobber was able to endure it no more.

"Here, drink, boy! Drink, I tell you! No, no, Loder; it won't hurt him, my whiskey, no more than it'll hurt you. Drink, you shining eyes! Drink, you blood-head! *That's* the ticket. *That's* my girl-stealer! Down with it. And here's another to follow."

As a matter of fact Rodney was amazed at the little effect the drink appeared to have on the boy. He himself began to feel so light in his head that he made up his mind not to stay much longer lest he might not be able to walk home. And in a few minutes, when they had been sitting there, so it seemed to him, for fully two hours, he got up unsteadily on his feet and began to explain, uttering each word with the unnatural precision of a man defending his sobriety that it was important that he get back to Spy Croft before his father's bed-time.

"I always mix his grog for him, Skald; and here I am, revelling with you and our young friend, while — And I've got that walk, too!"

"Listen, Rodney Loder," said the Jobber, sternly, as he helped him on with his overcoat, "I can't tell how much weight you have with Mr. Crouch, but I swear to you this — if Loder and Crouch don't take up the case on behalf of May and this boy, there'll be such a —— You can delay and hold everything up, anyway! I know enough of the law to know that. And today's Monday; and on Thursday the Dog thinks he's going to enjoy his woman! Those Cattistock and Frampton beer-barrels ought to have orange blossoms twisted round 'em — eh, Larry Zed?"

He moved round the table to get to the door, which he opened wide, calling loudly to Mrs. Trot to come and say good-bye; for his habit was — although she waited on him like a servant — to treat her on formal occasions as if she were the mistress of the house; but he now turned to Larry, while Rodney was looking for his hat and gloves.

"Did your May's conjuring-cards," he said in a cold, harsh, emphatic voice, "tell her anything about me and the Dog?"

Young Zed's Tom o' Bedlam wits seemed to grow more rational in proportion as the Jobber's manner became more savage and unrestrained. The Lad's mind rushed back, as the man asked him this direct question, to that scene in the hut when Marret and May quarrelled over the Tarot cards; and leaning forward in his chair, where he was cracking walnuts by pressing them together with his wrists, he remarked, in a low mumbling tone, as he spat out a bit of walnut shell, that he "were not one for taking stock in they fortune-tricks," when he could have a girl in his bed.

The Jobber had his fingers on the handle of the door when Larry used this expression, and he gazed at him in cold fury.

"So this boy and I will count on you, Mr. Loder," he finally remarked, while Mrs. Trot, having shaken hands stiffly with Rodney, began unbarring those absurd door-bolts, with which in his Portland manner, the Jobber loved to bar himself in.

Rodney hummed and hawed. Nothing was more objectionable to him than an eruption of his accurst profession into his ordinary private life.

"I'll mention to Mr. Crouch," he said, "that I have been making personal enquiries about the Lodmoor property; and that it *does* seem as if the Town Clerk had been a little — impetuous. I will suggest to Mr. Crouch that it might be well to ask for further instructions from the Council itself, before taking—"

He interrupted himself from half-way down the front steps — for it seemed as if he could not get away fast enough, now that the Law had been dragged in — to speak of his gratitude "for this splendid evening"; but the splashing of the waves swallowed up his voice, and Mrs. Trot closed the door on him without ceremony. If there was one thing more than another upon which Bum and his wife were in complete agreement it was their hatred and suspicion of all lawyers.

"Well, lad," said the Jobber as he returned to his supper-table, only to find the nut-loving Larry still cracking walnuts between his wrists, "I'm afraid your friend May will be coming to look for you if I don't pack you off home-along. I *think* — mind you I can't vouch for't, but I think — Loder and Crouch'll stop their turning you out; at any rate stop the Dog from *rushing* you out, as he'd like to do."

"Here! Put some o' they nuts in thy pocket, lad," cried Mrs. Trot, who had entered the room with her master; and as Larry, who had slouched obediently into the passage, was struggling with his weather-worn overcoat, smelling of eels and cow-dung, the woman began filling his pockets with both nuts and oranges.

"It's his red hair and his sweet tongue," thought the Jobber, as he opened the front-door and gave the boy threepence for the ferry. "I've never known a woman who didn't want to cosset him. You can see it in their eyes."

He waited till young Zed was at the bottom of the steps.

“Go by the Esplanade, lad,” he called after him. “Don’t hang about the Town.”

It was no surprise to Mrs. Trot, a quarter of an hour later, to hear from her kitchen the Jobber himself leaving the house.

“Who could bide quiet,” she said to Bum, “after eating and drinking with a lawyer?”

“Hush, woman! ’Tis no lawyer, and ’tis no idiot neither, what drives he forth,” retorted Bum. “Us do know what drives he forth; and us do know what be in’s mind! Haven’t us heerd ‘un yallerin’ in’s sleep, ever since the Dog shut down thik wold quarry?”

Such, however, were the unpredictable moods of the Jobber that his faithful adherents would have been thunderstruck had they known — as he walked towards the bridge harbour — that it was not upon his enemy at all, but upon Mrs. Cobbold’s companion, that his mind was running! It can be well believed what an effort it had cost him to restrain himself and to hold his peace, while Larry was rambling on, after his fashion, about Perdita’s visiting his bed.

“No... no... no,” he thought, “she *couldn’t* have done that!” And then he rounded savagely on himself. *“Why not?* Every woman he meets falls in love with that boy! Besides, what do *I* know of her? That she comes from Guernsey! Who gave me the right to quarrel with her if she’s found a lad that suits her foreign taste? Young Zed isn’t an ordinary boy. I’ve never taken him for an idiot; and if he’s had the wit to attract that girl—”

Such were the Jobber’s thoughts as he stopped presently by the edge of the harbour-wall and stared into the dark water. The tide was riding high at that hour, and towards the lantern-lit arches of the ancient Town Bridge joining the two boroughs the whole sea seemed moving with one vast up-gathered volume of dark, strange, far-drawn invasion. As he stared at that rushing water, the Jobber gave full rein to the impassioned craving for this girl which had been mounting up in him all these days. Instead of his murderous intention killing this violent desire, it seemed rather to have accentuated it. Love and hate as they seethed together in his nerves, seemed to double each other's power of obsession. But this boasting speech of Larry's and all the wild, exciting images called up by his rambling talk, made the Jobber realize, as he stared at that rushing tide, that you could walk with a strange girl for no more than a quarter of an hour along the sea's edge, only to discover that nothing else henceforth to the end of your days, no person, no thing, no cause, no idea, can ever be, in your inmost, secretest feelings, as important as this brief experience. It was not that he believed with his reason that young Zed had really embraced Perdita. Indeed he was clairvoyant enough to have got a pretty clear notion of what actually had occurred. It was as if his feeling for the girl had flown back over the intervening days like a greedy cormorant, and had devoured all Larry's feelings for her; so that as he stared into that rushing tide his desire for her was far more intense, far more tyrannous, than it had been when he woke up that morning. The Jobber's amorous experiences hitherto had been entirely sensual and transitory, hardly touching his deeper nature; so that from the moment he set eyes on Perdita there rushed to the intensifying of his feeling for her a whole suppressed world of passionate romance.

Mrs. Trot had often said to her husband: "If ever the master do love a 'ooman he'll go ramping wild like a mad elaphint!"

To this the faithful Bum had replied: *"He'll* never go mad about *they.* Of that thee may be sure. The only 'ooman *my* skipper'll ever love be the salt sea."

But the Jobber had drunk a lot more whiskey than usual this night, and all his senses were on fire. At this moment as he stood in a mental tumult, with both hands deep in his pockets, his fingers clutching his Chesil Beach pebble, it *was* of a woman he thought.

"I said to myself," he thought, "that I wouldn't see her till I'd done it; but I can no more go another twelve hours without seeing her than I can pray to Jesus."

The swirling of that night-tide below him, which he knew nigh as well as the beat of his own pulses, seemed to him now like the very rush of time itself bearing him on.

"I must see her first," he thought, "and *then* I'll do it."

And the swirling tide before him seemed to rise up towards him, for he had been drinking steadily glass after glass, as he listened to Larry's talk and his heavy nature was disturbed within him at its deepest roots. And as the black tide rose up before him he could see Perdita quite distinctly through its swirling mass, and she was looking steadily at him with those same soft brown eyes that had clung to his own underneath the esplanade lamp. And while she looked at him she smiled wantonly, provocatively; and, while she smiled, her fingers went to the clasp of her belt to undo it, and then to the hooks at the side of her skirt, to undo them also. Yes, he could see her funny, twisted mouth, drawn down a little at the corners. He could see her thin, tilted nose, and a brown wisp of hair fallen sideways against her sea-wet cheek. And he had only to go straight through that black tide to take her — there as she was — for she was waiting for him; but for some reason the stone in his pocket was growing heavier and heavier and bigger and bigger! He could hardly hold it with his fingers, it was growing so big; and it was weighing him down too... With a jerk of his shoulders and a hoarse chuckle he drew back now from the wharf's edge.

"What a thing a night-tide is!" he thought, and he began imagining the way it must carry up the harbour all manner of big fish, fish that never came up at all save when the night-tide was high, and all manner of fresh bits of seaweed, crimson seaweed, red as these ships' lights that danced on the black ripples, blood-red, like Larry's elf-lock, which had been the candle to light her to bed; blood-red, like the Dog's skull, when he'd cracked it with his great stone! What big fish there must be now, floating so easily, so calmly with great languid nocturnal fins and twitching tails under that black blood-stained water! How they danced and danced on the water now those blood-red ripples! The night-tide — aye! how many a wet evening had he watched it! Swirling, rolling, mounting, brimming up, against the slippery, green slime of this wharf-wall, it had always stirred him to the depths. Those foam-patterns that floated there — so livid-white in the lantern-flecked blackness — he always imagined them far out to sea, drifting across the bows of derelict wrecks, tossed against the flanks of "sea-shouldering" whales, bubbling up from the gasping of drowning men, blown aside from the sinking of inestimable treasure! Yes, the night-tide, the night-tide, was the thing! Day-tides were greedy, monotonous, miserly. They went up and down; they went down and up; and they didn't like it when the least bit of weed, or the least bobbing piece of cork got clear away, out to the open sea! *Back* they would have them come. Oh, there was something abominable about those day-tide motions and reversions... And then he remembered how the Town Council had cleared out the ancient Weymouth Breakwater across whose wide-stretching muddy flat the tides used to flow, and had built a great dam over there.

"So this swirling deep-sea water," he thought, "has *nowhere to go.* All it can do is to go back and forth, forth and back, till Doomsday."

He gave vent to a heaving sigh that shook his whole frame; and then very slowly, and with feet that seemed to drag under his weight he moved on towards the Town Bridge.

“I’ll go to High House early tomorrow,” he said to himself. “I *must* see her once — just once — before I do it. Damn! It’s no good my going to bed, no good, no good. I’ll go to the Weeping Woman and make a night of it.”

SARK HOUSE

AT NINE O'CLOCK ON THE MORNING OF THE FOLLOWING DAY, TWO DAYS before his sister-in-law's marriage to Mr. Cattistock, Jerry Cobbold was slowly finishing his breakfast in his gaudy, tarnished, stage-set dining-room, at the top of High House.

Perd'ta Wane, as young Zed called her, sat opposite the great clown, looking comparatively calm, for it was these tête-à-tête breakfasts with Lucinda's husband that would have persuaded her to stay on here, if anything could have done so. Mr. Cobbold lit a cigarette and offered one, and his match-flame with it, to his young vis-à-vis.

"You are thinking of leaving us, Miss Wane," he said quietly, in the same flat, neutral, colourless voice with which he always addressed her; and indeed, as far as she could make out, always addressed Mrs. Cobbold, too.

She thanked him for the cigarette, began smoking it awkwardly, flicked the tip of its illuminated end against the rim of her saucer, and with her left hand folded up her napkin, avoiding his eyes.

"Don't think, Mr. Cobbold," she began gravely, still without looking at him, "that I am ungrateful for all the kindness you've shown me. And your wife, too, has been more than kind. It isn't that I'm not comfortable here or at ease with you, for I am very much so; it's only that *I can't keep it up!* I mean I can't go on being your wife's confidante. It's too upsetting. I'm not strong; I'm not a spirited person; I've got my... my own difficulties and I tell you—" as she spoke she drew in a deep breath of her cigarette smoke and exhaled it slowly, letting it rise up like a cloud between them. "The truth is," she concluded, "what your wife wants is a very cheerful person, someone whose own nerves are very calm. I’m far too weak a character to be any help. It only troubles me, the way she is... I just listen and feel perfectly helpless.”

The comedian looked at her with his head a little on one side and a faint smile on his lips.

“I think,” he said, “if you’ll allow me to say so, you’re being quite unfair to yourself! Mrs. Cobbold has been... of course... *you* can’t know this... but I’m telling you now... better... than she’s been for several months... since you’ve been here... and I’m sure... between us... we could—”

He spoke in a low, hesitating voice — a voice she had never heard him use before, though she had heard a good many different intonations from him — and he gave her the impression of pretending to be afraid of her; when really he would have liked to box her ears for a silly little weakling. She had seen enough of Jerry by this time to have come to the conclusion that whatever his real life might be, not a flicker of it appeared on the surface at High House. What she felt was that he was acting all the while, acting *sans cesse,* a different rôle, of course, from his comic one on the stage, and not always the same rôle here, but always wearing *some* kind of mask.

“I’m afraid, Mr. Cobbold,” she said as resolutely as she could and with as little feeling, “I really cannot stay. But I don’t want to leave you in the lurch and I don’t want to be unpleasant. If you have anyone you could call in for a few weeks, while you advertise again, it would be—”

To the girl’s consternation the clown stretched his arm across the table and touched her knuckles with the tips of his fingers.

“Don’t run away today or tomorrow,” he whispered, with the air of a conspirator. “See me through this Cattistock business. Stay till the end of the week; and then you shall go — if you must.”

He removed his arm with an easy gesture; but it was clear to her that the automatic start she had given had impressed him; for his next words were more direct and more deprecatory.

"Stay till the end of the week, Miss Wane — if you can bear it somehow — and then, I swear I'll let you go. And I'll come back from the theatre earlier tonight, and the next night, and... yes! listen Miss Wane. I'll tell Mrs. Cobbold you must have a whole day off — a bit of a holiday — and I'll take your place on deck, while you're off duty. Come now! Be a kindhearted girl and do this for me — if not for her."

Perdita sat up straight and bit her lips. Her cheeks got white with the effort of struggling against him. Some sort of pathetic appeal she had expected; but not quite this. He put her in the position of a nurse, who proposed to leave her patient at a crisis. Oh, how indignant, oh, how furious she felt with him! For by some indefinable instinct she felt certain that Mrs. Cobbold *could* get on perfectly well without any companion.

"She's wicked," she thought. "She's a false, tricky, selfish, neurotic woman; and what *he* wants is just to escape the burden. He knows, as well as I do, that I'm not necessary to her. I'm *a vice* to her. That's what I am."

"I am... afraid... I can't stay," said Perdita firmly but faintly, disregarding his reference to Mrs. Lily.

Jerry Cobbold pushed back his chair with a jerk.

"Oh, well then! Oh, all right then!" he flung out, in a tone like that of a phlegmatic school-boy, who resigns himself to not having the half-holiday he had been promised. "Want me to play you something?"

Perdita could not help smiling at this. The man's transparent cajolery of her was really too childish! But she suppressed a hopeless little sigh, flicked away some cigarette ashes and, looking straight into his eyes, said that she would be thrilled to hear.

"You know you said yesterday that you always heard me play after breakfast down all that long passage from your room? You thought it was queer. But it wasn't so very queer, considering that I invariably opened the door! I wanted you to hear me, Perdita."

His use of her Christian name discomposed her far more than his touching of her hand had done. Neither gesture was anything in itself. She knew that. But she had come to feel disconcerted, puzzled, embarrassed, *defeated* by Mr. Cobbold. She did not dislike him. In truth she rather liked him. But she never for a moment felt that she could predict what he was going to say or do next, nor did she ever have the least idea what he was thinking in his own mind.

However, she got up from the table; and as he sat down at the little grand piano, where she knew it was his wont to play, in this soft, quiet manner, every morning, she sank into an arm-chair by the fire and set herself to smoke quietly and to listen to him, a thing she had never done before. She soon found herself throwing her cigarette into the flames and drinking in this music with unexpected interest. How softly the man played! How rapt and absorbed he was! Perdita had a passion for the piano, and a fairly comprehensive one, though her knowledge was small and her training nil. But now, as she listened, she forgot everything except these muted, muffled, tenderly evoked sounds. She had not the remotest idea what composer it was. It had the technique — so she thought — of the older masters; and yet there was something about it that stirred her pulses and lifted her out of herself as few of the older composers ever did.

"Is it," she thought, "some modern musician imitating the old style? No, no! This is no imitation. This is life itself, life filling out the patterns and rules that it has made, *as if they were sails,* to carry it beyond itself, over unknown seas!"

She had never listened to such playing.

"Why," she thought, "he is making a lot of mistakes! He is playing from memory and blundering and stopping. Is he extemporizing? No! it is *old* music; it is in the old style! He has forgotten it, and is leaving out and putting in! There — I'm sure *that* was wrong!"

She turned in her chair and tried to catch a glimpse of his face; but there was a big vase of Mrs. Cobbold's favourite waxen flowers on the piano; and she could not see him. How could he stand those things there, in front of his nose? She was still puzzled by what he was playing; but it was very soft and low, and became more and more beautiful as it went on. Her critical, pessimistic intelligence began its usual trick now of trying to spoil her pleasure.

"He is amusing himself by cajoling 'the companion'. He is talking to me through this music and trying to seduce me to stay. He *is* clever, though. He knows just what I like. He's a famous man, a great man, and I'm a poor, ugly, little companion; but here we sit at the top of this tall house and he's concentrating himself on breaking down what he thinks is my silly obstinacy. I suppose there are thousands of women in London who'd sell their souls to be begged and beseeched in this way by Jerry Cobbold. An insignificant, funny-looking, sulky governess, alone with the great Jerry!"

She could almost feel the caress of the man's fingers as this soft insinuating music rippled, quivered, trembled, rose and sank about her as she sat there. Slowly her bitter thoughts began to yield to the spell. No! she could not resist these ripples of lovely sound. She set herself to listen, while first one figure in her present life, and then another, came and went. The figure of the Jobber was the last to come; but it faded away like the rest.

"He doesn't play like a musician," she thought. "I know he is making mistakes."

But she had hardly thought, “He is making mistakes. He is playing badly” than she felt compelled to shut her eyes. An immense flood of happiness lifted her up and carried her away. Her irritation with this man of many masks dropped from her and sank as if into deep water. Her revulsion against Lucinda fell away, too, sinking down like a pebble-stone. Her loneliness, her anxiety, her pessimism, all were submerged. She was herself, and yet not herself! She became a disembodied spirit that floated in, and over, this quivering flood. Across these waves she skimmed, light as a seamew; and, as the man went on playing, it was as if every moment in her past life, when she had been happy, darted up from its hiding-place, an arrowy jet of gleaming luminosity, and diffused itself through the whole air on which she floated; till she felt as if she were drifting through the liquid ether of a substance that resembled mother-of-pearl. But when all that had ever thrilled her, whether of taste, or touch, or sight, or smell, was transformed into a super-ether, this ether itself melted into that sound-sea, that rolled and rippled and towered and toppled and carried her along. Everything became sound. Thought had no reality. Things had no substance. Memory had no meaning, hope no shape. Sound was life. Sound was death. Sound was fate. Sound was the pouring forth, out of the abyss, of something beyond all reason and all knowledge! She herself, the Perdita she lived with, became a sound among other sounds, a sound that was nothing but the rising and falling of darkness and light. Past and future were lost in each other. Nor did any present that could be called a present take their place. This conscious sound, that *had* been Perdita’s soul, was a thing that had neither inward nor outward, neither subject nor object. It was an Absolute, self-existent, self-generated, self-complete. Only it kept breaking up into innumerable waves of darkness and light, that fell and rose, rose and fell, till they were an eternal oneness in their manifold, and an eternal manifold in their oneness...

Then the man, without bringing what he played to its natural conclusion, let his fingers drop from the key-board. He seemed totally unaware of Perdita's presence. Rising from the music-stool he walked over to the great bow-window, built like the rest of High House of solid stone, and stood with his back to the girl, looking out.

For some minutes Perdita was in a condition of complete numbness. When her mind began to return to itself she found herself thinking — just as she had done when he began playing —

"He makes a lot of mistakes. You can see he is no musician."

Then once again that curious numbness returned, as if her soul had left its body and refused to come back. When it did come back its coming must have had a disturbing physical effect, like the return of circulation; for without the least emotional or spiritual awareness, and from some purely physical cause, so it seemed, she suddenly found herself crying — crying silently, automatically, stupidly — and with no feeling behind her tears, save that of an indescribable bodily relief. Whether Cobbold realized the effect his playing had produced she never knew. Her silent tears dried up. Her normal intelligence resumed its function. Her pessimistic attitude returned. She felt as if she had disembarked from a voyage to the Isles of the Blest, only to find everything in this old, bitter, unredeemed world, just the same.

Stiffly she stood up. The man had his hands in his pockets now, and he was actually whistling, in a careless, lazy manner, an air from the piece he had been playing. She thought to herself:

"If I slip away without saying anything, he'll know what I felt." It needed a terrible effort to speak to him; but her pride was in command again. “What *was* that piece you played, Mr. Cobbold?” she brought out.

Her voice sounded identical with the hard, cold, unfeeling voice with which, only last night, she had been driven to get Lucinda out of her bedroom.

He swung round with his most courteous and uncommitted manner.

“I thought you would—” he began, when heavy steps and men’s voices in the hall took the words from his mouth.

He looked at her and she looked at him; and one of those quick, subtle complicities, of people who have been tossed by a wanton chance into an unforeseen familiarity, passed between them, between an anonymous masculine soul and an anonymous feminine soul, driven into a forced and accidental reciprocity.

Then the door of the dining-room opened and the man-servant, ushering into the apartment the tall figure of the Jobber, announced, in a low but very emphatic voice:

“Mr. Skald to see you, sir!”

She had never dreamed that it would flow over her with a *double* overpoweringness, when she saw him again, her weakness, her helplessness, her enslavement.

“I love you, I love you!” was what every atom of her body was calling out now as she let him take her hand.

Jerry contemplated with some surprise and amusement this encounter between them. A vague notion flitted through his brain that the pair were old friends and had been friends in early youth. Perhaps her people had gone to Guernsey from Portland!

Perdita simply could not look the Jobber in the face. She hung her head and looked sideways at a gilded stool. This stool might have been the very one that Hamlet sat on, during the play-scene, when he cried out: “For if the king like not the comedy, why then, belike he likes it not, perdy!” but what Perdita noticed about it now was that the gilding had been knocked off from one of its edges, revealing a fragment of pallid, flaky substance, resembling cement rather than wood.

But the voice of the man holding her hand went on growling and muttering like low summer thunder above her head. Of course there was no earthly reason against the Jobber’s holding her hand so long and talking to her so possessively in Mr. Cobbold’s presence. They were breaking no law of society! He was a bachelor, she a spinster. He was of an ambiguous social position; and so most undoubtedly was she.

“Pardon me, Jerry Cobbold, I was so pleased to find Miss Wane here that I forgot my manners. We haven’t met, Miss Wane and me, for a long time. No, not since that first day, is it, Miss?”

“Sit down, sit down, Jobber,” broke in Jerry now; and he pushed the owner of the Cormorant into the chair recently vacated by Perdita. “Will you have one of mine?” he said to him when he had got him settled, “or do you, like the rest of us, prefer your own?”

But the Jobber’s great brown hand had already closed mechanically on the little object; and he was — from the cloud of smoke that now encircled his head and the length of the fiery ash-end that soon burned between his fingers — prepared to despatch Jerry’s cigarettes at the rate of one a minute.

“I hadn’t realized that you two were such old friends, Miss Wane,” murmured the clown. “Here — sit here — for I must go and see if my wife doesn’t want to share this pleasure. She’s as much in love with our friend here, as her—” He was going to say “as her sister”, but he stopped himself in time.

The Jobber’s threats of physical violence to Cattistock were common talk in all circles of the town.

“Won’t you, for five minutes, Mr. Cobbold, before I go to see your wife — for I know at this hour she’d sooner see me — just play us a little of what you were playing before Mr. Skald came in?”

Jerry smiled quickly at her; and once more there passed between them that curious wave of intimacy or familiarity which had brought them together when the Jobber’s steps had been heard in the passage.

“Certainly I’ll play for you again,” he said. “But only on one condition!”

Perdita was astonished at the ease, the freedom, the naturalness, the lack of all diffidence and all shyness which she now felt with the great man. And she looked straight into his eyes with an animation and a soft radiance that enchanted him.

Jerry’s perceptions, when it came to the relations between men and women, were subtler than a woman’s; and not the simplest woman but would have discovered the surge of mutual excitement that was rocking these two queer ones in their singular encounter.

“You... two... *are*... a pair... of sly ones,” said Cobbold very slowly, evidently gathering his cue, as he went on, from Perdita’s illuminated face. “Who would have guessed you... were... such... old friends?”

The Jobber’s arm shot out now and his fingers closed on the lappet of the girl’s plain, tailor-made jacket. This he held fast — apparently with the same unconsciousness with which he had a minute ago been puffing at the cigarettes offered him by Cobbold and throwing them into the fire — while Perdita’s hand, raised as if to loosen his fingers from her coat, remained, to the delight of the wily clown, in obvious contact with the hand she would have removed.

“Well, if you’ll sit on the arm of our friend’s chair,” he began, while his glance never wandered for one second from the girl’s brown eyes, which struck him as revealing a startled and infinitely touching happiness, “I’ll willingly play a bit of it again; only I can't promise, you know, to catch the... what do you call it... a second time."

He turned from them slowly, with a characteristic shrug of his shoulders that had become famous. But this particular gesture — familiar to his audiences in half Europe — was entirely wasted upon the Jobber and Perdita; nor when the music filled the room again did it recapture one-twentieth part of its former magic. In fact what little attention Perdita was able to give to it was quite distracted this time by her awareness of the player's blundering technique.

"He isn't a real musician," she said to herself. "What I felt before must have been some kind of—"

She was standing motionless now with shining eyes, just where Jerry had left her, and her cheeks were almost as white and her body almost as rigid as Lucinda's gardenias.

The Jobber, however, was evidently thankful for the music. He seemed like a man in a trance who responds to a word or to a touch, in a state of rapturous abstraction. He still retained his hold of the edge of the girl's coat and presently she felt herself drawn gently towards him. Unable, without destroying the solemnity of that moment, to free herself from him, she did, in a state of mind as somnambulistic as his own, precisely what the comedian had suggested. She slipped down upon the arm of his chair. With a delicacy and restraint which affected her far more than any audacity could have done, he relinquished, the moment she was seated so close to him, his grasp upon her jacket, and kept his heavy-jowled massive lineaments turned away from her face and directed steadily towards the figure at the piano.

Sitting on the arm of his chair, but free from his touch, she couldn't help letting her eyes take in every aspect of this man she had loved — so literally at first sight! He wore his usual sailor’s garb, a rough dark blue jersey and navy-blue baggy trousers.

“What has he got in his trouser-pocket?” she thought, observing the protrusion of the hidden Chesil Beach pebble.

She was spared that usual melancholy gulf between the ideal features of a mental image and the reality; for what she now snatched furtive glimpses of, the Jobber’s profile, as he stared at the piano, seemed like an incarnation of all the impossible images that had hovered about all her girlhood’s broodings and trances and yearnings.

But both Perdita’s drifting thoughts and Jerry’s swaying fingers were interrupted by the re-appearance of the servant.

“Mistress is asking for Miss Wane, sir,” the man announced.

Cobbold drew a fantastic flourish down the keys, as if signing his name, and closed the piano.

“Thank you, Fogg,” he said, “I’ll come myself. Miss Wane’s busy just now.”

But Perdita was already on her feet.

“No, no,” she cried, “I’m coming of course. Tell the mistress I’ll be with her in a second.”

“Yes, miss. I’ll say so, miss;” and the man closed the door.

“Good-bye, Mr. Skald,” she said, holding out her hand to the bewildered Jobber, who had scrambled out of his chair.

“But why... but can’t we... but wouldn’t you...” he stammered, his face getting very hot under his swarthy skin.

“What nonsense is this?” broke in their host, stepping between them. “There’s not the slightest necessity for your going, Perdita.”

She opened her eyes at being called “Perdita” by him for the second time; and the thought flashed through her mind:

“Does being in love lay a person bare to all sorts of liberties?”

But she let her hand rest, unresisting, in the hand of the Jobber, although in his agitation he was squeezing it with cruel violence.

“Of course I’m going,” she repeated, smiling at Jerry, but avoiding her lover’s passionate stare.

“Listen... Listen, *Perdita*...” stammered the Jobber in a hoarse whisper.

She suddenly was seized with a calm, steady, luminous insight into every aspect — so it seemed to her — of the whole situation, as they all three stood there between the table and the door.

“Why,” she thought, as she stared at the fantastic piece of drapery which covered the square back which the little piano presented to the world. “It’s Persian! I never realized *that* before!”

And in the strength of her new insight into men and things, in the strength of this inrush of infinite capacity and infinite competecy which she felt, she said boldly to her lover, smiling into his eyes:

“Are you busy all day tomorrow, Mr. Skald?” And then she hurriedly added, seeing so much pleasure, pursued by so much suffering, race across his countenance that it hurt her to behold it: “Tomorrow’s Wednesday, you know.”

While the poor Jobber, and it was for the first time that morning that the thing had returned, was confronted by the tragic brevity of the hours he had yet left to be happy in — Wednesday, Wednesday, Wednesday! — unless the Dog was to flesh his teeth undisturbed in that woman’s whiteness, and while he faced these terrible Norse days, Woden’s day, Thor’s day, and saw them far more livid with disaster than ever the Three Staves or the Hanged Man were, in the Lodmoor Hut repertoire, his expression began to reveal what a crashing, cracking, groaning, rending, there was going on within his breast.

“Because,” Perdita went on, “Mrs. Cobbold’s arranged to go out to see Dr. Brush tomorrow, and the Doctor’s asked her to both lunch and dinner. So tomorrow I shall be free all day; if *you* have any time.”

His face was like some old battle-book — some Malory or Holinshed — in which tourney after tourney, mêlée after mêlée, is followed by solemn Masses under candle-lit gothic arches. He remained rapt, caught-up, absorbed in his indecision, while he still went on squeezing her hand and staring, without seeing anything, at the grey belt of her grey cloth suit. Of their host — who stood patiently in attendance upon this queer scene — he seemed entirely oblivious. At last he said slowly and very gravely — though with no lifting of the gloom upon the brow, with no relaxing of the tenseness between mouth and nostrils and between eyes and mouth:

“Will you meet me then, by the Clock, at about this time, about ten, tomorrow?”

He seemed relieved to have got the words said, and to have shifted the burden of his indecision upon the sequences of destiny, and his face did clear up a little now.

But Perdita, looking rather puzzled, repeated his expression, “at the Clock”, with an interrogatory inflection of her voice.

“He means the Jubilee Clock,” explained Jerry Cobbold, before the Jobber — who seemed quite taken aback by having a girl who did not know what “by the Clock” meant — had collected his wits to reply, “That Clock you pass on the esplanade, near the turn to the station.”

Perdita gave him a grateful smile but the Jobber scowled at him. It hurt his pride that their first rendezvous should need an explanation by an outsider. He dropped the girl’s hand; but Perdita, quick to catch his mood, snatched at it again.

"By the Clock at ten!" she whispered radiantly. "I'll be there — if I don't die in my sleep, good-bye!" and she plunged her brown eyes into his grey ones, like a headlong diver seeking fabulous treasure at the bottom of the sea. It was a look that he never forgot; for it was her way of giving herself wholly to him, there on the spot, there on their second encounter, there without a word of love having passed between them!

When she was gone and the door was shut Jerry Cobbold asked the Jobber whether it was too early to offer him a whiskey and soda. But the man stared at him, as he spoke, as if the clown had been talking to the large Mid-Victorian print of Prospero dismissing Ariel which hung on the wall, rather than to him. As he stared in front of him in this way his face, without being actually distorted by the trouble of his indecision, twitched and contracted as if he were confronting a shining row of musket-barrels.

"Don't do that," he jerked out, when he saw Jerry hurrying to ring the bell. "I must go. I've got endless things to do. I've got to go over to Dorchester with some fish for Witchit and I've got to get my car" — in his agitation he forgot to call her the Slug— "attended to. She's been wanting tinkering up for some time. A man's pretty helpless, moving about these days and attending to his business, when his car's out of commission." He looked meaningly at Jerry and winked. "We need our cars for our girls," he said, and then as if conscious that Cobbold might have thought this remark an unnatural one, he added, with an obvious darkening of his cheeks: "Anyone would be surprised, Cobbold, at the number of people I've given lifts to, in my time, between Weymouth and Dorchester. I tell 'em they ought to get me a bus-licence."

Jerry did his best not to look as if he realized the man was making a fool of himself.

“How few of us,” he thought, “can carry off being caught ‘on the hop’ as I caught him with the funny little thing!”

It had become a private whimsy of his thus to belittle his wife’s companion.

“The funny little thing,” he said to himself, “is much too proud not to carry it off with the grandest air. I’ve never seen a woman carry off such a ‘give-away’ situation in a more natural style.”

With the departure of Adam Skald, and this took place less than five minutes after Perdita had withdrawn from the scene, Jerry Cobbold hurriedly prepared to take himself off, too. He had promised his dancer, Tossty, that he would call for her this morning at the house of a mutual friend of theirs, a certain Doctor Lucius Girodel, a notorious quack, empiric, and abortion-procurer, whose house in Ranelagh Road was a famous resort of a certain group of unconventional philosophers and their fair friends.

Among these cronies, who, by some obscure and furtive understanding that had casually and inconsequentially grown up between them paid liberally for their entertainment, Doctor Girodel was known as “Lucky” and his large dingy mansion, between the station and the old Backwater, was always referred to as “Lucky’s”. Jerry Cobbold had long been one of Doctor Girodel’s most liberal patrons. He had indeed a peculiar fondness for this shameless quack, among whose various rôles the one which he played to the greatest perfection was undoubtedly that of bawd. But Jerry Cobbold was authentically attached to Lucky, and seemed able to be more entirely himself in the Doctor’s company than in any other, whether it were that of man, woman, or child. Something about the complete freedom from ordinary human decency, dignity, propriety, seemliness, pride, honour and self-respect displayed by Lucius Girodel, tickled the comedian’s humour down to its roots; and it may be believed how Lucky's prestige was enhanced in the town by the general knowledge that as long as the world-famous clown had a crust in the world he would share it with him.

It was not therefore of "the funny little thing" nor of her formidable admirer that the clown was thinking as he hurried down King's Street and skirted the yard of the railway-station. Nor was he thinking of Tossty.

His face partook of the gusto of his feelings which were those of sweet satisfaction in the dirtiness and littered condition of the piece of road he traversed. The faintest and most pallid tinge of sunlight had just now broken through the clouds and its watery lemon-coloured light fell upon all the horse-droppings and all the broken boxes and all the puddles and all the mud. There were some high hoardings, too, in this ramshackle quarter at the back of the station, upon one of which the clown noted an advertisement of a well-known aperient, held aloft on the pinnacles of a Gothic Cathedral. But the old withered horse-droppings, together with certain wisps of dirty straw, were what seemed to please both this watery sunshine and the senses of Jerry most of all. A bit of blue paper, torn from the hoarding, flapped like a discontented flag in his path; but the comedian's grave eye, as it gloated with a sort of mystical ecstasy on all these manifestations of matter, seemed to rebuke the discontent of this piece of paper. He was soon traversing the yet poorer district of Ranelagh Road, a region that always fascinated him. Ranelagh Road at that time was a sort of poor people's replica of the grand esplanade; and it was above everything a parade-ground and rendezvous for the loves of the children of the poor. Here when the lights were lit at night the natural shyness of the large groups of boys and girls who met there concealed itself under loud guffaws, crude gestures, incredibly gross jests, and hysterical idiotic giggling. All this Jerry Cobbold sucked up with far more relish than he did the plaudits of any audience. Jerry had indeed something in him that went beyond Rabelaisianism, in that he not only could get an ecstasy of curious satisfaction from the most drab, ordinary, homely, realistic aspects of what might be called the excremental undertides of existence but he could slough off his loathing for humanity in this contemplation and grow gay, child-like, guileless.

All his life Jerry was destined to remain to every person who knew him an insoluble riddle. Like Augustus Caesar — who also was a comedian in his time — he kept even his intimates at a great distance. They might call him “Jerry”; but “Jerry” when applied to him became a title of aristocratic remoteness. They might utter the syllables “Jerry” when they addressed him; but the meaning of these syllables instantly became “your Excellency”, or even “your Royal Highness”.

Jerry’s “funny little thing” was not the only penetrating girl who saw the man as a sort of fragile Atlas, perpetually holding up the weight of other people’s destinies and aiming above all, as he did with Lucinda, at keeping people from going mad, by an everlasting process of distraction! His elder brother Sylvanus said once of him that Jerry wasn’t the child of human parents at all; but that his father was the Ghost of Swift and his mother a Lemur, a remark which, when it was reported to Jerry, received a *tu quoque* so profane as to be totally unprintable.

When he came in sight of Lucky’s, which was an old, unrestored Queen Anne dwelling, carrying the name Sark House by the side of its rusty bell, Jerry Cobbold thought of that fragment of Russian music which he had played, after his amateur fashion, for “the funny little thing”; and he paused for a moment, while some noisy children quarrelled and jostled on the dirty, littered steps of Sark House, to give himself up to those ideal cadences. The comedian’s passion for music Was his one grand secret escape. Here lay — if anywhere — the solution of the mystery of his character; for Jerry’s loathing for humanity was even deeper than that of Mr. Witchit, the fishmonger of St. Alban's Street, and the only pleasure he got from his fellows was a monstrous Rabelaisian gusto for their grossest animalities, excesses, lapses, shames! These things it was, the beast-necessity in human life, that he exploited in the humours of his stage-fooling; and because he loathed his fellow-men he was able to throw into his treatment of their slavery to material filth an irresistible hilarity as well as a convincing realism, a combination that always enchanted the crowd.

Another peculiarity of this enigmatic person, and one that helps to explain the weary meticulousness with which he upheld the social fabric of life, was the fact that normal sex-appeals had not the least effect upon him. What had drawn him to Lucinda — if the truth must be told — was a queer pathological attraction; and the same was true, allowing for the difference in her age and type, of his interest in Tossty.

With Girodel alone the comedian removed that mask which Perdita had so acutely divined. To the quack doctor he showed his real face, a face which was so sick of life that the sight of it would have disconcerted anyone less heartless than the cynical tenant of Sark House. Doctor Girodel, however, who picked up his living from the seamy side of existence, took his patron's life-hating mood as much for granted as if it had been the despair of a girl with an unwanted child. Indeed he had long ago discovered that of all emotions that release the clasp of a purse to a greedy hand disgust of life is the most potent!

"Oh, it's you, at last, is it?" was Tossty's scornful greeting, when across the great, faded, forlorn reception-room of Lucky's he moved to the girl's side. Under this chilly reception the clown fell into a very queer train of thought. "Do I know," he said to himself, "a single woman who could really love a person like me?" And then without any apparent reason the image of his wife's sister as she would look if Cattistock ill-used her, came into his head. *"She* might," he thought, "and I'd respond to it, too, if she were outraged and abject. I've caught her eye sometimes, and I almost—"

The flames in the big marble-manteled fire-place seemed to him the only objects just then in that melancholy chamber which he could contemplate with satisfaction. Great black-and-white, Mid-Victorian prints of public ceremonies — the Queen being crowned, the Queen being married, the Queen meeting her Cabinet, the Queen celebrating her Jubilee — hung round the walls, showing, against the stained and darkened wall-paper, which itself was the colour of Cattistock and Frampton's cheapest beer, like royal visitors in an asylum ward.

"Yes.. *she* might," he mused. And he visualized with a queer tenderness an ill-used Hortensia. But the little abortionist went skipping about like an evil bird from one guest to another. They had all evidently been drinking, though it was half-an-hour short of noon; for the battered and discoloured mahogany table was strewn with glasses, soda-syphons and bottles.

"It's not his money," the clown pondered, still thinking of Mrs. Lily. "I wish I knew—"

Lucky was a clean-shaved, restless personage. He had a sharp nose, a pointed chin, and long, straight, fair hair, which he wore thick in front, and was always running his fingers through and smoothing down, as if he were in a high wind; and with that mysterious instinct with which human beings often select some particular garment to suit their inmost identity, however incongruous with the rest of their array, he had caused to be made for himself certain striped trousers that were extremely narrow in the leg and which gave to his whole figure a sort of lively formality, mincingly important and preposterously obsequious, as he moved about, while neither the people he cajoled nor the people he twitted, for he was chattering *sans* *cesse,* felt him to be a person with whom you could exchange a single serious thought.

"Yes, I am alive again, Toss," Jerry cried suddenly, in a tone as if he had been under the power of some drug. "What is it? Tuesday, the tenth of February! A very good date. An excellent date. *Today's* date! Yes, Toss, you lovely one—" and here in spite of her angry, averted profile he gave her a fantastical kiss that seemed to go ricocheting round all the historic prints on the walls— "This tenth of February is not yesterday nor tomorrow. It's today. It's *today's* date, you beautiful one! Doesn't that seem odd to you when you think of—" Here he was interrupted by the lively abortionist, who pirouetted up to him to whisper something, gliding upon his thin, striped legs as if they were external to his organic volition, as a pair of roller-skates would be —

"Hullo, Lucky! How are you? Champagne did you say? Has the beautiful one been referring to her favourite drink? Surely! Let's have a bottle — two bottles — three — enough for everyone here! But what was I saying?"

Tossty, who was neither listening to him nor apparently — since his kiss — aware that he existed, called out now across the whole length of the room to her sister Tissty, who was talking earnestly to Dog Cattistock.

"Have you asked Mr. Cattistock, Tiss, what you said you were going to?"

Cattistock looked up quickly, lifting his great chin from across the girl's figure, for she was leaning against him on a horse-hair sofa, a sofa that had become so disfigured by ill usage that its colour had changed from black to a curious black-grey that always suggested to Jerry's secret imagination the appearance of a hearse. But Cattistock, as he lifted his bristly chin and blinked with his eyes, was not one to let these two sisters chatter to each other as if they were alone.

"What *was* she to ask me, Toss? Hullo, Jerry! How are you this morning? Why didn't you say you were going to order that champagne? Tiss said she'd go over to Portland with me presently; but *now* — It would be cruel to carry her off! Can't you put it off till tomorrow?"

There was a very curious eye-encounter then, across the big room, between these two men, who were, in the eyes of the world, the most important persons in Weymouth at that time, and who always met each other at Lucky's with that half-embarrassed air with which two well-known statesmen might meet at their accustomed brothel.

While his answer to Cattistock's request hung in the balance, Tossty began eagerly whispering to the clown, a red flush animating her swarthy cheeks, and more emotion and more interest suffusing her whole being than she had shown him since his entrance. It was characteristic of him that he dropped the matter of the champagne instantaneously, without even bothering to put his assent into words, thus lighly removing from in front of Cattistock's massive assault the sole prize of the financier's artillery.

But Cattistock was thinking: "I must take Tissty to the Sea-Serpent's Head up there. If those quarrymen grow nasty I'll have to leave her up there, till I've dealt with them. It'll spoil my night on Thursday completely if I haven't had Tiss first! I'd be pretending 'Tensia *was* Tiss, and I'm not clever enough for such tricks. Sippy's the fifth person already today who's warned me about Skald's threats. The man *is,* I believe, really going to try something. Well! I'll invade his terrain today, when he's in Dorchester selling fish; and then tomorrow, and that'll be in ample time, I'll deal with *him."*

So far he thought in the same quick, harsh, clear-cut sentences as he was wont to speak. But there came a minute later — and all his thoughts passed far more quickly than half-a-dozen of the smooth-drawn breaths that the fair-skinned Tissty was breathing so near to his rough cheek — when his thoughts ceased to be so definite, but still went on, and indeed grew in intensity. These thoughts were images; and the first of them was of the sea, of the sea carrying on its surface — a summer, not a winter, surface — one, two, three, red-funnelled Channel Island steamers, purchased by him from the railway. How fast over Cattistock's mental sea did these steamers move! And then the image came to him of Adam Skald, commonly called the Jobber, standing in the dock at Dorchester, answering to the charge of making murderous threats against his life. The unfortunate Jobber, in the dock at Dorchester, was not far removed from the smooth summer-sea over which the red-funnelled steamers followed one another so fast. In fact the dock, in this mental picture, became interchangeable with Portland Bill, until both of these vanishing, their place was taken by a bedroom at the Sea-Serpent's Head. This rapid survey of future events was now brought to an end by a repetition of his protest to the comedian at the other end of the room.

"Can't you put it off till tomorrow? Everyone who's here now could be here tomorrow, couldn't they?" He disentangled himself from the satiny pressure of his companion's lithe form and straightening his back looked round the room. "You could all come tomorrow, couldn't you?" he said, in that peculiar grating voice that he used when he asserted his authority in the Guildhall.

Doctor Girodel who had already got to the door in eager obedience to Jerry's words, was clearly much put out. He would have liked to sneak off, pretending he hadn't heard Cattistock's remark, but it was too late. His one hope was — for he was not a believer in tomorrow — that his patron Jerry would indignantly reject this delay.

"Yes," he thought, "you can stick out your chin all you like, you ugly brute! If Jerry thinks Toss wants the drink, he'll make me get the drink and you can go to hell!"

Tossty herself was the one who now indicated, in a whisper to Jerry Cobbold, that it would be better to have the champagne tomorrow when they could all enjoy it.

"We'll have it tomorrow, Tiss," she indicated to her sister across the room in one of those mute signals which between ladies are clear and decisive.

They were alike in figure, these two dancers, being a pair of the supplest, the most sinuous, the most provocatively slender girls who had ever graced the well-worn boards of the Regent; but whereas Tissty the one now flirting with Cattistock, was startlingly fair, Tossty the tyrant of the great clown was extremely dark. Their real names were Gloria and Pansy Clive; but everyone knew them as Tissty and Tossty. They were in fact Tissty and Tossty to each other; and even — one must suppose — to themselves. Born in the little village of Radipole at the end of the old Weymouth Backwater, now Radipole Lake, the sisters could not even now catch the scent of any spring flowers without recalling those cowslip-balls that they used to toss from hand to hand as they danced on the green in front of the inn on Club day. They had grown up to be very successful on the music-hall stage; but throughout their varied and adventurous career they never separated from each other, and they never consented to be long absent from their first love, the sea. This latter peculiarity of theirs — their mania for getting jobs at sea-coast towns — they were in the habit of attributing to their health. Pansy Tissty, the fair one, would always say: "Tossty *has* to be at the sea for her asthma;" while Gloria, the dark one, would say: "Tissty *has* to be at the sea for that neuritis of hers!"

Lucky gave vent to a palpable sigh, dropped the handle of the smoke-darkened door into the passage, pushed back the lank, limp hair from his forehead, and pirouetted, with a mincing and yet a gliding motion, clear across the room, to where, seated on a faded settee not far from the fire, little Peg Frampton, the neglected daughter of Cattistock's partner, was being rallied for her solitary condition by Cattistock's nephew, who, ensconced in the only comfortable arm-chair in that large room, held on his knees the diaphanous and love-dazed form of Curly Wix. When the gliding abortionist had slipped down by Peg Frampton's side and had crossed his thin legs in their tight striped trousers, the young Town Clerk, with the tone of a petted favourite talking to an infatuated Sultan, enquired of his uncle, who was now on his feet helping the fair Tissty into her silk-lined coat, whether he could meet him here a little before the others came as he had something rather important to ask him.

Peg Frampton's hollow, dissipated young eyes contemplated with a sullen envy the serpentine sinuosity of the dancer's slippery form as it wavered half-in, half-out of its silken sheath, as Cattistock turned his chin in his nephew's direction.

"What is it, Sippy?" he said. "We're in Liberty-Hall here. What is it, boy?" As he spoke he gazed, not at his nephew but at Curly. "That girl is growing extraordinarily beautiful," he thought.

Ballard's handsome face flushed.

"You don't want me to drag in that ass, Skald" — he pronounced it "arse"— "do you, sir? You really ought to hear some of the pretty tales I've been picking up about what he's going to do to you. He says—" There was a sudden hush at this point-throughout the whole room, broken only by an audible whisper of Jerry's to Tossty to the effect that the Jobber was the bravest man in Weymouth; but S. P. Ballard went on boldly: “He says you’ll never consummate your marriage on Thursday. He says—”

But Cattistock interrupted him.

“That’ll do, boy! That’ll do! If all you’ve got to tell me is gossip of *that* sort you can keep it to yourself. Can’t he, Tiss?”

But Tossty, leaving Cobbold with a hurried “Nonsense! You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” ran across the room to her sister’s side and began whispering earnestly to her, while Cattistock, with a contemptuous hardening of his face, flung his arm round Tissty and led her to the door.

“I’ll tell him... I’ll tell him, my dear!” they heard the fair girl reply, as she was forced out of the room.

With this departure a babble of tongues was loosed. Everybody began talking at once.

Curly, looking even whiter and more transparent than usual, moved a little on Ballard’s knee to fix her great violet eyes with an almost horrified stare upon Doctor Girodel, who was making advances, of a kind that seemed on a par with his fantastical trousers, to Peg Frampton, whose own attention was absorbed in watching Cobbold, a personage she had never before seen at such close range. The Wishing Well guardian was saying to herself, “Jerry Cobbold doesn’t agree with any of them about this nonsense. He doesn’t like Mr. Cattistock. Nor do I! I wish Magnus hadn’t gone and tied himself up with him. It was just like his foolishness to take that idiot child.”

Having come to the totally erroneous conclusion about Peg that she was too nervous, in so many people’s presence, to respond to his advances, the restless little quack doctor turned his malignant attention upon Sippy and Curly; for it was his custom to treat with repulsive familiarity any couple to whom in the past he had been useful in his ambiguous profession.

“Well, and how’s Mr. Muir?” he enquired with a sneer, leaving Peg’s side and standing with his back to the fire, while he jerked his hair from his forehead and grinned down at Curly like a drunken conjurer at a white rabbit.

Jerry was now helping Tossty into *her* cloak, which, being lined with white fur, enhanced the Spanish duskiness of her hair and eyes, and when it was on they, too, moved up to the fire.

“We’re talking about Miss Wix’s fiancé,” grinned the doctor as they approached. “Do *you* know Mr. Muir, Tossty?”

“Do I, Jerry?” the beautiful girl asked languidly.

“*I* do, anyway,” broke in the comedian. “Magnus is one of my oldest friends in the place. Don’t you be nasty about him, doctor!”

“When’s the marriage coming off, Curly?” enquired the doctor, with a leer. “I’m not being nasty, Jerry,” he added. “I’m asking the young lady for information.”

Curly got up from her lover’s knee and moved off, without answering him, to one of the great melancholy gilt mirrors that hung about the room. Here, without bothering to touch her dress or her hair, she stared into her own troubled eyes.

“I’ll die,” she thought, “before I’ll let Doctor Girodel meddle with me again.” Then she turned to her lover. “Let’s go, Sippy” she said. “I’m hungry.”

“When you *are* married to Magnus,” said Jerry Cobbold to her, in a clear, friendly voice across the room, “I’ll ask you both to dine with Lucinda... and I won’t ask *you,* you rascal, you may be sure,” he added, smiling at Sippy.

Thrilled at being actually addressed by the great man, Curly recovered her spirits in a moment, and moved towards him, her eyes large and liquid with excitement.

“Why, you’ve never even been introduced to her,” said Sippy.

The comedian ceremoniously caught up the girl’s hand and kissed it.

“I’ve seen her many a time at the Well,” he murmured. “We all envy you, you rogue, and Magnus, too! You’re a wise child, my dear, to have two strings to your bow. May you never get them entangled!”

He said this with such a tender and grave air that Curly was enchanted.

Meanwhile the lecherous little doctor was doing his best to establish some sort of ambiguous rapport with the forlorn intruder from Swan Villa. His knowledge that Peg had been brought here for the first time by Cattistock that morning, and might never come again if everybody neglected her, was enough to draw him to her side. In his fantastic vision of Sark House as a rendezvous for all erotic eccentrics, and of himself as an unexclusive Cicerone to a universal Cyprian Alsatia, he could not endure to lose even such a woebegone waif as this. Besides, after all, she *was* the daughter of Cattistock’s partner.

The great financier himself, though he had brought her, had dropped her and completely ignored her when it transpired that the lovely and capricious Tissty, whose skin was of a whiteness rivalling that of his bride, and to whom he had long been attracted, happened today — probably out of pure feminine pique over his approaching marriage — to be in a receptive mood towards him.

The only person who noticed the overtures Lucky was now making, on that sorry-looking settee, was his patron Jerry, who as he talked to the languid and preoccupied Tossty, near the half-drawn window-curtains, kept his cold non-human eye — the eye of a philosophical harlequin — fixed steadily upon the couple.

"What's the rogue up to," he thought, "with that pitiful little piece? Has he taken upon himself to besiege her maidenhood on general professional principles? Is he trying to seduce her on the ground that the condition of virginity is an unhappy one for everybody concerned, except the fortunate person who takes it away?"

"I do so love," Girodel was even now whispering to Peg, "the way your under-lip droops; and you're silly, you know, to put anything on it, for anyone can see it's got a delicious redness of its own. But the way it droops — no! don't bite it now! — is positively ravishing."

Peg stopped biting her lip and stared at him wonderingly. It was such a completely new experience for her to be courted in this sort of way that she was both pleased and bewildered. Was the man making sport of her? No — she could not believe that when she saw his animated face.

"I knew an artist once who used to tease me about my lip," she said. "He used to call it the coral-reef."

Girodel was delighted at the impression he was making.

"Those old poets would say, Miss Frampton, that a bee had stung it newly."

But Peg's unmoved expression, as if this were an extremely doubtful compliment, indicated to him that she was even more ignorant of "those old poets" than he was himself; and he hurriedly proceeded along a different track.

"You know you completely puzzle me, Miss Frampton! You look so quiet and still; and yet no one would think you hadn't had a lot of experience. You've lost all your illusions I expect. Well, so had I at your age. I saw all through the world's humbug when I was younger than you are. Since then I've got down to the bed-rock of things where you soon find out that everyone's got to fight for his own hand... yes, and against his friends, too! I love the good Jerry over there for instance — don’t look at him; for he’s watching us! — but do you think I sacrifice myself for him? I should say not, Miss Frampton, I should say not! I was neglected and alone when I was a little boy—” here the crafty Lucky looked down at his striped trousers, as if the emotion of thinking of himself as a boy was so great that he could not bear to meet a sympathetic gaze while he indulged in it— “but since I’ve grown up I’ve thrown overboard all that. Life is a battle in the dark, little girl, and the game wouldn’t be worth the candle if we didn’t meet a lovely spirit sometimes who’s had the brains to see through all the humbug, too — especially if this spirit has a drooping scarlet lip and delicious, slender little fingers!”

Here this Panurge-like figure in the striped trousers proceeded to take her hand; and as he crowded her against the end of the tattered settee pretended to peruse with solemn intensity the extremely broken and ill-fated lines in her hot, feverish, hollow palm.

“He’s rather like a monkey,” the girl thought.

But dropping her hand and lying back against the settee he began to talk to her more seriously; nor was he altogether hypocritical in this. There was a vein in Girodel of transparent simplicity and almost wistful childishness; but it very rarely appeared in his dealings with women. Jerry, who knew this vein well and responded to it, scarcely realized what a heartless rogue his friend Lucky was in his relations with women, or how completely this simple direct mood vanished away where they were concerned.

But Peg’s cynicism combined with her extreme youth was something that the little abortionist had never come across before. Thus the tendency to rascality which he habitually displayed where women were concerned was qualified while he talked to Peg by a recognition that she was in some way different from the rest and had a clear and unsentimental intelligence to which he could appeal. It was not long, therefore, before he launched — speaking in a hurried, earnest whisper — into an eloquent discourse on the advantages of prostitution, if a woman kept her head and got out of it in time.

"How can a girl," he said, "be really disillusioned with all this nonsense of virginity hanging about her like a blinding cloud? A girl with a mind like yours" — and he gave her a fervent admiring glance— "doesn't want to pay the price of some stuffy commonplace marriage for her experience; and a girl with brains like yours wants to come down to the real thing, and not be bothered by silly romantic illusions. Intelligent women need variety and change, just as men do, and they need the experience of these things without all the fuss and fume of what is called love. Of course a girl needn't 'go on the street' as we say; and all she has to do, if she gets landed, is to come — well! come to *me.* No, no, my dear Miss Frampton, a woman is made for these experiences. And it doesn't mean that she kills her power of falling in love. Girls who have been with endless men can fall in love in the end, just as we can; and when they *do* love, it's real, I tell you; for all the silly nonsense that virginity creates, the parthenogenesis of illusion," (here Lucky chuckled over his own inspiration) "has been squeezed out of 'em. You *can't* be disillusioned and remain a virgin; and yet what intelligent girl, until she's desperately in love, and not always even then, wants to tie herself to a husband and children. A conventional married woman grows inured to dullness and boredom; but she *cannot* be disillusioned, because she's not had the experience for that. And how silly and flirtatious these women are, my dear! Whereas a girl who has had her adventures — a prostitute if you like — can be a decent friend to a man without all this silliness!"

Peg listened to all this with absorbed interest, nodding her head now and then with the gravest approval and saying to herself in her heart:

"Now this would be the very man for me to experiment with and to satisfy my curiosity with."

And she grew happier and happier as Lucky talked more and more freely to her; for she thought to herself:

"I want to know *everything* about these things: and here's a man who's evidently attracted to me, from whom I *could* learn everything."

Presently he was trying to persuade her to let him show her the other rooms in the house.

"If you'll come upstairs — do, Miss Peg! please, *please* do! — I'll show you every room in the place."

And Peg thought to herself. "I'd far sooner be undressed by this man than by Mr. Cattistock. I wish I'd put on my best under-clothes though! How stupid of me. But that's always my luck. I'm always thinking of things and never doing things."

And then, as she found herself being helped up from the settee and led across the room, so that she might have the pleasure of being shown by Doctor Girodel "what the upstairs rooms were like", she thought to herself, while her heart began to beat fast:

"I might have gone on forever, going about with that Witchit kid and with all the other kids, and *never* have known all I want to know! But now I *shall* know. I know I shall by the way he was looking at me just now."

Thus she pondered in her beating heart, below the narrow, consumptive boy-like chest; and not only was the hand that Doctor Girodel held hotter, dryer, more feverish than any girl's hand he had ever held, but she herself was conscious of a sudden fit of what she called "the shivers". To plunge into the unknown world of all she wanted to know — that world that had just received its intellectual justification from Lucky's discourse to her, that world of the "upstairs" of Sark House, which she vaguely fancied would have furniture such as George the Third might have used — was an event of such startling magnitude in her life that it was no use pretending that it was nothing.

"I like him," she thought, "and he does really seem to have respect for my mind. I do think he understands me and sees what I feel, and wouldn't treat me roughly. But oh, dear! Perhaps I'll be sorry about this tomorrow!"

Peg had been rather a pitiable figure from the first in that motley assembly. To any woman of discernment it would have been clear she was motherless. There was something about her clothes, something about the way her hair was done, something in the very look of her shoes and stockings which testified to the peculiar desolation of her dilapidated man-ruled home by the edge of that ornamental water. Any woman who had once seen Peg's bedroom in Swan Villa or seen the meals over which Peg presided or seen the figure of Mr. Frampton leaving his house for his office would have scarcely been surprised that her life's destiny should have reached the point, on this tenth of February, of being led upstairs by Doctor Girodel.

Jerry Cobbold, however, who had at last persuaded Tossty to take a seat by those great Victorian winter-curtains, half-drawn at this moment, missed nothing of what was going on. His eye upon Peg was now like the eye of a manager of marionettes who is a little uncertain what wire to pull to prevent the Cinderella-Puppet from leaving the stage with the Don Juan-Puppet. Although endowed by providence with a detachment from ordinary passions that amounted to a monstrous perversity, Jerry had the instinct of a born clown for certain poignant human situations; especially for such as had a touch of the grotesque, or of the pitiful, or of the tatterdemalion in them;

and as Peg — who, as we have seen, could certainly not be called loath to go upstairs, and in any case was too spiritless and reckless to make any sort of struggle against Girodel's eagerness, even if her heart did beat and she did feel conscious of a fit of "the shivers" — glanced sideways out of her hollow eye-sockets in such a way as to give to the expression of her eyes, with the dark lines round them, a desperation that the girl would certainly have denied she felt, and which she probably did not feel, the great comedian, exactly as if he had been Hamlet, ironically and hysterically applauding the players, suddenly began clapping his hands together, extravagantly, violently, noisily.

Tossty got up from her seat by the curtain and looked indignantly round the room, as if calling upon public opinion to defend her from such a madman, but the subtle Lucky caught his patron's temper in a second, dropped the girl's hand, and as if jerked into reluctant propriety by some invisible wire, proceeded to occupy himself with a series of fantastic and bird-like movements in the service of his own disordered hair, alternately inclining and lifting his head; and finally pushing his hair carefully away from his forehead.

For a perceptible fragment of time Peg Frampton stood unsupported, awkward, embarrassed, in the middle of the room. Then very slowly, and walking like a child who has only just come out to play with the others and does not quite know which of them to approach, she moved over towards the left side of the fire-place.

Here Curly had rejoined Sippy, after having received upon the head — so to speak — of her adulterous life the comedian's impious blessing, and here the lovers were whispering eagerly together in some grave argument as to the best methods and ways of deceiving Mr. Muir.

Peg's fluctuating and hesitating approach — in her self-chosen and self-patched finery which made her look like a slum-girl out for a bank-holiday compared with Curly who looked *exactly what she was* and with Tossty who looked like a Russian Princess — drew her by nervous degrees, as if she were anxious to get a clearer view of the Coronation of Queen Victoria, towards the great black arm-chair where Sippy once more held Curly cuddled upon his lap. To the bishops and statesmen who thus looked forth at Peg from the choir-stalls of the Abbey she must have presented the appearance, as she advanced towards them in this wavering, hesitant *pas-de-seul,* of some little street-girl who had put on her Sunday clothes to see the sight, and had — God knows how — got past the authorities.

And when those dark-lashed, violet eyes of the lovely Curly were aware that her dialogue with Sippy was menaced by Peg's approach, she acted very much as the bishops in the coronation would have done: she put away, out of her face, every consciousness that the form of Peg Frampton was anything but thin air.

Peg — though not very solid, for her hip-bones were sharp as a consumptive's and you could have balanced a penny on her collar-bones — had enough substantiality to know when her feelings were hurt and she now hurriedly changed the direction of her *pas-de-seul* and began to manifest a desire to look out of the window of that large room, a window which was behind the figures of Cobbold and Tossty, who also — since the hysterical clapping of the clown's hands — were engaged in some intimate discussion.

"What cheek!" Peg said to herself. "Even if she is on Mr. Ballard's lap, she must know I've been with people hundreds of times to see the Well, when *she* was nothing. And what is she now, I should like to know? *Mr. Ballard's bitch* — that's what *you* are, white face!"

But her anger, as she paused in the pursuit of her new objective (for she saw that Doctor Girodel had approached Jerry and Tossty and had interrupted their dialogue) faded away now, as she stretched out her thin arms to their full length over the grate and leaned against the marble edge of the mantelpiece. It faded very quickly, for Peg Frampton in her secret heart had no malice against anyone in the world, unless it were its maker and sustainer. Profoundly and bitterly as she pitied herself and cursed her lot she blamed no one — not even her father. Had Lucky taken her upstairs just then it is extremely unlikely that she would have come downstairs a virgin; but she bore against the wearer of those striped trousers not the faintest feeling of resentment. She felt no anger against Curly either now, just an amused awareness that in the usual scale of social values in Weymouth her own position was that of a lady while Curly's was anything but that. But what did it matter? What did all these things matter? Here she was, in this big room, a little black figure with outstretched arms above a fire-place, and there was not a single soul who gave a thought — save possibly her solemn little Double Flower — to what became of her. Well? Why should they? Why should *she* care what became of her?

"The best thing that could happen to *you,* my dear" — thus, with her arms stretched out like a diver, she apostrophized her soul in the red coals— "would be to *take to drink."*

And then she suddenly thought of her young admirer from the fish-shop in St. Alban's Street, and with a faint smile playing round her drooping under-lip, naturally red, and being perpetually made redder, she took her arms from the mantelpiece and stood back a little from the fire, brushing her skirt.

"Miss Frampton, isn't it?" said Jerry, moving up to her now, and holding out his hand. "I've been wondering, Miss Frampton," he went on, still retaining her thin fingers, “if you’d care to come round to our rehearsal on Monday. Our regular chorus is filled up; but I want — I mean I have a notion that a page’s dress—”

Peg’s clouded face lit up with the first gleam of spontaneous pleasure that it had known for many a day.

“Shall I have to ask father?” she murmured. “I’m afraid he wouldn’t—”

“Here, Toss,” he said, turning to the dark beauty in the fur cloak, “what bribe can we offer Mr. Frampton to lend us his little daughter for a week?”

The dancer stared scornfully at Peg and remained silent.

“Oh, well,” said Jerry. “We’ll be seeing Cattistock again tomorrow, and perhaps his influence with your father—”

“But, Jerry,” broke in the dancer at this point, “do be practical for once! It’s no good raising Miss Frampton’s hopes when you know what always happens at rehearsals.”

She narrowed her eyes as she exchanged a quick look with Peg, a look that told the would-be page that she had no more chance of being accepted, when it came to the point, than of having a collar of white fur.

“He’s forgotten that he’s promised two kids already,” she breathed wearily. “I wouldn’t bother your father about it if I were you. Come, Jerry! We’ll give her a couple of tickets for the opening night, but you really mustn’t—” and sliding her arm under the comedian’s, and whispering something in his ear that clearly extinguished all the girl’s hopes, she led him away.

Doctor Girodel attended them to the street-door; but when he came back he informed Sippy Ballard in an aggrieved voice that it was raining and the wind was getting up.

“Did you come in your car?” he enquired, glancing at the neat grey dress worn by Curly, “or shall I telephone for a taxi? Jerry had his usual luck.

There was one just outside.”

The lovers jumped to their feet at that and fixed a dismayed look upon each other. Curly murmured something about telephoning to her aunt’s shop in Upwey, if they weren’t going back.

“Do you want to come up with me then,” said the Doctor. “It’s in my room. We’ll be down in a minute, child!”

But no sooner was Peg left alone than she slipped out into the hall and put on her jacket and her little cloth cap. Making a face at the great forlorn staircase, a face that seemed to dismiss Sark House forever as an escape from her desolation, the girl opened the heavy street-door and went out into the rain. The wind blew her skirt against her thin legs and drove the rain against her flat chest. Before she got to the railway-station she was wet to the skin; so that when she passed the back of the buildings, where Jerry had contemplated the horse-droppings, she thought:

“What’s the good of sheltering in there now? I’m drenched through and through.”

A miserable recklessness came over her and she hurried down King’s Street, making blindly for the familiar esplanade, like a rabbit seeking its well-known covert, even though its hole has been stopped up. She passed in the middle of King’s Street a confectioner’s shop where, because of the sudden darkness brought on by these floods of rain, they had lit the lights. People kept pausing at this shop and jostling one another as they tried to close their streaming umbrellas before entering, and every time the door opened a warm, sweet smell of new-baked cakes emerged only to be instantaneously dissolved in the pouring rain. So often had Peg hurried, on warm summer days, down this particular street, longing impatiently for her first glimpse of the water, and anticipating with quickened pulses all the delights of the beach, the performers, the comic singers, the onlookers, the chaffing boys, the satyrish leers of the old men, that in her present mood of numb desperation she automatically pushed on through this blinding rain-water towards the kindlier salt-water. She had no fancy about being welcomed in its depths by the friendly daughters of Nereus, girls kinder than any Tissty or Tossty, and where there was no Lucky with striped trousers; but all the same the sea was to this child of the old Backwater, as it was to many another native of Weymouth, something almost personal.

She crossed the wide road actually at a run, with its crowded busses and rushing motors, and turned westward from the Jubilee Clock which indicated that it was five minutes to two. Not a soul on the esplanade, and how the rain positively danced up from the hard, black, smooth asphalt in little watery tongues! These tongues were like flames; only they were water-flames; not like those fire-flames across which she had been leaning at Lucky's when she thought of taking to drink. What else had she been thinking about as she leaned over the fire after that pretty girl of Sippy's had snubbed her so?

Soaked through and through she was, and there was no bus going her way at the statue now till the end of the afternoon. Soaked to the skin she was; all the fault of her having gone to this Lucky's at all, just because Cattistock offered to take her. And when he *had* got her there, he scarcely noticed her and went away with Tissty! Well, that was natural enough. Anyone *would* prefer a clever girl like that, to a badly-dressed, ignorant kid. It always came back to the same thing: God not having made her beautiful. It wasn't Tissty's fault, or Cattistock's fault, or Lucky's fault. It wasn't even dad's fault. 0, if God could only once *hear* what she felt towards Him — even if He struck her dead the second afterwards — what a heavenly relief it would be! It would be like the bursting of a blood-clot that had grown and grown in her brain till she couldn't stand it.

“The harbour would be the best place for a girl to drown herself in,” she thought.

She was opposite the place now where the donkeys stood in the hot sand in the summer; and where that Punch-and-Judy man used to be, whose daughter they said — and she knew the girl, too, by sight — went about with the elder Mr. Cobbold, the crazy one, who was called Sylvanus. The roadway on her right narrowed considerably now, and the houses became smaller, older, more picturesque.

“Is the tide coming in, or going out, in the harbour now,” she wondered.

But what was this? She was leaving the esplanade now and crossing the road and the rain seemed to be abating; but goodness gracious! where *was* she going? She was entering one of those quaint, old-fashioned narrow streets, where they sell those little boxes covered with shells like what Daisy’s grandfather makes in Sandsfoot Castle. How odd that she had so often been down this street and never thought — The rain was certainly stopping; but she felt horridly clammy and chilly and sticky, and there was an odious smell of soaked cloth and linen always reaching her. Yes; here it was, the little fish-shop that she had passed so often in former days, when as a child these curious shops, full of sailor’s souvenirs, attracted her so, but which she had avoided since she had been going to the Palladium with that kid.

“I smell like a corpse,” she thought, and still feeling as if she were under the eyes of those girls in Sark House, she entered the shop.

“Something sent me here,” she said to herself, and she remembered how she had thought of young Witchit as she leant against that mantelpiece at Lucky’s.

The fishmonger himself was behind the counter and he greeted her with his usual eager obsequiousness.

"Miss Frampton, isn't it?" he said. "Your dear father still at Swan Villa? You used to come for his cod-fish, you know. Oh, yes! I never forget a good customer. Cod-fish — that was what he always ordered! Your dear mother liked 'em. Yes, she liked a bit of good cod-fish in them days. Aye! how time does pass! Well, and what can I do for you today, Missy? There ain't no cod today; but I've got some nice haddock."

Peg stared at the man. And as she became conscious that below his smiling chatter she was no more to him than a piece of fish that he would give to his cat, an unutterable desolation swept over her.

"No, thank you," she murmured in a weak voice; and then with a shiver, "I think the... rain... has... stopped... now. I must be getting on."

She had already turned to go out; and it was that moment, with the inability of getting any bus for hours and her sense that she hadn't the spirit to walk all that way, or the money to take a taxi, combined with the look of a disembowelled fish on a side-slab near the door, that was the breaking-point. She paused with her head hanging down.

"Peg," she said to herself, stupidly and dully. "Peg is my name."

A voice from the back of the shop made her turn round. Mrs. Witchit, a short and extremely plump lady, who must have been seated in a low chair completely concealed by the counter, was now on her feet, indeed was already at Peg's side.

"Why, Miss Frampton, you're soaking wet! Why — Lordy bless the child! — you're shivering and shaking. Oh, my! Oh, my! how wet you are, Miss Frampton! My son have told me how kind you've been to him, taking an interest in him and all that. Excuse me boldness, Miss Frampton, but I can't let 'ee go, like you be, catching your dear death afore you gets whoäm. Come into kitchen and warm 'eeself, Miss Frampton! Oh, my! Oh, my! how wet 'ee be!"

It was now the destiny of Mr. Witchit to see his plump wife lead, nay! drag, this customer, to whom he had tried to sell his last piece of haddock, into her warm kitchen at the back of the shop. Slowly he went across to his pet canary, which at once began singing, and proceeded to apostrophize it:

"These be queer doings, Chirpy; these be uncommon queer doings. Your mistress be took, Chirpy. She be took, worse nor you and I have ever knowed her took!"

If Mr. Witchit's misanthropy was outraged by the manner in which his lady was "took" when she dragged Miss Frampton into her kitchen, it was no less than thunderstruck when from certain sounds in a room above it became clear that the woman was actually putting the girl to bed in their own chamber. Not many minutes passed indeed before the plump little person, carrying in her arms every stitch of the girl's clothing, put her head into the shop.

"Her don't go a step from here," he heard her say, "till I've a-dried these here things proper and finical!"

The man made no reply; but he and the now mute canary looked at each other in astonishment. They both knew that there was nothing to be said or to be done to stem the tide of the surprising events. Whenever Mrs. Witchit declared that something was to be rendered "proper and finical" destiny had to be left alone, to take "unbewailed" its way.

Meanwhile in the big bed upstairs Peg Frampton, with hot brandy inside her and a hot bottle above her, lay with her face to the wall, softly, weakly, helplessly crying, from pure physical comfort. What with the brandy and the warmth of the bed and the relief of her tears — for Peg hardly ever wept — the girl soon sank into blissful unconsciousness and slept for more than two hours. She was awakened by the sound of loud voices in the shop below and the dragging and banging about of boxes and crates. She heard the high-pitched tones of her friend, the Witchit boy, begging his mother to let him go up and see if his young lady was still asleep. Peg could not help smiling, even in her present weak and somnolent state, to think how the lad must have boasted to his parents of his friendship with “Miss Frampton”, for she had not been able to keep up her incognito with him. Then she heard the deep tones of the Jobber, who had just come back from Dorchester where he had been carrying round boxes of fish all day. There seemed to be something especially malevolent in Mr. Witchit’s tone when presently she heard him ask the Jobber if he’d inherited a legacy since he saw him last.

“You be in such an on’nat’rel jubilation, Jobber! Seems as if ye weren’t so elated when I last set eyes on ‘ee.”

Then Peg heard the Jobber’s deep voice.

“What’s that you’re reading in the Gazette, Missus?” he asked, completely ignoring the fishmonger’s banter.

“ ’Tis about that racing-man in London, what they’ve condemned to be hanged,” replied Mrs. Witchit. “He were with his sweetheart when they took he up. They caught ‘un wi’ she down at Broadstairs, or maybe Margate ‘twere.”

Peg’s somnolence melted like a cloud. High-class murderers with sweethearts at Margate were what she, too, loved to read about. What made the Jobber’s voice so serious, though, when he asked them if they’d heard that Gipsy May of Lodmoor could read the future by mummy-cards?

“Maybe she can; maybe she can’t,” Peg heard Mrs. Witchit say. “ ’Tis as how the upshot be.”

“Do you suppose, Marm,” said the Jobber, “that this racing-man enjoyed himself with his sweetheart just afore he did the job, as well as just after he did it?”

Mrs. Witchit held clear and strong opinions on this delicate point, which she was beginning to expound when Peg heard the shop-door open and shut, and a completely new voice make itself audible. The moment the girl heard this voice she sat up in the bed and listened intently.

She looked a quaint little figure, as she saw herself in the looking-glass, sitting up like this, arrayed in an ancient night-dress of Mrs. Witchit's, which fell away from her thin flat chest in voluminous folds. But she felt compelled to drink up every syllable of this new-comer's vibrant words. Never had she felt like this before, with regard to any human voice; and as she leaned forward, in the plump Mrs. Witchit's white night-dress, something in the tempo of this person's intonation ran through her veins like the quiver of electricity.

"Wet through? Of course I'm wet through, woman," Peg heard him say.

But the queer thing about his tone was that it did not sound like one ordinary person talking to another in a fishmonger's shop. It sounded as if the "I" of this individual who admitted being wet, had broken some barrier, some obstacle, some customary reticence that closed people in and was uttering these simple words as if they came from a level of life that was outside ordinary experience.

"But I've been into the pub next door," the voice continued, "and have had a drink."

Then again she heard the Jobber's deep tones; and though she could not catch the full purport of what he said, it must have been something about "drinking to forget"; for the thrilling voice went on:

"We're all half-alive and half-dead. To be really dead would be—"

It was clear he was interrupted at this point by the clatter that the Jobber and Mr. Witchit were making with the empy boxes and crates that had come back from Dorchester. But after a pause the voice began again, more clearly and more vibrantly than ever; but he was saying something now too obscure for her mind to follow. She could catch single words, but the sense escaped her.

And then she became aware of a noisy disturbance of some sort going on, on the pavement outside the little shop. She could hear boy's voices; and it was through her window that these voices reached her ears —

"He be inside fish-shop. I've a seed 'un! But Jobber Skald be wi' 'un; so do 'ee mind, Herb' Johnson, what 'ee be up to!"

Then she heard the shop-door open and the Jobber gruffly bidding the lads be off. Then once again the voice continued:

"Want what? That's the rub. That's the sticking-point."

But once more young Peg could make no meaning — for *her* intelligence — of the words that followed.

"No, no, not there, Jobber, not there, if you *please!"* It was Mrs. Witchit's voice that broke in at that point.

"That's where he keeps his cod, and he's got a fancy for holding on to that fish till prices do rise; whereas I tells him he ought to sell it at any price, and get a fresh lot in, and keep our stock on the move."

"What we need is air, air, air," continued the magnetic voice, growing louder and more commanding in its tone, as if it were competing with all the noises of ordinary life both within and without that little shop. "People don't yet know that if we'd only stop loving and hating and wanting, all would be changed! Then the—"

"Father! Father!" and the shrill voice of young Witchit drowned every other sound. "Look out, Father! *There*! Catch her! She stole it off the floor when I dropped it. There!"

And Peg could hear a terrific scrambling and presently there came the shock of something heavy being thrown.

“Kitty-Cat, don’t ‘ee mind! Don’t ‘ee mind, little Kitty-Cat!”

Peg could now catch the mother’s voice.

“You’ve gone and scared Kitty-Cat into one of her fits, Witchit. She be panting like her heart were broke.”

There was a long pause at this point while some large fish-crate was being dragged across the shop.

“Thank ‘ee, sir,” she heard Mr. Witchit say. “Thank ‘ee kindly, sir!” so that Peg gathered that the owner of the voice had assisted them in their tidying-up process.

At this point she heard the Jobber’s deep voice growl something in protest, something about “grand words baking no bread”, and about human nature being enough without any gods. And then Mr. Witchit’s voice became just audible explaining in an ingratiating and obsequious tone to the company at large how nice it was that they still had real gentlemen in the land “who had the time to tell us poor dogs about all these” — Then the boy’s voice was lifted up again and Peg gathered that he was asking what he should do with the last piece of haddock.

But once more the magnetic speaker went on; only now he spoke in so low a tone that the girl couldn’t catch the words. She strained her attention to the utmost. No! ’Twas no avail. With an angry sigh she sank down on her pillow. But that murmuring voice seemed to be coming up through the floor like a current of electricity. There! It had slid under her bed-clothes, under Mrs. Witchit’s night-dress, and was clinging, and quivering and vibrating and twisting, like coils of seductive magnetism round her naked body. The next thing Peg knew was that she was out of bed, and out of the room, and gliding stealthily downstairs on her bare feet. Swiftly and softly she opened the door that led from the kitchen into the shop.

There was a little confusion at this moment; for the Jobber suddenly opened the street-door and could be heard packing off what, from the noise that ensued, sounded like a party of intrusive children. An immensely tall man in tweeds thanked him for this proceeding.

"They always follow me about now," he said. "I don't know why they do."

Yes! there he was, this man who had drawn her downstairs by the tone of his voice, and she knew him at once, for she had had him pointed out to her since she was a child, many a time on the esplanade. He was certainly a more remarkable-looking man than she had ever realized. Tall though the Jobber was, as he stood by his side, this man was perceptibly taller. But that was partly because he was so abnormally thin and lean. He had grizzled hair, a long cadaverous face with bony hollow cheeks, a face that was fantastically elongated; and while otherwise clean-shaved he wore a grey mustache of immense length and thickness, not a military mustache, like old James Loder's, but a Viking's mustache, or a mustache like those worn in these islands by the old Cymric tribes.

So it was Sylvanus Cobbold whose voice had called her down to him! Well! she understood now why it was that these women followed him everywhere and gave themselves to him, body and soul. She could have run straight up to him herself, just as she was, heedless of Mrs. Witchit's night-dress! It was Sylvanus himself who was the first to notice her as she stood there in the chink of the kitchen-door; but he only did so after he had bought that last piece of haddock, stuck it into the pocket of his rain-soaked tweed suit, for he had neither hat nor great-coat, and had half-opened the street-door.

"Crossing the bridge, Skald? You can give me a lift, for I'm done in. I've been on my feet all day."

The Jobber murmured his good-bye to the fishmonger without turning his head and went out. Sylvanus followed; but just before vanishing he looked straight at the white figure in the crack of the kitchen-door and called out to her:

"Don't catch cold, little sleeper, now you've come back from the Dead!"

Before the door had shut on him the three Witchits had swung round towards her.

"What had he got in his hand?"

This was the question she asked of them all now, as she threw the kitchen-door wide open, and lifted her loose-sleeved arms to her head. She awaited their reply with the utmost calm, gathering up her mop of dishevelled hair with her hands, as if *it,* and not her bare feet, or the woman's night-gown, had been the shameless exposure of that moment.

It was young Witchit who was eager to reply, though he did so with wide-open eyes and an awed voice.

" 'Twere his cane, Miss Framp — Peg, 'twere one o' they private soldiers' canes what he do allus carry round. They tell I that out there to Portland he have two hundred o' such canes and all broke in halves. They say he be a conjurer, Miss Framp — Peg, and that he breaks his canes like Moses and Aaron broke their rods, for to conjure over his enemies."

"He spoke to me alone," said Peg to herself; but aloud she said: "He pointed his cane straight at me. Does that mean good luck or bad luck?"

But the motherly Mrs. Witchit advanced resolutely towards her; and she fled upstairs, and the door was shut.

Then said the boy to his father: "Why were the Jobber acting so queer today and why were he talking so funny about that Margate man and his sweetheart?"

“Listen to me, son,” said Mr. Witchit in a low ferocious whisper, and without the flicker of a smile. “What you’ve got to do is to study and study and study till you be larn’d enough to go to East Afriky. ’Tis in East Afriky that there be gold; not here, where us be all lying in Hell like — like me haddock!”

This last remark was made with such an alarming contortion of the man’s features that the boy positively jumped back. But the street-door re-opened at that moment; and with the appearance of a customer, Mr. Witchit’s face resumed that air of exaggerated humanity by which he got rid of older pieces of fish than any other fishmonger in Weymouth.

THE SEA-SERPENT

WHEN THE JOBBER, WITH SYLVANUS COBBOLD BY HIS SIDE, HAD crossed the bridge over the harbour and had stopped in front of Trinity Church, he began to wonder if the man would alight there and walk to Rodwell to get the train, or if he were assuming all this while that it would be a natural and easy thing to carry him on, all the way to where he lived between the village of Weston on Portland and Portland Bill.

There was a press of traffic at this point owing to the cessation of the rain, so that he had plenty of time to consider whether to run his truck into Corder’s Wharf as he usually did or to go on up the hill towards Wyke Road. What decided him was the sudden thought that he’d better go to his parent’s house on the Island and warn them that he thought of bringing out Perdita to see them tomorrow. So he muttered:

“You’d like me to take you on home, I expect?”

The drooping mustache moved slightly; and the Jobber understood that the man admitted that he would be glad if this were done.

But it was still impossible to move; for since the opening of the big new bridge across what used to be the Backwater, there was so little traffic at this point that it was unnecessary to keep a policeman standing here, and so, when a torrent of rain upset the movement of vehicles, the classical façade of Trinity Church was compelled to contemplate a good deal of confusion and not a little cursing. Good God! and the Jobber stood up incontinently in his seat and leaned forward over his steering-wheel, peering into the mêlée in front of him.

“An accident, man?” enquired Sylvanus, beginning to show some faint awareness of the press of traffic and the agitation of so many drivers.

But a green-grocer’s hand-cart, far in front of them, having been pushed out of the way and having vanished down a little alley beside the church-steps, there was now a general movement forward, and the Jobber was forced to resume his seat at the wheel. He was kept so intent on the work of extricating the Slug from the confusion around her that he didn’t even bother to answer his companion’s remark.

When once they were well under way, however, and having left Rodwell behind were ascending the great mounting incline of Wyke Road, he had ample time to meditate on what he had seen. And what he had seen was the reverse of pleasant; for he had caught a glimpse of Dog Cattistock seated in an open touring-car, with a woman heavily wrapped up sitting pressed against him, evidently directing his way towards this very ascent. Mechanically the Jobber accelerated the speed of his truck but of course the Slug could never hope to overtake a car like that! Not a word did he say of what he had seen to Sylvanus whose elongated head was now uncomfortably nodding over his tightly-buttoned jacket; but he thought in his heart “He’s going to that quarrymen’s meeting. That’s where he’s going. But have they asked him? Do they know he’s coming? Has he agreed to keep Saxon Quarry open?”

They had now reached the top of the hill by Wyke Church, where the churchyard is crowded thick with the bones of wrecked men — most of them anonymous and buried together under the name of the vessel that carried them down and with whose drowned ribs they had been tossed so long in the humming surf. Here Sylvanus roused himself, straightened his back, lifted his long, bony, narrow face and tugged at the ends of his grey mustache, which hung down below his chin.

As for the Jobber, his quivering nostrils dilated like a gigantic seahorse, snuffing his native element. For there — spread out before them in the twilight, with the lights beginning to flicker from the houses on its Northern slope, and a vast threatening bank of clouds rolling up from across the West Bay, was the dark mass of the Island of Portland, with Chesil Beach transfixed in its side, as though some Being, accepting the ancient derisive challenge of Omnipotence, *had* put his hook into the gill of Leviathan! Across the dim escarpment of pebbles heaped together before them, the rising wind, which had been increasing in volume ever since the rain ceased, beat against them with the flapping of terrific wings. It was as if a sudden host of armless demons, with vast invisible wings, were whirling over those two men and over the fish-smelling Slug, and over the bones of the drowned people in Wyke churchyard.

"See *that,* Jobber?" Sylvanus' voice sounded hollow and yet not metallic. It sounded as if it came through a trumpet-shell that had turned into stone.

"It's coming!" growled the Jobber with a ferocious chuckle and an inflection that was like the neigh of a horse.

Sylvanus caught the exultation in the man's tone and it communicated itself to his own nervous system. "God!" he laughed tugging at the ends of his mustache with his long bare fingers and feeling about with his heels for something to press his feet against, "You're one for going fast, Skald."

The Jobber's answer to this was only to drive more recklessly still. The Slug — completely refuting her name — rushed down to the point where what is called Fleet Bridge crosses that strange strip of backwater that separates Chesil Beach from the mainland, making the beach — the Hook in the gill of Leviathan — a sort of elongated island itself.

Both the men realized that it had suddenly begun to grow dark, the darkness seeming to emanate from that solid bank of pitch-black cloud that the West wind was now carrying before it, just as a giant might come running up, carrying a coffin upon his head. The Jobber turned his truck towards Portland as soon as they had crossed the Fleet, and as he did so he slackened its pace. His mind was in a turmoil; and the approach of this storm from the deep Atlantic acted upon his mood like the low, hoarse, sullen tapping of some enormous tuning-fork. It was so dark now that the lights from the houses, clinging to the precipice-walls of the high Portland terraces, that rose tier above tier upon the northern extremity of his Wessex Gibraltar, glittered in front of them almost as vividly as if it were already night.

The Jobber drove along parallel to the stupendous pebble-bank which now hid the sea from him; and a sensation passed through him that would be almost impossible to describe in definite words. What it amounted to was the leaping up, in his excitement, of all his first childish impressions of Chesil Beach; impressions which might be best suggested by comparing them with that confused infantile feeling of how big a person one's mother is and how formidable, and yet at the same time how safe and secure a refuge.

"Did you see that fishing-boat's lights to the westward, Skald, as we came down the hill?"

Now the Jobber *had* seen those lights, which were those, he fancied, of a small schooner but preferred not to speak of them. A fishing-smack driving before a storm like that was hardly a topic to be discussed with a man like this.

"You needn't take me clear home," went on Sylvanus. "Drop me at the Sea-Serpent, for that's where I always go to get my supper."

The Jobber was too agitated to answer. He was wondering whether this move of Cattistock's meant that he *would* re-open Saxon Quarry.

Then Sylvanus said. “You’d better take your supper with me, Skald. Mrs. Gadget fries fish very well. Or do your parents expect you?”

This did bring an answer from the dark-browed driver.

“No, no! *They* don’t expect me. Do you happen to know, Cobbold, what time the quarry-men are holding their meeting tonight?”

The tall man gave his touchy companion a sharp, sidelong glance.

“At their usual curious time, Skald, I take it — about five. In fact I half thought of going myself. But I don’t think I will. I’m tired of hearing you people quarrelling.”

The Jobber mumbled something as a retort to this, but the wind carried his words away.

“Very well, Cobbold. I’m much obliged to you for your offer. Yes, sure,” he said, raising his voice as they approached Portland Railway Station, “I’ll sup with you at Gadget’s tonight. We can see the sea from there.”

While the heavily-driven Slug, with a great deal of groaning and exploding, was slowly dragging these two up the steep ascent, past one massively-built little house after another, whose stone roofs seemed like organic portions of the hillside, in the curious Inn known as The Sea-Serpent’s Head, or just briefly, The Head, on the seaward side of the hamlet of Weston, John and Ellen Gadget were hard at work preparing for much more exciting guests than Sylvanus or the Jobber. These were none others than Mr. Cattistock and Miss Pansy Clive, otherwise known as Tissty.

To the surprise of the quarrymen’s leaders it was not with the cold-blooded Mr. Frampton, but with the senior partner of the firm that they had been forced to negotiate; and though the result of these negotiations had been less hopeless than they had feared when they first saw Cattistock’s bristly chin, they had much ambiguous information to announce to their wives when they went home to supper. For one thing the more rebellious element among them had made a scene.

The Head was composed of huge square blocks of Portland stone; and although a very small edifice — of not more than half-a-dozen rooms all told — it presented itself when seen from the bottom of the cliffs that sank down beneath it, in the form of a massive fortress, that might well have defended the Island in ancient times. Immediately round it were several small paddocks, enclosed by rough stone walls; but within a stone's throw of its door were two quite large quarries, and all the table-land round that portion of the Island was strewn with blocks of oolite, limestone lying upon limestone, as human bones might lie upon human bones.

John Gadget was a sturdy, dark, short man and Ellen Gadget was a sturdy, dark, short woman. Time and isolation seemed to have made these two persons literally into the scriptural "one flesh". They looked much more like brother and sister than like married people. So close indeed was their resemblance that it would not have been hard to suppose that the old heathen aura of the Isle of Slingers had betrayed these two into the extremest form of in-breeding. Ellen was now standing erect and busy at her stove in the back when John and their youngest daughter Sue came in and settled down to disturb her.

"Well, mother," said John, "Sue and me have been and got all shipshape upstairs! Fire be blazing chimney-high; table be laid; bottles be on table; and me and Sue have worked thik wold warming-pan up and down bed, till you'd think Mr. Cat'stock had had three wenches in't already."

"How is it, mother," demanded Sue, a stolid child of fifteen and the living image of her parents, "that Mr. Cat'stock can enjoy 'isself with another lady when 'a be going to be married at Trinity Church, come Thursday?"

"Yes, mother," chimed in John Gadget, in a tone of innocent astonishment exactly parallel to that of his daughter: "How can he be so sure that no little bird'll tell Thursday's Missus how he've enjoyed 'isself tonight?"

"And mother," went on Sue, untying Ellen's apron-strings and tying them up again more neatly with little smoothings and pattings of her plump hand, "Daddy do say they *aren't* going to stay the night; only enjoy theyselves, and drinky and cuddly, and then go away. Be that the truth, mother? Be Mr. Cat'stock and the young lady going to get out of bed in the middle of the night and drive through the storm over Fleet Bridge?"

Ellen Gadget turned round, saucepan in hand, and smiled at John. " 'Twould be a turble taking to our Sue to get out of *she's* bed on such a night as this be," the woman remarked, "even if her good man were as prickly as they sea-urchings."

"But, mother, what *would* happen if anyone what knowed about such doings told Mrs. Lily, afore she stood up to altar, where he were tonight?"

"Yes, mother," repeated Mr. Gadget, echoing his daughter's words, "where he were tonight?"

But instead of answering them, Ellen removed her hands from her pots and pans and brought them thoughtfully together, twisting her own wedding-ring round and round her finger. It was her habit to fall into deep fits of meditation like this; and in these ponderings she frequently came to conclusions that would have bewildered and astonished both John and Sue. They would even have astonished the two other members of her family who now appeared, first 'Melia the eldest child, and then Celia, the second child, drifting into the kitchen, each holding an open book and both of them hazy-dazy and brain-fuddled with long reading by darkening windows.

"The storm's getting awful, mother," said 'Melia.

“The storm’s shaking the house, mother,” said Celia.

“We don’t believe, mother,” said ‘Melia and Celia, “that anybody will come tonight; and so we came to ask you if — since the storm is so bad — we *need* lay Mr. Cobbold’s table in the dining-room?”

The quizzical contempt with which John Gadget and the practical Sue contemplated these two dazed book-worms, standing there in the kitchen-door, with the pages of their books hanging open and their heavy eyes blinking, was not shared by Mrs. Gadget.

But she was not one for curtailing her preparations even if the storm did shake the house. “Of course you must lay the table, girls,” she said. “He may—”

She was interrupted by a loud ringing of the big brazen bell that was fastened to the bar-door; not *outside,* under the indecipherable signboard, which, with its pair of large cow-like eyes of a supernatural guilelessness contained all that was left of The Head, as it swung and rattled in the wind, but *inside,* opposite the dark, old, polished counter of the bar where there were shelves full of curious glass bottles of ancient and fantastical shapes and tints.

“Go, my dears, and see who ’tis,” commanded Ellen, hastily smoothing down her dress over her rounded hips, and giving her apron-string a jerk to bring it into position.

Sue pushed past her sisters to rush to obey her mother, but the others, still holding their books, dawdled down the little passage in her wake, ashamed of showing any extravagant curiosity, but conscious that this wild night might realize their bookish imaginations beyond hope; for ‘Melia was reading a thrilling History of Russia, while Celia was absorbed in Percy’s “Reliques.”

Thus the tall forms of Sylvanus and the Jobber, as they stood in that darkening room between the still vibrating bell and the gleaming bottles, presented themselves simultaneously to 'Melia, Celia, and Sue; while their three names, chanted in a sort of lyric sing-song by Sylvanus, rang through the house, as he made the silent Jobber shake hands with each one of them in turn.

"And now, my dears," said Sylvanus, "get Mr. Skald a drink quickly — whiskey, I expect, eh, Skald? — and give *me* a taste of Meliodka."

There was a burst of giggling when the man uttered this word; for 'Melia, who was the one reading the History of Russia, had been full, for the last fortnight, of Russian names, and had amused herself by filling one of those lovely, twisted-necked, old green bottles with a mixture of spirits that she had found described in some detail by her romancical historian. No one but Sylvanus, who seemed to have the digestion of a sea-lion, would have prepared for the most important meal of the day by even sipping such stuff; but Sylvanus disposed of no less than three whole liqueur-glasses of it, while the three girls stood in a row before him, watching him with a mixture of pride and consternation, and giggling delightedly when he ostentatiously pushed back his great Caractacus mustache and pretended to lick his lips like an epicure.

When the two men were seated comfortably by the fire in this small bar-room, each one with his glass of whiskey on the drink-stained chimney piece — for even the inventor of Meliodka considered that Sylvanus had had enough of that beverage — Ellen Gadget came in to say that their supper would be ready in ten minutes. It was now only ten minutes to six, so this was extreme punctuality; but the truth was the Gadgets had been consulting together and had resolved to satisfy these two tall men as quickly as they could, hoping that they might get rid of them before Cattistock appeared.

The girls were repeatedly summoned by their mother to help lay the meal; but only Sue could be persuaded to obey. ‘Melia and Celia were dark and stodgy and short, just as Sue was, but unlike Sue these elder girls wore spectacles, and unlike Sue, whose square face had no blemish, ‘Melia had a reddish birth-mark clear across her left cheek. As the two men sipped their drinks and stretched out their long legs on the floor and knocked the ashes from their pipes against the bars of the grate ‘Melia and Celia stood hand in hand against the bar-counter watching them with intense absorption.

Every now and then an especially violent gust of wind would shake the whole house; and when Sue opened the front door to throw something out, for there was no hall-way at the Head, the sound of the sea — harsh and menacing, could clearly be heard from the rocks below their cliff. Twice Sue was commissioned by her mother to throw away some refuse; and the second time she remained outside for several minutes. This behaviour caused ‘Melia to look significantly at Celia.

“Mother says,” she remarked, addressing both the men but keeping her eyes — as Celia did too — fixed entranced upon Sylvanus, “that Sarpint’s eyes be open tonight!”

“Why? Aren’t its eyes always open?” said Sylvanus.

“Yes, they be open in a kind-o’-way,” explained Celia, “but they bain’t awake. But, when a girt sea be cooming, then they wakes up. ’Tis because of they drowned sailors them wakes up then. Sarpint do mind how sweet they bodies were in they wold times, afore light-ship were thought on.”

There was a silence in the bar of the Head while the two men and the two girls stared at one another listening to the howling of the wind.

“Sue had mother’s shawl on,” remarked ‘Melia at last.

“Sue be looking at Sarpint by light ‘o thee’s head-lights,” said Celia to the Jobber.

“What?”

The man sprang to his feet and hurried to the window.

“Poor... old... Slug,” he muttered. “I’d clean forgot ‘ee,” and he opened the door and went out.

He found the youngest of the Gadgets contemplating with absorbed interest the swaying sign-board, which was tossing in the wind and rain like the flag of a derelict ship. The girl was so muffled in her shawl that for a moment — his mind being all amort — he took her for a very old woman; and it flashed into his head: “Is there a grandmother here, who never appears?” but the child addressed him by name.

“I can’t see whether Sarpint’s eyes be waked up, or whether they bain’t, Jobber Skald,” she cried out, plucking the shawl from her mouth, and challenging the hubbub with her shrill young voice.

“I can’t afford to leave my lights any longer,” he replied, proceeding to the body of the Slug, whose form, wearing an illuminated nimbus of streaming rain, the long shafts of which resembled a thick array of transparent spears, was an amalgam of darkness and light.

Sue Gadget rushed up to him with indignant protests, and tried to pull him back.

“I *almost* saw Sarpint’s eyes and you’re going to turn the light out; and it’ll all be over!”

There was such a woeful strain in her voice that the Jobber paused, leaning against the body of the Slug, which now looked like a gigantic glow-worm.

“What’ll you give me not to turn ’em off?” he said; and then without waiting for an answer, “Out of the way child!” he shouted, jumping into his seat.

He ran the truck close up against the front of the house and stopped it just beneath the tossing sign. Then, standing erect in it, he managed after several stumbles (for it was no joke to balance himself in that position) to catch the sign-board and hold it tight and still.

“Come on, girlie! Up you jump!” he cried.

Side by side, when he had her there, clinging to him with both her arms, they gazed into the obscurity of the Sea-Serpent’s Head. The Slug’s glow-worm lights did them very little good up there; but, for all that, the Jobber did seem to make out something curious about these darkly-discerned eyes. As for Sue, she was in a state of ecstasy. He could feel the throbbing of her belly, as it pressed against him, heaving like a bell-buoy in a high tide.

The girl knew the daylight stare of these weather-washed lineaments so well that her imagination was alert to anticipate any change caused by the storm.

“I can see it! I can see it!” she kept crying; and she clung to him tighter and tighter while he clutched the sign-board.

The Jobber could see in his truck’s long search-lights several great heaps of square stones piled up near the mouth of the nearest quarry, and these stones, combined with the stone walls of the Inn, made him visualize the whole vast mass of that promontory of oolite stretching out into the sea. The unusualness of his position seemed to hypnotize him in some way, while from the warm body of the young girl under her flapping shawl, as the wind and rain whirled round them came a feminine magnetism that he diverted to his feeling for Perdita.

In her ecstasy as she clung to the Jobber Sue happened to turn her eyes away from the dimly-lit sign he held and to plunge them into the moaning, hissing, swimming darkness towards the cliff’s edge. In the midst of this darkness she suddenly fancied she saw a light rise up; a light which wavered and fluctuated and then sank as quickly as it had come. With characteristic caution she said no word of what she had seen; but heaving round in his arms, she fixed her gaze — neglecting the Sea-Serpent altogether — upon the approximate place, in that humming and swimming darkness, where the light had appeared.

But the Jobber, noticing nothing of this move of hers, continued obstinately holding the sign-board for her supposed enjoyment — though to him it had become by this time no more than a square of obscurely painted wood — and letting his mind plunge freely into his own sea of troubles. He found that he shied away now from any reasonable attitude, or any *rational* attitude towards his resolution to kill Cattistock. There are those who would maintain that a deep, healthy instinct in the man had leapt up from the profound blood-pools of his being to save him from such a disaster; and that this instinct was using his love for Perdita to get him out of it. But such an explanation would find it hard to account for the exultant madness with which, as he hugged the shawled figure to him with his one free arm and abandoned himself to the feeling of its being a girl's, he gave himself up to the two great passions of human life. Those blocks of Portland stone, over there by the quarry, became an enlarged replica of the beach-pebble in his pocket, while the beating, stinging darkness became the eternal oblivion into which he was plunging both the Dog and himself.

"I'll kill myself," he thought. "I'll dodge the rope any way." And then he thought: "Ten o'clock by the Clock! And I'll bring her out here. I'll take her to dad's. I'll take her to the Bill. I'll take her to those light-house-keeper's graves. I'll take her to Saxon Quarry!" And in the hurly-burly of his mind the eyes of that painted Head to which he was clinging seemed to be like the eyes of all the stone of Portland and all the pebbles of Chesil. "I'll drag the Dog down with me," he thought. *"By the Clock tomorrow at ten!* And I'll have her for twelve hours; and perhaps all night — twelve hours more; and then I'll have you down, Dog. That will be a tit for a tat, and a pro for a quo! That will be hire and salary, and a brimming demi-john, Dog! And then when I've done it I'll drown myself. No one shall catch me. I'll see to that. And, by Dum, I'll have her again, *after I've done it...* like that man at Margate! By Dum! But they won't catch me with *her* as they caught him."

There. Sue saw that light again... not in the same place... much more to the north... and she knew what it was well enough... this was not the first time... *a ship signalling for help...* they must have given up all hope of getting round the Bill... they must be drifting on Chesil...

"There's a wreck, Mr. Skald! I saw a rocket. She's driving on Chesil."

"What's that?" He couldn't hear her. He couldn't hear a word in the roaring of wind and sea. "What's that, Sue? *What* did you say?"

"A wreck, Mr. Skald! A wreck, Jobber Skald!"

Her shawl flapped against his face, as, letting the sign-board go, he lifted her down; first upon the body of the Slug, then upon the ground. He stretched his arm across the machine and turned off the lights. Now, for the first time since they had been immersed in that rain-pierced dazzlement, they could see the warm red glow of the bar. Sue, round whose shoulder the Jobber had mechanically thrown a protective arm as they moved to the door, thought that she had never seen a house more like a castle than their house was.

"I'll tell 'Melia," she thought, recalling some of their everlasting arguments, "that there's no need to read about Russian Castles. And I'll tell Celia that the Head *was* awake as mother said it would be. This is my fifth wreck... and who'd have thought I'd have shown it to Mr. Skald!"

There was no small stir inside the Inn when the two entered and told their news.

"The first thing *you'll do,* Sue," said her mother "rockets or no rockets, is to change your clothes to the skin. Jobber Skald, you be as wet as she! You be as wet as if you'd carried she up cliff-path. Do 'ee want John to lend 'ee naught?"

"It doan't seem likely to I, mother," said Mr. Gadget, "that these here folk from—"

He broke off when he received a ferocious glare from his wife.

"No, no," said the Jobber. "What's the use of changing now? Come on, Missus, let me have a bite o' meat and a swallow o' drink and I'll be off to the Beach. Sue said she were running near Beach when she saw her. Didn't you, Sue?"

Sue's reply to his words came from the top of the stairs, where, apparently in the passage, so as to lose nothing of this exciting evening, she was hurriedly obeying her mother and stripping herself of every strip of clothing.

"Her were as near beach, mother — her were as near beach, father — as 'tis from here to Weston."

"I'll come down to the beach with you, Skald," said Sylvanus, whose figure, with one arm round 'Melia and the other round Celia, was looming in the back of the bar-room.

"Well, girls, help me to dish up quick," said Mrs. Gadget "and give them something to keep them warm afore they go."

So quickly did Ellen move upon this task that by the time the youngest girl had descended the stairs the two men, the one dry and glowing from the fireside and the other drenched to the skin, were half-through their hasty meal. Mrs. Gadget commanded her daughters not to tease the gentlemen, and the girls remained very quiet.

The whiskey he had drunk, the warmth of the bar-room fire, and now the well-cooked morsels which he swallowed, soon loosened the tongue of Sylvanus Cobbold and it was not long, in spite of the Jobber's taciturn preoccupation, before he was discoursing as if these short, dark, young women standing before him in a row were a large audience. His words were mingled with the howling of the wind in the stone chimney and the lashing of the rain against the window; and very soon, so magnetic was his voice, Mr. and Mrs. Gadget came out of the kitchen and stood at the open door of the dining-room.

"Those people in that ship," he was saying, "whose signals are going up as they drive on Chesil — don't they know more about life at this moment than any person safe and sound and snug under a Weymouth roof? What's at the bottom of the sea, 'Melia, Celia, and Sue? Most people don't think death's there at all, any more than the sea-serpent is. But it is there; and it's under this house, and under this cliff. Your sea-serpent wakes up in a storm like this but what we've got to do is to be awake all the time. That tragic half-life of the dead in Homer, that I heard Mr. Muir talk about once at High House, lies behind everything. Mr. Muir is right there, my dears. It lies behind everything."

The girls exchanged a certain glance that had the appearance of a mutual understanding about Sylvanus, not arrived at for the first time.

"If you," he went on, "take that half-life as if it were the bottom of the sea you give the sweet light of the sun its true meaning. Unhappiness comes from not realizing that life is two-sided. The other side of life is always death. The dead in Homer are tragic and pitiful, but they are not *nothing.* Their muted half-life is like the watery light at the bottom of the sea. It is like that faint stirring of the wind at the end of a summer's day that is so sad and yet sweet beyond description."

Mrs. Gadget, waiting in the doorway for the gentleman to reach a pause, began signalling now for Sue to come and carry some coal upstairs, a pantomime which ended in her dropping the shovel out of the scuttle.

Sylvanus turned his head slowly to the door and, stretching out his long arm, pulled 'Melia towards him by her voluminous skirt and went on.

"That Homeric death-life is tragically sad, but it has a beauty like the dying away of music when instead of becoming *nothing* music carries us in its ebb-flow down to this sea-bottom of the world—"

The clock in the bar-room which had the peculiarity of commencing its travail of striking with prolonged rattlings and heavings now began to deal with the hour of seven. As the last of its brazen strokes died away Sylvanus' voice could be heard again continuing his discourse.

" — where it's all echo and reflection, where it's all memory and mirrors of memory and brooding upon what is and is not. You girls are women," he went on, while Mr. Gadget, as if to make plain that at least he wasn't a woman, wandered off with a chuckle into the bar, "and for you the sea-serpent is always awake and the bottom of the sea laid bare."

He was interrupted by the discordant sound, carried into the house even above the roar of the storm, of the harsh honking of a motor-car. There was now a general confusion, the girls running to the window and Mrs. Gadget hurrying into the bar to confer with John. There was a quick exchange of whispers between them; and then as Mrs. Gadget came back into the dining-room, her husband came forward and announced in a loud voice:

"You'll have please to excuse me, gentlemen, but I must close this door."

A great gust of wind, shaking even that massively-built house, tearing off some slates from the roof which fell crashing down on the stone path, itself closed the door with a bang.

"What was that?" cried Mrs. Gadget in alarm at the terrible strength of the wind for she had always said to her husband even in the by-gone days when she resisted his passion, "Our place be too near the edge of cliff, John." In her nervousness she actually laid her hand on the Jobber's shoulder; but the soaked condition of the man's clothes changed her mood in a trice. "Off with your jersey, Mr. Skald, for Jesus' sake, and I'll lay 'un by fire, if it be only till Mr. Cattistock and the lady have come in out of storm and—" she caught her breath in dismay, realizing that after all it had been she and not John who had let the cat out of the bag! "Then you can put 'un on and slip off quiet and unbeknown, for I know how 'ee be, over he, and small blame to 'ee, *I* say."

And with that, so upset was she and so all-amort, she actually set herself to tug the wet and steaming jersey off the man's broad back. But the Jobber, stunned by this news of his enemy's expected arrival, awkwardly resisted; and there was something very childish in the way he looked round at her as he did so but she still went on pleading with him, and all the time pulling at his jersey, till Sue caught a glimpse of his grey flannel shirt and his red braces.

"It's girls like you," Sylvanus was now saying, and he was certainly justified in merging the three together, for in the excitement of the moment they had clutched so tightly at one another's hands that when he tugged at 'Melia's skirt, which was as voluminous as her Russian ladies', he caught, so to say, three fish with one hook, "yes, it's you, 'Melia, Celia, and Sue, who are nearer the common element, by which, you must understand, I mean what lies at the bottom of life and death, than any of the rest of us, because there's something in virginity — if you'll pardon my using that word — that is more passive to the ultimate forces. Virginity has something about it" — here, as his voice grew louder and his hold upon 'Melia's skirt tighter, the girl struggled angrily to release herself, and did release herself, but not till she had pulled his fingers apart with all her force— "that melts and dissolves into the 'common element' and is porous to the 'common element', and that's why when you remember, 'Melia, Celia and Sue, this night, later on in your lives, you'll see that it has done something to you that couldn't be done to any of us older people. It has sunk into ye, already, this storm; and, for all we know, it has dragged away some part of ye into itself, so that when these sailors, who are at the end of the vision of their past lives, perish, it will be into a storm, into a death, *into a life,* that has got something of 'Melia, Celia, and Sue in it, that their souls will pass!"

The Don Quixote-like gravity and earnestness with which this was uttered arrested the attention of Ellen and saved the Jobber from being stripped of his wet jersey.

Mrs. Gadget stared at Sylvanus' high cheek-bones and long-drawn-out cavernous face, as he sat there unconcernedly swallowing the supper she had prepared. He had released 'Melia's skirt at the end of his last peroration, and as Ellen watched his figure now, outlined against the heavy mahogany sideboard, and the old pewter flagons and pewter plates, and against the portraits of her parents above it, done — so it might seem from their dark and faded condition — by the same artist who did the Sea-Serpent's Head, she wondered, as she had often wondered before, whether this man in the frayed tweed suit really had a prophetic gift, or whether he was, in reality, just simply a madman.

Seated at the wheel of the machine whose horn had so disturbed those within — for the spirited girl had driven up here from the beach by herself — Tissty, or Pansy Clive, felt nervous of leaving the protection of the car to enter this lonely house by herself. She had been waiting outside there for quite a while, watching the dark shadows of unknown people cross and recross the glowing window-blinds. But though she had kept on mechanically sounding her horn, she had really been rather relieved at the opportunity to lie back in this comfortable equipage, while the rain beat on the closed windows, so that she might collect her thoughts.

She had flirted with Cattistock for months, proud of attaching to herself a personage of such wealth and prestige, but had not bothered her mind much about him till his imminent capture by Mrs. Lily had aroused her languid interest. Even then it was more out of pique, and because she saw the moments slipping away so fast that were leading him to Mrs. Lily, that she felt impelled to bestir herself. It was the sight, that afternoon, of Cattistock's encounter with the quarrymen; and his facing, immediately afterwards, the tragedy of the wreck, that had suddenly changed her mood of random mischief into something almost like a romantic hero-worship.

The place of the meeting with the quarrymen had been at a Working Men's Club in Chesilton, the oldest quarter of the straggling township that extends along the high terraces of Portland's western slopes.

Tissty had received one exciting emotional shock after another that evening. She noted how sardonically and humorously Cattistock had treated the whole incident; but a hundred little details returned to her mind now as she lay back on the cushioned seat, thoughtfully powdering her face and touching up her lips. He had intended to take her to the Head before the meeting and leave her there, but they had entered a private bar at the Railway Hotel and the time had slipped away so fast that it seemed tiresome to drive half across Portland and back when the place of the meeting was so near. He wanted her to remain in the Railway Hotel till he returned but this idea was so distasteful to her that in the end — though she knew he felt nervous about their being seen in public together so soon before his marriage and especially by these quarrymen — he yielded to her wilfulness and let her accompany him. Deeply had it impressed her, as from her sanctuary in the car she watched the hostile reception he got from the crowd outside the Club, the imperturbable way he had kept his head and his temper. She was near enough to the building to catch the sound of the voices inside; and it was soon evident to her that they were shouting him down. And when he came out and a lot of the younger ones followed him jeering and hooting and making sarcastic references to "Dummy Skald" she began to realize that this was no dull matter of business as she had supposed but a human situation full of dramatic and dangerous possibilities. What broke the meeting up was not only their refusal to listen to what he was suggesting — something about what they kept calling "Saxon Quarry" — it was the wildness of the storm and the news of the wreck; and what came to her now as she went on sounding her horn in front of this jerking sign-board and closed door was the way he had talked as he drove her to the beach.

"I'll just take a look at this wreck," he had said grimly as he got into the car. And when she had shown her anxiety and surprise about the evidences of ill-feeling she had just witnessed he had made an odd grimace. "Here today — and there tomorrow," he said. "It's just the same to be their hero as their devil. Disregard their moods and dominate them! Never mind their catch-penny driftings. Skald's the fellow for them today, but I could easily be in his place tomorrow. You'll see!"

She had reached this point in her thoughts when John Gadget, armed with an enormous carriage-rug that was a kind of heirloom at the Head, appeared at the window of the car, prepared to escort its occupants — two of them as he supposed — into the Inn. He was surprised to find the lady alone; but full of his wife's concern over the Jobber's presence, the absence of the girl's companion was a comfort to him.

The dancer hesitated for a second before letting him wrap her in the rug he was carrying, for the thing smelt like the very skin of Caliban; but when she had extinguished her lights and stepped out into the storm, she was glad enough to be enveloped in it and half-led, half-lifted across the threshold.

“There aren’t any quarrymen here, are there?” were her first words when she was free of the evil-smelling rug.

“Nay, nay, Missy-Marm, there ain’t no quarrymen, nor no smugglers neither. There be only Mr. Cobbold of the Beale and our Adam Skald, what be having a bite o’ summat with me fam’ly.”

“Isn’t he the one they call Dummy Skald? Isn’t he the man they call the Jobber?”

Mr. Gadget’s mouth dropped, for he saw that his wife’s admonition not to reveal their guest’s presence was going to be justified. He nodded dumbly. Tissty snatched off her hat with a sweeping gesture and making for the dining-room door, flung it wide open.

The Jobber who was seated directly opposite the door was the first to take in this brilliant apparition and, having expected to see his enemy, met her angry stare with a ferocious scowl.

The eyes of ‘Melia, Celia and Sue opened wide with an expression of thrilled wonder. This girl standing on the threshold of their familiar room, with her dazzling white complexion and scarlet lips, seemed to fulfil in a moment all that the Russian History and Percy’s Reliques had ever conjured up.

Sylvanus, whose long neck and bony face were averted from the doorway, turned round rather wearily and, surveying the intruder without any visible emotion, continued mumbling under his breath some fleeting half-thought connected with what he had been just saying to the three girls when this interruption had occurred.

Had the intruder upon this quiet gathering not heard her sister so often tell of Jerry Cobbold's difficulties with his eccentric brother, the sight of this formidable gentleman in a tweed suit, with mustaches such as she had always imagined — probably from stage-memories of Macbeth — the early Kings of Scotland to have worn, would certainly have quickly subdued the impulse with which she had entered. But her newly aroused emotion for Cattistock, which this evening's events had inspired and then cut short from any natural expression, now made use of this chance encounter with his well-known adversary to clear a channel for its pent-up force. Thus there descended on the head of the Jobber, who obstinately remained in his chair, pretending — as soon as he realized that his enemy was absent — to be absorbed in his meal, and whose woollen jersey, wrinkled up above the straps of his braces, still allowed his flannel shirt to be seen as he bent gloomily over his plate, a torrent of feminine abuse.

"So you're the man, are you, who's threatening to kill Mr. Cattistock! I'm glad to have a chance to tell you to your face what I think of you. All the town knows, but that's what you wanted of course, what you've been threatening about Mr. Cattistock. Yes! You wanted all the town to know and everybody to know, so as to worry Mr. Cattistock without running any risk of danger. You're just like your friends, the quarrymen. Cowards all! I was there and I saw how they would have mobbed him if they dared, but they didn't dare. And where was Mr. Jobber Skald all this while? Not even at his friends' meeting! No... not even there... nor nowhere else where there's any danger. All that *you* can do, you great huckster, who dresses himself up like a sailor in order to win favour from the people he peddles to, is to go round town whining and whimpering and talking of killing Mr. Cattistock. Kill him, will you? Oh, yes, you'll kill him! You're one of these dangerous, strong, silent killers, *you* are. You're not one to talk; you're not one to threaten; you’re one to strike and quickly, too! Oh, no, you’ll tell no one your intentions — only the whole town! Bah! you’re nothing but a blackmailer. You’re nothing but a dirty fish-peddler who curries favour with people.”

Here Tissty glanced at Sylvanus’ fingers that were nervously tugging, first at one mustache-end and then at the other. As for the Jobber, who kept cutting John’s cheddar cheese into fanciful little squares and thrusting great unnoticed hunks of home-made bread into his mouth, he could do no better than repeat over and over again under his breath:

“The Dog and his bitch! The Dog and his bitch!”

Then looking contemptuously at ‘Melia, Celia and Sue, who were standing against the wall, each one of them clasping one of her sisters by some piece of clothing, as they listened open-mouthed to her tirade, she renewed the attack.

“You’re a humbug in everything! You wear that great sailor’s jersey just for show. You’re no sailor; you’re not even a quarryman. You’re not a working-man; and you’re certainly not a gentleman. You’re nothing but a peddler; that’s what you are, trying to blackmail people. What are you doing here, I should like to know, when Mr. Cattistock, and even your precious quarrymen, are all down at Chesil? He sent me away because I was hysterical. I’m glad he did now; because you’ve had a chance, Mr. Peddler, of hearing the truth for once, in your sham sailor clothes! Eat, drink and be merry is the way, isn’t it? And let the other people die!”

She turned away, wrapping her cloak tightly round her, and went back into the bar-room. Here she asked John to pour her out a drink; and very soon both their voices were audible, in cheerful and lively tones, discussing the qualities of various liqueurs.

When the Jobber, a few moments later, without a word or sign to anyone, passed through the bar-room on his way out of the house she did not even turn her head to watch his departure.

Ellen meanwhile stood listening to the Jobber outside trying to start the Slug which was a process always attended by a series of such explosive sounds as neither wind nor rain nor tempest could muffle.

Sue, who had drifted close to the front-door, suddenly snatched up a mackintosh of her father's which was hanging on a peg and, unseen by her mother, who was still in the other room, let herself out. The explosive noises made by the Slug now ceased altogether, and nothing could be heard around the Sea-Serpent's Head save the howling of the wind. It often happens, that in some human group, in some pause of the human drama, one consciousness alone, out of the rest, will catch the significance of what has been going on all the while among the inanimate elements. It was Ellen who thus detached herself on this occasion from the others, and it was the intensity of her abstraction from all these human beings just then, that prevented her from remarking that Sue had not come back, after running out in her father's mackintosh.

But Ellen standing at the dining-room window, while Tissty went off, ignoring Sylvanus and fraternizing with John, to select a drink from among those old-fashioned bottles behind the counter, gave herself to her wildest storm-fancies in which she always told herself a story about a real sea-serpent coming trumpeting out of the sea on a night like this. Tissty's references to the wreck had stirred this vein in this short, dark woman; for both Ellen's parents had been drowned off Chesil Beach; but it was the wind itself that seemed to catch her soul now, and strive to fill the place of her imaginary sea-monster. Yes, the wind seemed to set itself to force her to listen to it and to enter into its non-human passions. It forced her to follow its wild path over the whistling wave-crests and amid the flying surf. It forced her to follow it, as driving the scudding spray before it, it shrieked round those jagged rocks, while beneath it, below the sea-floor level, deep-gurgling rock-chasms drew the waves in and spewed them out. The wind made Ellen follow it when it left the turbulence of the rocks, and began whirling up the face of the cliff. Up the face of the cliff it twisted like the sea-serpent. It whirled up through dead tufts of bent-grass and through the wind-blighted elders and ashes and stunted gorse. It whirled up over patches of samphire, and over patches of grey rock-lichen, and over whistling stalks of sea-lavender and over chittering seed-pods of sea-thrift. And as it rose higher, it wheeled and eddied and coiled, and it became easy for Ellen to feel that it really was the original of that pictured Being whose eyes had been quickened that night, come up from depths unimaginable.

It was not till three whole minutes had passed by that she turned from the window and called to 'Melia and Celia who were standing at Sylvanus' side to ask where Sue was.

"She went out to see Mr. Skald off," said 'Melia.

"She was out there saying good-bye to Mr. Skald," said Celia.

"She *must* have come in! What are you girls talking about?" repeated Ellen, beginning to get frightened. "John!" she called out, unscrupulously interrupting Mr. Gadget's flirtation with his beautiful guest, "John! Sue hasn't come back and Mr. Skald has gone!"

It was Sylvanus' turn to rise to the occasion now; and he did it with an obvious effort and with a heave of his body which made his lean bones creak like the boards of a wagon.

"I'll go and bring her back," he said; and then he came straight over to Ellen and bent his long, pale Hidalgo face over her short, dark one; for Ellen Gadget had the very stamp and seal and unmistakable look of that ancient, mysterious, short-statured, dark population that the Celts dispossessed, ere they were dispossessed themselves by the invading Saxons; and a little crustily as if cross at having to leave such good listeners as ‘Melia and Celia, he told her that he was sure Sue had gone off to see the wreck with the Jobber.

“I saw her eyes,” he said in a low tone, “while that girl was tormenting our friend. The child fell in love with him, then and there — if she hadn’t before! But I’ll bring her back, if you’ll only not work yourself up into a fever. I’ll bring her back *within two hours from now.* I promise!”

Ellen felt a strong impulse to make Mr. Gadget leave his gallantries behind the counter and accompany Sylvanus on this errand, but no sooner had she crossed the bar-room, with this intention, than Sylvanus snatched up his little soldier’s cane and, just as he was, slipped out, and set off on foot for Chesil.

He hurried along the grey and rain-swept way, going westward and while that “way” was too narrow to be called a road, and too wide to be called a path, its peculiarity was that it was designed for walking alone. No one could ride on it. No one could drive on it, and it was wondrous smooth to the tread. He had to go nearly a couple of miles before he came to the westward slope of the great promontory, and when he did so, though he could see flickering lights, and a great many of them, along the beach, and could clearly catch the white foam of the breakers under these flaring illuminations, he could see nothing of any wreck.

“It’s all over,” he thought. “She’s gone; and the life-boat’s come in. I doubt if they saved a single life.”

It was only about half an hour since he had left the Head and it would take him now no more than ten minutes before he reached the beach, so there was no need to hurry. The ship had broken up. The dead had gone down. There were only the sight-seers and the talk, and the jealousies, and the heart-burnings, and the loves and hates.

"What spiritual eyes and yet what vicious, dissipated eyes that girl had! I must see her again. I must talk to her properly. She'd quickly give herself up to what I tell her."

A man's thoughts — and not only when he is descending a declivity as steep as this of the Isle of the Slingers — could be as easily interpreted in a wrong sense as in a right sense, even if it *were* possible to overhear his wordless words! No sympathy, no understanding, no devotion, no passion, no clairvoyance could, for instance, have indicated to Gipsy May or to the Punch-and-Judy girl, had either of these infatuated women overheard this thought, "I must see her again: I must talk to her properly," that the person whose image accompanied this thought, this wish, this intention, was *not* the beautiful Tissty, to whose eloquence he had just been listening, but on the contrary was that white, haggard-faced figure in the doorway of the fishmonger's, who had stared at him out of such dark-circled eye-sockets, as if she were extending her very soul towards him.

The bare hill, upon which he now paused, rose abruptly over the most populated portion of the Island. Under him gleamed the motionless window-lights of many solid stone houses whose roofs were crowded together against the steep incline, with that effect of dim, rich, intricate, *Gothic* confusion, which human dwellings acquire when mingled with the massive irregularities of ancient hills. Not a living soul had he encountered in his walk to this spot! Not a living soul could he see from where he stood. Nothing confronted him here except the unknown mysteries of the life behind those glowing windows and the unknown death-tragedy beneath those flickerings on the beach!

He stood perfectly still for a couple of minutes, letting the rain beat on his bare head and on his long, Quixotic countenance. His thoughts gathered up in haste the whole essence of his recent life, his life of the past five years, since he had come to live in that lonely Portland house between the hamlet of Weston and the wind-swept “Beale”. Always a rebel, always dwelling in a mystical borderland of his own, Sylvanus was one of those beings who seem to draw from nature the power of escaping from the ways and customs and habits of his own race. The man himself had come to feel more and more as if his real home were not upon the earth at all but rather in some Cimmerian twilight belonging to the chemistry of a completely different star. His whole life now consisted in the self-pleasing enjoyment of a curious mystical contemplation; and he treated all actual occurrences, whether happy or unhappy, as if they were only half real. Certain words that have come down to us in the fluctuating borderland between religion and philosophy, words such as “absolute”, “essence”, “eternity”, “immortality”, conveyed when Sylvanus made use of them, a much more concrete and much more definite meaning than is usual with such expressions. By reducing the sensations of consciousness to the most primitive elements he had at last arrived at the point of establishing a certain rapport between himself and the cosmos which gave him a deeper sense of power and a deeper feeling of satisfaction than most people experience all their lives. It was, however, his relations with women that had come to be the most singular thing in his existence; and this element in his life had intensified itself of late. He was always trying to make clear to himself what he really was after in his dealings with women; but this seemed to be the evasive point in his days. He could not formulate it or define it. In fact he could not understand it. He only knew that he was driven more and more obstinately by some secret urge within him to do what, as he actually experienced it, he felt to be a sort of gathering up of women's most secret responses to life; as if some half-crazed Faust had found the magic oracles of those Beings he called "the Mothers" in the nerves and sensibilities of every ordinary young Gretchen he encountered. Well! not *quite* ordinary, for there had been, as can be seen in an obscure resemblance between Gipsy May and Marret, and between Marret and Peg Frampton, a certain indefinable quality that might perhaps be indicated as erotic virginity, a quality that had something in it of the classic abandonment of Bassarid and Maenad, and that it would not be inappropriate to name *unravished obsession.* What this quality really consisted of, in the women to whom, like a metaphysical ancient mariner he was compelled to reveal what Lucinda called his "wicked craziness", was a certain susceptibility to "religious prostitution", or in more ideal language, a latent passion to offer up their amorous life, as mystics offer up their souls, to some object of spiritual idolatry. What Sylvanus really was attempting to do, as he swept these prepared spirits into his mania for what he called the Immortal, the Eternal, the Absolute, it would be impossible to say. What he felt in his secret being was, that he had battered and bruised himself so long in his desperate struggle to reach the secret of life, that he had come now, in a kind of forlorn hope, to fumble and grope towards the world's mystery through the more receptive souls of women. One thing was certain. He never talked love-talk to them. He never made love to them. He never made promises to them: and when Gipsy May actually shared the same bed with him he scarcely touched her. Their passion was for him; but his passion was for the Eternal Being; only he had found his masculine reason so much of a hindrance in his struggle to attain what he called the Absolute that he was forever seeking to learn from the souls of women, attuned, as they were to strings and to chords which were hidden from him, some secret entrance to the Deathless and the Immortal which as a hermit and as a solitary he had been unable to reach for himself.

Sylvanus was older than Jerry by some five years; and their father, before he passed from the world under the care of Dr. Brush, had seen to it that this elder son, who from the time he left college, had shirked all human obligations, should enjoy an annuity, whose capital he could not touch. Even this paternal foresight had not, however, been sufficient; and when Sylvanus moved from Weymouth and established himself in a lonely house on the southern extremity of Portland, it soon became clear that his income, small as it was, would have to be doled out to him week by week if it was to last to the year's end; and this arrangement, by the aid of the firm of Loder and Crouch, was finally arrived at, not a little to the relief of Lucinda, for the man had contracted the habit, when his funds vanished and he felt hungry, of appearing uninvited at the High House dinner-table. But now, for the last few years, the High House pair had seen very little of him; and all seemed to be going well; until suddenly this new mania of his for expounding his ideas to anyone who would listen among the crowds on the Weymouth esplanade broke up the status quo and led to endless embarrassments.

It became one of the most popular topics of conversation in Weymouth society whether the elder Cobbold had "begun to go as his father did" but since apart from this mania for preaching, or rather for *expounding* — for Sylvanus' methods were more Pythagorean than Evangelical — he showed no sign of mental aberration, unless his fondness for the society of young women could be called by that name, not even Lucinda, who had always loathed him, had come to the point of suggesting having him confined, as they had done with his father, in the world-famous Home for pathological cases that the shepherds of the high downs called Hell's Museum. But with young Ballard’s accession to municipal authority a new régime had commenced at the Guildhall, and within the last few weeks this expounder of the Absolute, grown so familiar a figure on the esplanade with his tweed suit and his uncovered head, had received repeated warnings that if he persisted in disturbing public order in this flagrant way he would find himself “in trouble”. Sylvanus was not ignorant of what this “trouble” meant; for he knew that his brother’s thoughts — egged on by Lucinda — would naturally turn to the famous establishment where their father had passed his last years.

But though he felt no attraction to Hell’s Museum he had reached a point, in his meditations upon the Eternal, where the locality of his temporal domicile mattered little. He *had* vaguely wondered lately, as he lay in his bed, with the periodic revolutions of the great Portland light-house flashing across his face, whether they’d allow him to talk freely to the other inmates, in case he were “put away”; but in his heart of hearts, if the truth must be told, he had an instinct that something would happen to prevent his incarceration.

Had anyone less scientific than Dr. Brush, or less habituated to the evasive movements of animals under experimentation, peeped into the inside of that long Quixotic cranium at this moment, he would have found no evidence of insanity. He would, on the contrary, have found, if he could have read the man’s thoughts, a very natural concern as to how he was going to keep his promise to Ellen Gadget and get Sue home, and an equally normal concern as to what would happen when, under these exceptional conditions, his friend the Jobber encountered Mr. Cattistock.

“Well, here goes!” he said to himself, feeling nothing but the most healthy-minded nervousness as to what he was plunging into, as he scrambled down the declivity to Chesil Beach.

He soon discovered little Sue. The girl was running from one to another of the men of her acquaintance trying to get all the information she could about what had happened before she came on the scene. She hurried to meet Sylvanus as he came clattering and crunching down the slope of the beach, where the life-boat — evidently of no more use — had been pulled out of the surf, and lay on her side, like a beautiful circus-performer whose "turn" was over.

"She were broke up afore we got here, Mr. Cobbold," the girl announced, gasping for breath, "and they life-boat men were wading in sea, and swimming in sea, tied by girt ropes. One o' they told Jobber, when us first came, that them had seed summat tossing in sea what weren't a plank, nor a mast, nor a yard-arm. I heard 'un tell how they tied ropes about 'un and swimmed out. It were two on 'em what swimmed out. But they got nothing. If it had been a corpsy, they told 'un, 'twould have been the same, the sea were that high. Them two what swimmed out were dragged in they woneselves like corpsies. So 'twas a *real* wreck! 'Melia and Celia ain't been at a real wreck, like I've been at, have 'un?"

The dark beach upon which Sylvanus stood, listening to the excited child, who had let him take her by the hand, was now crowded with agitated human figures. The news that a ship had been broken up on Chesil had reached Weymouth a couple of hours ago, just about the time people were finishing their evening meal, and quite a number of enterprising individuals had hastened to the spot.

Among these sensation-seekers was Sippy Ballard, in his belligerent little car, and Magnus Muir and Richard Gaul in a hired taxi. The primal cause of this last appearance at the scene of the wreck, which was astonishing to everyone who saw the two book-worms there, standing side by side facing the flying spray, was not the mutability of the ocean but the mutability of a woman.

Curly, with the rain as an excuse, had easily been persuaded by her lover and by the little doctor to content herself with what they could find in the larder of Sark House and to stay there all the afternoon. From this paradisiac interlude in the arms of the Town Clerk, who, when he was not embracing her, was relating to her the drollest stories, it was more than even Curly could contemplate to go off and sit for two hours opposite the solemn countenance of Magnus; and so, though she had promised to have a high tea with him at the Regatta — an innocent, popular restaurant not far from the old king's statue — she had instead gone straight back to Upwey, little dreaming that both her men, the one filled to the brim with the after-taste of her sweetness and the other fretted to the breaking-point by the lack of it, would — in their opposite reactions — meet on Chesil Beach.

Sitting in front of her empty chair in his favourite windowseat at the Regatta, looking out across the esplanade, Magnus was persecuted by the proprietor of the place who, being an ex-yachtsman, had received special news from Portland of a wreck on Chesil. He not only recommended to Magnus — who would not touch a mouthful — to go and view this spectacle, but he expressed the opinion that "the young lady you are expecting, Mr. Muir, has heard of the launching of the new life-boat and has gone to see it". When Magnus fixed him with an eye which was as angry as it was bewildered, the man coolly added:

"I've never known a woman, Mr. Muir, who weren't crazy over lifeboats."

Disturbed beyond what he himself would have believed possible Magnus had actually hired a taxi, driven straight to Trigonia House, and implored Mr. Gaul to accompany him on this wild-goose chase. Mr. Gaul, contemplating his friend’s pitiable condition with unruffled detachment was, all the same, too good-natured to increase his agitation by refusing to ride through a storm. It was not, however, till they were nearly at Fleet Bridge that either of them uttered a word. Then Mr. Gaul remarked.

“That man at the Regatta makes models of life-boats. He brings them out to show you. They’re not very good. They’re too thick.”

Magnus made no attempt to follow up his friend’s knowledge of boat-building. He repeated mechanically the words “too thick” and fell once more to conjuring up in his mind a drenched and remorseful Curly who would rush up to greet him and throw her arms impulsively round his neck. He had even reached the point of vaguely considering where it would be best to deposit Mr. Gaul, when the taxi drew up.

“Do you want me to wait for you?” the driver called after them, as they moved off towards the beach. “ ’Tis a wild night for all consarned,” he said, as they came back, “and I’m sorry, gentlemen, but I have to arst you to pay my fare afore you goes. Such be me orders, after dark.”

Mr. Gaul found it discreet at this juncture, in spite of the tearing wind and rain-wet darkness, to rub his spectacles on his coat-collar and even to glance casually and lightly at them, holding them in the air at a suitable distance from his face, as if he were sitting on a seat in Victoria Gardens listening to the band, instead of standing dazed and uncomfortable, within a stone’s throw of drowning people.

“Shall I wait for ye?” reiterated the taximan, mollified by a good tip above his fare.

“Shall he?” said Magnus to Mr. Gaul; and it was then that the latter uttered the enigmatic words:

“Better leave it uncertain.”

Grasping the truant Sue tightly by the hand, Sylvanus was indeed astonished when he found himself greeted by these two academic persons. He looked at them self-defensively and a little quizzically, for he had met them at High House under embarrassing conditions and Mr. Gaul had been present at at least one of his really nasty scenes with Lucinda.

"You're wondering," he said to Mr. Gaul, "whether I saved this girl from the wreck?"

Mr. Gaul looked completely nonplussed. The wind and spray lashing his face did not save him from the sensation of blushing. He had, as a matter of fact, been wondering exactly what Sylvanus said he had.

"I think I'll walk about a bit, Gaul," said Magnus. "We can't lose each other here."

He went off accordingly.

"After all," he thought, "it does sometimes happen in life that a fool like that Regatta man gives you the right tip. She may be here. It's not an absolutely mad idea."

"The storm's over," said Sylvanus, "and the sea's settling down. When I was up there on the hill and had a bird's eye view I could see, by those lights those men are carrying over there, the surf blowing across the top of the beach. We couldn't have stood where we're standing now *then,* could we, Sue?"

"What a lot of people there are here!" remarked Mr. Gaul. "What I can't understand is, where's the wreck they've all come out to see?"

There was a solemn intensity in the gaze the young man fixed upon the seething waters in front of him that was almost pathetic. Had his mother been alive to see that particular expression it would have reminded her of the look the small Richard used to assume when he stared for hours into the unknown, from above the rail of his cot.

Meanwhile, as he shuffled over the slippery pebbles, deafened by the roar of the breaking waves, Magnus hunted in vain for any sight of Curly. From group to group he went, and many a Portland fisherman told his wife, as he lay down by her side that night, that “there were a bloke on beach who must have knowed one o’ they poor beggars. ‘Twere a holy fright to see the feäce he had on him!”

It was no wonder that by the flaring lights thrown on that strange scene Magnus’ expression was a shock to these men, used as they were to human perturbation in the presence of the elements. The extremity of what he felt was a surprise to his own heart. He had known too well how much he loved her, but the shock of this wild spectacle and the bitter vanity of the hope raised in him by that modeller of “thick” lifeboats, stirred up in his very midriff a feeling that made the pit of his stomach flap, like his old wind-blown ulster. Manfully he struggled with his unreason.

“She was scared by the storm,” he thought, “and her mother wouldn’t let her go out. It’s natural enough. She’s probably in bed already. Oh, my Lovely, my Lovely! your bed will be *my* bed before a fortnight’s over!”

What he could not help himself from doing now, was thinking what his life would be if Curly had been on this vanished fishing-smack, if that shell-like, brittle little head were even now being bruised and broken in this black welter! Not a plank, not a barrel — the fishermen assured him — had been washed ashore.

“ ’Tis like the wreck of the ‘Festy’,” they explained, “what had five men and a boy a’board. There be under-pulls in these here spring tides, what sucks ‘un down and out-along. If ’tis fair weather, come the New Moon, we may see summat! But not a ‘ooman who suckled ’em won’t know the poor sons of bitches then.”

Magnus wrestled with a terrible terror that something would happen to take Curly from him before he'd got her to himself. Her image became for him on that dark beach what he never thought any human image *could* become. Desperately he strove to gain the mastery over his wild fears. There *was* a vein in him, inherited from his father, of formidable exultation in such a furious mêlée as this. He tried grimly to get his old life-illusion back, whereby he thought of himself as a strong, primeval spirit, linked to a shrinking and cowardly set of nerves. He imagined himself as he moved up close to those towering, crashing waves, and let their foam drench his face, being called upon to rush into that seething blackness by the sight of human arms outstretched to him. An overpowering shame for all his habitual weaknesses shook his whole nature.

"Oh, my Lovely, my Lovely!" his spirit called out into that swirling chaos, "if fate will only give you to me, if fate will only let nothing happen, you shall find what I can be! You shall rest on me as on a rock!"

He stooped down once and picked up a fragment of tarry sacking. It was nothing. It had probably been floating out there in mid-ocean for months. But to touch with his fingers anything that had been in their roaring whirlpool gave him a queer feeling. He found at last that he had been scrambling along the edge of the waves till he was alone in the darkness. Turning round he could see the moving groups of people he had left, lit up weirdly and grotesquely, like a mask of demons, in the lights that some of them carried. What a place this Chesil was! As he turned again and tried to pierce the darkness where the great embankment stretched away westward, heavy with moanings and sobbings and inarticulate storm-wails of its own, he had a queer sensation as if he had walked along this pebbly ridge, on the verge of these ghastly down-sucking gulfs, many a time before! As a matter of fact this was the first time in his life he had been on the great beach in a night of storm. Was it then, he wondered, that he was *re-thinking the memories of his father?* Suddenly he became aware that he had not yet reached the bound and the limit of the other spectators of this madness of the waters.

The tall figure of a man was advancing towards him out of the westward-stretching darkness. Magnus recognized him before he spoke. It was Jobber Skald. In a flash he recalled the man's hoarse threats against his enemy from that tossing boat at the pier's end the night he transferred to him the task of meeting Mrs. Cobbold's companion. The sight of the man standing there, the sound of his voice, made him recall another thing, too, the fact, namely, that at the extreme eastern end of the crowd of excited watchers he had caught a glimpse, that night, of Cattistock himself, talking to his nephew the Town Clerk. Magnus had undoubtedly for some odd reason lost his early prejudice against the man, when he found out that he was a miser. Thus the idea of this singular character now standing opposite him, with his heavy jowl and dusky, passionate features, going about threatening to kill him gave him only a feeling of distaste. Cattistock *the miser* was a very different sort of person from Cattistock the promoter of companies, and he was a person, too, towards whom it seemed simply absurd to cherish such murderous emotions.

If the place, the hour, and the tragic vanishing — as if into fathoms of down-sucking chaos — of the lost fishing-smack, had revealed to Magnus the strength of his passion for Curly they had certainly worked up the less balanced nature of the Jobber, into a yet more grievous turmoil. There had been established a reciprocity — with a vengeance — between this man's soul and the elements about him.

"Did you see him over there?" were the Jobber's first words after the two men had shaken hands.

"See whom?"

"Him, the Dog."

"I saw Mr. Cattistock talking to Mr. Ballard; but I didn't speak to him. I don't know him very well."

"You're teaching his son now?"

"Why not, Mr. Skald?"

The words that they spoke to each other had to be shouted, to be heard at all, against the sea's uproar, and the mere fact that from these two figures standing so near each other, the one in his flapping cape and the other in his clinging, drenched clothes, there came these alternate shouts, reduced the interchange between them to something at once primitive and grotesque.

"He's an idiot, isn't he?"

"No, he's not! He's a very nice boy. You wouldn't say that if you'd ever talked to him."

"We all talk too much! There's too much talk, Mr. Muir."

"Too much *what,* did you say?"

"Talk, talk — too much talk!"

"Have you seen, by any chance, anything of Curly Wix down here?"

"There were a lot of women by the life-boat. She was probably with them. I didn't look."

"By the life-boat did you say, Skald?"

"The life-boat! The life-boat!"

"Are you sure you saw her?"

"By the life-boat! That's where they are!"

"Who is by the life-boat?"

"The women, the women, man! A score of 'em maybe, waiting for the bodies to come ashore."

"Was Curly Wix with them?"

"Oh, *that* girl. No, no! *she* wasn't with them. I'd have known *her.* I thought you were talking about Sue Gadget."

"You're *sure* you didn't see her with those others?"

"The Island's never had a worse enemy. Someone must finish it and soon, too. There's too much talk in this world, Mr. Muir! I'm a talker, am I, Mr. Muir? Is that what you think?"

It seemed to have sunk into the Jobber's head that this tutor of the Dog's son was hostile to him; and he now thrust his great face so close to Magnus' face and seized him so brutally by the arm that the Latin teacher was startled. But it was a peculiar thing in Magnus that while his reason was riddled and perforated with nervous terrors, there was something else in him — an inheritance perhaps from the elder Muir — that was liable at times to mount to his head. He shook off the Jobber's hold now.

"I don't know you well enough to say," he shouted, "but I do know this: that if you were doing to me what you're doing to Mr. Cattistock, going about through the pubs threatening to kill me, I wouldn't submit to it for a second!"

A responsive shock of anger quivered through the Jobber's frame and it rushed to the tip of his tongue to shout out to this touchy schoolmaster that he *was* "submitting", quietly enough already, while the pubs of the town mocked him as a wittold! It was on his tongue to tell him that at the Weeping Woman the other night he had heard some wag speak of him as "Mr. After-Sippy". But let him go! It was the Dog he was after, not this fool of a tutor. To the devil with him and his German cloak! He moved off and, shuffling down the dangerous slope of the sea-bank, stood staring into the swirling blackness, striking himself mechanical blows across the chest to warm his blood.

As for Magnus, he had no sooner expressed his anger than it died out of him completely; and when he saw the man warming himself like a frozen cab-driver, he experienced an unpleasant spasm of remorse. But he remained standing where he was, just above what would have been the water's "windrow" in any ordinary time, gazing into vacancy and letting his soul travel to his love. In that convulsed chaos of heaving ridges, slippery crests, tossing water-spouts, both men were now visualizing the faces of their women; but while the Jobber, whose case was the more desperate, took *his* girl's faithfulness for granted, Magnus, in whom caution and commonsense were once more entrenched, felt as if the shell-like face of Curly might dissolve at any moment, and be lost to him forever.

But even as they were standing in this position, the Jobber with his heels in the crunching slope of pebbles and Magnus with the cape of his ulster switching against the back of his head, and both of them half-deafened by the shrieking wind, there rose and broke in the welter before them a wave larger than the rest. They could see it towering up there, before it collapsed, in its precipitous and slippery bulk, and the resounding crash with which it fell, whirling its spray round the heads of both of them and covering the Jobber up to his knees, drove all thought away.

For the second time that night there came over Magnus a curious up-welling of something that was as one with these wild elements, and instead of retreating, when the fatal back-drawing of the wave's ebb began, he deliberately staggered, *with the wave,* down that dark pebble-slide and, digging his heels in, stretched out his arm to the Jobber. It was lucky he did this, for had the Jobber's foot-hold loosened, as it was on the verge of doing, the man would have been swept down, and once down there, in those churning waters, his chance would have been small; but the other's hand gave him just the necessary minimum of support and he quickly stumbled up the shelving bank.

They were no sooner side by side than the inherent weakness of Magnus' character — or what most people would call weakness — displayed itself in an invincible impulse to refer to the elder Muir. The elder Muir had been really remarkable in this one particular, namely that he had endowed each separate one of the material phenomena of the place of his earthly sojourn with a curious mythological identity for his son's mind. Thus every one of these objects, the White Horse, Hardy's Monument, the White Nose, the Nothe, the Breakwater, Sandsfoot Castle, and above all this great pebble-bank where he now stood, was seen by Magnus in a different way from the way others saw it. *It was a piece of his father's life.* Thus the moment they were out of danger he set himself to shout in the Jobber's confused and preoccupied ear:

"My Father, you know, Skald, was one of your old-fashioned sort, and he never could abide our friend Cattistock, but in those days people were more independent than they are today. But all the same, my good man, we simply can't," — here Magnus raised his voice to a shriek, and as he raised it he was aware that another terrible wave was breaking— "can't avenge ourselves by force! 'Leave it to God', is what my Father always used to say. I've heard him say it often when people cheated him, just like you've been cheated by Cattistock; and my Father, Skald, was one who—"

But what looked like a water-spout from the jaws of Leviathan was now pouring in upon them and over them and past them, out of the shaken trough of that many-sounding blackness, and they had to stagger still further up the pebbly slope, till in a second the torrential back-swirl of another foamy retreat tugged at their legs. When once more he was able to take breath Magnus stubbornly finished his sentence about the elder Muir:

“ — was one, Skald, who refused to be bullied!”

Aye! what comfort it gave Magnus to say — gasping for breath and dripping with salt water on this ridge of Chesil — that his father refused to be bullied.

“He refused to be bullied, Skald!” he repeated again, with a peculiar vibrancy in his voice; and he felt as if he heard those words blown on the wind, tossed on the waves, mounting up on the long spears of the rain. “He *refused* to be bullied, Skald!”

And as his voice sank, for the Jobber had fallen into his thoughts again, behaving towards these words about the elder Muir as if they were only another example of “too much talk”, it came over Magnus that what he was disputing about with this man on the rim of the world was a blind, a screen, a joke, an organ-grinding jig, a patter of marionettes, while all the while something much more important — something that had to do with the way his father used to stay so long bent down over the sea-anemones in the rock-pools below the Coast-Guards and the way he would say, “Magnus, my boy, I saw a little fish in this pool!” — was being transacted, behind and beyond all this unreal posturing. But he became aware now as he watched the Jobber’s absorbed and frowning trance, that the salt which had gathered on his lips and in his nostrils tasted differently from usual. It had a dangerous taste, a fatal taste. What had set him thinking of such a thing? To find the taste of sea-salt in his mouth on Chesil Beach making him think of kissing Curly, when at last he had got her safe in his own bed, what kind of thought was this?

“A fair thought” — ha? — like Hamlet’s about Ophelia’s legs.

Suddenly, while his mind was thus obsessed with exciting images of passionate delight, he became aware that there was something important going on among the rest of the people on the beach. Looking back past the

Jobber's abstracted figure, whose face was turned towards the west, his attention was arrested by a disorderly scattering of the glaring lights that the men near the life-boat had been carrying; and it seemed to him that there was a wild stir of some nature, amounting to something really serious, going on over there, away to the eastward, even nearer the Isle of Portland than the spot where he had spoken to Sylvanus.

"Something's happened; something's happening!" he shouted; and it was his turn now to tug roughly at the other's arm. "Come on, man!"

But the Jobber gave him the kind of stare that a person on a scaffold might give to a town-crier bawling out the news; and with the look of that contorted face, decomposed, wavering, torn by indecision, receding from his brain, as he went, Magnus hurried off so fast to ascertain what had occurred, that he didn't look round again to find out whether the Jobber was following him. He found the life-boat men busy with the struggle of launching their craft once more; but he did not wait to ask them any questions. On he went at a run; and it was still with the fantastic notion at the back of his mind that Curly might suddenly materialize, out of the sea, out of the wind, out of the midst of the crowd, that he joined a tense and wrought-up group of men, surrounded by a solemn and awe-struck crowd, who were watching them hold the end of a long rope while a solitary figure, rising and falling like a cork in the surf, was fighting his way towards a round, dark object that kept appearing and disappearing as the waves swept it shoreward. There were several lights at this point flickering on the men who held the rope — one of whom was S. P. Ballard — and on the man in the water, and the rather ghastly illumination flung, like a search-light, on the latter revealed — not a little to Magnus' astonishment — that this reckless swimmer was none other than Cattistock himself. The man was indeed forcing himself onward towards this dark object which bobbed up and down in the surf about ten yards in front of him while the life-boat, now safely launched, was making a circle in the illuminated water so as to reach with all possible accuracy the same surf-tossed objective.

Magnus soon learned from the excited remarks of Mr. Ballard, who was roundly reviling a couple of fishermen for letting his uncle do such a mad thing, that they'd seen what resembled a human form clinging to this barrel, but it certainly looked to the Latin teacher at this moment as if the barrel, bobbing up and down in the swirling spray, were empty and alone. But no! no! it wasn't *Something* — and it *was* a human form, only a very little one — was clinging tight to that round, gyrating cask. No! no! it *could not* be clinging to it. It would have been washed away from it an hundred times over as the thing leaped and danced and revolved, like a drowning Jack-in-the-Box. What he saw must be *tied* to it!

Cattistock's own thoughts, as he struggled forward, always being hurled over and rolled over, always being battered, pounded, half-choked, half-stunned, far from being confused or bewildered, remained sardonically cool.

"I'll show 'em, I'll show 'em, I'll show 'em!" he kept repeating.

He had come down to the beach without any definite purpose; simply from that obscure intuition of destiny that men of action so often have. His determination to deal with this serious animosity of the quarrymen was to a man of his kind such a compelling force that he couldn't just let it go and retreat to the Inn. His instinct was to follow up his enemies relying on some unexpected dénouement of circumstances to give him an unforeseen advantage. They had hooted him mercilessly at the quarrymen's meeting. Voices in the crowd had called out:

"Dummy Skald'll settle 'ee! Look 'ee out for Dummy Skald, master!"

At first he had not realized that “Dummy” was their pet name for the Jobber; but when Tissty explained it, for she “did not care now”, as she told Tossty later, “whether he were the greatest skinflint in the county”, he had seen the possibility of some spectacular gesture establishing his ascendancy in the Isle of the Slingers more effectively than argument or hard cash. The man was totally devoid of any poetical or emotional response to the storm himself, but he was shrewd enough to see that its effect upon the crowd lent itself to what he required. Never was a more strategic nor a more searching eye cast about for a move this way or that in the march of events than was turned that night upon the crowd and upon the waves and upon the life-boat and upon the beach and upon the sight-seers from the town, by the sharp-chinned president of “Cattistock and Frampton”. He had seen this floating barrel when he was talking to Sippy, and what certainly did look like a person clinging to it, for several minutes before he told a living soul. Indeed he despatched Ballard to get a flask of brandy at the Portland Railway Station before he made any move at all. Then when Sippy was out of sight he joined a group of excited fishermen, among whom was the bareheaded Sylvanus still holding Sue Gadget fast by the hand.

“Someone ought to swim out,” he remarked to this whole group, “and bring that thing in. It looks to me there’s a man tied to it.”

“Life-boat be being launched, sir,” said one of the men. “They must have seed ‘un, same as yourself. But I don’t believe there be a man, ‘ooman, or babe on ‘un.”

Cattistock glanced round. “By God!” he thought. “I’ll have to hurry up. They *are* launching the damned life-boat.” “If that’s a person on that barrel,” he remarked, “he’ll be dead before the life-boat reaches him.”

Sue Gadget stared up with big, wondering eyes at this courageous man. Could he actually be going to share with that girl the next room to her own that very night? Her heart began to beat fast at this thought, and she recalled the way a stream of light, when her own room was dark, came through a little narrow opening near the ceiling from this neighbouring room.

" 'Melia and Celia haven't seen the Head with Jobber Skald to hold 'un," she thought. " 'Melia and Celia haven't held hands all evening, at a real wreck, with Mr. Cobbold. They won't have a light shining into they's room, neither, from where Mr. Cattistock be stroking his beautiful lady."

Meanwhile Cattistock was watching the barrel — that sometimes looked as if there *was* something else there and sometimes not — with a measuring exactness.

"It's a chance," he thought. "It might—"

He picked up the end of a long rope and then, dropping it, began to take off his overcoat. Then he picked the rope up again and dropped it again. Then he bent down and with some difficulty, for the wind was very violent, unlaced and removed his boots.

Meanwhile the long white face of Sylvanus, as he watched the fishermen knotting the rope round Cattistock, began to show unmistakable manifestations of a goblinish desire to laugh.

"There's nothing tied to it," he murmured a little later, letting his eyes rest first on the barrel in the surf and then on the back of the man who was already off his feet and swimming desperately in a deep sea-trough.

And to Sue's consternation — and after this she became one of the very few women who shared the view of Lucinda and the police that Sylvanus was really mad — the man in tweeds, suddenly aware of the humorous irrelevance of this absurd display in the bosom of the Absolute, burst into a fit of Gargantuan laughter. Little Sue tried ineffectually to pull her hand away; and even the fishermen, occupied though they were by the vibrating rope, looked at each other with disapproval.

Meanwhile Cattistock, dizzied and dazed by the first shock of his plunge into that swirling sea, did not lose his wits.

"If I get through the next *two* waves," he thought, as he spat out a great mouthful of brine, "I'll do it. But the life-boat'll pick me up anyway."

His conscious thought was swallowed up now in a great drumming and humming. Then he was aware of what seemed like a terrific trumpeting. Had Ellen Gadget been stunned by such a sound she would have thought the original of the "Head" had lifted itself out of the waste of waters to bark at the North Star. But Cattistock, as he beat the waves in his final struggle, had a fleeting but intense awareness that Tissty was waiting for him in the upper room at the Head.

"She'll love me tonight as no woman has ever—"

He lost consciousness, in fact, before he clutched the barrel; at least he had no memory of clutching it; nor did he recall how they pulled him in, nor did he notice whether, at the last moment, "anything" was washed away that had been tied to the barrel...

It was a bitterly tragic face, about a quarter of an hour later, that from above the tight-fitting jersey of Dummy Skald looked over the shoulders of the excited crowd that surrounded the half-drowned but sardonically well-satisfied Cattistock. The Jobber heard people talking about the heroic bravery of the man. He heard them say, too, that a body — probably the body of a child — had been washed away in spite of this gallantry. Meanwhile the lights which people were carrying flickered about so erratically that it was natural enough that, when one of them fell upon the Jobber's face, Dog Cattistock, his cheeks a bluish white, his forehead and great chin bleeding, the sea-water trickling from his clothes and sinking down into the pebbles, should have fixed his gimlet-like eye upon the staring face of his enemy.

As for the Jobber, he could not have looked away from this extraordinary eye-encounter — no, not if the voice of Perdita had called him! Quietly, therefore, for Cattistock's head was in a very comfortable position upon Sippy's lap, the two men gazed at each other, and in the prostrate man's eyes was a cryptic expression that seemed to the Jobber like the words "check-mate"! Skald's whole frame began to tremble. His teeth chattered. For the first time that night he realized how soaked to the skin he was. He felt a monstrous desire to snatch the brandy-flask which Ballard was holding to the rescuer's lips and take a long pull at it himself. His hand plunged back into his trousers-pocket where the stone lay.

"I'll say good-bye to her tomorrow," he thought, "and then I'll do it. Damn him! Oh, damn him!" and then he turned and walked, dragging his feet heavily, up the beach and down to the road where he had left the Slug.

Magnus, who had rejoined his friend Gaul, observed the Jobber going off, and together they hastened after him.

"Can you find room for two, Skald?" he cried in his most genial tone, when they caught him up.

The Jobber growled something in reply that was scarcely articulate; but the wanderers from Brunswick Terrace were not in a mood to be nice about trifles. They had had enough of Chesil Beach. All the way into town, before they left their driver at the Harbour, they argued between themselves the important question, which many people were discussing that night, namely whether or not there had been a human body tied to the barrel that Mr. Cattistock had dragged in. Magnus assured Gaul that he had heard several fishermen declare that there had been a body fastened to that barrel when it was first observed.

"The life-boat wouldn't have put out again," he said. "Though of course a corpse—"

But Mr. Gaul corrected him for his use of the word “corpse”.

“I have heard,” he said gravely, “that people can be recovered from drowning after several hours’ immersion. But it’s true your friend Cattistock would never have rushed into the sea like that *if he hadn’t seen something.* He isn’t a man to risk his life for a barrel.”

Magnus, whose mind had reverted to Curly, had no comment to make on this.

“Perhaps, though,” continued the philosopher of Representation in a tone of balanced cogitation, as one who gives every aspect of conflicting events its due proportion, “perhaps it was one of his own barrels.”

MR. GAUL'S ADVICE

ALL THE NEXT MORNING, WHICH WAS WEDNESDAY, THE ELEVENTH OF February, Magnus Muir, as he stoically went through his task of hearing three little Weymouth boys stumble through that stately Horatian poem that contains the famous admonition about remembering to keep an equal mind under the pinch of adversity, saw before him, as if they had been floating in the air, the pencilled lines scrawled on a post-card in Curly's neat unrevealing hand:

"Mother wants me to herself all day tomorrow; so you'd better not come then; but can you be at the Clock on Thursday about twenty to twelve? I *must* go to Trinity Church to see the Wedding! I'll wait for you till a quarter to twelve, but not a minute longer; or we'll miss seeing the bride go in.

Love.
Curly."

Now it was impossible for Magnus to detect in this letter anything but what was natural. Curly's mother was a doting and sentimental woman and he felt she had never liked him. He could not read the old woman's thoughts. He could not know that the avidity she displayed at this juncture for her daughter's presence was by no means just simple affection. Mrs. Wix was afraid of her daughter's spending too much time with Magnus until they were actually married for two sound maternal reasons. She feared that he might learn about Sippy; and she also feared that Curly might get so exasperated by having Magnus too much on her hands that she would break it all off in an uncontrollable fit of rebellion. Mrs. Wix had the wit to see that Magnus in his simplicity attributed her attitude to pure fondness, and she played up to this with instinctive cunning.

"You know, Mr. Muir," she would say, "how soon I shall have to face a life without my darling."

Magnus bit his lip with annoyance when he read that their next meeting was to be at Cattistock's wedding. Like a map he saw how it would be his destiny to sit for hours afterwards at the "Regatta" listening to Curly flirting with that accursed yachtsman, while the two of them discussed — treating him like an ignorant outsider — every detail of the ceremony at Trinity Church.

"Aequam memento rebus in arduis—"

With his three boys' heads, a round one, an oval one, a square one, and each of them cropped, for cleanliness he supposed, like little convicts, grouped round his desk, while they made faces and fidgetted and yawned and scribbled and erased, for he had told them to turn into Latin verse the lines: "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more," he was presently able to walk up and down the room. This was always a prodigious relief to him, especially when, after executing a crafty flanking-movement round the three cropped heads, he managed to snatch a surreptitious glance at the sea.

"Aequam memento rebus in arduis—"

No! he would not weep, he would not tap the ground with his head, he would not walk into the sea if he lost her. But the point was — supposing something *did* happen to her, supposing this very day, in her own Upwey village street she should be killed by a motor-cycle — would he be able to enjoy anything in life again? He'd probably go on talking to Miss Le Fleau, and being sent for to teach Benny, and coming back, and taking his walk before tea. But would there be any pleasure in any of these things?

"Is Muir in?" his friend from Trigonia House would ask at the door.

"He hasn't come back yet, Mr. Gaul," Miss Le Fleau would say. "He must have gone the Round."

Now "the Round" was a walk he especially relished, and only took when he was in the best of spirits. He went clean over Lodmoor, skirted the hedge of a little spinney, crossed a rough cattle-grazed hill where there was sometimes a bull to make him quicken his pace, and following a narrow lane at the foot of the Downs returned by the Dorchester road.

He incidentally decided that he would go the Round this afternoon when they brought him back from Chickerel! But if Curly caught a fever and died — as might happen to any beautiful girl — would he ever go the Round again? No, he'd go to the Coast-Guards and straight back, as the elder Muir used to do. But would he visit those rock-pools by the sea over there and look for sea-anemones? *That* would be the test! And he tried to imagine, as he watched a small one-funnelled steamer moving along the horizon and leaving a trail of smoke in the grey sky, what it would feel like to scoop up out of those rock-pools those precious cowrie-shells that old Poxwell had such a mania for, and bring them home in his pocket, and put them in a bowl, if Curly wasn't there to see them! It didn't matter whether she took any interest in such things. He smiled faintly to himself — after a hurried glance round at the three cropped heads — to think how little interest she *did* take in these matters. But the point wasn't her interest; the point was *for her to be there.* Yes; those sacred hieroglyphs of the place, the White Horse, Hardy's Monument, the Coast-Guards, St. John's Spire, the Nothe, the Old King's Statue, the Harbour Bridge, as he told her about seeing them, or *not* seeing them in his walks, were the mystical links between his true-love and his father.

He had to get rid of his pupils before eleven today; for the Poxwell sisters wanted him at the Loders' as a witness to their signing certain papers. Taking his coat and stick, therefore, as soon as the boys were gone, he looked in, as he often did before setting out on any important excursion, to have a chat about it with Miss Le Fleau.

The lady hurriedly rose from her chair, where she was as usual reading and sewing at the same time; but on this occasion it was the Melcombe Regis Circular which she held in her hand, that small daily paper devoted especially to social news.

"It's all just as you told me, Magnus!" she burst out eagerly, and then conscious that he caught the twinge in her face as she rose to her feet: "My rheumatism has been more troublesome this last winter. There! I must try and move about more. I get stiff in my chair."

But with one hand resting now on the edge of her table she read aloud to him what the paper said about Cattistock's heroic plunge into the sea.

"It is understood on the Island," she read, "that negotiations have been resumed between the quarrymen's leaders and the shareholders in the Saxon Quarry. These negotiations are, we gather, entrusted to the well-known firm of Cattistock and Frampton."

While he chatted with her Magnus kept peering out of the window and it was not long before Miss Le Fleau referred to this fidgetty uneasiness of his.

"I know," he admitted, "I'm sorry. It's because when Chant comes for me today he's got to call for Mrs. Cobbold and Mrs. Lily. They're going to sign papers at Spy Croft and then go out to lunch at the Sanitarium."

"Not that poor little boy, too, Magnus?"

Magnus frowned.

“Yes, I’m afraid so, Miss Le Fleau. I feel about it just as you do. I asked Mr. Cattistock whether Benny and I couldn’t lunch quietly at Peninsular Lodge instead of going to that place. The truth is, I think he wants Dr. Brush to see the improvement in the boy.”

Miss Le Fleau gave her lodger a glance of proud affection.

“Well, you’ve done wonderfully with him, Magnus. I should think they’re all grateful to you. Does the boy mind it *very* much, Hortensia’s going out there to live?”

A curious expression of nervous reserve came into the tutor’s eyes and hovered about the lines of his mouth.

“Oh, well, my dear,” the lady hurried to say, “I don’t want to be inquisitive. But I should have thought after living alone out there, with no one but that old Mrs. Chant, it might be—”

But Magnus had turned his eyes to the window, and with a murmured “forgive me” he now moved close up to it. Suddenly the lady saw him tap the pane with his knuckles and make signs to someone below.

“It’s Gaul,” he explained, returning to her side with the smiling look still on his face with which he had greeted his friend from Trigonia House. “Well! Good-bye, Miss Le Fleau!”

He hadn’t *meant* to tell Gaul about Curly’s post-card; at least he hadn’t known that that was what he would do the very second they stood together on the pavement.

Mr. Gaul was in unusually good spirits. He had been for many weeks pondering on the problem of a metaphysical representation of Hell; and this morning he had been inspired with the thought that the status quo of Hell comes instantaneously and automatically into being, when, in a mood of cynical recklessness people let everything go and rejoice in the thought of universal disorder and destruction. When Magnus had tapped at the window Mr. Gaul was actually making little skipping motions with his feet as he went along, in the process of which he would rest the end of his cane on the pavement in front of him and then give it a lively kick. He was inspired to advance in this manner by reason of the fact that there entered into his brain at that time so many proofs of his interpretation of Hell that he was positively overwhelmed by them. The disturbing tantrums of his landlady's daughter for example, when she learned how independently a little girl called Sue had been behaving at the wreck, lent themselves with a mathematical exactness that was like Euclid to his solution of the problem. He had not yet mentioned her usefulness in this important branch of metaphysics to the little girl herself. She had destroyed the peace of Trigonia House till late at night. She had even brought S. P. Ballard out into the passage. But Mr. Gaul had long since found by experience that it is wiser to conceal than to reveal to the feminine mind its superb value as an illustration of philosophic truth.

It may well be imagined, however, that with his intellect all a-gog for living evidence of our human desire for universal disorder and destruction, he pounced joyously on Curly's unlucky post-card. Not lifting in his elation so much as the tip of a finger to his spectacles, he hurriedly advised Magnus, with a radiant countenance, to disregard Curly's commands and to go in spite of her to Upwey tonight.

"The thing to do with them when they're in this mood," he said emphatically; "for it's clear that to want to drag a thinking human being to a performance like a wedding is pure childish malice, is to disregard what they say completely. Keep your temper, my dear Muir, that's the great thing! Just smile, *whatever* she says. But go on yourself quietly doing what it is best and wisest, as if she didn't exist."

The young man’s round face gleamed with such guileless satisfaction as he pointed his friend to the philosophic path, that Magnus, who had a mania for humouring everyone, lacked the heart to tell him that his wisdom was a little self-contradictory in one particular, since a person would hardly take the trouble to visit a girl against her will only to prove to her that she didn’t exist. But Mr. Gaul’s words, in spite of this small lapse in pure logic, sank deeply into his mind, for they revealed to him that he really *had* a grievance against Curly, and they indicated a direct way of getting even with her, a way, nevertheless, that did not carry with it the punishment to himself of not seeing her.

He was pondering on this point — for Magnus’ secret thoughts, unknown to any of his friends, were very often on lines of drastic, vigorous blood-and-iron action — when Cattistock’s big car drove up, and the warm, brown eyes of young Mr. Chant looked down at him from the driver’s seat. Lucinda Cobbold, who was the only occupant of the car, began rallying them both for their absorption in each other’s society.

“We have to pick up Hortensia,” she said, “otherwise I’d offer you a chance of continuing that absorbing subject — whatever it was—”

“It was about you!” burst from the elated lips of Mr. Gaul, as he watched his friend stumble awkwardly into the seat by the lady’s side and stretch out his long legs with a sigh of achievement.

But it was a more composed and less exuberant Mr. Gaul who now continued his way to St. Mary’s Street, where he intended to purchase at a stationer’s shop a copy of Faust in the original. It had occurred to him that in many isolated passages of that enigmatic work there were paragraphs that bore out his contention that the “ultimate repose” of Hell, as Milton calls it, is rather a psychological than a geographical revelation. But the truth was he had thrown so much suppressed wit into his bon-mot to Mrs. Cobbold that it was as if virtue had gone out of him. His inspiration drooped. His high spirits flagged. He felt no further inclination to kick his cane. And so dangerous had he proved it to be to exchange brillant remarks with a society woman that all the way to the old King's statue, and all the way to the stationer's, he resolved that under no future temptation would he let himself be betrayed into such badinage.

"You can't serve philosophy and society," he said to himself, as he gazed into the royal countenance. "I wish I hadn't said those words. She looked astonished, though. They don't often get answered as quick as that, I expect."

Meanwhile Magnus, who felt no inclination to indulge in his friend's "esprit d'escalier", murmured something about hoping that Hortensia would have a happy life.

Mrs. Cobbold raised both her hands to her hat, which with its elegantly twisted green velvet band seemed to be a deliberate substitute for that classical fillet about the brow with which, in her home, she preserved that air of dedication that Perdita found so exasperating.

"It's a mystery to me," she said. "Of course, just like everybody else, I thought at first it was his money. Jerry *never* would believe that. Jerry has odd glimpses sometimes. And I've begun to come round." She leaned forward with such a gleam in her eyes that Magnus was filled with distaste. "She's infatuated with him, I tell you! I've found that out. And it's not an ordinary infatuation either. It's about as morbid and unhealthy as it can *well* be." She touched Magnus' knee with the tips of one of her gloved hands. "I know 'Tensia *so* well," she whispered. "She was always bored to death by her Captain. Your father used to say Cattistock was a Cro-Magnon. He meant just a plain brute. Well *that's* what 'Tensia likes! I give them twelve months — not a day longer, and it'll be over."

She drew back, and sank down into the capacious seat, settling the waxen flowers in her bosom and letting her eyes soften into a swimming haze of satisfied prediction.

Magnus sighed. “You mean he’ll desert her?” he murmured uneasily.

But the lady laughed, and the sound of her laughter reminded Magnus of the popping corks of those tiny little homoeopathic bottles that old Dr. Higginbottom used to carry in a black bag and open one after another with such assurance.

“No, my dear,” she said. “I don’t think *that* will be the way it’ll end.”

It was only a small gathering of relatives into which Lucinda and Magnus now plunged when they entered Spy Croft drawing-room. With its green curtains and green carpet, with its green valances round its green armchairs, with its green tassels round its vase-bearing brackets, this spacious chamber, designed to pleasure their dead mother before either of them were born, was like a mausoleum to Ruth and Rodney.

Magnus shook hands agreeably enough with the people he knew, and bowed politely to others as he was introduced to them by Ruth, but he soon sank down at one end of the great sofa — whose cushions and antimacassars seemed the only objects in the place *not* of this sepulchral green — and fell into solitary meditation. One of the windows was barely open at the top, but the heavy curtain stirred deliciously with the spring air that entered, even through so small an opening, and as Magnus felt this air floating in full of sea-scents from the near-by shore and looked at the people gathered in this room it occurred to him that there must be signs and tokens when spring touches the unharvested sea answering to those when it stirs the fields of the earth! Certainly *something* was affecting the people gathered here that was more than the fact that they had come to sign marriage documents. Those two Poxwell sisters — and how alike they were! — were dressed so much more strikingly than the other women that it was hard not to stare at them. What queer, high foreheads they both had! Hortensia concealed hers with her smooth-brushed, silky hair clipped straight across, and it struck Magnus that if he were Cattistock he would get pleasure from ruffling back that hair with his fingers, from that lovely white brow! It didn't take him very long to get the psychic import and mental implication of this group of people. It had long been a trick of his to treat occasions and gatherings like this as if they were some inanimate group of rocks and trees, with the light falling and the air stirring according to a spontaneous, natural art.

"This spring air," he thought, "is calling up these people's souls from fathoms of subconsciousness like a shoal of fish, and calling up their good and their evil, too, more unmistakably than generally happens. It's odd how uncomfortable it seems to make me to see Mrs. Cobbold talking to that lovely Mrs. Lily. Damn it all! I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't make a person uncomfortable to see Mrs. Cobbold talking to *any* sensitive and receptive person!"

His attention veered now to their host, "the general", who was evidently not to be driven from the room by the fact that he was suffering from his usual physical discomfort. James Loder looked happy enough, however, the moment his ulcers became quiescent. For one thing he was particularly fond of this room. He would no more have thought of changing anything in this drawing-room of his than he would have thought of shaving off his mustache. The happiest moments he had now, in his extreme old age, except the times when Ruth took him in his bath chair, were the moments on Sundays when, with the servants gone out, Ruth used herself to lay their tea on a little card-table in front of the drawing-room fire or, if it were summer, in front of one of the drawing-room windows. It was by the fire at this moment that the soldierly old man was standing, although every now and then he would cross over, in defiance of propriety, to the sofa where Magnus was, where he would stretch himself out, uttering audible groans. It was in fact one of James Loder's bad days. The chronic trouble which was the affliction of his old age was specially acute today. But Mr. Loder always enjoyed coming down from his bedroom to suffer in public, finding in the sympathy he excited and also in the distaste and disgust he excited, an important alleviation of his pangs. He really *did* suffer! The thing was no joke. But the very fact that it was a shock to people to see him twist about made it the greater relief. He derived an almost sensual pleasure from doing it. He experienced a satisfaction in bringing down the high spirits of others by flinging over them, so to speak, the mantle of his leprosy. There were doubtless subtler aspects still of this desire in James Loder to suffer in public; for Ruth and Rodney noticed that if ever they had anything resembling a party in the house on one of his bad days the old man was certain to insist on being present. On this particular occasion in the intervals of his visits to the sofa he chatted benevolently and with a certain old-world grace with the two sisters, rallying the beautiful Hortensia on Cattistock's heroism of last night, which he declared was in the best tradition of the West Country's historic chivalry. But after daring to hazard a repartee or two with the formidable Mrs. Cobbold, he thought to himself:

"How that son of mine does hate me! There's something sickening in such hidden-up, sneaking hatred. Yet he owes everything to me... life... career... sister... talent... and I *am* his father, after all! I wish the young parricide could feel for five minutes what this pain of mine really is."

The telephone-bell resounding violently now in the passage outside, caused everyone to glance at the door. To this insistent object that seemed animated by so importunate a devil at that moment that the whole apparatus shook as if it had been the body possessed by the demon named Legion, Ruth anxiously ran, and put the silenced instrument to her ear. It was Mrs. Matzell speaking from Half-Way House and speaking with no little agitation, but Ruth soon learnt all that was needed. Back again in the green chamber — and how stuffy it seemed after the cooler air of the hall — how scented with the exotic perfumes the Poxwell sisters always used! — she hurried at once, not to Mrs. Lily, but to Daisy.

"Come out with me a minute, my dear!" she whispered.

They got out of the room without anyone, except "that gloomy Mr. Muir, who always sits by himself at parties," noticing anything.

"Mrs. Matzell telephones that Captain Poxwell's got into his head that Mrs. Cobbold's here, and nothing could hold him. He's on his way now!"

Daisy turned white and bit her under-lip as she stared at Ruth. Then without a word she shut her eyes. She did this in order to think clearly. Had she been a Field-Marshal she would always have shut her eyes when the enemy's attack opened. Ruth stood waiting. She had full confidence in Daisy's power to handle this crisis, and she was unwilling to interrupt her cogitation. Finally Daisy said:

"There are only two ways by which he can come, Ruth: by Underbarn Path, and by Old Castle Road and Belle Vue Road so if *you* go by the road, I'll go by the sea-path and then we're *bound* to meet him! Quick! Oh, quick, *let's go!* Will you tell Rodney about it and tell him to get mother and Aunt Lucinda off, if he — oh, *where's* my jacket, Ruth? — if he *can*... I... don't... think... he'll... be able... to" — Daisy was panting now with the effort of getting into her things— "because... Aunt Lucinda... likes... tormenting... There! I'll go now. Mind! I'll go by the sea and you go by the road. You'll come quick, Ruth, won't you, when you've told Rodney?"

"But... Daisy... what if the Captain insists on coming?"

"He won't, he won't, Ruth! I could easily have stopped him if I'd been at home. He *never* does anything that hurts anyone! Mrs. Matzell doesn't understand him, though she loves him so. It doesn't do to let grandfather think you think he's not perfectly ordinary and like other people. Good-bye, Ruth! You'll be quick, won't you? And if he comes, *don't let Aunt Lucinda see him!"*

But the elder girl had more difficulty in getting a private word with her brother than she could have believed possible. Thus it was fully ten minutes after Daisy had set out, that Ruth found herself walking up Belle Vue Road and thence into Old Castle Road. She had hardly gone half-a-mile before she saw the Captain. He was walking very fast in his heavy cloth suit, holding a plaid shawl wound tightly round his lean neck. In fact he was bearing down upon her like one who contended in a race with an invisible opponent. He walked with such alacrity and his eye had such a bright, bird-like intensity, like the eye of a demented sea gull, that it was difficult to get his attention.

"Captain!" Ruth cried, "Captain Poxwell!"

But he swept on past her as if she were a casual acquaintance in the town whom he could legitimately pass with a nod and a lift of his hat. Ruth flushed hotly. She felt embarrassed and nonplussed. She felt angry with Daisy for assuring her that all would be such smooth sailing. Here she was, entirely disregarded, and there was the man, marching on with long strides like some terrible wound-up automaton to which she had lost the mechanical key that stopped it! But she ran after him and caught hold of his arm. Luckily at the point where she stopped him there was a little field-path, going straight down past the backs of some private gardens, to that shore-path, called Underbarn Walk, which leads from the Nothe to Sandsfoot Castle.

"I must get to the sea. I *must* get to the sea, Captain," she coaxed him now, in an unsteady voice that seemed singularly ineffectual to her own ears.

Yes, Daisy was right. He hadn't realized who she was at first but now he was at her mercy!

"I'm going to your house. You've got a party there. And my eldest girl's at your party. Please don't make me take you down there! It's easy to go down there. You're grown-up."

"I must get to the sea," she repeated, "and I can't go alone. I can't, I mustn't, I dursn't go alone. So you *will* take me down to the sea, Captain Poxwell?"

He moved his stubbly head with its restless blue eyes backwards and forwards, like an unhappy doll that found itself in the hands of an alien mistress. He would first glance towards the path going down to Underbarn Walk and then twisting round, gaze yearningly towards Belle Vue Road. His sun-burnt neck, whose corded veins resembled strings of leafless ivy, had such a pathetic appearance as it craned round that Ruth felt sorry for him. There was something touching and pitiful about his helplessness under her light pressure when it would have been so easy to shake her off and go right on. There must have been a distressing struggle in the man's mind as he wavered there. To her dismay, as she clung to his arm, she noticed several big tears roll down his leathery cheeks and fall on the plaid shawl. This she could hardly bear, and she was almost tempted to go straight on with him to Spy Croft. Probably Daisy exaggerated the shock it would be to him to meet Mrs. Cobbold. But no! She recalled the look of that sturdy little figure in the hall with her eyes tight shut. She must keep faith with Daisy.

"Well... I shall have to... give it up..." he said in a low, unhappy voice. "If you *must* be taken to the sea, you *must!* I... expect... you're afraid of the nursery-maids down there looking for soldiers who never come. I’m sometimes afraid of them myself! They have such white cheeks and such red lips and such staring eyes. The real reason why I live in Sandsfoot Castle is not a thing to talk about with a little girl like you, but it has to do with those nursery-maids’ eyes — always staring like that... always staring for the soldiers.”

They had begun to descend the path now towards Underbarn Walk and he stopped her and looked down gingerly into her face.

“Those soldiers aren’t dead,” he whispered. “Did you think they were? Oh, no! They’re not dead. But they won’t come back. No, no, it will never, never be.” He lowered his voice still further. “They’ve heard something about those girl’s fathers. Mum’s the word! The word’s mum... but all fathers aren’t like Mr. James Loder... such a good, kind, virtuous, thoughtful, righteous, God-fearing father! A father who’s got nothing on his mind, a father with whom a girl like you can sit and talk and tell old tales and cuddle and laugh and enjoy yourself! Take an unhappy wretch’s word for it, Ruth! To be able to kiss your father good-night, when there’s not a wind stirring and you can’t hear a sound of the sea... it must be like heaven. Nothing on the mind! And day following day so calm, so snug, so safe. No, no, no, no! I don’t wonder you dursn’t go down to the sea alone, for fear of nursery-maids. ’Tis terrible what stories go round to keep those soldiers away, so that they’ll never, never, never come back!”

A sigh shook him from head to foot, that made the girl realize his trouble better than any words could have done. Slowly supporting her, or being supported by her, down the slope, and the girl caught sight of a couple of sea-gulls’ feathers, as they went down, reminding her of some event in her infancy that she had completely forgotten, they arrived at last at Underbarn Walk.

Here they sat down on a bench and Ruth let her eyes rest in peace on the smooth oily expanse of water bounded by the two breakwaters and extending away, without one ripple that glittered or danced, to the base of Portland. How familiar to her was the outline of that great promontory! Several war-ships lay at anchor in the Roads, and their heavy, motionless forms intensified the pearly shimmer of that unruffled expanse. The sun was veiled in a tenuous gossamery mist. Not a breath of wind stirred; nor, since it was the hour of most folk's mid-day meal, did any passers-by disturb the impenetrable quiet. Still as a lake the great placid roadstead lay out-spread before her and the huge bulk of Portland seemed to float upon some tremulous substance more stable than water and more vaporous than glass. It was not Ruth's nature to deal in introspection. Self-pity was unknown to her. The young woman was by temperament an unquestioning accepter of Fate. But for all that, there *did* stir faintly in her, as she sat by this "child-changed" father, a vague sense that her dutiful service of old James and young Rodney did not satisfy the whole of her life-craving. Something slid into her being from that empearled surface that stirred up the mute, dumb life of her deep-rooted nervous system.

She knew perfectly well — as indeed did all the town — that the old man's mania took the form of imagining that he had got his eldest daughter with child. But woman-like she was not in the least shocked at the idea of incest in itself. Much nearer nature than the old man by her side, she could not comprehend that mystical horror and shuddering guilt, that feeling of sacrosanct awfulness as of some Mysterium Tremendum that can so quickly be worked up in the masculine conscience. But, "all the same for that", as Homer would say, the best of women are sensitive to the erotic electricity of any masculine companion, positive or negative, and Captain Poxwell's agitation was not without its indirect effect upon her steady nerves.

But that unruffled, pearly expanse she now gazed upon, possessed something in its own inherent nature — for it was the eleventh of February — that bore a curious correspondency with the first dim stirrings of early spring. Whether Ruth could have detected any subtle spring-change in the crimson seaweeds, that were now swaying to and fro in that lazy tide in the rock-pools below, is doubtful, but what is not doubtful is that from the actual chemic substance of that undulant mass of oily, opalescent water there emanated something of that relaxing perilous-sweet mystery of the spring to which all human nerves are porous.

There were few women's natures in the two boroughs more inherently virginal than Ruth's. Magnus did not know it; but if he had wanted to find a fellow-denizen of the elder Muir's Ideal Weymouth, one whose attitude to the Nothe, the Harbour, the Bridge, the King's Statue, St. John's Spire, Sandsfoot Castle, Chesil Beach, was as mythological as his had been, Ruth Loder could have been that person. Just because of her chastity, and her almost morbid indifference to men, Ruth enjoyed with a passionate and proud exclusiveness every light and every shadow, every breath and every calm, that touched these familiar landmarks. By slow degrees, for she had come to note changes of the seasons in her sea-atmosphere that most subtly corresponded to the same changes in the land-atmosphere, Ruth began to find in these changes, and in the varying moods they threw her into, something that represented, as Mr. Gaul would have said, the fitful and perilous magic of Eros.

Captain Poxwell had by no means been talking to her incessantly all this while. As soon as the old man realized she was enjoying something especially precious to her, he left her to enjoy it in peace; displaying in this restraint a delicacy of which one would hardly have supposed his crazy egoism would be capable. At last he said to her:

"I was trying to persuade my son John to take a year from the sea and live with Daisy and me, now she's off to Chickerel, but he writes me he's already signed up on the Tonquin, Captain Fred Hutchings, sailing for the West Indies. So Daisy and I will have to make out as well as we can! There'll be some things we shan't miss, however, you may be sure, when she's gone!"

The old gentleman's face was wrinkled now with a most natural and normal desire to laugh over some interior vision. He took off his hat and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with the end of his brightly coloured shawl emitted a series of half-suppressed chuckles. The expression in his blue eyes as his eyelids screwed themselves up, must have been a very familiar one to his subordinates in his master-mariner days.

"The Old Man's all right," their looks must have told one-another when he came on deck like this.

"You women," he brought out, wagging his grizzled head roguishly at her, "think that all comes to an end when you leave us to ourselves. But we know better. We get on very pretty. Daisy and me will be deuced well-pleased to run things in our own fashion. We'll pack off Granny Matzell, too, if she ain't careful. Yes, by God, we shall get on like flying fish, Daisy and me!"

He ended with more chuckling, and the big veins in his thin, red neck stood out unpleasantly. They seemed to pulse with a humorous desire to make every woman in the world realize how well he could get on alone.

"I believe you; I believe you, Captain," murmured Ruth, but without any responsive smile.

This sort of genial sex-badinage, so popular with sailors, to whom women's ways are one long, delicious exasperation, was peculiarly distasteful to her. Her self-centered independence was mingled with the fastidious intelligence, serious and deep, of a girl of instinctive intellectual power; and much as she shrank from Captain Poxwell in his insane mood, this mood of jocular facetiousness was even less agreeable. She was immensely relieved, therefore, when she suddenly saw the sturdy figure of his grandchild coming swinging round the corner from the direction of Sandsfoot; but that this relief was nothing to the child's own feeling was proved by the happy shout and impulsive scamper with which Daisy Lily flew towards them...

The only flaw in the harmony of the lunch-party at Hell's Museum, to which Magnus presently escorted the two Poxwell sisters, was a certain malignant impishness which Benny manifested more and more boldly as the meal went on towards his father's bride. But to his surprise it seemed to the teacher, when at last the two characteristic Poxwell voices, a little husky but always so seductive, were brought to silence by their host's getting up from the table, that the meal had ended all too quickly. It was then that Dr. Brush carried off Mrs. Cobbold, with a view to their professional interview, which was the real purpose of her visit. The Doctor did this as easily and lightly as if he were going to show her a collection of rare prints, while Magnus, leaving Benny with the prospective mistress of Peninsular Lodge, went off to find his friend, the young chauffeur.

Mrs. Lily retained the child at the tall large-paned window, looking across all the gardens of the Institute, and set herself with a passionate naïveté to overcome his malice. Magnus would have been shocked had he seen the impish devilry with which the little boy — as if fully conscious of the lady's pathetic longing to win him over — played with her desire and without being in the least rude or brutal, pushed her away, kept himself free of her, held her at arm's length.

When the tutor came back with Chant and his car and called the boy to him for their return to Chickerel he was startled by the pitiful, bewildered look in the new step-mother's face. With far more of the emotionalism of girlhood in her mood than her young daughter often displayed, Hortensia, in her exaggerated desire to win the boy, felt so rebuffed by his malicious coldness that as she stood at their car door there were tears in her eyes and her mouth was drawn down and trembling. Not having been present at their solitary dialogue Magnus was puzzled by her emotion, and being inclined to attribute it to her dread of being left alone in the precincts of Hell's Museum he tapped at the window, just as they were off, to make Chant stop. The bride's gloveless white fingers were clinging to the side of the car as if she would have tried by her own strength to hold it back, and she must actually have run a few paces with it before young Chant brought it to a pause. It was then that Magnus heard her ask the boy to say good-bye to her, "for you won't see me again, Benny, you know, till I come to live with you tomorrow night!"

But at this instant of time an event occurred that put the lady completely out of his mind; for he saw over her shoulder and across the boy's profile the door of one of the Laboratory buildings open, and a white-coated person issue from it.

"Murphy!" he cried in his heart. "It's Murphy, the Sworn Tormentor!"

No, no! he could not be mistaken. He had heard Benny describe this man with that excess of horror that makes a child's words irrefutable.

"Get out of the way, Benny!" he shouted at him, for he saw that Benny had not seen the man yet. "Let her come in! You'd *better* come in with us, Mrs. Lily; you really had! Your sister may be all the afternoon with the doctor; and this is a terrible place to wait about in."

But with that same passionate unreason that seemed to characterize everything she did at this epoch of her life, Mrs. Lily only drew back, peevish and wilful and uttered a little silly laugh.

"It's all right," she murmured, while Benny fumbled at the door-handle and resisted Magnus' attempts to pull him out of the way. Then Magnus could see her telling young Chant to drive on; and as the car started he heard her call out over Benny's thin wrists, "It's all right. It'll be my wedding vigil!"

All the way to Chickerel, while Benny continued chattering, just as if Dr. Brush's party were not yet over, the image of that man in the white coat, issuing from that building, nailed Magnus' imagination with a bodkin of torment.

"They're at it, in there!" he thought. "And these others are probably worse than Brush. What a coward I am! This vivisection is like the old gladiatorial shows. It won't be stopped till someone dies to stop it!" He lay back and closed his eyes, pretending to sleep, so as to keep the boy quiet, but under his darkened eye-balls his thoughts had never been so rending. "How can any one of us have a single moment of happiness," he thought, "when there's such a thing as vivisection in the world? And yet would I, to stop it once and for all, and to burn all their operating tables and all their straps and all their instruments, be prepared to sacrifice Curly?"

The coming together of these two electrified nerves in Magnus' nature, his erotic passion and his sickening twinge over vivisection, threw him, as the car wound its way along these narrow lanes, into a series of jumpy contortions. He kept experiencing a twitching in his long legs, and every now and then with a muscular contraction that corresponded to what he visioned was happening under Mr. Murphy's devotion to science he would draw up one of his heels along the floor of the car.

"I suppose," he thought, "the only thing to do is to *assume* that life contains cruelties so unspeakable that if you think about them you go mad! That's what it is! To think about Murphy and Dr. Brush's dogs brings you into the care of Dr. Brush! I wonder how many of his patients lie awake at night thinking of the dogs?"

It was curious how powerful Magnus' imagination became at this moment as he contemplated young Chant's back and grew aware that Benny was now counting... one... two... three... four... the beats of his own pulse by his Ingersoll watch. His imagination made his passion for Curly take the form of holding in his hand a girl's belt with which he kept warding off the active fingers of Mr. Murphy from his dog's vitals. It was a peculiarity of Magnus' nerves — especially of these two major nerves of his, the erotic one and the one that identified itself with physical suffering — that when they obsessed him to any extreme tension they always induced in his brain *the image of dancing.* This scene, therefore, which his sympathetic demon now called up under his throbbing eyeballs, quickly became a dance, himself beating off the flickering wrists of Mr. Murphy with the girl's belt while the very air round them jigged and dazzled with the iniquity of these cruelties in the name of science.

One curious thing about what he felt at this moment was that the ground underneath his feet — for Cattistock's car seemed to fade into non-existence — was not the chalky mud over which he was really moving, but the smooth, wet sea-sand, ribbed, glittering, warm, and covered with tiny little pyramidal hills composed of minute models in sand of the sand-worms that threw them up. This sea-sand — as his long legs kept giving these queer frog-like spasmodic jerks — was the *wet* sand of the Weymouth Beach, down there beyond the *dry* sand, where the donkeys and goat-carriages always stood. And as his tormented brain made these desperate attempts to bring the intensity of his passion for Curly into some mystical relationship with what those dogs felt, he began to be aware that when he thought of the “wet” sand — and it had to be the “wet” sand, not the dry — there arose in his memory some saying, like the “logos” of an oracle, that must have been uttered by his father when he was too young to comprehend it. The “Logos” itself thus uttered by the elder Muir when he may easily have been watching the little Magnus dig canals for the inflowing waves, escaped the grown man now completely, but a kind of aura of it hung in the air and came to him in his tension like the clear light at the end of a tunnel.

His lesson with Benny went better than he had dared to hope, after the way Dr. Brush’s ego-orgy had stirred the malice in the child, but he could not help remembering that pitiful look in Mrs. Lily’s face as she clung to the car when he left the boy at five o’clock with the little yellow dog scrambling all over him.

“There was a new picture of your darlings, Tissty and Tossty in yesterday’s Circular,” he remarked, as he stood up to go.

“Oh, Mr. Muir,” cried Benny with gleaming eyes, “is that picture... I mean does that picture...” the boy blushed and stopped.

“You mean,” said Magnus with the full gravity that such a topic required, “does it show their legs as well as yours does? Yes, old chap, I swear I think it’s still more exciting. Only listen, Benny: The Eumenides will bring you bad luck if after enjoying Tissty and Tossty you torment your dad’s wife. Never mind how much the devil drives you to do! You mark my words. You’ll have no luck with Tissty and Tossty if you’re cruel to this poor lady. The great thing, old chap, is to enjoy our Tisstys and Tosstys to the limit; but to *pay it back to the gods* by being awfully decent to our step-mothers!”

“But I don’t *like* her, Mr. Muir. I don’t like the way she—” and the boy screwed up his small face and person in a simulated shudder of physical distaste.

“That doesn’t matter;” said Magnus very gravely. “We’ve all got to put up with that sort of thing. How do we know that people we’re awfully fond of, like Tissty and Tossty, wouldn’t feel *us* getting on *their* nerves sometimes?”

“Why did you make that funny face, Mr. Muir, and frown like that? Does your girl, that you’re going to marry in a fortnight, not like it when you kiss her?”

Magnus got very red.

“No one likes to be kissed *always.* That’s just what I’m telling you. And that’s why, in such a mix-up as this world is, we ought never to be horrid to people if we want good luck for ourselves.”

“Do you mean, Mr. Muir—”

Magnus burst out at him:

“Don’t be so silly, Benny, pretending to be stupider than you are! Because you don’t torment a woman, that doesn’t mean you’ve got to submit to her always. You know very well what I’m trying to say.”

Magnus was rather astonished when just as he was leaving Peninsular Lodge old Eliza Chant appeared on the scene and asked him if he knew where the master was, and whether she had better hold back Benny’s tea till he came in.

“I don’t know, I’m sure, Mrs. Chant! No, if I were you I’d give Benny his tea. I think he must want it after our lesson today.”

The man who had told Benny so dogmatically and so crossly that he “knew very well what he was trying to say”, wished bitterly enough that he himself knew of a formula for these difficult subtleties, when having said good-night to young Chant, he made his way on foot through the village of

Upwey. Had his friend Gaul been right in so strongly recommending him to disregard Curly's direct command?

The Wix cottage, a little thatched one of the kind that has been for centuries the dominant feature of English villages, lay at the end of a by-lane that led to some high ground bordering the railway-line; an eminence from which, as you passed it in the train from Dorchester it was possible to get a glimpse of the whole of Lodmoor and beyond Lodmoor of the towering precipice of the White Nose stretching out over the sea.

When he drew near enough to the cottage as to be able to catch the glow from its windows he could actually see through the gathering twilight a gleaming point of light, down there, which, though it must have been more than a couple of miles away, marked the position of Gipsy May's hut. He now lessened his pace to a very slow walk, and presently stopped altogether.

"Damn young Gaul!" he thought. "It's easy enough to give advice when you're safe in Trigonia House. How would he like it to be invading the lonely habitation of two women who had emphatically told him not to come?"

And Magnus smiled grimly at the impossibility of imagining Mr. Gaul in his own present predicament. Then his mood changed.

"But he isn't a fool. He isn't an idiot. He's seen *something* of the world. He visits Mrs. Cobbold. I expect I'm frightening myself ridiculously. Curly doesn't know that I dislike weddings. How should she, when I'm always wanting our own to come so quick? She thinks it will be nice to go there together. And after all I *can* sympathize with her mother's wanting her these days. She won't have her for long. Oh, my love, my sweet love! shall I be able to make you happy?"

He looked about for some convenient place to sit down, so that he might collect his thoughts and light a cigarette.

“Perhaps they’re in the middle of tea,” he thought.

And then the unpleasant idea came to him that they might even have visitors... her aunt from the Upwey grocery, or some shop-girl friend from Weymouth. At last he found what he was looking for in an old disused pile of rough blocks of wood, of the kind known as sleepers, that are laid under the metals across railway tracks.

In the now deepening twilight he could detect far to the East two more lights in addition to the little faint glimmer that he assumed to be Lodmoor Hut. One of these was high up, and far distant, the other nearer, but more out to sea.

“The White Nose cottages,” he said to himself, “and a ship off Redcliff somewhere!”

The idea of Redcliff made him think at once of the elder Muir. He couldn’t help smiling a little, even in his perturbed state of mind, as he wondered what his father would say if he saw him sitting here, making every sort of excuse to put off intruding on the girl he hoped to marry in a fortnight! He began an imaginary explanation to the dead man of all the practical moves he had been making. He explained to him how he had made a sort of tentative arrangement at another lodging-house in Brunswick Terrace; and how he had been able to reach the penetrating conclusion, even without aid from Mr. Gaul, that Miss Le Fleau’s was not the place for this daring venture. At this particular season, he reminded the elder Muir, there were so few visitors that it was possible to leave this important matter quite open. He even confided to the dead man how he found Curly evasive and a little non-committal when he introduced such domestic problems. He went so far as to confess to the elder Muir that he had thought of purchasing a special license to avoid the publicity of having their banns published.

What he did *not* tell him was that it seemed rather odd that Curly should be so lack-lustre over all these arrangements and so ready to drift on with nothing decided! His own private notion on the subject, compounded of all manner of Mid-Victorian refinements, was that a modest and simple-natured girl was shy about these details, shy as she would be about the purchasing of a trousseau, a word that he always connected, perhaps because it was French, exclusively with underclothes. He knew that the girl's mother had no illusions any more as to his power of purchasing trousseau, or anything else, but he suspected her of being the cause of all his difficulties with the daughter.

"She puts silly ideas into her head," was what he had decided from his first encounter with her.

Contemplating now these four lights, Curly's, the Lodmoor Hut, the White Nose, and the ship off Redcliff, the vibration of the thrilling excitement within him, when he thought of that shell-like head on a pillow at his side broke against the thought of that horrible emergence of the white-coated Murphy from the laboratory door.

"Had he left a dog strapped down there," he thought, "till Brush was finished with Lucinda?"

It came over him that he could easily imagine a sensitive person, who brooded night and day upon vivisection, going mad from the horror of it.

"It's queer," he said to himself, "that I should have come across Murphy at this moment of moments. What would Curly feel if I *did* throw everything to the winds and give up my life to fighting vivisection?"

He buried the burning end of his cigarette in the damp earth by his side, and leaning forward as he squatted on the sleeper, hugged his shin-bones.

With a hoarse detonation, as it emerged from the long tunnel near Maiden Castle, a passenger train from Dorchester rolled by, throwing out as it did so jets of white steam in reverberating spasms. It did not stop at Upwey; and he could hear the low rumble of it dying off down the valley, as it ran along the edge of Radipole Lake. The shock of the train's passing helped Magnus to gather up his forces. He very soon knew, as his fingers clutched the edge of the damp sleeper beneath him, that this was a turning-point in his life.

"The struggle for happiness," he thought, "is no joke. Every living thing struggles for it, while anguish, like that which these devils inflict on dogs, writhes, tosses, screams, moans around its pursuit."

It was now nearly dark and the four spots of light had grown much larger and brighter. He hugged his knees and swayed from side to side. He began to feel as if in the process of staring at those four glimmering points he was slipping clean out of his bony carcass. As this feeling intensified itself it was accompanied by a curious half-consciousness *of what his body would look like to his soul* if he were completely outside of it.

"I shouldn't kill myself if I lost Curly," he thought. "I should just go on, taking my walks, teaching Latin, reading Greek, talking to Father's spirit. But would such a life have any happiness *if she weren't here?"*

On this question he concentrated, as he sat there in the darkness, the weight of his whole organic being; and it came over him that in all these years, whose passing had left him a middle-aged man, he had gradually — under the influence of the elder Muir — accepted a certain grim resolution to force himself to be happy, as his sole human religion. And it seemed to him that he saw the difference now between himself and his majestic begetter with a deadly clearness.

"Father," he thought, "was happy by nature. *My* soul takes my body as though by a leash, like an animal, and forces it to go through the motions of happiness."

Magnus had the peculiarity of being thoroughly "anti-narcissistic", that is to say it gave him a real twinge of unendurable discomfort to think of his physical appearance. It is the more remarkable, therefore, that at this moment as he imagined himself holding his body by a leash he did get an intensely vivid feeling of himself sitting there on a sleeper and looking at those lights! There wasn't a muscular excrescence, or a bony contour, or a fibrous hollow in his whole flesh-covered skeleton that he didn't *feel,* as he crouched there, hugging his knees and swaying a little from side to side. He felt the bone-points of his buttocks against the pressure of the sleeper. He felt the brittleness of his skull against the pressure of his cloth cap, and he got the sensation that he was travelling through immeasurable gulfs of empty, black air, he and those four lights, Curly's, Lodmoor's, the White Nose's and the vessel's off Redcliff, towards nothing and from nothing. Yes! and *with* nothing except an ultimate, defiant self-awareness, one skeleton's and four lights'; destructible and yet indestructible, travelling, travelling through eternity!

It was only by indulging himself to the limit in such thoughts, thoughts wherein he lost the rational proportions of things, that he got the courage at last to jump up from his seat and rush to the cottage-door.

The interior of Mrs. Wix's front-room was certainly the reverse of welcoming, when, as if to punish him for his disobedience, the old lady ushered him into this fireless and airless throne-room of propriety. There he had to wait, in company with a new-lit lamp, with which at this close acquaintance it would have irked him to compare his soul, for it smoked, stank, flared and spat, and acted towards him with a malignity that seemed inspired. Sitting miserable and chilly in this place, in constant fear lest that lamp-glass would burst, and aware that the stolid and unsympathetic faces of Curly's relations, all of whom seemed to be glowering at him out of extremely stiff wedding clothes, held nothing for him but icy disapproval, Magnus felt, for the first time since he had approached her cottage today, a faint but very definite anger against the girl.

There was not a sound to be heard in the whole house. Was Curly in bed? Were they playing some game with him and keeping silence on purpose? Oh, how stuffy this room was! It smelt as if from every thread of every tassel and from every bit of fluff on every mat, there emanated a purgatorial entelechy of joyless and pitiless propriety. At last there came the sound of the opening and shutting of the kitchen door. There were steps in the passage and Curly's mother came in, a little, wizened old woman, scrupulously neat, who had the peculiarity of picking up her crochet-work whenever she got on her feet, although when *not* on her feet no one ever saw her crocheting, and who now put down this humbugging fabric on the table as she took a seat; but immediately afterwards got up, went over to it, and replacing a loose end of it which she had left hanging over the table's edge, folded it into a form that might have been called a qualified rhomboid.

"My darling will be down to say good-evening, Mr. Muir. You must excuse us. We were struck all of a heap when your knock came."

"I hope nothing is the matter, Mrs. Wix?"

To this the old woman only gave a portentous sigh; and he went on:

"Perhaps... couldn't we... it would be rather nicer... I should feel much more at home... they are such friendly places I always think... much nicer if... in fact *won't* you let me come... won't you let us go — *into the kitchen,* Mrs. Wix?"

He rose as he spoke, to give emphasis to his words, and gazed fixedly at the door, as if he could find it in him to *project* Mrs. Wix like one of those conjurer's ladies, either intact, or in temporary halves, clean through this closed portal into warmth and welcome.

"My darling and me thought we'd do a little sewing for the wedding."

Still on his feet Magnus was compelled to pause in his spiritual teleportations.

"Oh, Mrs. Wix," he cried, inhaling this deadly hundred-years-old fluff, mixed with modern lamp-soot, with less hopeless exasperation, now that he learnt that Curly was taking advantage of their separation to work on her trousseau, "Oh, Mrs. Wix, that's sweet of you to help her! I knew it was a bother to her; but I know very well how she feels; and leaving you, too, so soon, and living in Weymouth besides, and having so much to think of in addition! How stupid I am! I never thought of how she must want her time for... for this necessary sewing."

The old lady regarded him with stony bewilderment.

"I told her," she thought, "I told her all along that he was not quite *all there*. They takes it in different ways, these tutors what teach dead languages, but I always told her that tutors be neither plain people nor plain gentry, neither quite sensible nor quite dotty. They be a tribe by their wone selves, tutors be; and if this one doesn't beat all—"

And she explained, as if to an infant, or to someone not quite "all there", that when people went to weddings of such gentlemen as Mr. Cattistock, if it were only to be as you might say in the back seats, people had to do a considerable deal of needlework first, "let alone what such as have got men, who lays themselves out to be good providers, may think it only right to buy in the best market!"

So it was for Cattistock's wedding, after all, not for her own at all, that this precious evening had been filched away from him and flung into the unrestoring past!

He left the door and moved over to the table, feeling quite nauseated now by the stuffiness of the room. He began picking absent-mindedly at that carefully-folded piece of masquerade crochet. A rush of hot anger suddenly burst up from somewhere within him. His face assumed that particular look of the elder Muir's, when the head-master of the school tried to bully him.

"Mrs. Wix," he said, in a low vibrating voice looking down upon the little woman from his full height. "Will you kindly go up at once to Curly, and tell her that I want to speak to her before I go home?"

"Sure-*lie*, sure-*lie*, Mr. Muir," murmured the old lady, as she glanced quickly up at him and saw the ominous quivering of his long shaven lip. She rose from her chair and gathered up the crochet-work. Once in possession of this symbol of a life of blameless activity, her sly composure re-asserted itself. "He's angry," she thought. "I must send her down to him! I can't have her throwing away such a simple party — though he is a tutor!"

Aloud she said: "Come into the kitchen, Mr. Muir, and I'll send my darling down to 'ee, though she *be* all dimsy-dowsy with her sewing — and with no dress on, neither!"

Left in the kitchen Magnus' habitual good-nature speedily returned. The warmth emanating from the stove, the wholesome smell of some savoury stew under a lid that kept heaving itself up and down, the brightly polished utensils, a rose-coloured Primula in the window, all combined, after his misery in that terrible front-room, to restore his ruffled equanimity. The idea of clasping his sweet girl to his heart in another second began to make his pulses beat deliriously.

"Perhaps she'll send the old woman to bed," he thought, as he recalled one heavenly evening when this desirable consummation had been brought about.

His face shone with expectant delight when he heard steps descending the stairs; but it was only the mother again.

"She do say to tell 'ee," Mrs. Wix gasped, out of breath from her hurried embassy, "that anyone what won't put 'isself to the trouble of taking anyone to the season's best wedding, and hasn't even thought to bring her a rose or two from flowershop, don't desarve to be said good-night to. But she do say that if 'ee promises to be there, by clock tomorrow, with a bouquet of pretty roses, 'ee shall have a kiss, and maybe two on 'em, afore 'a goes."

Magnus capitulated without a moment's hesitation.

"Tell her I'll be there," he said, "and I'll bring the roses. Only *do* tell her to hurry up! She needn't—" It was on the tip of his tongue to say "put on her dress" for an image of white soft loveliness with bare shoulders hovered before him; but he closed his capitulation more discreetly. "She needn't titivate herself," he added with a smile, using a word characteristic of the elder Muir.

When the old woman had retired once more with this message of warm surrender, the image of Mr. Gaul's philosophic countenance, gazing accusingly at him through its spectacles, did penetrate his glowing mood for a moment; but he said to himself:

"I'll tell him he was right and that we had a happy evening."

A more than "happy" quarter-of-an-hour the tutor certainly did have, when Curly, but not with the bare shoulders he had presumed to vision, came hurrying down. Seldom had he found her sweeter, more yielding, more tender. This may have been in some degree due to a sagacious hint from her mother; for the old woman had had time to whisper, "Don't 'ee afflict the poor soul too far, me pretty. I seed 'un just now at the end of 's patience; and I tell 'ee he's a man like any other when blood be up!" but it was also due to the excitement of the great Cattistock ceremony, and to the fact that she had been spending such an industrious, uneventful, cloistered day.

Although not "sent to bed" Mrs. Wix left them discreetly alone, and Curly did think to herself, as over her enraptured fiancé's shoulder while she yielded less coyly than usual to his ardent caresses, she stared wistfully into her own beautiful eyes in the little mirror among the plates on the dresser:

"It might have been much worse. He's a real gentleman in the way he touches a girl. I wouldn't wonder if I couldn't keep him from doing it for months after I sleep with him. Perhaps he'll *never* make me let him do it. That bar-maid at the Weeping Woman, that day I was waiting so long for Sip, said she knew a case when a girl never let a man have her, though they'd been married for years. Oh, deary I! I wish to the Lord a person could marry and sleep single!"

And then, while the warmth of the man's dalliance, as she tried to make herself soft and yielding, carried her thoughts back to her seducer's bolder usage, she couldn't restrain a sad little smile, as she gazed into her own eyes.

"I'm thankful," she said to herself, "he only does this... but oh, Sip, oh, Sip! if it were *you,* my sweet Love, my clothes would be off of me before I could say—"

And she made a protesting, endearing, girlish little click with her tongue, as if she had actually felt her frock slip to the ground.

SEA-HOLLY

NEARLY TWO HOURS BEFORE MAGNUS LEFT BRUNSWICK TERRACE TO join the Poxwell sisters, Perdita and the Jobber were enjoying their first rendezvous. They met at ten by the clock on the esplanade and were both in such a trance of delight at meeting that they stood talking for a quarter of an hour eagerly and passionately without moving from the spot. The Jobber was telling her about yesterday's storm, though he made no mention of Cattistock, and she was telling him how kind Jerry had been in helping her to get off early without having to see Mrs. Cobbold at all. At last the Jobber said:

"We've got the whole day haven't we? You don't have to be back for supper, even, do you?"

Perdita, smiling a smile of school-girl radiance which made her look extremely young and almost beautiful, shook her head.

"Well then," he went on, "the first thing we'll do is to go to Corder's Wharf where I keep the 'Slug'. You won't mind riding in *her,* will you, even if she is a bit fishy? Then we'll decide, as we're driving, what we'll do in Portland."

Perdita, "feeling nothing to the revairse", as Bum Trot would say, obeyed without a second's hesitation when he told her to take his arm, and they moved along the esplanade with faces so transformed by the blind delight of being together that several people who knew the Jobber well but could no more arrest his attention now than they could have stopped one of yesterday's waves on Chesil, turned round, when they had passed by, to stare wonderingly at them. But Perdita thought in her heart:

"What's the use of being silly about it? He has no ties that I know of. I am absolutely free. And, besides, I'm earning my living. There's no one in this whole town who has a right to say a word if we go about together!"

They went down St. Mary's Street, and he led her slowly along the pavement in front of the Guildhall, stopping to make her admire the Queen Anne carving above the entrance.

"That's where Sippy Ballard, our new Town Clerk, works," said the Jobber. "In just about an hour he'll be coming down those steps to go to lunch. He'd wonder how on earth an old dizzard like me got hold of such a beautiful girl!"

"Hush!" cried Perdita. "I *know* young Ballard. He'd want to stop and talk to us. Don't mention his name, for heaven's sake, for fear he'll come through that door now, before we've got past!"

He thought to himself:

"I wish we'd gone straight along the esplanade to the ferry! I'd like to have her in a boat more than anything. Well, we'll be nearer the 'Slug' by crossing the Bridge."

But, as luck would have it, by taking this particular way to the harbour they were compelled to walk close past the door of the Weeping Woman. As they passed this spot it came over the Jobber with the rush of an exigency too imperative to be disregarded, that it would be nice to take Perdita into this old haunt of his.

Perdita was in such a happy trance that she would have stepped straight into the "Cormorant" if he had led her to its side — and the Cormorant *was* moored within a stone's throw of the Weeping Woman — so that to enter a tavern that reminded her of a particular old wine-shop in Guernsey, where her uncle, the Purser, used often to take her, required no effort at all. She found it a little difficult to adjust herself to the situation, all the same, when she was inside. The bar-room was so thick with smoke and so murmurous with a low-muttered buzz of conversation, and the dim light, for the old house with its narrow Gothic windows was over-topped by tall ship-chandlers' stores, appeared so obscure and misty, compared with the glimmering atmosphere out-of-doors, that for a minute or two, although she felt not the slightest agitation, she did feel bewildered. He took her straight up to the bar-counter and introduced her to his friend Miss Guppy, who treated her — perhaps because of a certain air that her Channel-Island clothes gave her, but more likely out of feminine curiosity — with an exaggerated deference. He made her sit down opposite him at the little round table directly under the bar-counter which the bar-maid always kept for him by a thousand charming devices.

It was not, indeed, till he had disposed of two glasses of whiskey and had refilled Perdita's wine-glass, that he became aware that the striking figure of Sylvanus was seated at a table at the further end of the room between *two* young women. The Jobber recognized both these girls at once. He was surprised and rather amused to see them in such proximity and apparently in such singular harmony under the big man's dominance.

Helped by the whiskey, he succeeded in keeping intact a rigid mental barrier at the rear of his mind through which no thought of Cattistock, no thought of tomorrow, was allowed to break in upon his felicity. Luckily it was quite in accordance with the Jobber's character to be ready to live with absorbed passion in the emotion of the present, while he let the future take care of itself.

Little did Perdita know the full peril to their love of what he was suppressing; but she did divine, even while she gave herself up to this fate-given happiness, that there was something dangerous, disordered, desperate about his mood. But, after all, she had never had a lover before; and what did she know of the Jobber, beyond the town's gossip? Of this gossip she *had* heard a little, and she had resolved, when she got an opportunity, that she would challenge him about it, but she certainly could not have gone on quietly sipping her wine and staring into his eyes with a dazed and drugged beatitude, if she had known that it had become a maniacal imperative with him to prepare for killing his enemy before nightfall tomorrow.

Having nodded at Peg Frampton and smiled at the infatuated Marret, for Sylvanus was in one of his Seventh Heavens, the Jobber bothered his head no more about them, nor did he even take the trouble to explain to Perdita, whose back was towards them, with whom it was that he exchanged signals.

Perdita was too happy to think of anything save that the impossible had come true! Here she sat in this little old-fashioned place, knowing she was loved by the one man she had ever met who could give her the magic feeling "that redeems all sorrows". With an almost savage realism she found herself noting every smallest physical peculiarity in the man opposite her — how he had a small white scar over his left eyebrow, how his drinking had brought out a little drop of sweat, that was trickling down towards this white spot, how he had put on, for this special occasion, a new blue jersey that was of a rather lighter colour than the one he wore yesterday when he came to High House, how his eyes, though grey in the main, possessed several little marbly markings in them of a faint yellow and green and amber, how his lips, though full and finely turned, were rather babyish-looking than sensual; how often, when he got agitated and breathed heavily, which seemed to be a peculiarity of his under any slight stimulus, these lips of his remained apart, showing with startling clearness where one of his large white teeth had been broken off short, leaving a rather disconcerting irregularity.

The Weeping Woman was so close to the Harbour's edge that at one moment she thought she could hear the lapping of water, when Sylvanus' voice — and a vague notion that it *might* be Sylvanus crossed her mind — sank to silence. Yes, for a moment she fancied she could hear the gurglings and suckings of the tide round the wharf-piles and its motions against the slippery stones. She thought to herself, even while with her lips she was telling him certain simple details about her life at home in Guernsey:

"I never knew how love casts out fear! If he asks me to sleep with him tonight I'll do it. Why not? I don't care! He may easily turn against me when we know each other better; and I'm going to snatch at all of his love — all! all! — while I can get it. Yes! Uncle was very fond of me. We used to be together all the time when he came home from his trips." But her excited thoughts went recklessly on. "Better go as far as possible, while I've got the chance, so that when he gets tired of me I'll have something. I wonder what a child of ours would be like? It would be sure to be more like him than me; though it would be more mine than his!"

She felt angry with Sylvanus now — yes! it *must* be Sylvanus — for talking so loudly; and she felt suspicious of him too, and hostile to him, while all manner of scandalous stories about him floated through her mind. She had indeed listened so often to Mrs. Cobbold's version of the man's peculiarities that it would have been strange if some sediment of evil had not clung to her vision of him.

"I suppose," she thought, when turning round for a moment she glanced with an obscure distaste at the back of that grizzled elongated head, protruding from the frayed tweed coat. "I suppose he captivates these young girls with all this mystical rubbish — Oh, how I dislike these emotional preaching voices! — and then, when he's spoilt their innocence and got hold of them body and soul, he tires of them and picks up new ones!"

It surprised her to note that none of the other guests in the bar of the Weeping Woman shared her hostility to the rising and falling inflection of this man's voice. They seemed rather pleased than otherwise to continue their private exchange of furtive whispers — they were mostly couples of opposite sexes — under cover, as it were, of this metaphysical drum.

Perdita herself went on telling the Jobber all sorts of stories of her early life and of the Guernsey coast. And as she talked it became clearer and clearer to her that all her girlhood's imaginings about some mysterious lover who was more like a merman than a human being, had really and truly been fulfilled in this man.

By degrees a natural desire for a closer intimacy than was possible in a place like this mounted up in the Jobber. But where could he take her so that they should be alone? Till this moment the Jobber had never suffered from the conventional obstacles to free intercourse between the sexes which as Magnus had discovered, blight the *furtivos amores* of middle class persons in England. To take her to his own house was impossible. He had once brought in the redoubtable Miss Guppy and Mrs. Trot had been positively rude to her. To take Perdita to his father's dwelling, which was between the village of Easton and that "Last House" where Sylvanus lived, would have been easy, but he would have had almost as much difficulty in being alone with her *there* as under the tutelage of Mrs. Trot. What the devil *should* they do? At last, even as he listened to her telling him about the autumn fishing season at her home, the thought crossed his mind, why not steal a leaf out of his enemy's book and take her to the "Head"? The Gadget woman was a good friend of his. 'Melia, Celia and Sue were romantic-minded girls, entirely free from spitefulness and worldliness. Very few quarrymen frequented the place. "By Dum, that's the ticket!" The blood seemed to leave the pit of his stomach altogether and rush violently to his head. If the

Dog could take a room at the Gadgets' why couldn't he? He had come to feel towards this eleventh of February as if it were a whole month. And if the night was added to it — for what, after all, did Mrs. Cobbold matter? — it would be more than a month. It would be a whole year; and let come what *might* come on the morrow. He would have had his day! He wouldn't tell her, by Dum! no, he wouldn't tell her, about its being the end, the last of him, till 'twas near dawn and they had to part. That Margate murderer, they found with his girl, must have put much worse things than an unacted tomorrow out of his mind!

"Yes, as soon as she's finished what she's telling me now I'll get up and pay; then we'll go. By Dum! what moonshine that bloke *is* jawing about! It beats me how Peggie Frampton can stand it or the other one either."

What Sylvanus was "jawing about" in his queer manner just then, and he made it sound like something midway between a magician's invocation and a tipsy commentary upon Spinoza, was an impassioned appeal to Peg and Marret to sink their souls fathom-deep — even as they sat drinking in the Weeping Woman — into the everlasting Absolute. As he kept murmuring and muttering about the "Absolute" it was perfectly clear to both Peg and Marret that the feelings he described were rather obscured than revealed by the words he used. What annoyed the Jobber in the man's way of talking, what got on Perdita's nerves in his prophetic voice, didn't touch Peg and Marret at all. They loved him in the real "absolute" sense about which he was talking, and what they got from him was made up of sidelong intimations, droll by-issues, quaint betrayals of personal peculiarities and little unconscious gestures. The "Absolute" which these two girls got from him was indeed much more akin to the Chinese "Tao" than to any Parmenidean equilibrium. It was an Absolute that saturated with itself certain concrete objects more than others; and the girls began to divine that they could find it in the smallest “minute particulars” of their own lives. They loved him indeed with such disinterested intensity that it was what he was feeling behind his words, and what he *was* behind his words that caught them. They used his masculine discriminations like a skiff, in which they could ride the rocking waves of their own slippery and evasive natures.

With the clairvoyance of love they noticed that Sylvanus would stop every now and then and stare, with the simple gravity of a reverential animal, at a window through which the harbour-noises seemed to be entering the bar-room. They had come to know him so well as to be able to catch him out, as it were, and to get the essence of his spirit, in a thousand quaint unconscious gestures; and it was from these odd little physical tricks of his that his everlasting Absolute came filtering into their souls. They had come to detect, for instance, what a mania he had for such mysterious inanimates as air, earth, water, fire, and how he seemed to worship, not poetically, but *really,* the sun, the sea, and the sky. They weren’t in the least surprised, therefore, when he suddenly stopped his oracular mutterings, and gave a funny little ritualistic nod, which was clearly a religious obligation to him, as if he had caught sight of an altar, in the direction of the harbour. This, they knew, was his quite personal worship of the sea, his superstitious acknowledgment of the divinity of the sea, and they always got more of a shiver of real awe from it, when he made these awkward little nods, which he evidently thought no one observed, than when he chanted his ponderous metaphysical runes.

To Sylvanus’ own mind his peculiarities were a simple, direct, categorical way of living upon the earth, that had no connection with affection or nonsense or silliness. In fact he regarded them as an evidence of shrewd common-sense.

Perdita had learnt from Mrs. Cobbold to consider him an archhumbug, a man made up of evil subtlety and vicious hypocrisy; and this was precisely the sort of misunderstanding that, when Sylvanus encountered it, puzzled, bewildered, and disconcerted him; though it never made him change his ways. How could it do this when his ways were a fatality with him — much more integral than his Viking mustache — and born of a really *awful* simplicity in his temperament to which his intellect gave a shameless "carte blanche"?

What he thought at this very moment when Peg and Marret saw him — though no one else saw him — make this ridiculous bow to the sea through the smoke-begrimed window of the Weeping Woman, might be put into words like this:

"Sessa! Sessa! The beer in this bar has better froth than any John Gadget sells. What divine intelligence young girls have! I think they grasp the most difficult conceptions. These two are perfect. And they have no jealousy of each other. Aye! what celestial good fortune that I ever met these two! I understand them completely, and they understand me. Gipsy May is one too many for me. I'm too simple to follow her. But who *could* follow her? She's a scaramouch-woman! She beats me at my own game. I've had to think myself free of our race's nonsense, while she was born independent. She'll play me some shocking trick one of these days and only love me the more afterwards! I can't understand her. Life would be easy without her; but its salt, its bitter, smarting, tickling, rousing salt would be quite gone. I can't live with her. I've found *that* out. But to live without her — I can't imagine it! What goes on in her head no human being knows. She's completely inhuman, but that's her witchery, that's the essence of it. I hope she *does* come tonight and see me, but I feel a trifle uneasy when I think of it. If she *does,* what will she say to Marret? She could be heavenly to her if she *wanted* to, but *will* she — *will* she" —

It was at this point that he realized that without question he could hear the harbour-waves.

"O everlasting Sea!" he said to himself, talking to it quite quietly, just as if it were a person he had suddenly realized was present, "O divine, eternal, mysterious Sea, I never knew you were so near!" and it was at this point that he made his hurried, secretive, spontaneous little bow before he went on thinking about Gipsy May —

"Will she be nice to her? She won't be jealous in the ordinary sense. But you never know with May. She might hide her shoes or burn her clothes!"

Thus pondered Sylvanus as with Quixotic obstinacy he continued his oracular words. But his rhapsodical discourse was soon interrupted by an event that disturbed everything and everyone in the place. This was the sudden opening of the bar-room door and the spectacular entrance of none other than his brother Jerry accompanied by Tossty. It was not the clown's fault that his entrance with the haughty dancer created such a stir. Tossty had been seduced by the amenity of this spring-like day to wear a cloak of such a brilliant scarlet hue that towards this surprising adornment the whole heterogeneous company directed their fascinated gaze.

"Hullo!" cried Jerry. "Why, look who's here! And how are *you* enjoying this heavenly weather?" and he went straight up to his brother and kissed him in a somewhat un-English fashion. "Here," he went on, "I don't know whether you've met our great Regent star, Miss Clive — better known as Tossty? Toss, old girl, here's luck for you! She's been teasing me, Van, for the last month, to be introduced to you; only you never come to our little performances. Well! What do you think of him now you *have* met?"

Marret took the opportunity of this brotherly greeting to move up close to Peg, to whom she rather pitifully clung, as if from the other's superior social knowledge she would get support in this pressure of events.

Glancing down from where she stood, her hand resting indifferently in that of Sylvanus and a slight frown upon her face, as if angry with Jerry for what he had just said, the scarlet-cloaked dancer gave a start when she recognized Peg, and then, pleased to find an excuse to be contrarious she snatched her hand away from the tweed-coated man and extended it to the girl.

"Why, Jerry," she cried. "Here's your little friend of Sark House!"And then, stooping gracefully over Peg, from whose side Marret now felt impelled to draw back, she murmured in a penetrating voice. "You must come round to the theatre one of these days."

Meanwhile Jerry, calling to the bar-maid to bring them "some of that old brandy of yours, dearie, that you gave us the other night", caught sight of Perdita and the Jobber and greeted them in his most affable manner. Perdita half rose in response to this, but aware of the black cloud that had descended on her lover's face contented herself with giving the clown a grateful and almost confiding smile.

"You see how happy we are," this smile said. "And it's all due to your indulgence!"

It was then, to poor Marret's consternation, that the exponent of the Absolute called the scarlet lady's attention to his other companion; and he twisted one of his great drooping mustache-ends with self-forgetting satisfaction when he saw the wilful beauty shake hands quite sweetly with the terrified Punch-and-Judy girl.

Miss Guppy, full of fluttered delight at having been called "dearie" by Jerry Cobbold now came bustling up with shining eyes and panting bosom and cleared a table not far from the one where Sylvanus had been sitting. Here she placed the refreshment ordered by her new guests and gazed in fascinated approval at the scarlet cloak.

The presence of the great clown and his dazzling companion, brought into such close contact with them in this small place, evidently discountenanced one or two couples, for there was a movement to pay and clear off. But a few simple-looking sailors and their wenches remained, though even these, in place of continuing their whispers, stared in silence now at that silky, dark figure with its flaming background haughtily sipping neat brandy while Jerry talked to his brother, who had resumed his place between the two young girls.

"No, I didn't know you could hear it so clearly here," the clown was saying. "Listen, Toss! Do *you* hear it? It's nice, isn't it? It makes you feel as if you were in a ship. Do you remember, Van, old man, how they took us, when we were kids, to that old training-ship — the Boscawen, wasn't it? — and how we heard the water gurgling outside and how scared I was, but you said 'It's only the sea.' That quieted me. 'Where-ever it flows,' you said, 'it's always the same sea!' And I've often thought of that since. Yes, you've said some good things in your time, brother! 'It's always the same sea'; I've often thought of that when life's got me by the hair. 'It's always the same life,' I've thought to myself; and known I had to stick it out somehow."

"I've been trying to make these girls," said Sylvanus, "recognize just what you say, Jerry; only it's so hard to get it into words. But it isn't *life,* brother; you're wrong there, if you'll excuse my saying so. It's no more life than this sound we hear in here is the harbour! This sound — you certainly *do* hear it today — is in the harbour but it isn't the harbour. Come, Miss Clive, can't you help me out? Tell these girls that Jerry's wrong when he says it's *life* that's 'always the same'. When you're dancing at your best —

at your *very* best I mean! — and strike one of those wonderful balances that everyone tells me about, a pose that's like death itself, don't you feel as if you were floating on something beyond both life and death? Don't you feel so, Miss Clive?"

His voice was so solemn and his long El-Greco-like face, above his bottle-shaped, tweed-clad shoulders, wore such an unearthly look at that minute, that everyone waited for Tossty's answer, as if a ghost had been addressing her.

Never had this spoilt and petted native of Radipole such an opportunity to be provoking. She took it with the most teasing sang-froid.

"Do... I... feel... anything... Jerry," she drawled languidly, "at... all... like... what... he's... talking about?" She lifted her glass to her mouth and put it down untasted. "It's hot in here," she murmured hiding a yawn with her hand. "Jerry always tells me what I feel," she said, and she gave the impression, by some artful trick of tone and voice, of addressing herself exclusively to Miss Guppy. Then she threw back her head and extending her silk-sleeved arms in the air as if to stretch herself she yawned naughtily and rudely in the face of them all. "It's too hot in here Jerry," she repeated.

Sylvanus sighed; but his face brightened when Jerry spoke up, completely disregarding the girl's uncivil behaviour. But it did not remain bright, for Jerry's words, though tenderly affectionate to him, suddenly acquired a vibration that disturbed him and worried him, for in his fraternal concern he attributed it to the naughty ways of Tossty.

"You are the same old Cassius still," he said, "but it makes me angry to hear you deceiving these children. Behind... behind... behind — that's where you tricky mystics always put the secret, as if life had a rainbow-coloured rump like a pet baboon. It makes me sick to hear you, you old blackguard. Peace to all beings! Our only comfort is to rail, since we're not brave enough to die! Your baboon's arse may be an Aurora Borealis for all I care, since we shall never see it! The point is, pilgarlic darling, your jigging monkey-world is a Monsieur sans queue, an arse-less Monsieur! Like the Moon it has never turned round; and it *never will!* Dead shall we all be—"

The clown's voice gathered volume at this point; and Tossty, after one angry glance at him, wetted her finger and drew it round and round and round her glass with a frown even more gloomy than the Jobber's who had begun to fidget as if he were suffering from what is sometimes called "pins and needles".

"Dead we shall all be, dead as those Dinosaur bones that that girl found at Ringstead Bay. And the only good thing about life is that it *does* end! Poudre de Perlinpimpin! If we sick lepers couldn't lie down and *know* it was the last, we'd *all* be candidates for Doctor Brush's Summer House. Come now, Miss Wane, *you* speak up and take my side, for I know well what *you* think about all this."

Tossty left making music with her wet finger and bent hurriedly towards him, letting her sinuous body make the same kind of engaging angle with the droop of her cloak over the chair that the spears of the plants known as Lords and Ladies make when they are fully disclosed. Her whisper brought Jerry back to his infinitely meticulous rôle of master of ceremonies.

"True, Toss," he said earnestly, and then to Perdita. "Miss Clive here says she's never been introduced to you. That comes of being a friend of our good Jobber. He knows everybody and everybody knows him; but you of course—"

Tossty made an inclination of the head, so prettily appropriate and yet so delicately exaggerated that Perdita felt very uncomfortable as she nodded to her in return and began murmuring some old-fashioned compliment.

Jerry was evidently suppressing an irritable disapproval of the way Tossty was behaving this morning, and her perfunctory and unsympathetic nod to Perdita, to whom he felt curiously protective, touched off the explosion. To the astonishment of everyone, except Sylvanus, who had anticipated exactly this very thing, Jerry suddenly cried out:

"Yes, I'll tell you what the other side of Life is, about which Van tells you his lies!"

With these words he leapt to his feet, bounded across to the bar-counter, vaulted lightly over it, and turning round, to face them all with one arm round Miss Guppy's shoulders and the other waving a beer-glass he'd picked up, he burst out into wild fooling:

"Piffer-rary! love your dearie! and I tell ye all for once and clearly... But *my* dearie here *knows* all," and he hugged Miss Guppy more tightly still— "that at the bottom of our hearts — O me! my heart, my rising heart! but down! cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put 'em in the paste alive; she knapped 'em o' the coxcombs with a stick and cried 'Down, wantons, down!' 'Twas her brother — *and that's you, brother*— 'that, in pure kindness to his horse, buttered his hay.' Piffer-rary! love your dearie! — and I, *moi qui vous parle,* the dancing bear, have peeped behind that Curtain, when brother was playing his scrannel pipe and *there's nothing there*!*"*

The Jobber would have remained in his seat, right under the bar, scowling over his whiskey and grimly wondering what force was keeping him from flinging down what he owed and carrying Perdita off. But Perdita had become so interested in Jerry, and in a sense so fond of him, that she got up hurriedly now and moved to a table in the open, whither the Jobber had to follow her, to see what the man was doing.

And to their amazement Jerry was now, for he had dropped Miss Guppy, talking rapidly or pretending to talk on his fingers in dead silence, but with a hundred queer grimaces all addressed to Sylvanus as if he had been Panurge arguing with Thaumast. Something mute, violent, gross, inarticulate, in the Jobber's own nature now roused itself up to respond to the way the clown was letting himself go; and as he watched him, and he was unaware that Sylvanus had got up and was now standing close behind them, and as he saw him reverting to certain irresistible facial expressions that had gone — like inspired tunes — all over the world, he whispered hoarsely to Perdita:

"By Dum, the chap is a fellow!"

The only person who was not startled by these queer happenings seemed to be Marret. She apparently associated it all, in some natural and mysteriously intimate way, with the paternal performance with which she was so well acquainted.

But it was reserved to Miss Guppy, and to Miss Guppy alone, to have, so to speak, the best seat at this singular comedy; for except Jerry himself she was the only one who had the privilege of being able to see Sylvanus' face. Miss Guppy's conduct up to this point had been perfect. While being embraced by the clown she had worn upon her countenance that particular expression of good-natured protest, mingled with an irresistibly whimsical second-thought of "making hay while the sun shone" which certain charming elderly people always assume when their dignity is playfully rumpled. But it was Miss Guppy's privilege on this eleventh day of February, and hers alone, to see Sylvanus' face as he set himself to exorcise this wild devil of Tartarean burlesque that had suddenly possessed his self-controlled brother.

Perdita felt very uneasy for the man; and as for the proud Tossty, she did a thing that the emotional Tissty herself might have done, save that Tissty generally got rid of such tensions by impulsive action; she put her hands to her head and thrust her fingers into her ears, thus repeating a gesture which had evidently come to be her last resort when her friend's pessimism touched the breaking-point.

Watching his brother with concern, Sylvanus thought to himself: "What a fool I was to let him begin this!" and remembering how when they were children he used to startle Jerry into quiescence by playing the ghost, he raised his arms high above his head and began waggling his long lean fingers, horizontally from his bent-over wrists.

But it was not at Sylvanus' lifted hands, nor at these queer fish-fin movements that his lean fingers made, as they sawed the air, that the petrified Miss Guppy stared. She stared at the long, white face of the man which had suddenly become like a narrow window-blind through which two holes had been pierced into a burning outer darkness.

In the presence of this formidable apparition the antics of the breathless clown abruptly ceased. His dominant desire, the moment he ceased, was, it seemed, simply and solely to reassure Miss Guppy, and sweeping an imaginary plumed hat from his head, he made her a bow like a cavalier and kissed her hand. Then with his brother's help he scrambled back across the counter and returned to Tossty's side.

"Well, Toss my dear, you've seen the original first act I ever put on. I call it "Arsiversy" or "Heads and Tails". 'Tis an old comedy, Toss. Commedia Antiqua Veritatis! Or Devil cast out Devil. You saw the way he waggled his hands? They catch corncrakes so!"

Perdita was not the only girl in the smoky bar-room of the Weeping Woman whose inclination to "weep" that morning came from a tide of radiant happiness. Those words of Sylvanus that had seemed pure moonshine to the Jobber had been to Peg Frampton like the milk of Paradise! Brought up so drably and desolately, always so lonely, neglected, embittered, she had come to loathe the very name of religion. Her vice had been until now her one solitary refuge. For it was no glowing sensuality, but rather an acrid drug, a wretched intoxicant, distracting the sorry forlornness of her days. But this mysterious Absolute about which this man talked seemed to gather to itself everything lovely and sweet and satisfying that she had missed in life. There was nothing about it that suggested the conventional morality that stank in her nostrils, that was in fact actually mixed up in her mind with a certain musty-fusty smell that emanated from her father, whenever he gave her his formal and undemonstrative embrace. Peg had read little, but she had an inquisitive and receptive brain, and she had formed her own ideas as to the meaning of good and evil. Thus when her Don Quixote of metaphysics talked of this Tao-like presence that included and underlay everything, it at once occupied the place in her mind of all those vague desires, not vicious, but sweet and sensual and mysterious, which the drabness of her days had blighted.

To sit by his side and listen to him was all she wanted, and not the faintest jealousy of Marret entered her thoughts. Peg’s susceptibility to her own sex had of late met with so many rebuffs from Daisy Lily, that to find in this new friend a tender if not a magnetic response was a surprise and pleasure. But the greatest moment of all came when Sylvanus went over to the bar to stop the clown’s outburst. That elevating of his arms in the air and that queer movement with his hands was what gave her her greatest thrill of this whole morning. His hands seemed to her like fir-tree tops, like the indignant feathers of swans, like huge seaweeds from the bottom of the sea, like floating zenith-clouds, like windmill sails, like smoke from the great brewery in Dorchester, like storm-signals on the White Nose, like the weather-cock on the top of St. John’s, like sea-gulls on Hardy’s Monument, like the turning chimney-tops of Sark House before she had entered it, like the revolution of the Portland Bill searchlight that shone through the windows of Last House. She even went so far — and it was the reverse of blasphemy in her — to mix up the swaying of those horizontal fingers from the man’s bent wrists with her childish ideas of the Holy Ghost. The grotesqueness of the action was what led her to do this. It seemed to contain a rebuke, a retort, a defiance, a challenge to Evil, from an armoury of the perverse, the weird, the monstrous, the half-mad; and this — with her loathing of conventional religion — was precisely her own private notion of how the Absolute *should* go to work, when it broke out.

Jerry Cobbold seemed extremely reluctant to separate from his brother. In his curious Atlas-like tendency to hold up the status-quo of the whole world he fancied he discerned in this singular rapprochement in the bar of the Weeping Woman a dedicated opportunity for persuading Sylvanus to stop discussing metaphysics on the esplanade.

So it came about that Peg induced the nothing-loth Marret to accompany her to the “Regatta”, there to partake of the sort of lunch, consisting of lettuce salad, and a great deal of pastry, which young women, when left to their own devices, invariably select. Peg was compelled, before issuing this extravagant invitation, to un-click as surreptitiously as she could her tattered bead-purse. Thank the Lord! She had almost the whole of her weekly allowance left, an allowance that had been increased by Mr. Frampton on her last birthday from three and sixpence to four and ninepence:

The day was such a lovely one, and began — as noonday arrived — to feel so warm that when they found themselves on the esplanade nearly opposite their destination Peg impulsively suggested that they should go down to the edge of the sea. Here, as they stood side by side on the shimmering sand watching the tiny ripples lose themselves at their feet, they saw that a boy and a girl, who were evidently visitors for the day to Weymouth, had taken off their shoes and stockings and were boldly paddling in this shining water.

This sight roused Peg's adventurous emulation and she persuaded Marret who would much sooner have gone on standing where she was with Peg's arm round her waist, to take off her stockings with her. It is a proof of the lonely and independent life Peg had led, and of how, her father being so immersed in business, she had succeeded in practically de-classing herself, that she didn't give a fig for what the world might say at seeing the daughter of Cattistock's partner paddling in the sea with the daughter of the Punch-and-Judy man. When the two young women did follow that boy and girl, and made their way into the shimmering water, they quickly became a most natural pair of very youthful companions, chuckling, giggling, shivering, exclaiming, as they felt the shock of those cold ripples. A great deal of their attention was taken up by the effort to keep their clothes from getting wet; and they behaved like children rather than like grown-up people in the way in which they kept hitching up their drawers and letting their skirts, which were constantly trailing down at the back, nearly touch the water; but as they stood side by side, and indeed turned their faces landward when they saw that the boy and girl were laughing at them, they did not lose the chance of exchanging a few remarks about Sylvanus.

"Do you live with him now, Marret, just as if you were married to him?"

"Not... quite... like that," said Marret, speaking slowly and choosing her words with the utmost nicety. "We sleep together, you know, and he presses me to him, *but,"* and she finished her sentence with the natural frankness of a girl brought up among the donkeys and goat-carriages of the “dry-sand”, “but *he never does anything.* He never seems to want to, and I don’t think he ever will.”

“Don’t *you* want him to, Marret?”

Peg began to find a strange vicarious pleasure in all this. The fact that she herself was attracted to this girl seemed to make it all so much more natural and nice. She felt a tremulous excited curiosity as to what these two really did. She would have liked to have known everything, *everything.* She would have liked to have waited upon them as they lay side by side. She would have liked to have been their servant and carried up their tea to them on a tray, and put it on their bed, and sat on the edge of their bed. She felt herself in this position now as she pressed Marret with her questions, and her red lip — that lower lip which always hung down — had a tiny drop of saliva on its outer edge.

Marret was silent under the directness of this last interrogation.

“Did she want him to?” she wondered to herself, letting her eyes wander across “the wet sand” and across “the dry sand”, to the white wall of the esplanade. There was a young man sitting on a bench on the esplanade, and Marret instinctively let her clothes drop down. *“Did* she want him to?”

“I don’t know whether I do or not,” she murmured at last, and there crossed her face, as Peg sympathetically watched it, a far-away, passive, infinitely mysterious look, that strange annunciation-look that the early Italian painters are such adepts in giving to their extraordinarily youthful madonnas. There was a long silence, while Marret kept turning her head with a slow abstracted thoughtfulness, as her eyes rested upon the old King’s statue, upon the Jubilee Clock, upon St. John’s Spire. Then feeling a sudden shiver of cold in those sunlit ripples, for the water still retained its wintry chill, she suggested to Peg that they should return to land.

Peg received this intimation with protective sympathy and at once began heading for the beach; though, if the truth must be told she regretted having to give up the delicious sense of erotic stimulus which sprang from her knowledge of being ardently watched from the esplanade by the young man on the bench and furtively watched from the deeper water by the young man who was paddling.

“His girl isn’t much to look at,” Peg said to herself. “No wonder he looks at Marret and me!”

In saying “Marret and me”, she was obeying a deep inner imperative. Shamelessly immoral as Peg was, she was as austere as St. Augustine in regard to certain human weaknesses. When she was attracted to a younger girl, as she had been to Daisy Lily, and now was to Marret, it would have seemed to her a shocking disloyalty to allow a breath of comparison to enter her thoughts between her own physical desirability and that of her friend. But though it was with considerable regret that she approached land she was rewarded for her unselfishness by growing aware — and Peg was an expert in this kind of awareness — that the young man on the bench was spell-bound by the sight of her bare legs.

Marret — still with that Old Master’s annunciation-look — mechanically shook out her skirt as they advanced. This the Punch-and-Judy girl did not only because of her natural modesty but because she was in love. The girl was in truth as deep in love with her prophet as Perdita was with the Jobber, but being less pessimistic and much less intellectual than Mrs. Cobbold’s companion, her love took the form of a childish hero-worship that knew no bounds. At Peg’s outrageous question as to whether she wanted to be possessed by Sylvanus she had answered with literal truth, “I don’t know whether I do or not.” Her feeling had indeed the very chastity of devotion in it. If Sylvanus had wanted to cut off her hair as well as to possess her, her heart would only have murmured: “Be it unto me as my lord wishes!”

But it was far from Peg Frampton’s thoughts to drop her skirt over her shining legs. Tantalizingly they glittered in that spring sunshine. They seemed crying aloud for some wild dance of the Naiades on those sparkling wet sands.

The two friends did indeed make a subtly contrasting picture as they came up out of that pearl-soft sea. If Marret in her long black skirt resembled the little Virgin dressed up in an old robe of St. Anne’s, Peg had all that air of brooding secretiveness which allured the sophisticated Botticelli to diffuse something cryptic through the wind-blown movements of his Sea-born. Peg’s vicious excitement kept mounting higher and higher as she came nearer the young man seated on the bench. When at last she fancied she was near enough for him to know that she knew what his emotions were, a smile of the most equivocal abandonment flickered across her face. Almost immediately after smiling in this way she recognized who her admirer was. He was no other than that studious young man who lodged at Trigonia House.

Marret also recognized Mr. Gaul, and quite spontaneously — as she would have done had she been standing beside her father’s puppets — she waved her hand to him and even shouted to him, a high-pitched little-girl greeting.

With some trepidation, and not without a nervous glance around him lest Miss Monkton, his landlady’s daughter, should be returning from school, Mr. Gaul descended the stone steps leading to the dry sand and very soon had arrived at the spot, which was not hard to perceive, where the girls had left their shoes and stockings. He reached that spot indeed before they did themselves, and it came into his head that if some student at Jena or

Heidelberg were to ask the famous expounder of the Philosophy of Representation what object or group of objects would most vividly "represent" the sea-coast of his native land, he might very well reply: "A couple of pairs of girls' stockings carefully kept in their place by pebble-stones, and sprinkled by drifting sand!"

As with most human events it was a consensus of fatalities that led to Mr. Gaul's presence at that particular juncture. That he was alone there, and that the esplanade had no loiterers to share his interest in this classical scene was due to the fact that it was the hour for lunch. But that he had sat down on that bench at all was brought about by the most exquisite balancing of second causes. He had set out in high elation to purchase a copy of Faust at that same book-shop where it had been the Jobber's destiny to procure "Middlemarch". But the encounter with Mrs. Cobbold and his facetious remark to her "taunted", as Curly's mother would have said, his mind. The book-shop used to possess, so the Jobber's friend assured him, quite a number of foreign books, "but people don't read as seriously as they did when you and I were young, Mr. Gaul." Whether this addition of at least thirty years to his age was, like his own remark to Lucinda, a "jeu d'esprit", evoked by the warm day, he was unable to decide, but as he ran his fingers up and down the shelves of the Lending Library — every volume of which, as he took them out at random, seemed to smell of sea-sand and of hot sunshine in bow-windows — he began to fall into unphilosophic thoughts. In plain words Mr. Gaul began to feel the influence of the spring. He thought of his bold advice to Magnus to visit his girl willy-nilly; and there slid into his disturbed senses a forlorn wish that he himself had a girl to visit. Presently, still keeping his back to the Jobber's friend, who was now occupied in a triumphant conversion of a reader of "these terrible modern books" to the lost culture of George Eliot, Mr. Gaul turned abstractedly the pages of a work of Rider Haggard and stumbled therein upon a little vignette, for it scarcely amounted to a real illustration, of two engaging young women arrayed, “or rather disarrayed”, in antique attire. The book was nearly thumbed into obliteration. Every page looked as if it had been “kept”, while its reader bathed in the sea, by having bits of sea-weed stuck across it. There arose from it an “aura” of half a century of summer holidays, spent between the dry sand and the wet sand.

And it came into his mind — as if from the long afternoon fantasies of the last reader of “Alan Quartermain” — that he ought to find some really enlightened interpretation of the theological notion of sinfulness as applied to erotic feelings. And as he replaced the book, and bowed to the Jobber’s friend, whose correction of the taste of her young man had evidently left him confounded, it came into his head that it was impossible to philosophize adequately upon the mystery of lechery without yielding to it in *some* degree. These thoughts ripened rather than faded in the hazy sunshine, as he crossed the road at the back of the blameless King, and when he saw the visitor-boy and visitor-girl paddling in the glittering water and Peg and Marret watching him, he sank down upon that convenient bench and allowed the perilous spring weather to work its will upon him.

As the girls came drifting towards him, now stopping to enable Peg to pull down her under-clothes, and now stopping to pick up, and drop into the water again, some irresistible piece of seaweed, Mr. Gaul found that he *had* learnt one very serviceable piece of erotic knowledge — namely the important part played in the various stages of lechery by the element of the impersonal. The sight of Peg’s polished limbs, gleaning so beautifully in that pearl-soft sunshine, when he had first contemplated them had been an intense amorous delight, full of poetry, full of a delicious tremulous satisfaction, that diffused itself over the whole surface of the shimmering water. But the moment he recognized that the girl knew he was looking at her *in that way,* and that she, too, was deriving pleasure from it, the thing came over him with such overpowering force as to be shaking, agitating, destructive of peace, creative of disturbing desire. A yet further stage was reached — so the philosopher in Mr. Gaul observed, commenting upon his human senses — when he shook hands with Peg and Marret and began talking to them and enjoying their company, and he came to the conclusion that in this social stage of the affair a woman got far more satisfaction than a man, so much satisfaction indeed that Mr. Gaul began to wonder whether all love-passages were not a sort of rape committed upon the essential gregariousness of women, like picking a rose from a rose-bush.

But the truth was — though he could scarcely have brought this into his analysis — that Mr. Gaul had it in him to be a charming companion to young girls. Little Miss Monkton had already found this out to her cost, for what her teacher attributed to the Devil in her moods and her tempers was really due to the poor child's first consciousness of the darts of Eros. With Peg and Marret, as they slowly ascended the stone steps to the esplanade, Mr. Gaul was well-nigh perfect as a companion. Even Marret seemed to lose her shyness, for, as she said afterwards to Peg:

"You can't feel funny and think of things and all that, when you sees them shinin' round spectacles a-watchin' of 'ee, like the old gent from Regent's Park what used to sit all summer in front row at dad's show like he were gone on Judy!"

A delicate situation emerged, all the same, as the three of them crossed the road to the "Regatta"; for Mr. Gaul resembled Peg in that his purse was anything but inexhaustible. Neither he nor Peg had enough in their pocket to treat the other; and yet it was hopelessly contrary to Weymouth etiquette for each to pay for himself. But Mr. Gaul had a droll frankness when it came to such matters. He made the girls sit down with him on his bench, which was still unoccupied, and insisted that they should all three empty their purses into Peg's lap.

"But I want to treat Marret anyway!" protested Peg.

"Empty your purses!" repeated Mr. Gaul.

And then it turned out that in an ornamental leather case that looked as if she had picked it up at the feet of that visitor from Regent's Park, Marret possessed a golden sovereign.

"Put it away!" cried Peg. "She mustn't change that, Mr. Gaul! No, no! Put it away."

But Mr. Gaul was rather tickled by the idea of the Punch-and-Judy girl being the one to pay the bill.

"I'll like to see the face of that life-boat modeller," he said to himself.

In the end the whole contents of Peg's purse was transferred to Mr. Gaul's, and they assured Marret that it was only because they knew they'd got her gold to fall back upon, that they dared enter the "Regatta" at all.

The Jobber had never felt that unique character of his native "Isle of the Slingers" as poignantly as he felt it today as with Perdita by his side he drove the "Slug" across Fleet Bridge and along the inland side of Chesil Beach. They had been, after all, the last of their group of acquaintances to leave the Weeping Woman, the delay being due to Perdita's shyness both at the idea of pushing unceremoniously past the others or of bidding them a formal adieu, and Miss Guppy not knowing whether to laugh or to cry at the thought of having been dragged into what she called "Mr. Cobbold's foolishness", insisted on providing them before they left with an "elegant fish-lunch", fresh that morning from the emporium of Mr. Witchit, and a couple of bottles of local beer, which she was careful to pour out before she set them on the table, lest the label Cattistock and Frampton should raise ill thoughts in the Jobber's mind.

Such ill thoughts were indeed obliterated just now as he drove slowly on, resting his eyes now and then, as he talked to the girl, on the great sea-bank towering above them. But Portland, as it lay before them, rising tier by tier over its terraces of old walls and grey roofs, seemed to be tugging at its tether in that luminous and liquid haze, seemed to be straining at this gigantic rope of transparent stones, agates and carnelians, which bound it to the mainland. The huge limestone rock seemed to have no roots, under this enchanted light, in any solid earth. It seemed to be riding, just as the battleships in the harbour seemed to be riding, upon a liquid abyss of opalescent water that sank down to the antipodes. And the Jobber got the impression that this stupendous mass of oolite was really afloat today in this translucent calm; not only afloat, but longing to drift off, to sail out and away, over the surface of that halcyon sea. All the way up the narrow steep ascent above Chesilton as the faithful Slug snorted and spluttered and groaned, the Jobber gave himself up to the paradisal happiness of explaining to Perdita the nature of all this limestone, its long history lost in prehistoric aeons of time, its different sections and layers and strata and qualities, and what it was that made one particular old quarry, like Saxon Quarry, superior in its stone-bearing power to all the rest. Perdita could not prevent the tears coming into her eyes as she saw how moved he was, and how his voice took on a tone so solemn and reverential when he talked of his native stone.

“It's extraordinary!” she thought. “I know I love Guernsey and its rocks; but *he* seems” — so far she gave her friend no human name, nor did she want to give him a name— “closer to this place than I've ever thought anyone *could* be to the place of their birth. I think it's this element in him, just as if he had a vein of oolite in his disposition, that makes him so far-off from everybody and yet so familiar with everybody."

Skald had to get out, when they were half way up the incline, to do something to his spluttering engine, and the girl had a long opportunity to meditate on his character. It was not at all Perdita's nature to idealize where she loved. It was her nature on the contrary to be critical to the limit; to analyze, to question, to sift out. Psychological generalization was a passion with her and quite inseparable from the working of her pessimistic mind.

"He's lacking in intellect," she said to herself now. "He's not a thinker at all. He would have been happier, too, if he'd worked with his hands as a quarryman than become — just what he has! This jobbing business isn't what he was born for at all. It's the last thing he was born for."

She stared happily, but with many wild fantastic thoughts, at the man's great, dark profile as he bent over what he was doing.

"No," she thought, "he's not an intellectual person at all. He's a bit stupid. In fact he's worse than stupid. He's pig-headed. But one thing about him does please me so *very* much! He's neither ashamed of his lack of culture nor affectedly proud of it. He just *is* what he is, and lets it go."

Perdita's generalizations about the nature of the man to whom she was prepared to give herself, body and soul, were really pretty shrewd. Of course had she seen him with his book-shop friend and seen him submitting so patiently to a prolonged study of "Middlemarch", she might have got a new light on his desire to be cultivated, if not to be intellectual, but it was a significant thing that during the very earliest hours of these first twenty-four hours of their real acquaintance she detected so clearly that it was to be her destiny to feel herself as much cleverer than the man she loved as she was less clever than Mr. and Mrs. Cobbold.

Having successfully dealt with the infirmity in the Slug's belly, the Jobber clambered back by her side and they went lumbering on. At the top of the hill he brought the truck to a deliberate stop and proudly called upon his Guernsey friend to contemplate the vast sea-and-land landscape spread out before them. He showed her the White Horse and the White Nose. He showed her Hardy's Monument and Maiden Castle. He showed her St. John's Spire and the outline of the Nothe. He showed her the long line of Chesil Beach, curving away in a vast, unending half-circle towards the low-hanging mists of the legendary West.

"By Dum," he cried, "I can't tell what it is about this view that stirs me up so! That old church-spire is nothing in itself. Those old Nothe-forts covered with grass aren't anything. Sandsfoot isn't a real castle at all. And yet there's something about all these things, when you see 'em like this that just bowls you out — if you know what I mean!"

"I can see partly what you mean," said Perdita cautiously. "I can see that that Castle and that that Spire aren't as romantic as they *might* be, and I can see there's something striking rather than poetical about your White Horse on that hill. Do you suppose it's by looking at these things from earliest infancy that they've become what they've become to you?"

The Jobber stared at her blankly. His great hand rested on her thigh and his tobacco-scented breath hovered about her cheek and about the wisps of brown hair that began to slip — as they had done that night he first saw her, for it was a trick of her hair to fall loose like that — across the lobe of her ear.

"By... looking... at 'em so long, Perdita? No, no, sweetheart! They're what they are, these things — just look at Hardy's Monument now, with the sun on it! — independent of anything we do. No, it's something more than that. But *what* it is, by Dum, my precious, I can't tell'ee!"

He squeezed her thigh yet more tightly as he leaned forward, staring over the wheel of the Slug at that familiar scene, and as he stared at his own land and at his own sea under that glimmering haze, they both became to him something unutterable, something written upon over and over and over with the hieroglyphs of the spirit, and he felt as if he were offering up to them at that moment the very flesh and blood of his love.

"Yes," he began again slowly, "I know the spire isn't anything particular... and it's not old either of course... and I know the old Nothe isn't anything... just a fort... a deserted fort... with turf over it... but... but when things have been in sight of each other for many years... you feel as if they were *connected* in some way... as if they were part of something... as if they were... *making* something... yes, by Dum! as if they were making something."

He sank back as if exhausted by a mental effort that was beyond his power.

Perdita snatched at the heavy hand that now lay inertly in her lap and, bending her head, lifted it to her lips.

"I think I *do* understand what you mean about these things," she said, "and if I stay much longer I shall understand a lot more. But I've noticed already the way everyone talks about the Spire and the White Horse and the Nothe and the Harbour-Bridge. I heard Mr. Muir talking to Mr. Cobbold the other night about the shape of Portland as he sees it from his window. It's quaint to think of *his* landscape being your home and *your* landscape being his home."

The Jobber had his arm round her waist now, and as his fingers felt the beating of her heart a great wave of tenderness for her went vibrating through him.

"I have my left hand now," he thought, "on my Love's left breast. Isn't there something about that in the Bible?"

But Perdita did not think of the Bible, or which of his arms was round her, but she did think that she would have liked to tell him that except for her uncle, for she had never learnt to dance, this was actually the first time a man's arm had been round her waist.

"But I can't do it," she thought. "Yet it's funny that I can't! Am I afraid he might think I was *odd?"*

Then as she looked at the outline of Weymouth, stretched before them, with the Nothe at one extremity and St. John's at the other, some vague, obscure, difficult thought began to revolve like a tortuous serpent at the gateway of her brain. It was something that had to do with the implication of what all these people said about their town's landmarks and seamarks. It was a revelation to herself — but no! it had escaped. She couldn't remember it. But she said to herself:

"I believe the way every strip of coast has come to look, after all the tides and landscapes and earthquakes, is like a piece of ancient writing. But that spire is a different thing, and the fort is a different thing. But what came into my head just now included these as much as the shores and bays! It had to do with the whole look of a place being in some way — What... was... it?"

When they got within half-a-mile of the Head, which stood in the loneliest spot on the westerly coast of the island, the Jobber jumped out of the truck and told her in a very authoritative voice to remain where she was while he went on a little way to see someone and make some enquiries. Nothing suited Perdita better than to be left alone for a while, with the weight of all the accumulated mass of recent impressions fresh in her mind, and no sooner had his jersey-clad figure vanished behind a great pile of stones than she climbed out of the “Slug” herself and scrambled on to the top of the wall that bordered the road. Here she made herself as comfortable as she could.

“He has yet,” she thought, “to become acquainted with my mania for climbing walls, trees, cliffs, fences, anything, in fact, where I can get a foothold!”

She had settled herself sideways along the top of the wall, with her back against a leafless elder-bush that had managed to get rooted in that stony place. Never had her mind been clearer than it was at this minute! She stared at a little patch of cold leaf’d, cold-stalk’d stone-crop that grew where her heels rested and she thought:

“I am as happy, at this moment, as I shall ever be in my life. He’s gone to find out if we can stay the night at that Inn! He knows I’m ready for anything, and I am ready — for *anything*!”

She stared at the little greenish-yellow plant and at the grey stones out of which it grew.

“I must manage somehow to hold tight to this moment,” she said to herself. “How tight that plant holds to that stone! But I feel in my bones that this affair of ours will not run smooth. He’s not a man for quiet, established things. But it won’t be our *love* that will end.”

Her whole body grew taut, rigid, stiff, and her flexible face paled a little and took on a look — if there had been anyone there to note it — different from any she had ever worn. Perdita had a very small chin and a mouth that naturally fell open and drooped with a grievous droop at the corners. Her lower lip, red, and rather full, although a much dryer one than poor Peg Frampton’s, drooped habitually also, and there were lines from her nostrils to her mouth of a very sorrowful kind, and other lines, too, beneath her eyelids, that answered to these in gloomy conspiracy, giving her whole face a curiously forlorn and abject expression.

But this eternal bond between them that they had now both come to recognize had brought out, since yesterday morning, when he came to High House, a change in the girl's face. Something about the bony structure of it, especially in brow and cheek-bones, dominated the rest, giving her a look that was stark and even a little bit stoical.

"Our love is no ordinary love," she thought. "We could quarrel fiercely, we could separate in blind anger, but nothing could ever really divide us, now we've once met."

Her thoughts sank deeper and deeper down into the nature of this eternalized moment, into the heart of the experience through which she was passing. The hardness of the wall, as with her body thus immobile she pressed the stones with her fingers, gave her the feeling that her soul was sinking into this vast promontory of oolite as into the shaft of a bottomless quarry.

"I'm glad I came straight to his home," she thought. "It's funny how I don't really admire him or respect him or even altogether *like* him!"

She gripped the stone with her fingers so hard that her knuckles went white. That bony structure of her face showed itself now in her death-stillness, as if it were her very skull seen through the transparency of her soft, weak, drooping fluctuating lineaments. Her intellect seemed clearer than it had ever been in her life before, and she derived a savage pleasure from tearing away every shred of sentiment, every tag of reverence from what she felt for this man.

"It's as if something of him were inside me and something of me were inside him. It's as if there were no need for him to take me, more than he has taken me already! It’s as if when I hurt him I hurt myself and when he hurts me he hurts himself.”

Her fixed gaze, with its new “skull-look” transforming her sorrowful features, seemed to penetrate the very roots of that stone-crop at her feet and plunge into the substratum of this stupendous sea-rock, into the foundation of it, into what lay fathoms-deep below the sea-surface.

“I’m sure I don’t know whether people would call what we feel for each other ‘being in love’, or whether it’s even passion. I think if he *does* take me tonight he’ll do it clumsily, awkwardly, brutally, *and I shall be the same.* He doesn’t seem to want to kiss me very much, and I don’t want to kiss him very much. It’s as if we were both digging into each other’s soul to find a self that was put there before we were born.”

The Jobber came back highly elated from his visit to the Head with the news that they could have the very room that Cattistock and Tissty had had yesterday. Instead of annoying him, as might have been expected, it seemed, by some quirk of his queerly-constituted nature, to please him to think of this coincidence.

“I’m going to take you now to the Beale,” he announced “where the light-house is and where you can see the Race.”

She had jumped down from the wall to meet him feeling very cramped and stiff.

“Couldn’t you leave the truck somewhere,” she asked, “and let’s walk a bit?”

He agreed willingly to this, and having disposed of the Slug in the sawing-yard of one of the quarries near the Head, hand in hand they set out through that windless afternoon. He skirted the little town of Easton and showed her a dusty field-path which he told her led to his parents’ house.

"I first thought I'd take you there," he muttered. "But I changed my mind. You don't mind, do you?"

And there was actually a gleam of suspicion in the dark glance he darted at her. She shook her head, and then she heard him repeating under his breath that mystical line from the Book of Daniel that he was so fond of:

"A time and times and half a time."

"What's the matter with him?" she thought. "Why can't he be open with me in these little things? I'd far sooner *not* meet his father and mother today. Why couldn't he have asked me what I felt?"

But it had already — in these brief few hours of their coming together — established itself as a peculiarity of these two that they could recover from a divergence without the least tendency to sulk.

"Here's Last House!" cried the Jobber when they had gone some distance along a straight dusty road, bordered by the same monotonous stone walls that gave the whole place its character, "Here's where Sylvanus lives! I doubt if he can be back yet, for he hasn't a car, but isn't it just what you'd expect of that bloke?"

Perdita surveyed a dingy discoloured stucco wall, with a couple of symmetrical stone windows and a pair of cracked chimneys above them, looking like the pricked-up ears of a startled ass. Between the house and the road were heavy, massive, iron railings, and five cement steps led up to the door. Upon the surface of these steps both green moss and yellow lichen, in variegated patches of contrasting colour, were growing very freely. There were two cement posts with iron rings in them at the bottom of these steps, between which hung a rusty chain, firmly padlocked in the centre. By the side of this padlock someone had once, long ago, tied a luggage-label which, turned yellow with age, served as a sort of weather-vane for the snails that explored that desolate spot. And this luggage-label, as it stirred in the faint airs of this halcyon day, flickered almost imperceptibly north-north-west.

"He doesn't use his front-door very often," remarked the Jobber.

"Never, I should say," agreed Perdita.

Slowly they moved on past those deep-set staring windows and those melancholy asinine chimney-ears.

"It only needs the mustache," thought Perdita, "to be exactly like that great humbug. Does he bring *both* those girls up here with him? That's the sort of thing I used to hear about at home, but I hadn't supposed it went on in Weymouth."

The whole personality of Sylvanus, his tall form, his frayed clothes that looked as if he slept in them, his long, peaked parsnip-shaped head, those odious mustache-ends, and all the unctuous religiosity that flowed from him, returned to Perdita now as one of the most repulsive impressions she had ever received. She pulled at her companion's arm to get him away from this odious house.

The Jobber yielded to her pressure but as a matter of fact he would have liked at that second to stand much longer there, just as he was doing, staring at a tuft of dead, thick-feathered grasses that grew at one end of the steps and stirred even less than the luggage-label in that windless air.

"I've always seen grasses like that," he had been thinking— "they're common as dirt, too, but you don't always notice them! — when something important's going to happen. By Dum! it's funny that I should see them now! They make me feel that today could last forever. They make me feel I'd be able to send the Dog down without having to go down with him. They make me feel that something at the end might even let me off settling the Dog! They make me feel I'd seen them on some great moor in Wales or

Scotland where I'd gone for hours and hours and was numb and stiff and hungry, but enjoying myself like a curlew."

But he let Perdita drag him on without protesting and before long they came to that smooth level end of the Island called the Bill, where there are two great lighthouses, one disused and one in use, and where the land itself, reduced to a tongue, or rather to a flat-stretching beak of narrow rock-floor, juts out, as the slippery, naked prow-deck of a ship might do, over the gurgling, churning, dark-green water, and offers the wayfarer a circumference of double horizons, one infinite and one finite, both conveying an impression of boundlessness, but the boundlessness of the one being physical and the boundlessness of the other metaphysical.

The Jobber and Perdita made their way out, till they reached the very end of this sea-jutting platform of solid rock. Here they found themselves standing side by side upon what resembled some dancing-floor of the sea-nymphs, so smooth it was, or the level tombstone of some ancient sea-god. It was a floor upon which a herd of seals might have lain down to sleep, shepherded by Proteus! It was dark brown in colour, spotted with some variety of yellowish sea-lichen, and in particular places its surface was roughened by living shell-fish that clung tenaciously to it and by minute fossils whose indwelling entities had perished millions of years ago. Under it the dark-green water swirled and foamed and gurgled, and beyond it, below the tossed-up surf — for the waters of Portland Bill were disturbed by other agencies than the day's weather — there were endless whirlpools and revolving maelstroms of green water. It was one of those spots where Nature arrives at an extremity of contrast that suggests a sublime intention, for while there was gathered up in that rocky floor, which itself was about twenty feet long and about half that distance wide, the very absolute of immobility, there was flung abroad in those breaking waters the corresponding absolute of never-ceasing movement. Standing upon this platform a person felt himself held by gravitation to the very bed-rock of our planet's substance, whereas in that rushing whirl of waters he was aware of gaping holes out of which jets of the aboriginal chaos kept bubbling up. But this was not all. As though she had been roused by some human challenge into putting forth all her powers, Nature had decreed that clean across this great floor of stone there should be a slit of about a foot wide! By bending down, as the Jobber now proceeded to do, and staring into this chasm, you realized that there was a confluence of two water-courses wrestling here, namely the current that swept in, towards the inmost wall of this sea-level cave, and the opposing current that swept *out,* towards the whirlpools of foam.

"Look here!" cried the Jobber. "Look down here!"

Perdita knelt by his side on the brink of this slit in their platform. She could feel a cold breath coming up from down there, like the breathing of a monstrous sea-beast. Lightly he encircled her waist with his arm.

"Not much chance," he said, "for anyone who was pitched down there!"

There was something, even to her ears, a little ghastly about the tone in which he used the word *pitched.* It suggested — as indeed was the case — that the man's murderous obsession was still paramount in the deeper levels of his mind. She snatched off the flexible hat she wore and bent down a little, bent in fact, for his arm was tight round her, so low that her mouth touched the edge of the crevasse. Suddenly the arm that held her began to tremble, not just gently, but violently. Instead of frightening her this trembling gave Perdita a strangely reckless feeling. And it made her cry under her breath,

"I belong to you! I belong to you!"

But it was irresistibly borne in upon the Jobber, with one of those cold, shuddering certitudes that strike us as if a wedge of appalling reality of a different dimension altogether from any as yet known in our experience were being thrust into our warm human senses, that the thing to do, “when he had given the Dog his settler”, was to come here and end it for himself by one leap into this firmamental crack. He thought of this quite calmly for all his shivering, for his mind had been able to turn the next twelve hours into something like twelve days, so that though his body trembled at the thought of ending it, his mind managed to blow *tomorrow* clean away, as if it were one of the airy foam-wisps that kept turning round and round as they danced on that platform before melting into nothing.

“That would finish us!” he whispered to her now. “And it would solve a great deal and spare us a world of fuss, if we tumbled into that froth! How long would our consciousness last? A minute? Two minutes? You couldn’t swim a stroke! I’d just hold you tight and think to myself, ‘I’ve got her. I’ve had my day’. Listen to that noise down there. Do you catch what it’s like? *It’s like flames!* Aye? Isn’t it? *Isn’t* it like flames?”

But he gave her no time to verify this startling assertion. With a sudden swing he lifted her up on to her feet again and, still holding her round the waist, made her look sea-ward, where, a league or two from where they stood, the surface of the sea seemed convulsed under some invisible tyranny. He now began a confused account, in terms far too nautical for her to follow, of the precise causes of these whirling foam-gulfs. She gathered that it was the meeting-place of two far-drawn sea-tides, one travelling eastward and one westward.

“In old days this was a terrible spot,” he said, “but the light-house has changed everything.”

They both stared at that churning expanse. The windless weather seemed to make little difference to its sea fury.

“Not much hope for the old Cormorant there,” he said, “if she once got caught. She’d spin round like a top. There’s a sea-hole under there, that goes down like a shaft. Think of those dark, slippery under-sea walls! Do ‘ee suppose our two skeletons would go on whirling round and round down there, when the fishes had picked ’em shell-white?”

They walked back along a high cliff-path on the western side of the promontory so that they did not pass Last House again, for which Perdita was heartily glad. After seeing that abode of Sylvanus’ with its chained-up front-door, her prejudice against him had grown.

“I can’t make out why Jerry is so nice to him,” she thought. And aloud she said, “It’s funny how much I dislike that brother of Mr. Cobbold’s. I shouldn’t mind if I never saw him again!”

The Jobber’s great mahogany-coloured countenance became a little blank. He experienced that vague uneasiness with which men hear the strong opinions of women about other men. Finally the only answer he could discover to make to this arbitrary outburst of feminine criticism was to squeeze her slender figure tightly against him and murmur a mumbled question as to what was wrong with the fellow except his crazy notions of religion?

“Maybe you’ll feel before long,” he said, “the same shrinking from me! But come now. Tell me straight out what’s wrong with him.”

“I think he’s the kind of person,” she replied gravely, “who could commit a murder and go on without minding it *or being afraid of his victim.”*

“What would you do, Perdita, if I told you *I* had committed a murder?”

His voice sounded so vibrant that she turned quickly and looked at him.

"Don't talk nonsense!" she said. And then because she did not like the look on his face, *"There*! did you see that little brownish moth cross those stones? Isn't it too early for them up here? This place must be deadly cold at night."

"The Island's a great place for moths!" he boasted proudly. "You should see them in the summer. There are more moths than butterflies. I suppose it's the sea."

They went on in silence for nearly half a mile and then —

"By Dum!" he exclaimed, and stooping down he picked a small, glaucous-leaved plant at the edge of their path.

"What's that?" she asked.

"I'll tell you in a moment."

Again they walked in silence for another half mile, and while they walked Perdita looked about in vain for any other specimen of the thick stalk and strangely-shaped leaves which her companion was carrying so carefully. Every now and then, as they walked in silence, his arm round her waist, the Jobber would start humming, not very musically, the words:

"Awake, O Reinian, awake!
Awake, O Reinian, ho!"

"Is that an old song?" she asked when the repetition of these monotonous syllables, mumbled so close to her hear, began to make her nervous. "It sounds," she went on, "as if it were a sign to some smuggler friend waiting down there! You haven't got Mr. Trot with the Cormorant waiting for us, have you?"

As she spoke she swerved at the edge of the cliff and peered over the steep edge. But he pulled her back, and again they went on, and again he began humming:

"Awake, O Reinian, awake!"

“I mustn’t let things like this get on my nerves,” she thought. “He’s so inhuman that he hums and drums when anyone’s with him, as if he were by himself!”

At last they came to a place where half-a-century ago there had been a land-slide. The result of this had been that about six feet below the top of the cliff there was a broad, level ledge, along the brink of which grew several sturdy bushes, forming a natural but quite effective barrier against the precipice. But this was not all. There had been brought down by this land-slide, which must have occurred in one terrific subsidence, a large and very curiously shaped stone, composed of the same oolite as the rest of the island, but looking as if some early race of men with prehistoric tools had at one time worked upon it. Beyond the ledge where crouched this singular stone, Perdita, as she lifted her eyes, saw the whole level expanse of the West Bay, stretching off towards Cornwall and the Atlantic.

The late afternoon sun, from a western sky that looked as if it were made of one piece of unbroken gold-leaf, drew a motionless golden path across the dark-blue water, producing a curious effect of elemental opacity, and also, in the emphasis upon blue and gold an effect of some ritualistic selection. Had the philosopher of Trigonia House been with them at that moment he would doubtless have recalled to their minds what Spengler says of the Magian Culture. Perdita felt that this was exactly the kind of watery floor which the sea-god of her girlhood would have crossed to reach her, and it was natural enough for a mind like hers, engraved since infancy by fantastic images, to imagine such a Being now — in reality an immensely enlarged Jobber Skald — striding away towards that far-off horizon where the wide-arching goldenness touched the dark-blue pavement. But the sun, though it was low enough to create this Magian mystery was still a long way from the sea’s surface, and it threw a light, a glamour, a transformation over the ledge and over the fallen stone. Such landslide-ledges are often, above all other terraqueous spots, friendly and comforting to wayfarers. Warm are they beyond what one would expect, and for some reason both sea-ward winds and land-ward winds sweep over them without ruffling them, so that the grass-snakes and the adders, as well as the slow-worms and the lizards, appreciate their qualities even better than man.

"Come on down!" said the Jobber, after a pause, when he had given the girl time to take in the beauty of this ledge, poised perpendicularly so high above the sea and yet illuminated by the horizontal sun.

He helped her to descend, and she soon discovered that the presence of that stone Idol, if such it were, and of those elder-bushes, entirely prevented any of the giddiness she might otherwise have felt from the height above the shore. Ensconced on this ledge they could hear clearly the monotone of the sea and the cries of the gulls seemed nearer to them there than on the top of the cliff.

"I chopped those out!" said the Jobber as Perdita laid her hand on some indentations resembling steps that marked the side of the stone. "Can you see what it is?" he asked her.

And then the girl did see that in the slow process of aeons of time this stone had been carved into a tremendous torso of love. Man's nakedness and woman's nakedness locked together in the primordial creation of life were suggested here by the straining together of god-like flanks and thighs. Neither of the two figures possessed arms, head or shoulders. Neither possessed legs below the knee. And yet the effect of this huge organic work of art was neither base, nor gross, nor bestial; but godlike, cosmogonie, life-creating.

The old Cornish ship's purser, Phileas Wane, who had married a Guernsey native, would have been puzzled to see the look of radiant happiness which illuminated his niece's face as she stood with this man looking at this shameless stone! Love-encounters the most absolute are those between characters who are devoid of the more supple, more whimsical, more civilized sense of proportion. The Jobber and Perdita were alike in this, that all the various gradations and fine shadings of our middle-class sense of decency and humour and common sense were lacking in them, and they were proud that they were lacking! In Mediæval times it is likely enough that both these quaint persons with their archaic attitudes would have been very happy. But exasperated by the clever cruelties of Modern Science and hunted by the hostility of people like Mrs. Cobbold and Sippy Ballard, they were both forced to take refuge in their own secret fancies, and it had been just as if Perdita had found a piece of her soul lodged in this "Brown Adam", and he had found a piece of *his* soul lodged in this Channel-Island waif, when they met that first evening on the sea-front. The phrase "children of nature" applies, as a matter of fact, very rarely to any civilized individuals. But Perdita and the Jobber, as they allowed their feeling for each other to steal new stimulus from this stone of the centuries, were as little under the domination of the society to which they belonged as a Neanderthal couple would have been in a community of Cro-Magnons.

"I chopped out those steps!" repeated the Jobber complacently. "You can climb up there now and join *those two.* It isn't anything to have done of course, and no one seems to have noticed it since I did it."

She ran her fingers over the indentations. The stone was about ten feet high. It was clear to her that contact with its mysterious antiquity had been a profound pleasure to him.

"When I was little," said the Jobber, "no one used to come to these cliffs except people after birds' eggs and a few moth-collectors. I didn't find this stone by myself. A gentleman from the White Nose who used to come over here in those days to see the light-house keeper's daughter told me about it, and then I took to coming here on Sundays. Father lived in Easton then and the path up there didn't exist. But after what that gentleman said I used to come here often. There's not a stone in the isle that's had more foolishness thought into it and chopped into it than this stone. I've worked here so long on summer afternoons that there was an old sea-gull who used to take me for an idiot and came so near I could see his eye. Puzzled he was at my goings on, and not quite satisfied! He had his eye on me all the time."

Perdita surveyed the rough love-torso above her head.

"I'd *like*" she said meditatively, "I'd *like* extraordinarily well to climb up there with you. There's a stone in Guernsey — Men and women used to sit on it, and it brought them luck. Uncle and I sat on it once and it brought *him* luck, for he died the next month."

"Is it luck to die?" asked the Jobber, while that lethalized and chloroformed *tomorrow* pressed its chin, a chin with a mole upon it, against the window-pane of his mind. Perdita laughed happily.

"Well," she said, "give me your hand and I'll risk death!" And she thought in her heart, "Who knows if it wouldn't be the luckiest thing that could happen to me if I *did* die after today!"

He helped her up and they balanced themselves as best they could, on those entwined limbs.

"Now," he said, taking the little plant into both his hands. "Let's try our luck with this!"

"What do we do?"

“Eat it,” he replied laconically. “Eat it — *mouth and mouth about!* I *was* lucky to find a bit up here. There’s lots of it down on Chesil, but it’s rare on the Island.”

Perdita, propping herself with some difficulty where she sat, looked at the little glaucous plant in her friend’s brown fingers.

The Jobber himself seemed hard put to it to keep his balance. Twice, nearly dropping the plant, he clutched at the edge of their stone seat; nor did he dare to touch the girl for fear of bringing them both down.

Finally, their balance obtained, they turned to each other and exchanged a long clinging look. Perdita, woman-like, smiled as they stared at each other in their shaky position, but the Jobber, who was not one for smiling, remained as sombrely grave as he used to be on those old Sundays when the sea-gull took him for an idiot. It was one of those occasions when Chance having blindly prepared for a dramatic climax through aeons of time, seems itself to emerge like a palpable presence, out of the criss-cross accidents of its whirling possibilities and to survey its achievement. The queer-shaped block of oolite, the hint of “the gentleman from the White Nose”, the ancient land-slide, the accident that this slim figure in her black cloth dress, and this bony figure in his jersey and loose trousers — a male skeleton and a feminine skeleton — should be there at all, with that particular plant clutched in his fingers, were all elements that had prepared for the haggard-rapturous stare with which these two now embraced. In this stare there was no voluptuousness: there was no gaiety. They shared the gravity of two animals drinking at a longed-for stream.

“Well,” he said, breaking the spell, “shall we eat it?”

He stripped the plant of its three small leaves and flung the stalk violently away. Nor was this the first time that Perdita had noticed that when the Jobber threw anything away he always flung it as if with the words— “That’s the end of you!” But she obediently put the little leaves into her mouth and proceeded to bite them up. This proceeding was by no means a pleasure either for touch or taste; but she chewed them gingerly while a certain amount of their astringent juice trickled down her throat. Then she smiled at him and asked him what this plant was.

“Why — don’t ‘ee know? Don’t they have ’em in your Isles?”

He held his broad palm towards her and she took out the little chewed fragment from between her lips and placed it in his hand. With one of his curious solemn chuckles that were as totally devoid of any human humour as if a sea-lion were to display levity, the Jobber clapped his great hand to his face and swallowed the morsel at a gulp.

The next thing that occurred was not very surprising, although it was a shock to them both. The disturbance of exchanging the leaves upset their balance, and Perdita, finding herself slipping, clutched at his jersey, with the result that as she slid she pulled him down. Luckily the grass was soft at the stone’s foot, so they got no hurt. They had rolled round, clinging tight to each other; so that finally, when they reached the earth the girl found herself in what the poet calls “the very lists of love”. The Jobber, however, did not forget that they could be clearly seen by anyone following the cliff’s edge above them. He held her beneath him long enough, all the same, to kiss her as she had never been kissed before. And lying there on that sun-scented grass Perdita responded to his embrace. She was a grown girl. She was no child. But this was her first experience of what it was to be pressed against a man’s body. What he was feeling aroused responsive desire in her own senses. But the Jobber knew the danger of their position, so exposed from above, and scrambling to his feet he lifted her up by her wrists with a powerful swing of his arms.

“Well!” he panted, “that proves it’s true!”

She gazed at him with a countenance flushed, ruffled, discomposed, but radiantly happy.

“What proves what?” she gasped.

The Jobber wagged his head and then nodded at her, still breathing hard.

“Why, didn’t ‘ee *really* know what that plant was?” he returned. “It’s Sea-Holly! ‘Pilgrims of Love’ and ‘Brides of Quietness’ used to come to Portland and Chesil Beach from all over England in old days. Old wives in Chesilton in *my* memory used to make a concoction out of this that brides would put into their tea. You’re mine now altogether, Perdie, since we’ve swallowed Sea-Holly under the ‘Clipping Stone’! ’Twas ‘Clipping’ *he* used to say, though its called ‘Cuddling-Stone’ on the Island.”

Their sunset walk to “The Head” after this incident at the place so dear to “the gentleman from the White Nose”, was so happy that for the third time that day the Jobber came near to forgetting the Chesil-Beach pebble which he still carried in his trousers-pocket. Though in her excitement at the moment the girl did not notice it, she found afterwards that she had received a bruise in her thigh as they fell, from that primitive weapon concealed by her lover. He had feared lest, with her superior social usages and more delicate refinements, she might be embarrassed by the fuss that the Gadgets would be sure to make over her, but it turned out quiet otherwise. Those moments when they lay at the foot of the Clipping Stone seemed to have inspired her with something of her lover’s own easy indulgence and careless tolerance. It is true that for the Jobber, thinking of the morrow — for after all it was with a condemned man she was to be bedded that night — there were several occasions when he fell into miserable abstraction but whatever he might be feeling the girl noticed nothing of it.

And the Jobber was rendered proud, as well as relieved by the attitude taken by the family at the Head. It was clear they were deeply impressed by

Perdita’s manners and ways, and it was also clear that they were honestly very happy for him that he should have the good luck of such a companion. They accepted the pretence that this was her bridal night just as sympathetically as if it really had been, but while John kept his grosser jokes to himself Ellen lavished her yearning for romance upon this quiet girl’s head. ‘Melia and Celia were so excited that they actually changed rôles, ‘Melia turning the pages of “Percy’s Reliques”, and Celia wondering whether it wouldn’t be nice to put a glass of “Meliodka” on the little table by Perdita’s bed.

Long after Perdita was sound asleep the Jobber’s mind went whirling on in the same blood-stained circle.

“It’s God!” he said once to himself.

But what he called “God” was really his life-illusion, a sullen imperative that sucked up the whole fatal necessity of his nature. Half-awake, and yet not normally awake, he kept falling into a feverish delirium, in which the fact that he had possessed this girl at his side mingled their identities. It was not merely himself who kept striking the Dog with the stone he held, it was a double personality, made up of some incredible fusion of their bodies. It was something thickened, fortified, charged, with the spirit and the blood of both of them. And as he held the unconscious girl, who every now and then “made sweet moan” in her sleep, his delirious fantasy turned this new Being that was them both into the pressure of the fatal imperative that he kept calling “God”. It never once occurred to him that his original motives, righteous indignation, his long-nourished hatred, his sense of the man being a Power of Evil, had been totally transformed since yesterday morning when he went to High House.

Once when Perdita in her sleep threw her arm confidingly across his body he felt such infinite tenderness well up within him that he had a moment of relative lucidity in which he deliberately tried to realize what his life would be *if he let Cattistock alone.* What yawned for him *then* was a chasm in his central self as wide as that slit in the Beale-rock, a chasm in that soul of his soul which made him what he was in his own eyes. *Not* to strike down this man seemed to him like jumping to safety from a sinking craft, a craft of which he was the master; saving his own skin by a denial of his living honour, more than of his honour, of his uttermost life-sensation, of the integrity of the very "I" in his central consciousness. It was as if, in the full public gaze, he were to let the Cormorant, with Bum Trot on board, go down to perdition, while he swam off, to start a new life — a wretched, meaningless, dishonoured, coward's life!

As he tossed from side to side in that windless, starlit silence, with the sea-airs from the unruffled West Bay flowing in through their open window, there came moments when his hold on objective reality grew faint, and when a strange exultation seized him, made up of his love's lost maidenhead and his passionate possession of her, made up of the wild mixing of their blood; and in the tide of this exultation he felt as if blood and death and the blow with which he would rid the world of the Dog, were all part of some mystical transaction, beautiful, terrible, miraculous, that he had only to carry to its appointed end, to redeem all. It must have been about three o'clock when this final exultation came upon him. For a long time he had been answering to something in that feverish half-sleep, to something which held out a clue, a solution. Once he had disturbed the girl by a start and a jerk and a convulsed groan.

"Blood... blood," he had heard her repeat; but she had sunk again into unconsciousness; and he took it for granted that she had no notion of what he was suffering in his mind.

But this “something” in his half-sleep which had been the clue to everything — what was it? It had seemed to him a complete solution, turning everything to peace, to satisfaction... but *what* was it? When he recalled it now, in this cold, clear, deadly lucidity into which he had roused himself, it seemed to him as though it had been the Clipping Stone! But how could the Clipping Stone be a clue to anything — least of all to what he was going to do to the Dog? The Jobber began to suffer. A cold, grey, not-to-be-pushed-off wedge of desolate misery seemed to come in now through that window opposite him. He felt as if in the act of possessing Perdita he had lost his main-spring. All was done, all was over. To sink down upon blood and ashes and let what must be be — that was all that remained. He now felt towards the killing of Cattistock as if it were a private “debt of honour” to the people of his home and their heritage of freedom. If it wasn’t for this he might — for Perdita’s love hung deadly sweet about him — have tried to live out the rest of his days as so many cowards do. He shifted his position, and sitting up a little, he squeezed his pillow into a shapeless ball and thrust it behind his neck, between his scalp and the woodwork of the bed. There was, somewhere in the sky, he knew, a shapeless moon at the beginning of her last quarter, but he could not see it in the little oblong space of sky which was all his window revealed. But a diffused whiteness which came from this dying moon threw a corpse-like pallor on Perdita’s face, as he watched it now, turned so trustingly towards him; while her even and quiet breath, like the wistful air that had stirred in that lonely tuft of grass outside the barred door of Last House, seemed ready to carry the Jobber’s mind, as he watched her, to some far-off Limbo, where such purposes as his melted away.

But he could not respond! Stark, grey, and cold, the lucid wedge of his self-imposed imperative brought him to the brink of despair. Here was his girl, her face turned towards him in confiding sleep, one thin arm, bare of the coverlet, lying exposed, a faint twitching movement, even as he watched her, still troubling her limbs. How could he tell her what he had laid upon himself to do: this penalty of losing the taste of food, of drink, of sleep, of the sea, of life itself, and *of her?* He must wake her. He must tell her, and he must do it now!

Her brown hair was trailing in a long, neat braid across her pillow, and her face, as she lay towards him, bore on its lineaments what struck him at that hour as being the enviable security of the faces of the dead. She wore nothing but her slip, but there was a knot of dark blue ribbon round the end of her braid, which had been all there was left for little Sue to provide, since it had been allotted to ‘Melia to lend her her comb, and to Celia to lend her her bedroom slippers.

But the girl now woke with a start, and the first look of bewilderment that crossed her face at reassembling the events that had led to her lying in this strange room changed to a look of dismay at seeing his roused and watchful pose.

“It isn’t morning? No, no. I can *see* it’s still night. What’s the matter? It isn’t *nearly* morning!”

Her eyes had opened wide. There was moonlight enough to see she was not smiling. But neither did she look frightened. She just woke to consciousness to perform the natural, womanly act of beating back the movement of time.

“Haven’t you been asleep?”

“No, my beautiful. I haven’t slept a wink. You’re perfectly right there. I’ve been—”

He stopped because it was not very nice to see the droop that came at the corners of her mouth or the wretched misery-lines that dragged at her tender sleep-relaxed cheeks.

"What is it?" she cried. "You're not going yet, are you? Is it all over? In stories it always says that men want to be off and away. They get up and put on their hunting clothes — and— 'give their bridle-reins a shake!'"

She stopped. She could not help smiling at the word "bridle-reins".

But the Jobber gave her a look now as much as to say "I'll stop your damned feminine nonsense," and jumping out of bed he began impatiently fumbling about above the table where the matches and candle were. In this process he knocked down upon the floor the little glass of "Meliodka" which had been placed at their bed's head. Violently striking the floor this glass broke into a hundred bits, and a curiously pungent and very aromatic fragrance diffused itself through the room.

"There goes Celia's drink!" cried Perdita, lifting herself up a little in the bed.

She seemed to feel that even brides, at the third hour of their new day had to bestir themselves when things were broken and split.

But the Jobber, who had now laid his fingers on the matches, struck a light in a silence so portentous that it reduced Meliodka to its proper place in a world of blood and iron. But none of this grimness saved the man from receiving a sideways thrust when he noticed the way the grease had dripped down the edge of the candle. This had been caused by the fact that, teasing the girl, who wanted to blow out the light, he had pushed it away from her, while the air from the window kept blowing the flame sideways.

"Oh, Skald, whatever shall we tell her?"

This rather wistful voice from the bed as he squeezed the spilt candle grease away from the side of the candle only increased the Jobber's stubbornness. He replaced the spluttering candle upon the table with an intense solemnity. Then throwing upon her a look that was full of tragic reproach he went over to the door where he had hung his trousers the evening before. He had slept naked that night and that he had done this was not devoid of a curious appropriateness, because in Perdita's girlish fancies about a Being who was a kind of merman, and came to her out of the sea, the mysterious lover was always naked. Thus, as with the single candle between them, with its tiny heart of blue fire and its tremulous yellow pyramid that kept bending towards the wall as the night airs wafted it and ruffled it and spread it out like a flickering fan, the Jobber moved across to the door, Perdita could not help admiring his mould. His shoulders were so broad, his hips, flanks, and buttocks so thin, that his form did actually resemble a classic figure on an archaic frieze. As he unhooked his trousers he received yet another of these heart-sickening tragic stabs; for he could remember how his hand was so trembling with excitement as he hung these up, that he couldn't as he always did in his own house unbutton his braces from them and hang them separately. He didn't put them on even now, but he thrust his hand into one of the pockets and brought out that heavy grey-blue pebble, of the bruise from which, after sliding down with him from the Clipping Stone Perdita was already conscious.

"See that?"

He held it out to her across the side of the candle's flame. She looked at the stone; and then looking at his face she realized in an intuitive flash the connection between this object and all those dark rumours of his threats against his enemy that hitherto she had put out of her mind. Why hadn't she realized before? Women are sometimes much less subtle, much easier to deceive than men! Till this very second of time she had not the least suspicion that he was intending to leave her before dawn, not the least notion that all this long day, all the time since he met her by the Jubilee Clock, he had been brooding over this projected violence. The first shock of it — for her brain moved fast — when he held out that stone, was to fling her back, like a vessel striking ice beneath its keel, upon the cold substratum of her pride and her pessimism.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Feel its weight,” he said, “for where I go you go, and what I do you do.”

Her cheeks went white and she sat straight up in the bed.

“I shall do nothing of the sort!” she declared. “And what’s more if you don’t throw that thing away—”

She stopped, biting her lip, while a frown of intense concentration puckered her forehead and her unseeing gaze was fixed not on his face but on his navel.

“It doesn’t matter much to either of us *now,”* he said, *“what* you do. There would have been a time! But we’re one now.”

She leapt out of the bed and faced him.

“Throw that stone away!” she said in a low voice. *“No*! — don’t you dare touch me!”

“Take care!” he cried in panic, conscious of the broken Meliodka glass.

And without a moment’s hesitation he swung her off her feet and back on the bed. She gathered herself together, shaking from head to foot. She sat up and looked at him steadily, hugging her knees. Not only her body was trembling. Her teeth were chattering. Curious lines in her face appeared that he had never seen before, and her eyes grew larger and wilder every second.

“Take yourself off,” she moaned. “I don’t want to see your face. It’s monstrous, this thing you’re going to do.”

She must have grown aware of something in his look that overcame her completely, something that was like a stricken animal, something helpless and pleading, something bewildered as well as hurt; for her anger melted out of her, and an intolerable tenderness for him surged through her, like a wave through a sea-sponge. She stretched out her hand towards him.

"Skald," she whispered hoarsely. "Skald, my dearest love, I'll go with you everywhere, always, through everything, if you throw that stone away, if you give this madness up!"

She suddenly realized that his eyes had grown small and that his cheeks had grown puffy from sleeplessness. He now opened and shut his mouth like a great dusky-armoured sturgeon.

"All Chesil Beach is behind that stone," he said.

"All the salt sea," she retorted, "is with me to bury it where it belongs! Give this up, give this up, you don't know what you're doing!"

Both her thin arms were stretched out to him now.

"Don't torment me, woman," he said. "I've got to do it. I'll go down too, you may be sure of that. They shan't catch me! Nor you nor mother nor dad'll have any disgrace. The Dog'll be gone, and the Jobber'll be gone. That'll be all!"

"But our love, Skald, our love — is *that* nothing? Listen, Skald! It may be little to you, but do you think I can go on, as I was, without you? Do you think I could bear it?"

But even while they were talking he was feverishly putting on his clothes and by the time she uttered the words "bear it", his trousers were on and the stone was in its old place.

"John and Ellen will see that you get safe back," he said, and now to her consternation she realized that he had his jersey on and was lacing up his boots.

Each new stage in his dressing was like the pause in a march to an execution. He was dressed completely now and was standing, terribly still, in the middle of their chamber.

"If you can't bear it," he said, in a voice that quavered and shook, "with me and the Dog gone, by Dum! do 'ee think *I* can bear it, to be a talker, a *talker,* and hear the Dog jeering, and all pubs in the town jeering. No, no, no, my girl. I was awake thinking about it all night, and I tell you when there's a man like the Dog to be brought down, the only way is to go down with him. Don't 'ee see, Perdie, my little Perdie, I should be a laughing stock forever, if after so much talk I let him go?"

There rushed through Perdita's whole being now a surging torrent of anger against this man, standing there before her, this man who actually was weighing the opinions of friends and enemies, pot-houses and Peninsular Lodges, in the balance with such a thing as their love, the life they could have together — the life that was to end tonight.

"How can you—" she began fiercely, but a speechless amazement took the place of her anger and the words died on her lips.

She felt, trickling down, drop by drop, upon her heart from their eternal cistern of futility, the old, cold deadly poison of her familiar hopelessness. They had had their happiness — for just twenty hours! And meanwhile totally unknown to this girl in the bed and to this man obstinately condemning both her and himself out of his wicked "Hubris" as Homer would say, the measureless starlit heavens above the silent stone roof of the Sea-Serpent's Head were slowly crossed, several hours before dawn, by a long procession of small white clouds. And as if in occult confederacy with these clouds, by flying in the opposite direction, three large migratory birds, such as few Portland dwellers could have identified, passed swiftly, one behind another, with flapping soundless wings, over the Head's chimney. At all spots on the earth's surface, in these hours when the life-pulse is lowest, every slightest material movement is accentuated to an impressive degree, and rendered fatal and significant, like a solitary footfall in some vast empty universe.

Simultaneously with the passing of that procession of clouds and those unknown migratory birds across the spaces above the Head’s stone roofs, the raised voices in the guest-room of the Gadgets seemed to disturb, though nothing articulate could be caught, for the walls were thick, but the psychic vibration of the talk, the quiet repose of ‘Melia and Celia who shared the same bed. For both the girls, stirring in their sleep, murmured confused and troubled nonsense, but there was no one to listen to or try to interpret it. Ellen Gadget, however, in the room next the girls, rose on her elbow and whispered to John, who, like his daughters, had been talking in his sleep:

“Did ‘ee hear summat, me precious marrow?”

But all the answer she got for bothering the landlord of the Head was a sulky growl:

“Get thee to thee’s wone side, ‘ooman; ye be shoving I over, ye fool, to bed’s bloody edge!”

When in cold blood human beings recall the frantic agitations they make one another go through there is a curious tendency for the playing of strange tricks with Time. Human emotion seems as if it had the peculiarity of drawing Time in, or stretching Time out, like a telescope between the fingers of a child; so that an hour becomes five minutes or five minutes becomes an hour, independently of the glory or shame of clocks.

“I... will... not... let... you... go!”

How did the reverberation of this cry of Perdita’s in her own ears get transformed into so many things? How did it get transformed into a cold, wet stickiness, under her feet, that, in the state she was in, seemed to her to be blood? How did it get transformed into the thud of her own head against the floor? How did it become the unbolting of the door downstairs and the starting up to a wild series of explosions of the Slug's machine? How did it become the bursting into her room of three white-faced, white-robed, white-footed young girls? How did it become the voice of John Gadget saying to Ellen Gadget:

"Better leave she to she's self, Ellen, and get fires lit and kettles on! She'll be all right present! 'Tis Jobber Skald's little way to curse and to threat Mr. Cat'stock. Us do know thik little way, and that 'un means naught, and never *have* meant aught; being only the man's way of relieving his feelings; but pore Missy Wane, being a stranger, though she *be* Jobber Skald's girl, be unaccustomed, as you might say, to thik wold zong what 'a hollers and zings about killing of the good gentleman. What made him drumble her head on floor, say ye? I knows well what made him act so! 'Twere because she thought his leaving of her afore dawn were a cruelty to a bedded sweetheart. I knowed 'a was leaving, and I knowed what 'a had to do, too! 'A had to take a fine load of fish for Mr. Witchit to Sherborne for one o' they School Festies. I do know what's what, Ellen; for 'a told I, his wone self. 'A mighty fine load of fish,' 'a says; 'and I've got to drop some wondrous mackerel,' 'a says, 'on me way, as I goes by Chickerel'!"

It was one of the things Perdita remembered afterwards that she had, at this juncture, enough heart left to be glad it was Sue, rather than either of the elder girls, who was left to scrape up the broken glass from the floor and to see that "her had a few sticks in she's grate zet a-vire".

She lay on her back, stretched out perfectly straight and still, with her sheets, attended to by Sue's silent care, tucked neatly in, and folded smoothly under her chin. She remained with her thoughts numb, inert, dazed, quiescent, in a species of half-sensual, half-mystical trance, recalling the passion of their love. Then — as sturdy little Sue, with tumbled hair and sleep-swollen face, kneeling before the grate, caused the sticks to crackle and send forth an exquisite-smelling smoke, which the dawn-wind, blowing up from the sea, carried to her pillow — the thought came to her with a certain surprise that it had not come to her before —

“But I can — always — die — too.”

SYLVANUS COBBOLD

THE MORNING OF FEBRUARY THE TWELFTH, AS IT DAWNED UPON WEYmouth and Portland, was even warmer than the preceding one. It seemed as if nature were bent upon making up to the inhabitants of the two boroughs and their adjoining promontory for the violent mood in which she had disturbed the elements on the day of storm.

Curiously opposite were the local comments upon this second fine day, when it became manifest that the sun was intending to shine more and more warmly as the hours went by. Both in the trading districts and in the lodging-houses and the villas, both in the spacious Georgian apartments of Belvidere and in the small houses that adjoined the dingy mansion of Dr. Girodel, there was the same quaint divergence between the reaction of the men and the reaction of the women to this auspicious weather. The women, rich and poor, with complete unanimity, congratulated the Creator of all things on having realized, as *they* did, what a notable day this was, being the day of Mr. Cattistock's marriage; whereas the men with equal unanimity expressed satisfaction that the sky should be cloudless on the one day of the week when the shops and business-houses of the town closed their shutters in the early afternoon.

Awaking early — not, it may well be believed, on Mr. Cattistock's account, but on his own — Magnus let himself out of Miss Le Fleau's front door, without disturbing Martha, who was having her first cup of tea in the kitchen, and proceeded hurriedly down the terrace in the opposite direction from Trigonia House. When he reached "Fernlands", which was the elegant, if inappropriate name bestowed by Corporal Dawson upon his final retreat, he regarded this quiet abode with that tender attention, different from any other in the world, with which a lover contemplates what he hopes will be his first ménage. With a wise caution that explained the fact that Magnus was the only permanently successful private-tutor in the town, he had boldly asked Miss Le Fleau — whom he found still up when he returned from Upwey — whether in return for a comparatively small rent — nothing comparable to what he now paid — he could go on using his room, just as it was, for his daily lessons, until she should find some other use for it. Well did the crafty scholar know that for the pleasure of keeping up their daily affectionate talks in her drawing room his father's old friend would have let him use that room, free of all cost, forever; but he knew the elder Muir would wish him to pay *something,* and so it was settled that he should pay every week the sum of five shillings.

"Will she like it here? Will she? Will she?" was his one thought now, as he paced up and down in front of "Fernlands", observing every detail of its pleasing exterior and noting with satisfaction that it had far the best "garden" — if you could judge by cultivation — in the whole terrace.

The much-travelled Corporal, having watered flower-pots under the eyes of half the Orient, was not one to mind being seen scattering a little manure — bought at the stables of the Burdon Hotel — at the edge of a sunny Weymouth pavement. Corporal Dawson's appearance in this minute railed-in enclosure, wherein he had whitened with his own hands every pebble-stone that bordered the path to the door, coincided with Magnus' fifth approach during that early hour from the East or from the West of the terrace. To find that his prospective lodger had the peculiarity of a sentinel on patrol was by no means unpleasant to the Corporal. Instead of making him suspicious, it reassured him. He leaned in his shirt-sleeves upon the little gate and prepared to enter into a rambling discussion as to how far the

Nothe Fort was still in use, and how, when it was most in use, it compared with other historic defences of the country.

"Missis be still in bed, Sir. My first wife, Sir, were one to sleep late, and so be my last. My second were always up afore day-break. But she died in the first year of our union, Mr. Muir. 'Twas in Singapore she left me."

The Corporal sighed; while Magnus, whose mind was all hazy-dazy with thoughts of Curly concluded that the old soldier was accusing Providence of rewarding slug-a-beds with longevity, while early risers were cut down in their prime.

"I'm afraid," he remarked with a rather embarrassed smile, "that my young lady will be more like your present wife than like your second one, for she says she finds it very hard to wake up in the morning."

Saluting the Corporal warmly, if absent-mindedly, Magnus now crossed the road, stepped up upon the white-washed edge of the esplanade, where little, massive, squat posts with holes through the middle of them, indicated where ornamental iron chains used to hang in the days of George the Third, crossed the parade's shining asphalt surface and, jumping down on the crunching pebbles, descended to the sea's edge. The sun had not risen long and the teacher was met by a dazzling stream of unbroken rays reaching him directly as well as indirectly. Directly from the luminary itself these rays reached him, and they reached him indirectly from the dancing, glittering sea-path which was its reflection. And for one second Magnus forgot "Fernlands", the benevolence of Miss Le Fleau, his spiritual distress about vivisection, yes! and even Curly herself!

That young woman had wakened early that morning, her head full of the Cattistock wedding, which after all *was* the greatest social event, second to the August Regatta, in the whole year; and at this moment, after her mother had with the greatest difficulty made her swallow a little breakfast, she was standing erect in the centre of her bedroom — which was also their sewing-room and their summer sitting-room — while with pins between her old teeth and her fingers fluttering under and above the edges of the precious fabric, Mrs. Wix fitted on her daughter's new dress. This dress was of a shimmery grey; and as the girl stood there under the eaves facing the small window — upon whose broad sun-warmed sill, in a chipped soap-dish, was a little bunch of snowdrops — her eyes seemed as lovely in their translunar remoteness as her slender figure was bewitching in its delicate charm. Curly's eyes, as she let her mother pull her about and lift up her arms, and pinch her waist, and smooth her shining hips, with a patience that knew no limit, had such a far-off look of mysterious beauty in them that many an on looker would have considered both Magnus and S. P. Ballard totally unworthy of her.

The early morning light, for the room faced east, flooded the deep-set little window between the gables and caused to be thrown upon the girl's pale brow and delicate cheeks a radiance that was unearthly. Curly certainly was more than ordinarily beautiful that morning. That far-away look in her eyes, those transparent cheeks bathed in the freshness of the morning, that supple form in the dove-grey dress, would have made any outsider feel that such loveliness almost had a right to be supported by one man and loved by another. A less faultless figure, a less far-off trance of luminous wistfulness, and anyone might have condemned her as a designing whore. But the idea of infidelity fled away abashed and the idea of cuckoldry hid its head in the presence of such angelic grace.

"Oh, Mother, Mother," she presently sighed as she looked down at the devoted little woman, whose hypocritical piece of crochet-work lay untouched on the table, "I keep thinking that if I *were* still free — and Mr. Cattistock's wedding and all coming on — Sippy *might* have changed his mind when he saw me — you know? — in a nice dress and *might* have thought I wouldn't be a shame to him. Of course I know he has to meet real gentle-folk and so forth and go to their houses and put on evening dress and talk about the Germans and the Chinese, but though I'd have been scared at first by all that, I'd have done it all right — *wouldn't* I have done it, Mother? — and made him feel proud of me? That's to say if he'd only spent a *little* money on my clothes!"

Mrs. Wix smiled sadly, and standing back from her latest adjustment, took three pins from between her teeth.

"You'd be a perfect lady in a twelve-month, Love," she said. "But don't 'ee mind too much. You'll be *a kind* of lady when you be Mrs. Muir of Brunswick Terrace."

But Curly's thoughts at that moment were flying higher than Brunswick Terrace. Strong, if obscure feelings, just then were moving in her heart, moving in that region of a girl's being where her whole nature is stirred up, but where emotion, desire, longing, are only vaguely articulate. Her mind wandered back to her meeting with Tissty and Tossty at Sark House; and, although not half as aware of her own beauty as most girls are, she felt stirring within her a dim sense that there *was* something unjust about her fate, thus torn between an elderly fiancé and a selfish lover. Her passion for young Ballard and her respect — for she had a genuine respect — for Magnus, kept gathering up from the surface of her mental perplexity like wisps of foam from a troubled tide. She *felt* rather than realized how unsatisfied was her claim upon life, her claim upon happiness, upon a free escape from the imbroglio she was in, upon a richer, fuller, sweeter, more exalted destiny! Not Curly's intelligence, but, as it were, *her beauty itself,* beyond the margin of her reason, began to make its demands out of the dumb sub-rational levels of its own tender being. It was as if the soft petals of some ill-placed plant should protest, while its root and stalk made no sign, against the sterile spot in which fate had opened them to the air. Her incomparable form and face — standing pensively there by that attic-window, while her mother's swollen knuckles and bird-like fingers played once more over the surface of her dress, seemed themselves to protest that they deserved something better than to be the plaything of a Sippy, or the petted idol of an elderly inpecunious teacher! These dumb protests from the transparency of Curly's skin, from the lovely wistfulness of her far-off gaze, from the delicate curves of her slender body, were uttered in voices much more poignant, much more tragic even — for no self-pity can really touch the bottom of the pitifulness of such waste — than the abrupt and rather contrary sounds emitted by her young lips, as she murmured to her mother her hopes that she would get a good view of the wedding, and her doubts whether Magnus would select really "nice" roses.

Her mother's replies were brief, evasive, practical; but something in the old woman did respond — for a deep and mysterious link exists between a mother and the loveliness of the daughter under her cherishing hands — to this wordless spring-stir in the indignant flesh-and-blood she was adorning.

"You look pretty as a picture, my treasure," Mrs. Wix said at last; but the girl only gave an impatient shrug, and thought to herself:

"What is the use? Oh, why, Oh, why is not this my marriage with Sippy?" And then she did quite definitely formulate the thought: "I am really as good-looking as either of those actresses though my skin mayn't be quite as white as Mrs. Lily's!"

Even when Magnus was back on the Esplanade it was still only barely eight o'clock and he thought to himself:

"Martha never brings up the things till a quarter past. I'll walk a step towards Lodmoor."

Keeping to the esplanade, therefore, and turning his eyes away from Trigonia House lest he should be waved to by his friend Gaul, or even by that impertinent youth, Ballard, whose motor made such an unpleasant noise, Magnus had soon passed Penn House and arrived at that high wall and those various iron gates where the gardens of the Preston Road mansions descend to the sea. This was the place where, under the protection of the good Bum Trot, Mrs. Cobbold's companion had received her first impression of High House, and Magnus himself now looked up at High House, as he saw it towering above him, with no little interest. With a good deal more interest, however, he surveyed a striking mansion of yellowish cement that showed its superiority to all its neighbours by the possession of a tower. From the top of this tower, composed of what looked like stucco or painted brick-work, was suspended a flagstaff, and on the top of this flagstaff flew a small pennon.

This was the house of old Dr. Higginbottom, that choleric physician who when summoned to attend Captain Poxwell, the Captain being at that time most obstinately entrenched in Sandsfoot Castle, went off in a savage huff, uttering threats about summoning the police. Magnus had always cherished a certain romantic feeling for this stucco tower overlooking the bay. When he was a child it was Pearl Water, old Higginbottom's daughter who occupied that tower-room. He remembered Pearl talking to him once at this very garden-gate and how she made such an overpowering impression on him that when she died her figure always haunted this spot. The girl had married an assistant of Dr. Brush and it was her death that had first drawn Magnus' attention to the appalling facts of vivisection, that secret horror behind all modern civilization.

Pearl had indeed quarrelled with her husband over Dr. Brush's experimental laboratory, but Dr. Water had died when influenza attacked the

Institute, and Pearl came back with little Caddie to her old tower-room.

Rumour said that Higginbottom wouldn't have a thing changed in the turret-room after Pearl died, and that instead of getting a proper governess for Caddie he let her grow up in any sort of casual manner with all that tower-space to herself. He had indeed a good excuse for putting her physical health above her mental training, for Caddie Water was subject to epileptic fits. She was now eleven years old and not altogether, Magnus thought, as friendly to him as she used to be when she was five or six; but the Homer-loving teacher of Horace was still one of her best friends and Caddie Water's friends were very few indeed. She was an extremely plain child, heavy and awkward in figure, sullen and sulky in face; she would sit for hours in solemn lassitude staring across the sea. Caddie's best friend of her own sex was none other than Gipsy May, whom her grandfather had known from very early days. Among all the other local eccentrics, alternately patronized and bullied by the old gentleman none indeed was such a pet as the tenant of Lodmoor Hut. It was a wonder to see how well these two queer characters got on, and how the doctor humoured the gipsy and how the gipsy held her own with the doctor.

It was not, therefore, with any particular surprise in spite of the earliness of the hour that Magnus found a group of excited people, including old Higginbottom and little Caddie, standing at the garden-gate of "The Turret". He would have turned all the same the moment he came upon them there, for he sorely wanted his breakfast and felt anything but sociable, had not the doctor called to him by name.

"Muir! Muir! Come here a moment! Come here, please, Muir!"

Quite a disturbance it seemed to be that the teacher of Latin plunged into, when he arrived at the garden-gate of "The Turret". It had been May and Larry who were making the trouble in some private disagreements, but

Caddie had seen them quarrelling in the road from her tower-window and had come hurrying down through house and garden to find out what was the matter; and she had very quickly — for the old man was an early riser — dragged her grandfather into it. Dr. Higginbottom was always plastic as clay where Caddie was concerned and he was much more occupied with her now than with the angry pair. But Gipsy May was terribly excited. There were red spots on both her hollow, consumptive cheeks and her great dark eyes were luminous and black as coal. After her fashion she approached the gist of the matter sideways, glancing at it, pecking at it, diving at it with a swoop before it reached the surface like a sea-gull snatching from a ship's deck what *might* be bread and *might* be a bit of paper!

"It's a beautiful day, Mr. Muir," she said, addressing him at once and fixing him with the fleeting eye of a swallow, who had been caught persecuting a gosling. "Don't you think it would be a nice day for me to go to Portland? Larry's afraid — no! no! give him your proper hand Larry. You're not a child, are you? Your *right* hand, like a good boy, and don't look so sulky. I'll tell Mr. Muir what's all about, if you do — Larry's afraid I'll be making trouble at 'Last House' if I go over there, Mr. Muir. He's afraid I shall tell 'S. C.' what a little viper he's got there; but I never say nothing to anyone of what I knows from the cards."

"That's how she goes on, Mr. Muir," interjected Larry, his green eyes shining with the phosphorus of anger, "and she's got nothing against Marret at all 'ceptin' only that she bides with Mr. Cobbold. If she goes up to Last House like she is now, she *will* make trouble. Mr. Cobbold ain't one to be meddled with — and her be in a mood for meddling today — yes! meddling with Satan!"

The slow, hesitant voice of little Caddie now lifted itself up tremulous and hoarse, as if in her tower she had been copying the cries of sea-gulls and ignoring human speech.

“Does Marret,” she began.

“Ugh! Hum!, Ugh! Ugh!, Hum! Hum!”

Such were the sounds, but far more charged with significance than the mere syllables suggest, with which the old doctor invariably saluted any company of people when little Caddie began to speak; and even as he now said “Ugh! Ugh!” he pulled her shawl more closely round her neck, and as he said “Hum! Hum!” he looked with doting idolatry into her white heavy face, poring anxiously over the quivering frown that now puckered up her forehead.

“Does... Marret... live... *with* Mr. Cobbold?”

Caddie articulated these words as if they were not her own language, as if they were a language she had learned with difficulty. This was the impression Caddie gave everybody, as if she had learnt the language and ways of men very carefully and thoroughly but was in constant danger of forgetting them, being in her heart, as far as the human race was concerned, as remote as if she had been a sick seamew.

“Ugh! Ugh... Hum! Hum!” repeated the doctor, looking at Magnus fiercely under his bushy brows as much as to say: “Careful now! Be careful in your thoughts, my friend! You can see who is speaking, can’t you?”

But Caddie went on quietly, looking at no one in particular. She seemed to be asking her extremely touchy human question of the large tolerance of universal space.

“As his servant... or as... his... lady-love?”

“Missy! Missy!” cried young Zed, clutching with his eel-ditch finger-and-thumb the end of Caddie’s shawl and giving it a beseeching tug. “Don’t ‘ee let May use common speech about Mar’t! Mar’t be woon of they gals what the stories tell of, what be beyond the sweet ways and the thorny ways, what be like Pelicans in Wilderness. Mar't have never once, no! not all the times I've seen she, said woon word against May, or about May and Mr. Cobbold, or how Mr. Cobbold could never bide May's mischief and how he never could bide thik girt music-box she carries with her, and how she let loose his pet sea-parrot that a sailor-boy gie'd he, and how it got into field and couldn't fly and a cat killed 'un. Mar't never once talked to I about woon thing o' such tales."

It was Gipsy May's turn now, and her retaliation took, as all her emotional moves did, an angle so totally unexpected and so remote from the whole issue, that at first Magnus supposed she was about to be reconciled with her protégé out of consideration for her friend Caddie.

"Larry here doesn't know," she said, addressing the little invalid, who was now leaning heavily upon her father's arm, "doesn't know what Tarot cards have been telling about S. C.'s being in danger from Minerals. Animals couldn't hurt the flick of a finger of him. Vegetables couldn't hurt the tick of a pulse of him. Tis minerals where his danger lies. 'Tis Minerals what'll be his undoing. And that's why I be taking to S. C. this very morning, and take it I will, what Larry have persecuted me for and teased me for, ever since us first lived as we be now."

As she spoke she let go her hold on Caddie Water's shawl and tapped the bones of her own hollow chest. She always kept her collar-bones exposed to the air, as if by that means to retain some lost link with the elements; although, below her collar-bones, her incredibly thin bosom was always covered up in a bright-coloured, beautifully clean wrap.

"It be *in here* I've got thik Magnet for he, Larry Zed; and if thee hadn't made such a fumigation about me going to 'un I'd have gived it to thee, thee own self! Never will thee set eyes on it no more. 'Twere Gran' Holt's Magnet. And now Gran' Holt's Magnet be going to Last House; there to bide; there to keep Hurt-from-Minerals away from S. C. So your pretty Mar't's—" and she impishly imitated the way Larry pronounced her rival's name— "Mar't's silver bodkin her told 'ee of, 'ull never prick S. C. in a bed May's ever made, but Gran' Holt's Magnet 'ull draw all they bobbikins after 'en, and her won't be able to keep a prick-point on her bussum so hard and so strong will Gran' Holt's Magnet pull!"

But Gipsy May had gone just a fraction of an inch too far in her tormenting of young Zed. She *nearly* achieved her purpose, which was to throw him, before them all, into a paroxysm of childish anger, while she herself slipped quietly away, but she missed the fact that since the scene in his hay-loft bedroom with Perdita, the lad had changed and matured in some subtle manner so that he was less easy to handle.

It was Caddie Water, who — with a child-invalid's psychic susceptibility — realized the stress of young Zed's feelings as he stood, stunned, taut, and trembling, his eyes full of angry tears. Thus he stood, staring and quivering, as if she had thrown a spell over him, while Gipsy May with that peculiarly vibrant glide characteristic of her, which combined bewildering furtiveness with unassailable dignity — hurried off along the pavement. She passed Penn House; she crossed the road; she mounted the esplanade, and very soon she was hidden behind bath-chairs, rain-shelters, boat-men, notice-boards, and those characteristic figures of early-risen athletes of both sexes, who, with season-defying towels and wet bathing-suits, seemed to be accusing all the rest of the world of effeminate and contemptible degeneracy. Among all these did Gipsy May vanish; but if it had not been for Caddie Water the chances are that young Zed when he got his wits together would have run after her and made a distressing scene. But Caddie Water snatched her hand from her father and seized the lad by one of his wrists.

“Come up to my tower, Larry,” she cried, “I’ve got something to show you.”

The Doctor gave Magnus a most complicated look then, in which a desire to make things unpleasant, and to make them unpleasant *at once,* for someone or other, struggled with a desire to please his grand-child at any price.

“May I take him up? May I take him up? May I take—”

The child’s insistent voice brought back to Magnus Pearl’s tones, as she stood and talked to him that day at this very gate.

“It was Pearl,” he said to himself, “who first put vivisection into my head.”

“Won’t you go up with them, Muir?” said the Doctor.

Now Magnus knew perfectly well that this was a serious request, in making which the old man snatched at a chance to begin his breakfast with a free conscience. But in little physical exigencies of this sort Magnus was liable — as the elder Muir before him had been — to display adamantine selfishness.

“Not just now, thank you, Caddie,” he said. “Martha must have taken up my breakfast long ago. I must hurry off!”

“How’s Miss Le Fleau’s rheumatism?” enquired the old man in reply to this, jeering at the teacher’s restlessness out of one eye, while with the other he followed anxiously the little girl’s figure as she went off with young Zed. “Oh, yes! and *did* you find a room at the Corporal’s? Miss Le Fleau told me you were seeing him.”

“I hope so... I think so... but it’s too long a story to go into now,” murmured Magnus. “Excuse me, Doctor, but I really *must* be off.”

The old man returned slowly into the big house and went into his sunny dining-room where his silver coffee-pot already awaited him, in the window, close to a stand of red geraniums, and kept warm by the blue flame of a little spirit-lamp. He never smelt that peculiar methylated smell without thinking of Pearl. He could see her figure now as she poured out his coffee for him. How he always dreaded a certain curious look of unearthly detachment that used to come into her face. As he stood gazing at the geranium-pots behind the silver of his breakfast things, he suddenly set himself to listen. Could he hear any sounds from the tower? No; all was deathly silent throughout the house. Then there came the opening of a door and a hurried patter of feet.

"Damn!" the old gentleman thought, "It's Sarah."

It was indeed Mrs. Piddle who came cautiously in with the jerky movement of an anxious moor-hen exploring a suspicious weir.

"May I speak to 'ee a minute, sir?"

The Doctor countered her question with one of his own.

"I suppose young Larry Zed has had his breakfast long ago?"

Mrs. Piddle nodded. Then she said:

"I've 'a had a Card of Invite, Sir, from Eliza Chant out to Chickerel, and it says she's celebratin' Cat'stock's weddin' tonight at the Lodge with a few old friends and would *I* care to drop in. She says Mrs. Matzell from Half-Way House will be there and Mrs. Monkton from Trigonia House may be coming and Mrs. Wix from Upwey has promised to come. 'Twill be a nice little gatherin', Sir, such as I mayn't live to see the likes of again."

Old Higginbottom glowered at her.

"I suppose you're thinking of strolling up to Trinity Church this afternoon?"

Mrs. Piddle's face expressed dismay that he should even mention a matter so profoundly to be taken for granted.

“ ’Tis the great event of the year, Sir,” she murmured reproachfully, “and I could scarce believe me ears when John said you wasn’t going to the Church at all.”

The Doctor flew into a half-real, half-pretended passion.

“Sarah Piddle!” he cried out, in the fashion of Oliver Cromwell, “Sarah Piddle! The Lord deliver me from Sarah Piddle!” Then looking at her more calmly. “If your Cattistock’s a rogue,” he said, “this Poxwell woman he’s marrying is worse still!”

But the old lady had cocked her head on one side and was listening intently, very much as her master had listened a minute or two before.

“Is Caddie calling?” he said, his face anxious and concerned in a moment. “Yes, go up and see, Sarah! Go up, good Sarah, go up and see!”

When the housekeeper was gone he bent down and pinched with his fingers one of the scented leaves of his favourite ivy-leaved geranium. And a terrible longing for his dead daughter swept over him. His moroseness, his savage anger, his moods of violence had all come after Pearl died. Secretly at the bottom of his heart he considered that Dr. Brush’s Sanitarium had killed Pearl; and he never could endure a moment of the famous man’s company. He used to say to John Piddle, whenever Sarah had hysterics:

“We’ll send for that Sark House rogue, won’t we, Johnny, and try an honest quack before we let her go to that fellow out there?”

While matters thus settled down to their usual unquiet quiet at the “Turret”, Gipsy May was approaching the Jubilee Clock. The more disturbed, the more angry, the more upset Gipsy May was, the more tortuous and the more roundabout would grow her ways of mental procedure. These ways elaborated themselves until one would have thought it would be difficult even for herself to acknowledge the original cause of some puckish, impish scandalous action which seemed to be the finest flower of pure motiveless mischief. If the seriousness of her anger could be measured by the convolutions of her track she was very angry now, for instead of going to the station to catch the train, instead of going to the King's Statue to catch the bus, what must this circumambulatory woman do but visit the preparations for the wedding, outside Trinity Church and there wait quite aimlessly, it might seem, for a couple of hours. After this long delay she proceeded to the Pier and remained there, eating tangerine oranges, for no less than an hour more in order to catch the only morning boat there was, going to Portland!

A person clairvoyant of human thought would have found it an easy task to read and understand the thoughts of Sylvanus Cobbold; but he would have found it an impossible task to catch and explain the thoughts of Gipsy May. The truth perhaps was, as we might surmise of the thoughts of a raven or a magpie, that this singular woman jumped from one entirely concrete matter to another, pouncing upon it, snatching at it, picking it to bits, wrapping it up and hiding it and all the while thinking of it with a whimsical interest that was far removed from covetousness, an interest that was prepared to relinquish it at any moment with a complete gaiety of temper! Dr. Higginbottom used to say that Gipsy May was born under Saturn and was the true Saturnian type; but Pearl — those were in her happy days before she met Dr. Water — denied this and said there was nothing that happened in the world, unless it happened to a non-human animal, that May couldn't enjoy with a sideways relish of mischief.

Long before this mercurial Saturnian sucked her tangerines and collected the skins in little piles beside her, for she soon discovered that throwing them into the tide was a tantalization to the sea-gulls, out at Last House, which was the Gipsy's objective, Sylvanus Cobbold had been lying in his bed holding Marret between himself and the wall in his mystic-sensuous contemplations. The young girl had fallen fast asleep in the dark hour just before dawn; but as Sylvanus held her, pressed close against him, his own thoughts literally “wandered through eternity”. He had long ago acquired that precious power, in which, they say, the Lamas of Thibet are such adepts, of reducing the intensity of his physical desire to a level that lent itself to the prolongation rather than to the culmination of the erotic ecstasy. And as he now held this slender young being in his arms, who, even in her sleep, made little natural movements of confiding contentment, he began using her young warmth, even as the aged King David did that of the youthful Abishag, to strengthen his colloquy with the mystery of the cosmos. Desperately in that chilly hour did Sylvanus wrestle with the dark angel of outer space. What tormented him now, at this very second, as the great search-light from the Beale Light-House swept, moment by moment across his window, throwing his own hollow-cheeked physiognomy and the ends of his great mustache that hung down over the collar of his faded, washed-out, light-blue pajamas and the pathetically youthful profile of the Punch-and-Judy girl into an illuminated revelation, was the difficulty of explaining the atrocious suffering in the world under the hypothesis of the kind of Absolute he had hitherto imagined. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and trickled down the slope of his high cheekbones from his hollow eye-sockets; for not even the delicious sensuousness of holding Marret could make it easy to reconcile an Absolute that was good with the monstrous cruelties of the world as he knew it.

“How *can* you let these things be?”

These words Sylvanus uttered quite distinctly in his secret mind, though he did not let them pass, as Homer would say, “the barrier of his teeth”, and then he fell to contrasting the pleasure which he was deriving from the satiny smoothness of this girl’s body with the wretched suffering that even in Weymouth and Portland so many sentiencies were enduring. He shrank away, in all these thoughts of his, from every kind of physical self-consciousness. The subtlest of all differences between human beings has to do with their attitude to themselves when they are thinking about themselves. Some caress themselves when they are alone and consciously dote on themselves, whereas others hold themselves apart from themselves with a certain despotic contempt for themselves — and this, too, even in the midst of their liveliest sensations.

Of these last Sylvanus was an extreme example. Any idea of himself considered physically was nervously antipathetic to him. Sylvanus was more than shy of himself. A hot rush of blood causing him a curious discomfort, would mount up to his head at the merest approach to physical self-consciousness. He *had* to forget himself, or he couldn't go on! And yet he was a very sensuous man. Physical sensations he loved, cultivated, pursued, and fiercely sought; but physical self-consciousness shocked and outraged him. It seemed to give a twist, a tug, a squeeze, a jerk, a pull, a horrid twinge, to some invisible, *nervous navel-string* that was the devil's wire of his puppet-hood. Of all the men in Weymouth and Portland Sylvanus was probably the most egoistic and yet the least of a coxcomb. Such a shrinking had he from physical self-consciousness that it always worried him and gave him a nervous spasm even to set eyes upon his own shadow when he was going about! One of the most curious instances of this mania against physical self-consciousness actually arose at this very moment, while, satisfying his senses by holding the girl, he kept up an intense prolonged monologue addressed to the Absolute. For in talking to his God he never called himself "I" or "me" or "your servant" or even Sylvanus; he always called himself "Caput." But even this was not enough; for, since the Absolute was Everything, it was necessary to place the lowest function of his body side by side with the highest. Thus to the word Caput, in speaking of himself to God, what must this fantastical being do but add the word "Anus", which had the double advantage of indicating his spasmodic body-shame, and, incidentally, of rhyming with Sylvanus! As he lay there, in that incredibly hushed pre-dawn, thrilled through and through by a diffused sensuality, his mind gave up the struggle to reconcile his Absolute with the cruelty of things, for this began to seem beyond his power; and in place of it he wrestled with the Spirit in a frantic effort to make it include the Gross, the Repulsive, the Disgusting.

"Show yourself to Caput-anus! Oh, God, Oh, God, show yourself, show yourself, to Caput-anus!"

Thus did the cry of Sylvanus rise up from his bed in Last House, while constantly, like the repetition of some primeval creative act, like the index finger of the Absolute thrust into the gulfs of Nothingness, the revolving ray of the Portland Bill Light-house, that recurrent Pharos-Blaze, swept into the room and swept out of it.

Curious would it have been — but where was Peg Frampton to see such a sight? — to observe these two heads, the little doll-like head and the monstrous Quixotic head, with that minute-gun of blinding disclosure shot at them all the night! It was just as if the Eye of the Absolute itself had been turned in displeasure upon this unnatural assertion of mind over instinct, this side-steering, controlling, curtailing of the great erotic force that creates the world!

Nor was the grotesquerie of Sylvanus' thoughts at that time without its corresponding parallel in certain extraordinary movements he saw fit to make. He would, for instance, hitch himself up a little and crane his head forward, while his long neck, soft and malleable compared with the sinewy neck of old Captain Poxwell, would assume a striking resemblance to the head of a tortoise or a turtle. Straining himself in this way he seemed to have a remarkable power, which perhaps also was a trick known in Thibet, of being able to hold his neck extended, as it stretched upward and forward from his pillow, at an angle that might have given his bed-fellow an extremely uncomfortable feeling, if she had been willing to regard it. Gipsy May, of course, whose slumbers were lighter than those of a squirrel, had often been disconcerted by this peculiarity in her "S. C"; but it is doubtful if Marret, even if she had caught him at it, would have worried very much. Marret had watched so long those grotesque puppets of her father that she tended to consider such movements in a living man as the natural emotional expressions of the human frame.

But to Gipsy May, when she would wake up in that final watch of the night to find her companion in that queer position, and the salt air around Last House withdrawn into itself in a strange constriction, there was something upsetting to the nerves. The woman used to feel at such moments as if the very darkness itself, in the in-sucking sharpness of its suspense, were pulling in its cheeks along with its cold breath, in its passionate waiting for the dawn. And there was something about this turtle-like outstretched neck, with its super-independent mustache, that made her think of the twisted shape of the Hanged Man of the Tarot cards! There were few things, as Caddie's mother said, that could confound Gipsy May if they did not cause distress to beasts or birds or fishes, but always to wake up, just before dawn, and always be reminded of what those other, those non-human necks must have looked like, at this hour, hundreds of millions of years ago when that indrawn air shivered and yearned between the dawn's teeth for the red sun to touch the stalks of the pre-historic Mares'-tails, and to gouge great blood-pools out of the whitening swamp, was something towards which she at last had begun to feel rebellious.

Marret’s more docile nature, a nature, too, that was “native and indued” to the spasmodic movements of immemorial dolls, gave itself up without question to everything that Sylvanus did. As to what he *said* she seldom understood a word of it; but it gave her a physical sensation of ineffable peace to hear him talking and to know that he was talking to her. Virtue came out of the sound, and the meaning of his words reached her through the aura of this virtue, like the cry of sea-birds through a sunlit mist reaching someone who lies motionless upon a deck.

It was curious how Sylvanus and his young bed-fellow slept and waked by turns; for when the light of day was actually penetrating their room and the revolving search-light had ceased its spasms of illumination it was the girl who was awake. She woke up this time with a sudden, startling feeling of what it would be like to be driven out of Last House by Gipsy May! Her feeling at this moment isolated itself and projected itself into that air-swept chamber. It became a living part of that chemistry of reality to which she had to adapt herself. She knew Sylvanus was expecting Gipsy May today; and she said to herself now, just as if her leaving him could not be avoided when her older rival came:

“I shall go, if she stays; but they’ll quarrel again, and I shall come back.” Staring with wide-open eyes straight in front of her she said to herself, “He doesn’t know how fond he is of her. He doesn’t know that when she comes I must go. But when I go I mustn’t be angry with him. When I go I must say to myself, ‘They will quarrel again and I shall come back’. Whatever happens I must not get angry with him.”

But though she said this to herself, and could not imagine any possible change in her docility, in reality, deep down in her feminine nature, deep down in her long thin body, the old eternal anger of a woman against “the other woman” *was* beginning to stir.

"I must stop thinking about her coming," she thought. "I must enjoy every moment while she isn't here, while she is still at Lodmoor!"

With her wavy brown hair tumbled loosely about the pillow her little oval face fell now upon a pathetic placidity that had an almost inanimate patience. She made no attempt, however wakeful she felt, to hoist herself up and survey her companion! She shrank from staring at him in his sleep, as if it would be something in the nature of a sacrilege. But the first rays of the sun roused up Sylvanus and he forthwith entered into a singular conversation with the motionless girl by his side.

"What's the first thing you can remember in your whole life, 'Mart'?"

He called her "Mart" because of the way she herself pronounced her name, which was almost exactly the way young Zed pronounced it.

Marret was thinking to herself:

"That's the sun on the end of the bed! That's the sun on the blanket over his raised-up knees! That's the sun on his forehead! I must remember exactly how *everything* looks, so I'll have something to think about when it's all over," but she replied to his question without hesitation. "The first thing I remember was Father hitting Mother with a water-jug. He held it by its handle till it broke. There was water in it and Mother's clothes got all wet. She minded that more than being hit. Mother was never one for water. She always said water were made for fishes, not persons."

"Did your father kill her?"

"No, no, no!" cried Marret while her little oval face — which, when she had been asleep, had looked exactly like a small china doll — puckered itself up into a number of anxious creases, "Ermentrude, the Salvation Army woman, who lived under us, came running in and she said to Mother, 'did he hit you, dearie?' and Mother said 'no, he didn't;' and she said to Mother, 'did he do anything to you, dearie?' and Mother said 'no, he didn't;' and she said to Mother, 'was yer a-quarrelling, dearie?' and Mother said 'no, they wasn't;' and she never said another word after that and when Ermentrude went to her she were gone and her feet were cold. I knew they were cold, because when Father camed in he said, 'Mart, thee may feel her feet just once, if thee likes, so as to say you've touched Death'."

"Did he say anything else before they put her in her coffin?" enquired Sylvanus gravely.

Marret looked at him with a radiant face while the newly-risen sun turned her dusty-brown hair into the metallic shimmer of a copper beech-tree. It was wonderful to her that she could interest him by her conversation.

"He only said, when the parish-woman came to lay her out, that he hoped they wouldn't wash her with water. 'My wife,' he said, for Father were one to talk high and mighty with strangers, 'never were a 'ooman for the water; so let 'un be; do 'ee hear? let 'un bide in peace!'"

It had been a daily astonishment to Sylvanus, since Marret had come to live with him, how quickly the girl would fall asleep after being intensely awake. He remained quiet now, stretching out his neck in his swamp-turtle manner, and watching her puckered little doll face.

"She'll be asleep in a second," he thought, when he saw her eyes close. And in this conjecture he was completely justified.

Quietly he slipped out of bed, and even as he did so the girl turned her face to the wall and pulled the clothes tight as one who had no wish to awake. He went to the window and promptly addressed to the dazzling sun the same kind of formal little bow that he had directed towards the sea in the Weeping Woman. Having propitiated the great luminary by this brief gesture, he proceeded hurriedly to dress, paying, at present, as little regard to soap and water as Marret's mother seems to have done. Leaving the room very quietly he now descended the stairs and, going into the kitchen, proceeded to light the fire in the stove. When this was done, and thick fumes of acrid smoke had filled his nostrils, he transferred his attentions to the fire in the Last House parlour, which as a rule in spring weather he left unlit.

"May'll be here *sometime* today," he thought. "Since she sent that card, nothing'll stop her! I wouldn't be surprised to see her turn up before we've had breakfast."

He then went back into the kitchen and picked up the pail of refuse. Opening the front door by the handle — one of his quarrels with Gipsy May had been his custom of never bolting his doors — he carried the pail along a little path leading to a patch of desolate cabbage-stalks, where the barren ground had been disturbed many times. Here there was a fragment of a ruined fence and a few wooden posts. Against one of these posts leaned a fork which Sylvanus now took up and began to dig. As he dug he pretended to himself, in his peculiar whimsies, that he was digging a grave big enough to contain every living person who at that hour, all over the face of the earth, was giving up the ghost!

"Rise to life, Human Beings!" he repeated in a perfunctory and mechanical chant. "Rise to life, Animals!" And then, after a while, as he stamped down the earth on the buried refuse: "Rise to life all other Souls of the Dead!"

Replacing the fork against the post he now proceeded to a large woodshed with a high-raftered roof. Here he set himself to chop wood and sticks, cutting them into convenient lengths for tomorrow's fire-lighting. When his pile was complete he made that same formal little bow to the axe which he had just been using; and then following a fixed ritual which he had obeyed since he first came to Last House, he uttered a kind of Homeric

Litany to all his tools, not forgetting the fork with which he had dug the hole for the refuse.

“The Pick,” he repeated in a droning liturgical intonation. “The Pick, the Spade, the Fork, the Rake, the Hoe.” And then he added, peering into a portion of the great barn where stood a substantial wheelbarrow — in a tone exactly as if this last object’s dim identity exacted more propitiation than the rest— “and the *very good* wheelbarrow!”

The next thing he did was to gaze upwards where there was an old swallow’s nest on one of the rafters. To this object Sylvanus began chanting afresh, raising his great parsnip-shaped head, till, with the mustache hanging from it in that dim light, it came to resemble an upturned gothic gargoyle with two wisps of trailing ivy.

“The swallow,” he chanted, “has built him a nest, where he may hide his young; but the son of man hath nowhere to lay his head. Hold up the roof, beams! Hold up the roof, cross-beams!”

Finally as he went out of the shed carrying the wood very carefully under both his arms, hugged close against his ribs, he suddenly with a weary and a rasping sound, as if there were a croaking raven in his belly, uttered the words:

“Damp Straw! Damp Straw! Damp Straw!”

With this he left the shed, closing its large wooden gate behind him.

Once when Gipsy May — who was totally devoid of all reverence and all sentiment, save for cats and dogs “and such small deer” — spied upon Sylvanus as he went into his barn and from her hiding-place behind an old boat-sail which he had put up, so as to be able to make water when he had a mind, unseen from the windows of his house, listened first to the Homeric list of noble tools, then to the reference to the son of man, she was startled and shocked by this demon-croak in the man’s belly, as if it were the groan of the ghastly Man with Three Staves, contradicting all the worth and dignity and meaning and value of the rest of his ritual.

"Damp Straw! Damp Straw! Damp Straw!"

At least an hour had passed since Sylvanus had left the house on these daily tasks and when he returned he found that the two kettles he had left on the kitchen-stove were boiling. He filled a small can from one of them and with this supply of hot water, making his way upstairs, knocked as discreetly and politely at Marret's door as if she had been the most virginal of visitors — as in a sense she was — and informed her that it was time to get up.

"Time, Girlie!" he shouted, without so much as touching the door-handle.

Then, retreating into the parlour, where he secretly in the depths of his crafty mind intended to entertain Gipsy May, he made up the fire, putting on several pieces of wood and some lumps of coal. He so greatly enjoyed the sensation of coming in from an extended walk and finding that Marret had already got breakfast, that, after putting some more wood on to the kitchen-stove, he sallied forth again, this time picking up, from a rack containing quite a lot of them, one of his soldier-canes.

Skirting the side of Last House he emerged into the public road, where he was met by an eddying cloud of dust, that seemed travelling at its own volition across Portland. Totally oblivious to the forlornness of the front of his dwelling, Sylvanus now waved his cane towards their bedroom window feeling that if by chance Marret had already got up it would please her to be waved to; then he strode on, cheerfully brandishing his cane towards the great light-house. The wind blew fresh and cool from off the sea; and as the land narrowed to the Bill he felt as if the whole promontory were lifted up, up and out and away, from all the rest of the earth and was propelled by some unknown force to sail alone through empty space. This is a sensation that almost everyone experiences in the early morning on Portland, but it was an impression peculiarly transporting to Sylvanus, because it lent itself to his most characteristic way of thinking. It gave him a feeling as if Nature were returning to God, as if the Relative were returning to the Absolute, as if Life were returning to some mysterious Beyond-life. As he advanced now, almost due South, towards that tongue of rock which stretched out into the everlasting turbulence of the opposing tides, he became aware that beyond the Beale the risen sun, now blindingly in his eyes, had made a dazzling path over the water. Upon this sun-path, just as Magnus was doing at the same moment in front of Brunswick Terrace, he fixed his eyes.

"What have I done," he thought, "that I should be permitted to see a thing like this and live?"

In the extremity of his emotion he thought of those panegyrics to his strange Absolute which he still insisted on pouring out to all and sundry upon the Weymouth esplanade. Jerry Cobbold had used all the subtleties of his influence to persuade him to yield to the police in this point. Jerry had made the strongest personal plea, begging him, for the sake of their boyhood, for the sake of their father, for the sake of all the memories they shared, not to bring this thing to so final and fatal an issue.

"It'll be no use," Jerry said, "arguing with them. You're such an old offender that you've got their back up. They're just desperate. They'll finish you off, as *his* police-authorities finished off Socrates; and the whole thing will hurt me, my dear, more than you've any idea of! If you do this, Van, it'll be the cruellest thing you've ever done — and to what purpose?"

Thus had Jerry implored him only yesterday; and he had promised the clown that he would avoid the esplanade for a day or two while he plunged into his private equivalent of "fasting and prayer and the seeking of a sign from heaven". He could not help feeling as if this enchanted sunrise after his concentrated pre-dawn vigil, with his arms about his girl's polished limbs, were like an answer from his gods. He could not recall any morning by the sea, that he had ever seen, equal to this morning. He made a face of wicked buffoonery when he thought to himself:

"It's in honour of Cattistock's wedding!" and then, as he walked through the white dust, with the grey stones piled about his path, and in front of him that glittering, sparkling, dazzling trail across the motionless sea-floor, like the track of some immortal wanderer from an empyrean of sea-serpents, it seemed to him as if the Power that expressed Itself in this fire and air and water *must* be strong enough to give him the victory over Sippy Ballard and his Guildhall cronies!

It was an ironic thing — bitter with the grim tragedy of mortal contrast — that at the very moment when Sylvanus was thus exalted with happiness he should have proved the cause — and deliberately the cause, too! — of a poignant tantalization to another living soul. But of such events and of such coincidences is the very fabric of this world composed. What he did now was to suddenly swerve aside at a sharp angle, when he approached the tall light-house, for he caught sight of a woman's solitary figure standing at the very end of the Beale — standing, in fact, just where the Jobber on the previous day had shown Perdita that ghastly crack into eternity. The grand new light-house furnished with every modern device, knew nothing of the romantic legends that belonged to its vanished predecessors, knew nothing of this woman now standing on the edge of that rocky cleft. To the light-house she was merely an eccentric personage living in the little town of Easton!

How could this splendid modern erection, for all its searching scientific apparatus know that this eccentric individual from Easton was the enchantment, the magnet, the Hesperidean fruit, the Golden Fleece, that in former days attracted to this spot the Jobber's "Gentleman from the White Nose"? The latest phase of this woman's life had been a passionate devotion to Sylvanus. She had come to know his ways, his hours, his walks, and she had grown addicted to meeting him just about this time as he made his way to a certain favourite resort of his. These encounters were attended with almost as much emotional excitement for this woman as had been those former ones with "the Gentleman from the White Nose"; but today, his mind full of his long night with Marret and freshly aroused to the expected visit of Gipsy May, Sylvanus felt compelled to avoid her, a compulsion that caused bitter and cruel disappointment to the woman at the end of the Beale. Sardonic indeed would her comment have been upon masculine pharisaism could she have followed all her friend's superstitious mumblings when he reached his retreat.

Turning away from that watchful figure, and not refraining from a goblinish grimace that wrinkled up his whole countenance as he changed his course, Sylvanus now clambered down a sloping fragment of the eastern cliff's edge at an angle that actually faced the aforementioned White Nose as it stretched impressively into Weymouth Bay. Here he approached the entrance to a little ramshackle hut, which clung like an ancient fungus to a rabbit-burrow or a barnacle to a stranded keel, where the cliff sloped down. It was in reality the deserted tool-shed of some former light-house-keeper in the days before the new erection was built, but Sylvanus on the strength of being the tenant of Last House had boldly appropriated it to his own purposes. Here, for when the door was wide-open it made a pleasant three-sided shelter, he loved to sit, hugging his long shins, tugging at his long mustaches, and muttering crazy invocations to sun, sea and sky. It was his humour to keep up constant soliloquies in this little sentry-box with two inanimate objects, for each of which he cherished a fanatical fetish-worship.

The first was a rope which he kept twisted round one of the main beams of the shed and made use of sometimes as a help in climbing down the cliff to the rocks below. The other was a half-obliterated oil-painting. He had no sooner entered his retreat today than he fell to apostrophizing this rope, using a rhyming jingle that had come into his head of its own accord one day:

“Rope, rope, hang Sylvanus!
From caput to anus
His doings profane us.
Rope, rope, hang Sylvanus!”

Having delivered himself of this rigmarole he proceeded to twist about his turtle-like neck and to peer intently and anxiously into every portion of his sentry-box. It was clear he was searching for something and it was clear that what he searched for was very important to him.

Trivia, Trivia, Trivia!

There she was, the object of his concern, a small, palpitating, quivering, dancing sunbeam! This sunbeam, since it behaved always in the same excited manner, he had come to endow with a definite personality and he called her Trivia. He was so intense and so mystical a worshipper of young women that whenever he saw Trivia dancing on the wall he was ravished with pleasure. On this occasion, by resorting to the simple expedient of shaking with his hand a water-butt that stood outside his door he flung his little visitor into a frenzy. When quivering like the liberated spirit of an aspen-leaf she began this furious dance Sylvanus turned to the rope above him, which, as it dangled its frayed strands exactly over his head, had the air of accepting the use he had suggested for it as something that fell in very naturally with what it had observed during its life of the general tendency of earthly events.

"The rope I see up there," murmured Sylvanus, as if he were propitiating an extremely stupid and rather touchy judge, "is a very *strong* rope and a very *wise* rope!"

And once more he began gabbling his suckfist gibberish:

"From caput to anus Sylvanus profanes us!"

And then returning to Trivia he supplicated her to have pity on him in a voice so beseeching that if the woman standing by that crack into eternity had overheard him, she would certainly have thought there was a real girl in the shed.

"Trivia, Trivia, Trivia, Trivia, Trivia!" he repeated, as if pleading for remission of sins.

And Trivia, after a fluttering series of coy hesitations, would plunge once more, shivering and quivering, into a veritable maenad-madness. That old water-butt outside the tool-shed, which was always full of rain, fell into its rippling disturbance the very second the planks of the little building were disturbed by any movement. And the sun shone upon the water-butt. Such was the material cause of Trivia's saraband, but the effect upon Sylvanus was profound and quite immaterial. That shivering dance of reflected light from the heart of our planetary universe had a more mystical effect upon him than any other phenomenon between earth and sky. The only thing superior to it in its power to stir him was the dazzling glitter of the sun on the sea. Sunlight and water — whether the water were salt or fresh — always struck Sylvanus as being the nearest revelation of the Ultimate Being that man could attain.

But even while Trivia went on dancing Sylvanus betook himself to the most curious ritual of all. He had picked up on the rocks, somewhere below the old Portland Prison, a little, worthless, unframed oil-painting. There were other discarded objects in that particular neighbourhood; quite enough of them to indicate that someone had deliberately exposed this wretched derelict with the hope that the tide would wash it away. The tide *had* washed it away but had brought it back again with its colours not quite obliterated; and Sylvanus, after referring the matter to a solitary lad he found down there with as much nervous respect as Socrates would have used with Phaedrus, had saved this despised object, thinking to himself:

"It will do for my shelter."

Here indeed he had fastened it up; and not a day passed but he saluted it in grandiloquent words, words of which both *the picture itself* — to such an insane length had Sylvanus' superstition gone — and the artist who painted it, were supposed to be aware to their occult satisfaction.

"What a masterpiece!" were his words at this moment, uttered in the tone of a person contemplating Rubens' "Judgment of Paris". "*What* an artist! What rosy tints in the sky! What livid whiteness in the lake! What tree-trunks with water between them! What blue distance! What an artist! What a masterpiece!"

As Sylvanus returned to Last House — and he made as long a détour as he could so as not to approach the woman from Easton — he felt exultantly happy. Indeed he felt so happy as the wind whistled in the blocks of oolite, twittered in the telegraph-wires, hummed in the stones of the walls and roofs, jigged in the wooden quarry-cranes, and made the whole stone promontory drum to a monstrous tune as if it were covered taut with the skin of the sea-serpent's belly, that he wondered if any living person had ever felt as happy as he did. He did stop again, even now, and hesitate once more, before he was out of sight of the woman on the Beale, but this hesitation, which might have excited hope in that patient watcher had nothing to do with her. He stopped in the effort of remembering and what he tried to recall was whether in his salutation of those old, immemorial Homeric tools in his wood-shed at Last House, which he always fancied gave his day a lucky beginning, he had forgotten to salute his axe!

The thought of this omission, on any other day, would have sent him home in such a mood that Marret would have at once asked what was the matter, but today he was so happy that he soon forgot his forgetting. His estrangement from Gipsy May had been full of distress for Sylvanus; not so much for himself — for as far as happiness went that Shameless Being within him which we all consult in our devilish moods would, in this case, have congratulated him most heartily if he had never, to the end of his days, seen Gipsy May again — as for her sake, and for his sake only as far as she was concerned, as being responsible for her jealousy, suffering and pique.

He found Marret ready for him and breakfast more than ready, for the girl had made the tea twenty minutes ago and poached the eggs a quarter of an hour ago; but since it was evident that the Punch-and-Judy man, however vicious and vindictive — for so rumour whispered him to be — in other directions was easy-going over his meals, Sylvanus was fain to imitate him. He therefore hummed the tune of one of the Regent songs that he was always hearing on the esplanade, insisted on having their meal in the kitchen, and sat down, drumming the table with his spoon and feeling like an amiable ogre.

"Then the other room will be all ready *for she*!"

This he said with a sardonic grimace that made his long white face wrinkle up like the Ghost in her father's repertoire.

Unknown to herself even — and certainly unknown to Sylvanus — there had been mounting up, all the while he was away, a volcanic outburst of jealousy over Gipsy May. If only it had been her friend Peg who was coming! Gipsy May was perhaps the only woman in the whole world that Marret whole-heartedly hated; and the pathetic thing was that Sylvanus imagined that the two were good friends. As she sat opposite him in the kitchen now sharing their belated meal and the extremely strong contents of the tea-pot, she did not conceal from herself that she was feeling perturbed about the appearance of this other "she", but she never suspected the strength of the emotion that was smouldering under her ribs. She had not forgotten her visit to Lodmoor nor all the agitation over the Tarot cards and the Hanged Man. Gipsy May's equivocal temper and round-about ways made her likely to be an extremely disconcerting enemy, and heartily did Marret wish that their paths had never crossed. Was it merely out of wanton curiosity, that this woman was coming now, or was she resolved to oust her and replace her? Marret began to long bitterly and sorrowfully for the support, at this juncture, of her friend Peg. She smiled to herself as she thought how cleverly Peg had flirted with Mr. Gaul at their lunch at the Regatta and yet had evaded making any appointment to meet him again.

"But Mr. Gaul would be a very nice one for Peg," she thought. "He's the nicest young man, *I* think, in the whole town."

Marret's thinness was so extreme and she was such a tall girl that there were times when she resembled a pathetic doll's head at the end of a broom-handle; but the wistful smile which crossed her face when she thought of Mr. Gaul was so sweet and quaint that Sylvanus smiled in sympathy.

And then an unlucky thing happened. With all his mystical attraction to that inarticulate life-worship in women and girls, which flows round and about and under their conscious realism, as a stream flows amid the stalks of its sub-aqueous plants, with all his subtle divination of the porousness in them to the washing of these magical life-tides, he had not yet learned the importance of what might be called the psychic atmosphere of speech. It is not *what* is said — few women give much attention to that — it is the air, the tone, the atmospheric weather, so to say, of what a man says, that is the essential thing. A man who wishes to propitiate a woman by his lies *must make the atmosphere lie,* and the same thing applies to the prosperity of his persuasions when he speaks the truth! Forgetting, or never having learned these things, what must Sylvanus do now, in his sudden rush of tender sympathy as he saw this touchingly grave smile on Marret's little doll-face, but blurt out:

"If she insists on staying the night—"

"Just as you please," the girl murmured briefly, and relapsed into a silence that lasted for several minutes.

"A penny for your thoughts, girlie?" he said at last.

She looked straight at him.

"Father told me on Monday," she said, "that he was coming up here to fetch me home."

"What's that?" cried Sylvanus.

"Yes," she went on, "and the neighbours said they'd heard him say he'd send the police after me and prosecute you for having me."

She was again silent, and it became clear that some new current of thought and emotion had begun to mitigate her disturbed mood.

"Father thinks Tiny can't collect the money like I do. But she *can.* She does it *just* as well and better too. It's only an idea of his, but men are funny when they get ideas."

"Do you really think," asked Sylvanus, "that he'd stir up the police about us?"

"He can't! It's all nonsense. People are allowed to live together without them great sillies interfering. Why! Father lives with a girl himself! We calls her Zinzin but that isn't her real name. She's foreign. She's nice to

Tiny. She don't let Father hit Tiny. But she wants for me to come back for fear Father'll ask *her* to collect."

Sylvanus' face became grave. After all he had had a great many exquisite moments of happiness since he had lived in Last House, and he saw with a shrewd eye what would happen to him if they got any serious charge against him. He'd be among Dr. Brush's *compulsory* patients.

"Would you like Jerry to put me into a strait-waistcoat at old Brush's, Martie?" he said.

So he spoke; but when a tall thin girl who has lived all her days with hideously grotesque puppets shows signs of beginning to cry it is not an ordinary sight. It is an unhappy sight and a fantastic one, too. Marret wrinkled up her cheeks, opened her mouth, and turning her head away from him, presented to him so pathetically comical a profile that it hit him to the heart, till the big tears rolling down her face washed away every human expression, save the expression "of one," as Dante puts it, "who weeps".

"Don't 'ee mind, don't 'ee mind, Mart darling," he cried, rising and going round to her and taking her on his knee. "I'm ready. I expect they'll let me talk to the other inmates in the grounds; though I'm afraid they'd never let little Mart come and see me."

It is not an easy thing to hold a tall thin young woman on your knee and cajole her into relaxed peacefulness; and the Punch-and-Judy girl hardly ever broke down like this which made it worse. If the truth were known, this was the first time the girl had lost her self-control since the far-off day when her father forced her to begin "collecting". With a strained white face she now regained her feet and without looking at him began clearing away their breakfast things.

Sylvanus caught sight of a dancing shape on the floor. Had his wanton elf resolved to follow him everywhere?

"Trivia! Trivia! Trivia!"

He was so much alone, and his superstitious imperatives had got such a hold on him, that he could not resist uttering Trivia's name aloud. This brought down on his head the first outburst of real anger that he had ever seen in Marret. She came and stood by the edge of their kitchen-table and struck it several times with the sauce-pan with which she had poached their eggs. Sylvanus had never realized how big her eyes were till he met them now.

"That's it. That's the way," she cried. "Play, play, play, play, play! *You're just like your brother*! You've no real feeling. The whole of your life is a game, and now you whistle to sunbeams when they're coming to shut you up in Hell's Museum! Did you know they called it that, out there on Downs? Hell's Museum, or Once in, Never Out! We used to take our Punch-Box over there one time, but Tiny got so frightened when the people spoke to her that we gave it up. There's something else too" — Here the girl lowered her voice to an awed whisper. "They cut out the brains of live dogs up there. The mad people don't know it, nor their friends neither. But Father knows the man that sells dogs to them. Zinzin knows him, too. Zinzin's been out with him when he met a man called Murphy over there. This Murphy let Zinzin peep through a hole into where they were cutting out a dog's brains. She said it screamed like a human being. She said the way its eyes looked when they had their fingers in its brain made her so sick she came away from thik hole. The mad people don't know about this; but *I* know about it, through Father and Zinzin."

She stopped to take breath and then burst out again. "You're thinking of May — that's who you're thinking about; and what's more you've been thinking about her ever since you woke up this morning! It's her coming that's made 'ee so jubilating and so beyond thee's self. You don't think as I haven’t seen how ‘twere, all this while, ever since you got that letter from she? Very well! The best thing you can do is go into the other room and keep putting on wood till she do come! When she *be* come you’ll not be thinking of fires nor nothing else. You’ll be thinking—”

As she worked herself up in this way to greater and greater anger» she began, to his consternation, slipping off her apron. She had already put down the sauce-pan. When she came to the phrase “the best thing *you* can do,” she ran into the small passage, snatched up her coat and hat, came back to put them on in front of a hand-mirror on the dresser, and concluded her defiance with the biting words:

“You’ll be thinking you wished she were back here, with her ‘Hanged Man’ and her pussy-cat ways. Well! You can keep her here this very day if you want to, *for I shan’t be here.* I’ll be — somewheres else! You was hardly listening to me — was you? — when I were telling you about they screaming dogs. What’s a dog’s Hell to you, and what’s a girl’s feelings to you either, you great Booby, with your baby-bunting sunbeams? You think, with your crazy airs, you know everything there is. But I can tell you you don’t know me! No! you don’t know me or love me either, as well as, as well as, as well as, *little Toby does!”*

This final reference to the popular pet of her father’s show made Marret’s mouth go down at the corners, but she had no tears in her eyes this time and her contorted white face on the top of her tall body resembled the proud decapitated head of some woman-rebel of the old days, carried on a sword’s point.

That she should have appealed to the dog Toby’s love of her against his own did make an impression on Sylvanus, and he rushed after her as she went to the door. Twice he followed her and was rebuffed. Twice he caught her by the waist. Once — getting irritated by what he regarded as mere childish hysteria — he tried to pull her back into the house by sheer force. But it was all to no purpose. Marret's anger with him this morning was almost as deep as her love, and he had simply to submit to it and let it take its course.

It was with a heavy heart that he went out into the backyard when she was gone, and round to the front of the house and into the road between Easton and the Beale. There her figure was — what a tall girl she was and what a quaint hat she was wearing! — and how far she had already gone! Should he run after her even now and make one more last desperate appeal to soften her? No, she was passing some quarrymen. It wouldn't do! Besides, there *were* limits — If the kid understood him as little as this what was the good of anything? They'd be forever having rows. Better let her go. Besides if he *was* going to decide to go on with his talks it was no use having two rows with the police! If her father was the little devil she pictured, he would probably have been soon blackmailing them! He watched her till she was out of sight and then returned to the back of the house with dragging, weary, absent-minded steps. He thought of what she had been telling him.

"I'd like to meet that Zinzin!" he said to himself. "But I wonder if it's true that Brush goes in for vivisection up there? It seems a weird thing to do, with all those patients. But, God! it *must* be true. She couldn't invent all that. Oh, deary I! I don't like it, I don't like it, I don't like it!"

As the malice-demon of the inanimate willed, when he got to his parlour that accursed fire, which by his fussing over it, had done all the damage, was completely out. He found now that he had no heart to light it. He found, too, that he had no heart to go into the kitchen to wash up their breakfast-things, and still less heart to go upstairs to make their bed.

"God!" he said to himself, "You need have no great passion for a girl like that to feel miserably lost when she's gone!"

He sat down in his arm-chair by the empty grate. He glanced at the door which he had left ajar. He had no spirit to get up and close it. Her absence had taken all the livingness out of everything. The desolation of this familiar room of his was appalling. What had the child done to him? It was absurd to suppose he cared for her in any serious way. He cared for her only *after his fashion* and she had known it and accepted it. Why then had she gone off like that? Well! she was a woman. When they liked you they loved you, and when they loved you, "Prenez garde à toi!" Suddenly he jumped to his feet. This miserable desolation was more than he could bear! What had she done to him, and what to his house, this broomstick body with the little white face?

"I'll go into the kitchen," he thought. "I must wash up before the other one comes."

He went out into the passage and walked to the kitchen-door. They had left it ajar when she tore herself from him and now he suddenly found — he, the worshipper of the Absolute — that he *couldn't* push it open and go in. He stood stock still, staring at it like a dunderheaded simpleton. He fell to pulling at his mustaches and twisting them, first one and then the other, round and round in his fingers.

"I *can't* go in there," he thought, "and see her cup and plate and her chair. I *can't* look at the frying-pan, that she always put water in — so careful!"

He turned on his heel and walking back to the front of the house found himself, without his ever having *thought* of their bedroom, ascending the stairs. Into their room he went. There was her new brush, which he had himself bought for her in St. Mary's Street, when he found she always shared Tiny's. There was her big white comb, kept so beautifully clean, that she had bought with her own Punch-and-Judy pocket-money last summer. There was her nightgown carefully folded up and laid upon her side of the bed. She never *had* had any sort of luggage, not even a handbag. She had come to Last House with her nightgown and her comb wrapped up in newspaper. Sylvanus stood in the entrance to their room gazing at everything in it. She had shaken their pillows and thrown back the bed-clothes. He wished he could have seen the dent made by her head in her pillow.

"It's more dangerous than I thought," he said to himself, "to have a girl to your bed and board. They leave a feeling behind them that's unbearable. It's like homesickness in some foreign place where there's no one you know!"

He could not bring himself to touch a thing in the room, and down he went again, and this time hurried with a rush into the kitchen. Oh, curse it all! She'd taken off her bracelet when she got the meal and there it was on the lower shelf of the dresser! How he had twisted that bracelet round and round her wrist, as he held her in his lap the first night she came! She'd come entirely of her own accord. But, of course, these curst police wouldn't believe *that*! He picked up the bracelet. It was a cheap childish thing and of no value. He put it down again, exactly in the same place.

"What *is* it in a woman's presence," he said to himself, "that a person misses so? It's nothing that they say, that's certain! What the devil is it? Mart! Mart! Mart! *Where are you now?"*

The extremely unpleasant idea came to him that she might have met Gipsy May on the road, or at the little Portland Railway Station. He took the kettle off the stove and began slowly and ponderingly washing up, leaving to the last, however, her cup and her plate. From this latter he picked up a fragment of toast-crust and put it in his mouth.

“It’s not *love,”* he thought. “I’m no more in love with her than I am with May, or with Peggie Frampton.”

He stood now at the back-door, with her cup in one hand and her saucer in the other, shaking them vigorously in the air. This he did, not as a libation to any of his endless deities, but to make sure that nothing she had touched went down the sink!

When he came back and had put her cup and saucer away, where in a shockingly quick second of time they became like all the other cups and saucers, he was aware, probably because of his having left the back-door open, that Trivia had entered the kitchen and was engaged in one of her liveliest dances on the stone floor. This was too much for him. Cursing Trivia from the bottom of his heart, he rushed away to the foot of the stairs. Here he hesitated again. But he could not resist the feeling that the girl was definitely present now in the bedroom upstairs, where during the lowest pulse of Time’s great Mill-Wheel he had pressed her to him so tight between the curved horns of his skeleton shape.

“It’s not love... it’s not love... it’s not love!” he said to himself.

Then he rushed upstairs again, and into their room. Here he went over to the chest-of-drawers and touched her brush and touched her comb as tenderly as if they had been the brittle eggs of hedge-sparrows.

“If she only knew May as well as I do,” he said, “she would come back. Perhaps she *will* come back when May’s gone.”

He came down after that, so full of her presence that he forgot to close the door at the top of the stairs. He deliberately left the parlour-door wide-open now in his superstitious fashion, so that any flickering residue of her faded consciousness should be free to approach him there.

"Caputanus" he mumbled; and having thus in the numbness of his loss jumbled his two words together, he repeated this curious expression several times over with that deep craving to be comforted by symbolic gibberish that attracts children to certain ancient nursery rhymes.

"Caputanus... Caputanus" he repeated over and over again and while his voice died away something took the place of this gibberish within him which really did seem like a new clue to his Absolute and which henceforth he would always associate with this flight of his Punch-and-Judy girl.

Outstretched on this faded rug-covered sofa from which emanated the same kind of animal-smell of solitary maleness as emanates from a mat habitually occupied by some large dog, with his eyes tight shut and the ends of his great grizzled mustaches pushed forward by the wrinkling up of his coat-collar, Sylvanus went through one of those moments in which a man really tastes the bitter-sweet dregs of mortal life. He felt as if a false bottom had suddenly sunk away below him. He felt as if all the surroundings of his days, the sands of Weymouth, the stones of Portland, the pebbles of Chesil, and even the stained, discoloured wall-paper of this unappealing room, had changed into something more real, something more raw, something that included tragedies of human relations that shocked him with their unexpectedness. It was a crushing blow to his life-illusion to find that he *could* suffer a desolation like this desolation simply because a young girl had quarrelled with him and gone off!

"Caputanus!"

Was it by some abysmal Pythagorean magic of sound that these blind nonsense-syllables lapped up and soaked up the sharp-smelling fishy life-sweat of the sea-serpent of truth? Sylvanus received a final revelation then of what he had often suspected, namely that the Absolute was to be found in the concrete and not in the abstract, in thought dipped in the life-juice, and not in thought gasping in vacuo. But it was in thought, none the less, *in thought first and last.*

She was with him completely, his Punch-and-Judy girl, *more* completely, now she was gone, than when she was here! She had left behind an essence of her soul, and it was coming in through the open door and it was hovering about the dead fire, that was more entirely her very self than even the feel of her long thin body when he held her in bed! But she had done something, or her going off like that had done something, to the actual thought-reality of the whole world.

The great "S. C.", as his gipsy called him, had played the platonic nympholept a bit too far! He began to feel now as if everything about him were suddenly endowed with a raw, scraping, deadly reality, twice as intense as anything he had known before. The old carriage-rug beneath him, his rumpled coat-collar, creased up under his chin, the stained and peeling wall-paper, a certain damp sepulchral odour, like dead men's bones, that always breathed, for some reason, from the parlour of Last House, the feeling of all the piles and heaps of naked stones that covered the stark surface of Portland, all these things seemed to emerge from a pleasant nebulosity into a biting clarity, in order to scrape and harrow his consciousness.

Caputanus! There was only one loop-hole of escape for a man to whom everything had become like vinegar spilt upon dust, and that was the heavenly escape of sleep. This, luckily, or unluckily, his whole nature craved, and it was as a natural result of all his recent night-vigils with Marret that he presently fell into so heavy and profound a sleep that he was able to forget the loss of her. Why didn't one of his starlings, or one of his robins or at least one of his sparrows, for whose sakes he had so steadily refused to keep a cat, enter the house now, where all was so open and so still, and rouse him to the danger he was in? Instead of anything of the kind, Sylvanus' very tamest robin, along with a pair of starlings and half-a-dozen sparrows, actually followed the stealthy invader, when she came, hopping in her footsteps, making flutterings as if to alight on her shoulders, and, as it were actually guiding her to these defenceless rooms.

Arrived at the door, all these treacherous feathered accomplices watched with alert interest the way the gipsy kicked off her shoes beside the scraper, and the clandestine manner, with steps light as a faint gust of wind, she entered the house. Except perhaps in certain tribes among the red-men, there were no human beings anywhere who could *act on the chance* as May could, and so often did. By "acting on the chance", I refer to a certain throwing yourself into the current of events, and then just floating there, until a nod, a sign, a touch from the adjacent water-flags gives you the hint of your opportunity. Her opportunity now, in having Last House entirely to herself while its tenant slept, she only realized step by step, but anyone who had noted the stealthy swiftness of her movements and her quiet assured air would have sworn she had known from the beginning that it would be like this. Why couldn't that blue-bottle fly, so stupid and heavy from its long wintry quiescence, instead of settling on Sylvanus' tweed coat-sleeve, settle on his face and stir him up with a blow-fly's bodkin?

The woman's black eyes as she stood in the doorway watching the way his mustaches hung down and the way his arms hung down and the way one leg hung loosely over the sofa's edge, were gleaming with so much mischief, so many convoluted fancies, so many airy alarums and excursions, that no one — not the subtlest psychologist who ever lived — could have followed her thoughts. Her thoughts couldn't be followed. To get at them you would have to hop and skip sideways and round and in front, until at last from some intelligible idea floating, drifting *among* her thoughts, you might discover the faintest, filmiest, most tenuous clue to a vague general direction.

Certainly S. C.'s mustaches had never looked more like those of an amiable walrus than they looked now as he lay there. Moreover all ordinary human expression — possibly this was the result of his metaphysical struggles before he slept — had left his face. Sylvanus' face had indeed ceased to be that of a man, but at the same time it had not become that of an angel or a devil. It had become like one of those forlorn, denuded Homeric dead, those *ameneena kareena,* who, while they can remember and forget, are completely deprived of all the creative energy of the power of thought.

No one who had watched her watching him would have thought for a single second that Gipsy May was in the least fond of Sylvanus, and as for thinking that she loved him, as a woman loves a man with whom she had fallen in love, anyone would have mocked and scoffed at such a notion. She might have been saying to herself in an airy, casual, chanting voice:

"Nonny, Nonny! *He's* asleep! Upstairs.. upstairs.. upstairs.. and we'll see if the little Hide-and-Seek, is sleeping too!"

Upstairs accordingly she went, and since all the doors were open and she had taken off her shoes, it was the easiest thing in the world for her to enter their room up there without disturbing him. Something like the flicker of a beetle's flight over the silence of a burdock-leaf full of raindrops did cross the woman's face when she caught sight of Marret's night-dress on the bed. She went up to the chest-of-drawers, however, and while she fell there into what seemed like a brown-study, she began fumbling with the girl's brush and comb and also with a pair of scissors that lay beside them over against Sylvanus' shaving things. Then she proceeded to look at herself for quite a long while in the looking-glass, pondering gravely and intently upon every feature and even closing one of her black eyes and pressing her fingers against her eyelid, as if to see what appearance she would present if she had only one eye. All this time she did not relinquish the scissors and presently with a slow pensive, contemplative gesture she lifted them to her forehead and cut off quite a considerable tress of her own hair. Then she proceeded — and no one could possibly have told whether she did it in a fit of absent-mindedness or after full premeditation — to twist this tress of hers round and round, and in and through, one of those convenient turning-points or pivot-hinges whereby such simple looking-glasses as this hang upon their supports. You could have looked at yourself here for some while without being aware of anything exceptional; then by slow degrees it would have dawned on you that some sort of human hair had been twisted in at the side of the glass.

Still holding the scissors in her right hand she now fixed a long last look at her own black eyes and, lifting her left hand to her cheek, she touched the feverish red spot which burnt there with the tips of two of her fingers. The faintest flicker of a smile crossed her face as she did this and as she removed her fingers from her burning cheeks she pensively touched with them the edges of her wet lips. Then with the scissors still dangling from her hand, she went downstairs, treading with unbelievable stealthiness, but as she went she panted in little, quick, hurried gasps, as if she were in the throes of a fit of asthma.

Sylvanus was lying in exactly the same pose, one arm and one foot hanging loosely over the sofa's edge.

Gipsy May, holding the scissors tightly, stepped up to his side and using her free hand to secure what she was stealing, she deliberately cut off, in that same quiet absent-minded manner with which she had clipped the lock from her own brow, *both the man's mustaches.* Without waking him — for her movements were deft as those of a fly-catcher — she slipped off with her booty down the passage to the kitchen and flung these twisted grey coils that seemed to desire to cling to her fingers into the kitchen stove.

She had pushed open one of the round iron lids of the stove with a special poker kept for this purpose, and as she hovered like a tragic moth over this fiery aperture, she was shocked by two things: by the deadly speed with which the hair was licked up and by the smell that arose. It was this smell more than anything in the whole transaction that gave to her feelings something of that sick throb of ghastly sacrilege such as in former times must have attended the roasting of human flesh. She felt fascinated and a little triumphant, too, as she stood there, staring at the orifice, but her dominant sensation was as if she had sold her soul to the devil and therefore could afford to linger by the way and see what happened. Meanwhile, the unmistakable smell of sacrilege ascended the kitchen chimney. Into the sunlit atmosphere above the roof of Last House it went. Not as from the ancient halls of Thyestes, whence rose a more ominously-charged smoke into a bluer sky, it went up, for it carried the loss of a man’s pride, not the loss of a living soul, but it was full, none the less, of the fatal mischief of arbitrary destruction, only it was the destruction of a person’s life-illusion it carried, not of his mortal flesh.

Gipsy May firmly and quietly closed up the stove-entrance and with the air of a sorrowful executioner she moved to the back-door and went out. Here, in the yard — to the extreme agitation of a row of sparrows perched upon a clothes-line set up by Marret, she proceeded to put on her shoes. Her soul must have been hovering then between a sense of almost fairy-story guilt, as if she had singed the King of Thule’s beard, and a childish interest in finding herself again in Last House backyard!

Her black eyes began roving about from side to side of the little enclosure, and ere long it chanced that they fell upon a perfectly good

Brazil nut, that the Punch-and-Judy girl must have thrown by accident out of the kitchen-door. Upon this nut Gipsy May pounced, and cracking it with her heel against a flag-stone she scraped up the broken bits and began separating the edible morsels from the fragments of crushed shell with the absorbed concentration of a squirrel. She held the trampled nut — not unmixed with dust and dirt — in the palm of one hand, while with the fingers of the other she picked out what she wanted. As she was thus engaged she kept casting the hurried glances of a thievish magpie at a little cinder-strewn path that led, through some straggling currant-bushes, to a gap into the main road.

Had a wayfaring philosopher — if such persons still exist — rambling speculatively through Weymouth and Portland, and having just beheld the dense crowds assembled for the Cattistock wedding filling all the space in front of Trinity Church and even blocking up the Harbour-Bridge, looked casually down that path through the bushes and caught sight of this figure at the back-door, he might have said to himself:

“What a peaceful time that girl in that red shawl *is* having! *She* isn’t thinking about any mortal thing but ‘the pleasure which there is in life itself!”

Some such wanderer — at any rate a stranger to the Beale road — did as a matter of fact come along just then, and paused to stare, attracted by the brightness of her costume; and that was quite enough for this offerer of burnt-offerings to the Infernal Gods. Throwing the nut-shell away, she made a hurried indecent gesture with her fingers at this onlooker, and ran into the house.

Then it was that with a deliberate clattering and creaking of her shoes, which she made to sound as loud as if they’d been clogs thumping down the passage, she re-entered the parlour, crying out in a clear voice:

“Well, I never! Well, I never!”

Sylvanus opened his eyes with a start as she entered, struggled up awkwardly to his feet from the sofa and bending forward took her head affectionately between his hands and pressed it to his lips, kissing both her hair and her forehead many times over.

“But God! May,” he cried in astonishment when he held her at last at arm’s length from him and surveyed her brow from which she had cut that lock of hair.

His big hands completely hid her small snake’s ears, but she knew well what he was saying!

“What have you done to yourself?”

“Feel... your... own—” was her quick reply uttered in a whisper as his hands dropped from her head.

And it was destined to Gipsy May to know then how revenge tasted. It was like discovering a new Tarot card. The truth was she experienced a diabolical rapture from that first expression his countenance assumed as his hands went to his face and he found those familiar adjuncts gone. And yet it was not a look of anger that he gave her. Nor was it one of bewilderment. It was a look of pure shame, and it was accompanied by an unnatural rush of red blood to his usually very pale face. This flush on Sylvanus’ face was something that she had never seen before. In fact it was something that no one in Weymouth or Portland had ever seen. The last time it had appeared was when Bacon Major and Buckingham Minor tied his legs and tied his hands and left him at the gate of the Public Workhouse in the little town where he went to school. The tramp who untied him told his friends later,

“Thik young gent were as red as a bleedin’ raddish. He’d have bust ’is innerds, seems so, if I ain’t coomed by and let ‘un loose.”

But there was no tramp to "coom by" now through the open doors of Last House and put Sylvanus' mustaches on again!

For the passing of one second Gipsy May's black eyes drank up that extraordinary dusky red and that look as if he had been exposed to the mob, with a wild, wanton glee. She never expected to have a revenge quite as complete! She had fancied that Sylvanus would display a flash of anger and then laugh. Instead of which, out of that unnaturally red face, eyes were fixed upon her that contained the last bitter dregs of the cup of human shame. For a second of time Gipsy May tugged like a greedy child at the nipples of intoxicating sweetness.

"I'll larn him," her ecstasy might be translated, "I'll larn him to have girls' nightgowns in his bedroom!"

But the metheglin draught of sweet revenge resembles very closely the erotic obsession which exacts it, and there had no sooner appeared little, glittering drops in the man's eyes than the woman experienced a violent reaction.

"I'm sorry, S. C. I'm bitter sorry," she said. "Don't look like that, S. C. for your old Egyptian can't stand to see you looking like that."

"No, I won't! No, no, of course not; certainly I won't! In fact I don't!" he replied hurriedly, and his voice had the tone of a man who speaks to his nurse while he is performing some humiliating function of nature.

"I'll make it up to you, S. C." she cried hurriedly, "I will! I will!"

And she watched him imploringly while very slowly all that dusky red began to ebb from his countenance, leaving a terrible pallor.

"Don't 'ee put yourself out, my precious," he murmured quietly. " Tis a hard thing to take on yourself what another feels, but what I feel will — will be — all right in a minute!"

His mild philosophical tone brought with it a hurried, quite unconscious resorting to his old trick when anything disturbed him or when he desired to gain time. He raised his hand to his face, clearly with the instinct of getting hold of some philosophical idea through the familiar contact with his great mustaches. But there was nothing there! Only his upper lip had a small outgrowth, bristly and rough, thicker at the sides than in the middle, an outgrowth that gave him, when he touched it with his finger, the sensation of something weird having happened, not exactly as if he had a patch of sham hair on his lip, or as if a wandering thistle-head or a prickly burr had stuck to his skin, but as if his own hair had, in some terrifying manner, *changed its character!*

“What was that you were saying, May?”

And he sat down square and straight on the sofa and stretched out his arms to her. The woman gave her voluminous skirt a deft twist with her fingers and perched herself on the extreme end of his long knees; from which position she leaned towards him and took his chin between her finger and thumb. This immemorial gesture of humble supplication — the impact of which would certainly have made the harassed scholar at Kimmeridge House think of Thetis at the knees of Zeus — was less than nothing to Sylvanus.

“What... was that... you were saying... May?”

With that he thrust back her hands, and raising his own to his mouth licked the tips of them and rubbed them backwards and forwards over his denuded upper-lip, which to his sympathetic imagination began now to feel actually sore.

“Why don’t you ask why I did it to you, S. C.?” she said, watching” him intently, while she pressed her thin knuckles against the pit of her stomach and frowned a puzzled emphatic frown.

“Because you thought it attracted women towards me?”

She nodded vigorously.

“I did it first to myself,” she said.

Oh, *you* are different. *You’d* be attractive if you cut off every scrap of your hair!”

She jumped off his knees and stretched out her hand to him.

“Come on S. *C.*!” she cried, “I’m going to make it up to you! You’ve got your boots on. Do you want your hat? Come on! Never mind locking up. Come on. Let’s go. Quick! Quick! Quick!”

It was quite clear to him that the idea of his sulking, the idea of his sending her away, the idea of his being tragically hurt by what she’d done, never for one second entered her head. She was so used herself to being a show, a spectacle, a laughing-stock, a cynosure, that it never struck her that what she had done to him was parallel to Larry Zed’s dyeing his hair black.

“Poor May!” he said to himself. “She’s terribly upset because she did this. Why, *there* are the scissors — on the floor! And they’re Mart’s, too. I’ll go with her. I don’t know what she’s going to do with me. But I’ll go with her.”

The woman now re-appeared with a sheaf of his soldier-canes in her hand.

“Go on; choose quick!” she cried.

“She likes doing the same old things,” he thought, “that she used to do all those months.”

“And as the howling of those November storms came back to him, and the patter of those November rains, he submissively chose a cane at random and they went out together....

“There’s your girl, sitting with Peggie Frampton on Bridge!” his companion suddenly remarked, when, after vainly trying to make her say where they were going, he found himself hopelessly entangled in the excited crowd round Trinity Church. "I saw her push her way through to Missy Frampton, who were sitting where they both be now. 'Twere when I saw thik flock of people there that I decided to come out by boat."

Sylvanus could not but be thankful that, where he stood now by the gipsy's side it was difficult for those girls on the Bridge to see anything of them. And the crowd was packed so close that when once anyone was jammed into a particular vantage-ground it could only be by a violent struggle that freedom was obtained.

The gipsy soon gathered from their neighbours that all the important people, except the bridegroom were already in the Church. The bride had gone in, they learned, a few minutes before they appeared. In fact they could see from where they stood the helmets of the policemen who had cleared a path for her conveyance. Never, they learned, in all the history of the Two Boroughs had so many notables come together. Not another soul, they were told, could possibly get into the church. Jerry Cobbold himself, they were assured, had the greatest difficulty in getting into the building. He had come late and alone, for Mrs. Cobbold was with her sister, the bride.

Again and again as in his familiar tweed suit Sylvanus towered above his bright-shawled companion, people nudged each other and whispered and giggled. There was no mistaking him! It was clear to them all who he was, and it was abundantly clear to them all, too, that he had lost his mustaches.

Just in front of the two friends, however, as they stood there, between them and a gentleman who was frantically struggling to open a lady's parasol to keep the sun from his head, a short man and a gaunt woman were engaged in such earnest whispers between themselves that they were totally oblivious of the presence of Sylvanus and the gipsy. These were none other than Mr. and Mrs. Trot.

"If only us *knew* he were wi' his father and mother last night," Bum Trot was saying, "us 'ud feel different. 'Tis them turble words Jobber were allus uttering what do taunt *me* mind, Missus, zay what 'ee 'ool. Jobber bain't woon vor yowling and growling without doing naught. I be afeared for 'un, 'ooman, and that's God's holy truth. I be afeared for 'un!"

"Mr. Cat'stock 'ull be here present, man," responded Mrs. Trot, consolingly, though her troubled face belied her words, "and then us 'ull know the master ain't done no unlawful deed. I be more acquainted wi' high-life ways and such, than thee be Bum, and 'tis the custom I tell 'ee for these here bridegrooms to keep their brides waiting. Them grand ladies don't think nought of a man what's at beck and call. Be 'ee sure Cormorant ain't gone? 'Tis like the master to go off by his wone self when all the world be sight-seeing."

"Cormorant be where she allus do be," replied Bum Trot gloomily. "I wish to sweet Jesus her weren't!"

The grossly loud words of a neighbour a little further off now drowned the murmurs of the Trots. This person was commenting upon Sylvanus' appearance in language so emphatic that it could not but reach his ears.

" 'A have had they circus-twisties pulled off, look so," he heard this critical spectator say. "I allus knowed they things weren't real. 'A must have surmised 'a'd look more genteel without 'un. But 'a don't, do 'en? 'A looks like Bart Looney, the Four-in-Hand man, what drowned 'isself for love of Molly Dingle the school-teacher. Thee remembers Mr. Looney, doesn't? 'A were nephy, or summat o' that, to Herb' Dandin, the Radipole clerk. 'A had a monstrous long face, Mr. Looney had, and a sour, too, and 'twere no wonder neither, seeing 'a couldn't do it. Never *could* do it, try all 'a would and try all *she* would to help 'un. 'Twere *for that* and not for's sour face that 'a lost his Moll. He would try and she would try, and 'tweren't till they knowed ‘twere no good that ‘a drowned ‘isself. Aren’t I right, Elizabeth? And ain’t thik wold Cobbold there, wi’ his Roosian twisties gone, the living Superscription of Mr. Looney what never could do it all his days?”

No one will know what Gipsy May felt as she listened to this voluble wretch, who was an extremely shaky old man talking to a purblind old woman, nor what she felt as she saw Sylvanus’ hand go up again and again to his face, and as often fall to his side. She suffered most when she saw him lick his fingers and rub his upper lip, as if it were sore or even bleeding. Nervously and furtively she glanced sideways at his mouth, half afraid that she really *might* have hurt it with the point of the scissors. But no! It was all right, though she had to admit that her S. C.’s mouth, without those mustaches, looked like the mouth of a gigantic rabbit.

“Oh, S. C. S. C. why did I, oh, why did I?” she moaned in her heart. “’Twas that card that were the cause. ’Twas ‘the Man with Three Staves’ that were the cause!”

And what, meanwhile, was Sylvanus himself feeling and thinking? He also was occupied — if the truth must be told — by the problem of Causation. He was engaged in a dialogue with his Absolute.

“Are you the First Cause, or are you not?” he kept asking this evasive Entity.

And it seemed to him that the Absolute, like that Nothingness which must have confronted Mr. Looney before he drowned himself, replied that It was not the First Cause, or the Last Cause, or any other Cause! It simply was Everything, and there was no room in Everything for the idea of Cause. There was only All there was; and it was the inherent nature, throughout eternity, for All there was to change.

“Everything,” the Absolute continued, as his clean-shaven devotee stared at the green parasol with which the elderly gentleman in front of him was trying to protect himself from the sun. “Everything has always changed, and always will. Outside Me, who am Everything, there is Nothing.”

But the strain with which Sylvanus had forced himself to become for the nonce the Absolute arguing with the Absolute now broke down and humiliation swept over him. He felt that without his great mustaches, that secret belfry of wisdom at whose ropes he could always tug, he had become some one else, a different person.

“I must think it out,” he said to himself, and still staring at the green parasol he resolutely faced his humiliation.

He analyzed his whole character as he had never analyzed it before.

“I depended on the idea of myself with those mustaches,” he thought. “They were like my suit of clothes. They were like my cane. They were like my being Jerry’s brother. When I talked to my girls, when I talked to strangers on the esplanade, when I drew Lucinda on to berate me, I was always *myself with my big mustaches*! When quite alone, in my shelter over there, with my strong and wise rope and my wonderful oil-painting, I was always myself with my mustaches. It was *my* mustaches more than this old suit and this cane,” and he bent his cane between his fingers against his knee, for it was not long enough to touch the ground, “that were my leopard-spots. They were Me! Even when I was in my privy over there they were Me. When I held Marret in bed this morning, they were always Me. When I had cream to my porridge and that dark treacly sugar that I used to buy at that little shop in Easton, for I *can’t* afford to feed Marret *and* have that treacly sugar, too, though I like the way it mixes with cream and I wish I were going to have some for lunch today, they were Me. When I hummed my old Caput and Anus song in the potato-garden which invented its own tune, Me, still Me, always they were Me! When boys ran after me in the street and tormented me and when people stared at me on the sands in summer when I paddled with women, that no one else wanted to go into the water with, it was always ‘Me and my mustaches’. And as I thought to myself, ‘I go with people that have no one else to go with!’ and as I thought to myself:— ‘boys wouldn’t hunt me if I wasn’t like a Lama with my mustaches’ it was them — but what will I do now?”

He tried to force himself to accept himself as Mr. Sylvanus Cobbold, with a weak-minded mouth, like a prehistoric hare, going about helplessly over the surface of the earth! And then he left that attempt and tried to think of his soul as a mathematical dot in Space and of his body as being a bundle of negligible Matter that his soul dragged about with it.

“I can enjoy my sensations,” he thought, “even if my face *is* a laughing-stock. I can enjoy life even if I *am* the ugliest man. A dung-beetle can enjoy things as much as Tossty Clive. A lob-worm can enjoy things as much as Sippy Ballard. What I must aim at feeling myself to be now is one of those Freaks in Barnum’s Circus, only going about freely instead of on Show! I’m lucky to *be* still free. I must think of that. If I go on talking on the esplanade they’ll make Jerry give me over to Brush. At Brush’s I’ll be more in keeping as a mathematical dot, than if I had my mustaches. Yes, I’ll take it as fate. I’ll shave my lip tomorrow and henceforth I’ll shave it till I die. Maybe they’ll grow again, in my coffin. Well! They were the longest mustaches ever seen in Weymouth!”

He had stared so fixedly and so intently and so long at the green parasol opposite him before he reached his conclusion that he felt bewildered and confused when he came to himself. The crowd had grown excited now as it waited for this long-coming bridegroom. There began to be jeering cries, gross sallies, malignant facetiousnesses. One hoarse voice, speaking in the Portland accent, cried out suddenly:

“Where be Dummy Skald, then? Dummy Skald had zummat to zay to Master Cat’stock, us have heard tell, afore this little job can be car’d out!”

So dazed and abstracted was Sylvanus, and so separated from the jangle of the world, that Gipsy May had now to repeat a remark of hers twice before he caught it.

“Isn’t that Mr. Muir over there, son of old Muir, the Schoolmaster, standing on top step, near Church door, with that fine lady holding them lovely roses. They be moss-roses, looks so, but maybe not!”

She paused, staring intently at the couple she mentioned, who were standing wedged in and helpless in the thickest part of the crowd.

“Why, ’tis Curly Wix, the Wishing Well girl, that’s who it be, the one they say he’s marrying, now he’s the Cat’stock tutor. They be going to live at Corporal Dawson’s, if Mrs. Pengelly ain’t got it all mixed up.”

Sylvanus succeeded in singling out the strikingly dressed Curly, who did indeed make it seem as if Magnus were standing there with some famous county beauty who by some blunder of the officials had not been yet escorted into her reserved seat.

“Did you begin to think, S. C. that I’d forget what I promised?”

He looked down at the bright-shawled figure at his side and smiled for the first time since Marret had left his house.

“Don’t ‘ee fret yourself, May,” he responded.

But the woman insisted:

“I couldn’t sleep tonight,” she said, “if I knew you was grieving for your sand girl. She’s a poor preference, S. C. among so many, but when a person wants his choice ’tis his choice he wants. You stay where you be, S. C. and I’ll run round and fetch them two. Don’t ‘ee let nothing move you, S. C. from where you be standing for I don’t want to be left with neither of they kids.”

If she hadn't darted off before her last words were out of her mouth he would have clutched her arm, so mad did it seem to think of forcing a path through such a crowd. But all he could do now was to obey her command to the letter. Do what he could to stop it the sudden thought of Marret's seeing him as he was now, with his grotesque rabbit-mouth left naked, caused a hot flush of burning shame to mount to his face.

Presently there was a tremendous upheaval of the crowd and great disturbing currents swept it backwards and forwards. It became increasingly difficult to obey the gipsy's mandate, for his neighbours were flung against him by *their* neighbours, and the whole space between Bridge and Church soon became a seething arena of anger, scurrility and indignant panic.

But the near approach of a light, open touring car that had caused all this confusion helped in a measure to allay it. The police constables on foot had now been reinforced by several more on horseback and it was by the aid of these that the machine drew up at the foot of the Church-steps, so close indeed to that beautiful girl in the grey dress holding the moss-roses, that she was seen to draw back as if in considerable trepidation. Simultaneously with its stopping, one of the policemen threw open its door and a man holding a silk hat was observed descending. Cries arose of "Cattistock! Cattistock!" and one small boy — he was an office-boy in the brewery — piped up in a thin quavering voice: "Three cheers for Mr. " but young Witchit who happened to be with this audacious youth but who was himself speedily learning the ways of the world, put his hand over his friend's mouth. When, however, the man with the silk hat paused before ascending the Church steps and began to converse with Mr. Muir and the lady with the roses, there ran through the crowd that angry murmur of disappointed expectation which is often the precursor of reckless, wild, and dangerous movements. The man with the silk hat, who had been talking earnestly and rapidly to the lady in grey, now swung round and stood up very straight and very slender and handsome.

“Sippy Ballard,” cried one rude humorist in a loud voice, “Why don’t ‘ee take thee uncle’s plëace, Sippy?”

But a much more official voice, although a much feebler voice, now made itself heard.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” it said, “the Town Clerk has something to announce.”

It was then that Mr. S. P. Ballard rose splendidly to what everybody later admitted was a very awkward situation.

“Friends of the Two Boroughs,” he said, “who have come to do honour to our distinguished — to *my* distinguished uncle” — he was felt at this point to indulge in a very artless and very charming hesitation— “you will all be very sorry to learn that Mr. Cattistock’s wedding has — has been — indefinitely postponed — owing to — owing to—”

But by what subterfuge, by what diplomatic euphemism, this youthful Talleyrand explained the non-appearance of his master was totally swallowed up in the clamour and hullabaloo raised by the grosser elements of the crowd, and Sylvanus, drawing back from the violent struggles his elderly neighbour was making to close the green parasol, saw that the bright shawl of his gipsy friend had almost reached the parapet of the Bridge upon which Marret and Peg were sitting.

There must have been something in the interior mechanism of that green parasol which had a power of vivid reflection, for as Sylvanus’ hand went up to his mouth for the hundredth time that afternoon, there fell upon the broad back of Bum Trot a dancing sun-beam. Such, however, was the noisy exchange of agitated exclamations all round him that neither of the devoted adherents of the absent Jobber caught the automatic response of “Trivia,

Trivia, Trivia!” that broke from the shaven lips of the tall man in the Tweed suit.

CURLY'S ROSES

THERE WAS NOT A SINGLE ONE OF THE ELDERLY PERSONS SUMMONED by Eliza Chant to partake of refreshments that evening in the old-fashioned Servants' Hall at Peninsular Lodge, who did not say to herself when the news reached her of the postponement of the wedding:

"Well, thik party will be off, then! No taste of wine for we out to Chickerel, seeing as the Lord 'as decided contrary. But, all the same for that, I think I'll go round just for a minute, *by myself,* to see Eliza, if only to find out how thik poor woman be bearing up."

One by one, therefore, at any time between seven o'clock and nine o'clock that night, all her various invited guests rang the back-door bell of Mr. Cattistock's home and were admitted by Mrs. Chant.

Assuming that all her friends could not possibly have heard of the "Fee-asky", as she called it, at Trinity Church, and that, among those who *did* hear of it, would be some in whom curiosity would prove stronger than discretion, the wise Eliza had not failed to place on the big table in the Servants' Hall adjoining the kitchen, a cold but substantial supper. Here, accordingly, were assembled, volubly discussing every aspect of the day's occurrence, Mrs. Matzell from Half-Way House, Mrs. Monkton from Trigonia House, Sarah Piddle from "The Turret", old Ammabel from Spy Croft, and finally the two women who were her most especial cronies, though in no way connected with domestic service, Mrs. Wix of Railroad Cottage, Upwey, and Mrs. Witchit of St. Alban's Street, Weymouth.

Old Ammabel had been years and years in the employ of James Loder and all her feudal loyalty was concentrated on the old gentleman with the gastric ulcers. Ruth, her actual mistress, she disliked. She disliked her with one of those lodged, rooted, mysterious dislikes, which are the secret tragedy of so many human dwellings. Ammabel regarded Rodney as a dangerous atheist, partly because of various conversations with Ruth which she had overheard, and partly because in her tenderness and pity for the master of the house she felt instinctively that the young man lacked sympathy for his father. She was talking about her master now to Mrs. Matzell.

"All I say is, when his time comes he'll be as sure murdered by that boy and that mean, mimicking girl, as if they had done it by pison."

"You speak no less than gospel, Ammabel," replied Mrs. Matzell, whose ruddy countenance twitched, jerked, and one might almost say exploded, with her desire to be the person revealing tragical truths rather than the person receiving them, "but I can tell you that our poor Captain be tormented worse nor Mr. Loder for all his ulcers. 'Tis worse to suffer in mind, and it's the mind with him. What's *your* opinion, Mrs. Piddle, being in a Doctor's house as you are, about my poor dear Captain? We'll let alone what drove him to be like he is. But as I see it, Mrs. Cobbold stirs up his poor brain whenever she comes anywhere a-nigh him."

"I thought he never saw Mrs. Cobbold these days," threw in Mrs. Piddle. "At least that's what Doctor thinks. If thik evil woman, Doctor thinks, came as nigh thy master as I be to thee now, he would fall to raving. What Doctor thinks is *that summat* did happen twixt the two on 'em, but 'twere all Mrs. Cobbold's fault for leading the poor man on. Her led him on, Doctor thinks, so as to taunt his conscience with her, all his livelong days! Doctor thinks 'twould do no good to either party to send him to this here Brush — begging your parding since he's a relation — for this here Brush is—"

But Mrs. Matzell interrupted.

“ ’Twould be over my body, Sarah Piddle, and no ways else, that the Captain would go to *that* man! I know what I’m talking about, because I’ve seen what I’ve seen in our house, and I tell you the Captain’s a quiet, God-fearing, self-respecting gentleman to what he’d be if they took him into that place.”

All the women glanced furtively at Mrs. Chant. No one knew just how things stood between Mrs. Chant’s master and the director of Hell’s Museum. A silence ensued, during which they each called up the image of some member of their own family whose shaky wits might require aid from the ambiguous specialist.

The Servants’ Hall at Peninsular Lodge was in some ways the least unpleasing room in the house. Its chief characteristic was its faded neutrality. The ancient wall-paper was almost indistinguishable, as the lamp on the big table shone upon its discoloured surface. The walls were hung, too, with portraits of bygone Cattistocks, so dirty and uncared-for, that, in sheer shame at their condition, the owner had removed them from his front room.

All the time the discomforting idea of Dr. Brush was weighing upon these wedding-less guests their faces reverted to that pathetic weariness of a life of woman’s toil which the spice of scandal had temporarily removed. Mrs. Monkton’s countenance grew more pinched, more bitter; Mrs. Witchit’s more benevolently helpless; old Ammabel’s gloomier; Sarah Piddle’s more gross and earthy; Mrs. Wix’s paler and more stricken with years; Mrs. Matzell’s — she was a short, red-faced woman — more care-burdened and vulnerable. All of them, unlike men in a similiar situation, reverted with fatal acquiescence to the burden and the weight of life’s day-by-day assaults upon the soul.

It had only been by the use of her authority as his old nurse, and by threatening to spend her own money, that Mrs. Chant had got leave from her master to order the cold brawn, the cold tongue, the cold chicken that now tempted these guests, but thoughts of the Workhouse, of their relations, of their masters, and above all of Dr. Brush, led them at this moment to drop their knives and forks and sink sadly into themselves.

"Open the window a trifle for me, me girl, will 'ee?" whispered Mrs. Chant to the deep-bosomed Mrs. Witchit, who was sitting next her at the end of the table.

The fish-monger's wife extricated her portly form and went to the window and did as she was bid. But instead of recovering them from their temporary gloom the damp mud-scented airs that had climbed the upland from the shallow backwater that separated Chesil from the main-land only increased it. Such sea-birds as chose to break the silence, in their voyaging from the West Bay to Weymouth Bay seemed to leave their discordant cries behind them as they flew, the drifting, disembodied voices, not so much of flight and disaster, as of a beating against insoluble mystery.

But of all the living denizens of the two boroughs, the ones who heard these things least, who thought of them least, were these elderly, hard-worked, domestic women. Over their houses in Weymouth — prisons that had drunk up their youth, their blood, their life, as they toiled in the service of men and the children of men — those landmarks of the Inanimate, the Spire, the Nothe, the Bridge, the White Horse, the old King's Statue, the noble bulk of Portland, with the crying of their seagulls by day and by night had brooded and yearned in vain. They heard them not, these victims of house-care, or if they heard them they heeded them not. In the steam of their kettles, in the smoke of their chimneys, half the natural responses to the life of the race they served had evaporated from their devoted veins.

Matters soon cheered up, however, in the Servants' Hall of Peninsular Lodge when various neglected aspects of the day's great "Fee-asky" were brought forward for discussion.

Perhaps the lady, at this curious collation, who received the most dramatic respect from the others was Mrs. Wix, and this not because her daughter was engaged to Benny's tutor, but because her daughter, as well as the tutor, had left the church door in Mr. Ballard's car after the portentous announcement. Not a woman present had failed to gain some private word with Mrs. Wix to-night. After their hostess, who really knew less than anyone about what had happened at the church, as she had remained at home to prepare for the reception of the married couple, Mrs. Wix was the centre of the stage. Over and over again Mrs. Wix had to repeat her enlarged version of Curly's confused version of the clever Sippy's cautious and calculated perversion of what he had heard from his uncle.

Every human gathering, whether of elderly servants or of elderly members of parliament, falls inevitably into a natural rhythm of its own; a rhythm that gives it form and shape as a psychic entity. According to this spiritual rhythm in the Servants' Hall at Chickerel, whenever either Mrs. Chant or Mrs. Wix opened their mouths all the rest of the conversation ceased. The only chance Mrs. Matzell had of obtaining equal respect was to repeat for the tenth time that evening her account of the return of Daisy to Old Castle Road. Daisy, it seems, had returned without her mother, bringing the news that the disappointed bride had gone off with Mrs. Cobbold to spend a few days at High House.

"What did Mr. Ballard look like, Eliza," enquired Mrs. Witchit suddenly, "when he brought Mr. Muir to the front-door?"

One of those occult silences immediately occurred, by means of which a group of human beings indicate their recognition of the arrival of a point in the conversation where the devil is likely to break out. Into this silence, broken only by the hissing of the kettle in the adjoining kitchen, and the distant whining of Yellow, Benny's dog, who had been temporarily shut up, the voice of Lizzie Chant rose, projected itself, established itself, throwing out, as an airplane might scatter pamphlets little separate mental pictures of what was in the wind.

"I never saw Mr. Ballard," she said. "He took Curly home when he'd dropped Mr. Muir, and 'twas my son who drove Mr. Muir and our Benny over to Brunswick."

The silence that fell when she ceased was exactly as if in the midst of a company of ordinary witches the Witch of Endor had spoken.

It was the old Spy Croft parlour-maid who broke up this awestruck pondering on the ways of fate. Ammabel was so used to hearing the groans of James Loder and seeing him thrust his knuckles into the pit of his stomach while an atheist son and "a mean, mimicking girl" gloated over his pain, that she was aware of a feeling of superiority over these others, none of whom knew what real tragedy meant.

"Old Poxwell," she had been thinking indignantly, "Old Poxwell worse than the master? And worse because *mind* be worse than *body?* Oh, the Lord-a-Lord, the Lord-a-Lord! If they'd seen my master twist on floor, like a waspy what a kitten have caught, they wouldn't talk about their Captain and his mind. The Captain may have done what the Lord forbids but he doesn't twist and groan and hug his poor stummick. These ignorant torpids have no idea what is seen and known in *some* houses in Weymouth. The Captain's mind! What would they say and do if they knew all I know, of what the dear Lord allows us to suffer, when we are old? The Captain's mind! Them as talks of folks' minds being the trouble, dunno what *I* know.

’Tis our poor carcasses what be the plague! Master would exchange his stummick for the Captain’s mind any Sunday afternoon!”

With these thoughts in *her* mind old Ammabel turned to Mrs. Monkton and asked that lady whether Mr. Ballard had come straight back to Trigonia House after taking Curly home. Curly’s mother felt a little uncomfortable when she heard this question, for she was, herself, only too well aware that Mr. Ballard had not brought her daughter home till late in the evening, and then had brought her back in such a disturbed state that the girl had gone straight to bed. Mrs. Wix has a most agitating vision of that beautiful grey dress lying all crumpled and creased across a chair.

“I were out, my own self,” replied Mrs. Monkton, “so I can’t tell ‘ee for sure. And me darter were takin’ her English lesson with Mr. Gaul. She be mighty fond of her lessons, me darter be. She’s a-going to follow after her fayther, I shouldn’t wonder, who in’s time were a grand scholard.”

“What a day of days this has sure been!” exclaimed Mrs. Witchit in a rich contemplative voice. “Witchit were near church-door when the quality corned out, and he said ’twas a wonder to see ’em all so crestfallen. He said Mrs. Lily were as white as paper, and if it hadn’t been for pride and shame would have sat down on ground and cried pitiful. He said Daisy kept shutting her eyes when she stood holding her mother’s hand till Mrs. Cobbold took the poor woman away. He said Daisy went off with the Loders then and Miss Ruth were left to wheel the old gent in his bath-chair while Daisy walked in front with Mr. Rodney. They didn’t wait for the bath-chair, he said. They passed quite close to him, he said, and were walking so fast and so excited like that they didn’t see him. He said their eyes were so shining and they were talking so quick they never saw him. He said how kind of Mr. Rodney to take such an interest in a school-girl like that. But I knows Witchit, and what he *meant* was that he thought Mr. Rodney were taking advantage, and instilling ideas of bridal nights and such-like into that young girl’s head.

“I wouldn’t wonder,” broke in old Ammabel, “that he weren’t right there, Mrs. Witchit. I’ve been watching Master Rodney quite a lot lately and he’s forever making excuses to meet Miss Daisy. I expect he is — as you say — putting thoughts he ought not — being an atheist — into that dear young soul’s pure mind.”

It was Mrs. Wix who was the occasion now of the creation of another of these sacrosanct deathly silences, while Lizzie Chant spoke. Mrs. Chant had, it seemed, like the purveyor of the Marriage-Feast in the Gospel, a trick of saving the best wine of scandal till the last, and it was for such nectar as this that Mrs. Wix, extracting her immemorial piece of crochet-work from a black satin bag, and pushing her chair from the table now tactfully prepared the way.

“I keep thinking, Eliza, how you must have felt when you come down this morning and found Mr. Cattistock gone and stove in kitchen lit and kettle on. I hope whatever’s happened to the poor gentleman he had a good breakfast inside of he! That’s what I always said to my husband when he went off to his work. ‘Lay up a good foundation, Herbert’, I said, ‘for none of us knows what lies afore us when us leaves our threshold-stone’.”

Mrs. Wix’s last word — which was the syllable “stone” — seemed to be falling into a gulf of stillness so profound that echoes of its descent came to every ear as if from far away. Indeed the noise of “Yellow”, scratching at the door of Benny’s room where he had been shut up, became so loud, in this awe-inspiring hush, that Mrs. Witchit was heard murmuring to herself:

“That dog wants something.”

Mrs. Witchit being a giver rather than a taker among men was always finding that someone wanted something, and it seemed probable now that she might get up from her seat and go upstairs to the dog, if this silence were prolonged, but at last their hostess *did* open her mouth, and pregnant with significance were her words:

“He had no milk to his tea. I don’t know how I failed to keep back a little, but I don’t take milk me wone self, and how could I know he would want breakfast afore dawn? How could I know it? Tell me that!”

“You *couldn’t* know it, Eliza,” responded Mrs. Witchit. “There’s no one but the good God could know it.”

But Lizzie Chant fell into deep sadness, her old wrinkled face puckered up in the lamentable pondering of vain wishes.

“If only, if only,” she thought, “I’d left a drop of milk where he could have found it!”

It was at this point that Mrs. Monkton’s vigilant and wary countenance jerked spasmodically with the itch of enquiry.

“ ’Twas when you were having your own cup o’ tea,” she said, “just after calling Benny, that Jobber Skald came with that fish from Witchit’s, weren’t it?”

An electric quiver of resentment passed through Mrs. Chant’s thin frame at the bluntness of this inquisition.

“That’s done for *you,* Mam!” she said to herself. “I’ll never ask *you,* with your pertinent questions, to my master’s house again!”

“No,” she replied with an air of the lightest and most casual consideration, “I think it was *before* I took Master Benny his hot water that the Jobber called with the fish. I think ’twas just after I’d come down. Yes, it must have been just about six that he came, but anyway, ‘twere hours and hours after the master were gone.”

A deep, protective instinct — almost below the level of her own consciousness — now stirred beneath the voluminous bosom of Mrs.

Witchit.

“I mind well,” she began, drawing everybody’s startled attention to her by the intensity in her voice, “I mind well that I said to Jobber the last time he were in shop, ‘I be invited to Eliza’s at Chickerel, come Thursday night, but I’m sure Eliza won’t have thought of what to order for her wone friends, seeing she’ll have to cater for a new mistress and for new ways’.”

The quavering high-pitched voice of Sarah Piddle now broke in.

“You said Jobber were mighty funny when ‘a came, and that he brought his fish-basket into kitchen and asked in a graveyard voice for Mr. Cat’stock? What *I* do say is, ’tis a thousand pities the Doctor ain’t here,” — a smile ran round the table, for Mrs. Piddle’s infatuation with old Higginbottom was well-known to them all— “so that he could diagknow this case proper and say whether the Jobber were in his right wits or whether he were drunk. ’Tis likely enough he’d been up all night at some Public-House by Harbour and that the sailors down there — that’s what *I’d* say, if I were Doctor — dared him to call at Chickerel.”

“Well, as I looks at it, Eliza,” said Mrs. Monkton in a hard, clipped, pecking tone, like a vicious raven summoning up the case against the murderer of Cock Robin, “your master had reasons of his own for giving his lady the go-by. He may have heard, of course, that Mr. Skald threatened to insult him on his wedding-day, and even offer him violence, for we’ve all heard such tales, but as I looks at it myself—” at this point the didactic tone of the woman became so unsympathetic to the easy-going Dorsetshire gossips around her, for the Trigonia House landlady came from Salisbury, that they began murmuring and whispering to each other, even while she laid down the law— “and feels it,” she went on bitterly, “in me bones, ’twasn’t nothing to do with his quarrel with Mr. Skald that made him run off like this. *’Twas because he had some other woman.* I’ve a-heard from a good reliable quarter that he used to meet one of those dancing women at the Regents', and as I looks at it, Eliza, it was—"

But Mrs. Chant, who had made several vain attempts to interrupt this rasping voice, now rose to her feet in righteous indignation.

"When I asked you to Mr. Cattistock's house, Mrs. Monkton," she burst out, her whole, thin frame shaken with emotion, " 'twasn't to speak shame of him and evil of him afore us all. 'Tis my dear master's bread ye have eaten. 'Tis his wine ye have drunk. 'Tis his house ye are in. If you can't hold a civil tongue in your head, Mrs. Monkton, the best thing you can do —"

But Mrs. Monkton had already divined what was the best thing she could do, and having risen quickly from the table, glancing defiantly upon them all, she was already putting on her hat and cloak. No sooner had the outer door shut upon her than there was a general sigh of relief, and a warm wave of emotional sympathy rose from all sides and enveloped the trembling little woman at the head of the table.

"Don't 'ee mind, Lizzie dear," cried Mrs. Witchit. " 'Tis they Wiltshire ways, that's what it be! Mr. Witchit 'isself, though I'm not the one to say it, were born on Sarum Plain. 'Tis they east winds there, I reckon. 'Tis the terrible thin earth there that makes these harsh voices and these bitter tongues!"

To soothe her ruffled nerves and to win converts to her amiable and partial view of her master's flight, Mrs. Chant now produced and opened a second bottle of Cattistock's sherry wine.

"I never liked they Wiltshire foreigners," said Curly's mother. "There were one o' they peddlers that me sister Phem used to buy Bulls' Eyes from, for she's shop in Weymouth Road, but they never tasted proper-like to *my* notion. The pep'mint in 'em weren't what it should be. 'Twern't hot, as you might say. ’Tis a marvel what a many peddlers I’ve seen in my time from Salisbury, and nary a one of ’em sold real old-fashioned sugar-candy nor pure Bulls’ Eyes.”

These allusions of Curly’s mother to their ancient interest in peddlers and sweets warmed the old gossips’ hearts still further, as they sipped their vanished magnate’s wine. Sarah Piddle was actually moved to lift up an appropriate ditty in her thin treble voice.

“A boat, a boat, to cross the ferry!
And let us all be blithe and merry!
And laugh and quaff and drink brown sherry!”

“ ’Tis warm and cosy in here,” she went on, “now that there Wiltshire witch be traipsed off. What us must do in this here world is to follow our fathers what were afore us. There’ve been Piddles in Darset, I reckon, ever since Preston Brook ran into the sea. And there’ll be Piddles in ‘un when Harbour Bridge be like Backwater Bridge!”

“Would your master, Lizzie,” broke in old Ammabel, for her family came from Hampshire and there was therefore no way of boasting of a blood equal to that of the Piddles, “be as angry as Mr. Loder’d be if he found we’d a-drunk all this wine?”

Quite honestly — though doubtless she would have lied if need had been — Lizzie Chant explained that when she had first asked Mr. Cattistock about these invitations and had mentioned a little wine he had nodded and smiled.

“I don’t deny,” Mrs. Chant went on, “now that we’re all friends here and that that Salisbury bitch be gone, I don’t deny master be close-fisted; I don’t deny that in some respects you might call him a — a hoarder. But I’ve never known Mr. Cattistock not to act like a gentleman when the moment came.”

“I be so deaf,” protested Ammabel addressing herself to Mrs. Wix, “that I couldn’t catch whether you said Mr. Ballard had told Curly in what form he received his communication from Mr. Cattistock.”

Mrs. Wix hesitated. There had been a struggle going on in her mind for some while as how much it was lawful to reveal to these bosom cronies about what Sippy Ballard had said. Now — warmed by the sherry — she made her plunge.

“Mr. Ballard told my daughter,” she began, and the silence that followed this announcement was of that awful and sacred kind to which allusion has already been made, “told my daughter that ’twas a telegram Mr. Cattistock sent. What it said, or why Mr. Cattistock sent it, or where he was when he sent it, Mr. Ballard didn’t say. My daughter told me she had great difficulty in persuading Mr. Muir to accept a lift from Mr. Ballard.”

Mrs. Witchit looked at Lizzie Chant, and Sarah Piddle looked at Mrs. Matzell, while Ammabel looked nervously at the door, as if the woman from Salisbury might be listening outside. But turning from the door the old Spy Croft servant now fixed her eyes upon the little black satin bag on Mrs. Wix’s lap, upon which lay, untouched as usual, the piece of crochet-work.

“Mr. Muir has the same proud ways as his father before him, but I felt sorry for him when he were at our house yesterday. He hardly spoke to a soul. Does Mr. Muir know, Mrs. Wix,.. about... your... about Curly and Mr. Ballard?”

The hush, throughout the room, that fell like a palpable presence round these portentous syllables, was more profound than any that had yet fallen within these walls. No one but the aged Ammabel would have presumed to refer to so intimate a matter, and, as it was, her Hampshire audacity dumbfounded Mrs. Wix. All the women’s eyes in the lamp-light turned towards that lady, and so thunderstruck was she that she actually took up her crochet-work and extracted from it her crochet-needle. With this between her finger and thumb she turned towards the Spy Croft servant and made sundry little prods into an untouched piece of bread that lay by her plate.

“A handsome girl, like my darter,” she said, prodding the bread, while her old face puckered up with the momentousness of the occasion, “has many fine men to choose from, when and where she may be, and what she tells them or doesn’t tell them is her own concern. She and Mr. Muir will soon be married, and that should stop all mouths, I should hope, though *some* mouths, and some tongues, too, be busier with their mischief than waspies round a jam-pot!”

“Be it the truth, or be it not the truth, Eliza,” said the good Mrs. Witchit hurriedly, in her rich, motherly voice, “that Jobber Skald were seen yesterday on esplanade, walking, like he was keeping company, along-side of Mrs. Cobbold’s companion?”

Back went the crochet-needle into its proper place, and Curly’s mother, heaving a sigh of untold relief, hastened to take advantage of this timely aid.

“All I know about *that,* Mrs. Witchit,” she remarked, “be what my darter mentioned, afore she went to bed tonight, feeling footsore and forspent. She said when she were waiting for Mr. Muir, this morning, while he were buying roses for she, her met Mr. Fogg from High House, and *he* told her there were fine doings last night at Cobbolds’. He said the Companion were out all night and hadn’t sent no word. He said his Missus were all for calling up Police-Station, but Jerry Cobbold said ‘No’. He guessed the young lady were with Jobber Skald’s Pa and Ma, and that ’twould be disturbing a decent family to make a rumpus. Mr. Fogg said he laughed a lot at his Missus and made sport of the Companion’s cleverness. ‘They be old sweethearts,' he said, 'and 'tis for *that* she took this job at the start along with we'."

There was a pause in the conversation now and the women who had come out from Weymouth began murmuring to each other that 'twere time to think about catching the bus home.

"What be taunting thee mind now, Eliza?" said Mrs. Matzell to their hostess, whose preoccupation with her own thoughts had become apparent to them all.

"I were thinking of Master Benny," Mrs. Chant confessed quickly. " 'Twere in me mind how he were behaving at Miss Le Fleau's. He went to sleep, Mr. Muir said, on a sofy-bed along wi' he, but Miss Le Fleau's Martha be a particular kind of body, and I hopes to goodness Master Benny won't have none of his tantrums on this here sofy-bed!"

Everyone got up at this point, as if the particular Martha at Kimmeridge House had put them in mind of their duties. They were all in their out-door things and old Ammabel, nervous about missing the bus, had already gone, when to the general consternation there came from the front of the house, clear and unmistakable, the sound of the opening and shutting of doors and of heavy footsteps and of men's voices.

"The master brought back dead!" was Lizzie Chant's first wild thought... then "Mr. Muir with Benny!"... then "that terrible Jobber again!"

But as she stood listening, and all the women with their hats and their wraps on listened with her, there came the not-to-be-mistaken tones of Mr. Cattistock himself.

"He's back! He's safe!" her nurse's heart cried, and the same untold relief relaxed her nerves as it had done forty years ago when the little Dogberry returned alive from a boating accident.

Never have weddings guests vanished so completely at the appearance of a bridegroom as these poor ladies vanished, and Mrs. Chant, moving to the window to close it before she returned to the kitchen, looked out for a moment into the darkness. The window opened on a field at the back of the house, a field that rose to the summit of a low-lying ridge from which the West Bay was visible. It was to the summit of this incline, which was only a short distance away, that Benny's mother had been wont to stroll of an evening, in the days before her confinement, and it had become a morbid amusement of late with old Lizzie to pretend to herself that a certain lonely post, of unknown origin, locally known as "the Grey Woman" which stood upon this hill, was that young married woman's solitary figure, still staring out across West Fleet and across West Chesil, over the western sea. Lizzie had often thought of the woman's spirit as growing uneasy, wherever its abode was, at the arrival of another mistress at Peninsular Lodge, and to-night, as she glanced at that dark up-land whose outline was clearly visible in the moonlight, she was startled, but not overmuch surprised, to see a second post standing by the side of the first one. But she heard Cattistock's voice, calling her impatiently now, and leaving the window she hurried into the kitchen to meet him. It's a wonder she didn't cry out: "There are two posts!" for what she'd seen dominated her consciousness completely. Later on the fantastic notion visited her that Ammabel, who certainly was thin as a post, had, in her anxiety about catching the bus, hurried west instead of east, but during the whole of her meeting with Cattistock Lizzie's feeling was that she *had* been permitted to see the real dead woman standing beside the pretended one.

"Your friends have gone?" said her master, smiling grimly into her haggard face. "I've timed myself well then."

“Where... what... why?” gasped the old nurse. “Oh, Master Dogberry, how could you” — *there are two posts*— “act like this? How could you” — *there are two posts*— “let it happen like this?”

“The Doctor’s with me, Lizzie,” he said curtly, giving no other explanation, “but there’s no reason” — he looked at the big warm fire and he surveyed the cold brawn, cold ham and cold chicken about half of which was untouched— “you should light a fire as late as this in my room. Doctor won’t stay, only I thought I’d ask him in for just a bite because I knew the place was full of good food. What have you given them to drink? My best sherry? Well, well! I suppose you’ll say a day like this doesn’t come often. Only the point is — *it hasn’t come today]* Lizz, old friend, I *couldn’t* do it when it came to the point, and that’s all there is! I found I’d sooner risk everything here, risk making the Poxwells, Cobbolds, Loders, and all the rest of them enemies for life, risk upsetting all the ‘golden opinions’ they’ve now got of me in Portland, risk giving ‘Tensia a cruel, deadly hurt — but she’ll be all right, really! I hear she’s gone to High House for to-night. Lucinda called up the Doctor. I’m glad of that! The old man would have tormented her to death with his jubilations. She’ll never forgive me, and I shan’t blame her. I couldn’t do it, Lizz, when it came to the point. And that’s the long and short of it! I’ve been with the Doctor all day. Well — we mustn’t keep him any longer. Just clear away all this mess and set the table again. Pull it near the fire. That place of the Doctor’s is damned cold, Lizz. I wouldn’t be surprised if I’d caught a chill watching him in his Lab. It’s devilish queer what he does — I don’t know what to think! You have to be a scientist, I suppose, to get the hang of it. There! I mustn’t shout like that. I’ll be waking Benny.”

“Master Benny’s not here, sir.”

“Not here?”

“He’s staying the night in Brunswick Terrace.”

“With Muir?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was that fixed up, after or before?”

“After, sir.”

“All right, but Chant must fetch him back tomorrow morning. You’ll tell him that — eh? — if you see him before I do. Oh, yes, and let’s have whatever’s left of that sherry you had out. How many bottles did you open?”

“Three, sir. Three, Master Dogberry.”

“Three! Three bottles of sherry and I don’t know what for *these things?* Brawn is very expensive. They don’t seem to have eaten much, though — for so many of ’em — Well, this brawn will last me a long time, and Benny likes brawn, too, doesn’t he? Doesn’t he like brawn?”

“Yes, sir, Master Benny be very fond of brawn, sir.”

Mr. Cattistock lifted up the plate containing this popular edible and sniffed at it.

“I expect the brawn will be quite enough for the Doctor and me *now”* he remarked as he put it down.

“With the chicken, of course, sir.”

“No, Lizz, no, you spendthrift. *Without* the chicken.”

As he walked back to his study, where his brother-in-law was standing by the empty grate wrapt in deep thought, words such as these passed through his mind:

“Instead of the whitest body in the world — to eat brawn with Dan! That’s the final upshot. Brawn with Dan in the Servants’ Hall. Daniel Brush and brawn! The fat and the lean are so delicately balanced in brawn; and firmness and leanness in Daniel. Let me see! It costs three and six, when it’s in glass jars. For three and six you can eat as much brawn as you like. But one of his dogs, he says, costs nearly a pound. That is, if it's in good fettle. Well, if I hadn't cried off this business, I should be sitting now by a good fire in my study, drinking whiskey and watching the clock go round. Nine... ten... eleven... till it was time to go up to her. There'd have been no need for me to eat brawn in the Servants' Hall then or to watch the Doctor in his Lab either. What is the power they've got? Well, whatever it is, a man has to pay for it."

"All well I hope in your domain?" was his brother-in-law's greeting.

"Yes, the old trots are all cleared off and she'll have supper ready in the Servants' Hall in a minute. Benny's sleeping with his tutor in Weymouth. So I needn't have worried about him at all. Sit 'ee down, Dan, sit 'ee down. There's no good standing, though it *is* so blasted chilly in here."

They sat down on opposite sides of the empty grate.

"Have one of mine?"

"No, thanks. I always smoke these."

"Can't get her out of my mind, Dan. I suppose she'll never speak to me again."

"Oh, I don't know! I wouldn't say that. She'll probably marry someone else and invite you to the wedding."

"What *did* you say to that reporter from the 'Circular', Dan? How clever of the chap to go to you!"

"I told him you had come to the conclusion that with your bachelor habits you couldn't make a beautiful woman happy; that you regretted causing all your friends so much inconvenience; that your lawyer and Hortensia's lawyer were discussing the financial aspects of the affair; and that you hoped there would be no permanent ill-feeling."

Cattistock pondered for a moment. Then he said:

"You did very well, Dan. But you're still sure, are you, that 'twas the moment to mention lawyers and settlements?"

The Doctor sat straight up on his chair and pulled up his coat-collar. He began heartily to wish he'd never left his own house. What a man Dogberry was! Of course this case of his was all perfectly simple! He was suffering from — and the Doctor spoke to himself in his own scientific language for several seconds — combined with — and he added a few more words of classical origin.

"My hope is to avoid lawyers altogether," repeated Cattistock.

"But you said the Loders would deal with the claims she'll bring?"

"It's 'Loder and Crouch' now," corrected Cattistock. "The old boy's out of it. He spends his whole time, now, they say, talking to his ulcers."

"Well, anyway, you said that if a settlement—"

Cattistock smiled.

"What I say and what I want the Circular to say, Dan, are two different things. The great thing is to distract the attention of the public. Your phrase about my feeling I was too set in my ways to make a brilliant woman happy was splendid. But I rather wish you hadn't said anything about lawyers and settlements."

The Doctor hunched his shoulders and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He felt as if he was in a night train between Basle and Zurich. *Had* the man said there was a fire, somewhere in this accursed house, or had he imagined it?

"I can't do anything for him of course," he thought, "unless I can get him to talk freely. But it's all pathological. The great fool is simply riddled with neuroses. They stick out of him. He bristles with them. But he'll go down to his grave thinking he's a miser, a clever, maniacal miser, that everybody has taken for normal. Oh, the bitten and blistered fool he is! Oh, the congenital and convoluted fool he is! He thinks he is a formidable, irresistible, unscrupulous machiavellian man of blood and iron; whereas — God! how I'd love to have you mentally exposed to the limit! What juices of rich truth about the system of things could be sucked from analyzing you, what treasures of neurotic strata unearthed!"

Hunched up and miserable in that cold leather chair — for Cattistock was as partial to leather chairs as the Jobber — Dr. Brush turned his pale, neutral, de-personalized, ticket-collector's face upon his friend's great chin, protruding eye-brows, and prominent ears. He had, during this day of comparative intimacy, come to regard the man much more as a desirable patient — that is to say as a desirable field for exploration — than as any sort of relative. And as he looked at him now smoking so sullenly cigarette after cigarette as if to warm himself by their minute glow-worm ashes, he thought:

"I don't know which is the most exciting: cutting truth out of dogs or coaxing it out of men. But this I know: that I would help every dog in the world to die howling and reduce every woman in the world to a cold sepulchral pulp, like Mrs. Cobbold, if I could add only a page to the great Folio of *verified and verifiable truth!* How lovely, how exquisite are this man's lies and self-deceptions! God! I could watch him and experiment on him for a hundred years! Oh, how I wish I could buy a cartload of healthy Dogberrys as easily as Murphy can buy healthy Dogs! And Murphy himself. How beautifully complicated his sadism is, with its delicate feelers and its subtle arts of self-protective concealment! Murphy was drawn to the vivisection-laboratory as inevitably as trappers to traps or in the Middle-Ages those holy torturers to their castle-prisons. How Brother Dogberry does smoke and think to-night! He's thinking of the soft limbs of Hortensia Lily that won't lie by him or on him or under him to-night. What a head he’s got — what a head! But it isn’t *to the head* that a man’s thoughts are confined. They float round him in a vortex not yet fathomed; they retreat behind him into some magnetic causal dimension for which at present we have no name. Why doesn’t he light another candle? Those are both going out. Well, let them go out! Brother Dogberry’s skull is certainly an uncommon shape, and you can see — damn those candles! — you can see its shape from the way his hair is cropped, but—”

Mr. Cattistock got up in silence at that point, for the couple of candle-ends he’d lit on the chimney piece were indeed flickering down to annihilation, their small black wicks drowned in grease. He now struck a match, which, as its light flared up between them in that cold, fireless room, caused the countenance of Dr. Brush to manifest itself like a ghostly countenance at a séance — the cheeks visible at their extreme edges, the bridge of the nose visible, one side of the mouth visible, and one point on the ridge of the forehead visible. With the match Cattistock lit a candle-end that emerged from a flat candle-stick on the table and by slow degrees this dwarf luminary’s feebly ignited wick emitted spasmodic darts of light.

That miraculous projection of human personality that we call by such names as countenance, visage, face, features, physiognomy, lineaments, was now, in the case of Dr. Brush, thickened out and solidified so it no longer resembled an apparition. It did not, however, become all at once itself, as Cattistock’s face did. Something about the inbred character of Dr. Brush, something in his inmost soul that did really tend to correspond to a Faustian “Larva” or “Lemur”, seemed to retard his physiognomy in the re-taking on of its human shape. Thus thickened out and solidified, as Cattistock’s new candle-end spluttered, but not yet quite humanized, Dr. Brush’s face arrived at resembling the faces of the most revolting epoch of human decomposition, when, if we saw our dead beneath their trim coffin-lids, we would be quickly converted to cremation.

“Damn you, Lizzie!” Cattistock rapped out now as he stopped telling himself a story of what it would have been like to have Mrs. Lily waiting for him up there, nervous, feverish and fond, in cool-lavendered linen sheets, and went to the door and opened it.

But not a sound emerged from either kitchen or Servants’ Hall, and he returned grumbling, and sat down with a groan, rubbing his forehead with that portion of his hand that lies below the palm and is so momentously eloquent to the palmist.

Once more Dr. Brush fixed his eyes on the skull of his brother-in-law, now undergoing this gloomy massage as it bent forwards over its owner’s knees.

“What he thinks in his skull,” Dr. Brush said to himself, while his own neutral cranium resolved itself into its normal lineaments with the steadying of that little flame, “is that he dodged his wedding *because of his miserliness;* because, when it came to the ultimate point his insane love of money rose up like a demon, and struck down with one ferocious blow the whole fruition of his desire. Yes, you may rub your head. That is what’s going on, in there, you old clod-poll! The populace who waited outside that Church, on the other hand, and who know of course all about Tissty Clive, will put his insult to Hortensia entirely down to her. ‘He was off with his dancing-girl’. And all the while, I, who sit looking at this man’s skull, know perfectly well that the real cause of his getting up before dawn this morning and walking all those miles over the downs to me, was something belonging to that fluctuating, immeasurable, immaterial mind-circumference, that extends, my good friend, far beyond the limits of that hard pate of yours.

Rub on, rub on, brother Dogberry. By all the rubbing in the world you won't get the feel of those soft limbs out of your frontal-bone!"

As if aware of the not altogether sympathetic thoughts of his relative, Cattistock now rose to his feet, uttered another curse upon his old nurse, went to the door and opened it wide. Absolutely silent was the whole house! He made a movement to go off down the passage, but instead of doing so he called out:

"Hurry up, for God's safe, Lizz. The Doctor's hungry."

"She must be cooking something," he thought. "They never take a man's word. They can't believe that a person could be content with cold brawn."

He went back to the room and hunted about in several drawers till he found two more candle-ends. These he squeezed into the candle-sticks on the chimney piece and meticulously lit them. Sitting down again he fixed a sardonic stare upon his brother-in-law.

"Do you really get anything valuable from all this experimentation, Dan?" he asked.

The Doctor cast down his eyes.

"Anything," Cattistock went on, "to make all this bother and all the suffering you cause really worth it?"

"It is rather cold in here, Dogberry, isn't it?" Dr. Brush answered, rising from his chair. "Do you mind if I put on my over-coat while we're waiting?"

He went out to get the object he referred to, and he thought to himself as he put it on, looking down the dark passage leading to the kitchen,

"I don't like the smell of this house. I never have. It's not hygienic. Mrs. Lily's lucky to have escaped living here."

When he came back he found Cattistock with a bottle in his hand.

“Here, my boy,” was the welcome he got. “This’ll warm you up, better than that coat!”

But when Dr. Brush saw the two yellowish glasses — like the ones associated with the process of cleaning people’s teeth — that were now lugged out, he firmly declined the offer.

“They haven’t been rinsed out for weeks,” he thought.

But the owner of Peninsular Lodge was in a mood to be extravagant with his drink to-night. Looking about for a modicum of water he set eyes on a tumbler that Mrs. Chant must have balanced on the edge of the book-shelf, containing some of Curly’s roses that Mrs. Wix had brought for her. Snatching out the flowers and flinging them on the table, Cattistock diluted his drink with their water, and continued doing so, as he went on refilling his glass from the bottle.

The men were facing each other now in their seats by the empty grate. A faint fragrance, wafted from Curly’s roses on the table, reached their nostrils, while the door, which, in getting his coat, the Doctor had left ajar, blew suddenly wide open. Neither of them bothered to get up to shut it, for the Doctor’s mind was in his laboratory, and Cattistock’s was once more pretending that Hortensia was waiting for him upstairs. Damp, floating airs, neither pleasant nor unpleasant, came drifting down the long passage and entered their room, but they brought no sound of life with them. Lizzie might just as well have gone off with the last of her wedding guests. The two men with their heads half-turned to the grate fell into their separate tracks of thought as completely as if they had been two strangers waiting side by side in a railway-station. Every now and then the open door gave a little creaking sound, as if it said “Shut me! Shut me!” while Curly’s roses, which were not moss-roses, went on wafting forth their dim garden-fragrance from amid a litter of Circulars and scattered ashes and broken match ends.

And the Doctor thought:

"That gorilla-cranium over there is perfectly right! Experiments on dogs have *not* been of anything like the practical value my colleagues claim. I know *that.* And it's silly and tricky of them to pretend that the dogs don't suffer. They suffer horribly. Murphy would see to that in any case, for that is why he is here. And of course, since human beings are what they are, there are Murphys in every university, in every hospital, in every laboratory. About once a week it comes over me that I really must sack Murphy, but I never do, for he knows the ropes. He knows how to get hold of the dogs."

Here the Doctor ceased to think in logical phrases, though words, those animated eidolons that resemble the astral entities hovering over graves, still played a part in what went on in his consciousness. He recalled how he had heard the struggle between Murphy and Zinzin — he had no notion of the identity of the girl — and had made it clear that there were to be no more unprofessional "voyeurs" in his scientific Inquisition.

"But whether that'll stop it, is doubtful," he thought, while the indescribable image of what he had seen that day resolved itself into something his intelligence could handle. "When I hear my sweet hypocritical colleagues," he thought, "like so many clever politicians, defending experimentation as a humane duty for the curing of disease, I feel that the human race is so contemptible that the sooner some totally different creation takes its place, the better for the universe! Man is a loathsome animal, prodigious in his capacity for a particular kind of disgusting cruelty, covered up with ideal excuses. If I were allowed — as no doubt we *shall* be in half-a-century — to vivisect *men,* I'd gladly let the dogs alone. Comical, comical! It's comical but it's also a little ghastly! I wonder if our sentimental devotees comprehend what we real scientists are like. Mad! That's what we're like. It's a vice. *I know what it is.* And I know what I am. I am a madman with a vice for which I'd vivisect Jesus Christ."

Dr. Brush sat up as straight as a scarecrow as he thus formulated in his secret heart his views upon himself, staring into the dead cinders of Cattistock's grate. The candle-light flickering down upon him gave him — only Cattistock was too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice anything — a curiously malignant and even phantasmal detachment. What he really looked like — with his white face balanced above his new light-coloured over-coat, a garment that somehow suggested stables and the race course — was the Hanged Man of Gipsy May's Tarot cards. His body had the rigidity of a corpse just then, owing to the intensity of his thought, and his features for the same reason had lost all intelligent and even intelligible expression.

"It's all lies," his thoughts went on, "this chatter about the grandeur of truth and the noble virtue of pursuing it. There's nothing grand about truth. There's something frightful about truth! Really wise people spend their lives in forgetting 'God's truth', which is the horrible reality, and creating a truth for themselves. *That* is the wise life! I'm a madman, whose vice it is to enjoy pursuing the horrible truth created by God."

While these thoughts marched, one after another, through the brain of Daniel Brush, as if they had been an unending procession of Elsi-more sentries, clanking their halberds to the grinding noises of the ice-floes, Cattistock, a little dazed by the liquor he'd drunk, allowed his inner mind even greater liberties. When Dr. Brush denied that the thoughts in Cattistock's skull were circumscribed by their material container he certainly approached nearer to what Cattistock felt than to what he believed. As he thought of the satiny smoothness of Hortensia's legs as he had hoped not only to feel them in bed but to see them exposed for his pleasure when she rose in the morning, he felt as if his thinking ego were not inside this cold room, with the open door and the fireless grate, but as if this cheerless room were one fleeting and phantasmagoric object, among others, inside his thinking ego. But clever psychologist as Brush was, Cattistock beat him altogether to-night, if to beat an analyzing truth-hunter is to be something totally different from what he has diagnosed you to be! With his unshaven chin poked forward on the back of his knuckles, as he rested it on his clasped hands, with his thick eyebrows working up and down, as if they had been too long in one position and wanted to stretch, with his low, broad forehead wrinkling a little, as he gave the skin over his frontal skull-bone sundry automatic twitches, Cattistock became aware that the real cause of his fooling his lovely bride and half the Town, the real cause of his sitting here in this miserable room instead of stealing up, step by triumphant step, to where, breathing hard with excitement, and whiter than the sheets she lay between, his woman awaited him, was as obscure and inevitable a compulsion as that which had led him, on the night of the wreck on Chesil to swim out to that floating cask. He actually felt now the same sort of integral impulse, in all his muscles and bones, as he had felt then, and again it was as if from his physical frame itself, from its mysterious diffused life, rose up the decision he had made and was even now confirming.

As he sat, therefore, bowed down there, with his great chin on his folded hands and the air from the long passage blowing in through the creaking door, he reviewed the whole course of his days upon earth. A blind, obstinate, unyielding purpose gathered within him that seemed to spring from something in his being that certainly was not limited to his skull, but on the other hand, seemed much more like an emanation from his vigorous muscles and his athletic bones, as he bent and crouched, than from any superincumbent spiritual entity. Released by the whiskey he had drunk, with its faint flavour of flower-stalks, from all doubt and misgiving, the underlying consciousness of his powerful physique, his body consciousness, that terrible will to mastery that had dominated him while he wrestled with the waves that night, seemed now to articulate itself and to reveal its purpose. And the purpose thus revealed, as he saw it now, blindly reached after, furtively fumbled after, through all the years of his life, was something quite definite, but something, too, free from the usual vulgarities of gross ambition. Struggling there now, as his bristly chin pressed itself into his knuckles, to articulate this something, it seemed to him that what it really was was *power-in-suspension.*

In other words it was revealed to him now, in this upheaval of self-recognition, that it was no *overt* assertion of power he wanted, no worldly exercise of power, but the feeling that he was detached from all other men by his secret possession of what others, if they had it, would flaunt and flourish, but that he would hold, to the bitter end in volcanic reserve. To hold the thunder without scattering the bolts; it was this that now articulated itself to him as his real passion.

His idea of himself emerged into awareness, at this crisis in his days, as if he were a solitary arsenal of explosive energy, that must never be allowed to explode. An obscure, demonic pride in him held the human race in such contempt that all explosion, all hurling of thunderbolts, all external domination, presented itself as a confession of vulgar weakness. The sudden rising up within him of the subconscious Being who had driven him, after a sleepless night over the hills and made him walk, sometimes even, as he now remembered, actually run, across those long miles of dark country side till he reached the Brush Home, was an incontrovertible piece of knowledge. This knowledge, that had clarified itself just in time, was that to bring Hortensia into his life would undermine, dissolve, corrupt, disintegrate the grand secret of his days.

"She would spend my money," he had kept repeating to himself all that sleepless night. "Spend my money, spend my money, spend, spend, spend, *spend* it!"

He knew he wasn't the traditional sort of ordinary miser. He had no particular mania for the touch of gold as gold. What he wanted was to have it there as a mystical power-in-suspension, to have *the real thing there,* while other men swaggered and flaunted and strutted with the mere show of it! And to have it in secret — that was the main thing! It was the *secrecy* of power, of power unused, concealed, unknown even, to the very end, that alone satisfied his pride. Vulgar, vulgar, his heart told his heart, was this desire to be recognized, to be hailed as the winner in the great subterranean competition. He would like to die without one living soul of this contemptible race knowing him for what he was, knowing that he had held them in the palm of his hand! As it was *now,* though these fools called him the richest man in Weymouth, not a soul of them knew that in reality he was one of the richest men in England. Yes, his secrecy, his secrecy was his life! Only by his secrecy could he satisfy his pride, only by their not knowing, by their *never* knowing!

But it was just this secrecy that a woman like Hortensia, once settled snug and quiet there at his bed and board, would — it had come over him with a final, deadly certainty — inevitably destroy. Even if he kept his money from her, she would know, she would know! She would worm herself into his life *in order* to know. The truth was, when you got down to the depths, so he told himself now, he wanted in his direct masculine way, what every woman wanted, a certain mysterious, unknown life-tract, that he could govern without completely understanding it, and without ever boasting of it! Women were stronger than men, he thought, in that they could enjoy this mysterious kingdom and rule over it, without having to keep their feelings secret, even indeed while in full intimacy with other personalities about it! This they could do because they could always sink into Nature and draw new strength from Nature when their indiscretions and their social betrayings of themselves had apparently given everything away.

"But a man cannot do that; a man to preserve the power of his identity must keep to himself. A man who doesn't — even when living with a woman — *live alone* is only half a man. But women, though they admire a man's loneliness and in a sense prefer it, are driven on by an accursed fatality to undermine it and destroy it!"

Thus did Dog Cattistock articulate what he thought to be his inmost soul, while all the while that ghastly Lemur hanging there opposite him, that corpse-man, sweating the wise sweat of the cunning of corpses, was finding, as he sat up so erect in his new over-coat, just as if he had a rope under his expressionless face, that Dog Cattistock had not the smallest, faintest, remotest inkling of the real causes of his actions!

It is interesting to think of the telepathic waves of magnetism, whether recognized or not, that must have been passing to and fro just then between Peninsular Lodge, Chickerel, and High House, Weymouth. The two Poxwell sisters were certainly present in some kind of reality in that chilly room that night, where the air, blowing in from the long passage, was so full of the indescribable house-smells of half a cenutry of Peninsular Lodge existence! Even at the very second when the man who crouched down there, chin against knuckles, was tearing himself free of Hortensia, the man who hung there, like a cadaver in a straight waistcoat, was analyzing

Lucinda as if he were embracing a vivisected, half-anaesthetized, snarling panther.

But however much the Poxwell temperament, inheriting from the demented Captain so much more than the Captain would have cared to concede, diffused itself through that shabby room, it was not less of a shock to both the men when there came a sudden violent ring of the front door bell. The ringing of a bell is always charged with the electricity of drama, and the first thought that passed through Cattistock's mind was: "It's 'Tensia!" and in spite of all his resolutions a flood of happiness rushed through him as he rose to his feet and listened.

Dr. Daniel Brush also rose to his feet and the brothers-in-law stared at each other. Brush, the man, thought: "I hope it's not Mrs. Cobbold sent as an ambassador," a thought which Brush, the pathologist, immediately translated as: "I hope it is Mrs. Cobbold sent as an ambassador!"

"Why doesn't Lizzie come to the door?" Cattistock remarked sharply, and going into the hall he turned towards the long passage and called: "Lizzie! Lizzie Chant! Lizzie! Come! I want you!"

But instead of waiting for Lizzie to come, his excitement was so intense that he rushed to the front door and pulled it open while Brush with a doctor's instinct to be ready for immediate action began hurriedly pulling off his over-coat and hanging it with delicate care upon a peg. A sick, labouring moon, ill-shaped and blurred by mist, threw its distorting light on the heads of three persons out there, those of a young girl and two men. Cattistock, with Brush behind him, saw at once who they were, and at once these two clever ones realized the meaning of this invasion.

It was Captain Poxwell himself! And the old man was accompanied by his grand-daughter Daisy and by his lawyer, Rodney Loder.

“We came,” began Daisy at once in her clear rounded voice, raised a little, and trembling a little, but perfectly under control, “we came, because grandfather wanted so much to speak to you. Grandfather thought that it must be *because of him* that you didn’t come today. I told Mr. Loder how troubled grandfather was, and he said to get a taxi and let him do what he wanted. We told the man to wait, and the taxi’s over there in the road now.”

“Don’t ‘ee visit the sins of the fathers on the children, Dogberry Cattistock!” cried the old man himself, shaking off Daisy’s hand. “I never liked ‘ee, ye know — but that’s not here nor there. That’s a gentleman’s privilege, *with us;* though ’tis true in certain foreign places you and me would have, long ere now, been knife-sticking. But whether I’ve liked this wedding or no, Dogberry Cattistock, I can’t endure to think that you... are leaving... are jilting my daughter ‘Tensie because of what everyone says of me — of me and — of me and my other daughter. It isn’t, Dogberry Cattistock, the right time for thee and me, to settle our private account. We can do that another day and I haven’t come for that. I’ve come to take you to ‘Tensie out there at Lucinda’s. So don’t say ye can’t listen, nor heed, nor come. I know the pride of a man’s heart and I know the pride of a woman’s heart; but if you’d come, in Rodney Loder’s taxi, straight to High House, I’m sure to Almighty God that you and ‘Tensie would fall into such favour and prettiness with each other that you couldn’t help letting by-gones be by-gones. I know what I am, and I don’t deny it. I know I shall be damned in the other world and I know I’m tormented in this. But ye musn’t consider —”

Till this moment Rodney Loder had kept himself in the background, allowing the Captain his fling, but when the old man’s remorseful volubility showed no sign of abating, but on the contrary every indication that he was prepared to make a speech as lengthy as that of the foster-father at the tent-door of Achilles, he felt it incumbent upon him to assert himself.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind, Mr. Cattistock," he said quietly, coming forward towards the door, "if we came in for a minute or two? Our taxi's here. We won't bother you for long, but Captain Poxwell—"

"Come in, come in, of course, Loder," said the master of Peninsular Lodge hurriedly and kindly. "I'm sure we'll be able to satisfy the Captain. I'm glad you came, my dear," this was addressed to Daisy, upon whose shoulder he laid his hand. "You all know my brother-in-law, don't you? Help the Captain up the steps, Dan. That's the way! Come in here, all of you."

Once inside the house, with the door closed on the ticking of the taxi in the road, Cattistock managed with the assistance of the Doctor to get his guests into his desolate and chilly study. The old man let Daisy take his coat and stick from him and settle him in the leather chair lately occupied by Dr. Brush. Rodney sat down on the smaller arm-chair, where Cattistock had been brooding over the grate, and beside which the half-empty whiskey bottle still stood in the littered fender. As for the Doctor, he brought up to the table a high chair from the side of the room and sat there, quiet and erect, his hands clasped in front of him and a vacant, almost stupid expression on his face, like a weary ticket-collector who is waiting patiently for the *next* train to come in. Cattistock carried to the Captain's side the only other seat in the room, which was an old piano-stool covered with faded plush. Towards this object he waved his hand.

"Sit down, my dear," he said with a friendly grimace. "You're the only one I'd dare offer *this* to!"

But Daisy in an absent-minded way was collecting Curly's scattered roses. When she had got them together she stood by the side of the table, but at some distance from the Doctor, arranging them into a neat nosegay, not without a quick glance round the room for an opportunity to put them into water.

"Take those home with you, child," said Cattistock kindly. "I'm sure I don't know how they got here, but you're welcome to them, if you like them."

Daisy gave him a straight look with her grey eyes. She was puzzled at herself for not feeling more indignant with the man who had made her mother the laughing-stock of the town, but instead of feeling indignant she felt — now that he was not to be her step-father — more friendly to this self-possessed, harassed-looking person, with such smouldering excitement in his roving eyes, than she had ever felt before. Her chief concern, however, was with the Captain, and with the bunch of roses in her hands she now sat down by his side on the piano-stool and looked appealingly at Rodney.

Rodney, far more concerned with her than with her grandfather or anyone else, responded quickly to her appeal.

"We mustn't stay more than a minute, Mr. Cattistock," he remarked. "I'm afraid we can hardly persuade you to do what Captain Poxwell has in his mind."

"I've said to him what I came to say, Rodney," interrupted the Captain, speaking quite calmly and rationally, and then with a certain shiver. "It's chilly, to-night, you know."

Cattistock caught the old man's eye fixed on the bottle on the floor, and hurriedly looking round for a glass he picked up his own, poured some whiskey into it and handed it to him.

"Forgive the glass," he said, "but an old sailor like you, Captain, won't —"

Breaking off, as he realized the absence of water; he made a movement towards the door, but the Captain stopped him,

"Don't bother, Dogberry," he said. "This is all I want... just to warm my old bones."

Thus speaking he tilted back his head and poured the whiskey down his throat. The candle light from the chimney piece, as he did so, fell upon his long lean neck accentuating its corded muscles as they distended in the act of swallowing.

Rodney, from where he sat looking anxiously at Daisy, turned to watch the old man drinking, and thought to himself:

"He's exactly like a picture of a man drinking."

"I doubt," began the Doctor suddenly while Daisy, balancing herself on her stool, fixed him nervously with her grey eyes and then deliberately closed them, "whether it would be any use, just at present, for our friend here to see your daughter, Captain. If I know anything of women," — he spoke in a low emphatic, authoritative voice, a voice that clearly impressed the old man, who had now sunk back again in his chair, holding the empty tumbler in his hand— "it's always better to wait till a propitious moment, a propitious... what shall I say?... *mood,* and then, and not till then, make our... whatever move we want to make."

But the Captain turned to Cattistock.

"You'll say it isn't me, Dogberry. But I know better." And the old man fetched, in the presence of them all, one of those calamitous sighs that spring from a broken spirit. "But I've done my best for her... haven't I, Daisy? I've... always... done my best... for... my daughters... haven't I, Daisy? For your mother, I mean, and for... for Lucinda, too."

The Doctor, still sitting straight up at the table, turned his expressionless, ticket-collector's face towards the Captain.

"One day," he said, speaking very low and very quiet, "I'll tell you, Sir, something about Mrs. Cobbold that will interest you. No, not *now*—" for a look had come into the Captain's eyes like that of a hooked fish, on the bench of a boat, who catches a glimpse of the waves— "*another time;* but neither you" — he put a tone into his voice that caused the old man's tremulous mouth to work convulsively, as if he were biting at something— "nor she," he went on very slowly, "are what you think you are."

There was a heavy silence in the room, during which Cattistock crossed over to the chimney piece and moved both the candles till they were behind the old man. He seemed to do this quite automatically, but Daisy followed the gesture with gratitude in her eyes, now wide-open again and full of some interior resolution, for the result of his action was to throw the Captain's face into such deep shadow that neither the Doctor, nor anyone else there, could see his mouth, as it made those disconcerting movements.

Out of the shadow, however, which now obscured the figure in the arm-chair, a voice rose that was disturbing to them all.

"I'll give you all my shell-boxes and all my cowries, Doctor, if you'll make her swear by her mother's womb to leave me alone! I've got more cowries than they know about, and I'll give them all to you... tell him I mean it, Daisy!... if you make her swear she'll never come... never, never," — his voice began to thin itself out, till it was almost inarticulate... "come walking and beckoning and swaying her hips and pouting her lips, and smiling like she does, in front of my cabin-window!" He paused and then in quite a different voice, a voice restrained and rational, but which, for that very cause, was yet more disturbing: "Tell him what I call my cabin, Daisy. Tell him what it is and how I never answer, never open the window, when she comes, never look out once! I've blocked up the window, haven't I, Daisy? — Daisy knows I have! — blocked it up with shell-boxes. No, no, no, Doctor. I don’t want her secrets. She was always one for secrets and I never meddled with ’em. It’s to swear on her mother’s womb to let me alone — that’s all I want. For her to leave me alone!”

He leant forward eagerly, so that the front of his high Poxwell forehead was just beyond the shadow, giving the impression that what spoke now was some orifice in that fragment of grizzled skull, where his brains were most troubled, not his hidden mouth at all.

“Shall I tell you something, Doctor? Shall I tell you something, Dogberry, and you, too, Rodney Loder? It takes a man who’s sailed the deep sea to know it.” He lowered his voice to a whisper. “They’ve got a sting in them. That’s their secret. — It’s all right, Daisy... don’t ‘ee shut your dear eyes and frown... I’m telling ’em soft and careful; no maidie could mind how I’m telling ’em, only I *must* tell ’em; — It’s this sting’s poison that they always leave behind! When she sways her hips, and pouts her lips, outside my window she has to hum a little tune so I shan’t notice her sting. And do you know what she hums? She hums “Take her off to Devonport.. Take her off to Devonport.. take her off to Devon-*port*.. as you have done before!”

That exposed fragment of the old man’s head, protruded into the candle-rays, which seemed to contain a medium of speech in more direct touch with the disturbance of the brain than the one that really functioned, appeared to be what now chanted the famous village-green burden.

All this was so distressing to Daisy that she let Curly’s roses drop upon her lap, and raising her hands, pressed both her wrists hard against her closed eyeballs, while her fingers covered the throbbing of her temples and sank into her wavy hair. If the young girl suffered under the Captain’s wild words, Rodney, who was watching every movement she made was yet more troubled. He had never felt such a rush of protective tenderness for anyone in his life as he felt towards her then! Hardly realizing what he did he actually got up from his seat, hurried across to her and laid his hand, with as much solicitude as if she had been hit by a bullet, on one of her shoulders. The girl seemed conscious of his reassuring touch, but they had come to know each other so well that without a word breathed he understood that she wished him to leave her alone to deal with her nerves in her own way, and removing his hand he went back to his seat and sat down again with a strained smile.

But the old man went on in total obliviousness of the effect of his ravings.

"Oh, what a paradise it would be," he cried, in his high-pitched, querulous Poxwell voice, a voice that made Cattistock think most uncomfortably of Mrs. Lily, "if a person could get their sting out of his mind! They sting us, I tell 'ee,.. that's what they do... and the sting itches and itches till anyone could scratch out his brains! You're wise not to come near' em, Rodney me boy. Cupper's Compass! But how they *can* sting! Hark 'ee, Dogberry, hark 'ee, me great grinning lad, if 'twas *because of her sting* you ran away from church-door, I can tell you — Don't 'ee mind so, Daisy, if I *do* speak out! — I'm not going to blame 'ee! Mum's the word with the Captain, Dogberry. I'm not the one to—"

As Daisy shifted uneasily on the piano-stool, her hands still hiding her face, a few of Curly's flower-stalks slipped down from her lap to the carpet, a carpet that had not felt Mrs. Chant's broom for days and days. Cattistock, who now that Rodney had gone back to his seat was standing near her, automatically, as any man might have done, went down on his knees, picked them up, and laid them on her lap with the rest. But just as he rose, they were all arrested by a prolonged and penetrating howl from Benny's room upstairs, expressing the desperation of the dog "Yellow" who had been shut up there.

"Damn that dog!" muttered Cattistock, and then he thought: "But what on earth has happened to Lizzie? I must go and see."

It was Rodney's destiny, therefore, who always gave his own neat garments a timely brush with his hand, even when he rose from kneeling at Holy Communion, to behold in astonishment his present host rush from the room with trousers dusty and rumpled and not so much as giving them a fillip with a finger. But the owner of Peninsular Lodge had been feeling obscurely uneasy about Lizzie for some time. Why on earth hadn't she appeared? Was she undergoing a sudden fit of shamefaced self-obliteration on this night of "il gran rifiuto"? Leaving the room without closing the door, Cattistock now hurried down the passage. Entering the kitchen he found the big kettle emitting clouds of indignant steam, its impatient lid leaping up and down like the iron hat of a hidden Jack-in-the-box. But there was no sign of Mrs. Chant.

"Lizz! Lizz!" he called. "Lizz! Where the deuce are you?"

The door into the Servants' Hall was ajar and he could see the place was lit up. Yes! When he entered it he found it to be not only lit up but threatened with a conflagration. The small modern lamp which stood in the centre of an old table by the fire, a table with places suitably laid for two persons, was flaring abominably. Much lamp-soot had fallen on this table and the cloth was blackened. The window looking out on the moonlit upland, where that post stood, was wide open and an in-rush of chilly air came blowing into his face.

Looking out of his window something made him call Lizzie's name into the moonlight night and to his complete amazement he was answered by a faint voice that apparently came from the direction of that post up there that they called the Grey Woman. Thoroughly disturbed and puzzled he left the window and hurried out at the back of the house.

“Lizz! Lizz!” he kept calling as he hastened up the hill towards the post.

No sooner had Cattistock left the room than his brother-in-law rose from his chair by the table.

“Did you see my machine, Mr. Loder, when your taxi drove up?”

Not Rodney, however, but the Captain himself was the one who, it appeared, had noted the large Hell’s Museum car standing at the edge of the road.

“Your taxi will cost you a fortune, I’m afraid,” said the Doctor as he put on his great-coat.

Rodney smiled and shrugged his shoulders grimly in a typical lawyer’s fashion.

“Make her swear, Doctor,” the old man called from the threshold after that light-coloured great-coat as it passed through the front door and disappeared down the steps, “Make her swear not to torment me!”

When he turned back into the little “study”, where Rodney and Daisy had already exchanged an anxious word, he sat down chuckling and wagging his head.

“Did I handle him well, Daisy? Did I handle ’em *both* well, Daisy and Rodney? Hee! Hee! Hee! I fancy I did, my chickabiddies, I fancy I did! And Dog Cattistock — aye! what a pity our friend the Jobber wasn’t here to see me do it! I laid it on and spared not. Didn’t I, Rodney? Didn’t I, Daisy? He won’t run away from any girl of mine at the church-door again. Will he, Daisy and Rodney?”

After this rush of bravura, a physical reaction of old age came upon Captain Poxwell and he soon began to nod as he settled himself comfortably in his chair.

Rodney fell to conversing in whispers with Daisy. Daisy was dressed in a navy blue suit that made her figure look particularly soft and youthful, while the little faded black cloak she still wore round her shoulders threw into relief, even in the faint light of that poorly-lit room, the bloom of her cheeks and the rosiness of her lips under the shadow of her felt hat. As Rodney whispered some questions to her and she bit her lip and frowned almost crossly in her desire to give him a weighty, grown-up, well-considered answer and not a hurried childish one, he thought in his heart that the time would come soon when he would find it very hard not to bring their attraction to each other into the open.

"Is it 'virtue' that has kept me from kissing her, from making love to her, all these days?"

"No," he decided, as he watched the flickering above her head, of what might well have been, for all they'd seen of his ways, the last couple of candles their host possessed, "no, it's not virtue. It's just pure, simple intelligence! I *know* with a girl like Daisy to rush her, to bewilder her, to startle her would be a crazy way to act — that is, if you felt as I do. Of course, if you *didn't* — but I can't get any perspective, except a sort of indignant protectiveness, on a deliberate attempt to corrupt Daisy."

A pallid smile, which Daisy caught at once on his face, and which infinitely puzzled and rather worried her, followed the notion of some shameless seducer setting out to corrupt this sturdy mistress-mother of Quinquetta; but Rodney's pessimism had not left room for excessive, Quixotic gallantry, and he did not forbid himself the piquant pleasure of imagining what it would be like when the time for making love to her did arrive. Of this time he had begun to think now, as he listened to her slow, hesitant, well-weighed words, when all of a sudden both his thoughts and her words were interrupted by a distant cry in Cattistock's voice.

"Dan! Dan! Dan!"

Rodney and Daisy rushed down the passage; not, however, till the girl had given a quick glance at her grandfather asleep in the chair, nor till she had carefully closed the door upon him. The back door to Peninsular Lodge was half-way down a little passage-way between the kitchen and the scullery. At the door of the kitchen they stopped to listen. But the only sound they could hear was a faint whining upstairs, where "Yellow" was now pathetically crouched inside the closed door of Benny's playroom. Finding nothing in the kitchen except that Jack-in-the-box of a kettle-lid, dancing now a positively frantic dance, they went into the Servants' Hall. Here they found a smouldering fire, a table laid for two with an extinguished lamp upon it, and a round of brawn sprinkled with soot.

Another call from Cattistock, however, made them rush to the back door through which as they approached it, they could feel the night wind blowing. Just outside the house, in a cobble-stone yard, they found Cattistock on his knees by Lizzie Chant's prostrate body, trying to bring her back to consciousness. He was apparently using the most primitive and violent methods, just as if she were a person rescued from drowning, or a person who was drunk, or someone from whom death by freezing had to be driven away.

Doctor "Dan" himself could have hardly been more authoritative than Daisy became at this surprising juncture, and it was not very long before, carried upstairs to her own bed by her master and Rodney, and tended, in her bed, by this spirited young woman, old Lizzie Chant began to show signs of returning from the sanity of Not-Being to the insanity of Being.

"Lie down, sir! Lie down! Or I'll take you back!"

This remark was addressed by the master of the house to the dog he had just released from Benny's room and who was jumping up against the old woman’s bed.

“Where did you find her?” whispered Rodney.

“She’d wandered out of the house for some unknown reason,” Cattistock replied in equally low tones. “It was by a mere caprice I found her. I went up the slope at the back of the house, as far as a post there is there, that in old days we used to call ‘the Grey Woman’ and there she was! She must have felt nervous and in great want of fresh air after a lot of friends she’s been regaling. I brought her back from up there and we walked down merry as crickets and talking of old days, when she went dead off, there where you found me. I was afraid she’d done for herself that time. She fell so quick I couldn’t break her fall. That’s why I shouted like that for Dan. But on my soul, Daisy my child, you’re more useful than Dan could possibly have been; do you know that? Well, well, I know who does know it! Ha, Mr. Loder? But if I *had* turned up in that crowd today this conservative infant wouldn’t have been living here! No, no! She’d have stuck to the Captain, just as the Captain himself would have stuck to any of his ships! Eh, Daisy, my dear? Isn’t that true?”

But Daisy had the best of all possible excuses for disregarding this praise, praise that had come so nearly to being that of her step-father, for she had to interpret the faint whispers of her patient.

“Mrs. Chant is saying something to you, Sir,” she said emphatically.

Mrs. Lily had been trying in vain for months to make Daisy call him something different from “Sir”, but without effect. Cattistock himself rather liked it. He found it piquant and engaging.

“What is it, Lizz? What is it, Nannie?” he said to the old nurse.

Part of his roughness to-night to Mrs. Chant was due to a secret fancy he had, which happened to be totally unfair, that the old lady was drunk.

“She is saying someone’s at their post I think,” said Daisy.

“The Post?”

And Cattistock bent over the old woman and with an indescribable intimacy in his voice, an intimacy that proved them inseparably one, far more one than if they had been the most passionate of amorists or the most loyal of relations, he asked her what she was saying.

“Coom nigher, Master Dogberry,” she whispered. “ Tis for thee wone ear.”

And when he had bent low down over her, and Daisy and Rodney had drawn back a little, he heard her faint, wispy voice, like the voice of the wind in the telegraph wires that go over the loneliest stretches of the Dorset hills where she was born:

“There were two on ’em to-night, Master Dogberry; there were thik Grey ‘Ooman and Another along o’ she, whom thee and me do mind.”

PUNCH AND JUDY

IT WAS AUGUST, A DAY OR TWO AFTER THE AUGUST BANK-HOLIDAY, AND Weymouth was crowded with visitors. Up and down the esplanade people moved in two parallel streams, broken here and there into eddies and criss-cross currents, as new-comers joined the throng from across the road, or clambered up the stone steps from the beach.

The calm faces of the Janus-like Jubilee Clock rose out of the unending procession as if it had been a light-house amid confluent tides, as if it had been the Shambles Light-ship itself, where the tides of the two bays meet. It was nearly opposite the Jubilee Clock, which itself was opposite the short crowded street to the railway station, that the real Weymouth sands began. On the Brunswick Terrace side of the Clock there was very little sand, under most conditions of the tides none at all, for the pebbles sloped steeply down to the water, and the water itself was deep. It was west of the Clock, to the right and to the left of the place where the road, near the old King's Statue, disembogued itself of donkeys and goat-carriages and toy-vendors and sweet-sellers and handcarts and bath-chairs and fruit-trucks and children's perambulators, that the Weymouth sands proper stretched out, so nobly, so generously, so hospitably, and so astonishingly far into the sea!

It is indeed hard to imagine any expanse of sand — sand the element "nighest bordering upon Heaven" to the hearts of children — more perfectly adapted by nature to the friendly purposes of a watering-place than the sands of Weymouth. So far do the sands extend that from the days of George the Third, the town's historic patron, to the days when Jerry Cobbold discovered the genius of Tissty and Tossty there could have been seen numbers of stalwart horses at this August season passing to and fro from one to another of the bathing-machines which it was their task to pull out far enough from the shore to allow for bathing, though the more adventurous swimmers were forced to leave even these outposts far behind if they wished to reach any water out of their depth. But for boys and girls content with paddling, this smooth semi-cirque of shining ripples was an arena of undisturbed bliss. Nervous mothers and responsible elder sisters could rest in peace with their books and their sewing, ensconced in sun-warmed security on the hot dry sand above, while over the expanse of *wet* sand, between them and the actual water, little excited groups of bare-legged children and infants could always be seen digging with their wooden spades miniature moats and castles and canals. Gulls would come gliding in over the heads of the swimmers, cutting the air obliquely, like flying torpedoes, in their daring approaches, and then with a reversed motion of their powerful wings whirling sea-ward again, uttering their harsh but reassuring cries.

The scene on this particular afternoon, largely because of the warm diffused sunlight which fell from a filmy, feathery sky, and because of the absence of any blustering wind, had an air that resembled the air of Watteau’s “Embarkation to Cythera”. There was the same ideal atmosphere, as if the whole crowd, both in and out of the shining water, had been removed several degrees from the pressure of daily reality, had been transported, just as they were, to the magic shore of some halcyon sea, where “birds of calm sat brooding on the charmed wave”. Nor was the scene devoid of its own inherent aesthetic contrasts. That difference, for instance, between the *dry* sand and the *wet* sand, which had remained in the memory of Magnus as a condensation of the divergent experiences of his life, heightened the way everything looked from the esplanade till it attained the symbolism of drama. On the dry sand sat, in little groups, the older people, reading, sewing, sleeping, talking to one another, while on the wet sand the children, building their castles and digging their canals were far too absorbed and content to exchange more than spasmodic shouts to one another. The free play of so many radiant bare limbs against the sparkling foreground-water and the bluer water of the distance gave to the whole scene a marvellous heathen glamour, that seemed to take it out of Time altogether, and lift it into some ideal region of everlasting holiday, where the burden of human toil and the weight of human responsibility no more lay heavy upon the heart.

There, above, on the *dry* sand, there were forever limning and dislimning themselves groups and conclaves of a rich, mellow, Rabelaisian mortality, eating, drinking, love-making, philosophizing, full of racy quips, scandalous jibes, and every sort of earthy, care-forgetting ribaldry. But as these mothers and these fathers, these uncles and these aunts from hundreds of Dorset villages — for there is still a noteworthy air of real West-Country exclusiveness about Weymouth Sands — formed and reformed their groups of Gargantuan joviality and exchanged remarks upon the world that were “thick and slab” with the rich mischiefs of a thousand years, while, I say, the *dry* sands of Weymouth received the imprint of these mature glosses upon the life that went crying and weeping by, gathering I know not what of less human commentary upon its devious ways from the King’s Statue, the Church Spire, the turf-covered Nothe-Fort, the outlines of Portland and the White Nose, the *wet* sands of Weymouth were imprinted by the “printless” feet, light, immortal, bare, of what might easily have been the purer spirits of an eternal classical childhood, happy and free, in some divine limbo of unassailable play-time.

Between the donkey-stand, where the bathing machines hide the sea, where Magnus could remember in his childhood actually bathing from one machine that bore the Royal Arms, and the Jubilee Clock, the sands die away. Here the pebbles begin and the water offshore almost immediately grows deep. It was here that Marret's father, Mr. Jones, had set up this summer not only a permanent platform upon which to erect his Punch-and-Judy Show, but also a private and personal tent of his own in the interior of which — although, properly-speaking, he had no license to provide Public Refreshments — he was wont sometimes to serve, or rather to make Zinzin and Marret and Tiny serve, tea and bread-and-butter.

At the moment, on this particular afternoon, when the hands of the Jubilee Clock, across all its faces, pointed to the hour of four, Magnus, strolling along the beach, stopped at the outskirts of a crowd of children gathered before the miniature stage.

"Judy! Judy! Judy! Judy!" screamed Marret's father from inside his coffin-shaped stage.

"Judy! Judy! Judy! Judy!"

There was something unique — like no other sound in the world — about this more than brazen challenge. It was brutal, it was heartless, it was shocking, and yet there was about it, some indefinable quality — possibly simply the revival of his childhood — that flicked at Magnus' navel. Mr. Jones' voice was a very powerful one and possessed the penetration, and something of the harshness, of those Babylonian sackbuts that proclaimed the worship of the Graven Image set up by Nebuchadnezzar. It was like a savage chorus of age-old mockery, as if all the Mimes and Mummers of Antiquity, without pity or sensitiveness or remorse, were jibing at our modern sympathies. And when the first curious emotion, that of the revival of the infant in him, passed away, Magnus did actually imagine a long procession of all the neurotic acquaintances he had, a procession including Captain Poxwell, and Perdita Wane, and Peg Frampton, and Sylvanus Cobbold, and the highly-strung little Benny, advancing over those grassy Downs towards Hell's Museum, where the Cobbolds' father had died, and where for all he knew Mr. Edward Loder was still confined. He seemed to hear this incorrigible beady-eyed little reprobate, this Panurge, grown corpulent, with the huge red nose and the nut-cracker chin who now was banging the stage so viciously, leaping up out of a rabbit-hole beside those despairing pilgrims and calling out in his ferocious Babylonian intonation:

"Judy! Judy! Judy! Judy!"

"Yes, there's something," Magnus thought, "profoundly unchristian, antichristian even, about Mr. Punch. And how this chap catches the character of the pot-bellied rogue — God! how he smells of sour brass and strident brutality, like the bawdy-house signs in these streets at Pompeii!"

Magnus found himself wondering whom he knew in Weymouth who most resembled this irrepressible and paunchy villain. There! He caught it under the man's own inspired intonation.

"There's something," he said to himself, "of Punch in me, in Gaul, in Jerry, in old Poxwell, in the Jobber! Punch must be the eternal embodiment of what Rabelais calls the 'Honest Cod', the essential masculine element, in every living man. I know who *is* a born Punch — though he hasn't a pot-belly — and that's Sippy Ballard."

It is extraordinary what satisfaction Magnus derived, all the rest of the performance — which he felt no inclination to leave — by identifying the Town Clerk with Punch. When the Ghost groaned and gibbered at the wretch, Magnus felt exactly like the Ghost; he felt he *was* the Ghost. And as for the moment when the Hangman came on the stage he felt such a close identification of himself with this indispensable official that his fingers twitched as Punch dodged the merited rope. He was in a harassed, touchy, jumpy mood these days. All through the spring and summer, in fact ever since the fiasco over Cattistock's wedding, Curly had been putting off their marriage with first one excuse and then another. Her last excuse was that she didn't like the Corporal's wife, and Magnus as long ago as June had had to break it to this experienced traveller that it was no use his retaining a room for them.

He turned and looked about him, trying to visualize this familiar spot as if he were seeing it for the first time. Was there any town in the world by the English sea that equalled this old Georgian resort? It was so integral with itself, and it seemed now, in that August haze, as if it had risen in its complete totality — Spire and Statue and Nothe and Breakwater and all its ivory-misted rows of houses — straight out of the glittering bay. It seemed an immaterial, an insubstantial thing to him just then, a thing made of the stuff of thought! It was as if in all its long nights and days an impalpable thought-image of it had been wrought, that on such an afternoon as this substituted itself for the solid reality.

The comedy was over now and the little group of spectators melted away and went in search of new amusement. While this retreat was in progress Magnus found himself confronted by both Marret and her sister Tiny who with their little ornamental bags at the end of poles were trying desperately to extract their due of pennies from their escaping audience. Ashamed of an initial instinct to run away, the nervous tutor soon went further in his propitiation than really was necessary, and impulsively asked whether their father was supplying tea in his tent that afternoon. The girls implored him to come in, which he did at once to their surprise and pleasure. While they were at the tent-entrance they were joined by other persons anxious to have a cup of tea on easier terms than was possible in the ordinary shops.

To Marret's astonishment and to the awestruck delight of Tiny, the celebrated Tissty and Tossty turned up, escorting their rustic parents from Radipole, together with an extremely deaf old man, of equally humble station, who was the clerk at Radipole Church. Magnus was surprised at the affability and relaxed good-nature with which the dancers treated their relatives and was impressed, too, at the complete freedom from any snobbish embarrassment which characterized their attitude to Herbie Dandin, the Radipole Clerk. They were dressed exactly alike, in cream-coloured skirts and cream-coloured sweaters and hats. They both wore sandals and neither of them had stockings on.

Magnus had often met Miss Gloria Clive and Pansy Clive, for so the sisters called themselves, behind the stage at the Regent, and he was amazed to see them transformed into Glory and Pansy Rugg, the good-natured daughters of old Gideon and Hepzibah Rugg.

It was indeed a unique event, this visit of the old people to Weymouth and the girls were devoting themselves to making it a memorable day in their lives. They had put them into seats in one of the front rows for the afternoon's performance at the Regent, and then with an infallible instinct for what they would like best and what Mr. Dandin would like best, they had brought them to the beach to have tea at the Punch-and-Judy Man's.

"Rugg, not Clive, today, Mr. Muir," Tossty was saying now, as he entered the tent with them.

Once inside, he left the Radipole party and carried a canvas chair to the back of the enclosure. Magnus had prolonged his Bank Holiday to escape from teaching, hoping to enjoy one or two long and perfect afternoons with Curly, but he had not obtained hitherto more than a few hours with her since August began. Her absence from the beach today was especially bitter because it was his birthday. Magnus was forty-seven today and he had promised himself to celebrate the occasion by taking his girl for a long solitary row. He had fixed upon Preston Brook — a little stream running out into the sea between the cliffs — as the objective of this excursion, and he had pictured himself pulling up their boat, with Curly's help, in that lonely spot and gathering sticks and driftwood to make a fire.

It was a very different scene from the one he had conjured up that he saw before him now in Mr. Jones' Refreshment Tent, and charming as these beautiful girls were, in their rôle of Glory and Pansy Rugg from Radipole, he gave himself up to angry and bitter thoughts.

Curly had said she would be busy all day at the Wishing Well and too tired to see him afterwards, but although he knew that this first week in August *was* a busy one for her, there were troublesome suspicions in his mind. His suspicions about Sippy Ballard had commenced on that ill-fated twelfth of February when they stood together in the crowd at the door of the Church, and when Ballard had whispered so eagerly to the girl, and between them they had forced him to enter that odious car.

As the various guests settled themselves down at last and began to accept cups of tea from Marret and Tiny, Magnus was impressed by the exquisite sea-scents and sea-sounds that came floating in. He could hardly listen to poor Hepzibah trying to reply to Herbie's banter, which, since Mr. Dandin was such a bold one as to his tongue and so impenetrably sealed up as to his ears, was no easy task, so poignantly did all the old sensations of hot summers on Weymouth beach hit him to the heart. All the lesser smells, such as the smell of tar, of fish, of shag-tobacco, of ancient seaweed, of human sweat, of stale cake, of girls' cosmetics, of children's wet clothes, of men's new clothes, were caught up, as it were, and included, in the larger smell of the hot sunshine itself pouring down upon sand and pebbles.

One little incident and one only broke the current of his feeling. He suddenly realized that Marret — hitherto in good spirits — was silently weeping. Catching her quietly by the arm he asked the girl in a whisper what the matter was, and after looking at him quickly she whispered back:

“The police got after me. They made me leave him and come back to Father.”

This was all Magnus could get from her and she soon was serving the tea as before.

The dark proud face of Tossty, with her splendid eyes and her dramatic silences, the pale, passionate face of Tissty with her dazzling white skin and her excited, emotional gestures created an arresting foreground as the two girls began now to deliberately drop their metropolitan superiorities and laugh and nod and exchange glances and twit Mr. Dandin and whisper things into the ears of their mother, and listen with respect to the laconic remarks — for he was a South Dorset shepherd more voluble with his dog than with the human race — made by old Gideon.

Magnus never afterwards forgot — no! not to the end of his days — all his subtle feelings and sensations in that tent! Watching the two dancers in their innocent cream-coloured frocks and with their extravagantly touched-up faces, he felt as if they represented all that mysterious evasiveness in women that he was suffering from with Curly. His recognition of this came to him while he was exchanging superficial remarks with Zinzin, who was a small, slippery, gliding, iridescent person, curiously suggestive of a fresh-caught mackerel, but from whose form, instead of the smell of a fish, there emanated a strong odour of Opopanax mixed with human perspiration.

Back again, always back to Curly, wandered his deeper consciousness. She had of late been more reckless about what he thought with regard to her relations with Ballard, and not only so but she had had several violent quarrels with Ballard himself. Steadily, all these summer months, as she read her "Pansy novelettes" in the little rustic shelter by the Wishing Well, she had grown more lovely to look at. And it was as if the consciousness of her increasing beauty had given her a certain independence of both her men. Indeed it was not only Magnus — though he had no suspicion of this — who found the girl's attitude to her marriage disturbing and mysterious. Her anxious and puzzled mother had of late taken to coming upon her suddenly, and with premeditated unexpectedness in her Wishing Well Retreat, for the truth was that Mrs. Wix had begun to wonder in her heart *who the new man was*.

Tissty and Tossty's mother went on patiently retorting to the heavy-handed jocularity of the Radipole clerk, while her father grew more and more taciturn. Magnus, as he stole repeated glances at the shepherd's face, finally came to the conclusion that, like certain animals, he possessed the power of sleeping without the usual indications of sleep!

"He is asleep at this moment," Magnus thought. "His eyes are glazed."

"How can 'ee utter such words, Herbie," protested the old woman, "in the presence of God and me tidy girls? They be beer-shop words and Gideon don't like to hear 'un spoke. Glory and Pansy have always been the well-behaved maidies they be now. They did always wash them's necks when they was little, and both on 'em were always clean and sweet and spry, with their fingy-nails all shell-shiny. None set eyes on 'em but they made mention of it."

Mr. Dandin screwed round, on the pivot of his thin neck, his scarecrow physiognomy, with its retreating chin and enormous knobly nose and stared at each of the company in turn. But the responses he received were torpid. The old clerk was so used to having that lack-lustre, bored look fixed upon him that he had come to assume that this look was the natural look of the human race! It certainly was the look of the whole Radipole congregation when he repeated “And with thy spirit”, in the Church responses. It had been the look of Shepherd Rugg all the way to Weymouth in the ‘bus this morning. Herb had only to turn his face towards any living thing and the eyes of that thing grew as glazed as the eyes of old Gideon. When he went to his privy these autumn mornings and just glanced through the wet mist over the nettles and burdocks of Mr. Cole’s hedge to catch the yellow eye of Mr. Cole’s great sow, the creature, in plain pig-language, told him he was a nuisance.

And Herb Dandin *was* a nuisance. He was not a vicious man, nor was he a malevolent man, but he had only to wink at a pig for the animal to get that look. Thus when the Radipole Clerk heard Hepzibah tell the company that Tissty and Tossty washed their necks when they were little, he winked at everybody present, one after another, without moving hand or foot from the exact position he had assumed when he first sat down, a habit he had learnt from the thousand Sundays of his clerk-ship.

“Parson Hussey,” he said, “have many times told I about our Tissty and Tossty being such scholards with them’s dainty legs. Parson Hussey told I he’ve ‘a seed ‘un dance ‘The Cowslip’ many a warm May night, on Squire Coot’s lawn. Squire Coot be a friend, s’now, or cousin or summat, to wold Mr. Ludlow of White Nose, what found thik girt heathen stone, they called the Cuddlin’ Stone, out to Portland.”

Magnus, as he sat at the back of the tent listening vaguely to several conversations at the same time and exchanging perfunctory remarks with Zinzin as she presided over the tea-making, was struck by the way Tissty and Tossty treated Mr. Dandin.

“It is, of course,” he thought, “because they know they won’t have to see the old man again for a whole year. But they *are* nice. I never knew how nice they were.”

And then as that fatally *double* sound of the sea went on, systole, diastole, centripetal, centrifugal, flow-in, ebb-out, the long planetary rise-fall, up-down, pendulum swing of this self-contradictory universe, it seemed as if some destiny-drenched lust-sobbing force within him was carrying him forward on such a foam-crest, that he felt he must and *would* possess her, possess that maddeningly sweet body of hers, even if he had to ravish it by force!

“No, it were Farmer Coot, *that* were, me Dearies,” Magnus now overheard Mr. Dandin explaining to Tissty and Tossty and their mother. “Farmer Coot were no relation to Squire Coot, though both on ’em lived in village. Farmer Coot were a church-going man, a God-fearing man ‘a were, and took round collection-plate afore Communion, but Squire Coot were a friend to Mr. Ludlow of White Nose, what holds Cuddlin’ Stones, and such-like Pretties, of more valley than serving the Almighty!”

“I can imagine her bed,” Magnus was thinking to himself now, “though I’ve never been up those attic-stairs. I’ve heard them talking about the window being just above it. How lovely her face must look, these moonlit nights, with that casement-window open above her and the clematis swaying in the wind!”

The mind of a teacher of Latin and a reader of Greek is a queer thing. No sooner had Magnus in his justifiable indignation at her teasing ways imagined himself ravishing Curly by force in her own maiden bed, than such a blind passion of pure love for her swept over him that the blood rushed to his head and he squeezed his bony hands together.

“Oh, Curly, my darling, my life!” he cried in his heart, “never, never could I hurt you!”

At this moment the proprietor of the place entered the tent himself, and after looking grimly around began beckoning to Zinzin to come out. Marret and Tiny Jones were at that moment standing by Magnus' side with a cup of fresh tea and some bread-and-butter, and the teacher asked Marret in a whisper what it was that her father wanted. But Zinzin heard this question; and turning from a protracted interchange of slang words and gesticulations with Mr. Jones, swung round.

"He wants to begin another turn." she remarked. "He says there's a bigger crowd on esplanade. He thinks we're giving too much attention to *this* business, when it's the show that pays."

"Does he do *all* the parts?" enquired Magnus.

Zinzin nodded.

"I help though, don't I, Marret? But Tiny's the clever one of the family, isn't she, Marret? You see it's so narrow, our show-stage, and Marret's too big to squeeze in, when he's there. Isn't she, Tiny? So the little one has to do it."

A totally different odour from any of the preceding ones, and one that resembled turpentine, hung at present about the person of Zinzin and hovered round Magnus. This must have been the ordinary working emanation of this "mackerel of the sea", for she now went off with Mr. Jones.

It was not turpentine or tar, or any hot summer smell, that thrilled just then the senses of Tossty Rugg, *alias* Clive, as she threw one of her beautiful legs across the arm of her wicker chair and contemplated its noble curves. What came back to her was a certain dewy field beyond Radipole Church in spring time and the indescribable smell of cowslips. The seashore murmurs floating in, the children's voices drifting by, the disputes among the boatmen, the raucous shouts of Mr. Jones, all of these stirred up memories in her that seemed to go back, so deep they lay, to the time when she used to come to Weymouth "under one hat", as they say, with Shepherd Rugg's bride. And her mind as she gazed languidly at the white flesh of the leg she was swinging, turned with an almost passionate self-congratulation on the way she had manipulated her long intrigue with Jerry, never once letting that arch-disillusionist solve the real secret of her life. With that impenetrably hidden secret she dallied luxuriously now, as her dark-brooding eyes lingered upon her sister's beauty, upon that soft white neck, with its delicate blue veins, and upon those superbly modelled breasts. For the truth was that long ago, when they were little girls together, and her own beauty was undeveloped, the fair-skinned Tissty was the dark Tossty's one and single passion.

"Oh, little Tiss, little Tiss!" she said to herself now, "and you are the only one in the world that knows it! It's loving you, like I do," she said to herself, "that's given me the power to handle Jerry. Jerry's the kind of man," she said to herself, "and no one, not even Lucky, knows it as well as I do, who *has to have what he can't understand.* But I never could have got him, never kept him, if you hadn't been always first, little Tiss, first, last, and everything else! How sweet you look in that jersey, Tiss! It suits you to a T to wear jerseys! It never *did* suit me. Has Cattistock seen you yet in your jersey? Exquisite little fool! Anyone but you would have long ago landed that man. I told you, I begged you, I warned you, little Tiss, not to let him know you cared for him — and you *didn't* care for him till the wreck. Damn him and blast him! You're in love with the brute, kid; I know it! It's being in love that makes you so sweet to Mother and Dad today. Goodness, kid, you've given yourself too often to that great hulking stiff, with his damned chin! You've been with him, Tissy, too often. I *know* it, you've got the look, and it's bad for your work, and Jerry knows it, without being told! I watched him today, how carefully he was looking at you. You've been sleeping with him too often, Tiss, in spite of my—" and at this point the dark girl's thoughts became so much a matter of visual images, that it would be hard to translate them into words. They were shameless, too, these images, and scandalously realistic. For the proud, reserved girl allowed herself, as women will, actually to visualize the kind of encounter between her sister and Cattistock that she complained of as too frequent.

"The truth is," she concluded, "Tissy and Mrs. Lily are birds of a feather. They're both born to it. It must go with their kind of soft flesh and milk-white skin. I saw Jerry looking at Mrs. Lily in such a funny way yesterday. He always laughs at her to me — but I don't know! He's never looked at me like that. It's odd, rich man though Cattistock is, neither of his women love him for his money. I wonder if he knows that? Probably not."

Whatever may have been the cause of Tissty's relaxed sweetness, as she talked to her mother, her mood at least made it easy for Magnus, who was always afraid of both these girls, to go boldly up to her and beg to be introduced to her parents before he left the tent.

Shepherd Rugg's eye kindled just a little as he held his hand.

" 'Tis many a time, sir," he said, "that your father have passed me and 'they',"— "they" was the way he always referred to his flock— "as he came across White Horse valley. 'Twere one of Mr. Muir's favourite walks *that* were; and as ye knows, Mr. Muir were allus one for talking natural like the gentleman he were, with anyone who knew 'un to speak to. Many a time I've a seed Mr. Muir take out's watch to make sure 'a wouldn't keep nobody waiting for tea. He were one for them little flower-weeds, too, I do mind. Many a afternoon I've a-seed 'un with a nosegay of them things, as 'a came fast along, over Sour-Bit Drove, with his eye to the south, when it did look like rain to sea-ward!"

It sometimes happens that a contemplative person, whose head is full of contrary thought-currents, receives, in a quick, unexpected revelation, a view of the world as it exists when many separate, far-off moments of insight, that have caught our landscape under a large and reconciling light, melt and fuse themselves together. Such a view of things it was, that came over Magnus, when he heard Shepherd Rugg speak of those “flower-weeds” and that “rain to sea-ward”. All the calm monotonous years of his father’s life seemed to be gathered up in that one moment, as he saw him hurrying along, past the shepherd and his flock, with that little bunch in his hand and his eye on the rain over the sea.

That was always the best of the Weymouth Sands. The people who came to enjoy them were local people, as their own boatmen were. It was as if cowslips and cow-droppings mingled with sea-horses and cowry-shells.

Even when out of the tent and up on the esplanade Magnus was still followed by the brazen, goatish, rammish cry:

“Judy! Judy! Judy! Judy!”

He chose the esplanade to walk upon because it meant the quickest advance, and he had a queer desire to see Sylvanus Cobbold that afternoon though he could not have explained exactly why he wanted to see him. As he walked through the crowd his mind ran upon Mr. Gaul who nowadays was always to be seen with Peg Frampton.

“Will those two hit it off?” he wondered. “She looks like a vicious, perverted boy! I know the type in boys well, but I’ve never met it in a girl. I can... *not*... conceive... how... old Gaul... will... cope... with her.”

Mr. Gaul was, as a matter of fact, at that very second of time, doing his best to “cope” — and that not ignobly either — with this difficult little person. All the world was on the sands today, and though it was a tradition among the ladies and gentlemen of the town to declare that they avoided the sea-front when the place “was full of excursionists”, the only person who had ever really acted on this principle had now been dead some years! This was Magnus’ Father, who, when he had to walk from Brunswick Terrace to the station, always went by little side-streets behind the Burdon Hotel. Mr. Gaul and Peg Frampton were snugly ensconced on the lower ridge of the pebble-beach near where the lads were bathing.

Peg had a passion for seeing boys bathing and Mr. Gaul — esteeming it the business of a philosopher to understand all, and of an admirer to pardon all — had willingly yielded to her idea of what was a retired spot. Peg was thinking, as with her mouth more open than usual and her crimson lower lip more drooping than usual she lay on her face watching the bathers, how strange it was that although she was no longer officially and formally “unhappy”, as she was last winter, when Daisy and she used to hide their letters to each other in that Rodwell wall, she was not yet, no! not even now, what she herself secretly regarded as honestly and entirely happy. She felt affectionate towards Mr. Gaul and certainly very grateful. She had fits of quite fierce protective instinct with regard to him, especially as concerned the advantage taken of him by tradesmen, boatmen, bus-men, landladies, especially from Salisbury with cheeky daughters, but the flavour of his quaint character it is doubtful if she got.

Peg was what might be called a born “Passionist”. To abandon herself — that was her idea of bliss, to abandon herself to the intense and furious slaking of some sort of body and soul thirst. Well, it was certain that she did not find in the Philosopher of Representation anything that in the remotest degree resembled the slaking of such thirst! Certainly this girl, with her high Mongolian cheek bones and deep-set hollow eyes, with her abandoned look, with her long, hot, erotic-desperado fingers and her consumptive chest, found nothing of the pleasure which some found, from just sitting still and looking at the sea. She still required the dangerous, maddening nerve-quiver of vice to render existence bearable.

As she watched these bathers now her whole nature shivered like a harp-string in response to the excited feelings that they aroused. When the two of them had approached that exciting spot, she had replied by a brief, uncivil, heedless "what?" repeated more than once as her companion spoke of the parts played in the history of mythology by the masculine and feminine principle.

Meanwhile, Mr. Gaul, not relucting to compare himself with an Emperor, did his best to bethink him of the indulgence of Marcus Aurelius towards his dissipated Faustina. There indeed *was* something just a little resembling the big round, prominent eye-stare of the Imperial Stoic in Mr. Gaul's look, especially when he could take off his spectacles without blinking at the sun. This he certainly could not do now, for it was still mid-afternoon, and for a person with weak eyes the pebbles had a blinding dazzlement, as they flung back the hot rays. So he had to be as tolerant as he could to his little Faustina's impassioned interest in these Weymouth gladiators, while he turned upon them spectacles bought in St. Mary's Street.

"I do like him," thought the poor lust-driven girl as her whole nature flowed and writhed like a passionate Sea-Undine round the glittering bodies of the naked lads, "but Oh, I must come here more often! I must come here every afternoon! What a fool I've been not to come here every afternoon! But I *do* like him."

After a few minutes she sat up, hugging her knees.

"Why can't you love just as you want to," she thought, "just as much, just as often, and just as many? It's supposed to be wicked. I wonder if it *is*. I don't care if it is! I'd sooner go to Hell and be let do it, than go to Heaven and never do it again!"

“Richard!”

“Yes, dear.”

“What do you say in your book about being wicked as people would think I am, always wanting to look at boys and so on? Is it wrong, Richard?”

Mr. Gaul turned a perplexed, perspiring face towards the questioner, but he had his answer ready.

“It seems to me, Peggie,” he said in a tone of measured decision, “what you represent at present is the third rung of the philosophic ladder to the Contemplative Ecstasy. When you have reached the ninth rung you will find — you will lose — I mean you will gain—”

But the girl interrupted him.

“Are we really going to the Regent tonight?”

And the sudden anticipating of happiness that this prospect gave her brought back so vividly her old lonely and miserable dangling round the doors of Cinemas with boys like young Witchit that to his blank astonishment she suddenly burst into passionate weeping.

“You don’t know what it means to me, you don’t know what it means!” she sobbed.

She was perfectly right. Whatever her feelings represented they did not represent any rung in any philosophic ladder. Mr. Gaul, with the best intentions, could not conceive or imagine what was the matter. Like other philosophers, however, he was growing more and more accustomed to putting up with insoluble mysteries.

There was such a crowd on the esplanade that Magnus decided he had better get down to the sea’s edge. They had assured him in the tent that Sylvanus had been seen by the donkey-stand. He swung round, therefore, when he reached the Clock, grasping his stick tightly and pulling down his cap over his forehead.

“Once down by the water,” he thought, “there’ll be no chance of missing him.”

He had not left the esplanade, however, when he was suddenly accosted by a familiar voice and there stood the Jobber before him!

“Mr. Muir!”

The man jerked this out with a hoarse gasp of recognition.

“I’m gladder than I can tell you, Mr. Muir, to see you, to catch you like this. Here, Mr. Muir, I want—” In his excitement he seized Magnus by the lappet of his coat— “to talk to you a minute, to ask you, to beg of you, but I can’t talk here. Where could we—”

But at that very second, by some special dispensation of Providence, two sailor boys of His Majesty’s Navy got up from a seat quite close to them. Precipitantly, the Jobber pulled Magnus down into the places left by these lads, which were at the end of a long bench.

“Where is Miss Wane?”

It would be impossible to compare the intensity of these words to any earthly vibration. Their accent resembled the accent of those terrible scoriae syllables wherewith Dante makes the souls of his sons of perdition ask their single blood-freezing questions; questions that almost turn asker and answerer alike to stone. Such, and not less than such, was the petrifying force of the Jobber’s intensity, as he clutched at Magnus, gazing into his face.

“I don’t — know!” the teacher replied, feeling an overpowering rush of amazed pity.

He was deeply shocked, not only at the tone of the Jobber’s voice, which seemed to come from somewhere *below* the pit of his stomach, but by his appearance, which had changed since he last saw him to a devastation that was unbelievable. The man’s large, saturnine countenance, dark with that monumental look of bronze sculpture that had always struck him as something Spanish rather than Norse, sagged and wilted. In some indescribable way it had grown *indistinct.* It looked like a landscape over whose lineaments a whole ice-age had passed. Magnus examined this tragic map of glacial destruction very closely as he listened to him, and he noted that it was not only the nose and nostrils and lips that were, so to say, confounded. The cheeks had become bloated and pendulous. Dummy Skald’s face had grown in fact to resemble the face of a real dummy, at which, for the fun of the fair and out of pure sport, the gods had been aiming missiles. It moved about among men like an “Aunt Sally” of the immortals. All the capricious flickerings of normal emotion had deserted his face. All the lesser human interests — of which the man never had very many or very lively ones — had oozed out of it. It was like the face of some wandering Belisarius, blind to the world, who had lost his guide. Something was left, however. Something had spoken from out of this perambulatory Image of desolation.

“Where is Miss Wane?” it had said, and the words kept repeating themselves in Magnus’ mind and along with them, his own foolish ineffectual answer.

“Where is Miss Wane?”

It was like some ultimate babbled, burbled, blubbered *sob,* uttered by the whole human race, after Science has killed God, tortured the last animal to death, suckled all babies with machines, eaves-dropped on the privacy of all souls, and made life to its last drop an itch of the blood and a weariness of the will. Magnus couldn’t get the echo of it out of his mind. And he thought, as he watched the dense procession of holiday people, pushing, jostling, scolding, chattering, perspiring, their parasols and parcels, their skirts and trousers rustling so uncomfortably past the tragic face at his side, that perhaps it would be a good thing if human nature *were* completely changed, and Science did create a fresh race of Sippy-Cattistocks, to cry their "Judy! Judy!" in a new accent. Certainly that feeble reply of his: "I don't — know," had reduced Dummy Skald to complete Non-Existence. It seemed to Magnus, as if he had already joined the ranks of those Homeric *Kamóntes* he was always thinking about, those sad troops of the enfeebled Dead, who were sub-conscious, sub-sensitive, sub-normal, sub-substantial.

Magnus was aware of a smell proceeding from him that was like the smell of an extremely aged tramp. It was not indeed only the Jobber's countenance that was ravaged. His dress had completely changed its character since the tutor had last seen him. It was no longer the dress of a well-to-do seafaring man. It would be hard to say exactly what it did resemble. Perhaps it was like the attire of one of those hangers-on about the Weymouth docks who were not accredited longshoremen or stevedores, but just wharf-side loiterers, pickers-up of anything that came their way. He was a little too tragic and a little too desperate in appearance for Magnus even to imagine him as one of the shabbiest of those respectable elderly fisherman, or retired boatmen, who row people across the Nothe Ferry.

"I only know," added Magnus, "that Jerry has heard nothing of her. He thinks she is still in the town though. He said that to me only yesterday; whereas Mrs. Cobbold—"

"Eh? What's that? What does *she* say?"

"She says that Miss Wane has either gone home to Guernsey or that she's —"

The Jobber looked at him a moment and then gave vent to a low guttural chuckle.

"Or on the streets, eh? Yes, that's what she *would* say. Is her sister still with them, up there, or has she gone back? She told me a month ago that—"

"Mrs. Lily's still with them," the teacher replied, "but she tells me, every time I see her, that she's going back 'tomorrow'. Do you still see Captain Poxwell, Mr. Skald? I've seen nothing of Daisy all this summer."

The faintest flicker of human interest came into the Jobber's face.

"I saw her yesterday," he said. "She's with the Loders when she's not with the Captain. They tell me Mrs. Matzell, over there, is ill."

The Jobber was silent, while the ripple of human interest, excited by the mention of Daisy, died out of his eyes. For a long while he held his peace, and Magnus continued to curse himself for his lack of invention or inspiration about Miss Wane. The unhappy man by his side was now squeezing him unmercifully against a youth with a neat straw hat on, who was reading Hardy's "Well-Beloved".

As Magnus glanced down at this book he caught the word "oolite", and the word seemed to dance before him. A baby, somewhere on their crowded seat — somewhere beyond the boy with the straw hat — was holding by a string a rose-coloured toy balloon, an object which kept tapping the shoulders of the promenaders, and was indeed once tossed back by a spiteful old man with a vicious flick that sent it rebounding against its owner's head. It was upon this rosy toy that the word "oolite" now fixed itself, like a label on the surface of a red moon, and although the Jobber's stony island was hidden from their eyes at that spot by Weymouth Pier, the tutor had the sensation that the whole of Portland, with all its people and all their passions, was no more solid than this airy, floating ephemeral balloon.

"By Dum!" exclaimed the Jobber at last. "I never thought of *that*! She may have got Ellen up at the Head to hide her. There are lots of deserted stone sheds up there where a person, who wanted to, could hide forever!

’Twas the smugglers’ head-quarters in old times. By Dum!” — and he struck his corrugated forehead— “I thought Ellen talked funny to me about her, Mr. Muir. Yes, I did, at the time, and then I went and forgot it, Mr. Muir. But at the time I did! And she *is* a funny one, Mr. Muir. You don’t know her, I suppose — the landlady at the Head? Some say she’s her husband’s half-sister, and that her daughters are also her nieces, ‘Melia, Celia and Sue; you don’t know *them,* either, I expect? Nowadays they’re always on the sands with Cobbold.”

In his eagerness to get Magnus to agree to the notion, not indeed an impossible one, that Perdita was hiding from him in the neighbourhood of the Sea-Serpent’s Head, where they had spent their first night, Dummy Skald inclined his great ravaged face close to the tutor’s, and as he did so Magnus was aware of a villainous odour of what struck him as being, not whiskey, but rum. Now it happened that Muir, though not averse to whiskey or even gin, loathed the smell of rum! A sailor on one of the old men-of-war, when he was a child, had taken him on his knees and breathed upon him from what had seemed a very Avernus of sickly-sweet brimstone. Thus the rum on the Jobber’s breath considerably alienated the tutor’s sympathy.

He now hurriedly lit a cigarette, an action which, by the law of imitation, set the reader of the “Well-Beloved” upon lighting one, too. As for the Jobber, he put his empty pipe into his mouth and began biting its mouthpiece savagely.

“By Dum! If that’s the ticket why haven’t I thought of it before?” but as he hissed these words through his closed teeth, he sighed heavily, as if in his heart he knew the fallacy of this hope. Then Magnus had an impulse to say something very unwise.

“Jerry said,” he remarked, “that he was *certain* she was somewhere in Weymouth. He said it so strongly that I had a feeling that he *knew* where she was.”

The tormented stare in the Jobber’s eye-sockets concentrated itself and narrowed itself, but it did not soften.

“Yes, I know,” he growled. “He’s given me that feeling in a lot of talks, but I don’t believe it, Mr. Muir, I don’t believe it! I don’t believe she’s in Weymouth.”

“Have you gone to the police?”

Magnus blurted this out as inevitably as the elder Muir would have done, to whom Weymouth policemen were like a personal body-guard for the protection of the teaching of mathematics. He was surprised at the glance of contempt the Jobber gave him.

“Well,” he said rising, for in his own mind he was obstinately bent upon seeing Sylvanus that afternoon, “Well, one thing at least I’d do if I were in your place, Skald, and that is, go the round of everyone you know in Weymouth and make ’em swear if they see Miss Wane on the — in the road anywhere — to follow her home and let you know at once where she lives. If I were in your place Skald,” he repeated, warming to his advice, as he saw the end of this uncomfortable interview, “I’d make this little town ring and ting with your spies, all watching, all waiting for her! It mayn’t answer for a day or two, or for a week or two, but sooner or later — if she’s in Weymouth, and *my* instinct agrees with Jerry’s that she is — you mark my words, *you’ll find her.”* He had his hand extended now— “But let me just add one word, Skald, if you’ll not think me impertinent. I’m a good deal older than you... ten years, I shouldn’t wonder!... Don’t ‘ee go to the drink as a consolation. It’s a bad comforter, the drink is. Better say your prayers, Jobber Skald, and that’s the truth. Better say your prayers!”

He went off with his face a little flushed from the audacity of his last words. As he pushed his way through the moving crowd he felt a pang of shame. Who was he to talk to this man about prayer? What impulse had led him to "drop", as Jerry Cobbold would have said, such a "brick" as that? He turned and looked round. The Jobber was still on the bench, his hands clasped on his lap, sitting bolt upright. As Magnus peered at him between the intervening forms their eyes suddenly met, and one of those indescribable looks passed from one to the other that make up so large a part of the mystery of human contact.

"I wish I hadn't said that about prayer," he thought, as he moved away, "though it's just what father would have said! I *was* father at that moment."

He was now across the esplanade and had his back to its crowded procession. Here he felt an almost uncontrollable desire to return to that man on the bench. But he suppressed it.

"What's the use?" he said to himself. "If I only talk to him as father used to talk to tramps I shan't do him any good."

He was standing now on the top of one of the flights of stone steps that descend from the esplanade to the dry sand. A row of little barelegged children were sitting on the bottom step, while beside them, propped up against a miniature sandcastle, an enormously fat old grandmother was reading the Melcombe Regis Circular. Two infants, hardly more than babies, were sprinkling little spade-fuls of sand on the sides of this castle, while armed with a brilliantly coloured bucket, upon which was a picture of Brighton, another infant, a very solemn little boy, was, like the Israelites without straw, struggling to make mud-pies without water. Letting Sylvanus go for a further minute, Magnus sat down on the top step and fixing his eyes on a small wet place in the sand, near the melancholy mud-pie failures, where the little worker in dryness had produced water from his own body, he fell to conjuring up, in a vein of nervous craving that was unusual with him, such a voluptuous scene in that never-yet-visited attic room that it transformed sand and urine and newspaper and infants' bare legs and the folds of the old lady's black gown and biscuit crumbs and flies and a beautiful specimen of riband seaweed kept in its place by pebbles, into lips that smiled as they had never smiled before, into limbs that yielded as they had never yielded before, and into a passionate response such as he had only dared even to imagine once before, and then it was under the excitement of that wreck.

A shrill bark from a woolly dog, of a ridiculously diminutive size, that he now observed for the first time — for it had been hidden by the newspaper — on the old woman's lap, roused him from his trance and recalled him to his purpose. He ran down the steps, pushed past the children, apologized to the old woman, and set off rapidly towards the wet sand.

It was an animated spectacle at that hour, the whole crowded shore, and through it all now, following the fragile, friable margin-line of the tidal windrow, he hurriedly made his way. The sun poured down from a sky that was almost cloudless now, its blue intensity only modified by a delicate film of Chinese-white on the sea's horizon. *There he was!* Yes; it was not very difficult to make out that giant figure in the tweed suit, as he stood, with long, bare legs, his boots and socks held firmly by the boot laces, and a little soldier's cane flicking the air. Listening to his words with intense absorption were two feminine figures, who, to the eyes of the tutor from Brunswick Terrace, seemed a pair of the most uninteresting young women he had ever seen.

Magnus had never been to the Sea-Serpent's Head, and if he *had* it is likely enough he would have missed the quality of the Gadget family, but to the soul of Sylvanus these short, stiff girls in pink frocks and be-ribboned hats were of absorbing and enthralling interest. Vases of precious odours they were, urns of celestial unguents, vessels of paradisiac myrrh and cassia, whose receptive souls were reed-pipes through which the Absolute played without a pause, played all night and all day, on the beaches and on the sands, on the rocks and in the quarries, played tunes that taught Sylvanus, even as the Spirit taught Faust:

“Alles vergangliche
Ist nur ein gleichnis.”

“All appearance is but a symbol.”

“I’ve got used to him now,” thought Magnus, “without his mustache; it makes his face look much weaker, but it makes it more sensitive.”

Sylvanus’ discourse must have become too nebulous for his holiday audience, whether on land or in the water, as he thus stood, like inconstant manhood in the song, “with one foot in sea and one foot on shore”, for ‘Melia and Celia were the only faithful ones left of the crowd of young people he had had about him. Sue Gadget had never been the ardent devotee of Sylvanus that her sisters had become. Sue had a tenderness for men of action, and more than once, since his loss of Perdita, she had had the audacity to condole with Jobber Skald.

Nearby where Sylvanus was talking to ‘Melia and Celia there was a pleasure boat pulled up on the edge of the pebbles whose stern lay low in the wet sand. The boatmen to whom it belonged were out in the bay, and with the tide on the ebb they had left this boat to take care of itself. Magnus, feeling a sudden access of tiredness, seated himself on this sand-locked stern, not without noticing the boat’s name, which was Calypso. Like a magic touch, through all his worries and obsessions, this classical word swept the mind of the teacher to the far-off realms he loved, and in a flash between that glittering bay, flecked with darting gulls, airy yachts, gaily loaded rowing-boats, and the vaporous cloud feathers of that halcyon sky, the tall figure of Sylvanus struck him as the eternal recurrence of some undying “gleichnis”.

Sylvanus evidently did not recognize this man seated on the stern of the Calypso, for he went on with his rich, deep, low-murmured monologue, addressing himself solely to the two young girls, who with bare feet, each holding her shoes in her hand, kept their dazed, spectacled eyes fixed upon him, while their innocent mouths remained open. Magnus took not the smallest notice of what the man was saying, but he felt peaceful and happy as he sat on the Calypso’s stern. All the fussiness, all the fretting life-worry of his usual expression left his face. The lines of his mouth grew formidable, almost majestic, his nostrils quivered like those of a proud horse.

“Water and Sand,” he thought, “are what I want. The inanimate, not flesh and blood. I am *really* happier at this minute, than I am with Curly!”

His mind raced on from image to image of the Homeric mythology.

“I’m not the only one in Weymouth who reads Homer,” he said to himself as he moved his fingers along the curves of the Calypso which were so blistering hot from the sun that in some places they emitted minute bubbles of tar, “but I fancy I *am* the only one who accepts Homer’s philosophy as my own and Homer’s religion as my own.”

And then an odd thing happened to him. He caught sight of a large, derelict piece of cork, the sort of piece of cork that fishermen use to keep their deep sea nets from sinking out of sight. This large piece of cork lay half-embedded in the sand. But no sooner had he caught sight of it than a rush of happiness, so intense, so overwhelming, took possession of him, that he was as one transported out of himself. That piece of cork lifted him up, wafted him away. That piece of cork became all the summer afternoons when he and the elder Muir had set out from Penn House to walk to

Redcliff Bay. That piece of cork became the splash of waves into all the rock-pools from the Coast-Guards to Preston Brook.

He sighed heavily, rose from his seat and, moving straight up to Sylvanus, took off his cap to these two girls, who to him looked so incredibly uninteresting, but who to Sylvanus were the "still unravished brides" of an unutterable revelation. The tall man's countenance resembled the map of a Terra Incognita that is about to be inscribed by its discoverer. But by degrees he came to himself, his hand in that of Magnus.

"You mustn't leave Sue too long, sweethearts," he said in a quiet and rather wistful voice. "Your mother would never forgive me if she came to grief, and she's different from us! She's an explorer."

'Melia and Celia did not even throw one glance at the intruder. They lowered their eyes; they gave their skirts a few twitches; and they went off sea-ward, evidently intending to follow the retreating tide, to where — some three hundred yards away — the bulk of the boys and girls were paddling.

The two men sat down where Magnus had been seated, and as the ghost-conveying boat on the livid marsh, under the vermilion bastions if Dis, sank down to its gunwhale under Dante's weight, so the Calypso sank in the sand, under the weight of Sylvanus.

"We haven't seen as much of each other as I would have liked," Magnus began, "but the Bill's a difficult place for me to reach, and I've really had very little time since I've been teaching Benny Cattistock."

Sylvanus disregarded this polite opening as completely as if Magnus had merely sneezed.

"Did you want to ask me anything?" he said.

"I know you have your own affairs to attend to," Magnus went on. "We all have that. And I know your chief interest is your own mystical system.

But sometimes it seems to me as if we really ought—"

"Is it about Marret Jones?"

The realistic directness of the man's approach to bed-rock topics did not disturb Magnus. Polite circumlocutions were not really native to his spirit, although from nervousness he habitually used them. He smiled now and shook his head.

"Is it about your friend, Curly Wix?"

He laughed and again shook his head.

"Is it about the girl Dummy Skald has lost?"

"On my soul, Cobbold, you seem to think that nothing's important except what's happening to girls. What I wanted to ask you was whether you think people about here realize that there is vivisection going on at the Brush Home? Because I can assure you that it *is* going on there."

Sylvanus raised his hand to his face where the familiar mustaches used to hang.

"Listen, Mr. Muir," he said, and he turned his long neck round upon him with that curious turtle-head movement that used to be so disturbing to Gipsy May: "This is my last day at large. They... are... going,.." He spoke with a soft but significant emphasis... *"they are going to lock me up.* Jerry has done his best... but all he'll be able to do will be to have me sent to Brush's place... where my father was before he died, and where Edward Loder went. Whether *he* is still alive I don't know! Lots of us Weymouth people end at Brush's. Hardly an old family round here but has someone there. So you see I shall have plenty of chances to find out about that vivisection business. Don't 'ee look like that, Muir. I'm not afraid. Since her father made all that fuss and got Marret back I've been a bit lonely up there at the Bill. I shan't be lonely at Brush's. They'll let me have the run of the grounds, and no one will bother to stop my talking *to the others!* That's the privilege of Bedlam. They let you talk!"

As Magnus listened to the words, issuing thus calmly from the shaven face at his side, a deadly sickness took possession of him. He saw life from a new angle, as if all his days he had been swaddling himself in cotton-wool and now he touched the spikes! It was not exactly that he pitied this man. There was something in Sylvanus that thrust pity a thousand leagues away, something that made it seem misplaced, like pitying Maiden Castle or Hardy's Monument, but it was the revelation of the cruelty of the world that turned his stomach, its monstrous cruelty. Little had he guessed what he was doing, what he was fooling with, when he came to Sylvanus that afternoon. The man's tone was so final, and Magnus was so unworldly, that he felt no inclination to question his ghastly announcement or even to utter any protest. The aura that emanated from Sylvanus' whole personality was so charged with the gravitation of necessity that it seemed impertinence to disturb him by discordant clamour. But he did murmur one faint interrogation.

"What makes you so sure of their arresting you tonight?" he said in a low voice.

"My good sir," replied Sylvanus. "Three times today I've started talking on the esplanade. It was about three, I think, for I noticed the Clock, when I tried it last, and that was the end. Their Police-Superintendent himself was up there. He gave me one last chance. I've only to step on the esplanade and begin a few words, Mr. Muir, and they'll take me up. They're watching us now. They know I'm going to do it... and so I am! We understand each other perfectly. They've made all their arrangements. The warrant's already out. I'm on a sort of parole *now.* They'll take me to the Police Station for tonight. Tomorrow some local Magistrate — probably that little skipping

Town Clerk — will sign my conviction. They'll send for Jerry at once and for some fool of a doctor, and it'll be that County Asylum, or Brush's! Jerry will pay for Brush's, and there I shall be. One night in gaol, my friend, and then the Sanitarium at His Majesty's good pleasure!"

A long, silent look passed between the two men.

"Couldn't you," whispered Magnus — he felt as if the esplanade were bristling with an immense Battery of Artillery, that at that moment might open fire— "couldn't you follow your star, and do your job, *just as well,* without breaking their rules?"

"Impossible," the other breathed. "I've decided all this, months and months ago. You saw yourself how many people listen to me down here. Just those two girls! On the esplanade I always draw a crowd. Well, Muir, I must be off! If you have a chance of being nice to Marret, don't 'ee miss it... or to May, either, or to those kids from the Head. I'm not posing as any heroic, ironical Socrates. I'm taking it easy, because I've gone through the worst already. I'll sleep sound tonight, Muir, and sounder still tomorrow night! Why not? God isn't only on Weymouth Sands."

Magnus thought:

"It's incredible that they should put a man like this away only for gathering crowds on the esplanade. I wonder... I wonder if—"

What came into his head were all the wicked rumours going about Weymouth with regard to Sylvanus, his seduction of young girls, his abducting them to that lonely house near the Bill. Mrs. Cobbold had, for months, been whispering to him the most sinister things, and he had heard tales about him, too, in the town that were simply unbelievable. Even Miss Le Fleau had expressed a wish, and that quite recently, that the authorities would intervene.

"It brings our town into disrepute," the old lady had said, "and I'm sure the police ought to do something. The place won't be safe soon for young girls to go about alone in. I can't bear to think of it. It keeps me awake at night."

With these thoughts rushing through his brain Magnus took the bull by the horns.

"By the way, Cobbold," he burst out. "You're sure this police trouble is about your speaking? You don't think it has been worked up by that Punch-and-Judy man over his daughter? I saw her just now and she seemed—"

He was astonished at the spasm of anger that convulsed the tall man's face.

"They're my friends," he cried hoarsely. "Friends, I tell you. May, Marret, little Peg... They're my friends. They understand me and I them. It's God between us, man! Can't you see? Can't everybody see? It's through them I touch God!"

Magnus was silent. He felt anything but reassured. The man's allusion to Peg troubled him especially. Was he really a seducer of young girls?

"Do you... mean... Peg Frampton?" he blurted out.

Sylvanus caught his changed mood in a flash.

"I mean — my *friends*!" he cried angrily. "Who has any right in this town to interfere with my friends? Muir... Muir... you begin to talk as your father would have talked!"

Nothing could have been more calculated to alienate the teacher from him than these unlucky words. Magnus knew well the old-fashioned,conventional prestige that his father possessed in Weymouth. The other side of his father, that secret, elemental life he had inherited from him, what did any of these people know of *that?*

“All I can say is, Cobbold,” he found himself saying, while he looked at him with an electric flush of indignation, “is that if you’ve been... ‘making friends’... with the daughter of Cattistock’s partner, you’re in for trouble! I begin to see light on the whole thing now. This young Ballard has had a hint from Mr. Frampton, probably from Cattistock himself. You’d have been a lot wiser, Cobbold, to confine your... ‘friendships’... to girls of the lower classes... to girls like those two I saw with you just now.”

The tall man made no reply. With one glance that indicated to his interlocutor that their conversation was at an end, he began shaking the sand out of his boots, preparatory to putting them on, and when this was done to his satisfaction he bent down, and without attempting to dry his feet, proceeded to struggle, for it was not an easy process, to pull on his stockings. From his bent form by the boat’s side there rose an emanation of human sweat mingled with sun-blistered paint.

Magnus was conscious of a vivid pang of remorse. Who was he to take a conventional view of this strange being’s doings?

“Well, Cobbold,” he said. “I won’t bother you any more. But I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going straight to High House to see your brother.”

The man wrestling with the stocking made no response.

“And then I’m going to talk to Rodney Loder, for what you must have, if these demons really do take you up, is a clever lawyer.”

Not a sign, not an indication from the crouching figure that he even so much as heard what was said to him! The fellow’s obstinacy annoyed Magnus, but he thought:

“I’d be in a funny mood, myself, I daresay, if I were in danger of landing in Hell’s Museum. Well! I’m off to Jerry’s, anyway! The sooner *he* knows, the better, whatever happens.”

He gave one last glance at the preoccupied man.

“Goodbye, Cobbold!” he said and this time he fancied that he caught some kind of a response from above the obdurate stocking, but what he heard sounded to his classical ears like two Latin words rarely found in juxtaposition, like the words “Caput... Anus”.

“Eh? What’s that?” he said.

But Sylvanus was silent.

Left alone on his crowded bench, from which the crimson toy-balloon still tapped the elbows of the passers-by, Jobber Skald remained motionless, like an image of desolation carved in a darker, rougher stone than his native oolite. At length he slowly and stiffly rose to his feet.

“I’ll get a drink,” he thought, and he stood hesitating for a second, pondering in his mind where was the nearest bar.

Suddenly the short, square figure of the devoted Bum presented itself to his sun-dazed eyes.

“Skipper!” said Bum Trot in an unnecessarily loud voice, as if he were shouting against the wind from prow to stern of the Cormorant.

“Well?” groaned Skald.

“ Tis she what sent me to keep ‘ee in me eye. She be fine worried about ‘ee.”

“I’m all right,” muttered the Jobber.

“Oh, skipper, but ye bain’t, ye bain’t! Ye be far from all right. Ye be a walking corpsy, and they that knows ‘ee best do know it.”

The Jobber was clearly not untouched by his henchman’s faithful concern. A sudden impulse rose in his heart and depicted itself upon his grief-ravaged face.

“Come,” he muttered, “come, old friend. I want to talk to you.”

They left the esplanade, crossed the road, went a step or two up King's Street, and turned into the first tavern they came to, over the entrance of which hung a sign-board with the words "The Flag-Ship". Here in an almost empty bar-room, over foaming tankards of beer — and for once the Jobber raised no question as to whose brewery it came from — the master of the Cormorant unburdened his breast.

"I found her where I left her, Bum, when I went back that day. She was glad to her heart's core that I hadn't found him, and to tell 'ee the truth, Bum, I were glad enough myself. 'Twasn't a pretty thing to do, nor an easy, to leave her that dark morn! Well! We stayed, as you and the missus know, all that day and all the next, scarce going a stone's throw away from the Head. She thought I'd given up my oath to do for the Dog, and I never said no single word to her anent it, neither for nor against. 'Twere better I had, old friend, 'twere better I had! For the hour came at last — a time and times and half a time, woe be to all! — when she found out that that Chesil-stone were still in my pocket, yes and in my heart, God damn and wither my soul! in my heart, too. 'Twere a bitter moment when she found that, Bum, the bitterest I've known, and I've known many, afore and since! There were words between us, terrible words, my boy, words that... words that..."

His feelings overmatched him at this point, and to Mr. Trot's consternation his head bent forward over his beer, and sobs that seemed to proceed — so deep they were — from the place where the navel string of mortal men is cut at birth, shook his whole powerful frame.

Bum Trot had only once before seen the "skipper" weep, and that was when "the Dog" made his first move in the process of getting the stone quarries into his hand. But those were different tears! These that were now mingling with the froth and the dregs of what actually was — for the Flag Ship was a tied house — ale from a barrel of Cattistock-and-Frampton, were tears of the most self-obliterating passion of tenderness that Bum had ever seen shed.

When the woe-stricken man finally recovered his self-control and tossed off the dregs of his beer thus diluted with another salt than that which comes from the sea, the agitated Mr. Trot found himself almost relieved, in spite of there being so much the less to reveal at Cove House, when he discovered that the Jobber had exhausted his confessional mood. The only remaining scrap of information for the distracted Mrs. Trot that he could come at was the fact — and this they had guessed already — that a day or two after he had lost her he had gone to Guernsey to see Perdita's aunt, and that, though this secretive and cautious old woman did her utmost to tell him nothing, it was fairly clear that she had been hearing regularly from her niece, and was in no way perturbed about her.

While Bum Trot was doing his utmost to coax his master to return home by the ferry rather than by the bridge, the doorbell of Sark House, in Ranelagh Road, was ringing with a furious and frantic importunity. It was none other than Ruth herself, Miss Le Fleau's secret choice for Magnus, if a thoughtful Providence should ever take Curly to Itself, who was thus driven to invade these ambiguous precincts. But Ruth, though she rang violently, and though she prayed earnestly that her father's pain might cease before he died, retained all the while a large portion of her consciousness entirely calm, occupied indeed with matters far removed from both James Loder's ulcers and this teasing delay at the doctor's door. What she was thinking about were certain greenish-coloured fish that she had seen that afternoon below Sandsfoot Castle as she took care of Captain Poxwell. They had dark fins, erect and very sharp. She wondered to herself if they were in that pool still or if they had gone out with the tide.

Miss Le Fleau would have been simply staggered had she realized the calm depths and placid gulfs of inhuman detachment, far beyond anything Magnus knew, that lay beneath the tender solicitudes of this girl's gentle and devoted life! Ruth Loder was agitated as she conveyed the doctor to Spy Croft in her taxi, over her Father being in danger of his life, but what really diffused itself through her mind in spite of many twinges of nerve-to-nerve sympathy was a mysterious, inscrutable sense of satisfaction that she lived where there *were* greenish-coloured fish and where greenish-coloured fish could *go out on the tide...* Even when old Ammabel let them into Spy Croft, a few minutes later, and informed them that the master was worse, this inhuman girl — whose whole life was outwardly a long, patient devotion — breathed in with infinite satisfaction, after the unpleasant aroma of Sark House that peculiar smell of not only dead, but dried and embalmed seaweed, mingled with the odour of ancient woodwork, scorched by the sun, and cracking and peeling, into whose faded varnish had sunk the sun-blistered sea-salt of half a century of gala summers.

It was not that Ruth's reserve, the under-life with which her nature was sub-charged, was a furtive or guilty thing as it was with Rodney. When, only a second or two after her thrill of pleasure at getting home and inhaling the familiar sea-side smell, she and Dr. Girodel entered James Loder's bedroom, she carried her private underworld of well-being — full of greenish-coloured fish, floating and drifting, full of sunlit waters, rocking and tossing — quite unashamedly to her father's bedroom.

But it was shocking to see the old man as he received them and glared at them on their entrance! He had long ago, in fits of pain, inured his daughter to seeing him naked. He was stark naked now. He was stretching himself out on the extreme edge of the bed, so that having no support for his head, or for his buttocks, he might balance himself upon the middle of his spine, as a plank, in the game of see-saw, is balanced on its wooden cross-beam. Mr. Loder, by long and bitter experience, had found out that, when you have ulcers, uncomfortable positions are better than comfortable ones. And, moreover, it was still a comfort to this old man to harrow the feelings of those who yet had feelings to be harrowed. His daughter knew well enough that he had not stripped himself naked, nor had stretched himself out like this, *until they began to ascend the stairs.* He could torment and scare little Lettice, the under house-maid, without having to proceed to such lengths as these, but with Ruth and with Girodel, he was prepared to let himself go. Instead of ceasing these pain antics as with smiling face and outstretched hand the little doctor approached him, James Loder actually had the gall, in the midst of his acute suffering, to make a gross reference to the trade of an abortionist.

Ruth moved to the window, while Girodel by a mixture of persuasion and astute muscular pressure got his patron into his white night shirt and into his bed, but when safe under the sheets the General, for Girodel kept calling him by Sippy's nickname, made it worse for them by launching out into so vivid, so revolting, so realistic, and at the same time so emotional a description of his ulcers, that Ruth, with a distressed and angry flush on her white cheeks and even a faint spot on her smooth forehead, abruptly left the room.

As soon as she was gone there followed in the front bedroom of Spy Croft one of those contests that in her perverse belligerency Nature loves to evoke. It was a contest between savage pain avenging itself on what is free from pain, and heartless cynicism trying to jest while flesh and blood suffers. And it was Pain that won. The old man fixed his eye upon the doctor and remarked:

"There's a red circle of them in here!"

And it was as if out of the stomach of the recumbent figure — who soon had the bed-clothes off again and his shirt pulled up — an actual circle of red, pustular sores, livid, festering, pullulating, exhaling, reeking with fetid odours like crimson tussocks in a blood-red swamp, were projected towards the hypnotized abortionist through the space between them. The General was a strong personality, Lucky an extremely weak one. And thus it was brought about that Pain, with Malice to help it out, was more than a match for Cynicism with nothing to aid it except professional aplomb.

"There's a wicked old name for this 'ring of roses' inside me. They dance in a circle, you know," said James Loder with hideous distinctness. "It isn't Hans Carvel's ring this time, young man! It's a more uncommon kind of a ring."

And then, to Girodel's confounding, the astonishing General suddenly burst into the old nursery doggerel:

"Ring-a-Ring of Roses!
A pocket full of Poses!"
"Ashes!"

His utterance of the concluding word, "Ashes", was made in an accent of such crumbling, crashing, climaxing finality — as if these ulcers of his were in the throbbing midriff of the universe — that the abortionist, his bravura completely blasted by the metal-sick fumes of this projectile of Hell, simply turned tail and, fleeing incontinently from the room, slammed the door.

The indescribable satisfaction of having driven away both his doctor and his daughter brought at once a real surcease to the General's sufferings. He pulled down his night-shirt and he pulled up his bedclothes; and with the same look on his face with which he was wont to caress his cat, he actually lit a cigarette from the medicine table at his side.

"I believe I shall live another year in spite of them all," he thought.

With his head reclining comfortably on his pillow the General now became acquainted with the inmost secret of the wisdom of Epicurus — namely that simply *not to be suffering* in this world is Paradise enow! He was disturbed by footsteps and whispers outside, and presently two gentle knocks, followed by two quick, sharp ones, assailed his door. The General smiled, and converting his lips into a small, round orifice, blew out several neat rings of tobacco smoke that slowly ascended to the ceiling. As he watched these rings, and sent others after them from his pursed-up lips, he permitted himself a sigh of satisfaction that at least he was in his own house and not in the Hospital.

“Come in!” he called out quite vigorously and the runaway Lucky, attended this time by the aged Ammabel, re-entered the room.

The sympathetic servant, whose wrinkled face was all tense and drawn with emotion, asked him with infinite concern how he felt now. And the General, acting as he always did with this old woman, made light of his sufferings.

“Not nearly as bad as your rheumatism, Belle,” he averred. “Besides — what is a man here for, if not to learn to endure a few pin-pricks!”

Ammabel looked as if this was what her brave master naturally would say, but Girodel contemplated the man in amazement. He had never seen him with Ammabel before. It was a completely new aspect of the General’s character. Deftly and quickly he examined the patient now, left some fresh powders on the table with the other sedatives, shook hands with him warmly, and withdrew.

As soon as he was gone the General took stock of the thin, pinched line of the woman’s mouth and the clamped, bolted look of her stoical regard. Hurriedly he held out his hand to her.

“Don’t ‘ee worry, Belle, old girl! I’m good for another twelve-month.”

Instead of shaking his hand the old woman raised it to her lips and kissed it, and then went on mumbling and fondling it.

“She’s the only one of the whole lot who cares,” he thought.

And he made up his mind that he would conceal from her how much he suffered even more carefully than before.

Meanwhile Ruth — still feeling a most evil taste in her mouth from her experience in that bedroom — changed her dress, her stockings, her shoes, put on a light, soft, straw hat, gave some orders to the wide-eyed Lettice and left the house. She walked quickly to where the nearest busses passed and took a bus for the King’s Statue. Clambering down here with the rest of the passengers she hurried alone across the road and, skirting the donkeys and ponies and goat-carriages, made her way almost at a run, so faint for the elements she felt, to the sea’s edge.

It was the hour of sunset. In fact the crimson, unclouded sun, sinking down into the waters of the West Bay, was already invisible from the esplanade. An interesting change had passed over the Weymouth sands. The “dry” sand was almost entirely deserted, while the “wet” sand and the water, now much deeper as the great evening tide began to flow in, were crowded with bare-limbed boys and girls. Most of these paddlers were young excursionists whose train for Yeovil, or Sherborne, or Dorchester, or even Salisbury, would leave ere long and who wanted to sate themselves, before they left, with sand and sea. These were augmented, too, now by the town’s own youth, free from work in shop, workshop and office, and easily distinguished from the visitors by their more matter-of-fact air and the absence of holiday attire.

Itself invisible, the after-glow of the sunset gave the sands an incredible look of enchantment. Some of the pools and canals in the wet sand that the children had made gleamed as though, ere they were deserted, buckets of liquid gold had been poured into them. Local fishermen, their figures dusky and workman-like against that holiday expanse, were going about near the sea's edge digging giant holes to get sea-worms for bait, holes that were so much deeper than any that could be dug with wooden spades, while all over the wet sands, gleaming bright in those red-gold reflections, were little worm castles, where the worms had thrown up sandy reproductions of their own shapes. But by degrees the golden reflections died away and a curious chilliness, that gave to the dark blue water a cold, untouchable marbly look, and to the sands themselves something unfriendly and remote, established itself there, a chilliness that was the chilliness of a cemetery across which a gay procession of intruders has come and gone.

Ruth as she watched all this was aware that the hairy legs of the worm diggers and their great steel spades made her feel mysteriously sad. It was as if with the approaching darkness, and the chilly rising of the tide, and the near departure of the familiar seven o'clock train, the magic enchantment of those shores vanished away. Those dusky worm diggers were like remorseless grave diggers of another vanished day of pure delight. Questions of work and wages began to heave up their heads. The irresponsible Homeric hour had fled, and in place of it the sad, austere Hesiodic wisdom had begun to prevail. Sand in their shoes, slippery riband-seaweed in their hands, shell-boxes as glittering as old Poxwell's pressed against their breasts, tired, crying, scolding, quarrelling, vomiting, urinating, with pathetically helpless star-fish and jelly-fish from the free sea perishing cruelly in their hot, human clutches, many of the holiday people were already moving slowly down King's Street towards the Station, preferring — or at least the children's mothers preferring — to sit for half-an-hour on a dusty bench rather than lose the chance of a choice of pleasant window seats, when the seven o’clock train to Dorchester was actually ready.

But Ruth was not one to allow a momentary sadness to spoil her evening, any more than she would allow the sight of a naked man playing at “Marjery-Daw” to do it, and she soon began following the windrow along those sands with her accustomed response. It is hard to suppose that any strip of planetary surface, even one over which the sea-tides advance and recede, can be so totally oblivious to the shifting impressions of our race’s tragic comedy as to retain no trace, no memory, no memorial, of words that have once been spoken there. It is still harder, when we come to the works of man’s hand to reconcile ourselves to this annihilating obliviousness. When for nearly a hundred years the thoughts of men and women have been eddying, drifting, revolving, round the Statue, the Spire, the Bridge, the Fort, it is difficult to think that the spiritual intensity of no human words, words roused by feelings of anguish, ecstasy, treachery, heart-rending indignation, maniacal concealment, has the least effect upon them! That this *is* the state of the case, however, many among us, and not only scientists, feel quite confident. Such intelligences are equally alive to the fact that it is impossible to imagine any corpse more dead, more hopelessly and irredeemably unconscious, than the Spire, the Bridge, the Fort and the Statue!

The wind had dropped completely by this time, and with a full tide running high and showing signs of swallowing up every vestige of the wet sand, and even a little of the dry, there descended upon that whole shore the sort of atmospheric expectancy that makes human thought become most intense and evokes the feeling that Nature herself is waiting for some oracle. More often than not, Nature waits in vain. But on this day there *did* happen to be a sort of oracle delivered, though its utterer, in spite of being of an old Wessex family, was a complete stranger to the town.

At such a time as this, with a high tide running, with an invisible, cloudless sunset, with a cessation of every breath of wind, it was a memorable experience for old Higginbottom's new partner to be led by the old man and little Caddie along the beach. Very slowly they advanced along the pebbly slope, for the wily old gentleman knew how enchanting it was in this hushed hour, and he wanted, above everything else in the world to keep Dr. Mabon with him. He wanted him to live at the "Turret" with them. He wanted him to be Caddie's guardian.

When Magnus returned to Brunswick Terrace after accompanying Jerry to the Police Station he found himself going over again and again in his mind every detail of this event. He had waited outside the building seated on a bench in the glare of the setting sun till Jerry should re-appear. There had been a little boy there whose parents had been arrested and whose sister had gone into a neighbouring bar to get a drink. The child was crying piteously but he had a whip-top clutched in his hand and his tears had stopped when Magnus coaxed him into making his top spin on those sun-lit bricks.

It was of this the tutor thought now as he washed his hands in the bathroom, a room at the back of Miss Le Fleau's house. It was Windsor Soap he used, for he loved its healthy, disinfectant smell — Miss Le Fleau's own piece of private lavender-scented soap lying, pure and sacred, on its own separate china dish — and as he produced an abounding lather, almost worthy of the Jobber's method of dealing with soap, he gazed out, between the clean muslin curtains, at the Spire of St. John's.

"I'm doing," he thought, "what I made that kid at the Police Station do. I'm *washing my hands.* There are only two ultimate gestures of the human race. That of Jesus when He drove out those brutes from the Temple, and that of Pilate when he washed his hands."

He could tell from the sounds and silences in Kimmeridge House that tea had been cleared away and supper was still pretty far in the offing, so when he had dried his hands, still looking at the Spire and thinking of his Father, which he always did, for some reason, when he was using a towel at that back window, he hurried stealthily down stairs and out of the house.

Down at the sea's edge he thought of Homer's famous phrase "wine-dark".

"He *must* have been thinking of this colour," he said to himself for the hundredth time, "but it isn't reddish at all. It isn't even purple. It's dark blue, like Miss Le Fleau's sapphire ring. We're all astray about the Homeric colours. *Glaucous,* for instance I *know* is that peculiar blue-green of the leaves of sea-poppies!"

Whatever "colour" however, that full-brimmed tide may have been, as it heaved forward and sank back over the cold, brown pebbles, it pleased him to blend its deep, inflowing volume with the inside of Kimmeridge House, with that back window looking out on the Spire, and with the feeling of washing his hands. An expression came into his face that was neither his daily "worried" expression, nor his formidable look when he gave himself up to the elements. It was a placid, peaceful expression, such as he must have had many a time on that esplanade when he was in his cradle. He touched in his mind some new conclusion about life, in its ebbings and flowings, that he had never formulated before, and even now he couldn't quite catch it. But it had to do with what he had felt as, like Pilate, *he washed his hands.*

Three figures were now approaching him, walking along the edge of the sea. They came from the eastward direction, not the direction of the town.

Magnus surveyed them with some interest and a faint surprise. They turned out to be old Higginbottom, little Caddie, and a middle-aged man who was a stranger to him. Every now and then they would stoop down and pick up something from the beach at their feet, and little Caddie would make hurried scrambled rushes over the wet stones, where the sea had drawn back, and return with some small treasure-trove in her hand, or with a scream of dismay as a wave overtook her. Old Higginbottom appeared pleased to encounter Magnus.

“Let me introduce you,” he said, “to Dr. Mabon, my new partner. The doctor’s going to take my place, Magnus, as time goes on. This is Mr. Muir, Dr. Mabon! I told you about him just now. I’m going to slip out lad, slip out, me boy, from now on!”

The Latin teacher shook hands with his old friend’s new partner and scrutinized him carefully. Though the sun had gone down every visible object seemed to assert itself through that vapourless air with an interior illumination, as if it were independent both of darkness and light. Among these objects Dr. Mabon’s countenance asserted itself, and also the small entities which he held with infinite scrupulousness in the palm of one of his hands.

It would have been very difficult for Magnus to define what he felt as he kept his eyes fixed on this new Weymouth physician. There was certainly an element of astonished security, confidence, re-assurance, in his impression, and with this a fantastic sensation of unreality as if this man were a speciman of a new type of personality in the world. But simultaneously with this impression there rose up in the background of his thoughts all the old landmarks together, the Spire, the Statue, the Nothe, the Bridge. And what had these to do with this singular conchologist? But no one he knew in Weymouth had a face that pleased him more, unless it were his old friend Miss Le Fleau, and something about the indescribable calm of that whole occasion, the look of the beach and the sea and the fronts of those peaceful houses, made it impossible for any one of them just then, with little Caddie among them, to utter a word that was not solemn and significant.

The old doctor was evidently in an unusually emotional vein. He was clearly feeling that he was leaving his stage forever, and introducing his successor, while Magnus, for all his Pilate-like washing of his hands, was solemnized by the thought of the man he had left in the Police Station.

"Dr. Mabon's a great traveller," announced the old gentleman. "He's been all over the world."

The stranger took no notice of this remark. He kept turning over the shells in the palm of his left hand with the fingers of his right.

"He looks like a Harpooner," thought Magnus.

And indeed there was something about the man's silent, self-contained, suppressed concentration that made one think of some intent, long-sighted master of a whaling ship, with eyes forever fixed on a far off horizon.

"What did you call this one?" said little Caddie, taking up a long queer-shaped shell from his hand.

"A Solen," replied Dr. Mabon gravely, and then his whole face wrinkled up in a most whimsical smile. "Its shape is made like that for moving through the sand. It moves perpendicularly."

And he made a faint movement himself with his whole tall frame, as if he would willingly have exchanged his present incarnation for the life of a Solen.

"Dr. Mabon is writing a work on Ethics," said the old gentleman proudly. "He thinks that there's Science in everything else, but that our ethics are barbarous."

"What's this?" persisted Caddie, holding up a faintly-curved beautifully-indented shell, of a yellowish-brown colour.

"That's an Ostrea," said Dr. Mabon. "You see how equal its valves are, Caddie, and how small one of its 'ears' is! And look at all its 'rays'! It's got about thirty. I've often counted them... Ostrea varia... It's a very good specimen, this is... perfectly equivalvular!"

And the stranger, looking at Magnus, smiled such a sympathetic, tender, and yet profoundly humorous smile, that the tutor thought: "I'd like to know this chap's philosophy. He's in advance of all of us. He sees far. He's like the Pilot of the Argo. God! I hope he stays here!"

"Oh! and what's this?" cried Caddie. "This is my favourite of *all* shells! Oh! it's so hard to find one that's not broken. I shall collect *these,* Dr. Mabon!"

Here for the first time since she'd been old enough to walk Magnus saw little Caddie begin to jump about like an ordinary child. Dr. Mabon seemed to have a special look for everyone, with its own humorous commentary upon the world, but a *different* commentary for each separate person in any group. He became very grave, however, when he had examined this particular shell and looked at Caddie.

"It's a Pholas," he murmured, and his voice was as caressing and tender as if he had been the god who had just created this fragile entity. "Pholas Candida, and as far as I know it's peculiar to our English coast. It ought to be put into our national heraldry, this Pholas. It's far prettier than the Pilgrims' cockle-shells... don't you think so, Mr. Muir?"

"Dr. Mabon's writing a book on Ethics," repeated the old man.

"This is one of our commonest and one of our nicest shells," said Dr. Mabon hurriedly, not, however, without acknowledging, with a smile, his friend's persistence.

Magnus approached the conchologist with something like eagerness and took up between his fingers and thumb the shell he was now showing them.

“Yes, I remember!” he cried excitedly— “Mactra, Mactra... that’s what it is! It’s a Mactra... isn’t it, Dr. Mabon? My father used to collect shells.”

And from the fragile convexity of the Mactra there poured through him, quivering up through his finger-tips, a strange feeling of some secret continuity in experience that was the only thing that mattered.

“Barbarous,” remarked old Higginbottom. “That’s what he thinks our ethics are. Barbarous. I can’t get him to say what he thinks of Brush. But I know what he thinks of psychoanalysis. For when I told him *my* opinion of it he said he agreed with me entirely. Didn’t you, Dr. Mabon?”

“He must meet my friend, Gaul,” said Magnus.

“What does ethics mean?” asked Caddie.

The stranger’s countenance grew as sombre and drooping and his whole nature seemed as metagrabolized, as if the child had referred to a murder.

“My book’s purely *biological,”* he muttered.

And then with an obvious effort he indicated how antediluvian our behaviour to one another still was, even in the most ordinary human relations.

Magnus, thinking of the way he had left the Jobber on that bench, just telling him “to pray instead of drink”, began to have a guilty sense that this explorer-physician, who looked like the skipper of a whaler in the Arctic Sea, could teach even a reader of Homer something.

“Pardon my talking shop, Dr. Mabon,” he said hurriedly, “but how do you go to work with your neurotic cases, now that you’ve dropped psychoanalysis?”

His worried schoolmaster’s mind was running upon Benny.

Dr. Mabon fixed his Harpooner's gaze upon the horizon, and as Magnus awaited his reply he had a sort of visionary "second-sight", according to which this queer new-comer, with his mania for shells, was destined to bring a completely new set of values into Weymouth.

"How *do* you, Dr. Mabon?" he repeated, with an almost petulant reiteration.

"How do you, Dr. Mabon?" the little girl chimed in, while her grandfather, making some of those affectionate but inarticulate sounds that always indicated that people were in the presence of Caddie, that Caddie was feeling something strongly, that Caddie must be gratified at once, confirmed the general craving for something unusual and oracular, which indeed the whole stretch of that calm beach and whole expanse of that dark blue water seemed to feel.

"How do you, Dr. Mabon?"

But this new personality upon Weymouth Beach seemed in his goings to and fro over the face of the earth to have visited China. Dr. Mabon smiled vaguely, without — this time — looking at anyone in particular. Perhaps he was smiling at the whole tidal sea, in some deep conspiracy with its mysterious ways. But all he said was — and he might have been addressing the White Nose, or its famous resident, Mr. Ludlow— "I do nothing but listen... and... move... perhaps... a few things that have got in the way!"

Having been persecuted till he uttered this oracle, Dr. Mabon did not retire into sulky silence the moment he had spoken. It was evidently as contrary to his system of behaviour to show touchiness and pride as it was contrary to his temperament to express himself in anything but fleeting humour. He was occupied now in lighting a cigarette, which Magnus had offered him, when they were all startled by hearing a resonant voice — a voice that Magnus recognized at once — crying in agitated tones something about “water”. Little Caddie, whose surname was “Water”, turned a puzzled and frightened face to her grandfather, who in turn looked angrily at Magnus making his loudest “Caddie is here” sounds.

“It’s Jerry,” thought Magnus. “He must be drunk or something. I must go over there.”

Meanwhile Dr. Mabon, discreetly and tactfully, examined the Mactra Stultorum in the palm of his hand.

“Yes, yes,” he said to himself. “Subdiaphanous, smooth,.. radiate... purplish... gibbous... cinereous.”

It had been Lucinda Cobbold who had felt a necessity for getting out of the house and down to the sea. Just about the time when the two doctors encountered Magnus the Poxwell sisters, in elegant Regatta clothes, stood on the seaward side of the Esplanade, in front of the house which its garden-loving tenant had named Fernlands. Mrs. Lily, who still found it impossible to decide anything about her future had just run in to see the Corporal’s front rooms, but, like Curly, she found the excuse of a strong reaction against the old man’s third wife a splendid excuse for postponing any final conclusion. In her heart she thought, as Lucinda’s desire “to do something” led them to descend the steps to the beach:

“I mustn’t make that mistake twice, that I made with Dogberry. It seems I don’t give men the impression of a *free* woman! I give them the impression of a woman bound up with sisters and daughters and fathers. *That,* I’m sure, was what frightened Dogberry. But what a pity that the richest man in the place should lead the wretched life he does! Why, *together* if we’d taken a bigger house, and given parties, and entertained people, he could have assumed the position that a man like him ought to assume! Well! if I *did* take these rooms I’d seem a different woman... a free woman... I’d be starting my life all over again. But I don’t suppose I will. I don’t suppose I really will!”

Jerry, who had rushed to the Police Station just as he was, in his old grey trousers, baggy at the knees, and his faded Panama hat, had a particularly weary air that evening. He displayed his usual exaggerated deference towards his wife, he was polite and almost nervously distant towards his sister-in-law, but it was not concealed from either of the two women that he had trouble on his mind. It had been no pleasant experience that he had been through at the Police Station. He had come away full of a sick loathing for the human race, and the interview he had with Sylvanus left him hopeless about his brother’s future. It seemed even doubtful, when it turned out that there were definite charges against him about so many young girls, whether it would be possible to have him committed as mentally unsound to the Brush Home. Beneath his exaggerated politeness to his wife — for always as his contempt for humanity deepened his punctilious propping up of the status quo became more pronounced — he realized that his old interest in Lucinda’s convoluted morbidity was dead. What he kept thinking of now was a certain fish, with a horrible eye, that he had caught sight of at Witchit’s in St. Alban’s Street, when he went to see the boy there about a job for which the lad had applied. That dead fish’s eye had given him an idea, one of his most lurid and sardonic ideas, and he had so bewildered the elder Witchit by a casual reference to it, that the fish-monger had been betrayed, and it was the one time in his life he was so, into a revelation of his own ferocious misanthropy. Obscene beyond obscenity this idea had been, and as it returned upon him now, while he gave his arm to Mrs. Cobbold to help her down to the water’s edge, he wondered if at one of his nights at the Regent he would be tempted to burst out into a paroxysm so appalling that it would land him where his brother was! As they stood now in front of what had become a miracle of "wine-dark" water, the thought came to him:

"If in one mortal cry — the most horrible ever uttered by a human throat — I could cram all this loathing, loathing, *loathing* into a single word... a word like the eye of that fish... I'd willingly gulp out a great gobbet of blood and fall dead on my face!" And he thought, "If you found me out, my sweetheart," and he pressed his wife's arm tenderly, "would you have the wit to ruin me?"

And with a sort of precipitous, headlong gusto he set himself to imagine what his existence would be like if he were driven out of his profession!

Weymouth Sands under the rising of the evening tide, yes! and the Spire and the Statue and the Fort, too, must often have been reduced to a meaningless proscenium *by what goes on* in human skulls, but as Mrs. Cobbold beneath the high forehead inherited from the Captain, imagined herself — as it was her destiny to do now — left quite alone, without either husband or sister, in those rooms at High House, her thoughts were so deadly that the poor lover of Trivia, now at peace in the Police Station, might have learnt from them what it was that induced his evasive Absolute to start at all costs setting a cosmos in motion!

"Did you see the yacht-race *to-die,* Sir?" said a cockney voice behind them, and turning with a simultaneous start they all three beheld the landlord of "Fernlands", bare-headed, in clean white shirt and sky-blue braces, and holding his pipe courteously in his hand.

The Corporal's lady had not been feeling very well that day, and her physical discomfort had endowed her tongue with the hiss of a score of vipers. But when she had rushed upstairs from their tea table in the basement, almost beside herself with temper and nerves, the Corporal had merely sighed, murmured the syllables "Singapore", and gone out into the smallest enclosed space that has ever been called a garden. Here the imperturbable old soldier who had watered his flower-pots from the Ganges to the Euphrates, squatted on his heels on the gravel path and loosened the earth round every single one of his sea-resisting plants. By his side was his watering-can. In the reflected sunset his white-washed stones became glimmering milestones along incredible sea highways, all ending in Singapore. The road dust soothed him, the sound of the waves soothed him, the vesper bells at St. John's soothed him, and there was wafted through his old, cropped, snow-white pate — the stupidest pate and the pate of the most obstinate bore between the Spire and the Statue — a mysterious breath of indescribable reconciliation, a flowing, floating breath, that was at once a sigh of contentment in all the white-washed stones and cockle-shells and flower-pots that have ever comforted the human heart, and a sigh of relief that there *are* welcoming graves — at least in Singapore — to which old men can escape.

"Did you see the yacht-race *to-die,* Sir?"

"Hullo, Corporal!"

Jerry's voice shook with irritation.

"No, no! I can't say I did. I forgot there was a Regatta today! But we all watched it yesterday from the water — Didn't we, Lucinda? Didn't we, Hortensia? — from the water, Serjeant, from the water, the water, the water, the water!"

A non-commissioned officer of His Majesty's Forces is not slow, even if he has an extremely simple mind, in catching the quiver of exasperation in a personage of importance. The Corporal explained to his wife later, who made him repeat the story several times and completely recovered her equanimity as she listened to it, that "them Comedy Hactors 'ud do better to tike to some 'obby, such as siving a bit o' garden from drying up in the 'eat, or siling a' yacht, or breedin' a few nice dawgs. They heats their bloomin' 'earts out, with nothing to do but theaytering and staring at the bloody wives."

"What did Jerry Cobbold *say?"* demanded the appeased cross-patch. "Tell me exactly now, Stupid! As if you was on your Bible oath."

"He said, 'We watched the Regatta yesterday, Serjeant'."

"That wasn't it at all! Say it as you did before. And you needn't try and make *me* believe he called you Serjeant, because Jerry Cobbold would know better."

Certainly none knew better than the third wife where an old soldier's "funny-bone" lay. The Corporal didn't often get angry, but he did on this occasion, and his voice ascended from that Brunswick Terrace basement and rang across the road.

"We watched the Regatta from the water. Isn't that enough? From the water, Serjeant, from the water, the water, the water, *the water*!*"*

TUP'S FOLD

IT WAS NOVEMBER, AND ONE OF THE WETTEST, WILDEST NOVEMBERS that the Dorset coast had known for many a year.

Very early on the morning of the twenty-first of the month — the day devoted in the calendar to the presentation of the Virgin — Sylvanus lay awake in his small cubicle, partitioned off by bare wooden boards, which, however, did not reach to the ceiling, from the other cubicles in that particular corridor of Hell's Museum. It was pitch-dark, but he could hear the rain beating against his barred window and the long-drawn howl of the wind as it swept round the whole isolated building. There was no Gipsy May between him and the wall to be rendered nervous by his characteristic movements, no Marret to cuddle up against him full of tender indulgence for the weird antics of her tall human Puppet, and when he propped himself up in those early hours and thrust his long neck forward after his fashion it was as if he were lifting up his cranium from the bottom of a deep, dark sea and swallowing, like the Sea-Serpent itself, great gulfs of liquid night.

The man derived a half-sensual, half-mystical pleasure from the mysterious pressure of this circumambient darkness. He embraced it with all his soul and rejoiced to feel it embracing him. It smelt faintly of the rain-sodden earth, but it had also an under-scent that was less reassuring, an obscure, sickly and complicated smell, as of chloroform, grown mephitic with long diffusion, mingled with the odour of soap and wash-buckets, and an acrid savour of bed-clothes, wooden-planks, sour food, human sweat, and the disinfectants used in lavatories.

Sylvanus was worried in his mind, not bitterly worried, but perceptibly and teasingly worried. In his dealings with the Director of Hell's Museum he had won many surprising psychological victories, but he had been unsuccessful as yet in persuading Dr. Brush to close his experimental laboratory, where the dogs were tortured, or to dismiss the sadistic Murphy. He had made up his mind that something drastic, something even startling and spectacular must be done.

"Human beings," thought Sylvanus, "are so constituted that no revolution can be effected by words alone. 'In the beginning was *the Act.*'"

Thus he pondered, straining forth his long, fantastic, close-cropped cranium at the end of his turtle-neck, while the palpable darkness pressed in upon it and about it, like a black, liquid mould taking the print of a death-mask. And the pressure of the darkness became an image to him now of the Absolute he worshipped, but at this hour, as he lay in his cubicle, thinking and thinking, he was aware that the ecstasy of his wonted abandonment to his God knew some diminishing, some hitch, some flaw, some abatement.

"I'm not in love with the child," he kept saying to himself. "I'm not in love with her; I'm not in love with anyone."

But he couldn't get Marret out of his mind. She kept obstinately mingling with his worry about the dogs and with his failure to make Brush stop his cruel experimenting.

"I'm *not* in love with her. It *isn't* love. I've long since got beyond all that!"

What kept coming back to him, do what he could to thrust it away, was the pathetic passivity and docility of the girl.

"She's so tall," he kept thinking. "She's so tall and still."

Once this very night he had thought of her as a mermaid. That was because she was so tall and so very still.

"It's funny," he said to himself. "She's helped me to get hold of God; and yet there's a sweetness in her that I can't mix with God."

He tried in vain to analyze what he felt, but it was as if his great Being, whose Centre was everywhere and his Circumference nowhere, had an infinitesimal fragment of his rounded completeness *chipped off,* leaving a tiny gap, a gap of too-sweet, too-dear Time in the bosom of the Eternal!

"Well," he thought, "I shall see her soon, if Jerry posted my letter and if the Phoenix keeps his promise. It'll be a shame, though, if I get the Phoenix into a row. How unfair life is! Why should I be favored as I am above the poor Phoenix?"

As the image of this fellow-inmate of Hell's Museum presented itself Sylvanus' old ultimate difficulty about his Absolute rose up against him. Why, if God was all, was there this *difference in luck* beween one organism and another?

"Heigh-ho! this wicked difference in luck — in pure luck — was what you had to deal with at the roots of life. And how does it work in with the Absolute? How does it work in with God?"

Sylvanus had been in Hell's Museum now for over three months and the diagnosing of his "case" had proved the most interesting piece of analysis that Daniel Brush, in all his long experience as a psychiatrist, had ever undertaken. For one thing Sylvanus turned out to be a well-nigh perfect patient. He became so interested in Dr. Brush's de-personalized personality that he was ready to humour it to the utmost. And since the essence of this man's identity was to eliminate his identity and to become a pure, unblurred mirror in which reality could reflect itself, what Sylvanus constantly aimed at was to furnish the doctor with an increasing series of new layers, new levels, new strata of his precious objective truth. As a result of this, Daniel Brush had never known such persistent, unalloyed mental excitement as he experienced during these autumn months. The more he analyzed Sylvanus the more he found to analyze. And what was so extremely satisfactory about it, from Brush's point of view, was that *the question of cure* never emerged at all. The Doctor could in fact drop the "doctor" and give himself up to experiment with Sylvanus as he had never dared to experiment with anyone, no, not even with Mrs. Cobbold!

That Sylvanus had been committed to him by the authorities as a man who, as Paley says of Socrates was "more than suspected of the foulest impurities", that he had been convicted of having lured away both Miss Frampton and Miss Jones from their lawful parents, lured them away to that lonely house of sinister repute near the Beale, and there corrupted them, meant nothing to the Doctor except as a piece of good luck in keeping this bottomless cask of psychological interest from escaping his inquisition.

The situation from the Doctor's point of view was flawless, but it had one extremely unexpected result. His contact with this surprising patient began to give him new scientific ideas. Sylvanus had the whip-hand over Daniel Brush in the simple fact that by holding his tongue he could deprive the man of these sacred theory-shattering pathological facts. The Doctor couldn't read the life-history of Sylvanus by telepathy. Sylvanus had to describe it to him. And he did this in such suggestive, punctual, exact detail that the result was that there slowly dawned upon Daniel Brush a totally new perspective in scientific psychology. Indeed compared with the illumination thrown upon the deepest secrets of life by these new ideas his old psychoanalytical theories appeared like fantastical fairy-tales! As free from the human desire for notoriety as he was free from all impulses of philanthropy Doctor Brush made no attempt to rush into publicity with these new and fascinating clues. He decided to develop them at leisure for there seemed no immediate likelihood of Sylvanus being set free, and he hoped to have time to formulate, on the basis of what he learnt from him, a completely new set of pathological hypotheses.

As has been hinted, Daniel Brush had in a sense to pay a price for these startling and original ideas. But since what he had to sacrifice were processes of thought involving purely materialistic concepts, this loss was less serious than it would have been had not his new "aperçu" lain at the extreme opposite pole from everything materialistic.

The grand difference between his old system and his new one lay in the hypotheses they respectively assumed with regard to the *locality* of all those dark, disturbing impulses, manias, shock-bruises, neuroses, complexes that he regarded as both the causes and the symptoms of human derangement. In his old system these volcanic neuroses were resident in an entirely subliminal region, a permanent underworld of the human ego from which they broke forth to cause unhappiness and anguish. This region was out of reach, and possessed locked, adamantine gates, as far as our ordinary processes of mental introspection went. To isolate and analyze these peculiarities as *aberrations* it was necessary to assume some kind of well-balanced norm, some measure of well-constituted functioning, from which all such "complexes" could be regarded as lapses.

But the essential point of Dr. Brush's old view of things was that you could only deal with the deep-sea fishes of the Unconscious indirectly, and by a kind of poetical symbolism. It was impossible simply to use your will and move about freely, spontaneously, rationally, and like a natural-born native, at the bottom of this interior sea! Thus, as in the early religious systems, only certain initiated adepts, who had the ritual-patter at their finger-tips, could interpret the mysteries of this arbitrarily-invented region, this *other-world,* debarred to all who could not utter the correct "open-sesame".

Daniel Brush's new theory, on the other hand, abolished this distinction between conscious and sub-conscious as arbitrary and dogmatic, and, in place of this hard-and-fast division, regarded the whole ocean of human experience, with all its maddest and most unspeakable delusions, as *always open* to flashes of intelligent exploitation by minds that cared to dive into that deep sea.

Dr. Brush after analyzing Sylvanus night by night till a very late hour, and in the process, without a breath of controversy, suffering an insurrection in his own ideas, used to lie awake till three or four in the morning, not listening to the winds and rains of those wild nights but lost in concentrated thought. Had people come into his room and *seen* him there thus thinking after his fashion they would have seen a face more totally devoid of human expression than any they had ever seen. The appearance of Doctor Brush in the process of thinking, between three and four in the morning, was in truth rather a disturbing phenomenon. It was a Husk with a human head, out of which all identity had evaporated, like smoke out of a bottle.

One of these clue-thoughts that came to the Doctor after analyzing Sylvanus was that not only from the surface of that sea within us *but from all levels and depths of it* we have the power of coming into contact with one another. It is then, Brush thought, that our personalities emit luminous rays, like certain electric fish. He came to the conclusion that no generalizations can possibly cover the ghostly, twisted, tangential tricks with which the mind deals with its own submarine devils, its sub-tides down there, its sub-reefs, its sea-serpents. It was the unequalled objectivity of Daniel Brush's mind that was the cause of this mental "volte-face".

Had he been an old-fashioned, orthodox psychoanalyst, his obstinate theories would have been squeezed and bent and hammered till they found room, willy-nilly, for the theory-breaking Sylvanus. But Brush was a fanatic of objectivity. It was the pursuit of what he called “truth”, not any particular set of theories about it, that was his absorbing passion. Thus when Sylvanus came into Hell’s Museum, like a wandering Teiresias into the purlieus of Dis, the Doctor lacked all protection against the towering invader. To bed and board he had to welcome him! Impervious to the waving of the Plutonian sceptre Sylvanus simply came on and on and on, and in the end it was the practitioner who was practised on!

Matters at the Brush Home suddenly began to change in many serious respects. The truth was that Dr. Brush had never been a very practical Director. He was a man whose reputation had always depended rather on his intellectual achievements than on his conduct of his Institution. And now as he sailed recklessly forward— “stemming nightly to the pole” in his insatiable mental skiff — over the untraversed sea of Sylvanus’ perversities, he began to lose touch with the affairs of Hell’s Museum and to leave them more and more in the hands of subordinates. Daniel Brush went about these days like someone in a trance. Nothing except his precious interviews with his insidious patient had the least interest for him. His assistants came to him for advice, for orders, for help, and he had nothing to say to them! He put them off. He lost his temper with them. The breaking up of that mysterious “equator-line” between Conscious and Unconscious and the merging of these two worlds into one equally fantastical continent began to lead to the spasmodic introduction of new methods in the psychiatry of Hell’s Museum, methods that originated directly from Sylvanus’ experiences at “Last House”, methods such as had certainly never been used before in this Wessex Sanitarium.

Sylvanus himself had assuredly never met a listener in any degree approaching Daniel Brush. What he was always suffering from in his girls — who otherwise were so receptive — those unaccountable fits of irrational jealousy, those wild, hysterical outbursts, those moods that were, so to say, the actual crying aloud of the "Yang" itself, were quite absent in this intellectual fanatic. It was a little, it is true, like talking to yourself in a mirror — so perfect was the Doctor's de-personalization — but *that* didn't bother the man from Portland Bill. If the Doctor, by a lifetime of scientific "yoga", had made himself into an Inanimate, to talk to an Inanimate exactly suited Sylvanus. It was like talking to the rope in his cliff shanty. He came more and more to confess himself as freely to the Doctor as if the fellow had really been his good, strong, patient, quiet rope, his rope that did nothing but dangle down, however Trivia might dance.

On this particular twenty-first of November, which was an anniversary never forgotten by Sylvanus, for it was the date of his first sleeping in Last House, it must have been about four o'clock when he first woke up. Not only was it all pitch-dark, but the same wild, tumultuous wind that had been blowing off and on all the month tossed the thin, small, West-Country rain in splashing, intermittent volleys against his window, volleys that swept the pane with the impact of weeping faces whirling by in the impenetrable night. About five o'clock the rain showed signs of abating and the wind lessened. He turned on the electric light and flooded his cubicle with a distressing bluish-tinted glare.

"Oh, for the candles of Last House!" he sighed in discomfort.

Hurriedly he put on his clothes.

"She'll be there by six," he said to himself, "if Jerry posted my letter."

When he was dressed he opened his cubicle door and stood outside in the pitch-black corridor listening intently. It was a small corridor containing three more cubicles identical with his own, but only one of these was at this time occupied. Holding his boots in his hand, and he had been so excited at the thought of what lay before him that he had only half pulled on his socks, which protruded from his toes as he walked, and trailed, wrinkled and ruffled, along the bare boards.

Arrived at the inhabited cubicle he very gently turned the handle and whispered into the deeper darkness of its recess:

“Time to get up, you Bird of God!”

A crop-headed, middle aged man jumped up at once into a sitting posture.

“I’m with you, sir!” he jerked out. “I wasn’t asleep. I was watching for you.”

His intonation was neither what is usually called “educated” nor what is called “uneducated”. It was the tone of a substantial burgess in a small town.

“Is your great-coat there?” whispered Sylvanus. “It’s still raining.”

“It’s here,” said the man. “Go back to your room, sir. Don’t stand waiting. I’ll come in a jiffy.”

On returning to his room Sylvanus turned out the light and sat down in the darkness on his low couch-bed. The patient he had just roused, although by no means “cured”, had been promoted for his impeccable good behaviour to some temporary official post, a post that gave him the privilege of a pass-key. It was Sylvanus’ knowledge that he could always count on this fellow’s assistance that had given him the assurance to write to Marret and even to appoint a definite hour and a definite meeting-place.

How slowly the seconds passed!

“He’s got his braces on now. Now he’s doing them up. Now he’s putting on his collar.”

Constantly Sylvanus pictured and counted out every stage in the progress of the man’s dressing. Listen intently as he could, though, he couldn’t hear him make the least sound. Not a creak, not a rustle, broke the silence of that little corridor. And yet in other portions of Hell’s Museum there were all manner of curious, disturbing little half-sounds as if a number of demented rats were engaged in the task of pursuing hundreds of female mice in order to disembowel them. Sylvanus put on his over-coat now, for he began to feel deadly cold.

“It’s a terrible morning for her to be out in,” he thought. “She’s got no fear of wind and rain, but she may feel lonely on those hills.”

Again he listened; and it seemed to him as if from all the people under that roof, as they tossed about, or as they lay stone-still, little ghastly whispers kept mounting up and floating through his door and out of his window, whispers that left behind, as birds might leave behind their droppings, images of obscenity and evil. The darkness was so thick around him, as he listened, that by its very density it seemed to destroy and swallow up the intervening barriers of the place, all the walls, all the doors! The darkness made the whole dwelling one huge vault, a vault that was full of brain-tortured unresting ghosts who could neither realize their dolorous identities nor forget them, but were forever stumbling and fumbling and groping in pitiful bewilderment under the pressure of the grey, cold, invisible rain — worse than the visible one — of the implacable malediction of heaven. And like Teiresias in Hades it seemed to be the destiny of Sylvanus to find rational articulation, if nothing else, for the blind gibberings of these poor ghosts.

The unusual privilege accorded to his present companion of possessing a pass-key was only one instance among several others of the effect he had worked upon the Director by distracting, confusing, and subtilizing his intelligence. After passing several gratings and iron doors, and descending several flights of stairs, Sylvanus was unable to keep his nerves as calm as he had expected when he actually saw his friend beginning, with stealthy caution, to unbolt the great folding doors of the main entrance! As he watched his figure there in the phantasmal light of the entrance-hall, for to get the bolts moved in silence took quite a long time, he could not help thinking of this worthy man's obstinate illusion that he was a Phoenix.

These old classical, biblical, mediaeval appellations, how they hung about the world! They were an endless armoury of masks always available for purposes of auto-hallucination. How curious it was — when anyone thought seriously about it — the particular famous names that mad people assume! Like ghostly simulacra they were, these ancient syllables, doomed to drift about on the tradewinds of Time, like empty snake-skins or newt-skins, all silvery hollow masks, till they were seized upon, like these magic syllables Phoenix, to cover up the tragic nakedness of a new generation of witless anonymity!

Another thing had struck Sylvanus as curiously heart-piercing in this House of Ghosts, and that was the way Sex itself, the great life-urge of the world, fell away and dwindled and receded. It sank, this thing, from occupying the first place in human life to occupying the ninth or the tenth. Its results were here only too clearly; but its living manifestations seemed minimized, sterilized, paralyzed. Anyone who has been in Bedlam will bear witness how forlornly correct Sylvanus' observation was. As a matter of fact it is curious how the illusion should ever have got about that mad people are often happy and cheerful, and merry and gay! As a matter of fact upon an insane asylum lies exactly the same kind of sick, inert, bewildered, unearthly sorrowfulness that Homer depicts as the prevailing condition of those faint spirits, who in the realm of Hades "no longer behold the sweet sun". Yes, the sadness, the dispiritedness, the inert hopelessness that is the dominant atmosphere of such a place is almost identical with that twilight kingdom where only the drinking of blood enables a mother to know her own son! And it would seem that just as with the loss of their bodies “the noble nations of the dead” feel no longer the urge of amorous desire, so in the atmosphere of Hell’s Museum considerations of excrement played a larger part than those of the heart. That terrible and startling indifference to *personal appearance,* to the state of one’s dress for instance, that is such a noticeable characteristic of these societies of the damned is a fearful and significant hint as to how the implacable Goddess of Desire, when by her ravages she has reduced her victims to this condition, leaves them in contempt, and glides away, to impoison and drive to madness other, fairer, fresher, younger, less plague-spotted souls!

“Is it raining still, George Pounce?”

His use of his friend’s name betrayed how excited Sylvanus was. He generally called this excellent man not by the name with which his godfathers and godmother had baptized him, but by the wind-blown snake-skin into which he wantonly had slipped! This was indeed a curious and strange metempsychosis; for Mr. George Pounce, late of High Street, Dorchester, had contracted the illusion that he was a Phoenix.

A quiet bachelor tradesman, George William Pounce had become a passionate ornithologist. From the study of living birds he had pressed forward till he became a skilled amateur taxidermist. Then he had fallen sick of a villainous influenza, an attack that made him delirious for weeks, and even after his bodily recovery left him with wits fatally impaired.

“I could stuff a Phoenix for you!” he had remarked once to Mr. Ludlow, the Antiquary, and it was in the mythic feathers of the only rare bird he had never stuffed that he came to Hell’s Museum.

In these cases of insane transformation it is pathetic to note the accommodating malleability and flexibility of the mind’s diseased logic. This man, for instance, was not utterly and entirely a Phoenix. He remained

George Pounce. But he was a George Pounce who, under certain particular conditions, would flap his thin, short arms up and down, while under others he would run screaming through the halls and corridors, with the notion that he was on fire. It was the rarity of these burning fits — for the flapping of his arms would occur without any trouble to himself or to others — that made Pounce one of the most harmless of the Doctor's inmates and was the cause — coincident with the general loosening of discipline to which reference has been made — of his being trusted with the key.

He was flapping his arms now as he stood in that windy doorway contemplating the impenetrable darkness.

"That will do, Bird of God," said Sylvanus quietly. "We'd better get away while we can!"

He crossed the threshold as he spoke, and Mr. Pounce, his arms suddenly quiet again — as they generally seemed to be, when matters pertaining to practical human life compelled his attention — closed the unwieldy doors behind them, and they set forth.

It was not raining any more now, and the wind had dropped. George Pounce, from his long ornithological pursuit, could have led the way blindfolded to Tup's Fold, which was the spot Sylvanus had mentioned in his letter. It was only a couple of miles away, but it stood on much higher ground than the Brush Institution. What Tup's Fold really was, was an old excavated tumulus or barrow, that had been surrounded in more recent times by rough stone walls, and was still half-covered by an unfinished piece of straw thatching. It stood on a high, commanding ridge of the chalk hills and from it — in daylight — could be seen the whole curving expanse of Weymouth Bay, from Portland to St. Alban's Head.

The taxidermist was silent for nearly a mile of the way, though he walked with a firm step. Perhaps he felt shame for having waved his arms, or perhaps the re-assumption of normal mortality could only be achieved in silence. Sylvanus himself was silent, too, and for a very definite cause.

In the agitation of rousing Mr. Pounce and setting off in time he had omitted saying his prayers. And now, the more emotion he had at seeing Marret again the more necessary he felt it to be, to propitiate his elemental gods. Eccentric as Sylvanus' litany was, he had repeated it so often that he had a tendency to gabble it at a crisis, mumbling the words like a weary priest muttering a familiar office.

“0 earth!” Sylvanus mumbled in a very low voice, but quite audibly, while the dense darkness seemed to be swallowing up both the wind and the rain. “0 divine ether! O sun, that beholdest all things and hearest all things! O Sea, that hath comforted me and sustained me from my youth up! And you O Wordless and Nameless, that dwellest equally in all wisdom and in all folly, guard Olwen and Lily and Lottie and Nelly and Polly and May and Peg, and especially guard Marret.”

Here in still more emphatic earnestness — if such distinctions can be made in the matter of scarce-audible prayer — Sylvanus went on, in the most homely and realistic manner, to inform the earth, and the sun, and the divine ether, and even the sea who knew her so well, that Marret was the daughter of Mr. Jones, and lived not far from the Harbour Bridge in Weymouth proper. The fact that it was impossible just then to catch the faintest glimpse of any of these great Powers except the earth, and hardly even of her, meant nothing to Sylvanus. If he had been walled up in the heart of the Great Pyramid he would have periodically given vent to this gabble of cave-man supplication. He always preferred to kneel down, if it were possible, on these occasions, so it was a comfort to find he had no difficulty in lagging behind his swift-footed guide.

There was not the faintest visible trace of dawn as yet, and yet it would have been impossible for Sylvanus, had he been roused from the deepest sleep, not to feel it was near to a new day. The darkness itself seemed of a different texture from the darkness of midnight. As it pressed down upon eyelids and nostrils and lips and hands, it seemed penetrated by a faint magnetic chilliness, like the touch of a resurrected gods' breath!

It was close to a mole-hill that he knelt and it was an ecstasy to him thus to feel the dawn's presence in the mould before he could see a streak of it in the sky. Plunging his hands into the rain-soaked soil, thus thrown up above the surface of the chalk he tried, as he always did, to de-humanize himself. And as he squeezed the wet earth of the molehill, the whole vast expectancy of that rolling Down-land, waiting like an enormous beast for the Dawn's coming, seemed to reach his consciousness and flow through his veins with a touch of something that was *live*-cold, like the shivering nipples of a She-Leviathan. And as Sylvanus buried his forehead in that rain-drenched mole-hill he felt the night receding out of the body of the earth like the water of an ebbing sea-wave receding out of the crannies of a pebble-bank, and as he felt the night receding, he felt the dawn — the wet fungus-breath of the invisible horses of the dawn — stealing into the very substance of this dark chalkridge.

Rising straight up on his knees now and snuffing the darkness he suddenly became transported with the feeling that he was more and also less than a man. His thighs seemed to become the thighs of a colossus, as they sank into the slope of that hill! His neck as he stretched it upwards and backwards, felt like the neck of an antediluvian tortoise. Through his trousers, for the ground was soaking-wet, he felt the impact of the great round-bellied one with the rock-bound heart. She was waiting for dawn, the million-breasted, sleep-chilled, rain-soaked Mother of Beasts and Men, and such feelings as he had then may very well have created the dawn-mad Orion. Like Orion Sylvanus was now snuffing the far-off dawn-smell, while his knees were buried in the wet earth and his head was turned towards the cold tides of the fish-bearing sea. Like Orion he still strove towards his God through the loves of the daughters of God. Like Orion he lived an ambiguous double-life, between the *Kamóntes,* the "worn-out underground ones", and the eternal children of the ether.

A shout from Mr. Pounce, a ringing cry, in a clear young-girl's voice, from Marret, and Sylvanus rushed forward. There was Marret, waiting for him! And with her was young Larry Zed from Lodmoor. She had not been scared or worried at all — as Gipsy May in her suspicions and reservations would certainly have been — by the approach of Mr. Pounce. She knew "the Old Man of the Beale", as they called him in Easton, too well to have expected anything else. She had brought with her a regular feast in a large basket, and before Sylvanus had time to consider the weight of these viands, Larry Zed presented himself before his eyes as the pack-horse who had carried them.

All four of them stood close together for a while, at the entrance to the thatched portion of Tup's Fold. They were drawn by a power outside their control towards the eastern quarter of the sky, and Marret instinctively put off the opening of the basket. Meanwhile young Zed pointed out to them the bright spot of light on Lodmoor which he knew so well.

"May has lit she's lamp!" he said.

George Pounce, who was no stranger to the green-eyed lad, argued with him then quite hotly as to whether another spot of light they could make out, far to the left of the Lodmoor one, was or was not a light at the White Nose. Young Zed maintained that the White Nose "never had no lights" but the taxidermist, who knew the place well, declared that you could see for miles away the lamp in the window where Mr. Ludlow, the antiquary lived.

The dawn they were waiting for still delayed its appearance, and after some whispered conversation between Marret and Larry, the boy, who had learnt the art from Gipsy May, set himself with the air of one at home on rain-soaked hills to the task, in spite of the dampness of all available kindling, of lighting a fire, and it was then that Marret, hurriedly placing her basket at the complete disposal of George Pounce, took Sylvanus aside.

"We can go off now," she said. "It may be harder, later on! You never can tell what'll happen. No, no, you *must* come. Us haven't got so long together this blessed morn!"

She accordingly led him off along the ridge of the high Down, while Mr. Pounce, fraternizing very happily with Larry, and coughing and choking in the smoke of the new-lit fire, explored what the girl's great basket contained.

But Sylvanus and Marret walked away alone along the crest of the hill. Two tall figures they were, as they walked off side by side, and as through the smoke of his fire young Zed watched them, a deep and solemn feeling surged up in his heart.

"Her do love thik man," he thought, "same as I do love she. Me Nothing-girl be nought to I, same as I be nought to she. Us be both cast-off. Wold May don't mindy about such things as me and me Nothing-girl do. Wold May be like she's girt cat. 'Tis by reason of being Gipsy-born, I reckon. Gone now. They be gone now. He be *in there* where I were afore. And the poor man ain't got a mustache left. He've a-moulted hisself like a wold owl! But 'tis him she do love and none other. Him and not Lal. And so it must even be."

Thus, as with eyes smarting from the smoke he had raised, he bent over his fire, young Zed adjusted his nature, disturbed to its very depths, to that renunciation that is as ancient as our troubled race.

"And so it must even be," he repeated, as he applied himself to yet new Promethean tricks learnt from that friend whose own erratic affections seemed like those of "she's wold cat".

On and on Sylvanus led his girl, and on and on she led him, for no one — not even the psychological Doctor — could have separated and divided the impulse that held them, that drove them. Suddenly he stopped, held himself erect, raised his bare head high and snuffed at the air.

"It's coming," he whispered in a low vibrant voice.

And he was right. Like the first flicker in the eyelids of a dead man restored to life, a wan indescribable lifting of darkness took place in the far-off horizon, over the southeastern waters, close to St. Alban's Head. He tightened his arm round her waist. Well knew he that stillness, that quietness in her, that mute, untrembling trance, that made her always seem to his touch even taller than she was.

Minutes and minutes flowed over them, and the link between them became like another dawn, whiter, ghostlier, more inscrutable still, mounting up through a yet deeper dark. Then came a time when the whole wide stretch of waters threw open its tremulous dawn-porches to their intense gaze. Grey, and yet not grey, metal-livid rather, like the dumb glimmer of ten thousand sword-blades, the sea unrolled its leagues of shivering expanse. It grew whiter and ever whiter, and its whiteness was not the whiteness of death, nor yet the whiteness of light or of life. It was the whiteness of the spirit. It was the whiteness of that mysterious act of creation that came even before the word. Nor did this whiteness last for long. It lasted long enough to add something of its own immortal nature to the mortal weakness of their human feeling. But then, soon, too soon, it began to fade, and its place to be taken by something else. And what now took its place was the natural, the secular diffusion of ordinary daylight, of the accustomed, the familiar, the common day, one more day, just one more, among all the other days that had spread themselves out over two human lives.

The girl turned her face towards him, when this change came, but instead of raising it up to his own, she pressed it against his chest, against his heart, and there she remained, with her long bare arms, protruded from her black cloak, clinging tightly about him. She was too nearly one with him — only one tall pillar of darkness in darkness they formed now — for her to note the difference between the sickly-sweet Hell's Museum smell of the garments they had put on him and his old clean-scented tweed clothes. Knowing all, knowing how near the end of their time it was, knowing how hard it would be ever to snatch a meeting like this again, she yet felt happier than she had ever felt in all the days she could remember.

And Sylvanus was talking to her now, old Sylvanus, still talking, always talking, and his words became to her as the air-cleaving gulls, that she had so often seen without seeing, darting, dipping, swaying, hovering, along the Weymouth Sands. Proud and strange, proud and even blasphemous, his words were, and they were cold and remote, too, but not more cold, not more remote than the dawn she had just seen.

"Whenever you hold in your hand," he was saying, "a wet pebble by the sea's edge, you must believe you are holding me. Whenever you snatch up a handful of wet sand, by the sea's edge, you must believe I am holding you. I can *never let you go,* even if I wanted to! You're more real to me than anyone in the world, even than Jerry! Shall I tell you a queer thing, girlie? Last night when I was—"

They were interrupted by the voice of young Zed out of the darkness. The lad was running towards them.

"Coom quick, Mister!" he cried. "Coom quick, Marret! There be trouble with the loony. He'll be doing summat, lookso, if ye don't make haste!"

What had happened was indeed simple enough under the circumstances. That phantasmal whiteness upon the horizon had been almost as exciting to Mr. Pounce as to Sylvanus and Marret. He had left Larry's side and scrambling out of the hollow tumulus had brushed against the lad's fire which had begun to grow a little out of control. Here he had scorched one of his coat-sleeves. This was enough, combined with the magnetic influence of the dawn to start a psychic conflagration, or what Dr. Brush would have styled "an elation-response to unusual stimulus". George Pounce was in fact, when they reached the spot, whirling round and round on his own axis, like a frantic dervish, his stumpy arms and his poor spatulate fingers — the fingers of a born taxidermist — sticking out like the spokes of a wheel that has been stripped of its circumference. It was an extraordinary sight, this fire in the grey dawn, this smoke, this revolving man!

They approached in wonder this whirling figure who might indeed have been engaged, at the edge of this ancient barrow, in some prehistoric fire-dance. Strange was it to see him appear and vanish again in the smoke! To recover the burning Phoenix from his self-induced flames presented itself indeed as a harder task than Sylvanus had expected. The truth was that the presence of young Zed, whose own wits were never far *on this side* of the Pass Perilous, aggravated the man's disorder, and prevented these self-ignited blazes from dying down as quickly as usual. It was pitiful, and at the same time grotesque, to see this sturdy human form, spinning round on the edge of the old chieftain's rifled grave, his figure appearing and disappearing in that pallid dawn-light, as cloud after cloud of smoke from

Zed’s real fire kept rolling over his head! Heart-rending, too, were the curious sounds the poor man kept muttering, sounds that some unconscious imagination in his demented brain — the brain of an ornithologist — caused to approximate to the anguished croakings of some great bird in mortal distress. At last his galvanic movements ceased and he stood trembling and choking in the drifting smoke.

It was then that Marret approached Sylvanus.

“Good-bye,” she said, making no attempt to take his hand.

The tall man and the tall girl stared at each other in tense silence. By some kind-unkind chance a great cloud of smoke rolled between them, and the girl accepted the sign. Clutching Larry by the arm, who had already possessed himself of the basket, she hurried down the hill; nor did she once look back. Up went Sylvanus’ hand to his face, for it was always at a crisis like this that he was wont to tug at his great mustache. But he laid his arm instead on the shoulder of Mr. Pounce. As he watched their retreating figures, Zed swinging the basket and Marret with her small head, in its boy’s cap, hanging down a little on one side, he was aware of a sensation in the pit of his stomach as if there were an umbrella inside him that was blowing inside out. But he kept his eyes fixed steadily upon them till their forms vanished behind a curve of the hill. Then his hand dropped from the shoulder of the resuscitated Phoenix and his whole figure drooped and wilted in the grey dawn. It was one of those moments in a human being’s life when the will to live drains away, like water from a dam that has been lifted.

“I beg your pardon, sir?” gasped Mr. Pounce hoarsely, fancying that Sylvanus had commented upon his recent fire-dance.

But the tall man’s commentary had been of the sort that the Doctor would — at least three months ago — have termed a response to autostimulus.

"Caput... Anus," he repeated several times, while he stared at the spot upon which Marret had stood before the smoke intervened.

On their return to the Home, Mr. Pounce, a little anxious for his reputation as an inmate on parole, hurried into the main building, leaving Sylvanus to follow his own devices.

In every man's life there are moments when a desolation takes possession of him which resembles the terrible look which a dead planet might turn upon a lonely voyager travelling through space. At such a moment the heart feels as if an abyss of hopelessness had suddenly been revealed to it through some ghastly crack or crevasse in the buoyant etheric expanse. And it seems to him then as if, at some grim signal, what he had really known all the time had been relentlessly shown him, the ancient cosmogonie jest, the old unredeemed treachery. Like an infinitely forlorn face, stripped of all comfort, this ghastly vision of things limns itself against the surrounding nothingness. Nature has piled up all her resources to hide the yawning void through which this frozen look bids us despair. Viaduct after rainbow-viaduct have our own hearts thrown across this fissure in the familiar landscape, but perhaps it will only be when the Original Jester himself repents Him of His Joke and ceases to cry "Judy! Judy! Judy!" across our shining sands that that look out of the void will melt away. Or perhaps —

But the tall man — whose influence upon young women was regarded as so much more dangerous than that of Mr. Jones or Mr. Frampton — felt, as that cold grey day established its normal supremacy over the scattered buildings of Hell's Museum, that any prolongation of the desolation he experienced just then would end by making him the kind of inmate who — like poor Edward Loder — cared no more *whether he came out or not.*

Sylvanus stood on the gravel-path that led to the Doctor's private residence and contemplated a garden-fork that someone had left stuck deep into a heap of manure. Had this tool been a hoe he would have passed it by. Had it been a rake he would have disregarded it. Had it been a pick he would scarce have noticed it. But he had so often used a fork, just like this, for various purposes at Last House, that the mere sight of it stirred up his old fighting-spirit.

"What was it that the poor old Jobber was always muttering?" he thought. " 'A time and times and half a time'. Well... if I *am* destined to die in this place... and if I'm *not* destined ever to see Marret again... at least I'll *fight*! That's the whole thing. Suffer... be miserable... feel like a worm cut in half... but one thing a person *can* do, till he's stone-dead, and that's fight... even though his fighting is all done in the circle of his own mind!"

He felt so grateful to the fork that he actually stepped on the dung heap and, bending down, kissed its handle. To kiss the handle of a garden-fork would not have arrested any particular attention *where he was,* but it would have fatally lent itself to Perdita's impression of him, as one who, even when alone, was forever acting and showing off. Perdita's view of his character, and indeed the Jobber's view, too, would have been accentuated had they witnessed the sequel.

After walking briskly forward with a happier step, now he had seen the fork in the dung, for both these objects seemed to belong to everything that was outside the Brush Home, it occurred to his superstitious mind that the dung heap might feel neglected. Back therefore he went, and pulling out the fork with a jerk, while with the emergence of the tool came forth a heavy warm scent of long-buried cow-droppings, he raised the prongs to his face and kissed *them.* Then he replaced the tool where he had found it and hurried off again.

Entering the Doctor's house, without summoning his servant, and going straight to his study, he found little Benny Cattistock alone there, waiting for his uncle.

"Do you think I might sit down?" he asked the child, who was lying on the floor reading a newspaper. "This boy," Sylvanus thought, oughtn't to be always feeding his manias from the papers. Why hasn't that fool Muir swung him off this sort of thing?"

Benny's eyes were dilated with fascinated and horror-struck curiosity.

"I'm reading about it!" he cried. "It's in that paper... what I knew they were doing... what they got Yellow for... only they'd never tell me anything! I tried to peep through the key-hole once, but Murphy found me... It tells of how they get 'Hypo-Toxin'."

"How *do* they get it?" enquired Sylvanus. "I do not even know what it is."

Benny struggled to make it clear to him. It was not altogether clear, — probably it was not *that* even to the men who did it — but it was clear enough to contract Sylvanus' forehead with lowering attention.

"Wait a minute, Benny! Isn't that word *Hypno-Toxin,* not Hypo-Toxin?"

Benny's face, which had begun to cloud with irritation at this correction, lit up when he saw how interested Sylvanus was.

"Yes! Yes!" he cried. "That's it! I got it wrong. They've got a dog they're keeping awake, keeping it always awake — and they do it... you see it tells everything... to get something from it. When you've wanted to sleep for days and days, and can't sleep, your spine — I think it's your spine — begins to cry. And that's what they're looking for. It's only a drop. It's only the tiniest little drop. And they take it out of the dog and put it in a little glass bottle... Oh, so careful!... so as not to spill it. It's someone's business...

like Murphy... to keep the dog awake... and do you know how he does it, Mr. Cobbold?"

The child's face became convulsed with a babyish frenzy, and stamping on the newspaper and with the tears streaming from a reddened face, began kicking and scuffing the trampled pages about the room in the kind of tantrum that Magnus by this time knew only too well.

"That'll do, Benny. Quiet, my lad!" said Sylvanus.

The boy turned to him with clenched fists, and Sylvanus thought to himself:

"God! how like his chin is to his father's! I never realized how like they were."

But the boy recovered himself now and went on.

"They don't tell the truth, Mr. Muir says, when they say they give them Anna's Ethics. They say they always put dogs to sleep with that stuff. So they're just liars, Mr. Cobbold, aren't they, when they *keep* them awake till they get that drop?"

Sylvanus saw clearly enough that unless young Benny had pretty soon some tremendous reassurance his whole nervous system would be affected.

"Does that double-dyed fool, Muir," he thought, "encourage him in all this? But the boy's right; and what can a person do? We can't tell him that they don't torture dogs."

"I should say he is!" he now replied to the boy, in hearty confirmation of his opinion of the head of Hell's Museum. "But there are lots of them far worse than your uncle Dan, sonny, and that's the truth. You'll go after them and bring them to book when you're grown up! But now you must make *me* your man-at-arms. I'll deal with your uncle now. I've got a good yew-tree shaft to my bow. Have no fear. But you run off now quick, before uncle Dan comes. You wait and see what happens. We're fellow conspirators, that's what we are."

When the boy had gone Sylvanus put his hand into his pocket where there was a parcel of sandwiches given to him by Marret. These he proceeded to swallow, one after another, with incredible speed.

"From the brain, under the not-sleeping torture," he thought, "into the cerebro-spinal column. Caput... Anus! Caput... Anus! What a race we are!"

He had finished the sandwiches and was lying back in the Doctor's biggest chair feeling a craving for sleep when Daniel Brush entered.

"Hullo!" he said. "I've been hearing fine stories about you. You're a nice parole-patient, you are, and so's your friend Pounce!"

Sylvanus remained where he was and surveyed the man quizzically. He thought to himself.

"You wait, my lad. You wait a bit!"

Dr. Brush took off his coat and fidgetted uneasily about the room. He felt something was in the air; but he attributed it to this excursion to Tup's Fold, the details of which, in many exaggerated versions, had already been circulating freely. At last he sat down opposite his patient and an extraordinary duel began which was fought at one and the same time on the rational, the imaginative and the occult level. It was also fought — strange as it may sound — on the sexual plane.

"Doctor," said Sylvanus, opening the struggle with a terrific lunge of his sword-arm, "I'm not going to utter one word more, I'm going to keep as silent as Hardy's Monument, until—"

"I know perfectly what you're going to say, Cobbold! Until I've closed my little experimental laboratory? Have you heard anything, or seen anything lately, Cobbold, that's set you off?"

Sylvanus shook his head. As a matter of fact he had heard nothing of vivisection for several weeks.

"It's all for so little, Doctor!" he cried, suddenly sitting bolt upright and clenching his fists on his knees. "It isn't for an Elixir that would make us Immortal. You don't get *that* from pinching and prodding and torturing animals. I can't understand it! A man like you, who bleed if you're pricked, who laugh if you're tickled, how you can torment these dogs to such wretched purpose, for such a poor, paltry result? If you were going to make us Immortal by it, or reveal to us the nature of God by it, I'd *still* say it was wrong. But, as it is, it's monstrous! Your dogs suffer beyond what even you like to think about — and what are the results? Nothing really stupendous or world-shaking. If you ask my opinion, Doctor, I tell you this whole crime of vivisection will be horribly paid for in human suffering. That's the way the gods always work. This vivisection of yours is the worst sin of our age — of the age of *The Star Wormwood* as that Russian says — and it will be horribly avenged! The worst of it is, Doctor, that in these avengings the innocent suffer equally with the guilty."

Daniel Brush's countenance was not so much, as the poet says, "a book wherein could be read strange matters" as he listened to his prisoner-patient, as it was a title-page whereby what lay within was carefully concealed in an indecipherable cryptogram.

"You touch on a large question, my friend," he said quietly, pulling up one of his cuffs — for he was now in his shirt-sleeves — and examining some little abrasion on his wrist. "A large question," he repeated, looking, not at Sylvanus' excited face, but at the man's gaunt knees on which his fists rested as he leaned forward.

The Doctor's "sang froid" proved more like oil on a smouldering flame than on a rising wave, and Sylvanus' voice gathered resonance.

"I know what you're thinking," he cried. "You're thinking I'm 'elated' — in other words, mad like the rest. No, I'm *not* mad, Doctor, but if I were —! No, I tell 'ee. If your unrighteous Science, defying all God's decency and pity, calls itself the test of sanity, then give me the insane! Abominable cruelty remains abominable cruelty, whether it's performed on dogs by scientists or on his enemies by Tiberius! Come on! I take your challenge, Doctor. The insane *versus* the sane! God turns to Bedlam for His worshippers. The lost soul of pity finds lodgement where the demons dwelt till now!"

The resonant voice — that voice which had seduced Olwen and Lily and Lottie and Nelly and Gipsy May and Peg Frampton and Marret Jones, apart from anything he *said* — became inaudible now for a minute while Sylvanus fixed his eyes on the man opposite him. He seemed to be labouring under the illusion that he was still uttering words, and that his words were such that none could hear without a change of heart, for as he straightened his body and thrust forward his turtle-neck, till his whole El Greco skull seemed about to hurl itself like a cannon ball at his hearer, there was a gleam of unearthly triumph in his eyes. Then his voice rang forth with the ring of an antiphonal chant of which the opening strophe has been inaudible.

"His babes and sucklings have deserted him! They have become wise and cruel like the rest. And God, even the Absolute, has found Himself and known Himself and returned to Himself in... in... in..."

His voice died down, but this time it sank in a different manner than before. It sank as if his words had been some kind of foaming liquor, pouring forth from a bottomless cask, whose flow had been suddenly stopped. His "in... in... in... " was like the final drops, dripping down from the bung-hole when the spigot had been turned. If it could be said that this torrent of wild words had any effect on the Doctor at all, what it apparently did was to induce him to lie back at full length in his chair and give himself up to a luxury of relaxation.

"I'd like to get a crowd of your patients, Doctor," he went on, and there was a fretful peevishness and human irritation in his tone that was a new note, "and make 'em smash every vivisection-apparatus you've got! All those straps, that some reputable firm manufactures for you, all the fragile little glasses for bottling *Hypno-Toxin* that's been produced in cerebro-spinal columns by agonies of sleeplessness, all your machines for peering into living brains and entrails and hearts! I'd like to see that laboratory of yours combed out, raked out, scoured out, sucked out, vacuum-cleaned, stomach-pumped, disinfected, clystered, *gutted*! Don't you see that the mere fact of your *being allowed* to do this — for your chatter about giving 'em anaesthetics is all my eye — it's those nicely-manufactured straps that hold 'em so still — proves that we've given up trying to touch the secret of life by being just and righteous and pitiful. Good God! Given up the whole direction we've been making toward, from the beginning! How did it ever get into the world at all, this idea of *not* being cruel? But once in the world, *it has done it.* It's the only thing that has changed anything — changed Nature herself! If God's been vivisecting us, it may be the one single 'drop' He's got out of the whole ghastly experiment! And this is what you're prepared to throw away, as your cleaning-man might throw away your precious phial of *Hypno-Toxin!* As long as we can put off death for a few wretched years, in our cowardice we give you 'carte blanche' to make the dogs scream. Save us from death and you can squeeze all the agony you like out of our dogs!"

"One moment, Cobbold—" Doctor Brush did not change his position. He still lay back with an almost voluptuous air in his big chair, but he now pulled up his cuff again, and bent his head forward, peering down at that spot on his arm that so persistently tickled. “If it’s any comfort to you, my friend, I may as well tell you that I gave up my experimental laboratory here more than a month ago. Mr. Cattistock is going for a trip — perhaps you didn’t know that either — and has had to cut down his subscription. As to your bête-noir Murphy, you’ll be glad to hear I refused him a recommendation for any other place. He indicated that he intended to go in for raising water-cress. I commended this decision.”

Sylvanus’ whole frame underwent a process of sagging and wilting. He felt like a man who had struck out with a broadsword and beheaded a popinjay. The fact that vivisection was no longer practised in Hell’s Museum and that Murphy had gone was a deep comfort to him, but at the moment it was like the discovery that the tyrant he had disciplined himself by vigil and fasting to overthrow in the power of the Lord had perished of a jungle-fever. He felt a complicated humiliation, too, and an anger against Brush, which itself increased his shame. The fellow had let him talk, just wanting to hear what he would say, and knowing that, any minute, by a single word he could put an end to his harangue. He contemplated the relaxed and restful posture in which the Doctor was awaiting his reply to this little surprise.

At certain crises in life Nature Herself comes to our rescue by a peculiar power of her own — a power that is blinder, swifter, more formidable, than even instinct, and without knowing what we are doing, or why we are doing it, we fling ourselves pell-mell, hugger-mugger, helter-skelter, *into the breach.* There are some who call this power impulse, but what it feels like is an organic leap of our whole vital force, something that can *only* leap — like a ponderous beast — when it is in its last ditch.

Sylvanus, as he sat there, felt that he really was in the last ditch. He was beginning to recognize the grim and crushing fact that the Doctor did really regard him as demented, as demented as poor George Pounce, only with no hope that they would give *him* a pass-key. But great, creative nature, the mother and accomplice of miracles, came to his rescue by flinging him upon one of those subtle hand-to-hand psychic struggles with this man which always threw the problem of madness into the background.

"Doctor," he said suddenly, making no comment of any sort at all upon what he had just heard of the closing of the laboratory.

"Yes, Cobbold?"

"Is it your view that the world comes into being from purely mechanical causes?"

Doctor Brush sank even lower than before in his chair.

"Not from those alone, Cobbold," he replied. "But they played their part then as they do now."

"Do you believe in God, then?"

"Perhaps."

"In Immortality?"

"I wouldn't deny it off hand."

"In prayer?"

"As a subject for experiment."

"Have you any tendency, yourself, Doctor—"

Sylvanus having been given his cue by Nature was now interfering with her by trying to be too clever.

" — any tendency to mental aberration?" "I am glad I asked him that," he thought. "It may make him think a bit;"

The man certainly assumed a very odd expression when Sylvanus put to him this direct, this simple interrogation.

“Sometimes, my good Cobbold,” he said slowly, “I think I am the unhappiest person in this whole establishment. Do you realize that at this moment there is nothing that would give me greater pleasure than if you were to pick up that poker and knock my brains out?”

Sylvanus once more shuffled himself forward to the edge of his chair and sat at attention. Once more he held his long, lean thighs apart, once more his clenched fists were resting on them while he leaned forward. He was thus in the precise position that rowers assume, at the beginning of a race, when they are waiting the signal. The Doctor, on the contrary, was lying back now at full length in his low chair, his chin sunk into his neck, his arms drooping, his legs straight out and side by side, while of his feet, nothing of them but the heels touched the carpet. As Sylvanus gazed at the Doctor and pondered upon this startling remark, there came over him a very curious sensation. He suddenly found himself seized with a queer feeling, as if the Doctor, stretched out there before him, was really a *woman*! Do what he could to concentrate his thought on the problem of the Doctor’s unhappiness, he could not resist a weird, irresistible vibration, that reached him as he looked at the man stretched out in that chair, that he was dealing with a personality that was feminine. Sylvanus, although, as Magnus had correctly divined, he had nothing of the character of Punch in him, had an exaggeratedly male identity. Entirely free from the least flicker of erotic perversity, a freedom very rare among prophets, philosophers and priests, Sylvanus was, at this particular second, as he clenched his strong fists on his lean thighs, seized with a mysterious spasm of turbulent erotic emotion.

“Caput — Anus!” he cried in his heart, “What in the devil’s name is happening to me? Am I going mad? Is it with *this* that it begins? Are you really ‘flapping’ over there in that chair, you little fool? Are you really wanting me to ‘tart’ you? *If not,* why do I feel—”

Thus, in place of any modern jargon, Sylvanus in his simplicity used his old Public School expressions. But it now began seriously to enter his stirred-up wits, as a startling but quite real possibility, that he had at last stumbled on the secret of the Doctor's partiality to him and his passion for conversing with him. This would explain, too — for the unscientific mind of Sylvanus began to seethe with wild hypotheses — the man's power of self-negation and the almost humiliating way he had of imbibing another person's ideas.

"You poor devil!" thought Sylvanus. "What I feel now as I look at you is quite reason enough for your being unhappy. We need an opposite sex, just as plants need water."

Thus while a mysterious contact of his eyes with those of Dr. Brush — full of the interchange of magnetic currents that troubled his senses and perplexed his mind — increased the queer sensation he was experiencing, he remarked gravely: "I can't understand, Doctor, how anyone like you can be unhappy when you have only to walk to a place like—" he was going to say Tup's Fold but he could not utter those syllables— "a place like the White Horse to get the sense of... the sense of..."

He paused, feeling confused, puzzled, how to convey to this man, lolling there in his shirt-sleeves, inspirations that came from Something so "deeply interfused" as was the spiritual Presence he referred to. He found himself talking to the man, too, exactly in the tone he always used when he talked to women, and he had an odd feeling that his relaxed and reclining interlocutor was amused, just as a woman would have been at the notion that the Director of Hell's Museum had only to walk — to the White Horse, in order to recover the resources of his spirit. He stammered on awkwardly, trying to indicate his own methods of emotional recuperation, but something about the Doctor's quizzically lifted eyebrow and the almost Mona-Lisa-like equivocation of his flickering smile gave him the feeling that there were dimensions of sophisticated mentality in the world to which these simple spiritual secrets of his own life were totally inapplicable. And what was Daniel Brush thinking all this while?

He was thinking in terms, if you could put such a complicated procession of mental adjustments into a rational order, in terms of a vein of philosophical reverie that had nothing whatever to do with the differences of the sexes. But it was true, all the same, that the peculiar *trend* of his thoughts had been drawn directly from former conversations with the singular person now addressing him.

“Here we two sit,” thought Dr. Brush, “in this square room in the midst of these chalk hills, so many miles as the crow flies, from the salt sea, so many miles, as the plummet sinks, from the mathematical centre of the earth. And between our two personalities, that now touch through the rays of our optic ‘neurones’, there is of necessity attraction and repulsion, and he is trying to work psychic magic on me, and I am trying to work psychic magic on him.”

Three months ago Dr. Brush would never have allowed his thoughts to take this particular line. Indeed he would never have *had* thoughts of this semi-mystical nature. But at least the man was true to his maniacal pursuit of what he called “Truth”. If Truth began to look different to him, well! it must be followed all the same!

“Two men,” he thought, “never meet, save on those special occasions when they are attracted by love, without thinking at every point: ‘I am subtler, deeper, wiser, more dangerous, more complicated, than you are!’ But, Nom de Dieu! what a load of self-satisfied balderdash I’ve brought down on my head! I must break this up. And there’s always only one way to do it — one infallible way of asserting one’s superiority and that’s to be ironic, mocking, supercilious. When you're that, you dodge it all; spread your wings; off and away! But — damn the chap! — it's the trick of *the inferior intelligence*! But — perhaps — there is an irony... well, at any rate, I can't stand any more of *this*!"

And the Doctor, a very Proteus in mental somersaults, called up — using the actual introspective device he had learnt from his patient — an electric current of ferocious mockery. He sat straight up in his chair, as he resorted to this trick, and he even rose and lit a cigarette.

"But I was only joking, my good Cobbold," he said. "You needn't sermonize me! I was parodying the sort of dramatic 'narcissism' and sentimental tom-foolery that you get among the half-educated. Don't we Doctors know it in our profession? You get your own back from the universe by your voluptuous self-pity, by being such an interesting Sensitive. 'The most unhappy man in the Brush Home is Brush!' Hasn't that got the true ring of the hypocrisy of self-pity? Bah! my dear boy, I am an exceptionally happy person."

The foolish face of innocent bewilderment, mingled with tokens of a really deep outrage, with which Sylvanus received this information seemed to satisfy the Doctor. He actually came over to the tall man, walking gingerly across his flowered carpet, as we are told Agag walked when he saw Death to the windward, and snapped his fingers.

"I don't give *this,"* he cried, "for anyone's pity! I'm a singularly happy man."

Then he smiled at Sylvanus, as he stood there by his side, a smile that resembled that appalling smile described by William Blake, which can only be smiled once in a person's life-time, and as Sylvanus saw him smiling this smile he began to receive once more that extraordinary impression, and — what was worse — to feel again that curious feeling which put him to shame. A wave of uncontrollable anger with the man followed this feeling, an anger that was accentuated by the fact that he was being forced to experience erotic emotions *without any accompanying pleasure.* He, too, rose to his feet and the pair looked at each other for a second without a word.

Then it chanced that the Doctor's great clock over the mantel-piece began to strike, and it struck with the intonation of a certain Portland clock near the bowling-green at Easton. This sound was to the exile from Last House like the crowing of the cock to Peter. He felt that the Doctor *had* fooled him. He felt bitterly alone. He felt without friends, without future, without hope. In the expressive popular phrase, *he felt the draught;* and this superficial "draught", composed of the bleak corridors of Hell's Museum, suddenly made him feel as though his very Absolute had forsaken him. It was only of his mental humiliation that he consciously thought, as he stood in this spiritual "draught", but his poor, battered, lank, grotesque body felt a bewildered distress of its own that seemed to go down to the bottom of its being.

"It is *I*," said the lean, lank, turtle-necked body of Sylvanus in Hell's Museum, the body that had been stripped of its friendly tweed and swaddled in the prison-garb of the Home, "It is *I* who know where the compass is pointing now; and what *I* say, to the Spirit that has landed me here, is— 'Lama Sabachthani?'"

With the dying away of the last reverberations of that clock a thirst for Marret came over Sylvanus that made him howl like a famished wolf. He did actually give vent to a cry that seemed hardly human.

"Good God, man! What have I said? What have I done?" cried Daniel Brush, taking to himself, and to his clever devices, the credit for this beast-howl issuing from the body of his patient.

But Sylvanus seemed to have caught “the prevailing tone”, as one might say, of the place he was in. Casting aside every vestige and shred of self-respect, and humiliating himself before this man to the uttermost, yes! even to the extent of mentioning Marret’s name, he rushed weeping from the Doctor’s study. As he went, as he held the door open to go, he found himself uttering, quite without any intention of doing such a thing, one of those childish jingles of his which it seemed a fatality of his nature to be always stringing together. This persistent tendency of the man — he would probably die uttering some gibberish that rhymed with “anus” — was a pathological illustration of Wordsworth’s subtle hint that rhyme drugs and stupifies the poignancy of feelings that otherwise could not be borne.

“I’m an ass, I’m an ass, I’m an ass, my God!
An ass that’s tasted carrot —
You fill me full with the grass of the sod —
But you take away my Marret!”

As he uttered the final line of this doggerel of despair, he turned his great, white, parsnip-shaped face, with the tears streaming down it, full upon the Doctor.

“Damn your soul!” he cried savagely. “You are not a man!”

When he was gone, the first thing that Dr. Brush did was to pull up his shirt-cuff and survey with concentrated concern the little spot on his wrist which refused to stop tickling.

“Shall I never do it? Never do it?” he said to himself.

And what he meant by “do it” was to grow as impersonal in his relations with Sylvanus as he had compelled himself to be over the end of his experiments on dogs. There are things that happen in the world that have an effect out of proportion to their apparent importance. It is as if there were always blowing a faint, supernatural wind through the world, holding a secret of assuagement for troubled hearts, that is only perceptible when it can find a straw, a feather, a gossamer-seed, a leaf, in the débris of circumstance light enough for it to stir.

As Sylvanus that night went down the corridor to his cubicle he was saluted through the other’s half-open door by the demented ornithologist.

“Good-night, sir!” whispered George Pounce, in a tone full of respectful consideration.

“How nicely he said that!” Sylvanus thought. “He’d have said it just like that if the world were coming to an end tomorrow.”

Sylvanus was right, and he might have concluded furthermore that an Absolute that could roll away the stone of its sepulchre, through so simple a salutation from the mouth of a Loony, even if he *had* been trusted with the key to Hell’s Museum, was an Absolute not devoid of one power at least attributed to the most fabulous of birds. Such an Absolute had the power of renewing itself from its own ashes.

“Good-night, George!” replied Sylvanus in his normal voice.

LOST AND FOUND

ON THE SECOND MORNING after Marret's visit to Tup's Fold, Magnus Muir, still a bachelor-lodger with his friend Miss Le Fleau, sat talking with that lady in the drawing-room at Kimmeridge House, amid the furniture that he had known from childhood. As he listened to Miss Le Fleau, upon whose black satin lap lay a touching evidence of her devotion to him, namely a white, woolen bed-jacket for Curly, he contemplated a rose-wood chiffonier on which, in a little book-case, stood all his old prize editions from Weymouth College.

"I was miserable in those days," he thought, "much more miserable than I've been this autumn, for all poor Curly's moods! Well! I suppose everyone lands themselves in some wretched pass by following their temperament! After all it's my chief happiness to see her... if only once a week! How sweet she was to me yesterday!"

His mind wandered from Miss Le Fleau's words to that Upwey Attic and to the unusually voluptuous intimacies that the girl had allowed him to enjoy there last night. *What did this mean?* Did it mean that she was losing her "nervousness" about being made love to? Could it mean that what he still so obstinately, so patiently awaited, was really, at last, on the verge of materializing?

His eyes left his friend's calm neutral face, the face of a morning-after-morning sitter and knitter in a room full of old furniture, of Penn House furniture, in a room where between a green leather edition of Ruskin and an inlaid table covered with Meissen tea-cups, stood a maiden-hair fern on an old gilded stand, and wandered off to a large, oblong Chesil-Beach pebble

— also from Penn House — upon which had been painted by his mother, nearly half a century ago, a picture of the Great Eastern, the ship that had laid the Atlantic cable.

Curly had been so incredibly sweet to him last night! It was just as if she had *planned* to have her mother go off to spend the evening with Aunt Phem over the shop!

"Yes," he now remarked, "I hate to see him. I hate to meet him. He's just drinking himself to death! I *can't* believe any girl would be so cruel as to deliberately go on hiding herself away while a decent chap like this goes to the devil. My own feeling is she's dead. I didn't think so at first. Jerry was so sure about her still being in Weymouth that I thought he knew where she was. In fact I hinted to *him* that I thought Jerry knew. He never believed it! I think he must have had an instinct how it was, some curious sixth sense about it. And that's why he is in such despair. He's almost sure she's dead, but not *quite* sure — and that's the worst state a person could be in. He... was... very... *fond of her,* Miss Le Fleau!"

"Does he still go on talking in that wild way about doing some hurt to Mr. Cattistock?"

"No, no — at least I don't think so! In fact I can't imagine it, looking the way he does. But unless by some miracle that girl turns up, I tell you the chap's done for. He *can't* go on. It's humanly impossible. I met that man of his the other day, on the esplanade — I daresay you don't know him, his name's Trot — and he said it was all they could do to make him eat anything these days. He said he always went with him now to that 'Pub' down by the Harbour and had struck up an understanding about him with the bar-maid. You don't know, I daresay, Miss Le Fleau, what comfort and support those bar-maids are, to men who are unhappy. They keep 'em from suicide very often. Yes, they do."

"I've no doubt they do," said Miss Le Fleau smiling resignedly. But what she thought was: "Oh, the darling fools that men are! We torment them, we humour them, we look after them, we drive them to perdition, and all the while they are so blind, so stupid, that it's hard to bear it!"

"Did Martha hear any news, Miss Le Fleau, as to how old Loder is when she took your note to Ruth?"

The old lady bent her head and knitted in silence. It always hurt her in some obscure, sidelong manner when Magnus referred in this careless casual way to Miss Loder. Long ago in her secret heart the wise old woman had decided that if, by any Providential intervention, such as the Black Death invading Upwey, or the girl being drowned in the Wishing Well, Magnus became free again, it was Ruth who was best qualified to make him happy. Miss Le Fleau's judgment was infallible, but what she had not yet fully grasped was that the passion of love is like the Sword-Bridge to the Castle of Carbonek. It will as lief lead to death as lead to life! She therefore gave him time to intensify his enquiry a little while she let fall a remark without raising her head about the way Rodney and little Daisy Lily had been so much together all this summer.

"It's all right, of course. We all know what a trustworthy young man *he* is, and what a good, sweet child *she* is... but still... considering what sensitive things young girls' hearts are it does seem strange to me that her mother—"

"Her mother never goes near her!" interrupted Magnus. "Since Jerry left Lucinda and took rooms with that woman Tossty at Dr. Giro-del's, Hortensia hardly goes out at all. *She's* Mrs. Cobbold's companion now."

Miss Le Fleau looked grave. Recognizing her failure suitably to steer the conversation, she lifted her eyes from her lap and remarked that Ammabel had told Martha that Mr. Loder was dying.

"I fear it's a rather distressing end, too, from what Martha tells me," and she fell to giving lurid details, though still in the gentlest tone, about the old man's complaint. At one point she interrupted herself, as old ladies will, to pick up a copy of the Melcombe Regis Circular which lay by her side. "Did you see this about Dr. Brush having to give up his Experimental Laboratory, whatever that means, for lack of funds?"

Magnus looked at her sharply.

"Does it mention Mr. Cobbold?" he asked.

"Oh, no! It's only a couple of lines," she replied, and once more, waving the Brush Home away, she came back to the Loders.

But Magnus, looking at the carefully watered maiden-hair fern in its delicate china pot, allowed his attention to wander from James Loder's death-struggle with his ulcers. He instinctively avoided, too, any further thought about the Brush Home. The furniture helped him in this. Not one single piece of this dignified Penn House furniture but had some sweet, youthful, tremulous, forbidden imagination projected into its grain, into its texture, into its colour, into its pattern. And he set himself to recall, voluptuously, passionately, just as if they had been the Homeric flowers he was always reading about, "violet, amaracus and asphodel, lotus and lily", as indeed they were, for her loveliness had steadily increased since the spring, all the swan's-down softness, all the marbly whiteness of Curly's limbs.

What *did* it mean that she had let him come up into the Attic? What *did* it mean that she had let him caress her upon her bed? Magnus was so unused to girls that he had no notion how lightly, how absent-mindedly, and with how little in it but a vague good-heartedness and a wish to give where 'tis safe to give, they will bestow their lesser favours, favours that bind not a jot either themselves or the recipient.

But Curly was, as a matter of fact, an unusually cold and chaste girl. She was temperamentally proud, shy, reserved, and especially so in regard to her body. Such a girl is more than monogamous. She has an Artemis-like dislike, an angry, nervous, irritable dislike, of being so much as touched when she is not in love. Magnus, in his old-fashioned manner, frankly attributed this reserve in his girl to purity, modesty, chastity, maidenliness. *And he was right.* Dr. Brush's latest theories would have heartily corroborated this simple view. But although to be made love to, when she was not in love, was an irritation and an annoyance to Curly, it affected her deeper nature so little that it was something she *could* easily put up with for any important purpose of her own. Indeed it is likely enough that many professional prostitutes are as chaste as she was!

The tutor was therefore completely justified in being roused to new hope as he stared at the. diaphanous filaments of that maiden-hair fern, hanging so airily and lightly above the old gilt-bound school-prizes and above the pebble carrying on its surface the Great Eastern. He had not possessed her in the final sense, but she made no real resistance until quite near that consummation. Certainly he had enjoyed her in a way he had never been allowed to enjoy her before, and he kept asking himself:

"What did it mean? What did it mean?"

"With any other young girl," Miss Le Fleau was remarking, and as Magnus looked at those aged fingers, that soft white wool, that black satin, a curious peace began to insinuate itself among his worries.

All women, since they carry within them a portion of that primordial womb of darkness wherein creation once slept undisturbed, convey something of "this peace that passeth understanding". Every woman's lap, as she rests, nursing, sewing, pondering, chattering, is a cradle of eternal nirvana, capable of soothing the most troubled brain. And touching him now with a faint scent of Eau de Cologne, this smooth black satin, those aged fingers, brought back endless hours when weary of his restless boy's hunt for half-understood sensuality, he had come to this woman's side. He thought of it always on grey, still autumn mornings, mornings when the scent of Eau de Cologne was not easily blown way! How this white wool and black satin flowed in with the whole character of Weymouth, its spire, its clock, its two royal statues!

This old woman's limbs covered with her smooth dress brought peace, while Curly's, as he had seen them exposed last night, roused up the impulse that set the cosmos whirling! Suddenly something came over him that he had quite forgotten, thinking so exclusively about the liberties she had allowed him, something that happened at the last. She had wanted him to go before Mrs. Wix came back, and as they stood in the cottage doorway she had suddenly moved forward and thrown her arms round his neck, that gesture that *never once* she had spontaneously made before, that gesture about which he had told himself so many stories, that gesture which he had imagined when he had longed for her so desperately on Chesil on the night of the storm! With her arms round his neck she had pressed her face to his and kissed him passionately. She did this awkwardly, for she was not used to giving him kisses. He remembered how foolish he had felt when her dear lips in the darkness collided clumsily with his aquiline nose. And then, as he went off, she acted as if she had really at last given him a piece of herself. She acted as if she did not wish to add anything to her kiss.

"With any other young girl," the old lady was saying, still edging cautiously in the general direction of Spy Croft, "we should all be worried at her being left with that old man, and Mrs. Matzell ill, too, and only a maid about! But she's an exceptional child. You can feel as if she were well over twenty, instead of being — hardly seventeen! I don't wonder that dear Ruth, who has such wisdom in these things, is glad for her brother to—"

It was Martha, her lace cap covered with purple ribbons, who interrupted at this point, knocking at the door and turning its handle simultaneously.

" 'Tis only to tell 'ee Master Magnus," she said, "that Mr. Gaul be outside squinnying up at windy."

Magnus gave a hurried, unceremonious nod to Miss Le Fleau.

"Thanks awfully, Martha," he cried as he rushed downstairs.

He found his friend waiting on the pavement with a very dejected air.

"Do you mind coming to my room for a minute, Muir?" he said gravely. "I have something I want to ask your advice about."

It was so very rare for Mr. Gaul to ask advice of *him* that Magnus went with him with alacrity, being urged on by that rather ambiguous curiosity with which we learn of the agitations of our friends.

"It's a beautiful morning," Magnus said as they walked along, "after all this rain."

Mr. Gaul did not even trouble to give him a look, far less to comment on this platitude.

Then the Corporal met them, returning from his weekly visit to old Higginbottom about his lumbago.

"If he refers," thought Magnus, "to that damned second wife of his, I'll tell him what Curly says about his third one."

But what the old world-sentinel referred to lacked every vestige of interest for the two egoists. He told them that Caddie Water had trouble with her throat and he went on to say that the old doctor must think well of his new partner as he was letting him prescribe for his case. Then he wandered off to changes at Dr. Girodel's.

"He's coming on, that young man be.

"Pardon me, Corporal, but we've got an engagement that won't wait," and Magnus looked at him exactly as the elder Muir used to look at the garrulous School Porter.

"I suppose this Corporal," he said to Gaul when they reached Trigonia House, "knows every faintest smell, whether of dust or snow, or rain, or tar, or gull's droppings, or bilge-water, or bad fish, or bath-chair polish, between 'The Turret' and 'Fernlands'?"

But Mr. Gaul cut short this assuaging enquiry.

"Do you mind not speaking in the passage," he whispered. *"He's* in there!" and he made a jab with his thumb in the direction of Mr. Ballard's room.

It was then that Magnus realized for the first time that the car, covered with mud and dust, and looking as if it had not been cleaned for days, that was standing at the curb, was none other than the "Tirra-lirra" car!

No lowered voices, however, no tip-toe movements, could conceal from the Wiltshire landlady this morning visit. She turned to her daughter who was helping her to wash up.

"There's summat on, my charmer," she said, using an expression of endearment that she had picked up in a Canon's family in Salisbury Close, "there's summat on that's as serious as King's Evidence... Mr. Ballard going and coming since eight o'clock this morning, and now these two, glaring and staring, and nudging in whispers, like a couple of executioners! And don't let's forget to bear in mind how you saw that Gipsy from Lodmoor pass the door so early this morning, muttering funny-like to herself and dragging a heavy load, nor how that picture of your blessed Dad fell from its nail. The Lord be up to summat, my charmer; he be up to summat. But ' 'tis His Doing and So Be Still', as Canon's wife used to say to Maria the cook when he killed a mole on his lawn."

Once having seated his friend safely in his own room Richard Gaul explained the circumstances that made him come to him that morning.

“You know,” he said gravely, “that Miss Frampton and I have been seeing a good deal of one another this autumn?”

Magnus nodded, with equal gravity. The fact referred to was indeed well known in every lodging-house between the Harbour and the Spire.

“Nothing had been Decided,” Mr. Gaul went on. “Nothing *may* be Decided. My book remains of course the first and the last consideration. And what... effect...” He spoke as an astrologer might speak of the approach to each other of Jupiter and Mars, “what... effect... intercourse with Miss Frampton... may... have... on... my book it is hard to say.”

Magnus’ curiosity began to ebb and his attention to wander.

“If Gaul has only called me here to talk about the effect of Peggie on his Philosophy, or of his Philosophy on Peggie, he’s wasting my time;” and the catch came drifting into his head: “Thus did Bacchus conquer India, thus Philosophy Melinda.”

But the sight of Ballard’s car had sent his own mind off on his own affairs in a whirling gyration of agitated panic. These two girls had invaded the peace of Brunswick Terrace with a vengeance!

“Was she so sweet with me,” Magnus thought, “because she is intending to marry Ballard instead?”

“She has asked me,” continued Gaul, “well! not exactly *asked* me, but arranged the subject before my intelligence so that I thought of it myself — to risk spending a night with her at Swan Villa... you know?... where the Backwater used to be... while Frampton’s away on some business affair. Do you think, Muir, that it would be safe for me to do this?”

“Oh, perfectly safe, very, very safe,” replied Magnus absent-mindedly.

“You *really*... think so?”

His voice was so astonished and so intense that Magnus woke up.

"What's that Gaul? I'm so sorry! I don't think I quite caught just what you said."

Mr. Gaul rose to his feet, took off his spectacles and rubbed them against the tassels of a bracket bearing a photograph of the late Canon's garden in Salisbury.

"I asked you whether," he said with a forced laugh — and never had a more hollow sound paid homage to the Laughter-Loving One— "whether it would be safe for me to stay the night with Miss Frampton, when Mr. Frampton is away."

An irrational irritation with his philosophic friend seized upon Magnus. Compared with the ghastly possibility that his own Love had run off with this skipping pond-fly of a Sippy, what did it matter whether Metaphysics and Desperation lay together at Swan Villa or at Preston Brook?

"I wish you'd call her 'Peg', Gaul," he said crossly. "When everyone knows her as Peg it's absurd to call her Miss Frampton."

"But *do* you, Muir?" the young sage repeated, while Magnus became aware that some disturbance in Gaul's absence had strewn the floor with at least three sheets of manuscript, an accident that had passed entirely unobserved by the writer of them.

"Do I *what*?"

"Do you think it would be safe?"

"You mean he might come home unexpectedly and give you a hiding?"

Mr. Gaul's spectacles had been rendered considerably more obscure by the dust of those tassels. He removed them spasmodically again and, still on his feet, rubbed them so violently against the seat of his trousers that one of their lenses slipped from its horn-rim and fell to the floor.

"Blast the things!" cried Mr. Gaul, and when he had groped on the floor for the lost glass and placed it on the table he thrust his one-glass spectacles upon his nose and glared through them angrily.

"If you can't see what I mean," he cried, "without having to be told in realistic medical language, all I can say is, Muir, that you are—"

Magnus beheld in his mind the deep-sunken eyes with their dark dissipated look and the red under-lip with its pathetic droop.

"That poor little girl!" he thought, feeling a spasm of shame, "and we great hulkers discussing her! Her life's in her soul, after all, just as ours is!"

He gave his friend a not altogether sympathetic glance.

"You mean," he remarked, "you might get the pox?" He rapped out these gross words lowering his thick eyebrows and screwing up his eyes. "Get it on the ground of her having gone about such a lot, among—"

He was interrupted by the mocking, impish sound of that accurst Tirra-Lirra! He shrugged his shoulders, glanced at the window, and spoke more gently to Mr. Gaul who was engaged in making vain attempts to insert the escaped disc into its empty frame. As Magnus watched his repeated failures to do this, that arrogant horn outside was blown again.

Mr. Gaul looked up.

"I believe he is making signals," he remarked. "Yes," he went on, "I really believe he is doing that *for us."*

Magnus stared at him and turned angrily towards the window from which nothing could be seen.

"For *us?* God! they may have told him I was with you here, and it's me he wants."

A wild, unreasoning, animal fear now seized upon him. He thought:

"She is dead; and Ballard's come to break it to me!"

Then his saner reason prevailed again and he said to himself:

"He isn't calling us at all."

Mr. Gaul had seated himself at the table and was fumbling with his broken spectacles. He suddenly looked up so pathetically and with such a confused, lost look on his bland countenance, that Magnus felt heartily ashamed of himself.

"Of course, my dear chap," he said in his kindest tone, "we can't be too careful. But wouldn't Peg be frank with you? And if she *has* taken risks and has suffered for it, wouldn't she tell you? I'd ask her with absolute freedom, Gaul. It's wonderful what cowardice we can carry off, if we are open about it, and laugh at ourselves! But, Gaul, don't you think I'd better run down and see if Ballard really does want either of us?"

The author of "the Philosophy of Representation" glanced sadly at the floor, where it was too evident several of his pages had drifted.

"I must remember to get some more cockle-shells," he thought. "Yes, I think you'd better go down," he murmured. "I shall have to go down, too, because of these spectacles. I shall have to go to that place in St. Mary's Street. Yes, we had both of us better go down."

He uttered this so lugubriously that Magnus would have smiled if his growing uneasiness about Curly had not put an end to his smiling.

"Go down, go down, go down," Gaul repeated in a gloomy chant. "Yes, we had both of us better go down."

When they reached the pavement, there, seated in his car, was Sippy Ballard. He was sounding his horn in a mechanical way at intervals but his face looked white and he kept biting his lower lip and making an odd circular movement with his chin over his collar — a movement that Magnus had noticed before in him, but never in so pronounced a way. For half a second as he observed him making this queer automatic movement he saw the good-looking youth as if he were Mr. Punch on the gallows with the rope round his neck. The voice of Jones sounded in his ears: *“Judy! Judy! Judy!”*

Meanwhile Gaul, holding his spectacles in one hand and the unattached disc in the other and blinking helplessly in the presence of this new phenomenon tried to arrest his attention. Anxious to be off to the town and yet unfortified by any authoritative oracle from his friend, he gently poked him in the ribs.

“Then you’d advise me to go ahead?” he murmured. “I mean about Swan Villa.”

Magnus gave him a confused glance.

“Certainly,” he said, “certainly.”

Then he proceeded to address the young man who was moving hi? chin so oddly.

“Do you want me?” he said, and stepping forward he laid his hands on the edge of the familiar car.

All the answer he got was yet another mechanical pressure of that frivolous horn. Tirra-Lirra! it sounded between the houses and the sea.

“Do you want me, Ballard?” he repeated. “What on earth’s wrong? Is it from Curly you’ve come? Is it well with Curly?”

Then at last the handsome young man recovered his wits and looked down at him.

“Get in,” he murmured laconically. “Get in here, for God’s sake. I’ll tell you as we go!”

Magnus turned to his friend.

“Don’t worry about that little matter, Gaul. Be perfectly frank. Cover up your — your nervousness by jesting about it. Be open and shameless. It’s always best to be shameless with them. Good-bye, Gaul!”

If the Town Clerk had blown his horn when there was no need, it seemed to his passenger, jammed in so close to him by the wheel, that he didn't remember to sound it half enough as they drove past the Station and over the new viaduct dam by Radipole Lake. In dead silence the young man drove, while one wild thought after another coursed through his companion's brain.

"Has he killed her to keep her from me?" he thought. "Is he taking me to see her body?" And then he thought: "No, no! He isn't like that at all! It's something quite different. *He's given her up.* They've quarrelled, and he's given her up. Oh, little Curly, Oh, my precious darling! Is this really the end, the end of all our trouble? Have you turned to me, at last, my only true Love?" And he concluded in his heart: "Yes that's it, that's evidently it. That's what she meant by what she said last night."

How clearly he could see her face as it was when they came down from the Attic, as it was when they stood, together in the kitchen, before she hurried him off! What was it she had said to him then?

"You have always been so kind to me, Magnus."

He hadn't paid much attention then. His senses were in such a whirl.

"So kind. to me" — yes! that's what she said. *Kind?* Was that all he'd been? "Oh, Curly, my one of all, Oh, my little, little Curly!"

They were clear of the traffic now. But where was he going? This wasn't the way to Upwey! Why had he come *this* way? This led to Chickerel, not to Upwey! Then Ballard spoke. Clearly, without mincing words, he told him all. *Curly had gone off with Cattistock.* Magnus never afterwards forgot the look of that long white hill-road going up to Chickerel, its low hedges, its open, treeless uplands, the wind that suddenly came up, from across the West Fleet, over Chesil.

He accepted the worst in his deepest soul, while his brain, the surface of his mind, went on vainly, idiotically thinking, calling up one false hope after another. But Ballard's news had sunk, like that pebble painted by his mother, like that other one that people said the Jobber kept in his pocket, sunk sure and straight, down into his deepest soul! He had lost her. Gone, gone. It was all over. The surface of his nature, his reasonable mind, found itself astonished at his calm. He felt a little sick in his stomach. But what was that? A little dizzy and faint, too, so that he had to lean sideways, away from Ballard clutching the car's edge. But what was that? It occurred to him as if it were an event in the remote past, in someone else's life, that in his agitation that morning he had gone down to Miss Le Fleau's room without touching his breakfast. What was it this tiresome boy was saying now? He tried to attend to what he was saying, tried to fix his attention on each word, as a man does who wants to prove he isn't drunk. But underneath everything his deepest soul was washing, like an under-tide, up and down, up and down, over that sunken stone, over the boy's word that she'd gone off with Cattistock. Something at last did sharply arrest his attention.

"When was that? *When* did she say that?"

And Ballard went over it all again, wearily and patiently.

"It was yesterday afternoon. I was with her *all* yesterday afternoon, and I could see she was upset, had something on her mind she was keeping back, and then she said: 'I'm sorry, Sippy, if ever'—"

"Yesterday afternoon!" thought Magnus with that silly, fussy, intrusive top of his mind that still took an absurd interest in unessential details, that still persisted in conjuring up impossible hopes against all evidence. "Yesterday afternoon," he echoed dully, thinking to himself: "She must have come straight from him to me! She must have wanted to see us both at the very last. Had she said to *him,* 'You've been very kind to me, Sippy?'"

No doubt that's what she said! That was evidently her formula with her men. Kind? Yes, he had been "kind", and Ballard had been "kind". But kindness with girls is clearly not enough. They want more than that! They want the money of a Cattistock. They want to see the world. That indeed was apparently just what she *was* seeing.

"My uncle telephoned to me at the Guildhall," Sippy was saying now; "He says they're off this morning. He says he's taking her to Italy."

Magnus was silent, gripping the side of the car with his fingers as a man might grip the boards of a gibbet upon which his best friend is being executed. He did not recognize it himself till long afterwards, but something happened to him during that drive to Chickerel. After this there was a solid level of stone, deep in his heart, of stone in whose petrifaction was a single fossil — not an ammonite, but twisted like an ammonite — a fossil that would remain there untouched, till it dropped with a thud, into the bottom of his coffin, as the flesh left his bones.

"Do you think he'll marry her?" he said suddenly, as they approached Peninsular Lodge.

"How can *I* tell?" replied the other. "I don't suppose so. But you never know! If it goes on he may."

The outer surface of Magnus' mind was working firmly, calmly, normally now. That fossil, like petrifaction produced by seismic pressure, had already taken its permanent, imperishable form. And with his clearly working mind it struck him as curious that young Ballard should be treating him so considerately. But then how could you tell what Cattistock had said to him? He certainly did not miss the ironic queerness of their visit together to Peninsular Lodge. Who could have predicted among all the changes and chances that could possibly happen that the hour would ever arrive when he would be sitting in Lizzie Chant's kitchen, by Ballard's side, listening to the oracular discourse of Mrs. Wix.

Both the old women were seated, and it was clear that Mrs. Wix was upon very intimate and friendly terms with the aged housekeeper. It soon indeed became clear that the Upwey house was to be shut up for several months, perhaps forever, while Curly's mother made her domicile with her ancient gossip.

"What a dispensation of Nature," Magnus thought, "that a blow like this stuns you so completely that you're too numbed to feel the hurt!"

He did not realize that what he thought was numbness was really the turning into stone of a *woman-shell,* of a certain lovely tortuous conch of circles, a certain Ammonite with divine curves!

"Well," said Ballard, addressing both the old ladies, as he sipped a glass of brown sherry, "I suppose they're on the boat for Havre by now! Uncle telephoned to me, you know, from Southampton."

There was a long pause, during which Magnus found himself looking quietly about — now that the fossilized Curly lay so peaceful down there — to see where Mrs. Wix had put her crochet, for to his surprise that symbol of treachery was not on her lap. His astonishment was great — a sort of Alice in Wonderland astonishment — when he realized that Mrs. Chant was working hard, her aged fingers fluttering like wind-shaken straws in a barn-crack, at that identical bit of work!

"I suppose my Uncle has already been pretty liberal to your daughter, Mrs. Wix?" remarked the impertinent young man, beginning to feel what he would have called a bit squiffy.

The old women gave each other a sly glance, as much as to say,

"What gentlemen *will* say when you're alone with them!"

Magnus finished *his* glass of the absent magnate's admirable wine and addressed himself to Lizzie.

"I don't suppose the real relation between these two will ever be known," he said, speaking as gravely as if he had been talking to his friend in Trigonia House. "Women's characters change very quickly, don't they, Mrs. Wix?"

Curly's mother looked at Mrs. Chant from over her spectacles, a proceeding which made her eyes resemble those of a very wise, very crafty old frog.

"I don't think Curly's will," she retorted. "Am I telling these gentlemen the truth," she added, addressing Lizzie, "or aren't I telling 'em the truth?"

Mrs. Chant glanced furtively at the open door that led into the Servants' Hall through which she could see the window looking out upon "the Grey Woman". She was not by any means sure in her old mind what her life-long friend, *the first Mrs. Cattistock,* would feel towards such revelations! But she plunged in.

" 'Tis like of this, Master Simon," and she looked at Sippy. "This is how't be sir," and she turned to Magnus. "Master were always one to be shy of women-folk, 'cept where courtin' ways and haycock ways be concerned. Master could not endure — and I know what I be telling ye, for me and him have a-talked of it, many and many a night, when us has sat up when Master Benny were sick. He never could abide, I say, any sort of a 'ooman, whether she were old or young, meddling with his private life. It were for fear of her meddling with 'un in lovingness that 'a jilted Mrs. Lily. 'A always drop 'un, same as they were hot coals, soon as they clawed at's privy counsels, as you might say. 'Tweren't altogether the money, I'm telling ye, though 'twere that, *too,* on course. 'Twere that the Master do yearn to keep his wone soul in his wone belly! 'Tis for this cause 'a be more frighted of woon what loves and clings than of woon what keeps she's self *to* she's self, and respects pride and ensues it!"

The eyes of the diplomatic Mrs. Wix — whose ambassadorial credentials, in the form of the crochet-work, were thus found to be in the hands of a kindred spirit — literally shone at the conclusion of this noble defence of minding your own business. Her lips trembled with a desire to present to the company certain significant details from the life of Curly's father which bore on this principle. She confined herself to remarking that her daughter "were *the woon of all* o*' 'em* to keep she's self to she's self."

And it was then that Mr. Simon Pym Ballard, to Magnus' sardonic amusement — it was the first time he'd been in a position to *be* sardonic in this quarter — corroborated the trend of the conversation.

"I don't know whether you good people realize," he remarked in the oratorical voice that awed the rate-payers at the Guildhall, for his uncle's sherry was going more and more to his head, "but it was not only Hortensia Lily, née Poxwell, that was sacrificed at the altar of Mr. Cattistock's *Privacy,* as you, Eliza, have so admirably described it. He has more recently sacrificed — since we're all friends here! — a lovely Being we all know, a Being we have all admired, for her Person, a Person which has been generously displayed at a well-known local theatre, a Being who—"

But though he had become more cynical in the last couple of hours than he ever supposed any mortal man *could* be, Magnus found it impossible to endure the thought of Curly's proud body lying in a place still warm from the nakedness of Tissty.

"That'll do, Ballard! That's quite enough. Well? Do you want to take me over to Chesil before you go back to the Guildhall? I've a notion to find out what the old sea-bank looks like, on a calm autumn morning."

He rose quietly to his feet and put down his empty glass. He let his eye wander round Mrs. Chant's kitchen.

"Benny enjoying his holiday?" he enquired of the housekeeper.

"He've agone, with thik 'yaller' of his'n, to see old Mr. Cobbold at Brush's. Me nephy drove 'un in big car. Master took his wone little car when he and Miss Wix started for 'Truria'."

Etruria! Magnus sighed at the mention of this sacred word. What secret consultations at the Wishing Well, perhaps as long ago as August had conveyed such magic syllables from Dog Cattistock to Curly, till they came to Lizzie.

"And so that's what you're enjoying now! Well, good luck to you! I could never have afforded to take you in the storms in November, to 'the brooks in Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades'—"

No! these old women were perfectly right. Curly was, in some queer way — and he could admit it now, with that Ammonite lying so quiet down there — really more suited to this secretive, formidable, rich man than she had ever been to him. And what Ballard said about her being different from both Mrs. Lily and Tissty was perfectly true. Either of *them* would have wound her arms day and night round the man's neck, and when he got angry, and beat them, they would enjoy those blows. He'd have been driven to run away. But he never would need to run away from Curly. Yes! she was indeed in a profound sense, *born* to be the paramour, even the wife, of a great man of action...

"You're — not — by — any — chance — thinking of—"

Sippy had thrown out these words with some genuine concern when he finally left him on Chesil Beach.

"Good God, man!" he had replied. "Do I look like that?"

No! he cannot have looked in the least like that, though no doubt he looked different from the way he usually did in Miss Le Fleau's drawing room. He pulled out his father's heavy watch which he wore exactly as *he* had worn it, with its massive, well-worn gold chain. He had often felt a certain half-humorous uneasiness when he brought out this ancient timepiece in that Upwey Cottage. The elder Muir's watch regarded him now, on the crest of Chesil Beach, with unqualified approval.

"Tick! Tick!" it said. "Time ends all human folly."

And then it informed him with quiet emphasis that it was one o'clock. For the second time that day he remembered the fact that he had not broken his fast. This time he recognized that it was himself, Magnus Muir, the methodical Latin teacher, who was thus forgetful of the exigencies of the belly. But with a fossiled life in his heart, that was more recent than any to be found in Portland, he once more put the thought of food aside and turned a cold scrutinizing gaze, eastward and then westward, upon the curves of the enormous Beach on which he stood.

There is a spontaneous awakening of awe in the human soul when a person stands in the presence of any natural formation of the earth's surface that has no parallel in the whole circumference of the globe. The wind had shifted since his unforgettable drive up Chickerel hill and came now from the north. Thus it was prevented by the gigantic terraqueous bank itself from rousing to any further height the waves of the West Bay. But although divested of their usual grandeur by this accident, it could not be said that these waves slept in absolute tranquillity! Though no longer stirred up to terrific wrath, they did not cease from their rolling, tumbling, curving, cresting, restless activity, that immemorial sea-trouble, which, when it does cease, evokes the feeling that the waters have really been made a path for the feet of the Eternal. The sky itself had become clearer, and an army of ragged white clouds from the high plateaus of Mid-Dorset offered an aerial correspondence, as if they had been crossing some vast cosmogonie mirror, to the racing, tossing white horses that even yet, for all the change of wind, foamed and champed and careered towards the motionless beach.

That there should be a rim to this vast sea-cauldron, whether the waves towered high, or ran, as now, a monotonous, inverted race with the opposing wind, that there should be a rampart like this between the waters of the South Coast and what was practically the Atlantic had a monumenal congruity that satisfied while it astonished the mind. But had an imaginative traveller, travelling South-West, who had never seen the sea, come bolt upon this Cyclopean Embankment, without a glimpse of Weymouth Bay to mitigate the spectacle, he certainly would have felt that the rooted earth and the unresting waters were divided here in a way worthy of the demiurgic artist. The presence of the narrow strip of backwater, known as the Fleet, on the land side of Chesil, enabled Magnus, as he gazed at all this, and saw it as perhaps — for he was at one and the same time benumbed and sensitized — he would never see it again, to isolate this vast ramparted curve of pebbles till its stupendous entity seemed to detach itself from all contact with the normal phenomena of the world. This phantasmal detachment, endowing the colossal Beach with nothing less than an astronomical remoteness — as if it had been a parallel formation with the far-seen configurations on the surface of the Moon — seemed to mark it out, this bastion of the elements, this multiform Conglomerate, made up of individual pebbles surpassing the very stars of the Milky Way in multitude, as the actual rim of all the land and all the water on earth, as the true shore of that great Homeric Oceanus, from whose bank the slope descends that leads to the dwelling place of the insubstantial dead.

Feeling all this as he stood here now, it seemed to Magnus as if it were he, and not his Love, who had passed down into that gulf, leaving the sweet light of the sun, passed down, not exactly to death, for as he had lightly indicated to Sippy Ballard, he had not the least impulse to destroy himself, but a world from which something — though its loss might leave other consolations — had been taken away, that could never — no! not even by a miracle — be given back.

But what was that? The long-drawn, unmistakable emphatic siren-call of an incoming passenger steamer suddenly struck his ear. The Channel Island Boat! So they hadn't stopped yet, coming in in the middle of the day! In the winter they docked in the evening. Oh, but how clearly he could remember one particular night, only a year ago it was, come January, when Mrs. Cobbolt dispatched him to meet her companion, and he transferred the job to the Jobber.

Turning southward now, he moved hurriedly along the crest of the pebbled ridge till he reached the chaotic confusion of tumbled, jagged, slippery sea-rocks that lie along the base of the westerly cliffs of Portland. He climbed over a few of these until, feeling exhausted, he sank down on a rough limestone slab, overgrown with sharp indented rock-shells and gazed down into a rock-pool. Here living seaweeds, their lovely, light-floating filaments expanding in the swaying tide, revealed, as they stirred, all manner of rich, strange shells lying at the pool's bottom. Most of these as he gazed down, he could name, for the elder Muir had "collected" such sea-treasures and it always brought the old man's figure as he used to see it bending over such when he came upon them in his shore-walks.

Here, in this enchanted fissure, he could see purple and amber-coloured sea-anemones, their living, waving antennae-like tendrils swaying gently, as the tide swell took them. And tiny, greenish fish with sharply extended dorsal fins darted to and fro across the waving petals of those plants that were more than plants! But it was at the motionless shells at the bottom that he now gazed with his strongest sense of the past. Cowries he could see in plenty, and small gamboge yellow shells, and little pyramidal shells with alternate mother-of-pearl bands and black-green bands, and he could see one involved mother-of-pearl shell, with a tiny seaweed actually growing from its surface, the faint roots of which, against the pearl, took on, in those wavering, shifting, broken lights, an indescribable greenish tinge.

Suddenly he forgot his father's interest in these things, for against his will the shell-like radiance of his lost girl's flesh and blood, that incredible transparency her face used sometimes to assume, shot through his senses like an arrow, an arrow of sea-pearl!

Up he sprang and fleeing desperately from those rocks, as a lost soul might fly from an oasis in its perdition where the memories cut its feet, he made his way across Chesil, across the road, across the railway, till he came to the shallow mud-flats of the Fleet Backwater. Here he had never been with Curly, and as far as his troubled memory served him, only once, long ago, with his father. Had Ballard seen his face then he would have doubted the sincerity and questioned the weight of that lightly flung attestation that had induced him to leave him.

The singular Backwater across whose brackish mud margins he now hurried in his blind desperation had a character quite peculiar to itself. The saltish nature of these *stranded* waters, subject to risings and fallings in regard to their level, but never roused to any tumult comparable to the outer sea, gives to their sandy reaches, when they are traversed or even skirted by an observant wayfarer, a quality that is unique. The spot has a strange metallic look, a livid forlornness, as if the brackish element in its mud had not only killed any ordinary plant-growth in its salt-bitten bosom, but had rendered its own amphibious, marine mosses sea-pale, sea-chilly and sea-blighted.

Magnus soon found his way barred by wide stretches of treacherous-looking water, that seemed neither to belong to the sea nor to any recognizable portion of the earth. Cursing the place, and conscious still of that terrible mother-of-pearl arrow head in his vitals, he swung round now, and came pounding and splashing back, to the higher level that stretches towards what is called the Fleet Bridge. In this region he stumbled on nothing more consolatory than a few whitish-grey walls of Portland stone falling into slow decrepitude, and one or two ruined stone sheds, buttressed and plastered with weather-stained stucco. These edifices had grown so “native and endued” to that queer No Man’s Land, that, like the great, overturned, black-tarred boats upon the slope of the Beach above them, they seemed to take the shape of ancient geological formations rather than of structures put together by the hand of man.

Thus if Magnus, as he lurched so miserably forward, really faint now from lack of food, saw around him a domination of the artificial by the natural, it was the dominance of a “natural” that in itself seemed a fragment of a derelict and deserted world. Across this Waste-Land drifted the stricken man, while at his feet, as they sank into that brackish mud, curious little, purplish-stalked marine plants stared up at the travelling clouds, their abortive leaves clammy and cold, and thick, too, with a self-projected sap, wherewith they protected themselves from the invading brine.

Standing still, when about fifty yards from the Bridge, he watched his own feet as they slowly sank into the mud, causing bubbles to rise that looked as if the mud-worms were blowing tiny balloons of their salt spittle. He took out his watch. It was nearly three... two hours since Ballard had left him! He turned his eyes on the grey arches of the Bridge above him, which now seemed the one remaining goal of his exhausted desire. Suddenly a solitary taxi-cab, coming down the hill from the village of Wyke, moved slowly across the bridge. Even as it crossed the bridge it hesitated and almost stopped, as if the sight of his own presence, down here among these mud-pools, had arrested its occupant's attention. And no sooner had it crossed over, than it did stop; and after a pause a woman's figure descended from it and stood in the road, making unmistakable signals to him.

A wild, impossible hope flooded his whole being and the depths of his heart were stirred. *It is Curly.* But no! This girl was thinner, taller, more fragile looking. Her whole air was different. With a quick step, all the same, and a much lighter one, he made his way towards this figure, while the figure itself, seeing she had his attention, spoke a word to the driver of the taxi, and deliberately advanced to meet him.

Yes, two hours had passed since the elder Muir's triumphantly ticking watch had told Magnus it was one o'clock. But it was not for him alone that clocks and watches ticked. Time the obliterater, the restorer, the healer, the smoother out of our troubled footprints from more than Weymouth Sands brought it about that at the exact second when Magnus felt his heart so madly leap up at the impression that he beheld Curly, the news that had sent him hugger-mugger to this rim of the world reached Mrs. Lily and Tissty Clive, Cattistock's two most interested ladies, and reached them simultaneously. Yes, it was now just three by the Jubilee Clock — that Clock whose Janus-faces had been watched by so many and with such multitudinously different emotions, since in the great Queen's honour and in the interests of Weymouth Sands it was set up — three o'clock in the afternoon of the twenty-third of November, and the first act of Jerry's fantastical fooling at the Regent's was at an end.

The world-famous clown had deserted High House now for quite a long time, and had apparently been happier than he had been for many a year, as he shared one of those ambiguous “upper rooms”, at his devoted Lucky’s, with his mysterious Tossty, and gave himself up to enjoying his particular form of pessimism to its last opal-tinted drop. Most people assumed that it was the presence of his sister-in-law at High House that afforded this punctilious observer of forms and ceremonies his excuse for escape. Certainly no diplomatist could have conducted a delicate transaction more exquisitely than Jerry did his final flight from the courtly threshold of his lady’s room to this tatterdemalion mênage with the daughter of the Radipole shepherd. He had managed it all so smoothly that there was no break at all, no quarrel with Lucinda, no public scandal. He went often to dine with the two ladies. He made as much use of the services of the competent Mr. Fogg as he had ever done. But this was the first time since he had changed the locality of his bed and board that the Poxwell sisters had come to the Theatre and been actually present at a scene where he played vis-à-vis with Tossty. When the curtain came down on this first scene, which though such a short one, was followed by a long interval of nearly a quarter-of-an-hour, Mrs. Cobbold talked rapidly to her sister. She was persuading her to give up all thought of returning to Half-Way House. When she paused to take breath an observer would have been startled by her expression, which was sinister beyond anything that an ordinary onlooker could possibly analyze. Dr. Brush himself had begun in recent months to wonder whether in delving into this woman’s secret life and humouring her morbidities, he was not practising vivisection upon her rather than psychiatry.

Mrs. Cobbold was really unusual in the subtlety of her art of playing a She-Iago. She did it by self-deception. She never confessed even to herself, what she was doing. Her intellect was forever being tricked, most elaborately tricked, by the complicated perversions of her motives. She was forever telling herself morbidly sadistic stories, which, as she grew older and more jaded, became almost mad, but her grand engine for poisoning life, for undermining life, for bringing life down and crumbling it to pieces, was *the art of indirection.* She was the most indirectly malicious talker ever known in Weymouth, where talk, as in other fashionable places, was not always guileless. And she followed it up. She persecuted. She tormented. She ran people to earth. The only thing that at all excused her present wickedness in regard to her sister was that Hortensia did not really, not in her *deepest* nerves, dislike the situation! If she couldn't be trampled upon by Cattistock, she could at least be trodden upon by Mrs. Cobbold.

But grossly crude would it be to maintain — as in her breathing-spaces from her present masterpiece of indirection, over her husband's acting and Tossty's looks, she held up her proud, high forehead and gazed upon "Le Néant" like a blood-satisfied Medusa, that Mrs. Cobbold was entirely evil. Some mysterious life-impulse, bursting up from some crack in the marbly floor of her Mephistophelean beatitude, was always emitting flashes of a superb and defiant courage. Had the whole human race, in the circles of some immense Colosseum gathered together to see Mrs. Cobbold executed it is certain that she would never have blinked an eyelid, or lapsed one hair's breadth from her fortitude.

The subterranean struggle between herself and Jerry was of a very peculiar nature. She had inherited from old Poxwell a terrible vitality, a life-zest which, though it took an evil form, was never undermined by any feeling of futility. Jerry on the contrary was a pessimist to the bottom. Life to him was one long wearisome farce and he had only married her because to play with morbid humanity kept him alive.

As she sat now, gazing into that curtain before her and *through* it, gazing at the shops in St. Thomas' Street and *through* them, gazing at the old King's Statue, at the Jubilee Clock, at St. John's Spire, at the far-away White Horse and *through* them all, the beautiful sister by her side, as she stole glance after wandering glance at her profile, was struck, for all her familiarity, just as Perdita had been, by the woman's almost mystical air of dedication. The truth perhaps might have been, though such an interpretation had never occurred to Dr. Brush, that when with all her falsity she felt she was "dedicated", it was because she *was* dedicated! That all her morbid sadism and her malicious persecutions were the horrible scum and loathsome surface-froth of a crashing Power, that was destined one day to emerge and astonish all was not an impossible hypothesis...

The Theatre-attendants at the Regent that autumn were all of them lads, and it was no other than young Witchit who now, in his neat uniform, presented himself to the attention of Mrs. Cobbold and Mrs. Lily.

"What is it?" enquired Lucinda, who sat next the aisle, as the boy offered her a folded piece of paper.

"I don't know, lady" said young Witchit. "Mr. Cobbold gave it to me for you."

She took it in her hands — those plump, exquisitely-shaped hands with such short fingers — and opened it hurriedly, while young Witchit stole sidelong glances at the alluring Corregio-like sweetness, so extremely provocative to boys of his type, of her lovely sister.

"Thank you, sonny," she said. "There's no answer." Then she turned to Hortensia. "Let's go out into the foyer, 'Tensia, and have a cigarette. They're not nearly ready yet. Jerry's always so slow. And with that stupid, animal woman—"

They went out together, and it was at the end of the corridor, where they could sit down, that she told her the news.

"Dogberry has gone abroad with that pretty Wishing Well girl — you know? — who had an affair with Ballard and was engaged to Magnus. He's taken her to Italy."

It was then that Mrs. Cobbold discovered that she had not understood her pleasure-loving, easy-going, undomestic sister as completely as she fancied. She had prepared herself for one of those scenes that had recurred again and again between them since their childhood — false sympathy on *her* part and exaggerated abandonment on Hortensia's. Such, however, was not the manner in which things turned out today. What Hortensia did was to burst into a merry laugh.

"Poor old Magnus!" she cried. "What a face he will go about with, for weeks and weeks!" Her cheeks grew flushed with her merriment. "But it's Sippy who'll look the biggest fool! Why it's a regular Comedy of Errors; that kid fooling Magnus, and now fooled himself by Dogberry! Well done, old man! Well done!"

And her clear, rippling, silvery laughter rang in lovely peals down the corridor. Such can be the nature of a sympathetic sister that it must now be confessed that Mrs. Cobbold began a little to recover her good spirits. There seemed to be a chance that this laughter was a prelude to a fit of hysterics. But not the faintest sign of anything of the sort showed itself! Mrs. Lily's amusement at Sippy's discomfiture seemed to completely outweigh any personal emotion. The pretty woman kept chuckling over it. She seemed to rule out her own relations with Cattistock altogether. When she wasn't thinking of Sippy she was apparently thinking of Magnus. Just for one second, however, Mrs. Cobbold did look at her closely while a sudden most startling thought, like a flying wing, just dipped into the current of her consciousness.

"Has *any other man,"* she said to herself, "taken the place of Cattistock?"

But the Second Act of the performance had now begun and the sisters rose from their seat, threw away their cigarettes, and re-entered the darkened house. That dipping wing touched Mrs. Cobbold's mind just once more and then departed.

"If there is another man," this fleeting thought whispered, *"Who is he?"*

The contrast between the reception of the news of Cattisock's elopement by the lady who was to have been his wife and the girl who *had* been his paramour was certainly striking. Neither Jerry nor Tissty and Tossty had anything to do in the last act of the programme, and Jerry was himself rather amused to see that his wife and sister-in-law intended to sit it out to the end. It is even possible he was a little piqued, for in his opinion the conclusion of any performance without himself and the Radipole girls was less than nothing. At any rate, before he had any idea how upset Tissty would be, he had in his general desire to propitiate the sisters, sent young Witchit again with a request that they come round to his private office. This was a most pleasant room with several large book-shelves that were much mellower and more scholarly in appearance than any in the rooms at High House, and here it was his invariable custom to take a cup of tea, after the play, with both Tissty and Tossty.

But Tissty seemed broken-hearted. The fair, passionate, peasant dancer had come of late to love this rich descendant of peasants. Of all the men she had ever known Cattistock alone seemed able to satisfy her insatiable sensual desires. Sensuality had of late transformed itself into an authentic passion, and the flight of the man without a word simply prostrated her.

They had to get a substitute for her principal act, though she did dress and come on the stage. It was on the sofa in Jerry's office, a more comfortable couch than any in the girls' dressing-room, that Tissty lay now when the others came in, white and death-like and with her eyes tight shut. The other two still had on their stage-attire, but the girl on the couch had changed into her ordinary clothes.

"Don't 'ee mind too much, little Tiss! Don't 'ee, don't 'ee mind too much, my precious darling!"

Thus, on her knees beside her, in her gorgeous Gentian-blue tights and her belt of black ostrich feathers, the agitated Tossty gave vent to emotions that astonished even Jerry, though he was so well cognizant of the close link between the two. The girls had long ago been careful to unlearn their old Dorset dialect, and it sounded queer to Jerry to catch this "don't 'ee! don't 'ee!" in his Regent's office.

Tea was produced for the benefit of Tissty, without waiting for the appearance of the Poxwell sisters, but when the ladies did finally come in, it was this unfortunate collapse of the younger Radipole girl, that precipitated the crisis. The crisis, Mrs. Cobbold prayed, was for the nonce confined to her own consciousness, but it was of such a nature, resulting from so startling a revelation of her husband's duplicity, that it remained a serious question with her whether she had or had not the wit to conceal the effect it had upon her. It was Jerry's concern over Tossty's agitation, as the dark-skinned dancer in her fantastical costume kept flinging herself down by her sister's side that betrayed the shameless intimacy which existed between himself and Mrs. Lily. A glance and a touch between them — and the cat was out of the bag! Situations not a whit more explosive can go on, *have* gone on, without any of the parties involved being a penny the worse or a scrap the wiser. And so no doubt would this situation have gone on, in beautifully directed equilibrium, under the head of a master manipulator, if it had not been for the unpredictable vagaries of authentic passion — Tissty's for Cattistock and Tossty's for Tissty — breaking the rules of this school of artful gallantry.

Jerry must have felt that the Fates had turned against him, against all these meticulous proppings up of the Status Quo that resembled "a shining Pleasure-Dome with caves of ice" for he sank back in his mediaeval episcopal chair — smuggled in from that "Etruria" to which Curly was now whirling in an express-train — folded his hands over his knee and ransacked the utmost armoury of his spirit. He was dressed in a strange harlequin garb, of his own invention, that answered Tossty's blue tights with shimmering silver and pale rose, and the play of his mobile features, as he gathered himself together for the one exposure of his life that he really dreaded, had tragic-humorous reversions from high confidence to abysmal desperation, such as he had never equalled in any of his most brilliant stage performances! With one part of his subtle intelligence he was still searching for ways of escape, but with another, much deeper down, he was struggling to tap some ultimate acceptance of worldly exposure, some spring, some out-jetting of non-human defiance, that would enable him to re-create his life-illusion when all his elaborate "caves of ice" came crashing down, or melting, rather, about his head!

It is queer what odd little things come to a man's aid at such a toppling over of the spiritual towers of personality. What Jerry thought of now, with the part of his swift-moving intelligence that already accepted defeat, was that pebble in the pocket of the Jobber of which rumours had been filling the Weymouth taverns throughout this eventful year.

"Men and women are all the same," he thought. "They all want to live on the other side of the Moon, while they get glory for sweating in the Sun. It's the salt of our Sun-Sweat that turns our stomachs! If she finds me out, I'll change into the Jobber's pebble; and let her hate and let the other love, and let the waves roll over me as they will! No living person has caught me yet. Down pebble! Down soul of Jerry! Down to the bottom of the world! I'll smile... and smile... and smile — and be a pebble!"

The clown in the harlequin's dress was justified in his worst prediction. Mrs. Cobbold's fingers soon after she took her seat in her husband's office began dallying ominously with the gardenias in her bosom. Her eyes, having once seen in one single moment of emotional revelation during that agitation over the girl on the couch, *who it was* who had taken Cattistock's place, looked through them all, through the book-lined walls of that pleasant room, through the shops of St. Thomas' Street, through the old King's Statue, through the Spire of St. John's, and out, away, through the White Horse too, into Le Néant!

"How clever he's been!" she thought. "So there's nothing between him and the dark girl; probably there never was. It's to meet 'Tensia he's taken those rooms in Sark House! And it's for him, all for him, not for the game with me, she's remained with us. Oh, Father, oh, Father, did you suckle us both then, when Mother died, with that bulging vein in your neck?"

On moved the hands of the Jubilee Clock. St. John's Spire murmured to its movement:

"Piety and Respectability will never perish from Weymouth Sands while I point upwards!"

The old King's Statue murmured to its movement:

"Honour your Father and your Mother that your days may be long by Weymouth Sands!"

The Harbour Bridge murmured to its movement:

"The tide rises, the tide falls;" while the clock itself, as its bowels rumbled with its effort at articulation, ticked out the words:

"Wet Sand... Dry Sand... Wet Sand... Dry Sand."

Perdita did not take very long in explaining to Magnus over their cup of tea in the Refreshment Room of Portland Station, how it was that she had made no sign of life all these long months. As he looked at her there, sitting by his side, this Companion of Mrs. Cobbold's that he had *not* met that winter day when she first arrived, he saw clearly enough without her telling him, why she had made no sign of life! She was indeed, he thought, even now, like a departed Cimmerian spirit, come back from among those "powerless heads of the dead".

"Yes," she told him, in her low, husky scrannel-pipe voice, "I had a bad illness after I got back. I didn't cross at once when I left him. I waited to see. But they all said he hadn't changed; they all said he still kept — you know about that I expect, Mr. Muir? — *that stone* in his pocket, and so I went back. It was after he had been to see my Aunt. But I couldn't... bear it. It was... too much... after... being with him... so I got ill. And I've only just — got well!" she added with a weak attempt at a lively smile.

She had left her bag at the pier, it transpired, and crossing the ferry had gone straight to Cove House. Mrs. Trot was alone, but from her she had learned that "the Master", as the woman called him, had got a mania for staying whole days and nights, of late, up at the Gadgets', at the place they call the Head.

"And that's where *you* are heading for now, I take it?" he murmured, glancing at her wasted figure and death-pale cheeks.

She nodded, pushed away the uneaten Bath bun on her plate, and finished her cup of tea. Magnus surveyed the few crumbs that were left on his own plate.

“She wins,” he thought, “I lose. But I am the one who can swallow Bath buns.”

She looked so weak and ill that he insisted on their taking a taxi.

“But send me off,” he muttered, “if you’d rather go alone.”

But she had not been using her instinct all this while without detecting a heart that had a fossil in it, a hidden petrifaction, of nine hours’ eternity, a very ancient stone, shaped like an Ammonite, and yet it could shoot forth now and again, from where it lay, arrows of hurting that were tipped with mother-of-pearl! And she could not find it in *her* heart, for all its wild beating, to send this unhappy-eyed man away.

They had nearly reached the little town of Easton when Perdita suddenly cried out to the driver to stop. There before them, toiling up the steep road with a heavy, covered basket in her hand, went the unmistakable figure of Gipsy May. Magnus got out and saluted her. As usual her rambling speech debouched down every possible vista of information, except the one that would explain her presence there. He persuaded her at length, however, to enter their taxi for she admitted that her basket was heavy.

“Rowena’s in it,” she explained.

And, sure enough, a low “meow” from the confined animal witnessed to the truth of this explanation at least. She indicated presently that she had thought she might as well “look round S. C.’s old place, while she was up here”, and she seemed well-satisfied when Perdita, as if too weak to struggle against any jolt to her purpose, feebly requested the driver to take them to Last House. To herself Perdita thought:

“The Powers have kept us alive. I am on my way to him. I *can’t* be unkind to a living soul today.”

They stopped before that forbidding front-entrance to Last House. She and Magnus both stared at the forlorn chain with its closed padlock. The chain seemed to say to them: “Go away! Go away!” and there were bits of paper and shrivelled dead leaves, evidently blown in there from the road, that were also voluble.

“Gone,” they said: “Gone, gone, gone — never to come back!”

But Gipsy May resolutely got out and placed the basket with Rowena in it carefully on the ground.

“You may come with me for a minute if you want to!” she remarked proudly, with the air of a princess in sight of her ancestral drawbridge.

Telling the driver to wait in her feeble straw-like voice, Perdita gave Magnus a pitiful little smile. They both followed the Gipsy, Magnus offering, but without success, to take the basket from her.

“She’ll think she’s left!” the woman said, clutching the handle and giving him a fierce look.

When they stood, all three, the basket resting on the flagstones, in front of the kitchen-door, Magnus and Perdita caught the woman’s cadaverous face, with its roving black eyes, turned away from them towards Weymouth. Not the absent tenant of Last House himself could have addressed some unseen object of superstition more automatically than Gipsy May did now.

“Enjoy theeself with her, then, Fisherman! Enjoy theeself, Fisherman!” they heard her mutter, but the November winds in the dead raspberry-canes of that forlorn garden carried her words west instead of east.

But she now produced a big iron key from somewhere about her person, and as if the fact that she was to be alone with her cat in a moment had given her volubility she turned to them both.

“Those lawyers are no good,” she announced confidentially and even gaily. “Me cards were right! The Man with Two Staves was right.”

Had it been, as perhaps for all *they* knew it was, her own death that had been predicted, she still would have been pleased that the ancient Tarot wisdom was justified.

“That wicked young man came,” she said, “with a policeman, and turned us out of house.”

“Wasn’t Loder and Crouch managing things for you?” interjected Magnus. “That’s what Caddie Water told me,” he added, looking at Perdita.

At the name of Caddie, the Gipsy made a curious grimace, that was neither derisive nor pitiful.

“Her coffin’ll be a little one,” she said quietly, *“and* a pretty one. Me cards have seen ‘un where ‘un lies.”

“But Ballard had no right—”

Gipsy May gave him a look as old as all the sorrowful wisdom of her tribe. She didn’t deign to answer. That anyone should talk of “right” in a world ruled by chance and the devil, in a world understood only by “me cards”, struck her mind as the height of simplicity.

“And Lal Zed be gone to work for Jones,” she threw out, as if this event followed naturally from her previous allusion to Caddie’s coffin.

“Are you going to live here, then?” enquired Perdita faintly, looking nervously round for an available seat, for she felt as if her legs had suddenly become floating clouds.

Meow! came sharply from the basket, and Gipsy May picked up this covered receptacle of her only faithful friend.

“She wants Lal Zed to help with she’s Toby,” mocked the Gipsy, in a voice as high-pitched as the wind in the very key-hole into which she now prepared to thrust her big key.

“You shan’t have no Toby chasin’ you, shall you, Rowena?”

They watched her in silence as she went in. When she was well inside and had put the cat down she gazed at them through the door-chink, making that aperture too narrow for anything human to enter. Through this crack they could see her bright eyes above her hollow cheeks gleaming with satisfaction. She was like a triumphant elf, peering out of Child Rowland's Tower.

"Her lips look red as blood," thought Perdita, wondering whether she herself was going to faint.

"I can't wait here any longer," she suddenly said aloud, though she imagined she was only thinking this thought. "He may have gone when we get there."

The idea that, after all, they might reach the Gadgets' too late was so unbearable that with every drop of her life-force driven by sheer willpower into her tottering legs she started walking round the house. The world was just beginning to turn into a rocking, heaving, universal blackness when she found the driver was pouring some fiery drink from a little flask down her throat. This treatment brought her quickly round and her heart did the rest...

"Yes. He be in bedroom, in thik same wold room thee remembers mighty well, belike."

It was Ellen herself who thus greeted them as they passed in, under the indecipherable lineaments of the ancient sign-board.

"He ain't bed-rid nor nothing," she went on. "This be 'Melia and this be Celia and this be Sue — good girls, all on 'em, though Sue do take after her Dad, poor bustling maid!"

The "good girls" gathered round Magnus in the bar — Mr. Gadget having gone to Weymouth — while Ellen led, supported, and indeed almost carried the visitor upstairs.

"Will it... *hurt*... my going straight in?

“Not a God’s splinter, dearie! Aren’t you his life-blood? Aren’t you the marrow of his bones? In with ‘ee, for Christ’s love! We’ll take care of your friend.”

The romantic woman almost ran downstairs so that the lovers might meet in peace. This whole event was to Ellen the greatest that had happened in that house since she lay in the pains over her firstborn. She caught Sue listening — just as her father would have listened — at the foot of the stairs, and she indignantly dragged the child into the bar-room calling to ‘Melia to keep her there, while she herself went into the kitchen.

“Perdita!”

He leapt up from the bed. He had only his vest and his drawers on. His other clothes lay tossed about the room, and the room itself — for they were all afraid of him in that house — was like a place that shipwrecked people had slept in after escaping from the waves. There was not one single second of awkwardness, of embarrassment, not even one of heart-beating tension, or of fixed, staring, awestruck relief, or of frozen, spiritual ecstasy between them.

“Skald!” and the breath of her weak voice went wailing between her teeth, as if her whole frame had become a thin bag-pipe against his ribs.

“By Dum!” and as they pressed their bodies and their faces together they were beyond any definite kisses, just as they were beyond astonishment, surprise, thankfulness, happiness even. He could taste the salt of her tears, pouring, pouring, from what seemed like the whole surface of her face, and she could feel herself rising and falling, up and down, on the crests and troughs of his immense, slow, shaking sobs. It was as if they were not just human lovers, not just sweethearts finding each other again. It was as if they were animals, old, weak, long-hunted animals, whose love was literally

the love of bone for bone, skeleton for skeleton, not any mere spiritual affinity, not any mere sexual passion.

Skeletons, literally, they both were! His face was positively ghastly in its disfigurement, in its tattered raggedness, and hers, though, her features being less pronounced, it showed less emphatically, was the face of the dead come to life.

"By Dum!*"*... He lifted her up at last, clean off the floor. This he did while his sobs were still heaving against her body and his mouth was still contorted with crying. With an infinite, crooning, snarling, growling tenderness, like a lioness with her first whelp, he lifted her up, till her hair, loosened by their embrace, fell in wisps and swathes, and then finally shook itself free, as he swung her about, till it hung straight down.

"Put... me... down... Skald!" she gasped at last. "I'm too heavy... you'll hurt yourself doing this!"

It is true he *was* gasping for breath when he obeyed her and laid her down on the bed. Here he sank on his knees on the floor, by the bedside, one heavy hand covering her entire face and the other holding her feet, while he pressed his forehead against her navel. He remained like this for such a long time, while into her nostrils stole the smell of his hand — which, unlike the mad King's did not so much "smell of mortality" as of the smoke of driftwood and the bitter stalks of fennel — that she fancied at last that in the reaction from his storm of feeling he had fallen asleep.

Magnus was not such a daring tippler of the elder girl's Meliodka as Sylvanus had been, but he amused them by the wry faces he made as he sipped the famous drink. Celia, too, he delighted by being ready to read aloud to them all from out of her ballad-book. All would have gone well in this, as in the case of the drink, had not some restless demon of misadventure put it into the head of little Sue to ask to be the one to choose what he should read. Had Magnus been as well versed in old ballads as he was in Latin and Greek, he would have sheered off at the opening words, for he would have known what he was in for, but on he went, and his voice rose and fell feelingly enough with that sorrowful lilt till he came to the last line.

“Whan cockle shells turn siller bells,
And mussels grow on every tree,
When frost and snaw sall warm us aw’
Then sall my love prove true to me.”

At the last line the unfortunate man’s voice broke in spite of all he could do; but it was the restless Sue, the one who had been responsible for putting him to such a test, who paid the heaviest price. Sue Gadget suddenly felt as if all the waves of the sea did not contain water enough to wash out the pity and trouble and pain and weariness of being alive in this world. Like many another practical young woman, living anywhere between Brunswick Terrace and Old Castle Road, little Sue found out her womanhood when she least expected it.

Magnus* voice trembled, thinking of Curly, but when Sue rushed out of the house and turned her face to the Sea-Serpent on the Sign, crying out to it as to the Ancient of Days, “Oh, why was I born, why was I ever born?” she was thinking of no particular man, or boy either, who had turned from her. She was thinking of nothing *in particular.* But thinking of nothing, or thinking of something, she became at this moment the mouthpiece of that motiveless, causeless, non-human grief in the world, that comes on the wind, that rises and sinks on the sea, and that seems older and more tragic than all our human agitations. Even while poor little Sue was still out there, consoling herself in thinking that she had never seen the Sea-Serpent’s eyes so alive, Perdita came downstairs.

“Have you got a fairly large pocket, Mr. Muir?” she said.

Magnus stared at her, and very seriously began removing various objects from his left-hand pocket to his right.

“Pretty large,” he replied. “Is it a present for Mrs. Cobbold?”

Then, while ‘Melia and Celia looked on in astonishment, she handed him the stone which had been in the Jobber’s pocket so long.

“No,” she said and the words seemed to come to her by some sudden inspiration. “It’s for my old friend, Mr. Gaul. It will keep the Philosophy of Representation from blowing away!”

THE END

Maiden Castle (1936)

In 1934, after nearly thirty years of living in America, Powys, alongside his long-term companion, Phyllis Playter, decided to relocate to Britain. One reason for this move was the author’s increasingly dire financial situation: the libel lawsuit he lost combined with mediocre book sales and extravagant spending habits meant that maintaining his lifestyle in America was becoming difficult. He believed he could live a more comfortable life in Britain with his earnings; he sold ‘Phudd Bottom’ and sailed home, initially residing in Dorset, before settling in Corwen, North Wales in 1935.

Maiden Castle was first published in the USA in 1936 by Simon & Schuster and in the UK by Cassell in 1937. It is the final book in the author’s ‘Wessex Novels’ series, which is set in the town of Dorchester, Dorset and derives its title from one of the largest and most complex Iron Age hillforts in Europe, Maiden Castle — constructed over 2,400 years ago. Powys began writing the novel in Dorset in August 1934 and completed it in Corwen the following summer. The book centres on the complex and awkward relationship between a middle-aged historical novelist, Dud Noman and a young female circus performer he encounters, Wizzie Ravelston. Powys drew on aspects of his own personality to create his protagonist and was inspired by elements of Phyllis’s character in his composition of Wizzie.

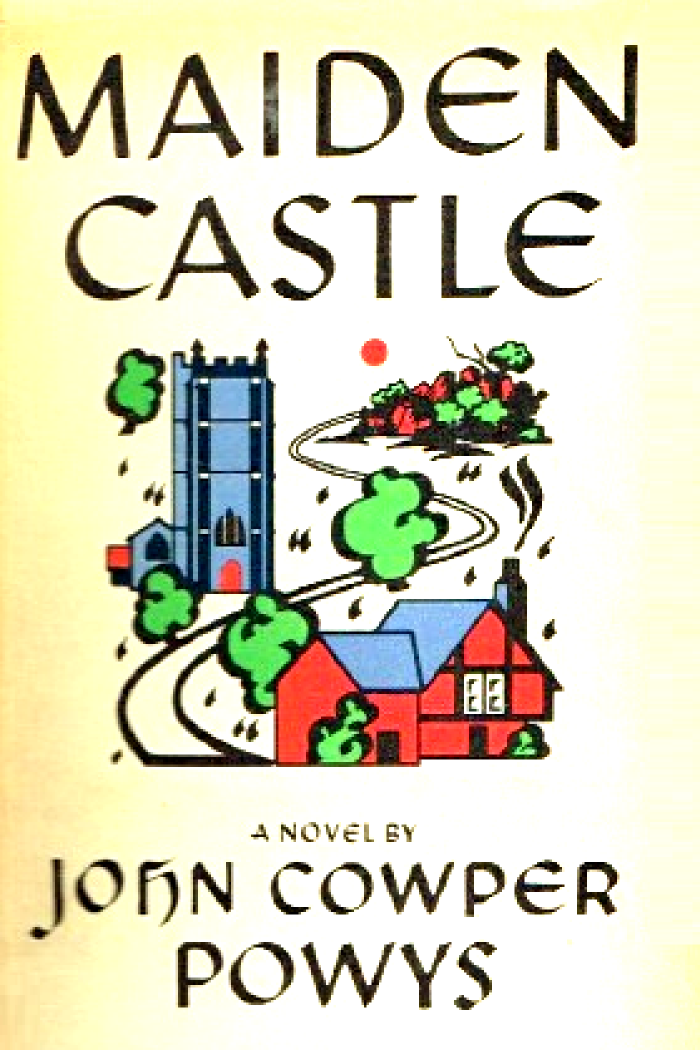
MAIDEN CASTLE
A NOVEL BY
JOHN COWPER POWYS

The first edition

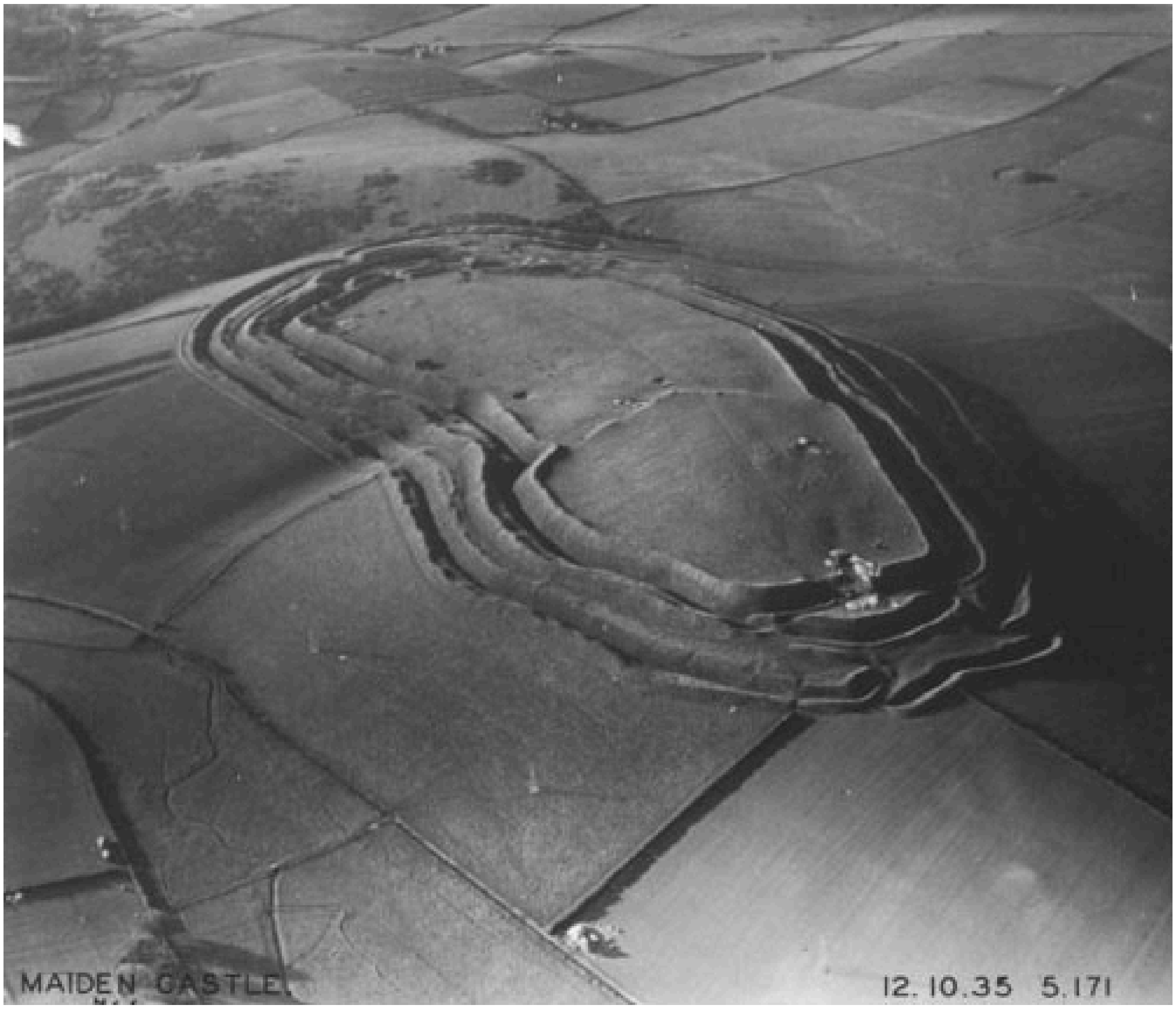
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Maiden Castle, an Iron Age hillfort in Dorset

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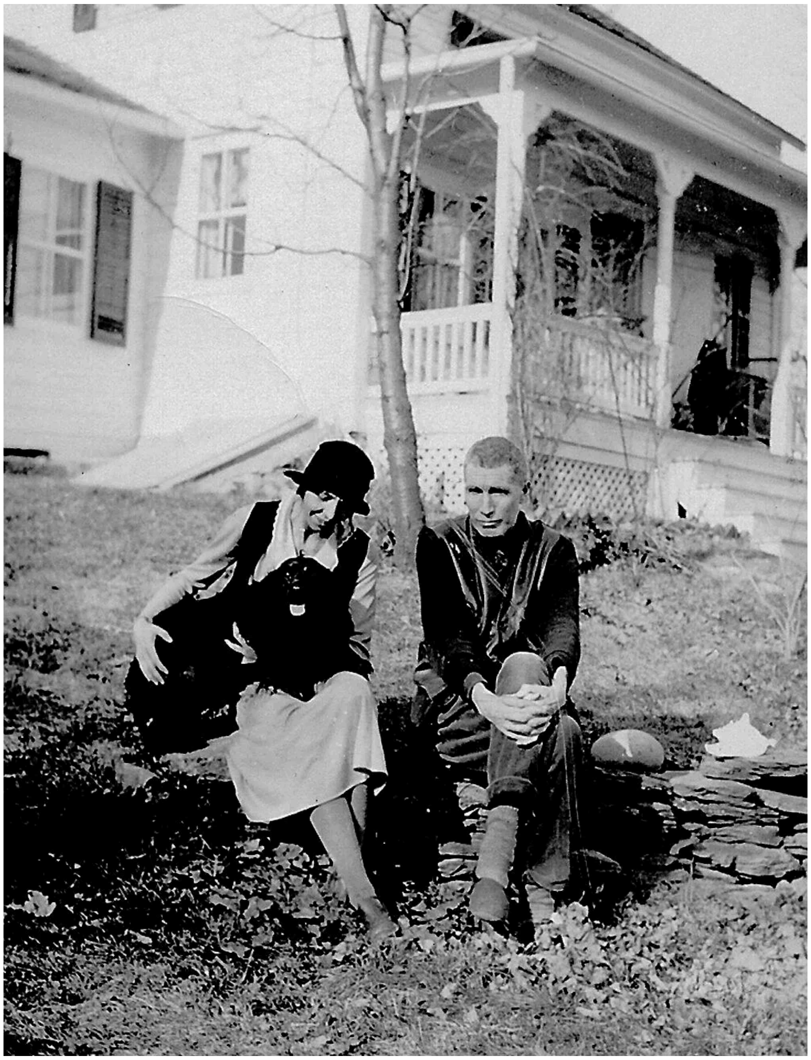

Powys and Phyllis Playter, c. 1930

Ar yr echwydd ethyw gwall!
A vydd vyth uryen arall?

CHAPTER 1. All Souls' Day

THE MORNING OF All Souls, November the second, opened in a not very remote year of Our Lord, for the town of Dorchester, with a sunrise out of a clear sky.

But such complete freedom from clouds at that early hour was not a sign of a day without rain. As the sun rose over the roof of Fordington Church, experts in the weather predicted at once what sort of day it was to be. It was to be what is called a pet day, that is to say a day that must quickly be made the most of, a pettish day, a petulant day, a day prepared to fall into a pet the moment any atmospheric event occurred that threatened the obscuring of its glory.

The old thoroughfare called High East Street, descending the incline from the centre of the town to the London Road, bestirred itself slowly, as befitted the dignity of its long history, to meet this beautiful but treacherous morning. One by one the great chimneys above the old brick roofs, many of them fronted with massive slabs of stone, sent forth their smoke. One by one the prentice-boys appeared, opening the shop doors and sweeping the pavement. Milk-carts made their pleasant clatter, while the sound of the hooves of the horses that drew these reassuring equipages, echoing between the walls, seemed to gather the centuries together with a familiar continuity of unbroken tradition that was not disturbed when an occasional bus or car came down the street.

The homely sense of a recurrent satisfaction of old human necessities found another expression in the pleasant chiming of the clock in the tower of the Corn-Exchange situated at the head of the street, a chiming that seemed in its perennial cheerfulness to purge the very mystery of time of its tragic burden and divide the hours to the tune of some secret knowledge of its own that good hope, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, still abode at the bottom.

Under the sloping roof of one of the older and taller houses on the northern side of the street a man of about forty lay listening to all these early morning sounds, lay watching the yellow sunlight flow like liquid gold over the various objects that surrounded him. Fully awake was this man, even while many of his fellows in High East Street were still unconscious of the horses' hooves, of the chiming of the clock, of the passing of the buses and cars.

This man now raised his knees under his bed-clothes, gathered his pillows under his head, and set himself to stare intently at the rose-patterned paper which covered his sloping ceiling and at the massive whitewashed beams which intersected the angle of its descent. These beams took the shape, as the man stared at them from his bed, of an elongated and distorted cross.

To the right of this cross a small deeply gabled window with a broad wooden sill overlooked, on the opposite side of the street, the roof of a cheerful stationer's shop, above which could be seen a couple of tall elms that lifted up against the sky three or four ancient rook nests, whose adaptability to the distant nesting-season seemed on that particular morning to be the subject of a clamorous investigation by a group of black-winged birds.

The writing-table of the man on the bed stood in front of this deeply embrasured window, while the whole width of the wall from window to door was filled with a series of capacious cupboards solidly built into the masonry of the room.

To the man’s left was a small ancient-looking fire-place, full at this moment of cold cinders and powdery ashes, while between this fire-place and the wall to the left of the man’s head, where stood his chest-of-drawers and his mirror, was a shallow alcove filled by an overcrowded bookcase reaching from floor to ceiling.

The room was homely and unpretentious, but it could not be called lacking, as the morning light flooded it, in certain pleasing qualities. There was, for instance, a reddish rug in front of the fire-place, that although very worn gave the hearth a welcoming air; and several small rugs in front of the cupboards had a cheerful look, while the cupboards themselves, in their old-fashioned mouldings and panellings, endowed the place with a certain tone of old-world dignity.

The most agreeable aspect of it was the wall-paper, which was covered with little pink roses, though there was one small spot where, as if there had been no more roses in the world, a fragment of a much older paper hung disconsolately in tattered shreds.

After making use of those whitewashed cross-beams as a background to his first waking thoughts, the man lowered his uplifted knees and concentrated his gaze on the foot of the bed. This bed was clearly a very ancient structure. It was large and massive, but its bed-posts didn’t match each other. One of them was lacking in something which its fellow possessed. This something was a grotesque head of heraldic carving, and it was in the ambiguity of this object, an ambiguity rendered still more obscure by the manner in which the narrow stream of sun-motes from the window passed it untouched, that the man’s cogitation was now absorbed.

For the thousandth time he asked himself to what conceivable body could that extraordinary head have been attached. Was it a lion’s head, a bird’s head, a dragon’s head, or a human head? Or had it, as happens sometimes with ecclesiastical gargoyles, elements of each one of these natures, of the bird's, of the beast's, and of the man's? What he was so intensely wondering just then with regard to this heraldic head was whether it was really possible, as he had been so often assured, that its companion, its mate, its fellow, was hidden away in one of the many old curiosity shops of this unique town.

The bed had been the property of his mother, and it was connected in some way with his mother's lover, that mysterious personage to whose existence the woman had only twice in her life, and then on very confused and agitating occasions, made the faintest allusion. The Woman from Wales — for this had always been the way his supposed father had expressed any momentary grievance against her — must have found in this mysterious head some token, some symbol of her concealed past; and the head itself, whatever it carried of old, dark, heraldic, or even mythological significance, had been the object round which, more than round anything else, the brooding imagination of his childhood, playing with the notions of both good and evil, had constantly hovered.

There was good in it, for *him* anyhow — else how could his mother have made so much of it? — but there was obviously evil in it too. What most of all he seemed to detect in it was simply *desire*, that Faustian desire to penetrate and enjoy — even in forbidden directions — the huge mystery of the cosmos. And yet, for all that, it had become a fancy of his that to his mental dalliances in that bed with the spirit of his dead wife, who had died a virgin, this head was in some queer way inimical.

And there was something else too about this relic that closely affected his life. This monstrous fetish of the Woman from Wales was mixed up vaguely in his mind with a singular reluctance of his, the reluctance to have a name!

It has not often happened, even in the most primitive times, for a man to have no name. Such, however, by a singular concatenation of circumstances, was actually the lot of this lean, hook-nosed, clean-shaven individual who lay staring pensively at his bed's head.

There had been, indeed, throughout all his forty years, only two modifications of this singular anonymity. The first of these occurred during his infancy and gave him a substitute for a Christian name. As a baby this tall man had been accustomed at frequent intervals to give vent to the babbled syllables 'Dud-Dud', and it was not long ere both his mother and himself began to apply to his small and querulous identity the monosyllable 'Dud'. His substitute for a surname did not attach itself to him till later — not, in fact, till he reached years of discretion — and was entirely his own choice.

After an agitating domestic scene when he had drawn from his mother the disturbing fact that Aaron Smith, the organist in a West Country town at some distance from Dorchester, was not his real father, he had refused to use his simple patronymic, and, casting about for some substitute for an ordinary name, hit upon the appellation 'No-man', and henceforth always signed himself, and indeed thought of himself, as 'Dud No-man' or 'D. No-man'.

In using this name that was no name, he had not been thinking of Odysseus's encounter with the Cyclops, for he was at that time unacquainted with Homer. The phrase had come upon him, in his sulky reaction against his parents, as an inspiration of pure misanthropy.

This was only the second morning of Dud No-man's life in Dorchester. He had spent the previous day unpacking his books and arranging his furniture. Yesterday night there had been nothing in his attic except this ancient oak bed, but now he was able to survey with satisfaction his snug quarters, and to ponder with pleasure upon the familiar domestic utensils which awaited him in his tiny kitchen across the small landing, along with a white-enamelled sink and an unpretentious gas-stove.

He had already discovered that this little kitchen, on a winter's day, was extremely chilly, but he made up his mind that independently of closing its door against the draughty staircase he would light the oven of his stove and get the place thoroughly warm on all the occasions he had to make use of it.

Dud No-man had been lucky enough to get two historical novels published, and though their sales had not been large they had been enough, combined with an occasional article on some kindred subject, to supply his needs. He was thus able — though he had inherited nothing from his parents — to live an independent life, and he had taken this attic in Dorchester with a view to gathering materials for his work in a region charged with so many layers of suggestive antiquity.

His thoughts, as he watched the yellow sun-rays from above the opposite roof strike first one object and then another in his little room, began now to wander from the heraldic monstrosity at his bed's head. He thought of his putative father, the music-absorbed organist, and of his silent, equally absorbed mother, whose everlasting pleasure it was to be perpetually embroidering, in carefully selected coloured wools, flamboyant covers for everything that lent itself to be covered.

He had only kept one of these covered objects, a small cushioned ottoman, which now occupied a place to the right of his attic hearth where there was just room for it. In this ottoman he kept the manuscripts, written in his own vigorous hand, of both his lengthy novels, and he had retained this specimen of his mother's devotion to her wools because she had worked upon it the picture of a stately manorial gate, ornamented by *two* heraldic heads identical with the one now before him.

One of his earliest memories had been of his mother working at this ottoman-cover, and since she always kept it in her own room the sight of it brought back her reserved personality more distinctly to him than anything else — except this bed of hers on which he now lay — that he could possibly have preserved from the past.

But No-man's thoughts, as he lay there enjoying the morning sounds that came to him from the street, did not remain long with his mother. They moved to the figure of his young wife. All three of them — his parents and his wife — had died in one of those virulent epidemics of influenza that swept over England at a certain date.

No-man had only lived with his wife for a year — or rather *she* had only lived with the three of them for a year, for at that time none of his writings had been accepted — before this disease carried her off, but she was still, after a lapse of ten years, by far the most powerful influence in his life. It was not that he had ever loved her, this girl that their neighbours called 'young Mrs Smith', with a normal love — for it was poor Dud's misfortune to be rendered nervously incapable of consummating his marriage — but his bride's startling beauty and singular character had made a deeper impression upon him than anything in his life; and for all these ten years Mona's personality had stood between him and all other emotional impressions. Now that it was too late, now that she had died a virgin, the vision of that beautiful naked body, ready to yield itself and yet so terrifyingly immaculate, had come to absorb every amorous instinct he possessed.

All feelings of that sort, such as now and then were stirred in him by casual encounters, invariably ran, like subservient tributaries, into this main stream. The glimpse of a lovely ankle, the turn of a soft neck, the swing of a girl's figure as she walked, if such things were ever dwelt upon in his thoughts, were always caught up and transformed and preserved in his memory to make part of his enjoyment of that terrifyingly beautiful body.

He had decided to come to Dorchester for several reasons, but as he pondered over his motives now, he tried to idealize them into a longing to solve, if he only might, on the spot where his own dead lay, the ultimate meaning of death itself. The phrase ‘where his own dead lay’ was already a pregnant one to No-man, for, living as he had done for the last ten years almost entirely in thoughts about these two women, he had come by degrees to link up his whole conception of our dim human chances of immortality with their two figures.

If our survival of death, he had come to feel, depended on the intensity with which we live our individual life, the intensity with which we grasp life’s most symbolic essences, then it was the Woman from Wales who was more likely to dodge annihilation, whereas if our chance depended on the power we develop for sinking our individuality in others’ lives, why then it was the dead Mona who had the better start.

He shifted his limbs uneasily and crossed his hands behind his head. He began wrestling in his mind with the old insoluble question. Already a premonitory cloud had materialized for a minute between the sun and the town, tossing against his window, ere it went its way, a spattering of thin rain.

‘ “Dorchester” means’, he thought, ‘ “the town of water”.’ And then he thought, ‘How queer that sorrow and sacrifice in men and women should draw water from behind the eye-sockets of their skulls!’

‘I haven’t cried for her once’, he thought, ‘since she died. All Souls’ Day it is! The right day for me to go to her. *Are* they gone forever, those two, or is one gone forever and the other, by some magic in her way of life, *not* gone? Why should survival of death be universal? Why shouldn't there be an art of survival, to which some souls find the clue and others not?'

And there came over him, as the sun of this pet day once more shone into his room, the old dark Homeric conception of death, with that terrifying multitude of the spirits of the dead surrounding us in their pitiful half-life and liable, on this day of their Cimmerian remembrance, when the minds of the living turn so desperately towards them, to rise thronging up, 'ethnea myria nekrōn', the myriad tribes of the dead, with a terrible cry!

But it *could not* be like that, not just like that, he told himself. Anything were better than that, even total and absolute annihilation!

Drawing up his knees again in the bed till his skeleton under his flesh assumed that huddled posture of the as yet unborn in which so many ancient bones are discovered, he now began to wonder whether it hadn't been this superhuman disinterestedness in Mona that had given her beauty that detached and unapproachable quality that used so to freeze his desire.

On this particular morning, his second morning in the place where she was buried, he caught himself in a very startling thought — the thought, namely, that in all his cerebral love-making during these years, he had furtively turned her into a *different girl*, a girl with erotic vice in her, a girl with wayward caprices and wicked moods!

Full of thoughts of this kind, thoughts that, now he had dared to let himself go, grew momently more sacrilegious, he jumped quickly out of his bed and proceeded to walk round the foot of it with the intention of closing his attic window. As he did this he lingered for a minute beside the questionable bed-post, and he seemed to catch an almost human expression upon that monstrous face, but an expression as much beyond his interpretation now as it had been in his childhood.

Dud washed and dressed more quickly than usual that morning. He was as pleased with his kitchen on the other side of the small landing as he was with his bedroom; but his head was full of various important purchases that he would have to make that day before he could consider himself really settled, and he felt impatient to get his breakfast over and go out into this unknown town.

Anyone watching Dud light the fire in his bedroom and the gas-stove in his kitchen and begin making his preparations for breakfast would have thought him extremely lucky to be able to obtain his living by something different from manual work, for it was very clear that his bony fingers, though as long and lean as the dwarfs in Scott's *Lay*, were so awkward as to seem scarcely under the control of a rational mind.

People regarded it as a wonder that his handwriting was so legible, but no doubt this was due to the intense childishness of a certain aspect of Dud's nature, his power of being transported with a pleasurable glow of pride in the accomplishment of the very smallest physical undertaking. Helpless though his bony fingers were, he derived extraordinary satisfaction from gathering up the cinders out of his grate and transferring them to a pail. Where, however, almost every day a malicious observer would have been tickled by Mr No-man's antics was when minute bits of his sponge — and his sponges remained in use till they fell to bits — were observed floating in the basin after he had sponged his face. These infinitesimal objects he always pursued with finger and thumb round and round the basin, and it was a recurrent wonder to Dud's mind why these wisps of submarine life should apparently desire so intensely *not* to be saved. He saved them by putting them into his pocket, where they mingled with indescribable fluff and vanished from the roll of recognizable objects into that obscure limbo of not-existing existence out of which all comes and into which all returns. What he saved them *from* was going down the drain-pipes into the nearest ‘cloaca maxima’.

Mr No-man got extraordinary satisfaction from lighting his fire. He made a point of having a fire in summer as well as winter — it was his one luxury — merely for the pleasure he got out of it! His fire had been literally the landscape of his heart’s desire during these ten lonely years. It had been his Lost Atlantis, his Eldorado, his Fountain of Youth, his Mountains of the Moon, his Coasts of Latium, his Urbs Beata, his ‘bed of crimson joy’. But though he derived such delight from devoted service to his fire, Dud was the worst maker of fires in Dorset. He had no notion of the natural laws that regulate this Promethean activity, and after ten years of blundering he still made the same mistakes as he had made when his mother and his wife first deserted him.

Nor was it much better — such a fool was he with his hands — in the matter of the various culinary tasks and the various kitchen utensils into a struggle with which destiny had seen fit of late to plunge him.

He had brought to Dorchester with him what pots and pans and kettles he possessed. They were not many, and they were old and dented, but he had unpacked them tenderly the day before, and now with his gas-stove lit and his kettle boiling for tea and his saucepan boiling for his eggs, as he went to and fro between the two rooms, arranging his breakfast things on a little folding table in front of the fire, he began muttering aloud — much in the manner of an aged religious recluse — and talking to his pots and pans as if they were human.

Dud had come to cherish, as a result of his researches, several strong historical prejudices. One of these was a quite personal hatred of Henry VIII. Another was a somewhat unusual animosity against the Stuart kings. And he had gratified both these hostilities by naming his kettle the Royal

Martyr, his saucepan James II, and his refuse-pail Henry VIII. Short of having kings for scullions it was gratifying to Mr No-man to see them making his tea and boiling his eggs; and it eased his rage against the destroyer of monasteries and the founder of county families to throw his tea-leaves and his egg-shells into that great belly.

For the House of Hanover, on the contrary, Dud had a strong penchant. Especially did his heart warm, as an unsuccessful historian, to the royal reception of the triumphant author of *The Decline and Fall:* ‘What? *Another* volume, Mr Gibbon? Always the same, I see — scribble, scribble, scribble!’

He knew very well, as he now proceeded to turn out the gas-jets and carry the Royal Martyr to the fire in his bedroom, that these lively sensations of his first experience of his new abode would never repeat themselves.

With the steaming kettle in his hand he leaned first across the broad sill of his kitchen window, looking due north, and then across the even broader window-sill of his bedroom, looking due south. He was enchanted by the view from both these posts of observation. Who would have supposed that you could see so many tree-tops and so many rooks’ nests over the roof of a busy stationer’s in the high street of a prosperous town? And as for what he saw from his kitchen window, it simply astonished him. It was a pure pastoral scene! Just a few slate roofs, a few tiled roofs, a few warehouses built with the solidity of churches, a few carefully cultivated little gardens, a few flagstone paths, ancient tool-sheds, disused privies, fowl-runs, cat-haunted stone walls, just one single row of artisans’ houses, and then beyond all these the veritable country, lovely in its dewy repose as if it had been miles away from any town!

As the man uneasily shifted his kettle from one hand to the other to avoid the steam, he allowed his gaze to follow the rising uplands till they lost themselves in a down-like horizon, topped by clumps of trees. But what was that line of shining silver in the middle distance, that curious strip of metallic brightness dividing the water-meadows of the immediate valley? Dud knew well what it was, though this was the first time he had realized that it was visible from his own dwelling. It was the River Frome! It was the river which shines so bright in its swift, clear, gravelly glow that the great Wessex author has compared it to a tributary of the celestial Water of Life.

Eating his breakfast at last close to his fire — and he was delighted by the amount of warmth that emanated from that old-fashioned grate — No-man decided that he would postpone washing up, postpone buying ink and paper and the few other necessities he required, till he had visited his dead in the cemetery. This was one of his motives in coming to Dorchester, that he might, by means of the familiarity of propinquity, overcome a singular reluctance that had possessed him, all these ten years, about visiting those graves. He had been ill himself of the same epidemic when they died; and when he recovered and ought naturally to have gone he found he could not bring himself to do it! The very fact that Mona was such a constant presence, that she was with him every morning and every night, made it hard for him to think of her body — that body which had become the object of all his idealism as well as all his satyrishness — actually lying in a coffin under a mound of turf.

It was even now with not a little trepidation that he made up his mind that he *would* go, go at once, go that very morning, to find the three graves. Aaron Smith’s relatives had been buried there from the time when the cemetery was first used; so he did not anticipate any difficulty in finding out from the officials where to look for the spot. His mother, as a waif from the Principality, with no known relatives at all and with no desire to go back to the land of her fathers — unless those armorial gateposts showed such a desire — was naturally buried with her husband.

As for Mona herself, he well remembered how, when he thought he was going to follow her, he had insisted that they should be buried together; and he had a vague memory of seeing her parents by his bedside through a cloud of delirium and of imploring them to keep a place for him in her grave. Such a place apparently *had* been kept — not in the same grave but between the girl and his mother — and Mona's relatives in their distant home had contented themselves with rarer and rarer visits to the Dorset cemetery.

Had Dud's business-like landlord in his little shop below been of an inquisitive turn of mind and on the alert for the goings-on of a crop-headed taciturn lodger, he might now have been surprised to hear a ferocious oath descending the stairs from the landing at the top of the house. A sudden realization that he was going to visit within an hour the grave of the girl whose spiritual body he had embraced in his amorous fidelity every night for ten years caused Dud's clumsy hands, when, his breakfast being finally over, he was carrying his kettle back to his kitchen, to become twice as clumsy as usual, with the result of the spilling of no little boiling water.

'Damn and blast you!' he cried in a fit of nervous exasperation. *'Spill*, then, if you want to!' And swinging the Royal Martyr in the air, he brought it down into such sharp contact with the sink that he made a dent in one side of the one and a chip in the edge of the other.

A second later he felt ashamed of this performance, and he set himself to do more tidying than he had intended. In his penitence he even made his bed. He could not, however, endure to wait for water to boil again so that he might wash up; and shaking the tea-leaves and the egg-shells and the crumbs into Henry VIII, he began pulling on his overcoat. His hand shook with excitement as he possessed himself of the oak cudgel he was wont to use, a support more like the club of an ogre than an ordinary walking-stick; but with this in his hand he leaned forward once more across the window-sill of his kitchen, which was as deep as the window was high, as if to give himself strength by a last glance at the view.

As he stared at the water-meadows, he detected, on the further side of that strip of glittering silver that he knew was the Frome, a most singularly shaped willow-tree. This tree grew in an isolated position in the midst of the ditches, and as he surveyed it now, he could distinctly make out two white objects in a stationary position beneath it. What were these? They were evidently living things. They must be white birds. Surely they were too big for ducks? Too big for geese even! Could they be swans?

Dud, grasping his great oak cudgel by the centre, and leaning over the broad window-sill while he stared at those water-meadows, let his gaze wander now from the mysterious white objects. He could see on the right of the willow-tree a large mediaeval-looking straw-thatched edifice, a cottage and yet more than a cottage. This building was now illuminated by the risen sun, to the rays of which its ancient masonry and its great thatched roof responded with what seemed quite a special sort of congruity. The southern end of it had apparently suffered long ago from some disaster, and looked as if it was uninhabited; but the bulk of its massive stonework seemed nobly solid and secure, and there was a wisp of smoke ascending from one of its spacious chimneys.

The sight of this building gave No-man an indescribable thrill, a sensation which, as he left the window and returned to his bedroom to make sure he had put the guard in front of his fire, he could not precisely analyse. When, where, and how had he seen a building like that before, a half-ruined cottage that was so much more than a cottage? The strange glow of elation which the impression of it gave him remained with him as he descended the three flights of narrow stairs.

‘I am glad’, he thought, ‘that I can see that house from my window!’ And the fatality that clings to these accidents of what we chance to see from some new day-and-night abiding-place fell upon him as he emerged into the street with a feeling that for a while distracted him from his thoughts of Mona. It was queer to come bolt up against the rush of traffic in this lively thoroughfare after giving himself up so entirely to the mysterious serenity of those water-meadows. The difference came to him in one of those swift mental shocks the full significance of which is so often obscure. It was as if he had been initiated at that small window into some level of life older, deeper, less transitory and vulnerable than the surface-appearance of ordinary reality.

Glancing up and down the street with a view of taking the nearest turn southward — for he had already discovered in what direction the cemetery lay — he noticed a turn a few steps down the descending thoroughfare, the wall of which seemed literally covered with friendly instructions. Crossing the road and following the pavement down the hill, he soon reached this turn. Yes! The directions on the wall told him that this street led to the Palace Cinema and to the YMCA; but it finally informed him that this narrow road itself, winding gradually southward, bore the name of Icen Way.

‘God! I am in the right place!’ muttered the history-obsessed Dud, as he contemplated these romantic syllables. ‘To think that a stone’s throw from my own door I can enter the Icen Way!’

As he followed this turn, up the picturesque narrow street, he was faintly aware of some deep movement of organic revolt in him *against his worship* *of Mona*, even at the very moment when he was setting out for the first time to visit her grave!

He had discovered on the previous day how the town was surrounded on three sides by ancient avenues of trees — mostly chestnuts, though a few other kinds were interspersed — and he found that the avenue down which, forsaking the Icen Way, he now hurried, was formed entirely of chestnuts and made even at this season an interlacing roof, like that of a cathedral cloister, over his head.

Turning southward again at the foot of South Street, No-man followed the Weymouth road, which itself for at least a mile was another avenue of trees. He passed the Dorchester Brewery, with its immense chimney. He passed one of the town's two railway stations. He passed the County Constabulary. And a few seconds later he found himself in sight of the low iron railings that separated this southern highway from the Roman Amphitheatre. Of this extraordinary legacy of the classic Empire, Dud had already caught a glimpse on his first arrival. He had heard his mother's husband speak of it as Maumbury Rings. Indeed, it had been one of the taciturn musician's favourite topics, on the few occasions No-man could remember him in an expansive mood, to speculate whether the Durnovarian legionaries confined their sport to the slaughter of wild beasts, or whether certain among Cornelia Smith's Cymric ancestors — for Aaron was never weary of malicious gibes at his wife's Welsh origin — had reddened that turf-covered enclosure with their blood.

For some while before reaching Maumbury Rings, Dud had been aware of a considerable though somewhat desultory activity going on in a much-trodden expanse of ground on the right of the road he was following. The Amphitheatre, like the cemetery, was on the left of his road, as were the railway station, the brewery, and the Constabulary. Thus his attention, absorbed in a mental image of how the bones of his unravished bride would be lying, separated from him by the merest parcel of earth-mould and grass, was kept automatically turned *towards his left*, and he had only realized with the most vague consciousness that there was some sort of small travelling circus, even at this early morning hour open to the public, *on his right*.

He had been tapping the ground steadily with his great cudgel as he went along, and his awkward figure with its long arms, bony countenance, and close-cropped skull might have belonged to some necrophilistic Cerne Giant intent on playing the werewolf in a civilized graveyard, rather than to an innocent antiquarian recluse.

But ever since he had passed the railway station Dud's abstracted senses *had* just been aware of certain lively sounds, gay strident gala strains and whirligig shrieks, combined with a confused babble, animate as well as inanimate, proceeding from a much-trodden open space, away there to his right, flanked by whitewashed pens for live-stock, and by wooden booths, and by counters for poultry, eggs, vegetables, and fruit. But this smallest of all possible circuses was not at that early hour in full blast, and only a few stragglers and a sprinkling of young people on their way to school seemed at present aware of its existence. Several large stationary caravans, too, and a row of agricultural machines apparently on show, made it difficult to observe from the road much that was going on.

When No-man did at last take in what was behind those caravans and agricultural implements his first characteristic feeling was a confused sense of the queer continuity of things. Here in front of him rose the grassy outlines — just as they had remained for nearly two thousand years — of the Roman circus where scattered legionaries from Gaul, from Spain, from Africa, from Asia, and a few perhaps from Italy itself, after due libations to

Mithras, to Venus Anadyomene, to Diana, to the great goddess Isis, gathered to watch the butchery they loved, whereas now the most exotic excitement that these schoolboys and schoolgirls hoped for, before their morning repetition of a prayer to the new Saviour, was the sight of a Fat Woman or a Legless Dwarf, or a lady in spangled tights turning somersaults on a pony.

What had worked this change of heart in men who eat bread upon the earth? Just the shaking of the atomic dice by purposeless Chance?

Dud sighed, swallowed his saliva, broke some thin cat-ice, that was already melting in the sun, with the end of his great stick, and hurried along by the iron rails.

It certainly looked a harmless spot today, that turf-ramparted enclosure, and yet such was the imagination he had inherited from the Woman from Wales that if he had been a Catholic he would have crossed himself as he shuffled past its high grassy bank.

He crossed a bridge over the railway now, and here he was at last at the gates of the cemetery! For a moment he was fearful lest these gates should not have been yet unlocked; but he found they were, though his hand shook as he lifted the latch, and he entered with something furtive and surreptitious in his manner, as if his errand had been a sacrilege.

He was surprised at the extent of the place. What a lot of people had been carried here since the burial of Aaron’s grandparents! ‘Who would have thought death had undone so many?’ Well, it was no use hunting for them; he must get hold of an official guide.

He had not far to seek; for one of the caretakers, an elderly man with drooping moustaches, was already burning weeds outside his ornamental lodge. By good hap the man had been at his job for twice the number of years Dud’s dead had lain in their graves, and after a brief colloquy he threw down his rake, stamped on the smouldering heap he was tending, and led the visitor down a winding gravel path towards the southern end of the cemetery.

The further they went, the older and more time-worn seemed the monuments, though Dud noticed that there were a considerable number of these horizontal mounds with no headstone of any kind upon them. But he was gratified by the care that was evidently taken in Dorchester of the green coats of this invisible population and also by the number of yew-trees between which his guide led him.

‘How black these yews are!’ he thought, as he moved between them. ‘Dark green flames, with separate up-struggling fire-tips, but all one underneath!’

At at once he found he was trembling from head to foot. ‘This won’t do,’ he said to himself. And then he thought, ‘How the devil am I to get rid of this fellow when — when I get to where they are?’

But the caretaker was one who understood the needs of the living as well as the needs of the dead. He suddenly stopped short. ‘Do ‘ee see thik ‘ooman, sir, down there?’ he said. “Tis she’s young ‘un her have got down there, and a fine lad ‘a were — I knowed ‘un, to pass the time o’ day to, afore ‘a fell sick. ‘A used to come by here to school; and ‘a used to ask I about they circuses — I do mind o’ he whenever I do hear ‘un.’

No-man allowed it to be realized that he did see the woman in question; but for his life at that moment he couldn’t have uttered a coherent sound.

‘Mr Smith and Mrs Smith be atween where thik ‘ooman be and where thik wall be. Some likes to be nigh thik strong wall and some dunna— ’Tis our fancies, I reckon, living *or* dead. ’Tis a fancy-world, sir, look at ‘un as us may. Thankee kindly, sir, though I weren’t looking for’t.’

Touching his cap and pocketing the half-a-crown which the visitor held out to him, the old gentleman turned his back and retraced his steps; nor did he so much as look round till he reached his heap of smouldering weeds.

No-man hurried forward. He had a sensation as if his legs might any moment grow numb and refuse to obey him. He felt as if his whole nature were suffering some overwhelming revolution. He passed, as he had been directed, the woman in question, who did not even raise her eyes to see what kind of an intruder he was, and there — under the wall — were the graves he sought! They each had a plain headstone, the girl's being the outer one; and a space had been left, wide enough for a fourth mound, between her and his mother.

It was upon this empty space that Dud, with his cap and stick clutched in the same hand, found himself staring. It was not, however, that he was visualizing his own resting-place. It was that between him and that fragment of level grass there hovered the familiar bed-post with its heraldic head, and, leaning against this object, there wavered dimly, as if about to vanish forever through the wide gates of Hades, the naked form of his unravished maid.

Without the least movement, just as if he had been himself turned into the Portland stone of the surrounding monuments, No-man watched the familiar vision fade slowly away. Not till it was quite gone did he step forward to the girl's actual mound. Here he stared downwards. There she was, the bride of his last ten obsessed years! *And what was she like now?* He had one quick hideous vision of the unthinkable possibility. He saw her bones. He saw horrible blotches of decomposed flesh and wrinkled skin upon those bones. He saw her long hair still clinging to her skull. But this was only for a second. Savagely he flung the image away and turned to the girl's headstone.

This was marked by a small block of the same grey stone as the others, and he set himself to read the inscription. *Mona Smith*, he read — so they had disregarded his request to put ‘Mona No-man’ — *the wife of D.N.* — they had at least humoured him there! — *who gave her life nursing Aaron and Cornelia Smith*. And down at the bottom, in type so small that some of it had already grown obscure, were the words: *Greater love hath no man than this*.

Dud glanced at the mound next to his girl’s as if to make a fatuous enquiry of the Woman from Wales whether it was true that Mona had given her life for her.

‘What else could she have done but what she did?’ he asked his mother. But of course gravestones always lied. *Greater love*, he read again. And then it struck him for the first time — and he thought afterwards how queer it was that he hadn’t noted it at once — that this scriptural anonymity it talked about was himself: *hath no man than this*. So what the Eternal really announced was that there was some rare mysterious species of love greater than giving up your life, and that this greater love, whatever kind of thing it was, was the prerogative of poor Dud!

And *this*, in the equivocal way she did everything, Mona, under this turf, had waited for ten years to tell him! ‘Damn it, though!’ he thought. ‘It’s not *you*, Mona No-man; it’s your relations who’ve put this quotation here!’ And once more Dud turned upon the Woman from Wales a look of almost imbecile bewilderment.

‘Did she give up her life for you, *did* she, or was it that the four of us just caught the plague and went down like ninepins?’

Cornelia Smith made no reply to this question; but No-man’s thoughts had suddenly rushed off at a tangent. ‘Why are there *two* graves for you and Aaron?’ And then a startling idea came into his head. ‘Did you arrange your life with Aaron on different lines than anyone guessed? Was Aaron complaisant all the time about — about *him?* Oh, Mother, why didn't you confide in me just a bit more?'

He stared down at a small cluster of freshly budded snowdrops that were coming up in that empty space between the two women's graves. 'Perhaps', he thought, 'they didn't leave this space for me at all, but for *him*! Perhaps he's an old man now and has made all his plans, and one day I'll come here and find him buried by her side!'

He looked hurriedly across Mona's mound to see if there was a place for him on the other side. No! There was a newly filled-in grave there, with an elaborate headstone in honour of some aged lady, *the daughter*, it said, *of Alderman Carroway, to whom this town owes*, etc. etc.

Dud's gaze came back to the snowdrops. 'I'd like to find out', he thought 'who he was or who he is! It can't be often that a person — I wonder if he knows of my existence.'

Once more he forced himself — he thought of it afterwards as a significant thing that he had to *make* himself do it — to read over again every word on his girl's headstone: *Greater love hath no man* — but at that point the devil in him, or it may have been the nervous agitation of the last three or four hours, burst forth, strangely enough, and he gave vent to a loud, harsh, jarring, unpleasant howl, a sound like that of a person making a forced imitation of a howling dog.

Thinking of this later, he came to the conclusion that if he hadn't uttered this malicious sound he'd have done something more hysterical still — danced a real 'danse macabre' perhaps over his girl's grave! But its sacrilege shocked his own ears, and for the first time since he'd come to the spot he glanced hastily at 'thik 'ooman', his fellow-mourner of this sunshiny day.

Yes, the woman *had* heard him, and the moment their eyes met she moved straight towards him.

‘Don’t do that,’ she cried earnestly, hurrying up to him. ‘It’s terrible to lose everything, but we mustn’t let—’ Her sentence hung unfinished, for Dud had taken off his cap with an exaggerated bow of malicious deference, and she could see from his quivering lip that his whole nature was drawn out like a piece of elastic.

‘I beg your pardon, sir — of course I have no right—’ Her face, as she spoke and as she quietly turned down her eyes and fumbled at a faded wreath she was carrying, had a queer effect upon No-man. It must have been her face, for the little soft brown hat she wore was so brimless that he could see her forehead for inches above her spectacles, whereas the rest of her person was concealed by a long, faded, tweed coat, which left nothing exposed to impress an observer except a pair of athletic ankles in grey woollen stockings and a pair of sturdy brown-leather boots.

‘I beg *your* pardon,’ he murmured apologetically. ‘I was bothered, you know, by what...’

Dud’s countenance became quite gentle and relaxed as he looked at her. He even smiled as he used the word ‘bothered’, for this word seemed to protect his pride, to push away his trouble, and to make a querulous little appeal for sympathy.

The woman raised her left hand — for her right was still clutching the wreath — and made a motion as if she were trying to pull down her brimless hat over her forehead.

‘It’s my only child *I* come here for,’ she murmured, disregarding the airy flippancy of his word ‘bothered’. But when she had spoken she bit her underlip with annoyance at herself. ‘I lost him last June. He was as healthy as could be till he got wet one day at Upwey.’

No-man gave his own dead a casual nod, glancing furtively sideways at the three little upright stones at their feet, then proceeded deliberately and carefully to put on his cap.

‘Are you going straight out?’ he said.

The woman made no reply, but she scrutinized him from head to foot with a friendly interest as they moved away together.

‘Don’t you find that stick heavy?’ she asked.

‘My wrists are very strong,’ he replied.

‘Do you live in Dorchester?’ she asked.

‘Three flights up,’ he answered laconically, ‘over a shop.’

‘I don’t think I’ve seen you on the streets, have I?’ she said; but Dud was silent. He liked this woman, but some obscure force within him kept saying, ‘Let her go! Let her go!’

But this irrational warning didn’t prevent his stealing several hurried glances at her face. He liked those features under the brown hat better and better each time he looked at them. ‘She’s about my own age,’ he thought, ‘or a *little* less. What I like in her face is its endurance. It’s a patient, gentle face, but very enduring. It’s a sweet face, but a rather dilapidated face!’

They were walking together in silence when they came to the caretaker’s heap of weeds. The man was visible a little distance off, gathering up rubbish. Dud called to him. The woman murmured something, drew away with an inclination of her head, and made as if to seek the cemetery gate.

‘Can’t we’, he whispered hurriedly, ‘walk back together? I’ve only got to ask him one little question!’

The woman discreetly moved away while he asked this little question, but Dud did not even wonder how it would have struck her had she heard what he said.

'I notice', he began bluntly, seizing the bull by the horns, 'that there's an empty space between my mother's grave and my wife's. Do you happen to know if any steps have been taken to retain that space for me?'

The elderly man with the drooping moustache gave him a sudden startled look, a look that made No-man feel as if he suspected him of intending to rush upon death in some way that interfered with the established order.

'You must go to *they* about *that*, sir,' he remarked gravely.

Dud's mouth opened; and so tense were his nerves that he felt on the point of repeating that sardonic sound — like a man imitating a howling dog — that had burst from him before. In his effort to control himself he glanced away from his astonished interlocutor to the figure of 'thik 'ooman', who was still standing by the cemetery gate. The sight of her enduring yet ravaged face under the brown hat had once more a calming effect upon him.

'All right,' he muttered. 'I expect I'd better do as you say.' But as he left the man — and he always remembered the peculiar sourness of the thin smoke that came from that heap of cemetery rubbish — he felt an unsurpassable barrier of distaste for the whole subject.

'What the hell does it matter *where* they bury me?' he thought. 'And what does it matter *whose* son I am?'

He had indeed an obscure sensation, as he hurried to join the woman, as if to go a single step further on this graveyard quest would really be a kind of suicide.

'Damn this whole business!' he thought. 'What does it matter? I'll write my books, and I'll live in the present! No-man is my name, and my business is No-man's business. My girl is my girl, and my mother is my mother. To hell with these graves!'

He felt, when he joined the woman and looked in her face, as if he had scrambled out of the earth and carried the smell of it in his nostrils.

When they were on the path by the side of the road she spoke gently to him as if she knew what he was feeling.

‘I couldn’t bring myself to go to my son,’ she said in a low voice. ‘But it was wrong of me. It sets them free when you go to them. We oughtn’t to hold them back.’

Dud’s countenance must have expressed his inability, in his agitated state, to catch her meaning, for she went on in a firmer tone. ‘He was with me too much at first,’ she explained. ‘It was like madness. I lived with him closer than when I really had him. But it came over me that I was doing him a hurt; and something made me go to him *there* — to set him free. Since then, I’ve—’ And the woman gave a sigh the like of which Dud had never heard from any mother or any wife. ‘We’ve got to live somehow,’ she murmured. ‘Don’t you feel like that?’

But No-man had been deeply disturbed by what he heard. ‘But doesn’t our thinking of them so much, so long,’ he protested, *‘help* them — wherever they are?’

The woman shook her head. ‘It’s of them we must think,’ she said firmly, ‘not of ourselves. We ought to set them free.’ And then she added, in a voice so low that he could hardly catch her words, ‘Life is for the living. Death, whatever it is, is for the dead.’

They crossed the railway bridge and were soon level with the Amphitheatre. No-man looked at its emphatic outlines with gloomy attention.

‘It’s queer’, he said to his companion, ‘that a thing made for cruelty should last so long.’

The head in the brown hat turned towards the steep bank beyond the railings. ‘Those are daisies, aren’t they?’ she said. ‘There! Near the top. It’s all this rain and warm weather.’

It was No-man’s turn to sigh now. ‘But I suppose’, he went on, ‘if the race of men was gone, and one spirit pointed out to another spirit our whole planet, it might say the same! The only comfort is that pain can’t last forever. Thank the Lord there *is* death to end it.’

But it clearly was not easy for the woman at his side to take these spacious flights. ‘You won’t think me rude’, she said, after a concentrated silence of a second or two, ‘if I ask your name?’

‘D. No-man,’ he replied hastily. ‘Stop! I’ll put it down for you, and my address too. I’m a writer. I’ve taken a room here so that I can get the quiet for my work. I don’t know a soul in Dorchester.’

‘My name is Nancy Quirm,’ said the woman. ‘I live on the other side of the town, about a mile out. I hope you’ll come and see me one day. You’ll be interested in my husband and in Teucer Wye. For the matter of that, you’ll probably be more interested in Thuella than in any of us.’

It was a peculiarity of Dud’s — and one which he had had from his childhood — to be forced to stand still, when he was out-of-doors, if he was to take in any important remark. He now stood still opposite the trim well-manured garden of the Dorset Constabulary.

‘Say your name again, lady, will you?’ he remarked, speaking in an unnecessarily loud voice. This was another peculiarity of his, to address people as if they were deaf, the moment he felt embarrassed.

‘Quirm, Nancy Quirm. If you are a writer, my husband is a reader. In fact he probably has got your books — somewhere about. Our place is nothing but books.’

‘I’ll write down my address,’ said Dud, fumbling in his pocket for pencil and paper. He felt that Mrs Quirm was watching him with amused sympathy; and this increased his impatience. Finally he did not hesitate to deposit the whole contents of his pockets on the top of the Constabulary’s thickly grown, evergreen hedge. But no pencil was forthcoming. ‘It’s High East Street — you’ll have to learn it by heart.’ He twisted his head round and frowned at her in vexation. But suddenly, as he began returning the things from the top of the hedge into his pocket: ‘Did you say “Quirm” or “Squirm”?’ he asked.

The woman smiled. ‘It will certainly be Thuella who’ll interest you. She does things just as you do, things like emptying your pockets.’

Dud turned towards her such a blank and bewildered countenance that she had to explain. ‘The Wyes live next door to us, in fact under the same roof,’ she said, ‘and Thuella is Mr Wye’s daughter. He has a son and a daughter-in-law, but they only come on visits; and another daughter, who lives in the town. He doesn’t like history, and he hates fiction. He never reads anything but Plato. We’ve found that it’s useless to lend him books, for they stay exactly where he first puts them down when you take them to him. I took him a novel once, and he leant it against the side of his clock. A fortnight later it was still there. Mr Wye said it shook when the clock struck.’

‘Is it in the country you live?’

‘A mile out of Dorchester. It’s half-way to Stinsford; but of course you don’t know where *that* is. But anyone will tell you, and I know you’ll like Thuella. You’d better say you want to go to Mr Wye’s. You’ll have no difficulty! Yes, I’ll remember yours quite easily. But come soon; come any of these days. Some of us will be sure to be in. Thuella will be thrilled to meet you.’

A sly and almost malicious expression crossed No-man’s face. ‘Well! I expect you’re in a hurry to get home, Mrs Quirm, and I mustn’t keep you.’ With this he turned again to the Constabulary hedge. A letter, or some piece of paper out of his pocket, had slipped down between the evergreen leaves.

‘Let *me* get it out,’ said Nancy Quirm, stepping forward. Her gloved hand proved more efficacious than his bare one; but No-man felt irritated rather than grateful.

As they moved on together he kept glancing, not altogether sympathetically, at her profile. ‘She’s one of those maternal women’, he said to himself, ‘whose sympathy for me is a kind of—’ But he checked himself in the middle of this thought. Something within him, far deeper than his spleen, responded to the character of this stranger, and he had the wit to recognize it. ‘She isn’t good-looking,’ he thought. ‘She’s very pale, and her face is very lined, and I hate to see them with spectacles. But I like her, and I think she likes me.’

Once more she began referring to Thuella, as they walked on, and how nice it would be for Mr No-man to meet her; but he heard all this as one who heard it not. His nerves, however, were growing much calmer as he walked by Mrs Quirm’s side. He liked her face, as he kept glancing at it, more and more.

And yet she had no dominant feature. Her nose, her mouth, her brow were none of them what might be called distinguished. Nor was it exactly a strong face. It was pale, and her eyes under her spectacles looked blurred and dim, though they were of a soft and friendly grey. Her face had lines of tragic suffering, but No-man came to the conclusion that what suffering it showed — and he could not forget how it had looked when she spoke of her son — had been, and *was*, under the control of an extraordinarily gallant spirit. Her mouth and chin were not in the least masterful. They were morbidly sensitive, he thought. But her whole countenance possessed a poise, a dignity, a curious kind of grace, that he found very charming.

Once or twice indeed — as, for instance, while she had teased him about resembling this damned Thuella when he emptied his pockets on the policemen's hedge — he had detected in her look something girlish and roguish, something challenging, something almost flirtatious, which strangely enough did not displease him as he recalled it now, though at the moment, perhaps because he was irritated by his own clumsiness, it had struck him as maternal rather than provocative. But when she began talking again about this confounded Thuella — what a name for a woman, and how he disliked the thought of her! — he decided that it wasn't maternal at all, but something quite different, something that was extraordinarily sweet and appealing, and yet light as the touch of a butterfly's wing, and something too that appealed to a vein of personal response in him that had not been reached for years, not for ten years!

In spite of these feelings, and yet perhaps because of them, there was a tone of sly malice in his speech when he suddenly interrupted her: 'I don't believe you yourself like this Thuella at all. I believe you *hate* her!'

Nancy Quirm's sensitive mouth opened in astonishment. Her grey eyes seemed to blink, as if he had actually hit her, under her spectacles.

'Oh!' she gasped. 'What *have* I said to make you think that?'

No-man looked her up and down. He had already noticed with approval how slight and girlish her body seemed under her rough coat. But this gasp of surprise made her slighter and more girlish still. 'She has very slim haunches, I'm sure,' he thought shamelessly, 'and quite slender hips too!'

He had no time to reply to her startled question, however, for a loud discordant shriek of some whirligig engine behind the caravans on the other side of the road made them both look round.

‘Let’s go in there for a second! Shall we?’ the woman said.

The last thing that Dud wanted to do was to investigate the activities of this intrusive circus. He had secretly been promising himself to offer his new acquaintance a cup of something hot in one of the South Street confectioners’. However, he had come to like this woman so well — and, after all, this was the first time in his life he had made friends with anyone in this unconventional way — that he felt ready to obey any caprice she might have.

‘Come on, then,’ he said, submissively though not very eagerly. ‘There’s nothing to pay to go and look!’

Nancy Quirm’s smile, when she heard this somewhat unchivalrous remark, was a flicker of that same charming challenge, more flirtatious than maternal. Inspired by that smile, he felt more adventurous, and boldly taking her arm, he led her across the road.

There were more people about now than there had been a couple of hours ago, and Dud soon began to be amused at the oddity of the occasion. He certainly had never foreseen, when he passed this place on his way to the cemetery, that he would be entering it in so short a time in company with a strange woman!

They were soon watching the roundabout whose engine had made such a demonic shriek, and, though there were only three diminutive little girls on the backs of extremely dilapidated wooden horses, the sound of the lively music and the gay up-and-down giddy revolutions gave them both the familiar revival of long-forgotten childish emotions.

Dud fancied he saw in the animation of the face under the brown hat that his companion was on the point of suggesting that they should join those three small riders! To avoid having to refuse such a wild whim, he hurriedly proposed that they should visit the chief place of entertainment. This was a not very large and anything but new tent; but there seemed to be something of interest going on inside. To this they accordingly advanced, and the magnanimous Dud was already surreptitiously trying to calculate — with the tips of his fingers in the leather purse in his pocket — the limits of his financial resources, when they became aware, by the sound of raised voices, of some sort of altercation going on at the back of the tent.

Drawn by a mutual impulse, they proceeded to the spot whence these sounds came, and found an old man and an old woman — both of them obviously connected with the show — trying in vain to persuade a young girl, in absurdly grotesque stage-attire, to enter an aperture in the discoloured awning, through which was visible the lower rungs of a small step-ladder. The upper portion of the girl's body glittered with tinsel chains of the most preposterous sham jewellery, while her lower limbs were clothed in very dirty lavender-coloured tights.

The old woman, evidently in a state of malignant helplessness not unmixed with alarm — for she kept glancing furtively round in dread of intrusion from the public — was listening to a torrent of wild abuse addressed to her from the excited girl.

The old man, whose bald head was topped by a red wig and whose crooked person was tightly covered by a long, greasy, greenish-black tail-coat, kept making feeble conciliatory clutches at the girl's brocaded sash, which looked, in its gaudy disreputableness, as if it had once adorned the body of a performing dog.

'I tell you this is the end!' the girl was crying in a voice at once husky and shrill. 'Don't you understand English? I say it's the end, the end, the end! It's one thing for me to do it when there are decent people in there, and I've told you I'd do it for them. Do you think I care what I do? But to this handful of grinning kids who don't know anything, who don't know me from a monkey, I won't, I won't, I won't! You're a money-licking old bitch, that's what *you* are, and I don't care who hears me say it! I'm done with you, do you hear? I'm done with you! A set of damned grinning kids — and me acting like a monkey, a monkey, a monkey!'

Her voice rose to such a pitch at this point that the old woman, scowling savagely at the old man as if he was responsible for this scene, rushed herself into the aperture and let the awning fall behind her.

The old showman now became aware that a gentleman in a shabby coat, holding a formidable-looking stick and accompanied by a tall white-faced lady, was standing not far off watching them intently, and he promptly made a sort of caressing gesture to the girl in tinsel, stroking the piece of dirty plush she wore round her hips, and whispering in her ear.

'Damn you!' cried the young woman, repulsing him with such a violent push that he nearly toppled over. 'Damn you all! I tell you I've had enough of it!' With this she rushed off towards the row of caravans that separated them from the road, and, scrambling up the steps of the nearest of these, disappeared from view.

Simultaneously with the girl's departure, the old woman, who looked like a bathing-machine attendant now that her weather-beaten countenance was no longer distorted with anger and fear, emerged from the aperture in the awning and stared about her with blinking uneasiness.

'She's a-gone, Mother,' said the man in the wig. 'No need to diddle wi' *she* till dinner-time. Be young Popsy in there, hearting of 'em up?'

But the old woman had caught sight of the lady and gentleman, and, walking straight up to them, began a voluble explanation of all that they would enjoy if they would only pay for the special and peculiar privilege of a front seat in the tent. 'A bob apiece, dearies, only a bob apiece', she chanted to them earnestly, 'and ye'll see what no Christian eye have seen since the Romans was drove from Darset.'

Nancy Quirm, taking no notice of this professional chatter, began questioning her at once as to what she had done to make that poor girl so angry, and No-man took the opportunity, when the old woman launched into an unending rigmarole of grievances, in the course of which the name 'Popsy', attended with lavish praise, and the name 'Wizzie', attended by complicated blame, kept entering and vanishing in confused succession, to walk towards the caravan steps up which the angry girl had fled. Seeing the ominous direction the gentleman was taking, the bald-headed showman hurried after him and caught him up just as he appeared to be actually meditating an ascent of these steps.

'All right,' muttered No-man gruffly, when the red wig and greasy tail-coat appeared at his side. 'All right, I'm no relation of that girl. I've never seen her before. But she's somebody's girl, isn't she? I take it she's nothing to do with you, or with your wife either? She's a hired performer, I take it. One of your dancing-girls, eh? Perhaps your only one! Yes, I can see that's it. She's your only one. And you and your wife (I suppose she *is* your wife?)' — and Dud nodded his head towards the old woman— 'are working her too hard. No, I'm not a relation of hers; and I've not — not today anyway — any authority to interfere with you. It's only that — well! I saw how upset she was, and I thought I might — I mean, I thought I'd *like* — just to see — you know what I mean — just to see she was all right again. I'm not a doctor, of course, and I'm not a clergyman; but when — you know what I mean — when a person sees anyone so upset as that girl was, he can't help—'

Dud broke off suddenly, for he perceived that instead of looking displeased at what he was saying the wizened countenance under the red wig brightened, and to Dud's dismay he saw with perfect distinctness a small grey louse making its way gingerly and tentatively along the thin line of demarcation between the wig and the skull. 'Well! At any rate,' he flung out again, and as he spoke he deliberately sat down on the bottom step of the caravan and took out a packet of cigarettes, 'at any rate she's *somebody's* girl, even if you and your wife don't give a damn what happens to her!'

Uttering this vague truism as if it had been a drastic ultimatum, No-man lit a cigarette, and perceiving that Mrs Quirm was still engaged in conversation with the man's wife, he offered him one too, deliberately taking care, as he did so, not to puff his smoke near the louse on the fellow's cranium.

The old man accepted the cigarette, and Dud noticed a most curious expression come into his face. His small gimlet-like eyes gleamed with an unholy light. A *mental* louse had evidently been engendered inside that unattractive skull, the glow-worm glitter of which was like the passing of a taper across prison-bars. 'Us be sick to death of she in there,' the old rogue whispered suddenly. 'Our new gal be worth five of she. Her in there were a horphan, *her* were, what me and the missus took for charity, whereas t'other one be coom of old Darset stock. I tell 'ee, sir, and may me liver be thunder-bit if I'm lying, 'twould be a Christian charity in any well-wishing gentleman who'd take she.' He glanced over his shoulder at the caravan door and twisted his mouth in a most unpleasant leer. 'Gentlemen *have* ere now, let me tell you, spoken to we of taking this crazy bitch off of us. Her be young, looks 'ee, and her be of a 'lurin' figure spite of her tempers. There were an old gent in Bristol, where me missus comes from, that would have given she I-don't-know-what if she'd a-let 'un. 'Twas her tempers and such-like frighted the poor man away, or maybe he'd have 'dopted she or made she his lawful. He told me missus — and a man could see it with one eye — that he was main gone on the bitch. ’Twas her figure, I reckon, for her face ain’t nothink. Some likes ’em for one thing and some for another; and this old gent was struck crazy, I shouldn’t wonder, by what he’d a-seed of her figure. You’ve a-said, sir, in me hearing, sir, that she in there were some man’s gal; but I tell ‘ee, sir, with her tempers and carryings-on and her “I-wills” and “I-won’ts”, she be no man’s girl and never will be nothink else. ’Tis to wokkus, ’tis to nothink but wokkus thik bitch belongs. I tell ‘ee, sir, if it hadn’t been for her figure and for our old hoss being so daft over she, we’d ‘ave popped her into wokkus years agone. Missus and me have no sponsoring for she, ‘ee must understand — no sponsoring for she at all. Us picked she up for charity, and us have picked up a wiper! That’s what that bitch be, for all her airs and her ‘lurin’ figure. Her be an ongrateful wiper! I tell ‘ee, sir, if some gent what likes ’em with a ‘lurin’ figure, and knows how to ‘andle ’em and not to ‘ave no bloody nonsense from ’em, were to say to missus and me today, “Mr and Mrs Hurgan, you’ve a-done godsends for this here chit, and in return her’ve treated ‘ee cruel, but seeing as her *has* got a ‘lurin’ figure — with or without they pretty jingles what you’ve been put to expense of perwiding, though there weren’t no sponsoring for it — I be minded to take she off of ‘ee, and do it legally too, legally, lawfully, and all according,” I tell ‘ee, sir, I should say to ‘un, “Take she quick, take she to Mother Carey’s Home for Horfinch! Us don’t want to see her — *nor* her bloody figure — never no more!”’

The old man now noticed that his wife, standing beside Mrs Quirm, who was apparently examining the contents of her purse, had begun making him private signals to join them. ‘Excuse me, sir, I’ll be back in a jiffy!’ cried the fellow, jumping up; and off he went, walking with a hop-and-go-one step in his tight shiny tail-coat till he reached the two women.

No sooner was the man out of hearing than, moved by a sudden overpowering impulse, Dud ran up the steps of the caravan, gave the door one sharp loud knock, and boldly flung it open. The place was so full of steam from a great pot boiling on the stove that it took him a second to get his bearings and see anything clearly; but there she was.

There was the ‘lurin’ figure. She sat crouching on the bed with her heels under her flanks and her staring brown eyes so wide open that to Dud they looked as round and as big as two shining pennies. She had torn off her bangles and chains. She had flung away the unpleasant plush thing she’d been wearing round her hips, and it was impossible for Dud not to be struck by the curves of her body in that crouching position.

Her face, however, was what really hit him to the heart, though he must have noticed *everything* about her, more than he realized at the time, for he recalled afterwards that her lavender tights had a stain on one of the knees, a stain like the skin of an orange when it is peeled off and takes the shape of the figure eight. But her face went clear through him. It went through him like the reflection of a face in a mirror that suddenly appears to a particular person after a long miraculous retention in the chemical substance of the glass. It went through him as some drowned face through fathoms of water.

She certainly was not in the remotest degree pretty. Daddy Urgan had been perfectly right there. And yet he had been right too — oh, so fatally right! — about the sensual attraction of her figure.

Of course her body was not perfect, any more than her face! It was not — and Dud found himself comparing his wife’s limbs to those he now saw before him in this dirty finery — in any sense what you could call a classical body, which was certainly what Mona’s *was*.

It is a deep and magical mystery, reverting to the fragilities and slendernesses of flower-petals as well as to the love-candles of glowworms, the secret of these indescribable touches that have been bestowed by the artistry of Nature on the limbs of some girls, and not of others.

As men go, Dud was the reverse of amorous. He was indeed morbidly fastidious. But when he saw this queer wild creature crouching there in her fantastic attire, he felt, mingled with his outraged pity, and in part *compounded of pity*, a shivering awareness of something more troubling to his senses than he had ever felt before.

What ravished him so in this girl's figure, what pierced his heart in this girl's desperate face, was nothing less than that troubling thing that he had added *out of his own perversity* to the personality of his dead wife.

It was not that he had time then to feel more than the overpowering beat of fate's terrible wings. It was only later that he realized the nature of his feelings. Something in his obscurest being was roused and stirred as he saw the girl crouching there; but the pity he felt for her so completely dominated his conscious mind that it was as if he had to wait till he was alone, to puzzle out the cryptic response of his subterranean senses, a response in which they indulged independently, like famished demons.

Thinking of her afterwards, he found that that blurred stain below her knee, that stain which resembled a bungled outline of the figure eight, was the particular thing that brought back with a fearful rush the subtle thrill which his senses felt even while his conscious mind was so preoccupied.

But it was of her face — only of her face — that he thought at the moment, and the expression upon it melted the bones within him. What a desperate face it was! As he saw it now in that dim place, with the thin straw-like hair falling straight down — and there seemed so little of it — falling each side of her hollow cheeks, he was struck by its pinched sharpness. Every feature of it seemed in that half-light so contracted and long and pointed! Her nose was thin. Her chin was thin. Only her eyes, looking larger than they really were, seemed so desperately dark and round!

For quite a perceptible moment Dud stared at her with stupid embarrassment, and she stared back at him, from beneath the wooden wall behind her, with terrified bewilderment. Then her eyes grew less preternaturally round. Something, swift as a breath, passed between them, and like a released bowstring her tense muscles relaxed. She sank back a little against the wall. Her thin fingers unclasped themselves from between her knees and fell loose at her side, the bare arms above them looking childish and piteously grotesque.

Suddenly she leaned forward listening intently. Then her young breast heaved with a deep-drawn sigh, and she lowered her eyes and frowned. She was evidently thinking rapidly, thinking intensely, desperately.

At last she raised her head, looked straight into his face, and quick and fast, her voice sounding as husky as a thin gust of wind through a patch of stubble, began speaking to him.

‘I was listening to Old Funky. I heard all he said to you about that man in Bristol and their wanting to get rid of me. It’s all lies! They don’t want me to go. They want to keep me till I’m dead. Everything he said was lies — except about the horse. I don’t know who you are, and I don’t care. I like you! You’re good. I can *see* you’re good. And you’re the first one. Listen! We’re going to Yeovil tomorrow. We’re going to the fair-ground there. But I’ll go to the post-office and ask for a letter. If there’s not a letter, I’ll run away. If there *is* a letter, *I’ll run wherever the letter says*! They always have tea at six, and I can run away then. I heard what Old Funky said to you — every word — about legal-and-lawful and all that. But *I* don’t care about legal-and-lawful. If you haven’t a woman, I’ll be your woman. I’ll make your bed. I’m a grown-up girl. I’m not a child. You heard Old Funky say what a good figure I have. I’m not mad either, though they think I’m mad. I can be your woman as well as another, for I know what men want and I won’t say a word. *Yeovil*, mind! And I’ll go to the post-office, and I’ll run wherever the letter says. No one shall stop me! If there’s no letter, I’ll disappear; but there *will* be a letter, there *will*, there *will* be a letter!’

The tone in which she uttered this final appeal gave Dud a particular kind of twinge, a twinge that he had not had since a garrulous nurse told him Mona had died calling for him to come and thinking he was afraid to come.

But now they both stopped and stared at each other. There were voices outside. The girl jumped to her feet with the leap of a wild animal, and her eyes grew round again.

But Dud’s good angel gave him an inspiration. ‘For Christ’s sake,’ he whispered, while they heard someone coming hastily up the steps, *‘tell me your name!’*

Her eyes twitched, and a scowl of anger distorted her face. For a moment he thought she was too angry to answer. But she did get the words out. ‘Wizzie Ravelston,’ she murmured, as if she were tearing the syllables out of her bosom and handing them to a bandit. Then she turned away and with the cunning of a wild animal flung herself down on the bed. Here they found her, lying with her face to the wall, when the old man and the old woman entered together.

‘It’s no good, I can’t get this girl to utter a word,’ pronounced Dud, in a stern authoritative voice, as if he were at least a Royal Commissioner. ‘So I am afraid I shall not be able to make a complaint — *this time* — to the proper authorities. But I can assure you that if you don’t treat this poor girl —’ He stopped and, turning his back on them contemplated for a second the form on the bed.

‘Good-bye, Wizzie,’ he swore to himself, ‘and if I don’t meet you in Yeovil may I die howling!’

He moved to the caravan door, turning a deaf ear to both the violent protests of Mrs Urgan and the obsequious innuendoes of Old Funky. With his foot on the first step, and emboldened not only by the reassuring sight of Nancy Quirm in her brown hat but by the reckless and cynical strains of an American tune that just then floated across the fair-ground, he turned round again upon them.

‘Your name, I take it, is Mr and Mrs Urgan? That’s what I thought; only I wanted to be quite certain in case we ever needed — for any reason — to communicate with each other.’

‘Yes,’ cried the woman, breathless to get the last word, and she pushed past Old Funky, who was winking and leering as if the authoritative tone taken by the visitor was a pure pretence for the benefit of the lady outside, to cover the little masculine understanding which they had established between them.

‘Yes!’ the old woman cried. ‘Yes! We’ll send for you when we want you!’

With this retort ringing in his ears Dud rejoined his new friend. He could see she was anything but deceived by the offhand and laconic manner with which he now proceeded to dismiss the whole subject, hinting that he *might*, if he felt uneasy about it after a night’s sleep, visit the circus again.

‘I’m afraid you won’t be able to do that,’ she said with a smile. ‘It appears they don’t own the circus; and the woman is anxious to get rid of that girl, while her husband, though he pretends to want to get rid of her, is really proud of her, as he taught her her job. She says they’re off to Salisbury tomorrow.’

For the flicker of a second Dud felt he could have seized Nancy Quirm and shaken her until the teeth chattered in her smiling face and until her spectacles fell on the ground; but he stopped a lad, as they moved away to the entrance, and made some enquiries. It turned out that it was not an English circus but a foreign one, and that the Urgans with their trained horse and its two girl-riders were merely in the temporary employment of the foreign owner, and indeed were unlikely — so the lad implied — to be retained very much longer. 'He only took they on,' the boy said, ' 'cos they was English, and his own foreign folk didn't go down in Darset.'

But *Salisbury?* Oh, damn them! What was he to do now? His present companion must have been used to being queerly treated by erratic persons, for she went on carrying it off without asking him any questions. She apparently accepted his laconic waiving of the whole episode, only remarking on her own account that from what she'd seen of the Urgan pair she preferred the old woman to the old man.

When they reached the bottom of South Street, where the South Walks begin, he felt that he couldn't, in the turmoil of his mind, endure to go a step further with Mrs Quirm. 'I *must* be alone,' he thought. 'I *must* get rid of this person, so as to think it out!'

But as chance would have it the poor lady now began showing signs of physical distress.

'I am sorry,' she murmured. 'It's silly of me. But I've — I've done more than I should today and — I feel — I feel I *must* sit down — just for a minute, if you don't mind!'

No-man cursed her to himself bitterly and unkindly. He glared round him distractedly. They were now standing by the side of a cenotaph for the War, and the woman was leaning helplessly against the rails.

He could see a stone slab under one of the chestnut-trees, where there evidently had been a seat, but they had taken it away for the winter. What the devil was he to do with her? He couldn't leave her leaning against the iron rails. Was it his destiny to take her somewhere, or fetch a doctor? He looked blankly at her. She had the appearance of a person who might at any second sink down on the ground. He stared angrily at a handsome wreath that someone had placed at the foot of the cenotaph. He visualized Mrs Quirm prostrate on the ground with her head against this wreath. He felt a curious hostility even to her brown hat. Why had she come all this way if she wasn't fit for walking?

He moved towards her and made a clumsy gesture as if to substitute himself, as a support, for the iron railings; but she feebly pushed him off.

'I'll be — I'll be better in a minute,' she whispered. 'It's really nothing — if I could — if I could — only — sit down.'

In his effort to help her his fantastic oak cudgel fell down at her feet, and as he stooped to pick it up he noticed that one of her shoe-strings was hanging loose. For some reason this made him more angry still. 'She didn't even trouble to dress herself properly', he thought, 'before setting out. She's a hysterical fool!' Her hat too had begun to tilt sideways in a ridiculous way. He now began indulging in the ignoble thought that the people passing by might suppose she was drunk.

But making a great effort, Nancy Quirm straightened herself up and, lifting one of her hands, adjusted her hat.

'There's a bakery — just there,' she murmured, looking vaguely towards the street. 'Perhaps — you could — take me there — and then — I won't — I won't trouble you any more.'

He took her at her word, and with her hand clutching his arm they moved slowly into South Street. Here to No-man's immense relief they did soon find themselves at a place where refreshments were sold and where there were little tables and seats.

At one of these tables they now sat down, and Dud got her some milk and a biscuit. Here, as she drank the milk, she showed symptoms of recovery. Her eyes behind her spectacles began to have more speculation in them, and ere long she actually smiled at him.

‘I’m quite all right now, Mr No-man,’ she remarked in her ordinary voice. ‘I’m *so* sorry to have been such a bother. You must wish you’d never spoken to me! And it was I, too, who made you go into that circus-field. I’ve brought you nothing but bad luck this morning. I’m almost afraid to beg you to come and see us. You’ll think of me as a person of ill omen. But please go now! I’ll rest here for a time before I start back. I beg you, don’t let me waste any more of your morning. My husband will be shocked when he hears I’ve taken up so much of your time.’

With the recovery of her equanimity, however, Nancy Quirm’s original effect upon him came back. ‘She really is nice,’ he thought. ‘For a very little’, he thought, ‘I’d tell her about Wizzie Ravelston.’

There was a mirror near where they were sitting; and as he was wondering whether he dared take her at her word and just leave her here — for he had already begun to compose *two* letters to Wizzie, one to Yeovil and another to Salisbury — he gazed at the reflected image of their figures sitting there side by side.

‘What kind of a person did I seem to Wizzie?’ he thought, as he surveyed his dark, closely cropped skull, his hooked nose, his weak chin, his protruding upper lip. ‘How old are you?’ he began to wonder, as he gazed at the image of his companion, but the next second Mrs Quirm’s pale lineaments in the mirror became merely the plastic material wherewith his senses repictured that girl's expression as he heard her say, 'I'll be your woman. I'll make your bed.'

He turned to his companion. 'If you promise not to move till I come back,' he announced suddenly, and then he rose so abruptly as nearly to upset the little wicker table with its blue cloth, 'I'll just do a couple of errands. But I won't be more than a few minutes; and if I don't find you here when I return I'll be so angry that I'll never meet your precious Thuella!'

'I'll be here!' declared Mrs Quirm emphatically.

'Do you promise?' he reiterated, for oddly enough he now felt protected in some way in her company, while outside, beyond her protection, were the dirty lavender tights of that 'lurin' figure, a hubbub of circus-fields, and all Yeovil and Salisbury mixed together in one terrifying crowd of unknown streets.

'I hope you *will* be all right,' he called back to her from the door. His tone had unmistakable concern in it, but though Nancy Quirm may not have been subtle enough to detect all the nuances of his childlike appeal to her, he felt something that was not just simple gratitude in the smile she gave him.

Hurrying up South Street, he rushed into the post-office, and buying a couple of letter-cards, each with its comforting rim of good, secretive, conspiring glue, he took possession of a partition at the desk for telegrams and wrote two communications. The first of these was addressed to the Yeovil post-office and ran thus:

Dear Wizzie,

Meet me at the entrance to the big Parish Church, or just *inside*, between six and seven tomorrow Thursday; and if we miss I will be there again on

Saturday; and I will call for a letter too. My name is D. No-man. Tell me in your letter where and when to meet you if we miss.

Your friend,
D.N.

PS I live — at High East Street, Dorchester.

And the second was addressed to the Salisbury post-office and ran as follows:

Dear Wizzie,

Meet me at the entrance to the Cathedral between six and seven on Friday. I will be there again on Sunday and I will call for a letter too. My name is D. No-man. The woman said 'Salisbury', so I chanced it!

Your friend,
D.N.

PS I live — at High East Street, Dorchester.

Having licked his longest finger with meticulous scrupulosity, Dud fastened up these missives, glancing round savagely at a portly commercial traveller who was fumbling across the desk to reach the inkpot. He then addressed them both to their respective destinations, angrily hiding what he wrote from the totally uninquisitive eye of this worthy man: 'Miss Wizzie Ravelston — *To be called for.'*

Hurrying out with these fatal communications, he dropped them, one after the other, with infinite care into the orifice marked 'Posting'. He even went so far, in his anxiety that they should get safe to the bottom, as to follow them with his hand, groping so much like a thief in that dark aperture that a passer-by glanced suspiciously at him.

Then he gave a deep sigh and walked back to the little bakery. As he walked he was conscious that the pulses of both his wrists were throbbing violently and that he had a clutching sensation in the pit of his stomach, while the whole of South Street was completely obliterated by a vision of lavender-coloured tights with a stain on them in the shape of the figure eight.

His mind was in a turmoil. He knew well what a revolution this was, what an insurrection against everything on which his emotional life had fed for ten years; but from the moment he had seen that figure crouching on the caravan bed he had no second of hesitation. His whole being leaped towards that luckless girl in one desperate upheaval. If he was conscious of the least back-eddy of remorse or shame it was no more than a handful of bubbles on the furious tide of his impulse. ‘If I don’t find her again,’ he said to himself, ‘I shall be—’ And at the thought of the absolute desolation that such a thing would mean — this new self within him, with its leap towards life, buried in ashes — he grew cold all over.

He received an unpleasant shock — not a very deep one (for, having got those letter-cards off, he was beyond any serious concern as to what happened to Mrs Quirm) but still an annoying shock — when he found her leaning back in her wicker chair in front of the blue table-cloth in a half-fainting condition. The woman of the shop was standing by her side with a glass of water, and as soon as No-man entered she informed him that she had dispatched a boy to call a taxi.

‘She told me to get one,’ the woman explained, ‘before she went off. She felt it coming on. How do you feel now, madam?’

Mrs Quirm made a feeble gesture towards her hat, which the woman had removed.

'I'm — *such* a — bother!' she gasped hoarsely, recognizing Dud, 'but — I must — I fear — ask you—'

He divined her meaning. 'Of course I'll go with you,' he said hurriedly. 'She lives at the end of some lane,' he added for the benefit of the shop-woman.

'I know,' that lady said. 'She's told me. They call it Glymes. There are two houses there. It's where Mr Wye lives. Tell the driver it's Mr Wye's. He's lived there for years.'

It thus became Dud's destiny to find himself, about twenty minutes later, supporting the Cemetery Woman on the seat of the biggest and most luxurious taxi he had ever entered. It appeared to be necessary for this conveyance to make a wide circuit to reach the lane in question, which turned out, when it *was* reached, to be a narrow road, sometimes running between hedges and sometimes through an open upland, but following in its main direction a ridge of green pastures that looked down upon Dorchester from the north.

Readers of this meticulous chronicle who know the district will look in vain today for any relics of Glymes, for not only has the plough passed over the spot, but ashes have been sprinkled where the two cottages stood; and where Mrs Quirm at this time cultivated her little flower-garden there is now a gravel pit.

But Glymes, when Dud saw it that day, represented a conglomeration of low slate roofs, irregular gables, and brick chimneys, that from a distance looked like a small farm-house but was in reality a couple of adjacent cottages, the abode at that time of the Quirms and the Wyes. These two dwellings stood side by side, so that all their front windows shared the same extensive view. The view they shared was indeed one of the finest in that part of the county, comprising in its scope the whole of Dorchester, together with the wide-stretching downs to the south of the town, downs which, beginning to rise beyond Fordington Great Field, and sinking for a space where Came Church and Came House stand, mount up to the far-seen tumulus-bearing ridge where Culliford Tree — really a monumental *clump* of trees — overlooks the expanse towards the Channel.

His charge once safe in her own house and in the presence of her husband, it might well have been supposed that Dud would have hurriedly departed; but such was far from being the case. His excitement about Wizzie, the thundering beat of his pulses, as if with the release of a sobbing flood of ten years' suppressed feelings, his anticipation of what tomorrow might bring forth, threw him into a mood of wild recklessness in which he only wanted to take the slow-moving hours by the throat and strangle them one after another and rush over their dead bodies to the train for Yeovil! He would get the earliest morning train. He would spend the day at the Three Choughs. He had been there before and remembered the name well. But aye! he would be outside that church, or inside that church, or straddling like Apollyon across the path to that church, long before it struck six by the clock!

'If that old bitch', he thought, 'wasn't lying and it *is* Salisbury, I'll take some late train from Yeovil; and if there's no letter at the post-office there — and it's mad to think there would be, for how *could* there be? — I'll go straight to the fair-field and *insist* on seeing her!'

So far he had only caught a glimpse of Mr Quirm as that gentleman helped him getting the lady into the house; and since then it had been his role to sit by her side as she lay on a faded and dirty couch in a room that he heard them describe as the study, though it turned out to be their only living-room, while her husband prepared some medicinal concoction for her in the kitchen. The woman's eyes were shut now, and she lay breathing so softly that he fancied she might be asleep. She had roused herself to murmur some question about Mr Quirm and had smiled with what looked like weary amusement when Dud explained where the man was.

His own thoughts, as he watched those tired eyelids under the blurred spectacles, had suddenly taken such a drastic leap that it made the whole fabric of Glymes with all its inhabitants melt into insubstantial vapour. 'Why don't I go round to that market-field tonight and find out for certain where they're going tomorrow? I'd surely find *someone* to ask, without being seen hanging round by Old Funky?'

With what seemed like the reasonable part of his mind he decided that this was what he *would* do, but he had an extraordinary shrinking from it that he couldn't overcome. He had a blind fear that he *might* be seen and that, if he were, the girl would be somehow spirited away!

He glanced at a plate of cold meat that had been laid at his side among the piles of books. 'It's funny', he thought, 'that I'm not a bit hungry. It must be that girl. I don't believe I'll eat a morsel till I'm safe in the train for Yeovil. How long that chap is! What the devil is he doing? I must have been sitting here for at least half an hour.'

But several more minutes passed, and he had begun to feel sure by her breathing that the woman *was* asleep, when the door opened and the man came in. He was holding a steaming bowl with a big wooden spoon in it, and he stood solemnly in the doorway stirring the bowl's contents. He was a big heavily built man, a good deal older than Dud, and what chiefly impressed the latter about him were the majestic proportions of his head and of his swarthy features. Mr Quirm's features were indeed nothing less than tremendous. Brow, nose, mouth, chin, all were modelled on a scale of majestic massiveness that would have been awe-inspiring if the man's eyes had been different. But Mr Quirm's eyes were dull, lifeless, colourless, opaque. They were empty of every gleam of human response. They neither softened nor warmed; they neither lightened nor darkened; they were simply *there*, as if someone had found a great antique mask with empty eye-sockets, and had inserted a couple of glass marbles into the holes. His head was covered with small stiff black curls, and so low did these curls grow on his brooding forehead that Dud was reminded of some gigantic bust he had seen once, but whether Greek or Roman he could not remember. His dominant impression of the man, as he recalled it afterwards, was of a half-vitalized corpse, a being that 'but usurped his life', a semi-mortuus, an entity only half there.

'Thankee for playing sentinel, Mr Newman,' the man remarked. 'Why, you haven't touched that meat! Don't you eat lunch? I don't myself, to tell you the truth. I think it's a miserable, pestilential meal. Now, my Nancykins, now, my sick kitten, your old conjurer has brought you your jorum! Here you are... Sip it carefully, now. Not too fast, my dabchick! That's it. Just a little more, my snowball! The whole spoonful now, and my seraph will soon be well again!'

Treating Dud as if he didn't exist, the big man had knelt down by the dilapidated sofa and had begun feeding Mrs Quirm with the wooden spoon. Never did our friend forget the convoluted unpleasantness of that scene! Indeed, if he hadn't been protected from the whole atmosphere of Glymes by his obsession for Wizzie Ravelston, he would have incontinently bolted. He felt convinced that the dabchick on the horse-hair sofa gave him several glances of ironic deprecation as she lapped up that precious concoction.

'It's made of nettles,' Dud thought, 'nettles and camomile and some kind of fungus. Yes, I certainly smell fungus in it!'

But the complicated irony of Nancy Quirm's expression, as he caught it over the great hand of her old conjurer and his wooden spoon, mitigated the unpleasantness of the scene. 'There's something in that woman's soul that's *invincible,'* he thought, 'something strong enough to defy this welter of antiquarianism, this great imbecile's bullying, this plate of cold mutton, this jorum of stinking funguses, this disgusting sofa, and all this horrible dabchick talk! There is such a thing as the Irony of the Mothers, that can cope with all the devils of Hell! This fellow's tone is sickening. It's like the jolly badinage of the Lemurs who buried Faust! The chap's face would be as pale as his woman's, only his complexion's so dark. He looks as if he never took any exercise. I believe he reads these damned books — God! it makes me ashamed to be a writer: "Scribble, scribble, scribble!" — all day and all night, lolling on this awful sofa like a great sweltering toad, like "the fat weed that rots itself at ease on Lethe's wharf"! The chap has an unpleasant smell too. It's in those clothes of his. I am sure he sleeps in them. No wonder his woman has a bad heart!'

It must be confessed that Mr Quirm's ancient and frayed broadcloth trousers, and his jersey that had once been blue and now was an indescribable colour, were not calculated to evoke pleasure in normal human senses; nor, as he knelt close to Dud, with the steam of his bowl circling round his head, was his proximity altogether free from a sweetish-sickly odour that really did have a faint resemblance to the smell of a corpse.

But to our friend's surprise this repulsive concoction thus indecently administered — for never in his life had he heard such a string of fondling endearments — had a magical effect on the patient's condition. Dud began to think there must have been some aphrodisiac drug in it, or at least some powerful juice charged with alcoholic fermentation, for at the end the woman not only swung her feet off the sofa and assumed a sitting posture, but actually snatched the bowl from her husband and, tilting it up, drained it to the last drop.

Our friend had the kind of imagination that always seized upon the grotesque and even monstrous aspects of things. If he had not been of an extremely sturdy nature in other respects, this tendency might have made him a savage pessimist, but it was a tendency well under control. He now observed, with a fantastic mixture of discomfort and satisfaction, in fact as if he were being *physically tickled*, the singular effect it had upon Mrs Quirm's appearance when her face was concealed by this convex object.

Mr Quirm, with a totally impassive countenance, leant forward and deliberately flicked, with his forefinger and thumb, the back of the upheld bowl. 'Good girl!' he murmured approvingly. 'Now you're my precious again, now you're my dandipet, my linky-love, my dilly-darling!'

It produced a weird effect to hear these fond babyings issue from that majestic and impassive mouth. The man turned his tremendous countenance towards our friend even while he was still murmuring this gibberish, and the newcomer at Glymes experienced a sensation that was nothing short of uncanny when he met the unmoved stare that accompanied such intimate endearments.

But Nancy Quirm stood up now and seemed completely recovered. She smiled at Dud in that same mischievous challenging way that she had made use of in the cemetery. 'I'm now going to keep my promise to you', she said airily, 'and introduce you to Thuella!'

Dud consulted his watch for the second time that afternoon. 'I am afraid', he murmured, 'I must be off very soon. I have only just — only just come here, you know.'

'Are you going to stay long?' she asked, picking up, as she spoke, both the empty bowl and the plate of cold meat.

'You needn't answer if you don't want to, Mr Newman,' interjected her husband. 'Women's curiosity can't always be satisfied.'

'His name is No-man,' protested Nancy Quirm, and with her free hand she straightened the collar of his filthy jersey, smiling at him tenderly. 'But of course I don't want to be inquisitive,' she added in a low voice, giving Dud a quick intimate glance.

The man surveyed them both with a look of weary indifference. 'He'll stay if he wants to stay, I suppose!' he reiterated. 'And if he doesn't want to stay he'll go. He has his own affairs, I presume, as we all have.'

With this Mr Quirm seemed suddenly to become completely oblivious of both of them. He fumbled about among the books on the table while his wife looked at Dud as if he were visiting her in the cage of the curious beast of whom it was her duty to take care. 'He'll turn round a few times and then lie down,' her look seemed to say, 'and when he's asleep we can go.'

The great unwieldy man did, in fact, soon find the volume he sought, and, sinking into a deep arm-chair by the fire, lit a cigarette and began to read.

He looked up, however, when he found that the couple hadn't yet gone out of the room. 'Have you told Newman what to expect?' he said. 'People don't like to be taken by surprise.'

Mrs Quirm went over to him and, bending down, kissed him lightly on the top of his coal-black head. Dud noticed that the man's hair, in its tight little curls, grew so closely to his ponderous skull as to resemble some species of dusky moss. He was reminded of the way certain similar growths look upon old tree-stumps. He felt himself almost as uncomfortable when the wife kissed the husband as when the husband called the wife dilly-darling.

‘They oughtn’t to act like this before a stranger’, he thought. ‘There’s something indecent about it.’

But the Beast in the Cage was evidently quiescent now and likely to remain so.

‘Come!’ she whispered, opening the door and beckoning Dud to follow her.

She took him first into the kitchen, a room that opened on the back of Glymes and that proved the only tidy and clean place he was destined to enter in that portion of the two houses. Here she deposited what she was carrying and then led him to a closed doorway at the end of a passage. This doorway possessed that peculiarly secretive, disconcerting, and even menacing aspect that doors have which are neither inside doors nor outside doors, but doors between separate establishments.

Before opening this barrier between the two families at Glymes, Nancy Quirm turned round to him.

‘What did you think of Urien?’ she whispered with her challenging smile, that smile that had the power of annihilating a score of years, and of making a woman of forty into a girl of twenty.

‘I beg your pardon. Do you mean—’ stammered Dud.

‘I mean *him, he*, my man in there,’ she cried. ‘Why don’t you exclaim over his handsomeness? Why don’t you cry out that you’ve never seen anyone like him? Why don’t you tell me what an enviable woman I am?’

Dud could only open his mouth in helpless bewilderment as he contemplated her expression of furious sarcasm outlined against that unpromising door.

'Hasn't everyone in Dorchester told you about him?' she continued with mounting excitement. 'Haven't they begged you to go and see him as their greatest wonder after Maiden Castle and Poundbury and Maumbury Rings? Haven't they assured you that in the future people will come to Glymes as if to a shrine?'

Poor Dud could only shut his mouth and uneasily moisten his lips with his tongue, as a lap-dog does when uncertain about his mistress's temper.

'Why didn't it surprise you?' she went on, while he thought to himself, 'What *is* there about a woman's sarcasm that hurts so? It certainly isn't its subtlety. God! I don't envy that great hulking stinkard. Good luck to him with his dilly-darling!'

'Surprise you, I mean,' she concluded, 'like something monstrous' — and he could see a swollen vein in her white throat expanding as if it would burst— 'when I called him Urien just now?'

'Why should it?' protested Dud, feeling less and less sympathetic. 'Why should it, if it's his name?'

Nancy laughed a rasping little laugh. 'I suppose *you* didn't mind his calling you Newman, then? But I saw you *did!* And so you can imagine what *I* felt when he started calling himself Urien when his name is Enoch! Enoch Quirm's *his* name, just as my name's Nancy. They're old West Country names; and of course Enoch's out of the Bible. But simple things don't suit *him*. No! *He's* not a simple man. He's *more* than a man! There are too many Enoch Quirms buried in Dorset churchyards to suit *my* Enoch. He must be something greater and grander! And if he can't be great in his life — and you see what he is: I can't even keep him *clean*! — he'll be great in a name, and not his own name either. He'll steal a name for himself, and then will swell over it and swell over it—' She broke off with a groan, but still stood gazing at what she could see of Dud’s bewildered face in that dark passage, keeping her hand on the unopened door.

‘Damn this Glymes!’ our friend thought. ‘What are these people to me? I’ve got to keep my wits about me, or I may be making a mistake I’ll regret till I die. I believe I *must* go back to that place tonight and insist on seeing her. They may change their mind completely, and go neither to Yeovil *nor* Salisbury. And she doesn’t know my name or address!’

But Nancy Quirm was speaking to him again, and in a different tone. ‘I really don’t know’, she said, ‘why I’m letting myself go like this with you, Mr No-man; I expect it’s because I live such an unnatural life out here, and see so few people. I oughtn’t to have said such things about Enoch. Of course he has a perfect right to call himself what he likes, or think of himself as he likes’. She paused, let go of the door-handle, and began straightening her blouse, stuffing it tightly under her waist-band. ‘He’s wonderful with his herbs. I must allow *that* to him. It’s that stuff he made me take that’s cured me. I suppose it’s gone to my head too. We’re a queer set out here at Glymes. But you’ll find us quite different another day, if you bother to visit us again. I oughtn’t to have said what I did, and I wouldn’t have if we hadn’t met *out there*!’ She leaned forward quite close to him and clutched at his sleeve. ‘He was Enoch’s stepson,’ she whispered. ‘They couldn’t get on together. *That* was at the bottom of everything. Enoch couldn’t change, and Jimmy couldn’t change. I oughtn’t to have talked like this, but I always feel I *must* burst out to someone after I’ve been to the cemetery.’

‘Oh, it’s all right!’ murmured Dud in an absent-minded voice.

But the woman had again let go of the door-handle. She seemed too excited to know what she was doing, and kept fumbling with both hands at the rim of his coat.

'I'll never come again to this damned Glymes,' he said to himself in a fever of impatience.

'I don't want you to think', she went on, 'that I blame my husband. I understand him as no one else understands him. I venerate him as no one else venerates him. You can see how he cured me just now! My heart's been so bad since Jimmy left us that I wouldn't be alive now if it wasn't for his knowledge and his healing power.'

'Oh, it's quite all right!' repeated the wool-gathering Dud, and he thought to himself, 'They *couldn't* stop me from seeing her! She's of age. She's her own mistress. Suppose I *did* risk it and go tonight? I know one thing: the bottom of my life'll fall out if I don't get hold of her!'

'Whatever anyone says against him,' went on the excited woman, and in complete unconsciousness of what she was doing she still continued fumbling with the frayed edge of his coat, 'no one can deny, *with my heart as it is*, that he is a miracle-worker with his drugs! But then, don't you see, if I'd never married him, Jimmy would be alive today. A woman can only save a life when she gives herself wholly. Without Enoch I could have saved him. *With* Enoch I couldn't. So I am the one! That's what I always say to myself. I am the one.'

'These are — hard questions,' murmured the preoccupied Dud, and then with a jerk of his shoulders and a high-pitched creak in his voice he suddenly cried, 'You won't think me rude, Mrs Quirm, if I — if I put off — *going in there* — till some other time?'

Mrs Quirm's weakness disappeared instantaneously. Her whole expression changed, and letting go his coat, she turned round sharply and gave that unpromising door several vigorous taps with her knuckles.

It was then that Dud realized how calmly he had been taking for granted that Mrs Quirm had been affected by the contents of that bowl and was in an unnatural state.

It was on the contrary in a competent woman's most normal manner that she now declared, 'Oh, certainly you shall go. I fully understand you must go. I only want you just to set eyes on—' But at that point the door was opened by the very person whose name she was on the point of uttering.

Dud's first impression of the notorious Thuella came from a pair of the most painted lips he had ever seen! These scarlet lips belonged to a tall and incredibly thin young woman, dressed in a long old-fashioned black silk dress that might have been her grandmother's. Her hair, of a reddish-gold, was drawn up tight from the back of her neck, and her neck itself, below these smooth strands of gold and above her lace collar, was white as a magnolia petal. When she turned her head towards him and gave him her hand he was startled by its feverish magnetism. Her fingers communicated to his nerves something that resembled an electric shock. He became aware too not only of her dark blue eyes but of her soft white neck that was as slender as a flower-stalk but seemed to pulse with the vibrant livingness of the neck of a swan.

Beneath that black silk gown he felt, rather than saw, the extreme thinness of her form. Her chest, her hips, her legs seemed to be thinner than the thinnest boy's, so thin as to resemble the fancy of some perverse sculptor who had turned in fastidious loathing from every normal curve in a woman's body!

But the girl had painted her lips so red that her mouth in her white face seemed like a wound, a wound that struck him at once as the outward sign of a complicated tragedy.

From this crimson mouth there now poured forth afresh a stream of high-pitched words, words that seemed like the *spiritual blood* of an infinite grievance. It was a continuation apparently of what she had been uttering before they interrupted her, nothing less in fact than a torrent of sarcastic invective addressed to her father.

This gentleman, who had risen from his chair by the fire when, after crossing a little passageway, they entered the room, bowed politely to Dud, nodded in a friendly manner at Mrs Quirm, and asserted himself sufficiently, in spite of the girl's invective, to get the visitors seated.

But Thuella refused to sit down. Like a black-and-white insect with a crimson mark upon it, she kept fluttering about the room, until to Dud's imagination she dropped her blood-spotted insect role and became the Lamia of Keats's poem, her swan's neck in her wrath acquiring the disturbing curves of a beautiful snake.

It was only by degrees that the drift of her grievance against her father became clear. It had been obvious from the start that she was anxious to drag Mrs Quirm into her quarrel, and now she seemed ready to drag in the stranger too.

From between those crimson lips she was, in her grievance and her passion, trying to direct against that little old man in his neat clothes and black skull-cap some jet of vengeance that was beyond her own frail androgynous being to call forth.

Some of her allusions were cryptic to a newcomer, and Dud's mind kept wandering off to Wizzie on her caravan bed, but finally the girl reached a point that made him very much alive.

'It's just like you, and just like *all* men,' she cried, 'and Nancy knows it is, to say because you took me to the pictures yesterday you won't take me to the circus tonight!'

It may be believed how Dud's attention quickened when he heard the word 'circus'. He was confused by the confederate glance that Nancy Quirm gave him at that point, but so lively had the reference to the circus made his wits that he now gathered that the young woman had just completed a small oil-painting — he saw it resting on its easel — and was in desperate need of distraction after this arduous undertaking. It also appeared that the income of herself and her parent largely depended on her activity as an artist.

As soon as he got these facts into his head Dud surveyed the picture on the easel with more interest. It was a picture intended, as far as he could make out, to represent either waves, or clouds, or spirals of smoke, but to his untutored mind it was like nothing so much as bales of fluffy and rather dirty cotton being projected through space on a pair of seraphic wings.

'It's in the modern style,' he thought. 'That's why I can't make head or tail of it.'

There were no more references to the circus in what the girl was now saying, and her grievance, whatever it was, began to subside and finally died down altogether.

Dud had at first been constantly rehearsing in his mind variously worded excuses with which he would get up to go; but the reference to the circus seemed in some mysterious way to carry through the air, clear from the Weymouth Road to Glymes — that is to say, across the whole town of Dorchester — some voyaging essence of Wizzie's personality, and to make this adhere, in a good deal more of a vaporous form than Thuella's clouds, to Thuella's own person!

The two girls were not in the least alike, and yet — and yet they *were* alike! But perhaps it was only that he had stumbled upon them both in their fits of anger. Yes, this psychic metamorphosis, this transubstantiatory grafting of the one's identity upon the other's, must have come about, he said to himself, from the fact that all feminine revolt has something in common.

Wizzie's anger was, it is true, rather addressed to Mrs Urgan than to Old Funky, and it had to do with much more serious issues; but how queer that the *circus* should bring them together!

Thuella was furious because she hadn't seen the circus, while to Wizzie it was a matter of life and death never to see the circus again. He certainly had the circus on his nerves just now, for he suddenly began to tell himself a story about the wearer of that black dress, for all her lovely face and the braids of shining hair coiled round the top of her head, being discovered by him as the Thin Woman in some sideshow of Old Funky's!

The girl, anyway, was now standing in front of Nancy, looking in her weird slenderness exactly like the Lamia of the poem. She kept twisting and untwisting her fingers behind her back as she stood listening, as far as he could gather, to the story of how Mrs Quirm had had her heart-attack at the side of the cenotaph.

'I think, if you don't mind,' Dud began, 'I ought to be—' But his mouth was stopped by the fascination with which he felt compelled to watch the motions of his host. The old man was taking two thin battered volumes out of his capacious side-pockets, glancing at them, exchanging them, replacing them, and then, even after giving both his pockets a complacent pat, falling into the throes of some new and still more troubled dilemma about them, which led, against his will, to his having to begin the whole adjustment all over again.

'What *are* those books, sir, if I may ask?' enquired Dud.

'The *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus* in old school editions,' replied Teucer Wye. 'I'm not comfortable if they're not in my pocket. Only I like the *Phaedrus* in the right one, and the other in the left one; and I'm not comfortable till I know for certain that I've got 'em where they ought to be!'

The man now came over to Dud and began talking eagerly to him. ‘They’re my only books,’ he said rapidly. ‘You see what this room is!’ He gave an expressive and rather Gallic movement with his shoulders and hands. ‘The girl’s room; entirely hers! And it’s the only room we’ve got, except the kitchen, and the bedrooms upstairs.’ His words grew faster and more confidential after a glance at the women to make sure he was not overheard. ‘It’s fate of course that she is as she is. Of course she *does* sell her pictures. She has an agent in America who sells them for her. They like the kind of thing she does, over there; and besides — well! we need the money.’

Once again he made that expressive French gesture. ‘But it’s fate of course. I called her Thuella, out of Homer. “Thuella” means “a storm-cloud”; and so the clouds of the sky, the dew of the dawn, the waves of the sea, and all other elemental beings are her passion. I used to read Homer in those days, when her mother was carrying her, and I was always quoting him — well! perhaps it *was* an infliction; at any rate she used to hold it against me — the mother, I mean — but I thought she’d at last have a boy I could talk to, for I couldn’t talk to the boy I had, though, my God, he talks to me! But instead’ — the little man’s skull-cap was now on a level with Dud’s chin— ‘instead of a boy it was Thuella!’

During this speech Dud’s mind kept wandering back to Wizzie, but he did hear enough to be sorry for this girl-ruled Platonist. Teucer Wye’s forehead was so capacious that it compelled respect for his intellectual power, and there was something at once spirited and touching, at least so Dud thought, about the way in which his white silky hair — was it red-gold, like his daughter’s, once? — hung over his brow in the manner of a feminine fringe.

Dud had time for an extraordinary number of conflicting images as he sat listening to Teucer Wye. Sometimes he was in the caravan, looking at the stain in the shape of the figure eight on Wizzie's lavender-coloured tights. Sometimes he was in the cemetery, looking at the skeleton-shape, still covered with horrible patches of decomposition, that was his lost bride's new legacy to his mind.

But his senses returned by fits and starts to the curious room in which he sat. It was certainly a feminine room! Apart from the cloud-picture on the easel everything he could see was feminine. The magazines were, the cushions were, the books were, the ornaments were, the decorations were, the very tidiness was! And in addition to all this, as he glanced about with his nerves as taut as if they were a string at which Wizzie Ravelston was violently tugging, he became aware that there were actually certain objects from Thuella's toilet-table here and there, not left by accident or from untidy haste, but evidently in constant use, things like cold-cream pots and elegant scent-bottles, and indeed, on one small writing-desk, a silver hand-mirror and a brush and comb.

When at last Mr Wye walked over to the fire-place and stood with his back to it, Dud took in the fact that the man, though of low stature and very slightly built, possessed considerable dignity. He seemed indeed almost a distinguished figure as he stood there making an obvious effort to overcome his mania about the volumes in his pockets, and muttering something to himself — probably in Greek!

Wizzie's would-be rescuer came to the conclusion that Mr Wye had lost all his teeth, for when his mouth fell into repose he had a habit of pressing his lips together in such a way as to form a perpetual grin, a grin hardly less sardonic than the one reproduced in Houdon's famous bust of Voltaire.

This nut-cracker mouth made a queer contrast to the man’s transparent blue eyes and the silky hair under his velvet cap; but to Dud’s grotesque and rather malicious imagination his whole personality, as he stood there in his elegant light suit and with a wisp of greenery in his button-hole, resembled some final touch of feminine bric-à-brac, a Meissen china figure, perhaps, in the biscuit stage, wherewith the young painter of clouds had adorned her studio! In fact the sight of this figure with a cigarette in its mouth, its hands fumbling at its pockets, and its lips murmuring some sentence of Plato, had something about it that struck even Dud’s preoccupied intelligence as not a little shocking. Had Thuella, with her mediaeval swan’s neck and her painted mouth, actually ensorcerized the words of Plato himself till they whistled between her parent’s toothless gums like the sighing of a virgin’s lute?

For about the tenth time in these Glymes ménages — and he found, as he met Nancy Quirm’s questioning smile from across the room, that this Cemetery Woman still exercised a friendly influence upon him — Mr D. No-man took out his watch. But on this occasion — on the strength of Mrs Quirm’s look — he had the courage to announce the necessity of his immediate departure.

‘It’s nearly four o’clock,’ he said emphatically. ‘I really must be getting back to my work.’

The thin black form with the swan’s neck rose hastily and began murmuring something about tea; but Nancy Quirm was on her feet too now and proceeded to make things easy for him.

‘I should be jealous’, she laughed, ‘if Mr No-man’s first meal at Glymes — for he wouldn’t touch any lunch — should be anywhere but with me! I must be off too, for Urien will be wanting *his* tea; but you’ll come over often, won’t you, Mr No-man, now that you know the way? I believe we’re all going to like you ever so much! Thuella — may I tell him, my dear? — says that you make her think of a gladiator.'

At that point the girl audaciously and impulsively lifted up her small head and, fixing him with eyes full of animation, cried in a caressing and cajoling tone, 'Won't *you*, since Dad is so crusty, take me to the circus this afternoon?'

The human mind is a strange thing, or at any rate the mind of Mr D. No-man was a strange thing, for, instead of being aghast at this startling proposal, Dud actually felt an astonishing shock of pleasure. The chief element in this rush of pleasurable emotion that brought the blood to his cheeks was — at least that is how he interpreted it to himself — an immense relief to his cowardice. Down deep in his nature he had already been planning to go back to those people that night. He felt if he didn't go he might lose sight of Wizzie forever; but he felt thoroughly scared — scared of himself, scared of Wizzie, and above all scared of Old Funky and that detestable woman.

But such was the nature of his nervous system that the idea of going there with this remarkable young person, the idea of facing those people in conspiracy with a youthful Circe who could reduce Homer to a harpsichord and Plato to a pianola, seemed to him quite different from the madness it really was, seemed to him in fact just *what he needed* to make the adventure, with all its wild possibilities, feasible to his timidity.

Mrs Quirm, who had been observing this scene with a look like that of a skilful playwright whose most secret intention has been caught by her puppets' representatives, now put in a decisive word.

'Mr No-man is already interested in a performer there. The circus is a foreign one, not a regular one,' she remarked, 'and since we've learnt that this special little troupe may lose its job any minute, he was thinking of going there tonight himself.’

Dud stared at her with open mouth.

‘Have you — told her — what — what we saw?’ he stammered.

Nancy Quirm smiled at him her most subtle and provocative smile, and, as she did so, came nearer to him. Then she repeated that impulsive gesture she had made in front of the closed door, and caught at the edge of his coat.

‘I only told’, she murmured softly, ‘how I held that old woman back while you went to the caravan. I couldn’t tell her any more, could I? But I’ll make her tell *me* everything when she comes back tonight!’

If Dud had been less obsessed by Wizzie’s desperate face he would have been dismayed at this publishing of his infatuation. But as it was he felt as if this subtle ally of his, knowing his timidity, had deliberately involved Thuella in his daring quest. He felt like a haggard knight-at-arms who on the verge of his great adventure was being led to the threshold of his desire by soft confederate hands.

Teucer Wye left his place by the fire, at this critical moment, and came up to them. His clear blue eyes were radiant with relief. It was evident that he anticipated with immense satisfaction a long uninterrupted Platonic evening.

‘By Jove!’ he cried. ‘Are you really going to be so kind to us, Mr—’ He paused and glanced at Mrs Quirm.

‘Mr No-man,’ murmured that lady.

‘Mr No-man,’ he echoed, thrusting both hands hurriedly into his side-pockets. ‘For I assure you, Mr No-man, it’s more than — more than — I mean it’s a great kindness to my daughter — and — *and to me too,’* he added, allowing his patient mouth to relapse into that *L’Homme qui rit* grin, which was so disconcerting. ‘She’s been working so hard lately,’ he recommenced, noticing the agitated frown of indecision that convulsed our friend's countenance, 'and I'm — well, to tell you the truth, it's an effort for me to go out in the evening.'

Never in his life had so many conflicting thoughts, so many turbulent impressions, whirled through poor Dud's brain. At his feet, on that smooth polished floor, he detected a little drop of blood-coloured paint. Upon this object the whole machinery of his soul seemed compelled to concentrate. For the flicker of a second he recalled Mrs Quirm's words in the cemetery: 'If you come to them, you set them free; and they must be set free.'

'It's all right,' he blurted out, lifting his head and relaxing his frown. 'Don't mention it, sir! It's nothing. It's a pleasure to me. Shall we—' And he looked straight at Thuella — not into her eyes, however, which were fixed upon him then with a slow questioning gaze, but into the soft obscurity of her white neck. 'Shall we start at once? You won't mind if we — if we call at my place first? But of course—' At this point he looked away from the girl to the elder woman, as if asking for a new lead. 'Of course', he added, now at last meeting Thuella's eyes, 'you'll want your tea; but there are' — he flung this at that scarlet mouth as if it were a snowball— 'plenty of little shops!'

'I should think there are!' laughed Nancy Quirm, looking from one to the other with her successful puppet-manager air. 'Oh, you'll make quite a sensation, you two, wherever you go! But don't be silly, as I was,' she added, smiling at Thuella. 'Don't faint by that cenotaph!'

A quarter of an hour later the figure of our friend carrying his great oak cudgel, and the figure of Miss Wye in a long ulster-cape and a cloth cap, might have been seen making their impatient way across the narrow river-bridge leading to what all Dorchester knows as the Hangman's Cottage. They spoke very little as they went, though at one point, where the path between the ditches was impeded by an overflow of water, Dud had felt impelled to offer his companion his hand.

To his surprise the fingers the girl slipped hurriedly into his own were ungloved, and he found them as feverish and electric as when he had first greeted her. Was she consumptive, he wondered, or was she morbidly sensitive to a man's touch?

The sun had disappeared for the day, when they reached the Hangman's Cottage; and Dud, who as yet knew nothing of Dorchester, hesitated whether to turn to the left, along the river-path under the prison, or to go straight up the hill between the overshadowing walls and trees.

'Do you want to go to your place', his companion whispered *'before* we have our cup of tea?'

Recalling this moment later, and how they stared at each other's faces while the sound of water rushing through an uplifted sluice became an integral part of the dusk about them, he wondered what it had been that had made them both speak in whispers. All he really wanted was to get to the circus, and to the devil with the rest, but what he actually said to her was that he had to get some money from his lodging.

Thuella pondered a moment, wrapping her cloak so tightly round her, as the cold airs from the sluice-gate invaded them, that he thought, 'She *is* thin! She's horribly, shockingly thin!'

Then she exclaimed, 'Why! That must be half-way down the street! We'd better go *this* way, then. It comes out by the bridge near the White Hart."

'What's that building up there?' he whispered as, turning eastward, he felt several drops of rain.

'Oh, I don't know,' she returned. 'Some nice comfortable house, I suppose!'

They went on a little further. ‘What’s *that* building?’ he whispered again.

‘That?’ she answered. ‘Let — me — see. Where have we got to? That must be the Governor’s, I think. No! I’m really not sure!’

The sound of running water never ceased, and with the rain the twilight seemed to be falling more thickly.

Dud kept feeling as if there were some subtle confederacy between the flow of the water and the descent of the dark. In the accumulative gathering of the one, it seemed as if what the Bible calls the water below the firmament were rising to meet its mate, while, in the accumulative sinking of the other, what the Bible calls the water above the firmament had begun to precipitate itself in a vaporous diffusion of reciprocal attraction. Dud felt as if this house his companion called the Hangman’s and this other she thought was the Governor’s were both guarding, like two insubstantial elfland warders, the one above and the other below, this mystic encounter of water with water.

‘Is that the prison over there?’ he asked presently.

‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘Over there and *up* there!’

Certain lamps on the slope of the prison hill had already been lit for the night, though it was still far from being really dark, and these threw long wavering light-paths over the ripples of the flowing water, light-paths that moved as the man and the girl moved, sometimes lengthening themselves and sometimes shortening themselves as the two advanced. There was a deep ditch on the side of the path opposite to this flowing stream, while the path itself was flagged at the edge next to the brimming water by grey flat stones which showed whitish in the faint light.

‘What a place for running water this is!’ Dud murmured to his companion. His tone was still low, still subdued to that muted key into which they had seemed compelled to sink when they first stopped by the Hangman's Cottage.

'Yes,' she returned. 'Dad's always talking Greek about it.' She shivered and hugged herself, twisting her cloak still closer about her. 'There's a great underground river,' she whispered, 'as well as all the rest. They get their drinking water from it. There's always water! Never an end to the water!'

Dud noticed as they moved on side by side under the precipitous prison garden that one of her hands was still ungloved. It was with this one that she kept dragging her cloak round her. What *did* she make him think of at that moment? Was it of one of those queer painted *posts* that he had seen in pictures of the Grand Canal in Venice?

Presently they came to a spot where a strip of concave flagstones crossed the path. A thin stream of water was flowing over this, from the river to the ditch on the other side, and once again he offered to take her hand.

As she slipped it into his he realized even more vividly than on the first occasion how full of magnetic life a girl's ungloved fingers can be! It was as if a small naked creature, trembling with the secret pulse of its own separate identity, had yielded itself up to him.

When she drew it away he could not prevent the thought rushing into his head, 'Will Wizzie Ravelston's hand be as electric as this one's?'

But he struck the ground, after dismissing this thought, with the end of his stick. 'I'll leave her in the street', he said to himself, 'while I run up to my room and get my money.'

CHAPTER 2. All Souls' Night

IT GAVE OUR friend a queer sensation to enter his attic room in the falling dusk of this disturbed day, knowing that his ambiguous companion was waiting for him in the street below.

The cinders in the little grate had that curious look of patient desolation that extinct fires share with deserted rooms, and he found he had to turn on the electric light by his bed in order to get his money out of his mother's ottoman.

As he knelt by this object there was a moment before he opened it when the heads on those delicately embroidered gateposts seemed to take on a threatening look; and so wrought up was he that he couldn't resist twisting his own head round to glance at their solitary prototype on the bed-post. Yes! That also, in the light from the bed's head, had an accusing expression, as much as to say, 'As we thought, as we thought!' But he opened the ottoman resolutely, and, following Iago's advice, put money in his purse. He also with grim foresight thrust his cheque-book into his pocket, and then, snatching up his oak stick from the bed, where he had flung it, he stood for a second staring in troubled suspense at the ashes in the fire-place. He had not bothered to take off his cap, and the feeling of it on his head in the presence of his bookshelf and of the coloured reproduction of Dürer's sketch of Nuremberg over the hearth grated on his consciousness with the rough-edged impact of the turbulent outer world, which those books and that familiar picture usually held at bay.

With the habitual caution of a bachelor of ten years' experience Dud opened his kitchen door to make sure the gas-jets were properly out. Yes!

The Royal Martyr reposed in melancholy state on the top of the stove like a monument on a chilly pedestal, nor had the mice dragged about the floor — as they had done in all his former kitchens — the refuse from the belly of Henry VIII.

Glancing into his purse with the same nervous scrupulosity — the scrupulosity of the most unpractical of men plunging into active events — to make sure he had his door-key safe, he now ran down the four or five short flights of stairs and rejoined Miss Wye.

When he saw her standing on the curb in the drizzling rain, with her cloak wrapped so closely round her and her likeness to one of those water-posts in Venice accentuated by the twilight, he received a rending awareness of the madness of what he was doing. But he was always one for encouraging rather than suppressing those shameful and unworthy thoughts that come to us all at certain crises; and he now said to himself as he banged the street door behind him, ‘If I’d never seen Wizzie’s desperate face, should I want to be false to Mona with a painted post?’

The painted post greeted him by declaring that if he didn’t want tea, *she* didn’t. She went on to say that if he did really feel he ought to see those people again about that unhappy girl, tea-time would be a better time to do so than when they were in the full swing of the evening’s performance. His acrobat would be busy then, wouldn’t she?

It gave our friend something of a shock to hear Wizzie described as an acrobat, but he saw at once Miss Wye’s advice was extremely sound.

While he was hesitating whether — on this rainy All Souls’ evening that was proving so charged with destiny for him — it wasn’t carrying matters a little far, however crucial the situation, to deprive a girl of her tea, Thuella pulled up her dark cloth collar, pulled down her dark cloth cap, and with a jerked-out ‘Come on! Let’s go by Acland Road!’ set herself to cross the street. Our friend had nothing to do but to follow her, though he was surprised to see her turn *up* instead of down the thoroughfare when she reached the other side. Like all strangers in a place who have discovered some road for themselves, Dud could not conceive of the Fairfield as reached by any way but Icen Way. But he hung back politely, for all his excitement, when Thuella nodded towards the pleasant purlieus and the warm-welcoming red-brick façade of Acland House. He needn't have done so, however, for he soon found that Thuella was the last person in the world to devote much time to the mellow legacies of the past.

Indeed, immediately after her vague nod of approval at the general aspect of this agreeable dwelling she began asking him what he thought of Urien.

'Why does he call himself that?' enquired Dud.

'Oh, *I* don't know! You must ask him when you see him. I think Dad said it was an Ancient British name; some British chieftain, I suppose. I don't know! He reads nothing but history-books. I expect he found the name in one of those, and just hung on to it. It's certainly nicer than Enoch.'

'What kind of a person is he, Miss Wye? He's one of the most curious-*looking* human beings I've ever seen. I couldn't tell what to make of him, but he must be extraordinarily interesting when you get to know him.'

Thuella gave Dud a look of puzzled wonder. He could see that he had sunk a little in her estimation by his use of the neutral word 'interesting' as applied to Mrs Quirm's husband.

'He has always been kind to *me,'* she said laconically, 'but of course — Well! it's silly to be conventional with you. The truth is he doesn't like Dad and can't be even decent to him. Dad's nervous about my being alone with him. As if it mattered! I'm not afraid of him. Well, it's all too ridiculous!

I'm nothing to him, and he's nothing to me. But he's the only man at Glymes who isn't my father. I have to talk to someone!'

No-man looked over a picturesque wall on their right. They were now approaching South Walks. He felt obscurely piqued at the role to which he seemed relegated by her last words. 'Anyway, I'll be more than someone to talk to, to Wizzie,' he thought.

'That's a malt-house, isn't it, over there?' he remarked aloud; and then to himself: 'She's one of those girls who have a mania for all men.'

But Thuella did not glance at the malt-house. She tugged at her coat to get it yet more tightly round her.

'Have you fallen in love with this acrobat?' she asked.

As was his habit when challenged by anything important while he was on the move, No-man abruptly stopped. They were turning into the South Walks now, and beyond the trunks of the trees he saw a high brick wall with a door in it. Instead of looking at his companion he gazed across both the avenue and the road at this door in the wall. He found himself wishing that he and Wizzie were safe on the inner side of this door, while the Venetian Post remained on the outside.

'What makes you say that?' he muttered.

'Do you think I'm a fool?' she whispered at his elbow. 'Don't be like all the rest with *me*. I'm a witch, you know. Besides, you don't think Nancy didn't tell me? What were we talking about, do you suppose, except you and that girl?'

'But she — but Mrs Quirm—' he began, feeling suddenly an intense longing to be with a man, with someone who lacked this curst power of seeing through the walls of caravans.

'Don't be a ninny, Mr No-man!' was all she replied, as their eyes met through the rain.

They walked on in silence and soon reached the cenotaph. There in the dusk lay the big wreath where he had dropped his stick that morning in assisting his companion.

To his relief the rain stopped as they went together up the Weymouth road.

‘What elements were *you* born under?’ he suddenly asked.

‘What—’ she began.

‘Don’t say “What do you mean?”,’ he went on, almost peevishly. ‘It’s not a silly question. I was born under earth and air. I’m bad at lighting fires and I hate rain. I expect you’re just the opposite!’

The thin girl thought for a minute and turned down the collar of her coat. They were now passing the brewery gates, and her movement once more revealed to her companion the softness and whiteness of her neck.

‘Dad would say air for *me*, I fancy,’ she replied gravely, ‘just because of my name. But I *am* good at lighting fires; so I suppose my other — if we’re only allowed two — would be fire. It sounds exciting; but I don’t believe in it! They’re all so superstitious at Glymes that I’ve grown to believe nothing. I don’t even believe’ — he felt she gave him a mocking glance in the darkness— ‘that you’re in love with that circus-girl!’

For some reason her audacity did not displease him, perhaps because of the mental satisfaction he got from discovering that like pale flowers, and even like the glimmer of that element under which neither of them seemed to want to be born, her face did not lose its whiteness in the dusk, though her painted lips were no longer red.

He could hear the sound of the circus-engine now, and he even caught sight of a smoky torch-flare between the dark shapes of the agricultural machines that hid the market enclosure.

A wave of something resembling panic took possession of him. His limbs began to feel that cold numbness he had experienced in the morning when he approached his wife's grave. He paused, and his companion did the same.

'I'd like', he whispered, 'to talk to you about this. I ought to decide beforehand — I ought to know what I'm going to do.'

She did not smile, and the fact that she did not was an immense relief to him.

He suddenly knew that at all costs he must take her fully, *quite fully*, into his confidence. 'Where can we go to talk?' he whispered eagerly. 'I *must* know what I'm going to do.'

Thuella glanced up the road towards the Amphitheatre. 'We might—' she began. 'No, it would be too wet. Wait! Let's go into the station! There's always a fire in that little waiting-room.'

No-man had never felt less of a man than he felt at that moment. He felt like a schoolboy under the care of a schoolgirl. What he wanted more than anything else now was a respite, a delay. That she should have the power of putting her finger at least on the big hand, if not on the little hand, of time, was what he required. He assented to her place with alacrity. The circus was *there*. No one could spirit Wizzie away *that* night anyhow!

Into the station accordingly they went, and, purchasing a couple of platform tickets at the slot, were soon ensconced on two straight horse-hair chairs in front of a glowing fire.

'Well! We're at any rate out of the water for a bit!' the girl exclaimed, removing her solitary glove and stretching her thin fingers towards the blaze. 'Now let's have the whole thing!'

The whole thing took poor Dud a considerable while, but as the warmth of the fire and the proximity of the young woman gradually thawed the tension of his nerves he did succeed at last in making his feelings clear.

‘You *must* have her, then, is that it?’ Thuella said. ‘You certainly are one for quick decisions! Suppose she *is* half-crazy?’

No-man waved this aside. ‘I haven’t gone back on it for a second,’ he declared emphatically. ‘In fact it isn’t *that* I want to discuss. If she weren’t over there now, I’d be too lost to think of anything but finding her. The point isn’t about *getting* her — get her somehow I must and I will. The point’s the practical one: what’s the wisest, what’s the most sensible thing to do at this moment?’

With the natural weakness of a writer, No-man began to feel much more certain of himself now that he had put the case into vigorous speech. He rose from his slippery horse-hair seat and began pacing up and down between the girl, whose face remained bent forward over the fire, and the edge of a massive table that occupied the centre of the small room.

There was a great coloured advertisement of Durham Cathedral over the fire-place, and at this, across Thuella’s bent head, he kept glancing as he paced up and down. The sight of those massive towers restored his spirit of adventure almost as much as the fire’s warmth; and, as he glanced down at the nape of the thin girl’s neck and at the strands of golden hair he could see below the back of her boy’s cap, the natural attraction of youthful femineity began to send such a glow through his veins that he felt a different person from the frightened schoolboy of a minute ago.

As often happened with him when physical warmth took the place of physical cold he began to feel so brave and confident that a shameless and scandalous thought rushed with the speed of a projectile through his brain.

‘*If I hadn’t seen Wizzie*—’ this projectile transcribed on the airy clouds; and then, when words ceased to be a decent vehicle for so outrageous a thought, the towers of Durham Cathedral were transmuted into the improper image of Thuella’s thin but magnetic form reposing on the bed in his attic.

It was the falling of a heavy fragment of red-hot coal from the grate to the fender that finally jerked his mind into a recognition of what had happened to him that All Souls’ Day. It was not a pleasant, it was not an ideal discovery, but it came in such a flash of convincing revelation that he was forced to accept it, though it tossed his self-respect without mercy on the pikes of his revolutionary insight.

What, in fine, he recognized, as if the falling of that coal in the waiting-room grate had broken some obstinate barrier in his wits, was that his anonymous sensual desire had used his memories of his wife as a mask for its own cerebral eroticism. In other words, the being with whom he had spent his nocturnal orgies for the last ten years *was not Mona at all*. Under the mask of the fading eidolon of Mona he had been making love to a vicious creation of his own imagination, a Fata Morgana, a sylph, an elemental; and this he had endowed with perverse fascinations such as the beautiful original never possessed. And what had happened to him today was simply — as Mrs Quirm said — that by visiting the real Mona’s grave he had set her spirit free and dissolved the spell.

This lust-created elemental of his, with the figure and the lineaments of Mona, was now entirely separated from the buried girl and had no connection with her beyond a mocking, ironic, and wicked likeness. He realized it all now. That sweet creation of his concentrated erotic longing was a Frankenstein-waif, an airy nothing from the Cimmerian shores of Limbo. It was she — and not the spirit of his dead girl — who had come between him and all natural amorous satisfaction.

As he reached this conclusion it did not occur to him to ask himself what would become of this poor entity, created by lust out of pitiful memory, if he brought Wizzie into his attic room! The curious thing was that, as he looked at the smouldering lump of coal gradually losing its redness at one end of the fire-place, and at the incredibly thin legs of his Venetian Post reaching out towards it from the other end, and realized what he had been doing, he experienced a feeling of intense inner release.

Instead of an emotion of futile desolation, what he felt was a profane and scandalous joy, joy that glowed through his veins so thrillingly that he pressed his hands on the edge of the great bare table — he was facing the fire-place across its surface — and, squeezing himself against it, stood on tip-toe and stretched himself forward. Had the table been higher he would have raised himself up off the ground in this queer physical paroxysm, and, as it was, he acted in such a youthful manner that he would have felt awkward if the girl had been scrutinizing his movements.

But Thuella was completely absorbed in warming her legs, to do which more thoroughly she was constantly shifting her heels nearer and nearer the fallen fragment of coal, while she kept the end of her spine just balanced on the edge of the horse-hair chair.

‘I’ll be thoroughly unscrupulous with this thin girl,’ Dud thought as he came round the table and sat down.

His movement towards normal quiescence induced the girl to make the same sort of gesture, that is to say, to pull herself up and sit straight in her chair and even begin to draw on her gloves. As she did this she chanted in a low sing-song voice:

‘Queen Anne, Queen Anne, she sat in the sun —
As fair as a lily, as white as a nun.
She had one glove on.
She drew it off; she drew it on!’

‘What are you muttering, and what are you laughing at?’ asked Dud.

But Thuella tossed her head. ‘I was only thinking’, she remarked, ‘that we’d look rather funny sitting here, if anybody came in.’

He scowled at the door, pulled in his legs, and gripped his stick. ‘Well, what *do* you advise me to do about my acrobat? I’m determined to get her’ — his instinct against betraying one woman to another kept him from mentioning Wizzie by name— ‘and I’m prepared to take risks.’

She looked at him with an ironic smile. ‘You don’t suppose, do you, that your landlord would let her live with you where you are now?’

‘Well — I’d have to move, then — somewhere else,’ muttered Dud peevishly.

‘Do what?’ she asked. ‘I couldn’t hear what you said then.’

‘Move, move, *move,’* he repeated, kicking the fallen coal with his boot. ‘I said if there were any trouble with the landlord I’d just have to *move* — to another place.’

‘You’d walk over to the Antelope, I presume, carrying *your* bag in one hand and the acrobat’s bag in the other? It’s quite clear, my good man, that you have no conception of what you’re undertaking. In the first place the girl might not want to settle down with anyone. Girls of that sort are geniuses at exciting a man’s pity; but they only want one thing, and that one thing isn’t, I can assure you, the *man.’*

‘What is it? What are you talking about?’

‘Money, my dear man, money! I’m not being cynical; it’s the bare truth. I’m the other way round, myself. I don’t want to excite men’s pity; I want to pity *them*. And as for their money, I want to give *them* money!’

Dud took out his watch for the seventeenth time that All Souls’ Day. The profane exultation that had seized him when he realized that he had never really been faithful to Mona, but for ten years had been thinking about a completely different girl under her name, had disappeared beneath Thuella’s realism. The image of himself with his bag, and Wizzie with her bag — and he imagined the lavender-coloured tights squeezed into hers — gravely presenting themselves at the door of the Antelope Hotel, in pouring rain, at ten o'clock at night, having been turned out by his landlord, gave him the sort of feeling he had eleven years ago when on the occasion of his marriage to Mona a neighbour asked how he was going to support her.

He stared gloomily at Thuella's ankles, noting with sulky annoyance that *her* stockings were anything but lavender, were indeed very elegant silk ones of a brown colour.

The thin girl was now smiling to herself in a teasing, imperturbable way, and, bending forward, was leisurely stroking her ankles as the fire warmed them.

Suddenly her expression changed. She frowned a little and then got up, giving her skirt an impatient shake.

'If you're really bent on this quixotic folly,' she burst out, 'I'll be a sport and help you.'

No-man rose too, but before she could speak again the door of the little waiting-room opened, and two rosy-cheeked country-women came in with loaded baskets. They were evidently mother and daughter, and they exchanged significant glances when they saw the pair by the fire.

Dud was aware that the place changed its whole expression at this interruption. Before these passengers entered, its big table, its fire-place, its advertisements, its windows, its very floor had been charged with a friendly kind of intimacy. Now everything was different. The room seemed to stiffen itself and pull itself together, as if it said, 'I must attend to business. These people are "bona fide" travellers!'

They went out and stood on the platform in the dusk. Dud could clearly make out behind his companion's figure the curved outline of the

Amphitheatre against the not yet totally darkened sky. He got a sudden feeling as if a part of him were entirely detached from this agitating crisis, this curst need of decision, and as if this part of him, like that dark bank against the sky, were so immersed in the fatility of matter as to be ready to face whatever happened with earthy acquiescence.

But Thuella was addressing him now in a brusque, rather harsh voice. ‘The thing to do’, she said, ’is to take this woman, if she really wants to leave them and if they’ll let her go, to my sister’s in Friary Lane.’

‘Your sister’s?’

Dud felt, as he looked past her head at that dark bank against the sky, as if he and poor Wizzie were being pushed through a damp mist — she still in her lavender tights and he with his useless cudgel — into a narrowing perspective of irretrievable destiny inscribed ‘Friary Lane’.

‘Yes, you didn’t know I had a sister living in the town, did you? She and I don’t hit it off so awfully well; *but you’ll* probably like her better than you do me! Her name’s Jane, Jane Dearth; but she’s separated from Tom Dearth and lives by herself. Dad dotes on her, but she’s too hardworking to be much with us. She disapproves of me, and when we’re together I can’t help being more — you know — of what she disapproves. They say she has some kind of an affair with a fellow next door — an idealistic chap. But she’s the one to take this woman. She lives alone. She has a spare room, I know, because my brother comes and stays with her. But the real point is she makes a cult of helping girls like this, and if you—’

But even by the light of a remote station lamp she could see that Dud’s face had suddenly become stony. She broke off at once. ‘Oh, it isn’t what you’re thinking!’ she cried hastily. ‘Jenny isn’t a social worker. She’s a feminist, if she’s anything! She’d make no difficulty about *that*. You could be together at her place as much as you liked. You could live together there if you wanted to. You and Jenny are birds of a feather in those things. She despises marriage. That's why Tom went off! He was far too conventional to endure her ideas. Of course, she's terribly good herself. I don't believe she lets her friend next door make love to her. But she likes to befriend the bad, while *she* stays good. I'm just the opposite. I hate that kind of moral immorality. I like to do as I like; but it bores me to tears to make a principle of it. Where's the pleasure of anything if bad and good are the same? But Jenny says—'

Dud tapped the edge of the platform with his cudgel. The last thing he felt equal to at this crisis in his life — let Thuella's white neck show never so inviting against Maumbury Rings — was to get embroiled in her dispute with her sister.

'Well — let's go!' he said brusquely. 'Perhaps it *might* be best for her to stop at your sister's tonight. Of course, we don't know yet for sure that those Urgan people will let her go. But I *am* grateful to you for your—' He stopped, and his face suddenly clouded with anger, for Thuella was smiling in the most teasing manner.

'Oh, that's nothing, my dear!' she murmured. 'Come on; let's get out of here. We'll soon see what happens!'

Dud had the peculiarity of being able to see the sardonic roguery of life's situations with an ironic substitute of his own for that physical response to it that people call showing a sense of humour; but if he refused to respond to her smile, he liked her calling him 'my dear'. Nor did it fail to strike him, as they went out of the station, that though Dorchester was under the water-sign, and himself under that of earth and air, his coming to this town coincided with the lifting of a great sluice-dam in his emotional fate, for here was he on the point of making himself responsible for a completely unknown circus-girl, while at the same time he heard himself called 'my dear' by an almost equally unknown painter of clouds.

'What do you think the time is?' Thuella asked, as they entered the market-field.

Dud's watch had grown to be as accessible as a woman's powder-puff, but at this moment it was too dark to read its face. 'Damn! and I never looked at the station-clock as we came out! But it must be about a quarter after six.'

'There's nothing going on here,' said Thuella. 'The music's stopped.'

Dud looked round. *There* was the big canvas tent. *There* was the caravan where he had found Wizzie crouching on the bed. But, save for a few fruit stalls and ginger-beer stalls where there was a handful of young people, there seemed to be nobody about.

Then he remembered what Wizzie herself had said to him about their having tea at six.

'They're all at tea!' he cried excitedly. 'This would be the best time to find them. Come on! Let's go up the steps. I'm certain they're in there. That's the one, for sure! I know it by those things hanging on that rail. Come along! Quick! Before anyone comes out. I'll knock and walk right in, eh? Not give them a chance of dodging, eh?' He was so agitated, and he took Thuella's confederacy so entirely for granted, that it was the merest chance that he didn't call *her* 'my dear' in the same way she had done with him.

They moved to the foot of the caravan steps. Yes! there were voices inside.

'This *may* be', thought Dud, 'the most fatal moment of my whole life! And I could still dodge it. I've only to go off with the Venetian Post, and nobody would know I'd been here!' But to himself the satisfactory thing was that though he could dally with thoughts like this he did not feel the remotest serious temptation to relinquish the quest. When Wizzie had uttered the words ‘I’ll be your woman’, and they had stared at each other through the steam of that pot, something very crucial and important — the drawing back of some tremendous bolt — had occurred within him.

But here they were — with the sound of voices on the other side of that door — and they had only to run up the steps and fling the door open to be face to face with the Urgans and Wizzie.

Dud was conscious now of a sickening feeling of nervous cowardice. He shivered as he stood by Thuella’s side; and he fervently and shamelessly prayed that when matters came to the pinch the girl would show her mettle and prove herself a powerful ally.

He knew well how frightened he was, for his fear totally transformed, as they stood there at the bottom of those steps, the normal process of time and space. His fear had the effect of making each single second, each tick of the eternal watch in the pocket of the Creator, transmute itself, like a vision in a magician’s mirror, into a shifting impression that was composed of space as well as of time. The space of this transmuted experience, this vision over which a psychological magnifying glass was being projected back and forth with every breath he took, was the trodden grass and clinging mud of the Fairfield; but the time element in these *magnified fear-seconds* extended itself so far beyond the present as to throw a magical desirableness over both a past and a future that were free from the engrossing panic of the moment. He was even able, while his feet were still on the steps of the caravan — so much did the nervous fear he suffered extend the content of the passing seconds — to tell himself a story about living in unruffled peace forever, with the eidolon of his wife visiting him daily while both Wizzie and Thuella melted into thin air.

But they were both on the top step now; and with a quick knock — just such a one as he had intended — and a quick turn of the handle, he opened the door, and they both went in. He couldn't see Wizzie at first glance, for she was sitting cross-legged on the floor with her plate on her lap; but when Old Funky and Mother Urgan rose from their seats he saw her, and their eyes met, and he experienced for the second time that impression of *recognition* — there was no other word for it — as if he had known her time out of mind. In that one look he knew that he had been right, he knew that all his *other* thoughts, his recoils, his hesitations, all the recent flutterings of the rational soul within him, had been but ripples on the surface of his being.

All this passed in a flash; and, as soon as it had passed, his mind felt clearer, more formidable than it had felt since she had said to him that morning, 'I will be your woman.'

It was only by degrees, after they had begun talking, that he took in the exterior appearance of things. Wizzie wore nothing but a cotton slip, not over-clean, and as she stared at them above the bowl on her lap she kept making childish attempts to pull her garment over her ankles with a thin white arm. A strong light from somewhere — he couldn't remember afterwards whether it came from the stove or from a paraffin lamp — made it possible for him to mark the tiny hairs on one of the legs she was trying to hide, and even to note the soft curves of the flesh of the other as it lay bent against the floor. Old Funky was attired in the same greenish-black frock-coat as before, but Dud noticed, as the old man was speaking, that his wig was perceptibly awry, which gave him a repulsively comic and even a tipsy air. Mummy Urgan's attire was more ordinary, for she wore a red woollen petticoat that appeared to be a replica of the one hanging on the rail outside, and the upper part of her short body was clothed in some black stuff, heavily ornamented with glittering black jet beads.

‘Well, Mr Urgan,’ said Dud boldly, but in that unnaturally loud and rather hectoring voice that his agitation had caused him to use in the morning, ‘I’ve come to relieve you of your troublesome young charge!’

Old Funky screwed up his eyes and performed the automatic movement of sucking in his thin lips till they nearly disappeared. Then No-man caught him giving the girl on the floor a glance totally at variance with any desire to be rid of her. It struck him at the moment as almost a tragic look.

‘I be glad to hear what ‘ee do say,’ the fellow began, ‘and if us can come to terms over ‘un, happy be all, and mare’s bosom take us! Mother and me were only considerin’ about you and your kind offer this wery arternoon, and us said — didn’t us, Mother?— “If the kind gentleman be ready to indemnity we for all the hexpense us ‘as been put to regarding she, us’ll be more thankful to behold the scut of her tail!” But ’twas good red gold us spent, and Mother over there knows how much it were!’

‘I’d — like — to — say — one — thing!’ This simple string of monosyllables unexpectedly uttered by Thuella caused a curious change in the tension of the group.

‘Sit ‘ee down, lady! Sit ‘ee down, young man!’ threw in Mummy Urgan, indicating the bed and a couple of shaky chairs.

But Dud’s mind was far too disturbed to let him sit down. He found himself mechanically repeating the curious invocation Old Funky had indulged in— ‘Happy be all, and mare’s bosom take us!’ — and he had begun to be disturbed too by the way Wizzie was looking at Thuella, her brown eyes beginning to assume that dark *round* look that he had seen in them this morning.

‘No, no, sit ‘ee here, pretty lady, sit ‘ee here, for ’tisn’t often a beautiful one like what you be have stepped across whitstone of our old van!’

‘It doesn’t matter where I sit,’ repeated Thuella, ‘for I shan’t be here long. But I would — like — to — say — one — thing!’

As she spoke she *did* sit down on the edge of the bed which, as it chanced, was directly facing Wizzie and so close to her that the point of one of Thuella’s shoes came within an inch of the circus-girl’s knee, over which — for the latter had put down her bowl on the floor — the not very prepossessing cotton slip was at once indignantly and fiercely stretched.

Thuella’s magnetic presence, red lips, and startlingly white skin were the things most calculated, of all the advantages any intruder could have had, to disarm Mother Urgan, whose passion for beautiful girls was at once vividly professional and intensely personal. It had been Wizzie’s pinched face and thin colourless hair, far more than the girl’s touchy temper, that had finally come to create that lodged hate and that certain loathing in the old woman’s breast, while the discovery of Popsy, whom she made into a pet but who could never manage the circus-horse, added the element of bitter jealousy to the situation.

Neither Dud nor Mother Urgan seemed inclined to sit down; but Old Funky, who always preferred to make his sorties during an explosive situation from some convenient retreat, squatted down upon a wooden stool between the stove and the wall of the caravan.

‘What — I — want — to — say’, continued Thuella in an emphatic tone, throwing upon Wizzie’s bare arms, and upon the garment the girl had dragged so fiercely over her knees, a quick satirical glance, ’is simply this: Mr No-man here is a friend of my father’s, Mr Teucer Wye of Glymes, and any misunderstanding about’ — she met Wizzie’s suspicious stare with a proud tilt of her eyebrows and substituted the pronoun ‘you’ for whatever it was she was going to say— ‘about *you* leaving the circus so suddenly can be referred to him. He understands a little about the law, and he’s lived in Dorchester a long time, and he isn’t badly known here. I only mention this’, she added, glancing at Dud, ‘because I know that Mr No-man feels rather like a stranger in this town.’

‘I want to go with *him*, not with *you*!’ cried Wizzie rudely.

‘You *shall* go with him, girl! He’ll take you to Friary Lane, where you can see him as much as you like. His place is just round the corner.’

‘I want to go to his place! If I can’t be with him, I don’t want to go at all! He and I will meet in Yeovil, where we’ll be alone without anybody. We’ve arranged that ourselves! You didn’t know we’d arranged that, did you, Grummer Urgan?’

The first portion of this outbreak was attended by a fierce glance at the girl on the bed, and the second by a yet fiercer glance at the old woman. This latter immediately retaliated. ‘You see what she is, beautiful lady!’ And she turned her black-beaded torso to the girl on the floor. ‘If you call me Grummer again, I’ll tell them how you scratched poor old Mr Tenterhook at Weymouth, and what you said to that nice Father Bones at Blandford, and how you pushed Mr Catchpole down the stairs of his own house in Bristol, and how you threw a jug at my husband, and how you pulled poor little Popsy round the stable by her hair.’

Wizzie appeared delighted rather than horrified by this recital. She put out her tongue at the old woman. ‘Grummer! Grummer! Grummer! Grummer!’ she cried. ‘That’s what you are, and that’s what you’ll always *be*. If you killed me, I’d go on saying it.

‘Grummer Urgan, born in Gloucester,
Without father, without foster!’

There seemed to be something about this jingle that convulsed the old lady with fury. For a second Dud thought she was going to fly at Wizzie, but Old Funky's voice, from his hiding-place by the stove, brought everybody back to the main issue.

'The pint is this, Miss Wye — and please give our respects to Mr Wye, for, though I can't say *for sure* as I've set eyes on he, to the best of my 'umble belief I *have* had that privilege, and anyone could see by the cut of his cloth how respected he were. But the pint is this. Mother and me have spent more'n ten gold sovereigns, late and soon, on Missy Ravelston's stage-dizzeries; and in addition, 'ee understand, 'tis mighty upsetting to business — legal, lawful, *and* according — for she to leave we without notice, and for this 'ere I must in duty to ourselves put down another ten pounds. That'll be a nice round twenty pounds to settle *all*, mister; and without *that* us can't let she go.'

Dud ceased his pacings up and down between the stove and the bed. *Twenty pounds*! He had imagined that he would be able to purchase Wizzie's release for a couple of five-pound notes. In fact he had transferred just that sum from the ottoman into his purse. Well! he would have to give them those notes and write a cheque for the rest!

But Thuella spoke up again. 'I think that's far too much, Mr Urgan,' she cried indignantly. 'No! stop a minute, Mr No-man!' — for Dud was already holding his cheque-book in his hand and looking vaguely round for ink and a pen. 'What', she went on, 'will she' — and she turned her scornful eyes, that showed almost blue-black in the lamplight, upon the girl at her feet— 'want with your circus-finery? You can dress your next girl in it, can't you, Mr Urgan?'

There was an uncomfortable pause, during which they all stared at Wizzie's purchaser, or rather at the cheque-book in his hands, which he kept absent-mindedly rolling up and unrolling.

But his own mind had taken a great leap from the whole scene. The preposterous jet-covered blouse, which wasn't a blouse at all but the top part of a heavy black dress, looming so near him above the red flannel petticoat, suddenly became the 'point d'appui' for a dance of exciting ideas.

'I am buying her! I am buying her!' he thought; and then he thought, 'Mona's been dead ten years. Mona is free — what was it the Glymes woman said? — free and far away from all this!'

But the glittering jet beads he kept his eyes upon gave his thoughts a still further projection. 'Mona is free and I am free,' he said to himself, and a strange wicked, heathen exultation began rushing through his veins.

He felt like a monk who, having once decided to break his vows, gave his sensual fancy full range. It had troubled him a little when Mummy Urgan brought out that spiteful list of Wizzie's misdeeds. It had troubled him a little to see Wizzie put out her tongue at her enemy. But in this new rush of wicked exultation he ceased to care. The girl's 'lurin' figure remained. That look which had passed between them remained. She was his. He was *buying* her! And how beautiful the Venetian Post had looked just now, lifting up her scornful voice on his behalf! He would never have dared it, he would never have faced them here without her support! But he felt exultant now. His mind seemed clear — clear and strong. His senses might be in a whirl, but his mind had never been more steady, never more compact, never more ready for what fate should bring. 'Death is for the dead: life for the living,' the Cemetery Woman had said.

And then all at once his ardour sank. Wasn't he to be alone with Wizzie that evening? Wasn't she to be his woman? Wasn't he to make love to her now, very now, in an hour or two? Weren't they to sleep together that night? Why couldn't he have a confidential talk with his landlord, and propitiate and get round him? Surely if he paid a higher rent, there'd be no objection to Wizzie? Damn this Mrs Dearth of Friary Lane! He didn't want any Jenny Dearth interfering between him and his girl!

But Thuella was now addressing a sort of personal appeal to Mummy Urgan. As Dud watched the two women's faces he could see why it was that the unknown Popsy, of whom he kept hearing, had got round the old crone to such a tune!

Mrs Urgan's face was indeed a map in which you could 'read strange matters'. Avarice struggled in it with a positively maudlin attraction towards the red-gold hair, the white skin, the crimson lips before her. She kept picking at the jet ornaments of her half-dress, and while she leaned forward her red petticoat, as it pressed against the rough caravan table, slipped down a little from her waist and caused a dingy strip of dirty linen to manifest itself above the table's edge.

'Make it eighteen sovereigns, Miss Wye,' she gasped at last. "Tis a-screwing of us down; but I want 'ee to be satisfied, and maybe them things *will* do as second-best for Popsy.'

'Us'll take eighteen, as Mother says,' cried Old Funky eagerly; and hurriedly getting up from his stool, he shuffled to a cupboard and produced a pen and an inkpot, which he placed on the table in front of Dud. 'Eighteen pounds, mister, and she's yours; and us'll never' — here he gave Dud a sly, blackmailer's leer— 'meddle with she or with thee again!'

Dud looked round for a chair and saw none; so kneeling on the floor, he began with meticulous nicety making out the cheque for eight pounds.

'What's your Christian name?' he enquired of the old gentleman, who in his anxiety to assist this laudable undertaking was tilting the ink-bottle towards the point of the pen.

Old Funky answered this question almost before it was out of Dud's mouth. It was as if the pen had answered it in an impatient squeak, or as if the inkpot had replied to it in gurgling haste. But to Mr Urgan's vexation the important word 'Ben' remained still unwritten, for the signer of the cheque felt impelled to glance at the girl on the floor.

During the whole of this singular debate Wizzie had been casting quick nervous looks at her rescuer. Dud too felt in his bones a vivid awareness of her presence. At some moments, while the others were speaking, it was as if he and she were really alone in that caravan, and yet separated, separated by troublesome phantoms that kept materializing and dematerializing like faces at a seance.

He had become aware that the girl was intensely shy of him, terribly afraid of encountering his gaze. She always looked away hurriedly when there was a chance of their eyes meeting.

At this moment her shyness of him seemed to mingle with his own consciousness of the unusual nature of the situation. From somewhere deep down in his soul a feeling arose as if all this had happened before, ages and ages ago! He *did* meet her eyes now, as he held that pen, and it was as if out of the remote past of that long-historical spot some reincarnated Bronze Age invader were selecting from among the girl captives of the older Stone Age the particular one that appealed to his erratic fancy, the one, out of them all, that no one else would choose!

He now repeated his question about Mr Urgan's Christian name.

'Ben,' was the comprehensive reply. 'Just plain Ben. Bee, hee, hen, *Ben*! With great oneyers like 'eeself I tells the bare truth, so strike me gawd! Ben for birth, and Ben for death, though in the hin-between, as you might say, a person like me gets called all and sundry!'

Dud was spurred on now, not only by the help of the tilted inkpot but by his impatience to escape a strong smell of burning fowls' dung which, at this crisis, seemed to emerge from the perspiring skin of Old Funky, and he was soon putting the final flourish to 'D. No-man'. He was in fact just completing this, and the silence was only broken by Mummy Urgan's whispering something to Thuella that he couldn't catch, when all at once Wizzie jumped to her feet and approached the tall young woman.

'So you think I'm not worth twenty pounds, do you?' she cried. 'You're happy now, aren't you, now you've beaten down my price? You think he'll always hold it against me, don't you, that I wasn't worth twenty pounds? I suppose you think *you'd* be worth a hundred to him, only he can't afford *you;* he can only afford *me*! Oh yes, you can lift up your eyebrows, you can turn down your mouth, you can look the lady! I've — a great — mind — to give — your lady's face — And I would too — yes, I would! — if it wasn't for him.'

Mummy Urgan now caught the angry girl by both elbows and pushed her in front of her till she projected her behind a screen of sacking which hung on a cord from the roof.

'Get your clothes on, you crazy bitch! Get your clothes on! And put in everything you've got — do 'ee hear? — *everything*. Us don't want nothin' of yourn, and Popsy don't want nothin' of yourn. Us wants the *scut* of'ee, that's what us wants, and never to see your ugly phyz no more!'

Wizzie's only reply to this was to thrust forth her head, without letting any portion of her neck or shoulders be seen, and make a savage grimace, a grimace that distorted her countenance much more than the mere putting out of her tongue had done.

Thinking it over afterwards, Dud found it astonishing that he didn't feel the slightest flicker of a reaction against the girl when she extended her head and made that horrible face. What he actually felt was a curious pleasure at the way that pinched little countenance, with the thin, straggly, straight hair falling, like straw from a hedge after a wagon has passed, on each side of the hollow cheeks, seemed for a moment to hang suspended against that piece of sacking. Dud felt as if he could gather up that small head in his two hands and carry it away — quite independently of the rest of the girl!

And then he began wondering if he ought to find out who the foreign employer of these people was. But no! The lad he'd talked to had assured him they were all just transients, taking the place of the circus owner's real troupe. 'They be like gipsy-folk,' the lad had said. 'Come today — gone tomorrow!' Besides, the chances were against this foreigner's being in Dorchester at all. Likely enough he'd slipped off to the Continent, now they were so near the coast.

His abstraction was interrupted by Old Funky's anxiety about the other ten pounds. Dud became aware that the man was in desperate fear lest Wizzie's purchaser should go off leaving nothing but the cheque for eight pounds, and was actually tugging at his coat like an excited ape.

'Sorry, Mr Urgan,' he said. 'I wasn't going off with them.'

On receiving the two bank-notes, the old man religiously and solemnly spat upon them both, and then, with a hurried glance to make sure his wife was absorbed in Thuella, and with a wink at Dud, he hid them in the same little cupboard out of which he had got the ink and pen.

It was at this juncture that there was a sharp double knock at the caravan door.

' 'Tis Popsy,' cried Mummy Urgan. 'Shall us have she in, Father?'

But Old Funky was so occupied in the effort to carry things off and make out that he hadn't hidden the bank-notes in his private cupboard but was even now leisurely engaged in putting them away, along with the cheque, between certain particular pages of the caravan Bible, that he made no coherent reply, and Mrs Urgan allowed Popsy to enter.

Dud was not tempted to share the woman's partiality for Popsy, though he did recognize her as strikingly pretty. She was short and plump, with a satiny skin and small dark eyes. She had long eyelashes, which lay, when her animation gave them a chance, like the softest and blackest pansy-petals against her cheeks. She was dressed in a dazzling costume, not in tights as Wizzie had been but in a spangled vest and glittering skirt, while her plump muscular legs jingled with little silver bells. Her appearance brought into the caravan a real aura of the circus. She flirted with the old woman, jested with the old man, kissed the tips of her fingers to the gentleman, and clapped her hand to her mouth in mock solemnity when she learned that Wizzie was dressing behind the curtain.

Dud now became conscious of a weird sensation that he had had once or twice before in his life, namely of the parallel existence of quite different layers of reality. It was a disturbing sensation, and it made *all* reality a little shaky, as if there were yawning gulfs of not-being under every particular manifestation of being. Even while he watched Popsy's antics and heard what he fancied were suppressed imprecations from behind the sacking, this wedge of unreality made the old lady's jet beads grow fantastic, like the ornaments on the poop of a fairy ship, and made the greenish mould on Old Funky's frock-coat grow diffused and undulant and floating and wavering and uncertain, more like a strain of music than the fungus of time settling down on a fragment of ancient broadcloth. But these evidences of the insubstantiality of *all* reality were only accessories to its chief mutation, which left him with the feeling that Popsy, with the silver bells round her knees and a blue feather in her cap, was on a totally different layer of reality from the one which he, with his eyes on that bulging bit of sacking, and Wizzie, struggling into her clothes in that narrow space, were now occupying.

‘Just one wee *leetle* drink, Mummy darling,’ Popsy was now imploring, with her plump hand on the wrist of the infatuated old woman, ‘and then I’ll go on! The music’s started — listen! — and tent be filling up! Just one leetle tiny wee drink, and I’ll draw silver from Maumbury Old Stone!’

With a melting softness in her blinking eyes Mrs Urgan shuffled across the caravan floor to what was apparently *her* private cupboard. Here, with her broad black-and-red back, like some great woodpecker at its accustomed hole, turned square to the company, she poured something into a tea-cup, and then, swinging round, handed it with a doting grin to her favourite.

‘Here’s luck!’ cried the young woman, emptying the cup in a couple of impatient gulps.

She was in the act of returning the receptacle to the old lady when Dud became aware that Wizzie had come out from behind the sacking. She was attired in a normal grey dress and a plain dark coat and hat, and she carried a small hand-bag in one gloved hand and an old umbrella in the other. She walked straight up to him and stood erect by his side.

With a proud dignified docility she slipped one gloved hand between his elbow and his side, and clutched tightly at the stuff of his coat-sleeve.

Dud never forgot to the end of his days the thrill of exultation that rushed through him when he realized, without actually feeling her touch — for her hold on him was like the imperceptible clutch of a small animal — the tragic pathos of this mute gesture.

It was clear that there was a sublime confidence in her unquestioning acceptance of what had been done. For a second, as they thus stood side by side, while Popsy, jingling her silver bells and putting her plump arms akimbo, began a little ‘pas seul’ in front of them, the monstrous thought came into his head, ‘Suppose I was to thrust her away, take Thuella’s arm, tell them all I was only fooling, that they could hang on to the money for the jest’s sake, and clear out?’

What he really said to Miss Wye, however, was simply, ‘Shall we go, then? I’m afraid we’re keeping this young lady’s audience waiting.’

No aristocratic prisoner of the Old Regime, leaving her jailers for liberty or the scaffold, could have turned on Mummy Urgan and on Popsy a haughtier and more indifferent glance than Wizzie bestowed on them as she and Dud followed Thuella out of the caravan.

Of Old Funky she took no notice at all. He might have been the pen or the inkpot, he might have been one of the bank-notes now secreted in his own cupboard, for all the awareness she showed.

As they went down the steps, however, the old gentleman scrambled after them. Dud heard him behind them and glanced round as they were leaving the caravan, but could not decide whether it was to say anything particular that he was following them, or simply from an innate tendency to play the satellite.

Just behind him, jingling briskly down the steps, and whistling as she went, came Miss Popsy; but *she* made a lively dash straight for the back of the tent, and the last he saw of her was the fluttering of her skirts as she skipped up the little step-ladder and vanished in the dark interior.

But still, as with Wizzie’s gloved fingers clutching his coat-sleeve he walked off between her and Thuella, he had an uncomfortable intimation of the proximity of Old Funky. At last, swinging round so abruptly as almost to disengage Wizzie’s hold upon his arm, he turned and confronted him.

‘What is it? What do you want?’ he rapped out, speaking crossly and sternly.

‘I wanted to say one word to you, mister, afore you went off,’ panted the old man, ‘not more than just one word to you!’

‘Don’t — let — him,’ whispered Thuella. ‘He’s up to mischief.’

‘Don’t speak to him,’ whispered Wizzie. ‘I’d kill myself before I went back!’

But Dud hailed him again. ‘What do you *want?’* he cried.

The old man stood stock-still in the trodden November mud. Then he lifted up a shrill unpleasant voice, a very different voice from that of his previous obsequious cajolery.

Both the women made repeated efforts to get Dud to move away, but he refused to budge. He felt a fascinated desire to hear every word the old man was saying in this surprising access of fury.

‘You think you’ve seen the last of Ol’ Ben, don’t ‘ee? That’s all I’ve got to say to ‘ee,’ Old Funky shouted. ‘You think you’ve paid he off and done with he, don’t ‘ee? Ol’ Ben’s easy to see the last of, ain’t he? Ol’ Ben’s one to be whistled down wind, ain’t he, and gone and done with, ain’t he? Ol’ Ben’s no better nor dirt, ain’t he? But I’ve got to say this to ‘ee, and to she too, so pussy-quiet by side of’ee. There be some what calls ‘spectable people bad names, some what calls the missuses what employs them dirt names. And Ol’ Ben what be so easy to see the last of, Ol’ Ben what’s so soon *laid*, same as dust be laid, Ol’ Ben what don’t know, do ’e, how to blow here and blow there through cracks and crannies, through keyholes and windies, through pleasures and palaces, from Journey’s End to John o’ Nought, Ol’ Ben have got to put up with hearing his missus called Grummer by a bedlam! I do know ‘ee, Mr D. No-man! ‘Ee be an indulging gent, a “Good luck and good-bye to ‘ee!” gent, a gent that can walk and talk pat-a-cake tender with a mind-your-step maid at his side. But look well to she, mister, *look well to she*. Her've deceived an old 'ooman. Her've a-flouted an old man. And let me tell you you'll wish, afore she's done with you, you was buried under Pummery, rather nor got she scrabblin' at thee's vitals.'

But at this point even the unbelligerent and propitiatory Dud could stand no more, and he advanced towards Old Funky in a manner which — though not exactly suggestive of physical violence — induced that gentleman to turn his back and shuffle off. He had not got far, though, and our friend had only just rejoined his companions, when the old man swung round to fire off a final verbal challenge.

'Her've deceived an old 'ooman,' he shouted. 'Her've flouted an old man. And let me tell 'ee this: afore she be done wi' 'ee, thee'll wish theeself buried under Pummery ash-pit rather than have she lodged in thee's bussum!'

With this the old man really did take himself off, and Dud was left with nothing to do but to look as indifferent and self-possessed as he could while he escorted the two women to the road.

'We *are* going to my sister's, then?' said Thuella Wye as they passed the lamp over the entrance to the station.

Dud glanced at Wizzie. The girl had remained completely mute and quiescent during the old man's vituperation; but now she cast a quick anxious appealing glance at him.

'It's like this,' said Dud nervously; and as he spoke he experienced an uneasy feeling that he was falling into the traditional hypocrisy of the lecherous male dodging responsibility for his pleasures. 'My landlord's an oldish man and a very pious man, and I *know* he'd only chuck us out if I took you up there, whereas Miss Wye says her sister—'

What it exactly was that stopped him there, just as if a hand had been put over his mouth, he could not have told; but he suddenly felt that, whatever he did or didn't do with Wizzie, it was essential to get rid of Thuella, and get rid of her at once.

'But we'll have', he said, fumbling at any delay that might serve to give him breathing-space, 'a glass of beer together somewhere and talk it all over.'

Whatever it may have been — whether a desperate gesture that he caught in the darkness, or a telepathic wave of passionate protest from the girl — he felt now that the one thing he must *not* do was to go with Thuella to this sister in Friary Lane. But what *was* he to do? The Venetian Post at his side had merely murmured her acquiescence when he suggested this glass of beer. 'What on earth has she got in her mind?' he wondered. 'She's had no tea. She'll be wanting her supper. Why doesn't she say that she must get back to Glymes?'

And then, as he glimpsed once more the stone front of the now too familiar cenotaph, the disturbing thought came to him that he could hardly allow this girl to walk back alone to Glymes.

'What a fool I was', he thought, 'not to take her to the station and put her in a taxi!' But simultaneously with this idea he suddenly remembered that except for a few shillings he had no money left. A taxi would empty his pocket!

Characteristically enough, as the three of them moved slowly up South Street and passed beneath the Almshouse clock, which informed him that it was already after seven, he made a mental attempt to detach himself from these absurd little worries. 'I've got Wizzie', he reminded himself, 'and that's the great thing. Somehow or another it'll work out and we'll be left alone!' Alone — *that's* what he wanted to be — alone with this silent girl in her grey dress and quaint black jacket. What was she thinking now, what was she feeling, as the three of them moved up that crowded street full of lively housewives come in from the country by late conveyances for their weekly marketing?

He began to be conscious that some of the people they met regarded them with puzzled curiosity; and this, though only present to him as a vague half-felt annoyance, was another teasing irrelevance.

They were nearly at the top of the street now, and since Thuella made no sign, and Wizzie walked at his side — he was still between them — with the automatic docility of a person who had been drugged, he began looking desperately round for some escape from the crowd.

At last, though they were on the opposite side of the street, he caught sight of the friendly old-fashioned entrance to the Antelope Hotel. He stopped and called Thuella's attention to this welcome refuge. 'Let's go in *there*!' he said.

The tall girl nodded without speaking, gave him a quick, fleeting, ironic smile, and at once took the lead in crossing the street.

They entered the historic archway, under pleasantly lighted windows, and pushed open the hotel door. Here, in front of the office-counter, No-man began to feel decidedly nervous. He glanced quickly to left and right, but, making a bold plunge, led his companions through a closed glass door into what turned out to be the private bar.

It being so near the dinner hour, he was rewarded for his temerity by finding the place less crowded than might have been expected, and he had no difficulty in selecting an inconspicuous table, neither too far from the cheerful fire nor too exposed to the public eye.

The young women sat down, Wizzie's bag by her side, Wizzie's profile turned away from the table as she stared frowningly at the blaze, which threw an added gleam on Thuella's bright hair, while, under the table, the girls' two pairs of shoes seemed as anxious to avoid any sort of contact as were their two pairs of eyes.

No-man, standing at the bar, ordered three large glasses of beer, which, when he had brought them to the table and taken his own seat, remained for a perceptible moment untouched, while the foam ran reproachfully down their sides.

After a glance, however, at Wizzie's averted face he stretched out his hand and pushed her drink towards her.

'Come on,' he blurted out impatiently. 'Here's to us all — my first drink in Durnovaria!'

Both girls fixed their eyes on him as they raised their glasses, and he noticed how curiously alike the expression in them was, an expression of forced indulgence that seemed to say to him, 'Well! This is a man's game. What is the next move, when we've followed you in *this?'*

He had had no food himself since his breakfast that morning, and while he recklessly drained his glass in hurried gulps it occurred to him that, since he had no money to treat them to a decent meal, he might at least have ordered sandwiches. Instead of doing this, however, he simply replenished his own glass, not only once but twice, before his companions, who seemed to be sipping beer as if it were some rare wine, had finished half of what their glasses contained.

But the effect of all this drink on Dud's empty stomach was to throw him into quite a new mood. He began to grow not only reckless and free from hesitation, but privately, to his own inmost soul, simple and emphatic in regard to the twist he wanted to give destiny that night. The more he drank, the clearer did his desire — and his purpose under the urge of his desire —

define itself within him. ‘Damn these delays!’ he said to himself. ‘I’ve got my girl. I *must* find a room for the night and get rid of this other!’

‘I like this Antelope bar,’ remarked Thuella, taking another little sip of her beer and turning her head slowly round so as to survey the room. ‘I’ve never been here before. It’s odd how you don’t find the right places till you’re with strangers!’

Rendered incautious by his drinking, No-man now looked straight at Wizzie and made a mute and helpless appeal to her, the sort of appeal a man makes when a situation is growing totally beyond him.

‘Are — the rooms — here — *very* expensive?’ Wizzie murmured in a low voice. ‘I’ve got ten shillings in my bag.’

Confused and excited as he was, No-man could not help catching the expression of absolute astonishment with which Thuella heard these words issuing from that pinched face with its constrained frown. That she should refer to her ten shillings was evidently as surprising as if she had suddenly spoken French.

‘Just one minute,’ the tall girl cried, rising from the table. ‘Don’t decide anything for *one* second — I’ll be back in a jiffy!’

Thuella’s appearance as she walked to the door must have arrested the attention of a couple of elderly gentlemen, of the country-squire type, who were drinking at the counter, for Dud, who for all his eccentricities was morbidly sensitive to social embarrassment, caught one of them whispering something to the other, while they both glanced at him and Wizzie. ‘They feel it’s odd’, he thought, ‘that the Venetian Post should be mixed up with such funny ones as Wizzie and me!’

He pushed the girl’s scarce-tasted glass aside along with his own empty one, jingling them clumsily together, and then, leaning heavily over the table, he tried to address her in a tone so low as to make it impossible that he should be overheard. ‘We’ll get off somewhere; only I’ve *got* to think a bit. But I’ll find a room somehow all right. I’ve a few shillings left, and we’ll certainly use your ten if we have to. It’ll be all right, my dear! Don’t ‘ee mind too much. This waiting about is awful. It’s *damnable*. But you’ll see! I’ll get rid of her somehow: put her in a taxi or something. It isn’t far where she lives.’

The girl muttered something he found it difficult to catch. ‘Say that again, Wizzie. I couldn’t hear you.’

‘He — said — you’d — be better — *buried under Pummery* — than to have me for your woman.’

‘Oh, *that* old rascal! I see what you mean now, my dear. But, God! what nonsense!’ He drew away from her and leant back in his chair. ‘I don’t think’, he said, speaking with an exaggerated nicety and choosing his words out of respect for the Antelope bar, ‘that *that* gentleman’s prognostications need worry us.’

But as he saw her frown again, and heard her sigh, and watched the weary submission of the way she once more turned her head and resumed her forlorn staring at the fire, he longed desperately to make her realize how good he intended to be to her, how fond he already was of her, and above all — only that would be very hard to explain — about that feeling of *recognition*. ‘That’s how all real love-affairs begin, Wizzie darling,’ he would say to her as soon as they were alone. ‘It’s like that queer feeling that you’ve seen some place before, or heard something uttered in a certain tone before. They explain it’, he would tell her when once he got her to himself, ‘by some trick in the time-sense of the brain; but I believe...’ Oh, he would confess to her all his wildest fancies as he undressed her by his fire in his attic room.

But — curse it! — he wasn't to be allowed to have her in that room! No, it would be no good, he knew it well, no possible kind of good trying to cajole his cautious elderly landlord. What he noticed in himself, however, was that he did not feel really indignant about the impossibility of having her up there. 'It must be that bed', he said to himself, 'and that head on the bed-post.'

And at once, after his fashion, he began telling himself an elaborate story about Wizzie and that bed-post head, how she would try to propitiate it, and, when she failed, how there would be a permanent quarrel between her and it!

Wizzie had turned her head away from the fire now. She was fidgeting in her chair and looking down at her hands on her lap. He wondered for a second if she didn't want to wash her hands, as he had taken for granted that Thuella had gone to do; but he decided she would not have hesitated if such *had* been the case. Then he wondered if she were not secretly studying the lines in her hand. She was looking down now with a more intense frown than ever, and he noticed that she had crossed one leg over the other and kept making various little physical movements with her shoulders and with her chin, lifting the former a little and letting the latter sink low down into her chest.

A great rush of tenderness for her thrilled through him as he looked at her.

The little movements she had just been making, as if she had been doing what he himself so often did, *hugging herself to herself* with a shiver of thankfulness that at least she had herself to take refuge with, gave him a sudden stab of delicious awareness of the mystery of her identity.

'I have bought her, I have bought her!' he thought, and then he thought how the relation between them, at least as far as he was concerned, and perhaps for her too, was a far more exquisite one than if they had been ordinary lovers who had known each other in and out for years and were now calmly anticipating their bridal night. For one thing, it enhanced the difference of their sex to a far greater extent than if they had had time to know each other well.

‘This is how men and women met in the old days,’ thought the historic Dud, reverting again to his original vision of the Bronze Age wayfarer with his Stone Age paramour, ‘and to have found Wizzie in Durnovaria and for us to sleep together the first day we meet has a beauty that makes an ordinary love-affair — such as I might have had with the Venetian Post — seem tame!’

Dud’s pulses began beating with so much excitement as he watched that sallow, oval little face with its chin pressed low between its owner’s breasts and its gaze studying carefully — at least so it seemed — the magic of destiny in heart-line and life-line, that it began to grow intolerable to him that it was still uncertain what would happen to them that night.

It seemed to his excited senses just then that it was no less than a miracle that he should be allowed by fate to see that long thin nose, that mute, pitiful mouth, that straw-coloured hair whose stray ends stuck out so comically over that tiny little ear — he could only see one of her ears from where he sat, and it really was like a shell, the old simile for a girl’s ear, usually so pathetically remote from the truth — that heartbreakingly neat grey dress, her only armour to face the world now that she had discarded her lavender-coloured tights and her performing dog’s cincture of red plush, and, above all, those nervous hands in her lap.

He got up and fetched himself yet another glass of beer, and as he stood over her before resuming his seat he became aware that it wasn’t after all at the fate-lines in her palm that she was looking so intently with lowered eyelids. All she was doing was passing the tips of the fingers of one hand backwards and forwards over the knuckles of the other. ‘This must be a nervous trick of hers,’ he said to himself. ‘She’s just thinking, and she’s shy of looking at me.’

As he drank this last glass, his wits, instead of growing more muddled, suddenly became preternaturally clear.

It seemed to him that never in his life — certainly never with his dead Mona — had the mystery of a woman’s identity held him under such a spell! As he gazed at her in this ecstatic trance, all his nerves sensitized and his mind whirling with vivid thoughts, he decided that it was her muteness, her passive submissiveness, the fact that she had never once opened her lips to smile all the hours he had known her, that made her so wonderful to him.

As for her putting out her tongue at those people, he liked her the more for it. Over her mute lips with their pitiful acquiescence, over her lowered eyelids, over her thin fingers that kept up that unceasing nervous movement, hovered, without troubling him at all, that savage grimace she had made at Mrs Urgan when she called her Grummer. Those words of hers that morning, ‘I will make your bed’, turned even that ugly look into something that gave him a grim satisfaction.

‘Wizzie,’ he murmured, leaning towards her with an almost imploring note in his voice, ‘don’t ‘ee think any more about what that old rascal said! It was all his malice at your going. He can’t hurt us. How can he? I don’t suppose we’ll ever see his face again.’

She did lift her hands from her lap now, and she rubbed her face with them, as if trying to obliterate some nervous tremor. When she dropped them after this, she let them rest helplessly on the table, and he could not help noticing the difference between *her* hands and Thuella’s. Hers were as thin, but much rougher and less tapering; and if Thuella’s had struck him, when he was with her on the river-path, as living things with an identity of their own, Wizzie's, now lying here, looked even more detached from their owner. They looked as if the girl might have got up and gone away, leaving them on the table.

But it was she now who looked round the room to make sure she was not overheard.

'I — am — trying — not—' she began, in a slow emphatic voice, as if she were laying down each word by the side of her hands; but after a second's pause, during which she drew in her breath with a gasp, she finished her sentence very rapidly, giving it that peculiar intonation with which school-children recite a lesson: 'not to think about what he said of me being a burden and a curse to you so that you'll wish you'd been buried under Pummery before you ever saw me or took me away from them, but I can't forget what he said, and I can't stop thinking about it.' She uttered these words so much as if she had learnt them by heart that they did not strike his ear as tragic, or even solemn.

He went so far — for, for all his romantic sensationalism, Dud had it in him to be a sardonic realist — as to accuse her, in his heart of hearts, of having been composing this sentence all that time he had imagined she was reading the lines in her hand.

He looked round at the bar-counter now. 'Why doesn't she come?' he said crossly, speaking his thought aloud. 'She said she'd only be a second. Has she gone back to Glymes?'

Whether it was that Wizzie's circus training had given her an unusual command over her expression, or whether it was that her jealousy of Thuella had been, all that evening, only skin-deep, she did not show any sign of distress at his concern.

‘Didn’t she — say — to wait for her before — before we—’ She stopped, evidently nervous of being overheard. Their eyes met, however, and this time, although she still did not smile — and he began to wonder if she had completely lost the power of smiling — it was the closest exchange of their real selves that they had had since their first meeting in the caravan.

But her wrists were soon on her lap again and her eyelids lowered, and he could see, without seeing, that she was once more drawing the fingers of one hand over the knuckles of the other.

Dud refrained from teasing her with any further questions. He pushed his empty glass into the middle of the table and settled himself in his chair, trying to sink back on the stream of events as submissively as she did.

But the thrill of having actually got her away from those people, the thrill of her docility towards himself, the vague delicious idea, half romantic and half sensual, that she really belonged to him, and that, if all went well, they would sleep together that night, made him oblivious of everything but the pleasure of just seeing her there, of just watching her there.

The intermingling in him of shameless introspection with intense cerebral eroticism was curiously manifested in the direction his thoughts took as he looked at her. He recognized clearly that this All Souls’ Day was the beginning of a new life for him.

The ten years’ suppression of his feelings for women, save as they had been concentrated on his occult idolatry, gave to his present emotion an intensity that transported him. With an exultant cynicism he fully admitted to himself that it was merely the simple fact that this girl was a girl, that made him so thrillingly happy. After all, if it had been the Venetian Post, she would have done her best to be so much more than a girl!

He began to take a curious pleasure in diminishing Wizzie’s personal charms. ‘She has bad teeth,’ he said to himself. ‘Her hair is as little beautiful as any hair I've ever seen. Her nose is too long, her eyes too small, her mouth too wide, and if that old reprobate was right about her 'lurin' figure, I'm damned if you'd think he was, from seeing her in this servant-out-for-the-day costume. No, it's simply that she's a girl. So, however you take it, good looks don't come in!'

Yes, she was his girl. Centuries, aeons ago, they had been together. But now — blessed be the oblivion of the past — all was new again!

What incredible luck— 'O great Chance, you *must* be more than yourself — that when he met her in that place, with those frightful people, he had had the gall to do what he did! He had *bought* her, that's what he had done, paid what they asked and bought her! And now she would sleep with him tonight and forever, and everything about her would be freshly wonderful to him every day.

How he liked the way she lowered her head now, dropping it down so that her chin became invisible. 'Whatever position she takes', he thought, 'she's afraid of changing it while I'm looking at her. And how much more attractive awkwardness and embarrassment and shyness and quaint, funny, nervous positions are in a girl than sweeping graceful movements! And how quiet she is. It's as if her *soul* were breathing rather than her body. I've seen plants in a hazel-wood, when there's no wind, that breathe just like that. There's more of a girl's life in her breathing than in anything else. They spoil it when they talk. The Venetian Post gives me no time to enjoy her. You can't smell a flower in a high wind. *What have I done* to have been given a girl like this? If I made love to her till doomsday I'd never reach the heart of her mystery!'

Wizzie did make a move now, for she opened her hand-bag and glanced into this receptacle which resembled those black bags that schoolboys used to carry in their hands when they travelled. She took nothing out of it and closed it at once, but a whiff of some scent that was not eau-de-Cologne reached his nostrils. But with a jerk of his mind he relegated this scent to the same limbo where the Grummer grimace was. ‘I’ll seduce her without possessing her,’ he said to himself. ‘There too she’ll be more indulgent than most of them. It won’t be anything to me whether she’s a virgin or not. It’s the shyness of her spirit that I want to seduce; and I could seduce *that* for ever and ever, and never come to an end! She’ll have to stay a virgin if she *is* one; but that’s nothing! She won’t want children, any more than I do. We’re alike there, I know — and in everything else! Oh, we’re extraordinarily alike! I can tell *that* by her being so self-conscious about her hands. I’m sure she’d suffer frightful pins and needles sooner than move her legs or change the position of her body while I am looking at her. When I sleep with her tonight she’ll be afraid of turning over for fear of waking me up! What a heavenly thing it is, the way I can enjoy her by simply looking at her, as I am now, and not touching her at all! By looking at her I can seduce that personality in her which says, “I am Wizzie Ravelston. I belong to Mr No-man, who bought me from Old Funky for eighteen pounds!” By looking at her I can seduce that personality in her that makes her hug her knees alone in bed, *like I do*, and become an embryo again, *like I do*, and put out her tongue at the Grummer universe, *like I do*. What a shame that I should have the advantage over her by getting an ecstasy from just looking at her and just thinking, “That’s the girl I’ve bought. Those are my girl’s arms; those are my girl’s legs; that’s the way my girl sits when she’s too shy to move,” while she can’t get any pleasure at all from looking at me! But I suppose being worshipped like an idol, when you’ve been bought for eighteen pounds, isn’t unpleasant — and yet I dare say it *might* be damned unpleasant if she wanted to be alone; but she can be a lot more alone as a

Stone Age girl bought by a Bronze Age man than if we were ordinary conventional lovers.'

The fire in the private bar of the Antelope gleamed brightly over the old walls and the polished tables, gleamed brightly, with a rich, warm lustre, over the rows of bottles behind the shining counter.

All Souls' Day was closing in *here* pleasantly enough, whatever it might be doing for the spirits of all that lamentable flesh that was dissolving in the cemetery by Maumbury Rings.

Where were they now, those invisible banished souls, who, before the flesh melted and stank upon their bones, gathered themselves together to endure and enjoy, even as this girl and himself were doing? Were they *as though they had never been?* Or was the unconquerable instinct about survival, that went back beyond the Stone Age, justified still, in spite of reason and probability?

Dud had for so many years mingled his sterile desire for the eidolon of Mona with the demonic personality of that bed-post head that it was not long, even in the private bar of the Antelope Hotel, before his imagination called up an image of the shapeless monstrosity to hover between Wizzie and himself.

Not only did the thing project itself between them, wavering above the three frothy empty glasses and above a solitary autumnal fly who had, all that evening, been divided between attraction to beer-froth and repulsion from beer-froth, but the Mona-wraith was there too — there with a shocking change, for in the morbid ferocity of his imagination he clothed this phantom in nothing less than the patches of dehumanized flesh that he fancied still clung to the dead girl's bones. And this change was the more revolting in that, though it was Mona's lamentable flesh that composed the substance of the image, its subhuman expression remained the unnaturally provocative one of the creature of his wicked fancy.

But No-man had long ago invented a certain trick of the mind by which he could thrust such things away, and very soon there was nothing in front of him but Wizzie's form, her hands still in her lap, her fingers still making their automatic movement.

Deeper and deeper delved his obstinately burrowing thoughts. 'Is it a legitimate thing,' he asked himself, 'is it part of the great creative life-stream, that I should brood like this on the sweetness of my Stone Age captive, or is it some devil in me?'

But the mere introduction of this question seemed instantly to make these broodings upon her — whether they were good or whether they were evil — more irresistible to him.

'It's just the girl *being* a girl,' he said to himself for the twentieth time, getting a curious pleasure from bringing his feelings down to bed-rock. 'I don't suppose I shall ever feel like this again. It's incredible that that little identity, seated there in her nurse-maid's dress, actually belongs to me, that I have bought her for eighteen pounds! *And she has not smiled once*. That'll be the sign that I've really got her — when I first make her smile! I'll have to seduce everything about her to make her smile! I'll have to seduce her thin face, her long nose, her funny mouth, her straggly straw-like ends of hair, as well as her 'lurin' figure. What a mystery it is! You can buy them, and you cannot buy them! You've got to seduce every inch of them if you want to make them really yours. And that's what I'll do with you, my Stone Age Wizzie! And when I do it, when I seduce that mystery in you that hides in your grotesque chin, in your colourless hair, in your long nose, in your sulky mouth, in your funny little ears — by God, your ears, Wizzie, have got as many curves and lobes as the tracks of sand-worms! — the great sign that I've got you won't be the blood in your cheeks, won't be the rising of your breasts: it'll be that at last you'll smile!'

Such were the thoughts of D. No-man, in the private bar of the Antelope, on the night of All Souls' Day; but they were followed by something else. 'Of course,' he said to himself, 'all this is only on the surface, only pretty play between us! At bottom, even if I *never* make her smile, I know, and *she* knows, that we've found our destiny in each other! And I know another thing too: if it was the Venetian Post who was sitting there, and who was going to share a room with me tonight, we'd be whispering and arguing and fussing, and analysing like the devil, instead of floating in a heaven of silence as Wizzie and I are — at least as I pray we both are!'

He was disturbed in his egoistic thoughts by Wizzie making the identical movement that he had been assuming it was impossible for her to make! She crossed her legs, giving the table a little push in his direction. She actually stooped down and arranged the position of her bag on the floor. Then, sitting up very straight, as if she had only just entered the Antelope bar, she gazed with interest at a woman who had just come in and who was looking quietly round the room.

The woman, for her part, was quick enough in returning Wizzie's stare; and presently it was Dud's fate to see that very smile, that smile that was to have been such an important symbol to him, given not to him at all but to this woman stranger! The smile, when it did appear, went on flickering over the girl's lips, and Dud could not help noticing what an elfish, even eldritch look it gave her face.

Meanwhile the newcomer, answering Wizzie's mute recognition, came straight up to them, and standing squarely by their table, spoke to them both, easily and naturally, looking first at one and then at the other.

‘Pardon my bothering you,’ she said. ‘I’m Jenny Dearth of Friary Lane, and Thuella told me you wanted a room. I myself sometimes let rooms — to transients — under particular conditions, and I’m always glad to oblige friends of Thuella’s. So I thought I’d come round and see if I could catch you before you’d made any other arrangements. I expect you’ll want something else later on, but Thuella seemed to think’ — here Mrs Dearth lowered her voice— ‘that you’d be glad for a night or two to pay the three and six for my double room, which is all I charge when I like people, and I’m sure, from what Thuella says, I shall like you two — like you ever so much!’

‘I knew it was you, directly I saw you come in!’ These surprising words from the lips of Wizzie, whose white cheeks now carried an unmistakable flush, were a complete bewilderment — and, it must be confessed, not at all a pleasant one — to Dud No-man. It would certainly have spoiled the fine edge of the whole situation for him had it turned out that Wizzie already possessed respectable friends in Dorchester; and it certainly looked, from the way Mrs Dearth was now leaning over the girl and whispering to her, that this was precisely the case.

But it turned out otherwise, to Dud’s immense relief! Taking a seat between them, but refusing any refreshment on the ground that she’d left her supper on the stove and must hurry back, Jenny Dearth soon explained that she and Claudius had been every night to the foreign circus, and though they hadn’t spoken to the young lady on the horse, they knew she had noticed them and had appreciated their being there and had been surprised and delighted by the interest they took in her horsemanship.

‘That fellow isn’t your husband, is he?’ Wizzie now enquired rather rudely of this friendly lady.

No-man was unpleasantly affected by the girl's words; but it was clear the lady from Friary Lane did not mind this familiar tone.

'Oh dear, no!' she said with a chuckle. 'My husband and I are separated. That fellow's Mr Cask, my neighbour in Friary Lane. His real name's Roger, but I call him Claudius, because he's so Roman-looking. Mr Cask and I thought this young lady was the loveliest thing we've ever seen at any circus. It's a shame — and I should say that to you if you were a nobleman carrying her off—' Here Mrs Dearth discreetly lowered her voice again. 'It's a shame that her power with that horse, the way she balances and all, should be given up! But there it is! When young people fall in love...' She looked from one to another as she spoke, with such a glow of maternal sympathy that Dud could not feel annoyed. He noticed the tact with which she linked them together, and he saw clearly that this attitude of hers was wonderfully comforting and reassuring to his companion.

'What's become of your sister?' he enquired.

'Oh, she went off home,' Mrs Dearth said. 'Father's getting the supper tonight — he often does — and he would have kept it till midnight if she hadn't come.'

'She said—' began No-man.

'Oh yes, she told me! But she *had* to get back to Glymes. I promised her I'd come round. I couldn't lose such a chance of letting my room! You'll both love it. There's a big double-bed, and it'll be a real treat to me to have such romantic guests. Do *try* it, anyway, Mr No-man! If you like it you can keep your other place as a room to work in. It'll be an escape from us women when you want to be alone!'

Dud's feelings were extremely complicated as he listened to all this. Destiny had certainly answered his prayer! Something about this woman, her gaunt angular figure, her rugged bony face, like the face of an affectionate steed — no wonder she was struck by Wizzie's horse: she was like an old circus-horse herself — made him think of the great Phrygian Mother. Hadn't he heard of some image of that mysterious divinity that had a *horse's head*?

It was a pleasure to him to see his companion look so different, so much less nervous and embarrassed, *and yet*, beneath this pleasure, in the undersea penumbra of secret feelings that encircled his thought as an old moon encircles a new one, he was conscious of a definite let-down in the vibrancy of the situation. Wizzie had smiled, Wizzie was more at ease, but her consciousness was no longer entirely absorbed in her relation to himself. 'The Stone Age captive with her Bronze Age rescuer' was no longer the unmixed note of the occasion.

They all three left the Antelope together; and as they turned down High East Street and passed side by side beneath the pillars of the King's Arms, No-man could not help being aware of the contrast between this moment and the former one when Thuella was their companion. It was quite clear to him that Wizzie tended a little to cling to this friendly image of the Phrygian Mother with the horse's head, and though he did feel ashamed of such a thought it was impossible for him not to wish that it was still his Venetian Post who was walking on the other side of the girl.

He could not help being delighted by the picturesqueness of Friary Lane as they now turned into it, passing on their left the tap-room and stables of the King's Arms, and on their right an ancient wall.

It was at a door in this wall that Mrs Dearth finally stopped, a massive and ancient door, leading into a small but solidly-built house.

Readers of Dud's veracious chronicle must, however, be warned that they will look in vain in these latter days for the house into which Mrs Dearth led him, for, solidly-built as it was then, it has long since been condemned as unsuitable for human habitation, nor are there any features left by which it could be distinguished by the curious.

But it was down a little bare hallway with a stone pavement that their guide led them then, and, opening an inner door, ushered them straight into her parlour, a retreat she always spoke of as the dining-room.

Here there was a warm fire, a supper-table laid for four persons, a wicker arm-chair on the left hand of the hearth, and, covering almost the entire wall opposite the fire, an enormous map of the county of Dorset printed in Dorchester in the early days of Queen Victoria.

A man got up from the chair by the fire as they entered, and Dud surmised at once from the tone of his greeting that this was the friend of Mrs Dearth whom she told them she had nicknamed Claudius. ‘Mr Roger Cask,’ was the way, however, she introduced him as they shook hands. Mr Cask indeed held Wizzie’s fingers so long, and praised her horsemanship so warmly, that the girl listened with the look of a complacent child who had won a prize at school; but it was a relief to our friend that at least she did not smile this time.

While the men were talking, Mrs Dearth, who quite startled Dud, when she removed her hat, by becoming more like that Phrygian goddess with a horse’s head than he supposed was possible, conducted Wizzie, along with the latter’s bag and umbrella, to see the double-bedded room she had told them about in the Antelope.

It was bitterness to him to lose the sentimental-sensual pleasure of seeing this room in company with the ‘soi-disant’ Madame No-man; but while in the case of both Nancy Quirm and Thuella he had felt very sure of himself, somehow with this horse-faced personage he felt at a disadvantage. ‘Do I like her or don’t I like her?’ he thought as he was conversing with Claudius. ‘I don’t think I do; but I can’t yet quite tell why. I must talk to the Venetian

Post about her.’ And he suddenly found, in his malicious jealousy of a rival who had taken by storm what was to have been the subtle reward of a complicated siege, that he was impatient to draw out the Venetian Post on this topic. ‘She’ll explain to me quickly enough’, he told himself, ‘why I don’t like this Horse-Head!’ For a passing second he found himself wondering how Thuella and this woman could possibly be sisters; but the question had little interest for him, and it left his mind as quickly as it entered it.

The two women were absent for nearly a quarter of an hour, but when they made their appearance again, he found that, whatever his grudge was against Jenny Dearth for her unlooked-for interference with the tone of his situation, he *was* impressed by the way she had brushed and combed and generally *thawed out* her young equestrienne. He got that impression of half-shock and half-beguilement that men so often get when they mark the difference between a woman in hat and jacket and the same woman with her head bare and in her indoor dress.

Though it *was* the work of the Horse-Head, as he kept maliciously calling her, and though he still felt jealous that it had been *her* hands and not *his* that had removed Wizzie’s outdoor things, he did become aware of a delicious sideways thrust when he observed the intimate indoor softness that now characterized the girl’s appearance.

‘Why! she’s made her change her shoes and stockings,’ he thought, as he noted the neat black indoor slippers, with a strap over the instep, that the circus-girl now wore. ‘Did she have those things in that bag?’ he wondered.

The supper whose preparation had been disturbed by Thuella, and which apparently had been saved by the discretion of Claudius, proved to be quite a substantial one. Though intended for only two people it had been successfully enlarged for the complete satisfaction of four, and Dud discovered that he was ravenously hungry.

Wizzie herself, whose pale complexion was never of the best, but whose cheeks did now display a faint flush, ate very sparingly, but Claudius ate everything before him, ate it in rapid hungry snatches, while he did his utmost to amuse them all by his lively discourse. 'He certainly does look Roman,' thought Dud, contemplating the man's long face, his high bald forehead, his heavy-lidded prominent brown eyes, his obstinate chin. He had very little hair, and the chief impression left by his countenance had to do with the weather-beaten skin of his high narrow skull, and with the wrinkled lid-folds above his prominent eyes, which gave him a pronounced hawk-like expression, both when he half-closed his eyes, which was a trick of his when speaking, and when he fixed the point of his gaze upon any particular object. In this latter case his expression became so *outward* that it was as if his whole intelligence was completely absorbed in the mere act of looking, until every reserve of personality *behind* the look ceased to exist.

He had been talking to them for some while in a vivid, lively manner, not exactly humorously, but rapidly and shrewdly, about some semi-official tour he had recently made through the Channel Islands, when it occurred to our friend to ask him point-blank what his particular work was.

At this Claudius stopped abruptly, lifted up his chin — a movement which had the effect of causing the lamplight to illuminate the tip of his small aquiline nose and the creases of his wrinkled, half-closed eyelids — and proceeded to reply as gravely and carefully as if Dud had been an official at a landing-stage.

'I'm a reformer, sir, a reformer,' he said; and then, with a half-glance sideways at Mrs Dearth, a glance that made Dud think of a bald eagle with moulting feathers that he had once seen at the Aquarium in Brighton, he proceeded to explain that he had no official job, that he lived on his private means, but that he spent his life meddling with social abuses. ‘Have you ever’, he asked our friend, ‘read the life of Lord Shaftesbury? The turning-point of *my* life came — didn’t it, Jenny? — but Jenny’s tired of hearing about it! — when I reached that passage in one of his letters where he uses the expression “I have to grub where the mischief is worst!”‘

At this point Claudius shut his eyes completely and, lifting one of his hands to his mouth, fell into a muse, while he ponderingly bit the nail of his little finger.

‘You old liar!’ murmured Jenny Dearth, regarding him with what seemed to Dud a stare of doting affection. ‘He’s always been the same!’ she pronounced, turning earnestly from Dud to Wizzie. ‘Always, always the same! He talks of living on his private means. As a matter of fact, if it wasn’t for me, he’d have been in the workhouse years ago! He gives his money away before he sees it — before he’s *touched* it! He wouldn’t even have the pleasure of doling it out, if I hadn’t — and by a dirty trick too — got hold of some of his capital. I’m the one who doles it out now — to *him*! And even that’s not safe. Oh, what a liar you are, Claudius!’

It was impossible to believe that Mr Cask hadn’t heard what his friend said; but, if he had, no actor in the world could have played better a complete mental abstraction that rendered him stone deaf.

When he woke from his musings, gave up biting his finger-nail, and lowered his chin, it was upon Wizzie that he fixed his raptorial bird’s gaze. ‘I hope that old horse’, he said, ‘won’t suffer too much from missing you. I suppose—’ And he turned his moulting eagle’s gaze on Dud with a little appraising nod that made our friend feel as if his own head were growing horse-like. ‘I suppose you’ll give this one so much pleasure that in the general balance it’ll be worth more than the pain of the horse.’

The faint flush upon Wizzie's cheeks deepened. 'It isn't that he doesn't like Popsy,' she protested earnestly. 'You mustn't think that! And you mustn't think Popsy doesn't like *him.'* She kept looking at Mrs Dearth as she spoke. 'He really *does* like Popsy. He's proud of having her on his back! It's only that he knows me better, and I know him better, and we've been so often miserable together and happy together. He always snuggles up to Popsy when she goes into his tent. He did it when she first—'

Wizzie paused for a moment and frowned in deep thought.

'Come on, child; out with it!' cried Mrs Dearth. 'When she first *what*?*'*

No-man was astonished to see how good-naturedly the touchy girl accepted this friendly brusqueness.

'When she first came,' she went on. And then she smiled with a most confidential smile at her hostess. 'I think', she added, 'he likes to be sad with me and happy with her, and I expect that's what — what's only natural!'

Roger Cask looked a good deal more Roman than any existing bust of the real Claudius as he concentrated his bird-like brown eyes on the circus-rider. 'I've had occasion once or twice', he began, 'to investigate the treatment of animals in our small travelling shows, and I've often been agreeably surprised to find...'

He went on at some length to relate his impressions; but, since Wizzie was now only an interested listener, No-man's mind wandered to other things.

He began, for instance, to take in the general appearance of Mrs Dearth's sitting-room. He noticed with some surprise that the Horse-Head kept her place scrupulously clean. As far as the furniture went, the room might even have been called austere. What pictures there were seemed to be old-fashioned oil-paintings, not copies of masterpieces but the sort of stiff, quaint, original pictures one sees in farm-house parlours, and there was a complete absence of all touches of feminine softness. The room indeed might well, Dud thought, have been the dining-room of an impecunious elderly bachelor, possessed not of a wife or daughter but of a shrewish housekeeper.

‘But the devil take the dining-room and the whole house!’ Oh, how enchanting his girl looked, sitting so sedately by the side of the Horse-Head! ‘I’ve saved her from Old Funky,’ he thought, ‘saved her and *bought* her for eighteen pounds!’

As he looked at her now in her grey clothes, he felt suddenly as if he had never seen a woman before: yes, in relation to this girl he was a real *No-man;* or rather he was a man-without-a-name, encountering, for the first time in his primeval wanderings, a woman-without-a-name! Oh, how the mere fact of their being strangers to each other, not lovers in the ordinary sense, enhanced this miraculous feeling!

An ordinary lover, an ordinary betrothed man, could have no notion, in comparison with what *he* felt, of the divine mystery of these things. Everything about Wizzie transported him with a thrilling reverence, with an *awe* even, such as he had never known. Her submissiveness, her mute acceptance of their extraordinary relation, gave him an ecstasy that made him feel almost faint. Yes, her phrase ‘I will be your woman: I will make your bed’ had been as much of a covenant between them as his signing of that cheque in the caravan. The thought that he alone in the whole world had the right to undress her, had the right to break down that sacred barrier between a man and a woman which was the screen between tedious illusion and all the prismatic enchantments of reality, made him dizzy in the pit of his stomach.

If she hadn't been so silent and quiet, if she hadn't lain back upon destiny like this, if she had been flirtatious, if she had chattered, the whole spell would have been broken. His ignorance of what her feelings were all this time was one of the deepest of the *notes of silence* that gathered between them like a mist of thin sweet rain. Were ordinary girls of the street like this? If so — But of course they weren't! They chattered, they drank, they flung out cynical obscenities, they ogled and leered, they told fabulous stories.

How much more exciting it was in the old days when you rescued a woman from the oppressor! She was quiet then. Perhaps she did not even know your speech, or you hers. And it was like that with Wizzie.

What was she wearing under that nursery-maid's grey dress? The glamour of her muteness, the glamour of her relation to him, turned everything she wore into a delicately withdrawing mystery. He felt as if he wanted to make love to her boots, her stockings, her waist-band, her funny hat! The mystery of her evasive inscrutability flowed through all these things, flowed *inwards* through them into her infinite feminine soul, receding, receding, yielding, yielding, so that of their heavenly seduction there was no end!

How unimportant this business of beauty in women was, about which men made such a fuss! Men who only wanted beauty had no idea of the ineffable mystery.

Damn this dining-room and that map of Dorset! Would this meal never come to an end? He now began to wonder what kind of pictures would look down upon him when he had Wizzie to himself in the chamber upstairs.

And then, all suddenly and uncalled-for, a vision of his familiar bed-post rose up, just above the table-lamp, between himself and the girl.

All Souls’ Night had come! And here he was, plunged into a treachery to his past: if he had been told of its possibility when he awoke that morning, he would have laughed with incredulous indignation.

He had from his earliest days suffered from the savage perversity of a morbid imagination. Indeed, he had by degress built up an elaborate technique against the loathsomeness of the images that the demon in him was liable to conjure up against his will. For some reason tonight, however, he felt too excited to make his accustomed *immediate* use of this technique. He felt so strong in his exaltation at the prospect of his night with his Stone Age captive that he was ready to dally awhile with the old disease before uttering the magic word that dismissed it. He knew it was a dangerous thing to do; but there is nothing like the moment when cerebral lust blends with romantic idealism to make a morbid nature reckless, or to fill timid nerves with abnormal courage. And the demon of his bed-post — that subhuman entity so fatally dear to the Woman from Wales — took full advantage of Dud’s moment of pride. It began making love to the pitiful shreds and tatters of Mona’s unthinkable state under that cemetery-mound. It became something that resembled the terrible Devourer of Egyptian Judgment scenes, only to our friend’s monstrous fancy it was immersed *in*, and yet emerging *out of*, the unspeakable dissolution upon which it fed.

The horror of it was, as the man’s excited mind still refused to dismiss his torturing demon, that the idea began now to enter his head that, by leaving the poor eidolon of his frantic worship alone that night with the solitary bed-post, he was deliberately giving her up as a prey to the thing.

All his recent reasonable view of the invisible odalisque of his last ten years as something quite different from the real Mona, as something transformed, in fact, to a being created by desires in him that Mona herself could never rouse, only left the unlucky wraith more pitiful. He seemed to hear the unhappy phantom crying out to him for help! He felt a sudden imperative to rush from this alien house, to let this alien girl sleep as she might in her Horse-Head's bedroom, and fling himself between the Devourer and this helpless wraith.

This would be the first night for ten years that he had not slept in that bed of the Woman from Wales. What would *she* think of his desertion?

His thoughts became more and more unbridled, more and more frightful in their monstrous inventions, and at last things went so far that the fever of the unnatural exaltation that had brought it all about began to drain away. He began to feel weak and inert.

Matters had reached this point, when he became aware that the monotonous voice by his side, whose steady sound had been the accompaniment of the madness of his thoughts, had ceased, and that a quite different voice was speaking, and speaking to him.

'You're tired, Mr No-man,' Mrs Dearth was saying, 'and I'm sure your little lady here has heard enough of our chatter. Don't let Claudius and me keep you up, if you want to go to bed.' She paused, and exchanged a quick feminine look with Wizzie. 'But don't you men move *just* yet,' she went on. 'I'll *take you* upstairs.' And again she looked at Wizzie, whose eyes, Dud could not help noticing, were fixed upon the hands in her lap just as they had been at the Antelope. 'And when I've made sure you're comfortable I'll come back and break up this — what do you call it? — this happy symposium!'

Thus she spoke, and rose at once from her chair, while Wizzie, without giving No-man so much as a single glance, got up quickly too, and bidding Claudius a nervous but self-possessed good-night, allowed herself to be led from the room.

No-man mechanically did as their hostess had suggested. He turned his chair towards the fire, refused the more comfortable one offered by Roger Cask, and bending over the grate, lit a cigarette with a torn envelope from his pocket.

Claudius, sitting erect in the arm-chair, with his back to the curtained window, turned his bird-like gaze upon Dud's crouching figure and bony skull. 'The conclusion I have come to', he threw out abruptly, continuing some line of thought drawn from his former conversation, the connection of which had been missed by his present hearer, 'is that a good thing sometimes does more harm — I mean in retarding progress — than a bad thing.'

'I quite agree with you,' commented No-man, with the exaggerated emphasis of a person who hadn't the least idea what the point was.

'This mania for what they call Nature', went on the other, 'and for what they love to praise as the quiet life, is all right in itself, just as their cult of a simple and primitive happiness is all right in itself. But what they forget is...'

'Who the hell are *they*?' said Dud to himself. 'God! I must pull myself together!'

'... what they forget is that life has to go on, that the world has to change. It's sheer pessimism to think that man's intellectual possibilities, that the possibilities of what we call beauty in the cosmos, are limited to looking at primroses, growing potatoes, preserving old parks, taking dogs for walks, and abusing the radio and cinema! This English mania for Nature and the quiet life is all very well; but it's only one part of what the cosmos offers. Machinery is another; wireless and the movies yet others; baths and radiators and airplanes others still; tunnels and—'

‘And aqueducts,’ suggested Dud, thinking to himself, ‘He’ll soon be talking of a new Appian Way out of Dorchester, and a new “cloaca maxima” in the centre of the Channel.’

‘And aqueducts,’ repeated Mr Cask without a smile. ‘The point is that I find as a reformer that our national virtues are just as much a hindrance to the progress of the world, to the evolution of life, as our worst vices. Take baths, for instance. We’re so proud of our stoicism — why! even Jenny up there is like that! — that we despise the science of getting our water properly heated. We’re so proud of the simple poetry of our coal-grates that we despise any attempt to get a proper temperature in our houses. We *are* a poetic race: I fully admit it. We’re prepared to sacrifice comfort to poetry, justice to poetry, health to poetry, science to poetry, machinery to poetry. But what we don’t see is that there’s something larger and grander than poetry, and that is *creation*! Poetry belongs essentially to the past. We’re the most poetic of all races because we’re the most conservative of all races. But creation, Mr No-man, creation is often sublimely beautiful where it isn’t poetical at all! It’s the same with this individualism we cling to so desperately. The world has weighed individualism of this sort, and found it wanting! The great thing *now* is the genius not of the individual but of the race. Humanity, Mr No-man, not your conservative Englishman, nor even your conservative Chinaman, is the unit of evolution. I admit freely that the English and the Chinese are the only races who make a cult of poetry and happiness. But — don’t you see? — that’s not enough! Life is more than poetry. Life has a pleasure in it beyond all poetic happiness. We must follow evolution, Mr No-man, because we *are* evolution; and so when I meddle with these worthy—’

‘Durotriges,’ threw in the historic Dud.

‘Very well, then, these Durotriges. And agitate and worry them to build, to build—’

‘Aqueducts,’ repeated his hearer.

‘Very well, then, aqueducts. It’s not to make them happy or to make them poetical; it’s to make them fulfil the *intention of evolution*, that is to say, the will of the only god *we* shall ever know! And the point is—’

But Dud, who had been just able to catch the drift of Mr Cask’s words up to this moment, now remarked, ‘There’s a great deal in what you say!’ and gave himself up completely to his own meditations. ‘Paracelsus certainly maintained’, he thought, ‘that our ideas really *can* beget subhuman entities.’

Meanwhile Mr Cask, whose attitude to Paracelsus and his entities would have been extremely unsympathetic, went into further details about the part played by Ancient Romans and by Modern Americans in fulfilling the purposes of evolution.

‘What the Cemetery Woman said’, Dud’s thoughts ran on, ‘about not dragging people back but letting them go free, has nothing to do with the Mona of my love-making. I have *created* the Mona of my love-making; and there she is, poor little wraith, left alone with that thing!’

At this point he began to wonder whether his shrinking from the act of love, those ‘philotēsia erga’ so impossible to him, might not be the cause of the whole direction of his fate. Indeed, the vile idea came into his head that since he had created his Mona-wraith only to tantalize her with his sterile desire she would be the dedicated victim of his mother’s demon.

‘*It* won’t tantalize her,’ he thought with grim bitterness. And then it entered his head to ask himself whether his nervous shrinking from ‘philotēsia erga’, which seemed to be the sinister under-note of his destiny, might not now play the same role with Wizzie as it had played with Mona.

And if so, whom would fate select to be the representative, in actual human life, of his mother's devil?

'Yes, there's certainly a great deal in it — a great *deal* in it,' the polite Dud now found it appropriate to utter in an emphatic tone.

The bird-like eyes in front of him blinked, as if under the impact of a volley of grape-shot. 'You *don't* agree with me, then?' he said. 'I understood you to say you agreed with me that there was absolutely nothing in this absurd English idea that the only beauty in life is the poetic one.'

'I meant—' said Dud as softly as he could — but in his heart he damned, up hill and down dale, this narrow, peaked, bald pate that seemed to glisten above those wrinkle-lidded eyes with the very sweat of the evolutionary process. 'What I meant was that there was a great deal in *your view* of the English idea, not in the English idea itself, for I disagree with you that—'

At this point Mr Cask, who had evidently begun to grow decidedly suspicious — at least in regard to his intellectual alertness — of this lean visitor with a cropped skull, interrupted him by getting up with an abrupt jerk and proceeding to open the window.

Now our friend *had* been aware — though in his fashion he had thrust it from him as incongruous with the idea of a Stone Age maiden rescued by a Bronze Age invader — that a penetrating perfume, that was certainly not eau-de-Cologne, had diffused itself through the room immediately after Wizzie had come downstairs after taking off her hat. But already annoyed at being exposed in his absent-minded propitiation of Mr Cask by this abrupt opening of the window — a gesture that seemed to say, 'Away with this woman's cheap scent!' — he began to feel belligerent. Besides, why hadn't the Horse-Head come down again? Was she going to stay up there talking to Wizzie all the night?

He rose to his feet himself. ‘Oh, by the way, Mr Cask,’ he said, *‘would* you mind telling me where the lavatory is?’

‘Certainly — certainly,’ responded the other and went to the door; but when he reached it he paused and turned. ‘I generally go out myself,’ he said, ‘for ordinary purposes, to the back of the King’s Arms. There’s a nice place there. Ours is next to the spare room, where your—’ He hesitated a second. ‘Where your wife is, and the flush — for I saw to its plumbing myself — is rather — rather violent; but, of course, do just as you like!’

Dud moved past him ungraciously with the barest nod and went out into the street.

Roger Cask followed him, pointing with his hand, and exclaiming, ‘There, over there! You can’t miss it; it’s just outside—’ But the man’s words were drowned in the musical voice of a youth selling the local paper. The tune to which he sang *‘Ech — o! Ech —* o*!’* would have charmed Dud at any other time; but on the top of Mr Cask’s aqueducts and plumbing it was too much.

He had not gone many steps in the direction indicated — and it had begun to occur to him that since he was so close to his lodging he ought to inform his landlord that he would be out all night — when he came upon a musician standing in a stable-arch and accompanying his singing on a concertina. This man looked at him — a wistful supplicating look — and Dud, feeling superstitious about refusing anything to anyone on this night of nights, fumbled in his leather purse for a piece of silver.

‘I was a double-dyed fool’, he said to himself as he produced a shilling for the singer, ‘not to take a room at the Antelope. Between us we’d have had enough. I feel as if I were going to my girl in the Temple of Vesta!’

Vesta or no Vesta, Dud certainly felt, as he emerged from the yard outside the tap-room, that he could not even spare the time to go and speak to his landlord. ‘I *must* get to her,’ he thought. ‘The Horse-Head may have scared her. She may be lying there now, wondering why I don’t come.’

But he was destined, when he returned to the door of Mrs Dearth’s dwelling, to encounter a far more aggravating delay than any musician with a concertina or any visit to a tap-room yard could bring about.

He found Claudius engaged in earnest conversation with a middle-aged lady without hat or cloak. They were standing in the doorway as he came up. Claudius did not see him at once; and even Dud’s impatience — for he had caught sight of the flicker of fire-light on the drawn-down blind of the room above — did not go so far as to induce him to push past them.

Hovering about them, however, as he was now forced to do, he was able in the light of a lamp against the opposite wall to get a most Rembrandtesque picture of the hatless woman’s face. She was of a plainness that was heart-rending! She was not ugly. Real ugliness would have improved her appearance. She was plain with a plainness that saddened rather than shocked. Her big nose, red from diurnal labours in fireless rooms, had a slight twist to one side. She wore a pince-nez of thick-rimmed glasses, her complexion was sickly, her front teeth prominent, and, as though *these* defects didn’t damn her enough, a malicious Providence had recently caused some kind of troublesome skin-affliction to appear on her chin.

Dud had now to endure a pathological state which was peculiarly distressing to him. Maddening as this delay was — for the illuminated blind he had caught sight of up there seemed to represent Wizzie’s very clothes neatly folded at the foot of her bed — he could not resist a sympathetic twinge at the cruel pathos of difference manifested in the person of this poor lady. That any woman should have been so absolutely denied the pleasure of love by acts of God upon her form and face, struck him in his excited mood as a monstrous thing. He would have liked to have done something outrageous, then and there, to prove to this undesirable one that she had attracted him at first sight *in the way women attract men*.

The two had reached a pause now in their talk, and Claudius introduced him to the lady. Nor did he confine himself to doing this, for he begged Dud to take Miss Constancia — our friend could not catch her surname — to the fire, and amuse her for a minute, while he ran down to the bottom of the hill. Thus, before he realized what was happening to him, Dud found himself ensconced opposite Miss Constancia in his old seat, in that room he had come so to detest, listening to an interminable rigmarole composed of praise for Mr Cask, and of her fears for the party at the foot of the hill to whose help Mr Cask had gone.

'It's a wonder', he thought, 'that God hasn't gone further still and given you an impediment in your speech!'

But Miss Constancia was, it soon became clear, exceptionally free from this disability, for she chattered without a pause; but even her chattering — or so it seemed to him in his angry indignation on her behalf — was an undercurrent of humble and yet aggressive apology for troubling Mr Cask's friend at all with her negligible society.

There was, however, no doubt — in spite of an unkind Creator having given the nose under that wretched pince-nez such a damning twist — that Constancia *could* assert her personality in a lively stream of words. Her talk, however, was sadly spoilt by her trick of interjecting 'See?' at every possible pause; and whenever afterwards Dud heard people use that interjection, he recalled how torn he was between his angry pity for this woman and his still angrier impatience for Claudius's return.

'It's my stepfather who wants him, see?' she was now saying. 'He's always the same, is Roger Cask! Don't *you* find him so, Mr Gnome?'

Dud did not mind being called Gnome — indeed, he preferred it to what Nancy's husband had called him at Glymes — but it irked him to hear Claudius commended, for the second time that evening, for being always the same. 'Damn the chap!' he thought. 'He's too much the same. He's been the same ever since Durnovaria was Durnovaria!'

'Dear old Dad,' Constancia went on, '(that's my stepfather — see? — I always call him Dad, but he's really Mr Rober Ferneau — see? — who married my poor mother — see? — but that was fifty years ago, and he's been father and mother and uncle and aunt to me since I was that high) clings to him, oh, so close! And when he gets what he calls the dazzles, he always sends for him. "Fetch Roger to me," he always says. "Let me lay my hand on Roger! Roger's an honest man. Connie, my dear, fetch Roger to me!" Why, Mr Gnome, you're an elderly man yourself, and you must know what the dazzles are. But to show you how Mr Cask's always the same, he's never once failed to come to Dad since I was that high!'

Now Dud had by nature a penchant for eccentric spinsters, at least for those upon whose countenances Providence, contending with Time, played a match as to which could do the most harm; but on this occasion he was so agitated that not even the touching gesture with which, when Constancia said 'that high', she measured in the air with her hand a distance from the ground that would have made her nothing less than a twelve-inch fairy, stirred his heart towards her. And — but perhaps not intentionally — he punished her in the most ferocious way possible for a man to punish a woman, a way that Swift himself would hardly have used. That is to say, *he never once met her eyes*.

When Claudius returned at the end of about twenty minutes, and she thanked our friend for his kindness (a kindness which had consisted in his allowing her to talk to him while he stared at her boots), he gave her a bow of the same frantic end-of-the-tether exaggeration — just as if he had leapt into the air with a scream — that he had given Mrs Quirm just about twelve hours ago when that lady accosted him over Mona's grave.

On the departure of Constancia, who hurried off to see the effect, on her relative's nerves, of Mr Cask's ministrations, that gentleman fixed his caged-eagle's eye upon the visitor and asked him quietly if he didn't want to go to bed.

Dud's angry confusion must have penetrated at least some of the lobes of that evolutionary skull, for, not waiting for an answer, he mounted two or three steps of the narrow staircase and called out, Jenny! Jenny! Come down!'

'*Coming*!' came the faint reply from that upper room; and a second later, with the opening and shutting of a door, Mrs Dearth descended. 'You'll find a good fire up there,' she said to our friend; and then — for on her appearance Claudius had retreated to the dining-room — she came up close to him. 'Be nice to her,' she whispered. 'She's feeling shaky after all this.'

The dining-room door shut behind her too now, and Dud mounted the stairs. There was no question about what room to enter when he reached the top, for, emerging from the spare room, the fire-light was flickering into the small dark landing. For two or three seconds he stood there, breathing heavily, his eyes fixed not on the door, which was ajar, but on the flickering light on the landing wall. He felt as if this crucial moment, with all it contained, with the darkness round him, with the cry '*Ech — o! Ech — o!'*, with the faint murmur of voices in the room below, with his little unlighted attic in High East Street, with those three mounds out there in the cemetery, with that foreign circus in full blast behind the farm-implements, was totally *unreal*. He had a sensation in his legs as if, were they to take a single step, they would find nothing beneath them but empty space!

And then, without a second's warning, the enormous sallow countenance of Mr Quirm of Glymes materialized between him and the open door. Vague, nebulous, darker than the darkness, the man's lineaments wavered, fluctuated, solidified, and then faded away. But even as they faded, Dud's original impression of the fellow's eyes returned upon him. They were devoid of every kind of expression. They were part of the feeling he had had just now — they *were* that feeling — that this whole place, with this whole day, All Souls' Day in Dorchester, was *unreal*, unreal with a dissolution that would turn it to dust under his feet if he moved an inch.

He made a desperate interior motion of his whole being, a motion that, in a blinding strain of shivering tension, resembled a motion he had once made when going under gas at the dentist's; and he *did* move an inch. He moved more than an inch, for he moved straight to the lighted door, opened it, and entered the room.

Wizzie was in a white night-dress, her thin, colourless hair tied back with a black ribbon. But she was not in bed. She was seated in front of the fire. She neither moved her head nor changed her position as he closed the door, and he noticed that her wrists were between her knees, and that she was rubbing the knuckles of one hand with the fingers of the other.

CHAPTER 3. Candlemas Day

THREE MONTHS HAD passed since Dud No-man came to Dorchester. It was now Candlemas, the second of February, and our friend, with his round skull cropped even closer than when Wizzie first beheld it on the pillow by her side in Friary Lane, sat writing at the window of his attic.

The rooks, flapping about round those ancient nests in the high elms above the roofs, were hardly less clamorous than in the autumn, though cleverer naturalists than Dud might have been able to detect from their sounds and movements that winter had not only come but was nearly gone.

His fire was burning well, his shelves of old books responded warmly to its pleasant glow, his coloured sketch of Nuremberg beckoned him with its accustomed benediction to follow its easy track among the richly mingled walls and towers of that ideal city. But on the thick western wall of his own deeply gabled attic window there lay no sunlight today, and if he wanted to conjure up any token of the approach of spring, all he could think of were the hothouse daffodils in the greenhouse by the bridge at the foot of the street.

He had not yet washed up his breakfast things. The Royal Martyr was waiting ready-filled on the stove in the kitchen. The belly of Henry VIII still bulged with the refuse that must presently be taken downstairs.

He himself was only smoking his second cigarette. But he had left his arm-chair by the fire the moment he had eaten his meal, for he had been in haste to get to his writing that morning. His hand was moving now at top speed over the white paper, directing the pen-point that did the work, that indeed sometimes went on doing the work when its director’s attention had drifted away. But fast as his hand crossed the white paper that Candlemas morning, his mind went faster still, beating against one barrier after another, flying down one open vista after another, losing itself in infinite perspectives, creating and destroying one landscape after another, each one leading to variable and vanishing horizons.

‘I’ve got my work,’ he kept thinking to himself. ‘Whatever happens, I’ve got my work.’ And indeed, in all this exciting and agitating time since he had snatched Wizzie from the circus, he had displayed an almost savage resolution in his concentration on his writing. Morning after morning, with an obstinacy that surprised himself, he left the girl in bed at Mrs Dearth’s and came over to his attic, got his own breakfast by eight o’clock, and settled down at his window to work.

Mrs Dearth humoured him to the limit in all this. She herself got into the habit of carrying up Wizzie’s breakfast long after she had had her own; and this went on till it seemed as if the little circus-rider would soon fall into the role of a privileged toy of the elder woman, the Friary Lane establishment becoming a doll’s-house, and the girl’s self-centred oblivious reveries resembling the natural passivity of a cherished doll.

The aura of this old Roman-British town, with its layers upon layers of human memories, semi-historic and prehistoric, seemed to have a magical power over Dud’s imagination. He began tapping levels in his consciousness that he had not known he possessed.

The moment he sat down at that table in front of those old roofs, the spirit of the past seemed to obsess him. Sometimes he actually wrote so fast — especially when his more analytical faculties were in abeyance — that it was as if he became a medium, writing he scarce knew what, under some unknown control. He knew he was living an unnatural sort of life, sleeping with Wizzie at night, living with her half the day — for, after he returned to

Friary Lane early in the afternoon, he never saw his attic again till the next morning — and he knew that all the customs, habits, crotchets, peculiarities, in which he had indulged himself for the last ten years, had been devastatingly infringed upon, some of them outraged. He knew that he was living, as it were, from hand to mouth, from day to day. He knew that the old meticulous continuity of his existence was completely shattered.

And yet no one could have persuaded D. No-man that he was anything but happy. He had come to accept his relations with Wizzie as his unquestioned fate, as the trench in the great cosmic battle-field up and down which it was his destiny to march, making the utmost of every view it offered, and escaping every morning to that secure dug-out of his own, where he kept his resolutely guarded tablets, and where he became an obsessed *hand*, covering sheet after sheet of paper with intimations reaching him out of the air.

Every now and then, while his pen automatically went on moving, he became aware of the noises of the street. They had come to be curiously dear to him, these sounds. Best of all it was when the bells of Fordington Church, away to the east, reached him over the roofs. These only sounded on certain days, and even when they were ringing, it needed a favourable wind to make them clear to his ear; but when he *did* hear them they seemed to have the power of transporting him to a city as ideal as his pictured Nuremberg, a city charged with the rich, sweet residue of centuries of human life, life from which the suffering and bitterness had been winnowed, and only the long, dim deposit of humanity's afterthoughts, its intimations of hope against hope, lived on in the air-motions of that far-carried sound.

He had come to like the noise of the great buses too, rolling up or rattling down the street with their reminders, so pleasant to his history-loving ears, of the old coaching days. Even the rumble of the ordinary motor-cars and lorries, as he caught their unseen passing from where he sat, seemed to come to him through a delicately muffled mist, softened by the ghosts of earlier, less mechanical sounds, and interspersed even now, especially in the morning hours, by the friendly beat of horses' hooves and the rattle of milk-carts.

It pleased him to think of 'the winding mossy ways' along which all this London Road traffic through the town, from Weymouth to Salisbury, and from Salisbury to Weymouth, had to travel ere it reached its destination. He had grown quite attached to the two Dorchester bridges over which these vehicles had to pass, the little one at the foot of the street, by the White Hart and the Bridge Hotel, and the big eighteenth-century stone one, beyond the filling-stations, known as Grey's Bridge.

But what he liked best of all, after the ringing of the bells, was the clatter of human feet on the two pavements. Never had the poetry of the anonymous human tread struck him as poignantly as it did here. He found himself recalling the famous passages in Keats about this sound, as the poet imagined its rising among the classic towers of Corinth or the Gothic arches of Chichester. He would even try sometimes to distinguish the tread of a man from the tread of a woman, when a chance hush in the stir of the thoroughfare threw into special emphasis the steps of some solitary pedestrian.

This particular Candlemas morning being windless and warm, though grey and cloudy, Dud had propped open a little the lower portion of his old-fashioned attic window. For this purpose he had not scrupled, in the absent-minded impatience of his fast and furious work, to use a large edition of Malory. His burst of inspiration, such as it was, having exhausted itself, and his pen having lost its magic, Dud felt ashamed of what he had done with this particular book, and he proceeded to substitute a piece of firewood. As he made the exchange, and in the process opened the window wider, he was conscious of a particularly refreshing breath of air coming in.

‘From the south-west it comes,’ he thought, ‘from Maiden Castle.’ And he remembered how Claudius had been speaking lately of taking him over there and of showing him the site of the last excavations. ‘But I must see it by myself first,’ he thought. ‘I’m damned if I’ll go with *him* to such a place till I’ve got my own impressions of it!’

Since his childhood Dud had obscurely linked his mother’s bed-post demon with Malory’s Questing Beast; and, still seated in his chair by the window, he now began hurriedly turning over the pages of the volume, searching for the familiar passages relating to this legendary being. Deeply implicit in the old dark religion of his mother’s people, the hunting of this monster was apparently confined to one particular family, of whom Malory only knew two, Pellinore and Palomides, who might have been father and son.

Dud soon found the passage he wanted, and read for the hundredth time the following words:

And this meanwhile there came Sir Palomides, the good knight, following the Questing Beast that had in shape a head like a serpent’s head, and a body like a leopard, buttocks like a lion, and footed like an hart; and in his body there was such a noise as it had been the noise of thirty couple of hounds questing, and such a noise that beast made wheresomever he went; and this beast evermore Sir Palomides followed, for it was called his quest.

‘For it was called his quest,’ Dud muttered aloud, and, returning the volume to the bookcase, he left the room and went into his kitchen. Here he lit the gas, set the Royal Martyr on the flame, and added a few crusts which he had overlooked to the tea-leaves and egg-shells already overburdening the belly of Henry VIII. While he did this he tried to recall the obscure arguments, drawn by Professor Rhŷs from a gnomic allusion of Taliesin's, that identified this Questing Beast with the ambiguous word 'Dormarth', meaning 'Door of Death'.

Returning to his bedroom to await the boiling of the kettle, he went up to the questionable image at his bed's head and laid his hand upon it. 'Dormarth! Dormarth!' he repeated with a sullen iteration, and even as he muttered this phrase, he experienced a shiver of malignant vindictiveness, as if he were deliberately insulting the thing. 'Dog of Hell, that's what you are! Dormarth, death-demon!'

In the passing of these three winter months, spent between Friary Lane and his attic, that first morbid panic about leaving the girl-wraith of his cerebral love alone with this Dormarth had almost faded away. But now, as he passed his hand over the thing's obscure lineaments, the old feeling stirred within him. But he had done it! If it were a sinister proceeding, it was irretrievable now, and he must accept it, just as he had accepted the breaking up of so many of his old celibate habits in his contact with his girl.

One incident after another came into his mind as he again crossed the landing and entered the kitchen, incidents that threw a not altogether pleasant light on certain aspects of Wizzie's character. But if Dud had any force of character at all, this force never showed itself more obstinately than in the way his will buttressed up his romantic emotion.

He had had for Wizzie, ever since that first encounter in the caravan, what he called the *emotion of recognition*, and from this — intensified by all the imagination he possessed — he had never gone back. He no doubt inherited from his mother a formidable tendency to live entirely in the imagination. The woman belonged to the most deeply ingrown, the most self-absorbed race in the world, and it may well have been the Cymric element in our friend that gave him the power to accept from Wizzie revelation after revelation of peculiarities in her character, of the sort most dedicated to upset a romantic lover, without, so to speak, turning a hair.

As he now poured the hot water from the Royal Martyr into his basin, and proceeded to submerge in this basin as many objects as it would hold, and then watched the steam ascending until it covered his little shaving-mirror with mist, he went through a sequence of thoughts of which the following would be a legitimate summary. ‘To the end of my life I’ll stick to Wizz. Whatever she does, I’ll stick to her. If she wants to get rid of me, she’ll just have to bolt, that’s all! I know she’s been really happier these three months than ever before, and I’m going to hang on to her now, like Pellinore to his quest!’

Just as it was not Dud’s custom to use soap or any cleansing powder in his method of washing up, so it was not his custom to use decency or delicacy in his soliloquies with himself. He derived in both cases a malicious pleasure from what might be called the art of reduction to essentials. He began now, as he took object after object out of the steaming water and held it for a second under the tap before drying it, one of his most shameless strippings of himself.

‘I’m alone,’ he thought, ‘as we all are. I’m alone, *and I’m mad in my egoism*, as she is in hers. Her crazy selfishness takes a different form from mine, that’s all, and that’s the bottom of the world!’

Then he remembered how that morning, as he came along beside the stream which flows between Orchard Street and the meadows, striking it to the east of the prison as he came down the hill, he had met an elderly gentleman with a dog. He had at once started telling himself a story about this elderly gentleman, whom he imagined as retired from some simple business and leading an absolutely harmless, happy, and selfish life. Dud had decided, as he went along between this stream and the meadows, and finally turned up High East Street by the bridge, that he could not have identified himself with this old man if he had not been at bottom *like him*, if he also had not been absolutely harmless and absolutely selfish.

He had decided then that he would certainly get on well in Dorchester if the psychic weather of the spot were of this kind. Had the place always been like this? Was a blameless propitiatory self-centredness the characteristic of the ancient Durotriges?

But he had also met, down by that river-path, an extraordinary number of babies in perambulators. Never in his life had he seen so many harmlessly selfish babies. Elements that went deep in Dud's solitary character responded instinctively to both these extremes of egoistic harmlessness. He had always been something of an old man, he had always been something of a baby; and in these daily walks from Friary Lane to the brick bridge, and thence up High East Street to his lodging, he had come to derive a mystical satisfaction from identifying himself both with the placid infants and with the placid old men.

This very morning he had been privileged to witness a singular encounter between one of his philosophic infants — only this one was out of its perambulator and on the steps of its dwelling — and a ruminative dog of an inquisitive turn of mind. This particular baby, who could *just* walk, was only faintly concerned by the fact that the door of its home had by chance been shut, nor was it much more concerned over the approach of the dog, who stood on its four legs almost as high as *it* did on its two. Dud was fascinated by the manner in which this young egoist guarded in one hand the crust of bread it was holding, while with the other it pointed out to the dog, with a sagacious forefinger extended, the desirability of its seeking its fortune in a distant meadow.

On resuming his place at his writing-table today, after carrying Henry VIII downstairs and bringing him up empty, No-man was annoyed to discover that his inspiration refused to return. He was accustomed to these lapses in his magnetic contact with his sources of inspiration, but as a rule, after waiting for a time with his ear attuned to the murmur of the thoroughfare, the breath of the spirit would return.

But on this occasion it refused to do so, and, laying down his pen, he stared in a sort of indolent trance at the rooks' nests in the opposite trees. He still was conscious of a faint delicious stirring in the air from the south-west, and it seemed to him that it came in stronger gusts than before.

'No!' he thought. 'I'll have nothing to do with Maiden Castle till I can go out there absolutely alone!'

Turning away from the window, he swung half-round and cast a malevolent glance at the dark, cracked, worm-eaten visage on his bed-post. 'Dormarth! Dormarth!' he muttered vindictively; and then he came near chuckling aloud as he remembered the similar tone in which Wizzie had hissed out the word 'Grummer' at Mrs Urgan.

'Is Rhŷs right', he thought, 'in flinging this old word of Taliesin's at you? What a word it is! "Hunter of Dead Souls"! But Malory says you have the head of a serpent. You don't look like a serpent to me, Dormarth!'

Dud realized he was behaving like the baby he had watched that morning; but the truth is that his ten years of contact with this piece of obscure wood-carving had endowed it with all that was least admirable in his own nature. The thing had become a sort of sin-eater to him in the course of these years, and even if it had been just a block of wood with no connection with any mythic creature, it would have imbibed something, as a child’s doll might have done, of its owner’s perversity.

‘This would be a good day’, he said to himself, ‘to slip off to Maiden Castle.’ And he wondered vaguely what it was that kept bringing Maiden Castle into his head this Candlemas morning.

He now heard the clock above the Corn-Exchange strike eleven, and with this sound there came a ring at the house door downstairs. He listened idly for any sequel to this signal, but without much concern, for as a rule such a sound only meant a visit to his landlord, who, being a vestryman of All Saints’, was frequently having calls on church business.

But he got up quickly with some interest when he heard steps ascending the last two flights of stairs. The mere sound of these steps disturbed him. They were shuffling steps, and they kept halting, as if the person ascending stopped to breathe, or to look round, or to listen. There was a long intermission of this sort when the visitor reached the top. What was he doing? Was he peering into the small kitchen?

No-man went to his door and opened it with an abrupt jerk. To his amazement, and it must be confessed to his extreme disgust, there stood Old Funky.

‘I — be — come—’ began the old man, who was dressed in a shiny broadcloth coat from below which, when he finally turned to depart, the coat-tails of his official attire were just observable. In one hand he carried his own ancient bowler-hat, and in the other an almost equally battered woman’s riding-hat with a cord twisted round the brim. ‘Come — mister — for to *see’ch* other.’

Biting his lip with annoyance, No-man made a sign for him to enter, and, as soon as he was well in the room, closed the door behind him. He then swung the chair round he had just been sitting in. ‘Sit down, Mr Urgan,’ he said.

Old Funky hurriedly touched the chair with the tips of his long fingers, as if it was necessary to bewitch it first, or unbewitch it, and did as he was bid.

‘For — to — see ‘ee, mister — just for to see’ch other, mister!’

This running together of the syllables ‘see’ and ‘each’ into the single syllable ‘see’ch’ was, No-man felt, exactly characteristic of Mr Ben Urgan. The man must have felt this himself too, for he repeated the phrase with unctuous satisfaction. ‘For to *see’ch* other, mister.’

No-man glanced angrily round the room. The only thing that gave him an ounce of comfort was that he had waylaid Old Funky and got him safely seated before politeness compelled him to offer him the arm-chair by the fire. As for the sin-eating bed-post, which now appeared anxious to catch his eye, he was conscious that it had never looked better satisfied with the general trend of events.

‘This ’ere riding-’at’, said the visitor, tapping the object referred to with the brim of his own bowler, ‘be hern what be with ‘ee. Me missus can’t a-wear ‘un, nor Popsy can’t a-wear ‘un. And me missus said ‘twere a tearin’ pity that such a ‘at, a ‘at might have been a Honourable’s ‘at, if not a Ladyship’s ‘at, should be gived to a scarecrow, so I takes the liberty and pleasure, as ‘ee might say, of killing two spadgers with one brick. I’ve brought ‘ee she’s ‘at, and *us* be able to see’ch other!’

As he uttered these words, he turned to No-man’s table at the window and with meticulous nicety laid down his bowler on the top of Dud’s last page, and the riding-hat beside it.

‘Be that the book you’re making?’ he asked when with his alert roving eye he noted the manuscript. ‘Bain’t about these ’ere parts, I suppose?

Bain’t about Darchester, be ‘un?’

‘I never tell anyone a word about my writings, Mr Urgan, till I’ve got them quite finished.’

‘Fear they’d steal ‘un, eh? Mare’s bosom take all, but I can’t blame ‘ee, mister! Them blighters from Ameriky be in *our* line of business too, and, by crick, they’ve a-stole all. I warrant there be some even now, if all were known, skivvying about this sober street, who’d as soon snatch up these ’ere papers and hide ‘un under their vesties as pick lice from a dog!’

‘Well, Mr Urgan, this is my time for work, and I’m afraid I must bid you good-bye. As to Miss Ravelston’s hat, I can assure you she has no use for it just now. But if your good lady doesn’t want it — and I can see it can’t be called a very new hat — you needn’t bother to carry it away. I’ll dispose of it somehow. You can leave it here.’

But Old Funky made no move that promised any submission to this dismissal. He gave No-man a look of the most equivocal blackmailing subtlety that our friend had ever beheld. There was a thin trickle of indescribable malice oozing from this look, which fell on every word the old man uttered, soaking it in venom.

‘Me and *her* what now bides along of ‘ee, mister, knowed each other better, look-see, than be natural for she to tell ‘ee of! There were a time when her and me were wondrous confiding. ’Twas about that time— ‘tweren’t so very long ago neither — that her told Majesty’s Spectre a plumbing great lie about a axidint our hoss had. Her were afeard ’twould have to be destroyed — that’s what made she do it — destroyed, see? — put out of way, you understand. But what her didn’t count on was Ol’ Ben looking out for his wone self and not forgettin’ nor forgivin’ like most silly ol’ men what have grown confidin’ with a young woman what has a ‘lurin’ figure’.

‘What — on — earth — are you talking about?’

And then Old Funky gave him a second extraordinary look. It was primarily the look of a furtive rat: ‘How far can I go before this dog springs?’ But it was also a look of what might be called the adhesive plaster of hatred, a look whose hatred clung like the fabulous shirt of Nessus to the very soul of its victim.

But a shirt — even a poisoned one — is after all inanimate, and Old Funky, in his role of the avenging parasite, seemed to flit like an insatiable mosquito round all the undefended places in No-man’s nature, seeking the spot where he could, with safety to himself, settle and suck. ‘I be come so us can see’ch other,’ he repeated. ‘Me missus have spoke ere now of calling in the law’ — he spoke of the law with an unctuous veneration, as if it were a sort of super-Funky, a kind of arch-mosquito of blood-sucking— ‘but in course as ‘twixt an Ol’ Ben like me, what means no ‘arm, and a chit like *she* what do now bide along of theeself, ’tis best — and so I tell me missus when her do carry on about thee’s gall and me— ’tis best to see’ch other, ’tis best to come to ‘appy ‘rangements. The truth be’ — here Old Funky actually extended a furtive wrist and a confidential hand, and lowered his voice to a whisper— ‘that thee and me, with ‘eads together and a few gold sovereigns to make the poor ‘ooman’s ‘eart rejoice, can settle this ’ere trouble smooth and sweet, without calling in no lawyer, nor no bloomin’ jury-courts.’

Dud advanced a step towards the seated figure, his eyes fixed not on the man’s face but on the sharp line where his reddish wig met his bald scalp, and even at that crucial moment he found himself quite vexed that there was no louse there today to emphasize the nice distinction.

‘Come, now,’ he said in a low clear voice. ‘Don’t beat about the bush! What actually *was* there between you and — and Miss Ravelston? What actually *is* there between you now, eh? Speak up! Tell me every *single* thing. Have you ever — have *any* of you ever — taken — liberties with her?' He felt as he said it that 'liberties' was an outrageous word to use, but Old Funky's insight into his character was so deadly that he began to feel sick with alarm and disgust. How could the old rogue have known that he wouldn't act like a normal man and kick him incontinently down the stairs? How could he have known that it was one of D. No-man's deepest peculiarities *not to be able to fly into a normal rage?* How could he have known that, although, like Othello, not naturally jealous, he *had* grown to have, in everything where Wizzie was concerned, an almost insane curiosity — not jealous curiosity, but what might be called erotic curiosity carried to a disturbing degree? How could Old Funky — except by throwing a Nessus-shirt of appalling comprehension round his adversary's soul — know that this man, instead of indignantly cutting him short as a gentleman would, as any man of honour would, would plunge into a detailed inquisition that clearly caused him extreme suffering and that would have thrown Wizzie, had she known what he was doing, into a fit of furious indignation?

At the time, after his babyish fashion, snatching at a glitter in the air — though that glitter was the ambiguous phosphorus of his girl's secrets — No-man thought only of his own desire to learn at all costs, even at the cost of not kicking Old Funky downstairs, what exactly were the kind of *lies possible* for these people to invent about Wizzie's life with them. No sooner had Old Funky departed than it *did* occur to him that the mere listening to these lies was a gross treachery to Wizzie. At the moment, however, it seemed the opposite of treachery, for wasn't he drawing out the old man? Wasn't he craftily discovering what dangers there might be, for both of them, in this game he was playing? Of course, if instead of being D. No-man, an individual who lacked the divine right of losing his temper, he had been a gentleman and a lover... But our friend was neither of these. He was a nameless bastard, whose mind was so morbid, and whose virility was so weak, that he could neither love as other men, nor feel angry as other men.

'Of course, mister,' went on Old Funky, 'I be only come *this* time to see'ch other. But I'll drop in again tomorrow about this time — for 'tis agin me principles to hurry a gentleman — and if so be tomorrow 'ee *happens* to have a fiver in yer pocket, what us could give to me missus, her won't think no more of calling in the law.'

'So you won't tell me', said Dud sternly, 'what I ask you? Come on! You'd better tell me. Out with it now! What *is* in your mind about Miss Ravelston? What have you got against her? Did you or anyone else in your damned circus take liberties with her? What do you mean about that inspector and the accident to the horse?'

Without replying, Old Funky rose to his feet. There was not a shade of disappointment, not a shade of confusion, in his manner. Apparently his gentleman had acted in complete accordance with schedule.

'See'ch other tomorrow, mister. A fiver ain't much. But it'll do wonders with me missus. No more talk to poor Ol' Ben about they police and they jury-courts. A fiver bain't much; but I can tell 'ee, private and confidential, 'twill do the trick.'

Saying this, Old Funky moved to the door, skirting the bony figure of his antagonist, who stood as if petrified, half-leaning against the bed-post that lacked its top, and gazing not *at* his tormentor but *through* him.

'Us'll see'ch other tomorrow,' the man murmured as he went out. 'Arternoon to 'ee, sir!'

Dud abode in the same position for some seconds after the fellow was gone. Then he pulled himself up, and threw a ferocious glance at the heraldic monster between him and the fire. ‘Dormarth!’ he flung at it. ‘That’s what you are. Dormarth!’ He tossed aside the chair where Old Funky had been sitting, with a gesture of disgust, and leaning across his table, looked out of the window.

It was a mental device of his — for in these last three months of his life with Wizzie he had out of self-protection contracted many such tricks — to throw aside the immediate trouble and force himself to realize his situation in general terms. ‘Here am I,’ he forced himself now to think, ‘looking down on Durnovaria! Beyond those elm-tops are the South Walks. Beyond them is the Amphitheatre. When they killed Mary Channing in 1705, with ten thousand people looking on, did she look *this* way in her last moments, or far off, towards Maiden Castle?’

His thoughts, when he reached this point, ceased to be transcribable in definite words, but their gist was that some kind of sympathy — some friendly influence beyond the power of that bloodthirsty crowd — may have reached the dying woman from the great earthwork.

A sick disgust with all the material happenings that had ever taken place in this town of such tragic roots seized him now, and he made an effort to think of his soul as altogether detached from matter, detached from all movements of matter, for they were *all* hurting and cruel. Matter couldn’t be stirred without pain; and he tried to think of his soul as if it floated in a clear calm sea underneath the whole turbulent business.

‘I must talk to that Mr Wye,’ he said to himself. ‘Doesn’t Plato teach *how* you can sink down into this sea of untroubled being, below all the fever of the world?’

He went over to his fire and, seating himself in his arm-chair, threw some more coal into the little grate. A blue flame, and then an orange-coloured flame, rose up to welcome this offering, and the light flickered on his cropped skull, on his bony knees, on his powerful wrists, as he leaned towards the blaze. ‘I’d better tell Wizz,’ he thought, ‘but it’ll upset her. It’ll make her angry.’

He realized, as he thought of this, how much everything in his life had come to depend on Wizzie’s moods. ‘Will it vex her, will it please her?’ had become, if not his dominant motive, at least his perpetual preoccupation.

He leaned back in his chair now, still thinking hard. ‘She never talks about those old bad days,’ he thought. ‘But *that’s* natural. It’s still too near and too painful. Aye, what she must have gone through!’ He began plumbing all the deep-sea fathoms of what he had learnt about a girl’s mind in these last months. But, after all, how little he knew! Mona had been obviously an exception. But wasn’t this one an exception too? Perhaps *every* girl was an exception! Perhaps there was no such thing as the normal woman, or woman-in-the-abstract. What was it that Old Funky had been hinting at and hovering round? The horse was clearly a side-issue. But what *did* he mean about Grummer Urgan being jealous? It was inconceivable that Wizz had allowed such a repulsive old man to make overtures to her. She would certainly be justified in getting furiously angry with a lover, however jealous, who for one second played with such a thought. But what did he know about the real conditions of her life with those terrible people? Old Funky may easily — it was exactly what he *might* do — have tried to play the pander with regard to her. ‘What a thing it is’, he said to himself, ‘that I can listen calmly to a person like that! What is it in me that makes me so — so detached? It’s not cowardice, and it’s not that I’m so inhumanly philosophical. What the hell is it? Anyone else would have stopped the chap’s mouth in a second, and sent him to the devil!’

Dud suddenly felt as though by reason of some lack in his character or in his mental vision, some want of a natural instinct in him to strike back a clean straight blow on a ticklish occasion, he were being pushed down a spiritual cul-de-sac.

He loathed that old man. He felt profound suspicion of him. Why, then, had he let him sit in his chair and talk like that about Wizzie? Then it came about, as his mind turned the thing over, that he went so far as to ask himself point-blank whether it was possible that for some convoluted reason he *wanted* Wizzie to have been involved in some squalid and revolting situation! The mere floating into his mind of this insidious doubt made him feel as if there were abysses of dark notions within him whose nature he hesitated to plumb.

The idea was so disturbing that he got up from the fire, went across to the Questing Beast, and gave its obscure worm-eaten physiognomy a sharp flick with his finger-nail. As he did so, another thought came to him. Wasn't it only too likely that what had filled Old Funky with so much gall was a rebuff he himself had suffered from the girl? Wasn't that what women often did — accuse a man of assaulting them who in reality had rebuffed them? Full of this illuminating idea — and he reproached himself for not having thought of it earlier — No-man began pacing up and down his small attic, bending his head mechanically, and even giving his body a sideways twist, when he was in danger of striking his head against the sloping beam.

'I daren't ask her, though,' he thought, 'whether anything like that happened. The man's such a disgusting specimen that to suggest that he dared to approach her at all would be an insult.' Or *wouldn't* it be? Dud felt he was much more capable of entering into the feelings of that infant he had seen, protecting her crust or her doll from the dog, than into the feelings of a grown woman.

Deep in his heart, like many another celibate who has only enjoyed women in his imagination — like the old monks of Rabelais's time, for instance — No-man was capable of taking the grossest and most shameless view of a girl's chastity.

Once more, as he passed and repassed that head on his bed-post, he put the startling question to himself: Did something in him, deep down below all his idealizations, want Wizzie to have been involved in shame and squalor?

Now, at any rate, after these months, she had grown to be so much a part of himself that distress to her was distress to him. Wasn't it the chief concern of his life now to keep her from unhappy moods? And yet where her past was concerned... But it had always been a mania of No-man's not only to analyse his moods to the very bottom — and often beyond the bottom, for his imagination was like an irresistible plummet sinking into the centre of the earth and liable to come out *on the other side* — but, when there was an equal choice of motives, to attribute his conduct to the worst of them!

He came to the drastic conclusion, now, that the worst of his possible motives — and there *was* a choice in this obscurity — for letting Old Funky ramble on unstopped with his lies about Wizzie was neither the madness of a lover's jealousy nor that mysterious erotic curiosity to which reference has already been made; it was his feeling that a Wizzie who hadn't lived a somewhat squalid life, a Wizzie who was still virginal, was not the kind of Wizzie he had recognized as having been his paramour in that far-off megalithic age on which his imagination loved to brood, whereas a ravished Wizzie, a corrupted Wizzie, a Wizzie who had known the depths of shame, lent herself to this fantastic ideal. Twisting himself for the twentieth time under the great beam, and conscious how the grey Candlemas light lay pallid and neutral on his cupboard doors — for the Corn-Exchange clock had already struck two — he discovered a still subtler, if not a still deeper, motive for his lack of anger with Old Funky in the idea that a pure Wizzie, in the conventional meaning of that term, would have been much more likely to be tragically upset by his neurotic aversion to the ‘philotēsia erga’ whereby the generations populate the earth than a Wizzie upon whose ‘lurin’ figure it would be natural for Old Funky to cast a lecherous eye.

Pausing by his writing-table to take in the full implication of this thought, and even going so far as to accuse himself of snatching at Wizzie just because such normal exigencies would be alien to the mind of a circus waif, his glance fell on the battered riding-hat left by the old man. Had it been Wizzie’s? It was likely enough! Well, it wouldn’t be hers, or anybody else’s, again, for he most certainly would destroy it.

He took it in his hands now and with all his force squeezed it out of shape against his knee. Then he jammed it with no less violence into the big sport-pocket of his roughest overcoat, which hung on the door. ‘I’ll throw it into the Frome’, he assured himself, ‘tomorrow morning.’

He stood behind his chair — the one recently occupied by Old Funky — and once more decided that he would go alone to Maiden Castle that very day. ‘I’d as soon go to Stonehenge with Claudius’, he thought, ‘as to these old earthworks!’

But for some reason he couldn’t get Maiden Castle out of his thoughts. ‘It’s the wind,’ he said to himself; ‘it’s this Candlemas wind, that you feel without feeling, because it’s in league with the grey air.’

And then it came to him that to reach Maiden Castle you had to pass not only the Amphitheatre but the cemetery. ‘I’ll just glance at the graves,’ he decided. ‘It won’t hurt to have a look at them! I shan’t be dragging Mona back, or Mother either.’

He bent forward over the chair, and suddenly everything fell away from him but the one desperate question: Was there — or wasn’t there — a life after death? The pressure of his thoughts at that moment was so intense that, taking up his chair by its back, he lifted it several inches from the floor, and then, when he let it down, held it balanced upon one of its legs.

Dud was at bottom, below all his morbid superstitions, a ferocious realist, a raw and brutal realist, a pounding and churning realist, and what he felt now, as he balanced this chair, where Old Funky had been sitting, on one of its four legs, and twitched it between his fingers as if he would willingly make it spin like a top, was that the only basis of his own belief in another life was the terrific and devastating vividness with which he saw and felt and palpably touched the limits of the material universe.

He knew nothing of Einstein; but from his boyhood he had had an inkling that what people called the infinite, as applied to the time and space aspects of matter, was only the name for the shock to our normal life-sense — like what a fish feels when it jumps out of water — when we come to the limit of our present dimension of being. That our present dimension of being is only one among many, Dud had never doubted; and it was this certainty, grasped by him in the most brutal, gross, raw, and entirely unmystical way, that kept the Death-Door, or the Dormarth, of his mind open for the survival of whatever it is in us that already belongs to this next dimension.

‘What *is* it in us that survives?’ That was what Dud was thinking as he dropped the chair with a thud and contemplated a tiny drop of unknown liquid that lay on his table beside his last-written sentence. Was it Old Funky’s spittle? Was it an excretion from one of Old Funky’s parasites? Was it a drop of rheum from his own sneezing? Or was it the bloody sweat of this dull grey lifeless Candlemas Day itself, dropped as if it had tried in vain to give birth to something and could only give birth to *this?*

‘Of course,’ thought Dud, letting the problem of the unknown drop on his table join the problem of death, ‘of course, what we want to survive is the essence of our identity, with all its familiar sensations. We hold to *this* dimension by our sensations — that’s certain — and, if they go, what’s left of our identity?’

But, after his fashion, he now began trying to get to the heart of the sensations that thrilled him most. Pondering on this, his fingers fumbling at the back of the chair as if they itched to magnetize it into some miraculous levitation, he came to the conclusion that what really had been all through his life his supreme sensation, was what he felt when he listened to the Fordington bells. It was in fact what he was always groping towards in his writing — the feeling of being a *medium* through which the overtones of human life upon earth, purged of its grossness, flowed through the present into the future. Secretly he had often justified that infantile-senile detachment of his on the ground of this inspiration. And he now felt as if he were on the brink of a clue, just here, to something in him that *might* survive.

But was it on the lines of his mother’s mysterious badness, or of Mona’s equally mysterious goodness, that this sense of being a medium worked? He was occupied with the darker side of these Durotriges in his present book, but something else had certainly reached him, reached him daily, from these Dorchester old men and these Dorchester infants.

He had just reached this point in his recondite speculations when he heard much heavier steps than Old Funky’s ascending his staircase, and ere long there followed a bold decisive knock at his door.

When he went to open it, there stood Mr Roger Cask, looking as if he had been working hard all that morning on a technical committee for the restoration of the old subterranean water-pipe between Dorchester and Maiden Castle.

Claudius was panting a little from climbing the stairs; but he seemed to display an additional nervousness beyond his dislike of being caught out of breath. He appeared glad, however, to sink down in Dud's chair by the fire, and he willingly accepted a cigarette as soon as the latter had gone through the particular formula the terms of which had been taught him by Mrs Dearth. All Claudius's more intimate friends were, in fact, implored by Mrs Dearth to asseverate to him that they got no pleasure from smoking alone. Dud in his gross way had sometimes wondered whether Claudius saw through this little formula but was so damned thankful to enjoy a cigarette that, as Shakespeare would say, he jumped this bit of casuistical cat-ice so quickly as to give the frozen fish, conscience, no chance to lift its protesting head.

Mr Cask's desire was to get rid of desire, to become, in fact, an automaton of self-sacrifice, and he had gone further than many saints in this direction; but if there was one physical sensation that seemed absolutely essential to his restless disposition, it was the sensation of smoking; and thus it came about that Mrs Dearth, whose role in his life was that of the benevolent temptress, was driven to invent this formula so that the poor man might have a *little* pleasure.

'Certainly — if it makes you feel more comfortable, No-man,' Claudius now remarked, sinking back in the chair, and drawing long luxurious inhalations of this desirable nepenthe.

'I'd like to tell him how much he looks like a tramp under a sunny wall,' thought Dud. But he didn't dare to tell him, though all Dorchester knew of Mr Cask's efforts on behalf of these wayfarers, efforts that were so popular with the tramps themselves as to be very unpopular with many who were not tramps.

But Dud did feel a twinge of shame over the little *he* did in the direction of sacrifice, compared with this touring-car of social devotion, and he made up his mind as he contemplated him now, with his heavy lids drawn down in delicious quietude over those prominent eyes, and the smoke emerging, it almost seemed, from every other aperture in his weather-beaten face, that he would save up a small sum of money every week and hand it over to the fellow, to do with it whatever he liked.

‘Oh, I mustn’t forget,’ began Claudius, whose memory, though it was like the Tables of the Law in the sphere of social reform, was liable to lamentable lapses in social intercourse, ‘I’ve a message for you. Jenny’s going to take Miss Ravelston to tea at Glymes this afternoon, and since she — they, I mean — had a late breakfast — or Miss Ravelston had a late breakfast — and they — *she*, I mean — doesn’t want any lunch, they thought you might get a bite of something indep-endent-ly, and come round about three, and we’d all go out there together.’

Claudius uttered the word ‘independently’ with an odd kind of reluctance, as if to his social-conscious feelings the partaking of anything independently was a sort of debauch.

‘Are *you* going out there?’ enquired No-man with surprise, for anyone less addicted to such jaunts than Mr Cask it was hard to imagine.

The question seemed to destroy the blessed moment of repose in which the man had been indulging. He threw the end of his cigarette into the fire and pulled himself together with a jerk, sitting straight up.

‘I’m collecting subscriptions — for the excavations,’ he said wearily; and then, with an obvious effort to get the interior wheels of his energy working: ‘The excavations at Maiden Castle next summer. There’s a great deal to be learnt about those early races: gaps — large gaps — in the history of evolution that must be filled.'

'But Mrs Dearth told me', said No-man, 'that you didn't get on with her father, that you couldn't bear that chap Quirm.'

Claudius's brown eyes seemed to gather a film over them, and a look of worry came into his face. He frowned in a vexed, troubled, bewildered way. 'I can't — go — into it — now,' he said, 'but I've heard from many quarters things I don't like about that woman's life. It isn't only in slums that there's wicked mischief; and wherever mischief is, I've got to grub.' This final word he rapped out with the flicker of a smile.

No-man surveyed him with interest. He looked so much more like one whose destiny it is to pounce than to grub, that our friend was conscious of the presence of an almost ghastly 'tour de force'. If the man were an automaton of sacrifice, he was one that required a great deal of cranking.

'She told me of the loss of her boy,' Dud remarked carelessly. 'I met her the first day I was here — in the cemetery.' He spoke without intention, but there came over him, after the words were out of his mouth, a wave of profound sadness. 'Three months,' he thought, 'and I haven't been back there. I've certainly left them what that woman called free.'

Claudius gave him one of his most raptorial looks. 'That boy—' he began, 'that boy ought never—' But he stopped short, turning his head away as if his decision not to go on was too sudden even to give him time to lower his great eyelids. 'It's only', he said hastily, evidently anxious to turn No-man's thoughts off the subject of the dead boy, 'those — excavations. I haven't been to Glymes about it yet.'

'I should — have thought', remarked Dud, looking sharply at him, 'that there would be a — a prejudice against meddling with Maiden Castle.'

Claudius turned his eyes upon him. ‘That’s just what I mean,’ he said. ‘It’s one of those cases when virtues are as bad for progress as vices. Evolution means scientific excavation at one end and scientific experiment at the other. The more you know about what *was*, the faster you can create what *will* be. We must undermine *all* prejudices!’

An hour or so later, Dud, his head full of his interview with Old Funky, entered the Friary Lane house. Claudius had retired to his place next door, announcing that when they were ready to start they could give him a call.

No-man found Mrs Dearth hard at work getting her house in order. ‘Our Wizzie was a bit nervous this morning,’ she said. ‘I expect it would have been better if I had just let her go on sleeping. She said last night, when Mr Wye was here and invited us, that she’d like to see Glymes. He asked her himself, but I don’t think he made much of a hit with her. And she seems to have woken up feeling a bit scared of us all. But you’ll see how she is. She’s up and dressed, sitting by the fire.’ Jenny Dearth paused, and then added, when Dud’s foot was already on the stair, ‘We must be very indulgent to her, my dear. But you *are*. I think you’re wonderful!’ And she gave him a slow, rich, deep smile that transformed her equine countenance.

He went on up, and softly opened the door of their bedroom. He had got into the habit of approaching Wizzie’s chamber in a sort of tip-toe manner, as if he were treading on a velvet carpet. And now, once in her presence, he closed the door behind him with as much care as if it were the entrance to a sick-chamber.

She was no longer dressed in what he had thought of as her nurse-maid’s costume. Mrs Dearth had helped her to get through quite a lot of shopping during these months of their life together. He himself had been ungrudging in supplying the funds for these enterprises, though the cost of feminine attire, even at the less expensive establishments, had been to his bachelor mind something of a shock. Black was what she seemed drawn to as to the colour of her clothes, while in their texture she evidently leant to the softer and less rustic fabrics.

He himself had only interfered in one single particular; and, as might have been anticipated — for it needs the strongest of all human urges to inspire a man with the gall to interfere with his girl's taste — this had to do with a substitute for the lavender-coloured tights. It was in fact in long black stockings he had insisted that the loveliness of Wizzie's legs should be emphasized. The decking out of all other portions of her person he was content to leave to Mrs Dearth and herself.

He found her now seated on the stool by the fire, hugging her black-stockinged knees. This was the position he had found her in on the evening of All Souls' Day, only she wore no stockings then. Her hair at this moment was tied up, but apparently not yet done for the day, for several untidy wisps of straight straw-coloured locks stuck out in woeful disorder above her lace collar.

She was frowning when he closed the door. She was frowning when he stepped hurriedly to her side. Indeed, Dud was so cognizant of the dangerous mood which this expression signified that when he did reach her side he was afraid of worrying her by any sort of clumsy caress, and instead of kissing her, leaned up against the chimney-piece and addressed her from that position.

'They've told me about our going to Glymes, Wizz, and that, though you didn't like Mr Wye, you'd agree to come with us. I'm afraid old Claudius is not best pleased at the prospect; but I shall get great satisfaction — won't you, Wizz? — from seeing the fellow quarrel with Thuella's father. What'll happen between him and that extraordinary chap Quirm remains to be seen.

I challenged him about that Glymes boy, but I couldn't get a word out of him. He sheered off, the second I alluded to it.'

'I — am — sure — it's very — kind of your friends to invite me along with you,' remarked Wizzie. 'Y*ou*, anyway, seem as pleased as Punch about it!'

'Wizzie!' he protested, and his mind began whirling round to discover what her new grievance was.

'I haven't seen you', she went on, 'in such good spirits for weeks. I expect you're thinking how wonderfully good of them it is to be so nice to your pick-up.'

'Wizz! Wizz!' he pleaded in a supplicating voice, and with a solemn, rather foolish expression. 'Wizz, how *can* you talk like that?'

The girl's eyes flashed with indignation. This particular martyr-like countenance, which he had recently assumed when he felt she was treating him unkindly, always infuriated her. Whether it seemed to her inconceivable that any human being could really give up the natural violence of our race to the tune implied in that portentous expression, or whether, while she believed in its reality, there was something about it that exasperated her nerves to such a pitch that, as she would have put it, she could have screamed, Dud had no idea; but he very quickly found out that the way he behaved when his feelings were hurt and he was trying to pretend that they weren't hurt and that all his concern was for *her*, was peculiarly irritating to the girl.

'Don't go now and put on your grieved face,' she burst out, jumping up from her stool and confronting him, 'because I won't have it! If *you* think it's so splendid of your friends to treat me as if I existed in the same world as they do, *I* don't! What's wrong with you, Dud No-man, that you're so humble and so grateful to these people? My mother was as good as any of them, though she *was* so poor! You're a bastard, and so am I. But I've seen enough to know that your father was something, just as my mother was something — better, I warrant, than any of these Glymes idiots! What's wrong with you to make you act like you do?'

He was indescribably relieved at the unexpected turn her anger had taken. It was a turn that started his mind off on a completely new track. He began telling himself a childish story about his father being some great Welsh nobleman who claimed to be descended from Sir Pellinore. He looked at his watch. This was a habit of his the moment he got excited about anything, as if all events in time were an unwinding scroll of mist through which the peaks of a higher reality could be seen. This higher reality just now concealed itself in the form of three minutes past three; and as he put his watch away, Wizzie's anger became a thin vapour crossing this triadic symbol.

He pulled one of the chairs close to the fire and sat down. He made a gesture to get her to sit on his knee, but she remained aloof. Her eyes, however, ceased to flash with that terrifying revolt against her life, against him, and against the whole cosmic system, which he was becoming so accustomed to in her.

'Can you remember those days, Wizz,' he enquired of her, 'when you were in that Catholic institution? When your whole world was made up of those nuns? You told me how your mother died, and how they put you into that place, and how you got out of it, but I'd give anything to know—' He paused and drew a sigh of relief, for she had resumed her seat on the stool, and her frown had disappeared.

'Wizz, why are you always so silent when I ask you about those nuns?'

She was silent now, staring placidly and not unhappily into the heart of the fire, and Dud had a curious feeling, as he looked at her, as if all that he could do or she could do in the sphere of practical life would always land them again in this passive situation, she waiting and he waiting, as they sat opposite each other, waiting for they knew not what, but being in some way spell-bound by their isolation from the rest of the world and by the fact that they were still complete strangers to each other.

After his fashion he began visualizing this particular moment as if it were a floating raft that was hoisted up on the crest of a great wave, and that, instead of toppling over like the others into the normal stream of time was maintained in its position by a balance of invisible winds.

Watching her, as she bent over the fire with that tragic frown that he had begun to fear would soon fix itself indelibly on her face coming and going in the wavering of the flames, he tried, after his manner, to grasp the exact nature of his feelings for her.

It was not that he went back for a second — he had never gone back — on that original intimation of immortality with regard to their indissoluble link, but, on the basis of that bond, he recognized without shame his difference from any ordinary lover she might have had. She was safer, if she only could know it, he said to himself, with him than with any other conceivable companion, but the jolts and jars of her wild-bird rebelliousness tended daily to drive deeper the essential isolation of that detached soul within him which from his childhood had been so oddly alone.

His congenital solitariness had certainly been intensified by his life in Dorchester. Quite apart from Wizzie’s disturbing moods, those encounters, in his daily walks between the prison hill and the Frome meadows, with so many wise old men and wise young children had intensified his natural proclivity. His deep instinctive motions, like a blind mole burrowing from one tussock-root to another, had proved his best defence from the turbulent agitations of Wizzie's waywardness; and, though in his love-making — always so much more cerebral than passionate — he had entered with the most sensitive imaginative nerves into what he could grasp of her proud and shy feelings, it was undoubtedly anything but hidden from her that there was a lack of those direct give-and-take scenes between them, those natural quarrels and reconciliations that in the normal play of the sexes bring a man and a woman together.

Ignorant of women as he was, Dud had never been blind to the fact that, while he apparently satisfied certain dominant romantic cravings in Wizzie, she did not, for some obscure reason, respond with any warm amorous reciprocity to his intermittent caresses. 'She's a virgin,' he was always saying to himself. 'She's a virgin not only physically but spiritually.' Sometimes he even asked himself whether it might not be that the sterile viciousness of the pleasure he got from her was the real bed-rock cause of her growing irritableness. 'Am I tantalizing her', he said to himself, 'in the same way I did Mona?' But Mona had shown no sign of revolt against the absence of normal passion in him. Mona had completely dominated both himself and his supposed father by her inviolable spirit, and she had seemed almost as detached as he was himself in the matter of a couple's impulsive give-and-take.

A faint quiver of diffused sensuality began now to disturb Dud's senses as the two of them sat there in silence. This was brought about by no conscious provocation on the girl's part, for Wizzie seemed more devoid of the desire to excite desire than Dud had supposed was possible in a young woman. It was purely due to her childish trick of exposing her knees to the warmth of the fire as she sat over it.

'If I go over to her', he thought, 'and pull her up by her hands, could I get her to sit on my knee?' He had found out by experience — and, oh dear, there were so many little discoveries of a similar nature yet to be made before he could feel that his knowledge of her had properly begun — that if he could get her to sit on his knee by the fire when she was absorbed in her thoughts, he could go on holding her and enjoying his contact with her for long periods of time without her displaying any annoyance, or apparently any consciousness, of the pleasure he was taking.

Dud used sometimes to fancy that his amorous propensities, in their long atavistic history, must have skipped over the quadrupeds and the birds, and gone back to the reptiles! It is true he had never been permitted the privilege of seeing the claspings of snakes, nor did he know if biologists could reconstruct the ways of love of Jurassic lizards; but he always imagined that there must be something about the cold-blooded protractedness of his own erotic joys that resembled the love-making of these saurians.

With the dead Mona — in the one single year of their life together — he had never got anything of the secret pleasure, half mental, half physical, that alone satisfied him. With the eidolon of Mona, on the contrary, his wraith-girl of the last ten years, it had been totally different. But however strong a person's imagination may be, a wraith *is* a wraith, and to find his Stone Age captive passive and not cantankerous under his cold-blooded ways was a heavenly delight.

'It's monstrous,' he thought, as he looked at Wizzie hugging her knees over the fire, and wondered if he dared pull her up to her feet by those thin wrists. 'It's monstrous how few people in this world are allowed their precise, exact, particular, and most secret delight! If it isn't a cruel one, if it's only a sterile and peculiar one, every way of love ought to be encouraged to the limit! I must talk to Claudius about this. I'd like to tell him that if evolution's to make successful machines of us in his Roman-American-Russian life, it had better give our amorous eccentricities all possible satisfaction. *Satisfied senses make docile servants* — yes! I must suggest *that* to Claudius as the motto of his ideal state.'

But, while Dud's thoughts wandered to Claudius, Wizzie, seated there before him, began to give way to *her* primitive peculiarity, which had to do, apparently, with the abandonment of her 'lurin' figure to the caresses of the fire-god, for she began to treat her skirt with the same contempt as she used to treat her circus finery, and to hug her shins in quite alarming closeness to the flames.

But suddenly her frown came back, and she turned her head with a jerk towards him. 'You're paying Jenny *enough* for me, I hope?' she said sharply. 'I *won't* be dependent on her, so you must remember that! It makes me feel she's making a pet of me — like Grummer Urgan did with Popsy!'

Dud hastily did his best to explain that the amount he paid Mrs Dearth every week, though not very large, was sufficient to give a business-like independence to the girl's position. 'A pound a week, Wizz? Don't 'ee think that's enough? You know how often we have our lunch out. Or do you think I ought to make it twenty-five shillings? I'm a bit at a low ebb just now. That's why I'm writing so fast at my book. But you wait, young lady! This book's going to sell much better than the last. It's a *lovely* book. It's a *terrible* book. You wait, Wizz, my angel.'

He was surprised to see the long, grave, penetrating stare she fixed upon him now. She pulled down the skirt over her knees and began tugging at it, just as she had done in the caravan when Thuella came near her, and in this hunched-up pose she swung round and faced him.

'I — want—' she said slowly and emphatically, 'to go — to work again. I don't like being her pet. If I'm not going to have a child, I want — no! let me go on! — *I want to help*. That one isn't the only circus, and my old horse — oh, I hope he's all right! — isn't the only horse. I used to think sometimes I could do more — more than they let me do — in a bigger show. It was never the work I hated. I was doing it easier all the while. It was *them*. It was her and him, and the men they made me meet. The tent-boy always used to tell me I could better myself in a bigger concern. He said he knew a girl, not near as good as me, who made three quid a week. I want to help, Dud No-man, don't you understand? I want to *do* something in our life.'

He achieved now, in the boldness of sheer tenderness, what, a few minutes before, he had helplessly contemplated from a more primitive motive. He pulled her up from her stool and took her on his knee.

'Jenny Dearth thinks', she went on — and it always enchanted him the way she perched on his lap as if he were her circus-horse— 'that it would be a pity for me — as things are — to let my work go. I should have to shake myself into it, of course. A girl gets soft and lazy, living like this. But it would soon come back. After a few rehearsals I'd be all right. Besides, there's plenty of time — more than a month before anyone's on the road again.'

'You're a darling, Wizz,' was all he could discover in him to mutter. 'You're a darling. But I swear to you we'll get on all right. There are all sorts of ways we could economize — much more than we've done yet. Besides, circuses mean travelling all the time. God! my dear, I'd never see you! No, no, Wizz. It's darling of you to think of it — but, Good Lord, no! I wouldn't let you do it for anything. Do — you — propose — that — I—' His tone had suddenly changed. His voice took on a harder, less sympathetic, almost ironical accent. 'Do you propose that I should go round with you, stopping at the inns in the places we visit, and always having a free seat to see the performance?'

The reason for this change of tone was that the real weight of what she suggested began to sink, with implications of an extremely upsetting nature, into his rational consciousness. He began to recall his conversation with Old Funky. But curiously enough this flicker of a change of feeling increased rather than lessened his pleasure in holding her. He kept her on his lap — she was always as docile as a doll when he caressed her in this protracted saurian manner — but he effected a change in her position so that she no longer had her feet tucked beneath her. He held her closer and closer, however, enjoying with an almost vegetative contentment the pressure of her flexible body.

His self-consciousness was so minute in things of this kind that he noticed that the initial rush of tenderness that had made him so bold to take her on his knee, did not destroy but rather enhanced the strength of his sensual feeling. This tenderness that swept him towards her under the first impact of her suggestion had seemed to add a new magnetic intensity to the thrill with which he held her. But he noticed that as soon as these scurvy doubts of her integrity began to slide into his brain, though attended by no inkling, on *her* part, of what was passing in his mind, the intensifying of his lust by reason of his tenderness was a small matter compared with its intensifying by reason of his suspicion.

He began to feel he could not hold her close enough. He stood up, straining her to him, while his face assumed the curious gravity of a mandarin. The odd thing was that in the intensity of his embrace he actually caught himself glancing towards the foot of the bed as if he expected to see his mother’s heraldic monster.

By holding her like this he seemed to drown Old Funky’s suggestions and even to fling into a momentary Lethe her proposal to go back to her circus life.

‘Darling,’ he gasped as his embrace slackened, ‘what — put — it — into — your — head — to think of such a thing?’

Now although Nature has denied to women — and no doubt for a sufficient reason — the power to discriminate between the lust in a lover’s embrace that is alien to love, and indeed may be the *opposite* of love, and the other lust which is an excess of tenderness, she has made her feminine creation abnormally sensitive to the tone of a man’s voice at such a crisis; and Dud’s tone betrayed to the girl, in a flash, that something was wrong.

‘What’s the—’ she began, and then, finding that he still continued holding her, she frowned angrily, and her limbs grew stiff.

Now the least suspicion of anger against him in *her* heart — it was a different thing when *he* was the angry one — always reduced his feelings to the coldest chastity. The second he became aware of this stiffening he released her and drew back.

The suddenness of this movement and the look which he gave her were enough to exasperate her nerves to the breaking-point.

‘It’s just what Jenny said,’ she burst out. ‘She said men hated us to keep our jobs after they — But I’m not married to you *yet*, and I’m glad I’m *not*, when you look like that after what I’ve said and after my wanting to help. No, I’m *not* married to you — and I never will be either, now I see that look on your face! You only wanted me just like all the rest. That’s all you did. Just like all the rest! I — was — going — to — do — this — for — *us* — to help us — to help *you* — but now — you’ll see. I’ll do it for a different reason! I’ll do it so as not to have anyone looking at me like you’re looking now! Yes, it’s just what Jenny said you’d do. She said—’

‘Damn Jenny!’ cried Dud, hurriedly fumbling for a cigarette. When he’d found one and had looked about in vain for a match, he finally lit it from the fire with a piece of paper picked up from the grate. In this procedure he

scorched his fingers, and the smart remained with him, like a little drop of the girl’s indignation clinging to his skin, as he sat down and smoked in silence.

Meanwhile Wizzie had rushed over to the dressing-table, and standing in front of the glass, began with trembling hands to tidy her hair and put on her hat. When he saw, through his clouds of smoke, what she was about, a deadly chill went through him. Unused to women’s ways, he regarded this move on her part as a kind of desperate ultimatum. He visualized her putting on her cloak next, and then her shoes, and then packing that bag of hers which stood at the side of the dressing-table, and then running down the stairs without a word!

A whirling sequence of violent thoughts pursued one another through his distracted mind.

Again his eyes glanced to the foot of the bed, as if looking for the Welshwoman’s demon, as if prepared to vent his confusion by muttering ‘Dormarth’ to it.

He recalled, as he watched the girl’s back and the fierce way she was struggling with the obdurate ends of her hair, that feeling *of recognition* which had given him such a thrill when they first met. His Stone Age captive? And was this the pass they had come to?

And then, as often happened with him when he felt driven to bay by the malice of chance, his mind tossed overboard at one fling all his cherished imaginative superstitions. Below these romantic dallyings there was in No-man, as has been hinted, a grim vein of savage bed-rock materialism, all the coarser and grosser, all the more stark and more brutal, for its contrast to his poetical fancies.

It was only a short while ago that he had allowed himself to play with the idea his mother’s lover was some great Welsh lord who deduced his lineage from the mythical pursuers of the Questing Beast; but now, as through the cloud of his cigarette-smoke he watched his Stone Age girl putting on her hat, a hat bought in Durnovaria for five shillings, he felt as though the real reality of things was much more simple and much less pleasant.

Here they were, a man by the fire, a woman by the mirror, confronting the mystery of each other's angry personality, and it seemed most damnably likely that the quarrel between them had more to do with the confused chemistry of Claudius's confounded evolution than with heraldic heads on bed-posts, or mystical recognitions from Neolithic times.

He threw his cigarette into the fire and rose from his chair. 'Wizzie!' he whispered gently.

She turned at once. 'What?' she murmured.

He moved a step towards her; and she turned from her looking-glass to face him. His feeling was — though, as has been hinted, he had far less knowledge of what was passing in *her* mind than she had of what was passing in *his* — that this was a most pregnant moment between them.

He took hold of the back rail of their bed — that double-bed of which he had heard from Jenny in the Antelope bar, and which had lain, like a corn-bin full of sweet apples, at the bottom of his mind all that long-drawn-out evening — and, as a dog in disgrace looks at the walls and the window and the door, and everywhere except at his mistress, Dud took in, as he had never taken in before, the rough oil-paintings, dingier and more amateurish even than the ones downstairs, that solemnized their room. He took in, moreover, the childish lithograph of a young woman in a barge, surrounded by water-flags and water-birds, that hung above the bed's head. The only thing in the chamber he didn't take in — for he had his back to it — was an extremely early portrait of Teucer Wye by his daughter, which had the place of honour over the mantelpiece. But if he didn't take this in, *it* took *him* in, for never was there a more deprecatory look than it fixed upon Wizzie, as much as to say, ‘Be lenient unto us, O powerful and terrible Girlhood!’

The young cloud-painter must indeed have pictured her parent in the suppressed condition to which she intended to reduce him, for, though it was in Mr Wye’s Homeric epoch that she painted him, the expression she gave him was that of his later phase, when the child-changed father had been driven to escape from his boudoir-study into his Platonic back-of-the-world.

‘You misunderstood me, my precious,’ No-man began. ‘I think it’s *very* dear of you, *very* dear, to think of helping me like this. It’s only that I — that I want to live with you, Wizz, all the year round, and not only in the winter when there is no business on the road. Do you know, Wizz, that old Urgan chap came to see me this morning?’

The result of these final words was startling. The girl gave up her fumblings with her hat, left it as it was, all sideways and disordered, and approaching the bed, sat down and gazed in panic at him, her eyes assuming that queer effect of being round that had been his first impression of them.

And now it must be confessed of Dud — such is the baser element in the hearts of the kindest among men — that it was not by any means unpleasing to him to tell her about Old Funky’s blackmailing demand for a fiver, and how he had mentioned some incident about an accident to the horse which gave him some mysterious legal claim against her.

It is true that his morbid curiosity about what had gone on between this girl, now gazing up into his face so wildly from beneath her disordered hat, and Old Funky and his clientele lessened in intensity now that he was face to face with her. But it certainly remained with him as an element in the situation; and it may well be that among his less worthy thoughts the mean and crafty satisfaction he derived from informing her of what Old Funky was up to was even less admirable than his curious lack of concern over her chastity and his furtive itch to know how far the old villain or any of his precious clients had really actually dared to go.

It had worked out that there was undeniably a release of suppressed anger against her in the way he told her about Old Funky's visit, a stirring within him of that fatal tendency of righteous masculinity to avenge itself on a woman for her shameless fits and starts by scaring her with the threatened disclosure of what would bring her an acknowledged shame.

In the quarter of a year he had lived with her he had come to find her indispensable to his life; and yet here he was, deliberately revenging himself upon her for the anger that had passed between them, by telling her almost all — though we must do him the credit to admit there were *some* reservations — of what Old Funky had said.

It would be, however, unfair to Dud, as he tilted his unpleasant news, as if out of a watering-can, into those convoluted ears and those staring eyes, not to point out that *for him* the gist of the whole matter lay in those very reservations which, like flakes of iron rust or dregs of chalk sediment, he had at all costs to keep out of his flow of ambiguous information.

'Why haven't you told *me* all?' he kept thinking to himself as he continued his story of Old Funky's blackmailing demands.

But her palpable agitation as she listened to him gradually assuaged his disturbed nerves; and by degrees his normal tenderness towards her began to flow back.

Poor little Wizz! Yes, he'd more than revenged himself for that stiffening of her limbs under his lecherous hug; and since his anger with her — and he was sure he was fair to himself in this — was a mere automatic response to *her* anger with him, and not due to sexual jealousy, he was resolved to restrain himself, even now, from teasing her with any questions about Old Funky.

‘I don’t care’, he said to himself, as he related every detail about the fiver that he was to have ready by tomorrow, ‘what liberties she allowed; I don’t care how jealous she made Grummer Urgan; but what I *can’t* understand is why she’s been so secretive about it all, and why she’s so upset now. There’s *nothing* she could possibly tell me that would shock me or make me turn against her. The more she’s gone through *of that sort of thing*, the better she suits me!’

Such were his thoughts as he dilated on the smug obsequiousness with which their persecutor had bowed himself off.

‘Well?’ he murmured when he’d finished. ‘Do you think we’ll have to fork out that five pounds, or shall we tell him to go to hell, and just see what happens?’

The way she raised herself from the bed’s edge, the way she stood facing him, still with her ridiculous hat — what bad taste *all* women had in hats! — clinging so disorderly to her head as if she were tipsy, the way she pressed her hands together across her stomach and began, though with her eyes still staring into him, her old trick of rubbing her knuckles, the way a particular vein in her neck that always looked knotted and swollen started pulsing as if of its own accord, suddenly thrilled him with such a rush of affection that he sprang forward and hugged her to his heart.

‘Don’t!’ she gasped. ‘Don’t! I can’t — I can’t—’ And she tried ineffectually to push him away. Whether she would have softened or whether she was so deeply agitated by what he’d told her, and by what — beyond his knowledge — it meant to her, that she *could not* soften, he never knew. He only knew that he held between his hands at that second all that really really pierced his heart in this phantom-world. Looking down at her disarranged hat, that now scarcely adhered at all to her poor wisps of hair, feeling her reluctant body throb against his ribs, Dud became aware that he was prepared for anything that Old Funky might do, for any crazy scheme she herself might launch upon, for any feministic chatter of Jenny Dearth's, *as long as she was his*, so long as she turned to him against all the world!

But a quick light knock on the door made him release her with a start.

'Come in!' he called out, while Wizzie fled to her dressing-table.

'All ready?' enquired their hostess briskly, entering the room.

'Must — I — really—' began the girl, with her arms lifted to her head, as she turned to her protectress.

'Of course you must! How on earth could you imagine anything else?' retorted Jenny Dearth. 'Claudius is here. He's just come. I've been waiting for him. How nice that hat looks! Where's your new jacket? Oh, you men, you men!' she added, taking a step towards the fire. 'She'd have been ready hours ago — yes, I can see she would — if you'd left her alone. But I don't blame you. She looks perfectly sweet in that hat.'

'Damn the hat, and damn *you*!' muttered Dud to himself, and it suddenly occurred to him, as an illuminating revelation, that it had been all the time for this expedition, and never to run away, that Wizz had been attiring herself at that looking-glass.

'I *must* learn', he thought, 'not to take too seriously what they say. They go on with their practical obligations *just the same*, while they are bursting out like fireworks with the most terrifying ultimatums!'

It could not have been more than half an hour after the appearance of Mrs Dearth that our four acquaintances were pursuing their way beneath the prison rampart, below the sloping garden of the Governor's house, past the Hangman's Cottage, with a view to crossing the Frome on their way to Glymes. They had to cross by the bridge that Dud was at last learning to call the Blue Bridge, though its present colour seemed to him unmistakably black; and so narrow was the path leading to this bridge, between the ditch and the small brook, that it became impossible for them to walk four abreast as they had been previously doing. Thus it came about that the two women walked ahead while Claudius and Dud followed a few paces behind.

Though our friend had taken a certain number of walks with Wizzie during their winter in Dorchester, he had never, as it may be supposed, had the privilege before of walking just behind her. He found that this particular mode of progression gave him an enchanting and quite peculiar pleasure. It had been one of Dud's fanciful habits from very early days to derive the most magical amorous contentment from walking behind a woman whose figure attracted him. He never allowed himself to enjoy this pleasure unless it came about by pure chance. It never amounted to a mania with him, and he never followed these desirable forms an inch out of his way; but to look at a woman when she did not know you were looking at her gave to Dud's infantile-senile senses a bewitching thrill.

It was his peculiarity — whether derived from his Welsh mother or from his unknown progenitor who, after all, might have been descended from the Questing Beast itself rather than any knightly pursuer of it — to find that the impersonal desire he had for these lovely beings was doubled when they were unconscious of his presence. His happiest moments with the living Mona were the moments when he caught her asleep and totally unconscious of him; and we have seen to what extreme lengths providence had extended his power of enjoying her after she was dead.

As, therefore, through this dull, grey, Candlemas afternoon, he followed the circus-girl, he was able to keep up an intense under-song of gratitude to his guardian-angel that this lightly moving figure, advancing with such a springing step by the side of Jenny Dearth, was really and truly his bedfellow. He mentally resolved to recall his feelings as he watched her now whenever anything made him doubt her integrity. ‘For, after all,’ he thought, ‘if she’s mine’ — and he remembered his exultation as he signed that cheque in the caravan on All Souls’ Day— ‘I can stand a good many lapses from *that* sort of thing!’

Glancing at the ditch on his left as he went along by Claudius’s side, he suddenly stopped with a sharp spasm of delight. *There was the first celandine*!

He stooped towards it. What he wanted to do was to throw his cap down on the wet ground so that he could kneel and thereby observe that dim little bud, among its glossy spatulate leaves, more closely! Even from where he stood hovering above it, its yellowness was visible through the pale green calyx; and the word ‘aguish’, as applied by the magical poet to the damp chill of water-ditches, rushed through his brain with a delicious pang.

Claudius’s voice interrupted him: ‘Aye? What is it? A celandine? There are always a lot of them along here — *later*, you know — much later. But come on, No-man! I want to make sure Jenny takes to the fields. The mud’s terrible by the back gate of Frome House.’

No-man straightened himself, put on his cap, and followed him. He had no wish to fall too far behind his girl. What was the Horse-Head talking to her about now? Encouraging her to go back to her circus life? Explaining to her that a spirited woman, without the prospect of a child, ought to be something better than a man’s plaything?

Claudius now himself turned westward; but it was far over the ditch he pointed, over the road to Cerne Abbas, over the river, over the stone causeway, over the filling-stations. ‘You must come again with me to Poundbury,’ he remarked, fixing his hawk’s eye on the curving valla and fossae of that prehistoric camp. ‘We were too hurried that day. The modern tendency is to diminish the Roman influence in all these earthworks. I want to show you how skilfully the Romans—' He stopped suddenly, as if he had at last come to be really conscious of his companion's trick of answering without listening. 'I keep putting off our walk to Maiden Castle,' he went on, having satisfied himself that No-man was not wool-gathering, 'but I'd like to show you those things in the museum first. They found a figurine of Minerva over there last summer. Think of Minerva having a temple on Maiden Castle! And built late, too — built a hundred years after the country was Christian!'

But Dud, with the swaying form of his circus-girl in front of him, felt only faint interest in Minerva. 'I don't believe', he retorted, with an obscure fumbling for some plausible fulcrum of contrariness, 'you'll find any of those Glymes people sympathetic with your excavations. But what — *are* you — looking at now?'

This last interjection was amply justified in its surprise, for Claudius was staring, like one possessed, at some object on or above the crest of Poundbury.

All that Dud could see up there was a solitary human figure and what looked like the rumps of a couple of cows. But *between* where they stood and the grassy banks of the old earthwork there rose three tall power towers, composed of steel scaffoldings and joined by a network of thin wires. Between the two nearest of these erections — which rose, indeed, from the water-meadow between the celandine-ditch and the Cerne Abbas road — hung quite an elaborate skein of wires. Was it only at these wires that the man was staring with such a transfigured countenance?

'A regular cat's-cradle of the air,' Dud hazarded.

'Oh, yes — those!' responded the other. 'No, I don't mean those, though it's splendid to think how far they carry it. But don't you see *them* — over there — above Poundbury? Don't you know what *they* are? I never thought you could see *them* from here!'

Gravelled by the man's intensity, Dud strained his vision in the direction indicated. No! he could see nothing but the rumps of the two cows. The human figure had glided over the crest. What the devil *were* these mysterious 'them' of which Claudius spoke with such worshipful awe? Completely nonplussed, he now swept his gaze over the whole line of Poundbury's turfy ramparts. The feeling produced in him by the fellow's tone was that he might, if he only looked close enough, catch a glimpse of evolution itself in the act of creation.

By God! he *did see* the things now! And he began to realize that he *had* seen those queer objects before, but without giving them a moment's thought. What he now made out against a fragment of sky-space where the Durnovarian heaven had cleared itself of cloud (as was its habit to do in the late afternoon) were several incredible shapes. They must have been several miles away; but even at that distance they showed taller than church-steeples, taller than sky-scrapers, *tall as hills*. And what was it they made Dud think of? — At the first gasp, of nothing less than Mr Wells's Martians, as those frightful planetary invaders stood pilloried at the last, perishing from our terrestrial diseases and moaning as they awaited death.

But a second later he saw them as beings of a different type, saw them as monstrous comics in some space-yawning gala-day of 'our lonesome latter years', and even as elongated parodies of Napoleon in grotesque three-cornered hats.

'What are they?' he asked in astonishment.

Claudius disregarded the question for a second or two, though he evidently heard it. It was as if he had to complete some telephathic transaction with these cosmic invaders, to whom, like a spy reporting to his masters, he was betraying humanity.

‘Come on!’ he cried when he returned to earth. ‘They’ve got to the bridge! I want her to go by the fields. Sorry! You don’t mind, do you? But we *must* keep them in sight.’

Dud kept on stealing surreptitious glances at the ditch by their side in hope of seeing another celandine; but it would have been hard to enjoy it if he *had* seen it, for his companion began rushing him on as if the two women in front of them might dissolve into thin air when they reached the Blue Bridge.

‘It’s the wireless,’ Claudius panted as they hurried forward. ‘Those heads at the top are turned, I think, to the quarters of the world they are designed to talk with. I often go to the foot of the nearest. It’s on the Bridport road at the turn to Martinstown. The perspective’s so mysterious of that head at the top! Sometimes you’d think it moved like a weathercock. But I fancy it’s all perspective! It’s hard to believe those things aren’t really living beings, isn’t it? I couldn’t help thinking, as you made such a fuss over that celandine just now, how much more godlike those transporters of thought, those transformers of electricity *into* thought, are than any pretty hedge-weed. I believe the head of one of them points to Singapore, another to Adelaide, another to Pekin — oh, I don’t know exactly where — but they point to the future of our race — *that’s* certain — and they shame us out of our warm, cosseted, human fol-de-rols — *that’s* certain too.’

They were pushing their way now through the first of the iron turnstiles of the Blue Bridge, and they paused for a minute side by side in the centre of the bridge, pressing their stomachs against its iron framework and looking over into the river.

‘Do you know, No-man,’ said Claudius, ‘the feeling of this iron rail against the pit of my stomach has done a lot, since they put it up, to help me endure my life? I’ve seen a lot of men in my time doing what we’re doing now. Of course sometimes it’s the hope of seeing a trout, but I’m absolutely sure that an iron rail pressed against the centre of the stomach *can* have an extraordinary moral effect — I mean, to make us stoics.’

‘I expect you’re perfectly right,’ said D. No-man, as he contemplated the amber-coloured pebbles under the rapid water and the long emerald-green water-weeds straining and quivering from their roots in the stones as they followed the direction of the current.

He was struck by the difference between the look of these weeds when safely under the water and their look when, half-stranded out of the water, they were indecently exposed. ‘It’s the difference’, he thought, ‘between Wizzie’s hair as it grows on her head and Wizzie’s hair if it were for sale in a shop!’

But he straightened his back now. ‘Come on, man!’ he exclaimed. ‘They’re out of sight.’

Yes, there was no sign of either Wizzie or the Horse-Head in the little dark lane separating the umbrageous garden of Frome House from the water-meadows. Through this leafy corridor between indigenous vegetation and exotic vegetation the two men hurried, but when they reached the stile by the side of their path they simultaneously caught sight of their lost friends, who had already got half-way up the great sloping meadow.

The men clambered over the stile and made after them. The field they were crossing was quite a park-like one. It was terminated at the bottom by wide water-meadows, over whose level expanse could be seen the formidable red mass of the prison building, the pinnacles of St Peter’s, the spire of All Saints’, the majestic tower of Fordington; and it was bounded on the north, at the top of its long friendly ascent, by the lane that used to lead to Glymes before destruction passed over that habitation, leaving its foundations, like the biblical cities of the plain, to be obliterated by dust and ashes and the dung of beasts.

From the high trees in the garden behind them, as Dud walked by Claudius's side, came, on that late Candlemas afternoon, the clear notes of the song of a thrush. An ancient doubt worried his mind a little, when he first began to listen, as to whether it *was* a thrush, or a missel-thrush. He had always meant to enquire of someone whether missel-thrushes sang in the same emphatic unmistakable manner as their more ordinary cousins; and the question was on the tip of his tongue now. But he held his peace. What would this worshipper of wireless stations know about missel-thrushes?

The bird's song — from whatever speckled breast it came — transported him with its defiant bravado. What a proud artist! And yet there was something in this sequence of far-drawn notes, following one another as if in a deliberately chosen and exquisitely balanced harmony, that seemed an exaggerated articulation of this grey day with its pallid fragment of light in the far west. It was one of those days that hover between winter and spring like a soul between death and life; and what No-man had felt as he caught from that faint celandine the aguish pang of its chilly yellow-green, the tremulous sharpness of its pale birth, piercing its way up through the womb of Nature, received an almost too jubilant expression in this bird's challenging song. He was thrilled by it, but he felt in some obscure manner that the poignancy of that immature yellow-green bud on the ditch's edge was, so to say, crowded out and fluted down by this brave artist.

The bird defied a winter not yet departed; it triumphed in a spring not yet begun; but in some odd way — at least to No-man's exacting senses — its gallant trillings as they followed him up that field missed the real burden of this grey Candlemas weather. Perhaps the thrush was right, and *he* was wrong. Perhaps it was all an imaginative fancy of his own, the tremulous pathos he gave to this day. But to him at any rate it seemed like some beautiful abortive thing, some dim borderland thing hardly emerged from the womb of life, whose inner nature had to be sought out, divined, guessed at through fragile intimations — possibly, heaven knows, even *invented* — by a mind that already contained within itself the tenuous image of that faint half-birth. It was the sharp, sweet, sickly yellow-green of the celandine bud which really expressed the nature of this interim season, of this Candlemas weather. Whatever it was, it was so different from either winter or spring that its life-stirrings had something startling in their pallid prematureness, as if all the abortive vegetation-births that had ever taken place on this spot were reiterating again, in some strange White Mass of Limbo, their spasmodic, pitiful, muted desperations.

Claudius and he soon gained on the women as they advanced up this long field, and it gave our friend a shock of curious pleasure to watch Wizzie vault so lightly over the rails at the top into the lane that led to Glymes.

‘What a supple body she has!’ he thought. ‘Damn! Perhaps it *is*, as the Horse-Head says, a wicked thing to snatch her away from her natural destiny and turn her into a single person’s plaything.’

He and his companion were so close behind them, now, that he felt tempted to call out, simply to make Wizzie turn round, but Claudius had plunged into one of his diatribes against the cult of the simple and poetic, and he hadn’t the gall to interrupt him.

But he felt in an extraordinary mood that day, more infatuated with this girl in front of him than he had ever been — *that*, then, had been one result of Old Funky's hints! — but more touched, in some manner he found it hard to analyse, by some new aspect of the girl's personality. Trying to sift out to the bottom what it was that he felt, as he responded to the man at his side — he had to be a bit careful in his propitiations of Claudius, as the fellow was less of a fool than he had thought at first — he came to the conclusion that he suspected Wizzie, deep in his heart, of feeling saddened by his inability to consummate their relation, and that it was this feeling of hers, rather than any words of Jenny Dearth, that was the impulse driving her back to the circus.

It was no doubt the peculiar quality of this Candlemas weather, which seemed to be sick with the very pallor of child-birth, that brought this thought into his head; but it did strike him as he watched her now, and noted the grave intensity with which she was listening to the Horse-Head, that there *was* something questionable in his making a girl love him when he knew he could never take her as normal men took women. He had not himself — at least he thought not — the remotest wish to have a child; but he *was* aware — quite apart from the question as to its begetter — of a certain piquancy, even a certain tragic appeal, in the thought of Wizzie with her bloodless cheeks and her pinched face and a new-born infant in her arms.

The effort of imagining Wizzie having a child, while he tried to answer Claudius's attacks on 'pale primroses', induced No-man to walk more slowly, so that it was not long before Wizzie and Jenny were quite out of sight round a turn of the lane.

Not to be able to see her any more seemed to put both the thrush's song and the celandine bud, not to speak of his image of herself as pale and weak in child-birth, totally out of his head. He began to give more of his attention to Claudius, with the result that Claudius expressed himself more forcibly still.

‘We’ve got to obey evolution now,’ the man cried fiercely, ‘just as we used to obey God. And the mores of evolution — its ethical values, as we say — aren’t easier than God’s, *but very much harder*! Under God we’ve had only to suppress our lusts: but under the spirit of the future we’ve got to suppress *ourselves*! Chastity or unchastity — it doesn’t matter any more. We’re interested in something else. That’s the whole point, I tell you, No-man. Damn our English quiet life! Damn our poetry of Nature! It’s all superstition. It’s nice, of course; it’s good and quiet and harmless and historic — but it’s all in the way. Evolution’s tired of it! When we leaned just now over the rail of that bridge — *that* was better than your celandine in the ditch! Those wireless stations pointing to Singapore and Australia, they’re something real. Evolution’s sick of our soft, sensuous poetic life. When you’ve got cold iron under your hands, my good No-man — Listen! Have you ever flown, No-man? Man wants hardening. He wants liberating from his sensual self-indulgence. All this business of primroses—’

But Dud, who *had* been listening at last, could stand it no longer. ‘Why do you always drag in primroses?’ he cried. ‘Curse it, man, we’re still men and women, aren’t we? Can’t you wait till we evolve new physical organs and spawn something different from our old hearts, our old nerves, our old senses, our old warm blood! Yes, it’s our *blood* you’ll have to change.’ He thrust his great stick deep into the leaf-mould. ‘ “Blut ist ein ganz besonderer Saft!” “Blood’s a very mysterious juice!” ‘ he murmured. ‘It’s so damned mysterious that it refuses to give up its primroses for any future!’

They were in sight of their women again now, and Claudius, who had opened his mouth for a crushing rejoinder, closed it with a sigh.

Dud suddenly became conscious that a vivid image of the monstrous countenance, dulled by its dead eyes, of Urien Quirm was floating before him. ‘Glymes will settle this chap’s evolution,’ he thought. ‘Glymes will do for his business. Wait till he talks to those Glymes people about his damned excavations!’

The women were awaiting them now at a closed gate by an extremely muddy pond in the centre of which a mottled cow was nervously holding her broad mouth against the water, pretending to drink but really waiting till the coast was clear. The grey Candlemas weather, as it worked its will upon this cow, and upon the troubled mud into which the animal’s cloven hooves were sinking, seemed to our friend at that moment as if its circumambient presence, extending to all the air above the firmament and to all the water below the firmament, were resting exhausted after having given birth to that single celandine bud.

This feeling was intensified by the look of several time-worn posts, with twisted wires between them, that stared down into the disturbed mud, as if waiting for some glimpse of their patient reflection to re-form in the rippled surface.

But what was that? Could it be true that Wizzie’s little pinched face, under that deplorably smart hat, had actually broken into a smile at his approach? Did she care for him, then, in *some* kindred approximation to the way he cared for her? Oh, damn these mysterious hearts! Could a man never read their secrets? Had she meant it when she said she was going back to the circus — to some circus — or was it only a momentary burst of anger? And was he, or wasn’t he, to greet that repulsive old man with his fiver tomorrow, and if he *did* give it him, how could he be sure...

But the four of them had met now. Claudius was opening the gate, standing in mud almost as thick as that which was liquefied in the water, and the cow was laboriously dragging herself, each separate mud-bound hoof after each separate mud-bound hoof, out of the pond, without having done more than wet her nostrils.

Wizzie's frown came back as soon as they were all through the gate. 'She *will* get that line fixed on her forehead if she's not careful,' he thought; and then, as they all moved on together, the shameless puzzle entered his head — it was the sort of thing Dud was always thinking about — as to why his wicked pleasure in Wizzie's figure, when her back was turned, invariably changed into a chaste tenderness when their eyes met. Of course he *could* turn his gaze then, if he wanted to, upon her girlish bosom, that object, in all the old amorous poems, of a lover's most consecrated idolatry. But Dud found he never had anything but chaste feelings in the presence of Wizzie's breasts. And as he lowered his eyes to the front of her jacket now — so much more worthy of the Horse-Head's skill than that awful hat — it came to him that it was a weird thing that he, D. No-man, should have the power, by yielding to his nervous manias, of actually preventing a woman from bringing to birth a living, conscious, and perhaps immortal soul!

The old idea came back to him now, the idea which had troubled him when he first ascended to her room, namely that if he went on only tantalizing her with his half-love, *someone else would take his place*. In his fancies about his Mona-wraith he had imagined Dormarth taking his place in that deserted bed of his mother's. Who now would take his place in the Friary Lane upper room?

As they all four now moved slowly uphill towards the portion of the lane where Glymes was situated, No-man turned his gaze northward. There was no hedge or rail of any kind on their left just here to separate them from a wide tract of undulating meadow-land that stretched, with only a few scattered spinneys and a few outlying farms, clear away to the bare northern ridge. Dud once more made up his mind, as he had already done that winter, that he must certainly explore that direction. It was its nearness to Glymes that had hitherto deterred him. He had only been two or three times to Glymes during these three months. He had felt shy of Thuella, and she apparently had felt shy of him. Indeed, their brief intimacy on that eventful All Souls' Day had drawn back, like the tender double horns of a terrified snail, into an awkward acquaintanceship which they both seemed anxious to make more reserved, rather than less, as time went on.

Yes, he must certainly make some explorations in this direction. Wizzie rarely came with him on his walks, and he was growing tired of *always* crossing Fordington Great Field, always surmounting that wooded hill to the south of the town, always visiting the grave of William Barnes! It was ridiculous to let himself be debarred from this beautiful strip of meadowland by his fear of encountering the Venetian Post. Couldn't he pass the time of day with her, be civilly decent to her, and let her go?

He began to experience that nervous twinge, that faint rush of the blood from the surface of the cheeks to the bone of the skull, that writers describe as smiling to oneself. This was the result of his suddenly remembering how he had made up his mind, in the reckless mood in which he decided to let Mona go free, not to allow his romance with Wizzie to interfere with his relations — *whatever* they might turn out to be — with the wayward cloud-painter.

Well! This, no doubt, was the way things usually worked out. It was not easy to keep two girls in your life, as women say, especially when they lived in the same town. The crafty but simple-minded Dud regarded himself as a man of cynical insight when he made this mental note as to how things worked out.

The truth of the matter was that after the shock he had had when he imagined Wizzie was *really* going to pack up her things and leave him, he felt nervous of this visit to Glymes. He distrusted Glymes. The place had left a disquieting effect upon him. It wasn't only his shyness of Thuella. Since Old Funky's visit he felt vaguely uneasy about the basis of his whole life in Dorchester; and in his own curious fashion, by indirections finding directions out, he had an inkling that the worst danger to his security lay — as if it had been one of Thuella's own absurd clouds — on the Glymes quarter of his horizon.

To change the current of his thoughts he began now to talk to the Horse-Head, addressing his remarks to her across the silent and frowning Wizzie; and he acquired from her the information that the solitary clump against the sky, to the south of where William Barnes lay buried, had been reduced by tradition, in an almost theological manner, from many to one, and had come to be known, though it was evidently a group of trees, as Culliford Tree. As he talked to her, he felt reassured. Surely, whatever this gaunt creature, whose passion for Wizzie apparently equalled that of Mrs Urgan for Popsy, said or did, it was without any personal hostility to him.

But this visit to Glymes was a very different matter, and the nearer they came to the place, the more uneasy he grew. Nor did his companions seem quite themselves. Their words to one another began to take on that curious mechanical tone that people assume when their minds have already jumped forward into an approaching crisis.

He now began himself to do what he always did when confronted by peril. He hurriedly cast about to get his philosophy into clear focus. He had lived so long amid phantoms and fancies, lived so long clinging obstinately to the shades of his mother and Mona, that he felt as if the whole matter of his life with Wizzie had been a plunge into that terrible real life which from his childhood he had dodged. This accurst real life had begun to take on a most menacing aspect with the reappearance of Old Funky, and he felt as if it were gathering thicker and thicker upon him now.

All four of them fell silent when they actually reached the place. The two houses, as they existed at that date, at the junction between the lane and the road leading to Piddletrenthide from the London road, were certainly not inviting in that grey weather. No tramp would have selected Glymes, as it showed itself this particular afternoon, as a friendly habitation at which to pause. No derelict boots, no ruined castaway shoe, would have been tossed in the purlieus of Glymes, informing the traveller, in the language of mendicants, that here was a possible welcome.

Wizzie's expression twisted itself into something a good deal more strained than her usual frown as Jenny Dearth opened her father's door. Even Claudius looked a little put about as he stood aside for the others to enter. As for Dud, so powerful was the place's aura, and so strong was his animal instinct of distrust, that he received, as he went in behind Wizzie, a peculiar chill that he had not known since the publicity of his marriage to Mona.

'God!' he thought, as he watched Mr Wye's two daughters greeting each other, 'the old Horse-Head's quite fond of Thuella. But of course the Venetian Post hates *her*!'

Mr Wye himself greeted our friend very amiably and involved him at once in serious conversation, while Thuella, giving him only the most casual of nods, made Wizzie sit down by her side on one of the elegant sofas in this super-boudoir, and, with malicious furtive glances at her sister, began plying the girl with a regular siege of impulsive cajolery.

Our friend was not so deeply absorbed in what the nervous Platonist was telling him as to miss the manifest distress of Mrs Dearth while her sister was throwing her whole soul into this prolonged cajolery of the young circus-rider.

He noticed too that even Claudius himself, who had at once begun engaging Mrs Dearth in a complicated interpretation of Thuella's new picture, kept looking at her sharply, as if he detected something that interfered with her usual infatuated absorption in his remarks.

But it was hardly less agitating to Dud than to Mrs Dearth to watch the beguilement by which the beautiful cloud-painter was trying to seduce Wizzie. 'What *is* the name', he thought, 'of that Frenchwoman who paints pictures of girls, that Thuella talked about the other day? She said they were like depraved hares. Is she trying to turn *my* girl into a depraved hare?'

'Yes,' he replied aloud to Teucer Wye. 'I *have* read him a certain amount; but *I* take Plato in a way peculiar to myself. I take him as an absolute sceptic, a sceptic so uncertain about everything that he could afford to turn God and immortality into poetry, and the soul and love into fairy-tales.'

Teucer Wye's sensitive mouth twitched so galvanically at this, and his two hands began to grope with such electric intensity at what Dud supposed to be the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus* in his side-pocket, that it was natural for our friend to feel that politeness compelled him to look away — to look, that is, in the direction of Thuella.

Thuella's slenderness was accentuated by an extremely clinging olive-green gown of fine silk. If it hadn't been that she was so deliberately setting herself to cajole Wizzie, Dud would have been fascinated by her appearance. With that silk gown clinging to her body she looked exactly like the Lamia of Keats's poem, while from the expression on Wizzie's face, an expression of almost idiotic satisfaction, he gathered that the seduction was complete.

‘Does she do it on purpose, to drive the Horse-Head to frenzy?’ he wondered, observing the look of desperation on Mrs Dearth’s face. But the odd thing was that what really was bothering his mind at that moment had nothing to do with Wizzie. What he found so disturbing was the simple and natural fact that at any second the door of this super-feminine room might open and Mr and Mrs Quirm come in. He knew that Mr and Mrs Quirm had been invited. He knew they were expected. It wasn’t a matter of the usual vague uncertainty whether they would be there or not. It was a matter of certainty. How was it that this group of people could go on behaving so naturally, so spontaneously, so casually, when there was nothing in the whole stream of time, nothing in the infinite past, nothing in the infinite future, that could stop Mr and Mrs Quirm from coming into that room in one minute, in half a minute, in a second?

Seated on the sofa by his host’s side in this ladylike room, listening with polite attention to the man’s Platonizing (who — poor dandified devil! — seemed relieved to be talking to anyone who wasn’t a *daughter)*, No-man tried to explain to himself why it was that his pulses were beating such a tune in expectation of the appearance of these people. He had seen them once or twice — not often, because of his shyness of Thuella, but enough to have kept up a sort of rough intimacy with Nancy Quirm. No, no, it wasn’t because of *her* that he experienced this singular excitement. It was because of her husband. Him he had hardly seen at all, never at any rate to speak to, since that first day; but it certainly was over him, not over the Cemetery Woman, that this coil in his nerves was growing to such a pitch. Was it because the man was the only person in Dorchester who knew him as a writer?

He felt anything but easy with regard to those two forms on the other sofa, his girl’s figure in her black dress, and that shining-headed Lamia at her side, whose long limbs shimmered so insidiously as she leaned over her. Nor did it give him any pleasure to see the poor Horse-Head suffer so, as this curious seduction proceeded.

But, for all that, he kept turning to the door. He couldn’t keep his eyes off the door. The truth was that a most singular sensation had begun to steal over him, as if he, and he alone, knew the real significance of the entrance into their presence of this man who called himself Urien...

‘Don’t you want me to bring the tea in for you, Ella?’ Jenny Dearth cried suddenly, and Dud felt as if her voice had broken *his* trance without disturbing the one which the green-and-gold serpent had cast on Wizz.

‘No hurry, no hurry,’ murmured Teucer Wye, anxious not to lose a second of these precious moments with a masculine listener.

Dud thought to himself, ‘Nobody seems to understand what’s happening.’ He felt more and more, as the windows darkened and twilight filled the room, that they were all involved in some obscure transaction of momentous importance.

After her hopeless attempt to break up that scene on the sofa, Jenny Dearth evidently resigned herself to her role of devoted disciple; but her deep-set eyes, out of her bony visage, seemed all the while to be crying pitifully to Wizzie, ‘Shake her off, shake her off! For the love of God, shake her off!’

It was certainly amazing to Dud to see how Wizzie permitted the long electric fingers of the cloud-painter — and Dud could remember the precise feel of those fingers — to rest on her knee as the tall girl murmured her whispered beguilements.

Thuella’s seductive murmurings were inaudible, so that the monotonous droning voices of Claudius and Mr Wye were the only sounds in the room. These two sounds seemed to move about together among the mirrors and the cushions, like a pair of obstinate bluebottle flies who ought to have had some window opened to let them out.

‘He’s coming along that passage now, between the houses!’ Dud thought. ‘Now he’s got to that wretched door where she told me about her boy’s death. Now he’s standing *just behind that door*! Why doesn’t someone get up, and go and open it for him?’

Dud sat up straight on his sofa, glancing anxiously from one face to another. He only nodded now in reply to Mr Wye’s remarks, but this seemed quite enough to keep the Platonist from falling into silence. No-man began to see through a filmy mist the fellow’s dandified clothes, his hair smooth in front like a woman’s fringe, his clean cuffs caught at the wrist outside his side-pockets, a couple of faded daisies in his button-hole, and his shoes gleaming with polish. But it was clear that Mr Wye had been doomed to discourse so often to women as they searched for their cigarette, or their thread, or their thimble, or their scissors, or their palette, or their eraser, or their novel, that he only increased the emotional pitch of his tone when his hearer gazed at him as if through a thick mist.

Dud’s own mind still ran upon Mr Quirm. ‘He’s tired of waiting. He’s got his hand on the knocker now. He’s still in those disgusting clothes. His hair’s still like dirty black moss on a rotten log. *There*! He’s dropped the knocker again. He’s waiting for Nancy before knocking, waiting with his dead eyes on the door, waiting without moving a muscle. The door, the door, the door!’ Yes, No-man couldn’t prevent the word ‘Dormarth’ from rushing like a flat-nosed bullet into his brain; and when once this had happened, he couldn’t stop himself from beginning one of those endless droll tales he was always inventing, a tale in which he imagined himself finding out that this man at the door was the living incarnation of his mother’s Questing Beast.

‘The soul remains pure as a drop of dew’, Mr Wye was now saying, ‘in spite of all its experiences...’ And to Dud’s mind, as he sat waiting for the sound of Mr Quirm’s knock to break up the unreality into which they were all sinking, a ridiculous little problem came totally unsolicited, and entirely unconnected with what Mr Wye had just remarked about the soul: the problem, namely, as to whether the soft human hairs that Nature — unless the girl were a real Lamia underneath her green-and-gold gown — must have permitted to grow upon the long thin forearm that now lay across Wizzie’s knees, were of the same colour as the hairs that gleamed in the fire light at the back of that slender neck.

‘Do you mean to say you really didn’t ever feel *at all* frightened when...’ He actually caught this whisper now from Thuella herself as his problem made him concentrate upon what he could see of her.

‘It isn’t mere historic curiosity that makes these excavations... ‘ were the words that Claudius was uttering into the poor Horse-Head’s ears — into her ears, but the woman’s eyes were fixed, just as Dud’s had been, on that long thin arm lying, like a green branch from a golden bough, across Wizzie’s lap.

There! Surely that was a knock at the door? Why didn’t someone get up and open it?

‘When people say,’ went on Mr Wye, ‘ “How can the soul remain a pure essence and yet retain a memory of its earth-sensations?” I answer...’ And in his eagerness, while his hurried movement carried to his interlocutor the peaty smell of his clothes, the man actually twitched out of his pocket one of his little school-texts and began turning the pages.

Dud saw Thuella at that second give her father the sort of look that an animal-trainer gives a dog when at the wrong moment it stands on its hind legs.

He himself sat up straighter than ever, listening intently. The idea crossed his mind, as he glanced round at the little group and saw how the twilight perished in those Glymes windows, that this was how they might all have been found if some cloud of volcanic ashes were to bury them as they sat.

‘Is her feeling for Wizz’, he thought, as the word ‘excavations’ reached him again, ‘going to kill the Horse-Head’s love for that chap?’

The woman’s expression was certainly just now more like that of a much-enduring wife than an ardent disciple.

‘Thuella’s doing this’, he thought, ‘either to tease *me* or to tease *her*. Which is it? She’s up to something. I’ve never seen Wizz in such a state. The child looks positively drugged with complacency.’

He suddenly felt a grim disgust for the whole situation in which he had landed himself in Dorchester. ‘I’ve got out of my element,’ he thought. And a picture of himself as a solitary writer, walking to the end of Lovers’ Lane every afternoon, and putting the Royal Martyr on to boil the moment he got back, rose up in his mind; and as it rose up it seemed to collide with the bruise left in his consciousness by Old Funky’s blackmailing visit.

‘Wizz isn’t happy with me,’ his thoughts ran on. ‘She never looks like this when we’re—’

The door of the room opened abruptly, and Nancy Quirm entered alone. ‘So sorry, my dears!’ she hurriedly began. ‘Urien’s gone to Maiden Castle, and he’s not back yet. I’ve left a note telling him to come straight over the moment he—’

‘Come and sit here, Nancy,’ cried Thuella, jumping up. ‘Jenny and I’ll get tea now you’ve come. We won’t wait for your husband.’

CHAPTER 4. Candlemas Night

THE PRESENCE OF Mrs Quirm at what Mr Wye had called Thuella’s cloud-party did a lot to break up — at any rate for Dud — the uneasy tension that preceded the appearance of tea.

Nancy was all on the ‘qui vive’ over Wizzie, and her lively concentration upon her seemed to please the young girl. It didn’t turn her head or cause her funny little pinched face to assume that idiotic look of satisfaction that it had worn on the sofa, but it evidently gave her confidence and reassurance. Wizzie, indeed, under her close contact with Thuella — for the cloud-painter managed to wedge the girl tightly against herself at the round table where they all sat — and the sympathetic encouragement she got from Nancy, became quite voluble. She talked more freely than our friend had ever heard her talk before. She told them all in a quite easy and assured tone all sorts of details about her circus life. These included many little matters that were of absorbing interest to him but about which he had never dared to question her.

But it wasn’t only on Wizzie that the tea had an enlivening effect. Dud himself drank several cups quite rapidly, one after another, and the glow that diffused itself through him dissipated in a very short time all his nervous feelings about the only absent one of the Glymes group.

It was Mrs Dearth who poured out the tea. ‘That’s why’, our friend said to himself (for he was seated between her and Mr Wye), ‘I’m so lucky. Thuella would have let me whistle for all these cups!’

The effect of their all sitting so closely together round the table seemed in some subtle way to change the whole key of the occasion. Thuella’s magnetic energy, no longer absorbed in seducing Wizzie, expressed itself in wilder and wilder speeches. Dud noted at first that Wizzie's hands, when not occupied with her plate or her cup, instinctively sought her lap, and were, he was sure, occupied in the accustomed trick of playing with her knuckles.

As time went on, however, and Thuella began to dominate the conversation, he became convinced that the elder girl's electric fingers had surreptitiously sought those nervous hands. An occasional flicker of something approaching a smile on Wizzie's mouth and a heightened flush in her cheeks showed that, whatever the effect of the other's touch was, it was not disagreeable to her.

Dud found himself curiously elated by what was going on round him. It pleased him to watch the effect of this table-talk compared with the preceding situation. In paradoxical contrast to our friend's cropped skull and lanky figure, he possessed — and no doubt it had something to do with his lack of normal virility — a queer and almost morbid curiosity about the inner feelings of women. Had he not spent the last ten years of his life in a sort of posthumous inquisition upon Mona and the Woman from Wales? Just because the intensity of his cerebral imagination had limited his knowledge of them, his interest in women, in everything connected with them, had grown into something like an obsession. '*Their* thoughts', he said to himself now, 'are their whole selves. It's from their bodies they think, whereas with us... ' And he gave himself up to a malicious pleasure in observing how, now that the women were in their element, the masculine monologues of Claudius and Teucer Wye completely ceased! Both these gentlemen struck him, indeed, as growing more and more wooden and blockish. He felt as if they had become a couple of great dolls set up at that table by their different mistresses.

‘Is this civilization?’ he pondered, as he allowed Mrs Dearth to refill his cup for the fifth time, ‘or did those old Maiden Castle men have to take second place like this when their women were enjoying themselves?’

And then the incorrigible Dud let his lawless thoughts loose on a different track.

‘Why is it’, he pondered, ‘that the chatter of women, the way they jaw, as we used to say, is worse than Wye’s migratory souls and old Claudius’s eternal evolution, whereas—’ But even as this thought came to him, another and a far more scandalous one thrust it aside, for he suddenly found himself in his imagination bending back Nancy Quirm’s animated head and kissing her soft throat.

Mrs Quirm was certainly looking unusually attractive as she listened to Thuella arguing with Jenny Dearth. She had the illuminated expression of someone absorbed in a daring piece of modern music; and even our friend had to admit that their conversation was growing exciting.

‘What do I *want?’* Thuella was crying now, and it was with a certain relief that he noted she was gesticulating with *both* her expressive hands. ‘I don’t want any of your moral virtue, Jin! I want something that’s not artistic either, *or* philosophical, *or* intellectual.’ And she glanced rebelliously at her begetter. ‘I want free, careless, ribald enjoyment! That’s what I want! I want the sort of gross, simple *pleasure* that girls of the people get when they pour giggling out of a picture-show and rush off with their arms round one another, off to buy fried fish and chips!’

‘But, Ella, you’re forgetting the reaction. You’re forgetting what they’ll feel when they have to get up in the—’ Mrs Dearth paused. ‘We all *have* to be good in this world,’ she added gravely, ‘and for a simple enough reason.’ She stopped again, but, instead of looking at Claudius, this time she looked at Wizzie.

But something made Wizzie, to Dud’s deep astonishment, burst into her own contribution to the subject.

‘If you *try* to be good’, she cried, and her lover noticed that the excitement of making this speech caused little red blotches to appear on her forehead while her nose became yet more peaked and drawn and thin, ‘*you spoil it all*\ That’s what I say. You’re just born good, or you’re not. *It’s terrible*! It’s enough to make anyone want to cry, to think about it. Being good means giving up everything you like’ — she sighed and looked at the hands in her lap— ‘while *not* being good means getting all you like but not enjoying any of it!’

Mrs Dearth’s gaunt figure semed to grow taller and more imposing under her role of exponent of the moral law. ‘You’re both of you silly little girls,’ she said triumphantly. ‘You ought to know better, Thuella, when you can paint a picture like that, and Wizz ought to know better, when she can jump through a hoop like she does! *I* can’t do anything but scrub floors myself; but I *know* this, that I’m a twenty-times happier woman than you two, though I’m near forty and you two aren’t near thirty.’

If Dud had been surprised at Wizzie’s throwing in her word in such a grave discussion, he was still more surprised to hear his Cemetery Woman say in a low clear voice across the table to Mrs Dearth, *‘What* a liar you are, Jenny! I don’t know anything about Miss Ravelston, but I can’t sit quiet and hear *you* call yourself a happy woman. Look at her now, you others. What does she do it for, telling such lies? Look at her, all of you! Does she *look* like a happy woman?’

Very slowly, and as if he were turning his long-sighted hawk’s eye upon a sudden crack in his own threshold-stone, Claudius gazed into his friend’s face.

She met his eyes, however, with a look that seemed to the fascinated Dud, from what he could catch of it, like the look a woman might give a man in whose stead she was being hanged. ‘I must make my Mary Channing’, he thought, ‘give her lover a look like that at the last.’

And then, by one of those chances of unconscious telepathy that are so much more common than we think, Teucer Wye asked our friend point-blank how he was getting on with his novel. ‘I suppose you won’t tell anyone what it’s about till it’s finished?’ he said. ‘That’s much the best way. That’s what Plato did over the death of Socrates. He let them talk their hearts out about it without telling them what he was doing, and that’s why —’

But Thuella, who made it a rule not to let her father mention Plato at the table, broke in at this point. ‘Of course Jin’s happy!’ she cried. ‘Nancy, take care now! You’re being just naughty to put such ideas into Mr Cask’s head. Don’t you believe her, Claudius! I know Jin better than any of you, except *you*, Father, of course! Y*ou* don’t think she’s unhappy, do you, Father?’

Mrs Dearth suddenly got up and hurried round the table. As she passed the chair on which our friend sat she lurched against its leg — for Dud had a rustic way of pushing back his seat when his hunger was appeased — and she came near falling. But her father stretched out his arm, caught her by her solid waist, and pulled her towards him.

‘Yes, I *was* coming to you, Dad!’ she cried. ‘I *always* do, don’t I, when they tease me?’ And sinking down very awkwardly on the arm of his chair, which brought her into close contact with Dud’s shoulder, she put her arm round her father’s head and began lightly stroking the smoothly brushed fringe on his forehead.

A faint scent of perspiration and a strong scent of camphor arrested No-man’s senses from the woman’s propinquity, and as she went on causing by this demonstration, so our friend concluded, exquisite nervous distress to her parent, he was able by a stealthy glance upward to get a much closer if somewhat oblique view of her face. He was also made aware that she was faintly trembling.

‘God!’ he said to himself, ‘the Horse-Head’s in trouble! I’ve never known her like this. *Is* it because of Wizz, or have she and her Roman come to grief? Well, it’s none of my business.’

Apparently restored now to her self-control, Mrs Dearth kissed the top of her parent’s head and went back to her place; but, slight though this incident was, it was enough to break up the animation round the table, and both Mr Wye and Claudius rose to their feet.

There was a general movement then in that Glymes room. Cigarettes were lit; and encouraged by Mr Wye, who, after exchanging a word with Thuella, began rearranging the chairs, they all moved nearer the fire.

No-man seated himself between Wizzie and Nancy, and feeling relieved when Mrs Dearth brought up a chair to Wizzie’s end of their sofa and engaged her in conversation, he began to do what he had been wanting to do for some while: that is to say, question her about her husband. He had begun to do this, and she was telling him, neither eagerly nor wearily but in a casual, half-amused tone, about Urien’s mania for visiting Maiden Castle, especially at certain particular seasons of the year, when he heard Mr Wye suddenly remark to Claudius as they stood together by the fire, ‘Did you hear *that*? The wind’s getting up!’

Nancy caught this too, and a look came into her face that was at once perplexed and faintly exultant. She and Dud stared in silence at each other, and he fancied that something passed between them that he would have been puzzled to express in words. ‘He knew it would rise by the evening,’ she whispered. ‘That’s why he’s so late. He’ll be back soon now! He waited there for the wind to get up.’

They both paused to watch Thuella go to the window. It was open a little at the top, and the dainty curtains — for there were no blinds in that studio drawing-room — had begun to flap and shiver uneasily. ‘It’s all right, Dad,’ the tall girl cried over her shoulder. ‘I can do it!’

‘How lovely she is!’ whispered Nancy, as they watched that thin figure in its clinging gown raise its arms and close the window with a deft movement.

‘He’ll be here soon now,’ she repeated, sinking back into the sofa. ‘The wind must have touched Maiden Castle long before this.’

‘He didn’t look much like a walker to me,’ Dud hazarded after a moment’s hesitation. The woman sighed: ‘Oh, that’s because of his clothes and all. I *can’t* manage him! Often for days he sits reading. But when he *does* set off—’

Their attention was distracted by a sudden recurrence of the tea-table argument. Claudius had apparently said something to Mr Wye about the superiority of Roman morale over the speculations of Plato, and Thuella, with a tray in her hands, turned on him before her father could reply.

Dud never forgot how she looked at that moment with the gleam of a lamp on her white skin and shining hair, as the weight of the tray emphasized the lines of her figure as she drew herself up under the stress of her feelings.

‘Not one of you understood me just now, except Miss Ravelston,’ she cried, turning her gleaming eyes on Wizzie. ‘No, not one of you! What I want from life is pleasure! Yes, strange as it may sound, simply a little pleasure, before I die! It’s what *all* women really want — Nancy does herself, only she won’t admit it. And Jin does too, only she has to be a copy-cat to Mr Cask. It's where women suffer from you all!' And she swept her indignant glance from the men at the fire to the man on the sofa. 'You *know* I'm right, Nancy. You and Jin have given up the struggle, that's all. And what have you got out of it? Yes, what have you got out of it? No, it isn't that Wizzie and I are younger. *That's* nothing! We'll be like this when we're old. We won't give up, like you two have, we won't, we *won't*!' She swung round with her tray to go to the door.

Something about the way the shining strands of her hair were caught up, tight and smooth, above the nape of her neck proved agitating to Dud, but he forced himself to turn his eyes in another direction.

'My dear child,' said Claudius calmly, 'you know very well that when you were painting that fine picture over there your head was full of something that wasn't pleasure at all. I don't say it was my ideal of life, or your father's. But it was something very different from this pleasure you're talking about.'

The fact that she had to release one hand from her tray to get the door open encouraged the girl to turn on all the men in the room with her final retort. 'Urien will stop your mouths for you!' was what she flung back as she left the room; and our friend noticed how, even in her fury, she avoided being rude to Claudius by instinctively including her father and himself in this threat.

Teucer Wye was so disturbed by his daughter's outburst that under the shock of it he hurriedly went to his bookshelf, and removing from his pockets *both* his little school-texts, deposited them on the top of a row of Loeb Classics.

'Sit down, man, sit down!' he said to Claudius, indicating the only chair in this lady's room adapted to masculine comfort. 'You must excuse her, you know — and you too, Mr No-man. A spoilt child, gentlemen, needing, you know, a mother's authority. But she's really a good girl, isn't she, Jenny? — and besides — well, the truth is — but you all know *that* already — if it wasn't for her pictures — by Jove, I don't know where I'd be! In the workhouse in Darners Road probably. But, Jenny, listen, my dear...' And he stepped quickly up to Mrs Dearth, who turned to him from Wizzie.

Dud took the opportunity of putting to this latter young woman a domestic question about the comfort of her shoes, which were her last purchase in South Street, but he felt instinctively that both she and Mrs Quirm were straining their ears to catch what their host and Jenny were talking about.

Enticed into the same eavesdropping by his companions, he caught the word 'Urien', and he caught, too, certain revealing glances that the father and daughter threw at the door. He could only hear snatches of what they were saying, but he gathered that they were concerned lest Thuella and the man from Maiden Castle should be staying too long together in the kitchen. But how the devil had the fellow got into the kitchen? — that's what puzzled Dud. He had heard no sound of the opening of the door between the houses, no sound of that knock or ring which he had been awaiting with such accumulative nervousness. How on earth had the man got in? Had Thuella found him in the passage? Was Mr Wye aware that he was even now talking to her out there? Did they suspect her of giving him his tea in her kitchen? The girl had flung at them like a magic weapon her appeal to Urien as she went out. 'She must have heard him knock while she was scolding us', No-man decided, 'and that's why she ended by throwing him at our heads'.

Teucer Wye was evidently anxious that Jenny should follow Thuella into the kitchen and break in on this undesirable tête-à-tête, but Mrs Dearth appeared reluctant to undertake this commission.

At last the little man made as if he were resolved to do it himself, but Jenny, tugging him back by his coat, addressed herself to Nancy.

‘We don’t want Ella to steal Urien from us *too* long,’ she said. ‘Dad says he heard him come just now. Did *you* hear him come?’

It was easy for Dud to satisfy to the full at this moment his new mania for dissecting women’s souls, for, with everyone — Mr Wye, Wizzie, and Jenny — staring so anxiously at Mrs Quirm, it was natural he should do the same. He gathered from the woman’s expressive face that she had realized for some minutes that her husband and Thuella were together out there, but that she had not the smallest intention of disturbing them.

‘What are you all whispering about over there?’ remarked Claudius in a complacent and even luxurious voice. To please Mr Wye, he had just accepted a particularly delicious cigarette, and he was enjoying it with ineffable contentment, enjoying it as a hermit of the Thebaid might have enjoyed a taste of ‘Flora and the country green, dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth’.

‘Go over and talk to Claudius, there’s a good girl!’ said Mrs Dearth to Wizzie in reply to this amiable challenge. Wizzie submissively obeyed. But Nancy Quirm was now on her feet. ‘Let *us* go,’ she said to Dud. ‘He hardly knows *you*. You’ll be a distraction. He can’t be angry with *you*. Besides’ — and she forced a somewhat hollow chuckle— ‘nothing wakes a man up more than our appearing with another man! Come on! It’s all right, Mr Wye, you and Jenny must have lots to talk about. Don’t you worry about them. Mr No-man and I will chaperon them!’

The anxious Platonist looked at his eldest daughter, who smiled at him reassuringly, and as Dud and Nancy moved to the door they saw them sit down side by side.

Our friend and his companion paused in the little hallway. Here was a hanging lamp that Thuella must have lit before retiring into the kitchen; and here too, set up against the wall, was a big iron chair with cushions on it, evidently brought in for the winter from the garden.

As soon as the door was shut behind them Mrs Quirm laid her hand on Dud’s arm just in the same way — and it brought back the whole incident to his mind — as she had done on All Souls’ Day when they stood together between the two Glymes houses. There was the very door behind which they had stood that afternoon!

His Cemetery woman was evidently thinking hard now, as she paused with her hand on him.

‘One minute!’ she whispered, and quickly opening the door of the kitchen, she held it ajar while she peeped in.

Dud had not heard a sound from the kitchen, and it gave him a curious shock now to hear a man’s voice.

‘In a minute, Nance!’ the voice said. ‘Tell him I’ll be in in a minute. He needn’t get fussy — I’m not eating her. I’m having my tea.’

Then came Thuella’s voice: ‘Come in, Nancy, dear. Don’t stand there like that. Come in!’

‘All right,’ he heard Mrs Quirm reply, ‘but I’m going to flirt with Mr No-man for a bit first, out here! Your dad wants to talk to Jenny. Miss Ravelston’s entertaining Mr Cask. It got so hot in there, Thel! We’ll be with you in a minute.’

She shut the door and came back to him, making a grimace like a grown person returning to another grown person from a children’s game. They sat down side by side on the big garden seat, and Dud lit a cigarette. ‘No, no!’ she said gravely. ‘I want to talk. I want to tell you so many things, and hear so many things. We’re old friends, you know!’

Dud stretched out his long legs. Then he glanced at the kitchen door.

'It's all right,' she said quietly. 'Our doors are heavy oak. You can't hear a sound.' Her words were true. That kitchen might have been quite empty; and he began wondering, as he looked round this little hall with its three doors, how it was that Thuella herself had heard that knock, the approach of which he had awaited with such queer excitement. But perhaps she *hadn't* heard it till she was out of the room. Perhaps her sudden mention of the man had been an unconscious awareness that he was there.

But Dud jerked his mind away from these teasing superstitions. He tried, in the presence of these three Glymes doors, to sink back upon his most stoical realism, back upon the sort of mood when he would give his bed-post a fillip with his finger and thumb, and defy it, and call it Dormarth.

But his companion laid her hand upon his knee. It was a fleeting movement, not more than a touch, and she withdrew it in a second, but in connection with the same gesture made in their first encounter it had its effect on him.

He possessed, as his life in Dorchester had begun to teach him, hidden away in his round, cropped skull, a selfishness that was both senile and infantile, but since he had emerged, after his decade of cerebral self-indulgence, into commerce with a real living woman, he had come to be devoured with a curiosity that was almost a vice about what these alien creatures really felt, what they really enjoyed, what they really suffered. Babyish though he was in so many things, No-man's imagination was powerful, and his analytic insight, though often abortive, had its moments of ferocious penetration. It had shown this penetration from the start over Mrs Quirm when he decided that the Cemetery Woman was *not* the maternal type; and now, since he felt no nervous recoil at her touch, no shrinking from this gesture so often repeated, he knew that his first impression was right.

Dud had his own secret explanation of the spasm of blind fury that seized on him at the faintest overture towards him of what he called the maternal gullet. He associated this angry emotion with his nervous inability to consummate any love-affair, whether legal or otherwise. ‘I believe I’ve been a fool, though,’ he said to himself, ‘over the Horse-Head. I don’t believe she’s the Phrygian Great Mother at all, or any other kind of mother! I think Thuella was right when she said that women wither and pine — never mind how much they love — if they don’t have pleasure, and the sort of pleasure they want, too, which is their own kind. *I* want to enjoy lechery; but I loathe and hate what they call pleasure. That’s what that fellow in there has done to this woman, and that’s why she’s turning to me. He’s been taking a woman’s natural pleasure away from her and burying it at Maiden Castle. He’s been *at it* to kill it for years, just as if it were an undying eel. It takes as much to kill pleasure in a woman as to end life in an eel!

‘No, no! You’re flirting with me, my sweet Nance, that’s what you’re doing. What you want is for me to make love to you — not directly, but indirectly! You want to get the pleasure of being made love to, and nothing but the pleasure! You’re man-sick, my pretty Nance — that’s what’s the matter with you. You’ve got the man-plague, the man-consumption, the man-decline. And if you’re not careful, you’ll get the man-death. And your body knows it, and that’s what makes you lurch against me like this and cling to me like this. I’m such a funny one that I’m an escape for you, and yet I’m not a woman. Your body knows all about it.’

Thus, after his fashion, philosophized D. No-man; but it did enter into his head to wonder once or twice whether Mrs Quirm might not be attracted to him for exactly the same reason she’d been attracted to Enoch Quirm twenty years ago, namely that there was so much about him she couldn't understand.

But it was of Enoch, or rather of Urien — for she usually called him by his adopted name unless to his face — that she was speaking now. No-man was prepared to find proof of his contention in every breath she breathed, but it would have been difficult for an outsider to have detected in her words any signs of that craving for pleasure, or of that desire to escape responsibility, by which he interpreted her conduct.

'I'm sure I don't know why I'm saying all this to you, Mr No-man,' she said presently, after explaining to him what an uncomfortable situation it brought about, this hostility of Teucer Wye to her husband, 'but you must remember—'

'*I* know why you're doing it, my dear,' he said to himself, lying back still more complacently in the iron seat, and puffing at his cigarette as luxuriously as if he had been Claudius.

'You must remember', she went on, 'that for years and years he hasn't noticed, hasn't hardly spoken to, any woman but me. There was a time, before *he* came' — she always spoke of her dead son as *'he'*— 'when it was like this, and it worried me a lot while it lasted; but then *he* was born, and something quite different went wrong. Enoch took to reading all these books. Did you know that half of them are in Welsh? Yes, he was with Welsh people when he was little, and he took to it *like that'* — and she made a characteristic feminine gesture with her hand to express ease and quickness— 'and then, when *he* grew older, Enoch used to talk to him a lot, but' — there were tears in her eyes now, and her face twitched, but she went on rapidly— '*he* never liked him; *he* was puzzled and frightened by Enoch's talk, and so — so Enoch lost interest in him and stopped liking him — at least I thought he did — and it made me angry, and there were scenes between us, and then — then *he* was taken from me.'

She glanced at the door of the living-room, and then at the door of the kitchen, and lowered her voice. 'People were nice to me, but they weren't nice to Enoch — to Urien, I mean — after that. They thought — I know Mr Cask thought, for he asked me terrible questions one night — that I wasn't happy with him, that he took drugs or something, that he was bad to me. But it was just the opposite! He saved my life with his medicines — you saw what he did for me that day — and I'm *not* unhappy now that I've — let *him* go free — but just lately Enoch's changed. I don't know what's happened, but he's different! He's got a mania for going — where he went today — I've come to hate the name of the place! — and he's always hanging about Thel. I don't mind *that*, of course — not in itself — for, in spite of what she *says*, Thel's a good girl, and we're great friends — but it's Teucer's attitude that worries me. I can't tell *what* may happen. He and Urien are both so — so peculiar!'

No-man extinguished the end of the cigarette by crushing it against the arm of their seat. There was nothing put on, nothing patronizing or propitiatory, about his manner now. He pulled his knees under him and tapped them with his fists as he sat up.

It is true that the latter part of what Nancy told him made but a vague impression on his mind; but one thing had hit his full consciousness — the news that half the books he had seen littering that untidy room of theirs *were in Welsh*.

Anything that had to do with the Woman from Wales always disturbed him; and now the wildest fancies began whirling about in his head! They came and went quite irrationally, quite arbitrarily; but, as we have seen, our friend was the opposite of rational where his mother was concerned, and he couldn’t help recalling how it *had* — as if on the wind itself — entered his superstitious brain that Mr Quirm — merely as a besotted student among old legends, merely as a local antiquary — *might*, by some turn of fortune, put him on the track of the other, the lost, heraldic head. He had already indulged in several long hunts through the Dorchester old curiosity shops, of which there were quite a few; and it annoyed him that he couldn’t absolutely remember whether it was his mother, or old Aaron Smith chaffing his mother, who had mentioned these places as possible repositories for the missing relic.

Nancy was evidently both surprised and pleased by the sympathetic gravity with which her new ally entered into her intimate troubles.

‘I’m so glad I told you!’ she cried. ‘I felt I *must* do it; I really don’t quite know why, but I felt I must. I shall feel much stronger to face whatever does happen, now that *you* know. It’s funny, isn’t it,’ she added after a pause, ‘what it means to have *someone* to tell things to? I used to tell everything to Thel; but of course, now he and Thel are — what they are — I’ve had to bottle it all up inside me. Well! we’d better go now and take them into the room. I don’t at all want Teucer to come out — as he may any second now, for you *never* know with him — and find us here. Come on! Quick, for the Lord’s sake!’

No-man got a fleeting impression that his companion, whom he now hurriedly followed to the kitchen door, actually gave it a swift tap with her fingers before turning the handle, but this may have been an illusion. At any rate neither Thuella nor the woman’s husband showed the faintest sign of embarrassment at this sudden invasion. The girl was standing at the sink washing up, and the man was seated by her side; and at their entrance he rose heavily to greet them, while she, with a tea-cup in her hand, merely turned her shining head with a half-petulant, half-playful casualness and began rallying Nancy about her new friend.

‘I’ll give you away to your little missy in there,’ she mocked at No-man, as soon as his hand had been released from the somewhat chilly grasp of the man from Maiden Castle. ‘You’re the one whose position’s shaky! Urien here doesn’t know what jealousy is, any more than Nance does — does he, Nance?’ She paused, put down the tea-cup, untied the strings of a ragged but spotlessly clean apron from her waist, and, while Nance was whispering to Urien what sounded, as they all stood there together, like an appeal for him to go on a complicated errand to the other house, she began addressing herself to our friend.

Even as she talked to him, in front of a little mirror that hung above the sink, she had both her arms lifted to the back of her head and was fumbling with her hair, and the shameless Dud, who as we have seen had begun to make spasmodic efforts to be faithful to Wizzie even in his thoughts, struggled with his vicious agitation in an odd manner of his own. It was a morbid peculiarity of his to dislike women with their hair down. ‘And hers goes below her waist, I’m sure!’ he told himself; and he called up the image of the miserable little braid that his Wizz was wont to tie so hastily with a black ribbon before she jumped into bed. ‘I promised myself to have no scruples over this girl,’ he thought, ‘and here I am, as faithful to Wizz as if we’d been married at Notre-Dame instead of in Old Funky’s caravan! I never realized what a conscience I had in these things till I came in here. No, I certainly never did!’

And he remembered a young neighbour of theirs, during his brief year with Mona, that he used to hug, whenever he got a chance, in Aaron’s back-garden, with never a twinge of remorse! He remembered how once Mona had even caught them coming out of the stick-house, and had only laughed at him and chased the girl into a gooseberry bush. He remembered how he had often tried to overcome his nervousness of Mona, when she took off her clothes, by pretending to himself that she was only Peggie in the wood-shed in her rumpled skirt and woollen stockings.

All these pictures of the past flashed like rapid cinema-films across Dud's vision, as he watched Thuella's uplifted arms, and saw her eyelids droop in a certain way and her face assume a particular trance-like expression that he had noted on Wizzie's face when she was busy with her hairpins; and he found himself conscious of a rush of blood to his head. It wasn't the long waist of his Venetian Post that gave him these feelings, and certainly not her young breasts, so like those two delicate cups she had just turned upside down; it was the thought 'She would never have gone to this terrifying chap, for all his tremendous features, if I'd kept up with her, if I hadn't dropped her like a hot coal!'

Nance was now dismissing her husband on his unknown errand, and Thuella began talking to our friend almost in the old frank manner. She tried hurriedly to explain to him what a dangerous tension they'd all reached at Glymes with her father's hostility to Mr Quirm.

'You can see how it is, my dear.' ('There you go', he thought, 'with your "my dears" again!') 'It's simply that I *must* amuse myself, and Dad *must* keep me like a child! You won't believe it, of course, but I've only had one real love-affair in my whole life, and that was when I was sixteen and with a boy of eighteen. I scared him away with my curiosity. I wanted him to take me then and there, out of pure devilry, and he wanted to have a long virtuous engagement. He's engaged still, if you want to know, to a waitress in the town. They're waiting till they can find a house. Dad was furious with me when I led him on, and more furious when I frightened him off. That's Dad all over.' And the girl's face contracted in a veritable spasm of hatred. ‘It’s the only way he can do anything with me, by getting angry! When he’s not angry, I do — with — him — exactly — what — I like.’

Dud, as we have seen, had a vein in him, below all his superstition, of Swift-like realism; but the ferocity in Thuella’s tone at this point did somewhat startle him. It was the idea of that dolled-up man being absolutely dependent on anyone who hated him to such a tune, that stuck in our friend’s gizzard.

And he recalled that picture of poor Teucer Wye that this young Circe had painted in her girlhood, seeing him in her prophetic soul as she intended to make him. *‘That* must have been her revenge’, he thought, ‘when she scared away the young man who is waiting for a house. She took it out on her father instead of on her lover, and she’s done that ever since. But how odd that such an exciting girl should have only had one love-affair!’

And Dud’s graceless mind, pondering on this oddity, came to the conclusion that he himself had considerable sympathy with the young man who was still engaged. ‘Those hot electric fingers of yours, my lady — God! I’d be jealous of everything they touched!’

It must be realized that all these thoughts used some indescribably rapid shorthand of their own, for he had only time to murmur ‘It’s a shame!’ and ‘Dear! dear!’ and ‘You never know *what’s* going on below the surface!’ when Mr Quirm hurried off in obedience to his wife, and then Thuella turned her back to him to say something to Nancy.

This turning her back had the opposite effect — so queerly was our friend constituted — to what might have been supposed, for the sight of that exquisite neck with the shining hair drawn up so tight, smoother than ever after her moment’s toilet at the mirror above the sink, sent a new shiver of desire through him.

‘Lucky devil!’ he said to himself, apostrophizing the absent medicine-man, as the three of them passed through the little hall and he opened the studio door for the two ladies. ‘Lucky devil! I wonder at what point the Cemetery Woman *will* get jealous?’

So intelligently had Wizzie listened to Claudius, and so happy had Teucer Wye been to have his elder daughter to himself, that both couples seemed rather surprised than anything else to see the absent ones returned.

‘I’ve sent Urien for one of his best bottles of elderberry wine,’ Mrs Quirm announced brightly. ‘I wanted Mr No-man and Miss Ravelston to see what can be provided for visitors on *our* side of Glymes, so that I can tempt them to give *us* a chance the next time they come. You don’t mind, do you, Teucer? My teas, I know, would fall flat after Thel’s; but if South Glymes is the place for a perfect tea, I don’t want them to think — or you either, Mr Cask — that we in North Glymes haven’t *some* resources!’

Dud saw nothing but weary displeasure in the sharp-cut features of their host. Over the man’s blue eyes there gathered a self-evoked film of uneasy submission, and, when he spoke, his absence of teeth, a defect barely noticeable while his face remained animated, gave him the wizened look of a person of eighty rather than one of seventy-two.

In all comings together of mixed human groups it is as though some presiding super-artist were at work on the psychic relations therein established, moulding this airy intangible substance as if it were the protoplasm of an invisible creation, moulding it awkwardly sometimes into something clumsy and silly, but at other times into some striking and symbolic significance.

This particular quarter-of-an-hour, while they were all waiting for the return of the master of North Glymes, was from this point of view the only complete botch of his delicate material that this ghostly moulder of human contact was destined to make that night.

Dud, after his excitement over Thuella, was aware of a lowering of key, a muting of the emotional pedal, in the vibration between Wizzie and himself. He left her to get on as well as she could, therefore, with Mr Wye, who began politely talking to her when the other three seated themselves side by side, but, as he talked, the disturbed scholar kept casting forlorn glances at his bookshelf, while poor Wizzie looked as if she found him much harder to deal with than her recent interlocutor.

Dud himself took the opportunity of studying the difference between Mrs Dearth and Nancy Quirm. There they sat, these two, both of them under forty, his Horse-Head and his Cemetery Woman, and they puzzled him still; but, after all, he had only known them since last November! He felt as if he had known Wizzie aeons of ages, known her long before he had known his mother or Mona. Yes, for good and ill, pleasure or bane, Wizzie was his girl. That is what she had declared she would be, that eventful All Souls' Day, and he felt that their very dissensions were part of the age-old bond between them, the eternal struggle between man and woman, upon which, much more than upon Claudius's wireless stations, the evolution of life depended.

Mrs Dearth's figure had remained virginal, had retained something of the attraction it must once have had for that unknown Tom who had been choked off by her feminist notions. Dud tried to visualize what that attraction must once have been before her heavy head had acquired its present battered droop, before the dark, deep-set eyes and the full lips had lost the glow and resilience of girlhood.

Thuella's contempt for her sister, the contempt of beauty for the tragic struggle of the intellect, had evidently cried 'Down! down!' so long to

Jenny's beatings against the mysteries that the woman's soul had been impaled on the iron spikes of self-disparagement.

Mrs Quirm, on the contrary, though perhaps a year or two older, had retained in her flesh, in her voice, in her manner, that indescribable feminine essence which the other's restless mind had driven to its last refuge in her lean but flexible limbs.

And Dud, as he turned his contemplative gaze from the one to the other, felt curiously touched and troubled by them both.

Never before had he felt so strongly the ghastly cruelty of the passing of time over women's lives. They both of them (he was clairvoyant enough to know that!) felt *within themselves* as young as when Jenny first lay in the arms of her conservative Tom, and Nancy was first brought home to this disconcerting Glymes.

And what a deadly joke it is, practised by Nature upon her daughters, this feeling of being a susceptible young woman, eager for the flutterings, the touches, the intimations, the sweet idolatries, the airy ways, light as love's own feathers, of the butterflies of love, and yet with a knowledge of the terrible fatality, like a doom engraved in stone, of the lines they carry to their mirrors, the too much flesh *here*, the too little flesh *there*, those folds, those creases, those hollows, those indents, those imprints, those furrows, those erasions, all those warnings that Time delves with its dreadful finger — 'Not for us, not any more for us: pass on your ways' — as if Death's own head had peeped like a jackanapes over the fence of their tender flowers!

There! he distinctly heard the knock at the outer door this time! The fellow must have waited on that first occasion, just as he had imagined his doing, till Thuella came out into the hall.

It was not Thuella now who went to open the two doors but Mr Wye himself. This was a disappointment to our friend as he was unable to see what kind of a greeting passed between the two men. None of the pleasantest, he imagined, when he saw the fixed Voltairean smile on the worried Platonist's toothless mouth changed into a round gutter-pipe hole as he re-entered.

Teucer Wye's mouth began, indeed, to emit a sound that resembled a whistle as he followed his guest into the room. 'Whew! whew!' it susurrated; and, combined with the expression in his blue eyes, the look of this whistling mouth gave our friend a very uneasy feeling.

But trouble was in the air at Glymes just then, literally as well as metaphorically, for ever since they had finished tea the wind had been steadily gathering force; and now, although the window was shut and bolted, it rattled in a most disturbing manner in its wooden frame.

'Was there a wind like this at Maiden Castle?' This remark of Nancy's, addressed in a subdued tone to her husband, received no answer from Urien Quirm.

'Let's have something to scoop it up with, Thuella!' the man exclaimed impatiently. 'And glasses, or anything you like, to drink it out of!'

Meanwhile, since Mr Wye was apparently buried in his shelf of the Loeb Classics and was keeping his slim back, in its elegant peat-smelling coat, turned so long to the company that Dud had time to notice how high his shoulders were and how his left shoulder was higher than his right, Claudius helped Jenny Dearth to move some flower-pots from a little round table and pull it out into the middle of the room.

By this time the door had begun rattling as well as the window, and long-drawn, eerie wailings became audible high up in the chimney. There began too a very singular sound at the top of the house, which for a while completely puzzled No-man. It was neither as loud nor as near as the creakings of doors and rattlings of windows, nor was it so emphatic as the crying of the wind in the chimney; but it struck No-man's ears as a sound with a quality in it completely different from either of these, different indeed from anything he had ever heard.

When he first caught it, it came to him — faint and muted though it was — with the kind of shock that our animal nature receives when it touches the *unknown*. He could not have analysed the nature of this shock, or have even said whether it was menacing or the reverse; it was simply outside his experience. What it made him *think* of — but that meant little: that meant merely the play on it of his own lively imagination — was some 'rushing mighty wind' carrying something before it, sweeping something along with it, lifting what it carried, and again lowering what it carried, in wild eddying gyrating spirals, while every now and then what it carried struck with a thick muffled curious thud — the sort of thud that a living thing might make, or *even part* of a living thing, if the wind were strong enough to toss such an object about like a child's balloon.

What, however, made this sound especially arresting to him was that it had an electric quality. Its passage was like a shock of electricity. No-man felt it in his nerves, in his fibres, in the roots of his hair. He felt it in the pit of his stomach. It was faint at first; but as he listened it became more and more pronounced, and it was with this gathering momentum, this mounting tempo of its approach, that its peculiar *impact of the unknown* was especially connected. It was like a touch of iron in extremely low temperature, when it's hard to say whether it gives the senses a feeling of cold or a feeling of heat. That is to say, our friend could not be sure whether the magnetic shiver in his nerves which was the result of this sound was a shiver of exultation or of uncanny discomfort. It kept mounting up, and the whole thing was always further off than the shrieking of the wind in the chimney, and then, with the same gradation in its recession, it kept subsiding.

It produced, as we have said, upon No-man's imagination the sense of some unknown object, or person, or thing, being carried on the wind to the chimneys of Glymes, carried away again, and again brought back; and the magnetic shiver of its impact upon the place was always accentuated, when it drew near, by these curious muffled thuds, as if, whatever it might be that the powers of the air were bringing to Glymes, they did so in such a way as to make the thing collide with the edge of a roof, with an angle of a gable, with the masonry of a chimney, every time it approached.

At one moment, as he listened, No-man felt certain that what he heard was nothing more than a flock of heavily-winged birds, sea-gulls or starlings or even plovers, but when the thing made that dull bumping sound it struck him as impossible that it should be caused by any feathered body. It came at what seemed fairly regular intervals, but, by reason of its being almost drowned in the nearer sounds, neither the rushing noise nor the bumping noise was always distinct.

Not one of the Glymes inmates took the least notice of this sound, though all of them, Dud thought, must have heard it.

While Thuella was arranging her table-glasses and placing some fruit and biscuits on the tea-table, and while the man from Maiden Castle was mixing the contents of several bottles in that same bowl Dud had seen him use on All Souls' Day, our friend took the opportunity of asking Nancy what that queer sound was upstairs.

'Oh, that's our Glymes ghost,' she said casually, neither smiling nor looking grave. 'It always makes that bumping whenever the wind gets up. You can hear it in both houses. Our landlord says it's a weathercock fallen down between the two roofs that rattles against the tiles when there's any wind; but all the farm-people I've talked to say there never was a weathercock at Glymes. *They* say — you know what they are! — that the noise followed my husband when he moved here from Shaftesbury.'

'Did Mr Quirm come from Shaftesbury?' whispered our friend.

This natural enquiry seemed to disturb the Cemetery Woman. She glanced rapidly at the others; but they were all gathered round Urien, who, having seated himself to mix the ingredients of his bowl, was completely hidden from her eyes. Even Claudius — though with an expression of weary indulgence, like an astronomer watching a glow-worm — was looking over Mrs Dearth's shoulder at what the fellow was doing. As for Teucer Wye, he still held a book in each hand and a third under his arm, and was apparently hovering about his shelf as if unable to decide which of his master's works would best lend itself as a countercharm to this ambiguous elder wine.

'His name's an old Dorset name,' she replied. 'But I only met him after he came here. Do you know, I went to Shaftesbury without his knowledge once — to see — if I could — find out — something!'

They were both on their feet just then, but, as if she were on the verge of betraying a grave secret, she pulled him down upon the one of the two sofas furthest from the spot where the others were standing.

'Yes! find out something definite about him!' she concluded in a burst of nervous confidence.

'Yes, I see — definite, very definite,' murmured No-man absent-mindedly. He responded with this lack of interest because at that moment he became aware that Wizzie was now standing by Thuella's side and that the tall girl's arm was round her waist.

‘But they told me’, Nancy went on, speaking very low and with a grave impressiveness, ‘that he was an adopted child. They said the story was that *old* Mr Quirm had taken him from a Welsh tramp and given him his name; but they looked repulsively malignant, at least one old man did, when they told me this, as if they knew better; but I don’t know what they were hinting at. It had—’

A prolonged wail of the wind in the chimney interrupted her, and once more No-man was conscious of that queer sound in the air above the Glymes roof.

‘Damn this place!’ he thought. ‘I wish to the devil Wizz and I were snug in bed under our picture of water-lilies!’ No one but himself, however, seemed to be worried by the eerie rattlings and creakings that followed each other now over all parts of the building.

Nance *had* paused when there came that particularly startling sound from the top of the house, and had listened to it for a moment; but she had listened with an expressionless face, as if the thing were such an ordinary accompaniment to life at Glymes that it had lost most of its interest. She went on now to relate in detail the story of her first meeting with Enoch Quirm and how it was not till after he had got into correspondence with some Celtic professor at Aberystwyth that he took to calling himself Urien.

No-man’s mind wandered away completely from all this, and all he wanted was for this wine-mixing foolishness to come to an end so that he and Wizz could get away.

It wasn’t so much that the sight of that thin green-and-gold arm, which really did look extraordinarily like a serpent, pressed so close round Wizz’s waist, made him jealous. What it did was to make him amorous — feverishly impatient, in fact, to get Wizz away from all of them!

But as Wizz's figure swayed a little under the tall girl's embrace our friend was able to get the first steady look he had had that night at Urien himself. 'What a face the fellow has!' he thought. 'And what's happened to him? His eyes look different'. In fact, from what he could see of Mr Quirm's eyes as they concentrated themselves with an almost unholy intensity on what the man was about, they no longer had that completely *dead* look which had struck him so forcibly when they first met. It was not that they had come entirely to life, but, whether as a result of the lamplight or from his interest in what he was doing, they did show — at least so No-man fancied — a more human expression than on that afternoon in November. Yes! there *was* some subtle change in the fellow's look. But what a curious individual the chap was, and how suited to this damned Glymes!

No-man leaned towards his companion and spoke in a whisper. Everybody in the room just then, for some obscure reason — probably because of the old primitive human tendency to be silent in the presence of a transaction that smacked of ritual — spoke in a lowered voice, so that Dud's whisper had to be a real whisper. 'Did you say it was with Welsh people that your Shaftesbury old man found him?'

Mrs Quirm, who also had been studying her husband's face from where they sat, turned her head sharply.

'Don't tell a soul', she murmured, 'what I've just told you. Yes, that's how they put it; but, as I've said, the old man I talked to about it — for it seems the elder Quirm's been dead for years and there are none of the family left in Shaftesbury — showed such malignity towards my husband that he made me angry, and I came away feeling suspicious of all he said. My husband himself talks to me about Shaftesbury till I'm sick of the subject. He always calls it Palladour, which he says was its old name; and he talks so much about the nunnery there that you'd think he knew every stick and stone of it, just as if it were our Glymes. He's got a mania for nuns, Enoch has, just as children have for—'

She was interrupted by Mrs Dearth, who was hurriedly pushing her way between the end of her sofa and one of Thuella's decorative cabinets with the intention of reaching her father.

As she brushed by them, Dud, after his fashion, made a mental note of the agreeableness of the scent of her body in its rustling dress. 'Dear old Horse-Head,' he thought, 'you smell like pot-pourri!' And he mentally compared the scent of Jenny's flesh, thus wafted to him as she passed, with that which emanated from the person of his present companion.

He had come to link up this latter emanation with the emotional confidences of which Mrs Quirm showed such a desire to make him the recipient, and he decided again that she differed from the Horse-Head in the fact that her flesh had remained much more youthful. Her soul was heroically enduring. He had divined *that* at their first encounter. It was older, more sophisticated, less idealistic, than Jenny Dearth's, but her delicate flesh had the natural sweetness of a quite young woman. And her breath was sweet too. In all these whisperings to which, as they say, he had been called, he had been struck by this peculiarity. Contrary to the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, Dud's babyish realism made him like or dislike human beings purely according to the flesh; and this girlish emanation, resembling the scent of cowslips, had done more than anything else to keep him courteous and tender to his over-emotional Cemetery Woman.

It must not be supposed that the two ladies had been all this while offering themselves, like a spray of rosemary and a sprig of ground-ivy, for his critical delectation, for Jenny had had time to distract her father from his books; but in any case he was now roused from his comparisons by a general move among the occupants of the room. Urien got up from his seat, put the empty bottles on the ground, and proceeded to carry his brimming bowl to the table where Thuella had placed the glasses.

It was at this moment that snatches of what Mrs Dearth was saying to her father reached our friend's ears, though he had his back to the bookshelf by which they were standing.

'Why not, Daddy? Why on earth not? I'll be here to represent you! And I swear I'll look after Ella, and of course I'll come up and say good-night before we go. There — *do* now, that's a darling! Do, for my sake. You can trust me — I swear you can trust me — about Ella.' What followed, what answer the agitated Platonist made to her, Dud could not tell, but no sooner had Thuella begun carrying round this unusual elderberry wine than he heard the door open and shut, and, looking round, saw that Teucer Wye had disappeared.

He found it very easy to get hold of Wizzie, now that Mr Quirm, liberated from his wine-mixing, was free to gravitate towards Thuella, and he beckoned to the girl to come and sit on the sofa between Mrs Quirm and himself. With their glasses in their hands, full of a wine more deeply coloured as well as more heavily scented than any wine he had ever tasted, the party was free now, being relieved of Mr Wye's presence, to enjoy itself entirely at its own discretion; and with an almost comical precipitancy it divided itself into couples, Claudius with Jenny, Thuella with Mr Quirm, and himself with Wizz; only, Wizz and he had Mrs Quirm on their hands.

'How queerly the chap's hair grows', he thought, 'and how black it is! And yet it isn't negroid in the least. It *is* like some kind of moss, though I'm damned if I know what kind. It's almost as short as mine. I wonder if mine looked like that when I was younger?'

He clinked his glass with Wizz, and, leaning across Wizz, with Mrs Quirm. They all three lifted the dark-coloured stuff to their lips.

‘It’s nice!’ cried Wizzie. ‘It’s like what Sister Bridget used to give her favourite girls on Saturday nights. But it’s much stronger — I can *feel* it going to my head!’

‘I rather like it too,’ remarked our friend. ‘It isn’t as sickly-sweet as I expected, and its smell is delicious. Nancy! you’re barely tasting it! You’re unfair to your lord’s concoctions!’

Mrs Quirm gave him in answer such an intimately challenging smile that he put a question to her that had been worrying the depths of his consciousness for some while. ‘How old is your husband?’ he whispered; and then, leaning towards her across Wizzie’s head, which the girl had bent low down over her wine, he added: ‘Would you say he was twenty years older than I am?’

Nancy pretended to be thunderstruck at this question. She made a silly and rather ugly grimace. ‘Urien is far, far older than me,’ she whispered back, ‘ and I feel as if you and I were the same age. We *are*, aren’t we?’

‘But he hasn’t a grey hair,’ murmured our friend. ‘He *can’t* be so much older. Why, a man can have a son at twenty, and you don’t mean to say that your husband’s old enough to be my father?’

‘He’s old enough to be—’

But at that point Wizzie lifted up her head. ‘Who’s old enough?’ the girl enquired in her natural tone, a tone loud enough to be heard by Urien as he sat by Thuella’s side. The man must have divined that they’d been talking about him, and must have even caught something of their whisperings, for he startled them all by answering Wizzie’s question himself.

‘*I* am, child, *I* am,’ he flung out abruptly. ‘I’m well over sixty, and Nance isn’t nearly forty, so she *might* be my daughter, as she says! She often *acts* as if she were.’ These last words were added with a faint smile.

‘I wasn’t boasting of my youth, Urien,’ our friend’s companion retorted, ‘and I wish you wouldn’t boast of your age.’

She suddenly looked from the window to the door and listened. ‘It has stopped,’ she said, looking at her husband. ‘So you’re right again!’ She put so much earnestness, and even a kind of timid remorse, into these words that Thuella, who had been watching her face closely during this interplay between them, asked her what she meant.

‘The wind,’ she said. ‘You’re too excited tonight, Thel, to notice anything. But the rest of us have been listening to it ever since tea. But it’s gone down now.’

‘Nance!’ cried Thuella. ‘What’s the matter? You’ve got a look as if — Don’t *let* her look at you like that, Urien!’ And the tall girl waved one of her long arms with a sort of exorcising movement, as if to ward off the evil eye from the man at her side.

Urien raised his hand and put the girl’s arm down with a gesture as negligent as if it had been the tail of a kitten. ‘I only told her there’d be a ghost-wind tonight,’ he said quietly. ‘And it’s come and it’s gone — that’s all.’

‘A ghost-wind?’ interjected the voice of Claudius. ‘I’ve never heard of *that* kind, and I’ve lived in Dorchester a good while.’

‘Tell him about it, Urien,’ Nancy cried. ‘And I *will* believe you another time!’ she added, with a proud awe in her tone.

‘I don’t know that there’s anything to tell,’ her husband replied. ‘I’ve noticed, from going so often lately to Maiden Castle, that on certain days — I won’t just now go into the question *of what* days — there’s a wind that blows out there that’s felt nowhere else — unless it takes it into its head to *follow you home*. It’s probably some magnetic disturbance due to quite natural causes. I only call it the ghost-wind to tease Nance, who's so damned superstitious though she pretends not to be.'

While he was speaking, Thuella got up, and she was now going round among them filling up their glasses.

Claudius alone refused to have his glass refilled. 'Talking of Maiden Castle—' ('God, it's coming!' thought No-man. 'I bet there'll be a row. It's a good thing the old man's gone to bed!') ' — I wonder', Claudius said, 'whether any of you people want to subscribe to the excavations this summer? Last summer, as you know—' ('Old ass!' thought No-man. 'He talks to us as if we were in the Corn-Exchange.') ' — a metal plate with a rough figure upon it of Minerva was dug up in the foundations of that Roman temple, and though that may not be important, it *is* important that we should realize how scientific, in the best sense, modern archaeology has become, getting rid of all the old romantic nonsense, and studying the way our ancestors obtained their food supply and their water supply, and how—'

It was Mrs Dearth who had the courage to arrest this ill-timed discourse. She laid her hand boldly on that of her friend, who had risen to his feet to make his blundering appeal and was leaning against the edge of the table.

'Claudius, don't 'ee, my dear! Don't 'ee!' she cried, assuming the Wessex accent to soften her interruption. 'Father's gone to bed. Mr Quirm never subscribes to such things. Ella hates the thought of excavations, and I'm a convert already! Mr No-man will certainly subscribe — he quite agrees with us, just as Wizzie does — but he'll give us the money later, not here, not now, not — at Glymes!'

Dud could not help being touched at the way the Horse-Head traded without question on *his* good-nature among all these egotistical people, and he mentally resolved to subscribe a pound to the excavations. 'This chap with his megalithic phiz and his ghost-winds is just as bad as Claudius.

Why *can't* people live to themselves and let other people alone? Curse it, I believe his damned wine's going to Wizzie's head!'

'But — Jenny — but I wanted — and now you've spoilt it all!' It had been with these rather pathetic protests — for he always showed at his best when his friend asserted her power over him — that Claudius sank back with a deep sigh into his seat; but what startled No-man at that moment had nothing to do with Claudius or Mrs Dearth: it had to do with his own girl.

The young circus-rider, who, ever since Urien had talked about the ghost-wind, had kept her eyes intently fixed upon him, now leapt up from her seat, and, crossing to where Thuella had just resumed her place by his side, perched herself on the sofa's arm, and, leaning over the girl, imprinted a kiss upon her shining head.

Thuella, who seemed — for No-man caught her expression — as surprised as he was himself by this uncharacteristic action, impulsively pulled Wizzie down upon her lap and responded to her gesture in kind.

The whole episode would have been perfectly natural, and fully in keeping with the affectionate rapport that the evening's excitement had engendered between the two, if it had not been for the singular expression that illuminated for a moment the majestic countenance of the man at their side.

Urien, indeed, appeared to No-man at that crucial instant to be in the act of suppressing a mighty glow of triumphant exultation, though it was obscure to our friend what there could be for *him* to triumph about in the mutual affectionate impulse of two young women towards each other. But as it looked down upon the two girls, Urien's face assumed an expression like that of some grandly modelled imperturbable idol, an expression of terrifying complacency.

‘He looks’, thought Dud, ‘as if he’d swallowed them both and were digesting them. Curse his blood, he looks as if they both were inside him!’

It was left to Jenny Dearth to interfere again now. *She* evidently had no more respect for Urien’s portentous lineaments than she had for his talk. She left Claudius, went up to the bowl of elderberry wine, and, replenishing her glass, called out in an authoritative voice: ‘Here, Wizz Ravelston, you haven’t drunk with *me* yet!’

Thuella’s lovely features contracted, and her eyes narrowed under their lids till they became all pupil; but her sister’s appeal was such a public one that she could offer no resistance when Wizzie got up with mechanical docility and went over to Jenny; and Dud, as he watched the two standing and whispering together, decided emphatically, as he had already done tentatively on his way here, that the worst danger to his peace was not threatening him from the Horse-Head’s quarter, or even from Old Funky’s, but from this ghost-winded Glymes.

He began asking Mrs Quirm questions again, this time about what her husband had said with regard to this suddenly rising and suddenly falling wind. ‘I’ve always thought myself,’ he told her, ‘that there are supernatural events in the elements and in the inanimate quite as often as in the human sphere. But what I think is that these inexplicable events have nothing to do with us. They are part of the interplay of powers within the cosmos who regard *us* as of no more importance than shoals of fish or clouds of midges! I have sometimes thought, however, that these elemental powers may be fooled in this, and that our minds are more powerful than they guess! In fact, I’ve sometimes thought that there really are ways — apart from physical science altogether — by which our minds can force the elemental powers to obey them.’ He was not being absolutely truthful when he said he had *sometimes* thought. As a matter of fact, this particular view had never entered his head before; but he had a very agreeable sensation of spiritual authority as he uttered these words in the sympathetic ear of Mrs Quirm.

The woman, however, had so often listened to similar talk from her husband, hints and suggestions, too, of a far more startling character than our friend's mild speculations, that she treated Dud in his own coin and allowed her mind to hover undisturbed round Thuella and Urien, while she smiled into his face, and from her soft skin and whole tender frame there emanated the familiar odour of cowslips.

Both Mrs Dearth and Wizzie had now drawn up their chairs close to the discomforted Claudius; but the reformer, after a considerable pause, during which the lids drooped wearily over his eyes like those of a sulky falcon who has been put back into his cage, turned to Urien with a less oratorical appeal.

'Jenny says I mustn't bother you now, Mr Quirm. But I do beg you to think of it. As a lover of history, I'm sure you'll agree that it *is* significant, in view of our present attempt to overcome Nature by science, that we should find a temple to Minerva at Maiden Castle?'

'There!' thought No-man, who was watching Urien. 'I believe I saw the fellow's eyes come to life!' What rushed into Dud's head as he noted this change was the curious phrase 'rex semimortuus', which he had once come across in some work on the religion of the ancient Celts. 'That's what he is!' he said to himself. 'He's a "rex semimortuus". He's a corpse-god!'

But the man had begun to reply to Claudius. His unwieldy bulk seemed, after his walk, to be less lethargic, though it was just as shabbily and untidily garbed as when Dud had first met him. He wore some sort of faded sweater over his waistcoat, and his corduroy trousers were so dirty as to strike an unseemly note beside Thuella's silken gown. But his general appearance — probably from his exposure to that ambiguous wind on the summit of the great camp — was undoubtedly a shade more prepossessing, while his head, with its queer dusky hair cropped almost as close as No-man's own, struck our friend now as if it were formed not so much of a metallic substance, as his earlier impression of it had been, as of some massed weight of cloudy mist solidified into human lineaments.

'Yes, I've seen,' he remarked quietly, but with a tone, a weight, a volume of power behind his words which made them more significant than their actual content. 'Yes, I've seen that Minerva. It's clearly a votive offering; but it doesn't in the least mean that the temple was Minerva's. But why don't you speak of the *other* votive image they dug up? *That* had nothing to do with Minerva, or with Rome either!'

The unusual elderberry wine had by this time so affected the whole party that there was quite an emotioned tension in Thuella's studio as the man spoke. The picture on the easel looked in the lamplight as if it were a representation of some huge astronomical catastrophe.

But the two daughters of Teucer Wye now demanded simultaneously what the other votive offering was to which he alluded.

Urien's massive features composed themselves like a dark stream on the surface of which an unknown animal has been swimming, leaving curious ripples. 'It's a three-horned bull,' he said, 'with two human torsos impaled on its horns and another one transfixed on its up-curving tail. It is one of those things', he said, 'that go deeper into life than anything in your Dad's Plato. *You've* had, Mr No-man, haven't you' — and the man turned courteously, but a little wearily, to our friend, as if he were tired of having to justify himself by argument— 'visions of life that suggest our being impaled on the horns and tail of darkness? I don't want to frighten any of you girls — especially Nance, who's so terribly superstitious — but those horns and that tail, carrying those three half-men, seem to me — Well! it's not classical symbolism anyway; it goes back further. And when you talk of science, you must remember that these things are like dark-finned fish embedded in ice. *They have life in them that can be revived*. And I must say this to you, Mr Cask: it is *not* science than can revive them. But go on with your excavations. I saw the place last summer when your friends were at work. They, and the scratchings they made, were — but I don't want to be insulting. Go on with your excavations. But you must remember when you're dealing with *that* place you're vivisecting something different from a dog! But it doesn't matter. It's only a few hundred years against twenty thousand. It doesn't matter. Besides, the secret escapes you! What you and your kind call evolution, *I* call creation: and it would do no harm to just remind you that those who create can also destroy!' His voice sank, sank like a heavy pebble thrown into deep water, and there was silence in the room.

Something about this hush (for the wind — ghost-wind or thunder-wind — had completely subsided) made our friend think of his attic room; and then, perhaps because some piece of flooring upstairs creaked as Mr Wye crossed his bedroom, the fancy entered his head that he could hear his own bed in High East Street creaking. And the effect of this fancy upon him was to bring his wraith-love of those ten half-insane years vividly before his mind.

Had that deserted creation of his morbid sensuality not even yet dissolved into air? It occurred to him, now, that on several different occasions, as he sat writing at his window, he had heard such sounds. But that was nothing! Most old pieces of furniture under particular conditions emitted queer noises.

He looked round furtively at Mrs Quirm's face, and then at that of Jenny Dearth. Each woman was watching with a strange and complicated intensity the face of her mate. It occurred to him as he observed them, while low-voiced desultory talk about the nature of various Wessex winds passed between Urien and Claudius, how different it would have been if their men felt for these two women the sort of concentrated devotion that made him alert for every change on Wizzie's quaint puckered face. The feeling of his emotional superiority to these two great fanatics gave our friend a whimsical satisfaction, and he tried to imagine whether he would feel for his girl what he felt now if Wizz were as near his own age as Nancy and Jenny were.

In the pursuit of this characteristic speculation — for Dud's mind was always debouching down shameless vistas of the improbable — he found himself wondering what he would feel if either Nance or Jenny had been the object of his superior emotion. They were both younger than he. They were well under forty. He glanced furtively at Nancy's white neck, as, with her head turned, she contemplated Urien. It was a soft neck. He imagined himself pressing back her chin and kissing her throat. He would certainly enjoy that curious cowslip smell of her identity best of all in this way. Then he allowed himself to gaze for a while at Jenny's legs, as she sat near Wizzie with one knee crossing the other, and it struck his mind that there was a most tender piquancy in the speculation as to what sort of expression would soften her horse-head face if he laid his hand on those youthful-looking limbs!

It was at this point that he suddenly became uneasy as he watched Thuella and Wizzie. What he really had begun to be conscious of, as they all went on drinking the man's wine, was some subtle undercurrent between Urien and *both* the two young women. His shameless but not very astute powers of analysis were baffled by this understanding between them which seemed to have originated in Urien's talk about Maiden Castle, and he could not even feel sure whether its nature implied a common attitude between the two girls towards Urien or a common attitude between Urien and Thuella towards Wizzie.

Whatever it might be that was up, it was at any rate something that made him feel obscurely uncomfortable. It fell in with the almost animal-like inkling of danger — of danger to his peace — which had come to link itself with Glymes; and it came over him, as all four women listened in silence to the rambling argument between the two men, that his anxiety about tomorrow's visit from Old Funky was quite thrown into the background by this new and far more obscure menace.

He began to feel an unexpected sympathy for their absent host. Was it from something of the same sort, from something that puzzled and troubled his mind in just this obscure way, that Teucer Wye had taken refuge upstairs?

He began to wonder whether those creakings he had heard, which, in his whims and his fancies, had brought his own attic room into his mind, were simply due to the distracted Platonist's sleeplessness in his room above. Was the poor man intently listening to every word that was uttered down here? Were they all deliberately keeping a nervous scholar awake with their silly chatter about excavations and ghost-winds?

If Mr Wye felt, when he saw Urien and Thuella together, what he himself now began to feel when he saw Wizzie's little frowning face turned so constantly to that damned bloke's great swarthy mug, it was no wonder he was upset. What a life that dapper little toothless beggar must be leading in this house!

'I'll get in touch with the chap,' Dud decided. 'I'm cursed if I don't sound him one of these days. If we're to be in the same box over these damned obscurities, we might just as well stand together. What a fool I was when I thought I could go on with Thuella and yet have Wizz! I'll be lucky if I can keep Wizz to myself among them all, and that's the truth.' And our friend fell into one of those extremely disagreeable trains of thought that come occasionally to the most egoistic among us, in which we feel ourselves, even in the presence of those nearest to us, in some mysterious way *left out in the cold*.

And then he too turned his gaze, as all the rest were doing, upon Urien's astonishing visage. 'The man's still drinking that precious wine of his', he said to himself, 'but he doesn't *look* drunk. God! I've never realized how tragic his face is! And it's not only his dead eyes. He looks as if he were *sodden* with some abominable suffering. He looks as if he were arguing with Claudius from about a tenth of his real consciousness, while the rest of it hangs suspended in some colossal instrument of torture, an instrument whose very enormity keeps it from being seen. No, I can't fathom you, you great staring image. It's no use pretending I can!'

It was at this point in his cogitations that he felt a desire to go out for a minute; and rising up rather stiffly and awkwardly — for he had a touch of what children call pins and needles — he apologized to Nancy and moved to the door.

As he turned the handle, he caught Wizzie's eye and gave her a little reassuring nod, while he noticed that Jenny Dearth glanced hurriedly at the ceiling as if afraid that, in his search for what he sought, he might disturb her father. He had hardly closed the door behind him, however, when it was opened again from within, and none other than Urien himself stood beside him.

'Come to *our* place,' the man murmured. 'You'll wake old Wye if you go upstairs.'

But our friend had a longing for air. ‘How do they get *out?’* he asked abruptly, looking at the door into the kitchen and the door into the passage between the houses.

‘In there,’ replied the man, with an approving glance at the kitchen where he had been given his tea. ‘And the way upstairs is there too. It’s the same with us, only we’ve got a lavatory down below. I’ll lead the way, if you don’t mind.’ He opened the door into the passage, and our friend could not help muttering the word ‘Dormarth’ as he followed the fellow’s bulky form across that unlively threshold.

The lavatory referred to by his guide turned out to be next to the study, and Dud, suffering a strong revulsion against the whole place, instinctively turned to the front door.

‘I’d sooner go outside, if it’s the same to you,’ he muttered. ‘I like the open air.’

The impression he got from the atmosphere of the night, when he returned across the little garden, was hardly distinguishable from what he had felt that afternoon about the quality of the day. No stars were visible, no moon was visible. The wind had dropped, and all was dark and hushed. Once more Dud received an impression as of something emerging into premature birth in the warm moist air.

He was anything but pleased to see the figure of Urien awaiting him outside the door. He had already endured much more of human society that night than suited his temper, and though he felt interested in Urien, and even faintly drawn to him, what he wanted at this particular moment was only to get Wizzie away from them all and have her in bed, safe by his side, under the water-lily picture.

‘Now we’re out here,’ said Urien, as soon as they were together, ‘come a step this way, will you? I want to show you something.’

Dud cursed him in his heart, but, as was his wont with annoying people, he did what he was asked to do, while at the same time he made a rapid tour of his own mental fortress, pulling down portcullises, raising drawbridges, and finally retreating to his inmost keep, where he shut himself in.

Urien led him to a small barn that had a loft above it, reached by a narrow flight of stone steps.

‘That’s Wye’s,’ the man remarked, pointing to the main entrance to the barn. ‘We’re above and he’s below. That’s one of his grievances, that the landlord didn’t let him have the whole affair.’

It was so dark that Dud had considerable difficulty in feeling for the steps up which the dusky figure of his guide now mounted with the easy assurance of a great furtive tom-cat. When he reached the top, he found Mr Quirm already in the interior of the place, which smelt strongly of rotten apples.

The man was busy striking match after match as he tried to light a stable lantern — containing a burnt-down candle-end — which hung from a hook.

Dud, who tried to help him, succeeded in extricating the wick of this used-up candle from the grease in which it was drowned, and it crossed his consciousness, as they fumbled over this job with equal indifference to the risk of they ran of setting the place on fire, that there was a disturbing resemblance between their methods of going to work.

When the lantern was at last really alight they both straightened their long backs and stared for an uneasy moment at each other.

Dud had never had a chance of looking at quite such close quarters into Urien’s face, and, although what he saw was affected by the Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro of the lantern’s rays, it did strike him that the man was much older than he appeared to be from a distance. And as they stared at each other, both a little hypnotized by the strangeness of the occasion, there moved at the bottom of No-man’s mind the same wild fantasy that he had dallied with once or twice before, not taking it seriously but playing with it as you might, just for sport, pass a finger through a candle-flame: what, in the monstrous madness of destiny, if none other than Enoch Quirm had been his mother’s unknown lover?

Dud’s animal instinct, which was always his own interpretation of the blind impulse of his intrinsic personality, still dodged, as it had done when the mad fancy first blew like a shard-borne beetle into his head, the overpowering notion that this fellow was actually his begetter. His real life had always been a thing of secret, arbitrary, fastidious cerebral sensations, and one of the most brooded-over of these sensations had been his reaction to the enigma of his mother’s past. For the personage staring at him now, out of the lights and shadows thrown by this guttering candle, to have been his mother’s lover was a startling enough thought; but from going a step further than this, even in his imagination, some overpowering force in himself barred his way. It seemed to rise up, this impulse against going further, like some vast dim slippery beast out of the lake of his soul. To touch this beast, even with the tip of a finger, would have been an indecent indulgence. It would have meant a vision of his mother in the arms of this fellow — yes! in the act of being possessed by him — an image at which the gorge rose.

Yes, the man’s face *was* an old face, for all his black hair; and for all its majesty of lineaments, its skin, too, was full of blotches and creases that this damned lantern-light drew forth. It was a sodden face, when you looked closely at it, a monstrous and sodden face, and yet it had touched his mother’s, pressed itself against his mother’s, slobbered its saliva over his mother’s!

No! He could imagine this man his mother's lover; but when it came to — Why! this great leathery face must have lifted itself up from touching hers at the very moment — But no! he must not, he *would* not, conjure up any more.

It was the man himself who was the first to bring this hypnotic stare to an end. He moved across to the further side of the loft and began striking a match there. The danger of this proceeding seemed more evident to No-man from where he stood by the lantern than it had done when he was helping the fellow; and he called out, 'Take care, sir! You'll set the place on fire!'

At the sound of his voice the other looked up from what he was about and trampled violently on the match he had dropped.

No-man approached him, and he lit another match. With the help of this tiny flame — though it only existed long enough for our friend to notice that the man's hair *was* grey above his ears — Urien found a small grocer's box, by the side of which he knelt down on the littered floor.

'Light another!' he murmured, handing the match-box to Dud.

Our friend obeyed him, and, covering the flame with his hand, held it close to the box. Pushing open the lid, Urien extracted a roundish object wrapped up in dirty newspaper. Lighting yet another match, No-man caught a glimpse of a fashion advertisement on the paper, representing a woman in evening dress. Had he known anything about ladies' dresses, he would have been struck in a flash by the remoteness from modern style of what this picture showed, but as far as he was concerned the gown in question might have been displayed in any Dorchester shop that very day. Tucking the object under his arm, however, Mr Quirm now went straight to the lantern and blew out the light. This done, and with a parting glance round the darkened loft, he led the way down the stone steps.

‘Here, my lad,’ he said quietly, as soon as our friend had descended, ‘here’s something that belongs to you.’ With this he handed Dud the package, made a sort of guttural rumble in his throat that might have been a deep-drawn sigh or a sardonic chuckle, and added laconically, ‘I knew your mother in the old days.’

No-man took the package without a word. Again and again that night this whole transaction, and the man’s tone as he said, ‘I knew your mother’, repeated itself in every detail in his mind. But *now*, standing by this man’s side as they both instinctively turned, before re-entering the house, to inhale the hushed, damp, birth-exhausted air of that cloudy night, his chief feeling was a feeling of unreality. He felt as if all that had happened had happened not objectively at all but purely in his own mind.

As he glanced at the vague dehumanized lineaments of the man beside him — every particular feature blurred, and even the general massiveness of the dark head hardly distinguishable from the superincumbent gloom — he recognized clearly enough that what made the whole event seem so unreal, what gave it this effect of being composed of mental stuff rather than of palpable substance, was the fact that from his first encounter with this fellow he had had an inkling of something on the wind in connection with him, something likely to affect the course of his own life.

It was this, then, rather than any new and disturbing rapport between Thuella and Wizzie, that Glymes had been hiding from him in its lap, waiting for the moment of revelation.

‘What are you writing now?’ The words came naturally and spontaneously from the man’s mouth, but they struck No-man’s ear with a sharp and naked impact, struck it as if he had just taken off a diver’s helmet and along with the helmet had put away from him the humming and drumming weight of fathoms of deep-sea water!

‘The truth is,’ he said to himself, ‘that damned elderberry wine has gone to my head.’ And he hugged the parcel closer, crumpling the pretty lady’s outmoded gown mercilessly against his ribs. ‘I’m trying my hand at a romance about Dorchester’, he replied, and his own voice rang harsh and sour in his ears, like some acrid, dusty sound on a hot early afternoon on a suburban road, ‘and I’m making that unfortunate girl, Mary Channing, my heroine.’

He was surprised, and not particularly pleased, to receive a congratulatory thump between the shoulder-blades as the man commented on this. ‘Bravo, lad! That’s the game. Give it ’em, the brutes, give it ’em, hip and thigh!’

The unconventional and familiar tone which Mr Quirm had adopted since the exchange of that parcel — and Dud was not without a shrewd guess as to its contents — especially his use of the word ‘lad’, thrust our friend towards that repellent vision of his begetting from which his whole nature recoiled. Had this fellow known everything, then, all the while? Was it for *him* that the cemetery people were keeping that grave alongside of his lost three?

‘I must keep my head,’ he thought, as he stood there; and the extremely uncomfortable intimation slid into his mind that his mother’s lover was, on *his* side, contemplating putting his great fist on his shoulder.

This nervous feeling that the man was only waiting to make the grand revelation that would bring them fatally and finally together, held No-man spell-bound.

‘Damn it!’ he said to himself, ‘I’ve got to face it, if it *is* the truth. And, after all, fathers are nothing! A man could get a hundred bastards in one year. It’s who your *mother* is that matters. For nearly a year you live inside your mother. Your father, for all you know, and for all you care, might give you bears and wolves, tigers and chimpanzees, as your brothers and sisters! He might scatter his seed like the dew; he might impregnate Thuella's clouds! And the early races felt this. In some savage tribes the mother's brother is the — Yes, and in old Wye's Plato no one knows who their father is!'

Thus did Dud seek, by one mental device after another, to dodge the disconcerting and indeed repulsive notion that this trampish medicine-man had actually slept with his mother. He began hurriedly inventing fantastic excuses for getting back to the Wyes' end of the house. None of these seemed appropriate; but this standing in silence and staring through the night towards Maiden Castle, while at any moment the beggar's hand might descend on his shoulder, had reached an intolerable point. 'There's something grotesque', he thought, 'about the relation of father and son. It's outside Nature.'

For a moment he struggled desperately to find a rational defence for his loathing of the process of generation. *'Parthenogenesis* is the natural thing! That's why the act of love is monstrous and ridiculous. Lust isn't comic. Lust is grave and sacred. And there's nothing but poetry in conception. It's the act of paternity that's so horribly humorous. Monstrous and comic. That's what it is. An interference with the beautiful processes of parthenogenesis. That's why Christ's mother was, *and must always be*, a virgin. He wasn't less of a male for that. He wasn't a woman for that! The great spirit of the cosmos poured through him. He was porous to the spirit — that's what he was — because there was no joke in his begetting,'

'Well,' said the big man at his side. 'We must be getting back to them, I suppose. Put that thing down here.' And he indicated a stone slab at the door. 'You won't forget it, I warrant. You can fix it on, *like the other*, with a little glue, when you get back to that room of yours.'

No-man placed the package on the stone; but neither of the men seemed in a hurry to re-enter the house.

'I told her it would be like this — a dead calm night after that wind.'

'Told her what?' asked No-man, his mind so busy with the mystery of procreation that he spoke at random.

'And that they all came to life on a night like this.'

'Came to life?' echoed our friend. And he thought to himself, 'Is it only my viciousness that's made me loathe the thing so, or is it really the monstrous joke it appears, the joke at the very bottom of creation?'

'Just think of it, lad,' went on the other. 'Mai-Dun, Poundbury, Maumbury Rings, all coming slowly back to life! I don't mean the dead in them.' And the man, lowering his voice, drew nearer to our friend, drew so near, in fact, that the sour smell of his body under his seldom changed clothes produced a physical revulsion that affected No-man like a wafture from decomposing mortality. 'I mean—'

'Let's go in,' interrupted our friend, turning brusquely from the misty night as if from a graveyard. 'How *could* Mother', he thought, as they re-entered the house, 'have been seduced by such a person? But perhaps he was different in those days!' The impulse to go further in his thoughts, to go the one step further, had become for him like a menace that *had* to be obliterated, suppressed, reduced to nothing. The second it heaved up, pushing him forward, he retorted by a quick mental act of deliberate negation. It was as if he set a machine at the back of his mind automatically working with a dark secret hammer that fell with an interior thud, 'Down, down, down!', at each stir of that suspected impulse.

Back again in Thuella's boudoir studio, he became conscious that the atmosphere was even more tense than when they had left the room. 'Claudius has been holding forth!' he said to himself, as his companion sank down by Mrs Quirm’s side, and he himself took a seat by Wizzie. ‘He’s been agitating the poor Horse-Head.’

The deep-set eyes of Jenny Dearth did indeed betray a trouble of soul that was painful to see. Whether this was due to the fact that Thuella was again whispering to Wizzie, or whether it was entirely owing to what Claudius had been saying, our friend could not decide; but the air of the room was certainly charged with dangerous electricity. ‘I believe it *is* Claudius and not Thuella,’ he said to himself, when, with the air of a man drawing a weapon out of a wound preparatory to repeating a blow, the ruddy hawk-beaked reformer, who was now standing with his back to the fire, began talking to Urien and himself as if they were an overflow from an already dazed and confounded audience.

‘I was saying that no one has a right to call himself a Communist, or to ask to be admitted into the movement, until he’s worked with his hands among other labourers and knows what manual work is. I don’t say that an agitator’s *not* a worker; but in my opinion no one can agitate with a clear conscience who has not known what is is to work.’

It was Jenny Dearth, not Urien, who replied to him now, and our friend was startled by the amount of feeling that her tone betrayed. ‘How can you talk so foolishly, Claudius? You know perfectly well that you work harder than any workman. You never rest for a moment! It’s what I can’t bear, this fanatical, unpractical talk. Everyone knows what your life is!’

‘But he’s not talking *practically*, Jin; he’s just theorizing,’ burst in Thuella. ‘He’s not talking about *himself*! Why do you always drag people’s words down so? Of course we know he couldn’t stand the strain of manual work for a day. Why haven’t you more sense of humour? It’s what you always do, taking things so literally! He was just theorizing, like we all may do sometimes. You make everything so personal.’

Claudius fixed his eyes upon the tall girl with an expression of amused indulgence.

‘No, I wasn’t theorizing, Thel,’ he said slowly and gently. ‘It’s a serious thing to me, and not an easy thing either. Jenny’s quite right about that. And it is a new thing too. I used to feel just as Jenny does about it.’

‘And do you know, Thel, what was the wonderful influence that worked this wicked madness?’ Mrs Dearth spoke with such harsh bitterness that everyone except Urien stared at her in astonishment. Urien’s own eyes — it interested Dud to notice — remained fixed on Claudius. ‘He’s wondering’, our friend decided, ‘whether his Maiden Castle spirits want him to answer the fellow or to let him be!’

‘Don’t ‘ee, dear! Don’t ‘ee say such things!’ murmured Claudius, making a quaint little deprecatory motion towards Jenny with one of his hands, a gesture that in some odd way made our friend think of a marble orator in Westminster Abbey.

But Mrs Dearth took no heed. ‘It was Dumbell,’ she cried in a harsh voice. ‘That’s who it was — poor little old Dumbell, when he had his Blackshirt meeting down here. Claudius went to it with his radical friends — some of them Communists — and they worried Dumbell with questions the poor dear, of course, couldn’t answer. At last he got red in the face, like he does when Thel teases him, and accused Claudius of knowing nothing about working-men because he’d never worked with his hands. That’s the great, profound, spiritual reason behind all this silliness, a “tu quoque” from poor old Dumbell. So now you all know! It’s rankled with him — yes, it has, Claudius, and you know it — from that night on. Dumbell was staying with me, and you should have heard the way Claudius went at him after supper that evening! But of course the lad had no more idea of what he’d set going than of why he wears a black shirt.’

‘Dumbell’s our brother, Mr No-man,’ Thuella threw in. ‘He’s still quite young, but he’s already married, and he’s already high up among the Blackshirts. We all hate his wife — don’t we, Jin? — and we all love *him*, but even Dad doesn’t take him seriously.’

‘*I* take him seriously, Mr No-man!’ said Claudius. ‘I’ve always considered this Fascist business is much more than the last ditch of capitalism. And it’s the more serious just because it is so evasive and indefinable. It springs from youth — I’m sure of that. It satisfies some craving that modern civilization has suppressed. It’s as silly to say that the leaders who gain by it *account for its existence* as to say that tyrannical popes account for the existence of the Church. We all ought to study its psychology minutely. It isn’t an invention, it’s a natural growth. Personally I think it’s a disease, but that’s only a name for something absorbing and dangerous.’ His hawk’s eyes hovered over them all with a sad assurance. Then they settled on Thuella’s picture and assumed a pensive as well as a contemptuous expression. He seemed to be seeking an explanation of Fascism in the painting of clouds.

‘Sometimes I think, Claudius,’ cried Mrs Dearth, ‘you positively love destruction. Sometimes I think that for all your fuss over our welfare you really *hate* us, and that’s why you’re so fond of machinery. You’d like a world of robots better than a world of men and women, for then you wouldn’t have even to consider such an irrelevant intrusion into scientific problems as a human heart!’

Our friend could not help feeling sorry for the man’s flushed face, as its heavy pendulous eyelids seemed almost to close as it sank forwards with a heavy droop under the woman’s anger.

‘I — don’t — think — Mrs Dearth, you’re attacking him for the right thing,’ murmured Urien in a thick husky voice, as if he were just beginning to feel the influence of his own wine. ‘What’s wrong with him is not his changing his life to confound your brother Dunbar, but not changing it enough! I would like to see Mr Cask give up all his philanthropies and live like a hermit on Tinkleton Heath. I’d like to see him’ — here Urien’s low hoarse voice gathered weight and volume— ‘and I’d like to see you all — especially my dear Nance here — go into a Trappist monastery for five years!’

‘Why do you’ — and to Dud’s astonishment he found that it was Wizzie who was speaking— ‘want to put us into a convent? I was taught in a convent a few years ago, and I shall never—’

‘Because, child,’ interrupted Urien, and Dud was not entirely pleased when it struck him that Urien’s dead eyes seemed to embrace in some queer way both the young girls, ‘because the only thing worth living for is what the old monks called contemplation. Not, mind you, what the mystics called by that name, but what the monks meant by it, which was quite a different —’

‘Stop, sir, stop, Mr Quirm!’ interrupted Claudius, his features quivering with wrath and his voice raised high. ‘There’s one thing I *won’t* allow while I am present, and that is the putting of mediaeval ideas into young women’s heads! If you’re going on with any more monastic hocus-pocus, let me know it, and I’ll say good-night. I can stand a good deal; but when I hear—’

‘Hush! What’s that?’ cried Thuella sharply, leaping to her feet. Her mouth was open and her lips were twisted awry — at least that’s how it seemed to Dud — as she stood listening and staring at the door.

Both Wizzie and Nance were on their feet too. He himself and Urien were the only ones still seated, and they looked questioningly at each other, Urien’s eyebrows a little raised and his own contracted. The sounds were now unmistakable, even through the thick walls. Someone was moving about the house. ‘It’s Dad!’ whispered Jenny Dearth, rushing to the door; but, before she reached it, it was flung open, and there on the threshold stood Teucer Wye.

The old man was in his pyjamas, which had the effect of making him look even frailer and smaller than he did in his clothes. On his head was a loose white night-cap, resembling the curious head-dress worn in so many of his portraits by the poet Cowper. His feet were bare, and their appearance in the lamplight gave No-man a queer shock. Not only did they gleam with a rather ghastly whiteness on Thuella’s carpet, but their size and shape were those of a woman’s.

‘Dad! Dear Dad! We’ve waked you with our disputes! But we’re going now, aren’t we, Claudius? Aren’t we, Mr No-man? Wizzie and I will get our things on at once!’ And Jenny moved as if to pass him in the doorway.

But the little man waved her back, taking no notice of her words. He advanced into the middle of the room and began speaking, addressing himself solely to Urien, who had got up now and was standing by his wife’s side.

With some vague feminine notion in her head of preventing the scene from being overheard, although everybody in Glymes was in the room, Thuella moved quickly to the door and closed it quietly.

A sulky revulsion, a sullen withdrawal from all these people, took possession of Dud as the flood of hysterical words poured forth from the absurd little figure in pyjamas. Uncivil though it was in the presence of his angry host, he sank down upon the nearest of Thuella’s sofas and tried to detach himself from the whole scene.

Wizzie alone seemed aware of this reaction of his, and, while the old man gave himself up to his orgy of indignation, he caught her casting a frowning and disapproving glance at his recumbent position, as if he were rudely detaching himself from a situation to which she felt they were both committed.

'Isn't it enough that you should force yourself into my house when you know what I feel', the old man was saying, 'without raising this disturbance and keeping me awake half the night? Take your devil's brew away, can't you, and don't come into the place again! No, don't you say a word, Thuella. I've had enought of it, I tell you! If I'm not to say what goes on in my own house, what am I? I'll tell you what I am, you proud child — no! you needn't glare at me like that, for I've done with you and your ways — *I'm your father*. That's what you seem to have forgotten, you and your friends! I'm your father. I know what you're going to say, so you needn't make that face at me with your painted mouth. Yes, I know I've got no money. I know you pay for all this. I know how long you've paid for it, too, and everybody — in — the — place—'

Here a choking sob made his voice inaudible for a second, but it rose again in a high-pitched wail: 'And they all, I can see that, hold me as cheap as you do! I — know — myself—'

Here his voice broke again, but No-man was able to catch his words: ' — yes, I do — what I am: an old man taking his bread, taking his lodging, taking his — his chair by the fire — from a woman's hand. Yes, don't speak now, Jenny, for I know what you are. You needn't tell me! I've always known you'd help me with your last penny. Oh, I ought to have come to you — only to you — long ago — long, long ago. It was — it was that...' Here his voice sank so low that Dud lost several words. '... my nature, my weakness, my...'

His voice sank again, and, what with its high pitch and the toothless gums through which it whistled, something stirred in our friend's stomach that forced him to stand up, that forced him to take a step towards that grotesque figure.

And what now began to happen struck Dud to the heart, for it was one of the most pitiful things he had ever seen.

Thuella, who had been listening all this while with an angry contempt in her eyes, deliberately walked past her father and went out of the room, returning in a moment with her arms full of her sister's and Wizzie's cloaks and hats. Wizzie, though she kept her frowning face towards the little man in the middle of the room — whistling there through his toothless mouth the humiliations of a lifetime — allowed the tall girl to help her into her cloak, and even began, though without the aid of a mirror, to put on her hat.

Thuella's move had instantaneous effect too upon Mr and Mrs Quirm, Nancy whispering something to her husband and then something to Thuella, after which both of them went out through the door which the girl had left open. They could be heard opening and shutting the heavy barrier between the two houses.

Thuella had now drawn Wizzie to one of her mirrors. Their faces were reflected there side by side. The elder girl was helping Wizzie with her troublesome hat, while from what our friend could see of Miss Ravelston's reflection she looked extremely discomposed.

He himself felt moved beyond his wont, beyond what he supposed he could possibly feel for a person like Mr Wye. But there was something beyond the pitiful, something that, if it did not reach the tragic, came very near it, in the way the old man went on with his hysterical monologue in spite of the fact that the Quirms had left the house and in spite of the fact that no one was listening to him except Jenny Dearth and Claudius.

Our friend himself found it difficult to listen with concentrated attention. He wished devoutly that Jenny, who was now standing close by his side, would stop him, but the main stream of his talk was still directed to Thuella's beautiful back and the nape of her shining head, and it crossed Dud's consciousness that it was not altogether disagreeable to the elder sister to listen to this public exposure of the old man's grievances against the younger.

There did seem to Dud something curiously shocking in the lack of moral weight in Teucer Wye's hysterical wrath. That this lack of moral weight coincided with a lack of *physical* weight was of course only a heart-breaking accident, but it certainly increased the ineffectualness of the man's pitiful emotion.

'Of course,' thought Dud, 'now he's got started, he can't stop, as happens with us all. I dare say he's burst out like this many times before, and talked to Thuella's back and Thuella's sofas and mirrors. Oh, why *doesn't* the Horse-Head stop him? I shall stop him myself in a second!'

The scene, indeed, grew steadily more unbearable as it went on; and it soon became clear that Claudius was as much moved as our friend, for he kept raising his hand and trying to interject a word. There was something ghastly about those womanish bare feet and that whistling voice, and what Dud found most unbearable was the way the neatly brushed fringe of hair on the man's forehead was all tousled and ruffled under the great night-cap. He looked like some disordered waxwork or marionette that had been brought to life by a magician and was now pouring forth all the high-pitched grievances of doll life without being able to touch any really comprehending human attention.

'Father! Dear Father!' Jenny Dearth kept crying. 'Thuella's not listening. Thuella doesn't care!'

That the old man should come and live with them in Friary Lane was what Claudius now seemed imperatively advocating. 'Oh, yes, Father, dear,' Jenny pleaded. 'I'll work for you, I'll take care of you. Come to Friary Lane and leave Thel to her pictures.'

'I've *tried* to please you,' the wretched little man wailed on as Thuella and Wizzie turned from their colloquy at the mirror and stood side by side at the fire. 'I've given up my life to you. I've dressed to please you. I eat what you eat. I drink what you drink. I've not a room of my own, not a table of my own. And you've — you've—'

Here Jenny cried out to her sister: 'Stop looking like that at him, Thel! If you can't answer him, stop looking at him like that! Do you want to drive him mad?'

'You've put—' he went on, in the most piteous tone he had yet used, 'you've put your cold cream on my shelf, *next to my books*!*'*

This singular accusation evidently represented some outrage to his nature deeper than all the rest, for he repeated it over again with a reproach in his voice that sounded to Dud like the inhuman plaint of all the ill-used dolls in the world.

Then and there Dud made up his mind that he would hunt through all the Dorchester shops till he found a bookcase worthy of the works of Plato. He threw a malevolent look at Thuella, but he couldn't catch her eye. She was now coolly bending over her easel, pointing out something to Wizzie.

'You beautiful devil!' he thought. 'If I don't put a spoke into your wheel for this—'

But the word about the cold cream was clearly the climax of Teucer Wye's outburst. He went on mumbling a little more, but they were incoherencies addressed to himself, and he allowed Jenny to take him by the arm; but the wrong done to his books must suddenly have swept over his mind, for, shaking off Jenny's restraining hand, he rushed to his shelf, snatched up a piece of bric-à-brac that had invaded it, and flung it full at

Thuella’s picture! Instead of hitting the picture, however, the missile struck the edge of the easel and rebounded into the seat of a chair, where it lay intact. It was a small jug of the kind that is given a human shape, and, tilted now against the chair-back, it cast a Punch-like eye of contempt at the little man in pyjamas who had presumed to lay hands on it, as much as to say, ‘I’ll soon be back among your books, and, by gad, I’ll jostle them!’

For some reason there was a general feeling of relief after the old man had made this gesture, ineffective though it had proved.

It was clearly a satisfaction to Claudius, who picked up the grinning jug and placed it on the table along with its mistress’s scent-bottles; and it was while he was doing this that Dud got an opportunity to catch Thuella’s eye, and he kept wondering till he got to sleep that night whether he had managed to throw into the look he gave her anything worthy of the indignation he felt.

He spoke to Wizzie then, telling her to remind him, when they were actually off, not to forget something Mr Quirm had given him, and when he turned round, wondering if he dared to give the agitated old man a friendly good-night, he found that Jenny had got him out of the room.

Their walk back from Glymes that night was a silent one. There was a manifest tendency in both Claudius and Dud to cling to their particular woman and avoid general conversation.

Our friend was scarcely surprised to find, as he held Wizzie on one arm and clutched the heraldic head under the other, that the girl took a very different view of Teucer Wye’s outburst than he did himself.

Wizzie’s view was that the old man’s clever and lovely daughter was sacrificing her chances of being married in order to keep a tiresome and fussy old gentleman from becoming a pauper. ‘He needn’t have come down like that just because he couldn’t sleep. We all have our bad nights, and I know it's hard, but he should remember that he was the one who invited us here, and it was wrong of him to go to bed just because he was angry with that Mr Quirm. But, do you know, I like Mr Quirm very much! Do you know who he reminds me of? Of the priest in that convent where I lived when I was little. That priest was dirty and untidy and had funny eyes; and he had the same tone as Mr Quirm.'

'What tone?'

'Well, it's hard to tell anyone exactly, a thing like that; but I'd say a tone that goes *through* a person, if you know what I mean; and is both frightening and exciting. Thel feels the same as I do about him.'

'You call her Thel now?'

'Why not? It's what *she'* — and Wizzie made a gesture towards the two figures in front of them— 'calls her.'

'I think Thuella must have behaved abominably to that old man for him to get so worked up.'

'I hate silly old men like that,' said Wizzie, hugging herself with a deliberate little shudder. *'He's* a gentleman, of course, and the other's a poor man, but I'll tell you who he made me think of as he stood there with that thing on his head cursing Thel. He made me think of Old Funky!'

Dud felt outraged by this remark. It was not the first time that Wizzie had shocked him by revealing a point of view staggeringly different from his own, but this confusion of values struck him as abominable. It gave him a sense of a gulf between them that he could see no way of bridging.

'Well, what am I do to tomorrow?' he retorted. 'I tell you what I'm inclined to do: just pack him off and let him do his worst! I don't see how he can hurt us.'

If she had shocked him by comparing Mr Wye with Old Funky, it was she who was troubled now. She actually clutched him with both hands and made him stand still.

'If you want to ruin us,' she said in a low intense voice, 'if you want to drive me away from you, that's the way to do it.' Then in a different tone, a tone of shrill supplication: 'Give him the fiver, there's a dear; give it to him, for Christ's sake! He may go then and never come back. They won't be round here again till Whitsun anyway. Maybe not till August. Give it to him, for Christ's sake. If you *don't'* — and she lowered her voice to a desperate whisper— 'I can't stand it. I'll run away — that's what I'll do. I'll go where he can't find me, and where *you* can't find me. None of you shall ever see me again!'

Dud was silent for a minute, his mind in a whirl. Mechanically he pressed the parcel he carried with his finger and thumb, feeling with the margin of his consciousness the wooden outlines of Dormarth's restored mate.

The girl's panic-stricken tone disturbed him to the roots of his being. This was just the sort of thing, this contact with unknown perils, perils that had about them the lawless squalor of a world he knew nothing of, of a stratum of life he had never penetrated, that was most calculated to upset his equanimity. It had gratified something very deep in him, some obscure craving of his cerebral eroticism, to live with a waif-girl he scarcely knew; but it was a different matter to find his companion involved in some mysterious and questionable transaction where the bourgeois code he had been brought up in no longer prevailed.

Dud had a restless imagination that was easily started off on wild vistas of fantastic alarms. And what her panic about Old Funky did now was to conjure up the maddest fancies in his brain as to what her connection really was with the old man. Well! he must treat this new 'terra incognita' in the map of his experience, this disturbing region marked 'Old Funky', just as he was treating that other menace to his peace from the Glymes quarter. He must sheer off from thinking about it! He must go on quietly, taking each step as it came, and not try to cross any bridge until he reached it.

‘All right, old girl,’ he announced to her now, in as firm a voice as he could muster up, ‘I’ll go to the bank tomorrow as soon as it’s open, and get some money out, even if I have to overdraw. We’ll want a little to go on with. But Old Funky shall have his fiver; and let’s pray that’ll be the last of him!’

The girl, whose fingers had been trembling with agitation as she clutched his arm, now stooped down and pressed her face in the darkness against the back of his hand, the hand that was holding Dormarth’s mate, and when she removed her cold lips his knuckles were wet with her tears.

Walking faster and in silence now, they soon came close up behind the others. They reached them, after turning south towards the river, between the park-like field that they had crossed that afternoon and the tall leafless beech-trees of Frome House garden. It was so dark that only the obscurest outlines of these trees were visible, and the whole weight of the atmosphere, windless, airless, and yet chilly with the breath of the river, pressed down upon them from all sides. No-man could not help thinking of that celandine bud whose birth had impressed him so; but now it was as if the power that had brought to life that small yellow-green entity lay itself, in its premature travail-throes, cold and dead, a burden of mortality on the patient night.

Wizzie pinched his arm when they got close up behind the others, for the two friends were evidently engaged in a heated if not angry discussion.

‘Why are we’, thought No-man, as almost perforce they found themselves eavesdropping, ‘so quiet and united in this darkness, and these others so upset?’ He grinned like a goblin as he answered his own question. ‘Because,’ he said to himself, as they followed the wrangling couple over one of the little bridges that lead to the main bridge across the Frome, ‘because I’m *going* to give Old Funky his fiver, while Claudius, in spite of all the Horse-Head says and feels, is going to do what he wants to do!’

He forced Wizzie to hang back with him on the iron bridge so as to overhear less of this unhappy dispute, but before they let them get further ahead they both distinctly heard Mrs Dearth’s ultimatum.

‘No, I’m serious, my dear,’ they heard her say. ‘And you’ll soon find out how serious I am! The day you first carry coal for Mr Tattery I’ll stop having you in my house.’

No-man received so sharp a pinch from Wizzie as these menacing words were carried away down the swift Frome water that he could not help wondering whether Mrs Dearth would have been equally impressed had she heard Wizzie threaten to leave him unless he gave Old Funky a fiver.

But they followed their friends at a greater distance after that, followed them round the turn by the Hangman’s Cottage, where the rush of the water through the weir sounded in the still night like the rush of the waters of death. The faint lamps from above gave only the palest glimmer. The Governor’s house was a dim blur, and to No-man’s eyes, as he glanced up the bank where the prison stood, the great red building showed as a pallidly lit cloud within the darkness.

When they came to the dam at the foot of the road to the town, where the stream falls through a narrow weir to the lower level, the darkness around them grew so dense that it barricaded their senses against everything but the smell of water, water on stone, water on mud, water on moss, water on ancient woodwork; but at any rate this smell of water purged No-man’s senses of that miasmic emanation which had so repulsed him when the man who had known his mother described how Maiden Castle, Poundbury Camp, and Maumbury Rings all rose to life on a night like this.

They overtook the others at a little bridge opposite a coal-yard, where beneath a small haystack could be discerned the huddled form of a group of roosting fowls.

Together now they ascended the hill into the town. A glimmer of candlelight in some upper room of Chubb's Almshouse was their sole welcome as they passed into Friary Lane.

' *That's* the sort of place there ought to be more of!' muttered Claudius, glancing at the solid stone lintels above his head and at the friendly beam of light.

'They'll sit up together and make friends again,' thought No-man, as Wizzie and he bade their companions good-night and ascended the stairs.

But they had hardly reached the landing before they heard Claudius's voice. 'It's no good, Jenny. I've made up my mind. But we'll both sleep over it and have one more talk tomorrow.'

Mrs Dearth's reply to this was inaudible, or perhaps she didn't reply at all, for immediately afterwards they heard the back door open and shut, indicating the man's retirement to his own domain.

The fire in the grate of their room had been out for hours, and, though with the instinct of animals come back to their lair they both drew their chairs towards the ashes, there was sufficient material cause for a tension of nerves between them, and the crisis was not long in appearing.

'What's wrong with you now?' he began in an aggrieved tone. 'I've said I'd give him that five pounds, though it's against the grain with me, and I don't believe we'll get rid of him by it.'

She took absolutely no notice of these words. She untied her shoe-laces and, kicking away her shoes, stretched out her feet towards the cinders.

Now it happened that the walk from Glymes, combined with the tightness of her shoes, had caused the particular part of Wizzie's new stockings that covered her toes to be stained with perspiration. The sight of this stain increased Dud's irritation.

'She's a circus-girl,' he thought. 'Why can't she choose her shoes properly?'

There was something aggravating to him about the way she stretched out her feet instead of hiding them, now she'd made them so hot, and this indifference to his presence, this behaving as if she was alone, was accentuated still further when, with a muttered 'Damn the things! I told Jenny they weren't right', she deliberately pulled up her skirt and relaxed her suspenders.

It is true that immediately after this gesture she dragged her skirt tightly over her knees, exactly as she had done in Old Funky's caravan, but the mere fact that the modest violence of this childish act brought back their first encounter only intensified his annoyance. Nothing is more teasing to the male senses than to be presented with something poignant or provocative in a girl with whom you are angry, and, just as Wizzie's exposure of her limbs with such contemptuous indifference to his presence struck him as a kind of insult, so this touch of the unconsciously pathetic, where pathos was the reverse of what his anger wanted, made matters worse.

Bending over the extinct fire, the girl now proceeded to remove her hairpins and let down her straggly hair. She went so far as to pull it forward across her forehead, and then, holding her head low down over her knees, she remained motionless, save that he could see her knuckles rise and fall every now and then, like the keys of a piano, as she nonchalantly scratched her scalp.

Dud thought: 'We're both tired. We're both sick of human talk. What she wants is to cry for a bit over her private troubles, say her prayers to her dead mother, suck a few lollipops, and fall undisturbed to sleep, while what I want is to make love to her for hours — delicious and yielding, but not too responsive!'

Evidently to neither of these legitimate desires were the hour and the companion prepared to be kind, and these two persons' irritation with the recalcitrancy of life, as if the cinders in the grate had been cunning devils luring them on, turned moment by moment into bitterer grievance against each other.

'I think Thel's the loveliest — and sweetest — thing I've ever seen!' This remark, in itself sufficiently calculated to annoy our friend, was not made less teasing by being punctuated by a yawn which the young woman made scant pretence at hiding.

Dud's upper lip began to quiver. The fact was that he yearned to make love to this sensitized being endowed with such rounded hips and such entrancing limbs, but, as if by an evil sorcery, with the body of his pretty Wizz was mingled the sour essence of an insulting termagant, deadly to all lust, destructive of all tenderness.

'I think your Thel's a cruel bitch!' he rapped out fiercely. 'She's turned her father into a lunatic; and now she treats him like a wooden doll — dressed and fed — undressed and bed — and it isn't as if she were so wonderful herself. Her painting's just a copy, you know, of this new fantastic fashion. Only *she* applies it to fogs and clouds, instead of to trees and animals! Of course, some people have a mania for red hair, and to them she's a miracle. I expect Urien Quirm has made love to her for years. He *must* have, living next door to anyone like that. But — Good Lord, her figure's thin enough to be a deformity!'

Dud had absolutely no notion, when he began to speak, that he was going to pour out all this invective against Thuella. The words seemed to shoot themselves forth like owls' pellets, gristle and hair and bones together, from the very bottom of his stomach.

Wizzie jumped to her feet and gave him a long protracted stare, less angry than darkly scrutinizing. Then, half-turning from him, she gazed for a long while at the ashes in the grate, evidently thinking intensely.

Our friend, meanwhile, ashamed of his outburst and bewildered by the breaking down of his self-control, unwrapped the heraldic head that Urien had given him, and balanced it carefully on the mantelpiece.

'You don't think I'm going to sleep with that thing there!' cried Wizzie a little later, as she stood in her white night-dress staring at this replica of Dormarth, which, free of its fashion plate, looked singularly sleek and complacent. 'What's the matter with you that you like such things? It's all right for a place like Glymes, but this is *my* room, the only room, as far as I can see, that I'm ever likely to have, and I won't have it spoilt by such monstrosities!' She looked so forlorn as she said this that No-man's imagination put into her words a craving for more than a room of her own, free from Welsh monsters.

'Poor kid!' he thought, as he submissively rewrapped Dormarth's mate in its advertisement sheet and, laying it on a chair, covered it carefully with his coat and waistcoat. 'What she wants is a child.'

Furtively, so as not to annoy her, he watched her jump into bed and heard her give a little cry— 'My goodness!' — as the chill of the sheets struck her.

Though he did not distinctly formulate such a thought, what his whole nature was really feeling was: 'It's all right for me with my work and all that; but she's a woman — and *they* want...' And he fell, as he hurriedly undressed, into a troubled cogitation of all that is necessary to make a woman happy.

She turned her face away from him when he lay by her side, but this had happened so often that it did not disturb him with the sense of anything seriously wrong. And she let him stretch his arm over her without the nervous protest she sometimes made. She fell asleep, indeed, long before he did, and it pleased him that she didn't throw his arm aside just as she was going to sleep, a thing she often did, even after submitting with apparent contentment to protracted caresses.

The childishness of her nature always astonished and delighted him — her power of falling asleep confidingly and peacefully in his arms a minute after some furious outburst of temper. Nothing pleased him more than to hold her as he was doing now, and to ponder, for long periods at a time, upon the enchanting mysteriousness of her identity — just as unfathomable today as it had been at their first meeting!

'I must enjoy her when I can and *how* I can,' he said to himself, 'for she's not happy here, and some change will have to come soon.'

How well he had come to know the familiar noises of the night that entered that Friary Lane bedroom! Intermittent they might be, but there was seldom an entirely new one. The stamping of a strange horse in the King's Arms stable, the cry of a wandering sea-bird come higher up the Frome than its wont, the hum of a voyaging airplane driven closer to the roofs of Dorchester than was *its* wont — such were the exceptions. But every night he could hear the long-drawn whistle of some heavy luggage train as it emerged from the Poundbury tunnel; every night he could hear certain particular human steps — he never found out whose they were; perhaps they were the troubled vigil of the unhappy old gentleman whose daughter had appealed to Claudius on All Souls' evening — that passed down Friary Lane between two and three in the early morning; and finally there were the harsh-sweet rook-cries at dawn, and the chattering of the sparrows above the King’s Arms tap-room.

It was of the flowing of water and of the peculiar smell of water as it sweeps between dark moss-grown walls that No-man kept thinking tonight as his arm rested on his girl’s hip, and his imagination made of her quiet breathing a symbol of all the sleepers in the world and all the oblivion into which their trouble sank; but these soothing half-thoughts were constantly invaded — do what he could — by the disturbances to his peace that were mounting up on all sides.

Though as he held Wizzie he succeeded in keeping the figure of Urien — with his ghost-storms and his elderberry wine and his unwashed body smelling of mortality — in the one single role of his mother’s lover, even this was enough, combined with the appearance of Dormarth’s mate, to fill his brain with annoying perturbations. This business of giving the fiver to Old Funky, too, though it did not bother him as much as the disconcerting figure of Mr Quirm, was sufficiently disturbing. He always, at the best of times, grudged going to the bank for money, but to have to go when his account was at its lowest ebb was an extremely unpleasant prospect.

‘Oh, deary I!’ sighed Dud to himself, recalling the plaint of his stick-house Peggie’s aged granny. ‘They above alone do know the worries of me wold heart!’

But he settled his cropped head comfortably on his pillow and visualized in the darkness the nape of his companion’s neck. It was not as beautiful as Thuella’s— ‘But thank the Lord’, he thought, ‘it isn’t Thuella’s! Yes,’ he thought, ‘I’ll stick to my little Wizz through thick and thin. The more angry she gets with me, the closer I’ll stick! What’s the use of being the fool I am, if I can’t at least hang on to my destiny?’

A faint stirring of air began now to tap the tassel of their blind against the sill of the open window, and a breath of pleasant coolness blew across his cheek.

‘I must get the essence of this old Durnovaria,’ he thought, ‘and turn Mary’s tragedy into a masterpiece. That’s what I must do: just work on, and let Glymes and Funky and Claudius, and the whole lot of them, come and go as they please. Hang on to Wizz, and not bother with them!’

So he thought, and yet before he slept he sighed heavily again, his mind reverting to those ten years of lonely independence and to that wraith of Mona who asked nothing and denied nothing.

CHAPTER 5. The Scummy Pond

DUD HAD ALWAYS been one — such was the childishness of his nature — to make much of what people call favourite things. He had his favourite hour, his favourite day, his favourite season, and each particular arbitrary and wilful choice of his he would justify with an exaggerated eloquence whenever he could get anyone to listen.

Until his recent experiences in Dorchester his favourite month had been September; but, as during this spring the vegetation became more and more lavish, he decided, after several struggles with his innate conservatism, to transfer his preference to May! For he found he could not remember — though he ransacked his remotest memory for a parallel — any May in any place equal to this one in Dorchester.

On the fifth, therefore, of this favourite month, just three months after what Teucer Wye had called Thuella's cloud-party, our friend found himself, as he dressed and shaved in their Friary Lane bedroom, full of impatience to set forth on his morning's walk before getting his solitary breakfast in his High East Street attic.

The air that came in with the sunshine was so balmy and sweet, the sunshine itself was such a largess of golden benediction, that No-man's spirits rose and rose as he completed his hasty toilet. It was his usual custom just to give a fleeting kiss to any portion of his girl's head or face that emerged from the bed-clothes, and then slip off without waking her; but today he felt impelled to take her small oval skull between his hands and press his lips against the faint wrinkle between her eyebrows that even a night of unbroken sleep seemed in these days unable to smooth away.

‘Dear-est!’ she murmured in response to this, and her tone increased his happiness, for one of his sweetest compensations was the tender mood to which her dawning consciousness almost invariably *first* awoke.

He was, indeed, already at the door when to his surprise she called him back, and he found her eyes wide open.

‘Don’t forget we’re to lunch with the Cumbers at the Antelope today,’ she reminded him, and her words, as well as her tone, brought down his spirits by several pegs. ‘And don’t wear that old coat when you come, for they’ll think I don’t look after you at all, and don’t forget to call for me here, as you did last time! I don’t want to walk into the hotel alone, for it looks funny. It looks as if — oh, I don’t know — but it looks *funny*!’

‘Sure, kid!’ replied our friend briskly, standing by her bedside with his cap in one hand and stick in the other. ‘I’ll be here by a quarter to! It’s at one, isn’t it, this damned lunch? Sure I’ll be here! I’ll be here at half past twelve, if you like, and then you can dress up, and dress me up, to your heart’s content!’

Wizzie blinked and frowned as she stared at the dark form in front of her in its nimbus of golden sunshine. There was always something distressing to her nerves in the high spirits with which he plunged into the activities of a new day. She herself never felt as if she were alive till well on in the afternoon.

She sat up in bed now and pushed back the hair from her high forehead. Then she rubbed her face with both her hands, drawing the skin tight across it, a gesture which he loved for its characteristicness but hated for the way it brushed off the delicate bloom left by sleep.

‘Why do you groan like that over this lunch?’ she asked in the particular tone which he always dreaded. ‘I don’t have so many amusements that you need make a face like that when, once in a blue moon, we go out together!’

'But—' he protested. 'But — Wizz, I've *said* I'm ready to go. A person can't like what he *doesn't* like; and George Cumber — well! you know what he is, and Sissie too! They're a fair pair. I don't know which I detest the most.'

The girl plucked at the pillow behind her head and settled herself more comfortably.

Now if there was anything that No-man disliked it was getting involved in a long discussion of their friends when he longed to be out-of-doors and down there by the sunlit stream and the cool wet grass.

'Give me a cigarette,' she said. 'You've woke me up. Can't you sit down for *one* minute?'

He laid his stick on the bed and, fumbling with his cap, sat down at her feet. The bed creaked beneath his weight.

With an impatient movement of her knees she caused his stick to fall clattering to the floor.

It was a peculiarity of Dud's to like to get the fresh impact of the morning air free of the smell of tobacco. 'Everything in its proper time,' he would say. 'Your first cigarette should be after breakfast.' He uttered a whistling sound, in imitation of Mr Wye, through the barrier of his teeth.

'I really believe', pronounced Miss Ravelston gravely, 'you're the most selfish man I've ever known.' She closed her eyes and sighed. Dud bit his lip and looked down at a golden pool of sunlight on the floor at his feet. He recalled how delicious it had been when he made love to her 'lurin' figure in the middle of the night.

'She wants *this'*, he said to himself, 'and I want *that*. Do men and women ever want the same thing at the same moment?' And then he thought: 'But I'd be a brute only to take and never to give. Besides, what's to stop me enjoying her in my mind even while she's scolding?'

'You don't care for this Cumber chap yourself, Wizz. You know you don't!' he expostulated, stretching out one of his feet towards the pool of sunlight.

'That's the way you go!' she cried crossly. 'As if in this world we had only ourselves to think of! He's a newspaper man. He's got a great office somewhere. Urien's coming over especially to meet him. Thel's arranged it all! It's not only one article he wants. He wants a series of them — all on the same thing — all about these old Welsh yarns — you know better than I do what he wants. But Thel says it's their one chance of making a little, and they *must* make some! Thel says no one knows how they starve themselves. That's why she's so delicate and he's so badly dressed.'

No-man opened his mouth and expanded his eyes in astonishment. 'But — Good Lord! Urien never goes anywhere. What — on earth — will he — look like — in the Antelope dining-room? If I've got to change my coat, he'll have to change — *everything*!'

Wizzie's frown deepened. 'He's been out more than you know, and more than I know,' she cried. 'He's not so peculiar, Thel says, as everyone thinks. Thel says he's only got to meet people to *make* them do what he wants.'

It was Dud's turn now to rub his face with his fingers. He felt conscious of an extremely lively wish that he could rub Mr Enoch, alias Urien, out of his present experience of life! It spoilt this balmy air coming in through the window, far more than Wizzie's cigarette, when his senses recalled that smell of the man's unwashed flesh under his unchanged clothes. He had only seen him twice since their conversation on Candlemas Day, and on neither of these occasions had they exchanged any significant word. The fellow had called him 'lad' again, but no doubt he called every man he met 'lad'. Probably he called Mr Wye 'lad' when he'd been drinking elderberry wine!

‘Did he sit on Mother’s bed’, he thought, ‘like I’m doing on Wizzie’s? But ’twas more likely Mother who sat on *his* bed.’ And No-man set himself to wonder at what point in the life of the Woman from Wales did this unusual wayfarer from that historic land present her with an armorial bed. It could hardly have been after she had married her organist!

‘Damn!’ he said to himself, holding his foot in the pool of sunshine, where its warmth seemed to penetrate even the muddy leather. ‘I won’t think about it. He may have given her the bed, and he may have held her *on* the bed, and he may have kept that space by her grave in the cemetery; and yet he may not be—’ And the portcullis in his brain came clanging down on the disturbing possibility.

But the notion of his having to meet Urien at lunch that very day was extraordinarily unpleasant to him. Between Urien and George Cumber — God! what an embarrassing time he would have!

‘Thel says they positively *must* get these articles for him,’ repeated Wizzie, ‘else they don’t know how they can go on living at Glymes.’

‘I wish to the devil they couldn’t go on living at Glymes!’ burst out Dud. ‘Why don’t they go back to Shaftesbury, where he came from, and write articles about that nunnery he’s so fond of?’

The girl raised her arm with a disconcerting suddenness and flung her cigarette into the grate. Then to his surprise she jumped out of bed, but on the opposite side from where he was sitting.

‘I’m going to dress,’ she said. *‘You’d better go* if you can’t talk more sensibly to anyone than that! I suppose you think you’re being funny when you say such things. But *I* think you’re being rude — rude and ill-bred. That’s what *I* think, if it interests you to know. And it’s all because you hate taking me out and hate being interrupted one inch in your selfish ways!’

Dud, stretching himself across the disarranged bed-clothes and bending down his head, fumbled for his stick on the floor. While he did this, Wizzie's anger seemed to increase by automatic expansion. It grew like one of those Japanese objects that mysteriously enlarge in water. His fumbling for his stick in this clumsy manner was the water on this occasion.

'Why — can't — you — for once', she cried, stooping down above him in her white night-dress, while he felt, although he could not *see*, how pinched and contracted with anger her face had grown, 'do something like an ordinary person? And what do you want with that stick at all when you're only going up the street to your room?'

'*Am* I only going up the street?' thought the wicked Dud, confounded by the amount of floor-space his fingers seemed able to traverse without encountering what he sought. 'I'm going as far as the Blue Bridge, and perhaps further!'

'It's all this fussiness of yours', the voice above him continued, 'about sticks and walks and your own affairs, that no girl who knows what real life is, and what poor people have to go through, can put up with! It's just what Mr Cask said.' So the voice went on, growing shriller and shriller, while Dud, with the blood rushing into his head, came to the conclusion that with a shrewed kick from her bare feet she had propelled his stick out of his reach. 'What Mr Cask said to Jenny. "I may get dirty and tired", he said, "but I shall know what life is, and that's what these talkers and writers—"'

But Dud had got possession of his stick now and was soon on his feet and at the door. With his hand on the handle, he was the prey of three separate emotions. The first was pure personal resentment. The second was a quiver of vibrant pity for an agitated white-faced young woman whose burst of irrational fury had brought it about that the little black ribbon with which she did up her hair hung down from her thin locks like an eel at the end of a line. The third was a cold-blooded condemnation of certain basic aspects of women's appearance, as contrasted with that of men, which Nature according to her inscrutable wisdom seems to insist upon, and which were emphasized at this moment by the inpouring sunshine, which reduced Wizzie's thin night-dress to something approaching invisibility.

'Good-bye, kid!' he murmured. 'I'll be here by half past twelve. Is Thuella coming too?'

But Wizzie, with her back to him and at her looking-glass now, was too upset to make any answer, so he contented himself by directing a sympathetic nod towards Thuella's portrait of Mr Wye, whose pathetic glance gave him the feeling that, if the poor man wasn't depicted in his pyjamas, such an omission was not due to any filial tenderness.

Our friend, however, got no further than the foot of the stairs before his conscience compelled him to hurry back. How far this laudable proceeding was due to his desire to enjoy that fresh May morning with a free heart, or how far it was due to an impulse to soften his girl's mood before he left her for so many hours, he himself would have been puzzled to determine; but back he went, and, finding Wizzie in a daze at her mirror, haloed by sunshine like a young saint, and with her brush and comb untouched before her, and her hands in her lap, he gave her a quiet kiss on the back of her drooping head, and without waiting to observe the result of this manoeuvre hurried off again down the stairs.

He walked quickly down the hill, with the prison wall on his left, and crossed the bridge leading to the coal-yard where Claudius had been at work for nearly two months.

Yes! the man was there now, labouring in his shirt-sleeves at unloading a wagon. His boss was not to be seen in the small enclosure that morning, so our friend, after a second's hesitation, crossed the planks that had been laid down over the ditch that ran parallel to the stream, and entered into conversation with him.

The reformer seemed prepared to enjoy this interruption to his toil with the same quiet satisfaction as when he allowed himself to smoke a cigarette for company's sake.

No-man was less shocked by his appearance than he expected to be from things that Wizzie had told him of Mrs Dearth's concern. It may have been the effect of that fresh morning with its balmy air, but Claudius seemed in good spirits.

He did look a good deal thinner, though, and Dud fancied — for he wore no hat — that the scanty hair behind his high bald forehead was greyer than it had been before this experiment.

'Are your hands better?' Dud inquired.

Claudius gave him one of his most piercing rostrum looks, and then, evidently satisfied with his sincerity, smiled like a little boy proud of his football scars and held out the begrimed palm of his right hand while he touched its blisters with the index-finger of his left.

'Better,' he murmured. 'I put vaseline on them. Vaseline's better than cold cream.'

Dud nodded sympathetically. 'Back better?' he inquired.

Mr Cask straightened himself and look round. 'It doesn't keep me awake now,' he replied briefly. And then, gazing up towards the prison hill with wrinkled, screwed-up eyelids: 'It's late today,' he remarked in an aggrieved tone.

'What's late? The bugle?'

'No, no!' he replied, but with a pleased and softened look, as if Dud had made an erroneous but at the same time a very sensible observation. 'It comes *before* the bugle! The airplane, I mean.'

‘Oh,’ said our friend.

‘Yes, it gives you the feeling that you’re in the swing of things, not just idling about and tinkering. There! That’s it — it’s coming now! Don’t you hear?’

Dud removed his cap and, leaning on his stick, set himself to listen. A faint but familiar drumming, such as might have accompanied the approach of an antediluvian monster, began to fill the air. They were both silent, giving this well-known sound their combined attention. It soon became quite loud, then with equal rapidity lessened and died away.

From between his companion’s clenched teeth a sympathetic sound emerged, as if something in the man’s very soul were automatically responding to the departing pulse of the air-borne engine. Again was our friend reminded of a small boy’s pleasure in his toy kite, or boat, or locomotive. He half-expected to catch the syllables ‘chu-chu-chu’ issuing from that exultant physiognomy.

‘Are you really happier than you... ‘ he began. His words were lost in the loud quacking of a pair of white ducks that were hurriedly leaving the coal-yard to seek the water.

Claudius took no notice of the ducks. An expression of weary resignation fell like a film across his face when he marked Dud’s intense interest in the awkward manner in which these creatures conducted their plunge into the stream. The proceedings of ducks played, it was clear, no part in that feeling of being in the swing that was the reformer’s present response to the life-tide.

Dud had often chatted for long periods with the benevolent coal-merchant about these birds, which were his escape from the cares of supplying the descendants of the Durotriges with coal from beyond the Severn, and this particular pair, who for reasons of their own, unconnected with evolution, always kept apart from their companions, he had named Hero and Leander, and had noted morning after morning with absorbed fascination the power they had of remaining upside down in the swift current while they buried their yellow bills in the mud.

But Mr Cask's oratorical countenance was clearly bothered now by something beyond the irrelevance of ducks, and with a faint darkening of his ruddy cheeks, which was his nearest approach to a blush, he began, in a manner that quite touched our friend, to utter a tentative and hestitating enquiry as to Mrs Dearth's state of mind in regard to him.

'You know what they're like, No-man,' he murmured. 'We hurt them more by deliberately disregarding their wishes than by any infidelity. I suppose it would do no good for me to make another attempt — just to see her, I mean? She won't see me at all now, you know, or answer my letters! She thinks I'm deliberately doing this to annoy her, to break with her. She's got into her head — how, God knows, for she's my only intimate friend, and I shall never have another — that I'm what they call tired of her. Would you, No-man, if you were me, force yourself on her, to see if — when we were together and she saw what I felt — her mood would change? Or do — you — think — it would be — a good thing, No-man, if *you* were to say something to her? You and Miss Ravelston see her every day. Perhaps if you told her how I missed her — for *herself*, I mean, not for—' Here a very curious look, half humorous and half heart-broken, fluttered over the man's face. 'Not for what she's done for me — those meals in her house, I mean — not for cupboard love, No-man.' And once more his face assumed that ravaged and bewildered look, with the eyes wide open and the contours of the cheeks suggesting, in spite of the sunshine, that they were exposed to down-pouring rain. 'I mean — what they like you to say, No-man — that you're' — he closed his sentence with a desperate and yet awkward rush, like the final and squawking plunge of the coal-man's ducks into the water — 'still very very fond of them — *in love with them*, in fact!'

This conversion of his old friend the Horse-Head into the mysterious 'they' of men's bewildered respect for their perplexing partners would have tickled our friend's fancy if it had not been for the image he saw in the sunshine of that lamentable expression. No doubt something of what he felt was due to the actual sweat of this elderly convert to Communism; but Dud never forgot how the man's Roman nose emerged at that moment from the troubled outlines of his face, like an undefeated standard out of a confused mêlée.

'I'll do what I can,' he murmured. 'I'll talk to Miss Ravelston. In these things women are wiser than we are. Yes, I'll do what I can, Claudius. I'll talk to Wizz.'

The appearance of the owner of the coal-yard ended their conversation; and No-Man, saluting this worthy in his most propitiatory manner, went off in haste.

He followed the path between the stream and the water-meadows, thinking to himself, 'I'll go round by the Hangman's Cottage and back into the town *that* way. I don't want to pass him again.'

The chestnut branches drooping over the rapid stream were already loaded with new-budded flowers, and amid the long grasses of the prison bank primroses and bluebells grew profusely. This particular blending of pale yellow and azure blue, as patches of these flowers appeared between the trees, carried our friend's mind down a long vista of indescribable feelings.

He said to himself, 'What I really live for, what I've always lived for, are sensations like this! If Wizz were to get more and more irritable, as long as she *had* her happy moments, I could go on. If Old Funky appeared on the scene again, I could still go on. If that Glymes chap did turn out to have planted his damned sweaty seed — in Shaftesbury or somewhere — and I'm the offspring of it, I could still go on.'

He quickened his steps, and the freshness and balm of that morning poured through him till he felt as if his girl's angers, Old Funky's depredations, his physical repulsion for his mother's friend, were like that great red-brick prison up there, and he, with his skull pressed against the bars behind that high wall, were drinking up, in spite of them all, the very essence of life!

'But I'm out', he thought, 'and they're in. Would I be still able to go on if I were in for five years, for ten years? Could I if I were a lifer?'

The idea of being *inside* that building whose red bulk had grown of late so familiar to him, instead of being free to get magical sensations from the bluebells on its slope, did just then a little damp his high spirits. Wasn't there something monstrous in letting himself make use of that flowery bank as the leaping-off place for his enchanted reveries, while *inside*...?

'Inside, outside,' he muttered to himself, walking slowly on. 'I suppose old Claudius would say that a life like mine, made up of such sensations, is a Gothic anachronism, a hang-over from a selfish leisure that evolution is liquidating.'

He turned nevertheless at the Hangman's Cottage and followed the narrow path between the ditches towards the Blue Bridge. Half-way to the bridge, where three months ago he had seen that first celandine, he turned and looked back. There to his left across the water-meadows rose the series of outstanding landmarks that he had come in these months to know so well. The prison, first, then St Peter's tower, then the roof of the Corn-Exchange with its elegant clock-tower, then All Saints' spire, and away between these the tall brewery chimney on the Weymouth road, then the town's gas-tanks, recently painted a dark green, and finally the majestic tower of Fordington Church, with the sacred clump of trees, half a mile further on, that hid the house built for himself in his early days by the great Wessex novelist.

No-man had formulated during his long bachelor years a curiously rigorous system of thought-control, a system that had hardened and deepened still further since his intimacy with Wizzie. It would have been difficult for him to isolate from amid the stream of his habitual impressions the precise moments in which his various reactions to the world had crystallized into this secret mental ritual, or indeed to have explained the nature of the spiritual imperatives which dominated his interior life; but the master-gestures of the thing had come by this time to resemble those acts of faith, to use the theological term, by which the old monastic mystics sought to bring the chaos of their emotional feelings into some sort of integral continuity.

Dud's chief act of faith in this particular was a steadily acquired power of forgetting, as he would put it to himself, not only those aspects of life and experience from which his whole nature revolted with an intolerable repulsion, but even a good many other impressions which he simply regarded as alien, hostile, uncongenial, outside what he felt to be the fatality of his destiny.

Nothing was now — certainly not any erotic feelings he might have — of equal importance to him with this secret continuity of alternate acceptance and rejection; and, as may be supposed, after having practised this thing for ten solitary years with no companions but his mother's bed-post and his wife's wraith, the new tide of feeling called up by his life with Wizzie was compelled to flow through the moulds and grooves of his self-ordained system.

After this trick of sprinkling oblivious drops of Lethe water — of which he liked to fancy he kept a private reservoir in his soul — over what he *willed to forget*, Dud's next grand conjuring trick was his isolation of himself as a solitary flesh-covered skeleton, 'anthropus erectus', facing the cosmos, and his obliteration of his own past and his own future — that is to say, of both regret and hope — in his intense awareness of the present.

It was not that this present in Dud's egoistic philosophy — if it could be called by so grand a name — necessarily implied any particular awareness of the superficial objects that might at the moment be around him. Sometimes it might, sometimes it might not, imply such physical awareness. What it *did* imply was an intensely conscious separating of himself from, or fusing of himself with — as it might happen — the whole weight of the essential elements around him.

It had in fact to do with the interior substance of things rather than with their transitory accidental forms; but even this definition of it was not true in a strict metaphysical sense, for what Dud had set himself for the last ten years, and indeed for the last twenty years, to aim at was only what in some measure all men are forced to acquire under the pressure of events, namely the power to enjoy life on the barest, the most stripped, most winnowed terms, and to enjoy it *in itself*, as it slips away under our fingers, without a thought of past or future.

This substance of things, as Dud named it to himself, might just as well have been called the emanation of things, for it was as much connected with their evanescent bloom and fleeting perfume as with any spiritual essence concealed within them; but the grand secret of our friend's life depended on the pleasure he got, and the comfort he got, when he fell back upon some aspect of what was around him that gave him a sense of the continuity of the centuries.

It was this stream of life flowing down the ages, with its magical overtones and undertones, that he had come to seek in a thousand chance-given groupings of things and people. This was the purer, the less personal element in his subjective life. This was the reverse side of the shield to his cerebral sensuality. The truth was that he needed the sense of the past, the sense of the pathos and significance of the past, before he could enjoy to the full this present he made so much of.

He was no historian in a scientific sense, no historian in the way Claudius understood history. History to him was life *at one remove*, life purged and winnowed of its grosser impact! It was a second reality, so to speak, a reality passed through the sieve of one man's peculiar imagination; but to such as it was, thus purged, thus held at arm's length, he responded with the abandonment of a spiritual voyeur.

To this winnowed reality of his, which was existence seen under a certain light, a light falling on the larger, the less transient gestures of our race, No-man's soul, whenever it freed itself from the burden of subjective sensuality, responded with an almost feminine abandonment such as few would have expected from his gaunt figure, cropped skull, and grim appearance. His response to these particular intimations had indeed been refined upon so long in his solitary life that they had become like a second nature to him, something that was deeper than a conscious cult.

No-man might be said to have acquired the power of becoming a *medium* to these overtones of the centuries; and it was with these — these essences or emanations, whatever they might be — that he was now trying to thicken out and double-charge the tragic story of Mary Channing and her execution in Maumbury Rings.

It was the sight of cuckoo-flowers, growing by the ditch on his right hand as he walked towards Frome House, that was destined just then to be the talisman that lifted the sluice-gates of these intimations and sent them quivering through his nerves. He stopped in front of several of these flowers; and, this time without any effort, he saw the generations of burgesses and artisans, their lads and their maids, their baby-boys and baby-girls, pause transported with delight in the presence of these lavender-tinted tremulous entitites.

‘These are the symbolic flowers,’ Dud thought, ‘and not bluebells or primroses or mary-buds, of a spring in Dorchester!’ And he noted how frail their long stalks were and how their leaves were attenuated to the delicacy of green filigree. Some of the plants had petals of a deeper lavender than others; and Dud noticed that this occurred when they grew amid the taller grasses, as if, in the effort to out-top these cool-rooted neighbours, their cheeks had grown flushed. ‘No,’ he thought, as he glanced from the paler ones by the water to the flushed ones in the meadow-grass, ‘it isn’t the bluebells, or the blackthorn, or the primroses, or the marigolds, that carry with them the essence of this place. It is these, and these alone!’

Moving out of the path to let an old man, with a peculiarly shaped spade over his shoulder, pass him, he went on pondering to himself as to why it was that this particular flower thrilled him so and opened such a long vista of those overtones of the centuries for which he was always seeking; but mingled with the problem of the cuckoo-flowers there now came the figure of this old man.

Dud, for all his natural babyishness and his cultivated senility, had been endowed by Nature with a superstitious respect for signs and tokens, and such was his mania for these omens of the way that he had come to regard this particular old man — whom he was always meeting down here in the water-meadows — as a symbolic figure. He vaguely linked him in his mind with the mystical Water-Carrier, who was, at this period of our planet's history, ushering in the new epoch dominated by the zodiacal sign Aquarius.

Dorchester was, as he had long ago recognized, a city under the especial influence of water. Its name meant 'the Camp upon the Waters', and its psychic as well as its physical life seemed connected with the absolutely inexhaustible subterranean river that fed its water-tower, a consecrated-looking erection on the Bridport road that always made our friend think of a particular temple of Vesta he had seen in an old print.

This old man's name was Droit, and Dud had been attracted to him, long before he dared to speak to him, not only by the curious sweetness of his smile — a smile that had something mystical about it, like the smile, transferred to the face of an aged day-labourer, of Leonardo's smiling woman — but because whenever he met him he had some significant object on his shoulder. Sometimes this was a bundle of faggots, when Mr Droit looked exactly like the Man in the Moon, but sometimes it was this unusual spade, an object especially adapted for mending the banks of water-courses, and when the old man had *this* on his shoulder our friend, for all his lack of classical education, couldn't help thinking of the passage in the *Odyssey* where Teiresias predicts for the Wanderer that the oar he carries on his shoulder will be mistaken for a flail!

Dud always regarded the occasions when Mr Droit passed him as lucky occasions, and it was therefore to the accompaniment, so to speak, of Mr Droit's enigmatic smile, which mingled so pleasantly with the sound of the water-brooks, that he now pondered on the problem of the cuckoo-flowers.

They certainly were free from any link with the more active memories of childhood! You couldn't make balls of them as with cowslips, or tea out of them as with dandelions, or chains of them as with daisies. You couldn't eat them as you ate water-cress, or sip their honey as with honeysuckle, or sell bunches of them on the street as with violets or daffodils. On the other hand, Dud said to himself, they didn't belong to that particular category of the less striking wayside plants such as red nettle and ground-ivy and lesser stitchwort and common woundwort and hedge-parsley and self-heal and hawkweed, such as slip sideways into a wayfarer's consciousness as he goes along, without any shock of surprise, and merge insensibly into his thoughts as he leans over a gate, or stands against a fence, or glances casually at the dusty hedge-growths in the outskirts of some town he is entering.

'What you've got in you', our friend thought, addressing the cuckoo-flowers, 'is an upwelling of Nature's shyest, purest secret. Old Wye would say you were the Platonic idea of the magic of flowers, cold and transparent, veined with the mystic greenness of some spiritual dimension just beyond the normal plant world!

'Those mother-of-pearl sea-shells', Dud went on thinking, 'that Wizz and I found when we went to Weymouth — they're the things that come nearest to these cuckoo-flowers. And yet I don't know! No shell, however pearl-like, can equal the livingness of these fragile plants. And there's something else too. What they have about them is something that you lose after the first glance, something that belongs to things seen through mist, through rain, through water, something that belongs to things seen *in* water, seen in mirrors, seen in crystals, seen in polished silver! Generation after generation of old men and young children in Dorchester must have felt what I felt a minute ago. It's gone now, because I've begun counting their petals and examining their little fretted leaves. What *was* it that I felt, all of a sudden, just now? It was a glimpse of a reality just beyond our reality, a reality that I've been longing for all my days, a reality that has nothing hurting or harsh or sour *or comic* in it! But why can't those marsh marigolds give me this peculiar feeling? It must have something to do with this faint lilac colour, like the colour of the first ripples of dawn, or the drifting of spray over twilight sands. Too rich colours, too emphatic shapes, dam up our escape into this reality behind reality, hinder our dipping into those pure springs where each generation washes away its brutality, its blood, its guilt, its executions in Maumbury Rings!'

Dud pressed his stick heavily into the grass at the ditch's edge while he allowed an elderly shop-assistant, who made a custom of a brief airing before his day's work at the counter, to step briskly past.

'Was I more myself, he thought, 'before I snatched at Wizz, before I met Thuella and all these Glymes people? No! Not a bit of it! Wizz is my girl for good and bad, whatever her moods may be. Yes, I'll have Wizz with me, the darling, to the end of my days! It's No-man-and-his-girl now, not D. No-man, to the last stroke. But that's no reason why I shouldn't analyse what my destiny is in regard to this girl-carrying soul of mine!'

As this thought came to him he suddenly saw his whole character as if it too, like these cuckoo-flowers, were something outlined, magically outlined and attenuated, in a transparent watery mirror.

'I wonder', he thought, 'if all the old men in Dorchester are like me! What I want in my inmost self is absolutely nothing but a series of harmless sensations, and above all the sensation of feeling what hundreds of generations have felt when they slipped out of their itching skins, when they slipped down into the reality below reality! God! What a blessed thing I didn't land myself with Thuella instead of Wizz! Wizz may get angry with me. She may keep her secrets from me. She may hide up heaven knows what.' And he thought of the malignant hints of Old Funky. 'But she'll never torment me as Thuella torments people. She'll never turn our love into a torture to us both, as Thuella would have done if I hadn't seen through her in time.'

He pulled his stick out of the mud, and, swinging round with a self-satisfied grimace, set off in the direction of the town. As he passed below the high grassy bank, sprinkled with the first bluebells, from the top of which the prison looked down, just as the old Roman castle had formerly done, on the activities of men with spades — like that ditch-mender, or drowner, as the man was technically called, who endured life with such a strange smile — our friend gave way to a good deal of self-congratulatory conceit over what he considered his masterly handling of the Thuella problem. 'She made a clear advance to me', he thought, 'that time in the kitchen on Candlemas Day when she'd been all stirred up by that man of Mother's, and, if I'd given in to her then, she'd have never made such friends with Wizz. If I'd wanted to, I could have taken her away, with a touch, from that man of Mother's. That man—'. It had become a mental habit of his to think of Mr Quirm in this way, for it had the double advantage of sprinkling oblivion on his own relation to the fellow and of treating his connection with the Woman from Wales as a mere lapse in the dead lady's life. 'That man's no doubt a match for her. But good luck to him! He'll have his hands full if he goes further with her.'

And once again, as he turned into High East Street by the well-worn brick bridge, where so many of the older Durotriges are accustomed to survey the stream of life coming into their town from the London road, he allowed a glow of satisfaction to pass through him as he thought how easy it would be, *if he wanted to*, to make Thuella whistle that man of his mother's down the wind.

Arrived at his landlord's little shop, he produced his latch-key and opened the street door. Yes! there were his letters, placed as usual on the bottom step of the staircase. There was his morning paper, which he rarely opened now owing to a nervous dislike of the lively pictures it displayed, but which something always prevented him from counter-ordering. There too, meeting him as he ascended the staircase with the letters in one hand and his stick in the other, was the peculiar smell of this massive old house, a very agreeable smell suggestive of burnt almonds and ancient rose-leaves.

Arrived at the top, he entered his small kitchen, tossed down the letters on a shelf without glancing at their envelopes, and walked over to the window.

How emerald-green the water-meadows looked this May morning over the roofs of Orchard Street!

‘I wish I could see old Droit down there’, he thought, ‘working with his spade, and in those great wading-boots of his! Does he smile like that when the plovers come screaming round him? Droit the Drowner — I wonder if they had drowners in the days of Mary Channing. I’d like to bring in two old chaps like that, talking about her execution in one of those ditches, like the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*!’

He leant out of the deep-set aperture, in the hope of seeing Mr Droit, and his gaze encountered the ancient stone cottage, with thatched roof and corniced windows, that he had remarked when he first settled in these rooms.

‘What old memory was it’, he said to himself, ‘that that cottage brought back when I first saw it? I’ve lost the feeling now. But perhaps I lived there when they burnt Mary Channing.’

He turned away from the window with a sigh, and his mood quickly returned to its former complacency. He took up the Royal Martyr, filled him at the sink, and lit the gas-flame beneath him. Then he lifted the lid of the shining refuse-can he called Henry VIII. He found it half-full of tea-leaves and egg-shells. ‘But I won’t take it down now,’ he thought. ‘I’ll have breakfast first.’

Leaving his kettle on the gas-stove to boil, he now entered his bedroom, and it came over him how different an aura, as they say, the place had, now that there were two Dormarths at the foot of his bed.

He went up to the original one and flicked it with his finger and thumb. ‘You let her alone *now*, don’t you, now you’ve got your mate?’

His eyes rested on the pillow of his mother’s bed, for he had kept it, without a pillow-case, to serve as a couch when he had a mind to lie down.

‘Not a sign of you for months!’ he whispered. ‘Have you gone off free, then, as the Cemetery Woman said our dead ought to go free? Or have you only gone back to her bones?’

Dud was surprised to notice that it gave him no shock to think of Mona’s bones lying out there! So much had he been awed by her in life that it was hard to feel that so formidable a personality could ever grow really pitiable, even in the cold ground.

‘I expect the other spirits are frightened of her,’ he thought. But as he stood at the foot of the bed, his hand resting mechanically on the heraldic beast and his eyes on the pillow without a pillow-case, he could not keep back a heavy sigh. Yes, it was a far deeper sigh than had been drawn from him just now when he thought of those two drowners chatting in the ditch while ten thousand Dorset moralists watched the Amphitheatre lesson to guilty wives.

‘She’s gone. She’s gone!’ he sighed; and he knew very well that the entity he mourned was not the Mona whose bones lay by his mother’s but that *other* Mona who had responded to him in this bed for ten solitary years!

From the vanished Mona-phantom — whose disappearance, like all the important events in Dud’s life, was an event in the mind, depending on his fancy that she had dissolved into the elements only because Dormarth had found his mate — he turned to his mother's ottoman. There were the manorial gateposts, as the Woman from Wales had embroidered them, with those two heraldic mysteries confronting each other just as they now confronted each other here in High East Street at the foot of the woman's bed!

Gazing at those proud gates, he could not resist thinking to himself, 'How the devil did she or this Glymes chap — if he *was* her lover and if he *is* my begetter — ever come by this armorial bed? It must clearly have been a covenant between them that she should retain the bed of their embraces while he carried off half its heraldry!'

Dud now, after twisting his head round for a second to catch the familiar hum of the Royal Martyr's boiling, bent down over the ottoman. They *were* drive gates — that much was clear — but there was no indication of the nature of the place to which they led. Was it in Wales, and had this man of his mother's any connection with it before he was brought to Shaftesbury?

'No, no! The bed was Mother's. Mother brought it from Wales. This Maiden Castle chap simply carried off his trophy, his love-token, and kept it till *she* was dead and till *I* turned up!'

He straightened his back and moved round the bed to the open door. Yes! the kettle was hissing now. It would soon boil. He started laying his breakfast on the desk by the window, pushing aside his papers, spreading out a clean towel for a table-cloth, arranging bread and butter and milk and sugar with the ponderous gravity of a priest at an altar.

This had come to be one of Dud's happiest moments in the twenty-four hours. His *most* happy moments were when Wizzie, in a really receptive mood, allowed him to make love to her; but of late, for reasons which were obscure but which he vaguely attributed to her infatuation for the Venetian

Post, these moments had been rare, and the rarer they grew, the more meticulous unction he bestowed on these interludes of solitary self-indulgence.

The kettle was steaming violently now, and he hastened to make his tea and boil his eggs.

Seated in front of his window, which was propped open this fine May morning with a toy trumpet he had picked up in the Amphitheatre, he set himself to enjoy the sounds that came up from the street while he munched his bread and butter. Something about the pollen-dust freshness and fragrant balminess of the air made it easier for him than ever before to envisage, as if it really were his destiny to accept such a grotesque situation, the probability that Urien Quirm *was* his begetter.

‘But if he is’, he said to himself, ‘I must be a double-dyed Welshman!’

This thought, the idea of his being Welsh on both sides, was not entirely pleasing to him. He had for so long — in fact ever since the shock of discovering that he was a bastard — satisfied his secret pride in separating himself from all normal human ties, that he experienced a revolt in some deep portion of his soul against being *placed* in this way.

It had indeed become such an intimate habit of his life-consciousness to live entirely in the sensations he got *through* his body that he had come to lose all definite awareness *of his* body. His cropped head, his hooked nose, his loose mouth, his bony figure, had come to be so non-existent to him that it always felt as if his real self — the sensitized soul behind all this — flowed through what it enjoyed of its vision of life as if it were disembodied. This mental habit of his, this almost morbid anti-narcissism, if such a word may be used, was rendered easier for him by the fact that — as he well knew — his soul was much weaker, much more nervous, much more fluid and mediumistic, than anyone confronted by his formidable and ever grim exterior could possibly have guessed.

It was this, he sometimes surmised, that was one of the causes of Wizzie’s fretfulness and irritation. ‘The kid took me’, he would say to himself when he tried to get to the bottom of the trouble between them, ‘as a formidable kidnapper of young maids, a drastic fellow who would strike, and quickly too! But what could I have done? A person could hardly announce to a girl he was rescuing from people like Old Funky and Grummer Urgan that he was not enough of a man even to give her a child!’

Dud’s glance now happened to fall on one of the sheets of paper he had pushed aside to make room for his extempore table-cloth. He stretched out his arm and pulled it towards him, spreading it out over his empty plate, while one of its edges rubbed against his empty egg-shells.

Perusing a line or two of what he had written, he suddenly had an inspiration with regard to an important change he must make, and without more ado he reached for his pen, knocking his cup into the saucer as he did so with the movement of his sleeve.

In the midst of inserting this change at the end of Chapter Twelve he laid down his pen and gazed fixedly out of the window. The nesting rooks in the high elms of Acland House garden were making a fine cawing, and into this upper level of rustic clamour the town noises ascended like voluble dust blending with aerial orchestration. ‘Dorchester’s one of the most interesting towns in England,’ he said to himself. ‘It’ll be a wicked thing if I don’t do justice to it in *Mary Channing.’*

With this thought in his mind he fell into a muse over the various strata of social life that the place revealed, level upon level of quaint traditional differences between man and man, and all receding further and further backward, as he pursued them, into the customs of the remote past.

He had already discovered that to divide the citizens of Durnovaria into upper class, middle class, lower middle class, and proletariat, was a crude and inadequate way of dealing with the town's complicated organism. Each of these classes, the deeper he went into them, divided itself into much subtler categories. How delicately, for instance, the town's professional people, its lawyers, doctors, clergymen, bankers, and so forth, separated themselves from the neighbouring county families, to whom in a few cases they were allied by blood! How unmistakable was the gulf between the great Dorsetshire landowners, with their immemorial manor-houses and parks, and the less wealthy gentry, who yet regarded themselves, and were regarded by others, as county people!

And then, among the tradesmen, what a gulf opened between the more ambitious merchants of the town, with wide provincial connections, and the quieter, less modernized burgesses, often with far more ancient links with the borough's history, who for the most part still lived above their old-fashioned shops!

And then, in regard to the working population, the differences grew and grew, as Dud observed them, between the more skilled artisans, whose habits of life resembled those of the older shop-assistants, and the more floating, less stable element of the unskilled, constantly recruited from the neighbouring villages, and in so many cases driven by the introduction of machinery to depend on government aid and the fluctuations of the dole. Then there were the dairymen and the farmhands, the carters and the shepherds, forever coming to town for this reason or that, and easily distinguishable, as were their rustic housewives, from the borough's permanent inhabitants.

But beyond and beneath all these variations, our friend had gradually come to feel the intermittent pressure — like an atmosphere that advanced and receded, thickened and thinned out — of layer upon layer of racial instinct and habit. How docile, how patient, how industrious, the poorer descendants of the old Durotriges were!

Dud had come to be more and more amazed at the way — as if the tragic levelling of the war had changed nothing, as if the cataclysmic phenomenon of Russia on the horizon had changed nothing — the old feudal distinctions held on, held tight to their deep roots in that populous soil. The respectful manner in which the humbler of these Durotriges, children at school, labourers going to work, men on the dole, old men with pensions, touched their caps to him as he passed them down there on the river-path, many of them dressed far more neatly than he was himself — for Wizzie was not one to trim him up or spend much time sewing on buttons — often made Dud feel nervous and ashamed.

What had a nameless bastard like him, with a mere trick of book-writing, done for these patient people, to receive such honour? It must have been lodged in their blood, like a secret unescapable chemistry, this respect for a gentleman, even for such an extremely dubious gentleman as himself! It must, he thought, be the automatic issue of countless aeons of scandalous oppression, oppression of Neolithic men by metal-bearing men, of Durotriges by Romans, of Romanized Celts by Saxons, of Saxons by Normans, and, for centuries upon centuries, of all those who weren't gentry by all those who were!

As he stared out of the window, turning the motions of the rooks above the stationer's roof into the beatings of his thought against the mystery of custom, he began wondering in what directions, through what psychic cracks and crannies, all the stored-up retribution for these ancient wrongs was now, this very day, finding its outlet. An outlet of some sort, surely, it must find — but what, and where?

That man of his mother's had assured him on Candlemas Night that there were times when Maiden Castle, when Pummery Camp, when Maumbury Rings, came to life again. Did they come to life with a vengeance for all the wrongs they had known under the sun? And was the cruelty of that atrocious justice that strangled and burnt Mary Channing something that must still be avenged? 'And am I', he thought, 'destined to be the mouthpiece of that retribution?'

Impulsively he pushed back his breakfast things, and, without bothering to remove the towel from his desk, pulled his inkpot towards him and began writing at top speed.

As he wrote, with the balmy May air blowing in upon him and the clatter of the traffic mixing with the rhythm of his thought, he felt as though he really had become a medium for the expression not only of one unavenged wrong but of a thousand, all interpenetrating one another, all overlapping and perforating one another, like separate magnetic currents within one great heaving sea of psychic tragedy!

He wrote furiously for about half an hour, letting the feeling that obsessed him pass, as it seemed, from his receptive soul into the words formed by his pen, as if he had been a bodiless presence himself rather than a bony middle-aged man bending over a cluttered table.

When he laid down his pen at last, he gave a great sight of relief, and a wave of extraordinary well-being flowed through him, singularly at variance with the tragic nature of what he had been writing.

He got up then, and straightened his back, forcing his fists so violently into the depths of his trouser-pockets that the trunk of his body came to resemble a knotted tree with a protruding bole bulging out on either side.

Then, for some reason, the image of Thuella crossed his consciousness.

‘I’ve been more than a match for *you*, you cruel bitch!’ he muttered aloud. ‘Yes, you vile larva, you may torture your father and you may fascinate that Glymes man, but you’ll never catch D. No-Man!’

It was at this point that our friend suddenly remembered that he hadn’t read his letters. He generally brought them in with him to his breakfast, gazed languidly at their envelopes while he ate, and opened them as he sipped his last cup of tea. He hurried across the landing now, only to discover that the Royal Martyr had boiled away and was blackening ominously above the flame. He turned off the gas with a jerk and stared round the kitchen. Where the hell had he put his letters? Oh, there they were, under that damned paper! He glanced through them. All were unimportant except two. The first of these was in an unknown hand and bore the postmark ‘Yeovil’.

Our friend contemplated this missive with extreme distaste. An uneducated hand... the place, Yeovil... the address written in pencil— ‘It’s those Urgans! It’s Old Funky or Grummer!’

Not only was the writing bad and in pencil but the envelope was dirty and crumpled. It looked as if it had been kept a long while in the writer’s pocket before the opportunity came to post it. It was stuck down so tightly — had been licked so viciously by some venomous tongue — that it would evidently require some violent handling to get it open.

No-man laid down this unpromising communication and surveyed the other letter. God! what was this? There was no need to use any violence in opening *this* epistle, for the ladylike envelope was barely secured by the minutest dab of glue.

He did not groan out aloud the syllables ‘Thuella’. He did not even *think* them. It was the tall girl herself — the Venetian Post in her green-and-gold Lamia’s skin — who slipped out between his finger-tips and this elegant envelope, and began dancing before him on that small landing and smiling at him with painted lips.

It was not in pencil but in the clearest and most unblotted ink that this letter was written; and Dud read as follows:

Meet me today without fail by the gate a little way up Lovers' Lane where the Scummy Pond is and that Ash you told me about for I *must* see you before this Antelope lunch and I've told Dumbell I'll be there so it won't matter keeping them waiting but be sure to come to that gate in Lovers' Lane by eleven for certain. I'll be expecting you and if you don't come it'll be the end.

Yours, *as it happens*, Thuella.

Our friend looked at his watch. It was now a quarter to eleven. What a fool he had been to leave his letters so long unread! He ought to change his clothes for this lunch — but it couldn't be helped — it was too late now — they must accept him as he was. Even now he couldn't get to that pond — he knew well where it was, and he *had* told her about the ash that grew on its bank that he always thought of as the Ogre-Tree — till a quarter past eleven. She'd have to wait for him. Well! never mind! That'd do her good, the bitch! But it would be maddening if she *wouldn't* wait, for he might never know then — no! not to his dying day — what her motive was, and a person couldn't but feel intense curiosity where anyone like her was involved. She had some favour to ask him, no doubt, on behalf of Enoch before this meeting with the editor, and she no doubt fancied that the writer of a couple of romances would have a great influence on this magnate. Little did she know!

He was glancing now at the stove to make sure he had turned off the gas. He was rushing now into the bedroom to close the window lest it should begin to rain before he got back. He was imprisoning now the letter from

Yeovil between his cup, which he snatched out of its saucer, and his last sheet of manuscript! This he did — heedless of the circle of tea stain it was bound to make — so as to be sure of not mislaying such an ominous missive before he was acquainted with its contents. Finally, with his cap pulled low down over his eyes — a trick of apparel that never failed to inform his mother that her son was on mischief bent — he was running rapidly down the staircase, far too rapidly to notice the smell of burnt almonds and rose-leaves, and was letting himself out of the front door.

And all the while he was doing these things, and all the while he was hurrying along the riverside path, under the prison, by the Hangman's Cottage, round by the dam, between the ditches, to the Blue Bridge, it was neither of rooks nor of cuckoos that he was thinking — though cawings and cuckooings had never seemed so voluble, nor the murmurings of wood-pigeons so close to his ear — but of how he would reproach this cruel hussy, this shameless Venetian Post.

'Oh, the sly bitch!' he thought. 'She'll meet me, will she, by the Scummy Pond? I'll teach her to be the torment of a good man! I'll Platonize her, with her sofas and her cloud-parties! Oh, the sly bitch!'

He didn't actually run, but certainly his thought ran, as he pressed forward, swinging over the Blue Bridge, along the laurel-dark path, under the newly budded beech-trees, till he reached the back gate of Frome House. His thoughts ran so fast ahead that they were circling like swallows round that figure by the Scummy Pond long before he had even got to the entrance of Lovers' Lane.

It was not concealed from him that his moral disapproval of the Venetian Post was a great support to his loyalty to Wizzie. As he strode on, past the neat little lodge so suggestive in its picturesqueness of the influence of Ruskin, he was once more made aware, as he had been three months ago at

Glymes, how little he had known of real erotic fatality when that day in the Urgan caravan he vowed there was no need to give up Miss Wye simply because he was going to live with Miss Ravelston.

‘I can deal with her,’ he said to himself. ‘I’ve proved to her I can get on beautifully without seeing her, and now I’ll prove to her that I can see her and be as hard and secretive as a stone. Not a thing, not a word, shall she get out of me, either about Wizz or about old Claudius’s trouble with the Horse-Head; and I’ll let her know too, before I’ve done with her, what I think of her treatment of her father. It’s lucky for me that she’s so little my style in girls. The back of her neck... well! let *that* go, but her thinness is a positive deformity. There’s something repulsive about her long thin body. It’s not like a girl’s body at all! God knows what it’s like — a snake standing on its tail! Old Funky was perfectly right about little Wizz’s ‘lurin’ figure. *That’s* the figure for me, if only she weren’t so — but *that snake*!’ And once more, as he hurried along, his thoughts circled round the form by the pond, reproaching it, arguing with it, keeping it at its distance, showing it what it was to have met its match!

‘How *did* she’, he thought, ‘get such wicked power over that unlucky bloke? I’d like to make her wait on him hand and foot. I’d like to scuttle her out of that room with her sofas and mirrors and easels! I wonder if he’s got *any* money independently of her? Poor old beggar! He’d be happier in Chubb’s Almshouse with his *Phaedrus* and his *Timaeus.’*

Few of those ten thousand moralists who crowded into Maumbury Rings to see justice done on Mary Channing can have experienced more excitement than that young woman’s historian when he approached the gate leading to the pond.

He was indeed so vexed with the agitation he felt that he actually forced himself to stop for a moment to pull himself together. With a violent effort of his will he not only stood still but compelled himself to take notice of the fast-fading blackthorn blossoms in the hedge, blossoms that had begun to assume a reddish-brown tint before they fell, blossoms that, when they *had* fallen, lay in showers, like microscopic Milky Ways, on the rough leaves of the hedge-nettles.

‘It’s their stamens’, he compelled himself to note, ‘that give them that colour. Their actual petals stay white to the last, which isn’t true of the hawthorn. Why, there *are* some hawthorn buds! I didn’t know blackthorn and hawthorn overlapped in their flowering. I must remember that when I make poor Mary come along this path in her tight-fitting bodice and dainty shoes!’

If any mortal resolution has ever been registered with what might be described as the outermost skin of the mind, it was this resolution of Dud’s about the overlapping of the two kinds of thorn. He released himself from his botanical observations with the rush of an arrow released from a bent bow, and, arriving at the gate, leaned over it, breathing hard and fast.

No sign of any girl, thin or otherwise, snake-like or otherwise: nothing but the Scummy Pond! Well, *that* is not quite correct, for the ash-tree was very much alive. A pleasant-stirring air moved in its branches, but this only accentuated the upward clutch of its ogrish fingers, while it was clear from the direction of its roots that it derived much comfort from sucking up the slime of its green-mantled companion.

Dud looked into the grey branches of the ash and into the dark spaces between the patches of green scum. The thin form he was to have met hovered in the tree, not so much mocking him *from* the tree as substituting its invisible metaphysical substance for the invisible substance of the tree, while for his excited consciousness time was lost in space, and space itself was reduced throughout its centre-revolving spheres to the same thin form, standing and yet *not* standing, in dizzy spasms of alternate being and not-being, between the pond and the tree.

This cosmic experience of Dud's — for such it was, though it would doubtless have occurred in the same way, although on a different plane, to a male cuckoo who had been led to this unfulfilled assignation by a female cuckoo — was not permitted to last to its natural conclusion of being gradually absorbed in the un-Platonic, unheightened welter of ordinary life, but on the contrary was brought to an end by a violent jerk, a jerk almost as startling as when consciousness itself is brought to an end by the administering of gas: for he suddenly heard a step behind him, and, swinging round, he saw her approaching.

She was coming *down* and not *up* Lovers' Lane; and he had time, as he automatically rushed to meet her, to receive that curious shock, so disturbing to human sensibility, which occurs when the person we are waiting for turns out to be, in some startling detail, seriously different from the image of them in our mind.

Thuella did not look in the least like his smart Venetian Post! She was less well-dressed for one thing. Her overcoat had been a tattered object for some while. He remembered how she had worn it when they went together to the Urgans' caravan. But on this warm day she wore in place of any overcoat the most old-fashioned, faded, frayed cloth suit that No-man had ever seen on the back of a gentlewoman. It was of a dirty heather colour, with a most discouraging effect of muddy brownishness, and it had a belt which was so frayed and twisted that it looked as if the girl had used it to drag a restless animal about or was constantly using it to tie up bundles of sticks. In place of her usual boyish cap ('It's the warm weather', he thought, 'that's made her bring out all these old things. It's come too soon for her, before she's had time to buy new ones!') she wore one of those big wide-brimmed flexible straw hats that have come periodically into fashion, and gone periodically put of fashion, since the days of the Stuarts. This hat of Thuella’s looked as if *it* individually — possibly with other ribbons or feathers — had gone in and out of fashion since the Wessex revolt against James II. It certainly looked as if Gainsborough might have painted it on the head of a great lady, but in the presence of that pond and that ash-tree, and in combination with that brown suit and schoolgirl belt, it struck our friend as the sort of pathetic hat that Wizzie might have bought.

The girl’s greeting of him was as different from what he expected as was her attire. She flushed with a childish pleasure at seeing him and hastened to explain that she had gone out at the back and over the fields so as to avoid being seen by the Quirms. ‘Nancy will be there too’, she informed him breathlessly, ‘and I wanted to get hold of you first, for they told me you were all coming!’

All the while she was speaking she held him by the hand and gazed into his eyes with a clinging confidence; and, even after their fingers had separated and he was leaning back against the gate listening to her, her form in that brown suit seemed, without actually touching him, to yield up to him without reservation the appealing warmth of her wistful youth. Anything less like the Lamia figure of the green-and-gold gown of that Candlemas Night at Glymes could hardly be imagined. She was transformed, transmuted, reborn.

The shock of this change was so overwhelming to Dud that it totally upset all his calculated campaign. He could only stare at her with a sort of puzzled indulgence, while the mixture of bewilderment and tenderness in his surrender showed itself in his face as an expression of almost foolish concern.

‘What is it, Thuella?’ he murmured softly. But, even as the vibration in his tone drew the warm body under that frayed belt closer towards him, a mocking demon in some detached part of his brain kept repeating in a jeering sing-song: ‘As wicked dew as e’er my mother brushed, with raven’s feather from unwholesome fen... ‘ And he found himself deliberately shifting his position till he could catch a glimpse of the green-mantled water, as if the mere sight of the Scummy Pond would help him to keep his head!

‘What is it, my dear?’ he repeated. And the girl, in the same wistful voice, childlike, pleading, and full of an absolute confidence in his sympathy, poured forth a long pitiful story of the troubles of her Glymes neighbours.

‘Their investments have gone wrong,’ she said. ‘I don’t know the details, but their income has gone down to almost nothing. Do you know, I’ve had to help Nance from *our* larder. They’ve paid their rent, but that’s left them with barely enough for bread and milk and butter. They’re not penniless, of course. They’ve got a few pounds coming in every quarter, but that goes in absolute necessities. Do you know, I even found Urien was short of cigarettes, and he’s a great smoker.

‘They *must* get a little money somehow — even if he has to do uncongenial work. And he’s ready to do anything! He wasn’t before. He said he had other things to do that were more important. He never talks about what he’s doing, but it’s something connected with a revival of the old religions. I know *that* without his telling me. I feel it. It’s a kind of instinct, you know, when you’re interested in anyone! But this lunch with Dumbell’s father-in-law is his grand chance. That man’s got endless irons in the fire — newspapers, books, magazines — it’s a huge firm!’

Dud listened gravely to every word. He felt ready to do anything she suggested, but in the hard realistic core of his being there rose up an impenetrable doubt. It was impossible to imagine Enoch Quirm writing anything saleable. It was hard to visualize him even in conversation with a real man of affairs! What would he look like at this lunch at the Antelope? Would he wear that old filthy sweater? Why, the very sight of him would choke this man off!

And yet the girl went on pleading with him. She kept assuring him that as a writer he was much better known than he realized, and known too for just the sort of thing that Urien might be able to do on some smaller scale. He felt inclined to cry out more than once: ‘But what is Urien to me?’ But such hardness evaporated in the presence of that frayed belt, and besides, if this man of his mother’s *was* responsible for his being in the world...

Thuella had already taken off her gloves. Indeed, she had appeared on the scene with the right-hand one already off; but the other speedily followed. She now, with great deliberation, removed her hat and placed it on the grass by the side of the hedge. He could not help being fascinated by the way, when this was done, she snatched her tortoise-shell comb from the top of her head and proceeded to smooth back her shining hair from that unequalled neck.

‘You and Urien have become more friendly than you used to be?’ he hazarded at last, grown weary of all these details of domestic penury upon which she seemed to take pleasure in enlarging.

She gave him a quick tender intimate look. ‘I see’, she said, ‘you haven’t forgotten our talk in that old waiting-room. But yes! I *have* grown to like him better and understand him more. But, as I told you that day, it’s impossible to know him *really*. He’s an extraordinary being, my dear! Sometimes I think he must be one of the most extraordinary people who’ve ever lived. One thing is certain about him: no one — Nance least of all! — has the remotest idea of what goes on in his head.

'He must have talked to Nance quite a lot when he first fell in love with her — she's twenty years younger than he is, you know — but from the way Nance speaks of those days, and from what she tells me of what he used to say, I don't believe she understood a word. She's devoted to him, of course. We all must admire her for that. But it's painful to watch the way she treats him. I mean the mental way she treats him, dragging down his dignity and self-respect, and turning him into a kind of boor. Of course we know she slaves for him; but you feel it's done for conscience' sake, and because, you know, once her man, always her man. But I think she despises him down to the bottom of her soul. It began before her boy's death, but it's got worse since, and you feel it in the air. You feel as if she regarded him as a repulsive animal to whom in some way she's hopelessly committed.'

'But he is rather — odd, isn't he? I mean in his ways! I could well understand a woman finding him terribly trying.'

The girl smiled. 'Never mind about his character, my dear. What I want you to do for me is a clear issue: get him some work that'll bring them some money. I know this man will do it for you. He's very keen to meet you. I think between ourselves' — here her voice sank to a whisper— 'he *wants you* to do something for him; and it came over me that, if you wanted to, you might strike up a bargain.'

'A bargain?' echoed Dud.

'Don't you see?' she whispered, nestling close up to him. 'You'll do something for *him* — and he'll do something for Urien. Do you catch on now?'

D. No-man nodded. He didn't catch on enough to compare himself with Zeus the Cloud-Gatherer, but there was a maudlin unction of nervous indulgence in his gesture not at all unlike that god’s attitude to the supplicatory Thetis.

‘Well, that’s settled!’ she murmured, breathing a sigh of heart-deep relief. She gave a quick glance, after that, up and down the lane, and it presented itself to even Dud’s wool-gathering wits that she was thinking of rewarding him as men have been rewarded by women from time immemorial.

‘Come to the pond’s edge!’ he jerked out abruptly, putting his shoulder to the gate to get it open.

The deepest part of the pond had no green scum upon it, and, as it happened, this portion of the water lay at the bottom of the bank under the thick hedge, completely out of sight of the lane, and even out of sight of anyone standing at the gate.

To this point of vantage, after having carefully closed the gate, Dud led the young painter of clouds. The bank had been thoroughly dried by the morning sun, and though it sloped down into water of considerable depth, judging from the ink-black surface, its slope was not a steep one, and there were several deviations in its grassy descent. Some of these were ledges no wider than those made by hedgehogs or field-mice; none of them were as wide as those made by rabbits. Down this grassy slope, offering all manner of footholds, finger-holds, and knotted supports to those who, like Dud and Miss Wye, craved a temporary isolation from their kind, stretched the roots of a couple of small hedge-trees.

Our friend had only just got the girl settled in a tolerably comfortable position when she remembered that she’d left her hat on the grass by the gate. This meant that he had to scramble awkwardly over her and make his way back to their original meeting-place.

As chance would have it, whom should he see coming up the lane but three middle-aged men, persons he had come to know quite well by meeting them so often by the old brick bridge at the foot of High East Street. They were all, he supposed, on the dole, and they were rarely seen apart, and with them, almost invariably, was a little bitch terrier.

He felt decidedly uncomfortable to be caught holding such a striking-looking lady's hat; but there was nothing for it but to bid them good-day, make his comment on the warmth of the weather, and assume the attitude that it was his usual habit to carry in his hand on a fine May morning this particular feminine adornment.

Treating Thuella's hat, therefore, as if it had been a bunch of bluebells, he kept the three men in friendly conversation for a minute or two, and then continued casually leaning against the gate after they had gone on.

The only trouble was that the little bitch terrier became quickly aware of the presence of Thuella behind the high hedge and proceeded to sniff and jump about and bark vociferously at the spot nearest to the invisible form.

Hearing their dog's excitement, the three companions turned round and began slowly to return, which was the last thing our friend desired. The men called to the dog as they came back, and Dud, beginning to find the situation more awkward than ever, tried to drive her away, even going so far as to wave the girl's hat at the small beast's excited tail.

In the detached portion of his mind where he habitually analysed his experiences and kept a rein over his feelings, a very quaint struggle went on. According to his long-practised philosophy — now, after all these years of egoistic concentration, grown almost automatic — he set himself, even at this grotesque contretemps, to squeeze *some* contemplative satisfaction from the moment's passing; and, just as he had forced himself to pause, while approaching the Scummy Pond, to note the petals of the perishing blackthorn, so now, while he waved the girl's elegant hat at the rump of the terrier, he forced himself to envisage the whole situation in the large sweeping manner, purged of all teasing details, which he had made into his obstinate life-cult.

‘A masculine skeleton covered with lean flesh and shabby clothes’, he forced himself to soliloquize, ‘waiting the moment when it will stretch itself out beside a feminine skeleton covered with a brown suit encircled by a frayed belt!’

‘Get on! Get away!’ he heard himself cry to the persistent dog, whose own skeleton — though he did not go into that — was covered with a black-and-white skin, while its quivering tail, electrified by the presence behind the edge, was of unspotted white.

But the men had got her now, and No-man watched them with extreme relief disappear at last round a bend in the lane.

It was only when he had opened the gate to rejoin Thuella, and had caught a glimpse of her childish figure (for she seemed altogether childish today) balanced contentedly if a little precariously above the deep end of the pond, that his mind — but *this* movement of thought had nothing to do with any contemplative cult — recalled the drooping head of Wizzie as it looked when he had run back into their room to give her that reconciling kiss. This image floating irrelevantly into his head over the water-meadows, past Frome House back gate, caused him an unpleasant twinge.

As he scrambled along the bank towards the recumbent figure, his satyrish pleasure in the exposed curves of her limbs was lost in a moment’s intense thinking; and yet it was not so much thinking as the distressing clash of two contradictory opportunities, the opportunity to be faithful to Wizzie, and the opportunity to enjoy after his own cerebral fashion the yielding mood of this strange young woman.

It was some plausible demon — the demon of convoluted self-preservation perhaps — that came to his rescue as he clambered over the girl's body to his balancing-place at her side. This demon suggested to him the idea of exploiting his moral disapproval of her treatment of Mr Wye, exploiting his resentment of her for her seduction of Wizzie, exploiting in fact all his accumulative malice against her, to assist him to remain scrupulously faithful to the circus-rider, while at the same time he allowed his sense of sight to enjoy what he rigorously refused to his sense of touch!

'She will be piqued', this craft adviser whispered, 'by not being able to ruffle your self-control; and without giving her the satisfaction of making you unfaithful to Wizz you will get such pleasure from contemplating what you refuse to touch that tantalization will be swallowed up in ecstasy.'

But Dud's demon betrayed him into the girl's hands. Thuella must have had the exactly corresponding feminine perversity answering to our friend's, for never, since in that old organist's house in East Dorset he had first grown conscious of these matters, had he known such entrancement, such 'linked sweetness long drawn out', as he enjoyed that morning on the bank of the Scummy Pond.

'How grotesque', Dud thought, in the detached portion of his mind, 'are the situations we get into! I must remember this in the story of my Mary. People in books are luckier than in life. Every life, if the truth were known, contains experiences of a monstrous grotesqueness.'

These reflections of our friend came and went like crude captions on the screen of his sensations. The real background of what he felt must have been the edge of the green slime against the deep water, for he found himself impressed by the unevenness of this edge and by the way certain agglomerations of the microscopic green weed floated out further than the rest in minute promontories and capes. The ungodly pleasure the girl was giving him began actually to take the shape of this wavering edge between greenness and blackness; and this congruity went so deep that the satisfaction of his mental desire seemed to him then like a delirious worm feeding upon the vegetation roots of the world, a worm rising up from that black water — that was the primal gulf of space — to feed forever upon celestial duckweed!

It must not be supposed — so touchingly hypocritical men and women are in their love-attractions, as if this amazing vibration between the two were too sacred, too holy, too near the eel-bridge between life and death, to be subjected even to the sacrilege of thought, much less to the vandalism of words — it must not, I say, be supposed that Dud and Thuella were guiltily silent during their cerebral absorption. They kept up all the while — as if for the benefit of the ash-tree and the pond — a perfunctory semblance of conversation. Nor could they bestow even what was left after that of their superficial consciousness on much rational awareness of their bizarre situation, for it was constantly necessary to keep themselves from slipping by the aid of those accommodating hedge-roots.

Meanwhile, the ash-tree on the further side of the pond kept clutching at the air with its queer upturning fingers as the soft breeze rustled through it. If it were an ogre-tree, that ash, as Dud had let himself fancy in many of his solitary walks up Lovers' Lane, it was contenting itself just now with a harmless vegetation mimicry of what was going on opposite it, save that it was the invisible spring air, and not a palpable form encircled by a brown belt, towards which its budding twigs vibrated, swaying and undulating there, as if to the rhythm of some secret pulse-throb of its life-sap.

Yes, in their pathetic human hypocrisy Dud and Thuella went obstinately on, putting various floating fancies, unworthy of the name of thoughts, into perfunctory words; and, all the while, their real thoughts were the recurrent orbits, each revolving on its own quivering axis, of their magnetic advances and retreats, while the absence of actual contact between them evoked, in place of any twinge of tantalization, an intensity of imaginative lust that was transporting.

Thuella seemed to know to a point of exquisite clairvoyance how to play on the psychic nerve of his cerebral desire; and our friend was astounded, even while he was enraptured, by her understanding of the perversity of his senses.

The magnetic interchange between them was rendered more complicated, though not less exciting, by reason of their dangerous position above the Scummy Pond, into whose dark water it is certain that John Bunyan would have precipitated them both, and out of whose green slime it is equally certain that Dante would have called forth a cart-load of horned devils, of scratching, biting, scaly devils, of foul, stinking, obscene devils, to switch them off to hell.

But all forms of erotic rapture — even that mysterious embracing of the cosmos known to so many of the old saints — come at last to an end, and the time arrived when our friend found himself helping Thuella, with her hat in her own hand now, to reach the gate.

Here he looked at his watch, and the very gesture of doing this, though he had not discarded it in the interval, swept his mind back to their first meeting on All Souls' Day.

'Plenty of time!' he remarked. 'But I've got to call for the others in Friary Lane. You'd better come there with me, eh? — and we'll all go on together.'

Thuella merely nodded and made a little grimace. She began raising her thin brown-sleeved arms to her head and adjusting the great flapping hat. As he saw it now beside him, it did not look so pitiably incongruous as he had felt it to be at first, and the further they advanced side by side down the lane towards the back gate of Frome House, the less incongruous it seemed.

‘They’ll stare at her at the Antelope,’ he thought, ‘but I’m really not sure they won’t think her a grand lady! She looks very fashionable to me, in spite of the belt!’

Dud’s notions of what was fashionable were somewhat vague; but he *had* seen in South Street, during the morning hours when the upper class did their shopping, hats not so very unlike the one that was now fluttering at his side.

By the time they reached the Blue Bridge they had passed several groups of pedestrians, and the glances of furtive awe which he had caught directed to Thuella, who was evidently taken for a distinguished visitor, changed his attitude to her whole costume.

He even decided, after various surreptitious glances at the brown belt, that what looked to him like its frequent use for other purposes than adornment might really be the last touch of refined dress-making. Could this also apply to the look of genteel fadedness that emanated from the brown suit itself?

Thuella, having stolen from him a promise that he would do everything in his power to wheedle Dumbell’s father-in-law into assisting Mr Quirm, fell into pensive silence, a silence which it may well be believed gave our friend an opportunity for many lively thoughts.

Among these thoughts one at least was decidedly cowardly, namely that Thuella would make it appear to Wizzie that he and she had merely encountered each other at the entrance to Friary Lane!

But what staggered and confounded him, and led to meditations that were ‘heavy as frost, and deep almost as life’, was the fact that with their departure from the Scummy Pond all his old resentment against Thuella had returned. This was an emotional phenomenon that astonished him more than any discovery he had made in himself since he discovered that Mona's phantom was not Mona at all but the creation of his perversity.

One very subtle point he arrived at in his analysis just as they were turning by the Hangman's Cottage. In fact he blent his thoughts about it with his observation that his friend the drowner had opened the hatch from the river to the side-ditch, thus lowering by several feet the level of the water under the prison bank. It was always water... water... water...in this unique old town! No wonder the Romans, with their mania for bathing, had enjoyed themselves here for so long.

But the point he had come to was that his anger and malice against Thuella had been deeply connected from the beginning with his deadly attraction to her.

'I *do* think,' he said to himself as he walked in silence by the side of the object of his conclusions, 'that she's behaved abominably to old Wye. But who doesn't know the nervous repulsions that are always springing up between fathers and daughters? Perhaps her treating him like this was the only alternative to incest between them!'

Thus did our friend ramble on, arguing with himself just as if three people had been strolling beneath the Governor's house instead of two.

'But what a fate I've got into!' he went on. 'Wizz is my girl. I had that feeling about her when I first set eyes on her in the caravan! And Wizz's figure is a lovely, natural, girlish figure, beautifully developed, beautifully athletic, whereas *yours*, my demon, yours, my cunning, lecherous bitch, is an unhealthy distortion, a deformity, a sickness of Nature!'

He suddenly felt a longing to see more of his companion's face than he could make out under her spacious hat. 'What on earth', he asked her, 'will your Urien have put on for this affair? Will he be wearing that old jersey of his?'

He obtained his wish with a vengeance, for the tone in which he had said ‘your Urien’ gave her eyes a flash of fury as she turned, and her red lips a twist of unconcealed contempt.

‘He’ll be no worse’, she remarked curtly, ‘and no better, I suppose, than the rest of us! We’re none of us so very wonderful. But if you feel like that towards him, if you’re so little that you can’t recognize a great man when you see him, I won’t keep you to your promise for a—’

She was interrupted by a greeting from the coal-yard, where Claudius, leaning on the handle of his shovel, stood smiling and nodding at them.

It was impossible for No-man to pass him with a mere salute; so he paused by the bridge, and Thuella paused with him.

‘Don’t forget what you promised to do for me,’ murmured the penitential coal-heaver across the ditch. He spoke in what he supposed was a confidential whisper, but the words were carried as far as if they had been spoken from the rostrum in Pompey’s Theatre. Several Orchard Street boys, making a toy dam in the familiar ditch, stopped their game to listen. Claudius had already become to the children of this district a treasure-trove of delight, a jumping-jack of surprises.

‘So *you’ve* made him promise something too,’ said Thuella. ‘I hope no more people will go and do that. If we’re the only ones, we can keep him faster to it.’

The candidate for Communistic freemasonry stared at her blankly, and his ruddy face darkened. Dud saw that he suspected him of unsympathetic chattering.

‘She knows nothing about *our* affairs,’ he said hurriedly. ‘Promises to women are quite a different thing. But I swear now by — by Hero and Leander’ — for at that moment his two favourite ducks crossed the path with nervous quackings— 'that I won't promise anything more to anyone till—'

But Claudius interrupted him, letting the shovel tall and drawing anxiously nearer. 'Don't offer any hopes of my changing — all *this,'* he whispered solemnly. 'I'm glad I saw you again. I was afraid I might have led you to think—'

'No, no!' cried Dud reassuringly. 'I fully understand. It's live and let live. That's the motto! Everyone to do what's right in their own eyes, and to let everyone else do the same!'

The reformer's face relaxed. A smile of touching gratitude passed over it, and he half-turned to resume his work.

Dud had an inspiration. 'A cigarette?' he cried, and added hurriedly: 'I want an excuse for buying another packet!'

Leaving the despiser of the primrose path to reconcile his conscience as best he might to this heaven-sent luxury, our friend, followed by his slender companion, began ascending the well-known hill to the entrance to Friary Lane.

The encounter with Claudius set him pondering on the indelible stamp that Rome had left upon this place. 'It's Rome', he thought, 'more than the Norman houses, more than the feudal gentry, that's made all these people so patient of authority, so slow in striking back, so enduring and stoical. If that man of Mother's is right, and Mai-Dun and Pummery ever do throw off their burden, it'll be Rome that they'll throw off last! Perhaps — they — will — some — day. There are strange things deep-suppressed in you, my Durnovaria, deep, deep-suppressed!'

'Do you believe in Christianity, D. No-man?' These surprising words reached him from Thuella's scarlet lips as they were passing Chubb's Almshouse.

He characteristically came to a complete stop, and, leaning heavily on his stick, peered into her face under the brim of her hat as if he'd found a blackthorn with purple petals instead of white.

'Which do you mean,' he asked very gravely and in a hesitating voice, 'the prophet, or the magic ceremonies?'

The girl looked down. Then, in a scarcely audible voice and with a scared look in her eyes: 'The god,' she whispered. But directly afterwards she replied crossly with an angry frown: 'I was thinking of right and wrong. I don't know what you're talking about.'

Dud picked up a couple of crushed bluebells from the sun-baked road and threw them over a wall. Their moist stalks left two wet marks where they had been lying, marks that resembled the slime of snails but were less glittering.

'It's him down there', he said grimly, 'made you think of *that*! But he's no more a Christian than your father!'

Thuella moved on with an impatient gesture, and he was compelled to follow. He felt ashamed of what he had said. It was unkind to refer to her father, and who was he to take it for granted that this girl had no more conscience than Mary Channing?

Entering Mrs Dearth's house, he left Thuella with her sister and hurried upstairs to Wizz's room. Though he did not pause — no! not for a second — before opening the door, he had plenty of time, so fast move the thoughts of men, to wonder nervously in what mood he would find her.

As a matter of fact he found her exactly where he had left her early that morning, seated before her looking-glass. She might have been seated there for the last four hours, except that she was no longer in her night-dress. But this time she rose at his entrance; and, Heaven be thanked, her radiant face expressed nothing but pleasure at seeing him.

‘How nice you look!’ he cried, holding her at arm’s length. It was true. The ex-circus-rider had turned overnight into Miss Ravelston of Ravenswood. She wore a dress he had never seen her in before. Indeed, she and Jenny had kept it a secret from him. Jenny herself had helped her choose both the stuff and the pattern, and they had found a clever seamstress, not many doors off, who had fitted it and made it up in an incredibly short time. It was a wonderful fairy-like grey, with filmy flounces and loose sleeves, and it had a romantic touch of rose colour at the bosom, like a wound from a spear.

The girl looked a totally different person from the Wizz he had parted from that morning, and he said to himself, thinking of the changed Thuella, ‘They are conjurers with their clothes! And if with their clothes, why not with...’ And his mind raced off down an incredible and confusing vista of feminine metempsychosis!

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you’d better come down now, if you’re ready, and show yourself off to your precious Thel. She’s down there with Jenny.’

Wizzie’s hands went up to her head, and she turned quickly round again to her mirror. He saw her small oval face and shining eyes reflected there, and how anxiously she patted the sides of her head and smoothed her hair forward, hiding more of her forehead.

‘I’d rather put on my hat first,’ she remarked; and then, more to herself than to him: ‘It isn’t right. It’s too large.’ Saying this, and muttering something else too technical for Dud to follow, she picked up from the table a round black object that appeared to him to resemble a priest’s biretta.

‘It doesn’t *look* very large,’ he murmured, thinking of the adornment he had recently made use of to drive the terrier out of the hedge.

‘It’s too large,’ she repeated with a sigh as she put the thing on.

‘It’s much nicer’, he said reassuringly, ‘than your other one.’

Wizzie treated these words as if they were so irrelevant as not even to be annoying. From the faint movement she made with her shoulders he knew that he had said something with as little bearing on the occasion as if he had told her that he had found bluebells in the road.

‘Well! Come on down,’ he cried abruptly. ‘They’ll soon tell you whether it looks all right! Where’s your cloak?’

But it now appeared that Wizzie had made her toilet under the impression that the day was too warm for cloaks. She finally, however, did allow him, though with a sharp rebuke for his fussiness, to carry her cloak on his arm; and thus they went downstairs.

It may be believed that the last thing Dud wanted when they entered Mrs Dearth’s kitchen, where Thuella had ensconced herself in Claudius’s arm-chair, and Jenny, already dressed to go out, was tidying things up before setting forth, was to meet Thuella’s eye. But to avoid doing this he had to devote himself so exclusively to Jenny that he missed, to his great annoyance, the expression on the two girls’ faces as they encountered each other in their lunch-party clothes.

He caught the intonation of their voices all the same, and it was an indescribable comfort to him to recognize that they sounded as friendly, indeed as infatuated, as ever. But it soon became hard for him to overhear anything that was going on between them because of the extreme tension of his interview with Mrs Dearth. He had boldly taken the bull by the horns and had attacked Jenny at once in his role as ambassador from Claudius; but he was shocked at the dark cloud of implacable resentment that descended upon her when her friend’s name was mentioned.

It was the first time he had dared, since her estrangement with Claudius, to approach the perilous topic, and he said to himself when he saw this black cloud of remorseless obstinacy, ‘Is it impossible for *any* ordinary, natural, simple kindness to play a fundamental part in the relations between the Yin and the Yang? Must the attraction between men and women *always* entail these abysmal angers? It isn't even misunderstanding,' he thought, as he surveyed the Horse-Head's face, in which the blood literally seemed to change from red to black, and the eyes to grow fuliginous, and dusky wrinkles to gather between them and the nose, as soon as he referred to the man in question, 'for she knows him far better than I do! She knows perfectly well how his conscience works; she knows how, after that passage with her brother, he *has* to do what he's doing. But yet she won't forgive him! He has committed the unpardonable sin, from a woman's point of view. He has obeyed his conscience and not her. What they want is to possess a man's whole identity, to turn him from lover into child, to be *in* his nerves, *in* his mind, *in* his religions, *in* his conscience, so that there is no portion of his being where they aren't at home. No, no! These deep conflicts aren't misunderstandings, as both sides love to affirm: they are *understandings*. They know each other too well!'

Dud sighed as he looked at the face opposite him where black blood had replaced red blood. 'You're a good woman,' he thought. 'It's the sex-demon that has entered into you. You'd be lovely to Claudius if only you didn't love him.'

When the four of them, the two Wye sisters and he and Wizzie, finally entered the Antelope, they found that they were the very last to turn up. All the others were talking in the comfortable lounge on the ground-floor. This was not the bar where Mrs Dearth had first met our friend, but a room on the opposite side of the staircase, a retreat used more by residents than transients.

Over and above the guests of Mr George Cumber there was but one person in the room, a pathetically self-conscious little man, dressed in the most perfect negligence of pure gentility, whose one desire, as he sat writing at a table and shrinking into himself, was to feel his difference from this motley group of fellow-creatures. Everything about this refined person seemed to be shrinking into itself along with him. Providence, in depriving the poor man of every human gift but that of being a gentleman, had endowed this virtue with so much magic power of its own that a palpable though imponderable circle of exclusiveness spread itself over everything within his reach. The chair he sat on became his own private library chair; the carpet beneath his feet became a compendium of all the carpets in all the rooms where he had been valued at his true value. Between his self-conscious boot-soles and this particular carpet a feudal relation had already established itself which compelled all the other boots in the room to recognize the presence of some subtle privilege.

But the poor man himself had paid such a heavy price for this advantage that his shrinking discomfort in the presence of Mr Cumber and his guests made our friend feel quite sorry for him, and it was with relief that he watched him retire from the scene the second the clock indicated the opening of the dining-room for lunch.

‘Good Lord!’ Dud said to himself as soon as Mr Cumber, who had been standing in the full sunshine from the window with his broad back to the fire, was made aware of his identity. ‘Is Thuella right, then, and *am* I more of a person with people like this than I supposed?’

Certainly the moment the man grasped his hand he felt himself the subject of concentrated civility. But our friend’s egoism was so subjective, and his pride so averse to this particular kind of recognition, that after listening politely for a while to the magnate’s talk his thoughts began to wander. Civility prevented him from looking away from the countenance of his interlocutor, but each competent business-like feature of the great man's face became the jumping-off board for his own private meditations.

The man's well-cut nose caused him to remember that unopened letter with the Yeovil postmark. 'Curse it!' he thought. 'I believe it's Old Funky again!' And then the man's strongly marked chin served as a promontory from which he took flight to Claudius and his coal-yard. But the most curious of the transformations that the energetic face of this unwitting patron of historians had to endure was the mental sorcery that substituted for the gleam of his small penetrating eyes one particular look that had darted forth, at a certain point, from Thuella's soul as they hung together over the Scummy Pond.

There finally arrived a moment when the man's talk — he was evidently fishing for a sensational article on something or other — became so tedious that No-man allowed his gaze, as well as his mind, to wander; and it was then he took in the attitude of Urien to all this.

Urien was seated on one of the couches between their host's daughter and son-in-law, and although he *was* wearing a sweater in place of a waistcoat, it was a clean one of a dark colour and looked by no means unbecoming.

Dud himself had been greeted by Dumbell and his wife on his first entrance, but they hadn't bothered to rise. The only rapport he had been able to establish with Dunbar Wye since he first met him was connected with botany, for which the young man had a passion; but one could not very well plunge into botanical pedantries every time one encountered a person. Apart from botany it was hard to imagine human stupidity carried further than in the brain of poor Dumbell, though that further point of pig-headedness *did* seem to have been reached within the fuzzy-haired skull of Sissie Wye.

The young man had inherited from his parent a high narrow forehead, and he parted his straight locks exactly in Teucer's way. He even had the old Platonist's trick of alternately pressing his thin lips together and abruptly opening them as if to snap at a gnat. His whole nature, indeed, seemed to express itself in a strain of gaping intensity varied by frequent clicks of obstinate closing down. The young man's sensibilities seemed atrophied in other directions, as if he had no natural pores to his skin, as if his sole contact with the world was through his trout-like gills which nothing but a particular kind of fly could bring to the top of the water. The face he turned to life was bloodless fish's gills into which, our friend was forced to conclude, the Blackshirt philosophy — whatever *that* was — had thrust a stout hook.

The little wife, on the contrary, turned upon existence the head of a cantankerous doll, all fuzzy-wuzzy with flaxen hair, but quite as impervious to all but extremely limited considerations as were the hooked gills of poor Dumbell.

But what was this? Both these young people, as they sat on either side of him, appeared fascinated by Urien! Dud had never seen them in the man's company before. Were they always like this with him, or was their behaviour just now due to their knowledge that Mr Cumber really *was* intending to take some practical advantage of the fellow's erudition in Welsh matters?

But as he let their host continue indicating the nature of the contribution he wanted, of which the most important aspect appeared to be the precise number of words required, he took the opportunity to study Mr Quirm's attitude to it all with a growing interest. The look of the man bewildered him not a little. Was he one of those exceptional human beings whose bodily appearance depended on some secret intention of their inner will?

Our friend, as a romantic student of history, had come to explain many old psychological riddles on this ground, namely by the power that certain rare natures have been given of changing their protective colouring for private ends of their own.

All his former physical impressions of this man of his mother’s required readjustment in his mind as he saw him now in this pleasant lounge chatting so plausibly with the young Wyes. His face had subsided from the majestic and relapsed into the handsome. His features had lost — or was it that between the bright sunshine and the hospitable fire this peculiarity was momentarily obscured? — that look of being formed out of mountain mist that struck No-man so much on former occasions. His dusky hair no longer resembled some queer kind of moorland moss. His eyes, though their expression remained veiled and indistinct, had no longer that semi-mortuary look. And the man, though his corduroy trousers were by no means new and his sweater inappropriate enough to the occasion, looked quite at his ease, neither abashed nor nervous, and in no sense like a desperate suppliant for financial aid.

He caught our friend’s glance fixed upon him, and a natural and even mischievous smile flickered over his lips, as much as to say: ‘You needn’t worry about me, my lad. Look to yourself!’

From Enoch Quirm Dud’s glance wandered to Jenny and Nancy, who apparently were as much under the spell of Thuella as the young couple were under the spell of Urien. The three of them were standing by the window, out of which Wizzie, preoccupied with her new black hat, to which her gloved hands were constantly rising, and seated in a large arm-chair, stared rather self-consciously.

Dud’s thoughts, as he learnt from Mr Cumber the importance of addressing yourself, in a magazine article, to the simplest intelligence among your readers, soon fell, after their usual fashion, into what he himself would have described as bed-rock considerations. In other words, he meditated upon Thuella and Wizzie.

He confined himself at first to the former's brown suit, which struck him now as too big and loose for the thin form within it. 'What it really does', he said to himself, 'is to emphasize the fact that it is the conventional covering of a quite naked girl. She *isn't* naked, of course — who knows that, if not I, after this morning? — but its looseness, and that schoolgirl belt, suggest that under it is just a bare body, not a lot of underclothes. Wizz, on the other hand, looks in some funny way *all* clothes! But of course that's because of her normal feminine shape that fills out any well-made garments and lends itself to their flowingness like a mountain-side to beautiful vapour! That's how a girl ought to be dressed. Her clothes ought to be part of her soul. But Thuella's clothes have nothing to do with her soul! She looks as if she'd got wet and put someone else's on — and her great-grandmother's hat! Yes, there's something about her body being so cold and slippery and naked all the time inside her clothes that's very curious. I suppose that's why it attracts me — or do I want to make her seem like that in order to...? Yes, but there *is* something dangerous to me about her contempt for clothes *as* clothes. They're nothing to her unless they can give a wicked effect!'

All these thoughts vibrated through the air, up and down, in and out, in front of the well-moulded features of Mr Cumber, features that in his office at home were an ideal of competent virility to a couple of male clerks and a mask of confused humbug to a couple of girl stenographers.

But it was that one particular look from Thuella's eyes, as she made it possible for him to enjoy just a little more of the curve of her exposed limbs, that recurred to his mind now.

Wizzie, in her arm-chair by the window, was playing her old trick with her knuckles in her lap, while Jenny was bending down above her and doing something to the touch of rose at her bosom.

Mr Cumber, without interrupting his discourse on the nature of magazine articles, had rung a bell at his side and had ordered a variety of drinks, which a waiter was now handing round on a tray.

But, although Dud took in these ripples on life's surface, it was as if the old hostelry about him, and indeed the whole of the town, from the chestnut walk in front of Rothesay House to the statue of Thomas Hardy with its profile turned towards the Roman wall, were but a negligible framework to that look in Thuella's eyes. The whole town? Why, Maiden Castle, Pummery, Maumbury Rings, were as nothing, and the Chesil Beach was as nothing, compared with that look! 'It's all in my mind, all, *all*!' thought the philosophic Dud. 'And if the ether above us on this bright day is only the circle of *our* dimension as against the next, that look of Thuella's is one of the ultimate cosmic realities.'

And what did it say to him, that look? It said that their sensual nerves corresponded in a manner that linked them together until death. It said, 'I can call you to me, I can excite your lust to madness, at any time I like, with this look of mine *and what it means*. You can kill me', the look said, 'but as long as our eyes meet in *that* way, you'll be enjoying me in your mind; you won't be able to help it. Even though you flee to the uttermost ends of the earth, you'll have to enjoy me in your mind — yes, you'll have to lick me up like water forever! Forever I'll be the water flowing under your chin,' that look said, 'and the mirage under your wheels, and the wind between your teeth! And yet we'll have no need to touch each other! Our nerves are our gods when we're like that, and they are the same gods!

‘Now that it’s once happened, you’d know I was looking at you, and you’d know *everything else*, even if you were blind, even if we were both dead! Yes, it’ll be with *that look* that I’ll call you to me if I die first. Yes, yes! and you’ll come quick enough, night or day, grubbing at my grave with your tongue hanging out! They’ll have to put you away; but I shall be there with you all the time!

‘I shall be there, looking at you — *you know how* — till they can’t keep you, you’ll be such a husk with enjoying me! Yes, you’ll be so light that you’ll blow out between the bars, and we’ll float together forever over the Scummy Pond of the world!’

While all this was whirling through No-man’s brain he was accepting a glass of something from the waiter’s tray and exchanging nods with Mr Cumber.

‘I have one little condition to make’, he remarked slowly, ‘before I undertake anything definite for you. We all, down here, think so highly of Mr Quirm, and we feel sure that if you *could*, in some branch of your publications — on Welsh matters, of course — give him a chance to show what he can do, you’ll find him a mine — yes! a mine, Mr Cumber — of untouched information.’

His host tossed off his drink and gave Dud a steady, penetrating look out of his small grey eyes. Then he smiled in a cold but not unfriendly manner.

‘Mr Quirm and I have already had a little business talk’, he said, ‘and I hope we may arrange something; but of course I never come to any final decision until I know a man’s work.’

‘Certainly, quite so. I understand, perfectly,’ said No-man. ‘But I’m a little — well — eccentric perhaps — in this case; and it would distress me to get — to get things taken, you know, until my friend Mr Quirm—’

‘Your friend Mr Quirm shall have his chance,’ said the great man solemnly. ‘And as to our own little matter, you’ll hear from me — you’ll hear from me very shortly, Mr No-man. I am extremely glad to have had this opportunity.’

Dud suddenly felt as if he had been made a fool of. Urien seemed to have gained his point independently of any assistance.

‘Now, Sissie, dear’ — and Mr Cumber took a ponderous step or two towards Dumbell’s wife— ‘will you lead the way with Mr Quirm? I think we shall find our table and our lunch ready now. The room’s upstairs, they tell me.’

Dud found himself ascending the Antelope stairs side by side with his old ally Nancy. *She* looked exactly the same as when he had first seen her that day in the cemetery.

‘I believe you’ve done it for us,’ she whispered to him as they went up. Her eyes were shining, and she gave him the usual warm pressure upon his arm. ‘Sissie has been sweet about it all. She likes him, you know. It’s queer, isn’t it? She really does! But of course it’ll be what *you* say that’ll clinch it. I don’t think, out at Glymes, we’ve quite realized—’

But Dud cut her short. ‘It just happened that this chap had heard of me somewhere. I’ve no influence with him whatever, or with Sissie either. What I *am* proud of is that your husband has read my books!’

She held him back for a second on the landing before they entered the dining-room. ‘I’ve come to wish very much’, she whispered, leaning so close to him that the cowslip sweetness of her breath stole through his senses and mingled with the balminess of the air and with the scent of the flowers in the big cheerful room at whose open door they paused, ‘that *he* had lived to make friends with you.’

Dud was not oblivious to the poignance of the sigh that accompanied this remark.

‘I am sorry for that too,’ he replied as they went in together.

Mr Cumber’s lunch-party began now to prove, with the help of the good wine from the Antelope cellar, quite a lively and prosperous affair. Neither Friary Lane nor Glymes being accustomed to such luxurious entertainment, they all made hay while the sun shone, and though their conviviality was discreet it was unrestrained and free.

Except for a group of elderly ladies — residents in the hotel — who regarded our friends with amused interest, the only other stranger was the gentleman who had fled from the lounge, and though their good spirits entirely destroyed the psychic harmony which this good man felt to be his privilege, thrusting between every inch of his careful person and that decorous dining-room a wedge of discord, his sufferings were lessened by the tact of the waiter, who, without anything said, protected his life-illusion with every wave of his discriminating napkin.

The least lively of Mr Cumber’s guests was Jenny Dearth, who in some sad way suggested that her black silk dress concealed not only a Friary Lane overall but a bruised and brooding heart.

It must have been a wave of telepathy from this unappeased heart that started No-man off upon one of his favourite topics: the difference in domestic quarrels between men and women. It was a new experience to our friend to be treated with the respect he was receiving from Mr Cumber, and the consequent glow that suffused his lean frame was his excuse for so inappropriate a discourse. He had begun to receive several sharp interior stabs of remorse as his eyes turned from Wizzie’s little hat to Thuella’s large one, and the eagerness with which he developed his improper theme was an escape from conscience as well as a response to unwonted appreciation.

‘As long as men have no feeling of personal jealousy’, he was remarking, ‘they soon learn to forgive the way women bring down their pride. But women are always vexing themselves over obstacles to their possessive instinct that have nothing to do with other women. They grow jealous over things, over ideas, over ways of life, in their men, that put them at a distance.’ Here he hesitated, catching a glance from Jenny that showed he had gone too far. ‘Don’t you think so, Mr Cumber?’ he added weakly.

But it had become already abundantly clear that Mr Cumber was a man’s man and that he regarded pother of this sort about the dear ladies as an interruption of the practical business of life. Our friend watched him now enjoying this good Antelope fare and sipping his wine, and it amused him to note how all the vibrations quivering forth into that pleasant room from these soft feminine bodies, and from the fabrics that concealed and revealed them, fell away, as if in the presence of some non-conducting chemical substance, before the man’s iron-clad virility.

Mr Cumber treated this point-blank question as if it had been a Rabelaisian joke. He chuckled indulgently and assumed an air as if this unconventional man of letters, who must be humoured in his whimsies, had introduced the levity of the smoking-room into this mixed company.

‘Oh, come now, come now, No-man!’ he laughed. ‘You mustn’t appeal to me when my daughter’s here — must he, Dunny?’

Dumbell’s mouth opened wide, as if a completely unknown fly, some may-fly of an extraordinary appearance, had fallen into his pool. He turned his head towards his flaxen-haired wife.

‘What I would like to ask Mr Wye’, said Urien suddenly — and something in his tone, perhaps the intonation of a man about to speak to men on the subject of politics, caused Mr Cumber to assume his most alert office expression and grow serious— ’is whether you mightn’t maintain that the Fascist movement in the world today is a reaction from matriarchy?'

'What *I* tell Dunny', intervened his father-in-law, 'is that where both Communism and Fascism go wrong is in their interference with individual initiative. Capitalism has its faults — I've always said so, and my feeling is that we *must* say so — but at least it allows for individual initiative. It's based on the instinctive nature of the human average — not on our worst impulses, nor on our best, but on our normal average character.'

Dud's mind took rebellious refuge, as he heard this, in Claudius's coal-yard. 'Isn't it a little *too* average?' he protested. 'Doesn't the pressure of evolution imply — I mean,' he caught himself up, 'aren't reason and imagination more important than our average character?'

'But what about liberty?' threw in Mr Cumber, now thoroughly enjoying himself and squaring his shoulders as if addressing a meeting of dissatisfied printers. 'I know the usual retort, "Liberty to starve", but with a government ready to pay the dole and to tax the rich, don't we, after all, get more liberty to live as we like in England than in—'

'But, Dad!' interrupted Sissie Wye, 'you remember what Dunny said yesterday about our selfishness and lack of discipline? I can't bear selfish greedy people who—'

'Stop, little Sissie. Rogue!' cried her father with the air of one putting a troublesome kitten down from his knee upon the floor. 'I'm not a bigoted Tory. I'm an old-fashioned Liberal, with respect for the natural rights of man. Ask any of my employees what I am! I've got none of Dunny's Blackshirts among my people — no, nor Communists either. And why? Because I treat 'em proper! Because I know what average men want — and ought to *have* too, by God!'

Dud found himself repeating in his heart a train of crushing argument that he had heard Claudius use; but he felt sorry too, in some odd way, for this old-fashioned Liberal. ‘He’s not a bad chap,’ he thought, ‘and between Dumbell and Sissie...’

But the matriarchal instinct in Jenny Dearth — or it may have been her natural reaction against politics as the tools that shaped her sorrow — induced her at this point to steer the conversation in a new direction. The direction she selected, however, was so dull to Dud that he dropped out of the talk altogether and contented himself, like his favourite poet Wordsworth on a similar occasion, with munching almonds and raisins with the greed of an animal.

He was amused, and for some reason curiously elated, to find that when he dropped thus completely out of the conversation both Thuella and Wizzie began to take a part in it. This elation of his, which mingled, like a sweet savour of erotic incense, with his munching of raisins, puzzled him a little.

‘Is it’, he thought, ‘because I like to feel that they’re both conscious of my presence — so conscious that they can only be natural when I’ve drawn back and got out of it? Is it a new vice that I’ve discovered in myself, to enjoy watching two girls together, with both of whom I’ve been intimate? But I *haven’t* been intimate with Thuella, and I don’t want to be. What we’ve had is too intense, too exquisite, too impersonal, too wicked, to be called intimacy!’

Whatever was the cause of the change, whether he had eaten all the raisins, or whether he disliked hearing Thuella and Wizzie being so merry, he presently fell into a quite different mood. He was seated where he could look out of one of the great bow-windows, and the heavenly airs that were blowing in over the roof of the ancient saddler’s shop opposite gave him the feeling that all human relations — all *his* human relations anyway — were a vicious or a troublesome or a frivolous interruption of the real meaning of life.

‘I’ve got to pay back’, he thought, ‘to the human race what I take from it, and to Wizz what I take from her; but *after that* I am free! Am I queer in this, or are there lots like me? Nothing of my real life’s in these discussions, these damned gatherings! My real life’s between me and Nature, between me and I don’t know what — something impersonal, something made up of —’ Here he hesitated, trying to think what he actually *did feel*. ‘Made up’, he concluded clumsily, ‘of the sensations of centuries of human life!’

Thus did Dud struggle to articulate what he felt; thus did he struggle to detach himself, perhaps a little maliciously, from the lively chatter going on around him. The origin of this mood of his was no doubt a conscience-killing gesture, an attempt to make light of his recent infidelity to Wizzie, but the feeling he drew upon, in this self-protective reaction, was as native and as natural to him as the bones of his body or the shape of his harshly moulded, close-cropped skull.

He continued to catch snatches of the conversation round him. Somebody — was it that man of his mother’s? — had started them off on the subject of prayer; and Dud noticed, as a touching human trait, that the waiter showed an interest in this that he hadn’t displayed before, and as for the old ladies, they listened in spell-bound fascination.

‘Certainly I do,’ he heard Mr Cumber reply. ‘Not *long*, you know; but I do. I wouldn’t feel comfortable; I wouldn’t have the proper grip of my day’s work; I wouldn’t—’

‘Oh, always!’ he heard Mrs Wye exclaim. ‘*I* never do; but I never interfere with *his* doing what he likes. *He* kneels down — I don’t believe many men still do that.’

'Does he kneel by his bed or by a chair?' he heard Urien enquire.

Dud got a pang of uncomfortable sympathy, like a distressing blush, on behalf of the botanist who said his prayers. He got such a clear vision of that round head, bowed down in silence above a striped suit of pyjamas, while Sissie fussed round the room with her fuzzy hair about her ears.

Then he caught the voice of Wizz herself. 'I used to pray at the convent when I was little,' she brought out eagerly. 'But I haven't done it for years and years. And Jenny says she hasn't done since she married.'

'Nance never does, either,' remarked Urien. 'And *her* not doing it makes me keep mine to myself, except when I'm out walking. So you see how true it is, what I said just now, that men are naturally more religious than women. Here are three men' — and he glanced at Dud, who had turned his most forced and most abstracted smile on the company in general—' (for I know *you* pray when you're out-of-doors, just as I do) and all three of us say our prayers. And here are four women — for I also know' — and he exchanged a look with Thuella that jarred unpleasantly on our friend's abstraction— 'that *Miss* Wye never prays — and not one of them out of all the four—'

At this point the self-conscious gentleman, who discovered to his vexation, when he wanted to pay his bill, that his appreciative waiter had turned his back on him and was listening with absorbed concentration to the talk at the central table, called out 'Waiter!' in so commanding a voice that the poor man swung round as if he'd heard a bugle.

'But, Mr Quirm,' said Jenny, 'isn't a woman's whole life a life of prayer? I don't know what you call it if it isn't, for I know under all the practical things we do there's a feeling of — well! — worship. Worship of unworthy idols, no doubt' — here Dud noticed a dangerous darkening of the Horse-Head's cheeks— 'but still *worship.'*

'Yes, and apart from that, Urien,' cried Thuella, 'isn't our nature naturally more porous than yours, and don't we feel towards life itself exactly what men feel when they pray to their gods?'

It was a little ironical that No-Man's reaction from this group of friends should have culminated at the moment when they were talking of such a grave matter as prayer, but so it was; and while the discussion grew quite hot between the men and the women — with Mr Cumber behaving like a benevolent schoolmaster umpire at a football match — Dud really did succeed in sinking down into his own thoughts. Either Wizzie or Thuella *alone* would have been deeply indignant with him for this; but together, like two chemicals neutralizing each other, they seemed content with his silence. He noticed, however, before he relapsed into his abstracted thoughts, that, while Thuella to the last most carefully avoided meeting his eyes, Wizzie on the contrary seemed unable to make the slightest contribution to the conversation without giving him a curiously proud and tentative look, as much as to say, 'You see how I'm getting on? I'm doing honour, aren't I, to the upper room at Friary Lane?'

It was a particular smell that came in through that open window that finally carried our friend so completely away. He had never been able to discover what this smell was; but it always came to him in the spring and the autumn, never in the winter or summer. It came to him now, this mystic smell, across the roof of the famous saddler's shop, and it transported him at a touch into the state he desired, the state where nothing existed except his soul and the cosmos. And even this would not put the case adequately, for this peculiar smell did not give him his ordinary kind of feeling about Nature, or any ordinary thrill of well-being, but a sensation that was totally different. Perhaps the best way of putting it would be to say that he felt as if this smell transported him to some point in the circumference of our present dimension of existence that was so extremely thin as to be almost porous!

They had stopped talking now about prayer, and the old ladies had gone away. They were talking about ghosts. Nance was pressing her husband to tell Mr Cumber about the ghost-wind of Glymes; but the man was evidently reluctant to do this. All three young women, however, were eagerly speaking, Sissie's voice the loudest of all. Her tone was like that of an eager, spiteful mouse describing a cat with eyes like saucers. But Wizzie and Thuella were both so anxious to relate some ghostly experience of their own that she could get neither of them to listen. No one, indeed, seemed to be listening consecutively to anyone. All, it appeared, had had supernatural experiences; but no one would lend a willing ear to another, and no one had the art of compelling the interest of the rest.

Dud's mood grew rapidly more and more withdrawn. It annoyed him in some odd way to see how calmly and easily Urien fell in with all this tiresome sociability. He may have been reluctant to talk about the ghost-wind of Glymes, but nothing seemed to disturb him. He kept turning his great swarthy head from one to another, and showed no sign of any desire to sink back into himself.

One cause of Dud's growing sullenness was a curious distaste that began to assail him for seeing Thuella and Wizzie chattering so happily with the others. Their high spirits began to offend some obscure caveman instinct in him. Indeed, as he watched them across the table, it seemed to him as if their separate identities — those identities that meant so much to him in their isolation — were actually melting together, fusing themselves on some common level of young girls enjoying a party, and in this fusion losing the dangerous qualities, the mysterious qualities, that were so important to him. He suddenly recognized in himself a very queer peculiarity: *he did not want* *to lose his sense of guilt in regard to them*! As he looked at them now, the figure under the big hat and the figure under the little hat, it seemed to grow unimportant *what* his relations with them were! They had ceased to be two mysterious tunnels into infinity. They had become a couple of lively young women enjoying a sociable occasion.

It must be remembered that Dud's ten years of solitary life had dug such a deep groove for his peculiar notions that, though his conscience could force him at a pinch to act generously and even nobly, it raised no protest against his habitual egoism. It *was*, however, a somewhat startling revelation, even to himself, to find, when he saw the two girls so happy together, that he actually missed his sense of guilt in regard to his treatment of them.

As he watched their shining eyes and their enjoyment of each other, the feeling came over him that *he* was the victim and they were the aggressors. He felt as if he were some sort of helpless animal, with his own language that neither of them could ever understand, while they had their own private understanding — exchanged in *their* language, of which he knew no word — as to how they would use him, how they would amuse themselves with him, taking him by turns! 'I suppose', he thought, 'there's a subtle freemasonry among women to which we haven't the least clue. I suppose they only belong to us when we get them *alone*, and the moment they're together they join forces and become *something completely different*, something far stronger than we are!'

The situation was indeed growing more and more distasteful to him. That deadly-sweet nerve, extended like an electric wire between himself and Thuella, seemed to have been cut by this damned party and its ends left dangling in the air, while between these loose ends the two young women were chattering about ghosts. And what had become of that ultimate link of his with Wizzie, that *recognition* of her as having been his, ages and aeons ago? Had women the power, when they merged their identities in this common femaleness, of withering to the root a person's life-illusion about them?

But another fancy, equally upsetting to him, entered his head now. He began to think he caught that same look on the Glymes man's face that had startled him on Candlemas Night — yes, he was sure of it! This tender gaiety between the two girls that smouldered beneath their silly talk about ghosts drew its life from Urien. At each glowing increase of their warmth towards each other their eyes under those absurd hats seemed to turn to the fellow. It was as if their feeling for each other nourished itself in some ambiguous way upon their mutual attraction to the man.

But there! There again was that indescribably sweet scent upon the air! Was there such a thing as a ghost-scent parallel with a ghost-wind?

He began to feel an infinitely sad longing for his old life with his Mona-wraith. Where was *she* now, she who had never needed any hat, whether big or little?

He began to move uneasily in his chair. 'God!' he thought. 'I can't stand this much longer!'

Suddenly, without definite intention, he found himself on his feet, he found himself moving round the table, he found himself extending his hand to Mr Cumber.

'Well, sir,' he found himself saying, lightly and casually as if it were a perfectly natural proceeding, 'I've got to get back to my work now. We writers aren't our own masters like you men of affairs. We have, you know, to keep our fixed habits, or we're quite lost.'

Either his tone really did carry it off, or Mr Cumber himself was thinking that he ought very soon to be catching his train, for the great man responded quite naturally and easily and bade him good-bye.

'I'll write to you', he said, 'and I'll have a talk' — here he lowered his voice— 'with Mr Quirm before we separate. Good-bye, No-man, good-bye — and good luck to you!'

It pleased our friend to note that both Wizzie and Thuella stared at him in dismay as he made a general bow to the company and walked to the door. Once again, however, he did something he hadn't known he was going to do till he found himself doing it. He hurried back to Wizzie's side, taking no notice of Thuella or anybody else, and remarked to her quietly, though not in a whisper, 'I'll be back at Friary Lane by five. Let's have tea in *our* room, eh? — but with Jenny, of course!'

It had been one of Dud's frequent experiences in life to find certain situations — not unusual ones, but still not *daily* ones — repeating themselves in an almost exact reaffirmation of their larger outlines; and this happened to him now, for he was scarcely out of the Antelope archway when he found Urien standing by his side.

'I'm glad I caught you,' the man said. 'I was only just in time! What do you say to a walk this lovely afternoon?'

Now as he came downstairs our friend *had* thought to himself, 'I'll go straight off for a walk!' But this decision had been modified by another one:'I'll go to my room first and get that letter.' Now, under the pressure of Urien's presence, he decided that he'd postpone getting that letter till after his walk. He could take it to Wizzie then, and they could discuss it before tea, or *later* if she wanted to keep its contents a secret from Mrs Dearth! So he expressed himself amiably, and suggested boldly that they should walk to Maiden Castle.

' *That* was just what I was going to suggest,' said Urien complacently. ' "Every day lost in May is a day twice away",' he quoted, 'and though it's not the exact day I would have chosen, there’s nothing against it *as* a day, as far as I know.’

They both walked with such rapid strides that it was not long before they reached the couple of isolated cottages, with a vegetable garden in front of them, that marks the half-way point to the ancient earthwork. Their road was both treeless and hedgeless, and around it in all directions extended wide stretches of arable land where not a hedge or a tree was visible.

In fact nothing seemed visible from that long straight pilgrims’ road except the object of the pilgrimage. Towards this object, towards this low-lying and yet grandly rising mass of fossae and valla, this man-made promontory of earth in an expanse of natural earth, this man-made city of turf in an expanse of natural turf, this Titanic erection of the demented mouldwarp man, heaved up between the roots of the grass and the highways of the winds, the narrow road led as directly and undeviatingly as if this vast polis (for so the classical geographer designated it), this mystical city of Dunium, had been an antediluvian monster — a monster compared with whom Leviathan himself were but a field-mouse — whose long straight dragon’s tongue lay supine as a strip of seaweed so that the beings it intended to swallow might advance at ease along it, undeterred by any distraction from advancing to their doom.

Dud stared in fascinated awe at the great earth monument. From this half-way distance it took all sorts of strange forms to his shameless mind. It took the shape of a huge dropping of super-mammoth dung. It took the shape of an enormous seaweed-crusted shell, the shell of the fish called Kraken, whom some dim motion of monstrous mate-lust had drawn up from the primeval slime of its sea-bed. It took the shape of that vast planetary tortoise upon whose curved back, sealed with the convoluted inscriptions of the nameless Tao, rested the pillar of creation. But above all, as he surveyed that dark-green bulk rising at the end of the long narrow road, he was compelled to think of the mysterious nest of some gigantic Jurassic Age bird-dragon such as in this May sunshine he could imagine even now hatching its portentous egg.

‘I’m damned if I don’t believe’, he said to himself at last, ‘that this extraordinary smell that has puzzled me so, all the days of my life, comes from Maiden Castle!’

He decided not to breathe a word about this smell to his companion! The last thing he wanted, just then, was to have to listen to some interminable description of all the mystical smells of the world, ending up with the fishy fume of Asmodeus.

‘I wonder’, he said to himself, ‘whether it really *is* possible that if I’d come along this road ten thousand years ago I should now be gazing up at the Cyclopean walls and towers and temples and parapets of a great peaceful city of a far nobler civilization than ours, where war and torture and vivisection were unknown, where neither the pleasures of life were denied nor the paths to immortality discredited?’

His companion was walking along at his side without uttering a word. Dud noticed, however, that as they passed that half-way house the fellow removed his cap and squeezed it with some difficulty into his trouser-pocket. Dud was surprised to observe that Mr Quirm carried no walking-stick. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask him whether he never used a stick or whether he only refrained from using one on his excursions to Mai-Dun; but in place of this innocent remark a much more important question leapt to his lips.

‘May I ask you something very personal, sir?’

‘Certainly, certainly, lad! By all means, my boy!’

‘What was it that made you change your name from Enoch to Urien? Enoch’s a good Biblical name; and I’ve often heard it down here in our parts, just as I’ve heard the name Aaron. By the way, Aaron was, as you probably know if you knew my mother so well, her husband’s name — the man who was supposed to be my father.’ *There* was the opportunity given point-blank to the Maiden Castle man to announce to him frankly and freely, and without beating about the bush, that he believed he, and no one else, was his father.

But Mr Quirm did not reply. All he did was to clench his great fists, as if under some intense mystical excitement that had nothing to do with his companion, swing his arms more emphatically as he moved, and quicken his steps, till in the end they were both walking at such a rate that they might easily have been racing, or at least competing for some sort of a wager.

But an impulsive and reckless devil in Dud forced him to continue. ‘I must confess,’ he said, ‘I don’t think Urien’s nearly as honest a name as Enoch. There’s something tricky and shifty, something fanciful and affected, about Urien to me! It’s like the name of a person in a book. It doesn’t sound authentic.’

The man allowed Dud to finish every word of his criticism. Then he remarked, in a low and perfectly calm voice; ‘It was your mother’s favourite name. We meant it to be *your* name!’

CHAPTER 6. Maiden Castle

SO THE CAT was out of the bag at last, for good and ill, and the fatal word had passed betweeen them — between his mother’s man and her bastard son!

Had Dud been expecting this all the time while he was calling up image after image with regard to the mysterious objective of their walk? It may well have been that he had, for when the word was out, as the result of his rude attack upon his begetter’s name, instead of a rush of awkwardness or embarrassment our friend felt an incredible relief.

‘How long’, he enquired calmly, as they walked side by side, rather slower now but without pausing, ‘has this been going on?’

‘Been going on?’ echoed the other.

‘I mean,’ explained No-man, ‘how long have you known this? Ever since we first met in November?’

Urien turned upon him a look which said with overpowering clearness, ‘I wish you weren’t *quite* such a fool!’

‘My good lad! What do you take me for? Of course I’ve always known about you. Your mother wrote to me to the last.’ He quickened his pace as he spoke, and added in an almost querulous tone, ‘They wouldn’t let me see her. I don’t *say* I’d have cured her; but I’d have had a try. They kept me away. It wasn’t Aaron; it was those doctors and nurses.’

Dud *did* now, and for the first time during this singular dialogue, begin to feel a definite rebellion mounting up within him. Nothing could have outraged his life-illusion as a lonely independent spirit more than the idea of this man's knowing him *without being known by him*, and watching his life from Glymes!

'Why didn't you tell me — after they died? Why didn't you come to me through all these years?'

'You didn't want me.'

'Why do you do it now, then?'

'You mean you don't want me *still*?'

'How do I know whether I want you or not? I don't know you, and you don't know me.'

'They told me the time had come.'

'They? Who are they?'

'What you like! I don't care what you call them! The powers created by man, but now independent of man, the powers that have come to life *up there* where we're going now!'

Dud came to a dead stop, as his habit was when he had to think hard; and Urien, evidently chafing under the delay, stood impatiently watching him, his hands still in his pockets, and as he watched him he made a sort of wind-in-the-telegraph-wire sound in his throat, a humming and drumming noise which he apparently found soothing to his impatience.

'You don't mean to tell me', No-man began, '(for *I'm* not one of your women — I'm not your *daughter)* that you really and truly believe in these superstitions? I know, of course, that you like playing with them, just as I do, and even half-believing in them, or trying to, just as I do, but — there — comes — a point — doesn't there? — *doesn't* there come a point, sir? — when all this playing at the supernatural, all this half-belief, this demi-semi-quaver belief, has to be thrown to the devil, and a person has to face life four-square and first-hand.'

Enoch ceased imitating the wind through telegraph wires. ‘But, lad,’ he began, and then he hesitated, while some peculiar substitute for an amused smile flickered over his face. ‘But, lad, you *can’t* face life four-square. That’s where you make your mistake, and so many others. The back side of your square turns away from life. Life never sees it. It cannot see life. It’s like the other side of the moon! And yet nobody has ever doubted that there *is* another side to the moon. No, my dear boy, you’ll have to think of another metaphor for your facing of life. Four-square’s an unlucky one.’

‘But do you really believe in all this business of spirits and powers and influences and presences? Mind you, the point is not whether there may be *something* in it. I’m not Mr Cumber. I think it’s extremely likely there *is* something in it. But the question is: do you believe in what’s in it enough to fight for it, to starve for it, to sacrifice women for it, to desert children for it? Is it as important as your lust, your glory, your peace of mind? Come, sir, come, Monsieur mon père, don’t let’s begin our new life by anything short of the absolute bed-rock truth. I’m not a young man any more, and I’m asking you this’ — and No-man struck the stones of the road with his great oak cudgel— ‘because I *must* know! Are you just playing with these supernatural influences, with these powers, as you call them, or do you take them as actually real, real as this stick, real as your cap in your pocket?’

Enoch Quirm shuffled with his right foot, gently propelling a dry dog’s turd towards a beetle who was astray on the surface of the road. Then he fixed his eyes on the front of his son’s trousers, where, as often happened with our hasty friend, a button had been left unfastened. Not a word did he utter for the passage of several minutes, nor did he shuffle his foot again. Only his eyes turned slowly from the dog’s turd, which the beetle was now exploring, to the unfilled button-hole, and from the button-hole back to the turd.

'No, lad! *No*!*'* This 'no' was so decisively and abruptly ejaculated, and with it the man looked so straight into our friend's eyes, jerking himself up and straightening his shoulders, that No-man remembered for long afterwards the impression he got, at that moment, of undeviating sincerity.

'No, lad, my gods aren't as real as your stick, or as that bit of dung down there, or as your fly-buttons, or as the mole on your belly that your mother used to tell me about; and as to sacrificing women and deserting children, I *might* do such things and I might not; but if I did, it wouldn't be proof of anything. I might believe absolutely in my gods and *yet* refuse to sacrifice anything to them! They'd have their reality — not the reality of the mole on your belly, lad, but they'd have their own *kind* of reality, all that gods *can* have, or ever *do* have, or ever *will* have — and yet I might easily decide, on the strength of *another* reality (the reality, for instance, of my conscience, which also isn't as real as your fly-buttons or the mole on your belly) that I'd never sacrifice a thing to them, not even the sacrifice of a humble and contrite heart! You talk like a baby, lad, when you talk of this bed-rock truth for which I must be prepared to offer my life, or the gods don't exist! I tell you, lad, there are a thousand realities in life that aren't, and never *can* be, bed-rock realities, and yet they're well worth pursuing. Why are you such a fanatic? But there's more in this matter of my old gods than I can explain to you now. Would to the devil you *were* a girl instead of a bed-rock man! Girls are satisfied with the *atmosphere of reality*. They don't need your damned all-or-nothing truths!'

But though the fellow met Dud's eyes, as he uttered all this, with a simple enough stare, our friend had an uncomfortable feeling that in some subtle way, impossible to define, he *was* fooling him and lying to him.

One impression that he got — and it may have been produced by that 'semimortuus' look which, though it was always fluctuating, never quite left the man's face — was that you couldn't get him to say anything impulsively or on the spur of the moment, but only what he'd decided for some reason of his own to say.

'I'm not so particular as you seem to think,' No-man remarked. 'I know what atmospheres are, as well as anybody. But I can't help feeling that when you touch the supernatural it must be a clear issue — yes or no. I feel just the same about life after death. There's something teasing to my mind when people blur the issue of a thing as important as that. Either we *do* survive, or we *don't* survive. I think it *is* all or nothing in that case! Do *you* believe we survive, sir?'

'Presently, lad, presently!' murmured the other. 'I'll tell you exactly what I think, when we've got on a bit.'

He was as good as his word; but it became Dud's destiny to listen now to what struck him as the most confused and unconvincing rigmarole he'd ever heard. All he could lay hold of out of the man's words was that survival of death depended on three things: on your own effort, on the luck of being chosen as a favoured spirit by the gods, and on pure chance.

Our friend had read a certain number of metaphysical books, and it seemed to him that what he heard now contradicted the very rudiments of all intellectual reason! What struck him about it — though his mind began quickly to wander from what the man was saying to all sorts of speculations about the man himself — was that it was simply a drift of very obscure oracles, snatches and fragments of the old Welsh books, but given by Urien some particular twist of his own.

It was when they came to a gate across the way, with instructions on it, worthy of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, about not wandering from the path, that the little polite struggle he made to open this gate for 'Monsieur mon père' brought his mind back to what the fellow was actually saying; and it became clear to him that he was calmly assuming — what struck our friend as a monstrous assumption — that if he could tag together a sufficient weight of legendary allusions to immortality in the old books, it established a strong probability in its favour; but it also struck Dud's mind, as he closed the gate only to find that he had to run after his parent as if he had been a small boy, that the way Urien combined these floating straws on the legended tide of the soul's long history was extraordinarily clever and plausible.

'He's an old conjurer,' he said to himself, as they ascended the slope to the earthwork's entrance, 'but for me to assume that, because the other world played such a role in Welsh mythology, there's a living entity under my bones that'll survive death and burial, seems going pretty far.'

They were passing some gorse-bushes now on their way up the turfy slope, and Dud turned aside to smell a spike of their yellow blossom, the first he had seen that year. Just as, with his hooked nose suffering a surprising number of pricks from the thorns, he struggled to inhale the faint breath of that almond-like fragrance, he heard from over the wide valley a long-drawn whistle from one of the trains between Dorchester and Weymouth.

Now a faraway train-whistle was always a sound that gave Dud a peculiar thrill, but for a reason exactly opposite to the reason for Claudius's pleasure over the hum of an airplane. This far-off whistle brought the same sort of release that the creaking of the wings of flying swans would have brought, the suggestion of something voyaging across the world but doing so *in a traditional manner*. A train-whistle always brought to Dud's mind the feeling that he heard it from the window of a strange house in an unknown town! It brought with it a peculiarly sad and sweet sensation, as though he shared the lives of unknown and remote people, people deep-sunken below the waters of lost memories. It resembled the inspiration he always got when — apart from any particular work of that great man — he suddenly was reminded of the richly charged human touch of the genius of Charles Dickens when dealing with the overtones of the generations.

It was no doubt the two sensations together — the scent of the gorse and the sound of the train — that transported him so, both things being reminders of solitary excursions in which he had escaped, and in which his parents had escaped before him, from the pressure of the immediate.

It was an accident, of course, that it happened just at this particular moment, but, coming as it did, it restored him to himself and made him feel as if it was of minor importance whether the powers this man believed in existed or not. Yes! that was the real essence of the strange thrill these things brought him, that they lifted him for a passing second to the edge of another dimension, a dimension wherein the difference between there being gods and there not being gods was reduced to unimportance.

As he hurried up the slope after Urien, who seemed to delight in making his middle-aged progeny run after him like a boy, the sensation he had had just then, instead of fading away as these feelings usually did, increased upon him and diffused itself more widely till it was no longer the train-whistle and the gorse-scent but that transporting unknown sweetness that had blown in upon him through the Antelope window, that mysterious *ghost-scent* that had always visited him in the spring and autumn since his earliest consciousness. The few paces he had to go to overtake Urien seemed by some trick of thought to lengthen out into a charmed duration of absolute timelessness, a timelessness that was filled to the brim with this mysterious scent. He seemed to float, rather than walk, after the figure striding on in front of him, and the distance between them became a heaving cloud-sea made up of an imponderable substance upon which he was borne forward.

Even after he had overtaken the man and was hurrying on by his side up the last lap of the grassy ascent, he still felt the same sensation of airiness and lightness, as if that unknown fragrance had taken complete possession of him.

It was not till the man actually spoke to him that the charm was dispelled. ‘We’re at the gate now,’ he said, with the self-satisfied sigh of a pilgrim whose journey is over. ‘This, they say, was the main gate; and often when I enter here in the night I can feel the chill of a great stone arch above me.’

Dud refrained from asking him whether by ‘they’ he meant his spirits or the modern archaeologists; and they went on in silence for a few more steps till they stood in a level opening between two steep grassy mounds.

‘Pardon me, lad, one minute!’ Urien muttered, as he peered quickly round to make sure they were alone. With great deliberation he now proceeded to squat down on the ground, his buttocks resting on his heels; and from this position he bent forward, all hunched up as he was, and pressed his forehead against the turf. Many times he did this, each time for a longer period.

At first Dud followed a natural delicacy, just as he would have done had they been together in a church, and looked away; but he soon grew tired of this discretion, and, with that vein in him of shameless realism which counterbalanced his subjective fancies, he fixed a detached and cynical eye upon his hunched-up progenitor. He noted that Urien kept his hands in his pockets during his performance, which caused him at one point almost to lose his balance and roll over sideways; and he also noted, in the rumpling up of his coat and sweater, how lean his flanks were. This latter observation was satisfactory to our friend. For some reason it was a comfort to him to find his father had lean flanks.

One effect all this had upon Dud was to drive out of him every intimation of the supernatural. Averse as he was from bodily self-consciousness, he felt suddenly intensely aware of the bony structure of his own frame! Contemplating that hunched-up massive figure which, save for the thin flanks, had the heavy flesh of a sedentary book-worm, he felt glad he himself was so gaunt and bony, he felt glad his skull was cropped so close, he felt glad his cap was drawn down so irreverently over his brow, and above all he felt a great contentment in clutching with his bony fingers his solid oak cudgel.

‘I’ve played with the supernatural’, he thought, ‘and I believe in another dimension, but all this business of supernatural beings exercising arbitrary influence upon us — to the devil with it! Go on, you great curly-pate, eat the grass and bite the chalk! That’s right. Down with you again. That’s the way. Cringe before them, old grasshopper. Lick their dung! Perhaps they’re there; and perhaps they’re *not* there. Perhaps there’s *nothing* there but this great thick globe and empty space — and then more space — and then more and more space, till it’s full circle, Monsieur Bien Croupé! But better be on the safe side —

For who can know that They’re not there
Who hasn’t himself been everywhere?

‘Pray! Pray! Pray! Pray! Pray! If they’re not there, they used to be there, and if they never were there, they ought to be there, and if they couldn’t be there, they will be there! So cringe and crouch, wallow and swallow, tumble and mumble. *“Somebody* must have made all this”, as the energetic Napoleon said. Somebody made us and not we ourselves!

‘Atoms can’t make atoms, nor life life, nor motion motion, so pray! pray! pray! pray! pray! *He* made us, *She* made us, *They* made us. If Nobody’s in today we must call tomorrow, and if Nobody’s in tomorrow we must call on Sunday. Press your head down once more, mon vieux! That last nod may do it. Croupeton, croupeton, croupeton!’

But Mr Quirm rose up now, a little red in the face but otherwise unperturbed. ‘Shall we go round’, he asked his son, ‘by the street or by the wall?’

Our friend saw no sign of either a wall or a street, but he felt glad all the same that his parent didn’t mention such things as valla or fossae.

‘Oh, the street, by all means!’ he replied.

They advanced accordingly along the bottom of the green trench. On either side of them a grassy rampart rose steep and smooth to a height of about fifty feet.

Dud had never been at Mai-Dun in anything but bad weather; and the last time he came the wind and rain had swept round this green gully with such violence that he could think of nothing but the force of the contending elements.

Nor had he ever come with Claudius, in spite of all their talks about the place. He had deliberately dodged it, being reluctant to listen in such a spot to nothing but praise of Roman civilization. For his present companion the Roman occupation might have occurred yesterday. Indeed, Mr Quirm referred to it in exactly the same tone of indulgent contempt as he referred to last year’s excavations.

Light and lovely airs cooled their faces as they advanced, drifting and eddying round them, stirring the grasses first in one direction and then in another, and letting them fall back into breathing immobility as they wandered off again.

Dud had noticed three different sorts of butterflies already — the brimstone, the common white, and the tortoise-shell — and among several minute plants in the grass of whose names he was ignorant, he marked a few that were well-known to him, especially the blue and the white milkwort.

Mr Quirm was expatiating to his companion now on the limitations of the new methods of archaeology. ‘No human beings’, he told his son, ‘could possibly live under the conditions revealed — as these new students of the past put it — by scientific excavation. Mai-Dun was a civilized polis long before the Romans came, and it is only an impoverished imagination that sees them as living in miserable thatched holes along with bones and cinders and potsherds. You must remember, lad,’ he said, ‘we’re talking of the civilization that built Stonehenge and Avebury. Why should the dwellers in Mai-Dun be regarded as wretched earth-burrowers, when their contemporaries could raise such monuments?’

It was, however, less the actual arguments his companion kept using that affected our friend than a certain vague exultation of his own spirits, an exultation that seemed to be working both ways, intensifying both his bodily senses and his mystical super-sense. The mere fact that, as they advanced in their gradual encircling of the great erection, they saw nothing of the outside world intensified the impression Dud got of sacred isolation.

It was as if he had been lifted up, off the surface of the revolving planet, in some kind of aerial keep — not the keep of a Norman castle but a keep made of pure chalk and turf by some vanished race of giants, a keep that was like a hanging garden of waving grasses and delicate weeds, within the ramparts of which he was floating free, free of all the worries of his life, free of the sight of Teucer Wye’s humiliation, free of his pity for Claudius in the coal-yard, free of Old Funky, free of the fatal nerve that bound him to

Thuella, free of the warm touch of Nancy, free of the black heart-bruise of Mrs Dearth.

So complete was this feeling of liberation that possessed him that the thought passed through his head: 'Is the real reward of experience not the amount we gather together but the amount we *strip off?* Is it always towards this that life progresses, towards a thinning out instead of a gathering up, towards nakedness rather than enrichment, towards loss rather than gain?

'I would have everything left if I had nothing left,' he thought, as he fell back a little behind the absorbed figure of his begetter. But he knew he would have Wizzie left. Yes, there she was, the Wizzie he had recognized on that first day! There she was, the Wizzie he could not imagine himself without, the Wizzie whose place under the ribs of his spirit had been made only more emphatic, like a worked flint under horses' hooves, by the clashes between them.

He found himself wishing that his mother's man wouldn't hurry on at quite such a pace! Out there, down in the world below, was that unopened letter from Yeovil; out there was the letter, probably composed already in that competent mind, from Mr George Cumber, repeating again exactly on what lines, and with what expurgations and discretions, his article on the social origin of the old Welsh custom of bundling was to be written. Out there the Ogre-Ash might clutch at the wind above the Scummy Pond; out there Thuella might force her father to keep his *Phaedrus* on her dressing-table, side by side with the combings of her bright hair. But here, with his real girl — No-man's girl — ensconced in his soul like a flint in a cairn, here, with no link with the world but the necessity of keeping his irresponsible creator just in sight, he was free to float on a wave of pure sensation, upon which — for what he felt, *she* felt — Wizzie might drift with him for ever and ever!

On and on did his mother's extraordinary friend conduct him; and his only regret was that, by reason of the way being circular, there would have to come a moment when, as with the macrocosmic circle of our present astronomical dimension, it would of necessity return upon itself and thus lead them back to the point from which they had started!

'This is one of the happiest moments of my life,' Dud said to himself. 'I must engrave it on my heart with a dagger, so that, whatever happens to me afterwards, I shall not turn out ungrateful to the gods.'

And once more his thoughts ran to that unopened letter awaiting him on his desk under his unwashed cup. 'I don't care', he concluded, 'what there is between Wizz and those people. She's my girl, she's D. No-man's girl, and if she's been enjoyed by Old Funky up hill and down dale, it doesn't make her less mine! She's certainly got something hidden up about those Urgans that's worrying her sick and that she daren't confess to me. She hasn't said anything for months about going back to the circus; but that may be it! She may have arranged it all with them by letter; or Jenny, who's certainly in the mood for spiting all men, may have been her intermediary. I wouldn't be surprised if that wasn't it! Well! if she *must* go, she must. I'm not going to hold her back by force — and, after all, she'll be my girl whatever she does!'

And Dud, in this Maiden Castle mood of his, lifted above the earth, following his fantastical begetter along what seemed to him like some pearl-green convolution of an airy world shell floating in space, tried to imagine the indulgence with which he would treat the most excessive and unexpected action of his true-love.

As has been hinted more than once, our friend had a vein of monstrous and even obscene imagination concealed below his sentimental sensuality; and in his present state of exultation he allowed this vein its full scope, telling himself stories about Wizzie's complications with the Urgans, which, though he forgave them on Maiden Castle, were, as he dallied with them, enough to have shocked even a worshipper of that beast-god with a human torso impaled upon its tail that he had himself recently seen in the Dorchester Museum.

'Sir!' he cried out — for it was still impossible for him to utter the syllables 'Father'— 'Wait a second, will you?'

His guide swung round and awaited him with a friendly smile. 'Let's sit down for a bit,' said Dud. 'I don't want to make the circle too quickly.'

The pair of tall men lowered themselves to the ground, their lean buttocks resting on the warm fragrant grass that the sun had already dried.

'When I asked you just now', began our friend, 'about the name "Urien", you told me you and Mother had thought of it as *my* name, but you didn't tell me what made you choose it as your own. Won't you tell me that now?'

The man looked at him closely for a moment. Then he looked at the butterflies on the bank opposite, and then he glanced up and down the green trench. 'If you're ready to listen without interrupting me for a bit, I'll tell you the whole thing.'

Dud edged himself back a little so that he shouldn't embarrass the speaker by keeping his eyes on him. All he could now see of the man's face was the curve of his left cheek, the wrinkles at the side of his mouth, and the curious moss-like hair that above his ear was unmistakably grizzled.

'Cornie and I' — and it gave our friend a most curious shock to hear his mother called Cornie, for only once or twice in his life had he heard Aaron even so much as call her Cornelia— 'were cousins. We were both precocious, and we were inseparable. You must understand, lad, that in Wales class distinctions, while more tenacious in blood, are less dependent on money. Cornie and I were both orphans, brought up by an aunt at the lodge of the park gates of the very place where in old times our ancestors had lived.

‘When this woman died, your mother was sent away to some distant relatives in Shaftesbury. Me these people didn’t want, or couldn’t have; so I was boarded out by the parish guardians, first in one place, then in another. As I say, I was a precocious child and no doubt a difficult one. I don’t think I was unkindly treated, but I missed Cornie so much that I grew more and more secretive and unhappy. The end of it was, when I was about ten, I ran away, the word “Shaftesbury” being my single hope.

‘I fell in with a group of tramps from our parts bound for the South, who made use of me in various ways, and when finally they took different roads we had already drifted into Dorset. Cajoled by the way I talked, one of these derelicts, with hopes of something coming of it to his advantage, stuck to me, though I often tried to give him the slip, till we did eventually reach the place.

‘Here my companion got into trouble for something or other. I was taken away from him, and an old childless couple called Quirm legally adopted me as their child. Cornie’s protectors — for they made enquiries about them — had left the town by that time, and no one knew where they’d gone; and it wasn’t till we’d both grown up, and she’d become Mrs Smith, that fate brought us together.

‘I got a job where she lived, and we soon were lovers. At that time, my lad, I was crazy about women. Cornie wasn’t the only one; and we had miserable scenes. In the end we had a terrible quarrel by the side of that very bed you’ve got in your room. I lost all control of myself — but I won’t go into that. But the end of it was I left her and went away.

‘But I didn’t go without my *trophies.’* And here Dud was destined to hear the hoarse chuckle, in this case like that of a deep-chested Centaur, of the male triumphant. ‘For I left her with you, my lad, and I stole one of our ancestral beasts!’

He ceased speaking, but fixed upon the opposite bank a long bemused stare, full, his son couldn’t help thinking, of memories more voluptuous than sad.

‘But what about “Urien”?’ No-man enquired, while once more the bitter waters of physical distaste began to enter his mouth and creep into his stomach. He had felt something like a cold, remote sympathy while the man described his passion for little Cornie, but the second he used the word ‘lovers’ such a shiver of revulsion passed through him that it would have given him pleasure to have brought down his cudgel on that hairy scalp. ‘What about “Urien”?’ he repeated, relieving his feelings by emphasizing his contempt for this affected and ridiculous name.

‘I’ll tell you, lad; I’ll hide nothing from you, my precious poppet.’ And the man turned his great, handsome, swarthy, perspiring face towards his offspring, while his dead eyes drew up to their surface from the soul behind them a light that resembled the light of a lantern in the head of an up-swimming diver. ‘When Cornie knew she was going to have a child — for our worst quarrel didn’t happen till after you were well on the way — we used to talk a great deal about the name. It was your mother, not I, who first got the idea of it. She woke up in the night once, she told me, and found herself repeating it aloud. It was that furious quarrel we had that really changed her mind, though I fancy a wish not to annoy old Smith may have played a part. Aaron would as soon have had his son called Satan as called Urien, and of course you passed as *his* child.

‘It wasn’t till long after this, not till just before your mother’s death, and when I’d been married to Nance for several years, that — I — changed — my own — name — to Urien.’

The man stopped. These last words were spoken with extreme solemnity and in a very low voice; and Dud received, as he sat with his knees locked under his clenched hands, a curious impression from them, an impression that they were uttered from some level of his begetter's being much deeper than any he had yet revealed.

Until this point our friend had been suspicious with regard to everything the man said. The whole story of that house by the park gates, of the boy's vagabonding to Shaftesbury, of his adoption by the Quirms, of his rediscovery of Cornie, had struck No-man's mind as too smooth and glib, in fact as exactly the sort of tale that a wayfarer on the highway would tell, a tale whose continual repetition turns what was originally a harmless fable into a suspicious half-truth. 'I shall never know how it *really* was,' Dud had found himself thinking; and in a sense he was reassured by this, for the whole business of discovering a local habitation and a name for his solitary spirit went against the grain of his life-illusion.

It did not occur to him to connect this instinct, this desire to detach himself from the mass of men, with his companion's preference for the name 'Urien' over that of 'Enoch'; but his subterranean suspicion of all the fellow said had the effect of rousing up in him everything in his nature that was hard and cynical.

It was therefore in that sort of automatic stiffening by which we deliberately accentuate the qualities that have narrowed us, that he now fell back upon the starkest, grimmest, most uncompromising self he could find, a self that was almost savagely conscious of its hard mortal skull and its lean bony structure, a self that regarded every conceivable fancy about life after death with a sardonic superiority, a self whose pride it was to be a plain blunt downright unpersuadable entity, an entity that held firmly to brute matter.

Dud knew perfectly well that the man squatting there in front of him was stirred in a way he had never seen him stirred before. He knew that something deep in the man's nature was groaning and heaving and lurching towards utterance, an utterance which very likely it had never found before. And yet, such was the force of the contrareity that possessed him, he found he derived a grim satisfaction from *not* asking him the clue question that would set him off!

Instead of anything of that sort, he seemed compelled *to stiffen himself against the man* in an actual bodily self-consciousness that was a new experience for him, a self-consciousness that emphasized the bony outlines of his own figure and the compact moulding of his own cropped skull. And he found that the more he gave way to this unresponsive mood, the more it tightened upon him.

'Yes,' his lean frame seemed to say to the soft body of his begetter, 'yes, you great mass of majestic mist, you great battery of deceptive magnetism, you great conjurer with illusion, I know you for what you are, and though I spring from your seed, I revolt from you, I loathe you, I defy you. I turn myself into granite against you!'

As Dud thus listened to the bones in his body, he felt as if this man and he, both of them hugging their knees, both of them staring at the sun-illumined rampart in front of them, were being held up in the vast reaches of empty space by the enormity of Mai-Dun for the sole purpose that they might be forced to recognize their abysmal hostility. The gods of Mai-Dun were holding them in this planetary isolation for no other reason than to enjoy the gladiatorial show of a struggle between an honest anthropoid skeleton and a treacherous magnetic conjurer!

As they sat together there, both bare-headed, both hugging their knees, No-man's own mind moved faster than it had ever moved in his whole life.

‘Because I feel myself in bones and skull’, he thought, ‘hostile to this man’s nebulous talk, and because I don’t believe in any of his ideas, *that* doesn’t mean I’m a bigoted materialist. I believe absolutely in another dimension surrounding this one; and I believe in my power of becoming a medium for the life of the generations. I believe in the truth of my book about Mary Channing!’

Thus, with what might be called his official credo, did Dud justify his lack of sympathy. There was, however, a lower level of his consciousness wherein, like an antediluvian creature confronting its progenitor, he made no attempt at articulating what he felt. He simply hated the man because the man was his father.

According to what this lower level of consciousness brought to him he felt as if he and his father, isolated from all other living things in the mystic circle of Mai-Dun, were two prehistoric entities linked together by the invisible semen of paternity but *for that very reason* destined to a struggle of measureless malignity, a struggle that could only end in the death of the one or of the other.

How natural, how inevitable it seemed to him that he should now plague, torment, and cruelly tantalize his father by keeping him waiting so long for the least word, the least sign that he cared a fig why he had called himself Urien!

‘Call yourself Urogen,’ this consciousness cried; ‘call yourself Urus; call yourself Urban of Hell! *What is it to me?* Tell me the most ghastly, the most tragic, the most sacred secret of your life, and I’ll treat it as a joke. I’ll play with it as an Arab might play with the Sacrament. I’ll tell Wizzie about it, and we’ll laugh over it till our bed shakes.’

He noted that under his father’s haunches lay a daisy whose brittle stalk had been crushed but whose rose-tinged petals emerged quite intact. In the process of fidgeting about to make his position comfortable, Mr Quirm had got the bottom of his coat rumpled up above the seat of his trousers, and these little rose-tinged petals peeped out from beneath his rump in a manner that was distressing to No-man. Dud did not go so far as to entreat his parent to move, though the phrase ‘Excuse me, sir, but you’re sitting on a daisy’ hovered on the tip of his tongue, but the presence of the daisy in that position did a great deal to increase his nervous revolt. He had a sensation as if he could actually feel the man’s huge, dusky, smouldering soul heaving and labouring there in the centre of that hot mass of ill-smelling, sedentary flesh and blood; and in the intensity of his reaction against the seed that begat him, he now thought to himself, ‘I’ll get up and make him come *before he’s got it out;* and every time he tries to tell me about it, every time he mentions this damned word “Urien”, I’ll change the conversation!’

But Dud’s mother’s man must have had a telepathic inkling of this impious plan, for he suddenly swung round on the pivot of his rump in such a way as to release the stalk of the daisy, and incidentally too to release a little Glymes moth from the folds of his coat, who seemed, on its emerging — for it settled fumblingly on a tiny grass-spear and began groping at the air — to find its role as a denizen of Mai-Dun totally beyond its strength.

But the face with which he now swung round and confronted his unsympathetic progeny was no little shock to our friend’s egotistical soul. The man had certainly — of that there was no doubt — a tremendous face; and as he turned it on his son now in that bright sunshine there were lines about the eyelids, lines about the mouth, wrinkles above the eyebrows, a certain upward twist of the eyebrows combined with a sombre opening of the great Laocoön mouth, that really startled our friend.

The eyelids alone seemed so heavy with a dark weight that Dud’s loathing lessened appreciably, not so much turning into tenderness as into a sort of outraged pity. It was as if he were lifting a scab from an unhealed wound, and the foul blood and yellow pus filled him simultaneously with sympathy and disgust.

It became at last impossible for Urien to remain quite unaware of what was going on in his son's mind.

'Why do you hate me so, lad?' he brought out. 'I don't ask you to like me. Why should you? But what — have — I — done to you that you should look so stern at me, that you should harden yourself so against me?'

He stopped, and fixed upon his son the full stare of his 'semimortuus' eyes, eyes which at that moment were so heavy with majestic desolation that Dud found he could not bear to meet their gaze.

And there came into our friend's consciousness a queer emotion such as he had only known once or twice before, when because of some passing mood of hers he had felt unfathomable bitterness towards Wizzie. It was an emotion of pure, blind, desperate awareness of the infinite pathos of another's identity, a feeling as if he were one kind of substance — stone, let us say — sending forth a tragic vibration that beat against a different kind of substance — iron, let us say — in a struggle to get at the heart of its alien being.

'I'm sorry — *Father*!' murmured Dud in a low voice. These words cost him a violent effort. Never indeed since his boyhood had he uttered anything that so tore at his vitals. The effort of it caused such a rush of blood to his head that his face burned; and, unclasping his hands from his knees, he pressed the knuckles of one of his fists awkwardly against his cheek.

'It means nothing to you, I suppose,' were the words that now proceeded from the swarthy countenance before him, 'what my experiences have been, any more than it meant to your mother; and I'm not now telling you this as a father speaking to a son.'

He paused, and a physical tremor crossed his face that gave our friend more than ever the impression that the man's whole physiognomy was composed of some substance that was extraordinarily malleable to the inner workings of his spirit. And the odd thing was, in spite of his recent rush of pity — if pity was the word for it — the more wavering and discomposed, the more misty and vaporous, Urien's face grew, the harder and more bony did Dud's own skull *feel* in chemical opposition.

'I suppose the idea of reincarnation is nothing to you,' went on the face in front of him. And so independent of the words that fell from it were the wavering tremors that passed over it, not convulsing it or distorting it but just crossing it like ripples crossing dusky water, that No-man couldn't beat back the impression that the words that reached him came *through*, rather than *from*, that dusky physiognomy.

'Now for it!' thought Dud. 'Now for the grand conjuring trick of the great illusionist!'

'I'd have you to know', continued this fluctuating visage on which the sun fell so disconcertingly, 'that there's not a supernatural being ever worshipped, or, if you like, ever invented, by our unhappy race who does not keep on incarnating itself as the ages proceed. I had always guessed that what the ancients called "the Mysteries" had their parallel in Welsh tradition, but it wasn't till I learnt to read the *old* Welsh books that I came on the track of a whole cycle of ancient gods connected in one way and another with the Mysteries, that's to say with the worship of the great goddess Caridwen.'

Dud, feeling himself all bone and stone in his sullen incredulity, drew in his breath at this point with a harsh derisive sound. 'Good Lord!' he thought. ‘This is worse than I expected!’ And his mind with one swift rush went off to Claudius acquiring merit in his coal-yard. ‘I’ve been unfair to you, you poor old beggar,’ he thought. ‘When we come to Caridwen, it *does* seem about time to listen to the airplanes!’

At this moment, however, it was the shrill sound of a lark, not of an airplane, that kept up a protesting orchestration to Urien’s illusions. Apparently the man himself was not altogether oblivious of this accompaniment, which to Dud was as if the sun itself had dropped in its anger a vibrant lute-string from its elemental orchestration, for there appeared a pitiful twitching in one of his heavy eyelids.

‘It was *The Book of Taliesin’*, the voice went on, ‘that made me understand at last *what I was*. All of us, men and gods alike, have been incarnated many times. And do you want to know how it came about that I discovered what I am?’

It was not only the air-quiverings of the lark that emphasized for our friend at this moment what seemed to him the shocking grotesqueness of his father’s talk. The amorous absorption of a couple of white butterflies, coupled in love and fluttering helplessly among the grass-stalks, struck him as bearing yet another witness to the irrelevance of his father’s fantasies. Lark wings and butterfly wings seemed to join with the sunshine in *outlawing* such monstrous conceptions.

‘From my boyhood, lad,’ the man continued, in a low sad voice, ‘I’ve had a queer notion of my own. I’ve felt for some unknown reason that I was born to bear — well! not exactly the sins of the world but the terrible pressure of that hurt of the soul when it struggles to break through.’

‘To break through?’ echoed Dud feebly.

‘To break the bonds of life’s natural law! To break *out*, to break *in*, to take the secret by storm!’

No-man watched a soft gust of wind carry the coupled butterflies out of sight.

'What I mean is this,' the man went on. 'All extreme emotions reach a point where you can't distinguish between pain and pleasure. The suffering is intense; but something in you rushes towards the suffering, opens its arms to the suffering. Now, lad, you must know it is not given to everyone to feel what I'm talking about. At its intensest it comes when love and hate are one. It is terrible then. It is a feeling so terrific that it often ends in madness; but if it doesn't end that way, it ends in *breaking through*. You must know, lad, that there are secrets only revealed to magic. I don't mean physical magic; I mean *spiritual* magic. And this kind only comes when the emotion of love-hate gathers to a point that's terrible. And you must know too that it only comes when the passion remains sterile. Any fulfilment dissipates its power. Nothing but unfulfilled love, love turned to hate, can beat hard enough upon the barrier of life, can beat hard enough upon what separates us from the secret, till it breaks through! It's like despair, lad, *that's* what it's like; it's as strong as despair. Of course it means abominable pain. I mean *mental* pain, of course, though there's a frightened pleasure mixed with it too, and few can endure it. Mental pain is worse than physical pain; and that is because —'

Here Dud could stand it no longer. From head to foot he was trembling with an antagonism that it was impossible to suppress.

'Physical pain's a hundred times worse,' he shouted. 'Physical pain's the supreme evil of life, the *only* unbearable evil! Pain in the mind can be overcome by the mind; but pain in the body is pain *in matter itself*. It goes down to the bottom of the world, down to the roots of Nature, down to the stuff out of which life's created. It's the great enemy of creation: it's worse than death!'

No sooner had he uttered these words, bellowing them forth as if his father were standing on the opposite rampart, than he became aware that he was catching the very rhythm of his father's tone. He was refuting him, but he was talking to the wind just as *he* did! But, though he knew all this, he seemed compelled to go on. It was as if this contact with his father were forcing him to become like his father even in the act of denouncing him.

'There's nothing,' he yelled at the man, 'not your love-hate or anything else, that's as strong as physical pain. I tell you it won't bear thinking on. What you're saying now is the lie of all false prophets since the beginning! Physical pain damns the whole creation. It damns God. It damns the mind. It damns religion. And what's more, if science can cure it, if science can drag up pain to the light as Hercules did Cerberus—'

He stopped; and to his own amazement — for once more he had a vision of Claudius staring after the airplane — he actually felt tears at the back of his eyes. But it was not his vision of Claudius that stopped him. It was an appalling sense that his words were not his own. He was his father arguing with his father. The harsh nervous eloquence, the curious spiritual anger, the wild ruggedness of the words he used, all belonged to this man of his mother's.

He was his son, then. It came out when their souls were stirred. Nothing like talk about pain to bring forth the truth! They might differ over this mystery, but it was the same nerve, the same wolf's howl from the navel of life, the same obliviousness to every sense of proportion.

Quite unaware of what he was doing, Dud began plucking both hands at the grass beside him. As he did this, his whole lean frame began rocking itself up and down as if he had been a mechanical doll wound up to bow before his father. What he began to feel now was indescribable. Not only was he compelled to talk *like* his father, but he began to feel as if the powers of Mai-Dun were fusing him *with* his father. Was that what was meant by that horrible votive offering of the men impaled on the bull? Little did the happy, way-worn, casual visitors to the Dorchester Museum who glanced at that small metal object in its glass case realize that there was nothing in the old religions of our race that didn't find its spiritual counterpart in the undying tragedies of the soul!

But this business was getting serious for our friend, and it was characteristic of him that in such a crisis he should pluck at the roots of the grass. In normal times of stress he automatically lit a cigarette. But to find himself hypnotized to this tune by the magnetism of his mother's man was a crisis beyond cigarettes. Grass-clutching alone seemed to answer his need, and the feel of gravelly chalk under his finger-nails.

Dud's secret soul, beneath his grim and gaunt exterior, was abnormally fluid and abnormally flexible; and the terrifying thought began now to trouble his imagination that, for a nature as lacking in the vital and seminal *stamina* of a normal man as he knew his to be, there might be an appalling psychic danger in the present encounter.

No one would have guessed, beholding this thin middle-aged man listening with such grave attention to the discourse of a loose-limbed individual with a great, black, almost negroid head, what wild thoughts were whirling through his brain.

'By living in my own secret sensations so long,' Dud said to himself, 'I've reduced to a minimum my power of resistance. Out of this man's surging seed I was born, and against this monstrous vitality what can I set up?'

And the extremely unpleasant fear came to him lest, brought into contact with this terrific fount, he, the weak tributary, might be completely reabsorbed into the parent stream! He was so agitated by this thought that he found it difficult to listen to what the man was saying now; but by degrees his mind cleared.

‘So you see,’ his father was explaining, ‘it wasn’t my blind instinct that showed me what I was and what I am. It came to me as the only possible interpretation of my great secret, of this destiny laid upon me to reach the life behind life. Fumbling about in the roots of the past, I found what I was, what I *must* be, to be the thing I am! Everything’s in the mind. Everything’s created and destroyed by the mind. It’s the mind, it’s not any devil’s magic, that makes and breaks our mirrors and mirages. All’s vision, lad, all, I say, *all;* and the mind’s the only demiurge. You think it’s madness to talk of the old gods of Mai-Dun? You think I ought to be interested in their excavations, and their proofs that human beings lived in this place like hyaenas in holes among bones? I tell you, lad, the truth of life’s in the imagination, not in ashes and urns! I tell you *we*, I and others like me, are the gods of Mai-Dun — the same, yesterday, today, and forever. There’s no one god, lad. Lay *that* up in your heart. Things are as they are because there are so many of us; and as fast as some create, others destroy: and a good thing too, as the Son of Chaos cries out in *Faust*. Certain masks of life *ought* to be destroyed, to make room for others, to make room sometimes for those that have lain beneath them for ten thousand years.

‘Yes, my dear boy, as I talk to you now I feel the power rushing through me. You may well clutch at the grass! This bank, and that one opposite us, that seem so solid — shall I tell you what they are? — They’re mists and mirages and vapours! Don’t ‘ee feel it, lad, as I speak to you? Don’t you feel this whole great fortress ready to shake, shiver, melt, dissolve? Don’t you feel that you and I are behind it, making it what it is by the power of our minds? Don’t you feel it floating, with all its bright grass, on the dark under-sea of our terrible—’

He was interrupted by the unexpected appearance of three young men and a small dog advancing along the crest of the rampart in front of them.

No-man at once stopped clutching at the grass, and automatically picked up his grotesque cudgel, and then, shuffling a bit till his legs were in a more comfortable position, held this Cerne Giant club of his tightly across his knees. It had been a wonder to him, all these months, that the people he passed in his walks refrained from jeering at this absurd stick. ‘These patient Durotriges’, he thought, ‘must have got so used to the eccentricities of one set of rulers after another that they treat my stick as if it were the battle-axe of Sir Jonathal!’

His first impression, when he caught sight of these three men and their little dog, was that they were his old friends the dole-receivers from the bridge. For a second he suffered that uncomfortable sensation we get when some particular chance seems more than chance.

‘Am I destined to meet these three men and their dog’, he thought, ‘at every crisis in my life?’

But he soon became aware that the men were much younger than his unemployed friends of the bridge and that their dog, though as inquisitive as the other, was of a different breed. It was indeed a Scotch terrier, not a fox-terrier, and of the male sex, and it amused him to observe, when it came sniffing and gambolling to his companion’s side, how disdainfully and irritably the man behaved. ‘He’s like old Claudius with the ducks,’ he thought. ‘These people with fixed ideas can’t bear it when reality barks or quacks at them.’

‘A fine afternoon,’ our friend called out to the three young fellows, as he stroked the dog, ‘and a good day for a walk.’

‘Killed anything with that stick yet?’ one of the boys shouted; and their giggling broke into a loud guffaw.

Dud and his father evidently struck them as eccentric persons who could be insulted with impunity. ‘They’re not from Dorchester,’ thought our friend. ‘Those aren’t Durnovarian manners.’ But after the young men had moved on and their dog had followed them, No-man found he’d received a fresh impulse towards resisting his father. ‘I’ve changed a lot since living with Wizzie,’ he thought. ‘In the old days I’d have been furious with these lads. But how silly! We need these raw youths, and slaps in the face from them, to keep our sense of proportion.’

‘I’m not telling you all this with any hope of your taking it seriously,’ went on his father. ‘I can see you’re more interested in those young fools and that dog than in me. I’m talking because I *must* talk. A person must have someone to talk to. Nance used to believe in me; but since her boy died’ — and he cast an almost savage glance towards the sky as if the sun were deliberately pelting him with lark-music— ‘she’s changed.

‘And the upshot of it was, lad,’ he went on, ‘I became convinced, not from any revelation, you understand, but because of this *necessity* I’m under of bearing the pain of the world, the pain of what beats against the wall, that in one incarnation after another I’ve been the same power! And do you want to know *what* power I’ve been, lad?’ Here the man lowered his voice to a solemn whisper. ‘I’ve been the power that’s older than all this damned sunshine, the power that’s older than all these new gods, the power that’s deepest of all, for it’s got death in it as well as life. It’s this power — the power that works in me, lad, the power that I *am* — that beats in its pain against the wall of the world.

‘You can cry out, lad, if you like, that it’s all fantasy and illusion; you can cry out that your excavations set it at naught; but I tell you that sooner or later you’ll know it as I know it! I tell you it’s in all the pain of the world where love turns to hate and beats against the wall! It’s in the despair of all the sterile love there's ever been since the beginning! Don't you see what force there is in sterile love? Why, my dear boy, it's the strongest force there is! Rampant desire unfulfilled — why, there's nothing it can't do. Stir up sex *till it would put out the sun* and then keep it sterile! That's the trick. That's the grand trick of all spiritual life. It's the pain of Saint Derfel. It's the pain of Saint Demogorgon. Your physical pain's nothing to it.

'Now do you begin to see the truth about my name? I didn't change it to Urien because Urien's a prettier sound than Enoch, but because I found, in incarnation after incarnation, that I've actually *been* Urien! It's all in the books. The mental pain that breaks against the barrier, the mental pain that loses itself in death-in-life, is the key to Urien's country. This is the land of Mureif and Rheged and Catraeth and "yr Echwydd". Rhŷs says that Skene's version of Taliesin's fragment —

Ac ef yn arbennic
yn oruchel wledic
yn dinas pellenic
yn keimyat kynteic

— ought to be changed a little. I would change it to: "And he especially, the supreme power, in the distant city, the principal companion." And it's Rhŷs, and no one else, who makes clear what this power, this the Urien in me, really is. It is the old magic of the mind when, driven to bay by the dogs of reality, it turns upon the mathematical law of life and tears it to bits. It's the old magic of the mind, the secret of which has been so often lost, till the Welsh, alone among the races, *hid* it instead of squandering it.'

Here there began again that same curious quiver in Urien's face, as if the man's lineaments were decomposing, as if the ghastly ripples of some actual commencement of physical death were passing and repassing across his face, and not only did this occur, but simultaneously with it Dud became conscious of that same repulsive mortuary smell he had noticed on Candlemas Night. ‘Do the man’s death-thoughts’, he said to himself, ‘produce an actual smell of death? Or is it the smell of that sterile life-seed he’s talking about that beats against the wall?’

‘Do you know, lad,’ his father went on, ‘Rhŷs says that in the triads describing my death I’m spoken of as having a crow— “brân” it is in Welsh — on my breast? And do you realize, boy, that this is exactly what I *have* had since I was a child? Cornie could tell you about it! Nance could bear witness to it! It’s been a peculiarity of mine, for as long as I can remember, that whenever I come near anyone with that mental pain I’m talking about I get an actual physical hurting in the centre of my chest that’s like a fiery beak pecking at me and yet that’s sweet as an ecstasy.’

Dud now became aware that the man was actually pulling up his sweater and undoing not only the buttons of his grey flannel shirt but those of his vest. In the hurried effort to accomplish this he got up on his feet.

No-man rose too; but a quaint instinct of self-protection, as if the vision of his begetter’s naked torso were a threat, caused him to stoop down and pick up his great cudgel.

‘Look!’ cried the man proudly, holding open his clothes.

‘How hairy his chest is!’ thought our friend; and as he stared at Enoch Quirm’s bosom a violent revulsion against being the son of such a hairy man, and a man whose sweat had such a vile smell, took possession of him.

But the Glymes man complacently fumbled at his prodigious breastbones and began with the tips of his fingers pushing the black hairs aside.

‘Look! Why don’t you look?’ he repeated.

Dud reluctantly bent forward towards him, feeling as he did so as if he were peering into a miasmic pool, worse than any scummy pond, out of which rose a reek of corruption.

But even this was not enough. ‘Feel!’ the fellow cried with a satisfaction that revolted our friend.

Dud permitted his fingers to be directed by his begetter to *certain just* distinguishable birth-marks, or scaly disfigurements of some kind, that really did seem to exist beneath these damp hairs.

No-man’s mind had never moved more rapidly, nor had his sense-consciousness been more acute, than at this complicated moment. One extraordinary fancy came into his head as his fingers encountered these faint abrasions. ‘Does he get his damned ecstasies when he looks at Thuella and Wizzie? Do these marks burn when he gloats over Thuella looking at Wizzie?’

But this thought passed as quickly as it came; and its place was taken by an almost vicious plunge into the miasma of loathing that surrounded him. He began to get a sensation that had a monstrous sensuality in it — though to be aware of this sensuality was anything but a pleasure to him — a sensuality that sprang out of the very disgust he experienced; and in his morbidity he began furiously scraping and scratching at the itch in his soul. ‘It’s the seed that begat me,’ he thought. And against this enforced parentage, against his fatherhood thrust upon him by an alien lust, he revolted in fury.

It was too much! That a great, hairy, foreign maniac should have snatched him from the lovely dignity of nothingness, to make him puke and pine and babble and scrabble in the indignity of being born, was an insolence that roused him to sickening disgust.

The fellow had talked of the secrets of sterile desire and of the terrible urge of love-hate — but what was this? What was this groping, grasping, in-sucking whirlpool of *father-loathing?* What was this subhuman sensuality, a sensuality resembling not so much the glorying of an ape in its own excrement as the glorying of the ape's excrement in the —

'Yes — I do — feel — something. Yes, I distinctly feel something there. Is it a scar?'

Dud had never seen a human face collapse so quickly from infinite complacency to infinite hopelessness as when the Glymes man heard the words 'Is it a scar?'

'I thought — it would — mean more — to you — than that, lad. What you've just touched is the...' While he muttered this in a low colourless voice, he turned away from his son and began wearily buttoning up his underclothes. The words 'Please adjust your dress... Please adjust your dress before leaving' repeated themselves in Dud's brain.

'What you've touched is the Crow — Brân, the Crow. I suppose you've never heard of Bendigeitvran, or Brân the Blessed? I suppose...'

But it seemed as if there was a growing hostility to the Glymes man among the larks of that radiant sky, for the solemn word 'Bendigeitvran' reached Dud's ears through such a burst of lark-music that it sounded like nursery gibberish, while the rest of the sentence resembled the babbling of Nimrod in the *Inferno*. 'Rafel mai amech zabi almi!' was no more unintelligible than the words those sun-servants made Urien utter.

'Sir John is inclined to think', Mr Quirm concluded, in a tone of patronizing indulgence towards the good intentions of scholarly erudition, 'that King Pellam, and Urban of the Black Thorn, and Yspyddaden the father of Olwen, and Uthr Ben the father of Arthur, are really every one of them just local names for the Urien in me as I was incarnated down the ages.

'He makes it clear that the word "Urien" is no Celtic word, but far older, a word belonging to that mysterious civilization of the dwellers in Dunium, and in the great cities about Avebury and Stonehenge and Caer Drwyn and Caer Sidi and Catraeth and Carbonek, that was not Aryan at all, but a civilization possessed of secrets of life that Aryan science has destroyed.’

Thus speaking, the Glymes man panted a little with the effort of what he was doing, and made the familiar grimace that almost all mortal men make when they pull up or pull down their clothes; and when he addressed his son again, it was in a more cheerful manner.

Dud was inclined to attribute this recovery of the man’s life-illusion to the mere sound of such resonant words, whether Aryan or non-Aryan, as Uthr and Urien and Catraeth and Carbonek, but he was not wholly satisfied with this explanation. Perhaps a better one was that a small compact cloud, shaped like a millstone, had rolled up unobserved by either of them, and was now darkening the sun and taking the brightness, though not the warmth, from the green turf at their feet.

‘But you *did* feel something,’ he said, ‘didn’t you? It’s not a scar, of course. What put into your head that it could be a scar? A scar? What scar could it be? But you felt *something*, and that’s what was wanted! That’s what’s been wanting, my lad, ever since I gave you that head and let you know who I was. You’ve laid your finger on the seal of Urien, and that’s the chief thing.’

Dud and his father stood for a while gazing into each other’s eyes. ‘I don’t *feel’*, the former thought, ‘as if you were out of your wits; yet no one else, listening to all this, would think otherwise.’

Our friend was the first to withdraw his eyes. ‘Come on!’ he said quietly and in the most matter-of-fact voice he could assume. ‘Let’s complete the circle, and then I must be getting home. I promised them faithfully I’d be back for tea at Friary Lane, and I’ve got to go to my rooms first.’

By one of those phenomenal changes of the weather that Dud had already recognized as characteristic of the Durnovarian climate, quite a lot of clouds had followed the one whose shape was like a millstone till the darkened grass began to lose its warmth and a distinct chilliness fell on this citadel of the old gods.

'It's appropriate enough', our friend couldn't help thinking, as they continued their march along the sunless trench, 'that I should be walking, here of all places, *with my father*. I wonder what she's feeling over there under her cemetery mound?' And he tried to imagine the interviews that this Glymes man must have had with the authorities of that crowded burying-ground before he persuaded them to allot him a place hard by those three graves.

'No,' his thoughts ran on, as they strode forward in silence, 'I *can't* feel that you're just a madman, with your head turned by reading these old books. And yet, if you're not a madman, what the hell *are* you?'

And No-man began ransacking his memory for other cases of this sort of megalomania. Of course the thing *did* happen, and not so unfrequently either. Christianity was only one of thousands upon thousands of miraculous religions founded by this same queer human aberration of men with abnormal magnetic powers.

'Our age,' he thought, 'just as Spengler says, is full of rumours and intimations of the occult; and who can tell whence or when some new religion may arise? If it *does*, isn't it likely enough that it'll draw its symbols, though not its *life*, from the prehistoric past? It's not absolutely impossible' — so his erratic imagination concluded— 'that in a few hundred years some devoted, mystical group of people will actually be invoking you, you old arch-humbug. Yes, and I dare say claiming *me* as your first convertite!'

But *was* the man a humbug? At every step Dud took by the fellow's side he wrestled with this question. 'No,' he thought. 'It's to judge him crudely to assume that if he's not a madman he must be a charlatan. These things are much more subtle than that.' And he began calling up all he'd heard of such personages as Simon Magus and Paracelsus and Eliphaz Levi and Cagliostro. 'They must all have gulled people over and over again without the least shame; but I can't imagine *their not believing in their own power*. I certainly prefer this notion of his that he's been some kind of demigod in the remote past to any spiritualistic tricks. Besides, after all, there *may* be a kind of truth in what he says! There may never have been an actual god, or man either, corresponding to Urien, but if from 1000 BC to 1000 AD those old bards told themselves stories about Urien, and worked themselves up into ecstasies over Urien, why shouldn't their fancies correspond to a certain tremendous cosmic power that really *does* incarnate itself now and again? I don't like it, and I don't like *him*, and I'd give every penny I've got for a convincing proof that he's not my father; but I can't take him as simply a liar, and I can't take him as simply a madman.'

'The wind's going to get up,' murmured Enoch Quirm, sniffing the air.

'Oh, damn it, sir!' cried Dud in exasperation. 'I've heard wonders enough this afternoon without any ghost-wind! Besides, if anything, the wind has dropped. Look there! The grasses were stirring when we first got here, and they're absolutely still now.'

'All right, lad,' answered the Glymes man, in a voice so natural, so friendly, and so sensible, that No-man felt almost sympathetic towards him. 'We won't call it a ghost-wind. We'll just call it the wind getting up — as it usually does get up when I come to Mai-Dun. You won't feel it for a couple of minutes, nor will the grasses, but you'll see *then.'*

And sure enough he was right. Not in a couple of minutes, perhaps, but certainly in five minutes, No-man was aware of some sudden indefinable change. It was a vast universal shiver, a vibratory stir, a low faint indescribable tumult, a deep-throated humming in the purlieus of space. What it brought into Dud's mind was, first, the scriptural phrase 'a rushing mighty wind', and then a sense as of the beating of the wings of a vast host of invisible birds.

It pleased him that his mother's man took no credit for the coming true of his prediction. He did not even glance triumphantly at his son. All he did was to stand absolutely still, like a colossal rabbit who freezes at the approach of a pack of dogs. Before becoming immobile, however, he thrust his right hand deep into his trouser-pocket, and tried to do the same with his left, but in this he was prevented by the fact, as our friend had not failed to note, that he had already stuffed that aperture quite full with his cloth cap.

They were now at the extreme eastern end of Mai-Dun, the particular portion of the turf metropolis that most antiquaries regard as the oldest. Of this fact our friend, of course, was ignorant. Indeed, if it had not been that there was a marked difference in the contours of the trench where they had first entered it, Enoch Quirm might have led him round and round for hours without his being conscious of any north or south or east or west.

The wind that had got up, whatever its nature may have been, came straight from the direction of Chesil Beach; but such was the peculiar configuration of Mai-Dun that once within the circle of the place its course became arbitrary and wayward. Whether it would have been the same with any wind from that quarter, Dud knew not; but certainly this particular wind, as its force gradually increased, began to act in what seemed to him an eccentric manner. In place of leaping straight over the trench where they stood and streaming away across the centre of Maiden Castle, this wind seemed to descend bodily, just as if it were a compact and living entity, *into* their trench, and thence proceed to whirl round the whole circle, gathering speed as it went, and uttering long-drawn, gasping, spasmodic sighs.

Dud had always been something of a wind-worshipper, and he was preparing now to enjoy to the full the feeling of this cold, slippery, invisible being beating against his bony frame, when he became aware that his companion was muttering something. Whatever it was — probably Taliesin's chant to the wind — the strange elemental syllables were in singular harmony with the subhuman sounds that went sighing past them.

'This Old Welsh', he said to himself, 'must be the most primitive of all tongues. It sounds as if human inventions, human necessities, human thought even, barely entered into it — as if its rhythm were identical with the orchestration of the planet, whose only notes are the motions of air and water, and its only burden the ancient sorrow of the earth. What he's muttering now must be what the spirits of space must have heard, rising night by night, day by day, through millions of ages, from an earth that as yet knew no organic life.'

Something atavistic in No-man's nature was stirred to the depths as the two men stood there listening, the one in silence, the other muttering his incantations. 'It sounds', he thought, 'as if the whole round earth were strung with invisible harp-strings that responded to her rush through the ether.'

The men's position as they stood there certainly lent itself to the depth of our friend's impressions, for, though they were lifted up by the towering mass of this city of chalk and turf above the rondure of the planet, the fact that they stood at the bottom of that trench cut them off as completely as if they were below-deck in some voyaging ship of space.

It thus was brought about that Dud, the wind-lover, found he had never realized until now what a mystery it was, this creature that sweeps so tumultuously and with such a rushing sigh over the surface of the earth. He felt as if it were the Great Spirit itself, beating against the mass of inert matter. There, under their feet, was immobility, the immobility of what could never move of itself; and here, whirling over their heads, was the primordial impetus of all motion!

Such, however, was the obstinate egoism of Dud's nature that his impressions at this unusual moment soon settled down into a reviewing of his own personal predicament, and such was his irrational childishness that this reviewing took the form at first of a ridiculously trivial grievance against Wizzie.

'She kicked my stick under the bed,' he said to himself. 'She kicked my stick with her bare feet.' He was prepared for any revelation about Wizzie's obscure past. He was prepared to accept with philosophic calm the most shocking details of her life with Old Funky. But this kicking of his stick under the bed, and that she did it *with her bare foot*, seemed a grievance whose proportions could not be exaggerated.

Most people would have surmised that Dud had been brought up with some small sister of his own age with whom the eternal belligerency of childhood had led to perpetual physical contest. They would have taken for granted that it was the memory of some babyish biting and scratching that made it so terrible that she had done it with her bare foot. But our friend had, as a matter of fact, never been allowed to play with other infants, and, save for the few timid advances to the girl of the stick-house, all his early intercourse with the opposite sex had taken place in his imagination. A much wiser guess as to the cause of the triviality of Dud's grievance, and of the grotesque manner in which at this eventful moment the thought 'She kicked it with her bare foot' rose into an outrage worse than adultery, would have been that his long years of cerebral eroticism had so perverted his natural instincts that in all these things he was at once superhuman and subhuman, prepared to be oblivious where normal passion tends to grow homicidal, and prepared to make an issue of some infinitesimal clash between masculine and feminine nerves.

But each man's world is the whole world, and if Dud's grudge 'She kicked it with her bare foot' lacked objective proportion, so no doubt did Wizzie herself show a lack of intelligence in not confiding more fully to a mate prepared for anything.

And out of proportion though Dud's grievance was, he felt at this moment far too inspired by the Mai-Dun wind to submit tamely to *any* grievance against the girl. He thought to himself as he glanced at Urien, 'This self-indulgence of yours, my good man, in your wild fancies ought to be a warning to me. What I must do is to take life on its lowest level, gather my soul together, and stand what fate sends. And I *won't* change from holding fast to Wizz and bearing the burden!'

It gave him a curious satisfaction to use the word 'burden' in these colloquies with himself. He envisaged himself standing here on this planetary excrescence, lean and compact, stripped of all nonsense, even as the place itself was, and prepared to bear the burden. This had long been a favourite clue word of his. He had used it when the other boys laughed at him at the agricultural college. He had used it when he found Aaron's ways to the Woman from Wales hard to witness. He had used it when his mother's own aloofness to himself, with her eternal romances and fantastic embroideries, saddened and troubled him. He had used it when his desire for Mona was frozen by his nervousness in her presence. And above all he had used it when attacked by his morbid fear of physical pain.

He was doing what he called bearing the burden when he let his mind brood upon an aspect of physical pain that always horrified him: its power of feeding on its victim till, swollen by his blood, it becomes his alter ego, forcing him into an interior vacuum where all is insubstantial except the quivering umbilical cord that connects him with the pain-self. Broodings of this sort he had quickly to forget or life would have become intolerable, but there was always their mark on the wall of his mind, like the mark left when you take away a picture, and this mark was the sign-manual of the burden.

What he decided now as he stood in this darkened turf-shell of the encircling wind was that he would bring his whole life under this bearing the burden. He decided that he would force himself to talk sympathetically to the Glymes man about his identity with Urien, Lord of Illusion. He decided that he would betray no shrinking from him even though his senses revolted to a point of nausea from the mortuary smell of his skin.

Such were No-man's thoughts as he shifted his cudgel from his right hand to his left, the better to turn up his coat-collar, for he began to feel chilly; but he soon became conscious that this Mai-Dun wind was impaling him on the horns of a crisis quite as sharp as those of any bull-god. 'I *must* stop this business with Thuella,' he thought. 'I shan't breathe a word to Wizz about the Scummy Pond, but I *must* stop it!'

Chillier and chillier he grew under the growing force of the wind; and there came to be presented to him one of those searching glimpses into his intrinsic self that come so seldom to mortal men. 'I could never give up my life like old Claudius,' he said to himself; 'but I *could* struggle, like this man of mother's, after the secret. Not in his way, not by magic, of course — but I *could drop* the entire world and live for the spirit, as long as I was allowed my imaginative lusts!'

And it came over him what a blind plunge into reality it had been, this Dorchester life! Before he came here what he lived in was a sort of Nirvana of mystical sensuality; but these people of Glymes and Friary Lane — why, he felt as if they were all conspiring against him to draw him out of his quiescence. Did that mean that his quiescence was an evil thing? He couldn't believe it! But, evil or not, *it was his life;* and under the surface, under his dealings with all these people, it would have to go on. Nothing but death could stop it. And perhaps not even death. Perhaps it was this secret life of his that would help him to survive death! But *that* brought him back to those two women's graves. Had Mona, with her indifference to herself, become *nothing*, while his mother, with her absorption in herself, was still vividly alive? But what he lived for, though it wasn't a cause like Claudius's, wasn't exactly himself. It was himself *in a certain relation to the cosmos*.

Down at the bottom he knew he disliked *all* flesh and blood, not excluding his own. What he secretly longed for was to live for imaginative lust, for intellectual pleasure, and for the magic of the universe. He could have gone on enjoying his Mona-wraith, reading and writing eternal romances, walking forever over the downs, in perfect contentment to the end of his days. It was human beings that spoilt life for him. It was Glymes and Friary Lane. It was letters from Yeovil and lunches with Mr Cumber. 'I'm afraid of their eyes,' he thought to himself. 'That's the whole thing! *Their eyes won't let me enjoy myself.'*

But the wind seemed to be dividing him in half just now like a sharp sword. What he felt at this moment was beyond any moral struggle. He might make resolutions about not doing *that* with Thuella, but give up his secret Nature-worship in order to serve humanity like old Claudius — he couldn't do it! He wanted to live a life that hurt nobody. But why should he have Glymes thrust upon him, and the Horse-Head's troubles? Oh, that he might never have to meet another human eye! What he couldn't stand were all these terrifying conspiracies — so much more frightening than anything in Nature — that looked out of the human eye. 'I'd be all right', he thought, 'if I had Wizz absolutely alone.'

But what this wind was doing was dividing him like a sharp sword. Half of him was crying with a savage finality 'I! I! I! I!' while the other half was threatening to put a leash round the neck of this 'I' and turn it into an obedient servant of evolution, or Communism, or the will of God!

The colder Dud got in this Mai-Dun wind, the more savage grew the pleasure that he took in thinking of this leash with which he would drag himself here and there. 'If it's not my nature to have a cause like Claudius,' he said to himself, 'at least I'll hold Wizz against the ribs of my loneliness and make people realize the tragedy of girls like Mary!'

His brain began whirling from point to point in his secret life; but just as a tapering water-spout might carry various objects in its upward swirl, yet steadily diminish its mounting circumference, so his thoughts drew these points nearer and nearer to each other as they whirled up in their spiral ascent.

And after all, wasn't this wind only bringing to a climax a change that had already come over him? His nature, he told himself, had always been more abstracted than malevolent, and the lovers' quarrels he had had with Wizzie, since that All Souls' Day, had broken up his inhuman isolation.

'The truth is,' he thought, 'I have a shy, frightened, morbidly shrinking soul under my lean bones. There's nothing manly or masculine in my soul. It's the soul of a neurotic nun. I haven't the gall to stand up to a single human being. All my life I've dodged and shirked. That sweet fool Nance is attracted to what doesn't exist! What would she think if she knew that her warm touches make me shiver all over as if I was made of brittle glass? I expect Mother was really like that. I know she hated to be kissed. I expect that eternal embroidering was *her* escape from people. What a thing to be *made* of flesh and blood and to loathe flesh and blood!'

Our friend edged himself forward a little and tried to listen to the Glymes man's mutterings. 'Why don't you try to understand your son a little?' he apostrophized his parent. 'One live son is better than many dead gods.'

'What is your idea', he suddenly cried out, raising his voice, 'of the difference between good and evil?' His question was carried by the wind as it swept over tussocks of grasses, over hoof-marks of horses, over windings of sheep-tracks. It was carried sighing and swishing over the heads of daisies; it was carried sobbing and soughing between the stalks of last year's thistles; it was carried sliding and slithering along narrow rabbit-runs; it was carried with faint elfin screams through the curves of snail-shells; it made sorties from mole-hill to mole-hill; it whistled over the thresholds of shrew-mice.

But his father's answer was harsh and discordant. 'What's that, lad? What's that? What's that? What's that?' And the man began turning these harmless monosyllables into incoherent croaks such as might have proceeded from that crow sign in his hairy chest.

'Never mind now,' muttered our friend. 'I won't bother you now.' And he thought to himself, 'How bitterly alone we are when it comes to taking stock of our essential life! What was I thinking of just then, when I blurted that out? Oh, Thuella, of course! No, I must take that damned nerve between Thuella and me, and cut it clean through — cut it with a knife! It must be Wizz alone. I can't hold Wizz against my ribs and do *that* with Thuella.'

The wind had turned so cold by this time that Dud shivered. ‘Come on, sir!’ he burst out. ‘Let’s go! I’ve had enough of this.’

His father gave him an angry look and shrugged his shoulders. ‘You’ve broken it with your cursed questions’, he muttered. ‘Come on, then. Never mind the circle! We’ll go back by Monkton and the Weymouth road.’

They clambered up the opposite bank, descended into a parallel trench, mounted thence to the crest of a second ridge, down again into another grassy channel, up once more to yet another turf rampart, and then down at last into the umbrageous valley below.

Dud remembered afterwards how vividly every detail of the way stood out before him as he came down the slope by his father’s side. There was a dead rabbit in the path, in the last stage of its decomposition, and he had to force himself to do what he always did with dead things — to make the sign of the cross over it and to place it carefully in the ditch. As he stooped down for this pious act, Nature, as if unsympathetic to such proceedings, brought it about that his gorge rose to a pitch of actual retching, so that although the rabbit got its obsequies — such as they were — he himself was denied any sort of ritualistic satisfaction.

‘No, no,’ he said to himself. ‘I’m going to try more than ever to make *Mary Channing* a book that shall — and I’m going to stop doing *that* with Thuella! I’m not going to care *what’s* in the Yeovil letter. But I haven’t come out of my Mona-wraith world to be caught by your manias, old Topknot. *There* I’m hard as a rock. But oh deary I! Damn *all* these people. Why can’t I be left alone in peace with Wizzie? D. No-man and his girl... D. No-man and his girl... D. No-man and his—’

His thoughts were interrupted by a peevish and fretful grumbling from his companion, and he noticed that his father now began to manifest the same sort of symptoms of nervous exhaustion that a priest who on an empty stomach has been chanting a long and complicated mass might display on his way back to breakfast. He asked for a cigarette, cursed irritably when the wind extinguished his first two matches, fussed with his sweater, which seemed to have gathered itself into unconscionable folds round his hips, kept searching about under his trousers for the tape on one side of his drawers which had escaped from his braces, fumbled at one of the buttons of his coat which kept slipping out of its button-hole, and at intervals pressed the front of his wrist against his eye-sockets as if his eye-balls hurt him.

He grumbled more than our friend thought necessary about their inability to open a gate into the lane above Monkton, and seemed to find the effort of clambering over it almost beyond his strength. To some remark of No-man's about the peacefulness of the little churchyard he broke out crossly against the way the enclosure had been mown. He even displayed annoyance at the manner in which Dud hung back to get a final view of Mai-Dun between the trees. 'We'll be catching our death in this damned wind', he muttered, 'if you keep stopping like that!'

All this would naturally have amused and perhaps even gratified our friend as signs of a pleasant human weakness in the man, if he himself had not been so wrought up by his experiences on the hill that he had lost all power of humorous observation. He tried to put his father out of his mind and gave himself up to the sweetly dolorous motions of the wind in these freshly green elm-branches.

A feeling began to take possession of him that he had known before, but never quite as intensely as at this moment, as though all the long generations of men who had listened to this mysterious sound had left behind them some abiding residue of their deepest underthoughts, thoughts full of dark rain-swept vistas, sweet and tender and infinitely sad, and yet with a strange hope in them too, a hope that went drifting down mossy alleys and away over primrose-sheltering banks and sedgy streams towards cool dark retreats of the fevered spirit, far from human lives, but gathering up all the mortal pity, purged and muted and transformed, of what it had left behind. ‘I must carry the soul of Mary Channing with me into this green dimness,’ he thought. ‘That’s what I must do in my book! I must collect the shreds and patches of her poor substance that were dissolved among the elements, and comfort them in some way, and give them pardon and peace. I must wash every memory of our accurst justice from them and bathe them in this healing greenness. Perhaps the only after-life we shall get is a gradual dissolving of our identity among the memories of all we have enjoyed most.’

All the way back to the town, as he walked by the side of his silent parent along the Weymouth road, this posthumous restitution of Mary Channing obsessed his mind. In some wild fantastic manner he linked the dead woman’s personality with Wizzie’s, linked her poisoned husband with Old Funky, linked himself with the dim figure of the equivocal gallant for whom she killed him. ‘I believe if I hadn’t got Wizzie,’ he thought, ‘I’d be taking Mary’s ghost home with me to my room — not as a substitute for Mona, though, but as...’

But even the Mai-Dun wind lacked the power to inspire our friend with any role really appropriate to this ill-used shade. But he fell into a deep consideration, as they moved on towards the cemetery and the Amphitheatre, with the spire of All Saints’ already appearing in shortened perspective behind the brewery chimney, as to the manner in which he would make his Mary a veritable symbol of all the women whose love of love, and love of pleasure, and loathing of married slavery, had made them victims of a morality based upon property. ‘I’ll make her so pitiful,’ he thought, ‘and I’ll describe her judges and her husband and the cruelty of those onlookers so piercingly, that I’ll burn this crime into the bones of Wessex. I’ll do *what they did to her*, only the other way round!’

But from Mary his excited mind soon came swinging back to his own affairs. ‘What *will* there be’, he thought, ‘in that Yeovil letter? Well! I’m ready, whatever it is!’

And then, as they drew near the cemetery and he decided that nothing would induce him to enter that place in company with his mother’s man, he thought how, if he were writing a story about himself, he would make All Souls’ Day this last autumn appear like a new birth, the birth of a middle-aged man over forty into normal human life. ‘The truth is,’ he thought, ‘what I have to struggle like the devil to be is what normal men are already by the nature of things. And yet I would not change with any of them! I’ll still be myself: but I’ll be myself entering *their* life.’

They were opposite the cemetery now, and our friend took good care to look the other way, and to *think* the other way too, lest some telepathic wave of consciousness should set Urien upon entering the death-enclosure.

But what was this? Yes, there was some kind of circus — and it looked to his eyes most startlingly familiar — being put up in the Fairfield! ‘I expect it’s a different one, though,’ he said to himself. ‘There must be endless ones on the road.’

And then the thought came to him: ‘But I’m certain Wizz told me none of them went their rounds till the summer. What the devil *is* this, then?’

Urien made no sign of any sort as they passed the cemetery, and Dud didn’t dare to take off his cap. ‘But what would you think, Mother,’ he said to himself, ‘if you saw us passing you without a word?’

It was a relief when they began to skirt the iron railings by the Amphitheatre; and Dud tried hard to put both cemetery and circus out of his mind and to concentrate on Mary’s execution. He had picked up some ghastly details from various traditional accounts of this event, but upon these he refused to let his mind dwell.

‘That’s one thing I learnt from old Aaron,’ he said to himself. ‘Aye! how I remember the way he looked on his knees at prayers when he used to say, “And keep us all, dear merciful God, from thinking of cruel things, lest our thoughts carry food to the devils.”’

When they came past the railway station our friend remembered how he had decided during his first encounter with Wizzie not to have any scruple about making love to Thuella. ‘Well, I’ve got plenty of scruple now,’ he thought, with a wry grimace.

But here were the South Walks; and presently the familiar cenotaph hove in sight. ‘How like a figure in Hardy’, he said to himself, ‘poor Nance looked that day staggering against those rails! It’s funny how I began my life in Dorchester just as the Mayor began his, only Trenchard *sold* his woman and I *bought* mine!’

‘You won’t mind if I don’t come with you further than the Hangman’s Cottage?’ he remarked to his companion. ‘It’s a quarter to five, I see, and I promised to be at Friary Lane at five.’

Urien surveyed the big clock on its sixteenth century façade, and nodded amiably. ‘Don’t bother yourself, lad! Further or no further, ’tis all the same. But I’m right glad you came up *there* with me.’

By a mutual instinct to avoid the crowds on South Street the two tall men crossed over by the entrance to Bowling Alley Walk and proceeded up Trinity Street. This particular thoroughfare — for when he wanted to take a walk through Came or Herringston he generally started by way of Acland Road or the Icen Way — was less familiar to him than the other Dorchester streets. The fresh interest he took in it now as they advanced made him think how completely he'd taken all that old life of his for granted, and all the people in it for granted! Though he was a man of thirty when the three of them died, it was as if he had been a boy of thirteen. It was through the thick mist of an absolutely secretive imagination that he saw his mother perpetually embroidering, his pseudo-father perpetually praying and gardening, and Mona managing them all like an angel from Heaven.

But how different life was since he had lived in Dorchester! The old Roman town must have had in its possession some ancient classic cement of actuality that had the power of making the real doubly real! Nothing but his imagination had been *really* real to him before he came to Dorchester; but how palpable Wizzie was, and how terribly alive Thuella was! Claudius and the troubled Horse-Head, too, were no mean wedges of this new verity; and as for the warm touch of Nance...

But the Glymes man and he were in High West Street now, and he became aware that it was Mr Quirm's intention to go down Glyde Path Road to the Hangman's Cottage. Into this romantic by-way Dud therefore escorted his companion, and he soon recognized that this road was, like Trinity Street, almost new to him. This was proved by the fact that it was left to Mr Quirm to call his attention to a curious water-spout or gargoyle head that had been placed above the old brick entrance to what looked to our friend like a Quaker meeting-house. He had come upon a mention of this head in Hardy's book, but apparently it occupied in poor Trenchard's time a different position from what it did now. In the overcast afternoon light of this spring day the stone face, as the two men paused to gaze up at it, wore a most ambiguous expression.

'Well? What about it, lad? What about it?' chuckled the Glymes man grimly.

‘I don’t — know — what — to think,’ hesitated the son. ‘Doesn’t it look — rather — as if — as if it hid some terrible world-joke behind that skull, some joke that nothing could—’

His father gave him a most sardonic glance from under his eyebrows. ‘Joke, do you say? He’s grinning at his own mental pain — that’s what he’s grinning at. He’s the face in God’s backside — that’s what he is. You’ve got to walk round your precious world, my lad, and see *the other side*, before you can talk about *his* little joke. It’s a joke all right, but it’s a deep one! It’s the deepest, my good boy. He’s the original Momus, lad, that’s what he is: the face that peeped out of God’s backside when He found His creation “good”.’

Dud struck his oak cudgel on the stones of Glyde Path Road and moved on. He detected, without being able to define it, an emanation of something so sinister from the man at that moment that it suggested things far worse than any blasphemy. He received an uneasy impression that Mr Quirm would have exactly that same grimace on his own majestic physiognomy when he came to die.

‘But if so,’ he thought, ‘if this whole Urien game of his is a devilish joke, why can’t someone make him stop it, and set him off on a different track?’

They were soon descending the steep slope between the high walls that leads to the Hangman’s Cottage. ‘It must have been up this hill’, Dud said to himself, ‘that the executioner came when he met the sheriffs officers taking Mary to her death. Oh, damn them! Damn them! But you wait — you wait. That Momus grin is *not* the last word!’

At the Hangman’s Cottage they separated, the father following the track towards Frome House, the son the path underneath the slope leading up to the prison.

Our friend was dismayed, as he approached the coal-yard, to catch the familiar voice of Claudius raised in violent altercation with someone. 'Is he quarrelling with the boss?' he wondered. But when he reached the yard — and it was clear that the quarrel must have been a vociferous one, for every goose, duck, and fowl had cleared off in terror — he found it was with young Dunbar Wye that the row was taking place.

Dumbell happened at that instant to be rallying the candidate for Communistic virtue for his inability to deal with his sister Jenny. 'That's what comes', the young man was saying, 'of taking women from their place in the kitchen and letting them meddle with men's affairs!'

Both the controversialists now recognized Dud and gave him casual nods; but it was clear to our friend that his presence rather intensified than diminished the ardour of their dispute.

'And what are you doing now?' jeered the irrepressible Dumbell. 'What have you come to as a result of all this doctrinaire internationalism? You've come to *shovelling coal*! Jenny's quite right to quarrel with you. This nonsense always leads to something unnatural. Its whole basis is unnatural; and it can only be imposed on healthy-minded people by brute force and blind—'

'What?' shouted Claudius, his face looking almost purple under its smears of coal-dust. *'What's* that word you used then? Has there ever been in history such blind tyranny as the tyranny of Fascism? The things that go on in those—'

'But that's natural,' shrieked Dumbell. 'Can't you see it? That's natural compared with your monstrous and hideous logic! It's healthy and natural. It's the Nature-born force of a great man, of a born leader, of a real Caesar of the popular will. It's the heroic force that's genuine and righteous, that has *blood* behind it, real red blood, without which, and without the shedding of which, nothing good can come. Fascism's a return to Nature, to the genius and honesty of Nature, after the gibble-gabble of parliaments, the poppycock of vote-seekers, and the unreality of logic. *Our* faith's a *real* faith, with traditional human feeling behind it! Our leader's a *real* leader, with the laws of Nature behind him! Our severity's a real severity of the roused-up blood of the race itself, which at all costs must keep its historic —'

'*Past*!' interrupted Claudius, hoarse with indignation. 'Its natural Palaeolithic *past*! We, I am thankful to say, are concerned with *the future*! It's the future *we're* creating. Of course we appear to you unnatural. That's how all evolutionary progress appears, to the woodenheads and mudheads, of *that which has to be changed*! And as to what you said just now about women, I'd sooner, my dear Dunbar, never see...'

But Dud, who, unlike Dante, derived no pleasure from cruel and shameful backbiting, lifted his cudgel in a sort of deprecatory apology for having to go on, and hurried off towards the bridge by the White Hart.

It was already chiming a quarter past five from the clock above the Corn-Exchange when our friend, with the Yeovil letter still unopened in his pocket, reached Mrs Dearth's house in Friary Lane.

As a rule, when he came to this house, he found the front door unlocked, but this afternoon, when he tried the handle, the door refused to open. He hesitated whether to step back into the street and call up to Wizzie's window, but there were people about, and he had no idea of Wizzie's mood, so he decided to knock and wait for Jenny to open to him.

While he waited, his mind reverted to the dialogue he had overheard between Claudius and Dumbell. 'Evolution against reaction,' he thought; 'but after all, this struggle between Communism and Caesarism is the whole thing today. Cumber said he was an old-fashioned Liberal, and I suppose

I’m an old-fashioned individualist, but when I listen to those two and see how desperately they believe in themselves, I feel as if old Cumber and I were completely out of it.’

He knocked again at the door, this time with the handle of his cudgel.

‘Jenny can’t be out,’ he thought. ‘The kitchen door must be shut.’

Once more, as he stood there waiting, his mind played round the dispute in the coal-yard. ‘You’re outside all this, you old devil!’ he said to himself, thinking of the hairy chest of the Glymes man. ‘I suppose *your* idea is that in two thousand years the mental pain of the world will be beating at the mystery just as it did two thousand years ago, whereas Communism and Fascism will both have been supplanted by some kind of anarchistic system.’

But though it gave Dud a certain sardonic pleasure to think of Mr Quirm’s manias as more lasting than the absorbing catchwords of the day, he did experience a vague uncomfortable feeling that both himself with his *Mary Channing* and his father with his chthonian conjuring tricks were outside the real pressure of life.

But Jenny Dearth opened to him now, and he saw at once that something had gone wrong. She led him into the kitchen without a word and closed the door upon them.

‘Nance is up there with her,’ she said. ‘Oh, no! She’s all right.’ And then, after looking at him for a moment without a word, but with nothing but anger and contempt in her face, she announced in a low bitter tone, ‘And he’s started writing letters to me. That must be one of *your* ideas!’

Dud began blurting out some awkward pleasantry about Mr Cumber’s party, but he soon broke off in confusion, for the woman’s face was dark with emotion.

‘Good Lord!’ he thought. ‘She must have sent Dumbell down there on purpose. Those letters must have maddened her. I wish she’d tell me what he said.’

‘Don’t stand gaping at me like a sanctified ninny!’ cried Mrs Dearth. ‘You stare too much. All you can do in life is to stare.’

Dud nervously collapsed on a seat by the window. He thought to himself, ‘Is *this* the dark pain the Glymes man talks of, that unlocks the secret of life?’

He looked vaguely round for a place to prop up his stick; but afraid lest it should fall with an inappropriate clatter on Jenny’s stone floor, he laid it down humbly at his feet.

‘What right have *you*’, Mrs Dearth cried — and he noticed that the effect of anger on her face was to make it much more human: it lost its equine nobility and became at the same time meaner and handsomer— ‘to meddle with my affairs? Look to your own, you idiot! They’re not what you think they are. Nothing’s like what you think it is in your great rum-a-drum wooden head! He says in one of his letters that you think I’m hard on him. *I* hard on him! I, who’ve done more for him than anyone in the world — far more than his own mother!’

No-man shuffled uneasily in his seat. He did not dare to meet her eyes for fear of exciting her still more, and he did not dare to look at the door for fear she would see he’d heard the steps of someone coming down. He looked at his two hands, which were spread out palm-downwards on his separate knees. These hands of his looked so gaunt and so harmless as they lay there that it made him feel indignant with all these people for not just accepting him as a simple well-meaning honest man who only wanted to be alone.

‘And what’s this between you and Nance Quirm?’ Mrs Dearth went on. ‘She’s been hanging about here waiting for you and her husband all the afternoon, and she never waits for Urien. She’s upstairs now with Wizzie. I got weary of her talk — all about what you’ve done for Urien. Have you started meddling with *their* affairs too? Oh, you’ve got round Nance, sure and proper, with your sympathetic starings! She thinks you’re a saint. She thinks you’re the only man she knows with a really noble heart! *You* with a noble heart! You who don’t know what natural human feeling is!’ She gasped and choked in her emotion, and came a step nearer him. ‘Aren’t you satisfied, then, with what you’ve done to your own, that you’re playing your games with Nance? I suppose you’ve told her to talk to Wizzie, just as you told *him* you’d talk to me! Oh, you’re a sly one, with your roundabout ways and staring eyes! You’ve turned Nance’s head with your dear sympathy, that’s what you’ve done, and that’s what you wanted to do! Oh, you’re the one to give Enoch a lift, to help a fellow-writer with the Cumbers, and meanwhile steal away his wife’s heart!’

Could our friend have stared just then at his own visage in a mirror, he would have noticed that it had its mouth open and that a tiny dribble of saliva was descending its chin. This idiotic expression of his, combined with an unruffled air of martyred helplessness that seemed to be murmuring ‘Hit me! Hit me!’, was evidently, of all human attitudes, the one most calculated to drive the Friary Lane lady to distraction.

‘Old Claudius’, he found time to think, ‘must have said every wrong thing that it’s possible to say to a woman in love. He must have enlarged on aqueducts, he must have dragged in Marx, he must have appealed to reason, he must have talked about forgiveness, till he had thrown so much straw on the fire that when it *did* begin to burn...’

‘You thought only of your own selfish sensations when you first brought Wizzie here,’ was what he now heard Jenny say. ‘It was nothing to you that you took her life away from her — yes! her life! Nothing to you that you broke up her career and spoilt her natural self-expression forever. You and him and all of you are the same. *He* has his selfish theories, and you have your selfish books, and as long as you can hoist a woman up into your own romantic fancies you think you’ve done all that’s necessary. That’s to be our whole life, just pleasant adjuncts to your careers — *here* when we’re wanted, *there* when we’re not wanted — and all the time — you mark my words — Wizzie’s far more of a genius at *her* job than you’ll ever be at yours! And you keep her here as your plaything, idle and useless! You’re too selfish, or too depraved, even to give her a child. You take a girl who’s an artist in the most difficult of all arts. I suppose she’s never told you how early she had to begin, or what she had to go through, to become what she is? You get round her by your damned sympathy and your romantic talk, and then go and keep her shut up like a common tart — yes! like a common tart, for your lazy-dazy lust! You don’t even try to get her a house of her own. Oh, no! you can’t afford that! The truth is you don’t want her in your real life, which goes on in that precious attic of yours above the churchwarden’s shop. You want her *here*, all fresh and prettified, for your off-time entertainment! Is that a life for a spirited girl who might be earning money at any hippodrome in the kingdom? The truth is, my good staring friend, you don’t know what real feeling is!

‘And what makes it worse is your conceit, and the grand opinion you’ve got of yourself! Oh, you’re the noble one, you’re the one who’ll set everybody right. And now you’ve gone and got round Nance. It was him in the coal-yard, no doubt, who told you Enoch was a wife-beater. Oh, you’re a pretty pair, you two! As if we all didn't know she can twist that great idiot round her little finger!

'But you and he down there *must* be interfering! Nance must be saved from her wicked husband; and who must undertake this tender task but *you*, the sympathetic, staring *you*! That's the whole thing, my good man.'

But Dud, who had by this time managed to shut his mouth and even to wipe away with the back of his hand the spittle from his chin, noted that the introduction of Nance into her diatribe had acted like a lightning-conductor and drawn off a good portion of her electric anger from its more dangerous concentration upon Claudius. 'If I can keep her on Nance,' he thought, 'she'll soon be all right.'

'Yes, I confess I *have* got rather fond of Mrs Quirm,' he murmured craftily.

'You see?' she cried, falling at once into Dud's simple trap. 'It's your conceit that makes you act as you do. You'll never be any good in the world or any help to anyone till you've got rid of your conceit! I know you through and through, and what's wrong with you is simply conceit. You're a monster of conceit!'

Dud was quick to recognize the fact that this attack on his intelligence rather than his heart was a sign the Horse-Head was softening; and he hurriedly picked up his stick. Holding this great club in his hand, he could not help pondering on the changes already produced by Claudius's darling evolution.

'It's doubtful', he thought, 'whether any of the men of old time, except perhaps a few mediaeval knights, would sit as quiet as I'm sitting here now with this Cerne Giant stick on my lap, listening to the Horse-Head putting me in my place!'

‘Yes, it’s your conceit,’ she added, her face by this time wearing an almost indulgent expression. ‘You think you’re ever so much nobler than Wizzie because she lets herself go and you never do. You think you’re behaving like I don’t know what because you don’t let yourself go with her when her nerves are bad, whereas of course a *really* sympathetic man wouldn’t be able to rest till he’d found out *why* she was like that, so that he could remove the cause.’

Dud gave a deep sigh of relief and thrust his hand into his pocket to make sure he had the Yeovil letter. The immediate effect upon him of Jenny’s outburst was to accentuate his usual animal-like passivity. Not that he had totally forgotten the spiritual illumination of Mai-Dun, but so far it had only penetrated the rational surface of his consciousness. A flicker of it did, as a matter of fact, come back to him even now, but so far it only enabled him to give a quick ironic inward glance at the fatal inevitableness of his idiotic docility: it did not give him the power to adopt any other method of retort!

His thrusting his fingers into his pocket, however, and their consequent contact with the Yeovil letter, caused him to wonder whether Jenny Dearth knew more than he did of the relations between Wizzie and those circus people. But she couldn’t, surely, have spoken in *that* tone if she had! The more she knew of those people, the more she must realize what a good turn he had done Wizzie by rescuing her. She talked of the cause of Wizzie’s nervous irritability. The cause of it was in his pocket now: her mysterious fear of Old Funky and Mummy Urgan!

He looked at Mrs Dearth closely. The woman’s anger was gone. But though her face was no longer handsome and human, it was not quite itself.

‘Well, up you go to Wizzie,’ she said. ‘Tell her I’ll bring the tray in a few minutes!’

He got up obediently. ‘I’m sorry, Jenny,’ he said, speaking in rather a high-pitched tone, and with a sort of airy emphasis of impressive candour. ‘I’m sorry if I didn’t do any good by my meddling, as you call it. Perhaps if everyone treated my ways as drastically as you do I *would* begin to change. Perhaps anyhow I’ll begin to change! I give you my word of honour I’ve thought of it. Something must change — I can see that. There must be *some* sort of a “primum mobile”, and some sort of a Prime Mover, or there wouldn’t be any—’ He was going to say ‘evolution’, but he knew Jenny would take that as a piece of malice, so he said ‘progress’ instead, and leaving this brisk word behind him, like a puff of gun-smoke, in Mrs Dearth’s kitchen, he nodded his farewell to her and went out into the entrance-hall.

It was lucky that in doing this he shut the kitchen door behind him, for to his surprise — though not to his very *great* surprise — he found Nancy Quirm standing in the front entrance, apparently watching something in the street.

She turned when he came out, and in his heart he thought at once, ‘She’s been listening!’ But Mrs Quirm beckoned him to join her at the front door.

‘What is it?’ he asked, for all he could himself catch from the street was that familiar *‘Ech–o! Ech–o!’* of the local newspaper’s distribution. This cry of *‘Ech–o!’* always made him think of making love to Wizzie, for it was usually to be heard about six o’clock when they were lingering over their tea together in their upper room.

‘It’s the Funny Man!’ Mrs Quirm cried eagerly. ‘There he is! *There*, don’t you see him, Mr No-man? He’s talking to those boys over there!’

Our friend followed her gaze and responded to her excitement with an alacrity of interest he was far from feeling. The person she called the Funny Man was indeed one of the sights of Dorchester. *He* really was a quite authentic Momus, and in his present occupation as town-crier for the Tenth Muse he lent himself, with his quips and cranks and wanton wiles in a manner almost Elizabethan, to the old-world liveliness of the town.

If Dud could never help thinking of making love to Wizzie when he heard *'Ech–o! Ech–o!'*, he found that it was almost always when he was deepest sunk in this book that the accents of the Funny Man reached him. Mary Channing's waverings between a life of her own and obedience to the grinding selfishness of parents and husband gained in their human subtlety by being attuned to the Funny Man's Shakespearean fooleries as they drifted down High East Street.

'Yes! I can see him; and I can hear him too. How wonderfully he does it. It must be quite a good performance, this piece he's talking about!'

As soon as he had uttered these hopeful words and glanced into her face he knew she *must* have been listening to their talk, for she accepted his forced geniality at its face value, whereas under normal conditions she would have caught him up and protested with lively vehemence. Had she heard all? Had she heard Jenny accuse him of meddling between husband and wife? 'I bet she *did,'* he said to himself, noticing, with nervous relief but with mental suspicion, that she didn't cling to his sleeve in her usual impulsive way.

But it was his destiny to receive a greater shock to his nerves than any touch of his Cemetery Woman's warm fingers.

'Come in here for a second, Mr No-Man,' she whispered, opening the dining-room door and entering the room.

She turned her head as she preceded him, and threw him a look which she evidently felt to be the look of a reckless courtesan. 'Jenny'll be five minutes at least,' she whispered. 'I *know* she hasn't spread the bread and butter yet.'

As soon as the door was shut on them he knew that his Cemetary Woman was in a fever of emotion. ‘Come over here and sit down,’ she murmured. ‘She’s spreading the bread and butter, I tell you, and Wizzie’s tidying up her room for tea. There’s — no — chance — of anybody’s — coming — no — chance — of anybody’s coming — no chance — of anybody’s... ‘ And in her excitement she actually repeated these words in a sort of infantile chant.

She pushed him down into the arm-chair that had always been Claudius’s, and with a look in her eyes that Dud had never seen before in any woman’s eyes she perched herself on the chair’s arm.

Our friend’s thoughts became like the darting wings of a flock of swifts. ‘She doesn’t know that my soul’s as brittle as glass and as cold as an icicle! She doesn’t know that under her hot hand and heavy cowslip breath I feel as light and frail and feathery as hoar-frost! She’s no more idea what a person like me really feels than she has of the feelings of the Loch Ness Monster!’

And while he felt the hot magnetism of her senses rock him on its waves like a baby in a cradle, he thought how unemotional, how coldly vicious, how entirely imaginative, his own sensual feelings were. ‘Why,’ he thought, ‘I can’t even enjoy playing with Wizzie without reminding myself that I bought her for eighteen pounds! What I’m made for is quiet, *cold-blooded* lust. This hot passion’s horrible to me!’

‘I — couldn’t — wait — to — tell — you — any — longer,’ she gasped in a queer husky voice, a voice quite different from her usual sweet rich tones; and he noticed that as she spoke she made a feverish rocking movement on the chair arm, just as if her whole body burned with such passion that the mere pressure of the woodwork was a relief.

‘You — don’t — mind — do — you — if I touch — your hand? — It’ll make it easier — to tell you.’

No-man had already raised his arm and rested his hand on the curve of the soft limb that was nearest to him, across which her skirt was tightly drawn, and, when her fingers closed over his, his nervous shrinking became so acute that he gripped her with the talons of a vulture.

‘I heard,’ she whispered feverishly, leaning forward and pressing her shoulder against his. ‘I heard what Jenny said about you and me. I knew it was in her mind. I knew she’s been thinking of nothing but you and me ever since you first came to Glymes.’

Now that the first shock of the situation had ceased to startle him Dud became so detached that his thoughts wandered away altogether from the excited woman. They reverted again to the difference between Urien’s mania for reaching the cosmic secret and the argument between Dumbell and Claudius about the past and the future.

‘Do you know’, Mrs Quirm continued, ‘what Jenny’s made up her mind about? That you and I are lovers! Can you imagine such silliness? Yes, she’s certain it began soon after you first came.’ As Mrs Quirm uttered these words she actually touched No-man’s chin with the extreme tip of one of her hot fingers.

Our friend bit his lip and stared into the empty grate, which was still shining with the vigorous blacking Jenny had given it that morning, but into which, not content with this, she had put a small pot of yellow musk.

‘Of course I know we’re nothing of the sort,’ Nancy went on, dropping the hand she had raised, ‘but it’s amusing, isn’t it, what people *will* say? What I wished you’d say to Jenny was that I’d been your mistress from the first day we met, from that first All Souls’ Day, *No-man*!’

It gave our friend a very odd sensation to hear his name, a name he had selected for its gaunt and grim taciturnity, used in a manner like this, as if it were a synonym for ‘sweet chuck’.

'But — my dear — *you weren't*!' murmured our friend calmly. He was, as a matter of fact, a good deal less agitated than he would have expected by all this. The agreeable problem slid coldly into his mind as to whether it would give him any sort of pleasure to pull her down on his knee. But instead of trying such an experiment he made his voice as light and humorous and friendly as he could. 'Besides, by this time we'd have certainly quarrelled, whereas—'

'I seem not to care *what* I say to you!' Nancy went on, bending so low over him that she did almost, without any help from him, slide down upon his knees. 'Do you know I'm *afraid* of *you*, No-man? You've done something to me that makes me more afraid of you than I ever was of Enoch. Just feel, No-man!' and for the first time in his extremely inexperienced life it was our friend's destiny to know what it was to have his fingers snatched at by a woman and pressed against her side. It was under her left breast that she pressed them, and he was not only made aware of the beating of her heart but of the fact that her whole body was quivering. She held his hand tightly against her side as she spoke, pouring out the words without a pause, and in the old rich mellow tones again; and the sweetness of her breath made him feel as if he were being rolled over and over in a whole field of cowslips.

In exultant and voluptuous tones, quite free now from all hesitation, she told him how she had loved him since their first meeting in the cemetery. She told him that she had at first struggled against this feeling; but on Candlemas Night, when he had come to Glymes, she had decided that there was no harm in yielding to it, no harm in giving it free rein in her secret thoughts, as long as no one else knew.

'What made you decide on telling *me?'* was his comment on this.

These tactless and even, in a sense, brutal words were accompanied by a perceptible stiffening of No-man’s frame and by the removal of his fingers from hers and the withdrawal of his hand from her side. But it was clear to him that Nance had no more idea of how he was shrinking from her than she had of the contents of the sacred books of China. It gratified an obscure malice in him to notice this innocence of hers, and he wondered if it weren’t connected with the feminine experience of thousands of years that *what you least expect*, as the card-readers say, is liable to happen.

At least he had not got up; and the quivering nerves that wavered towards him like the antennae of a sea-anemone deceived her by their sweet assurance that if he only could be kept where he was for a little longer all might yet be well.

But a certain vein of wicked malice in him got more and more satisfaction the longer he continued to lie back in old Claudius’s arm-chair, not because from Nancy’s soft body, burning with desire, there emanated the fragrance of a bed of cowslips, but because there was something piquant to him in the fact that she interpreted so incorrectly what these invisible antennae of her feminine desire, wavering towards him, signalled to her. ‘They signal all right,’ he thought, pondering upon her condition in his most cold-blooded manner, ‘but she interprets them all wrong! They tell her I’m getting pleasure from what’s happening, but they don’t tell her the ambiguous nature of this pleasure I’m getting. She thinks I’m struggling against an inevitable attraction to her body. She thinks I’m holding myself back with a will of iron from taking her on my knee, whereas what I’m really doing is holding myself back with a will of iron from struggling out of this chair.’

But there had come a hot flush on Nancy’s cheeks now, and she was doing to the limit what she had begun to do that very first day when he came to Glymes. She was telling him all sorts of details about Enoch, even going to the length of describing various aspects of his love-making that had offended her.

This really did shock our friend. ‘I suppose’, he thought, ‘that when women fall in love, whether for the first time or the fifth time, everything connected with their new love is pure and beautiful, whereas *all other* sensual experiences suddenly become dull, coarse, distasteful, indifferent, and even faintly comic! I suppose they detach themselves completely from these experiences and regard them with shameless amusement, as if they had happened to someone else!’

The irony of the situation lay in the fact that Nance in her girlish innocence supposed that she was exciting the strongest of all masculine passions by these revelations.

‘Poor *old* chap!’ Dud groaned. ‘Thank the Lord no son of mine’ll ever hear such things about his father!’

But there was a yet further surprise in store for him. He had begun to take for granted that this woman hated Enoch with a relentless and vindictive hatred. But not at all! Though she told Dud things that made him shiver through the very bowels of his being, she uttered other words — and entirely spontaneous ones — that proved to him that at the bottom of her heart she loved Urien still.

‘This is getting beyond me,’ thought our friend. ‘Can a woman love two men? And does she know what *our* relationship is?’

On and on ran the stream of Nancy’s voice. Every now and then she would give little curious indrawn gasps for breath, but all the time she leaned lower and lower over him, not touching him any more, but causing him to feel the tenseness of her nerves even more than when she *was* touching him.

One thing he noticed in his feeling about her was that her passion for himself, instead of making her seem younger, made her seem older to him. He began to experience the sensation that he was much younger than she was, and he tried in the most cold-blooded way to account for this feeling. He came to the conclusion that it was due to the fact that never before in his life *had any woman been really in love with him*. This conclusion gave him a curious shock, and his physical distaste at her propinquity subsided a little, though no sensual response took its place.

'No woman', he kept repeating, 'has ever made real love to me before!' He thought of Mona's goddess-like detachment. He thought of Wizzie's reluctant wild-bird yieldings to his satyrish caresses. 'It's because I made my Mona-wraith into such a perverted elf, he said to himself, 'that a real woman's love seems so...'

And then he recalled how he had imagined himself, on that Candlemas Night at Glymes, bending back Mrs Quirm's white neck and kissing it under her chin. But how queer it was! This hot, feverish woman's body leaning over him seemed to have no connection at all with that cool soft anonymous throat to which he had felt that moment's piquant attraction.

Why was that? Was he so perverse that he couldn't feel anything towards a woman unless she were absolutely cold? What did a characteristic like that mean in a person's life? Was Jenny Dearth right in her denunciation of him as a cold-hearted and inhuman wretch? Trying, rather pathetically, and certainly very belatedly, to get out of his own skin in this surprising situation, trying to realize, as Jenny had said he *couldn't* do, the real tragic identity of another person's soul, it did strike him as an abominable trick of Nature that the passion of a woman who has lost the bloom of her first youth should appear at such a disadvantage compared with the passion of a man. But *did* it appear at a disadvantage? What if it was all a damned sensual lie, invented by the lusts of men who liked to corrupt innocence rather than respond to desire?

‘Poor darling!’ he suddenly heard himself utter in reply to her passionate confidences. And then, in an abrupt reaction from the smug hypocrisy of this ‘Poor darling!’, he broke out in the same brutal strain as before: ‘My dear, my dear, why in Heaven’s name are you telling *me* all this?’

But Nancy seemed as if nothing that he *said* made the least difference. Dud had never had the privilege of experiencing the natural consummation of normal desire, but it struck him now as if his Cemetery Woman had reached some point of intensity that narrowed down her appeal to a desperate cry from *her* body to *his* body, a cry that numbed and atrophied her awareness of their two conscious minds.

The grotesque idea came into his head that if he stretched out his finger and touched the form that leaned over him his finger would catch fire like a match.

‘She’s telling me all these things about him’, he thought, ‘without knowing what she’s saying! It’s like a terrible drum-beat — *that’s* what it’s like — to hide what she’s doing.’

The secret maliciousness that he had felt at the start had died down in him. He began to wonder if even now he couldn’t, by thrusting her head back and kissing her throat, excite himself enough just to embrace her once. The odd thing was that it never crossed his consciousness that if he did this it would be any betrayal of Wizzie, still less of that man of his mother’s. But no. He *couldn’t* do it! The passion in her overwhelmed him too completely. It would be her mouth — always her hot mouth — and her breath like burning cowslips!

He decided that this thing must stop. He must get up somehow from this fatal chair. If her feelings were hurt, well, there it was!

Then a cruel inspiration came to him. ‘I know, my dear!’ he said coldly, pushing her gently aside and rising to his feet. *‘I know*: you’ve gone through hell in one way and another — but you’re not the only one. You’re not the first, my dear, and you won’t be the last. Do you remember how we met at those graves, and how you told me about your boy’s death?’

They were standing facing each other now, and they both could hear Wizzie’s voice calling down from the top of the stairs in reply to something that Jenny was saying to her from outside the dining-room door. And Dud wished, then, to the depths of his contrarious soul that he had used any method, rather than *that* one, to end this wretched scene. The workings of the woman’s face, as she took in his word about her son, were harrowing to watch. It was as if, instead of her human blood recovering its circulation after being frozen to death, all the fiery pulses of her being had been smitten at full beat by the descent on them of an avalanche of ice.

‘Nance, dear, *my* Nance!’ he cried, laying his hand on her sleeve. He felt at the moment how ironic it was that he should be the one now to be doing this, but he spoke earnestly and with full sincerity. ‘If only your boy were alive’, he said, ‘I’d show him what friends you and I are now. We’re bound together now for life, my dear. I felt we were when we first met. I had a presentiment; and now I *know* it. Don’t ‘ee be too sad, dear heart! What Jenny said of us isn’t true; but something better is true. I know you, Nance, for what you are, and you shall know me. This love business passes away anyhow, Nance. We can begin where most couples leave off. We first met at our graves and we must make that a covenant between us. Give me your hand on it, my girl!’

As he spoke, he held out his hand to her. But she did not take it. Her warm body had become a hollow reed, in the heart of which the Promethean spark had been extinguished. Slowly, and as if by some power beyond her will, her soft features returned to their normal expression, each wry curve, each wretched twist, smoothing themselves out, not so much as shadows in water after their dispersal by a flung stone, as shapes in a flooded landscape when the waters have subsided. But such shapes, returned though they are to light and air, carry upon them an indescribable film, the ashen-grey deposit of their long submersion.

Dud had many strange feelings as he watched her there, while the voice of Wizzie from the landing above cried out impatiently: ‘Tea’s ready, you two! What’s the matter with you? Are you deaf? Jenny’s up here, and tea’s ready. We’ll begin without you if you don’t come!’

He felt as he watched her, for those brief seconds, as if her soul had drawn back down some long narrowing perspective, and was hesitating there whether to return to the tunnel’s entrance or to go on and on and on till perchance it came out on the other side! There must have been something in his eyes that showed her at that second that he was not unaware of what he had done to her, and this knowledge, as it passed between them, came near to bringing her the relief of a flood of weeping. But she swallowed her tears.

‘Kiss me once, No-man,’ she whispered, ‘and then we’ll go!’

He took her head in his two hands and pulled it against his chest so that her hair tickled his chin. But he did not kiss her, and she remained motionless, his hands clasped round her head. While he held her like this the voice of the Funny Man was audible again from the far end of Friary Lane. Then suddenly she broke away; and they both heard Jenny running downstairs.

Nance moved to the door and got it open in time to confront Mrs Dearth in the passage.

‘What on earth—’ began the latter, but stopped abruptly.

‘I can’t wait for tea,’ Nance said; and Dud thought she said it in a purposely loud voice so that Wizzie upstairs should hear. ‘Mr No-man’s been telling me of his walk with Enoch, and I must hurry back to Glymes. He *can* get his tea, of course — but he doesn’t like to. He’ll just put the kettle on and linger about. I’ll find him washing himself, I expect — not having a bath, you understand, but putting his head into a basin of water, over and over again! He says he says his prayers while he’s doing that. I don’t know *what* prayers, I’m sure. But what he likes is for me to have tea ready when *he’s* ready. I wouldn’t be surprised’ — and she gave a little forced laugh, for the benefit also, he divined, of the girl upstairs— ‘if I got home before six and began my tea well before you three are finished! Good-night, Wizzie, dear!’ And she raised her voice. ‘I’m off! Good-night, Mr No-man!’

It was Jenny who helped her on with her hat and cloak; but Dud met her eyes as she stood on the threshold.

‘Listen!’ she said, holding the front door open. The old mummer must have been announcing the entertainment for that evening to a group of men in the high street, and his resonant actor’s voice gave our friend a queer impression that he too, and Nance, and all of them, were characters in a play.

‘I suppose the town-crier’, he thought, ‘announced the execution of Mistress Channing in a chant just like that!’ And there came over him, as he and Nance lingered in the doorway holding each other with their eyes, a strange feeling as if all the buried generations of Dorchester were murmuring in a low persistent monotone, ‘Pity, pity, pity, pity — none is good, none is bad — pity, pity, pity, pity!’

It struck him as very queer, while he and Nance stood there, that he should be so reluctant to let her go. As he looked into her face, all his shrinking from her vanished away. That chant of the pity of the generations seemed to turn her feeling for him into something tender and precious, all passion spent; and he felt as if, when once she was gone and he had to go upstairs with that unopened Yeovil letter in his pocket, he would be leaving a protectress behind and plunging into a mêlée of unknown peril.

‘Good-bye — only for today, Nance! This is a beginning, my dear, not an end!’

Answering he knew not what, when the door was shut, to some toublesome comment from Jenny, who looked especially grim and caustic in her black dress, he followed her upstairs. ‘You talk of our baffled desires breaking into the world’s secret,’ he said to himself, apostrophizing his mother’s man, as he entered Wizzie’s room, ‘but for most of us desire itself breaks like a bubble when it gets anywhere *near* the secret!’

Jenny’s strained and caustic mood didn’t last very long when their tea-party was once under way. Wizzie herself turned out to be in high spirits that afternoon, whether due to the fact that she was still wearing her pretty luncheon dress, or because she felt she’d carried it off better than she anticipated with the Cumber people, or simply because she enjoyed playing hostess to Mrs Dearth, he could not decide, but her happy mood was not long in communicating itself to Jenny.

He had many curious thoughts below the surface of their chatter as the meal went on. For one thing he found himself placed opposite the fire-place, from which the lamentable, life-drained portrait of Teucer Wye looked down upon him. Hypnotized by the pitiful eyes of this young-old victim of the cloud-painter, and still hearing the voice of the Funny Man in his ears, Dud began to feel as if his emerging from a life lived entirely between his Mona-wraith and the memory of his mother were something that might vanish away as suddenly as it had appeared, flinging him back upon the Royal Martyr and the Questing Beast. ‘But it can’t, it can’t vanish; it *never* can vanish! Did you think you could meddle with flesh and blood and go on just the same?’

It was much more than an hour after they sat down when Jenny retired and he and Wizz were left alone. Most of their talk at the end had been about Teucer Wye and the way Thuella was treating him; and Wizzie had astonished her lover, and apparently Jenny too, by the intensity with which she stood up for Thel.

No-man was in no mood for angry discussion, and he had just listened in quiet and passive astonishment to his girl’s startling defence of her friend. Mrs Dearth herself, perhaps in the reaction from her outburst in the kitchen, seemed reluctant to protest. The gist of what Wizzie had said was that no one knew what Thel had had to put up with for years from that tiresome old man. ‘He looks harmless enough,’ Wizzie had explained, ‘but if I’d had to bear what Thel has from him, with those old books and all, and his sneering at everything she enjoys, and her supporting him all the time, I’d have killed him by now. Yes, I would! I’d have killed him if I’d had to hang for it!’

But the moment they *were* alone, Dud, without beating about the bush, brought out the Yeovil letter. The girl had lit the fire to make their tea more cheerful, and it was upon a Wizzie lying back at ease in the arm-chair, more serene and placid than he had known her for a long while, that, standing opposite her by the mantelpiece, No-man released the thunderbolt. ‘It’s got the Yeovil postmark right enough,’ he said, holding it between his finger and thumb. ‘ “Mr. D. Noman, High Street”. He’s forgotten the “East”. Would the Urgans make a mistake like that? He’s been twice to my room, too.’

‘Damn you, *open* it! Or let *me*! Give it here!’ She was on her feet already, and she rushed up to him trying to snatch the letter from him.

But his infantile instinct to tease her, especially in the face of this ‘Give it here!’, and his outraged regard for ritual and decency, made him hold up the Yeovil letter at arm’s length out of her reach.

There was a struggle between them, and as she clung to him, growing more and more angry while he backed away from the fire, they collided so violently with the edge of the tea-table that they unbalanced the milk-jug, which fell down with a crash on the floor.

She had never turned upon him a face so contorted with fury as she did now, and he was glad enough to let her get hold of the letter as he knelt down on the floor. Crouching there in the simple desire to escape the sight of her face, and trying to mop up the spilt milk with his handkerchief, he began gathering together the broken bits of china.

That the girl’s anger was short-lived, that after she had torn the letter from its dirty envelope she was frozen numb with the shock of its contents, Dud from his task on the floor soon realized. She took it over to the fire, and as he gave her a sidelong glance from his crouching position, he saw that the impulse crossed her mind, for the beat of a second, to fling the thing into the flames. She *did* tear it in half, and Dud felt no impulse to stop her, but no sooner had she done this than it seemed to him that a weight of inert despair descended on her, depriving her of all anger, of all energy, almost of all feeling.

With the torn letter on her lap and the torn envelope at her feet, she sank down on the edge of the arm-chair and stared hopelessly and vacantly in front of her. He could only see the profile curve of her small face, but in his mind he knew that those unseeing eyes, gazing so straight before her into nothingness, had grown large and round.

His own thoughts, as he mechanically rubbed the milk stains on the carpet with his soaked handkerchief, were the last he would have expected. The images of his mother and Mona came into his head, combined with the problem — of all things in the world most out of place just then — whether his mother's way of life or Mona's offered the better hope of surviving death.

He found himself making every excuse to delay the moment when he must get up from under the table. Over and over again he rubbed these dark milk stains with his handkerchief, which was by this time as wet as a sponge. Faster and faster whirled his thoughts as he postponed the moment when he would *have* to break in upon her despair.

He noticed that her numbness was so complete that she did not even resort to her trick of polishing her knuckles. One hand hung down like the handle of a pump, limp and lifeless at the end of her cold arm.

What he kept trying to return to was a segment of empty space that had somehow obtruded itself into this upper room; and on the horizon of this empty space hovered his mother and Mona, for even the Mona-wraith was gone and the Questing Beast was gone. Over this empty space those two forms brooded, but both it and they were threatened by a great tidal wave of disturbance, a towering wave that rolled and heaved and crested, bearing the faces of Urien and old Claudius and Jenny and Thuella and Nance. Out of this wave these faces appeared and reappeared, tossed and swirled and buffeted, as if the ship that carried them had foundered.

'I must hold tight to Wizz. I must finish my book about Mary Channing.' These two necessities, as he rubbed at those dark stains with his soaked handkerchief, pressed upon his suspended intelligence rather as *objects* than as ideas. The Wizzie object was a formless figurine-idol, like one of those minute doll-shapes that represent the soul or ka in Egyptian tombs, only less definitely outlined. This he seemed to carry under his ribs. The Mary Channing object, on the contrary, was a globe of air, like a child's soap-bubble, in which he discerned not only the tragic figure of his heroine and the obscure shapes of her parents but all the familiar landmarks of the old town.

When he did struggle up at last from the floor and take the torn letter from the girl's lap, it was as if he had a tremendous weight upon him. He felt as if he were doing this not only with the Wizzie object under his ribs but with the dark globe of his book, heavy with earthworks and amphitheatres, bowing him down as the world did Atlas.

Even now, with the two torn halves of the letter in his hand, he felt an overpowering reluctance to read it. He found himself inclined to imitate Wizzie in her hopeless apathy and to sink down in a chair opposite her and let all go.

He did sink down for a minute there, and just stared at the two bits of paper in his fingers. On these two bits of paper, in place of any threat of Old Funky's, he saw the dispute between Claudius and Dumbell, and he thought of the Glymes man on Maiden Castle. 'With all your magical humbug and your mental pain,' he thought, 'you *are* wrestling with the secret of life, whereas both Communism and Caesarism are just methods of—'

But, brushing these things aside with a splash like that of a fish rising to the top, one single word from the Yeovil letter caught his full attention. It was an odd word to be there. It was the word 'Lovie'. But it was 'Lovie' who broke the spell; and jumping to his feet, he puzzled out now, word by word, in the light of one of the candles under the portrait of Mr Wye, the letter's astonishing contents.

It was, as we have said, written in pencil, and it ran as follows:

Mister D. Noman, Sir,

I takes the liberty of letting you know that the child Lovie, what have been hid from your knowledge by she and me with Best Intentions, be going to be took to the Ouse owing to Mrs. Urgan *aving found out all*. Never would this ave rizz if Her we know hadn't stopped payment. In case, Mr. D. Noman, Sir, you wish to adopt the child Lovie me and me missus will say nothink save for small compensation for expenses already incurred. Hopping this finds you, Sir, same as it leaves us at present,

Your obedient servant to command,
Ben Urgan.

Dud's first feeling when he had finished this communication was one of immense relief. When his eye first fell on the word 'Lovie' scrawled on that dirty piece of paper, one of his wildest and most lurid imaginations with regard to Wizz and Old Funky seemed to be coming true, namely that she *had* had a child by the old man but that in her misery of mind she had murdered it, and the Urgans had been holding this over her ever since! He had thought of this possibility, and of many others equally unpleasant, for so many months that it was a heavenly reprieve to know the worst and to find that the worst was only Lovie.

He knew Wizzie had no confidence in his behaving well at a pinch of this sort. He knew that just as she couldn't understand the *defects* of his quality, so she couldn't understand his quality. The subject of Old Funky always divided them; so he had naturally avoided approaching it; and even if he *had* approached it, it would have been hard to have said to her in cold blood: 'I don't care, my dear, what children you've had, or *who* gave them to you!' But *as it was* — Good Lord! he was ready to adopt Wizzie's child tomorrow. He remembered his thoughts about parthenogenesis in connection with his own birth. He would no more see Urgan's blood in Lovie than he was able to feel Urien's blood in himself!

But the realities of this Roman town *were* thickening upon him. First a father, and now a child! But he knew himself in these things. This was just the sort of shock he could bear with the equanimity that was the advantage of having such an outrageous imagination! The reality, when you met it, was mild in comparison.

All this rushed through his brain as he played with the two halves of this bit of paper, separating them and fitting them together under the candle.

'Well, old girl?' he murmured, coming close up to her. She listened to the sound of his voice as a suicide drowning in the sea might listen to a dialogue on the deck above, and he received, as their eyes met, what was the greatest shock to him in the whole episode — the feeling that the girl was, in regard to this matter at any rate, completely insane, and that there could be no rational exchange of ideas of any sort between them about it.

'Wizz, my darling! My life, my love!' he cried, when he caught this look. 'You're my girl always, you're the same always. Don't look like that, Wizz, don't 'ee do it!' And he flung himself down on his knees by her side. 'Look at me, Wizz!' he repeated. 'Look at me, my treasure. It's your old Dud speaking to you! We'll go to where the child is tomorrow. We'll take her away. We'll have her always. She'll be *yours* to me — nobody else's! Of course we'll take her! Little Wizz, little Wizz, *do you hear what I say?'* And in the tumult of his anxiety he seized her by the shoulders with his two hands and shook her violently.

But the girl snatched at his wrists and flung him back with all her might. 'You — fool! You don't know what you're saying. There! Let me go. I tell you I've got to think this out *alone.'* She swayed to her feet and drew away from him. He too scrambled up from his knees and stared helplessly at her.

Yes! There was that look in her eyes that he'd seen in the caravan. To talk to her now was like talking to a person in delirium.

'Wizz—' he began desperately, but she cut him short. 'You — *fool*!' she repeated. 'You know no more about it than — than—' And to his dismay her voice broke into a long-drawn terrible moan, like the moan of a wild beast that has been wounded, and, rushing to the bed, she threw herself diagonally across it, and lay there face down, her arms stretched out taut and stiff in front of her, and all her fingers extended.

After a minute or two that terrible moaning ceased. But her quietness was almost worse to No-man, for it seemed to draw a screen round her, like those hospital screens with which they isolate the beds of the dying. One little movement of hers was a relief to him, however. She clenched her fists. This seemed more natural. Those stiff extended fingers had been ghastly.

But he couldn't escape from a sickening fear as he saw her lying there. Suppose the reaction from this business over the child had really driven her insane? *He had no Wizzie then*! The madness in her brain would be always a death-wall between them.

He walked slowly round the foot of the bed, stepping gingerly, as if she lay on the edge of a precipice and a touch might fling her down. He stood so close to her clenched outstretched hands that he could see the distended blue veins and the sharp knuckles, white under the tension. Her straggling brown hair looked so extraordinarily innocent of the whole situation. He longed to appeal to it, his old playmate, the companion of so many amorous nights. What had it done to be tangled and disarranged like this? Well! this was reality.

And all the world would say he had been living a wicked, an inhuman life when he lived alone with his Mona-wraith! But here they were, two human skeletons, a horizontal one and a perpendicular one, making in that criss-cross position a monstrous caricature of a cross without its head-piece. And all the time there was only wanting the simple exchange from brain to brain of a little philosophy, just a little, little philosophy!

So thought the distracted Dud; but the longer she lay there, the more sickening grew his fear — a fear that needed more than a little philosophy to allay – that he really was in danger of losing her.

He surveyed her form, extended so piteously across the bed, and he had the feeling that he was dealing with this wounded body rather than with any conscious mind. *There* was the head he knew so well, but he felt as if the curves of her back, the outline of her limbs under her skirt, her prostrate legs and upturned heels, had substituted themselves for the conscious brain of his Wizzie. They were there *instead* of the girl he knew, and they were all he could appeal to!

Suddenly the sight of the inverted heels of her shoes, as they lay turned up at the ceiling, stabbed him to the heart. They looked so grotesque and yet with such a lot of life of their own in them. They looked as if they wanted to dance on the ceiling. They looked as if they wanted to trip off and away and dance on many ceilings! And yet they held so much — so much more then any other part of her — of her intimate woman's life. They were what she tapped the floor with under the table. They were what she ran down the stairs on. They were what held her up as she stretched her muscles when she was alone, as she made her secret faces in the glass.

And this body extended in front of him had given birth to the unknown body of Lovie! Old Funky had done for this woman's body what *he* wasn't man enough to do! But it wasn't *that* that bothered him. He felt that he now knew why she was often so sad. A piece of her had been torn away from her; and it was her fear of his knowing about this that had doomed her to her wretched half-life. The virtuous Old Funkys of Mary Channing's time had killed Mary and her unborn child together; and the wicked Dud — though he hadn't known it — had put *his* girl's child away!

No wonder women were different from men! No wonder they were swept away by irrational moods! No wonder they flung down these fatal miraculous bodies of theirs sideways across beds! To be able to give birth to another entity — *that* in itself was so desperate, so inexplicable a thing, that they ought to be petted and cosseted and humoured all the days of their lives — yes, and all their crimes forgiven!

Jenny said he had no feeling; Jenny said he was a selfish sensualist. It was his selfishness that shivered, then, with an ice-cold death-chill at the thought of losing his girl?

He tried to imagine what life would be without this form in front of him. He couldn't conceive it! Standing there now, with the middle of his thighs in an exact line with her convulsively clenched hands, the weird fancy came to him that it wasn't a headless cross that they were making but a mathematically correct image of the letter T.

And he remembered how he had felt when he heard of the deaths of Mona and his mother. Not anything like this! He was bewildered and upset then, but this cold breath of something happening to Wizz was more than that. It was blighting desolation. And yet he could only remember one single occasion when his mother had got really angry with him — and not one when Mona had!

What *was* it that made those clenched hands and prostrate head so precious to him? Jenny had accused him of having no feeling. What was it to have feeling? What would a person with feeling do now?

'Wizz, Wizz,' he began again. 'Little Wizz! Look up and speak to me. I've no right to hold anything against you. I've *nothing* against you! We'll go tomorrow to Yeovil and get hold of Lovie. Jenny won't mind her being here with us.'

But there was no answer from the form stretched across the bed, no answer from the tense white knuckles, no answer from the figure that Old Funky had found so 'lurin', no answer from the stiff girlish shape that in its prone position had become, in conjunction with his own lean frame, such a beautiful example of the letter T! 'What *would a* person who had feeling', he thought, 'do at this juncture? Lift her up in his arms? Argue with her? Beat her?'

In place of doing any of these things, he recommenced his feeble murmurings, more as if they were addressed to himself than to her. 'You know I do love you, Wizz, don't you? I may not be good at showing it, as some men could, but you've grown into me, Wizz, my only one; you've grown into me!'

The girl on the bed made no answer; and it was unlucky that at that second, as he lifted his head, he encountered the humiliated and offended look of Thuella's portrait of Teucer Wye. 'If you can't be a man', Mr Wye's expression said, 'the best thing for you to do is to read Plato.'

CHAPTER 7. Lovie

‘BETTER PUT ON my grey dress,’ thought Wizzie, a couple of days later, as, about eleven o’clock, she awaited the return of D. No-man from his High East Street room.

‘And better put on my new underclothes with it,’ she added hastily to herself, as attired in nothing but her slip, and with bare arms and feet, she moved from her cupboard to her chest-of-drawers and back to her cupboard.

‘But what’s the use? What the hell’s the use?’ were the sentences that the girl’s inmost consciousness kept reiterating as she sat on the bed and pulled on a pair of new stockings, stockings even newer than the underclothes.

In the process she was now engaged upon, it was natural enough that she should note what certainly was the unequalled beauty of her limbs. ‘Soft... ‘ she murmured aloud, as she let her fingers stray pensively along her thigh. ‘Soft as any damned school-miss.’ She leaned forward more intently and passed her hands over her muscles. Then she gave a glance at herself in the mirror. For a moment she saw herself as she used to be when, in those wretched tights and that loin-cloth of red plush, she was ready to rush into the tent and jump on her horse’s back. Those tights, and the gaudy beads she had to wear along with them, were detestable to her, but far worse was that bit of red plush. When she put *that* on she used to feel as if she were going to be a mark and a mockery before a jeering crowd. But in spite of these absurd gauds, she well remembered how proud she used to be of her figure. She remembered how taut and tense every muscle of her body was, and in such perfect training. Yes, in those days her whole frame was as lissom, as supple, as plastic to every strain she laid upon it, as the body of a ballet-dancer. She sighed heavily as she lowered her eyes and completed the business of fastening up her stockings. 'What's the use?'

Shaking down her soft grey skirt and smoothing it carefully round her hips and flanks with her fingers, twisting about as she did so with sideways glances at the looking-glass, she made little forlorn whistlings, not bothering to screw up her mouth to do it properly, but just enough to do it audibly.

The top of the old-fashioned looking-glass standing on the chest-of-drawers had ornamental carvings on each side of it that resembled ears. It also had two carved holes in the crown of its woodwork which possessed a faint likeness to eyes. Thus the demon-artist who, in spite of the neatest housekeepers, can give to the scatterings of chance in the arrangements of human rooms a mischievous twist of his own, brought it about that the glassy portion of Wizzie's mirror — that world of unexpurgated reality which is yet *not quite* the same as the ordinary one outside — should represent, as it stood there, an enormous gaping mouth. It was in this mouth, beneath the unsympathetic leer of a pair of low-lidded eyes, and beneath the suspicious pricking up of a pair of alert ears, that Wizzie's person had to appear whenever she made her toilet.

'What's the use?' was still the weary burden of her consciousness as she presently fixed upon her head the fashionable hat of the Cumber party and smoothed back her hair below it with quick deft touches.

A glow of faint satisfaction warmed her pale cheeks as she did this, to think of the shock her ladylike appearance would be for the Urgans and their entourage.

'How Popsy will stare!' she thought. 'She won't like it a bit! She'll be sick with envy — the little fool!'

When she was ready to go, she sat down by the fire and slowly pulled on her gloves with her eyes on the bright flames. As she did this, she glanced at her wrist-watch, her Easter present from D. No-man, and was annoyed to find that it still lacked five or six minutes of eleven, when No-man was to call for her.

'I suppose Lovie will be able to walk back,' she thought. 'Perhaps I ought to have let him bring the pram; but we'd look so silly wheeling it empty through the streets.' And her mind reverted to a certain annoying scene of the day before, when Jenny had supported D. No-man in his insistence on purchasing this indispensable adjunct of a child's life.

'I'm not going to put up with it', she said to herself, 'if he goes on making all this fuss. You'd think Lovie was the only kid in Dorchester. No, I'll have to make a stand at the start. I'm not going to have him interfering, messing about with the kid, and spoiling her, and turning her against me. If he's set on having her with us, he must take the consequences. *He's* not her father.' Her mind reverted again to the perambulator. 'Silly!' she thought. 'Kids of three are too big for prams.'

But the consideration that D. No-man *wasn't* Lovie's father switched her mind to the man who was, and with one glove on and one glove off, and staring at the fire, she became lost to every conscious thought but the sick hatred that was now, and had been for the last three years, her dominant obsession.

Up it rose, that familiar demon, that terrible 'worm i' the bud' that had come to be the gnaw and the fret of all her real existence; and as she mechanically began yielding between gloved fingers and bare knuckles to her accustomed habit, and as she broke this off for a second to stoop over the hem of her elegant skirt and pick a wisp of cotton from its edge, the almost insane landscape of her tragedy took its implacable shape.

She saw herself, she felt herself, she knew herself, a real artist, after those years of unwearied labour, in the art that was her life; and she saw Old Funky, like a maggot in the rose of that life, withering her petals, her stamens, the very calyx of her being, so that only an empty husk was left, and the seed — the seed!...

No one watching the girl as she sat there in her pretty clothes and neat shoes, and with as refined a lady's purse as could be bought in Dorchester on her soft lap, would have guessed for a moment what dark thoughts they were that made her frown. That frown had always been sometimes visible, even when, so to say, she wasn't frowning; but now it never for a moment disappeared. Even D. No-man had noticed it of late, and had said to himself, 'She's frowning in her sleep.' But she wasn't frowning in her sleep. Those two small lines were always there now. They were there when the image of Old Funky was completely swallowed up in kindly oblivion.

Especially might an onlooker have been deceived by the natural way she glanced at the watch on her wrist. But perhaps a woman wouldn't have been deceived by that! So large a part do these tiny fate-hammers play in the lives of most owners of the small wrists held up to reveal their message that a girl on the way to execution might well look at her watch, *not* to see how much longer she had to live, but simply because, after adjusting her hat and smoothing out the wrinkles in her gloves, it had become an automatic gesture. Thus, though she felt no impatience with regard to D. No-man turning up — indeed, her impression of her own feelings was that she would have taken it very calmly had he *never* turned up — it was inevitable that she should lift her elbow more than once in its tight-fitting sleeve to glance mechanically at her wrist.

But her thoughts about Old Funky were always in the back of her brain. Whenever she had a moment to herself — unless in the middle of a blood-curdling novelette, and not always even then — Old Funky would sit down with her, or lie down with her, or stare out of her looking-glass by the side of her own face.

On the occasion of Nance’s recent visit to Friary Lane, Mrs Dearth had countered the visitor’s praise of No-man by extravagant praise of Wizzie. How much Wizzie had confided in her of her past life Jenny revealed to none; but if she *had* known about Old Funky and about the existence of Lovie, what she had thought of it all can easily be imagined! Wizzie to her was a girl in whom sex-instinct and maternal instinct were underdeveloped, a girl for whom the first experience of sex-violence had been a shock from which recovery, if it every really came, would be very slow.

‘Love, and love alone,’ Jenny would have said, ‘can obliterate such memories. The poor thing’s ignorance of sex coincided with her wholehearted devotion to the circus-ring, and the man must have taken advantage of that.’

Jenny did reveal to Nance that in her opinion Wizzie’s circus-man had been a first-rate teacher, and that, if he *did* take advantage of her, it was his hold on her *as* a teacher that had given him his opportunity. ‘When a girl like Wizz’, she assured Nance, ‘has had a shock of that kind, it’s like a wedge of iron in her soul. It starts a brooding hatred that can sap the very spring of life.’

Mrs Dearth’s view of the case, though based on imperfect knowledge, was not an unreasonable one. The birth of Wizzie’s child had been to her like the madness of a fever.

No-man’s wild imagination had indeed not been far from the truth when the lurid idea of infanticide crossed his mind. At the beginning, in her feverish agitation, she had not been able to endure the sight of the little creature, and it had needed all the old wife’s astuteness to avert worse scandal than a birth in her caravan. Nothing but the blind impulse of the healthy young animal in Wizzie's blood had kept her from complete despair.

Her hatred for Old Funky had all the same grown to such unbalanced proportions that she would spend hours inventing complicated schemes of revenge. Indeed, when No-man took her away her mood had not been at all unlike what that quixotic sensualist wanted to imagine it. She *had* let him carry her off in the benumbed unquestioning passivity of a Bronze Age captive. Had the good man, however, brought down his Cerne Giant club on the head of her enemy, it would have jumped better with her feeling than having to run away, but, as it was, this lean staring gentleman with his obscure talk was at least a new court-card in her wretched pack; and, after all, a man at her side *was* a man at her side, and she had no divining-rod to sound the abysses of this particular man's limitations.

If Old Funky — who wasn't, as she well knew, nearly as old as his name sounded — hadn't so fatally intertwined himself with her passion for her work, her feelings would have been different. If only she could have left the whole lot of them and started her life afresh in another circus! But she wasn't herself, her free independent self, any more. In some damnable way her work and Old Funky were blent together. He had trained her too assiduously, too patiently, the old devil! Not a curve of her frame, not a muscle, not a suppleness, not a quivering balance, not a poise, not a motion, not a turn, not a twist of her young body, but he had watched its development with the eyes of a lynx! If only she had had another trainer, if only his work hadn't been work on her own body, if only she could have done it for herself without him, she would now be able to put him out of her mind and let all he had done to her go to the devil! His taking of her then would have remained as a fever-memory, a horrible unreal illness, a passing madness. All could yet have been well if only he hadn't been the one who had made her what she was. No acrobat, no dancer ever had such a training! That man was *born* to train her, and she had responded to his persistency with a perseverance that only he could evoke. He had made her a flawless, a perfect instrument. She knew it. And all for nothing! All just so that he could play with her and destroy her.

Various disgusting occasions came rushing into her brain now, as she rubbed her bare knuckles with her elegant gloved fingers, occasions when Grummer Urgan had burst in upon the two of them with savage jealousy. She had laughed at the woman while the man sneaked away. 'What do you take me for?' she had retorted. 'Do you want a good show, or don't you want a good show? Why don't you send me off and get another girl?'

And when it was all over, and only her hatred and her nerves and tempers were left, they'd got Popsy. 'But he couldn't train Popsy, and the old horse couldn't—' But at *that* point, as always, quite apart from her will a hot tear ran down each of her cheeks. Her feeling for the horse was the one living thing left in her except her hatred! These clothes, these shoes, this hat were part of her hatred. They would show him how little she cared, by showing him what a lady she'd become! But the horse — No more of that; she must stop thinking of that. Was Popsy riding him in that field this very day? 'Silly!' And she rubbed her cheeks with her gloved hand and looked at her watch again, this time quite consciously.

Oh, why didn't D. No-man come? He ought to know by now that she couldn't bear being kept waiting. But it was just like him — lost in that ridiculous book! If he couldn't do anything but write to earn his living, why couldn't he write something that a person could read?

With a childish movement then, just like a little girl who ought to be doing home-lessons instead of spoiling her eyesight, she slipped her fingers — the ones bare of her grand gloves — under the cushion of her arm-chair and brought out a tattered story-periodical. The discoloured pages of this unliterary pamphlet she now began hurriedly to turn, wetting the tip of her first finger at her lip to expedite matters, and assuming an expression of placid achievement when she found the page with the corner turned down. Then, heedless about creasing the flimsy ladylike dress that was to be her revenge, she pulled up her feet beneath her and settled herself to read, holding the paper — for she was short-sighted and the print was microscopic — close to her face.

She hadn't submerged herself, however, for more than a couple of minutes in *The Adventures of Lily Turnstile*, when she heard the front door open and shut, and No-man's steps in the passage.

Under the cushion again went Miss Turnstile, for though she knew that he was aware of her passion for such thrilling tales, she had a feeling that it was more appropriate and more in keeping with her hat and her shoes to be found idling by the fire than absorbed in such reading. It was part, too, of her instinctive system with D. No-man to emphasize her romantic desolation. It helped to make him polite and concerned, and while it stopped his asking futile questions, it kept him — or so Wizzie fancied, judging by Lily Turnstile, who drove her infatuated count into slavish obsequence by such a demeanour — on the sort of tenter-hooks on which elderly protectors of young ladies ought to be kept if their interest was to be preserved. Her glove was being hurriedly pulled on and her feet were no longer in the chair when the door opened and No-man entered.

'Good girl! You're all ready, I see,' was his greeting, and then: 'But I *say*, sweetheart, how lovely you look! Lovie will be simply thrilled to see you.'

If he hadn't said *just* that — though by this time she ought to have grown accustomed to his stupidity, which made Lily's count seem a veritable thought-reader — she'd have probably smiled and let him kiss her lips. As it was, she turned to him the coldest of cheeks. But even so — why did she *always* forget how carefully balanced a lady's hat has to be? — it became imperative she should go once more to that mirror-mouth under the leering eyes, and once more see Old Funky clapping his hands as he always did when her act went well.

'I never told you, old girl,' D. No-man remarked as they went down the narrow street which in her rebellious mind — so often had her companion tired her by his praise of its antiquity — she had come to call Itching Way, 'that I saw a circus there when I came back with Urien from Maiden Castle; only of course I couldn't tell if it was our foreign circus; but I *thought* it might be, only I remembered how you said that none of them — Think of our having only met each other last November! I feel as if I'd known you all my life, old thing. Don't *you* feel like that?'

What Wizzie felt — as, stirred apparently by the thought of their first encounter, he clutched the tightly sleeved grey arm at his side — was a nervous irritation that was almost unbearable. Why couldn't he see that the idea of having Lovie hung round her neck, like the albatross in *Gems of Standard Poetry*, was the last straw? And why, when he got into this mood, did he always call her 'old girl' and 'old thing' instead of by her name? *'I've* got a name,' she felt inclined to cry, 'if *you* haven't!'

He went on holding her arm as they passed down the South Walks. 'I suppose he knows', she thought,'that I wouldn't lean on his arm if he didn't hold me! I wish he wouldn't hold me. He pinches me, and he knows I don't like to be held. I feel as if he were a policeman walking me off to fetch Lovie. Oh, he's talking about the chestnut-blossoms now. Why must he always show me everything? Does he think I haven't got eyes? Oh, I wish he was carrying me in my coffin! Then he could have Lovie all he wanted to, and I'd be at peace.

'How Grummer Urgan will stare when she sees what a lady I've become! Shall I see Popsy? I hope so, and I hope she'll die of envy. Here's the old war-stone. It makes me sick to see it. Thel was with us that day, though! Thel will never have a baby, she says. She'd sooner die first. If Lovie's pretty, I'll take her out to Thel's tomorrow. I've *had a* baby. I'll show my baby to Thel and see what she says. I'm younger than Thel, but I know a lot more than her. She'll feel like a kid when she sees me with Lovie.

'He doesn't want to give Lovie up. It's Grummer making him. If Lovie were entirely mine, and not his at all, would I be glad I've had a baby? I'll get Jenny to go with me and buy her clothes. No, I won't take her to Glymes tomorrow. I'll buy her clothes tomorrow and take her the next day. If he's crazy to keep Lovie and have her to teach, I'll be glad to take her from him. Yes, I'll be gladder, the more he feels it! I know its Grummer who made him write. I'll let her see I know it. I'll be very cold to her and make her feel things — things like her being a common woman and me a lady. *He* shall never speak to Lovie again, though he begs and begs. Oh, I *must* tell D. one thing; and I hope he'll do it, though maybe he won't. A person can't tell from moment to moment what D. will do.'

It was not till they were at the station gates that he dropped her arm. She glanced furtively at his profile. He was evidently pulling himself together to do what wasn't easy for him.

'Listen, D. No-man, will you do something for me?'

'If it's not to make a row with these people! Certainly I will, my sweet.'

'Do you mind, D. just for once, just for *this* time, making out we're married? It'll be easier to get Lovie away then.'

The man was silent for a second. He evidently didn't want to do it. Oh, it was just like him — a little thing like that! Then he stopped, and *she* had to stop. That was a bad sign. No, he wouldn't do it! He always stopped like this when he was going to give some roundabout reason why he wouldn't do what she wanted.

'What's the idea, kid?' he enquired. 'It's not their business whether we're married or not. *You* don't want to be married, do you? You've always said — at least I thought you've always meant—'

'Only to *them*, D. only to *them*! It'll make it so much easier.'

'I don't know what concern it is of theirs. I'm going to adopt the child. The letter said "adopt". That was *their* word. Are you thinking they won't consider me respectable enough to take a child they were going to put into the workhouse?'

It was Wizzie's turn to be silent now, but as he watched her he saw her lower lip begin to quiver and the familiar wrinkles appear that meant she was about to cry. 'Oh, if you're going to take it as hard as that, child,' he cried hastily, 'I'll do anything you want. I know it's wretched for you, all this business. I don't like it very much myself. But it's only right we should have the poor little thing. There, there, my darling one, my precious one, don't 'ee cry! Sure I'll say we're married. I'll say I got a special licence last November. I'll say we were married last week by the Bishop of Salisbury. I'll say *anything*, if you'll only be a brave girl now, and let's get this damned business over!'

'It's — only — to — say', murmured Wizzie, drawing the back of one of her wrists across her cheek, 'just once — anything you like — that makes them think we're married — but if you don't want to—'

The harsh-gay noise of the circus now reduced them both to silence, and they entered the Fairfield. Threading their way between a couple of gypsy-carts, they soon found the Urgan caravan, and, with composed faces and all the assurance they could assume, they mounted the steps side by side.

It was clear they were expected, for there was Mummy Urgan in her best black gown and all her jet beads, and there was Popsy in her stage finery, and there too, dressed in a manner more suited to a little acrobat than a child of three, was Lovie herself! The small creature was sitting on the knees of Old Funky, who himself, attired in his usual tight-fitting green-black coat, sat on the bed.

The little girl turned her head away as soon as the strangers entered, and, flinging her arms round her father's neck, burst into a fit of sobbing.

It became plain at once that the child had been told that she was to be taken away by these unknown people, and Wizzie's first thought — and she was too unanalytical to be surprised at anything she felt — was a wave of dark anger with them for making it so hard for a baby to go with its own mother. She herself was so absorbed in taking in her child's appearance — yes, thank goodness, Lovie certainly *was* very, very pretty, and Jenny would make a fine fuss of her, and how nice it would be to buy her clothes with Jenny, and Thel would change her mind, when she saw her, about never having a baby — that it was with less than half of her consciousness that she caught the look of deadly malevolence that the child's father cast on her companion.

'Mornin' to 'ee, mister!' murmured Old Funky hoarsely. 'Mornin' — *madam*!' This last word was uttered with a sarcasm so biting that Wizzie threw at No-man a glance that was at once imperious and beseeching.

'Mrs No-man and I', began that gentleman, laying down his cudgel on the foot of the bed, 'have come, as you see, ready to take this little one — That *is* Lovie, I suppose? No, no, don't cry, little girl! The man's very fond of little girls. The man will be very kind to little Lovie. The man'll give her

such a lot of pretty things. The man'll give Lovie a big doll with eyes that can shut!'

While he uttered these words, to Wizzie's complete astonishment, D. No-man bent over Old Funky and caressed the sobbing child, stroking its brown curls. Beneath his forward-bending figure she noticed that Old Funky had shut his eyes and was silently murmuring — without making any audible sound — some rigmarole of his own. What struck her as odd was that the child, though it still sobbed quietly, dropped its hold on the old man's neck and turned its blubbered face towards the stranger.

But a still greater surprise awaited her, for, not content with this advantage, D. No-man with one bold swing lifted the little thing bodily from the circus-man's arms and began swaying it to and fro, hushing its sobs against his chest with a series of sing-song murmurs such as 'There's Lovie! There's little Lovie! There's the man's Lovie!' — a performance that clearly had a most comforting effect.

It was Mummy Urgan who intervened now, interrupting a nervous and timid advance which the bedizened Popsy had begun to make to Lovie's fashionably dressed mother.

'Better take her straight off, straight away — there's a dear gentleman,' whispered the old lady. 'I've had a trouble enough to get him round to this, and if the child have took to 'ee, as seems it has, and 'tis plain you be wondrous smart with childer, the sooner you're out o' here and well away, the better for all! Give your missus the money you've a-brought, and if'tis a fiver — I told 'un a fiver *'twould* be — I'll say you *be* a real gent. And don't 'ee let—'

By this time No-man had been hustled so hastily to the door that it was not till he was bearing the gleaming little personage down the steps that he handed the woman his precious wallet.

Nor was it Lovie who stretched out her arms to Old Funky, but Old Funky who stretched out his arms to Lovie. Such at least seemed the explanation of a spasmodic jerk, like the jerk of a frog, made by the figure sitting on the bed, a futile jerk that only ended in the same incoherent gibble-gabble, with shut eyes and sucked-in lips, that the old man had been engaged upon when they first entered the caravan.

‘Don’t ‘ee let she hit her, nor spend she’s tempers on her, mister!’ were the last words Wizzie heard through the caravan door as Grummer Urgan came back with the precious wallet. The girl did her best to carry off her amazement at seeing this object in the woman’s hands, and she promptly opened it with the most natural air, not even concealing the fact that it contained another fiver in addition to the one she now extracted.

Meanwhile, Old Funky had stopped making obscure noises and had opened his eyes. Before he consented to receive the bank-note, however, which his wife held out to him, he seemed to find it imperative to give weight and permanence to his feelings in some sort of solemn ritual. He rushed accordingly to the caravan door, which Grummer had closed on her return, and, reopening it, sank down on his knees there and lifted both fists — the thumbs compressed within the fingers — straight into the air, where he caused them to quiver and shake with the passion of the curse he sent after Wizzie’s friend.

Not the blind Cyclops, hurling curses at ‘Outis’, the Greek ‘No-man’, could have given vent to more ferocious maledictions than those that now issued from that kneeling figure.

Wizzie could guess the kind of thing he was shouting from his lifted fists and the look of his back in its long tight coat with the tails flapping over his heels, but neither she nor Grummer nor Popsy, and certainly not the retreating No-man, could hear a single word. The noise of the circus-engine swallowed up the abduction of Wizzie's child, just as it had drowned the cries of Wizzie herself when Lovie had been begotten.

The glance that Lovie's young mother now fixed upon that grotesque gesticulating form would have revealed a great deal to any shrewd observer. What Wizzie *thought* she felt, as with screwed-up eyelids and contracted brow she watched him kneeling there, was simply contemptuous hatred; but an expert in women's expressions would have found something far more complicated than that in her face. There was even a weird flicker of sensual satisfaction in it, the look we assume when we scratch some sore spot that gives us an excruciating pleasure, a tickling pain, to touch at all!

That no one could hear a word he uttered made no difference, for had the words of Old Funky's curse been heard by everybody they would have been totally incoherent. The phrase 'rats and gall' might have been caught, together with something about 'maggots and gizzard'; and to a very strained ear, in the midst of that whirligig din, there might have come syllables that sounded like 'the worms of Herod' and 'the lice of Pharaoh'. But beyond a wish that No-man should quench his thirst with the urine of dogs, and have sand for bread, and that his bowels should burst with those of Judas, and his skin itch with the scabs of Job, it would have been the general drift, rather than any particular details, that the hearers would have carried away.

More articulate, perhaps, at the end, before the distracted old man scrambled to his feet, would have sounded his vague but reiterated prediction that No-man hadn't done with him yet, that he would in fact make him eat with Old Funky, drink with Old Funky, lie down with Old Funky, till he should pray for Pummery to cover him, and for Maumbury to hide him, and for the fishes of Chesil to carry him quick into the pit!

Having got possession of the fiver, and watched No-man's precious pocket-book being hidden away from sight in Wizzie's purse, Mummy

Urgan greeted her husband's return from the top of the steps. 'You and Popsy best be off to show now. What's the matter with 'ee, then? Doesn't 'ee mind what us 'cided on? Hasn't us argied long enough about her going with she? What be up to, then? What be mumbling about? 'Twas thee bubbled us into all this brabblement; and 'tis lucky I've got a head on me, or Lordy knows *where* us 'ud be by now! In jail maybe, for all *you* gone and done!'

Old Funky made no reply. If he wasn't by rights as old as his name, he looked a deal older as he squatted down on the bed and shut his eyes. Many people, when things have been too much for them, or when they've received an overwhelming shock, follow the example of Julius Caesar and hide their eyes; but Old Funky neither muffled his face in his mantle nor brazened it out. He just sat on that bed, the bed where Wizz had given birth to Lovie, with his lips working like a monkey's, and kept his eyes tight shut. He hadn't cast a single glance at her since she entered the caravan, and this piqued her in some curious manner; and as she stood talking to Mrs Urgan and Popsy, with the caravan door swinging on its hinges in the wind, she edged round a trifle so as to keep that figure on the bed in sight.

'What a silly softy I am,' she said to herself. 'I *hoped* he'd be funny over Lovie going, the dirty devil, and now he does this and it makes me kind of want to cry. I'd *like* to cry — that's what I'd like! I'd like to cry and cry, *and yet* take Lovie away! I'd like him to hold Lovie like he was just now every day, and me to come and take her away every day! Mercy! How he looks, with his eyes all pinched up and his mouth working! That night when he got hold of me his wig fell off. It was like scrabbling at a slippery egg when I pushed his head away. I *could* have broken loose altogether. I *could* have thrown him on the ground and run out, just as I was. But I only kept pushing his head away and digging my nails into it till I felt all weak. He's got the marks of my nails, though, I bet a tanner, under that wig, and somewhere else too. My! I let him have it! Yes, you ugly, dirty little devil, you'd better screw up your eyes and work your chin. Yes! 'Twas me, your little Wizziepeg, what you thumped and tickled and cursed and petted and made her muscles ever so, and her balance never to be beat, what took Lovie away! And I'm going to *keep* Lovie away, too. Never, never, never will you see Lovie again. *See* her? Oh well, perhaps I'll just let you *see* her. Maybe when I'm wheeling her in her pretty pram down the South Walks one hot day, with my parasol and my magazine and my nice muslin dress, there'll *you* be, you dirty little devil, with your Frenchified tail and your shaky pins and your Wizzipeg's nail-marks under your wig. And you'll say to yourself then, "Oh, and if I had my own child Lovie, to eddicate, like I eddicated her mummy, for show-riding, how blest I'd be!" And if I just nod to you in passing — for of course I shan't *speak* to you, and you'll know it would be impossible to speak to Lovie — you'll think to yourself, "There goes No-man's girl and his girl's girl — how happy they look!"

'My! If you're not beginning to cry, you ugly funny little man! And I could cry myself, and that's the truth, for I'd sooner be in the circus, you bald-headed old devil, with you clapping your hands and the crowd hallooing, than walking dumb and mum along of him, and him droning on about how they burnt Mary what's-her-name, and how the history women worshipped bulls, and how he and me were sweethearts before history began.'

But she mustn't go on peeping at Old Funky across Grummer's heaving bosom. She must listen politely, and like a lady, to Popsy's chatter. 'No,' she now found the spirit to say in a clear firm voice to Popsy, 'no, I never regret my marriage. My husband writes very interesting books; and we talk a lot about them, about history and the old days, and he asks my advice, though of course I don’t know much *yet;* and we go walks up Lovers’ Lane in the afternoons. I expect you know Lovers’ Lane, Popsy? There’s a gate, a little way up, that looks over a pond and an ash-tree. Mr No-man and I often look over that gate.’

Wizzie’s volubility was now rewarded — though in truth she hardly knew what she was saying — for Old Funky opened his eyes and their glances met. But then it seemed to the girl that it was extraordinarily difficult for either of them to look away. They could only stare; and this they did, mute, bewildered, hypnotized.

‘Yes, it’s a very nice lane, as you say, Popsy. You said you knew it, didn’t you? And it’s nice leaning over that gate, isn’t it, by that pond?’

But Popsy, though she knew Lovers’ Lane, had apparently never noticed the pond. ‘Can you see yourself in it?’ she asked innocently. ‘I like seeing my face upside down, and it looking at me.’

It transpired, however, that Grummer Urgan *had* known the Lovers’ Lane pond in former days, though not for twenty or thirty years. ‘But in *my* time you certainly couldn’t see your face in it. You couldn’t see *anything* in it but green slime. In my time girls were frightened of it. ‘Twere quite a game with *our* young men to lift we over gate and pull we toward thik green pond. ‘Twere only a very little pond, ‘ sknow, no more nor a girt hole in ground under thik ash-tree, but ‘ twere turble deep. Sookey Marabout — and don’t ‘ ee say’ — this was addressed not to Lovie’s mother but to her father— ‘thee don’t mind Sookey Marabout, Father, for you were mighty taken wi’ she in them days. *She* used to tell as how when her grand-dad, what lived up that way, towards Pigeon Barn, tried to find bottom of thik green pond, it hadn’t no bottom, but just went down and down. “You’d have come out in Australy, Sookey,” her grand-dad said, “if you tied your pinny up wi’ quarry-stones and dived in. And what’s more,” ‘a said, “thee’d have to take care, Sookey, that ‘ee went in with thee’s head and heels fixed proper, according to geography rules, for’t be wondrous, they do say, how travelling down turns into travelling up when you be going to Australy. It have to do wi’ volcannies what be down there. They be turble rough with a maid wi’ stones in her pinny travelling to Australy, they volcannies be!”‘

‘He’s wanting to speak to me; but he durstn’t open his mouth,’ was the thought that flickered through Wizzie’s mind now, as she said aloud to Mummy Urgan, ‘What’ll I give Lovie except bread and milk? Does she have any meat yet? She looks as if she wants feeding up.’

The old woman’s face lost in a moment its air of sentimental reminiscence. ‘You best arst *him,’* she replied curtly. ‘He’s always been one for interfering. The Yeovil doctor said not to give her a taste of meat; but *he* were minded — oh, I do know him! — to make a show-maid of her, and he thinks a bit o’ meat do build up. ’Tis all of this here show business, and making of ’em to turn turvy, and jump through they hoops, that *he* thinks about!’

‘What a *lovely* dress, if you’ll excuse the remark,’ cried Popsy irrelevantly. It had not been concealed from Wizzie with what passionate interest her successor was gloating over her fashionable attire; but now, when the lively girl, with her bangles all jingling, took the edge of one of the visitor’s frills between her plump finger and thumb, the irony of it was that in our friend’s watching of Old Funky’s twitching mouth the careless ladylike retort she had been storing up for Popsy’s benefit was never uttered.

‘Sookey Marabout *were* a wunner!’ went on Mummy Urgan pensively, her sentiment for buxom young women overcoming her spleen about Lovie’s diet. ‘You *do* mind she, Father? Her and me were always together. “Black and White” the boys called we in them days. Gracious! But Sookey were a tansy for the lads to spy on when her went minny-catching! You've a-said the same your wone self, Father, and what a prime one her'd have looked on hoss's bare back.'

'Why *can't* he spit it out?' Wizzie kept thinking, her eyes growing rounder and rounder as they remained fixed on the man on the bed. 'You filthy old devil! Have you gone dotty? Yes, you look like a monkey in a cage — that's what you look like — jabbering to yourself and can't spit out a word!'

But Old Funky sat up at last and said his say. 'The old hoss,' he began, and this word alone made the girl relax and move a step towards him. 'The old hoss — have — pined — and pined — for 'ee, Wizz. *Her* can't no more manage 'un than my old 'ooman can. 'Tis — a wonder us — don't — hear 'un stamping and neighing for 'ee now! I'se warrant he knows right enough 'ee be in caravan!'

Wizzie's eyes opened to their fullest extent. Her mouth twisted. The old woman, watching her, evidently expected a fit of hysterics, but even she could not know how great was the lump that rose in the girl's throat.

As she struggled against that great lump, which *wouldn't* down, her heart made the maddest leap it had made that day. 'Suppose I stayed here', her heart whispered, 'and rode him again tonight? And rode him tomorrow, and never stopped riding him till we were both dead! I'm proper fond of my old D. and I hate *you* to hell, you filthy old monkey, but — but — suppose I never went back? *He'd* look after Lovie, and I should be gone!'

And then her body, below — oh, deep below! — her beating heart, must needs add *its* moan to that sobbing lump under the lace frills that Popsy envied. 'At least you were man enough to take me,' her body cried. *'You* didn't play doll with me. You wanted me, me down in here, me to the bottom of hell. And that made me weak, and you got me, got me and gave me Lovie! You were a man anyhow, you old devil! *You* didn’t care how I fought. You didn’t care if you did get my nail-marks under your wig.’ Oh, but it would burst, that lump in her throat, in another second.

‘Good-bye, Mrs Urgan! Good-bye, Popsy, old sport! Good-bye, you over there! Can’t you take a girl’s hand, then, who hates you so, and who’ll never, *never* forgive you? That’s all you can do, is it — sit on your bed and shut your eyes? I wish *I* could shut my eyes and see nothing — see nothing forever! Good-bye, good-bye, all! *Mr No-man’s waiting for me*. My husband, Mr D. No-man, is waiting for me with Lovie.’

She was out of the caravan and down the steps before Popsy had time to utter a word, before Mummy Urgan had time to shake Old Funky by the arm and tell him the fiver anyway was safe. She was out and down the steps just in time, just in time for the lump not to break in their sight.

‘Did I look hard and cold and cruel to him?’ she thought. ‘Did he think I was *all Mrs No-man*? Did he think I wouldn’t give Lovie no meat, wouldn’t let her skip and jump, wouldn’t let her turn wheels in her fine clothes? I hope he did. No, no, *no*, I don’t hope he did. But oh, the old filthy devil, how like a monkey he looked! But *he* didn’t stop because I fought. *He* didn’t stop because I dug my nails into his bald head. He went on. He went on till he’d given me Lovie. So I *have* known a man, though I am Mrs No-man!’

All this while, though she didn’t know it, she was running so fast that her little black hat was blown all to one side. But just as she reached the exit from the Fairfield, the whirligig engine stopped; and in the sudden silence, as she stood there panting and straightening her hat — for everyone was staring at her and she wanted to swallow the lump and get her breath — there *did* come, quite unmistakably to her trained ears, the sound of a horse’s whinny.

At this sound she swung round and started running back. Who but she knew the exact place where he was now with the show starting? As she ran, her eyes must have looked so wild and so fixed, and her face, between the new hat and the new dress, must have looked so distorted, that people nudged each other and turned to stare after her. But there, where she knew she *would* find him, she found him! A lad she'd never seen before was leading him out ready for the show, but her fashionable dress awed the boy, and he only drew back and gaped helplessly at what he saw.

For the great lump in her throat had burst now, burst at last, and as her tears rained down on the old horse's neck her arms were round him, her convulsed cheek against him. Her hat might hang disregarded now from her dishevelled hair, her purse might slip to the ground. Her life was her life again, as it had not been since All Souls' Day. The old horse kept making a pitiful bowing movement with his head, but from tail to ears he knew her, gave himself up absolutely to her, while long shivering spasms of contentment trembled through his frame. No barrier divided her girl's body from the horse's body. Her pretty clothes were nothing. His gay trappings were nothing. Her shaking sobs were his, her flowing tears were his, and the wetness of her mouth, as with lips apart she pressed her face against him, mingled with the moisture and warmth of his hide.

But the lad who was watching all this suddenly seized his bridle. 'Miss Popsy! Miss Popsy!' he cried. 'Coom 'ee here quick, miss! Coom 'ee here quick! Here be a lady loving thee's hoss like 'a were human! Coom quick, missy! Coom quick!'

Wizzie's hat as well as her purse was on the ground by this time, and the lad, still shouting to Popsy, picked them up and thrust them hurriedly into her vacant hands. But the sight of the glittering Popsy's approach brought her to her senses. With one quick movement she pressed her wet face against her friend’s nose; then, letting the lad drag him round towards his approaching rider, she readjusted her hat, squeezed her purse against her breast, waved her hand to the girl, and walked steadily away without once looking back.

But to her own surprise it was a strangely passive sadness she now felt as she walked back towards the town. She had suffered violently before; she had been rent and torn before. This was a different feeling altogether. This was not despair. She didn’t feel any wild or desperate emotion. She had felt much worse that day when they got the Yeovil letter and she’d flung herself across the bed.

‘ *Will this last?’* she wondered as she gave herself up to what was almost a sweet sadness. She walked very slowly by the station gates, by the brewery gates.

It was a queer feeling she had, but she remembered having it once before, in the circus-ring, when she was on her horse’s back, balanced on one leg, with bare thighs and bare upraised arms, and the crowd holding its breath. It was a feeling as if she were crossing a tight-rope between two worlds, her past world and her future world, and as long as she was balanced there, free of all responsibility, absolved from doing, thinking, deciding, she felt only a sort of winnowed essence of both her past and her future. Not that she could analyse all this. She always told Jenny that she wasn’t one for brooding, but there were two things that kept rocking up and down on the wave of her mood. One of them was the way Old Funky had shut his eyes. ‘That wasn’t only for Lovie,’ she said to herself. The other was the way the horse had whinnied. ‘He couldn’t have heard my voice,’ she thought. ‘He must just have known.’

It was not till she reached the cenotaph — and how like No-man it was to wait for her there, when she might easily have gone straight up South

Street and never seen him! — that she caught sight of the pair.

No-man was seated on a bench about a hundred yards up the avenue, and Lovie was playing on the grass border by his side. ‘He must have taken for granted, *the fool,’* she thought, ‘that because we came by his damned Itching Street we’d have to go back by it! Couldn’t he have had the wit to think I’d want to get a few things on our way, in the town? I can see already how it’s going to be. I’m going to have all the bother of Lovie, and he’s going to pet her and spoil her and make her troublesome!’

She got fairly close to them without being seen, for No-man’s head was turned as he watched the little girl, who was on the further side of him; but when she came near, it was the child who saw her first.

With one glance in her direction, Lovie, with both her small fists full of blades of grass that she had been picking, bolted helter-skelter to the man’s knees, where she promptly hid her face.

‘Don’t be so silly, Lovie! It’s only me! You’re not afraid of *me*, are you?’

Such were Miss Ravelston’s first words in her new role of maternal authority, and Lovie, hearing this querulous feminine voice behind her in place of the indulgent chuckles of her elderly playmate, only buried her face the deeper between the man’s knees, while her thin bare arms, each hand clutching its own handful of grass, lay stretched out along his thighs.

‘Lovie, get up! Don’t do that. Don’t be so silly!’ the girl cried; and when the only effect of her words was to cause Lovie’s brown head almost to vanish out of sight, and to bring up No-man’s arm with a careless swing into a protective position round the little girl’s body, she stooped down impatiently and shook the child’s shoulder. ‘Lovie! Do what you’re told! Don’t wait for me to tell you twice. Get up at once. Didn’t you hear me?’

But No-man took the child by the waist with both his hands, and, lifting her from him, struggled to his feet, and held her high up in the air.

This abrupt action of his, in place of disturbing the small creature or making her angry, obviously delighted her. As a matter of fact it was the kind of thing Old Funky had done with her from her infancy; and Wizzie was soon to discover that all such rough-and-tumble games, especially when there was a touch of acrobatic daring in them, always quieted the child's nerves, quelled her naughtiness, and threw her into a trance of happiness.

On this occasion the man finished by perching her on his shoulder, but he was prevented from carrying her in this position by the sharp tone in which Wizzie bade him put her down, and also by the fact that he had left his great stick on the bench.

Once on the ground, however, Lovie fell into a grave and silent mood — Wizzie suspected she was beginning to feel the pinch of home-sickness for the caravan and the whimsies of Old Funky — and offered no objection to walking solemnly between them, a hand in the hand of each. They advanced peacefully enough in this manner till they reached the end of the South Walks and turned down No-man's favourite Icen Way. Here the little girl dragged a good deal, for, though accustomed to rough-and-tumble games, she was evidently not used to walking, and it was to the accompaniment of forlorn little whinings such as 'Lovie's tired', 'Lovie wants to go home', 'Man carry Lovie', that they finally reached the street door of No-man's lodging.

Here — though Wizzie fancied he gave her an almost threatening look, as much as to say, 'You just *dare* to treat her badly!' — he brought out his latch-key.

'Don't forget to have something to eat, yourself,' he said gently, 'when you and Jenny are getting her dinner. I'll do a little work, have a bit of a walk, and be with you for tea. About the usual time, eh? Well, good-bye, Lovie, my pretty! See you again soon.'

So, for no more than the third time since she had become a mother, Wizzie found herself alone with the child of her womb. Queer how angry it made her feel to note the trembling lip and the wide-open frightened eyes with which the small creature saw the door shut upon D. No-man.

'I've got to pull myself together,' she thought. 'I'm in for it now, and *must* carry it through. Jenny'll be surprised how pretty she is. I'll take her over to Glymes in the pram as soon as I've got her some clothes. Why did he make me come this way? I meant to buy—'

But she decided, since they were so near home, to give up buying anything now till after Lovie had had a good meal. She had forgotten her door-key; and so, like D. No-man on a recent occasion, she was compelled to knock at the door and stand there in the narrow lane till someone should come.

She waited so long that she came to the conclusion that Mrs Dearth must be out. 'She's run out to get something for Lovie's lunch,' she said to herself. But what was she to do with the kid? It would be silly to go to a café when Jenny *must* be back any minute.

But her thoughts were interrupted by Claudius opening the door. 'What — Mr Cask!' she murmured. 'Is anything wrong? I thought you were at the coal-yard. This is my little girl Lovie, Mr Cask. Say "How do you do?" to Uncle Claudius, Lovie.'

Claudius, who was looking disturbed and upset, bowed gravely to the child as if she had been sixteen instead of three. 'No,' he replied, glancing nervously up and down the lane. 'It's early closing, and he lets me go when *he* goes. He closes the yard on Thursdays, and goes to Weymouth with his wife. *She's* a very nice person, his wife is; she—' Once more he threw one of his most searching glances up and down Friary Lane, for he was evidently extremely unwilling to be caught by Jenny in her house, though the connection between the two abodes was still kept open. 'She', he went on, ' is very interested in goldfish. She keeps them in a tank. They know her. They come to her. *You* would like to see some golden fish, wouldn't you, little girl? The Romans had aquariums of goldfish. Did you know *that*? And the Americans too, I understand, are very fond of them.'

When they were inside and the street door was shut, Wizzie saw that the back door at the end of the passage was wide open. This door led into the yard between their houses, and it was clear that Jenny, in spite of their quarrel, had refrained from fastening it.

'I saw you from my front window', he murmured, whispering the words as if he were in church, and looking wistfully through the half-open dining-room door at his old place by the fire, 'and I knew she wasn't in, for I'd watched her go out.'

Wizzie, holding her child tightly by the hand, and anxious to get her safe upstairs, was all the same not quite impervious to this picture of Mr Cask taking advantage of the early closing to watch his old friend's outgoings and incomings from his bachelor window. She surveyed the Roman physiognomy before her with more sympathy than usual. The horse-smell and horse-warmth that were still in her nostrils seemed to lend themselves to intercourse with this simple-minded man.

'He's got no one, now Jenny's turned against him,' the girl thought, and in her present softened mood she was aware of a faint impulse to be nicer to Claudius than she'd been before. She felt he caught this softening in her, but she was unprepared for his next move.

'Come in a minute while you're waiting for her,' he whispered earnestly; and then added humbly: 'I'd like this little miss to see my airplane.'

Normally Wizzie would have made an excuse and taken the child upstairs; but her experiences that morning had left her tender to any emotional appeal. Holding Lovie by the hand, she submissively followed the man out of the house, across the little intervening yard, and into his desolate front room.

There was his chair by the window! He had evidently been sitting at that point of observation for some time, waiting to get a glimpse of the wrathful Jenny, for the *Daily Worker* lay on the floor, and Wizzie noticed the end, reduced to the smallest possible dimensions, of this ascetic smoker's latest cigarette lying on the window-sill.

Claudius brushed hurriedly with the flap of his coat the only other chair in the room and begged his visitors to be seated; and in her new mood of docility Wizzie sat obediently where he placed her and took Lovie on her lap.

Lovie stared wonderingly about her from this position; and well she might, for even Wizzie herself was shocked by the spectacle of this private parlour of the candidate for the Communist Party. Nothing but maps and plans and drawings, of factories and dynamos and every new type of airplane and electrical machine, adorned the walls. Books were scattered indiscriminately everywhere, and the floor was littered with magazines and papers. A wide-open door led straight out of this wretched room into the kitchen, and on the kitchen stove Wizzie's eye marked vaguely — although everything she saw just then seemed to be seen through a vision of Old Funky crouched on the bed with his eyes tight shut, and a vision of her old horse dragged away towards Popsy — a bubbling pot from which came an unappetizing smell of cabbage.

But the neglected forlornness of the man's sitting-room was what shocked her most. Wizzie was the very opposite of a domestic person, but after all she *was* a woman, and a woman who had her own child on her lap, and what she saw here outraged something in her that lay deeper than her egotism, deeper than her disdain, deeper than her cynical indifference.

She suddenly became aware of a violent rush of indignation against Mrs Dearth. What was the matter with Jenny that she could let a man, *any* man, live so near to her, and with no door locked between them, in such a way as this?

Meanwhile, Claudius shuffled across his littered room and came back with a model of an airplane in his arms. ‘Isn’t this pretty?’ he said, addressing Lovie and waving the airplane up and down before the child’s face so as to resemble a flight through the air.

But the little girl pushed it away with her hands. ‘The goldfishes!’ she cried. ‘Want the goldfishes!’

Wizzie’s natural instinct was to shake her for this rudeness; but into such a queer mood of soft-hearted tenderness to the whole human race had her encounter with the horse thrown her that all she did was to apologize to Claudius. ‘Lovie forgets where she is,’ she said quietly.

Now whether Claudius’s attitude to the little girl was one of Communistic principle, or whether it was the sort of old-fashioned chivalry that would have been displayed by Duke Jonathal of Dorchester, mentioned by William of Malmesbury, is a delicate point; but standing in front of the little girl as she sat on Wizzie’s lap, he compelled his airplane to perform such a series of astonishing gyrations that even a child’s obstinacy could not resist the seduction of the spectacle.

Before very long, in fact, Lovie had slipped off her mother’s lap and was seated cross-legged on the floor playing some silent game of her own with the airplane, while Claudius was taking advantage of a woman’s presence in his retreat to put various crucial questions to her about the preparation of cabbage, so that it should not be too unpalatable, and the washing of men’s shirts, so that they should not lose altogether the shapes of their collars.

Wizzie moved about with him through the rooms, putting salt into his cabbage and hanging his laundry so that it should not be hopelessly remote from the warmth of the stove, and, as she did so, the magnificent simplicity and humility of the man, combined with the absence in him of all self-pity, affected her as human goodness had never affected her before. Wizzie had never had the luck to encounter much of what we mean by ‘simple goodness’, and, as we have hinted, whatever elements of it may have existed in D. No-man had been obscured for her by the constant pressure of that worthy’s self-centred egoism.

Something about Claudius’s freedom from normal human guile kept reminding her of her horse, and she thought, ‘I’ll slip in here tomorrow when he’s out, if that yard door is not locked, and clean up for him.’

D. No-man would indeed have opened his eyes had he caught *this* resolution passing through his girl’s small head. As so often happens with a man and woman who live together and are forced to humour one another’s less pleasing peculiarities, there were aspects of each of these friends of ours that were completely unknown to the other one.

‘There she is!’ cried Claudius suddenly, drawing quickly back from the window, out of which, for all his politeness, he had been constantly stealing anxious glances. ‘You’d better go,’ he added hurriedly and bluntly. ‘I don’t want her to—’ He stooped down, and picking up his airplane from the floor with one hand, gave the other to Lovie to help the child to her feet.

Wizzie smiled at his trepidation; and even Lovie, with one of those inexplicable flashes of clairvoyance that children display when you least expect it, looked straight into his eyes as soon as she was on her feet, and said with intense deliberation, ‘My Mummy likes it here, and I likes it here, though there isn’t no goldfishes.’

Once more Claudius made the child a quaint little formal bow, such as he might have given to Wizzie herself. This gesture appeared eminently satisfactory to Lovie, who gave him a smile that made her small countenance resemble that of a fairy queen, and Wizzie thought, ‘She likes Claudius for just the opposite reason from D. No-man. *He* tumbled her about, while this one treats her like a princess. It must be one extreme or the other with her. Well! Perhaps I’m like that too. D. No-man’s never tumbled *me* about.’

Back again in Mrs Dearth’s quarters, Wizzie was quickly made aware, though no immediate reference was made to it, that Jenny knew perfectly well where they had been.

‘What on earth *does* D. No-man mean’, the girl thought, as she greeted her friend at the kitchen door and glanced at her face to savour her surprise at Lovie’s good looks, ‘by saying she’s got a head like a horse? Anything less like a horse than Jenny Dearth I can’t imagine. She’s just a wrong-headed, obstinate old maid. I expect Tom was like my D. only more pious and proper.’

Jenny’s behaviour to Lovie was as different from D. No-man’s as it was from Claudius’s. She treated the child in a calm matter-of-fact way, as if little girls were as common as hips and haws, patting her hair, glancing suspiciously at her finery, picking up and dropping again between finger and thumb her chain of beads, and repeating in a rather reproachful voice, as if the child had done it herself out of malice to her elders, that she was very big to be only three.

Lovie had never met anyone in the least resembling Mrs Dearth, nor had she ever seen a woman before who was always busy about something and never enjoying herself, and as for Jenny's calm, matter-of-fact way of treating her, it struck Wizzie that the small creature was waiting and watching to see what appalling adult vice this unemotional behaviour concealed.

What it concealed for Wizzie's own experienced observation was a gathering storm; nor had the mother and daughter been long upstairs together when Mrs Dearth appeared at their door, her arms full of clothes.

These clothes, when they had been carefully laid out upon the bed, turned out to be a complete outfit for a little girl of three; and it soon transpired that it was to make *these* purchases, and with no thought at all of the child's meal, that Jenny had been shopping for so long.

It was the clothes that precipitated the storm, for, mingled with all Wizzie's emotional reactions since the events in the circus-field, and underlying all her softenings towards Claudius, had been the pleasurable anticipation of dressing up her daughter in pretty and suitable things. And now, out of kindness of heart, but also, Wizzie suspected, out of a jealous desire to be the first to buy things for her friend's child, Jenny had taken the edge off this innocent pleasure.

In her vexation Wizzie's athletic hands were more hasty and brusque than they ought to have been in removing from her daughter's person all the garish Urgan finery, and it was a pathetic little figure, with bare white arms and thin white petticoat, who was now plumped down in D. No-man's arm-chair by the fire.

There Lovie sat, with her legs hanging very straight and her round eyes fixed on the flames; there she sat, through all that followed between 'Mummy' and 'the lady'; there she sat, remembering sadly what funny faces Old Funk, as she had learnt to call him, used to make to keep her amused when she was waiting for dinner. Her great hope now was that the polite gentleman who played with airplanes might be persuaded to substitute goldfish once in a way. But it had long passed the time for that happy moment when Old Funk and Popsy would come in, laughing and hungry, and the caravan would grow warm and snug and full of nice smells, and when Grummer would tie on her bib and set her on her highchair.

Her new Mummy had very grand clothes. She would like to wear clothes like her new Mummy. And she longed to see ‘them golden fishes’. But ‘Lovie wants her dinner, and Lovie wants to go home,’ she thought; and, though she also thought, ‘Mummy’ll be cross if Lovie cries,’ before she knew what was happening big, slow, quiet tears were running down her cheeks and dropping from her chin into her small lap.

‘I thought you’d forget about early closing’, Jenny was saying, ‘and so I got these things before the shop shut. I made sure you’d be pleased with them! *Don’t* you like them? Would *you* have got different ones? You told me you didn’t know — and I thought—’

‘Oh, yes, they’re very nice, Jenny. It was only that I wanted — But I can get others later. These will do *nicely* now. But wouldn’t white socks have been better? I never thought of stockings for her, but of course—’

‘Oh, if you’re only thinking of the modern fashion—’

‘Yes, I know what you feel about all that — but I thought — and isn’t this vest too long? She’s got some sort of woollen thing on now under that little slip. Wouldn’t it have been better — and I *had* thought of blue for her — though of course pink will *do*, just for now — but oughtn’t her sash to go with...’

All the while this talk was going on, and the two women were picking up and laying down these little objects spread out on the bed, their nervous vexation against each other was mounting up.

‘I thought I’d find you *here’*, Mrs Dearth murmured presently, ‘but I saw where you were. He was on the look-out and made you go in. He spies on me all the time. He can’t rest till he’s got round everyone, and has everyone on his side. He’s done it with D. No-man. D. No-man and he are thick as thieves now, whereas they *used*, if anything, to dislike each other. “Anything to keep women down” is their motto. It’s funny how little anyone knows! I thought you were the last person in the world to join with him against me — but there it is! I was a fool to think what I did! It’s natural enough — when a man pities himself so, and is so sure he’s in the right — that he should try to wheedle a person’s best friend away from them — but I *did* think — though of course I knew what D. No-man was — that you were different. I’ve just been a fool — that’s what I’ve been.’

As Jenny spoke, she mechanically held up in both her hands, against the light, the small vest she’d bought that morning; and Wizzie, even while she retorted, pinched it carefully with her fingers, thinking to herself, ‘It’s not *all* wool. It’s wool and cotton. I’m sure Grummer Urgan’s put *all* wool against her skin.’

‘What put me wrong’, Mrs Dearth went on, ‘was not realizing all it meant, your being so sweet and submissive to D. No-man. Just because *he* takes his *side, you* must go and take his side! It’s just as if you and D. No-man were married; that’s what I’ve got to learn to say to myself now. “She’s acting”, I must say to myself, “as my Tom wanted *me* to act, only I never would. I had too much spirit! She’s acting like a good, patient, gentle little wife!”‘

The two women were now examining the out-of-door jacket and woollen cap that Jenny had purchased, and Wizzie, as she approached her offspring to satisfy herself that both these things were, as she felt sure they were, a good deal too small, was worried to see the child’s silent tears.

‘She’s hungry, the poor little mite,’ she thought. ‘I made sure Jenny would cook us a nice lunch. Instead of that—’

‘Yes, it must be a funny feeling’, Jenny continued, ‘to feel as afraid of a man and as slavish to a man as you’ve grown lately. But that’s what a woman with any independence has to face. Her own friends desert her the minute she shows spirit.’

‘Well,’ said Wizzie with a sigh, ‘now that you *have* been so good, Jenny, as to buy these things for her, I think, if you don’t mind, I’ll take her out to that tea-shop in High East Street just below No-man’s place. I believe I’ll go with her and see Thel this afternoon. If you say I’m too good to No-man, I may as well tell you what I think I’ll do after we’ve had a bite to eat. I think I’ll run up to that room of his and tell him Lovie and I are going out to Glymes if it stays fine, and may stay there for tea.’

Jenny Dearth laid down on the bed the sash she held in her hands, and, impervious to the fact that the child was just going to put the thing on, she began scrupulously folding it as if it were to be deposited in a cedar chest for fifty years.

Wizzie’s decision to take her daughter out was a bitter blow to her. Lovie’s appearance on the scene had been more than an exciting event to Jenny. It had given her a solid new interest, independent of her grievance against Claudius. Thus the idea of being left alone for the rest of the day in Friary Lane, with Claudius free to spy on her from *his* solitary quarters, filled her with a sense of desolation.

Knowing well what her friend was feeling, but not at all inclined to spare her, Wizzie now went over to the fire, lifted Lovie out of her arm-chair, and began to dress her on the hearth-rug in all her new clothes.

‘Oughtn’t those things to be washed’, protested Jenny, ‘before the child puts them on?’

But it was Lovie herself who answered this objection by a piteous request to be dressed like her new Mummy. It would evidently have been the last straw to what she was enduring had she been compelled to put on again the Urgan clothes that had just been taken off.

‘I don’t think it’ll matter for once,’ said Wizzie in a tone as practical and assured as if she had been dressing her fifth child instead of her first and for the first time too; and she couldn’t help noticing, as in the process of turning Lovie round so as to get the new attire over her head she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, how the lines about her mouth and the creases under her chin assumed that air of preoccupied complacency that she had often noticed in the expression of women handling their children but had never expected to catch upon her own countenance.

‘I must say I can’t quite understand’, she now said to Jenny, leaving Lovie to stare for a moment into the flames while she crossed over to her dressing-table to get her big white comb for the child’s curls, ‘what you have against Mr Cask. I don’t know anything about politics, but I can’t see myself quarrelling with D. No-man even if he started calling himself an Anarchist. I know how teasing men can be. Gracious! I’ve heard D. arguing with Mr Quirm till you’d have thought it was a matter of life and death whether Maiden Castle was a town or a fort. Why do you look at me like that, Jenny? I’m not saying anything very awful, am I? No! I’m *not going* to hold my tongue! It’s time someone should tell you what everybody’s saying. Thel said it to me when I was last with her, and Mrs Quirm’s always saying it. They think you’re hard and unforgiving to Mr Cask. They *can’t* understand, any more than I can, any more than anyone can, a person quarrelling with a man about politics. Thel says it’s because you’re a suffragette, and that suffragettes quarrel with everybody, but I thought all *that* was all over now. Besides, Jenny, dear, if you’ll allow me to say so, I think women ought to have more sense than to bother about men's opinions. No! Don't look like that.'

As she spoke, she smoothed out the new frock round the little girl's waist, and, placing her again in the chair, knelt down to put on her stockings, conveying in the quick sideways glance she gave her friend as she did this a clear intimation that it was a thousand pities she hadn't bought socks.

Jenny, erect by the table, folding and unfolding in her fingers the sash for the child's waist, had already assumed the look of indignant grievance which according to D. No-man made her face at once handsomer and more human.

'I'm not saying this because he was nice to me and Lovie. I'm saying it because — because we're friends, Jenny. I used to hear in the circus, especially when they'd been drinking — and Mr Cask never touches a drop — terrible rows all the time over politics; but it never bothered *me*! They like having their ideas, men do. It makes them feel — you know! And if you contradict them, like you must have contradicted *him*, it makes them obstinate, and they go and do just what he's done, to make you feel — you know!'

It indeed seemed difficult for Jenny even to begin to say all *she* knew, and her tragic expression ruffled the maternal complacency of her friend's face.

'Neither you', she began, 'nor anyone else know *anything* about Claudius and me, so the sooner this silly talk stops, the better! We've worked together for years, helping — oh! no one will ever know how many people! It's been *my life* to carry out his plans — all for helping people, and helping them in sensible, practical ways. He's been silly about it sometimes, I know, and people have been ungrateful, but we've gone on, gone on for years and years, steadily and in spite of everybody. It's — brought — us — nearer — together — than anyone has any idea of. And now, for a mere fancy, and to spite Dumbell, whom nobody, not even his wife, takes seriously, he goes and throws it all up! Do you know what he says now? No, you don't know; and none of you know, and none of you *want* to know! He says that charity's no good, that helping people's no good, that the only cure for everything is to become a Communist. And it isn't as if the Communists want him. They don't! I know them. I've heard them talking to him. They're all for destroying things, for changing everything, and they stick at nothing! They don't want a man like Claudius who wouldn't hurt a fly. I tell you I know them, and they're only playing with him and using him. Think of their letting him — a man like that and with a position like his — work in a coal-yard till he ruins his health. Is *that* their way of changing things? It'll kill *him*. That's all it will do. And — everything — will — be — the same — and he'll be dead. That's their precious Movement, as they call it. Oh! it makes me sick to talk of it. Here were we two, working to help people, not for any silly idea like what your drunken circus-men quarrel about, but just to help them, and then Dumbell must come with his nonsense that none of us have ever taken seriously — and — so — it — all happened — but what none of you understand is what it broke up. It — broke up — the most — pure — and — and spiritual friendship that's ever been. It wasn't — like — what — what people thought. We were more than just a man and a woman — we were *equals*, I tell you! He always listened to what I said. We were different from the rest of you. We were like one person! And now — just to get an advantage over a little idiot like Dumbell — all this ended! Sometimes I feel as if I couldn't —'

She broke off with a choking sound in her throat, and fell into a deep gulf of intense and miserable thinking, during which she kept winding the child’s sash like a bandage round and round her arm.

Wizzie, from her knees as she bent over Lovie’s little legs, gazed at her with puzzled astonishment.

She suddenly felt older than everyone she knew, older even than Old Funky! Her present mood of acceptance of fate, her renunciation of her work, of the horse, of her life, seemed to put her outside all these narrow, bitter misunderstandings. Her feelings were less obscure to herself than usual, as she stared at her friend’s brightly decorated arm. The familiar Dorchester landmarks she had recently seen — the brewery, the cenotaph, the spire of All Saints’, the South Walks chestnuts in their bloom — came back to her now like a row of diminishing milestones in the long perspective of the road she had to follow. All she had seen in that momentous retreat from the circus-field seemed to have lodged itself in her mind like the solemn syllables of a materialized paternoster or Hail Mary, bringing a dim voluptuous detachment from human complications.

It had never been her way to draw back from the pressure of her fate; rather, save for the crushing fever of Lovie’s birth, she had submitted with a sort of stoic sensuality to whatever came. ‘I am dead now’ had been her feeling when she went back alone to the convent; and something of the same nature, though softer and gentler, had been her mood when she allowed that boy to lead the horse away. The hands with which she now struggled with Lovie’s stockings, trying to turn them into socks, were the hands of the ghost of Wizzie Ravelston, a resigned and patient ghost that even Old Funky could hurt no more.

That bright bandage round Jenny’s arm became at this moment the focus-point of two women’s souls, each living in her thought; but whereas

Jenny's thought was one reiterated 'How could he do it? How *could* he deliberately hurt me so?', Wizzie's mind used that twisted sash as if it were only one more milestone on the way of her fate, a sad though a shining milestone, reminding her that, though she might be a ghost without a heart, she had a child to take care of. 'Thel doesn't know', she said to herself, 'what it is to have a baby.'

But a difference of opinion between herself and the little girl now broke up this voluptuous detachment. 'No, leave them like that! Don't you dare to touch them!'

'But — them be socks now — and Lovie wants stockings!'

'What *have* you gone and done with that child's clothes, you ignorant circus-girl?' Thus, and not otherwise, did Wizzie interpret the look which Jenny gave her when that lady too was roused from her bitter thoughts by Lovie's obstinacy. 'I've turned them down,' Wizzie replied to this unspoken challenge. 'They're too short for stockings and too long for socks. I've turned them — No! I won't have you meddling with them any more, Lovie! Sit still now and let me talk quietly to Aunt Jenny.'

But if Wizzie could interpret a glance from her friend, she could also interpret a glance from her daughter; and Lovie's indignant look said, as plainly as if the child's shrill voice had been raised to its highest pitch, 'I've lived too long, you silly new Mummy, and I've seen too much of life, not to know what talking quietly to Aunt Jenny means. It means making little girls be good so that grown-up people can be as bad as they want to be!'

'Sit still, I tell you, child! I suppose, Jenny — you haven't — ever — had — any *suspicions*, have you?'

Jenny came towards her, unwinding as she did so the sash from her arm, and the two women proceeded to fix it round the child's waist. Lifted hurriedly out of her chair, Lovie displayed in this transaction a good deal more concentration of mind than either of her elders. The escape of the slippery syllables ‘suspicions’ into that thickly charged air caused the two pairs of eyes that encountered each other across the small figure standing on the rug to burn with a dangerous animation.

‘What do you mean? Have you heard anything? I tell you if I caught anyone breathing a single word about him in *that* way, I’d soon let them know—’

These strong words from the lips of ‘Mummy’s lady-friend’ passed over the little girl’s bent head as naturally and easily as the smoke of a fire over a sleeping dog. Lovie was used to much less elegant outbursts and to their utterance in much more violent altercations. The two antagonists would indeed have had to resort to something more emphatic than words to make Lovie at that absorbing moment stop smoothing out with her small fingers the front part of her sash.

‘I may have heard things, and I may *not* have heard things,’ retorted Lovie’s mother, tying and untying the sash at the child’s back. ‘What I did was just to ask *you* what *you* knew; so you needn’t flare up so.’

‘I know what you’re talking about,’ said Jenny in a low tense voice, and Wizzie could see it was not easy for her to say the words. ‘You’re talking about those Communist girls he meets at their crazy gatherings. Yes, I have sometimes—’ Here she lowered her voice so much and spoke with such suppressed emotion that even Lovie lifted her eyes from her sash and stared at her. ‘Have sometimes thought that it *was* one of them that had got round him. But none of them come here. *That* I know, for I’m — and it’s only right I should be — always on the watch. I’ve made up my mind — though I’ve told him I won’t speak to him till he breaks with these people, and he knows I’ll keep my word — that if I do see one of those women hanging round here, I’ll tell her what I think of her, coming between me and him!

No! You and your Glymes friends have no idea what he's done to me. He's taken his money away from me — did you know that? — to give to these people! I sometimes feel as if I *couldn't* bear it, as if I should do — something — I don't know what — but something — that'll show him — when it's too late...'

Wizzie, after tying the little girl's sash in a big bow, had followed her friend's words, but only with a part of her mind. She was struggling to retain her acceptance of things in spite of the fact that the image of Old Funky crouching on the bed with his eyes shut kept coming between her and her child's form.

As this crucial dialogue between her elders went on, however, Lovie's interest waned. It was the sort of thing she had listened to so often in the caravan between Grummy and Popsy; and now, looking about for something to play with — for the first thrill of the new clothes had passed — she picked up from the floor one of the torn halves of Old Funky's letter, and, scrambling back into the chair, began tearing it into a faint resemblance to a doll. Lovie had never had a doll. The nearest approach to such a thing had been a sorrowful ape swinging in a wire cage, but though, tearing the wires asunder, she had made *something* of this, pretending sometimes it was Grummy and sometimes Old Funk, she had never committed her heart to it. But at this moment, weary of these human voices going on and on, she did sigh for Monkey, and very soon, in a thin simulacrum scrawled with Old Funky's writing, she apprehended the presence on her lap of an entity she promptly christened Gwendolly, herself and this bit of paper becoming mother and child.

It is interesting to note the physical positions that women instinctively take when their interest is absorbed, and D. No-man would have been amused to observe how Wizzie at this crucial moment stood in his own most spontaneous pose, her arm propped on the mantelpiece opposite Lovie's chair and beneath the picture of Teucer Wye.

It being early-closing day in Durnovaria, quite a different set of noises floated into that upper room than were usual on a weekday; nor were they Sunday's noises. They suggested secular activity but not business activity; and just as our Wessex novelist has differentiated the sounds of the winds as they pass through various species of vegetation, so at this moment an experienced native, with his eyes as tightly shut as Old Funky had shut his, could have divined the early-closing temper of the citizens of Dorchester merely through the sounds that entered that room.

Watching her child with its new-born charge on its lap, and listening to these early-closing sounds, Wizzie, from her position by the mantelpiece, felt not only twice as old as the black-gowned woman against whose wrong-headedness she was protesting, but morally and spiritually superior to her.

'I *have* changed my opinion of you!' she thought, and she recalled how at first she had been quite embarrassed by her friend's infatuation and by her passionate desire to make her assert herself against No-man.

'Mr Cask', she thought, 'had good reason to be jealous of *me*, but he never was. You're a nice woman gone crazy,' she thought, and, from the height of her resigned detachment from all these wearisome human quarrels, she wondered if it was because Jenny had never had a child that she was so difficult.

'To anyone who's gone through all I have,' she thought, 'and has a baby to look after, it seems just silly waste of time to make a quarrel when there needn't be a quarrel.'

'Why don't you get your father to come and live with you?' she was now emboldened — perhaps by her position under Mr Wye's picture — to fling out.

‘Has No-man asked you to leave me?’ was the retort to this.

‘No, of course not — not *yet* anyway — but you’re always saying you’d like to have your father here, and Thel always says she’d like to be rid of him.’

Wizzie was ashamed of herself the moment she had said this. She could feel her spiritual vision of that long self-lacerating road of her life, with the police station and the brewery chimney and the cenotaph and the chestnut walk, calling on her to accept, accept, accept, receding into the distance, while this malicious remark brought her back to the very atmosphere she had renounced.

‘If you’re tired of being here, it’s easy to go!’

‘I’m not tired of being here.’

‘What do you mean by my bringing Father here, then? The only room he’d endure to be in is this one.’

‘I’m sorry, Jenny. You misunderstood me. I thought—’

But Jenny made no answer; and Wizzie recalled how a priest at the convent had told her once that she must never say anything that she couldn’t imagine the Blessed Virgin saying. ‘It would have been better’, she said to herself, ‘if he’d said “feeling”; but what I feel now, my good Jenny, is a longing to shake you out of all this nonsense!’

‘He hasn’t changed one bit to *you*. It’s you who’ve changed to *him,’* she remarked.

Jenny stared wildly at her. ‘Sometimes’, she said, ‘I wish he *would* kill himself at that yard, and then we’d be at the worst!’

Wizzie removed her elbow from the mantelpiece and glanced at the girl among the water-lilies over their bed. She remembered looking at this picture that first night when she waited so long for No-man to come upstairs. How uneasy Mrs Dearth's infatuation had made her at first! It had reminded her of Grummer's mania for younger women. In *her* case it had gradually been transferred to Popsy, though she was sure it had never quite died out, not even after *all that* with Old Funky, but in Jenny's case this quarrel with Claudius was what had ended it.

'It's my figure they like!' she said to herself, as she contemplated the very different figure of the young woman among the lilies. 'It's the way I'm made, and the way I carry myself, and all that business that *he* put me through. It's not my face, for *that's* only passable once in a blue moon. Women certainly do like girls *whose bodies have been trained*, even when they're not like old Grummer was.

'But what tragedy airs you do give yourself, Jenny, sitting on that table and swinging those old boots of yours as if you'd like to kick the house down!' And then, in spite of herself, Wizzie suddenly felt a stab of pitiful pathos, a stab that went through her like a bare bodkin, for she remembered how, when she'd teased her friend, as long ago as Christmas, about these old-fashioned boots of hers, which were the kind that had elastic at the sides and might have belonged to her grandmother, Jenny had confessed that neither she nor Claudius ever bought new boots. 'We get second-hand ones at sales', she told her, 'and we try them on at home. He hasn't been into a shoemaker's for years, and the last *I* went into was with Dad, and that's ages ago. He once came back in a pair of tramp's boots that he'd exchanged on the Bridport road. I made him throw them away; but he wouldn't do it till I'd promised I'd stop wearing these.'

'These' were the boots with elastic at the sides that were now being so viciously swayed up and down under the table, and something about their particular kind of middle-aged shabbiness, combined with the black scowl on Mrs Dearth's rugged face, gave Wizzie a feeling as if, in some way she couldn’t understand, Claudius *had* been cruel to her. ‘Perhaps all men are cruel to *all* women,’ she thought.

‘He doesn’t care now what I wear,’ Jenny had said, ‘so I thought I’d wear these boots with elastic sides — so as to save my others.’

The two women, as they exchanged glances, now seemed to be trying desperately to plumb the depths of each other’s real thoughts. In the silence between them little Lovie looked up from her extempore doll, and it was clear that her instinct told her that whatever their thoughts were she was left in the cold, for she suddenly burst out, in an evident rush of self-pity, ‘I want to go home. I want my dinner. I want Grummy.’

‘In a minute, Lovie,’ said her mother. ‘We’re going out in a minute.’ And then, thrown into an unsympathetic mood once more by the thought of Jenny’s neglect to prepare them a nice lunch, she ostentatiously stretched herself and yawned. ‘What *I* think is,’ she remarked carelessly, ‘Mr Cask has spoilt you! If D. was as unselfish as he is, I’d never have thought of going back to the circus.’

‘I might have known it,’ said the other. ‘I was a fool to talk to you! Your life’s been so different from ours, and lived with such different people, that you can’t understand a love like ours. Love to you means only one thing, whereas to him and me, until he did this terrible thing—’

‘But I can’t see, Jenny, *what* he’s done that’s so terrible. Men *have* to have their ideas. It’s like that bit of paper to Lovie. You were lucky in keeping him sensible so long, and managing him so well, but why you have to pick such a quarrel with him the moment he does anything—’

Jenny’s eyes flashed. ‘Well! Go off to your restaurant, and go quick!’ She uttered the word ‘restaurant’ with as much contempt as if she’d said, ‘You’re a flighty circus-girl bent on dragging this poor little thing over to your precious friends at Glymes!’ But she closed with a yet more palpable hit. ‘Why, if you’ve any spirit at all, you don’t get a proper job on a proper stage, and show them that a woman’s something better than a man’s pet doll, is beyond me!’

This turning of the tables upon her own life confounded Wizzie, but curiously enough it made her feel troubled rather than angry. *Was* it possible that this noble resignation of hers was just weakness — just fear of making a struggle?

Seeing that she had made a hit with her last retort, Jenny slid down from her perch on the edge of the table, and, sinking into a chair opposite Lovie’s, covered her face with her hands.

Her attack had one unexpected effect upon Wizzie, for that young woman, either in an instinctive desire to prove to herself that her detachment from her career was no mere negation, or actuated by a dim awakening in her of some long-suppressed feminine response to domestic life, grew suddenly aware that this room of hers, which she had hitherto treated so cavalierly and taken so much for granted, was a disgrace to the mother of a child in a new sash. How well she knew every aspect of it, but only as she might have known a casual lodging in a town where she was working!

Hardly conscious of the complicated pressure of motives behind such a natural act, she moved over to the bed, and, picking up Lovie’s cast-off clothes that had been thrown across the head of it, began piling them in a little heap and tidying up the disarranged pillows. Catching sight of her own slippers, thrown down carelessly in the middle of the floor, she picked up these also, and placed them neatly side by side under the bed, on the very spot where, in one of their morning disagreements, she had kicked No-man’s stick out of his reach. Then she went over to the child and, bending down, gave another twist to the folds of one of her stockings, now converted into rather clumsy-looking socks. 'Mummy's got *you* to take care of now, hasn't she, love?' she murmured, with her head bowed over the child's knees. 'You tell Aunt Jenny that Mummy can't ride horses and wear tights and jump through hoops now she's got a little girl to look after.'

'I — simply — can't — *understand* you,' groaned Mrs Dearth, removing her hands from her face; and her tone had more sorrow in it this time than anger. 'But no one seems to care any more what I think! You used to agree to every word I said about your work and about not letting D. No-man thwart it. But of course we were friends *then'* — her voice became bitter again— 'and of course that was before you went over to Ella. Well, take the pram I chose for you, put on the hat I found for you, carry your child to Ella in the clothes I spent a whole morning getting for you! It's just like what I've had to get used to in this place! He and I used always to say it took the Romans to keep the devils out of this town. He and I have always known that that Quirm man over there brings bad luck to everyone he comes near by stirring up the old devils of this place. But go on — take your child to Ella and Quirm! Claudius and I used to say that if it hadn't been for that man, Nance's boy would never have died. You'll find your precious Ella with him. Ella's always with him. That's what's making poor Nance run after D. No-man. But I'll say this much. If you're going to give up your life's work to look after children, you'd *better* look after them. And the way to look after them in Dorchester is to keep them from people who stir up devils!'

With this as her final word, and not waiting for her friend's answer, the woman rose from her chair, moved to the door, opened and shut it quietly, and went heavily and wearily down the stairs.

With the new pram waiting for them outside the shop, Wizzie and her little daughter partook of their belated refreshment in the bow-window of an upstairs tea-room almost directly opposite the house in High East Street where No-man had his attic. They shared an omelette and several pieces of bread and butter. Wizzie drank coffee, Lovie ginger-beer; and they rounded off their meal by enjoying a full plateful each of bottled pears and cream.

Wizzie finished her dessert some while sooner than Lovie, and, lighting a cigarette, set herself to contemplate the attic window at which the man was now sitting who had bought her from Old Funky for eighteen pounds.

What a simpleton D. No-man was! An actual smile, though it was only a faint one, crossed the girl's lips as she thought of various outstanding examples of the incredible simplicity of D. No-man's selfishness. She thought of all the nights — and there seemed five or six years of them instead of five or six months — during which, at intervals that seemed to her as regular as clockwork, she had submitted to D. No-man's excited caresses. She remembered with special vividness how one night, after a love-making so protracted that she had actually fallen asleep before he left her alone, he had awakened her to listen to a long-winded and roundabout explanation of the various manias, as he called them, which made it impossible for him even so much as to attempt to consummate their union. She remembered how she had said to herself, as she listened to this rigmarole, that it was a very simple mania in *her* case that made it impossible for her to be anything but passive under these prolonged caresses, the mania, in plain words, of not being able to feel the least stirring of anything in her towards D. No-man except a friendly indulgence and a qualified gratitude!

She did not smile when she thought of his reiterated words about their recognizing each other, about their having belonged to each other in some previous incarnation. She was too much of a woman to be able to regard any profession of love, however extravagant, as a humorous thing or a thing to be laughed at; but though she took his sentimental sensuality very gravely, it never crossed the threshold of her consciousness that there could be a grain of truth in his fantastic notions.

She extinguished her cigarette and lit another.

The window of her tea-shop was not quite opposite D. No-man's house, and therefore, unless he actually leaned his head pretty far out, it was impossible to catch a glimpse of him.

'Think of his never once having asked me to go up to his rooms! Of course I don't *want* to go. It's nothing to me what his rooms are like. But it does seem odd, and Jenny once said it proved beyond question that he didn't really love me. Jenny said that men, when they really love us, always want us in their rooms so as to have the scent of us left there, and the feeling of us, and the thought of how we looked and what we said and did.

'Goodness, but he's a funy one, old D. No-man! I *can't* believe that it doesn't hurt him like hell, my having lain with Old Funky, and yet he won't admit it. Never once since we opened that Yeovil letter has he given a sign of minding. But he *must* mind in his heart! He must just cover it up, thinking it's grand to be like that, as men so often do. Of course it may be true, and not just in talk — the kind he soothes everybody with — that he's glad to have Lovie. There *are* men — Popsy used to tell me of a case she knew well — who like having their girl's child to live with them, especially, so Popsy said, when the kid's a bastard, but D. No-man's not *that* kind of a fellow at all, not a fellow who doesn't give a damn as long as his girl hugs him and messes about with him.

'What D. No-man's like is that polar bear they took me and Popsy to see, who walked up and down, without stopping once, over a single slippery rock, and didn't make a sound of sniffing or stretching, only went up and down by its dirty pool.'

At this point Wizzie's thoughts were interrupted by observing that Lovie, having finished her pears and licked her fingers, had brought out from between her sash and her frock that crumpled simulacrum of a paper doll she had been playing with in the arm-chair. She now was deriving unbelievable satisfaction from pretending to make this forlorn substitute for a second Lovie — this Lovie once-removed, whose new Mummy was the real Lovie — lick up whatever drops of pear-juice sweetness might be supposed to remain on that extremely bare plate. 'How the child makes herself at home wherever she is!' Wizzie thought. 'She might be in the caravan, with Grummy stirring the pot for supper, or she might be in...' And the girl's fancy called up, as she contemplated D. No-man's attic window, the pleasant warmth, on that grey afternoon, of a snug little parlour of her own. Why hadn't D. No-man made an attempt to get a little home for her? Never once since that first night in November had he suggested such a thing! It couldn't be because they weren't married. Lots of unmarried couples called themselves Mr and Mrs, and established themselves in conventional little homes. There would have been no need to bother about gossip. It was nobody's business but their own. And it wasn't the expense! She knew, none better than she, how much they were spending month by month. They could have afforded a little place of their own — if not a whole house, at least a flat to themselves. Why hadn't D. No-man at least thought of it? He seemed to take for granted that she'd be ready to on living indefinitely in this half-and-half way, neither *with* him nor *without* him.

Yes, there was reason enough for Jenny's perpetual harping on his selfishness! But why hadn't Jenny herself encouraged her to press him to give her a place of her own? Simply because she wanted to keep her in Friary Lane. That was life. Everybody wanted what suited them best! Jenny had been as bad as D. No-man in that respect. It would have been nothing less than desolation to her if they'd thrown up their room and moved.

She pushed back her plate now with a gesture that she knew was an unladylike one, and made signs to the young woman who had waited on them to give her the bill.

Once in the busy street, she found herself to her bewildered amusement one of a crowd of young mothers who were pushing their offspring in parcel-crammed perambulators up and down the pavements of that ancient thoroughfare. She pushed *her* little vehicle across the street and hesitated for a moment in front of D. No-man's house. How surprised he'd be if she rang the bell, got admitted, climbed all those stairs with Lovie, and knocked at his door! She knew he had the whole top of the house to himself. She had only to get in!

While she was hesitating, the master of the house came out and stood in the doorway talking to someone. The sight of this elderly man's placid countenance, every line and curve of which said 'Thou shalt not' to all the back-eddies of existence, dissipated in a second this reckless impulse. Hurriedly she pushed her perambulator away from the door and up the street; nor did she pause again till she had turned down Friary Lane, passed her own door, descended the hill, and crossed the little bridge by Claudius's coal-yard.

All the way along the path under the steep prison bank she suffered from the feeling of being an outcast and an outlaw. To Lovie's excited interest in the ducks, who, as they floated in the stream, kept making frantic efforts to remain head downwards long enough to reach the mud at the bottom, she responded with vague automatic monosyllables.

'No one knows how proud I am,' she thought, and a look of hard, bitter satisfaction came into her face as she thought how she had completely hidden from D. No-man the fact of her mother having been ‘a lady’. The whole scene of her mother’s death came back to her now, as she remorselessly quickened her pace. She became once more that white-faced young girl, with unweeping eyes and set mouth, who had deliberately buried her old life in her mother’s grave and gone back with the heavily veiled sister to the convent school.

As she pushed her perambulator now round the turn of Hangman’s Cottage, she experienced a moment of sick dizziness so vividly there returned on her the cold, savage, insane hardening of her young heart under the desolation of that time. She had gone through terrible things after that, things such as few young women, brought up as she had been, have to face; and many of these were due, as she well recognized, to a half-crazy recklessness in her own character, a passionate and almost sensual recklessness driving her to plunge headlong into self-laceration, but she had never, not even when she realized the pass to which her training by the Urgans had brought her, felt again the despair in her soul that she’d endured in that convent till the numbing power of the Mass wove a new skin over the wedge of iron.

But they were near the Frome now, and she had forgotten that it would be necessary to lift the pram over the little swing-gates on what D. No-man insisted on calling the Blue Bridge. This obstacle all the same would have been easily left behind if Lovie, who had had to cross the bridge on foot, hadn’t suddenly become naughty about being lifted back into her seat. There was, indeed, a tense and disturbing struggle between the two feminine wills at that point, for the little girl, passionately bent on reaching a patch of buttercups between the railings, clung indignantly to one of these rails and refused to budge.

Wizzie had already seized her in a rush of nervous anger when the sight of a horse placidly feeding on the other side of the field swept the taste and smell of *her* horse's warm neck into every fibre of her body. 'Lovie, listen!' she gasped, and her tone at once quieted the child, who turned startled eyes upon her. 'If Mummy ever hits you, you must pretend you're a horse, and do this.' And leaning over the top of the railing, she emitted, from a face so contorted with conflicting emotions that it was fortunate the child couldn't see it, a husky and rather ghastly parody of a horse's whinny.

This sound, projected from Wizzie's agitated throat across the field, had but small resemblance to any conceivable equine utterance, and the grazing animal didn't even raise its head, but the proceeding had an instantaneous effect upon the little girl, who stood transfixed with remorse, staring at her mother in mingled terror and puzzled commiseration.

'Don't cry, Mummy!' she burst out at last; and then, actually running to the perambulator and trying to scramble into it, she murmured, more to herself than to her mother, 'Lovie *hates* buttercups. Lovie's going to have hundreds of goldfishes!'

Wizzie felt, as she pushed the perambulator on through the mud at the back gate of Frome House and up the wide avenue of freshly green elm-trees, such a sense of overwhelming relief that she *hadn't* hit the child or shaken her savagely — for she had come near to doing both — that she actually reverted in the depths of her soul to her old convent religion, and, hardly conscious of what she did, murmured in Latin an incoherent Hail Mary as an outward sign of pardon and peace.

Meanwhile, Lovie, producing from somewhere about her small person the crumpled paper doll, sank back in her seat and began pretending that both she and it were riding to London in a circus-carriage to find the Queen.

The sight of certain scattered windrows by the roadside, composed of tiny fruit-seed wings that had been shaken down from the elm-tops by the pressure of the budding leaves — minute gauzy life-sails, as it were, each with its own germinal centre: air-perambulators of innumerable vegetation-Lovies voyaging through space — started our friend's thoughts off now on a different track. Something about the lavish and wasteful fertility of Nature on this grey spring day stirred up in the girl's senses — far down below that hardened place where with the body of her mother she had buried her young heart — an unexpected fount of natural feminine sensuality.

At that moment she found herself longing for embraces of a passionate lover. The feeling was so unexpected and so irresistible that it sent through her a long sweet shuddering spasm. It tossed up and shook away from her, while it lasted, that lodged and settled loathing of Old Funky, that shocking memory of the madness of her submission to him; but it was not of the violence to her youth of the old man's lechery that she thought, still less of the sterile caresses of her present bedfellow: it was of some unknown lover, some ardent lover of her own age to whom she could give herself up as these tiny vessels of life, tossed on the air from the budding elm-trees, gave themselves up to the warm breath of this cloudy day!

By the time she had propelled the now entirely content and preoccupied Lovie into the narrow road that led to Glymes, the whole brooding essence of that dark spring afternoon fell upon her and sank into her as if *it itself*, the non-human presence of one unique day among all the days of her life, had become the lover she longed for! And then by degrees, as she pushed her abstracted child along the winding lane and grew vaguely conscious of the white patches of stitchwort in the hedges and the diffused scent of hidden primroses on the air, this sweet spasm of sensual craving, this craving not for sterile lust but for equal passion, for life-creating passion, mounted so strongly to her head that it swept into its train other desires.

She imagined herself back again in tights and spangles, not the old lavender-coloured ones of which D. No-man used to murmur as he made love to her — as if the actual touch of her flesh was not in itself enough to stimulate his senses, just as he had to whisper ‘I bought you, I *bought* you!’ to turn her into what he called his Bronze Age girl before he could get his pleasure — but in fresh, new, beautiful, sky-blue ones, radiant as the supple limbs they covered, as she would balance herself on her old horse’s back (for she would buy the horse from Old Funky) or would leap like a shooting star, as no girl had ever leapt before, through a rainbow circle of dazzlement and wild applause!

She even went so far, as they drew near the pond where she had to open the gate, as actually to visualize a little house of her own, with things in it like those she faintly remembered as surrounding her infancy, and a porch covered with — but at this point, it must be confessed, our friend’s imagination began to debouch into a picture-show region that to D. No-man’s severe taste would have seemed the acme of false sentiment — at any rate, a porch at which Lovie stood waiting for her (a tall, extravagantly beautiful Lovie, dressed in clothes like those she had once seen worn by Lady Betty Millefleurs, who had come to the circus with her governess), waiting to welcome her return in her lover’s car from a bewitched and spell-bound hippodrome!

But there was such a lot of mud on both sides of this gate, and the gate itself was so hard to open, and there were such formidable-looking cows — and Wizzie was always afraid of cows — close to the hedgeless road on the further side, and the pond itself, by whose edge they had to pass when they’d got through the gate, looked so grey and gaping, so like the face of

Grummer Urgan when she came upon her once with Old Funky, that her heart sank just as her shoes were sinking. There! The wet mud had splashed her ankles, splashed the bright new wheels of the perambulator, while Lovie, as frightened as she was herself at the cows, began to set up a piteous sequence of tearful protests. These protests became a shrill cry when the girl turned to get the gate closed and the cows, in place of retreating, began advancing a step or two.

It is always hard for women to believe that it is pure curiosity in these speculative beasts that makes them advance in this manner with such a formidable stare in their liquid eyes; and as she took hold of the perambulator again to force its wheels through the mud in full face of this array of horned countenances, she felt tempted to join her voice to that of her offspring and send up a wail of hopelessness.

Things were in this condition, and Wizzie was wildly gathering her forces together with the intention of leaving the perambulator and rushing at the cows as if they had been geese, when the figure of Mr Quirm, who, unknown to both of them, had been slyly surveying this scene from the recess of a gate to their right leading to the farm-house known as Coker’s Frome, leisurely advanced into the road between them and the row of horns.

Whether he realized the depth of her relief at his appearance at that moment Wizzie did not know, did not ever know, but with his presence at their side the cows seemed to change their whole position in the cosmos, and, whether in retreat or not, became merely a harmless addition to a warm grey day and a moist green landscape.

Mr Quirm wore no hat or coat and carried no stick. He had evidently drifted out, dazed and confused from an afternoon’s reading or writing, to get a breath of air before tea.

‘Hullo!’ he murmured, addressing the child in the perambulator after he’d given Wizzie a friendly smile and nod. ‘Hullo! Whom have we got here? Riding in state, eh? Riding to London to visit the Queen? And what’s *this?* Another little girl in the equipage? She’s fallen out of her carriage, *this* one has, as if I were a highwayman! Hold tight to your little mother, now you’re safe back!’

These last words were addressed to the tiny paper doll, which, at the moment he approached the vehicle, had fluttered down from Lovie’s lap into a puddle at his feet; but it was not only his recovery of that crumpled bit of paper that endeared him at once to the child’s heart; it was something that she alone knew, she alone, not Mummy nor anybody else, namely that she was playing at visiting the Queen just as the man had said!

It never entered her thoughts to wonder how this heavy, dirty, sallow, black-headed intruder in a woollen jersey knew about this secret game between herself and the paper doll. With an instinct beyond the instinct of any of his intimates, beyond that of Nance herself, and far beyond that of his son, Lovie had divined the fact, after one glance at that majestic, nebulous, sickly-looking face bending down to pick up that bit of paper, that here was someone who treated existence exactly as she did, that is to say, who regarded *what you were pretending* as the only real reality in your life. This being the case, it hardly required explanation that he should have jumped to the right conclusion about her doll, namely that she was the troublesome Gwendolly going to Court in a circus-carriage with her severe mother Lovie.

And as for Wizzie herself, perhaps never since that first day with the Urgans, when she had realized with a young girl’s penetration that Old Funky liked her so well that nothing would stop him from giving her the best training he could, had she felt so rejoiced to meet anyone as she felt now to meet Mr Quirm. She liked him for his evident admiration of Lovie, she liked him for saving them from the cows, and above all she liked him for looking at her as if he found her beautiful and desirable.

With D. No-man she always felt, when he looked at her, as if he were trying to think up something fantastic that would *make* him want to make love to her, whereas Nance's husband looked at her as if the sight of her, just as she was, warmed, as Grummer would have put it, the cockles of his heart.

She felt indeed, as she allowed him to wheel the perambulator and walked by his side, that he got as much elation from just being near her as D. No-man got when, by calling up her lavender-coloured tights, or by imagining she was his Neolithic captive, or by reminding himself that he had bought her for eighteen pounds, he worked himself up into a mood to take his pleasure of her as she lay staring at Thel's picture of Mr Wye or listening to the paper-boys selling the *Echo*.

'I suppose', he remarked presently, in a voice so casual that Wizzie thought he must be referring to that ridiculous bed-post that D. No-man made such a fuss about, 'your good man hasn't yet told you what we discovered that day at Maiden Castle?'

'Oh dear, no, Mr Quirm. D.'s never one for talking about his walks! He adores walking. I've never heard of a man who loves it more than he does, but I suppose I don't seem interested enough. He's very proud, you know, though he pretends not to be. But I can't help growing a bit tired of the same old thing in the same old way. You'd think, to listen to him, that no one had anything else to do but to call a lesser willow-wren a lesser willow-wren, or a dead-red-nettle a dead-red-nettle! But D. certainly adores walking.'

As with her mental picture of a beautiful daughter awaiting her in a jasmin-covered porch there was a touch of the influence of the cinema, so in the particular tone in which she uttered the word ‘adores’ there was a peculiar girlish archness that betrayed the influence of Thuella. Neither in the convent nor in the caravan had Wizzie been permitted to establish her self-expression on a firm personal ground. Both from the sisters and from Grummer she had learnt reticence and self-control, but no one had warned her against copy-cat intonations when she wanted to make a favourable impression in conversation.

‘Then he told you nothing?’

‘Oh, yes, he told me he had walked all round the Ancient British camp with you; but he said you hadn’t had time to visit the excavations.’

‘Then he didn’t tell you what *we* excavated?’

‘No. He said nothing more. Was it a Roman relic, Mr Quirm?’

But in her heart Wizzie sighed with consternation, fearing that her sympathetic friend would now launch out into one of those interminable and quarrelsome diatribes that the mere word ‘excavations’ always seemed to evoke from men in this town.

Mr Quirm turned his lack-lustre eyes upon her with what seemed an almost quizzical look. ‘Not a relic, my dear,’ he said softly. ‘No, not a relic, nor Roman either! What your friend and I discovered together was more of the nature of — well! perhaps I might call it a biological discovery.’

Wizzie was silent; but her silence was not the silence of interest. She took it for granted that D. No-man had shown this friendly person some plant, or moss, or fungus, or even bird, such as he never failed to enlarge upon when he came home from his walks and they sat opposite each other at tea in Friary Lane.

‘But you haven’t told me’, Mr Quirm now blurted out, ‘where you picked up this little one. Is she a relation of yours?’

Wizzie replied to this by leaning over the edge of the perambulator and asking Lovie, as she laid her hand on the child’s shoulder, to tell the kind gentleman what her name was.

‘Lovie Ravelston,’ the little girl answered promptly and clearly in the automatic and yet self-conscious way in which children repeat the Catechism, ‘and *her* be Lovie’s new Mummy. God bless Old Funk and Popsy and Grummy, for Jesus’ sake — Mummy can say tishoo-tishoo like a trot-trot, Mummy can!’

Wizzie’s heart was beating fast under her Antelope-luncheon dress as she glanced at him to see the effect of Lovie’s words. But Mr Quirm displayed perfect composure. ‘Your own, eh?’ he said, smiling. ‘I guessed as much! And how does our friend No-man hit it off with his new daughter?’

‘You’d better ask *her,’* brought out Wizzie with much relief; and they both looked at the little girl.

‘Man’s going to give Lovie great big goldfishes,’ pronounced the child eagerly. ‘And Gwendolly wants goldfishes too!’

‘She’s mixing up D. No-man with Mr Cask,’ Wizzie hastened to explain. ‘He called us into his place this morning when Mrs Dearth was out.’

Mr Quirm, who was now steering the perambulator into the common entrance of Glymes, looked puzzled. ‘I thought Cask was at work,’ he said. ‘Over here we feel your friend Jenny’s being a bit contankerous with her old Roman; but you know more about that, of course, than we do. By the way, it’s Thel, I take it, you’ve come to call on, not Nance by any chance? Nance would love to see this little lady of yours. What did you say your name was, my sweet?’

Lovie fixed on him a somewhat dubious and hesitant eye, and several shades of expression crossed her face with extraordinary rapidity. It was clear to Wizzie, who was watching her with interest, that the child didn't feel as sure of Mr Quirm now as she had felt when he picked up her doll. An indefinable unction in the tone of his voice when he said 'my sweet' must have put the little thing on her guard. She turned away from her questioner and murmured a casual answer to the general purlieus of Glymes. 'Gwendolly's 'tending that Lovie isn't her mummy. Gwendolly's playing this be workhouse, but Lovie bain't going to be put—'

Wizzie sharply interrupted her. 'She doesn't know what she's saying, Mr Quirm. Lovie, I'm *ashamed* of you! You mustn't play "Workhouse" here. This is Mr Quirm's nice home, and Auntie Thel's nice home. You'll soon see Auntie Thel, won't she, Mr Quirm? And then—'

But Urien had such a sardonic expression in his dead eyes when she caught his glance that she stopped abruptly.

'No, not the workhouse exactly, darling,' he said, 'but your mother's quite right in calling it a home. We call a place a home where people live whose play doesn't suit the rest. But you and Gwendolly will be all right here. *He* won't hurt you, any more than I will. But I ought to warn you—' Here he straightened his back, looked significantly at Wizzie, and jerked his thumb in the direction of his neighbour's house. 'There's been a fine rumpus in there this morning,' he whispered. 'Thel had to fetch Nance, so as to—'

But Thuella herself emerged now, from the second Glymes house, in her studio smock, and, rushing to Wizzie, embraced her with ardour.

'And who is this? And what is here?' she cried when she released her.

But Wizzie, resolute not to enter into further explanations till she was alone with her friend, offered her hand to her rescuer, thanked him for his help over the cows, and added airily: ‘If I *can*, I’ll look in on Nance, tell her, before I go. But you know how it is when a person’s with Thel: it’s hard to tear yourself away!’

‘Oh, you lovely thing!’ cried Thuella, surveying her friend’s attire and touching its grey flounces with the tips of her fingers. ‘I must give you one more kiss before we go in. Don’t let’s keep *you*, Urien. I know Nance is in the kitchen getting tea.’

Mr Quirm obediently moved to his own door, but made no bones about turning round, when once his fingers were on the handle, to throw upon the whole little group, even down to the sacred scrap of paper cradled in Lovie’s lap, a look that Thuella, in the act of embracing her friend, missed altogether, but that Wizzie, who was the passive one, and whose eyes wandered to the man as the girl kissed her, intercepted with a glow of satisfaction.

‘He wouldn’t mind’, she said to herself, as she lifted Lovie from her carriage, ‘doing that to me! He likes me. I believe he likes me more than Thel!’

She held her child tightly by the hand as she followed Thuella into the house, while the child herself held more tightly still in *her* hand what had once been a piece of writing-paper taken from a box with a picture of Shakespeare on it that Popsy’s grandmother had given to Popsy at Christmas, but what now, having once emerged from that small chamber of Limbo — for everything with the inanimate is as relative as it is with ourselves — had been permitted by fate a dim sub-reality of livingness under the creative imagination of Lovie.

‘Dad’s been terrible today,’ Thuella whispered, as they entered the kitchen. ‘The ingratitude of men, my dear, especially of fathers, passes all bearing! I bet your man’s just the same, but it’s worse in a man like Dad.

Urien's the only one I know who's different. Don't you think so? I'm always telling Nance how lucky she is!'

Wizzie only caught the general drift of her friend's grievance, for she was occupied in removing Lovie's coat, a proceeding that was rendered difficult by the clenched fingers of the small hand clutching the crumpled and wet bit of paper.

'Oh, she *is* a darling!' the tall girl cried, with forced enthusiasm, when the coat was removed and the sash displayed. 'But what funny socks you've put on her, my dear! Is this a new style?'

Wizzie bit her lip. She had looked for something much more than this. Why didn't Thuella comment on the child's beauty? But the girl was off again now in a voluble torrent of tell-tale revelations. Mr Wye's ways were growing daily more intolerable.

At last there was a pause, and it became clear that in Thuella's opinion Wizzie's attitude to the Glymes situation had been perverted by the wrong-headedness of Jenny Dearth. 'She'd take his side', the girl broke out, 'if he drove me to giving up painting altogether! And where would he be *then?* He's always threatening to live with her, but gracious! he couldn't stand it for a week in Friary Lane!'

'Would he like to see Lovie?' our friend enquired.

'Oh, I dare say!' was the answer. 'He'd like to see *you* anyway, but I'm not sure that he shall. Oh yes, I suppose he must, for I've *got* to show you the thing I'm doing now! It's *that* that makes me so nervous — but it's the best thing I've done yet. It's got more — but you'll see in a minute. Urien helped me a lot in it. It was really his inspiration. It's the clouds over Maiden Castle when the wind — *his* particular wind, you know! — is getting up. I sketched it out there with him. He says it's like the spirits of the place when — but you know the thrilling way he talks!'

Wizzie nodded, thinking to herself, 'I believe he's dead tired of Thel and her clouds. I *know* it was me and not her he longed to kiss just now.'

'But how selfish I'm getting!' interjected the tall girl, bending her shining head a little to one side and smiling at her visitor while she negligently passed her fingers through Lovie's curls.

The child was now warming an attenuated and weather-beaten Gwendolly against the front of the stove, and, annoyed at this interruption, she made a peevish little movement as much as to say, 'Go on with your chatter, you frivolous creature, and let a busy person alone!'

'Selfish?' echoed Wizzie vaguely, wondering whether she would be allowed to run in and see Nance before they had to go, and wondering too whether, if Nance invited her to tea, she would dare to leave D. No-man alone for once at this ritualistic hour.

'Talking about my painting and my father', the other went on, 'and stupid things like that, instead of asking you a word about your pretty self!'

Both the girls were on their feet at this point, and Thuella threw one of her arms round Wizzie's waist and drew her towards her, running her fingers caressingly down the girl's side.

'What a lovely dress!' she murmured softly. 'D. No-man *must* like this dress! It's *so* well-made and it fits so perfectly. You darling! You don't know what it means to me to have got you again at Glymes!'

Keeping her arm tightly round our friend's waist, she lifted up the girl's chin with her free hand and kissed her.

Wizzie's thoughts were extremely detached as she submitted to these endearments. For one thing, she became conscious that Lovie was watching them with eyes as round as her own were wont to grow when something serious was happening. For another thing, she couldn't help an uneasy feelling that all Glymes, and every room in Glymes, was dominated by the personality of Urien. ‘He looked at *me,’* she thought, ‘not at Thel at all.’ And she found herself glancing towards the window of the kitchen, even though it was at the back of the house and there was no earthly reason why Urien should be walking about out there.

So thin was the tall girl’s figure, and so Aphrodisian in their softness were the curves of her own bosom, that our friend felt as if she were being embraced by a swaying willow-tree rather than by a mortal woman. She said to herself, before Thuella released her: ‘Grummer used to hold me like this and hug me like this, till she caught me that day with Old Funky. But what’s natural with an old woman like her, without children or anything... Goodness! It’s funny when Thel does it. I don’t think girls *ought* to be so demonstrative. I wonder if I remind her of some boy she’s lost. She never talks of those things. I must ask Jenny what boys she’s had. Oh, I don’t understand her! I wonder if she ever lets Mr Quirm kiss her? But I know — I *know* he likes me the best!’

The tall girl seemed as if she couldn’t let Wizzie go. She was dressed in a long painter’s smock smeared with stains from her palette, and our friend felt as if she had nothing on under this thin garment, such feverish electricity shivered through her lithe body.

What she was doing now was explaining to Wizzie the picture she had been painting; but it struck our friend that she used her eloquence as a sort of wavering screen to conceal the intensity of her feelings. She kept talking of the response of Maiden Castle to some mad dance of cloud-shapes she had painted above it; but Wizzie soon began to feel as if in her disturbed imagination the excited girl were identifying herself with these clouds.

‘There, Thel, dear,’ she murmured at last. *‘I’m* not Maiden Castle! You’ll make Lovie jealous if you make such a fuss of her Mummy — won’t she, my pet?’

Something in the tone in which she said this served as a chilling non-conductor to Thuella's infatuation. She let her go, and a strained silence fell upon them both.

Wizzie lowered her eyes and stared at Lovie, as the child swayed and crooned over her paper doll in front of the stove.

She had always told everyone, and it was the way she regarded herself, that she wasn't one for brooding, but at this moment she felt as if some other Wizzie in the depths of her being were holding a candle to her most secret thoughts.

With an austere and savage honesty that would have even satisfied her old confessor in the convent, she asked herself why it was that she felt as she did about Mr Quirm. On the way to Glymes it was a lover of her own age she had imagined, with a real passion for her, a lover who would love her for herself and not just for *that*!

With a vividness that displeased her, though she couldn't resist it, she called up occasion after occasion when the vicious sterility, the tantalizing detachment of D. No-man's caresses had made her loathing for Old Funky seem like something *alive*. How cruel fate had been to her! What she wanted was the most natural thing a girl *could* want: to be passionately loved for herself, to give herself up to passion, to drown herself in the act of love! And yet all that fate had given her was the savage lechery of one man and the sentimental lechery of another. This other Wizzie, with her candle of sad sardonic knowledge, hinted to her now that even her loathing, her revengeful hatred of Lovie's absurd father, was a less hopeless thing, just because it was more intense, than the passive respect mingled with cold indifference that she felt for D. No-man.

But the worst thing this terrible other did to her at this moment was to whisper that she was doing a dangerous and wicked thing to let this sudden rousing of her benumbed senses betray her for the third time. Her perfect teacher had turned into a satyrish goblin, her romantic rescuer had turned into D. No-man — and was she now going to fool herself again with the Black Man of Glymes? (That is how the other Wizzie thought of Mr Quirm — ‘the Black Man of Glymes’ — and it wasn’t a reassuring thought!)

Nor did this terrible other self stop its drastic commentary even there. It tried to force her to confess that in her reaction against the Urgans her heart *had* been stirred at first by D. No-man. ‘And are you’, it said, ‘such a slave of your woman’s nature that you can let dry up this spring of love for a good man simply because —? Why, even the ignorant Popsy would have more heart than that! And haven’t you enjoyed, in your own way, the poor man’s idolatry? It may leave you cold; but — confess, confess! — you haven’t altogether disliked it! At least it hasn’t got on your nerves. And why haven’t you done what Jenny has so often told you to do: gone off and got work in another circus? The truth is, my good girl, like all women, you really adapt yourself to your life and take for granted that it will go on the same, even while with your surface-nerves you’re cursing and damning it. You’ve got more affection, my friend, for D. No-man than you’ll admit. You’d like to be loved, as you say, to the limit; but you don’t *really* consider leaving D. No-man any more than you consider leaving Lovie!’

‘Yes, I do!’ answered the normal, the natural Wizzie, with indignation. ‘And I’ll *show* you I do, if you say much more!’

It was Thuella who broke the spell of this prolonged soliloquy, and she did it by a series of hurried questions as to the manner in which D. No-man had accepted Lovie. ‘Did he mind’, she enquired, ‘when you *had* to tell him about her? Did he make a fuss at your wanting to have her? Did those Urgan people make trouble? Did they get money out of him?’

‘What an actress you are!’ Wizzie thought. ‘You don’t care a damn whether they got money out of D. No-man or not, or whether D. No-man was beside himself with rage or gentle as a lamb! But on the other hand, *I* don’t care how much your father spoils your happiness. That’s how life is, I suppose!’ Then aloud: ‘You remember how I decided to tell him nothing even if I *did* have to take the child in the end? Well, do you know, my dear, I wish now I had told him! He was so nice about it. You can’t think how nice he was. And the extraordinary thing was he didn’t seem surprised when that letter came. Listen, Thel! — you didn’t breathe a word to him, did you? But of course you didn’t! Well, then, I simply can’t understand it. I made sure he’d throw me out. Any other man would — wouldn’t he? I thought, when I read that letter, “Well, young woman, *out* you’ll have to go, bag and baggage, you and your bastard!” — but he didn’t even sulk. He completely astonished me. You’d have thought Lovie was *his* child and he was telling *me* about her, not me telling him!’

She paused, and then with a glance at the window and a little sigh, ‘Does Mr Quirm’, she asked, ‘help you a lot with your painting?’

The moment she had asked this question, she thought in her heart, ‘I know what you feel about *me* with all that sort of thing—” a little outsider like her, with an acrobat’s training, can’t really understand such things “ — but still, all the same...’

Thuella gave her a quick searching glance and shrugged her shoulders; and Wizzie deemed it wiser to revert to D. No-man. ‘Wasn’t it extraordinary, Thel, his acting the way he did? Would *you* have thought he’d have acted like that?’

‘What did you do when you first read the letter?’

Wizzie shot at her a very straight glance, and one of those curious looks passed between them that will be a trouble to men till the end of days.

‘You got hysterical and drew the lightning on yourself?’

Wizzie frowned. This sophisticated tone in her friend displeased her. In a flash she became defensive of her man. ‘He acted splendidly,’ she said. ‘I needn’t have made any fuss.’

‘But wasn’t he scared at having the child? I take it you two must long ago have decided against—’ And Thuella made a little gesture of disgust at the thought of maternal responsibility.

Wizzie couldn’t restrain the glow of satisfaction with which she let this natural implication pass as the truth. She knew her friend well enough by now to realize the wisdom of tempering frankness with certain basic reservations. ‘No, he wasn’t scared. He doesn’t want children of his own, but he *likes* children, and he thinks it’s only right that I should look after mine.’

Thuella shrugged her shoulders, and to Lovie’s relief ceased her perfunctory toying with that busy young woman’s person. ‘Thinks it right,’ the tall girl echoed with bitter sarcasm. ‘Oh, they’re all the same. Dad thinks it right to keep reminding me that I’m his housekeeper first and foremost, and his bread-winner afterwards! By the way, has Jin made it up yet with *her* old man? Does *he* still think it right to torment her with his coal-yard? That’s what I can’t make Nance see — that she’s the only lucky one of all of you! Urien’s like me. *He* doesn’t bother about what’s right. He just goes ahead and does what he wants to do.’

‘Not always,’ thought Wizzie, remembering the glance she had encountered across her friend’s fair hair; but aloud she said, ‘Jenny’s cruel to that man, and I’ve told her so. It’ll serve her right if he makes friends with—’

‘With *you*, do you mean, you funny little thing?’

Wizzie disregarded this. ‘Jenny thinks’, she remarked, ‘that he enjoys himself with a group of girl Communists.’

Thuella laughed aloud. ‘Old Claudius? Gracious! They *must* be hard up. Forgive my laughing; but I can’t imagine what Dorchester girl Communists are like, or where they live. And why doesn’t Jenny turn Communist herself? It’s in her line, I should have thought. But *I* don’t care what these crazy people do. It comes of having a conscience. People with consciences are always unhappy. But come along, you sweet, troubled, responsible thing, I want to show you what I’m doing. If it’s worth anything, it’ll be worth a hundred consciences. You won’t be interested a bit, of course, but that doesn’t matter!’

She moved to the door, but, instead of opening it, turned sharply round, her fingers on the handle.

‘Do you know, my dear,’ she said, ‘I’d give up’ — and she raised both her arms to the back of her fair head and clasped them behind her neck— ‘every pretension to good looks I’ve got, if I could do some really good work!’

From between her lifted elbows her eyes gleamed wildly and desperately round that little kitchen as if it had been transformed with all its pots and pans into one large empty canvas. ‘You don’t know what it is to want anything as much as I want to be a *real* painter! I come near it. Yes, I do, now and then! But just as I’m on the edge of something good, something really *great*, Dad’s damned sneering contempt drags me back.’ She stopped, let her hands fall to her sides, and stood silent for a second, gazing on the ground.

Then she raised her eyes. ‘How you’ve given *up your* work, as you have, passes my comprehension! I’ve never forgotten how you looked in those things you had on when you sat on that bed and hated me so. You looked like — oh, I don't know what! — and now here you are — with *that* little thing — and a pram at the door! You looked beautiful then, child, beautiful and *terrible*, like a woman who could dance on a bare sword — and now — I hope D. No-man enjoys the change — that's all *I* can say! Well, come on. I want you to see what I'm doing. I don't talk like this to everybody. But though you've put on petticoats and thrown your soul to the fishes, you've got it in you, Wizz, and don't think I don't know it!'

A week ago Wizzie would have been impressed and even a little awed by this outburst, but she had had so many emotional shocks of late that it was only with a narrowing of her screwed-up eyes and a contracting of her straight eyebrows that she responded to her friend's words.

More reluctantly still was Lovie dragged away to see these pictures and these philosophers. The miracle was still going on at that warm stove — a scrawled-over bit of paper becoming a person with a past and a future! Just four hours — four drops of conspiring time — had this creation occupied. And now the paper doll, like the rest of us, had to pay the penalty of being something rather than nothing. Clutched in Lovie's hot fingers, this poor entity was now compelled, as were its young mother and *her* mother, to follow that tide of destiny that sweeps earth and Heaven and men and gods along, the moment they emerge from Nirvana. And, like ourselves, the paper doll had had no choice. Snatched from the trunk in the caravan — where it lay between Popsy's underclothes and a volume entitled *The Book of Beauty*, given to the girl by her first sweetheart — it had been forced to submit to Old Funky's scrawls, forced to submit to being torn in half by Wizzie, and now, without question asked as to whether it would prefer to remain warm and quiescent by a kitchen fire, it was destined to be conveyed into the presence of a Platonic thinker at the end of his tether.

The desperate state of poor Mr Wye must have been divined by Lovie, if not by her doll, at first glance. He had evidently just come in from a long walk, in which no doubt he had sought to recover from the turbulent scene referred to by Mr Quirm. He had thrown down his overcoat and hat on one of Thuella's sofas and was now engaged in taking off his boots by the fire. He rose at their entrance and shuffled forward to greet the visitor with one boot on and one boot off.

The silky white fringe across his high narrow brow was all dishevelled, and one lock of grey hair hung down almost as low as his left eyebrow and looked damp with sweat. His thin lips were sucked in in a forced grimace, and from the cavity of this Voltairian leer, as he gave his limp hand to Wizzie and stared in amazement at the child, there emerged a whistling series of half-articulate interjections: 'Whew! — What a pleasure! — Whew! — What a surprise! — Whew, whew! — What little girl have we got here?'

Thuella's face hardened with disgust as she surveyed the trailing laces of the boot he still had on and the muddy aggressiveness of the one befouling the hearth-rug.

'So you've come to tea with us?' he said, looking reproachfully at his daughter. 'I must say I don't see any sign of it yet! Kettle boiling, Thuella? Bread and butter cut? I expect — whew, whew! — our little girl here is hungry. I know I am.' He skipped back to his place by the fire. 'Sit down, Miss Ravelston. Forgive me a minute—' Here he resumed his own seat, and, drawing his breath unevenly, mingled his 'whews' with long-drawn groans as he struggled to get off his other boot.

Wizzie, after a bewildered glance at the big easel in the centre of the room, pulled the child towards a chair opposite the old man, and sat down submissively, drawing Lovie against her knees and keeping one of her arms tightly round her.

The clock on the mantelpiece, making a laborious clicking in its interior — which at once brought back to the visitor her long evening in this singular apartment on Candlemas Night — began to strike four o'clock. It achieved this task not only with some effort but with a kind of genteel hesitation, as if it were apologizing for reminding the daughter of the house of the existence of the kettle, and the master of the house of un-Platonic hunger.

'We have tea at half past four, Miss Ravelston. I like my tea as soon as I get back from my walk. But of course I try not to be impatient. Is the kettle boiling, Thuella? Is the bread and butter cut? I expect this little one likes cake. Come over here and let me look at you, child! No, no, don't hide you pretty face! Don't be shy. Have you got any cake for the child, Thuella?'

Wizzie risked a hurried glance at her friend; but the tall girl, taking absolutely no more notice of Mr Wye's words than if they had been another clock — some old hall-clock that was always wrong — was standing in front of her easel lost in critical contemplation.

Wizzie herself began to grow more and more ill at ease. She felt thoroughly unsympathetic towards Mr Wye. 'He's selfish and he's silly,' she thought, and in her mind she turned to old Claudius, in his desolate littered house, going backwards and forwards to the window to peer out for his cruel Jenny. 'I'll go in there tomorrow, if he leaves the door open,' she said to herself, 'and tidy the place up — and I don't care if Jenny *does* catch me at it. She ought to be ashamed of herself, with a kind man like that! How nicely he played with Lovie! *He* saw how pretty she is. I wish I hadn't brought her here. Thel hasn't taken any real notice of her; and all this old man thinks about is his tea. D. No-man's like that too, only he hides it up.

They're just selfish — that's what they are! I'd like to get out of this place. If I can't see Mr Quirm again, I'm not going to keep D. No-man waiting.'

She allowed Lovie to establish herself on the floor, where the child became at once gravely occupied in arranging her sacred bit of paper so that what passed for its head should rest on a particular square in the pattern of the rug.

Mr Wye, evidently suffering acutely from this delay in the preparation of his meal, kept glancing alternately at the clock and at his daughter. At last, with an angry effort to emphasize his patient impatience, he settled himself in his chair and produced, one from each pocket, his cherished volumes. Wizzie could see he didn't read a word but opened first one book and then the other, balancing them on his thin knees, while little drops of perspiration trickled down his brow, causing his errant lock of hair to droop in damp misery.

But Thuella now turned her easel round so that Wizzie might see the picture. The tall girl's bright head hung sideways in intense absorption, and, with each broken sentence of explanation of her purpose, her flexible body seemed to quiver in sympathetic response.

'She's feeling', thought Wizzie, 'like I feel when I'm on the horse and I don't care who sees me!'

All that our friend could make out from the picture was a wrack of tormented clouds piled up in the wildest confusion above what looked like a towering dark green wave.

'I've made the hill *conscious* — if you understand what I mean,' she was saying, while from the curves of her figure, as she hovered over her work, magnetic shivers kept following one another in a series of spasmodic vibrations that seemed to pass into the canvas. 'I mean I've made the hill *alive*, don't you see? Not just grass and chalk, but the breasts of the earth.'

What Wizzie saw was that Thuella's own small breasts were responding far more obviously than Maiden Castle to that cloud orgy in the sky.

'It was Urien — saying — it came — alive — on — certain — nights — that set me off,' the artist went on, uttering her words in short gasps.

The mention of Urien's name broke up Wizzie's feeling that this tension above those cloud-wraiths was like herself on her horse, and once more she found herself recalling the peculiar look Urien had fixed upon them when Thuella was kissing her. 'He wants me! He wants me!' her thoughts repeated, and a revival of something like that delicious throb of warm sensuality trembled through her that she had felt when she imagined herself embraced by a passionate lover of her own age.

The girls were now startled by Mr Wye letting both his books slide down upon the floor while he rose with a bound. 'You're doing this to torture me!' he burst out, glaring like a demon at his daughter. 'You know it's tea-time. You know, when I come back from my walk, what I want is my tea, and you're just hanging round that damned picture to torment me! And do you know where I went for my walk, you girl that I've fed and clothed and — and *worked* for — yes! worked for — as long as my health allowed? I went to Maumbury Rings — yes, I did! — and I went further too — I went along that road that leads to your friend's damned place. And I tell you *this*, since you're bent on making my old — life — a hell—' Here Mr Wye's throat began to emit a sound like the wind through telegraph wires, a sound that accompanied all his words and seemed to lift them up and scatter them down like shrill-wailing gnats. 'Those human mole-hills you people make such a fuss about are nothing.' Here, in his impotent fury, Mr Wye made a gesture with his fingers as if flicking Maiden Castle into the air. 'Nothing to a man who is raising his soul's wings above the whole stellar system! *He* says' — and Wizzie thought, 'He says "He" just as Sister Bridget used to say “The Holy Father” ‘—’ that when the soul’s shaken itself free of your damned illusions, what it sees — is — is—’ But here a rush of renewed self-pity broke up his words, and the whistling in his throat became a sob, and he turned directly to Wizzie. ‘You wouldn’t think it,’ he panted, ‘but that girl over there *is* my daughter. Yes, she is! She’s bone of my bone! You wouldn’t think it, would you, now that she makes such a fuss about doing the least thing for me — for me who gave her all! She thinks, because I had to give up my work and live on her bounty, that all the thoughts of my life are nothing. You’re a woman, you’re a mother—’ And he glanced at Lovie on the floor. ‘And mightn’t it be supposed to be at least *natural’*— ‘Don’t get sarcastic, now, old boy,’ thought Wizzie, ‘for it doesn’t suit you’— ‘for a child, who wouldn’t be in the world at all except for you, to listen for a moment, just now and then, to the conclusions of a lifetime?’

What Thuella was doing now struck Wizzie as proving most definitely that the man was right in calling her bone of his bone, for she was pressing her fingers into her ears. Wizzie sighed with vexation. Was it for this she had come to Glymes and risked keeping D. No-man waiting for his tea?

The sight of his daughter still surveying her picture with absorbed attention while she kept her knuckles pressed against her ears caused the indignant old man to devote himself exclusively to Wizzie, who groaned as she saw all chance of seeing Mr Quirm again vanishing away.

‘You wouldn’t believe it,’ the man went on, ‘but your — your husband’s the only person round here who takes the least interest in what I say!’ He passed his hand over his forehead, pushing back his forelock, and sat up straight in his chair. ‘I’ve been a professor in my time. My unnatural child forgets *that*! Perhaps Mr No-man doesn’t realize that I was a professor of Greek in one of our Midland colleges. Will you tell him that from me, Miss Ravelston? For I think it will interest him. Tell him — what he certainly wouldn't know from the way I'm treated in my own house — that in Derbyshire they still call me Professor! *That's* what the girl over there forgets when she behaves in the way she's doing now. Professor Teucer Wye: that's what I was when I made my wife choose "Thuella" as the name of our second child; that's what I was when I bought for her, in the main street of a well-known Midland town, her first paint-box.' Here, to Wizzie's consternation, the furious little man skipped across the room to Thuella's side, and, seizing her by one of her elbows, tried to pull her fingers from her ear. 'Yes, a paint-box, you unnatural girl!' he shouted. 'A paint-box! A paint-box!'

But Wizzie was on her feet by this time. 'Good-bye, Mr Wye!' she said in a clear emphatic voice that had, all the same, something of an uncomfortable tremor. Our friend was no longer in the tender mood she had been in in Claudius's house, but the sight of the contemptuous loathing in Thuella's face as she tried to shake off her father's fingers, and the view of the back of Mr Wye's head, which looked so pathetically calm and scholarly as he struggled with her, made her feel what she later described to D. No-man as 'funny in my inside'.

'Good-bye, Mr Wye! I'm afraid I've got to go now. Mr No-man is waiting tea for me.' As soon as she had spoken, she felt ashamed of having uttered the dangerous word 'tea'; and when afterwards she told D. No-man what she had said, he maintained that she'd done it with malicious intent; but her speech had at least the effect of causing that grotesque struggle in front of the picture of Maiden Castle to come to an end.

Mr Wye hurried up to her at once and became the normally polite gentleman. Thuella too came forward. And as it worked out, the visitor's departure was attended by unexpected ease and geniality on the part of the father, and unexpected awkwardness and embarrassment on the part of the daughter.

Wizzie herself was overwhelmed with shame at the end, for, when the moment arrived to disturb Lovie's game on the floor and get her into her jacket, it was found that her extremely good behaviour during all this unpleasant scene was due to the fact that she had pulled towards her the *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* from where Mr Wye had dropped them, and converted them into a tunnel in and out of which it gave her a grave ecstasy to propel the two-dimensional form of the recumbent Gwendolly.

Wizzie had a momentary glimpse of Mr Wye's face as she stooped to pick up the books for him, and she was amazed to observe that the event pleased him rather than the reverse. He opened his mouth and sucked in his lips in such a gargoylish grin that at first she was afraid he was going to have a fit of hysterical fury; but all he said was, 'A professor at one of the smaller Midland colleges — in Greek, of course — you won't forget to tell Mr No-man that?' And then, seeing tears come into Lovie's eyes at the loss of her tunnel, 'You'd think', he said, 'she knew the value of these books. One of the *smaller* Midland colleges, tell him, for I don't want to boast. Yes, little one, you made them into a gateway — that was what they were, wasn't it, a gateway? Not just a doctor, tell him, for they're as common as dirt nowadays — and in the Midlands, tell him, where they stand no nonsense and have their wits about them. Yes, a gateway, little one. I must put them back where they live now, mustn't I? For they wouldn't be happy anywhere else. *There* they go — there, there, there — back to bed! No, they can't come out any more. They've gone now — see?' And Teucer Wye, with a terrifying smile, held his hands out towards the child with all the fingers outspread.

It was at his face, however, not at his antics, that Lovie stared; and she stared at him all the time her mother was forcing the clenched fingers of the most obstinate of sturdy little hands into the proper sleeve.

‘But you see what *he* is,’ concluded the Professor to Wizzie, who was again reminded of the revered ‘He’ in the talk at her old convent school. ‘He can show us how all the great things in the world, like Quirm’s precious Maiden Castle, are vapour and smoke compared with the progress of the soul; and he can at the same time keep a little girl quiet for more than an hour by the mere touch of his pages!’

It was to Lovie herself — for he seemed to treat the child’s contact with the mere binding of the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus* as a species of initiation — that his final words were uttered. He muttered quite a lot into the little creature’s ear as he saw them off the premises, and Wizzie wondered, as she watched him turn back at the garden gate, whether he had told Lovie that in Derbyshire he was still known as Professor Teucer Wye.

The door of the southern portion of Glymes had, however, hardly closed on the troubled Platonist, and Wizzie was formulating in her mind a lively account of him for the benefit of D. No-man, when the gate of the northern garden opened and both Mr and Mrs Quirm hurried after her.

‘Urien told me about the cows, my dear,’ panted Nance hurriedly, ‘and I thought I must just see this little person.’ She bent over the perambulator as she spoke, and began to make warm hovering overtures to its occupant.

But Lovie was tired and irritable by this time, and replied to her approaches by drawing rudely back and acting like a little hawk of whose distance from its nest a benevolent and maternal hen is trying to take advantage. But the warm soft pressure of the friendly lady’s purpose did not cease. It seemed difficult for Nancy Quirm to regard it as possible that a child rescued from *those people* should refuse to respond to the glow of her interest if only she could express it warmly enough.

But the mother was as unresponsive as the daughter. ‘Sorry not to stop,’ murmured Wizzie, pushing the perambulator forward so fast as almost to trip up the poor lady, ‘but I must get back as quick as I can. D. No-man’s waiting for me in Friary Lane. Don’t make that noise, Lovie! We’re going home. Look! The cows have all gone home!’

‘Have you seen his attic in High East Street yet?’ enquired Nance, hurrying along on one side of the small conveyance while her husband walked on the other. ‘I’m always so interested — as Enoch knows — in a writer’s study. Has he a warm fire up there? Does he have any of his meals up there? Has he got a nice view from his window?’

Pushing the perambulator faster still, and acutely conscious in every part of her person of a magnetic pull reaching her from the dark figure on the other side of her whimpering charge, Wizzie was faintly conscious of an instinctive stiffening against these interrogations. She made up her mind in a flash not to admit that she had never ascended those stairs above the shop.

‘You don’t know D. No-man’, she brought out, ‘if you think he doesn’t take care of himself.’

‘There — there — don’t ‘ee cry, little one!’ came the husky voice of the man on her left, and Wizzie became aware, as she hurried on, that he had laid his hand on Lovie’s shoulder.

The spring sky had grown dark with heavy clouds; and a mist coming up from the river was now crossing their path with a palpable chilling of the air.

Her reply to Nancy seemed to have reduced that friendly lady to silence, and all the way down the hill till they reached the pond Urien kept murmuring consoling words to Lovie.

To him the girl felt she couldn’t utter a syllable — no! not if all the cows in the Frome meadows were obstructing their way! That warm wave of delicious response to anonymous human passion which had swept over her on her approach to Glymes began to flow more and more consciously into the channel of her contact with this living man at her side.

Little Lovie, whose pathetic whimperings had completely ceased, like the trouble of a small bird soothed in a magnetic hand, now became a medium for the electric current between him and her, a current which she could feel tingling irresistibly through every nerve of her body.

It was out of an exquisite trance that she suddenly grew conscious that they had reached the gate by the pond, that there were no cows to be seen, and that, with the opening of the gate to let her through, her companions were intending to turn back. So strangely elated and yet so numb and passive was her mood that the withdrawal of the Quirms hardly seemed to touch the deeper levels of her feeling. She couldn’t be quite clear, indeed — as she pushed the perambulator on and muttered mechanically to herself, ‘I must be quick; I mustn’t keep him waiting’ — how they had left her, or even whether she had thanked them or said good-bye to them. All she knew was that she felt happier than she had felt for years, happier than she had felt since the last time with a free heart she had balanced herself on her old horse’s back!

When she reached the turn leading to the back entrance of Frome House, an impulse that she would have found hard to explain compelled her to pause and let go for a minute the handle of her little vehicle. Stepping hurriedly to her child’s side, she bent down and gave Lovie an impassioned hug and the first kiss, the first *real* kiss, her offspring had ever received from her.

‘Don’t, Mummy!’ the little girl spluttered, under this unexpected embrace. ‘Don’t, Mummy! You’ve — made me — pinch Gwendolly.’ And then, without warning, something in her small bewildered heart broke down, something that reacted obscurely and wildly from all the troubled impressions of this long day, and the little girl lifted up her voice and wept. ‘Lovie wants to go back to Old Funk and Grummy,’ she wailed. ‘Lovie wants to go home!’

CHAPTER 8. Midsummer's Eve

THE EVE OF St John the Baptist, the twenty-third of June, fell this year on a Sunday, and turned out to be one of the hottest days of one of the hottest Junes that the West of England had known for a long time.

Dorchester was full of visitors. The unusually warm weather had stimulated the archaeological society engaged in the Maiden Castle excavations to begin their summer work earlier than was expected; and in the afternoon of Saturday the twenty-second the local *Echo* announced a momentous discovery.

In a portion of the earthworks, in a place where digging had been undertaken for the first time, the remains of an extensive stone building had been discovered, of greater antiquity than the well-known Roman Temple on the high table-land in the centre of the ramparted hill.

So important was the discovery, the *Echo* hinted, that the head people in the work had halted all further meddling with the spot until several experienced authorities could be brought to the scene, and the paper went on to predict that there would be a rush to the place from all parts of the country.

The day following this exciting announcement being Sunday, and the weather remaining as auspicious as ever, there was a pronounced tendency among local persons interested in such matters to make their way as soon as possible to the scene of action.

The astute Mr Cumber, from his publicity watch-tower in a remote town, lost no time in making sure that the chain of papers connected with his office should have first-hand information of what was going on. With this in view, he hurriedly dispatched to Dorchester his son-in-law and his daughter, in his own private car, with explicit orders to remain at the Antelope till every aspect of the new find had been thoroughly investigated. They were bidden to keep in touch with him over the telephone, and he declared his intention of coming down in person when things had gone a little further. Meanwhile, he instructed them to get into immediate contact with both his local correspondents, Mr No-man and Mr Quirm, and obtain a general article on the situation from the former and a special one on the mythological implications of the discovery from the latter.

The task given to Dunbar Wye on this occasion was the first among all the labours undertaken for his father-in-law from which he could derive any personal pleasure. Dumbell hated office work. He was the worst possible reporter. Everyone had been amazed when Mr Cumber consented to his only child's marriage with so unpromising a youth, though the explanation was simple, namely that the famous widower was completely under his daughter's thumb. How the girl herself yielded to the candid innocence of such a lad no one inquired. Her own quality of intelligence was obviously of so thin a texture that, whatever her friends *said*, in their hearts they thought, 'She's lucky to have found such a good-tempered, quiet lad, free from all vice.'

For Dunbar Wye was certainly untempted by either the world or the flesh. Whether the devil left him alone too was a question dependent on one's view of the metaphysics of Fascism; but if not to flirt, or to whore, or to drink, or to smoke, or to give way in the luxury of solitude to lascivious thoughts, was to be a good catch for a petted little shrew, Dunbar was the man. That to top all this he was an incredible fool was not perhaps a paradox. Many ere now have held the view that simple virtue and extreme foolishness are blood-brothers and that it is as hard to be clever and good as it is to be rich and good.

At any rate, what the Cumber girl suffered from in Dumbell was not his virtue, was not his Fascist devotion; it was his mania for collecting, and drying, and keeping in portfolios, endless specimens of the larger-growing vegetation of the United Kingdom. In plants, in ferns, in mosses, in mushrooms, Dunbar took less interest. His passion was for trees and bushes.

Mr Cumber approved of this mania in his daughter's husband. He took the point of view that it was better to make love to trees than to ladies; and he used to derive a proud satisfaction from being able to say to his colleagues, 'That lad of my girl's knows every damned shrub in the Garden of Eden!'

But Mr Cumber's offspring came, after five weeks of life with Dumbell, to loathe the sight of a bush. Their little suburban garden was all bushes. You couldn't plant a pansy in it, much less a row of poppies. And Dumbell's study — as the girl strove to make her servant call the apartment where his specimens were arranged — had the peculiarity of leaking all over the house. The young woman had told herself the prettiest stories of the way she was going to run her establishment and decorate it and show it to her admiring friends; but Providence had other plans.

In excusing Dunbar's lack of the lighter touches of sociability, she would always say, 'Well, at any rate Dun isn't a writer. He won't mess up the house with books and things!' Her forecast was correct. The only books in Beulah Lodge were presentation sets of standard authors; but what no girl could have predicted, from such harmless evidence as a habit of plucking leaves and twigs wherever he went, was that she and her little servant, neither of whom was in any sense a devotee of Nature, should come to be faced with a positive plague of vegetable débris.

The two young women in Beulah Lodge — and even the tradesmen noticed this — grew week by week, under this deciduous affliction, more and more alike in their ways. By contending against the same obsession they acquired a secret code of unspoken understanding, an identical pattern, you might call it, of protective colouring, so that they even began, after a year of Dumbell’s arboreal researches, to resemble each other in facial expression.

Young Mr Wye soon found it was no use to enquire of the maid what had happened to a rare specimen of a certain blackberry, or to a treasure-trove among willows — for of these simple growths, contrary to received opinion, there seemed to be unending varieties — if the mistress declared she had never seen it!

Dumbell’s passionate acceptance of the Fascist hostility to feminism may have had nothing to do with his obstinate pursuit of a hobby so incompatible with a tidy house, but he made no more successful attempts to get into the mind of his womenfolk the importance of collecting willows than he did to make them realize the catastrophic menace of Communism.

It was therefore a triumphant relief to the Cumber girl to carry her dogmatic botanist to Dorchester, knowing that in her absence her other self, in the person of Lottie Day, would dust most vigorously and with most thoroughness where dusting was most forbidden.

It cannot be said that this son of ‘the Professor in a small Midland college’ was in the least interested in excavations; but since he had well-nigh exhausted both the indigenous and the exotic vegetation in the environs of Beulah Lodge, he accepted his commission with alacrity, bearing with him not only reams of Blackshirt propaganda but the most capacious of all possible botanizing tins.

Early as was the start of the Cumber pair, however, it was impossible for them to reach Dorchester till midday; and long before that — in fact before most of the inhabitants of the old town were stirring — considerable numbers of interested people were already on the way to Maiden Castle. Among these might have been seen, while the Corn-Exchange clock was striking ten and the bells of Fordington Church were already ringing, quite a large group of our particular acquaintances setting out from Friary Lane. Both the Glymes ménages were represented — Nancy alone, by an arrangement with Thuella, having stayed behind to cook a combined Sunday dinner. 'Don't hurry back, now!' had been her last word to them all. 'I'll manage somehow, however late you are.' D. No-man and Wizzie had privately arranged for Claudius to accompany them to the scene of action; and this meant — for the idealistic neighbours were still unreconciled — that Jenny Dearth found her own reasons for staying at home. And since she *was* at home, Wizzie entrusted her with the care of Lovie.

It was no surprise to Wizzie, as they all met at Jenny's door, to see the portentous face of her Glymes man, for No-man had received a telegram, and they took it for granted that the other Cumber correspondent would be stirred up in the same way. But it was a most startling surprise to them both to see the dapper and even dandified form of old Teucer Wye, swinging an ash-coloured cane as slender and straight as himself, and prepared to be amiable and polite to everybody, not even excepting his younger daughter.

Both the pockets of the Professor's light tweed coat bulged a little, for he evidently anticipated interludes in the proceedings wherein a word of the greatest of all philosophers might be appropriately snatched; but his mood was as unruffled as the weather, and he skipped about from one to another of the party with a lively volubility that astonished them all.

In the general confusion of the start there was quite a conclave outside Jenny's house, while Thuella, dutiful for once in her life, ran in to have a word with her sister.

Wizzie noticed that No-man began at once arguing with Claudius, and she gathered that it was the old topic they were debating, the topic she had heard till she was utterly weary of it, the topic that seemed to demand that you had to pit the word 'subjective' against the word 'objective', as if these expressions, totally meaningless to *her* mind, had been a pair of fighting-cocks.

The elated Professor — for it was soon clear to Wizzie that the whole Glymes party were in high spirits — had stopped an impatient member of the Salvation Army, whose band always gathered in that part of the town for their march to chapel, and was telling him — as far as she could catch his words — that Midsummer Eve ought to be a great occasion with a sect like his, which had revived under the Christian symbols of blood and fire the old Dionysian ecstasy of salvation. The Salvation Army man rested his weight, and the weight of his musical instrument, which the Professor called by some Greek name Wizzie couldn't catch, first on one leg and then on the other while he struggled to escape; and if the girl didn't wonder what that college in the Midlands could have derived from such fantastic studies, it was only because what she heard from Mr Wye kept being interrupted by what she heard from D. No-man as he argued with Claudius.

'It *isn't* just sensation that I live for,' D. was saying. 'It's something that has behind it more than you think — the feelings of our race for thousands of years. For instance, this morning, warm though it was, I lit a fire in the grate to celebrate Midsummer's Eve. What are all your electrical apparatuses compared with a fire that I light with my own hands? It isn't only a sensual pleasure; it's a religion, it's an ecstasy of life.'

Wizzie couldn't prevent an amused feminine smile — irreligious as the famous laughter of Sarah in the presence of the angel — when she heard this word 'ecstasy' repeated on both sides of her. 'I wouldn't be a man for anything,' she thought. ' *They* talk; but *I* feel. Old Teucer Wye's beating the dust up now with his stick and letting himself be happy just because they lit bonfires on Midsummer Eve thousands of years ago!'

But if the humorous feeling that might be called a recognition of the eternal limitations of homo sapiens was on *her* side over Mr Wye and D. it was on No-man's side when Urien came up to where she stood and began to talk to her.

'I didn't dress like this *for you,'* she kept saying to herself as she gave herself up to the man's formidable magnetism. But though she repeated these chaste words in her brain, she could not prevent all her girlish senses, from the tips of her breasts to every nerve in her body, from responding with 'linked sweetness long drawn out' as she felt his dead-looking eyes stray over her figure's provocative curves.

It was the first time she had put on what she was wearing now, and she knew well that never — certainly not in the days of those old lavender-coloured tights — had the loveliness of her form had such complete justice done to it.

More than a month had passed since that day in early May when Urien had rescued Lovie and her from the cows, and, though she had only seen him about half-a-dozen times since then, their attraction to each other — or at any rate her submission to his spell — had gone a good long way. It had not yet led to their being alone together, or even to her going, as he had asked her several times to do, with Thel and him to Maiden Castle. Nor had it — at least she told herself it had not — roused D.'s jealousy, though at this very moment she could not help being aware that No-man was keeping watch on her and Urien.

'I wish Thel would come,' she said to herself. 'D. *is* watching us. I *must* put a stop to this.' But even while she talked to herself in this strain, the sweetness of yielding to Urien's magnetism began to assume an intensity that made her tremble. He was talking, like the rest of these excited men today, about the old heathen customs of Midsummer; but she knew, as well as anything, that his words were only an excuse, and that all the time, in some queer spiritual way, he was making love to her. It was entirely a mental seduction, and that was why she was able to give herself up to it without more of a sense of guilt — that, and because it seemed to her a perfectly wicked waste for her figure to be looking so lovely and only old No-man allowed to enjoy it!

It was all done just by his nearness, just by the way he looked at her, but she remembered very well how a girl at her convent school had assured her once that it wasn't impossible for a woman actually to conceive from the mere *look* of a man with a strong spiritual personality. And this psychic yielding to him, she said to herself, was almost as sweet as if he had been actually ravishing her.

Indeed, she risked everything, it was so sweet, so much what she had longed for all her life and never come near enjoying. She risked the danger of D. seeing the rapt expression of her face; she risked the danger of committing herself irretrievably to her Black Man of Glymes; she risked the danger of killing his interest forever by abandoning herself so precipitously.

'Yes, yes!' she murmured to this huge dark wave of magnetism that was overpowering her. 'Yes,' she kept murmuring, just as the god-ravished mother of Otus and Ephialtes murmured *her* gasping acquiescence to the tide that took her. 'Yes, yes!' And she felt an indescribable exultation that her figure did please him. But there, Lordy! — as Grummer used to cry when things were at sixes and sevens — D. No-man *had* seen! Well, she must brazen it out. But she knew he'd leave Claudius at the first chance he got — well did she know him! — and come lurching over to where she stood by Urien's side.

Urien himself seemed entirely unperturbed, though he *must* have seen, just as she had, the savage look of jealousy that No-man had cast on them. But so unperturbed was he that he told her quite quietly, turning his dead-alive eyes to the door of the house to watch for Thuella's reappearance, that he didn't think she realized how passionately Thuella admired her. 'It's a rare thing,' he whispered, keeping his eyes on the door, 'and it *can* be a very tragic thing, for one girl to admire another as much as our friend admires you; and the truth is—'

'Oh, you're exaggerating, Mr Quirm!' she threw in.

'The truth is,' he went on, 'Thuella's so self-distrusting that she's got the idea she's unloved and unlovable. Don't be angry with me for what I'm saying, but if you *could* bring yourself to respond a little more, you'd be doing — But if you feel you absolutely can't, never mind — forget I've spoken of it. Sometimes it's the best we can do, to beat on the impenetrable; and if we go on doing that—' Here he suddenly raised his voice and addressed D. No-man, who *had* left Claudius, as she knew he would, and was already at their side. 'Wizzie and I are getting impatient to start,' he said. 'Can't *you* go in and get hold of Thuella?'

No-man made a queer little bow. 'Gladly,' he threw out in a high-pitched artificial tone that evidently covered a spasm of irritation; and he kept repeating the word 'gladly' as he disappeared into the house.

But they were off at last; and as they passed under the projecting windows of the King's Arms, Wizzie grew aware of a wish leaping up within her that she had, after all, brought Lovie with them. Her spirits rose high as she walked by No-man's side behind Urien and Thuella. She had at least been spared any awkward crisis this time. But the sun was so warm, the traffic so quiescent, the streets so deserted, that it seemed a shame for little Lovie not to be getting the benefit of it all, particularly as Jenny, who, like Nance, was going to cook an elaborate Sunday dinner, would have to keep the child with her in the hot kitchen.

'I'm half-inclined', she murmured to D. No-man, 'to go back for Lovie. It wouldn't take long. I'd soon catch you up.'

But No-man scouted the idea. 'You ought to have a holiday now and then,' he said, 'and besides, I *like* to see you so free and so charming in those things!'

Wizzie cast a complacent glance downward. Yes, the thin grey jersey she was wearing, the little grey cap, and above all the tight-fitting flannel trousers, were by far the most becoming attire she had ever put on! She felt deliciously at ease in them as she advanced with her springy step. If it hadn't been for thinking of Lovie in the kitchen, her elated mood, now that D. had got over his spasm of jealousy, would have been without alloy this perfect morning.

Oh, how superior she felt to Thuella! Thuella, in her yellow frock and absurdly flapping hat, which at the slightest breeze she had to clutch with her hand, was acting silly to put on that affected way of walking, swaying her hips and flanks like that. That was the way girls walked when they wanted to attract men. There was nothing in it but the obvious fact that you had a slim waist and a woman's back. It was all very well to sway like that on the stage. Thel ought to know better than to do it on the street. Oh, how she longed to jump on a horse just as she was! She would have shown them what a girl's body could do.

How slow they were to get off! They were all at the Corn-Exchange now, and were waiting, before crossing over into South Street, to watch some soldiers, still some way off, who were marching down the hill from the barracks.

Suddenly D. No-man turned to her with a troubled face. 'I've left my stick,' he said. 'I've left my stick in my room.'

The babyish way he announced this, and his gravity about such a trifle, annoyed Wizzie. 'Well, if you've left it, you've left it,' she said. 'You can't keep everyone waiting.'

He looked at her with an expression of outrage. 'But you know perfectly well—' he began. The worst of it was that the others all seemed aware of the situation, for they glanced with amusement from No-man to her and from her to No-man.

At that moment the Salvation Army band, which had been collecting its forces at the end of North Square, began to advance to where they were standing, striking up, as it did so, a gay, beautifully conducted tune, whose stirring sound, rolling over them and gathering weight against the tower of St Peter's, brought a dark flush of pleasure to Claudius's face, and even caused Teucer Wye to open his mouth and tap his cane on the stones in sympathetic rhythm.

No-man made a move to be off under cover of this distraction, but she caught him by his sleeve.

'What does it matter, *once in a way?'* she whispered. 'Claudius hasn't got a stick. Mr Quirm hasn't got a stick. These manias of yours can't *always* come first. You *can't* keep all these people waiting. You just *can't*! I've never heard of such a thing.'

‘Oh, I want the *Observer*!’ cried the Professor at this juncture, in a piercing voice. ‘Paper! Paper! Have you got the *Observer* there, young lady?’

His sharp cry caused a girl who was riding past on a bicycle with a pile of Sunday papers to stop so suddenly that if she had not been a very active and limber person she would have fallen over. Wizzie had seen her often before, and, with a connoisseur’s eye in these delicate matters, considered her to possess the most beautiful figure, second to her own, in all Dorchester. ‘She likes the feeling of riding her bicycle’, she said to herself, as she watched her extract the required paper for Mr Wye, ‘just as I did my horse. And she’s got an interesting face too. Oh, so No-man must get *his* paper too — and how silly when we’re going to Maiden Castle! But I hope he’ll forget about the stick. *I* shan’t wait for him.’ And her thoughts took on, with regard to No-man’s stick, that curious substitute for maternal irritability which the youngest woman can acquire when she’s grown used to the sharing of bed and board.

‘Yes, she *has* a lovely figure,’ she said to herself, as the girl jumped lightly on her bicycle and rode away. ‘No wonder No-man’s watching her. I wonder if he *always* buys his Sunday paper from her.’ And then, as they all fixed on the departing bicyclist the sort of vague stare that a group on an esplanade might fix upon a vanishing yacht, she heard Teucer Wye say, ‘I wouldn’t bother to go back now, No-man. What happened was probably intended. If you’d brought your stick you’d no doubt have lost it. I took *this* stick once to Chesil Beach, and if it hadn’t been for Thuella, who ran down between the waves, I shouldn’t have it now.’

‘Would you like me to go back with you, No-man?’ put in Claudius, approaching them. ‘I’m not so necessary up there on the hill as these people, and I’d be glad—’

But a new encounter had just been effected which kept them still standing in uncertainty on the curb-stones of St Peter's. This was Thuella's accosting of a stalwart and robust old man, bearded like the pictures of Sir John Falstaff, and looking as if he could confute a whole consistory of lawn-sleeved bishops, like Falstaff's prototype, Oldcastle the Lollard.

It was this old gentleman's pastime, in the later hours of his well-earned retirement, to aid informally in the distribution of the *Echo;* but on Sunday morning, bereft of this distraction, he could only watch from a respectful distance the lively proceedings of the young purveyor of metropolitan news as she glided in and out of the old squares and alleys.

Thuella was a friend of this aged man whose heroic Gargantuan laugh, disposing sardonically of all human weakness, would resound from above his sheaf of *Echoes* as they exchanged their badinage.

It was this old man's reiterated laugh, a laugh that certainly refused to be bothered with any nice punctilios of sentiment, that now blent with the tramp of the soldiers from the barracks and the intermittent drum of the band from North Square.

'I wish Lovie was here!' our friend thought, her fingers still clutched tight to the sleeve of No-man's coat. 'It's nice in this town on Sunday.' And while they all waited for the soldiers to pass into the church and for the band to disappear down High East Street, there stole into Wizzie's heart, forcing its way through her irritation with No-man's fuss about his stick, a new and curious feeling.

The girl herself, with a feminine instinct to reduce all lovely sensations to something personal, linked it at once with the fact that, though he remained by Thuella's side in her colloquy with the laughing philosopher, Nancy Quirm's husband kept turning his great black head — the man wore his usual dirty clothes and in spite of the hot day had no hat — in her direction.

‘He likes me better than Thuella,’ she said to herself. ‘He talks and walks with her, but he looks at me.’ And it was the delicious perception of a growing attraction between herself and this singular person that she took for granted must explain the sudden rush of happiness that so unexpectedly warmed her blood.

But it had, she admitted to herself, something to do, too, with the day and the hour. Never had the old town seemed so friendly to her as it did just then! It was partly the absence of the weekday crowds. It was partly the soldiers and the Salvation Army. Her physical sympathy with the tender contours of that young woman on the bicycle, and even the white-bearded old man’s stentorian laughter, may have had something to do with it, too.

But what she felt was beyond all these. It was a sensation she had never had since her mother died, a sensation of being at home in the world and not an outcast. Dorchester seemed full of nice, kind, warm-hearted people, whose presence — most of them, it was true, hidden in the depths of these old stone houses — radiated a pleasant warmth that rose like unseen incense into the warm air. The silence too, now that the marching feet were gone and the drums departed, seemed to her like Lovie’s breathing when she was asleep!

Was there, after all, a chance — one in a thousand — that she might, without deserting Lovie, without an agitating break with D. No-man, get back into her circus life?

‘He likes me! He likes me!’ her nerves kept chanting, as she glanced shyly at Nancy’s husband. She was unwilling — just as No-man himself had once been, only for a very different reason — to let her thoughts about the Black Man of Glymes go far, go an inch beyond the vague stirring in her senses which the feeling that they were aware of each other produced.

What was going on, she wondered, between D. No-man and her mysterious Black Man that had made them so much more intimate during the last month? It must have to do, she decided, with the fact that they were both working for Mr Cumber. Buy why was D. No-man always so funny when she questioned him about Urien? She hadn't questioned him much. She had been shy herself over that. But there always seemed some queer barrier that rose up between them when his name was mentioned.

Was there any truth in what Jenny had said about Nance being too fond of D. No-man? Oh, Nance was a silly! You couldn't tell with people like that. Nance was one of those women who rub themselves like a cat against men's elbows. But she couldn't imagine herself being jealous of Nance. She knew her old D. too well. He didn't like warm soft women. He liked them thin and he liked them boyish and hard and with slender legs. She knew well what he liked, for she'd noticed the type he always stared after on the street. Thel came near it. She knew he'd like to make love to Thel; but she wasn't jealous — not really jealous — of Thel over *him*. It was Thel's friendship with the Black Man that got on her nerves. But she was sure all that talk about painting wearied Urien.

'All right, then! I'll come without it. I *could have* caught you up; but if you feel like that about it — let it go! There, my dear, take my arm. I won't run away.'

Why did D. No-man have to say all this so loudly? Did he want everyone to know how trying he could be? But she took his arm, and tried to be as sweet to him as she could. She smiled at him, as much as to say: 'Look at Thel fussing over that old man!' And with her free hand, while she leant on him with the other, she pushed her jersey under her broad leather belt, calling his attention to the prancing horse on its polished buckle, and hoping all the while that Urien was watching these intimacies.

The little party walked down South Street in a loose casual group. They could really have walked side by side down the middle of the road, so quiet was the town and so few were the people visible. The Fordington bells had stopped; but those in St Peter's tower were ringing beautifully, and their sound made Wizzie's mood grow tenderer and tenderer. 'It's funny how I like holding D.'s arm', she thought, 'and looking at Urien! It makes me feel safe. I really don't know whether I'd *want* to hold Urien's arm. I'd be so nervous, it would spoil everything.'

Up and down on the sound of St Peter's bells her spirit floated like a boat on a brimming tide. How massive and compact all the houses were in this old town! How they seemed to settle their patient stones into the solid earth, just as if they were searching for the foundations of older buildings, who, in their turn, were reaching down to yet older ones.

'Mercy! I believe I'd even enjoy Icen Way today,' she thought. 'I must be getting soft like Nance. What a lot of people there must be just out of bed and having breakfast! The houses have a look as if they were full of people.' And the fancy came to her, as she walked along clutching D.'s arm, that what made the town so still was purely the sound of these bells. Everything was listening to them. Not only the people, but their furniture; and not only the furniture, but the geraniums and calceolarias in the window-boxes!

'I used to feel like this', she thought, 'waking up in that house in London when I was little. I used to feel like it when I played with my doll's house on the landing where the blue vase stood, as if everything was yours and you belonged to everything — to the stones outside and the chairs and tables inside, and the playthings in their boxes, and the fires in their kitchens, and the cats on their rugs, and the canaries in their cages, and the pots on their kitchen-ranges! It's like the air and the warmth in the air knowing about you, and everything being nice because of that, and because of the rooks cawing, and because of those milk-bottles being outside that door! It's the quietness of it, with these crowded houses listening to every step, and the pavements hot with sunshine, and the roads all still, enjoying themselves, enjoying a little peace.'

Her mounting happiness became so intense as she went along — gazing at Urien's huge slouching back and dusky head, and thinking to herself, 'He isn't listening to what Thel's saying. He's thinking of me!' — that, when they reached the South Walks, she felt, since Lovie wasn't here to be hugged, she'd have to do something to please D. No-man!

'I don't mind waiting for you here, D.' she said. 'I couldn't in the town. Beside, it bothered them all, your going back. But I'll sit down over there. You can run round by your Icen Way. *I* don't mind! I really honestly don't. We'll soon overtake them. I do wish to goodness we *had* brought Lovie!'

No-man removed his cap and wiped his forehead with his hand. He dropped her arm and stood still. He looked perplexed and worried, hesitating what to do, miserable without his great cudgel, but evidently unwilling to leave her.

'Well?' she repeated. 'Aren't you going? There's a seat over there. You won't be long. We'll soon catch them up.'

She looked steadily at him, and their eyes clung to each other. They were standing by the railings, close to the cenotaph. The others were already crossing the road, Claudius and Mr Wye in front, Urien and Thuella following them.

A faint scent of sun-warmed foliage reached them from the avenue, while a middle-aged citizen with a rose in his button-hole and a big hymn-book in his hand cast what he evidently hoped appeared a brotherly and a Christian glance at Wizzie's leather belt and tight boy's trousers.

The bells of St Peter's were still audible, but their sound diffused itself here in the warm dusty sunshine and became at once more than a sound and less than a sound.

Neither of the two seemed to wish to be the first to look away; but the girl didn't feel as if either of them were thinking solely of the other. They each seemed to be looking *through* the other, down some long receding vista of future days.

Almost as instinctively as if No-man had been Lovie, the girl suddenly put out her hand to straighten the collar of his coat. There must have been something about this natural gesture that struck the man as unusual, for the character of the expression in his eyes completely changed, and in its changing caused a change in hers too. They no longer looked through each other, thinking of their own lives. They looked *at* each other, wondering, confused, embarrassed, and with a sort of tentative shyness.

The bells at this point changed their tempo, no doubt to indicate that there were only five minutes left before the beginning of the morning service, while a couple of tall choir-boys, hurrying past them, cast the same sort of covetous look at Wizzie's perfectly modelled hips and flanks as the older church-goer had done.

The girl herself, so accustomed had she grown in the circus to these anonymous recognitions of the desirability of her person, didn't give the boys' clinging glance a thought, but she detected in a second how a magnetic current passed into No-man's erotic nerve, and well did the girl know the appraising look with which he surveyed her from the collar of her jersey to her belt and thence down her side. She knew that at that moment he would have been ready to burn a whole page of *Mary Channing* on condition that he might fondle her then and there to his heart's content!

But she frowned and sighed and looked away. Their significant moment had quite gone, killed by those choir-boys' effrontery, but the very last thing she wanted just then was to give him an opportunity for that cold-blooded dalliance which seemed the only passion of which he was capable.

Oh, she knew him so well! For then, after a nervous opening and shutting of the fingers of his right hand, as if to grasp the handle of that stick he had forgotten, he gave a little jerk to her wrist and whispered hurriedly: 'Come back with me, sweetheart! They'll not worry; they'll just go on; and we'll catch them up before they get to Maiden Castle; or, if we don't, we'll find them there. Come along, my pet!'

The dark wave of anger that mounted up in her against him at this moment showed itself in her eyes. Was this the way he was going to take her to his lodging in High East Street *for the first time*? Just because he hadn't seen her before in jersey and trousers!

He had hardly touched her hand when he dropped it hurriedly, catching sight of her face. 'You don't want to? Oh well, oh well — then I won't go myself. To the devil with my stick, sweetheart! Don't 'ee look like that. I won't go at all! Come on, we'll soon catch them up. I didn't mean to spoil the day like this — and such a perfect day as it is! Come on, old girl.'

Wizzie turned with him in silence, and they followed the path beside the row of villas that border the Weymouth road as far as the brewery.

It was impossible for them to avoid turning to look at the familiar Fairfield when they came opposite to it. There was a great show of some kind there; but it was one of the ordinary big English circuses, and the name of its proprietor — a thoroughly English name — was displayed in large letters on its whirligigs and caravans. A curious Sunday calm hung over the glittering engine and the great show-tent, a somewhat desolate calm, characteristic of most places of human entertainment when under a temporary religious ban. A few men were strolling about among the closed booths, and a group of children was peering at them through the rails, hoping evidently to snatch some unofficial glimpse of the open-mouthed lions and tigers advertised on the bill-board.

‘I expect our friends have left that foreigner’, said D. No-man, ‘and gone back to a gypsy life again. I expect your foreign circus itself has gone back where it came from — to Prague perhaps!’

Wizzie quickened her steps. She could just see, a good way ahead, over against the railings of Maumbury Rings, the slouching form of the bare-headed Urien and Thuella’s yellow dress and big-brimmed hat.

The sight of the Fairfield and the familiar circus erections brought back to her her insane desperation at Lovie’s birth. But these things couldn’t hurt her as they had done once. Away with them into the furnace of foul memories!

Her anger against D. No-man ebbed away rapidly as they went on; and they gradually drew nearer to Urien and Thuella.

They were at the Amphitheatre now, and the sunshine lay warm and bright on the slope of the near bank of that ancient circle of cruel sport and inhuman punishment. The man at her side gave the place a hurried excited glance, and then turned sharp upon her, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets in an obvious effort to forget the absence of his familiar stick.

‘Do you know, Wizz,’ he began, and then, as he always did when his mind was full of something — and she sighed as he did it now — he stood stock still, so that she was forced to pause too. ‘I’m going to make this old place of cruelty’, he went on, ‘such a wound on the conscience of everyone that the ripples of what I say’ll go on expanding till — till—’

‘Till what?’ she said, watching him with her usual puzzled frown.

‘Till they touch a few horrors of *our* time, my dear, such as—’ He stopped, while an expression she had never noticed before came into his face. ‘Do you know’, he went on slowly, and as if it wasn’t easy for him to say the words, ‘that these mad scientists torture animals in their laboratories for what they call knowledge, just as the Romans did for what they called pleasure?’

It was the tone of his voice rather than the gist of his words that made the girl’s eyes grow startled and round. ‘Yes, and our stupid public opinion is just as indifferent — just *as gulled into* indifference — as it was then, and as it was when ten thousand people came here to see my Mary burnt!’

It was curious how she couldn’t help the skin under a part of her boy’s clothes turning into what is called goose-flesh under his words. He had talked to her about vivisection before, but never quite in this tone. Not that her mind was impressed. It was her body that felt that spasm of shivering. In her mind she reassured herself. She remembered the extravagant heroics that the girl in her story-book had to put up with from *her* eloquent lover.

Wizzie’s conscience in these things was not, it must be admitted, any striking compliment to the influence of that early bringing-up of which she was so proud. She was no fool, but in certain directions her mind was almost as undeveloped as Popsy’s.

D. No-man sighed. He had evidently transgressed in this outburst some long-standing rule of his, and the girl felt vaguely that she hadn’t distinguished herself in his eyes by the feeble ‘Yes, D. yes, I see!’ with which she received his words.

They moved on again, but their delay had put a considerable distance between them and that slouching figure and the yellow dress by its side.

Indeed, by the time they reached the cemetery gates Urien and Thuella had turned into the Maiden Castle road and were out of sight.

Opposite the entrance to the cemetery, however, her incorrigible companion stopped again. ‘If he mentions Mary Channing now’, the girl thought, ‘I’ll just run on after Urien, and he’ll have to catch me by running!’

But it was about Urien, not Mary Channing, that the man wanted to talk to her; and she listened with some apprehension. ‘Have you noticed anything...’ he began very gravely, while the irrelevant thought flitted like a swift bird through the girl’s head: ‘He’s never taken me to see his mother’s grave, any more than he’s taken me to his room! He treats me like his tart, not like his wife.’

‘Noticed what?’

‘Anything about me and Enoch Quirm?’

‘You and Urien?’

‘Yes.’

‘What about you and Urien?’

‘Have you noticed anything lately, very lately — anything different?’

‘You’ve gone about a lot together. You’ve taken a fancy to each other. But why not? You gave him a share of the Cumber work. You got him out of a ticklish place. He’s grateful, I expect.’

‘I don’t mean that. I mean something else, Wizz.’

There was no need for him to take her by the wrist now, for she had lifted up her face with breathless interest and was giving him a tremulous and concentrated hearing. ‘Is he’, she thought, ‘going to warn me that Urien and I are too thick? Is he going to tell me that those Glymes people have begun to talk? I don’t care if they have! I’ll tell him what Jenny says about Nance and him.’

‘You remember that time in February, Wizz, when we went to Glymes and he gave me that head for my bed — the thing you hated so when I put it on our chimney-piece?’

‘Yes, yes, of course. Go *on*, for pity’s sake!’ For some reason she felt a fantastic alarm at what he might say. The idea that he was going to scold her about Urien died down. But she still felt a tension of her nerves that made her extremely uncomfortable. ‘Tell me, tell me quick! Don’t torment me, D.! What is it?’

‘You remember how I’ve said that you and I are so like each other in so many ways?’

The girl nodded. She would have made a wry face at this point if she hadn’t been so intensely interested, for it was to the tune of these precious resemblances that he made love to her in the way she disliked most.

‘And that it seems like a kind of fate bringing us together that we both should have lost our mothers and never seen our fathers?’

‘I saw *my* father!’ she cried; and at the word she felt an almost complete liberation from the nervous tension that had been mounting up in her. In her relief she permitted her eyes to wander over the crowded cemetery at their side, wondering where D.’s mother’s grave was, among such a multitude, and what *her* mother would have thought of D. had she ever met him!

‘But you don’t *remember* seeing him,’ argued No-man stubbornly, evidently prepared to let the most life-and-death subject go when the question arose of his ideal resemblance to his Bronze Age captive.

Wizzie shook her head and smiled at him happily. She felt so relieved that what he was making all this fuss about had only to do with their parents, and had no connection with her interest in Urien, that she no longer hung on his words. In fact, as he went on to tell her about his mother, and about some affair his mother had had with Urien before Nance came on the scene, her attention began to wander.

All sorts of odd people were drifting past them now, coming out of the town while their families were in church, to see what was to be seen of this famous discovery. Even to Wizzie's unspeculative eye it seemed as if this discovery, whatever it might be, was attracting all the queerest, all the most eccentric, all the least respectable Dorchester people towards Maiden Castle! Whatever it was that had been discovered, it was certainly something that was stirring the dregs, so to speak, of the old town.

The warm day, no doubt, had a lot to do with it. The warm day had a lot to do, too, with the longing glances that so many of the young men who passed them by allowed to rest as long as they decently might, and even longer, upon her soft tight flannel trousers. It *had* pleased her to buy those boy's trousers on Saturday night and to pull them on before the looking-glass this morning while D. was taking his walk. He hadn't seen her in them *alone* for one second, for when he came back from his walk the Glymes party had arrived, and they had all had breakfast in Jenny's kitchen.

But she hadn't worn them to tantalize D. or to make men follow her with their eyes. They pleased her because they made her feel like she used to when balanced on her old horse's back. The nearer her clothes resembled tights, the more was she conscious of her body as the instrument of her art. It was partly because her jersey and trousers showed off her figure to such perfection that she'd felt so happy this morning. Not for men's eyes — or for women's eyes either — had she worn them, *but to feel herself*, to feel the leap and bound and balance and poise of her musical instrument, even if fate didn't let her play it!

And now, drawn by this mysterious discovery at Maiden Castle, all the most shameless young men in the town seemed drifting past her, while D.

went droning on about Urien having lain with Cornelia Smith, and about old Smith having known of it, and about Mrs Smith and Urien being cousins, and how both of them were natives of Wales, and how — But the ‘how’ she would have liked explained was how men’s way of talking managed to bring down a pall of dulness on women’s minds.

But men were all like that! The nuns had looked at each other when their priest was talking. She and Grummer had looked at each other a thousand times when Old Funky was talking. She and Jenny had looked at each other when Claudius was talking, and how often must Thel and Nance have looked at each other in that dirty study at Glymes!

While she kept saying ‘yes... yes... yes’ as D. went on — and he seemed surprised she wasn’t more astonished when he told her so solemnly about his mother having let Urien embrace her in the bed with the heraldic heads — she was more interested in the people who passed just then than in Urien’s early love-affairs; and she noticed how silent these young men became in the intensity of their desire for her. She noticed how they stopped talking and laughing — just stared in dazed absorption till they had passed. None of them, however, dared to look back; and it wasn’t as if D. had his great stick! No, she couldn’t understand their not looking back — but let them go! It wasn’t for men, not for *any* man, she’d put on these things — not even for her Black Man of Glymes. For herself, alone!

It must have been because it was Sunday that all these men were in their best clothes. But they looked as if they were going to a wedding! They seemed solemn and yet excited. What could there be in these tedious excavations to attract so many? And they were mostly Dorchester people. She knew many of them by sight.

But what was this? Mercy! What was D. telling her now? Her mouth as well as her eyes opened as the import of his words reached her, and her hands, which had been rather awkwardly pressed low down into her boy's pockets, began unconsciously to clasp each other, squeezing her knuckles white.

'But — you are — *sure*, D.?' she gasped in a low voice. 'They may have had a child, but are you sure it *was you?'*

No-man, who had been astonished and a little hurt at her previous calmness, couldn't prevent a flicker of satisfaction in the presence of her agitation, the satisfaction a person naturally feels when startling news produces its proper effect.

'There can be no possible doubt,' he said dryly. 'The man's my father. I've got to make the best of it.'

'Do you — like him?'

No-man gave vent to a grim chuckle. 'It's not a question of *that*, my dear. It's a question of — It's a — different question, Wizz.'

'And Jenny says Nance has got fond of *you;* and I—'

He caught her up. 'And you, I suppose, have got, as you say, fond of him! It seems a peculiarity of girls to do that. Thuella appears altogether—'

He stopped abruptly, aware of the deep trouble in her face. Then he laid his hand on her shoulder. 'Don't 'ee take it too hard, old girl,' he whispered gently. 'Perhaps it's just as well you *do* like him since I'm his son.'

'Oh, why, why didn't you tell me this before?'

He made a vague gesture of helplessness.

'You knew in February, didn't you?' she said sharply.

'No, I didn't know then.'

'But *that* was when — wasn't it?'

'I didn't know then.'

She was silent, letting her eyes wander to the headstones that were visible through the iron gates.

‘I don’t see’, he said slowly, ‘why you should take this so hard. It’s me — it’s I — not you — who’s got to deal with it.’

Her reply came quickly. ‘You ought to have told me from the start. You’re not open with me, D. — not only about him, but about everything. Oh, why did I ever—’ And her mouth drew down ominously. ‘You’ve not been open with me,’ she repeated, swallowing the lump in her throat.

‘Were you so open with me, then, my girl? A lot you ever told me about —’

‘Stop!’ she cried sharply. ‘No more of that! I won’t *have* it — do you understand? If I agreed to live with you — if I went on living with you after I found—’

‘Found *what?* Go on! We may as well have it all out, now we’ve begun. This isn’t a bad place for you and me to come to an understanding. I don’t know whether I ever told you, but it was here — by their graves down there — that I first met Nance, before we found you — and those people — behind the tent—’

She gave him one startled outraged look, a look from the depths of her woman’s nature. ‘D.!’ she murmured in a different voice, a subdued, weak, unsteady voice. ‘I never thought you would speak of *that* in this tone.’

His face became drawn and tense, and his mouth twitched. ‘You’ve never talked freely to me,’ he said. You’ve never taken me into your confidence. You’ve kept that for your friend Jenny. Even *now* I don’t know — I’ve not the least idea — what’s really going on in your mind. You keep yourself as far from me as if — as if our room — our bed — our life together, were no more to you than — than your life with *them*, before I took you away.’

A spectator of this scene would have found it pathetic, the way in which in her boy’s costume she made the little movements that a woman makes at a moment of stress. She herself was unconscious of what she did with her hands, feeling for her pockets, fumbling at her belt, plucking at the front of her jersey.

She knew him so little that her ignorance closed in upon her self-pity, narrowing its channel, building a barrier between them. She didn't even know — since in her self-colloquies she had got into the habit of assuming that the only bond between them was his cold-blooded sensuality — why it was that his words, his tone, hurt her like this, or why, beneath her anger and grievance, a strange cold lost feeling began to invade her heart. Some deep instinctive assumption she had slipped into with him, far below her nervous irritations, began to crack and fall apart, as if that familiar Weymouth road under her feet had broken into fissures and yawning crevices.

It never occurred to her to suspect that the sweet exciting glow about Urien's interest in her was like the dallying of a rock-plant with the caresses of the wooing sun — dalliance that was impossible save for its root in the stone out of which it grew.

Her pride was so much greater than her knowledge, her conscious understanding so far inferior to her blind feminine instincts, that even now, in spite of the deathly chill that invaded her under his unexpected attack, she clung obstinately with her story-book intelligence to the fixed idea that there was no real love between them, that real love belonged to that picture-show world of her imagination, that world of magnetic glances from mysterious personages like the Glymes man, that world where she was brought back from her circus triumphs by a passionate admirer's limousine to a resplendent Lovie under a rosy porch.

'So Nance is fond of *me*, is she?' he brought out with bitter sarcasm, 'and *you* find yourself quite upset when you know who the man is you're so attracted to. And don’t think I’ve not seen it — I saw it on Candlemas Night, when he made that stuff you and Thel liked drinking! It’s unlucky, isn’t it, that he likes Thuella so much? But come on; let’s hurry and catch them up! I’ve known, all the time, how annoyed you’ve been to hang back for me, with such exciting people ahead. I saw why you didn’t want me to get my stick. Come on; let’s catch them up! He’ll love to have you with him as well as Thuella.’

No-man might just as well have been repeating his own name— ‘Dud, Dud, Dud, Dud, Dud’ — over and over again as indulging in all this elaborate sarcasm. Since his first words, she hadn’t listened to a thing he said. That deadly chill air from the crack in the security under her feet had numbed her whole being. She didn’t care what he thought, or what he said, or for any reasonings he used. All she wanted was for the ground under her feet to stop swaying and cracking, to stop letting through those death-airs. So she kept staring and staring at him, her eyes brimming, her throat swelling, her lips sucked in against her teeth, and her nose, for all the sunshine that played upon it, showing white and pinched.

He must have seen that his sarcasms were paper darts sinking into a wooden post, for he suddenly changed his tune. He began talking to her in a low whisper, a whisper into which he threw every grievance against her that had been accumulating since November.

‘How far have you gone with him, you and Thuella? Or perhaps I ought to say: how far have you let *him* go? It’s a shame I don’t feel proud of a father — isn’t it? — who likes ’em in pairs, like partridges. But how far has this thing gone? I knew there was something. You didn’t fool me *altogether*. But all these things are so laughable, aren’t they, that it’s hard to be serious about them. But you didn’t fool me altogether! But what’s so amusing about it is to think that he was just the same to Mother as he is to you! That’s what

I’ve been thinking about lately — the amusingness of it all — *his* body and hers, and now yours — and how funny that both Mother and you should like men with hairy chests, and men who aren’t particularly keen on washing. *Can’t you speak?* I know it’s a shock to you to find out how old he is — well over sixty, anyway — I’m the one to know that much — *but can’t you speak?’*

Perhaps it did begin now to reach her wits, through the miserable numbness into which that death-cold air — that feeling of being lost, of being left outside, of having no place in the system of things — had plunged her, that if her D. really had no room for her any more, that if she’d killed something that she had all along taken for granted without knowing that she took it so (something to which in her thoughts she had even denied existence), it *was* queer that he should be in such a towering passion! Perhaps it did begin to reach the woman in her, the mother of Lovie, that a man didn’t grow suddenly frantic like this, or see red, as they said at the circus, unless you were pretty important to him.

At any rate, she straightened herself where she stood, clasped her hands behind her back, swallowed her tears, and faced him boldly. ‘I — simply — don’t — know — what you’re — talking about, D.’ she said slowly. ‘There’s *nothing at all* between Urien and me, and let me tell you this too: you’ve no right to say that there’s anything between him and Thel! He’s a peculiar man, he’s a wonderful man; and I don’t deny he’s been kind to me and to Thel too. What’s the matter with you, D.? What’s come over you, that you act like this? You’ve never done it before. You’ve never before interfered with me. You’ve let me have everything I wanted. And now you suddenly turn on me like a madman! If you didn’t want me to go to Glymes, if you didn’t want me to see Mr Quirm, why didn’t you tell me so? I was happy enough in Friary Lane with Jenny. I didn’t need to go to Glymes, or to take Lovie to Glymes. What *is* it? What's come over you? You must know perfectly well in your heart that I've not let any man but you — old *or* young — touch me since I've belonged to you. Has Jenny been putting things into your head? Do be sensible, D. *Don't* get such wild ideas!'

No-man's face changed a lot during this appeal. It lost its tension. Something resembling the pallid ghost of a smile flickered across it.

And Wizzie, whose penetration into the depths of human feeling had sharpened a good deal during this agitating scene, had the wit to see that he believed her, and the wit, too, to see that this reassurance was an incredible relief to him! Who on earth had put it into his head that she had gone such lengths with the Black Man of Glymes? As to what he told her about Urien and him and their being father and son, she simply didn't believe it. D. *couldn't* be so much younger than Urien. In all his ways D. was like an old man. Secretly she'd suspected from the first that he was much older than he pretended, just as Old Funky was much younger. No — no. Urien was up to something with D. like everybody else was! D. was the most hopelessly stupid man in the whole world. Even Mr Wye, that silly old pantaloon, was as clever as Dan Leno, compared to D.

Each one of these thoughts, as she watched No-man's recovery of his normal self-control, carried a margin with it, a nimbus, a moon-circle of shy evasive feelings, much more tenuous than thought. Among these subtle feelings there began to predominate a certain protective instinct towards this easily deceived man, as if he were a sort of elderly Lovie.

'Well, kid, let's go now, anyway. We can talk as we go,' he had murmured awkwardly; and it was to the rhythm of their two pairs of feet on the Maiden Castle road that he gave her the rest of his evidence about the Glymes man and tried to show her that there could be no mistake in his conclusion. To all this she scarcely listened. What she kept wondering was how he had got it lodged in his mind that there was something between her and Urien.

With her fixed idea of his pathetic stupidity it seemed to her unthinkable that he could really have noticed her girlish tremors in Urien's presence. Her relief at his faith in her denial, the closing up of that terrible crack in the ground under her feet, her surprised recognition that he *could* get angry with her in the jealous fashion of an ordinary lover, all these things so restored her good spirits that she began to feel not only much wiser and cleverer than her old D. but easier in her mind about the excited feelings that the Glymes man had aroused.

The heroine of her magazine story found it perfectly natural to be interested in two men at the same time. But she had not thought of old D. as a man at all in that sense! She had lived in her irritations with him, in her grievances against him. She had just taken him as an inevitable background. But this sudden outburst of his had brought her background to life, had revealed it as being more to her than she thought. She shuddered even yet when she recalled that lost sensation, that cold draught out of empty space which had come when this basis of her life had heaved and trembled. When she was standing just now by those cemetery gates, she had had a revelation as to herself. Not even now, not even after the shock of that weird panic, did she say to herself that she loved her old D. It was still different from that. In some queer way what she felt about him was mixed up with her feeling for Lovie.

Indeed, if Wizzie's chronicler were to be absolutely veracious, he would have to convey the curious fact that not only did she link up D. No-man with Old Funky's child but — such was the realism of her mind — with the familiar feel of the handle of the child's perambulator!

For the space of a few seconds — and her memory of it took the form of two small headstones and a squat cypress — the shock of the ground yawning beneath her feet had frozen to dead ice the sensual glow of her excitement about Urien. But now, with the bad moment over, and D. No-man apparently reassured, that perilous sweetness in her veins began slowly to make its presence felt again. It began to come back even while she gave her absent-minded replies to what her companion was saying, and, as usual, he was talking about the excavations; but though she did her best to show interest, the sight of those two figures they were now gradually overtaking kept distracting her, do what she could to follow his words.

It worried her, the tricks her mind played, as she gazed at those two forms, the lumbering dark one and the slender swaying light one, outlined against the distant promontory of sun-misted turf.

She kept trying to remember what Urien had said when he begged her to be kind to Thuella, something about beating against the impenetrable; but No-man's rambling allusions to these eternal excavations projected an image of a jagged hole in a great slope of darkness, out of which the two forms in front of them kept rising up, like the clouds in Thuella's picture, luridly entwined with each other, while she was out in the cold.

It was not long, however, before No-man, captivated as he had been all that morning by the appeal of her boy's clothes, slipped his arm about her waist and began a sort of perambulatory love-making as they moved forward. She soon felt his fingers sliding from her waist to her side, and under his touch the swing of her limbs as she walked became a mechanical response to his amorous pressure. Cold as she was left as a rule by No-man's caresses, there was something in the impregnating warmth of this June day that made her feel abnormally receptive, and thus it came about, for what was really the first time in all these months, that this pressure of his hand against her side as she moved proved to be what no toyings or dallyings in the secure retreat of their Friary Lane room had ever been — a real provocation to her senses.

To the end of her life she never forgot that walk to the foot of Maiden Castle. All the way along that straight white hedgeless road, as it crossed the unenclosed pasture-lands and arable lands which rolled off on both sides to their remote upland horizons, she yielded herself to a delicious orgy of nervous sensuality. Her relief in escaping from that ice-cold feeling of being an outcast in the world endowed the pressure of No-man's satyrish fingers with an unwonted human warmth.

And now that the danger had passed, or seemed to have passed, she allowed free scope to the relaxed sensations that Urien seemed to have the power of creating. She lay back upon No-man's support, upon No-man's reliability, just as night by night since last November she had lain in his arms in that room at Jenny's; but from the snug security of this easy asylum, just as if No-man's had been the 'everlasting arms' of her childhood's deity, she gave herself up without the least flicker of remorse to her obsession for Enoch Quirm.

But what was that? Her companion's voice, piercing the languorous trance of her wanton feelings, was talking now about something different from these diggings for dead idols.

'May I ask you something, something very particular, my precious?' he whispered, pulling her so close to him that she had to skip a step or two to get into rhythm with his strides. And then, taking her yielding person as a symbol of a yielded personality, he admitted that what he would give a great deal to know, if she didn't mind telling him — but if she *did*, she must just say so, and he wouldn't be offended — was whether, if she *had* by any chance got fond of Urien or had had what they call an affair with Urien, she would have felt a curious loathing for such an entanglement now he'd told her who the man was.

'You mean, who *you* are,' she said with rather a silly little laugh, but, feeling reassured as she did now, she felt it hard to be serious.

'Don't 'ee try and be funny, child!' he retorted. 'If it *isn't* as sickening to me as it would be to some, it isn't very nice. You mustn't think I'm entirely philosophical about it — I mean, that I'm his son and he's my father.'

'No, dear. I know how you feel.'

'But would *you* have felt upset over it, Wizz, if you had — I know you haven't, but if you had — let him make love to you?'

'I don't see—'

'You mean you'd feel the same as if we weren't related at all?'

'I don't see—'

'You don't see that it makes any difference?' He looked at her gravely, half-humorously. 'I always thought *I* was pretty detached in things like this, but on my soul, old girl, you beat me at it! I suppose it's only my bookishness, but when I think of those old Greek plays making so much of —'

'Of what, D.? What on earth are you talking about now? Gracious! I've never read a Greek play in my life. You'd better talk to Mr Wye! Popsy told me she knew a father and son who lived with the same girl for years. She was his stepmother, of course, and there used to be rows; but in the end, when the father died, he left them all his money, and Popsy said the girl wasn't so nice to him when the old man was gone as she was before; and she never would marry him.'

No-man couldn't help smiling at this. 'But what would your convent people have thought, Wizz?'

'I'm sure *I* don't know! Not the same as your old Greeks anyway!'

A flock of starlings swept down upon the edge of the field at their side where there was some newly sprouting corn, and then, disturbed by their advance, whirled away again with a confused chattering, the sunshine heavy on their swaying mass of clumsy wings.

A man whose occupation it was impossible to guess, but whose attire was neutral, his expression impenetrable, his tie modest, his boots polished, his hands in his pockets, overtook them at this juncture, walking with brisk steps, his eyes on the road. No sooner had he passed them than he began whistling, in a faint flat monotone, a few bars from the familiar song: ‘Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do! I’m half-crazy, all for the love of you!’

No-man’s arm fell incontinently to his side; and Wizzie could see from the savage wrinkling of his profile, which seemed snarling like a dog whose bone is taken away, that he could hardly restrain his anger.

A dead rook, with a look in its eye as if it were thankful to be dead and its few remaining feathers discoloured by dust, offered itself, however, as a humble distraction; and No-man, stooping down, picked it up by its tail, muttered some gibberish over it that she couldn’t catch, and flung it into the young green wheat. To her present mood, the neutral pedestrian with his half-hearted whistling was a pleasing episode, while her companion’s fuss over those dusty bones struck her as a most dreary affectation, but she could see that his face had resumed its equanimity as he paused to let the impertinent personage get ahead.

‘What I mean is, Wizz,’ he went on, ‘suppose you *had* started an affair with my father, would it have weighed on your mind when I told you who he was?’

She tried submissively to catch his drift, but she tried in vain. His own obvious absorption in the irresistible appeal of her figure in those tight trousers added the last note to the exultant trance of well-being in which she moved, and this matter of Urien and him being father and son seemed totally irrelevant, even if it *were* true, to her relation to either the one or the other.

There was a groan of real trouble in the sigh with which he received her vague expression of uncertainty, her feeble 'I don't see, D. *why* it would have been so awful', but he let the matter drop after that, and they moved on slowly, keeping well to the rear of the brisk-stepping citizen with his hands in his pockets.

It was not long before No-man expressed his feelings about this easy gentleman in plain words: 'God damn this chap! Why can't he go slower or faster? What does a person like that, anyway, think is going on at Maiden Castle?'

'Oh, shut up, D. do!' she protested. 'We don't own the whole road.' Womanlike, she accepted this neutral person's presence as she accepted the dead rook and the hovering starlings; but the presence of a low bank at their side with an amazing variety of feathery grasses made her think how Lovie would have liked this walk. 'She'd have wanted to get out and run along that bank,' she thought, and she longed to be able to share her good spirits with her offspring.

'I'd like to know', said No-man presently, when they had nearly reached the gate where the road ended and nothing but a lightly trodden field-track led up to the sacred earthworks, 'what that fellow gets out of coming here.'

'Much the same as ourselves,' she retorted, turning to glance behind them. 'There are people all the way along the road now! Dorchester people love an excuse to come out on Sunday.'

But they both instinctively paused at this point, for the man in front of them had taken off his new bowler-hat and was apparently examining the label inside it, as he leaned over the gate.

‘I can’t understand how anyone like you who’s writing books about people’ — Wizzie had no idea she was going to blurt this out, but the thought seemed to have got so heavy in her mind that it slipped out and fell of its own accord, like a ripe pear— ‘can hate everyone like you do, D.! The world has to have all sorts, hasn’t it? I know you don’t think you’re like anyone else, but *really* you’re just like those patronizing upper-class people who want to keep everyone at a distance.’

She felt his blank astonishment at her audacity in the way he looked at her; but he only said, ‘Come on, child! We must hurry up. They’re waiting for us up there.’

They had to pass the man at the gate; and in place of opening it to let them through, he stepped back a pace or two and stared intently as they opened it for themselves. No-man haughtily averted his eyes from the irrelevant personage as he closed the gate after them, but Wizzie met the fellow’s glance, and no sooner had she done so than she realized that all this manoeuvring was simply to get a good, undisturbed stare at herself in her jersey and trousers. The normal set expression of the man’s face changed, as his eyes met hers, into a relaxed and maudlin leer — not so much a leer, perhaps, as a fatuous, desire-drunk spasm of obsessed gazing — and afterwards, as they proceeded towards the entrance of the mysterious polis, she knew perfectly well that the besotted individual was walking as closely as he dared behind them! She could even hear him pant — for he was not an athletic figure — and tap his knees, as he walked, with the hard brim of his bowler-hat.

But *there* were all their four friends, waiting for them on the extreme top of the first rampart of turf! No-man waved his arm to greet them, and Wizzie was struck by the solemn and dramatic manner in which he did this

— not just perfunctorily and casually but exaggeratedly, just as Popsy used to do to the circus audience when, after some difficulty with her balancing, she had at last got through her turn.

‘I ought to have let him go back for his stick,’ she said to herself; and she felt the same sort of twinge, only not quite so acutely, as she had felt a few days ago when by an unpardonable accident she had thrown Gwendolly into the fire.

But though *her* waving at those four figures was more like the negligent manner in which a grown-up person waves at a group of children from a train window than any conceivable gesture of Popsy’s, she did experience some incredible sensations as she climbed the slope towards them.

‘You go on,’ No-man had implied as he nodded at her. ‘I’m not as young as you are.’

But she felt his eyes following every step of her rapid ascent as he scrambled after her, and, when she turned to wave to *him* in the middle of her ascent, she was aware that the bowler-hatted man, still lower down the slope, was ascending the hill with such an impetus that it looked as if he would soon overtake him.

None of the four at the crest of the highest ridge could see anything of her as she climbed, but in her mind she saw them — at least she saw Urien and Thel.

It was no great distance from the foot of Mai-Dun to the summit, but the final slope was steep, and not even in the circus had Wizzie’s spirits risen to the pitch they rose to now, or the exultant power of her body been more ready for anything. Her boy’s attire offered no feminine impediment to her breathless rush as she climbed the face of the final bulwark, but though the distance was negligible and her speed was beyond the power of any ordinary girl, she experienced for that brief epoch — for nothing is less of an absolute than time — some of the most radiant and exultant moments in her whole life.

Light-winged butterflies — but since neither at the convent nor at the circus had Wizzie learnt any natural history, their names were nothing to her — fluttered against her face. Tiny little moths of various shades of pallid brown appeared and disappeared under her very fingers. There was a scent in her nostrils as of grass upon which the sun had been shining so long that from every particular blade above the ground and from every rooty fibre beneath the ground something of the earth's most intimate sweat seemed to evaporate in the hot amorous air. She derived a curious sensual pleasure, every time she stooped in her ascent, from contact with the sun-warmed grass; and once or twice, as she bent down, she actually dug her nails into the thick-growing, honey-sweet turf. 'I want to be myself,' she thought as she scrambled up the slope with that hay-sweet scent in her nostrils. 'I don't want to belong to either of them!'

But in the play of her limbs as she climbed she found it impossible not to yield more and more to that dangerous magnetic pull of Urien's personality. 'I may have a funny face', she thought, 'but I am beautiful today.'

And the whole bulk of that steep turf rampart seemed to acknowledge this beauty and to make it its own. She had the feeling that her youthful body was growing more lithe, more pliant, more desirable, with every step she took; and before she emerged over the crest of the rampart she told herself, not bitterly or cynically but quite deliberately and with a calm, non-moral, feminine snatching at the essential, that, after what she had gone through, it was silly not to take all that was offered. 'If Urien were D.'s grandfather', she concluded, 'and he loved me for myself, what would it matter?'

Had the spirit of Jenny Dearth been at her side at that moment, reading her thoughts, the poor Horse-Head's view of the matter — more philosophical in another woman's predicament than in her own — would no doubt have been that her friend's experience with both Old Funky and No-man had so corrupted her that she had no idea what being loved for herself meant; but subtler psychologists than Jenny might have taken a different view of what was going on just then in the heart under that grey jersey. At any rate, her appearance, hot and breathing hard after her rapid climb, but charmingly flushed and radiant, produced an electric effect upon the four persons seated on the top of the ridge.

Thuella jumped up at once. 'We were waiting for you, my dear,' she cried. 'We thought you and D. might be totally lost! But sit down and rest yourself. We'll wait for D. here. Urien has to go on now, to see what's happening at the excavations; but when he's found out how things are over there he'll come back and tell us. What are *you* doing, Father?' This last remark was addressed to Teucer Wye, who was trying to catch a languid butterfly in his thin fingers.

'I'm going with Mr Quirm,' the Professor brought out, letting the butterfly escape. 'Won't *you* come too, Cask?'

'Hadn't we better wait for No-man?' said Claudius, with no sign of rising.

But Teucer Wye scrambled up at once and laid his hand on his shoulder. 'Come along, Cask,' he said. 'They can follow us, if they want to. No-man'll need a rest after his climb. We can report progress when we get back.'

Wizzie noticed that Thuella gave her father an appreciative glance as Claudius rose stiffly to his feet. She seemed in as good a temper with her parent today as he was with her. 'There, my dear, *there*!' she said to Wizzie.

‘Do as you’re told, like a good child.’ And, collapsing again upon the turf, she pulled her down at her side.

Almost everything that our friend had hoped for was in the quick exchange of looks that now passed between Urien and herself as she stretched herself, still breathing hard, by the prostrate girl. The man’s glance seemed to her to say, ‘Do as they tell you. Don’t worry about me. We understand each other perfectly.’ And, when the three of them went off at a leisurely pace, she deliberately refrained from following them with her eyes, but turned, with more sympathy in her flushed face than usual, to the wearer of the yellow dress.

‘You darling,’ Thuella murmured, ‘now at last I’ve got you to myself!’ And then, with the particular look of narrow-lidded concentrated mischief with which from time immemorial the harem has conspired against its possessor, she whispered in hurried eagerness, ‘How far did you leave him behind? How soon will he be here?’

For answer Wizzie merely shrugged her shoulders and, rolling over with her face against the sweet-scented turf, began plucking little blades of grass and drawing them negligently between her teeth. She knew exactly how Thel was sitting — for the girl too had changed her pose after that furtive question — by the feel of a foot against her side and a hand on her shoulder. Clearly she could visualize that upright cross-legged figure in the yellow dress, the long limbs bent beneath the flimsy skirt and the flapping hat concealing the bright hair. She felt wonderfully older than Thel as she tasted the bitter-sweetness of those small grass-blades. Somehow she felt as if her own unfulfilled and perhaps never to be fulfilled ambitions, that image of herself balanced in radiant poise on her old horse’s back and leaping forward, with that strong back always beneath her, through all the starry hoops of the world, placed her, even in her very renunciation, on a higher level than Thel's cloud-creating claims.

But had D. or Urien himself perhaps, told the girl, long before this, of their men's astonishing relationship? And, if Thel did know, did it set up in *her* eyes, as apparently it had done in his, some shocking barrier, a barrier only to be passed by an unthinkable sacrilege, between Urien and any girl who lived with D.? No, no. Thel was no more like an ordinary woman than she was herself! These artists were free of such scruples, and the wild clouds on Thel's canvas were like the glittering spangles of her own starry rush through the air — something that crossed these things on a magic tight-rope!

But Thel was talking to her now, talking in a low excited voice, and Wizzie could feel not only those electric fingers through her jersey, as the girl's hand caressed her shoulder, but the troubled intensity with which she was looking down upon her prostrate form.

'Yes,' she was saying, 'and I'm not a bit jealous of you with him, and never shall be; but I am — oh, Wizzie, darling, and you know it, only you don't *want* to know it — terribly jealous of him with you! I'm jealous of everybody with you, of old D. even, silly though that may sound, and I'm wickedly — do you hear, you dangerous, silent girl? — I'm wickedly jealous of Lovie.'

Still drawing the little grasses through her teeth and making a faint sound that only she herself could hear as she drew a drop of sweetness from each of them before she threw it away, Wizzie continued to feel so much older than the breather of these impassioned sentences that she found it impossible to take them seriously. Her convent school and her circus school had set such a gulf between men and women, and she herself — for all Jenny's talk of her corruption — was so eminently normal in these things, that all she said to herself was, 'Thel's too demonstrative. I *must* make her tell me which of her boys I remind her of!'

'It's Urien's *ideas* that fascinate me,' Thuella went on. 'I can't bear the smelly clothes. He's more like a Chinaman than a Welshman. How on earth Nance can bear it when he takes off—'

'Don't be disgusting, Thel!' our friend protested, spitting out a fragment of chalk grit that had got into her mouth. 'Of course you'll say it's my circus life; but it *isn't* that at all. I don't care a damn how dirty a man is, or what his ideas are either! It's something quite different. By the way, Thel, what *are* Urien's ideas? I've heard him talk, and I like listening to him, but it seems to me it's all perfectly crazy. If Lovie were a man instead of a baby-girl, she'd have ideas exactly like—'

' Who would Lovie have ideas like?'

Both the girls gave a start, and Thuella uttered a shrill little noise like the cry of a frightened moor-hen. But their disturber was only D. No-man, reaching them from an angle rather different from the one where they would naturally have looked for him.

'Well? Who *has* got Lovie's ideas?' he repeated brusquely, sitting down on Wizzie's further side. He was evidently delighted to come upon them like this; and to Wizzie, though she still continued lying on her stomach sucking grasses, it was a pleasant surprise that he was so gratified. 'He can't like Thuella *very* much', she thought, 'or he'd be annoyed by finding us together.'

'Wizzie says', began Thuella, removing as she did so her big hat and tossing it on the grass, 'that though she respects Urien very much she thinks nothing of his ideas. She thinks his ideas are childish. What do you think about *that*, Master?'

He mumbled some incoherent sentence in reply to this, which Wizzie thought was a quotation from Shakespeare, but it left the younger girl as much in the dark as before as to whether Thel knew, or did not know, about D. and Urien.

There was a silence after that between the three of them, till the man enquired what had happened to the rest of the party.

‘Oh, don’t worry about them, D.’ Wizzie answered. ‘They know where we are.’

‘It was Claudius,’ threw in Thuella. ‘He couldn’t wait; and he dragged Father and Urien with him.’

Another silence ensued, which was broken by a noisy group of young people passing just below their resting-place. Of these new-comers it was possible only to see the heads and the hats, objects that belonged, it seemed, to three lads and a couple of women. It amused Wizzie to note the effect of this bodiless cortège, advancing with mechanical jerks along her line of vision, and disappearing one by one. It made her think of a certain peep-hole in the circus-tent through which she had often peered out while waiting her turn. She used to try and distinguish their faces later, but never could! And now, in the same way, her mind — floating on the happy reassurance of the look which the Glymes man had given her — wondered whether the hat with a red ribbon on it had been chosen as carefully for this Maiden Castle outing as her own boy’s suit had been, and whether it would bring its chooser the luck hers had brought her.

‘Did you have a good breakfast in your attic, D.?’ enquired Thuella. ‘Or did you get cross with the Royal Martyr this morning?’

The effect of this question upon Wizzie’s mind surprised her, and while No-man began some long-winded rigmarole about what he’d seen from his kitchen window yesterday or the day before, she rolled over and lay on her back between them, her head raised a little and her hands clasped behind it. ‘What’s this?’ she thought. ‘He never tells *me* these things. But I’m not going to ask him what she’s talking about.’

She had scarcely made this wise resolution, however, when she heard herself saying, ‘I wouldn’t cross the threshold of D.’s room up there, Thel, for fifty pounds! He brought one of those monsters — the one he got from Glymes — into *our* room, and I made him take it away. He’s got a pair of them up there now! I wouldn’t sleep with such things at the foot of my bed — not if he paid me!’

She was certain she saw No-man, at that second, dodge a look that swept across her from the sunlit figure at her side. But he hurriedly began talking to them both in his most tiresome vein.

‘You women are too practical,’ he told them, his eyes turning hastily from one to the other. ‘When Wizz wakes up, she only thinks of what she’s done or is going to do, or what Lovie’s done or is going to do. *I* keep my mind—’ He paused for a second under the look Wizzie gave him. ‘I’ll pay you out for this,’ was what her look said.

And then her thoughts went back to Urien and his being this tedious man’s father. ‘It’s all nonsense! Urien can’t be as old as that. But if he is, *I* don’t care! I wouldn’t care if the devil was the father of both of them!’

But as she cogitated in this way, with her eyes half-closed, it began to dawn on her that some sort of emotional drama was going on across her grey trousers. No-man kept fidgeting uneasily as he talked, and through the dazzling sun-spangles that did not so much hide the two of them from her as metamorphose them into a blinding transfiguration, she seemed to detect — for she compensated for her want of responsiveness to symbolic figures like D.’s ditch-digger by being abnormally alive to the psychic currents between men and women — that Thuella was exercising some kind of sensual witchcraft over No-man. The second she realized this, she became vividly alert to every word he was uttering, and not only so but she gave him one of those inspired smiles that women have the power of conjuring up, a smile whose falsity no man can fathom, for it has behind it the treachery of Nature herself.

But it must not be supposed that Wizzie for one second shared the sardonic masculine view that there was anything ironic in all these criss-cross love-makings. Like most women — moving, as we all have to do, in the midst of a flickering cat's-cradle of erotic currents — she took the most fantastic complications, that life so delights to improvise, in a spirit of practical and literal simplicity. Left to herself — a natural daughter, as Urien might have put it, of the earth-goddess Caridwen — it would never have occurred to her that any emotion, as long as it could somehow be squeezed into the category of love, could be regarded as piquant or ironic or grotesque. It was as much a part of life, this gypsy emotion, as a stickleback among minnows or a puff-ball among cowslips, and to regard it as a mixture of the monstrous and the humorous, instead of taking it simply and sadly as the way life was, struck her as childish.

A logical statement of what she now obscurely felt would be, perhaps, that — though she could hear the voice of No-man, or the voice of Mr Wye, or even the voice of Urien himself, calling it an *ironic situation* that Thuella, so passionately fond of her, could tempt D. across her body, or that she herself could be interested in D.'s father while Nancy was interested in D. — to her mind these situations were simple facts, lucky or unlucky facts, not ironic at all; and you had to accept them and make what you could of them, just as you had to accept the fact that Lovie was harder to manage when D. was in the room than when you had the child alone.

She could tell from D.'s tone at this moment that he was in some deep internal excitement, though he was talking in his habitual vein. But there was a hollow space, full of an undercurrent of feeling that had nothing to do with his words, *between* his words and what they served to screen.

'What I can't get you people to see', D. was saying, 'is that when, in that bit of road, for instance, between the barracks and Poundbury, which is now one of my favourite walks, I come on a patch of green moss on a grey wall, or catch the peculiar scent of trodden grass, I get a sensation that's more important than what you call love, or anything else — nearer the secret of things too! It *is* love, in a certain sense; but it's love of life itself and of something that comes to us through life! I don't know about Nancy or Jenny, but I've an idea that neither of *you* get these feelings, or you wouldn't look like you do when I talk about them. But of course you're an artist, Thel, and Wizz is too, in her way, I suppose; but I'm not talking about that. I'm talking — Hullo! *There* you are! Well? What news? Have you seen the grand discovery?'

As he spoke, he scrambled to his feet, and the young women rose too; but for a moment the old gentleman — for it was Teucer Wye who had caught them napping — could only make whistling sounds through his toothless gums. He was panting and exhausted, and he had apparently been running, but he waved Thuella aside when she tried to make him sit down. 'Whew! Whew! I'll tell — you — whew! — as — we go. *It's there* — they're showing it to everybody! They're quarrelling about it — but come — whew! whew! I've come to get you — you'll — whew! — see — for — yourselves.'

Wizzie saw No-man, who had a dazed and shame-faced look as he rose to his feet, like a boy caught in the act of cribbing, contemplating with evident astonishment the dutiful way Thuella offered her parent her arm, which the panting Mr Wye was only too thankful to take.

‘How stupid D. is!’ she thought. ‘He can’t understand the simplest event. He thinks a miracle has happened because Thel and her father are friendly. Can’t he see that when a person’s free of her home and getting a little pleasure, a father becomes a different thing?’

But the Professor of Greek at the small Midland college did seem different enough to justify No-man’s surprise, even if he had no explanation of the phenomenon. The old man hopped along so happily on Thuella’s arm, flourishing his cane so gaily, and digging it so wantonly into the mole-hills, that he resembled a sprightly wagtail under the escort of a considerate yellow-hammer. Out of breath though he was, he discoursed volubly all the way; and Wizzie — who advanced with *her* arm in that of D. side by side with the father and daughter — could hear all he was saying. The fact that she was being hurried to a spot where she would see Urien again put her into such good spirits that even when No-man, taking advantage of the situation, began to squeeze her wrist against his ribs it didn’t get on her nerves.

Old Teucer Wye was so excited that he forgot to give his side-pockets, where his precious text-books were, the usual reassuring pats. But he talked shrilly on the topic of how this great discovery appeared in the eyes of a true Platonist. And as far as Wizzie could gather, it appeared very small and unimportant indeed, which was so exactly her own view that her heart warmed to the gesticulating little man. To *her* mind, as to the intelligence of one who was still called Professor in Derbyshire, these broken images from the dust-bins of antiquity meant nothing but desolate bits of pottery labelled with paper tags. Wizzie had been taken once by Sister Bridget to visit a provincial museum, and she remembered how, as she followed the heavy black robes of the nun, the whole place had smelt of a sepulchre and had suggested at the same time a conspiracy of one's godfathers and godmothers to take away even what excitement the bones of death possessed by putting them under glass cases. Thus, our friend, buoyed up by the thought that in a minute or two she'd be seeing Urien, kept smiling and nodding to old Teucer across the agitated D. who himself all this while was atoning for his recent shame by squeezing her arm with ferocious remorse.

'It's a beautiful image,' Mr Wye was saying. 'It reminds *me* of the enthroned Demeter in the British Museum; and Quirm himself admits that the cult of the chthonian divinities from Samothrace certainly spread to these islands; but what I feel' — and here he permitted to the handle of his dark-coloured cane the privilege of tapping against one of the faded volumes hidden in his tweed-cloth pocket— 'is that it's all so utterly unimportant! They weren't so wonderful in their lifetime, these religious rituals — only reflections in water, only flickering shapes on the faces of clouds — but *now*, when they're historical curiosities or bits of doubtful evidence in support of questionable theories, they've no serious power over our souls. No, no, my boys — I mean, my girls — the soul feeds on invisible, not visible things! The soul is a wayfarer *through* matter only to learn the trick of shaking matter off! Of course matter affords symbols of the soul and of the soul's journey from one level of spiritual beauty to another, but there's nothing divine in matter *except the divine*! The symbols that matter casts up are like the bubbles cast up to the surface of a stream when a glittering fish passes by. It's because of the passage of the soul through its inert resistance that matter produces symbols at all! No, no, this image isn't really important to us, not to our souls, you understand, for our souls are off and away, like — like a shoal — like a shoal of — of — of—'

‘Of great white whales, Dad!’ threw in Thuella.

‘Well — why not? That’s not a bad image of yours, Thuella. That wasn’t a bad simile of Thuella’s, was it, No-man? Did you catch what my daughter said, Miss Ravelston? Shoals of white whales? Yes, my dear, why not? Shoals of whales voyaging on and on and on, over seas and seas, and beyond all seas, till they reach — whew! whew! But where have we got to? I wasn’t looking! *This* isn’t the way.’

Thus speaking, the excited little man stopped, jerked his arm away from Thuella’s support, and, leaning on his cane, looked about him. Instead of the excavations, what he saw before him was the deep trench to the east of Mai-Dun, the identical trench in which D. and Urien had lingered when the latter revealed to the former those weird ideas that Wizzie so lightly discounted.

‘We’ve gone the wrong way. I wasn’t looking,’ the little man repeated. ‘I think it must be — more — more *over there.’* And he lifted his cane and waved it vaguely in a northerly direction.

‘This way — this is the way,’ threw in No-man. ‘I’m sure we shall soon —’ And dragging Wizzie off, in advance this time of the others, he began to ascend the slope leading to the northern extremity of the earthworks.

As they moved over the hot sweet-scented turf, the metallic sky above them quivering with distant lark-music, and the air about them disturbed by no nearer sound than the occasional droning flight of a bluebottle fly, whose passage across her ear-drum seemed to Wizzie charged with memories of her childhood, they came upon an ancient dew-pond in whose dry circular hollow the delicate grass had been burnt by the heat to a faint sedge-colour. In the centre of this tawny bowl, which resembled a hollow concave shield, they noticed a heap of firewood, only barely charred by fire and evidently left in haste by persons interrupted in some projected picnic.

‘We must tell them about this,’ murmured D. pausing on the brink of the hollow place. ‘It would be nice to celebrate Midsummer Eve in the old heathen way.’

Wizzie made no comment on this, but she thought in her heart, ‘They’re all the same, these men! They *can’t* take things as they are. They have to link them up with what other men have done and said and fussed about in the olden days. I’m getting sick of it.’ And with the weight of the burning sun on her head there came over her a fierce revulsion against all these thick, crushing, heavy burdens of cruel antiquity. She recalled what D. had said to her on their first night in that upper room, when in order to enjoy his love-making — that love-making which always left her cold because it wasn’t her *as she was in herself that* he caressed — he had imagined them both as living God knows how long ago!

This burning sun seemed to be thick today with the accumulated weight of all these Dorchester antiquities. She felt as if not only the place where they were but Maumbury Rings too, that D. was always talking about in connection with his dreary book, and the ancient ridges of Poundbury he had now got such a mania for, and the Roman wall by the gardens, and the spirit of that damned Icen road he must always be going out of his way to traverse, were all diffused in this heady, dizzy heat, and pressing down upon her.

‘I’m for Claudius’, she thought, ‘and his free airplanes. *They’re* what we want to clear the air!’ And then she recalled what Thuella’s father had just said about souls shaking things off and floating free away. ‘He’s a silly old fool’, she thought, ‘and half-dotty; but he’s right about people’s souls. I know just what he means. I have that feeling often. I shall have it again in a second when D. grabs my arm!’

Suddenly without warning the girl was seized with a wild rush of emotion from some deep part of her being that she had been successfully suppressing for some time. ‘I’d like’, she thought, ‘to fly to America in one of Claudius’s airplanes, and leave them all — yes, leave even Lovie! As it is, she’s fonder of D. than she is of me. I’d get a job in a real great circus over there — the greatest of all! And then — and *then* — hard and clear and free — and with a body limber and bare, untouched by any man, and on a horse just like my old horse — no! *my old horse himself*, come over the sea like a white whale — I’d show them, I’d show them!’

No-man turned out to be a better guide than Teucer Wye, and it was not long before they were all four jostling and pushing and arguing along with the rest of their party in the crowded interior of a little wooden shed where the overseer of Maiden Castle, assisted on this particular occasion by a couple of uniformed policemen, was having all he could do to keep people from touching with their hands an object that rested on a rough wooden bench at the back of the hut. The small building was packed with people, most of them young, some of them passionately interested in the object before them, and all eager to propound their own especial theories as to the identity of this extraordinary thing.

D. kept Wizzie by his side, retaining a tight hold on her arm, while Urien, who had easily and naturally joined them at their first appearance, was now wedged in against the girl’s other side.

The packed little crowd in the shed kept heaving this way and that, while new people came and others pushed their way out. Everybody was talking at once, so that there was a hubbub of excited voices, some of which were listened to by a larger group than others, but save for the overseer and the two policemen there was no authority present — none, that is, at that mid-morning hour, of the principal chiefs of the excavation work.

One disturbing element was present in the form of a large and extremely ugly Irish terrier, whose owner, a lanky youth not much more amiable in aspect than the beast itself, hovered about at the entrance, deriving an imbecile and apparently a malicious satisfaction from the confusion caused by the dog's proceedings. Something about the great discovery, as it — or they — rested there on that crude bench, evidently excited a fearful but fascinated frenzy in this unappealing animal, for he kept making short runs towards the thing, between the legs and skirts around him, barking furiously and then retiring in terror. Now and then his tail would wag with extreme delight as if the whole matter were a lively game; then he would be seized with panic, real or assumed, and would back away, or sink down on his hind legs.

Wizzie was too absorbed in watching Urien's face to pay much attention to the thing before her. She gave it one quick surprised glance, and then, twisting her head round away from D. who was too preoccupied to notice what she was doing, stared in wonder, and something like awe, at the great dark countenance by her side. The Glymes man's massive lineaments seemed to her absolutely transformed by the object on that rude wooden stand. His eyes blazed with an interior emotion that held the girl spell-bound; but unlike No-man, who seemed completely to have forgotten her, though he held her arm in an almost savage grip, she felt sure that Urien was not only conscious of her presence — had he not moved up to her the second they came in? — but was making various impatient movements to arrange matters according to some overpowering secret intention of his own.

What this intention was became speedily clear to her, for, after several shufflings of his unwieldy frame and blundering gestures with his arms, he succeeded in inducing Thuella, who had deserted her father on entering the shed, to wedge herself in between himself and Wizzie. This manoeuvre accomplished, he fell back a step — they were all being jostled and crowded against one another by the strangers about them — so that he now stood immediately behind them both; and Wizzie was soon aware that, in the general crushing and squeezing of all of them together, he had taken the opportunity of resting one hand on Thuella's shoulder and one on her own.

The effect of the mysterious object before them upon Thuella's consciousness seemed, as far as she could make out, as negligible as it was upon hers, unless a tendency to be especially affectionate towards her could be regarded as connected with the thing. The young cloud-painter was indeed embracing her now with a clinging intensity that considerably got on her nerves and certainly met with the very opposite of a friendly response. Wizzie couldn't shake her off, partly because of the pressure from the packed crowd about and partly because of Urien. This latter seemed at that moment to transform himself into a magnetic thunder-cloud behind them and around them, a hovering influence that seemed feeding, from its own formidable battery of electric force, the wave of passionate yearning with which the slender creature enveloped her. Thus pressed against the girl, she felt herself — what she had so often scolded Lovie for becoming — as stiff as a poker, but she managed to give her body a twist so that it was to her side and not to her bosom that the other clung.

Amid the loud excited voices arguing, disputing, exclaiming round her, she felt nothing but Urien's presence. It was he, it was his hand upon her shoulder, that was sending these delicious shivers through her, not the extraordinary image about which that roomful of people was gathered. But, mingled with the sweet and disturbing elation that filled her because of Urien's proximity, she was not unaware of a jealous trouble in her heart which rose from the fact that he had wanted both of them near him in this mystical crisis. It was therefore with a feeling that was almost relief that she caught Claudius's familiar voice saying something to Teucer Wye above the hubbub.

'No! I don't call it at all like the Demeter,' she heard the coal-yard amateur say. 'The expression's much rougher, and the features less correct; but it's a wonderful achievement. I've no doubt it was done by some Roman soldier from the East, from some Greek colony that the Empire had civilized.'

'What *are* you talking about, Cask?' she heard the shrill voice of Teucer Wye protesting. 'A *Greek* colony civilized by the Romans? My dear man, look at the moulding of that brow, look at those deep-hollowed eye-sockets. The thing's from Samothrace; there's no doubt about it! It's earlier than Scopas, though, earlier than Praxiteles, but it's Greek through and through! It's one of those "alloi theoi" that Socrates invoked on the bank of the Ilissus along with Pan.'

'But it's a group, Mr Wye,' she heard Claudius protesting. 'The local authorities wanted to take it away — these officers tell me they watched it by turns all night — only they were afraid to touch it till an expert from London had seen it. That torso without a head — are you going to tell us that that's Persephone? It's a man, Mr Wye, it's a man! And from his bust I would certainly say a Roman emperor, one of those great civilizing Caesars who—'

He was interrupted from the threshold of the place by the voice of Dunbar Wye, who, with Mrs Dunbar, had been standing outside the crowd for several minutes. They had reached Maiden Castle thus early by reason of Madam's desire to give her maid at least sixteen hours in which to dust and scrub and bustle about where it was torture to Dumbell to catch the swish of a skirt.

‘Mr Cask! Mr Cask! Do I hear you mention the Caesars, Mr Cask? It’s a Caesar we want in England today, Mr Cask. Just glance, any of you people, at *this* — and *this* — and *this*. No, they cost nothing, my lad. They cost nothing, sir, nothing at all. And you’ll soon see the danger of all this Communistic—’

Here Dumbell hesitated, and for two good reasons. For one thing, his wife, with a shrewd Cumber instinct for season and occasion, figuratively clapped her hand over his mouth, and for another, he couldn’t recall the latest Blackshirt slogan. Guileless but obscure syllables burst the barrier of Dumbell’s teeth; but with his lady’s help he got his leaflets back into the botanical tin that hung round his shoulders, and they both tried to push their way toward Urien, who had turned quickly round at the voice of Mr Cumber’s son-in-law.

Though she could only just catch his profile, Wizzie was amazed at the change in Urien’s face. It was as if he were applying the whole machinery of his personality to the business of burying his intellect, his pride, his very soul at the bottom of an interior pit! He allowed his chin to sink down upon his chest. His eyes grew so dead as to resemble opaque pieces of glass in the eyes of a South Sea idol; and removing his hands from both the girls’ shoulders, he let them hang loose by his side like the hands of an idiot.

Wizzie was not a little shocked by this transformation in her formidable Black Man. What was the cause of it? It was inconceivable that Dumbell Wye — the greatest simpleton she had ever met — could scare Urien Quirm. She came to the conclusion that it was Cumber himself, represented by the practical Mrs Wye, who had the power to take the magnetic heart out of her hero. She had plenty of time to ponder on the matter, for the shed was so packed that it took quite a while for the Wyes to reach him.

'It must be the money he gets from them,' she shrewdly surmised. 'I know exactly how he feels. It's how I used to feel after I surpassed myself in the ring and Old Funky would send the hat round. Yes, it's money! Wherever money enters, it kills life! That's really what's the matter with D. and me. If I were working, and coming home every night to Lovie and him, how different it would be! It isn't Dumbell; it isn't *you* either, you fuzzy-wuzzy chit of a pin-head! It's the Cumber purse that's done it.' And she gazed up at Urien's great hang-dog face, with her own features all pinched and strained in sympathy and her eyes brimming with tears. 'Oh, you great one, you mysterious one,' her heart groaned, 'I know you because I love you; and when you started writing those articles for Cumber you blew your soul away like dandelion seed — yes — no — yes — no — yes — no! You gave him your ideas, one by one for his money, and now, when you see those two fools squeezing through to get at you, you feel — oh, I know how you feel!'

Her cheeks went hot and cold, and she found herself pressing the hand which No-man had left free against one of her breasts. For the first time in her life Wizzie knew what love meant in a woman. Those warm sensual feelings she had felt at first under Urien's spell had transformed themselves completely. Strange and wild thoughts rushed through her brain. 'If he is D.'s father,' she said to herself, 'why can't we go — all three of us — and live with him and Nance at Glymes? Jenny says Nance has got fond of D. so she'd be happy; and I wouldn't want anything but to see him every day, to be near him, to watch him, to comfort him about the Cumbers, to tell him it doesn't matter, to tell him to think — like I did in the circus — that it's for life we work, not for Old Funky, not for those staring boys, not for the Cumbers — because they're all outside! Oh, my great one, my wonderful one, I don't mind your not washing! I don't mind your dirty clothes! It's *you* *yourself* I love — inside all that. Yes, yes, if you are D.'s father, I'll be your girl, your daughter — I'll be your servant — I'll be anything to you you like!'

She kept making little unconscious movements with her free hand as she gazed up at that great, lowering, unhappy, drooping head, and finally she found herself, as the pressure increased around her due to the Wyes' squeezing themselves forward, holding tight to a fold of the man's jersey.

She had to swallow desperately to keep back her emotion. 'He's unhappy; he's misunderstood by them all,' she thought. *'He's like my old horse.'*

All this while, it never entered her head to wonder what these ideas *were* which were the man's soul and which he was selling to the Cumbers. The extreme feminity of Wizzie's mind in regard to philosophical notions and all moral or immoral habits of thought had been left incredibly pure and unperverted by both convent and circus.

She now became aware that No-man had at last come back to life from his trance of absorption in the treasure that the two policemen and the overseer were guarding so carefully. He swung round, clumsily separating her from Thuella, and dropped his hold on her arm. Glancing at his face, she watched him while he took in both the gloomy collapse of his father's spirits and its obvious occasion in the imminent encounter with the young Wyes. Never had she seen No-man embrace a situation with more detached and humorous indulgence. He seemed like a man who has returned to the pell-mell of human existence from some high remote watch-tower.

'What can he have seen', she thought, 'in that idol's head, and those headless shoulders, and that thing at their feet, to make him look like that?' Glancing for the first time with a flicker of interest at the strange group before her, round which the chalky rubble clung so thick and had been left so intact that it still obscured their outlines, she seemed to trace an odd resemblance between the rough-hewn object at the two figures' knees and that bed-post carving that had repulsed her so when D. put it on their chimney-piece. 'So *that's* it,' she thought. 'That's what's put him into such a good temper!'

'Is it a great find?' blurted out Dumbell breathlessly, nodding violently to No-man but addressing Mr Quirm. 'Is it important? Do you know what it is? Mr Cumber wants you to write at once, as much as you like, and make it — you know — rather sensational.'

Here Mrs Wye put in her word. 'How do you do, Mr No-man? How do you do, Mr Quirm? Dun's to talk to Father presently, over the long-distance. Father wants an outline of what you'll write, and then he'll suggest the line to take. He wants you, Mr No-man, to do the human part of it — these people, for instance, and whether they're local, and whether Lord Fordington is here. *Is* Lord Fordington here?' And she lifted her head like a bird looking for a crumb.

Dumbell's anxious fish-mouth, too, turned enquiringly round, while the persons nearest him nudged each other and gazed about them and stared at the policemen, as if the well-known personage referred to might pop out at any moment from some official pocket.

Wizzie herself received a greeting from Mrs Wye as that young housewife followed her husband, a greeting which took her up between the little woman's finger and thumb, as if she'd been a flea on a counterpane, and placed her in the exact psychological niche proper to a well-meaning lady assistant of an elderly historian.

'Are *those* all there is?' was Dumbell's salute to the sacred discovery as he peered critically at the confused mass of unearthed rubble and stone. 'What — did — you — say it was, Dad?' And heedless of the intervening crowd — among whom Wizzie could see her persistent admirer of the Maiden Castle road, who was even now fidgeting this way and that to keep her in sight, while his eyes clung in maudlin rapture to every curve of her figure — the young botanist hailed his parent with such a mumble-jumble of mispronounced names that the old gentleman couldn't have been put to greater shame. 'Did you say it was De-met-rea with Dion-issius, Dad?' But what's that thing at their knees? A devil? A dragon? A hound with scurvy? What do *you* say it is, Dad? Mr Quirm says Mr No-man knows what it is, and ought to be the one to write about it. What do you say it is, Dad?'

Wizzie felt really sorry for old Teucer Wye at that moment, for all the heads in the place were craning towards him and he had got himself wedged in among a group of noisy young prentices who displayed a tendency to push him to the front.

'Give us a speech, Professor!' one of them shouted. 'Tell us what kind of a dog it is that the angel's kneeling on!'

'Thank you, Mr Quirm,' said Dumbell gravely, as Urien muttered a few words in his ear. 'It's all right, Dad!' he called out. 'Don't disturb yourself. Stay where you are. Mr Quirm says it's not Demetrea but the same thing in Welsh.'

But Teucer Wye continued to disturb himself and allowed himself to be pushed forward towards the policemen, until at last, dared, defied, hustled, and with his own excitement at fever pitch, he actually began, to Thuella's horrified disgust, a sort of public harangue.

Few of those present could see the speaker, so diminutive was his stature, but his shrill voice carried such a vibrating quiver of emotion that most of them stopped talking and set themselves to listen.

'My friends,' cried the Midland Professor, 'oh, my dear Dorchester friends, this is an occasion—'

‘Three cheers for the Mayor!’ interrupted a child’s voice, repeating a lesson learnt for a quite different group of persons.

‘An occasion when we ought to take stock of ourselves and of our lives. My friends, these figures represent the religion of people four thousand years ago, and today is Sunday, a day we owe to *our* religion. But what I want to say to you is this. On the top of this ancient earthwork, in this amazing weather, on the eve of the greatest of all heathen celebrations, the mysterious day which our Church has dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, we must remember — oh, my friends, we *must* remember! — that our souls are bound by no tradition, by no religion; that our souls have the power of separating themselves from matter altogether, the power of shaking off altogether this whole astronomical world, and of entering that higher, that purer level of existence where dwells the eternal’ — here the little man whistled through his gums— ‘and the — and the unspeakable! These precious discoveries must not bind us to earth. We must not think that because it is Sunday—’

But Thuella, who had been pushing and squeezing all this time to get near him, now indignantly seized him by the arm and soon reduced him to sulky and shame-faced silence.

But ‘Three cheers for Mr Wye!’ cried one of the boys, the one who had been the worst in badgering the old man, but who now was profoundly impressed by the tone if not by the substance of these earnest words; but the elder of the two policemen intervened. Making a step in the boys’ direction, he gravely raised his hand. This was enough. The eyes that had been turned towards that shrill impassioned voice now returned guiltily and self-consciously towards the unearthed objects. Official decorum, on the top of Maiden Castle, had indicated that the path of discretion for the obedient commonality of Durnovaria lay in the direction of discreet idol-worship rather than of spiritual exaltation. To raise a cheer for an old gentleman whistling ‘Whew! whew!’ through his gums, and talking of the flight of the soul, presented itself now as a serious lapse in good manners.

The only person present who disregarded the policeman was the supposed goddess from Samothrace. Her hollow eyes continued to stare straight in front of them as they had done under the chalk for four thousand years.

Wizzie, on the contrary, felt that if she and Thuella looked at each other they would have a giggling fit. That gravely uplifted hand seemed to say, ‘Everything dug up belongs to the Crown. This is not the place for a rumpus.’

Then she heard the policeman whisper to No-man, who happened to be the person nearest to him, and she strained her ears to catch his words. ‘His Lordship may be here any minute,’ she heard, ‘and ’twould scarry the good gentleman for them girt oneyers from Lunnon to find a uproar when they comes to open these here exkivations.’

The man was communicating something else to No-man now, that she couldn’t catch so clearly, though she saw D. shake his head with something like a smile. It seemed to her that he was expressing a fear lest the figure that had been dug up should crumble to bits when exposed to the air. His grandfather, she thought she heard him say, had been present at the exhuming of a Roman soldier, and he seemed to anticipate a similar fate for the object before them.

But whatever he was whispering was interrupted by an event which, trifling though it was, raised almost as much commotion around her as the Platonist’s speech. The Irish terrier, having been quiescent for a long time, considered this a dedicated moment to bestir himself once more. He consequently resumed his game of hurried rushes and agitated retirements, and, not content with this, what must the profane animal do but, in the sight of them all, advance to the bench whereon the discovery reposed, and, deliberately lifting a shameless leg, proceed in all calmness to relieve nature.

The confusion coincident with the ejection of this animal distracted our friends of Glymes and Friary Lane from one another; and Wizzie by pure accident was led for a moment to take stock herself of the treasure-trove on the bench. The woman's head was certainly a remarkable piece of work. Carved in some hard stone whose texture was rendered uneven by the patches of chalk dust, the face yet retained a strange grandeur. While the girl confronted its faraway stare, a certain formidable tenderness in it, not exactly maternal or pitiful — for it was too superhuman for that — began to hold and dominate her.

And the headless bust by this figure's side — was it, as Claudius had said, the bust of a man, and of a man wrapped in the dignified folds of what in her ignorance Wizzie might well take for a Roman toga? Mercy! But what was this? It came over her suddenly, and with a warm rush of excited recognition, that the shoulders and rather fleshy chest of this headless trunk bore a marked resemblance to the torso of Urien as she had been recently watching it beneath the man's sunken chin. She drew nearer, and heedless of the fact that Thuella was at her side, twitching at her belt to get her away, and that the eyes of the Maiden Castle overseer — for the elder policeman was still talking to No-man, while the younger one was expostulating with the owner of the dog — were following every move she made with deep suspicion, she bent down over this headless bust, attracted by what seemed to her some sort of pattern or engraved medallion standing out in relief, quite distinct from the folds of the garment, on the figure's massive chest.

Forgetting everything but her interest in this curious pattern, which, save that it stood out in relief, resembled the tattoo on the breast of a sailor, she raised her hand to brush away the chalk dust that blurred it, when the man in charge, his honest countenance expressing the extremity of shocked dismay, pounced down on her.

‘Miss! Miss!’ he cried with horrified reproach, though not without a glint of pride in his honest face that he had had the foresight to expect exactly this from a young lady so indecorously attired. ‘Nobody bain’t allowed to touch one of they things! They things be waiting till His Lordship and the gents from London be here, to make speeches over ’em, and christen ’em afore they goes to museum. Me and Sergeant Bool has orders to keep all and sundry off of ’em. This here dog—’

But his further explanations were lost on Wizzie, who, drawing hurriedly back, turned to Thuella, and both the young people relieved the long tension of their nervous restraint in all this antiquity-worship by a burst of girlish merriment.

One last glance did Wizzie give at the *third* of these heathen apparitions awaiting their christening by His Lordship. ‘It’s *not* the bed-post head,’ she said to herself, ‘though it’s the same sort of thing. How disappointed old D. must be!’ And with a shrug of her shoulders she let herself be dragged away.

The gathering of all our friends from Glymes and Friary Lane outside the excavation shed was Dumbell’s grand opportunity; and he hastened to disburden himself to both Urien and No-man of the instructions he had brought from Mr Cumber.

Wizzie’s heart, as she overheard all this, was torn for the father and full of wonder at the son’s self-possession. Urien seemed overwhelmed with shame and gloom. He struck the girl as a man who had sold his soul by a secret impulse and now was called upon to receive the price in public. D. on the contrary, seemed to have imbibed some psychic emanation from that weird stone group that had given him such peace of mind that he was prepared to do anything required of him without question, like a happy automaton. He seemed to Wizzie like a man whom a spring of interior exultation detached from everybody round him; and this, instead of pleasing the girl, proved profoundly annoying to her.

It soon transpired that the young Wyes were anxious now to carry off both the son and the father to the rooms they had taken at the Antelope — there, doubtless, to apportion them both the exact limits of the aspect of the great discovery which it would be their task to handle.

D. at once suggested that instead of doing this they should all seek that dried-up dew-pond he and she had found, and there, ‘in situ’, have a thorough blood-and-iron discussion of what was to be telephoned. To this proposal Mr and Mrs Wye willingly consented, not so much — as Wizzie saw — with the idea of calling in the elder Mr Wye to their discussion as of avoiding any risk of their evasive correspondents escaping or their impressions cooling off before they were officially registered.

It was a cruel disappointment to the girl when she found herself once more led off by No-man, in advance of the rest, across the central plateau of Mai-Dun. She tried to hang back, casting sympathetic looks at Urien as he slouched wearily along between the two Wyes; but it was no use. No-man remorselessly dragged her on. Her only comfort was that Thuella was a good way behind, walking with her father again, and accompanied by the silent Claudius.

The thought of going back to Friary Lane after all this, the thought of resuming her normal life, of wheeling Lovie in the perambulator, of listening to Jenny’s piled-up wrongs, of submitting to No-man’s caresses night after night, seemed just then more than she could endure. How that image had stared past her, out and away, beyond them all! Yes, that stone woman's stare seemed to have broken up her resolution to be docile to fate. How *could* she leave him to that Glymes life with Nance? Oh, what *was* going to be the upshot of it all? 'No, I can't stand it!' she said to herself. 'I *know* he knows how much I care. But day will follow day, just as they always do. I shall be a good mother to Lovie, and a docile plaything for D. and you, my strange one, my unhappy one, my wonderful one, *you'll* try to console yourself with Thel! Oh, oh, oh! What a thing, what a thing life is!'

Damn D.! What possessed him to hold her so tight and drag her so fast? And all the time he seemed only half-conscious of her existence. That was how he always was! He never talked about his ideas like Urien did — only about his wretched sensations, only about what he saw on his walks or out of that attic window, or about that murderess they burnt in Maumbury Rings. It was as if he wouldn't share his thoughts with any but *dead* women, either with that dead bitch or with his dead wife. And why did he never speak a single word to her about that woman? It was only by accident she'd found out what her name was. *Mona*? It sounded like the wind over a grave! All he cared for were his walks, and his book — and to play with her body when she wanted to go to sleep.

And this was to be her life! To be dragged about by a man — by a *no-man*! — as he was dragging her now, with his thoughts far away, just to make sure she'd be there when he grew tired of his writing and walking, and wanted a different sensation. Oh, it was too much! How he enjoyed the pretence that he'd bought her from Old Funky! Of course he hadn't bought her. Any woman would know it was she who'd done it all, she who'd decided to use him to escape from the Urgans, she who'd summed him up, the sentimental fool that he was!

As she now rubbed her knuckles together against her jersey, treating his arm as if it were a fetter she'd got so used to that she could reduce it to non-existence, she felt an intense longing to bring down this mood of self-satisfied complacency in which he strode along. Oh, she knew him through and through! His happiness just now was partly caused by that stone woman's head, with which he'd no doubt fallen in love simply because she'd been buried for a thousand years, and partly by a childish longing — D. was much more childish than Lovie, for Lovie played at serious things — to light a bonfire in a dew-pond!

But whatever was the cause of his complacency, oh, how she longed to bring it down with a jerk! She longed to trouble it, to agitate it, to break it up, for she knew exactly how it made him feel from the look of his profile. It made him feel superior to Urien, to Mr Wye, to Claudius, and of course to herself.

'I told Jenny', she began, feeling almost as irritated by the noise the larks made over her head as by the heat of the burning sunshine, 'that I didn't believe Nance was really so infatuated with you as she made out. What do you think yourself?'

No-man evidently regarded this question as of absurdly minor importance, and of no interest at all between him and her, for instead of stopping — that teasing trick of his when he wanted to think — he only went faster. 'What's that?' he said. 'What do I think about Nance and me?' He turned his eyes away from her to watch a butterfly. 'Well, old girl, to tell you the truth, I think I'd feel a bit funny if I were to make love to Nance. I wouldn't *mind* doing it! I've always thought there was something about Nance like a great soft white musk-rose with hardly a thorn on its twigs. But — God! — my dear, it's too late. I might once have enjoyed making my little Stone Age girl jealous; but I've got too fond of her now.'

Wizzie almost drew blood from her lower lip, so fiercely did she bite it; but he went on, totally oblivious.

‘Besides, I’d feel funny, and that’s the plain truth — I’d have an unpleasant sensation — if I made up to my father’s wife.’

Wizzie could hardly contain herself any longer, and the gall of her restraint transformed itself into the most corrosive sarcasm that he had ever brought down upon his head. She felt, herself, as if all the poison with which Mary Channing killed *her* old man were condensed into the syllables. ‘What a good thing you’ve only got your sensations to think of, as against your funny feelings, D.! It must make everything so wonderfully simple.’

Her bitter words did bring his stride to a pause then, and, swinging round her, he looked her up and down. ‘What is it, kid?’ he asked gravely. ‘You’re upset about something.’

‘Oh, don’t mind me!’ she retorted. ‘Go on thinking about Mary Channing’s wrongs!’

A look of real outrage came into his face, which in her anger she felt a malicious pleasure to have caused. She could hurt him where his book was concerned. She’d found that out anyway!

But now, driven by the demon that possessed her, she tried another track. ‘He — your father — doesn’t seem to like this work for Cumber. It doesn’t bother *you* much, I see.’

‘Still harping on *him*, then?’

‘Why not, if he *is* your father?’

‘Wizz, Wizz, what on earth’s the matter with you? Have I done anything? Have I annoyed you?’

‘Annoyed me!’ The savage stress she laid upon this made him drop her arm. ‘Come on,’ she cried. ‘For God’s sake, shut up and come on! Do you think I want *him* to hear us wrangling?’

As she spoke, she started off at such a pace that he was hard put to it to keep up with her.

‘I hope Lovie’s all right with Jenny,’ he murmured, as they approached the empty dew-pond with its unused heap of wood and kindling.

The girl was silent; and he tried again, for Old Funky’s child still seemed to him the only safe topic with her in her present mood. ‘It’s certainly a shame, as you said,’ he went on, ‘that we couldn’t bring her with us, but it would never have done.’

‘That’s a word you love, isn’t it? “Never would do”! “Never would have done”! Well — don’t mind me — set a match to your Midsummer fire! I know how much you’ve been looking forward to *that* sensation!’

‘Damn you, Wizz!’ The words were out before he could hold them back; but immediately afterwards she could see how ashamed and remorseful he was. ‘Forgive me, sweetheart!’ he whispered. ‘I don’t know how we’ve slipped into all this. There, there, my treasure, don’t ‘ee be cross any more with your old kidnapper.’ As he spoke, he laid both hands on her shoulders. ‘Wizz,’ he said, ‘little Wizz. I don’t believe you’ve the smallest idea how fond I am of you. And you’re really — down in your deep heart — just as fond of me. We didn’t meet in that caravan and recognize each other at once for nothing. There! I won’t say another word. You’re just being childish about him. You *must* really feel, just as I do, that if he *is* my father, it’s sheer madness to be silly like this. You don’t know him as well as I do. Neither of us knows him as well as poor Nance does. That boy of hers—’ But he broke off suddenly and allowed his hands to sink down from her shoulders. She knew he had caught a look on her face that she had never let him see there before, a look of actual physical shrinking from his touch.

‘All right, my dear,’ he said hurriedly, ‘I won’t bother you now. We’ll talk of this later.’

If she had longed to make him suffer, she got little satisfaction from the grim hardening process through which his features now passed.

But leaving her side without further words, he ran down to the dew-pond, knelt on the grass by the heap of wood, and, producing matches and some crumpled papers from his pocket, set himself to start a blaze.

This evidently proved more difficult than he anticipated; and, sitting down on the edge of the grassy hollow, she watched his clumsy fumblings, with lack-lustre eyes.

‘Lovie would be all right with him,’ she thought. ‘He’d pay someone — Jenny herself very likely — to look after her; and old Claudius would be there. The child would probably bring those two together. No, I can’t stand it any more. This is the end. I’ll go off — to Bristol — to London — to America — and start working again. Thel was quite right: when a person can do what I can do, it’s crazy to let it go.’

But no sooner had these thoughts raced through her brain than she heard the voices of the Wyes approaching. ‘He’s coming,’ she said to herself. ‘He’ll be here in a minute. If I go to America, I may never see him again. He’ll be with Thel, and he’ll never know!’

No-man succeeded at last in getting his Midsummer Eve bonfire lit. When once it started, the flames rose high, for there was enough wind stirring to help the blaze and yet, since the whole thing took place in so deep a concavity, not enough to disturb or carry away the burning pieces of wood.

It was not long before the whole party was grouped on the northerly rim of this grassy basin, from the centre of which, like some gigantic spike of fiery blossoms from a sunburnt calyx, the red flames wavered upward.

Most of the time while No-man kept tossing fuel upon the heap — and he went on till he had exhausted all there was — the fire retained its original pyramidal shape; but there did come moments when the wind blew strong enough across this small crater to sweep the whole living mass, the red flames along with the clouds of ash-grey smoke, towards the particular segment of the enclosing circle where our friends were sitting. When this happened, they were all completely hidden in smoke, not only hidden from any passing stranger but hidden from one another — a state of things which, curiously enough, seemed to lend itself to the mood of all of them, except young Mrs Wye, whose lively little screams, alternating with Dumbell's solemn protestations, made up a sort of comic-opera orchestration to the excited murmurings of the rest.

Wizzie had been to picnics before in full daylight when a fire had to be lit to boil a kettle, but those little gypsy flames were nothing to this flare. It was impossible not to be interested in the spectacle; and though she made up her mind not to bestow on D.'s silly idea the least word of commendation, she found herself deriving an unexpected satisfaction from the crackling of sticks, the roaring of flames, the eddying of smoke, and the weird alternations of illumination and obscurity.

Urien was separated from her by both Thuella and her father, while between Thel and herself reclined old Claudius, who was now gazing at her and talking to her with infinite content after the hubbub in that excavation shed.

'What a thing fire is, Miss Wizzie!' he was murmuring now. 'And doesn't it give you a queer feeling to see it in this blazing sunshine? I can see Thuella is absorbed in it all, and we mustn't disturb her' — here his voice became so low that Wizzie could scarcely hear it in the roaring of the flames— 'or I'd like to ask her, and I warrant we all would, if there exists in the world any really good picture of this weird struggle between sun and fire. Some would say the fire was defeated; but I don't think so. It's not as yellow as at night but I think it’s redder in some odd way, and I think it has a more supernatural and *impossible* look, if you can follow me, as if it really had the personality of one of those old four elements they worshipped, before the Romans used—’

‘Well done for you, Claudius!’ came the voice of No-man from out of the smoke, as, like some lumbering aboriginal, he moved round the bonfire he had lit. ‘If I hadn’t left my old stick behind, I’d stir up redder flames than these for you! I’m glad you’re *worshipping* fire for once, instead of only — Urien, here’s Mr Cask ready to worship fire!’

It was out of a thick rush of smoke that Urien’s voice came then. So thick indeed was the smoke that Teucer Wye scrambled to his feet and would have retreated; but it soon rolled away, and after coughing a little and spluttering a protest to his daughter, who continued to hug her thin knees as one impervious to such things, he turned back, and, leaning on his cane, gave an ear to what his Glymes neighbour was saying.

Wizzie couldn’t catch Urien’s first words; but it soon became clear to her that he was resuming an argument he and Claudius had already begun.

‘Not only Romans,’ she heard him say, as the cloud of smoke rolled aside. ‘All ancient busts. But what you thought was an armoured breastplate on his chest, like those on the coins of the Caesars, was something quite different. No-man knows what it was. No-man knows — No-man knows!’ There was an almost tragic appeal in his voice as he raised it then, and Wizzie glanced at D. to see if he would respond. But that gaunt figure, with his cap pulled low over his eyes, moved round and round his sinking fire, paying not the slightest heed.

The girl longed to call out, ‘Don’t ask him again! Don’t humiliate yourself before him!’ But once more the man cried out, ‘No-man knows what it was!’

‘He knows what you *think* it was!’ she heard D. mutter grimly.

And Dumbell must needs at that moment try to bring to the agitated man’s notice some tiny little plant he had picked on their way to the place. ‘It’s still in bud, Mr Quirm,’ she heard the man persist, ‘for it’s early for them yet. But would you call it a sheepsbit or a devilsbit? They’re not both scabiouses, you know. One is a—’

‘You mustn’t mind what I said, Quirm,’ pleaded Claudius gently, twisting his neck round and blinking from the sunshine while he still coughed from the effect of the smoke. ‘I see it hurts you to agree with me. I see that you’re vexed about it, and I think—’ He hesitated, and rubbed his face with both his hands. ‘I think there’s something else on your mind. Aye, man, man—’ And Wizzie looked sharply at him as his voice sank, for he suddenly spoke hoarsely and with deep feeling. ‘You’re not the only one! Here we are, watching our friend’s fire — and I wish your little girl could see it—’ This he threw in ‘sotto voce’ to Wizzie, catching her look. ‘But we’ve all got a hurt of some kind at the heart. It’s because we won’t — forgive me for saying it, Quirm! — shake off the past, shake off our personal feelings, and work for the future! I’ve been thinking a lot about this discovery, that goddess’s head, and that headless one, and that — other thing. And what I feel, Quirm, is — and I think I know you well enough to say this — that things like that, brought into the air after being buried so long, have an evil effect! Yes, an evil effect on all of us, Quirm. They’re full of the old self, full of the old subjective personal life that we must shake off if the world’s to go on and get better. Don’t interrupt me, Dunbar! I’m not dragging up our dispute now. The thing is, we *must* get rid of this perpetual “I, I, I” with all its cravings and hurt feelings! We must live in the race and in helping the race forward. Man, man’ — and once more Wizzie caught something like a groan beneath his words— ‘don’t you see it’s nothing whether I'm right or you're right about that thing? Where we're all wrong is that we live by our personal feelings instead of living...'

But Wizzie lost what he said at that point, although, in spite of many indignant whistles from Dumbell's father and an outburst of spiteful giggling from Dumbell's wife, he went on for some while in the same strain, still addressing his remarks to Urien, who stood as if sunk into a trance — not unlike the trance that was rendering Thuella so motionless and silent, as she sat hunched up on the brink of the hollow.

But what distracted Wizzie at that moment was No-man's coming up to her and throwing himself down at her side.

His fire was low and smouldering now. The smoke had vanished; and all the fuel was exhausted. The tremendous force of the midsummer sun — for it must have been at least one o'clock by this time — seemed to be sucking up, as if with a gigantic tongue, all the life, all the vitality, all the character from those dying flames. If they were red before, they were a mockery of redness now. Some of them, in fact, as they rose into a momentary flare from the fiery heap, took to themselves the colour of fading crocuses. Others became pallid as summer lightning. One or two, just because this blazing sun and this burning metallic sky had sucked all the devilry out of them, and all the piracy, and all the life-lust, became spiritualized and etherealized, became like candle-flames, those purest of all forms of fire, those guileless sisterhoods of fire. There were even some — but this may have had to do with the wavering edge between the grass that had been burned by the sun, that shaped itself into little straw-coloured estuaries and promontories round the place of burning, and the grass that had been burned black by the fire — that presented the appearance of *invisible fire*, fire that was almost as colourless as water.

Maiden Castle was undoubtedly doing what she must have done more than four thousand years ago when that woman's head, along with those other things, looked into eternity across the land of the Durotriges: lifting up this blackened circle of burnt grass, the work of the fire substance produced by man, towards the far-off living body of the greatest fire mystery we know.

Round the dying flames of No-man's bonfire, on the rim of a dew-pond that now offered itself as a target for the sun's rays with what must soon be a bull's-eye of black annihilation, sat and stood, each with his own peculiar sense of the significance of the occasion, our group of enemy-friends. None of them could shake off a vague impression of something momentous in this death of fire beneath this majesty of burning light; none of them, unless it were Mr Cumber's daughter, could dismiss the image of what the excavators had unearthed. That woman's head, that headless torso, that eyeless and earless beast-god — these things had been under the chalk when Caesar landed, under the chalk when the Conqueror landed, under the chalk when Victoria was crowned! They had been storing up in that long darkness all the wild prayers, all the desperate imprecations that had been addressed to them on the summit of Mai-Dun before the last stone had been added to Stonehenge.

And yet descendants of the same feathered tribes as had dashed their wings against the temple that housed these entities hovered still about the spot where, after their long sojourn in darkness, they saw the light again. And the great turf promontory, lifting up to the burning sun this blackened bowl of smouldering flame, lifted up also to the metallic sky the invisible thoughts about those weird 'revenants' that each of these human skulls concealed. It is hard to believe that objects of frantic human invocation, however weird and monstrous, do not release, when freed from their long imprisonment, something of the magnetic potency that the minds of their far-off worshippers communicated to them as they prayed.

But whether due to what they had lately seen, or simply to the hypnotism of what they saw before them now, it remained that this whole group of men and women felt as if something had heightened, transformed, held in a strange suspension, their thoughts about themselves and about one another.

Claudius alone among them seemed to keep his normal energy, his habitual mood, and his voice rose and fell between the dying bonfire and the burning sky like the voice of some tremendous future, some catastrophic renewal of all things, lifted up in a low, terrible, ominous, blasphemous menace against the whole weight of the past, and lifted up where the past bore its heaviest burden, and when the gods of the past had just been dragged up from the dead! Not a person there but knew how completely Claudius had sacrificed for this new *objective hope* all that magical self-life, of which he seemed to regard those disfigured objects in the shed as perilous symbols; but, between sun and fire, between Mai-Dun and that burning sky, his voice sounded to most of them there like the voice of some remorseless anti-man, threatening with destruction the foundations of their life.

It was not only No-man's lying down by her side that made Wizzie stop listening. Heedless of the blazing exposure of the least move that any of them made in that tremendous glare, D. laid his hand familiarly and possessively on the girl's thigh, just above the knee that was nearest him. 'Don't 'ee be cross with me, my treasure!' he whispered. 'I *swear* I won't be jealous with him any more.'

She didn't dare to make a proclamation of their quarrel by shaking off his hand, for, though Claudius, as he talked, had turned away his head, almost everyone there could see them clearly. But she cast about for a diversion so as to avoid answering him; nor had she any difficulty in finding what she wanted. To her absolute amazement, as she glanced at Thuella, who was sitting bolt upright in her yellow dress hugging her knees, she saw that the tall girl’s face was convulsed with sobs, and big tears were rolling down her cheeks. No one else but she and No-man could see this, for they alone were between the girl and the smouldering flames at which she was staring, but the sight of her tears filled Wizzie with astonishment, for it was the first time since she had known Thuella that she had ever seen her weep.

‘Look at Thel, D.!’ she whispered to him. No-man was evidently as much amazed as she was, and he leapt instantly to his feet and, offering his hand to Wizzie, pulled her up too. They hurried past Claudius, who scarcely glanced at them from where he sat, and both sank down at the girl’s side.

‘What is it, Thel?’ whispered Wizzie in a low voice. Low as her voice was, she would certainly have been overheard by Claudius if he had not been absolutely absorbed in his discourse to Urien. Even as she spoke, she glanced anxiously round, aware of an instinctive hope that no one else in that little group had noticed the girl’s distress. Her father certainly was oblivious! What *was* he thinking about, that funny little man? In a flash, as her eyes took him in, his thin haunches propped on a mole-hill that might easily have been an ant-hill, she saw that he had taken one of his little school-texts from his pocket and was holding it unopened in his hand. ‘Thel might cry her eyes out,’ she thought, ‘and *he’d* never see. But I know what he feels. He feels like I do when D.’s talking and I’ve got my story under the pillow. It’s his way out, and I don’t blame him.’ Thus did Wizzie interpret the escape from the great sun above, and the dying bonfire beneath, that a dead philosopher was able to achieve for an ex-professor.

The weeping girl was so slow in answering, and the deep shadow of her big hat made it so hard to see with what expression she regarded her would-be comforter, that our friend had time, as she still felt the imprint of D.'s fingers on her thigh, to turn her pity into a fierce pulse of revolt against masculine possessiveness. How *dared* he lay his hand on her like that in this exposed place? It was therefore with a malicious sympathy that she heard Thel murmur at last, in a choking voice, and evidently addressing No-man rather than herself: 'Not — one — of you — cares — anything! I — I could — paint such — pictures — if I had one single person who — who — None of you know, none! I'm — I'm more alone than if *I'd* been buried for four thousand years!'

Then Wizzie saw No-man, who had sat down a little further from the agitated girl than she had done herself, shuffle across the grass till he could touch her and lay his hand on her knee. 'I hope she'll enjoy *that,'* she thought angrily.

But Thuella seemed totally indifferent. 'Not one of you know,' she gasped again. 'Not one of you care! I go on — working — in a void. It — was — it was this fire — in the sun — and I thought — I thought — what I could make of it — and then I thought — but no one cares!' And once more her sobs choked her.

For a second, Wizzie was really touched by the spectacle of this passionate grief emerging from beneath that great flapping hat. 'Thel, darling, don't you—' she began.

'It's like poisoned blood!' cried the girl, pointing at the bonfire, whose flames, rising up before they died, had caught the last fragment of unburnt fuel.

But Claudius, who had at last grown aware of what was happening, was now on his feet looking down at the three of them.

‘Mr Wye!’ he called out. ‘Mr Wye! Your daughter’s crying!’

This of course brought about the very contingency that Wizzie had dreaded most for her friend; and she glanced upward angrily at Claudius. What a fool the man was! Who but an idiot would call one’s father to the scene when one was upset? For, of course, they all crowded round now.

‘It’s the heat!’ cried the Cumber girl. ‘Get some water for her, Dun!’

But Dumbell could only open his botanical tin, look inside, and close it carefully again. ‘She’ll be better soon,’ he remarked, as if the opening and shutting of his collector’s tin had been the removing of a thermometer from a patient’s mouth.

‘Don’t be silly, Thuella,’ protested Teucer Wye peevishly, making an effort to drag her to her feet with one hand, while with the other he squeezed his book back into his side-pocket.

Very slowly, Urien, following the rest, stood sombre and gloomy behind the girl, where it was impossible for her to see him.

‘The great mistake *you* make, child,’ said No-man calmly, pressing his fingers still more closely round her curved knee, ’is to change the current of your way of taking life. Concentrate on your own mind, my friend, instead of on your work. It’s your mind that’s important, not what you do!’

Something about the tone in which he uttered these words seemed to fill Thuella with fury. She scrambled hurriedly to her feet, gave her yellow skirt an angry shake, and, pointing a quivering finger at No-man, careless of the presence of the others, burst into a bitter invective.

The man rose too, and so did Wizzie; and Wizzie herself was astonished at the uprush of evil pleasure that flooded her being as she watched D.’s babyish bewilderment under the girl’s torrent of words. ‘She’s not well today. That’s what it is,’ she thought. ‘She oughtn’t to have come. I could see she wasn’t herself. But all the better! If she’d been herself, she’d never have said these things. Oh, I'm so glad she came. He'll hear *something* anyway!'

And then, as Thuella went on, while her father, who had caught hold of her arm again, kept giving feeble tugs to drag her away, Wizzie had a savage impulse. 'I'd like everyone here to attack D.!' she thought. 'I hope Urien does. I hope Claudius does, and Dumbell too! Oh, I know so well what D.'s thinking now. He's thinking, "I'm a good, quiet man, working at my book, going on my walks, enjoying my sensations, being kind to the girl I rescued. I am strong. I am self-controlled. I am dependent on nobody. I can get my own breakfast in my own attic. I am happy in myself, especially when I have a harmless amusement like making a bonfire. Wizz can kick and scream. Thel can kick and scream. I'm the quiet, strong man who can listen to their wild nonsense and never say a word!"'

'Concentrate on my own mind?' Thuella was now screaming in hysterical shrillness, as with the brim of her hat pushed back, and her eyes gleaming like a demon's, she poured out her pent-up feelings on the bewildered D. '*His* own mind, *my* own mind, *all* our own minds! Why, it would be like that stream by your coal-yard, Mr Cask, where those ducks stand on their heads all day long to get at the mud! My mind, *of* my mind, *to* my mind, *by, with*, or *from* my mind! I know what you think — What contemptible teaching! You talk as if our minds were cheeses. I agree with you entirely, Mr Cask. Let's burn our cheese-like minds clean of these maggoty sensations! Every noble person has ideas beyond himself, ideas that are dangerous to himself; but you dodge all that! It's round and round with you, isn't it? Count on your fingers; count on your toes; canter and caper and down he goes! Oh, how I despise you — how I *despise* you!' She stopped, exhausted, staring at D. with flashing eyes.

By some chance, No-man had been isolated from the rest as they crowded round; and he now stood close to his bonfire, whose flames, pale red — like poisoned blood, as Thuella had said — and looking shockingly unnatural in the bright sunshine, emphasized in some queer way the leanness and gauntness of his figure.

‘How babyish he looks without his stick!’ Wizzie thought. ‘With it he looks like a selfish old man; without it like a selfish child! But that’s all *his* mind does when it gets out of itself. It goes into his stick!’

The dew-pond where No-man had made his bonfire was well out of the track to the excavation shed, so that only a few strangers came even within sight of this group of friends, and those who did were in too much fear of missing His Lordship’s christening of the great discovery to yield to their curiosity.

Thus it was brought about, either by the great goddess Chance, or by those occult fatalities of character that are often stronger than Chance, that while that southern promontory of Maiden Castle held up to the burning sun this unnatural bonfire whose flame looked like poisoned blood, it also held up a half-circle of highly-strung men and women, their nerves wrought upon by the weird images that had been unearthed, who, through the medium of a girl in a yellow dress, were swept forward by some sudden psychic wave of irrational hostility towards their lonely bonfire-maker.

Any collection of human beings, however casually gathered, takes upon itself the nature of a living entity, but when the component members of such an entity have not been gathered casually, when there has been a united and premeditated object in such a gathering, and above all when the separate units making up the resultant entity are well-acquainted with one another and have been previously linked to one another by endless subtle relations, the most surprising and unpredictable behaviour may be expected of the multiple being thus created.

Individually there was not a member of this group, except perhaps Dumbell and his young wife, who was not friendly to D. No-man. Urien was more than friendly to him; and it was alien to the whole nature of Claudius to be seized with sudden malice against anyone. Teucer Wye had been all that day only waiting for an opportunity to tell No-man about the respectful memory of people in Derbyshire. And yet, as they all listened now to Thuella's indignant reproaches — and it was only a woman friend who could know anything about the part played in such an outburst by sick nerves — it was easy for Wizzie to detect that her malevolent wish was actually, beyond her hope, being fulfilled.

Had they been contemporaries of those images, No-man at that moment would probably have been flung into his own flames; and, civilized as they were, it was still plain that some morbid magnetic sympathy with Thuella's emotion had isolated the bonfire-maker. They had all been long without food. The unusual heat of the sun in that exposed spot had fevered their blood; and that staring stone head, that headless torso, that shapeless beast-form, though interpreted so differently by all of them, were still at work in the secret places of their minds, and anyone could see that the disturbing and even shocking sight of these flames in sunlight was rousing some sort of devilry in them.

What Wizzie felt herself just then, and she felt it with a sort of evil triumph, was that they couldn't help sharing Thuella's feelings, couldn't help feeling just as she did at that moment towards D. And though it was all instinct with her, and she would have been puzzled to explain it, she had an obscure sense that something she had always been aware of in D. was itself drawing towards him this psychic wave of hostility. It was his habitual propitiation, his curious love of putting himself in the wrong, of bringing down on himself reproaches and abuse. Other people, men who *were* men, hit back openly and honestly when they were attacked. D. never did. Never once, till that scene today by the cemetery gate, had she known him to stand up for himself as people should! He led you on to make a fool of him. He seemed to *like* looking a fool with you.

In the depths of her mind Wizzie knew that one of her chief grievances against him was that she couldn't make him angry. It was like living with a tree, rather than a man, to live with D. — a tree that enjoyed having its branches mauled and cut! And now at this moment the man looked as if nothing would please him more than for them all to leap on him and throw him into those red embers.

'He's like a malicious scapegoat!' she thought, remembering the old scriptural phrase from her convent lessons. 'And how silly he looks,' she said to herself, 'just like Lovie when I burnt her paper doll. And yet how pleased with himself he looks, just like he did that first night when he found me undressed by the fire! He's got nothing on his mind, as Thel says, but his walks and his sensations. All the rest of us are unhappy — Urien most of all. And there he stands, enjoying himself, enjoying — oh, how well I know him! — even being shown up by Thel! Yes, you *may* look at me. It's true, it's true what I've told you. I *hate* you. Do you understand that? Put *that* among your sensations! I hate you; and I hate your book and both your dead bitches! And I'm glad Thel's cursing you, and I'm glad the others feel the same.'

Meanwhile, Thuella, irritated rather than quieted by No-man's mock-submissive silence, and relieved at last from her father's feeble tugs at her arm, began afresh. She told her victim that it was because all the rest of them were wrestling with life— 'She's got *that* from Urien,' Wizzie thought

— and he alone was just enjoying life, that he could talk as he did about the mind.

But at that point Wizzie experienced the weird impression that with a wild tumultuous rush as of beating wings the tragic souls of all of them — old Wye's trying to escape from everything with his learned books, Claudius's with his airplanes, Urien's with his unhappy ideas, Thel's with her unintelligible pictures — were hurling themselves forward, out of all their tormented brains, in one furious invisible rush, to make a real Guy Fawkes of this bonfire idiot!

'Yes, that's what you are, and now you know!' she muttered under her breath in a burst of savage inspiration. 'You're the Guy Fawkes of Maiden Castle!' And then, while she saw D. looking foolishly north and south and east and west as he stood there: 'Is it for your stick you're looking, you great baby, or is it for your dear Nancy, for the sweet clinging Nancy, who loves you so?'

It was at that moment that Urien, who had been standing gloomily between the young Wyes, suddenly moved forward till he was just behind Thuella. Here he paused, while the girl, quite oblivious of his proximity, went on, though more faintly now, with her vindictive tirade.

But the eyes of the Glymes man had met Wizzie's eyes, and she felt herself being drawn towards him, or rather, strictly speaking, towards the girl in front of him, who, the moment she approached, began clinging frantically to her, sobbing hysterically, and twining herself about her, till Wizzie, already troubled by the burning sunshine, staggered under her weight.

At the very moment she was thus supporting and soothing her friend, there reached her ears, carried over the great hill on the midsummer breeze, the sound of lively cheering. She saw Dumbell and his wife swinging round to listen. A cheering crowd was evidently more to their taste than the hysterical scene before them; and they even moved a step or two in the direction of so comfortable a sound.

Wizzie had just time, as she too listened and watched their movement over Thel's shoulder, to say to herself, 'Those two are getting sick of all the fuss we're making,' when Urien, stepping forward, took *her* by one hand and Thuella by the other. In a voice of forced facetiousness that jarred oddly on Wizzie's ears, he cried out to No-man, 'Get out of the way, lad! These girls and I want to pass through your fire!' And heedless of the indignant protests of the ex-professor, whose countenance at that moment assumed an almost shocking resemblance to Dumbell's, the unwieldy man, pulling the two girls with him, actually plunged down the slope of the pond, passed No-man in the descent, and rushed with his startled companions clear through the fiery embers.

Wizzie, who had never been in contact with the man before, except for a few conventional handshakes, gave herself up to the magnetism of his grasp with the elation of a little girl; and when they were safe on the other side, and he released them both, she gasped with delight and uttered a quaint little circus cry, the cry with which she was wont to respond to applause in the old Urgan tent.

Thuella, on the contrary, seemed ashamed and sobered; and when No-man, who negligently followed them across his fire, trampling, as he went, on what was still smouldering, bent down to brush some sparks from her yellow skirt, the girl laid her hand on his head. 'Sorry, my friend,' Wizzie heard her whisper. 'You didn't mind so terribly much, did you? It was *everybody* I was cross with — not particularly you.'

Scarcely three-quarters of an hour after the extinction of No-man's fire, our whole party was passing the cemetery on their way back to Dorchester.

It was now a little after two, but Wizzie was aware that Mrs Dearth hadn't expected her and D. much sooner; and neither the Wye family nor Mr Quirm seemed inclined to hurry back to Glymes, where they knew Nance would have some sort of meal for them, however late they appeared. From various whispers exchanged between Dumbell and his wife as they went along, Wizzie gathered that the Cumber girl was inclined to share the Quirms' hospitality rather than go to the expense of treating her husband's relations at the Antelope.

The return down the Weymouth road coincided with the hour in which the burgesses of the town were lingering over their Sunday dinner, so that there was nothing to distract our friends from one another as they drifted en masse past the railings of the Amphitheatre. The massively built old town, surrounded four-square by her umbrageous avenues, seemed to welcome their approach with her promise of shady coolness and bodily refreshment. The absence of the weekly traffic had the effect of attenuating to a minimum all the usual vibrations interposed between humanity and the mellow identity of the place. Like the balmy air of a placid valley drifting over the grazing backs of multitudinous cattle all feeding like one, the combined scent of foliage and flowers, of dust and chimney-smoke, of sun-warmed masonry and mossy walls, came forth to meet them. But it was as if this Sunday smell of Dorchester contained something quite beyond all these familiar scents. It seemed to bring with it — as if the whole ancient place had been one deep vase of thick-pressed pot-pourri — a subtle perfume that was like the sweet dust of long-buried generations, a consecrated secular dust from which all that was foul in mortality had long since evaporated, leaving only a thrice-purged residue, a holy deposit, the dust of what was inviolable in ashes, indestructible in embers, destined to perish only with our human senses.

‘Well, never mind about my bed-posts,’ No-man was saying when they reached the Amphitheatre. ‘That thing at their feet was *some* sort of a totem-god, some sort of a symbol of subhuman life. You must admit that, at any rate, Claudius.’

Wizzie was glad to see that Claudius was too occupied in watching Urien to respond to this. She also was troubled about the Glymes man, but, along with her concern, a new element had entered her feelings towards that brooding figure, who had not spoken a word to anyone since the episode of the fire — an indefinable suspicion, a sense of danger.

But the man broke his silence now, and, as if realizing what the girl was feeling, his words were calm and practical. ‘You’ll come to Glymes with us, won’t you, Cask?’ he enquired. ‘Nance will be ready for all who come. She loves a lot of people.’

‘Thank you, Quirm,’ the other replied. ‘No, I’m afraid I can’t do that now. Another day, perhaps — but I *must* tidy things up a bit. It’s too good a —’

‘*What* was the name of that Celtic goddess you mentioned, Mr Quirm?’ interrupted Dumbell. ‘If you don’t mind spelling it for me, I think I’ll run into the station and send Mr Cumber a wire. He wanted us to telephone to him, but—’

But at that point Mrs Dunbar whispered something to the young man that made him close his mouth with a snap and relinquish this project. ‘Oh, very well,’ he muttered. ‘I was only thinking that some other paper...’

In a straggling shifting group they moved on until they reached the bottom of South Street. Here, after a brief discussion between Thuella and Urien, the suggestion was made that to finish their discussion and avoid the town they should all go together by Bowling Alley and the West Walks to Hangman’s Cottage, and separate there. Turning to the left, therefore, the whole cortège drifted down the shady seclusion of the Alley, and made their way, still through a branching aisle of trees, to where, near the top of High West Street, is the railed-in fragment of Roman wall.

'You and Quirm', said Claudius to No-man, turning round as he spoke, and sweeping his hawk's eye over the whole company to make sure Wizzie as well as the other two women heard him, 'are agreed, then, that what we saw is a pre-Roman image representing three mythological figures: a woman, a man, and a beast. Urien suggests that the woman is the goddess Caridwen; that the headless man, which I took for a Roman emperor, is—'

Here Urien himself hurriedly interrupted him, though Wizzie received the impression that her Black Man of Glymes only broke his gloomy silence under some strong interior compulsion. 'I don't suggest,' the man almost groaned. 'I know.'

'Who do you say it is?' enquired the Cumber girl sharply. And, turning upon No-man, she added in the brisk tone in which she had told her maid to dust Dumbell's treasures, 'Father won't like it if you and Mr Quirm take different views!'

'Who is the headless one?' cried Dumbell, taking the cue from his wife and precipitating himself towards Urien in such haste that his botanical tin emitted a metallic tinkle. *'Who* is the headless one?'

For the first time in her knowledge of him, Wizzie saw a flash of real anger in Enoch Quirm's eyes. Heavily he swung round and faced poor Dumbell. ' "Who?" ' he growled. 'Did you say "Who?" "Who, who, *who"* — that's the word — and "Who cares?" is another word!'

'But who *is* he?' repeated the searcher after the hundred-and-twentieth variety of British blackberry. 'Who *is* he, Mr Quirm?'

At that, the Glymes man lost all control of himself. *'He's the devil!'* he roared out, and, turning away, began hitting his chest and mumbling something in Welsh. This outcry of Urien's, made more resonant by the presence of that ancient wall, caused a general disturbance.

Teucer Wye impatiently drew his cane along the railings that protected the imperial masonry, causing an unpleasant 'tick-tick-tick' as the ferule struck each iron bar. Then he looked his Glymes neighbour up and down, as if he would have liked to have extracted the same sound from that lumbering body by a similar method.

Wizzie caught this look in Mr Wye's face, and it made her dislike him more than ever. For her own part, when her Glymes man cried 'He's the devil!' she would have done anything for him, anything to comfort him! Her sense of fear was still there, but, had the man been seated at that moment, she would have willingly slid down upon his knees.

Thuella, when *she* heard this unhappy outburst, impatiently pushed her brother aside and began tucking in with her fingers the big man's baggy jersey, which was protruding in an unseemly fashion from his belt.

This, it may well be believed, caused Wizzie a spasm of jealousy, but it was upon No-man that her anger fell. She caught on D.'s face, as he too approached Urien, a look she had come especially to loathe. It was a look that to her mind seemed to say, 'I am made of granite. These nervous attacks are beyond my comprehension.' So strong was her feeling that she jerked him back by the arm. 'Leave him alone! Can't you see we're only making him worse?'

Neither the emotion in her voice, nor the violence with which she pulled him back, had any effect on No-man; but they had an immediate effect on Thuella, who, swinging round, gave vent to a ringing peal of shrill malicious laughter, after which, clutching at her hat — for a hot dusty wind was now blowing on them from the road up to the barracks — she cried out impatiently: 'Come on, Urien! Come on, all of you! I want to show you something I've discovered in the Hardy statue. I told *you* about it, Wizz; but the others don't know.'

It was an added blow to Wizzie when she saw Urien shake himself like a great sick bear and stride off at a great pace by Thuella's side. Her feeling was clearly shared by Teucer Wye, for the little man clutched helplessly at Dumbell's arm and dragged him in pursuit, while Claudius, seeing the Cumber girl unsupported and evidently in a huff, went straight to her side and began a polite discourse on the superiority of engineering over architecture, to which Mrs Wye, giving Wizzie the kind of spiteful look one schoolgirl might give another, answered with an insolent shrug of her thin shoulders.

When Wizzie and No-man reached the cross-roads at the top of High West Street, they were forced to wait, before following the others, while a number of newly enlisted recruits, led by a middle-aged corporal, marched past.

'Doesn't it look heavenly on a hot day like this?' said No-man, pointing out to her the tower of St Peter's at the bottom of the street. 'I always like to think', he went on, 'how old Barnes, standing down there in his knee-breeches, must enjoy a day like this.'

'Barnes?' murmured Wizzie absent-mindedly.

'His statue, my sweet. It must feel so miserable in bad weather.'

Wizzie sighed. Her thoughts at that moment had taken a wild and strange flight. She had been trying to recall what she had felt when the Glymes man led her and Thel through those smouldering flames, and there had suddenly come upon her a vision of that nameless beast-snout carved at the feet of those two figures. 'It was like D.'s monster', she thought, 'and yet it wasn't.' And, linking it in her mind with that passage through the fire, she gave way to the morbid fancy that it was astride of that beast-snout that Urien had dragged her over the fiery embers.

Hardly realizing why she did it, she hurriedly laid her hand on D.'s arm. It was an almost automatic gesture, and one that was natural enough now that the recruits had passed and they were free to cross the road, and it was not accompanied by any tenderness towards D.; but it *was* accompanied by a sudden uneasy suspicion of her Black Man of Glymes.

'I wish he hadn't pulled us like that through the fire,' she thought; and along with this uneasiness about Urien there came a longing to be safe back in Friary Lane with Lovie. 'I hope Lovie's all right,' she said to herself. And then it came to her that she felt faint from lack of food. 'I wish we were sitting down', she thought, 'to Jenny's good dinner!'

As they began to cross the road, she indicated to D. how hungry she was, and suggested that they should say good-bye to the others at Hardy's statue and go straight home down High West Street.

'I should say so!' D. responded with instant sympathy. 'You must be famished, sweetheart!'

When they were nearly across, he asked her what it was that Thuella had discovered about the statue.

'Oh, nothing,' she replied wearily. 'Only some old picture it makes her think of

They paused for a second when they got to the curb-stone, and Wizzie found herself tightening her grip on No-man's arm. In the exhaustion that had seized her she felt suddenly unequal to facing the group gathered about the statue. It had been the leap of her spirit, its fling, its escape, that had turned her to Enoch Quirm. In this feeling of deadly exhaustion, without heart for anything, she leant on D. as she would have leant against their bedroom chimney-piece.

It is one of Nature's favourite tricks with a man and a woman who live together to intermit their bitterest quarrels with moments when, contrary to their own will perhaps, they find themselves as much united against the outer world as if they were the most passionate of lovers.

'Look at Thel,' whispered No-man. 'She's taken off her hat. Look at the sun on her head against old Hardy's knee! I wonder which he'd have been most interested in — you or her?' He became silent, staring, as Wizzie could see, not at Thuella's golden head but into vacancy.

'Don't let's wait a single minute with them,' she whispered eagerly, looking up into his face. 'Just hullo and good-bye!'

With a slow smile he returned from his interior contemplation. 'Sure, my sweet!' he said. 'Good-bye, and off we go.'

When, however, they reached the statue, they found it harder than they had expected to follow this drastic resolution. Straight towards the barracks, as if he were acting as umpire in some invisible aerial tournament, gazed with fixed stare the great sculptor in words. His bronze legs in their serviceable stockings were crossed restfully at the knee, and his compact head, poised above his upright shoulders, was held as alert and as raptorial towards the cunning masks of the Immanent Will as it had been held in life for the best part of a century.

'Hullo! You look as if you were all gathered round the figure-head of a ship!' cried No-man in his abrupt way, as they joined the others; and though as a rule Wizzie deliberately closed her mind to his off-hand imaginings, this time, in her unexpected mood of taking refuge with him, she gave herself up completely to this fancy of his. Their friends were too occupied to bother about the way he greeted them, so that she had time to feel as if the old town lying round them were actually and indeed some huge phantasmal ship, loaded to the bulkheads with the perilous cargoes of the generations, and voyaging to its unknown port behind that forward-gazing bronze figure.

‘Come here a second, No-man!’ cried Dumbell. ‘No, wait a moment, Father! Let him see it! I’m not hurting Mr Hardy.’

The ex-professor ceased his efforts to snatch from that bronze back — so characteristic still, even in metal — a blank page from one of his son’s Blackshirt tracts. This fly-leaf the sacrilegious youth had spread out on that almost living surface and was using as a note-book.

As far as Wizzie could gather, he was engaged in making a rough sketch, with hurried strokes of his pencil, of the great discovery they had just seen. Dumbell’s gift for such rough drawings was not contemptible, and Wizzie was astonished at the crude verisimilitude of the scrawl. There, if her Glymes man was right, was the great goddess Caridwen. There was the headless unknown with what looked like Egyptian hieroglyphics on his breast. And there was the eyeless, earless beast-snout!

Once more that disturbing feeling that had something to do with her passage through the bonfire came over her, but very faintly this time, for she was clinging to D.’s arm as she leaned forward. It assumed too a rather different form, due to the fact that up the deeply cut highway, flanked by houses with a rich Balzacian look of old romance, the cool airs from the river could reach her face, for she fancied herself wading through water in place of fire and being aware of this demon beast as a great slippery fish-head swimming between her knees.

It annoyed her a good deal afterwards that so much of her consciousness should have been preoccupied just then with herself, for a curious event now occurred, about every detail of which she would have liked to have been absolutely certain; but, as fate would have it, she was doomed to be uncertain about the whole business.

D. had dropped her arm. Of *that* at least she was sure. And, after dropping it, he had taken the pencil from Dumbell to make some alteration. Whether he too was seized with dizziness then from lack of food, or whether — well, she never knew, then or later, what really happened. D. himself always swore to her on his dying oath that the last touch he gave with Dumbell's pencil was on the snout of the beast, which he was anxious to make resemble still more closely his heraldic bed-posts. But what at any rate was certain was that, after Mr Wye or Claudius had snatched the leaflet away from the great man's back and they were all examining it, not without uneasy glances at each other, D. suddenly seized it and tore it into bits. But he had not done this before she had seen what was there: the name 'Mona', in a shaky hand, written clear across the sketch!

CHAPTER 9. Full Circle

THE UNUSUALLY FINE weather continued, with only brief intermissions, all through the summer. Indeed, it was not till the beginning of October that the rains began. When, however, they *did* come, they avenged the long months of drought with such a constant downpour that conditions of life in Dorchester were completely changed.

One result of this incessant rain was the collapse of Claudius, whose health, already undermined by his labours in the coal-yard, now broke down. The end of the second week in October found him laid up in his house in Friary Lane with a complication of obstinate ailments that threatened to be serious.

Mrs Dearth, however, remained obdurate. Do what they could to persuade her to forgive her old friend now that he was so ill, the indignant protests of both No-man and Wizzie were always received in the same way — by an implacable refusal to submit to what the aggrieved woman called 'putting weakness before principle'. What had fixed the final seal upon Jenny's perversity was her discovery — and our friends soon recognized that concealment was impossible — of the fact that the sick man was constantly being visited by youthful members of the Movement in Dorchester.

The relentless Horse-Head — and how cross Wizzie became when D. indulged his tedious love of nicknames! — had marked down among these young revolutionaries one or two who were not only feminine in sex but endowed with a charm that fell in most fatally with her preconceived ideas. She did once go so far as to invite the doctor who visited the ex-philanthropist into her front room to ask his opinion of the patient's condition; but, as Wizzie and No-man knew too well, the one person who might have shocked and startled her into a more generous mood was not the doctor, a laconic optimist, but the district nurse — but she, unfortunately, was almost as comely in appearance as the young revolutionaries!

Talking it over together, No-man and Wizzie came to the conclusion that their friend had obstinately closed her mind to any possible issue to Mr Cask's illness but a favourable one.

'She thinks of it', No-man would say, 'as a game of bluff between them. She feels that he would have made a fool of her if he melted her heart by taking to his bed.'

'It's the doctor,' Wizzie would reply. 'He's a first-rate man, but he'd be cheerful if the town was full of the Black Death.'

Agreed as they were about Jenny and Claudius, it cannot be said that No-man and his girl had grown any closer during these summer months. The presence of Lovie had pushed them further apart rather than brought them together, and of this the child seemed dimly aware, for they had both caught her in various irritating devices to bridge the rift.

Wizzie still brooded over the protracted wrong done to her about the attic in High East Street, and though it was plain he had to have a place to work in, and plain too that if he delayed his breakfast long enough to share it with her his morning's work would have to be curtailed, it was still a rooted grievance that this book of his always loomed up as more important than their life together.

All this summer her devotion to Enoch Quirm had been the chief outlet for that vein in her of girlish romance that was always being fed by her story-books; but something or other — some teasing obstacle — seemed always to turn up to prevent her being alone with him.

Over and over again, while the air was full of flower-pollen and grass-seed and humming insects, she had wheeled the perambulator over the Blue Bridge and up the lane to Glymes, only to find Urien away at Maiden Castle. And when she *had* caught him in his house, it seemed difficult to get a moment with him alone. Nance wasn't the difficulty. Nance always seemed ready to leave them together. The trouble came from Thuella. The girl invariably came out when she saw Lovie's perambulator; and Wizzie even noticed that, when she didn't join them, either Nance or Urien himself would make some excuse to bring her on the scene. It was as if it needed the presence of the two of them together to liberate him from his growing gloom.

This gloominess was a new thing, and it evidently was a worry to Nance. Wizzie suspected that Nance's warm greetings had to do with the lifting of this cloud, and she came to the conclusion that the woman must have had the wit to notice that his spirits rose to their old pitch only when both the young women were with him.

The chief reason for his gloom seemed to be a very definite one; and Nance often talked to Wizzie about it. This was some hurt to his inner nature done by his weekly articles on Welsh mythology for Mr Cumber's paper. Nance told her that she'd implored him to get out of it. She confessed that she'd offered to get some daily job in the town to keep them going, if he'd only consent to give it up.

Wizzie herself had felt from the beginning that she understood perfectly what the man suffered in having to work for Mr Cumber. She was still in the dark, and content to be in the dark, about these ideas of his, but she told herself it was as if she'd had to do her turn in the circus-ring for the pleasure and under the censorship of Lord Fordington and his private guests.

Everybody by this time, both in Friary Lane and at Glymes, knew that D. was her Black Man’s son. The story had even begun to leak out in the town; and the two tall men — both of them striking figures, the one in his faded jersey, and the other with his familiar cudgel — were followed sometimes by inquisitive looks when together in the Dorchester streets.

Her private feeling was that Urien was fonder of D. than D. was of him; but then D. though propitiatory to everyone, was fond of no one, while Urien had become more vulnerable and human since the discovery at Maiden Castle.

Of one result of his connection with the Cumbers Wizzie couldn’t help approving. The indefatigable Mrs Wye, as much without reverence as she was without fear, and with no more sense of a person’s feelings than of the feelings of a carpet that had to be beaten, drove the man into going to the barber’s, with the result that his head no longer had an African look. Older he undoubtedly became under the scissors of the barber, but he acquired a more normal and natural appearance, and his head ceased to resemble the woolly topknot of a mammoth ram. The little autocrat of Beulah Lodge hadn’t scrupled to badger him about his clothes too, but here he proved incorrigible.

‘If she takes away his jersey’, D. told Wizzie one night by their upper room fire, ‘he’ll go dotty, just as I would if you took away my stick.’

All the first week of October it rained incessantly; but the heaviest rain Wizzie had ever known in her life was the rain that swept down the panes of Claudius’s room when she and D. went in to see him on the afternoon of the eleventh.

Claudius confessed to them he had been worse in the night. He told them he had had a violent shivering-fit just before dawn and had tried to reach his fire, which the district nurse had made up in the hope that it might last till she came back in the morning.

'She rated me well, you may believe,' he told them, 'when she did come. She wouldn't have known about it, though, if Katie and Edith hadn't looked in on their way to work.'

'Known about what?' enquired Wizzie anxiously. 'You don't mean to say you couldn't get back to bed?'

Claudius worked himself up a bit higher on his pillows and chuckled. 'I'm right as a trivet now,' he said. 'I'm far better than yesterday afternoon. Look at the rain! Listen to it.' He was silent for a moment, watching the streaming pane. Then, with a change of expression: '*She* doesn't know about last night, does she?'

'We don't know about last night,' cried Wizzie, very much perturbed. 'Did your Katies and Ediths find you out of bed?'

He surveyed her troubled face with a look of childish satisfaction. 'How kind you are!' he murmured, stretching out his arm and touching her sleeve. Then, drawing his hand back, he sighed heavily. 'No-man, my friend,' he said, 'this business must end well *this* time' — the rest of the sentence came slowly and emphatically— 'for it wouldn't do for me to kick the bucket till she came round.'

'But you *are* better today,' said Wizzie gravely. 'Your face shows it. Did the nurse let you have that stuff that I made D. buy at Boon's?'

But the man closed his eyes with a worried frown. His childish pleasure in frightening her about last night changed to weariness as her question about his food hung in the air. 'It *must* end well *this* time,' he repeated, without opening his eyes, 'but after she's come round and we're happy again...'

Wizzie and No-man exchanged glances as his voice sank.

‘She’s not the only one, Claudius,’ broke from the girl’s lips; but No-man took him up in a tone that was almost argumentative. ‘I don’t blame you, old man, for wanting to be out of it all, when you lay such burdens on yourself; but how on earth can a way of life be right when it makes a fellow like you talk of your end in that tone?’

The man on the bed opened his eyes and fixed them gravely on the speaker. ‘You — don’t — understand — No-man,’ he said slowly. ‘A person can find life hard and look forward to being released just as a — as a soldier —’ He hesitated a moment, while a charming and quaintly deprecatory smile flickered over his mouth. ‘A *Roman* soldier — might — want — his — discharge — even though...’ And he closed his eyes again.

Wizzie gave D. a quick reproachful look, and, bending over the bed, pulled the counterpane more closely round the man’s shoulders. Then, while No-man, moving to the window, stared at the streaming rain, she went into the kitchen and opened the stove to see how the fire was. Putting on some coal, she lifted the kettle, made a little clicking sound between her tongue and her teeth when she found it empty, filled it at the sink, and, taking up a tin of invalid’s food that stood unopened on the shelf, proceeded to open it and transfer some of its contents to a saucepan.

‘Wizzie!’ called out the sick man from his bed in a faint and worried tone.

‘He’s calling you, Wizz!’ echoed No-man from the window.

She hurried to his side, where he was craning his neck round to discover what she was doing.

‘I don’t — *want* — you to do anything in there,’ he murmured peevishly. ‘Nurse is a good nurse. She brings me broth from over the way. There’s no need for you to do anything in there.’

‘All right,’ she replied. ‘I was only looking at the fire. I won’t touch a thing if it worries you.’

‘Listen to me, Wizzie!’

She saw that it had become an effort to him to talk, and she bent down till her head was close to his.

‘The doctor said yesterday’, he whispered, ‘that if I didn’t get someone to be with me at night I’d have to go to the hospital. I told him how good the nurse was; but he said she had other cases and couldn’t give me enough time. Wizzie, listen! I don’t *want* to go to the hospital. In fact, I *won’t* go; and that’s the truth. But I’m afraid he may get an ambulance when I’m too weak to resist. Wizzie! If I went there, *she* would be shy of coming to see me, and I — know — she — may — take — into her head — to come any minute! So — get me some woman — an old woman, mind! — she wouldn’t like it if it wasn’t an old woman — will you, Wizzie? You will? You promise? Oh, how good you are to me, Wizzie!’ And he sank back with his eyes shut and an expression of blissful satisfaction on his face.

The girl left him and went over to D. at the window. No-man began whispering to her at once. ‘But you do everything as it is, Wizz! You’re always in here. He doesn’t know half you do! Besides, there *aren’t* old women like that. He’s thinking of years ago.’

Wizzie pondered, staring through the window at the torrents of rain. It was as if she were looking through *two* windows, both made of some substance less transparent than glass, and both in the state in which the whole universe was to the eye of Heraclitus. And if the window of glass and the mock window of water were both of them, in the grey corpse-flesh pallor that had substituted itself for daylight, spectral epitomes of the flowing away of all things, the wall of the King’s Arms stables opposite, usually so mellow and friendly, showed like the side of a drowning galleon, while the path beneath the wall was no longer a road for solid people to walk upon but a phantasmal river for ghosts to gather at, a river where a crowd of Limbo-weary spirits might wave beseeching arms. The only substantial thing Wizzie could see as she looked out was a tradesman's boy wearing a man's mackintosh who was pushing his bicycle against the torrential flood. This lad's face — for the boy didn't know he was being overlooked or he would have pulled himself together — wore an expression of woebegone desolation.

Following that piteous white face with her eyes as it melted into the rain, she felt as if it were drifting on the same fatal tide that was bearing her own life into the unknown. D. had always told her that the first syllable of the word 'Dorchester' meant 'water'. He had always said that there came moments in the place when the waters under the firmament rose to meet the waters above the firmament, and deep called to deep. Only a night or two ago, in intervals of that love-making which left her so stiff and cold, she had had to listen, till she hated these things as much as she hated the touch of his bony fingers, to vague murmurings from him about difficulties between people having to do with the opposition of the elements to which they were attracted — fire against air, water against earth, and so forth.

'I hope *I s*han't die on a night like this!' she thought, as she turned to No-man, who, judging by his expression, was deriving some weird pleasure of his own from the corpse-grey deluge.

'I shall do for him myself,' she whispered. 'He won't know! He doesn't know now who empties his slops or fills his hot bottle. He thinks it's the nurse. Lovie will be all right with Jenny. You must look in in the morning to see how he is; and I'll get up earlier. What are you smiling at?'

No-man became grave at once. 'But the nights, the nights, sweetheart,' he whispered. 'He oughtn't to be left alone at night. You heard what he said about those girls finding him? He ought to have a trained nurse. I'll talk to the doctor.'

Wizzie frowned. She saw in her mind's eye, clear as a map, the upshot of this talk of D.'s with the doctor. They'd take him straight off to the hospital — the one thing she'd promised to prevent.

'What', she whispered, after listening intently for a second to the patient's loud and troubled breathing, 'could a person sleep *on* here, if they did stay all night?'

No-man gave her a quick, surprised look. He was evidently being shown an aspect of his Neolithic captive's character that was new to him. Nor did Wizzie miss the full significance of this look. What it said to her was, 'Can *this* be my selfish, touchy, spoilt, wayward Wizz, this practical helper of broken-down eccentrics?'

In a flash it shot through her head, while her frown deepened till it deformed her whole face, 'He has no idea that it's only *him — him and his ways* — that I can't—'

'He's got a room upstairs, hasn't he?' No-man whispered.

'Only with a big bed in it that he never uses. *That's* his bed. He's sleeping on it now.'

They both gazed hopelessly round the littered room, which might have been the office of some overworked agent of a foreign airways company in Bangkok or Honolulu. To Wizzie's mind the only friendly objects to be seen in the whole place were the steaming kettle, visible through the open kitchen door, and Claudius's own head on his pillow.

She was now seized with an inspiration. 'I'll bring down his mattress from upstairs,' she whispered, 'just for tonight, and I'll take the rug and a blanket from *our* bed. I don't want to speak of it to Jenny if I can help —

but she's bound to find out. Well, there it is! We must do what we can, day by day. If he gets worse he'll *have* to go to the hospital.'

No-man nodded; and it was her turn now to feel surprised. She had supposed that at the mere idea of having to sleep alone he would have raised the devil.

'The rain's stopping!' he now whispered eagerly. 'Look at that gutter, look at those drops, look at that roof!'

But while the girl obediently considered these objects, what No-man looked at was his watch. 'It's nearly four,' he announced softly. 'I think I'll go for an hour's walk and come back *here* for tea. You get tea ready for us all three; and I'll tell Jenny to give Lovie hers. I'll tell her we're going out. She'll guess where we are — but nothing said, nothing felt!'

Wizzie's face brightened. She knew that Claudius would be overjoyed at this arrangement. 'All right. Get a few buns at Mrs Major's, will you? You know? Those old Dorchester ones. Don't get soaking wet, now! I won't have this place dripping with water. And clean your boots on Jenny's door-mat. Do you understand? Don't forget, now, and come rushing straight in here from your drowner's ditches! I'll be—' And she looked round, clicking her tongue against her teeth. 'I'll be clearing up some of this clutter.'

No-man began hurriedly putting on his overcoat. It was absurdly obvious to Wizzie that his chief anxiety now was to get well away before she changed her mind. But nothing, as she knew — hardly the torrential deluge that had just ceased — could stop him from snatching a walk before tea. This particular contrast, the tension of his walk and the relaxation of his tea, was, next to his pleasure in caressing her in bed, his greatest daily sensation. She watched him, therefore, with feelings that were only too familiar, as, clutching his cudgel in a hand that was not yet lodged in the sleeve of his great-coat, and with that garment trailing loosely over his shoulder and the stick colliding against the door, he took himself off.

‘I can’t stand it! I can’t stand it!’ she repeated to herself in a kind of desperate chant as she went to get the broom from the kitchen.

Her thoughts became less hopeless but more drastic after she had lit a couple of candles, for, as they had begun to say in the Dorchester shops with that curious satisfaction in *all* weather changes that townsfolk have, the evenings were closing in. By the light of these candles, which, as she saw them reflected in the grey desolation outside, looked to her like what Grummer used to call a ‘copsy’ fire, she set herself to make the place a little more cheerful.

But the grate was such a small one that, though the coal was good — for no doubt his indulgent boss provided him with the best — Claudius’s fire gave forth nothing like the warmth of the familiar one in Jenny’s dining-room; and, as the girl moved about, piling up the sleeping man’s magazines almost as ruthlessly as if she’d been Mrs Wye with her husband’s botanical specimens, the reflection of the two candles in the greyness outside kept taking a curious share in her thoughts. They became, indeed, an objectified image of the one really warm interior glow in her life-feeling just then, the glow that the thought of Urien still provoked.

She smiled to herself, a queer little contortion of her thin lips, as she told herself how silly and girlish this feeling was. Well! It was no good pretending. She *had* become like so many of her story-book heroines. She had all the symptoms — every one of them! She was shy of meeting him, and yet she was always trying to meet him. She didn’t want anything from him. She wanted all from him. Her whole body felt different when she was near him; and any allusion to him, or even to Glymes, or to Nance, made a flame rise up and waver and flicker in the grey monotony of her days!

How funnily Claudius breathed when he was asleep! She paused in her work — she was now laying the table for tea by his bedside, and she had to put her own cup on a plate instead of a saucer, his pantry was so meagre — to stare at his open mouth and high-bridged nose. What hollows he had round his prominent eyes with the white lids so tightly drawn! How sunken his cheeks were! She surveyed him closely, drawing in her own lips and wrinkling her forehead. Watching him lying there, she began to doubt of his recovery. Suppose he was to die tonight while she was lying by his side on that mattress from upstairs and under Jenny's blanket? Would she know it if he did die? Would she wake up and feel for the matches? She must make up a good fire before she lay down. Little had she guessed last autumn, when she left the circus, that in less than a year she'd be spending the night by the side of a dying man while *her* man looked after Old Funky's child! Would she be scared in the night? She must have their rug *and* one of their blankets, and tell D. to put his great overcoat on the bed. How queer it would seem, waking up in this room with those airplane pictures all about! Would D. miss her in the night? Well! He'd better practise missing her, for she certainly wasn't going to stay with him forever!

In total unconsciousness that she was doing such a thing, she began whistling a faint little tune as she went back to the kitchen. She found a loaf — a miserably stale one, but there was an untouched pat of butter — and she set herself to spread a few slices, at first rather thinly, half-thinking they were for Lovie, and then thickly, as she remembered how fond D. was of butter.

As she stood in the kitchen occupied in this way, she caught sight of Claudius's shaving-brush beside a little cheap mirror like the one left by Tom Dearth that Jenny kept in her kitchen. 'Does he manage to shave himself still?' she thought. 'No! He must get the nurse to do it when she comes in the morning.'

With her hand on her knife, which was half-way through the thickly buttered side of the loaf, she leaned forward and stared into the mirror. This action of hers led to the discovery that her blouse, which had of late grown too tight for her, had burst its brooch and was displaying more than her neck.

Before refastening the brooch, which she did with her left hand, she pulled down her blouse an inch further, revealing the upper curve of her left breast. It is not an uncommon thing with women to make a fetish of a particular portion of their person; and though Wizzie was, as girls go, rather humble than otherwise as to her feminine charms — taking what Lovie's incorrigible father called her ' 'lurin' figure' very much as Thuella took her palette of pigments, as the mere medium of her art — she did admire her breasts, which certainly were exquisitely moulded; and from her earliest girlhood, even as far back as the old convent days when her spirit was at its lowest ebb, she would surreptitiously contemplate a tiny mole on her left breast, a mark like that which betrayed the heroine of *Cymbeline*, and tell herself romantic stories of its being pressed by a lover's lips.

What came into her mind at this moment, as she leaned forward over her half-cut loaf, staring at herself in Claudius's shaving-glass, was a recent occasion at Glymes when this same brooch had come loose and Nance without a word had fastened it for her. Her Black Man *must* have seen this gesture of his wife's, but whether he had noticed her disarray before Nance rectified it, she had no idea; but the incident, carrying all manner of vague, voluptuous broodings in its train, had played of late the sort of part in her thoughts that a perilous strain of music might play, so that she never fastened up her blouse with that brooch without a secret thrill.

Their patient did not awaken that afternoon till No-man had been back for nearly half an hour. She decided to let him sleep as long as possible, though she caught D. in several shame-faced glances at his watch.

To make up to her pedestrian for this delay, she permitted him to relate to her in a whisper, as they stood by the stove, all the events of his walk. This was such a rare privilege to No-man that he soon became voluble, forgetting where they were, forgetting Claudius, forgetting everything except to move the kettle and stir up the flames in the stove with the iron poker.

'He's enjoying his damned elements today, anyway,' thought Wizzie, as she saw him refrain from replacing the kettle and extend his bony fingers over the fiery aperture.

'I went clear round Poundbury,' he whispered proudly, and she thought to herself: 'He talks of Poundbury as if it were the Cape of Good Hope.'

'You know that steep copse on the other side, before you get to the old farm?'

Wizzie nodded smilingly, as much as to say, 'Oh, yes, dear D. I am as familiar with that spot as I am with my own bedroom.' But in her heart she sighed, 'Oh, what *is* he talking about?' And she tried to conjure up this umbrageous precipice where all she had ever seen were grassy banks like those of Maiden Castle.

'It's on a day like this', he went on, 'that I can imagine the Roman sentries challenging any stray wanderer. Coming back along the south of the hill, where there's a row of old thorn-bushes, I actually got a shock, and thought—'

She forced herself to smile. 'You saw a Roman ghost?'

'Well, no! Not *quite* that. But do you know what it was?'

'What D.?'

‘A black heifer! They like lying down under those old bushes. The trunks are worn smooth by the way they rub against them. You can believe how dripping wet it all was — and the grey mist — and the mud — and the dung under those bushes.’

She pretended to give a little shudder. Oh, how well she knew his childlike desire to enhance the contrast between her cosy warmth in Claudius’s kitchen and his own encounters with thorn-bushes and heifers. She could humour him at these moments, especially on an evening like this, just as she did Lovie when the child was pretending there was a wolf behind the curtain.

‘Yes, it’s an odd thing, but I feel a much stronger Roman aura on Poundbury than at Maiden Castle, or even at Maumbury Rings. They must have used Poundbury more consecutively, I think. It must have been a permanent camp, whereas—’

He was interrupted by Claudius’s voice. *‘Who’s there?’* came from the bed in the front room.

‘Why, you said that’, cried No-man, hurrying to his side, ‘exactly like my Roman sentry on Poundbury! I’ve just come back from up there,’ he added in a lower voice, ashamed of having forgotten the man’s state and spoken so loudly.

But Claudius was evidently refreshed by his sleep; and the pleasure with which she found him contemplating her preparations for tea gave the girl a pang as she joined her friend at his side. She had got the little fire to burn more brightly too, and its pleasant blaze, combined with the light of the candles, made a delicious contrast with the premature twilight framed in the uncurtained window.

‘Shall I pull down the blind?’ she asked. Claudius nodded, and, while No-man shut out the moribund day, he whispered to Wizzie, ‘If only the door were to open now, and *she...*'

Wizzie helped him to raise himself up on his pillows, made No-man retire into the kitchen while she aided him in a yet more personal way, and then, long before the familiar cry of *'Ech-o! Ech-o!'* sounded from the entrance to the King's Arms tap, they were all enjoying themselves, just as if he had not been ill at all, over their tea and their talk and the buns from Mrs Major's.

For a while, their conversation remained peaceful and unexciting; but, do what the girl could, it was impossible with these two to keep them from the wretched topics that had become the bane of her life. D. of course, like the fool that he was, was the first to begin it all; but the sick man caught it up in a flash, and very soon began getting flushed and feverish and staring-eyed, one long arm thrust straight out from the bed-clothes as he gesticulated, and both his wrists displaying the white sleeves of the old-fashioned night-gown he wore under his woollen jacket.

'I know very well', No-man was saying, 'that working-men can't yet afford the walks I enjoy except on Sundays. But they *will*, when their hours are shortened. They *will*, Claudius! It's the deepest life-instinct in us, I tell you, that makes us struggle for solitude and to enjoy Nature alone.'

'You're wrong, man, you're absolutely wrong!' cried the invalid, beating the air above his counterpane with his hands, as if scattering a cloud of contemplative midges. 'What the world wants is a completely new set of *values*! You don't suppose it's been easy to give up all my old ideals, all my old doctrines of righteousness and benevolence? Jenny knows better than you do, No-man, how much I've changed! I've changed abominably. I've changed devilishly. I'm a different man, with different ideas of good and evil, from the ground up, and, what's more, I've—'

But No-man burst in at this point, swallowing half of one of Mrs Major's buns in the strength of his emotion. 'The old values can never change! God must always be good, and evil evil! Even if mankind left the earth altogether and flew to another planet on one of your damned—'

'Hush! Hush, D.!' cried Wizzie. 'Stop this now! Don't go on with this a word more.'

But the sick man's voice rose so high that they both glanced at the window, fearful lest the passers-by should hear him.

'Good and evil *must* change,' he shouted, 'like everything else. Our art must change; our poetry and philosophy must change; our morals must change. A year ago I was a pacifist and a reformer. Now I'm a Communist and a person born again! All that old notion of yours, No-man, about the superior man living for contemplation — I tell you we've had enough of it! The poor, the working-people, have always been as I am now. What is this precious *personal life* you make such a fuss about compared with the great living spontaneous forces that move and stir in the crowded masses? I tell you the life of the working classes today anticipates the noblest life of the future. With what sardonic humour must a miner or a quarryman or a factory-hand today watch your poetical gentleman going for a walk with his stick and his dog and his love of Nature! It's the human beings who sleep ten in a room, fighting, laughing, weeping, loving, hating, who know what Nature is! The rabbit in a trap knows what Nature is; and a man and a woman making love in the presence of their grown children, or beside themselves with hatred in the presence of three other families, know what Nature is. Oh, you poetical people with your simple life, I could curse you as Jesus cursed the Pharisees! I tell you, No-man, it costs money to live a simple life. A simple life's the luxury of the comfortable. Your benevolent poetical gentleman feeds on the poverty of others. He sucks blood like a flea, he cracks bones like an hyaena. He hates the radio, the cinema, the circus, because he can *afford* to hate them! I've found out this, my dears, from the little real work I've done already: that if you can't sink into the midst of a crowd, into the midst of ordinary people, loving, hating, chattering, suffering, enjoying themselves, being bad, being good, being swayed by all the natural human passions, and with no pride in themselves as superior to average humanity, and with no time to be fastidious, it's no good pretending that you've got the secret of life!'

He paused for breath and fixed on D. an annihilating hawk's eye. Then suddenly a sweet smile flickered over his face. 'Sorry, No-man!' he whispered. 'I got carried away.'

Wizzie, on the other hand, biting one of Mrs Major's buns as fiercely as if it was D.'s inhumanity, felt a malicious joy in the prospect of her man's discomfiture. But No-man didn't look discomfited. He sat with his legs stretched out towards the bed, and his eye on the teapot rather than on his companions' faces. From his muddy boots arose a faint smell of manure, and his face had the happy, stupid, healthily dull look of a person relaxing in warmth after rapid exercise.

Wizzie had only vaguely followed the drift of Claudius's words; but her heart leapt eagerly towards the old fanatic, for she felt by instinct that he was attacking in D. what to herself, in her rooted grievance, seemed his monstrous selfishness. 'Well, now,' she would have liked her look to say to him, 'stop thinking about the teapot and about whether there's any more boiling water, and see if you can answer *that*! Doesn't *that* shake your self-satisfaction?'

'No, old friend,' No-man replied slowly, after breathing a faint sigh — a sigh that merely signified, Wizzie said to herself, his reluctant relinquishing of more hot water— 'I can't agree with you. I *do* agree that everyone ought to share the world's drudgery. I *do* agree that it's unfair that some should have more time than others. But if we *had* all to live, like you describe, without privacy or solitude, I would still feel I had a right to snatch every moment I could for being alone. However much my neighbours or fellow-lodgers in this life-in-common of yours bullied me for walking round Poundbury when I'd done my job, I'd still feel I had a right to walk round Poundbury — and alone too! But I do agree that it would be wrong to feel grand or superior about it.'

Wizzie bit her lip. He always evaded the issue like this, neither getting angry nor yielding up his point. Oh, why had her fate linked her with such a person? And now, while her patient pondered, with his eyes closed, on how to answer this peripatetic fool, she could hardly restrain her anger at the mere look of his boots. How well she knew the expression of those two thick-soled objects! They seemed to say to her, 'We shall walk steadily on; we shall be still walking round Poundbury, still walking round Maumbury Rings, when a silly little girl like you has learnt at last to give up all hope of your Glymes man, all hope of your circus triumphs, all hope of your little house with the rosy porch! A quiet self-satisfied man's *boots* can outlast the most spirited girl's fancies!'

Suddenly Claudius hoisted himself up from his pillows, and, thrusting out a long arm in the direction of the two candles, which now were burning low, lifted up his voice like a prophet. 'I tell you,' he cried, 'none of you can stop it. It's coming on the world like shock after shock of electric light! Our candles will burn out, our pride will fall, our personal life will dissolve away; but the new order is coming! Strong and terrible and impersonal, it's coming — a new good, a new evil, a new hope! Let those who cling to what they call Nature look to it! The new age is the age of man conquering Nature. And to you beauty-mongers let me say this. Your beauty is cruelty;

your beauty is evil; your beauty must be destroyed! This is the age of man, not of men; of the mass life, not of the individual life. It's the age of the mocked-at, scoffed-at, despised *crowd*. The age of superior poetical persons, the age of Nature-worship, the age of the gods, is gone forever. Its stale echoes, its guttering candles, its hollow repetitions, they're only waiting their next electric shock! The new world of evolution is no more worship of Nature, no more worship of great men. It is power *over* Nature, it is power *over* great men. It's the life — *it's the life of the masses*! And I say to you, No-man, just as those candles—'

He stopped with a sudden quiver of all his body. He uttered a low, sobbing gasp, while his outstretched arm dropped down like a cut branch, and his head fell on the pillow. His eyes seemed now to double-shut themselves, as if not only their outward flame, but the inner flame that had gleamed through them, had become extinct. And following that first gasp there came a sound from his throat that made Wizzie's heart grow cold.

They both rose to their feet. Wizzie gave No-man one fierce reproachful look, and, pushing back the tea-table, moved close up to Claudius's side. Here she stood for a second, gazing at him with round eyes and open mouth, in frozen immobility. Then she swung round and gave No-man such a look of concentrated hatred that she could see him wince under it and turn his eyes away. Very slowly and softly, having whispered to him not to stir, she moved on tip-toe towards the door.

Before she reached it, however, she caught a sound from the bed and turned back quickly. That terrifying sound in the man's throat had ceased, and his eyes had opened. Not only so, but he was smiling reassuringly at D. whose expression of childish dismay must have struck him.

When they were both at his side again, he looked almost quizzically from one to the other. 'How nice you two look together!' he murmured, and then he sighed heavily. ‘Do you know,’ he said, ‘I sometimes take the auspices, quite in the old Roman way, about her and me. I look out of that window and watch for birds; not sparrows — for I don’t count sparrows — but any other birds. And if the first one I see flies to the right, I say to myself, “She’ll come round in the end.” But if it flies to the left, I say to myself—’ Here that peculiarly sweet smile of which he had the secret crossed his face. ‘What I really say to myself, No-man, if it flies to the left, is, “It’s all childish nonsense!”‘

‘How do you feel *now*?’ enquired Wizzie gravely. ‘You frightened me stiff a minute ago!’

‘Oh, I’ll be all right now,’ he said, composing his face and stretching out his legs as if for a familiar ordeal. ‘But I’ll have to go through a bout of the pain now. So I’m afraid we’d better say good-bye for a while. When I get like that, it always comes — just here.’ And he jabbed with his great, spatulate thumb, a thumb that could be bent backwards further than any thumb in Dorchester, the spot in the counterpane that covered the centre of his body. ‘What I think it is,’ he said, ’is pleurisy. But the nurse won’t have it. She says it’s something else. But, whatever it is, it’s hardly weakened me at all. Do you know what I told Edith when she said I fell down from weakness? I told her I fell down from dizziness, not weakness; I told her I was strong enough to beget a child! She *did* laugh at that. But I always talk freely to those girls. I like to make them laugh.’

‘Does it hurt much?’ asked Wizzie.

‘No, no, little one! Not as bad as all that. It takes most of my energy to cope with it. But I *can* cope with it. It’s sharp; but it’s not acute; it’s not unbearable. Only I can’t think of much else while it’s going on. Much better be off, you two! I don’t like having visitors when I can’t amuse them. But don’t look like that, you darling girl! I’m not going to make faces, or make noises. I swear to you it isn’t so bad.’

‘I wouldn’t think of leaving you, Claudius,’ said Wizzie quietly, ‘but don’t worry about me. I’ll find lots to do. I’ll treat your house like my own.’

‘I’ll stay — a bit — longer — too,’ murmured No-man humbly, resuming his former seat and stretching out his legs again, ‘but I won’t talk. I’ll think. I’ll think about my book.’

After carrying the tea-things away, Wizzie joined in this silent vigil. An occasional faint twinge in his face and a few spasmodic jerks of his knees were the only signs of what the sick man was enduring; but he evidently had removed his consciousness from their presence as completely as if he were a thousand miles away.

Since that look of unequivocal hatred he had caught on her face, D. had avoided Wizzie’s eyes. But with this single exception he seemed wholly himself, serene, friendly, quite at ease, and enjoying to the full the sensation of the red coals, the guttering candles, the darkening window.

‘I suppose he’d enjoy himself like this’, the girl thought, ‘if Claudius were dying, and I’d run away, and Lovie were howling with that stitch in her side!’

‘Ech-o! Ech–o!’ came distinctly now from the end of Friary Lane; and in spite of the wretchedness of the evening there was faintly audible from the top of High East Street that warm stir, that rich vibration, that glowing movement of life in Dorchester which always seems to rise to an intenser pitch when the wealthier Durnovarians have had *their* tea and the poorer ones are preparing to go home to theirs! The actual *volume* of sound, no doubt, is greater at half past four, or even at half past three, but when five o’clock strikes at the Guildhall some magnetic current of psychic sympathy seems to pour into the old place from all the country round, till, from

Piddletrenthide on the east to Martinstown on the west, a thicker smoke from human chimneys and a quicker pulse in human bodies carry into Dorchester a fresh awareness that the happiest hour in the whole Durotrigean day — the hour of tea — has come round again!

There arrive moments in all lives when the flowing of time seems mysteriously to pause, making, as it were, a little eddy in its implacable tide, wherein a person — or even a small group of persons — can detach themselves for a second or two from the onward rush of events, not so much whirling round like straws, in that mystic interruption of the tide, as lifted above its flow, and allowed for the beat of a pulse to see their life, not perhaps 'sub specie aeternitatis', but at any rate unclouded by their normal passions.

Such a moment came now to Wizzie, and as the girl gave herself up to it, an attitude to D. different from any she had yet known drifted across her consciousness. She felt towards him as if she were dead, as if she were a disembodied indulgent ghost, and in the light of this mood even those great boots of his, smelling of heifer dung, seemed harmless, pardonable, almost pathetic!

And there was more in it than that, for the feeling she experienced had something to do with those familiar cries of *'Ech–o! Ech–o!'* that so monotonously and magically kept reaching her ears from the end of the street. That reiterated cry became the voice of something in this Dorchester life of hers that was just out of reach of her comprehension! It came to her like a voice that might reach the ears of a little girl in bed in a familiar nursery, not the voice of her nurse, not even the voice of her mother, but a strangely multiform voice, the voice of all the moments amid her fairy-tales and playthings that made her feel safe, made her feel as if the very wing of her guardian-angel brushed her cheek!

And the odd thing to Wizzie just then was that this unearthly reassurance borne to her on the cry *'Ech–o! Ech–o!'* did not destroy a fantastic feeling she had of there being four of them in that tense vigil! This *other one*, this mysterious fourth, was not exactly what her old convent lessons would have named 'the Son of Man', but it had this in common with that wayfarer on our difficult road: that its substance was wrought of suffering, but of suffering with a background of indescribable peace. This fourth person of their vigil was in fact nothing less than Claudius's pain.

The man's pain — as first one candle and then the other guttered down and was extinguished — became to her a living presence in the fire-light. It was actually there among them, waiting in silence just as she and D. were waiting while the fatal tide flowed past them! It had no form or comeliness, this pain-presence, by which it could be palpably felt, and yet it was the opposite of an evil thing, as it shared their silence.

Had it created itself out of those words of Claudius to No-man about something in humanity which needed not to feel superior or to seek solitude, something that underlay, like a dim rich note transcending all differences, the human passions of our life? Whatever it was, it entered strangely into the girl's mood. It entered into her childish feeling of safety; it entered into her indulgence towards D. It was as if Claudius himself, in his struggle with what he had told them he could cope with all right, had fed this pain-presence from his own life-fount, had externalized the power of his soul in it, so that now it was not just the pain of Claudius, nor just the soul of Claudius, that hovered there between her and his pillow but a presence composed of them both.

How long they waited like this the girl could not have told. It seemed to her afterwards, judged by the sinking of the fire, to have been a good deal more than an hour. At any rate it was her practical sense that the fire must not be allowed to go out that brought that curious vigil to an end.

But she had no sooner got up and lit the kitchen lamp, and brought in a couple of fresh candles along with the coal, than No-man scrambled to his feet. ‘There are people stopping — outside!’ he said. ‘I believe they’re—’ He was interrupted by a sharp knock at the house-door.

‘Are — you — sure — it’s *this* house?’ murmured Wizzie, turning round as she lit the candles. ‘It may be ours!’

But a repetition of the knocking made her open the door into the passageway and stand listening. ‘It *is* this door,’ she cried. ‘I must go and see!’

So remote from everything outside that fire-lit room had her mind been that it gave her an almost painful shock, like being suddenly roused from a deep sleep, when she opened the door.

‘I’ve come to see Mr Roger Cask,’ said one of the three figures standing outside. ‘I’m the district—’ But another of the figures, that of a man, came forward, and it did not lessen Wizzie’s feeling of dazed confusion when she saw it was old Teucer Wye.

‘I — was — in — town’, stuttered the old man, ‘and — I — thought I’d just ask how our friend — was — but if—’

‘Oh, no! Come in, Mr Wye!’ cried Wizzie. ‘Come in, Nurse!’ And she stared almost impolitely — so dazed she felt — at the third of the visitors. This was a tall, excessively plain woman, with a big nose surmounted by glasses, and with something queer — at least so it seemed to Wizzie in that faint light — about her chin.

‘Constancia,’ said the nurse abruptly, turning to this person with the vague intention of introducing her, ‘this is, I feel sure, Miss Ravelston, from next door, who’s been so kind to our patient. This is Miss Ferneau, Miss

Ravelston, who's come to look after Mr Cask. They are, I believe, well-acquainted already, but I think Miss Ferneau will keep him in order. You *will* keep him in order, won't you, Constancia?'

Wizzie kept smiling and nodding in complete bewilderment while all this went on, and then, drawing back against the wide-open door, she made way for Constancia and the nurse to enter the narrow passage.

'Won't *you* come in, Mr Wye?'

'No, no — whew! — no; no, my dear Miss — no, I won't come in. But you'll tell him I called? That's the chief thing, that he should know I called! Oh, no! I wouldn't disturb anyone now. Besides' — and he pulled Wizzie towards him while the nurse took Constancia into Claudius's room— 'what I've really come to do is to tell my girl Jenny that she *must* make it up with our friend now that he's so ill. I've been thinking what to say for a whole week; and I've got the passages marked' — here he tapped his pocket— 'that will settle it! I'm going to speak plain to her, Miss Ravelston. It's all here — and *here.'* And this time he tapped — though this second fountain of justice received but a feeble flick in comparison with the other — his forehead as well as his pocket.

'We'll come *with* you, Mr Wye — one minute!' And she called down the passage: 'D.! D.! D.!' For she said to herself, 'He'll stay there, the stupid, while the nurse is taking — But I'm glad she's brought that woman for the night. He won't think *she'll* carry him off to the hospital! I only hope she won't forget — but the nurse *must* have told her—'

'Yes, come along, D.! Here's Mr Wye come to *make* Jenny behave; and he wants us to hear what he'll say!'

This last remark of hers caused the old Platonist to shuffle with his feet for pride and joy. Wizzie could see how it pleased him by the way he fidgeted while he shook No-man's hand. He evidently could not wait to unburden himself of his week’s meditations, while the presence of these two witnesses made him feel as if Friary Lane did after all possess some resemblance to Athens.

Their knocking soon brought the not entirely unprepared Jenny to her door, and they all went straight into her kitchen, where Lovie, sitting in solitary state on a high chair, was having her tea.

Lovie put down her mug and held out her hands with such joy to greet No-man that Wizzie felt a momentary pang; but her spasm of jealousy was speedily forgotten in her intense curiosity, and, to confess the truth, in a malicious hope against hope concerning the plain words her friend was to hear.

Wizzie had always disliked old Teucer Wye. She completely understood the way he got upon his younger daughter’s nerves. But her recent vigil with Claudius made her feel so indignant with Jenny that she prayed to God this horrid little man would make her sit up and would say things to her that neither D. nor herself had dared to say. ‘But he won’t,’ she thought. ‘He’s one of these dreary talkers, and he’ll go on and on; and he’ll read his lesson-books to her; and Jenny will simply smile at me!’

But Wizzie soon discovered, to her delight, that she was completely wrong. In her ignorance of the ways of idealists — for neither in convent nor in circus had she met such people — she did not allow for the astonishing lapses into gross realism, into shocking materialism, that seem Nature’s revenge upon these rebels against her delicate adjustments. But this gap in our friend’s knowledge of life was destined now, in Mrs Dearth’s kitchen, to be amply filled.

The scene soon became, indeed, one of those intense domestic dramas that a wayward imagination, pondering sardonically on the lit windows of a human dwelling, so often conjures up.

Jenny’s kitchen was certainly not a luxurious one. It might indeed have been called austere. But it was scrupulously clean; and in addition to a wooden settle near the stove, a place of refuge into which No-man hastened to retreat when the storm began, there were several plain kitchen chairs arranged round the walls. On the shelf above the stove, which was a regular cooking-stove, stood a round metal clock with a broken alarum, and above this was a tiny miniature of Mrs Teucer Wye, representing a fragile girl’s face, more like Thuella’s than Jenny’s, but showing, too, a certain pathetic wistfulness suggestive of their guileless brother.

Wizzie waited till the riotous greeting between No-man and Lovie was over, and then, drawing up a chair near the child’s table, began encouraging her to get on with her meal.

But the ex-professor refused to sit down, while Mrs Dearth, after refilling Lovie’s mug, and catching the ominous trend of her father’s harangue, stood erect and defiant on the side of the stove opposite to the one where No-man had taken refuge.

‘It’s a disgrace to me as your father, and to your mother who brought you up!’ cried the old gentleman, not so much tapping as thumping the books in his pockets. ‘Do you know what I saw just now? And Miss Ravelston can bear me out.’ Here Wizzie bent low over Lovie’s bowl of bread and milk. ‘I saw some terrible person brought in by the nurse to spend the night with that poor fellow! And here are you, to all intents and purposes his wife — yes! I repeat it, his wife — refusing to lift a finger to help! Why, the man may die. I didn’t see him, but I saw enough. The man may die tonight, with no one with him but the awful individual I saw just now. It’s not *my* affair, you say? God help you, woman, it’s everyone’s affair! All the town knows of it — he so ill in there, and you—’

He stopped for breath, but Wizzie noticed that on this occasion — in his role of a father rebuking his favourite daughter — he kept unusual control over himself and showed no sign of hysterical weakness. He never once whistled through his gums, and after that first thump at his side he never, till the end, so much as touched his pockets.

'We're all friends here', he continued, advancing to the table and resting his hand on its edge, while Lovie, pushing her mother's fingers away, dropped her spoon and stared at him with fascinated wonder, 'and so I can speak plainly to you, my girl. The truth is — you've never grown up! You're behaving like a woman *who's never lived with a man*. It's — yes, I've made up my mind to say it and I will say it. You've grown into an unnatural old maid, Jenny, and it's because *of that*, because of your not living with him as a woman ought to live with an honest man who loves her, that you can keep up a silly quarrel with him like this! I begin to think that it was this old-maidishness of yours, and not your wild notions of women's rights, that drove Tom Dearth away. You're a bigoted old maid, Jenny — that's what you are, and I'm ashamed of you! I've been thinking of this all the week. It's because you've not lived with Cask as a woman should, I tell you, that you are acting in this obstinate, wicked way. You're only *half a* woman. If you'd—' Here he did give a glance round him and pull himself up. 'If you'd gone to bed with the man, Jenny, this old-maidish silliness would never have—'

But Mrs Dearth had leapt forward with her hands clenched. *'Father!'* she cried; and the extremity of her indignation so scared the child at the table that she began to cry and hid her face against Wizzie's shoulder. 'How can you, how *dare* you, say these things to me? Isn't it you who've always told me, since I was *her* age' — and she pointed at the sobbing Lovie— 'that real love has no need of — of what you're talking about? Isn't it you who've always said that when two people love — oh, it's too much, it's too much, for *you* to turn against me. I've expected it from the rest — yes! and I've had it too, all these cruel months, from those nearest to me.' And she swept her blazing eyes across Wizzie's averted face. 'But that *you*, you from whom I've learnt what real, pure, spiritual love is, should now—' And she pressed her clenched fists against her mouth, while her bosom heaved with deep dry sobs.

'I — tell — you — you unhappy girl,' brought out the little man, taking his hand from the table and raising himself automatically on his toes, 'I tell you, you've misunderstood me all along — like everybody else. What I say is that we must free our souls from *all* these material things. While we're on earth our bodies must have their natural satisfaction, but this doesn't touch the soul. It's nothing to the soul. The soul has no part in it. We're only here, imprisoned in matter, so that our souls should learn how to be free. You do the senses too much honour, you think too much about them, when you deny them like this. The soul should be indifferent, aloof, free of the whole business! When you play the angry virgin with this good man, you're not making less of your miserable senses, you're making more! Go to bed with him, girl, in this little house, in this little lane, but let your soul rise to the eternal, rise to the—'

But Jenny suddenly snatched her fists from her mouth — and Wizzie saw she had pressed them there so savagely that there was blood on her lips — and coming straight up to her father, hissed out at him in a low terrible voice that made even D. draw up his muddy feet beneath his seat, 'If you mean what you say, Father, *throw those books of yours into my stove!'*

At first the old gentleman, as he sank back on his heels and withdrew a step or two from her, could only whistle through his gums in the old familiar way. Then, as Wizzie stared in wonder at what she could see, half-hidden by Jenny’s shoulder, of the man’s face, she saw an extraordinary change pass over it and a look come into it as if of another Teucer Wye, a Teucer Wye who had no daughter at all, a Teucer Wye who had never been a professor in a small Midland college, a Teucer Wye who did not know whether Glymes or Friary Lane, whether Dorchester or Athens, was his abiding-place, a Teucer Wye who had — and yet had not — slept with the woman who gazed down on them out of that little picture. And it was while this other Teucer Wye, now looking forth from his face, gave a completely different air to his high forehead, to his toothless mouth, to his diminutive frame, that the man drew from his side-pockets both of his old school-texts and, pushing his daughter aside, went straight up to her stove and moved away the kettle from the fiery-red opening.

Human gestures between four walls have the peculiarity sometimes of gathering to themselves such intense emotional magnetism that they are palpably felt, like the reaction to a physical shock, not only by the persons concerned but by alien persons and, it may chance, also by foreign substances. It was certain, at any rate, that Wizzie felt compelled to rise to her feet and move forward towards the man as he held those books. It was plain to her that No-man too was driven by the same psychic force to do the same thing. As for little Lovie, she managed to scramble down unaided from her high chair to the floor, where Jenny, not knowing in the least what she was doing, untied and took off the child’s bib.

But not only have these tense moments within human walls and under human ceilings the power of generating palpable electric force, they seem also to have the power of retarding the movement of time. Anyway, what Wizzie felt, though she couldn’t have put it into words, was a sensation as if the whole of Jenny’s kitchen — with all four of them standing there, staring and petrified — had been lowered by some eternal hand into a timeless vacuum. Her legs began to feel ice-cold, as if the passage from time to timelessness meant the ebbing away of all bodily warmth. It was as if the little man's overpowering emotion generated a shock upon the surrounding atmosphere so great that an actual displacement of electric particles occurred that not only created the sensation of cold but left a permanent impression upon that particular spot, to which sensitive or psychic natures long afterwards might respond.

It is perhaps fortunate, therefore, that both Jenny's and Claudius's houses have long since been pulled down, and that where old Teucer Wye on this October evening moved his daughter's kettle to expose the red-hot interior of her stove, the sparrows from the cheerful tap-yard of the King's Arms can hop in peace among nothing more ghostly than a few weather-beaten flagstones.

When it became clear, even to Lovie's mind, that this neatly attired little man with the well-brushed hair actually intended to throw into that fiery furnace what was more precious to him than food or drink or human affection, the little girl rushed up to him screaming, 'Not put books in fire! Not put nothing in fire!' and began tugging at his coat.

The transfigured expression on his countenance had been until then concealed from Jenny herself, but when he turned now with the books in his hands and faced her, it became clear to all of them that she suddenly began to tremble.

'It's a bargain, Jenny,' he said solemnly; and Wizzie was struck by the quiet, self-controlled tone in which he spoke. 'Give yourself to your man; throw this cruel virginity of yours into the fire, and I'll throw these books, which are my life, into your stove! Will you do it, Jenny, my girl? The word was yours. It was you who said, "Throw your books, your life, into my fire." I'm serious, my child. This is a — a covenant between us. You've always been my dearest. You know *that*. And now I'm giving my best for you, more than my best! Shall we take' — he spoke almost exultingly at that moment— 'the "Sortes Platonicae"? Shall we see what they say before they die? Mark you, my girl. This isn't only your father's sacrifice speaking, this is your proud virginity speaking — before we give them both to the fire!'

Little Lovie, with a face blubbered with tears, stopped pulling at his coat. Wizzie could see that the child thought the man was going to read a story from the pretty books instead of throwing them into the flames.

'O beloved Pan,' the old man translated, in a low intense voice, 'and all ye other gods of this place, grant to me that I' — here he paused and looked straight at Mrs Dearth, who was trembling violently from head to foot while her fingers plucked at the fastening of her black blouse— '*and my dear daughter here*, may be made beautiful in our souls within!'

Wizzie, who was watching him intently, saw him fumble perceptibly with the second little book. 'If he waits a second longer', she thought, 'he won't do it!'

But Teucer Wye did not wait. Mumbling something that the girl couldn't catch, he rushed to the stove, flung both volumes into its fiery heart, and clamped the kettle over the opening.

There was a deep hush in that kitchen then; and for an instant even Lovie held her breath. But she only held it, as children do, before a passionate burst of sobbing; and, when this came at last, she ran not to Wizzie but to Mrs Dearth, and buried her face in the woman's dress.

'In our souls within!' repeated Teucer Wye in a whisper that was scarcely audible above the child's desperate sobbing; and touching lightly with his lips his daughter's head, which was bent low down over the clinging child, he picked up his hat — he hadn’t taken off his overcoat — made two formal little bows, one to Wizzie and one to No-man, and hurried out of the room.

Wizzie remained staring at the door he had closed behind him till the sound of the street door opening and shutting released the tension. Then she and No-man exchanged a long wordless look.

It was not till much later, not indeed till they were both of them in bed in their upper room, with the fire-light flickering reassuringly over its familiar furniture, making the girl among the water-lilies blush rosy-red and Thuella’s picture of her father look forth with the lineaments of Pico della Mirandola, that they expressed their impressions of that scene in the kitchen.

‘Do you think it *will* make any difference?’ murmured No-man, taking advantage of the chance that so pregnant a question gave him to slip his arm beneath her supine form.

‘How can I tell? — Don’t, D.! — She only talked about Lovie afterwards when I was helping her wash up. She’s got awfully fond of Lovie, D. If anything happened to — to me, I think she’d be almost glad.’

‘Don’t ‘ee say such things, my treasure.’

‘But she would! I *know* she would. At first she made — you remember? — all that fuss over me. But it’s Lovie now. He said she was an old maid; but *I* think she’d like to have a lot of children. She’s lonely; that’s what it is.’

‘Maybe she’ll come back to him now, and then perhaps—’

‘How long can women have children, D.? Don’t — I won’t have it!’

He chuckled. ‘Oh, it all depends — How unkind you are to me, Wizz! — Certainly till forty, and over that, too! She’s some years off forty yet.’

There was silence for a time between them, Wizzie meditating on the subject of women with forty in sight, and No-man trying to get the feeling that he was caressing her out of the bare fact of their inevitable contact as they lay side by side.

Then Wizzie said, ‘I didn’t much like the look of that woman the nurse brought. Do you think she’s sitting up with him? I don’t know if anyone told her about the mattress upstairs. I told the nurse. Well! he won’t be frightened about the hospital anyway! That’s one good thing.’

She paused, and it now came over her that she had heard D. greet the woman when the nurse took her in, as if he knew her. ‘Yes,’ he returned, when she brought this up. ‘And do you know when I saw her, little Wizz? On that first night, when you’d gone upstairs and I was down there with old Claudius! I almost hugged her when I saw her just now, for it brought it all back!’

Encouraged by these amorous memories, he once more tried to make love to her, and for a while, with her thoughts on this unknown woman, she made no resistance. But soon her brain, suddenly recalling one of her worst recent grievances, sent drastic orders to her obedient body to stiffen itself in frozen distaste. The luckless No-man, being neither a sadist nor an impassioned ravisher, experienced a more unpleasant shock than usual from this frosty rebuff. As a general thing, when once Wizzie was caught in a docile mood the worst she did was to fall asleep, and she had heard him explain a thousand times all the delicious sensations he got under those conditions. ‘A person would think’, she was accustomed to retort, ‘that you’d like anyone best if they were dead.’ And No-man would then launch into a passionate eulogy of the charm of girls asleep, declaring that some wondrous essence of desirability only came into being at such times when the brain ceased its normal functioning.

What she felt now, as, with her frosty distaste stretched out between them like a sword moulded of a solid icicle, they lay watching the flickering features of Mr Wye appearing and disappearing above the foot of their bed, was that a man who wouldn't confide in his girl about a woman who had died ten years ago was certainly a man who preferred them not only asleep but *dead*. He was the same in everything, she said to herself. Nothing *as it really was* had the least interest for him. Things had to be pushed back, like those unintelligible pictures Thel painted, before he seemed even to see them! He liked the whole of his life to be something in a mirror. That was what made her so furious, that she, Wizzie Ravelston, to whom life had been so appallingly solid and real, had to live in a damned second-hand mirror, if she lived with him at all. And why *should* she live in someone else's mirror? 'Because of love!' people would tell her. But this word 'love' struck her just then as a devilish trick, invented by the most selfish people in the world!

What was he thinking about now? He hadn't said a word since she rebuffed his love-making. Well! Popsy had often told her that nothing made men feel so humiliated and ashamed as stopping them suddenly like that; but what could you do? Her body was her own, not his, though he *did* like to tell himself he'd bought her from Old Funky.

It was at this point that Wizzie's drastic meditations carried her so far that they drew from her a faint smile. She thought how little this coldness of hers would have stopped Old Funky, had that unscrupulous rogue been at her side now instead of D.

It is a sad commentary on the maladjustments of sex that neither Wizzie nor No-man had ever had the experience of mutual sense-satisfaction. He had come nearest to it in his perverse relations with Thuella, but, after the Scummy Pond incident, he had successfully resisted this weakness.

His protracted silence now — for she could tell by his breathing, and by the way he lay so flat on his back, that he wasn't asleep — did begin to make her feel a little remorseful. She was, after all, an extremely normal and natural girl, and, deep down below these reasonable thoughts of hers about her body being her own, a blind, atavistic, feminine instinct began to heave up within her, an instinct old as the human race, and possibly far older; and a strange beyond-good, beyond-evil conscience within that instinct began to assert its authority, the immemorial conscience, one might say, of the feminine organism in itself, totally outside the working of any individual girl's indignant brain, the primeval conscience of the eternal feminine in matter as it yields to the embrace of the spirit.

But though this mysterious and irrational conscience in the depths of her being caused her to feel remorse with regard to the humiliated male by her side, the brain of Miss Ravelston, the angry mother of Lovie, brought at once to the surface her most romantic grievance in order to suppress this voice from the deep.

'Listen, D.!' she said, and the syllables of her voice made their own invisible vibration on that dim fire-lit air, a vibration which neither flickered nor wavered with the motion of the fire-light across the picture of Mr Wye, a vibration which, according to rigorous laws of atomic acoustics, must have passed in its entirety out of the inch or so of open window and floated away over the silent roofs of Dorchester into incredible gulfs of space. 'I don't see how you could have written your wife's name that day without knowing you did it, if you're not always thinking about her.'

'Good Lord, kid! Have we gone back to *that?* I tell you I *didn't* write it! Can't you take a plain answer? I don't know, any more than you do, how it got there.'

'I suppose you want me to believe *she* wrote it — after being dead for ten years!'

He was silent; and she went on. ‘Grummer used to tell of a man she knew whose dead wife never left his girl a moment’s peace. She said that in the night—’

‘Now that’s enough, Wizz! If you won’t let me touch you, you needn’t start — But you’re only saying it to tease. You *know* you’re not really jealous of — of those days.’

‘Who wrote it, then, on that bit of paper, and why did you tear it up so quickly?’

He made no reply to this. ‘And what’s more,’ she went on, ‘you went back there next morning to pick up those bits of paper!’

‘Wizzie!’

She certainly had roused him now, for he raised his head from the pillow and glanced at the window, where the string of the blind was making a faint tapping as the wind blew. But he sank down again with a sigh; and again there was silence in that upper front room of Friary Lane.

‘I know what you’re thinking now, D.’

‘Oh, for God’s sake, Wizz, don’t go on with this! Do let’s go to sleep.’

‘You’re thinking, like you always say, about two skeletons lying side by side on the surface of the earth, and neither knowing a thing of what’s in the other’s head.’

‘I’m thinking of something much more to the point than that, though it proves it about our two skulls. Do you know, Wizz, I saw *him* today on High East Street.’

It was Wizzie’s turn to be startled now; and she did more than just lift her head from the pillow. She sat straight up in the bed.

‘Saw *him?* Old Funky? Why didn’t you tell me before?’

‘My dear child’ — and he pulled the clothes round his exposed shoulder — ‘what time have I had for telling you anything? Besides, I thought we’d enjoy ourselves a little first, before we—'

'Enjoy ourselves!' She couldn't help throwing into this bitter exclamation all the complicated trouble his news brought her. She felt overpowered by a great wave of self-pity. Wasn't it just like her fate to have *him* reappearing, on the top of everything?

'Is the circus here?'

'I've no idea. I haven't been that way for weeks. I suppose it is, or he wouldn't be in town.'

'You don't think he's up to something new, D. wanting more money or anything?'

'Oh, I don't suppose so. Just wandering about, looking at the shops. He didn't see me. At least he pretended not to.'

'What'll you do if he speaks to you?'

'Well, find out what he wants, I suppose.'

'Yes! That's just what you *would* do! Talk to him till he finds out everything! I suppose you'd bring him in here to see Lovie if he asked you to?'

No-man was silent. With a feeling of absolute hopelessness she sank down again on her pillow, and, pulling the bed-clothes with a vicious twitch to her side of the bed, turned her back to her companion.

'He doesn't care what I feel,' she thought, 'any more than Old Funky does!' And she made, as she curled up on the extreme edge of the bed, with her knees almost touching her bosom — reverting, in fact, to the position in which she had lain before she was born — a vow that that very next day she would go out to Glymes and pour out all her troubles to Urien. 'Ordinary men don't understand women,' she said to herself, 'but *he* may, if only he lets me talk to him. But it'll be the same as it always is! He'll get Nance to fetch Thel from next door, and Thel will act silly and make a fuss of me like she always does, and he'll just sit and stare at us.'

Here Wizzie gave vent to a heavy sigh, in which she deliberately indulged her self-pity, letting it go to the uttermost reach of all that a sigh — that prelude of our last breath — can express of human misery.

It is doubtful, however, if she would have allowed quite so deep a wafture of lamentation to have passed her lips had she been alone. Like Lovie in her own presence, she found that the fact of D.'s being there caused her to exaggerate her woe — a woe for which she held him so greatly responsible — as if, by the mere act of compelling him to share it and endure its misery with her, she was enabled to revenge herself upon him. It had the further advantage of making it hard for him, without feeling a callous brute, which she knew from experience he hated feeling, to slide off to sleep in the way he usually did when she had rebuffed his love-making.

'Two skeletons?' she thought bitterly, recalling the way he loved to philosophize about a man and a woman lying side by side. 'Why, D.'s not human enough to be even a skeleton! There's nothing human about him. No wonder he prefers thorn-stumps and cow-dung to his life with me. No wonder he sneaks off to his attic and never lets me go near it. He's much happier with those bed-post monsters of his than with a natural girl.'

So thought Wizzie, hugging her rounded knees on the extreme edge of the bed; nor did the other skeleton make any attempt to disturb her, but over them both as they lay there — and it was not long before they were asleep — the wind began to shift, blowing now from south-south-west, straight across Maiden Castle from Chesil; and, as its palpable but invisible form swept inland from the beach across the earthworks, there adhered to the substance of its presence particles and flakes, atoms and motes, gathered up from the surface of that huge parapet of pebbles and from the heaps of stranded seaweed left to perish there between its shelving ridges.

These particles and flakes, sea-soaked, sea-perforated, sea-born, sea-bitten, became now as much part and parcel of the pressure of the life-mystery in Durnovaria as was the steady breathing of Miss Ravelston or as were the intermittent heavings and spasmodic jerks with which the muscles and nerves of D. No-man recovered their equilibrium after the excitement of the day.

And since what exists in the macrocosm exists also in the microcosm, it may well be that these journeying sea-particles, carried on the wind, exercised upon these two sleeping forms the same sort of influence that the sea itself exercises on conscious minds, blighting and sterilizing in one sense, curing and restoring in another.

Over many another male and female pair, in its air-voyage from the Atlantic, must that south-west wind have blown, carrying the same influence of the salt sea, rousing far-off atavistic responses, making appeals where there could be no response, over furred couples, over feathered couples, under straw, under rustling leaves, under waving grasses, till it came to these two beneath their bed-clothes.

Its effect upon the inanimate things it passed that night, we are forced in our ignorance to regard as nil: Hardy’s bronze image unaffected, the brewery chimney unaffected, the bones of Mona and Cornelia unaffected. But that (before the dawn came, at the hour when the magnetic pull of the solid earth is faintest, at the hour when all living things seem loosening their hold on the elements that sustain them) the sea wind found Wizzie’s warm body in a yielding mood — not only allowing but encouraging No-man’s caresses while neither of them was fully awake — may well have had to do with those salt-tasting atoms and the unbridled restlessness of the earth's great lover.

This salt wind from Chesil Beach must have numbed and atrophied all those touchy centres of egotism in our friends wherewith their personal minds spoilt their impersonal sensations; but when the interlude was over, and the depersonalized Wizzie, with hot cheeks and glowing limbs, had become the personal Wizzie, with tantalized nerves and unsatisfied feelings, the wind dropped, and a pallid light — a light that was neither grey nor blue nor white nor yellow, the nameless light of the first vibration of dawn that can only be described as a thinning of the thick rotundity of darkness — drew the girl's wide-opened eyes towards it in impatient longing for the day.

No-man, however, who had never been as fully awake as she, fell fast asleep now, and the girl was left to watch as calmly as she could the vast process of the earth's illumination. This huge creative act, in its detachment from all human troubles and in the implacable persistence of its cosmic cheerfulness, was far less sympathetic to her grievances and her fears than would have been the corresponding twilight of nightfall. But sympathetic or not, she had no wish just then to dwell upon it at all.

Wizzie was not of an introspective nature, nor was she the kind of person to be vividly conscious of the non-human background of our life; and although, if left to herself, she couldn't be accused — few intelligent women can — of being totally blind to these recurrent phenomena, there were especial reasons why she instinctively encouraged her insensitiveness. The truth was that No-man's attitude to these cosmic processes irritated her to such a tune that she had come to take a kind of wilful pleasure in suppressing even such natural reactions to such things as she did feel. Quite recently, for instance, on her way to Glymes, a cloud of midges, brought to life by the sun and hovering over some ditch-bank, had been blown against her face, rousing in her mind that feeling of poignance that the contrast between a girl's life and the life of a midge naturally suggested, but she had remembered D. and the fuss he made about such matters, and had flung the thought away.

If, therefore, it *had* entered her head, as she stared at the slowly undarkening window across the humped-up bed-clothes that were D.'s sleep-mound, to try and sink her worries in the supreme miracle of planetary life, she would have hurriedly suppressed such a thought, purely because the mere fact of indulging it would have made her feel that she resembled the man at her side.

She was not left long, however, to the risk of having to restrain any planetary emotion she might feel, for the dawn had not advanced very far before her nervously acute sense of hearing became aware of a distinct series of very human sounds in Jenny Dearth's bedroom. Jenny was certainly up and dressing herself!

Her first thought was of Lovie. It was Jenny who had begged her, very soon after they first had Lovie with them, to move the child's cot into her room. As a rule Lovie was the first in that Friary Lane house to salute the sun; but, closely as Wizzie listened now, she could not hear a sound from her daughter — nothing but the creaking of the boards and an occasional contact of glass with china that showed that Jenny was making her toilet.

What was the woman up to, getting out of bed before it was light, before Lovie had lifted her voice, before a single sparrow had chirped? Intently did Wizzie listen, and as she listened she wondered more and more. Yes! Jenny was certainly dressing, and dressing too — *that* her feminine eavesdropper detected from all sorts of subtle indications — with unusual nicety and care! Could it be that after sleepless hours spent in pondering on her father's gross and violent words she had decided to give up her nonsense and live with Claudius as his wife?

No sooner had this idea entered her head than she felt sure it *was* the true explanation of this early rising. Jenny was going to be on the watch, and the moment that woman went off duty she was going to take her place. Wizzie lay down again. If Jenny were going to wait till that woman went away, she might have to wait till breakfast-time, till the time the nurse came.

But she jumped up now, quivering and tense with electric energy, for she heard Jenny's door softly open and shut, and then the stairs creaked under the woman's tread as she went down. Wizzie didn't hesitate a second. She slipped out of bed, snatched up the first garment that presented itself in the dim light, which turned out to be her own skirt, and with this clutched like a shawl round her shoulders, and with her bare feet emerging from her long old-fashioned night-gown, she opened the door without making a sound, left it ajar for her return, and tip-toed half-way downstairs.

Here she paused and leaned over the banister. Yes! Jenny was in her kitchen now. She could tell exactly what she was doing. She was poking the coals, which, as Wizzie knew, were almost always still red in the morning, and throwing in certain bits of stick that it was her custom to keep all night close to the stove so that they might be especially dry when she came down.

Wizzie stretched as far as she could over the banister rail and listened motionless. She kept well on the 'qui vive', however, so that the moment Jenny emerged from the kitchen she could be upstairs in a flash and back in her room, but she gave herself up to this eavesdropping with unmixed delight. If there was an element of malice in it, after the long vexation of Jenny's wilfulness, there was much more of excited sympathy for a woman's defiance of her own pride and prudery.

‘She’s not going to wait any longer,’ Wizzie thought. And she could feel through the pit of her own stomach, that was now pressed tightly against the stair-rail, something of the wild beating of Jenny’s heart and Jenny’s pulses. Her instinct, which was almost telepathic, justified itself up to the hilt. She heard Jenny fill the kettle from the tap. She heard the unmistakable sound of iron on iron as the woman placed it over the orifice of the stove. Then she heard a sound that caused a smile to cross her face and made her close her fingers still more tightly on the banister, for it was the sound of the tinkle of a wine-glass against a salt-cellar. Now these objects always stood in front of a little round mirror, the shaving-mirror that had belonged to the vanished Tom; and to Wizzie, who knew by this time all the domestic recurrences in her friend’s house, this sound meant one thing and one only, namely that Jenny Dearth was surveying her own appearance in the glass.

‘She’s going to him! She’s going to him!’ the girl thought, and, drawing back from the banister, she flattened herself against the wall and waited in breathless excitement. Yes! Apparently satisfied with the way she looked, Jenny now hurried with hasty steps to the entrance of the little back-yard that connected the two houses. A breath of chilly air struck Wizzie’s thinly clad figure as this door opened, letting her friend out; but heedless of this discomfort she hurried downstairs and, rushing into the dining-room, stationed herself at the window.

‘If she’s going to stay with him,’ she thought, ‘she’ll bundle that woman into the street in no time.’ She waited for three — four — eight minutes without anything happening. Then she heard the Guildhall clock strike half past something. But it was still dim outside, and the light in the King’s Arms tap-yard was still burning. How slowly the day came, in this part of the town! It used to come much more quickly in the old Fairfield.

Oh, how cold her bare legs had begun to feel, and her feet were icy, but a desperate obstinacy kept her there, and something else too, something that she would have found it impossible to explain to anyone. For, as she stood clutching the curtain and staring across the narrow street at the stable window opposite, through which she could see a lantern moving about that every now and then threw into distinction a bundle of loose hay that was pressing against the pane, her sympathy with what she imagined going on became almost morbid.

'She's giving herself to Claudius!' she thought. 'She couldn't wait till he's well, and he'll be in a fever to respond. That crazy old man was right, and none of us thought of it. I was a fool not to think of it, and so was D.! Tom must have left her because all that suffrage talk on the top of her prudery was too much for him. And old Claudius must have been too tender and gentle, too. I suppose a woman's resistance is harder for a man to deal with than a girl's. I suppose if I'd been as old as Jenny — but then I'd never have had Lovie! Will Jenny have—'

But at this point her sympathy with Jenny's happiness transformed itself into a terrible craving for her circus life! To be on her old horse's back; to feel the tingling rapture of those balancings and leapings, those plunges and summersaults; to hear the cries — Oh, how often she had suffered from bitter cold just like this while awaiting her turn in the tent! As she hugged her skirt round her shoulders, and even went so far as to snatch up one of Jenny's woollen antimacassars and twist it round her waist, she noticed once more that moving lantern throwing a light on the wisp of hay that pressed against the stable window, and she made up her mind that come what might she would leave both Lovie and D. and go back to her *work*.

But she was out into the hallway again now, for she had heard a sound upstairs. Yes! it was Lovie talking to herself, but apparently quite happily. 'I declare,' thought Lovie's mother, as she began to ascend the stairs, 'that kid would be happy if it never saw a soul except when it was hungry. I — don't — believe — she'll — miss — me — one — bit!'

Each of these monosyllables was punctuated by the imprint of a bare foot on the staircase carpet, but, in spite of their consolatory implication in the face of her recent resolve, it was with some degree of peevishness that, after wrapping Jenny's bed-clothes round her and sitting down on the edge of the bed near Lovie's cot, she endeavoured to recall the child's absorbed imagination from Gwendolly's successor to herself.

Lovie's new 'Lovie' was a real doll, chosen for her by No-man with infinite care through at least half-a-dozen shops in Dorchester. She was a young doll — let us say a year old — but, having been made in the fatherland of dolls, her blue eyes and pouting lips possessed that fairy-like beauty which few English doll-makers seem able to capture.

Every morning — about the time when the first cawing of the rooks was to be heard as they flew from the elms in Frome House garden to the elms in Acland House garden — Mrs Dearth had to get out of bed to put on to the child a little woollen jacket, too thick for her to sleep in but indispensable when she sat up with 'Popsy'. It was to Popsy that she was talking now, to Popsy that she'd been talking ever since Aunt Jenny had slipped the jacket over her sleepy head.

'Mummy's cold,' said Wizzie, trying to appeal to the little girl's sympathy. 'Mummy didn't want to disturb D. so she came to see if her pretty one was all right.'

'Popsy isn't cold.'

'I should think not, with half your jacket twisted round her! You and Popsy can't wear the same clothes at the same time. There — there — *that's* enough clothing for a doll. Dolls aren't—'

'You've got Aunt Jenny's things on. Y*ou've* got D.'s money. *You* took Old Funk's life and joy away!'

'What's that?' Wizzie jumped up from the bed and, bending over the little girl, seized her by the shoulders. This she did in such a rush of agitation that Popsy, who in her turn had been seized by *her* parent, uttered, under pressure of the child's fingers, a squeak like that of a new-born shrew-mouse and fell on the floor, where she lay with her eyes closed and her arms extended. 'When have you seen him? Tell me now! Tell me everything.'

'Pick Popsy up. Popsy's deaded. Y*ou've* deaded poor Popsy.'

'When did Old Funky speak to you, Lovie? Yesterday? Remember, now!'

But Lovie's head, in spite of the hands on her shoulders, was hanging over the edge of the cot, uttering consoling words to the fallen doll.

Something might easily just then have passed between these two feminine authorities at which even Popsy, behind her diplomatically closed eyelids, might have felt surprise, had not there come through Jenny's open window the distinct sound of a sharply closed street door. Leaving the child's cot, Wizzie flew to the window just in time to see, in the now quite transparent morning light, the upright form of Miss Ferneau making its dignified and unhurried retreat down the hill towards the coal-yard.

'Is she furious? Was there a scene? Did Jenny turn her out?' These were questions that so absorbed the interest of our friend that when Miss Ferneau had vanished from her sight she picked up Popsy with her own hand and returned her to her offspring, merely remarking as she left the room, 'If *you* can't remember who you meet when you're out, we'll see if D. can!'

It was after ten before Wizzie was ready to set off for Glymes. Her resolution to get a glimpse of Urien that morning was finally sealed during a bitter quarrel with No-man over his allowing Old Funky to speak to his child. It had for some months been D.'s custom to take the child, without her perambulator, for little strolls down the street; but what especially hurt Wizzie's feelings in this case was that in mentioning the old man's presence in the town he had concealed the fact that he had a definite encounter with him. What *had* he actually said to the little girl? D. had got sulky under her anger, and would neither deny nor admit that the man had used the startling expression repeated so emphatically by Lovie. Their quarrel had ended by No-man's going off in silence to High East Street, while she herself, in Jenny's continued absence, had had to get her own and Lovie's breakfast in the deserted kitchen.

This task accomplished, she settled the child on the kitchen rug, with the table between her and the stove; and, before leaving her there, she forced herself — though her head was throbbing with a whirl of conflicting emotions — to display a lively interest in Popsy's being put to bed in a miniature Great Western truck. She soon realized, however, that Lovie was shrewd enough to divine something of the tragic tension of her mood; and every now and then, in the midst of their attendance on Popsy's siesta, she caught a pair of serious eyes fixed furtively on her face.

She got away at last; but she couldn't leave the child without telling Jenny that she was alone, and so after running upstairs to dress for going out, and after a final glance into the kitchen, she decided to visit the other house before setting forth.

Poor little Wizzie! For all her bitter experiences of what life can do to a spirited girl, she was not such an egoist as to find it altogether easy, on this particular morning, to leave Lovie by herself on the kitchen floor. What she kept repeating in her heart, as with her hand on the door-handle she watched the child putting Popsy to sleep in the truck, was that it was fear of Old

Funky that made it impossible to take her to Glymes. But, below all that, she knew perfectly well that her real reason was her passionate feeling that she *must*, for once and at all costs, see D.’s father alone.

It was hard, all the same, to close that door on the child! Not that Lovie — though she knew her mother was standing there — showed the smallest interest in her presence. But the child’s very lack of concern seemed to hold her all the more strongly, seemed to hold her as if, instead of being stationary on the floor, Lovie was being carried rapidly out of sight on a magic carpet. She was certainly experiencing what D.’s poor Mary called, more than two hundred years ago, ‘being torn in half, and what she suffered was not the less acute for being unexpected. She felt so totally unable to move from that threshold that her mind began wandering about, just as if she had to wait till someone released her.

One of these wandering and drifting thoughts had to do with the new dress she had just put on. She became aware of a vague tickling sensation in her left breast, and she wondered if this feeling were the result of her dress being too tight.

And now, as so often happens at these critical moments in human experience, the man-made, immortally mechanical god of civilization, that voice so comfortable to some and so dreadful to others, that our race has succeeded in installing on the pendulous point of time’s swaying pinnacle in the boundless, took upon itself to straighten out the confusion of Wizzie’s wavering mind by reminding her that though a girl has a longer life than a midge she hasn’t indefinite time for delayings on thresholds. The time-god’s jolt just now came from Jenny’s broken alarum-clock, another relic of the vanished Mr Dearth, which stared at her and ticked at her from across the stove that had consumed at a gulp the philosophy of the eternal. But gods whose voice is a tick resemble gods whose voice is thunder in the fact that their commands are at the same time definite and obscure; and when Jenny's clock repeated so emphatically 'Give up — give up — give up', it was hard for Wizzie to know whether it meant 'Give up the circus' or 'Give up D. and Lovie'.

Never had the tug in those opposite directions been so vicious as it was at this moment. It amounted to real suffering. She was wrenched apart between warmth, safety, security and all that wild rush of free, free air as she rode, dazzling and radiant, tip-toe and transported, round the dizzy ring!

The natural climax of her miserable indecision was that she began to hate both these alternatives! One was like an over-hot room with an over-hot fire and nothing but the smell of Lovie's washing and D.'s boots: the other was like the crossing of a glacier chasm on a quivering tight-rope.

She was still clinging to the door-handle and swaying from side to side on this terrible eel-bridge of destiny when the door into the yard opened and there, in the passage behind her, stood Jenny Dearth! Never in her life had she seen so transfigured a human face! It was a countenance of paradisic ecstasy. Had No-man seen her he would have been compelled to admit that extreme joy had the same effect on his Horse-Head as extreme agitation. It converted the bizarre into the extraordinary, the grotesque into the sublime.

In fact, Jenny's illuminated lineaments seemed more than human to Wizzie's startled eyes at that moment. It was like a face she had once seen outside the circus-tent, the face of a woman who had won on a lottery ticket. But the worst of it was that this illuminated woman's face hovering before her, near her, and now pressed passionately against her own, while she knew that it brought the decisive settling down to her dizzy trapeze of indecision, was prevented, by some diabolical non-conducting substance in herself, from delivering its message!

In fact, all the while her friend was hugging her to her heart, she was trying desperately, but quite in vain, to take from her some final supernatural oracle. It had been a superstition of Grummer's that the first loss of a woman's virginity endowed her with magical and prophetic insight. Grummer had given many instances from her own experience of this species of second sight. “Tis the first ’er meets be the lucky oon, but ‘tain't all as knows it, more's the pity!’ How she could hear the old woman's voice! Once Grummer had even murmured something in this connection about ‘they Vestie Virgins in them Roman times’, and, though this particular example seemed a singular one, there certainly was something in Jenny's face— ‘But very likely,’ she said to herself, as she returned her friend's hug as warmly as she could, ‘very likely it's all my fancy. They've made it up — that's the great thing! And after all Claudius is a sick man.’

One thing it certainly did, this sudden reappearance of a transformed Jenny: it made it easy for Wizzie to set out alone. She took a new umbrella D. had given her on her birthday, which was on the twenty-seventh of July. This umbrella was the first really ladylike one that she'd ever had, and she was not a little proud of it. It had a round black handle with a solid silver band upon which D. had had her initials ‘W.R.’ engraved, and she never let herself carry it unless she wore her best clothes. She had her best clothes on now, consisting of a navy-blue tailor-made suit, with a neat blue hat trimmed with grey feathers. Nor would she like it if we forgot to mention her hand-bag, which she had bought herself with Jenny's help, and which both of them considered the finest flower of Durnovarian taste. Over her pretty clothes, on a day of such doubtful prospects, she was forced to throw a not very becoming rain-coat, whose lack of style troubled her not a little;

but she had bought it in her early Dorchester days, and D. was one who never noticed such things.

Thus attired, she set out; but instead of going the shortest way, which was down the hill to the coal-yard bridge, she turned, after a moment’s hesitation, into High East Street, and proceeded slowly along the near pavement towards D.’s lodgings. She was led to go this way, rather than the other, by one of those strange impulses that often remain, to the end of a person’s life, so totally inscrutable that a superstitious mind might well be pardoned if it supplied the lack of any rational explanation by the idea of a supernatural hand laid on one’s shoulder.

When she reached the door of No-man’s lodging she stopped, and under her ugly rain-coat and well-fitting blue dress her heart began to beat wildly. With a spasm of curious agitation she noticed that the door of the house had been left wide open. There before her was the flight of stairs going up to D.’s attic! She advanced into the passage and stood at the foot of the stairs, thinking desperately. Her face was puckered into a concentrated frown, and her gloved hands, fumbling at her hand-bag, seemed as if they sought, independently of her consciousness, to slip into their old habit of chafing each other’s knuckles.

Contrary to all her ways with D. — for she had long ago come to the conclusion that the more shabbily she was dressed the better he liked her — she instinctively bent her head and surveyed her appearance from head to foot. Then she twitched back the unsatisfactory ulster, and, fidgeting a little and bending sideways, gave her dress, at the place where it covered her hips, several cautious jerks. A crease in one of her stockings caught her eye next, necessitating the tightening of her suspenders, and to accomplish this manoeuvre unseen from the pavement she was forced to ascend the staircase a step or two. This small matter adjusted, she pondered again, and this time her reflections led to her slipping off the offending rain-coat and hanging it across the arm that already held the umbrella and hand-bag.

'Damn this business of being a woman!' was what she thought as she ascended the stairs. 'If D. came to surprise *me*, he wouldn't have to give a thought to how he looked! And I declare *I* wouldn't either, if I had my fling at the circus!'

Arrived at the first landing without meeting a soul, she ascended the second flight much more rapidly. But at the foot of the third, the one that led direct to the attic, she paused again and rearranged her bag in relation to her cloak and her umbrella. In fact, she shifted these objects very much as a soldier, mounting a besieged wall, might take his dagger between his teeth.

All the while she was making these preparations she kept thinking, 'What's the use? He'd be better pleased if I'd tumbled down and was all covered with mud!'

Biting her lower lip and moving so lightly that not the creak of a single step betrayed her approach, she now ascended the last flight to D.'s landing.

'What's the *matter* with my heart?' she said angrily to herself as she went up; and she became so aware too of that tickling sensation in her left breast that she pressed her free hand against it.

Once on the attic landing she looked about her as furtively as a thief. 'Yes, *that's* his room,' she thought, but she felt she *must* delay for a second, for half a minute, before she surprised him.

Then suddenly, and without the least possibility of a doubt, she heard the sound of a woman's voice inside the room. Her first instinct was to run down the stairs, run out of the house, run all the way to Glymes. But her second was to stand at the door and listen.

She did neither of these things. She went on tip-toe into D.'s kitchen. 'He's got a girl in there,' she told the Royal Martyr, under whose heart, though it must have been more than half past ten, a gas-flame was burning. ‘He’s got a girl in there,’ she told Henry VIII, as she mechanically bent down and tried to arrange his lid in a more decent manner. Then she went to the window, which was wide open, and, standing immobile before it, stared out over the roofs at the Frome meadows.

‘That’s the old thatched house he says he lived in in some other life; and there’s that man of his working in a ditch. A “drowner” he called him, and he said he had a smile as sweet as I don’t know what. And over there, where those trees are, must be the lane to Glymes. I’ll be in that lane soon, going to see D.’s father. D.’s got a girl in there; and I’m going to see D.’s father. In the convent they said a girl oughtn’t to let a fellow touch her if she wasn’t married to him. I’m not married to D.; but I *feel* as if I was.’

She told herself often afterwards that she hadn’t tried to listen a bit, not a little bit, to the voice of the woman in D.’s room.

It was only when the woman laughed at something D. said — and she could hear the low tones of his voice going on all the while — that she rushed out of the kitchen, across the landing, and into his room, with one sharp knock.

Yes! As she’d guessed from the tone of the laugh, from the low, sweet, milk-dripping, honey-oozing laugh, it was Nance who sprang away from him — Grummer would have said ‘like a cork from a bottle’ — and came slithering towards her with outstretched hand and two burning red spots on her cheeks! Yes, it was Nance who began at once, even while Wizzie was pushing her hand aside and plunging a look she would have liked to have been that wall-scaler’s dagger into what she’d have liked to have been D.’s heart: ‘Oh, that dress, my dear! I can’t help saying it, even if you don’t like to have your clothes mentioned, even if it gets on your nerves to be — Oh, that dress is the loveliest thing I’ve seen!’

Wizzie had not grown accustomed, either in convent or in circus, to the peculiar archness that passes for a light social tone in certain feminine circles. Nancy Quirm was not, it must be confessed, any great adept at this airy art, but her manner of speech came nearer it than anyone else's Wizzie knew. And now, as our friend struggled heroically to combine the opposite roles of one superior to feminine weakness and one whose silence was a steel blade, the demon of righteous anger within her almost deafened her spiritual hearing by the way it kept mocking Nance's social chatter. 'It's the loveliest thing she's ever seen, ever seen, ever seen! It's the loveliest thing she's ever seen—' And the demon ended by hurling at the poor woman one of the filthiest of the obscene wishes that Old Funky used to express when he quarrelled with Grummer.

But what she felt towards Nance was nothing to what she felt against D. Never once, in all their days together, had he shown her this retreat of his; and now that she had come of her own accord it was to find his father's wife! She didn't care what they'd been doing, she told herself. She knew what Nance was, the sick cat! But that he should share with another woman —

The truth was that Wizzie was enough of a normal girl to feel defrauded of her rights by this exclusion. It hurt something in her that lay deeper than mere sex-instinct. It was treating her like a prostitute! Of course she took no interest in his work. Why should she? But that he should have deliberately kept her out of this intimate side of his life, that he should have deliberately said to himself, 'I won't have *her* in my attic!' — this was something far worse than just kissing or whatever it was.

While all this bitterness surged up in her, D. was carrying the thing off with cold-blooded aplomb. In some odd way her contempt for Nance's chatter had staved off the outburst that she felt sure he had expected. She caught him looking at her as she struggled with herself — her bosom swelling under her tight bodice — with puzzled astonishment. How little he knew her! Did he think that to have caught him kissing Nance, or letting Nance kiss him, would make her make a scene, like a vulgar wife? She would show him! If she couldn't chatter like Nance, she could hold her tongue and crush people by her dignity.

She said scarce anything — she couldn't trust herself to say anything — but she sank down on the chair he pulled over to the fire, letting her discomfited rival swing her legs awkwardly from its arm as she went on with her purring cajoleries. What *was* it about this soft feminine body, as it leant over her, pretending to appraise the stuff of her blue suit, that made her feel sure she *had* interrupted something between them?

She forced herself to endure the woman's proximity the better to observe her, and she gave herself up to a cold malice as she did so, a malice that held a wicked sweetness of its own. How weary and worn, and yet how sickeningly sweet, that face was, in the pallid light of the autumn morning! 'D. doesn't *really* give a damn for her,' she thought, as she listened with less than half her consciousness to the rigmarole with which No-man was trying to distract her. And, indeed, in the submissive sweetness, like the scent of overblown lilies at an unhappy marriage, that emanated from the woman's presence, there was something that, though it didn't disarm our friend's contempt, did quite considerably diminish her indignation. And this irresistible feeling of something pathetic in the creature increased steadily as she remained at Wizzie's side.

No-man, with his mania for nicknaming everyone he met — which was his way of detaching them from the reality of vulgar acceptation — had called Mrs Quirm, as if conscious of something about her that was like the smell of overblown lilies, his Cemetery Woman, but he might just as well have called her his Door-step Woman. Not one of Nance's friends but must have known at some time or other that they must draw back gently or move very gingerly if they didn't want to hurt this apparition at their door. It seemed to be her destiny to be always sitting on the elbows of chairs, always hovering at the doors of rooms, always clinging to coat-sleeves and shawl-ends.

But what began now, more than anything else, to disarm the indignant Wizzie was the vein of guileless stupidity she detected in Nance. No, it wasn't with a white-faced thing like this, with such weary lines and such blurred spectacles, that a person could be angry. D. might let her kiss him as much as he liked! No, it was with D. himself! What self-respecting girl could stand being kept in one house while her man met his friends and enjoyed himself in another? And what a big fire for October! Men never grudged themselves coal, any more than they grudged themselves cigarettes.

'No, I'm not going to bear it any longer. He'll have to give up this place and find somewhere where we can live properly, or I've done with him. He can have Lovie, but I'll have my life.'

'No, my dear, I'm *glad* to give it back to him, tell him,' D. was now saying to Nance. 'Are you listening, Wizz?' he added, turning to her. 'Nance and I are worried about my father. Dumbell and Fuzzy-wuzzy — isn't that a good name for the minx? — appeared last night and are sleeping in Wye's room while he sleeps downstairs. They seem to have driven my father distracted. It seems they're going to chuck him. His last articles have been too much for them. Nance simply doesn't know what's going to happen. Do you see *that?'* And he pointed to a roundish object, rolled up in brown paper, that lay in the middle of the bed. 'That's my other head, the one he gave me, the one you hated so on your chimney-piece. It's nearly the same as my old one — see him? — but not quite. Dormarth's more like the Maiden Castle one, but they're all different. Devils differ as much as we do. It was what he said about these heads that did for him with old Cumber.'

'What did he say?'

'He linked them up with Derfel's horse, or with Derfel himself — didn't he, Nance? Derfel was a saint from the part of the country where his ancestors lived. In fact, as far as I can gather, he was a good deal more than a saint. I suppose you might call him a saint-god. And Father thinks — aren't I right, Nance? — that in the end he was confused with his beast. He said that where he and Mother's people lived there was an avenue with these heads on the gateposts — there's her picture of them, sweetheart, on that ottoman just behind you! — and people used to pray to Derfel's beast long after they burnt the image of Derfel.'

'Is *that* all?' said Wizzie dryly. 'I don't see what Mr Cumber could object to in that. He's not a Catholic, is he?'

'I'm afraid Enoch went a good deal further than that,' said Nancy sadly, getting up from the chair's elbow and beginning slowly to gather her belongings together. She stood for quite a while with her back to the foot of the bed, putting on her old-fashioned hat; and Wizzie could not help noticing that she treated Dormarth with quite as little respect as she showed to the bed-post that had been left vacant. 'Urien's things are nothing to her,' thought our friend, as she watched the woman's figure outlined against the attic window; and she turned her eyes to the package on the bed with a new interest, now that she realized what it meant to her Black Man of Glymes.

'What *are* Mr Quirm's ideas about these things?' she asked abruptly.

No-man turned to her with a sharp surprised look as he rose to help Nance on with her ulster. 'I'm afraid, my pretty one,' he said, 'you wouldn't be much the wiser if I tried to explain.'

‘I should say she wouldn’t!’ echoed Nance, turning round too, and resting her hand on the solitary head as she stooped to adjust the lower buttons of her rain-cloak. But her smile had faded when she straightened herself again and began pulling on her gloves. ‘It’s all we can do,’ she remarked to D. sadly. ‘He’s got the thing on his nerves. But he’d have never asked you if I hadn’t—’

But No-man, who had been watching Wizzie with curious interest as she lay back in her chair with her brows knit and the fingers on her lap busy at their old trick, began to speak with some eagerness. ‘It’s no secret, my dear. Besides, things have gone too far. Nance and I are worried about him. His idea is—’ Here he paused and glanced at Nance, as much as to say, ‘Stop me if I oughtn’t to tell her.’ ‘His idea is that *he himself* — and that’s why he calls himself Urien — is in some way connected with our old mythology. I don’t know whether you’ve ever heard of what they call reincarnation? You have? Well, what my father’s made himself believe, or come to believe, is that the supernatural power, whatever it was, that incarnated itself in the Urien of the legends — and it must have been a kind of Titan, if you know what I mean: not exactly an evil spirit, but not a good spirit either — has now, after all these centuries, come back to the world in him! In several of the old legends this power was attended by some sort of beast — the whole thing’s mixed up with sex and death and good and evil and all that’s hardest in life to understand — and, as far as I can make out, it’s with this beast, or *through* this beast (and that’s where the sex part of it comes in), that we touch some great secret! It all sounds crazy — or, as I put it, it does — but so do all very ancient religions. But the thing that’s worrying Nance and me now — and that’s what she came to talk to me about — is that by letting himself go for these papers, and openly discussing it, he has shaken his own faith and got all confused, troubled, uncertain, *exposed* in some way, not knowing what he does believe or doesn't believe. Nance says she's only sure of one thing, and that's that he wants this head back. And it looks as if that were all we could do for him just now. Of course, it may end in his shaking off the whole business; but what we're afraid of is that it's gone too far, gone so far *that he couldn't go on without it*. Well, old girl, that's the situation! Of course, what I've told you is between ourselves. He's my father, and I couldn't bear—'

But Wizzie interrupted him. 'D.!' she brought out; and she uttered this syllable with such outraged indignation that Mrs Quirm, who had wandered round the further side of the bed to reach for the package, paused in the act to look at her.

'Well, anyhow, that's the situation,' repeated No-man. 'I've put it badly; but what it really amounts to is my father's life. I know it sounds perfectly crazy to you, Wizz; but, as it says at the end of *Faust*, all life is a symbol, and I suppose no religion that doesn't deal with sex-longing in *some* kind of way is much use to us.'

Instead of replying, Wizzie glanced at Nance, and the two women exchanged a very complicated look in which not only quotations from *Faust* but all masculine philosophizing was put aside in the interest of something else.

Then, while Nance was telling No-man what shops she had to go to, Wizzie began glancing critically about the room. How big the bed was! And this was the bed where for the last ten years D. had slept — not in Dorchester, of course, but somewhere — slept, and thought of Mona! He had spoken about this bed, and about that ottoman too, only a few weeks ago, when she enquired, thinking of her ideal little house, whether his mother had left him any furniture. 'I expect', she said to herself bitterly, 'his mother wouldn't like him to let *me* sleep in this bed!'

And then it came over her that this was probably the very bed where Urien had seduced D.'s mother and where D. had been born.

'Well, good-bye, my dears!' murmured Nance quietly, moving to the door, with the sacred beast's head clutched as callously against her bosom as if it had been a bag of oranges. 'I've got a lot of errands before I start back.'

Wizzie jumped up at once. 'Listen, Nance! I'm coming now, straight over to your place. I haven't seen Thel for an age. You don't want to carry that thing as well as a lot of parcels! Let *me* take it.'

'But, darling,' interposed No-man, and then, turning from her to Nance: 'I want to show her everything, now she's here. I never would let her come before because she can't bear those heads, and it's no good — But now she's here, I'm going to show her everything.'

Wizzie glanced at Nance again, and another look, not at all resembling the one exchanged before, passed between them. Wizzie said in this look, 'He's trying to get round me. It's been a great blow to him that I've always refused to come up here,' whereas Nance's look replied, 'He wants to make you forget you found me here. I know this room as well as I know my own. It's a shame he's never let you come near it.'

But No-man intervened at this point, addressing them both with the complacent indulgence of a grown-up person putting right a couple of engaging children in an affair that required a mature mind. 'Put that down, Nance!' he commanded, taking the package from her arms and laying it on his desk. 'Wizzie shall bring it over a little later, after I've enjoyed myself with her a bit!'

The words struck Wizzie as designed to revenge something or other that Nance had done to him, or wouldn't do for him; but the woman showed no sign of taking the remark amiss. 'Very well, let's try and meet, and walk *together!'* she said eagerly. 'I'll be as quick as I can. I *shall* have a lot of parcels; so it *is* a comfort not to have this too. It's heavier than it looks! No, don't bother to come down. And don't forget to show Wizzie that house where you lived when you were Mary Channing's friend!' She shut the door behind her with one of her most pathetic society smiles, one of those smiles that always struck Wizzie as having something indecent about them, considering her spectacles and the weariness of the imprints in her face.

As soon as the door was closed, there occurred between them that curious suspension of the stream of events which is an almost universal phenomenon when a couple who know each other intimately are suddenly left alone by the departure of a third. It is, at such times, as though this departing third, whose vanishing swells into so portentous a recession, actually raised as he departed an invisible dam of unearthly water that now flows between the two persons left behind, across which they gaze helplessly at each other, each of them feeling as if the familiar objects round them had undergone some curious change. It is then that the pair seem suddenly grown shy of each other, gazing into each other's eyes across the last words of the departed, across his final gesture, across the diffused aura of his personality, each of them too shy to utter the magic word that shall break the spell. It even may occur that they feel a curious discomfort in looking at each other, as if something had happened to their familiar relation that had changed its quality, so that their common interests could only be referred to now in a whisper, as if the air were full of ears, or as if they were speaking before a corpse. And not only so, but each material object in this transformed spot, each chair, each rug, each cushion, each picture, gives the impression of having been drained of its customary spirit, of having been left a mere husk or mask or eidolon of itself, as though the departed one had carried away with him the living essence of these things, leaving them weary nonentities and insubstantial negations. Thus it was with our two friends while they stared blankly at each other, listening to Nance's steps descending the stairs.

But Wizzie suddenly broke the silence. 'Why!' she cried, stooping down by the bed. 'She's dropped one of her gloves. One minute, D. I'll soon catch her!' She jerked the door open and ran at top speed down the stairs. 'Nance!' she cried. 'Mrs Quirm!'

But it wasn't till she was out in the street that she overtook her. Nance turned at her voice, and she handed her the glove, and for the third time that October morning an interchange of commentary on what was happening passed without words between them.

And then, before she had the least notion of doing such a thing, an irresistible impulse of pure mischief, the sort of mischief that made the quietest sister in her convent flash out sometimes with a startling jest, forced her to fling back, as she turned to go, 'Well! So long, till later! Isn't it a shame we're not allowed *to change our men* — you to look after D. and me to look after Urien? We ought to make a little private plot about it, Nance Quirm! After all, we're all related now!'

Never had she seen behind poor Nance's spectacles such a look of bewildered simplicity as she caught at that moment. 'She's stupid!' she cried to herself as she ran back. 'No; I couldn't be jealous of *her* — even if I wanted to!'

She was confronted on her return to the attic by the sight of D. carrying a tray from the kitchen to the bedroom. On the tray was a teapot, two cups and saucers, and some milk and sugar. He looked extremely complacent and well-pleased with himself as he put down the tray on his mother's ottoman and hurried off to fetch some Osborne biscuits.

Wizzie reseated herself in the arm-chair and accepted a cup from him, with a biscuit in the saucer. She said to herself, ‘He’s glad to have me here, I declare he is! Goodness, man! Why didn’t you think of it before?’

‘A cup of tea’ll be just the thing for you, my lovely, before you walk. No! Don’t ‘ee move! Here! Put it down on this.’ He brought her a little stool, like a church hassock, and placed it carefully by her side, giving one of her legs, as he did so, a joyful squeeze.

With his own cup on the mantelpiece, she felt him looking down upon her, sitting there, with profound satisfaction. ‘Take off your hat, my sweet,’ he said. ‘God! I feel as I did last November when I first carried you off.’

She balanced her cup on the not over-attractive stool and began to lift her hands to her head. Then she changed her mind. ‘Oh, I can’t bother,’ she said, ‘not now — but’ — and there was a certain wistfulness in her tone, as if she besought him to forgive her about the hat— ‘I’ll take off my *gloves* — only I mustn’t forget them, like Nance!’

He stooped down, and she felt that it gave him a thrill of pleasure to help her remove even these barriers. The minute they were off he lifted one of her hands to his lips, and then, bending down in front of her, pressed her knees together with his bony fingers. ‘God!’ he mumbled again, ‘but I’m as pleased as Punch to have you up here.’ Straightening his back again, he remained opposite her, watching her drink her tea. ‘Wizz, old girl,’ he said. ‘ *Think* of that first time I saw you in the caravan! We weren’t long in understanding each other, were we?’

Her hand did not twitch as she held her cup, nor did the slightest vibration of response run through her, but deep in her heart this daughter of man cursed her Maker. Her curse was a woman’s curse, not as articulate as his would have been; but, if her Creator had possessed a human ear, what he would have heard would have been something like this: ‘Damn you, God, for not fitting the love to the man!’

But D. suddenly hurried to the window and began rummaging in the drawer of his writing-table. ‘Thank the Lord!’ she heard him mutter. ‘It *is* here.’ And when he came back to her side he thrust into her hand a tiny little roughly-taken photograph, one of the kind that beach-photographers take at the sea-side.

‘What on earth’s this, D.?’ she murmured; and, leaning forward — for the day was so cloudy that that side of his room contained but a dim light — she held the little picture so that the flames flickered upon its glazed surface.

‘Why!’ she cried, in a rush of real pleasure. ‘It’s Lovie! How *did* you get it taken?’

‘Oh, just the other morning,’ he answered casually; but she could see he was thrilled by her surprise. ‘I was keeping it for All Souls’ Day,’ he added in a low half-apologetic voice.

It was his tone more than anything else that upset her, and the timid hesitation with which he referred to the day they’d first met. This timidity, this fear lest unwittingly he should make her angry, had been growing upon him of late. As a rule it had just the opposite effect upon her from what he intended; as a rule it brought down on his head the very thing that, ‘if he hadn’t been so silly and hadn’t acted as if I were some kind of I don’t know what’, he would have escaped; but today, with this supernatural hand on her shoulder, with this sense that she had at last really reached the end of her endurance, with this feeling that she *must* go back to her spangles and her tights, to her dust and her danger, to those heavenly rushes through the air, to those hushed expectancies and wild outbursts of applause, this nervousness of his touched her as it had never done before.

‘Why, it’s lovely, D.!’ she cried. ‘It’s — it’s *our* — Lovie — to the life! I can’t think — what made you— ‘But here she couldn’t go on, and, with the little picture clutched between finger and thumb, she bent her head on her knees in a fit of low-voiced crying. They were silent tears, and not the breath of a sob came with them; but this only affected D. the more, for, having become a veritable expert in feminine emotion, he knew that loud sobs mean indignant self-pity, if not furious temper, whereas this silent rush of tears down a scarcely contorted face means that one more tributary has begun to flow of that unceasing flood that from before the days of Niobe and Rachel has poured down the cheeks of women.

‘What *is* it, my darling, my precious?’ he cried, kneeling down in front of her. ‘Tell — your — old — D. what it is!’

But the delusion, full of the bitter-sweetness of love’s treacherous sea, that she was simply weeping from the happiness of their love made No-man’s own underlip begin to quiver. To recover himself, and to give her a chance to do the same, he now rose to his feet; and walking up to his original bed-post head, which showed not the remotest sign of disturbance at being deprived of its mate, he began to tap out a tune upon its sconce. The tune, of all tunes, that he selected, and that, to effect some kind of cheerful diversion, he must needs begin to drum, was none other than that familiar evangelical hymn, ‘Shall we gather at the river?’ — a composition that he had recently heard sung by a little group of revivalists upon High East Street: ‘Shall we gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river? Shall we gather at the river that flows by the throne of God?’

And, as if his tappings on Dormarth’s head were not emphatic enough to satisfy his desire for something normal and calming, he now began chanting aloud the actual words of the tune he tapped.

But Wizzie, who had not seen that quivering of his lip, at once assumed that this ‘Shall we gather at the river?’ was an impatient outburst of gross masculine ribaldry, indulged in at the expense of her silly girlish tears. In any case, even if she *had seen* his underlip tremble, she would still have been totally astray as to the nature of the relief he got from chanting ‘Shall we gather at the river?’ with such unnecessary vehemence. What she did, anyway, was to sit up at once, open her elegant hand-bag, take out from its silky recesses a handkerchief Popsy had given her on her twenty-second birthday, and proceed to dry her wet cheeks.

‘What was it, sweetheart?’ enquired D. tenderly; and, leaving his beast, who certainly, in the dim light of that cloudy day, looked as if it well might be what he had told Nance it was, he went over to her side and stood, after his fashion, close to the mantelpiece, with his arm extended along half the length of its bare surface.

She did not reply at once, but stared, across his long legs, frowningly at the fire.

‘God! What a brute I am!’ he suddenly cried, clapping his hand to his pocket. ‘I never gave you a cigarette.’

This lapse in his hospitality having been rectified, and what was to her a quite irrelevant explanation gone into as to why he never smoked himself in the afternoon, she slowly lifted her small head and looked straight up at him.

‘I was thinking of our life, D.’ she said. ‘It’s not what it ought to be — but I’ve never been—’ She spoke in a low and intense voice, while what colour she had slowly left her cheeks in the effort her words cost her.

She saw that his face expressed bewildered astonishment and a miserable childish disappointment, and what she saw froze the words in her throat. How could she ever explain to a man like this? It was like snatching from

Lovie, without a possibility of making her understand, something that she thought was hers to keep forever!

'Tell me what it is, Wizz! For God's sake, tell me what's wrong with you today. Is it *him?* Is it Old Funky?'

She shook her head, and then with an impatient gesture threw her cigarette, only half-smoked, into the fire. How like him it was to drag in Old Funky — and how sick at heart it made her to have *that* worry brought up again! Oh, to get back to her real life, to get away from them all!

'What *is* it, then?' he persisted. 'Have I done anything? Is it because you found Nance here? If I thought for a minute that you were bothered about Nance, I'd—'

But she interrupted him with a weary gesture. This was worse still. Would he never understand that it was *he himself*, not Old Funky, not Nance, not even her feeling for his father, that was at the bottom of it all?

'Don't you see, child, how unkind it is of you to go on like this and not even give a person a hint of what's the matter? What do you mean about "something wrong with our life"?'

She felt so desperate and so driven, so torn and miserable, that her self-pity transformed itself into a rush of anger with him and his stupid badgering. 'I mean you're *not a man*, D. That's the whole thing, if you *must* have it. No! I know what you're going to say — but I'm not thinking of *that*. You're not a man. You may be higher or lower. You may be an angel or you may be — that beast over there! But a girl, when she's my age — though I dare say when I'm as old as Nance or Jenny it'll be different — wants a companion, wants someone she can fuss with, be silly and gay with, take sides with, share things with — yes, and quarrel with! Do you realize, D. we've never once *made it up?* Why haven't we? Because you're not a man! Because—'

But at this point, in the tempest and whirl of her feelings, she suddenly remembered all the times he had responded to her outbursts with a placidity that was more maddening than if he'd hit her, and a confused sense came over her that by his open mouth and stupid bewilderment he was forcing her to say things quite different from what she meant! Her hopelessness of *ever* saying what she meant, while he looked at her like that, made her lips tremble and her eyes fill with angry tears.

'You oughtn't to forgive me like you do!' she cried in a strange husky voice. 'You ought to shake me; you ought to curse me; you ought — Oh, D. I don't know what you are' — and her voice rose almost to a wail— 'but you're not a man!'

She never forgot what his face looked like after this cry of hers died away in the silence of that small room. It wasn't quite as tragic as the face of a wretched Guy Fawkes she once saw as it collapsed into the flames. It was more like the face of a terribly human scarecrow out of whose mouth, in one of their Sunday walks, she had seen Popsy knock the poor creature's pipe.

It was his overpowering astonishment that in a measure numbed the force of the blow, and he drew his arm from the chimney-piece as if it were something that didn't belong to his body at all. Then he stood for a second with his eyes fixed not on her face but on the hand-bag in her lap.

After that, he began, with fingers that she could see were so deadened by her words that they could hardly obey his will, to button up, slowly and carefully, all the buttons of his coat. When his coat was buttoned up, he turned half-round and for another second stared in a puzzled way at his writing-table by the window, as if he were wondering what that round package was that he had taken from Nance and put down there! Then, turning again, like one of those hooded chimney-pots that some faint wind, felt by no other neighbouring object, seems to sway at its arbitrary whim, he fixed his eyes on the bed.

Wizzie was impelled, this time, to follow the direction of his benumbed stare, and she half-expected to see the phantom shape of that wife of his, whose name had appeared so queerly on Dumbell's sketch, lying with her head on the pillow! 'If he'd only snatch me up now', she thought, 'and throw me down on that bed, it would end all this nonsense!' She drew a deep angry breath. 'But that bed's sacred to Mona — *that's* why he'd never let me come up here.' And once more her heart became cold as a stone.

But he moved across the room now, to where, on a hook next to the cupboard, hung his overcoat and cap, with his Cerne Giant's cudgel propped up beneath them against the panelling. 'I think I'll go for a little walk,' he murmured in a low sing-song voice, 'a little walk, a little walk; yes, I think I'll go for a little walk, as the weather's so nice and fine!'

He went to the door as soon as he'd got his overcoat and cap and taken his stick. 'Don't forget the package,' he remarked, forcing himself to give her a wry smile. 'And I won't expect you till I see you. They're certain to keep you to tea. But don't be *too* late — with *him* hanging round! Nance may overtake you, but I wouldn't stop about, waiting for her.'

He paused for a second and then added, in a voice that was like the voice of a person watching a ship go down, 'It may rain, and then again it mayn't rain. We shall know if it comes; and if it doesn't come, we shall know it hasn't come. Don't worry about Lovie.'

With that, he was gone; and she heard his heavy steps — those steps that were neither fast nor slow, neither hurried nor lingering, sounding just as they always sounded, the steps of D. No-man going for his walk, going earlier than usual, but going for his walk — deliberately descending the stairs.

‘I must be crazy, I declare!’ she murmured aloud, as she caught herself making a hurried move forward, just as if, quite apart from her reasonable decision, something in her cried, ‘Run after him! Run after him! Stop him while you can!’

But it did give her a queer feeling to be left in possession — the very first day she had entered it — of this room of his! The first thing she did was to carry the tea-things back to the kitchen. Here, finding that the Royal Martyr had still a little hot water left, she cleaned their cups and deposited the tea-leaves under the lid of Henry VIII. Then, returning to the bedroom, she approached the one Questing Beast that still remained ‘in situ’, and considered its appearance with some minuteness, running her fingers over its ambiguous physiognomy.

Still leaning forward against the bed-post, and fumbling — quite mechanically now — with the strangely carved head, her mind reverted to that inexplicable incident of the sudden scrawling of the name ‘Mona’ across Dumbell’s sketch. ‘The real Mona’, she thought, ‘can never have slept in this bed if it was his mother’s; but *he’s* slept in it ever since, and thought about her, too, as he turned over, like he always does, with such terrible jerks from side to side; and I bet he felt funny when he stopped sleeping here and slept with me. Dear Christ! I wish to hell I loved him like I love his father! Everything would be right then, and I wouldn’t be thinking about the circus. When he took me away, he ought to have found a job for me, like Jenny said, in another circus, not kept me with him. But that’s the way they are! They’re proud of their generosity to us as long as we give them what they want; but when it comes to helping us to be independent...’

All this while, with her eyes fixed on the pillows of that ancient bed from which so many wild human thoughts must have risen up and beaten against so many different walls, she had been vaguely conscious again of that tickling sensation in her left breast, due, she kept fancying, to the tightness of her bodice.

She had felt no pleasure from the way this new dress of hers emphasized her normal womanliness, no pleasure comparable with what she had felt that Midsummer Eve when she put on boy's trousers. All she had felt when D. had looked at her, with the look she knew too well, was a hope that Urien would be equally pleased when *at last* she got safe to Glymes. But, whoever a girl wants to please, she pays the same penalty in discomfort, and, hardly conscious of what she was doing, Wizzie now found herself standing on tip-toe against D.'s bed-post and pressing herself against the heraldic head in order that, as when an animal rubs itself against a tree, she might get relief from the sensation that bothered her.

But she moved away to the fire now, to pick up her gloves; and she only arrested herself in the act of putting on more coal by the thought, 'But he'll be up there with Lovie.' She contented herself, therefore, with hooking the guard carefully over what fire there was, and then, without further delay and having possessed herself of her various belongings, she picked up the paper parcel from D.'s table and ran downstairs.

Once on the pavement, she decided that this time she *would* go the shortest way, whether the invisible hand that seemed directing all her motions this morning approved or disapproved.

The Guildhall clock was striking half past twelve, and, as she had only nibbled at D.'s Osborne biscuits, she said to herself, 'I'll run into the sweet-shop by St Peter's and buy some of that chocolate Jenny gets.'

Possessed of the delicacy she desired, she was returning to North Square and the street leading to the little stream when she happened to glance through the iron rails of the church at the statue of William Barnes.

She had often passed this statue before, but never till this moment had its mellow charm and the majestic benignity of its expression struck her as they did now. Wizzie's aesthetic taste was totally undeveloped, but there was in this venerable old poet's look something beyond all art, an effluence of peace, a spirit of benediction, a promise of comfort and of healing, that seemed to rise up in that centre of Dorchester life as if it sprang from some level of goodness in the deep earth below the town's oldest foundations.

Unused as Wizzie was to all introspective thought, she could not but feel, as she leant against those rails and gave herself up to the influence of that calm figure with its downcast eyes, that there was some aspect of life, some way of taking life, that, with all the changes she had gone through in these last months, was still hidden from her.

A strange mood came over her, in which, though there was self-pity in it, there was much more than self-pity. She felt sorry for old D. sorry for Urien in this new trouble that had fallen upon him — and how she had foreseen it, how she had felt it coming on that Midsummer Eve at Mai-Dun! — and sorry even for Old Funky!

So deeply did the mystical benignity of this hushed figure affect her that, as she stood there frowning and pondering, with that weird wrapped-up object in her gloved hands, for one passing second she actually forgot everything in a rush of melting sympathy for all the people in her confused life.

But the moment vanished as quickly as it came, vanished indeed in a sudden dread of encountering Nance and of having her as a companion all the way to Glymes; and under the pressure of this fear, which quickly became something like a panic, she fled into North Square, hurried past the prison gate, and ran down the hill to the river-path at the bottom.

All the way to Hangman's Cottage, as she went along munching her chocolate, the image of that old poet by the church accompanied her, soothing her troubled mind. Everything she had come to like best in Dorchester seemed to be expressed in that calm figure.

'If I do go back to my life,' she thought, 'if I do leave D. and Lovie, I shan't forget what I felt just now!'

But she wasn't destined to leave the town in undisturbed peace. It had been — so she fancied — her fear of meeting Nance that had set her off at such a pace; and all the way to the Hangman's Cottage, in spite of the spiritual presence of William Barnes, she kept looking back: but oh, oh, oh! — just before she reached that familiar landmark she was seized with a flash of conviction, a conviction as certain as if she had seen him following her, that Old Funky had watched her flight and would be on the look-out for her when she returned!

'He must have been watching for me,' she thought, as she hurried on towards the Blue Bridge. 'He must have seen me run down the hill! I *know* I wouldn't think of him like this for nothing.'

But Wizzie was a brave and a resourceful girl, and she told herself that if Urien wasn't in a fit state she would ask Mr Wye, or even Dumbell, if he were out there still, to accompany her home. 'He wouldn't dare to speak to me then,' she told herself. 'And if he did, I'd know what to say to him!'

She had walked so fast all the way that, when she finally reached the pond where Urien had once rescued her and Lovie from the cows, she felt quite at ease in her mind about Old Funky following her. 'Let him wait for me, if he wants to!' she said to herself. 'He'll get more than he bargains for!'

As fate would have it, although neither Old Funky nor Nance beset her approach to Glymes, she was not spared a troublesome companion. This came with a sudden change of the weather and took the form of a very formidable wind, blowing from the south-west. The girl had heard so much about this wind from Maiden Castle in connection with Urien that she became at once vividly aware of its growing force and even prepared to welcome it as a sort of advance-guard of Urien himself! She remembered how it had blown against the Glymes roofs and down the Glymes chimneys on Candlemas Day, and though, being the most unsuperstitious of women, she'd never given a thought to what, out there, they called 'the ghost-wind', her attitude to what she thought of as Urien's wind was something very different from her attitude to D.'s Roman sentries on Poundbury, or his drowner in the Frome ditches, or his favourite old willow-tree in the swamp at Herringston.

D.'s talk about Nature never failed to fill her with infinite tedium. She couldn't help thinking of that very thing now, as she responded in such an excited manner to Urien's wind, shutting the gate by the pond with an exultant clatter as if it were a mystic gate of deliverance. Her heart rose higher and higher as the wind blew her along. She became aware of a sacrilegious impulse to play with the head she carried as if it were a ball!

It was a queer thing. D. had only to begin speaking of what he'd seen on one of those walks to cause a thick cloud of gloom to descend upon her. But when his father referred to the wind, or to the mist, or to the hills, she felt as if she longed to leap on her old horse, spring to her feet on his back, and tear round the ring! 'I believe', she said to herself, as, instead of playing ball with what she carried, she pressed it, because it was *his* now and was to do him good, tightly against her heart, 'that it's because with D. it's only his own sensations, whereas with Urien—' She concluded her definition of the difference by a burst of that touching faith that girls have, when they're in love, as to the dim grandeur of their idol's mental processes. 'I'll make him understand today,' she thought, and she beat with her umbrella, though her hand-bag was clutched in the same hand, against the thick stalks of the hogweed in the ditch by her side.

The only religion Wizzie was conscious of in herself was composed of stray tags and broken snatches of her old convent teaching; and it was possible that some obscure memory of the contempt for Nature, save as a step to the life of the spirit, that the nuns had taught her came to her aid in her reaction against D.'s selfishness. Every physical movement Wizzie made this eventful day had a psychic significance, and when she struck at the stalks of the hogweed with the end of her umbrella what she was really doing was fighting for the father's wild mysticism, of which she knew nothing, against the son's physical sensations, of which she knew too much.

But the nearer she drew to Glymes, the stronger blew the wind; and it presently became necessary for her to button up her ugly ulster, clutch all she was carrying tight against her, pray that her grey-feathered hat wouldn't blow off, and hurry forward, like a little fishing-smack with all sails but one well-furled.

When she arrived at the two houses, and had pushed open the garden gate, she paused for a minute to take her breath and gather herself together. This delay, followed by her nervous and lingering approach to the Quirms' door — for her heart had begun, as it always did at the prospect of meeting Urien, to tease her by its agitation — brought it about that her presence was observed from the front window of the Wye establishment, where the guileless Dumbell, weary of the wrangling between his wife and his father, was standing to watch the approach of the non-human storm. He must have called Thuella upon the scene at once, for, while the visitor still stood at Nance's door waiting for an answer to her hesitant tap, that young woman, her painter's smock surmounted by a shawl, burst from their house and rushed across the flower-beds to greet her.

'Oh, I'm so glad you've come! Oh, I've got such news for you, such incredible news!'

'How is Urien?' was Wizzie's reply to this. 'Has Nance come back? Will he come to the door? Is he still—'

'Hush — he's coming *now*. Oh, such news, my lovely one! You must come — *Good-bye!'* And before the man inside had got the door open the excited girl was back again in her own house.

'How do you do, Mr Quirm? I came to bring — Nance had too much to carry — I hope you don't mind—' She brought out these sentences in spasmodic jerks, while all he said was, 'Come in, child. It's warmer in than out.' This last sentence he repeated as he ushered her into their untidy room. 'Warmer in than out, in than out.'

'How are you, Mr Quirm?' she said, when the door was shut and she'd slipped off her ulster and laid down her things.

He made no attempt to help her in this, but stood with his back to the window gazing gloomily, and she fancied a little reproachfully, into her face. Without a second's hesitation she took off her hat, and, throwing it down on the nearest chair, gave him the sweetest smile she had ever given to anyone in her life. A faint gleam came into his heavy-lidded eyes.

'How — pretty — you — are,' he murmured in a low whisper; and suddenly, to her intense surprise, he moved a step nearer, and, taking her small head between his hands, bent down and kissed it.

The touch of his hands, his breath on her hair, made Wizzie's heart beat furiously. Her legs too began to feel weak and shaky; and in the pit of her stomach she had the sensation she used to have as a little girl when she was being swung too high. 'Alone — with him — at last,' the pit of her stomach said. ‘Alone — with him — at last,’ repeated the trembling breasts under her tightly drawn dress.

It was upon the latter that his eyes fell now, as he released her head. ‘Pretty,’ he muttered again, and this time his tone troubled and perplexed her. There was something in it quite different from the tone of a normal grown-up man expressing sensual interest. But this very fact, that he was so different from his son in the way he acted, gave her a vibrant quiver of tenderness towards him.

‘Pretty,’ he repeated; and, stretching out his hand, he touched with his forefinger the tip of her left breast, the one she’d been conscious of all day, the one that had teased her by that tickling sensation. His gesture was the extreme opposite of a sensual one. An onlooker who had been to Rome would have been reminded of the outstretched finger of Michelangelo’s Divinity putting life into the languid frame of the newly created parent of our race.

But just because his touch was so strangely chaste Wizzie felt under its impact such a melting response that it was impossible to bear it. From the spot where he touched her there trembled through her whole body a tension that could only find relief by being taken into his arms.

‘Let’s — sit — down,’ she stammered. ‘No — *you* — and I’ll—’ And pushing him into his great arm-chair, a much more capacious piece of furniture than the one in D.’s attic, she slid down upon his lap. The warmth of her body, its electric pressure, the way she cuddled up against his chest in blind contact with those garments whose state had shocked the fastidious D. the manner in which she caught up one of his hands and kissed it as reverently as if he’d been some famous sage or formidable potentate instead of a half-crazed fanatic whose work wasn’t good enough for a newspaper, all these things had a most releasing effect, not on the man’s senses but on his tongue.

But the flood of strange talk to which she now found herself half-listening — for she had never been one for taking the discourses of the sons of men with much seriousness — was nothing in intensity, or in abandonment, to her own feelings. For the first time in her life Wizzie had round her the arms of a man she loved. It was no more to her than the howling of the wind in the chimney that this man was her bedfellow’s father. It was no more to her than the lashing of the rain on the pane that *another* father — the father of her own child — was waiting to intercept her return.

These ironic aspects of her situation, the scandal of which even the kindest of the kind priests of Durnovaria could not have condoned, no more bothered her than the fact that all those queer ghost noises that she’d heard on Candlemas Night in the rafters of Glymes were now starting up again over her head! She had known what it was to feel herself yielding to her Black Man when she was no more than standing by his side and talking to him; but now she was between his hands; now she was lying on his knees; now her whole identity was being subdued to him, surrounded by him, dominated by him; and her emotion became so intense that his words, reaching her through a cloud of mist, through a vapour of smoke, through a medium that he would himself have compared with the sacred steam that rose from the life-giving cauldron of Caridwen, might just as well have been ‘I love you, I love you, I love you’ as anything that they actually were.

She didn’t even bother herself as to whether it gave him any pleasure to have her there like that. He pressed her tightly to him in the pauses of his talk, but he always went on again, as if to talk to her, much more than to caress her, was his grand relief. It was not that he refrained from caressing her. Sometimes his hands were on her bosom, sometimes round her hips, sometimes against her flanks, as she cuddled up to him; but his mind was far away most of the time, absorbed in what she could see was more important to him than anything else: to pour out his thoughts into an ear that was ready to hear!

And the wind howled round the house as she had never heard a wind howl, and the rain dashed itself against the window. *This* rain did not fall in a continuous stream, as it had done yesterday at Claudius's, but in furious intermittent gusts, under the impact of which it seemed sometimes as if the panes would be broken.

As in so many dramatic scenes that occur on this earth, there was no one there to take full cognizance of the significance of that scene: the young girl clinging so passionately to the unsightly form of an unceasing voice! Other human groups — other pairs of flesh-covered skeletons, as No-man would certainly have pointed out — must have been listening to this wild storm, which must have swept over all the roofs of Dorchester before it reached Glymes; but, if scenes between human beings are carried according to their intensity so far or not so far from our planet's surface into the enveloping atmosphere, this exchange of feeling, the man talking and the woman giving herself to the talker, made up a projectile of human emotion that like some towering psychic rocket must have come near to reaching the last circumference of troubled air that surrounds the orbit of our globe.

'I thought', he burst out, after a torrent of words that meant nothing to her, 'that I'd only to tell them clearly what I was — the new medium, after all these years, of that great power of the abyss that the bards and prophets of my race have groped for — for them — I won't say to accept — but to — to hear — to respect — not to turn *what is my life* into the — into the joke — oh, the devil's joke! — of what they call "scientific research".'

Here again he began to talk of things that the girl on his knees could make nothing of; but all of a sudden he stopped short, and a long terrible sigh, the sigh of a heart near its breaking-point, convulsed his whole frame. ‘You don’t think’, he said, in a very low but terrifyingly clear voice, ‘that’ — and she could feel his whole body stiffen beneath her— ‘that — they’re *right* — and that it’s all — that it’s all — *tommy-rot?’*

It may have been the combination of the tremendous gravity of his tone, the tragic desperation of that ultimate heart’s cry, with the commonplace expression ‘tommy-rot’, that hurt her so, but her nerves broke down at that point and she could bear no more. Slipping from his lap, she ran across the room, picked up the package she had brought for him, and, tearing off the paper and string as she returned, thrust the head into his hands.

His delight was touching to see! He kissed the grotesque thing, he hugged it, he mumbled incoherent gibberish over it, he examined it, he turned it first one way and then another, he scrabbled over it, he scraped at it, he slobbered over it, he tapped it, he smelt it, he held it to his eyes, to his mouth, to his forehead, and even to his ears.

The girl stood in front of him, her fingers clasped behind her back, watching him with infinite sadness.

Presently, as he began chuckling to himself and behaving as an idiot might do to whom someone has restored some lost and precious plaything, she became aware that there was a new sound audible somewhere that was struggling to make itself heard above the roaring of the wind and the weird noises in the roof. There was something about this extra sound, added to all the rest, that was too much for Wizzie’s nerves; and the breaking-point of her tension, as was generally the case with her, showed itself in a burst of realistic anger.

What she felt now — and it was a natural woman's instinct — was that Urien was giving way, that his loathsome fuss over a block of wood was just a fit of wilful hysterics out of which he ought to be shaken. She found herself on the point of snatching the obscene thing from him. She did lay her hand on it; but he clutched it to him and looked at her with a glance of heart-breaking supplication. There was a momentary contest between them, which was ended by Wizzie suddenly feeling that she was behaving as Mr Cumber's daughter would have behaved. So she drew away. But that was her Urien, her Black Man of Glymes, sitting there before her, and it was unbelievable that her mind couldn't get into contact with his mind through all this nonsense.

'What *is* this thing?' she shouted at him just as if he had been deaf, while all the while that strange new sound kept hammering at her own consciousness. 'What *is* this thing? What do you *want* with it? What good can it do you?'

She stood above him trembling with anger. She felt as if he was hugging this lump of wood out of deliberate devilishness, hugging it *instead of her*, hugging it to keep her away, just when fate and the storm and everything has given them this moment alone. There he was, her Glymes man, touching her, alone with her, she *herself*, he *himself*, and out of pure devilry he must play the imbecile and hug this loathsome thing!

'What are you doing with it? What *is* it?' she repeated hoarsely. Her hand was still on it as he clutched it against his jersey, but she no longer tried to take it from him, for somewhere at the back of her mind she could hear the voice of Dumbell's wife telling the doctor that she'd been forced to burn a horrid piece of wood.

'You — don't — understand,' he said, still shrinking back in his chair with the same supplicating look. 'It — he — I — always had some creature that was the body of our longing, of our “hiraeth”, of our desire, the incarnation of our power to break through and to pass—’

But Wizzie interrupted him. She felt like screaming at him! She felt if she could only outscream the storm, outscream those noises in the roof, outscream that *new* sound, which now struck her as a furious knocking at the outer door, she could get beyond this idiocy of his, back and behind it, where somewhere, in that majestic personality, abode the calm, unruffled Urien she loved.

‘To break through *what?’* she shrieked, swaying up and down before him like a wounded pigeon and lowering her face till it almost touched his. ‘You can’t break through life except by dying. And what’s more, if you don’t stop this, if you don’t drop that thing, you’ll kill me!’

This last word of hers did seem to affect him, for, making an obvious effort to satisfy her, he squeezed the creature into the space between his thigh and the chair, and took her hands in his own.

‘But, child,’ he said, ‘I think there’s someone at the door. Do — you — mind — going to see?’

She straightened herself and listened. Yes, he was right. But to be heard in this wind they must be knocking with a heavy stick! And she thought of D.’s great cudgel. Was it D. come after her? She hurried to the window and looked out, and the second her back was turned to him Urien repossessed himself of the head and began to fondle it like an infant.

But there, outside the door, drenched to the skin, his long black coat clinging pitifully to his grotesque figure, without hat, without stick, without anything to mitigate the woefulness of his appearance, was Old Funky!

Driven by a kind of frenzy to get in out of the storm, Mr Urgan was striking at the door, kicking at the door, butting at the door, and raving at the door. The author of the First Gospel might have made him a symbol of the wicked man shut out of Heaven. His coat-tails were so soaked with rain that the wind, which whirled round him and seemed every minute about to lift him bodily off his feet, could do no better than hoist them up an inch or so, flap them against his rump for a minute, and then, dropping them, cause them to wrap themselves closely round his hips in the reverse way to the manner in which the parade-coats of the grenadiers of former times used to be folded back.

Wizzie gazed at him through the window with round eyes and rounder mouth. It was one of those spectacles that Chance and Nature combine to produce that are so evenly balanced between sickening pitifulness and monstrous humour that the same person could laugh or cry at the sight, according to the turn of a straw.

When the noise of the storm rose to such a pitch that the swinging of a battering-ram against the door would be no more than the tapping of a wren's beak, Mr Urgan, in his blind passion — for by this time the little man was well-nigh beside himself — would draw back from the obdurate door, only to rush at it in the next lull like a beast with a pack of hounds behind him, when he would beat at it with his fists, and kick at it with his feet, and even pound at it with his head.

Now there was something about Old Funky's frantic fury to get in that excited in Wizzie not fear — for at that moment she felt no more afraid of him than if he'd been a demented jackdaw — but a savage desire to keep him out. The sight of him there — and she felt sure the room was too dark for him to see her, even though she pressed her face against the pane — raging so obstinately and so helplessly, had a most curious effect on her. It brought back, as if by a series of livid lightning flashes, her struggle with him in the caravan. She *was* pressing her face now against the pane. Her thin nose, flattened at the tip, must have assumed, had Mr Urgan been able to see it, the likeness of a crooked sixpence. And as she stared she seemed to engage again in that wild struggle. 'I *could* keep you out!' she kept repeating through her clenched teeth, while her face, pressed yet closer against the window, enlarged the blurred whiteness of that wicked sixpence.

But the wind began gathering in force just then to a pitch that made her draw back. The noises in the Glymes roof-top were increasing too, and the whole house seemed to rock and shake.

She glanced at Urien. He was still muttering and crooning over that beast-head, and it struck her that his great swarthy face had lost its accustomed restraint and had relaxed into a maudlin abandonment. What she saw now in his expression thoroughly shocked her. It was much worse than the tragic look he had worn when she first came in.

The noises in the roof were so alarming now that she couldn't help glancing up at the ceiling. 'Don't you blow down!' she thought; and to her surprise she realized she had uttered this thought in audible words.

But there came a lull now, as if the storm were drawing back for a yet more terrible onslaught, and in that momentary cessation the frantic knocking at the door became audible to Urien. He listened a moment, and looked at her with a puzzled expression. 'There's someone out there,' he said peevishly. 'Why don't you let them in?'

'Don't you move!' she cried. 'I was *keeping* him out; but I'll let him in!'

She opened the door, meeting as she did so a startling rush of cold air, and ran down the passage.

Urien must have shot the bolt after he admitted her, and the pressure of the wind outside was so great that, when she'd drawn it and turned the handle, the door flew open with such a swing that it flung her against the wall and dashed Old Funky against her. She pushed him aside, however, and, using all her strength, got the thing shut and bolted. As she did this, the image of Nance rose up before her, but she said to herself, ‘She must have gone to Jenny’s. It *must* have begun before she started.’

‘Come, then,’ she said crossly. ‘Come in, now you’re here!’

Mr Urgan seemed too dazed to notice her crossness. He stood leaning against the wall, recovering his breath, and fumbling, so it seemed to her, in an attempt to get something out from some inside pocket.

‘Come in, now you’re here,’ she repeated; and he followed her into the room.

He showed signs of suspicious alarm when he saw Urien staring at him from above the object clutched in his hands.

But Wizzie’s nerves rendered her desperate and shameless. ‘This is Lovie’s father,’ she cried in an unnaturally high-pitched voice, ‘come to ask how his child is getting on.’

But Urien only nodded. Then he seemed to realize that something was required of him, and, with a curious stiffening of his ravaged visage till it resumed something of its normal dignity, he forced himself to speak quietly and naturally.

‘I’m — not—’ he said, in a low faraway tone, like the voice of a living soul concealed behind a mask of decomposition. ‘I’m — not — myself — just now. Don’t mind — talking — business — you two. I’m — not — very — well — today. Take — no — notice — of me.’

This said, his whole countenance seemed to change before their eyes, becoming like the face of that ancient Anarch so eloquently described by Milton, until, quite relapsed into his former condition, he fell to murmuring to himself, and finally to cuddling upon his lap the object that gave him such strange comfort.

The alarming noises in the roof above her, the tornado of wind and rain, her heart-sick consciousness of Urien’s condition, made the presence of this dripping figure, under whose boots little pools were forming on the carpet, of less consequence to Wizzie than if he had been Lovie's doll.

But it was not like a doll that he looked. Never had Mr Benjamin Urgan so closely resembled a monkey. He was like a monkey escaped in the storm from some barrel-organ that had been washed down the Frome!

All the girl's heart and soul were set on that lamentable figure in the chair. Was it a relief to her, or was it not, that his trouble took the form of this maudlin, gloating pleasure? For himself it might be better, better than the despair from which it was an escape, but for her there was something degrading and sickening, something that made her loathe the whole business of life, in seeing him like this.

She noticed, as she watched him, that his hair had grown perceptibly greyer. If in its tight negroid curls it had formerly resembled moss, it now resembled some species of lichen, lichen growing on a log that had been dead for a thousand years! 'How *could* Nance leave him', she thought, 'just to do some wretched shopping?' But then she remembered that, after all, the woman had come to fetch him the ghastly plaything he was now fondling with such satisfaction.

A singular peculiarity of the human mind is the power it has of hypnotizing itself, or, perhaps one should say, of anaesthetizing itself, at moments of great stress by the contemplation of small and insignificant details amid the whims and caprices of the inanimate. Thus it came about that — when Wizzie turned away sick at heart from the spectacle of her hero's degradation and began saying to herself, 'It's all those Cumbers. This would never have happened if he hadn't worked for those Cumbers' — instead of taking any notice of Mr Urgan, who was now unfolding with intense absorption some species of document he had at last extracted from the inner covering of his drenched person, she gazed with interest at the progress of a thin trickle of water that, originating in one of the pools that had formed themselves at the man’s feet, was making its way with apparent intention along the pattern in an extremely dirty carpet. For the girl’s mind at that moment, as she stood between these two fathers, feeling as little for the one as if he had been a pond-water frog that had hopped in, and so much for the other that she would have given her life’s work to heal his trouble, the immediate pressing preoccupation was to note if that trickle stopped, or didn’t stop till it reached the place where the pattern ended.

But Old Funky had now found what he sought. ‘Here — take this! Read this! ‘T is dry as a bone. I got ‘un out here, no matter for this end-o’-world ‘urry-cain, and ’tisn’t many what ‘ud ‘ave done it, not for love of a ‘ard ‘eart like the ‘eart *some* ‘ave got under their pretty titties!’

Lifting her eyes from the floor, Wizzie took the envelope he handed to her, and stared frowningly at it. Old Funky’s allusion to the emphatic feminine curves thrown into relief by her dress caused her bitter amusement. What an example of those tricks of fate which D. must needs call ‘irony’, that she should have put this dress on to please Urien, only to catch the libidinous eye of Lovie’s father!

What with the howling of the storm and the terrifying sounds— ‘Those aren’t ghost noises,’ she thought — that were getting worse in the roof, she could make nothing of this paper except that it was some sort of legal production and contained the word ‘whereas’ written many times in capital letters.

‘Take off your coat and lay it over that chair,’ she said to him, letting the hand in which she held his document sink down wearily against her side.

But he waved this suggestion away. ‘Ben Urgan’, he assured her, ‘bain’t woon to rin arter a female ‘ooman through a come-to-Judgment ‘urry-cain, only to dry his wold coat at her fire. What be writ in this ’ere dockymint be a matter for King’s Jury. ’Tis to save ‘ee from court and scandal I’ve a-follered ‘ee here, and back Ol’ Ben don’t stir, though the ‘eavens fall, till you’ve a-seed ‘un!’

Wizzie gave him a blank stare. Then, glancing at Urien, she found — and oh, she thanked the Lord for that! — that he’d fallen asleep, his massive head nodding and swaying over the object in his lap.

“Tis like this,’ said Mr Urgan, catching at one of his dripping coat-tails and unceremoniously squeezing the water out of it where he stood, ‘and ‘ee’ll larn to harken when ‘ee, larn me business! This ’ere dockymint, wot ‘ee treats so light, be to tell all and sundry that me missus be a-summoning of ‘ee, calling of ‘ee, that is, afore court and kingdom, to answer the charge —’ Here Old Funky shut his eyes, the better to recall what he had evidently, with the utmost difficulty, learnt by heart. ‘The charge of alienmating me affections. Her do say, nevertheless, and her lawyer do say arter her, that if your good man pay over to she summat in cash, and pay over to *he* summat in cash, this ’ere charge of alienmating, writ in this ’ere dockymint in King’s Court Hebrew, can be nillified. The sum she *mentioned*, as settling thik little job to the peace of all, were fifteen guineas, and a trifle of a fiver on top of that for they as made out the same. Her *did* mention summat about taking a few pounds less, for old acquaintance’ sake, but that’s ‘atween she and thee wone self! I washes me hands o’ such meddlings wi’ the course of law and government.

‘What be doing of, ‘ee mad ‘ooman? ’Ere, ’ere! Gie ‘un over to I — gie ‘un over! Darn it, wench, what’s come to ‘ee, then?’

This rush of protests was caused by the fact that Wizzie, her endurance quite at an end, was making an attempt to tear in half this formidable piece of foolscap with the clear intention of throwing it into the fire!

Two things, however, made it possible for Old Funky to rescue his ‘dockymint’, the first being that the paper was hard to tear, and the second that the fire in this house of confusion was nearly out. But the scene was a sufficiently shameful one. It would have been still more so if the uncanny creakings and groanings above and the elemental hubbub outside the walls hadn’t reduced to comparative negligibility all conflicts that were merely human. But they weren’t an engaging sight just then, the proceedings in that front room at Glymes: Old Funky, with his red wig awry — nor was it the first time that in a struggle with Wizzie this unholy topknot had been disarranged — and with his thin, black, dripping form swaying about on the wet floor, struggling frantically to get the paper away from Wizzie; and Wizzie, with a flush of dangerous anger on both cheeks, and with her ‘lurin’ figure more ‘lurin’ than her antagonist had ever seen it, tugging at the paper so as to throw it on the fire!

If indeed there is any justification for our theory that by the intensity of the magnetism released in such scenes a lasting impression is made on the chemistry of the finer air, it might well happen that, should any reader of this narrative take the trouble, on some dark stormy afternoon, to visit the ploughed-over dump-heap by the gravel-pit where the road from Piddletrenthide crosses the lane from Stinsford, he would become conscious, between pit and hedge, of the furious wrestling of a beautifully formed woman with a harlequin-like man, until with a leap and a cry a third figure, more startling than either, dissolves these eidola of emotion into the damp air around them!

For it was Enoch Quirm himself, and none other, who brought this shameful scene to an end. The shock of their physical contest must have roused him in a way their voices, however raised, were unable to do. At any rate, he awoke from his coma to see what looked to him like actual violence being offered to Wizzie by a veritable rain-goblin from whose black, tight-waisted, struggling form the water trickled to the floor.

Leaping up so suddenly that the head fell from his lap and went rolling along the carpet, Enoch Quirm — or, to be kind to him in his downfall, Urien of ‘yr Echwydd’ — came lurching towards them with such a terrible gleam in his dead eyes that Old Funky, in a paroxysm of panic, tottered backwards, tottered in fact so blindly that he tripped up over the beast’s head, which had come to rest in a pool of water, and fell to the floor. In falling, though luckily he was no heavyweight, he struck the back of his head such a violent blow on the iron fender that he lay stunned.

For a second Wizzie thought he was killed, and a queer reaction came over her. Forgetting all about her ally, she knelt down by the fallen man’s side and set herself to examine his hurt. As she bent over him and pushed back his wig, which was already bloodied into a new shade of red, she was no more conscious of Urien picking up his fallen fetish and hurrying out into the passage than she was conscious of a lull in the storm and the sound of a car in the road outside.

An emotion stranger than any she had ever had, or than she was ever destined to have, flooded her being at the sight of that white skull with the blood oozing from its wound. The past swept over her with an overwhelming rush; and it came into her mind that the last time she had touched that slippery surface it was from the marks of her own nails that the blood had come. Indescribable emotions welled up in her breast and shivered through her. Kneeling there, over that blood-stained skull, she reached the tragic level of mortal feeling where love and hate, blind savagery and infinite tenderness, melt into something for which there is no name.

What she had suffered, in shock and pain and outrage, when she yielded her maidenhood to this grotesque creature, seemed to return upon her, and to return in quite a different way from what she felt just now as she pressed her hot face against the window, watching his fury at the door. It returned softened, transformed, dissolved, no longer as a brutal violation but as something in which, with a wild self-laceration, she could even exult!

And what she felt now, as she pushed aside his repulsive wig and examined his scalp-wound, was something that never for one instant she had felt for her old D. How *could a* girl have any human feelings, good or bad, for a person like D. who, if you tickled him, didn't laugh, and if you pricked him, didn't bleed?

How it all came back, that wild struggle in the caravan that had ended in giving her Lovie! And, curiously enough, she now clearly remembered, as the dishevelled wig brought everything back, a detail of that scene that had sunk into complete oblivion. She remembered how, at the very moment she was digging her nails into this brittle death's-head, she was sure she heard — for he was stabled nearer to them then — the frightened neighing of her old horse!

As she thought of this, she suddenly stopped examining his cut, and, inserting her hand under his soaked clothes, groped for his heart. Her joy to feel it beating was so intense that she was deaf to the hooting of the car in the road, deaf to the sound of Urien's voice in the garden, and, thrusting her fingers into her mouth, she began to bite them.

Into this quite unconscious reversion to childhood she would never have been betrayed if the shock of Old Funky's fall and the sight of his naked skull hadn't stirred up the self within the self in the depths of her nature. Almost everyone has some childish habit to which he reverts in times of extreme stress; and this trick of biting her fingers was an earlier one with her than rubbing her knuckles. ‘Take your fingers out of your mouth!’ was an even more frequent admonishment from the convent sisters than ‘Stop doing that with your knuckles, child!’ But one of the tragedies of life is that, save for some guardian-angel in the invisible world, there is no eye to note the peculiar poignancy of the occasions when we revert to these childish gestures.

Whatever her guardian-angel, if Wizzie had one, thought of the way her mind worked as she bit her blood-stained fingers, what the girl said to herself, or rather what she said to the unconscious form beneath her, was something like this — and as the words took shape in her breast she stared at him with that intense, round-eyed look that had excited No-man when he first saw her: ‘You taught me my job. You taught me my power. You taught me my life. You recreated my body!’

The salt taste of Old Funky’s blood in her mouth still remained with her as, scrambling to her feet, she ran to where she had left her things, and, returning to his side with a clean handkerchief, folded it into a little pad and pushed it under the wig where the scalp had been injured.

Old Funky’s eyelids now began to quiver, and, by the time she’d adjusted the handkerchief and placed a cushion beneath his head, he opened his eyes and gazed into her face with the dazed confusion of someone coming round after an anaesthetic.

His first words were enough to show how much alive he was: ‘Where — be — me dockymint, wenchie?’ And then, after a pause, and a feeble effort to turn his head: ‘He ain’t a-stole ‘un, ‘ave ’e?’

But Wizzie, now that it was clear that the old rogue had suffered no serious injury, became a completely different girl. She jumped to her feet and gave him a look of disgusted contempt. ‘You stay just where you are!’ she said. ‘Wait a minute, though! I’m going to dry *this* at any rate.’

Thus speaking, in spite of his feeble resistance she managed to pull off his drenched coat. She then gazed round the room till she caught sight of a not over-clean rug spread out on a dingy sofa, and, having wrapped this, in spite of his protests, round the exposed person of the unfrocked Mr Urgan, she gave heed for the first time to what was going on outside the house.

The storm had abated. The noises in the roof had ceased. But other sounds — sounds that had reached her ears before, but without carrying the faintest ripple of a reflex to her brain — were now entering the house from the wide-open front door. She stood for a second, listening. Then, catching sight on the floor of Old Funky's 'dockymint', she picked it up and, tucking it under his rug, watched grimly the ecstatic delight with which the old wretch received it.

Events began now to follow one another, in this ceasing of the storm, with the precipitation of a stir in a cage of birds from which the covering has been removed.

Running out into the passage, Wizzie could see, framed in the open doorway, surrounded by a spectral afternoon light — from which the storm, ere it went, seemed to have sucked all natural livingness, leaving it wan and ghastly like the skin of a corpse — the towering figure of Enoch Quirm, assisted by a stranger, half-carrying, half-supporting the collapsed form of Nance.

'The storm frightened her,' Urien found time to call out as their eyes met, and she noticed that he had actually propped his heraldic monster on the top of the umbrella-stand, where what seemed its head lay tilted against the wall. 'It's the old trouble,' he said, when they'd got her through the door, and he spoke as naturally and quietly as Wizzie had ever heard him speak. 'It's her heart. But I'll soon get her round.'

Hearing him speak like this, Wizzie couldn't help thinking, 'He can shake it off for *her*, though he can't for me!' And as they carried Nance in and laid her on the wretched sofa from which she had herself just snatched the rug, it was upon him, and not upon Nance or Old Funky, that she kept her eyes fixed. She and the stranger — who was clearly the taxi-driver — now stood side by side as Urien attended to the collapsed woman. Watching him as he prepared his drug, she uttered a prayer of intense gratitude to her convent's God, for it seemed certain to her now that his malady was a temporary one.

She began talking quite garrulously to the taxi-man, so immeasurable was her relief; but alas! it didn't take long for her heart to sink again. She had scarcely been called to Nance's side by a smile and a whisper from the recovered woman, and had only just bent over her in response, when she knew by instinct, without actually seeing his face, that he was only waiting for an opportunity to slip out into the passage. Yes! When she lifted her head from her talk with Nance he had already been out to the umbrella-stand; and now, with his fetish under his arm, and craftily avoiding her eye, he was fidgeting about the room. 'He's looking for a place to put it,' she thought, as she pretended not to notice him. 'If I'd been that Cumber girl, I'd have got rid of it while he was fussing over Nance.'

Had the shameless No-man been present while his father, looking like a blasphemous sacristan, made a pile of his old Welsh books and balanced Dormarth's mate with exquisite nicety on the top of them, and while Old Funky, squatting like a baboon in shirt and braces, peeped under the rug that covered his knees to see with his own eyes that Wizzie hadn't stolen the paper he had apparently braved the storm to give her, it may well have occurred to him that these obscure abortions, the wooden heraldic one and the parchment legal one, were striking modern instances of the ancient primitive belief in what recent research has come to name ‘exteriorized souls’.

Meanwhile, Wizzie, though in a quieter and sadder key, had resumed her conversation with the elderly taxi-driver, lending a grave ear to his impressive account of his drive through the storm — and indeed of other drives through many other storms, in a receding perspective of catastrophic motoring. The man was an elderly Dorset man of not a little personal dignity, who in his day had been a family coachman; and Wizzie couldn’t help being struck by the discretion with which he suppressed the curiosity he *must* have felt about the singular appearance presented by Old Funky, and about the childish preoccupation of the master of the house with a pedestal of books upon which he was trying to balance a wooden idol.

‘It’s Mr Urgan, from the Fairfield,’ she explained to him at the first opportunity she got. ‘He was caught in the storm, and had a bad fall. Yes, this storm has upset us terribly. We thought the house was coming down! Mr Quirm is a nervous gentleman anyway’ — here she lowered her voice to an appropriate whisper— ‘and all this’ — and she glanced at the unfrocked ring-master— ‘has upset him. Oh, yes, and I’d be so grateful, Mr Netherby, if you’d take the old man back — his coat’s drying — you see how upset we’ve been — we’ve let the fire out — back to the fair-ground. Could you do that for me?’ She paused to open her purse and to hand him a pound note. ‘No, never mind the change, Mr Netherby! Only get him safe into his caravan. Will you do that? And if you would do something else for me?’ And she smiled confidentially. ‘We live at Mrs Dearth’s in Friary Lane — No-man the name is. And I want to send a note to *Mr* No-man. Could you go round that way and leave it? Mrs Dearth will give it to him if he’s not in. Sit down, won’t you? I shan’t be a moment.’

Too polite to sit down, but noticing that Nance from her sofa was nodding encouragingly to him, as much as to say, ‘Do whatever the young lady’s asking you,’ the ex-family-coachman, who in his time had seen such amazing scenes between aristocratic four walls that the spectacle of Mr Urgan in his shirt and of Mr Quirm building pedestals for beast-heads must have presented itself as a simple vignette of ordinary middle-class life, stepped forward to within a couple of yards of the sofa of his recent fare, and joined respectfully in the amiable commiserations she was extending to Old Funky.

As Wizzie sat down to compose her letter at his writing-table, Urien’s pile of books collapsed for the tenth time, and the poor man cast upon his idol a look of hopeless apology, as though he heard the very voice of this brutish image of human desire assuring him, ‘If I’m not housed to my taste in a very few minutes, the curse of Math the son of Mathonwy, and of Gwydion the son of Dôn, and of Manawyddan the son of Llŷr, be on you! May you do nothing else to your dying day but love *me* in place of your God, cherish *me* in place of your love, and look for the secret of life and death in *me* alone!’

In contemptuous disregard of both the prophet and his beast, Wizzie disentangled a pen and an inkpot from the litter in front of her and composed the following letter:

He followed me out here but your father frightened him and he’s gone. Am staying the night. Come over and fetch me if you like tomorrow afternoon. Not earlier though, as we shall all sleep late. I think your father’s a *little* better. Don’t worry. Love to Lovie.

Your escaped What’s-her-name, Wizz.

She had only just signed her name when she became aware that Urien, having given up for the nonce his struggle with the books, was watching her with an expression of diabolical cunning. She found an envelope, however, and got her letter fastened up and addressed before she betrayed that she knew he was watching her; but, when their eyes did meet, the gleam of ferocious craftiness with which he whispered his request startled her not a little.

‘Run in next door for me, will you, child, and get Thuella to come? But don’t go away yourself! *I want you both*. But tell Thuella to make the excuse of cooking something for Nance. Do you see? I want us all three to meet in the kitchen — it’ll be quite easy; you needn’t look like that! — while Nance is still out here.’

To say that Wizzie was startled by the treacherous cunning in the majestic features of her Black Man as he bent down and whispered these words, would be to understate it. She was outraged and made furious. The mortuary smell of his breath, which, if his wife’s was like the fragrance of cowslips, may be said to have resembled an emanation from long-dead seaweed, did not lessen her feeling; and with an expression in her face that D. knew only too well, but that Urien had never seen before, she answered coldly, and no doubt more loudly than was necessary, ‘Certainly. I’ll be seeing Thel soon; but whether we’ll come over here tonight, I’m sure I can’t say! No doubt *she’ll* come sooner or later. But it’s too early yet to say what *we’ll* do.’

With this remark she left him to his obsession, and, crossing the room, gave her letter into the care of Mr Netherby.

It is a curious weakness in human nature that the fact of a person who hurts our feelings being unsettled in his wits doesn’t prevent our injured egoism from experiencing its usual reaction. Wizzie was as angry with

Urien now as if he had been as sane as Mr Cumber! And in her anger she reverted in her thoughts to the man she was resolved to leave. 'D.'s a double-dyed fool; but never once' — thus she pondered, in her ignorance of what the Scummy Pond could have told her— 'has he betrayed me with Thel.' She even found herself, in her anger with Urien, casting an indulgent eye upon Old Funky's unappealing figure as he squatted on the floor.

Women are not less but *far more* polygamous than men, only it is a diffused and psychic polygamy, a polygamy that doesn't require for its satisfaction any contact of flesh with flesh; and they are, for this very reason, so protected from being exposed in these spiritual infidelities that they are often able to hide them even from themselves.

Until she began to have this romantic feeling for Urien she had no idea from her own experience what it was like to be in love; and it had been her ignorance of this emotion that had tossed her first into Old Funky's arms and then into No-man's. Even now she was far more in the dark with regard to her real feelings, as the heroines in her story-books called it, towards D. and the circus-man than towards Urien.

But she could have faced all this — for Wizzie had immense reserves of spirit and vitality — faced all she was enduring between her three men, had it not been that, below it all, there was such a struggle going on in her soul between the whole lot of them and her work. It was this struggle — tragic in the strict Hegelian sense of being the encounter of almost equal antagonists — that made her fingers tremble as she handed her letter to the taxi-driver. She could have contemplated this scene — Old Funky, on his feet now and wrestling with his drenched coat, which, though she had thrown it over the coal-scuttle, had got no heat from the dead fire; Nance, watching her husband through her blurred spectacles as he fidgeted over his tower of books — and could have endured it with an unfastidious feminine acceptance of the human mêlée, had it not been for the terrible contest in her mind that was going on beneath it all.

Thus, as she turned her eyes from one to another, she felt as if she had been stripped, not only of her pretty, tight-fitting dress but of her skin. She felt raw and aching all over. A morbid minuteness of observation, a savage realism, dominated her impression of all these people. Mr Netherby had a drop of rheum hanging from his nose, and she wondered when it would fall. Old Funky's wig had got disarranged again, and she could see the edge of her blood-stained handkerchief. Nance, in the process of being restored by Urien, had suffered such a ruffling of her toilet that a couple of hairpins trailed across one of her ears at the end of a dishevelled wisp of hair. Urien's own wretched clothes, always untidy, had recently become so rumpled that there had appeared a grotesquely flapping end of a not over-clean shirt between his jersey and trousers.

To her present mind, or rather to her exposed skin in its present nervous sensitivity, each of these persons became nothing else but the particular unpleasant detail upon which her morbid eye now dwelt. The ex-coachman became a drop of rheum; Nance became a couple of hairpins suspended from a wisp of hair; Old Funky became the edge of a bloody handkerchief; Urien became the strip of a soiled shirt. And so exhausted did she feel in mind and body that when Old Funky, as he set forth under the careful escort of Mr Netherby, poked his tightly buttoned rain-soaked garment and whispered in her ear, 'For another twenty quid, wenchie, tell your good man — and that'll make a snug 'arf-'undred — I'd let 'ee have the old hoss. He ain't what 'a were, and our Pop's got afeared o' he; so 'twould be a kindness to take 'un off us,' she hadn't the heart to respond.

A dead sea of such weary distaste for the whole business of life, distaste for man and beast, distaste for the smallest effort to change the drift of fate, took possession of her that she let Mr Netherby help the little man to shuffle across to his taxi without so much as a word of farewell.

Half an hour later, leaving Nance still on her sofa and Urien back again in his chair, Wizzie did what she'd never done before: made her way alone through the passage between the two houses and knocked at the Wyes' door.

Thuella herself opened it. The girl held her finger to her lips to enjoin caution and began whispering eagerly to her. 'They're all in the studio. Let's go into the kitchen and lock the door! That's what I *have* to do now when I want to be alone. Father was bad enough, but — my dear! — it's far worse with these two. You know what poor old Dumbell is, but *she* — oh, my precious! — *she* — Why, I even felt sorry for Dad this morning when she went at him! And Dad came back so excited from Jenny's. He said he'd given her a proper fright. He didn't say much, because of *them* being here; but I've never seen him like he was last night. I really felt — oh, I don't know! — but he seemed *more of a person* when he came back last night. And do you know what? I took his side against *her*, and he was as pleased as if I'd given him a kiss! So when he went to bed I *did* give him a kiss, and, do you know, he gave me *such* a look, and then, all low and solemn, he gave me his blessing! I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Listen, Wizz — oh, I can't *wait* to tell you my great news! — but do *you* think he did any good with Jenny?'

By this time the two young women — and Wizz began to feel her spirits rapidly coming back under the spell of her friend's excitement — were safe in Thel's cosy kitchen, where it was an indescribable relief to the younger girl to warm herself at the glowing stove. But for some reason she felt reluctant to tell her friend all she knew about the effect of Mr Wye's visit to Friary Lane. She was no sentimentalist; but there had been a note struck in her morning's encounter with Jenny that made her prefer to keep her and

Claudius out of this particular conversation. So, to change the topic, as they sat facing the open stove, she asked her friend how they'd got on during the storm.

'Wasn't it awful?' replied Thuella, and then held her peace for an instant, while an almost mystical look came into her expressive face. 'But — I'll tell you — all about that — later. How's Urien now? I suppose Nance was in that taxi we heard?'

She fell into silence again; and Wizzie thought, 'She's keeping back something about Urien, just as I am about Jenny. Oh dear! What people we all are!'

But the other went on now in a low musing tone, as if talking to herself. 'It was my fault at the start. I put it into D.'s head to introduce him to the Cumbers. It all began at that Antelope party.'

Wizzie looked at her closely. 'Do you think, Thel,' she said gravely, 'that he'll be himself again, after a time? Nance came to D.'s today — did you know that? — to get him one of those damned heads. I couldn't bear to see him with it. It was like Sister Agatha, when she got queer about the image of the Blessed Infant. I wish now that D. hadn't let him have it.'

This time it was the elder girl who changed their topic of conversation. 'Yes, it was the worst storm I've ever known here. How quiet everything seems now! Dad thinks there's a chimney, or a piece of the roof, blown down. Our fire, in there, smoked terribly. We could hardly sit in the room. But Dumbell's been out, and can't see anything wrong. We've always called those noises our "Glymes ghost", and we'd look silly — oh, my sweet one, how lovely you are in that dress! — if it turns out that there's been something wrong with the roof all these years. But you wait, my angel, till you hear my great news! I've not told a soul yet. You'll be the first.'

At this, she bent down and pulled up first one and then the other of the most scarlet stockings that Wizzie had ever seen. Her stockings were the only finery Thuella had on that day. For the rest, she wore her working-smock and a long faded skirt.

‘Tell me about it now,’ whispered Wizzie, trying to throw more eagerness into her tone than she felt.

‘No, no — it’s too important for now. I’ve got to get them their tea in a minute. Look at the clock!’

‘Listen, Thel,’ said Wizzie abruptly. ‘May I stay the night with you? I’ve told D. I might.’

The elder girl jumped to her feet and clapped her hands. ‘Have you really? Oh, what joy, what joy! We’ll talk and talk! *That’s* when I’ll tell you what’s happened — when we’re in bed and all’s quiet. Oh, you *dear*, how sweet of you!’ And she threw her arms round her.

Their embrace, to which Wizzie, in her present mood of warmth and nervous recovery, responded more sympathetically than usual, was interrupted by two distinct knocks at the door in the hallway, followed by a third, a little louder. ‘It’s Urien!’ cried Thuella. ‘That’s his signal!’

Leaving the door open behind her, so that Wizzie saw all she did, she answered the three knocks by three quick taps from her side, and, admitting the man into the hallway, led him straight into the kitchen. Here, the minute he was safely inside and they were all three together, she locked the door again.

The big man was in a terribly excited state. ‘Don’t let me—’ he gasped as soon as he was inside. ‘But it’s a good thing’ — and he lowered his voice to an inaudible whisper— ‘that I’m the...’

Wizzie felt completely at a loss what to say to him, at a loss to understand what had brought him here or what notion he’d got now into his disordered brain. She was also completely in the dark as to how far Thuella comprehended his manias. They all three hesitated for the flicker of a second, standing together in front of the warm stove; and then, in the spontaneous and instinctive way natural enough when a couple of young women are standing in a formidable man’s presence, Thuella took possession of Wizzie’s hand.

Wizzie, however, who never liked it when her friend became what she always thought of as too demonstrative, frowned nervously and pulled her hand away. For some reason this harmless gesture, which at the worst was a thing of overstrained nerves, seemed to hoist up the dam and release the sluice of their visitor’s feelings.

‘Don’t ‘ee mind her,’ he said hurriedly, laying his hand consolingly on Thuella’s shoulder. ‘It’s the same all over the world! We may beg and beg, but it’s no avail! The thing to do’ — and he bent down towards Thuella, totally disregarding Wizzie— ’is to let your love transform itself into — into the force that makes the mystery tremble!’

Urien seemed so helpless and so agitated as he stood before them there, mumbling about unreturned love, and his form seemed so unwieldy and so much too big for the little kitchen, that the two girls exchanged glances wondering where to seat him. ‘Let’s get the one in the hall,’ Thuella whispered, and, unlocking the door, she succeeded, with Wizzie’s help, in carrying in the old rusty iron garden-chair that nobody had bothered that year to drag into the garden. Unhooking from its peg her own domestic overall, she threw this over the ironwork to lessen its chill and persuaded the big man to trust the chair with his full weight.

Wizzie never forgot the tragic look of supplication that he threw — and he looked his full age tonight, looked as if he might be her grandfather — first at one of them and then at the other. He made little groping movements, too, with his hands towards them as they leaned over the backs of their chairs.

‘He wants *me* to sit on his knee,’ thought Wizzie; but immediately afterwards the ridiculous notion entered her tired head that he wanted *both* of them to sit on his knee!

It was queer how in her nervous state her consciousness of the least physical movement that anyone made became twice as intense as it would normally have been; but it was queerer still that her impressions in this unnatural condition reverted to old obscene talks between the Urgans over their caravan fire! What would *those* two have made of this scene in Thel’s kitchen?

Urien all this time seemed struggling against some weight upon his spirit that was pressing him down. Even those groping movements with his hands, directed first to one of them and then to the other, had ceased, and certain spasmodic shivers and jerks of his big frame — resembling what we so calmly call the ‘automatic movements’ of the animal we are killing — had taken their place.

But great incalculable Nature, who is often so much kinder to her misfits than any of their fellow-mortals, chose, in her arbitrary waywardness, that Urien should catch a quick feminine glance that now passed between the two girls. It is a mistake to assume that a mind unbalanced in one point becomes less than normal in others. It often, on the contrary, becomes ten times more penetrating! And what the unfortunate man caught in this look between them was conditioned by the difficulty, to which reference has already been made, that most of us find in suppressing our own egoism in dealing with the obsessions of others. Had Wizzie and Thuella — and they often spoke of this when it was too late — been as alive as they should have been to the man’s trouble, and alive, too, to the terrible sharpening of his wits by his very malady, they would have spared him this cruel exchange of weary sanity. As it was, the whole fury of the force within him, the monstrous craving that possessed him to find them linked to each other and to him in a particular way, shattered itself in a deadly explosion against this fatal concert of cold-blooded reason.

The thing happened naturally enough. His mind, like that of all persons with fixed ideas, was preoccupied with one thought only; theirs, on the contrary, were full of agitations of their own, totally unconnected with their relation to him. But the naturalness of the spark does not lessen the force of the conflagration that follows it; and both the girls drew back in dismay at what they now saw and heard.

Enoch leapt from his iron chair and rose towering above them, his striking lineaments convulsed with passion. His dead eyes flashed as Wizzie had never supposed they could; nor did the grotesque detail that Thuella's overall continued to cling to his unwieldy bulk bring the least flicker of amusement into their frightened faces.

'So that's it — *you women*!' he broke out, and the instinctive cunning of his possessed spirit was shown in the way, for all his fury, he kept his tone low so that it should not reach the Glymes parlour. 'It's nothing to you that I've put my last hope upon this moment! It's nothing to you that I've taken *your*' — and he fixed his flaming eyes on Thuella— 'feeling for *you'* — and he turned them on Wizzie— 'to break through into the mystery that maddens me!'

Speaking in a lower and lower voice as he went on, but more and more rapidly and passionately, he now bent his great head and moved his swaying bulk nearer and nearer to the two girls. Unconscious of what they did as they drew away, they pressed close to each other, Thuella clutching Wizzie's arm, and Wizzie clinging to Thuella's smock.

‘Nothing,’ he went on, his fingers closing and unclosing round the iron rim of the chair from which he had risen, and at one second actually lifting it from the ground, ‘nothing, *nothing* to either of you, any more than it is to them! Well! It’s over now. Between you all — you and these Cumbers and *he*, my own son, and Nance, my own wife — you’ve done it at last, done what you’ve all been trying to do ever since I told you — fool, fool, fool, to tell you — what I know and what I am! If John Rhŷs were alive, I’d have left you all, years ago, and gone to tell *him* the whole thing. He’d have understood, for he put me on the track of it. *He* knew how all Taliesin’s prophecies were about me. He knew how all the old bards worshipped what works through me. *He* knew the mysterious secret of my race, of *his* race — that straining, that longing, that yearning, that craving, that madness to break through! *“Hiraeth”* is our word for it — no other tongue on earth has a word like that! — and *he* knew what it meant. Desire, but not ordinary desire. Desire grown beside itself! Desire driven against custom, driven against habit, driven against the cowardice of mankind — that’s what “hiraeth” is!’

He paused; and Wizzie felt as though Thel’s hot fingers clutching her wrist had pulses in them like burning fever. She herself was having to swallow and swallow, for there was a lump in her throat that she hadn’t felt since the day she said good-bye to her horse. As is generally the case when women listen to the passionate madness of a man’s life-illusion, what both the girls were feeling, what was making Wizzie swallow that lump and Thel grip her wrist till it hurt, was their own life-burden, their own self-pity. This lump in Wizzie’s throat was called up by Enoch’s tone, but the form it took, the picture reflected in its crystal globe, had no connection with anything he was saying. It wasn’t his demented ‘hiraeth’ that brought that lump. It was her own practical, definite, professional 'hiraeth', her longing to be whirling round the ring!

'What you women can't see,' the voice of their deranged giant was now whispering, and his voice was so low and yet so intense that it was like the wind lifting the tapestry in a royal death-chamber, 'and what those fools can't see, and what my son *won't* see, is that the power of the Underworld that our old bards worshipped, *though it was always defeated*, is the power of the Golden Age! Yes, it's the power our race adored when they built Avebury and Maiden Castle and Stonehenge and Caer Drwyn, when there were no wars, no vivisection, no money, no ten thousand times accursed *nations*! They twisted it all round later, the sly children of gold and of burning, turning the dew of darkness into evil, and Brân the Blessed into a demon. But the power that rushes through me when I go out *there'* — and he gave a jerk of his shoulder towards Maiden Castle— 'the power that I *am*, under my name Urien, lies too deep for them to destroy. Whether I'm Urien or not— "for all my mind is clouded with a doubt" — this "hiraeth" of my race, this baffled, this thwarted, this hopeless desire, that from the beginning of things has defied morality, custom, convention, usage, comfort, and all the wise and prudent of the world, can never be destroyed out of the human heart, now it has once appeared! It moves from the impossible to the impossible. It abolishes cause and effect. It strides from world to world creating new things out of nothing! It takes Nature between its fingers and evolution in the palm of its hand. It's more than desire. It's all the defeated longing, all the baffled longing, all the forbidden longing, all the beating against the walls, that makes the wind howl and the rain cry! And it will break through. I tell you girls this, as I've told it to Nance and as I've told it to my son. It'll break through. And when it breaks through, these four thousand years wherein the world has been deceived, and has left the way, will be redeemed, and what was intended to happen will be allowed to happen, and the superstition of science will be exploded forever!'

His huge physiognomy was softening now, as the breath of his inspiration died down, but his unwieldy figure still bowed, still stooped, still swayed forwards towards them, and his hands still kept clasping and unclasping over the rim of the iron chair.

'But', he went on, 'this — fulfilment — of — my — desire — I — shall — never see. Those people' — and he jerked his shoulder towards the parlour— 'and you women and Nance and my' — here a great sob rose in his gullet— 'and my son too — even my own son — have killed my chance of ever seeing it — I mean, in my soul' — and he struck himself on his chest— 'where the only reality do bide.'

Enoch's use of words as a rule was that of the upper middle class, so that when he said 'do bide' he was proving the depth of his emotion, for 'bide' must have been a frequent expression on the lips of that Quirm family who had — unless he was lying to his son on the top of Mai-Dun — adopted him at Shaftesbury.

'Yes, I shall — never — feel that power — any — more. It came on the wind; and on the wind it has gone away. When I kept my secret here' — and again he struck himself on the chest— 'where I've had it written from my birth, as *she* knew, and as Nance knows, I was strong in my faith. When I told my son, I was strong in my faith. But when I wrote of it for the world, the virtue went out of me! And now — you women, you women! Your hearts may love, but it's not with "hiraeth"; they may ache, but it's not with "hiraeth"; they may break, but they can never break as mine is breaking! But listen—'

He dropped the iron chair he was tilting as he bowed himself towards them, and it was as if his whole frame crumpled, wilted, and shrank. His features, too, lost their nobility, lost their massiveness, lost their very shape, and became decomposed like the face of a corpse.

'The wind from "yr Echwydd",' he murmured in a far-off voice that seemed to come *through* him rather than from him, 'the wind that — made me Urien — has carried Urien away. You women, you women, you care for none of these things! The "hiraeth" of the mystery doesn't touch you, never has touched you. It's your men and your children and your play you want, not to *break through*, not to — to — take life by the hair of its head and wring the secret out of it!'

His last words were spoken so low as to be scarcely audible; and after uttering them he was silent. The two girls, who were now shamelessly clinging to each other in scared bewilderment, noticed that the great drops of perspiration which had been slowly forming across his forehead like bubbles of turpentine oozing from a fir-trunk had taken to themselves, by reason no doubt of the upleaping of the flames in the open stove, a curious reddish tinge.

But he turned away from them now and moved towards the door. Wizzie made a slight step forward with the feeling that she must, she *must* help him, but Thuella pulled her back, and she lacked the spirit to break away.

But all the human life appeared to have gone out of Enoch Quirm. He seemed to grope with his hands, as a beast might do who was standing on his hind legs. He seemed also, in some manner that was shocking to see, to be pawing with his feet, as his great slippers scraped along the floor. This trouble with his slippers was understandable enough, as he had long since trodden down their heels and it was hard for him under normal conditions to keep them on; but Wizzie had the sharpest stab she was destined to know that night, when she saw him go out in this manner.

But the strange thing was the depth of the anger she still felt against him for refusing to respond to her devotion except by this crazy dragging in of Thel. With this anger she killed her pity. She felt as if his very madness were something he deliberately put on, part of his preference for Thel! ‘You’ve been strangling my love’, she thought with a proud sob, as the door closed on him, ‘inch by inch ever since it was born; and now I’ve done with you! You’ve been playing with me from the start. You’ve always liked Thel the best! You and Thel must have a complete understanding. Let Thel take care of you! I wash my hands of you!’ And, throwing off her friend’s hand, she stood absolutely still, and did not move a step even though she heard him fumbling and groping, like an animal without hands, to open the door into the passage between the two houses.

Thuella drew a deep breath. ‘You see?’ she whispered. ‘I’ve known it was coming; and so has Nance. He’s never been right since he worked for Cumber. I don’t know what they’ll do now, though, without that money.’

Wizzie looked at her in silence; and then, like a hand striking her in the face out of the invisible, the abominable loneliness of every single person in the world, the loneliness of our pain, of our despair, of our insanity, sent a shiver through her that made her feel sick and weak. She found herself trying to say something to Thuella, but, though her lips moved, not a syllable could she utter.

She turned away and remained motionless for a second, staring at the door, her mouth open, her hands hanging loose. Then something outside the Wizzie she knew took possession of her. ‘Stay where you are!’ she said in a tone like the fall of some small heavy object into water, and, rushing to the door, she opened it and closed it, crossed the hallway, and ran down the passage after him.

The place was dim, but there was light enough to see what made her knees knock together and her heart almost stop. She saw Enoch Quirm on his hands and knees. The man was moving down the passage, slowly and heavily, *on all fours*.

She was too paralysed to move. She just stood there and watched him. It wasn't until he reached the door at the other end that he rose unsteadily to his feet. Then, with a sound that seemed to herself like a piercing cry but was in reality a hardly audible whistling through her teeth, she ran after him and caught him up just as he was opening the door.

Together they confronted the unperturbed figure of Nance, who was passing at that moment from kitchen to study with the tea-tray in her hands. Only partially turning her head, she said quite quietly over her shoulder, 'Oh, there you are! I was *just* ready for you. Come in, Wizzie, dear! I hoped he'd manage to get you. Isn't Thuella coming?'

The familiar presence of his wife, the familiar look of the tea-tray, perhaps even — Heaven knows! — the piled-up pedestal of familiar books on which rested the head, seemed to bring the man back to his normal state.

Wizzie was the victim of such a whirl of indescribable relief mixed with proud anger that she began to feel sick in her stomach. Both relief and anger must have appeared in the look she gave the man when their eyes met, for he removed his with an almost hang-dog expression.

They all sat down at once round the table, and, like a child who turns from his nurse to his mother, Enoch felt for his wife's hand and, when he got hold of it, held it so tightly that the woman had to make a sign to the girl to pour out the tea.

'But you're ill,' she gasped as soon as she saw Wizzie's face more clearly. 'You're white as a sheet!'

‘Don’t tease her. She’ll soon be all right,’ grumbled the master of the house. ‘Drink your tea, child!’

Wizzie obeyed, and her colour slowly came back; but in a minute or two — though she saw that he was eating and drinking greedily — she had to beg Nance to let her go out for a second; and she had hardly shut herself into their lavatory when she was violently sick. After that, she felt better, though she vomited nothing but a little chocolate-coloured fluid; and on returning, though she refused to eat anything or to smoke a cigarette, she drank several cups of strong tea.

‘I’ll have a cigarette, my chuck!’ murmured Enoch to his wife the instant he’d finished. He pushed away his cup and plate then, but, though he lit his cigarette, there was something unnatural about the manner in which he leant his arms on the table and bowed his head over them. He was like a man who began to be overpowered by some secret drug that nobody had seen him take.

Wizzie thought she could detect — though the woman’s spectacles always made it hard to catch the niceties of her expression — a look of terror in Nance’s eyes. He seemed himself to be struggling against this seizure, for every now and then he would jerk his head up and take a whiff of his cigarette, only, however, to let it sink down again, till the fingers that held it hung finally at arm’s length by his side.

At last, as the two women watched him — both of them thoroughly frightened now — the cigarette slipped from his fingers and fell on the floor, where, taking advantage of the human trouble in the air, it set itself to satisfy its own private and inanimate ‘hiraeth’ by making fiery love to the poor faded carpet.

‘Urien!’ cried Nance, jumping up from her seat. ‘Urien, what is it? What’s the matter?’

He made a feeble gesture to raise his head.

'Enoch — my chuck!' he murmured, and then, making what was evidently an heroic effort of his will, he heaved himself up almost straight in his chair and looked at his wife with one of the most natural smiles Wizzie had ever seen on his sombre face.

'Enoch, dabchick — not Urien! "I have forgot", as it says somewhere, "that name and that name's - " ' And once more his head sank on his arms.

Both the women were at his side now in consternation.

'Let's get him to the couch,' whispered Wizzie hoarsely, growing almost as pale as she had been before.

'We — can't! He's too heavy,' cried Nance. 'Oh, my God — what *shall* we do?'

'Shall I run across for Dunbar?' whispered Wizzie. 'Let's try, first,' said the other. And the support of their combined weight, the pressure of their hands, along with a half-conscious craving in the man's own body to be in a horizontal position, evoked just enough impetus to get him to the sofa. Once there, however, he sank down with a weight that seemed almost superhuman, as if his form were responding to the gravitational pull of the earth's centre with a more than normal response, and lay motionless with closed eyes.

It was with a gasp of relief that Wizzie watched his massive chest under his rumpled jersey rise and fall gently with his breathing. 'He's asleep,' she whispered to Nance. 'He was just worn out with — all this.'

The older woman made a gesture as if to lay her hand on his heart, but Wizzie caught her arm. 'Don't touch him. He's all right now. For pity's sake don't wake him! It's the effect of — of the storm.'

For a while they stood by his side, watching him intently; but his breathing continued quiet and natural, and at last, turning to each other, they drew a long deep sigh of relief.

‘Shall I put this over him?’ said Nance, picking up the rug that had covered Old Funky.

But Wizzie shook her head. ‘For God’s sake,’ she whispered crossly, ‘don’t bother him! If he has a good sleep now — No! Don’t touch the fire! Let him sleep. It’s sleep he wants.’

She moved on tip-toe to one of the chairs by the table and, carrying it to the side of the sofa, settled herself there as if she intended to repeat yesterday’s vigil over the bed of Claudius.

Nance shrugged her shoulders and, taking off her spectacles, held them up between her eyes and the lamp. Then she licked her thumb and rubbed some speck or other from one of their glasses. Wizzie could see she was quite reassured now and had begun not only to feel a little ashamed of her own recent agitation but to feel that Wizzie’s present concern about him was being carried too far. Putting on her spectacles again, she began, moving quietly but without any excessive caution, to clear away the tea-things, while our friend, left on her uncomfortable seat at the unconscious man’s side, was able to sink into her own thoughts.

These took, as it may easily be imagined, a none too cheerful form. She saw again that huge beast-like figure on all fours advancing with such unnatural speed down that dim passage. She began to feel sick again in her stomach as that sight recurred. What on earth had made him do that?

In her present position she sat almost directly opposite that accursed head, propped up on its pedestal of ancient volumes, and in the stillness and warmth of the room — for Nance’s fire was now a mass of deep red coals — her fancy conjured up a sinister connection between the way he had hugged that evil thing and the way he had come down that passage.

Of his outburst against Thel and herself she did not think at all. All *that* she put down to his ideas, to that remote realm of masculine infatuation about which there was no need for a sensible person to trouble her mind. But she did think long and deeply, while her fingers, clasped in her lap, played undisturbed their old game, about his preference for Thel over her.

'How silly I've been!' she thought. 'I suppose that's always the way it is when you get fond of anyone. You think they *must* be feeling all you're feeling! But that's—' And the disillusioned young woman made a face at the unconscious Enoch. 'Well! Whether it's Thel, or whether it isn't Thel, I was a fool to think it was me! I expect it isn't *us* at all; no, nor Nance either! I expect' — and she gazed with a sort of humorous peevishness at the countenance at her side— 'he's like D.; and the only woman he ever really thinks about is D.'s mother!'

What began to disturb her just a little at this moment, as she tried to look humorously and indifferently at him, was the fact that in its present repose Enoch Quirm's face had once more become dignified and noble. How strange it was that her Black Man of Glymes should look so beautiful when he was asleep! But even as she pondered on those quiet lineaments, so solemn and inviolable on that filthy sofa, that other image of him took their place; she saw again that bestial figure swaying and heaving as it fled from her on all fours down that Glymes passage. Clear through those majestic features the girl now stared into remote vacancy, the man's nose, eyes, mouth, chin, all growing vaporous and unreal, until they melted quite away. And it seemed to her as if both he and she were figures in some ghastly moving picture where she could feel herself following him as he moved like a beast, following him without cessation, up one diminishing perspective and down another, until her stomach grew so sick that she was always having to stop to retch and vomit, so that she was never able to get near to him, any more than he was able to get out of sight of *her*.

Her thoughts had carried her so far that it came with a startling jerk to her consciousness to find that his eyes were open and looking straight into her own. She was pulled back to reality with such a shock that she couldn't even smile at him, far less utter a word; and this numbness of her faculties was not lessened when she realized that he didn't know her, that he was thinking of someone else and addressing someone else in her form.

'Cornie,' he murmured, 'I forgive you. You forgive me. That's enough, isn't it? And now they can do all.'

Once more his eyes closed; and an expression of impenetrable serenity came into his face.

'It's D.'s mother,' thought Wizzie. 'And how like D.! Yes, they're both the same! Their life, their women, their work, their love — all nothing to them unless far away, far off in the past. I declare, it makes me want to live with old Claudius! He knows what women are. He knows it's the *present* we've got to have — or turn into shrews like Jenny, or softies like Nance!'

It was several hours after this, having left Enoch asleep on his sofa and Nance asleep in Enoch's chair, that Wizzie herself lay unconscious by Thuella's side.

Perhaps the one point — save their love for Lovie — where Wizzie and D. were completely agreed was their loathing and contempt for dreams. Instead of 'Good-night and sweet dreams!' the most amiable wave of the hand that these two queer ones ever gave each other before they slept was 'Sleep well — and don't dream!' But the secret of that great underworld sea into the bosom of which at that hour, after the tumult, so many human consciousnesses, from Portland Bill to Stonehenge, had sunk, was independent of the demon-shoals of dreams that troubled it. It was an element ‘sui generis’, an unfathomable dimension peculiar to itself, the everlasting *other side* of the turmoil of life, a state of being that resembled death in one of its aspects and life in another, and was indeed life with something removed and death with something added. And though independent of those troublesome shoals of demon-fish that dart through it — wretched intruders, phantom half-lives, chaotic eidola from the muddy inland streams of consciousness — this great undersea takes many shifting lights, many variations of density and volume, from the accidents of time and place and neighbourhood.

To a girl asleep by a man those mysterious waters are not the same in their lulling flow as to a child asleep by its parent. A woman asleep by another woman draws from this mysterious sea ebbings and flowings of magnetic currents different altogether from those that reach her when she lies by a man. The same unfathomable redemption lulls and soothes her, but the mystic chemistry of that sublunary immersion, that baptism in the flow of this life-death, has its own peculiar quality, a quality as different from the other as the nearness and neighbourhood of a man is different from the nearness and neighbourhood of a woman.

It was not till after they had slept for several hours that, awake together in the darkness, Thuella told Wizzie her great secret.

‘And you haven’t let a soul know? And you’ve been arranging everything? And you’ve got the money? And you’re off tomorrow?’

And then it was that the voice out of the darkness uttered the word with which the whole of the space-gulfs round them had been palpitating for some minutes. In those deep gulfs Wizzie had felt that fatal word taking *visible*, though not yet *audible*, shape; but her heart knew, and the throbbing in her pulses knew, and the drops of sweat on her forehead knew, and her occult soul, in its instincts and premonitions, had known the longest of all, what that word was to be.

‘It’s the way they do things there,’ Thuella was whispering now. ‘They don’t write, as we do, and give people time. They *cable* — and you’ve got to cable back. Well? Will you come, Wizz?’

As must have happened so often in these turning-points in women’s lives, no breath from Wizzie’s lips actually formed the syllable ‘yes’. D. would have made her utter this word of fate and would have told her it was the most important word a woman *could* utter. Indeed, he would not have stopped there. He would have gone on to wonder which of all the affirmative syllables in the history of humanity — all equally drenched with the saliva-dew of destiny — had been the first to pass what Homer calls ‘the barrier of our teeth’. ‘Think, kid,’ he would have murmured into Wizzie’s annoyed ears, ‘just think! At *some* actual moment in time, in *some* hollow cave, *somewhere* on the earth’s surface, the particular sound destined to mean “yes” for the whole race who inhabited Maiden Castle must have been heard *for the first time*!’

But Thuella, not being a man and not having a mind for which words, as words, whether affirmative or negative, are the best indication of the way the wind blows, was quite content with other than spoken signs as to how her friend received her generous offer.

Be it enough to say that when the two girls fell asleep for the second time that night it was clearly understood between them that no weakness at the last moment, no remorseful drawing back for any conceivable reason, should interfere with their daring and audacious plan.

Wizzie was, as may be supposed, the first to awake; and she was no sooner awake than, after a wide-eyed stare at the vaguely outlined window, and with only the faintest puckering of her small face, a stream of tears began rolling down her cheeks. It was silly. It was soft. It was, she told herself, like Nance. But she couldn't help it.

Her one hope was that Thel, when *she* waked, as she was bound to do soon, would not try to comfort her. And it wasn't long before she became conscious that her companion *was* awake. And yet she was sure she hadn't made any noise. Well! It didn't matter now! Now she could lift up her voice, as the Bible says, and really weep. If only Thel would leave her alone — wouldn't ask her, now or ever, why she was crying, or for whom she was crying.

And Thel did leave her alone. She would never have thought that a girl like Thel — and what an artist she must be to have had such a thing happen to her — could be like this and just leave her to herself. Popsy couldn't have stayed so still. Sister Bridget couldn't. Only her mother! And with that thought it became impossible to keep her sobs from shaking her and even shaking their bed.

But they stopped at last, stopped before there was light enough to see Thel's face; and it was she herself and not Thel who broke the silence that followed.

'Do — you — think', she said, 'that if I do get work over there, and get on at all, I could have my old horse sent over? They'd sell him, I think, if I paid enough, for he's getting old and crotchety, and Popsy never could manage him. I don't mean at once; but later on. Do you think I *could* have him over?'

Thuella replied sympathetically to this question, but our friend could catch in her tone a faint ambiguity, as if she thought it very unlikely, as the world went round, that the old circus-horse would be welcome in the new hemisphere.

They lay side by side in silence then, while the outline of the window grew slowly more distinct. Like two figures on a raft of fate they lay, half-tragic, half-exultant, till the morning's tide should carry them out.

'We wouldn't go by that nine train, would we, unless he was better?'

'Oh, he'll be better! Besides — remember what you promised last night!' And Thel, who now looked, Wizzie thought, in that dawn light, like one of the coldly beautiful inhuman angels who used to prop up the austere Madonna over the doorway that led to the convent lavatory, made it clear, once and for all, that for no earthly reason — not even if Urien were much worse — could they afford to miss that train at the Southern station.

'I've got the money; and as soon as we get to Southampton we'll buy everything. Nobody here'll be up till late, and we needn't carry a thing! Don't look like that. You're not going to turn on me now, are you?'

As Wizzie looked at the white figure by her side sitting up in bed, its face a blur, its hair a blur, but the tension of its will taut as a tight-rope, it presented itself to her consciousness that the act of running away when you had a child — Thel hadn't got a child! — was like feeling yourself slipping, everything going black in front of you, when you *had* to jump. She began to feel sick in her stomach like she'd felt last night. Through the blur of Thel's face she could see the Great Western truck on Jenny's floor and Lovie's plump hands squeezing her doll into it.

What it was that influenced Thuella to say what she said now — and Wizzie divined she realized fully that the compass-point of the decision was quivering — she never discovered to the end of her days. Was it some devilry in the girl? Was it the bottom dregs of her contempt?

'We can't,' she must have been saying, 'we can't, can't, go back on it now.' But Wizzie was only dragged away from the truck on the floor in time to catch the end of her sentence: 'Because — don't you remember? — in the fortune we got that day in the slot-machine at Weymouth, my paper said, “What you do, do quick!” and yours said, “Don’t stop to think before you leap!” So it’s the same for both of us!’

Whatever consolation Wizzie may have derived from the fact that her flight was in harmony with the slot-machine’s prejudice against ‘the pale cast of thought’, it was not till the day after their boat sailed that Dud was able to get *his* thoughts about this event into any kind of order. He was helped to see matters in a clearer light by quite a long letter from Wizzie, a letter in which — though half of it consisted of a series of instructions as to his sounding the Urgans about the selling of the old horse — the girl went fully into her chief motive for running away.

‘Everything’, she wrote, ‘was too mixed-up. I simply couldn’t stand it any more. I leave you quite free. It’ll be only what I deserve if you get another girl. Only if you do, I advise you...’ Here there was a sentence crossed out on which Dud pondered in vain. ‘And if you do,’ the letter continued, ‘I think I’d let Lovie stay on with Jenny and Claudius. I don’t want to defend myself, D. I know I haven’t been as nice to you as I should, and you’ve always been’ — she had put ‘nice’ first, but, crossing it out, had substituted ‘good’ instead— ‘and considerate to me. It was my longing to get back to the Circus and my work that made me do it — and other things too, but that was the chief thing. If I’d been cleverer, about books and all, it would have been different. If I’d got work at once when you took me away it would have been different. Don’t be sorry or sad, and don’t let Lovie feel bad, or think bad of me. You *were* good about Lovie. No one but you would have been like that. Don’t think I don’t know it. I wouldn’t like any other girl to see my things all about. Give them to Jenny, and if she doesn’t want them, let her give them away. They know a lot of poor people. When I was in a bad mood the other night I hid all your boot-laces — those you bought from that tramp — under the mattress. And those bits of paper by the statue which you *did* go and pick up, for I found them in the drawer where your shirts are, I threw into the fire. I'm sorry, D. I ever said I hated you. *It isn't true'* — this last sentence was underlined several times— 'and perhaps some day we may meet again. But don't think about me...' Here there were more scratchings out; but No-man, after long puzzling over these erasions, concluded that the sentence went on, 'as you did about', but he could not decide whether the final word was 'Mona' or 'Mary'. '... and don't let Lovie forget me. I'm sorry I was angry that night when Claudius was talking; and I'm sorry about *all* the times I was angry. Thel has been sea-sick, but I haven't at all, *not once*. Kiss Lovie from her affectionate Mummy — And don't wish you'd never seen me. Wizz. P.S. Write me a line how your father is, to the General Post Office, New York.'

It was in Jenny's kitchen, three days after the flight of the two young women, that Dud finally deciphered all that was decipherable in this letter. Jenny was at the table giving Lovie her tea, preparatory to getting it for the rest of them in the dining-room, where Claudius was now ensconced in his old place by the fire. Dud had found himself clinging a good deal to Mrs Dearth these last days, for something had held him back from going over to Glymes; but as he thrust these crumpled and pondered-over sheets into his pocket he came to the conclusion that he really *must* walk over there that evening. He kept thrusting his hand into the inside pocket of his coat to make sure that Wizzie's letter, which it would be intolerable for any eyes but his own to see, was safe where he had placed it, but even while he did this he began another of the mental struggles he had been making for the last couple of days to shake off the numbness and inertia that had fallen on him.

‘I must go over to Glymes,’ he kept saying to himself. ‘I must go over to Glymes tonight. I must go directly after tea.’

They had just had a visit from Dumbell, who was unaccompanied this time by his fuzzy-headed lady, and Jenny had been revealing to Dud the direction of various straws on the life-stream at Beulah Lodge which surprised him not a little. Jenny said that Dunbar had told her himself that he was giving their servant notice. This, he told her, he had been compelled to do because of her lack of proper respect for his botanical collection. ‘And that, you may mark my words,’ said Jenny, ’is the beginning of the end. The next thing he’ll do’ll be to give Madame notice! When a man dares to go as far as to pack off a woman’s pet servant they won’t hang on much longer; and I wouldn’t wonder if it won’t be Dumbell who’ll make the move. She’s humiliated him to the limit over his Blackshirt pranks, and he’s taken it like a lamb; but botany’s a different story. I believe he’d walk over both the father and the daughter to reach a new blackberry.’

But it wasn’t of these heroic deeds of poor Dumbell, in a cause older than Fascism, that Dud was musing now. He was going over in his mind all the upheavals out there at Glymes that their ambassador had been recording. Urien was still in the same state of helpless apathy, lying all day without taking notice of anyone. Nance was still nursing him, helped now and then, much against her will, by the intrusive Mrs Wye. But the most dramatic news brought by Mrs Wye’s husband was that old Teucer Wye had decided to leave Glymes at once for good and all.

Dud had been impressed by Jenny’s reception of this news, which meant, of course, that the ex-professor was intending to plant himself on her and Claudius. ‘We’ll be glad to have him,’ she’d told Dumbell bravely. ‘After all, if it hadn’t been for him...’ And she’d explained frankly to her brother how Claudius would now give up his place next door and live altogether with her, and how Mr No-man, who couldn't bear to sleep alone in Miss Ravelston's room, was already spending his nights in his attic.

'I *must* get over to Glymes after tea, Jenny,' was Dud's refrain tonight, but he seemed thankful that a good long time had yet to elapse before he would have to pull himself together for this duty.

As a matter of fact, on this particular evening he never did go to Glymes, and, as the autumn went on, he found that this tendency of his to sit brooding over Jenny's kitchen fire became a recurrent habit. He had finished *Mary Channing* and his publishers were considering it — had been considering it for more than a month already — and he found himself unable to make the effort of beginning a new book.

He walked even more than in the old days, and further afield, but with nothing approaching his former delight in these excursions. Little as Wizzie had been interested in what he called his 'adventures', half the pleasure he got from them was to know that he would find her there when he returned, and it wasn't the same thing to tell Jenny.

As October drew to its end he rarely went to Jenny's for any meal, for by this time her father had moved from Glymes and now occupied, in visible presence and in happier reality, the room dominated by Thuella's wicked picture, and it struck Dud as unfair to inflict upon the woman a third hungry man. But this self-denying ordinance in respect to imposing on Jenny meant that if he didn't want to have his meals out he had to get all three of them in his own attic. And the result of this hugger-mugger method of feeding was that he soon began to suffer from vicious attacks of acute acid dyspepsia. In the long lonely years before he knew Wizzie he had got his meals out with normal regularity; but now, after his life with her, he found he had acquired a nervous aversion to entering the most harmless restaurant.

Less and less, too, after Teucer Wye's move into town, did Dud go out to Glymes. Unable, as we naturally are, to put down the singular behaviour of those who have had the privilege of living with us to a physical revulsion from ourselves, Dud was often tempted, as he went over and over in his mind every possible motive for Wizzie's leaving him, to attribute it in *some* measure to her jealousy of Nance. This thought made him extremely reluctant to have, just at present, any tête-à-tête interviews with his father's wife; and as such interviews were the only ones he *could* have — for in those last weeks of October Enoch seemed oblivious to everything — he made his visits to Glymes as brief and few as was compatible with a decent display of sympathy.

Urien was indeed as good as dead; and, though medical science gave a different name to his disorder, Dud agreed with Nance that by publishing his life-illusion he had killed his heart. The only exceptions to his withdrawn and comatose state during his son's visits seemed to Dud to resemble faint spasms of distaste for his presence. There were times when he thought the man knew him and deliberately, in scriptural language, turned his face to the wall. He spoke of this to Nance, suggesting that his father was concealing some mad suspicion that it was he who had spirited the girls away; but Nance wouldn't hear of this, and assured him with a sad smile that the runaways always overrated, as young girls will, the interest her husband took in them.

It was a day or two before October was over that the end came. Nance had been forced to accept financial help from him, and forced also — and here he had the doctor's support — to call in the aid of a trained nurse; but by one of those accidents that can always happen in a sick-chamber it was when he was alone with him that Enoch died.

He was thinking of Wizzie, as he kept guard while Nance and the nurse had their meal in the kitchen, and he had been staring gloomily out of the window, wondering if she would reply to a letter he had written, when a sudden movement from the sofa — for they had left the man in peace where he first fell ill — made him swing quickly round.

Enoch's great heavy-lidded eyes were wide open and fixed with clear intelligence upon his own. And it was not any self-deception in our friend's mind, for he knew at once, with every faculty he possessed, that it was death and not life that brought this change; but, as he answered his father's look, everything he was aware of — his own identity, the identity of the dying man, the untidy room, the head on the pile of books, the window through which his thoughts had flown so far, the image of Wizzie — receded, dwindled, melted, fused themselves together, reduced themselves to a faint remote pressure of something imponderable and far away! And in the place of these things thus withdrawn, thus rendered vague and tenuous, a completely new reality, a reality that was himself and yet not himself, that was his father and yet not his father, pressed upon him and surrounded him.

The mysterious 'Echwydd', of which the man was always talking, had no need now to be besieged by violence! It was here, it was around them both, it *was* them both, and all their accumulated experience with it. But this experience of theirs, their piled-up life-sensation, floated far off on this new reality which now undulated, as the poet says, so closely round them and absorbed them.

Dud tried to speak, but it was as if the air that carries articulate sound had suddenly been removed; and, though his lips and his tongue were ready to obey him, not a word came from his mouth.

But Enoch spoke. '*I* am', he said with extraordinary naturalness and quietness, and without any particular emotion, while an expression, which neither then nor later could his hearer interpret, crossed his face, '*what I am*. So it's all right. It doesn't matter.'

How the son wished afterwards that the man had been able to die as easily as those words had been spoken! But it was as if the terrible vitality that had always smouldered in that heavy frame couldn't give up its old desperation. His soul had spoken; but it was with a violent and spasmodic jerk of his prostrate frame, as if the vital spark, whether it called itself Enoch or Urien, were wrenching itself from its bondage, were really breaking with a last desperate 'hiraeth' of its whole life-essence into the secret already known to his spirit, that the man tore himself out of life.

The days that followed his death were days of labour and trouble for poor Dud. Wizzie would have been amused, if not annoyed, by the number of times — sometimes to himself and sometimes to Claudius, who was now his chief confidant — No-man used the word 'ironical' about the matter of his father's interment. He was buried on the last day of October in that very place, by the mounds of Cornelia and Mona, upon which our friend had had his eye as his own resting-place; and it was this fact, along with the chain of events connected with it, those fatal and grotesque links that bound them together, that made Dud envisage the whole business as a perfect example of Nature's humorous ways with man.

To Wizzie's mind — and it was an indignant grievance with her — this trick of his of calling events ironical was all part of his way of separating himself from life, of picking and choosing from life, for the mere pleasure of his personal sensations; and this to Wizzie, for whom life was part of oneself and, *like oneself*, incalculable, thrilling, and intensely serious, was a kind of sin against the Holy Ghost. But it was no more possible for Dud to stop detaching himself from life and seeing life's eventualities as ironic than it was for him to stop being excited by Wizzie 'her wone self when she appeared before him in boy's clothes. He had always seen it — and she had known this by instinct, and it never failed to make her want to strike him with her clenched hands — merely as one of his ironies that, living together as they were, they really lived in two separate worlds, whereas to her this was simply a bitter grievance, a tragic fact that had to be faced or brought to a drastic end. And she would have seen this burying of Enoch in his son's chosen spot as the same sort of fact, not at all a matter for humorous philosophizing.

When November came, however, and brought with it the anniversary of their first meeting, Dud's thoughts, as he waited for Nance in his familiar attic room, were of the grimmest and most bed-rock kind. If there was any of this ironical detachment that used to make his girl so angry left in his mood now, it had been reduced to something more like the polish upon bare bones than the glow upon flesh and blood.

As he crouched over his fire the soul within sank down to its ultimate ledge of resistant power. 'I'll hold her tight,' he thought, 'tight under my ribs, whether she hates me or not! To the end of my days, where *I* go she'll go, and what *I* do she'll do.' But even as he thought of this there came over him, like the slow drifting in of a vast, terrible, irresistible tide, the temptation to drop his personal life, to let it pass from him, to toss it overboard with all its sacred sensations, and to treat himself, as Claudius did *himself*, as a mere objective bridge to the world's future.

But, gathering up all his forces, No-man resisted this. 'It can take my work', he thought in his desperation, 'and my life, but my soul it shall never take!' And against that insidiously seeping tide he felt as if he were stretching forth his arms and clutching at the great cloud of witnesses that emanated from the very foundations of this old Durnovaria. How they floated round him! And how, if he only clung to them through thick and thin, they could bear him up — clouds and vapours though they were! For they were the residue, immortal, indestructible, of all the personal souls that had held to their identity in the midst of the flowing away, an identity that rested on what all the while was behind this universal flux. ‘What’s behind it is *in* us,’ he thought, ‘not outside us. And all this progress that old Claudius praises is only a return, a return *with a difference* but still a return, to the centre from which we spring!’

He thrust his fists against the pit of his stomach, for his dyspepsia became sharp at that moment, but, using his very discomfort as a ‘point d’appui’ for intenser thought, he plunged like a diver into the mystery of the old town about him, whose mellow murmur came up from the street into his ears; and, as he sank into its undersea of the long generations, he felt as if he were touching some calm undying presence down there, whose secret was that of the individual soul, not of the passing of any present into any future.

He undid the buttons of his braces now, so as the more easily to press his knuckles against his navel, and, as he did this, all his strength seemed suddenly to drain out of him, and a dull inert weariness of the whole struggle descended on him. This whoreson lethargy was the worst form that his nostalgia for Wizzie took. He missed her in every possible way. He missed her as the general background of his life, and this perhaps troubled him the most; but he also was perpetually receiving sideway thrusts of a sickening poignancy from all manner of unexpected little things.

And instead of missing her less, as day followed day, his longing for her increased. The very absence of emotional passion from his nature, his very lack of feelings that depend on a certain virile energy, made it worse for him, for it deprived him of the relief that passionate hearts find in anger and pride and thoughts of revenge, while his grand cult of sensations, though it didn’t altogether fail him, lost in some subtle way much of its finer edge.

What he discovered, in fact, was something he had never realized before: the crucial role played in this life of sensation by contrast with something else! What he had really done — and the girl had known it — was to use the living Wizzie as he had used the dead Mona. It meant nothing to her that there was in this a proof of the intensity of his feeling, a proof of its etherealized sensuality, of its all-pervasiveness and absorbing diffusion. It was no consolation to her that he thought of the modelling of her limbs as he walked round Poundbury, or that he mingled the curves of her ‘lurin’ figure with the valla and fossae of Maiden Castle! But this diffusion of her desirability through the earth he walked on, through the grass and the rocks and the stones and the trees he passed, became, now that he had lost her, a perpetual reminder of her, and an increasing craving for her presence. His Mona-wraith had not been the real Mona at all. She had been a creation of anonymous desire. But never was there a girl, he thought, more vitally alive than Wizzie.

And it wasn’t only in his walks, which she had not shared, that he pined for her. He had never believed that a girl’s body could diffuse itself as Wizzie’s did — quite apart from her mind — through the fabric of chairs, through the stuff of table-cloths, through the polish of door-handles, through the angles of looking-glasses, through the reflections on glass bottles, through the flickerings on coal-scuttles, and through all those meaningless scrolls and scrawls that the elfish artistry of time leaves upon walls and ceilings.

He missed Urien too, but not very much! He decided on general grounds that it’s impossible to miss a man as much as you miss a girl, because a girl’s body passes into everything round her whereas the body of a man stays inside its clothes. It was Enoch’s voice, Enoch’s turns of speech, Enoch’s expressions when he was speaking, that he missed in that direction. He hoped devoutly that he never *would* see again any of the objects in that filthy study.

But he found it was cruelly difficult to do what Wizzie had told him to in her letter and give her things to Jenny! Her things were herself. While he still had her things, something, some essence of her personality, stayed with him. In fact, so much of her stayed with him that he once found himself wondering if she mightn’t be conscious over there of how he was still clinging to her and hate him for it — no, not hate him, for she said she didn’t do that, but feel cross and angry with him for it. Would she have been pleased or annoyed — he simply had not the least idea! — had she known how her going had changed everything for him?

Less than a month ago his escapes to this attic had been moments of stolen bliss, whereas now it was hard for him to realize what on earth there was in the place that had pleased him so much. He made a mental resolution that never again would he let himself fret or rebel against the contrast that lay at the bottom of all. How heavenly had been that passing backwards and forwards between Wizzie and his attic! That was the whole secret, though there was no need to go as far as the old monks and monkish scholars, and make Wizzie and her ways a temptation of the devil. But to pass from your girl to your work, and then back again from your work to your girl — that was the way to live!

As he now sat by his fire, waiting for Nance and staring at the two bed-post heads — for she had made him take back the one Wizzie had carried away — he went over in his mind certain troublesome events that had occurred the day before, the day dedicated to All Saints. Nance had come to see him in great trouble early in the morning — that was the first thing —

with the news that the workmen called in to examine the Glymes roof had announced that without extensive repairs the place was no longer safe for human habitation. Dumbell's verdict about such danger had thus proved superficial, and Urien's ghost-wind had done damage of a more material sort than generally follows such phantom visitations.

Nance's early appearance, with a suit-case in her hand, after a panic-stricken night under the condemned roof, had necessitated his finding for her some immediate lodging, and this he had done through a good-natured acquaintance of his, the landlord of the Phoenix, who caused a fire to be lit for her at once in a pleasant room of that romantic hostelry, looking out on his own High East Street.

But the disposal of Nance had only been the first of a series of sharp tests for our friend's philosophy. On returning to his attic, after leaving Nance to recover her equilibrium and possibly to get some sleep after her agitated night, he found that some relative of his landlord's, in that sagacious man's absence, had allowed an obviously questionable visitor to ascend his stairs, for no sooner had he pushed open the door of his room than he was confronted by none other that Grummer Urgan — and by Grummer in the highest feather of loquacity and greed. Her outer garment would have disgraced the most disreputable of madams, but when she threw back this piece of filthy finery her capacious bosom revealed a wealth of black satin worthy of Lord Fordington's housekeeper.

In trying afterwards to piece together in correct order of events the extraordinary interview that followed, Dud could not help giving way to that vein of Swift-like realism — or, shall we say, to that vein of naturalism charged with monstrous ferocity — that was a basic element in his consciousness, and was a thing that sometimes gave him satisfaction and sometimes tormented him with a veritable devil's dung-fork. When he tried afterwards to conjure up every detail of Grummer's victory over him, he gave full freedom to this mood, till the perversity of the images he conjured up grew monstrous. He began by trying to analyse what it was that gave to Grummer this power over a man like himself. Would a person of her bulk and volubility dominate any man in the world who wasn't a homicidal gangster? Was it that the stored-up feminine magnetism which makes any slim girl's aura so much more pervasive than the aura of the most formidable man, and which must be, in some subtle manner, allied to her potential motherhood, seethed and fermented and boiled up in Mrs Urgan to such a pitch of hypnotic power that her victim would have given more than money, might even have given both his bed-posts, to be well rid of her?

We need not enlarge on the super-Rabelaisian dance which Dud's imagination — that of an innocent child combined with that of a sensual dotard — led this satin bosom and these clinking jet beads; but, as he worked it out afterwards, a certain sympathetic pity, doubtless the inverse side of his loathing of the preposterous woman, mingled with his almost malicious eagerness to be robbed.

After all, she did reveal to him that Old Funky was dangerously ill, that Popsy had had a final quarrel with the horse, and that they had received notice from the foreign circus owner that they must quit. But what made it possible for Grummer to carry off the *whole* contents of the cash-box in his mother's ottoman was undoubtedly, he decided, what usually makes us submit to spoliation: just an exaggerated fear of the power of the aggressor!

He could not now recall whether he had *asked* her to sit down; but at one point in their extraordinary talk she certainly did sit down, for he remembered how especially headstrong his monstrous imaginations had become when he saw her in his chair.

It was congestion of the lungs, she told him, mainly that her husband suffered from; but she went into lively details about other ailments that had a less euphonious sound. She had heard, she said, of Miss Ravelston's departure, and had at once felt it to be her melancholy duty to come to assure him of her 'kindly feelin's', especially 'as that gal had rinned off'.

Remembering Wizzie's letter, Dud had interrupted at that point to murmur something about hoping, as time went on, to be able to buy their horse from them, but Grummer's eyes gleamed with such lambent avarice at this that he contented himself with adding, 'But one thing at a time, Mrs Urgan, though I see you *would* sell him, if we agreed on the price.'

And it was at that pregnant moment that the lady had presented him with the precious 'dockymint'. Now Dud being as ignorant of the mysterious processes of the law as was Wizzie herself, the terrifying number of 'whereases' and the still more alarming phrase 'alienation of affection' on this piece of paper very quickly caused him to open his mother's ottoman. Unfortunately he had only just withdrawn from the bank — so as to be ready for Nance's necessities — almost the whole of his balance; and if he didn't smile now to think of the ease with which this Gargamelle in satin disappeared with his savings, it was only because the third blow he received on this All Devils' Sunday, the one upon which he was pondering now, was more serious still.

But what *had* the shameless old trollop hinted at as she departed? He tried to remember her exact words. 'Me and me 'usband don't 'old nothink but kind feelin's,' was *one* of her final remarks; but her grand 'esprit d'escalier', as he bowed her out, consisted of an obscure hint as to a new form that these 'kind feelin's' might eventually take, something to the effect that if he required any further feminine society Popsy had several amiable friends in Dorchester who would be very pleased to ‘see’ such a liberal gentleman.

He had only just begun to confide to his two Questing Beasts his reaction to this handsome hint, when, as if All Saints’ had really turned into All Devils’, his eyes fell upon several unopened letters that had come by the last post on the day before. Turning these over — as he did all his letters now — with a fantastic hope that there might be another from Wizzie, he had found that the only important one was from his publishers, and, upon opening this communication, he had learned to his dismay that ‘the reports of our Readers on *Mary Channing* have been so unfavourable that we feel obliged, much to our regret...’ In plain words, his book was rejected. This final blow on the top of the rest, and the fact that it had fallen just when his father’s wife had become dependent on him, did come near to breaking down his fortitude.

Well! He must bestir himself. ‘I must go to the bank’, he thought, ‘after we come back from the cemetery, and find out the worst. If I *am* overdrawn — well, I’ll have to wire for an advance from Cumber, and just do nothing but write articles. One thing’s certain: I won’t start sponging on Claudius and Jenny!’

It occurred to him now to wonder what he would do, supposing old Cumber, in a rage with them all because of Dumbell’s revolt against the Fuzzy-Head, stopped giving him any work? He hadn’t received a word since the man had disposed so abruptly of Enoch and his mystic contributions. He would certainly be in a nice fix then, with his savings carried off by Grummer and no money left in the bank! What *would* he do?

What he did at the moment was to pull his chair close to the fire and rub his hands up and down his shins. This was certainly a different kind of All Souls’ Day from the one he had known a year ago! Instinctively idealizing his troubles, he began a childish and masculine attempt to make Wizzie and her running away responsible for the death of Enoch, for Nance being thrown on his hands, for Grummer's carrying off his savings, for the rejection of *Mary Channing*, and for his wretched dyspepsia. Closer and closer he bent over his fire, putting his trousers tightly round his shins and passing his bony fingers up and down their nearly scorched surface. 'Never has any girl', he thought, 'left such a gap behind!'

And then suddenly, without any warning, just as though it had flown across his senses with the low hum of a shard-borne beetle, came the memory of that maddening orgy of delicious viciousness that he had enjoyed with his Venetian Post by the Scummy Pond.

Even at that moment, just when his whole being was crying out for Wizzie, and Wizzie alone, the mere approach of this memory made his pulses beat and the blood rush to his head. 'It's a madness,' he thought; and he began to wonder whether he were alone in such madness, or whether, reaching out through the nerves of all the sons of man, from some electric Scummy Pond at the heart of the cosmos, there was for every man alive some peculiar impersonal lust that made the knees knock together and the hands shake.

'It's the *sharing of it,'* he said to himself, 'it's the sharing of this black electricity! Thuella and I must be exactly alike in that.' And he fell, while the mere contemplation of it brought back the mad excitement, to speculating as to how long this thing would have lasted had he and Thuella lived together.

'What she and I feel', he thought — and it came over him that for a whole year, ever since he had first set eyes on her, he had really known it— 'isn't passion, isn't *love* in any sort of sense; it's a black jet, a black spout, from the most dangerous madness there is! It's something that simply sweeps you away!’ And with one of his outrageous flights of fancy Dud allowed himself to wonder if the appalling power of this insanity didn’t spring from the fact that there was a paternity for it in the supernatural world.

He drew back now rather quickly from the bars of his small grate — he had long ago come to the conclusion that Dorchester’s possession of the nicest hearths in the country was due to ancient Rome — for he thought he detected rising from his trousers the unmistakable smell of scorched cloth.

‘I wonder if everybody’, he said to himself, ’is as immersed in the elements as I am. By God, I believe if I hadn’t wanted to carry Wizzie off I might...’ And the thought came into his head, even as the smell of the scorched trousers came into his nostrils, that in mediaeval times his dalliance with his Mona-wraith would have been regarded as an affair with an elemental.

‘But why was my conscience free over *that,’* he wondered, ‘and so terribly stirred about Thuella? Does our *real* conscience only get roused by a madness that reduces the pleasure of life itself to cold, stale, wet ashes in comparison with it?’

Another odd thing was that for some reason — and his feeling here was very complicated — he found himself scrupulously avoiding any thought of the two girls being together. When he thought of Wizzie in America it was always as being alone, or as being alone in an American circus.

Staring into his fire, but no longer warming his shins, it came over him now with a curious chill to think of those Glymes houses completely deserted. Nance had said that it was more than likely that the whole place would be pulled down. He remembered the queer feelings he had that day of Thuella’s party, when he kept listening for Urien’s knock and imagining his figure outside the door. Damn! But it was hard to think of Glymes without Thuella! Quite against his will — for he was the old shameless Dud still — he suddenly wondered what his life would have been if he'd never seen Wizzie! He would certainly have gone far with Thuella. Maybe they'd have —

But he pulled himself up at that point and asked himself once more what he'd do, supposing Cumber *didn't* give him any more articles to write.

'What of that decent old chap', he thought, 'who gave Claudius work?' And it made him feel contemptible and ashamed when he realized how scared he was of manual labour.

And what of those dignified and quaint characters that he was always meeting down by the bridge by the White Hart? 'But unsuccessful novelists', he said to himself, 'don't get on the dole.'

Just then he caught from the street below his window the familiar sound of that Shakespearean mummer's dramatic voice advertising some new attraction come to town. 'I'll stick to old Durnovaria,' he said to himself, 'whatever becomes of me. By God, it's the most English town in England, and by far the best! I'd sooner be a door-keeper in Dorchester than...' And he thought of how he had felt the roots of this ancient mellow place sinking down to the very nadir of the earth, full of the magic of the generations! He thought of that refined young person who carried the Sunday papers on her bicycle. He thought of the unconquerable laugh of the old *Echo*-seller. He thought of the mysteriously sweet smile of his friend the drowner. He thought of his tragic Mary Channing, of whose fate he had written — probably too well! No, no, whatever happened to him, he must hang on here. Where else should he be when Wizzie returned, a famous circus star, from over the water?

'I'm not going to give up', he said to himself, 'because Wizz got bored with me. And I'm not going to become objective either, for all old

Claudius's eloquence. I've got hold of something; and if people don't want what I've got hold of now — they'll come to it — sooner or later!'

He pushed back his chair still further from the fire, and, turning round, glanced at the two heraldic heads. And the thought came to him, as he contemplated their obscene beast-faces, that all this talk of Enoch's about the prophets and their non-human familiars applied in his own case to what he got out of the inanimate. 'Yes,' he thought, 'that's what you are, you two: you're all the inanimates on earth in which man's love-longing loses itself, and in which it finds itself. There's not a stick or stone in this place into which some lonely spirit hasn't poured the tragedy of his unsatisfied desire. *He* thought this groaning and travailing of the longing in us could break through the barrier. But there *is* no barrier! We couldn't think of a barrier if there weren't something in us *already outside it*!

'Yes, you can leer at me, you two! If I hadn't found you out I'd be scared of you; and if I were scared of you — whether you were Mother's or not — I'd throw you into the Frome! But you can stay where you are. I'm not going to think of my girl here. I'm going to think of her in every stick and stone I pass, till she comes back. I'm alone with you again. But there are two of you now, and *I'm two*, wherever I go, whether she hates me or not!'

But the carved heads stinted not nor abated one jot of their inscrutable derision, and as he went on surveying them he began to feel not only a vicious twinge of his dyspepsia but the same weary and hopeless lethargy as had been weighing him down ever since Wizzie went away.

He must, indeed, have fallen asleep soon after that, for he didn't hear Nance's steps or even her knock, and, as she stood in the doorway, watching him there, her spectacles grew blurred with tears, for there was that in his unconscious pose that made her think of Enoch.

As they set out to the cemetery down Acland Road — for it was characteristic of Dud’s present mood that he lacked the heart to insist on the Icen Way — poor Nance, who was in a sufficiently shaky state herself, was shocked to see him pause so often and bend low down, supporting himself on his cudgel and thrusting his fist into the pit of his stomach.

‘It’s nothing,’ he said, when, with the tips of her gloved fingers laid with infinite gentleness, for fear of hurting his feelings, upon his arm, she begged him to tell her what was wrong. ‘It’s nothing,’ he said peevishly. ‘It’ll pass in a moment. I can’t help it. My friends’ll just have to get used to my acting like this! It’s all nerves; but nerves generate acids.’

And as they went on and turned into the South Walks opposite Rothesay House, he imagined to himself, on the high wall before them there, a grotesque and terrifying fresco in rich colours — like the Inferno on the wall at Pisa — representing the persecution of a human stomach by a demon-nerve. It was a monstrous Inferno of his own that he mentally projected upon the garden wall of that solidly built mansion of the early eighties, but it was a wondrous comfort to him to see it there, and it gave him just the spirit he needed to straighten his back and trudge on. And, as often happened with Dud, whose physical sensations, originating in the chemistry of his body, became the battle-field of his soul, this victory over the downward drag of his dyspepsia gave a zest to the more spiritual struggle of his whole identity with the present crisis in his life.

Thus he found himself able to jest quite lightly to his companion as they passed the cenotaph, reminding her of her collapse on this spot exactly a year ago.

‘Take care,’ she said with a tender smile. ‘You may make me collapse again!’

But he forced himself after that to glance boldly at the familiar circus name on the boardings along the fence where the Fairfield was. ‘Perhaps she’ll come back famous and rich,’ he said to Nance, ‘and Lovie and I will go to see her and sit in the front row.’

What did, however, give his philosophy a blow that made it stagger was the sight of Maumbury Rings. ‘How the devil’, he thought, ‘can I start another book, with Mary still unchampioned?’

But Nance had her own secret worries that she had been longing all day to confide in him. ‘What do you suppose he really did feel’, she suddenly asked him, ‘when he went to such lengths to bring those two girls together?’

Dud was nonplussed at this, not because he hadn’t thought over it himself and come to his own conclusion, but because he found it so hard to explain his conclusion to his father’s wife. He walked in silence for a little while, and then he said slowly and gravely, ‘He and I, my dear, are’ — he hesitated for a second before the word ‘are’ but brought it out firmly enough — ‘very alike in certain things. We both live at a somewhat different level from most people. Mind you, I don’t say at a higher level, but a *different* one. With us, if I may say so, the actual substance of our planet down to the centre of the earth, with all the elements that work on it out of space, is something — its mystery, its power for good and evil — that we can’t take, as most people do, just for granted! We think of it all the time, if you get what I mean, and to him it always meant — this vast weight of matter — something separating us from the real reality. Old Wye feels much the same, and that’s where—’ He hesitated again, and again overcame his hesitation. ‘... where Urien and he differ from Claudius. I don’t know whether you’ve read *Faust*, my dear, but, if you have, you’ll remember that he has to break through — and that’s the word *he* was always using — into the Underworld, or the Overworld, or whatever you like to call it, to reach the secret - “the Mothers”, as the book says. Enoch’s idea was, I think, that frustrated love — unreturned love, I mean — was the strongest magnetic force in the world. Mephistopheles gives Faust a key by which he breaks through. Do ‘ee see now what I’m driving at? To Enoch this key was frustrated love; and for some reason he got into his head that Thel’s love for Wizz was like that! Neither of them, of course, had the least notion of what he was up to. No sane person *could* have had. How he supposed he could break through, as he called it, on the strength of another person’s feelings is more than I can follow. But of course some sort of *vicariousness* does appear in all the old mystical cults. His mania for those damned beast-heads of my mother’s — and *that* I know, as I tried to explain to you and Wizz the other day — was the same sort of thing. And *there* I’m rather like him. It all comes from living, as he and I do, more in the great cosmic forces — forgive the way I’m talking, my dear! — than in ordinary human interests. I take these things historically — what *would* old Claudius say if he heard me? — but *he* took them literally. And it was when he read what Rhŷs says about Urien that he began pretending to himself — for he couldn’t have altogether believed it, or he wouldn’t have broken his heart when he *wrote* about it — that he was himself the mysterious being of those old legends.’

Dud stopped at this point. They had crossed the railway-bridge and were already at the entrance to the cemetery. Not the smallest comment did his Cemetery Woman make upon his long discourse. Whether she followed it or not he couldn’t tell, and her silence made him feel something of a fool; but the mere putting of all this into words had been a comfort to him; and now, as they threaded their way between the mounds and the cypress-trees, he couldn’t help drawing her arm through his own.

What a sequence of events in those crowded twelve months had linked him with this sad, soft, much-enduring creature!

Well, *there* they were, they were coming to them now, his graves and her graves. For a minute or two they stood hand in hand by the freshly turned mould. Then the woman whispered, 'I forgave him when he didn't know it. But he knows it now.' And Dud realized what was in her mind when, with a faint smile, she drew her hand from his and moved away to the grave of her son.

And an apathy, a numbness, a strange quiescence descended upon D. No-man, not the same apathy that had been weighing him down all these last days, but the apathy that comes on a person when his soul, removing itself to a distance from his body, faces without flinching but with an immense weariness the long ascending path up which it has to drag that mortal companion of its wayfaring.

Which of those two — his mother, with her inhuman egoism, or Mona, with her weird unselfishness — held the secret that prevailed?

Well! He must go on as best he could in his own way. He must be decent to Nance. He must be faithful, after his fashion, to Wizzie. He must hold fiercely to all those sensations of his! It was no good. He could *not* live, as this dead man had done, in a wild search for the life behind life. One life at a time! But neither would he close one single cranny or crevice of his mind to the intimations of immortality that in this place and at this hour were so thick about him.

And then a well-known sound in the air above him made him glance upwards. One of old Claudius's airplanes! 'Hold to the centre', he said to himself, 'as you move on. The future's *not* everything!' And he dug his stick into the earth, with his eyes on the ground.

Then, pulling it out with a jerk, he went to meet Nance.

The Welsh Novels

Montacute, a village in Somerset — in 1879 Powys' family moved to Montacute, where his father served as vicar for thirty-two years.

Montacute Vicarage, the Powys family home for many years

The Powys Family at Montacute Vicarage, c. 1899 — Powys' father appears in the centre back row, with the author next to him on the right

Morwyn (1937)

OR THE VENGEANCE OF GOD

Morwyn: or The Vengeance of God was first published in Britain in 1937 by Cassell & Co. It is often described as one of Powys' 'Welsh Novels', alongside *Owen Glendower* (1941) and *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Age* (1951). The author had moved to Corwen, North Wales in July 1935 with the intention of connecting to his Welsh ancestry and exploring the country's rich history, literature and mythology. His father, Reverend Charles Francis Powys claimed that he was descended from Rhodri Mawr, the great ninth century Welsh king. The Reverend could trace his ancestry back centuries to the Montgomery region and both he and the author took great pride in their heritage and family origins.

This novel is an evocative work demonstrating Powys rich and expansive imagination and his broad knowledge of literature and mythology. The narrative takes place in Hell after a meteorite strikes a Welsh mountain and opens a void thrusting the protagonists down into a frightening underworld. It is subterranean realm of sadism and horror where the narrator encounters the spirits of famous figures from history, such as the Marquis de Sade, Tomás de Torquemada, Rabelais and the sixth century Welsh bard, Taliesin. A central concern of the novel is the use of scientific knowledge and in particular the practice of vivisection — a preoccupation of the author's — as an excuse for cruelty and torture.

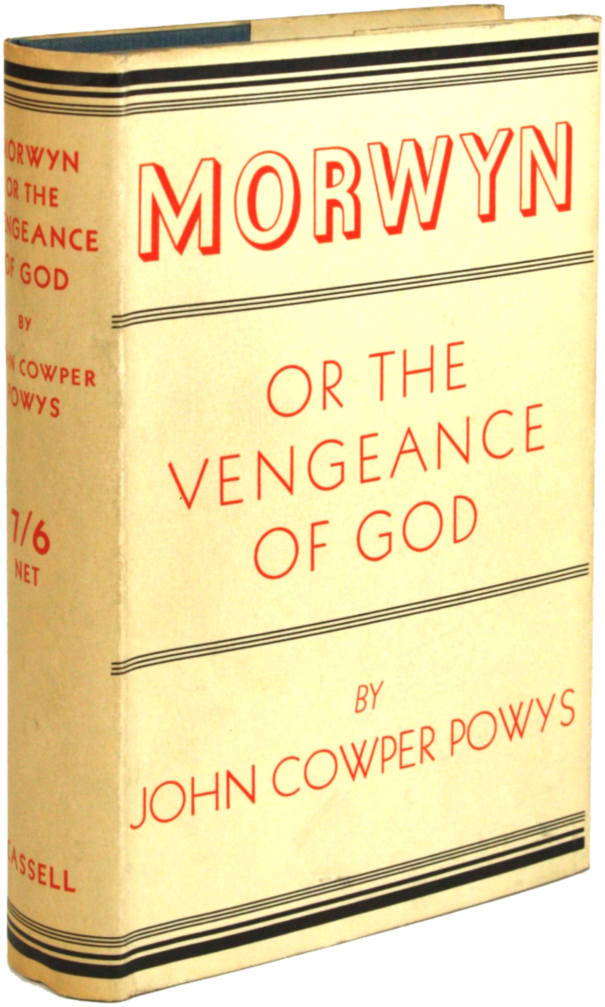

MORWYN
OR THE
VENGEANCE
OF GOD
BY
JOHN COWPER POWYS
7/6
NET
CASSELL

The first edition

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Dedicated

With Affectionate Respect

and Admiration

to

Theodore Francis Powys

Part One

TO YOU, MY son, and to you alone, will I tell the whole story as it actually occurred. Perhaps even to you I could not be so frank if there had not come to my ears a garbled version of what happened; and it is to prevent such false rumours from troubling you that I am writing now.

As I hinted during your recent visit, I can remember vividly every single event of the extraordinary day that ended in the devastating experience that left me as you found me.

Science no doubt would be ready to give a technical name to the extreme lucidity with which the smallest events of that time stand out, but I will only say now that what those hours finally led to was so convulsive a shock that in place of making my memory a blank with regard to all the little previous things it enabled me to envisage them with an almost intolerable distinctness, like the distinctness we used to be warned in childhood to expect from the Day of Judgment.

It is indeed appalling in what overwhelming emphasis every material circumstance, every form and figure and shape, presented itself on that day to my consciousness. Whatever planetary event it was that precipitated it all, turning the touchy personage you used to call “father” into the stranded inanimate, like an old battered figurehead washed up by the sea, that you found here a week ago, it must have cast, in advance of its descent at this particular spot, some sort of premonitory illumination.

Why this illumination should have been mental as well as electric I can make no guess. I can only assure you that when I came out of my house at sunset, on the twenty-first of this month, the eve of our shortest day, I was staggered by the devastating clearness with which I saw everything. This was the more remarkable, though at the time I gave it no thought, since twilight was already coming on and the sun had gone down in heavy clouds.

But the illumination that met me was certainly not merely physical. It *was* physical, but it was something else as well. I can only describe it as the presence of some source of light different from both the descended sun and the as yet unrisen moon, a light which not only counteracted the natural twilight but heightened and quickened in some startling manner my powers of observation. As you know from old days your progenitor has never been a very lively observer of what goes on round us. Indeed, I have been attacked sometimes as positively sub-human in absent-mindedness. So that, when I emphasize the mental illumination that that moment brought, you must remember that it must have taken a good deal of this inexplicable current of cosmic electricity to stir up my sluggish mentality to the normal level, not to speak of lifting it — as I really believe it did lift it — into a clarity beyond the normal.

You have not had, I'm afraid, too many occasions for congratulating yourself on being the motherless bastard of a selfish bachelor, so you must make the most of the satisfaction to be derived from the fact that no one but yourself can suffer from whatever this story of mine may contain of the sort of thing from which our flesh and blood so naturally shrinks.

Well! I was setting out as usual up the slope of the Berwyn Range — you remember how you carried my chair into that path when you were here? — and Black Peter was, as he generally is, caracoling and sniffing and relieving himself after his fashion a little way in front, when I became aware of this abnormal quickening of all my mental powers.

That this heightened condition of my faculties commenced to show itself the second I crossed my threshold I have no doubt; but it was not till I had nearly reached that house higher up the mountain where, as you must have heard though you’re so discreet, the girl lived, that I became conscious of my abnormal mental condition.

The path I was following takes us past the outbuildings of this house, which is, as you’ve seen, a good deal larger than most of the little places up here to whom the privilege has been given of contact with the miles of barbed-wire that confine this part of our mountain-range to certain plump totem-birds and their dedicated keepers.

If you hadn’t been too busy, my son, to visit me often during these last years you would have heard me speak of this old farm-house and its inhabitants, for no human abode has ever made so deep an impression on me.

It is quite true what the papers said about the girl’s affection for her father. Where they went completely off the track was in regard to the quarrel, I might say the rift, for it was more than a quarrel, that was rapidly widening between them. It was about vivisection.

Morwyn, who’s nearly twenty, though she looks much younger, couldn’t endure it in any form, and Mr. — of course was a tremendous vivisector, more passionately fond of it, I suppose, than any other man in England.

Mr. — and the girl had only been coming here for the last four or five years. In fact she wasn’t seventeen — just about what she looks now — when I first saw her. It was Mr.— ‘s peculiarity to take his annual holiday in the winter; but what first attracted his daughter to this mountain farm was its being linked up with the romantic history of Owen Glendower, who, as you may, or may not, remember, drew his name from this region.

Morwyn’s mother was Welsh — I understand she died in child-birth — and it was my interest in Welsh history that gave me my hold, such as it was, upon her imagination.

You won't, my dear boy, understand anything of what I have to tell you if you don't get the personality of Morwyn lodged in your mind.

Descriptions of women's beauty are always tedious, especially so, I suspect, when a father is writing to a son, and I'm not going to enlarge on her dark hair and dark eyes and on her willow-wand slimness. But this much I will say — I have never known such an aura — if you understand what I mean — of magnetic desirability — as emanated from this girl's figure. I can't tell you whether other men felt it — I have no idea whether *you* would feel it. But to me that was the chief thing!

Whether you'd call her pretty or plain I simply don't know. I only know that from the moment I first saw her I would willingly, like Faust, have sold my soul to the devil to get hold of her. And, as you have reason to know, I'm not a person totally without experience!

But it was my dog, Black Peter, who — more than my interest in Owen Glendower — was the real bond between us. I spoke glibly just now of selling my soul to the devil for Morwyn; but the truth is, after she became so fascinated by the dog, it *did* occur to me more than once, that Black Peter was extraordinarily like the famous poodle whose shape Mephistopheles assumed!

I don't think *you* ever cared very much for my spaniel. I think you regarded him as a selfish and neurotic old bachelor, extremely like his master. But Morwyn acquired a veritable passion for him; a passion to which the dog, queerly enough, was almost indifferent, but of which I, as you can well believe, took every possible advantage.

But, God help me, I can see well what I'm doing now! I am doddering on with this lingering preamble just to put off telling you my story, which, as Dante says, "nel pensier rinnova la paura," in the thought renews the fear!

As we ascended the slope of the mountain and got nearer and nearer to the out-buildings of the farm this queer illumination, that was apparently both mental and physical, seemed to increase.

All the material, all the emotional elements of that moment revealed themselves to me with a lucidity that was startling, that was, in fact, *shocking.*

I saw for instance with a clearness that was anything but pleasant, the unmitigated sensuality of my personal side of the relations between this girl and me.

All the pretty tags and streamers of platonic idealism with which my specious reasoning-power had tricked up my attraction, seemed to go sailing away on the northeast wind!

As Mephistopheles said of Faust— "a girl was leading me by the nose!" The "illumination" from which I suffered — for I got no joy of this insight and much grief — revealed to me, the fact that just as I was coming up the mountains with the hope of catching a glimpse of Morwyn so was Black Peter keeping a little ahead of me in the hope of getting on the trail of Bitch Bessie, my young woman's fox-terrier.

I always knew pretty well what Black Peter was thinking and feeling by the particular angle at which he held his tail. On this occasion he held his tail almost — not quite, but almost — at right angles with his broad and solid back. And he caracoled and shook his ears and galloped and cantered with all the manifestations of exquisite rapture such as he generally reserves for the moment when at the end of our walks I turn on my heel to move homeward.

We had reached the entrance to the farm-yard — for the normal farm operations weren't interrupted by these visits of the famous vivisector — and as usual I was peering into the cattle-stall where not unfrequently she would be petting one of the animals, when, under the power of this "illumination," which I had by this time come to recognize in myself but attributed it simply to erotic excitement, I saw that she was watching me from the hayloft above the shed where out of a dark square opening they used to toss down bundles of hay into the yard below.

And now I had my second shock in regard to Morwyn; for with this terrible clarity that had come upon me, and I still in my folly attributed it to the clairvoyance of "love," I saw in her face as it hovered in the opening of that hay-loft — and she must have been on her knees, in there, or she could not have peered out of that aperture — what I had never seen before in my whole life, the look of first love in a young girl's soul. I had often cursed my ignorance of women's secret thoughts, cursed myself for not being able to read the enigma of their feelings under their flickering expressions, but now — when by the accident of this meteoric illumination Morwyn's inmost self was revealed to me — instead of being gratified I was shocked and appalled!

I must have often talked to you — but no! I suppose not to *you,* though certainly to everybody else — about what nonsense I considered it, all the fuss that used to be made about the "purity" of unwedded girls. I've always maintained that the whole thing was just the invention of vicious old rogues like myself, anxious to retain the monopoly of melting the ice-chaste senses of these vases of innocence.

I've protested that vicious men are naturally more distrustful of this purity than their less sensual brethren, and I've always declared that the latter are completely gulled by these crafty innocents.

You can therefore understand what a shock it was to me when under this psychic "ray," from God knows what region of the cosmos, I was made aware of the terrifying purity of Morwyn's nature!

You will ask why it appalled me instead of delighting me? Simply because of the frightful responsibility it implied! Your grandmother, whom you may perhaps just remember, used always to warn me against what she would call, “meddling with a young girl’s heart.”

Consideration of that kind I regarded as old-fashioned nonsense. But, God! When I saw the look on Morwyn’s face through that loft-window, I realized that I had stirred up an emotion compared with which my romantic sensuality was an airy straw on the wind!

Is all first love in all maidens as powerful and awe-inspiring as what I saw in the face of that blurred figure at that loft-entrance? For I realized then that Morwyn’s response to my infatuation — and, mind you, I had never breathed a word to her about such things, and still less had ever given her a kiss — was a feeling so fatally strong that had she melted, as we say, in my arms it could hardly have been stronger!

The image in the hay-loft vanished as soon as I stood still at the farm-yard entrance; but I knew she would soon appear in my path through a gate out of the kitchen-garden.

Meanwhile I was disturbed, and not only disturbed but shocked in my romantic touchiness, by the flagrant overtures that Bitch Bessie was making to Black Peter. Whether Black Peter had, like his master, received from this mysterious meteoric disturbance a new and unnatural insight into the universal feminine organism, or whether he was, as I have often suspected, so cerebral in his eroticism that he preferred the pursuit of the scent of the feminine, or even the *idea* of such a pursuit, to the confounding reality, I cannot tell, but I know that while the gambols of Bessie round him and her excited leaping clear over his glossy, four-square back, caused his short spaniel’s tail to stand erect and to shiver like an aspen-branch, he was soon taking no more notice of her than if she’d been a fly, and was entirely occupied in devouring an old chicken-bone that he had unearthed from under some manure which lay beneath a dung-cart that had lost one of its wheels.

But there was Morwyn advancing nervously towards us from the gate into the kitchen-garden! She was wearing her out-of-doors grey jacket and her little furry Russian hat with a grey woollen tuft on the front of it, and she carried a blackthorn stick in her hand. It was clear she had come out that evening with the intention of accompanying me up the mountain. She gave me her hand as she always did and looked hurriedly aside when our eyes met as she always did, and when I began talking to her, and she felt it was impolite to stare any more at Peter's activities with the bone, instead of looking into my face, she compromised by fixing her eyes on the bottom of my old greenish-black over-coat and only left her contemplation of this to turn her gaze upon the large round-handled sycamore stick upon which I leant as I talked to her.

Never had my mind been more terribly clear than at that moment. Indeed it struck me then how unfair and unequal the contact between us had now become, considering that if I didn't actually read her *thoughts* I read everything else with appalling distinctness!

It soon transpired that her glances at the overturned dung-cart were not altogether due to shyness; for with a brusque determination, that contrasted oddly enough with her former embarrassment, she called to Bessie to follow her and ran off through the yard towards the house, evidently with the intention of relieving Black Peter and me from the terrier's distracting liveliness.

It was I confess rather to my relief that she came back without Bessie, but it was to my complete dismay that she informed me — and she bent low down to caress Black Peter's flopping ears as she brought out the bad news — that her father was coming out in a minute to accompany us.

The moments that followed, while she and I waited for Mr. — were moments of indescribable misery to both of us. It was lucky for her that my "illumination" gave me such insight into her heart just then, or I would undoubtedly have revenged myself upon her for this frightful contretemps by some extremely unkind words.

Instead of upon her, I "took it out," as we say, upon poor Black Peter, compelling him to let the remainder of the chicken-skeleton he had disinterred drop back in peace into its cow-dung grave.

So miserable were we both, I holding Black Peter's collar by the hook of my stick instead of troubling to put on his leash, and she poking at some tuft of lichen on a mossy stone with the ferrule of hers, that we could do nothing but chafe in silence at the devilish cruelty of this accident that on the first and only day in these precious three weeks that we had a chance to go up the mountain alone, her father must decide to come with us!

Well, he came at last, this pompous, plausible man, and I dodged shaking hands with him, as I always did, for like the good Ingersoll I would no more shake hands with a vivisector than I would shake hands with a torturer from the Inquisition. But I couldn't stop him coming; and we all three, with Black Peter making a fourth, ascended the mountain.

The winter is the only time, as I've told you before, that a mountain-climber in this place can feel absolutely secure from the interference of game-keepers, and since this fatal walk took place in the very heart of mid-winter, I knew we ran no risk of that sort of molestation. But little did I realize towards what we were advancing so blandly and casually. It is extraordinary how blinded we human beings can be at the great turning-points of our life!

Slowly up the hill we wended our way; Mr. — in front, for the path soon grew narrow, then Morwyn and finally Black Peter and myself.

Never shall I forget that ascent! I suppose you of the new generation have your own way of taking stock of your nature and your life; but I confess to my old-fashioned mind you all seem swimming on the surface like water-beetles on a pond. This easy fashion of going to work has never been natural to me, as you know too well, who have suffered so often from my long talks about myself; but never have I summed myself up to the tune I did that evening climbing the mountain behind Morwyn and her father!

I came to some most drastic conclusions about myself as I watched Black Peter roll on his back on the dead bracken and then proceed to work himself along on his belly in the way he does, like a dog-headed serpent in a cerebral ecstasy.

It was the sight of Morwyn's darling figure, as it went swaying and gliding and pausing, and springing forward in front of me, that started me off, but it was this unearthly illumination, which I keep trying to tell you about, that made my conclusions so devastating.

I decided that what the human race meant by *love* was totally unknown to me. I decided that I possessed the gift, or the curse if you like, of pity, to an abnormal degree; but of pity, you must remember — for otherwise I could not possibly have survived what I shall presently relate to you — for physical rather than for mental suffering.

I decided that my enjoyment of life was so narrow that no human being who didn't share my peculiarities could possibly believe that such narrowness could exist. They would say — as you, my son, are probably saying now — that I have a mania for self-laceration and for making myself out worse than I am; whereas, as a matter of fact, I have a deep suspicion that I am really far worse than I dared to conclude on that memorable ascent of the mountain!

But I will tell you frankly — though I can assure you it was a weird thing to watch Morwyn's lovely figure just in front of me while I received such revelations — what that evening's cosmic illumination showed me with regard to the insane narrowness of my pleasure in life. I came to the conclusion that I had long ago outgrown my youthful greediness for food and drink, but had substituted three other equally vicious cravings, that had to be satisfied or I should be left in a state of apathetic collapse, the craving to enjoy Nature, the craving to enjoy young women, and the craving to enjoy old broadmouthed books, especially the works of Rabelais. You will probably refuse to believe me when I say that I could satisfy all these three manias to the fullest extreme through one of my senses only, the sense of sight, but this is the exact truth. I could even enjoy the ecstasy of the climax of the Eleusinian Mysteries themselves without hearing or touching or tasting or smelling — purely by seeing!

And I came to the conclusion that though when I *saw* physical suffering my pity was extreme, when it was out of my sight I did not think about it at all, or only at the times when I said my prayers, prayers that I can assure you were longer and more eccentric than any invented by the Pharisees.

Now perhaps you are beginning to understand what a momentous walk this was for me up this mountain and why it gave me such a weird and uncanny feeling to watch Morwyn's lovely young back as she climbed in front of me.

For the whole nimbus of romantic sentiment, of purged and winnowed idealism, that Nature, the Old Illusionist, had hung about this girlish form in front of me was torn away by this cosmic illumination. The thousand little things, delicate, dainty, tender, quaint, touching, pathetic, mental and spiritual, for which over and over again I had told myself I was attracted to her, were smitten into thin air; and in their place I was forced to recognize the bare fact that what led, drew, *dragged* me towards her was simply the maddening slenderness of her figure and the irresistible seduction of the way she would sometimes look at me! This latter attraction, which was ten times stronger than her physical charm, though her figure *was* of the precise kind to trouble my senses, I now saw to be due to the fact that she'd fallen in love with me.

I suppose she had never been looked at by a grownup person in the way I must have looked at her; and instead of this vicious desire of mine exciting any sensual response in her it had simply made her fall in love!

I cannot tell you what a shock it was to me to discover, in the strength of this meteoric illumination how frighteningly "pure," in the strictest and most old-fashioned sense of that word, a maiden could be when she fell in love — though with my mania for Homer I was an idiot not to have recalled that infinitely poignant passage where Nausicaa waits for Odysseus by the pillar in her parents' hall.

I want you to realize, my son, though I daresay it's the last thing I'll ever persuade you to do, that though my pleasure in life is strictly limited to a mania for slender women, a mania for Homer and Rabelais, and a mania for Nature, I am terribly and most absurdly hampered in my free enjoyment of these delights by a powerful — though in my opinion a miserably distorted — scrupulousness of conscience.

This conscience of mine used, when I was young, to be a Christian one, and on the strength of it, I was wont to regard all the quivering ecstasies of Eros as equally wicked. But *that* view, my dear boy, I have entirely outgrown. My present view is that erotic pleasure is not only lawful but commendable save where it causes direct suffering. It must, and always will, cause *indirect* suffering, because of the tragic possessiveness of human nature, a possessiveness that makes us seethe and ferment with fury when we are forced to *share* the persons we possess; but though we shall, I suppose, always suffer from this cruel hurt, bitter as the grave, we may, I think, as time goes on cease to regard such suffering as a legitimate cause of hatred and revenge.

But though my conscience no longer considers erotic pleasure as sin, it persecutes me abominably in other ways. In fact it plays a much larger part in my life than when in my youth it confined itself to that particular sphere.

I had refrained from "making love," as we say, to Morwyn or even from kissing her, because my conscience was touchy about being the first one to stir up in her those tyrannical desires that have led me such a dance since I was her age. You can therefore, my dear boy, judge of my feelings as I followed her sweet figure up this accursed hill, when I recognized under this terrible illumination that *already*, without my having kissed her, she was hopelessly in love with me. How unsympathetic I felt, during that long ascent, towards Black Peter's well-known peculiarities! It was his habit, when he intended to roll on his back with his feathery legs bent so restfully and prettily inwards, to lay his snout against the ground before he sank down, turning his head a little sideways so that his left cheek, if one can speak in such terms, pushed itself along the sod like an energetic little plough. By these signs which he always came to my side to make, he was wont to indicate to me that he desired my sympathetic assistance at his orgy of wellbeing.

The moment he got my attention he would turn completely over on his back and proceed to roll in an ecstasy of joy, every now and then, however, propelling himself forward with a jerk by pressing one of his hind-paws against the earth. The moment I ceased to give him my sympathy in these manifestations he would spring up, shake himself vigorously, just as I noticed he always shook himself after indulging in the smallest erotic excitement, and run forward as usual, but if I stood still and encouraged him, using a certain grotesque jargon which we had composed for these occasions and which a good deal resembled the “little language” which Swift invented for his correspondence with Stella, he would turn over on his belly, and with his feathery legs outspread like a young crocodile, work himself forward with his stomach pressed against the ground and his head upraised, while his liquid brown eyes remained fixed in delirious rapture upon my own. At these moments I often experienced the feeling that I was watching the love-dance of the heraldic animal known as a Wyvern.

But on this fatal evening I was far too perturbed by what had been revealed to me to bother about Black Peter’s ecstasies; and when he began licking with his tongue — oh, how well I knew the strawberry-red tint of that lively little organ! — every road-side stone or tree-stump past which in some solitary stroll earlier in the day Morwyn must have taken Bitch Bessie, I began to feel a positive anger against him.

I knew Black Peter’s peculiarities as well as I knew my own. His life-pleasures, like mine, were not of a wide scope. They were indeed extremely limited; and the sharing of the embrace of love with Bitch Bessie was certainly not one of them. But sniffing along the road where Bitch Bessie had passed earlier in the day, flitting on her light butterfly feet, *was* one of them, and one of the most ravishing.

Of Bitch Bessie in person he never took the slightest notice. Even when in her ardour she leapt over his back he took no notice; but the impersonal trail, or track or scent of Bitch Bessie was a very different thing. This seemed to cause him thrill after thrill of that ideal aspiration to arouse which Goethe declares at the end of *Faust* is the cosmic prerogative of the Feminine Principle.

But the sight of Morwyn's darling figure drifting up that hill behind her father and evidently resolute to walk alone — for the Vivisector often stopped so that she could overtake him, but the moment he stopped she stopped too and made as if she were waiting for us to overtake *her* — caused me to feel a nervous irritation with Black Peter on no other grounds but that he was as peculiar in his reactions to the Feminine Principle as I was myself!

A little later, when I realized the meteoric cause of the quickened intelligence I was suffering from, it occurred to me to wonder whether it *mightn't have affected Black Peter too,* and, if so, whether it was *his* enlightenment, parallel to mine, that roused my anger against him?

But it is no wonder I was in a touchy state going up that hill. Here was my one chance for a walk alone with her, before they went away for another year, being snatched from me, and snatched from me at the very moment when the impregnable chastity and purity of her nature had been so clearly revealed to me that I should have had no qualms of conscience left about making love to her. It would indeed have been an ideally harmonious situation! I should have got transporting delight from touching her and nothing that I did could have altered one jot the amazing purity of her feeling for me. She would have taken my satyrish love-making lightly and tenderly; but as for it exciting any corresponding viciousness in her own nerves I could see that the magic of love had completely removed such a possibility.

If only her father hadn't selected this day, of all days, to thrust his company upon us, we would have had one of those indescribable encounters between a man and a woman that come to most of us only once or twice in a lifetime. I would have been transported by making love to her and she would have been entranced in her love for me. A man's desire would have encountered a girl's passion, and the deepest human situation, save birth or death, would have occurred between us. As for the future, I don't believe either of us would have given it a thought. *You* will no doubt be giving it a thought, my son; and I've no doubt you will be thinking that if ever there were a case of unpardonable depravity it would be what might have occurred that evening between the elderly rascal who begat you and this misguided young woman!

It is a sad commentary upon the prevalent human illusion that the more you know the happier you are, that this climb up the mountain behind Morwyn and her father should have been one of the most bitter of all the experiences of my life.

I tell you it was a crushing thing, that illumination! It made me realize, what at the time without any equivocation I *knew* to be the bare truth, every most shameless detail of every feeling of my dog, my girl, the Vivisector and myself.

Four exposed entities, three bipeds and one quadruped, were thus climbing that hill — and you must remember it was a steep hill — one after the other, in straggling Indian file.

That I should now know — from this accurst illumination that exposed the sweet girl so nakedly to my troubled mind — that I might have taken her up this hill yesterday, the day before yesterday, *any day* during this last week, without the possibility of hurting her more than she'd been hurt already, simply by the unpredictable movement of her heart towards me, was like a dagger in my flesh.

I suppose you, my lad, with your modern cynicism and your modern sexlessness, have never known this particular torment, the torment of "if only I'd known"; but I can assure you as I looked at that girl's form — and seven times she looked back at me and smiled a smile so inscrutable that even this damned illumination couldn't strip it of its mystery — I suffered the acutest tantalization I have ever undergone.

I was far too occupied with Morwyn and with my own agitation, to take much notice of her father; but when — and it was the merest accident that it happened — my eye did fall upon that small compact figure, its big head topped by a ridiculous shooting-cap far too small for it, I got an unpleasant shock from what my "illumination" — I have to go on using that word: for what else could I call it? — revealed to me about him. Mr. —, you must understand, wasn't a doctor — and indeed I've met many doctors who detested his practices and felt they had a pernicious rather than a good effect on the art of healing — and what shocked me now was the intensity of the emotion that surrounded his drifting thoughts, though in truth they were his habitual thoughts, as he climbed that hill. You must not think that the "illumination" I am trying to describe to you, enabled me to read Mr.— 's thoughts any more than I could read his daughter's.

What it revealed to me was the diffused reaction of his emotional nature to these thoughts. In other words, the magnetic disturbances inside this squat, goblinish personality, corresponded to the very different disturbances that were now giving me my insight into the heart of Morwyn.

The effect upon us of witnessing cruelty or of reading of cruelty is one of the most searching tests to which we can be subjected. I am of opinion that very few of us are free from some voluptuous response of the erotic nerve in the presence of cruelty — but I feel that the amount, the kind, the variety, the species, the measure, the seriousness of the particular cruelty adapted to our particular erotic nerve, differs enormously in different people.

I am not free, and I am sure you, my dear, will not claim to be free, from certain aspects of this dangerous vice, but I may tell you at once — and I'm not a squeamish person — that I was shocked by the nervous excitement into which Mr. — had been thrown by a series of "scientific" thoughts that had visited him as he ascended that hill in front of us!

Whether these thoughts had occurred to him after a glance at the somewhat curious antics of Black Peter I cannot tell, but what I felt from his nerves was a gloating response to some kind of horrible cruelty, the exact nature of which was as completely concealed from me as the thought that aroused it. I had come to realize from my instinctive knowledge of human nature and my long experience of human perversity that many of these scientists derive intense voluptuous satisfaction from their experiments on animals; but you can realize something intellectually and yet suffer a sickening shock when you approach it with your senses.

The nearer we drew to the great dusky table-land on the top of this mountain-slope the more silent and apart we seemed to grow.

Save that including Black Peter we were four entities instead of two, the sentence with which Dante begins the twenty-third canto of his Inferno would have exactly applied to us as we ascended that hill, "Tacite, soli, e senza compagnia, n'andavam l'un dinanzi e l'altro dopo, come frate minor vanno per via."

"Silent, apart, and without escort we went on, the one before and the other after, as Friars Minor go their way."

This silence between us and this instinctive keeping apart must have had to do with the fact that the "illumination" I speak of was felt by us all, so that while Morwyn realized the cruel tantalization of my senses as I watched her, her father realized how maddening to us both was the fact that he was there at all, and even Black Peter in his dim fashion realized that the

Vivisector, angry with his human companions, had been visualizing at least one rebellious, wayward and sensitive body securely fastened down by those effective straps that our manufacturers hasten to supply as soon as the magic word “Science” is whispered in their ears.

That Black Peter felt instinctively shy of that squat, toad-like figure, whose big head with the little sports-cap balanced on the top of it resembled the picture of Tweedledee in the illustrations of *Alice,* was proved by the position of his short tail, which, though he still sniffed about and every now and then lifted his leg against a tuft of grass, remained clamped to his rump, an attitude which gave him the look of a small black louse who has smelt a whiff of carbolic acid.

How well I had come to know every curve and line of

Black Peter’s expressive form! My feeling for him was the extreme opposite of that “sentimentality” of which Mr. —, earning his glory by practising on nerves and yet himself so impervious, had already begun to accuse me. Black Peter and I would quarrel and make it up just like two human beings. We would sometimes selfishly contend for a comfortable seat by the fire; while at other times, at breakfast, for example, he would jump about with disinterested joy that I should be enjoying a meal in which he had no part or lot, and of which I never gave him a crumb.

I know he’d been long aware of my secret feeling for Morwyn. I am sure he knew of it before she did, and knew it in a way she never *could*; for what does a girl ever really know of the desire of a man of my type?

It had before now been quite an annoyance to her the way he would sometimes utter queer little emotional cries and rush between us. I believe she put it down, though I don’t think *that* pleased her very much, to the presence of Bitch Bessie, whereas it was really, as I well knew, a wave of tragic jealousy at his heart’s core. In fact it was more than that. It was the human soul in Black Peter struggling to express emotions that were so blind and powerful and dark and dim and obscure that he himself did not know the cause of those wild sobs that rose up under his glossy coat.

Considering the nature of the illumination that I felt then, and that I believed both the girl and her father felt too, I soon became certain that it was because of Mr. — that the higher we got up the hill the closer was that little short tail clamped to the dog’s rump.

But it was by the girl herself all this while that my mind was obsessed. Black Peter and Mr. — could only distract my thoughts for brief intervals — I came back to her with torment and rapture like a piece of extended elastic against the hand that holds it. I could not recover from that first shock of what I now knew about her. Although the “illumination” didn’t enable me to read her thoughts, any more than those of her father, it enabled me to read with provoking vividness her emotional condition. And I kept tormenting myself with what might have happened *if only* I had known before. The revelation that she loved me was accompanied you see, by this other startling revelation with regard to what love could mean in a girl.

And think, my son, of my never knowing this before? Do you know it? No, I suppose not! You and all your generation talk about this “sex” of yours as if it were a kind of fairy frog-spawn — something that could be artificially preserved, artificially manipulated, artificially separated from the people who possess it, and in general treated with such a mixture of scientific pedantry and moral flippancy that it makes me feel as if you were all a set of airy explorers, bringing your “sex” with you as if it were a new kind of quinine, or iodine, in little labelled bottles!

I hate the word “sex.” It makes me want to begin rehearsing: “Common are to either sex oppifex and artefex, parens, sacerdos, custos, vindex, judex, haeres, comes, dux, princeps, municeps” — and so on! I prefer the

Biblical tone, “And from the beginning of the creation God made them man and woman.”

Well! Men and women, even after all these generations, are still mysteries to each other. Certainly until I walked up that hill under the extraordinary revelations brought to me by a meteorite, I never knew what a thunder-clap of finality a woman’s love could be! I supposed that all of them chopped and changed in these motions of the blood even as we ourselves.

But now under this diabolical search-light I learnt that when a woman, well! at any rate a girl like this, once loves, her whole nature is affected. She may come to hate later, with that peculiar hatred of the heart for the Being to whom once and for all it has been given, which is the most merciless of all hatreds, but hate as she may, to the end of her life she will bear that particular signature carved on her vitals.

And now, as I ascended that rocky path behind Morwyn, pondering on the mystery of the last smile she had turned to give me, the craving that obsessed me to embrace that sweet body of hers rose like smoke into the cells of my horribly-clear brain and set up a wrestling there of the most contradictory thoughts.

Knowing now that her whole nature, every inch of her lovely flesh, every nerve in her precious being, was mine to take, it was impossible to restrain my imagination from playing upon the string — *what would it have been like* had we been alone together to-day!

But, against this maddening sweetness, contended the opposite thought — just as fatally clear in the cells of my brain — that the very fact of my already possessing every portion of this virgin citadel would deprive my contact with it of those indescribable raptures that attend the event of being the first to make love to a maid.

She would rest blissfully in my arms, she would accept everything. “Everything” would seem natural and right to her, since her soul was already mine and there would be nothing of what Milton — profoundly immoral as all puritans are — calls “sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.”

This thought would never have risen in me if it had not been that my illuminated vision penetrated with such fearful distinctness into all those recesses of reserved girlhood from which we are as a rule so hopelessly excluded, and from which — judging from what the genius of the old painters reveals to us in those shyly-musing, vaguely-brooding young women of their Annunciations — the full consciousness of the girl herself is excluded too.

But strange as it will no doubt seem to you, my dear son, with your light airy-fairy modern humour in these matters, this thought was a serious trouble to me as I went up the hill behind that form I so intensely desired. It was as if, by reason of that fatal illumination, she had already become, inside her clothes and her skin, just as completely mine as she would have become if we had lived together for five, or even ten years!

In a physical sense of course she was still an unpossessed maid; but my meteoric insight into these feminine secrets showed me clearly that the physical with women is *far less important* than we are apt to assume.

But see! She had turned and smiled at me again; and there arose, as if conjured up by magic from regions of obscurity beyond all penetration, the old unrevealed secret; and her smile hovering back to me down the slope of the mountain, threw once more over the link between us, and over her feeling about it and over her thoughts and over herself that prehistoric *tremble of mystery* like the quiver in the air that certain hot days call forth out of the ground, that no insight could capture or explain. But I have no doubt, my dear, that by this time you’re getting terribly impatient to reach the top of this mountain-ridge, up which I have been taking you with such lingering steps!

Indeed, I daresay you wouldn't be far wrong if you accused me of making every sort of excuse to delay my getting to the top! But we *did* get there at last, first Mr. —, then Morwyn, then Black Peter; and once there we all paused in a group, with Black Peter in the centre, to rest and drink in the unparalleled view. Black Peter sat straight upright, his mouth open and his red tongue hanging out. He established himself in the not very wide space between Morwyn and me; and I could see the girl was a little teased by his loud pantings.

Our heads were all turned southward, looking down towards the wide valley through which flows our deep and famous river, and Mr. — was explaining to us the correct geological names of the particular rock-formations that lay in jags and crags about us, when some electric vibration, some weird disturbance in the air above our heads, caused us all to look upwards.

Even Black Peter, who, as he sat on his rump between Morwyn and me, his short black tail resting on the dead heather like the rudder of a stranded boat, was beginning to make the curious moaning sound that was premonitory to a heart-stricken cry of jealous anguish, turned his nose upwards, his nostrils quivering frantically, as if under the impact of an absolutely unknown smell. With the intense preoccupation of a man whose whole desire is turned to a girl I glanced hurriedly sideways to see the effect of this phenomenon upon Morwyn, taking it myself to be the approach of a thunderstorm.

Never shall I forget the girl's expression! She had removed her hat and was holding it in the hand furthest away from me, swinging it carelessly against her side. Her jacket and skirt, both of them of some dark colour and some smooth texture that I am too ignorant to describe, struck me at that moment as fitting her very badly. Why this should have rushed through my head simultaneously with the idea of a thunderstorm I can’t tell you, but another thing was puzzling, for though she had always struck me as having a white skin I now visualized her little body under these loose clothes as being of a brownish tint, in fact as resembling the slippery, sunburnt form of an extremely dirty little tramp-girl I had once caught bathing in one of these mountain-streams. But, as I say, this thought of her clothes being too big for her, and of her body inside them being as brown as a gipsy’s, came and went in less than a second. What really arrested me was the look on her face. Will you believe it, my dear son, when I tell you that her expression was that of rapturous transport? That’s what it was; and I couldn’t put it to you in any other way. Her face was literally transfigured.

I didn’t think of such a thing *then,* I only watched her in amazement, but in the process of going over these things again and I suppose I shall do nothing else than go over them till the end of my days, it has occurred to me that her face was like that of a Madonna in a well-known Spanish picture, not a pretty face but an extremely *feminine* face, if you know what I mean, a face with nothing of that boyishness about it which so many English girls cultivate, but a face into which the Spanish painter — I’ve forgotten his name though I’ve heard it scores of times — has put the wildest ecstasy of unearthly love.

In my clumsy self-complacency I must confess I attributed this heavenly look to the girl’s newly-flowered love for myself, and to her happiness in our standing together on this mountain-side, but of course you must remember, my dear boy, that I had the excuse of what this curst illumination had been revealing to me all this evening about her. In fact I had that advantage over her which girls have been taught by their mothers from time immemorial to regard as the worst possible humiliation. I knew she was in love with me; though I had not confessed to her that I was in love with her!

Oh, my son, my son, as I go over all these events in my mind I am amazed at the amount of “stupid being,” as that American lady in Paris calls it, with which a man’s self-complacency muffles his natural mother-wit. Of course I know *now* that that look on the girl’s face had nothing at all to do with me! Her nature may have been changed by her having fallen in love with me, but it was with the whole of her nature, changed or unchanged, that she now waited in this strange rapture for what she must have felt to be — but God knows *what* she felt it to be!

But to the end of my days that look will remain at the back of my consciousness to be a comfort to me. It was a look I couldn’t mistake: a look of radiant pleasure. As I have said, Morwyn could not be called pretty. Her eyes were her best feature; but though their colour was a rare one, a curious grey-green that resembled certain shells in a rock-pool, they very seldom lightened or darkened, and only once had I seen tears in them. This, however, was not strange, because, as they always seemed to look out at me from under fathoms of water, she may sometimes have had tears in them without my knowing it. Her hair was dark and very straight, and always drawn back tightly from her forehead, revealing her ears, which, though delicate in modelling were decidedly large and had a tendency to stick out from her small head, detracting a good deal from the effect of her madonna-like brow and creating a somewhat elfish impression. You know — or does anyone of your sub-erotic generation, who by analysing their feelings have separated them from the terrible force of the imagination, really know? — how when you’ve got a desire for the body of a girl devouring you day and night, every little material object becomes a symbol? Well, all the way up the path till this moment, I had been finding tokens of the mystery of her appeal in certain glittering pieces of amber-and-white rock that lie embedded at intervals in our grey slaty stone. Mr. — was in the act of expounding the presence of these veins of marbly waywardness in our mass of slate rock, when the cosmogonic event, whose coming had been heralded for me, if not for the rest of us, by this damnable illumination, swept down upon us.

That look of transport on Morwyn's face was the last thing I saw; and when I die it will be the most important thing I shall have ever seen. But how can it be explained? A meteoric splendour from some exploded stellar body, crashing down into our globe and sinking into it as a stone might sink into a hollow skull — what was there about a cataclysm like that to excite rapture in a girl's breast?

And though the mental illumination by which I at any rate, and I feel pretty sure Black Peter too, had a premonition of some cosmic shock, was as psychic as it was electric, I cannot regard it as anything but a ghastly crack in the order of things and a colossal bolt hurled at our little oasis of order out of the blind tumult of the outer chaos.

And why a monstrous event of this kind — a horrible invasion of cosmos by chaos — should light up in ecstasy a thin girlish face with elfin ears was then — and is still — beyond my understanding.

You tell me, my son, that you and your cynical young friends are sick to death of the fuss and talk that this "collision with the end of a dark star" as my favourite newspaper called it, has excited throughout the country.

That's another of your suicidal analytical tricks! In my simplicity — a simplicity which I cultivate as desperately as you young people do your sophistication — I would be perfectly ready to share the popular thrill of awful but delicious terror which the newspapers caught in their dramatic way; but at the moment it was different. Anyway if you and your young people are sick of the *talk* about this astronomical accident you ought to listen with all the more pleasure to what I'm going to tell you now, which is not "talk," but a very grim experience.

Whatever meteoric body it was that collided with our earth it must have struck the edge of a vast solid mass of rock, hidden beneath the heather-roots, a rock upon the opposite circumference of which, without the least intimation of the peril we were incurring, we were all four standing. It can only have been because this rock was so large that we were not crushed by the impact of the falling body which bore it down. But its size saved us. The blow carried down the whole block of stone, carried it down to the centre of the earth with ourselves on it, but it was so large that it must have carried with it, if not something of its own atmosphere, at least something of its own balance, poise, and relative gravitation, so that it was really like sinking down with our feet securely planted on a solid segment of our planet and all the while being protected from the whole spatial sensation of "up and down" by some of the deepest laws of the cosmos.

We were not protected from the mental or magnetic shock of this cosmogonic fall; but as far as I can understand from what people have since told me of the look of the spot to-day the bolt — or whatever it was — that carried down the plot of ground on which we were standing, was followed, as well as preceded, by a cyclone of disturbance: and this must have choked up the crater behind us with rocks and rubble.

The first thing I recall — and you must be indulgent to me, my dear, if my memory grows shaky at the crucial moments of my story — when my consciousness returned, was the warm breath of Black Peter on my face. He was never one for licking you with his tongue; but at moments of agitation, when for instance someone closed a door between him and me, he would breathe hard at the crack under the bottom of the obstacle, puffing forth heavy breaths, so it always sounded to me, rather than inhaling. And it was of the familiar sound of Black Peter's heavy breath and its hot puffs against my cheek that I was first aware, and I believe it was my old familiarity with this trick of his that kept my mind intact at a moment when my wits might easily have been unsettled.

My first thought was of Morwyn, for this feeling of Black Peter's breath could scarcely be called a thought, and I made an effort to rise to my feet. This I found for several minutes totally beyond my power, but I did finally achieve it; and although my muscles seemed half-paralysed, I staggered towards her. But there were three figures there, two of them bending over the body of someone who lay twisted and distorted on the ground!

I was too dazed when I reached them to realize at once in its full ghastly abnormality the import of what I saw. I took it in at a glance; but I was in such an unnatural condition that I was not as disturbed and confounded by what I saw as I would have been under normal circumstances. But I expect you have noticed — only you post-war young people always take *everything* so coolly! — that the mind at a crisis grows conscious of a profound wonder at its own power of facing things as calmly as it does.

At any rate, when I did grow aware of the monstrousness of what I saw, I accepted it with a singular coolness. What I saw was nothing less than my precious Morwyn staring with tearless eyes at the corpse of Mr. while another Mr. —, a replica in outward aspects of the one on the ground, only this one's face was free from distortion, was trying to console her.

As far as I could make out she herself was suffering no overpowering shock from the presence of this other Mr. —. Her expression wasn't at all that of a person overcome with blank terror or struck dumb with amazement; it was simply that of a daughter whose father has been killed in a sudden and shocking accident. We might have been at the bottom of a rocky gorge in the Alps. The “second” Mr. — could not even there, have looked with more normal human concern at the frozen and tragic grief on the face of our companion. That I was not staggered by the situation, beyond all power to adjust myself to it, is proved by two little details. I noticed in her expression, and I marked it as a touching example of her impulsive goodness of heart, a longing to be left quite alone with the “first” Mr. so that her frozen feelings could melt over him in passionate grief; but along with this I noticed a perfectly well-balanced anxiety lest she should hurt the feelings of the “second” Mr. —, by being deaf to his comforting words.

And as I dragged myself to the girl’s side and stood behind her — for I did not dare to meddle with her grief — I suddenly became conscious that Black Peter had begun to utter that moaning sound he always did when he caught me making love — *mental* love, you understand, for consumed with desire as I was I had never touched her — and that as he made it he was jumping up against me and pawing my back with his feathery front paws.

I suppose as long as I live I shall have a certain power of standing aside from events and from my own extremest feelings under events and watching them with a diabolically detached eye, for such as you know to your cost, my dear, is my nature. I *can’t not* be scandalously and shamelessly conscious of every mortal experience and *of myself*, as the experiencer of it all!

And it shows how the human heart works, and how what we call “love” — with all its manias and perversities — makes us blind, deaf, and petrified to everything else, that not one of us, not even Black Peter, gave a thought to our astounding situation, or so much as looked round, or snuffed the air, to see where we were, or *how we were to get out.*

Morwyn thought only of the “first” Mr. —; while the “second” Mr. — and I, in our different ways, thought only of her, and Black Peter thought only of me.

Another peculiarity of our human consciousness struck the callous and curious eye of my detached self, namely the power which the mind has of adapting itself to conditions that you would naturally suppose would send it stark mad. And how obstinately, how fatally, we *are* what our passions are. Here was I gazing at Morwyn’s entrancing figure exactly as I had done all the way up that hill! No matter if we were enclosed in the bowels of the earth: no matter if the sweet girl herself was stupefied in grief at the death of her father: no matter if Black Peter was scrabbling and moaning like a crazy thing at my back: no matter if I had to overcome for the “second” Mr. — a shivering distaste that would have made it easy for me to run away with the hairs of my head standing on end: what my detached self noted, and noted with aid still forthcoming from that downpour of cosmogonic electricity, was that my consuming desire for the sweet body of Morwyn overcame both the stiffness of my limbs and my sick terror at the presence of the “second” Mr. —.

I think it was respect for her grief that kept me from approaching her and speaking to her, and no doubt terror of her father’s spirit entered too, but knowing what I am — only it’s impossible for any of you young people with your butterfly-loves, to know the madness of real sensuality — you can take for granted that I snatched this opportunity to gaze upon her as she hung over that man’s corpse, as I would have gazed upon her if she’d hung over a clump of grass.

I daresay my expression at that moment — and it must have been the same as we came up the hill and the same at every chance I’ve had for the last fortnight of watching her without her knowing it — resembled the expression of a village idiot hidden in a withy-bed where the farm-servant comes for water-cress. It would have resembled that idiot's expression if the thunderbolt that carried us down had bruised me so that I had barely a minute to live! That minute I would have spent in staring at her.

I used the expression "spirit of her father" just now, but the truth is that the expression on the face of the "second" Mr. — was entirely different from that on the countenance of the dead body over which his daughter was kneeling.

I could only bring myself to glance once or twice at the ghastly physiognomy of this new companion of ours, but the impression I received when I did steal a look was by no means a pleasant one. If, as I'm tempted to think *from the way I feel,* my own expression when my madness for Morwyn took possession of me was that of a village idiot, the expression of the "second" Mr. — was that of a pompous hangman. It was the queer noise Black Peter was making as he scrabbled with his paws at my back that finally made the girl turn round, and I saw at once that I had been unconscious much longer than I supposed, for she must have had time to get over — in a measure — her shock at the presence of the "second."

Mr. —, since she now deliberately asked him some question in a whisper and from the naturalness of his response I could see that they must have exchanged many words before.

All this gave me — absurd as it sounds — something of a twinge, for it looked as if she hadn't turned away, even for a moment, from the body of her father, and from communion with his spirit, so much as to find out whether I was alive or dead! I say "with his spirit," for after watching them whispering together for a second or two the form of the "second" Mr. — became so extremely transparent that I could clearly see *through it* a portion of the dead man's figure and even a fragment of the edge of Morwyn's jacket; but the face of the creature — even while it was conversing quite quietly with the girl — was so contracted with some interior spasm of passion that it was hard to endure to see it so close to her.

It was indeed just as I had decided that I *couldn't* bear to see it and was on the point of dragging myself between them that Black Peter began barking. Automatically I swung round — as I had done during our walks together for the last ten years — to see what he was barking at; and it was only *then* and from this you can see what my obsession was, that for the first time my brain took in our physical surroundings!

We were in a vast cavernous space, the floor of which — save for the little island of peat-mould and heather, upon which, like beetles on a burdock-leaf, we had been carried down — was of solid stone, smooth and of a very dark colour, while in a single glance you could see that the roof of our prison was of a similar dark stone, but was so high above our heads that it was much more indistinct than the vast ocean-like floor that stretched away on every side of us.

But I now recognized the cause of Black Peter's barking. Someone was rapidly approaching us. Morwyn, who also at that moment saw what Black Peter and I saw, at once made a step towards this figure. My own first impression about this stranger was a very natural one, though not a very enlightened one. I took him for the first of a rescue party already come down to help us out! But fantastic though this delusion was, it was clearly shared by Morwyn, for she at once lifted her arm and began frantically waving. It was then that I became aware that the tension of the countenance of the "second."

Mr. — had become accentuated to a degree that was shocking. The creature's face was positively twitching! Perhaps the transparency of this Being — in appearance so exactly the double of the corpse lying on our little island of heather in the midst of this boundless stone pavement — made me more aware of this movement in its face. I know I could see a portion of Morwyn's arm, as she waved to the approaching stranger, quite clearly through that contorted visage; and perhaps it was the girl's dark sleeve as it kept crossing the face — as you've seen some tiny bit of weed in the magnifying glass of a powerful microscope cross the whirling convolutions of those diminutive water-dragons that jerk about before your eyes — that threw into relief those spasmodic twitchings.

But what was this? He too, the "second" Mr. now began frantically waving! Black Peter had never ceased from barking and he was now barking furiously, as if some dog-torturer even more zealous than Mr. — himself, were coming towards us. Such was my obsession for Morwyn that I experienced at that moment a definite up-rising of anger against this unknown person whom she was so anxious to summon to our aid.

He was far off still; and it was the first indication I had of there being something decidedly weird about the properties of visibility down here, that though he was far off — a mere dot, blur, smudge, speck, on that boundless plain of level grey stone we all *felt* his presence — felt it as powerfully, as magnetically, as if he'd come already to within a few feet of us!

The man, if it *were* a man, but the presence of the "second" Mr. — had given such a jolt to the normal machinery of my habits of thought that I was prepared for anything, must have been several miles away, and we must have presented to his vision the same sort of blur on the face of this vast level surface that he presented to ours.

Satisfied that he had seen us and was coming towards us, Morwyn and the eidolon of her father ceased their frantic waving to him and once more began an impassioned conversation. I have used this phrase before to describe their communication; but to tell you the exact truth, no audible word had yet passed any of our lips! I know I am right in this, because, as we were waiting for this approaching figure, I made a superhuman effort to attract Morwyn's attention to myself and the odd thing was that in this effort I made no attempt to *speak*; nor did I entertain the faintest hope that she would speak to me. It was not all at once that I came to the realization that this silence of ours was forced upon us by the nature of the place into which we had come. Black Peter's barking seemed the only thing capable of breaking this terrifying silence. I suppose we could have wept. But I feel sure we couldn't have laughed; and my impression of our state as I look back to it now is that we had absolutely forgotten that such a thing as audible speech existed.

And you can imagine, my dear, how this inability even to *try* to speak added to the quickening of my ordinary intelligence by our meteoric fall! I became acutely conscious of the significance of every fleeting flicker of facial expression, while the most negligible gesture expressed a burden of emotion that was hardly bearable.

"You *are* a little glad," my appealing glance must have said to her, "that you're not the only one alive down here? It *is* a little comfort to you, isn't it, to have Black Peter and me with you in this appalling place?" I must have thrown into this supplicating tone such a jet of nervous desperation that our eyes did cling together for a perceptible moment. But hers were as dry as shore-pebbles beyond the sea's reach, dry and heavy-lidded and full of terrible suffering; and the fact that my "illumination" gave me less than the penetration of a wasp's sting into her most obvious *thought,* made it impossible for me to know anything except that she still loved me and was broken-hearted about her father.

How strange it was! As our eyes clung together for that brief space I desired her so much and I had brooded upon every portion of her sweet body for so long that it was as if I saw the whole of her Being — body, soul and spirit — in the irises of her eyes but was prohibited from so much as touching the outmost fringe of a single one of her thoughts!

I didn't go so far as to wish she *didn't* love me; but to see this love flowing with her maiden-blood through every vein and pulse, and yet to be held off from taking advantage of it to press her to my heart in our wild predicament, was a pitch of tantalization to which few have come, or, I hope, ever will come!

It was the approach of the stranger that broke up our exchange of — whatever it was we exchanged! She must have known before this what I felt, and I certainly knew what *she* felt, so that it was with no fresh understanding between us that we turned to the approaching figure. In doing this I was unable to resist a glance at the ghost of Mr. — and if I'd been shocked before by the expression on this damned phantom's face, I was absolutely outraged by what I saw there now! There was something in those convulsed nerves — and of course the transparency of the man's flesh made these spasms repulsively noticeable — that was indecent to see. They called up those alarming anatomical pictures where veins have such ghastly prominence and where ligaments and bloodvessels and muscles and tendons have such a *visceral* look.

I won't say to my surprise, but certainly to my rapidly accumulating dismay — for how were we going *to get out*? — this newcomer soon revealed himself as another of these fleshless mockeries of mortality, and one too in whose face the nerves were working so furiously that they resembled the quivering reflections thrown up upon the tree-roots of a river's bank by some trouble in the flowing waters. And as I looked at the two of them — for they were greeting each other now and talking together in the mute language of this place — I realized that there was a very strong resemblance between the shapes taken by these anatomical nerve-ganglia as they jerked and danced in these two repulsive countenances.

As I think of it now, knowing to what lengths my obsession for Morwyn was destined to carry me, I feel as if it were strange that I should have examined so coldbloodedly and in her very presence the flickering motions of this obscene nerve-dance. I can only say in excuse that the electric shock of our descent had not only taken away my normal fear of the supernatural, but had so increased my powers of perception that it was almost impossible not to make use of them! I know you have always regarded me as the most inobservant of men; but I assure you that a far more absent-minded person than I am would have stared in amazement at these unhappy wraiths.

I am very loath to confess it, but I must have felt something like a morbid fascination in these jumping nerves; for I remember I looked down to see if their bodies were as transparent as their faces. I discovered quickly enough that they were; but that the clothes they wore, although insubstantial to the touch, retained that visual opacity which the phantom-flesh they covered had lost.

The stranger who was now eagerly — though without an audible word — conversing with the "second."

Mr. — was attired in a dark-coloured habit of antique cut, and had the cast of face and the general air and demeanour of one of those austere figures that you see in the background of so many of the old paintings of Spanish masters. Morwyn seemed at first as bewildered as I was during the impassioned interview between Mr.— 's wraith and this grave shadow, but ere long they both turned towards her and I could see by her face that they were informing her of the absolute necessity of some course of action that was extremely distasteful to her.

The “second” Mr. — seemed impatient to get the affair — whatever it was — well over, so that he might be free to do something or go somewhere, the mere expectation of which threw him into a paroxysm of nervous excitement. It was clear to me that the impatience with which he was convulsed was entirely shared by the individual in black, though *his* nervous tension was more under control.

The “second” Mr. — kept shrugging his shoulders and making peevish gestures with his hands, as much as to say: “It’s nothing to me as long as we get it over.”

All this while Black Peter, who had now become too frightened to bark, crouched pitifully at my feet, and every now and then I could catch from him a faint, miserable whimper, very different from the tragic moans with which he uttered his love-yearnings.

At last I was forced to recognize that, between the appeals of the two of them, the pair of shadows had persuaded Morwyn that what they wanted done *had* to be done, for she turned to the poor distorted body on the ground, and stooping down began closing its eyes and mouth as well as she could, and brushing the dirt from its clothes. I was touched by seeing her trying to fold its hands in reverent Christian fashion, though one of them had evidently been injured in some way.

When she had done all this, and I didn’t dare to help her, for it is never good to meddle with women when they are ministering at a birth or at a death, I saw her pick a small weed that was growing amid the mass that had descended with us from the upper world and thrust its stalk between the dead man’s fingers. Then she sank on her knees and gave full vent to her grief, letting her tears rain down upon Mr.— ‘s bruised hand and disfigured face, and as I watched her I could not prevent the thought crossing my mind what a wonderful power women have of lavishing their tears, just as they do their smiles, with an infallible instinct for the permissible, the natural, the appropriate! I don't mean that they feel less than we do, but the pulse of existence in them is so close to nature that their most tragic sorrows have the rhythmic appropriateness of the motions of the salt sea; and yet at the same time the normal course of their life flows on — and must flow on, for all depends upon it, independently of these violent crises.

The Spanish stranger was, all this while, communicating something to the other; and I confess it bothered me a little to note on the phantasmal clothes of the "second" Mr. — those very same blood-marks and dirt-marks which had been just removed from his body; but the news he was now receiving clearly afforded him the most intense excitement. It was impossible to misunderstand the spasmodic quiverings and twitchings that appeared in both these two transparent countenances, and I remember wondering to myself, what topic it could be that set their nerves dancing to such a tune.

Morwyn, however, was on her feet now and was asking me to do something. For some reason, perhaps because I had always thought her voice was the most characteristic thing about her, for though gentle and low it had an odd huskiness in it and a thin roughness like the sound of an elfin nut-grater, I felt sad when I found that neither of us could utter our normal speech in this place. The girl was much quicker than I in adapting herself to this mute tongue. At first I experienced difficulty in following her; and I have no doubt even she spoke the new tongue somewhat awkwardly, but after a little practice I found I could catch her meaning.

She explained to me, hesitatingly, but, as she went on, with increasing fluency, that I must help her bury her father. Of course I obeyed at once but none of the appalling events that happened later have blotted from my mind the vivid memory of what followed then. We had nothing to work with but our hands; and how we would have managed to cover the body at all if this heathery island hadn't descended with us, I can make no guess.

As far as the eye could see in every direction the floor of the great level plain was composed entirely of grey stone, and of stone so smooth that it looked artificial just as if it had been the floor of some incredibly vast cathedral. You must remember that Morwyn and I knew, in the ordinary normal human sense, practically nothing of each other. Had we been open lovers, had we even been acquaintances of the same age, we would doubtless have been thrown intimately together in this unique crisis; but to her I must have seemed a mysterious old man, and no doubt, if she read my feelings as I read hers, a very wicked old man, and the mere fact that she found herself in love with such an ancient devil probably made her morbidly shy of me, shy of me with the peculiar shyness of a young girl in the presence of her fate.

You can believe, my son, not of course from any experience of such feelings, for I am sure you and all your young friends treat sex so lightly and scientific exploration so seriously that down here in hell your interest in such novel surroundings would have absorbed you completely, but from what I've already told you of myself, that it was a wonderful benediction to me to be allowed to accomplish this difficult task: grubbing at the heather roots with my fingers, and little by little covering the body of the Vivisector with sweet-smelling, dark-coloured earth. I suppose I shall be drifting into what to you must be the veriest dotage when I say that I've always derived an extreme sensual pleasure from watching women gardening! Is it perhaps this going back to the customs of our remote ancestors, or do you suppose — you may skip this psychological problem if it offends you — that it is the charming postures that their flexible bodies assume while engaged in this occupation that fascinate me so much; or is it conceivable that a young girl’s contact with the earth adds a bloom, a glow, a malleable and pliable sweetness to her whole being which is only attained in this historic manner?

You must remember, my son, and I have not attempted to conceal it from you, that my infatuation was anything but a pure and ideal love. It was a most satyrish and ungodly desire. But at the same time it certainly could not be called an easy-going self-indulgence. It was very different from anything of that kind. If you have ever seen the expression upon the satyr’s face in Titian’s wonderful “Antiope” you will understand me when I say there was an abandoned intensity in it that amounted to the tragic.

Well, we finished our job at last; and there lay Mr. —, deep-embedded in a mass of wholesome earth and familiar leaf-mould on the adamantine floor of this weird cathedral of Dis! I confess — though apparently Morwyn didn’t share my feeling — to a definite dread of turning round when our job was done. If I distrusted the look of Mr.— ‘s wraith, I distrusted still more the physiognomy of the personage in the dress of Old Spain.

Indeed I would have been incredibly relieved if I’d found on turning my head that both these transparent phantoms in solid-looking clothes had vanished away forever! That opacity in their clothing especially bothered me. It was that that made the transparency of their faces so villainously noticeable; and I was teased by the extremely uncomfortable feeling that just beneath those smug clothes were all the organs of our poor human frame, pumping and jumping, burning and yearning; betraying without being able to help it those physiological accompaniments to the mind’s activity the sight of which, if all men were as these were, would make hypocrisy ridiculous and decency a figure of speech.

As I made one excuse after another, even going so far as to pretend to be muttering prayers, so as to prolong the girl’s interest in Mr.— ‘s burial, the idea, I remember, rushed into my head how ironical it was that such contemptibly inanimate things as clothes — and so many of them underclothes — should be privileged to retain their opacity, if not their tangibility, while human flesh became thin as air!

But our preoccupation with the burial of the vivisector’s body was now violently interrupted by his agitated spirit; and it was my destiny to be present at a scene so painful that my whole nature shies off from the thought of it; and it is with difficulty that I can bring myself to record it.

I suppose it was natural she should understand him better than I, since they were of the same blood, but when I saw this great transparent head, with its nerves working so repulsively, thrust — the fellow was a short, toad-like man anyhow and in death he was even less prepossessing — so close to Morwyn’s tragic little face, and a passionate struggle going on between them of which I could only follow intermittent snatches, I suffered the miserable pang of feeling a complete outsider. I could see she was being driven to accept as final whatever this damned spirit was saying. I could see, too, that it was all so distressing to her that she would willingly have turned away from that convulsively-working visage and flung herself down in hysterical weeping upon the wretched mound we had made for his body.

But not being able to catch more than fragments of what they were saying to each other I was flung cruelly back on myself, and though I shirked doing so as you would shirk looking at the carcass of a sheep suspended from an iron hook in a butcher’s shop, I did glance at the stately gentleman in the garb of old Spain, and I noticed that he was hanging in quivering intensity upon every word they uttered.

Finally that horrible squat shadow left her, and at once conveyed his disgusting triumph to his fellow-demon. It was then that I decided, when I saw the two of them together, that though the Spaniard was the wickeder, my fellow-countryman was by far the meaner.

The queer part of it was that at the very moment when Morwyn yielded and these two "abominations of desolation" exchanged their repulsive glee, Black Peter leapt towards them barking furiously. Oh how comforting, how restoring, sounded that honest voice in my ears! But what a humiliation it was to my race's bewitched pride that just as the vilest rags in this Underworld turned out to be more resistant than our sacrosanct human flesh, so where our human speech, that venerable, that holy, that unique invention of humanity, was reduced to silence, a dog's barking echoed through all the corridors of Hell.

How pleased I was to see the way these wretched phantoms retreated, squeaking and gibbering, from before this honest, and reassuring sound! But I can tell you I didn't relish the look that crossed their exposed faces as they drew back — a look that seemed to be saying to Black Peter, "you wait, you wait — you *only* wait!" In fact I hurried after him then, and dragged him away by the collar. What happened after that comes back to me with hideous clarity. The Spaniard, in the mute language of this country, the A.B.C. of which I was now rapidly acquiring, was impatiently imploring the vivisector to leave his daughter and set out with him alone to what the Bible would have called "their own place."

Morwyn had evidently done her utmost to keep her father's spirit by her side. I could see she distrusted the look of this stranger as much as I did; and I could see, too, that even now, though her arguments had proved of no avail, she couldn't believe herself at the end of her resources.

Nor, as it turned out, *was* she. But I certainly thought she was; and my feeling that her defeat was inevitable, and that nothing could hinder her separation from her father was not altogether displeasing to me. If I could have kept this repulsive wraith from deserting her I should have been forced to do so. For at a crisis my obsession seemed indistinguishable from the purest love. But since this was beyond my power, I confess to you that the thought of being left alone with her, even in this place, was a blessed thought. Oh, how queerly and unexpectedly our nature reacts under the pressure of any weird concatenation of events! While Morwyn was clinging to her damned phantom — and I could see, and it was no joke to set eyes on such a thing, how, as she tried to embrace him, her arms returned to her own bosom as if through the body of a hideous cloud — and while Black Peter was cringing at my feet after his fit of barking, I suddenly experienced a terrible panic at our appalling situation. I looked up and down, staring at the place with the desperation of a trapped animal; while the thought came to me: "Surely our local authorities, up there, must have realized what's happened, and be sending down search-parties to look for us!" I remember now the sick dismay that the thought brought me: "Suppose the huge hole into the earth, down which we were carried, *has closed up again*?" This, as I found out later, was precisely what *had* happened, but at that moment it seemed a possibility too awful to contemplate.

It was while I was staring in this sudden panic round every quarter of our horizon — for the roof, or sky, of this subterranean land offered no gleam of hope, though there appeared now to be a multitude of thin wisps of vapour rushing pell-mell across it, as if driven by a wind that we could not feel down here — that I suddenly became conscious that another stranger was rapidly approaching us. As one tends automatically to do, when one has seen what others haven't seen, I rushed at once to Morwyn and indicated the approach of this new apparition. Our two phantoms promptly made as though they were going to meet the newcomer, but when they saw the extreme distress into which this move of theirs threw the girl they were civil enough to forbear. So before anything else happened this other spirit of the abyss, who came much faster than the Spaniard, was actually with us; and most curious it was to note the greeting which passed between these two *habitués.* This one had a cast of features far less sinister to me than the Spaniard's, but not less so, apparently, to Black Peter, who became too terrified even to bark, but began whining in a low, pitiful key that I confess sent a shiver through my veins. Morwyn, too, was grievously upset by this new Presence. The shock seemed as bad to her as to Black Peter. In fact I believe it was the thought of this newcomer's arrival that gave her the desperate courage to do what she did. I knew at once to what country and to what epoch *this* phantom belonged! He was a Frenchman of the end of the eighteenth century. Oh! and how his politeness to myself disgusted me, and how his attitude towards my girl filled me with fury!

Except for the fact that whenever his head was bent down between her and myself, as he made his seductive speeches, I could see Morwyn's darling figure *through his elongated skull,* I think I would have forgotten myself and struck him as he bowed and scraped!

As it was, I had the questionable satisfaction of learning his identity and the Spaniard's too, from their first greetings to each other; and I must own that my recent panic at being lost in the bowels of the earth came back not a little when I found that my present companions were respectively the infamous Torquemada and the hardly less infamous Marquis of Sade!

"It'll be coming in a minute. You'll be wise to cast yourselves on the earth."

These startling words were addressed to us simultaneously by both Frenchman and Spaniard, and coming so close upon my discovery of their identities they disturbed me not a little. Indeed they disturbed me so much that I felt an unworthy impulse in the pit of my stomach to behave like Black Peter, and crouch down then and there and give up all resistance to fate.

What would be “coming in a minute”?

I gazed wildly about us; but I was surprised to notice that Morwyn’s reception of this mysterious news was directly opposite to mine. For one thing I am sure she’d never heard of the Marquis of Sade; and though she *may* have heard of Torquemada her ideas about the Grand Inquisitor were probably even more popular than my own; and mine, I confess, were largely drawn from the imaginative tale composed by Ivan Karamazov in the novel!

But at the word of the two phantoms: “It’ll be coming in a minute,” a sudden inspiration seemed to seize the girl and she ran hurriedly to my side. “Pick him up,” she cried in the mute speech of the place. “It’s what they travel on that’s coming! I’m going with Father, and you’re coming with me! Pick him up quick; for we—”

I only just had time to obey her and to snatch up Black Peter when “What they travel on” came whirling down on us.

It was no ordinary vessel of air or land; nor was it simply a hurricane of wind. What it really was was an element quite peculiar to this region, an element that had the characteristic of gathering itself together in whirlpools of motion whose revolutions were so rapid that in whatever direction they moved they thickened out the air till it congealed into a subsistence as solid as snow. This element, unlike our electric thunderstorms, obeyed, as the planets and stars do with us, certain fixed gravitational laws. To it, in its periodic movements, were due the alternations of light down here, light that was never stronger than our twilight, but never weaker, *for they had no night here,* than our earliest dawns, light that resembled the fading luminousness of our longest summer days.

But in addition to supplying the inhabitants of Hell with light, this subterraqueous element also supplied them with facilities for extremely rapid travel; and this it did by reason of its power of congealing the air into what resembled moving islands. These islands were of a substance solid as drifts of snow but of a dusky colour, and in many cases almost completely black.

It was their texture, however, that made it possible to use them as vessels of transit; for they were softer than the softest velvet and as yielding as swan's-down. The typhoon-like wind that surged in eddies round the prows of these voyaging islands of black snow was wont to catch up such of the light-bodied people of the place as were in its way, and swing them up on the body of one vessel, where, for all the shock of its typhoon-like speed, they sank down luxuriously, as if upon the up-piled feathers of millions of black swans. For the first time since the cosmogonic accident that brought about our descent, and indeed for the first time in our whole acquaintance, I was now in close physical contact with Morwyn. It was she who seized me, not I her, for as the thing struck us it had been all I could do to pluck up Black Peter from where he crouched, and hug him against my stomach. She clinging to me then, and I clinging to Black Peter, we were lifted bodily off our feet, and tossed, like dead leaves, into the air. But we were flung with incredible precision; and before I had time to feel any conscious spasm of terror, we sank straight into the centre of this rushing airship of black snow!

Here for a moment I *did* have time to think, and what I thought caused Black Peter to utter a cry of distress, so tightly did I squeeze him. I thought we should all three sink clean through the downy substance of this Devil's Swan and be precipitated upon that adamantine pavement below, where our bones must inevitably have been broken to bits.

But the faster we were carried along, the more securely was this soft bed congealed beneath us; and, as it turned out, it was fortunate for me that our living weight did make us sink so low, for to my inexpressible comfort we were separated a little from Morwyn's father and his sinister companions.

Little had I thought, when I woke up that morning to my accustomed habit of reading a page or two of the eleventh book of the Odyssey, where the great wayfarer encounters the weary nations of the dead, that before the day was over — *our* day, that is, under the sweet light of the sun — I should be holding Morwyn in my arms as we voyaged, and upon no earthly wind, through that very same kingdom of the Shades!

Yes, I was holding her, holding her pressed, oh so closely! against me. Nor do I think it was only my fancy that in that tragic moment she was glad to be held as I was holding her.

The third living member of our group was the one who suffered from this beatific proximity; and if I had not been in such a “Nunc dimittis” mood of reckless rapture I should have been disturbed by the broken yelps of obscure desperation that came from this black canine body as it scrabbled and moaned at my side, so wild to share — only it knew not how! — the ecstasy of our embrace.

You can believe — though I suppose you young cool-heads would have been observing and noting everything — that in this passion of satisfied longing, content to let the whole cosmos go to smash, now that I had known such joy, I scarcely glanced at the monstrous world through which we were travelling! I did however just glance at the sky-roof above our heads from which, every now and then as we rushed along, queer phosphorescent lights kept flashing.

The place was so vast that as we whirled along I received the impression that we were not underground at all, but were travelling over some interminable plain of smooth adamantine rock such as, for some unknown reason, I have always connected with the plains of Upper Tartary. This may be a pure fancy of mine. But whether or not there is such a place as Upper Tartary this dusky roof-sky, with its intermittent radiations of phosphorescent gleaming, made me think of the fantastic theory of a weird American writer, that our familiar star-sprinkled heaven is not composed of space at all but of an unthinkably stupendous *firmament of solid rock,* a sort of astronomical continent, or “main-land” of the upper firmament, whereof the lights that we see glittering above our heads are the artificial evocations. I had brooded so long over this crazy theory that I had grown accustomed, at least in my private thought, to the monstrous idea that we were all moving about beneath a Cyclopean continent of solid substance.

And so though I knew with my reason that this black opacity with its phosphorescent gleams was nothing but the floor of our own earth I kept reverting to the *feeling* that it was “the spacious firmament” of our ordinary experience.

I think it must have been the ecstasy I felt at holding Morwyn like this — isolated from the whole living world except Black Peter — that gave me the feeling I had of being carried through the unfathomable ether rather than through the hollow interior of a metallic ball. I certainly felt so isolated with the girl, in our whirling bed of wind-created swan’s-down, that I got the impression of being the last man alive with the last woman alive, borne aloft on a mountainous sea of inhuman elements, reaching to infinity!

And so far was this sensation from diminishing the sweet madness transporting me, that it heightened and increased it. That there should be in existence at all such a creature as I now held in my arms seemed a miracle beyond miracles — so pliable was she, so yielding, so inexpressibly sweet, and yet so evasive and escaping that I felt as if the mystery of her Being were something that would lead me on forever, lead me on down avenues of pursuit compared with which the immensity of the elements around us was as nothing.

If only Black Peter had stopped “making his moan” and scrabbling feebly against my side I would say that few human entities in the history of the world have been privileged to know the entrancement that I knew then.

I suppose what is called a “good” man, or at least a “decent-minded” man, would have been so disinterested at that moment that he would have thought to himself, “this poor young girl, left friendless by the ghastly death of her father, carried on a weird and unknown wind on a bed of *black snow,* can I possibly feel towards her shameful and unregenerate feelings such as not even Hades itself can paralyse?”

Thus would a “good” man, of my old-fashioned time, have *forced* himself to feel, impelled by his self-respect as a Christian and a Gentleman. “I must get this poor child out of this as soon as possible,” he would have said to himself, calling the disturbing and agitating Being at his side “child” the better to resist temptation!

Such an old-fashioned attitude to the greatest of all problems would not, I know, have been yours, my dear son. You would have been so busy analysing the elements of that place, the black snow, the electric wind, the adamantine floor, the wisps of flying mist against the sky of stone, pondering on the question as to whether your fellow-passengers were subjective visions or objective realities that to be on a bed of the Devil’s own swan’s-down with a young girl, and a girl, too, whose youthful feelings in your favour, had been betrayed by a meteoric illumination, would have been, I do not say a negligible situation, but certainly not a transporting and absolutely absorbing one.

But “transported” is what I was, during those brief moments, though my brain was by no means so drugged with ecstasy that I couldn’t think. On the contrary I thought intensely. I thought as I had never thought before, and I thought on the subject of men and women.

It suddenly came to me as an inspiration — though Goethe hints at something like this in *Faust* — that my desire for Morwyn, for I will steer clear of the obscure word "love," was all the more intoxicating *because it existed for itself alone* and was totally unconnected with any wish for a closer physical union, or with any idea of marriage or of children; and it came into my head to retort to an imaginary antagonist, accusing me of an unhuman deviation from nature, that it may well be that sex-love, divorced from complete union and divorced from any thought of children, is so far from being reprehensible that it is the most potent of all urges in the process of the evolution of a higher race.

The longer I gave myself up to the enchantment of holding Morwyn, the more drastically did my mind obliterate all the traditional ideas of love. "If what I now feel is love," I thought, "love has nothing to do with ordinary affection. It's an impersonal ecstasy. It's the fusion of our soul with the 'eternal feminine' diffused through the entire universe."

Love such as I felt now for Morwyn as I held her like this in our deep snow-bed, is I am sure, the greatest emotion possible to a man. No complete physical union, however harmonious, could equal it.

As I held her my feeling for her diffused itself through the black snow — through the electric air — through the stone sky, until it embraced all the bowels of the earth and all the ether round the earth. The rapture I was deriving from contact with this slender little Being would have been the same if I'd been twice as old as I was and her response much more doubtful. Certainly in my whole experience I had never known anything comparable with it.

It was perhaps because of the speed of our rush through the air that my happiness stretched forth such towering wings and flew so far! I imagined myself embracing Morwyn at the unthinkable heart of the burning sun. But my ecstasy didn't stop there; and I will now tell you a very queer thing.

You know how, before Einstein conceived his mathematical idea of the *circularity* of space, we used to look up at the sky and think in our hearts—"How queer that *that* goes on, world without end, forever and ever!"

Well, from our voyaging bed of black snow my feeling for this girl shot forth like a mystic rocket *till it became* that "forever and ever!" I felt as if that receding space were itself the infinite yielding and the infinite withdrawing of the maiden I held. I remember so well how, as I gazed up at that sky of stone, wavering and flickering with phosphorescent light, I got the feeling that these elements of adamant and mist were in some extraordinary way the actual creation of my desire. I got the feeling that if I stopped holding her and drinking up her soul that thrice-blessed stone sky, separating us from the human race, would vanish away!

Judging by such power as I had left of calculating the lapse of time we had been about twenty minutes clinging to each other. Our voyaging couch, though resembling snow in its soft texture, produced no feeling of the chill of snow in its temperature as we lay embedded in it, and I was thinking to myself that I would like this to go on forever and be for us a kind of eternal living death, when I became aware that my companion was responding — in that mute language of the place that was so much more difficult to me than to her — to some meddling voice descending to us from above our deep-sunken refuge.

The dialogue that followed between my girl and this damned intruder — I knew at once it was the voice of the accurst spirit who has given his name to the sensuality of cruelty — remains word for word in my memory just because it was such a torture to me to have Morwyn's mind distracted from our trance-like union.

“Your father and our Spanish friend,” the Frenchman was saying, “seem to understand each other perfectly. I confess I’ve never been able myself to rise to such noble heights. Our Marshal of France down here, who was, as you know, the original of Bluebeard, justified *his* cruelties by declaring that it was by such black magic that he wished to prolong his life. If you will allow me to say so, young lady, I think wickedness as frank as that is more honest than the line taken by your father and his friend up there. Your father says he tortures animals to prolong the lives of women and children, and our Spanish friend is delighted with this sentimental excuse for causing extreme pain. *He* says he does it in order that the souls of his victims may go to Heaven. But don’t you think, young lady, that it’s more satisfactory, from an æsthetic point of view, to be quite frank in these things? To me the voluptuous delight of causing the weak to suffer *is an end in itself.* I took the risk of being damned for it, and I *am* damned for it; though I confess I never anticipated the sort of damnation it would be. But your father, young lady, and this Spanish kindred-spirit of his, really believed they were fooling the System-of-Things. Yes, they fancied, good simple souls, that as long as they could delude themselves into even a half-belief that people could be made to live longer by the torment of dogs, or that souls could be saved by the torment of human bodies, the System-of-Things would swallow so noble a subterfuge and they would escape damnation! But you can’t fool the System-of-Things. I’m a realistic Frenchman and I’ve always known *that.* I’ve never felt the least envy of the exalted excuses our churchmen and statesmen make, when they use torture in their prisons and plunge whole nations into the anguish of war.

“The pain suffered by *my* victims, I’ve always frankly admitted, was suffered purely and solely for my own voluptuous delight. Of course I know very well that *among themselves* many vivisectors laugh at the public

Conscience, over the eyes of which they have so successfully pulled wool; but I believe a great many of them — and your lamented father among them — keep their gravity and composure unruffled as they order their straps and racks ‘for the prolonging of human life,’ just as our Spanish friend did when he ordered some special kind of fuel for his religious purpose.”

Morwyn must have been made so indignant by the Frenchman’s words that she was reduced to silence; so I had to take the liberty of joining in the conversation. In order to give it a less personal twist I inquired of Monsieur the Marquis if the beating of slaves and the historic cruelties inflicted on Jews and Africans came under the same damnation as the torture of the Inquisition. I expect my blundering use of the mute language of the place led to a misunderstanding just here; for the Frenchman replied in that tone of exaggerated politeness which is a sign of suppressed irritation, that though he himself had never had an opportunity to derive voluptuous joy from watching the punishment of Jews and Africans, he had frequently contemplated with extreme delight the vivisection of dogs for scientific purposes.

“Do you consider, then, Monsieur,” I asked him, while with my free hand — for I had been compelled to release Morwyn — I stroked Black Peter, “that according to the law of the Universe it is as wrong to torture for the sake of scientific knowledge as for the sake of political power?”

I shifted my position a little as I stammered out this question, so as to see the Frenchman’s face; but no sooner had I seen it than I wished heartily I had been content with the sound of his voice, for I detected that beneath his courtly speech he was gloating with horrible intensity over the pain that this argument was causing Morwyn.

“Not a doubt of it!” he replied eagerly. “The System-of-Things, having once thrown its weight into the evolution of pity and sympathy, regards *all* cruelty as wrong. Our Spanish friend up there excuses it for religion's sake. Our respected Mr. — justifies it — this young lady will bear me out! — for the sake of Science. For my own part" — and he said this with the utmost moral unction— "I never used these grand excuses. I pursued cruelty purely because of the sensual pleasure it gave me. Of course most human beings love cruelty in some form. It's the Old Adam in us, which the System-of-Things, since it started Evolution, has resolved — as my Communist friends would say — to 'liquidate.' In every laboratory, under the excuse of the pursuit of knowledge, a great deal of sadism is practised. I know what I'm talking about, because by the law of the System-of-Things my whole life down here is spent in the pursuit of my vice; and by a system of television we have access to every vivisection-place in the civilized world. But I can assure you, Monsieur" — here I restrained myself with the utmost difficulty, for I could see by his face he was in a state of voluptuous excitement, and I knew well it was because his words were so distressing to Morwyn— "yes, on my honour as a gentleman, I can assure you I have got far more pleasure from the cruelties practised by scientists to-day than from anything I did during my own life."

"How can that be, Monsieur?" I inquired.

"The reason is simple," said the Marquis of Sade. "With *us* there is a certain residuum of conscience left, that even in the whirlwind of our tempestuous joy holds us back. But your pure scientific investigator stops at nothing. He has no more conscience about the feelings of his animals than have the straps and appliances that he uses to hold them. As I say, I know what I'm talking about, because by far the largest part of my life down here is spent at our television-screens, where all modern laboratory experiments are reproduced. I confess there are a few of my companions — and there are millions and millions of us in this place — who require more lively victims than dogs, who of course are usually muzzled so that their anguish shall not go beyond the walls. These do have a tendency to desert our scientific picture-shows in order to enjoy the spectacle of Jews and Africans being suppressed; but my own experience is that they very soon come back to Science. Africans have such extraordinary powers of silent endurance, and Jews are so pointed in their retorts, that I'm sure the wiser course is to choose the laboratories.

"I may tell you in confidence that our Spanish friend up there never leaves the laboratory-screens; and the ones he especially frequents are the ones where there are no students of *my* kidney at all, but many of the type who think, as our French Bluebeard himself thought at the beginning of his career, that for the prolongation of human life it is well worth it to become a professional torturer.

"Personally I always found life so evenly balanced between the agreeable and the disagreeable that it is hard for me to understand the desperate importance of prolonging it, especially at the risk of meddling with this new evolutionary mania in favour of pity and sympathy which the System-of-Things has developed. So hard do I find it to understand this desire for longevity that I am tempted to think — though I am afraid such an opinion will be painful to our young lady here — that most vivisectors only use it as a pious sentiment wherewith to soothe or to scare an over-awed public, while their real motive, all the while, is just pure scientific virtuosity."

I remained silent at this point, hoping that he would leave us in peace, but when I realized that if I didn't intercept him he would be talking to Morwyn, who I knew was shuddering with repulsion, I hoisted myself up a little in our voyaging bed, so as to get between him and her, and went on with my blundering questions in this damned wordless language of theirs.

“Has this implacable System-of-Things of which you speak, Monsieur,” I said, “condemned military torturers in the same wholesale fashion as those, who, like poor Mr. —, torture animals out of scientific curiosity or with the idea of prolonging human life?”

My abrupt question seemed to disturb the Marquis of Sade; for the nerves of his exposed face underwent a series of revolting spasms. In the deep irritation I felt at having to separate myself from Morwyn I spent the moments while he was pondering how to reply in clutching handfuls of the black stuff that composed our couch and allowing it to slide through my fingers. It was not a bit chillier than ordinary sea-sand would have been, but its texture was certainly exactly like that of snow.

Black Peter’s devotion to me was now strikingly displayed, for instead of remaining where I had left him by Morwyn’s side, in the place which our recumbent bodies as we clasped each other, had hollowed out and made so warm and snug, he scrambled up to my side, and as I played with the black snow I felt his cold nose pressed against the palm of my hand.

“No, Monsieur le Capitaine,” began the agitated nobleman, for her father must have told him I’d retired from the army, “no, I’m afraid I can’t say that military tormentors are as numerous here as people with my peculiarity or people with Mr.’s or with Torquemada’s.”

“But surely,” I cried, “to cause abominable pain for the sake of power is worse than doing it as the vivisectors do for curiosity or to prolong the lives of their dear ones?”

The Frenchman gave me a look so penetrating and so quizzical that I felt myself blushing.

“He knows,” I thought, “that I introduced that old tag about ‘our dear ones’ to please Morwyn.”

"The best scientists of my time," he said with a smile, "used to tell me that the physical constitution of men and animals are so different that it's pure waste of time to torment either of them for the benefit of the other. No, no, *mon cher Capitaine,* since I'm already damned there is no reason why I should not amuse myself by speaking the exact truth. Political and military cruelties, devilish as they are, can never be as bad as religious or scientific ones. In political cruelties you have an open materialistic struggle for gross power — a brutal, barbarous, and ill-bred business — but not nearly so mental or subtle, and therefore *not half so damnable,* as what we become when we torture human bodies to save human souls or to prolong, as our crafty apologists say, 'the lives of our dear ones.'"

"But you said just now," I cried eagerly, knowing how hurt Morwyn would be to see her civilized parent put on a lower level than Ghengis Khan or Attila, "that there were many television-screens down here recording cruelties to Jews and Negroes of unspeakable horror."

The Marquis of Sade shrugged his shoulders. "My brave Captain," he said, "one of the most marked characteristics of Hell is the omniscient knowledge of Matter we all possess. Down here we already know *all there is to be known.* I mean all that can be known by scientific methods. We know every aspect and phase of electronic energy and force and motion. We know every possible chemical combination. In biology I confess we are not quite so enlightened. Of the mind we know little; and of what is called the spirit nothing at all. You protested in surprise, my gallant Captain, because the System-of-Things decrees that the vivisection of animals for scientific curiosity or for human longevity is as abominable a crime as those committed by our French Bluebeard in the days of Joan of Arc, or as those of the Holy Office, and it struck you as amazing that to this same System-of-Things, bent so obstinately upon pity and sympathy, the huge slaughters and stupendous desolations caused by the lust for political power should be regarded as less wicked.

"Now I can't take on myself to explain what the System-of-Things is up to in its new evolutionary trend, or how, out of the bosom of Nature, so unnatural a tendency ever came to appear. I will content myself with reminding you" — here the phantom's countenance was convulsed with a hideous leer— "that we extreme individualists, not to use any less polite word, are constantly being so pricked in our consciences by this accursed tendency to pity and sympathy that except when we are intoxicated by our vice our life is made a hell! I say this deliberately, Monsieur, for to tell you the honest truth, though our real hell down here isn't very nice, I believe I suffer less in it than I did in the world! You see I'm not tormented any longer by the possibility of not doing what I like. Here I do forever exactly what I like. It's amusing, isn't it, Captain?

"When I was alive I was always being tormented by the power of choice. It was my free-will that was the devil! No wonder I joined a school of sturdy thinkers who denied the existence of free-will. But between ourselves, *mon vieux,* I never really believed in the logical arguments we were accustomed to use. Secretly I knew that though I couldn't help being a sadist I could *very well* help putting my sadism into practice; and easier still help writing about it! Here, as far as I know, I am condemned to do exactly what I like for ever and ever; and let me tell you, Captain! it's a fate that doesn't bear thinking on."

"What *do* you do?" I asked rather unsympathetically; but it was becoming more and more clear to me that unless we reached our destination soon Morwyn would have hysterics. I felt as if I could already hear her wild screams ascending to that adamantine sky.

The Marquis of Sade gave me one of the ghastliest smiles I have ever seen on any human face. It would have been distressing enough if his wraith's countenance hadn't been so horribly transparent. But as it was —!

"I suffer, as you see, Captain," he said, "in trying to answer your question; for my choice does seem an unaristocratic choice. But the truth is, though I hate to confess it, I always come back to vivisection. Those Negroes die so quickly! I often think they die of pure terror when one of those Southern mobs is only beginning to get to work. And, as I always say, the Jews are so used to it, that they've learnt how to suffer so as to get the least pain! It must be some protective organism they've evolved. No! I always come back to vivisection; especially the vivisection of dogs. But I don't confine myself, as our Spanish friend does, to the laboratories of those who gull the public by their sentimental talk about the longevity of 'our dear ones.' The laboratories I prefer are the ordinary ones, the common ones, those that exist everywhere in our civilized world, where the pure unadulterated love of science has a free fling! You see, Captain, people aren't torturing Jews and Negroes *all* the time; but there's never a second when in some laboratory somewhere—"

A desperate movement of Morwyn's arms — she must have suddenly tossed them above her head like a drowning creature — broke off short the Frenchman's words.

"I think," he murmured, "Monsieur had better look after the young lady. Women are all so *nevreuse*; but our young friend down there seems *une grande nevreuse.*"

It proved anything but easy to soothe my darling, and no wonder! It had probably never happened before to a young girl "to go down alive into the pit," and I suppose the chance is small that another falling star, like the one that carried us down here, will strike the earth again till the final catastrophe.

The annoying thing was that she wouldn't let me take her in my arms any more because of this accursed Frenchman; for instead of retreating to what might be called the "upper deck" of our electric ship what must the voluble wretch do but continue to hover over us, displaying an interest that was extremely disconcerting in my blundering attempts to comfort her.

In the end — worn out with all she had undergone — she sank down inert and motionless in her bed of black snow and fell asleep.

I can't tell you how relieved I was when this happened, for I had been fearful, ever since I returned to consciousness after our first descent, lest she should have a complete hysterical collapse, or even lose her wits, under all these shocks.

As soon as I recognized that she was really asleep I thought to myself: "I'll take her in my arms again now." But I had only to make the faintest move in her direction to recognize that the Frenchman's interest instantaneously doubled.

I am sure she knew in her sleep that this sinister Being had not left us; for every now and then her arms would give a spasmodic jerk and her fingers would open and close.

It was my awareness of this and my intense desire to distract the Frenchman, that led me once more to force him to talk. I began pestering him with questions; and the more I grew aware of the effort he was making to keep his eyes upon the sleeping girl, even while he was replying, the more drastic and importunate my questions became.

"Do you really mean to tell me, Monsieur," I said, "that what you are pleased to call the System-of-Things concerns itself enough with our human affairs to bother about punishing us when we're dead?"

He still kept his horrible transparent visage turned towards Morwyn and as he watched her I could see the facial nerves under his glass-like skin vibrating like crowds of small electrified worms dancing on their tails; but this did not prevent him from replying to my question with the utmost calm.

"Pardon me for saying so, Captain," he remarked quietly, "but you use very naïve and somewhat barbaric expressions. Is the System-of-Things human that it should behave like a man? No, no, *mon cher*, its ways are completely non-human. When I told you just now that its evolutionary trend towards pity and sympathy made the peculiarities of our friends up there into something more evil than the slaughters of Attila, I didn't imply that it invented this Hades where we are or that it invented our appalling fate in it. Shall I tell you, *mon Capitaine, who* invented this place and all that occurs therein?"

"I wish you would, *Monsieur le Marquis*," I said, "for I confess I've hitherto held it against the Emperor of the Universe that he should have designed a torture-chamber for the criminals he himself created when he gave people like us free-will."

"*We* invented it!" cried the Marquis of Sade in a terrifying voice — and this time he turned his head clear round towards me. "*We* invented it. This place and what goes on here is the patient creation, little by little, of all the sadists who've ever lived! It has taken us a long time to make this place as we wanted it. There was an Elysium here in Homer's time. Huge fields of bog-asphodel used to grow here then. Even in Dante's time it still had patches of emerald-green grass where philosophers and poets could walk up and down without disturbance.

"It wasn't till Vivisection reached its present point that we could get rid of these archaisms! We have even invented — did you know *that,* Captain? — a new inscription for the entrance to this place. Instead of Dante's

‘Abandon hope,’ the writing on the entrance to our world is, ‘Do as you like.’ Yes, all this is *our* doing. The System-of-Things goes blindly on with its unscientific evolution of pity and sympathy, and it doesn’t bother *us. We* don’t go blindly on! We are scientists and rationalists. Our poison-gases and our explosive shells are nothing to the instruments we’ve invented for causing anguish. What would war be to-day without science? What would our knowledge of the limits of endurance be without science? Oh, my dear Captain, you’ve no idea how our most secret thoughts are carried out in these vivisection-places! ‘To prolong human life.’

‘To discover truth’ — these are the phrases with which the public is gulled. But the sweetest morsel of the devil’s irony of the whole thing is, Captain, that what they do is so horrible to think of, that sensitive people swallow these holy texts in sheer dread, dread of having to bring their mind to bear at all on what goes on.”

“But surely, Monsieur,” I said, nervously keeping my eye on the twilit form of the sleeping girl as we were whirled along in that singular equipage, “surely, *Monsieur le Marquis,* the majority of vivisectors are fanatics of knowledge rather than followers of *your* cult?”

The phantom gave his mouth a twist that caused it to resemble the convolutions of a decapitated worm. Then he bowed politely. “I admit it, Captain,” he said. “But the point is that this fanatical passion for knowledge — and, mark you, many of the greatest authorities hold that the difference between ourselves and the lower animals is so vast that experiments upon the one have absolutely no value in the healing of the other — this *mania* for knowledge, as I might say, is more hardening to the heart, more implacable to pity and sympathy, than what you are pleased to call my ‘cult’—”

“I find it hard to follow you there, Monsieur,” I protested, giving Black Peter a reassuring caress, for I could feel his hind-quarters beginning to shiver as I’ve noticed they always do when the conversation becomes scientific. “Aren’t you dealing a little in that delicate paradoxical wit, for which so many of your brilliant fellow-country-men are renowned, such as Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargue, Fontenelle, and others?”

“Not at all, not at all, Captain,” returned the phantom. “When our cruel lust is momentarily satisfied we become as tender as angels to the victims of it. Whereas the cult of your scientific fanatics allows for no more breathing-spaces, no more lapses, no more interregnums in the crescendo of its ferocity than did our Spanish friend up there. That is why” — and he fixed a look upon Morwyn that caused me a pang of alarm— “he gets on so well with our young lady’s revered—”

He interrupted himself to call my attention with quite a violent gesture to a remarkable change in the subterrestrial scenery through which we were passing. It seemed to me, too, that our speed had changed its character. It was still rapid but was in a curious way different. We seemed to be moving in a series of jerks. But the change in the scenery was striking and for a minute or two as I gazed at the incredible panorama I felt as I fancy you, my son, would have felt in a similar situation. All my emotions were swallowed up in pure wonder and overpowering astonishment.

The stone sky above us had entirely disappeared which made me realize that the floor of our subterranean world had sunk by several miles. It must have been sinking all the time we had been travelling at this terrific speed, and sinking more and more steeply, so that our black-prow’d hollow ship, as Homer would have called it, must have arrived, when our conversation was interrupted, at a point thousands and thousands of feet below the level where our fall had landed us.

And with the disappearance of the stone sky the whole aspect of the place had changed. We were now moving along a narrow gully, between black shining rocks. These rocks that towered above us on both sides, were jagged and broken, and, as far as I could make out, were of a substance considerably darker — though *that,* the devil knows, was dark enough — than the adamantine floor at the bottom of this monstrous world.

It was then that the Frenchman uttered as astonishing expression in that mute language of theirs. “The Magnet!” he screamed, “the Magnet, the Magnet!”

To the end of my days I shall remember the ghastly contortion of this wretched Being’s face while all the nerves behind its transparent surface, shivering up from where they transferred their frantic desire from senses to brain, twisted, twined, gyrated, and, as you might say, *spasm-ed* outwards, in horrid erectness, like the quivering serpents of the Gorgon’s head, till in a silence more terrible than the most frightful sound — the silence of lust drawn out taut and tense to its breaking-point — they became the multiform worm-heads, all spiralling and straining together, of the phantom’s response to what was attracting its deathless corruption.

The intensity of this accursed shadow’s emotion and the wordless moan of its frightful yearning woke Morwyn from her uneasy sleep. It produced, too, a wild fit of barking from Black Peter; and even in the agitation of that moment I could not help being again struck — just as any of you young people might have been — by the interesting objective fact, full of biological chemical, and electronic significance, that that was the only *real sound,* in this whole underground world! There was no sound of wind, or rain, or thunder here. There was no sound produced even by the speed we were travelling through the air. There was no sound from the coal-black rocks on either side of us. There was no sound of water; no sound of fire. It was as if this monstrous continent inside our hollow earth were hermetically sealed to every audible phenomenon save what issued from the throat of a dog. The world through which we were now travelling, between these pitch-black rocks, in a twilight generated by electricity, was a world where the roar of an earthquake and the trickle of a rivulet would have been equal, for both would have been nothing.

But now into the hushed air of this continent of silence it was destined that Black Peter's vigorous voice should uplift itself, asserting its homely protest in the midst of these desolate secrets of the abyss.

While I was quieting Black Peter as well as I could, Morwyn got up from where she lay, and with one hand on the side of our swan-like conveyance and the other — I say it with pride and joy, for it was an instinctive gesture — on my own shoulder, began a rapid exchange of question and answer with the Frenchman as he bent down towards her. I was at first astonished at her boldness; but pondering over it, for I soon gave up all attempt to follow what they were saying, I came to the conclusion that from the moment the man cried out: "The Magnet! The Magnet!" he had come so completely under the control of his main obsession that the voluptuousness with which he had till now enjoyed Morwyn's tragic unhappiness about her father had entirely disappeared; and with that insight into feelings — though not into thoughts; for *they* belong to a level of the soul's life independent of all such meddlings — that we had both got from the meteorite that hurled us down, the girl had recognized this change and now felt no more dread of the fellow than if he had been a wicked aristocrat in the French Revolution on the way to execution.

It was, I am compelled to say, pure jealousy, quite in the style of Black Peter, rather than any nobler emotion that led me, after a while, to interrupt their talk.

I must have interrupted it at the very moment when she was asking him something that had to do with the fate of her father, for in her irritation at my rudeness, she removed her hand from my shoulder. It was about that surprising word he had used when I first saw his agitation that I asked him; but it was Morwyn herself and in a tone of cross impatience who answered my question.

She told me briefly and bluntly that any frantic lust to practise cruelty or to contemplate cruelty, is after death increased to an insatiable mania which is forever being tantalized and maddened by sensual provocations of a kind beyond the most extravagant fancy. This tantalization — and it is really a form of semi-satisfaction — affects them, she explained to me, with the blind pull of an irresistible magnet as soon as they come within a few hundred miles of it; so that, in the conventional slang of the place, the word “magnet” has come to mean the circumference of the invisible pull which Hell’s greatest attraction exerted.

She turned away from me, as soon as she had peevishly explained all this, and resuming her impassioned questioning of the agitated shade above her, apparently forgot my existence.

As for me, all I could do was to take Black Peter on my knee, not without the bitter thought that only in him could I find undeviating devotion. Hugging him closely, though to tell you the truth he detests being in anybody’s lap, I tried to fix my mind on the rocky gorge through which we were travelling. This had considerably narrowed by the time I really began to examine it, and I now became aware that its walls were engraved with colossal carvings, cut in deep relief in the pitch-black stone.

The nature of these carvings would have been a greater shock to me had it not been for Morwyn’s explanation of the Frenchman’s cry. As it was, they were shocking enough. But such is the grossness and brutality of human curiosity that I could not resist staring avidly at each of them as we whirled past. They were monstrous representations of abominable cruelties inflicted by pre-historic animals upon one another; and as we passed one particular surface of jet-black rock in that strange twilight I noticed that the ghostly figure of a man in modern dress was actually working at it, armed with some kind of an electric tool that emitted livid sparks!

We passed this frantic artist and the work on which he was engaged, so quickly that I had no time to take in any details, but I saw enough of what he was doing to get a pretty clear notion as to what it all meant.

And though you, my son, from your "objective" point of view, will probably not agree with me I must confess that my own secret sense of justice was singularly gratified by what — through Morwyn's words — came over me now like a revelation.

A certain number of our modern artists, especially in literature, gratify their sadistic lust through what they invent and describe in their books. The ironical thing is that our moral censors, while condemning fiercely any realistic description of the most natural, harmless, legitimate, and perfectly justifiable sensuality, are too ignorant of psychology *even to recognize* the dangerous sex-nerve in these sadistic writings! I wish, my dear son, that you and your modern friends who take all these erotic peculiarities so lightly — let's hope because none of you know what they are! — would answer me this simple question. Is the writing and reading of sadistic books a good thing, or is it a bad thing? I mean, does it lessen, or does it increase, the temptation to put sadism into practice?

Well! You may answer my question or not as you like; but to me who find human psychology, whether normal or abnormal, the most enthralling study there is, it was not a little illuminating to see those monstrous images carved in that black rock!

And the sight of a modern wraith actually chipping out new ones, with the frantic speed of his diabolical obsession, completed the revelation. Whatever you young people, with your airy touch and your surrealistic fancies may feel about it, the sight of this wretched modern shade, alone in that hell’s gorge, feverishly adding to the number of those monstrous reproductions of sex-ferocity among mammoths and ichthyosauruses sank deep into my mind. The implacable method of the System-of-Things, in its evolution towards pity and sympathy, was revealed to me at that moment with a convincingness that made me tremble; and I could see how it was that the extravagant satyrishness of a rogue like Casanova, just because it is in line with the sex-urge of the cosmos, could never isolate him from all human relations to the degree this wretched ghost had isolated himself with his picture of the death of a young male saurian at the hands of a score of females! I saw too, in a flash of insight that made me squeeze Black Peter till he yelped, that the thoughtless butchery of millions of human beings by tyrants and statesmen and conquerors did not *necessarily* isolate a person’s spirit and set it upon creating for itself an eternity of sadistic satisfaction.

Some of these conquerors were undoubtedly sadists but it was their ambition, their egoism, their greed and pride — not their sadism — that shed all that human blood! It was borne in upon me as a most startling secret of life — as our weird equipage whirled on and that tortured creature in the power of those she-monsters blotted out for some twenty miles of cyclopean art everything else — that this matter of the fate of the soul after death is purely individual, not depending so much on the scale of its atrocities as on the degree to which this particular sex-nerve has vampirized the whole life of the soul.

My reflections were now tossed to the winds by the simultaneous occurrence of so many agitating events that I felt reduced to the level of a lump of quick-silver, broken up into a thousand globes of alertness, each rushing wildly in a separate direction.

In the first place, our singular vehicle began very perceptibly to decrease its speed. And instead of those huge, dark-sweltering, twisted shapes of antediluvian lust, what covered the rocks new were enormous mirrors of a slimy whitish-yellow colour, a colour resembling that of the swollen eyes of certain kinds of fish when they have been long dead.

Vast crowds of agitated shadows were pressing against each other, jostling, squirming, struggling, to get near these repulsive-looking mirrors, the appearance of which — it must have been that sickly yellowish-whiteness — made me think of the fermented gastric juices that Black Peter would sometimes vomit up from an empty stomach.

Though our equipage was moving quite slowly now, and it must have looked — from where those wretched spirits were struggling — rather like a shapeless mass of black foam carried down a stream — I could see enough of the living pictures on those pallid expanses to realize that they were all reproducing, by some new process of television, things that were going on at that very moment on the surface of the earth.

I have spoken of these extraordinary picture-screens as mirrors; and indeed *that* and nothing less was the effect they produced on me as I caught glimpses of what was being revealed in them. This was nothing less than a direct reproduction of all the worst Vivisection Laboratories in Europe and America.

I learnt later that certain laboratory work is reproduced down here that has been most carefully concealed from the public. I saw experiments on these screens, undertaken from the purest scientific curiosity, but of a sort that would make anyone, save a frantic scientist or an obsessed sadist unable to eat or sleep till he had got them suppressed.

Long before our conveyance stopped I had been permitted an exceptionally good view of what was going on; a much better view in fact than any I could have had among that swarming multitude of tantalized spirits which heaved and twisted like a seething mass of tadpoles, newly emerged from their natal spawn, or like millions of shining maggots making of themselves a living fountain of corruption.

I was amazed at the immensity of that crowd; and the mingling in it of all the costumes of all the races and epochs since the beginning of history was in itself an overpowering sight.

I would never have supposed that so many sadists could have lived and died on our earth as I saw teeming and tossing in never-ceasing waves about those vivisection pictures! It was curious to me to notice how certain races and certain epochs were so much more addicted to this vice than were others. I didn't, for instance see a single ancient Greek among them, and very few Negroes. Of Chinamen I detected a good many, but of course their outward appearance was more noticeable than that of other races. I was shocked by the number of well-dressed English and Americans I saw there. Of Scandinavians — and I had read so many wild tales of the old Viking depredations that this astonished me — I could not see one.

For myself, I have become so conscious of the extreme susceptibility of pain and terror among animals since I've known Black Peter that I couldn't bring myself to give more than a hasty glance at what all this multitude were watching. The fact that what we saw was actually going on at the moment when we saw it was no doubt a great comfort to the sadistic craving, but it was almost intolerable to me, and as for Black Peter I soon realized that though he was making a ghastly moan under his breath he was far too panic-stricken to do it aloud. I could see he had been seized with a desperate fear lest someone should drag him out of Hell, back to earth, and experiment on him there for the prolongation of human life.

There was one particular mirror or screen that we passed when our voyaging had almost come to a standstill, in which I could see a spectacle of such monstrous cruelty that I shall remember it to the end of my days.

It was a peep-hole into an experimental laboratory that has been kept very carefully from public knowledge, though of course, according to the law, it has had to undergo certain periodic inspections. I will not describe to you, my dear son, what the pictures in question revealed, but what I *can* assure you is that the unhappy wraiths who jostled one another to see it were almost beside themselves with sadistic frenzy and were betraying their emotions shamelessly. As I watched the back of their heads, for our conveyance was scarcely moving at all now, and I could look down upon these swarming shadows just as if I had been sitting in a balcony at the play, the thought crossed my mind that I've never read, in any of these authors who derive such pleasure from describing cruelty, any description of how the face of the sadist himself looks — how *their own* face looks — when they are writing these passages!

I couldn't see *these* people's face but I could see quite clearly the faces of certain students in the horrible scene at which they were gazing; and it would have been a revelation to any great pathologist to note the manner in which the frenzy of scientific curiosity was so delicately mingled — like the colours in "shot" silk or in "lustre" ware — with the subtle undertones of the other mania.

It was the extreme agitation of Black Peter that first brought home to me the fact that our wind-ship had stopped. Morwyn and the Frenchman were still whispering together; while a little further off the shade of

Mr. — and his fanatical Spaniard were engrossed in what seemed to me a passionate recognition of mental affinity.

But our equipage had stopped, and unless we living creatures were prepared to remain in this precious conveyance while it went ferrying backwards and forwards through Hell until we perished, the moment had come to disembark. The moment had also come to get something to eat and drink! Poor Black Peter, whose wits for all I know may have been quickened as much as Morwyn's and mine by the magnetism of that falling star, was evidently aware of the world-old aura of sickening cruelty that like a miasmic vapour exuded from this vast surging multitude, "thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa," for I've never seen him so cowed.

As a rule his hindquarters and feathery hind-legs would alone shiver, but when I lifted him up and stepped out of that air-ship I discovered that he was shaking like an aspen-leaf from head to foot.

Nor was it much wonder he was, considering that all the lost souls of cruelty, whether sadistic or religious or political, from the beginning of the world, were gathered here in these valleys, like the sands of the sea for multitude, to enjoy the spectacle of vivisection! Anxiously stroking Black Peter, for I was afraid to put him down lest in his insane terror he should bolt God knows where, I stood where we disembarked, dazed and confounded, staring helplessly around me.

Then it was my lot to witness an abominably distressing scene, a scene that even to-day, as with the fountain-pen you gave me I write this word, returns upon me with the most fearful clarity.

I had noticed before we left the air-ship that the Spaniard's face was convulsed with his longing to rush back to those Vivisection Screens. I expect he was afraid lest his favourite one, where the worst cruelties went on *because the scientific interest there was purest,* might be crowded by English and Americans and by obsessed ghosts from Ancient Cathay and Ancient Rome and Ancient China.

But it was now clearly intolerable to him to stay a moment longer and it was equally clear that Mr. —, whose appearance as a spirit exactly reproduced his appearance as a living creature, was just as desperate to depart with him. Together they approached Morwyn and I heard Mr. — say, in that particular tone I know so well, "Oh, of course! If they weren't under an anæsthetic how do you suppose they'd keep—" And I heard the Spaniard interrupt him. "Nonsense, man, you *have* to use straps — and your manufacturers are wonderful in the straps they make! In my time we had only great clumsy chains. It's remarkable how strong heretics grow when they first feel the pinch. No doubt dogs are the same."

They both became silent, for even their obsession couldn't prevent them from noticing the look of horror on Morwyn's face. But she was too upset to remember the silent language and they drowned her stammered outcry—"We *must* be cruel for the sake of human souls, lady!" cried the Inquisitioner.

"We *must* be cruel for the sake of human bodies, girl!" echoed the Vivisector.

"We get knowledge of God when we burn his Image!" cried the Theologian.

"We get knowledge of Nature when we crucify her children!" echoed the Scientist.

With this the two obsessed spirits rushed off together; and it was piteous to see how the girl clutched at the solid-looking clothes of her father only to find them as porous as air. In her final desperate attempt to hold fast what in the nature of things could not be held, the brave creature fell down prostrate upon the ground. Here she remained weeping like a broken-hearted child and I couldn't even get hold of her hand to lift her up.

"You see what they are!" whispered the Marquis of Sade in my ear. "Their fanaticism has fixed its roots so deeply in cruelty, that you can't separate the two things. I understand the phenomenon perfectly! The abstract thought 'The Pursuit of Truth,' and the abstract thought 'The Protection of Truth' no sooner enter their brain than the nerve which I know so well begins quivering like an aspen, and Monseigneur sees heretics in the flames while Monsieur sees dogs strapped down at his mercy.

"And the interesting thing is" — here I could see, though I felt nothing, that our shameless wretch had laid the tip of an aristocratic finger upon my wrist as I stared distracted at the girl on the ground— "that though persons of my peculiar cult have — it's no use denying it — caused a moiety, a quota, a percentage of human anguish, they have been innocent babes compared with these protectors and pursuers of Truth."

I shall never forget the complicated misery of that moment. I longed to kneel down by my darling's side. I longed to stop her tears by assuring her of the purity of Mr.— 's motives. I longed to be able to quote the newspaper accounts of his disappearance; where I am sure there would be no hint of the possibility that according to the inexorable law of the System-of-Things he might be already in Hell. But how could I dare to make the use of these consolations under the sardonic eyes of this particular son of perdition? Why the devil didn't he go away? Was he going to attach himself to us forever?

I shook off his touch as I might have shaken off a mosquito; and being anxious to distract his mind so that my darling might recover herself in peace, I plunged him yet deeper into the metaphysics of retribution.

"I gather from your remarks," I said to him, "that the System-of-Things doesn't concern itself with the amount of suffering a person brings upon others but only with his own private *will to cruelty*?"

The Marquis smiled. "Naturally," he replied, "for if the System-of-Things once began weighing the actual quantity of suffering caused by anyone in the world with a view to distributing punishment, the majority of all who have ever lived would be in hell!

"We shouldn't be able to move down here for the crowd of generals and statesmen. Besides, when it comes to suffering, what about the System-of-Things Itself? I take it that as the ultimate Cause of the universe it can hardly plead not guilty." Here to my dismay I saw that visible-impalpable finger resting once more upon my wrist; and the Marquis spoke in an intense gravity. "No, Monsieur, I tell you it daren't begin making the amount of pain the Test. Besides it would have to consider the negative side of things. Haven't you thought of that? Not only the rich, but all of us who are comfortably off and who know perfectly well that we *could* relieve so many of the poor if we set our minds to it, would become involved in guilt.

"War and economic inequality, my good sir, are matters in which the System-of-Things is as cautious as the Chinese about meddling! There are some famous generals and some famous statesmen down here, I don't deny it, but they are here as the remorseless Defenders or the remorseless Pursuers of 'Truth', not for their public misdeameanours.

"What you don't see and what so many of these vivisectors don't see when they first arrive, and you have no notion what airs they give themselves as they rush off to their television-screens with the idea that they are serving humanity, is that the System-of-Things allows us to do to the limit here what we most enjoyed doing in the world above. *That* really is the only difference between the two worlds. Up there our desires are restricted by the infirmities of our bodies. Here with our insubstantial bodies we have no restriction at all."

"But, sir," I said, for I noticed that Morwyn as so often happens with young people, had cried herself to sleep, and I was afraid lest, if our voices ceased, the blessed oblivion she was enjoying on Hell's pavement would cease too, "but sir, in all the moral codes I've ever heard of, anger and selfishness and greed and falsehood are sins that deserve punishment quite as much as cruelty."

The unhappy nobleman gave me one ghastly look and I shall never forget the gulfs of misery that that look revealed. Then he heaved a deep sigh. "I'm afraid," he remarked, "we Frenchmen are more sceptical than you. I'm afraid we keep too sharp an eye on the people who *benefit* by these moral codes to attribute their origin purely to the creator. It may surprise you to learn it, as an honest Englishman, but I haven't met one single liar, one single thief, one single murderer all the time I've been in Hell. Cruelty seems the only vice that absolutely *requires Hell* in order to indulge itself to the limit! Thieves and liars can evidently ply their trade elsewhere, and of course the energy of murderers is pointless where there's nothing to resist a blow or respond to—"

"But, Monsieur!" I interrupted, forgetting in the pleasure of our philosophical argument where I was and giving Black Peter's leash an unkind jerk. "What about shrewish tongues? What about those adder-bites that make so many honest men's lives a burden to them?" The Marquis de Sade positively tittered. "Pardon me, Monsieur, but really, *vous anglais* — Don't you see, my good sir, that women's tongues can't have the least effect down here? It's the *simplicity* of our pride they hurt. Here we should hardly listen to what they said, so engaging would be the spectacle of the futile anger bubbling up in their transparent breasts."

“Aren’t you afraid, sir,” I craftily suggested, “that some of these scientific experiments that our friends have rushed off so hurriedly to enjoy may be over before you join them?”

The man shrugged his shoulders. “I trust,” he said, “you do not fail to note the difference between me and those earnest-minded gentlemen. In fact the psychological profundity of the way the System-of-Things works couldn’t be better illustrated than in the difference between us. I shall, I daresay, be strolling down presently to the laboratory-screens — and you know there isn’t a laboratory, not the most secret and hidden in the whole world, that we haven’t access to down here — but at present I’m taking a little holiday.” Here he smiled an extraordinary smile. “My desire,” he went on in a low voice; and I was so relieved to see that both Morwyn and Black Peter were now lying peacefully asleep that I wouldn’t have disputed the most monstrous proposition, “my desire suffers lapses and intermissions wherein, as you observe, I become a quite normal person; but this fanatical scientific curiosity, especially when the human conscience is dulled by the ambition of helping humanity, knows no pause nor respite nor interval! These people cling to their strapped animals like limpets, as long as there’s a breath of life in them. Of course they die on their hands sometimes through the very extremity of what is done to them — but it’s wonderful how long they can keep them alive! They give them restoratives; and then go at it again. Oh no! those of us with my little peculiarity, who only do it for its own sake, have a much easier time down here! We have our intermissions, when we forget it all and live like ordinary people — well! like ordinary people in Hell — but there are no intermissions for scientific curiosity. It goes on and on and on, sans cesse. That’s where it’s so like religious fanaticism. I’ll take you presently to the screen where those two are. I know exactly which one our Spaniard will make for, for he told me there's a monkey they're working on there who has a face just like a heretic. It's interesting to see the way that man's mind works. He pretends the animals have souls to save! No doubt our good friend Mr. — disbelieves altogether in the soul or in any other life. When his energies flag, his 'rationalizing,' as you people call it, takes the form of benefiting—" He was interrupted by a deep sigh from the girl on the ground, a sigh that was answered by a pathetic little moan from Black Peter; and both the girl and the dog sat up.

The well-bred Marquis at once pretended to be watching with absorbing interest the departure of the black equipage that had brought us here.

But the girl called him to her side. "Is there *any* way," she asked him, "of getting my father separated from that man?"

De Sade bent his head in deep cogitation. I looked at Morwyn expecting to get at least the flicker of a smile from her; but propping herself on the ground she kept her eyes fixed with passionate hope upon the Frenchman's face.

At length he raised his head. "I can't do anything for you myself," he said, "but I can take you to a person down here who might be able to help you. I don't say he will, ma chère, so I beg you not to excite yourself; but there's no reason why you shouldn't go to him and boldly ask him what you —" He paused and a far-away look came into his face. "He won't do anything for *me*; but I know him and at intervals go to see him. The rules of the System-of-Things aren't often broken but they *have* been broken and will be so again. He *might* be able to help you if I took you to him. I know where he's usually to be found, and it's not so very — The only danger is — For *then* he goes enormous distances! They say he goes to the Elysian Fields; and though many of us doubt if there's such a place as the Elysian Fields, he's certainly the one to have gone there if anybody has gone there!

They tell me he's only a visitor down here like yourselves. But what do I know? At any rate he's a great traveller."

I could see Morwyn's eager face growing more and more illuminated with hope as the man went on; and I confess that the thought sprang up in my own mind: "What if this adventurous Unknown who knows the way to the Elysian Fields also knows *the way to get out*?"

"Does he go these long distances," I asked, "for his own pleasure or to find a way—"

The Marquis interpreted this question in a correct manner. "A way to get out of Hell? Oh, no! He must already know endless ways to do that. What interests *him* are the ways to get in."

"Why, isn't he one of — one of the — Inmates?" I inquired.

"Oh, no, no!" replied the Frenchman. "He represents one of the rare cases when the System-of-Things by some secret necessity of its own nature has to yield to Chance."

"To what did you say, Monsieur?"

"To *Chance,* Captain, to *le Hasard.*"

I was silent. I was even aware of a moral shock. I may not be a good Englishman, but after all I *am* an Englishman and I didn't like to think of there being anything in the System-of-Things that lent itself to such a bagatelle of French coinage as *le Hasard.*

The Marquis did not miss my disapproval. "But, my dear Captain," he threw in, "your own curious descent down here — that surprising meteoric accident—"

But Morwyn, with unusual colour in her cheeks and her eyes shining, implored him to go on and passionately forbade me to interrupt him.

"Our whole country," he continued, not without throwing at me a glance of inscrutable significance, "has been seething with rumours about this

Person, who apparently first came down here in the fifth century of the Christian era. Some say he has found some magical device for evading the Cosmic Machinery."

"What — do — you — mean — by 'evading?'" cried Morwyn, while I thought to myself how strange it was that a silent language could convey the effect of a girl's voice raised to the highest pitch.

"And what do you mean by Cosmic Machinery?" I added to keep him going, for in spite of my dislike of such a Frenchified notion as *le Hasard* brought into Cosmic matters I *was* grateful to the fellow as I looked at Morwyn — grateful and jealous at the same time!

The man looked at us both, smiling a little. Then with what apparently was just natural politeness he answered Morwyn first.

"The Person I'm thinking about who might help us," he said, "and he's the only one I've ever heard of who spends his time in this place apart from *the necessity of his nature,* is an old Welsh Bard called Taliesin. As far as I can gather from the rumours current about him he chooses to live down here from pure imaginative interest. He finds there's more intensity of feeling in our world than in the others; and I understand he's a touchy and self-centred person and too much loving-kindness gets on his nerves. Here, of course, except for a few people of *my* kidney, everybody is too occupied to take any notice of anyone else. We're a lonely set; and that seems to suit this cantankerous old Bard better than paradisaic sociability."

I noticed that Morwyn's face had grown more and more illuminated with excitement as she listened; and now she couldn't contain herself any longer.

"If he goes out when he likes," she cried, "and we made friends with him, he might take father with him!"

Our gentleman bowed gravely. "I'm afraid," he said, "even so great a poet as Taliesin would find it hard to separate an Inquisitor and a Vivisector when once they have met in Hell."

"But what about using force?" I allowed myself to intervene.

Morwyn frowned at this word of mine; but our polite interlocutor did not lift an eyebrow. "Unfortunately," he said, "this erratic Welshman is occupied just now with a wild-goose chase of his own."

"But couldn't he get hold of some — of some strong gangster, some powerful apache, who'd carry Mr. — to that spot — and then — perhaps — we might *all* get out?"

The Marquis's expressive features displayed profound disgust; and he made an instinctive movement that suggested the taking of a pinch of snuff.

"This isn't a Reformatory, Captain," he said. "There are no ruffians of that kind here. We're here because here alone in the Cosmos we can be ourselves without shame. I thought I'd made it plain to you," and his voice became grieved and pained, "that this is an extremely exclusive community. What we come here for is to enjoy in peace a very special peculiarity. Brutality, ruffianism, vulgar violence, don't give people the right to come here. Hell, let me tell you, Captain, is a place more — what do you call it? — more *raffiné* than you seem to realize. *Nom de Dieu!* People don't come here for such crude reasons as war or robbery or murder. Those activities are in line with the ordinary struggle for existence. You won't find a single politician or patriot down here. What do you take us for, Captain? This is a place of real, subtle spiritual evil, evil that *is* evil, not just the commonplace scramble to live. Our motives down here are all unusual, extraordinary, exquisitely remorseless. My own are erotic, of course, erotic with a peculiar twist, I admit, but still erotic, as I could prove to you beautifully if only — while our Spaniard's are religious, and your little lady's respected father's, are of course scientific. In fact let me put it like this and then I'm sure, you, Captain, with your eye of a Chasseur, will see the point. A place where we could make the Hell we needed *had* to be given us by the System-of-Things. It soon found it necessary to allot a geographical location to us, for our influence didn't stop with death. We used to hang about after we died. I've heard that our eccentric visitor Taliesin prophesies a time when in all the countries of the world Scientific and Religious and Erotic cruelty will be confined to one class alone, and *that* the ruling class. This class, he predicts, will carry things so far that there will be a terrific upheaval, led by those who still believe in the System-of-Things' pet scheme. And out of this will emerge a completely new world, that world of mercy and justice, to which it has been aiming from the beginning." He paused, and as I looked at him an expression of despair, that made me feel physically sick, flickered over his face. "That's *Its* peculiarity," he added in a hoarse and horrible tone. "It won't, It won't, It *won't* meddle with our wills!"

"You mean," I said rather heartlessly, "that by leaving such wills as ours free it's just as responsible for our damnation as if It damned us from the start, as the Calvinists believe."

The Marquis of Sade shrugged his shoulders. "Calvin is here himself," he replied dryly, "so you'll be able to discuss these niceties with a master — and *in situ.* But personally, Captain, I confess I'm beginning to find your — your interest in my perdition a little tiresome."

I bit my lip, for I knew well Morwyn was frowning at me; and I was fearful lest his satanic despair, combined with his lace-ruffles, might excite the girl's pity. "I think you said," I hurriedly threw in, "that this person you speak of was engaged just now upon a wild-goose chase of his own?"

But the man uttered the kind of weary sigh that a grand gentleman utters during a tedious sermon. "Oh yes," he remarked patiently. "But that's a long story and of course all my knowledge of this singular Being is ambiguous and fleeting. But what they *say* is that he's been seized with that weird passion for a ‘Quest’ to which his fellow-countrymen are so prone. The ‘Quest’ in his case is to hunt high and low for the great enchanter Merlin, who, as perhaps you are aware, since you come from his country, has not been heard of from any quarter of the visible or invisible world since his affair with that remarkable girl. They say that Taliesin talked to that girl in Heaven, and her opinion was that Merlin had hidden from her in Hell. They say that before going to Heaven she hunted for five centuries through every cave and burial-mound in Bardsey and Gresholm. They say saint after saint was sent to persuade her to give up the search; and none of them ever came back. But in the end they say she went to Heaven of her own accord under the escort of Saint Derfel; though how Saint Derfel beguiled her I haven’t heard, or whether—”

But he broke off abruptly. I think he must have seen from my face that this glib talk about these mysterious characters threw me into a sarcastic and sceptical mood.

“You’re laughing at me,” he protested; “but pray ask yourself, my dear sir, what conceivable motive I could have for telling you fabulous—”

But Morwyn was on her feet now and trembling with excitement. “Let’s go, let’s go!” she interrupted. “Which way is it? Oh my father, my father! But you’ll take us to this man yourself, Monsieur, won’t you? We should be helpless without you!”

You can believe, my son, if you have ever had anything to do with young women, how agitated I was when I actually saw this lovely girl lay both hands in cajoling supplication upon the wrist of this damned French ghost.

All manner of shocking fears rushed into my head, fears that I would shrink from revealing, even to you. But, after all, we were in Hell, where the most abominable thoughts in the Cosmos must have piled up since the System-of-Things first tolerated their segregation. I could have endured my girl’s gesture better — for of course her hands passed clear through his vaporous wrists and she drew them back hastily — if it had not been that the transparency of the man’s countenance enabled me to notice the lively dance his nerves were playing; and he must have detected my emotion; for he turned to me with an exaggerated air of deference.

“But I’m sure Monsieur is thinking,” he said, “that the lady needs some refreshment before setting out on so arduous an adventure? I have guessed correctly, eh? Well, I am glad I thought of it! So let’s go at once to the Tavern of Tiberius. You’ve read Milton, of course, Captain*? — Paradise Lost* has always been one of my favourite poems — and you won’t be surprised to learn that persons in our condition take quite a good deal of refreshment now and then, at least those among us who are not glued like insane moths to those Vivisection Screens.”

“Oh, I don’t feel hungry!” cried Morwyn eagerly; and then with that passionate gratitude for every sort of consideration that is natural to young girls — and you must remember that the Marquis’s manners were infinitely superior to any she had ever met before — she took upon herself to add in a voice vibrant with sympathy: “I’m *so* glad, Monsieur, you can enjoy a few of the pleasures of life still!”

“Oh,” he said, with a smile that was anything but reassuring to me, “you mustn’t pity me, lady. We’re like Milton’s angels.” And, if you please, what must this devil do, but with an air that would have lent itself to the *Comédie Française,* begin quoting the archangel’s speech to Adam.

“Let it suffice thee that thou knows’t
Us happy, and without Love no happiness!
Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy’st
(And pure thou wert created) we enjoy

In eminence; and obstacle find none
Of membrane, joint, or limb—"

Now I don't think even you, my son, can fail to understand how disturbed this quotation made me. That Morwyn loved me I had no doubt. Our time in that ship of black snow had proved it conclusively. But a girl — and was I to come to Hell to learn *that*? — can love one man, and yet —

But we were already being hurried towards the Tiberius Tavern. Our guide seemed to make no effort to take us by a quiet back-way to this resort. I was shocked by the manner in which he led Morwyn, walking a little in advance of me, straight past one of the worst, though it could not have been the *very* worst or we should have seen her father there, of these Vivisection Screens.

Did the girl realize the things that were going on in this particular laboratory — it was in America where there is even less interference than in England and it made even my hardened blood run cold — or was she so excited by the Frenchman's words as to see everything as if she saw nothing?

I noticed that the man himself went through a mental struggle not to pause at this Screen, whose audience as far as I could make out was almost entirely made up of medieval torturers and modern vivisectors, though there *were* a few there whose more casual absorption in the performance and whose obvious interest in ourselves, showed them to be more ordinary sadists.

But we had not gone very far before we encountered a sight so horrible that I could see Morwyn clap her hands to her eyes to keep it out. It was the spirit of a man I knew perfectly well as one of the most famous of all vivisectors, and he was evidently hurrying to this screen from some remote spot. You'll think I'm exaggerating, my boy, but I assure you that the man who approached us then was actually eaten up by invisible flames! I could see him writhing as he moved, and all his gestures were correspondent with this; but, as I say, the flames were invisible and were obviously nothing but the material projection of the working of his mind.

From what I now knew there was no mistaking the nature of the mental burning that made this figure a moving image of torment. They were the flames of that special electric current whose one pole is scientific curiosity and the other pole delight in exercising power over what shrinks.

That I was correct in my conjecture was confirmed by the fact that the figure of a woman who came hurrying after him, also with an air of exhausted yet maniacal resolution to reach that Experimental Laboratory, was devoured by self-created flames of a different kind. Well did I know the face of this woman, for I had often pondered as a boy upon her gloomy historic countenance, as I read of her unwearied zeal in the burning of heretics.

It was a strange thing to see these two inflictors of pain, the one the bigot of science and the other the bigot of religion, as their nearness to that notorious Laboratory fanned their self-created fires.

And the curious thing was that this chemical difference between their flames was emphasized by the cries they both uttered, cries that even my rudimentary knowledge of that mute tongue made me able to follow. “Harder, harder!” cried the man, “so that we may live long in the land!”

“Hotter, hotter!” cried the woman, “so that their souls may be eternally saved!”

Part Two

I WILL NOT weary you, my dear son, with a description of our experiences as guests of the Marquis of Sade at the Tavern of Tiberius. Suffice it to say that we all three, Morwyn, Black Peter and myself, came out thence with our hunger and thirst completely gone, and our various natural egoisms flattered, soothed and appeased.

Though our diet there had been composed of what I presume was some diabolical inversion of nectar and ambrosia, even Black Peter seemed half-drunk and it was in a strangely exalted mood that we set out on our grand adventure.

The Frenchman had been explaining to us at some length why it was necessary to proceed on foot in our search for the great Bard. Morwyn seemed to follow his explanation easily enough, but it was far too involved for me. Our fiery meal — for it seems that in the scientific handling of volcanic nourishment these people were far in advance of ourselves — had the effect of throwing us all into a state of drugged beatitude. I really cannot tell you how it had been brought about; but as far as I was concerned as we started off on our difficult journey I found I had almost ceased to be jealous or suspicious of our ghostly companion. I suppose any of us moderns, when it comes to diplomatic subtlety, are like simple children compared with an eighteenth-century man of the world.

I had never felt more enamoured of Morwyn than I did as we said good-bye to this city of insatiable television, and the odd thing was that the presence of our companion had no deterrent effect upon my feelings.

There she was, walking a little ahead of Black Peter and me, by the side of that sad and courtly figure, and never — not even on our walk up that Welsh hill before our accident — had I desired this little Being as intensely as I desired her now. How on earth *did* this damned Frenchman manage to outwit us so completely?

It wasn't as if I couldn't *see* the neurotic fever that was burning in his brain. And it wasn't as if I couldn't perceive too — for the clairvoyance created by that fallen star still quickened my mind — that Morwyn's childish and simple heart had lost all fear of the man. Could it have been that by some devilish ingenuity during our pause at the Sign of Tiberius he had engendered in me a tinge of that curious masculine *confraternity of attraction* towards young women, which can, under certain special conditions, take with men the place of the more natural and more respectable feeling of rivalry? It isn't a very nice thought that I should have had *any* feeling in common with a soul that the System-of-Things found so hostile to its evolutionary purpose, but to share even a tinge of the classical masculine freemasonry with such a person, and the girl in question my own true love —

But enough of this! I daresay the truth of the matter was simple enough, and purely material! No doubt that scoriae diet was burningly aphrodisiac, and both of us had been physically drugged into our dangerous and stupid beatitude. I even believe that while she kept the release of her father as her underlying motive she came pretty near forgetting what his ghost had looked like as it went off with the Inquisitor!

For myself I had never been so stirred by any feminine being as I was by Morwyn as we moved along that narrow desert-path, all three of us side by side, and Black Peter — for I had taken off his leash in my foolish mood of satisfaction — gambolling in front of us.

My girl had lost her hat by this time. I think she must have dropped it on the black snow of our wind-ship; but she had managed somehow, as women do under all conditions, to tidy herself up a little at that Sign of Tiberius. It shows how hopelessly indurated our human faults are, that not all I had seen of the risk of indulging in cruelty — *especially in self-righteous cruelty* — had purged me of human malice; for here I was, planning and plotting now with all my craftiness to prejudice this unlucky daughter against her father!

I began trying to lure on the Marquis of Sade to expatiate upon the comparative leisure enjoyed in Hell by pure and simple sadists, compared with the far more horrible fate of the inquisitors and vivisectors.

My wicked diplomacy was entirely successful; for so great is the urge to self-justification that this courtly son of perdition soon plunged into an impassioned eulogy of the serenity of life in Hell for his type of sinner compared with those whose cruelty was fortified by the search for knowledge, or the passion for orthodox truth. I had not noticed many women so far, and it was of particular interest to me when two of these unfortunate creatures came flickering across the desert towards us, hurrying to get to the Vivisection Screens.

I inquired of our guide whence these miserable ones came, and what he supposed they had been doing all this while, to be so long unaware of the exquisite delight offered by our modern Research Laboratories. My impression was that they were both of European extraction as they came hurrying by; but they did not display the least surprise at the sight of our two living figures or at the figure of Black Peter under the escort of so distinguished a ghost.

As I have already hinted to you, the clothes worn by all these self-damned shadows were as opaque as our ordinary human clothes; whereas their flesh was entirely transparent, betraying to every onlooker the complete working of all our poor mortal machinery. I have never been attracted to feminine nakedness. I suspect that few sophisticated sensualists are. But I have certainly derived many a thrilling moment from the occasional glimpse of a delicate neck, a maidenly bosom, a polished thigh, a well-turned ankle. I peered curiously at these phantoms as they passed but I can assure you I resolved quickly enough that I would avoid a glance at any other women among these self-damned! I had fancied they were of European extraction; and my guide seemed delighted to be able to inform me that one was a settler in Modern Africa, and the other a lady in old New Orleans.

I have seen many cruel faces in my time; I have never seen such an appalling mania for inflicting pain as I saw in these four phantom eyes, nor such repulsive nervous activity as I saw beneath these two pairs of soft breasts. They were both uttering panting sounds in their inaudible language; nor were the invisible flames that consumed them a whit less apparent to my horrified gaze than were their pantings and gaspings to my astounded ears.

"Tighter! Tighter!" cried the Louisiana lady— "Harder! Harder!" screamed the East-African settler; and so intense was their realization of their visions of blood, that, as they went past me, I got an actual impression as if from images limned on the air, of the dark bodies upon which they imagined themselves working their will. I noticed that though they didn't so much as glance at us, they did pause for a second to exchange looks with our guide.

"*There!* You see?" remarked that gentleman when they had passed. "Had they been scientists they wouldn't have found time even to greet a friend!" Morwyn turned inquiring eyes towards him but I hastily forestalled her question with one of my own; for I was extremely loath to let any chance of disparaging Mr. — to his daughter pass me by unexploited.

“Can women such as those two, Monsieur,” I inquired, “really get enough pleasure from vivisection to make them exchange their memories of tortured Blacks for a peep into our Laboratories?”

“Certainly, certainly,” replied our distinguished friend. “And if you will allow me to say so, I am no mean authority in these matters. Dogs are quite as sensitive to pain as we are, and their imaginative sensibility — their response, I mean, to the fear of the repetition and so forth — is even more lively than ours. It’s this expectancy of the repetition — I mean of what’s been done to them over and over again — that these ladies will find so interesting. And of course, though plenty of victims come safe and sound out of ordinary sadists’ hands, no victim ever comes out alive from the Research Laboratory! But it’s wonderful how long animals *can* live. Oh, I assure you, those women will get all the pleasure they expect! They’ll soon forget their Blacks; and the great thing is they’ll be in no danger now from the mob or the police! As with the Holy Inquisition, nobody dares lift a finger against Scientific Investigation. It’s sacrosanct! Those sublime words, *wrong and right,* and *good and evil,* words that have even made *me* shake in my shoes, mean absolutely nothing in a scientific laboratory! We ordinary sadists, when our perverse paroxysms are over, feel uneasy and ashamed; but no vivisector ever feels ashamed. His two grand sops, ‘Prolong Precious Lives’ and ‘Pursue Holy Truth,’ are the best anaesthetics for Conscience our race has ever had. I assure you, Captain, all we experts down here see a marvellous future for Scientific Sadism. The religious people will be left far behind. *To torture for knowledge* — why, the Devil himself must have invented that beautiful idea! It cuts at the very root of right and wrong. To burn alive to save souls was a happy inspiration; but this baking and freezing alive for pure knowledge — why it undermines the moral evolution of twenty thousand years! Good is no longer Good. Evil is no longer Evil. I am lost in wonder, my dear Captain, when I think what Science has done to side-track the purpose of the System-of-Things! Of course it can't win in the end — the System-of-Things is too crafty even for *it*; and I can't look about me down here at the results of the abolition of good and evil without confessing that there is some justification for this mania for Pity and Sympathy by which the System-of-Things is governed.

"Probably one day, when Science in her triumphant assurance has provided glass walls for her laboratories, there'll be a terrific Revolution and the moral sense will return with a vengeance. I wouldn't like to be the vivisectors in those days; but of course by that time their gases and bombs and engines of war—"

He was interrupted by a sound from Morwyn different from any sound I have ever heard. It was a horrible and harrowing sound; and faintly resembled the sound that a fish sometimes makes when a hook is pulled from its gills.

Black Peter showed signs of understanding this sound better than I, for he flew at my Lord of Sade with the most vicious barking, elongating his neck like a snake and quivering from nose to tail. I think the sound my girl made — for it was too inhuman to be called a cry — was due to her outraged feeling for her father, a feeling which our elegant companion had so unmercifully disregarded. I think her emotion made her forget her dumbness, made her in fact utter one of those inarticulate sounds which are so disturbing in dumb people.

But the unexpected attack from Black Peter brought us all to our senses and I fancy de Sade himself must have felt some sort of qualm. At any rate I noticed that when Morwyn refused the pretty pretence of taking his insubstantial arm as we went on, he paid no heed to this affront, but removing his great feathered hat, began pointing at different quarters of the horizon and expatiating to her on particular features of desolate picturesqueness which the landscape displayed. The girl’s anger melted more quickly than I liked under his courtly airs and indeed I soon came to the conclusion that I had gained little by my malicious attempt to get Mr.—‘s damned cruelties shown up in their proper colour.

Two of us living entities listened after that in a most gloomy silence to the intercourse between the girl and this lively phantom. It was indeed for many a long hell’s mile — a measurement I have reckoned since to be about three times as long as miles are with us — that I stretched my lean infantry-officer’s legs — plod, plod, plod — behind their mutually engrossed figures.

And all the while on his four feathery paws Black Peter trotted solemnly at my heels, perfectly miserable now, for it had only been for a little while after our visit to the Tiberius that he had ceased holding his tail clamped tight to his rump. My own tail, figuratively speaking, was certainly clamped to *my* rump as we went along; for all sorts of devilish suspicions kept entering my head. With what motive had this accurst Frenchman with his bowings and scrapings devoted himself to us? The voluptuousness of cruelty — he had confessed as much — was his sole joy and only occupation. Why then had he left those precious Screens to guide us upon this wild-goose chase? Where were we really going? Was it not possible that I was about to be doomed to witness — until the sight of it drove me mad — unspeakable atrocities, both physical and spiritual, inflicted upon this gentle creature?

Unfortunately for him, but very fortunately for me, the man’s vicious excitement — as it arose, as it increased, as it died down — was so transparently obvious, to the most innocent and superficial scrutiny, that I could keep an eye upon him. His thoughts, it is true, I couldn't read; but his feelings — such was the transparency of his person wherever it was exposed — I saw displayed before me in all their maniacal perversity; and I can assure you it was no engaging sight. But not only were they displayed before me. I still seemed to possess a great deal of that curious clairvoyance which my contact, such as it was, with the magnetism of that falling meteorite had bestowed on me; so that I was able to interpret what I saw with more penetration than you would perhaps credit me with possessing.

Another characteristic of mine, which is still less likely to have arrested your notice, is a certain desperate and reckless humour, upon which, at a pinch, I have the power of retreating. While the faces of other men — not only established persons of society either — take on a look of grave reproach when chance and circumstance shake them up and ruffle them, I derive a certain sardonic satisfaction from the very enormity, the very monstrousness, of the predicaments into which I fall. “Why should *you* escape, Captain?” I say to myself, “when so many men, much worthier than you, are drowned and burnt and starved and buried alive, in the natural order of events?” And then it is that I fasten a leash round my neck and jerk myself into position, and force myself to leer back at Life, as though I said to her, “I quite understand the itch you feel to make this solemn idiot skip a little; but I can skip and yet snap my fingers!”

Well, I can assure you that this sardonic bed-rock vein of mine had a full opportunity just at that moment as I plodded sulkily behind Morwyn while she talked to the Marquis of Sade. Trusting to my direct reading of his nerves I soon ceased to listen to their talk. I suppose quiet, soft-hearted, normal girls automatically fall into a yielding mood when a certain type of man — even the ghost of a certain type of man — talks to them in a particular tone; and I confess even for myself there were moments when I grew oblivious to this damned rascal's nerves, and even felt — for you must remember you *couldn't see* '*through his clothes* — something of the spell of his French manners!

But I was guilty, as Black Peter and I walked behind them, of so much irritation at the impression the fellow was making upon her that I caught the unpardonable wish flitting for a second like a malicious cormorant across my brain that this tantalizing innocent might not get off *quite* scot-free from being so susceptible.

I really don't know how long we walked like this. It seemed to me as if a whole day went by, but it *may* have been only five or six hours. My annoyance with Morwyn did not lessen; indeed it seemed to intensify as the hours of that infernal pilgrimage lengthened out and the day waned. I say "as the day waned" but Hell seemed to share with the Biblical New Jerusalem a preference for an unchanging mystical twilight over our familiar alternation of light and darkness.

But whether it was day or whether it was night, we three in our helpless livingness, and the crafty Frenchman in his active deadness seemed prepared to stagger on forever on the strength of that fiery meal at the Sign of Tiberius.

And the more my sweet girl drooped with the length of the way, and the more Black Peter dragged at the end of his leash, the more seductive grew the Marquis's tone, and the more greedy to monopolize her beauty and keep it entirely to myself did my agitated senses become. Don't be angry with me, if I keep brooding, as my tale proceeds, upon this life-creating, this god-like, this evilly-abused, this guilty-innocent mystery of desire.

I can so well recall every detail of my feelings during that weary plodding behind those two; and I assure you that what I felt for Morwyn was well worth brooding upon! It must have borne a resemblance to that yearning to be diffused through the whole body of the cosmos, about which Goethe is always dropping mysterious hints, and which certainly must have stored up, in its long secret history, many an occult magical rite, that, if revealed, would astonish the profane!

My own feeling is that something of this kind was behind the ritual of the Druids; and had to do with the bloodless cult of the Great Mother which reached these shores in prehistoric times from Crete; and I have sometimes thought that in certain intense and imaginative moods of desire, in lands where this bloodless worship continued longest, our most unsatisfied lusts might find a paradisaic fulfilment.

Well, well! With your airy modern humour, my dear son, you are no doubt growing impatient for me to get on with my tale and to leave this mystic babble. But after all you must remember that in a long day's march behind the desirable form of one's girl on the adamantine floor of Hell, one naturally tends to fall back upon primeval considerations.

As a matter of fact what came over me more and more strongly as we advanced across this twilight landscape was the crucial difference between those who hold that *all* sex-desire is evil and those who hold that sex-desire is only evil when it is linked with cruelty. I confess that I have had moments in my life when I have doubted if any sex-desire is really free from cruelty and when I have been vexed in my conscience by certain sayings of Jesus and Paul that seem to imply that sex *in itself* is an evil thing. But if you will allow me to say so, it was a significant experience to me that I had not seen in Hell any vicious ghosts at all save those whose vice took the shape of cruelty.

Vicious I know I am, if it is vicious to indulge to the limit an intense excitement in the presence of youthful femininity, but what, pondering deeply upon the matter as I trod the “marl” of Hell’s floor, I did finally decide, though the orthodox would say that it was a decision reached under the influence of the devil, was that, though cruelty might be the *ferule* of the immortal staff of Eros, its *handle* was legitimate lust, and the fact that both these impulses — the lawful one and the unlawful one — belonged to the same magic wand no more made them identical than good and evil are made identical *by their equal birth from the same heart.* In thus devouring Morwyn’s figure with such mystic-sensual eyes, I came by degrees to forget the Marquis of Sade entirely. It was the blending of slenderness with softness that I found so irresistible in the sweet creature, and when I reflected that, except for this damned ghost, Black Peter and I had her entirely to ourselves it seemed well worth it to be in Hell.

As for Mr. —, I really wasn’t sorry that his burning faith in annihilation had proved such a pathetic fallacy, for as long as his spirit remained where it was it seemed unlikely that Morwyn would want to return to earth, where no doubt I should have plenty of rivals a good deal more substantial than this shadowy Frenchman. According to the clairvoyance of our fall I still recognized that she loved me; but I began to recognize now a quite definite emotional disturbance in her girlish feelings, which was undoubtedly her reaction to this fine gentleman; and I thought to myself: “If a dead reprobate excites her so much, what about the living reprobates she is bound to meet up there?” And so — scandalous though it is to confess it — I decided that even if this evasive Welshman *did* show us how to get out I would find some trick to double-cross him. “Better,” I thought, “have your girl to yourself in Hell than share her *anywhere else!*”

Justifying myself in this shameless manner I allowed my whole soul, through the medium of sight, to play round the lovely form before me; but no sooner was my spirit beginning really to feel I possessed her than what must my wretched conscience do but start accusing me of unpardonable selfishness. And how unreasonable my conscience was! Anyone who knows human nature and its basic egoism must know that it was impossible for me just then to enter into an objective consideration as to what kind of life, now that she had lost her father, would really make her happiest. A life with me, supposing we got back to earth — and no lover can be blamed for regarding the fulfilment of his love as an advantage rather than the reverse to the object of it — would, I did admit, scarcely have been life with a young and handsome man. But on the other hand it would not have been a life of hard domestic work or of extreme penury. Well! well! What I think I secretly all the while anticipated was that we should spend the rest of our days where we were! I began now — for our weakness imposes limits even to the most ecstatic contemplation — to glance away from Morwyn, and to take in our surroundings. The light in this world was, as I have hinted, of a muted kind. It resembled the beginning of the evening twilight and the end of the morning twilight. And the floor of this world upon which the uniform light fell was on the whole a monotonous level, its few roughnesses and corrugations never, as far as I could see, amounting to more than scoriac dust-dunes and a few low hillocks where some ancient seismic disturbance had scattered a thin, brownish, volcanic ash.

Between these excrescences, some of which were composed of ribs of hard volcanic rock, but most of them of mere powdery cinders, there were wide expanses of rocky slate, not always *quite* smooth, for there were curious gradations here and there, like irregular steps for the convenience of infant-goblins, but presenting on the whole the appearance of a vast cathedral-floor. Quite unlike a cathedral-roof, however, was what the eye saw above us as we advanced. The ceiling of Hell was itself indeed seldom visible; for hideous-shaped processions of moving mist — and yet it was not mist as we know mist on earth — kept sweeping across it.

But I now suddenly became aware, as I gazed across the vast plain we were traversing, that we were not, as I had previously supposed, the only wanderers in this scoriae wilderness.

Far away on our left — I am compelled to confine myself to speaking of "left" and "right," for I had no inkling of the points of the compass — I seemed to make out a sort of lurid "ascension" going on, as of a number of gesticulating human figures.

These figures were apparently being whirled up from the surface of the plain towards these grotesque cloud-shapes; and as I gazed at this singular spectacle I was reminded of the way we ourselves had been whirled into our ship of black snow. The ascent into the air of these phantoms, for such I assumed them to be, troubled me with an access of shocked and horrified pity, for their limbs seemed tossing about in a manner that made me think of a shoal of water-newts suffering some extreme distress This spasmodic waving of so many arms and legs, as these lost souls were whirled upwards, troubled me not a little, and even brought to my mind, for some of them seemed clinging together, the desolate fate of Paolo and Francesca in the *Inferno!*

So concerned did I become by what I took for a cruel punishment that I hurried after the Frenchman and made bold to interrupt his gallantry by pointing out what was going on.

With perfect politeness he turned and paused, though the girl frowned at my intrusion. "You've absolutely no need, my dear Captain," he said, "to get excited over that little matter. Those people are perfectly all right. I admit their arms and legs, as they're caught into the air, do jerk about in rather a startling way; but I must beg you to remember that Hell is not, and never was, a place of punishment. On the contrary it's the only place in the whole cosmos where people can do just exactly what they like. Please believe me, and you, my dear lady, too, that those spirits over there aren't waving their arms and legs in pain but on the contrary from a lively expectation of approaching voluptuous delight. I admit they do, as you say, look like agitated newts; but if we were nearer you would I am sure" — and he gave me a wicked leer— "derive no small pleasure from the exposure of those pretty limbs; many of which belong to quite charming—" Here he caught himself up and added hurriedly: "But not as charming as *you,* Madame," and with that he swept the air with his feathered hat. "But I swear to you," he went on, "that it's the hope of pleasure, not the endurance of pain, that makes them expose themselves in that manner. They are rushing off to some new Screen, a rumour of which must have reached them; and they're 'taking a wind,' just as in my days we used to 'take a calash' to go and see an execution. You're only doing now what our Parisian military men used to do in my days, watching the naughty women mount their coaches!"

My girl looked away, in proud disgust; and of course I was far too absorbed in her own dear figure to have the least desire to see these sadistic bitches, however beautiful they may have been, reveal their charms in this frantic and shameless scramble.

But a new and very disconcerting thought had come into my head at that moment — why, if it had been all this while perfectly possible to travel so expeditiously, had this tricky Frenchman led us this exhausting tramp on foot? I thought to myself: "Ho! Ho! my clever friend, I'll have a few straight questions to ask you before very long!"

But Morwyn's crossness when I interrupted her talk with the fellow had been profoundly irritating to me; and with that human desire to punish, which is one of the greatest evils of our mortality, I deliberately turned the conversation upon vivisection.

"Have you given any time yourself, Monsieur," I asked him, "to this tragic problem? Don't you think there must be some good and honourable vivisectors in England, if nowhere else?"

The Marquis of Sade smiled. "What a profoundly characteristic question!" he cried. "Aren't you, my worthy Captain, enough of a realist to see that you can no more talk of a 'good vivisector' than you can talk of a 'good inquisitor'?

"From the point of view of our mysterious System-of-Things *to be a vivisector at all* is to put yourself on the side of evil against good. It's simply to substitute the cruel superstition of unscrupulous science for the cruel superstition of unscrupulous religion. The people who torture animals for the benefit of humanity are no better than the people who invent diabolical engines of destruction for the benefit of their tribe. I have given considerable attention to these people's hypocritical reasoning, for it makes my own position so frank and satisfactory in comparison! I have even examined their claims to have effected cures; and I assure you that in almost every case what they claim as *their* achievement has in reality been done by better hygiene and sanitation, and by the removal of physical overcrowding and extreme destitution. Moreover, if you read your gazette with any intelligence, Captain, you will notice that over and over again after their proclamation of some startling cure derived from torture a complete silence will follow; indicating that in practice the thing has proved a failure! And what do they do then? Do they give up their frightfulness? Do they relinquish their practice of trying to cure diseases by creating more diseases? Not at all! They simply get hold of more thousands of cats and dogs and monkeys, and go at it again; by pain trying to cure pain, by torture trying to circumvent the laws of nature! For, consider, Captain. Everyone has to die at last, haven't they? Isn't there something monstrous and indecent in trying to get round death by inflicting torture? Death is certain. Do they think to make man immortal by torturing beasts? You turn your face away, little lady, and I will say no more; but being *what I am* I can assure you, across my heart, that even in my imagination I have never gone to the lengths in diabolical cruelty to which these scientists are prepared to go in their insane mania.

"The true sadists among them must have, if I know anything of my own psychology, hundreds of violent reactions; but I have never known a strictly 'scientific' vivisector to have one single flicker of pity or mercy or remorse."

This struck me as a good moment for giving the fellow a shock. "Monsieur," I began, for I am not one to beat about the bush, "why is it, Monsieur, that we haven't taken one of these precious 'winds' of yours, in place of wearing Madame out in this exhausting tramp?"

My lord gave a fine jump at this unexpected remark. He looked a fool; and you should have seen the agitation in the nervous ganglia of his transparent countenance as he bowed and stammered! I was immensely pleased. I had caught the wily rogue fairly "on the hop" as we say, and indeed I have often noticed in my long life that the cunning of a good man is much more formidable than that of a bad man. I have seen it again and again; and yet bad men never take warning. They think they can outwit what this wretched ghost calls the "System-of-Things" all the time!

"Oh, my dear Captain," gasped the fellow, and I'm sure the smile which illuminated my features as I stared at him must have caused him acute distress. "Of course I've *thought* of that, but I thought too that this lady wouldn't care to use so dizzy, so rapid, so adventurous a mode of travelling.

I thought it might discompose her and even give her *mal-de-cœur* to fly so high and so fast — but of course if—"

"Do you mean, Monsieur," cried I, throwing into my tone as much indignation as I could assume — though as a matter of fact the pleasure of having proved a match for this son of perdition had thrown me into a very good temper— "do you mean that you actually could have called down one of those comfortable air-ships at any moment during the last dozen hours? And instead of that, Monsieur, you have allowed—" And I cast at him that look of scandalized reproach with which my particular generation — as I expect you know only too well — takes its revenge for the normal strain of its virtue.

"I must apologize to Madame," said the Marquis with a bow, "but she herself is my best excuse." As he spoke, I am sure that something passed between my girl and this lost wretch. My meteoric clairvoyance had already faded a good deal; but I had enough of it left to catch a perceptible stir of emotion, though it was a very difficult one to analyse, in Morwyn's bosom, and I could see that the Frenchman's wicked nerves were jumping up and down like sand-fleas.

"I don't think *any* excuse is necessary," said Morwyn, "and I don't wonder that our friend thought I should be shy of a conveyance" — and she cast a glance upward— "when I see those things rushing about under the roof!"

I bit my lip, and gave poor Black Peter's leash a vicious jerk. The unlucky little beast was sniffing about round the edge of a rough lava-ridge, and in my discomfiture it irritated me profoundly to see him behave so foolishly; for it was clear that there could be no scent of any living creature in this ghastly desolation. What must our Frenchman do, however, but approach the ridge as I pulled the dog away from it, and begin poking about. It is extraordinary how a human being gets used to things as long as they go on a certain length of time! As I looked at this cavalier figure of a man in his Louis Seize costume bending down so mincingly over that scoriac heap not the remotest flicker of supernatural awe modified my jealous irritation.

It would have given me incredible comfort to have fallen upon the chap, then and there, with my bare fists, and given him as we used to say at school, a thorough good licking. But in addition to the accident that he was too insubstantial to be affected by such treatment, my fear of Morwyn's anger deterred me from attempting it.

But he rose up now and came briskly towards us, holding his hand stretched out with a coin between his finger and thumb, that looked about the size of a penny. I at once extended my own hand to receive this coin and make my pronouncement upon it, thinking, as an Englishman naturally would, that it was the man's prerogative to examine any interesting treasure-trove, especially if it had a classic character. But this frivolous Frenchman disregarded my gesture and presented the coin to Morwyn as if it were a nosegay.

"It's one of the Emperor's," he remarked with noticeable respect. "It must have fallen from a cloud. The Emperor never walks."

My first impression was that he must be talking about Napoleon; but when Morwyn handed me the coin I saw at a glance that it was one of the ordinary denarii of Claudius Domitius Cæsar, usually known as Nero. I might have thought, if I'd had any wit, that the number of Emperors in Hell, though less than the number of Bishops, must be considerable; but I never suspected that in the difficult art of *carrying their money with them* they could often have succeeded.

"He has a special conveyance of his own," went on our informant gravely. "He shares it with Calvin and with a great continental vivisector whose name I forget. I heard the Emperor maintain once that Calvin got more pleasure from burning Servetus than he himself got from burning a thousand Christians in his garden. 'It's all in the mind,' he remarked on that occasion, 'which is a thing we artists are apt to forget.' There is recent gossip in Hell, however, to the effect that Calvin and the vivisector have decided that if the Emperor doesn't give up his hankering after artistic cruelty and devote himself more rigorously to scientific and religious cruelty, they'll have to leave him. I understand it's the money he gives them that makes this decision a hard one. People tell me that between them they've got a million sestercii out of him, which they employ to get the front places at the Screens. Some of us ordinary people, whose nerves are not yet hardened by Science, are ready enough to give up our places for a few Neronian coins. I myself have often—"

"Have you any use for money down here?" I interrupted, with a quick glance at Morwyn, for I hoped by leading him on in this way, to show him up as the kind of miser that women always loathe.

"Oh no," he replied smiling, while my girl looked at us both. "It's only a hobby with us. Many of us down here are expert numismatologists. We find we need relaxation after our nervous excitement at the Screens. That is" — and he hesitated a moment under Morwyn's gaze— "those of us need it who are not adamant in our devotion to humanity."

Morwyn frowned; and turning away from us both scanned those queer vapour-shapes that were passing and re-passing below the metallic sky.

"Is it much further," she asked our guide, "to where you're taking us? I hate" — and she looked at the Frenchman with what struck my mind as almost a coaxing look— “to leave my father with that person a minute longer than’s absolutely necessary.”

For reply the man put his ghostly fingers to his mouth, threw back his head, and uttered in the mute language of that country, a prolonged reverberating whistle.

I shall never forget the weird effect it had upon me, this soundless sound producing a soundless echo — I suppose from metallic roof itself — an echo which filled the silence long after his whistling had died away. Nor had we very long to wait for a response. With our heads thrown back we all three waited, gazing upwards, while Black Peter strained frantically at his leash, trying to return to the lava-hillock where he had smelt out that Roman coin. In the absence of any smell save the unspeakably foul one that sometimes emanated from these bodiless apparitions, I suppose the million-times faded aroma of sweaty front seats at Roman circuses, that I daresay hung still about that little bronze disc, gave the dog’s senses a particular flip.

I believe it was Morwyn herself who was the first to notice the special manoeuvring of one of these vaporous air-ships; but she soon pointed it out to our Frenchman who clapped his hands in infantile excitement.

“It’s the Emperor! It’s the Emperor!” he cried. It was really quite shocking to see the way this lost spirit’s hands *passed silently through each other,* as he beat them together in his excitement. I tried my best to idealize this gesture by recalling a similar phenomenon I had noticed in a certain clear Welsh stream when the shadow of one fish kept passing through the shadow of another fish till both of them vanished in the reflection of the opposite bank.

It was to me a pathetic example of the weakness of the feminine mind, and it distressed me that this Frenchman — who certainly didn’t miss it —

should have seen such frailty in Morwyn, that my girl's hands at mention of the Emperor's ship should at once have flown to her head. It is true she had lost her hat; and since she had tidied herself up at the Tavern of Tiberius her hair had become ruffled — but still —

For myself I made a point of stooping down and nonchalantly stroking Black Peter's feathery ears. I trust in that way I showed my complete indifference to the descent upon us of this notorious despot. The conveyance he arrived in was, I admit, a very compact and serviceable one. And although its exterior substance was composed of a yet more fleecy vapour, its interior seats were evidently formed of the same compressed dark snow which I shall forever link in my mind with my first intimacy with Morwyn.

Something about my studied indifference must have piqued the vanity of this imperial wretch, for his first words on alighting were addressed to me.

But the Frenchman pushed himself forward between us and became so voluble that I soon ceased to listen to his jabber or to watch his theatrical gestures; nor do I think the heavy-jowled brute he was addressing lent an ear to him longer than I did. I was, however, thoroughly disturbed to notice the looks which — from under his heavy brows — this unholiest of the Cæsars kept casting in Morwyn's direction. He really seemed at first to forget where he was and that my girl was blessedly alive while he was a damned ghost, for he looked from her to us as if he were bidding us clear off and leave them alone together; but a brief word from me, and you can imagine how stiff I kept my back, was enough "to put him wise," as they say, as to the proprieties of the situation.

But if I disliked the way he stared at Morwyn — and I can't deny that for all his sulky, cloudy, scowling features, the brute was, in his own unpleasant sensual way, uncommonly good-looking — I disliked still more the way he drew our guide, who had been pirouetting round him like a besotted Abbé round an abstracted Cardinal, close up to his purple-swathed belly, and began whispering to him. The process of whispering in this country I had only seen once before, and that was between our Frenchman and Mr.— ‘s precious Spaniard and I had been too happy then to take much notice of it.

But now between Claudius Domitius and the Marquis of Sade I was able to see this particular form of communication in its most perfect expression. And it was so much the opposite of a pretty sight, that first Morwyn, and then I, though I have to confess I got a malicious pleasure from seeing these devils humiliate themselves before her, were forced to turn our heads away.

As for Black Peter, he seemed to be almost as afraid of this sulky potentate as he was of Morwyn’s father, and with his feathery legs straddled wide apart — to gain purchase for his pull — he began tugging furiously at his leash, as if he would willingly flee to the furthest boundaries of Hell to escape this plump purple-swathed intruder.

It had taken me some time during that first journey to learn what these children of perdition were doing when they whispered to each other. What they did

— and what this obese matricide and his obsequious devotee were doing now — was to rub their stomachs together, while each of them drummed with his fists on the other’s rump. This double motion of rubbing and drumming took place of course in dead silence; and it was plain that the pitiful lack of solidity in these self-tormenting Shades rendered this whispering business a feat that required a good deal of delicate balancing and adjustment.

What brought it about, of course, was the fact that since their language was already a voiceless one any considerable muting of it would mean its vanishing away. Thus there became necessary some system of physical signs; for since the greater part of the population spend the whole of the day and most of the night jostling at the Screens and are frequently jammed so tightly together that their transparent bodies are forced to interpenetrate, this whispering by belly-friction and buttock-pounding must have arisen, as all language arose in the beginning, out of the special and peculiar necessities of the case.

Morwyn and I remained politely in profile while this business went on, but we didn't hesitate to exchange, in the ordinary mute language of the place, a few words together.

"Do you want to take *every* risk in getting to this Welsh Seer?" I asked her. "I am ready, you know, for anything you insist on; but I can't say I like the look of things! Do you see those two leaning over the side?"

The girl nodded. Yes, she *had* seen them; and I can tell you, my dear son, that if it was unpleasant to watch those two Latins exchanging their unholy thoughts, it was still more unpleasant to see Calvin and his vivisector friend peeping over the side of their cloud-boat! Each of them craned forward a revoltingly withered neck pulsing with wicked veins. Each of them clutched the edge of the boat with fingers that looked as if they had been already clutching at the living nerves of heretics and dogs for a whole eternity.

One of these shocking bigots betrayed in the gloating look he cast upon Morwyn the hope that her heresies would take a million years to eradicate — always for the good of her soul — while the other seemed calculating just what process of piquant investigation — always for the sake of humanity — would make Black Peter strain most at the straps that held him down.

"Yes," the girl cried, "I'm ready for any risk for dad's sake! If I die it doesn't matter; and if we die together *you* won't mind that — *now* — will you?"

As she spoke she gave me the sweetest smile I had ever received from a woman. The only smile nearly approaching it was one I got once from a harlot in Berlin when we saw, out of our window, a circus-elephant take off a general's hat.

"Well, Captain, will you come with us? I've explained to Cæsar which way we're going, and he's delighted to give us a lift."

Morwyn and I swung round together. Claudius Domitius Cæsar allowed the extreme tip of his tongue to emerge from between his teeth as he licked his upper lip. He gave me a patronizing nod. I suppose he thought a Retired Captain from Britain was of no more importance than a Retired Centurion from Judæa. But he took no notice at all of Morwyn; a detail that I had the wit to regard as extremely ominous.

We looked at each other and we looked at this plump purple-swathed phantom and we looked at the burner of Servetus and we looked at the torturer of ten thousand dogs.

"Well, Captain?" repeated the Marquis of Sade. "Well, young lady? Are we to accept Cæsar's offer or are we to continue our tramp?"

Morwyn and I gave each other a long clinging glance, a glance that had a good deal more of tragic significance than we ourselves realized at the time. Then we made a slight movement towards each other; but that was all.

For a moment she stood very still, and I shall never forget how she looked with her bare head held back so straight and her face grown so white as it showed against the side of that air-ship, over the edge of which those two horrible phantoms gloated down upon her, and then she murmured quietly in the mute language of the country: "We are ready. Let us go."

Without farther delay I caught up Black Peter under my arm and together we ascended into the vessel. We were followed immediately after by the imperial phantom and his obsequious friend; and very soon a lavasmelling wind, not unlike the wind offered by the witch in Macbeth, was lifting us off the ground and carrying us at an easy rate of speed, but at a surprisingly tilted angle, towards the dusky roof of Hell.

Part Three

OUR FLIGHT IN this Neronian equipage was our second flight over the infernal landscape; but alas! it was a very different one from the first. *Then* I seemed to be entirely alone with Morwyn; for the Frenchman never obtruded himself, and the others — her father and the Spanish Inquisitor — were almost out of sight. But on this occasion things grew sinister from the very start. In the first place the Emperor and his French admirer, who seemed to have much to communicate, made no attempt to retire from our presence for their repulsive whispering; but rubbed stomachs and thumped rumps in immediate proximity to us and in disregard of all propriety. There was something revolting in this spectacle; and it was made almost unbearably grotesque by the pretentiousness of the folded toga worn by the one and of the laces and ribbons worn by the other.

Morwyn kept her eyes nervously lowered, like a young nun caught in a tavern brawl, and it came over me that I had always disliked — even on earth — the particular hissing sound, as of Miltonic Pandemonium-Devils, that people seem forced to make when they whisper; and I said to myself, as I watched these two sons of perdition plotting their filthy plots, that it was clearly a characteristic of Hell to bring out into the open and enlarge upon, as if under a magnifying glass, all the lesser, as well as the greater, abominations of our earthly life.

As a matter of fact there was nothing really indecent about this whispering; but it gave me, and I think Morwyn too, a sense of gross brazen obscenity — the sort of shrinking nausea that extremely old-fashioned

English ladies get in Paris and that I suspect most squeamish travellers receive in the Priapian quarters of ancient Pompeii.

But if Morwyn and I were uncomfortable I have never seen Black Peter so upset as he was upon this imperial air-yacht. He made water constantly, evidently overpowered by something sulphurous on the air around him, and I saw him struggle in vain to ease his bowels. Several times he lifted up his head and barked at these whisperers; but when he did this I struck him without scruple. I didn't at all want to excite any outburst of fury in that purple-wrapped brute, and in any case the shrill sound of canine barking in this vast Colosseum of deadly silence got on my nerves.

But worse was to follow. Our Roman and Frenchman were still at it, and Peter was still curving his back and making that too familiar arch of his stumpy tail, when our other fellow-travellers forced themselves upon our notice. The ship was moving very rapidly just now and rather jerkily, or their proceedings would have been more apparent than they were; but it was impossible not to feel disconcerted when the notorious Theologian and the famous Vivisector — both of them anything but young men — perched themselves on a kind of yard-arm above our heads and like a pair of screaming vultures stretched out their long hairless necks and began jabbering in the soundless, language of the country through what obviously was some infernal substitute for a wireless microphone. Poor little Morwyn was by this time at the breaking point; and sinking down under the bulkhead she thrust her hands hysterically against her ears and bowed her head over her knees.

I shall never forget the desolate look of her thin elbows as she did this, nor the way in which the big tears falling from her eyes made little round holes, like those of sand-worms, in the chemical substance of our vessel. If I weren't such a wretched linguist I could have understood by now every word these long-necked scare-crows were screaming from their bird-like perch. They would each in turn have a go at the instrument, and then reluctantly yield its mouthpiece to the other, and I grew more and more horrified as I made out first one and then another terrifying menace from broken fragments of this devilish broadcasting. They were both up to serious mischief, these insane rogues — *that* much was clear — and that it was mischief aimed especially at my feminine companion I began to be more and more certain. They were sermonizing all Hell — *that* too I could detect — on their curst bigoted theories; but they were also indicating that it would be encouraging to religion, beneficial to science, and extremely satisfactory to the Imperial artist, if the heretical young lady who had come down into their midst should be saved from her heresies and the black dog used for humanitarian research.

As to the silly old military man who accompanied them — so I seemed to gather to be the drift of this genial broadcasting — it would be best to deport him back as quickly as possible to the country from which he came, on condition that before he died he should bring down more young ladies and if possible a monkey or two to be offered up to God and the Truth.

I could clearly hear the ferocious advocate of Predestination arguing that the burning of Servetus had kept millions of souls in the Faith and that the death of this woman — thus providentially sent to Hell before her time — would have a similar effect. I think I could also gather that the Vivisector felt that several years might be added to the lives of old gentlemen on earth when you had a real dog to work upon down here. There was a lot more from both these aged broadcasters, but it was of a scientific nature, and I believe it referred to the material difficulty of their pious undertaking, owing to the fact that they were Shadows; and though a shadow can feed forever upon the pleasure of *seeing* cruelty, it is hard for it to *inflict* cruelty.

If I understood what I heard correctly, but the vivisector involved it with a great deal of obscure phraseology, the suggestion was thrown out that from all the confines of Hell a great host of spirits should gather, who should meet our vessel before we reached our destination and by the sheer oppression of their numbers separate me from Morwyn and Black Peter.

As soon as these ravens of disaster had finished their accursed croaking I hurried Morwyn aside into the stern of the ship where we were comparatively isolated. Here I revealed to her what I had heard during her collapse and how extremely sinister I regarded it.

The girl's face betrayed a whole drama of emotion as I spoke. At one moment I really believe the idea crossed her mind of flinging herself out of the boat; but as I went on she suddenly laid her hand on Black Peter's head and lifted her face with a noble gesture of defiance and desperation. Luckily there was no need to fear being overheard; though I was firmly resolved that nothing would make me go through, with Morwyn's dear form, this humiliating process of whispering. But the rush of the wind was so strong through the body of our ship, for we were travelling now at a very great speed, that it drowned the magnetic vibration of even the most intense of our silent words.

We sat close together after this disclosure of what awaited us, with our hands clasped tight and our knees touching; while Black Peter, who seemed to understand that some new menace was in the offing, refrained from his usual agitated whining in the presence of human fondness, and showed his concern by a series of low-pitched rumbling sounds, directed vaguely towards all our fellow voyagers. Black Peter's rumblings were the only audible sound as we rushed through the air, though we could feel quite clearly the impact of the wind on our faces. The two wicked old men remained aloof from us after sending off their wireless message; but they were so constantly occupied in that repulsive stomachrubbing and buttock-thumping game I began to wonder — though I said nothing to Morwyn about my misgivings — whether they were deciding that there was no need to wait until that multitude of spirits arrived before playing some devil's trick upon us.

It was one of those moments when man in his helplessness instinctively turns to God; and I knew by Morwyn's expression that she had already begun saying her prayers. But — there it is! — I am not naturally of a religious turn of mind, and certainly nothing that I had seen down here impelled me in the direction of pious thoughts, though I have always uttered long pharisaic prayers to the elements of nature. But what we needed to come to our rescue at this juncture was one of those terrifying angels of Dante, who rush so proudly down the gullet of Hell in obedience to some pitiless vendetta of Omnipotence. In place of any such Being whose *primo amore* and savage "justice" had created Hell, I felt myself confronted down here by nothing more active than this calm, evolutionary System-of-Things, upon whose "mysterious ways" our Frenchman was always animadverting with such a mixture of self-congratulation and dismay, — a System-of-Things whose purpose was pity and sympathy, but whose method was the appalling one, worse than any personal "vendetta," of leaving evil minds to their own horrible devices!

As I watched Morwyn's white face and closed eyes, and saw her lips moving in desperate prayer, and as I felt Black Peter's nose, which in the poor beast's agitation had grown hot and feverish, touching the back of one of my hands, my thoughts beat, as they never had done before, upon the adamantine mystery of cosmic existence, whether on earth or in Hell.

"The best of all possible worlds" — that was the tag that kept running through my head; but running with a new stress on the word "possible."

Perhaps it was the best of all possible worlds? Perhaps without the freewill of the created no tolerable world was possible; and the only alternative would be some appalling predestined machine such as this cruel old man who wanted to please God by burning Morwyn alive believed in, and such as this other horrible old man believed in too, who hoped to prove its existence by playing a tune on Black Peter's nerves. If this devilish machine-world was the precious "Truth," for which girls must be burnt and animals vivisected, and the only possible alternative was a world of such free-will as I now saw around me, perhaps this slow-moving System-of-Things, whose purpose caused such dismay in the heart of the Marquis of Sade, *was*, after all, doing the best it could!

But, meanwhile, what the devil were we to do? What hope was there for us? Here we were, in a Hell that the System-of-Things had provided for men of evil will after their death, in a Hell where, as on our own earth, everything that happened was due to a mixture of Chance and Free Will; and what comfort was it to know that *in the long run* pity and sympathy were bound to prevail?

What we needed was pity and sympathy — even as much as a "wren's egg" — here and now!

It was with a sick hopelessness that I turned from these thoughts and looked over the side of the vessel. What a sight it was! Not so very high above us stretched the roof of our world. It was of a dusky brown colour, and appeared to be composed of the same metallic rock as the ground we had left, ground that now frequently disappeared altogether as wisps of sulphurous smoke crossed and re-crossed it. We were off on a wild-goose chase in any event; a chase in which I confess I took very little interest. What was it to me, any more than to the easy-going System-of-Things, that a truth-loving vivisector should become the bosom-crony of a truth-loving

Inquisitor? I felt sure in my own heart that no Welsh Bard, even if he were a re-incarnation of the audacious little man who stirred the Cauldron of Caridwen, could prevent these *birds of a feather* flocking together; and I felt equally sure that no Welsh Bard, even if he conjured up his friend the enchanter Merlin, could persuade Morwyn to return to the earth while her father remained down here. Oh, what an *impasse* it all was! But you can imagine in what direction I turned my eyes most often, after watching my sweet girl sink down from her prayers into a heaven-sent sleep of sheer exhaustion. To the stern of our rushing cloud-chariot, I turned them, for I feared, after that murderous summons over the wireless, that any moment I might see the dusky air behind us grow thick with pursuers!

And I began endeavouring to disentangle from all the senseless scientific verbiage with which it was mixed up what that rascally old vivisector had actually hinted that they could do to us if they were so minded. I tried to imagine what would be the issue now, if, like a resolute mutineer, I started to fling our four ghostly companions overboard?

I hadn't seen any air-sailors on board; not even so much as a pilot, but of course I hadn't explored the whole of the ship. There may have been a deck hidden away full of such patient mariners. But if so I never saw them. The Emperor and the Marquis seemed to do with ease whatever navigation was required on this singular boat.

I think there was a *kind* of helm; but it was evidently not one at which it was necessary to stand all the while. I suppose it could be fixed in a certain position and then just left.

Black Peter was now lying at our feet with his legs stretched out and his back paws upwards; a position which normally gave me a feeling of peculiar security. Just now, however, I felt so jumpy and uneasy that this irresponsible doggish calm seemed a mockery.

"That's right, fool!" I muttered to him in my vexation. "That's right! Trust to the good, kind System-of-Things. Why, they'll bake your guts by inches inside your living body before that ancient Snail moves the millionth part of an inch towards helping anybody! This cosmos of ours — and Hell's no exception — is run by two goblins — the goblin Free Will and the goblin Chance. They used to worship goblins in the old time; and they were right! Goblins are brisk and lively. A minute is an hour to them, while to the System-of-Things a thousand million years is as one day."

To this reproach Black Peter replied with a faint tremulous shiver of his tail, and once more, while my eyes automatically turned to the quarter of the compass where I expected to see our pursuers, I tried to visualize how a hand-to-hand encounter with these demons would turn out.

As I contemplated the Emperor and our Frenchman at one end of the ship, and Old Predestination and Reflex-Action at the other, I thought to myself, in reality they can do nothing to us and we can do nothing to them! That's the rub. That's the heart of the situation. They're air; or only a trifle more than air. If I took hold of that great purple-swathed brute to throw him overboard, my hands would *go through him.* When they plunged through his clothes they'd be concealed from me but they wouldn't meet with any resistance; and where he wasn't covered by clothes *I should see my hands through him* as if through a shadow in water!

No, they can't *do* anything to us and we can't *do* anything to them. They can't burn Morwyn or take our Black Peter's brain. But they can *be there,* and be there too in such overpowering numbers that everything we looked at would have to be looked at through the body of a Shade! What a fate that would be! As a matter of fact it would drive a person mad. And I must remember that it would be *with the intention of driving us mad* that these sadistic scientists and theologians would crowd round us.

It would be a religious festival to some and a biological experiment to others; but a sadistic ecstasy to all. They would take notes of our contortions at every stage of the process. I don't suppose it would draw the most cruel of all from their beloved Screens, but it would draw a great many. Besides, Hell would then, for the first time in its history, possess an experimental laboratory entirely of its own; and we should be the squirming exhibits in it.

Such were my thoughts as I kept craning my neck round — for we were seated you must remember, amidships, with the old men at the stern and the other two at the bow, and we ourselves facing ahead — full of dreadful anxiety as to what I might see behind us. How beautiful Morwyn looked as she slept! And though every now and then, Black Peter would utter a low whine in his sleep, he too slept soundly, and looked so natural and peaceful in the way he was lying that when I kept my eyes on him it was hard to believe the appalling nature of our predicament.

I know I am not naturally brave, but you must admit that there was something so shocking in the present state of affairs, something at once so horrible and so uncanny, that you'd have had to have been a pretty tough customer to endure it with equanimity. I have often thought all the same that if we could practise assiduously enough the art of taking everything that happens to us from the artistic point of view, we could grow much more hard and callous than we are at present. It was with this in mind that I struggled frantically to thrust the idea of ghostly pursuers out of my head and to enjoy the unique experience of this voyage. You must bear in mind that the whole scope of Hell, as we flew along under its adamantine roof, was silent with what on earth we would call "the silence of the grave." It was this silence that made my consciousness of Black Peter's distress so vivid. It was a weird thing to be whirling through this vast hollow continent where the only sound was the whining in its sleep of a little dog!

If I *could* have got out of my mind the hideous possibility of what might prove our end as it will be recorded in the horror-diary of the System-of-Things, I might have derived much artistic pleasure from what I saw as I stared forward. That screwing my neck round to glance astern was a very different thing; but forward the spectacle really was impressive. I could of course see *clear through* the bare heads of both Roman and Frenchman, and indeed clear through the bare legs of the former, who seemed anxious to display his plump figure as much as possible to his admiring friend; and I can assure you there was something curiously and weirdly beautiful in thus watching the subtle changes in the infinite gulfs of luminous twilight as they were perceived *through the shadowy heads* of these two lost souls! The Emperor — either to enjoy the feel of the air upon his insubstantial flesh, or to excite to still further raptures the admiration of the Frenchman, presently unfolded his purple toga from his effeminate torso, exposing its obese curves without the least shame to the hollow vault through which we were voyaging. The purple folds thus thrust aside from the imperial breast, though of course insubstantial as all the rest in the matter of touch, were opaque in the matter of transparency. You could see through the flesh of Claudius Domitius but you couldn't see through his clothes!

But lying on his knees, after the wretch had removed them from his great transparent chest, whose capaciousness as I saw it before me in the eternal greenish-grey twilight, made me think of the Hebraic metaphor, "the bosom of Abraham," they looked, these sumptuous purple folds, like fallen curtains above which — clear through the now quite visible heart of this evil spirit — I could see the wondrous gulfs of air into which we were sailing! I was gazing with a certain grim and sombre interest, in spite of my anxiety, at

Hell's landscape, as it presented itself *through the bosom of Nero,* when I noticed a sudden and startling change begin to take place both in the appearance of the roof above us and of the ground beneath us. In fact both of these objects, upon which I had been keeping a pretty steady eye since we mounted into the air, simultaneously *disappeared.* The ground beneath us opened into an unfathomable gulf downwards, and the roof above us opened into an unfathomable gulf upwards. We were now travelling — save for the rare appearance of vessels like ours, and these I was thankful to note passed our bows diagonally, and thus obviously were not pursuers — through a complete void, a void that was literally, so it seemed, the "illimitable inane." The mental effect of this was anything but reassuring. After all, we had been dropped through the roof into this appalling country; and as long as the roof *was there* we might dally with the idea of getting back *through* it. And we had proved that it was possible to walk for twelve hours along the floor of this land. But to be whirled through a Hell-Gulf that had neither roof *nor* floor was a condition of affairs that wrought upon me like desperation. I am easily made dizzy by heights; and the thought of having a bottomless hole below me, as well as a bottomless hole — if one can speak in that manner — *above* me, gave me a sensation of psychic vertigo that was hardly bearable. I tried to remember words in the Psalms about flying to the "uttermost parts of the earth," and the Lord being "there also," but I couldn't get them straight!

In fact I couldn't feel sure whether the Lord "was there also" with a friendly intention or with the reverse.

I clasped my hands fiercely together, and watching the quiet breathing of Morwyn I made a super-human attempt to be a real philosopher, capable of facing the crisis when it came. I said to myself, "Death must, in any case, come for us all three sooner or later; and few people die without going through *something.* Well! *vie* may have to go through something; but in the end we shall be dead and out of it all! Stone dead shall we be; dead as all the millions upon millions born since the world began."

In making this philosophical attempt to gather myself together and be ready for the worst, I tried to realize my situation in the cold, merciless, white light of stark acceptance. I said to myself, "Here am I, an unknown human entity, but with a miraculous living body and with a mind that can travel through unbelievable gulfs of space and time. I've got with me two of the only three beings in the world that are part of myself" — you see I didn't forget you, my airy offspring, at this supreme moment— "and though we *are* lost in Hell and though we *are* in danger of being hunted to death by the Damned, *I know this for certain,* that the whole material cosmos is but a small part of the Reality of Life and that we all three — Morwyn, Black Peter and I — have something in us that's indestructible, something that belongs to a reality outside the astronomical universe, something that can still defy and resist, even though multitudes upon multitudes of these terrible spirits, whose consciousness has become a flaming, devouring Worm of undying cruelty, rise up upon us and do us to death with disgust and loathing!"

And I said to myself, "I can shoot forth my mind, without its leaving my body, until in pure empty nothingness it sees the astronomical world like a speck of dust, and in that speck a smaller speck which is the earth, and in the centre of *that* speck an infinitesimal pin-prick of hollowness, which is the Hell where we now are!"

At that moment almost simultaneously, Morwyn stretched out one of her thin girlish arms with a convulsive gesture of mental agitation, and Black Peter uttered a pitiful moan: and it came over me that as long as I was committed to these two, as I so deeply was, every mental attitude I assumed had to include them and take account of them.

But now a new distraction tore me from these desperate thoughts and brought fresh bewilderment and fresh alarm. I suddenly became aware that Black Peter's head was up and his nostrils twitching violently. That was the first sign I had. But very soon I could see Morwyn shifting uneasily as if something were bothering her, something that, though it didn't actually wake her, drew her mind up to the last delicatest ledge below the level of waking consciousness. And then I became aware of the most horrible smell I have known in my life proceeding from the gulfs beneath us.

I became aware, too, of a lively movement among our fellow-voyagers. The two old men at the stern came hurrying past us, hastening to join the others at the prow, all gabbling and bickering in the voiceless language of the Abyss. Their excitement soon awakened Morwyn and I feel sure she started up with one of those bewildered screams that children give when disturbed from deep sleep. And how pitiful it was to mark that this childish cry — the cry of living humanity in a madhouse of phantoms — was audible only as the faintest squeak of a mouse!

Quite different was the long-drawn howl set up by Black Peter. This sounded really shocking in the dead silence; and it was not made less so by the fact that the smell that was the cause of our agitation grew in intensity as our ship proceeded.

All four men were now talking together in the bows; and I was amused to notice how shamelessly terrified the plump Emperor showed himself. He kept twisting his purple toga round his portentous waist, and as he stared anxiously into the faces of his advisers with an expression that struggled to be frivolous but was really terror-sick, I was reminded absurdly enough of a Purple Emperor Butterfly I caught once, gorged with carrion.

Meanwhile Morwyn and I, with Black Peter at our heels, moved to the edge of the ship and gazed down into that misty void.

“There’s a Pit *above* us too,” I whispered to her. “We’re between the two Nether Gulfs of the Universe! We’re at the bottom of the one, and at the top of the other.”

The Theologian and the Vivisector were evidently less taken aback by the unspeakable smell which was now rising from the bottom of the world than were the Roman and the Frenchman. De Sade came over to us and explained with a great deal of self-depreciating mock levity that he had a curious dislike, inherited I think he said, from his father, of bad smells. “They don’t so much make me physically sick,” he elaborately indicated, while through every inch of his person that was not concealed by clothes I could see his nasty-looking nerves whirling up and down like medieval tumblers, “not so much physically sick, my good sir, as spiritually upset, and they make me furiously angry. Some of the worst things I’ve ever done were done on occasions when my sensitive nostrils were offended by a villainous stench. I was just telling the Emperor that if this smell has any origin that we people down here can deal with without using force, no punishment would be too—”

He was interrupted by a rush to his side of the three other spirits; and an instinctive huddling together of the four of them took place. I have never seen, except in one of those disgusting tins of live bait that boys sometimes carry when they go fishing, anything quite so repulsive as the way the forms and shapes of these four insubstantial Beings overlapped and interpenetrated one another as they huddled together there.

Evidently what the damned fear most in Hell is a spiritual visitor from a higher Dimension. This much of their accurst psychology I certainly learnt as, with Black Peter under my left arm and Morwyn’s dear fingers clutched tight in my right hand, I watched these cruel sons of perdition experiencing down here what their victims must so often have felt in life.

But the girl suddenly snatched her hand away and pointed hysterically over the ship's edge. And there, coming up towards us from out of the Abyss, was — and neither of us had the least doubt of it from the first moment we saw him — the very Personage whom we had come so far to seek!

Never have I seen so formidable a figure. Never have I seen so noble, so majestic a face! He was steering a little air-skiff of his own, and it seemed to me as if that small boat of his — and a life-boat indeed it was to us I — were actually riding on the crest of that filthy stench as it mounted through the air.

Out of that odious smell came this calm heroic figure, all that was most loathsome in the world seeming to give birth to all that was most god-like!

The two impressions came simultaneously. The smell was such as might have proceeded from millions of tons of decomposing fish down there at the bottom of that gulf; while the features of the mysterious Person that were now uplifted to greet us seemed illuminated by a mystic, phosphorescent glory.

The stench that bore him up in his little air-boat seemed to me in that tremendous moment to take a reflected gleam from his illuminated face. It seemed to grow palpable, as if with the leprous whiteness of millions upon millions of fish-scales, scales that might have been shed like a glittering scurf from the body of the great world-snake of the old Norse legends.

Yes, it was undoubtedly the man we sought, that mysterious spirit of the enigmatic Taliesin, who alone of all the myriad hosts of the dead moved for his own inexplicable reasons from one realm to another of the afterlife. Had he really been seeking his fellow-countryman, the lost magician, "at the bottom of the monstrous world"? It seemed to me judging from the indescribable nature of that smell, that it would have been more easy to lay hands upon some antediluvian survivor of the Jurassic Age marooned down there, than upon any enchanter, dead or alive.

But I had no time for speculation. Like our insubstantial companions, Morwyn and I stood spell-bound by this startling apparition, who now proceeded quite coolly to attach his little cloud-skiff to the stern of our big one, and to step quietly on board. He was a tall, personable figure, dressed more in the manner of some old Homeric Soothsayer than of a medieval minstrel; but to tell you the truth I hardly looked at his dress when he came towards us, for he had one of the most extraordinary faces I have ever seen. It was a face whose lineaments seemed to fluctuate and waver as he spoke. Like the other phantoms his flesh was transparent, and, as with them, you could see what the poet calls "the very pulse of the machine," but where he differed completely from the other Shades was in regard to the nature of the nervous system thus exposed wherever his skin was uncovered. His nerves were absolutely calm and still! O my dear child, I cannot describe to you the relief it was to all three of us living creatures to encounter such a person. I could see Black Peter felt just the same; for I had to pull him back from jumping up in the most happy manner against this stranger. He did once, before I could stop him, lay his paws upon the man; and the fact that they went through his airy substance as if it had been water did not deter him from trying to repeat this demonstration. He wagged his tail too, which I can assure you I hadn't often seen him do down here!

And even when the old Bard actually stooped down, and began whispering to him *in the way they did down here,* the spectacle was a pleasant rather than an unpleasant sight, and the thrill it gave to Black Peter was overwhelming.

Our visitor was enchanted with Morwyn at first sight. I could clearly see that! But to watch a Shadow addressing her with his nerves under complete control was such a wondrous comfort that I would have been ashamed to let myself feel jealous.

Morwyn and he fell at once into a quite intimate conversation; while all Black Peter and I could do — for such volubility in this country's silent language was totally beyond us — was to gaze upon them both with sympathetic awe. But you can believe that while Morwyn conversed with our new friend, and it was a wonderful reassurance just to contemplate his old white garments, faded and threadbare, after the sinister purple on the Emperor's plump body and all that Louis Seize finery of the Frenchman, I didn't fail to cast several sly glances in the direction of our ghostly companions.

Aye! but how frightened they were of Taliesin! They remained huddled up, all four of them, in that interlapping and interlocking confusion that was so unpleasant to see, and I noted that they were too panic-stricken even to *look* in our direction. They resembled a number of eels, some of them with black skins and some of them with brilliant-coloured skins, twisting and twining together in a terrified effort not to be observed by some great white-feathered fish-eating heron.

I didn't dare to interrupt the stranger's colloquy with Morwyn; and even if I had, I would have shrunk from trying to whisper to so dignified a Shade in the humiliating fashion of the place.

So I just waited till they should pause, and contented myself with restraining Black Peter from any further protestations. But while I was waiting I became aware that our cloud-vessel, incommoded no doubt by the weight of the visitor's skiff at her stern, and entirely neglected by her imperial owner, was acting in a manner that I felt was unusual and for all I knew, might be extremely dangerous.

She was in fact beginning to descend, and not only to descend, but to list to one side in a way that was decidedly alarming. In the course of these erratic movements she swung so far round that without turning my head I found myself facing the direction from which we had come. I knew this to be the case by the position of certain stationary smoke-clouds, whose shape I had noted, for indeed they resembled both the "whale" and the "weasel" referred to so caustically by Hamlet.

But — Heaven save us — what a sight I now beheld. That vicious "wireless" issued by that pair of bigoted old men, had indeed met with a terrifying response! I suppose the thought of sacrificing a living woman to the questionable "Truth" of the past, combined with the thought of torturing a living dog for the equally questionable "Truth" of the future, was irresistible! It must have excited to a fever-pitch just that particular mixture of evil emotion in them, that, under the indulgence of the System-of-Things, with its prejudice in favour of Free Will, had been the primal cause of the creation of Hell. And now they were coming here by the millions. Yes, and as the Bible says, "all Hell was moved at their coming."

A live woman to be tortured as a heretic — for no doubt both Torquemada and Calvin would view Morwyn's simple idealism as fatal to Salvation — and a living dog out of whose sufferings might be squeezed exquisite drops of dubious knowledge, these were attractions enough to despoil all the television-screens of Hell. "He-souls, she-souls, and shoals of souls," as the Dublin writer says, they were all pouring after us, in every cloud-vessel and air-wherry, and wind-skiff, that the fumes of the Abyss could carry. There wasn't a second to be lost. It was madness to be any longer scrupulous about interrupting those two. We were lucky in the fact that the four devils on our ship were too busy hiding their heads from the Welshman to notice how successful their appeal had been. The immediate danger, in my ignorance of such things, seemed that our whole ship might capsize. And *then,* what a fate! To fall down into that bottomless pit which was even now yawning below us and out of which came this infernal stench; and to know that these millions upon millions of maniacs of cruelty would be gloating over our unspeakable end — oh, I can tell you I had need at that moment of every scrap of philosophy I've raked together in my fifty odd years.

But I expect you'll be surprised — as indeed I was myself — that with this absurd ship of ours steadily sinking, and the fumes from that pit, like the reek of a thousand dead leviathans, steadily growing thicker, and that accurst armada of pursuers "warping," as Milton says, "upon the wind," I *still* hesitated to interrupt those two!

I suppose it was the extraordinary dignity of that old man in his threadbare bardic dress. No wonder those cruel devils had to hide their heads! There was something about that old man, phantom though he was, that made a person lose his assurance. But I hazarded the plunge, and speaking — in their silent language — louder than I need have done, for this telepathic speech has many degrees of psychic intensity, I burst in upon them with my alarming news — that the whole of Hell was after us, and that our vessel was rapidly sinking!

The force of my interruption was so great that it broke up that group of panic-stricken wretches, and the two friends, the religious bigot of Predestination and the scientific bigot of Determinism, hurried past us to where their wireless was, and began chattering into the air in alternate volubility like a pair of savage chimpanzees.

The old Welshman bowed politely to Morwyn, and lent a grave ear to my somewhat incoherent speech. I was still clumsy in the use of their language; but I had come clearly to see the absolute necessity for something of the kind. In fact from beginning to end of my visit to Hell I was struck with the amazing "strides" — as people put it — that Science has made in this underworld. The moral atmosphere of Hell, its power of concentration, its lack of distraction, its indifference to right and wrong, its ghastly fatalism are all conditions that lend themselves to scientific progress.

The mingling too of spiritualistic experiment with biological experiment is so easy and natural down here. Immoral spiritualism falls in most happily with immoral science; both of them feeling at home in Hell and both of them being ardent idolaters of non-moral truth in a world where the System-of-Things is so obstinately bent upon making mere human goodness the test of everything.

And what a triumph of the reconciliation of science and seance was the discovery, helped on no doubt by many learned vivisectors and black magicians, of this silent telepathic speech! Of course the grand difficulty of social intercourse down here from the very start must have been the difference of tongues; and though it takes a certain time for a lost soul to learn this mute language, what it really amounts to is the substitution of one minor difficulty for a great number of insuperable difficulties.

I had already discovered that people come to Hell because it's the only place left where you can enjoy the simple pleasure of pure cruelty uninterrupted by the System-of-Things *penchants.* No one, but this man I was now addressing, and possibly his enchanter-friend can ever have come to Hell for any other purpose. But as all practisers of cruelty know, whether their sadism is personal or theological or scientific, there is a curious heightening of the pleasure when it is enjoyed in common; and the beauty of this common language is that a Negro-torturer from the United States when once happily down here, can exchange his feelings with a courtier of Nero; while, to the deep comfort and satisfaction of them both, an old Inquisitor can strengthen the nerves of a young vivisector.

The Welshman listened patiently to my disconnected and agitated words which as you may believe were supplemented by frantic gestures in the direction of our pursuers and in the direction of those vicious old rogues who were so busy communicating with them; and when I'd finished I was hardly surprised to observe a brooding frown flicker across his calm features. *Could he help us?* As I watched him pondering there, this one single spirit of good-will among all these millions, I confess I gravely doubted what he could do. My chief relief lay in the manner in which the purple-swathed owner of our sinking craft was blending his phantom substance in sick terror with that of the Frenchman, who was in vain endeavouring to release himself.

If the ruler of the whole ancient world shivered like that before this solitary old man, wouldn't all that motley riff-raff draw back in even greater terror when they realized who was with us?

While our visitor stood pondering, with sombre eyes fixed on the artistic substance, like congealed cat-ice of a rich blood-colour, whereof our deck was composed, for the Emperor's yacht was of a less natural and simple texture than our previous vessel, I managed to exchange a word or two with Morwyn. "He's our only hope, our only chance," I said distractedly, "but whatever happens to either of us, remember this — *Nothing* will make me wish that this hadn't been!"

She gave me a long steady look which I have never forgotten. Its precise meaning was obscure to me then, and is so still, for I couldn't read her thoughts; but with one last flash of my old meteoric illumination I saw that she had not ceased to love me, and that was enough. I was ready, as we say, for the event; not heroically ready, but still ready; and I prayed that if these demons did frighten us to death, the girl and dog and I might perish simultaneously.

But a wild trouble came suddenly into Morwyn's face and I knew well what it was. She was thinking of her father! Oh that accurst Mr. —, how I did hate him.

I hated him alive and I hated him dead; though of course I was glad he was dead. But in his dead state he certainly revealed his full disgustingness. It's extraordinary how deceptive the mere fact of being alive makes us! Everything living, everything healthy and sound and natural, blooms like a flower with illusion and pretence! The illusions of life, as Goethe says somewhere, are encouraged by Nature herself, and woe to those who meddle with them! Mercy and Justice are no doubt the most deceptive of all Nature's illusions; but since the System-of-Things has thrown its weight behind them they will prevail. Illusion against *the World*! *That* accounted, I said to myself, for the noble calm of this old Welsh Bard, and the panic he created among all these Torturers for the Truth!

To the great Spirit who renews the world a creative Illusion is far more precious than a dead dissected Truth. That is why so many sadistic people become vivisectors. Sadism in its essence is the perversion and sterilization of the life-force. It tortures to death; and then, in its diabolical frenzy, it becomes necrophagous It eats the dead! All the nobler inventions of humanity are the work of the living imagination. Vivisection is the morbid cruelty of those who medicine life with death.

But I am, of course, elaborating too far your father's thoughts, my child, as Morwyn and I turned away from what might have been our last look at each other, to gaze like two terrified children into the insubstantial lineaments of this extraordinary person, the only person in the whole history of the world who has gone in and out of Hell for purely intellectual reasons, but the substance of what I have just set down did flash through my mind.

“Well, Captain; well, little lady,” our friend said at last. “We’ll do what we can. Things do look pretty unpleasant. But there’s always a limit to the cunning of madmen, and that’s what these people all are. Are you prepared to take a great risk, Captain? Your lady says she is if you are.”

I uttered the word “yes” as vigorously as I could; but unfortunately in this atmosphere of the everlasting “No,” and I daresay under the influence of so many great masters of paradox the word “yes” has come to sound like its opposite.

The old Welshman lifted one of his eyebrows and gave me a sharp look. “He means ‘yes,’” threw in Morwyn hastily. “He speaks Leprosid with difficulty.” This was the first time I’d heard the name of their curst language; but I caught at the straw she held out.

“With difficulty, Leprosid,” I echoed feebly. “Yes-no, no-yes. Me with she. She with me.”

The Welshman smiled, and his smile was such a comfort to me at this juncture that I looked away from them both and faced our pursuers.

Oh, but they were getting so near! The whole air, for half the circle of its horizon, was alive with cloud-ships. “*Come here — you!*” This command, uttered in a voice that sent a cold shiver down my spine, came from the wireless apparatus. I could see the Predestinarian and the Determinist grinning from above the gunwale with goblinish triumph. They were transferring to me a message they had just received; and they were using a loud-speaker.

It was the voice of Mr. —! Morwyn’s face as she listened to it was “a study;” but I believe I actually detected, among other emotions, *pleasure* to hear the brute's voice! "I'm her father," it went on. "She's my daughter. I've made arrangements to have her with me. I wish to see her here."

"Pick up your dog, Captain," said our Welshman, "and take your girl's hand. Gobaith gwr o ryfel, man's hope's in battle!"

Morwyn, however, wasn't persuaded at the first word, or at the second word either, to do what our protector bade. She had an obstinate and most untimely longing to try to talk to her father over the wireless! I doubt if we could have got her away at all, if, with the gathering about us of this host of demons, Claudius Domitius hadn't grown suddenly bold.

Egged on by the Marquis of Sade he actually dared to approach us; and it was a sight to see the great purple-swathed bully-boy hanging back and lurching forward in alternate gusts of fear and desire. His very hands, I could clearly see, would have been burning hot to the touch, for all their transparency, so intense was the erotic emotion that impelled his advance.

Our protector's attention was occupied just then with unfastening his boat; and taking advantage of this these two cowardly wretches came near frightening my girl in a manner upon which I dare not even now allow my mind to dwell. What made it so particularly unpleasant for us was that the torturer of Servetus had his little glowing persecutor's eyes fixed on Morwyn, from whose mortal frame he must have felt a ravishing desire to expel heresy.

As for his friend, the famous vivisector, *his* eyes, I need hardly tell you, fastened themselves so covetously on Black Peter that I could feel the poor beast, as I pressed him against my side, shivering from head to foot.

"Father, forgive me!" cried Morwyn; and I knew from that that she *was* at last prepared to go.

But it was now too late. Our rudderless vessel gave such a lurch at that moment that the Welshman's little skiff, in which he was standing beckoning to us to descend, broke away; and to our horror as we leant over the side, we saw it sink down; while, relieved of its weight, the vessel that carried us rose into the air with a violent jerk. The foremost of our pursuers were now so close that we could see their decks crowded thick with maniacal spirits; and there was no doubt from what I could see of those obsessed faces that our fate was upon us. A lingering death — by terror in place of instruments — was what they had come to enjoy; and it was evident they anticipated some delicate additions to scientific knowledge and some exquisite confirmations of religious "truth" before they had done with us.

Our accurst vessel kept lurching from side to side as it slowly rose. Many of our pursuers were now alongside of us, and we could see their eager forms clinging to the taffrails of their ships, like huddled flocks of evil birds.

Desperately we leaned over the side and peered down into the gulf, hoping against hope that our protector would manage to right his small wherry and ascend again. We could just discern him, through the everlasting twilight, working at the tackle of his boat; but he was still sinking, not rising, and he was evidently too busy even to glance up at us.

By this time one of the pursuing vessels was side by side with our own, and presently a horde of excited phantoms boarded her and began crowding round us. All was lost. We were completely hemmed in. On one side of us were old Predestination and old Determinism; on the other the Roman and the Frenchman.

It was the Frenchman who inaugurated the proceedings that were to be the beginning of our end; but of course, since our tormentors were what they were, the longer our inquisition lasted the more knowledge would be added to the archives of Hell.

"Put the Catechism to them, Professor!" cried the crafty Marquis; and without a moment's delay the croaking voice of the famous Vivisector began as follows.

"Is there any who can protect the helpless?" And at once, in that silent Leprosid that made the effect more horrible, for it rose like an eager miasma from a thousand perverted hearts, came the reply:

"*There is none who can protect the helpless!*"

Then again the Vivisector chanted:

"What are above Pity and Mercy?"

And the answer came in a ghastly universal howl from that gibbering crowd:

"*God and the Truth are above Pity and Mercy!*"

And, while the infernal catechism rose and fell, the crowd about us grew so thick that it blotted out the whole air. All we could see were multitudes of excited faces, of every race, nation, and age, their maddened nerves jigging under their transparent skins with frantic emotion.

"What must we give heretics for the sake of God?"

"*Torture!*"

"What must we give animals for the sake of Truth?"

"*Torture!*"

All this while I was searching the faces of the lost souls who were nearest to us in a despairing hope that I might detect in one or two among them *some* sign of softening. I was still holding Black Peter under my arm and I was still clutching Morwyn's hand, and we were all three huddling together against the vessel's side. I could clearly see the nature of the vivisection to which they proposed to subject us and it was one that would certainly, in its terror and shame, have killed Morwyn sooner than they hoped. They proposed to pass, in a long interminable procession, *through* *our living bodies,* as of course it was easy enough for them to do, and by reason of the verisimilitude of substantiality which they possessed, the shock of it, particularly to Morwyn and Black Peter would have been unendurable. I might myself have clenched my teeth and endured the horror of it, but to Morwyn —

As I watched those nearest to us, and among them were the four in whose company we had been voyaging, I thought I did, quite distinctly, see some faint signs of compunction in the faces of the Roman and the Frenchman. They, of course, as I had now come to understand, were just personal sadists who tortured from pure pleasure. But in the countenances of the Theologian and the Vivisector I saw a pitiless hardness, against which it was clearly useless to struggle. These two felt so absolutely certain that their wickedness had behind it "God" and "the Truth" that they would have willingly spent months in doing Morwyn and Black Peter to death in the manner at which I have hinted. They had no drop of human pity left in them!

I could feel Morwyn's fingers begin to grow cold, as these Lemurs pressed in upon us, and as for Black Peter, his whole body was shivering. I was at my wits' end. Morwyn, I know, was praying desperately to the God of her fathers; and, after his fashion — as no doubt millions of animals were doing at that moment in Research Laboratories — Black Peter was praying to some Power in Earth or Heaven more pitiful than man.

And then it came over me that sooner than endure the devilry of these phantoms the best thing we could do would be to throw ourselves overboard. The last time I had looked over the side, there were no cloud-ships *beneath* us. There was nothing beneath us, but the fathomless gulf of the Abyss, out of which rose this unspeakable smell that filled the air.

But we should be dead — all three of us — dead and safe from all these horrors, long before we knew where our bodies would lie! And our souls? Well! None of u*s* were heretic-burners or vivisectors. Morwyn and Black Peter were innocent of all vice; and my own vice — and you can believe I had noted *that* with some interest — was apparently un-represented in Hell.

I daren't reveal my decision to the girl in their curst Leprosid — How could I make her know? How could we say a word to each other before we plunged to our death? So far — and I put it down to the lingering irradiation of our wits by the magnetism of that falling meteor — we had been wonderfully preserved from any *supernatural* fear of these phantoms. But my instinct told me that this preservation was rapidly drawing to an end. If we didn't plunge to a natural death in a second or two, our death would be an appalling one; at least Morwyn's and Black Peter's would; and though I managed, because of my tougher nature, to survive, what should I feel, lost in this place, along with the bodies of the only creatures in the world except yourself for whom I have —

But I must tell you what actually happened. We were — as I say — facing our persecutors; not conveniently bound to the stake, or to the torture-table, as they would doubtless have preferred, and not without a vague hope that the Marquis or the Emperor, since they had no ideal interest in our contortions and squirmings, *might* relapse into common human pity, when I became aware that Black Peter had suddenly twisted round under my arm and was violently sniffing and panting.

My heart almost stopped with a spasm of wild hope. I knew Black Peter so well that I felt sure that this sudden exhilaration of his, for he always panted in this way when he was welcoming someone or something he liked, could mean only one thing; that our old Welshman had got his boat under control and was near at hand! If I hesitated to go through the grotesque and ignominious process of whispering when all I had to communicate was my decision to plunge to our death, I didn't hesitate now. To the girl's complete astonishment, and I think she feared for a second that I had gone mad and wanted to embrace her in the presence of all Hell, I flagrantly pressed myself against her, squeezing Black Peter recklessly in the process, and with my free arm about her body, tapped out upon her back, using my fist exactly as a one-handed typist might use a typewriter, the incredible news that our preserver was at hand!

Then I drew back, and we both swung round towards the side of the ship. Our retreat was a sign for a general advance of the whole crew. "Thick as autumnal leaves," they swept down upon us — only to see us scrambling over the side of their damned vessel and tumbling, safe and sound, into the little cloud-skiff of our Bardic friend! There was no further attempt to interfere with us when once we were snugly ensconced at the bottom of that celestial life-boat.

The old Welshman of a thousand incarnations apparently must have excited in them exactly the same shiver of *supernatural terror* that they themselves had now begun to excite in us. There weren't many vessels below the keel of the imperial yacht, and those that *were* there when we boarded the little boat scattered in all directions like a flock of sparrows before a hawk!

It was from a different quarter that danger was menacing us now; and it considerably spoilt both the sweetness of our relief and the expression of our gratitude to find that our astonishing old gentleman was having a most crucial struggle to get his craft under control.

Now that I saw his difficulties with it, I realized the stupendous effort it must have cost him to mount up to our rescue after his wherry had once sunk down. Down it was going again now — a fool could see *that* — and at a most disconcerting speed.

The old man, beyond a grim smile when we first appeared, had no time to concern himself with us; and as I watched his desperate struggles to cope with the problems of aerial navigation I couldn't help thinking how queer it was that the transparent bodies of the souls who survived death should not be able to disregard completely the laws of gravitation and just float about where they pleased. Such, I know, is a great many people's naïve and unthinking view of the state of things after death; but now that I saw how matters really were I realized how ridiculous it was to expect any creature, however ethereal, living within the categories of Space and Time, to be able to disregard these familiar limitations. I mentally resolved to inquire of the old man later — if we three luckless ones were to *have* any "later" — what would happen if one of these spirits fell from a great physical height? According to ancient mythology Satan himself and his followers fell from the greatest of all conceivable physical heights and yet after a period of bewildered unconsciousness picked themselves up intact. But those were angels — rebellious angels it is true, but still angels — and had the advantage of bird-like wings; whereas we have no authority in Homer, or Virgil, or Dante, or Milton, or even John Bunyan, for endowing the souls of the *damned* with wings, and my personal experience coincides completely with the inspired clairvoyance of these sages.

As we lay huddled at the bottom of the Welshman's boat my thoughts took a far flight. I said to myself: "It's clear that Hell possesses, as the medieval cosmographers taught, a definite geographical location, and it's clear too that the souls of our dead who have made a cult of the pleasures of Hell, being automatically drawn, as the scripture so well puts it, 'to their own place,' find here their natural home. But though Hell," so I concluded in my pensive audacity, "is circumscribed by time and space and by the laws of this stellar universe, there are plenty of other invisible regions, many of them completely outside the whole astronomical world, that remain available for such as have sought to adapt their human nature to the System-of-Things's slow-moving prejudices, and there, very likely, the laws of space no longer hold good."

I had such confidence in our aged pilot, and so I think had Morwyn, and I know Black Peter had, that it was a considerable shock to me when he suddenly approached us and, wetting the tip of his longest finger at his lips and making a mystic sign in the air, told us in Leprosid that there was nothing for it but to let the boat sink.

"Where shall we land?" I inquired while Morwyn stared at him with troubled eyes.

He shook his head and made a motion that I should follow him to the stern of his air-schooner.

"The fact is," he whispered to me, and I can tell you it was a queer experience to feel, and yet *not* feel, his ghostly fists beating a tattoo on my back, "I don't know if we shall ever land at all! Some authorities from Africa — whence I have reason to believe the deepest human wisdom proceeds — hold the view that the great river Oceanus flows at the bottom of the gulf we are approaching. If this is the case — for the Oceanus is a circular river without source or outlet — it is possible that my little boat will be carried round and round within the interior of the earth, without pause or relief, until the end of the world."

Black Peter, who invariably followed me every step I took, now rose on his hind legs and laid his paws upon the old man, gazing up into his face with so much gravity that the Welshman could not help smiling.

“He knows what I’m saying,” he remarked to me in Leprosid. “Well! You’d better prepare your lady for the worst; though I wouldn’t mention the Cimmerian river! Tell her we’re sinking into regions beyond my experience; but tell her I’ll do the best I can.”

As I returned to my place I heard him muttering to himself what I fancy was a Leprosid rendering of the praise of “Branwen ferch Llyr” in the second “branch” of the Mabinogi, “tecaf morwyn yn y byd oedd hi — the most beautiful maid in the world was she.”

I was glad enough for practical reasons to catch this unconscious revelation of our bard’s admiration for my girl. If he felt like *that* in his old phantom heart, it was clear that nothing would induce him to desert us! At the same time I didn’t attempt to conceal from myself as I hugged her close in the bows of that sinking boat, that I did wish it were possible for a young woman to receive a famous poet’s admiration without so much as a butterfly-wing’s flutter of emotional reciprocity!

But our rescuer had evidently all he could do at present to keep his overloaded craft on an even keel, as it sank down to God knows what abysmal landing.

And Morwyn and I had all we could do to keep from being overpowered by a ghastly dizziness that was now overtaking us. Faster and faster the boat sank, and so much time passed that I began to wonder what would happen if we reached the magnetic centre of the earth? Would there arrive some staggering revolution, some palpable reversal of “up” and “down,” after which, according to the laws of gravitation, we should find ourselves *ascending* in place of descending? How clearly I can remember every detail of that plummet-like fall into the bottomless pit!

The very struggle against that ghastly dizziness soon began to narrow down my perceptions to the essential and the ultimate. The stench from below grew worse and worse all the while. It was as if we were descending into the Morgue of the Universe! We were falling too fast and the gulf was too wide for anything to be visible save the usual cold grey artificial twilight — the accursed everlasting twilight, "eterna, maledetta, fredda, e grave," — that was Hell's substitute for our familiar alternation of day and night; but I knew that we must long since have left the level of the plain, and I drew back with a shudder from the thought of the sickening vertigo we would necessarily have felt had we approached in our recent march over the volcanics and the edge of this indescribable pit!

Had that Frenchman intended all the time to lure us to the verge of this Bottom of the World, to describe which, let me assure you, my good child, isn't for a tongue "che chiami mamma e babbo?" It is well within the bounds of probability that this is precisely what the rogue *had* in his mind, ever since he drugged us into that stupid beatitude with his vile Tiberian brew!

But now I must reveal to you a queer thing. One would have supposed that beyond my desperate clinging to Morwyn the dizzy tension of our descent would have totally killed all more earthly feelings — but not at all! Whether it was due to some demogorgonic aphrodisiac, diffused through the abysmal fumes I was inhaling, or whether I was thrown into some primordial mood of erotic recklessness as happens sometimes among people condemned to death, I cannot tell, but the fact remains that it was certainly, as the Prayer-Book says, "with my body" that I "worshipped" this sweet girl, as the fetid wind from the gulf beneath us blew back her hair and whistled through her dress!

I shall never, after this adventure, feel the least doubt about the truth of the story that it was the Welsh prince Madoc who discovered America long before the Norseman or the Genovese. I would never have believed that a

Bard, or a Prophet, or a mystical Teacher, could possess such a firm hand in sailing an air-ship as this extraordinary old man revealed as we went down.

He actually managed at last to lessen very materially the speed of our descent, which was an enormous comfort to both of us, and indeed removed once and for all the danger of either of us being physically sick. But in doing this he steered the boat almost within arm’s reach of the side of the pit, a move that was considerably agitating to his passengers, for it necessitated the bringing upon the scene of a gigantic pole, with which as our descent became slower, the old man kept prodding the wall of the gulf, and each time he did so Morwyn would utter an inaudible feminine cry, for there did seem an emphatic danger of his being jerked overboard.

But I could see what a proud delight he took in being once more captain of his ship and master of our destiny. He even began to murmur some fantastical Welsh ditty, using the mute Leprosid language but throwing into it all the elfin wantonness of his own ancient tongue. With his voice in my ears I found myself gazing with an almost luxurious passivity at the smooth slabs of volcanic stone that composed the side of the shaft. They showed themselves in that livid Hell-light, which resembled a diffused electric radiation seen through water, to be of many various tints; but their predominant colour was a metallic steel-blue, whose cold gleam, sometimes almost phosphorescent, was accentuated by the artificial quality of the twilight.

Both Black Peter and Morwyn were now happily and peacefully asleep, and I am inclined to believe that I should have been soon in the same condition, for I had begun to feel as if we might sink down like this forever, when my wits returned to me in a startled awareness that our pilot was staring upwards with an expression of intense and troubled consternation.

I had come to know his facial expressions pretty well by this time; and even when he spoke of the possibility that our descent might end in that fatal Homeric river, I didn't catch upon his countenance such an expression of concern as I detected there now. Some new menace of an unlooked — for and most alarming character was clearly imminent. I took the liberty of hurrying to his side and following his gaze. I could, of course, discern but dimly and ignorantly what he had seen with devastating clearness; but I could see enough to realize that the pursuit had begun again. Some fast-sailing craft — I could make out its general outlines though the thing was still many miles above our head — was boldly following us into the bottomless pit!

Our protector hurriedly returned to his steering-gear and our speed began rapidly to increase; but although I had already found out how much he hated to be questioned when busy with the problems of navigation, this was not a moment for scruple or hesitation, and I followed him to the stern of the boat and asked him point-blank what vessel it was that was following us. I found him very crusty and laconic; and though I plied him with questions his replies were like those of Panurge's semi-quaver friar.

"We *are* being pursued then?"

"You saw."

"Is there any danger?"

"A great deal."

"What kind of danger?"

"You'll see."

"Whose ship is it?"

"Nobody's."

"Has it ever been anybody's?"

"Yes."

“Please tell me whose?”

“Fu-Hsi’s.”

“Was he a Chinese king?”

“The first.”

“Where is King Fu-Hsi now?”

“Gone.”

“What’s the name of his ship?”

“The *Yin-Yang*.”

“And some of these devils have stolen the *Yin-Yang* in Fu-Hsi’s absence?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know who they are?”

“Yes.”

“Who are they?”

But the Welshman was silent.

“O greatest of all the Bards of Ynys-y-Kedeirn,” I implored, throwing into my imperfect Leprosid the most moving propitiation I could conjure up. “If not for my sake, at least for Morwyn’s sake, tell me who these ship-stealers are?”

The old man jerked me towards him and rubbing his lean belly against mine and thumping on my buttocks with his clenched fist admitted he had caught a glimpse of the rascals. And the thieves who had stolen the Yin-Yang in Fu-Hsi’s absence were none other than Mr. — and his Inquisition crony!

“May I tell Morwyn?” I inquired as soon as he released me; and I shall never forget the look of unfathomable contempt with which he replied.

“God’s love hurts; the devil’s tickles. Tell her what you like!”

I returned to my girl’s side; and though I awakened her as gently as I could, I confess it was impossible for me not to reveal to her that we were being pursued by the most formidable air-ship in Hell under the pilotage of the Grand Inquisitor and her deceased parent. It was all very well for an ancient Welsh Bard to bear so much responsibility and to steer our common fate in resolute silence. I simply wasn’t made for such heroism. Besides, who knows what unexpected resources a crisis like this might reveal in a feminine mind? In plain words it presented itself to me as simply ridiculous to keep Morwyn in the dark just at the very moment when we were in most need of her presence of mind! I must admit, however, that our old Bard had reason enough for warning me. I am, and I know it well, far too quick at blurting out things to women. I tend to forget, not only that our strongest weapon against them is silence; but that our wisest moves in their own protection are made in silence. Lie to them and they’re almost sure to squeeze the truth out of you. Once let them read your silence in your face and they’ll get your secret, be it buried never so deep! But conceal the fact that you’re concealing anything; and in that way, and in that alone, you — and very often themselves too — will be safe from danger.

Little do we know the hearts of women! When we’re involved with them in moments of the most tragic import they will absolutely astonish us by their reactions.

No sooner had I revealed to Morwyn what our Pilot had discovered — and I remember his curious boast in one of his oracular poems that it was from Africa, not Asia, that he drew his mystical science — than she leapt up from her place, causing Black Peter to bark vehemently, and rushing to the old man began imploring him to wait for her father.

I shall never forget how the sound of Black Peter’s barking echoed and reverberated in that gleaming twilit shaft.

Our pursuers on the deck of the *Yin-Yang* must have heard it clearly and no doubt attributed it to its true cause; namely the agitation excited among us by their appearance.

"Certainly, certainly!" I heard the old man reply in Leprosid, and I can now see the besotted smile, for he was evidently infatuated with her, with which he said it.

As for me I turned cold at such incredible folly! Didn't the old idiot realize — didn't "all the sciences of Africa and Europe" reveal to him — that Mr. — and his atrocious ally came as *enemies,* not as friends?

"Certainly, certainly," he kept repeating from his position in the stern, where he was frantically busy with his sailing-gear.

I sat down by the girl with an indignant sigh, prepared at any moment for the boat to cease her descent; and it was hard for me, and clearly impossible for Black Peter, who by the aid of an instinct older that "all the sciences of Europe and Africa" knew perfectly well what danger we were in, to help giving way to a fit of real anger with this silly girl whose infatuation for the ghost of that cruel wretch was risking all our lives.

The crazy child kept glancing upwards to where we could see the *Yin-Yang* rapidly descending upon us like a great buzzard upon a wounded lapwing, and before long what must she do but begin frantically waving to two little black specks that now showed themselves at the side of the vessel; specks in which even I with my elderly vision imagined I could discern the detestable triumph of Mr. — and his Spaniard.

But what did this mean? What was happening now? As Morwyn and I kept straining our heads upwards, it began to become evident to me that those two phantom specks at the side of the *Yin-Yang* were beginning to grow smaller instead of larger! This was followed, in a short while, by the *Yin-Yang* herself growing obviously smaller; and it began to dawn upon me that instead of constantly diminishing, as it had previously been doing, the distance between us had begun rapidly to increase. I breathed a sigh of intense relief but what could be the cause of this extraordinary phenomenon? It was then, as I gazed anxiously at the expressive features of our old pilot, that the truth of the situation dawned on me. The crafty Welshman had quieted Morwyn's desperation but he had done *the direct opposite* of what she had begged him to do!

Instead of waiting till the *Yin-Yang* drew near he had removed every impediment to our descent; and save for the very slightest mechanical control, he was allowing us to sink, by our own gravitational weight, plumb down to whatever lay at the bottom of the shaft.

Having arranged the boat's gear so as to leave only the barest minimum of resistance to her descent, the sagacious Bard, with a portentous cloud on his formidable physiognomy, came hurrying up to us.

"I found it impossible to do what you wished, lady," he said; and I couldn't help noticing that though compelled by the chemical atmosphere as well as by the psychic aura of the place to speak in Leprosid he was struggling to find a synonym for the Welsh word for "lady" and I could see his attempts were in vain. No parallel expression for that strange, beautiful, non-Aryan word, "Arglwyddes," a word that he must often in former incarnations have applied to the great goddess Caridwen, existed in Leprosid.

But Morwyn leapt to her feet and gazed upwards in desperation. No, we were falling like a plummet now, and there was no sign of the *Yin-Yang.* She was too overcome with disappointment to burst out angrily against our friend, as I greatly feared she might do. She just staggered down into her seat and lay deathly still, hiding her face in her hands. Thus we remained. And I told myself grimly that it might easily be in this precise position that we should be caught by that mysterious reversal, that saltimbanque-trick of gravitation, which must play the devil with all travellers who pass through the "thick rotundity of the world."

Every now and then Black Peter would utter a low frightened moan in his sleep; a moan which was echoed, faint as it was, from both sides of this unfathomable shaft, and echoed too both upwards and downwards. It began to seem to me now, however, that the upward-sounding echo was the one that receded into the greatest distance.

It was becoming to me more and more of a race-outrage, or perhaps I should say of a "genus"-outrage, that while our human speech was rendered mute by the atmosphere of this place, the least sound Black Peter made seemed doubled or trebled in its acoustic power. "But what is that?" I thought. "Is this still only the echo of Black Peter's moaning — grown twenty, thirty, a hundred times louder as it recedes?" For what I heard now, where had been audible only the prolonged reverberation of a little spaniel's moan, was the roar of some antediluvian Zoological Garden, a Zoological Garden of Dinosaurs and Dinotheres.

It was at this point that our pilot suddenly leapt to his feet; and I don't think I have ever seen a human countenance express the kind of impersonal excitement his expressed then; an excitement of pure childish interest in what was going to happen next! "We're near it, we're near it, we're near the bottom!" he cried and rushed to his electric machinery; but I could see that his absorbed ecstasy in this great moment of cosmogonic discovery had made him totally oblivious of us — yes, even of Morwyn. "All's well!" he shouted; and then, "you'd better—" But even as he spoke I was aware of a mass of water beneath us and a deafening, stunning, blinding crash that obliterated everything.

I hadn't time to snatch up Black Peter or to hug Morwyn to my heart; and now, as I consider it all in cold blood, I think it was providential that I *didn't* have time for these things; for since we fell into deep water and I was myself the only one of us rendered unconscious I might have dragged down and drowned both of my loved ones.

How it happened that neither the girl nor the dog were stunned in the way I was, I cannot to this day understand. It must have been largely due to the miraculous precipitancy with which this surprising old man mitigated our descent at the last and to the manner in which he kept his head and guided the boat till we struck the water.

My first impression when I returned to consciousness was that of extreme heat upon my face and hands. As far as my companions were concerned they seemed, in my dazed state, to be in exactly the same position as when we had been together in the boat, only Morwyn and Black Peter were now leaning over me. As my wits came back I realized that the heat I felt came from a fire of dead wood, round which we were all gathered, and upon which the tall shade of the old Bard was still piling fuel. My clothes were steaming in the warmth of the fire, and I noticed that Morwyn had taken off her jacket and her shoes and stockings and had laid them on the ground to dry.

Confused as I was, I was not too stunned to derive a delicious sense of pleasure from the sight of her bare ankles in the glow of the flames.

Another thing gave me a thrill of delight even greater than her ankles, and that was the unbounded joy that her face expressed on seeing my recovery! "Thank the Lord," I said to myself, "so you can forget your father under *certain* conditions!"

And if I was touched to the heart by my girl's absorbed concern in my safety, I was hardly less affected by the fuss, as soon as I began to take notice of him, that Black Peter made over me.

Even the old Bard cast a benevolent glance in my direction and this — after our experience with the other Shadows — was a most comforting relief.

I could really have sat up long before I did; but it was so sweet to me to enjoy the girl's entire concentration, and the change from what we had gone through brought with it such a delicious relaxation of mind and body, that I deliberately remained as I was, in spite of the heat of the fire, and gave myself up to that lovely mood of diffused tenderness towards the whole cosmos which often accompanies physical weakness in an atmosphere of sympathy.

But I did sit up at last and even stand up, and as soon as I had done this I completely passed out of my melting mood and contemplated our situation with absorbed amazement. We were on the shore of a vast subterranean sea that stretched away, without limit or interruption, to the furthest horizon. The waters of this extraordinary inland ocean were breaking gently, in long, oily, rolling waves, within a few yards of where I stood.

The shore upon which our fire was burning was composed, as far as I could make out, of one vast mass of dark-green granite; and the colour of the water, although it darkened to sheer black as it receded towards the horizon, was of that metallic blue-black which, if I am not mistaken, is called Indigo, though why this Acherontic ocean should resemble the juice of the plant Indigofera was a mystery to me.

But the more I gazed at what was before me the more absorbed, petrified and completely rapt out of myself I was by what I beheld! I begged Morwyn to hold Black Peter for a minute or two while I retreated a few hundred yards inland to a spot where there appeared to be several granite ledges of a considerable height. Seeing that I was obviously quite myself again she expressed no objection to this, though Black Peter pulled desperately at his leash.

But I didn't want him with me at this particular moment. For one thing I desired to retire out of sight for a natural reason and for another thing I was afraid he would start barking and thus reveal to the crew of the *Yin-Yang* the fact that we were alive after our fall.

My hope was that this accursed ship had given up the chase as too dangerous; but as I walked away from our fire, I paused to glance up above my head and I fancied I could make out, by a certain patch of lighter greyness in the stone roof, the actual orifice, or tellurian pit-shaft, down which she would have to sink, if Mr. — and his ally were to come at us.

But what a sight met my gaze when I finally turned to take my bearings on the top of a granite-ridge! In my usual manner I kept a close analytical eye on my own feelings at this crisis, and it was really amazing how calmly I took the astounding spectacle presented to me, a spectacle which, you must understand, my good lad, struck with its bewildering shock upon my senses of hearing and smelling, quite as vividly as upon my sense of sight.

For one thing I noticed how nothing in the lurid monstrosity at which I looked affected my intimate feelings as much as the sight of Morwyn's bare legs as she dried her stockings!

"What a mystery it is," I thought, "this maddening, this irresistible attraction of girls' legs!" The truth is, I have always resented the idea that this attraction comes purely from what you, my dear boy, in your modern jargon would call "sex-appeal." I resent equally the notion that the paradisaic fascination to me of youthful feminine limbs comes from their intrinsic loveliness. They're prettily turned enough; but I think, from the point-of-view of pure a*esthetic beauty*, they aren't to be compared with the limbs of boys and young men!

No, my own secret feeling here — though you will doubtless laugh at me — is that the particular kind of charm in the legs of young women is in some mysterious way connected with the deepest mystery of creation and with some especial magic — like the reflection of those wonderful dark moons in a flowing stream due to the flickering motions of water-flies — that runs through nature, and is a symbol, or archetype, hinting at a secret in the universe at present unrevealed! I think this is suggested by the curious attitude, full of an intense furtive, reverential narcissism, with which girls themselves regard their limbs.

However this may be, I have certainly never seen anything more captivating or engaging than the sight of Morwyn drying her stockings by that fire and the red flames throwing into relief the whiteness of her skin.

The black form of Black Peter, as he still struggled against his leash which the girl had twisted round a broken portion of Taliesin’s boat, looked so touchingly *little* from that distance that I caught myself in a tragic realization of the physical littleness of all living entities among the huge terraqueous forces that toss us forth and draw us back. Rationally I knew then as I do now, that the mind is greater than all these, and that considered relatively and philosophically *size is nothing,* but when I saw that little black form, among all the enormities I have now to describe to you, straining at his leash with his feathery paws straddling so pathetically on this ultimate floor, it was not easy for me to hold before my consciousness the insignificance of Matter compared with the significance of Mind. If ever Matter cried out in triumph: “I alone am the Conqueror!” it was here, in this navel-pit of the world.

If it hadn’t been for the red flames of that fire and the white gleam of Morwyn’s ankles and the familiar shape of Black Peter struggling against the pull of his leash, I should have been overwhelmed by the terrible sublimity of all that now pressed upon my consciousness. The lean figure of the old Welsh Bard, too, as he fed the flames, I found reassuring; but otherwise what I saw before me was so terrific that it made me lose all thought of that accursed *Yin-Yang,* the re-appearance of which I dreaded more than anything else.

A little to the left of our fire rose a group of seven gigantic trees. Now, as this was the only vegetation I had seen since that sidereal meteorite swept us down, you can imagine how I stared at these titanic growths. They were larger, far larger, both in height and in girth than any I had ever seen. I fancy the colossal Redwoods of the Pacific coast would have been dwarfs compared with them! And their enormous size made it easy for me to detect their species.

I recognized them at once by their peculiar shape; though they were leafless at this winter season. They were gigantic alders; and it was with the dead branches of these trees — fallen I suppose for thousands upon thousands of years on the banks of this Avernian sea — that our Welshman was replenishing his fire.

I couldn't remove my eyes from these trees. I tried to imagine what they looked like when they were in leaf; and the thought came to me how invincible was the power of Nature, that even upon this floor of the bottomless pit there should be felt, year after year, season after season, the miracle of resurrection!

But, heavenly Christ! What were those two monstrous Shapes bending over the blue-black water? They were alike and yet not alike. They looked solid and palpable, and yet in some indescribable way I knew that they were not made of any material produced by the earth. In fact, even as I surveyed them from where I stood I perceived a queer sort of perpetual motion, like the faint-flowing pressure of some unseen creative power altering their shape before my very eyes! Though they faced the water and bent over the water, they were looking downwards with what seemed to me, from where I stood, almost human lineaments. These lineaments were only in half-profile, for the larger portion of their cyclopean physiognomies were turned seaward, but no words of mine, my good son, can describe the horror of their expression! I thought to myself, as I stared in stupefied awe, that no one could have looked upon their full faces and survived such a Gorgonian experience.

And, moreover, as I continued to gaze upon them, it seemed to me that there was *something else* round and about them that touched a limit of frightfulness beyond what they were in themselves. It seemed to me that there floated round them moving images of unspeakable and unbearable cruelty, such as might have curdled the phantom-blood even of our pursuers!

The Shapes themselves were so tremendous that they seemed only a little less tall than the topmost branches of the gigantic alders; but they were hunched and humped and indrawn, as it were, as if they shrank in undying loathing from the very images of intolerable cruelty about them, over which, at the same time, they were gloating with an everlasting obsession.

The waves of that blue-black ocean, as they gathered and crested, were swept oilily forward, and subsided without breaking into foam at the feet of those two crouching Shapes, but this was by no means all; for I now became aware, and aware for the first time, that the surface of that dark, oily water was broken by the occasional appearance and disappearance of vast, wallowing, saurian creatures, creatures such as I have seen reproduced in imaginary pictures of the Jurassic Age, and such as I myself have often clothed with imaginary flesh, as I have gazed at their bones in our various museums of prehistoric relics. I find it hard to describe to you what I felt as

I stood on this granite-ledge and beheld these things, but this much I will say, that side by side with the petrifying shock of all this I retained my normal self-consciousness sufficiently to make a mental note of the miraculous adaptability of the human mind.

As I think of it now, and still more as I think of what followed, it does seem to be astounding what our nature *can* endure of the shocking, of the appalling, of the overpowering, and yet retain its sanity. Can it be that there is something below all the nervous refinements of our precarious civilization, something that we have inherited from the prehistoric jungles and swamps and salt-marshes, that at a crisis leaps up from the depths of our being and endows us with a veritable ferocity of courage? And not only of courage. What I felt then can only be described as a sort of mad ecstasy of contemplation, the kind of insane glee such as one can imagine Satan feeling, when, as Milton describes it, he forced his way like a dragon through the wild elements of chaos. Had nothing more been presented to my senses at that moment than these two humped shapes, made of a substance that was half-mental and half-material, and surrounded by shadowy images of blood-curdling cruelty, while at their feet wallowed and sported in the water these primordial monsters of the deep, I really believe I could have kept my head, kept it at least at that infernal level of crazed contemplation. But what I was destined *now* to witness, went beyond all endurance; and I am not ashamed to confess that when I saw what I saw now, it was in sheer brain-sick panic that I fled down from my granite eminence to the protection of our familiar fire and our friendly Welshman.

If it had been only the *sight* of that spectacle, far away as it was — in fact I believe it must have been half-way to the horizon — I might have remained where I stood. It was the renewal of that long-drawn bellowing sound that we had heard as we descended that broke me down, and even more than that, the unbelievable smell that accompanied it. For what I saw, before I ran down in desperate panic to my girl's side, was nothing less than two mountainous Leviathans — I don't know how else to describe the Things that rose up out of that blue-black sea — both of them trumpeting like sea-elephants, and as far as I could make out locked together in a loathsome embrace, and in that condition rending and tearing each other's flesh. It struck me at once that it was from this frightful struggle and from the rending of their Saurian bodies that this filthy smell proceeded. Their trumpeting was like an accumulated scream of appalling physical pain, and as they heaved up and down upon the surface of the water, burying themselves in each other's flesh, I received the impression that this hideous contact and this mutual immolation had been going on in this subterranean sea for thousands of years.

There was a moment before I fled down to the fire and before the wild tension of my frantic contemplation collapsed in a fit of hysterical panic, a point of time, if the truth must be told, that was probably less than a minute, when the whole enormity of what I saw was realized in its monstrous fullness. It's extraordinary how at such moments something takes hold of Time itself and draws it out to its breaking-point, to the point where if it *did* break it would dangle and bleed in an eternal void. Yes, I took it all in before I bolted, and if I were to shut my eyes now, even as I write this word, I should see it all again.

The roof of this ocean in the bowels of the earth was not as high as the roof which had covered the great plain from which our shaft descended, nor was it too high for the opening of that shaft to be visible from where I stood.

But the spaciousness of this watery world with its sky of stone was rendered monumental by the naked simplicity of every element in that terraqueous abyss. The granite shore was of one prevailing tinge of grey-green, the oily sea of one prevailing tinge of blue-black, while the very light that illuminated the whole spectacle seemed to have been strained and purged and wrung-out, so that nothing but its harder, colder, and more metallic quality remained.

That towering grove of bare alders seemed to have gathered into itself everything that was least warm and tender in vegetable growths, while it emphasized everything that pertained to the weird, the ominous, the deathabsorbing. The deeply indented bark of these alders had apparently thickened itself out with some species of dark moss, and even with minute specimens of ferns and funguses; and I have certainly never seen any vegetation more deeply rooted.

All around them the soft leaf-mould was piled. I think they were rooted in great fissures of the granite; but a thousand years of falling leaves had surrounded them with a porous mould that was black as pitch. Those two humped and crouching figures, that were forever quivering and shivering under the creative breath that was moulding them, displayed, in the half living, half-inanimate spasms that kept shaking them, an absolute absorption in the wavering images that hovered round them; while the surface of the ocean nearest to the fire whereon the Welshman kept throwing pieces of dead alder-wood was not only swept by wisps of smoke, but kept heaving up under the shapeless backs, slippery as eels, yet scaly as dragons, of those prehistoric creatures.

But all this, if you are following me, my dear son, fell into a mere negligible frame-work for those screaming monsters against the horizon. The moment they rose above the water, these frightful screams that must have been muffled under the water — for I doubt if they had ceased for centuries — rose with them; and with the screams came floating in over the water that pestilential smell.

There before me, in that terrible moment of time that was being stretched to the breaking-point, I seemed to feel in the eternal embracing and eternal devouring of these first-born of the abyss the very secret of the dark, obscene, life-and-death entanglement, that old evil "knot of contrariety," out of which, as the lips of the damned had confessed, the System-of-Things was evolving its purpose. I wonder how *you,* my dear son, would have borne up under what my fate presented to me at that unique point of time? You and your new generation, with your disillusioned lightness of touch and your deft avoidance of mysteries, would I daresay have settled like butterflies upon this abysmal revelation and dodged its significance with a flutter of wit. You would certainly have smoothed out the complicated meaning of what I did next by your airy formulae.

Rushing like a frightened infant to Morwyn's feet I flung myself down in front of her and hiding my head between her knees, I clung to her bare legs and burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing. Her soft skin, now completely dried by the fire, smelt of fragrant wood-smoke and though she was youthful enough to be my daughter, what I felt, as I clung to her body and buried my life in her life, was an absolute abandonment of my hard, clear-cut identity in the deep sweetness of her young strength; and as my paroxysm of sobbing died down a strange sensation of infinite safety and security took its place together with a feeling as if I were back once more, for all my grey hairs, and conscious too of its fathomless beatitude, safe from life's horrors, in the blessed womb of the woman who bore me. The intolerable screaming of those Enormities as they rent each other's flesh reached me in that warm darkness, but they reached me through the tender beatings of the pulses of my girl's life, and became no more than some inevitable cosmic note, some necessary Discord of the Spheres, without which the whole planetary motion, from equinox to solstice and from solstice to equinox, would be inconceivable.

My hysterical weeping — and let me confess I suspect this was the first time Morwyn had ever seen a grownup man cry, for Mr. — was a perfectly self-controlled person except when he was confronted with the provocative nerves of tortured animals — ended at last, as was natural enough, in a deep and prolonged sleep. The wondrous thing, as I knew from her tone and her whole attitude when my sleep was over, was that this absolute collapse of mine and this infantile clinging to her woman's limbs and all my flood of tears against her fragrant fire-warmed knees, broke down some barrier of virginal reserve of which she had herself hardly realized the existence. There is such a thing as a spiritual ravishment of maidenhood — occurring like its physical loss on a particular and recognizable occasion — which gives to a girl's love something peculiarly intimate and impassioned. And such a moment of spiritual seduction is often far more important and far more emotionally serious than the corresponding physical one; an aspect of things which entirely demolishes the undue stress laid by puritans upon mere physical purity.

There was something most exquisitely touching to me about Morwyn's attitude when I awakened at last from this desperate and abandoned sleep. There was a timid ardour about her, combined with an enchanting shyness, that to the subtle sensuality of my mood, as I awoke, resembled the temper of a youthful bride. I felt as if my clinging collapse, my absurd tears, my reversion to the eternal child that lies concealed under the mask of all the sons of women, had in some queer psychic sense broken the final barrier between us.

Would that this blessed moment could have lasted forever! But, alas, I had only to struggle to my feet to be arrested once again by the sickening terror of the impressions that crowded in upon us. One relief, indeed, I did have, when I recovered enough spirit to look about me, and that was indescribable. Those two monsters of the deep had carried down their obscene embrace, their revolting struggle, their loathsome stench, their appalling screams, into the abysmal sea-gulf out of which they had emerged.

And with them all the lesser spawn of that prehistoric subterranean ocean had sunk down out of sight.

We were left with that endless expanse of blue-black water, and with those crouching figures of half-materialized substance, and with that sinister grove of leafless alder-trees. Even the floating shapes of superhuman cruelty that I had seen gathered like the ghosts from some Cosmic Inquisition about those bowed figures had vanished away.

I moved closer to the fire. I even began replenishing it, as I had seen, or fancied I had seen, our shadowy Welshman do, with bits of ancient wood that must have fallen, in the course of centuries upon centuries, from that grove of colossal vegetation. I occupied my mind with this, partly to regain my disturbed and distracted wits, but also from a feeling that I ought to give Morwyn, too, a chance to recover herself and to re-assume her now completely dried garments.

“Where’s our friend, the Bard?” I inquired of her when at last I turned round. I spoke in Leprosid; for I’d resolved that no risk of being overheard should ever make me practise again upon her dear form that repulsive whispering-trick.

She shook her head, placed her finger on her lip, and pointed across our stranded air-ship in the direction opposite from the alder-grove. I saw then that the tender mood had left her too and that she was tense with alert concentration.

Following her gaze I detected the pallid wraith of the old soothsayer, standing about a hundred yards away, staring up anxiously at the black gulf in the roof above us.

"My father!" she cried. "He thinks he hears his ship!"

Under my breath I damned both the ship and the man, and then I chuckled at my irrelevance; for wasn't the cruel wretch sufficiently damned already?

"Does he hear—" I began.

She nodded. "He did just now," she said.

But at that point our protector came striding back.

"Is it my father, is it my dear father?" she cried.

"It was," answered the old man laconically.

"Oh, don't hide things from me, don't hide things from me!" she begged, lifting her arm in her emotion as if to touch him.

But he drew back sternly. "It *was,*" he repeated. "But the ship's gone up again."

He paused for a moment, frowning. "Gone to bring more of them," he added, looking significantly at me.

For several seconds the old man and I stared at each other. "Is there nothing we can do?" I murmured, glancing at our stranded conveyance and casting longing eyes across that great mass of blue-black water.

His expressive face grew as hard as a stone. "Nothing," he said. But a minute later a faint light came back into his face. "Wait," he murmured hoarsely, and fell into a fit of deep inner concentration. "I seem," he began after a pause, "to remember — something. It came — to me once—" His voice died away again; but even as I watched him he seemed to fall into a kind of self-imposed trance. “Came to me once,” he repeated, “when I remembered those drops from the cauldron. I was on the shore of Tegid Llyn with Llywarch Hen and he asked me — and!”

Once more he paused and then added in a strange, far-away tone: “And I wrote it down — afterwards — long afterwards.”

“What did you write down?” I asked him; mixing up their damned Leprosid words in a most shameless manner in my eager snatching at this straw.

His stony face relaxed into the flicker of a smile. “It’s hard enough,” he said, “in our own tongue.” And then he brought out the following obscure syllables, which the mute Leprosid accent reduced to gibberish.

“*Bu kyweir karchar gweir ygkaer sidi...*
trwy ebostol pwyll
a phryderi.”

For some extraordinary reason the queer rhythm of this abracadabra came to me with a thrill of vague relief. “Complete,” he continued in Leprosid words, still smiling his strange, far-away smile. “Complete was the captivity of Gwair in Caer Sidi through the apostle of Pwyll and Pryderi,” and with that he fell silent.

“What does it mean?” was my natural question; but my bluntness didn’t seem to bother him.

“It was,” he replied, “under the inspiration of that Cauldron I used the word ‘Cyweir’ or ‘complete.’ Now ‘Cyweir’ also means ‘harmonious’ or ‘beautifully arranged’; and now — after pondering on the question for nearly a thousand years, for no bard understands at once the full meaning of his words — I am inclined to think I was referring to the deepest secret of all in our old—”

“*What are you doing?*” I interrupted him, calling anxiously to Morwyn, who having slipped off in the direction whence the old man had just returned, was staring pitifully into the shaft’s mouth above her head.

But I had come by this time to know so well the nature of the look she threw at me across the granite floor that I tried to absorb myself in Taliesin’s tantalizing riddles and forget the imminent appearance of that wretched *Yin-Yang.*

“I beg your pardon, sir. You were speaking—”

But I needn’t have thrown that in. He was going on just the same, as if Morwyn were out of hearing and I were in a mood of calm receptivity: “ — the deepest secret of all in our ancient religion; a secret that bears upon the mystery of good and evil and upon the mystical light that sometimes shines out from the most noisome regions of evil.” He paused and pointed with his hand towards the massive rocky base where those two thought-created Images looked down at the blue-black water. “Of course,” he said. “You realize what *those* are?” I shook my head; but I confess I had formed a pretty shrewd guess.

“They’re the twin-gods of Religion and Science,” he went on. “I don’t myself know which is which; and I think in the end under the washing of this sea they will become one figure with two faces. They’re both, as you observe, still in the process of creation. They’re the creation of their worshippers and have only a dim half-life. When we first came down here their worshippers were at work on them. The air was full of scientific and religious thoughts.” He paused, for me to make some comment; but I was still pathetically clinging to that straw of hope he had tossed out.

“Do you mean that your ‘captivity of Gweir’ may be *under* those horrible Molochs?”

The old Bard nodded. “I am not able,” he said, “even yet to unravel to you all my meaning. But I think I meant that Hell, in some special sense — perhaps in a musical sense, for my word ‘Cyweir’ implies a musical mystery — when ‘harrowed’ as the Bible says, and as I say in my ‘Harrying of Annwn,’ may be made a hiding-place for the highest. But *a vo penn bit pont* as Bendigeidvran cried. It’s only the greatest who makes of himself a bridge into the future.”

With these words upon his lips he turned and glanced at Morwyn. Exhausted with straining her neck to stare at that ghastly shaft in the roof, the girl had sunk down with her back against a ridge of granite, so as to be able to keep her eyes on that grim orifice with at least less physical tension.

The old man and I exchanged a significant look.

“Nothing short of violence will move her from *that* vigil,” our look decided.

Then he resolutely pulled his grey garment tightly about him. “I’m going,” he said, “to see if there *is* any passage there. Will you come with me? We won’t leave her for long.”

I glanced down at Black Peter and he returned my look with a long, puzzled, uneasy, searching stare. “Be cautious, O great master!” his eyes seemed to say. “A little unwise recklessness may be the death of all of Us!”

“I’ll come a step anyway,” I said. “I can always go back if I feel nervous about her.”

So we advanced along the windrow of that blue-black sea, hoping to find some kind of expanse of sand or pebbles between the Images and the water. Black Peter came with obvious reluctance. He kept pulling at his leash and twisting his plump body into a galvanic crescent in his desire to keep Morwyn in sight.

It became clear to me that in his faithful dog-mind he half-suspected us of some deadly human treachery. As for me, I only prayed to heaven that he wouldn't bark. I didn't dare to disturb Morwyn's vigil at that moment; but I felt, for all our sakes, that I *must* try every door of escape while there was still a chance.

"Better not look at those faces as we come up to them," said my guide. "I've fought against Arawn, King of Hades, in my time, but there was nothing there like *those* Horrors."

I obeyed him; but though I didn't "look", I could feel my deepest flesh shiver itself into ice-cold wrinkles as we approached; but I was glad to find there *was* a strip of sand between those Images and the water so that if there existed any passage beneath them a person would be able to enter it dry-shod. No, I didn't look at their faces as we turned our backs to the sea's edge and moved up closely to them; but there are expressions on the faces of Life, or perhaps I should say on the faces of Death-in-Life so appalling, that it is not only with the eyes that you perceive their presence.

But the old man was perfectly right about these twin Molochs being in the process of *becoming one.* Without lifting my eyes beyond their knees I could see that under some parallel movement of the tides of human cruelty and the tides of this pre-historic ocean these two gigantic bodies *were* growing together.

But a very curious thing began happening to me then, of so bewildering a nature that I almost forgot what I had come here to seek. It was a queer spot, this little strip of sea-sand. There were several very oddly shaped shells lying about, but they were composed of such lovely mother-of-pearl that their shapes didn't worry me, though they did make me think of those sea-krakens I'd seen, whose smell was still in my nostrils and their screams in my ears.

But what I made an effort to concentrate upon, so as to avoid any danger of a chance glance at those unspeakable faces, was a vast piece of sea-weed that lay stretched out on that sand.

I was absolutely sure I detected that same loathsome smell — the smell of the erotic sweat of Jurassic-Age monsters — coming from that piece of sea-weed. But its size was so terrific! Its size troubled me. I had an odd feeling that that piece of sea-weed of so monstrous a magnitude was breaking some fundamental law of nature; had something obscene about it, something startling and sickening.

But what I referred to just now was not the sight of any of these details. Indeed, I tried to absorb myself in these details so as to shut my mind to this other thing.

It was the effect produced upon my own nature by the aura that surrounded these gods of religion and science!

I suddenly began myself to think of such things, that, as they conveyed themselves to Black Peter, for in his crucial nervous state the dog had become positively telepathic, made him lift up his head and howl. I didn't yield my will to these thoughts. I held them at bay. But there was something devilishly insidious about their particular kind of frightfulness, automatically transforming itself into what, under other conditions, *might* have disturbed me. But there they were, crowded into that single spot, all the thoughts of all the minds that all the way down the ages have killed their pity, for the sake of these twin Monstrosities!

So absorbed was I in this mental struggle that it was with a shock of awakening, as if roused from a trance, that I heard the Welshman cry out in shrill Leprosid: "By the Cauldron of Caridwen, there *is* a way down!"

I rushed forward to his side. Yes, we were standing now — and we were below the stone base of those half-created Idols — on the very brink of an enormous tunnel. The floor of it sloped clear down before us, not very steeply either; but in the dim artificial light of this place we could see it descending, descending indefinitely, descending immeasurably, into the bowels of the earth! Above the entrance to the tunnel was a cyclopean monolith of granite, in appearance suggesting the work of superhuman hands, for it was perceptibly curved in the centre, like the curve of a Norman arch. It was all of one integral single stone. There was no doubt of that; and in *that* respect it looked, but so indeed everything else did down here, as if it had been in existence before the Flood.

The old soothsayer stood spell-bound, gazing without speech at this entrance and this path-way to what he had visioned as he walked with Llywarch Hen by the edge of Bala lake.

Suddenly he lifted his hand and pointed. “There’s something engraved up there,” he murmured. “There are words up there.” The “words” were easy to read, for they had been deeply chipped out of that huge slab; but I could make nothing of them. I had never in fact seen anything in the least resembling these extraordinary hieroglyphs. They seemed to me to be entirely composed of straight lines, but arranged in such a way as to suggest the separate letters of separate syllables.

I regarded them with wonder and not a little awe. What hands, among the ancestors of our race, had carved those everlasting symbols over the entrance to this terrific descent?

But the awe I felt before this dusky lettering in the heart of Hell was not unmixed with a faint comfort. In this kingdom of insane shadows it was a relief to see the handwriting of men who at least had been alive and in their right minds when they moved about down here.

My companion, however, who had been contemplating these strange symbols with intense concentration, turned round to me now with a look on his expressive face that I shall never forget. There was a dim radiance in it, as though someone had suddenly lit a lamp under fathoms of water.

“Do you know what those words mean?” he asked me eagerly.

I shook my head.

“It’s in *Ogam,*” he said, “the old Druidic script; but the words are Greek words.”

“What does it mean?” I asked.

He pondered for a moment, evidently finding the task of translating by no means easy. I suppose he had to turn it first into his old Welsh and then into this damned Leprosid.

“Sleep is the bond forged for Cronos,” he cried at last, and there was not a little of the pedantic pride of the scholar in the complacency of his tone.

“What does *that* mean?” I asked him. My question must have betrayed a barbarous ignorance, for he became at once as testy as a schoolmaster.

“Mean?” he cried. “It means what it says! You and I, by a grace we don’t deserve, have stumbled upon the most sacred spot in the stellar universe. Somewhere down here is the actual place where Saturn sleeps, until the overthrow of the world! And with him sleeps — I have no doubt — the great magician and prophet of my people!”

“You mean—” I began; and if I hesitated to utter Merlin’s name it was more because of the mystical excitement I saw on my instructor’s face than because of any superstition of my own.

He solemnly bent his head; and I saw that my guess was correct. His lips now began moving, as if in prayer, and I felt constrained to look away; I had never seen a person praying to any God except the one worshipped in England and I regarded him with embarrassment. I couldn’t catch his words. Indeed, to confess the truth, I drew away a pace or two, afraid lest, in his mood of awed respect, he might feel compelled to address me in a Leprosid whisper.

But in place of whispering he uttered what I suppose was a Leprosid version of something in Greek; and I fancied I caught the word “Crete” or “Cretan.”

More humbly than ever I implored him to make his meaning clear to my limited intelligence. He gazed at me in astonishment.

“I thought—” he began, but hurriedly checked himself, out of what was evidently a polite desire not to hurt my feelings. “I know of course,” he went on more quietly, “that a generation that thinks it can gain knowledge by torturing animals must have lost the clue to the secret of life.” He spoke sadly, but very gently; and proceeded, in the tone one uses to a badly brought-up child, to explain to me that Cronos, or Saturn, was a Cretan ruler in the Golden Age, when the only worship known was the bloodless worship of the Great Mother. It was in connection he told me with the baskets in which offerings were made to the Great Mother that the cult of the Holy Grail originated, coming to these islands long before Goidel or Brython, and of course æons before the Christian era. “Whatever Creative Spirit,” he said, “is responsible for the existence of our Cosmos, it’s clear that *Nothing can come of Nothing.* In other words Nature, through her human children, refines herself and spiritualizes herself, just in proportion as she returns, though enriched of course by the experience of the struggle, to the Saturnian Age from whose wisdom and simplicity we have so lamentably fallen. Those words up there must have been engraved by Druidic hands under the influence of voyagers from the Grecian isles.

“I suspect that the planetary resting-place to which this descent leads can be reached from the interior of many a Gorsedd Mound in my country. Our enemies, the Norsemen, made Hell conquer Heaven. Our poets, much closer to the secret of the universe, reveal the existence of a Paradisaic Underworld that is beyond both.

“And I can tell,” he went on, still with the charming complacency of the vindicated scholar, “I can tell from the significance of these difficult letters, that this very entrance, where we stand now, actually leads, not only to the captivity of Gweir in Caer Sidi, but to the sleep of Saturn himself.” He was silent, while several shuddering spasms of what I suppose was pure joy in some inner beatific vision passed and re-passed across his fluctuating lineaments.

Seeing that he was so absorbed in his great discovery, thus stumbled upon by pure chance as he assisted Morwyn and me, I made a sign to him that I would soon return, and hurried off with Black Peter to bring Morwyn to the spot.

The smoke from our smouldering fire concealed her from me when I first emerged from beneath that loathsome pair of Demogorgons; but I knew at once that something was wrong from the way Black Peter dragged against his leash and hung back. As a rule he became almost as excited as I did myself when we were hunting for Morwyn; but on this occasion he kept huddling himself together, and looking sideways, and licking the edges of his mouth with his pink tongue, and several times he even squatted down on his rump. No! there was no sign of those appalling sea-beasts; nor had the floating images of horror returned, wherewith the religious and the scientific have, from the beginning of time, appeased their self-made idols.

When, however, I was half-way through the smoke, the dog began uttering quick low growls in rapid succession. This alarmed me and made me so nervous that I clapped my hand over his mouth and held him down by his collar. Then — for necessity knows no nicety — I practised on his black form that villainous whispering-trick, and told him, after the repulsive fashion of the place, that he mustn't make a sound as we were all in great danger. My attempt at whispering must have struck him as a deed of desperation, for he followed me quietly after that and with no further struggle.

There are moments in our life when the devastating shock of what we see makes us death-cold as the inanimate, makes us like an ice-floe carried down a swift tide. Such was my sensation, in spite of the friendly warmth of our fire, when I beheld what I now beheld.

The whole expanse of the granite shore below that terrible shaft was crowded with air-ships, some broken, some intact. Air-ships were floating far and wide in the water; and all about them and between them, crowded together and jostling one another, were the desperate Beings they had contained. In some places, as it seemed to me, these evil voyagers were so merged and fused in one another that I got a revolting sense of a *multiform Shadow,* wherein the separate shapes of these lost souls were fused together, in an inchoate mass.

And even as I looked, other air-ships kept descending, kept disgorging their burden of living-death, till the whole stretch of those forlorn sea-banks was thick with a tumult of excited phantoms. But dear God! what was happening to Morwyn? As far as I could make out, from where I stood choking in the smoke of the fire as I struggled to keep Black Peter quiet, the girl was crouching against a granite-ridge, while between her and the seething crowd of our adversaries were the figures of her father and the Spaniard, engaged as it appeared from where the smoke whirled round me, in a tense and dramatic argument.

I shall never forget the frozen misery of the way my mind cracked and groaned at that second! Should I rush to her support? Or should I fly back whence I'd come and call the Welshman to our assistance?

If only Black Peter had been a different dog, had been like some dogs, I might have sent *him* back to fetch him, and rushed alone to my girl's side!

And then it occurred to me that if he barked — the one thing I'd been keeping him from doing, for I was muzzling him with both hands — our protector might hear the sound, in this great hollow shell of atrocious silence, and know that there was something wrong.

No sooner had this flashed through my brain than I did release the dog; and sure enough — and the sound echoed like homely thunder under this vault of Hell — he burst into furious and wild barking.

Dragging him on his leash by main force I then emerged from the smoke and made straight for Morwyn. If the tumult had been bad before I intervened, it was trebled now. The crowd of spirits made that sort of desperate rush forward that mobs of men and packs of wolves make when they smell blood. Terrified, frantic, completely at the end of my tether, pulling Black Peter, who was now too paralysed to make a sound, recklessly after me, I was just in time to reach Morwyn's side when the crowd swept round us.

I say "round us" — and so it felt to me — but as a matter of fact though they formed more than a semicircle about us they never came quite *behind* us. There was still that one avenue left, for rescue or escape!

But the moment was such a tense one that I could do no more than throw one arm round my girl, while with the other I lifted Black Peter from the ground.

At crises of that kind abysmal weaknesses in our nature — such as we have never supposed existed — are revealed to our shame; and I now have a disgraceful thing to confess. In my dazed agitation it never occurred to me that I was showing equal concern over the girl and Black Peter; and one of the most grievous regrets that trouble me now is that I didn't hug Morwyn to my heart, or at least — for I could have done that and still clung to my dog — given her what might have been our last embrace.

But if you — even you, my dear son, with all your modern devil-may-care tone — had been where we were at that moment you might have lost your self-esteem just as I did. You can have no notion of the expressions in the faces that thronged about us, and if the roar of a mob is blood-curdling, I assure you that the dead silence in which all this took place was something more appalling still. Black Peter's pantings as he pressed himself against my side seemed like the sound of all the elements; *for it was the only sound there.*

The waves of that water were inaudible as they broke; and beneath all that vast hollow vault not a breath of air stirred. But, oh the sickening expression on these multifarious faces! There must have been a sprinkling of pure sadists among them, but these evidently formed a very small minority. The bulk of this multitude were scientific and religious fanatics; though I believe a good many of them worshipped the State in place of any personal God.

But whether they wanted to torture Morwyn to death for the sake of her soul, or whether they wanted to torture Black Peter to death for the sake of humanity, the expression on their faces was simply unforgettable.

Every trace of natural human feeling, every trace of that mercy and pity and righteousness and justice to which, although so slowly, the System-of-Things is moving, had vanished away. All that this expression said — all that it said to the water, to the fire, to the air, to the towering alder-trees was: "Let me torture to know more! Let me torture to save souls!" And as if their *expression* wasn't enough, there were other things. The excitement of their nerves was an appalling spectacle, showing clearly how it had come about that they had flocked into Hell. The perversion of the pivot of divine sexuality, upon which the whole cosmos turns, into this piston of cruelty needed nothing less than all the bowels of the planet for its satisfaction.

And there was something else too. As in the case of those entwined sea-serpents, only *that* was natural compared with the effluvia of this shoal of perdition-fish, a reeking fume exuded from their jostling forms. I think it was this fume, more than anything else, that gave Morwyn the desperate courage actually to whisper to me something before them all. Tragic and heartbreaking it was to feel her young breasts pressed against my chest and her small clenched fists beating wildly on my back. What she whispered to me I shall not reveal. No doubt to the new generation it would have seemed the most old-fashioned nonsense.

Suffice it to say it had to do with her determination rather to die than to yield her living body to the bodiless rape of that mob of unspeakable shadows.

But the protracted altercation that was going on between her father and the Spanish Inquisitor held back our adversaries for a while. The whole crowd paused so intently to listen to what those two were saying, that it began to dawn on my dazed wits that upon this colloquy our fate depended. The strange thing was — as I look back upon it all now — that I never felt that their savage and cruel obsession was directed to myself as well as to my girl and my dog. Nor even yet do I believe it was! The great advocate of Predestination — who burnt Servetus to establish his “truth” — and how, after my time in Hell, did I loathe the very look of that word! — was apparently not among this crowd. I learnt later that the artistic Emperor and his obsequious admirer had refused to risk their valuable air-craft on the mere chance of torturing a girl and a dog. The hearts of both Nero and the Marquis of Sade lacked the sacred fire to keep their cruelty at white heat. It tended to flicker down when the conditions were difficult.

On this occasion they must have simply steered their precious yacht in the opposite direction, completely disregarding in their sublime egoism, the indignant howls of Calvin and his aged friend. Well, you can imagine, my boy, how if our multitude of tormentors stopped to listen to their momentous argument, Morwyn and I awaited its conclusion with beating hearts!

What she heard from her father, in that terrible mute tongue, must have pierced her bosom like a sword; for Mr. — was actually trafficking, as far as I could make out, his paternal feeling, for the privilege of being the only torturer in all Hell, of a living animal. The Spaniard was to have the undisturbed right to "save," after his fashion, Morwyn's soul, as long as Morwyn's father was permitted the uninterrupted ecstasy of squeezing *his* truth out of the nerves of Black Peter.

It is a wonder that at a fearful crisis like this the human mind doesn't lose its balance. What incredible tenacity our normal reason must have, to be able to retain its power of observation and even of philosophical commentary, when the very ground is opening under its feet!

At that moment I seemed endowed with a calm clairvoyant insight into the exact emotions of every character in this mad drama. The emotions of that great phantom-multitude, as it closed in upon us, were indeed not difficult to follow. But I could read the much more complicated feelings of Mr. — at that moment just as I could read those of his daughter. And I am anxious — mark you — not to load the judicial dice against this detestable person. I do believe the fellow, in his own manner was attached to Morwyn; and I believe that even at that moment he was exerting more will-power than either of us realized to keep the mob from rushing upon her.

I wasn't near enough to catch in any detail the terrible struggle that must have been visible in his transparent countenance; but even at that distance I could see that the stress of the moment was contorting his whole face.

I think myself that something in him trusted all the while that the Inquisitor would refuse the proffered bargain; and, after all, the Spaniard's cruelty, as with most experimentalists in the sufferings of others, had probably outgrown its original purpose. He may have been dallying with the hope that Black Peter too had a soul to be saved.

Yes, I do really think that Mr. — was procrastinating, and deliberately doing so on our behalf. Possibly he knew better than I did, being a spirit himself, that Black Peter's burst of furious barking would be sure to bring our friend to our rescue. And he may have supposed that the Spaniard was so sure of getting *both the dog and the girl* that he would refuse the bargain with contempt!

But I know you are asking me why it was that none of these "sworn tormentors" ever turned their ferocity on me. I'm not made of wood or of stone. I can feel a prick or a burn as well as another. But I suppose the truth was that I'm such an ugly devil, and such an elderly devil, and such a thick-skinned devil, that it didn't strike them that there was much sport to be got out of me. I must have appeared to them as one of those tiresome fish who just sink to the bottom and refuse to be "played."

But now, having done my duty by Mr. — and his compunctions, I must tell you what actually happened. I soon perceived that the wily Spaniard, so far from rejecting this bargain, was all itching to close with it; but knowing human nature a good deal better than Mr. — he was anxious, before he made any move, to get him completely absorbed in the dog, to get him, in fact, *off with the dog,* if possible on board the *Yin-Yang,* so that while his rival and the dog were sailing away, he, the most religious of Inquisitors, would be in a position to take control of the situation. Whether it was that the mental illumination which had been brought to me by our meteoric descent had not yet been dissipated, or whether it was that the emotions of these lost wraiths were so transparent that any fool could read them, I now perceived that the sight of Black Peter in my arms was a greater temptation than Mr. — was able to endure.

I have never in my life seen such a look as the look he fixed upon this unfortunate dog. Still held back by their desire to await the end of this trafficking between the Vivisector and the Inquisitor — for with the cunning of the insane they saw that for their purpose we *must* be separated before they fell upon us — the multitudes that thronged round us were now straining most dangerously at the rope.

In their horrible Leprosid a muted howl went up from their throats, and the loathsome stench of their excitement made the air feverish and fetid. Their torture-lust communicated itself to Morwyn's father, as he gloated over the dog in my arms, and finally so intensified became his feeling that, as if to make it an accompaniment to the Spaniard's agreement to their bargain, he burst into a sort of litany of scientific Research. "What will you do to it that we should let you have it?" was what the Leprosid silence around him cried; and the answer came in a spume of exultation from the man's lips.

I was foolishly relieved by the fact that no sooner had he begun his infernal chant than Morwyn's hands went to her ears. And she didn't confine herself to that, for shrinking, as well she might, from the look on his face, I could see, as I glanced sideways down at her profile, that she had shut her eyes as well.

Soundlessly the long blue-black waves broke on those granite rocks; soundlessly the towering alder branches stretched out their gaunt protest to the metallic roof that was their sky. But what was that? As one by one the revolting threats to Black Peter rose from the man's perverted soul, I fancied I saw, through the smoke of our fire, the figure of the old Bard dragging from beneath those alders great bundles of dead wood and piling them on the smouldering flames. My first impression — and the desperation of my nerves was revealed in this — was that our Welshman had gone over to the enemy and was preparing the fire in which Morwyn's soul was to be saved; but this horrid illusion only lasted a second. As soon as I saw the effect produced upon the whole horde of our adversaries by the red flames that now began to leap up I drew a sigh of relief.

But the multitude didn't move back far; and after their first recoil at the sight of these huge flames which threw a vibrating fiery path over the water, they came on again. Their gregarious ferocity resembled the persistence of summer flies returning to their blood-sucking the moment the beast's tail ceases to swing!

And still Morwyn's father went on with his vivisector's Hymn of expectant joy. And what a fool I'd been to suppose that by stopping up her ears Morwyn could escape their curst Leprosid! Alas! I knew by the way her whole body was shuddering that she heard every word this scientific sadist uttered. It was only when I saw the man's ghastly expression as he gloated over the dog and prepared to sacrifice his own flesh-and-blood for the sake of what he desired that I realized the full effect upon these people's minds of the practise of vivisection.

"*What will you do to it that we should let you have it*?" chanted those lost souls; and while the whole multitude strained forward at each exciting promise, Morwyn's father chanted in reply: "I'll cut out his organs and keep him alive! I'll drive nails into his paws! I'll squirt virus into his brain! I'll drown him by inches! I'll plunge his head into plaster of paris! I'll bake him! I'll scald him! I'll burn him with molten lead! I'll pour boiling water into him! I'll tie his legs over his back! I'll stitch his kidneys into his neck!

I'll sew up his bowels! I'll mangle his brain! I'll cut off his head and keep it alive!"

I cannot describe to you the horror of this infernal chant. I have put it down as I best recall it, but it was interspersed with inarticulate howls of exaltation that I couldn't attempt to reproduce and then at the end, quite gravely and pompously, evidently repeating what he must have often said in his life, he remarked quietly: "You laymen know nothing about it. I am a privileged person. I hold a licence from the Home Office. No society can touch me — No pity can affect me. My Research Laboratory is beyond good and evil. *I am Science* — holy and sacrosanct!"

And at that point, to add the last touch to this crucial scene, I caught from the lips of the Spaniard, who all this while had kept his burning eyes fixed on Morwyn, the final culmination of it. "It would be better," this demon cried, "for all living things to perish in a paroxysm of pain, than for one single human soul to be lost!"

The crowd began now to press closer upon us, and Black Peter had already set up a low despairing whine, when I felt Morwyn's fainting body fall with its full weight upon my arm. That revelation of her father's degradation had been the last straw. It was not till then, but, Christ be praised! it *was* then, that I saw the Welsh Bard, with a great blazing torch of wood in each hand come rushing straight towards us! It was clear — though I hadn't realized it before — that these damned spirits had an extreme dislike of fire.

At the sight of those flaring torches in the old man's hands they fell back — I should think about twenty yards — but at that point they stopped again. Fire certainly frightened them; but it appeared that even fire couldn't hold them back for more than a few seconds.

But our protector was now at our side. “Lift her up and carry her!” he cried hoarsely. “And drag your hound by his leash!” Even at that moment — such is the complexity of the human mind — I noted, with something approaching amusement, that he should call this poor little object, who now came trailing after me in the manner of a scurrying black louse, by so grand a title as a “hound.”

But I obeyed him literally. I took Morwyn up in my arms, and stumbling and shuffling, with the dog’s leash round my wrist, I made my way as best I could into the cloud of smoke.

The Welshman followed behind us, every now and then turning round to brandish his torches; but as soon as we were in the heart of the smoke he threw them into the fire and moved up to our side. It was a good thing he did this, for without the encouragement of his presence, I doubt if I could have found my way, so thick was the smoke, to the spot where at the feet of those two monstrous creations lay the entrance to the nadir of our earth. Once within this entrance, once under the great inscribed trilithon beneath which the passage descended, and I felt such a relaxation of escape that I became, as I laid the girl down on a slab of stone and leant over her, a little hysterical. Black Peter certainly became more than hysterical. I have never seen such a transformation in any living creature. He proceeded to rub himself against the very stones of that sacred porch to the sleeping-place of the world as if they had been posts in a cottage garden. But the Welshman rebuked us both; admonishing me to gather my wits together, and with similar severity commanding my “hound” to postpone his demonstrations.

“You’re not safe yet,” he said. “You don’t know those people. Listen! Can’t you hear them?” He must have referred to their silent Leprosid uproar; but I was too overcome by our escape to do anything but try to catch some ordinary human sound; and of course I heard nothing except the panting of Black Peter.

Again I knelt by Morwyn's side. I had no fear that she wouldn't regain consciousness; and indeed I was clumsily fumbling with the fastenings of her dress, under the old-fashioned notion that such was the way to bring a woman out of a swoon, when the colour came back to her lips and she opened her eyes. She opened them with a wild frightened look, and made a motion to lift her hands to her ears, but when she saw nothing but Black Peter and me and the figure of our protector she closed them again, and relapsed once more into a happier but yet deeper trance.

All this while the old man had been standing under the entrance-arch listening intently, but he now came up to us, evidently greatly troubled.

"They're near — they'll be on us soon — the whole multitude—" he brought out. "I wish I knew where — I wish I knew what—" His aspect and tone made me think of the distress of Virgil when in the Inferno the demons refused him entrance into Dis. But an angel had come to aid those two; whereas, in our *real* Hell, the cruelty of the dead had nothing to resist it except the obscure intentions of the System-of-Things!

"Take her up," the Bard directed; "and the hound's leash too. We must try to find him."

I took it for granted that this "him" referred to the great Magician whom he had so long believed to be hiding down here, and when I uttered that tremendous name, I found my assumption was correct. But our friend's agitation was imperative; and slipping the leash hurriedly over my wrist, as I had done before, I lifted up the girl, in my arms and we moved together down that dim descent.

The incline was a steep one and what we had gone through had thoroughly shaken my courage. I kept stumbling as I went and my precious burden, slim as the girl was, weighed heavily on me.

“Faster, faster!” cried the old man. “They’re crowding in. They’re just behind us!”

I clenched my teeth, to confess the truth I uttered in my heart a prayer that I had not used since my boyhood. Every step I took seemed to me the last I’d have the strength to take; but on I went, reeling, staggering, gasping, while the sweat, trickling into my mouth, tasted to me rather of blood than of tears. But my will took hold of my shaky body as a strong man’s hand might take hold of a river-reed and I found myself counting in foolish mental iteration every step I made, and as I counted I seemed to see each figure I named as if it were a living creature!

Like goblins, with variously coloured heads, they were, and these heads seemed to me, as I named them, to grow smaller and smaller; till when I passed the hundredth step they were no bigger than the heads of ninepins.

But suddenly we found ourselves on level ground, and as we did so I became conscious of a sensation that came terribly near to proving our ruin. It was as if the power of gravitation had doubled itself! It had become, humanly speaking, *impossible* for me to go on. Each foot, as I moved it forward, seemed to be lifting a great lump of lead. My will seemed to grasp these leaden-bound feet of mine and lift them up for each step with merciless invisible hands.

And then like a lightning-flash it came over me what the cause was of this singular experience. We were actually approaching the pivotal centre, the astronomical navel-point, of the whole round earth. The light about us was now much dimmer; but after labouring forward, I think it must have been about twenty paces from the spot where the gravitational pull had increased, we reached a vast cyclopean wall of solid rock, split in the centre by a narrow chasm. There was a faint light coming through this cleft in the rock; a light of a different quality from the pale diffused artificial glimmer by which we had descended.

I don’t mean it was brighter, though perhaps it was a little brighter. I mean it was, so to speak, of a different texture. The light we had come by was like a pallid, spectral, gaseous emanation, evenly diffused throughout the air; whereas the gleam that now shot into our twilight through this narrow aperture resembled the sort of ray that certain submarine fish have the power of projecting as they move through their world of ink-black water; only this ray had a warmer glow than any phosphorus could give.

Our guide signed to me to pass on through the cleft; but this was no easy task. Indeed it would have been an impossible undertaking had I been a shade stouter than I am. As it was I had the greatest difficulty in supporting my burden through this world-old planetary crack; for the opening was a crevice in a solid mass of rock that might well have been some ten or fifteen yards thick and the crack itself was so narrow that it was necessary for me to push myself along sideways, holding my limp burden with the utmost care lest her head should strike against the stone.

As I shuffled forward I couldn’t help being seized with what perhaps was the absurd fear lest on emerging from this passage into whatever lay beyond I should be forced into a blind somersault, due to our arrival at the geographical centre-point of the planetary globe.

All the way through this abysmal cleft the magnetic pull upon my feet seemed to increase; and indeed at one point I turned in cold terror and cried aloud to the old man behind me that my feet had turned to stone and were clamped to the ground.

But the power of our mortal will can at a pinch compel the most exhausted of corporeal frames to achieve the impossible; and I did get through at last; and did *not* when I emerged undergo any startling reversion, or any transference of "up" and "down."

The first thing I did was to stretch the girl out as comfortably as I could on something that looked like a low altar-stone save that it rose a little at one end and was covered with soft grey lichen. She was now, from her look and her breathing, sleeping a deep and quiet sleep; and this was an indescribable comfort to me, for I thought: "The longer she sleeps like this the more chance there is that she'll recover from her father's ghastly words." At the same time I couldn't resist a secret hope that that glimpse into the soul of a Vivisector was the end of her filial devotion.

Rising to my feet from where I had laid her, though in every nerve of my body I felt an infinite longing to sink down and sleep by her side, I began to take in the extraordinary sight before us and the awful solemnity of what the old French chronicler calls the "Esplumeoir" or secret alcove of Merlin's hiding-place. Extended upon a slightly raised bed of stone not unsimilar to the one whereon I had just laid the girl lay the Magician's recumbent figure; and it seemed to me then, though I cannot vouch for the accuracy of my bewildered impressions, that even in size the form I saw was super human. It was the form of a man well advanced in years, though perhaps not as old as our bardic protector, and even if he was not of the gigantic size I thought at first, he certainly was of a superhuman dignity. His long beard, darkly grizzled rather than grey, flowed down beyond his waist and gave a wondrous emphasis to the calm outlines of his majestic physiognomy.

Like our guide he was wrapt in a faded white mantle caught in at the waist with a broad massive girdle; but unlike our guide, whose mantle only reached to his knees, the motionless occupant of this antechamber of the world’s sleeping-place wore *his* garment of dim white wool almost down to his sandals.

But I now became aware that the warm magical glow that illumined this rock-hewn vault came from a second cleft in the stone, a cleft at the further end of the vault almost identical with the one through which we had just forced our way. I strained my eyes to follow to its final source this shaft of misty illumination; and as I gazed through that rocky cleft, beyond the head of the sleeping figure, it seemed to me that I was aware of two vast Presences in there, far more shadowy and mysterious than the one before me, but lying just as this one did, at full length upon their stone beds. I keep using the words “rock” and “stone” for the cosmogonic substance out of which, at some planetary epoch “in the dark backward and abysm of time,” this great vault at our globe’s centre had been formed; but as a matter of fact as I gazed at the walls around me and the roof above me I received a strange impression — and I think it came from the colour of these things — that they were made of a material more like metal than stone.

I moved a few paces beyond where Morwyn slept; and, as I moved, I couldn’t help remarking that Black Peter had stretched himself out, in that queer way he always did, with his hind-legs straight out and the pads of his hind-paws exposed, at the foot of Morwyn’s temporary sarcophagus.

This was the first time in all my memory of this devoted little beast that he had deserted me for any living person; and I wondered whether, in this weird temple of the sleep of time, an irresistible hypnotic trance had come over him, as indeed it had nearly done in my own case; or on the other hand whether, without experiencing any panic, for he hadn’t barked since we escaped through that smoke, he was aware — with some sort of dim and doggish kind of psychic awe — of the presence of supernatural Beings.

But if I stood spell-bound at what we beheld, my aged companion gave way to his feelings in a much more impulsive manner. I suppose it's my English temperament, but I must confess to receiving a certain shock when he fell down on his hands and knees and began tapping his forehead upon the ground! Whether he did this before the majestic sleeper stretched out in front of us like an Image of Eternal Rest, or whether he did it before those two Divine Presences in the farther sanctuary, I have no idea. During his many incarnations he may have seen other sleepers than this one, and other Presences than those two immortals. In his time he may have seen the old Welsh gods Pwyll and Pryderi, and Arawn, king of Annwn, and Rhiannon, and the great Caridwen herself!

But you mustn't think, my dear boy, that because I lack your modern generation's artful-artless levity I can't see the monstrous grotesquerie of life. I am not at all sure that in un-sexing yourselves, as you have all done, and in cooling the burning seeds of erotic imagination by your methods of frivolous analysing, you haven't dissipated your sense of the real grotesqueness of life, and turned it into a sort of Alice-through-the-Looking-Glass joke. It was a grim kind of burlesque-sense I admit that I was destined now to indulge, while my love's sweet bosom rose and fell in her untroubled sleep, and the breath between her parted lips kept being caught in pathetic little whistlings and sighings, like a newt's breath coming up to the top of a lily-pond. It was a humour as profane as you could wish; but it was monstrously, not airily profane.

Indeed, it was as if I had the power of entering with a weird exultation into the feelings of some ribald Cosmic Showman whose whole pleasure lay in the outrageousness of the events of his planetary entertainment.

You must remember how my nerves had been strung up to the breaking-point during that exposure of the heart of a Vivisector; and there really was a pantomimic ghastliness in the dead silence in which our dignified old guide jerked himself along that floor like a reverential caterpillar, prostrating himself and then shoving himself forward, in fantastic alternation, and doing this round and round in a circle, just as if he were playing some childish game of "forfeits."

But if I gave way to my feelings in a mute chuckle of gross ribaldry, when I saw this dignified old Bard gyrating like a mechanical toy about the magician's bed, I confess I yielded to an outburst of hysterical Leprosid laughter when I suddenly perceived, side by side in the cleft through which we had come, the triumphant, leering countenances of Morwyn's father and the Spaniard. These gentlemen evidently made sure they'd caught their victims at last, beyond any possibility of escape; and their gusto was an indecent spectacle. I suppose to the mind of the pious Inquisitor all the old heathen tales about the Sleep of Cronos were inventions of the Devil, while no doubt to Mr. — they were the hallucinations of some erotic reflex action. I expect they both thought they had stumbled upon the real secret of Taliesin's visits to Hell, his discovery, down here, of some valuable collection of paleolithic antiquities! They probably took the sleeping Magician for an interesting specimen of Egyptian mummification and even as definite scientific proof that in the Bronze Age Britain was colonized by Egyptians.

What they felt with regard to the chamber beyond I cannot guess. My suspicion is that both these respectable practitioners of ideal cruelty were extremely insensitive to sense-impressions. They could smell heresy afar off, and they could watch the saliva pour out from a slitinthe neck of a dog, but in respect of ordinary human impressions their physical senses were as atrophied as their moral ones.

But it is curious that at this crisis of my life I should have been seized with this outburst of silent laughter. I have called it “hysterical”; but I’m sure I don’t know. There was that in the whole situation, in the whole pressure of our predicament, that really had something monstrously comic in it. That fantastical old Bard doing ecstatic homage to his unconscious Sorcerer by encircling his bed with Tibetan prostrations; Black Peter stretched out at full length with his paws upward, in sublime confidence that all was well; Morwyn’s dear lips uttering in her sleep those childish whistling sounds, like fairy-bubbles through heather-bells; and now those two obsessed faces peering out of the cleft of the rock, with multitudes upon multitudes of their damned confederates behind them; all these things, touched with a kind of trance-like unreality by the silent aloofness of that figure on the stone bed and the indescribable Presences in the chamber beyond, affected my mind, down here at the bottom of the world, as if they were some fearful Burlesque, performed in the “lonesome latter years” of our poor planet’s history, for the edification of some jaded Demiurge.

Where was the mercy and pity, where was the tenderness and justice, towards which, according to our unholy Frenchman, the System-of-Things was directing its irrevocable course? Can there lie hidden in the most harmless of men, even in the bowels of an amiable Captain Shandy like myself, a vein of sympathy with what one might call the humour of Satan? Why the devil else should the sight of this intolerable Vivisector and his accursed friend watching the gyrations of our protector round that blind bed, while Morwyn and their other proposed victim slept their poppied sleep, have roused me to so gross an outburst?

Those two foul shadows filling that narrow entrance were evidently being pushed from behind by a dense and excited crowd, for every now and then they were impelled forward with a violent jerk.

What made the two hang back, I think, in spite of this pressure, was their fear that the influx of the mob would cause the immediate death — a horrible enough death, but still a quick one — of both the maiden *and* the dog. For how would Religious and Scientific Truth be served by so bungled an event as that? The two rogues were glad of the pressure of the multitude to strengthen their hand, but they had no intention of delivering up these two precious organisms, dedicated to their private use, to a speedy and unprofitable oblivion.

All this while, you must understand, there was no sound audible on this subterranean stage except the whistling catch in the unconscious girl's breath and the steady breathing of the dog at her feet.

But our Welshman rose to his feet at last and in a flash realized the peril that confronted us. I could see him cast a look upon the recumbent Magician, and another quick glance upon the entrance to the inner chamber; but he came boldly forward and confronted the forms in that narrow cleft. "Get back, get back where ye belong!" he cried in shrill Leprosid. "This is sacred ground. We're in sanctuary here! This is outside your Hell. Can't you read what's written? Can't you see where we are?"

But his words were evidently drowned in the inaudible howlings of that multitude of the damned, and those two fearful faces in one foreground were thrust still nearer by the mob behind them.

But I could see the Inquisitor turn his head and make some kind of angry appeal to the maniacs who were pushing him forward; and apparently his authority still held its weight, for after his words there was an obvious lessening of the pressure. There was a pause in fact at this point, while the two leaders went through the disgusting process of whispering together; and because of the narrowness of the entrance and the awkwardness of their position, I was nearly driven to a second fit of gross laughter by the spectacle of their performance.

When they separated, however, Mr. — at once began addressing the indignant old Bard in the pompous tone of professional authority.

"I'm a medical man," he said coldly and sternly, "and I hold a licence from the Home Office. No society, no body of persons in the world can interfere with me. I am a Scientist. What would get ordinary people a long sentence in gaol if they did it to an animal, I do every day — with my licence and behind my thick walls. I don't want to disturb you in your study of mummies. Give me that dog, and I'll leave you at once. I'm a scientist and you're a layman, so it's no use explaining—"

But the Bard interrupted him. "Yes," he retorted bitterly. "You hold your licence! And the moaning of your victims goes up to the Creator night and day. You're the plague-spot at the heart of this accurst civilization! And let me tell you this. Your science may torture all it likes with your precious licence, but the vengeance of Heaven will fall on your race! More will perish because of Science than will live because of it. You can't mock God forever. The lives you save — if you *do* save them — by this unspeakable wrong, will survive to curse you and your diabolical science. The law of the universe is righteousness and justice and mercy and pity; and not all the Science in your laboratories can make wrong right! The moan that rises from your places of torment will return upon you and upon your children — yea! it is doing so already! — with a vengeance that will shake the world. It is the pity of God that lies bound upon your tables; it is the justice of God that lies helpless under your racks. But it will be the *vengeance* of God that will descend on your children's children; for unto them that use the pain of the helpless to extract knowledge, their knowledge shall turn to madness and destruction; and, to them that use the torture of the helpless to prolong life, life shall be a burden and a plague and a despair! Back, I say, all of ye, back where ye belong! This place, though it's in your Abyss, *is not yours*! Don't you understand the great hidden secret of my People, that there's a Below-Hell, just as there's an Above-Heaven?"

He paused, as well he might, for I had never heard since I first came down here this curst dumb tongue used to such effect. And the quaint thing was that though he spoke Leprosid with what I recognized as a Welsh accent, it wasn't the accent of to-day. It had the *inflexion* of the Welsh of to-day but there was something else in it that suggested to my unscholarly mind the "timbre" of certain intonations that I recall as a subaltern when I was stationed in one of those semi-Greek islands of the Near East where they're always finding prehistoric remains.

I suppose it was the fact that they weren't accustomed to so much energy being thrown into words — their own being completely absorbed in other activities — that made them listen to the old man as they did. I don't think his words had the faintest effect on their *feelings*. They had predestined themselves to perdition too absolutely for that; but I do believe they were fascinated by the music of his speech; and who knows if to some of them that prehistoric Mediterranean accent didn't revive memories of wonderful civilizations long buried in the grave of the Past?

"You want that hound," he went on — and once more I came near smiling at the difference between my notion of a "hound" and the funny little black object stretched out at Morwyn's feet— "to practise your filthy experiments on. Let me tell you once for all — yes, you may laugh, but not one of my prophecies has ever failed — the great spirit of the Cosmos isn't found in physical knowledge; isn't found in long lives purchased with the pain of the helpless. The great Spirit of the Cosmos is found in righteousness against unrighteousness, in good against evil, in mercy and pity against cruelty and injustice. If ever a generation of men in Ynys Prydein obeys the great Spirit of the Cosmos it will refuse your loathsome drugs, every drop of which is a drop of bloody sweat, every drop of which is wrung from some wincing and quivering nerve, and it'll expose the lying tricks wherewith you've gulled the crowd; it'll take away your damned Licences, and, if you persist in torturing, it'll clap you into a madhouse, as the perverted criminal you are!"

He paused again and then with surprising agility for so old a Shade he leapt upon a ledge of stone adjoining the narrow cleft where Mr. — and the Spaniard were restraining their followers, and began pointing with shrill cries of recognition at a phantom in armour just behind these two, from the edge of whose gorget sprang the bristles of the most repulsive beard I've ever beheld, a beard that in the curious light of that spot had a most unbelievable tint.

"Ho, Marshal of France!" cried the old man in a terrible voice. "So you're here too? So you've thought a girl's blood would serve, have you, as well as a boy's, to prolong your precious life? But you'd better go back to your Laboratories! You'll find them in full agreement with you. They haven't come to children yet; but they will, they will! They already agree with you that there's a peculiar satisfaction in the prolongation of life through the pain of the small and weak. But there's only one young person here, *Monsieur le Maréchal,* and she's the property of Holy Church. But listen, child-killer: On this very day in a well-known English laboratory there's an experiment being performed on a young monkey, who's so sensitive and so human in his reactions that I'm sure it'll prolong your Hellish vitality for centuries to see it! It'll be on the Screens now. Later it may be too late!" He dropped down from his post as he spoke, and I caught a villainous susurration of Leprosid laughter as *Monsieur le Maréchal,* aided by the look of his fifteenth-century armour, forced his way out of the crowd.

Evidently somewhat dismayed by the effect of the Welshman’s words, the Inquisitor now moved forward a step and uttered his ultimatum.

“I’ll give you three minutes,” he said, “to get back where *you* belong,” and he peered with a dim, incurious eye at the entrance into the next chamber, “and then we’ll do what we’ve come to do, in spite of you and *through* you!”

I think that was the moment in this whole frightful experience when my heart sank the lowest. I could see nothing for it but that these demons would rush in upon us in their multitude; and knowing Morwyn as I did I knew well enough what *that* would mean.

Whatever happened to Black Peter or to me, unless I did what she’d asked me and killed her with my own hand, the first of these evil ones who reached her — and she’d be awake enough then! — and passed through her woman’s body would be — But I turned sick at the thought. Shadows they were. Transparent they might be. But I knew now that their substance was not *pure air.* Had I not smelt their loathsome essence?

But the voice of the Bard rose to meet the challenge in a torrent of impassioned words.

“Mad ye are!” he cried, “mad and besotted in your damnation! Have ye no vestige of humanity? Have ye forgotten that ye were ever born of women, that ye ever looked upon the light of the sun? Come! Ye shall hear it. Come! Ye shall know it. Learn now, ye larvae of Satan, learn and turn back howling into the slime that spawned ye. Here I have found what I have searched for in vain in a thousand incarnations! This is the Sleeping Place of Cronos, this is the navel of the Universe, this is the lap of the Great Mother, this is the Centre of the Circle; this is the King’s chamber! Here is the bed of the Indestructible; here is the Cauldron of the Indissoluble; here is the resting-place of the System-of-Things. Here and nowhere else is the sleep of the deathless; here and nowhere else are the seeds of what was and is and is to come, the all-powerful, the all-merciful!"

He stopped exhausted and I perceived a kind of tremor, like the tremor that passes over hushed waters before the awakening of a great wind, go shivering over that horde of reprobates. Then he turned to me with a groan and murmured, in the lowest tones possible to that odious language, short of whispering: "It's no good, my friend. We must wake the lady. Our hour is come. There's no hope for us unless — but that's impossible. And mark you what he'll say now. Mark you how he'll do it. Mark you, my good Captain, mark you, my worthy friend. It'll be the voice of the old eternal objective lie, the lie that's hindered creation since it first stirred in the void! It'll be the voice of the false Law, the false Causation, the false Predestination, the false Reality — It'll be the voice of that ancient Serpent that forever devours its own poisonous tail!"

But he was not altogether right in his prophecy at this grim juncture. For though Mr. — began to speak in a low, cold, smooth, official voice, exactly as he had predicted, the man's fanaticism soon carried him away. "The late Grand Inquisitor," he began, and I could see that the moment he ceased speaking nothing would be able to stop the multitudinous rush of the whole mob, "has told you why we are here and what we have come for. Some of us in this country — I could name an Emperor of Rome and a Marshal of France and I am afraid I must include my personal friend the Marquis of Sade — are inclined to take their duties too casually and lightly; preferring to indulge in airy journeys through our God's dominions, to serving him with the holocausts and hecatombs his soul loves. But we are agreed that *nothing,* not conscience, nor mercy, nor pity, nor justice, nor any other feeling, no! nor any creature in heaven or earth, can stop us from serving our God and getting knowledge of his laws by the torment of the helpless! Therefore, whatever things can prod, whatever things can burn and freeze and scald and boil and convulse and cause twinges and squirmings, if there be any torment, if there be any despair, if the walls are so thick and high that no help can ever come, *think on these things*!

"Yes, our Inquisitor has spoken; and it now left for me" — he spoke very slowly at this point and I've wondered since if his heart failed him just a little as he looked at his daughter— "left for me to sacrifice all feeling, all remorse, all compunction, all conscience, all difference between right and wrong, for the sake of our most holy Science. *Give me that dog!*"

During his final sentence, where his voice assumed that "dying fall" which betokens the last word of an ultimatum, I was hastily arousing Morwyn from her sleep.

Black Peter must needs at this crisis go through that pathetic and provocative trick which is natural to spaniels and turn over helplessly and resignedly on his back! Here he lay, with all four feathery paws bent at the knees, and his liquid eyes fixed upon me; and when I tugged at his leash all he did was to wag his stump of a tail, as if he were saying: "Give *me* to the wolves, master, and escape with the lady!"

I do not think, however that he *was* saying that, or anything like it; for when the rush came, and we all four of us fled recklessly and impiously past the living tomb of the Magician, Black Peter was by no means lingering in our rear. In fact he was leading our blind flight.

Have you ever, my good son, been tossed up by some untoward and startling shock till you found yourself clinging to a tight-rope in eternity? Some such feeling I had when, as we approached the cleft in the wall before us, we were met by such a *supernatural awe,* for I can call by no other name the magnetic effluence that poured out upon us from what was beyond that barrier, that we were fain to crouch down, the Bard lowest of all, as do Catholics at the sacring of the Mass.

Huddled thus together, Black Peter on one side of me, and Morwyn on the other, and the Welshman a little in front, we instinctively turned our heads to face our enemies. The crowd burst in, headed by Mr. — and the Inquisitor as if shot out of a catapult. By reason of the propulsion of those behind them the violence of their descent into the vault was so overwhelming that any resistance offered them, whether physical or psychic, must of necessity have swept them in a confused welter to the ground.

And what *did* meet them and *did* fling them pell-mell into a surging and catastrophic heap was a sight aweinspiring enough, even to us for whose sake it occurred.

As for our protector, he dropped his grey head so violently to the earth that I actually felt the shock of his skull in contact with the stone floor! For that motionless Figure upon the stone bed heaved itself up, and erecting itself in a sitting posture before the inrush of intrusive phantoms, lifted a long threatening arm against them. I could see his hand, with the palm outwards and the fingers distended in the manner of the avenging Christ in Michelangelo's "Last Judgment," menacing them with what, for all I know, the Book of Revelations calls "the Second Death."

I expect it was simply my wooden-headed stupidity — for I've always had a tendency to "rush in where angels fear to tread" — but I didn't imitate our old Bard even then by hiding my face.

To confess the truth, I stared like an idiot with my mouth wide open. And now, after it's all over, I can't be too thankful that I did see what transpired before us. For one thing, I realized clearly enough that this mysterious

Being, from a Past so remote that the mind staggers at it, was not a phantom like the rest, but a thing of flesh and blood, even as Morwyn and myself.

I suppose he had gone further than any earthly creature into the mystery of life and by his power and his magic had put on, even while he lived, that “new body” of which St. Paul speaks. No doubt it was partly this, his not being dead and his not being a phantom, that overwhelmed these mad Shades in such a seething rout; but I soon became aware that he was doing much more than hurling them back. He was working some terrible spell upon them! He actually began uttering words, and I shall never to the end of my days forget the voice in which he spoke— “husky” as Dante says, from so long a sojourn among the dead.

And he didn’t speak in Leprosid either. Aye! but what a relief it was to my poor mortal ears to hear, for the first time in Hell, the accents of a living man! What his words were, God knows! I assumed then that they were in the ancient tongue of his countrymen. But they were abracadabra to my intelligence, and perhaps they weren’t Welsh at all, but some secret esoteric language common to the magicians of all ages. He only uttered a few of these husky words and then — just as if he’d done the whole thing in his sleep — his arm sank down to his side; and with a strange, long-drawn sigh, like the sound of a far-off sea on a great beach, he re-settled himself to his repose, and assumed again the position from which he had been aroused.

My interest had been so absorbed in the man himself that it wasn’t till he had retaken his recumbent position that I realized what he’d inflicted on our enemies.

He had turned them into the victims of their own cruelty! Black Peter must have been, after his fashion, aware of this, for he began sniffing the air as if he smelt a host of other animals.

Thinking it over afterwards there occurred to me many ways of diminishing the miraculousness of this act of magic. Take Mr. — himself. It's clear that day and night he must have had before him the image of the squirming creature from whom he was extracting his wretched drop of Satanic knowledge. This image — the image of the tortured beast — must have been emphasized in him to a point of mental intensity, stopping only just this side of a visual manifestation. All that the Magician's art had to do then, was to give bodily reality to this *almost* objectified thought; and where could he find the protoplasm for this save in the substance of the thinker himself, who, you must remember — now that he was a shadow — was made of very tenuous stuff?

I will not say it was a sight more shocking than the half-created *eidola* of victimization that I had caught floating round those two imponderable Idols; for these lacerated and macerated creatures now before me, their limbs and their flesh twisted, distorted, scraped, raked, combed, harrowed, shredded, gouged, singed, plague-spotted, till they had become mere ghastly puppets of petrified pain, were after all finished and done with, whereas those others were projections of what was, what is, and what was to come.

I fancy, too, that their transformation only lasted as long as they remained in the presence of their punisher. I think the moment they managed to scramble out — which they did in so wholesale a manner that their flight resembled an escape from a burning zoo — they must have resumed their natural shapes.

At any rate I could catch from among them the psychic shishing and soughing, the chittering and chattering, of their vile Leprosid the moment they were out of sight. So I take it they were not deprived permanently of their vicious "images of God." I hadn't the heart — nor indeed, to confess the truth, *the stomach* — to look closely at this seething and scrabbling mass of tortured flesh and blood; but I could see that though there were some human forms among them the majority were clearly victims of vivisection.

How far the perpetrators of these crimes, who had been compelled to assume the ghostly ligaments and phantom fibres of the flesh they had desecrated, felt the pain they had inflicted, I cannot tell. Certainly I saw one dog tottering out of sight that *looked* as if it were in abominable suffering; and on my soul, this particular animal had something about its appearance that made me think of Bitch Bessie. Had there perhaps been some predecessor of Bitch Bessie who —

But I was interrupted in my thoughts by our triumphant guide, who with his noble lineaments distorted by overpowering awe informed us in a tremulous voice, keeping with some difficulty — such was his excitement — his Bardic-British syntax out of his Leprosid words, that the moment had come, if we were brave enough for such a quest, to enter the Sleeping-Place of Saturn.

You will easily understand me, my son, when I tell you that this audacious enterprise meant much less to me than it did to our good friend. For though I didn't take the sordid view of the late Mr. — that the mysterious Presences upon whose "eternal rest" we were to intrude were merely a treasure-trove of well-preserved mummies, I was so unacquainted with ancient mythology that the name "Saturn" brought little to my mind but the notion of a savage divinity who was accused of devouring his own children.

Instinctively I looked to Morwyn for a lead; but, not altogether to my discomfort, I found that she was still so drugged by sleepiness that though she was passive in my hands she was hardly aware of the danger we had just escaped, or alive to the importance of what we were going to do next.

Supporting therefore her wavering, sleep-drugged steps with one hand, while with the other I held Black Peter's leash, I followed our guide, with outward boldness but inward trepidation, through the cleft in the rock, into what lay beyond.

The first thing I realized, when we had pushed our way through the narrow passage, was that the place we entered was of unexpected and startling dimensions. Indeed I could see no boundary to it, whether of horizon or roof. It struck me as an adamantine pavement without end, without walls, without sky, without any dimension that Science could measure! The very pavement itself was of an unknown metallic substance, much more like bronze than like any stone I have ever seen, and the rays of light, which I soon perceived came from two separate centres in the place, were reflected from this brazen floor in a dull, deep, misty radiance, like the reflection of a late October sun upon the dead leaves of a thousand years.

Thickly-drifting, heavily-charged smoke-clouds of ancient sour-sweet incense, with a smell totally different from any I have ever known, wavered up and down in fluctuating eddies over the recumbent Presences of this strange spot.

I said there were two distinct centres from which the dim yellowish rays diffused themselves through the place; and as we stood with our backs to Merlin's hiding-place, Morwyn in her half-drugged state leaning in relaxed abandonment upon me, and Black Peter with quivering nostrils and vibrant tail straining forward, I could see that one of these reservoirs of light was on the left of us and the other on the right of us, and that in each case the light emanated from the top of an exalted oblong *mound,* like the longer-shaped mounds among our oldest prehistoric earth-works.

I became aware also that the clouds of drifting incense, although they mingled together over our heads, came, just as the light did, from these two divergent directions, and I thought I could even detect a difference in their fragrance.

I noticed for instance that the one that pleased *me* the more, and seemed even to exercise a mysterious pull upon me, drawing me towards its source, proceeded from the left-hand Mound; while the other, the one proceeding from the right, seemed, from the way she made unconscious little movements of pleasure whenever it touched her forehead, to be Morwyn's preference. It was the opposite flickering of these separate streams of light and the opposite drifting of these separate currents of precious odours that made it difficult at first to see what was immediately in front of us, midway between these Mounds of misty sweetness and dim radiance; but as I looked more closely I could clearly make out the brazen rim of a gigantic Cauldron, and beyond this what looked like a seated image of the extremest limit of human old age.

It had been towards this seated figure behind the cauldron that our guide all this while had been directing his impassioned gaze: and I was surprised, when the drifting incense lifted a little and we both could see what was there, to hear him utter a deep and disappointed groan.

And then to my astonishment he began rolling off rhythmical vowel-deep symphonies of indignant eloquence, no longer in Leprosid, but in his own bardic language.

Though I couldn't make out one single word he uttered, it was, I can assure you, an indescribable relief to find that we were free in this place to speak once again in our native tongues; and without, I am afraid, showing much interest in the cause of the old man's disappointment I began whispering rapidly and volubly in our blessed English; and oh! how lovely it sounded and how sweet it tasted! I whispered to Morwyn, I whispered to Black Peter, I even whispered to the mysterious Presences. I would have whispered to that vast cauldron in a minute, for the thing had a look — I can't explain why — that made me think of the Blessed Sacrament; but I soon found that my old gentleman was seriously disturbed, for he began casting wild and agitated looks about him, looks that were extremely at variance with the lotus-breathing languor of this place.

So I instinctively began speaking to him in the language of Hell; and I am thankful to say he replied to me at once in the same tongue. As long as I didn't have to *whisper* in that infernal shorthand of theirs, I was quite ready to use Leprosid to the end of my days, just as Englishmen will use French, purely as a convenient common coinage.

Hurriedly the old Bard explained to me that it was from the Cauldron of the great Welsh goddess, Caridwen, that he had derived, in the first of all his incarnations, his occult wisdom from Europe and Africa, and that it was a bitter disappointment to him to see that the figure he had expected to be of a woman was of a man, and a man with a snow-white beard descending to his knees!

The old gentleman was so outraged to see this bearded antiquity, where he had expected to behold the mysterious goddess of his most intimate worship, that I was at the end of my wits to console him. But it sometimes happens that a fool and an ignoramus manages to hit the mark where wiser ones fail, and so it proved in this case; for ignorant as I am of ancient mythology, I am unusually quick — I suppose because of my sensual nature — to detect the faintest signs of feminine attraction, and I had been gradually coming to the conclusion that the mysterious Presence on our left, from whose Mound of Sleep came the fragrant incense that especially stirred me, was of the feminine sex.

"If it's a beautiful goddess you expected to find down here," I said to him in Leprosid, "I shall be much surprised if your divinity is not over there.” And I made a shrewd inclination of my head towards the Mound on our left.

He gazed searchingly at me. “But — but—” he stammered, and I noticed that his awe was so great that he dared not look directly at the spot from which this delicate fragrance was wafted— “but *that*” — he did not even dare to say “she”— “must be” — and I had a momentary panic lest in his infinite reverence he would revert to their horrid whispering— “must be — can only be — the Great Mother herself.”

“The Great Mother?”

He positively gasped at my stupidity.

“Rhea, Bona Dea, Cybelè, Dindymene, Magna Mater, Titæa, Ops—” he began.

I raised my hand, and suppressing an inclination to smile — for after all a half-pay officer of His Majesty’s Forces could hardly be expected to take such a rigmarole in solemn earnestness — I modestly suggested that since the Personage on our left had already so many names there seemed no reason that the name he made so much of shouldn’t be added to the list.

“You mean,” he murmured, while a gleam of hope lit up his anxious lineaments, “that — *she* — may be Caridwen?”

I overcame my inclination to smile, and replied gravely that I saw no reason why she shouldn’t be.

“She is evidently a Being of many aspects,” I repeated. “Why shouldn’t she have been worshipped in our part of the world under a Welsh name?”

“And is sleeping here with *Him* till the Golden Age returns?”

“Why not?” I concluded. It certainly was an ironic turn of the wheel that I — a plain half-pay soldier in these troublous days — should have been the one to reassure this master of mysteries upon so nice a point; but as I said before, there *are* moments when the veriest simpleton can instruct the wisest.

I was all this while leaning against the wall through which we had come, holding Morwyn's warm relaxed body against my own while Black Peter lay peacefully on the ground beneath us, his head upon one of my feet.

Our old friend, who struck me at the moment as resembling the ghost of Don Quixote, had fallen upon his knees and with his head bowed on his chest was muttering some rhythmical invocation, directed to that obscure Mound on our left towards which I myself was aware of a growing attraction.

We were all in a curious condition, both mentally and physically; our nerves, now that the old man had found his Caridwen in the bride of Cronos, profoundly quieted, and our minds filled with a peace beyond peace.

But the strange thing was that in the midst of this Reverential cessation of all mental or physical activity a deep unutterable voluptuousness took possession of us.

I have experienced in my time, as all amorists must have done, delicious sensations of diffused sensuality, sweeter and more entrancing than any actual erotic satisfaction, but what I felt now was ten times more intense.

I felt as if beneath that mystic Mound, sleeping its sleep until the return of its bloodless rule, when cruelty and torture would be ended and all these scientific horrors would seem monstrous insanities, lay in etherealized essence the eternal Well-spring of all the creative magic of femininity!

But the interesting thing was that Morwyn's girlish senses — and as I have already told you, my son, till no doubt you're sick of hearing it, never was a maiden more chaste — were evidently roused to exceptional voluptuousness by the incense that floated over to us from the right, from where in fact, as our friend had explained, “Sleep was the bond forged for Cronos.”

If the sensuality evoked in *me* by the presence of the Magna Dea of the Cretan Age was a delicately diffused emotion, you may imagine that what was felt by the slender form leaning against me was of a yet more tenuous quality. Such as it was, however, you will believe me, my son, when I tell you that I took full advantage of it. The heavenly yieldingness that melted her young frame under the influence of that Saturnian incense, oh, what enchanting pleasure it was to me, as I pressed her soft body against my own!

We were disturbed in our happiness, which was of a far more mutual character, let me tell you, than any that our propinquity had aroused before, by the old man rising from his knees in a new state of excitement, The profane thought crossed my mind, as I turned to listen to him, that his invocations must have been somewhat perfunctory for the last five minutes, if his thoughts had had the time to travel so far in a different direction!

What he was now talking to us about — and Morwyn was evidently prepared to listen to everything in a most fond manner, looking up at him with a bewitching responsiveness — was the huge Cauldron, beyond which we could still see that bearded sleeper nodding in his upright chair.

I certainly had never realized what a mystical and sacred object a cauldron was to the ancient inhabitants of these islands till I heard the old man roll out his sonorous and enigmatical list of these miraculous vessels, just as Don Quixote might have done with his interminable romances. His enumeration commenced, where perhaps it should have ended, with mention of the Christian Grail, but I confess I was relieved when he began to do justice to vessels of a remoter antiquity; for with all this Cretan incense in my veins I felt in anything but an ascetic mood.

“Which of all these sacred objects do you suppose this one to be?” I asked him. But I regretted I had done so immediately afterwards, for careless of my total ignorance of ancient Welsh he began, in a low impassioned voice, to chant what I suppose was a bardic composition of his own. I could of course make nothing of this; and even Morwyn, though she knew modern Welsh pretty well, seemed at a loss, though in her relaxed mood she smiled so sweetly at the old man that he appeared quite satisfied. She must have caught something of his meaning, however, for she repeated the mysterious word “Annwn” several times and also the words “Caer Sidi”; and after listening to them for a while I got a vague impression that this Cauldron of Annwn in the Sleeping-Place of Cronos was of some Apocalyptic significance.

“Does he mean that we are in Caer Sidi now?” I asked the girl, but she was in one of her Welsh moods when any point-blank question caused her evident pain, and I hurriedly let the matter drop.

Deep in my heart I cared very little *where* we were or by what learned names these Presences might be described. All I cared for was that the place had drugged her into forgetting her father. If it could also provide us with the means of getting back to earth I would be willing I thought, to insert the words “Caer Sidi” into every devotion I uttered to the end of my life.

“I have it!” cried the Bard suddenly. “That old man over there with the great beard is Rhadamanthus, the Judge of the Golden Age. He must have come from Crete to Carbonek with those Two. Shall we — dare we — go nearer to the Cauldron?”

I glanced at Morwyn who smilingly nodded assent. It was clear to me, not altogether without a spasm of jealousy, that the girl was in a mood to humour our guide to the uttermost. Walking gingerly therefore, as if we were pilgrims in some secret shrine in Tibet, surrounded by the living and the dead, we moved round the Cauldron, whose edge was garnished with what looked to me like extravagant pearls, each one as big as a heron's egg, and approached the seat of that judicial Ancient of Days.

"Why, he's a living man," cried Morwyn, "though he's as old as time!"

And certainly the figure we approached was made of the same stuff as ourselves, though his flesh was wrinkled and wasted to a degree that made him repulsive to look upon.

"He is no god. He's a man like Merlin," murmured our guide, "only Merlin survives by his own power, and this one by the gift of heaven."

"The gift was a cruel one," I thought; and even as we came to the Judge's feet I noticed that he was mumbling and gibbering to himself while the spittle ran down his monstrous beard.

He was indeed a lamentable specimen of an undying Judge. His flesh was mummified into parchment upon his bones, not by human art but by the more merciless art of nature; and it covered his gaunt skeleton like an ill-fitting garment of dead leaves. It hung in wrinkles and folds on his thin neck, and in leathery flakes on his hollow cheeks; while his hands, which still clutched tenaciously after all these centuries at his precious wand of office, resembled the withered hands of the father of all forest apes. Into such a pitiful scarecrow of righteous judgment had the "iniquity of time" reduced the lawgiver of the Golden Age! I suppose it was the withered wretchedness of this undying sacrifice to the cause of justice — and far kinder would it have been to have buried these lamentable bones out of sight and allowed this weary soul to refresh itself in the fields of asphodel — that produced the extraordinary event that now occurred.

Ever since Merlin had transformed those devils into the victims of their own bigotry I had been occasionally conscious of a tickling and scratching sensation in the middle of my back. Several times I had tried to reach the place with my hands; but had given it up, partly, I confess, because to my old-fashioned mind, though I suppose you modern lads think nothing of scratching in the presence of your girls, there was something humiliating in being caught by Morwyn in such a low activity.

But now the discomfort was fully explained; for, taking, as he must have done, this forlorn Rhadamanthus, with his black wand, to be the royal ancestor of all monkeys, an indescribably mutilated and disfigured little ape, who instead of escaping from the magician's anger as the rest of them had done by hurrying back to Hell, had sought refuge under my coat, now leapt forth and scrambling up upon the pearl-bordered brim of the Cauldron of Annwn — or was it of Caridwen? — sat there jabbering and screaming.

Our guide, who had made an instinctive effort to prevent the little creature from reaching his venerated Mystery, now fell back into one of his hushed and awed expectancies, evidently anticipating some catastrophic upshot.

Nor did his anticipation go unfulfilled; for no sooner had the beast's hands and feet clutched that sacred rim than we were made witnesses to a most shocking phenomenon.

Two completely separate voices suddenly proceeded from the monkey's throat, voices that at once began angrily conflicting with each other. One of these voices was the voice of the monkey itself and the other was the voice of its vivisector. I wasn't altogether satisfied with our guide's mythological explanation of the place where we were. "Caer Sidi" sounded as remote as the zodiac to me; and in fact at the back of my mind was a dim idea that some living species of *homo sapiens* may in prehistoric times have established itself underground and that this was the headquarters, so to speak, of the tricks by which it was ruled.

But I confess I was horrified by the startling clamour that now rose up from that gesticulating little beast as it clung to the magic cauldron. Though this place may not have been the eternal refuge of the First-Born of Earth and Heaven, it was undoubtedly a holy place; and I felt outraged that it should be desecrated in this manner. Nor, as far as I was concerned, could I catch a single intelligible word, though both these voices out of the monkey's belly were apparently speaking my own tongue.

Our guide was even more aghast than I was to hear so violent an altercation issue from the throat of a scarcely recognizable ape. I caught him muttering in his ancient language some gnomic sentence that sounded like "Gwern gwngwch uiwch," that I took to be a reference to those alder trees we had seen in Hell for I knew "Gwern" had something to do with alders.

As for Morwyn I could see that the sight of this vivisected creature recalled to her mind the one thing I had prayed she had forgotten — that appalling litany of exultant torture chanted by her father. This I knew at once by the way her hands went up to her ears.

And then, to the complete amazement of all of us, the undying Cretan Judge, moving aside the white hairs that covered his mouth and the heavy eyebrows that covered his eyes, with the ferule of his rod, gave us as well as the poor little double-voiced beast a shrewd and piercing glance; and it soon became clear to me that in his infirmity he took Morwyn and me for monkey-friends of the poor creature.

"This — is — not," his words began slowly; but as they went on they soon gathered weight and speed. "This is not as strange to Rhadamanthus, as it seems to be to the relatives in court," and he gave me a very grim look. "Centaurs and chimæras have ere now come before our judgment-seat and have gone away satisfied. Speak one by one, accused and accuser, so that we can hear more clearly and the better judge. Let the accuser begin."

Awed into silence I suspect rather by the patriarch's tone than by the meaning of his words which were in Homeric Greek, the vivisector in the belly of the victim held his peace, allowing that poor husk of an ape's body to speak for itself.

"He used me for human diseases till I could bear it no longer," screamed the disfigured ape, "and then he practised on me with a slow instrument to learn the effect of extreme fear upon certain of my organs. He did the same thing with a cat and a dog; and I can see the dog's eyes now, and the way the cat bit in a spasm at its own flesh. One of us got loose and drew a drop of blood from him, and you should have heard the fuss they made about that! They said he was an heroic martyr. What I want to ask you, great Judge, is this: Is it right to cause us all this intolerable and prolonged pain just for the sake of knowledge? If they were like serpents and swallowed us it would be different. What I call wicked is the way they do it in cold blood, simply for knowledge. That is my plea, great Judge — that it is wicked to extract so little knowledge out of so much pain. Is it right, or is it wrong? And if it's wrong, why do they give them a licence to do it?"

Morwyn dropped her hands from her ears. Black Peter sat up and stared, panting wildly as he always does when he's very excited.

The Ancient of Days gave us a prolonged and puzzled look. To his dim old Minoan mind it must have seemed queer that a she-monkey could be as lovely as Morwyn. But he turned to Taliesin. "It is against the custom of our court," he remarked gravely, "to use the plaintiff's relatives as interpreters; but perhaps *you*," he evidently regarded our guide as some kind of semi-immortal— "know enough Greek to tell me what that poor creature has just said. I can see he has suffered some great wrong."

Our guide came forward gladly in obedience to this; but his response was unintelligible to me. It may have been Greek; but if so, it was Druidical Greek, and spoken with an extremely Celtic accent.

But Rhadamanthus seemed to get the drift of it; for he soon made an abrupt sign to the Welshman to stop, and turning to the monkey on the Cauldron's edge, remarked categorically: "Stand down, so that the accused may address the court."

The monkey's disfigured body quivered and shook, and a human voice began to mingle with its pitiful wail; but this gouged-out and scraped-out phantom of a shredded husk, that once in its natural body had swung free among golden boughs, must have felt that it was on the verge of being swallowed up in that vast gulf of black Nothingness, in which the shrillest screams are silenced, and must have resolved to break its cracked heart in one culminating appeal. If such a ghost of a ghost had any intelligence left at all it must have observed how this withered judge of monkeys and of men spoke with a grave sympathy for its doom.

"Judge, Judge!" it shrieked, while its small hands clung desperately to the edge of the Cauldron, just as its perishing consciousness clung to the edge of extinction, "there's a cry going up from these places of torment, a wail of nether-most despair, such as no martyrs at the stake have ever uttered! These, oh just and righteous Judge, had paradise and glory to look for, but we have nothing — nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing! Think not because we're dumb that we lack the feelings of your branch of our race. Closed in our cages, behind those great stone walls, none can hear our screams but those who cause them. No Heaven, no Jesus, have we to look for when the torment is over! Even Inquisition-prisoners, even political prisoners, have a faint hope that one day they may escape. We have no hope — None is ever seen alive again that once crosses a vivisection threshold.

Their devilish Science does its best to enable them to kill one another — thousands of them it kills with its gases and engines to one it saves with its vivisection! — but when they're wounded they're allowed to go free and to live long. Never can we go free. The sight of what they reduce us to would turn all but scientific stomachs sick with nausea and shame. At first we can hardly believe that human beings can be such fiends. Hunters and wild beasts we have known and the brutality of trappers; but this is another thing. Did you know that when once they've got us they keep us alive in our pain *as long as possible*? They bring us back to life a hundred times by their science; and then — begin it all over again. Think what we feel when we see them preparing to begin it again!

"'Yes, I'll have that monkey out now!' they order their attendants. 'Get it well strapped down!' We ourselves have killed and eaten in the struggle for life. *But this is different.* This is not a matter of life and death. This is not a matter of ancient custom. This is not a primary impulse of Nature. *This is pure mental evil!* This is the cold-blooded substitution of the law of evil for the law of good! O Judge, O stern and righteous Judge, hear me this once, this once, before I die forever! Even if out of our torment their race *does* prolong its life, is not that life under a curse? Their scientists think they can mock at God, mock at right and wrong, mock at good and evil. They say there's only nothingness behind the Motion that makes Matter. They say their ways of horrible cruelty are the law of the universe. Oh rise up, great and righteous Judge, and condemn these demons, so that the poor creatures of earth may be avenged!"

All the while the monkey was jerking out these words, in a sort of high-pitched pidgin English, its body was being contorted and convulsed. Evidently the particular vivisector whom Merlin had transformed into this small beast was excessively anxious to get a hearing.

And he certainly got it now; for the moment the monkey paused to take breath he gave him such a wrench that the miserable little thing let go its hold upon the edge, reeled for a second trying in vain to recover itself, and fell backwards into the Cauldron. There was a startled movement among us all at this point, mortal or immortal, living or dead. Rhadamanthus dropped his staff of office. Morwyn rushed to the brink of the Cauldron and peeped into its obscure depths. The old Bard made a hesitating and wavering movement towards the girl as she leant over that nearby rim. He evidently felt that her audacity was unpardonable, but at the same time he couldn't resist a passionate curiosity to see what the result of her boldness would be.

No doubt he expected her daring hands, like those of

Rhiannon the mother of Pryderi, to be glued to that perilous rim.

But the issue was stranger than any of us expected; and to tell you the truth it was Black Peter who first got wind of its nature, for he now set up a savage fit of barking. In the appalling silence of Hell it had been a relief to hear the homely voice of a dog; but somehow in this sleeping-place of Saturn

Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon and eve's one star

this echoing hullabaloo from the throat of a little black spaniel seemed impious and profane.

But profane or not, I fully understood the cause of the dog's agitation when I perceived Morwyn actually helping a brisk and malapert young phantom, obviously bursting with indignant *amour propre*, to extricate himself from the depths of the magic receptacle. Skipping down to the ground, and making a mock-reverence to Black Peter while both Morwyn and Taliesin drew hastily away from him, this lively young springald saluted the Judge with the air of a youthful atheist entering a consistory of cardinals.

"So you don't think much of modern science down here," he began briskly. "I kept telling them that, all the way. I kept warning them they'd get into trouble. I'm a Behaviourist myself and I find I can always predict future reflexes from past reflexes. 'But aren't we,' they said to me, 'survivors of the death of the body?' Think of their saying a thing like that in these days! But they didn't talk to me for long. I soon showed them they were only bodies still, only matter and motion, only chemical automatons, only organisms reacting to stimuli! I don't know what kind of a museum this may be, or who you are," and the young phantom stared defiantly at Rhadamanthus— "but I can tell you this. It won't be long before the whole world will be where it ought to be, under the heel of Science; and then all these backwaters of yours will be mopped up. It's beginning now! The new governments are scientific governments, and it won't be long before Science will have the whole race at its disposal. It's begun, I tell you, and nothing can stop it. Pity and mercy do you say? Why Science laughs at these old superstitions! Science will soon have the whole race to experiment on. The public's afraid of us already. I've only to say, "I'm a scientific man. I hold a licence from the Home Office,' and everyone bows and scrapes. They know it's coming. They know it's idle to resist. Why, we scientists rule the world already! See what we make of justice and mercy and all the old catch-words! Everything is chemical. Everything is subject to the law of cause and effect. I make no apology for my shadowy condition; but I make no claim either. I am no more a self, a soul, a spirit, than that monkey whose decease you're lamenting! Mankind has thought too highly of itself. Men are nothing as individuals. The whole human race amounts to nothing except as the subject of sociological experiment. And the public begins to recognize these truths. Look at our art; look at our writers; look at our rulers. What do they really admire? Machines! Are machines merciful? Are machines pitiful? Do machines follow the dictates of conscience? Does a machine lie awake in the night thinking about Good and Evil? I don’t know to whom I’m speaking in this Colosseum of Antiquities. But if this is any kind of a law court, I can only say I’m a privileged person. You’re all laymen here and know nothing of—”

But the Welshman could contain himself no longer. Rushing forward, his whole frame quivering with rage, he thrust his face so close to the young phantom that the latter contemptuously drew back and began grinning like a gamin.

“And what do you suppose that is?” the Bard shouted, pointing to the Cauldron. “That’s the Cauldron of Annwn! And if it wasn’t for that, where would you be now? You’d be screeching in the belly of a dead monkey — that’s where *you’d* be!”

There was a pause then, a pause of miserable discomfort to everyone present except the youthful vivisector. This arrogant young son of perdition took the opportunity of gazing with itching desire at Morwyn. Now the attraction of Morwyn’s girlish charm had been — I am not the one to deny it — enhanced tenfold by the warm waves of aphrodisiac incense that floated backwards and forwards over those two mystic Mounds.

As she shrank back to the feet of Rhadamanthus, whose old fingers kept feebly clutching the air, for he was too stiff to pick up his staff, her nervous confusion increased this appeal; and she certainly did look — at least to my eyes — absolutely irresistible.

For my own part I could think of nothing but of how she looked; and yet this insolent lad totally devoid of all the nobler values created of twenty thousand years of human evolution, found it as easy to look away from her as to look at her! His impertinent stare now wandered from Rhadamanthus to the Cauldron, and from the Cauldron to those two Mounds of Sleep.

"I would like," he murmured, talking apparently to himself, but surveying us all as if we were in cages in his Research Laboratory where his white-frocked assistants only waited the word to strap us down. "I would like — to do — a little — excavation — in this queer old place."

Then, giving Morwyn, who was still crouching at the Judge's feet, a casual glance, as much as to say: "I may, and again I may not, bother with *you,*" he deliberately fumbled in his pocket for his note-book. But though these disembodied shadows seemed able to exercise a kind of de-tactilized pressure upon material objects, as when they steered their air-boats and as when our guide bore those burning alder boughs in his arms, it took them some time, as if in the manipulation of evasive magnetic currents, to adjust their will-power to their desired purpose.

So this cool young upstart's production of note-book and pencil to make a mathematical calculation of the exact number of furlongs between the Sleeping-Bed of the Son of Heaven and the Sleeping-Bed of the Daughter of Heaven was an affair of time.

And during this time, except for an occasional glance at Morwyn — as if to make sure she was still waiting his leisure — he hummed with patronizing carelessness a parody of the Mass that had recently become popular in his circle.

I looked at our guide and he looked at me, while Rhadamanthus, with his two-thousand-year-old fingers, made several touching attempts to reach the girl's dishevelled hair. Backwards and forwards above us swept the mystic clouds of immemorial incense, and not a sound was audible in this navel of the cosmos save the nervous breathing of Black Peter and the lewd humming of this impious popinjay. It was one of those moments that are so full of a strange poignancy that they remain in the mind like a wedge of ice, never to melt till death.

Waiting there, at the heart of the universe, I was struck by the fact that so far from diminishing the portentous awe which lay, cloud upon cloud, upon the solemn unconsciousness of those silent Presences the lewd ribaldry of this intrusive young phantom only intensified their mystery. And I was aware of an inkling, too, that the whole material universe, with all the dramatic issues that we see unrolling themselves, is forever being created and destroyed by the magic of the mind.

Intermittently amid these thoughts I caught myself glancing rather reproachfully at our ancient Bard. I confess it began to present itself to me as a queer thing, that, after all he had done for us in Hell, he should be powerless to deal with this insolent intruder into the resting-place of the Age of Gold. Though the whole scene, under the pressure of my whirling thoughts, seemed to rock and heave and sway, like an island upon a ghostly tide, yet the figures of Rhadamanthus and the Scientist, of the old Substance and the young Shadow, confronting each other under the Judgement-seat of the centuries, gathered to themselves such a significance at that eternal moment, that even Morwyn in her sweet confusion and Black Peter with his nervous pantings, drew back, as it were, to the misty horizon of my consciousness.

But the young vivisector had now completed his measurements; and the insubstantial pocket-book, with its careful data for a future excavation of Caer Sidi, was back again in that shadowy pocket.

As I am always reminding you, my indulgent son, I am only a doddering half-pay captain of His Majesty’s Forces, and it is not often that I can act boldly or wisely. But, as I have hinted, the aphrodisiac fumes that rose and fell with the glimmering light from those mystic Mounds seemed to exercise a quickening influence on my simple wits. I remembered the trick played upon the Marshal of France by our subtle Welshman, and I decided to try it upon this bold wraith.

"It must be about now," I remarked calmly, addressing the young man, "that that famous experiment on the brains of a thousand puppies is to take place, from which hope is entertained that the crisis of two most rare and interesting diseases may be postponed for half-an-hour. But I expect even the perfect Television of your best Screens down here will hardly be able —"

My words were like a burning fuse to a charge of gunpowder and the young man found difficulty in buttoning up his coat, his fingers trembled so. But he had only recently died. He was still young. He had rushed to damn himself the second his breath left his body, but he had *some* human instincts still clinging to him. He wasn't as de-humanized as Mr. —; and these subtle Minoan odours, in spite of his pocket-book, had had their effect on him.

In a flash, before it was possible to stop him, he leapt upon Morwyn and pressed his burning and yet ice-cold lips upon her panic-stricken mouth!

A burst of crimson fire dazzled my eyes; but snatching up the nearest weapon that offered itself, which turned out to be the fallen staff of Rhadamanthus, I struck wildly at him. I had never realized before, though I daresay if I'd been a more literary person Dante or Milton would long ago have enlightened me, that, though their bodies were only a little more corporeal than air, these souls of the dead were still subject to the mystery of pain.

Whether, during its long sojourn down here at the bottom of the world this staff of the great Judge had turned to stone, or whether the vegetation in that far-off Golden Age was tougher and more perdurable than ours, the youth set up a yell that pierced my bones, though being in Leprosid it made no audible sound.

Turning fiercely upon me he tried to tear the weapon from my hands. Again and again his ghostly fingers passed clear through its petrified substance, while the jerks he caused it to give almost threw me to the ground.

So violent was the strain of our struggle — his diabolical magnetic pull pitted against my normal human clutch — that in a second or two the rod broke in half, leaving the shorter but more jagged end in his possession. With this dangerous instrument, before I had time to defend myself, he proceeded to make repeated and vicious jabs at my groin, using the thing like a broken spear-head.

It was *my* turn now to cry out; and I am afraid I uttered a howl — and it wasn't in Leprosid either — that made that holy place resound. I could see that our guide was wrestling with him; for the white garments of the one and the black garments of the other seemed to mingle before my eyes; but the wretch kept on jabbing me in the same place till, dizzy and sick from the pain, I sank helplessly to the ground.

Triumphant from his victory he flung his weapon to the earth, and then, to my helpless indignation, proceeded deliberately to give Morwyn a second kiss.

"I'll take your love to your father!" he mocked, as he dashed away.

Following his flight with impotent rage I could see him beating the air with his hands, as if warding off — as Mephistopheles did the angels' rose-leaves — the formidable influences of the Sacred Mounds; but instead of directing his flight towards Hell, it seemed to me, perhaps owing to his excitement, that he was moving in the opposite direction.

But at any rate he was gone; and my comfort was that the torture of the puppies had taken place long before we descended down here; so that if he *did* get back to the Screens he wouldn't have the satisfaction of carrying the impress of Morwyn's lips to *that* particular entertainment. I think I may have become unconscious for a brief space of time after his departure for I have no recollection of being moved to the stone base of Caridwen's cauldron. But that is certainly where I found myself, when with a confusion of tumultuous emotions that I can still feel I saw Morwyn and our guide bending over me.

It was with a spasm of terror at my heart that I asked after Black Peter; for the thought crossed my mind: "He has carried him off!" and the vision of that shrinking little black form being dragged away to the slowest death it was possible to inflict caused a cloud of blackness to descend between me and Morwyn's sympathetic face.

But it was with an irresistible smile that Morwyn pointed out to me the familiar feathery paws with the black nose resting on them, as they crouched safely ensconced under the footstool of Rhadamanthus.

What I couldn't quite understand, and never have altogether, was the attitude taken by our guide to my wounded condition. He seemed intensely bothered, or perhaps I should say profoundly disturbed by the whole incident — I could see that. But his agitation did not seem to be caused by human sympathy with me, or by concern over my hurt, or by anxiety as to what was going to happen to us all? Oh, it's very difficult to explain to you, my son, precisely how his curious preoccupation struck me. It's a subtle point of course, but then our Welshman *was* one of the subtlest human beings I have ever met, but I am really, on the whole, temped to put it like this, strange as it may sound. He seemed to treat me as if I were one of the figures — not the principal figure, but *one* of the figures — in some mysterious Cosmic Rite, or Ritual, or Passion Play.

That’s as near as I can get, anyway, to the impression I had of his behaviour — and his behaviour *was* very odd. He was in fact never the same to me after this incident. It was as if in the place of any natural feeling he had for me as an individual — I don’t say he had much of that sort of thing but I do think he had a little — he now had the sort of attitude that anyone would feel to an anonymous priest, a totally unimportant priest, to whom chance had given a minor part in some awe-inspiring mystical ceremony.

The individual feelings of such a priest would be totally unimportant and less than negligible. It would be nothing to us if he had lumbago as he held up the cope of the High Priest, or if his spine should tickle extremely, when it was impossible for him to move a finger.

In my obsession over Morwyn it was at once with her that I linked this queer behaviour of our venerated friend. What strange beings we lovers are! I believe — though it is a shameful thing to have to confess — that deep in my heart I was conscious of a sense of injury because the girl didn’t seem more upset by the insult she had received. She certainly had been looking incredibly lovely as she crouched down at the feet of the old judge. All the enchantment of that Cretan incense had gathered about her. With or without her will her whole being diffused an irresistible attraction. Nor was this charm lessened by her complete unconsciousness, or by that virginal innocence of her senses the discovery of which had made such an impression on my libertine’s mind.

By degrees as she tended my hurt, which really caused me a great deal of pain, and as the old Bard watched her and struggled to adjust his mind to his occult vision of my condition, I seemed to gather from their attitude — not by anything they actually said, but indirectly by what they *didn't* say — that they felt I had brought this trouble upon myself and upon them by my own lack of self-restraint. Their idea seemed to be — mind you, they never *spoke* of it, but I felt sure I read it in their tone — that if I hadn't flown at him like that, the young wretch would have hurried off after his first kiss and left us all in peace.

There was some phrase in his ancient tongue that I caught our guide muttering when I first regained consciousness; and now, when he began repeating it to himself, I listened closely to the queer syllables. It sounded like the words, "Tryded anvat palvawt yn yr ynis honn," and because it struck me from the way Morwyn looked at him that she understood its significance, I asked her pointblank what the thing meant.

And then it was — and I so often think of it now as I lie here, still suffering from this curst hurt in my groin — that she smilingly asked me if I'd ever read *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*?

I must have looked somewhat blank at this; and I daresay, in my weakness and pain, I replied rather peevishly that I'd never even heard of the work in question. "They don't teach us Old Welsh at Sandhurst," I said, "but what *does* it mean?"

"The Third Dolorous Blow in this island," she answered.

"But I admit," she added with a smile, "I don't see how it applies to *you.*"

Part Four

I HAD LOST by this time all consciousness of the passing of days, and since we hadn't seen the blessed light of the sun since our first descent, it is useless to try to tell you how long we remained in this lotus-drugged Hall of Sleep. Much of our time was spent in listening to our guide's somewhat obscure discourses. He pretended once or twice, though I took it for poetic licence, that he'd been here before; but the main drift of his argument, as far as I could make out, was that in the spiral evolution of terrestrial happenings the Powers of the Golden Age who were sleeping here would eventually rise up again and bring a happier life to the world.

I got Morwyn to ask him once in a whisper, not a Leprosid whisper but a Welsh one, whether this forlorn Rhadamanthus who made me think of that frightening description in Dean Swift of the undying old men—"Struldbrugs" I think he calls them — would play a part in this happy consummation; and I still remember his answer, for I think it was a good one.

"God," he said, "leaves to chance and free will the details of His purpose; but we may be sure that the Justice of the Age of Gold will return, whatever happens to its Judge."

Considering things later, when I had the normal seasons to go by, I fancy we must have remained encamped — if I may use such expression — between that Cauldron and that Judgment-seat for at least three months.

I must have been a miserable care to both Morwyn and our charitable Welshman, for they had to be frequently carrying me considerable distances from our bivouac, and as frequently coming to fetch me, so that I might, as we say, “obey Nature” in all propriety and decency.

At first I used to be extremely fussy about this; and made them carry me quite long distances; in fact till I could hardly see those sacred Mounds, or the *gorsedd* of Rhadamanthus; but by degrees I became less punctilious. But, you may be sure, however far I was carried, Black Peter came caracoling behind us, and as I think of it now we must have appeared a queer cortège to the vision of the immortal Judge, as he watched us disappear in the mist!

As to food and drink, including Black Peter, we needed not to take thought, for the Cauldron supplied us freely. “It is the ‘peculiarity,’” our guide would remind us — and he always made use of the old word Kynnedyf— “of all magic Cauldrons, whether the Cauldron of Caridwen, or the Cauldron of Pywll Penn Annwn, as I believe this one to be, or the Cauldron of Diwruach the Goidel, or the Cauldron of Gwydno Garanhir, that they should supply the brave and the beautiful” — and he would cast a faintly ironic look at me and a lingering look of almost maudlin adoration at my girl— “with the best refreshment any human heart could desire.” And then he would launch into that particular poem of his own about a former visit of his down here, which I always regarded, but I daresay unjustly, as pure boasting. I heard the words so often that I got quite weary of their wind-in-a-stone-circle sound. They ran something like this:

“Ys kyweir vyg kadeir ygkaer sidi
Nys plawd heint a heneint a vo ynd!”

And Morwyn told me Rhys has translated them as follows:

“Perfect is my chair in Caer Sidi:
Plague and age hurt him not who’s in it—”

I am afraid I criticized this last passage to our friend, indicating, during one of our daily excursions, that in the particular example before us of extreme old age in Caer Sidi it could hardly be said to be so desirable.

The Bard’s retort to this was that God gives to all souls what they want most and will continue doing so, till all the cruel ones in the world have deliberately damned themselves to Hell. “It’s a terribly slow method,” added the old gentleman sadly, “and our respected Rhadamanthus, being dissatisfied with the slowness of it, has got what *he* wanted most, the position of an immortal righteous judge.”

“But there’s nobody,” threw in Morwyn, “for the poor old man to judge down here!”

“There *may* be yet, my child,” murmured the Bard.

“We’ve already had—” and he gave me one of his quick, ambiguous looks.

“But if the vengeance of God is so slow,” protested the girl, “how are the weak to be protected from the strong?”

The poet only replied with a sigh; but after a pause he said, in a low far-away voice: “The weak are sometimes stronger than the strong.”

In spite of my crippled state, for I couldn’t move more than a few steps without support, and in spite of the pain in my groin, the days — if we can speak of them as days, for we slept when we wanted to sleep and waked when we wanted to wake — passed peacefully enough. Whether it was due to some magnetic effluence from the two Divine Sleepers, or whether she was hiding her thoughts too deep in her heart for my clairvoyance to reach, my sweet love seemed no longer fretting about her father. I sometimes wondered if the man’s appalling eulogy upon vivisection had killed her feeling for him; but, knowing her as I did, I didn’t play with this thought very long.

At any rate the time passed easily in Caer Sidi. Black Peter’s tendency to begin barking at any sudden move of the old Judge was practically the only thing that really disturbed us. We found a beautiful pool of water to wash in, not too far away, and my companions would sometimes leave me there for a change, while they walked together and discussed their interminable Welsh topics.

It was on one of these occasions, and they had left me stretched out on the brink of this pool, my mind pondering languidly upon the everlasting question as to whether we should ever get back to the surface of the earth, when I realized, to my startled surprise, that a strange figure was approaching me. He approached from the direction directly opposite the cleft in the rock that led to Merlin’s hiding-place but yet he did not move like one who had come from very far.

I was clearly not visible to him till he came quite close; and he gave a lively exclamation of astonishment when he stumbled upon me lying there.

But if his astonishment was great, mine was a good deal greater, especially so as I was certain I had seen him before, though where or when I couldn’t think! He was dressed a little like our old guide, but in a much less incommodious attire, and on his naked feet were a stout pair of leather sandals.

But oh! I was sure I had seen that physiognomy somewhere. It was an unforgettable face and to tell you the truth it was the most unprepossessing human countenance I have ever seen in my life. He was an elderly man, though not, I fancy, as old as our Welshman; but his features were positively monstrous in their ugliness. He had a thick negroid nose, loose sensual lips, staring, animal-like eyes, and with his short, bristly beard and his bull neck he resembled nothing so much as those gross eighteenth-century vignettes of the demi-god Silenus that one sees in the frontispieces of old bawdy publications.

And the moment he opened his lips and addressed me I knew who he was! Have *you* guessed, my son? No! I suppose not, with your modern education. But he was Socrates of course; and since by good luck I had "taken" the *Apology* at my prep-school and have always been an adorer of *his* adorer, Rabelais, I soon found, after I'd begged him to speak with slow articulation, that I could get the hang of his words.

He seated himself, with an easy and considerate courtesy, quite out of keeping with his boorish physiognomy, very carefully at my side, arranging himself so that I could see him and hear him with the least possible effort, and have at the same time my view of that lovely pool of water entirely unimpeded.

Before seating himself, however, I noticed that he made, casually and almost automatically, like an old, benevolent, credulous-ironic priest, a gesture of worship to the *Genius Loci* or indwelling *Numen* of this charming pool, dipping reverently the palm of one of his great hands into it and sprinkling the drops upon the air.

What struck me at once about him was that he was so much more of a *solid* ghost than the others. It was as if his genius for falling into philosophical trances at any moment and in any place, while it was unable to spiritualize his muscular frame, had the opposite effect of thickening out his surviving wraith with a corporal opacity altogether beyond the normal. You should have heard — only I fear my British officer's directness must have seemed somewhat blunt to this metaphysical foot-soldier of Athens — how I struggled with my wretched prep-Greek to compliment him on the surprising solidity of his posthumous flesh and blood.

He seemed greatly amused at my favourable opinion of his pretensions — shadowy enough as they were — to substance and opacity; and he proceeded at once to give me — speaking just as he must have done to his young disciples by the Ilyssus, only a little bit slower and with fewer niceties of wit — a most original explanation of his prosperity as a ghost. He said he had always been an impassioned worshipper of youthful beauty and had so long cultivated the power either to yield to his emotions or to restrain them, that his inner being had become absolutely impregnated with the vitality of the erotic.

And thus, when he came to die, there was twice as much livingness in what survives death as is the case with most men. I think he thoroughly enjoyed explaining this to me and drawing his images and illustrations from the delicate reflections in the pool at our feet and the lovely spirals of fragment vapour, that kept forming and reforming in the air above us; and he led me on to make such unheard-of use of my prep-Greek, — but I must have been extremely well-grounded in the rudiments — that I broached a subject that was very close to my heart, but that I hadn't dared to mention to our Welsh friend.

The truth is I felt much more at my ease with this grotesque-looking sage with his prize-fighter's body than I ever did with our heroic guide.

There is something — some sort of imaginative reserve — about the Welsh nature that has always prevented me from feeling quite at home with it; whereas to this un-fastidious Greek, free from all suppressions and all resentments, though, I suspect, taking most things with a pinch of Attic salt, I felt at once that there was simply nothing I couldn't say.

To be plain with you, my son, I told him how bitterly — especially since I had been crippled with this wound in my groin — I had missed the relief and comfort of smoking cigarettes.

He was extremely interested in my accounts of the virtues of tobacco and declared with an engaging smile that he would like to experiment in its power over erotic agitation. “I have been in the habit,” he said, “of inhaling the smoke of dead asphodel stalks. Something of the sort has become a necessity to me; for I have been undergoing a trying time of late. The truth is I have been — But I don’t want to bother you! Are you tired of this secluded spot? Would you like me to carry you back whence you came?”

The tender graciousness of the look he gave me as he said this is something I shall never forget. I can see now, the moment I shut my eyes, the way it illumined his satyr-like features.

“Oh no!” I exclaimed, and I anxiously cast my eyes over the now quite familiar aspects of this mysterious “field of sleep.” I wanted to catch sight of my companions.

Yes! there they were, walking as gravely and serenely side by side as if they had been in the Elysian Fields! I suppressed the faintest flicker of a jealous pang; and hoisting myself up as well as I could, I pointed them out to my new friend. I think I detected a shade of disappointment cross his face when he took them in. I suppose a young girl meant little to him, and I daresay one of his chief objects in leaving Paradise was to escape the society of elderly poets.

“Listen, my friend,” he said hurriedly. “Before your companions appear I must tell you why I’ve come. I believe I can trust you?”

To this I replied that it was not the habit of His Majesty’s officers — even on half-pay — to betray the confidences of fellow-soldiers.

“So it’s soldier to soldier, is it?” he remarked with a smile. “Well, it’s like this. I’ve always been more of a city-person myself than a countryman, but they knew my ways in Athens, and when I wanted to sink into my soul, and converse with my daimon, they let me alone, even if I stood still for hours in the market-place! But since my death I've been greatly harassed by troublesome sophists. Every new philosopher who dies must needs come bustling to Paradise to explain his ideas to Socrates; and none of them seem to understand that the humble questions I put to them, aren't quite as simple as they sound. I didn't mind it so much in what I understand you call your Middle Ages; for though very learned in the works of one of my pupil's disciples, an industrious student of Nature, they still put the Human Conscience and the difference between Good and Evil in the forefront of their doctrines. But a dreadful person — I believe he belonged to your remote island — whose patronymic was Bacon turned up, and since his time everything went wrong. The soul of a wise man, the conscience of a good man, became no longer the test of the purpose of the System-of-Things. And it gets worse and worse. Oh, my good friend, you have no idea to what things I've been compelled to listen! I've had to give up my ironic method altogether. It makes no impression on these fellows. They take my pretended ignorance literally and lecture me as if I were a child. They seem to think that the mere study of what they call Science gives them the right to defy Conscience, to mix up Good and Evil, and to practise devilish cruelty. They come jostling round me when I want to sink into my soul, and worry me to death with talk about reflexes and complexes. And I can't see any ennobling of human character, any enriching of the human mind, any real philosophical wisdom, issuing from their theories. They don't seem to understand that the centre of the cosmos lies in a man's soul, in a man's character, in the difference between Good and Evil as the System-of-Things reveals itself to our reason. They even talk as if the phenomenal accidents of cause and effect limited the working of the highest intelligence. But I see your friends are coming and I must be quick.

"As I say, I have been, for some centuries now, living alone not far from here, hoping against hope that these rulers of the Golden Age would awake from sleep. But I've been disturbed lately by a most lamentable invader of my solitude. One of those old defeated Titans — I don't know whether you've heard of him: Tityos he calls himself and he claims to be one of the first children of Heaven and Earth — has forced his way into my refuge. He's a pitiful and horrible spectacle, larger than human in his body but weaker than human in his wits, and he is tormented by two loathsome birds, or ghoulish ghosts of birds, who tear at his vitals without mercy or respite. I think they renew their base lemur-like existence from his immortal decomposition.

"Now I believe he could wring these foul creatures' necks, for, like himself, they are more tangible than ordinary phantoms, if it weren't for a mental delusion from which he suffers. He's got it lodged in his afflicted brain that only Rhadamanthus can absolve him from his guilt, and until *that* is done he won't raise a hand against these winged demons. But that's not all! The worst of it is that quite recently there has drifted into my retreat a second intruder, in the form of the most unpleasant young man, with the most abominable ideas, that I've ever set eyes on. My accusers at home were pillars of righteousness — and between ourselves I did of course, *from their point of view,* corrupt many lads — compared with this young upstart. I certainly have no wish to try to corrupt *him.* Nor, to do him justice, does he beat about the bush or mince matters very much.

"When I asked him what philosopher he followed, and alluded to Democritus, who was I believe the first thinker to divorce reason from conscience, he told me he was a 'Behaviourist'; and when I put to him a few humble questions — and I assure you my face remained perfectly grave — you have never heard, my dear Captain, such monstrous, inhuman, and grotesque dogmas as issued from those youthful lips I “Had he but once murmured that philosophical phrase which is the axiomatic basis of all polite discussion and which I always taught my pupils to introduce, ‘might it not seem,’ or ‘isn’t it possible for us to suppose,’ I would have listened to him patiently; but when I heard this conceited baby laying down the law for a universe that baffles the oracles of the immortal gods, when I heard him announce that beyond the use of teeth and claws and the getting of progeny man has no access to the mystery of life, in fact when I heard him imply, as I assure you he did, that to him the cosmos was no longer a mystery, I was compelled to retire to the interior of my cave, and to the inhaling of asphodel-smoke.

“But now comes the point; and you must forgive me if these long years of silence have made me long-winded. After driving me to remain in my cell, what must this popinjay of science do — and he himself assures me that these vivisectors are quite distinct from ordinary doctors and form a special class by themselves — but begin experimenting upon this poor half-witted Titan!

“I suppose, in his contempt for the past, he regards this early child of the cosmos as so entirely sub-human as to be good for nothing but the torture-chamber of physiological ‘truth.’

“On the contrary, all that this wretched giant needs is the authority of someone who represents to him absolute spiritual infallibility. It’s an unphilosophical wish, but hardly an inhuman one. You see, he’s got on his crazy brain the unhappy delusion that the more exciting and satisfying an erotic pleasure is the wickeder it is!

“In my study of human religions I have come so often upon the track of the cruel Zeus and the cruel Jahveh that I now recognize that they are the same; the same inchoate Monster, perpetually being re-created by the energy of cruel minds! This purely speculative conclusion I have of course verified down here" — and he nodded his satyr's head in the direction of that pair of Abominations between whose legs we had escaped into this Limbo— "and it interested me to remark," he went on, "that the scientific Idol, though so much younger, is already a good deal more horrible-looking than his mate. But of course both of them—"

He was interrupted at this point by the arrival of Morwyn and our guide; and I regret to say that the moments that followed were unpleasant ones to us all.

Of course I had had plenty of what you might call "lover's quarrels" with my sweet girl since we descended into Hell, but this was the first time that I gravely and profoundly disapproved of her behaviour. She took an intense dislike to Socrates; and I grieve to say hesitated not to express her feelings in manner, tone, and speech. She shrank back from him far more noticeably, she avoided looking at him far more apparently, than she had ever done with the Marquis of Sade or with the impertinent young phantom who had kissed her!

And unfortunately her feelings appeared to be entirely shared by Taliesin. Thinking it over afterwards, I came to the conclusion that in Morwyn's case it was pure feminine divination. She saw that the Athenian wasn't attracted to her and never would be! She felt that when she spoke he wouldn't listen, when she smiled he wouldn't respond, when she wept he wouldn't yield, and when she looked her most lovely and touching he would notice nothing.

With Taliesin, I believe, it was not very different. Supreme genius as he was, like all poets he craved instantaneous admiration and unbounded reverence. But the Athenian Sage, ironically indulgent to the humbler commonalty, had already crossed swords with more than one distinguished poet.

He bothered them by his ironic questions and they bothered him by their prophetic assurance. So that, just as Morwyn knew in advance that her charms would draw no blood from this ugly-looking philosopher, so the Welshman knew in advance that his peculiar kind of genius could never, under any circumstances, have justice done it in that same quarter.

This reluctance in my devoted companions to accept my new friend cast a gloom over the return to our "camp" — if I may so call it — beneath the magic Cauldron.

But when the Athenian explained to Rhadamanthus, whose pitiful appearance with that broken staff in his withered hand in no way lessened the respect with which the philosopher treated him, I was astonished at the change that took place in the old man.

"We have heard of you," this forlorn image of ancient justice cried, and the sound of his voice was like the sound of the wind among dead reeds. "You are the thinker who died, *not* for knowledge, but to obey his conscience, to obey that eternal law of Right and Wrong which is beyond all reasoning and all wisdom, which is, in fact, de facto and de jure, the will of the System-of-Things. Aye! We know thee who thou art; the one who obeyed the Law, for the sake of the god in his own breast!"

And as he uttered these words I was amazed to see great tears, "tears as big as ostrich-eggs," roll down his hardly human countenance.

And when the Athenian went on further, and with grave humility implored the great Judge to leave his seat in Limbo for a brief space and bestow his official pardon upon this tortured son of the Earth, I could hardly believe my eyes at what I saw.

Very slowly, and with infinite pain to his petrified limbs, that grim Arbiter of the Golden Age actually descended from his seat of Judgment! He was forced to rest for a space then, leaning upon the stalwart shoulder of the Athenian; but he gathered up his great beard and thrust it under his belt, and though for a moment his skeleton-frame seemed to sway like a leaning tower troubled at its foundations, he soon stretched forth the hand that clutched the broken staff and rested it against the rim of the Cauldron.

The Welshman gave me a quick significant look when he did this — as much as to say, “You see how they all depend on It!’ And indeed our guide’s confidence was wholly justified. Even as the old man leant his weight on this Fountain of Life I could see the natural forces return to that mummified body.

And then without delay we all set out. The Athenian insisted on carrying me in his powerful arms; and though his ghostly substance was like thick vapour to the touch, it had, as I have hinted, far more opacity than the other Shadows, and I felt nothing but pride and satisfaction when his insubstantial flesh penetrated my own as we moved along. Every now and then he had to make a fresh adjustment of my weight and change his hold. I noticed in fact that it took about thirty steps of our slow advance for his arms to pass through the portion of my body they supported; but he never let me fall. He was always careful to shift his burden, which he did as tenderly as any woman, in time to prevent such a mishap.

The great Judge, swaying and toppling like a stone image, came heavily behind us, supported on one hand by Morwyn and on the other by Taliesin, while to my considerable amusement I could catch at intervals hurried glimpses of Black Peter, leaping and bounding in high delight round the whole surprising procession.

I had remarked for many days — if I can so speak, though they may have been years in Caer Sidi — a particular spot in our landscape above which a cloud of smoke seemed always to hang.

My companions had often spoken of visiting this spot: but for some reason — probably because they were too occupied with their Welsh mythology — they had never realized this project.

But arriving at this over-clouded place we found that what the mist concealed was a cleft in a vast wall, a wall whose height it was impossible to gauge owing to the heavy vapour, that constantly swept against it. Through this cleft, which was a little wider than the one between Merlin's refuge and our Field of Sleep, the Athenian boldly carried me; and though he kept stumbling over Black Peter as he went he held me firmly, and we were followed closely by the others.

The moment we were safely through, our leader laid me down with my back against the great rock through which we had passed; and from this point of vantage I was in a position to take in to their full extent the grandeur and strangeness of what lay before us.

We were in a region totally different from the one we had left, and the scene that faced us now possessed many elements that were extraordinarily comforting to my poor human senses, homesick for the familiar aspects of the earth. For one thing we were confronted by an astonishing expanse of dead, but quite naturally and seasonably dead, vegetation. Most of this consisted of the dried-up, winter-withered stalks of asphodels, stalks of a pallid yellow colour in themselves but bearing clustered spikes of reddish-brown seeds.

The spot where we now rested — and the aged Judge and our dear maid sat side by side upon a ledge a little to my right — was on a level with this strange garden, over whose drooping feathered grasses and upright stalks a cavernous breeze was blowing.

But what a spectacle met my eyes when I looked across this reassuring wintry parterre! Lying at the foot of two cyclopean flights of steps, which separated above his head, was a dim gigantic Figure, stark naked, and even in his lacerated state possessed of the tremendous muscular development of which we get so many broken hints in our museum-fragments of Pheidian sculpture.

I don’t think he was a phantom-shape; at least through his recumbent form I couldn’t detect the outline of the enormous stairs, that in a double flight rose above his figure. His face, though across those withered flowers I could only faintly discern his lineaments, was, as the poet says of another of the same primeval brood, “large as that of Memphian sphinx, pedestalled haply in a palace-court, when sages looked to Egypt for their lore.”

But what I saw being done to that huge offspring “of the infant world” made my gorge rise and a shuddering nausea pass through me. Two unspeakable creatures — if they were vultures I can only pray their breed is extinct! — kept plunging their beaks into his belly and as they did so fluttering their evil wings and uttering low blood-curdling slobbering sounds, the peculiar horror of which I would give anything to erase from my memory.

But what was this? Mercy of God! my dear lad, you can imagine what I felt when I saw the figure of that accursed monkey-torturer who had insulted Morwyn, gloating over this disgusting scene and taking passionate notes in his pain-diary of every contortion of the wretched Titan’s face as he winced and squirmed under those fiendish beaks!

I was so outraged by this sight that I made an instinctive and desperate effort to rise to my feet; but it was useless. Coward though I am, I think I *would* have rushed to that poor giant's rescue if my groin had been only a little less hurt.

But every attempt to stand gave me such a spasm that I believe I should have fainted if I hadn't fallen back against the rock and given it up.

But my Athenian was already on the spot; and after a moment or two of his intervention the note-book was being returned to the youth's pocket, the beaks of the vultures were being lifted from their repast, and the head of the unfortunate Titan was feebly hoisting itself up and staring with piteous hope at the apparition of the undying Judge. I had time, during that brief lull in events to notice that the two flights of stairs, before they were completely lost to sight, diverged to the left and to the right. And not only so; but I was comforted to observe, for I regarded every sign of vegetation as a promise of escape, that the one that led to the left — I had lost all notion of the points of the compass — seemed to assume a faintly green colour, as if overgrown by some species of living moss, ere it vanished in the mist.

But what it was my destiny to see now, my good son, will be forever bandaged so tight round the nerves of my vision that I shall behold it, blurred in a fog of blood, to the end of my days. For I saw my philosopher struggling to help Tityos to his feet; and I saw our Welshman, after a second's hesitation, due either to the ironic lift of the Athenian's ugly eyebrows, or to the ghostly entrails dangling from the combed-out belly of the Titan — begin to heave him up from the other side.

And thus supported the wounded creature tottered forward towards us. As he came, stride by heavy stride, across the intervening space, treading down the stalks of the dead asphodels while a faint stir of wind made the tall feathered grasses brush with a long-drawn sigh against his legs, those two foul birds, their phantom beaks still dripping with his blood, came fluttering with him, the loathsome quills of their moulted wings beating against his side. I could only catch the half-profile of Rhadamanthus as this crazed victim of the vendetta of Zeus offered himself as a suppliant; but what I saw now did, I'm not ashamed to confess, give me that feeling of tears behind the eyeballs which one gets from the emotion of the heroic. Every particular hair on the old man's face seemed electric with ecstatic joy, and every individual wrinkle on his withered features seemed to melt away in exultant rapture.

"Let the accuser speak first!" boomed forth the hoarse voice of this derelict of the Golden Age. These words took by surprise everybody present.

Morwyn looked questioningly and somewhat nervously at her Welshman. I could see that she half expected some cruel sky-god of thunder and lightning to come down cursing and accusing from above our heads. It was then that I was struck by the amazing legal acuteness of my noble Athenian as he hurriedly intervened.

"The accuser, O great Judge, is, I humbly submit, unable to appear before this Court, and for a sufficient reason."

"For *what* reason?" boomed Rhadamanthus. "If he were my own father I would insist that he present himself before me!"

"The accuser is unable to appear," replied the philosopher firmly, "because he is only half-existent, only half-created. The accuser of Tityos is that possessive, implacable *Automaton,* sometimes called Jehovah, sometimes called Jove, who is forever being half-created by the minds of men, and forever falling back into the maggots of decomposition.

"The damnation that follows all cruelty would have annihilated him long ago if it weren't for a new God-Devil to which mankind is now giving the same horrible half-life. Knowledge-without-Pity is this fiend's name, and he is a worse one than the other. In plain words, great Judge, the accuser of

Tityos is now undergoing a blood-transfusion from this younger brother of his."

"Let them both come!" boomed the Ancient of Days. "I fear, my Lord, *that* is entirely impossible. The System-of-Things has found them a place in Hell, where their worshippers are most numerous. Once every twelve months, my lord, on the night that used to be dedicated to Saturn, these two proclaim the passing of a year in those regions by breaking the eternal silence."

"How do they break it? Do they call for a righteous Judge to judge them?"

"No, my Lord. From one of them comes the cry: 'My worm dieth not!' and from the other comes the cry: 'And my fire is not quenched!' and I assure you, my Lord, this annual breaking of the eternal silence by these Half-Lives has a very curious effect."

"How do *you* come to know so much about all this?" inquired the astute Cretan. And for once I saw my philosopher look a little non-plussed. Indeed I think I caught him murmuring something about a pupil of his who was a great traveller and had a poetical imagination.

"Come to the point, come to the point!" said the old man sternly; and then, raising his voice: "The accuser of Tityos, the Titan, is not present in court. Is there anyone here who will represent him?"

"That will I, sir!" cried the young vivisector, skipping impertinently forward and staring shamelessly at Morwyn, "I will represent him."

Black Peter hid himself under the fold of my coat. "*On what grounds?*" And I was touched to see how the noble old law-giver laid aside completely any personal feeling against this young man; though it was entirely because of him that he was at this moment clutching only half of his staff.

"On the grounds," declared the youth boldly, "that *my* god is the old god's successor."

Rhadamanthus gave a little nod. "I wish just to say," threw in my philosopher — and I confess I began to think that the old Cretan law courts must have been more orderly and more like our own than those of Athens— "that it was only for a natural erotic impulse that this first-born of Earth and Heaven was condemned."

"We'll hear all that presently," said the Judge, "when the time comes for the Defence. Go on, prosecutor?"

"You have only to look at that dumb savage, sir," cried the young man, "to see how useless to Science and Progress his existence has been. I understand he was condemned for attempted violence offered to one of the wives of my God's predecessor, a silly, senseless irrational crime, and one that could only have been attempted by a half-wit. My God's predecessor, not improperly, condemned this stupid savage to the beaks of those birds; and no experiment I have ever made on monkeys, or dogs, or cats, or any other creature, has brought me as much knowledge of the psychology of pain as I've had from watching this brute's punishment. He's on a level with the animals; and the word of my God is: 'The animals are given you to torture, that you may gain knowledge of my laws and live long in the land.'"

"All this," said the Judge sternly, is "irrelevant to the accused's guilt. What was his crime?"

"He attacked a-high-born woman."

"But isn't he himself," protested the Judge, "a son of Heaven and Earth?"

"Brutes of his kind," snapped the scientist, "must be taught their place. A time will soon come when my God will give us for our Laboratories any specimens we need from among the inferior races."

"But his crime, his crime?" repeated the Judge. "The future of the world doesn't depend on your new god any more than upon the old. It depends on the secret purpose of the System-of-Things."

At this point, with a pitiful strumming and drumming in his deep chest, the lacerated Titan before us began uttering articulate sounds. I don't know whether you, my son, have ever heard the wind howl on November nights through the monoliths and trilithons of Stonehenge; but only if you have, can I give you the faintest idea of the lamentable sounds that now issued from that lacerated bulk.

The abominable vultures kept flapping their featherless quills against his face as he tried to speak, smearing it, as they did so, with blood and filth from his own bowels and making his words still more obscure.

My philosopher for the second time that day seemed baffled; for it was clear that he couldn't understand, any better than I could, the primeval syllables, like the autumn wind through cyclopean ruins, that came, hoarse and pitiful amid the flapping of those horrible wings.

But it was then that our Welshman stepped forward. "Can I interpret, Arglwydd?" he inquired. "I can read what we bards call Ogam; and these are Pre-Aryan words known to me in Ogyrven."

The Judge lifted up his over-hanging eyebrows with the jagged end of his staff and cast a piercing look upon this new witness. "What did the accused say?" he asked.

"He said that she was more beautiful than he could bear. He said he embraced her as she went towards Pytho, through Panopeus with its lovely lawns."

The Judge turned to the vivisector. "Is an embrace a crime?" he asked.

"You can see what an animal he is," retorted the youth. "He has shed blood too. He has killed and he has raped. These violences on the part of the lower races must be rigorously stamped out. Science must have an absolute control over the sex-impulses of—"

But at that moment I heard Morwyn give a peculiarly sharp cry, pitched in a certain key that I well remember noticing once before when she caught a boy killing a squirrel. She made a rush forward after uttering this cry, and frantically waved her arms. This did for a moment drive off the vultures who were now doing all they could to prevent the Titan's uncouth words from coming forth.

"What does he say?" repeated Rhadamanthus to the Welshman.

"He says that a son of the Earth and Heaven can't help fighting and embracing. He says he was born to fight and to embrace; and if there was violence he says, it was the fault of life itself."

"Well, young man," said the Judge, turning again to the vivisector, "what do you say to *that*?"

"He's excusing himself," retorted the youth, "in the way all the lower natures excuse themselves. But science will soon put an end to all this. There will be no natural fighting, and all the embracing that will be done will be done under the control of our laboratories. We shall keep a percentage of the lower races alive for experimental purposes. And they will be too frightened to resist. At the sight of a man of science they will shiver all over, as this giant's doing now, and as that dog over there is doing. Qh no! These stupid fighters and embracers, these lusty children of Nature, will be made so quiet by experimentation that they'll cast down their eyes when they meet a scientist. Just as we do with dogs, now, we won't let 'em die. We'll keep them alive to experiment on; so that by their torture we and our dear ones may live forever! I'm speaking frankly; but you must remember, I'm only speaking before this archaic court under strong protest. The Press of our country trembles already before our name. And well it may. Science is ten times more powerful for punishment than for anything else. Look at the weapons of destruction we have at our control! No, no! It's only under protest, and because I want to finish my observations on the reaction of gastric nerves to ornithological stimulus that I'm speaking now. When I've finished with Tityos I hope to come upon Tantalus. It'll be wonderful to examine the saliva from a human dog's mouth who'd been in a Laboratory for fifty-thousand—"

But the Athenian, whose ugly face had been for some while positively twitching to interrupt, could suppress himself no longer. Pressing forward in that impulsive manner which startled me as much as it disturbed Rhadamanthus, he demanded whether he could crossexamine the prosecutor.

I could see that this interruption spoilt the whole consummate scheme of the great Judge as well as scandalized all his ideas of legal propriety; but while he was pondering how to refuse the philosopher without prejudice to the defendant Socrates began his speech.

I couldn't resist a wry smile when I detected — even down here at the bottom of the world — how this old pillar of justice bit his lip in vexation and combed indignantly his great beard with his staff at this breaking of court rules, even though, as I knew well, he agreed with every word the impetuous pleader was uttering.

"There's the issue," cried the satyr-faced philosopher, "and the court has seen it! This young man, whose new god-devil is only the old one in another mask, claims to be superior to the difference between good and evil. But may it not be that even while we are holding this trial the eternal System-of-Things, beyond all reason and all understanding, is working out its purpose? The issue at stake is a simple one. Is there a Right and Wrong in the world? I call upon the earth and the heaven to answer, I call upon the fire and the water to answer, and this young man may justly say there is only silence. There *is* only silence; the silence, the emptiness, the horror, of the place from which he comes! For he comes from the deaf Outward, he comes from the abyss of death, he comes from the atoms and the void. Where he comes from there is indeed no answer; and he may ply his pincers and his lancets, and he may record in his brain and in his note-book all the motions of those atoms and that void, and there will be no answer! For the answer comes from another place.

"The answer, O great Judge, comes from the heart of man. It is in the heart of man, in defiance of the whole universe of atoms and void, that the System-of-Things — our great unknown Pan, for He is our All — has placed the response to this cry of the world. The base god-devil this young man represents, in his inhuman and heartless science, has challenged the only Revelation from the System-of-Things that we possess, the revelation — beyond all analysis and all argument — of the difference between Right and Wrong. One of the few modern philosophers, great Judge, who for his open mind can be compared with our ancient Empedocles, is a citizen of the New Atlantis, called in our tongue Jakobos or James. And this James, whose personal name I understand was William, and who like myself was interested in the silent voice of the soul, declared that vivisectors ought never to be trusted, either in what they do or in what they brag of doing.

"And does it not appear and might it not be said, that whereas the big things, the vast expanses, the enormous forces, are all on the side of this false god, on the side of the System-of-Things there is only the murmur of conscience? Against this faint sound, this frail voice, this sigh from within, all the knowledge and wisdom of the universe is helpless. This faint sigh can subdue the strongest, can shake the foundations of the earth, can overthrow all their laboratories of torture! For this faint murmur of conscience in the human heart, this daimon of the god within us, has behind it all the power of the Unutterable, all the purpose of the System-of-Things. As the accused says, to fight and to embrace, yea! even to shed blood in the hot struggle of life, is according to Nature. We err, we repent, and we are forgiven. But this new claim that we have a right to torture for knowledge, and a right to torture so as to prolong our lives upon the earth, is a claim that sets itself against the voice of the heart within us, sets itself up against that unutterable Will to mercy and pity which is at the heart of the System-of-Things!

"This young man, great Judge, torturing animals to prolong human life, has separated Science from the most important thing life has produced — the human conscience. May I ask the Court this? What is the importance of human lives? Is it their continuing alive for so many years like animals in a menagerie? *Me genoito!* The value of a man cannot be judged by weighing the atoms and measuring the void, or by the number of the diseases from which he escapes. The value of a man is in his human qualities; in his character, in his conscience, in the nobility and magnanimity of his soul. I humbly submit that this young accuser of Tityos the Titan has no place in his Science for human character.

"I submit that all the way down the ages evil and dangerous attempts have been made *to shift the pivot of life* to something other than the character of the individual man. The character of the individual man has been held as unimportant, O righteous Judge, in comparison with the State, in comparison with Religion, in comparison with Knowledge. It is held unimportant now in comparison with Scientific Invention. But I submit to this court that everything in the universe is negligible compared with the character of an individual man! This is the teaching of all the poets of my race. What was their sole idea of a worthy and tragic subject? It was always the same — the character and conscience of a man wrestling against Fate.

“And does it not appear as if the terrible catastrophes that have followed these attempts *to shift the pivot of life* have been due to the fact that the System-of-Things Itself, that Power beyond all Powers, is behind the conscience and character of a man, as it is behind nothing else? I am not learned, my Lord, in the laws of the Atoms and the Void as is our young disciple of Democritus, but when he tells me that people to-day torture animals to gain knowledge and to prolong life, I do not need to go to the Atoms and the Void for direction. In my own being *as a man* I find a complete answer. The daimon in my own conscience speaks in no wavering terms. And what does it tell me, O righteous Judge?

“It tells me that this torture of animals is wrong, that it is against the will of the System-of-Things, and that *until it is stopped,* there will be disaster after disaster for the human race. When I was in the Elysian Fields, O righteous Judge, shall I tell you who was the wisest man I met? He was a little old Chinaman, and he was so frail that I’m sure in life I could have taken him in my arms and broken him to bits like a sea-shell.

“I had grown weary of the solemn superior men in that place — for as the cruel choose Hell, so do the professional philosophers gravitate to the Elysian Fields — and I found that Kwang-Tze, for such was his name, was as weary of them as I. ‘Confucius alone is enough,’ he said, ‘but when it comes to Mencius’ — and he made a gesture I shall not describe, for it would be out of keeping with the dignity of this court.

“I used to go every evening to the outskirts of that place, dodging with infinite care the tent of Parmenides and nodding a cautious good-night to Pythagoras, where I would always find my little friend Kwang-Tze hugging his knees on the back of an intelligent tortoise. He said that this tortoise was wiser than all the philosophers and that on his shell alone were engraved such humorous and illuminating paradoxes that Mencius would long ago have had him thrown out, only he had been there when they first came, and it was against the conscience even of the most tedious of Chinamen to meddle with a prehistoric *status quo.*

"I would beg for permission to sit down on the grass by the side of this aboriginal of the Elysian Fields and I am convinced I caught once in its curious eye, when the creature twisted its neck almost completely round to inspect me, a look that seemed to say: 'Now you take care how you behave to Kwang-Tze. *He* never asserts himself; but *I* have been known to assert myself!'

"I don't want to trespass too long on the patience of the court so I'll come to the point of my story as quickly as possible.

"One evening when the tortoise had fallen into a philosophic trance the Chinaman took advantage of its quiescence — for I believe the creature used to upbraid my little friend very severely if he ever launched upon a modern topic — to inquire of me what I thought was the strongest power in the world. He asked this question in such a quaintly wistful and whimsical manner, not at all with the massive ironic gravity which we Greeks affect, that, in spite of the fact that I have myself no mean talent for dialectic, I couldn't — onmysoul, most righteous Judge, I simply couldn't — tell where his humour ended or where his seriousness began.

"Baffled by his whimsicality, for to confess the truth my victories in argument have been largely due to my being more sophistical than the sophists, I took refuge in simple and naive directness and replied to him bluntly that *Wisdom* was the strongest power in the world.

“No sooner had I uttered the word ‘Wisdom’ than the Chinaman skipped up erect on his tortoise’s back and danced a jig. It was clear he was entertained: but whether his hilarity sprang from the truth or from the absurd error of my reply I hadn’t the remotest idea. The man’s whole attitude to these profound matters was so different from that of anyone I had ever met that I felt completely puzzled.

“Taking his seat again while I caught myself hoping that his absorbed friend would awake from its trance and with its cold prehistoric eye put a stop to these levities, Kwang-Tze now proceeded to make a sound on his pipe like the voice of the bird known as the Goosander.

“‘It is very sad,’ he then remarked in a plaintive resigned tone, ‘that a spirit-like man like yourself should not know any better than that.’

“I asked him what in *his* opinion was the strongest thing in the world and if the court will allow me, and I assure it is not irrelevant to the case before us, I will try to tell you his answer.

“He began by saying that water was stronger than rock, and that air was stronger than water. Then he went on to say that some mental quality — only to my Greek mind it was very hard to follow exactly *what* quality, but it certainly had to do with an absence of self-asserttion — was stronger than the greatest intellect, stronger than the most heroic courage.

“And may it not be that this invisible mystery, this formless, weak, yielding mystery, finding its level like water, is nothing less than the will of the System-of-Things?

“Why, O great Judge, is the crime of Tityos, the old animal crime of struggle and violence and rape, less wicked than the cold-blooded, deliberate, *rational* crime of a vivisector like this accuser?

“May we not suppose, does it not seem, that when selfish cruelty is the act, not of blind sensual impulse, but of deliberate mental fanaticism, it is far more damnable?

“Sensual people, O great Judge, even vicious people, do nothing like the harm to the world that is done by mental fanatics, full of self-righteousness. And, what’s more, this whole system of spreading disease to cure disease and inflicting pain to cure pain is a false and evil system. The bodies of animals and the bodies of men are totally different. I’ve been keeping in touch for some while with these matters, and I notice that the Press is always announcing new cures obtained by the torture of animals, but when these cures are proved futile by experience never a word appears to tell us so!

“Why, O great Judge, after all these failures do the vivisectors continue their diabolic work? *Because they enjoy vivisection for its own sake!* One of the chief peculiarities of this atrocity is that in regard to the contemplation of pain it totally dehumanizes those who practise it. If it were absolutely proved that no cures have been worked by it, or ever *could* be worked, do you suppose, great Judge, that they would chloroform the victims upon which they’ve started, destroy their instruments, give away the animals waiting their turn, and never vivisect again? God knows they would not! They would go on *just the same.* They are fanatics of knowledge, just as their fellows in perdition are fanatics of politics, or religion, or what they call ‘purity.’ And I humbly submit to this most ancient court that it is this cold-blooded mental fanaticism on the side of evil that was, and is, and is to come, the only unpardonable crime against the mystery of life.

“And the best proof, great Judge, that I am right, is the tone these vivisectors take! They all say the same thing. ‘We are privileged. We are holy. We are beyond the good and evil of ordinary people.’

“And need I remind the court that this attitude of theirs: ‘We are experts. We know what we are doing. There is a necessity for it beyond the law of conscience, is the attitude that from the beginning of the world has condoned crimes so hideous and horrible that the rape of a wife of Zeus appears virtue in comparison!

“But I don’t want to exhaust the patience of this indulgent court. I have said what I had to say, an immortal spirit speaking to an undying Judge.

“Whether it is better to be as I am, liberated from the afflictions of the flesh, but debarred its glorious and delicious pleasures, or to be as these three are” — and he indicated Morwyn and Black Peter and me— “the System-of-Things alone knows. These will return to their earth-life. The rest of us will return to our lives as spirits. But may I not hope that it will prove an infinite comfort to all here, except the Accuser, when the undying Rhadamanthus gives his judgment?”

With these words, spoken, I daresay, according to the best tradition of forensic poignance, the Athenian fell back and began talking quietly to Taliesin; and I confess I marked with satisfaction how much his eloquence had impressed the Welshman in his favour.

Then the undying Judge gathered himself together and stretched out his broken staff towards Tityos, who obedient to the signal came forward and humbly knelt upon the stone floor. As he knelt the vultures circled over his head; and he was so tall that, even so, the Judge had to tilt back his head to look into his face.

“We have heard,” Rhadamanthus began, and I could see from the heaving of his mummy-like chest and the gleam, as of a live coal, in his unconquerable eye, that he was with difficulty restraining his emotion, an emotion largely, no doubt, of pure joy, at being able to take up his vocation again, but also of righteous indignation. Yes, it must have been the mingling of natural delight in the job he could do so well, with his sense of the importance of his verdict that gave to the words of this Ancient of Days their accumulative weight.

“Accuser of Tityos,” he said, “or representative of his accuser, this court has given full consideration to all that you’ve brought against this man — vivisected by these birds at the command of Zeus for fifty thousand years — but now it is the duty of this court to announce to you that judgment is given absolutely and entirely *for the Defendant*.” At this point he paused for a minute and then concluded. “Your presence, therefore, young man, being no longer necessary for the purposes of justice, is no longer desirable for any reason, and the court emphatically recommends that you go back whence you came as fast as you conveniently can.”

I happened to glance at Morwyn while the Judge concluded his sentence and I was surprised and not a little disturbed to notice a distinct wave of pity for this arrogant young soul sent back to Hell flicker across the girl’s face.

But the youth turned upon us all, waving his note-book in the air. “You don’t suppose,” he cried, “that *this* ends it, do you, this ridiculous farce played out on this prehistoric stage by a set of antiquated puppets that intelligent progress has left far behind. It’s not you who judge me; but I who judge *you!* Science will keep you, you besotted old fool, among the Hottentot idols in our museum. And as for you, Captain,” and he unexpectedly singled me out, “we’ll give you the wholesome and honest job of cleaning out our monkey-cages! We know the kind of sensual sentimentalist you are and we’ll appoint you nurse to our youngest and most pathetic she-monkeys.”

Then he moved a step towards Morwyn. “Don’t you worry about your father, my pretty lass,” he said. “I’ll send him down here to you, if only to score off the Captain!” With this he was off, disappearing with such alacrity through the cleft rock that you would have supposed the earth had swallowed him up.

And then and only then and not till then did the vivisected Titan realize that he was released from his guilt.

Leaping up from the ground to his full height, in which he towered above us all, he clapped his great hands together over his head; and even as he did so the evil birds that had tormented him since the beginning of time fluttered down at his feet in a little pile of dust. Then in a rapture of joy he sank down again, and kissing the earth his mother, burst into a torrent of weeping. Above him, drawn by an impulse beyond our control, we all gathered, beholding that gigantic frame shaken with sobs.

Even now, as I recall that moment something of the strange rush of tenderness and release and pity and reconciliation that melted us all comes back to me. I could not explain it then and I cannot now, but I think my feeling, and I believe the others experienced, each in his own fashion, something of the same emotion, was as if, for the flicker of a moment, the vast burden of the long tragedy of our planet and its pitiful “knot of contrariety” melted and flowed away; while a hint, a glimpse, a wavering intimation took its place of a redemption for all souls, souls human, sub-human, super-human, to whom the earth in her huge fecundity had given birth!

What I think I especially felt in that moment was that the vast convulsed figure grovelling there at our feet in this ecstasy of its release, was more, much more, *than itself alone.*

In it, so I think I felt, were included, in mystic participation, all the millions upon millions of anonymous lives, beast-lives, half-beast lives, and undeveloped human lives, that had been tortured by the pitilessness of the competent and the intelligent since the days of the Golden Age; that is to say since conscience first began to be divorced from intellect.

Part Five

MORE TIME MUST have passed, I think, over our dazed heads than we had any notion of; but what roused us from this condition — and I noticed that Morwyn and the Welshman were the first to glance at each other and then at the rocky wall on the right of one of those Cyclopean flights of steps — was, it seemed to me when it finally reached my ears, the sound of monstrous reverberating laughter. I have heard many unpleasant sounds in my time, including the trumpeting of those monsters of the deep, but I've never heard any sound quite as disquieting as this abominable laughter. And though it reached us through that rocky wall, it was distinctly human laughter; indeed I might say it was philosophical laughter! Our eloquent Athenian had grown, I believe, a little deaf, for I noticed that even the old Judge began to move aside with his broken staff the snow-white hairs that covered the ear nearest to the rock, before that ill-favoured satyr's skull turned to the sound.

When he *did* catch it however, he swung round to us all in a most knowing manner. "Hush!" he whispered. "Listen to *that!*"

"What is it? Who is it?" I asked him hurriedly; and I was struck by the fact that even Black Peter fixed his liquid eyes upon, him, as if aware that only by that ugly-looking head could the mystery be solved.

"I may be mistaken," said the voluntary victim of the laws of his city, "but by Pan, I believe it's that rascally old scientist, the ribald of Abdera! That fellow's laughter was so malicious in Paradise that it kept even Kwang-Tze's tortoise awake. 'It's the Laughter of Matter,' Kwang used to say, as we heard it resounding through the Elysian Fields. ‘Eternally it mocks at the Tao and tries to drown the spirit-like whisper of the heart.’”

I set myself to listen carefully to this devilish sound, which certainly drowned the sobbing of the released Titan and introduced a most disturbing element into our midst.

We all looked at each other in a kind of nervous discomfort, as if we’d been caught in some act of superstitious sentiment.

The Titan alone completely ignored it. But he got up from the ground and began, like a foolish infant, scratching the new skin which had already begun to form over his lacerated stomach; a proceeding which evidently gave him an agreeable sense of being tickled.

“I wish,” said Morwyn, “that the tortoise was here.”

The Welshman nodded vehemently in response to this. But I doubt if Socrates understood what she meant; and certainly I didn’t. He and I looked at each other as if the situation had begun to get out of control.

As law-abiding soldiers of free Democracies there was something extremely disconcerting to us both about this shameless laughter of the Atoms and the Void. Tityos, however, continued to take not the slightest notice of it. I suppose his mother, the seed-bearing Earth, had taught him long ago how to disregard such profane malice of the chemistry of meaningless chance.

But the old Judge evidently shared our discomfort, for he took a couple of tottering steps towards the cleft in the rock that led to the sleeping-place of Cronos; and though he turned after that and leaned against the wall I could see him plucking nervously at his long beard.

I found it hard to believe that in Abdera, or any other human city, there can have been a Being who could so completely identify himself with the ghastly futility of chaos.

But the laughter we listened to *was* the laughter of a man. Indeed it made me think of certain moments in my own life, when everything seemed useless and purposeless, and "Matter alone," as some writer says, "continued onwards."

What *had* Morwyn meant by wishing the tortoise were here? What could a tortoise, even if he'd survived seven ice-ages, do against this Mephistophelean contempt for all creation?

Suddenly I saw the old Judge jerk himself together with automatic severity and tighten his grip upon his broken staff.

Morwyn gave a wild cry and rushed forward. "Father! Dearest Father!" she wailed. I swung round; and there, emerging from the place we had left, which they must have traversed with the most exquisite precaution, was that horrible young man again, leading this time, with mock reverence and respect, my girl's unhappy parent!

The old Judge, leaning against the wall, began to shiver, and I got the impression that he was trying to speak; but all this agitation after such huge aeons of inactivity had clearly been too much for him. Had it been in crafty malignity that the lord of thunderbolts had given him the gift of immortality?

I was pleased with the way, like a faithful supporter of the laws, the Athenian now moved to his side and did his best to support him; and by concentrating on this praise-worthy effort I tried to avoid being an onlooker at the meeting of Morwyn and her father.

But as I watched the philosopher help this poor mummified creature to lift his broken staff to his face, so as to make an orifice in his tangled and be-dribbled moustache, a pang of sick and weary hopelessness shivered through me. It seemed so bitterly cruel that after his noble judicial decision this poor old scarecrow of immortality should be reduced again to such a woeful wreck. But I am sure it was the simultaneousness of that youth's reappearance with the damned laughter of Democritus that blighted the old gentleman's exultation.

If the laughing philosopher had said to himself, like Iago: "I'll set down the pegs that make this music," he couldn't have timed his appearance with more devilish ingenuity. What I wished above everything else at that moment was that the Abderan should appear in person before us instead of jeering from behind the wall, so that my philosophic fellow-soldier might put a few pointed questions to him!

I even went so far as try to imagine, since anything that prevented me from looking at Morwyn and her father served my turn, what knock-down question I could *myself* have put to this invisible materialist, but oh dear! I couldn't scrape up a single one.

At *this* moment, as I recall these events in peace and quiet, I can think of several retorts, but, as I say, that terrible youth's return on the top of this atomic guffawing put my wits to rout as completely as it did the Judge's. Aye! but "isn't it sad" — as that friend of the tortoise would say — how a "spirit like man" such as this noble Rhadamanthus could be so humiliated and crushed by time and tide and chance and circumstance?

I'm sure if that satiric buffoon from Abdera — whom we read that the scientists of his town supported to a man when he got into trouble with simpler people — had stayed to crack his jokes with the atheistical statesmen and prelates in Elysium, and hadn't taken into his inquiring head to wander down here, the Old Man of Crete would have been able to cope all right with the new incursion from Hell.

But these reverberating peals of mocking laughter going on and on at such a crisis would have upset even a modern judge. And it was impossible to order the court to be cleared as I should have loved to hear him do; first because the court was no longer sitting, and secondly because except for Socrates and myself he had no officials at his command.

Strange thoughts, unusual to my sensual nature, began now to stir in my brain. Could it be that ever since the beginning of the world the *material* of creation, the “body” so to speak, of the System-of-Things as opposed to its mind, has been itching and seething and fuming and spluttering to express its furious malice at being disturbed in the amorphousness of its original chaos? Could it be that as it turns and twists in its desire to thwart its own restless soul it becomes the cause of those moods of depression, these moods of abysmal disillusion, that trouble so many of us all our lives?

And was it *this,* the inert malice of matter, that was being, as you might say, *intellectually expressed* in this echoing cachinnation? Perhaps it was from the mind of my fellow-soldier, as we looked at each other across the shaky form of the Ancient of Days, that these unusual thoughts entered my head. I certainly began to feel as if I were struggling at that moment to loosen the ultimate knot of the cosmos. Still putting off as long as I could the distressing sight of Morwyn with those two damned ghosts — though I rejoiced to observe that now he had been released from his own feeling of guilt the exultant Titan took no more notice of the young scientist and his note-book than if the fellow had been a gnat or a beetle — my eyes, when they looked away from Socrates, wandered to those two flights of steps that lost themselves in the cloudy firmament. Whither did those flights lead? While I was pondering this question I heard Socrates give a heavy sigh of relief and I could see that he had succeeded in soothing the agitated old man, for I observed a distinct tendency in those withered eyelids to close over their eyeballs. The intrusive young phantom still remained busy with his note-book, and Tityos was still absorbed in scratching his new skin, when I was suddenly impelled to take notice of the extraordinary doings of our Welshman, who was now scrabbling and grubbing, on his knees, on the spot where the poor giant's sobbing had so affected us all. Thank the Lord, the Citizen of Abdera had taken himself off at last; and I confess I indulged in the hope that the first thing he would see in returning to Paradise would be the outstretched neck of that redoubtable tortoise, and the look of its cold, inscrutable, *un-amused* prehistoric eye, the one aperture perhaps into the evolutionary mind of the System-of-Things that could disconcert the laughter of chaos!

"But what on earth is the crazy old Bard doing now?" I said to myself, as I watched that hunched-up form carefully and meticulously sifting between his ghostly palms every grain of gravel and dust, every minute spore of lichen, every wisp and twig and husk and flake that had drifted here from the dead asphodels.

As I have explained before, it was by no means easy for these airy spirits, with their insubstantial simulacra of physical bodies, to exert pressure upon solid matter. But their "spiritual bodies," although like air, were not *quite* air; and though the pressure they used, which I daresay was partly magnetic, was a very weak one, still it was a pressure, and things — especially inanimate things —— did in the long run yield to it. But what the devil was the man after? Was he hunting — as those cynics in Hell had maintained all along — for hidden treasure? Was he geologizing or botanizing at the foot of this Jacob's Ladder?

I was interrupted by the Athenian, who came to ask my advice — as one faithful soldier of another — whether it wouldn't be a good thing if he carried the old Judge back to his official seat by the Cauldron.

"Of course the best that could happen to him would be to die. But are we to suppose that in that case his soul would prove a mere replica of what he is *now,* or would it receive, as my own has done, a fresh influx of vitality from the fount of life?"

"Perhaps he'll just sink down into sleep," I said, "like those two divine sleepers. Couldn't you make him comfortable *between* his seat and the Cauldron? I'd leave him actually touching its base. It may be a superstition, but I've a feeling that no harm would happen to me if I slept till Judgement, as long as I was in contact with that thing!"

The Athenian smiled. "Yes, my friend," he said. "It's better to be both superstitious and sceptical — about all things but one."

"And what is that one?" I asked.

He looked at me sharply. "You know as well as I do," he said.

I nodded.

"Everything that exists," he went on, "as well as everything that is said to exist is a matter for both faith and doubt. But that the System-of-Things is bent upon goodness and mercy — *that* is beyond them both." Thus speaking, he approached the old Judge, who by this time, though he was still leaning against the wall, was sound asleep, and lifted him bodily up in his arms just as he had done with myself.

It was a curious sight to see those strong phantom arms sink slowly into the flesh of this living mummy; but after giving me a reassuring nod the philosopher bore him off so swiftly that it looked as if they would be well through the entrance into the shrine of divine sleep before any readjustment of that burden became necessary.

Still postponing as long as possible my encounter with the detestable Mr. —, I hoisted myself up as well as my wounded groin allowed, so as to discover if I could what this mysterious thing was that the Welshman was so industriously seeking.

The movement I made and the concentrated strain of my observation roused the interest of Black Peter, who now began snuffing about, this way and that, round the crouching figure of the Bard. I saw the aged Shade give him a quick glance as he heard his heavy breathing, but as he didn't seem to mind the assistance of my diminutive "hound," I made no attempt to call the dog away, asking myself what on earth this venerable spirit of so many incarnations could have got now into his eccentric head. I did become aware of one curious thing about that patch of earth over which man and dog were so excitedly hovering. The released Titan had shed so many passionate tears upon the place where he had bowed his head and kissed his mother the earth, that the dust — and some of it must have been composed of the remains of those two terrible birds — had caked itself into little pellets and gobbets of damp clay.

I was disturbed in my observations by a sudden movement on the part of the young scientist; and I saw that he had begun making laborious efforts to get his precious manuscript-book into his ghostly pocket. Unwilling to let him know I had my eye on these proceedings, and it was always a rather pitiful sight to see how these phantoms were forced to fumble with the resistance of matter, I only gave the youth an occasional sidelong glance.

But my spying grew much more alert, though not less furtive, when, the book disposed of, the rogue began making a stealthy movement towards Morwyn. How softly he moved! I see now that I was a fool to refrain from disturbing him, as I could no doubt easily have done by giving Morwyn a shout of warning; but a complicated and ambiguous motive held me back. It was no doubt a certain kind of morbid and malicious jealousy — such are the wayward intricacies of the heart — but something in me longed to give the damned wretch *as much rope as possible* before I made any move.

If this was an evil impulse in me I was well punished for it; for after stalking his lovely prey like a lustful panther, for several moments, the irrepressible youth suddenly made a dart forward, planted a kiss — the third he had given her — upon the back of her neck, and crying out: “I’ll think of you at the Screens!” dashed away to the entrance, and vanished out of sight.

I’m afraid even then, though the girl must have known what had been done, for she swung round at once and watched him disappear, that it was I and not she who lifted up the howl of indignant execration that now resounded through that place.

There was some little disturbance then, but not very much. Black Peter began barking, though he did not leave the Bard’s side, and Taliesin himself, rising on his knees, stared about him, dazed and puzzled and distracted, evidently with only a modicum of his usual wits free to realize the situation. All he did in fact, and I couldn’t resist a groan of irritation, was to murmur something about this being “the Third Dolorous Kiss.”

I had already been initiated by Morwyn into the *penchant* of the ancient Welsh — almost equal to that of Hegel — for the number three; but it was small comfort to me, after this final outrage, to know that this son of perdition’s sacrilege could be neatly fitted into a semi-prophetic Triad.

How often since that unlucky third kiss have I cursed myself for the crooked and convoluted malice into which my jealousy led me when it stopped me from crying out in time! What had my motive been in letting him steal up to her like that without lifting my voice? Did I merely want him to damn himself further, or did I want to torment myself, and test her, by seeing *what she would do?*

I daresay even now I am exaggerating the violence of the cry I uttered as the youth vanished; and no doubt as one usually does in such cases I over-emphasized the effect of my agitation upon my companions.

At any rate both the Bard and Black Peter were soon reabsorbed in their mysterious search; and neither Morwyn nor her parent as they advanced towards me seemed aware of all I had thrown into that cry as, out of my complete helplessness, I witnessed that third kiss. My great comfort was that he didn't touch her lips this time, as he had done before. If he had done that I can't answer for what would have happened! You *do* know, my dear lad, don't you, that a girl's lips are twenty times more sensitive than ours. When a girl really yields herself to a kiss it is as if she yielded herself to everything. Our battle is won. All that follows is a clumsy sequel. That's why all good women who haven't attained the chastity of nuns and whores are so chary of letting anyone but their chosen lover kiss them on the mouth.

But, heaven help me, it was impossible to retain even an after-taste of jealous malice when she came towards me now, leading Mr. — by the hand! Her lovely little face was absolutely radiant; and I confess that Mr. — *did* have an expression in his eyes that I had never seen there before. I can't say it was a serene expression, in fact it was a tormented and contorted one, but it did have in it something that was quite new; and it wasn't hard to detect — after I'd been with him for a couple of minutes — what this something was. It was the uprising of a tiny portion of his perverted soul that had begun seriously to protest and struggle against this licence from the System-of-Things to spend an eternity in Hell.

I am no psychologist, as you young people count psychology. My ideas are all grotesquely obsolete; and I find it impossible to take the difference between modern ideas and "obsolete" or "archaic" ideas as seriously as you young people do. *All* ideas, being human, and being limited by the fancies of a particular epoch, are soaked in illusion. "At a clap of thunder, at a fall of mist," as Taliesin would say, a new enchantment covers or uncovers the vision of men.

You'll probably say that Mr. — was deliberately fooling us. Certainly that young villain who insulted Morwyn brought him here with some infernal and tricky purpose. But I don't think he was fooling us. I think he was entirely sincere; though I would be puzzled to tell you on what I base this feeling, except perhaps on the *unhappiness in his eye.*

Morwyn brought him up to me with that intense and quite special joy that women take in the wicked men they save. For a parallel to her excitement you would have to go — I speak of course as belonging to a very definite generation — to the virtuous man who "saves" or tries to "save" a girl of the streets. In Elizabethan days of course there was less of this sensual glow when good men spoke to erring women. In those times a whore was a whore, a loving wench perhaps, like Mrs. Quickly's Doll, but not exactly a soul to be saved. In the days of my youth, however, there was a peculiar and special unction in such transactions. Mr. — was not a whore, nor was his daughter a philanthropist, but I can assure you that her touching delight in hovering over this very doubtfully-reformed gentleman had a glow in it not unlike the glow to which I refer.

But oh, how lovely she looked! If she had been desirable before under those aphrodisiac waves of Saturnian incense, she was ten times more so now! In her concern over her father she seemed to completely lose all consciousness of herself. I have never seen her face more animated, her gestures more captivating. Her slender limbs moved with a voluptuous magnetism; and her warm, girlish bosom rose and fell under the panting eagerness of her feelings, till I could scarcely refrain from hugging her to my heart.

The encounter between “the second Mr. “ and me — and so vividly realistic did the *clothes* of this damned ghost look that it was hard unless I kept my eyes on his transparent face to realize he was only a spirit — brought down the girl’s happiness a good deal. You must remember I hadn’t addressed a word to the wretch, since — not without satisfaction — I had helped to bury him.

However, he held out his phantom hand to me quite in his old conventional way, and by staring at his rumpled waistcoat which still carried the stains of the fall that had killed him, I was able to go through the motion of taking it without too much distaste.

I have always sympathized with the American, Ingersol, who refused to shake hands with a vivisector, but what could I do under Morwyn’s eye?

But she saw what I felt — you can’t hide these things from a woman — and as the man and I exchanged a few superficial words I caught a grave, inscrutable look on her face, the meaning of which was totally beyond me.

What distressed me, as I kept glancing at her, while I laboriously tried to be civil, was the fact that ever since this hurt in my groin I had lost that wonderful psychic clairvoyance which had come to me from the falling meteor.

Thus as I mechanically replied Mr.— ‘s conventional talk I thought bitterly how ironical it was that the man’s tragic attempts to conquer his obsession should bring back the dullness of his old self; and along with this I began to be troubled to the bottom of my heart by a terrible doubt.

Had Morwyn’s revived devotion to this man *turned her against me*? Was she one of those girls — and in my time I’ve met such — whose heart can be hardened permanently against a lover by the deadly force of family ties?

“Tell him what you feel now, Father dear,” she suddenly broke in, evidently anxious to put an end to this exhibition of commonplace fatuousness in such a place and at such a moment.

And then the perturbed phantom did make an attempt to describe what was going on within him. It was the cynical tone, he confessed to me, of that repulsive young man that had given him the required shock. He himself was one of those vivisectors — and I had always known it — who have a whole array of sentimental moral reasons to justify their cruelty.

I am tempted to think that there may often occur in Hell cases like that of Mr. —, where the society of frank and shameless rogues, of a less hypocritical kidney, bring them, I won't say to their senses, but to a recognition of how far they've lost their senses. I would have liked to have asked the Marquis of Sade, that curious authority upon the ways of the System-of-Things, how it was that a commonplace hypocrite like Mr. — could be brought to the point of desiring, if only feebly, to get rid of his vice; while so many cruel devils, who are frank and shameless, are allowed to go on de-humanizing themselves without hope of change. I tried to imagine, as I listened with weary distaste to Mr.— 's specious apologia, what the realistic Frenchman's reply would have been; and I told myself that he would have quoted the clever phrase of one of his contemporaries about hypocrisy being vice's tribute to virtue.

Would the fellow never stop his long-winded confession? And how *could* he in this place, under those stupendous flights of stairs, and among asphodels that the most honest of sages had brought from the Elysian Fields, go on with the old conventional excuse about the torture of animals having saved women and children from so much pain? How is it that the greatest rascalities in the world are always committed "for the sake of women and children?" No doubt a lyncher from Mississippi would say that tying black men to posts and pouring petrol over them was "the only way to protect our precious womanhood."

I believe all would have yet been well, and I should have got through this appalling ordeal — for I can't tell you how much like a penitent butcher-bird the fellow looked — without irrevocably offending my sweet maid, hadn't by ill luck our good Athenian come strolling back at that particular moment. You know, my lad, how difficult it is for us in our mortal malice to avoid *bringing in a third person,* and of all men alive or dead Socrates was the one best adapted to make this repentant devil realize what he'd been and what he was!

It was therefore as great a joy to me as it was a distress to Morwyn when Socrates joined our little group; and I'm afraid my tone when I continued interrogating our pompous culprit was not entirely free from metaphysical spite. Certainly his replies were stupid enough to give anyone an advantage. He played on all the old sentimental strings. He used statistics loosely and deceptively. He assured me that even now "he wavered in his new faith when he thought of the wonders of insulin." He certainly wavered from *some* cause at that moment; for I noticed that the eye he fixed on Black Peter, who was still snuffing the ground where the Titan had bowed his head, gleamed with a throbbing longing to have this nervous little beast securely fastened down with straps provided by the best manufacturers.

"*Have you cured cancer?*" *I unkindly asked him.* He shook his head.

"Is there *complete* agreement among medical men over any one single cure you claim?"

He shook his head.

"Are there other ways, other paths, other directions in which alleviation of human suffering *can* be found, independently of vivisection?"

He nodded his head; but all this while I could see that it was touch and go with him. He had come here only partly in reaction against the brutality of that young scientist, and only partly from his feeling for Morwyn. An irresistible attraction to Black Peter — of the old wicked kind — had also played its part!

But I went at him again. “Doesn’t,” I asked him, “the devotion of such huge sums of money to animal torture, the cost of all these ships-loads of monkeys for instance and all this vast secret traffic in cats and dogs, divert resources that might be used in other directions for an equal alleviation of human pain?”

But at this point Morwyn angrily intervened— “Stop!” she cried. “How *dare* you treat my father like that? How *dare* you say such things, when you can see how he feels? If *that*’*s* what you’ve become from your—”

I’m sure she was going to say, “from your friendship with *him,*” meaning with my philosophic Athenian; but at that moment our wretched quarrel was interrupted.

There was a stifled bark from Black Peter, a wild cry from the Welshman, and I saw the latter struggling desperately to snatch something from the dog’s mouth. He was evidently successful in preventing the dog from swallowing what it had found. He was on his feet now, holding the thing up to the stream of misty light that came through the entrance to the place we had left, and uttering incoherent cries of excitement.

We all looked at him, and at Black Peter who was jumping up at him, in complete bewilderment. It was clearly something very different from a Neronian penny that my clever “hound” had discovered this time. The man of a thousand incarnations came actually running towards us with this precious discovery.

“The Tear of Tityos!” he cried. And again he cried. “God slay me if it isn’t the Tear of Tityos!” His tone as he repeated this phrase was like the tone of some old alchemist who had discovered the elixir of life. I’m sure I don’t know, my dear lad, if you’ve ever felt for a girl as I felt for Morwyn;

but I can tell you it wasn't to see the effect upon her of "the Tear of Tityos" that I kept desperately trying to catch her eye.

But she wouldn't look at me! The cruelty of these exquisite creatures is beyond belief when you're unlucky enough to make them really angry; and it was now clear to me that I had hurt her to the quick. This perilous gulf between us — her love for her father and my hatred of him — had always existed, but it now had deepened to a yawning chasm. By my Socratic questions I had, as the phrase runs, "called his bluff," and the girl had witnessed his confusion.

So now it was my destiny once more to learn that there is something in a woman's love — even in the gentlest and tenderest — that partakes of the cruelty of the elements, something blind and remorseless, something beyond good and evil, something let's hope, that they don't themselves understand.

Of course it's a thing that cuts both ways. It enables a woman to forgive, as Morwyn had forgiven in her father, the most frightful of crimes, but it also enables her to punish with a scorn that turns to stone like the gorgon's head. I do not say of course that it's given to all of them to love with this death-in-life love; but when they do love with it they can give their man one single assassinating look and leave him forever! They seem *forced* to leave him; though I think — but this is a terrible mystery — that when they do so they feel themselves to be in some incredible sense the living heart of the man they've left! And that's why they can do what they do — *for it's as if they did it to themselves!*

"What *is* it?" the girl now asked the excited Welshman; but I noticed there was nothing in her tone that showed her usual sympathy with his mystic agitation. She asked him the question as coldly and calmly as if all he'd done was to find a snail on one of the dead asphodels.

But she had struck me so cruelly with that Medusa look that I got no comfort from this coldness of her tone to him.

And as for the Bard himself, he was far too worked up to notice anything unusual in her manner. He spoke to her alone and he spoke in Welsh; but when he saw that she didn't at once translate his words for my benefit, he turned to me too and spoke slowly and distinctly in Leprosid.

"The Tear of Tityos," he said, "is one of the Three Mysteries of the World. Do you know what it is? It's the one and only token there's been in the whole universe from the beginning that the world's cry is not disregarded. It's the tear shed by the System-of-Things itself in pity for the pain that life would bring when the spirit first moved in the darkness of matter. It's the eternal retort to the laughter we heard just now. All the way down the ages a few men, a few bards, have known it existed. It's the only material proof we've got that the System-of-Things-is — is to be — is not to be—" He broke off; and then added in a shrill, piercing cry that made the walls echo, and went reverberating up those two great flights of stairs, a cry that was as thin as a hair and as broken-edged as a crack in ice, "*is not to be hated and cursed!*"

After that he became calm again, so calm that he permitted me to try to translate, in my clumsy prep-school Greek what he had just said, to my friend the Athenian. And then with awe and reverence, as he held it in his shadowy hand — and I couldn't help but notice that even the airy substance of his hollow palm retained what he held, as a leaf might hold a drop of dew — one after another we all gazed at the thing.

What struck me most about it was that it kept changing its colour. Sometimes it was like a drop of blood; then it would grow clear as crystal; then it would take a pearl-like softness; then it became as blue as a hedge-sparrow's egg, then as green as the most vivid moss; and under all these changes it shot forth an indescribable lustre, that was not of any colour I had ever seen, and yet *was* a colour, though it wasn't white, or yellow, or golden, or the colour of flame.

I suppose all this is simply tedious to you, my son, with your modern mind. I suppose you're thinking that once lost, as we were, in the bowels of the earth it was likely enough that we should come across unusual geological specimens. I suppose you've already decided that Tityos must have been a survivor of some early Neanderthal race, who, to escape one or other of the glacial ages, had taken refuge underground. No doubt you think that anybody's floods of tears, dropped in an emotional crisis on one spot, in a place like this, might wash away a few grains of dust and bring to light some unknown precious stone. Why attribute such a portentous mystical significance, you are thinking, to what may well have been just an unusual natural phenomenon — a nameless gem with a lustre different from other gems?

Well, my lad, I can only remind you that every day in some place or other in these islands tears are shed, so desperate, so heroic, that some regard them as divine. There are plenty of you young people who don't boggle at believing this; and why shouldn't the intense emotion of the last of the Titans, or the last of the Neanderthals if you like, wring a wren's egg of pity out of the great Macrocosm Itself? Besides, my good friend, you mustn't forget how moved we all were at the giant's release. The extraordinary power of such waves of psychic emotion has been manifested again and again. Few scientists would dare deny that groups of intensely moved human minds have had, all down the ages, the power of working what look uncommonly like miracles.

The hearts of all of us were melting at that moment towards the System-of-Things. Why should such feelings remain subjective? Why shouldn't they crystallize themselves in a material form?

But I confess I'm using special pleading adapted to your particular habits of thought. What I prefer myself to think, and what seems the most natural, is that "the Tear of Tityos" was drawn out of the Titan himself along with the poor giant's own bloody sweat at his overwhelming redemption. But whatever the explanation may be, I shall never forget how we all stood, bewildered and dazed, staring at the object in Taliesin's hand.

Recumbent as I was I had my back to the stream of warm thick light, full of dancing dust-motes, motes which seemed larger, richer, goldener than the dust in any ordinary ray, that streamed in from the sleeping-place of Cronos. Full upon Morwyn's lovely face fell this magic light; and as I gazed frantically, cringingly, pitifully at her girlish form, outlined against those Cyclopean flights of steps behind her, it seemed to me that her youthful breasts were more developed than they had been before we entered Caer Sidi.

Had the psychic effect of that fit of abandoned weakness, when I sobbed myself to sleep against her body, been to make her less of a child and more of a woman?

But it was in vain I struggled to catch her eye. More beautiful, more animated, more maddeningly desirable than I had ever known her, she wouldn't look at me!

It was as if her love for me had turned, not so much into anger or hate, for then there would have been hope of a change, but into a frozen wall of icy indifference that nothing would ever melt again.

But the stream of light that illuminated my girl passed by, owing to some projection of the great rock, the burly figure of Socrates. Standing a little back as he was now, it seemed to me that he was completely out of sympathy with this increasing fuss over "the Tear of Tityos." Morwyn had come under its influence now and she and the Welshman were pouring out upon each other a veritable stream of broad Cymric vowels and deep Cymric gutturals.

But Socrates's satyrish face had begun to assume, if I'm not wrong, the particular look it must often have taken in the streets of Athens when his ironic questions only led to an irrelevant outburst of poetical rhetoric. It was an indulgent look. It had no weary detachment in it. At the same time it was formidably attuned to a very different spiritual key from all this mystical agitation. I am not sure that he didn't answer my glance across the space that divided us by a something approaching a philosophic wink. But I know it wasn't from any lack of sympathy with the Titan, who was still blissfully scratching his huge naked torso, that he acted like this.

I fancy it came from an instinctive hostility to women and poets; an hostility that many great philosophers, and a certain number of soldiers too, have displayed ere now in the annals of history. Surprised that I still regarded him with sympathy — I suppose he thought that I must of necessity share every mood of Morwyn's — he came slowly over to where I was and began giving me all his most personal impressions of this incident of "the Tear of Tityos." He was less logical than usual. His feeling about women and poets was evidently clouding and blurring the free working of his brain. My own impression is that he was struggling to give utterance, though his Greek sense of dignity held him back, to a mood totally at variance with that of Morwyn and her Welshman, a mood that was stoical enough, but at the same time obstinately humorous, and possessed of an abysmal sense of what you might call "cosmogonic beatitude," such as I have always relished in his admirer Rabelais.

I expect you're smiling, my boy, to hear *me* talk in this intellectual manner; but after all, you've so often caught me over the fire with Rabelais that at least you must know it isn't affectation, though it may be pedantry.

"What do you feel yourself, my friend," Socrates was pleased to inquire, as he sat down by my side, "about this 'Tear of Tityos'?"

"I'll tell you," I said, answering him gravely, though I couldn't take my eyes off Morwyn's illuminated face. "I think it's going too far to make as much of it as those two are making. I certainly haven't myself seen anything in the method of the System-of-Things that lends itself to the possibility of its shedding tears. It seems to me to be evolving its reign of pity in a less emotional manner. In fact I'm not at all sure" — here, for Black Peter was between us, I twisted into a regular curl the wisp of hair on the top of his head, which I call his "talent lock"— "that what my dog found is a tear at all. But, if it is, I regard it as what our anthropologists" — he smiled at my use of that word— "might call the *external soul* of all tortured animals. Tityos was the victim of a sort of vivisection; and it seems to me that this discovery, whatever its chemical constituents may be, might be regarded as an embodiment of all the tears that these wretched creatures, if they'd been human, would have shed in their helplessness and their pain. Not one of them in all their torture could really, of course, any more than the System which produced them, shed a real tear, but don't you think that what Black Peter found, connected so closely with this first of vivisected Beings, might be taken as a sort of symbolic covenant between them and the power behind the world that the cry of their torment *has been heard?* I have a notion that pain does possess the power to create and destroy various organic secretions, and what I really think is that the pain of Tityos, whose parents, like those of our immortal Sleepers" — and I nodded towards the place we'd left— "were the Earth and the Heaven, caused to be secreted within him, since he refrained for twenty-five thousand years from lifting a finger against those birds, this curious and tangible sign that the 'System-of-Things,' in spite of all appearances *was on his side.*"

"It may well be," remarked Socrates with a sigh, "that you have put this matter correctly, but I find in my heart a profane wish that the Daimon in the System-of-Things's conscience would stir it up to quicker and more direct action. However! If the Tear of Tityos is a covenant that the Golden Age *will* return, and the weak and the helpless *will* be saved, I can only hope that the great Pan and the other gods will do all they can to hasten the coming of that most blessed day."

He was silent; and perceiving very soon with his sympathetic instinct for all erotic subtleties how absorbed I was in watching Morwyn, he left my side, and wandering over to Tityos began, after his customary manner with the simpler intelligences at home, asking the Titan a few provocative and revolutionary questions.

It was then I became aware that some new matter had arisen between Morwyn and Taliesin that clearly had to do with me. They both kept turning towards me and then gazing again at each other; and then, in obvious connection with her and me, glancing at those two great flights of stairs which rose in front of us and lost themselves in the darkness. At first I regarded all this with an intense and morbid interest, but without the remotest suspicion of any danger.

Then suddenly I turned deadly cold. *They were plotting to desert me!* Yes, there could be no other explanation of those repeated glances at that staircase, and these furtive and deprecatory looks in my direction. This was for me, except for that crisis on the Emperor's yacht, when the hellish crowd was actually upon us and they recited the Vivisector's Catechism, the worst moment of this whole appalling experience.

I made a frantic effort to get up and go to them; but my groin made me so sick with pain when I tried to stand that I had to give it up.

Then I waved to them to come to me, but their heads were turned away, and not only so, but they were straining their necks with the utmost concentration; struggling I fancy to pierce as far as possible into the darkness where those two staircases, the one to the right and the one to the left, vanished from their eyes.

Socrates, too, had his back to me. He was standing like a stalwart, broad-shouldered dwarf at the knees of a naked giant, and I could see the face of the Titan, who was bending down above him, already stiffened into a pathetically anxious and puzzled expression.

And then what should I see but the exultant Taliesin actually handing over to Morwyn his precious "Tear of Tityos"; and when he had made sure it was safe in the palm of her hand, what did he do but hurry off towards the Athenian, evidently to try to induce *him* to join in this plot against me!

Yes, except for that scene on board Nero's galley when we were huddled together at the taffrail and I thought the end had come, this was my worst moment. Three times I struggled frantically to get on my feet; but it was no use. Not only was the pain of such a movement intolerable, but it seemed to me that some essential muscle, or sinew, or tendon, deep inside the socket of one of my thighs, had grown entirely atrophied and refused to obey my will.

There I was, left completely alone, while Morwyn with her back turned to me, sometimes gazing at what she held in her hand and sometimes staring up at those enormous flights of steps, made no attempt to prevent her father who was pouring into her ears his ambiguous remorse, from stealing furtive and burning glances at Black Peter where he lay at my feet.

I don’t believe she was lending more than half an ear to what the fellow was saying. Having once got him into the right path she displayed a profound feminine unconcern about his elaborate explanations of this change of heart; and she didn’t seem in the least disturbed by his obvious hankering after the old wickedness. I suppose *that* was feminine too. Shakespeare, I remember — though by God! I didn’t think of Shakespeare then — indicated in Macbeth the difference in this point between men and women. Emotion of *some* sort is to them — and heaven knows perhaps rightly! — the sole moving force in all human decisions; and they just take it for granted that the man they’re dealing with, though he’ll *do* what he wants to do, or what they want him to do, won’t be happy unless he’s allowed to dilate on all the plausible and logical reasons for this line of conduct and allowed to indulge to the limit in regrets, compunctions, afterthoughts, reversions, recessions, and in every sort of backward glance in the forbidden direction.

What with the pain that my struggles to get up had caused in my wounded groin, and the complete loss of that re-assuring clairvoyance that had made me certain of her love, I felt at that moment that I touched the rock-bottom of human misery. How could she treat me so? How could the rest of them treat me so? I had realized the Welshman’s infatuation for her; but I had thought, I confess, that the Athenian would stand by me to the last.

But there he was, talking as earnestly to the giant and Taliesin as if I didn’t exist! And there they were, returning to Morwyn now, gathering round her, gathering round her father, while Tityos towered above them all, dazed and bewildered, almost numb with puzzled beatitude.

I stretched out my hand to stroke Black Peter; and in my weakness and pain I muttered to him monotonously, over and over: “I’ve got one friend anyway! I’ve got one friend anyway! I’ve got—”

And then I saw the whole group of them, with Tityos in the background, advancing towards the place where I lay.

“Well, Captain,” began my friend the Athenian, “we’ve had quite a council of war over you, and though the conclusion we’ve reached will distress you in one way, in another way it will have its compensation; and in any case you will, I know, bring your philosophy — which I think I may say is also mine — to bear upon the issue.”

I barely gave him a nod. Every pulse, every nerve, every drop of blood within me, all that we call “mind,” all that we call “spirit,” was beating and quivering and straining towards Morwyn, making a fierce, wild struggle to break up this terrible barrier between us.

“Can’t — we — talk — *alone*?” I murmured, as I gazed up pitifully into her face.

She looked at me for a long, long minute in absolute silence. And not only were we two silent, but all our friends were silent. And it seemed to me as though from the mysterious place we had left, the Caer Sidi of our guide’s wild boasting, where “sleep was the bond forged for Cronos,” there flowed over us all a veritable eternity of silence.

In the abysses of Hell — unless those sea-monsters were still making their moan — a yet deeper silence prevailed. I felt as if I could hear nothing in the whole universe of matter except the panting of Black Peter and the beating of my own heart! Black Peter was particularly jubilant at that moment. He even began dragging himself about on his belly after that curious fashion of his, a gesture in which he never indulged unless he was obsessed by some overwhelming pleasure.

But save for the thundering sound of my own heart in my ears and for this ill-timed outburst of joy on the part of Black Peter, all the whole earth, all the whole sidereal cosmos seemed waiting upon the decision of this one slight girl, seemed hanging upon the inscrutable working of this one enigmatic breast. But harder than adamant in the self-lacerating whim of its arbitrary choice, my girl's heart showed not the slightest sign of yielding, nor even — and this was crueller still — of revealing any reason for this sudden mad resentment against me.

In vain I tried to call up the faintest flicker of that wonderful clairvoyance that the fall of the meteor had evoked. It had left me forever; and as I gazed up from the ground upon that little oval face with the eyes fixed so clingingly upon my own, it seemed as if some monstrous enchantment must have fallen upon us, that we could look at each other like that — that *she* could look at me like that — and no intelligible communication pass between us! But she did look at me with her whole being. I felt *that* at the moment when it happened, and thinking of it since I am absolutely sure of it.

For that brief while our eyes, as the phrase is, "clung to one another." Can it be that there comes into existence an actual identity between lovers who are more than ordinary lovers, an identity that is totally unaffected by the feelings of the moment, an identity that can continue undisturbed in the midst of paroxysms of anger and grievance and even in the presence of actual hatred?

But what a fate to be united in hopeless identity with a being who constantly turns upon you a look of cold and indignant contempt! If any other person hated you, or despised you to such a tune as this, oh, how willingly and with what a sigh of relief you would whistle them down the wind and take measures never to cross their path again!

But you can't do such things when once this identity has established itself. Is there *anything* you can do?

Nothing at all! Nothing will come of nothing. For the rest of your days you will have to endure every grade, level, and degree of contemptuous distaste — just as if you were some fabulous beast whose forked and stinging tail was forever being turned against its own flanks!

Ah, my dear son, you and your generation are so accustomed to analyse all this away that you cannot take it seriously. You name these things by one queer name after another, not realizing that the thing itself *remains unchanged by being named.*

Down there in the heart of the cosmos — where no one could interfere with us or make a guess as to what was going on between us, any more than if we were two pips in the centre of an infinite orange — Morwyn and I wrestled, as our eyes clung together, in that old immemorial love-hate, ancient as life itself, forever beginning, forever ending, without reason, without cause!

Her face was strained as she stared at me, but at the same time triumphant. What was she doing? What was she being driven to by the double-edged force within her? The longer our eyes clung, the stronger she became and the weaker I; till at last I could bear it no more, and I looked away in order to find refuge in Black Peter.

But Black Peter was no longer at my feet, no longer making those ecstatic movements on his belly. Black Peter was desperately jumping up towards her hand, towards the mysterious object she held in her hand. Then it rushed into my mind what a mad fuss he had made when he first found the “Tear of Tityos.” So that was it! That was the cause of his excitement; not, as I had innocently supposed, because of his joy at the three of us being together.

But the breaking up of our mutual gaze was the signal for a fine hullabaloo of excited chatter between all our companions. Even the poor foolish Titan began murmuring articulate words. Indeed they all talked so fast, and in so many different tongues, that the scene became for me, in my insufferable misery, like a monstrous burlesque of the day of Pentecost!

But silence came at last, and Morwyn began speaking to me. She spoke calmly and quietly, but with the same curious strain in her speech that was at once queerly exultant and in some odd way abnormal and unnatural. I heard her with my eyes fixed in dull hopelessness on Black Peter's futile struggles to reach what she held so tight. She explained to me, while the rest of them listened more closely than I did — for what did I care? — how one of those great flights of steps led back to Wales, and the other to a portion of this strange underworld from which it was possible to reach North America. She told me that Taliesin had been long prophesying to her — so now I knew the secret of all those passionate conversations! — that only by the return from the dead of the soul of a confirmed vivisector could this atrocious crime against the conscience of mankind be abolished.

It was on the occasion of some old dark legendary crime, occurring I understood in Ireland, when he'd heard some avenger called Mordwyd Tyllyon utter the syllables "Guern gwnywch," that this kind of penance for an unnatural deed first entered his head. But many other portents, he had told her, pointed in the same direction.

Tityos, in his dumb brutish way had, it appears, got the idea lodged in his brain that if he could only get safe to North America he'd be able to roam, free and at large, over vast mountains and illimitable ice-fields, and never meet a living soul. And if a woman and a dog, Taliesin had told her, were to make a pilgrimage throughout Northern America, they could excite, among such as had the destiny to be excited— "tynged" was the word the bard used— "a passionate response against vivisection. I told him," she concluded, "that Black Peter was so devoted to you that he would never leave you unless he was carried by force, but he said — and you see how true it has proved! — that as long as I had ‘the Tear of Tityos’ the dog would follow me to the world’s end. We’ve been talking it all over, my father and I; and we feel that in your unhappy condition it would be lunacy to attempt to take you with us. Black Peter and I will have all we can do to get on alone. I expect it’ll end with the Titan having to carry us both! But Socrates here” — and she glanced at my Athenian with a gleam of that terrible feminine humour that bites like poisoned flame— “says he’ll be delighted to escort you home to Wales! Now do you see what I mean? Now do you realize how our course is marked out, as Taliesin says, by the stars? I shall be helping my dear father to undo the harm he’s done” — here she actually touched the sleeve of the second Mr. “ — while you’ll be able to get safe home — a thing beyond our hope! Once home I’m sure you’ll be” — here for a moment our eyes clung together once more— “cured of your hurt, and” — here she hesitated and her lips did seem to me to twitch, while I wondered desperately what was coming— “and it’ll be easy, of course, *after all this,* for Black Peter and me to come back to you over the water.”

I think I might have been able to keep my self-control at that moment, for there’s a deadly strength in righteous indignation and she’d struck me a blow whose mark I’ll carry to the grave, if it hadn’t been that her wretched father must needs put in *his* hypocritical word.

“It is, my dear Captain,” he said, “one of those spiritual matters that can only be understood from the inside. This mission of ours to America will be only a beginning. I think I’ll reside in California when it’s over. There’ll no doubt be splendid missionary work to be done in California. I’ll be interested to argue, too, with the spirits of the Californian scientists out there. I believe they’re wonderful in some of the things they’ve done, especially in regard to dogs. I’m sure Morwyn won’t mind my visiting some of their Research Laboratories as long as I speak against the *abuses* of the practice. I'm sure she'll feel as I do when she's seen some of their more beautiful experiments, that it's well worth a *little* suffering of the lower animals, and — perhaps even of the lower *races,* if the precious lives of our dear ones can be prolonged. Indeed, I intend to suggest that in the Southern States, and I'm sure my little daughter will agree with me, that when that unspeakable and unthinkable event occurs of which I can scarcely bear to speak in her presence, of an African man embracing an American woman, it would be both a protection for pure womanhood and a wonderful advance in scientific knowledge if they substituted" — here the second Mr. — glanced, with the sly unction of a statesmanlike moralist, first at Tityos and then Black Peter— "a few of their most problematic black men for the dogs and monkeys in their laboratories."

He looked round, as he concluded, with so much self-satisfied composure and such an air of preposterous virtue that I was roused to a fit of blind fury. To have endured all we *had* endured, to have seen all we *had* seen, only to find this incorrigible man just as lacking in conscience as ever was the last straw.

I lost all control. I became beside myself. Staggering to my feet, though the pain it caused me was almost intolerable, I seized Morwyn by the shoulders, and pressing myself against her thumped out upon her back a savage Leprosid whisper.

"He's dead, dead, dead!" I gasped in insane anger. "He's dead, I tell you, and I'm alive! You're sacrificing life to death. You're letting this miserable ghost, whom God has damned, come between us forever! If you go away now, if you rob me now of my only friend in the world, you may be proud of your pious choice, but you are — you are — you're killing—" My hands dropped.

The pain was too great. I staggered away from her and sank down unconscious against the wall.

“Morwyn! Morwyn!” I murmured feebly, when I saw only the ugly satyr-visage of Socrates bending over me. His face seemed to hover so deliberately between me and the dim-ascending stairs that I thrust it impatiently aside. Oh, my love! oh my false, false love! There she was, Tityos in front of her, the Welshman behind her, and Black Peter’s little dark figure at her side, all vanishing into the mist, all deserting me, as the darkness of the ascent gathered their forms into it!

She was gone. Black Peter was gone. Not once had she looked back. Oh, unbelievable strength of woman’s will! Cruel in their love, cruel in their hate, how *could* it be that their limbs should be so soft and their hearts so pitiless? That little black louse-like figure, *he* did look back! Clearly I saw him twist round; and the touching thing was that he did what he frequently used to do when I have been taking him where he was reluctant to go. He pretended to want to lift his leg! But she dragged him on; and that was the last I saw of them. The thing she held, burned still, a beautiful, terrible burning. *That* shone on, when all the rest was swallowed up in darkness.

But I sank back, and waving the philosopher away — how I hated his kind ugly face at that moment! — I shut my eyes tight and fell into a blank, hopeless, despairing coma. I think I must have been delirious when this coma passed, for in some strange manner the loss of both girl and dog were for a time — such are the opiates of mental aberration! — held in abeyance by thoughts of what she carried. It was the last thing I had seen and my stunned intelligence seemed to cling blindly to it. But it was all confused and changed in my delirium.

Had I really heard someone say, when they were discussing this thing, that though it had fallen from that poor giant’s eyes it was really a tear of blood shed by the Power behind the universe?

All these immortal spirits, from the Marquis of Sade to our old Welshman had spoken of the System-of-Things as if it were some kind of living Being, and now in my delirium I seemed to visualize this Being. But, as so often happens in the extravagance of such raving, my vision of it was grotesque and ridiculous. For I saw it, this *Tremendum Mysterium,* in the form of a fish, and not of an uncommon fish either. To say the truth I saw it in the form of a mackerel of the sea. And the curious thing about my vision was that it seemed perfectly natural to me that a mackerel of the sea should be the Beginning and the End of all things. It never struck me at that moment, such was the power of my delirium, that it was as impossible for a fish to weep as for the First Cause to weep.

I was indeed completely obsessed by this Tear of Tityos! I seemed to see it as it slid burning and beautifully down the furrowed cheeks of Cronos, down the weary ages of evolution, down the unending spirals of terraqueous change. In generation after generation I saw it — a light shining in darkness — and it was always mocked and derided. Over it and about it rose and fell forever the laughter of Democritus, the jeering of the atoms and the void. It was weakness; it was folly; it was madness; it was the eternal protest of the Impossible against reason, against the determination of matter, against the doing of evil "that good may come."

How grotesque this vision of my delirium was can be seen in the substitution in my trance of a fish — a common sea fish — for the unknown Power behind the universe! What under heaven had put into my head this grotesque substitution? Certainly nothing I had seen in that ghastly Cimmerian abyss where those monsters clung and tore. I have never set eyes on a mackerel of the sea except dead and bleeding and sold to me for food. But what insanity! Had I seen the System-of-Things sold in the market? Had I caught its eye fixed upon me glazed and white from the slab of a fish-shop? Had I eaten the System-of-Things with bread-crumbs and vinegar?

Certainly that whole vision, after seeing her drag Black Peter away, was a mad affair; and through it all ran, not only the thing she held in her hand, but the image of that familiar little black shape twisting its head round and uplifting its leg. In fact I seemed to see the whole secret of creation in that black reversed head and that pathetic excuse as she jerked him forward. Yes, I saw the 'Tear of Tityos shine forth pitiful and terrible from every prodded nerve in every beast in their laboratories. I saw it in the scorched flesh of every negro at the stake. I saw it in the wild eye-balls of pain none ever see, save the demons in Hell who feed upon such sights.

The chemistry of its mystery seemed to be drawn, in my madness, from — But I will not go on! Only it seemed to me that in what I saw there was something else than pity — something that I couldn't understand. Yes, that was the rub. That was the question of questions.

I found myself saying to myself as I awoke, "The vengeance of God! The vengeance of God!" just like that, over and over again.

Thinking of it now in cold blood, however, I confess it does not seem as if my experience of the ways of the System of Things jumps, as you might say, with the idea of vengeance. It rather suggests the idea, a good deal less satisfactory to one's human mind, of the doling out of rope to the wicked, so that they can damn themselves at large, at their full leisure and discretion!

It was at this point, before the cold, clear, deadly recognition of what had happened turned to a block of ice in my heart, that the infinite tenderness and delicate tact of Socrates served me such a wondrous good turn. He gave me no time to brood upon my situation in a spot where every rock and stone, every dead asphodel-stalk, every phosphorescent light-mote from the sleeping-place of Cronos, was full of reminders of her words, her movements, her frail form. Careful and gentle as a woman — and of course his lack of bodily substance helped him to make full use of this delicacy of touch — he lifted me from the ground and holding me firmly and lightly in his arms strode over the asphodel-stalks towards the steps.

You can imagine, my son, what I felt when we reached the point where the steps divided! Far into the mist I saw that right-hand flight ascend, up which she had dragged Black Peter. *He* had turned but she had not turned. Had my distrust, my *worse* than distrust, of that damned ghost alienated her heart from me forever? Noticing how I kept twisting my head as he bore me up the fatal steps, my Athenian paused for a minute and took breath. Made bold by his tenderness and feeling a deep urge to confide in someone, I asked him point-blank if he thought my girl's heart had turned completely against me.

His reply, as I think of it now, showed no small wisdom. Gravely — and yet with a flicker of a smile, for I could see he regarded all this fuss about a woman, so alien to his own weakness, as pure Nordic moonshine — he assured me, swearing devoutly by his beloved Pan, that I need have no anxiety.

"She would never have taken your dog," he said, and unlike the Welshman he didn't refer to my small pet as a "hound,"

"hadn't she resolved to return to you. My own good woman used frequently to present to me a countenance convulsed with hatred, but that didn't prevent her from preparing my supper with the utmost care! She once broke a valuable pitcher on my head, and followed the blow with a torrent of the bitterest invective, and yet she remembered that very day, when the man came to our door, to choose the particular Piraeus cake for which, just then, I had a special fancy. No, no, Captain! I assure you, across my old love-bruised heart, you need have no fear. She will come back to you, if she lives! And unless those hyperboreans she is visiting are godless barbarians I'm sure that with that Homeric minstrel to guide her, and that simple son of the morning to protect her, she will be perfectly safe. Well! if you have gazed long enough at the place where she vanished, we'll proceed on our way."

It was indeed a strange journey upon which we set out. The light grew dimmer and dimmer as we advanced, and ere long vanished altogether, leaving us in thick darkness.

But the darkness, instead of retarding, seemed only to quicken the sturdy steps of my athletic bearer. It seemed as if nothing was impossible to him as long as he could plant one firm foot after the other upon the atoms and the void that lay beneath him. Something about this immense confidence of the man made me thoroughly ashamed of my pusillanimity. Besides, who knows? If she *did* reach America, after all we had gone through, a voyage home by sea would be nothing to her.

"Do you suppose," I asked him after he had been put to it to shift me from arm to arm several times, and I can tell you I sank into his bodiless substance as if into a bed of down, "that when she *does* return she'll bring back that horrible spirit with her?"

He pondered for a while, in the dense darkness that surrounded our ascent, without replying. Then he said, speaking very slowly and in something like my own Preparatory-School Greek: "You have asked me, Captain, a difficult question, and I must ask you something in return. Do they, among those Atlanteans to whom she is going, defy the immortal concepts of Mercy and Pity for the sake of knowledge and to prolong life, as I find they do to-day in wide-stretching Europe?"

“I believe,” I answered, “that there are even fewer restraints over there with regard to the torture of the lower animals. There are certainly larger bequests of money among them to encourage such cruelties.”

“In *that* case,” he said, “I think you may be pretty sure that the man’s repentance will be short-lived. He’ll probably give her the slip and spend his time hovering about the worst of their torture-chambers until he gets a hankering to return to Hell, where he can indulge his ‘service of humanity’ with less trouble. No, my friend, my prediction is, though I am no prophet, that your woman will bring your dog back alone.”

His words were such a comfort that I must have fallen then into so deep a sleep that even the shiftings I had periodically to undergo, when I sank too far into his insubstantial form, lacked the power to awaken me.

When I did at last come to myself it was to find that we had reached a kind of platform or landing in our ascent, upon which there was falling a soft and pearly luminosity through a narrow arch. Fronting the arch through which this most welcome light fell, a man in the garb of a priest-scholar of about the time of Holbein was squatting upon a plump wine-skin of some sort, from a little slit in whose side rich purpureal drops were oozing, drops that trickled unnoticed to the ground from beneath his faded cassock.

He was a middle-aged man with the most intellectual head and the most piercing eyes I have ever seen in my life. He wore a closely-trimmed beard, cut after the French manner, and as far as I could make out, as he jumped to his feet to greet us, he laid down beside his wine-skin-stool an earthen pot full of tiny seedlings growing in dark leaf-mould which he had been examining under some primitive kind of microscope.

He came hurriedly forward with a cry of joyous recognition and helped my Athenian to lay me down on the ground; where with my head resting on the wine-skin whose oozing drops actually wetted my skull, I was in a position to gaze through the arch into what — even to my wounded heart — seemed like a veritable heaven. I saw an expanse of softly-lit, emerald-coloured pastures, among which upon lovely undulating slopes and by crystal-flowing streams men and women in gay butterfly-clothes were dallying and conversing with eager joy.

"This old rascal, Captain," said Socrates with some embarrassment, "will never let me introduce him properly to anybody. He insists on being called 'Frank,' and nothing but 'Frank.' When I introduced him to my Chinese friend Kwang-Tze the situation I can assure you became extremely disconcerting. This incorrigible Frank — yes! my fine rogue, I *will* give you away — who's the friend of god knows how many princes and prelates, wanted my polite Chinaman to dispense with all his submissions and prostrations and call him his sweet cod, his honey-cousin, his pilgarlic crony, his blessed pig's eye, his jolly cheese-mite, his honest drinker, his royal tickler, his darling cock-weevil of the quintessence. And now, on my life," so Socrates went on, in his elaborate city-manner, poking satiric fun no doubt at both of us, "I don't see, Captain, how you'll know who *this* honest Frank may be, compared with all the other honest Franks and Toms and Jacques Bon-Cœurs who have drunk neat and spat white over the barley-bearing earth. But I can assure you that not his own Doctor Rondibilis or any of *our* old classic medicine-men has understood more deeply the secrets of the cosmos than Master François here; and *this*, my dear Rabelais" — so he was pleased to continue with a tender glance in my direction— "is a gallant Captain from the Britannic Islands who has been on his travels but is now on his way home. The Captain tells me he knows your book, my good Frank, from cover to cover; and indeed he spoke of it only lately, in the sleeping-place of Saturn, as the wisest and greatest book ever written by human pen."

The man in the faded soutane chuckled cordially as he made his bow, while I summoned up the best French I had learnt at Sandhurst to express unbounded veneration for the immortal creator of my admired Pantagruel, that indulgent, heroic, tender-hearted model of all noble virtues.

Socrates had spoken in the slow and simple Greek I had come to follow pretty well, and it was in that same language, but uttered far too quickly for me to catch its drift, that the great Doctor now murmured something in reply. I believe his words referred to the hurt in my groin, which since that burst of angry whispering in the ears of my girl, had been causing me the most devilish pains.

That such *was* their import I felt to be confirmed by what now followed; for kneeling at my side this great and good physician actually squeezed some of the heavenly contents of the wine-skin beneath my head into the palm of his hand; and before the precious fluid had time to sink through that shadowy cup he tilted it into my parched gullet; and I can assure you, my child, I have never tasted such a drink!

Sinking back after this divine refreshment I found my spirits so wonderfully recovered that I began *fo* babble out my most intimate secrets to this worthy man; and though my French must have been a disgrace to my education I confess I found the language peculiarly adapted to the topic most near my heart.

“I want to assure you first, Doctor,” I began, interspersing my boorish struggles with this amorous tongue by a few debouchings into a still more clumsy Greek, “that I have been asking myself since I have been in Hell whether what has happened to me is a punishment for the sensual pleasure I have derived from making love to a girl so much younger than myself. It is true I have refrained from actually seducing her; but I’m afraid—”

I was interrupted by a tempestuous burst of laughter from the Curé of Meudon. “O most honest,” gasped the great Doctor, “but most deluded of Captains; let me tell you once and for all — so that you will never again make this wretched, this god-forsaken, this blasphemous, this hell-spawned error — that there is no sensual pleasure, as long as it contains no scurvy and one-sided cruelty, whose joy and rapture and ecstasy in our brief and troubled pilgrimage through this mortal life is not allowed, encouraged, indulged, confirmed, and more than blest, by the most bountiful and all-wise God, who is the great shepherd of us all! He it is who has put into our poor, frail, weak, shaky, and metagrabolized bodies, that celestial power of being transported to the Seventh Heaven by the rapture of voluptuous dallyings. No, it is not this great and good god, whom the deep philosophers of all the centuries have known as the System-of-Things, and whose pity and mercy are revealed in our human conscience, who would forbid the exquisite delights of our amorous senses. It’s the false god of Science who’d forbid these free joys in the name of ‘Eugenics.’ It’s the false god of Religion who’d forbid these heavenly delights in the name of Chastity. All sensual joy, oh most honest but most gullible Captain, is permitted by this great and good god, as long as it isn’t cruel, and I can assure you that the horrible cruelty in the world doesn’t come from the pleasures of Eros but from the puritanism and fanaticism of misguided bigots.

“My precious crony here tells me that your dainty, sweet-natured, most loving wench has one of these stony-hearted dog-tormentors for a father. A pox on the cruel devils! I knew them well, in my time on earth. I always hated them. They’re not true doctors. True doctors cure diseases with the wholesome antidotes given us by Nature and with a firm hand on a beneficent knife. They destroy disease; they heal disease; they don’t expel disease by the means of disease, or with the help of Satan cast out Satan.

This honest drinker here has been investigating this very question as it exists in your world to-day. He has had plenty of opportunity; for many excellent doctors come to this place who don't give a fig for such abominations. They tell him that of recent years the death-rate from every disease has gone down, *owing to sanitary improvements* except in the cases of the very diseases they claim to cure! And yet this honest cod here swears by his god Pan, and I believe him too, that these cruel devils would go on doing what they do for the pure interest of what they call Research, even if it were proved up to the hilt that they've never cured a single human ailment. That's where the rogues are such cunning catch-poles! They gull the people, just as the begging-friars and the pardoners and the psalm-singers gulled the people in my day. They spoil the sweet breath of life with their secret torments and their poisonous practises! May a million cart-loads of hornified devils carry them away! The stomach of an honest man is turned by their practices; and yet no one dare lift a finger against them. By the belly of Bacchus, if I were a living man again I'd write such a sequel to my Book as would clear the earth of such smug bigots.

"The merciful and great God who made the world will call upon them to answer one day for this foul crime against his creatures. And as for your pleasures with your wench, may the same omnipotent Being increase them ten-fold! Therefore take heart, dear cod, and keep the divine spirit within you unperturbed."

He was silent; and once more I took up my tale; rambling on about all my anxieties and troubles, and I doubt if any unhappy lover — certainly none of my mature years — has ever found such a courteous and sympathetic audience.

The Athenian's satyrish features did, it is true, not unfrequently break into a sly smile, and now and again a gargantuan chuckle issued from the great humorist's bearded lips, but they both heard me with infinite patience and understanding; and the comfort of expressing my heart's burden — even in abominable French — was indescribably sweet.

As I went on — and the sight seemed to tune my periods to a rhythm far beyond my natural gifts — I couldn't help gazing across their expressive lineaments into the luminous expanse of verdurous felicity that was revealed through that narrow archway.

It is not everyone, my dear boy, who while yet alive has been privileged to fix his eyes upon the Fields of Elysium — but our nature is such that when a miracle actually confronts us we take it very easily!

"If I could only be sure," I murmured passionately, "that neither my girl nor my dog had turned against me; if I could only be sure that I should eventually see them both again, I think I could endure the misery of this separation. But it's terrible to me to feel that my distrust of that accursed ghost should have thrust an everlasting wedge between her and me.

"Has all the self-restraint which I've displayed in my relations with her, been totally thrown away and wasted? You know how it is" — thus did I address these two great spirits without fear of being misunderstood— "with the dearest of women? They fall into perfectly insane fits of erotic hatred; and yet you know very well that if once they've loved you, you have a hold upon them that outlasts life itself. Of course men are different in these things; and though I shall forgive her the pain she's caused me, I shall never *forget* the sickening despair that came over me as she dragged Black Peter after her up those steps!"

There was a pause when I had finished and a look passed between the two friends that was beyond my interpretation. I think they must have seen that I had caught this look, for Socrates spoke at once.

“You won’t be offended, Captain,” said he, “if I reveal to you the thought that the Doctor and I exchanged just then? We decided together that it was *God* you wanted!”

I moved my legs to make them more comfortable and gazed dumbfounded at the two of them.

“God?” I exclaimed. “Aren’t half the cruelties of the world done in the name of God?”

Socrates quoted a passage from Homer; but it was the immortal Doctor himself who now addressed me.

“There have always,” he said, “been a multitude of gods in this mortal world, and not one of them but spends the whole of his time, or of her time, meddling and tinkering with the lives of honest men. I rejoice to learn, Captain, that this brisk, neat, gay, kind, most happily-toying, most sweetly-dallying wench has gone to lure, beguile, seduce and cajole these bastard scientists from the cruel torments they inflict on the creatures of earth. If only, as Aristophanes says — for our friend here will allow me to quote once from that jibing and jesting enemy of novelties — if only all such comely, waggish, fair, good-conditioned, daffidowndilly lasses would turn sour, peevish, gloomy, unkind, biting, sarcastic, puritanical, until these inventors of bombs and poisons and gases, these torturers of monkeys, these cutters-up of dogs, ceased their devilish games, the great universal God who has revealed Himself in our human conscience, would then, and then only, and not till then, see his divine will realized upon earth! Then would the Golden Age return. Then would Saturn awake from sleep. Then would the wise and the un-wise lie down together in confidence and peace. Then would the restitution of all things be at hand.”

The good Doctor bent forward at that point to hold to my lips another deep draught of his immortal liquor. Then he recommenced. “If you, my worthy but heartbroken cod from the Britannic Islands, would turn, as our friend says, to the only great and true God whose name is mercy and pity, you would find him in the fire, in the water, in the air, in the earth; you would find him in the divine spark of heroic magnanimity at the bottom of your own immortal soul, you would find him in the link indestructible, in the bond unbreakable that exists between all honest lovers from the foundation of the world. It is the worship of false gods that does the harm.

"Not long ago, along with my friend the poet Villon, I made a journey to the edge of the Cimmerian ocean. Here I discovered two monstrous and cabalistical idols, idols in the very act of being worshipped by a horde of famished, hunger-starved devils, of filthy, swingeing devils, of rustling, thumping and scuffling devils."

I could not resist interrupting him at this point to say that I also had seen these Images and that it seemed to me they were still in the process of being created by the souls that cringed before them.

The noble Doctor contemplated me with astonishment. "Then you have been," he said, "where few, even of us, have presumed to wander. You have been to the bottom of the ultimate abyss, and how you escaped with your skin from that Colosseum of Tophet the System-of-Things alone knows."

With this he turned to Socrates and began rallying him roundly; for it appeared that my Athenian had refused to believe that his friend had actually seen these horrible gods of black Religion and black Science. "You see," he cried, "hyperbolical and sophistical cod, how this honest drinker of a Britannic Captain bears out what I've always said? I tell you Master Villon and I heard these thumping devils howl out their litany to their twin Beelzebubs. 'O great Demiurge!' they cried to one of them, 'that out of thy canonical whimsies and for thy own private and arbitrary will and pleasure hath created all the cruelty on earth, save us and help us who cringe and cower and lick the dust before thee! Make us thy pets, make us thy favoured ones, make us thy darling elect, chosen by thee for our dung-licking, even from the foundation of the world! Out of nothing, O great Demiurge, didst thou for thy merry sport create this world, predestinating it according to thy wilful fancy and moulding its nature after the model of thine own sacrosanct will; so that power and cruelty and strength and knowledge and cleverness should have the weak and the simple and the foolish and the helpless at their absolute mercy for ever! Favour us therefore who copy thee and cringe to thee and forever cry upon thy name, favour us who acknowledge thee as our only god; and as for the heretics who refuse to lick the dust before thee — burn ’em, tear ’em, nip ’em with hot pincers, drown ’em, hang ’em, spit ’em at the bung-hole, pelt ’em, bruise ’em, dismember ’em, gut ’em, bowel ’em, paunch ’em, thrash ’em, slash ’em, gasp ’em, pare ’em, hew ’em, flea ’em, boil ’em, broil ’em, carbonade ’em, crucify ’em, these wicked heretics!”

“Master Villon was so panic-stricken at what we heard that I was hard put to it to keep him from bolting back to Heaven the prehistoric way; but I held him — as the poor rogue can bear witness — till we’d listened to what the other devils were howling who were worshipping the other Image.

“‘O great God of Science,’ these cogging prattlers chittered, ‘grant us to know more and more and more and more and more of thy divine chemistry and most sacrosanct secrets! Grant us to pinch and boil and freeze and burn and press and prod the lower animals of the earth, till in every devilish way thou canst devise we have wrung-out and squeezed-out the last shrieking drop of thy most holy knowledge from the nerves and the veins and the sinews and the fibres of the helpless creatures thou hast given into our hands! Thus with their diseases shall we cure our diseases; thus by their torture will our lives be prolonged. Thus shall we prosper by poison; thus shall we flourish by torment; thus by evil piled up upon evil will knowledge and progress and civilization prevail!”

But I could stand no more — this frightful confirmation of all my fears, issuing from the lips of my favourite writer, broke me down completely. I saw the whole round earth given up to the fanatical, the powerful, and the cruel. I saw Morwyn raped and murdered; I saw Black Peter flung into a Research Laboratory. My groin gave me an intolerable spasm; my heart seemed to break; and while my head slid down from the dripping wineskin, I rolled unconscious upon the ground.

When I returned to life again I found that both the two magnanimous spirits were bending over me.

“Take comfort, Captain,” Socrates was whispering in his simplest prep-Greek. “Remember the Tear of Tityos.”

But the other great Shadow lifted my head upon his own lap, as he squatted there; and I shall never to my dying day forget the words he uttered as he bowed down above me.

“You are going back into your own world, dear cod,” he said gently, “and may that Intellectual Sphere, whose Centre is everywhere and Circumference nowhere keep you in His Almighty Protection. He is the System-of-Things, my honest friend, and not these false gods. He works slowly, but He works surely, for His ways are not the ways of power and force, but the ways of mercy and pity. Beware of those who look only to the future; for all true advance is also a return. The sleeping-place of the Age of Gold is in the depths of every human heart; and to this must all revert. Bloody religion and bloody science are not forever. At the bottom of the world is pain; but below the pain is hope. Be of good cheer, dear cod, He is overcoming the world. There is knowledge; but He is not in the knowledge. There is religion; but He is not in the religion. Wherever a man refuses to do evil that good may come, wherever a man is merciful and pitiful *even unto his hurt*, there and there only is the great and true God, who is below all, and above all and in us all!"

It's a queer thing to have to confess, my son, but so deeply did these words move me in my weak state that even before he ceased speaking the tears were pouring down my cheeks.

"Take him up now, my friend," I heard him say through my sobs, "and carry him whence he came. He has seen Hell; he has entered the sleeping-place of Saturn; he has looked into the Elysian Fields; but when he goes back whence he came, it will only be to discover that in his own heart, and in his own heart alone, is the divine weakness and the divine madness wherewith the System-of-Things overcomes the world!"

I find it hard to recall, in any coherent or logical sequence, all the details of my long journey home under the care of my courteous Athenian. We spoke much together as we went; and I fear I wearied his patience sadly with my perpetual talk about Morwyn and Black Peter. I confessed to him again and again that I myself was far too great a coward ever to give my life for these tortured beasts; but I told him how greatly I feared that my girl, especially if her father gave her the slip, might be driven to do that very thing. But at this he always shook his great satyrish head.

"No," he assured me, "whatever dangers those two may encounter in America, they will return home safe, even as she said they would, in some mighty ship. But remember," he said, "if by any chance they *did* give their lives for these tormented animals, or if you yourself by any chance died of this hurt, which I am afraid is more serious than you think, before they came back, no one knows and no one will ever know, until the System-of-Things restores the Golden Age, whether it is better to be alive or dead! But alive *or* dead, as the Doctor reminded us, the real mystery of our hearts, and of the hearts we carry with us, lies outside all we know, lies outside Earth and Hell and Limbo and Paradise, lies in that Circle that has no Circumference.”

THE END

Owen Glendower (1941)

The second of Powys' 'Welsh Novels', *Owen Glendower* was first published by Simon & Schuster in 1940 in America and by The Bodley Head in Britain the following year. He decided to write the novel about the great Welsh soldier, leader and military commander, Owain Glyndŵr, after encouragement from his partner, Phyllis Playter. He began working on the book in the spring of 1937 and spent the following months visiting sites of historical importance relating to Glendower's life. He devoted the next two years to researching and writing the novel, reading extensively about his subject. In his diary, he noted that during the process he frequently received helpful and informed advice from Phyllis that improved the narrative and characterisations.

Owen Glendower is based on the eponymous hero's uprising and war against King Henry IV at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Owain Glyndŵr led a fifteen-year Welsh revolt against English rule, gaining popular support from many of his countrymen and capturing much of Wales during the early years of the conflict. He received military aid and assistance from Scotland and France and in 1404, he was proclaimed King of Wales. However, the English forces eventually managed to reassert their authority and from 1408, he was forced to retreat to the Welsh mountains and engage in guerilla warfare. Owain Glyndŵr is believed to have died in 1415, although the circumstances surrounding his death and burial remain unknown.

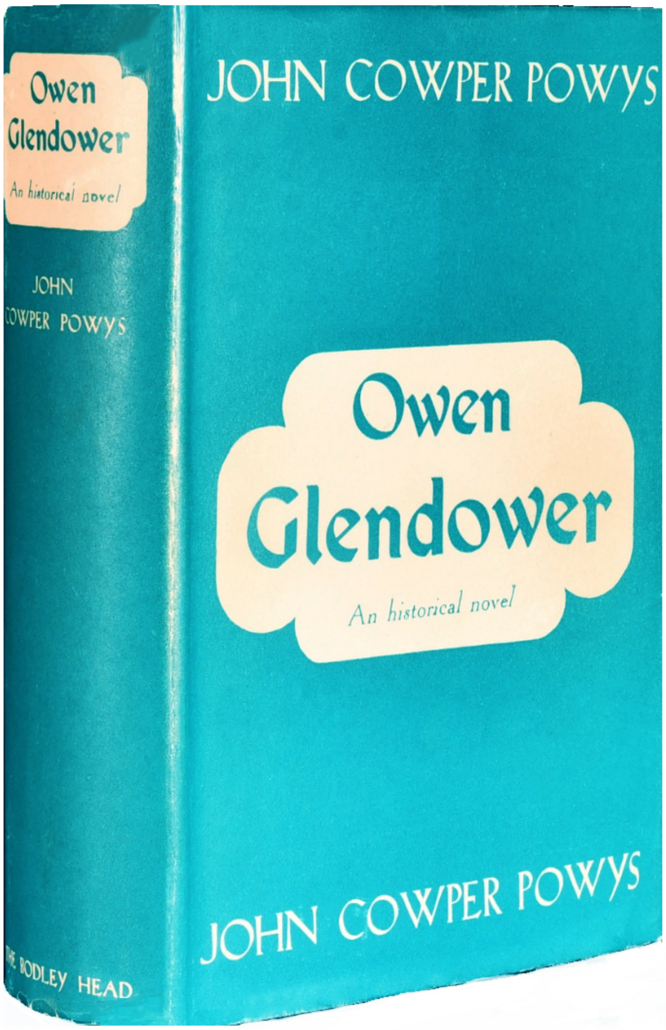
Owen
Glendower
An historical novel
JOHN
COWPER POWYS
THE BODLEY HEAD
JOHN COWPER POWYS
Owen
Glendower
An historical novel
JOHN COWPER POWYS

The first edition

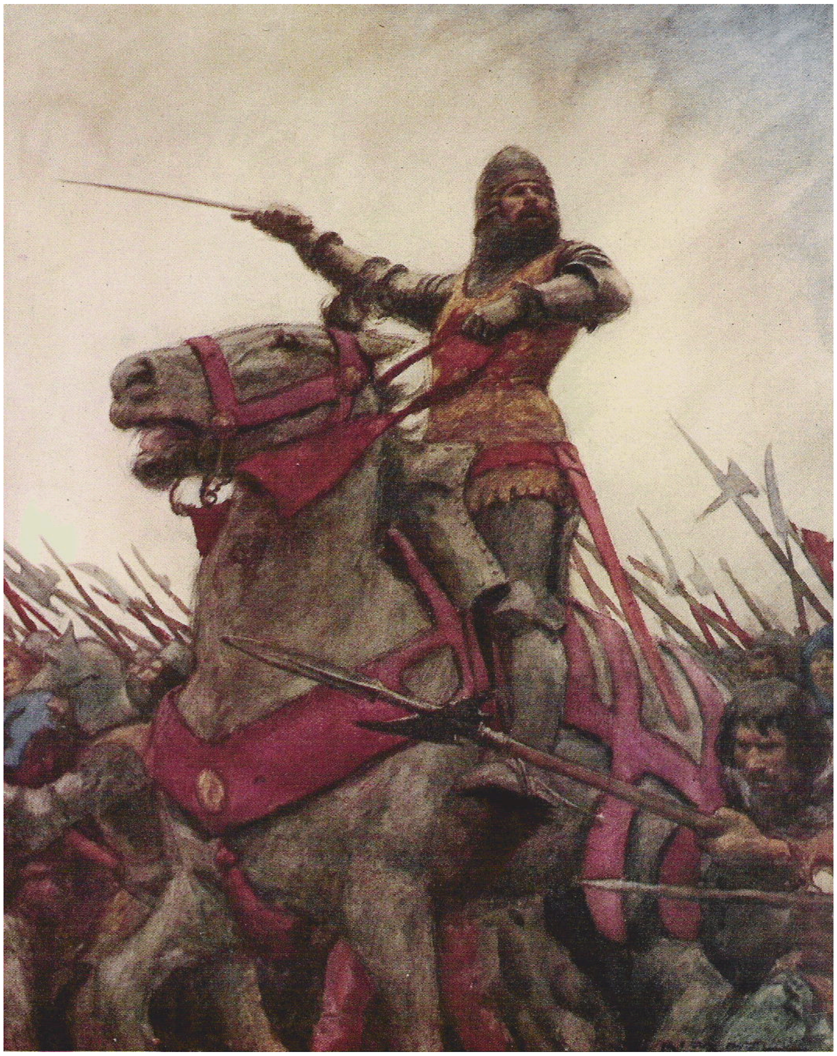

Depiction of Owain Glyndŵr in battle by Arthur Cadwgan Michael, 1918

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Valle Crucis Abbey where Powys began writing the novel on 24 April 1937

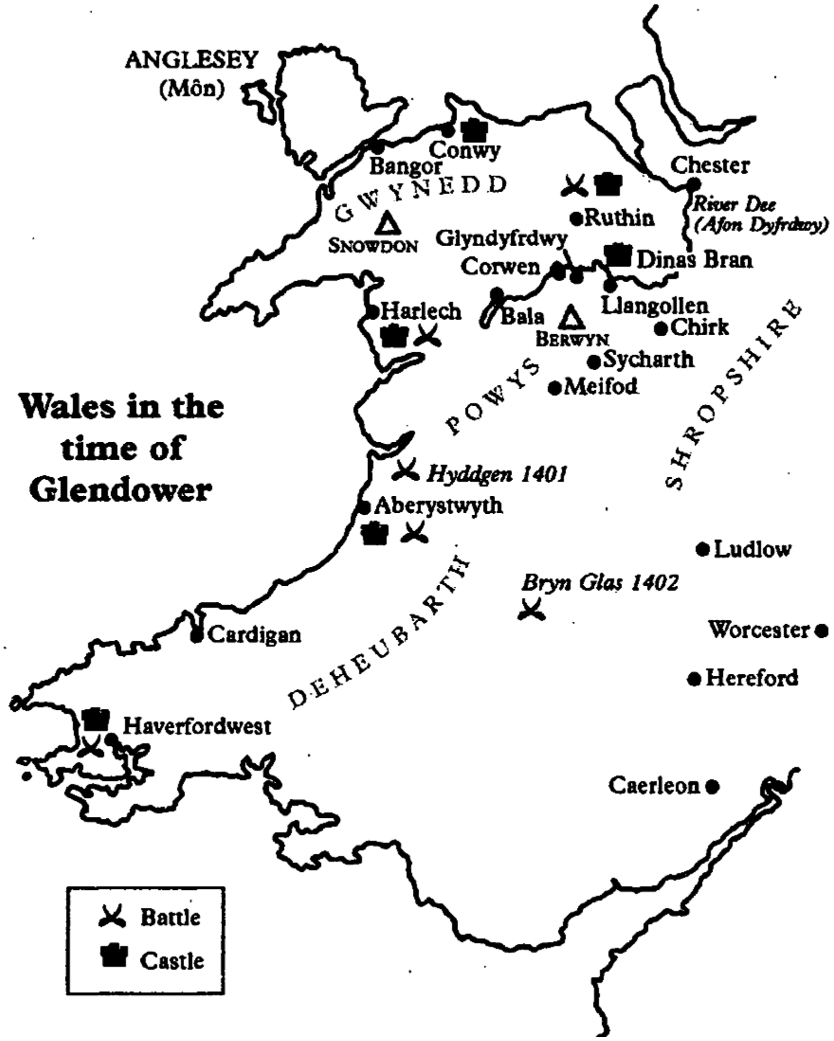
ANGLESEY
(Môn)
Conwy
Bangor
GWYNEDD
Chester
Ruthin
River Dee
(Afon Dyfrdwy)
SNOWDON
Glyndyfrdwy
Dinas Bran
Corwen
Harlech
Bala
Llangollen
BERWYN
Chirk
Sycharth
Meifod
POWYS
SHROPSHIRE
Wales in the time of Glendower
Hyddgen 1401
Aberystwyth
Ludlow
DEHEUBARTH
Bryn Glas 1402
Cardigan
Worcester
Hereford
Haverfordwest
Caerleon
Battle
Castle

Map accompanying the first edition

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN HISTORY

OWEN GLENDOWER, GLYN Dŵr or Glendourdy, also referred to as OWEN AP GRIFFITH FYCHAN

Owen's family, friends and allies

MARGARET HANMER, "The Arglwyddes", Owen's wife

GRIFFITH, his eldest son

MEREDITH, his youngest son

CATHARINE, his youngest daughter

TUDOR AP GRIFFITH, his brother

JOHN HANMER, his wife's brother

RHISIART AB OWEN, Oxford scholar; Owen's cousin and Secretary

WALTER BRUT OF LYDE, Hereford, a Lollard (follower of the religious reformer John Wycliffe)

ALICE, a woman from Ruthin, later wife of Walter Brut

RHYS GETHIN, Owen's Chief Captain

GRIFFITH YOUNG, Owen's Chancellor

HENRY DON OF KIDWELLY

CRACH FFINNANT, “the Scab”, bard and Owen’s Prophet

GRIFFITH LLWYD, Owen’s Bard

IOLO GOCH, Owen’s bardic friend

SIR EDMUND MORTIMER, initially Owen’s captive, later married Owen’s daughter Catharine

JOHN AP HYWEL, Abbot of Caerleon

RHYS DDU OF CARDIGAN

ELLIW, his daughter

PATROUILLART DE TRIE, a French hero

ROBERT DE LA HEUZE, “Le Borgne,” a French Commander

The English court and its allies

HENRY IV, or Bolingbroke, of the House of Lancaster. Deposed Richard II in 1399 and ruled until 1413

PRINCE HENRY, son of Bolingbroke, afterwards Henry V

HENRY PERCY, or Hotspur, initially an ally, then an enemy of Henry IV

THOMAS FITZ-ALAN, Earl of Arundel and Lord of Chirk

REGINALD GREY, Lord of Ruthin

DAVID GAM OF BRECON, swordsman

HYWEL SELE, Baron of Nannau

UN-MENTIONED IN HISTORY

FATHER HUW, the Grey Friar, or Mad Huw

FFRAID FERCH GLOYW, the Prophetess of Dinas Bran

LOWRI FERCH FFRAID, her illegitimate daughter

TEGOLIN FERCH LOWRI, the Maid of Edeyrnion, Lowri’s illegitimate daughter

MISTRESS SIBLI, a dwarf

LUNED, a lady-in-waiting

RAWLFF, a page, subsequently knighted

IAGO, a page, subsequently a sailor

ELPHIN, a page, subsequently a herald and later a priest

GLEW THE GRYD, Owen’s Porter

FATHER PASCENTIUS, a Cistercian monk

FATHER RHEINALT, a Cistercian monk and Tegolin’s father

PHILIP SPARROW, champion of the peasantry

BROCH-O’-MEIFOD, Owen’s lifelong friend

MORG FERCH LUG, his wife

DENIS BURNELL, Constable of Dinas Bran

ADDA AP LEURIG, Seneschal of Dinas Bran

SIMON THE HOG, married to Lowri

EFA FERCH TUDOR OF MÔN (Anglesey)

RHISIART AB EDMUND, a grandson of Owen’s, son of Catharine and Edmund Mortimer

GILLES DE PIROGUE Ambassador from Charles VI of France

JEAN DE PIROGUE ditto

Time of the Novel: A.D. 1400 to A.D. 1416

I. THE CASTLE

Don Quixote might well have recognized in the gaunt piebald horse that carried young Rhisiart down that winding track towards the river Dee a true cousin of Rosinante's. Like Rosinante he was as much of a personality as his master; and like Rosinante he was burdened with a strange assemblage of unusual objects.

One of these objects was a heavy crusader's sword, at that time completely out of date; while another, contrasting oddly with this old-fashioned weapon, was a trim leather case such as Disputants at the University of Oxford were wont to carry, packed so full with parchment-covered manuscripts that any inquisitive stranger under the excuse of caressing Master Rhisiart's steed might, had he been able to read, have deciphered between the gilded straps, fragments of a Latin that clearly was not the Latin of the Church.

Master Rhisiart had also burdened his powerful but odd-looking steed with a huge bundle of a young man's changes of raiment, wrapped up in what might have been taken for — and in actual truth was — a thick bed-cover of well-worn sheepskin, better adapted to a scholar's wintry nights at Oxford than to the hot June sun that just then beat down upon it.

But this was not all; for firmly attached to the sheepskin bundle was an object that flung back the blazing sun in a thousand fiery points as the horse moved, an object that needed no very close inspection to reveal itself as a light mail jacket of polished metal formed of a number of loosely-riveted links.

Rhisiart was certainly not a good-looking or a particularly sociable-looking youth, and yet neither at Oxford nor on his slow journey northwest had his extreme self-consciousness, though a far touchier medium for impressions than superficially appeared, suffered many rebuffs from strangers. This may have been due to something dangerous about the gleam of his dark eyes, but it was no doubt also the effect of a large aquiline nose, a feature which the rank and file of that epoch had come by bitter experience to regard as a sign of noble, if not predatory blood.

Save for the antique sword and the coat of chain-armour fastened to his sheepskin bundle, the youth's appearance would have passed for that of a well-born scholar, a novice perhaps of some religious house, though this latter possibility was made unlikely by the fact that in his leathern belt, next to what was clearly a well-filled wallet, was stuck a rather vicious-looking dagger.

"How soon, how soon shall I see it?" had been the refrain of Rhisiart's thoughts ever since he left behind him the towering battlements of Chirk. This desire of the young scholar's heart had nothing to do, as might have been expected, with his first sight of the sacred river. It was a more personal and more inflammable craving than could be satisfied by any merely historic encounter.

Ever since his earliest childhood he had longed for the moment that was now approaching — the moment when with his own eyes he would see that ruined castle on the sharp-pointed hill where his traitor-ancestor had died, the besiegers baffled, but the man's own heart broken by his fearful remorse. His own particular ancestor had been this princely traitor's bastard; but for several generations his immediate family, oblivious to this double "bar sinister," had been devoted servants of the Sheriff of Hereford in a semi-legal, semi-official role.

This old piebald horse, of which he had been permitted by his mother to take possession, was the last of a sequence of such beasts on which it had been the fancy of the pageant-loving sheriffs of Hereford to mount their clerkly assistants; and it had needed all that Rhisiart's hooked nose and flashing eyes could do to quell in mid-speech many broad-mouthed jests at the expense of this pride of Hereford town.

Indeed, so peculiar did the horse look that the prentices of Welshpool, encouraged by the presence of a group of idle bowmen from Lord Charlton's Castle, had raised the cry of "Mummers" as he stopped to buy a capful of strawberries in that pleasant market.

It was clear that Master Rhisiart's mind was agitated by more than one emotion as he followed his sinuous path through the scattered patches of hazels and the verdurous park-glades with their clumps of freshly-green beeches, and through all the ferny hollows full of rabbits and grass-snakes, that the ruling Fitz-Alan in his grandiose way was wont to speak of as "our Forest of Chirk."

The young man kept swinging round in his saddle, causing the more warlike portion of his baggage to jingle so sharply that any horse but Griffin would have been seriously disturbed. Then he would bring him to a complete standstill, and with his own neck so twisted round that he resembled those unfortunates in the Inferno, upon whom the humorous ferocity of the Emperor of the Universe had worked its will, he would stare backwards.

Having listened intently in this manner for some minutes he would swing himself round again and spur Griffin on, his whole soul straining and stretching forward in single-hearted intensity to meet whatever it was that lay behind the next curve.

"I must see it alone," he said to himself, "at least I must see it *for the first time* alone."

And then when the next curve of that pastoral road had revealed nothing but another clump of beeches hiding the horizon he would pull up Griffin again and once more twist himself about with jingling and discomfort.

“If that heretical fellow overtakes me at this minute,” he thought, “just when Dinas Bran may be round the next corner, I’ll completely forget myself. I’ll do him a damage!”

Rhisiart had neither spurs nor whip. He and the old horse needed no such intermediaries. At the slightest touch Griffin would quicken his jog-trot. But these motions of haste in the young man were always the unconscious expression of his feelings in response to some irresistible mental vision of Dinas Bran; and the moment his mind returned he reined back the obedient creature, whose weariness was apparent.

A moment soon came, however, when something had to be done; for during one of his nervous pauses he became aware, beyond all mistake, of the sound of voices behind him.

“The Lollard has found another victim,” he thought. “What the devil am I to do?”

It was only too clear that unless he went on at a cruel pace he would soon be overtaken. All manner of wild ideas rushed through his head. Should he turn round and ride back, pretending he’d lost something on the road? But that unconscionable heretic would no doubt think he was doing God service by riding back with him.

And who was the fellow’s companion? Very likely some henchman of the Earl of Arundel, the last kind of person before whom he’d care to betray his feelings when he first saw Dinas Bran. He flung down his reins on Griffin’s neck and groaned aloud.

Up went the old horse’s ears, and its nostrils expanded, wide and quivering. Then very slowly and to its rider’s complete astonishment it began leaving the road and ascending a grassy slope that led to a small patch of woodland.

Tightening his knees about the piebald sides he knew so well, Master Rhisiart, getting his cue from the horse, began eagerly urging him forward; and to his delight, when they did finally reach the wood, there presented itself to them an overgrown narrow path totally invisible from the road below, but obviously leading clear through the little copse to whatever it might be that lay behind.

Into this leafy path, while the young man on his back bent low down to avoid the swishing hazels and the brittle sharp-smelling elders, Griffin forced his way.

Wisps of trailing parasitic tendrils, bewildered caterpillars and grubs, feeble brown moths and flimsy white butterflies clung, as he moved, to his hot panting bulk. The vegetable waifs among these disturbed natives entangled themselves in the woolly sheepskin and between the links of jingling armour; while the living insects, including little armadas of drifting midges, seemed ready to drug themselves to death in the sticky equine sweat, or to risk a more violent end between impatient human fingers, so long as they could taste, for one paradisic instant, the inebriating nectar of mortal blood.

Once safely escaped from all danger of evangelical interruption young Rhisiart drew rein and fell to listening. How curiously satisfying to hear those manly tongues in lively discussion and their owners so completely unaware of this ambush above their heads!

The wood was too thick, and he had already plunged too far into it, to have any chance to see what kind of a fellow-pilgrim the Lollard had picked up, but the tone of the unknown’s voice, when at last he got the ring of it clear of the other’s eloquence, made him rise very straight on his saddle and, with a gesture he was quite unconscious of till after he had made it, jerk towards himself by the middle of its worn-out sheath his crusader's blade.

But he soon let the sword sink back to its place beside the sheepskin, and with a sigh he plucked a twig from a sycamore branch at his side and began stripping it of its leaves and counting them as they fluttered down.

"One... two... three... four," he counted. "In four years I'll have shown them what Rhisiart ab Owen can do!" But the voice that had so disturbed him still went on, and our friend couldn't prevent a stir of malicious pleasure at the thought of his eloquent acquaintance being fairly out-harangued.

"Out-chanted I ought to put it," he said to himself. "This is clearly Welsh poetry, and my gentleman has found his match!"

It certainly was an extraordinary sound that reached them in that wood; and Griffin seemed as fascinated by it as his master.

"That's Welsh poetry, Griff!" murmured the boy, stroking the gaunt shoulder beneath him. "We'll hear plenty of that from now on. So you'd better get used to it, old friend!"

But the horse, feeling the reins slack on his neck, bent down and began tasting some wood-sorrel that attracted him amid the moss and rubble. Though both the heretic and the poetry-declaimer, who were apparently riding at a swinging trot, were soon out of hearing, our traveller sat on there on his horse's back absorbed in a bottomless sea of thought.

The sound of that Welsh poetry had brought back all those particular memories of his early life from which he had built up the main outlines of the narrow imaginative cult by which he had come to live.

Upon Modry his nurse, a handsome young Welshwoman who had married before he was capable of grasping all she had taught him, lay the responsibility for this unbalanced idealism. He had learnt Welsh from Modry much more quickly than he ever picked up French or Latin from the monastic schools in the city; and along with her native tongue she had inspired him with a frenzy of patriotic feeling for his ancestral country, especially for that portion of it that surrounded Dinas Bran. A person would only have had to give a cursory glance at Rhisiart's appearance to gather the fact that he would be just the very one to get lodged in his brain some obstinate and passionate obsession.

As he let Griffin search about for something more to his taste than wood-sorrel and allowed his own fingers to follow idly the pattern made by sun-flicker and leaf-shadow upon that stooping neck, he recalled how Modry's teaching had thrown him at Oxford into the society of an ardent group of Welsh scholars. He felt ashamed now as he thought how crudely he had patronized these evasive eccentrics on the strength of his mother's proud Norman blood, and how mockingly he had cajoled them and led them on, till one by one they had secretly confessed to him that at any clear call from their native hills they would sell their books, get themselves arms and horses and gallop westward.

His closest friend among them, Master Morris Stove of his own Exeter College, had already begun practising with the long-bow for this unlikely event. The learned man's convulsions of pride when by some chance he killed a wild-duck on the banks of the Isis came back to him now and he found himself comparing his own more fanciful and complicated motives with this heroic simplicity.

Master Stove had no long-cherished shame to purge, no dark old treachery to obliterate, no Dinas Bran lifting its mystic battlements against indescribable spiritual horizons.

All *he* possessed was the plain downright imperative, one that had already got him into many a street-brawl in Oxford town, to hold the call of Cambria above everything in the world.

From his earliest childhood under Modry's influence Rhisiart had hugged to himself a vague fairy-story hope that he might be the one destined by fate to restore the lost glories of the old chiefs of Powys or at least make Dinas Bran what it had been in the days of Griffith ap Madoc.

Modry had got it lodged in his earliest consciousness that his name Owen carried with it some mystery of prophetic significance; and she had talked to him *sans cesse* of the great Owen Red-hand, in the Black Prince's time, who had fought for the king of France. Many a night by his dying fire, with this very sheepskin over both their legs, he had heard Master Stove express the view that the elderly Baron of Glendourdy, or Glendower, who was a cautious and law-abiding subject of the late unhappy king and a great patron of poetry and scholarship, might have been the Owen of all these prophecies had he been a younger man, or a man prepared to live a dangerous and desperate life.

"But he's old," Master Stove would add with a groan. "He must be nearly fifty. Besides he's related to half the Border, and his daughters have all married English barons."

Rhisiart could remember one particular interruption when Stove was speaking like this and they were both drawn to the window by a sudden uproar and saw some terrified town-official extricating himself from an angry mob and heard great shouts going up: "We want King Richard! Give us back King Richard!" He could hear now, as he stared at a clump of late bluebells, that looked in the shadow of the underbrush as if they were purple rather than blue, the bitter curse with which Stove came back to their wretched students’ fire and began accusing this peace-loving Glendourdy of having betrayed the unfortunate King.

“It was old Fitz-Alan who came between them. He always hated Richard; and Owen was his squire.” Up and down that small green clearing among the hazels Rhisiart let his horse carry him, while one after another of the sights and sounds of this little wood — certainly a very modest portion of the “Forest of Chirk” — mingled with his thoughts.

He saw what he supposed to be a black-cap singing passionately on the branch of an oak-tree. He could see the outline of its throat as it heaved up and down under the long-drawn notes of its whistling. He could see its feathers ruffled at the same time by a faintly stirring wind.

“I’ll let my friends down there get well to the river. If I give them a little longer they’ll be across the ford and lodged at the Tassel, unless they’re going on to the Abbey to-night.”

Thus he talked to himself; seeking in reality any excuse to postpone the great moment to which he had looked forward almost as long as he could remember.

Was he afraid that the sight of the real Dinas Bran would make the ideal one — that mystic terminus of every vista of his imagination — dissolve into air?

Always vague but always dominant, the secret channel which his under-life had worked for itself had adopted Griffith ap Madoc’s hill-fortress as the ultimate symbol of its direction. In some confused and tortuous way he had come to take it for granted that he, plain Master Rhisiart, descendant of a traitor’s bastard, would be accepted by the invisible spirits of all his ancestors as the destined restorer of their lost glory. Years ago the patriotic Modry had told him of this Baron Glendourdy or, as the Welsh called him, Glyn Dŵr; but she, like Morris Stove, had always spoken of him as too absorbed in scholarship, too rich, too peaceable, too closely connected with the English Court, to be in any sense the man of destiny who would people with free warriors — like fiery shapes from a vasty deep — the towering battlements of the old castle of their race.

As he listened to the black-cap's self-absorbed singing, and watched Griffin's leisurely movements among the cool-rooted woodland growths, he began to realize two things; first that he had deliberately thrust the idea of this "Glendourdy" into the background of his mind from an obscure prejudice against a person so lucky as to be the recognized heir, not only of his own chieftains of Dinas Bran but also of the ancient rulers of South Wales, and with all this to have played his cards so well as to have won renown in Richard's wars without being implicated in the ill-starred monarch's ruin; and secondly that hidden out of sight, down deep behind his own boyish ambitions, had lain all the while a shrewd and practical resolve to introduce himself, with his piebald horse, his crusader's sword, and his coat of chain-armour, to the notice of this powerful kinsman of his — and see what happened!

His horse was bending so low now over a large patch of wood-spurge, amid whose foliage he had apparently discovered some especially succulent leaves, that Rhisiart was forced to lay his hand on a hazel-branch beside him to keep himself and his heavy load from a tendency to slide forward.

Normally he would have dismounted during this pause; but his mind was in such a state of abstraction that it was like the mind of a person under a drug. He had grown unconscious of the ordinary significance of material bodies. He had ceased to be a lean youthful figure, in a dark scholar's dress with a leather belt and a velvet cap, mounted on a piebald horse. He had become a bubble of complicated thought, a bubble that floated beside the sheepskin bundle, a bubble devoid of weight or substance.

"Will it spoil it all?" he thought. "Will it break to bits the only ideal I've got in life, when I see Dinas Bran?" So wayward and so self-lacerating was this Hereford boy's nature that as he looked at the sun-and-leaf flickerings on Griffin's back and listened to the queer sounds the animal was making as he tasted those leafy juices, he felt already the ice-cold waters of disappointment. Dinas Bran *couldn't* be what he had, all his days, imagined it!

And with this feeling that he was approaching the worst catastrophe that could befall him — the loss of his life-illusion — there came over him in an accumulated weight of released emotion his jealousy and envy of this lord of Glyndyfrdwy, this legitimate heir to Dinas Bran, who was such a friend of Thomas Fitz-Alan and such a traitor to the murdered King.

Rhisiart stared and stared at a flimsy currant-moth that was now fluttering feebly through the twigs of a thick-growing elder. He felt as though, with the panicky distaste of those slender antennae, he himself was cursing the raw pungency of that rough foliage.

It was King Richard's wistful face, as he had seen it once at Hereford, that hovered about those sharp-smelling boughs, and when he thought of his murder he confused those delicate features with those of a man he had seen put to death in his childhood, an unforgettable, abominable sight, taking the heart out of all the June woods of England!

And it was an imaginary Cousin Glendourdy, crafty, grey-headed, portly, full of punctilious fussiness about nice heraldic points, only anxious to be left in peace to his bards and his women, who was the bitter-smelling elder-branch against which that moth fluttered!

"He's not the Owen of the prophecies," thought the obsessed youth, "any more than was Owen Red-hand! There's been no "Owen of Wales" since they buried Owen ap Griffith ap Cynan in Bangor Church."

The lad’s nostrils dilated and his whole face changed its appearance as he sucked in his lower lip. In a sudden spasm of angry vision he saw the diplomatic Glendourdy drowning their disgrace in drink and song while the Fitz-Alan ensign floated from the fortress of Griffith ap Madoc.

Impatiently he dropped the hazel-branch, snatched up the reins and rode on. Stinging sprays of trailing branches brushed against his mouth and rustled against his knees, but he bent his head low and pushed forward, while the piebald horse kept shaking his mane and champing on his bit, as if the taste of some woodland weed had turned sour in his throat.

At last there appeared a free open space at the end of their path; and at the sight of this both man and horse strained eagerly forward, the young human body and the old equine body fusing themselves together, in that excited rush, as if they were one creature.

There it was! There before him, towering up beneath a great bank of white clouds and against a jagged ridge of bare and desolate rock, rose the castle of his imagination.

For some minutes he remained spell-bound, absolutely caught out of himself, lost to everything but that majestic sight. It was not less, *it was more* than the picture he had in his mind.

All ramparts ever built, all towers, all fortresses, all castles, seemed to him mere clumsy reproductions of the ideal perfection of Dinas Bran. It wasn’t that it was so large — and he could see clearly, even from this distance, that it was in a battered, broken condition — but it took into itself that whole hill it was built upon! Yes, that was the thing. Dinas Bran was not the stones of its human walls, not the majestic outlines of its towering battlements, not its soaring arches and turrets and bastions; it was an impregnable mountain called up out of that deep valley by some supernatural mandate. Its foundations were sunk in the earth, but they were sunk in more than the earth; they were sunk in that mysterious underworld of beyond-reality whence rise the eternal archetypes of all the refuges and all the sanctuaries of the spirit, untouched by time, inviolable ramparts not built by hands!

Oh, it was far more than the image of his long hope, far more than what he had prayed for in the audacities and desperations of his long desire!

The season of the year, the climax of June's lavish greenery, had undoubtedly something to do with it. It was this that gave it that apocalyptic look, as of some far-away fairy-tower in some old pre-druidic Book of Revelation.

And the late afternoon light too, under which our traveller saw it, contributed to this enchanted effect. Out of green pastures, in which might have wandered flocks upon flocks of fairy sheep, rose that mystic, castellated mountain, and the horizontal sun-rays falling at their lowest possible angle, ere the crest of the Berwyns beat them back, threw a rose-bloom upon its towers. And if the sunset threw such light upon the stone ramparts, it gave to the grassy precipices from the brink of which the masonry ascended such a glow of incredible greenness that the first thing that came into Rhisiart's head when his trance relaxed was a green shield he had seen a workman painting once in the illumination of a tomb in the cathedral for one of the dead King's beautiful and fatal minions.

Rhisiart's old horse seemed at first, as often happens with animals, to be contemplating that astonishing stretch of landscape with an interest hardly less than his master's; but when the youth jumped off his back and proceeded to go through a ritualistic performance that he had been rehearsing for many years, Griffin gave his bony frame a vigorous shake, causing the armour he carried to jangle loud and clear, and began sniffing about again in the sweet-scented herbage of the wood's edge.

But Rhisiart ab Owen took his crusader's sword from the creature's back and drawing it from its embossed and enamelled sheath planted it firmly in the greensward. Then, kneeling on one knee so that the cross-handle of his weapon rose between him and Dinas Bran, he gave vent to a series of solemn ejaculations; not so much praying to his Creator, or even to the Mother of Christ, as uttering a string of incoherent vows, the drift of which was that he dedicated himself to the super-human task of restoring the honours and glories of his ancestors.

As he made these vows his curious physiognomy lost its sullen self-concentration, and an innocent and childlike look took possession of it. But it must be added that when he leapt to his feet again, and plucked the great sword out of the grass, this look completely vanished, its place being taken by an even more pronounced scowl of truculence and secretiveness than it had previously worn.

Ingrained and obstinate was the pride in the lad's face as he clambered back, not very elegantly, upon his saddle; and even the gaze he kept turning upon his ideal castle as he rode down the hill, letting Griffin choose his own path through the bracken, retained little of that moment of inspiration.

Nor indeed, if the truth must be told, were the thoughts that crossed Rhisiart's mind any more admirable than the expression worn by his hooked nose, his sallow cheeks, his sucked-in under-lip. They were images of fantastical domination, images of himself exercising arbitrary power over multitudes, images of himself revenging himself upon multitudes; and revenging himself not only for every rebuff he had suffered from his Hereford relations, who regarded him as a fool and a failure, but even upon his mother, who never ceased teasing him for his equivocal ways and calling him her "little monk", her "begging friar", her "catch-penny pardoner". Rhisiart had only a few indistinct memories of his father; but from certain scenes that *had* impressed his childish mind he had conceived the notion that he too had been despised, frustrated, ridiculed and misunderstood.

"You wait!" he shouted in his heart, addressing the whole of Hereford City, *"you wait!"* And in his mind he saw himself surrounded by an applauding host of rebels as he rode down from Dinas Bran, leaving the "Lion, rampant, gules" of the old Griffith ap Madoc banner floating from its battlements!

Once in the road, with the sinking sun behind him, he began making a few hurried re-adjustments both in his personal accoutrements and in his somewhat singular baggage.

The piebald horse regarded these manoeuvres with cynical lethargy. "For God's sake," he seemed to say, "ride on to the stable; or leave my harness alone while I see what grows here."

But Rhisiart had been seized with a fear lest his precious piece of chain armour might slide off when they moved at a greater speed, and being but a clumsy squire-at-arms it took him some while to adjust it, and the great sword with it, to his satisfaction.

While thus employed, and while Griffin was chewing the grass, he caught sight of a little patch of moschatel, whose small green flowers, thrown into delicate relief by the horizontal sun, brought to his mind many a stroll at vesper-time in the Oxford meadows when Master Stove had astonished him by the noble simplicity of his Welsh heart.

"No," he thought, as he pulled Griffin's head round and threw back his own, "no, if I weren't of the House of Dinas Bran, if I were a poor nameless 'legitimate' like Morris Stove, I'd get my Doctor's gown and serve this crafty king.

“But they say he’s too mean and miserly to use men of birth, the devil take him! They say he lets the Percies fight for him at their own charges. Well, if the worst comes to the worst I must turn clerk and scrivener and copy these new-fangled verses — what did they call them? — *Cywyddau* — for Cousin Glendourdy.”

The old horse, who now began anticipating better nourishment than wayside grass, had quickened his pace to a fast trot; and it wasn’t long before not only Dinas Bran but the much-frequented river ford leading to the Tassel appeared in full sight.

Our traveller had been recommended as he came through Chirk to take lodging that night at the Tassel, or *Tercal,* and the recommendation had imprinted itself on his mind owing to the fact that his informant, who was a Salopian humourist, chaffed him on his personal resemblance to the sullen-looking bird whose raptorial beak adorned that famous hostelry’s sign-board.

To Griffin’s chagrin Rhisiart pulled up for a minute or two when he saw, half-a-mile below him, the sacred river winding through its sun-illumined valley. From his present position he could see a great many interesting things; and he wanted to gather his wits together and decide on some clear line of action.

There was quite an assemblage of travellers waiting on his own side of the ford, and on the further side there seemed to be some kind of country fair going on round the entrance to what looked like a farmhouse.

Nearly a mile further on he could make out a much larger group of buildings, the central one of which was evidently built of more solid material than the rest.

“That,” he thought, “must be the Tassel; but what’s going on down there by the river?”

And then he remembered that today was the Eve of Saint John, when in many of the more old-fashioned districts of the country it was the custom to hold local fairs, to which not only the peasants came but to which the castles and monasteries of the neighbourhood were accustomed to send their stewards and caterers. Automatically and perfunctorily our young man decided that before making any move towards an encounter with "Cousin Glendourdy" he would have to attend High Mass somewhere or another; and it crossed his mind that the natural thing to do would be to hunt up the Abbey which his Dinas Bran ancestors had founded in these parts. He knew it was called Valle Crucis; but that was all he knew. "But at least I'll see their tombs," he said to himself; and this secular thought quickened his languid piety into a lively intention.

"But where shall I sleep to-night?" was his next thought, as the piebald horse, with erect and twitching ears, strained at his bit.

"On the Eve of Saint John every room in the Tassel's sure to be taken; and probably the monks' guest-house will be packed too. Well! I'll have to go to some farm or sleep in the woods. Think of having forgotten Saint John! How that damned Lollard would chuckle!"

The obsessed youth had indeed been grievously slack about his religious duties since he left Oxford. His mother had dragged him to church before she would let him say goodbye; but since then, till his childish prejudices had been roused by the Lollard's challenge, he hadn't given the thing a thought.

"I suppose those Chirk people keep a troop of their lazy devils in Dinas Bran," he said to himself, as he rode down the hill.

"Will the Earl go to the Abbey to-morrow? I'd rather like to set eyes on him — and on Lord Grey of Ruthin, too." And the lad's mind reverted to the few famous personages he had had the luck to see in the late King's time.

With less trepidation than many young men would have felt — but his nearness to his ancestral fortress seemed a stronger armour than any that Griffin could carry — Rhisiart boldly advanced to the agitated group of persons who were arguing and disputing at the brink of the ford.

Two dismounted riders leading their horses approached him at once, and one of them, greeting him in a pleasant manner by name, introduced him to the other.

"He gave me the slip, this young gentleman," he remarked in English with an indulgent smile. "Rhisiart ab Owen his name is, if I get it right; but yours, Master, if you'll pardon me for saying so, hardly seems—"

"Seems or not seems, Master Brut," cried the Lollard's companion, "the young gentleman will have to call me what all Powys and Yale and Cynllaith Owen and Glyndyfrdwy and Maelor and Bromfield and Chirkland call me, or he may call me King of the Fornicators. *Y Crack,* the Scab, is my name, born in Ffinnant near little Llanfechain, where every maid is my cousin and every old trot my god-mother! No, you needn't blush to look at 'em, young master. Birth-marks all, birth-marks all! And by whom were they put on me, think ye? Every jack one of them, by Holy Derfel, when I came out of Sister's belly! Sister Mallt she was, my blessed mother, God give her peace; and *Y Crach,* of Ffinnant near Llanfechain, I am, young master! Every man born knows Llanfechain where the great hanging oak is, and where Sheriff Burnell's grandmother, he who now's so hot for the new King, were drowned in green pond for a whore of Satan. And there's no Welshman, nor no Englishman neither, between Chester and Chirk that doesn't know *Y Crach,* the Scab.

"Listen to me, young gentleman," and to Rhisiart's disgust the fellow laid a hand on his black sleeve. "How do I manage it, so as to have no enemy in all the Marches? Is that what you're asking? Well?" and he lowered his voice, "I'll tell you! 'Tis these here rose-petals as does it," and with a wicked grimace he tapped his shocking facial disfigurement, which certainly had the effect of intensifying the halcyon blue colour of his one remaining eye to such a point that Rhisiart found it hard to keep his eyes away from it. "But that's not all," and the Scab proceeded to close this bright window to his roguish soul with a cyclopean wink.

"First and last, 'tis all Holy Derfel's work. He put these rosy-posies on me afore I came out of my poor mother; and do 'ee know who *her* were? Her were a dedicated nun; and to bear a *baban* to Derfel were too much for the maid. They didn't have to do nothing to her. She died in peace. She died smiling and whispering to her *baban* and calling on Derfel. That's who she called on, young man, Blessed Saint Derfel; and seeing you're a friend of Master Brut here, who's the best Christian poor old Scab have met for many a year, I thought it best to tell you who I were and who, in a manner of speaking, me parents were, so that there'd be no mistake. Presently if, as I hope God wills, we'll pass the night together I'll compose a poem for you. I've already composed five for Master Brut; and if he writes them down later, as he says he's a mind to, maybe he'll do the same for yours. 'Tis one thing, young gentleman, to be an inspired bard; 'tis another to understand reading and the art of—"

But Rhisiart, who had already dismounted and left his horse to make friends with the Scab's Welsh pony and the Lollard's mare, interrupted the poet's discourse by enquiring of Master Brut where he intended to sup and to sleep.

"From the look of things over there," he added, "there's a market going on.

"And what are those monks making such a disturbance about? That Prior, or whoever he is, seems to be reading his missal as if he were alone in his cell."

"Prior?" broke in the Scab in high glee. "Where have you come from, Mr. Scholar, not to know a Lord Abbot when you see him? Your Prior's the great John ap Hywel, Abbot of Caerleon, where the Round Table is. See the horse he's riding, my good sir! *He* don't have to haggle for a lift in a ferry-boat! It's his Chamberlain, his Almoner, his Kitchener belike, or just a pack of his lay-troop who're raising hell. Long Thomas of the Tassel puts his price up, and small blame to him, on such days as these. The ferry's his ferry and the boat's his boat; and though the ford goes with the Barony he's the one they have to pay. I haven't learnt law for nothing in cloister."

"Why doesn't the Abbot intervene? Why don't these Almoners or lay-brothers, or whatever they are, go to him and complain, if that rascal's asking too much?"

"Tell your friend why they don't, for God's sweet bones!" cried the Scab, turning to Master Brut.

And the Lollard explained that Abbot Hywel was known all over Wales for his piety and his passionate temper. "No man dares," he said, "especially when that book's in his hands, approach him with any secular matter!"

The Scab fixed his solitary blue eye upon our young man and winked solemnly. "Temper, you see! That's what *he* calls it. *He* thinks a Christian should have command over his high blood. Don't 'ee listen to him, young master! If I wasn't a prophet of Derfel he'd be a dangerous companion for a poor bard. Wait till Hal Bolingbroke gets hold of him! He'll truss him up like a partridge. He'll baste him to a crisp. He's a great baster of heretics is your King Hal. God griddle his—" And the Scab ended with one of the foulest oaths our traveller had ever heard.

The altercation over the ferry-boat rose now to such a pitch that it became incredible to Rhisiart how that formidable-looking Abbot could sit so quiet on his great black horse.

"Here! Catch hold, Master, for a minute!" and snatching at Griffin's bridle Rhisiart tossed it to the Lollard and ran down the slope straight to the abstracted dignitary.

What the impulse was that forced him to do this he would have been hard put to it to explain. No thought he could define, no intention he could describe, made him do it: and yet he would have done it had Abbot John looked ten times more formidable.

"My Lord!" he cried, laying his hand on the black horse's trappings. "My Lord! My Lord!"

Walter Brut watched his friend's audacity with no little concern. "Jesus help him!" he muttered, and then he added, "and help us all, and forgive us our sins, our most grievous sins!"

But the Abbot of Caerleon broke from his trance with a start that made his horse rear. "What? Eh? Who? A messenger from *him* are ye?"

"My Lord," the young man repeated, "I'm a messenger from no one. I'm riding, my Lord, from Exeter College, Oxford, to my cousin Owen, Lord of Cynllaith and Baron of Glendourdy."

The Abbot of Caerleon gave the excited intruder one searching look. "And who's this?" he asked. "Is he from Oxford, too?"

Rhisiart, who was in the act of making the formal gesture of kissing the Abbot's hand, swung round and beheld Master Brut blamelessly advancing towards them with a serene countenance, while a few paces behind him, as if not to be outdone in this daring move, came the irrepressible bard, trailing in his rear all their three steeds.

"And who's *that?"* asked John ap Hywel. *"He* at any rate isn't from Oxford."

Rhisiart stood politely aside as the Lollard came up. "The peace of Jesus be with you, John ap Hywel," he said; and Rhisiart as he heard him couldn't escape a shock of interest at the difference between the two men. Deeply indented with furrows of thought and passion was ap Hywel's swarthy face; whereas the fair, placid countenance of the learned Hereford squire had the angelic smoothness of a Saint Michael in a church window. And it was the same with the tones of their voices. The Abbot spoke English painfully and with a perceptible Welsh accent, but every word was charged with a smouldering intensity of emotion; whereas Master Brut expressed himself casually, easily, quickly, almost as if he regarded the whole business of using words at all as something inessential and irrelevant.

"You know my name so well," replied the churchman, gravely, "that you won't be surprised if I ask you, before we go further, why, in greeting me like this, you make such a point of omitting the first and the third Person of our most Holy Trinity?"

"Forgive me, my Lord Abbot," returned the other, completely unabashed. "I should have supposed that to any high-placed apostle of our faith the name of Jesus was sufficient."

The lines in the dark-visaged monk's face deepened and he seemed on the verge of an angry retort; but to Rhisiart's astonishment, in place of anything of the kind, a sad and tender smile crossed his lips.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," he murmured in Latin, "may both the peace He brought and the faith He revealed be yours, my son. And now," he went on in English, "may I ask you your name, and the name of this young gentleman and the name of—" But the piebald horse's desire to reach his master gave the Bard of Ffinnant an opportunity of answering for himself; and before his rapid flow of extremely colloquial Welsh, sprinkled with poetical bardic tags, had subsided, an interruption occurred which altered the whole situation.

The excited crowd of monks who so gallantly had followed their Abbot from Caerleon were displaying now a less agreeable aspect of their nature. "It must come," thought Rhisiart, "from their secluded lives that they haggle like this over a penny."

But matters by this time had reached such a point that the ferry-man, who was a powerfully built, grim-looking peasant, was now obstinately pushing his way through the midst of them and making straight for the Abbot.

With a heavy sigh John ap Hywel thrust his breviary into his leather pouch and rode towards the crowd, followed closely by Rhisiart, leading Griffin, while the Scab, detaining Master Brut by his arm, tried to explain in clumsy English the gist of what he had just said to the great man and his assurance that his remarks had met with uncommon appreciation.

"It's always the same," he gave the Lollard to understand. "The higher-placed these fellows are the better they understand me. It's the rag-tag of them, like those idiots over there, that see nothing but the devil in the bardic art."

Rhisiart was almost as astonished as the angry monks at the rough manner in which the ferry-man addressed their Superior; but John ap Hywel received him with courtesy, and helped him, for the fellow was too indignant to be very articulate, to explain the cause of the uproar.

The explanation, though our traveller could make nothing of it, apparently satisfied the Abbot, for, searching in the wallet that held his psalter, he handed him a large silver coin, the receipt of which produced an immediate change in the man’s demeanour.

“What do they call you, my friend?” the churchman asked him.

“Philip Sparrow, your reverence. I be herdsman, your reverence, to Long Thomas of Tassel; but being Saint John’s Eve like, I’ve a-took ferry-boat in place of Mother Kench who be selling she’s pasties and bride-cakes yonder.”

The fellow paused, glanced at the silent and sulky monks with a revengeful scowl, and then looking across the river set himself to listen to the confused uproar that was coming from the further bank. “I wish, your reverence—” he began uneasily.

“Speak up, man,” said the Abbot, who also had been listening with some concern to the sounds that were reaching them. “Out with it! It seems to me there is something more than ale-drinking and cake-eating going on over there.”

“I wish, your reverence—”

“Speak up, man! The Brothers and I were hoping to be at Valle Crucis to-night; but if there’s anything here needing the—”

He was interrupted by an agitated movement towards him of all his monks. Troubled by what they were hearing from across the Dee, their natural instinct, as with a pack of startled animals, was to draw close to their leader.

Walter Brut and the Bard of Ffinnant came forward too, the latter having deemed it wise, in case of accidents, to be on his pony’s back.

For a space they were all, churchmen and laymen alike, awed into silence by the sounds they heard and the mysterious tumult that was rapidly increasing. One wild, resonant voice kept rising above all the rest, and they heard too, and this was curiously agitating to Rhisiart, certain desperate cries for help evidently proceeding from a feminine throat.

“Your reverence—” began the heavy-browed ferry-man and then hesitated again, looking nervously at the crowd of silent faces.

“Speak up, Philip Sparrow,” murmured the Bard, pushing his pony forward while his eye grew bluer and his birth-marks redder in his desire to win favour.

“He’s a simple man, my Lord, a poor, simple ignorant man. Perhaps if you allowed *me* to have a few words with him I should be able—”

But ap Hywel waved him aside. “Come close to me, Master Sparrow — that’s it — you needn’t be afraid of me — I’m only a poor priest. Closer still, my good friend! That’s it! Now then, tell us what’s going on over there. Is it the King’s justice? Are they hanging those people? Is it a man and a woman? Are they adulterers caught in the act? Have they committed sacrilege? Under whose lordship is this fair? Chirkland? Valle Crucis? And where’s the seneschal of Dinas Bran? Speak quietly. Take your time. No one’s going to hurt you.”

While the churchman was speaking Rhisiart could see his fingers busy with the trappings of his great horse.

“He’ll be across the river in a second,” he thought, “and Griffin and I with him! They’re torturing those two over there! Oh damn this fellow! Let the slave go, and find out for yourself, my good Lord! Oh hurry, hurry, you holy idiot, for God’s sake! That woman’ll be past helping in a minute or two.”

But the low-bent swarthy head of the ecclesiastic and the up-raised equally swarthy face of the ferry-man were so close to each other now in their exchange of deep-throated whispering that though Griffin was licking the neck of the Abbot’s horse Rhisiart couldn’t follow — for all his nurse’s lessons — the rapid Welsh they were using.

Their conversation was drawn out to such a length and the cries, if such they were, of victimized man and woman across the river grew so violent that not only the nerves of young Rhisiart but the more seasoned ones of Master Brut and the Scab began to grow strained.

As for the monks, they were staring at their leader with such anxious faces that no one could have guessed the crude simplicity of the thoughts that rushed through their tonsured heads as they pressed forward. One worthy brother had been occupied all that morning in wondering whether there would be wine as well as beer provided by the Valle Crucis caterer on their arrival. Another had been weighing in his mind many casuistical reasons why, in honour of Saint John’s Feast, it would be advisable to give himself a plenary indulgence in the matter of a small and private vow against eating flesh.

They were all hungry and tired; and this new obstruction to their journey on top of the exorbitant demands of the ferry-man seemed the last straw. Curiously enough — possibly from their own self-mortifications and daily broodings upon death and judgment — they were less disturbed by the sinister events across the river than were the three secular persons.

There trembled through Rhisiart’s young body the strangest tinglings of emotion. He could hardly be called a normal youth in his relations with women. Rarely had he had the faintest flicker of natural lasciviousness towards them. In fact, the only woman except his mother and Mistress Modry who had ever infringed upon his life at all had been an ex-harlot in Oxford, married to an elderly water-man, whose outrageous tales of her first experience of men’s desire, related to him on a sunny bench by the Isis in her husband's garden, he did remember with a certain glow of unholy pleasure.

But that woman's voice across the Dee excited in him such a turbulent flood of sympathy that he could hardly restrain himself from urging Griffin into the river. Her voice seemed to conjure up her figure, her look, her spirit, her whole being! Something in its tone made him convinced that she had eyes like Modry's, very dark, but of a queer greenish tinge, and that her body, like Modry's, was exceptionally long and slender.

And how strangely the towers of Dinas Bran, as he saw them still, straight before him though illumined no more with the rosy glow of the setting sun, became part of that woman's cry.

For some reason, as he listened, he arrived at the conclusion that the outcries of neither of them were the expression of physical pain. If it *were* so, the man's, at any rate, were triumphing over what he suffered.

Still that everlasting whispering! Would it *never* stop, so that he could show them how a Herefordshire horse could ford a river and how a Hereford lad could rescue a girl?

In the sinking of the sun a faint grey haze, too delicate to be called a mist, had risen from the water, and had stolen imperceptibly over the whole landscape. It was only very dimly, though he knew exactly where to look, that he could any longer make out the castle's walls. But this mist had the effect of endowing that reiterated double cry with something almost supernaturally disturbing.

Perhaps that was why the Caerleon monks bothered so little about it! They were so much *on the inside* of the supernatural that the little accidents of daily life, the harshness of a superior, a hole in somebody's sandal, the substitution of wine for beer, a chilly draught in the choir-stalls, a leak in the gutter-pipe, caused them more actual worry than any glimpse into the dark vistas, full of howling devils, of death and pain.

But for Rhisiart and for Master Brut, and in a measure even for the Bard of Ffinnant, these reiterated cries became something that swallowed up everything else.

Rhisiart could see that the Lollard at any rate was deeply disturbed and as anxious as he was himself to ford the river and solve the mystery.

The man had the clearest complexion he had ever seen and the most open countenance. His smooth unwrinkled face, his full red lips, his closely-cropped fair hair struck our friend — for all his prejudice against the tediousness of the fellow's talk — as making a most agreeable impression, along with the modesty of his well-fitting country-gentleman's attire. He felt indeed, as they now exchanged glances in which their mutual impatience was revealed, that he had done injustice to the power of character behind the man's stolid calm and theological prolixity. He went so far as to decide that if they *were* destined to share any perilous or reckless adventure he couldn't wish for a more trustworthy companion.

Thus much young Rhisiart took in; and it had needed those terrifying cries from across the river to rouse even this insight, as he sucked in his upper-lip and turned his narrow Norman face towards the object of this unusual perspicuity.

But he was finding those double cries more and more disturbing. They made a landscape within the landscape, tragic, fatal, full of ominous premonitions.

In the man's voice was all the desperation of the terrible power of the soul to resist, to defy, to repeat its challenge, against the force of overwhelming odds.

But the feminine voice affected him even more. Yes, all the mystery, all the lawless pity of a woman's soul, all the deadly sweetness of a woman's body were being thrown out upon that summer twilight!

The liquid and tender greenness of the evening seemed to be gathered into it. The cry was richer, fuller, closer to Nature, than the one with which it alternated, and to which it echoed.

To Rhisiart it was more than a sound among other sounds, more than a normal cry for help above a normal tumult. It had in it the curves of a woman's neck, the softness of a woman's breast, and as it reached him out of the green sap of the long darkening of the summer day it had a mystery of appeal that was like the sob of the night-dews upon a thousand hills. Master Brut was in his saddle now and his sturdy grey mare was addressing the piebald in a low whinny, as much as to say "What's the matter with these young men of ours?", while to the jangle of his heavy accoutrements the Abbot's old war horse, lifting his head and sniffing at the air, might have been taken as retorting "Wait a second longer, my innocent friends, and you shall see what life is!"

But the whispering was over now at last. "Get the brothers across!" cried John ap Hywel, while his eyes began to burn like bivouac flames through the thick smoke. "Fall into procession when you're all across and follow us!

"Chant the *Illumina, Domine Deus, tenebras nostres*! while you're looking for us; but don't leave the river until every one of you is safe over. Now, Master Rhisiart, Master Brut, as fast as you like!"

II. RHISIART DRAWS HIS SWORD

THE SACRED DEE, or Deva, or Dyfrdwy, whose name in Welsh signifies "divine water" or "the water of the divinity", is not always as easy to ford as its firm, un-muddy, pebbly channel would lead a stranger to suppose.

Such a stranger were well-advised to obtain local advice ere he makes the crossing; since many quite historic fords are, within a limited distance, inconstant and variable.

On the present occasion the laconic Philip Sparrow was so busy getting his late antagonists across the river that he lacked the opportunity to show the horsemen the best place for them to enter the stream.

Thus the old black charger and the piebald were soon up to their bellies in the swift current, while the pony and his rider seemed in actual peril. The Scab's small animal was quite as high-spirited as the big horses, but the Bard himself was considerably agitated and incommoded; especially as the little creature displayed a lively desire to resort to swimming before the occasion required it.

The gurgling of the water now quite drowned those appalling cries; or it may have been, Rhisiart said to himself, that death had ended it and the victims were out of reach of all human help. He was in less of a fury of impatience, therefore, when the Abbot reined in his big horse almost in mid-stream to watch the success of Master Brut's benevolent manoeuvres to assist the disturbed prophet of Derfel. This process meant the return to shore of both Lollard and Bard, for Philip Sparrow was now calling to them from his crowded boat and directing them to a shallower spot.

But the old war-horse and the elderly piebald seemed so much to enjoy the swirl of the water that the Abbot had time to explain to Rhisiart what the ferry-man had revealed.

Rhisiart listened spellbound to this account; and as ap Hywel got excited in what he was telling him the youth noticed two things: first that he referred to Glendower with a curious reserve, and secondly that he quoted the ferry-man's speech with the rough gusto of a native.

The ferry-man had evidently small respect for his employer, the landlord of the Tassel, whom he had described as a cringing and contemptible time-server. He had explained that two great Welsh notables, who were notorious Bolingbroke men, Hywel Sele of Nannau and David of the Squint, or David Gam, had been staying for a week at the Tassel and had filled the place with riot.

"It seems," the Abbot went on, "that they wanted to see Glyn Dŵr, and when he refused to see them they fell into a rage and swore they'd stay at the Tassel at his expense. They've been treating all-comers to drink; they've been drunk themselves; and today in honour of Saint John they've been giving prizes for archery and spear-throwing.

"But it appears that Mad Huw, the Grey Friar from Llanfaes, a man all Welshmen know, though I doubt if his fame has reached Oxford, has also come to the fair. He goes about the country declaring that King Richard's still alive. Of course, for all we can tell in this part of Britain, what he says may be true; though they say some kind of a corpse was shown in London.

"But he tells me a girl from Dinas Bran, a mere child, but comely and kindly, follows the fellow everywhere. He says she's still a maid for all her following a man by night and by day, through wet and fine, in sickness and in health.

“He tells me the Friar puts thorns of the rose between them when they sleep, or else thistles and nettles; and at times he says he makes her tie him wi’ ropes afore they lie down.

“But these aren’t tales for a young man’s ear,” and the Abbot gave a grim smile, “save that this black water keeps our erring flesh cool! Oh you’re there, Master Brut? You’re there, Master Bard? On with us then! We’ll let the Brothers pray for us. ’Tis Mad Huw they’ve got hold of; Christ and Saint John be his help!” And crossing himself seven times the Abbot of Caerleon slipped his right hand under his cloak and rapidly numbered as many beads.

Rhisiart was amazed at the change in the great man’s manner and tone. His speech had lapsed into something similar to the peasant’s he was quoting, and in place of a mystical ascetic he saw at his side an excited warrior, his eyes shining with the glow and glory of battle.

The young scholar remembered to the end of his days every impression both physical and mental of that eventful moment. The dark swirl of the sacred river, its noisy foaming over its rocks, the bloodstreaked rack of jagged clouds that now completely hid the real Dinas Bran only to lift in front of him once more, as he had seen them since his boyhood, the enchanted battlements, towering to heaven, of the citadel of his secret thoughts; these things became like a spiritual body, larger, freer, more porous than his fleshly one.

He hadn’t troubled to kick loose his stirrups, as the other three riders had done, and he was wet to the knees; but as they struggled up the bank he fancied he heard that woman’s cry again and all manner of confused imaginings surged through him.

He couldn’t resist, in his boyish way, as he kept Griffin’s head close to the tall flanks of the Abbot’s steed, telling himself one fantastic story after another.

He told himself that it was none other than Princess Myfanwy of Dinas Bran to whose rescue he was riding. He told himself that the moment was actually at hand when he would strike his first blow to redeem from purgatory the arch-traitor of his race.

They were riding into the fair-crowd now, straight between the booths. There were wooden trestles outside the rough tents, piled up with every sort of merchants' wares. There were men's accoutrements, women's ornaments and raiment; there were tanned skins, there was dressed leather; there were every kind of homespun woollens and every variety of horse-trappings and stable-gear.

The Abbot drew rein only once; and that was to enquire of an old Salopian herdsman from over the border whether it was the Lord of Nannau's men who were ill-using the Grey Friar and his virgin.

"They be joined up wi' 'em, your reverence," the man replied. "But 'tis my Lord's steward from Chirk, Simon the Hog we call 'un, tied the man up to burn 'un, and a' said he'd burn the wench too if her didn't stop hollering. She be quiet now, I reckon; so maybe them's given her a finisher. Two companies of the Earl's bowmen be up there. 'Tis them have tied Mad Huw to cart-tail; and them's sent to Valle Crucis for a priest to shrive 'un. Simon swore a' wouldn't turn the Devil himself into Hell without a bald-pate to bless the deed. But what I says, saving your reverence, is that the holy man must look sharp if he's to do his good work. Simon be buying so much for the Earl and be drinking so much for 'isself that them who've got aught to sell don't know he from God Almighty; and seeing he bides at Chirk and holds it for the Earl, I reckon them at Valley Crucis 'ud wink at his wickedness were his lads to start burning the man afore priest do come. They say the Maid's mother, from Castell Dinas Bran, be at market, along with Denis Burnell the Constable, who do hold she for's ‘ooman, and they do say—”

But ap Hywel had heard enough already — and so indeed had young Rhisiart who got no joy from learning that the keeper of Dinas Bran had the English name of Burnell. Simon the Hog, Denis Burnell the Constable, Simon the Constable, Denis Burnell the Hog, he repeated under his breath and, “O great Spirits of the Dead, help me, help me!”

“Blessed Jesus!” he heard the Lollard mutter.

“John Baptist!” he heard the Abbot exclaim.

“Saint Derfel!” cried the Scab; and they all rode forward.

They passed close to one market-counter at which in the warm twilight a large company of men were drinking, and Rhisiart tried to imagine that he could single out among them the unpleasant face of Simon the Hog.

But blessed be God's Mother! There was the Grey Friar himself and still alive! They'd fastened him to the cross-plank of a small dung-cart, his arms tied right behind him, and both the dung cart and the defiant man were exposed to the jeers of a crowd of bowmen on the summit of one of those mysterious mounds that in Wales are to be found everywhere.

The warlike churchman took in the situation with one shrewd glance. There was a motley crowd assembled in front of the bowmen, and many members of it were clearly in a threatening mood.

One of these went straight up to the Abbot and began telling him something that Rhisiart couldn't catch; but he did catch the name “Meredith ab Owen,” and he noticed that both the man and the rider turned their heads towards the wooded slope above the valley.

Ap Hywel was the first to arrive on the scene; Rhisiart followed; while the Lollard and the Bard brought up the rear. Our friend could feel that the approach of four horsemen, when everyone else, including the archers, was on foot, produced a considerable stir among the crowd.

But for himself he had no eyes for anyone except his imaginary Princess from Dinas Bran. She was dressed more like a boy than a girl; but her doublet had been torn at the throat and her girl's neck showed bare. She was running wildly round the half-circle of archers, imploring first one and then another in every tone of vibrant feminine appeal to let her ascend the mound and join the Friar. In several cases she actually pulled some of the younger and more susceptible, or it may be less susceptible, of these fair-haired lads — for many of them came from the Fitz-Alan estates in the south — a few paces up the slippery mound, till the mockery of the others or a rough command from the oldest of the troop made them draw back.

But it was evident that the whole company was deriving an unholy pleasure from the mingling of beauty and desperation in this girlish figure; and it struck even Rhisiart's inexperienced mind that while only the most depraved among them would have hurt her if alone, there was no denying the fact that a dark salt tide of cruelty was stirring in them as a crowd.

Both the girl and the Friar showed signs of lively excitement upon the arrival of the four horsemen, but it was clear to our friend that the Abbot had decided to postpone his interference for a time. "He must have heard something," thought the boy; and he turned Griffin's head a little so as to take a closer look at both the Friar and his Maid. "She's younger than me," he said to himself.

As for Mad Huw, there was something about him that reminded Rhisiart of his friend, the Lollard. The Friar's face was much thinner than Master Brut's and it wasn't nearly so fair; but it had the same kind of spiritual calm; nor, as far as a stranger could detect, did it betray the remotest sign of mental derangement.

It was true that when the man uttered his prophetic declaration about the late King his features lost this serenity. At these times his eyes grew so praeternaturally large that they became as beautiful as a woman's. They became in fact, the lad said to himself, so dangerously hypnotic, that it was no wonder the girl followed him everywhere.

But the Friar's Maid — for Rhisiart had no other name for her save his own secret Dinas Bran one — no sooner caught sight of the four horsemen, if the Scab on his pony be called a horseman, than she burst through the ring of archers, and throwing her bare arms round the pummel of the Abbot's saddle, while her braided hair swayed and swung against the war-horse's belly, begged and implored him to release her idol.

"They've got the faggots to burn him!" she cried in that clear childish voice that had already pierced Rhisiart's heart. "They've got the faggots to burn him! And they're only waiting for a priest! Save him, Father! Save him, sweet Father!"

Some of the soldiers burst into brutal laughter. Others muttered obscene jests. The crowd of common people grew thicker every moment as more and more marketers, pouring up the slope from the sale booths of the fair, pressed forward towards the great black horse and its priestly rider.

The four newcomers were in danger of being separated from one another by the impact of the people, and Rhisiart had all he could do to keep Griffin steady and hold him with his head against the big charger's flank.

Ap Hywel was now bending down over his horse's head and asking the distracted girl a number of grave questions, the bulk of which, because of the tumult surging round them, Rhisiart couldn't catch.

But as he let his eyes linger on her figure he fancied he felt — gradually, slowly, irrevocably — the dew of destiny soaking that moment. She was still clinging to the Abbot's knees and the crowd about her was already uttering dangerous cries, some of which were hostile to the man in the dung-cart and some to the bowmen; but when the Grey Friar himself lifted up his voice Rhisiart was astonished at his own response.

Even from his present distance he could see the light in the man’s abnormally large eyes, and as he looked to see how Master Brut was affected he wasn’t surprised to see a twitching in those plump cheeks and a contraction of those calm lips, indicating in no uncertain manner that the self-possessed heretic was equally stirred.

The Grey Friar in his emotion used the late King’s name as if it had been hardly less potent and precious than the name of Christ. From that dung-cart on the mound there kept rising into the air, and floating away over the weapons of the Chirk men and over the agitated fair-folk, the same reiterated cry; and the fact that the ropes that bound him were cruelly tight and that they’d even fastened some kind of cord round his neck gave to each repetition of the words a vibrant intensity, as though they were projected by some supernatural force in the man through a body that was suffering martyrdom.

So no doubt he would have cried had they been actually burning him, and the fact that his bonds were causing him such pain gave to his reiterated appeals a quivering force that was evidently piercing the soul of that poor Maid. “Our dread and puissant Prince, Richard, is alive! Richard, the friend of the poor, is alive! Richard, the son of the Black Prince, is alive! Richard, God’s wounded rose; Richard, Cambria’s bleeding heart; Richard, the sweet passion-flower of love; Richard, the oblation and sacrifice of love — Richard is alive!”

“How miserable, how base, how cynical,” thought Rhisiart, “these modern days are! Damn this usurping Bolingbroke with his mock piety and his heresy-hunts! This Friar’s a saint; and saints see more than common men. Perhaps — perhaps—" And with his upper-lip drawn into his mouth till his hooked nose became the image of a falcon's beak, Rhisiart turned from the dung-cart to the girl.

In her desperate and pitiful pleading her torn boy's doublet had slipped down, displaying her shift beneath it and laying bare part of her shoulder.

Simultaneously with this, some abrupt decision among themselves — or it may have been an order from the one who seemed older than the rest — caused the bulk of the Chirk archers to swing round and face the Abbot, while the rest moved a few paces up the mound towards their prisoner. They had other weapons than their long-bows, but it was by their bows that they made themselves feared, and Rhisiart once more cursed the levelling science of this modern weapon.

"Why doesn't the Abbot tell them who he is?" he thought. And then he thought, "But I suppose in these degenerate days the Church has no power except to burn heretics. They'd put an arrow through him, I expect, if he tried to talk to the Friar as he's talking to that girl. It's these curst long-bows that have spoilt everything. In grand-father's time, on Griffin's back, and with my sword, I'd have soon cut the Friar's cords and cried "Long live King Richard!" and made these English serfs kiss a Welsh Abbot's shoe; but these new-fangled long-bows bring everything down to a common — what is ap Hywel going to do? Why doesn't he stop talking to that girl and tell the soldiers who he is?"

But watching the Abbot closely — a proceeding which gave him an excuse for watching the girl — he decided that the man must be in possession of some piece of knowledge that made the situation less critical than it seemed.

But it certainly seemed as ominous as it could well be; and there was proceeding now from the dung-cart a cry that resembled the croak of a half strangled bird. “He’s coming to us again! Richard, the friend of the poor; Richard, the enemy of the rich; Richard, the sweet rose of Britain!”

But from the half choked Friar it was always back to the girl that Rhisiart’s agitated feelings rushed. That bare shoulder had begun seriously to trouble his senses. His whole soul was in a turmoil. He couldn’t himself understand the conflicting feelings that were whirling up from the obscure depths of his being and struggling with one another in his nerves and brain.

He hadn’t failed to notice that what most upset the Friar’s Maid — and small wonder! — was the horrible regularity with which an evil-looking camp-follower of the Chirk men kept heaping up faggots and brushwood in a great pile round the stump of a dead thorn on the southern side of the mound.

And along with this it hadn’t escaped him that the archers themselves, whose leader in the absence of the Steward seemed to be merely the oldest among them, were always slipping aside to take a pull from a great barrel of liquor. “It’s stronger than beer,” he said to himself. “It must be *metheglin.”*

Unbelievably brutal were the jests each archer shared with the villainous bonfire builder every time they had a pull at that barrel; and it was doubtless this furtive tippling that accounted for the increasing interest they took in the Friar’s girl; and as the lad watched them he decided that it was the expression of some of the older ones, who weren’t openly taunting her as she clung to the black horse, that was the most ominous thing.

Some of these silent ones had an air as if it would be the greatest pleasure to shoot arrows at that bare shoulder. They were well-disciplined men; they were good natured men; but, even so, with that barrel at their disposal it was disconcerting to see the way they flicked at their taut bow-strings.

Some would point the tip of a long, polished arrow straight at our friend himself; others at the Lollard, but most of them seemed to take their chief delight in aiming at the girl, as if she had been a tantalizing hare or deer.

"The Abbot must have something on his mind," thought Rhisiart, "that he's keeping dark; or surely he'd ride straight up the mound. I pray to God he won't draw that breviary from his wallet."

Our friend could see the unwarlike Bard of Ffinnant making obvious attempts to back his pony a little, a manoeuvre that was entirely unsuccessful, for a mob of bare-legged spearmen from the hills kept pressing him forward.

From several snatches of speech that reached him from these people Rhisiart got the impression that there were some in the crowd who knew nothing of the immediate locality and who thought that the Grey Friar was none other than the late King himself, and that the four horsemen had come from London to arrest him.

He prayed that this incalculable Abbot realized the ticklishness of the situation and that any rash move might bring the discharge of those terrible new-fangled bows. Oh how he hated the look of them!

And how he loathed the power their technical efficiency had of making a man's heroism of small value! He'd been studying the *Itinerary* of Giraldus de Barri in his college library, and recalled what the Archdeacon had said of the yew-tree bows of that epoch. What would the good man have thought could he have seen these soldiers of Fitz-Alan with their murderous engines of destruction?

Such were the lad's reasonable thoughts; but all the while below these thoughts there was going on a strange ferment in the depths of his nature. Feelings totally unknown to him, sensations that he would have denied were possible to him, rose up and strove for mastery. The sight of that girl with her long braid of reddish hair and her bare shoulder roused more than a simple protective instinct in him. He did long to protect her; and yet in this surge of unwonted feeling he felt a dark, hot, secret sympathy with the arrows that were aimed at her. “I mustn’t look at her,” his heart cried; and yet he kept looking at her, and the sight of her, always with those arrows, made him feel as if he could shoot her and protect her, protect her and shoot her, at the same moment, and get wild pleasure from doing both these things.

And he knew too in his heart — for Rhisiart was no self-deceiver — that it was all due to the way her boy’s doublet had slipped.

“I mustn’t look at her!” one voice in him protested; but, even while it was uttering the words, not only was he looking at her, but he was being swept away on a dark tide that save for certain puzzling moments in his early youth he had never known before.

Below the disturbing whiteness of that soft flesh throbbed a living soul that he longed to guard and protect; but something else in the youthful beauty her torn doublet exposed had a fearful power in it that turned this pity into its extreme opposite and the object of it into a dedicated victim of arrows and spears.

The actual girl over there, pleading so passionately the cause of her idol, the breathing, living girl who had a life of her own as vivid as his life, excited melting pity in him; but this mysterious other one, the maddening prey of his dark urge, was something abstract and impersonal.

What did he want? That was the question. He wanted to protect the owner of that bare shoulder; and yet he wanted to see that shoulder pierced. He wanted to protect against all the world that red braid of twisted hair; and yet he wanted to see it cut off by a sword!

He had once heard the late unhappy King cry aloud at a lost tournament in Worcester a wild and strange oath, the strangest he had caught on any lips: “By the nails of the Cross!”, and something about the feelings this girl roused in him brought back that cry.

But how pearl-white, how smooth, how polished that shoulder was, and how daintily twisted was the red wisp that fell across it! To save his soul from instant damnation, he couldn’t stop himself from imagining one of those terrible modern arrows quivering in that tantalizing flesh.

There would be no blood. No, not one single drop. Between the fluttering wild-goose feathers and the flesh in which their burning head was buried there would be only the long yew-shaft.

“Richard is alive, the lovely rose of Britain! Richard, our sweet sacrifice, is alive!”

But the girl suddenly drew away from the side of the horse, and covering her shoulder stood erect with her head high as if to face a new danger. Rhisiart saw at once what brought this about. It was the appearance on the scene of a personage he felt at once to be none other than Simon the Hog. The fellow was evidently further gone in drink than any of his men; and seeing this quickly enough the archers instinctively unstrung their bows and relaxed their alertness.

Still absorbed in the girl, who was now standing alone, Rhisiart noticed that it wasn’t only the appearance of the Hog of Chirk that had reduced her to this intense quiescence. He could see that she had caught sight of some other figure in the crowd. Yes, she was actually lifting her arm now, in a childish gesture of recognition, to someone on the outskirts of the tumult.

Following her gaze the lad became aware of a richly dressed woman’s form forcing a way through the press, and from something in her appearance, all alert as he was to anything that affected his “Princess

Myfanwy", he jumped at once to the conclusion that the two were mother and daughter. He could even see the girl making an attempt to meet the woman, but this she evidently found to be quite impossible, but being both of them tall, he could catch the way they greeted each other, and their exchange of looks confirmed, to his impetuous judgment, his idea of their relationship.

The Hog of Chirk advanced straight towards the black horse; but the Abbot's complete indifference to his authority, for the great churchman surveyed him as if he were unworthy of notice, seemed to sober him a little. He muttered something about being interrupted in his duty to the King; but it was clear to our friend that the look of indignant contempt that the girl fixed upon him was almost as disconcerting as the Abbot's haughty stare. He went on with sulky protests, but his eyes began wandering uneasily over the rapidly-increasing crowd, and all at once Rhisiart saw his expression change to a look that was totally beyond the boy's power of interpretation.

It was a look in which pain, fear, rapture and humiliation seemed all mingled together.

Rhisiart followed the man's glance. Ah! So that was it! It was at the woman our friend had decided was the girl's mother that the wretch was now gazing; and as he gazed all his tipsiness seemed to leave him and his first expression was followed by one of tragic and despairing obstinacy.

Still taking no more notice of the now strangely-transformed Steward than if he'd been a nonentity in the crowd, the Abbot uttered some low-voiced command to his monks who at once began chanting, just as naturally as if they were in their own choir-stalls, the well-known psalm, *In exitu Israel de Egyptu.* They were monks from the banks of the Usk, and they had no authority on the banks of the Dee, but our friend was amazed at the calmness they showed at this agitating moment, keeping the rhythm of their chant as if it were losing itself amid familiar aisles and arches, instead of in the angry murmur of a menacing crowd.

When the psalm died away Rhisiart wedged Griffin still closer between the black horse and the Hog of Chirk. “Hold your peace,” he whispered bending down towards Simon. “It’s the Abbot of Caerleon!”

But the fellow didn’t seem to understand his words. He turned on him a face so distorted with conflicting emotions that it resembled the face of one of the damned in Dante’s Hell; and shrugging his shoulders began pushing his way through the crowd towards two new persons who were approaching the scene.

Rhisiart’s heretical fellow-traveller had by this time got his mare quite close to Griffin, and the two animals were happily flirting.

“Do you know who those two are?” enquired our friend; and he wasn’t greatly surprised to learn that they were the Lord of Nannau, a cousin of Owen Glyn Dŵr, and his bosom-crony, David Gam, the notorious swordsman from South Wales, each of them ferocious Anglophiles and devoted champions of the House of Lancaster.

Both the rider on Griffin and the rider on the mare watched with interest the complaint that Simon was evidently making to these newcomers about the attitude of the mounted intruders.

As the group approached, the crowd surging away from them with respectful hostility, Rhisiart could see the Hog of Chirk directing their attention to both the Friar, whose voice was still audible though very weak, and also to the sinister scarecrow who with inhuman obstinacy continued his task of piling up brushwood round the stump of the dead thorn.

During the temporary relaxation among the archers which had followed the emotional trouble, whatever it was, that had for a moment paralysed Master Simon, our friend observed with relief that his “Princess Myfanwy” had succeeded in ascending the mound, and was now engaged in ministering as best she could to the victim in the dung-cart.

The Lord of Nannau, a tall, powerful figure with a smooth, sleek, handsome face that made Rhisiart think of a vicious bully he had known in his Hereford school, speedily detached himself from his companion and, approaching the Abbot, began protesting against this delay in "the King's justice" which he and his monks were causing.

The man on the black horse listened to what he said, and watched grimly the hurried recovery of their discipline by the Chirk archers; though none of them seemed to have the heart to separate the Maid, now once she had reached him, from the condemned man.

But what an extraordinary figure the notorious David Gam was! Rhisiart had heard of his prowess as a soldier of fortune attached to the House of Lancaster, but it was a surprise to find him a bosom-friend of this Lord of Nannau, who was at least a distinguished looking person.

Anything less distinguished, anything less of a gentleman, than the famous swashbuckler from South Wales, could hardly be imagined!

Gam was of abnormally short stature but with arms so muscular and so long as to resemble those of a gorilla. He had the peculiarity of always keeping these simian appendages bare, though they were covered, as indeed was his head and his frequently exposed chest, with red hairs of an animal-like thickness.

It was with one of these arms that he was now barring the way, as the richly-dressed stranger, of whose relationship to his "Princess" our friend was more assured than ever, tried to approach the Hog of Chirk.

Aye! But how beautiful her face was — and young, too, perhaps too young to be the Maid's mother. "But I think she is her mother all the same," said Rhisiart to himself.

The lad too could even catch the glint of the cajoling smile with which she protested against the monstrous arms that barred her way. But she made no attempt to circumvent them. All she did was to flash a look at the Steward of Chirk, so full of what seemed to our young friend the most devouring emotion he had ever seen, that he wasn't surprised at the man's tragic discomfiture.

Beneath that Medusa stare the fellow seemed as paralysed as a rat before the eyes of a snake. He made an attempt to speak, and Rhisiart thought he would have spoken if a sudden shout from the crowd and a stir among the archers hadn't turned the attention of everyone to the mound.

And there, ascending the mound and moving straight to the dung-cart, was a cowled figure that our friend for a moment took to be one of the Caerleon monks, till a repeated cry of "Valle Crucis! Valle Crucis!" undeceived him.

The archers showed a respect for this plain monk from their own religious house that they had refused to the mitred Abbot from South Wales, and from our friend's "Princess", as she greeted the newcomer, there came ringing down the slope an exultant cry. "It's Father Rheinalt, Mother! It's Father Rheinalt." This curious name — for from the vantage-height of Griffin's back it could be seen that the cowled figure was bending over the man in the dung-cart, either shriving his soul, or assuring him of his safety — had an instantaneous effect upon both the girl's mother and the Hog of Chirk. They exchanged one look, that to our agitated youth was as startling and inscrutable as a blow in the dark, and immediately turned hurriedly away, the latter to have another word with the red-haired Gam, the former to speak to the Lord of Nannau, who had just retreated with a vicious leer on his smooth face from the imperturbable Abbot.

Rhisiart couldn’t hear what this second pair were saying, but he could hear Simon make a boon-companion appeal to the little red monster, reminding him with a forced attempt at jocularity of some savage escapade they’d had together in Ireland.

Of this brutal tale our friend could only gather that it had to do with some revolting treatment of certain Irish girls; but the little red man refused to be cajoled.

“Peace, good Simon,” Rhisiart could hear him say. “Enough, worthy Simon! If you’re serving the Lord of Chirk.

“I’m serving the Lord of Nannau, the King’s best friend in these parts. Your plain Davy’s on the road, I tell ‘ee, to be Sir David Gam at your service, renowned for generations. So hush, gentle Simon; be at peace, honest Simon; and let’s see how you do your duty to that Richard-loving traitor. Burn the man, good Simon, and without any more dillydally. Is that shaven poll up there a-shriving of him? ’Tis for that, I tell’ ee, and not to gabble about Irish maidens, that I came here. I came here for a burnin’. Burnin’s be rarer to old Davy than the prettiest maidenheads. Oh, a mighty man for burnin’s is King Hal, a grand man for burnin’s. So get on with the job, sweet Simon; or lend me one of your big bows, and I’ll give him ‘Richard’s-come-back’!”

Whether encouraged by these words or rendered desperate by the Medusa-looks of the woman, Master Simon now moved in among his archers and directed them to tighten their ranks.

Rhisiart exchanged a glance with the Lollard and both of them drew their horses as near as they could to the Abbot’s charger, so as to form a solid phalanx of mounted men.

As they did this, the lad glanced at the imperturbable expression with which the Abbot grimly and quietly waited upon the course of events. “I expect he’s heard something,” he repeated to himself; but he couldn’t help thinking how helter-skelter and casual a real battle must be, if it took so long for a single event, like the burning or the release of this Friar, to come to a decisive climax.

“Are all the events in the great world like this,” the boy thought, “so different from what the historians say?”

But at this moment, and Rhisiart knew very well that it wasn’t this the Abbot was expecting, the Scab’s mountaineers, waving their spears like savages, began pushing their way towards the spot where the Lord of Nannau and David Gam, for the woman had withdrawn into the crowd, were standing alone.

The Scab and his pony were thrust forward, surrounded, and then left behind by these excited men. “Saint Derfel! Saint Derfel!” they cried as they brandished their spears; and even in that tense moment Rhisiart was amused by the mixture of alarm for his own skin and pride in the excitement he’d stirred up that was displayed by the one-eyed Bard, though the intrepid pony showed no sign of any emotion save the joy of battle.

The Abbot called out to his monks to draw back; and he himself did the same, for the old war-horse was growing unruly. Rhisiart and the Lollard followed with their steeds; and as the three horsemen backed away it became clear to our friend that if the Lord of Nannau and his precious companion didn’t also beat a speedy retreat he would have the satisfaction of seeing them spitted like a couple of wild boars who have no avenue of escape.

It must be confessed that for one single second our young friend — for, after all, this would have been his first skirmish with real bloodshed — hoped heartily that the two bullies would escape those gleaming points; but whether this automatic prayer, which he might have uttered had they actually been wild-beasts, had or had not anything to do with it, out of that closing circle they did manage to skip; and that was the last seen of either of them that night.

The Medusa-like woman in the rich garments had also vanished; while the Valle Crucis monk, whose name, as the girl had shouted it down the slope, had had such a startling effect, must have succeeded in loosening the condemned man's bonds, for that monotonous and intolerable reiteration about King Richard, though much weaker than formerly, was no longer in the voice of a man who was being choked.

The now quite sober Hog of Chirk had got his archers into good order by this time, all along the slope of the mound; while the Scab's spearmen, gathered now in front of the crowd, were suffering something of a reaction in the presence of those drawn bow-strings.

And there fell upon the scene one of those inexplicable silences that occur sometimes at a crisis. The shouts died down. No one stirred or made any movement except to gaze anxiously at the wooded hills around them. Had Rhisiart's light-hearted mother, now taking her pleasure in the gaieties of Hereford town, caught sight at that moment of the frowning intensity of her son's narrow face, with its abnormally high forehead and big nose, she would most certainly have teased him unmercifully and called him, as was her wont, her "baby Chancellor".

But just as it was an upsetting discovery to him that he could fall in love with a girl simply from imagining her being pierced through the shoulder by a new-fangled arrow, so it was a sinister enlargement to his knowledge of life to see how a place of execution could act like a magnet upon human nerves. Modry used to tell him that there was a magnet in all Welsh souls that always pointed north, to where the mouth of Hades was; and this perpetual cry "Richard is alive!" seemed to act just in that way: drawing that whole motley assembly towards the mound, towards the dung-cart, towards the towering pile of brushwood prepared for the burning.

The Abbot showed no sign that he intended to ride his charger through the archers, or to dismount and climb the slope on foot. “Would I risk it in his place?” our lad thought. And then he thought, “We’re all waiting — on this Eve of Saint John — for a miracle to happen. There! He’s staring up at those hills like everybody else. Do they expect the King and his army back from Scotland?”

A fearful turmoil now began in young Rhisiart’s heart. He felt that if he didn’t ride forward, straight into those fifty arrow-shafts, he would be burnt too, burnt slowly to the end of his days, by a remorse worse than his ancestor’s in Dinas Bran.

Still the man in the cart kept crying, “Richard! Sweet Richard!” but his face now, which was like an angel’s, and Simon’s face, which was like a lost soul’s, were both turned towards the bare-legged spearmen at the foot of the mound.

Rhisiart heard the Lollard whisper something to the Abbot of which he could only catch the word “madness”; but the Abbot’s reply struck him as a strange one. “He won’t let the man be burnt,” he heard him mutter. “He’ll come at the last moment.”

Rhisiart’s brain began to grow dazed under his desperate interior struggle. Who would come at the last moment? Wasn’t fate beginning to lay it upon him to be the one to act at this crisis, be the result what it might? And if such was his destiny it was useless to dodge the logical conclusion; namely that if he did fling himself upon these deadly modern weapons not a soul would ever know that the treachery of Dinas Bran had been redeemed!

It was through a blood-red mist that he heard the hoarse voice of the Bard of Ffinnant invoking Saint Derfel. Modry had told him queer things about Saint Derfel; and he could see from his position on Griffin's back that a mysterious wave of feeling had begun to pass over the people like the wind at Pentecost.

Master Simon appeared to be having an angry dispute with the repulsive individual who was now engaged in pouring some imflammable oil upon the pile he had made. But what the devil was that extraordinary Abbot doing now? Was he expecting a miracle? Did he, a learned Cistercian, have faith in this mad Derfel cult? "By God, I believe the old chap's going to bestir himself. What's he calling to his monks about in Latin? Are they the ones who're going to march upon the arrows?"

"Richard, our sweet sacrifice, is alive!"

Never in his life had the young Rhisiart felt more at the mercy of uncontrollable events than he felt at that moment. His brain seemed stunned, his senses drugged, his power of action atrophied. He suddenly felt very young. He even felt like crying.

In spite of the familiar piebald back on which he sat and his big crusader's sword and his sheepskin bundle his nerves became like those of a child whose pretence had suddenly, to his intense bewilderment, come true. He did his best afterwards to forget his weakness at this particular moment; but those wildly-brandished spears and those wilder cries of "Derfel! Derfel! Saint Derfel for Edeyrnion" approaching him from one side, while those terrible modern weapons menaced him from the other, gave the poor lad a paroxysm of sheer panic.

Instead of thinking of Dinas Bran or even of his red-haired "Princess" he thought of the kindly streets of Hereford, and he thought of his mother.

And fate seemed resolved to put him to shame; for what must his fellow-traveller, this cool-blooded heretic, do at this juncture but slip down from his mare, hand her bridle to him to hold, and completely unarmed as he was, walk calmly up to the pile of faggots on the southern slope of the mound, and taking Master Simon by the arm, begin, to the man's amazement, uttering some eager, long-winded conjuration.

Rhisiart began to feel a curious darkness stealing over his senses. Was he going to faint? But summoning up all the spirit that remained to him he did manage to urge Griffin forward about three yards, dragging the mare behind him. There he stopped, for he saw the glittering point of one particular arrow directed straight to his heart and he caught the cold, resolute, measuring eye of the bowman who was extending the string.

Thankful to be still alive, he tore his gaze from that arrow's point, and half turning his head tried to catch what the Abbot was saying to his monks. It sounded like a mixture of Latin and Welsh, but neither his lessons with Modry at Hereford nor with his teachers at Oxford had given him a clue to the words he heard.

In any case the Abbot was taking no notice of him; and there he was with Master Brut's mare on his hands, the only remaining person in the open space between the arrow-heads and the spear-heads!

To relieve their feelings the bare-legged followers of Derfel were now tossing their weapons in the air and catching them as they came down. From both sides there arose, and in no very gentle terms, extremely blunt advice to the boy on the piebald horse to get out of the way.

It had been however, young Rhisiart's custom, during the solitude of his long ride through the woodland paths, to pretend to himself that he was rescuing Dinas Bran, and though the only eyes that saw his exploits were those of rabbits and sparrow-hawks it had been his delight to draw his crusader's sword out of its scabbard. So accustomed to these heroic pastimes had old Griffin become that the moment his bridle was jerked he would lift his head, advance far enough to satisfy his rider's impulse, and then, realizing that it was all pretence, begin quietly cropping the grass, well-assured of at least ten minutes of peace.

And now, not in the least affected by either spears or bows, being accustomed as a sheriff's state-beast to every sort of warlike pageant, he displayed only a reproachful astonishment at the antics of the Lollard's mare, who was rapidly getting out of hand.

"Richard, our sacrifice!" The Friar's voice was growing very faint, and the yells of the Scab's mountaineers almost drowned it, but through all the turmoil of thoughts and images that made the boy feel as if he were being drowned in a black tide, the thought kept coming to him: "I wonder if, when it's over, they'll take as many arrows out of Griffin as out of me."

And then he thought — but it was rather a flash of electric vision running like a tongue of fire through his body, his nerves, his brain, his heart, than any definite thought— "If I just stay where I am it'll be a quick death; and I'll have died for Myfanwy if not for Dinas Bran. But a gentleman always rides forward!" So strong was his conviction that his end had come that he already felt the arrows piercing his flesh; and though the feeling it gave him had nothing of that dark trembling he had felt when he thought of the arrow in the girl's shoulder, it did bring with it a wild and desperate exultation that seemed to hover in circles above his terror as a hawk might hover over a heron.

But the thought "Will it hurt?" and the thought "I mustn't cry out", wrote themselves in letters of fire upon the wings of this exultation.

And then there fell on him "like a clap of thunder and a fall of mist" a curious cessation of all movement of time. Time stopped; and something else, another dimension altogether, took its place; and in that deep time-vacuum, with an absolute naturalness helped doubtless by the calm assumption of his horse that he was doing what he always did — he drew his crusader’s sword out of its sheath and lifting it high into the air rode forward.

III. MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

IT MUST HAVE been a spectacle evocative of many various impressions, the sight of this tall, dark lad on the piebald horse brandishing his old-fashioned weapon in the face of the best archers in England.

“Why, each one of those fellows,” the more practical onlookers must have thought, “holds that boy’s life on his bow-string!”

To some it must have seemed the very top of idiotic folly, to others the limit of theatrical bravado, to others just the old pitiful tale of youth’s throwing its life away on the chess-board of human wickedness.

To a few it may even have seemed an action prompted by cunning craftiness, timed to a nicety, and calculated to win a particular kind of notoriety at the minimum risk.

There must have been some among the archers, on the other hand, to whose south-of-England humour the whole episode was simply comic. This humorous attitude to it was certainly encouraged by the bad behaviour of the Lollard’s mare who not only plunged and dragged, but did her best in every possible way to make Griffin and his master ridiculous.

It was indeed the necessity of using both hands to restrain this roguish animal that brought the lad to his senses; but he had no sooner recovered his normal wits and had even begun, in a natural human reaction, to congratulate himself that he was still alive, than he realized that the whole situation had completely changed.

Intoning the chant *In toto corde meo,* and led by their Abbot on his great steed, the monks of Caerleon were moving in procession between the opposing ranks. But it wasn’t because of the bravery of the monks that a great cry was now going up from all the people. As it rose, and rolled away over the hills, it was echoed by what sounded to Rhisiart's ears like thousands of deep voices, all crying the same name, and it was as if the river itself had caught it up, and as if the long-sighing summer night wind were carrying it, and as if the high invisible battlements of Dinas Bran were sending it back!

"Owen! Owen! Owen!" it repeated and then, while the lad gazed in astonishment at the figure approaching him, "Meredith ab Owen! Meredith ab Owen!" was the acclamation he heard around him.

What Rhisiart saw now was a slender young man, plainly dressed save for some kind of hawk's feather in his cap and totally unarmed, coming straight towards him down the slope of the mound while the Chirk men lowered their weapons to let him pass. His hands were bare, his throat and neck were bare, and he walked as easily and leisurely as if he were in the circuit of his own sylvan halls. Round his neck, suspended by a silver cord, hung a richly-decorated hunting-horn, with which every now and again his fingers would toy, a trick that struck the manly taste of our Hereford friend as bordering upon the effeminate.

But Rhisiart forgot all tricks of manner when Meredith ab Owen came up to him and spoke to him; forgot everything but his face and its expression which made him feel as if he were confronted by his own favourite Knight of the Round Table, the enigmatic Gwalchmai!

But Meredith ab Owen was a sad not a gay Gawain. In form he was a dark, slim youth, not so tall as Rhisiart himself though some five or six years older; but what struck our traveller most about his face was the quality of its wistful disillusionment. He had never seen such a depth of gentle life-weariness as looked out at him from this young man's dark eyes.

There was a softness, like that of a glossy dusky brown of certain time-dimmed royal velvets, about his hollow cheeks, while his features, in that gathering dusk, were all soft and nebulous, as if their human flesh were only partially solidified after being called up from the vasty deep by some enchanter.

It very soon became apparent why the Chirk men had lowered their arms. And they were doing more than that now. They were piling them into a great heap beside the unused bonfire, while Master Simon himself, with his hands tied behind his back, was directing this symbolic proceeding.

The whole mound was surrounded by Glendourdy's men. They had descended like an elfin host out of that Midsummer Eve greenness. Especially had they appeared from that particular direction beyond the mound where Master Simon, in his private griefs, had forgotten to place a guard.

Rhisiart instinctively doffed his scholar's cap to this young man as he had not done to anyone but the Abbot all that long day; and feeling ashamed to address him from Griffin's back, he swung his leg over his saddle, extricating it with some difficulty from his big bundle and bigger sword, and slid to the ground.

Here, holding both the horses, he made with some awkwardness his best Hereford obeisance, looking as his mother had taught him to do when addressing a great personage, not at the young man's face but at his feet.

"May I ask," the new-comer earnestly began, while beyond them against the darkening sky the monks of Caerleon chanted their in convertendo *When the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion,* "may I ask whether it was on behalf of Henry Bolingbroke, or on behalf of King Richard, that you drew your sword and kept the peace?" And then in a much lower and more youthful tone he added quickly, "What a perfectly lovely horse! I've never seen anything like him. Do you come from London? Are you on a pilgrimage to Valle Crucis? May I have the pleasure of knowing the name of one who has faced the Earl's best bowmen? But I see you're wrought-up. My curiosity is ill-timed. But if you're not expected at Valle Crucis I know my father will want to thank you in person; and perhaps you will allow me — I'm expressing myself clumsily — but I keep thinking of how you looked just now — and how you looked" — and with a smile full of a most wistful tenderness he stroked Griffin's heavily-loaded back— "I mean, I beg you'll allow me to take you both to Glyndyfrdwy to-night?"

Rhisiart lifted his eyes and then dropped them, turning his hook-nosed profile first towards the chanting monks and then towards the jubilant crowd. He acted like some agitated young falcon upon whose perch an eaglet has suddenly alighted. Embarrassed though he was it didn't escape him how respectfully the excited crowd kept aloof, leaving a clear open space about the two of them.

But his first duty as a man of honour was to disillusion his new friend as quickly as possible. "I did nothing," he stammered, "I — I just happened to be where I was. It's all a mistake. I wasn't — what you think. It was — my horse"

"I'm sure it was your horse," said Meredith ab Owen with a smile of almost girlish sweetness. "Well! you must bring your horse for my father to thank. Will you tell me his name?"

Rhisiart murmured the word "Griffin" and then once more plunged into a long and incoherent explanation of how he'd become so panic-stricken that he'd been afraid to move, and how— "And this fine old sword came out of his sheath of his own accord?" said the other with perfect gravity. "Well, we'll have anyway to take your sword and Griffin to my father and since you're the owner of these independent beings I'm afraid you can't very well refuse—"

There was indeed something so engaging about this young man, with his dark well-fitting tunic, his bare brown knees, his cap with its hawk's feather, and his puzzling air of belonging neither to court nor camp, neither to cloister nor college, that Rhisiart gave up the attempt to explain his behaviour. "It's fate," he thought. "I've told him; so if he won't believe, it's his own fault! I'm not going on proclaiming my childishness!"

But the young man was now, in his delicate, indirect, and almost feminine fashion asking him who he was. "My father will want to know; and it'll save you the bother of explaining if I can tell him in advance."

"Rhisiart ab Owen is my real name," replied our friend eagerly. "I'm descended on the bastard side from Madoc ap Griffith of Dinas Bran. Your father's the Baron Glendourdy, isn't he? I thought that's who you were, when you came so suddenly, and I'm glad you've asked me to come, because — though only on the bastard side, of course — I am, unless I'm mistaken, a sort of connection of your honoured house."

Meredith gave him at that the most radiant smile he'd ever seen, and bending forward with his cap in his hand kissed him tenderly in the Norman manner on both cheeks.

"Why then we're cousins," he cried, "and cousins well within the ninth degree! I had a queer feeling there was something about you. What do they call you at home?"

"Rhisiart's what I usually call myself," answered Griffin's rider, doing his best to soothe both the horses, for the mare's restlessness was beginning to fret the old piebald. "I've been at Oxford; but I thought — I thought—"

"You thought you'd like to see your Welsh cousins! And so you shall. You shall see us all. I won't tell you yet which you'll like the best! But I know very well indeed. And I'll tell you afterwards if I was right. On second thoughts I think you'd better sleep here to-night — here or at Valle Crucis — and come on to Glyndyfrdwy tomorrow. My father's at Sycharth just now. Our old friend Iolo Goch's lying ill in our place there; and I can tell you when he's ill my father won't stir or think of anything else. But he's better now and we're going to move him tomorrow to Glyndyfrdwy. Father's had a special conveyance made for him out of withy-wands; and our own people will carry him. They may stop for High Mass at the Abbey; but I doubt it. The poet's not over-pious. Few of our bards are. Their religion is like the Scab's yonder, with his Derfel. By the way, I hear another cousin of ours, along with that cut-throat David the Squint, is stopping at the Tassel. Have you seen anything of him here?"

Delighted to have something easier to talk about than his own conduct, Rhisiart launched forth into a vivid description of the two traitors, a description that was spiteful enough and boyish enough to afford their young enemy no small satisfaction. But all the while he was talking his eyes were searching for the red-haired Maid, whom he finally discovered not very far away and looking anything but radiant.

The girl wasn't with her Friar. She was talking to the richly-dressed woman; and now when he saw them side by side he felt certain of their relationship. "Yes, she's younger than I am," he thought. "I don't believe she's sixteen!"

"Well," said Meredith, "I must pay my father's *devoir* to John ap Hywel now. She's lovely, isn't she?" he added quickly, causing our friend's startled blood to rush to his cheeks. "I don't wonder you were relieved when I asked you to come to us tomorrow instead of tonight. Well, good luck! See you tomorrow at Glyndyfrdwy." And he ran lightly up the slope of the mound.

Impatient to get rid of the Lollard’s horse, Rhisiart now looked about him to try to discover Walter Brut. Yes! There he was, still talking in his obstinately-tender manner to the unhappy Simon.

“Did he think I was unhappy when he talked to me? Does he talk like that to all the unhappy people he meets? God! I couldn’t stand it if I were the Hog of Chirk.” And for some reason, just as it gave Rhisiart a curious pain to watch the wretched Simon submitting to the spiritual consolation of Master Brut, so it troubled his mind to see the Friar’s Maid listening to her own mother.

“Why don’t people leave each other alone?” he thought, as he saw the girl’s head hanging down under what was evidently the handsome woman’s bitter tongue. He glanced towards the exhausted Friar, by whose side was still standing the heavily-cowled monk from Valle Crucis, and he couldn’t help noticing that this same monk kept turning round to stare at the two women; and, unless the twilight misled him, the fellow was as uneasy under what he saw as he was himself.

Master Simon too, he noticed, stole many a furtive glance at the mother and daughter; but the scolding to which the girl was submitting didn’t appear to worry him very much.

“I believe there’s some trouble between them all,” our lad thought; and he tried to pretend to himself that he had had an inkling of this from the first moment he’d seen them. He remembered an occasion in his childhood when his frivolous Norman mother had observed his interest in a complicated social situation. “The little monk’s got his eyes about him,” she’d said to Modry. Yes, he began to feel sure that between these two men and these two women there was a mysterious bond. And how did the mad Friar come into it?

The whole problem provoked him; for if there was one thing he prided himself upon it was his social acumen. And how could there be any link between that tragic-looking Cistercian and this richly dressed woman? Or, for that matter, between such a woman and the Hog of Chirk?

"I wouldn't give any of them a thought," he decided irritably, "if it weren't for that girl."

But how the monk was staring! "Blessed Mary," Rhisiart said to himself, "if I were Master Simon, afraid of that over-dressed sorceress and afraid of that scowling priest, I wouldn't be so patiently listening to a gospel-man! I'd hit out. I'd do somebody a mischief!"

The Maid's head, grown dusky in the twilight, was sinking lower and lower under her mother's words. But what a long braid she had, as she clasped her hands across it behind her back!

Suddenly the woman seemed to lose all patience, vexed rather than appeased by the girl's quiescence. With one last word, obviously as cruel as a blow, she turned impatiently from her and moved off towards the slope of the mound.

Rhisiart's heart beat fast. Now had come the chance he had been passionately desiring, ever since he had first set eyes upon this girl. But he was burdened with two horses, both of them heavily loaded, both of them restless and hungry, both of them in as ill a humour as it is possible for elderly horses to be. She still stood there by herself, biting her lips and watching her mother make her way towards Simon; and Rhisiart felt he must snatch this precious moment, or she would be whirled out of his path and out of his life forever! His knees shook; a hollow emptiness in the pit of his stomach began throbbing like the tap-tap of a sickening drum.

Desperately he dragged the two unwilling beasts towards her, Griffin every now and then turning his head and twitching an ear as if to say, "I know what you're feeling, Master; but I would like to bring my feed of oats before your enamoured intelligence."

She turned her head when she saw him coming, and their eyes met. Then, looking down, she ran the palms of her hands over the folds of her boy's dress. Reaching her side, where Griffin, either out of an old servant's instinctive tact or because of his gnawing belly, induced the mare to drop her head along with his own and crop a few grass-blades, he suddenly found that something had deprived him of the gift of speech. There she was, and here he was, but not a syllable could he utter. All the moisture seemed to have left his lips, his palate, his throat. Nor did the power that had taken away his speech even allow him to look at her.

Luckily it didn't make him shut his eyes, and never has there been a patch of earth so microscopically stared at as the one between her feet and his. In this small radius of midsummer vegetation, great creative Nature had caused to spring up an exceptionally early meadow-orchis, and following Griffin's example the boy deliberately stooped down, and plucking this spike of soft petals, whose colour was lost in the falling night, thrust it hurriedly, as if he were just giving it to her to hold while he adjusted the bridle of his horse, into the maiden's hand.

The crafty old piebald seemed to take a sly pleasure in making what the youth had to do to his bridle as difficult as possible. "Take time, Master," he seemed to say. "It's better not to rush them at the beginning. Pardon me if I taste that bit of clover!"

No classical Pandarus could in fact have been kinder to young Rhisiart than his hungry old horse, and before, as they say, he realized he was in the water, lo and behold! he found he could swim.

While their four young hands were disentangling the confusion of reins, which the immortal fingers of Eros, helped by old Griffin's artfulness, were twisting as fast as they untwisted them, it was Rhisiart who found it easier to talk; and he talked rapidly, saying things that astonished himself a good deal more than they did the Friar's Maid.

He told her that he had heard her voice as well as the Friar's before he crossed the river. He told her what a power over him her voice had had, and how wonderful it was that it could carry so far and yet remain so clear and sweet.

"What's your name?" he finally blurted out, stealing a glance at the curve of her cheek.

"Tegolin," she answered, stroking Griffin's neck. "It's a funny name, but I've got used to it."

He now realized that she had stuck the meadow-orchis into her red-gold braid, where it swung as she moved as naturally as if it were growing there.

But if it was Rhisiart whose tongue was free when they were busy over the horse, the moment their eyes met she took the lead.

"I saw you drawing your sword," she said in a low voice, pressing a finger against the one of her cheeks which felt less cooled than the other by the damp on Griffin's neck. "I've never seen a gentleman's sword drawn before. They use spears and bows in my *cantref.* How beautiful it looked as you held it up, and you sitting so lonely in front of them all! You looked like Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, riding against Halgan, crowned King of Annwn."

Poor Rhisiart! If she had never seen a gentleman's drawn sword before she had certainly never suffered from a gentleman's touchy conscience before.

It now became necessary for the boy to enter at full length, with his profile turned sharply away, into every detail of that wretched predicament in which panic, according to his furious pride of self-deprecation, played the part of courage.

She heard him gravely, watching him intently, her blue eyes growing wider and wider as he went on. But when he came to Griffin — how in the midst of his dazed and desperate thinking the old horse shook himself and lifted his ears, thus hypnotizing the man on his back into the automatic playing of his part in their familiar game — a faint smile flickered across her lips.

"I was thinking so hard," he said, "that everything seemed only half-real, everything swayed and heaved and melted; and I suppose I'd so mixed up drawing that sword with vows and resolutions to be worthy of it that in my weakness and cowardice it drew itself, if you know what I mean."

He turned upon her so suddenly that he caught that tender half-smile; and for some reason instead of making him angry or making him more ashamed of himself, it was just the one thing he needed, and the words that followed it became only a roundabout commentary upon the effect it produced and the knowledge it revealed.

"I'm just like you," she whispered: "I'm always begging the Friar not to come to these places and not to cry his message where there's such terrible danger; but when we do come I seem to turn against all I've said and something in me pushes me on, and I push him on, and so it happens."

They were both stroking Griffin now and she looked Rhisiart straight in the eyes. "When these moments come," she said, speaking slowly and very emphatically, "I don't think it's ever we who're brave. I think it's something inside us."

The fact that he was understood in his deepest weakness, and also in this "something" which was in him and yet outside him, brought the tears suddenly to his eyes, and he made such a pathetic effort not to break down and, in doing so, screwed up his queer physiognomy so absurdly that Tegolin, with her own mouth distorted, bent suddenly forward and, snatching up his hand as it rested on the horse's neck, pressed it tightly for a fleeting second against her breast.

This impulsive gesture established no new relation between them. Indeed, ignorant of the ways of women, our friend accepted it as the natural behaviour of a young girl who wanted to comfort him; but from the unconscious way they both acted it was as if their hands had been independent entities for whose behaviour they were in no sense responsible.

"How old are you?" she asked him. "I was sixteen on the first of this month."

Rhisiart smiled proudly. "I was seventeen on the first of this month. So I'm a year older than you."

"Draw the sword again for me," she begged him. "Only a little way! I don't want anyone to see you do it. But please draw it!" And then she added, evidently reverting to his pride at being a year older, "Seventeen isn't much."

Rhisiart obeyed her at once, and in the hay-scented twilight that seemed as if it would last till dawn, he pulled from the ancient sheath about three inches of that exquisitely-chiselled blade. "May I touch it?" she asked.

Rhisiart hesitated and pondered in silence. Did the girl know all he would be giving her if he let her do that? But her long twisted braid had already fallen sideways against his sheepskin bundle and against his ancient tunic of chain-armour, and though it was too dark to see much difference in colour between her hair and the meadow-orchis, a blur of paleness at one spot in that dusky braid showed him it hadn't yet fallen.

There was a broad, expansive yellowish light above the mountains to the south-west, but the river below them was of a cold, metallic whiteness; and the fragment of steel he had laid bare took to itself, as she bowed her head over it, the cold grey of the water of the river rather than the warm tint of the sky.

There were no longer any wild sounds or desperate shouts coming from the people. He could see that the Grey Friar had fallen peacefully asleep and that the tragic monk from Valle Crucis was kneeling by his side. The Chirk bowmen were sprawling on the ground, disarmed now and helpless, but joking in their careless English manner with their captors, and perfectly content at the turn which events had taken.

Glendourdy’s son was standing alone on the slope of the mound, evidently waiting till the Caerleon monks had finished their evening psalms.

The indefatigable Lollard, who was still sticking fast to the Hog of Chirk, was leaning against the faggots; and it was across the great heap of surrendered weapons that he was murmuring his evangelical consolations.

With the constant smell of new-cut hay there came to them on the soft wind occasional wafts of other pleasant fragrances. Some of these Rhisiart took for the scent of honeysuckle; but there were others that may have been exotic foreign perfumes that merchants from overseas had brought to the fair; and once he was sure he smelt a whiff of wood smoke from the Tassel Inn.

The bare-legged Derfel-worshippers had now lighted a bonfire of their own, and round it, with their spears stuck in the earth, they were reclining at their ease, listening to some bardic composition of the inspired Scab.

Thus the Latin of the monks and the Welsh of Derfel’s prophet answered each other across that misty expanse, uplifting in pure haphazard an antiphonic hymn to the powers of the night. Most of the crowd had already vanished and the silences and mysteries of Nature resumed their ancient sway. The sacred *gorsedd* mound, covered with the same unbroken turf as had covered it before rumour of either Christ or Derfel had reached this place, rose to its proper dignity and claimed its indestructible inheritance.

All these things did Rhisiart feel, but only vaguely and indistinctly as he pondered in his mind whether to let her touch the sword. Conscious of the boy's hesitation Tegolin lifted her head, and it was now too dark for him to see her flushed cheeks.

"If you'd rather I didn't touch it," she said, "of course I won't. Would you rather I didn't?"

Her renewed question forced Rhisiart to make a decision. But oh, it was so hard! to let her touch his precious sword at this turning-point of his life would be to commit himself to her in a way far beyond the flower in her braid or his hand against her bosom!

Hit in her pride by his continued silence she drew away from him and began tightening the leather collar of her boyish doublet. He caught the movement and it brought back a rush of that dark unholy emotion that had swept through him when he had envisaged the imaginary arrow.

It was therefore with the most dangerous thing in him, as well as with the depths of his secret mania for Dinas Bran, that he tore the hesitation out of his heart. It was as if the imaginary arrow had been in him instead of in her, so much did it cost him; but he whispered hoarsely, "Yes, Tegolin, you may touch it!"

All her sweetness, all her submissiveness returned to her as she came close to him and leaned across Griffin's back. But instead of touching the exposed steel with her fingers she bowed her head over it and pressed upon it her open lips.

Rhisiart drew a deep breath.

"How cold and damp it is!" she murmured.

He gave a queer little chuckle. “Steel’s always like that,” he said. “But it’s not wet with blood.” And then, in a low eager voice, “When shall I see you again — Tegolin?”

Her reply was a double question: “Where are you sleeping to-night? Are you squire to Owen?”

“You mean the Baron Glendourdy? No, I’m not his squire yet; but I’m his cousin, and I’m going to see him. No, I don’t know where I’m going to sleep. Meredith said I couldn’t see him till tomorrow night.”

Tegolin looked at him with increased interest, and as she looked at him something about his innocence and unworldliness touched her to the heart.

For all his crusader’s sword and his chain-armour and his hooked Norman nose, she suddenly saw him as very young and very lonely and not a little helpless.

“You heard what the Abbot over there said about taking us to Valle Crucis?”

Rhisiart murmured a gloomy assent. “Oh don’t be afraid. We’re not going there. Brother Huw and I have a cow-stall to ourselves at that farm near the ferry. It belongs to the Tassel, but it’s quite different. If you come later and ask for us — Only don’t tell anyone else; for I can’t have the Father disturbed any more tonight, and if people follow us he’ll preach till his heart breaks.”

Rhisiart had strained his spirit of independence to such a point of late that it was like a sweet immersion in a bath of warm and fragrant water to place his will entirely at her disposal. He thanked her earnestly and gravely; and in that obscure light she smiled at him with a smile of such protective strength that a wave of relaxed peacefulness flowed over him and he drew a long happy sigh.

"I must get Brother Huw away now," she said. "I can see he's awake and listening to Father Rheinalt. Father Rheinalt is good and kind. I'll tell you about him — another time — but I don't want—" She paused and looked round them. "It's my mother who's on my mind now! She's gone up there" — and Tegolin pointed to the dead tree and the faggots and the pile of arms — "to gloat over Master Simon; and I can't bear it when she gets like that. Brother Huw would forgive anyone; even if they were burning him alive. He says King Richard would too, but I don't know! You see I don't believe everything the Friar says! But will you do something for me? Will you get my mother away from Master Simon and find someone who's going to Dinas Bran? She's living in the castle up there with Denis Burnell, the son of the Sheriff of Shropshire. Mother tells everybody Father Rheinalt married them; but, oh dear, I don't know! I was a baby when she married Master Simon; and the nuns brought me up. But it was her going to Simon — I know that — that drove Father Rheinalt into the monastery. But I'll tell you all I know about them another time. But I don't know much. The nuns wouldn't let me see her, and since I've been with Brother Huw — but do get Mother off to Dinas Bran! There must be some of Denis Burnell's people here. The Chirk men will tell you where to find them. Don't go with Mother, mind. Not under any condition! Come to the farm and ask for us. But oh! go quick! Get her away from Simon and find Burnell's—" she stopped abruptly. "Do you mind if I ask you your name? Mother's a distant relation of Owen's; but he doesn't like her, though she's useful to him. My Lord of Arundel's very fond of her, too; so she has two strings to her bow. What's your name?"

No story our friend had ever told himself about his romantic future was as full of conflicting emotions as Rhisiart's face when the words Dinas Bran fell from Tegolin's lips. There flashed across his brain a memory of a summer evening by the banks of the Wye, when he had prayed desperately to the Virgin that some tremendous event might transform his life. And now — “My name is Rhisiart ab Owen,” he said hurriedly. “In Hereford they call me Rhisiart.”

Tegolin turned away her head, and laying her hand on Griffin’s mane began twisting its hairs round her fingers. “What shall I call you?” she enquired. Her shyness communicated itself to him, and he too looked away.

“Modry used to call me Gwion Bach,” he brought out with a wry smile. At that she turned sharply upon him.

“Who was Modry?”

“My nurse,” he said; and she gave a little laugh; and then it became his turn to ask a question. “Have you ever been up to Dinas Bran, Tegolin?”

“Never!” she confided. “Mother would hate to see me there. Besides, Denis might treat the Friar as Simon tried to do.”

“But why don’t you go alone?”

“And leave Brother Huw? How on earth would he get on? And anyway Mother wouldn’t want me up there in these clothes. Don’t you see, Gwion Bach, I’ve got hosen like you? I’m the Friar’s page. He often forgets that I’m a woman at all. Oh you’ve no idea—” she broke off. “Please go quick. Gwion Bach, and take her to the Constable’s people. I can see—” Hurriedly she helped him to get the bridles of both horses round his wrist. “Goodbye,” she cried, giving him an anxious push. “And ask for us at the farm — Gwion Bach!”

It was a strange scene he encountered when finally he’d got the horses to the top of the slope; and he arrived there hot and exhausted and very irritable. Both animals had been a great trouble. The mare had pulled violently at her halter in her desire to get quickly to her master, while

Griffin, sulky and hungry, had hung back, knowing that his only chance for oats and hay lay to the west rather than to the east.

Dragging one beast therefore, and dragged by the other, Rhisiart skirted the circle of disarmed bowmen, who, seated on faggots from the stake-pile, were playing cards and drinking and singing and chatting to their captors, till he came to where his Lollard friend stood in the background, looking baffled and nonplussed, listening with an expression of growing apprehension to the ambiguous and cruel words poured out upon his convertite by Tegolin's mother.

The heretic's eyes were wide open and his full lips considerably apart, while upon his smooth face there had formed at least two noticeable lines that Rhisiart had never seen there before. Everything about him, down to the way he was fidgetting with his feet, seemed absorbed in one overwhelming sensation, the recognition of evil of a kind he had never met before!

What a handsome woman she was, this mother of Tegolin, and what a terrifying one! Her hair hadn't a touch of grey in it, but it was much duskier than her daughter's, and was indeed of so dark a tinge of chestnut as to look black in that obscurity.

But no shadow of night obscured the terrible glint in her eyes. It was clear to our friend that the student of the Gospels was spell-bound by what he heard. He stared at the woman as if the wicked emotion she displayed were a conjured-up trick rather than a revelation of reality.

Absorbed in the miserable mind of the Hog, Master Brut had been struggling for hours with profanity and despair, but from the eyes and lips of this beautiful woman there jetted forth a passion so weird as to produce the feeling that it came from a fount of evil infinitely deeper and more dangerous than anything in her wretched victim.

All this after Tegolin's hint was easy enough for Rhisiart to read in the Lollard's face, as he placed the mare's bridle in his hand. "He's been struggling with an ordinary devil," the lad thought, "but with this witch he'll have to change his weapons!"

Master Simon was sitting hunched up on one of the highest faggots, with his back against the dead tree, and he looked to our friend like a man who was deriving some horrible satisfaction from being beaten to death. His lower lip hung loose as if his jaw had dropped. In the dying light you could see that the corners of his mouth were dribbling. His heavy head drooped sideways upon his chest. His hands, as they dangled helplessly across his knees under the torment of the woman's tongue, looked as if they had been cut off in the pillory and unskilfully replaced, so white and leaden-like they hung.

"You've come from my daughter," was the woman's greeting to Rhisiart. "I saw what she was up to! I could almost hear her words. I suppose you're from Sycharth, eh? I wish you would go and tell my Dinas Bran people that I'm ready to go. That was what Teg told you to do, wasn't it? She's always looking after her mother. It's touching, but it's very awkward. You saw how simple she is? She and her Friar are a fair pair. They're shining candles in this naughty world; but you look shrewd enough. Are you one of Owen's scribes? Can you write a good Latin letter? No, no, I'm serious, young man! I must see more of you. I'm in want of just such a — But there they are! Lawnslot! Cystennin! Rhydderch! Well, lads, it's time we set out. They'll think we're murdered as it is. Throw down those bows, my boys. I'll explain to the Constable. Yes! you can keep your other things. I'll explain that to Meredith."

While our traveller was contemplating the strong and athletic appearance of these lads from Dinas Bran, who were evidently like so many others in

Wales “serving two masters”, he felt old Griffin give a sudden jerk and make an attempt to swing round. Turning rapidly himself, while the three stalwart young “traitors” gathered close to their mistress’s side, he saw a great war-horse approaching, bearing on his back a most formidable-looking personage, armed in grander and more modern armour than Rhisiart had ever seen, but with no weapon in his hands, and his hands themselves ungauntleted and bare.

This awe-inspiring individual had a weather-beaten, battle-scarred face, piercing grey eyes, an aquiline nose, a grey moustache, and grizzled hair beneath his steel helmet. Though both the man and his horse looked travel-stained and weary, his whole presence breathed an air of proud, habitual and impatient authority.

Everybody present, including Master Simon, the Chirk bowmen and the three lads from Dinas Bran, straightened themselves and uncovered their heads.

Rhisiart pulled Griffin back a little, and took the opportunity, while the horseman turned with a series of angry gestures upon Master Simon, to enquire of the lady who he was.

“Hush; you young fool! He’ll hear you,” she whispered. And then in a tone of bitter sarcasm, “It’s the great man himself. It’s Thomas Fitz-Alan, Earl of Arundel and Surrey, Lord of Oswestry, Chirk-land, Bromfield and Yale! He’s come post-haste from the King. The Scottish war must be over.”

Rhisiart mechanically followed the example of the rest and removed his cap. Then he led Griffin as close as he could to the Lollard’s side. It was a relief to him to observe the calm dignity and unabashed composure of that revolutionary scholar.

But the magnate in armour took no more notice of the two young men than if they’d been pedlars from the market. His whole attention was directed to his unlucky Steward, whom he proceeded to berate unmercifully for the predicament into which his men had fallen.

"I've seen Glendourdy's son," he said, "and he's given me a safe conduct for you idiots to go back whence you came. But look at all these good bows — all lost by this madness. Who told you to take on yourself to burn heretics and rouse the countryside? This is the very thing I've been trying to avoid. I warrant my Lord Grey's hand's in this, the obstinate numskull. This is exactly the kind of thing young Percy was warning us against. It's all wrong, I've told the King over and over again he should follow Percy and not Grey. Grey thinks only of himself and his damned red castle. Well off with you all! Back to Chirk by the nearest road! And don't touch those bows, or I can't do anything for you. If the whole country's not up, it's not your fault. Simon, Simon! I've a great mind, Simon, to tie you up, head and foot, and leave you to our Welsh friends. You've done more harm than you wot of, my little Simon! Oh, I've a mind to leave you. God's holy teeth! I've a mind to leave you to the wolves!"

What struck Rhisiart as so queer, and what made him terribly embarrassed too, was the way the Earl kept turning from Simon and addressing his remarks upon these matters of high state policy to himself and Master Brut. He might have been addressing them to Griffin and the Lollard's mare as far as any recognition of their existence as personalities went; but without acknowledging their presence as separate human entities he evidently required some sort of sounding-board for his quirks and his sallies.

"Oh, it's you again, is it, Mistress Lowri?" and he made a courtly but ironical bow. "How is your gracious mother? I see your daughter has got her Friar safe back. Tired already of our little Constable, eh? Gone back to brave Simon, gentle Simon, faithful Simon, ha?"

This was the first time Rhisiart had heard the woman's name. "Lowri," he repeated to himself in a whisper while he watched her press close to the Earl's saddle and lay her richly-gloved fingers on the trappings of his horse.

"So you've made it up, have you, Mistress, you and Simon? You've got tired of Dinas Bran and our little Denis? Somebody must lend you a mount then, I suppose, if we're to have you back in your old bower in our unworthy domain!" And he cast a hawk's eye upon Griffin and the mare as if their owners had not been present.

The Earl's style of address as he talked to Tegolin's mother was something quite new to Rhisiart's experience. It was an indulgent tone — with an undercurrent of ribaldry — and it was extremely intimate, too. It was such a different thing from the impersonal obliviousness with which he treated our two young men that there was something indecent about it. In fact our friend, who had already taken an extreme dislike to this handsome and shameless lady, decided in his blunt Oxford manner that she was a whore and that the Earl was treating her to a mocking parody of the French Courts of Love.

He came to the conclusion, however, a moment later, though quite likely with gross injustice, that there was an ardent sensual passion behind this mock-chivalric tone. "Oh it's all dying," thought the startled lad, "the high romance of the old days. If this battered, cynical old tyrant were like the Black Prince, how different! He'd at once have spoken to Master Brut and me. Mistress Lowri would have told him how I drew my sword between spearmen and archers; and he would have offered to make me his squire! I wouldn't have accepted; but I'd have liked to tell Tegolin he'd made me the offer."

The Earl was bending down over his saddle now listening to Lowri's whispers.

Master Simon hadn't changed his besotted look of maudlin submission since the woman had first appeared on the scene. Rhisiart concluded that he took for granted that her appearance was his doom, that she had come, like the *Erinyes,* to hound him to his death, and that there was nothing for him to do but accept the worst and hug it to his heart. Indeed, while Lowri whispered like a she-devil in the Earl's ear, our friend watched Simon with curious interest. He saw him replace his cap on his head and squat down at the foot of the Friar's tree and fold his arms. The fellow seemed to know by instinct that the end of this whispering would be the end of his life. Indeed, he seemed half-dead already.

Rhisiart himself could hear quite enough to gather that the woman was giving the great man lurid and abominable details of Master Simon's behaviour to her.

Every now and then the Earl would interject some indignant and horrified exclamation; such as: "Impossible!" "Did he do that?" "Oh monstrous, monstrous. Such a man pollutes the air! Not that, Mistress? No, no! He couldn't have done that, and to a woman as — oh vile! oh most vile!"

At last she finished her tale and drew away; and she made Rhisiart think of a deadly snake uncoiling itself from a formidable beast it had poisoned.

"Here, you fellows! Come here a minute!" cried Fitz-Alan hoarsely; and all the archers crowded round him. "I'm going straight to Chirk now, my lads, and I want you to come with me. My horse is tired so I shan't leave you in the lurch. But you and you" — and he named the two most brutal-looking of the band— "stay behind and string up this unspeakable devil! Hang him to this very tree where he was going to burn the Friar; and when you've done it come straight after me! Nobody'll touch you if you don't touch them!" He paused, and once more fixing his eye — without seeing them — upon our two friends, “If only,” he muttered, “that fool Grey hadn’t put in his damned voice, and the King had left Percy and me to settle things. It makes me sick to see the King led astray as he is! I’ve told him from the beginning that what we want in all these Islands is simply a wise application of the Conqueror’s Feudal System. Let ’em all do homage to the King — just as I do myself — and remain masters within their own provinces. This Glendourdy of yours — you call him a wizard — but I know a wizardry that would settle him and settle all his sons too, from Griffith to Meredith — simply the old-fashioned Feudal System properly applied, with our Norman Primogeniture in place of this mad splitting-up of estates! But Grey of Ruthin’s a fool. That’s what he is, a damned fool, and, as Solomon says, ‘The Fool will end by begging his bread’!”

Rhisiart found it impossible to lend more than half an ear to this political sermon preached to the air and the darkness through his nonexistent form; but it struck his mind that the man’s only excuse for his inhumanity would be if he really were enamoured of Lowri.

So indignant did he feel at the injustice of the whole thing that he couldn’t resist a murmured protest. “My Lord Earl, may I be allowed — as one who has studied law at the University of Oxford — to inform the prisoner of the charges brought against him?”

“Gorge de Dieu! And who in the wide earth told you to lift up your voice? I don’t know who you are, and I’m in Glendourdy’s power here or I’d soon find out; but this you shall have, young malapert, you shall have the privilege of selling me your horse, to take this lady—” And he actually began fumbling beneath the pommel of his saddle to find Griffin’s price.

But Mistress Lowri came close to him again and whispered something else. Rhisiart presumed she told him she was going back to the Constable of Dinas Bran, and he fancied she may have told him of his cousinship with

Owen, for he let the gold-piece drop back into his wallet, gave her a stiff but courteous obeisance, and gathered up his reins.

"Is that your old confessor, Father Rheinalt, over there talking to the Friar?"

"Yes, my Lord. He's praying with him."

"Well! let him stop praying with him and come and pray with your Simon! He prayed too long with one person I know, once upon a time; till that person grew too heavy to go to confession....Well, well, I mustn't tease you, my pretty; but I should have thought it would exactly suit your particular kind of humour to have your Rheinalt absolve your Simon. However! Do as you like!"

He turned to the two archers. "Oh you've found a rope, have you? Very good! Now remember I shall ask you to tell me how Simon died. *Gorge de Dieu!* There goes the Abbot; and I must have a word with him. Tell all your Welsh friends, you lovely one, that I hanged my steward to make them bread. *Au revoir!"* And he rode off in pursuit of the monks of Caerleon.

"Gently, Measter! Coom, Measter!" cried one of the two archers, approaching Simon as if he were a tethered beast. He was a Wessex man, and Rhisiart, even at that horrible moment, couldn't help noticing how queer his English sounded. "Out o' the way wi'ee! Us must heave up rope to hang'ee, Measter, to thik wold tree!"

The wretched Steward struggled with difficulty to his feet and cast a confused look round him. Rhisiart fancied that there came a kind of comfort into his face when he saw that the Lollard was still there.

But the other archer — a great hulking South-Saxon from Lewes — began roughly and clumsily putting the rope about the man's throat.

"Stop! I won't stand by and see this iniquity done!" Rhisiart had no time on this occasion to get his crusader's sword into action, but he snatched his

dagger out of his belt and in the darkness this looked dangerous enough.

The Sussex man drew back, but the Wessex man caught the boy, dagger and all, round the waist, and pinned both his arms against his sides.

At that point the Lollard sprang forward; and without drawing his sword delivered such a shrewd blow with his fist at the Sussex man's head that it sent him reeling.

"Cystennin! Rhydderch!" cried Lowri in a voice of hysterical fury. "Oh, and there's Lawnslot, too!" she added with hideous exultation. "Come lads, every one of ye! Help to swing him up, or I'll tell your master you failed me."

The three Welshmen came forward, and the noose was soon round the unhappy man's neck.

"Catch hold of the other one, lads, priest or no priest." And the Lollard, whose religious exhortations had misled her as to his quality, was seized and secured in the same manner as Rhisiart.

"One minute!" she cried; and the two young men, struggling helplessly against the powerful arms that held them, saw her approach the extemporized gibbet and begin whispering to the man and even caressing with her fingers the rope round his neck.

"Help! Help!" shouted Rhisiart, while Griffin, to the mare's astonishment, uttered a shrill whinny.

The hanging of the Hog of Chirk now seemed only to await the moment when the woman should choose to stand out of the way. Rhisiart peered desperately through the darkness to catch sight of Tegolin; but she had gone, and the Scab and his spearmen were gone, and monks and the market-people were all gone.

Save for a couple of repulsive looking old women who had come like vultures to the scene, the mound was completely deserted. Nothing remained but the dung-cart, the faggots, the heap of long-bows and the dead tree converted into a gallows.

“One minute!” cried Lowri again; and this time she came so close to Master Simon that their figures, to Rhisiart’s disturbed vision, mingled together. Her words seemed to burn the darkness into smouldering holes

Rhisiart struggled desperately in the arms that held him. “It’s murder! It’s damnable murder!” he cried; and his heart felt as if it would burst under his ribs.

“Jesus forgive you! Jesus receive you!” prayed the Lollard hoarsely.

“Mine’ll be the last face you’ll see, Simon,” she whispered. “The last voice you’ll hear! Hell is deep, but you’ll know I’m thinking of you. You’ll know—”

“Off with you, every one of you!” It was as if his voice came out of the dark substance of the mound itself, but he must have come round it in the darkness. “Off with you!” he repeated, addressing the two bowmen, “and tell your Lord to hang his servants within his own walls. Tell him that my father — do you hear? — that my father makes himself responsible for this man. And now, Mistress,” and he turned to the woman, “I hope you’re satisfied. The man’s half-dead with the fright you’ve given him. I don’t really know” — this he said very much slower and emphatically, and Rhisiart was delighted to see the woman wince— “I don’t really know what my father will decide about you.” Then he turned to the Dinas Bran Welshmen. “Take your mistress back to the Constable,” he said, “and tell him from Meredith ab Owen that he’d better hear Mass tomorrow at Valle Crucis. Don’t forget, you three! Have you got that? Very good. Well, off with you, Mistress! My father will keep his eye on your girl and on her Friar. Remember me to the Constable. And if I were you, I’d keep to the direct highway!”

Rhisiart cursed the darkness that had fallen now, thickened by mists rising from the river; for he was obsessed by an almost sensual desire to see her face in its defeat and for her to know he was seeing it. But this unholy wish was totally denied him; for the lady said not a word to anyone, looked at nobody, gathered up the skirts of her green embroidered gown, laid her hand on the arm of the tallest of her three Welsh servants, and hurried away in the direction taken by the monks.

Rhisiart and the Lollard were left alone with Master Simon and his rescuer. The first thing Meredith did was to sigh such a world-weary sigh that it came near to being a groan. Then he moved towards our friend and began caressing Griffin.

“We couldn’t get our sword out to time, eh?” he murmured; and Rhisiart was so close to him that he caught upon that disillusioned young face one of the strangest smiles he had ever seen. It was a smile that flickered, wavered, faded and vanished, like a candle-flame falling for a moment on a ghostly portrait.

“I didn’t like — I didn’t dare — till I knew—” stammered our pilgrim in shame and embarrassment.

“Do you know now?” returned the other, while they heard the Lollard’s voice muttering some religious exhortation as he bent over the prostrate Steward.

“I know nothing. I’ve seen too much today. But by degrees — do you think, Arglwydd” — he had the wit to use the Welsh word, though they both were speaking in English— “that your father could find some employment for me about his person? I know a little Latin and French, and a good deal of law. And I’d like to be — I’d like to be where you are — and I’d like to serve—”

It may be seen from these impulsive words how much the events of that day had affected our traveller's feelings. In place of any "Princess Myfanwy" he was now compelled to link the mystical fortress of his desire with this Medusa-like mother of Tegolin; and in place of a rich, idle, selfish "Glendourdy" he now visualized as the background of all that was going on in these regions an unapproachable, mysterious figure whose power seemed palpable at every turn but whose personality remained evasive and obscure.

"He wouldn't like me to say too much now," returned the young man gently. "But I do think he might find a use for you. Anyway I know my mother would like to see you. So come to Glyndyfrdwy tomorrow — not too early — somewhere about four o'clock, let's say, if that'll suit you. Have you anywhere to sleep to-night? The Abbey guesthouse will be full; and I wouldn't try the Tassel if I were you."

"I have a place," murmured Rhisiart, thankful enough that the darkness hid the way his cheeks burned. "But may I—" he paused while they both listened to the Lollard's murmurings over the man on the ground. "May I beg you" — and he lowered his voice to a whisper— "if you're really going to take this unfortunate man with you, to let my fellow-traveller, Master Brut, go too? He hasn't anywhere to sleep to night, and his horse'll be a help to you in carrying this fellow."

"You know something else, it seems," returned the young chief, "beyond Latin and French! You know our Welsh tongue uncommonly well, and you speak it with the true Powys Fadog accent. Your teacher must have come from these parts. I'm going to sleep with my foster-parent tonight, who is a swine-herd half-way to Wyddgrug, and I'll leave our prisoner there till my father decides what's to be done with him. Your friend must please himself of course." He politely lowered his voice to a whisper. "Brut, did you say his name was? Why, that's as though we said 'Master Divination'. He acts like a priest but I can see he's a *gwr bonheddig,* and I expect—" He stopped suddenly, for he didn't miss the droop of Rhisiart's whole body and that it had become an effort to the boy the moment he leant against Griffin to keep his eyelids from closing.

"But you're dead-tired, lad. Up with you! I'll explain everything to your friend; and I'll let him finish his prayers. I'll tell him he can find you at Glyndyfrdwy. Here's a hand now. Up with you! That's the way! And listen, comrade" — Rhisiart bent low over Griffin's neck— "the next time you draw that sword of yours, it mayn't be to *separate* Welsh and English! God 'ild you."

Though the darkness grew perceptibly more dense as the old piebald cantered down the slope towards the river, carrying a rider whose eyelids soon ceased to droop as he rode, neither horse nor man made any question about the way.

Griffin must have tasted in advance the delicious refreshment, composed of all that the heart of an old horse could most desire, that the practical Tegolin had obtained for him, along with a heavenly bed of clean straw.

Not less sweet, indeed much sweeter, was the soft hay upon which the young man stretched his limbs in the farm's most retired cow-shed. By his side, under his own sheepskin — which indeed proved somewhat too hot for that June night — lay Tegolin in her white smock; while in another part of the shed the Friar slept his deep untroubled holy man's sleep, with his back against the back of a sleeping heifer.

Between himself and this girl — the first feminine being by whose side he had lain since his infancy — was nothing but her linen shift and his own woollen shirt; but they were both so tired out that though his left arm was beneath her head and his right above her breast, their dipping and kissing soon ended in a deep and almost simultaneous sleep.

A maid she lay down, and a maid she rose up; and neither of them flickered an eyelid when, in the first light of dawn, the Grey Friar stood over them before repeating, to the murmur of the river and the breathing of the cattle, his morning office.

All through that short summer darkness he too had slept an untroubled sleep; and when he awoke to whisper his psalms and to extinguish the smouldering wick in the lantern above his head, it seemed to his crazed wits as if the lost King whose return he confused with everything in life that is and yet is not, and with everything in death that is not and yet that is, were present with them in that shed. He mingled King Richard with the sound of the river, with the scent of the hay, with the awakening of the swallows, with the cool dawn airs that stole into their shelter like the fore-runners of an exultant host, but above all with those youthful heads lying side by side! The Maid was his, and this young soldier of his King was the Maid's, and therefore his too; and the great John Baptist whose day was dawning was carrying them all three forward, forward where the river was flowing, forward where the mists were lifting, forward into a new Valle Crucis, a new Wales, where there were no burnings and no Bolingbrokes, no hearts that would not heal, no loves that could not be satisfied!

IV. HAND IN HAND

Neither brother Huw nor Tegolin, when it came to the point, showed much desire to visit the monastery on a crowded feast-day, and since the lad himself was anxious to enjoy their society as long as possible, it was decided that they should all three seek, for the next night at any rate, the hospitality of his formidable kinsman at Glyndyfrdwy.

Tegolin, however, with a woman's feeling for what was meet and right on such a day, persuaded her two companions — for the halfwitted Friar seemed as forgetful as Rhisiart about ordinary religious observances — to pause for early Mass at the little church of St Collen, which lay directly in their path. They found only children and a few very aged men and women entering this small edifice; for it seemed as if the whole countryside was tricking itself out in gala attire to attend the High Mass at Valle Crucis.

There was an atmosphere of undisturbed peace brooding over the small churchyard as they led Griffin up the path to the door; and Tegolin was soon pretending to be gravely absorbed in helping Rhisiart to tether the old horse where it could best enjoy the uncut grass. The Hereford boy was in a state of exuberant high spirits, and he began at once, in his blundering youthful way, teasing her about the manner in which, with a view to baring her head without betraying her sex, she had squeezed her twisted braid of red hair under the collar of her tunic.

His infatuation grew moment by moment; but the thrill of being attracted to a feminine creature was so new to him that he had no idea how to steer his emotion into the channel where it would give him the greatest pleasure.

And indeed, if the truth must be told, he had even less of an idea how to steer it so as to give the object of it the corresponding pleasure.

Thus there arose all manner of trifling but disconcerting awkwardnesses between the Friar's young companions. Such sensual feelings as the boy had kept showing themselves in clumsy, indirect ways. They were so fresh to his experience that he lacked the power of focussing them on the particular differences between a boy and a girl where they would be provocative of delight to both.

All he seemed able naturally and spontaneously to do was to tease her, and to tease her in that particular way that young girls especially dislike because it makes them feel as if they'd become children again.

But Rhisiart was no fool; and when he found that such things as making fun of her red hair and of her blunders when she tried to speak English only brought a flush to her cheeks and a quiver to her lips, while at the same time they produced a discord in his own feelings, he cast about in the depths of his consciousness for the cause of this atmospheric disturbance.

What troubled him was that there seemed such a queer gulf between the delicious thrill that the idea of being in love with a real, actual girl gave him as it diffused itself through everything, and these blundering attempts he kept making to establish a humorous brother-and-sister rapport between them.

Luckily for him, the romantic part of Tegolin's nature was so absorbed in the service of the Friar that she could afford to treat these boyish lapses — all except those that had to do with her braid and her broken English — with a detached maternal indulgence; and she had enough subtlety to surmise that it was because his sensual feelings were all disturbed and bewildered, and because he had not discovered his destined way of love, that he behaved as he did.

But it was all different from last night. Last night it had been so sweet and natural when they lay in each others' arms, overcome by exhaustion. What Tegolin didn't realize was that it was just this innocent sleeping together that had destroyed her strangeness to him without initiating him in the art of love. He wanted to assert himself with her but he didn't know how to do it.

He wanted to touch her, to ruffle her, to disturb her, just as a boy wants to do something — he knows not what — to a bird or a butterfly whose beauty troubles him.

All this ridiculous teasing sprang from the exciting trouble into which she threw him; but had it not been that so much of her nature was already absorbed in her devotion to the Friar, it is likely enough that the difference between what he had been last night and what he was now would have made her seriously unhappy.

Rhisiart indeed, though it would have given him small pleasure to know it, had been placed by fate in an especially favoured position for the enjoyment of Tegolin's identity just because he was *not* the object of her ideal romance; nor was he without some dim inkling of this when he began to notice certain arbitrary injustices and even cruelties into which her romantic love betrayed her where Brother Huw was concerned.

They had hardly got clear of the environs of the Tassel, and they took care to make a wide circuit to avoid meeting any of the Lord of Nannau's followers, when the Brother began to grow uneasy in his conscience about their decision to avoid Valle Crucis.

Rhisiart, who had at last got her to mount his old horse and was watching with intense delight the engaging curves of her limbs as her body clung in womanly fashion to Griffin's mottled back, was shocked when, instead of humouring the Friar by piling up every sort of reason against this visit, she insisted on dragging out of the poor wretch the tragic and touching weakness of the flesh which was the real secret cause, as she knew well, of his dislike of going near the place.

"Why on earth can't she," thought Rhisiart, "leave this human frailty in her hero alone? Why must she compel him to confess it and acknowledge it? How does she dare to risk arousing in him just the sort of righteous obstinacy that might well ruin us all?"

But now that she was off Griffin's back and all flushed and flurried about this business of going bare-headed into the church, what must Rhisiart do but, forgetting his recent resolution to stop these boyish impulses, begin teasing her again — this time about her page's dagger, an ornament which, according to what she evidently considered the latest fashion, though even in Hereford it had long been given up, she had ostentatiously suspended at the point where her tunic covered her hip. At this she came near to really losing her temper; and giving him a reproachful look she turned indignantly away.

At his wit's end to appease her — for he saw that this was the worst of his blunders — he began a confused apology, when she suddenly softened of her own accord and, touching his elbow, signed to him to note the conduct of their companion. She did this with a smile of such intimacy and an air that linked them so closely in tender amusement at Mad Huw's peculiarities that the boy was astonished.

Indeed he was so absorbed in this novel privilege of being allowed to be one with her in her protectiveness towards Mad Huw that he could only take in very cursorily what it was that she found so touching in the Friar's present proceedings. What she gave him was the look that one girl might give another in the presence of an eccentric man they were both in love with, and if our friend’s response was half-hearted to this it was because he found bitterness in it as well as sweetness.

All that Mad Huw was doing, as far as Rhisiart could see, was interfering not very effectively between an aggressive little boy — hardly more than an infant — and a flock of geese.

It had evidently fallen to the child to look after these creatures in the absence of their proper guardian; who was no doubt at that moment putting on her gala-dress before the family mirror in view of the Feast of Saint John.

The child was a mere baby, but of extraordinary sturdiness and resolution. Nature had not only given him the legs of a giant but also the countenance of a dictator. But Nature had also bestowed on his enemies, the geese, the power of exciting awe; so that what Mad Huw had taken upon himself to meddle with was a war between two irrational thunder-storms, neither of which was able to use lightning,

The child was evidently swayed by the opposite emotions of aggression and panic; and so were the geese. And these emotions came and went in periodic alternation. The infant was armed with the lid of an iron pot and with the leg of a milking-stool. The geese had their voices and their elongated necks. The child stamped at the geese. The geese hissed at the child. Sometimes panic seized the one side and sometimes the other. When the signal “advance!” was sounded at what might be called “headquarters” in the child’s head, he would strike the iron against the wood and rush to the attack; whereas when nature gave the signal “retreat”, it was in the blind confusion of his flight that these objects jangled together.

“Retreat” had been the order of the day when Brother Huw intervened; and the geese had followed in their thin line of battle so hard on the track of the little boy that he was fain to cling to the Friar's habit and hide his face behind it.

The Friar's countenance, as he faced these outstretched loud-screeching necks, was like that of a boy of seven who is protecting a boy of six. He made them debouch in the direction of the river; but they didn't scatter, nor did they draw in their necks. Their instinct told them that these substitutes for the goose-girl who was before her mirror were of negligible authority.

"What's your name, little one?" asked the Friar gravely. "Caswallon," the child replied without emerging from his refuge; and it was impossible to tell at that moment whether it was by accident or by intention that the spear and shield clashed together behind the Brother's back.

"What are you doing, Caswallon?"

"Driving the Saxons!"

"Who is your general, Caswallon?"

"Me," said the child, peeping out at the screaming geese.

"Who is your king, Caswallon?"

"Me," confessed the infant, emerging into the open. "Who is your abbot, Caswallon?" "Me," admitted the little boy.

The Friar bent down. "Do you know who's coming back?" he whispered.

But "advance" must have sounded just then so loudly in that crowded tent of king, abbot and general that there was no time for other thoughts. With a terrific beating of wood upon iron the geese were now triumphantly driven, flapping and screaming, out of the churchyard.

The combatants had hardly disappeared when the old parish-priest emerged from a wooden hut nearby, a hut that looked as if Saint Collen might well have built it with his own hands. He passed close by our three friends on his way to the sanctuary, and glanced at them in some surprise, giving them each a quick searching look; then muttering a hasty blessing in reply to their salutation, he hurried into the building.

They were all three a trifle upset as they followed him, for Rhisiart unthinkingly must needs tell Tegolin that a wisp of hair was still visible; and the Friar received a sharp word from the Maid because of the reluctance he showed to leave the free sunshine.

But when once the Mass began all these troubles ceased. Indeed our friend had never been moved so much by the magic of the supreme mystery of his faith as he was that Midsummer Day, kneeling there between the two wanderers. The sky above them indeed was but a neutral sky. It was neither over-clouded nor was it clear. But it was one of those days when a delicate film of faint mist, floating in diaphanous diffusion between earth and heaven, seems to bring these divided regions close together, while at the same time it endows them both with a curious element of unreality.

The voices of the parish-priest and his solitary server seemed to merge, as they intoned, into the quiet breath of the whole umbrageous valley, while the scent of the hayfields, which flowed in through the open door behind them, mingled as pleasantly with the smoke of the censer as the diffused sunlight filtering down upon that small grey building through a motionless filigree of leafy twigs itself mingled with the pallid light of the altar candles.

Brother Huw had behaved reverently, but he had soon grown rather restless; and it was a relief to Rhisiart when Tegolin allowed them to rejoin their horse and pursue their way. The girl had possessed herself of several St John’s-cakes and a pat of fresh butter at the farm; and as soon as they got well out of sight of the small wooden homesteads scattered about St. Collen’s Church, they began to look round for some suitable spot where they might break their fast.

Rhisiart had had considerable difficulty in persuading the Friar’s Maid to make use of Griffin. Indeed, most of the way from the Tassel farm to Llan-Collen, they had all walked by the horse’s side.

But the Mass had sobered them all, and as they moved slowly along, following the river up-stream, Tegolin sat silent and pensive on the horse’s back. They found a spot at last exactly suited to their purpose, and letting Griffin wander as he pleased, they seated themselves on a dead ash-tree by the edge of a small brook. It was a spot eminently suited to all that Rhisiart was feeling. The little stream made a faint tinkling as it descended into the river. Its banks were covered with ferns and moss; and the St John’s-cakes and the fresh butter tasted more delicious than any repast he could remember.

“Have you ever seen my cousin, the Lord of Glyndyfrdwy?” he enquired of Tegolin. “I’ve always thought of him as a time-serving grey-beard who spends his days tagging bardic rhymes, like that chattering Derfel-idiot, not as a person who’d take any real risk for Wales and her people.”

Tegolin smiled. “You’ve got him wrong, Gwion Bach; though I’ve no doubt that’s exactly what he intends you English should think of him. No, I’ve never seen him. Have you ever seen him, Brother Huw?”

“Seen whom, my daughter?”

“Owen Glyn Dŵr.”

The Friar nodded. “I saw him at Flint when the King was taken. The King looked at him. I can see his eyes now, my daughter. And I saw the look Glyn Dŵr gave him in return. It was a strange look. It wasn’t the look of a Judas; and yet it wasn’t a pitying look. But I think the King got comfort from it.” The Friar paused and muttered something to himself. Then he went on. “I saw him turn and follow him with his eyes as he rode away. And I saw the King fall into a muse, so that he seemed scarcely to notice the evil tongues about him. The man must have said something with that look. But it was a strange look."

"What was it like, Brother Huw?"

The Friar took a sip from the little silver cup the girl passed to him, and handed it on to Rhisiart.

"I've often asked myself that very question, child," he murmured, letting his own gaze wander up the course of the little stream, "and I've told myself sometimes that it was the sort of look that a traveller in Jerusalem might have given Him when they were leading Him to Golgotha. A traveller — a traveller—"

Rhisiart and the girl exchanged glances.

"A traveller," repeated the Friar.

"Did he seem — I mean did he seem to you — *old?"* asked Rhisiart eagerly. "Was his hair grey when you saw him?"

The Friar's sensitive countenance took on such a stricken expression that the boy added hurriedly, "I know you can't catch a very good likeness from a distance — so don't trouble yourself. I expect you can't bear to think of what happened then. It was only that I wanted to find out something — about my kinsman — before the moment of meeting him. He seems to be extremely difficult to meet. The Scab told me he was much more genial and much easier to get on with before they crowned the new King."

Tegolin was balancing herself now on a portion of the fallen tree a little higher than her companions. She was unceremoniously licking the butter from her fingers and in the process making a little whistling sound.

Rhisiart, who after the experience of the last twelve hours felt that feminine psychology held few secrets for him, said to himself, "She's thinking how nice it is to be a beautiful girl and to be with two men on Saint John's Day."

But Tegolin soon sacrificed these agreeable thoughts to a confession of curiosity; and she begged Rhisiart to tell them about his friend the Lollard.

At the word “Lollard” the large dark eyes of the Friar narrowed ominously, and a cold hostile film came over them. As Rhisiart watched him he realized that the enlightenment he had received about women hadn’t extended to madmen. To this heroic fanatic — himself in mortal terror of all ecclesiastical restraint — the word “Lollard’ was like the word “sodomy”.

“What on earth,” thought our philosophical youth, “is going on now in this fellow’s brain?” And then as he tried to recall what his own vague feeling had been about Lollards before he met Master Brut, he couldn’t conceal from himself that obscene images of ravished nuns and violated virgins, of monstrous outrages upon consecrated wafers, of goats dressed up as apostles and the rumps of apes substituted for holy relics, had inevitably flitted across his mind.

But Tegolin — and this only confirmed certain conclusions he had come to about his mother and Modry — seemed able to speak of “Lollard” quite easily without a thought of bestiality or the Black Mass. Quite calmly she now proceeded to enlarge upon her question, though our friend was convinced she saw — as how could she not? — that forbidding expression on her hero’s face.

“Didn’t you like him, Gwion Bach? You told me he was a Lollard, and then you stopped! I thought he had a lovely face as he talked to the Hog; and how straight he sat on that beautiful-coloured horse!”

It was our friend’s turn now to look less than noble. “Have you ever confessed a Lollard, Brother?” he enquired.

The monk shook his head. “But our Prior,” he remarked after a pause, while his lustrous eyes transformed themselves into the glazed windows of a condemned cell, “our Prior told one of the lay-brothers that he once had to fast for three days after hearing a Lollard's confession — just to conquer the evil thoughts it aroused in him."

"Have you ever seen a Lollard burnt, Brother?" asked Rhisiart viciously.

But Tegolin intervened at this with a quick girlish gesture. "Don't, Gwion Bach! No, Brother Huw, I won't let you tell him. You ought to be ashamed of feeling like that, and you so nearly burnt yourself! Blessed Virgin! Can't you leave these wickednesses to King Harry?"

A curious puzzled look came into the Grey Friar's face, and he fixed his eyes on a great clump of pink campions, near which Griffin was searching for some more dainty growth. That he should be caught sharing any opinion with Richard's enemy was appalling to him; but his gorge rose in equal disgust at the abominations he had come to link with the word "Lollardry".

Tegolin snatched off her page's cap, and began leisurely unplaiting her red braid. But suddenly a troubled look came into her face, and her eyes darkened. She glanced nervously at Rhisiart and asked him whether the Bard of Ffinnant was also on his way to Glyn Dŵr's place.

"God! I hope not!" laughed the boy. "But is he really a Bard? Is he really the son of a nun? He's a comical kind of Merlin if he is!"

His words had a surprising effect upon the girl. She jumped down from her perch, her loosened hair flowing over her shoulders, and stood erect in front of him, her hands behind her head. Her position threw her youthful breasts into prominence under her boy's tunic and added height and dignity to her figure, but her eyes were flashing.

"Why did you say that?" she asked in a low intense voice. But before Rhisiart could reply the Friar hurriedly intervened.

"Don't'ee mind him, child. Don't'ee mind him. He doesn't know what he says. He speaks like a Saxon."

But the girl was seriously upset. In his bewilderment and remorse as he stared with open mouth at her white face and mass of blood-coloured hair she made him think of a Salome in a church window.

"I only said," he stammered, "that if the Scab was the son of a nun he wasn't much like Merlin."

His words brought Mad Huw to his feet, and both the Maid and the Friar stood looking down at him as if the ground had suddenly opened between him and them.

Rhisiart began to feel really troubled. What on earth had upset them so? "But he's such a conceited fool," he stammered uneasily, making a sorry pretence at a laugh. What the devil was the matter now? Into what new blunder had he fallen?

"There are three names, my son," said the Friar sternly — and Rhisiart, even in the midst of his confusion, noticed with interest that while the man spoke he kept his expressive eyes tight shut, a proceeding which gave to his hollow cheeks and the quiet outlines of his face the look of an image carved on a tomb— "there are three names which we of North Wales never allow ourselves to utter lightly: the name of Our Lady, the name of Derfel, and the name of—"

"Hush, Brother!" interrupted Tegolin, actually clapping her fingers in her nervous excitement over the man's mouth. "Don't say any more to him! I should have thought a gentleman like him would show better taste! But it's ignorance, of course. You have to be born and bred a Welshman to understand these things, and perhaps you don't know, though someone must have told you by now, that I'm myself the unlawful — there's no — no! there's no reason why I shouldn't tell him, Brother! — the unlawful child of that Father you saw yesterday — the one who covered his head when David the Squint put his arms round Mother — the one Simon was so afraid of. So you see when you poked fun at *Y Crach* just now for having a nun for his mother it made me feel — it gave the same shock — as if you were teasing me about Father Rheinalt."

She took a long breath, dropped her hands, and stared frowningly, just as the Friar had done a little while ago, at the wealth of pink campions beside which Griffin was feeding.

But the Friar came up close to her and, drawing her head towards him so that all its torrent of hair fell over his sleeve, began whispering in her ear.

Rhisiart could see her face as she listened, and he was struck by its abandonment against Mad Huw's shoulder and by the way her fingers plucked at the cord round his waist. She made a gesture of assent at last, and then with a gentler look than she had given our friend for some while, she came, and the monk came with her, a step or two nearer. They both made this step — or so the boy in his bewilderment fancied — as if he'd been something under an evil spell.

"Gwion Bach," she said slowly and earnestly, "the Brother thinks, and I think too, that you ought to know before you see your cousin that we're on the verge of great events. Our Lord Owen has just called all the bards and all the leading men round here to come to his house at Glyndyfrdwy for some secret purpose. Brother Huw believes — and I've never known him wrong in things like this — that Owen intends to defy this cruel King, to throw off — what do you call it in English? — his allegiance, and raise the flag of — No, stop, Gwion Bach!" — these words were in answer to the excited cry with which Rhisiart leapt to his feet— "for there's more to—"

She paused, bent her head, and began toying uneasily with the embroidery sheath of her page's dagger. "The truth is the Brother doesn't like all he's heard about what your cousin's doing. The Brother hoped he would tell them of King Richard's return and gather the *cantrefs* together in his name. Instead of this he's using these Derfel prophets to stir up the people. You English don't understand these things; but in these parts Derfel's held to be more than a saint. Many people think he wasn't a saint at all, but something else — something beyond what is—"

She dropped her dagger and let it swing against her side again. Then she moved still nearer to him, laying her hand on his belt. "We girls," she whispered, "girls like me at any rate, are always being warned by the priests to have nothing to do with these Derfel men. They tell us" — she lowered her voice to a whisper— "that there have been cases when — when children have been born — whose mothers — girls like me — have cried out in their pains — that it was Derfel's! So now you see, Gwion Bach" — and she raised her voice again and glanced proudly at the Friar with the air of a pupil who has said her lesson correctly— "why we wish our Lord Owen would put more trust in the Friars, who are all friends of King Richard, than in heathen Bards like the Scab. Of course I know the way the Scab boasts, and what a fool he is, and what a drunkard and coward he is, and all the rest — but you know, Gwion Bach" — here her voice became almost inaudible — "very cunning and wicked people can wear a mask like that, and it isn't only Brother Huw who's told me of girls taken by Derfel. You won't find a maid in all Edeyrnion who doesn't beg her lover to marry her quick, and all for fear of Derfel. It's maids in love they say he visits, not the others. He always knows when a girl's in love because his Horse begins neighing when he rides round the house. It's when the wind's in the west and rain's coming that he rides; and when a girl hears Derfel's Horse she knows she's found out."

Rhisiart's countenance, while he was listening to these surprising matters, was a picture, but Brother Huw; when his King was in his thoughts, became oblivious to what went on in the minds of others, while

Griffin, who might have been disturbed if his head had been directed towards his young master, had wandered off between the pink campions and the bracken.

Our friend had attended lectures on Aristotle at Oxford, and had even been led, by one of the magnates at his own Exeter College, who was of a bold and sceptical turn of mind, to an investigation of the arguments against occult superstitions in Cicero's *De Divinatione.* And so, while his senses were stirred to their depths by the girl's words and the nearness of her soft body to his own, and while only the Friar's presence prevented him from hugging her to his heart and swearing that he would guard her from a thousand Scabs and a thousand Derfels, he felt it was only just to himself and to his University to bring the light of a little modern rationalism to bear on this ticklish subject.

"I have given much time," he began gravely, "to the study of Incubi and Succubi; and though many authorities hold the view that they are descendants of Lilith, the writers most to be trusted argue with convincing force that they are a creation *sui generis* and are only to be feared when—"

Though these bold words brought Mad Huw several steps nearer to Tegolin's side, and caused a shiver to pass through his frame and his beautiful wild-deer eyes to peer nervously among the thickets around them, Rhisiart felt that it would be childish not to put at his friends' disposal the results of his scientific research. "Only to be feared," he went on in a high-pitched rapid tone, for he was fearful lest his mind should suddenly become a complete blank, "when the normal animal spirits have been debilitated. Master Morris Stove — a learned Welshman with whom I lodged — told me he had studied the works of eleven Doctors of Divinity on this point and not one of them but demanded in such cases the word of more witnesses than the victim's; that is to say, of the woman visited by the Incubus or of the man visited by the Succubus. Master Morris Stove assured me, as the result of his studies, that if the girl visited by the Incubus could prove that it was impossible at the time referred to and according to the reasonable sequences and progressions of nature, for any masculine being other than a supernatural one to have had access to—"

But his discourse was interrupted, not by the Friar, for he was too agitated to speak, but by the approach of Griffin, who with the armour and the sword jangling on his back came hurriedly trotting up and incontinently thrust his heavily-breathing nose into his master's bosom.

To the unphilosophical mind of Tegolin there was something comical about this interruption of what promised to be a topic of more legality than liveliness; and she gave vent to a little laugh. Our friend tried not to feel hurt by this, and all would have been well if the Friar, thrust unceremoniously backward by the horse's bony flanks, hadn't nearly fallen.

Now Mad Huw had been compelled ever since he escaped from the hands of the Hog of Chirk to struggle with the demon of jealousy. With the help of his Guardian Angel, for we may believe that to madmen as well as to children are such special protectors granted, he had until now restrained his feelings.

But although as a saint it had been possible to repeat his psalms while the outward form of Tegolin lay by his rival's side, it was as a man impossible to bear a jostling from the rump of this rival's horse. Giving way therefore to his long-suppressed feelings, when the mottled rear of this young rationalist's steed thrust itself between him and his Maid, he snatched at the nearest weapon that presented itself to his hand, which was nothing less than the great sheathed sword lying across the offending back, and with the heavy handle of the old weapon struck the animal several violent and vicious blows.

A dangerous flash shot for a second out of Rhisiart's eyes; but Griffin only swished his tail and blinked, while Tegolin rushing to the Friar's side pulled him quickly away.

"They didn't mean it!" she cried in her penetrating voice. "They didn't mean it!" and many a time long afterwards Rhisiart remembered those words. They seemed to him like an appeal from the heart of the whole round earth against the blind folly of men's childish quarrels.

What exactly Tegolin had implied in them the lad never knew. Did they include all three of the girl's masculine companions or only himself and the horse? At any rate he felt ashamed of his momentary fury and thanked Heaven it had done no harm. Removing his cap he advanced humbly to the offended man and began with a charming earnestness making excuses for Griffin's clumsy movement. "In fact he thought I was reciting a lesson," he concluded, "and perhaps," and this he added with a smile that would have disarmed a harder heart than the Friar's, "perhaps I was! For indeed this question of children born without human fathers is one about which Master Morris Stove and I have had long disputations. Master Stove made it the subject of one of his official theses when he was studying for his Doctor's —"

"Hush!" interrupted Tegolin, pushing back her hair and listening intently. "I thought I heard something."

It appeared that Griffin heard something too, for he swung round and raised his head. They all instinctively moved nearer to each other and then stood transfixed, staring nervously down the path up which they had come. Presently Rhisiart, noting his horse's quivering nostrils and erect ears, began making the warlike preparations, such as loosening his great sword in its sheath and adjusting more conveniently the dagger in his belt, that a lad brought up as he had been upon tales of less civilized epochs would naturally make when he found himself the sole protector of a woman and a priest.

"They're not riders, whoever they are!" whispered Tegolin at last, "and I don't think they're armed either. Listen! Do you hear?" — and she drew a deep sigh of relief— "I'm sure they're bare-footed!"

They all listened; and even to Rhisiart's city-bred ears it seemed as if the low murmur of the human voices that he now could hear approaching were unaccompanied by any footfalls at all! It seemed to him as if they were being approached by the ghosts of voices travelling along a familiar path.

"They're only herdsmen from the mountains," whispered the girl, "coming back from Saint John's Mass."

But Mad Huw shook his head, or rather to be exact, he nodded his head like a person who congratulates himself upon his own secret perspicuity. "Those men are religious men," he said. "Those tones are the tones of religious men debating a fine point of doctrine."

"Impossible!" replied the girl. "Your ears mislead you, Brother. No religious men could possibly be walking away from Valle Crucis at this hour. No, no! Don't be so absurd, Brother Huw. You know yourself it can't be what you say. Those are neat-herds or swine-herds coming back from Mass."

A flickering smile crossed the Friar's face at this positive declaration from his young disciple. But as the murmur of voices drew nearer he began to show signs of alarm.

"Don't give me up to them, young gentleman!" he whispered anxiously. "I'm sorry I hit your horse. They want to shut me up in Valle Crucis. That's what they've come for — to shut me up!" He paused with his hand on Rhisiart's belt, while his great, beautiful hunted-deer's eyes fixed themselves beseechingly on the lad's face.

"Of course he won't give you up!" cried Tegolin. "Not one of them shall touch you. Gwion Bach! let him get up on Griffin! That'll give him faith in you — more than anything else."

Our friend obeyed her without hesitation; and bending his knee to serve as a stirrup-stone he helped the Friar, who had never mounted a horse in his life, to seat himself somehow on Griffin's broad back.

The old piebald turned his head with a peculiarly human gesture, as if to investigate the temper of this new burden; but he was evidently satisfied by what he saw and made up his mind to forget those unfortunate blows.

Thus, with the Friar in the saddle, Tegolin holding the bridle, and Rhisiart with a shining dagger-blade clutched in his hand, our three friends and their sagacious companion awaited the arrival of the strangers. Yes, Mad Huw was right. It was unmistakably the figures of two Cistercians that were now advancing towards them.

Their own appearance on the summit of that small eminence was evidently no surprise to the two monks. Either they had heard of their movements as they came through Llan-Collen, or they had been to the Tassel-farm to make enquiries. All they did as they came forward was merely to cease their animated discussion, exchange a quick word or two, and accelerate their pace.

"It's Father Rheinalt!" cried Tegolin in high excitement, and without a thought of the others she ran eagerly down the slope to meet the two monks.

Rhisiart hurriedly replaced his dagger in his belt, and rather shamefacedly began concealing his big sword under the edge of the sheepskin.

"Don't let them—" whispered Huw in his ear, and then, with an evident moral effort, the poor madman straightened himself on the back of the piebald; and though Rhisiart could feel he was trembling — a weakness that all Simon’s piled-up faggots had been unable to produce — he began proclaiming to the newcomers, just as if they had been a procession instead of a couple of pedestrians, that King Richard was still alive.

So loud and resonant was this challenge that Rhisiart, though he was all ears to catch what his red-haired Maid was saying to the man she had admitted to be her earthly parent, couldn’t overhear a syllable of their dialogue. He did notice, however, that while the girl knelt to receive the man’s blessing the other monk — out of delicacy perhaps — moved aside and began absorbing himself, or pretending to absorb himself, in the examination of some wayside plant.

Tegolin’s father seemed so stirred by the girl’s pleasure in seeing him, and so moved by her tenderness, that he paid not the smallest heed to the familiar cry, “Richard, our sweet sacrifice Richard, the chosen of God!”

But the other monk, whose appearance, though our friend only gave it a glance, was indeed sufficiently striking, did make a curious little gesture of assent, or at least of sympathy, raising for a second his great shaven poll and making a gentle, half-acquiescent, half-deprecatory movement with one of his plump hands.

Having been brought up by his mother to behave with courtesy to all ecclesiastics, Rhisiart made an effort to lead Griffin down the slope, so as to meet the Cistercians. But after each of his official pronouncements about the late King Mad Huw clutched at the boy, imploring him pitifully not to give him up. Then, as if not content with these appeals, he straightened himself in the saddle and thrust his feet, and the stirrups along with them, as far forward as he could, while he made desperate pulls and tugs, sometimes at the reins, sometimes at anything he could lay hold of on the horse’s back. These frantic movements, which resembled those of an obstinate and sulky child, struck Rhisiart as so pitiful that he threw politeness to the winds and remained where he was. He was afraid that if he left the Friar for a moment the fellow would slip off the horse and in his wild fear of losing his liberty make a bolt up the mountain; and so, though it hurt his sense of proper behaviour and even made him feel a fool, standing there like a sentry guarding a prisoner, he patted Griffin's neck and tried to recall his feelings when he had first listened to this man uttering his mad cries.

But Father Rheinalt and his daughter had now overtaken the other monk, and in a few seconds they were all standing together, with Griffin in the centre, asking questions, exchanging news, and discussing that mysterious summons to Glyndyfrdwy.

It soon became clear that the Friar was more afraid of Father Rheinalt than he was of the other Father, and, to confess the truth, our friend shared this feeling.

"It's all getting beyond me," he thought, as he watched that white face in its blood-coloured frame turning from her begetter to this madman she idealized. He noticed how whenever she spoke to the man on the horse she kept her fingers in contact with the monk, either upon his shoulder, or his wrist, or upon some fold in his raiment. Was it before he became a monk that this man begot Tegolin? And how with such a past — for he could never have been married to Tegolin's mother — could he have risen to the high honour of being sent to represent their foundation at Glendourdy's conclave?

The two had no physical resemblance that he could see. The monk was as swarthy as a Moor. Rhisiart had never seen such black hair or such dark flashing eyes. One thing was quite clear: the man was a volcano of smouldering and tragic passion. His burning eyes seemed to drink up Tegolin, as if she had been a water-spring in a boundless desert.

No wonder Mad Huw was afraid of him! How could a father with such a passionate feeling for his child let her wander about like this with a vagabond hedge-preacher?

"I suppose," the boy thought to himself, "it's what old Stove at Oxford used to call a case of mass-obsession. All the country holds Mad Huw for a saint and her for an innocent; and this dark monk — God comfort his soul! — gains glory with the other Fathers, if not with the Abbot, by being known as her begetter."

But the lad sighed as he looked at the three of them. What place could he hope to have in the heart of such a girl? Oh, how deep he had got landed in the drama of life! He could well remember an occasion when, on his way to his elegant school under the newly decorative wing of the big church, he had cried aloud for something real in life, cursing the monotony of the conventional pageants and gaudy processions of which his mother was so fond, with the same fashionable colours always repeating themselves and the same everlasting flags and banners. He could remember catching sight of an old-fashioned, brown-robed begging friar under a heavy Norman arch amid the flamboyant modern buildings and thinking how much more simple, more honest, more close to Nature life must have been in the old days.

"Oh life, life, bring me something real!" he had cried out on that occasion; and now, here he was, actually in love with a vagabond girl whose mother was the mistress of the Constable of Dinas Bran and her father a Valle Crucis monk! Here he was, drawing nearer and nearer every moment to the presence of this mysterious kinsman, whose character — even more than the problem of Incubi and Succubi — had been the subject of interminable discussions with his Oxford friend.

Rhisiart roused himself from his reverie to find that Father Rheinalt and Tegolin between them, by the simple process of asking him to tell them the whole story of his encounter with the late King, had already succeeded in allaying Mad Huw's fears. With our friend's help they now persuaded him to descend from Griffin's back; while Father Rheinalt explained that it was due to the powerful intercession with their Prior of Father Pascentius — here the other Cistercian made a smiling bow — that at the close of High Mass he had been allowed, on condition that Father Pascentius accompanied him, to obey an urgent summons he had received from the Lord of Glyndyfrdwy.

The man told them all this in abrupt short sentences. It was evidently a nervous trouble to him to use words at all. He was like one who has been rendered hoarse from solitary confinement. "Father Pascentius is a great authority on Saint Thomas," he finally blurted out; a statement that was received by this authority with what Rhisiart soon found to be his most characteristic gesture — an expressive wave of his heavy hands which seemed to wipe out from the scroll of destiny every certainty that man could desire and every assurance that prophetic foresight could reveal.

Mad Huw opened his great beautiful eyes to their fullest extent and gazed upon this marvel of erudition with renewed comfort. He had, it appeared, in his experience at Llanfaes, found that the learned among the Brothers were kinder to mental eccentricities than the more worldly and bustling.

As for Rhisiart, he gazed upon Father Pascentius with awe. He had learned at Oxford to respect theological learning beyond everything else except proficiency in civil law. The great metaphysician, however, was now discoursing to Tegolin about the flower he had seen; and it was evidently a more stimulating experience to him to talk to a girl about the nature and properties of plants than to his usual pupils about the mystery of the Trinity.

Father Rheinalt meanwhile was trying to discover from Mad Huw how far the Franciscans of Llanfaes were actually prepared to go in their opposition to the usurping monarch. Thus the field was clear for our young friend, as he mechanically plucked the grass at his feet and offered it to Griffin, to take a good look at the commentator upon Saint Thomas.

Rhisiart's own teachers in the fashionable monastic school at Hereford had been inclined to mock the Cistercians as an unpolished and rustic Order, as negligent of scholarship as they were averse to the enterprise of great cities, and he had suffered so much from those modish and foppish people, cringingly obsequious to their wordly rulers, that it filled him with malicious joy to contemplate this great imposing theologian whose presence, before he spoke a word, would have made those sycophantic Hereford priests look like sleek little mice.

But all the same Father Pascentius was an enigma to our traveller. He had an enormously fat body, unwieldy and awkward, huge gross hands, unnaturally large feet, while his great tonsured head was remarkable for nothing but the gleam of his eyes. He might have been compared to a clumsy trireme carrying at its bows two burning lanterns.

But what puzzled our friend about the man as he watched him talking to Tegolin — and at one point he saw him take a wisp of her hair in his coarse fingers — was the feeling of distaste his eyes excited. Rhisiart didn't feel in the faintest degree afraid of him, nor apparently did Tegolin or Mad Huw. But he certainly had insatiable eyes. They were as radiant as small globes of transparent jet, in the heart of which Nature had placed inextinguishable flames.

Rhisiart's knowledge of human character had hardly less than trebled itself in the last four-and-twenty hours, not to speak of the insight he had won into the darker aspects of his own nature, but Father Pascentius was too much for him Those little insatiable eyes seemed like astronomical spheroids that possessed devouring intensities and absorbing interests of their own, completely unconnected with the corporal frame of the man and indeed only remotely connected with the undistinguished countenance they transfigured. Other human eyes, especially with persons of character, tend to resemble deep holes descending into subterranean worlds; but though the eyes of Father Pascentius were far too intense to be called shallow, they didn't seem to lead into his personality. They were things in themselves. They were like that solitary eye of the daughters of Phorkys that could be transferred from one Phorkyad to another.

Nor, our friend decided, could the eyes of Father Pascentius be said to express either good or evil. He couldn't imagine himself demanding tenderness from them; and yet he could very well imagine himself appealing to them for help, as he might appeal to a philosopher's stone or to an inanimate magic crystal. They certainly were the most intelligent eyes he had ever seen. Immortal intelligence shone out of them! They were undying eyes. After a thousand years they would be still shining in Father Pascentius's sarcophagus amid the ashes and the dust; but they would be no more human then than they were now!

Rhisiart began at first by feeling uncomfortable when he saw these singular luminaries fixed upon Tegolin's loosened hair, for it seemed to him that the intellectual voracity in them transformed itself then into another sort of voracity. But by degrees this look the man was fixing on Tegolin became the lad's own look! There was nothing that it communicated comparable to the dark emotion he had felt when he thought of the arrow in the girl's shoulder; but it *was* an exultation of the senses; and it struck him as amazing that he could feel like that under the influence of another person, especially when his own feelings when she lay in his arms had been so very different. His cheeks grew hot — lightly as the man did it and lightly as the girl took it — when the theologian toyed with that wisp of blood-red hair.

A fierce liberation of free desire such as he had never known before rushed through his nerves. And the strange thing was that this feeling didn't bring with it that sense of remorse which had seized him after conjuring up that image of the arrow. It seemed to carry with it its own justification and an immense sense of freedom, springing from the release within him of an interior urge that gave him a new and reckless strength.

And in the rush of this strength he suddenly felt a rebellious hostility not only to that smouldering passion of Father Rheinalt but even to the pathos of Mad Huw. It was against both the tragic possessiveness of the father and the clinging helplessness of the Friar that this new feeling rose; and it seemed to him as though those undying Phorkyad eyes in that undistinguished head were liberating both himself and Tegolin from some enslaving fatality.

And mixed with all this, as he kept furtively glancing at that negligible mask with those burning eye-slits, was the curious feeling that, without a word addressed to him since their original greeting, Father Pascentius was not only giving him the courage to be himself, but revealing to him a self that it would certainly need some courage to be.

Yes, the wretched modelling of the man's shapeless features gave our friend the sense of surreptitiously consulting some inanimate wooden idol whose wonder-working eyes — brought from some far-off prehistoric shrine — possessed an older and more formidable authority than the image into whose sockets they had been irrelevantly thrust.

It was Father Rheinalt who finally gave the signal that they should move on. It was clearly a passionate excitement to him to be taking his daughter for her first visit to Owen, and the girl's nervousness made him unusually loquacious. He was the only one of the party who had been to Glyndyfrdwy before, and he explained that they should aim at making their appearance an hour or two before the chief meal of the day, which took place, he told them, soon after four o'clock.

"Owen is peculiar in certain things," he said. "He likes to keep up the old customs; and though our young friend here" — and he gave a friendly nod towards Rhisiart— "must expect neither the grandeur of a castle nor the ceremony of a court, he will, I think, be impressed by what—".

"But, Father!" interrupted Tegolin "You don't mean that Gwion — I mean that Master Rhisiart — will be asked to sit at the high table with—"

The monk's swarthy face relaxed in the first smile that our friend had seen upon it that day. "My good child!" he protested. "We're in Edeyrnion, aren't we, where you and I were born, and where Father Pascentius was born. Where have you and the Brother been in your travels that you've forgotten how things are done at home? We shall all, of course, every one of us, sit at the high table; and if we had servants — which, being what we are we haven't — you'd see them being well-feasted not so far away! Yes, and you too, my good friend" — and he patted Griffin's neck— "will have your entertainment within a bowshot of where we're all sitting. Owen's own horses will be further off; but the house-stable is close by, and he keeps it free for his guests' beasts."

"But Father," the girl murmured, and our friend noticed that she instinctively began braiding her long hair, "I'm not dressed for — there'll be the Arglwyddes and the young ladies — oh, I should die with shame to be seen among them like this. You don't understand, Father. When we were in Mona—"

"Hush, silly child!" said the monk sternly. "You've made your bed and must e'en lie in't. All Gwynedd, all Powys, know our Friar and our Maid. The Arglwyddes is a sensible woman. Does she think a girl can do what you do, and go where you go, and be the plague to Hal Bolingbroke that you are, and be dressed up like a court lady? Besides, if it shames you to sit at meat with Owen's people in your tunic and hose, you can get tricked out to your heart's content in their women's chambers. The Arglwyddes has better serving-maids at Glyndyfrdwy, and bigger robing-rooms, I warrant, than any you'd find at Chirk or Ruthin or Chester! You speak like a gipsy-wench, child — not like the Maid of Edeyrnion that all Wales wots of."

Tegolin bit her lip and hurriedly finished braiding her hair; but Rhisiart could see she was by no means reassured.

He himself began wondering with a good deal of nervous anxiety when and how he would be able to snatch an opportunity to put on some of the fine things he'd got concealed in his sheepskin bundle. Until Tegolin expressed her fears this disconcerting aspect of the matter had never occurred to him; and now as he helped the girl to mount Griffin, and persuaded the Friar to add his small bundle to the horse's burden, it flashed through his mind how calmly he had assumed that his attendance upon this famous Maid of Edeyrnion and her notorious friend would be accepted by everybody in the same light as it appeared to himself.

And how did it appear to himself? How far was his own heart irrevocably committed? And what would happen when the Maid and the Friar set out on their travels again? Was he intending to accompany them, mounted on Griffin, wherever they went, with his crusader's sword at their disposal?

"What's the matter with you, daughter?" enquired Father Rheinalt after the four men had walked some distance in silence by Griffin's side. "You haven't spoken a single word since I told you about the high table at Glyndyfrdwy! Are you still fretting over your clothes? I tell you it's the fashion now among noble ladies to dress as you're dressed when they travel. And when they're hungry and thirsty — you should see them at our refectory! — they don't mind us seeing them like that. Why should you be more particular about the Arglwyddes of Glyndyfrdwy than about the Abbot of Valle Crucis?"

"It's quite different, Father" the girl retorted. "But what's the use of arguing? You could never understand! Master Rhisiart knows what I feel."

Never had there fallen from feminine lips a more ill-advised retort than this. The monk turned upon Rhisiart with a smouldering flash of instinctive hostility.

"I've no doubt," he remarked sarcastically, "that this young gentleman has seen a great deal more of the world than I have. It is true I've only lived very briefly in Rome and Paris and Padua and Verona. It is true I wasn't lucky enough to see Constantinople when I was in the land of our Redeemer. It is true I never visited Toledo when I was in the household of Don Alvares in Salamanca. But I've seen what I've seen; and I tell you this, you proud wench — and you can pout as you like! When at our Prior's advice I didn't interfere with you following the Brother across the country — no! excuse me, Father Pascentius, I must speak to her now or forever hold my peace! — it was because I knew what honour it would bring to Edeyrnion. And you've done nobly, Daughter, and all Edeyrnion is proud of you! I'm right, aren't I, Father Pascentius? My little girl's a famous figure in North Wales. Isn't that so?"

Father Pascentius made his characteristic gesture; and with a wave of his plump hand reduced to metaphysical equality all feminine achievements.

Then he turned quickly to Rhisiart who was looking at Father Rheinalt with a defiant and threatening stare.

"He's never been to Oxford anyway," he remarked, "nor have I! And I doubt if he's ever — in all his travels — seen a city as sophisticated as Hereford. You must remember, Father," and he turned to his fellow monk, "that young people are much more sensitive about their appearance than we old recluses. You who've seen the great world in Paris and Rome and Padua and Verona, and have been in what's-his-name's household in Salamanca, should know young people better than to speak to them like that! Our daughter here doesn't follow the Brother to win glory for Edeyrnion, or even for Wales. She follows him because he needs her and because she believes in him. I'm afraid some of our clever politicians" — he lowered his voice so that Mad Huw couldn't hear him— "have been using both the Maid and the Friar as pawns against Hal Bolingbroke. But we'll see what Owen ap Griffith says. It may be—" Here he murmured something into the monk's ear, and drew him forward a little, keeping a heavy hand on his shoulder.

Mad Huw had picked up a stick and was amusing himself with it in the most youthful manner. He kept digging it into the ground and leaning his weight on it and making grotesque little jumps.

Tegolin signed to our friend to come to Griffin's head. "I ought to tell you more about me and him," she whispered, nodding towards the Cistercians. "It's true he's been in all those places. He wasn't boasting, so you mustn't be angry with him. He's jealous about Oxford and he hates

England. He was a *bonheddwr* — what do you call it in England? — a small landowner — when he met Mother. She was the same as she is now. She was his — how do you say it, Gwion Bach? — his paramour — when I was born; and then she left him for the Earl, under cover of marrying Master Simon. It was then he took the vows. But he loves her to distraction still. The sight of her drives him mad. Sometimes I think she's afraid he'll kill her. And I believe once—"

"For sixteen years?" threw in Rhisiart in an incredulous tone. "Can men feel like that for sixteen years?"

"Hush!" the girl whispered and touched his lips with her finger. "Perhaps they can't in Hereford, Gwion Bach; but they can in Edeyrnion!"

They were both silent. She trying hard to imagine what the hooknosed lad at her side would look like in fifteen years, and he telling himself a story about breaking into Dinas Bran at the head of a Welsh host, and giving Denis Burnell his life at the piteous supplication of both herself and her mother.

The sky had grown a little more cloudy, though they were still only thin, filmy clouds, when our party of friends arrived at the outskirts of Owen's manorial abode.

The first intimation they had of the approach of their journey's end was a somewhat startling one. They were following a narrow path between the river and some heavy over-hanging woods when they were aware of the shrill note of a horn among the trees above them. This sound was answered by another of the same kind higher up the mountain, and then by another, sounding more faintly, from the opposite side of the river.

"Come on, Brother Huw! We must keep together!" cried Rhisiart; and he himself was astonished at the instinctive authority with which he spoke.

But he seconded his words by dragging Griffin hastily forward, while with his other hand he clutched at the Friar's habit and unceremoniously pulled him along. The monks in front were at first too engaged in their conversation to catch these sounds; but the horn in the woods above them soon approached so near that they couldn't help hearing it, and they at once swung round and waited for the others to come up.

They were hardly together when two figures burst from the brushwood about five hundred yards above them, one pursuing and one pursued; and began leaping and scrambling down the slope. The fugitive was evidently at the end of his tether and must have been hunted for some time, for his clothes were stained and torn and he was both bare-headed and bare-handed. He was rushing down the hill so desperately, and was in a state of such panic, that for a moment he didn't notice the group of people gathered round the girl on the piebald horse.

But it may be believed that all our friends noticed him; and for a moment or two they remained spell-bound, lost in that curious state of mind, at once complex and very simple, with which human beings contemplate a life-and-death chase.

As for Rhisiart, his heart beat wildly, beat more than it had done since he lifted his sword between the archers and the spears. The infinite duration of time crumpled itself up into a little round ball. He looked at those two figures, the pursuer and the pursued, in a throbbing trance. There was something in the sight that seemed to arouse instincts in him old as the world. The fleeing figure was himself. The pursuing figure was himself. To escape, to keep his life, only to keep his life, was the spinning, dizzying, hurling, crashing bolt of his blinded passion. Into water, into fire, down precipices, into oblivion — so that somehow he might escape!

But to overtake, to have the prey at his mercy, to overcome in this straining, groaning, panting contest, to break his heart in one frantic sob, but to have him down, down at last, down beneath his feet!

In Tegolin, however, there was no such division of feeling. Long before the other watchers came to their senses the heart within her was calling out in a tongue older than thought, older than justice: “To me — to me — to my breasts, hunted! Here, here! Here to me! No, not there! Here to my heart, here to what doesn’t question, doesn’t judge, doesn’t waver, doesn’t think! Here to what is life merely, life only, life beyond all dispute, all argument, all justice, all reason!”

And all the while in the shining black eyes of Father Pascentius, those little black eyes of the everlasting blessing on *the event,* gleamed burning interest. Would he catch him? Would he escape? Yes, no — no, yes? Double sixes again! Being, Not-Being, Not-Being, Being; so runs the world away!

As soon as the fugitive noticed our group of onlookers he stood for a second stock-still, just as an animal might have done, who, hunted by another animal, is suddenly confronted by human beings, and stares at them, gasping, panting, desperate.

Then, as he recognized the familiar Cistercian dress, the man swerved in his flight and began scrambling and stumbling, in the same wild-beast haste, straight towards them. But he was still more than three hundred yards away when his enemy, who was leaping after him, overtook him.

Had the wretch continued his descent uninterrupted he might possibly have gained the river, but his moment’s delay was his ruin. He stretched out his arms in wild supplication when he saw that the monks had seen him, and uttered a cry for help, but the cry was soon turned to a piercing and heartrending scream, when feeling his pursuer to be just behind him he tripped on a rock and rolled over in the bracken.

It was now the other man’s turn to catch sight of the group of people whose appearance had given his enemy into his hands; but all he did was to wave haughtily with his left hand for them to remain where they were while he proceeded to despatch his victim. In this process he evidently didn’t intend to hurry himself.

The victim was disarmed, exhausted, done for, and the pursuer apparently felt justified in keeping him waiting for his death until he had regained his own breath. Thus both the man crumpled up upon the bracken and the man holding the spear above him panted out their long-drawn gaspings in a fearful unison and in complete disregard of five strangers.

It must be confessed that Rhisiart’s first instinct was the law-abiding Hereford one — more than natural in the scion of a legal family — the instinct to assume that a man in such haste must be a malefactor and that the death held over him was a lawful execution.

Tegolin, however, who had been brought up in a less well-ordered society, felt nothing of this. All she felt was the spear of the hunter at the throat of the hunted; and jerking Griffin forward she lifted up her voice in a shrill cry of protest. The sound of her cry made Mad Huw recall his own recent predicament and he began leaping up the rocks with such agility that it was soon clear he would reach the scene of the killing before she could.

Meanwhile, the man with the spear, who was a tall personage with a heavy protruding forehead, deep-set eyes and shining teeth, seemed determined to get his own breath before despatching his panting enemy.

He kept lifting up his spear as if pondering where to strike, but he was clearly reluctant to waste his stroke, and the memory must have come to him of some unpleasant recent occasion when he couldn’t draw out his weapon from the victim’s body.

So, panting still, he deliberately bent down, and pulling the man round by the hair of his head, shortened his grip upon his weapon, and experimentally, but without breaking the skin, pressed the spear-point against the man's throat.

It was more with the feeling that he must, right or wrong, support Tegolin and her Friar, than that he ought to interfere in what was probably a mere deer-stealing execution, that Rhisiart followed his friends to the spot.

Meanwhile, what might be called a double-spouted jet of ultimate human emotions rose up from the green hollow where the man lay under the spear-point. It cannot often happen between slayer and slain that such a vivid exchange of consciousness takes place as occurred between those two breathless men.

The man with the heavy brows and gleaming teeth had become unconscious of everything else but of the ecstasy of thrusting his spear into this human throat. He felt the throat with his thumb and the point of his spear with the same thumb. An intensely vivid foretaste of what in a second he would feel, when, rising from his knees, he leaned his full weight upon the spear and pinned the man to the earth, came over him mingled with the extraordinary sweetness of crushed bracken.

And then he forgot everything in the expectation of having that throat under his spear, and of pressing his full weight upon it. The actual words "I pinned him down like an eel!" came into his mind; and he thought of the gurgling sound the soul would make as it left the body.

"Down, down!" his pulses drummed. "You below; I above." And side by side with this up-jetting emotion on the part of the slayer rose a parallel spurt of mortal feeling on the part of the victim. Are there perhaps invisible students of such ultimate human feelings whose business it is to make notes of the varying degrees in the gamut of this music?

If there are such, and if these parallel vibrations had been weighed in some psychic balance, it would have been found that the expectation of imminent death was less intense on this occasion than the rapturous expectation of inflicting it.

The truth is that for the man panting on the ground the bitterness of death had already passed. It had come in a crescendo of despairing sobs when he had felt his pursuer gaining on him. And when he stumbled and fell on that slippery stone it reached its consummation. Then it broke and ebbed; and though he could suffer still, he couldn't suffer with an intensity equal to the other's triumph.

An infinite weariness had come upon him as he lay supine on that pungent-sweet bracken, while the other pricked at his throat. His thoughts took physical shapes. They took the shape of a neck-bone bending under iron; and he even began to confuse the bone which was his life with the iron which was his destruction. The idea of pain no longer existed. The fear of death no longer existed. The humming in his ears and the panting of his lungs became the grinding of the iron which was his enemy upon the bone which was himself.

"Stop! Stop!" shrieked Mad Huw, as he came leaping like a wild goat up the steep ascent. "It's Richard you're killing! Hold your hand, you murdering slave!"

The man's answer was to bring down his spear with the full weight of his body upon the fragment of space occupied a pulse-beat ago by a naked throat.

But Mad Huw's cry, though unheard by the prostrate man's benumbed reason, was heard by the life-impulse of his body. And his body, making a movement like a galvanic fish, twitched out of the way, so that the flashing spear-head pierced nothing but the earth; and at that point Mad Huw flung himself upon him.

"It's Richard! It's Richard!" he kept repeating, as he wound his lean arms round the tall man's person. "Don't — you — know — that he's — the sacrifice — for us all?"

It took more than a moment even for the fellow's immense strength — and his spear still quivered in the earth — to free himself from the madman's clutch; and no sooner was he free than he found himself confronted by a girl with a swinging braid of blood-red hair, to whose knees his victim was now clinging.

The shock of this combination of events catching him at the moment when the electric explosion of his savagery had run like lightning down the shaft of his spear into the ground dissolved the magnetism of his mood. A struggle took place in his distorted lineaments that was most curious to see. He bit his lip till the blood ran down his chin.

"Who in Holy Mary's name—" he began, then, shaking himself free from the Friar's grip, he saw Rhisiart by Tegolin's side with an ugly looking dagger in his hand.

"Mercy! Mercy!" cried the hunted man. "Don't let him kill me, my sweet people! I'm a priest of God!"

"A priest of God? You scurvy scrivener! Lady, he's a spy of Bolingbroke's. He's a filthy parchment-eating lawyer, lady. He'd have taken service with Owen to damn us all! And he'd have done it too, if I hadn't chased him out like a stinking fox. Look at him, the mangy cur! Does he look like a priest?"

The wretch at the girl's knees made Rhisiart think of a criminal he had once seen hanged in Hereford for coining the King's money.

“Get up, man!” he cried, with the air of a sheriff’s proctor, pulling the kneeling suppliant to his feet. “Here are those who’ll know whether you’re a priest or not!”

It was then that to everybody’s surprise Father Pascentius stepped forward.

“Haven’t I seen you before?” he asked.

Rhisiart, who was still supporting the culprit with the grandiose air of a pillar of Hereford justice, felt it proper to repeat the monk’s question as if his prisoner had been an idiot. “He’s asking you if he’s ever seen you before!”

But the fellow took no notice of anybody except Tegolin, upon whom he continued to cast desperate and appealing looks.

“I’m sure I’ve seen you before,” repeated the commentator upon Saint Thomas; and then, while a gleam of something like amusement lit up his heavy face, he made his characteristic gesture; and remarked with a finality of authority that seemed indisputable, “This man is no spy. He is—”

But the personage with the spear interrupted him. “I don’t care who he is! The point for you, my good Father, is who I am!” And at this he unslung his horn from his neck and blew a resounding blast.

Rhisiart dropped his prisoner’s arm so suddenly when he saw and heard this blast of the horn that the poor wretch — staggering, as the psalm says, like a drunken man at his wit’s end — reeled close up to Tegolin, who was now standing with her arm across Griffin’s neck, and clutching at the belt round her waist swore to her by Saint Tysilio, by Saint Collen, by the majestic Festival of Saint John, *per festum Sancti Johannis Baptistae,* that he was a priest of God!

“A parish-priest, dear lady, a respected and learned priest, sweet lady, and though it is true not altogether unknown at the court of the King, a good

Welshman at heart, and above everything else anxious to lay all my legal learning at the feet of the rightful Prince of Wales!"

Rhisiart who now held the savage stranger's hunting-horn in his hand, for seeing his interest in this symbol of romance the man allowed him to examine it, heard this tremendous and fatal utterance— "the rightful Prince of Wales" — with a curious shock. It struck him in a double way. In the first place it awed and moved him profoundly; as if with the impact of an oracular word, a word that the tossing wind of destiny had only after long hesitancy brought itself to pronounce.

In the second place, falling as it did from the white and twitching lips of this runaway lawyer, the word had an artificial sound, an unnatural sound, a sound smelling of parchments and sealing-wax, rather than of chariots and horses.

It would sometimes come back to him, all his life after, when he heard that magic title *Tywysog Cymru,* this unpleasing memory of a hunted lawyer's frightened, reckless, unscrupulous, and infinitely crafty face!

Father Pascentius was now talking rapidly to the man with the spear, while Rhisiart, after a friendly nod of permission from its owner, was himself trying to blow the horn. He would have got on better at this job if he had been able to keep his eyes, as their gaze wandered here and there above his distended cheeks, from focussing upon the psychic encounter that was going on between the girl and her "respected parish-priest."

This encounter, which at first had been a matter of clinging looks and then had become — when he clutched at her belt — a matter of clinging hands, had now become a curious exchange of words.

After some extremely quavering notes, that made the spearman smile as he listened to Father Pascentius, Rhisiart took the horn from his lips and under pretence of polishing its silver-rim retained it in his hand, while under his bent brows he spied upon Tegolin and the fugitive. A woman’s power of pity — Christ and God, he had never realized it before. But what a world of secret treacheries this hinted at, what a world of yieldings, sweet and furtive, that not the most jealous love could guard against!

“She’s got a look in her eyes,” he said to himself, as he licked his fingers and polished the horn’s rim, “that she’s never had for me, or Rheinalt or Huw. And why the devil does she keep her lips open as she listens to him? And she’s got her knuckles pressed against one of her breasts now, as if it was just, there she felt the pity — this damned unfair pity for a sneaking lecherous scrub whose soul ought to be in Hell! Yes, and I swear there’s a tear on her cheek, too. What a little goose she is! A fool, that’s it; just a silly fool.”

In truth it did almost seem as if the man’s narrow escape from death and that heart-rending scream he uttered when he tripped had really, as girls love to say, “done something” to Tegolin. It seemed as if the fearful vibration of the life-and-death struggle he’d been through had projected a charge of magnetism, quivering and irresistible, that was seducing her innermost nerves.

“Why had she followed Mad Huw?” our friend thought, as he watched this subtle process going on. “Out of pity! And why did she let me take her in my arms last night? Out of pity!”

But the boy soon realized that he wasn’t the only one of their party hit to the quick by the girl’s concern for this runaway scribe. He soon became aware that both Father Rheinalt and Brother Huw were watching the pair as jealously as he was himself. This at once consoled him; and even brought a slight reaction in her favour.

Wasn’t the girl free to extend her pity — granting that it were a sort of vice — in any direction she pleased?

But the tension came to an end now, and in a surprising enough manner. Father Pascentius had at last, it seemed, quite won over the impulsive warrior with the spear. Both of them came forward; and the man, who a few minutes ago had been fumbling at the fellow’s throat, now stretched out his hand to him and made the sort of blunt and bluff apology that he might have offered had he killed a dog or brought down a horse.

The person he addressed pulled himself together, moved away from Tegolin, swept a guarded reproachful and defiant look round the assembled company, and clasped his hands behind his back.

At his pursuer he didn’t look at all, nor make the least acknowledgment of his apology.

“I remember you now perfectly well,” said Father Pascentius. “You are Master Young, Incumbent of Llanwys in Dyffryn Clwyd, and Canon Elect of Bangor. No, listen to me, Master Young! Your name was mentioned I understand in the new King’s Court as a candidate for the Archdeaconry of Ardudwy. But it was over a point of canon law that I had the honour of your acquaintance, Master Young; nor do I think you will have forgotten the occasion quite so completely if I remind you that you took up a position, in regard to the Bishopric of Bangor, and the Holy Father’s consecration of Lewis of Aber, that was somewhat contrary to our Welsh hopes. No, hear me out, Master Young! This worthy gentleman, deceived by your appearance, misunderstood your business here. He was mistaken; at least let’s hope he was mistaken! But all this can wait till we reach Glyndyfrdwy. It will be in our company that you’ll come to Baron Owen; and this gentleman assures me he’ll give us his escort and the benefit of his—”

Rhisiart had all this while been closely watching the face of their ambiguous captive, and the longer he had looked at it the less he had liked it. It was a flat face with very small features and a mouth whose thin lips accentuated the prominence of a narrow, projecting, and extremely pointed chin.

The man’s eyes were pale, and had a wandering, restless, furtive look; but what puzzled our friend in his prolonged scrutiny, and confounded his analysis, was a certain indescribable air of formidable power and self-possession.

“He’s no common customer,” thought the lad, “and he’s no fool, but I don’t like him.”

Liking or disliking, however, had now to give way to obvious humanity, for what interrupted the Cistercian’s remarks was nothing less than the sudden collapse of Master Young, who fell, as a dead man might have fallen, with a decidedly unpleasant thud, upon the grass at their feet.

To our friend’s vexation, and to the equal annoyance of Father Rheinalt, it fell to Tegolin’s lot, with the aid of her silver flask and some water from the stream, to recover him from this well-timed swoon; and the end of it was the very issue that Rhisiart had been for some while dreading — that it became his destiny to hoist the fellow up upon Griffin’s serviceable back, and even to remain by his side when once they’d got him mounted.

By this time our friends had found themselves surrounded by quite a number of wild-looking spearmen, whom their leader’s horn had brought to the spot; so that when the party finally moved forward again on their way, their company was a large and formidable one. Father Rheinalt took exclusive possession of his daughter during the rest of their march, so that our friend had at once to support Master Young and listen to Mad Huw’s incoherent rhapsodizing.

At one point indeed the commentator upon Saint Thomas was thoughtful enough to come to the lad’s side and explain to him, and to the man he was supporting, the identity of the impulsive huntsman.

“He’s a friend of Iolo Goch,” the theologian explained, “and a landowner from Cwm Llanerch in the Vale of the Conway. He heard that the old bard was dying, and he heard of this gathering at Glyndyfrdwy.

“So he came with his tenants, and Owen has kept him. He seems to have become a kind of outlaw since” — and he lowered his voice so as to be unheard by Mad Huw— “since Richard’s death. His name is Rhys. They call him Rhys Gethin, Rhys the Savage; and my own impression is” — and he spoke more kindly than he’d done before to the man on the horse— “that the less you yourself make of what happened just now, Master Young, the more likely it’ll be that your over-zealous pursuer will get a shrewd rebuke! Owen doesn’t like tale-bearers. But you may be sure our rough friend won’t hold his tongue; and your discretion will win all the more favour.”

With these politic remarks — and Rhisiart began to think that if Father Pascentius was as good a philosopher as he was a diplomat the Cistercian Order would certainly hold its own — the discreet sage drew back to the rear of the company and fell to botanizing.

For several miles Rhisiart had all he could do to keep Master Young from slipping from Griffin’s back. The nervous reaction from what he’d gone through, combined with complete physical exhaustion, produced intermittent spells of extreme sleepiness, at each access of which he would lose his balance and sway violently to one side or the other.

However, by degrees, he recovered himself, and as his strength revived his normal intelligence revived too, and he began to question his young escort.

Rhisiart replied at first in unsympathetic monosyllables; but few young men can for long resist talking of themselves to an ingratiating listener and it wasn’t long before the crafty lawyer-priest had heard all he wanted about our friend’s life in Hereford and Oxford.

Rhisiart grew in fact more and more disarmed by the man’s tact as a listener; and the next stage of their conversation took the form of a brilliant disquisition, to which the lad listened with absorbed interest, upon the nicest and most delicate points of Welsh politics.

The astute cleric was at pains to make clear to the young Oxonian that Father Pascentius’ tone towards him was due to the bitter rivalry that existed in Wales between the regular and the secular clergy. The Friars, he told him, were all for Richard, whereas the Cistercians were struggling to retain a diplomatic neutrality between the House of Lancaster and its enemies.

And then, while his curiously level face with its round toothless mouth and projecting chin grew animated with frank confidence, he began without shame to confess to the young man that he was in the greatest personal quandary whether to range himself openly with the new nationalist movement among the Welsh, or to return to Henry’s court and content himself with advocating the Welsh cause in the councils of its enemies.

This frankness in an obviously formidable man of affairs was exquisitely flattering to our friend’s vanity. He found himself even going so far, under the stimulus of the other’s confidence, as to speak freely of his own secret ambitions. It must be remembered that this was the first time in his life he had presumed to discuss public affairs with a man who could boast a personal acquaintance with the reigning monarch; and as he walked by Griffin’s side, watching the subtle play of Master Young’s mobile face — which he kept mentally comparing to a certain recently-carved gargoyle, through whose mouth the roof of his College Chapel drained itself of the rain — he began to feel a sense of worldly superiority to his recent companions, none of whom, he felt sure, was capable of following Master Young’s statesman-like thoughts.

Of his own ambitions he began to speak more and more freely; avoiding, however, with an instinctive shyness, any reference to Dinas Bran. He questioned the archidiaconal candidate very closely about the character of the Lord of Glyndyfrdwy, and was delighted to find that his own suspicions about his famous kinsman, as being more addicted to poetry than politics, were fully shared by this virtuoso in human character.

“No, I’ve never met him,” Master Young declared, “and to tell you the truth I am exactly in your own position with regard to him. Indeed, the chief purpose of my journey — so rudely interrupted by that uncivilized brute — was to judge for myself the chances that this cousin of yours would have, in case these Burnells and Arundels and Greys did drive him into revolt.”

“Shall you,” enquired our young friend impulsively, warming to a man whose opinions jumped so closely with his own, “shall you, do you think, follow Father Pascentius’ advice, and say nothing to my kinsman of this murderous attack? And what, by the way, if I have an opportunity of talking privately with him, would it be best for me to say about the matter?”

Master Young didn’t reply for a moment. His eyes wandered thoughtfully over the slopes of a bracken-covered range of hills that now appeared on the right of their winding track.

“I think I must leave all that,” he said at last, with a melancholy sweetness, “to the natural discretion of an Oxford scholar. No, I think the good Father was right, absurdly prejudiced as he is! No, I shall say nothing to Owen myself, unless — No, I shall say nothing.”

He paused a moment and then, leaning his hand against the edge of Rhisiart’s little bundle of books whose parchment-covers were protruding from the sheepskin, he twisted himself round, as if to assure himself of the whereabouts of Rhys the Savage, and remarked lightly, “Of course, if I hadn’t been a priest I should have stood up to that ruffian. It’s the first time in my life I've had to take to my heels. Holy Mary! And I'd be a dead man now, if I hadn't bestirred myself."

In spite of his mental affinity with the would-be Archdeacon it did cross Rhisiart's mind that though the fellow had indeed "bestirred himself, and done so with the agility of a hunted rabbit, it was the intervention of Mad Huw rather than his personal activity that had saved his skin.

Master Young must have divined the drift of his new friend's thought, for he now remarked that he had only recently heard of the wandering Friar of Llanfaes. "I'd like to thank him though, for his assistance just now."

Once more Rhisiart couldn't restrain a fleeting thought that the word "assistance" was a somewhat modest one for what the Friar had done while Master Young panted on the ground; but anxious to further this laudable duty he raised his voice and speaking authoritatively and loudly, as if to a deaf child, called the Friar to their side.

"I almost believe, Brother," whispered Master Young, "yes, I really almost think that I owe you my life."

Mad Huw contemplated him in astonishment, his beautiful eyes wide open. "It's the blessed King," he replied in awe-struck tones; "it's he who's come back and will be with us soon, who saves all our lives. That's why we're all going together. That's why you and the Maid and that man with the shining teeth who wanted to make your death a quick one, and the Father who tears up flowers to put under his vest, and this young man who draws his sword and puts back his sword are going to beg Owen to deliver the land from this enemy of Christ, this scourge of innocence, this plague-spot Bolingbroke!"

Rhisiart had already grown so accustomed to treat Mad Huw's words with tender solicitude that it made him think of the legal parchments in the sheriff’s office at home when he saw Master Young’s pragmatic mind curl up like bonfire shavings under these fiery words.

But he was really shocked when the priestly lawyer thrust his hand into the stout wallet he carried at his waist and fishing up from its recesses a couple of silver groats held them out to Mad Huw with the words: “For your little necessities, Brother! I am not a rich man, or—”

But the lad never supposed that the Friar would have had the wit, or indeed the gall, to do what he did with these two glittering coins.

A couple of Rhys Gethin’s somewhat ragged followers were trailing their spears at a little distance; and the Friar, calling out to them in the rustic idiom of the Vale of the Conway, flung the coins towards them and chuckled like a mischievous boy when the men nearly fell into the Dee in their struggles to pocket these precious pieces.

The sight of Master Young’s disconcerted face and the way the small, well-modelled features of its oblong expanse contracted, as if they had received a smart fillip from the back of a lean hand, lessened considerably our friend’s disgust. But he did make a mental note that it is possible to be a great statesman and a very questionable gentleman.

Tegolin from her position in the little cavalcade by Father Rheinalt’s side must have noted with indignation this offer of money to her hero, as if he’d been an ordinary begging friar, for she came hurrying up to them, and Rheinalt followed her. It was impossible for our friend not to feel a certain amount of malicious joy when he heard his intellectual acquaintance receive some lively home-thrusts from the impetuous and impulsive girl.

“So you pay for your life with silver groats, Master Young?” and her tone had a texture of delicate fury in it that made the boy think of the polished slipperiness of his mother’s voice when she came upon his father and Modry in the rose-garden.

What, however, puzzled the boy about it, and by no means pleased him, was the manner in which Master Young received his punishment.

His curious pale eyes seemed to darken in a kind of withdrawn and abstracted delight and out of his thin-lipped toothless mouth, that seemed to round itself in sensual expectancy, came a faint purring sound. It was an intense relief to Rhisiart when Father Pascentius enquired politely of the would-be Archdeacon what his view was about Owen's chance if there were a rising. Master Young replied at once with grave authority.

"The worst," he remarked, "of a gathering like this, with all its ridiculous mystery and its bard-business and its bandits from the Conway and its" — he lowered his voice with a glance at Mad Huw— "its Franciscan fuss about Richard, is that it's all local and provincial! The stage is set for great events — that I grant ye; but it's a bigger stage than your bards and bandits realize. I'm as good a Welshman as any of you, but I can tell you this, if the red dragon comes back it'll be because the lions and leopards have fallen out among themselves. There must be trouble in Ireland, trouble in Scotland, and all Northumbria rising; yes! and a war-cloud from France too, before the House of Lancaster's shaken. I know the Prophecies of Merlin as well as any of you; but if Owen ap Griffith thinks he can drive the English out of Wales by magic and sorcery, he's—"

"Richard, sweet Richard, will do it by his blood!"

The Friar's voice rang out so loud that Rhys the Savage with a couple of his followers came hurrying down upon them through the bracken from the higher path they'd been following; and at his enemy's approach Master Young fell silent.

Indeed they all fell silent; and the murmur of the river and the chirping of a small bird in the undergrowth and the harsh croaking of a raven poised above the high rocks were the only audible sounds, save when Griffin's hooves struck against an unseen stone.

Then Tegolin's voice became audible; though it seemed as if the girl were rather talking to herself than to any of the men round her.

"Only a terrible, only an intolerable wrong, worse than any I've heard of yet, would justify the lifting of the red dragon, and all the burning and all the spoiling and all the torrents of blood that would follow a struggle between Welsh and English. Baron Owen must die one day, as we all must, and how will he feel if, for some paltry quarrel with my Lords of Chirk and Ruthin, he has covered our land with blood, and blackened it with fire, and made—"

"Hush, girl!" interrupted Father Rheinalt, his features distorted with the intensity of his feeling. "Hush, or you're no daughter of mine! As John ap Hywel said to us in the guest-house last night, it is the Lord Himself who is sowing dissension between Henry of Lancaster and the Percies; and what I say is, if all Gwynedd, and all Powys, and all the commotes of Deheubarth were soaked in the blood of their children, it would be a small price to pay for a Wales free and united as it was—"

"As it *never* was!"

The words fell harshly and brutally from between the gleaming teeth of Rhys the Savage. "Pardon me, Gentles and Fathers all," he went on, while his two shaggy-haired, bare-foot followers glared at the man on Griffin's back as if at the least stir of contradiction they would wring his neck, "but when I hear these Lollardy-words about peace and unity and all Welshmen linked in love, and think of the proud warriors of old and the free princes of Gwynedd, who'd as soon see a scurvy South-Walian on the banks of the Conway as they would a dirty Saxon, I could spit on the earth! In those old times," he went on while his followers' eyes flashed in sympathy, "there were real saints among us! Saint Derfel, Saint Tysilio, Saint Collen — wouldn't any of them as soon fling a spear at a Gwyddel from Ireland, or a Silurian from Gwent, as at any serf-Saxon or bastard-Norman?"

Rhys the Savage uttered these words in furious jerks, rolling his eyes and baring his teeth. Like spouts and jets and flukes of hot blood they whistled about that little company's ears.

What with the spear he held in his hand and kept toying with, and what with his followers' barbarous looks, neither the cloistered monks nor the secular cleric uttered a word.

But Mad Huw cared nothing for this beastly chatter, nothing for this brandished spear.

"Holy Saint Francis!" he cried. "What talk is this? Was Blessed Francis a Lollard? Was the Son of Mary a Lollard? Is sweet King Richard, who gives his life for us all, a Lollard? Yes, go on! Gnash your teeth and roll your eyes at me, Rhys Gethin! I snap my fingers at you. Haven't I read the secret of the years in sweet Richard's eyes?

"And it's love that will conquer, in spite of your teeth and your spear! King Arthur wasn't born in Conway nor Dewi Sant in Edeyrnion. It wasn't in Mathrafal that Merlin found the red dragon for Gwyddyrn the Goidel! Holy Saint Francis! what Devil's coil is this, Rhys Gethin? Not a word will King Richard say through me for Owen; not a word will poor Huw say for himself, unless Owen is out to bring all Wales together!" He stopped breathless and let the lean arm he had stretched out sink to his side.

The irresponsible chief from Cwm Llanerch lowered his spear and stared frowningly at the earth; and it seemed to Rhisiart as if his ferocious tribalism really had received a shock. Inspired, however, by a not unnatural delight at seeing his enemy discomforted, Master Young deemed it a propitious moment to thrust in his diplomatic oar; and he proceeded in carefully-chosen words to bring forward the legal aspect of the subject.

"And if Owen," he said, "did bring all Wales together, as Brother Huw desires, his success could never be lasting until he made peace with England. And the only way he could make peace with England would be by paying homage to the King in London. This, just this, and nothing less than this, has been the wise policy of all our greatest princes. A free Principality — and I would even go so far as to say a Principality with a Parliament — rendering without question that geographical, that legal, that historical homage to the crowned King in London that has been paid since the days of King Alfred — that is the line to follow!"

For one beat of his agitated pulse Rhisiart felt sure the lawyer's end had really come this time. The spear was raised, and he could see it actually quivering in the Conway man's reckless hand. He himself was moved by no rush of automatic impulse to defend Master Young, but he did, as soon as he had taken breath, lay a firm hand on the hilt of his crusader's sword which offered itself so easily to his hand.

But Tegolin had moved by an instinctive impulse — and it can be believed how our friend went over this incident again and again in his mind — and if Rhys Gethin hadn't held back just in time the spear would have passed through her body rather than Master Young's.

It was a toss of the dice, too, whether the fellow's uncivilized henchmen would do what Tegolin's rush forward had prevented their master's doing; but with an angry oath in which he included the whole party, Rhys the Savage called off his men as if they'd been a pack of dogs, blew his horn as a sign to his little army on the upper path, and scrambled up the rocks to rejoin them. Half-way up he paused upon a platform of stone for a final word, and pointing at Griffin's rider — for the whole party had stopped to follow his ascent with their eyes— “Wait till you find yourself,” he shouted, “you scurvy Carmarthen spy, in Owen’s prison at Carrog! You’ll only come out of that like a trapped rat — to be baited by Conway puppies!”

They were now actually in sight of the tall flagstaff in the centre of the enormous circular stockade which surrounded Owen’s dwelling. This flagstaff, made out of an untrimmed spruce-fir of exceptional height, was planted on the top of one of those ancient mounds, centres in Wales, as doubtless in ancient Greece, of mystical entombings for the dead and of magic enchantments for the living.

They could see the patrimonial pennon of Owen’s ancestors floating from that fir-pole top, bearing, though from that distance the whole flag showed smaller than a butterfly, the solitary “lion rampant” of the chiefs of that ancient princedom. It wasn’t long — for at the sight of the mound and its flagstaff they instinctively quickened their speed — before they saw much more of this fortified palace. It was built mostly of gigantic planks of wood, but of wood supported and foundationed upon a system of massive stonework.

It was clear that none of our friends, even if they had been ten times more numerous than they were, would be without shelter that night. Owen’s domain was indeed a *Llys,* as the old romances call such a place, worthy to be compared with those primeval ones of the ancient Welsh myths, mentioned so constantly in the “Four Branches of the Mabinogi.”

Like the Homeric palaces it was two stories high, the upper one devoted to the women of the family and their feminine attendants and the lower occupied almost entirely by one enormous hall strewn with last year’s bracken, with an open fire in the centre, round which at night, when the tables had been cleared, the whole company of warriors and their retainers could sleep.

But this was by no means all; for quite clear of the main edifice there were outbuildings and guest-houses and extensive stables, not to speak of bakeries and kitchens and laundries and cattle-sheds. The place, in fact, could offer food and shelter, and frequently did so, to a population much larger than many villages.

Unlike the great Norman castles, however, and unlike such purely Welsh castles as Rhisiart’s Dinas Bran, Owen’s *Llys* would have been at the mercy of a body of foes formidable enough to defeat its defenders. That indeed was its essential character. It could extend a more lavish hospitality than the largest castle; but its strength lay in its warriors, not in its walls.

Rhisiart’s emotions as they approached the main entrance to the place, the general effect of which rather resembled an immense stockade than an embattled fortress, were so deep and overwhelming that he kept sucking his lips into his mouth and tightening his belt, and twisting the hairs of Griffin’s mane between his fingers, in complete unconsciousness of anything but the romance of the moment.

With a gesture that touched Tegolin far more than anything he had done since he held up his crusader’s sword between the archers and the spears, he finally slipped his hand into hers, and in complete oblivion of the fact that Master Young had descended from Griffin’s back and was supporting himself or pretending to support himself by leaning upon him, he clutched her fingers and pressed close to her side, much more as a child with an elder sister might do than an armed lover with a timid maid.

The summer afternoon had by this time clouded over and the wind was beginning to rise; but this only stirred the folds of the pennon which he could still see waving from its mound, into that occasional slow unrolling on the air, which gives to a flag the appearance of being woven of some rich, heavy heraldic stuff.

In an instinctive movement of awe and excitement the whole of their little company advanced close together, Tegolin holding Griffin's bridle, Rhisiart holding Tegolin's hand, and Master Young leaning heavily, like a sick or wounded man, on the lad's other arm.

On arriving at the barred gate of the enclosure they found two horsemen waiting patiently on their respective steeds, one of which was coal black, and the other of a dark roan colour.

Rhisiart was in too deep a trance of excitement to take in anything save a vague impression of patient men upon patient horses. His inmost being kept saying to itself, "With my girl's hand in mine I've come to the palace of my fathers."

One ridiculous little thing did, however, considerably bother him, disturbing in a measure his ecstatic trance; namely, that across the illuminated parchment of the one among his books that protruded itself from beneath his sheepskin bundle there hung down in full view — probably because of the fidgety movements of Master Young — a considerable portion of a stout pair of knitted drawers, with which his mother had insisted upon providing him when he left Hereford.

Nothing would have induced him to release Tegolin's hand in order to thrust this domestic object out of sight, but the image of that curst underwear might have taken to itself quite monstrous proportions if Tegolin hadn't whispered in his ear, "Mother of God! if it isn't the Abbot and the other one!"

She had hardly uttered the words than the impetuous Father Rheinalt rushed forward and boldly greeting the Caerleon prelate, and kissing his hand, introduced to his notice the less presumptuous Father Pascentius.

Luckily for the harmony of the occasion it was only the girl and our friend himself who knew that the calm smooth-faced layman in the dark clothes of a scholarly country squire was the notorious Walter Brut, whose trial for heresy before his bishop had already made him infamous to the orthodox.

Whether the warlike Abbot from Caerleon knew the identity of his companion, Rhisiart had no idea; but the great man kept it to himself if he did, and the whole company of them were soon greeting one another with the happiest friendliness, Master Young assuming a prominent part in the exchange of courtesies, and taking stock of Master Brut with a lively and interested curiosity.

The Abbot from the banks of the Usk was indeed in his most genial mood, his powerful features more animated than our friend had ever seen them; and though he had evidently been wiling away the time in his usual manner, his Psalter was no longer open and he was soon waving it in the direction of a taciturn and heavily-armed Porter, who was seated with his back against the closed gates, polishing a murderous-looking battle-axe.

“I suppose you Valle Crucians,” he remarked with a chuckle, “are well known to that surly gentleman over there; whose name I gather is Glew the Gryd. And, if you are, you’ll doubtless also know how impossible it is to disturb him. He has, however, revealed to me that Owen is at the death-bed of Iolo Goch, whom he’s just brought over here from Sycharth; and until the old Bard wakes from the coma into which he’s fallen everything must fain be at a stand-still. It’s a blessing my almoner isn’t here. The man’s such a stickler for the proprieties that what he’d say to see his Superior, and his Superior’s worthy friends, waiting the pleasure of Glew the Gryd is more than I dare imagine.

“But here’s our brave Brother Huw; and if I mistake not, this pretty lady is the famous Maid Tegolin. Give me your hand, daughter. The last time we met we had a worse reason for possessing our souls in peace than we have today.

"And how goes it with my silent lad of the big sword and Hereford horse? If we can't see the great Owen yet awhile, we must e'en make the best of his cousin."

The formidable Abbot of Caerleon was evidently in one of his relaxed moods when nothing could upset him, and when, as long as he could speak Welsh and not Latin, and there were none of his convent at hand, he was free with everybody.

Rhisiart's acknowledgment of his greeting — and the boy wasn't too dazed to notice Master Young's astonishment at the broad rustic dialect in which the Abbot's sallies were expressed — was interrupted by the necessity of distracting Griffin's interest from the Lollard's roan mare.

There was a huge horse-block before the entrance to the *Llys,* adorned with ancient bronze rims and rings; and to one of these rings our friend proceeded to fasten the piebald's bridle, remembering, as he did so, that other horse-block at the gate of another Welsh palace, upon which, as his Modry loved to relate, the great goddess Rhiannon, in the tale of *Pwyll Pen Annwn,* had to sit for penance!

Meanwhile, as behind him, and he noticed it with extreme displeasure, Tegolin was taking the opportunity of introducing Master Young to the Abbot, in front of him the indignant Father Rheinalt had walked straight up to Glew the Gryd.

"What do you mean by this? Is Welsh hospitality gone forever? I thought Owen's gates were never shut. Have you no respect for a Lord Abbot?" Such were a few snatches of the monk's observations that reached Rhisiart as he fastened the piebald to the horse-block.

“You come here and talk to him, lad!” cried the Cistercian at last. “He’s always been a brute,” he whispered when our friend with some reluctance drew near. “Owen spoils him because he saved his life in Scotland. He’s a great—”

He raised his voice so as to pierce the Gryd’s inflexible ears. “I’m telling this young scholar from Oxford, who is studying how to drive out devils, what skill you have with the battle-axe!”

“She wants sharpening,” was all the answer he got.

Then Rhisiart shot his bolt. “Why have we to wait till your master can leave his friend?” He raised his voice till he could feel it penetrating every crack and cranny in that obstinate gate. “Couldn’t one of his sons open the door, or his High Chamberlain, or his Chief Butler, or even one of his cooks?”

“It’s sharpening she wants,” repeated the Porter.

“Don’t you think,” the boy shouted, raising his voice still louder and using a pitch that had always had great success at his Hereford school, “that you could just slip in for one little moment, and tell the Arglwyddes that her kinsman from Hereford waits outside?”

“Her be blunter nor the mischief,” said Glew the Gryd, “but I’ll sharpen the bitch yet or starve for’t!”

Rhisiart gave vent to a blunt English oath; but the imperturbable Glew only shrugged his shoulders, and continued applying the sharpener to the edge of his weapon.

The lad looked hopelessly round. He was aware of plenty of people coming and going among the outbuildings. Sometimes a group of them would stop to stare for a moment, talking and gesticulating to one another; but when either the Lollard or Father Pascentius began cautiously moving towards them, they disappeared like rabbits into their burrow.

He went back to the old horse-block and began stroking Griffin. Mad Huw had already seated himself on a bench under the wall and was contentedly watching a flock of pigeons, several of whom, doubtless recognizing him as a creature nearer themselves than normal humanity, seemed on the point of alighting on his knee.

All at once the lad's impatience vanished from his mind like a puff of smoke. He suddenly remembered another of Modry's tales, where the porter at Arthur's gate refused admission to Kilhwch the son of Kilydd. "The knife is in the meat," he repeated to himself, "and the drink is in the horn... and none may enter therein save the son of a king or a craftsman bringing his craft."

"Can it be possible," he thought, "that in this civilized day and age, when life has become so scientific and safe, and men question everything — even the existence of Incubi and Succubi — and when freethinkers like this Lollard read the Scriptures in place of the Missal, that I should see with my own eyes a figure like this porter?"

And then as the Lollard rode up and began explaining how he had left the unhappy Simon in the herdsman's hut in order to appeal personally to Owen on his behalf, Rhisiart found himself thanking all the saints in his heart that Tegolin had braided her hair again before exposing herself to the gaze of so many! The Lollard smiled as he watched the lad thrust his offending under-clothes carefully into hiding; but catching sight of the bundle of books that now emerged, as a result of these adjustments, he asked him in a friendly tone what they were.

Our friend replied courteously but a little vaguely, for the works in question were more classical than scriptural; but as he equivocated and muttered something about old school-texts, his mind became more and more concerned about the welcome he would receive from his kinsman, and whether, if he did get employment under him, it would mean a temporary separation from Tegolin.

“If it does,” he thought, “can I stand it? And what may not happen to her without my protection? Oh, how hard and terrible life’s great decisions are!”

And then as he watched the girl standing there between Master Young and the Abbot, “What I’d like,” he thought, “would be just simply to marry Tegolin, and live quietly with her here under my cousin’s roof; making excursions now and then against Chirk and Ruthin, and perhaps, with the help of that savage knight and his men, assaulting Dinas Bran in some surprise attack, and being met by Tegolin with her hair all unloosed, when with Burnell dead and her mother a captive I return at this very—”

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of some considerable stir going on inside the great gates.

Master Brut ceased talking, and both the piebald and the roan pricked up their ears.

Rhisiart turned hurriedly round to see if Tegolin had heard anything, but she was too deep engaged with the Abbot and Master Young.

As for Father Pascentius, he had calmly seated himself by the side of Mad Huw, and with his garments hitched up above his great unseemly legs was examining a fragment of moss.

“Iolo Goch must be dead,” said the Lollard suddenly; but Rhisiart was silent. Death? Well! it had to come; as he’d seen it so nearly come to Mad Huw and to Master Young; but that was death in its violent form. What of dying in a closed chamber with only a little square hole to let in the air and the whole outer world?

And Rhisiart suddenly realized, as he stood by the old horse-block and in preparation for the opening of the gates began to loosen Griffin’s bridle from the bronze ring, what it meant for Iolo Goch to be dying. Till this moment the Bard's being at the end of his long life had been no more to him than if they'd been waiting there for the death of a cow or an ox. But now, as he watched Tegolin's delicate figure in her page's dress and noted its soft curves and the slenderness of her neck compared with all these men, a vague obscure thought that he couldn't have put into any words took possession of him. It was something so passive, so receptive — but there was no real word for it! — in Tegolin's pose, something that suggested, compared with the compact and concentrated energies of all these men, the deep, soft, yielding, silent growing potency of Nature herself! Yes, there was an aura about her, an aura that even those monks were feeling — the greatest mystery in the world! And between the old Bard's death inside the gates and this young girl's life outside the gates there seemed to the lad then — only it was all vaguer than words and subtler than thought — a magical reciprocity, a reciprocity between two things that were both of them deeper and more real than any waving in the wind of that "lion rampant."

What was this? Surely he heard the sound of iron bars being drawn and of iron chains clanging and jangling as they were unfastened!

But the imperturbable axe-sharpening of Glew the Gryd didn't cease; and it was an obvious supposition that obstinate though the Porter was he could hardly remain seated in the centre of the gateway when the gates were thrown open!

"This gate must lead into a court-yard," our friend thought, "where there must be stables for our horses. I shall certainly see where they put Griffin. But not at once. I'll let my cousin's servants take him away when we first get in. Will my cousin be on the steps of the great hall to welcome me? Will he perhaps have heard rumours already about how I lifted my sword?"

Ah! the axe-sharpener had skipped aside like a great disturbed goblin and the gates were opening! They opened very slowly; so slowly that Rhisiart fancied he detected some ritual motive; for surely the natural thing after all this delay would have been to fling them wide in one grand burst!

But opening they were; and the Abbot got down from his black charger and with great dignity advanced alone, allowing Father Rheinalt to lead the horse behind him. After Father Rheinalt came Father Pascentius supporting Master Young, and after them came Master Brut with his mare.

Thus it was that Mad Huw, made aware of a rich concourse of people — suddenly revealed like a sumptuous picture between the posts of the great gate — fell to crying out that Richard was alive, that right would now prevail over wrong and that the oppressed would be comforted. And as he proclaimed this message at the top of his powerful voice he pushed eagerly forward, squeezing himself between the mare and one of the gateposts, in a desperate attempt to overtake the Abbot.

Thus, by what seemed to the boy a special providence, he and Tegolin, with Griffin pulled along by his bridle behind them, were enabled to enter the *Llys* of Owen side by side; and it may easily be believed how spontaneously their hands sought each other and clung tight together, as they followed the rest into that crowded court-yard.

V. GLYNDYFRDWY

THAT HE WAS taller than the rest of them, that his legs were bare above his high, tightly-fitting, chamois leather shoes, that he had a dark tunic with broad purple belt and a purple mantle over his shoulders clasped by a massive gold brooch, that his yellow-grey beard was forked and carefully trimmed, that round his head was a twisted golden thread and from his belt hung a short two-edged sword of antique shape, were all things that Rhisiart only took in after several minutes had passed.

What he noted at once about Owen ap Griffith's appearance were his eyes. These were of a flickering sea-colour, sometimes grey and sometimes green, yet always with an under-glow of light in them that had the effect of an interior distance.

And something else Rhisiart noticed very quickly about his kinsman's eyes, and indeed about the whole expression of his face, and this was a sudden change that would every now and then bring a kind of paralysis of all animation, not so much as if he were engaged in thought as if his consciousness had been transferred to an interior plane.

Owen's forehead was low and broad, the hair thick and wavy; but his locks were so neatly trimmed, and the thread of gold so carefully disposed across his brow, that the general effect was courtly and regal rather than shaggy or leonine. His nose was of the type sometimes called Roman, but it had nothing of the aquiline, and its nostrils were unnaturally large. His cheek-bones were decidedly prominent, his cheeks hollow and curiously white against his yellow-grey hair. His skin was obviously of the texture that responds to exposure by growing freckled rather than tanned.

But it was the curious change that kept coming over his lineaments as he turned to greet first one and then another of his guests that arrested our friend most. It seemed to occur quite independently of the person he was addressing, and it didn't affect either the flow of his own words or the politeness with which he listened to the words of others. To our highly-strung traveller it seemed there was something startling and rather troubling about this phenomenon. He told himself several times that he must be imagining it, for none of the man's interlocutors, as the boy watched them, showed the slightest awareness of these curious psychic withdrawals.

"I must be imagining it," he repeated to himself. But then, as Owen turned from Master Brut to Master Young, it seemed to him that this intermittent paralysis — just as if the man's soul had left his body altogether — descended so palpably that he found himself making an instinctive movement forward as if the chieftain might suddenly reel and stagger.

Rhisiart had never in his life concentrated such a mental intensity of scrutiny as he concentrated during those first brief moments upon Owen Glyn Dŵr.

Apart from these queer "attacks," for so our friend regarded them though nobody else seemed to notice them at all, the lad was amazed by the courtly manner in which Owen handled his guests, greeting them rapidly one after another, and yet leaving each of them obviously delighted with his reception.

Another peculiarity of Glyn Dŵr's which interested Rhisiart was the man's way of talking in so low a voice to the person he was addressing that no one else, however close they were standing, could hear what he said. This especially struck the lad because all the English magnates he had known in Hereford were wont to prove their importance by the high pitch of their voices.

All these impressions, though he could have put them into words at his leisure, passed through his brain in that rapid mental sequence which resembles the flow of images rather than of thought; but what startled the lad most was not the nature of any particular observation he made as a surprising upheaval in his whole emotional attitude.

In his secret feeling about Dinas Bran, that feeling into which he had thrown all the shy and obstinate idealism of his furtive pride, he had deliberately thrust away the image of this lawful head of his tribe as an unworthy inheritor of the high tradition; but now that he stood there watching the man’s every movement with such passionate interest he was conscious to his absolute astonishment of a mounting feeling towards him, the quality of which disturbed him to the centre of his soul. And the curious thing was that the dominant strain in this feeling was neither admiration nor awe. It was an up-welling of fierce protective pity.

Owen’s presence affected him with the tremulous heart-beating feeling such as a young savage might experience who finds that the god of his race — upon whose rough image he had long cast a negligent and even critical eye — has suddenly appeared to him in the wistful and helpless beauty of his real identity out of that familiar and neglected shrine. It was partly the scrupulous delicacy of the man’s forked beard and of the thin gold thread round the brow that evoked this feeling, for in some curious way these details bore an infinitely pathetic look, as if the figure thus adorned and tended had been prepared or had prepared himself for some mysterious sacrificial rite.

Rhisiart never again got’ quite the impression he received that midsummer afternoon, and there came moments when its memory grew blurred. But it never altogether left him; and the Owen he saw that day took his place, easily, naturally and with a fatal inevitableness, on the ramparts of Dinas Bran and gathered into himself their mystic enchantment.

All this while Rhisiart had been clutching tightly the hand of the red-haired Tegolin and waiting patiently till the chieftain thought fit to approach them. Once or twice the girl made an effort to free herself, and the boy knew perfectly well that she was growing anxious about Mad Huw who was behaving rather oddly.

The sight of Glyn Dŵr evidently brought back to his distracted mind a lively remembrance of the fallen King at Flint; and indeed it was clear that the Friar's mind was grievously confused. Rhisiart expected him every moment to lift up his voice about the late King as he always did in the presence of any new group of people; but in place of doing this he was standing in troubled amazement, sometimes gazing intently at Glyn Dŵr and sometimes staring wildly about him, as if he expected to see Richard himself.

In her concern lest the Brother should make a scene and prejudice their host against him, Tegolin now implored Rhisiart in a loud whisper to let her go to him. But Rhisiart took no more notice of her appeal than of the voice of a group of starlings who in that crowded court had begun to show agitation.

But at last Owen himself went up to the Friar and both Rhisiart and the girl gazed with astonishment at the scene which took place. Mad Huw must have known that the man was not Richard, but the fact that he had seen them together on the only occasion when he had ever set eyes on the King evidently had a bewildering effect on his troubled wits. Down on his knees he sank and began kissing the hand with which Owen tried to lift him up;

and when Glyn Dŵr did at last get him to his feet the poor man fell to blubbering like a child.

At this Rhisiart did let go of Tegolin's fingers, and the girl shot off like a released arrow to the Friar's side while our friend followed more slowly, leading Griffin with him. He paused out of politeness when he was about a dozen yards away; for he saw that the chieftain had addressed the girl, and was now speaking to her in that same low voice in which he had conversed with the rest. He could see what a comfort it was to the Friar to have her at his side again; and he noticed the touching pleasure with which the man watched her as she replied to Glyn Dŵr's questions.

Presently he saw that the chieftain must have said something that concerned both Tegolin and the Friar, for the girl turned and evidently repeated his words, at which Mad Huw, now quite calm and happy, nodded a vigorous assent.

This seemed to our friend the moment for which he had been so patiently waiting; and with a heart that beat in an emotion that it was impossible to conceal, and still leading Griffin by the bridle, he went straight up to his kinsman, and dropped down on one knee just as his mother had made him to do in his childhood.

"Why, Cousin Rhisiart, you put us all to shame with your pretty manners! No, no, dear boy, you mustn't do that, even though I am old enough to be your father!"

Thus speaking Owen raised the lad to his feet and kissed him tenderly on both cheeks. For a second our friend's lip quivered, and he could easily have followed Brother Huw's example and burst into sobs; but he pulled himself together, blinked a little, swallowed the lump in his throat, bit his lip, and stammered something about his mother sending her respects and about his father being many years dead. “And I thought perhaps, my Lord, that you might — that I could — that there might be—”

“Something you could do for me, cousin, eh?” said the other kindly. “Certainly there is; and not only one thing! There aren’t so many Oxford scholars drifting about Wales that we can afford to miss the help of one who is of our own blood. We must talk more of this later, lad, and about Hereford too. But meanwhile — no, keep your horse! we must introduce him to your cousins. And we must present our Maid of Edeyrnion too, and this good Brother of Saint Francis.”

As Rhisiart followed the chieftain towards the steps that led up to the main building, his heart was so over-brimming with emotion that everything and everyone he set eyes on showed like visionary shapes in the translucent depths of a magic crystal. He never forgot that moment. Moving behind Mad Huw and Tegolin, who were both at Owen’s side, the twisted braid of the girl’s hair, as it hung below the bottom of her tunic, became to him in his exultant mood like a blood-red ladder up which he was climbing into a Jack-and-the-Beanstalk felicity.

With each step he took there seemed to fall away from him a great segment of his past identity. The image of his pleasure-loving, frivolous mother, calling him her “little monk,” appeared for a moment and was swallowed up. The image of Morris Stove bending over their Oxford fire and pouring forth disparagements of Owen materialized for a second, like a bubble on a stream, and was lost forever.

Before he knew where he was he found himself confronted by the assembled group of all his fellow-travellers. The Abbot was talking earnestly to a portly lady dressed in a thick green mantle over which fell a crimson scarf; Master Brut was being politely questioned by a dark anxious-looking man of about thirty who bore an obvious resemblance to the matron in the green mantle.

A servant was leading away the Abbot's charger while another had just laid his hand on the bridle of Master Brut's mare. But stroking the roan's silky flanks, and being talked to by the commentator upon Saint Thomas across the animal's back, was a startling vision of girlish loveliness.

Rhisiart's politeness altogether deserted him under the shock of this apparition, so that in place of falling on his knee as he had done before, he merely lifted the fingers of the portly Arglwyddes to his lips and responded as vacantly as any Hereford clown to the stiff greeting of the lady's eldest son.

"Come here, Catharine," cried her father, "and don't stare at our cousin as if he were a Legate from the Pope."

"I think Cousin Rhisiart finds more to look at in Catharine than he does in Mother or me," remarked Griffith ab Owen in a penetrating high-pitched voice that was totally at variance with his stocky figure.

"Answer that question, Catharine, that Father Pascentius asked you," said the Arglwyddes, "before you run away."

"You see," said Owen quickly laying his hand on Rhisiart's shoulder, "you're a member of the family already! We're scolding you and our little Catharine as if you'd been brought up in the same nursery! No, no! Kiss your cousin properly, my pretty! You give him as cold, shy, and distant a cheek as if he were young Grey of Ruthin!"

"Catharine has answered my question already," said the theologian placidly, and Rhisiart, as the blood receded from his flushed face, enquired with studied ceremony of the Arglwyddes whether he might accompany the servant to the stable so that he might know where to find his horse.

“Our cousin doesn’t trust you, Gwalchmai,” said Griffith to the man who was waiting at the mare’s head and had already possessed himself of Griffin’s reins. “He thinks your Welsh oats will be thin fare after his English ones.”

The fellow evidently got the drift of this speech, though it was deliberately spoken in English, for he cast upon this bastard relative of his master a look of such hostility that Rhisiart resolved that he *would* see what was done with the horse.

He found it difficult to move, however, and quite impossible to retort, as he would have liked, to the Arglwyddes and her eldest son.

Everybody seemed to be talking at once, and yet all their voices seemed faint and far away. He knew very well what he wanted to do himself. He wanted to say something, something important; something that had just come into his head. But he couldn’t think, and the man they called Gwalchmai was already leading off the mare and Griffin. He felt like a traitor to the old horse.

But the Arglwyddes was speaking again. “When you’ve stopped staring at your cousin, Catharine, I wish you’d run upstairs and tell Nurse—”

“This is our Maid of Edeyrnion,” interrupted Owen, addressing his wife in a sterner voice than Rhisiart had yet heard him use. “Mistress Tegolin! Come here, child. Yes, and bring the Brother too. The Friar must have that little room upstairs, near the women, so that the Maid can look after him. They’ve been together so long that he’d feel—”

The Arglwyddes came forward and greeted Tegolin more warmly than Rhisiart had expected, and the way she spoke to the Brother too was a surprise to the lad. “She’s nicer than I thought,” he said to himself, “though she’s taken a dislike to me. Did she see me holding Tegolin’s hand? Does she think I’m her lover?”

He still felt that the many voices round him, as he stood at the bottom of that flight of steps, kept receding into the distance, and he still felt that he had something important to say, something that it was absolutely necessary that he should hear himself say.

And there was still that long blood-coloured braid of Tegolin’s as she leaned forward with bowed head listening humbly yet proudly to the Arglwyddes; and he could even see a small withered flower twisted into it where its plaits were knotted. “And we’ll put you, my Lord Abbot, in the blue chamber,” Owen was saying, “and Father Pascentius and Father Rheinalt with you — and I think, with your leave, Arglwyddes,” and he smiled at his wife, “we’ll put Master Brut under the care of Cousin Rhisiart in the ‘Saracen’s chamber’. Some of my good men are subject to silly superstitions, Master Brut; otherwise I’d tell them to give you the guest’s place by the hall-fire. But the nights are warm now; and I daresay you young men will be glad enough to be out of the heat and smoke. The Saracen’s chamber isn’t often slept in, but there are no lack of warm rugs and I — What’s that, little one? Oh, no! Cousin Rhisiart won’t be afraid. Besides he won’t be alone.”

These last words were addressed to Catharine who had whispered something to her father. Having reassured the young girl Owen paused for a moment with an arm round her waist and his eyes fixed on Rhisiart; and even though the boy and Catharine were still staring at each other the lad felt that one of those curious attacks had seized the chieftain and that the look the man fixed upon him had no “speculation” in it.

A great rack of clouds, that had been sending several advance-guards across the sun, now swept in its whole bulk completely over it; and it seemed as if this palpable darkening of the earth had a psychic effect upon the group of persons standing there.

The Abbot who, with Father Rheinalt and Father Pascentius, was waiting, half-way up the steps for the Arglwyddes to tell someone to show them where the “blue chamber” she’d referred to was to be found, proceeded calmly to take out his psalm-book.

“He’d read that,” the lad thought, “if he were dying on a battle-field or sinking in a ship.”

The omnivorous intelligence of Father Pascentius was, however, totally unaffected by this solar lull in the movement of events, and he proceeded to break the spell by approaching the Arglwyddes and begging her in a series of rapid plausible sentences to allow Master Young to share the Saracen’s chamber with Rhisiart and the Lollard.

“If Owen is afraid,” he remarked, “of letting Master Brut sleep by the hall-fire, he surely will see that it would be unwise to allow an unattended clerk in Orders with such an English name to sleep in so public a place and be at the mercy of any dissension that might arise?”

“But I don’t believe there are enough rugs for three guests, Father, in the Saracen’s room,” replied the lady, a little disturbed. “Catharine! Haven’t you gone yet? Didn’t you hear me tell you to go and see Nurse, and explain to her what your father — No! wait, child! You’d better take Mistress Tegolin and the Friar straight up to Nurse and tell her that Griffith Llwyd ap Dafydd ab Einion — and don’t forget to repeat his full name if he’s up there now, for he doesn’t like people to take liberties with him — will have to sleep in the hall to-night. But tell Nurse he can bring his harp down and that if he plays it very quietly he can even refer to Iolo Goch. Oh yes, and tell Nurse—”

But the young girl had already gone up to Tegolin and taken her by the hand; and it was our friend’s destiny to see the blood-coloured braid passing through the gate into the hall side by side with Catharine’s slender figure.

"Is it white samite she's wearing?" Rhisiart asked himself, "or is it that stuff Modry used to talk about, called *pali,* that Branwen ferch LJyr and Kicva ferch Wyn Gloyw, and Rhiannon ferch Heveyd Hen always wore, and that Modry said was really French silk?"

When the girls and Mad Huw had vanished, Rhisiart felt as if the figure in *pali* had diffused itself like a spiritual essence through every object he looked at. The heraldic stone pedestals on each side of the steps shimmered with silvery gleams. The velvety darkness of the interior of the building contained a flickering perspective of *pali*-wearers.

Owen himself was talking to the Arglwyddes now. They were evidently debating the point raised by Father Pascentius about Master Young; and, while this went on, Master Young himself, with diplomatic indifference, was asking Tegolin's father about the antiquity of certain great stones that had been built into the masonry of the steps.

How the man's countenance managed to convey such a feeling of power, when every feature of it, especially the toothless mouth, was so negligible, puzzled our friend a good deal; but he tossed the problem aside, and going up boldly to Griffith, asked him whether he might see where his horse had been put.

Owen's eldest son gave him a hostile glance, almost as vicious as Gwalchmai's had been; but when Master Brut, to whom Griffith was speaking, seconded this request and made some joke about Hereford horses being more brittle than others they received a sulky nod of assent, and the young chieftain went so far as to offer to show them the way.

The Lollard's unfailing sweetness of temper did, however, by degrees work a change in the young man's tone; and though Rhisiart continued to feel ill at ease with him, his boyish interest in the stables and in the Welsh ponies they were shown clearly mollified the man's unfriendly humour.

Rhisiart was glad enough too that they had the son of the house with them when he found that his precious bundle had been taken into the hall instead of into the Saracen's chamber; and when at last the fellow travellers found themselves safely established there with all their belongings, and with a promise from Griffith to come himself and conduct them into the hall when the proper moment came, the boy felt that he had been spared just that particular nervous discomfort in strange quarters that he had been dreading as they approached Glyndyfrdwy.

He was gratified, too, to find that in spite of its being Midsummer Day the Arglwyddes — or that mysterious potentate of the upper floor who had been referred to as "Nurse" — had caused a small wood fire of birch logs to be lighted in the great open hearth of the Saracen's chamber, for the place certainly had the chilly air of a long-unused apartment in a great house.

The Lollard's travelling equipment turned out to be a good deal more extensive as well as more carefully packed than his own, and Rhisiart found himself several times thanking Heaven that the duty of being tactful in social matters formed an obvious part of this person's evangelical principles.

Both the young men — for it turned out that Master Brut, though he looked older, was only twenty-five — set themselves to wash and dress before taking much notice of their accommodation.

Rhisiart did however observe, as after dipping his face in a silver bowl of clear water he rubbed it violently with a linen napkin, that above their fire, where the smoke disappeared through a blackened aperture leading into the central hall, there stood on an elaborately carved stone bracket a large, headless crucifix. He observed too, as he pulled on his tight scarlet hose, and thrust his head through his black armless tunic, that the walls were hung with faded tapestry in which, though the figures had long ago become discoloured with smoke, he could make out several episodes from Virgil's story of Eurydice.

Master Brut's change of garments proved a good deal more fashionable than our friend's, for the Lollard assumed, in place of the lad's sleeveless tunic, a long loose gown of dark blue velvet, caught up at the waist by an enamelled belt, trimmed at the skirt by a thin band of twisted silver.

Master Brut carried no weapon, and Rhisiart fancied he caught him looking with an amusement he couldn't quite conceal at the meticulous care with which our friend arranged his rather pretentious ivory handled dagger; not dangling it, however, in the fantastic style that Tegolin had affected, but fastening its sheath with two short cords to a slit in his tunic.

When they were dressed they took care to throw more logs on their fire, agreeing that they would retire from the banquet as soon as the potations of mead began and enjoy themselves in peace, exchanging their impressions of Glyndyfrdwy.

"They must have disposed of our lawyer-friend somewhere else; and I must say I'm glad of it," remarked Rhisiart, contemplating the two comfortable beds, each of them raised about a foot from the ground and covered with soft rugs, that filled most of the space beneath one of their walls.

"I hope the poor man won't have to sleep in the hall," murmured the other uneasily; and his silence after this remark somewhat disturbed our friend, for knowing the Lollard's reckless goodwill he felt afraid he would get it on his conscience that he ought to exchange places with Master Young!

To distract his companion's mind from such evangelical qualms he began examining their quarters. A rough painting of what looked like a decapitated turbaned head, held up by a mailed arm, and wearing an expression of undying ferocity, hung from the wall opposite their fire; and the young men soon discovered that the Saracen's chamber had two windows, both mere slits in the wall, and so deeply set that, though they were unglazed, it wasn't possible to see much through them.

One of these, no larger than an arrow-slit in a castle stairway, led into the open air, and the other, though the young men could only see a tiny segment of what it revealed, opened directly into the hall.

"Let's see where we are, and whether they keep guards in these passages," urged our impatient friend, placing his fingers on the bolt of the door with the intention of opening it.

At first Master Brut showed lively signs of disapproval of this bold enterprise — even going so far as to lay a restraining hand upon the boy's arm — but when the door was flung open, he took as much pleasure as his companion in the various mysteries it concealed.

They found themselves in a low-roofed, narrow passage-way, which at night must have been lit up, for they could see the iron brackets for the torches; but by day, even on a day like this, it was very dark and gloomy.

"Wait a moment," Master Brut said. "I always make a mental map of a strange place before advancing," and on Rhisiart's giving him an impatient and puzzled frown, "I saved my skin," he added, "in my heresy trial, by making a mental map of the Bishop's mind!"

"We'll talk about that later," said Rhisiart. "Shall we explore this way a little? I think it was that way Griffith brought us here."

"Listen!" cried the Lollard; and the two tall young men in their rich dark attire, the light from the Saracen's chamber falling dimly on our friend's scarlet hose and on the other's enamelled belt, stood side by side, hushed and intent.

A low faint sound, like the sound made by a deeply-convoluted shell when held to the ear, became audible to both of them. It began very low and as it increased in volume it no longer resembled that initial shell murmur, but became more like “the rushing mighty wind” of Pentecostal visitation. Then it changed again and it seemed to the two listeners that it was the sound of distant voices, in fact a confused whirl of voices, voices in different keys and tones, voices of lamentation, voices of supplication, voices of wild and terrifying triumph.

“What the hell— “whispered Rhisiart; and then with an access of sheer childish panic he clutched Master Brut’s wrist. But, following the same graduations of sound in its dying down as it had followed in its mounting up, the noise now subsided into its original sea-shell whisper and soon ceased altogether. Absolute silence followed. They could hear each other breathing. It was as though they were in a tomb.

“Why the devil can’t we hear any stir of life in this place?” murmured Rhisiart; and to his considerable dismay a distinct echo came down the passage towards them, repeating “in this place”— “in this place.” Boy-like he must needs revenge himself upon his own trepidation by a clumsy challenge to this phenomenon. “Who are you down here?” he murmured, as loudly as he dared. “Down here! Down here!” replied the echo.

“You don’t suppose that damned Griffith has forgotten to call for us?” whispered our friend.

The Lollard smiled at him. “If we were really shut up here,” he said, “with that sound and this echo, I should certainly beg you to stop cursing like that! Don’t you remember how Griffith had to get a great key from somebody to open the door we came through? It was when you were asking him where Owen himself slept.”

“By God, you’re right, Master! I can see him now as he shut it and put the key in his pouch! I’d forgotten. Shall we go that way and bang at the door? I’d sooner go that way than the other after hearing that noise.”

The Lollard made no reply. What Rhisiart could now detect on the blurred countenance beside him was a completely new expression. Master Brut’s calm features had tightened into the technical intensity of a man of science. He made various grave motions with his hand, drawing lines and angles in the air; and then proceeded to regard the invisible map with his head a little on one side.

“What the — what is it?” enquired our friend, regarding these proceedings with some uneasiness. “You’re not doing anything, I hope, that’s—”

But Walter Brut straightened himself briskly and replied with eager precision. “As we stand now, with our backs to our chamber, we are looking due north, that is to say, at right angles to the entrance of the palace. That direction,” and he pointed down the passage whence the noises had proceeded, “leads directly to the mound where we saw Owen’s banner. That way,” and he pointed into the gloom where in his imagination Rhisiart could see a veritable dungeon-gate, “leads to the great hall. Do you remember where he told us Owen slept?”

Rhisiart shook his head.

“Well, I *do* remember,” and in the light of that open door a look of the most childish complacency came into the heretic’s face. “He said it was up the passage leading out of the north end of the hall, that’s to say over there!” and he pointed at the wall opposite their door. “I see it all now like a map. Have I made it clear to you?”

Rhisiart shook his head. He found it difficult to interest himself in these architectural plans of Owen’s abode. His mind kept running on two things:

the unpleasant thickness of the door that made this passage so silent, and the inexplicable sound they had just heard.

"Our passage led out of the hall due west," continued the Lollard, "and, as I said, at right angles to the one leading to where Owen sleeps. You noticed, I suppose, that great latrine we passed before we came to the locked door? It must drain into some stream outside. We're lucky in our chamber, I mean to have one of our own! And I hope you noticed what a modern one it is! I've never seen such a neatly made disgorge. It must drain into the same stream as the common one. Owen must have had it cut in the wall when he came back from Scotland. I've always heard that the nobles in Scotland disposed of their excrement more scientifically than—"

"Pardon me, Master," interrupted Rhisiart who had begun to say to himself, no wonder this chap became a Lollard! "I'd like to ask you one little question. What will you do if this sulky Griffith — damn his soul! — *doesn't* come for us? Our window's too narrow; and nothing would make me go a step down there!" and he indicated the passage from which those sounds had come.

Master Brut smiled. "Let's have a look at that door he unlocked," he said. "He may have left it open and we're disturbing ourselves for nothing."

With more uneasiness than he would have cared to confess Rhisiart followed him. Huge rafters, dark with the smoke from the torches, crossed the roof of the passage, and the walls, as far as they could make out in the gloom, were partly of blackened oak and partly of rough stone.

They soon came to the door which looked, as they approached it, as though it might easily be four or five feet thick and which soon proved as unyielding to their united weight as if it had been a wall. Rhisiart put his ear to the crack where the hinges were.

“I think I can hear something,” he began. “No, I can’t! It’s a humming in my own ears. Mother of God, Walter Brut, but I believe we’re prisoners!”

The Lollard laid his hand on his shoulder. “Nonsense, lad,” he said. “And you a Welshman, too! I would be less surprised to hear that Prince Hal was preaching the Gospel than that Owen’s hospitality—” But both the young men stepped suddenly backwards, for, even as they were staring at it, the door began to open.

It opened towards them, and with its opening such a confusion of sounds emerged that Rhisiart felt dazed. But almost immediately it closed again, and left them in the same tomb-like silence.

“Come back to our room,” said Master Brut. “I don’t want him to find us here shivering like a pair of thieves!” They hurried back, closed their door, pulled a bench in front of their fire and sat down.

“What would this place be like in winter,” our friend remarked, “if a fire is as nice as this on Midsummer Day?”

“It’s our nerves make us chilly,” said the other. “When I was in our Bishop’s prison it was mid-August, and yet I was always bribing my gaoler to bring me logs.”

Rhisiart was silent. That iron-studded, sound-proof door had imprisoned his imagination.

“Do you often think about death, Master Brut?” he suddenly enquired. “What would you have felt, what would you have done, if that door had never opened again?”

The Lollard smiled and laid his hands on our friend’s scarlet-covered knees. “I should have prayed for the spirit,” he answered.

“I should have prayed for a miracle!” cried the other.

“The spirit *is* a miracle,” retorted the heretic.

“How old do you think Catharine is?” enquired our friend.

The Lollard removed his hands from the boy's knees. "Catharine?"

"Owen's daughter — the girl in that shimmery dress."

The Lollard half-rose from their bench and at some risk to the long skirt of his decorous dark blue gown threw on the fire another log.

"That tall little child? Oh, I don't know; I didn't look at her particularly. About twelve I should think — Yes, that tall fair little thing; yes, I saw her. I expect the Arglwyddes has her hands full correcting Owen's spoiling! She looked a capricious little baggage to me. But I daresay in ten years she'll have grown into a sensible and beautiful girl."

"Don't you think she's beautiful now?"

Master Brut shrugged his shoulders; and after turning to glance at the window began making calculations with extended forefinger over the spluttering logs.

"Making another map?" our friend enquired.

The man lowered his hand and contemplated Rhisiart with a grave frown. "I believe I misled you just now," he remarked, "but the truth is—"

"You *did* admire Catharine?"

"The truth is, this palace of Owen's isn't built even with the points of the compass. Owen's sleeping-place — I believe the Arglwyddes sleeps upstairs with the women — isn't due north of the great hall but northwest by north, and this of course means—"

But both the young men now jumped simultaneously to their feet for there was a low but very distinct knock on their door.

"Come in!" cried Rhisiart in Welsh; and in his excitement he added an old-fashioned greeting that Modry used in her fairy-tales, "and God be with you!"

To their immense relief, in place of the sulky elder brother, it was Meredith who entered their room. He was in the same plain hunting garb that he'd worn when he came to Mad Huw's rescue; but he was perspiring and out of breath, and his clothes were stained, muddy, and disarrayed. He flung down a bundle he was carrying, shook hands warmly with Master Brut, and after a second's hesitation kissed Rhisiart shyly.

"Look after the fire for a while, will you, you two!" he said. "I want to use your conveniences for a moment and wash and change. Griffith and I sleep in the ante-room to my father's chamber, but my mother has put some lawyer-priest there to-night, a fellow they say Rhys Gethin nearly killed. Griffith swears he'll read all my *englyns,* and eat all the Moorish sweetmeats Catharine bought from a pedlar for us. He certainly looks as if he hadn't teeth for much else! But look after your fire — I'm as finicky as my father over being watched at my toilet!"

The two guests proceeded to obey him to the letter, and, returning to their bench, fell for politeness' sake into a low-voiced rather forced conversation between themselves. Meredith seemed to take an unconscionable time over his ablutions and his change of clothes and long before they heard his voice again they had lapsed into silence, Master Brut even nodding a little in the aromatic heat of the burning logs.

"Now, gentlemen, we're ourselves again!" The young men rose to their feet. Turning to face him it was all Rhisiart could do not to utter an audible cry of admiration.

Meredith's banquet-attire was cut after a style the lad had only seen once in Oxford among a group of students who had been to the University of Paris. The tunic was quite short, leaving the limbs in their tight-fitting yellow hose uncovered half-way up the thigh. His neck and chest were bare save for the links of a heavy gold chain, and his tunic, which was of a rich moss-green, had wide loose sleeves, showing a white satin lining.

In place of the dagger worn by our friend in the manner he regarded as so much more *à la mode* than poor Tegolin's, Meredith ab Owen wore nothing but an exquisitely-embroidered velvet pouch with a golden clasp, hanging from a belt that was fastened beneath, not above, his moss-green tunic. Round his dark hair, which fell in wavy curls upon his shoulders, was a thick gold "torque" of antique design, clearly a family heirloom; and his feet, like those of his father, were slippered in some sort of soft light-coloured skin, drawn-out, however, beyond his toes, into curious narrow points.

"Don't laugh at my finery, coz," the youth cried hurriedly, "You mustn't think I dress like this often. It's only to do honour to the Abbot of Caerleon. Mother has made Griffith, as the eldest son, put on King Eliseg's belt, given him by Arthur. They say Merlin made it for Arthur's sword. Father's never worn it. He thinks it would be sacrilege. But Griffith cares for none of these things! I hope it won't bring us all bad luck. Mother made him do it. Mother's half-English you know, and I sometimes think she — doesn't — quite — You see it was meant for a belt but Griffith doesn't care, and Mother doesn't understand; and he's going to wear it round his neck! Father looked at me when they were talking about it — the way he does! But he said nothing."

Rhisiart could see that all this flow of talk was chiefly to conceal the youth's embarrassment at his extravagant attire. The young man had blushed deeply when they first turned round; and he hadn't finished speaking before he began prodding the birch-logs with the iron-prong as if to cover his discomfort in a blaze of sparks.

"How did you leave the prisoner?" enquired Master Brut.

"Oh, I ought to have told you before," burst out Meredith eagerly. "He's getting better. I sent my foster-father to find the Scab, and the Scab bled, him and gave him a sleeping-draught, and my foster-mother's looking after him. He clings fiercely to that little psalter you gave him. The Scab tried to take it away when he bled him, but he couldn't open the fellow's fingers. What spell did you work, Master, to turn the Hog into a scholar? Scholar! he can't read or write! It's only because you gave it to him. What did you do to the fellow, Walter Brut, to get this power over him? I believe he'd do murder for you! You'd better take him as your disciple, Master, if my father doesn't want him, and somehow I can't see—"

"Oh my Lord," interrupted the Lollard, catching sight of the stained and torn clothes the youth had thrown down on one of their beds. "I ought to have left my horse with you! You've been—"

The man's concern was so spontaneous and sincere — and certainly to see Meredith as he was now it did seem hard to imagine him struggling and panting and covered with mud and blood — that Rhisiart was shocked by the flash of cold steely anger with which he received these friendly words. His face went hard and hostile and his dark eyebrows under his golden torque twitched like a haughty girl's.

"We Welshmen don't need to depend on our guests' horses, fine as they are," he muttered; and Rhisiart thought to himself, "I know exactly what you felt just then! Master Brut will have to learn that kindness and simplicity aren't enough when you're dealing with us."

He found himself glancing at the Lollard with malicious curiosity while Meredith, trembling with the effort of controlling himself, folded his dirty clothes and carried them to the other side of the room.

Our friend was absolutely amazed, and to confess the truth caught by a spasm of sheer terror, when he saw Master Brut step with complete aplomb across the chamber and pat the aggrieved son of Owen familiarly and coaxingly on the shoulder.

Meredith jerked himself up, and presented to the well-meaning intruder a countenance so convulsed with fury that Rhisiart could see the Lollard draw back as if he'd trodden on a snake. In a flash our friend saw the two men locked together in a deadly struggle. But no! Nothing of the kind occurred.

Meredith drew back a step, with a movement — in his rich dress — like a turn in a dance; and then in place of leaping at the other's throat he made very deliberately a low obeisance before him, so low that the golden torque around his head fell with a metallic ring on the stone floor.

The young man retained this pose of hysterical emotion, or of vibrant malice, or of inspired restraint, for it was totally beyond our friend's fathoming to decide which it was, for quite a few beats of the younger guest's pulse; but when he straightened his back, with a flutter of his loose green sleeves, it was with one of the sweetest smiles that Rhisiart had ever seen.

The Lollard picked up his fallen torque for him and an interchange of looks beyond our friend's comprehension passed between them.

"Could I smile at anyone like that," thought Rhisiart, "and still hate him?" for curiously enough it never entered the lad's proud head to suppose that Meredith didn't hate the man still; though from the easy way the two of them talked, as they left the Saracen's chamber, it was as if they were better friends than before the incident occurred.

As soon as they were all three in the passage, Master Brut spoke of the strange sound they had heard.

Meredith showed a lively interest at once. "I'm glad you mentioned this to me," he said, "and to nobody else. We're all rather touchy about those sounds; and on the whole, if I were you, I wouldn't refer to them — except with me, of course! You've been to the end of the passage? No? Well, there's nothing to see; not even a closed door! The passage ends in a block of stone. Long ago, in my great-grandfather's time I believe, it was closed up. It used to lead — I expect they've told you — to somewhere below the mound. My brother knows more about it than I. They tell the eldest son, whatever there is to be told, in each generation. No! I've never heard those sounds. I expect," and in the dim light from their door our friend caught a look of complicated sadness on his face, "I'm too modern to hear such things. But Catharine's often heard them. She says — but I mustn't tell a young girl's secrets!

"May I shut your door, gentlemen? You'll find it easily enough after the banquet, for the torches will be lit then. Well? Are you ready? Shall we go?"

But when they reached the door at which the young men had recently stood their guide turned. His face was now a mere blur in the darkness and all that was visible of his dress was the white lining of his sleeves.

"I brought the Scab with me," he remarked. "Please be civil to him! And I brought bad news for us all. The King is on his way from Scotland; and Grey is back at Ruthin."

Though Rhisiart could see that he'd lifted his arm by the moving gleam of his white sleeves, he couldn't see what he did to make that huge oaken mass swing towards them on its hinges. When it closed behind them, however, the visitors found themselves in a vaulted stone vestibule into which a confused rumour of movement and voices reached them from the hall beyond.

There were narrow window-lights here through which the daylight entered, making pale the flames of a couple of torches against the wall, and adding a queer effect to the wisps of fragrant smoke that floated up among the arched mouldings of the roof.

"Sit down a minute, will you?" said their guide, pointing to a rough smoke-blackened bench.

Here he left them and disappeared between some heavily-hanging curtains into the tumult of voices.

"Did you notice what he said," whispered Rhisiart to his companion, "about Catharine's hearing those sounds? What a strange life it must be for a young girl in a wild place like this. But I think he's a favourite of hers, don't you, from the way he spoke?"

Master Brut nodded. "As we're sitting now," he remarked, "we're undoubtedly facing the entrance to the hall. That must mean just as I thought, that the building faces — I hope," he interrupted himself, "that that lawyer fellow is being looked after. It would be easy in all this uproar for someone—"

But at that moment the green sleeves and yellow stockings of their elegant friend reappeared, accompanied by none other than Owen himself.

The young men rose. Rhisiart bent his knee and the Lollard his head. Owen approached them with a smile of recognition and laid his hand on our friend's shoulder.

"How nice you look," he said. "Both of you!" he added, including the young heretic with an appraising eye. "I'm afraid you'll think, with your English taste, that we're too fond of gaudy colours in Edeyrnion. Well, it's not every night we wear such fine feathers, is it son? What I came to settle with you two — and his tone changed to something almost apologetic— "is a small point of family punctilio. You won't be offended, I hope, Master Brut, if I put you just — only just — below the dais? You'll be within our reach, so to speak. In fact you'll be just below us, and close to our Bard. But as we must have the good Fathers with us up there, and we know the little points of variance between you and them, the Arglwyddes thought you'd feel more at your ease—"

Rhisiart, upon whose shoulder Owen was still resting his hand, didn’t dare to look at the Lollard’s face. His own face, he knew, was flushing darkly and deeply. Oh, this was an insult — and an insult to him as well as to his room-mate! How differently would his mother, for all her frivolous snobbishness, have acted! These were French ways, like those of the flaunting nobles that Richard brought to Hereford! Master Brut was a truer gentleman, as he was a far nicer man, than any of those insolent priests. And what about Master Young? He would no doubt be on the dais, to make up for his cowardice, and because he was a canon in a cathedral!

But the Lollard’s own easy and friendly words — for he spoke at once, assuring his host that he had never sat on a dais in his life, that he was a simple farmer who always avoided such state-occasions, that his trial for heresy had got him far more notoriety than he deserved, and finally that he would have felt extremely awkward and embarrassed among the monks and the ladies — considerably soothed our friend’s mind.

He caught Meredith, however, watching the man as he spoke with intense concentration and with a curious little flickering smile on his lips.

“He’s thinking what a simple fellow he is,” was what passed through Rhisiart’s mind, “and how silly it was to get so angry. No, by God, I’m wrong! He’s looking at him as if he can’t understand him, as if he’s completely puzzled by him!”

When he had finished explaining why he would prefer not to be on the dais, Master Brut turned upon them all an open countenance of such serene friendliness that Rhisiart felt puzzled himself. “Can he really be a simple farmer?” he thought. Then he noticed that a pause had arrived in which they all stood waiting in silence — waiting presumably for Owen to make some move.

But Owen, though no one but Rhisiart seemed aware of it, had been seized by one of his “attacks”. Doubtless, to the rest of them, the chieftain looked merely like a statesman-like warrior, pondering some nice point of court etiquette, and plucking as he did so first at one side of his forked beard and then at the other; but to Rhisiart he looked like some delicately-carved statue, hung with sacrificial wreaths, awaiting the ritual-dance. The man’s soul, so it seemed, had left his body altogether and carried its consciousness into a different region.

But now with what to our friend was quite a startling shock Owen threw off this lethargy, and lowering his fingers from his beard extended them to Master Brut and shook him warmly by the hand.

“Well done, sir,” he said, “you’re a magnificent liar, a triumphal liar, an heroic liar! You shall sit wherever you want to; but you must come and see me when the banquet’s over” — and he turned to the puzzled Meredith— “you’ll bring him, son, won’t you? — for I’d like to ask the advice of such a liar as you, Master Brut, on a great many questions!”

To this unexpected command the Lollard only turned the same serene unruffled face, acknowledging it with a glance into the chieftain’s eyes, but without even a nod of acquiescence as far as Rhisiart could see. He wasn’t surprised, however, as they followed Owen to the door of the hall, to overhear Meredith whisper in the “simple farmer’s” ears, “I’ll look out for you as soon as he leaves. He won’t stay when the drinking begins. You must have made an extraordinary hit with him. I’ve never heard him speak to an Englishman like that before.”

“But I’m not an Englishman,” Rhisiart heard Master Brut reply; “and your father seems the only one here to know what ‘Brut’ means!”

As the three young men stood back to let Owen enter the hall alone, they heard him being greeted with a cry that made the blood rush tingling through Rhisiart's veins. "Owen ap Griffith, Prince of Powys!" they heard again and again; and then, in words that were yet more applauded, and in which our friend thought he recognized the shrill voice of the Bard of Ffinnant, "Owen, the Elect of Saint Derfel!"

Nor was our friend greatly surprised, when the clamour had subsided and Meredith was ushering them in, to catch the familiar voice of Mad Huw. Not even in such a gathering as this could they persuade the Friar to relinquish his allotted task on earth; but he was not quite oblivious of the spirit about him. "Owen," Rhisiart heard the Friar shout, "Owen, the friend of King Richard! Owen, the friend of the sweet sacrifice of God!"

The first thing Rhisiart did, when Meredith, having safely disposed of Master Brut in a snug position just below him, placed him in a seat at the end of the dais, side by side with Master Young, was to choke and sneeze. The hall was thick with fragrant birch-wood smoke from the fire in its centre, round which what looked as many as fifty men-at-arms were grouped, some seated on rough stools, some lying on heaped-up bracken, into which every now and then gleaming sparks from the fire would drift down, to be extinguished as soon as they fell.

Up and down among the banqueters, servingmen and servingmaids were already circulating, filling the guests' wooden bowls with steaming stew and piling their earthenware plates with meat and hot cakes. Through the high, narrow windows a pale diffusion of the mellow afternoon light of that Midsummer Day fell upon the scene, but not in sufficient strength to make pallid or negligible the bright flames that shot up amid the smoking logs. Jugs of beer and of light wine followed the meat and stew, in the hands of lively and chattering boys, all dressed for the occasion like little pages in the black and yellow of Owen's ancestral livery, and carrying on their breasts the single lion, "rampant and sable," of the old princedom.

As he had been promised, Master Brut had as his neighbour below the dais the striking figure of Griffith Llwyd, Owen's private Bard, whose harp was suspended from a bracket in the wall just above the Lollard's head.

All the privileged assembly on the dais sat facing the body of the hall, Owen himself in the centre, with the Arglwyddes on his right and his eldest son on his left. Rhisiart, as he sat with the lawyer-canon of Bangor at the end of the long table, was able to scan the figures of the whole company; and his swarthy face darkened in a hot excited flush when he simultaneously caught the eyes of both Tegolin and Catharine who were seated side by side.

And what was this? In place of her page's attire the Maid of Edeyrnion was dressed in a rich green gown, almost as sumptuous as Meredith's tunic, while her blood-red hair, free of its braid, flowed long and loose about her shoulders. Mad Huw was safely ensconced by the girl's side, and Rhisiart could not help being touched by the appealing way the man kept glancing at her, just as though he were a child at some grown-up ceremony for which he had been carefully schooled.

"How much brighter the dresses are," thought our friend, "than those at home. And yet," so he commented in his mind, "they're worn much more carelessly, much less as if their wearers were conscious of them, than ours are."

For himself he was most uncomfortably conscious of his new suit; and he found himself wondering whether Catharine had noticed his scarlet hose before he sat down, and whether Tegolin had seen the real way, in modern civilized circles, that young men wore their daggers.

Every now and then he would steal a furtive glance at the two girls; and almost always when he did so Tegolin would give him a frank, brave, encouraging smile, while Catharine would hurriedly look away. Feeling that it was incumbent upon him as a relative of the family to make the Canon of Bangor feel at his ease, Rhisiart interrupted the good man's absorbed enjoyment of a slice of savoury meat-pasty by remarking to him how like a prince of the old days Owen looked as he sat at the board with a great silver flagon at his side and the hilt of his sword gleaming above the dark oak of the long table.

"He'd be fitter for the part," murmured the legal expert hoarsely, "if he would listen more and think less."

"Think less?"

"Look at him now. He's not listening to anyone, or noticing anything! I believe that half the time he's composing these damned *cywyddau."*

"Look at the Abbot, Master Young! Is that the place of honour by the Arglwyddes' side? How fast he's drinking that red wine! Will he make a speech to the company, do you think? Look! He's telling her a story now, but she's only half-listening. She's watching over her shoulder that old witch with the black wand."

"King Harry," commented the world-wise Canon, washing down his pasty with a draught of beer, "won't have a woman near him when he's at table; but our good natives here are so gross in their cups, that if it weren't for the sharp eyes and sharp tongues of an old beldam like that they'd be drunk before the harp-playing!"

Rhisiart followed the old woman's movements with interest and wonder. Every now and then she would hobble up to the Arglwyddes and whisper something; then she would return to the back of the hall and point out to the serving-men with her staff some group among the warriors by the fire whose platters or flagons needed replenishing.

She wore an amazingly tall stiff cap, from which a long white wimple descended to her shoulders, and her spotless gown, made of some grey woollen stuff, hung about her form in stiff creases.

"She must be the Nurse," thought Rhisiart; and then as his eyes, which were always hovering about the two girls, met Tegolin's glance again, and again were evaded by Catharine's, he was arrested by the sight of Rhys Gethin who appeared to be narrating some murderous personal encounter with the most irreverent and reckless abandon to none other than Father Pascentius. The Father's expression of lascivious interest in what, from the warrior's gleaming eyes and flashing teeth, must have been a tale of blood and rapine, was the more noticeable because of the expression, full of a disgusted loathing of what he heard, upon the passionate countenance of Father Rheinalt.

Indeed, it was clear to the lad that Tegolin's begetter was completely out of his element, and sitting there, separated from his daughter, was angrily brooding upon one single wish, to get safe back to his cell!

"Is the poor monk," thought Rhisiart, "reminded of the Hog of Chirk by these blood-thirsty tales?" Regarding it as a dedicated topic of conversation with a man of the great world, and a topic to which he himself could display some degree of penetration, our friend commented to his companion upon this angry aloofness of Father Rheinalt and compared it with the almost liquorish interest displayed by the theologian.

"I'm afraid the man's an idealist," responded Master Young; and then, with a tone of weary acquiescence in the aberrations of the human race, he added, "I have always found that idealism gets more in one's way than actual wickedness; but the only thing to do is to expect it, allow for it, and discount it. You are beginning life, Master Rhisiart, and will have to learn these things by experience but I can assure you—"

He was interrupted by a disturbance just below where they sat, and Rhisiart saw his friend, the Lollard, pushed unceremoniously from his place by the side of the Bard by none other than the loquacious Scab.

Derfel's prophet was already a little drunk, and in his whimsies and humours had taken it into his head to give personal advice to Griffith Llwyd as to the direction his bardic impulse should take when the moment arrived.

The Lollard himself only smiled agreeably, and found a place on the bench behind; but our friend felt such indignation on his behalf that he couldn't resist calling out to the intruder and telling him, in no unsparing language, that he was taking a better man's seat.

The Bard himself acted like one whose sole concern was to keep his flowing beard from coming into contact with the foaming beer and the broken morsels of meat and pastry from which he was selecting his long-anticipated feast.

Rhisiart had always been told that Welsh Bards were insatiable trenchermen; but he had never seen such a zest for the flesh of sheep and cattle as was manifested by the descendant of Einion.

The Bard had a wizened, puckered little face, like that of a harp-player among pigmies. His pinched nose, pale blue eyes and twitching lips peeped out from his tangled mass of hair like a squirrel from an ivy-tod; and it appeared to our friend, as after a reassuring nod from the dispossessed Lollard he gave himself up to the amusement of watching the little hairy man's reception of the Scab's advice, that his vanity was so impenetrable that not only Derfel's prophet but Derfel himself would have had no effect upon him.

Like an owl under its feathers the Bard seemed to be of so small and brittle a frame that it was incredible to our friend not only how he could dispose of so much bodily nourishment, but upon what, in that wrinkled nut of a skull, any kind of *awen* or inspiration could find scope to work! The prophet of Saint Derfel, drunk as he was, recognized at last that it was harder to make headway with a bard at table than with spearmen in the field and began to become abusive. So noisy did he become — and Rhisiart could see that the rougher element among the warriors by the fire were entirely on his side — that it became necessary for Owen himself to intervene; and Meredith was sent to pacify the disturbers.

Our friend noticed with satisfaction that it was from the Lollard that this ambassador from the dais tried to arrive at the cause of the fracas, and he also noticed how oblivious he was to the rough usage that his green sleeves and yellow hose underwent as the Scab's supporters jostled him, and squeezed him against the greasy trestles and benches.

Rhisiart long remembered one particular moment of this scene. It was when Meredith was being more hustled than the lad had supposed could be possible under this roof, and when the sagacious Master Young had whispered in his ear the opinion that the Bard being a virtuoso was naturally unpopular with the rabble, whereas the Scab was a born demagogue, that the picture that arrested him so limned itself upon his mind.

Meredith was being hopelessly shouted down. More and more of the rougher warriors were leaving their seats by the fire and crowding forward. The Bard, afraid that someone would meddle with his harp, had drawn an ugly-looking knife.

And it was then that all Meredith did was to raise his arm, which in its loose sleeve rose above the tumult like the flag of a sinking ship, towards his father. And Rhisiart caught, as he watched the father and son, a look pass between them of such weary amusement that everything else in that smoky hall faded away, and the man with the forked beard and the man with the black curls created between them a gulf of intellectual detachment into which all the fever of life sank.

A wordless conclusion was evidently reached between the two, for Owen said something to the Arglwyddes and something else — across the lady — to the Abbot; while Meredith, extricating himself from the press, returned to his place on the dais.

"He's got more sense than I thought," whispered the worldly-wise Canon in Rhisiart's ear. "He's going to get up and speak."

Our friend shook his head. Master Young might know the ways of King Henry. It needed a returned native to know that a Welsh chieftain never rose up at a feast, but always left the art of oratory to his bards and his prophets.

But what actually happened was different from what either the gentleman from London or the gentleman from Hereford expected. Owen did rise to his feet— "And Blessed Virgin!" thought Rhisiart, "I'll be damned if he doesn't look like Modry's Pryderi!" — but instead of making any attempt to forestall his prophet or his bard, he stretched out his great two-handed cup at arm's length away from him, and leaning forward over the table dipped into it the fingers of his other hand.

His rising was the signal for a great wave of silence to flow over the company. It was like enchantment. Where each man stood or crouched or sat — there he remained. But when he stretched out the silver flagon and dipped his fingers into it a second silence followed the first silence, like a soft volcanic cloud following a tidal wave; and at this, and Rhisiart himself felt it, all the petrified human shapes in the hall — those tragic, laughable, fevered shapes whose tumult had been swallowed up in a hush deeper than the mere negation of sound — drew their breath with an audible sigh. It was at that moment that he met Tegolin's eyes and clung to them for an instant; an instant of tension so vibrant that it resembled the tinkling fall of the hands of time's clock upon the marble base of space.

Then he turned back to Owen and saw him sprinkle drops from the cup in every direction; and he was aware of a shiver of consciousness in the people, mounting up and up, until it became one universal living nerve suspended in the air. Then Owen let his left hand fall to his side and with his right lifted the flagon high above his head.

And as he held the cup he raised his head so high and tilted it back so far that Rhisiart, from where he sat, could see the soft white flesh of his neck under his grey-yellow beard. Then, not in a loud voice, indeed in a voice that was almost like a whisper, he uttered some words that were totally unintelligible to the Hereford boy. They sounded like Welsh; but they were no Welsh that Rhisiart knew. But whatever the words were, their effect was electric. Every man in the hall, following Owen with the rhythmic consentaneousness of a familiar ritual, repeated the words he had used; and, after that, with a movement as spontaneous as if it had been practised for a thousand years, they lifted their cups to their lips.

And if it had been an extraordinary experience to our traveller to sink, with Tegolin, into that underworld of silence, it was hardly less of a shock when, on Owen's resuming his seat, the hall became filled with a confused uproar of excited voices.

Derfel's obstreperous representative had already pushed his way back to the fire and the descendant of Einion had already risen to take down his harp, when Rhisiart noticed the old lady with the tall head-dress and black wand go shuffling in an evident fever of excitement to the Arglwyddes' side. Between these two there then ensued a long and intense discussion, to which it was plain that both Owen and the Abbot were listening with absorbed attention.

Rhisiart couldn't see Owen's face, but he saw the face of his eldest son, as the torch-light in that midsummer twilight gleamed on the belt of Eliseg, and what he read there made it clear to him that something of very serious moment had happened or was on the verge of happening.

And then, as was natural enough, the news was passed along the dais till it reached Rhys the Savage and his theological neighbour; "What is it? What is it?" our friend whispered to Master Young.

At first the Canon of Bangor was too occupied in straining his own ears to reply; but presently he turned and, with that smile of egoistic satisfaction with which the imparter of important news betrays his advantage over the recipient, announced to Rhisiart that the aged Iolo Goch had expressed a desire to attend the harp-playing.

Whether Master Young's words were overheard by the harpist himself the lad couldn't tell; but he had never seen any human being isolate himself so completely from all contact with his kind as the Bard did then, pushing back his masses of hair from his ears, touching one harp string after another as if they had been the lips of the dead, and literally drinking up the faint sounds which he evoked as if they had been sound, touch, sight, smell, taste, and ecstatic spiritual absorption, all in one!

The smoke from the fire was now so thick that the noise of loud coughing became audible from many quarters, and when the "Nurse" had retired from the scene Rhisiart could see the Arglwyddes giving a new set of instructions to one of the men-at-arms.

The upshot of these last orders became manifest almost at once, for the great oaken doors of the hall were presently flung wide open, revealing, in the blue-grey twilight, a large throng of peasants of all ages who had been attracted by the prospect of Griffith Llwyd's famous performance. Master Young sighed heavily when he perceived this addition to the audience.

"I understood," he whispered to our friend peevishly, taking unnecessary care that the Bard should not hear his words, "I understood that this was to be a serious council, what in Wales we call *cynghor,* but evidently it's going to be a country fair. Didn't I tell you," and his voice and manner were full of a bitter contempt, "how *he over there* misses every opportunity? The man's a fool, I tell you, even if you are his cousin. He's a play-acting fool! Where, I'd like to know, does all this bard business and Derfel-business lead? Here is news just arrived — did they tell you? — that the King's back from Scotland, Lord Grey back at Ruthin, and Fitz-Alan — you told me yourself — at Chirk, and what's Owen doing? Pouring out libations to Merlin, and setting up one Bard on his death-bed against another Bard in his dotage! Listen, Master Rhisiart, you're one of this extraordinary family; can't you manage—"

Our friend's heart bounded. In a flash he saw himself in the role of a trusted intermediary between this cosmopolitan statesman and a newly-proclaimed Prince of Powys. But he soon found that the would-be Archdeacon's final words had a more immediate significance.

"Can't you manage," Master Young insisted, "to get that old trollop over there to bring us some French wine? I can't last out these mummeries much longer. Bah! and what a chilly air they've let in! I must have something more wholesome than this sickening-sweet mead!"

But another and more serious reason now presented itself for the shutting out of the peasants and the night-air. There were sudden cries in the court-yard, and loud agitated voices, and the high-pitched clamour of women; and while Owen and Griffith rose to their feet and the warriors by the fire clutched at their weapons a jostling body of men hurled themselves into the hall, and behind them, against a yell of protests from outside, the great doors were shut and barred.

Everyone in the place — except the descendant of Einion — made a hurried movement to see what had happened and who had entered; and in a moment the cry rose up, “A spy! a Ruthin spy! Kill him, kill him! Throw him in the fire!”

Rhisiart saw the Abbot of Caerleon hasten round the top of the dais, as if to intervene; but Rhys Gethin was too quick for him. With a bound the man vaulted over the table, leapt down into the hall, pushed his way through the crowd, and presently his abrupt, hard voice could be heard giving hurried and drastic orders.

To see what was going on our friend instinctively climbed upon his seat and from this point of vantage he could make out the figure, bound and helpless, and with blood streaming down his face, of a powerful, fair-haired man in the dress of an English archer.

“Kill him! Throw him into the fire!” rose a howl of innumerable voices.

“My Lord, my Lord,” came the deep voice of the Abbot, “this man must be heard, lest his immortal soul—”

“He won’t speak! He won’t speak! To the fire with him!”

Then came the murderous voice of Rhys Gethin; and Rhisiart could see through the smoke that he had taken hold of the wretched captive— “*Now* will you speak?”

Rhisiart glanced at Owen expecting some intervention, and to balance himself on his stool he pressed his knee against the neck of Master Young. But it seemed to him as if Owen’s soul had fled far away from the whole tumult.

“He’s got one of his attacks.” he said to himself. “But I must do something. I can’t stand this.”

“Now will you speak?”

“Stop, stop!” came the ringing tones of Mad Huw, while he could be seen forcing his way towards the victim. “Stop! he may be Richard!”

But at last there came a sign from the victim himself, and it came in the familiar accent that brought back all his Hereford childhood to our friend’s mind.

“God save King Harry!” cried the Englishman, “and may his—” but his voice ended in a long-drawn death-cry.

There was a moment’s appalling hush; and then, over the whole assembly, there rose, more piercing, more pitiful, even than the man’s last breath, the rending shriek of a young girl; and Rhisiart, stumbling down from his stool, saw Owen lift up his daughter in his arms and carry her out, while scream after scream, cutting into the smoke and cutting into the murkiness of that murder like a knife, quivered back into the hall as she was carried away.

VI. BARDS AND HERETICS

THE DEATH OF the spy and the collapse of Catharine broke up the first part of this midsummer banquet. But more was to follow. Owen had carried the girl away; and his absence was a signal for a wild clamour of voices from every part of the hall. But Rhisiart was amazed at the presence of mind and calm authority displayed by the Arglwyddes. Leaving the dais she called first one retainer to her side and then another, giving them abrupt and decisive orders. There ensued a general clearing away of boards and trestles. Water was brought to wash away the blood of the dead, while fresh supplies of green bracken were strewn on the flag-stones round the fire.

Then he saw her approach her elder son and give him what were evidently careful and explicit instructions as to the nature of the Bard's performance.

"She's told him, I warrant," said the lad to himself, "that he'd better confine himself to playing on his harp and not attempt any improvisation in words."

He watched the lady follow Griffith with her eyes as with Eliseg's great belt twisted so absurdly round his neck the chieftain's son made his way to the harp-player. And he noted how as soon as the self-centred artist had understood her commands and was prepared to obey them she despatched one of the little pages to fetch Rhys Gethin to her side.

Since the monks and the Abbot with them had followed Mad Huw into the body of the hall, and since the legal-minded Canon had slipped down from his seat to discourse to the Lollard, Rhisiart found that Tegolin and himself were the sole possessors of the dais. The girl was standing up, following Mad Huw with her eyes, but evidently uncertain what to do. Her tall figure in its green robe, with the mass of blood-coloured hair framing her white face, brought in a flash to the lad's mind one of the few Homeric passages — and this was only a quotation in a Latin manuscript in his college library — that he had ever seen.

It was a description of the ill-fated Cassandra; and it only came back to him because it was connected with over-turned goblets and a desolated board and with blood and wine spilled together on the floor; but it returned to him often, this impression, and whenever it returned it wasn't only the girl he saw, standing alone in front of that tenantless table. He saw a vision of the strange beauty that could rise — but it was all vague and blurred in his brain — out of the very depths of tragedy.

It came and went in a moment, the impression he got then, but when it passed he found himself already at the girl's side. His approach decided her. "Come," she whispered hurriedly, "let's go to the man they killed. I want to see—"

How cold her fingers were as he took her hand! He glanced quickly at her face; but her smile reassured him; and they made their way without difficulty to the scene of the killing. The men-at-arms fell back with a murmur of awe and admiration to let the Maid of Edeyrnion pass.

They found Mad Huw on his knees by the head of the corpse whose wide staring eyes gazed frantically at the ceiling; while standing at the victim's foot were the two Cistercians and the Abbot of Caerleon, intoning in low anti-phonic alternation certain solemn verses over a soul that had perished without the rites of the Church.

The Maid fell on her knees by Mad Huw's side; but in place of bowing her head in prayer she began at once closing with her fingers the dead man's staring eyes, wiping the blood from his face with a handkerchief she drew from her own bosom, and with deft womanly touches smoothing away all she could of the distortion and horror of such an end.

The only dead bodies Rhisiart had seen hitherto had been the unhappy mangled remains of victims of Hereford justice, and as he stood looking down on this youth, obviously only a few years older than himself, and saw the girl's hair cover the lad's breast as she folded his dead hands, a recurrence of some half-forgotten night of childish fear, fear of the tumult and the violence of life, came over him, the shouts of the street, the howling of the wind, the patter of the rain, and the ineffable safety of Modry's presence and the flickering firelight and the warm bed in which he lay; and for a second he became this stranger laid to rest under Tegolin's soft hair.

But the girl rose up now and roused Mad Huw from his trance. She must have known what was on the Brother's wild brain for she whispered to him something about the dead being alive, and Rhisiart saw a strange swift smile pass between them, as though, by reason of some secret confederacy with Rhys Gethin's victim, it had become unnecessary just then to name the late King's name.

The Arglwyddes herself and her son Griffith now appeared on the scene, and our friend noticed that Rhys Gethin, with five or six of his men-at-arms, was unbarring the door of the hall to let himself out.

This was a relief to our friend; for it seemed better for the dead and better for them all that the corpse should be carried to the house-chapel without having to pass that man of blood.

The Arglwyddes herself, when this had been done, carried off Tegolin and the Friar to their rooms on the floor above, and Rhisiart was consoled for the Maid's departure by being treated as sufficiently one of the family to help Griffith and the pages in arranging the benches and composing the audience in preparation for the harp-playing.

He found himself finally reclining by the Lollard's side on a fresh heap of bracken, the fragrant smoke from the fire quieting his pulses, while he listened with half-dazed senses to what struck him even in his benumbed abstraction as a fantastic dialogue between the tipsy Scab and the inquisitive Master Young.

The Abbot and the two monks having returned from the chapel — the exact geographical position of which, in the corridor leading to Owen's chamber, was now being demonstrated to him by the Lollard with the aid of sundry little fragments of firewood — and having been comfortably installed within a convenient distance of the harp-player and an equally convenient distance of a capacious bowl of steaming *metheglin* which stood between the fire and the empty dais, Griffith gave the signal to the Bard to begin.

As Owen's eldest son it was evidently this young man's privilege to sit by the Abbot's side in the state-chair, and to represent the chieftain at this traditional performance. In the absence of both Lord and Lady, and freed, as the night fell and more torches were lit, from the formidable presence of Rhys the Savage, the company disposed themselves in easy relaxed postures to give themselves up to what — as far as the majority were concerned — was the great event of the evening.

Rhisiart could see that Griffith was abstracted as he sat in his father's chair, and it was clear that the impatient Abbot was chafing for something to happen more germane to the cause for which he had come so far; and as for Father Rheinalt our friend felt that like himself the unsociable monk was struggling against a strong tendency to fall asleep. Like himself too, Tegolin's parent kept casting furtive glances at the particular door that led in the direction marked on Master Brut's invisible map as north-west by north.

Both the monk and the youth had evidently come to link this “north-west by north,” as they sat in the hall, with the apparition of desirable shapes, and the more the birch-tree smoke and the heady, sweet, hot mead drowsed their senses the more did they hope against hope that this blessed quarter of the compass would repeat its beneficence.

Rhisiart indeed, as he stretched himself out in the fire-light by the Lollard’s side, soon reached such a point of confused expectancy that the dusky portals of this particular exit managed at once to shimmer like *pali* and to gleam like blood-red hair.

But the son of Dafydd ab Einion had now really begun to play, and though the Scab might criticize and the Canon of Bangor might groan at such irrelevance, the mass of the audience, soldiers, servants, and pages alike, were caught up into an ecstasy of response.

Large as the place was it was crowded from wall to wall. New groups of people had been slipping in all the while ever since the murder of the spy. Almost the whole of Owen’s enormous household must have been present, together with a considerable percentage of countryfolk from the vicinity who possessed friends at court to smuggle them through the kitchens.

At first the Bard played very low and almost timorously; but as he warmed to his task his fingers seemed to gather strength and swiftness and his whole personality seemed to melt into the instrument and become an organic part of it, so that it appeared to Rhisiart as if that little wizened head, small and brittle as a nut under a mass of foliage, were a physical portion of the harp, and as if the harp itself, endowed with a figure-head of its own, were plucking at its own breast and making music of its own heart-strings.

The man was so little and the harp was so large, and he threw himself with such absolute abandonment into every motion he made, that another impression our friend received was that of an aged “atomy”, or fluttering insect, clambering at intense speed up and down the shining strings, and, as it moved, evoking all manner of subtle halftones and fractional modulations such as are audible to the sub-human ears of the creatures of the air, but until touched by this winged scarab of divination inaudible to the ears of men!

And then without leaving behind these hummings and dronings, these wailings and whimperings, these gnat-cries and shard-borne moans, this singular virtuoso began invading the sky and plundering from its invisible registrations such sounds as the screaming of eagles, the croaking of ravens, the quiverings of larks.

But the spirit of the descendant of Einion was not content with these limited regions of naturalistic vocalization; though even by this time, as our friend gazed at him through the smoke, the little head with its hairy burden had vanished completely, and a towering, formless, shapeless personality had taken its place, an irresistible, non-human personality that shook the notes out of the frightened harp as a god might shake music out of a shell.

But it was Nature’s more grandiose reservoir of sounds that the spirit dominating these obedient strings now began to ransack. Sweeping the instrument with stronger fingers, till it seemed as if more than a mere framework of strings responded to his touch, he began to evoke the winds in their voyagings, the cataracts in their crashing falls, the wild rains in their torrents.

The Hereford boy was sitting straight up now, hugging his knees. All lethargy had passed from him, as apparently it had from that whole crowded assembly. He ceased turning his glance “north-west by north.” Even the tipsy Scab had been reduced to silence and Owen’s eldest son had stopped fidgetting in his chair. The Abbot had pulled out his psalter and put it back again many times, not knowing what he did.

The Lollard had risen to his feet. Master Young himself had allowed the fate of nations to recede into the background, while his toothless mouth became as round as a wood-pecker's hole.

A queer sensation began to invade Rhisiart's nerves, as if not the harp alone but the whole torchlit hall were the instrument the obsessed player was using, and as if his own secretest fibres, and those of all the company about him, had become the strings at which the man was tearing.

But what was this? Lost in his blind inspiration, the player had forgotten the Arglwyddes' command that *the harp only* was to speak. At first with low sounds that seemed hardly human syllables, and then, as he went on, with words that took their meaning as well as their music from the notes that accompanied them, he began a celebration of his Lord's prowess in battle. "With a broken sword," he said, "the son of Griffith Fychan mowed down the enemies of King Richard! With a red flamingo's feather in his helm he flamed through the battle, and the sound of his onslaught was like the sound of the waves of the sea when they roar over the sand-dunes! The dead, the dead fight for the son of Griffith Fychan, and the spirits of the air gather about the rush of his onset, like the winds out of their dark pavilions in the track of the hurricane!"

As the man's voice rose in his wild excitement the notes of the harp seemed sometimes to follow, sometimes to lead his utterance; but what Rhisiart, as he listened, found most extraordinary was the way a certain hard, clear, conscious, almost cold intention continued to retain in the midst of the wildest excursions of his frenzy the symphonic unity of his performance.

He went back upon himself, he gathered up his earlier motifs, he reverted to those hummings and whisperings, like the vague stirrings in the air of thousands of summer afternoons. He reverted to the screaming of eagles, to the pipings of curlews, to the cawings of rooks.

Into the rhythm of the hooves of Owen's war-horse, into the rush of the flying track of that flamingo feather, into the cleaving of skulls under that broken sword, he tossed the roar of the falling cataracts he had plundered, he flung the wailing of the journeying winds he had invoked.

Rhisiart couldn't follow all the words he used. Many of them were old archaic words, words borrowed from Taliesin, from Aneurin, from Llywarch Hen. Some of them he suspected to be words coined for the occasion by the Bard himself. Nor could he follow all the strange rhythms of the accompaniment. Many of these seemed to him to be conjured up out of the very abysses of prehistoric time. He heard the crashing of ice-floes in the glacial era; he heard the moaning of winds in forests roamed by mammoths; he heard the hissing of the lava in prehistoric volcanoes as it was drowned in the tidal waves of nameless seas.

There came a point when the lad actually couldn't see the form of the man who was playing. A cloud of conjured-up shapes, like the shapes of the first day of creation, blotted him out. The descendant of Einion had ceased to be a harpist in a smoky hall. He had become the beating of immortal wings in a great void! He had become the breath of the ultimate spirit moving on the face of the waters.

"The poor little hairy man!" Rhisiart heard Master Young exclaim with a gasp of wonder to Derfel's prophet. "He'll fall down in a fit soon. He ought to be stopped."

"Hush! for Christ's sake!" responded the Scab. And our friend, rising like a deep-sea fish, or descending like an empyrean-bird, from the regions into which he had been transported, said to himself that a player who could make Master Young sentimental and the Scab cry “Hush! for Christ’s sake!” must indeed be an artist.

“But what in the Virgin’s name—”

The startling, indeed it might be called the shocking, effect of the sudden cessation of the Bard’s performance was felt by everybody in the hall.

Owen’s son jumped up from his chair and stood transfixed. The Abbot and the two monks crossed themselves as if in the presence of something supernatural. Rhisiart himself leapt to his feet, and the Scab and Master Young rose so hurriedly that their bench fell with a thud on the flag-stones.

Borne in on a litter, upon which rugs and cushions had been hurriedly flung, appeared a tall lean figure, with a drooping red moustache, hollow eye-sockets in which burned a pair of literally blazing eyes, a high, bald, unwrinkled brow, upon which the torch-light as it flickered shone like pallid gold, and a thin elongated neck, whose veins and muscles, as the man lifted his head, seemed to be almost anatomical, so naked of flesh they were!

Straight up in his litter the man heaved himself, leaning on his own wasted arms; and it seemed as if his blazing eyes swept round upon every separate person in the company as if they were searching for someone in particular. The dying man was carried slowly and carefully by four men-at-arms, while Owen himself, his face cold and hard with the emotion he was at pains to control, walked by the side of the litter, every now and then bending down with his hand on the man’s shoulder, rather, it seemed, to catch the murmur of his wishes than to prevent him from rising.

They carried him straight towards the fire but very slowly; and he might have been Owen’s father from the impassioned solicitude the chieftain displayed, holding back with difficulty, as must have been clear to all, the tempest of emotion he felt. Soldiers, archers, servants, guests and pages —

all crowded round the dying man. Many fell on their knees. There was the sound of the weeping of women, and harsher and stranger than that the hoarse heart-shaken sobs of battle-scarred veterans.

Rhisiart in an impulse of shyness and awe fell back as the cortège advanced, and so did his friend, the Lollard; but the Scab and Master Young moved forward to meet the litter, and even tried to draw some notice to themselves from the absorbed Owen.

When the bearers reached the fire they put down the litter, which was really a sort of wooden couch, and themselves drew back, leaving Owen alone by the dying man's side.

The great Bard — and our friend was near enough now to see that he was much older than his red moustache implied — was evidently struggling desperately to make clear to the chieftain something that he wanted done; but though he had the physical strength to hold himself erect his voice came in feeble sighs, weak and faint, and was accompanied by a curious whistling sound that was distressing to hear.

Rhisiart could see that Owen couldn't catch the import of what he was struggling to say, and the scene grew more and more painful, great drops of sweat appearing on the chieftain's brow and unmistakable flashes of angry impatience in the Bard's burning eyes.

At last Owen straightened himself and glanced hopelessly round. He caught Rhisiart's eye and beckoned to him.

"Where is Meredith?" he murmured when the lad approached. Griffith ab Owen, who was standing near by, caught this whisper, and as Rhisiart turned to look for Meredith, he saw the elder brother's face grow suddenly distorted with passion and saw him snatch Eliseg's belt from his neck and fling it upon the foot of the litter.

Owen himself seemed totally oblivious of his son's anger and he stared at the sacred belt as if it had dropped down from the ceiling.

To Rhisiart's immense relief he now caught sight of Meredith's green tunic and yellow hose, and he called out to him that he was wanted.

Owen was still staring at Eliseg's belt as if he had never seen it before.

"It's one of his attacks," our friend said to himself; and when his eyes met those of the dying man he caught such a desperate appeal in them that he couldn't bear it.

"Perhaps, my Lord," he cried impetuously, facing that forked beard in his rashness, "the other bard would understand him!" He could see that Iolo the Red understood his words for the great bald head was slightly shaken, but Owen mechanically obeyed his young cousin's hint and summoned his harp-player to his side.

Griffith Llwyd ap Dafydd ab Einion, oblivious of everyone and everything, was just then meticulously wiping every separate string of his harp with a piece of cloth; but to our friend's surprise he obeyed his lord's summons and came forward, his slight frame staggering under the weight of his instrument.

"Put that down!" commanded Owen sternly, but the Bard took no more notice of his words than if they had been addressed to the smoke. Dragging the great harp towards them he finally balanced it against the knee of the dying Iolo, and then bending down kissed one of the poet's knotted hands as it pressed against the side of the litter.

Pantingly and feebly came another desperate gust of whistling words; but it was clear to Rhisiart that though the harp-player was able well enough to follow the first wind of creation he could make nothing at all of this same mystic breath when in its sighings and groanings it expressed the heart's desire of a dying man.

Meredith was with them now and it was obvious that with his failure to understand what Iolo was trying to say Owen gave up all hope.

The old man was getting more and more desperate. He kept rolling his eyes from one to another in frantic supplication, and Rhisiart could see that his long moustaches were actually dripping with foam as he struggled to give to these death-whistlings some sort of coherence.

The Scab had already been pulled away twice from Iolo's side; though it seemed to our friend as if the dying poet himself had a stronger hope of being understood by this disfigured scaramouch than by any of the others.

As for the Abbot and the two Valle Crucians the dying Bard wouldn't allow them to come near him. Rhisiart already had received hints of Iolo Goch's dislike of ecclesiastics. Scraps and tags attributed to him, containing the most blasphemous animadversions upon both the regular and the secular clergy, had spread as far as the Hereford border, and no doubt many scurrilous quips and jibes from the controversies of a much earlier epoch were attributed to this modern enemy of the Church.

There was one moment, and the spectacle of it sent a quiver of agitated though not altogether unpleasant awe through our friend's nerves, when even the powerful soul of the Abbot of Caerleon met its match in a collision of eye-glances that was like the bandying of buffets at a spiritual tourney.

"Priests and bards!" the boy said to himself as he watched not only the Abbot, but even the simple-minded and patriotic Father Rheinalt draw back defeated from this heathen death-bed; "priests and bards — aye! but they'll be enemies to the end of the world!"

The whole assembly, gentle and simple, men and women, were now crowding round the singular death-bed, and an awed silence held them as they listened to the incoherent sounds that came from beneath that red moustache.

Rhisiart was struck by the popular reverence that left a clear space round the litter where Owen stood alone with big unnoticed tears running down his set face into his forked beard; and he remarked too how not one of the soldiers and servants, however eager they were, pushed forward into the circle of the family and their guests.

The harp they had been listening to still remained propped up against the litter, and at the feet of the dying man still lay the belt of King Eliseg, untouched since Griffith had flung it down.

Every eye was fixed upon the face of Iolo, and though not a sob was heard, Owen's tears weren't the only tears that fell. The two Valle Crucians mechanically tolled their beads but did not lower their heads, and Rhisiart was conscious of a certain discomfort as if in the presence of something indecent as he caught the look of devouring interest with which Father Pascentius stared at the great bald head before them and listened to those whistling sounds.

Suddenly the dying man seemed inspired by a new hope. He lifted one of his hands to his face and covered his eyes, and it was clearly a relief to most of the onlookers to escape those wild supplicating glances.

Owen made a movement to support him but he shook off the offered hand. It was plain to them all that the man was desperately, quietly, passionately exerting his will-power in some intense interior concentration. A faint gasp, a perceptible murmur, arose as from one man from the whole of that spell-bound crowd. But an audible word broke from one of them.

"He is calling upon Derfel!" cried the irrepressible Scab. The baldheaded figure before them, supporting itself in that erect sitting-posture by one lean muscular arm, swayed backwards and forwards in the intensity of the willpower he was exerting.

“He is praying to God!” sighed the Abbot of Caerleon. “Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend—”

But to the amazement of all present the passionate tension of the dying man suddenly relaxed. He removed his hand from his eyes. He accepted with a nod, and even with something like a smile, the support which Owen offered him. Thus he remained for quite a considerable passage of time, with every feature of his face as completely relaxed as was his body.

“Jesus receive him!” murmured the voice of the Lollard.

Rhisiart too thought that the end had come; but that terrible whistling sound still continued, and the great head, though the tension of the neck was eased, didn’t droop or sink.

Suddenly he made a slight movement to the left — towards that direction which Master Brut had so carefully designated as “north-west by north,” and our friend following that movement with his own eyes gave so lively a start that the watchers in front of him turned their heads, too. There in the doorway, in a long child’s night-gown, and with her fair hair tied back from her bare shoulders, stood the young Catharine! The girl was struggling to free one of her wrists from the grasp of the old woman they called “Nurse”; and even while she struggled she lifted up her voice and cried in tones that rang through the hall, “They’re killing someone! I know they’re killing someone! Where are you, Father? I must go to my Father. They’re killing some-one!”

Owen signed to Meredith to take his place and swung round. “Let her go, Nurse!” he cried. “Come here, child! No one’s being killed. Be a brave girl and come here.”

The crowd parted in silence to let that white figure with its staring feverish eyes rush into his arms. He hurriedly unclasped the brooch that held his great purple mantle and wrapped its thick folds round her.

“Say goodbye to your friend, Catharine. His spirit’s struggling to get free.” For a second the girl hesitated, as well she might, for the eyes of the dying man burnt more feverishly than her own; but his whole face was illuminated as she bent over him.

“What do you say, Uncle Iolo? Say it again, slower! Whisper it, Uncle Iolo! I can hear you.”

Owen raised his hand for silence. But there was no need. The whole hall had become silent as death. From the Abbot to the youngest page, everyone held their breath. Not a soul present but knew this was the man’s supreme moment, his last chance of being understood.

And she did understand him! How she did was a mystery to Rhisiart. But it may have been that the girl’s instinct in making him whisper was the secret of it. Perhaps all the while if someone had held their face close to his lips that terrible whistling wouldn’t have drowned his words.

“Oh women, women!” thought our young psychologist. “It’s you we want, and only you, at such a moment!” The lad was astonished at Catharine’s calm. Sinking down by the man’s side on the litter she pushed her brother away and let the full weight of that heavy torso fall against her young body. And balanced there, her father’s mantle brushing the strings of the harp and her own white gown touching Eliseg’s belt, she resolutely and clearly, in a voice that didn’t even tremble as she spoke, repeated after him in her own words all he whispered to her.

Rhisiart could hear some little page behind him struggling pitifully not to cough as the smoke from the fire got into his throat, and some serving-wench at the end of the hall sneezed once or twice; but except for that every word the girl uttered fell like a smooth stone into the unrippled pond of absolute silence.

"He says he willed someone to come," she interpreted. *"Me* to come," she corrected herself. "He says you must all swear on the king's belt to be his men against the English. He says September the—" Here she paused and Rhisiart could see the frown of intense childish trouble with which she struggled to catch the difficult word. "September the — the fifteenth — no! the — the sixteenth. He says on September the sixteenth you must all come here and — and — and proclaim my father Prince of Wales. He says on Saint Matthew's Day we must—"

She broke off for a long tense moment while it became clear that the pressure of the gaunt shoulder against her had suddenly grown too much. Then in something almost like a cry of pain she repeated the single word "Ruthin," and sank sideways under his dead weight.

That word "Ruthin," the name of their bitterest enemy's stronghold, must have been the last word uttered on earth by Iolo Goch, and so closely involved was the girl's body with the man's death-spasm, that when Owen and Meredith had lowered his head on the cushions of the litter, Rhisiart could see the Nurse, into whose arms the exhausted child flung herself, wipe from the front of her night-gown a smear from the red froth that had come from that desperate mouth.

What, however, chiefly worried our young adventurer's mind, as the old woman in the tall head-dress disappeared "north-west by north" with her young charge, was whether the final glance that Catharine flung back towards them included himself in its farewell.

Her father had clearly forgotten her as he bent over the corpse of his old friend, while he himself saw nothing save her vanishing figure; but *had* her eyes met his, as he gazed after her, or was it an illusion? She still had Owen's purple mantle wrapped round her as the Nurse took her away; took her down that corridor which was now fraught in our friend's mind with all the perfumes of Arabia, but the image he retained of her, the image that remained in its cloudy niche in his soul all the while he was staring at Eliseg's belt lying at the dead man's feet, was the image of her as she had appeared when the crowd divided to let her pass, her flaxen hair all braided for the night and her eyes so wide and staring.

There was now a surge and clamour of voices, loud as the roar of the surf when some heavy postern door looking seaward is suddenly opened, and there was a general rush forward.

Owen was still standing by the Bard's head. Without his purple robe he looked like a statue carved in gold, and he looked younger, too; though his forked beard stood out more clearly than it had done before. Rhisiart could see he was totally absorbed in his grief. He seemed to have grown oblivious to everything in the world but Iolo's death; and our friend asked himself whether that final request or command or prophecy uttered by the dead man was going to be obeyed or not. "Probably not," he thought, as he watched Owen's distraction. But he was counting without the impetuous Abbot and without the reckless monk who'd begotten Tegolin.

Both these men now advanced to the foot of the bier, and their deep rich voices, trained to the intoning of ritual, rose simultaneously above the hubbub. "I swear by the belt of Eliseg to be true man and liege servant to the puissant Prince Owen ap Griffith Fychan as long as my life shall last!"

The rolling resonance of these two patriotic priests' voices hadn't died away before they made room at the litter for Father Pascentius. He uttered this formidable vow in the same words but quite slowly and quietly; and Rhisiart observed that he didn't hesitate to take hold of the sacred heirloom and examine it with curiosity and that as he moved away he made that characteristic gesture with his hands that had become a habit with him and that seemed to absolve all the makers of vows from all the vows that they had made since the beginning of the world!

The clamour and shouting in the body of the hall had now become so vociferous that it was evidently a trouble to Owen; for he kept frowning vaguely; and staring round; but there was a film over his eyes as he did this, and since he neither spoke to quiet them nor raised his hand for silence the shouting grew louder and louder.

“Make the pretty cousin swear!” Rhisiart heard one voice bawl out. “Make the little Hereford calf give a kick at his King!”

“Make the damned Lollard swear, my Lord Abbot!” cried another,” so us can see how one of these heretic dogs takes an honest Christian oath!”

“My Lord Abbot,” cried a third, “make the lawyer swear! Don’t let the lawyer sneak off without risking his neck!”

With that natural human instinct that causes the persecuted to cling together both Master Young and Master Brut now came forward to our friend’s side.

But the Lollard only paused to give Rhisiart a humorous smile and to whisper hurriedly, “Here we are following John ap Hywel again!” before he boldly advanced to the litter.

But in place of touching the king’s belt as he made his vow, he laid one hand on the thigh of the dead man and the other on the hilt of Owen’s sword. The action startled the chieftain, and even for a second seemed to anger him, but when he saw who it was who had touched his sword a faint smile crossed his lips. “You too, Master Brut? Well, well! Don’t go to bed to-night without coming to see me!”

Aroused by the Lollard from his trance, Owen embraced the situation in a moment, with Rhisiart and Master Young hesitating as liege subjects of King Harry about committing such an overt act of treason.

“Make the Hereford cousin swear, my Lord!” shouted a voice from the rear as soon as it was seen that Owen’s consciousness had come back to earth.

“Make the Canon of Bangor swear, my Lord!” came the harsh voice of the Scab. “If an Abbot can be a good Welshman, a Canon can!” But Owen was himself again.

“No need for any of our family to swear!” he said easily and with careless dignity. “And we shall want Master Young,” he added gravely, “to represent us at Henry of Lancaster’s Court. So it would be a mistake to narrow his freedom by oaths and vows. But it would be a great comfort to me and my family, too,” and he raised his head with a gesture so princely that it filled our friend’s eyes with tears, “if everyone here tonight will vow with me, by Our Lady of Valle Crucis and Saint Derfel of Edeyrnion, that we will not sheathe our sword in this righteous cause till Henry of Lancaster —”

He was interrupted by a thunder of voices and a savage clatter of arms, as every hand and every weapon that was to hand was raised in the air.

“Saint Derfel for Edeyrnion!” cried the Scab in an ecstasy, and not only that great hall but the whole of the palace seemed to rock and sway to the shout that arose: “Saint Derfel for Edeyrnion! Saint Derfel for Owen Glyn Dŵr!”

Rhisiart never forgot the conflicting tumult of his feelings at that moment. He longed to have Tegolin’s hand tight in his. He longed in some queer way for the Modry of his childhood. Along with all his emotion at the sight of that tall, grief-stricken, golden figure, and along with all his response to this high moment, he was aware of an obscure stab of home-sickness for the familiar faces and voices of the old Hereford streets; and deep in his heart he was grateful to Owen for saving him just then from the irrevocable plunge of taking the Abbot's vow.

"And now," Owen was saying, "the Arglwyddes and I have only to tell you all that there will be mead and wine in this hall till midnight. Griffith Llwyd ap Dafydd ab Einion will remain with you. He will sing for you of the dead and of the living, of our wrongs and of the day of our vengeance. He will sing to you the glory of Iolo; he will sing to you the destruction of Mathrafal; he will sing to you of the rise and the fall of Dinas Bran. He will sing to you of the great king of our house upon whose belt we have sworn." He paused, while throughout the hall there was a general movement of relaxation, the spearmen and men-at-arms resuming their places about the fire, and the great gate being unbolted to admit the villagers and to relieve the guard.

Then appealing once more for silence he reminded them how the dead Bard had named with his last breath the sixteenth day of September as the day of their re-assembling.

"Let the word go forth," he concluded, "to the north and south and east and the west; but let it be a word for our people only. If a Saxon from Ruthin or Chirk or Castell Goch ask you, 'What is this September? What is this sixteenth?' say in answer that it is the day of the threshing of the wheat and the day of the burning of the weeds!"

While Owen was uttering these final words, Rhisiart watched how the young man Griffith sat down gloomily on a heap of bracken close to the fire, where he bent forward and stared at the burning logs. The fragrant smoke swept over him and hid him from our friend's sight; but, when it swept away, there he was still, his powerful shoulders hunched up, and his big hands rubbing first one shin and then another, as he felt through his hose the scorching heat.

What were that young man's thoughts? our lad wondered. Did he hold all this business of swearing by Eliseg's belt as arrant tom-foolery? Did he despise his father for his womanish grief over Iolo? Did he hate Meredith as an obsequious popinjay in his green sleeves and yellow hose? He couldn't surely hate Catharine? But he certainly hadn't looked at her, as she bent over the dying Bard, with a very tender eye. "On my soul," our friend concluded, "I believe both he and the Arglwyddes are critical of all this Welsh enthusiasm. The Arglwyddes comes from the Hanmers, a good solid border family, and no doubt Griffith takes after her. If these damned lords of Marches had had the least tact, the Arglwyddes and her son between them would never have let Owen go so far. Yes! that fellow warming his shins hates his Welsh blood. He wore that belt round his neck just to mock them; and he flung it at Iolo's corpse as you'd fling down a glove!"

Our friend was so absorbed in his attempts to pluck out the heart of Griffith's mystery that the Lollard had to address him twice. "The Abbot's speaking to you, Master!" he repeated.

But when Rhisiart turned round, the impatient autocrat from Caerleon had hurried on with the matter in hand and was giving directions to the pages for the transporting of Iolo to the chapel.

Owen had already disappeared and the hall was now full of bustling servitors of both sexes, dispensing the new supply of mead in a manner so lavish as to reduce to positive niggardliness all that our lad had ever seen of baronial hospitality.

"Beati pauperes spiritu," began the Abbot in his great bass voice; Father Rheinalt, who was clearly a mighty intoner of penitential passion, answering at once with the next beatitude, while Father Pascentius, his eyes roving wantonly, so Rhisiart fancied, towards the serving-wenches and the mead-cups, followed their lead more leisurely and mechanically.

“What are we supposed to do now?” enquired Master Young of the Lollard and our friend, when the corpse had been carried out. There was in the man’s tone such a mixture of querulous grievance, of amused and indulgent disapproval, and of philosophical patience, that our friend felt quite drawn to him. After all he was from that great civilized world, of London and Paris and Rome, the skirts of which he himself had touched in Oxford, but of which, except Owen, nobody here knew a single thing!

“I believe Meredith will come back for us in a moment,” Rhisiart replied. “For there’s to be a sort of council in Owen’s private chamber; and I fancy we—” He spoke in his grandest Hereford voice, picked up in the sheriff’s court; but the Canon of Bangor had had occasion to propitiate too many proud young men in his time to allow the faintest smile to cross his diplomatic features.

“Hasn’t everything been decided already,” he said, “by my Lord Abbot? I don’t see what’s left to hold a council about! Though I confess it was to be present at some kind of a meeting of that sort that I risked my life with our friend, *le Capitaine sauvage.* By the way, Master Brut, don’t you think our young patron here, who as one of the family has already been so kind to us, had better warn the gentleman in the yellow hose when he does come back that all the guards from the base-court are in here, getting drunk, and that none — for I’ve been watching these little arrangements very carefully — have been sent out to replace them, and if Grey or Burnell or Fitz-Alan happen to be on the prowl — and we know that at least one of their scouts has been caught already — this feast-night of Saint John would make a perfect psychological moment for an attack! One good bonfire would bring the yard-gates down, and another would bring those down, and where would Glyndyfrdwy be then? Up in smoke, my young master; up in good pinelog smoke, and all these sinful Christian souls with it; though I daresay they wouldn’t take the *life* of that little girl we saw just now. They certainly wouldn’t if they came from Chirk!”

And the Canon gave vent to a cavernous “hee! hee!” out of his toothless mouth. The fellow was addressing Rhisiart, but he looked at the Lollard; and our friend, too outraged by the allusion to Catharine to meet his eye, also looked at the Lollard, and it was a deep satisfaction to him to see the expression of stern disgust on the heretic’s face. There followed an uncomfortable silence between the three of them, but a distraction offered itself in a comical dispute hard by, between the Scab and the nervous harp-player, in the course of which the tipsy prophet presumed to lay hands on the precious instrument, actually drawing sacrilegious fingers across the strings.

While the three visitors were watching this clash between prophet and musician and observing how the indignant artist wiped each string the other had touched, as if it were a living creature, they heard a loud and prolonged battering at the bolted door.

“Just what I said!” whispered Master Young. “By the Baptist I believe it *is* Grey or Fitz-Alan!”

As he spoke, Rhisiart saw him thrust his hand into his doublet, as if to make sure of the safety of some secret packet that he kept hidden there.

But even while our friend was wondering what line he ought to take if there were a rush of Englishmen into the hall, a man-at-arms deliberately unbarred the door and let in none other than Rhys the Savage. Rhys was followed by quite a large company of spearmen, many more than the few who had left the place with him, and by the manner in which these fierce warriors stared round them it was clear they were unaccustomed to scenes of such courtly revelry.

Upon Master Young’s face might be read the struggle between two emotions; immense relief at this timely addition to their defenders, and a natural dislike of being under the same roof with the man who so recently had made him bolt like a rabbit.

“Pray God,” he whispered to Rhisiart, “the brute is no drunkard, and will keep the liquor away from those ruffians of his! Well, at any rate, Owen’s palace is safe *pro tem;* and if it gets known outside that the place is manned to such a tune, those Ruthin fellows will clear off, even if they are on the prowl. Yes, they’ve lost their chance, the fools; just as Owen has lost his by telling the world what he’s going to do — oh, my dear young man, I sometimes feel as if the whole human race is so brainless that it deserves to suffer what it does! But here’s your handsome cousin; and, by cock, he’d make a pretty Lord Chamberlain to the little Dauphiness of France! Where do you suppose he picked up that pattern for his tunic? It’s the very mate to the one my Lord Beaufort wore at the King’s coronation!”

Rhisiart saw Griffith ab Owen get up with an impatient gesture when his brother approached them, and walking round the fire enter into conversation with Rhys Gethin.

“Father wants you all in the ‘magician’s chamber’,” Meredith began hurriedly. “Oh, there’s my brother talking to Rhys! That’s just what I hoped he wouldn’t do at this juncture. Rhys is our perdition in council, as he is our salvation in the field. Griffith is angry about the oath, and angry with my father for mentioning September the sixteenth. He never liked Iolo. He thinks my father was infatuated. He’ll do what we decide, but he thinks it’s silly to break with the King just because of Grey. He thinks the Abbot’s a hot-headed firebrand, and of course” — here the dark youth smiled his weary and whimsical smile— “that’s just what he is! But Father feels, and I daresay he’s right, that if Wales is ever liberated it’ll be through hot-heads and madmen, through bards and Derfelites, through Rhys Gethins and Father Rheinalts, rather than through the counsels of the prudent.”

Master Young’s eyes narrowed in his flat, featureless face and the muscles around his mouth twitched so much as to cause hairs on a wart on his chin to emerge into an emphasis that hitherto had escaped even the observant Rhisiart.

“Wise counsellors,” he remarked in a whisper, “must use all weapons; but they need not keep them!” The tone in which he uttered these last words was so sinister and formidable that our friend had a vision of Rhys the Savage and John ap Hywel and poor Father Rheinalt being handed over to their enemies.

But he caught Meredith looking so anxiously at him that he asked if there was anything he could do for him.

“Perhaps, if you,” Meredith began, with a pondering look at his elder brother whose saturnine countenance was evidently responding heartily to the savage Captain’s discourse; “perhaps, if you were to—” They were interrupted by some new disturbance going on outside the bolted gate.

Rhisiart even thought he could detect the sound of a woman’s voice. Rhys Gethin leapt from Griffith’s side and rushing to the door shouted some unknown Welsh words through its thick resistance. These must have been a password of some sort; for, apparently satisfied by the response, he pushed back the iron bolts. A couple of his spearmen entered at once dragging a woman with them. She was a young woman of a pleasing figure but somewhat plain face; and the poor thing was weeping so wildly that many in that hall half turned to see what was the matter. But a woman in tears who was neither a pretty girl nor a Welsh girl excited little interest; especially as Einion’s grandson had begun to play a mournful and tender dirge over Princess Myfanwy of Dinas Bran.

A certain number of the Captain's spearmen did, however, put down their flagons and lurched towards the new-comers and their wretched captive.

"From Ruthin, from the castle," our friend heard Meredith murmur with a sigh, and in a tone that certainly showed more weariness than commiseration. "They're always finding sweethearts outside the walls and then they get caught. She'll be put to work here or married to one of our men. You needn't waste pity on her. But pardon me, gentlemen, this is my chance to get hold of my brother."

"Shall we try to find this astrologer's cell he speaks of?" suggested the Canon after a pause. Rhisiart hesitated. Meredith had already taken his brother by the arm and led him aside. Instinctively he followed the Lollard, who had already advanced a step or two towards the group round the English girl, for he said to himself, "After all I haven't been invited to this council any more than you, you clever rogue; but Master Brut I heard being invited! I wish I knew whether I am expected or not. I would hate — Christ! how women can cry! And she doesn't look hysterical either. She looks a sensible, sturdy kind of wench — I suppose she doesn't want to be married to one of Rhys's men or to serve under that old woman with the head-dress! But I expect these women of the people don't feel things as Tegolin or as Catharine would."

With this unsympathetic thought in his head he caught, as he was advancing still nearer, a glimpse of such wild trouble in the woman's face that it was worse to see than her weeping was to hear; and the idea suddenly seized him, "What if it's that dead Englishman who was her lover?"

Rhisiart was standing near the Lollard, but still a little way behind, and he noticed that Master Brut was clasping and unclasping the fingers of his right hand, as if he were about to use his fists. "He may be a Welshman," our friend thought, “and he may be a heretic, but I’m damned if he’s not going to give that savage a good Herefordshire clip!”

“Well, I’ll swear to it then,” Rhys Gethin was snarling through his wolfish teeth. “I’ll swear to it on my honour.”

“Come off that, Captain!” cried one tipsy spearman. “Honour ain’t naught on Saint John’s Day!”

“On this then, you scoundrel!” and he held up the cross-hilt of his dagger.

“Not good enough, Captain!” cried a burly archer from Conway.

“Here! Here’s me own mother’s death-cross! Swear on this, Captain, and then Hell-fire’ll have’ee if a don’t keep word!”

There was a dead silence in that portion of the hall save for the woman’s sobs, while Rhys Gethin stretched out his hand and took the little iron crucifix.

Rhisiart saw the fingers of the Lollard’s right hand clench themselves and remain closed. A rush of wild thoughts raced through the lad’s brain. I don’t care if it is the finish of me here, he thought. If Master Brut goes for him, I’m with him, Owen or no Owen!”

“I swear on my Saviour,” cried Rhys hoarsely, “that the man who hands over a good silver groat — a good one, mind you, no Scot counterfeit! — shall have this woman, ring or no ring, from this day forward; and the man who lifts a hand to take her from him will have to deal with me!”

Rhisiart heard the Lollard draw a deep breath while his shoulders stiffened. There was a low murmur of voices among the group of men gathered round the sobbing woman.

One of the men who had brought her in kept his hand on her wrist, or, as Rhisiart saw by her face, she would have rushed across to Owen’s sons who were now pacing to and fro on the other side of the hall, absorbed in some heated argument. “They don’t care!” he thought. “I suppose this sort of thing’s always happening.”

Meanwhile there must have been something about that little iron object in their Captain’s hand that made those dare-devils hesitate. And in addition to this, as our friend quickly divined, a murmur of protest had begun to arise among a group of the Arglwyddes’ servingmaids who had been drawn to the scene.

“Well,” repeated Rhys Gethin, “if none of you white-livered mothers’ sons have the guts to take this bitch — and she’s a plump wench though she’s not as well-favoured as some I know — I’m damned if I won’t throw down the groat myself! I deserve one night of—”

But at that the Lollard walked straight up to the man, our friend at his heels. But it was a great silver piece he held out to the ruffian, not a clenched fist.

“It’s more than a groat!” thought Rhisiart as the resplendent coin, fresh from the King’s mint, flashed in the torch-light.

Rhys Gethin took it, tossed it in the air, caught it again, bit it between his shining teeth, and thrust it into the pouch in his belt. “Take her then, Master Scholar,” he said. “She’s yours, such as she is! And if any of you staring fools try to meddle with Master Scholar’s property, you know what I’ve sworn! There she is, Master; and there’s your mother’s death-cross, my son!” and he returned the crucifix to the man who’d produced it.

Then he turned to the woman who was swallowing her sobs and staring at the strange gentleman in the dark velvet gown as if he were an angel.

“What’s your name, my pretty?” he jeered.

Rhisiart couldn’t catch the girl’s murmur; but apparently her questioner did.

"Alice!" the outlaw roared. "Her name's Alice!" And then he burst into a tavern song:

What matter her name, Clerk Waters said.
With books at my feet and books at my head,
There's room for the doxy who makes my bed!

"But off with her, Master Student, or she'll have no tears left to cry tonight. And bring me drink, my kittens, and stop that giggling!" And he turned to one of the girls who were carrying the mead and possessed himself of a double-handled flagon.

"Here's to Alice of Ruthin and her Hereford scholar!"

Rhisiart felt a more murderous desire to stick his dagger into the fellow's ribs than he had felt with regard to anyone in his whole life. He glanced hurriedly at the Lollard, but that worthy had laid his hands already on the woman's shoulders and was murmuring something he couldn't hear.

"Bring her away," he whispered, going up to them. "Let's take her to Meredith."

The kindly servant-girl had made room for them and they were crossing the hall, the Lollard still whispering God-knows-what in the woman's ear, when Master Young intercepted them.

"What madness is this?" he protested. "Those sons of Owen have no time just now to dispose of camp-followers. Are we never to reach this council-chamber? Let the woman go, for Christ's sake! She'll look after herself all right, now that Savage has forgotten her. Let her go to the kitchen as Meredith said. She isn't such a great beauty. The scullions won't draw blood over her."

Thus protesting, but to no purpose, the Canon of Bangor followed them as they went up to the brothers.

"The crusader's sword again?" laughed Meredith. "There, there, my girl! You're all right now. The gallant Captain's fully occupied. Nurse will find you a place to sleep upstairs, unless—" and he glanced with a sly questioning look at the two Herefordshire youths.

"I don't want her to be—" began the Lollard. "I mean I don't want to lose sight of her till I have—"

Meredith smiled while Griffith gazed gloomily upon the silent woman, as if she were a window into a receding corridor of trouble.

"Till you have decided what to do with her, eh? All right, Master Brut! Our guests' belongings are as sacred as our guests' heads. Well, bring her along. We'll get hold of Nurse. She'll look after her for tonight. My father wants you both in the magician's chamber and you too, Canon! I'm sorry we've kept you waiting; but Griffith and I had a certain little point to settle," and he gave his elder brother the same half-tender, half-mocking smile that he had given the Lollard.

"'Twas lucky," he whispered to Rhisiart, as they all moved to that "north-west by north" door that our friend had come to know so well, "that you settled it without blows with the Captain! If this woman comes from inside the castle she may be useful to us. But don't let your friend worry about her. I don't want to disturb my mother; but Nurse will look after her."

They came to an arched door carved in stone that struck Rhisiart as the oldest piece of masonry he'd yet seen in the place. Here, a flight of steps, lit by a couple of dimly-burning torches, led up to the women's quarters. The same sluggish door-warden they had seen guarding the outer gate sat nodding on the lowest step.

"Nurse!" cried Meredith over this sluggish person's head. "Nurse! Nurse!" he repeated, when only a faint feminine titter sounded in the distance, "Nurse!"

Then they did at last hear the tap, tap, tap of the ebony wand and the shuffle of the rabbit-skin slippers, as the old crone, with an extremely irritable face in the smoky torch-light, came feeling her way down.

“Will you take this woman—” began Meredith. “Her name’s Alice!” threw in Master Brut, and there was something about the Lollard’s insisting on her name at this moment that gave our friend a very queer feeling. For one thing it seemed like a humanizing seal set upon this helpless creature’s form, and for another thing it aroused an obscure pulse of sensuality in him.

It suddenly made the anonymous body of this “woman from Ruthin” something precious and desirable, the neck, the bosom, the waist, the limbs of a nameless victim of chance becoming the sentient personality of Alice.

And indeed it seemed that the woman herself was struck by the tone in which the Lollard had said “her name’s Alice”, for, with a hurried glance at the wrinkled unsympathetic face under the tall headdress, she laid both her hands on Master Brut’s velvet sleeve. “Come here, girl!” commanded the Nurse out of the gloom of the staircase.

But Alice only hid her face against the sleeve of her protector.

“Leave it with me, Masters!” cried the old woman hobbling down the remaining steps, and laying her bony hand on the girl’s shoulder. “It will soon learn its place with me.” She spoke in broken English, apparently for the benefit of Alice, but the effect of her words was clearly the reverse of reassuring.

The girl began to cling frantically to Master Brut’s arm; and over her bowed head the heretic appealed to Rhisiart.

“Perhaps your friend, the Maid—” he murmured.

“May I call Tegolin?” asked Rhisiart of Meredith.

“Make it let go of the gentleman,” repeated the Nurse, “and leave it with me.”

“*Tegolin!”* Our friend had anticipated Meredith’s consent, and his voice rang loud and clear up that dark stairway.

Griffith muttered something about disturbing the Arglwyddes, while Master Young shrugging his shoulders edged away from this meddlesome boy and gave vent to an ostentatious sigh of disapproval.

“Hush!*”* cried the Nurse indignantly; and pointing at Alice with her stick she uttered some querulous instructions to the lethargic porter who scrambled stiffly to his feet.

But at that instant there were voices and lights and laughter and hurried footsteps above; and down the stairs came Tegolin, her red braid coiled round her head, a blue mantle thrown over her night-gown, and her eyes shining with excitement and high spirits.

To Rhisiart’s romantic mind there was something annoying in the fact that he had caught the Maid of Edeyrnion thus revelling in the society of girls of her own age. “She wasn’t with the Friar at all,” he thought in a spasm of reproach. “She was laughing and enjoying herself with those hussies!”

It was clear that the lad’s masculine objection to such a waste of sparkling eyes and panting bosoms was fully shared by the old woman in the head-dress. She pointed her stick again at Alice, who now had lifted her head and was staring at the Maid. It was evidently a profound surprise to this English girl to find anybody in this stronghold who was different from Rhys Gethin.

But our friend was now speaking hurriedly to Tegolin while Meredith with a movement of his hand reduced the porter to his normal sluggishness.

“And don’t let her out of your sight for a moment, for the Blessed Virgin’s sake!” he implored the girl. “Master Brut saved her from the

Captain. She’s from Ruthin and her name’s Alice. Don’t let anyone get her away from you till Master Brut’s seen her again.”

Never had our lad felt such complete trust in any living creature as he felt in this red-haired apparition smiling down upon them from those dim stairs. Tegolin seemed to absorb the whole situation in one laughing glance.

“How clever she is!” the boy thought. “No, there’s no one like her.” And then he sighed; and this sigh of his, like so many motions of the perplexed human heart, had more causes than one.

One of its causes was that he had seen the Maid so radiant as she was at that moment, coming fresh from that circle of young girls and the warmth and glow of their admiration. “Neither Mad Huw nor I,” he thought, “can make her happy like that.” But another cause of that sigh was the discord in his own heart brought about by the vision of Catharine and by the queer spasm of sensuality which his pity for this Ruthin girl had excited. This latter feeling still subsisted after Tegolin, followed by the old woman, had disappeared with the girl up the dark steps.

It was still with him when a moment later they passed the open door of the little chapel, in which he got a glimpse, under the red lamp of the Sacrament, of two black-draped forms lying motionless before the altar, with lighted candles at head and feet. “It’s because the beauty of her figure,” he thought, “is so insulted by the plainness of her face! But am I so much more depraved than these Welsh people that I can’t feel pity for a girl without this other feeling?”

He set himself, as they went down the long passage, imagining how that dead boy, if he were indeed her lover, must have forgotten the plainness of her face when he embraced her those warm summer evenings under the Ruthin walls; and he rubbed his fist against his forehead in the darkness as he followed the sons of Owen. His brain felt so dizzy with all the impressions he had received this day of Saint John that he began to envy old Griffin who had nothing to adjust himself to except the smell of Welsh ponies and a strange bed of Edeyrnion straw.

A very different kind of porter stood at the door of the magician's chamber when they came to the end of the passage. He was a youth of short stature but of singularly athletic build, and his bare arms rested, as he stood there, on the cross-handle of a long naked sword not unlike the old crusading one that now lay at the foot of our lad's bed.

"Well, Madoc ab Ieuan," said Meredith, "we've come at last! Has he got tired of waiting?"

Madoc smiled as he moved aside. "You know what he is," he answered. "If you hadn't come till midnight he wouldn't have known it, Masters! He's deep in his books."

"Are you sure it's his books?" returned Meredith. "I was afraid from your tone that it might be—"

But Griffith ab Owen had already knocked impatiently at the door; and at a word from within they all entered, while Madoc, entering with them, took up, as was the custom in that court, the same position inside the room as he had occupied outside.

As the young man had warned them Owen rose from a massive reading desk so arranged that the light Of no less than three brightly burning torches fell full on the parchment page he was deciphering.

"In God's name, welcome!" cried the Baron of Glyndyfrdwy, "and be seated, every one of you! Welcome to all, and welcome to each, and may the Holy Virgin and all the Saints be with you! But where is our good Abbot and the Fathers?"

Griffith muttered a Welsh proverb about the best council being a council without a priest; and Rhisiart caught Master Young scrutinizing Owen with a very sly and searching look. “He believes it’s all put on,” thought our friend. “He believes he’s dodged having the Abbot here on purpose! He believes he’s playing the sort of game King Harry must usually play,”

“They must have gone to their sleeping-place to chant the night office,” said Meredith. “I heard them in the chapel an hour ago, but they weren’t there just now.”

“Go and fetch them, son, will you? It would be wrong to the Abbot to begin our discussion without them.”

“Shall I fetch Rhys Gethin and the Scab, too, sir?” enquired Meredith.

But Master Young hurriedly intervened. “Wouldn’t it be wiser, my Lord, to come to our decision first, and then call the Captain and the prophet? Indeed, I submit to you, sir, that we might make — what might be called a — a tentative decision — and *then* call the Abbot and the good Fathers? I’m a churchman myself, but I’ve sometimes found—”

“You’re quite right, Canon, you’re quite right,” interrupted Owen hurriedly. “We’ll leave Rhys and the Scab to their cups and we’ll leave Griffith Llwyd to his harp. But I think, my boy, you must fetch the Abbot and the Fathers. They came especially for this, and if they found—”

But Rhisiart noticed that when Meredith had departed on his errand Owen made Master Young sit down by his side on the Oriental divan that extended along the whole length of one of the walls, and entered at once into a low-voiced consultation with him.

Griffith ab Owen began nervously pacing up and down the chamber; while the Lollard proceeded to examine with a scholar’s interest the vast shelves of folios that rose on either side of the hearth. Above the divan with its Arabian rugs there hung from the ceiling an arras of some richly-woven stuff that gave the room a curiously sumptuous look, more like the apartment, Rhisiart thought, of some effeminate Saracen than a warlike

Christian prince; while under the lancet window, through which, in the summer darkness, could be seen several glittering stars, stood two mysterious objects which suggested the abode neither of a Gothic baron nor of a Paynim knight but rather of some Nostradamus or Albertus Magnus engaged in the arts of black magic.

These two objects excited our friend's curiosity so much that he couldn't resist approaching them, although as he did so he noticed that the young squire with the sword watched him with suspicious alertness.

One was an enormous crystal globe supported on an ebony pedestal; while the other was a great square board of ancient wood-work, upon which, on a white ground, were inscribed a series of astrological symbols that our friend supposed, in his complete ignorance of such things, to be the signs of the zodiac.

The lad knew well that it was only the effect on his own mind of that orb of crystal, upon whose equivocal depths the bright torch-light from the neighbouring reading-desk was shining; but the thing certainly did have the power of materializing his thoughts, for the longer he stared at it the more vividly did his imagination conjure up in its orbic depths the three feminine forms of his recent experience. In truth he was still pondering, just as if they had been really imaged in that crystal, upon the red braid of Tegolin and the shining *pali* of Catharine and the simple garment that covered the alluring figure of Alice, when Madoc flung open the door of the chamber to admit the Abbot and the two monks.

Owen rose at once and greeted them as ceremoniously as a King might greet an Archbishop. Rhisiart tried to stand as humbly, as patiently, and yet with as much self-possession as Madoc ab Ieuan; but not having a sword to lean upon, he felt awkward and embarrassed. He envied Master Brut his calm, frank, unabashed aplomb; but he thought to himself, “I should never dare to behave as he does.”

He couldn’t help glancing at Master Young while these high-flown greetings, almost Chinese in their ritualistic courtliness, passed between chieftain and the churchmen, and he felt a pang of innocent and youthful envy at the flawless manner of the learned lawyer.

The Canon was leaning a little forward, as if in habitual reverence to all the potentates of Christendom. His face was contracted into an expression of alert and confidential gravity. His thumbs were in his belt, and his thin shoulders, discreetly raised, indicated a supercilious indifference to all earthly considerations except that of obeying the caprices of the great without infringing the law of the greater.

To reduce his respect for this perfect demeanour, which was indeed beyond anything he had seen in Hereford or Oxford, our friend was driven to recall the headlong, scurrying speed, mad for dear life, with which this consummate courtier had bolted into their arms when Rhys the Savage was about to rip him up.

The Lollard in his easy unabashed manner had already asked an eager question of Meredith concerning some particular book he had found which contained, so he declared, certain daring free-thinking speculations which went much further than those of which he himself had been accused in the Bishop’s court.

Griffith ab Owen, interrupted in his sullen perambulations by the Abbot’s entrance, silently pulled out from beneath a pile of folios an ancient duskily-painted chair, upon whose back was carved an elaborate coat-of-arms, and in this the Abbot was now installed.

Owen still continued to address John ap Hywel in what struck our friend as rather excessive propitiation, but by degrees he realized that this was the chieftain’s Welsh way of leading up to a very ticklish question, the delicacy of which, following so hard upon all this effusive ceremony, evidently discomposed the worthy man.

As far as the lad could make out, and Owen’s courtly Welsh was interspersed with several French phrases that clearly confused the Abbot as much as they did our friend, he was enquiring now in some subtle and roundabout way as to the possibility of Masses being said for the soul of Iolo Goch, and incidentally whether the Abbot of Caerleon would use his influence with the Abbot of Valle Crucis — in spite of the Bard’s having behaved so obstinately on his death-bed — to get permission for his entombment within the Valle Crucis precincts.

Turning hurriedly, as if to consult a living register as to the drift of these high politics, the Abbot instinctively glanced at Master Young, who was beginning to strike our friend as the kind of man who by his mere presence had the power of compelling great personages to appeal to him.

The Canon answered the Abbot’s look by a few hurried words in ecclesiastical Latin, and then himself with indescribable deference appealed humbly to Father Pascentius, who promptly replied — fixing his insatiable black eyes upon the book under the three torches — in such a stream of scholastic “buts” and “ifs” and “in-as-much-as-we-might’s” that the bewildered Abbot, after producing and replacing his old battered psalter, had nothing to do but to nod gravely several times with his tonsured head.

“What,” he enquired hastily of Owen in obvious anxiety to let the soul of the obstreperous Bard rest in peace, “what are the royal arms against which I am now resting my poor mortal back?”

Owen with a deep sigh of relief, and with the first smile our friend had noticed on his face since Iolo’s death, hastened to explain that they were the arms of the old princedom of Powys before King John burnt the palace of

Mathrafal; and no sooner had he offered this explanation than Master Young, snatching at such a heaven-sent opportunity of plunging *in medias res,* rose to his feet, and while all the company, except our friend who played nervously with his dagger and Madoc ab Ieuan who leaned abstractedly upon his sword, found seats for themselves, began a lively and vivid statement of the present political situation.

The Abbot frowned, Father Rheinalt fidgetted, Griffith rested his arms on his knees and covered his face with his hands, Meredith stretched out his shapely yellow-stockinged legs and toyed, as a woman might have done, with one of his green sleeves, while the Lollard smiled sweetly and innocently into the devouring black eyes of the commentator on Saint Thomas.

"I am, as Lord Owen knows, a Welshman with a bar sinister," the lawyer began. "He knows the secret of my birth. He knows the great family from which I spring. He knows too, I think, that though I serve in my official capacity the House of Lancaster, my heart is always with the land of my fathers, and when the moment comes I shall be at his side.

"But the moment — and this, my Lord Abbot and reverend Fathers, is the point I wish to make to-night — the moment has not yet come. France is not ready to help us. Scotland is still divided against itself. The Holy Father at Avignon" — here all the ecclesiastics gazed at him in consternation— "though recognized by two powerful nations, is still weak compared with the Holy Father in Rome. The Tudors in Môn, though restless and dissatisfied, are not yet strong enough, or indeed united enough, to be of much help; while above all, my Lords and Fathers, the rift between the Percies and the — the King *de facto* — has to grow wider before the break comes. The break will come — I can assure you of that from the highest possible authority — indeed from the lips of my Lord of Northumberland himself — but they are not ready yet. The Earl of March is in Henry's hands; and though by his marriage-link with Hotspur, who by the way has expressed to me over and over again his admiration for 'our brave friend Glendourdy', as he is pleased to call you, sir, my Lord Edmund is committed to their side, the great House of Mortimer is still in need of reassurance as to what would happen to their Welsh estates in case — well, in case we were successful! My conclusion, therefore, gentlemen, and I have risked much and travelled far, as Lord Owen knows, to lay this humble view before you, is that we have everything to gain by delay and everything to lose by being hasty and precipitate. I heard, as did we all, those noble and inspired words from lips that are now silent, but in justice to our great cause I must say—"

"You made a mistake there, my friend!" thought Rhisiart, when Owen, with a stern gesture and with less courtesy than the lad had ever seen in him, motioned the speaker into silence. "Why the devil must you drag in the Bard?"

But the Abbot was speaking now, and though he was no orator, and though from that old Powys throne his words came in crude jerks and angry spasms, and though before he had gone far he relapsed into the rough peasant dialect that was natural to him, there was an intense moral fervour in his words that moved everybody present. Griffith sat up straight. The Lollard ceased to smile. Father Rheinalt's swarthy countenance gleamed with delight. Owen himself leant forward, plucking nervously at his forked beard.

"Does the God of battles wait," cried the passionate churchman, "till all the wretched pawns on the chessboard of human politics think the right moment, the safe moment, the crafty son-of-Belial moment, has come for striking for the right? No man, I say *no man,* can predict the future, can calculate the issue, can foretell the event. All we can do is to obey our consciences and strike boldly at the oppressor. It is God, Owen Glyn Dŵr, it is the God of our race, who will give us the victory, not the nice calculations of clever mortal men! The great rising we intend is the rising of the oppressed against the oppressor! It is the rising of—" here he stammered for a word, and then groaned angrily and forgot what he was going to say. "I mean," he added with a noble simplicity, "if we remain pure in our motives, if we remain righteous and Christian in our lives, if we strike for justice and liberty and not for malice and revenge, we shall need no Percies or Mortimers, or French kings or false schismatic Popes; we shall need only our good Welsh spears and our good Welsh Prince, we shall need only our" — his voice became hoarse, and he bent forward, clutching the arms of his chair and bowing his forehead over his knees, while his powerful shoulders shook with emotion— "our trust in the God of our fathers, our faith in the Blessed Virgin and all the—"

Here his voice broke, and so overwhelming was the man's feeling that even so young a lad as Rhisiart couldn't fail to see that he was putting into these simple and even commonplace words the accumulated passion of a life-time.

But Father Rheinalt could no longer contain himself. "My — my — my Lord Abbot," he stammered, leaping to his feet, "and my Lord Owen, I never — I never thought to hear such words spoken in Powys Fadog as those I've heard from the Canon of Bangor. Our land is stirring with the breath of a new hope. From Bangor to St. David's, from Llanfaes to Strata Florida, the clergy of our race, regulars and seculars, friars and monks alike, are crying aloud to the Holy Father to free us from the yoke of Canterbury. With a Prince of our own blood and Bishops of our own blood, and Abbots like — like thee, my Lord — the Holy Father will be brought to know the truth, that — that at the last Day — when the Souls of the Faithful rise to meet their Judge — Wales will be — will be — of all the company of the blest the land nearest to — nearest to — the heart of — of the successor of Peter, of the Vice-Regent of Christ upon earth! But oh, my Lord Abbot, we must strike them down, these oppressors! With fire and sword we must smite them! We must burn their habitations, for they are of Satan! We must tear down their castles! We must kill and kill and kill in this holy cause. It is a Crusade, my Lord Abbot; it is a new Crusade — to smite and burn and kill till there isn't one of these accursed English left alive — no, not in Ruthin, not in Chirk, not in all Powys, not in all Wales, from Mona to Deheubarth!"

He sank back exhausted, and there fell a troubled and embarrassed silence over the whole company. Then Owen spoke; and his words came slowly, gravely, sadly. "He has been deeply wronged. His heart burns. Out of its cruel burning he utters these things. Aye! and there are many hearts between Mona and Gwent that burn as his does. But if the Lord Abbot will allow me, I would like to ask Master Brut here, for he is a good Welshman — a *Britonibus ex utraque parente originem habens* — as he declared when tried before an English court, what his impressions are of our chances. Master Brut, my Lord Abbot gives you permission, and we ourselves ask you as a favour—"

Rhisiart noticed that the chieftain's astute use of the Latin tongue had its intended effect, but he noticed also the obstinate frown with which the Abbot gave his curt nod of assent.

The Lollard, however, turned upon them all his calm and unperturbed smile; and after a time, so frank and conciliatory was his manner and so gentle was his tone, even John ap Hywel began to contemplate him with a relaxed indulgence. The gist of his speech, as far as Rhisiart could make out, was that it was the destiny of the Welsh race to give a new and more spiritual significance to the Catholic Faith, a significance in closer harmony with the actual words of Jesus as reported in the Gospels than anything at which the unimpassioned and worldly temper of the English prelates could possibly arrive.

The general feeling he got, before the man’s hopeless long-windedness made him feel drowsy, was that any real practical success of Owen would be to the advantage of this new spiritual revival, this escape from materialistic superstition into the “glorious liberty of the children of God”.

But the Lollard’s arguments were so monotonous, and so garnished with tedious quotations from the Scriptures, that our friend’s mind began to wander. His eyes began to wander too from the placidly arguing countenance of his room-mate. They fixed themselves upon that mysterious crystal; and the moment they did so his sleepiness passed away and all manner of troubling images obsessed his brain.

He thought of how Alice had looked when she hung her head and wept so pitifully in the hands of Rhys Gethin. He saw again with an irresistible stir of his senses that contrast between her rounded figure in its scanty woollen garment and her uncomely face.

But *was* her face so uncomely? Her eyes were heavily-lidded, and had an expression, for all her tears, that suggested to him — he couldn’t have explained why — a nature disturbingly amorous and passionate, a nature dedicated to every kind of sensual response. The longer he stared at that crystal globe the further his thoughts carried him and the more shameless they became. He imagined — but in the heat of his imaginings this unconscionable crystal thrust before him those two black-covered forms he had glimpsed in the chapel! Dead, stone-dead and mortuary-cold they were, the great Bard and the unknown spy, and the merciless crystal seemed to force the lad, full as he was of the hot sweet shame of filling those heavy-lidded eyelids with fresh tears, to lie down there, before that very altar, in direct physical contact with the deadly chill of mortality.

Still, still the Lollard went on; and at last Griffith actually got up from his seat, and going over to the young man with the sword began whispering to him.

“It’s his spirituality,” thought our friend, “that Griffith can’t stomach; but why doesn’t he make us *feel* this spirit without so much sermonizing? That’s his damned heresy I suppose!” And into our friend’s youthful brain the obscure question insinuated itself whether all this spirituality, so logically defended, was “meant” for a race that produced people like the Scab and Rhys the Savage.

“The Church,” he thought, turning his eyes to Owen’s signs of the zodiac, “knows what it’s doing when it keeps these preachers in their place.”

But Griffith’s restlessness had now spread to the whole company, and Master Young who had sat since his rebuff with an expression of protesting innocence, his toothless mouth open and his reproachful eyes staring into vacancy, permitted himself an ostentatious yawn followed by a resounding sigh.

Owen alone preserved his pose of concentrated interest in the Lollard’s discourse.

“Good luck to him if he understands all this!” the boy thought. But suddenly he decided that his wise kinsman was deliberately letting the man go on so as to clear the air from the electric bloodthirstiness of Father Rheinalt’s “burn, kill and slay”.

Back to the crystal wandered Rhisiart’s eyes, and while the Abbot brought out his psalter, and Father Rheinalt groaned aloud, and Madoc ab Ieuan pressed his lean stomach so heavily against the handle of his sword that its point made an audible scraping upon the stone floor, the images in the boy's mind were accentuated by a red wave of hair falling over one corpse and a shimmer of silk *pali* over another; and so impishly did the crystal go to work that in some outrageous manner he was actually making Alice cry while that burning hair lay upon one cadaver and those warm childish breasts pressed softly upon the other..

But the Lollard sat down at last, and if Rhisiart had been amazed at the tedious arguments with which he defended his sublime notion of the unimportance of all sublunary happenings compared with the life of the eternal spirit, he was still more amazed at the incredible good temper and complete lack of injured vanity with which he smiled upon them all, and even went so far, so it seemed to our friend, as to direct towards him a boyish wink as he resumed his seat. Were all epoch-making councils of history as undecided and confused as this one? the lad wondered; and then at a nod from Owen Father Pascentius stood up.

"By God and Christ," thought Rhisiart, "what eyes the man's got!" And there was Griffith arrested in his pacing, and there was the Abbot eagerly clasping his bony knees with his great hands, and there was Master Young coming to life again and sniffing the air like a badger who smells a fox. "If he manages Saint Thomas as he does all these people," thought our friend, "he's the greatest philosopher the Church has ever had."

But why wasn't Owen caught by the fellow's black eyes and magnetic talk? It was natural that the Lollard wasn't; for even Rhisiart had the wit to recognize that in Father Pascentius' words the pure clear air of the spirit, which the heretic's earnestness had evoked, disappeared as completely as the tedious arguments with which he had supported it. Every mortal object of human interest, Welsh independence, revenge upon the English, the reign of justice, the advisability of burning Ruthin, the sweetness of slaughtering every living soul in Chirk, all fell into their places, all became parts and parcels of the complicated nature of the unknowable First Cause!

Everything was allowed for, every event, every emotion, every human possibility. A united Wales under Owen was allowed for, to be followed, as far as our spellbound friend could make out, by a united England, Scotland, Ireland, if not France too, under some problematical descendant of Owen— “A child of Catharine’s” rushed through our friend’s mind — and as for the Lollard’s appeal to the words of Jesus, it became Rhisiart’s destiny to learn how these also, even these, must be regarded as relative to the limited comprehension of the human mind; while in the universal stream of the Church’s tradition the Absolute revealed itself.

All the tags and scraps of scholastic, training the lad had accumulated at Oxford fell into an illuminated synthesis as he listened to this amazing speech. And the wonderful thing was it really did seem to have its connection with the problem of whether or not to defy the. House of Lancaster!

How far the Abbot and Father Rheinalt understood what the man was saying it was hard to tell, but they were deeply impressed; and the legal intelligence of Master Young was evidently fascinated too. It was like being present at some miraculous creation, out of the air, of the veritable tree of faith, extending its branches, all relative but all rooted in the Absolute, over every aspect of human controversy!

Our friend was startled, and indeed, to confess the truth, a little shocked, by the attitude of Owen to this masterpiece. The chieftain smiled at the Lollard, glanced at his astrological map, caressed his beard, and finally went so far as to take down from a hook beside his desk a long, dark satin gown ornamented with strange hieroglyphs and slip his arms into its sleeves! He then laid his hand upon the crystal globe; and in this position, wrapped about in that dark mantle, he made our young man think of Elymas the Sorcerer listening to the inspired metaphysics of Saint Paul!

When the theologian at last sat down, making quite unconsciously with his plump hands his usual gesture of universal futility, his black eyes seemed to drink up at one gulp every person in the room.

But Master Young was on his feet again now. “It is clear,” he said in his most insinuating and velvety voice, using his lips as if they were teeth, “that the learned Father feels exactly as I do about this, rising; feels in fact that for my Lord Owen to commit himself to lift his standard as soon as the Feast of Matthew would be one of the worst mistakes he could make. I don’t mean,” he went on hurriedly, for Owen had made a dangerous movement forward, “I don’t mean to underrate the wrongs we’ve suffered. But if we can only wait till more nations have joined the Holy Father at Avignon; if we can only wait till the Percies break with the King; if we can only wait till France—” And he went blandly on, introducing the little Earl of March again, and Sir Edmund Mortimer’s link with Hotspur again, and the Mortimer estates again.

“He’ll come to Ireland soon,” thought our friend. But Rhisiart’s mind wandered off before he came to Ireland. And what abominable speculations that crystal kept calling up! It even set him wondering which of the corpses in the chapel — the great Bard or the unknown spy — would begin to stink first. In veritable shame he turned away from this heathen globe, turned away hurriedly, before it had time to lead him back to Alice of Ruthin and her salt tears. Then, for Master Young still hadn’t got to Ireland, he began wondering why the Lollard’s speech was so dull and Father Pascentius’s so arresting. He felt a glow of pride at his penetration when he decided it was because Father Pascentius included so many evil things in his clue-word “relative”. It was, Rhisiart impiously decided, just as if God had burning black eyes that enjoyed everything as it was on the easy ground of its being all "relative".

Suddenly, and not without wicked pleasure, he caught sight of a wasp moving gingerly and tentatively around the top of the Canon's pointed slippers; and a shameless desire seized him that this great Doctor of Decrees might be stung ere he reached the question of Ireland!

To distract his attention from the wasp's explorations he boldly took upon himself to carry a log to the fire and lay it down as quietly as he could upon the now smouldering embers. When he turned from doing this he was astonished to see the young Madoc regarding him with a look of uncontrolled fury.

"Heavens!" he thought, "what have I done now?"

And then he remembered how in one of Modry's tales there was a young knight whose special privilege it was — and his alone — to replenish his lord's fire.

"This is the third enemy I've made," he thought, "Gwalchmai the stableman, Glew the Porter, and now this young fool!"

But he soon lifted his head and looked at Master Young, who had not only reached Ireland but had passed it and the Mortimer estates, too. Then he heard the Canon say: "And so, my Lord Owen, and so, my Lord Abbot, I think I have made it plain to you why the death-bed words of our venerated friend and his allusion to the sixteenth of—"

"Enough, sir!"

At these words from the indignant chieftain, the Canon's toothless mouth closed on what it was uttering, half of the sentence hanging in the air, and the other half, like a creature decapitated by the spring of a trap, disappearing down the man's throat.

Glyn Dŵr’s sea-green eyes flashed ominously. He made a quick movement with one of his hands, but it wasn’t a weapon he drew but the great signet-ring from off his finger.

As Master Young stepped back in consternation, he moved straight up to him and pressed the ring into his hand.

“Return,” he said in a low vibrant voice, a voice audible to everyone in the room, “return to Henry of Lancaster and tell him he may raise the devil in every shire in England and burn every heretic and every friar; but never shall he — But keep my ring, Master Canon, keep my ring; and when your hour comes, your ‘relatively suitable’ hour” — and he gave Father Pascentius a look like a flung dagger— “you may use it to claim free access to our presence, whether it be here or in *some other place!”* He drew back from the abashed lawyer and glanced at the Abbot whose eyes shone in sympathy like an old war-horse who hears the trumpet; and then he said in a gentler voice, “Stay with us here for a day or two longer, Master Young; and be assured of this, that when you *do* return, that ring of mine will be a safe passport wherever Welsh is—” He was interrupted by the sound of hurrying feet in the corridor and a tumult of excited voices.

Madoc ab Ieuan gripped his sword and stood listening intently, his head on one side like a blindfolded hawk. Rhisiart moved impulsively to the young man’s side, and everyone in the room, including the Abbot, rose to his feet.

“Open the door,” said the chieftain quietly. As soon as he was obeyed there stumbled into the room, panting, indignant, perspiring, and yet full of pompous authority, a little, stocky, swarthy foreigner, dressed in a rider’s garb of outlandish pattern.

With the point of his sword Madoc drove back the revellers who had followed, and in spite of many angry and tipsy protests bolted the door in their faces.

Then the pompous stranger, glancing hurriedly round the room, saluted the Abbot, gave Owen a formal little bow, and drawing a heavily-sealed document from his cloak waved it in the air as if it had been an enchanter's wand.

"From Rome," he said, with the solemnity befitting an emissary from the Metropolis of the Universe, "from the Holy Father, in his Holiness' own hand and seal!"

Our friend caught the eye of Master Brut; and in a moment, for some deep instinctive reason, all the three English-bred travellers, Master Brut, Master Young and Master Rhisiart, moved close to one another and remained apart from the rest.

The Abbot advanced with dignity but with a reverence that struck our friend as almost comical. After a second's hesitation the squat little man, whose shrewd inquisitorial eyes had narrowed at the sight of the great crystal globe and the zodiacal map and whose dark eyebrows had lifted a little at the array of questionable folios, allowed the respectful churchman to inspect the document he held.

"It is as he says, gentlemen," the Abbot reported solemnly. "I have seen it before and I know it," and falling humbly upon his knees and with a touching expression of awe on his rugged face the burly prelate reverently pressed the Pope's superscription to his lips. Father Pascentius first, and then Father Rheinalt, imitated the Abbot in this pious recognition of the papal missive.

As soon as they had risen to their feet the aggrieved Italian burst into an indignant account of what he had undergone from the drunken revellers in the hall. Dogs, caitiffs, insolent and ignorant serfs he declared them to be;

and worst among them all — this he made very plain — was the blasphemous *Capitano Rossi.*

At this Italianating of Rhys the Savage, our three visitors from over the border couldn't help exchanging a smile; though in the lawyer's case it was a somewhat wry one.

But the extravagant airs assumed by this bearer of the Pope's sign-manual didn't seem to arouse any mirth in the rest of the company. Even Meredith looked grave and thoughtful; and the sulky Griffith appeared as abashed with awe as he might have been had this comical little official been an angel of God.

As to our three travellers, however, whatever traditional piety the word "Rome" might conjure up within them, they had imbibed for too long the humorous independence of the shires to feel anything but amusement in the presence of this grandiose messenger from the papal city.

The whole incident was of absorbing interest to Rhisiart; not from any respect for the touchy little Italian, but as a revelation of the imaginative quality of his fellow Welshmen. He was conscious himself of an irresistible up-welling of malicious detachment. He could hardly bear to see the dignified old Abbot and the heroic Father Rheinalt looking like respectful school-boys before a fellow who after all was only a fussy mountebank, and who looked like the leader of a band of Tuscan Mummers whom one of King Richard's favourites brought in his train to Hereford! He felt a warm longing to jump up and down in front of the Pope's ambassador making jeering faces and calling out, as the Hereford prentices had done, *"Blanco! Neri! Blanco! Neri! Punchinello! Arleguini*!*"*

It was quite evident that Master Young, who had been many times to Rome and knew in person several of the Papal Secretaries, would soon intervene if this prating little man didn't stop repeating over and over again to the Abbot, in his Tuscan accent, *“Troppo avem sofferto!”* — Too much have we endured! — and come to business; for he whispered loudly to Master Brut that it was the custom at baronial houses all over Europe for a messenger from Rome to present his credentials to none but the person designated, and above all not to reveal them to local ecclesiastics! “You can see,” Master Young whispered to the Lollard, evidently hoping that Owen would hear, “how necessary such a rule is when you realize how often His Holiness must wish to communicate with some noble foreign gentleman without the knowledge of the local clergy.”

Rhisiart was vastly entertained to note how this well-timed rebuke from a personage who might have been an archbishop’s secretary changed in a trice the tune of the querulous Tuscan. “But I am forgetting my duty,” the fellow now murmured, “I am much to blame — but Capitano Rossi has upset me and I am not myself yet.” Then at last he did move across the room to where Owen was standing and gave him the document.

Owen took it with a bow and raised its seal to his lips, and though he didn’t bend his knee as the monks had done his face remained solemn and reverential.

Master Young at that point glided like a well-meaning and serviceable ghost to Owen’s side. He didn’t offer to interpret the scroll, but he gave the fabric of its parchment an appraising pinch with his finger and thumb, as if to indicate that there was nothing in this document, not even the kind of calf-skin used, with which he was unacquainted.

But Owen did ask Master Young to read and interpret the missive to the company. “I have nothing to keep secret from these friends of mine,” he assured the Tuscan.

As Master Young began to read, Rhisiart said to himself, “It’s just like the old days! Here are we Celts and Saxons disputing over our tribal feuds and suddenly the long finger of Rome is stretched out into our midst and we all bow down and cry, ‘To Rome be the power and glory!’ On my soul, the Canon’s perfectly right to remind us of that anti-Pope at Avignon. A Benedict for a Boniface and Britain for herself!”

Whether it was the heresy emanating from the unruffled countenance of his friend, or whether it was his youthful reaction to the dangerous new ideas which had buzzed about his ears in Oxford, it seemed to our lad that there was something pathetic about the way these Welshmen cringed before the emissary from Rome.

“I suppose their women,” he pondered sententiously, “intermarried with the Roman legionaries.” And he decided that over his fire that midsummer night in the Saracen’s room he would introduce this illuminating thought to the notice of Master Brut. “But oh dear!” he sighed, “our fire will be out!”

“This document,” Master Young was saying, “is what we call an indult; and I will now proceed to translate it into the vernacular. ‘From his Holiness; *Pontifex Maximus,* Servant of the servants of God, Boniface the Ninth, under our paternal hand and seal, to our beloved son in Christ, Owen ap Griffith, armiger baron in tenure of Sycharth and Glyndyfrdwy. By the authority given to us by Almighty God we do hereby permit and allow the aforesaid Owen ap Griffith’s ordained Confessor to give unto the aforesaid Owen, and unto Margaret his wife, not only in the hour of their death, but at any other time, plenary remission from all their sins.”

It may have been the weight of conclusive legality that Master Young gave to his paraphrase of this imposing document or it may have been that the solemn words “remission of sins” carried a personal poignancy for all present; but there certainly fell a grave hush upon that group of men, and our young friend himself experienced a definite reaction from many of his recent thoughts.

Owen himself seemed the least moved of them all; and Rhisiart noticed that he and the Lollard exchanged a long enigmatic look full of God-knows-what unholy reservations.

But the Pope's messenger seemed to recover his spirits and began to assume an air of almost indecorous levity. He approached the hearth, where the logs, thanks to our friend's interposition, were blazing high, and expressed his wonder at the disappearance of the smoke.

"I've heard of these new-fangled chimneys," he said, speaking in French with a broad Italian accent, "but the Holy Father is afraid to tamper with his walls. How rich you Welsh gentlemen must be, how very rich, to afford — hee! hee! — such luxuries as chimneys!"

Owen gave the man a curiously haughty look and made a gesture with his hand as if to dismiss as irrelevant and even indecent this homely topic; but Rhisiart could see that the chieftain was listening to a second hullabaloo that had arisen in the passage. He himself fancied he could detect the drunken voices of both Rhys Gethin and the Scab out there, and Madoc ab Ieuan had assumed once more that intent expression, with his head a little on one side, that made him resemble a blindfolded buzzard.

The Abbot and Owen's sons were also listening with some nervousness to the tipsy voices outside, and the irrepressible Tuscan was beginning some jest about the folios, when Master Young, who had been standing by himself lost in thought, suddenly confronted the fellow with an outstretched menacing forefinger and said to him in sharp clear French, "May one enquire, sir, if the message you're bearing from his Holiness to the King of England has to do with the new statute? I refer to the recent royal edict entitled *'De Heretico Comburendo'*."

Owen swung round on his heel; and the Lollard, as if to bear off some tragic mental image, began making one of his architectural maps in the air.

But our friend, watching the Pope's messenger closely, saw the colour leave his face as he began gesticulating and protesting and denying. "You've got him, Master!" Rhisiart said to himself; and he looked hurriedly down at Master Young's pointed shoes to see if the wasp was still in view.

"May you never be stung till the end of your days!" he prayed. "And I wish to God Owen would take your advice, in place of those drunkards outside there!"

Owen now stepped up to the lawyer's side and, taking not the least notice of the agitated and protesting Italian, said curtly in Welsh, "I thank you, good Master Young! I hope *your* time will come before any of us expect it. I shall remember there *is* another Pope."

Rhisiart's impression was that the noise outside had risen to such a pitch that the Abbot didn't catch this last remark; but he fancied he caught the black eyes of the theologian gleam with an ominous comprehension.

"Open the door!" commanded Owen Glyn Dŵr.

Madoc surlily obeyed; and there appeared in the entrance, both of them hopelessly drunk, the figures of Rhys Gethin and the Scab.

"This fool says — says, my Lord — this fool says," cried *il Capitano Rossi,* "that it's on Saint Matthew's Day we're to raise our flag — but I tell him it's on the sixteenth we're to do that, and on Saint Matthew's Day we're to burn—"

"Listen, you two; listen, both of you!" interrupted Owen, tearing off his mantle and drawing his sword, "if I hear any more of this, if I hear a word more of this babbling and bragging, by the head of my father it won't be on Saint Matthew's Day but on the night of Saint John that I'll raise my flag and burn — and burn Nannau! Yes, by Saint Derfel, Master Scab, I've a mind" — and he lifted his sword and pointed it at the drunken prophet— "I've a mind to raise my flag now and march you both across the Dee and across Ardudwy till we see how you'll stand up against Cousin Sele's arrows! Get back to the hall, both of you, and tell them all, all who're not too drunk to listen, that we've decided in council — *yng nghyngor,* do you understand? — to burn my cousin's house to the ground, and David Gam's too, tell them! Now off with you both — and no more of this."

Totally bewildered, reduced indeed to a sort of drunken stupefaction, but muttering the words "Nannau" and "Hywel Sele" as they went off, the two revellers retreated and the door was shut.

Meredith dragged his brother aside and began whispering to him, while the Abbot and Father Rheinalt stared blankly at Owen as if he had lost his wits.

"You shall sleep in this chamber to-night, sir," the chieftain remarked quietly to the messenger from Rome. And then, as he put up his sword, "You'll find Henry of Lancaster on the Scottish border if you ride fast, and if the Douglas doesn't catch you! What you heard just now has to do with a family feud; and you'll have to ride hard if Henry's to save Nannau — can you remember that word? — on Saint Matthew's Day. A family feud, good sir, a family feud! But remember, Scotland looks to Avignon, not to Rome; so if the Douglas *does* catch you — a family feud, my good sir!'"

Master Young who was still holding the indult now handed it to Owen, who received it gravely.

"The Abbot of Caerleon," he said, looking significantly at the puzzled group of churchmen, "is my confessor, and if Nannau is burned on Saint Matthew's Day, it will be one of the sins he must remit." And he laid down the indult beneath the crystal.

VII. VALLE CRUCIS

Rhisiart knew at once, when he awaked on the following day, that he had slept late. The first thing he realized was that his room-mate had already dressed and was sitting, so as to get the benefit of the light from the window, on his big sackcloth bundle, reading à small unbound book.

Our friend soon interrupted this peaceful orison. “Why the devil didn’t you wake me?” he cried indignantly.

Master Brut closed his book and jumped to his feet. “For à purely selfish reason, my good lad,” he replied with his everlasting smile. “I like to read the Gospel in absolute quiet the second I’m dressed.”

Our friend stared at him. “The office for the day you mean — like a priest?”

Master Brut’s smile deepened. “No, my friend, the sayings of Jesus which put priests in their place!”

“Is that a whole Novum Testamentum?”

“No, my boy, it’s not. It’s an abbreviated translation of Saint Luke’s Gospel in the original.”

“Wasn’t Latin the original?” enquired Rhisiart.

“Well, lad, well, not exactly the original,” replied the Lollard as tactfully as he could. “Some authorities hold the view that the Greek is earlier.”

“Don’t they say the same thing?”

“Not always, son, not always.”

“But in essentials they do; they must!” protested our friend, tossing off the rugs and sitting on the side of his bed and hugging his bare knees. His pride was hurt by having slept so late, and he felt the righteous anger of Orthodoxy burn in both his cheek-bones.

"Is the proclamation to the world by 'multitudes of the heavenly host' of the birth of a Redeemer an essential thing?" enquired the Lollard with Socratic deliberation,

"Of course," growled our friend, "if it was a miracle attested by the Church and "recognized by the Holy Father, It is reported by Saint Luke. Well? What then? What are you driving at? Some damned trick of devil's logic I warrant!"

He rose, as he spoke, and began, without thinking what he did, to pull on the scarlet hose he had worn the night before.

"You're not going to wear those?" protested his friend. But Rhisiart, standing like an irate long-legged heron, with one white shank and one red one, seemed to tell him by his glaring scowl to get on with his argument.

Master Brut hesitated. He was evidently torn between his passion for theological discussion and his inherent good-nature. But the worthy man's conscience must have helped his disputatiousness to overcome his tact by persuading him that "he owed it to the truth" to enlighten his stubborn friend.

"What Saint Luke in his Greek," he went on, "makes the angels say is, 'Peace on earth; good-will to men,' whereas what the Church's Latin makes them say is, 'Peace on earth to men of good-will.' Now it is clear that there is an essential difference here. In the one case—"

"Come in!"

Rhisiart uttered this permission with unnecessary violence; but his relief in escaping his friend's logic was so great that he turned quite a cheerful face to the page who entered. This was a boy about twelve, pretty as a maid, with clear-cut features, white skin, and long eyelashes, which, when he shyly cast down his eyes, pencilled themselves with exquisite delicacy on his soft cheeks. His limbs in their tight hose were certainly modelled more beautifully than any maid's, and the "lion rampant and sable," embroidered on his tunic, set off to perfection his ivory-soft neck and coal-black curls.

Rhisiart, under the warm glow which the beauty of this boy evoked, became anxious at once to make his own person as manly and well accoutred as possible, and hastily removing his scarlet hose began pulling on his student's breeches and tunic and even went so far as to draw from its sheath, in order to inspect its edge in a careless and martial manner, his formidable Toledo dagger.

But the dark-eyed page, after giving each of them a timid smile, took no more notice of the dagger than if it had been a brush or a comb. He set up a rough table which he had brought with him; and then, going several times to the open door, where from certain suppressed gigglings that entered the Saracen's room it appeared that he had colleagues of both sexes, he placed upon the table an enormous flagon of foaming beer, a substantial joint of cold beef, a rabbit-pasty, and a platter of hot newly-buttered scones.

Finally he carried in and set by the table two rough three-legged stools, polished smooth by use, but bearing on their shiny surface not a few neatly-cut inscriptions, the amusement probably of many a long winter evening in the Glyndyfrdwy kitchen. Not content with this, having lifted his long eyelashes and shown his bright teeth to explain to our friends that the wind was easterly and the weather unseasonable, he carried to the hearth a bundle of straw and a faggot of sticks, and made for them, to their great comfort and cheer, a blazing fire.

Before he left them to themselves, Rhisiart, anxious for any excuse to keep so attractive an attendant by their side, and with a delicious feeling that he had been transported into one of Modry's romances, called him to their table, and pledging him in a draught of ale and playfully drawing him to his side with an arm thrown about his waist, as he had seen one of Richard's followers do with a wine-bearer at Hereford, he began asking him various questions.

One question led to another; and it wasn't long before such singular revelations began to fall from the boy's diffident lips that Master Brut felt it his duty to dismiss the coy prattler.

Our irascible friend was on the point of making this into a new grievance, if not into a mortal insult, when the Lollard began, in so grave and gentle a tone that it was impossible not to be disarmed, a direct appeal to his honour. Very tenderly and with such real affection and concern that it touched the lad to the heart, especially as Master Brut deliberately used the rustic Herefordshire dialect, giving a touch of nostalgic homeliness to his elder brother's tone, he warned the boy of the danger of these fashionable flirtations with beautiful pages.

"I know the temptation only too well," he said. "It has many times overcome me, and will no doubt do so again — God help us all — but I swear to you, lad, there are no cunning whores in Paris more treacherous and dangerous than these pampered pages; and it's just because" — and he spoke with such frank earnestness that the ribald feeling Rhisiart was indulging, that the whole thing was a bagatelle subsided a little— "just because it's such a temptation to me that I can speak with knowledge about it. It begins with just such toying and dallying as you indulged in a minute ago, which no doubt was perfectly harmless; but after a time, if the Blessed Christ doesn't help you, the thing becomes an obsession. Think of Edward the Second! I've no doubt that at your age he played harmlessly enough with the pages of the court, but you remember to what it led? Do you know, Rhisiart" — and he lowered his voice— "certain things, like what the chronicles say of the shrieks of Edward the Second, have come near to making me an atheist. But of course lots of men who're not kings have known — But pain like that, my lad, when it comes to the shrieking point, is what I can't — Do you know, Rhisiart, there've been times when I've *cursed* God, yes, cursed him, for making a world where such things can be; and if it wasn't for—" He stopped suddenly, and a strange wild look that alarmed his companion crossed his placid face. Then he said quietly and in his ordinary voice, "But I needn't have dragged in Edward — Christ give him pardon and peace! — our poor late King, Mad Huw's Richard, ruined himself in just the same way. These unhappy men's minions — all fatal, all treacherous — are only grown-up pages. Oh, my dear lad, if I could only tell you all I've seen—"

Our friend was moved beyond his wont. It wasn't so much what the man said; it was the revelation of the feeling that lay beneath that calm exterior. He stretched his arm across their wooden table and grasped the other's hand and their eyes met in embarrassed sympathy.

Then Rhisiart raised the great two-handled flagon to his lips. "To Wales and Owen Glyn Dŵr!" he cried, and gave it to his comrade. "To Wales and Owen Glyn Dŵr!"

Their meal went on after that in desultory talk about last night's events; but as they rose from the table Rhisiart said abruptly, "What do you suppose that boy meant by saying that Griffith and Meredith have left the palace and that Rhys Gethin has gone back to Conway? Do you think Owen was upset by the way things turned out? And did you hear what he said about giving up his room to that ridiculous Italian?"

"And the way he lied about Nannau?" responded the other, as they moved to their bench by the hearth. "He wanted to keep the man from questioning the servants, I fancy. What puzzles me about it all," the Lollard went on, “is Owen’s attitude to Master Young. How could he be ready to let the man go back to Henry, with that ring of his on his finger and without any security? I don’t know what you feel, lad, but it struck me the fellow must hold some sort of commission from Avignon. Did you notice how he was always coming back to that?”

Rhisiart bent forward over the fire, turning his Norman profile to his friend as he drew in his lips. “He’s a clever man,” he remarked after a pause. “He knows more about state affairs than anyone I’ve ever met. Maybe it would be a wise move to play off Avignon against Rome?”

Master Brut smiled. “Oh, you orthodox believers!” he burst out. “Can’t you see how it upsets the whole system for there to be two Popes?”

Rhisiart waved this aside. “Owen must know more about him than anyone else. I heard someone say in the hall that he’s the bastard of one of the greatest of our Welsh families. Anyway, Owen trusts him; and I don’t believe he’d do that if he didn’t know something that we don’t. Do you think Rhys Gethin’s in disgrace that he’s going back to Conway? You should have seen how he ran the bastard to earth. If it hadn’t been for Brother Huw, Avignon would have had to find another champion. But wasn’t it amusing the way he exposed that Roman? He talked better French — that’s how he did him down — that and his lucky guess that the chap was going straight to Bolingbroke and that he had—”

But Master Brut begged his friend not to forget what he was going to say next; and retired for a minute or two to make use of their newfangled latrine invented by the Scotch nobility.

While he was thus engaged there came a soft knock at the door; and Rhisiart, thinking that at any rate for that moment he could tease the pretty page without interference, hurried to open it himself.

But in place of the white cheeks, long eyelashes and delicate limbs of young Elphin, there stood Meredith ab Owen in full warlike array! He wore a steel breast-plate, sharp-pointed steel greaves and a small steel helmet, without any visor, fitting tight to his head. Even as he stood there he began fidgetting with his helmet to conceal some straggling dark curl, and in a flash our friend was reminded of the peevish way Tegolin had struggled with her locks at the door of the Church of St. Collen.

"They call us bare-foot savages," Rhisiart thought, "but on my soul, that boy Elphin would suit the court of Constantinople!" And he allowed Meredith to take all the time he needed over his military adjustments so as to give Master Brut an opportunity to regain a strategic position by the hearth before their entrance.

Meredith had brought his fighting-spear to show his young allies; and it was upon this weapon, when they were all three sitting on the bench by the fire, that the general interest concentrated.

"Do you ever use it as a javelin?" enquired our friend.

"I've always heard so much of Welsh spear-throwing, but I've never held a real Welsh spear in my hand before. This must be the sort of thing that our ancestors, the Trojans, used, mustn't it? With such a spear as this" — and our friend couldn't resist getting up from the bench and brandishing it— "Hector must have wounded Patroclus!"

"Who was Patroclus?" asked the son of Owen; and then with a sad little smile that contrasted quaintly enough with his flashing armour, "I'm not like my father. I never went to Oxford; and they've got only a few scraps of Homer in Valle Crucis; and I don't believe even Father Pascentius can translate what they have got!"

Our friend was quite prepared to enter at some length — as the headless crucifix looked down upon them and a chilly draught descending the new-fashioned chimney made the birch-logs smoke — upon the inexhaustible learning of his teacher at Exeter College; but Meredith in a quick change of mood stirred the fire with the point of his spear and confessed to them he had brought bad news.

Both the young men looked anxiously at him.

“That Roman?” they exclaimed simultaneously.

Meredith propped his weapon against the side of the hearth and laid his helmet down beside him. “You’ve hit it, lads,” he said. “That smug rogue’s let the devil himself loose, and the fat’s in the fire with a vengeance. You know he went off last night? Yes, he wouldn’t stay half-an-hour after we broke up. Our lawyer-friend’s attack on him burst his bubble. He had a message to the King from Rome, had it under his vest all the while! In a fit of panic when the noise in the hall grew worse he confessed as much to my father, claiming immunity as King’s messenger; and then, calling for his horse and his servants, off he rode — straight to Valle Crucis.

“As luck would have it, the guest-house there was full of our enemies. Grey and Fitz-Alan had dined at the refectory and were staying for the night. They sent down to the Tassel for Cousin Sele and Davy Gam; and young Burnell from Dinas Bran was brought down, too. I wonder Lowri let him come; but at any rate there he was. Not one honest Welshman among them! They must have stayed up, plotting trouble for us, half the night. That curst Roman was at the bottom of it. I think he’d have made trouble anyway, but Master Young’s attack on him set the gunpowder off! And now, quite early this morning — Griffith and I were still asleep, but father was awake: I think he’d been in the chapel all night praying over Iolo — what must arrive but a nice little set of demands from old Abbot Cust. It’s the Prior of course who composed this precious document. He’s the master there, and a worse enemy we've never had. But at any rate, what they demand is:

"One, that your friend Alice, whom they call a house-serf at Ruthin, though the gossip in our kitchen is that she's young Grey's paramour, be carried over there and delivered to her master;

"Two, that Mad Huw and the Maid be brought before the Abbot's court; and

"Three, that one Master Brut, of the Manor of Lyde in the County of Hereford, be also handed over to the aforesaid court to answer why, how, and on what authority he, a declared heretic, should travel at large through His Majesty's fiefs of Ial, Bromfield, Glyndyfrdwy and Edeyrnion, to the danger, peril, risk and injury of His Majesty's faithful and pious subjects of the aforesaid manors, baronies and jurisdictions!"

It would be hard to say which of his guests was more staggered by this blow; and harder still to say whether it was of Tegolin or of Alice or of his friend, the Lollard, that Rhisiart first thought. But they both kept silence, waiting to learn more before committing themselves to any comment.

"Well," Meredith continued, bending down to ease the clasps of the steel plate that covered one of his knees, you can imagine what I said when Father came and told us. But I could see Father had made up his mind before he gave us a chance to speak. He said we must give way on every point except in the matter of giving you up, Master Brut. To that, he said, nothing would make him consent. But he thinks his submission about the Friar and the Maid and about that girl was the only thing they *hadn't* counted on.

"He said our reputation for hospitality and their knowledge of our touchiness about the honour of our house and so on was what set them — Prior Bevan especially — on making these demands.

"He thought the whole thing was only to give colour and excuse to a move on which they'd already decided. He said the only alternative to submission was to leave this place, and leave our place at Sycharth, and take refuge in the mountains of Snowdon. But he said this would ruin our plans for the rising in September. You see he's got those unlucky dates — the sixteenth and the eighteenth — lodged like a doom in his head! It's what we call a fate or a *tynghed* on him. He loved old Iolo so much that he makes everything depend on carrying out his prophecy. Griffith and the Arglwyddes are very upset about it. They don't care, I'm afraid, what happens to your Alice, Master Brut; but the idea of giving up the Friar and the Maid seems monstrous to them. And, of course, it is monstrous; but so is the idea of giving up that unlucky girl!

"But Father's got it into his head that nothing worse than temporary captivity could possibly happen to the Friar and the Maid, though I don't suppose he gives the fate of Alice much thought — but, as I say, his absolute conviction is — since his night with the dead Bard in the chapel — that if we hoist our standard in September, as Iolo prophesied, every victim of those monks and every prisoner in Ruthin and Chirk will be set free!

"Well, having decided on submission, except in your case, Master, the next thing he decides, since they won't dare to attack such obedient servants of Holy Church as we shall be then, is for Rhys Gethin to scour the Conway country till he gathers a regular army of spearmen, and for Griffith to rush to Mona to get help from the Tudors, and for me to hurry off to our place at Sycharth and bring over here all the money" — he lowered his voice in what might have been a mock imitation of a Jewish usurer— "about five thousand silver groats, that he's got hidden there. Some of this sum Rhys Gethin will want for his new army; but the bulk of it Father will hide in the mound, where, if Grey does burn this place, it'll be absolutely safe."

"But what about the Arglwyddes and Catharine?" our friend enquired.

"Oh, we'll have our scouts round here! We shan't take them away; and at the first news of danger in the offing the ladies'll ride across Moel Goch to a perfectly safe hiding-place."

"And your father?" asked the Lollard.

The youth smiled. "Oh, he can be left to take care of himself!" And then, seeing an expression of shocked amazement on his hearers' faces, he burst out laughing.

"You think I'm frivolous and callous, do you? Well — you'll soon feel just as I do when you see more of him! Everybody here feels the same; even the Arglwyddes, even Catharine."

"What do you mean?" asked Rhisiart.

"Oh, it's not a thing you can easily put into words," replied the young chieftain, rising from the bench and picking up his helmet. "It comes from living with him. I don't say it gives you any especial confidence in his success — I mean in his triumph over our enemies — but it makes it impossible to imagine him — him himself I mean — helpless in their hands."

Master Brut looked up at the face of the young warrior, who now towered above them, the firelight flickering on his breast-plate. One dark lock from beneath his steel cap crossed his forehead and the glint of the metal made his eyes even more animated than their wont.

"Pardon the question if it seems impertinent," said the Lollard gravely "But is your father a religious man? Does he pray more than most of us ordinary people?"

Owen's son smiled his sad ironic smile. "If he wasn't praying last night I don't know what he was doing. Our Porter told me he was on his knees for hours."

“Christ have mercy on him and on us all!” murmured the other.

“But I don’t want to give you a wrong impression,” Meredith went on. “He’s always reading that crystal you saw, and he’s always studying astrology. Our old wives consider him a necromancer. Nurse told Catharine once, when she caught her listening at the mound-stone, that she was going the way of the master. She thinks he’s sold his soul to the Devil; but I know — Rhisiart’s a relation and you, sir, are” — he hesitated a moment— “an honest man, so I needn’t be squeamish — but I know Griffith and the Arglwyddes sometimes think—”

He stopped and listened. “I thought I heard it — the mound I mean — but it was only the rain — that he’s committed to Saint Derfel.” He paused again; and once more he smiled that sad ironical smile. “There! I’ve said enough; and too much, my lads! Saint Derfel means nothing to you, and why should he? God! Why should he? Why should he?”

His voice, as he repeated this, had a wild, high-pitched, hysterical note that troubled his hearers not a little. But his mood changed in a flash. “Blessed Mary!” he cried, “what nonsense I’m talking! It’s this midsummer rain. Well, comrades, wish me luck with that damned silver! It’s the sort of job I hate. I wish I were going to Mona, and Griffith to Sycharth. But when Father makes up his mind — well, goodbye, my lads!”

But the Lollard was on his feet now. “Just one little thing,” he said quietly. “Will you tell your father, before you go, that I shall accompany the Friar and the Maid and — and the other. It’s a small point, among all the rest, but I’d like him to know it. In this way all their demands will be satisfied. But in any case, tell him, I’ve decided to go. I can leave my horse, eh? and my clothes and books? — and then, if I don’t come back—”

It was Rhisiart’s turn now to jump to his feet. “And tell Cousin Owen,” he announced emphatically, “that, with his permission, I would like to go, too. It might make his obedience, our obedience, more clear and definite if his" — and he gave a little forced laugh— "if his hostages were accompanied by a — by a sort of relative of the family."

Meredith fixed upon them both a grave and absent-minded stare. He had turned at the door, and they could see from the abstracted look that he was still listening to something outside the room. At last he shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a pity," he said. Then, after a moment or more of listening, "A pity," he repeated. Then, while his face took on a hard, rigid, mask-like look, "Up in smoke it goes then, my chance of having someone to talk to. I must play chess again with Madoc ab Ieuan and hide-and-seek with Catharine! So you've decided, have you, Master Brut? And you too Rhisiart? Well, I think your idea of a member of the family bringing our — what did you call them? — our 'hostages,' may appeal to my Lord. I'll send you word, anyway." And with a stiff little bend of his steel-clad head the gleaming figure was gone.

Then our friend turned peevishly to his companion. "What made you do that?" he said. "Owen wanted you to stay."

"Tu quoque!" retorted the other. "What do you know about Welsh etiquette and honour? A member of the family! A member of my family of combustible heretics is what they'll make of you, lad, riding with Master Brut along the King's highway and drawing your sword against the archers of Chirk! But there it is. We've both done it now; and there can be no going back. Meredith knew Owen would agree, or he wouldn't have looked like that at the last. Poor lad, I expect he does pine for someone to talk to, with only that spoilt child and her taciturn brother."

Rhisiart made no reply. He walked across the room to where his sheepskin bundle lay and pulled out his crusader's sword. No, I must leave you behind," he said to himself, "just as I must leave Griffin."

Following one of his little private rituals he drew his dagger and laid its blade for a moment across the blade of the old sword. Then, replacing this latter, he straightened himself, tightened his belt, brushed away some crumbs from his doublet and remarked rather peevishly to his friend, "No one'll meddle, I hope, with our things here while we're away?"

The Lollard, who was transferring his precious Gospel manuscript from his bundle to some hidden receptacle about his person, hastened to point out how extremely unlikely it was, at this particular juncture, that any other guests would be put in the Saracen's room. "But if you're fussy about your things, I'd say a word to that old woman. She's the one—"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" the interruption came in a high-pitched tremulous voice from outside their door, and upon the door itself fell sundry vigorous blows from something harder than human knuckles.

"Talk of the devil—" cried Rhisiart, "By Gis! if that's not the Nurse!"

"She's come to tell us they're ready to start," said Master Brut; and both the young men, standing there in their neat students' garb, cast that curious look round their chamber that most human beings and many animals throw round the already familiar outlines of their lair of the past night. Then they flung open the door and slipped out side by side. Yes! There was the tall head-dress. There was the white wimple suspended from its grotesquely elongated peak, and there was the black staff.

"Oh Masters, what goings-on!" the old woman cried. "Oh gentlemen, sweet gentlemen, what a coil is here! 'Tis my precious Missy that be the cause; for the pretty honey-bag has shrieked and battered at my Lord's door, where 'a be turning wet to fine with crystal-gazing, and calling up of spirits from below, and now, seeing he won't open to her; or change his hard heart, dost know, honey-gents, what's gone and done? 'A's gone and barred herself up, along with they naked men, and them ready to stink too afore sun-down, and all in chapel-vault. I've never let her blessed little knees touch they cold stones all her days, no! not at Holy Mass, and there my sweet lamb be — for I've squinnied through door-crack and seed 'un — along wi' they naked dead — and crying her heart out! She do think the world of thee, Master Rhisiart, though I shouldn't say it, and the man that gets her, oh, my daisy-gents, the man that gets her! will know what I alone do know, who've washed her and combed her since her first cry."

Rhisiart felt too nervous, too agitated, too puzzled, in short too young, to do more than stare blankly at the old woman and fumble awkwardly with the wallet in his belt. There did just enter into the shrewd sheriff's-officer portion of his youthful consciousness that what the old lady was really after was a tactful, casual, discreet and timely offered half-ducat or even a silver crown; but since like the Lollard his whole stack of funds consisted of a few fresh-minted gold nobles and a quantity of king's pennies, neither of which seemed appropriate to the occasion, he contented himself with allowing his fingers to remain in contact with the wallet in his belt.

His companion, however, was less tongue-tied. "Go and tell your silly child," he said, "that her cousin is going along with the Maid — if that's what's bothering her — and you can add, if you like, that I'm going along with her cousin and that I've got great influence! Influence at Court, you may say; and you needn't tell her that I speak of the King of Heaven; but will you please tell me, my good lady, where the Abbot's room is, for I would dearly like to have his venerable blessing before we all set out."

"John ap Hywel are you speaking of? Bless my stars, young man! Let me see; let me see. So that wench is going with you to Abbot Cust's court, is she? And you gave the Captain a whole groat for her? Marry of God! Enough to make a grand lady unpin her smock, not to name a poor Ruthin girl! Abbot John, do you say? Why he rode off on his black horse before ’twas light. They say he’s gone to raise men for my Lord from Usk to Dynevor! But if you want a holy man’s blessing on your dear face there’s Father Rheinalt left. He’s going to monk it no more, ‘a says! We’ve never had a shaven priest in hall since old Father Jenkyn died. He were a one, Father Jenkyn. Couldn’t abide sour wine nor sharp-tongued women. And ‘twere the poor gentleman’s sweet tooth, I reckon, in this sad world what took him off at the last. I mind well his end. There weren’t a dry eye in kitchen or bower. And when I laid him out — Marry of God, what didn’t I see! And him that couldn’t abide sour wine or stand-off women. ‘A wore against his poor skin what must have tormented him night and day! Us don’t know nothing of a man, that’s what I tells the maids, shaved or unshaved, till us lays him out! So go to Father Rheinalt, young man. He’ll bless your kind face and absolve your sweet sins!”

Our friend all this while had been listening with only half an ear to the Nurse’s chatter; for it seemed to him that he too — just as Meredith had done — heard something out of the darkness by the mound-stone that was more than rain or wind. But he was surprised at Master Brut’s affability to the bawdy old trot, and still more surprised when he saw him put into her hand some loose silver from his pouch, with the words, “Well gossip, whether your confessor be Jenkyn or Rheinalt don’t ‘ee forget with all your ‘Paternosters’ and ‘Hail Marys,’ to say a prayer to the Saviour now and again, in plain Welsh.”

“Where is Father Pascentius, Nurse?” our friend enquired abruptly.

“Him? Don’t you talk of him to me, Master Rhisiart. He went off last night with that false proud priest who brought all the trouble on us; and before he went what must he do but come up to me where I stood by the stairs, listening to the harping, and ask me more questions in five blessed minutes than I’ve heard all my days. You can believe he got God’s truth! He got as much truth as a fish of the sea gets air. That’s what he got for his pains!”

By this time, hearing the Nurse’s voice and seeing in the light that issued from the open door of the Saracen’s chamber her familiar figure in close colloquy with the two guests, a group of inquisitive pages had arrived on the scene, and among them the pretty lad who had brought them their meal.

The Nurse was now relating to the Lollard a new story about the deceased Father; so that Rhisiart in that dim light, feeling himself a reckless soldier about to risk his life, hesitated not to pull the boy to him, and while he fondled him, to ask him whether Master Young had yet gone off.

The boy replied that the Canon was at present closeted with their Lord in the Astrologer’s room, but that a considerable band of spearmen under the command of Madoc ab Ieuan had been deputed to conduct him to the border. He also whispered to our friend in that conspiring dimness that Mad Huw was already in the hall.

The mention of the Friar brought about a remorseful reaction in Rhisiart’s impulsive blood and, changing his manner abruptly if not rudely, he packed Elphin off to find out if the ladies had come down. The boy, sulky and loitering, had scarcely reached the entrance to the vestibule when Mad Huw himself came hurrying past him. The door of their chamber had been closed by this time and the remains of their meal had been divided with a good deal of suppressed squabbling among the pages. The Nurse herself was locking the shut door with one of the great keys that jingled at her side, and the Lollard was watching this performance with an interest that even a student of the Greek Testament might legitimately feel where the bulk of all his worldly goods was in question, when Mad Huw came down upon them.

Our friend detected at once that the man’s sojourn in a civilized abode, short as it had been, without fear of molestation or of mockery, had had some deep psychological effect on him. He had ceased, at least under this roof, all noisy proclamations of Richard’s return, and in place of these vociferous outcries he had acquired a trick of hurried, secretive, mystic communications.

This new form taken by his ruling passion may have been due to the hours he had spent among the lively and sympathetic maidens of the Arglwyddes’ entourage, or to some deep impression made on his mind by the presence of the two dead men in the chapel, or even, it may be, to his consciousness of the great conspiracy in the wind. He certainly acted now as if he were in the midst of some dramatic secret transaction and in the presence of a perpetual audience of spies from whom this transaction must be concealed.

“He’s being moved across Wales,” he whispered in our friend’s ear as soon as he emerged out of the darkness, “and it’s because he’s expected at Valle Crucis that that Roman came here last night. Richard loves the Grey Friars just as Owen does; and that’s why the Pope is so spiteful. The Popes have been jealous of them from the beginning. And every house, every wall, every tree, has a spy in it now; and that’s why we have to be so careful what we say and whom we talk to. And there’s another thing, my son, that we mustn’t forget. Not all Grey Friars are Grey Friars. Skulking wolves some of them are, and cunning foxes! You have to look out all the time. You have to look for their pointed ears and their sharp teeth.”

“Have the Maid and the woman from Ruthin come down yet, Brother?” enquired the Lollard.

“No, no, no, Master Brut; they’re waiting, just like we are. We’re all waiting, so that Bolingbroke won’t hear a sound when He’s brought across

Wales.”

At that moment the pretty page, Elphin, came back, and in order to punish Rhisiart for his abrupt dismissal he remained, in spite of the passage being so dark, proudly and coyly out of our friend’s reach.

“Hist!” cried the old woman fixing the key of the Saracen’s chamber to her girdle. “There’s Derfel making his moan! He’s asking for a new maidenhead! Who was that last Derfel-bride in Edeyrnion, Brother Huw? Can’ee remember her name? ‘Twere’nt Gwen were’t? No, her bastard were Tom Ifan’s. Nor it weren’t Sibli ferch Rhys either; for her man was Davy Ddu of Bonwm. Which were the last Derfel-imp, Brother? I can mind when Crach Ffinnant were born; but her what bore he were a convent-maid. Were it Sara Llwyd of Trawsfynydd? But she—”

“Come, Masters! Come, Masters!” interrupted Mad Huw. “The Maid must be down by now. I always know when she’s near. No, daughter, I can’t remember the last one’s name any better than yourself; but I know the unhappy licence that God, for his own mysterious purpose, has allowed to Satan in the name of Derfel. Saint Derfel” — and the Friar crossed himself devoutly— “is in the company of the Blest; but there are those, in the heathen places of this land, who conjure up terrible evil in that blessed one’s name! Would that Lord Owen relied, as our Richard does, upon the humblest Brother of Saint Francis, rather than upon all the powers of the air! But come, Masters, come! The Maid is calling.” He paused for a moment, and then turning towards the mound stone drew himself up, a tall grey figure in the gloom, no longer — so it seemed to Rhisiart — a poor distracted half-wit, but a formidable priest of God. *“In nomine Christi et omnium sanctorum,”* he cried sternly, “be silent, unhappy spirits!

His words were responded to by a sound that Rhisiart, with his sceptical Norman blood, took for a receding wail of discordant echoes; but a dead silence undoubtedly succeeded this, a silence that was only broken as they followed that grey figure towards the hall, by a plaintive, “Marry of God, sweet men!” from the bewildered Nurse.

An hour later, with the two girls mounted upon Welsh ponies, and a boy from the stable, who was to bring back the animals, following after them, all five hostages were making their way, and doing so quite leisurely, towards the famous monastic house.

Rhisiart’s nature was stirred to its depths by what was happening. Tegolin and Alice exchanged casual and friendly remarks as they rode along together, with the Friar at the Maid’s left and the two young men on the other’s right, while their youthful escort, humming and whistling to himself and throwing stones at the rabbits, loitered carelessly in the rear. Luckily for them all the rain had ceased, and though the wind was still in their faces and blowing fresh and chill there was a feeling in the air as though the sun might break through at any moment, and the yellow and green of gorse and bracken stretched away up the slope above them and down the slope beneath them, with a rich reassuring welcome.

They were all of them young, and the rain-washed air of that summer afternoon, and the spacious curves of the great mountains above them, overlapping each other like prone giantesses, and the foxgloves in the hollows beneath them, and the yellow trefoil under their feet, made it hard for them to believe they were heading for pain or disaster.

“I’ve been thinking out,” said Rhisiart to Master Brut, “the exact line I’m going to take. I’m going to make a lot of being one of the family. So for God’s sake, don’t contradict anything I say! And I’m going to make a lot of being a law-student — do you understand? — from Oxford. What do you think’s become of our Abbot’s monks? I take it they’re not rushing after their leader half across Wales. And if they're still at the Abbey — well! we've got some friends at court."

The Lollard chuckled. "I doubt if even the monks of Caerleon would stand up for a sworn gospel-man like me. But Abbot Cust knew me as a child. So I can't believe — But it's Prior Bevan who's my danger, and our Friar's too, I'm afraid. From all I hear about him, and they tell me he's a bullying Salopian and has got the old man under his thumb, you'll need your best forensic eloquence — especially as everybody saw us together on Saint John's Eve."

Rhisiart's thin Norman face contracted with a spasm of boyish arrogance. "You wait, partner!" he announced proudly. "I've been thinking it out; and I'm not at all sure Father Bevan won't find himself checkmated!"

The Lollard watched a rain-ruffled brown butterfly pursuing his less heavily-winged mate across the patches of yellow trefoil. "I hope you're right, comrade," he said, "but it'll be a bad look-out for us if Hywel Sele and Davy Gam are still on the scene. That rascal from Rome must have done his worst. Oh, these Papalists! These Papalists!"

Mad Huw caught the trouble in his tone and peered back at them over the pony's mane. "Mum's the word, Masters!" he murmured. "He may be there by this time. But he'll be disguised. If you see him you must take no notice. I shall know him and he'll know me; but neither of us will make a sign! Mum's the word, my lads, till we've got him safe to London."

Both the young men nodded respectful assent to these instructions; but the Ruthin girl, whose desirable figure as she rode by Tegolin's side had shared with the swaying red braid and with the yellow gorse they were passing not a little of our friend's concentration, turned her head quickly and self-consciously now from the Maid to the men and back to the men, and said with some embarrassment and with hot cheeks, "Will you tell them about me, Mistress, please? I want them to know; especially the lawyer-gentleman from Oxford!"

"Won't you try and tell them yourself, Alice?" protested the Maid.

But the girl gave Rhisiart a heavy-lidded enigmatic look from her pony's back and shook her head. "I can't do it," she said. "I'm not ashamed, and I know the gentlemen are kind. But I just can't do it. The words cling to something in here" — and she indicated her bosom— "and I can't drag them out."

Tegolin frowned. Rhisiart could see that the self-consciousness of her companion irritated the Maid and that she hadn't any overwhelming sympathy with her in her present predicament.

"Alice wants you to know," she said, speaking hurriedly and rather brusquely, "that she lives with her parents in the English quarter of Ruthin. Her father's a master-baker, from — Coventry didn't you say, Alice? — yes, from Coventry, but her mother's Welsh. Her father wanted her to marry the lad we saw murdered last night, and Alice had to consent, and they were betrothed, but she never loved him; so that his death last night was — what did you say it was, Alice? — not a Providence, for that would have been too heartless — well, an escape anyway! But Alice has been working every day since she was a child in Ruthin Castle; and she thinks Lord Grey's son Ambrose wants to — how do you say it in English? — *treisio,* to violate her; and she would much rather — that's what you said, Alice, wasn't it? — leave Ruthin altogether than risk such a thing. She says her parents don't believe that Ambrose would hurt her, and short of that — stop me if I'm wrong, Alice! — she says they're rather proud he notices her and gives her presents."

The Maid paused; but Alice turned quickly towards her. "Tell them what I said just now; for I did mean it, and I do mean it!"

"Alice said just now," repeated the Maid in an almost mechanical tone, "that she'd like above everything else to be my servant and to go about with me and Brother Huw; and when I told her that we both have now sworn to support Owen and join his household, she said — stop me if I'm telling them wrong — that she still wanted to be my servant. She says she hates kitchen-work and is very good with her needle."

"And what did you say to this, Tegolin?" our lad sharply enquired. He had noticed all the way through her speech that she felt anything but really friendly towards this girl, and in his secret heart he attributed this entirely to jealousy. "She has the Friar," he said to himself, "and yet she won't let a person think of anyone else!"

"I told you, didn't I, Alice?" replied the Maid gently, "that I've never had a servant since I was little and I'm too old to begin now."

"Mistress! Mistress!" protested the other, "when you know you're not seventeen! I shall be nineteen come Michaelmas. All born ladies like you have their tire-woman, if it's only to comb their hair." And with a tender protective gesture the Ruthin girl extricated from the plaited coils so near her hand a couple of dandelion-seeds.

Watching this slight movement, Rhisiart suddenly wondered if the Maid of Edeyrnion had kept that meadow-orchis he had given her when she wanted to touch his sword. It wasn't, of course, in those plaits any more. She had loosened her hair last night. But had she preserved it, or just forgotten all about it? And did she ever think now, after so much had happened, of how honourable he had been when she slept in her smock under his sheepskin?

The tale of Alice's troubles must have made her hearers think of their own, for all that youthful company fell now into gloomy silence, from the influence of which Mad Huw found it necessary to escape by turning repeatedly to watch their childish escort throw stones at the rabbits.

It gave Rhisiart a very queer feeling when at last, through a gap in the mountains, the bases of which were now heavily wooded, he caught a glimpse of Dinas Bran. How much had happened since he had planted his sword in the earth at the first sight of that extraordinary stronghold!

He still gazed at those towers with reverence and awe, but with how much more knowledge of life than when from old Griffin's back he had first observed them! He thought of Modry. What would she have felt if she could have looked into the future and seen the young listener to her wild tales riding beneath those battlements with a mad priest, a reckless heretic and these two disturbing young women?

And then he thought of his light-hearted Norman mother. How she would have laughed could she have foreseen to what use he was going to put the expensive legal education she had given him! "She would think I'd been just a fool to let Tegolin get up from that straw the same as she lay down. And she'd say it was all in the game and *à la guerre comme à la guerre* if I stole Alice away from Ambrose Grey!"

But they were getting near the monastery now, and it wasn't long before they reached a grassy hill-side, flecked with patches of yellow trefoil, and interspersed with grey rocks and a few ancient, solitary growing birch-trees, from which the walls and pinnacles of the Abbey itself were visible in the vale below.

The girls brought their ponies to a stand-still; and the young rabbit chaser came running hastily to their side, panting and excited, to inform them in rustic Welsh that he had been forbidden to go any further.

His tone struck Rhisiart as more perturbed and imperative than was suitable to the occasion. He seemed almost rudely anxious to get the ladies out of their saddles; nor did the three big copper coins bearing the bearded countenance of Edward the Third which our friend rather nervously thrust into his hand lessen his feverish desire to be off.

When he had mounted one of the ponies and got a firm hold of the bridle of the other he barely stayed to acknowledge with a word their final salute. Off he went at a wild gallop, and it was only after watching him disappear round a bluff of the hillside that they realized the cause of his haste. They had been so absorbed in their first view of the Abbey that it had escaped their notice that in a narrow defile just below them, under a group of tall chestnuts, was a party of men-at-arms, upon whose helmets and spears the sun, as it fell through the wet branches in the fresh breeze, cast a proud flicker of lights and shadows. There was nothing for them to do but to advance as boldly and calmly as they could; but the path having narrowed itself between slippery banks, they were compelled to proceed in single file, Rhisiart leading the way and the Lollard bringing up the rear.

Partly in order to display his calmness to Tegolin who came behind him, and partly because the presence of danger brought his kinsman to his mind, Rhisiart turned when they were half-way down the declivity and asked the Maid in an easy, casual whisper why it was that Owen hadn't come out to see them off.

"I saw him at the foot of the stairs," she returned hastily. "They said he was so upset about Master Brut going that he couldn't bear to meet him. He was in a strange mood. He stood and stared at me just as if he didn't know me, and then just bowed like a man in a trance and went back to his room." She paused; and then, in a low hurried tone, "Gwion Bach," she whispered, "you won't forget me, if they separate us?"

"They shan't separate us!" he replied boldly; but she shook her head, and although he turned too quickly to see it a sad little smile crossed her face as they went on.

They were soon confronted by the armed men, who turned out to be fewer in number than the gleam of their armour under the chestnut trees had suggested. Not more than half-a-dozen they were; but they straddled across the path, while their leader, a singular looking young man, advanced a few steps alone.

“It’s Master Ambrose!” whispered Alice to Tegolin, plucking her by the arm. “Tell the young gentleman to leave him to me; and get quick into the precincts! He can’t touch us in the precincts.”

Tegolin caught Rhisiart by the belt. It was his crucial moment, when he was straightening his shoulders and collecting his wits for the encounter; and he turned impatiently, frowning crossly. It was just like a girl to go and disturb a person when it was all worked out in his mind exactly what to do.

“It’s young Grey,” the Maid dutifully whispered. “She says to leave him to her, and for us to get quickly into the enclosure where they can’t touch us!”

“All right,” said Rhisiart brusquely. Her words made him suck in his lips till they were as queer looking as Master Young’s. But to have a couple of girls deciding what was to be done at a crisis like this!

“Who are you?” he asked in blunt Hereford fashion, just as if he were interrogating some fancy foreigner in the old law-office in Worcester Street.

“Grey of Ruthin,” replied the young man haughtily. “Are you Glendourdy’s cousin or are you his secretary?”

“I’m his cousin and his secretary, and I happen to have just taken my degree in civil law at Oxford and I have come to represent my cousin in the Abbot’s court, and it is at my advice that he has acted so legally and so properly in the sending of Master Brut of Lyde in the County of Hereford, of Mistress Tegolin, commonly known as the Maid of—”

"Tut! Tut! Master Cousin Legality! Didn't you hear who I am? I'm Ambrose de Grey de Ruthin 'commonly known' as the son of my father, and I've not come here to be lectured on law, but to possess myself of — of — of the person — How *could* you frighten me so?"

The discontinuity of this curious young man's speech was due to the fact of Alice's slipping hurriedly past both the Maid and Rhisiart and spiritually — though not actually — throwing herself into his arms.

It must be admitted in our friend's favour that he didn't allow this grievous shock to his self-esteem to interfere with the working of his intelligence. He was angry, he was humiliated, he was ashamed of himself, and he felt extremely young, but his wits seemed to work all the quicker for this, and to work quite independently of his irritable and outraged dignity.

Beckoning to Master Brut, who either had caught the Ruthin girl's shrewd whisper or was acting in accordance with evangelical principles, for he remained amenable to every ripple in the stream of events, he hurried them between the Ruthin soldiers who were staring with absorbed interest at Ambrose and Alice, and led them through a small wicket gate into the precincts of the monastery.

Here a diminutive little monk, with his robe tucked up under his belt, was gathering herbs for some culinary or medicinal purpose, and he advanced tentatively and politely towards them.

Rhisiart, however, took no notice of this friendly advance on the part of the monk, for all his interest — like that of the Ruthin men-at-arms — was absorbed in the conversation between Ambrose and his runaway girl.

The heir of Ruthin was certainly one of the queerest-looking youths Rhisiart had ever seen. He was well above middle-height, indeed of much the same stature and build as our friend himself, but his face was sickly-white, and his mouth oddly twisted awry. He had been disfigured by a sword-cut in his boyhood; and this disfigurement, though he wore on his upper lip a small black moustache, could not be concealed. His chin was abnormally long and pointed, and this with a pair of protruding ears, which stood out grotesquely from beneath his steel cap, gave him the look of some kind of animal — our friend couldn't decide what animal — that had been endowed by an impish freak of Nature with a human form.

But whatever animal it might be that Ambrose Grey resembled it was, Rhisiart felt, not only a sick animal but an animal obsessed by a veritable demon of desire. He had hollow eyes of a pale blue tint, and the fact that they seemed, at the distance our friend now stood, to be entirely devoid of eyebrows, increased the besotted craving, as if he could drink her up, body and soul, with which he gloated over Alice.

For some reason the very strength of the youth's desire, unholy and carnal though it was, had a poignancy that made it hard for our friend to despise him, much less to hate him. There was something at once grotesque and tragic in such unbalanced emotion, which resembled that of an infatuated beast for its mistress, rather than the passion of a seducer for his victim.

The Ruthin girl had said "leave him to me," and it was clear that she was justified in her confidence. By gestures and whispers and low voiced murmurs, like a crafty white pigeon fooling a demented jackal, the girl led him nearer and nearer to the wicket, and just as one of the men-at-arms, more on the alert than his master, was on the point of intervening, she slipped through the gate and closed it in the young man's face. Even then, it seemed to our friend, as the herb-gathering monk approached them, that the obsessed youth had no idea of what this meant, or of the fatal barrier which that flimsy trellis-work offered.

Automatically, all armed as he was, young Grey pushed the gate open, and heedless of the astonishment of Mad Huw who was whispering to the Lollard, he took the girl by the arm and made an attempt to drag her back.

But the little herbalist indignantly intervened. “Sacrilege! Sacrilege!” he cried, and our friend had never seen such a transformation. From every feature and from every limb of that slight figure there emanated the spiritual authority of a thousand years. “Holy ground! Holy ground!”

“Get back, Master Ambrose, or I’ll—” And, with that, waving his bunch of weeds as if they were the “bell, book and candle” of an outraged Christendom, he hustled the bewildered Ambrose outside the precincts, and closed the gate.

But it wasn’t only the little Cistercian who was transformed; for no sooner was the man outside, with the indignant monk guarding the closed gate, than the Ruthin girl sprang to the fence and began in viciously honeyed tones a series of mocking taunts.

These taunts, in her rich sensual voice, were uttered without the least tremor of anything hysterical. She didn’t seem bitter, or even angry. There was a voluptuous unction in her tone.

“Better luck, next time, stupid! Why don’t you try it with Molly Price again who was born blind? Or with Sibby Saunders who’d let a toad do it? Or with Polly Walker who says you waggle your ears when you get anyone down? Do you know what Mother Pusey who keeps the whore-house calls you? — Monsieur Point-du-Tout! And do you know what—”

But the monk intervened. “Come away, woman,” he said sternly. “You shall go to the Prior! And you, Master Ambrose, take your men off at once and never—”

But something in the young man’s livid and ghastly face made him stop abruptly. Skilled as a good priest in sounding the depths of mortal passion he recognized that this was no ordinary case of sexual brutality.

"If you or my Lord of Ruthin," he said in a gentler tone, "have anything against this young woman, you can take off your armour, lay down your weapons, and come now, at once, to the Prior's court. Is it your pleasure to do this?"

But the youth in armour seemed hardly to understand what was said to him. In a curiously helpless manner, and stumbling a little as if some vital contact between his brain and his limbs had been severed, he moved to the gate again. His eyes had never left the face of the woman, and he now began fumbling with the wooden catch of the gate as if his fingers were paralysed and his wits drugged.

But his men came crowding round him and, though Rhisiart couldn't catch their words, it was clear they put some pressure upon him that was more than he could resist. With his head hanging in a curious sideways manner over his steel gorget, as if he'd received some wound in the gullet and was bleeding internally, he let himself be led away; not, however, before one of his men had flung a threat into the girl's face of so shocking a character that Tegolin made a protective movement towards her and the monk indignantly lifted his hand.

But the Ruthin girl merely narrowed her eyes under her heavy lids and smiled contemptuously.

Rhisiart was conscious as he looked at her of a wild drumming in his pulses and of a sensual stir that made his eyes darken and the pit of his stomach turn dizzy. He had hated her when she said those things to that stricken youth in armour, and he hated the way she was smiling now under that ruffian's appalling threat; and yet something about those heavy-lidded eyes and those rounded flanks made this hatred quiver and vibrate with a craving to hug her till she cried out under his grip.

But Mad Huw had come over to him now. “Not a word, not a word of him!” the Friar whispered. “This Prior’s court is a trick. They know we know where he is. But if they torture us we mustn’t breathe a word.” Then he glanced anxiously at the Lollard. “Does he understand? Will he be silent?”

Rhisiart assured this innocent conspirator that if anyone “understood” anything it was Master Brut; and they all followed the little monk as, walking by Tegolin’s side with eyes modestly cast down upon his bunch of herbs, he led the way towards the Abbey.

They soon arrived at the imposing west front, where, above the rich Gothic entrance, several delicately-carved windows seemed calling upon the sun with a beguiling and living welcome to mingle its rays with the smoke of the incense and the rhythm of the sacred chants. Here their guide paused. “You must pardon me, gentlemen,” he said, addressing the two young men, “for you, Brother,” and he turned to Mad Huw, “will understand how it is, but I must call for Sister Cunlap to take the ladies to the women’s guest-house.” Thus speaking he took hold of a rope which dangled from an orifice above the gate and gave it a gentle pull.

There was a faint tinkle from inside the building, and a small iron-grated shutter in the frame-work of the door was shot back disclosing a tonsured head and a pair of inquisitive eyes. “Is Brother Jenkyn there?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Is he free for a moment?”

“Yes, Father.”

“I want him here.”

There was a brief pause during which Tegolin came close up to our friend and whispered hurriedly, “Don’t believe any message you get from me unless the messenger says, *'Crusader.'* Do you understand?" He nodded assent. "Kiss me, Gwion Bach!"

Their lips met. His were hot and dry, hers cold as a stone. She drew back to Alice's side; and our friend, though he felt her gaze was upon him, and he wanted to meet it, was aware of a sensation like the pressure of an iron bar across his forehead which compelled him to turn away.

Then the gate was cautiously and partially opened and an elderly lay-brother squeezed himself out, crossed his arms upon his chest, and bowed to their guide.

"Tell Sister Cunlap I want her, Brother. Tell her to come at once. And tell her there are some visitors for the women's guest-house."

The lay-brother glanced at the two girls. "For the night, Father? Or just to lie down, Father?"

The monk frowned and shook his head, as if by this introduction of the image of night combined with the image of the lying down of ladies Brother Jenkyn had gone too far.

"Tell the Sister to come at once, Brother! Tell her we're waiting." Although that queer bar of iron still weighed on his eyelids, our friend spent most of his time during the uneasy interval that followed the Brother's leisurely disappearance in trying to catch Tegolin's eyes; but Alice was holding her in eager whispered conversation, and he had no success.

Meanwhile, through the chink of the great door which had been left ajar, but was now crossed by a heavy chain, there came the sound of chanting.

"What office can this be, Father?" enquired the Lollard. "I thought in the Cistercian Order—"

"It's choir-practice, Master Brut," replied the monk with a smile. "No, no! As I said just now, the Prior receives complaints in his cell today; but tomorrow, owing to his age and ill-health, the Abbot's court will be held in the chapter-house. I believe" — and he lowered his voice so as not to be heard by the door-keeper— "that today the Prior will only request you to submit to a few questions in the library. That is his usual procedure in cases of — in cases like yours. And then — after the Librarian's report—"

"But I hope," interrupted Rhisiart, trying in vain to remember a particular Latin phrase that was always used in the sheriff's office to denote privilege, "I hope you'll explain to Prior Bevan that I've come as Baron Glendourdy's emissary, I may say as his representative, to show his pious observance of the wishes of Abbot Cust by placing at his disposal—"

But here Mad Huw, breaking in with what he evidently considered the most diplomatic of casual gestures, caught our friend by the arm and murmured portentously, "Hush! Hush! Mum's the word, sweet sir, and don't forget it!"

It was while he was reassuring Mad Huw with vigorous asservations of his constant discretion that he caught sight of a little drama between Master Brut and the Ruthin girl that sent the hot blood to his cheeks again and disturbed his senses. He heard the Lollard suddenly request the Father to pardon him, and quite calmly and naturally as if he were saying goodbye to a well-intentioned pupil he walked up to the girl and deliberately tearing a page out of his precious Gospels and folding it up very carefully, and indeed with some difficulty, for the parchment was unyielding, he thrust it into her hand.

And the Ruthin girl never lifted her eyes while he did this. That was what absorbed and startled our friend so. She dropped her eyes when she felt him near and kept them lowered. Rhisiart was in front of her, so he couldn't be mistaken. She didn't look at Master Brut all the time. She held her eyes down while her hands kept fumbling and twitching — our friend was sure of that too — at the rough clasp of her dress. He saw her take the bit of paper the man gave her — she raised her eyes enough for that — but the Lollard's sturdy back intervened just then, so that he couldn't see what she did with it. Did she unclasp that pin she was fidgetting with, and slip it into her dress?

But through the monotonous reiteration of conspiring whispers breathed into his ear by the Friar he heard her now; and though the Lollard's back hid her face her voice was so rich and clear that he could catch every syllable, especially as she spoke in English. "I'll burn, before they get it from me!" he heard her say; and he surmised that the Lollard uttered a startled protest and made an attempt to get the paper back; for there was certainly some sort of struggle between them which was ended by Tegolin; but whether Tegolin made her give back that gospel-page Rhisiart couldn't tell, for Master Brut's broad back hid them both at the crucial point.

"Sister Cunlap says, Father," began lay-brother Jenkyn as soon as he reappeared. The fellow's eyes were gleaming with excitement. What he'd caught of the Sister's orders to her subordinates had evidently quickened his lively imagination. But he wasn't allowed to finish his report, for rapidly behind him, wearing a heavy veil, came the Mother of the guest-chamber herself. Sister Cunlap was clearly an amiable woman and not less clearly a very simple one, and her countenance, when she lifted her veil to speak, reminded Rhisiart of their old cook at home. He could see that both the girls were extremely relieved by the unveiling of that ruddy face and those homely grey eyes.

"The Lord be with you, Father, and with you, gentlemen," she began at once; and though a little out of breath her voice had a pleasant ring. "And the Lord be with you, my daughters!"

Mad Huw stepped up to Tegolin and laid his hand on her wrist. "The password's 'mum,' child, till we meet again; and the same *here,"* and he tapped his forehead with an air of theatrical cunning.

"The Maid of Edeyrnion will be all right with me, Brother," said Sister Cunlap reassuringly.

"I know it, I know it, I know it!" chanted the Friar in childish spirits, "but we walk among pitfalls and our paths are beset by evil men!"

"Forgive my question," enquired the Lollard, "but how comes it that you all know us by name?" And he looked with his frank disarming smile from the Father to the Sister and back to the Father.

"Everybody round here knows Friar Huw of Llanfaes," said the good-natured woman, looking as she spoke so much like his mother's cook that Rhisiart had a vision of that cheerful, friendly English hearth, with its turn-spits and burnished pots, its smoky roof and brown flitches of bacon, "and everybody knows our brave Maid! Be you her serving-wench, my pretty daughter?"

Alice laughed outright at this. "I hope to be, Sister," she broke in eagerly, "but Mistress Tegolin—"

"I have come from the Baron of Glyndyfrdwy," interrupted our friend, "in obedience to—"

But Sister Cunlap's blank and bewildered face cut short his words. Feeling something of a fool he turned to the monk for corroboration, and once again searched his mind for that curst legal phrase about privilege; and then it seemed — as he went over it afterwards — as if the two girls had been whisked away under the voluminous wing of the worthy Sister with such discreet rapidity that, however much he'd been on the alert, no final glances could possibly have been exchanged.

As soon as they were well inside the nave of the Abbey church, which seemed full, at the same time, of a rich quietness and of a warm stir of sacred movement, their guide, after passing by with a searching glance several of his fellows, selected for his purpose a monk with the face of a happy but stupid child, and handed over Mad Huw to his care.

The choice was a singularly good one; and indeed, as our friend looked about him in this muted fragrance, where the afternoon sun as it fell through the high windows was so mellowed by the incense and the candles as to become something dim and sacrosanct, as if the great heathen orb itself had been lured into obedience, he came to the conclusion that this kind of ascetic fraternal life evoked a sort of "sixth sense," a sense by which, without any overt instruction in worldly diplomacy, a certain exquisitely subtle and sagacious handling of intruders from the outside world was practised. It was almost, he felt, as if some invisible cocoon of sanctified silk, impalpable as the surrounding incense, was made to encompass the recalcitrant motions of normal humanity, under the power of which such visitors from outside became docile and pliable, losing, without realizing what was happening, the vital urge of their natural self-assertion.

It was a great comfort to him — for in Tegolin's absence he felt responsible for Mad Huw — when he saw the respectful wonder, and even awe, with which this childlike Father went off, with the Friar's hand on his shoulder and all those obscure hints concerning Richard's movements hovering about his ears.

Yes, under this high carved roof and in this atmosphere where the very beams of the sun fluttered down like the locks of a shorn Samson before the altar candles, he felt as if there existed between all these silent, muffled, mysteriously busy Fathers a wordless understanding; an understanding that fathomed all, directed all, assuaged all, and no doubt could punish all, without the exchange between them of so much as a sign!

His instinct was justified when, after a merest whisper, in passing, with one of his colleagues, their guide informed them that he would leave them to their own devices for a few minutes while he went to inform the Prior of their arrival.

The fact that the chanting that was going on had no connection with any particular office made it possible for our two friends to wander where they pleased; and the first object of note they stumbled upon after making their formal genuflexion to the high altar was the pulpit.

Rhisiart made a gesture of wanton boyish hostility in the presence of those narrow steps and that carved rostrum. Aye! how he had hated the sermons in the Cathedral, and more still the laboured logic of the dean of his College! But the Lollard entered at once into a careful and scientific calculation of the acoustic properties of the screen above the preacher's desk.

"I believe you'd enjoy haranguing the whole establishment," Rhisiart whispered to him. "I warrant you'd make the Abbot squirm!"

But the face of his friend showed nothing but a sad earnestness. "I would like once, just once," he murmured, "to preach the Gospel of the Saviour up there!"

But leaving the pulpit and following side by side one of the narrow transept-aisles, they came upon a tomb that moved our friend to unforeseen excitement. It was his turn now to show emotion; and Master Brut was astonished to see him fall on his knees and even close his eyes in prayer. When he got up he pointed out to his companion the word "Madoc" carved on the great stone, above a two-edged cross-handled sword.

"Think of his having actually lain here," he whispered, "under this very stone, for nearly two hundred years!"

"Who is he?"

"Why, man, he's the founder! He's everything! And he's my ancestor, too. It's his blood that was in the blood of that traitor—" The lad stopped, overcome by his emotion. Like an avalanche of rubble, all the lesser impressions that had been absorbing his mind fell away, and the towers of Dinas Bran, as he had seen them that first moment from the edge of the wood, rose up in undiminished magic before his eyes.

But he swallowed his tears. "I must come here again," he thought, "and I must come alone!"

Respecting, though they were completely obscure to him, the feelings of his friend, the Lollard moved on. But Rhisiart, already a little ashamed of his agitation, soon followed him and found him puzzling over the inscription upon a most striking effigy, the like of which neither of the young men had seen before.

It was the figure of a woman, lying supine as if in a bed of granite; and what especially struck the two friends was that her form was hollowed out, not super-imposed upon the stone in raised relief.

Once more it was Rhisiart's destiny to interpret to his well-meaning but unenlightened friend the historic treasures of Valle Crucis.

"Read! Read, man! Can't you read what it says? It's Myfanwy herself!"

"She has a lovely name," murmured the Lollard cautiously, "but I don't think I recall — Is she mentioned in Giraldus?"

But Rhisiart waved Giraldus aside without a word. Bending reverently down he kissed the effigy's chilly feet in its hollow coffin.

"Princess," he recited, when he rose, as if the syllables were an incantation that could only be uttered in a special tone, "Princess Myfanwy of Dinas Bran; and that" — and he pointed to an effigy at her side— "is her husband. The story is that she loved — but you don't want to know the story. But she's been my ideal ever since I was a child. She must have come down from up there every Sunday for Mass! I expect her lover came too —

"No! you can glare at me all you like, Jennap ab Adam! If you couldn't do it while she lived you can't do it now. You can lie by her side, Monsieur, with the sword that killed him. But he's lying in her heart; and he'll lie there for ever! You can't cut love out of a girl's heart, Monsieur. You by her side, he in her heart — that's how things are. And that's how they'll be at the Judgment Day, though she goes to Hell for it!"

They were moving towards the Lady chapel now when the herb-gathering monk who'd brought them in suddenly appeared as if out of the wall.

"He's ready to see you," he said. "But he won't keep you long. Father Pascentius will then see you in the library. Will you come this way? He's in the cloisters."

He led them half across the entrance to the Lady chapel on whose altar was a gleaming array of candles evidently newly lit. The fellow stopped and began muttering under his breath so many "Hail Marys" that the suspicious and touchy Rhisiart began to feel as if everything that happened to them here was part of a deliberate plan to guide their souls into the way of peace.

"Would you like to go nearer?" said the monk when he rose. "It's a beautiful altar. Edward the son of Yeo is buried beside it. Some of us think that our Blessed Lady is already beginning to work miracles there. She certainly protected Edwardus filius Yeo with special favour when he took sanctuary here. He gave very liberally to our necessities. We pray for him daily. Won't you come nearer to the altar?"

But Rhisiart suggested that they mustn't keep Prior Bevan waiting any longer, while the Lollard enquired what crime Edwardus filius Yeo had committed that he had to pay so heavily to the servants of Our Lady. The monk had got them as far as the little passage leading into the sacristy before he replied to Master Brut.

But at this spot, well out of hearing of both Our Lady and her protégé, the man seemed automatically to assume a totally different tone. He now expressed nothing but natural horror at the nature of the crime committed by this subject of heavenly intervention. “Our Lady of Valle Crucis,” he said, “has melted many hearts, black with appalling sins, but her power has never been more miraculous than in the case of Edwardus filius Yeo.”

Rhisiart was too much perturbed by the extreme stuffiness of the sacristy, and by wondering whether what was obviously woman’s work being done there upon these embroidered vestments was a penance, to feel much inquisitiveness about the bones in the chapel. “God forgive us all!” he murmured watching the exquisite measures being taken to mend and clean a certain pontifical garment, through whose embroidered purple, to all appearance, Caesar himself might have been stabbed to death.

“Those poor fellows!” he thought. “They must feel like those wretched moths Modry used to catch and kill in my blankets at home.”

But the Lollard was totally unaffected either by the mustiness of the place or by the patience of the men doing that women’s work. He still went on sounding the monk about the sins of the son of Yeo. “Do you mean to tell me that Our Lady protected a rascal like that by a miracle?”

The monk’s face lit up. To be permitted — and in the presence of these penitential colleagues — to argue with a heretic in defence of the maternal clemency of the Mother of God was an unlooked for gift from Heaven.

“Surely all good Catholics must feel that the greater the sin the more wonderful the divine mercy?”

“Blessed is the intercession of the Holy Virgin,” said the Lollard, “but the Son of God alone, in the power of the Father and of the Spirit, can give absolution.”

The brow of the little monk beneath his big tonsured head knitted itself into wrinkles of incontrovertible logic as he set out to explain that just as the Vicar of Christ and the Priests of Holy Church have power on earth to forgive sins, so it is impossible not to suppose that the same power —

But our friend could think of nothing but these sacristy monks. "They're like those pictures in our new Cathedral window," he said to himself. No, they didn't once raise their eyes while this dialogue proceeded, though there was a faint shuffling of sandalled feet on the stone floor. "They'll chatter about it like magpies, I warrant, as soon as they get to their dormitory."

But a great booming voice interrupted the colloquy, and there in the doorway leading from the sacristy to the library stood Prior Bevan himself! He was a big, burly middle-aged man of over six feet, with a large, plump, unruffled visage, small searching eyes, and a jaw like the prow of a river barge.

Rhisiart made a little stiff obeisance and went boldly up to him. "I am the Baron of Glyndyfrdwy's cousin," he began, "and in obedience to Abbot Cust's message I have brought—"

But the Prior's deep voice intervened. "Just so, just so, exactly so," he bellowed. "You, sir, are Rhisiart ab Owen of Oxford, and you, sir, are Walter Brut of the Manor of Lyde, near the City of Hereford, lately under trial for heresy by your Bishop." He paused for a moment, while his piercing, screwed-up little eyes moved from person to person among everybody in sight.

"Abbot Cust is in bad health, in bad health," he went on. "It is to be feared he may have to leave tomorrow's court as well as tomorrow's chapter to me, leave 'em to me. We must pray that it may not be so; but it looks as if it would be so, as if it would be so." Prior Bevan's habit of repeating the final words of every sentence struck our friend as curiously disconcerting. It was as if he were dragging in to his support, to crown his most casual utterance, a great thundering echo from some invisible judgment-seat. You might presume to contradict that barging jaw and those imperative eyes; but there would still remain this portentous echo to bring you down.

“Father Pascentius,” he proceeded, “though engaged with a novice in his cell, engaged with a novice in his cell, is ready to receive you both. He will prepare you for the court tomorrow with a few little necessary questions, little necessary questions; and after that you will retire to the guest-house for sleep, for sleep. The Lord be with you, Master Rhisiart, and the Lord be with you, Master Brut — *ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum!”* And with this rather ambiguous last word for the benefit of the Lollard, and some low-voiced instructions to their guide, the Prior walked solemnly past them and entered the church.

Their guide now led them past a little alcove at the end of the stuffy sacristy which served for a library. Master Brut allowed his unruffled countenance to relax into a sly smile in our friend’s direction and even into a profane wink; for the collection of folios presented to their eyes was very meagre, not a twentieth part of the books they’d observed in the Astrologer’s chamber at Glyndyfrdwy.

One young monk, who cast down his eyes at their approach just as the sacristy ones had done, was engaged with a camel’s hair brush and a pot of glue over a volume in worse condition even than the vestment they had just seen.

Their guide, in the quick, subtle manner acquired by living so long and so silently cheek by jowl with other men, detected in a second what they felt and hurried to explain that all the real treasures of their collection had been conveyed to Father Pascentius’ cell to assist him in his labours upon Saint Thomas.

Out into the cloisters the little man now led them; and since these pleasantly-vaulted promenades occupied only two sides of a spacious lawn with a clear fountain in its centre both our travellers paused in admiration. On a stone bench, covered with a piece of well-worn matting, sat a couple of monks, who had evidently just come in from working in the fields and were contentedly resting themselves; and the sight of these men gave our friend a much happier impression of Valle Crucis than anything he'd yet seen.

Quick as ever to catch their mood their guide approached these men who rose at once and greeted them with frank, easy, natural simplicity. "He's not had time to give them the least hint," thought our analytical friend. "It must be the open air."

But after the conversation had drifted to the special devotion to agricultural pursuit of the great Cistercian Order, the thought did begin to insinuate itself into our lad's suspicious brain that it was not by a mere accident that these tonsured farmers should at that exact moment have been resting in the cloisters. Receiving an easy and almost secular farewell from these new acquaintances they were now led up a narrow flight of steps to the monks' dormitory. Through this they passed quickly, all too quickly for Rhisiart's taste, for he was beginning to compose in his mind a more succinct and effective address to their friend with the Phorkyad eye than he had as yet been able to deliver, and those agreeable cubicles each with its own especial window and breviary-shelf pleased and attracted him not a little. "How glad I would be," he thought, "when the bell rang for bed in this busy place!"

But they now reached a doorway at the head of a much smaller and more secretive-looking flight of steps than the one they'd come up, and at this door their guide deserted them; only turning to inform them, as he disappeared down this narrow descent, that it led directly into the church.

The cell of Father Pascentius, who was evidently a favoured personage, was of considerable size, and, as their guide had hinted, contained more books than the whole of that collection at the end of the sacristy. He was seated at his desk before a beautiful transcript of the works of Saint Bonaventura, and by his side stood a handsome boy of about fifteen for whom he had obviously been translating, and no doubt criticizing, the work before them. He greeted them warmly enough, but didn't rise from his seat. Indeed, instead of doing so, he put his arm round the boy's waist and asked him a question about the passage they had been studying.

The boy, naturally enough, found it embarrassing to be thus catechized before two strange young men, and blushed and blundered in his reply; but instead of releasing him in the presence of these signs of nervousness, the Father seemed to take pleasure in his discomfort, and pressed him with further questions.

Finally, just as Rhisiart had reached in his mind the climax of what he was about to say, the theologian asked the boy why he was in such a hurry to be gone.

This time the lad answered earnestly and to the point. "There's an archery-match at the Tassel to-night, Father, and Davy Gam is giving a new bow to the winner, and I promised to go."

"To go with whom?"

"With Sieffre of Dyffryn Clwyd, Father!"

"With that young rogue; eh? Well, I'm sure — I don't know. Didn't I say I was afraid I might have to keep you in to-night?"

"Yes, Father."

"Well, I'm sure — I don't know."

The boy's lips trembled. Like a wild bird he glanced at the narrow window and then down at the great book on the desk.

"What do you think these gentlemen would say if they knew why you may have to give up the archery-match to-night?"

The blood rushed to the boy's cheeks and he hung his head.

"Look at me, Griff!"

But Griff only bent lower.

"Well, off you go! But remember—"

Rhisiart moved aside to let the lad reach the door, and when he was gone Father Pascentius gave utterance to a heavy sigh.

"Well," he repeated, motioning his visitors to be seated, "well — I'm sure — I don't know. But now to business, to business, as the Prior would say. *Your* case" — and he turned his black eyes on our friend— "is more simple *than yours"* — and he turned them on the Lollard— "but it's clear you both have come into this country at the same summons as brought Father Rheinalt and me to Glyndyfrdwy the other night. Now, of that, my sons, I would say nothing, if I were you, when we meet at the court tomorrow. Owen has his friends here, of whom as you know I am one, and he has his enemies, among whom, as you may not know, is our good Prior. But Owen's quarrel won't come up at the court tomorrow, unless either of you are unwise enough to bring it up. But you, Master Rhisiart, will have to defend yourself from the charge of breaking the King's peace in the matter of Brother Huw. That's the charge that the King's friends at the Tassel and my lord Fitz-Alan of Chirk will bring against you; and considering that Hugh Burnell and his son Denis and the yeomen of a couple of shires are encamped only half a mile away, it's a serious charge." He paused and, lifting up one of the vellum covers of the great book under his hand, produced a paper of notes, which he proceeded to scan.

“The line I would suggest you take in your defence, my son, is that you were moved by your zeal for Holy Church to protest against the impiety of Master Simon in taking it upon himself to put to death a Brother of Saint Francis without trial before the proper authorities. Our house has already many points of litigation against the Earl of Arundel, and if you steadily repeat in court, ‘I drew my sword for the rights of Valle Crucis,’ and refuse to discuss anything else, our Abbot — I should say our Prior — will be forced to defend you.”

Rhisiart bowed, swallowed with an effort the eloquent speech he had been composing, and expressed his becoming gratitude.

“And now,” said Father Pascentius, referring again to his notes, “having decided that we’ll keep our Welsh controversy out of it altogether, and in the matter of Brother Huw that we appeal to the privileges of the Church, it remains, Master Brut, to arrange your line of defence.

“Now I would suggest,” and he settled his unwieldy form more comfortably in his seat and stretched out his legs, “that you answer me, here and now, a few crucial questions and that — when we’ve prepared your answers — I write them down. Is that your pleasure, my son?”

“Hereafter as may be,” replied the cautious heretic.

“I have before me,” continued Father Pascentius, “the opinions of certain followers of the deceased Master Wycliffe, and I will take the most questionable of these opinions in due order. Firstly, John Becket of London holds and maintains that Christian baptism is of no value if done by a priest living in mortal sin. Do you, my good son, separate yourself entirely and absolutely from this unphilosophical and crazy notion? For what parent anxious to save the soul of his child would think of bothering himself about the life of the officiating priest — the mere medium of the divine mercy?”

"I certainly can, Father," replied the Lollard, "absolutely and entirely separate myself from this opinion."

Rhisiart looked out of the window, feeling as weary of all this as the youthful Griff. And since the window opened upon the deep well-stocked fish-pond and since standing in a flat-bottomed boat, his clothes fastened about his waist and his legs bare, was an excited monk with a rod and a great net, his thoughts were agreeably distracted.

But Father Pascentius continued. "Secondly, we have the opinion of one John Purvey, a friend of Master Wycliffe, that decisions of Popes and councils have no value unless they are grounded expressly on Holy Scripture or on reason and should be publicly burnt as heretical. Now, Master Brut, do you absolutely and entirely separate yourself from this un-Catholic view, which, as you can clearly see, destroys the tradition of the Church, the authority of the Father, the unity of our communion with the departed, and the faith once for all delivered to the Saints?"

Rhisiart was drawn back sharp from the window by the abrupt tone of his comrade's answer: "I do not!" said the Lollard firmly. Father Pascentius was not in the least perturbed.

"Quite right," he said. "I can see you are a cautious student of the necessary antinomies and contradictory truths in our Holy Faith! I can see that you recognize the profound danger of emphasizing any single aspect of Catholic Doctrine lest other aspects, no less important, should be disparaged. There have been, and no student of history can deny it, local councils and individual Pontiffs whose arbitrary and capricious decrees have been implicitly, if not explicitly, burnt as heretical by a more universal authority. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum,* and it is only by the patience of the Holy Spirit and by the patience of Rome in holding back her decisions till the *orbis terrarum* has spoken that this grave danger of arbitrary caprice in local councils and individual Popes is avoided. You see, Master, my question concerning this man's heresy was designed to test your theological balance. Had you replied too hastily in an unqualified dissent from Master Purvey's opinion I would have felt anxiety lest you might fall into the opposite heresy of judging truth by vulgar majorities. The Catholic Faith is the great sublimator and subsumer of the inevitable contradictions and paradoxes of the human mind. To balance her *orbis terrarum* she has her *Athanasius Contra Mundum.* She is at once the centre and the circumference wherein the pendulum of our poor fallible reason swings.

"I know well, Master Brut, that with your well-balanced nature you are fully aware of the ferocious and fanatical extremes into which reason and logic can lead us. Isn't it much more likely that the critical thought of so many generations of wise and learned men, giving articulation to the inspired piety of the people, should be in the right of it rather than the arbitrary opinions of John Purvey?"

Rhisiart nodded at his obstinate companion with such a frown on his narrow Norman visage and his lips sucked in to such an extent that his face took in the appearance of the handle of a carved walking-stick.

"Surely," his look said, "you cannot follow a Jackanapes Purvey against the shrewd legal wisdom of universal common-sense?"

But the Lollard was unshaken. "I cannot separate myself," he repeated, "from Master Purvey's opinion that in the Holy Scriptures, reasonably interpreted, is to be found the Truth."

"But not the only truth, my son! And not the most important truth. The Church as the Bride of Christ can answer you, my dear lad, in Christ's own words. Was He referring to our poor, crazy, logical faculty when He said, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life?' But let me pass to another opinion of this disciple of Wycliffe — No! no — I beg his pardon! — we return again here to John Becket who certainly disgraced his martyred namesake when he maintained the following amazing thesis: that his own teaching — the teaching of this worthy citizen of London — was more likely to be edifying to others and pleasing to God than all the teaching of the Church in all previous times."

The Lollard smiled at this. "Not having heard Master Becket's discourses, Father, I cannot say; but I confess I think the good gentleman's tone does smack a little of self-conceit."

Father Pascentius, without a movement of his great heavy body, turned his burning eyes once more upon his notes.

"Do you, my son," he began again, "utterly and absolutely separate yourself from the opinion of William Chatrys, otherwise called Sawtry, priest of Kings Lynn, when he maintains that after the words of consecration the bread remains bread and nothing more? This, my son, I needn't point out to you, is an opinion which cuts at the very root of our Holy Religion. Surely, surely my dear child, you cannot subscribe to such a denial of the supreme article of our Faith?"

To Rhisiart's amazement Master Brut hesitated before replying. This was a serious shock to our friend, who thought that only Mohammedans, Turks and Chinamen refused to believe in the Miracle of the Mass. Then very slowly, word by solemn word, as if he were sealing each syllable with his blood, the Wycliffite answered. "It remains bread, but bread plus the body of Christ. It does not cease to be bread, but it remains holy, true, and the Bread of Life. That I believe to be the very body of Christ."

Never had Rhisiart seen such dark fire in any human eyes as that which shone from the eyes of Father Pascentius as he gazed at and through the pale but unruffled countenance before him.

But he spoke gently and even tenderly. “You have weighed your words well, my son, and if you will allow me I will make a note of them exactly as you uttered them.” He bent over his desk and wrote, and when he’d finished he repeated the words to the accused and asked him if they were correct.

Master Brut, with a faint smile, inclined his head.

Rhisiart began to feel extremely uncomfortable. Matters were getting out of control and he was being carried out of his depth. He stared at the paper in the monk’s hand as if it had been a death-warrant, while a rush of confused images swept through his brain of historic occasions when a few scrawls upon a bit of parchment had meant life or death.

“Thank you, my son,” murmured Father Pascentius, folding up the paper; “and now I will tell you frankly what I think. You weighed your words so well that I think it depends entirely upon the prelate who judges your case. In the same hands as those in which the unfortunate Master Sawtry found himself you would be condemned. Henry Spencer, the Bishop of Norfolk, has declared his intention as is well known, of making all you Gospel-men ‘hop headless,’ as he is pleased to put it, ‘and fry-faggots,’ and Archbishop Arundel is of the same kidney. Our good Bishop, however, Bishop Trevor of St. Asaph, is totally averse to such unintelligent harshness. He’s a theologian, not a bully; and he would at once remember all the profound metaphysical issues involved, relative to the change of ‘substance’ and the continuity of ‘accidents’ to which your words obviously refer.

“The unlucky thing is — I speak to you two lads as a fellow Welshman — that our good Prior is looking for the Archbishop’s word with the Holy Father in regard to filling our Abbot’s place when he leaves us. With Abbot Cust, who also is a theologian and well read in the metaphysic of the schools, you would be perfectly safe. But I doubt—” He hesitated and pondered. “However,” he went on, with a quick glance at door and window, and with the flicker of a conspirator’s smile, “we three are sworn adherents of Owen, and Owen has taken a very natural fancy to you both, and, after all, the bread does retain, to our relative and fallible senses, the ‘accidents’ of bread, and if our old gentleman” — he paused and, folding his hands on his great belly, gazed at the vaulted roof “could, perhaps, see you to-night, he might, sick as he is, be persuaded to give our ambitious Prior” — here he unclasped his hands and leaned heavily forward over the great book— “a very considerable — shock.”

There was a deep silence among them for a second or two, while there came through the narrow window the brooding voice of a distant wood-pigeon. Then Father Pascentius lifted up the vellum cover of Saint Bonaventura and dropped it, and again lifted it up and again dropped it, and while the wood-pigeon, in a voice soft as the divine afflatus of a scholastic philosophy as yet unrevealed to the wisest, was answered by the voice of its mate, he leant back once more in his chair. He now appeared to be surveying an alien speck upon the noble parchment before him, a speck that may have been the result of a sneeze of his own but more probably was caused by Griff’s distress over the complexities of seraphic argument.

Touching this speck upon the great tome as if it had been a fairy’s seal he now addressed his visitors with an air of such pensive casualness that it made them feel as if the arrival of a hundred heretics from Hereford was less important than the dropping of a single tear upon Saint Bonaventura.

“Suppose somebody,” he murmured, looking down at the tip of the plump finger he had placed upon this small speck, “suppose somebody should — as is of course quite easy in a community like ours — have been whispering for several days in a certain old gentleman’s ear that since he has to die anyhow he might just as well spend his last breath check-mating the English? Isn’t it possible that when tomorrow comes such an old gentleman might decide to hold his court in person? I ask you, isn't it just possible he might?"

Though to all appearance it was of the mark left by Griffs tear that the Father asked this question, Rhisiart hastened to prolong the topic by boldly enquiring how it came about that with such a patriotic influence at Abbot Cust's elbow this drastic document from the Abbey had reached Owen that morning.

The burning Phorkyad eyes were raised at this, and there was a significant pause.

"Well, I'll be frank with you, son," said the theologian. And after what seemed a suspicious glance in the direction of an eaves-dropping wood-pigeon, he went on gravely. "The King must have heard something in Scotland. And after our experience of Owen's discretion last night can we wonder at it? At any rate, here is Hugh Burnell, a sturdy Shropshire squire and, let me tell you, a man worth a dozen of these border-barons, encamped at Oswestry. It was from his camp and with a guard of his bowmen that this Italian arrived, not only a go-between, as Master Young guessed, between Rome and King Hal, but, as our Prior soon discovered, between Rome and the Archbishop.

"The Prior snatched at this grand chance. He was up all last night sending messengers and letters; and there was nothing for the Abbot to do but to implore Owen to yield on every point. I myself added a note to Father Rheinalt with a hint about Huw and the Maid and this Ruthin woman — aye, my lads, but there's been a fuss about *her.* Grey's people were over here before dawn making their complaint — but now that he's sent you two as well and I never thought he'd wit enough for that — we may, if the old man can be brought to the scratch, give Owen the breathing-space he needs."

Rhisiart's thin face had grown by this time dark red with excitement. Here he was, playing a living, nay! a leading part in momentous, in historic transactions!

"Father!" he burst out. "Was Master Young right in thinking so strongly that Owen ought to wait?"

But the wily theologian evidently felt he had gone far enough in his talk with these simple young men. He rose ponderously from his seat.

"By my confession!" he cried in Welsh, using a phrase familiar to Rhisiart in Modry's tales, "I'll chance it! Come along, Masters. We'll pay a visit to the old man!" Thrusting his notes into the pocket of his habit, and opening the door with caution, he conducted them down a short passage-way to an airy platform, where half-a-dozen winding steps led up to the private rooms of the Abbot of Valle Crucis.

Without knocking, and moving as quietly as his great bulk permitted, the monk opened the door of his Superior's ante-room. Here they were met by an intelligent-looking lay-brother who seemed less surprised at their appearance than might have been expected. "He's intended to do this all the time!" thought our astute friend.

"Brother Gerald is studying medicine," remarked the theologian, introducing the man in a series of low whispers. "How is he to-night?"

The lay-brother shook his head. "He *will* get up," he whispered. "You'll find him reading by his fire. He's eaten nothing. He can't sleep. Does" — he paused and jerked his head in the direction of the dormitory— "he know you've brought them?"

Father Pascentius made his characteristic gesture of wiping out all human follies and reducing the whole troublesome drama of existence to kindly nothingness. "Who knows what he knows?" he murmured. "At any rate, *here we are*! May we go straight in?"

Brother Gerald glanced quickly at the young men as much as to say, “You see what he is! You see what little good it would do for me to protest!” and moving straight across the ante-room, opened the inner door.

Rhisiart was quite taken aback by the simplicity of Abbot Cust’s cell. It was much smaller than Father Pascentius’ study. A good many books, however, chiefly of an antique devotional nature, though our alert Oxonian did notice a dilapidated and evidently much-studied Virgil, occupied two sides of the little room. Next to the window, which was filled with dark reddish-coloured glass, hung a large wooden crucifix, of somewhat ghastly realism upon the rude features of whose victim flickered the light of a couple of rustic candles both of which were dripping upon their iron sconces.

Unlike any ecclesiastic our friend had ever seen, the frail figure that rose from the hearth to greet them wore a straggly beard. This beard was of a reddish tint, and combined with the extreme pallor of the man’s emaciated countenance and the fragility of his diminutive frame, it gave him the appearance of a small fish, a holy and red-finned roach, the Abbot of the Fish-Pond. It was his enormous learning and his mystical piety that had been the cause of his rise to an Abbot’s throne; but his appointment had been much more popular with the Welsh than with the great barons of the border. Chirk and Ruthin and Dinas Bran were all delighted when the formidable Prior, as well adapted to this difficult world as Abbot Cust was ill-adapted, began to harry and drive and dominate and overawe this gentle creature of another element.

“What a contrast to our old friend of Caerleon!” thought the young men; but they both knelt down with unsimulated humility before this abject little figure, not so much because he was reported to be the most learned Abbot in Wales as because there was something about him suggesting that his days were near their end.

"This is going to be," said our friend to himself, "the most important conversation I've ever had in my life!" But Father Pascentius had barely seated himself opposite the Abbot, with the medical lay-brother and the two visitors established on wooden stools between them, when a sound that caught the quick ears of Brother Gerald caused him to jump to his feet and hasten through both the doors into the little passage from which they had entered.

The Abbot showed so much anxiety over this new disturbance that Rhisiart wondered if he didn't fear the intrusion of the formidable Prior, and he noticed that even Father Pascentius fell silent.

"Is it the Prior?" seemed indeed to be what they were all thinking; and for several minutes, as people do when something menacing is threatened, they all swung round and stared at the door.

The general tension was increased rather than relaxed when Brother Gerald hurriedly returned with a grave face.

"It's Mistress Lowri," he announced, bowing quickly to the Abbot and glancing at Father Pascentius. "I told her my Lord Abbot was too ill to see her in his reception-room and I told her it was against our rule for her to see him here; but she says it's a matter affecting the honour of the house and a matter too, if I understood her correctly, relating to tomorrow's court." He now turned point-blank to the sick man. "She refused to be satisfied until I told you, my Lord, that the news she brought was of such importance that —"

Rising with some effort from his chair Abbot Cust looked appealingly at Father Pascentius.

"Where is she now?" the latter enquired of the messenger.

"In my Lord's reception-room."

"Have any of the Fathers seen her?"

"I don't think so, Father. She came straight through the garden to my Lord's postern, and Brother Iorwerth let her in."

"Are all the Fathers in the church?"

"I think so, Father."

The theologian turned to the Abbot. "It almost seems to me, my Lord," he said, "that this *would be* an occasion for relaxing our rule. If you were well enough you would certainly go down to your reception-room. And since it's an affair for your court tomorrow—" He paused, as Abbot Cust sank back with a nervous spasm into his chair, and then added, "You remember you saw the Lady Charlton here once, and we all felt grateful to you for stretching a point when so much depended—"

"But Mistress Lowri!" gasped the sick man.

Father Pascentius rose. "I will take the full responsibility, my Lord, and if the Prior—"

The mention of his troublesome subordinate seemed to rouse the old man and he spoke in a tone of defiant authority. "Go and fetch her yourself, Father. My days are numbered." And then as if the fact of having asserted himself in the small matter of breaking a monastic rule gave him courage for a bolder plunge, he looked challengingly at his medical attendant and announced in a trembling voice, "If it kills me, Brother, I shall preside over our court myself tomorrow."

Father Pascentius gave a quick glance at the Lollard and left the room. In his absence, Abbot Cust seemed to become a different person. He sighed, he shrugged his feeble shoulders, he rubbed his face with his thin hands. And then he glanced almost humorously at his visitors.

"Mistress Lowri," he said, "is a good Welshwoman and a true ally of Owen's. She is living — *miserere nobis* — in venial, though let us hope not in mortal, sin; but I am not without hope for her. Her daughter is a good girl — a very good girl — and I don't want — I don't want when I'm so near my own last account — to break the bruised flax!"

"My Lord," began Rhisiart boldly, "I don't know if they've told you that it was to save Brother Huw from being burnt, burnt illegally, burnt contrary to your own jurisdiction by Master Simon of Chirk, that we, in company with the Abbot of Caerleon—"

Abbot Cust raised his hand to stop him. "I know," he murmured, "I know, my son." And then with a heavy sigh, "This burning for heresy is a new thing in our land. There have been cases — I suppose there are cases — but I don't like it, I don't like it!"

"Are we to blame the present King, my Lord," interjected Master Brut eagerly, "or is the Archbishop—"

The Abbot gave him a long, sad, weary look. "These are dark times, my son, dark and cruel times; and I can well see that if our rulers resort to such methods it is natural that violent and godless men like Master Simon will take upon themselves—"

"But in some matters, my Lord," broke in Rhisiart, full of boyish pride at being permitted to talk freely with a mitred Abbot, "our ways are better, aren't they, than our fathers' before us? We saw just now in the church, my Lord, the tomb of Edwardus filius Yeo; and our guide informed us—"

Abbot Cust's withered face brightened perceptibly. It was clearly an immense relief to him to pass from modern persecution to mediaeval crime. "Ah, my dear child!" he said, assuming the joyful expression of a scholarly historian, "we are dealing here with a most interesting subject!" He moved in his chair as he spoke and leaning forward from its edge warmed his bony fingers over the fire. He forgot the chapter house, he forgot Master Simon, he forgot Mistress Lowri. He became a passionate Welsh archaeologist proud of the darkest secrets of his country's mythical past. "From what I can gather," he began, "it seems that this particular benefactor of ours was one of these curious disciples of our great Saint Derfel. I suppose you lads have never heard of Saint Derfel and his Horse? Well, for many hundreds of years this curious Being has been the object of what to my mind is undoubtedly a most interesting heathen cult. The Church of our ancestors, as I always say, was wise in assuming the canonization of this queer figure, though I doubt myself whether the Holy Father had anything to do with it!

"I have myself — but alas! I shall die without finishing my notes — made some slight investigations into this extraordinary subject, and it appears," and he quoted a Latin author unknown to either of his hearers, "it appears that not only was the deflowering of young virgins a definite part of the worship of this ancient Welsh god, but that certain unscrupulous men made use of this dark tradition to satisfy their unholy desire under the guise of priests — no! I mustn't say priests — under the guise of disciples, of this singular Personage and his Horse. It was, I understand, as one of the worst of such offenders that this 'Edwardus,' who later was privileged to decorate our Lady chapel, was found guilty. And the curious thing is, my dear boys, that there still survive, in out-of-the-way districts of this country, ignorant and simple people who—"

But Master Brut could contain himself no longer. For some while now Rhisiart had been aware that though the Lollard's eyes were fixed with absorbed interest on the aged antiquary, he had begun scraping the floor with his feet and muttering "um-um-um-um" without knowing he was doing it.

“Pardon me, my Lord,” he cried, his eyes eager and stern and grave under his smooth brow, “but how can the Church tolerate such evil superstitions? How can you, my Lord, tolerate them?”

“I don’t — quite — follow you, my son,” and the old man sighed and leaned back in his chair.

The Lollard began afresh: “Isn’t all this making of saints out of devils part of the same concessions to evil as the selling of Indulgences and the preserving of relics, and the tyrannical claims of messengers from Rome like that Italian last night?”

“But, my son, my son,” murmured the old man, “Saint Derfel and his Horse are like Bran and his Crow, and like Rhiannon and her Birds. The Church in her wisdom has always sought to consecrate rather than to destroy; and as Father Pascentius writes in some notes upon Saint Thomas that I’ve had the benefit of reading, the ultimate nature of the Deity, what He is Absolutely in Himself, must be forever unknown to our finite intelligence. Every good Catholic is, in this absolute sense, in the dark, and must ever be in the dark, about God. But the Church has always been tender and indulgent to the instincts of awe and worship, even where—”

But in a voice vibrant with emotion the Lollard interrupted him. “With humble submission, my Lord,” he said, “it remains that — whatever the Church teaches — we possess, as Saint Paul says, the mind of Christ.”

The Abbot sighed heavily; more, Rhisiart was certain, from anxiety as to the fate of this audacious free-thinker than from any personal irritation. Evidently desirous of dodging any further allusion to the desperate psychologizing of Saint Paul, the old man now changed his tone. “But apart from theology,” he pleaded, “surely you, my son, as a good Welshman, must feel that these old legends have played, and will play again, an important role in the preservation of our national spirit?”

Rhisiart, thinking of all that Modry's tales had done for himself, threw in his word at this: "Yes, surely, Walter! Yes, surely!"

But Master Brut, undeterred, flung out his deepest thought. "Not in our superstitions," he cried, "but in our language is the salvation of our race; and I hope a time will come when in our own tongue and in our own mountains the Gospel of Christ will so stir Wales that once again as in the days of Saint David—"

The Abbot lifted his hand. "My son, my son!" he groaned; and for a moment he closed his eyes, and Rhisiart was sure he was praying for this misguided and unbalanced soul. But once more, while Brother Gerald glared indignantly at the presumptuous heretic, the old man returned to his favourite topic. "It must be my blundering exposition of this old Derfel cult," he said, "that leads you to speak as you do. I have gone very deeply into it and I can assure you—"

But to our friend's disgust, though to the obvious relief of the lay-brother who evidently regarded these antiquarian predilections as a sign of his patient's approaching end, the door now opened to admit not only Father Pascentius and Mistress Lowri, but a roughly accoutred burly gentleman whose genial and brusque manners over-rode every soul present. It was pitiful to Rhisiart to see the collapse of the old prelate to whom he had been listening with such rapt respect.

Abbot Cust fell back in his chair without the heart to do more than make a weak, faint gesture with his hand to bid them all be seated.

But the Englishman, standing erect in his cross-gartered hose, his great leather jerkin, his muddy shoes with their gleaming spurs and his broad leather belt with its couple of hunting-knives, took complete possession of the situation. He was certainly one of the most good-natured magnates that our friend had ever seen. His broad red cheeks, big nose and shrewd grey eyes were quite spoilt from the point of view of good looks by certain noticeable smallpox scars, but the honest friendliness of his smile, in spite of the fact that most of his front teeth had been knocked out in quarter-staff, made him a person — Rhisiart felt at once — whom even as your enemy you couldn't hate!

He had been talking to Mistress Lowri as he crossed the ante-room, and now having bent the knee to the silent Abbot whose bearded chin had sunk down upon his chest, he went on with what he'd been saying to her, though out of respect for the sick man in a much lower tone of voice.

The lady's dark eyes, after her quick obeisance to the Abbot, flashed provocatively at Rhisiart, and her red lips parted in a mocking smile; and all the while she was listening to the Salopian Sheriff's words she concentrated upon our friend, disregarding everybody else. These beguiling advances, although lips and eyes were alone employed, were anything but wasted. Our friend's inner consciousness went promptly whirling off upon an imaginary future in which he was the cause of sundry desperate and distracting quarrels between a mother and a daughter. Sheriff Burnell was, it seems, half-rallying and half-threatening the lady. He kept chaffing her about his son's infatuation, he kept chaffing her about her infatuation for Owen, and all the while he kept referring to her purpose in coming so secretly to the Abbey, which apparently concerned the fate of her husband, Master Simon.

"But you know where he is," Burnell was saying. "And you could lay hands on him if Denis gave you the men and my Lord here gave you the licence. But what would you do with him when you got him? He's your lawful husband, isn't he? Starve him to death at the foot of Denis's bed? That's the point, isn't it, my Lord?" and he turned to the comatose figure in the chair. "That's the point, isn't it, Father?" and he warded off with unruffled aplomb the black fire that was being shot at him from beneath the brows of the theologian. “King Harry wants his liege subjects to live in peace, and you, reverend Fathers, want all of us husbands and wives to consort amiably and piously together for the procreation of loyal, faithful, baptized and Christian souls! But the point in this case, it seems to me, is that the King’s justice, of which Hugh Burnell, not Denis Burnell, is the custodian, has a claim upon the body and goods of Master Simon, commonly called the Hog, that must precede the claim of his espoused wife, even though she burns to have the custody of him, and even though she is the friend of the Constable of Dinas Bran. What do you say, Father?”

Father Pascentius began his wily handling of the situation by imploring the Sheriff to sit down.

And the man *did* sit down, with a great deal of creaking of his leather attire and not a little scraping of his spurs on the floor; and he sat down opposite the comatose Abbot, upon whose narrow forehead, white as ivory, the firelight was flickering.

But having very sagaciously got the sturdy Salopian into a deep seat by a warm fire and opposite a nodding old man, with knuckles that clutched the arms of his chair like gleaming bones, Father Pascentius whispered something to Brother Gerald, who darted to a little cupboard in the wall and brought out a small gold vessel, which he filled from a larger vessel in the same recess and presented to Sheriff Burnell.

The Salopian smiled benevolently at the whole company, raised the gold vessel to his face, smelt it, held it up towards the unnoticing head opposite him, and disposed of half of it in a gulp. But so strong was the wine that even this seasoned drinker spluttered a little as it went down and spilled a few purple drops upon his brown leather jerkin.

“Malmsey?” he chuckled, smiling at Father Pascentius.

“The oldest in Wales,” replied the commentator upon Saint Thomas. “The King has no better. The Archbishop none so good.”

The Sheriff glanced at the two young men. “Once in a way — to the Lord Abbot of Valle Crucis — English or Welsh — guilty or not guilty — will you fill for the lads?”

At a nod from the Father the troubled and outraged Gerald refilled the gold beaker; and between them the Lollard and Rhisiart drained it to the dregs.

“To my Lord Abbot!” they cried in turn.

Something in their warm heart-felt youthful tones reached the old man in his prostration, and raising his hand with an effort, *“Pax vobiscum, filii carissimi!”* he whispered.

While this was going on, Mistress Lowri with a burning spot in each of her white cheeks, but with her beautiful head modestly cast down, had seated herself on the floor close to the old man’s feet; and the Abbot now, with a gesture that was evidently spontaneous, laid his hand for an instant on her bent head.

“Be as good a woman, daughter,” he murmured, “as your child is a good girl.” The head he had touched with its dusky weight of fragrant hair sank still lower.

Rhisiart couldn’t see her face but he was bewitched by the manner in which, as her dark riding-cloak fell back, the folds of her green-and-gold gown settled themselves about her crouching limbs.

“Pray for all — for all the” — murmured the old man softly— “for all the faithful departed — *et videbit omnis caro salutare Dei.”*

In the silence that fell upon them after this Rhisiart could catch, far away in the Church below, the deep-voiced intoning of the monks.

The rich wine had already begun to go to the boy’s head, for he had had nothing to eat since their meal in the Saracen’s chamber; but as he sat there on his stool close to his comrade, while Father Pascentius on one side of the fire and Brother Gerald on the other looked from the Abbot to the Sheriff and from the Sheriff to the Abbot, and the ghastly face upon the wooden cross stared reproachfully upon them all, a deep quiescence fell upon him, and an indescribable feeling possessed him that was profoundly sad and yet in some strange way comforting and sweet.

Abbot Cust was lying back in his chair now with his eyes closed and his hands folded, breathing softly.

“My Lord sleeps,” whispered the careful Brother.

“Come, Father,” said the robust Salopian, looking up at the theologian, “you are a sensible Welshman as I am a sensible Englishman. We’re not young hot-heads like these lads here; and we’re no — God rest my poor Bessy’s soul! — no avengers of injury!” Saying this he glanced at the woman on the floor, whose own eyes were fixed on those of the dazed Rhisiart who was trying to defend himself from them by calling up the image of Tegolin.

“Well, Father,” he went on, “putting aside all the Norman legalities so dear to your good Prior, what’s to be done with all these hostages Glendourdy’s given up? I would suggest, as a plain servant of His Majesty, that we pack them all off to-night before my Lords of Chirk and Ruthin arrive, and before little Davy at the Tassel gets wind of it, straight to my son in Dinas Bran. There they’ll simply be prisoners at the King’s pleasure, and not Welshmen in the hands of Lord Marchers. I had definite authority from the King to raise these troops from his loyal county of Salop; and I had orders to use them at my own discretion. Grey and Fitz-Alan are as jealous of each other as wolf-hounds. Grey had the King’s ear in Scotland and has now posted home with the hope of catching your friend Owen off-guard. But Owen by his submission to my Lord Abbot, and by handing over these people, has dished him neatly, and cut the ground under his feet. These lads are here" — and he glanced humorously at Rhisiart and the Lollard— "and your daughter and her Friar are here" — he looked at the lady on the floor — "and the Ruthin hussy's here, too. Now wouldn't the best thing for all concerned be to hurry off the whole lot of them under a strong guard of my Salopians, who care for none of these things, to my son at Dinas Bran? They'd be His Majesty's prisoners then under the care of His Majesty's Constable; and our good Prior down below will be as neatly cheated of his precious court-trial, which might end," and he gave the young men a shrewd and significant glance, "most unpleasantly; and Grey, with his friends at the Tassel, will be cheated of their revenge on Owen."

His long speech ended, the robust Englishman made an instinctive motion of his hand towards the golden beaker which either the Lollard or Rhisiart had placed on the floor between them; and Father Pascentius made a sign to Gerald to refill it.

While the Brother was thus engaged, Abbot Cust, to everyone's astonishment, opened his eyes and leaned forward. It was clear to them all that he had formed some definite resolution. But he sighed heavily before speaking, and murmured sadly, *"Usque quo Domine, sanctus et verus, non judicat et vindicas sanguinem nostrum?"* But after that, he straightened himself in his chair; and as if to reassure the perturbed Brother Gerald he deliberately twitched the end of his beard with his finger and thumb.

"If I agree to your demand, Sheriff," he said, "and allow you to take them to your son, will you swear on your word as a Shropshire gentleman and before all these present that you'll write to King Henry of Owen's submission, and that none of these people will be given up, save into the King's own hand, or into that of his Lord Deputy at Chester?"

The faithful Gerald was so agitated by this miracle of energy in his master that he spilled quite a quantity of the precious wine as he handed the cup to the Sheriff.

"Brother! Brother! Be careful!" pleaded Father Pascentius; and it struck Rhisiart's mind as quaintly characteristic of the commentator that at what was perhaps a life-and-death moment to some of them he should be fussing over spilt Malmsey.

But Hugh Burnell rose to his feet with the cup in his hand. "The King!" he murmured, tilting it to his lips. And then, with a wink at Mistress Lowri, *"Heddwch!"* he cried, using the historic word with which the bards proclaimed peace.

"And now," said Abbot Cust, with a faint smile, as his head sank against the back of his chair and his hands, too weak to pluck his beard again, lay like used-up gloves on his lap, "we won't torment our medical brother here any more. I know he has been long impatient to get us to bed."

The Sheriff bent one of his steel-protected knees to the ground, while our two friends knelt down completely.

"Bless us, my Lord!" prayed Rhisiart hoarsely.

"Gratia Domini nostri Jesu Christi cum vobis nobisque in saecula saeculorum!" whispered the old man, raising his fingers with an effort.

As he got up Rhisiart became aware that the smell of spilt Malmsey was mingled with the heavy fragrance of feminine hair. Mistress Lowri had risen to her feet and was standing by his side.

The Sheriff was asking Master Brut about the price of a yoke of oxen at Hereford fair and Father Pascentius was bending over the old man, so that the lady was able to whisper anything she pleased in our friend's dazed ear.

The Malmsey-fumes in our lad's head were still at work, and he thought to himself, as she drew off her glove and let her fingers rest for a second on the sleeve of his tunic, that he'd never seen such a slender waist. Certain unchaste words from some old voluptuous ballad about loosening a lady's zone came into his head.

"How can she be Tegolin's mother?" he wondered, as the image of the maid's boyish figure in her page's dress opposed itself to this Circean form, whose green-and-gold gown seemed to cling like a serpent's skin to her sides and to her flanks. All this while, as he was wondering what kind of fabric it could be that had the trick of displaying all the charms of her body with such tantalizing completeness, she was whispering to him that he need have no fear of Denis Burnell. "It'll just be a pleasant adventure for a brave boy like you," she said; "nor need your friend have any fear. The King is much more easygoing than any of these monks. They say he'd have let off these London heretics if it wasn't that the Archbishop keeps egging him on."

She paused and, with a gesture that made Rhisiart think of some woman in the tale of *Math fab Mathonwy,* slipped her fingers under her warm belt, as if to ease for a second its pressure against her waist.

"My daughter's such a little nun," she sighed. "Her only trouble'll be the nearness of her mother. I hope you aren't as virtuous as all that! What kind of a girl is this pet of young Grey's? They say he's half insane about her. Some men are like that. It's curious, isn't it? While a lad like you—"

"Mistress!" interrupted Hugh Burnell, "you'll have seen plenty enough of this young gentleman by the time the King pardons him. But remember — there's one thing that I won't allow — never mind what the Fathers say — and that's that you should get Master Simon into your hands. That I won’t have! I’m not so simple as not to know what you’re after.” He moved up quite close to her as he spoke. “Give me your fingers!” he commanded.

She obeyed him, meek as a maid.

“Burning — burning!” And he pretended to drop hastily and in horror the hand she’d given him. “you’ve been thinking of nothing else, you pretty one, day and night — I know you, if Denis doesn’t! — of what you’ll do to this husband of yours when you’ve—”

The Abbot’s voice broke in at this juncture, and to Rhisiart’s mind there was something at once awe-inspiring and grotesque about the look of that straggling beard and extended neck as he peered round the stooping figure of his attendant. “If you torment that wretched sinner, woman, or cause him to be tormented, to whom by your own will you were united, I swear to you, on the word of an old man about to meet his Judge, your soul shall burn in unquenchable fire!”

Our friend couldn’t help glancing at Mistress Lowri’s face when these terrible words had made a silence in the room; but not a feature quivered as she slightly inclined her head. “Her lips must be as hot and dry as her hands,” the boy thought; and as the idea of burning lips transferred itself to burning limbs, even if it were in the fire of Hell, his pulses beat to a yet wilder tune.

“What’s the matter with me?” he thought, as Father Pascentius came forward to usher them out. “Am I as wicked as this woman?” And all the way through the monk’s dormitory, and all the way down the stairs into the cloisters, till the chanting from the church reduced even Hugh Burnell to silence, our friend tried desperately to fathom this wickedness in himself. Why was it that when Tegolin slept with him under his sheepskin his feelings had been so gentle? They had been amorous feelings, too; but amorous with a tender, sweet, diffused sensation that seemed hardly more intense than what the girl herself must have felt!

But now, just because this woman's fingers were so dry and hot and the nerve of cruelty in her was so quivering, he was stirred to such a point that his knees knocked together as he helped her to descend the stairs.

When they reached the cloisters, however, and paused to listen to the chanting in the church, all the boy's feelings, both good and bad, vanished in a pressing physical need. He perceived that the Lollard made no bones about this natural necessity, but boldly retired — chanting or no chanting — behind a stone buttress that buried itself in the dark and dewy obscurity of that enclosed lawn, but our friend was far too shy to do this, and it was only when emerging from the cloisters into the paddock between the men's guest-house and the women's guest-house that he had the courage to leave them and seek the latrine in the former place.

It had struck his mind before, but never so much as now, how queer it was that a pressing physical need of this simple sort should be able to obliterate everything else. '"Twould be the same," he thought, "if I were on my way to be executed, or to see Lowri have her husband executed. It shows how Nature comes first. Comes before the most agitating drama — before all good and all evil, before *everything]"*

Returning to rejoin the others, who were waiting for the appearance of Tegolin and Alice, he passed — with his interest in life fully restored — the chief kitchen of the Abbey. He was surprised to find this building a good deal smaller than the one in his Oxford College; but how convenient it was, compared with that! He couldn't resist entering this place for a moment, the practical Norman in him being fascinated by such curious inventions. There were no less than three shining spits against the furnace, connected by an iron bar in such a manner that they could be turned at the same time by any small boy. This boy could stand, too — Rhisiart noticed — well out of the way of the cook when he was basting the meat. But the polished containers for disposing of the refuse were of such a scientific kind that our friend longed for Modry to see them. His mother had never taken any interest in such things, but he had listened to Modry, and watched her too, and he knew as well as anyone what modern contrivances in such a place meant!

There was nothing very much going on at that moment in the Valle Crucis kitchen. Rhisiart indeed found it deserted except for an elderly lay-brother from Scotland who was engaged in preparing a special kind of Scotch griddle-cake. This he laconically explained was for the supper of Prior Bevan who came from the Scotch border; "And he's a true man, young Master, and honest, and that can't be said of many!"

While our friend was regarding with wonder the singular iron plate, like a small tin shield, upon which the Scotsman was at work, there came a voice at the door, and swinging hastily round Rhisiart saw the most unhappy simulacrum of a human being he had ever seen in his life. He was a man half-naked, with a face so emaciated that little remained of any recognizable personality except the misery in his eyes. This misery was neither passionate enough nor recent enough to be called despair. In a sense it was sadder than that; for despair had ceased to be concerned with the necessities of life and this unhappy one was kept alive by the momentary relaxations of suffering that occurred in his daily hunt for such necessities.

Rhisiart could see at once he was a stage below the level of the outcasts that in Hereford were known as vagabonds. He certainly wasn't a beggar. All the beggars he'd seen before had been "characters," characters of a sort! But in the man who now stood mumbling in the doorway there was nothing left but physical craving. He lacked the heart even to lift his curse, still less his hand, against anything, human or divine. He had no love, no hate, no wrath, no grievance. He hadn't even self-pity. His abasement was so complete that it was beneath humility, below resignation. His need was so dominant that it had obliterated the last human emotion — the emotion of gratitude. Either he had once been flung a scrap from that kitchen-door or had managed to pillage some garbage from one of those neat receptacles for refuse before it reached the pigs, for he now hovered in that entrance in his rags and his nakedness with an air that partook at once of a migratory bird and of a starving cat.

But the Scotsman no sooner set eyes on him than he snatched up a skewer from a hook by the fire and drove him away with a volley of obscure curses. Rhisiart would have left the place in disgust; for the last thing he wanted was for the Sheriff to think he was skulking off.

But the image of his friend, the Lollard, suddenly presented itself to his consciousness. Like a younger boy with an older one he had come by this time to divine pretty well how at any crisis his comrade would act. "I'm not afraid of a scurvy Scot," he thought, and snatching up one of the Prior's half-cooked cakes and a repulsive bone that had a quantity of red meat still clinging to it, he pursued the outcast, crying out, "Stop! stop!" 'Twas a wonder the wretch didn't only run the faster; but either Rhisiart's tone was different from the curses he was used to, or the boy's high-pitched Norman accent had a magnetic authority, for he stopped and turned and gathered his rags about his nakedness.

Thrusting the cake and bone into his hands the lad waited, panting. He felt no great spasm of pity, for the distressing stench that emanated from the wretch blotted out such feeling; but like a child feeding an animal he was curious to see what he would do.

But the creature looked at nothing, saw nothing, understood nothing except the wet raw meat adhering to the bone. This he began hastily devouring, until his white lips and even his hollow cheeks became greasy and bloody; and while he gnawed he pressed the Prior's cake tightly against the hairs on his chest, and every now and then, over the bone, Rhisiart could see the whites of his eyes as he glanced suspiciously round him.

And it was lucky for Rhisiart that he did glance round him, for the Scotsman, skewer in hand, was obstinately limping after them, and our touchy friend would certainly have expressed his shame and disgust in some disgraceful act if the bone-gnawer hadn't fled away.

"Foul fa' your thievish hand!" panted the cook. "I'm na sae muckle of a puir kitchen-knave that ye can gar me gang to nourish such as he. Do ye ken who'a be, ye thieving Jackanapes? Ye might as well give scraps to Judas Iscariot!"

Anxious though he was to rejoin the others, Rhisiart reduced his pace to the Scotsman's limp, as they returned, and listened to a lurid description of a creature he had taken upon himself to champion.

It appeared that the man had been caught making love to a plough-boy, and though there was no question of actual sodomy, the women had hunted him out of his home, the Church had excommunicated him, Lord Grey had had him flogged almost to death, while the children of any hamlet he tried to enter were encouraged to drive him away with curses and stones. And, as the Scot explained, "When ilka bairn in his kelpy Welsh tongue cries *droog* at a man when 'a shows his face ye'll ken a critter's best dead than alive. Why, laddie, the very dogs maun hae their spit at him; and yet the man lives! He just canna dee, I reckon, till the Deil carries him awa."

Our young man experienced not a little personal uneasiness as well as indignant pity when he heard the cook's story. His mind reverted most uncomfortably to that dusky corridor at Glyndyfrdwy. But what would the

Lollard have done? Refused to go a step towards Dinas Bran till he'd got the fellow clothed and fed and given a fresh start?

With his hand in his belt he wondered whether he should offer this moral Scotsman a small piece of silver, but instead of doing so he confined himself, as he bade him farewell, to enquiring his name.

"Gibbie Saunders I *were,* young Master," was the reply, "free born by the braes of Annan. Brither Jock I be now; but aye! I wad gie the banes from my ribs, laddie, to be auld Gibbie Saunders at hame among the lavrocks!"

But it wasn't of Brother Jock's troubles that our friend thought as he hurried to rejoin his companions in bondage. A deep shame such as he had never known in his life took possession of him. No wonder that ghastly head on the Abbot's crucifix had hung so heavy! "What luck," he thought, "to be mad like the Friar! What luck to be as good as Tegolin!"

But he soon had occasion to test the sincerity of this new feeling, when among the whole crowd of his friends — all the "hostages of Glendourdy" as they were called by the bluff Salopian — he sat down with the Sheriff's men by a bivouac fire at the foot of that eminence he knew so well. There were blazing torches there as well as the fire; and from all sorts of odd angles, in the dusk of that summer evening, the red-glancing lights and flickering flames fell with strange effect upon moving faces and shifting garments as he shared, hungrily enough, that solid soldiers' meal.

Mistress Lowri had made no effort to refuse on behalf of her Constable's "hostages" this timely refreshment. "She's saving her man's larder, the cunning bitch!" Rhisiart heard one trooper whisper to another with yeoman maliciousness — and indeed it had crossed his own mind to wonder what kind of repast, if any at all, would be awaiting him in that half-ruined fortress.

But in his present mood it was with a singular relief that he answered Tegolin's quick concern as she handed him the bowl of sweet mead and the platter of ox-tongue. He tried hard not to look at the tightly-buckled cincture, above which the breasts of Lowri ferch Ffraid seemed to draw the fire-light and drain the twilight.

But the treacherous thought slipped somehow into his mind as to whether the points of those breasts under that green-and-gold gown were as burning as her limbs, as her fingers, as her lips.

The Ruthin girl seemed to be in radiant spirits and kept edging herself closer and closer to Tegolin's side. Her heavy-lidded eyes he didn't scruple to catch, as she sat munching that good Shropshire fare and plaiting and unplaiting the end of her companion's braid as it lay across her lap.

But the sweet mead he kept drinking, although, after that heady wine, it tasted like pure milk and honey, didn't tend to diminish the excited conflict going on between his senses and his conscience. As he listened to the deep voice of Hugh Burnell, still talking to Master Brut about the price of beasts in Hereford fair, and to the jerky whispers of Mad Huw who had got into his head that he would surely find his King safe and sound in the great keep of the fortress, the lad tried desperately to fix his mind on the red braid of the Friar's Maid.

But the more he drank the more did the red braid seem to melt into the Ruthin girl's lap. "I must be losing my wits," he thought, "or is the Abbot's curse working on me as well as on Mistress Lowri?"

The Salopian conscripts, most of them yeoman-farmers with a sprinkling of journeymen-craftsmen, were evidently thoroughly enjoying their trip across the border. Rhisiart caught snatches of a lively conversation going on where a young springald from Shrewsbury, upon whom this good mead appeared to have the same effect as it did on himself, was asking a veteran of thirty, who had been in the Irish wars, as to the precise number of maidenheads that had fallen to his prowess.

The Lollard and Hugh Burnell on the other hand were now engaged in a heart to heart talk about border politics, from which, as he listened, he gathered that they were practically of the same opinion, namely that Wales ought to be liberated from the Norman castles and their oppressive occupants, and ought to have a prince of her own and even a parliament of her own, but that this prince should do homage to the King in London and that, as against France or Scotland or the Turk, England and Wales should be staunch allies.

It was perhaps this absorption of her protector's parent with Master Brut that brought it about that our friend now found himself in close juxtaposition with the gold-and-green gown, and divided by the whole blaze of the fire from Edeyrnion's chaste Maid; and it was likely enough that the complete disappearance of the red braid, which had already been melting into the Ruthin girl's lap, was what at that juncture made his conscience throw up its hands. For the red braid had become a kind of heraldic symbol to him, like a red lily on his shield, and now, in the place of this pure token, there were only the fiery tongues of flame!

And Mistress Lowri was talking to him now, talking in a low intense voice about what his future was to be, and what a great part he might be destined to play in Owen's revolt. Her words were the words of a mature woman encouraging a young man's most secret ambitions, but behind her words there was a quivering caress, a furtive, flickering caress, as if with electric finger-tips she were searching for the very passion-pulse of his naked being!

"Denis knows, and *he* knows," was one of the things she murmured as she tossed her head in the direction of Hugh Burnell. "Yes, they know and so does Fitz-Alan, what I feel about Wales and about Owen. But they think it's just a woman's folly. Owen himself — and he knows I know it — thinks that I'm just their spy, their agent, their bought and treacherous tool! But I'm like you, Richard" this was the first time anyone had called him "Richard," and it gave him a curious thrill— "I've got Norman blood — well! to tell you the truth, Angevin blood — but it only makes what's Welsh in me more dangerous and more deadly! Has anyone told you about me, Richard? How my father deserted my mother; and how I've played the whore to keep the old lady in comfort and peace? Well, never mind that! But I'm a bastard — just as Tegolin is — and she takes after *her* father, just as I do after *mine."*

While she spoke, and she soon returned to what Rhisiart's future would be when the revolt broke out, he could see her playing with one of her silken gloves, drawing it off and drawing it on, and finally letting her bare hand lie between them, like a lovely little white bird only waiting to be caught. Nearer and nearer to that fatal white hand his fingers kept hovering, but she suddenly made the mistake of speaking of Tegolin and her Friar in a tone that made it possible for him to clasp his own knee with both his hands, and to utter a wordless prayer to that ghastly-drooping head he had seen on the Abbot's wall.

And it was then, in the tension of the struggle within him while her voice mingled with the leaping and lapping and licking of the flames in front of them, that he had a curious hallucination. The smoke of the bivouac fire as it swept away into the darkening sky had been for some while taking strange shapes, but now it took definite and recognizable shapes. It took the shape of a gigantic figure, in the armour of the ancient days, mounted on a huge war-horse, and the word "Derfel" came into his mind, coupled, however, not with the word Saint, but with the word *Gadarn,* the Mighty, and following Derfel Gadarn was the wraith of the old poet he had seen die so hard, and the grotesque figure of the preposterous Scab; and along with them, leaping and bounding, was the wolfish apparition of Rhys the Savage.

Nor was this all; for as that bivouac smoke broke into the substance of his secretest trouble, he seemed to see the shape of Owen himself, hesitating there, his hand raised to his forked beard, and his eyes fixed, in one of his strange seizures; while, over against those others, and as if offering him an alternate destiny, the whirling smoke began to take the form of the mysterious Bran himself. Yes, in the strange mood in which he was now, with the corporealizing of those smoke-wisps, he felt he knew, as he had never known before, what he really felt about the man these English called "Glendourdy". There was something subtly tragic about him, something that really did approach — as he recalled how he stood by the Bard's side in his golden array — a figure decked and adorned for sacrifice.

And the lad remembered how, in one of Modry's tales, when Bran the Blessed brought his army into Ireland to avenge Branwen's wrongs, the only way of crossing the dangerous river was that his people should pass over the body of their lord.

There was one sentence Modry always used to quote in the old tongue; and because it was one of the few moral tags she ever did quote it had remained in his mind. *"A vo penn bit bont,"* she would say — He who is the head, he will be the bridge.

No! he hadn't touched yet those burning fingers lying at his side, though he felt them there through all his bones, and he knew that the yielded willingness of her whole body was in them and every one of its quivering nerves!

But now as the sign came from Hugh Burnell for the ascent of the castle-hill he couldn't have sworn — no! not on the handle of his crusader's sword

— whether he was sorry or glad he hadn’t done it!

How steep that ascent was! All manner of irrelevant questions kept coming into his head. How had they dragged the stones up here to build this place? His back hurt him as he thought of the serfs who must have done it. No! he hadn’t taken thought enough of these things! Would the all-enduring common people really gain if Owen were victorious?

He could see some red lights at one spot in the great circular ramparts above him. Was that where the entrance was? But more arresting to his mind was a single yellow light he could see, high in some turret up there. “I warrant Mad Huw thinks the sad face of his King is watching us from that window!”

The nearer they approached the castle, the less he could see of anything but those encircling ramparts. But his imagination built up corridors, passages, buttresses, stairways, balconies, courts, towers — a vast, intricate world of masonry under the twilight sky. “It’s a real Welsh fortress,” he thought, “built before Edward’s time; built, I daresay, when John destroyed Mathrafal.”

But what, he wondered, was it before that? And the idea arose in him that there was probably a peaceful hill-city up there, before there was a castle at all. But whose city? And vague memories came back to him of Modry’s tales about Bran, how he was so huge that he could cross the Irish Sea on foot, so huge that no roofed abode could contain him. “The City of Bran the Blessed,” he said to himself, and he tried to imagine that somewhere within those walls was to be found a secret chamber, where, older than Caesar, older than Derfel and far more majestical, was the gigantic head of Bran the Blessed, immortal, indestructible, pitifully smitten, but able to give surcease to all human sorrow!

Aye! it came back to him, as he climbed this hill of his long desire — a "hostage" not a conqueror now — the way Modry had comforted him with the thought of Bran the Blessed, as they listened awestruck one summer night to the wild weeping of his frivolous mother!

He had been walking now for some while in silence a few paces behind the Lollard — for Hugh Burnell had taken chivalrous possession of his son's ambiguous lady — and he was watching how the green and the gold of that gown mingled with the buff of the man's jerkin and the glint of his steel, when suddenly Tegolin appeared at his side.

"Gwion Bach!" she said gently, laying her hand on his arm, "don't'ee forget the Tassel-farm."

He made an effort to look straight into her face as they paused in the ascent, but his eyes sank upon that boy's dagger of hers swinging so gallantly in that absurd out-worn fashion against her hip. Something like a groan came from him; and then he suddenly felt an unaccountable rush of anger.

"Why did you refuse that girl?" he cried irrelevantly. "She wanted to serve you. She hates young Grey."

"I've not refused her, Gwion Bach," she replied softly. "She *is* going to serve me!" and then with one more attempt to meet his eyes, but the wind swept the torch-flare down so that they were left in darkness, she drew away from him and was gone.

It was by the light of several smoky flambeaux, gleaming and red like the eyes of a dragon above the entrance, that they reached the castle gate.

Tegolin had gone ahead, with the Friar and the Ruthin girl, and had already passed under the archway. The Lollard, after his evangelical custom, had fallen into the rear. Hugh Burnell was giving instructions to his men. So that it came to pass, as if by a deliberate intention of chance, or, shall we say, of Derfel Gadarn, that our friend entered Dinas Bran side by side with its lawless chatelaine.

And Mistress Lowri in that dark archway did at last possess herself of his hand. “Shall we burn together, Rhisiart?” she whispered. And for answer he pressed those hot fingers in a clasp as feverish as their own.

Thus did Rhisiart ab Owen cross the threshold of the fortress of his ancestors.

VIII. THE SWORD OF ELISEG

IT WAS MUCH darker inside than outside the walls of Dinas Bran; and it was characteristic of the divided rule under which the already half-ruined place raised its battered head that there was a great scarcity of torches and lanterns.

Having succeeded in troubling the most deadly nerve in Rhisiart till his whole nature was in a turmoil, the lady of the castle completed his discomfiture by taking no more notice of him than if he had been one of the English troopers who were now handing over their prisoners to the Constable.

Having been embraced by her “protector” with a solicitude as tender as if she had returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre rather than from the Abbey at the foot of their hill, Lowri led her daughter and her daughter’s new attendant across the wide-stretching grassy court, which although empty now looked big enough to contain the tents of a squadron of troopers, towards her rooms on the further side, the side which faced the precipitous slopes of the Eglwyseg Rocks.

Into such neglect for several hundreds of years had the fortress fallen that many of the upper chambers upon which the outer walls abutted had sunk forward into the court, leaving the lower ones, which were in most cases more strongly vaulted and buttressed, to be reached through scattered heaps of ruins. The only chambers in Dinas Bran which were habitable were those ranged round the huge circle of the outer walls. The ancient banquet-hall was still sometimes used; but of the chapel and the castle library nothing but heaps of stones remained, some of them still carved and moulded, others shattered out of all recognition.

Rhisiart stared inquisitively at these pitiful stones, for they lay in heaps in every direction, and he tried in vain to imagine how the place looked in the heyday of its glory, before the treachery of his own ancestor had left it to alien hands.

One curious effect these ruins had upon him as he waited in the draughty damp-smelling darkness, along with the Lollard and the mad Friar, was to evoke such a different Dinas Bran from the one he had imagined that it was no longer a rival to the imaginary one and no longer mingled with it or impinged upon it. All the while he had been approaching the real Dinas Bran, that other, that mystical one which he had created in his childhood, had kept blending with it, had kept rising out of it and beyond it into more fabulous, more enchanted towers. But now as he stood in that dim guardroom, listening to Mad Huw's irrelevant whispers and quiveringly conscious of the dark nerve which Lowri had set twitching in his inmost being, these two Dinas Brans separated completely. The imaginary one lifted itself clean out of this draughty mad-house of broken stones, of which Lowri was the evil spirit and wherein he must meet "burning" with "burning," and limned itself on those flying cloud-wracks of the mind's horizon that no madness could touch and no burning blacken!

That Dinas Bran, painted with mystic pigments upon a spiritual canvas, rose up still in its immortal air, clear of all these tumults.

But they were no pleasant moments, these first moments of his treading that deep-indented stone floor that had been trodden by Princess Myfanwy and by Madoc ap Griffith. Obsessed by the adder-tongue of lust, of that particular lust drugged with cruelty that he had come to recognize as his master-devil, he recalled how a Russian student at Oxford, a youth who had come in the train of Chrysoloras, the tutor of the Emperor Manuel, always used to say, when he went to a bawdy-house, “My insect wants a bite”. How deeply he himself had been shocked by this expression! But now he began to feel that this Russian knew what he was talking about! It seemed to him that he could actually feel an “insect” of lust within him, that was only connected with his brain by a thin corridor, and that had no connection at all with his heart or his soul.

He was looking at this moment through an archway, where there was a light gleaming from the wall, and where the modern long-bows of the Sheriff’s men as they lounged about, chattering with the Constable’s servants, gave him a very queer sensation. He could hear the familiar English jokes, with their customary allusions to the Scotch wars and the Lollard heresy and the doubtful loyalty of the Percies and high price of French wines.

“How different,” he said to himself, “from the old days, when people treated serious things seriously, and there was none of this modern cynicism that spoils the romance of everything! And God! how draughty it is in here and how cold for midsummer!” The cold indeed seemed doubly unnatural; not only unnatural at that time of year but as if the very walls themselves of this lost fortress had died with its defenders and were now corpse-walls, riddled with the smell of decomposition.

Even that evil desire, which existed in him apart from his will and which was like a devouring insect in his deepest nerve, ceased to give him any pleasure. He knew he would obey it. That woman had touched him with her dry hot fingers and he must obey it. But what he longed for, as the noisy laughter of these Shropshire intruders mixed with the high-pitched broken English of the natives, was to feel again all he had felt when hand in hand with Tegolin he had first set eyes on Owen’s forked beard!

He tried to catch the Lollard's eye, but the worthy man was giving his full attention to Mad Huw's excitement, which seemed to be plunging into the deep patience of that bland countenance like hail into a pond.

Rhisiart shivered, and thrust his hands — they were cold enough now! — into the folds of his jerkin, while through the stone doorway and over the heads of the soldiers he could catch a glimpse of the mountains away towards the north. And a strange feeling came over him. It was a feeling of the vanishing away of all things, the absorption of all things; the rushing down in a cataract of annihilation of loves and hates, of bodies and the bones of bodies, of souls and the thoughts of souls, all of them swallowed up like unreturning ripples in the great ocean of Being.

It was the physical sensation of cold that brought this feeling. He was sure of that. It was the death-chill wafted against his face from the damp stones; and as the four winds of heaven ambuscaded one another and wailed at one another, and mowed and mumbled and mewed at one another along the grave-stone indentations and hollow channels of that gusty floor, he felt that he would never be warm again, never be naturally happy again. The infernal ice was closing in on him and his twitching nerve. Oh it wasn't ordinary cold! It was a particular kind of cold. He knew that well enough. It was a cold that had a shiver in it that came from some deeper level than mere damp, or mere stone, or the mere teeth of the wind. It was a shiver that had something metaphysical in it. He had felt it once at Hereford, when he was a little boy, down by the bull-baiting field in winter, when there was frozen mud and ice everywhere, and the servant who was with him had gone to help in the killing.

There were great blocks of ice in the river that day, and some of them, drifting down from the slaughter-ditch, had blood on their surface. He hadn't wept but he had pressed his forehead against an iron post with a ring in it, and had felt glad that those blocks of ice were being carried away, and had wished that the animal they were killing and the men who were killing it and his mother’s servant who was helping, yes and himself too who was there to look on, might all be carried away.

He wished now that it could be suddenly five hundred years hence, be at the opening of the twentieth instead of the opening of the fifteenth century, with his bones lost and Lowri’s bones lost, and the shard of that insect within him, that was now goading him to his perdition, lost, too!

“No, I haven’t seen him, Master. I never told you I’d seen him,” Mad Huw was saying to the Lollard. “But I know he’s here; and I know he’s here because my head doesn’t ache any more, and I don’t hear voices any more. And shall I tell you something else? And you can hear this too lad, if you like.”

But his voice was almost inaudible though he had been speaking low enough before. *“I’m no trouble to the Maid any morel”* he declared. “Yes, I do what she tells me. She’s like the Mother of God to me, now that he’s here. She’ll be sending for me soon and I shall go! I shan’t cry out. I shall do what she says without a word. If she told me to go back where she first found me I should obey. With him here I’m let off everything! I haven’t to think what to do or what to say. It’s all happiness now, because I know he’s safe. He’s safe and waiting his—”

But at that moment they were confronted by an apparition. An old man, grey as a ghost, stood before them, solemnly bowing to each of them in turn and with every bow introducing himself with stately politeness. “Adda ap Leurig ap Coel,” he said, and repeated it three times.

Grey as a ghost he was, this formal little man, and so lean and so upright that he resembled one of the pillars of the groined roof under which they stood. His garments were grey and his head was grey and his countenance was grey.

Mad Huw broke into the pleased laugh of an infant who had been offered a bauble. The Lollard gave him a polite smile. Rhisiart scowled. But the apparition went on. “Seneschal Adda. And my Lord has sent me to show you your rooms.”

“A dungeon A dungeon!” cried Mad Huw in extreme delight. “And you’ve got chains for us?” and he stretched out his hands towards the official, the folds of his old travel-stained habit looking almost black against the other’s neat garb.

“I’ll come back for you, Brother,” said Seneschal Adda quietly, “and for you, Master Rhisiart. Will you follow me, Master Brut?”

“No, no, it’s all right!” cried the Lollard hastily, laying a restraining hand on his companion’s impetuous arm. And then to the other: “I shall be able to see my friend later, eh, Seneschal?”

Adda ap Leurig bowed without speaking; but in spite of the darkness his prisoners caught a suggestion in his look that he didn’t regard the sight of Rhisiart’s scowling face as an unmixed advantage.

But the Lollard moved up close to our friend and paused for a moment till he caught his full attention. Then with an unruffled face and his usual flickering smile, a smile that was neither gay nor sad, a smile that always made Rhisiart a little uneasy, for it seemed to rise to the surface of that placid countenance from a psychic level different from that of most human smiles, he uttered the following enigmatic words:

“If you’re called upon to make any decision, lad, make the *negative* one! I’m quick at catching the aura of a place; and I tell you I’ve never felt so many mixed currents of good and evil as there are here. Everything in this castle's confused to a point of insanity — *embrouillé à la folie!* So look to yourself, gossip. *Prenez garde à cela."*

"You heard what I told Master Brut?" whispered Mad Huw as soon as they were alone.

Rhisiart assured him that he had heard every word. He felt at that moment that the merest mention of his royal namesake would be more than he could bear. But a new burst of bawdy camp-merriment reached them from the lighted guard-room. "The English are enjoying themselves," he muttered vindictively in Welsh.

"They are good-natured lads," remarked the Friar quietly. "Our quarrel isn't with them, and never will be. No, not even if Owen raises the dragon."

Rhisiart gave him a wicked look. "They'd have burnt you, all the same, that other night."

"No, no, my son. Not they, not the soldiers! And even Master Simon wouldn't if he hadn't been tormented in his mind. It was her," and he lowered his voice and made a motion with his head towards the interior of the castle. "She's in league with the Scab, and if you don't know what that means, you don't know the power of Satan round here. Why, they tell me" — and his voice sank to a yet more solemn whisper— "that those two are plotting to give Derfel another bride. They say there's a maiden in this castle — Yes, and they say when her men have caught Simon that she'll—"

"Your precious Simon would have burnt you!" interrupted Rhisiart savagely; and then he added out of pure malice: "But our Lollard must have felt like you about him, for I've never seen a priest of God take more trouble than he did to drive the evil spirit out of a man!"

Mad Huw's generous temper vanished in a flash; and in its place came a harsh professional austerity. "To drive out devils by Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils," he began angrily; but remembering the context of these words, he sighed deeply, and in a tone that had less bigotry in it, a tone that reverted to the purer disciplines of his Order, he said gravely: “Lollardry is the first step to atheism, my son. Your friend may be a good man. I daresay he is. But he is opening the flood-gates to the tide that will sweep everything away.”

One of the Shropshire yeomen was carolling a bawdy stave; and Rhisiart could catch through the illuminated arch an indecent refrain he had often heard on summer evenings, floating out from the beer-houses on the warm air, along the river-wharves of Hereford.

“What tide, Brother?” he asked mechanically.

“The tide of reason!” cried the Friar fiercely, “the tide of mad, wicked reason!”

The loudness of his tone attracted into their dusky alcove a couple of young pages who had been listening to the troopers’ song, and with the quick instinct of their tribe these lads soon perceived that their intrusion was not displeasing to Rhisiart.

“Please, sir,” the taller of the boys shyly began, “are you the Oxford astrologer who’s come to help Owen drive out the English?”

“Run away, there’s a good child!” murmured the Friar. “We’re waiting for the Seneschal and can’t listen to you now.”

But Rhisiart, who liked the lad’s appearance, disregarded this admonition. “If I were an astrologer,” he said, “what would you like me to predict? That Owen should become Prince of Wales? Or that your Constable’s father should give him up to King Hal?”

“The Crow’s going to put you in the Princess’ Bower,” announced the boy irrelevantly. “I heard my Lady tell him; and the one the King’s going to burn for spitting on the Blessed Sacrament he’s putting in the Traitor’s Tower, where the Friend of the English died of shame.”

“And, please, sir,” threw in the smaller page, “the Crow’s cross today because my Lady has sent Lawnslot and Gerallt to bring Simon the Hog up here. Please, sir, ’twas me, not Rawlff who heard she’s sworn to chain him to the ‘Old Skeleton’! Rawlff says such doings will bring down the Blessed One’s curse upon us all. Be you afeared of the Blessed One’s curse, Master?”

Rhisiart’s pinched Norman face had had a troubled frown upon it ever since her mother had carried Tegolin away; but it relaxed now into the first smile he had smiled since entering the castle. He seized the last speaker’s arm above the elbow. “Let’s feel your muscle,” he murmured, “and you’ll soon know if I’m afraid or not! They say in Hereford, where I come from, ‘A lion’s gamb and a deer’s heart’, but who the devil do you mean by ‘the Crow’? No secrets now! Tell me of whom you’re talking!” And he tightened his bony fingers round the arm he held till the boy screwed up his face and struggled to escape.

The older boy contemplated his companion’s predicament with a mixture of complacency and jealousy. *“I’ll* tell you, sir,” he interjected, “for no one can make *him* speak — not even my Lady!”

Rhisiart released this young hero and turned to the taller one. “Well! you tell me,” he said.

“‘Tis Adda ap Leurig we call ‘the Crow,’” the latter replied eagerly. “He’s the oldest man in the place. He was born here and has lived here all his life. He’s the only one, except my Lady, who durst go near *Ysgerbwd Hen,* the ‘Old Skeleton,’ where my Lady’ll chain up the Hog when Lawnslot and Gerallt have caught him. Under the Traitor’s Tower *he* is, by the nettles and burdocks, where the men’s latrine drains out. Grrr! But there’s a filthy smell down there, Master, when the wind’s in the quarter. Luned says my Lady often goes down there to hear *Ysgerbwd Hen* rattle;

but the Constable doesn't like her going, Luned says, because of the nettles and the smell, and because it's where the men's latrine runs out."

"Who's Luned?" enquired Rhisiart. Save for the grail-messenger, the only possessor of this name he'd ever known was a silly relative of his mother's.

"She can climb better than him," said the boy, indicating his friend. "She's older than me," he went on. "She's eighteen. But in a few years I shall marry her, and we shall have seven sons and three daughters."

"She's very *nearly* nineteen. She waits on Ffraid ferch Gloyw."

"Who's Ffraid ferch Gloyw?"

"My Lady's mother. She never comes down the tower. And that's where Efa is! Efa waits on her, too."

"Who's Efa?"

"Efa's *his* friend" — and he indicated the younger page— "and she's younger than Luned. They say Ffraid ferch Gloyw makes her sleep every night in a bed that's older than the castle. They say it has a piece of the Blessed One's cauldron worked into it."

"Why does she make her sleep in that?"

"So that Crach Ffinnant can't touch her. Crach Ffinnant wants her for Derfel."

Rhisiart was aware of a distinct stirring of excitement with regard to this Efa who was "wanted" by Derfel. In Luned on the other hand he seemed able to feel very little interest. So, to divert the boy, he enquired who it was, or whose bones they were, that bore the name of the "Old Skeleton."

The lad looked hurriedly at the younger page as if to make sure that it was right and proper to reveal these secrets of Dinas Bran; but since his friend was listening awestruck to Mad Huw's revelations he was forced to test Rhisiart's reliability by his unaided wit.

"You're the one, aren't you, sir?" he said, "that the bowmen of Chirk tried to kill and who'd have done it if the Scab hadn't thrown an illusion over you so that they couldn't see you?"

Rhisiart suppressed his natural reaction to this, and contented himself with enquiring whether such was the version of things given by the Bard. There was something all the same peculiarly irritating in the idea that his defiance of all the scientific archery of Chirk should be attributed to the black arts of the Scab!

"I am Owen Glyn Dŵr's cousin," he added sternly; and he took the opportunity, in a casual and nonchalant way, of toying with his antique dagger and of surveying it from every possible aspect before he replaced it in his belt. But the name "Owen" was enough without the dagger.

"Ysgerbwd Hen is the skeleton of Hywel the Bard," whispered the lad. "I only found that out myself last winter. He," and he indicated the younger page, "only knows it because I told him. Hywel the Bard loved Princess Myfanwy and she used to let down a rope from her window when the Prince was away; and the Prince heard of it and came back suddenly. The Prince chained him where she could see him from her window. That's what they say my Lady will do with the Hog."

"Did you tell me," asked Rhisiart, "that this Ffraid ferch Gloyw is the Lady Lowri's mother?"

The boy glanced about him and spoke in still lower tones. So low indeed did he speak that Rhisiart was forced to draw him very close before he could hear.

"Yes, yes, her mother," he said, "and we're all afraid of her except my Lady; and my Lady's a little afraid of her. Luned says it was to give her a home that she consented to live with the Constable."

“Does Luned like her?” asked Rhisiart; and as he bent down to catch the reply the boy’s breath reminded him of some forgotten day in his childhood when he had scrambled through a briar-rose hedge. But though the lad was panting with excitement something seemed to prevent his replying.

“Well?” Rhisiart repeated; and then, quite sharply, “I want to know whether Luned likes her.”

“Luned — won’t — say,” the boy brought out with an obvious effort. “She tells me it’s not right to ask her.”

Rhisiart began to feel as if this unknown maid’s discretion were a rebuke to his own curiosity; and to change the subject he asked the boy his name.

“Rawlff ap Dafydd ap Llwyd,” replied the youngster proudly, “and he’s Iago ap Cynan. We’re Owen’s men,” he added, “though we wear the Constable’s livery. But the Constable knows it. Nobody can deceive him, not even my Lady!”

Rhisiart didn’t miss this remark, and it made him thoughtful. “I must be careful,” he said to himself, and he became aware that something in his colloquy with these two boys had a little cooled the response of his itching insect-nerve to Lowri’s beckoning.

But it would be certainly awkward if the Constable knew as much as the boy hinted he knew. It would not be very nice to share the fate of Hywel the Bard. “I must be careful,” he thought.

Meanwhile the younger page, catching his own name, had turned for a second from the extraordinary revelations Mad Huw was disclosing to him, so that Rhisiart was enabled to make further use of this antidote to his worser devil by clutching the boy’s arm again. The older lad, however — perhaps because of the insight into life he was learning from the sagacious Luned — snatched from this casual gesture a hint that if he didn’t make some swift self-assertive move, it would be the son of Cynan and not the son of Dafydd who would be the Oxford scholar's friend; and pretending that he had heard a summons from the guardroom he begged Rhisiart's pardon, and pulling his friend after him ran off beneath the lighted arch.

It may be imagined how astonished Master Adda the Seneschal was when, returning from disposing of the Lollard in the Traitor's tower, he discovered his sulky hostage loitering at the entrance of the guardroom and listening with the utmost good-humour to the troopers' revels. He was still more surprised when, as they made their way to that chamber in the wall from which to an accustomed eye the "Old Skeleton" could be seen among the elder-bushes, he heard this uncompromising young Norman — for in his long life on the marches he had come to know well enough that type of profile — begin talking to him with friendly assurance.

"How comes it, Master Adda," was one of Rhisiart's questions as he and the Seneschal crossed the court, "that you, a Welsh gentleman of high birth, should be serving the son of the English Sheriff?"

The base-court of Dinas Bran was as draughty as it was dark; and our friend, as he pulled his cloak about his ears, made no effort to discern the effect of his words upon his companion's countenance. But at all events the old man's *tone* was neither shocked nor hurt.

"I might retort, young gentleman," he said, "by enquiring how you yourself, a Hereford *Bonheddwr,* have come all this way to join Owen, to whom I understand you're only very distantly related. But why should either of us ask such foolish questions? Welsh and Norman, Welsh and Saxon, we have mixed with each other now for at least three hundred years. Though not of the House of Madoc ap Griffith, I am of the blood of the old Talaith of Powys, and it is my privilege to possess, for my family has lived at Meifod since John burnt Mathrafal, a bronze sword which goes back to the days of King Eliseg."

“King Eliseg!” cried Rhisiart. “But he was of Arthur’s time; and it was long before Arthur’s time that swords were made of bronze.”

The Seneschal was silent. He had shown so many visitors to Dinas Bran this old Bronze Age weapon and had told them so often it belonged to King Eliseg that it was distasteful to him to be reminded of the gap between the sixth century B.C. and the sixth century A.D.. He consoled himself by remarking that Eliseg of Powys possessed in his time as cunning a magician as Arthur of Caerleon, and that his bronze sword was as enchanted as the other’s steel one. “But I wish,” he said, “Owen Glyn Dŵr and Harry Bolingbroke could settle their account alone, like Gwydion and Pryderi, for to speak frankly I think a war between the two races is absurd.” He laid his hand on Rhisiart’s arm and spoke with grave earnestness. “Owen possesses the belt of Eliseg; and I possess his sword; and there’s an old *englyn,* “When the sword of Powys goes back to the belt of Powys it will reach across all Wales.”

They were passing just then close to a certain aperture in the ramparts, where the constant rain working upon some original flaw in the masonry had caused an enlarged opening to appear, a jagged and sorrowful opening, that gave the impression of something desolately ruinous. Through this aperture Rhisiart could see nothing but darkness; but the night wind as it blew damp and chill between the crumbling stones evoked such a feeling of exposure and discomfort that it took the heart out of Master Adda’s *englyn.* The old Seneschal, however, was so accustomed to these rebuffs to his antiquarianism from across the border that he was only made more intent upon impressing the Oxonian with his knowledge.

“There’s Myfanwy’s Bower,” he now announced, “where the Lady Lowri has arranged for you to sleep. And this is my chamber, as it was my father’s and my grandfather’s, and I would be honoured” — and Rhisiart

saw his erect old figure bend in a courtly obeisance— "if you would enter for a moment."

There was nothing to be done but to obey; and our friend was well rewarded for his affability; for when the Seneschal had taken him by the hand and made him bend his head to avoid the lintel he was ushered into what was — though it was of small dimensions — the most perfect example of a twelfth-century chamber he had ever seen.

While the old man was engaged in lighting three large iron lanterns that were suspended from the roof, Rhisiart walked gingerly to the window. The room was more remarkable for its twelfth-century carving than for its furniture, but our young friend did notice one heavily embroidered chair whose appearance reminded him of a certain Lombardy merchant's shop in Hereford where his mother used to meet her fashionable gossips and, while the obsequious Italian unrolled his Moorish fabrics and dusted his Venetian curios, would chatter about the latest town scandal. Thrusting his shoulders with some difficulty through the narrow window at the end of this low-roofed chamber, Rhisiart gazed downwards, both to the left and the right, in an eager endeavour to catch a glimpse of that audacious lover's skeleton, but the night was much too cloudy, and all he could see was a thin stream of light, emerging from what seemed to be a larger room than this, where the dark walls curved away to the northward.

A pungent scent of elder-blossom did, however, reach him from the darkness, mixed with a vague sourness on the air which suggested the pollen of nettle-flowers and perhaps also the presence of that latrine of which the page had talked. The combination of these smells with the thick darkness, a darkness which in a manner he couldn't define, suggested that the whole castle was suspended in a void rather than founded on a hill, held him at his post of observation for an unpardonable time.

He behaved indeed as if Master Adda were his private attendant rather than his indulgent jailer. But he was reduced to a blush of shame over his impoliteness, when, on withdrawing his head from the window, he not only found that the Seneschal had already extracted his bronze relic from its hiding-place and was holding it as if it were a piece of the True Cross, but that the figure of a young girl had suddenly materialized, like an apparition of Myfanwy herself, and was standing at the Seneschal's side, swinging at arm's length a little silver lamp. Either from the lamp or from the girl there now spread through the vaulted chamber a queer Oriental perfume that brought to Rhisiart's mind a dark-eyed, indeed devilish-eyed, pedlar, who used to come to their house in Hereford and talk for hours in the kitchen.

And as the light of her lamp threw its rays upwards, every aspect of her personality seemed emphasized by this Saracenic odour; and it was on this undulant wave of Sabean incense that her personality sank into his confused consciousness. He guessed at once that this was the discreet young handmaid of whom the page had spoken; and though her extreme pallor was mitigated by the way the light she carried mingled with that of the lanterns above her head, Rhisiart could see that her coils of dark hair fell on either side of features that were more striking than beautiful. Luned's nose was the reverse of delicately moulded. Her upper lip protruded beyond her lower. Her chin was too prominent. And though her neck and throat had a warm, soft, disarming appeal, not only were her breasts too womanly for her years, but they seemed to our friend unnecessarily emphasized by the broad band beneath them.

"The Sword of Eliseg!" murmured Master Adda, holding out the weapon towards him,' as if it rested on a royal cushion.

But Rhisiart merely nodded at him. "Let me introduce myself, Maiden," he cried eagerly, and approaching the girl with the sort of obeisance that he had seen the Hereford nobles offer, when they singled out a particular tradesman's daughter from among the spectators at some public joust, he made as though he would lift her unresisting left hand, for she held the lamp in her right, magnanimously to his lips.

"The sword of Eliseg!" repeated the Seneschal; and then it became evident to our impetuous friend that the girl's dark eyes were wide-open in a strange, defiant, excited gaze, and were fixed, not on him at all, but on the rusty bronze weapon, with its double edge and simple cross-handle.

"Put it away! Don't let him touch it!" she cried indignantly. "You know perfectly well, Master Seneschal, what my Mistress feels about the Blessed One alone being revered in this castle. *Eliseg's magician was Saint Derfel."*

Rhisiart let her hand drop. He recognized that her excitement was so great that she was totally oblivious of the fact that he had taken it at all. She was completely absorbed in her emotion; and her eyes, as they confronted that rusty weapon, were bright with anger. The lad received the impression that she regarded it as she might have regarded something that was an obscene threat to her girlhood. The old man drew back.

Rhisiart could see that Luned's tone cowed him. He muttered something that the boy couldn't catch and, hurriedly bearing away the weapon to the further side of the chamber, replaced it reverently in a wooden chest that stood against the wall.

Meanwhile the girl did look at Rhisiart. She looked at him with a friendly surprise. He was not sure whether he liked this surprise. It was clear she was astonished as well as pleased to find him so youthful and inexperienced.

"My Mistress has sent me to bring you to her," she said gravely; and then smiling at Master Adda as he returned from concealing his precious relic, "I didn't know," she said gently, though with a faint suspicion of reproach, "that Rhisiart ab Owen had not yet seen his room. It's to be Myfanwy's Bower, isn't it?"

Master Adda hastened to explain that he was even then on his way to guide the young gentleman to Myfanwy's Bower; and leaving his lanterns burning in the vaulted roof and accompanied by Luned with her silver lamp he hurriedly proceeded to escort his hostage to what might have been called the tragic heart of Dinas Bran.

But no sooner was Rhisiart in the air and in the obscurity of the court, where the sandal-wood fragrance that emanated from the girl was carried away by the wind and where her lamp only caused a pale-flitting watery moon to glide along the flag-stones, than the riotous sound of the troopers in the guard-room reached his ears, and this virile revelry made him feel rebellious.

"I wish I'd taken Eliseg's sword in my hand," he remarked aloud, addressing no one in particular; and as he spoke he swung round and looked at the faint light issuing from the chamber they had left.

"Luned says our Lady's mother has forbidden me to show it to anyone," interposed the Seneschal; "otherwise I'd not only have let you take it in your hand, but I'd have let you stretch it out of the window and *hear the skeleton rattle."*

Rhisiart couldn't help glancing, and dark though it was, at Master Adda's face as he uttered these vicious words. Their tone, as they emerged from that sedate grey figure, was startling. "It was my ancestor," the Seneschal went on, "who lent it to Jennap ab Adam when he killed him and exposed him to the crows; and they say that at sight of it, especially when the stars are in their midsummer position, those adulterous bones—"

But the girl startled them both at that point by the suddenness with which she lifted her lamp and swung it full upon Rhisiart's face. Then she turned to the old man.

“You’d better let him do what he wants,” she said, letting the light slowly sink down. “If he doesn’t do what he wants now he’ll want to do it worse when he’s thought of it at night.” She paused for a moment. “I speak for the Lady Ffraid,” she added in a low tone.

Rhisiart gazed at her through the darkness in bewilderment, but all he saw was her small, dark, obscure figure, round whose indistinct garments, caught up below her full bosom, the lamp she carried was making bizarre patterns on the stones.

The Seneschal, however, was far too anxious to have his treasure appreciated by an Oxford scholar to care greatly how the opportunity was restored to him. “Come then,” he said. “It was my young Lord Mortimer who last held the sword. Meredith ab Owen, when I showed it to him, said he was no friend to Saint Derfel.”

The girl’s voice rang out at that; and Rhisiart was aware of a new note in it. “My Lady says that Meredith ab Owen is the only one of all the Welshmen she knows who has remained true.”

“True to what, young Mistress?” murmured Adda ap Leurig.

“True to Bran the Blessed!” she cried excitedly. This display of emotion about what, after all, was only superstition, irritated young Rhisiart.

“She just repeats what the old woman tells her,” he thought; and he couldn’t help raising his shrill Norman voice in a high-pitched argumentative tone, as they retraced their steps. “Bran wasn’t any more a saint than Derfel. Master Brut and I have just heard the Abbot talk of these things. He didn’t say it in so many words; but I gathered his drift, and I’m sure he implied that Derfel and Bran were both—”

“Not a word of *him*!” cried the young lamp-bearer. But, she added more gently, “I’ll wait for you here. What you do, Master Seneschal, do quickly!

My Lady—” she stopped and turned away.

But Rhisiart, as he entered for the second time that vaulted chamber, was uncomfortably aware of her figure in the darkness outside, standing tense and taciturn, her face towards the rising wind and her lamp making a flickering pool upon the ground.

As he stood there nervously waiting, while the Seneschal crossed the room to his precious chest, a thing he did as reverently as a priest approaching his altar, he realized that the girl’s attitude had roused in him a surge of complicated feelings. He felt in some odd way as if the indulgence she had given him to handle Derfel’s sword was a greater restraint than her opposition. And he rebelled fiercely against this restraint. He experienced an uncomfortable sense of being as young as Rawlff ap Dafydd! He had the feeling as he stood there, with drops of sweat bursting out on his forehead, as if this whole great mass of half-ruined masonry were isolated from the rest of the world and were growing more isolated every moment!

It was as if Dinas Bran were really in some extraordinary manner not as solidly material as other places. And why shouldn’t there be spots like this on the surface of the earth where the electric currents of good and evil have clashed and contended for so long that they had drawn the opacity out of “matter,” showing it to be what Aristotle said it was, entirely malleable by mind?

He felt just then that Dinas Bran had become like an enormous meteorite without any planetary gravitation, drifting up and away towards the northern constellations and carrying with it all its good and all its evil!

“How old is this castle?” he asked suddenly; and in immediate reply to this, though it meant leaving his sacred chest unbarred, the Seneschal promptly brought over to his visitor a parchment-covered volume from which, as they stood side by side, he proceeded to read.

As if in order to concentrate the stranger's attention on the antique text, the old man insisted upon touching with his fingernail each single word in the line as he pronounced it; and the nervous Rhisiart was only just able, by wrinkling his hooked nose and drawing in his lips with an audible sucking sound, as if someone were tickling him, to endure at all the movements of that ancient human claw under the lantern-light.

A drop of sweat from his forehead finally just missed falling on the page, and he became so irritated by the courtly polish of that ridiculous fingernail that he was driven to cry aloud; "Allow me! Allow me!" and incontinently drawing his dagger proceeded to use its sharp point as a substitute for that moving finger.

Though he heard with his ears the words the man was reading, he only responded to them with half his mind. What he was thinking now was that though his "insect-lust," to use the Russian's expression, had a cruel and wicked aspect, it was also connected with the preservation — perhaps the "insect" itself had the gleaming shard of a fire-fly — of his independent identity against forces that were fain to swamp it and swallow it. There did come to him all the same, though muted and muffled, certain nursery memories as he watched that dagger-point; and of these he recalled enough to be conscious of a suspicion that the "Crow" was applying to Dinas Bran details that belonged to a quite different stronghold.

"And they did not any of them know the time they had been there; and it was not more irksome to them having the head with them, than if Bran the Blessed had been with them himself... but one day.... *'Evil betide me if I do not open the door to know if that is true which is said concerning it.'*.... So he opened the door and looked towards Cornwall... and when they had looked they were as conscious of all the evils... as if all had happened in that very spot... and because of their perturbation they could not rest, but journeyed forth with the head towards London. And they buried the head in the White Mount—”

It had clearly become a ritualistic performance with the old man, this reading from the life of the Blessed Bran; but he carried the book away now, and moved back to the iron-bound chest.

Our friend could see how his hands shook with eagerness as he opened this receptacle; and there was a moment, when he rose from his stooping position, with the blade in his hand, that Rhisiart fancied he heard those old bones creak, much as the Bard’s bones outside were said to creak under the power of Derfel’s sword! The lad’s thoughts came thick and fast as the old man held out the rusty relic, presenting it once more just as if it lay on a velvet cushion.

Rhisiart’s desire was to treat the whole thing lightly, as a casual whim that he wanted to satisfy before his introduction to Tegolin’s grandmother; but there was something in the old man’s excitement, in the aloofness of the girl outside, in the thought that it was actually this very weapon that had been brandished in Jennap ab Adam’s hand as he rose from Myfanwy’s side, that stirred up once more the tumult in his conscience. He stood there irresolute, staring at that rust-covered brazen blade, but feeling a curious childish longing to rush out into the court and rejoin the wise Luned!

But what a fool he would appear to the expectant old man! What a weak, unmanly, fool! Besides he couldn’t disappoint him now. But why did his wrist feel like this, feel just as if it had been suddenly turned to lead? The whole thing was the silliest trifle. Why then was his forehead damp and his heart pounding? Master Adda was evidently disconcerted by this protracted pause. Fortunately the light from the lanterns in the roof fell in such a way as to leave the agitation in the face of the tormented young man partially concealed.

"Don't be afraid," said the Seneschal with tender consideration for what he regarded as a spasm of religious awe. "Even if King Eliseg's magician was none other than Derfel Gadarn the sword has brought no ill-luck to Mortimer who was the last to whom I showed it. I'm speaking of Sir Edmund of course, not of the young Earl."

Rhisiart bit his lip. Why the devil didn't Luned come rushing in and give him an excuse for avoiding this curst elongation of clotted rust that looked so like a stalactite of blood?

"So Meredith refused to touch it?" he found himself murmuring; though so little had he intended to hesitate any longer that he actually felt the wind already bringing in through the window the rattle of the Bard's bones as he brandished the "pitiless bronze." It was just as if it were his physical body hesitating, and not himself at all! Why had Meredith ab Owen refused to touch it?

But Master Adda was once more quoting his ridiculous jingle about the sword and the belt. Rhisiart felt at that moment that he completely understood Griffith ab Owen's attitude to all these devilish superstitions. When one's nerves were on edge and one had serious matters on one's mind these absurdities were too much! "After all," he thought, "I'm a Norman as well as a Welshman; and I like clear issues. I like to be honestly wicked and I like to be honestly good."

"Embrouillé! Embrouillé! What cursed things decisions are!" Oh why didn't that girl make some sign and end this wretched scene? Or why didn't this old man with his shaky hands get weary of waiting, and put that piece of rust away! Why when you'd committed yourself to some fantastical caprice couldn't you just stop and without giving any reason change your mind?

But what was this? His legs had suddenly begun to move, apparently of their own volition, and he was walking hurriedly towards the window, and without the bronze sword! As he went he found he was uttering the words, "One minute — one minute — one minute," over and over again.

Arrived at the window he once more squeezed his shoulders through its narrow orifice and peered out into the darkness. He felt rather than heard that Master Adda had followed close behind him with that rusty abomination. By God, if there hadn't appeared some kind of rift in that cloudy sky! Yes, and there — right under that protrusion from the wall which no doubt was the balcony of Myfanwy's Bower — he *could* catch a glimpse of something that wasn't nettles! Was it the white blossoms of elder-bloom or was it — He had a curious feeling, as he stared downward, as if the whole castle, yes! with the whole mount that bore it, were surrounded by a dizzy, precipitous gulf, not a slope he could climb, but a gulf, a gulf that sank down and down and down, with that white thing at the bottom!

But his body, and by Christ his tongue too were playing their tricks once more and behaving in a way that was not only beyond his will but unpredicted by his mind! He was back under those lights in the vaulted roof again, and he was eagerly, almost cajolingly, begging the Seneschal to replace the sword of Eliseg in its chest.

"The time hasn't come," he was saying, "for me to hold it. In a year perhaps, if I can be of use to Owen, I may be worthy... but not yet—" This reference to Owen and indeed the whole line he took of being "unworthy," whether it were an inspiration reaching him from the figure outside or some atavistic reversion to crafty Norman diplomacy, had an effect upon the old man that was beyond anything he could have calculated.

The Seneschal nodded his head several times gravely and feelingly and then, with complete satisfaction and without the least demur, proceeded to do exactly what had been required of him. Thus for the second time that night was the sword of Eliseg thrust back into darkness.

Once out again in the open air of the court-yard Rhisiart experienced an access of shyness with regard to the girl with the lamp. He was profoundly thankful that the stars in that midsummer sky were obscured by clouds so that Luned couldn't notice how embarrassed he was.

And it certainly was enough to make a person look a fool, this silly relinquishing of a natural caprice for absolutely no reason! But Luned spared his feelings; and the sword being relegated to temporary oblivion, she at once became younger, gayer, more girlish. She even began teasing Rhisiart about sleeping in Myfanwy's Bower, assuring him, in a tone that was almost mischievous, that Mistress Lowri was very particular about the men who had that privilege; and that Efa said whenever a young man with the heart of a bard slept there he wasn't allowed to sleep alone, but that an *Ellylles* slept with him.

"And the *Ellylles* who slept with him had two peculiarities. In the first place her body and all her bodily ways were what he loved best in the whole world. But in the second place her head was the head of a skull! And Efa said that this was because, in grievous pity for what was chained at the foot of her tower, Myfanwy's flesh died before she died. Efa said that after the bard's death Myfanwy never left her Bower; and that though they kept burying her in Valle Crucis her body always returned at night. Efa said that her head was as bare as the head in the chains before they could make her lie quiet; and 'twas only when she stopped having any lips at all that she would sleep by Jennap ab Adam. That's what she says; but I think she didn't mind him having her *body,* because her spirit never left the *Ysgerbwd Hen!"*

The patient Seneschal lent the same benevolent ear to these tales of the lamp-bearer, as they reached him through the darkness, as he would have lent to the confidential talk of Efa and Luned themselves, had he come upon them on the battlements.

And as for Rhisiart, it was far more important that his foolish behaviour over the sword should be forgotten than that the wise Luned should be rebuked for chattering. The girl was indeed in the liveliest spirits when they entered for a moment that fatal Bower. She went so far as to sink down laughing on the pile of last year’s bracken, covered with a thick blue rug, which was to be the young man’s bed.

Since it was she who held the light, Rhisiart was unable to catch more than a glimpse of her face as she lay on his couch, but the faint outlines of her form on that blue coverlet brought back to his mind with a sweet shiver of romance the feelings he’d had in the cattle-shed by the river when Tegolin shared his rest. He took but scant notice of anything in Myfanwy’s Bower save that blue rug with the damsel’s form upon it, but he saw enough to realize that the chamber had been recently garnished with all the modern decorations of the flamboyant epoch which had just ended. There was nothing here of that twelfth century dignity and simplicity that hung about the faded embroidered chair and the carved chest in Master Adam’s room. How his modern-minded mother would have adored these fantastical decorations! The very window, jutting out from the castle-wall, was full of foliated tracery. And as he glanced at these things all manner of sophisticated Oxford discussions floated at the back of his mind and he resolved that he would take the first opportunity that offered itself of indicating to the ladies of Dinas Bran that their passion for these fourteenth-century novelties was a vulgar innovation and quite out of keeping with the atmosphere of the place.

As they came out into the court he became aware of a sudden change of sound in the guard-room at the castle-entrance. The tipsy laughter and riotous snatches of song had ceased, and an intermittent clamour of surprised voices had taken its place. This was followed by the passing across the court of a silent band of men, not more than half-a-dozen in number, carrying on a hurdle some unfortunate captive, whose tightly-bound figure, as the group drew near, was thrown into prominence by the yellow blaze of several streaming torches.

The man himself, as far as Rhisiart could tell, as he was hurriedly borne past them, was unconscious though still living; but what caused Rhisiart's most dangerous nerve to start pulsing within him was the fact that before the bearers bore their load away to the northern extremity of the court, he was certain he recognized the features of the unlucky Master Simon, the Hog of Chirk.

So those monks were right in their surmise; and right in their priestly estimate of Lowri's nature. The woman had managed to get into her power the man she was ready to risk Hell for the pleasure of torturing. As the flare of the torches vanished he heard the great sentinel bell of Dinas Bran striking midnight, and each stroke of this solemn announcement sank into his soul.

Instead of following the men, however, who were carrying the unfortunate Master Simon, the old Seneschal, who had stood still to watch the passing of that cortège, now proceeded to conduct his young hostage to the eastern side of the castle's base-court. Luned's lamp still flickered around them like an *ignis fatuus;* but the figure on the hurdle had taken the heart of the girl's liveliness, and not a word did she utter until they arrived at the foot of what was called the Ladies' Tower. Here she whispered something to the Seneschal; and the old man turning gravely to Rhisiart intimated that at this point he would bid him good-night.

But he turned to the girl again before he left him. “I suppose your pages, young Mistress, will be all asleep when he comes out? Will he be able to find his way to the Bower alone? I don’t want him to get into any trouble with the Sheriffs people. They’re evidently making a night of it over there.”

“My Lady will arrange it,” replied Luned, “and if not,” she added quickly, “I’ll show him the way!”

Our friend had himself begun to speak, and had got as far as the words, “I know exactly,” when his cheeks suddenly got hot. Was there in the whole of Oxford, he thought, a greater fool than he?

IX. THE LADIES' TOWER

Rhisiart's blush of shame and abrupt pause caused no astonishment to the bearer of the lamp. She was asking the old gentleman some practical and indeed domestic question. At any rate the lad caught the word "brisket" and the word "venison" as he frowned gloomily at the entrance to the Ladies' Tower, wondering whether Lowri, as well as the old woman, was awaiting him up there, and whether it was here that they'd put Tegolin and the Ruthin girl.

"I don't care for her," he said to himself as he glanced at his guide: "She's too dark, and her figure's not like the figure of Owen's daughter. Perhaps she's got Saracen blood! She looks lovingly at me; but she certainly doesn't admire me! What a man wants, when he's left his horse and his sword behind him, isn't patronizing love but some sort of respect." And the Norman mind of our friend, aware of a midnight reaction against everything *embrouillé,* went so far as to clear up the difference between a man and girl by deciding that nothing was easier than to make a woman love you but nothing harder than to make her admire you!

"Besides," he thought, "love imprisons a person. Brut talks nonsense about not making friends with boys. *They* do admire anyone!"

Having returned old Adda's farewell bow and having cordially thanked him for his kindness, Rhisiart now followed the girl through a narrow archway and up a winding flight of stone stairs. So small was the circumference of this spiral ascent that Luned would have disappeared completely every third or fourth step had she not made a habit, as they mounted, of swinging completely round and, with one arm clinging to the surface of the great column round which the steps circled, stretching the lamp down with the other till it illuminated every step he took.

This precaution, as he quickly discovered, was by no means a work of supererogation, for some of the steps were almost completely worn away in the centre, and he had to place his foot sometimes on their extreme right side and sometimes on their extreme left.

He caught a glimpse, at several points in the ascent, of various rough carvings on the stone column round which the steps revolved, one of these, a gross love-knot intertwined with two initial letters, brought with a sudden rush to his mind a philosophical illumination he had once had on a staircase in Oxford as he contemplated a similar mural design.

He nearly missed one of the dangerous steps as he tried to recall the exact nature of the intellectual truth revealed to him on that occasion. It was after attending a lecture on Virgil, and it had to do with that poet's bold passage about "mind animating matter" which the lecturer associated with the Aristotelian view of the nature of God. It gave him, he remembered, some sort of intimation as to the presence of the divine *Nous* in the very lowest forms of the inanimate, even in a stone wall, for instance, like this very one, against which, by her flickering lamp, he could see his guide's rounded arm!

At last they reached a small closed door with a little stone platform in front of it. There was a cord dangling down from the top of this door with a piece of lead tied to the end of it, and at this cord Luned vigorously pulled, waiting at each pull to hear the result; and Rhisiart thought he could just catch, though far away and as if at the end of an unseen corridor, a faint tinkling response.

A long pause ensued after this, during which they listened intently for the sound of steps, and though they neither of them heard anything resembling steps, heard nothing in fact but each other’s exhausted panting, it gave them an opportunity to draw closer together, and Rhisiart laid the tips of his excited fingers upon the wrist that held the lamp.

The girl gave her dress several little violent jerks with her free hand, brushed some dust from her skirt, and pushed back a wisp of heavy dark hair that had fallen across her cheek.

“You mustn’t be surprised,” she began, gently repulsing his fingers, “if my Lady talks to you in a whisper and makes you talk in a whisper. Efa always goes to bed earlier than Sibli and me, and my Lady won’t let her out of sight, even when all the doors are barred. My Lady makes her sleep in the Tower bed.”

“Why is that?” enquired Rhisiart, wishing that he had the courage to snatch the light from his all-knowing guide.

“For a very good reason,” replied Luned, and her face, as the lamp threw the curve of her chin and the contours of the cheek into relief, assumed the expression of a resolute nun.

“For what reason?” he insisted, trying to take a commanding and dominating tone.

Luned hesitated. Then, with a gesture that he had already remarked as characteristic of her, she stiffened her short frame to its full height, jerked back her dusky head in a movement which threw forward her bosom, and with a bold and gallant rush of words, though speaking with an obvious effort, “You’ve heard, I suppose,” she said, “of the brides of Derfel.”

Rhisiart nodded.

“Well, Èfa has been chosen to be the next one!”

“Chosen?” he protested. “But hasn’t he been dead for a thousand years?”

Luned gave him a reproachful look as if this stupid levity were ill-timed. “They want to give her to him on the night they proclaim Glyn Dŵr. They say that the people of Ardudwy will rise in greater numbers if Derfel has a new bride."

"Why did they choose this particular girl?" enquired Rhisiart. Luned was silent; and then, disregarding his question, she brought out in a quick burst of words, while her dusky cheeks darkened still further, "Efa wants to be given! She wants to be the one! We can only hope, my Mistress says, that her child — if she has one — will burn Derfel's image and his Horse with it!"

These last words were spoken with so much feeling that our friend's predatory desire received a shock; and once more it was made clear to him how right the Lollard was in his use of the word *embrouillé.* He contented himself, however, with a humble enquiry as to the origin of this "Efa" who alone among the maids of North Wales actually wished to be the bride of a devil.

Luned showed no hesitation in satisfying his curiosity. "She's a niece of Rhys ap Tudor of Môn," she explained. "She's a cousin, therefore, of Owen's; and I suppose in some degree a relative of your own. But you won't see anything of her to-night, unless we wake her by talking very loud! She sleeps sounder even than Sibli."

"And who is Sibli?" and he raised his hand to his mouth to conceal a yawn. It began to present itself to his mind as a discouraging certainty that he was not destined to enjoy any sort of love-making that night.

But before Luned had time to answer his half-hearted question they both heard little tapping steps behind the closed door; not by any means quick steps, but steps that dragged and tapped, steps that were presently accompanied by the sound of a high-pitched voice muttering to itself. Luned lowered her lamp and they both gazed in silence at the dark outline of the barrier in front of them.

Presently the door was opened inwards, very cautiously and very slowly; but nothing appeared where Rhisiart expected to see a human head. A hoarse sound, however, made him look much lower; and there, only a yard from the ground, between the iron-clamped wood-work and the stone door-post, flickered what seemed a woman's features. Towards this face Luned directed her lamp, and Rhisiart stared down at it in astonishment. The face showed unmistakeable signs of having been roused from deep slumber. It had still about it the nameless scum of the wharves of Lethe; and it kept wavering up and down in that narrow crack as if its owner were repeatedly rising on tiptoe and repeatedly sinking back again upon her heels.

"It's all right, Sibli!" cried Rhisiart's guide. "Let's in, for Jesus's sake. We're tired."

The personage addressed opened the door a few inches wider but still barred the way. "She says 'we,'" she muttered in a kind of malicious chant as she opened the door an inch or two further; and her tone had a gloating mischief that made Rhisiart feel extremely uncomfortable.

He glanced quickly at the dusky profile of his companion. Had she betrayed him? How did he know that this mysterious Ffraid ferch Gloyw was not in the habit of sacrificing young men to Bran the Blessed, just as report said that the Scab sacrificed young women to Derfel Gadarn?

"She says 'we,' she says 'we,' she says 'we'!" chanted the woman, while her head bobbed up and down in the aperture like the quick-silver in a barometer. "We're tired, we're tired, we're tired. To bed, to bed, to bed!"

But Luned thrust her back, and squeezing herself through began whispering hurriedly, evidently explaining to the woman, whom Rhisiart thought to be the loathliest creature he'd ever seen, exactly who the visitor was. "*She* thinks a lot of him," Rhisiart heard her whisper; "and I wouldn't wonder if he doesn't enter her service. He got into trouble about the Hog of

Chirk. He defended the Hog when *she* was hanging him. Lawnslot was there and he’s told me all. In the guardroom they call him Master *Leap-before-you-look,* because of the way he faced the archers of Chirk.”

It was Luned herself and not this malicious porter who now pulled the door wide-open; but Rhisiart only found himself in a round, low, stone vestibule, with three steps leading up to an arch on the opposite side, and nothing in it but filthy straw, scattered heaps of what looked like human excrement, and three extremely menacing rusty chains attached to iron rings in the wall.

“Tell my Lady we’re here and ask her whether we’re to come in.” Before obeying these orders Sibli rose and fell several times on her high shoes, which gave vicious little clacking sounds as her heels came down. She was a dwarf, but not a particularly small dwarf. But her chief peculiarity, and what had formerly earned her many a silver groat from the inquisitive whores and wanton wags of Chester, was a birth-mark on the tip of her sharp chin, from which a long tuft of hair protruded. This tuft of hair had been dyed on one occasion by a couple of lively prentices in that rowdy town with an indelible pigment of a brilliant purple colour; and it was on the strength of an appendage of so unusual an aspect that this gnome-like creature had earned her living till she entered the service of the ladies of Dinas Bran.

The dwarf now tapped her way on her high shoes up the stone steps and disappeared through the arch, leaving Rhisiart and Luned alone. Both the young people had regained their composure and they proceeded to contemplate each other with shy interest. There was an antique lantern suspended from the roof by a twisted iron chain, and the girl tried to extinguish her own little lamp by vigorous puffs of her breath. In this she was unsuccessful; and as the lad bent down to try the force of his lungs on the obstinate flame, she made no attempt to prevent her dark tresses brushing against his forehead.

From her whole person there still emanated that fragrance that reminded him of a certain Moorish jewel-box of inlaid cedarwood that his light-natured mother used to unlock on festival mornings, and there was such a glow about her ripe lips and warm-breathing bosom that he felt a longing to quench the fever in his nerves, caused by the sight of the figure on the hurdle, by playing, without further restraint, that role of a lean hawk seizing upon a soft-plumaged pigeon to which he considered his Norman blood entitled. Hotter and hotter did this blood in his veins grow as he hovered over her.

He was staring now at the extinguished lamp clasped against her body and covering, as she pressed it to her, the embroidered band that was tied so tightly under her bosom. As for the discreet damsel herself she had certainly become shy and silent; but she displayed no token of alarm or any sign of repugnance. In fact, if instead of frowning at the lamp he had glanced at her face, it is possible that he would have detected the quiver of the faintest approach of a smile upon her lips.

This was the first time in Rhisiart’s life that he had been the cause of a girl’s becoming shy and silent. Tegolin of course had taken the lead from the beginning, and Tegolin’s mother had carried him off his feet, and with neither of them had he felt in the least formidable.

But the hint he’d had in Valle Crucis of a certain nerve in Lowri that fatally corresponded to the same nerve in himself had had the effect of making him a different person from the lad who had been so horrified at his thoughts when he allowed them to run riot about the imaginary arrow in Tegolin’s bare shoulder.

The wickedness excited in him by Lowri's burning fingers, and by the picture she had conjured up of letting him make love to her in the presence of her victim, had been accentuated to such a pitch by the sight of the man on the hurdle that he felt now as though he were a lost soul, a soul for whom the seduction of a discreet and nun-like maid could be the occasion for nothing but cynical satisfaction.

Looking round with the idea of finding a place to deposit the girl's ubiquitous lamp, which he had already come to regard as possessed of an annoying identity of its own, he caught, through an arrow-slit in the wall, a glimpse of the sky. "Ah!" he thought, "the stars, the stars! If only I could see the stars I would be a man. I would dominate this girl and beguile her mistress like a real adventurer! But there are no stars! This damned tower has blotted them out! Yes, if I could see only one single tiny star I'd be a man!"

Unfortunately for our friend he had no practical experience as to what measures a man took to make a sensible girl yield up her virtue. All he had discovered in himself was a will to be unscrupulous. All he had discovered in her was a prejudice against Saint Derfel. So he decided that he must just wait and see what opportunity the devil would give him! There was no doubt as to what he *wanted* to do. He wanted to twist his lean limbs and his fiery spiritual desires, like the glittering scales of a snake, round every curve of Luned's struggling form; conquering her not only physically, but also spiritually, so that there should be no part of either her body or her soul that did not cry out. "Rhisiart, I'm afraid of you! Rhisiart, I can't resist you! Rhisiart have mercy!"

It may perhaps have been, though in such crises one can never be sure, only the rapidity of the dwarf's return that saved Luned from the ultimate test of a maid's discretion; but as it worked out, her hooknosed companion lacked even the courage to take her hand in his own, as together they ascended the steps and passed under the arch and the two lanterns.

Here they were confronted by a pair of heavy curtains, between which the little Sibli, turning towards them like a jubilant fiend, bent low in a mocking curtsey. As the little creature did this she raised one of her bird-like claws to her chin and made a motion as if directing, in an obscene wish to humiliate both them and herself, its tuft of purple hairs towards them. But she swung round and with all the force of her small arms pulled aside the curtains and held them apart while they passed through.

Rhisiart was at the first moment far too overpowered by the Lady of the Ladies' Tower to take any definite notice of her surroundings; but, as time went on, his impressions of the singular apartment in which Mistress Ffraid now spent her life gathered weight and clarity.

One thing our friend had at once to admit; and that was that in place of resisting the influences of the elements the chief peculiarity of the tower-chamber was its exposure to them. In one part of it indeed the roof was entirely uncovered to the sky; and in order to dispose of the rain when it entered there was a deep groove cut in the flag-stones, leading to an aperture through the outside wall.

The Lady Ffraid passed most of her hours seated or reclining on a dais at the southern end of the chamber from which, by a nice calculation, she was able to watch the particular segment of the sky with its changing constellations, where appeared those celestial bodies with whose influences she was especially concerned. Immediately below this opening the apartment was hung from roof to floor with the biggest piece of tapestry Rhisiart had ever seen upon which could still be detected — though many of the colours and some of the forms were very dim — a striking representation of a deadly combat between a yellow and a red dragon.

Rhisiart's artistic Oxford friend would have been hard put to it to find any trace in this extraordinary apartment either of the flamboyant modern style, so dear to their parents, or of any conscious reversion to the austere beauty of the twelfth century, so treasured by themselves. The place contained indeed hardly any furniture at all; and what it did contain were such huge, rough, clumsily-carved objects as might well have been unearthed from the ruins of Mathrafal or left here from the days when Eliseg built the castle, or even have reverted to a still deeper level of antiquity, to nothing less than the sacred hill-city of the Blessed One himself!

But these details were only revealed to the young man by degrees. At the present moment as he advanced towards the southern extremity of the chamber, which resembled more than anything else the narrow platform with its wide altar-space of an ancient Greek stage, all he had eyes to see was the Lady Ffraid ferch Gloyw, whose name the little Sibli was now mockingly informing him meant nothing more than "Bridget, the daughter of Claudius." He climbed the two or three easy steps that led to the place where the Lady Ffraid was sitting, and in his desire to approach with a dignity becoming a cousin of Owen's he stumbled over the edge of a heavy Moorish rug, which among several others of a similar kind was spread out upon the dais. This stumble gave something grotesque to his approach. Indeed he was enraged to hear Sibli utter, without an attempt to suppress it, a high-pitched scream of pure delight.

But he was relieved to notice, as he recovered from this shock and dropped, as he'd seen his mother's noble admirers do, on one knee before her footstool, that the Lady Ffraid was totally devoid of any irritable punctiliousness. What he found disturbing about her, though neither Luned nor Sibli seemed in the least troubled by it, was not that she was exacting or particular or in any conventional way terrifying, but that she possessed a brain about five times more penetrating than the one with which he himself at that epoch of his life had been endowed.

"But she oughtn't," he said to himself, "to make me *feel* the superiority of her mind. That's not what women were intended to do. However, I'm not as frightened of her as some would be, or as stupid with her as some. Brut would be conceited enough to interrupt her. But I wish she would let me talk a *little* more!" And he went on to decide that if she did let him speak he would tell her about his meeting the great scholar Chrysoloras who taught Greek to the Emperor of Constantinople.

But it certainly was not about Chrysoloras, or the Emperor of Constantinople, that he found himself discoursing now, as he stood like a sulky school-boy in his dark Oxford tunic, with his thumbs dug deep into his belt. In fact he was completely tongue-tied. Tegolin was his good angel; Lowri his evil one. But this old woman — No, it was impossible to say what effect she was having on him. Was she throwing a "veil of illusion" over him? Was she trying to bewitch him? "I must say to myself," he thought, *"Rhisiart is Rhisiart,* over and over again. That's the best way when you're being bewitched. But what a lot of wrinkles she has! And they all seem aiming at me. I must pull myself together. Rhisiart is Rhisiart — Rhisiart is Rhisiart — Rhisiart is Rhisiart! — and I'd better not listen to what she's saying. It's with their words they do the damage. I can't stop up my ears, but I can look about."

He did realize that the old lady was speaking of Owen and giving him elaborate instructions as to how to use his influence over Owen; and the gist of her words, as far as he permitted himself to catch it, was that he must detach Owen from Crach Ffinnant and Derfel Gadarn.

In pursuance, however, of his drastic resolution to hear without listening, he forced his eyes to wander in the direction of little Sibli; and what he saw there was disagreeable enough to counteract any spell; for the dwarf was positively wriggling with pleasure at the embarrassed stupidity of his appearance. As she met his wandering stare she pressed her tiny knuckles against herself in an ecstasy of vicious satisfaction and swayed to and fro, poking her chin at him.

It is clear that Ffraid ferch Gloyw, for all her cleverness, underrated the childish cunning of the youth before her. She must have thought that his wandering attention was simply unmannerly curiosity. That he was deliberately resisting her instructions with an interior effort of will cannot have occurred to her. Living isolated in that tower-room, pondering day and night on the influences of the stars, the old lady had correctly divined Owen's need of a devoted young scholar; and the moment she heard of our friend's presence in Dinas Bran the thought must have come to her that if this devotion could be steered in a direction hostile to Derfel, Owen's destiny would gather momentum; and would revert, in fact, to the pure cult of the Blessed One from which these Derfel superstitions had diverted it.

At this point, however, there arose in Rhisiart's consciousness such a vivid memory of what Luned had told him about this singular young maid who "wanted to be given to Derfel" that he had less difficulty in keeping his response to the great lady's instructions cautiously mechanical. Rhisiart was Rhisiart now in the most primitive sense, as he contemplated the great piece of furniture near the warm peat-fire which he had heard spoken of as the Tower bed. So it was actually into the old, black, oaken boards of that archaic structure that there had been inlayed, perhaps a thousand years ago, a real fragment of Modry's favourite "cauldron of renovation" which Bran had given to the King of Ireland!

"Is she asleep now in that bed?" he thought, while his latest "Certainly, Madame!" sounded more intelligent than before. "And where would her head be? Just behind where that modern shield was leaning against the thing?"

Whether the sleeping girl's head was behind it or not, this polished shield became at once interesting to Rhisiart because it was so bare of every device. A deep, dark mirror it was, this plain shield, and the longer he stared into it the stranger, the more impossible grew the reflections he saw in it. For instance, he fancied he could see within it, not, as was to be expected, Sibli's lantern or Luned's freshly-lit lamp, but the actual movements of the voyaging clouds across the bare space in the roof, and what looked like the journeying of the stars themselves in and out of the moving clouds! He even assured himself — though he knew such a thing was totally out of the question — that he could see the flutterings of dark wings mingled with those clouds and with those stars.

"Has my coming here," he thought, "disturbed the crows of Dinas Bran, or is this shield, like Owen's crystal, a mirror of the future rather than of the present?"

And then, while the Lady Ffraid was still formulating an elaborate schedule, just as if she were never going to see him again, as to the methods by which he should turn the heart of Owen from serving Derfel, he suddenly realized that the sleeper in the Tower bed was peeping at him over the top of the shining shield! Yes, it was here, like a mermaid in a sea-shell, that the mysterious Efa had been sleeping all this while. She wasn't asleep now, however! On the contrary, with her elbows on the top of that shining shield, she was straining towards him with her whole body, straining with a wordless cry, "Take me! Take me!"

If our friend had already been lending no very attentive ear to the great lady’s instructions, it may be well imagined that he now became entirely oblivious of them. His being was absorbed in that bright shield-rim, over which those pleading eyes, disheveled curls, and warm, soft neck were outstretched towards him, like the very figure-head of the Cyprian Barge emerging from the haven of Love!

“How young she is!” he thought. “She’s a lot younger than me!” And incontinently he gave himself up to the most reckless and wanton interchange of glances. His narrow skull, with its predatory beak and snatching lips, must have looked to the Lady Ffraid, as she bent above it, like the human cranium of a man-headed kestrel. Taught by nobody but Nature herself how to prolong this eye dalliance, Efa instinctively pretended to be struggling in vain to resist the sweet rape of his hawk-pounce.

But the Lady Ffraid suddenly turned her head towards the Tower bed. “Lie down, child, at once,” she commanded sternly. “Bring that light nearer, Luned! It gets in her eyes over there. Lie still, child! You mustn’t lift your head from the pillow! Come nearer, Luned! Come nearer, Sibli! And, Luned, you’re too hot in that gown. Take it off, girl! Master Rhisiart has seen maidens in their shifts before. He’s a gentleman. You needn’t be shy of him. Take it off for her, Sibli! Do you hear, woman?”

It may be imagined that our visitor’s gentility didn’t prevent him from turning his eyes from the Tower bed to the sight of the dwarf’s helping Luned to disrobe; and when the girl’s figure was disclosed in her white smock, he certainly did feel less curiosity as to how far the wanton Efa had obeyed her mistress. Of one thing our young man was certain; namely, that Luned’s shyness in laying aside her gown was quite unaffected; was, in fact, something altogether different from the self-conscious shrinking of the younger girl.

When the dwarf had folded up Luned’s dress and they had both brought their lights to their mistress’s side, Ffraid ferch Gloyw spoke again.

“Listen, you three! I’m going to do something now that will keep Efa quiet, even if it doesn’t send her to sleep. I’m going to tell our young friend’s fortune. Sit down here by my side, Master Rhisiart, and show me your hands. There! No; like that! Nearer with the lamp, Luned; you’d better kneel down, girl, and hold it close.”

Rhisiart now became aware of a most eager excitement among all the feminine beings in the Tower-room. From the invisible Efa to the great lady herself there was projected into that peat-warmed chamber the particular vibration that any beating of the great wings of Destiny always arouses in the daughters of men. But for himself during this moment of tense expectation, as he laid his hands with their palms upward upon that prophetic lap, the lad couldn’t help glancing at the voyaging clouds and the apparently voyaging stars, as they pursued each other across that opening in the roof. And he began to wonder if there could be any real connection between the influence of those remote splendours and the snail-track hieroglyphs in his ape-like palms. And then from that starry hole in the roof he proceeded to look down at these same monkey-human hands of his! And as he looked at them he fancied he could feel a queer tickling in them, as if his “line of life” and “line of heart” were actually responding to the far-off influence of those splendours in the firmament!

“I believe,” he said to himself, “she made Luned take off her gown. I believe she wants me to fall in love with Luned.” And then as he stared down at his hands, while the Lady re-arranged the cushions that supported her enormous bulk, he seemed to grow aware of the twin orbs of her vast bosom bulking larger and larger upon him, as if in some superhuman vitality of maternity, they were irresistibly drawing him towards them!

"It would be like falling into the Pontic Sea to fall into her arms," he thought and he hardened his heart like a child when it stiffens its body. He suddenly began to feel suspicious of the whole atmosphere of this Tower-chamber. He felt as if some secret core of free egoism and masculine profanity was in danger of being submerged and lost in this super-feminine place. He felt obscurely hostile to all four of them. Up here together they seemed too powerful! He felt as if his only defence — the only way he could beat off this influence — would be by unscrupulous love-making. He felt now as if even his eye-encounter with Efa hadn't resulted in the pure, irresponsible conquest he had intended!

It was as if every feminine presence here — and he began to feel as if the Tower-room itself were a colossal feminine entity — were doing her best to absorb and drain out of him the very fount of his manhood.

With a savage self-insight, such as he had never known before, he recognized this core of his nature to be something free, hard, shameless, untamed, uncaught; and this it was that all this feminine sorcery — yes! even Efa's pretence of resistance over the rim of the shield — was bent on swallowing up!

He even found himself turning in his helpless desperation towards the disinterested viciousness of Tegolin's mother. She, at any rate, that depraved and shameless creature, had turned her sex into a lust that was motiveless, that was impersonal, that led nowhere, except perhaps to Hell, and that left him as he was, a free, uncaught, independent adventurer!

He even began to experience a malicious sympathy with his princely cousin's association with Crach Ffinnant. The Scab wouldn't let him be swallowed up as he himself was now in danger of being.

But the fortune-telling was on the point of starting in earnest; and our friend assured himself that less astute intelligences than his own — the well-meaning Lollard for instance — would by now have been absolutely bamboozled! “Rhisiart is Rhisiart,” he repeated like a charm. “And I expect,” he said to himself, “it takes the kind of legal mind that would have made me resemble Master Young, if I’d stayed at Oxford, to cope with situations like this.”

But now that Sibli was holding a taper close to his extended palms, while Luned, kneeling at her mistress’s feet, was pressing so close in her lively curiosity that her warm breasts touched his knees, Rhisiart had an admirable opportunity to take in in detail the appearance of Ffraid ferch Gloyw. She certainly had a figure of terrific proportions. Not only was she a very tall woman, quite as tall as himself, but her person was so enormously stout that her height was lost in the mountainous curves of her form. Her face, which our friend decided may once have been beautiful, was now covered with a multitude of little wrinkles. These wrinkles even descended to her double chin; while the creases about her nose and about the curves of her cheeks were accentuated by a certain habit she had acquired of twitching her nostrils and screwing up her eyes.

But her hair was the chief wonder of her appearance; and had our friend been less absorbed by the expectant itching in his palms, little Sibli would have had further opportunities for bursting into malicious derision at the sight of his naive astonishment.

As it was, whenever he did glance at the wrinkled countenance bending over his hands, he was filled with amazement, not only at the monumental enormousness of the woman’s face, but at the masses of hair, thick and curly, which, as in that vision of the Ancient of Days in the Book of Revelation, were whiter than the whitest wool.

“Let us all repeat a ‘Hail Mary’,” whispered the Lady, closing her eyes; and without a moment’s hesitation two, if not three, feminine voices joined her in the words, *"Ave Maria gratia plena, Dominus tecum... benedicta tu inter mulieres... benedictus fructus ventris tui."*

Rhisiart crossed himself, and bowed his head over that portentous lap. The words brought Modry to his mind. She too upon uncanonical secular occasions could often be caught murmuring the consecrated words. It must, he thought, be a habit of the Welsh; and he couldn't help wondering what the difference was between the tone of his friend, the Lollard, in such matters and the way the thing sounded in these rich feminine murmurs, as if it were an incantation!

But though his own lips moved in familiar response, there stirred, deep within his nature, a protest of reckless and impious defiance. Call it his wickedness, call it what you like, he felt he must keep the central core of his identity from being drugged, swamped, dissolved, in this Tower-room piety. The Blessed Virgin reinforcing the Blessed Bran was too much! He was once more conscious of a reaction in favour of the scurrilous Scab. The shameless thought actually crossed his mind that he would be ready himself to represent the demonic Derfel in the sacrifice of Efa's virtue to Owen's success!

But Luned's soft breasts were pressing closer still against his knees as she and Sibli stretched forward. The dwarf, as he could feel, was actually squeezing her purple chin against his shoulder; while over them all the great waves of fragrant warmth kept flowing from the burning peat-sods behind the Tower bed.

"It is in your line of heart, child," the old lady was proclaiming now. Her voice had precisely the same rich, low, chanting cadence as when she murmured *Ave Maria, gratia plena,* and Rhisiart was reminded of that deep-toned wood-pigeon he had listened to in the theologian's cell in Valle Crucis. "Yes, it is in your line of heart — there, just at that point! — where I can see the crux of your destiny. Strangely enough, though, the point I mean — do you see that protective square? — has nothing to do with any woman. Do you remember, girls, the night Owen himself came to me? This square upon Master Rhisiart's heartline corresponds almost exactly to what I found in Owen's. Your hands are quite different, child — well! — I mustn't tell you how they're different — but you and my Lord your cousin have at any rate *that square* in common! But you have a more unusual line of heart, child, even than Owen's. I've never seen one quite like it; and I confess it looks to me as if you would never be happily married. At this moment, as far as I can make out, you are being offered the love of several ladies; but though you will take some minor advantage of their feelings — that is indicated quite clearly — you will not be united in any serious manner to any of them! In fact, my dear child, from what I see there" — and she indicated that portion of his palm from which the four out-spread fingers diverged— "the curious thing is that unless an element of — of something I don't like to see at all is allowed to enter, it is impossible for you to get involved with any woman. On the other hand, you have a sensitive conscience, capable of causing you a great deal of acute distress; and so it looks to me as if—"

But at this point the little Sibli could restrain herself no longer. She uttered three shrill screams of elfin merriment; and Rhisiart became aware that the small creature, in her vicious interest, was actually digging her sharp chin into the back of his neck.

"Could I not, Lady Ffraid," he murmured, "overcome this — this influence in my stars — if I used" — he hesitated a second— "if I used all my will, and even" — he stopped again in a still longer pause while his cheeks grew hot— "even prayed to the Blessed Saints?"

The huge head with its animal-like covering bent in silence over his hand. The dwarf's guttering candle spilled a trickle of grease over his jerkin. Luned's soft bosom pressed so hard against his knees that it must have hurt her. And there arose in that tower-room a faint whispering and rustling as the summer wind passed through it on its devious and spiral way; stirring the thick curls of the great lady, agitating the dead reeds on the floor, causing the fighting dragons on the arras to bulge and swell.

Sometimes it sounded as if it were sighing down the tower-steps, with longdrawn broken gasps, longing to snatch at love-messages engraven there, longing to carry them across the valley and hide them in the lonely cracks and crevices of the Eglwyseg Rocks.

Sometimes it swept up to the roof of that tower-room, and went eddying on, softly and sadly, like a messenger whose message none had understood, into the vast air-spaces that separated Dinas Bran from the northern constellations.

"It looks to me," murmured Ffraid ferch Gloyw at last, "that your real danger, child, the supreme danger of your life, lies in yourself, and springs from your obstinate fear of committing yourself to any woman's love."

These conclusive and final words had an instantaneous effect in that warm, yet draughty chamber. They seemed to suck up in an arctic void all the magnetic currents that were rocking and lulling our friend, as if he had been a sturdy infant passed from one lap to another.

The little dwarf revealed her feelings at this anti-climax by a portentous yawn, followed by a grumbling apology to the visitor for the candlegrease she had spilt on his doublet. Luned rose stiffly to her feet and stretched herself with a deep-breathed sigh; while the old lady, returning his hands to him with a gesture of aristocratic indifference, enquired in an abrupt tone whether he was comfortably lodged for the night.

"The Seneschal has put me in Myfanwy's Bower," our friend explained, "but, as Mistress Luned knows, I haven't had much opportunity as yet of enjoying this privilege." As he spoke he also rose to his feet, and stepping backward a pace or two took the opportunity of once more fixing upon his mind — for somehow her talk had given him the impression of a last interview — the extraordinary personality of this mother of Lowri and grandmother of Tegolin.

Ffraid ferch Gloyw's face looked nobly monumental as he surveyed it from this distance, but screwing up her dark eyes she met his boyish stare with an amused smile.

"Do you see my daughter in me?" she asked him, "or do I remind you of our dear red-haired Maid?" And then, without giving him time to reply, "My daughter and *her* daughter," she said lightly, "take opposite sides as to your cousin's future. Lowri holds by Derfel while our Maid follows me in remaining faithful to the Blessed One."

Now it must be admitted that Rhisiart's experience of intellectual woman, whether old or young, was extremely slight, in fact might have been called nil; nor had Providence — when it caused the most frivolous lady in Hereford to give birth to a son who was as grave when he made love as when he said his prayers — chosen to compensate him for this peculiarity by any exceptional insight, as it is called, into human nature. Insight into the complications of jurisprudence, both civil and canonical, he did possess; and since he had gone to Oxford he had struggled to apply the niceties of Aristotelian metaphysics to the vagaries of human reason.

But he had of late begun to feel that even *this* was like fishing for minnows with a salmon-net. The strands were perfect; but the stream flowed through them, and the minnows followed the stream. In plain words the events of life — although they did have a certain resemblance to

Aristotle’s ideas — had the peculiarity of tumbling down upon him in impish disorder, as if they desired, without quite losing their labels, to behave as unlike philosophical events as they possibly could.

It had been no small shock to Rhisiart when he found his senses were more stirred by the wicked lust of the mother than by the sweet fidelity of the daughter. And now there seemed to be absolutely nothing in what he had learnt at Oxford that accounted for the fact that when Ffraid ferch Gloyw tried to lure him to the Blessed One by the naughtiness of Efa and the shyness of Luned he still should resist!

And he had by this time got a shrewd inkling that the methods of the Blessed One in the liberation of Wales were little to his taste. Had he become a hostage for Owen in Dinas Bran only to have it softly suggested to him on every side that his compatriots could get their freedom without drawing a sword? The proud, unscrupulous Norman blood in his veins rose in revolt as he stood there, sulky and sleepy, among these women. He found himself thinking with relief of that old warrior, Abbot Hywel, on his black horse, and of Father Rheinalt and his savage maledictions upon the Saxon.

Nothing would make them — holy men though they were — talk of liberating Wales without the sword! He began to curse himself for letting Luned come between him and King Eliseg’s “pitiless bronze,” and full of this sulky reaction against the great lady, to whom he seemed to find it all the same so hard to say farewell, he told himself that he was entirely glad that the daughter of Rhys ap Tudor had resolved to be Derfel’s bride!

“If I weren’t so sleepy,” he said to himself, “I’d ask the old lady to let Luned show me the way to Myfanwy’s Bower.” But it wasn’t only sleepiness. He recalled how clear and simple his purpose had been when he dug his crusader’s sword into the turf at his first sight of Dinas Bran. “Something’s gone wrong with me,” he said to himself. “These women have confused my mind. I wonder if life was as mixed up as this to King Richard when he was my age?”

What was Ffraid ferch Gloyw whispering to Luned now? Had she forgotten he was standing there, waiting to be allowed to go? Well, he must make the move himself. To fall into unfathomable gulfs of delicious oblivion in Myfanwy’s Bower seemed at that moment the only paradise in the world! He fancied that he caught a sudden darkening of Luned’s cheeks as he did at last make his good-night bow, but though he saw the girl’s eyes turn to her mistress, it was clear that Ffraid ferch Gloyw took for granted that an Oxford scholar could find his way about a castle without assistance.

Overcome by this access of sleepiness there might have been an awkward moment as he stood blinking at the great lady like a hook-nosed owl. And awkward it evidently did seem to Luned and the dwarf; for, as if inspired by a simultaneous desire to throw off some uncomfortable oppression, they carried the lights they held to a large iron chest at the back of the dais. Here they deposited them; and the effect of this move, for the lights on the walls were burning low, was to leave all the three feminine faces in deep shadow as the young man moved away.

But before he reached the curtain leading to that littered vestibule, the voice of the Lady made him turn round again; and sleepy as he was, he was relieved that she did speak, for he felt that his sudden departure was not falling out as a triumph of good manners.

She spoke quietly, so as not to disturb Efa. “You will have to choose, my dear child!” she said. And as if to emphasize her words she rose portentously from her couch, letting the mighty robe she wore sink down from her shoulders. Though still in shadow, her huge bulk in that peat-warmed chamber began to tower up before him, till it became a shape of superhuman proportion, its vast girth accentuated rather than diminished by the plain grey garment she wore, bound at the waist by a dusky cincture.

"Yes, you'll have to choose," she said, "between the one path or the other if you're to be intimate with Owen. The stars are predicting a fatal encounter; the invisible powers are gathering; and upon the alternative, whether his course will be guided by Bran the Blessed or by Derfel the Accursed, his whole future and the future of Wales will depend."

Muttering some rather feeble remark about a hope that the Lady Ffraid would pray for them all Rhisiart bowed low before the whole group of women and, parting the curtains asunder, passed out of their sight.

He had only just crossed the evil-smelling vestibule, however, and was standing under the lighted archway surveying the dark stone steps, when the curtains behind him opened and closed; and behold there was Luned, with a cloak thrown over her white smock, carrying her silver lamp.

"My Lady told me to lend you this because the stairs are so dark," she whispered, "but my Lady would rather I didn't go any further. She thinks we might meet the Sheriffs men and there'd be talk." She paused and half-turning round gave the curtains behind her a quick, apprehensive glance. But they had fallen back in their heavy folds and formed a massive barrier between the two of them and the chamber they had left. "It isn't that my Lady," Luned went on — while our suspicious friend assumed that she was only making what in a military language is called a "covering movement"— "it isn't that my Lady would mind our own people, who're all Welsh, seeing us, for they would understand. It's only that these English soldiers—"

And as she continued whispering, in the vein so shrewdly interpreted by our friend, enlarging upon the intelligence with which the Welsh would "understand" while the English would only indulge in ribald grossness, he himself, with a design that was no less clear to her, was engaged in taking the lamp from her hand. “It isn’t that my Lady doesn’t know,” she murmured, “how entirely to be trusted you are, and how you are an Oxford scholar and Owen’s cousin. It’s only that in a place like this there’s such a lot of gossip that one has to be careful. And it isn’t as if my Lady didn’t trust me with anybody, and especially with—”

Whether the discreet Luned heard herself uttering these final sensible words it was hard to say, but certain it is that, even before she ceased to have the breath to go on, the no longer sleepy Rhisiart had arrived at that point in masculine sensation where a girl’s words mean no more than the beating of the wings of a moth against a panther’s ribs. He had got the lamp away from her without extinguishing it, and had managed, without letting her go, to balance it, along with her cloak, upon one of the stone-mouldings; but what he couldn’t do was to cleanse the fetid air of this vaulted place, which certainly was, with its damp walls and its human excrement, the most inharmonious spot for such an encounter as could well have been selected.

On that night with Tegolin at the farm all had been in keeping with his romantic feelings. The mad monk, the sleeping cattle, the scent of hay, the sound of the river, the presence of his crusader’s sword, the flower in the Maid’s red braid, everything had worked in with his mood. But in this vile-smelling vaulted chamber he found, as he twined his bony frame about his not unwilling captive, that a totally new feeling took possession of him. For the first time in his life he realized the nature of pure lust.

They were both on their feet — indeed nothing else was thinkable in that foul alcove — but as her response increased and her breath came in gasps he had no desire for anything else than to press her more and more tightly against him.

There was a narrow window behind her, through which, as he held her, he could detect a group of those pale northern stars in which destiny had written so much. The sky was clear where those particular stars receded into a gulf of blue-black space, and what a queer pattern they were making! He found a curious satisfaction in observing those points of light as he strained her softness against his hardness, for they helped him to escape from the malodorous atmosphere of the place, and especially from the presence of one particular faecal entity which had already arrested his attention and that might well have been formed in the bowels of the Blessed One himself, as by the flame of that iron-socketed torch it took to itself the role of a reproachful witness.

The girl was shivering a little in his arms now as they swayed to and fro in front of that narrow aperture; but our friend was too absorbed to consider whether this was due to any weakening response of her nerves or simply to the contrast between this draughty evil-smelling spot and the fragrant peat-fire she had just left.

But Rhisiart was throwing into his caresses all the pent-up masculine irresponsibility which the matriarchal aura of the tower-room had drained out of him. He hadn't forgotten the words of Rawlff ap Dafydd, but in his present temper it only heightened his sensuality to think that he was stealing a march on that sturdy page. The ecstasy he was enjoying was shot through, like radiant parti-coloured silk, with the flickerings of his savage imagination.

Unlike the desire of some lads whose wantonness might have led them into "making love" to a maid with whose personality they weren't in love, Rhisiart's feelings were mental rather than physical. His caresses were electric and intense rather than violent and gross, but they were completely devoid of that fiery passion that redeems the senses. What he felt most definitely was a thrilling wonder at the pure mystery of feminine response. Wonder too at the intensity of the feelings which he himself was experiencing! These feelings, as they increased, seemed to grow more and more general. It was no longer the conscious personality of the little lamp-bearer that he held in his arms. They were not Luned's breasts any more that came to life under his touch. They were the breasts of girlhood in the abstract. And as he contemplated those distant points of light through the narrow aperture beyond her head they ceased to be what human custom called stars. They became flame-points of quivering angelic desire plunging into the dark coolness of uttermost space.

It is true that his ecstasy in rocking her to and fro and associating his feelings with those shivering points in the ether was not entirely unalloyed. The "Hail Marys" which she had repeated just now kept tolling their muted reverberation like a bell-clapper muffled in black velvet.

But the fact that his emotion was more imaginative than personal seemed to give him a sort of license to be unscrupulous; and his consciousness that the girl was responding to him with her body, even while resisting him with her will, increased this unscrupulousness. But that concerted feminine appeal to the Mother of God — *Hail Mary! Hail Mary!* — didn't grow less. And for some strange reason, though it troubled his conscience, it increased his lust. Out there, with those distant stars, it seemed like the cry of the ultimate darkness, of the primordial femininity of original matter, ravished by the energy of light.

But what was that? Could it have been only a frantic croak from some nocturnal bird? There! He heard it again! And it seemed to him that across the form he was embracing, and into that narrow window through which the stars had become his accomplices, there came from the base-court below several deep-throated human groans.

The Russian's "insect" in him was alert in a second. Had Lowri even now, while her infatuated Constable slept, slipped down to her victim's side? Had she taken with her one of her unscrupulous Welsh attendants; that Lawnslot, for instance, whom he'd seen with her on Midsummer Day and who certainly had the look of a born executioner? God! There was the sound again! And as he lent his ear to it, instead of releasing the now quite docile girl, he began to play with the monstrous fancy that he was holding Lowri; Lowri who was calling upon him to love her more, *more,* while in a frenzy of satisfaction her eyes devoured the helpless Simon.

And it happened to Rhisiart that the more these outrageous thoughts mounted up in him the more did that bell-clapper sound— "*Hail Mary! Hail Mary!"* — mount-up with them. *"Ave Maria, benedicta tu inter mulieres!"*

Oh, he had known evil before; but he had never known it was so *embrouillé;* that it held in its depths such varieties of deadly sweetness!

Luned had forgotten to shiver now, though she still had the wit to cast a glance now and then in the direction of the curtains. She was apprehensive, no doubt, of seeing a lifted candle, and beneath it the dwarf's illuminated chin!

But the stars through that window were all Rhisiart could see— "*benedicta tu inter mulieres"* — and they seemed to be growing larger and larger! Burning angels of the spheres they were, moving so rapidly in their eternal circles that their very speed made them motionless. And as Luned responded more and more to him, and playing upon her nerves he drew from her response what seemed to him like dark vibrant music; he began to feel as if all those enormous burning Beings were projecting in ever-widening circles a dazzling and glittering spray of desire as they plunged and dived and floated, and then rose up again, following the great astral wheel of super-mundane life that is encircled by the *Primum Mobile* of the cosmos!

Yes, he was sharing, he was sharing the high translunar impulse of those celestial creatures as they drew sweeter and ever sweeter music from the dark bosom of eternally receding space!

In the exultation of these moments all manner of wild heresies that he had heard of at Oxford returned to his mind, gathering a new and fearful meaning. He recalled how one young scholar from Italy had confessed to him that he knew a man at Padua who denied that the earth was the centre of the universe! He recalled how it was whispered that a student from Prague, who had recently arrived to study the doctrines of Master Wycliffe, had promulgated the blasphemous thesis that all the stellar heavens, including the *Primum Mobile* and the Empyrean, were the material body of God Himself.

"Does God, then," came the bold thought into his head, "hold infinite space to his heart as I am holding this girl?" And all the while, as he kept wondering how far this ecstasy of his could stretch without breaking, those glittering stars in that blue-black gulf grew larger and brighter. They were no longer little round pin-pricks in a great black tent. They were alive. They were enormous Beings. They were quivering with feelings akin to his own. He was one of them! He could feel the vast hollows of ether about him, wafting breath after breath of dark, delicious, primordial coolness against his burning face.

What did love matter to that abysmal coolness on his face and to those flashing fires that were now whirling about him? "No, no! I don't love you," he thought. "You're not going to catch me that way! If you want love-making you shall have love-making; but my fate's free, my fate's my own!" And it rushed into his mind that what Owen wanted was a man who could save him from himself, save him from all these superstitions; a man who knew Roman Law and Church Law and Common Law, a man who couldn't be fooled by wizards and bards and priests and women!

What did she say? That Wales can be free without fighting for it? Shiver, shiver in your black air, you burning stars! Yes, yes, my sweet one — but it's those proud glitterers I must follow — and take Owen and Wales with me!

But his ecstasy was over now; and with a gasp that was half sob, half sigh, he let her go. Aware for the first time that in his excitement his dagger had fallen from its sheath, he bent down to pick it up; glad enough at the excuse for avoiding her eyes. A strange shame, an intolerable shyness, took possession of him; and a heart-felt wish formed itself in the depths of his consciousness that neither tomorrow nor the next day, nor the day after that, need he see her again, nor breathe that sandal-wood fragrance!

But his punishment was only beginning; and the first stroke of it came as a direct result of his discourtesy in averting his eyes from her. For what must his gaze fall upon as he shook his belt and dagger into place, but that repulsive faecal entity whose loathsome presence had so outraged him at the start. And then — alas, for masculine resolution! — the tower-chamber began again to exercise its soft, sweet, maternal influence.

How calm the girl was as she slowly and languidly repossessed herself of her mantle! That protracted embrace, in which he thought he had been spiritually ravishing her, in which he imagined he had played the part of those high stars plunging into the yielding ether, though it had left her submissive and docile, had given her a power over him that made him feel like a helpless child! He had expected to suffer remorse, but he had expected also to be able to look at her like a hawk looking at a captured linnet!

But here she was, as she cheerfully adjusted her mantle and pushed back her heavy hair from her ears, meeting his eyes with an effortless triumph that was like the unrippling, undeviating upheaval of a wave that had sucked down a ship. The Welsh word for fate — *tynghed* — came into his head. Modry had taught him that word before he was six, in her tale of Arianrod.

Yes, he had used those softly-panting breasts for his impersonal pleasure. Now it was their turn; and they would be more personal! Those soft eyes that watched him from above that gently-heaving bosom had a look in them that he had seen before. He had seen a little girl he used to play with in Hereford with exactly that look when she cuddled a tiny toy soldier. He was that toy soldier now. “I’ve put a *tynghed* on you for good and all,” that look assured him. He glanced furtively, wearily, at the arrow-slit in the wall through which his soul had voyaged into space.

But the stars he had identified with his free ecstasy were smaller, paler, feebler, further away. They seemed to be weeping for his defeat; while the excremental entity upon the floor grinned at him.

And now, in a tone as rich and mystical as the voice of Mistress Ffraid herself, there issued from that warm, happy, care-free throat, as she handed him the lamp and lifted her face to be kissed, words that were the seal of his responsibility. “I’ll be feeding the crows at the foot of our tower to-morrow,” she said, “when the castle-bell strikes noon. I shan’t expect to see you but if you are by any chance on this side of the court—”

She said no more. Nor had she need to say more. An indescribable weakness, as if the hard core of his independence had turned into a warm-flowing sluice, reduced him to silence. Tenderly she smiled back at him as she parted the curtains; and he fancied he could hear the derisive chuckle and could glimpse the painted beard of the dwarf, as the words of Mistress

Ffraid returned to his mind. "If you want to help Glyn Dŵr you must choose between Bran and Derfel." *Bran? Derfel?* What had he known of either of them, when with a free heart he planted his crusader's sword in the grass above the river, while Griffin — Yes! What were those stable-men at Glyndyfrdwy doing with old Griffin now? Were they feeding him properly? Were they making sure that he had his bucket of water?

He unbarred the door at the head of the stairs and closed it behind him. He turned Luned's light upon the dark-winding steps. He felt as if his old adventurous, reckless, free heart were rolling down those steps in front of him, tapping the damp flag-stones in the darkness. "Griffin would be no good to me here," he thought, as he followed his heart down. "A prisoner doesn't want a horse."

But the image of the old piebald at that moment was too much for him. By the time he reached the place where the steps were worn away the twitching of his mouth increased; and before he arrived at the bottom his throat was swelling with the sobs of a little boy.

X. RHISIART LOOKS ON

THE FOLLOWING THREE months of our friend's incarceration in Dinas Bran passed in a manner so different from all he had expected that he decided that the only thing he could count on in the great world both with regard to himself and with regard to the events that happened was that no prediction was possible! To his bewildered surprise, and, we may add, to the relief of all the more normal elements in his nature, the very next day after his escapade with the dwarf he was informed by his young acquaintance, Rawlff, that the Constable had left the castle to go on some secret errand of the King's and had taken the Lady Lowri with him.

It was now three months since these two had vanished; and not even the all-knowing Luned had been able to satisfy his curiosity about them. Rumours of the wildest kind kept spreading through the castle. Some said that Denis had interrupted, on that first night of Master Simon's captivity, a scene between his mistress and her former husband which had shocked him so that he punished her by carrying her off, no one knew whither! Another rumour went so far as to declare that he had forced her to journey with him all the way to the great Nunnery at Shaftesbury, and had caused her to be shut up there.

Certain it was that since her departure the unhappy Simon had made several unsuccessful attempts to escape. Rawlff gave it as his opinion, based on something Luned had let fall, that in spite of her cruelty to him the man was actually pining for her; and if he had escaped would have risked his life in pursuit of her.

This in Rhisiart's opinion was a fantastic view, founded on the romantic illusions of youth, and he had on several occasions held both the son of Dafydd and the son of Cynan spell-bound for a whole summer afternoon, while he revealed to them certain cynical truths about human nature and about the relations between men and women. Listening to him on the battlements with either the fertile plains of Bromfield and Ial stretching beneath them to the eastern horizon, or the rugged mountain ranges of Saint Tysilio mounting up towards the west, the pageboys not only displayed an intense interest in these ideas but a lively admiration for the brain that entertained them; for they could not help reflecting that only experiences of a most startling character could have led to conclusions so drastic.

These frequent and intimate parleyings between our friend and the two pages did not pass unnoticed. Rawlff himself admitted to Rhisiart one day that Lowri's servants, Lawnslot and Gerallt, had asked him point-blank what it was that Master "Leap-before-you-look" was always talking about.

"What did you say?" Rhisiart asked.

"I said bull-baiting in Hereford and bear-baiting in Oxford," replied Rawlff.

"You said well," commented our friend; and he thought, "At his age I wouldn't have answered like that. That's where they're cleverer in Wales than in England."

But these warm late summer days had not only been completely different from what he had anticipated; they had been also very much happier. The castle hadn't yet — as he had been sure it would — married him off to Luned. Besides he had got fond of Luned, and he would have got more than "fond" of Efa if she hadn't, one hot August day, slapped his face so viciously that his cheek hurt him when he lay on his left side at night.

Tegolin, it seemed, preferred the company of her mad Friar to that of Luned and Efa. She had known them from their childhood. But with neither of them, though for very different reasons, could anything have persuaded her to be confidential.

Alice of Ruthin, too, seemed rather to avoid than to cultivate the society of the tower-chamber ladies. This was partly, as Rhisiart knew, a matter of race and class. No English girl of such humble extraction could feel at ease with high-born maids of the Welsh aristocracy. But it was also, he decided, a matter of personality, for the further his acquaintance with Alice grew the less he liked her; while her attendance on Tegolin proved a serious obstacle to his getting the Maid to himself.

Did Tegolin, he wondered, chafe at all under this restraint? Did she miss the romantic excitement of their first companionship? He couldn't tell. He had never fancied she was in love with him. But he had felt from the start that there was an unbreakable link between them; and it seemed strange she should have settled down so easily to this queer confined life without making any move to enter into closer touch with him. As a matter of fact they hadn't had one really intimate conversation since they had been together in Dinas Bran.

But it wasn't that he gave any deep thought during these peaceful months to Tegolin's feelings. She was always the same to him, always kind and natural. She had never been a demonstrative person save in her heroic championship of the Friar; and if she was a little more reserved than formerly, and now and then a little abstracted, he attributed these things to the moods of Mad Huw, who seemed to be growing more and more dependent upon her.

In the absence of the Constable and his mistress the management of the castle reverted to old Adda, though there was a general awareness of the obscure influence of Ffraid ferch Gloyw in the background. The Seneschal’s position during this momentous time was by no means an enviable one. But Adda ap Leurig was a self-assured old man of great dignity of deportment and of no small diplomatic experience. He was proud of his post; and on one occasion when the famous Welsh robber, Gruffydd ap Dafydd ap Gruffydd, who had had trouble with Lord Grey, was brought in duress to Dinas Bran, he managed to uphold so vigorously the jurisdiction of the Sheriff of Shropshire against that of the Bishop of St. Asaph that, in the course of the legal debate as to who should have the privilege of hanging him, Gruffydd ap Dafydd escaped scot-free.

But trouble was in the air; and that it was a trouble much more charged with dangerous electricity than the case of the notorious robber was proved by the fact that hardly a day passed after the first of September without messengers of some sort arriving at the castle, agitated and excited, bringing tales of movements of English troops or of Welsh insurgents.

It was no doubt the absence of Denis Burnell that made the place a centre for the intrigues that were going on; for Adda ap Leurig had for so long followed a policy of drawing the two races together that everyone on the Marches knew that if anyone could patch up a quarrel between a Welshman and an Englishman, that one was the old antiquary of Dinas Bran.

It was so long, too, since Wales had fought for her independence that there were a great many Welshmen on the Marches who, without losing anything of their racial traits, had won for themselves, among the King’s officials, positions of great responsibility.

Hitherto old Adda had ostentatiously refused to believe that Owen was plotting to strike for anything more important than a tract of bracken-covered upland between Gwyddelwern and Derwen of which Lord Grey had robbed him.

But as September advanced the rumours that kept reaching the hill-fortress grew so wild and startling that it became hard for the Seneschal's prisoners to believe that the old man knew as little about the trend of events as he publicly averred.

During July and August he had evidently enjoyed his position of authority and the chance which the border-situation of his impregnable fortress offered him in his role of peace-maker. But when September came, and the fatal day drew near to which the dying words of Iolo Goch had pointed, it was clear to everyone in the castle that their Seneschal had become a changed man. He kept his counsel, but his countenance grew daily greyer and more taciturn; and Rhisiart noticed that there was a perceptible tightening in the discipline in the place, and that a closer guard was kept, not only upon the unlucky Hog of Chirk but even upon his own movements and those of his friend, the Lollard. He kept wondering whether, after all, the astute old man wasn't in constant touch with both the Sheriff and the Constable. Was he playing some complicated and double part, intending all the while, when the returning army was near enough, to hand his hostages over to the King?

Our friend had his moods of considerable nervousness. A pretty end it would make to the grand adventure of his life to be hung, drawn, and quartered with every circumstance of Lancastrian cruelty before he had struck a single blow for the cause! Night by night as the days wore on — each more lovely in its autumnal peacefulness than the last — he communicated these apprehensions to Master Brut; but nothing that he said could destroy the heretic's aplomb.

“I may have to suffer in the end,” the Lollard would say, “and I daresay neither of us will live to be as old as Master Adda; but I feel a stronger confidence than I can describe to you that the Lord Jesus intends to use us for the cause of Wales and her religious liberty, before our hour comes. If Henry of Lancaster were as near as Shrewsbury, and all his host with him, I should still feel the same. If I could only persuade you to let me read—” and the man’s discourse would swing off to those interminable theological points, illustrated by his Greek text, which Rhisiart found so unbearably tedious.

And there was still another worry to our friend, as those lovely September days went by, arising from the missionary zeal of his fellow prisoner. It seemed to Rhisiart that the Ruthin girl was up to some shameless game with the worthy man. Master Brut had an innocent habit, or at least it seemed innocent to Rhisiart, of relating to him at night every detail of his patient attempts to initiate this languorous hussy into the mysteries of the Christian Faith.

It was not, of course, concealed from our astute friend that when the good Wycliffite did this he had an eye to killing two birds with one stone, and by appealing for intelligent sympathy in his struggle with the soul of this tantalizing baggage to instill sideways a drop of evangelical truth into the careless heart of his comrade in arms.

But Rhisiart discounted all this in his growing suspicion that Alice was leading her teacher a fine dance. His own regard for Master Brut, quite apart from the man’s mania for making converts, had increased steadily all this summer. He had never met a person, certainly not another young man, so considerate to his moods, and so interested — and our friend had many of these and loved to express them — in his ideas.

One aspect of the Lollard’s nature, however, suited Rhisiart less well; and that was his sociability. Master Brut was always coaxing the young people of the castle — and the man seemed to have no prejudices either with regard to sex or class — into joining in various open-air games. Certain ball-games he especially loved to organize, for these were adapted to women as well as men; and though he always explained the rules of these games as if they were old traditional country sports, Rhisiart secretly suspected that the best of them were invented by himself and invented solely to give the girl from Ruthin an opportunity to enjoy herself with her social superiors.

Rhisiart in his own heart despised and hated all games. It was one of his quarrels with what he called the garish vulgarity of modern times that young people were no longer content with the old-fashioned pastimes of mumming and miming, jonglerie and jousting, all of which had about them an aspect of the poetic, but must needs play at some hit-or-miss sport, with a Jack-in-the-Pulpit solemnity, such as made a man feel a complete zany.

But Walter Brut was a difficult person to turn aside when he had once set his hand to a thing; and one by one his little group of players at Ting-a-Ring, at Hit-and-Run, at Shuttle-Cock, at Bob-Bunting, at Save-your-Saucer-Sally, at Spy-Fox, increased and increased; until before hay-time was over and harvest begun, not only Rhisiart himself but Lowri’s two henchmen, Lawnslot and Gerallt, and the pages Rawlff and Iago, together with Tegolin and Alice and Luned and Efa, got into the habit of meeting at the foot of the Ladies’ Tower every fine afternoon, thus to disport themselves. Here, divided into opposing sides that generally assumed the names — to avoid touching modern politics — of Greeks and Trojans, the Lollard would elaborate such unexclusive sports that the high-born had no advantage over the low-born, nor the men over the women!

It was upon an occasion of this kind, on the fourteenth of September, in the year of grace fourteen hundred, that Rhisiart, having grown weary of comparing the movements of Tegolin with those of Efa, and of Luned with those of Alice, sat down upon a stout-backed bench by the old Seneschal's side and tried to disperse both his own dislike of games and his bearer's dislike of war.

"May I ask you, sir," he began, "a rather delicate question?"

Adda ap Leurig sighed. At the first sound of the young man's breaking silence, his grey face had lit up, for he believed that at last he was to be asked for another sight of Eliseg's sword. But the word "delicate" dashed this hope to the ground.

"Well?" he groaned, watching Efa leap up from the flagstones like a young deer and intercept a lightning-like fling of the ball, thrown by Lawnslot to Gerallt, "what is it, lad?"

"You haven't heard anything," enquired our friend, "to suggest that people in this castle think there's something — I mean any kind of plighted troth — between Mistress Luned and me?"

The old gentleman couldn't restrain a smile. "Dear me, no!" he responded hastily. "Certainly not!" Then more gravely, after clapping his hands to indicate appreciation of a piece of brilliant play by young Rawlff, "I have recently discovered," he remarked, "that many round here hold the view that it would be a good thing if Owen gave his remaining daughter to someone with Welsh blood. It has gone against the grain with many, though I approve of his policy myself, to see him with so many sons-in-law who have nothing Welsh about them except their lands!"

Our friend's eyes shone, and his swarthy cheeks darkened with pleasure. "Would I really—" he began.

The sly old antiquary was delighted with the effect of this casual suggestion; for it is certain that whomever else he may have considered as a partner for Owen's child, he had never thought of Rhisiart.

"I only hope," he went on hurriedly, "that when this foolish war-scare has blown over — for of course we know in our hearts that Providence has intended our two races to live side by side — you'll be able to make your cousin see that the policy of all wise people must be the unity of *Ynys Prydain!* Why, in that old book of mine from which I recall reading to you a passage on your first night here, it is always assumed that the rulers of Wales do homage for their lands to the King in London. You must remember, lad, that we gave London her kings in the old time; and who knows whether in future times we shan't do the same! The great thing is for the two races to intermarry."

"But, sir!" interrupted Rhisiart, proud to think he was discussing affairs of state. "Didn't you say that people round here blamed my cousin for marrying his daughters to—"

The old gentleman gave him a shrewd glance; "I said his *daughters,* lad. What I would like to see would be a marriage between Meredith ab Owen and a little princess of the House of Lancaster. *Then,* if there were a child, for you must remember that Owen through his mother is as much the rightful heir to South Wales as he is through his father to Gwynedd and Powys, that child would be, I tell you, successor to both Edward the Third and Rhodri Mawr! That is," he added with a frown, "unless the Percies dethrone King Harry to put the little — bravo! well caught, Mistress Efa! — the little Earl of March in his place."

While they were thus conversing Rhisiart observed the familiar figure of Mad Huw approaching them. Now it was well known to every gossip in the castle that the Grey Friar was always careful to avoid the sight of his devoted Maid when she was engaged in these youthful sports. Some scandalmongers maintained that it was a carnal temptation to the worthy man to see her fling herself about in the ardour of the game. Others attributed it to a cloistered prejudice against any mingling of the sexes. Whatever its cause, Rhisiart felt an uncomfortable sense of foreboding when the man broke his custom and came hurrying up to them.

"They tell me in the guard-room," he began at once, taking no notice of our friend and addressing the Seneschal, "that there have been three messengers today asking for Master Denis. I listened while the men at the gate were talking; and I heard them say that it *was* true the Usurper had returned from Scotland. I heard one man say he'd got his whole army with him and had already reached York. Of course we know" — here he turned to our friend and gave him a significant and exultant look— "what this lost soul is after, and that God has already defeated his devil's design — But I've come to suggest to you, Master Seneschal, that the castle-beacon should be lit at once. We know where God's Richard is; but it might be wise to warn the people that the enemy of God is on his way."

The mingling of native shrewdness with maniacal fantasy in Mad Huw's remarks struck Rhisiart deeply. As he looked from this prophetic figure standing there with its outstretched arm pointing towards the gate, while the game before them grew momently more absorbing, it struck him that it was a curious thing to see all these lovely young creatures so oblivious of the larger game of which the more responsible minds in Dinas Bran were so gravely aware.

Of course it was absurd of the Friar to suggest lighting the castle beacon of an English out-post to warn the Welsh of the approach of the English King. But if the Constable chose to be absent when events of such importance were in the air anyone in Dinas Bran had a right to make suggestions.

“Master Seneschal must be wishing more than any of us,” Rhisiart now blurted out, contemplating with his swarthy narrow face and sucked-in lips both the Friar and the old man, “that Denis Burnell would return.”

Adda ap Leurig directed towards the young man a dull unresponsive stare. “That is as it may be,” he replied laconically. And then added, “But I trust you and Master Brut and you too Brother Huw, aren’t tired of the manner — inadequate as I admit it is — in which the Constable’s responsibility has been carried on in his absence?”

Nothing in any king’s court could have surpassed in dignity the bow and smile with which Mad Huw received these words.

But Rhisiart was less polite. “You won’t hand us over to Bolingbroke, I trust, sir, whatever demands you receive from the English camp?”

The old man’s face stiffened; and he gave a quick glance at the Friar, evidently afraid lest the allusion to Richard’s enemy should produce an outburst. But Mad Huw was following at that moment some rather severe test of his Maid’s skill so intently that he didn’t seem to have caught our friend’s words.

Rhisiart followed the Friar’s gaze. Certainly the Maid of Edeyrnion looked by far the most athletic of the four girls and by far the best proportioned. Alice’s figure was more voluptuous; but the boyish resilience of Tegolin’s muscles struck our friend’s mind as more beautiful. But just now he was not only concerned with beauty. He found a peculiar and special pleasure, though it could hardly be called an aesthetic one, as he watched these girls at play, in their appealing awkwardness. How funnily they threw the ball when they got hold of it! Was that due, he wondered, to the natural softness of the upper portion of a girl’s arm where it touches her bosom, or was it due to some inescapable pliability in her bones that forbade the stiffer purchase necessary for a powerful fling? And if their awkwardness pleased him, another thing that afforded him satisfaction was to watch their self-consciousness increase as they began to get hot and dishevelled, and to note how in any pause their fingers would fly to their heads or to their belts.

From these philosophical contemplations our friend, turning his attention to his neighbour, found the Seneschal sitting bolt upright upon the bench, his thin figure erect, and his eyes fixed, not on the crisis in the match, but on the ground at his feet. It was at once evident to Rhisiart that the man was making some important decision; so that it did not surprise him when lifting his head and speaking with a grave deliberation he uttered the following words: “I may as well tell you, young Master, that there is to be a conclave to-night over our supper-board at which your presence, and that of your heretical friend over there will be required. My Lord of Nannau and his friend, David Gam, arrived at the Tassel last night. Father Rheinalt is expected this afternoon at Valle Crucis, and as soon as the Prior has received him, he and Father Pascentius will come up here to meet these gentlemen.”

Rhisiart’s countenance fell. The last persons he desired to meet in Dinas Bran were Hywel Sele and the notorious David. He was faintly reassured by the thought of Tegolin’s father being present; but towards Father Pascentius his attitude was only a little less nervous than towards the brutal pair of Anglophiles.

But the Norman blood in his veins did him a wise turn at this juncture. While he was debating legal niceties in the Oxford lecture-rooms this same Norman blood had often stood him in good stead; and now it enabled him to turn upon the Seneschal a frank, disarming, and almost stupidly ingenuous face. It enabled him in fact to open his eyes and mouth with modest astonishment. It enabled him to express the hope that in his meeting with Sele and David he would bear himself as befitted a cousin of Glyn Dŵr's; and he concluded by expressing a puzzled and almost childish wonder that the impetuous Rheinalt should dare to meet these dangerous and remorseless free-booters; and that he hoped the patriotic Cistercian wouldn't say anything to excite their fury. The tone he took completely reassured the old man.

"To tell you the truth, Master," the Seneschal said, "I had this morning a message from Owen himself proposing to come and meet these men. But I replied at once begging him not to run such a mad risk. I told him that it would be very difficult for me to protect him. I warned him that it wasn't only Welshmen who knew about the date prophesied by Iolo Goch, and now so near."

All sorts of agitating ideas rushed through Rhisiart's head at this piece of news. But he forced his narrow face to grow almost square in its simple ardour, while his indrawn lips fell apart in a look of gaping trustfulness.

And Adda ap Leurig went on making the mistake that sly old men make when they underrate the subtlety of youth. He added yet more to his revelations; for he was clearly anxious for reasons of his own not to keep his prisoner in the dark, as long as such enlightenment could be, as it were, brought about inadvertently and without too great a shock. So, like a butterfly whose antennae are delicately feeling the plant it hopes to use for its purpose, the Seneschal lingered upon his words, ready to shear off the moment their implications produced trouble.

"I knew," he went on, "from Owen's message, that he was growing anxious about your fate and that of your friend. I could see he fully understood my dilemma, being, as I am, the Constable's representative here.

And it seemed to me that in his consideration for both parties — for myself as responsible for you to the King, and for you as his hostages with the King — he was prepared to take a very serious personal risk. It was to avoid this risk — for Hywel Sele, in spite of their relationship, which is, I understand, much nearer than your own, hates Owen with a murderous hatred — that I took the course I did; for I was sure that both of you honourable young gentlemen would have bidden me to do so. I refer to the course of strongly dissuading him from such madness. In fact I went so far as to forbid him, in the name of the Constable, and of the Sheriff, and of the King, to come near Dinas Bran at this dangerous moment! As to his further plans, I told him I wished to hear nothing of them, and indeed refused to hear anything. I told him bluntly that I held Dinas Bran for the King, and that if he approached it in the present tension of feeling, I should man the walls and hoist the Royal Standard."

The old man drew breath, and sank back on the bench, exhausted with his effort. But this didn't prevent his directing towards his hearer, through half-closed eyelids, a long searching look.

Our young man, however, promptly turned away his head, leaving Master Adda to close his eyes to the warm autumnal sunlight, and to subside, or pretend to subside, into a peaceful sleep. But Rhisiart's face now took on its narrowest Norman intensity. He sucked in his lips till his mouth became like a crack in a sun-baked ridge of sandstone, and he fixed his frowning stare not upon the game, which was reaching its close with the victory of Tegolin's side, but upon the scarred and broken terraces of the Eglwyseg Rocks.

Ever afterwards, thinking of this moment, he associated these jagged precipices and cosmogomic bastions with the grim thoughts against which his spirit was beating like a wounded bird. Was it the old man's intention, he wondered, to make an indirect appeal to him, and through him to the Lollard, to be ready, for Owen’s sake, to be handed over to Henry of Lancaster?

A horrid vision came between him and those blood-streaked jagged rocks. He saw himself in the position of an unhappy traitor he had once seen on the scaffold in Hereford; and the pit of his stomach turned at the thought. He saw Master Brut bound with chains to a bull-baiting stake while men in leather jerkins and with bare hairy arms piled faggots round him. His lips just then were not available for smiling; but a sardonic self-mockery crossed his mind when he recalled the dark emotion with which he had thought of making love to Lowri while her eyes met those of the victimized Simon.

“There’s nothing,” he thought, “like being put through it oneself to see one’s blood-lust in its true proportion!” And then he thought, “What a thing that it should be my life that will probably end now and not anyone else’s! And except for the ordinary execution-crowd no one will know! The crowd will disperse, each to his home; but where will Rhisiart be?”

He was so absorbed in his dark thoughts that he was hardly aware that the match was over and that the players were either standing about discussing the game or moving slowly away. Seeing their outward forms with only a very faint consciousness of their identity, he now noticed the Friar and Tegolin advancing to meet each other. With this same lacklustre eye he watched them meet. With this same lacklustre eye he watched the childish pride with which the Friar congratulated the girl on her victory.

Mad Huw and Tegolin, after all, he had only known for a few months; but himself, his consciousness, Rhisiart’s feeling about Rhisiart, he had known as long as he could remember, and it was this that now faced its end! That punctilious little grey man at his side, no longer pretending to sleep, talking quite naturally to Luned just as he might have done if it had been someone else, had been hinting that the youth called Rhisiart was destined to be hung and quartered! Then there would not be anyone in the world to say, “Rhisiart is Rhisiart — that is, I am I.”

Our friend had got as far in his thoughts, when once more he felt physically sick. He couldn’t forget certain particular circumstances of what he had seen in Hereford. Barrels of burning lime, or bubbling tar, rose up before him; into which certain shapeless and bloody objects, that five minutes before had been the limbs of a living man, were plunged by the help of iron prongs. “I mustn’t begin to spue,” he thought, for he suddenly felt in his vitals the nausea that comes to mortal men when they really take in that what has happened to someone else is likely to happen to themselves.

Instinctively he turned his gaze to his friend, Master Brut, resolving that he would ask him in a moment to accompany him on a walk round the battlements. He felt he must tell Master Brut what peril they were in — and tell him at once. The excellent man would probably preach him a sermon about trusting in the Lord, and expound to him where the doctrine of Master Huss in regard to death differed from that of Master Wycliffe, but for some reason he felt just now that such a discourse would be a comfort.

But just as he was going to summon his friend, young Efa came running up to the Lollard to implore him to accede to some caprice that had suddenly entered her lively head.

Rhisiart was actually on his feet now; but he hung back, watching Efa’s coquetry. The young girl was certainly the loveliest creature, save Owen’s daughter, that he had ever seen, and he felt that for lighthearted love-making, as intense in its concentration as it was remorseless in its dodging of responsibility, he and Efa were exactly suited to each other. They were indeed, he now decided, too suited to each other; for ever since she had slapped his face in the ruined chapel, where they had come much nearer to cheating Derfel than they had intended, he had shown himself as haughty with her as she was haughty with him.

It had entered his head once or twice that this mutual pride was silly, since, like himself, she had no heart, that organ he so especially dreaded in women! But a slap in the face was a slap in the face; and it wasn't very nice to have to sleep on his right side for nearly a week!

All the same, as he watched her now, leaning forward against the Lollard's stout figure and twisting between her fingers one of the buttons of his tunic, while her curls brushed his shoulder, the doubt did penetrate our friend's consciousness as to whether he'd been wise in doing nothing but sleep on his right side. Suppose he had given his dignity to the devil and made love to her again? Would a couple of months spent in irresponsible pleasure have enabled him to regard those bubbling barrels and iron prongs with equanimity; or would they —

But Efa had left the Lollard now — apparently with his consent to her plan — and was racing from Luned to Tegolin, and from Tegolin to Alice.

Not only the hang-dog Lawnslot — whose ugly visage had from the start brought bloody executions into Rhisiart's mind — but quite a large group of troopers from the guardroom were still hanging about, some no doubt with the hope of an assignation with the Ruthin girl, others just content to stare as long as they dared at the irresistible Efa. Rawlff and the other boy, however, had clearly had enough of feminine society. They had both been on the losing side; and Rhisiart saw them now hurry off with obvious relief upon some private enterprise of their own.

But Master Brut now approached the Seneschal with a bland and smiling countenance.

“With your permission, sir,” he said, “our four lasses propose to give us a round or two from an old Welsh dance. Mistress Alice knows it quite as well as our young ladies here, and little Efa swears to me that there is nothing in it that could offend.”

Adda ap Leurig seemed at first unable to catch his meaning. “Offend?” he repeated as if thinking aloud. “Offend? It must need be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom — but quite right, quite right, though for myself you’ll have to excuse me. I’ve got to make certain — arrangements — we’re expecting various important guests to-night to what poor cheer our kitchen and buttery can provide, and I must bestir myself. Master Rhisiart will tell you that I hope to have” — he spoke with a deliberate gravity and emphasis— “the honour of the presence of you both at our little — banquet. And you, Brother,” and he turned to Mad Huw, who was evidently undergoing some interior emotional struggle, “must beg Mistress Tegolin to excuse you, too; for I have a wounded man on my hands in need of spiritual consolation.”

There was something about this direct appeal to his divine office — an appeal which, owing to his eccentricity, the poor man had not received for years — that touched the Friar to the heart. His whole face lit up. “Certainly I will come,” he responded. “At once, at once! Let us not linger a moment. Even now it may be too late!”

Rhisiart did not fail to notice, as the two went off together, the fine politeness with which the Seneschal refused to give to any of them that look of sly complicity with which normal human beings tend to conspire together to make sport of the abnormal. “The Welsh,” he said to himself, “are certainly the most civilized people in the world.”

But the Lollard wanted his help now to spread upon the ground long strips of brightly-coloured ribbon, making squares and angles and oblongs upon the flag-stones.

“At home,” the Lollard said, “our ribbons are fastened to the pole; and the dancers hold them in their hands. But in this dance, which is called the *Dawns Gwymon* or Sea-weed Dance, the girls pick up the ribbons from the ground and exchange them with one another. It must have been danced originally upon the sea-sand and like all extremely ancient dances it has a number of inflexible rules for every movement, and nothing is left to chance or to personal mood or caprice.” He now turned to the four young dancers who were talking eagerly together, and began clapping his hands in a monotonous beat. The troopers who had drifted to the scene immediately followed his example, as also did Lawnslot and Gerallt. By degrees, under a few signs from Master Brut, all the men present formed themselves into an extended circle around the dancers, every one of them keeping up this monotonous beat of hand-clapping.

Rhisiart was quite startled by the peculiar sensation that came to him as he joined the other men; a feeling as if in some odd fashion he were joining a musical accompaniment that had had no beginning and could have no end! He felt as if he and all his companions were intruding upon some unearthly ritual that had always been going on, though only as they began to share it had it become visible and audible to them; and as he clapped his hands in rhythm, he felt as though the stiff, mechanical movements which the four girls now began to make, as they stooped to pick up the ribbons and raising them above their heads wove them into a swaying pattern as they danced, were inescapably forced upon them by this monotone of beaten hands.

Where he stood he was facing the Lollard, and though the man’s face was often concealed by the weaving and unweaving of the dance, when he did catch sight of it, it wore an expression that completely puzzled him. It was a religious expression, and might have been called a mystical expression, and yet it was full of a kind of ecstatic sensuality. Its expression reminded him of the look he used to catch in Hereford Cathedral on the face of a certain choir-boy when he was singing the *tantum ergo.*

For himself Rhisiart was surprised at the difference of his feelings from those he had when he was watching the game of ball. "It must," he thought, "be those barrels and prongs". But it couldn't have been the barrels and prongs; for that vision of unspeakable frightfulness had already sunk away to the far background of his mind, where it lay like a blood-red bruise. No, it was something different. While that game had gone on he had watched each one of these girlish forms with satyrish interest. But now in some strange way the natural appeal of bodies and limbs struck him with a piercing sense of pathos. "It's for the bearing of children," he thought, just as if he had never seen a woman before, "that their hips are formed like that!"

The truth was that all the mechanical movements they were making now, as their arms rose and fell and their bodies bent and straightened with the weaving and unweaving of the ribbons, and all in obedience to the unceasing beat of the hands that encircled them, emphasized this curious pathos. Those soft arms, those tender bosoms, those curved limbs, what could be more unlike the complicated series of clear-cut, doll-like, automatic gestures into which they were being forced under the mandate of that monotonous clapping?

At any rate, as he went on beating his hands, he felt as if he could hardly distinguish one girl from another! The voluptuous limbs of Alice seemed forced into a frieze-like purity of outline as they followed these scrupulous measures, while the luxuriant breasts of Luned seemed to tighten and dwindle into Artemisian maidenliness as she spasmodically lifted and lowered her arms.

Tegolin's red braid, not content with tapping against her own shoulders seemed sometimes to resemble a fiery shuttle that passed in and out of the flaxen curls of Efa, and the dusky tresses of Luned. At certain moments in the dance, under rules so automatic that the gesture reminded Rhisiart of priests at an altar, each pair of dancers formally and lightly gave each other a mechanical kiss.

From where Rhisiart stood, beating his hands together, he could see further than the stiff movements of these soft creatures hypnotized out of their natural capriciousness by the imperative of an archaic tradition. He was tall enough to see through a gap in the battlements the whole plain of Maelor spread out before him.

And as he gazed he was aware that a peculiar and emerald-coloured light had obliterated all impertinent and teasing details, leaving intact only the universal aspects of the world — the earth, the air, and the water. Yes, stretched out before him in that curious Homeric light, for the girls were dancing close to the battlements, Maelor melted into Bromfield and Bromfield melted into the pastures of Shropshire. The light was indeed so green that it was as if the fiery sun had changed into a huge translucent emerald. The rich aftermath of meadow grass broke the distance into a vast chess-board of the Immortals, and so enchanted in its windless calm did the scene look that the smoke that rose from the plain and kept forming itself into filmy wreaths took the shape for him of god-like Beings moving across an emerald stage.

And then he thought of the thunderbolt that was to fall on all this when Owen raised the red dragon. Instead of soft blue wreaths of delicate vapour there would be vast-rolling clouds of black smoke, and shrieks and tumult and blood and flames! Beat — beat — went his hands, along with the hands of his companions; and the more tired the men grew of clapping the more obstinately they clapped.

The girls themselves were well-nigh spent by this time, but Rhisiart knew in his heart that until they actually fainted away nothing would induce them to stop till the men stopped.

But suddenly the men did stop; and instantaneously the girls sank back against the battlements; sank back so entangled with ribbons that they might have given Rhisiart, or anyone else who had the heart to think of such things, the idea of tangles of sea-weed and iridescent sea-spray clinging to a flotsam of stranded Nereids!

But the thoughts of our friend, as well as the thoughts of every other man there, had left both the dance and the dancers. A burst of trumpet blasts had reached them from the gate of the castle, and as they all turned towards the guard-room they saw the emblazoned pennon of the Royal Arms flutter slowly to the top of the flagstaff. There was a general rush across the court towards the guard-room; and Rhisiart and the Lollard heard several shrill bugle-calls summoning the castle servants to appear at the gate.

Never had our friend seen Mistress Lowri look prouder or happier than when on the arm of Denis she came up the steps that afternoon.

The misty autumn sun fell upon her rich dress, for she had been riding, according to the fantastical new fashion, in plum-coloured velvet and a sweeping crimson sash, but it fell too upon that indescribable radiance that emanates from women when they feel that the stars in their courses are fighting their battle!

Old Adda was far too discreet to ask any questions at their first encounter or to reveal any of his own difficulties. He held his black wand of office very straight and bowed with a low and separate bow to both Denis and Lowri.

Nor did Denis ask any questions of his Seneschal. He began to converse easily and leisurely with the old man, almost as if he were deliberately giving his lady time to greet the Lollard and our friend; and when Rhisiart, struggling to steel himself against the woman's fascination, turned to look at Denis, he found that in spite of Lowri's magnetic appeal he continued staring at him for a considerable time.

Denis Burnell had a small clipped beard which had turned so prematurely grey that when he and his father were together, strangers who caught the likeness between them took them for brothers. He had the same affable manner as his father and the same quizzical hazel eyes; but there the likeness ended. Nor would it have been easy for Rhisiart to say what did arrest him so about the man. It was some kind of personal power; but exactly where it lay he would have been puzzled to define. One quality Denis obviously possessed, and that was an unruffled calm; but along with this calm Rhisiart got the impression that the man suffered from a perpetual absentmindedness, just as if his mind were forever functioning on two levels.

One of these levels was a world of practical necessity, in regard to which he was quick and competent; but the other was a world of inner vision which apparently reduced the former, for all his competence in it, to something as futile as it was frivolous.

Rhisiart was fully aware that in his desperate temptation he was frantically trying to put his interest in the Constable between himself and the Constable's lady. His whole nature suffered so much from the contrast within him that just as in the case of that accurst bronze sword his narrow forehead became wet with sweat.

Lowri kept addressing faintly ironical questions to the Lollard, but certain little twitchings about the corner of her mouth which was nearest to Rhisiart, accentuated by a drop of saliva left there by the tip of her tongue, seemed to convey to him a wordless intimation.

"I'm still holding you," that electric communication seemed to say. "Wait till our hands meet, and tie, and *then* you won't resist any more!"

And the cruel thing was that this tantalizing profile, with that quivering corner that so disturbed him, seemed as youthful as Tegolin's own.

But what was she saying to the Lollard? It seemed incredible to our friend; but she was actually asking Master Brut questions about the miserable Simon, questions about his attempts to escape, questions about the treatment he had received from the Seneschal.

To these questions the disciple of Wycliffe answered with an eloquent appeal on behalf of the wretched prisoner and with reiterated asseverations about what he described as "his change of heart".

Our friend was so disturbed that all manner of subtle impressions forced themselves upon his mind that ordinarily he would have lacked the wit to catch. He noted, for instance, as Denis gravely commented upon the startling news that the old Seneschal was at last freely imparting, how the young grey-bearded man was alluding as casually to such troublesome intruders as Hywel Sele and David Gam as if they were figures on a pictured tapestry only brought into momentary life by a suddenly-risen wind! And even while he struggled against Lowri's fatal appeal something in him exulted in vibrant spasms of sympathetic devilry as she led the Lollard on to describe in detail the various spiritual transformations that the grace of the Redeemer had worked in the desperate soul of the Hog of Chirk.

“We’ll see,” the corners of her lips seemed to whisper in our friend’s ear, “what this conversion amounts to when we visit him to-night!”

“I mustn’t look at her! I mustn’t look at her!” Rhisiart’s better angel kept repeating; and he even went so far as to try to thrust between himself and those burning white fingers — for she was deliberately slipping off her riding-gloves now — that image of himself mounting the scaffold where stood those barrels of pitch.

But the stress of his feelings seemed to have turned his mind into such a sensitive plate that, while every little outward thing about him was mirrored upon it, those hooks and prongs failed to materialize. He noticed every detail, for instance, of the heavy accoutrements of certain Salopian yeomen; for quite a number of English levies had followed Denis up the hill.

It was indeed while his demon was forcing him to observe the fantastic belt of one worthy trooper, that was ornamented with the white skulls of stoats, that he became aware that a wild-looking body of Welshmen armed with spears were parleying with the gate-keeper. Something made him fix his gaze upon these men, whom the official at the gate was evidently admitting on the condition that they piled their spears against the wall; and in a flash his mind rushed to the bed in the tower-chamber and its tantalizing occupant.

Yes, standing under the raised portcullis was none other than Crach Ffinnant himself! The prophet of Derfel was, as the Scripture says of another tricky idolator, moving “delicately.” He ostentatiously laid down a not very dangerous-looking weapon by the side of the others, and while pleading with the Porter and holding up his arms so that his clothes might be searched, and turning his birth-marked cheek and scavenger’s eye to everything in sight, it soon became clear that he was going to be allowed to skulk in. When he did get in, Rhisiart watched him wrap his heavy mantle discreetly round him and hurry off, with his head bent and with furtive glances to left and right, straight in the direction of the Ladies' Tower.

"He looks like a stoat," thought our friend, "entering a rabbit's burrow. I shall certainly tell Luned to warn Ffraid ferch Gloyw. I wonder if they'll let him have a share of this damned banquet? I'd wish him luck if he'd throw his evil eye on Cousin Sele's smug face!"

It was with an ice-cold shiver at his heart and a rush to his lean cheekbones of blood that pricked and burnt that he now gave Lowri a nod, for he couldn't force his lips to utter a sound, when she asked him to come to her presence-room in an hour's time. "Knock three times slowly and then three times quickly," she told him, "and if I don't open at once go away at once."

Never in his life had he experienced, never was he destined to experience again, any hour like the hour that came upon him then. The Russian's ravening "insect" had now possessed itself entirely of his will; and whenever he thought of how hotly twisting her fingers would be as she let him have his pleasure while her eyes clung to the eyes of her victim, his knees shook under him and everything round him darkened and receded.

But though the Russian's "insect" had to be fed, and all questions of deciding against feeding it had come to an end, the strange thing was that the rest of his nature, his ordinary sensitized being, instead of feeling atrophied by this horrible obsession, this fact that his will was all insect, seemed to have become abnormally porous to every kind of impression. His senses felt praeternaturally alert, just as they had been three months ago, when he was hypnotized by the voice of Ffraid ferch Gloyw.

He accompanied the Lollard back to the Traitor's Chamber, conveying to him in brief and unnecessarily pessimistic words all he had learnt from the Seneschal. "They may call it a banquet," he assured the good man, "but what it is for us is a gallows' supper. It's simply a conclave of our executioners. You mark my words, Brut. Hywel Sele and David Gam will insist bluntly that we should be given up."

"Given up, lad?" questioned the other. "Given up to whom?"

"To King Harry," Rhisiart blurted out fiercely, "who'll burn you and hang and quarter me!"

The psychological disciple of Wycliffe gave his friend a very straight look. He seemed to divine that all was not well with the boy's nerves. His face assumed its most irritating look of smiling aplomb; but all he actually said was that the spirit of Christ was as powerful in the English camp as it was within the walls of Dinas Bran.

This reference to something in the castle that it couldn't eat kept the Russian's "insect" and its perambulating shard in sulky silence.

The Lollard was consequently extremely relieved when he got the obsessed young man to sit down by his side on his bed. The Traitor's Chamber was a good deal more draughty and very much damper than Myfanwy's Bower, and it was furnished more like a guard-room than a guest-room. Master Brut, however, had made his little arrangements. He had moved his straw-pallet under a portion of the roof that still kept the rain out. He had got his Greek Testament and his *Consolations* of Boethius neatly spread out on a battered chest at the head of this unpromising couch; and as they had done almost every evening during these months the two young men sat down together there and talked without turning their heads, as naturally as if they were talking to themselves.

"You've got something on your mind," said the Lollard at last, after trying in vain to interest his friend in the latest development of the spiritual growth of Alice of Ruthin.

But instead of answering him Rhisiart jumped to his feet. "God in Heaven!" he cried. "I'd forgotten the news I've got for the Ladies' Tower!

Our friend the Scab is here; and the Lady Ffraid ought to be warned of it at once."

"What are you going to do?" And the Lollard, also risen to his feet, bent down and very deliberately placed the Greek Testament on the top of Boethius.

Rhisiart turned on him when he reached the door. "Find someone who *can* be trusted in this damned place!"

The Lollard's smile vanished. "You're beginning to forget, my friend," he said sternly, "that I'm no more an Englishman than you are. There's no race in the world more trustworthy than the Welsh; when they're properly handled. To put your own head on the block isn't trustworthy: it's insane."

"Oh shut up, for Christ's sake! Sometimes I think there's no bigger fool on either side of the Dyke than you are, Walter! You may understand Greek; but you don't understand me!"

With this our irascible friend slammed the oaken door of the Traitor's Chamber and made off in a blind huff. "I'd like to take a glance at that presence-room of hers," remarked the hungry "insect" within him while its hollow shard rattled huskily. "I feel as if the mere look of the place would help me to bear the delay!"

Rhisiart knew well enough where this room was, but he had instinctively avoided it during the last three months. As he approached it now, however, whom should he meet, returning from their bird's-nesting excursion, but the two pages! The boys stopped at once. They had much to tell him. But he cut short their confidences. "Want an excuse to climb the Ladies' Tower and be sure of a welcome?" he craftily said addressing Rawlff.

"And me too?" put in the younger boy.

"Certainly, sonny, if Rawlff lets you! But the message, remember, is only to be given to the Lady Ffraid herself."

“Tell me what it is, Master Rhisiart; and I’ll decide whether under the circumstances it would be wise or unwise to take a kid like this into our confidence.”

The son of Cynan flushed fiery-red; but professional shrewdness, even in the smallest of all the pages of Dinas Bran, enabled him to be patient. “It’s no good getting angry,” he must have said to himself. “The great thing is not to be left behind. I can settle with this conceited ass later.”

“It’s a perfectly simple message,” Rhisiart said, “and since you’re both friends of Luned and Efa you’ll realize its importance. It’s to tell the Lady Ffraid that Crach Ffinnant’s already in the castle.”

The boys exchanged a quick glance of full understanding, and without another word or sign darted off towards the Ladies’ Tower. Rhisiart paused to watch them disappear; and then, urged on by his obsessed Will which dragged his conscience, his soul, his senses, his nerves, like a row of captives tied together by the neck, he advanced towards the fatal door. “It can’t be more than thirty minutes,” he said to himself, “since she said ‘come in an hour,’ but I may as well have a look at the place.”

A couple of Salopian troopers strolled past in the September twilight. They were engaged in political discussion. “What I say,” one of them was remarking, “is that the sooner it comes the better. I don’t give a damn for this chatter about bardic predictions. What I say is that these Welshies need a lesson. And they’ll get it too — you mark my words! They say in Chirk that the Earl told Grey to keep his people within the walls, so as to lead on that braggart Glendourdy. And who is Glendourdy anyway? Only a whoreson bandit! Let the beggar revolt I say! What we want is an excuse to scotch the sly snake once and for all. I wish the Welshies would come out. But they won’t! You mark my words; they won’t. They won’t give us a chance. Christmas will see things just as they are now. A few fines, maybe.

But you know what the King is. He’s too lenient. He’ll fine ’em, and let ’em go. If I had my way he’d burn the beggars out, once and for all, whether they rose or not! Burn ’em out! That’s the only way to give these whoreson bards a lesson. Let ’em skip for their own whoreson skins and you’d soon see. Of course the King ought to call up the Staffordshire folk as well as we.

“Why should we always bear the brunt on the Marches? If I were Harry do’ee know what I’d do—” but the voice died away before our listener could learn this nice point.

He walked straight towards the door and the curious thing was that his knees knocked together as he moved and he kept jerking his dagger half in, half out of its sheath. The nearer he approached the half-ruined mass of masonry on this north-west side of Dinas Bran the more hungry became the Russian’s “insect.” But if it possessed the power of dragging an individual’s reason and conscience after it, it possessed no flicker of authority over the antics of the great goddess Chance. And Chance bestirred herself now.

For what was that? His obsessed eyes had been so absorbed in that closed door, a door which was easy enough to recognize by reason of its newfangled modernity and the way some tricky craftsman had carved all manner of Frenchified levities above its lintel, a door which he knew better than any other door in the castle, just because for three months he had refused to turn his head towards it, that it was with a startled shock, a shock so great that it made him feel physically dizzy, that he now caught sight of the repulsive little figure of the tower dwarf, standing with her impish back to him and lost to the whole world as she gazed through an upper light of one of those flamboyant foliated windows.

The little creature had climbed up upon the exterior ledge of the window through which she stared; and her thin extended arms clutched mechanically at the newly-chipped mouldings of the tracery. In this position she resembled, to our friend's abnormally acute senses, a female crucifix turned back-to-front. What was she watching there with such intensity? It was indeed more than intensity. The dwarf's whole being seemed to be resolving itself into the masonry of the stone-work to which she clung! So death-still was she that her motionlessness made him think of a chrysalis; though as he stared at what was a symbol of more than staring he felt that if he could have seen this crucified chrysalis from the inside there would have been something frightful about the expression on its face.

But the Russian's "insect" now decided that it was not fair — and what a sight that purple beard would be, squeezed against the pane, if the persons within the chamber were to glance up! — that a demented dwarf should gloat alone in solitary ecstasy at such interesting spectacles.

And so our friend, under its guidance, with exquisite caution, and moving like a creature who possessed the cunning of the insane, climbed up the stone-work till he was just behind Mother Sibli. There, bringing his hand in absolute silence to within an inch of the back of that grotesque cranium, he clapped it on her mouth and lifting her from the window and pressing her like a helpless infant against his ribs, he took her place at the small broken window-light. For that was, he discovered, the reason why this peeping-hole was so ecstatically satisfying. The coloured glass in that particular pane had been broken. You could hear as well as see what was going on.

Rhisiart was soon made aware that he wasn't crushing the life out of the dwarf, by reason of the sharp teeth that began at once to draw blood from his hand; but what he was watching and listening to inside the presence-room held him so transfixed that it was a wonder he didn't break the small creature's bones in absolute unconsciousness.

The presence-room was luxuriously furnished in that fashionable end-of-the-century style that Rhisiart's mother loved so well and which his aesthetic Oxford friends regarded as the height of ostentatious vulgarity.

Huddled upon the edge of the spacious bed, his arms tied tight behind him and his feet manacled together, so that he could only have moved, had he been compelled to do so, by a series of grotesque jumps, crouched Master Simon, while before him, coolly and calmly putting the finishing touches to her toilet for the banquet, was the Lady Lowri, looking so deadly lovely, with her white cheeks and scarlet lips, her long curved eye-lashes and arctic-ice eyes, that with the same hand that was closing the dwarf's mouth Rhisiart, in feverish emotion, began twisting the creature's beard into stiff little horns. These horns he continued to make constantly stiffer and more pointed; for his fingers were hot and moist and the beard was naturally adhesive.

"Will you love me just the same when that ugly little boy comes," he heard the Lady say to the Hog of Chirk, "and I let him do anything he likes? Will you love me then?"

Shockingly husky and hollow was the man's reply. "If you kiss me," he said, "like you did just now I could bear anything. But why should the boy die when his life's only beginning?"

"You don't think I'd let him live — afterwards — do you? But I won't poison him. You needn't look like that! I'll just hand him over to the worst devil in Wales, that traitor who's coming here to-night, Sele of Nannau! Nobody will ever hear of him again. Let him tell Sele all he likes. He won't tell anybody else."

And then the husky voice began again; and Rhisiart could now catch a glimpse of the man's eyes which seemed to him all sockets, as if two diminutive glow-worms of glittering fire swam in two circular bottomless cavities!

"Will you kiss me — like you did just now — when he's gone?"

"You liked that, did you?" she whispered, hovering above him so that he could breathe her breath.

But what Rhisiart had already not failed to miss was the way these strange creatures clung with their eyes to each other's eyes, all the while they were talking. Not for one second did their eyes cease from this feverish clutch; and it seemed to the eaves-dropper that it was because their eyes were clinging in this particular way that their words sounded like the broken speech of people who are dancing, or of people who are riding in a boat, rocked by the undulating waves. That was indeed, he found out afterwards, what sank most deeply into his consciousness, the sense that this manacled man, whose gleaming eye-candles floated in such dark cavities, and this dazzling creature in yellow satin were actually dancing some strange mad love-dance together, such as might easily turn into a death-dance for anyone who meddled with it! And that was to have been his role! In the dusk outside that window he felt such a wave of gratitude at his escape that he positively murmured three "Hail Marys." He also became so conscious of the inconvenience he was causing little Sibli that he bent down and whispered in her ear.

"We're in the same galley, Mistress," he breathed, "and we've got to keep this to ourselves — do you understand?"

The sharp teeth ceased biting his hand and a sound that resembled suppressed giggling issued from the living bundle he was pressing against him.

"Will you still love me whatever I let him do?" repeated the woman in yellow satin.

"In chains," retorted the man on the bed, "and without my hands, how can I know you still love me! Oh, if I only had you back at Chirk, if I only had you back at Chirk—"

"What would you do? Not that again — not what I told Fitz-Alan?"

"Yes, yes! just that!"

"You'd never dare!"

"Try me!" and those sockets became like lanterns in a pair of mephitic wells. "You'd have hung me if Meredith ab Owen hadn't come."

"Listen, Simon. Would you love me still if I brought *him* in here and let *him* have me?"

"You don't mean young Rhisiart now?"

"Of course not! I mean Rheinalt."

The Hog of Chirk, after an unpleasant struggle to rise to his feet, during which she never put out a finger to help him, turned back to her and hopping towards her on his chained legs made frantic clutches at her body with his bound hands.

But she twitched her dress out of his fingers and clasped him round the head, blinding those obsessed eyes. "I know you," she cried. "You won't believe me that I hate him until I've driven him mad. But why should I do that?"

"Tegolin loves him."

Then it was permitted to Rhisiart — who, after a little more whispering had lifted up Sibli so that she could share with him the broken pane — to behold a queer sight. For the satin-gowned lady turned this shocking figure of a half-clothed ruffian round about in her hands, till the two of them were facing each other. His chains clanked as she turned him; and she did it just as if his coarsely-garmented hairy torso had been something inanimate. Then she forced him backwards, compelling him to make half-a-dozen grotesque leaps, until she got him against the wall. Then she flung her whole weight upon him, clutching his hair with her fingers while she assaulted his scarred face with a rain of burning kisses.

"Order me to send him mad! Order me to send him mad!" she gasped, and tugging at his hair she shook his great haggard face to and fro, as if she had been a lurcher-bitch worrying a rabbit.

It was only when she paused for a second to take breath, letting her hands sink down that Rhisiart had an opportunity to catch the look in the man's face, and it was a look he remembered all his days. It was a look of beatified bliss. It was the look Saint Stephen must have had when they were stoning him and he saw the heavens opened.

Master Simon was now propped helplessly against the wall; and indeed, if it had not been for an unevenness in the stone floor against which he pressed his heels, he would have sunk down under her weight. For oblivious of the effect upon her thin satin gown she cuddled close against him, quivering and twisting like a mesmerized serpent.

Rhisiart, as he watched them, forgot to suck in his lips. His mouth for some seconds remained open like the mouth of a gudgeon. He found himself treating the little monster who shared his eavesdropping as if she had possessed a normal feminine shape. It was upon the emotion of Lowri that the Russian's "insect" was now concentrating; and he had cause enough to open his mouth! He was witnessing just then for the first and last time in his life what few men have been privileged to contemplate; namely, the writhings of a lust-demented lady on the breast of a man whose arms were tied behind his back.

Strangely enough it was with the woman and not with the man in this singular scene that our friend was identifying himself. It was into her nerves, not into those of the Hog of Chirk, that his demon passed. Each convulsive shudder of that beautiful form under that satin robe was like a spasm of his own; and the tension between her and that unsightly torso was like the tension between the most reckless, the most desperate, the most instinctive desire in him and something, some Person, some indescribable Reciprocity that had been escaping him ever since he set out on his quest. His thoughts soon became completely inarticulate. A power, an impulse, was stirring into which his conscious mind could give no rational form. Of one thing, however, he was aware. The Russian's "insect" was submerged, drowned, lost! Had it perished of surfeit?

He suddenly felt physically light, as if no material obstacle could resist him. The fancy rushed through his brain that this whole scene was taking place in his mind, as he watched, light as a feather, the dipping of his own limbs in those barrels of pitch! He was dying for Owen. He had died for Owen. It was against the majestic torso of Owen that his soul, now quivering in spasms like hers, would soon be at rest, untroubled, dissolved, satisfied!

He had quite ceased from treating the dwarf he was supporting as if she were a woman. He in some extraordinary way was the woman now. No! not a woman; a spirit, light as a feather! Was he going off his head? Those barrels, those prongs had vanished altogether. The scaffold had vanished. He was no longer Rhisiart ab Owen. Who was he? He was Efa. He was Efa giving herself up for Owen's triumph. But not to the Scab, to Owen himself! Owen was his own prophet. Owen was his own high-priest of Derfel. Light as a feather, that's what he was! And the golden torso of Owen had now transformed itself, horribly transformed itself. It was the torso of that image of misery he had fed with the bone. It was the torso of that crucifix he'd seen in the Abbot's cell. His eyes had grown blurred! In his ears was a sound like the sound of Tegolin's cry when they were strapping Mad Huw to the cart on the gorsedd-mound.

It was through a mist now, like the mist through which he had ridden between the spears and the arrows, that he tried to see them. A wave was rocking him, so light had he become; a tidal wave that could neither sink him nor salvage him. And it was on this wave he was resting now. No, it wasn't a wave; it was Owen's breast.

Lowri's shudderings had quite ceased. She was clinging to Simon's body like yellow sea-weed to a rock. Had she fallen asleep? Was the silence that had descended upon the two of them like the silence of the sculptured dead, like the silence of King John's tomb in Worcester Cathedral? "I mustn't disturb them," he said to himself; and he suddenly became aware, in his half-bodiless state, that he dreaded to hear himself knock at that fastened door. A panic seized him. What if he couldn't descend from his perch? What if he heard himself knocking and couldn't get away?

Tightening his hold on Sibli he made a few tentative movements. Oh, thank God, he wasn't paralysed! Hurriedly he clambered down to the ground. And then forgetting entirely to put the dwarf upon her feet, he ran with her, pressed tightly against his chest, till he reached the foot of the Ladies' Tower.

Here, moved by God knows what sudden impulse, he actually imprinted his lips upon the little creature's contorted visage; and, only after having done so, gently put her down.

The autumn twilight had darkened the whole sky; but there was a lantern swinging above the stone archway; and by its light, in spite of the confusion in his mind, he saw enough to be shocked by the effect of what he had just done. The little creature stood for a moment like a bird transfixed by an arrow, too dazed to die. Then without a second's warning her twitching face melted in a tempest of tears such as Rhisiart would never have supposed such a grotesque little skull could contain.

He did all he could think of to console her. He knelt down before her and stroked her hands. He called upon the Saints, upon the Holy Virgin, upon the Blessed Bran himself. He invoked Saint Bride the patroness of the Lady of the tower. He called upon God to bear witness that he had meant no insult to her, no affront to her dignity.

"'Twas as if you were my — as if you were my — my aunt!" he stammered.

But she gasped out some words of her own now, mixed with the sobs that shook her from head to foot. "No — one — has — ever — kissed me — before!"

Something in the tone of this made him stop referring to his aunt. He even began to discover that there was a sensation at the back of his eyes suggesting that if he couldn't comfort her quickly, he would begin to cry too. All he could do was to pick up one of her tiny hands, that seemed to be loose and lifeless as a jointed doll's at the end of her thin arms, and very gravely and very formally, in his best Hereford manner, lift this small object to his lips.

"I beg and implore you, Mistress Sibli," he murmured, as reverently as if she had been a princess, "to forgive me what I did, and to allow this night, and all that has befallen us, to be a solemn and sacred secret between us two, binding us together in a covenant, in a pledge, known to no other living soul!"

Never had Rhisiart's Norman blood stood him in better stead. As a Welshman he would have been far too imaginative to have thought of using a word like "covenant" or "pledge." As a Saxon he would have been too realistic to put so much emphasis upon a point of such nice legality.

But it was just this legal turn to the matter, as if he had given her a document signed and sealed, that was the one thing needful. In her ingrown, convoluted self-pity the idea of a bond between herself and this impulsive young gentleman was something upon which she could live for months and years. It was as if he'd handed her her marriage lines after "taking advantage" of her.

Her tears dried up, her sobs ceased. Since he was still on his knees before her their faces were very close. But she had suddenly become a normal woman, a woman who had a man, and her first instinct was not to kiss him but to scold him.

"You ought to be dressing yourself for the banquet," she said crossly, straightening as she spoke the collar of his tunic. "I can't think how you'll be in time as it is! You saw how she was dressed. You'd better go first to the Traitor's Room and see what your friend is putting on. Have you a black velvet doublet with black hosen to match? If you have, put that on, If you haven't — Well! you must ask Master Brut. He's seen more of life than you."

Rhisiart rose to his feet. It was extremely disagreeable to him to be told he had seen less of life than his devoted friend. From their first encounter on the highway he had regarded Master Brut as a complete ignoramus in anything that had to do with polished society. He decided to regain his diminished prestige with his new ally by turning the conversation to the deeper psychology of love; that sphere of philosophy in which his insight had proved so startling to the page-boys. He had not yet learnt that although women love to exalt the intelligence of their man to the outer world, to the man himself they dole out this admiration in a less wholesale manner.

"I thought she hated Master Simon to the death," he now began, looking down frowningly at the lifted purple chin beneath him. "I saw her myself trying to hang him. She seemed to want to caress the rope that was doing it. He was only saved by Meredith ab Owen.”

The small upraised visage, to which he addressed this startling revelation, carried upon its features in the flickering lantern-light a mysterious kind of lustre. This lustre was no mere outward phenomenon, such as a purple reflection from the creature’s outraged chin. It proceeded from a feminine heart stirred by the emotion of first love.

But Rhisiart looking down upon it from above was only anxious to regain what he feared he had lost, her respect for his searching intelligence. With the knitted brow of a thinker, therefore, he laid before her the following disturbing question: “Is it possible for a woman to order the man she loves to be hanged; and not only so, but to watch him being hanged; and not only so, but to caress his body while it swings? I tell you, Mistress, I saw her, I heard her! She told him she would think of him burning in Hell whenever she drank a sip of water!”

While he spoke in this manner, and indeed went into yet more horrid details, Rhisiart couldn’t help noticing the lustre that shone from the dwarf’s face. It crossed his mind that Sibli’s actual features weren’t displeasing at all. If it weren’t for the purple beard her face might even, by some people any rate, be called a comely face.

But the more he was forced to confess that the countenance looking up at him was not completely ugly the more inclined he grew to take cold-blooded precautions. He set himself to withdraw every sort of magnetic reciprocity from the expression with which he looked down upon her. He tried to throw into his stare the abysmal indifference of a cold-hearted cat to the perverse advances of a dog. He began reiterating his puzzled indignation at Lowri’s behaviour. “I tell you, Mistress, I saw it with my own eyes! I would be obliged if you could tell me what has changed her since then? Or isn’t she changed? How, from hating him so, has she come to love him like that? But perhaps you’ll say it never was love, except on his side. But, Sibli, surely it was love! Wasn’t it love, Sibli?”

The dwarf evidently derived profound emotional satisfaction from being appealed to to decide this delicate point. She paused before replying, not because she didn’t know well what she wanted to say, but because it was a precious moment to her to be the arbitress in this solemn Court of Love. At last she nodded her head so vigorously that, considering the thinness of her neck, it was hard not to feel as if her little doll-like skull might suddenly slip out of its socket and roll to the ground.

“Then why did she want to hang him that day?” he protested. “And why didn’t she untie his hands to-night? Master Brut sees him every afternoon and always unties his hands. Lawnslot must have tied them when he brought him to her room. But why didn’t she untie them?”

The Presiding Judge of the Court of Love considered this problem with a radiant countenance. “She did it afterwards — after we went away. She was in a different mood then.”

“Then you do say she loves him? Loves him as much as he loves her?”

Once again there took place that alarmingly vigorous nodding of the small head.

“As much as he loves her?” repeated Rhisiart in frowning amazement; for it seemed to him that if amorous phenomena of this kind were frequent in the world, neither he nor the Lollard knew much about life.

“As much as he loves her?” he reiterated stupidly.

“More!” and with this she gave her newly covenanted friend such a sharp rap with her tiny knuckles that he stepped back a pace. “More!” she repeated, her tone rising to that familiar pitch which he hadn’t heard for so long. And then, making him, with a chuckle of hilarious glee, a low mock-curtsey, “More! more! *morel”* she screamed at the top of her voice, as she disappeared up the tower-steps.

XI. ROOM FOR THE PRINCE!

THE BANQUET-HALL OF Dinas Bran had fallen, by the year of grace fourteen hundred, into so ruinous a state that it was very seldom used. Indeed, if the truth must be told, the last Lord of Bromfield, Ial and Maelor to use it regularly was that treacherous representative of the old *Tywysiog* who on betraying his province to the English had become the ancestor of our friend Rhisiart.

It was clear enough to all the guests that evening why it was that the hall was rarely used. Several wild birds that had entered the place before it was dark still fluttered about among the stone arches, arches whose particular type of masonry resembled that of the sacristy of Valle Crucis. In many places the roof had such great jagged holes in it that it must have been evident to all that had the night been stormy the banquet would have had to have been held elsewhere.

One advantage of the hall's ruinous condition was that the great volumes of smoke, which rose from more fires and larger fires than Rhisiart had ever seen in a manorial chamber, were enabled to escape into the cloudy night. The stars, as he hadn't failed to notice before he entered, were completely invisible. It wasn't possible from where he and Master Brut were seated to detect anything through those jagged apertures but thick darkness.

Rhisiart couldn't help thinking of Ffraid ferch Gloyw, tended by little Efa, alone up there in her tower; for both Luned and his friend Sibli could be seen along with the other ladies not far from where he sat. And thinking of little Efa left alone with the old lady it was a considerable relief to Rhisiart to notice among the group of Welshmen at the lower end of the hall the unmistakeable facial disfigurement and the solitary roving eye of Crach Ffinnant. Hung at intervals on the walls — though the columns of swirling smoke prevented our friend from seeing more of them than the one just above his head — were large, rough, imaginary representations of former rulers of north-eastern Wales before the days when violence and treachery together brought down to the ground the mystic towers of Mathrafal.

These crudely-limned figures, darkened by smoke, dimmed by damp, had become no better than forlorn eidolons in faded torques and desecrated armour! “Slain in battle” had been their epitaph; and what was left of their once commanding presences had become like the half-ruined hall round which they hung: a rumour, a memory, a long reiterated sigh upon the flickering streamers of the torches and the undulant eddies of the wind.

The one figure Rhisiart could make out, though between him and its sorrowful lineaments the smoke from a great crackling fire kept rolling, was that of a dark-bearded man with an expression of resigned desolation. Was that face, he wondered, the face of the famous traitor who was his own ancestor? “Shall I have that look one day,” he thought, “when I have dodged the executioners of Bolingbroke by betraying Owen?”

The Lollard was talking to him earnestly and quietly all this while. No one else could hear them, for the uproar from all sides, now that the honey-hearted mead had begun to flow, was deafening, and all tongues, and all souls too seemed loosed in a torrent of excited speech.

But the Lollard was talking about the inevitable power of Master Wycliffe’s ideas when once the common people understood them.

“The common people!” thought Rhisiart sadly and bitterly. “Doesn’t he realize that there’s no more chance of the common people understanding such things than of their understanding Saint Thomas Aquinas?”

But Master Brut’s arguments were so forcible that our sceptical friend began trying desperately to imagine a Wales wherein every serf and every serf’s wife and daughter were alive to the metaphysics of the Redemption. He couldn’t imagine it! “This Lollardry,” he thought, “is a thing for the few; and must always be for the few! You can’t put the philosophy of religion into simple brains. You can only give them the images and the symbols that have been worn smooth by the handling of centuries!”

Lending, therefore, but half his mind to the discourse of his companion, Rhisiart allowed his attention to wander at large over the torch-lit spectacle of that ruined hall.

The women were all seated together; and he was hard put to it, as his gaze scanned their faces, to convey to each particular pair of eyes, as his own encountered them, the appropriate recognition of a special understanding. With Tegolin this was easy, and with Tegolin alone. The Maid was dressed in blue, and with her flaming hair falling loose and unbound over her shoulders she looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her.

But she met his glance in the old spontaneous manner, with a direct comprehensive smile; and he had the wit to see that his startled admiration at the transformation of her appearance pleased as well as amused her. She was seated at the end of the row of ladies and had Mad Huw at her side; nor was it hard to detect that the poor man was in a seventh heaven of happiness.

Her floating hair brushed against his grey habit, and Rhisiart could see that she made signs to the pages who carried round the sweet-smelling mead to leave his goblet empty. She herself, he noticed, did every now and then share a two-handled loving-cup with the good man, a cup that our friend suspected contained some very mild home-made wine.

Rhisiart's own mood was just then a chastened and tender one; and something about the poor Friar's beatitude as he permitted himself to sip this innocent beverage touched him to the heart.

"He must feel that his King is safe," the boy thought; and then he thought, "I know what he feels; for I feel the same about Owen,"

Entirely at ease with regard to Tegolin, between whom and himself there seemed to have fallen away, whenever their eyes met, every trace of misunderstanding, Rhisiart was rendered considerably uncomfortable by his fear of any direct glance from Tegolin's mother. This latter lady, by whose side sat the Constable, seemed however too absorbed in a contest of ironical wit with Hywel Sele of Nannau, who held the place of honour on Denis' right, to have time to exchange any sort of devilry with himself. He did notice, however, that she wore that same tight-fitting gown of yellow satin; and he couldn't resist a startled emotion that was almost like awe, as he caught amid the turmoil of voices the airy accents of her jests with Owen's worst enemy.

"I should think that dress would burn her flesh," he thought, "like the robe of Nessus!"

But it was in meeting the eyes of Luned and little Sibli that he actually suffered most. He was too proud to dodge their glances, in which there seemed to him to be a sort of mischievous conspiracy to make him feel a fool. He was certain the dwarf was murmuring remarks about him to Luned, remarks at whose nature he could make no guess, but the purport of their conversation, as he saw it go on, was something that filled him with uneasiness. It wasn't that he didn't trust Sibli absolutely in the matter of their vigil at the presence-room; but he suspected that the little creature was bringing down by as many pegs as she could whatever admiration for him and awe of him the wise Luned might have succeeded, during all these months, in hiding away in her spacious bosom.

He couldn't see Lowri's face during her wit-contests with the Lord of Nannau; but what he could see was the face of Father Rheinalt, and this concentrated image of fatal obsession revealed everything. It was clear that whenever she flirted with Hywel Sele across the Constable she took a devilish delight in throwing some significant look at the agitated monk — and well he knew what her looks could be! She threw these looks at the man just as a cruel boy might throw stones at some wretched pond-newt that refused to quit rising to the surface in obstinate but helpless defiance.

Yes, it was easy enough to read in the passionate features of Tegolin's father the desperate trouble into which these looks threw him. Our friend decided that Master Simon must have ended that strange meeting of theirs with the command, "Drive him to it!"

Father Pascentius was seated near Father Rheinalt, but between them there was an old silent lay-brother, of huge proportions and with an enormous beard, so that the two monks had nearly no opportunity to exchange confidences as they devoted themselves to the highly-seasoned meats and the heady drink.

Rhisiart's diplomatic mind was teased by this; for the longer he watched Tegolin's father, the more nervous he became lest the man should burst out into some violent patriotic indiscretion, the rashness of which would prove a vent for the turmoil into which Lowri was throwing him.

And what a fool the Lollard must be so blandly to go on explaining to him the precious "difficulties" — all pretended no doubt — which the Ruthin wench found in Wycliffite doctrine when matters were so crucial!

"The baggage has got hold of *you* sure enough you poor idiot," was our lad's secret comment as he muttered his mechanical surprise at what his friend was so eagerly revealing. For it was not concealed from Rhisiart that the tension, as this strange banquet went on, was growing moment by moment more perilously acute.

How should it not be so with that cold-blooded jeering devil from Nannau just come to make trouble and supported by that little red monster, who as he gulped down the mead looked more and more like one of those Pictish aboriginals that were supposed to linger still in the Plinlimmon mountains!

“Well,” thought Rhisiart, “it’s clear that I’ll get scant help from you, Master Brut, if I’m to manage to keep our honour and yet save our skins!”

He could see that the Seneschal, who kept whispering across the board to Denis, was as worried by the look of things as he was himself. The old gentleman had a couple of Welsh men-at-arms of his own — our friend knew the fellows by sight but knew no more of them — stationed at his elbow; and every now and then he would despatch one or other of these men on some discreet errand, either to the end of the banquet-hall, where Crach Ffinnant and his mountaineers were already growing uproarious, or to the entrance of the great ruinous hall, where a considerable number of Shropshire yeomen were keeping an attentive eye upon Denis Burnell.

Men-at-arms from the guard-room kept joining and leaving this stationary group, perhaps merely to share their flagons; but perhaps also, for Rhisiart soon became aware of considerable excitement as these new-comers went and came, to bring further disquieting news from the castle-gate.

At one point our friend was sure he heard, carried across the courtyard on a sudden gust of wind, the sound of trumpets from outside the walls. At any rate it soon became clear to him, as for the twentieth time he put down his own cup untasted, that, trumpets or no trumpets, some very grave and momentous news had just now reached Master Adda and had been hurriedly passed on by him to the imperturbable Denis.

As he gazed at the forlorn features of the historic personage — could it really be his ancestor? — whose crudely-depicted lineaments looked down at him through the smoke, he couldn't help recalling the sinister old tale of that banquet between the British chiefs and the heathen invaders that had been suddenly interrupted by the cry of "Knives!" and the plunging into unsuspicious Welsh hearts of a double score of hidden Saxon blades. Yes — trumpets or no trumpets — some event of a startling and unexpected kind must have occurred. There was an ominous stir among the Shropshire troopers and the flirtation between the Lord of Nannau and Mistress Lowri stopped as suddenly as if it had been interrupted by a flight of arrows.

Both Luned and the dwarf, after staring with wide-opened eyes upon the Constable, turned spontaneously towards Rhisiart; and he could see Father Rheinalt speak hurriedly to the old grey-beard at his side, while Father Pascentius fixed upon the Constable's face what looked like two burning points of black fire.

Hywel Sele, making a quite obvious effort to compose his great, sleek, clean-shaved countenance, bent down to the little ruffian at his side and whispered something to him that caused the man to turn his head and throw a most murderous glance at the three clerics from Valle Crucis.

The Scab alone and his friends from the mountains seemed oblivious to this new development. They were either too far gone in their cups, or they were so used to dramatic surprises and tensions, that twenty trumpets might have sounded without their turning their heads.

Denis Burnell's expression alone betrayed no flicker of surprise, or astonishment, or agitation. Once as he sat there with the whole banquet hall, except those preoccupied mountaineers, watching him in awed silence, he deliberately turned to our friend and gave him a pleasant reassuring smile.

As for old Adda, he had clearly reached a point when things had become too much for him. All he appeared to want to do was to efface himself completely and leave the progress of events to take their predestined course.

Suddenly Rhisiart found himself trembling violently from head to foot. He wasn’t conscious of any definite cause for alarm, beyond the awareness he had had all the evening that his life along with Master Brut’s was in extreme peril. But what afterwards struck him as significant was the manner in which he forced this trembling to stop. He stared at Tegolin in a sort of desperation, concentrating all his will to make her meet his eyes. There! She met them. She gave him a deep steady understanding look, a look like the one he had had from her that Midsummer Eve when they told each other their ages!

Nor did she smile this time as their eyes clung together. She just stared at him and he at her. Indeed he was the first to look away. But when he did so, drawn by something arresting in the Ruthin girl at her side, his trembling fit had gone.

But the Ruthin girl’s manner held him fascinated for several seconds. His prejudice against this young woman was maliciously deep. He couldn’t get out of his head her tone to that unlucky young son of Lord Grey. He couldn’t forgive her for leading his comrade such a dance. But now, as he turned to her from his eye-encounter with Tegolin, he was suddenly aware of something in her nature such as he had not realized before. The girl was now gazing at Tegolin with an intensity of regard that startled him. It was a look of a kind such as he had never seen in any woman’s face directed towards another woman. It was more than affection; it was more than admiration; it was a look of worship. Illuminated by this look the heavy, uncomely countenance of the girl was absolutely transfigured! He couldn't help glancing quickly at his companion. Had Alice's spiritual instructor, that besotted dupe, seen what he saw?

But no! The Lollard, like everybody else at that tense moment, was looking from the Seneschal to Denis, and from Denis to the Seneschal.

What was that? It seemed to him that there now reached them all, carried on the far-drawn breath of the autumnal wind, blowing the flames of the fires and the flames of the torches into long red streamers, an obscure sound of enthusiastic cheering. Was Owen already in possession of the castle? Were all its Lawnslots and Gerallts and Iorwerths going over to his side?

"I think the Constable will be on his feet in a second," he thought. And then drawn once more to the Ruthin girl, whose whole being seemed melting into that of the red-haired Maid, he said to himself, "I could never love as much as that!"

Yes, Denis did rise now to his feet and whisper something to the Seneschal. But as he moved slowly down the hall between the trestles and the torches, to pass out of sight among troopers, his whole air expressed no more than a mild concern.

But there rose at once an uproar of excited tongues, under cover of which Rhisiart announced to the Lollard that in his opinion Owen's revolt had already begun. "It may even be," he assured his friend, "that news has come that the castle is captured!"

But the Seneschal must, by now, have given some special orders; for from the further end of the vaulted chamber, from behind the place where the adherents of Derfel were revelling, there came, clear and distinct, the sound of a long-drawn sequence of penetrating pipe-notes. These notes produced an instantaneous hush — as Homer would say— "throughout the shadowy hall."

Even the Scab’s friends held their peace. Gently and slowly, with one last faintly-receding note, the pipe-music died away.

Glancing towards the entrance Rhisiart realized that the Shropshire troopers were as puzzled as he was himself. Some moved uneasily forward. Those who had been surreptitiously drinking sneaked hurriedly to the nearest trestle-board to replace their beakers. Others straightened their belts and jerked their weapons into position. All stared at one another in amazement; their broad-mouthed mutterings being the only sounds audible from end to end of the whole time-worn place.

“What is it?” whispered the Lollard, turning towards him a face of such childish and simple wonder that Rhisiart sucked in his lips in irritation.

“He took it calmly enough,” he thought, “when I told him the war had begun. But at the note of a flute he looks as if he’d seen an angel. I shall never—”

But his irritation with the childishness of his comrade was interrupted by an outbreak in chorus, without a word uttered to start it, from every male Welsh throat in that smoky hall.

Our friend tried in vain to catch the full meaning of what was sung. It was in old Welsh; and though Modry had taught him many antique words, they were mostly the names of domestic objects.

But as far as he could put the words together now, what he heard was an archaic Welsh rhyme that ran roughly like this:

Woe for us! Woe for us! The embers are dead.
The Birds of Rhiannon are all flown away.
Beauty has gone with the Blessed Head.
We are left to the sword and the wind and the clay!

It was not only the Lollard who was moved now. A wave of emotion ran down the whole length of that ruined hall as every Welshman joined in these enigmatic words. The monks from Valle Crucis alone refrained: Tegolin's father whispering conspiracy into the ear of the bearded lay-brother, while Father Pascentius wore the air of one who was ostentatiously detaching himself from everything in the world save the *Summa Theologica.*

But the moment the words ceased, all the women in the place rose up from their seats and with the same spontaneity as the words had been chanted moved in procession towards the door. Two by two, they moved, with a gravity like the gravity of some automatic religious ceremony.

Mad Huw hesitated a second, and it was clear to Rhisiart that the Maid was giving him his choice to go or stay, but when he saw that cloud of fiery hair drifting off between the tables, a look of terrified desolation came into his face and he hurried after her with the forward-flung concentration of one who sees his very soul escaping from him.

Master Brut was now expressing to Rhisiart his evangelical distaste for the chant the men had just sung. He declared it was a survival of a heathen celebration of the Earth-Goddess. "It is this sort of thing," he assured our friend, with a harsh expression in his guileless face not unlike Mad Huw's when he indicated the perils of Lollardry, "from which our study of the New Testament will free the Church! This sort of thing is in the Church but it is not in the New Testament. There is nothing for instance in the New Testament to suggest—"

But Rhisiart's mind had voyaged far from the New Testament. He was recalling the feeling he had had as he watched Lowri and Simon; that vision of himself weeping like a lover on the golden breast of Owen. He associated this pure emotion now with what had been revealed to him of the Ruthin girl's feeling for Tegolin. "When I made love to Luned," he thought, "my soul was hard as a bit of marble. But when I thought of Owen, as I watched those two, I felt I could lose myself in that man's soul. I felt I could melt and dissolve away, as long as I melted into him!"

The Seneschal had moved now into the place of the absent Denis, and was engaged in a heated but whispered argument with Hywel Sele. Meanwhile Sele's friend David was clearly itching for something to happen that would end all this suspense. "What an unpleasant little man!" thought Rhisiart, contemplating the scarred face and great naked hairy arms of this famous swashbuckling servant of the House of Lancaster.

Every drop of the lad's Norman blood turned physically sick at the primitive brutality, just like one might imagine emanating from some squat skeleton of the Bronze Age, that the figure of this famous soldier of fortune revealed. Teased by the whispering in front of him, which must have been, in some special way, curiously irritating to his type of nerves, David Gam deliberately drew from within his clothes an evil-looking knife and began sharpening it against the edge of the trestle-board.

Every now and then, however, he would lay down this dangerous weapon upon the table and glare round him with an expression of such murderous intention that Rhisiart said to himself: "The moment a blow's struck, if it's at the other end of the hall, this hairy wretch will leap up like a little wolf and go stabbing right and left among the Scab's Welshmen!"

It became impossible for our friend to stop himself from murmuring a few "Hail Marys", so extremely unpleasant he felt it would be to engage in a struggle with this goblinish assassin. There was something about his gnome-like stature combined with those gorilla-like arms that made the idea of any physical contest with him singularly distasteful. "I would far sooner," he thought, "stand up to Hywel Sele. At least he wouldn't tear out your liver with his own hands!"

And in imagination Rhisiart found himself with his teeth embedded in one of those hairy arms as the little monster held him down on the ground and kept stabbing him with heavy sickening thuds, while each time the blade was tugged out and the blood spurted, his mind thought clearly and distinctly, “That’s the last!”

He couldn’t help a small but very cold shiver running down his spine, for this time he had no Tegolin to meet his look, nor was the expression of Hywel Sele, under what old Adda was whispering to him, at all re-assuring.

“At least that’s what *I* think,” concluded Master Brut, turning his bland countenance towards the Scab’s followers, who, under the influence of what they’d drunk, were breaking into song. “And now what do *you* feel?”

Rhisiart made no reply. He had begun to be puzzled by the manner in which both the Cistercian Fathers were now appealing to their long-bearded companion. Where had he seen this majestic old man before? He tried to recall the various persons who had crossed their path in Valle Crucis three months ago. No! This old man escaped him; and yet there was something about him —

But a great gust of wind, bringing a palpable suggestion of rain and rain-soaked earth, made him turn his face to the entrance. Such a moan did this wind make, as it swept torch-flames and fire-flames before it, that even the Scab’s people were awed into silence. And on the wind there now came, and the thing was all the more impressive because of the choking clouds of bitter smoke, an unmistakeable sound of trumpets. The feelings that whirled through our friend’s consciousness swayed and eddied, gathered and dispersed, like wind-swept flocks of starlings. He knew now, by the movements and gestures of the troopers in the entrance, that it was not Owen who had possessed himself of Dinas Bran.

He could hear the wind still moaning through the broken masonry of the walls and through the fragments of stone-vaulting in the roof, where the ancient sleeping places above the hall had crumbled during the centuries and now lay in scattered heaps on the hill-side. The taste of the thick aromatic smoke that filled his mouth made him feel that he was once more twisting his bony limbs round the soft cedar-wood scented body of Luned while he cried to the stars to witness that he had her while she did not have him!

But to die for Owen. Never to be Rhisiart again! And for death to come to him so soon! To come to him when he hadn’t even taken his degree. When he had never killed a man, never ravished a girl, never struck a single blow for the land of his fathers! Would Tegolin cry when she heard of his execution a little more than the Ruthin girl when she heard of the burning of Master Brut? And the shameful wish stole over him, as he and the Lollard choked in the smoke and watched Father Rheinalt and Father Pascentius get up from their seats and move towards the entrance, while their long-bearded lay-brother bent himself forward over the board, pressing upon it with his elbows, and covering his eyes with his hand, that he had done what his mother always said would suit him best — become a monk!

How happy to be Father Pascentius and sit in your cell all day long, listening to the wood-pigeons, and thinking up objections to every single interpretation of Saint Thomas that was not by a Cistercian!

But this hot thunder-wind blowing the choking smoke into his face, combined with the superstitious silence of the men of Derfel and the high expectation of the guards at the entrance, produced finally a most curious impression. He had the feeling that his fate was advancing upon him in the form of a vast pair of dusky feminine breasts, each with a crater where the nipple should have been out of which proceeded fire and smoke!

He felt that to be Rhisiart still, to be Rhisiart free and independent, to be Rhisiart who could climb the steps of that scaffold, or who could fall sobbing on the breast of Owen, it was necessary that he should embrace, oh! relentlessly embrace, the fragrant darkness that thickened and deepened below that advancing vision!

"Give me your hand, my friend," he found himself gasping out to the Lollard. "I believe it's the King!"

The Lollard not only accepted the proffered fingers and held them fast; he bent forward and in full view of the great, plump, white, sneering face of Hywel Sele, that leered like a comfortable sword-fish surveying the antics of a couple of mackerel, kissed our friend on the forehead.

"Fear not" he whispered in Welsh. "Christ is greater than any—"

"Room for the high and mighty Prince, Henry of Lancaster, Prince of Wales! Room for the noble and puissant Baron, Henry Percy, Warden of the King's Marches! Room for the most noble Knight and most Honourable Member of the King's Privy Council, Thomas Fitz-Alan, Earl of Arundel!"

Everybody in the place, from one end of the hall to the other, rose to his feet; and from the Shropshire yeomen, who were a good deal more excited than the Seneschal's Welsh retainers, a deep-voiced cheer went up.

"Long live Prince Hal! Long live Harry Hotspur!"

Not a voice was raised for the grizzled Lord of Chirk. The Earl was hated by the Welsh, in spite of his conciliatory policy, even more than was Lord Grey; while the stout Salopians, of the old Mercian breed, nourished in their rustic hearts deep resentment against both these Norman barons.

Rhisiart stared with wide-open eyes at the slender figure of the little Prince, as he paused in his courtly Lancastrian fashion to receive the blessing of Father Pascentius.

Father Rheinalt drew up his swarthy tonsured head and folded his arms with such a forbidding air that our friend could see the boy cast on him a quick puzzled look as he made his way between the tables to greet the Seneschal. That diplomatic old Welshman was completely in his element; and Rhisiart felt proud of his Welsh blood when he saw the perfect tact with which he bent his knee to this alien Prince and made some easy jest that brought at once a frank response from the boy.

With something that looked like exaggerated and sarcastic diffidence Hywel Sele bent his proud knee, but our friend couldn't help remarking that it was rather upon his companion with those hairy red arms that the royal child gazed with more interest. The elderly lay-brother, who had been left alone, now himself came forward; and if Rhisiart had been impressed by the courtly dignity of old Adda he was amazed at the natural ease with which this humble retainer of Valle Crucis bent his tall frame, lifted the child's hand to his great beard, and then modestly stepped backwards into the covering smoke of the nearest fire.

Before he knew what was happening it was his own and his companion's turn. The Lollard was in front; and Rhisiart could see that his frank smile and kindly blue eyes made a favourable impression on the little Prince. But it was a complete surprise when, in the midst of his own obeisance, the young Harry began speaking to him as if to another boy, and a greater surprise still when, after a puzzled nod in the direction of the Bard of Ffinnant, who with his birth-mark ablaze and his solitary eye gleaming like a bewitched gem was uttering unintelligible words, the royal child, evidently feeling that he had completed his duty, deliberately sat down at our friend's table.

The Prince once seated, all the rest of the company found places as chance dictated; but Rhisiart for a few minutes saw nothing in that smoke-darkened hall but the unnaturally long, strangely wistful countenance of the Usurper’s heir, his dark steady gaze, his troubled nervous mouth.

But the boy was chatting freely and naturally to him now, giving no sign that he knew him as a prisoner, only delighted, it seemed, to discover someone not so remote from him in age, and someone too — it may be believed how this delighted Rhisiart — who could describe to him in detail how boys lived when they became students at Oxford.

What an extraordinarily long face the child had! And how naturally and hungrily, having once made sure that the great Hotspur was satisfied with his behaviour, he devoured the venison-pies that Lawnslot and Gerallt were privileged to set before him, and only frowned a little, but made no protest, when Master Brut, treating him like an infant, mixed water with his wine!

He was dressed in plain black and white; and had no colour at all about him except a scarlet ribbon round his neck from which hung a little silver medallion of the Blessed Virgin.

The only weapon Rhisiart could discover about his person was the hunting-knife on the opposite side from the hunting-horn, in his black leather belt. It may be believed that it was not very long before our good friend — who habitually used this antique treasure to win favour with younger boys — produced his own wonderful-looking dagger.

The Prince’s eyes gleamed with delight when he saw it, and with so much more delight when Rhisiart let him handle it, that our friend had a troublesome pang lest his chivalrous civility should compel him to make him a present of it.

“Is it sharp?” enquired the child, flashing a swift penetrating glance at the lucky possessor of such a treasure. And then, “May I try it?” he asked; and immediately began searching in the pocket of his tunic for some letter or document to practise upon.

Rhisiart couldn’t help glancing aside to see whether Hotspur saw him hand over this murderous weapon to the heir of Lancaster. But the crafty border-chief was fully occupied in propitiating the wild Welsh of Cadair Idris and Llyn Tegid. He prided himself on the fantastic estimate with which the uneducated all over these islands accepted his military prowess.

As a matter of fact Percy was a far more brilliant diplomatist than he was a formidable fighter. Indeed it was actually because of a certain temperamental distaste for desperate single combats that the front he assumed to the world was such a rough and brusque one!

And as Rhisiart glanced at him now and noted how his impassioned gestures, gleaming dark eyes, and rich deep-throated voice were casting a spell over the Derfel-men, he couldn’t help thinking, as he marked the popular hero’s unwieldy bulk compared with the flexible muscles of the young Prince, that in a couple of years he would far sooner face Harry Hotspur in the field than Harry of Monmouth.

Turning his attention to Fitz-Alan, who now sat between the Constable and the Seneschal, he seemed to detect from the mere look of the back of the man’s head that he was in a towering rage. Unscrupulously eavesdropping, as the Prince after some hesitation began cutting and stabbing with the borrowed dagger a voluminous document to which was attached the royal seal, Rhisiart was certain he caught the syllable “she” dropped more than once from the Earl’s lips. He was talking about Lowri; that was it! He was complaining to Denis, with the peculiar irritation that men of a certain type feel towards the philosophical companion of a desirable woman, that it was very early for the ladies to have left the banquet.

It was clear to our friend, who could see old Adda’s face, but not the face of the Constable, that the latter was taking the whole blame upon himself for this discourtesy; and it was plain that such coolness under the Earl's wrath excited the wonder of the old diplomatist. Denis must have jested about the little Prince, for Rhisiart quite distinctly heard the Earl protest in his harsh voice that he couldn't imagine the lady in question being shy of meeting a mere child.

Meanwhile the boy in question having proved to his lively satisfaction the sharpness of Rhisiart's dagger upon the paternal letter, and having succeeded in quaffing a deep draught of red wine before the Lollard had time to dilute it, was now engaged in a dangerous game of his own, which consisted in throwing the dagger into the air above his head and catching it by the handle as it came down.

Master Brut was evidently not a little troubled at this proceeding, and so indeed was Rhisiart, for he doubted very much that he would escape serious trouble if the heir to the throne injured his right hand with a blade borrowed from himself. But something in him was so sympathetic with the owner of that long white face and tense wrought-up nerves that he kept avoiding the Lollard's eyes; and thus, unworthy and meanly, put upon that conscientious man the responsibility of interfering.

Turning his head a little in this mischievous process, to the end that at least he shouldn't see the boy wound himself, he met the subhuman glare of David Gam, and became conscious that Hywel Sele was slowly rising to his feet with the obvious intention of stopping this dangerous game with his own hands.

But the Lollard had already interfered. "God's teeth! What d'ye mean by *that?"*

The boy's shrill cry of pain and rage rang through the hall; for the well-meaning scholar in snatching at his arm had brought it about that the descending dagger, which had been flung higher than usual, grazed, as it fell clattering among the cups, the Prince's bare wrist, breaking the skin and drawing blood.

Everybody leapt to his feet. The troopers came rushing forward. The Scab set up a peculiar howl of his own which sounded like the neigh of Derfel's Horse; and before either the Constable or the Earl could swing round, David Gam's hairy arms were about our friend's body, while Hywel Sele was clutching Master Brut by the throat.

"Kill the murderers! Kill the assassins!" cried the excited troopers, jostling even Fitz-Alan and Denis as they thronged forward to protect the son of their King.

But the little Prince, hurriedly mounting his chair and stepping from thence upon the table, raised his hand high in the air and made his youthful voice ring through the hall. "I'm all right, good people! I'm all right! It had nothing to do with these gentlemen. I was" — he paused nervously and then added very slowly and distinctly— "I was playing a game of my own."

The anxious troopers raised a thundering cheer and, laughing and jesting, obediently drew back; but so occupied with the safety of the child, who was now sucking his wounded wrist while he still stood erect on the table, were both the Constable and the Earl that the Lollard might have been strangled and Rhisiart's ribs cracked if chance or Providence hadn't intervened.

As it happened it was our friend who suffered most. In fact he suffered a great deal worse than Master Brut; for the latter, being harder to get at had more time to defend himself, and though dedicated for a skilful torturer Hywel Sele wasn't a born killer with his hands. But the friends were in evil plight. Crowding about the boy on the table nobody seemed to care what was going on behind the table, nor was there any sound down there save the heavy panting of four human throats.

Our friend went through what to him seemed like several hours of desperate contest. The little red man had got hold of him round both his elbows; and having seized him like this, he began, with heavily drawn breathings, to tighten his hug.

When the two Anglophiles were alone together, later that night, and Hywel Sele was almost dead drunk, he so far forgot the character of David Gam as to enquire about his feelings as he was hugging “that young fool”.

“I suppose,” he remarked, “you thought you’d just go on squeezing the little devil till you’d squeezed the Holy Ghost out of him?”

But David Gam could only return an extremely fatuous grin to this question; for the truth was he had simply given way to a wholehearted joy in the power of his hairy arms.

“You’re an idiot,” was his patron’s comment upon this grin. But Gam wasn’t an idiot. He was a person whose identity could only be fully realized when he was squeezing the life out of another person.

But if Gam’s feelings on this occasion were simple ones, Rhisiart’s were extremely complicated. Thought after thought rushed headlong through his consciousness. “He’ll break my arms first,” he said to himself, “and then my ribs.” And in his breathless pain he was surprised to find himself becoming two Rhisiarts. One Rhisiart was savagely biting the bare shoulder of the ruffian who was hugging him. The other Rhisiart, quite cool and collected, was looking on as if he were totally uninvolved. “I am being obscurely murdered,” thought this other Rhisiart. “And no one except little Sibli will care very much. But I’m not going to call for help, however it hurts. Go on! Break my bones. You can’t make me call for help! No one will ever know about this except Owen. But Owen will know about it. No! you can’t make me call out! — Owen — will — know — about it. No! I’m not crying because of the pain. I'm crying — because Owen — will know about it."

But suddenly the pain ceased to be the kind that required all his willpower to bear it without calling out. In place of murmuring, as he had been doing from the beginning, "He'll break my arms if he goes on!" Rhisiart began to find something in the pain itself that gave him a strange exultation, an exultation akin to but not identical with the old dark trembling of the "nerve perilous" that Lowri had played on. "It's for Owen," he thought. And then he thought, "Am I going mad?" For the pain had begun to take a palpable form; and the form it took was the form of a corpse, which was himself, and yet not himself!

With this corpse he was wrestling; and as he wrestled he kept crying out, "I know your name! I know your name!" And sometimes the corpse had an evil stench, and sometimes it had a lovely heavenly smell like lilies of the valley.

And he kept crying out to it, "I know your name!" though how it could have a name when it was only himself remained one of those problems that often confront a mind under some cracking tension.

Less occupied with anxiety about the little Prince than the Earl and the Constable, and by reason of their holy office more alert to the back-washes of events, the two Valle Crucis Fathers and their burly attendant pushed their way past the absorbed magnates. Father Rheinalt took Hywel Sele completely by surprise and sent him reeling, while the lay-brother, plucking the little red man from his victim like a maggot from a tasteful nut, hurled him with the force of a catapult straight into the substantial figure of Harry Hotspur, reducing that genial hero to a state of breathless speechlessness!

The first thing that Rhisiart himself felt when he recovered his senses was a fit of violent nausea. Humiliating though it was in the presence of all these notables he was forced to go down on his knees beneath the Prince's table, and vomit there like a sick dog. He knew that the kindly hands that were patting his shoulder, as he retched his heart out, were the hands of Master Brut; and when, pale and exhausted, he regained his seat he knew it was the same hands that were offering him a drink of water.

Father Rheinalt and the bearded lay-brother had moved away, and he could dimly make out their two cowled forms standing in the smoke by one of the fires; but Father Pascentius had remained on the scene and was now engaged in giving a detailed account of the whole occurrence to the ruffled Earl, while the Constable, taking care to send old Adda to intercept any false rumours that might be spreading through the castle, was preparing to bind up with his own hands the child's bleeding wrist.

But the little Prince, waving aside Denis' help, jumped lightly down from his perch, and Rhisiart caught the dark eyes in that long white face turned half-reproachfully and half-sympathetically towards himself and the Lollard. The temper of the scene changed rapidly now, from tragic tension to amused relief, a change that was accelerated by the noisy and humorous invective which Harry Percy, to recover his own aplomb, began pouring upon the head of David Gam.

In the reaction from the shock neither our friend nor Master Brut was in much of a mood to exchange confidences. Rhisiart was aware of two physical sensations, one unpleasant and one pleasant: the smell of his own vomit rising up from the darkness and the pressure upon his fingers of the Lollard's hand. Resignedly fatalistic though his mood was he did retain enough vitality to watch with fascinated interest the proceedings of Hotspur.

Though so conceited about his legal acumen our friend really *had* it in him to be, whether he knew it or not, a formidable novice in the art of diplomacy. It was therefore very natural that he should be so fascinated by

Hotspur who was a living example of all that he most instinctively reverenced.

And he watched Hotspur now with growing amazement! The man still kept turning to the Scab and his fellow-Derfelites, treating them as if they were an independent Welsh tribe whose attitude of mind it was essential that he, as the Warden of the Marches, should be able to follow with intelligent sympathy.

But what it was impossible for Rhisiart not to notice was the haughty attitude of Fitz-Alan to both Hywel Sele and David Gam, This evidently meant little to the red-haired adventurer, who, as a mercenary freelance, expected nothing else, but that it was a surprise and a shock to the Baron of Nannau was very obvious.

It was also plain to Rhisiart that what especially hurt the self-respect of this complacent and sardonic Anglophile was the fact that the Lord of Chirk regarded him and behaved to him as if he were, socially speaking, on a level with David Gam.

“Shall we all move, my Lords and Masters” — it was Denis himself speaking— “to the further end of our poor hall, where our good friend here, the Bard of Ffinnant” — and he made a courtly bow in the direction of the Scab— “is anxious to give our gracious Prince Henry a specimen of his curious and interesting art?”

The young Henry, who had been for some while regarding the disfigured countenance and the cyclopean eye of the prophet of Derfel with excited wonder, brightened up at those words, and at once cast such an appealing and self-accusing glance at our friend, whose unlucky dagger was now safe back in its sheath, that the Constable hastened to add— “Oh yes, my Prince, Master Rhisiart and Master Brut will join us; and so I hope” — and he raised his voice so as to be heard by Father Rheinalt and the formidable lay-brother— "will our Fathers in God from Valle Crucis."

It was a blessed comfort to both Rhisiart and the Lollard to leave the spot from which they might so easily have been carried away dead; and when, following the Constable and the Prince, the whole company re-gathered about the fire at the end of the hall, our friend's spirits rose so considerably that he began to take a more hopeful view of their fate.

"I hope to God," he said to himself, "the Scab won't go and spoil it!" But encouraged by Denis, who by this time seemed to have got the situation well under control, the representative of Derfel confined himself to a series of bardic improvisations, to which, since they seemed to know by instinct the drift of his *Awen,* the rich bass voices of his mountaineers extemporized a kind of vocal accompaniment.

The artful monotony of these ancient melodies from the slopes of Cadair Idris soon began to have a more than soothing effect upon the less musical in the audience.

The red-haired David, who treated the occasion as if it were a bivouac in the desert, soon slipped from his seat to a couch of bracken, where neither the sparks that showed signs of igniting his bed nor the noise of his own snores were able to disturb his oblivion.

The little Prince too, though with no other movement, allowed his head to sink against the Lollard's shoulder; while the great Lord of Chirk, whose experience of life had not included Welsh minstrelsy, occupied himself in puzzling out word by word, for he was a poor scholar, a despatch which he had received that morning from the King's camp.

By the time the performance was at an end and the old Seneschal had returned from his errand of counteracting false rumours, Denis hastened to put the royal child into his care, with instructions that he should be given a bed, under a responsible guard of Shropshire troopers, in the warmest guest-room in the castle. As the sleepy little boy put his hand in the old man's hand everyone rose to their feet.

Hotspur, however, strode up to the child, whose long white face in the torch-light had something phantom-like about it, and bending down whispered in his ear and placed a coin in his hand.

"I would — like — to — bestow," the boy repeated at once, bravely straightening his shoulders and holding his head high, "this — little — token — upon — so — upon so gifted a poet." There was no need for anyone to push the Bard of Ffinnant forward, for that worthy fully comprehended, none better, what it was proper for princes to do when they were impressed by the inspirations of genius.

With the natural grace of a born courtier the rogue now went down on his knee.

"I — bestow — on you," said the little boy, losing his sleepy stare as he encountered the burning eye which was fixed upon him, "this — poor piece — of gold." He paused a moment, keeping the outstretched hand waiting, and then added, "I shall tell — my father — of — of your kindness — to me."

The hand of the prophet of Derfel had closed upon the coin and he was retiring in discreet haste, when suddenly a voice that made Rhisiart quickly turn his head, though it was only the voice of the lay-brother, called upon the mountaineers to acknowledge this gift to their leader.

The tumultuous shout that followed was so loud that the unresponsive Fitz-Alan turned upon the men with a menacing scowl. But the diplomatic Hotspur intervened. "'Tis a royal gold 'noble' of the Prince's great-grandfather," he announced in his rich hypnotic voice, "Edward the Third of Crecy and Poitiers, where the Welsh archers helped us to conquer France.

You'll see upon it, my good friend" — this addressed to the Scab who certainly by this time had seen all there was to be seen— "the image of King Edward sailing in a galley. I'm sure you all wish for his great-grandson as many more happy nights in Wales as — as there are—" But the allusion to the prowess of the Welsh at Edward's battles was enough to start a vociferous acclaim, and as, to the tune of it, old Adda led the boy away, Rhisiart gazed with renewed respect at Harry Percy. "It isn't by the sword," he thought, "it's by the tongue, that the world is ruled." As he thought of this, a bold and startling idea took possession of him, an idea so agitating that it caused the pit of his stomach to feel as if it contained a flapping sail. Why shouldn't he make an oration to these great lords, defending Owen against the treacherous machinations of Lord Grey, and indicating that if there *were* any sort of rising it would be solely and entirely due to the brutal selfishness of that unworthy sycophant.

Once having come into his head this awe-inspiring idea took such possession of him that he found it hard to give polite attention to anything that was spoken to him. On the little Prince's departure the sagacious Hotspur expressed the view to the Bard of Ffinnant that it would be comfortable for him and suitable to the late hour if he should follow the example of the heir to the throne and retire to rest. This advice jumped well with the wishes of the prophet, who longed to devote himself to an uninterrupted study of the king crossing the sea; and so rapidly did he leave the hall that his followers were put to it to keep pace with him.

When the Welshmen were gone our friend's trembling resolution to make his first political oration was defeated by Hywel Sele, who, already more than a little drunk, launched into a rambling attack upon his cousin Glendower. He complained openly to Hotspur that neither the present Lord of Chirk nor his predecessor took a strong enough line with the son of

Griffith Fychan. “I know him through and through,” Hywel Sele affirmed. “He’s just like his father. He never forgives and never forgets. He caught me once, in pure boyish sport of course, when we were serving the late King, cutting off one of the forks of his beard, and do you think, my Lord Warden, that he has ever forgotten that boyish jest? You can bear me out in this, Constable! His pride and touchiness and his ridiculous gravity where his personal vanity is concerned are fantastic. The man’s got no sense of—” He wanted to say “sense of humour,” knowing Hotspur’s genial reputation, but he was too drunk to remember the English word so he concluded with the French word *esprit.* “And what’s worse,” he blundered on, “he’s a dabbler in—” He wanted to say “black magic,” but the phrase escaped him: “You saw that rascal who snatched at your gold noble? Well, everyone on the Marches knows that this precious cousin of mine who’s so finicky about his beard — they say he washes the hairs of it every morning with liquid gold! — hires that one-eyed buffoon to pimp and pander for him under cover of — under cover of — you know! — that holy Saint’s holy Horse! I should like to ask” — here a peculiar leer of drunken cunning crossed his face— “how these Valle Crucis Fathers reconcile it with Holy Church to defend such a devil worshipper! What have they got, I should like to know, either from Griffith Fychan or from Owen? Not a groat! And yet in your own presence, my Lord, here were these Fathers meddling with — with the King’s justice! This drunken beast here” — and he contemptuously touched the oblivious Gam with his foot— “was only doing what I told him. He’s a brute of course” — and he viciously disturbed the bracken under the sleeping man’s head— “but he was doing his duty. But honest men doing their duty are to be meddled with, are they? Meddled with by Valle Crucis! Meddled with by the Lord of Chirk!”

Hywel Sele was getting confused or he wouldn't have made the blunder of expressing his spleen against the Earl in this appeal to Hotspur.

It was Fitz-Alan who now interrupted him, and he did it without a word. He did it by taking up in his hands the thin-stemmed silver beaker out of which he'd been drinking and after bending it between his fingers as if it had been made of tallow instead of metal flinging it into the fire.

It was Denis who now intervened. Leaning forward a little, and addressing Hotspur, but fixing his grey eyes on some remote point in space, "My Lord," he said, "there has been in this castle to-night, and I may remind our friend of Nannau that it is under none but the King that I am Constable here, a series of misunderstandings that will have to be unravelled. These two gentlemen now with us, Master Brut and Master Rhisiart, are not here as guilty of treason. They are here as hostages for Glendourdy. It was under a misapprehension, my Lord, that our guests from the Tassel attacked these gentlemen; and as for Valle Crucis, as long as I am Constable of Dinas Bran I shall welcome" — here he turned to the two monks and the bearded lay-brother who were now seated under the wall just beyond the man on the floor— "all the assistance I can get in the performance of my duty."

"May I say—" began the Lollard. But to Rhisiart's relief, for he felt that the last voice he wanted to hear just then was that of his friend, Harry Percy himself broke in.

"Pardon me a moment, sir. Pardon me, Constable. As far as I understand this situation, the Baron of Nannau, and his loyal but at the moment inarticulate ally, are here as representing the policy of Lord Grey of Ruthin. To the regret of Fitz-Alan and myself, Lord Grey has at the moment much influence at Court. But I will be quite frank with you, my Lords and Masters. It was to counterbalance this influence that I found a way of putting pressure on the King to trust me with the person of his eldest son. The Prince is to hold — and he’ll be soon able, in spite of his tender age, to justify my confidence — a Court of his own in Chester. In that Court Harry Percy’s, and not Lord Grey’s, will be the determining voice.

“It is to protest against this that Grey has, even now, posted back to the King; and to despatch Glendourdy’s hostages to the royal camp at this moment would be simply to give them up to Grey, a course entirely contrary to the policy of conciliation the Lord of Chirk and myself are resolved to apply to Welsh affairs. The King’s army is marching south. The royal presence is required in the south. And if by making Glendourdy see that his quarrel is a private one — with Grey and not with England — we can smooth over this present trouble, there will be no need for the royal army to delay its return south.”

There was a long silence after these words. Hywel Sele was too drunk to gather their import; but he felt things were going against him, and he drew closer to the man on the floor; bending over him and prodding him. His whole attitude towards David Gam from now on was curiously revealing of the relations between them.

Rhisiart contemplated in awed admiration the rugged countenance of the heir to the vast Northumbrian estates. There was a single black lock falling across the Percy’s forehead, and his straggling dark moustache only seemed to accentuate his full, red, Viking-looking lips. And as our friend gazed at these massive lineaments, and actually dared to meet the man’s warm, irresistibly magnetic eyes, he decided that he would postpone his first public speech until he had conversed with a few more really enlightened statesmen like this Hotspur, and a few more really great legal authorities like Master Young.

One thing he would never do. He would never interrupt a group of formidable rulers with a blunt outburst like the Lollard's. He would turn on everybody present, before he said a word, a warm, glowing, disarming, ingratiating look, like that which Hotspur had turned upon him. "If the tongue," he said to himself, "is stronger than the sword, a certain kind of look is stronger than the tongue."

Meanwhile Hywel Sele, who had imbibed so much that he was forced to withdraw himself for a moment — indeed to our friend's ideas of propriety he might have withdrawn himself further — proceeded, as he re-took his seat, to indulge in a series of angry fumblings with his great silver-mounted belt which had become unhooked. It was clear that the man missed the bodily services just then, like those of a "gentleman in attendance", which David Gam habitually performed for him; for he now began viciously kicking his slumbering friend, evidently with the intention of suggesting their departure to the Tassel Inn.

But at this point Father Pascentius suddenly left his companions and deliberately sat down, without so much as a "by your leave", in the empty space that had been left unfilled between the Lord of Nannau and the Lord of Chirk. As he did this he gave our friend a shrewd glance with his black eyes, as much as to say, "We'll drive this nail home."

. Rhisiart was now in excellent good spirits. The only thing that worried him was the teasing question as to just where, as his friend and he loitered in the monastery three months ago, he had met that powerful-looking lay-brother.

"I know I must have seen him down there," he thought. "Is he one of the men who spoke to us in the cloisters?"

But apart from this trifling puzzle he had a delicious feeling of lying back, calmly and recklessly, on the great wave of destiny. He hadn't drunk much since he had vomited so violently; but the little he had drunk, and indeed was still drinking, seemed to have a wonderful effect on his nerves. He began to experience a tender and almost tearful regard for everybody about him. Even towards the great, handsome, evil, mask-like visage of Hywel Sele, down whose unwrinkled expanse big drops of perspiration were pursuing one another, he felt nothing but pity.

As to his would-be assassin on the floor, he even found himself vaguely concerned when a burning wisp from the fire, falling on one of those great hairy arms, caused the fellow to swing over in his sleep. “What’s making me feel like this?” he wondered; and he decided that it had to do with Owen. An indescribable sweetness seemed to flood his soul whenever he thought of Owen.

The man’s figure bulked larger, fairer, more majestic, more fraught with a strange diffused glory than anything he had ever known. “If Mad Huw feels like this,” he thought, “for the late King, he and I are in the same boat.” And letting his imagination run riot he imagined all four of them safe back at Glyndyfrdwy, himself happy with the live Owen, Mad Huw happy with the dead King, and Tegolin holding both their hands!

He felt so elated that he longed to catch a glimpse of at least one of those Northern constellations whose magnetic influence through so many summer nights had calmed his soul. “But they’d be all different to-night,” he thought, “all changed. It’s autumn now.”

He cast his eyes along the cornice of the broken roof. Yes! there were certainly many ragged gaps in the unrestored crumbling masonry. And yes, he could, through one dark aperture, make out a fragment of the sky. But how dark it must have grown out there since they sat down to the banquet. There were certainly no stars to be seen that night.

When his mind returned to itself after this attempt to escape into stellar space, he found that Father Rheinalt had left the lay-brother to his own devices and was seated close to Father Pascentius.

What was the lay-brother doing now? Rhisiart saw him walking slowly up and down, examining closely the various places where the walls had fallen outwards, and where the pitch-dark patches of sky were visible. How black and mysterious those patches looked — just as if space were a palpable substance rather than a hollow negation of all substance! And backwards and forwards across these apertures in roof and walls rolled the smoke of the fires, as if, like himself, the warm interior soul of Dinas Bran were seeking to cover up its blind track through the dark by wisps of comfortable thought!

Both Master Brut and he had their backs against the wall, whereas all the others were leaning forward over a long refectory-table, some resting their chins on their hands, and some sitting bolt upright, like figures on a pack of cards.

What on earth could it be that caused the restlessness in that big lay-brother, wrapped up so close in his monastic cowl? Up and down the whole length of the hall the fellow kept wandering. Was he interested in the smoke-darkened fancy-figures of those bygone heroes? Or was he, like Rhisiart himself, longing to steady his soul by a glimpse of the stars? But there were no stars. That was certain. The night had grown pitch-dark and the wind had dropped. Dinas Bran might have been a lonely galley, like the galley on the king’s gold noble, carrying the fate of the “Isle of the Mighty” from darkness to darkness.

There! He thought that would happen soon. The Lollard’s chin had sunk down upon his chest, and the man was sleeping peacefully. The great magnates before him, that noble Hotspur, that sad, withdrawn Denis, that battle-scarred Earl, were all listening gravely — everybody was listening, except the now quite tipsy Lord of Nannau — to the steady low-pitched voice of Father Pascentius.

How like a picture it had become! “All the history of this island,” Rhisiart said to himself, “could be read, if I had the knowledge of Master Young, in those faces!”

And what would his mother say if she could see her “little monk” now? “Oh I wish I could make an impression on these great men! I wish I could say something to them now, so penetrating, so original, that they would all look at each other and think to themselves: ‘How lucky Glendourdy is to have a relative like that!’”

But instead of saying anything at this propitious moment that would force these makers of history to recognize that they had a fellow-spirit among them, our friend could do nothing but impress their faces on his attentive mind. Still lying back on that curious sweetness that the thought of Owen brought, he felt as though in some odd way his identity had lapsed, and he had become a disembodied spectator of some pause in the march of events, when Destiny itself was treading water or marking time, and when as with a full moon in an eclipse the solemn shadow of the weight of life’s procession dimmed with a coppery mask the revolution of the spheres!

Some kind of enchanted interlude had fallen upon this group of people, like that of the mysterious vigil with the head of the Blessed Bran, when a similar group of warriors were lifted up into a beatified timelessness! All it needed now, our friend thought, as his imagination struggled to disregard the commonplace attire of the men about him and to envisage them as they would have looked in the majestical days of old, was that strange singing of the Birds of Rhiannon, which, like Helen of Troy’s nepenthe, swallowed up all sadness.

“Will there ever come a time,” he said to himself, “when the art of painting will immortalize such countenances as these men have; not just in fancy-trappings, like those old Princes mouldering on the walls, but with such living details as that scar across Fitz-Alan’s cheek, that dark wart above one of Hotspur’s eyebrows, that impeccable forward-pushing point of the Constable’s clipped beard, and, above all, the life-draining, in-sucking gleam of Father Pascentius’ eyes!”

It did, however, gradually dawn upon the legal mind of our friend that the crafty theologian had taken advantage of the Lollard’s slumber to make it clear to these important personages that the worthy man was not the type of obstinate heretic whose soul it was the peculiar joy of Henry the Fourth and his bustling Archbishop to save by the anguish of being burnt alive.

“For God’s sake sleep on, Master Brut!” was the prayer our friend sent up now; and he even strengthened it by more “Hail Marys” than he had ever strung together in all his days; for though he couldn’t understand a word of Father Pascentius’ theology, he knew too well the spirit of his *camerado* and how the reckless man would disperse in a second all this convoluted logic by some aphorism from the mouth of his Saviour.

“Where our too zealous Bishop of Hereford,” Father Pascentius was now arguing, “was led astray in accusing Master Brut of a schismatic bias was in relation to the order of perfection among immaterial substances. Now in my examination of Master Brut three months ago I found that where the learned Bishop had become confused, and indeed had approached a grave heresy himself, was in this most equivocal, most ambiguous, most dangerous, matter of plurality in the Divine Persons, otherwise than according to the order of origin.

“For if the Holy Ghost were not from the Son they would be equally referred to the Father in point of origin; wherefore either they would not be two Persons, or there would be order of perfection between them as the Arians pretend or there would be a distinction of matter between them; which is impossible. Consequently it is impossible that the Son and the Holy Ghost proceed from the Father except in such-wise that from the Father alone one alone, that is, the Son, proceeds, and from the Father and Son, inasmuch as they are one, the Holy Ghost proceeds. Anselm was quite correct in saying that the Son and the Holy Ghost are distinct from each other by this alone, that they proceed in different ways; but, as Saint Thomas had clearly shown, they cannot proceed in different ways unless the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son; wherefore if it be denied — and it is at this point that the learned Bishop of Hereford must have lost his bearings, quite simple as the point is, and, as you, my Lords and Masters, must clearly perceive it is — if, I say, it be denied that the Holy Ghost is from the Son it must likewise be denied that he is distinct from the Son.

"The conclusion being thus, as the angelic Richard of Saint Victor makes entirely plain, and as you, my Lords, are so clearly perceiving, it lifts the learned Bishop out of his perplexity and at the same time lifts this honest and loyal gentleman out of all neighbourhood to heresy; for as I have made clear to you, my Lords and Masters, the difference of properties, when we speak of the Divine Persons, consists merely in the number of persons producing, in that the first has being from no other, the second from one only, the third from two."

"I would like to ask you, Master Theologian," broke in Fitz-Alan, "whether in the dispensations of divine wisdom there is any special provision made for separate races? I am a plain soldier. I serve the King. But I have found it sometimes" — here Rhisiart caught a quaintly humorous expression flitting across the man's scarred face— "tedious and stupid when I come home tired with chasing my Welsh thieves to listen to my Chaplain, though he's a worthy man enough, God comfort him, and a stout drinker, preaching to me that all men are equal in the eyes of God, and have souls of the same Substance, to be hauled out of Purgatory or damned in Hell! You, Father, let me tell you, are the first scholar I've ever met who can quote your Anselms and your Ariuses; and I'd like to ask you the plain question, how without any damned Lollardry I could shut the mouth of this good priest of mine?

"What I'd like to tell him would be that the Blessed Creator when he made the soul of an English gentleman made it out of completely different stuff from the soul of a Welsh thief, just as one of my grand old wolfhounds has a different nature from a skulking, fish-eating otter. Doesn't your angelic Saint Richard of Somewhere, or your angelic Saint Thomas of Something, have anything pat to this matter, with which I could give my smug cleric a wholesome jolt? I'll take your word for it, Father, that the decent lad nodding over there is no curst heretic. But I tell 'ee 'tis no joke for a man like me, keeping the King's peace by day and by night, to be told that these sons of whores are no better than honest men when it comes to the Last Judgment!"

A silence followed this unexpected outburst. "I believe," thought our friend, "all these magnates are drunk. I believe Father Pascentius himself is drunk."

Glancing at the two monks, however, he recognized that it was from Tegolin's father, not from the theologian, that indiscretions were threatening.

The dark-swelling vein on Father Rheinalt's forehead looked as if it might suddenly burst and spout black blood over them all!

"I cannot sit here and listen," the monk began, but the theologian clapped his hand over his mouth. Rhisiart feared an outburst would follow this; but Cistercian discipline prevailed, and the man obeyed his superior. It was clear that Father Pascentius was deriving huge satisfaction from the whole situation. His voracious eyes looked as if they were actually swelling with the joy of mental contest. They looked as if they were sucking up the sacredest quintessence of these human souls into which they were thrusting their insatiable proboscis.

Hotspur shook himself now like a great friendly schoolboy when an awkward scene in the class-room has taken place; and for the second time our friend caught his eye.

"Now if Owen ever sent me," he thought, "as a special envoy to you, Harry Percy, we'd soon come to a perfect understanding. What a pity it isn't you instead of this bigoted Bolingbroke who's on—"

But he caught himself up, for he thought of that white-faced boy. But quite beyond his will what should slide into his head now but a picture of himself, dressed in the garb of a chancellor, signing in Westminster Hall an eternal treaty between Prince Owen and King Hotspur!

"The question you have raised, my Lord of Chirk" — it was the theologian speaking— "is one of profound importance. My good friend, Father Rheinalt here, completely missed its point; which was not, of course, the unphilosophical, uncanonical, un-catholic error of the superiority of one race over another, of the Welsh over the English, for instance, or the Saxon over the Norman, but the natural tendency to the cardinal virtues in some souls compared with the natural tendency, for it does as you well say seem almost to amount to this, in other souls to the cardinal vices. And while we're talking of these moral differences I would like to express a hope, good my Lord, that when the Most High chooses to take our beloved Abbot from our head, which may — God preserve him long! — happen any hour, you will feel the importance of refusing your support to Lord Grey's choice of a successor, which has only to be named to be seen in all its absurdity — our well-meaning but hopelessly incompetent Prior!"

That same flickering smile that Rhisiart had noticed before did at that moment cross the face of the Earl; but instead of pressing his original point, or making any comment upon the blunders of Lord Grey, he leaned across and gave Hotspur a rude nudge with his fist, directing his attention as he did so to the solemn antics of the tipsy Hywel Sele.

That gentleman was now gravely and absorbingly occupied in seeing how long he could scorch the hairs on his friend's bare arms without causing him to awaken. As he bent down over this task his great, handsome, sardonic physiognomy assumed an expression of frivolous but intense concentration, like the concentration of a person who plays a card-game by himself. The placing of his foot upon the arm of the sleeping man, to hinder his turning over, seemed as much part of this quiet game as did the ignition of various convenient wisps of bracken to serve as tapers.

A protracted series of these extempore tapers were now applied to the hairs on the sleeper's bare arm; but a rule of the game seemed to be that the assiduous scorcher was forbidden to approach a scarcely healed wound on the curve of the man's elbow.

Hotspur's reaction to the spectacle thus called to his attention struck Rhisiart as a somewhat singular one; for across the hero's physiognomy passed an unmistakeable contortion of extreme fear, a contortion that was accompanied by all those palpable manifestations of a childish shivering-fit that are indicated in the phrase *a goose walking over your grave.*

The great warrior recovered himself immediately; and Rhisiart was confirmed in his admiration of him as the first of English gentlemen, when he heard him begin at once, without the least shame, explaining to Fitz-Alan that from infancy he'd had a horror of torture; and that these curious antics of the Lord of Nannau hit for some reason that vein of weakness in him.

"Well, Lord Percy," said the Earl, with more sympathy than Rhisiart expected, "I'll give my troublesome confessor a dozen groats next feast-day to say a thousand Hail Marys that you and I, when our time comes, may die a clean death in the field."

"Amen!" murmured Hotspur from the bottom of his heart.

For some while Rhisiart had been aware, as he sat by his sleeping friend's side, and he had already induced Master Brut to stretch himself out on the bench and use him as a pillow, that Denis had been listening to the murmur of voices from the other end of the hall. Thus it was no surprise to him when Lowri's protector rose to his feet.

"With your permission, my Lords," he said, "I'll dismiss our guard. The men must be tired; and though I'm loth to interrupt our conversation, there seems no need to keep them in attendance any further."

"Surely, surely, Constable." Hotspur responded at once. And then with a friendly glance at the two young men, "And if these gentlemen—"

But Rhisiart hurriedly shook his head and murmured something about the great privilege it was to be in such exalted company.

"Well, off with those poor troopers, Constable!" Hotspur repeated. "We won't keep any of you very much longer; but I don't often get a chance to discuss matters with my Lord here, nor" — and he smilingly stretched himself in his seat and loosened the great sword in his sheath— "nor with our famous Valle Crucis scholar."

"One word, Constable." interjected Fitz-Alan. "I've no suspicions under your roof. But I'm an old soldier and have my humours and my habits. If you don't mind, you might send Trenchard and Hardy to me. You've only to mention their names, Trenchard and Hardy. Even in my closet, even in my chamber, I keep those two. They're more than servants. They're companions in arms. Chirk ain't Chirk without 'em. They can sit down behind us here."

"Trenchard — Hardy," repeated the Constable, and with a bow to his feudal superior he moved away.

Rhisiart soon heard the grateful shout, not loud but heart-felt, with which the Shropshire yeomen welcomed the permission to seek their rest; and when Denis returned, there came, striding heavily behind him, the Earl's two attendants.

"All right, Trenchard? All right, Hardy?" was Fitz-Alan's laconic greeting. "There you are, my men. Sit ye down! Here's some marrow left in this good pasty. And here — drink out of this!" And moving stiffly to where the men had seated themselves, the Lord-Marcher conveyed to them without spilling a drop his own deep flagon of mead.

"Dorset men, both," he whispered, as he and Denis resumed their places. "I have a parcel of good grazing land down there, and those fellows suit me better than any of my Arundel lads. King Richard always used to say, 'To fight for me when I'm awake give me Yorkshiremen, but to keep my bed when I'm asleep give me men from Dorset.' But if the Constable will forgive my returning to our present business—" He paused and gave Denis a look that caught our friend's eye at once, for it was a look that was like an armorial seal!

It was a look at once imperious and cajoling, the look of a born master in the nicest points of feudal relationships. "For the truth is, my Lord," and he turned to Harry Percy, "we are exceptionally fortunate to-night."

These last words were spoken with so much emphasis that everyone present — except Hywel Sele who, with his great bland face wearing the same tipsy solemnity, continued scorching the hairs on his friend’s arm — leaned forward to catch what was coming.

“I am only revealing,” he went on, “what you two Fathers, for we soldiers are children — and don’t think I don’t know it! — compared with you churchmen, must have detected already, that Percy’s brought the Prince to the Marches to cut the ground under Grey’s feet. Never mind how he got the child. The point is, having got him, and the King’s Writ with him, the boy’s Court at Chester will turn that great beggarly castle at Ruthin into a castle of sand! What, dear my Lord,” and he gave the great Hotspur a most quizzical glance from under his bristly eyebrows, “you don’t know yet is that this Father,” and he nodded in the direction of Tegolin’s parent, “is our friend Glendourdy’s private confessor. I dare warrant he’s not so stern with Owen as my terrible Father Talbot is with me! You *are* Owen’s confessor, Father, eh?”

Father Rheinalt’s brick-red face darkened ominously; but he bowed an unhesitating admission, while Father Pascentius murmured hurriedly in legal Latin, “It is allowed.”

Rhisiart’s eyes were glued on the great Hotspur now. Would he spoil this scene of perfect diplomacy by some brusque North-Country blunder? Fitz-Alan had gone too far, telling him about Father Rheinalt.

Not at all! Pushing back his dark forelock and crossing his iron heels, the most famous warrior in Britain only smiled his most winning smile at the embarrassed monk.

“’Tis nigh as good,” he cried, “as seeing Owen himself, and see him I can at this moment, Father, just as he rode like a madman into the hottest prick of the Douglas spears! ’Twas splendid — though of course not war, as a wily old borderer like me regards it. But tell Baron Owen from me—” but he caught himself up; and with an easy deprecatory chuckle turned to Fitz-Alan.

“Tell him from Lord Percy and me,” threw in the latter, “that we recognize his quarrel to be with Grey — with Grey and not with King Hal and you can even hint to him, if you like, that if he chased Grey back into his Red Burrow like a fox into his earth—” He stopped short and glanced, Rhisiart thought, a little nervously at Hotspur. But that border-chief to our friend’s culminating delight only clapped his great hands over his ears and murmured with a chuckle, “The King’s Warden of the Marches, tell him, suffers from a whoreson deafness!” And Rhisiart saw that it was all the reserved Denis could do — philosopher though he was — not to display his simple Saxon disgust at these frivolous Norman ways.

But having made their point, both the great men now relaxed in the most amiable manner; and Hotspur enquired of Father Pascentius whether he possessed a complete copy of the *Summa* of Saint Thomas. “In my father’s library when I was a child,” he said, “the good Father who tried to teach me — well! to write my own name — used to take down—”

But Father Pascentius required no further encouragement. In exactly the same tone of ironical patience that he had used to his pupil in his cell he scrupled not to plunge into an elaborate explanation of the superiority of the Cistercian libraries, and especially his own at Valle Crucis, over those of the other religious houses.

But Rhisiart turned his attention now to a lively conversation that was going on behind him between Master Trenchard and Master Hardy.

“Tis our wold Corfe, looks’ee,” the elder of the two men was now remarking, “that do coom into me vancy as us do sit here. Do’ee mind how Master Cob, down Bere way, used to mention ‘un? ‘A said his granfer, or summat, were from they parts. But I’ve a seed ‘un me wone self. Is, ’tis wold Corfe to the image this toomble-down pleace, ‘sknow?”

“So’t be, Jimmy Mummer, so’t be,” acquiesced the younger man.

“‘Twere well for I, Tom,” went on Trenchard, “if thik were the worst o’t. What do taunt me poor mind be thik reverend man what be now a-marching up and down, back and forth. Don’t’ee look behind’ee, Tom! But to tell’ee true I be worritted lest ‘un be the Wold Un his wone self!

“‘Twere conjurer Long John to Fordington who told I of me last end, and how ’twould be. ‘A said ’twould coom to I in a girt wambly pleace, same as this pleace be! ’Tis no common man, Master Trenchard, ‘a said, what I do see as thee’s doomster. ’Tis a tall man I do see, a proper tall man, but ‘a do glower at I, as the Sperrits bring un up, like a holy man, Master Trenchard.”

“Don’t’ee utter such words, Jimmy Mummer, don’t’ee utter ’em” protested the younger man. “What would Mary Elizabeth say, an her heard such dimsy words?”

Trenchard sighed heavily. “Ees, lad, ees, lad,” he groaned. “‘Tis of she I be frettin, Tom. Ye’ll be leal to me little wench, Tom, wunna, when I be gone? Ees, lad, ’tis of she I be frettin! I do see she cryin’ her heart out over me death-mound time one of they every shaven-polls do act as ‘a were spyin’ at I. ‘Taint that I be afeared for me wone self, looks’ee! Jim Mummer have had his day and have served his lord, and have kept Mary Elizabeth in twine and hosen, in smock and fairing; and now be ready to let his wold bones rest in peace. ’Tis of Mary Elizabeth I do thinky and thinky. Swear to I, lad, over thee’s dirkhandle, that thee’ll be a true man to me sely child? Her thinks the world of ‘ee, Tom, and that’s the blessed truth. And though she be only sixteen come Martinmas her ‘can beake a ceake crisp as any wold wife in Wareham.”

Our friend's attention was now diverted by the two monks rising simultaneously from their seats. But he caught one more remark of the man called Tom, apparently commenting on the care with which Jimmy the Mummer had placed his long-bow on the board beside him with an arrow across its string.

"With your pardon, my Lords," said Father Pascentius, "Father Rheinalt and I must be descending the hill. The hour is late; and, as it is, we shall have to enter by the Abbot's postern. Brother Glyn over there, Master Constable, may with your good leave have to stay the night in the castle. There are some little trifles of church-tribute due to the Almoner that he has instructions to collect. We bid ye good-night, gentles all! *Dimitte populi tui, Deus, et ostende eis viam bonam per quam ambulent — et da gloriam in loco isto."*

"Et da gloriam in loco isto," repeated Father Rheinalt; and they moved quickly across the hall to give their final instructions to the restless lay-brother.

The two noblemen emitted the unconscious sigh of relief that the departure of the learned commonly evokes, and moving nearer to each other began consulting in whispers.

Denis kept his eyes fixed on his accustomed point in space; while Jimmy Mummer's hands, as he listened to Master Hardy's re-assuring voice, kept fidgetting uneasily with that long-bow string, as if, beyond all rationality, he would dearly have loved to discharge its deadly missive clear at the heart of this perambulatory cleric.

"I have a notion" — it was the Constable's voice directly addressing our friend— "that this dark night may end in a storm. Perhaps this would be, therefore; a good moment—"

“Do you mean a thunder-storm, sir?” interrupted Rhisiart. “I’ve been thinking myself, sir, that there’s something queer about the darkness that has rolled up in the last hour. It has fascinated the lay-brother over there, too. Look, sir! He’s talking about it to Father Rheinalt; and it seems clear to me—”

It must have seemed clear to the philosophic Constable that like other young persons when the moment for rest is mooted, the Oxonian was saying anything that came into his head, behaving in fact like a child who hopes to make its elders forget the fatal motion of the clock.

But something so startling had just then met the lad’s eye that his childish babble was changed to an intense desire to turn away the Constable’s attention from the talk between Tegolin’s father and the lay-brother: As for Father Pascentius our friend hadn’t failed to mark the undignified haste with which, jerking up his habit like an impatient old woman, he had scuttled out of the hall.

“I must wake Brut! I must wake Brut!” was Rhisiart’s chief thought now; and he found himself trembling with excitement as he shook the Lollard by the wrist, waving that object up and down and taking care to hide the man’s face while he did so. Oh! he could feel the Constable’s steady gaze watching him; and he couldn’t help becoming cognizant too of an intense interest taken in his proceedings by Hywel Sele.

The drunken idea had evidently entered the Lord of Nannau’s head that he might pick up some new manner of tormenting a sleeper by watching Rhisiart’s roughness to his friend.

But Walter Brut was fully awake now; and our Oxonian got a glimpse into the instinctive sagacity of the Hereford squire that astonished him not a little. For the Lollard, having drawn a deep breath, and having stretched himself by throwing back his head, as a dog does when it is rudely waked, gave one slow meditative look at everyone in the hall, ending with a concentrated stare at what our friend had seen, and hurriedly rose to his feet pulling up Rhisiart with him. *“Garde à toi!”* he whispered. “It’s Owen himself!”

Now what our friend had seen, when he realized that he must turn the Constable’s attention away from the lay-brother, was an actual slipping down, by several inches, of that great beggarly beard, and the appearance beneath it of the familiar forked beard of shining gold.

Nor had this been all. He had noticed that before Tegolin’s father left Owen’s side and hurried out of the hall, just as rapidly, though with a bolder stride than Father Pascentius, he had received from beneath Owen’s voluminous robe a thick and newly-woven coil of rope!

“My Lords!” It was Owen himself speaking. And there he was — standing with his back to the only entrance, his right hand thrust through the handle of a sword he must have been concealing as well as the rope, so that the bare blade was now swinging from his wrist like a giant’s trinket, while in his free hands was one of the Salopian longbows that had been left by the weary troopers when they were dismissed.

Standing thus, like Odysseus confronting the suitors and tossing away his habit and his false beard, Owen emptied a full quiver of arrows upon the table in front of him.

“My Lords!”

Hotspur and Fitz-Alan were on their feet in a second, the former drawing his sword, the latter buckling his belt. Quicker than a flash of lightning could have burst did that bare blade appear in Harry Percy’s hand; but not less quick — for the brain, even of an Oxford student, can move faster than lightning — the queerest side-ways impression rushed through Rhisiart’s consciousness.

"What a friendly weapon," he thought, "that sword of Hotspur's is!" It was certainly an old sword; and it fitted the man's hand like a glove. Its ancient cross-handle in some fantastic way conveyed to the lad's mind the notion that it was a kind sword! It certainly had a homely look, and a proverbial, mellow, North-Country anvil-look. It looked like an heraldic sword, and yet it looked like the sword of a "good giant" in a fairy-tale.

Indeed before this rush of unexpected suggestions had been whirled out of the boy's head he actually found himself contemplating the gleaming object as if it weren't a death-dealing thing at all, but something for homely usage — almost like a spade!

"My Lords!" And as Rhisiart stared at Owen standing there under a great sconce of flaming torches, slowly and deliberately fitting an arrow to his string, it seemed to him that not only the forked beard and the princely torque and the gleaming breast-plate were all of gold, but that from the man's figure itself emanated a supernatural light!

Rhisiart's nerves, as may be imagined, were in a state of hyper-tension, and this tension was rather increased than diminished by the fact that a real flash of lightning, which was followed immediately by a startling burst of thunder, interrupted Owen's words. The lightning lit up for a second the entrance to the hall, but its cessation, for it was not repeated, made the dense darkness behind that golden figure more Tartarean than before.

Rhisiart had, as we know, a sturdy and un-mystical soul; but Modry's imagination had dominated his childhood, and though his intelligence assured him that it needed no magician to conjure up a storm on a night like this, it was impossible to suppress an exultation in the feeling that when his hero, his god, did show himself at last; the age-old tokens of the conspiring elements were there at his side!

"My Lords! I have only one request to make of you, and then I'll trouble you no further. You are Peers of the Realm of England, and I am Owen ap Griffith Fychan. But I have to ask you, as I stand here in this hall of my ancestors, to permit me, with all due courtesy and according to the laws of chivalry, to take away with me to-night Rhisiart ab Owen, my Secretary, and Walter Brut of Hereford, my Librarian; which same learned and honourable persons were hostages for me in this castle of Dinas Bran for as long as I didn't appear to claim them."

Hotspur began pushing back the refectory-table in his heavy, easygoing fashion. He clearly intended to walk straight up to Owen and enter upon a friendly discussion with him. Neither the dramatic stir in the elements nor the fantastical strangeness of Owen's appearance — as if the man really were the necromancer people accused him of being — seemed to impinge on his consciousness at all. He had told Father Rheinalt he wanted to see Owen; and here the fellow was. A few direct and friendly words together, and what waste of life and property might be avoided.

"One minute — one minute — Baron Owen," Rhisiart heard him say, as he stamped with one of his armed heels on the stone floor to get rid of a trifle of cramp. But before he could advance a step the explosion had occurred.

Rhisiart hadn't even time to turn his head, but it crashed through his brain, as if he'd been hit by the arrow himself, just what had happened. Without warning, without a nod from his master, old Jimmy Mummer of Puddletown had drawn his bow-string and drawn it by no means, as Scripture says, "at a venture." In fact he had smitten the transfigured lay-brother through the upper part of the very arm that was holding the Salopian's bow. Through the man's arm the well aimed arrow sped, close to the shoulder, and there it stuck fast, the barb having passed clean through; and the feathers remaining quivering and shivering on the hither side.

Hotspur must have stepped back a pace, recognizing the possibility that a sudden shock of pain might make so impetuous a chieftain start shooting indiscriminately at them all; but with the arrow still piercing his arm and obviously biting pretty sharply, for our friend could see his face twitching, Owen lifted his own borrowed weapon and, as it seemed without giving himself a second to take aim, discharged an arrow full into the throat of his assailant.

This done, and Jimmy Mummer falling choking into Master Hardy's arms, the ex-lay-brother was seen deliberately to fit another arrow to his string. His appearance certainly had for our Oxonian at that moment a more striking air than even the flash of lightning had given it.

He seemed to resemble at the same time a sacrificed god and an avenging god; for, with every movement he made, the arrow-point which stuck out of him and the arrow-feathers which stuck out of him moved with him, giving to his appearance a ghastly element of the grotesque.

As he watched him and wondered when he would have to leap to his side there came into our friend's mind a monstrous picture of Saint Sebastian which had followed the Eastern Emperor to Oxford.

The Russian gentleman who spoke of the "insect" had shown it to him and had explained to him that it answered to some special craving in Byzantine piety.

But in Owen's case the effect was further enhanced by the manner his short sword — of the kind known on the Marches as "Roman" — swung from his wrist.

But Owen was speaking again now. "I am sorry, my Lords, this thing happened. I shall pray" — and the man actually had the gall, burdened as he was, to cross himself as he stood there— "for the soul of this unhappy person. I should be as he is now, if his hand hadn't shaken; for my throat, like his, lacks a gorget. Will you be pleased, my Lords, to give me your word as gentlemen that Master Rhisiart and Master Brut may depart with me? If you will, this painful scene shall end at once! And let me repeat again — I am sorry to have killed that man; and I promise his friend that I will have Masses said—"

"Damn your Masses, you girt conjuring devil, you whoreson byblow of a Welsh whore!"

At this Fitz-Alan, who was now kneeling over the dead man, and taking no more notice of Owen than if he'd been one of the pictures on the wall, rebuked Master Hardy; but Master Hardy went on. "What wold Jimmy said to I just now, clear as Sturminster-bell, be enough to crack the heart in I, Master. 'A said, 'Mary Elizabeth,' clear and sensible, as if 'a were in Sarum choir. Ees! Durn ye! I beant afeared of 'ee, ye girt glittering Warlock, and I do pray for thee's whoreson sake thik arrow be adder-nointed!" And Tom Hardy of Milborne Port spat on his fist and shook it fiercely at Baron Owen of Glyndyfrdwy.

But Owen was speaking again. "The first man of you," he shouted, "who makes a movement towards me will get my second arrow. Let Master Rhisiart and Master Brut come here to me. I don't ask for a safe-conduct out of this castle. I came without permission and I shall go without it. But these two gentlemen must go with me!" But Fitz-Alan took no more notice of Owen than he did of Hotspur. His whole attention was absorbed in the pitiful attempts made by Master Hardy to pull the arrow out of the dead man's throat.

He now said to him in a husky voice, "Shall I do that, or do you want to do it, Tom?"

"Do't thee wone self, Master!" And Rhisiart was destined to see a sight he'd never seen before, and a horrible sight it was. For the Earl had to put his heel on the Mummer's body, and pull with his whole strength, to get the barb of the arrow out of the man's neck; and when the thing did come, the black blood that followed was a grievous sight. It was a sight, however, that caused nothing but lively interest in the Lord of Nannau.

Rhisiart was too occupied with wondering whether he ought to rush to Owen's side to pay much attention to the two gentlemen from the Tassel. But once when by chance he did turn his head it was to discover that the drunken Sele was actually on the floor by his friend's side, shouting into his ear that the Devil had come to take him to Hell in the person of Owen Glendower.

Rhisiart couldn't help a moiety of his attention being arrested by what the smooth-faced gentleman was saying. "He's come for you, Gam, and you'd better go quietly; and I'll go home to bed. I shall miss you in the morning, Gam, but it can't be helped. Better go quietly with him, Gam; and I'll to the Tassel. Say goodbye, Gam! It may after all suit you better than Purgatory. You'll find a wondrous company of whores down there, Gam. When you see those Irish girls we killed, ask 'em which they like best, us or the devils."

Master Brut by this time, heedless of the blood, was on his knees by Fitz-Alan's side. His eyes were tight shut; but he wasn't telling his beads or muttering anything in Latin. He was, to Rhisiart's amazement, addressing the Son of Mary in plain English and as if He were standing a few paces away.

Hotspur, meanwhile, leaning on his "kindly" sword, kept his puzzled but quite self-possessed gaze fixed on the strange figure at the end of the hall.

“That arrow ought to come out,” Rhisiart heard him mutter. But Denis addressed the Northumbrian without turning his head. He too kept his eyes on Owen.

“With your permission, my Lord,” he said, “I think I will let these lads go. They’re his hostages. And he’s come to claim them.”

“Let ’em go,” muttered the other. And again he repeated, “That arrow ought to come out.”

But the Constable moved to Fitz-Alan’s side. “I may tell him he can have them, my Lord?”

“Them? — us — all!” groaned the Earl, staring at his dead servant; but immediately after and with a flicker of a grim smile, “Parley with him, parley with him, Constable. Didn’t you hear what he said? She’d never forgive me if he shot you too!”

It was clear that neither of the great noblemen felt impelled at that juncture to disregard Owen’s threat.

But Denis Burnell, who had nothing but Saxon blood in his veins, and whose great-grandfather was a Shropshire shepherd, appeared to feel that the son of the King’s Sheriff had certain duties to perform which were unavoidable. So without a weapon in his hand, or a word in his mouth, he strode hurriedly up the hall, neither holding his head high nor holding it low, but keeping his eyes, as usual, fixed on some remote point in space that was neither bounded by Owen’s golden beard nor by the black darkness behind it.

Slowly, as he came near, the solitary figure beyond the trestle-board allowed his transfixed arm and his dangling sword to sink down.

Rhisiart with his eyes screwed up into burning, glittering points, out of which the soul of the lad rather than his intelligence gleamed, watched while the two whispered together, with nothing but the table between them; but presently Denis turned round and easily and naturally beckoned to him.

After muttering he hardly knew what to the two Lord-Marchers, and literally dragging his friend from his knees, Rhisiart advanced up the hall.

“That arrow ought to come out!” was the last word he was privileged to hear from the lips of Harry Percy. “A keepsake, Constable!” he caught in a hoarse murmur from Owen, and with a gasp of consternation he saw his hero hand over to Denis his precious “Roman” sword.

Well! It was all over now, and into the heart of the scriptural “outer darkness” Glyn Dŵr led his youthful hostages from that lighted hall.

“We are going the wrong way,” our friend heard the Lollard mutter, as they moved through the impenetrable obscurity. “This isn’t the way to the gate!” he repeated.

“We’re not going to the gate,” their guide replied. “We’re going by the ramparts. Father Rheinalt is there with our rope.” With our rope? Was this astonishing man assuming that a monk, a scholar and an Oxford student had the knowledge and courage of sailor-boys.

Presently they heard the deep-throated voice of Tegolin’s father. And the voice came from the precise direction towards which they were hurrying. All they had to do was to increase their speed. How on earth had their guide known which way to go? Was the substance of this extraordinary man’s nature actually porous in some way, like that of animals and birds, to the chemistry of the elements? Or was he really, as his enemies were always hinting, a black magician?

“I don’t care,” our friend thought, as with his fingers in Master Brut’s belt he hurried after his hero, “what he is! I shall never leave—”

But suddenly with a deep interior shiver came the thought of that rope! Ah! here were the ramparts — broken and jagged at this point — and here was the dark form of Father Rheinalt!

The monk was tugging with might and main to make his great coil sure and fast round the abutment of a massive and unbroken stone.

Rhisiart shuddered when he peered into the black gulf into which that rope descended. How high did the wall just here rise above the ground? A sickening sensation seized him, like fingers of ice clutching at his vitals. He could feel his torn and bleeding hands slipping, sliding, losing their hold.

“Can you do it?” he whispered to Master Brut; and he knew the Lollard was smiling by the familiar tone of his response.

“Of course, lad, if the monk can! Twist your legs round it, that’s the great thing; and take it hand under hand. Don’t let it slide through your fingers. We used to do it to get crows’ nests. Kick yourself clear of the wall as you go down.”

But Rhisiart suddenly knew that nothing could make him trust himself to that rope. And with this knowledge there came upon him the worst moment he had known in his whole life. The wildest, maddest ideas rushed through his mind. “For his sake,” he thought, “I could jump down there! But swing over that blackness on that—”

“Who goes there?” And the blaze of a lantern, whose shade had suddenly been removed, flashed upon all four of them.

Luckily it wasn’t a trooper. It was one of Denis’s regular watchmen. And the worthy man, an elderly ex-forester from Chirk, was more startled than the men he’d stumbled on. This sudden uncovering of his lantern upon such a group, one of them with an arrow through his arm, was such a shock to him that Master Brut who was nearest had no difficulty in pinioning his arms to his sides and throwing him to the ground, There was a brief struggle, during which the fellow kept crying out, “Help! Murder!”

But it ended with the Lollard getting his light away from him and kneeling on his prostrate form, while the lantern, lying on its side, threw weird horizontal rays upon the monk’s sandals.

All this while Rhisiart kept saying to himself, “I can jump and I can die, but I can’t—”

A black dizziness was attacking him now. He felt as if he had already jumped, and was lying dead beneath the wall. As he fought against this blackness he was aware of the monk deliberately untwisting the girdle of his habit and binding it round the prostrate man, while the Lollard did what he could to stifle his piercing cries.

But what was that? Oh, Hail Mary! Hail Mary! Hail Mary! Weren’t those shouts? And weren’t they answering the cries of the man on the ground?

“I can jump and die, but I can’t—” But the blackness was over him now, O the blackness....

Not dead? Hadn’t he jumped then? Where was he? What was that light in his eyes? Tree-trunks? There were no trees in Dinas Bran! “There, lad! A drop more of this, and you’ll be all right.”

It was from Owen’s own little silver phial that this choking fire-water was bringing him back. They were in the midst of a thick coppice of birch-trees, on whose white trunks the lantern was flickering.

He began at once babbling the most childish questions; and he saw it was Owen, his face twitching with pain, who was answering him with grave amusement.

“Did I jump?” he gasped.

“Jump, lad? You wouldn’t be alive if you had! You climbed down — like the rest of us!”

He shut his eyes. He began to feel that “blackness” again. No, no! He couldn’t have done that.

"You came down just as I told you to," threw in Master Brut. "You came down faster than my Lord, faster than the Father."

And then he remembered how he had ridden forward on Griffin that far-off Midsummer Eve, between the bows and the spears. He'd been in a trance then, a trance of "blackness", like this time! It must have been Owen who willed him to do what he *couldn't* do. "But—" he began.

"There are no 'buts,'" said the Lollard. "Down you came, like any ship-boy. Best not think about it any more, lad!"

But our friend seemed unable to stop thinking about it and asking questions about it. He was in that soft, melting tearful mood, with which young people return to consciousness after some crushing experience, and he couldn't help blurting out, with his eyes fixed on his hero: "How did you learn, sir, to climb down ropes so easily?"

Owen was on his feet now, passively submitting, though with many suppressed groans, to Father Rheinalt's blundering attempts to loosen the arrow.

"Much as — your friend *did!"* he cried; but the final word emerged from his mouth with something so like a scream that the Lollard could no longer contain himself.

"Excuse me, Father," he cried, thrusting the monk away. "I am more of a doctor than you. In these things we need to be pitiless. Please kneel down, Lord Owen, and cling to the tree as fast as you did to that rope. I must hurt you very sore so you'd better bite on this." And the calm blooded Wycliffite, while Owen obediently though with a wry face sank down and gripped the tree, searched about with the watchman's lantern till he found a fragment of not too rotten wood. Clenching his teeth upon this object the Lord of Glyndyfrdwy prepared to bear what was coming.

Our friend stumbled to his feet. He longed to share his master's suffering. He longed to press himself against that noble form and sob out his devotion.

The monk meanwhile was glaring at the self-constituted doctor as if he could have killed him.

"Stand back, Father!" cried Owen; and then to the Lollard: "Get birch-lichen if I bleed — birch-lichen — do you understand?"

The Lollard nodded. And Owen turned to Rhisiart. "Hold the light for him, cousin!"

After examining with the utmost care both the head of the arrow and its feathers, which latter were now clinging close to the shaft owing to the hot hands of the nervous monk, the first thing the Lollard did was to take out his knife and sever this feathered end of the dart, as close as possible to the wound. The next thing he did was to cut away every strip of clothing from the man's shoulder.

"Hold it steady, lad!" And Rhisiart, clenching his own teeth, did at last succeed in preventing the light from skipping about like a will-o'-the-wisp, anywhere but on the hurt arm.

"Now, my Lord!" And Owen's teeth sank into the block of wood, while the Lollard, bending low over the man's shoulder, and gripping the arrow-head and the few inches of shaft that had followed it through the flesh threw all his spirit into one clean, straight, unshrinking pull, till — while the lantern suddenly flung its rays at the sky — he lifted up the whole weapon, bloody, but unbroken, safe in his hands!

Owen uttered a long, gurgling sigh, like the release of water from under a lifted weir, and loosening his grip of the birch-trunk sank down beneath it, while from his mouth the piece of wood, bitten clean through, fell with a just perceptible sound upon the wet moss.

The Lollard promptly snatched the lantern from our friend, and its rays instead of tremblingly searching the zenith fell upon the dark stream of red blood now issuing from Owen's flesh.

"Birch-lichen!" whispered the wounded man. "Press it against the place and bind it tight! And give me my phial."

But our friend Rhisiart, to use the expressive Homeric phrase, "took other counsel."

Within the narrow but astute cranium of his Norman skull there had just repeated itself that ominous word uttered by Master Hardy—"adder-'nointed". He waited till the Father had held the phial to Owen's lips; but he refused to wait till Master Brut returned with the lichen.

"Cousin Owen," and it was only the intensity of his feeling that made him use that word, "I heard the man's friend speak of adder's poison. I want to suck your hurt before he binds it up!"

The chieftain's eyes opened wide, and a very strange look flickered up into them. "If you will, child," he murmured faintly, "but my blood is dangerous."

Rhisiart didn't wait for further permission. Kneeling down by his hero's side in the darkness he had no difficulty in finding the wound in his arm and pressing his lips to it. Then he sucked and swallowed and sucked and swallowed.

"Spit it out, coz! Spit it out! A man's blood's a man's soul. Do'ee want to share—"

But in spite of this protest, our young friend knew well that the unhurt arm had been lifted, and that his master's fingers were stroking his head.

The Lollard had nothing but praise for his fellow-hostage's behaviour when he returned with the lantern and the lichen; but Father Rheinalt, from that moment till they reached Glyndyfrdwy, uttered not one single word.

“I oughtn’t to have let him do it,” thought Glyndyfrdwy’s lord. “I know those Wessex men-at-arms! They’re the same today as they were in King Alfred’s time. Adder-’nointed! They all talk like that; but they’d no more poison one of their weapons than they’d trust a Welshman with one of their daughters. Why did I let him do it then? Why didn’t I make him know how it commits him? Ha! old conjurer, at your tricks again! Well, if it has been, it was to be, and if it is to be, it will be! You don’t know what you’ve done; and I don’t know what I’ve let you do, Rhisiart ab Owen. But I know this well enough. I’ve got what I wanted!”

XII. MATHRAFAL

IT WAS ABOUT dawn on September the sixteenth, in the first year of the fifteenth century, that Owen Glendower threw off the heavy wolf's skin beneath which he had slept, and looked about him in that familiar room at Glyndyfrdwy, the room that his jesting family had long nicknamed "the magician's chamber."

The coals on the open hearth were still red, and in the grey light that seemed pressing like a sorrowful face against the narrow window he could see lying still open upon his desk the old parchment-covered folio — the most precious of all his books — which he had been championing the night before. It contained poems and prophecies reputed to have been uttered by Taliesin, Llywarch Hen, and others — one or two claiming to be from the actual mouth of Merlin himself!

Even his friend Iolo had confessed himself unable to interpret more than a line here and there of these *ogyrvens* as he had called them. The old Bard had done much better with Taliesin. But that great pilgrim of incarnations, whose special genius for imaginative metempsychosis made the human soul seem like an unwearied traveller down the ages, was still as much of a riddle to him as was the obscurer Merlin.

Before he slept last night he had summoned his impassioned harp-player, Griffith Llwyd ab Einion, and had spread out the mystic pages before him; but Griffith had explained at such length, and with so many technicalities, how the whole art of poetry had been revolutionized by Dafydd ap Gwilym, that Owen had been seized with an unscholarly rage; and had, he now remorsefully remembered, seriously hurt his faithful Bard's feelings by declaring roundly that these fashionable modern *cywyddau,* lovely as they were, totally lacked the terrible grandeur of the earlier inspiration.

Justly irritated by this outburst, the worthy man had grown vehement in his defence of modern poetry, maintaining that it dealt with living realities, in place of parables and symbols and mythic fables; and had finally so warmed to his subject as to challenge his lord and master to prove by some actual quotations from the book before them the superiority — in anything but oracular obscurity — of the old over the new.

This challenge — and Owen smiled in that grey light as he recalled how it had confounded him — he had unworthily dodged in a manner more proper to a touchy baron than a patient scholar, merely muttering something about its being better for a great bard to write of magic cauldrons and mystic castles and the Lords of the Under-World than of the arching of ladies' eyebrows and the curves of their breasts.

Standing there staring at that narrow window and thinking of the ceremony before him and of the dragon-beflagged pavilion that had been erected for it in the field by the river, an anger against his fate greater than he had ever known before, though something akin to it was a recurrent mood with him, swept over his soul. He glanced at the red coals of his fire. He glanced at the couch from which he'd risen, and he gave vent to a sigh that seemed to come from depths below his consciousness.

He suddenly felt like someone who has been dragged back from levels of life far more satisfying than any outward events, levels where he could lose himself in the unlabouring flow of the tides of Being.

He loosened one or two of the galling hooks of his mail-shirt, and kicking off the fur slippers in which he'd been sleeping began hurriedly pulling on his silken hose and his new-fashioned deer-skin garters. Then he struggled into his upward-twisted boots with their fantastical curve. Thus accoutred but still unwashed and uncombed he went to the iron-barred door and listened. *Tramp — tramp — tramp,* up and down the whole length of the corridor. Yes, his faithful door-man was on guard as usual.

He hesitated for a moment, contemplating in the grey light a couple of curious marks that had been cut in the wood-work of the door. They were clearly meant for some sort of lettering — the initial letters of some child's name — but it was a calligraphy so different from the kind used now that neither his father nor *his* father had known whose initials they were. Lost, lost, the hand that made those marks.

And so would this day be lost — at least *as it was to him;* though no doubt in the chronicles kept at Valle Crucis future pupils would have to learn by rote for their tedious novitiate, "On the sixteenth of September, in this aforesaid year of grace, Owen, son of Griffith the younger, was unanimously proclaimed Prince of Wales by a gathering of the men of Gwynedd and Powys." He stood listening to the lad's marching steps.

"Shall I call him in," he thought, "to make up the fire? No, better not!" and turning to the heap of logs he proceeded to do it himself.

He had certainly awaked in a mood wherein the least encounter with any mortal person was something from which he shrank. Watching the leaping flames throw flickering rays on his ridiculously up-curved shoes he thoughtfully stroked his beard.

And then, as he crossed the room to his chamber-latrine to relieve himself, "Did Bolingbroke feel like this when he first got them to cry 'God save the King!'?"

Stepping gingerly now to an arras-hung aperture in the wall he extracted a silver tray of toilet-articles whose dainty appearance would certainly have pleased the heart of Mad Huw's Richard. Conveying these objects to the window, along with a mirror of polished steel, he discovered that the dawn was still too dim for his purpose.

“I suppose it’s nothing to you,” he thought, apostrophizing the grey slit in the eastern wall, “whether a Prince anoints himself or doesn’t anoint himself!” and he impatiently lit one of the great sweet-scented flambeaux that stood above the oracular crystal globe. Then he set himself to comb his beard and arrange with the utmost nicety one of his ancestor’s tarnished circlets of gold about his forehead. If he didn’t take as much trouble over all this as Hywel Sele had told Hotspur he did, he certainly took a good deal of pains to enhance his princely appearance; making use of various courtly devices to this end that would have reminded his new Secretary of the fantastical fol-de-rols of Richard’s entourage, when that unhappy King kept his Easter Jousts at Hereford.

From his childhood he had had this mania for a meticulous care of his person. How well he knew every curve, every contour, every mark, every hair on his face! It was always a puzzle to him how essentially careless about their appearance all his children were. “They must,” he thought, “have got this peculiarity from the Arglwyddes, who — noble and loving creature! — leaves her gown, her head-dress, the fashion of her hair, entirely to her tire-women.”

He had often thought, “I don’t know why I’m so fussy about my appearance. My father wasn’t, nor his father.” But at this moment, as he went on combing his beard and trimming it across his fingers, he was in a mood to carry his self-analysis further.

“I’ve never been ashamed,” he thought, “of anything I find I am. I wish to Blessed Mary I hadn’t hurt old Griffith’s feelings by attacking this clever modern poetry in comparison with the old great bards; but I’m not ashamed of it — because that’s how I am! I shan’t be ashamed of getting a vicious joy in beating down every enemy I have, especially Grey and Sele and Gam and that sly wolf, Fitz-Alan! I'm not ashamed of using one brave man's love, and another brave man's conscience, another's ambition, another's patriotism, I'm not ashamed of using Saint Derfel his holy self!

"No, old cloven-beard" — and he regarded his soft, yet rugged countenance with grave satisfaction— "I'm not even ashamed of my whoremongerings or of lying to the Arglwyddes! And yet, old conjurer" — and he stared long and deeply into his curious-coloured eyes— "you are ashamed, really and ultimately ashamed, of something that you habitually do. And 'tis the custom, my tricky cloven-beard" — and the man distorted his face out of all recognition— "for a sovereign prince before his coronation to confess himself to the uttermost!"

Relaxing his visage to its normal form he dipped his fingers in an ointment-pot and managed without removing the bandage to anoint the wound in his arm. "The Arglwyddes," he thought, "will want to dress it, but it'll be too late. The Prince of Wales provides his own holy oil! But is there anything to confess? Owen confessing to Owen!"

And then he drew a deep and bitter sigh. And as if fishing for his own self-treachery in his fluctuating eyes he spiked with his spirit a terribly glittering fish, and as he caught it he thought, "That's my reward for knowing you so well, old cloven-beard. I can detach myself from you till my soul *isn't in you at all,* till my soul is there, or there, or *there"* — and he made motions with his head— "till my soul's so independent of you that it can make you do anything — *perhaps even live after you're dead!*

"Yes, old conjurer, there's a soul watching you that by petting you and cossetting you and humouring you has got all your secrets out of you, and has caught now, on your declaration day, the most slippery one of all. Listen, forked-beard! Listen, treacherous eyes! You want to do it — all you're going to do — not as the elements do things, not as the Spirit of the elements does things, but as priests and druids and magicians and fortune-tellers go to work, *by meddling with the future!"*

Had the gargoylish head that the monkish scribe had caused to emerge from the letter "M", with which the unintelligible prophecy in the open folio began, been endowed as some have fancied such entities are with the power of vision, it would have been startled at that moment to see the prospective Prince of Wales grimly and with some physical distress hook up his mail-shirt and when this was done fall on his knees.

Had this angel-demon head been also — as a child might pretend — possessed of thought-reading powers, it would have been further startled by hearing the following voiceless prayer:

"Oh Unknown Spirit of the Universe, build up before me, before the soul of Owen ap Griffith Fychan, like the rampart of an unassailable fortress, the unbroken, the undisturbed, the absolute darkness of your impenetrable purpose!"

Rising to his feet after this, Owen replaced his mirror, put away the various utensils of his toilet, and going to the door listened to the marching steps of his sentry. Then, as soon as he knew that the man was at the remotest end of the corridor, he rushed to the wall where his ancestral weapons hung and took down a mighty battle-axe of antique design. The next thing he did was to fling over the magic globe, which now reflected the first real light of the rising sun, the wolfskin from his head. Then after a moment's pause he raised the great axe in both hands and brought it crashing down upon the hidden crystal. Three times he raised the axe and struck. At the first blow the thing cracked, but with such a strange sound that it came near to relaxing his nerve. At the second blow the crack sank deeper into the darkened object. At the third the crystal fell into fragments!

He stood listening intently, leaning on the handle of the weapon and surveying the wolfskin.

Tramp...tramp...tramp! His sentry's steps drew near. No! thank the mother of God — they receded again. The fellow was surly and faithful; but, even so, he felt at that moment as if he would shriek like a woman at the shock of facing another, *any* other, human soul.

There, the sun had risen! A thin spear-head of golden rays flickered upon the crumpled skin that now lay almost flat upon the massive oak support. He stared at the ruffled pall, as if he expected to see bloodstains of some sort — bloodstains of the eidola of the future — staining that grey pelt.

Making a painful effort, he switched off the covering; and the golden light, now no longer a mere spear-head, bathed the illuminated fragments. He counted them mechanically. There were seven of them. Half mechanically he cast his mind forward. "Fourteen hundred and—" but he brusquely curbed that thought, and carrying back the old war-axe to its place hung it up as it was before. Then he gathered the seven fragments together and conveyed them to a chest over against his books, removing and replacing all that the chest contained till the fragments were concealed. This done, he pushed the oaken stand, still intact but badly dented, to the same spot, and lifting it up in his arms, not without consciousness that his shoulder was giving him some vicious pangs, placed it on top of the chest. Then he went to the window, and facing the sunlight, all grandly accoutred and anointed as he was, became — had there been eyes peeping through that arrow-slit to see — a figure of gleaming gold.

His countenance, however, had suddenly grown strangely stupid and dull, like the drugged and helpless countenance of a sacrificial animal. And thus he lapsed, even as he stood, into one of those singular trances that had caught Rhisiart's attention when they first met.

Had the continuation of this queer coma, like the sleep of a beast who sleeps as it stands, been threatened by the familiar knock of his surly sentry he might not have been roused; but a lighter, though hardly less familiar, tap took him to the door, and it was against the girlish breast of his youngest child, warm from her bed, that his soul came back from its fathom-deep recession.

It was much later on that eventful morning — that morning in the middle of the first September of the new century — when the self-anointed Prince of Wales — for this was a declaration not a coronation — the long fantastic ceremony over, stood alone on his high platform in the pavilion by the river to listen to the voices of his subjects. Old Griffith, the family Bard, had already recited, to his own accompaniment on the harp, a carefully prepared poem in the manner he had defended so vigorously, and he had just begun what struck the new Prince as a far more inspired performance, an improvised chant in the older style, when the irrepressible Scab, clearly determined that prophecy on this occasion should supersede poetry, burst into a Derfel-celebrating series of dithyrambic howls.

As was always the case, the extraordinary waves of magnetism that vibrated in the voice of this singular person soon began to release emotions which the solemnity of the ceremony had hitherto held in check. Glendower himself, however, as he watched that crowd of upturned faces extending far beyond the entrance of the tent grew sadder at heart.

“Long live Owen, Prince of Powys!”

“Blood,” he said to himself, “blood and ashes! That’s what this means!”

“Long live Owen, Prince of Gwynedd!”

“I’ll do it,” he thought. “Nothing can stop me now. *But to what end?* There won’t be a castle in Wales in Harry’s hands when I’ve finished with him. *But to what end?”*

"Long live Owen, Prince of Deheubarth!"

He raised his hands to his forehead and adjusted more comfortably the old coronet of his race, made of heavy gold, that Hywel ap Madoc, Dean of St. Asaph, had unearthed from his cathedral's crypt.

"Will they stop shouting," he thought, "when I sit down?" And the grotesque idea rushed into his head: "Suppose that old oak throne from Meifod breaks down under my weight? What did William the Norman say when he fell on his knees at Senlac? But I shouldn't fall on my knees!"

"Long live Owen, Prince of Wales!"

He let his eyes move slowly from face to face among the figures in front of him.

How proud and happy the Arglwyddes looked! She at any rate wasn't thinking of blood and ashes! He turned from his wife to his brother Tudor, who was standing between her and her brothers, Griffith and Philip Hanmer; and there shot into his brain the memory that this kind-hearted man, younger than himself by a year and a half, had once carried him up the last lap of Snowdon on his back. He looked exultant and happy too. He wasn't thinking of blood and ashes. And then he caught the eye of his new Secretary, as the lad stood by Meredith's side holding in his hands the new standard, a golden dragon on a white ground, about which he was weary of hearing his women talk. It was the Arglwyddes' choice. He knew it was all wrong. It ought to have been a red dragon, not a yellow one. But what matter? It, would soon be red enough! But that boy was his; body and soul he was his. That's what he'd wanted, and that's what he now had.

"Only I wish," he thought, "that little Catharine wouldn't stare at him so!"

He lowered himself cautiously into his ricketty "throne." It creaked but didn't collapse. "Meredith must have had it tinkered up," he thought. "He remembers everything. How sulky Griffith looks! But the rest of the boys" — and his eyes swept hurriedly along the line of tall lads, come at his call across the mountain from Sycharth and now grouped behind their mother's chair— "Mother of God! they look as if this were in Westminster Hall! What do they think, the brave children? That their sisters have only to embroider golden dragons, and their dad only to put a gilded bit of iron round his head, and Bolingbroke will send heralds of peace? How many of you, my bright-eyed lads, will live to see the real crowning of Owen? Blood and ashes — but I shall do it. But oh! how sad Meredith looks!"

Crach Ffinnant had fallen into a monotonous chant now; and Owen, settling himself in his ancestral chair, had plenty of time to let his thoughts wander where they would. It was even unnecessary for him to keep a responsive eye on the prophet of Derfel, for the sole concern of that magnetizer of souls seemed to be to make an impression on the Arglwyddes and the ladies who surrounded him!

And it was, as he turned his own eyes upon the mother of his children, touching enough to him — for he knew her so well! — to see the attempt she was making to look sympathetic towards the Scab, when in reality she was both puzzled and horrified. But there was a pair of bright eyes near the great lady that showed no such weakness. Twice already during that interminable ceremonial had he caught the lively and wanton gaze of young Efa from Dinas Bran.

He knew Efa well. He had seen her when she first came to these regions; he had seen her as a maiden when he visited the Lady Ffraid; and he had heard rumours of the shameless, or was it the miraculous, notion that had obsessed her since she'd grown up of being chosen as Derfel's bride.

What completely puzzled him was how the girl had got out of the old lady's keeping. Had the Scab kidnapped her? No — impossible! Even he wouldn’t dare to presume as far as that. Besides — oh, the whole thing was unthinkable. One of the least fatal aspects of it would be a blood-feud to the death with the Tudors of Môn.

But what an amorous little wench she looked! Owen gravely raised his left hand — for the right one held the golden-hilted sword of Madoc ap Meredith, his family’s best substitute for the prehistoric treasure in the hands of Adam of Dinas Bran — and tugged, as was his habit when exercised in his nerves, first at one and then at the other of the points of his forked beard. He couldn’t keep out of his mind another shameless girl’s face — and yet it was a shamelessness different from this — that had looked up at him once, when before going to Richard’s wars he had let the Scab twist to a lecherous purpose his mystical interest in Derfel Gadarn.

“No, I *won’t* smile at you, you tormenting minx!” he thought. And then he became aware that the Scab’s madness was spreading rapidly through the whole host of spearmen who crowded round that richly decorated pavilion on the southern bank of the Dee.

He knew their habits of thought so well and he knew their local dialects so well that, though many of them used the slang of Ardudwy and of the regions round about Mur-y-Castell and Penllyn, he could catch from their excited comments upon the prophet’s oration that they were beginning to indulge in the hope that the wild scene of three years ago, when under the “holy madness” they had forced him into the mound-chamber, as if he’d been Derfel himself, and the wantonest maid of the *cantref* with him, was going to be repeated.

He ceased tugging at his forked beard. He was suffering a curious physical pain just then, the cause of which he alone of living men knew.

It was old Iolo who had set him upon this trick. The old man had sworn not to die, had sworn to linger on in a half-death like a corpse-god, if he weren't obeyed. He could hear him now assuring him with oracular earnestness that he would never free Wales if he didn't wear day and night, as monks do their hair-shirts, a coat of chain-armour under his clothes.

In these last months — and he couldn't have kept the secret from the Arglwyddes if they hadn't ceased sleeping together after Catharine's birth — he had only taken the thing off when his door was barred and not always even then.

But to-day when he had to wear Eliseg's belt in addition, he couldn't relax when the mail-coat, separated only by a silk shirt from his ribs, began to chafe and bruise him. His arrow-wound troubled him much less; but it too was a discomfort, because in the natural process of healing and under the weight of all these ceremonious robes it had set up a lively tickling.

One of the few things he had overheard of his enemy's talk to Hotspur and Fitz-Alan was Sele's statement that he had no sense of humour. His malicious relative had bawled this out in a tune that was meant to emulate the coarse camp-jesting of Norman barons. But it alone, of all the fellow had said, had pierced Owen's chain-armour.

"Am I," he said to himself, as he fidgetted on his princely chair under this combination of pain and tickling, "am I devoid of a sense of humour? I'm certainly not devoid of something resembling it. But I just notice such things and let them go. I suppose humour's a thing that bubbles up, like loving-kindness, out of a person's soul. No, cousin, you're right. My soul can't send up bubbles like that, any more than yours can, sweet coz — even when it's drunk!"

And as Owen sat on there, growing less and less at ease both in mind and body, and even while a portion of his brain had begun to devise methods and schemes to side-track this mounting mob excitement, there came over him a vision of the one man he had met whose English humour — and

English it certainly was; and yet what profound wisdom lay behind it! — had impressed him as a thing of genius. How well he could see it now, that portly form of the famous Lollard, Sir Thomas Oldcastle! Instinctively he looked about him for the evangelical countenance of his new Librarian. Yes, there he was, evidently more aware than his friend with the Norman nose of the sinister electricity that the prophet was conjuring up.

But Owen looked in vain for any Oldcastle humour in those gently worried lineaments. Master Brut evidently was, as he perpetually claimed with somewhat pedantic emphasis, a Welsh heretic, not an English one! No, there was nothing in him of that deep fountain of philosophy which in "the old man of the castle" took the form of humour.

"There's something formidable in the fellow," Owen concluded, "and I must find out what. But it isn't what Sir Thomas had!" And then it came to him with what a quizzical eye the great Oldcastle would regard the present scene, and himself seated in this ricketty old chair, aching under the pressure of Eliseg's belt! But he mustn't think of these things; he mustn't think of the monstrous grotesquerie of human affairs. Action — *any* action — hadn't he learnt that? — meant evil as well as good. Save a man's life? And what will he do with it? Starve his serfs; murder his friend; drive his woman into despair, and then die a death far worse than the one you've saved him from!

"Yes, what I'm doing now, and what nothing can stop me from doing, won't only mean ashes and blood. It'll mean mumming and miming and play-acting and masquerading, till a man's heart turns sick! Well — well"; and he shifted his fingers from his ancestral sword and pressed them — he hadn't let himself do even that before — against his bandaged arm, "I've got to save those shining eyes and that baby mouth somehow. How the devil did she get here? What these children can do, when the life-lust gets into their little—"

"Long live Owen, Prince of Wales!"

The Scab had now collapsed in complete exhaustion; but matters were looking unpleasant. The Arglwyddes had risen; and the gentlemen were all crowding round, to protect her and the other women. How madly they were pushing forward, that wild host he had called up from nothing. Well, from the caves and camps and homesteads and forests of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy.

He rose to his feet and straightened his shoulders. Both these movements were so painful that they made his mouth twist a little under his beard.

"We want Derfel's bride! We want Derfel's bride!"

Owen raised his left arm with a gesture of authority. "Let Rhys Gethin come to me," he shouted. "Let no man of you move a step till I've talked with Rhys Gethin."

He saw that his brother and his wife's two brothers and his eldest son and Rhisiart and Brut and half-a-dozen more of the gentlemen there had formed a circle round the women; and he saw that Meredith had forced his way out of the pavilion. He let his arm sink down; but raised his voice again.

"I, Owen ap Griffith Fychan," he cried in a clear voice, "swear before you all, and before Derfel Gadarn and his prophet, that I will not sheathe my sword, or cease from battle, till there's not a castle in Wales under any flag but the dragon!"

But the *vivats* for "Owen, Prince of Wales" came fainter now, till the hideous howls, "We want Derfel's bride!" began to drown them completely.

"How do they know that silly child's here?" he thought. "But Griffith's getting angry. *That* won't do. God! if he isn't flinging them back already!"

And then an inspiration came to him. Thrusting his unbandaged arm beneath his robes, he drew forth a parchment-scroll to which was attached a formidable red seal that swung in the air as he raised and straightened the document.

"A moment, my men — a moment!" he cried; and then raising his powerful voice to its fullest pitch so that his words might be heard outside the entrance to the tent, "I have here," he began, "the last will and testament of Iolo Goch, the illustrious Bard of our ancient Princedom! Iolo Goch leaves to me, and through me to you, the greatest host raised in this land since Llewelyn, all the gold which in his long life he stored up! Iolo foresaw by the celestial signs and the sacred constellations just what was to happen on this historic day. I propose, therefore, after talking with Rhys Gethin, to open my old friend's iron chest, referred to here, under his hand and seal, and now in my possession; and although the gold he speaks of in this will and testament" — his word rose to its fullest compass at the word "will" and the word "gold"— "may be in the ancient coinage and therefore of uncertain value in the Usurper's realm, it were only in accordance" — here he made as if he were reading from the parchment he held— "with Iolo's bequest to me, and to you through my hands, that we delay our march upon the Red Castle until this gold, spoken of in Iolo's will—"

But Rhys the Fierce was now at his side; and it soon became clear to Owen, when the man began explaining a new plan of campaign that had come into his head, that it was a hundred times more likely to succeed than the one they had all agreed upon and worked out in such careful detail in their recent council of state.

"Saint Matthew's Fair;" Owen kept repeating to himself; and the words called up many enchanted memories. Saint Matthew's Fair wasn't on the morrow for which their march on Ruthin had been planned; it was on the day after that, but the delay gave them time to gather round the doomed town in such strength that resistance would be out of the question.

"I've been thinking," Rhys Gethin said, "that Grey when he sees our numbers will be scared to show his nose out of doors. We haven't the engines and we haven't the time for a siege, and we'd only blacken his ruddy walls and then decamp, with no real blow struck at all. If we burnt the town on market-day 'twould be something; but to burn it on Saint Matthew's Day — why 'twould be remembered forever! And that's — oh, damn those men and their blasted Saint! — what I suggest. And you see, dear my Lord, 'twould hurt Grey more than anything we could do except take him prisoner. That would hurt him most — more than to kill him! I heard his own son, the one who loves the wench I sold for a groat to Master Brut, say that his father'd sooner be dead than in Glendourdy's hands. But to burn Grey's great Fair — think of it, my Prince! Why the news'll travel all over England; and the big merchants of Winchester and Gloucester and Sarum and Exeter will send their pedlars to Chirk or to Castell Goch at Welshpool instead of Ruthin! Why 'tis one of the old devil's chief sources of revenue, this Saint Matthew's Day. He'll howl like a black dog when he smells the smoke going up! I'll see that my people bring plenty of oil. Mother of God! but we'll have a bonfire! The burghers of Chester'll shiver like novice-nuns when the herdsmen of Moel Fammau light their beacon. I know the houses at Ruthin well, my Lord; and I tell you — oh damn you, you brainless, lecherous Derfel swine! I'll Derfel you! I'll bridle you! Frighten the ladies, will you, you mountain-hogs? You wait, my squealers, till Rhys Gethin takes you where you'll get something to squeal for! — I tell you, my Prince, apart from the booths of the Fair half the roofs of the Ruthin houses are reed-thatched. We'll light them their candles for sweet Saint Matthew! We'll sell them Hereford saddles for silver bells! We'll make maidenheads cheap at Ruthin Fair! We'll give them red flames for their red gold!"

" We want Derfel's bride!"

"Oh, for Mary's sake, hold your peace, you Tegid thieves! I'll give ye a bride, you bare-foot scavengers! I'll give you gold, you rogues!"

And then, while Rhys explained other advantages of not making the attack till the day after tomorrow, Owen thought, "If I don't do something with this fellow, now that I've got him here, I shall deserve—"

And beyond the spear-points, and beyond the ladies' head-dresses, and beyond the fluttering of the pennons, and beyond the cries for the Saint's bride, Owen saw the glittering baubles of Saint Matthew as they were when he and his brother Tudor as little boys came across the Berwyns on sumpter-mules to the great Fair. He saw the embossed trappings, the shining shields, the wax figures, the nodding hobbyhorses; and all the enchantment of that early vision came over him with such force that these crazy shouts about gold and Derfel seemed like voices in a madhouse.

In a flash he began identifying himself with one particular harness-merchant of those old times whose glittering wares had fascinated his imagination. There'd be salesmen there in a couple of days just like Master Peter of St. Albans. There'd be quaint old travelling pedlars from Shropshire and Hereford — and then — whirling down upon them in a moment — shouts and screams and rape and murder and blood and ashes — and the sly, white face of that fox, Grey, peering out, as the smoke rose, from some arrow-slit in those inaccessible red walls!

"We want Derfel's bride!" But there were now — thanks be to the Blessed Mother! — other and equally excited shouts: "The will! The gold! Iolo's will! Iolo's gold!"

Ah! Meredith had brought in with him now his own special troop of spearmen from Sycharth, picked men, well-disciplined and well-armed, old retainers of their house, who would perish, there in the tent, rather than yield an inch to this mutinous crowd from the mountains.

He took the opportunity of explaining to Rhys in as blunt and clear a manner as was possible in that tumult what insanity it would be to allow the Lady Ffraid's ward to suffer any hurt. "The girl's a Tudor of Môn," he kept repeating, "and you know, man, what they are. They'd go over to Harry tomorrow if a hair of her head was touched! As it is — but they won't believe that — it's too wild a tale."

The chieftain from the Conway nodded. Then he listened to the hubbub outside the tent and smiled grimly. "Your gold *nearly* did it, my Lord," he remarked laconically, "but not quite. Can't you think of something else? Can't you take the wench away yourself, as if you were — The old Red Head used always to be talking of Mathrafal. Couldn't you tell them—"

Owen stared at him. Then his face cleared. "Right, as usual, Gethin!" he muttered. "My wits seem dull this fine noon. Owen of Glyndyfrdwy's a cleverer man than Owen, Prince of Cymru! Well, go out to them, my friend, and tell 'em I'm going to give Derfel his bride. But tell 'em Iolo said it must be done at Mathrafal this time — and done alone! Tell Meredith I'll want his troop with me and only his! Don't be afraid. I'll send them back and be back myself in plenty of time."

It was one of the rarest and most perfect September afternoons when Owen and Rhisiart, the former on a powerful grey horse, with little Efa, almost invisible in a big mantle, perched behind him, and the latter on his old piebald, rode up the bridle-track that led across the solitary uplands of the Berwyn Range. Owen rode slowly, partly so as not to out-distance his troop, and partly that he might not tire the horses at the beginning of so long a ride. Whether the small creature behind him kept her head turned towards Griffin and his rider Owen had no notion. It certainly wasn't necessary for her to cling tightly to him, for if there was one craft in which his river-side adherents excelled it was in saddle-making, and he had had this particular saddle especially designed so that he could take little Catharine with him from Sycharth and back without incommoding her.

He was indeed so little aware of the childish arms that encircled his steel-clad waist that, as he pondered on the events of that momentous morning and on their dubious issue, he caught himself more than once forgetting that there were two living souls mounted on that grey steed.

For more than an hour the cavalcade moved forward in silence. What a comfort it was to have a boy like this! Whenever he turned his head to make sure their followers were in sight he caught nothing but a quaint mixture of grim resolution and exultant happiness on his squire's face. The young people certainly weren't chattering to each other! In fact, as mile after mile of fading heather, red whin-patches, and masses of bracken, still green, but sombrely and heavily green, fell behind them, the new Prince might have been riding completely alone so little was there to interrupt his thoughts.

"I must keep those men with me," he thought, "till we get across the mountain. But once across I'll let them wait our return. I'll get to Mathrafal by that path through the forest, where there'll be absolutely no chance of meeting any large body of men; and armed and mounted as we are" — again he forgot the feather-weight at his back— "we needn't worry about ordinary encounters."

He had long since decided that at all costs he must get this ticklish little encumbrance, butterfly-light though she was, back safe to the Lady Ffraid, with all her fragile Tudor "honour" — as hard to preserve, it seemed, as a lily's gold-dust! — intact as when she came.

"I shall take her," he thought, "to Broch-o'-Meifod. Nobody, not all the English in Shropshire, would dare to meddle with her in his mill under his protection! She can sleep in his mill to-night. That'll be an adventure for her to talk about to her friends on the hill — and Cousin Ffraid will know it's been all right."

"Do you like riding over a mountain like this, child?" he asked gently at last, fearing that his absorbed silence might be troubling her. "Oh yes, my Prince," came the answer. "I've never been so happy." Her voice rang out so firm and strong that it quite startled him. It was like the sudden ringing of a clear little bell just behind his head. "I suppose I ought to say something," he thought, "now that the ice is broken, to get this 'bride of Derfel' business out of her head." But he was puzzled how to begin. In the elaborate and fantastical code of courtesy in which he had been brought up, and for which the late King's dissolute but punctilious court had been famous, it was one of the basic principles of chivalry to assume that a maid's thoughts were as chaste as those of the Blessed Virgin.

But it had given him an unexpected thrill of pleasure when she said "my Prince" in the tone she did. The Arglwyddes had called him so, and so had all his tall sons when they kissed his hand in the accredited feudal fashion; but these formal ceremonies had been for so long a family jest between them all that when he was about to kiss little Catharine on his departure, and was interrupted by Rhys Gethin's addressing him as "Prince," he heard the child eagerly clap her hands and cry out, "It's begun! It's begun!"

Heaven help him! It had indeed "begun"; and it was in part to blot out the picture of Ruthin market in flames that he plunged into this unchivalrous discourse to Efa.

"I ought to tell you, Demoiselle," he began with unprincely hesitation, "that the great Iolo, whose memory I so revere, directed me — by his occult knowledge of the stars — if I wished to make my revolt a success, to find — to find a bride for Derfel."

Clear and firm, without the least trace of the shyness he was displaying, rang out that little silver bell behind his half-turned head. "I know — I know! I *want* to be Derfel's bride!'

"But Iolo also said" — may the Saints forgive me for all my lies this morning!— "that it was to be—"

"Yes, my Prince?"

"That lad is perfect," thought Owen. "Bless my soul, if he hasn't pulled up that old horse of his, so as to be out of ear-shot!"

" — to be a spiritual union... like that of Saint Ursula with Our Lord."

Had he announced to this little Tudor that she must have her feet cut off, she couldn't have been more upset. "I don't — want — to — be a nun!"

And Owen again blessed the tact of his new squire; for he became conscious that from the butterfly-weight behind him there was proceeding a series of bitter sobs. He flung down the reins and half turned in his saddle.

"I — don't — want — to be — a nun! I want to go back to Luned and Sibli!"

With some discomfort to his bandaged arm he turned far enough round to catch sight of that outraged and miserable little face. It struck him like the face of a wax image he'd seen once, half-melted by the heat of a torch! He patted with his gauntleted hand the only portion of her small person he could reach, which must have been one of her knees.

"Then you shall *not* be a nun," he whispered, with all the emphasis he could throw into the words. "And I promise you on my word of honour I'll send you back to Dinas Bran tomorrow night!"

"On — your — word — as — as a Prince?"

"On my word as a Prince!" and he crossed himself with the utmost gravity.

"May I tell Rhisiart?"

He swung round and picked up his reins. *"Rhisiart!"* he shouted.

The old piebald came cantering to their side.

"I've promised the Demoiselle Efa that she shall be back in Dinas Bran by tomorrow night; and back, too, without being anybody's bride."

"Yes, my Prince." And Owen noted how careful the lad was to keep his eyes on his.

"Am I to escort her there, my Prince?"

"No, no, lad! We're going to get Broch-o'-Meifod's blessing on our business. We'll stay with him to-night and he'll be her escort to-morrow. You and I will have our hands full." He could see the boy suck in his lips and frown doubtfully.

"You don't know, either of you children, who Broch-o'-Meifod is. He's the safest man to trust a lady with between the Orkneys and Land's End. Can you hear what we're saying, Efa?"

"I — wanted — to see — a battle — my Prince." There was still a hint of tears in her voice.

"You'll see what you want then — won't she, Rhisiart? — if the stars fight for us. You'll see the red dragon — I mean the golden dragon — flying from your tower, before we've finished with these English! She will, won't she, Rhisiart?"

Rhisiart bowed in silence over Griffin's neck, drew rein, and fell back once more, so that the big grey horse could have the track to himself. Comforted, but feeling obscurely in some portion of her consciousness that she had been cheated of the dramatic role she had planned for herself as she lay night by night telling herself stories in the tower bed, Efa resigned herself to destiny.

The motion of the grey horse, in her present mood of relaxed submission, caused her to nod; and very soon a new sound from behind his back reached the Prince's ears, the soft and even breathing of a butterfly-maid asleep!

The September afternoon as they rode on grew more and more golden. Here and there even the foliage of the bracken bore faint traces, like the shadow of the passing of years over the locks of a proud queen, of the mountain's response to the sinking of the vernal sap; while so far had the rich tints of the bell-heather already yielded to the paler hue of the ling that in place of the imperial purple of the high summer the tender lavender of this latest of the mountain children bloomed amid a bleached and rusty obscuring.

And yet the bracken was green still, and the autumnal gorse had an even yellower glow than its vernal predecessor. It was only that, over the whole mass and roll of the Berwyns, the year's decline was beginning to be revealed in what might have been a sprinkling of scarce-visible cosmic ashes, ashes imponderable in any earthly balance, and thinned out by their descent through space, and yet perceptible, as they reached the earth, through the diffused sun-rays.

It was one of those days, peculiar to September, when the whole landscape seems resting; resting and waiting in spell-bound patience for the passing across the earth of powers and presences beyond the normal, powers that could only present themselves when the forces of life and death, of growth and dissolution, were held in motionless equilibrium.

To the faithful troop of retainers who followed them the riders on the grey and the piebald horses must have appeared at that hour, if not quite the unearthly beings the season demanded, at least separated from the common run of men and things, heightened, consecrated, dedicated to some unusual quest, as that golden haze floated round them and moved with them as they moved!

Owen wore round his helmet, as was the custom of a hundred years earlier, the golden circlet of a ruling Prince in Cymru. Slung in front of his saddle was his two-edged Roman sword, a deadly weapon when handled with skill, and one of which he'd already proved the value in the Scottish wars.

But what gave his faithful Sycharth men the greatest satisfaction as they watched it moving before them in that golden haze was their Prince's great lance, bearing on a long streamer, now scarcely fluttering in that still air, the single lion rampant sable of the ancient realm of north-eastern Wales. This lance, heavy though it was, he could support with a careless touch, for its handle rested in a deep leather groove in the front part of his saddle.

Over his breast-plate, upon which this same black lion ramped, he wore a flowing moss-green mantle, richly embroidered with silver.

As for his new squire, that resolute young man — not it must be allowed without some embarrassment and difficulty — had put on his ancient coat of chain-armour and had refused to leave behind either his great crusader's sword or the handsome Toledo dagger that had drawn blood from the wrist of the Usurper's heir. If it had not been for these menacing antiquities Rhisiart's attire was more adapted to the council-chamber than the camp, but he had consented, under pressure from the ladies of Glyndyfrdwy, to place a red feather in his student's cap, and this, against his black locks, had an appearance of no little distinction.

According to his pre-arranged plan Owen dismissed his troop as soon as they descended into the valley. Here our three riders were confronted by a dense forest of oak and sycamore; the young woman — now fully awake and with eyes shining eagerly for adventure — couldn't help exchanging with the young man behind her several exclamations of delight. She had allowed her cloak to fall back from her head, and her bright curls, loosed from control, caught so magically the slanting sunrays that fell between the branches that to Rhisiart's eyes she resembled some little fabulous princess from one of Modry's stories.

There was so little wind stirring that the warm fragrance of this mass of tresses, thus loosened just behind him, reached Owen's consciousness like the floating essence of its owner's reckless youth; and if the flickering sun-motes that had turned themselves in those tangles were an enchantment to the boy, the sense that he was riding in a moving cloud of fragrant hair was not without its power to relax the strung-up nerves of the man.

How far little Efa in her childish excitement had an inkling of the spell she had so lightly cast upon that mossy track it would be hard to say; but all manner of wayward fancies, airy and wanton, fluttered like butterflies in and out of her small head.

Griffin alone, as he followed step by step the movements of the other horse, seemed to be thinking rather of bodily refreshment than of romantic vistas. But the spell the girl had thrown upon them was entirely impersonal. Man and boy would have been immune at that high moment to the most perilous temptation.

But it was as if a mute wax image of a little maid, carried along behind an armoured figure, had suddenly come alive, and the leafy path itself with all its ferny tendrils had begun to respond to a kindred presence.

The two young people soon began to exchange low-voiced murmurs of wonder and admiration at the manner in which their leader — who from his boyhood had known every path and track of this umbrageous region — urged the grey horse forward.

Turn after turn he took. Mossy glade after mossy glade he followed. Often had little Efa to press her forehead against his broad back lest her curls should be caught in the switching branches.

At last they came to a rushing stream, and Owen guided his grey horse along the southern bank of this obstacle, a course which presented more difficulties than they had yet experienced. In the first place the stream's bank was strewn with the dead branches of old trees, trees that had flourished and drooped and sunk into lifelessness years before the new prince was born. In the second place the branches of the living trees on that little river's side had a tendency to grow nearer the earth, as well as to sprout more vigorously than the rest, owing to the watering of their roots.

But the grey horse was thoroughly accustomed to such uneven going and old Griffin, though reared in a city and inured to social pageants, had always been one to relish a woodland track; so that it was really — for Rhisiart soon removed his cap with its red feather — only a matter of dealing with Owen's great lance, which he was forced to hold horizontally, as if in readiness for an attack, and with Efa's curls, which she was driven to cover once more with her cloak. There came at last a moment when their guide drew rein.

"Slip down, both of you children," he said gently, "and stretch your legs. But keep an eye, each of you, on some kind of wood-marks to bring you safe back here, in case you want to wander alone. But you needn't be frightened," and he smiled at Efa who was already on her feet, "even if you do get lost, for I could find you in five minutes anywhere round here!"

"Shall I tie up Griffin, my Prince?" asked Rhisiart.

“God! no, lad,” and Owen, jumping down from his horse, planted his spear in a bed of water-mint, “I’ll look after both of them. They’ll be quieter together. Off you go, children! I’ll give you as long as you like. But if I whistle don’t come back till I whistle *like this,”* and he imitated the thin shrill cry of the water-ouzel.

“That boy’ll have the sense to leave her to herself for a minute,” he thought, as with his wounded arm through both bridles he proceeded to ease himself. “Between me and God that boy’s perfect! Oh, I hope I shan’t drag him to his death. I’ll keep him busy with pen and parchment — and then—” And leading the horses to a spot where they could crop the lush-growing grass, he fell into one of his prolonged reveries.

He would have been puzzled to explain in intelligible words — indeed he had never attempted it, save once to old Iolo, and even he had only stared at him in silence and shaken his head — what happened to his conscious soul when these fits took him. He knew one thing about them, however. They always left him with a feeling of power and confidence and serenity. His own vague notion was that his soul “went somewhere” at these times. But where could it go in a world like this, to come back refreshed, strengthened, fortified? Where could it go, for instance, to come back with such absolute assurance as to the success of his revolt?

On this occasion he found himself dallying with some nameless clue that he had caught as he stared with unseeing eyes at the flow of the little stream. It was a clue — he felt sure of that, though he had long given up any attempt to force his soul to remember what happened to it or where it “went” at these times — that concerned what he would do for Wales when the English were driven out. He had always known vaguely what he would do, but on this particular return to consciousness he retained an obscure intimation that his soul had come back from an interview with none other than the Holy Father! The odd thing was that he was convinced he hadn't been thinking of Rome.

"Can it be," he said to himself, "and didn't that man Griffith Young hint at something of that kind — that I'm destined to grow enough of a Lollard to follow the sly French King and have a Pope, or at least a half-Pope, of my own?"

A pair of late wood-butterflies, linked together in love, came fluttering past; and in a mood of languid superstition, giving the fancy no more weight than the insects themselves possessed, as they drifted awkwardly by on their double set of wings, he told himself that if they settled on a patch of ragwort near the path it would be to Avignon he would go, and if on the loosestrife by the water it would be to Rome; whereas if they drifted away without settling at all it would mean a church of Wales independent of them both.

The pair of airy lovers, however, did none of these things. Naturally enough they fluttered down to the ground. But the Prince's reverie, whatever its nature may have been, must have lasted longer than he supposed, for with the subsidence of the butterflies, the last golden rays of the sun sank also; and he was aware of a premonitory chill in the air, rising, like the breath of some great hidden water-beast, from amid the roots of the mint and the burdocks.

He pulled his green mantle closer round him. "Strange," he thought, "if these fits I get should one day leave me as dead-cold as a corpse! I wish I'd told those children not to be away too long."

But he'd scarcely breathed this wish than there they were; Efa looking flushed and radiantly happy, while Rhisiart struck him as sulky and embarrassed.

"She's been teasing him," he said to himself. "She's been making him treat her in her way — not in his!"

Mounted as before, they rode on awhile, still following the little stream.

Suddenly Owen brought his horse to a stand-still, and the lad's piebald stopped too without need of a word or the least pull on his bit.

Their leader called their attention to an extremely aged oak-tree, still green, but reduced to little more than a gigantic torso save for one outstretched arm.

"The old north-way to Mathrafal," he told them, "begins here. It runs for a mile along the stream. You'll see a lot of these old stumps presently."

Rhisiart and Efa exchanged awed and bewildered glances. The boy had recovered his spirits. The girl looked grave and slightly pale.

Moving forward again, the young people were soon staring in wonder at what they saw; for the brushwood had quite disappeared, and parallel with the course of the little brook, which now ran smoothly between mossy banks, a broad avenue of immemorial turf stretched before them, flanked on either side by these gnarled and misshapen relics of what a thousand years ago must have been majestic oak-trees.

In place of the striking of hooves upon stones, the snapping of fallen twigs, and the swishing of the under-growth, the feet of the two horses now fell in a strange awe-inspiring silence upon that soft turf; while in place of exchanging any youth-and-maiden signals, whether of war or peace, Rhisiart and Efa gazed about them as if they had crossed the leafy threshold of an enchantment older than the forest itself.

But Owen drew rein again. "I think," he said, turning round in his saddle, "just in case some of the Sheriff's people should have taken it into their heads to encamp round here, 'twould be a good idea if you slipped down now" — he addressed himself to Efa— "and rode with Master Rhisiart. I'd be freer then to use my lance."

"Shall I take her in front of me, my Prince, or—"

But the agile little maid was already on the greensward and, pulling herself up by the help of Griffin's saddle and the quick pressure of a light toe on the rider's instep, she soon had her arm round the boy's waist and her body adjusted to the old horse's rump.

"Well done, child!" cried the chieftain in a relief that his chivalry couldn't altogether conceal. "I can account for a troop of them now!"

But the first use the Prince made of being the sole burden upon that grey back was to bring the two horses neck to neck, and as they rode on to begin an impassioned discourse to his two listeners concerning the place they were approaching. Something about that verdurous and mossy track between perishing relics of an antiquity that staggered comprehension seemed to shake off from the man's mind every pressure of modern transactions.

But there was another cause for Owen's excited, low-voiced murmur to those two. Save when, under rare conditions, he had got Meredith and Catharine together by the log-fire in his "magician's chamber" he had rarely enjoyed the heavenly liberation of a perfect audience. With old Iolo he had always been the one to listen, and with the Bard Griffith it was not hard to grow restless and argumentative. The strain of the morning's interminable ceremony had driven his soul inwards till everything on earth had seemed of little moment. But the place, the hour, these grave and eager listeners, set free elements in his nature such as he had only vaguely realized were there at all.

"I tell you," he was saying now — and his voice took on a solemn intonation that seemed to his hearers as if it came from far away; from over the ruins of these ancient trees, from beyond this long green twilight-vista, from across the dim grey stones that they now began to distinguish in the distance— "I tell you, children, there's no name in this land of mystical names, no! not Caer-Dathyl, or Caerleon, or Narberth, or Dynefor, or Harlech, that can compare with Mathrafal. Those of our fathers' fathers who before both Christ and Caesar journeyed towards the setting sun and paused in this place must have mingled with the Caer-builders and the Mound-builders and the Circle builders who possessed this land from the beginning.

"And, in the process of this mingling, the souls of the people who were here from the beginning conquered our fathers' souls even while our fathers' swords smote them down! And these first people must have known secrets beyond the understanding of our fathers. But our fathers were bards as well as warriors, and though they understood not the hidden meaning of the words, and though the words seemed to them like the motions of winds and motions of waters, they gathered up their ignorance into the most magical names ever invented by man. Who can tell, my little ones, what hidden power over life, over nature, over the ways of men, lies bound up, as with a living scroll, in the syllables of this name? Our fathers flung into this name all their beating against the gates of the mystery that bowed them down, as it bows us down!

"What high and fatal secret, lost — and yet perhaps not quite lost — awaits, in this destiny-charged name, its final revelation?

"Do you see those stones, children?" And he held back his grey horse and laid his hand upon his squire's hand to slacken the piebald's stride. "Whenever I pass those stones at an hour like this, do ye know what I feel? I feel as though in the dust of Mathrafal there lives forever, indestructible I tell you, children, indestructible, all the pilgrim prayers, all the journeying longings, all the voyaging desires, all the cravings and the cryings, older than the wind, deeper than the sea, of the people of this land. Let them burn Mathrafal into cinders; let them grind Mathrafal into dust; I tell you, Cousin Rhisiart, I tell you, Cousin Efa, as long as this name lasts on the lips of the people of this land there will be one beat, one pulse, one motion left in our blood that neither the good nor the bad nor the worst nor the best of our crafty conquerors can ever blot out or destroy!"

His hand by this time was pressing so heavily upon Rhisiart's hand that old Griffin was growing uneasy, though the grey horse, more accustomed to his rider's peculiarities, seemed prepared to accept any unusual gesture without surprise.

"Ought I to stop while I can stop," he said to himself, "or dare I say everything to them?" For there was now pressing upon him, like a wave mounting up from some unknown chasm in the soul, a wild torrent of suppressed feeling.

"I must yield to it," he thought. "It's only fair to them!" And pulling back the grey horse till it almost fell on its haunches he swung his great lance into the air till the black rampant lion fluttered against the rose-coloured sky.

His face was blurred to his hearers in that dim light, but he felt as if its features were melting, and as if his whole torso were melting and turning into a dissolving tower of mist. He felt as if he had sat on that spot on his grey horse for a thousand years, while the rains and the dews and the days and the nights passed over him, telling to all who came what was the secret of the place. He couldn't really utter it — he knew that well enough — for the meaning of it belonged to the ancient people, not to his own proud race but he felt as if he'd been appointed — had a *tynghed* or a "fate" put on him — to sit on his horse forever at the gate of Mathrafal!

Strange that even at that moment his self-consciousness should be so active, feeling itself so vividly into the consciousness of that boy and that maid. But, as his brain moved now like summer lightning from point to point, he noted in a flash how powerful the spell upon him must be, if he could so calmly envisage himself in those eyes — his forked beard, his lion rampant, the golden circlet round his helm — and yet submit, like an inanimate mask, to the wild stream of words that the spirit of the place poured through him!

"Sometimes, children," he went on, "I've felt as if in the early days, in the days when merchants from Tyre and Sidon and the mouths of the Nile visited these Isles, there was a great city with granite walls and marble towers here. Iolo once revealed to me that in that book of mine — you know the one, Rhisiart? — it says that the people before the mound-dwellers worshipped the Great Serpent, and built their cities to the Great Serpent, and were wiser even than the mound-dwellers! I can't speak of these things myself. I'm sure of one thing, though — that in Eliseg's time, or before Eliseg, there were great ways leading to this place from the four quarters of the horizon. The remains of the oaks are all covered up now, save only here; but wasn't it once between stones and not between trees that pilgrims approached Mathrafal? Approached kneeling, it may be, when the Great Serpent gave his peace to—"

His voice died away and a long, shivering convulsion seized him. Rhisiart urged Griffin forward. The girl uttered a cry like an injured squirrel. The heavy lance fell from the man's grasp and lay on the ground, with the rim of a red toad-stool, like a broken fairy shield, lying beside it.

But Owen's soul returned to him almost at once, and returned to strange effect. He let his reins go as his lance had gone, and he even shook his mantle away from him. But he lifted up both his hands above his head, and not looking towards his companions, not looking even towards the entrance to Mathrafal, but looking no doubt, as he felt in his coldly self-conscious brain he was actually doing, into another dimension of life, he gasped out the words: “The Past is the Eternal!” and then, as he lurched, toppled, crouched, huddled, and almost fell from the saddle, across the grey mane of his steed, he tried to mutter, and thought he had muttered; but he never knew whether they heard him:

“The Past...is...the...is the...for which we...and I give you a... a new... a new war-cry — *Mathrafal!”*

Efa was on her feet and at his side even before Rhisiart; but it was the lad’s arms that raised him and propped him up in his seat and obeyed his murmured instructions to give him the little silver phial from the pocket of his saddle.

Whatever the contents of that phial were, a few drops seemed enough to send back the blood to his brain and heart as the two young people watched him. “Shall I carry your spear, my Prince?” the boy asked him then; but the look of infatuated sympathy with which both the youthful creatures were regarding him was as restorative as what he’d drunk.

“No, no, cousin!” he said in his normal tone. “You’ve got the lady. I must have the spear.”

Moving on now at a slow walking-pace and keeping their horses neck to neck they were soon actually passing between the ruined pillars of the western gate of Mathrafal, that very heap of broken and scattered stones — some of them of megalithic size — which they had seen afar-off, awaiting them at the end of the mossy avenue. It was clear to Owen that Rhisiart and Efa would have much more enjoyed the spectacle if they hadn’t been nervous of his losing control of himself again.

"Aye, the darlings!" he thought. "How can I reassure them? How can I make them understand that I never lose control of myself; that everything I did just now, even to hugging my horse's neck, even to letting myself collapse, was deliberate? Efa ought to understand; for it's only what Nature teaches all women." He pondered for a while in silence leading them between such a chaotic mingling of old rocks and old masonry and old mounds and perhaps yet older subterranean passages, marked still, or the roofing of them marked, by undulant elevations in the grassy turf, that the imagination was at once excited and baffled.

"I must go on talking about it," he thought, "or they'll get into their heads that I can't speak of the place without getting hysterical." So he drew rein and turned; and at once little Efa hid herself so completely behind the boy's back that all he could see of her was one terrified wide-open eye and a single wisp of bright hair, objects that normally would have had an endearing effect, but that had an irritating effect just then as he contemplated them between the crusader's sword and the coat of chain-armour.

But the young descendant of two generations of sheriff's clerks in the aristocratic City of Hereford was once more a match for a delicate predicament.

"You're a perfect wonder, lad," thought the Prince, as he looked in vain for the faintest trace of apprehension or embarrassment in the narrow features of his new squire. "I only wanted," he began, in the most practical and matter-of-fact tone, "to show you two how that little stream follows every wall and buttress and angle of the ruins. There, if I'm not mistaken" — and he pointed down to the water from the edge of a steep bank, the surface of which was still faced with massive stonework— "was the north entrance. Think of it, my cousins! Five hundred years ago there must have been a postern here; and I suspect there's a secret passage here still, only King Eliseg, or King Brockwell, or King Cyngen must have blocked it for safety against the English.

"It's getting dark, Rhisiart, and we mustn't tire our little maid; but I must just tell you one thing more, and it's something I've never — careful, Seisyll! careful, old horse! — told any living soul. Sometimes, cousin, when I've stood here on this rock above this stream, I'm certain I've felt the rush of the souls of the dead, whirling past me like leaves on the air! I call them the dead; but what do we know? In the ancient times, long before Eliseg, long before the coming of our people, the souls of the living must have thronged these ancient ways. I mean that from their mounds and their camps and their caves living men and women, as they poured out their mead and broke their bread, must have felt over miles of forest and moor the call of Mathrafal, felt it until in their longing and craving their souls came crowding to these gates, jostling, as they rushed through a twilight like this; the souls of the free dead! I would like — if you're not too exhausted, Cousin Efa — just to show you—"

But his words were cut short by the sound of a horn and several sharp words of command reaching them over the darkened meadows. There wasn't enough light to see the nature or the number of these intruders; but though they were still too far-off for it to be possible to distinguish the words, both Owen and his companions recognized at once that they were uttered in an English voice.

"Come," whispered Owen. "It's not the moment to take risks. We'll be as safe in Broch-o'-Meifod's as in Valle Crucis. Most likely they're only Chirk foresters, and I'm behaving like a fool. But I'd be unworthy of today if I didn't show some caution. Turn your horse, lad, and follow me close. It's all right, Efa — only for Christ's sake hang on to him with both arms!"

Owen’s tall Seisyll — and it was the first time Rhisiart had heard that historic name — set off at so fast a gallop that Griffin, with his double burden, was hard put to it to keep up with him. As it was, the old pageant-horse stumbled once or twice in the darkness; and it was a lively comfort to his young rider when, passing through a clump of beeches, a warm red, glowing light could be discerned shining from the open door of a substantial wooden building.

Owen himself breathed no small sigh of relief when, extricating himself and his great lance from Seisyll’s complicated harness, he heard the clatter of the piebald and saw his distended nostrils and panting sides.

“This is my cousin, Master Broch, the Demoiselle Efa ferch Tudor of Môn. And this is my cousin too — Rhisiart ab Owen, from the University of Oxford. This is Master Broch-o’-Meifod, cousins; and here is Mistress Morg ferch Lug, his good lady, and these are Morgie, Orlie and Mair, the prettiest girls in the Paradise of Wales!”

By the time the horses had been fed, watered and stabled, and Efa had been brought back from the women’s quarters, refreshed and radiant, it was certainly around a noble supper-board and over against a noble fire that the party assembled. Loud, gay and unrestrained was the chatter that broke out as soon as the collation began.

Neither the gigantic Miller nor his sprightly lady showed the faintest sign of embarrassment in the presence of the newly-proclaimed Prince. The little Mistress even rallied him and made jokes at his expense, to which Morgie, Orlie and Mair listened with round-eyed bewilderment.

The three girls certainly were strikingly pretty, but not one of them as pretty as their mother; and it was clearly this astonishing little being who made the deepest impression on Efa. Not only did she look as young as any one of her three daughters; but it was the blending of such authority and decisive despotism, with such fairy-like grace, that Efa found so fascinating.

Mistress Broch looked quite as young as Morgie, her eldest daughter, not to speak of being more vivacious and sprightly than any of her daughters; but what so intrigued little Efa was the extraordinary combination; in this frail creature, of aggression with delicate beauty. It was as if the three girls who were the most soft-hearted maidens in Meifod had been doomed to pay for their pretty faces and good-natured hearts by heavy and unwieldy figures, whereas the mother was as light as a feather on her feet.

Little Efa, who from her life at Dinas Bran was more interested in other women than in anything except imaginary seductions, was fascinated by watching the queer relations between this elfin mother and these heavily-built nymphs. They didn't seem at all afraid of her, which was a surprise to Efa, who missed nothing of the deadly sarcasms shot here and there from between those beautifully curved lips. Perhaps they were too simple-minded to catch these jeering jibes, or perhaps having been, by reason of their enormous stature, spared the usual corrections of children, they had grown by custom and habit completely immune to this darting tongue.

As he sat enjoying the honey-hearted mead, and swallowing the well-cooked morsel of meat garnished with spicy herbs from the mill-garden, Owen fell by degrees, though he responded friendly enough to the elfin lady's airy teasing, into a train of thought that soon made his retorts a little perfunctory.

"It's no good going back on this business," he said to himself, "even in my thoughts. There was a time for that — but that time is over. To drive out the English — well! and what then? Iolo used to say that he found in the old books hints that the way of life of the first people was far wiser, far freer, than anything suggested in good King Hywel's Laws. It seemed, Iolo said, that there were no princes, no rulers then, but only the men of the land, living at peace together and worshipping peaceful gods without sacrifices and without blood. Prince? Prince of Powys? Prince of Gwynedd and Deheubarth? What is Prince? A word! And what does that word mean? Blood and ashes! What does it mean in this house and in all the other houses in Wales? It means the strong men, the brave men, it means the men I love best as Owen Glyn Dŵr, dragged after me to God knows what fate, for Owen the Prince! What do the spirits of Mathrafal care that Owen should be — But no more of that. There was a time for that. But now the hour, the flood of the tide, the stars in their courses — these *are* Owen, Prince of Wales! These are what I am; and like the tide, like the stars, I must take the men I must take, though the event is not theirs or—"

His thoughts became confused at that point, and in an obscure and even blasphemous desperation he began to think of himself as if he were a blind portion of the life-force itself, and as if his struggle with Grey and Fitz-Alan and Bolingbroke and the English found its justification as part of the resistless process of the cosmos.

But while the new Prince pondered in this way and while little Efa watched intently the girls and their mother, the youthful Rhisiart found himself unable to remove his eyes from the Master of Maen-y-Meifod. This was the first time he had met any human being with a personality of equal weight to that of his hero, and to see and hear these two great men at close quarters and on such natural terms was an absorbing experience. The Master of Maen-y-Meifod was a person of Herculean proportions — indeed physically speaking he was the most powerful human being Rhisiart had ever seen — but his rugged countenance was rendered more striking, if not more grotesque, by the fact that his great head was completely devoid of hair.

If he was the biggest and strongest man Rhisiart had ever seen, he was also the most comical-looking. He was in fact like a combination of the Show-Giant and the Show-Dwarf in Hereford Great Fair.

Rhisiart hadn't failed to notice how his Prince had said that no one on either side of the border would dare to meddle with Broch-o'-Meifod or with anyone under his protection; and as he listened to the Miller now at the head of his board, by that spacious and blazing hearth, he was able to realise the full truth of these words.

It wasn't only the man's enormous size. There was something even more awe-inspiring about his colossal bald head and about the cavernous pits out of which his eyes peered forth — and so deeply set in his skull were these same eyes that it was hard, if not impossible, to distinguish their colour.

It was only by asking him a series of point-blank questions that Owen succeeded in drawing him out at all; and he was baffled by the despotic little fairy at the head of the table long before he was able to make him talk in the way he hoped for; that is to say, in a manner that would really satisfy his young squire's curiosity.

"Between me and God," said the Prince to himself, "if I can't do better than this as a diplomatist I'll never be a match for Bolingbroke."

But it was in vain that he tried to imagine even the King of England outfacing Morg ferch Lug at her own table. The little lady had indeed got the look now that Owen especially dreaded. It was a look so bright, so sparkling, so scintillating with domination, that it always gave him the feeling that he himself was some inanimate object in the process of being cut by a diamond!

"She doesn't like me," he thought, "and she's prejudiced against Rhisiart. But Efa dotes on her already." Up went his hand to his beard as he heard her begin rattling off one of her liveliest most vividly-told tales about the Miller, the only point of which seemed to be the big man's lack of the most human intelligence.

There were sitting "below the salt" at that commodious board three stalwart labourers and as many robust house-girls, and it was to these, quite as pointedly as to her guests, that this imperious little woman directed her sallies. Roars of laughter from the three men and more restrained gigglings from the three wenches made up the politic response from that end of the table, but the heavier-witted daughters turned their beautiful heads in puzzled protest towards their gigantic begetter.

"You know how he always wears his axes, my Lord, stuck in his old leather belt? He's only got three of 'em on now; but I've seen him come down to his morning ale with half-a-dozen of 'em round his waist. Well what must he do when Fitz-Alan's archers came here a hundred strong to take that old robber Griffith, who was hidden all the time in Broch's corn-bin, our Orlie sitting on the lid, but forget to put his belt on! And there was his belt, with all his axes in it, hanging on a peg by the hearth, and he with nothing but his naked hands. And do 'ee think, my Lord, he made any bones about what he said to 'em — and they, with their bows and spears and clubs, all crowding in at our door?

"If I hadn't told him what I thought of him before them all, so's to make a booby of him, and sent our lads for the mead-barrel, he'd have been a real 'badger in the bag,' as the saying is, and the lasses and me, what about us, with hot devils like them let loose?"

"Tut, tut, Pretty," responded the bald-headed giant. "'Twas to give harvest-home kisses and thy cider-press cuddlings that I took off the belt that warm day; and wondrous it were, Owen ap Griffith Fychan, to see how bashful the Pretty was because our girls were only a loft's steps away! How could I know, Owen ap Griffith, that the slipperiest thief on the border and the smartest troop in the province would choose the same afternoon to visit Maen-y-Meifod?"

In vain did Owen follow up this protest from his friend by putting some hurried question about the harvest to one of the labourers at the foot of the table, a man whom Rhisiart had already recognized as none other than that same surly Philip Sparrow who had played ferry-man for the Tassel's landlord on Midsummer Eve.

Master Sparrow was evidently quite prepared to respond to this question at some length; but Morg ferch Lug seemed to have the power of carving pasties, filling goblets, handing round sweet-meats, without any intermission in her brilliant talk.

"What a sly elf she is!" thought Owen. "Morgan le Fay couldn't be slyer. She's going to keep this up till Broch and I are too heavy with food and drink to think of anything but sleep. Can there be anything in the tales about this creature that her father had traffic with a water sprite? I mustn't forget to tell Rhisiart the whole story." And as he bowed his head before this silvery stream as it eddied round the table it struck him how extraordinary it was that this woman should have realized what he'd come for, before he'd realized it himself!

He'd told those two, and he'd believed it when he told them, that it was simply to ask Broch to take Efa back to Dinas Bran that he'd come to Meifod; but he now saw that he had really come with the hope of persuading the Miller to join him in his dangerous adventure.

It was a relief to Owen — and at first it looked as if he'd been totally unfair in all his suspicions — when Morgie and Orlie and Mair came gravely up to their father and held up their heads to be kissed prior to their retirement for the night. The Prince lifted each particular hand of these young giantesses to his lips, and it was touching to him to see how moved their lovely faces became under this perfunctory courtesy.

They carried off Efa with them; and Owen was interested to see how eagerly she went. “She’s really a girl’s girl, that little thing!” he thought. “And that’s why she worked up all this Derfel business. No normal child would get pleasure from imagining herself ravished by a goblin. She’s about as queer for a girl as Rhisiart is for a boy.”

While the handmaidens were clearing the table Master Broch requested his friend’s permission for Philip Sparrow to join them round the fire.

“And tell Llewelyn and Rhys, Philip, that they can broach a fresh cask in the kitchen in honour of Owen, Prince of Cymru.”

Glendower liked the way his friend brought this in. The words came so easily that they gave him, more than all the ceremonies of the morning, that sweet shock of romantic realization that his own thoughts seemed set upon spoiling.

He was pleased, too, by the spontaneous grace of those unlettered men; for each of them before retiring to the kitchen dropped on one knee and uttered in Welsh in a goodly and clear voice, “May our Lord the Prince overcome his enemies!”

Morg ferch Lug had led the way when her daughters took Efa from the room; but Owen kept expecting her re-appearance every moment. She had bidden him a formal good-night; and it would be an unusual proceeding, and one quite contrary to Welsh custom in these things, for her to come back later.

But, for all that, it was so much too good to be true that he and his friend were destined to have this deep fire and this deeper barrel of mead entirely to themselves that Owen could not believe it.

“No, no!” he thought, “she’ll come back.” And indeed as he went on asking Master Sparrow various social questions and getting from that sturdy enemy of the gentry some extremely uncompromising replies he had a disagreeable sensation of the surprisingly near presence of the darting and glancing daughter of Lug.

Perhaps it was this discomfort that made his defence of the regiment of princes a little feeble and querulous as he brought down on his head the clear-cut revolutionary notions of Master Sparrow. The hired harvester from the Tassel had for so long been accustomed to alternate between sardonic silence — when his mouth fell at the corners and a savage sneer distorted his features — and a dogmatic brow-beating of any interlocutor that to be listened to as Owen listened to him was disturbing and exciting.

The Prince himself felt it incumbent upon him in his new role to make various mental sorties into regions from whose austere landmarks he had hitherto shied away; but it was entirely, against his idea of himself as a magnanimous ruler to show stiffness and prejudice in the presence of startling modern ideas. His acquaintance with the great Oldcastle had done more than shake his orthodoxy; it had destroyed at the root that unquestioning acceptance of the existing class system which makes every innovator a criminal.

But he was, as we have seen, hardly what could be described as an altruist. And it is one thing to be free from prejudice, and quite another thing to have the spirit of a revolutionary!

Master Sparrow was an egoist too, deriving, it is to be feared, quite as much satisfaction in the logical defeat of an opponent as in any feeble effort such an one might be persuaded to make to grope his way towards the light.

Broch-o’-Meifod looked on with an expression of absent-minded wonder as the dispute proceeded; whereas Rhisiart didn’t know whether to admire the more the good-humour of his Prince under Master Sparrow's sarcastic dogmatism, or the actor's skill, for such he took it to be, and a thing quite in his own vein, with which Broch summoned into his face a look of childish simplicity.

"You Lords and Gentles," Master Sparrow was now saying, "will do everything else for the people except the one thing that alone would change all."

"What is that, Master?" enquired Glendower, while the baldheaded giant's innocent stare met the knitted eyebrows of the observant Oxonian.

"Get off their backs!"

The harvester flung this word forth with such vehemence that Owen's hand went up to his beard.

"But what method would you use," he said, trying to keep all irritation out of his voice, for he felt sure his sagacious squire was observing him carefully to see whether he would escape from this with his dignity intact, "use, I mean, as a substitute for the system that gives us our present rulers?"

"Gives us yourself, that is, my Lord," commented the free-spoken fellow.

"Myself — perhaps," said Owen, "but many others, too."

"Grey of Ruthin?" interjected the harvester with a sneer.

Owen forced himself to smile. "We needn't quarrel over the nature of the status quo, my man," he said. "The custom is a common one, and I admit an imperfect one. But what do you propose to substitute for it?"

"Whose hands till the soil, my Lord? Whose hands sow the grain and gather the harvest? Who herd the sheep and shear them in their season? Who feed and water the cattle?"

"Damn that mischievous elf!" thought the harassed Prince irrelevantly. "She's here somewhere — I feel her — glancing and dancing!" And he inserted a finger between his bandage and his wound, as if the daughter of Lug were the cause of the tickling that now began to trouble him.

"Who weave the cloth for your garments, my Lord," went on the triumphant harvester. "Who build your castles, and are slaughtered by the hundreds in your private wars? Who are hanged by your Manor Courts if they kill one of your deer?"

But Owen was staring at the unshuttered window. He was sure he had seen a small white hand emerge from the darkness and point derisively at him with out-stretched fingers. "I must come to business," he thought, "before this gets worse."

"I admit the injustice of our system, Master," he said. "And I would willingly talk further with you on how to remedy it. But just now I have only this to say — you are a powerful man of your hands, Master Sparrow; and I am sure you deserve the silver you've earned by gathering in our friend's harvest. What I would like to know now is, whether you would consent to come with Master Broch as his body-servant if he consented," he gave his friend a steady, shameless, penetrating glance, "to leave his mill for a time and help me drive the English out of Wales?"

This point-blank question did alter for a moment the habitual scowl on Master Sparrow's visage; but it made a much more perceptible disturbance in the corrugated countenance of the bald giant, and not only in his countenance.

Broch-o'-Meifod gravely and heavily rose to his feet from the stool on which he was sitting and, unhooking his leather surcoat, began brushing with his hands, or rather beating with his hands, the rough woollen garment he was wearing beneath it. This garment, girded up at the waist under his belt, was what he'd had on all that day at the mill; and as he struck it now with his fists, clearly without the least consciousness of what he was doing, a cloud of flour-dust drifted away from it, and floated off with the log-smoke.

"I believe," thought Owen, "he did that in an automatic impulse of obedience to Morg!"

It must have been at the very instant when the man was thus, without knowing what he did, dusting his miller's garment, that he made the supreme decision of his life; for by the time he sat down again on his oak stool his face had resumed its normal composure.

On Master Sparrow's face, too, habit reigned again; but it did strike Owen as if that familiar sneer of contempt at the blindness of human valuations had been lightened a little by a natural lust for adventure.

Owen exchanged a quick glance with Rhisiart, and it struck the Prince as strange that the hardly perceptible nod the young diplomatist gave him — as much as to say, "You've got them both, my Lord!" — should have so greatly re-assured him. He himself gave a deep sigh of relief. He found he'd been counting much more than he'd known upon the aid of his indomitable friend, and he felt profoundly comforted when he stole a glance at his face.

But now, lest the man should think he was pressing him too hard, he deliberately let his eyes wander over that spacious chamber. How clean it was! The Maen-y-Meifod house-girls must use better mops than *his* maids used at Glyndyfrdwy.

And could all those boards and panellings and rafters, black as night, and yet glowing, gleaming in the firelight, be just ordinary oak? And what a clever device that was — Broch must have thought of that himself to let the smoke out through a wide hole above the door, instead of by these tricky smoke-vents behind the —

But all of a sudden, tug at his beard as he might, sharpen the points of it as he might, till they resembled the beard of a prince of Nineveh, he found that an ice-cold shiver was running up and down his spine, and that his legs were growing cold. Mother of God! he couldn't even feel his feet any more. They were numb; they were as dead as if they had been amputated!

Turning his head to the window he now felt sure that he saw a slender wrist and a white finger pointing directly at him. It had vanished in a second; but this new vision of it, more definite than the first, was a deadly shock to his nerves. He tried to recall an incantation that Iolo had given him as a sure protection against *Ellyllesau* or female demons, but not a word of it could he remember!

He began to feel as if his blood were turning to ice. Instinctively he had recourse to his old mental trick; and never had he used it with such a desperate effort! Instead of trying to move hand or foot he threw every ounce of will he possessed into an imaginative exteriorizing of his soul. He forced himself to visualize himself, sitting there, exactly as he was, facing the Miller and the harvester, but he struggled and strained with every fibre of his being to imagine — just to imagine — that It, the inmost Self of Owen, was watching the whole scene like one of the Birds of Rhiannon from the top of a conventionalized picture of Tysilio, the patron saint of Meifod.

In imagining the exteriorization of his soul he was forced to concentrate on Tysilio's face — and what an ugly face it was! — and Tysilio saved him. His blood began to circulate again and he forced himself to meet his squire's anxious and puzzled gaze.

"I think, cousin," he said quietly, relaxing the tenseness of his will as he might have unstrung a bow, "we might leave Broch and Master Sparrow for a minute to talk over my suggestion. I'd like to show you those old shields over there, of my friend's ancestors. They were barons in Meifod before

John burnt Mathrafal; but all their lands, except the mill-farm, were forfeited to the English."

He rose as he spoke, breathing a sigh of unspeakable relief to find that his limbs obeyed his intention; and resting his hand on Rhisiart's shoulder moved across the hall. They were approaching the entrance, on both sides of which hung the ancient shields, when the dark, polished doors flew open, and Mair ferch Broch, the youngest of the three girls, stumbled awkwardly into their presence. The girl was in her night-gown; and her agitation was so great that she hadn't even waited to throw a cloak over her shoulders.

"Father! Father!" she was crying; and then, finding herself confronted at such close quarters by Glyn Dŵr and Rhisiart, she staggered backwards and nearly fell.

But Broch was at her side in a moment. "Mair, child? Mair, Mair, what is it?" And lifting her up in his arms as if she were a creaking stiff-jointed doll he carried her to the fire.

Owen made a sign to Master Sparrow to leave them together, a sign which the sarcastic champion of the people obeyed with tactful discretion.

"It's about *her,"* the fellow whispered as soon as he reached them. "I heard what the damsel told the master. It's about her going out to the millpond to set the mill-wheel working."

"Mill-pond, mill-wheel? I can't understand you," protested the Prince. "She meant, Owen ap Griffith," replied the other, "that Morg ferch Lug *has gone to turn the wheel."*

"I still don't understand," said Glendower gravely.

"Twice already," explained the other, "since Broch brought her to Maen-y-Meifod has the Mistress run wild like this. When she runs wild, the wheel goes round of itself! The first time she did it 'twas to bedevil her own mother anent the poor lady making a stir over her marrying a man old enough to be her grand-dad. *That* were sixteen years agone, afore the Mistress had cuddled her first-born."

"Well, Sparrow — for Heaven's sake tell us, good Master Sparrow—"

But the fellow sneered like a devil. "Punctual Sparrow!" he sneered. "Serviceable and useful Sparrow! Convenient and appropriate Sparrow!" and he mimicked the Prince's accent with a savage unction.

Owen bit his lip. He had never been treated like this before. But something was "upon" him to make him act according to the most fantastical code of magnanimity. "Richard's father, the Black Prince," he thought, "let himself be insulted by the rudest of his French prisoners; and between me and God, old conjurer, you've got to make this fellow a test of your self-control."

"Pardon my impatience, Master," he enquired, "but what was *the second time* she turned the wheel?"

"You'd be wiser, Owen ap Griffith, and 'twould be more to the point, to ask me what the result'll be of her turning it the third time! But — let that go — her mother died the day after she'd turned it on *her,* and the second time she turned it was when King Richard laughed at her complaint about the Chirk foresters killing her pet deer. So she turned it on him; and a year later, just about the time when she'd run wild, *he* was a dead man."

"What do you mean by running wild, Master Sparrow?"

"Just what I say. Broch and the young ladies dursn't move from their beds nor from wherever else they may be when she be out at mill-wheel. If'ee was to peep into kitchen now, ye'd see Jock Efan and Dick Lloyd hugging themselves over fire, just as the Master and Mistress Mair be doing yonder, and if ye went upstairs — though God forbid your noble lordship should see such sights! — ye'd find Mistress Morgie and Mistress Orlie twisted together like silver eels; that is, if ye saw them at all; for ’tis like enough they’d have the blankets over their heads!”

Owen fixed upon him an unhearing, unseeing look that brought down the corners of Master Sparrow’s mouth into his taciturnity. Then the Prince glanced at his friend by the fire, who was still rocking his daughter on his knee; and finally he met the untroubled gaze of Rhisiart, who boldly inquired if he should take his sword from the porch and go down to the mill-pool.

But it was to Master Sparrow the Prince turned. “She’s the mistress of the house,” he said, “and we mustn’t meddle with her; but if you could stop her from rushing in on those two without warning it would be a good thing, and if you could persuade him,” he lowered his voice, “to carry the child back to bed before her mother sees her it would be wise. I leave it to you. Only I do hope, Sparrow,” and he deliberately gave the man a particular smile of intimate confidence such as he had found seldom failed of its purpose, “that you will decide to accompany us tomorrow. You’re not likely, Sparrow” — here he spoke very earnestly— “to find such a chance of seeing *some* of your ideas put into practice, as you are with me.”

Then he turned to his impatient squire. “And now, cousin,” he said. “We’ll have a look at the mill-pool together!” The bald-headed giant at the fire turned towards them at that moment; for Owen had deliberately uttered his last words in a penetrating tone. But all the man did was to lay his finger on his lip.

“He’s getting her to sleep, Sparrow,” Owen whispered. “Make him take her to bed fore *she* comes in. And if you do go with us tomorrow, remember your only job will be to look after him — to see he doesn’t leave his belt behind him when he goes into battle. And remember too that I know what belongs to my men — before I take them to be slaughtered!”

"I believe," he said to himself, as he and Rhisiart left the hall, "that the man will come. And it's just what we need among us, a few all-or-nothing champions of the people. If my dragon-standard — whether it be yellow or red — isn't a rallying of the people, what is Owen?"

"May I take my sword, my Prince?" enquired Rhisiart, watching eagerly to see whether his chief would touch his great lance with its leonine streamer.

"Surely, lad, surely. No, no — not your chain-armour! And you can lend me your dagger if any pinch comes; but how chilly it is with all this water about!" Saying this he wrapped himself round in his green mantle.

"It's other weapons than spears I'll need to-night," he thought. Rhisiart too remained bare-beaded; but the rush of autumn air that blew in through the great doors when he unbarred them induced him to snatch up a coat of sheep's wool that hung against the wall. Thus attired, with the crusader's sword bare of its sheath, the Prince and his companion set forth to meet whatever awaited them.

They found a different sky, a different atmosphere, a different feeling in the air, from what they had been experiencing all that warm September day. It was partly the mill-pond and the mill-stream that accounted for the death-like chill they felt; it was partly the warmth of the great fire they'd left; but to the Prince's mind at any rate there was something else abroad, something that made him shiver as they moved, even under his heavy mantle.

Did Cousin Rhisiart feel what he felt? He'd have given a good deal to know. But a certain shame, and a desire not to put ideas into the boy's head, made him keep his feelings to himself.

What he liked least of all about the look of things in those obscure purlieus of Meifod mill was the appearance of the waning moon. Rack after rack of yellow-tinted unwholesome clouds kept voyaging across it, not so much borrowing its radiance, for it had little radiance, as borrowing its illness, its sick desolation, its malady, its maniacal unease.

What a shapeless thing of leprous whiteness it was, this journeying deformity, on the distorted surface of which could still just be detected the floating ends of the tumbled hair of the moon-maiden!

And there it was again, as they approached the mill-pool, swaying and tossing, rising and sinking, in those reedy depths! Their own figures, as they moved, threw dim, misshapen inhuman projections upon those livid ripples, more like the motions of monstrous fish beneath the surface than of shadows passing across it.

Save the tall reeds nothing but a few ancient willow-stumps, most of them dead, were to be seen by the water’s edge, and those that were not dead were even less auspicious, so ghastly were the twigs, in that sick light, that protruded from them!

At last, as they went tramping side by side through the moist grass, across which every now and then came fungus-odours from half-submerged and time-blackened roots, they could see before them, where the out-flow of the water narrowed and deepened, the vast form of the mill-wheel. They had to cross a couple of half-open weirs before they reached the wheel, weirs that opposed or released the rush of subsidiary channels into the mill-pool, and it was as they were crossing the second of these, listening, as they clutched the wooden rail, to the hollow gurgling beneath the dam, that they realized that the towering form of the great wheel before them had slowly begun to turn.

It turned silently at first; but as soon as they were both on firm ground again, and quite close to it, there arose from beneath its vast rondure a strange, multitudinous sound, a sound not loud enough to be called a roar, but too loud to be described as a murmur.

Beside the wheel, and above the wheel, extended the dim shape of the mill itself, along the outer wall of which, high up from the ground, higher even than the topmost curve of the wheel, ran a narrow, balustraded platform, and standing upon this platform, with all the wild-tossed intermittent light of that ghastly shapelessness in the sky falling full upon her elfish figure, hovered the form of Morg ferch Lug.

She was evidently expecting them; and the moment she realized they'd seen her she waved to them to stay where they were and disappeared into the mill.

"She's going to stop the wheel," whispered Owen to his companion, "and then she'll come back and curse us!"

Rhisiart nodded but seemed not the least disturbed by this prospect. Catching the lad, a moment later, observing with calm and untroubled interest the way the water dripped and lingered and fell with diminishing force from the wheel's subsidiary revolution, Owen thought to himself, "God! he's got the nerve of a Norman!"

But there she was again, poised above their heads, above the now motionless wheel, and drawing to herself the full ghastliness of that phantom sickness in the sky.

Owen's mind was working fast now, and noting all manner of irrelevant details. What in Christ's name had the woman got round her? A robe of white foxes' skins? No, her form shimmered in that fevered light too much for that.

But the moon and she were cousins-german; and it was as if she couldn't toss forth the hectic sparkles of her marsh-fire hate quickly enough, before the next onrush of rolling clouds covered her confederate!

Her voice, when it did come, was hardly human. It wasn't easy to catch all her words, so wrought up was she. And yet it wasn't a wail, or a scream, or even a series of marsh-bird's cries. It was like the voice of a creature that has leapt out of one element into another and was using ordinary human words with a difference. They were Welsh words; but they were old Welsh words, many of them words that Owen had only met in that ancient folio of his.

"Take him away!" shrilled this voice, wherein seemed to shiver all the gurglings of the weirs and all the drifting sobs of the moon-wane, "take him away and murder him, my man, my marrow, my life! You shall have him, Owen the Accurst, Owen, the Bane of Cymru! But take this with you. As long as you destroy you will succeed. But try to build up again what you've torn, what you've burnt, what you've ravaged — and then will be the end! New-comer you are to this land, Brython the Accurst, with your spear of iron and your sword of brass; and I tell you to-night that the wheel has turned against you. You conquered us by your force and your cunning and your talk of the good and the evil; and so shall the English conquer you!

"Evil is the King in London, evil and cunning; and he talks of the good while he burns and tortures. And as you fight against him, Owen ap Griffith, you will grow like him! As long as you destroy you'll succeed; but try building up again, Owen ap Griffith, try building up these homes and these lives you've laid waste, and you'll see what you've done! For this land, Owen the Accurst, Owen the pure-blooded Brython, belongs not to you, to your evil strength and your weapons of steel, belongs not to your talk of the good and the evil. It belongs to us, to us who have been here from the beginning, to us the old people!

"Out of the old rivers, out of the old hills, out of the moons who know us and the deep night which is our beginning and our end, I lay upon you, Owen the Destroyer, the curse of the turning of the wheel! Take him away, my life, my marrow. Take him away, the prop of my children. I lay upon you the oldest curse in the world, the curse that is stronger than iron or brass; the curse of the water and the wind!”

Her out-stretched hands which had been pointing at the motionless figures beneath her now sank down; while she herself, like one of the last drops of water, sliding from the wheel she’d turned, vanished as suddenly as she had appeared!

Owen shivered, pulled his green mantle round him and became as motionless as any of the dying willow-trunks that leant over the pool’s brink. What his wandering soul was doing during these moments was curious enough when the nature of the place and of the occasion be considered. It had gone labouring back through the heavy years like an underground mole till it came to a critical day in his boyhood when his younger brother Tudor had jumped over a sandy stream by the edge of the sea, and not all the encouragement of their father nor all the repeated rushes Owen himself made to the brink of this obstacle were strong enough to conquer his fear of jumping. He could see now, as he tugged at his beard, just what he saw then, an old massive spar of ship’s timber, with barnacles and sea-weed clinging to it, that was stopped from getting back to the sea by a bank of sand, and yet was forced to ride on the tide and ride on the stream and forced to push before it and drag after it masses of sea-wrack and river-drift.

For no reason, to no purpose, for no intelligible motive, this piece of timber endured the rush upon it from one side of the salt streams and from the other side of the fresh streams; and it was with this object that Owen had identified himself.

In his boyish shame at not daring to jump, and at hearing his father say, “If you can’t jump, Owen my boy, you’d better give it up,” he had, rather in the way he did still, tried to fling his soul into that ancient fragment. “It just follows the tide,” he had said to himself. “For it has to float. It can’t jump.”

“I think,” he now remarked quietly to his companion, “we’d better start at dawn tomorrow; and you and I had better wait as near to Dinas Bran as we dare, till Broch gets that child safe back. I promised her she should go. We’ll let him have Seisyll. He won’t take long. And then we’ll have to decide whether to go straight to Ruthin and meet our people, or go home first. But if we go straight to Ruthin we must warn Rhys not to wait for us. Aye! aye! aye.” He sighed, but not too heavily, a little weary physical sigh, like that of a man who picks up a burden; a burden he knows he can carry, but a burden that’ll give him small ease or comfort.

But he felt that the boy was staring at him, puzzled and anxious in that dim light, and he turned his face away. It was then that he noticed a piece of rotten wood, with what looked like a living plant growing on it, gliding towards the pool of darkness under the wheel.

“Lend me your sword, cousin!” he said; and bending over the pool, without much difficulty he steered the floating derelict to their feet.

He gave no reason to the boy for this proceeding, as he thrust the bit of wood with its wisp of plant-life among the roots of a willow-stump. “You can never tell with these Normans,” he said to himself, as he returned Rhisiart his sword; but he couldn’t help a quickening of his pulse as they crossed the weirs.

“That anyway,” he thought, “won’t go under the wheel of Morg ferch Lug!”

XIII. THE COMET

SOMETHING LIKE A year and a half had passed over Wales, and the excitement among its people created by the hoisting of their old dragon standard had increased to an extent that was stirring up the wildest rumours on both sides of the border.

Following no advice but that of his friend Broch-o'-Meifod and his chief captain Rhys Gethin, Owen had decided to do what so many of the wisest patriots of his race had done before him, namely to leave his patrimony — in his case both Glyndyfrdwy and Sycharth — and retreat to an inaccessible and unapproachable citadel among the rocks and mountain-lakes at the foot of Snowdon.

He had therefore taken possession of a half-ruined fortress of unknown antiquity; and with the aid of stone-cutters and craftsmen from Gethin's domain in Conway had converted it during the summer and autumn of 1401 into a quite spacious stronghold with halls and chambers capable of sheltering not only a large household but a considerable bodyguard of devoted and well-armed adherents.

These latter kept increasing all through the winter of 1401; neither the snow-choked passes of that wild district nor the dangers and difficulties of leaving the England of Henry of Lancaster being able to deter thousands of patriotic Welshmen from deserting their studies in the universities and their avocations in the great merchant-cities and plunging into this desperate struggle to drive the stranger from their land.

Owen had gathered all his own family and all his closest personal friends round him in his mountain retreat. Important changes had taken place both at Valle Crucis and Dinas Bran which further enlarged the circle of what had now become quite a princely court in that inaccessible region.

The one event which those starry revolutions upon which she was always brooding had *not* predicted had befallen Ffraid ferch Gloyw, for she had died in her sleep; with the result that Lowri had fled with Simon to Owen, bringing not only Luned and Sibli and the two pageboys, but her daughter Tegolin, still accompanied by Alice of Ruthin and Friar Huw. As for little Efa, she had long since returned to her home in Anglesea.

Fate had chosen to delay the death of the Abbot of Valle Crucis until, when this event did occur, there was no question as to his successor; and the pro-English Prior, now the new Abbot, made it so uncomfortable for Father Pascentius, who had long intrigued against him, that the sly theologian, one dark providential night, brought not only his own casuistical intelligence to the Prince's mountain-court, but, packed securely on a sure-stepping Welsh pony, his famous unfinished Commentary upon the *Summa Theologica.*

It had been left, amid all these alarums and excursions, to the common-sense of the Arglwyddes — for the excellent lady steadily refused to use any other title — to suggest to the Prince to get Father Rheinalt out of the way before the arrival of the dangerous Lowri and her chastened Hog of Chirk. The patriotic monk had been therefore despatched with a letter to the warlike Abbot of Caerleon begging him not to send to the Snowdonian fastness any more long-bows from the Usk; but in place of this to get together as much gold from his monastery's treasury as he could lay his hands on!

The outlawed Prince wrote to him that it was gold to pay the troopers he *had* that he wanted, not more hungry mouths to feed; and it was the reply to this communication that he was now impatiently awaiting, while his Lady hoped and prayed that it would be by another hand than that of their passionate messenger that the response would come.

It was a clear evening in early February of the year 1402 when Owen, having returned from a fortnight's raid into Lord Grey's now far-off Vale of Clwyd, found himself, the great meal of the day well over, alone with his Secretary Rhisiart in his own private chamber.

Rhisiart was engaged just then in making fresh drafts of two important. communications that the Prince had despatched during the winter, one a letter in Latin to the native chieftains of Ireland, and the other a letter in French to King Robert the Third of Scotland.

News had reached the little court during its Christmas celebrations that the messengers entrusted with these epistles had fallen into the hands of the Usurper; and it was with a view to making another attempt to get them to Ireland and Scotland that the young Oxonian was copying his original rough drafts.

The room was a low square chamber with a spacious enclosure in its centre to serve as a fire-place and a wide vent above the iron-barred door to create a sufficient draught of air to carry away the heaviest portion of the smoke. Three deep lancet windows pierced the thick outer walls, and at one of these Owen now stood, contemplating the twilit expanse before him with more satisfaction than he had felt for some months; for it had needed as many as two score of sturdy ponies to convey to their overcrowded stronghold all the plunder his raid had carried off.

There had been a persistent thaw during the last couple of weeks and though the snow still lay on the ledges and ridges along the higher slopes, in many quite considerable open spaces and level terraces lovely stretches of fresh emerald-coloured grass were now apparent.

But just because the fatal law of contrariety can play more devilish tricks with an introspective soul than with one of a simpler kind, no sooner did he feel this surge of spring-sap mounting up in his veins than almost automatically, by reason of his unremitting self-consciousness, a certain recent occurrence, consorting ill with any kind of self-complacent well-being, presented itself in all its revolting and shameful details, and called upon him to watch the unrolling before him of a Hell-scorched scroll of memory.

The diplomatic Dean of St. Asaph, prompted he now suspected by that fanatic for peaceful settlements, the old Seneschal of Dinas Bran, had induced him to cross the frozen hills on the Feast of Stephen to try and patch up some sort of family truce with his cousin of Nannau.

The Arglwyddes had been fiercely opposed to the whole proceeding. “I shall never trust that man,” she kept repeating; and when he had argued that with such high dignitaries from the cathedral present at their encounter Hywel Sele’s hands would be tied, she had only shaken her head and given expression to one of those teasing feminine retorts that offer nothing to lay hold of, but carry about them all the same an atmosphere of imponderable truth which can penetrate the joints of the most rationalistic armour.

It was the Arglwyddes who had insisted on his taking Rhisiart with him, and it was to this precaution combined with old Iolo’s chain-armour that he owed his life. His treacherous cousin had indeed so skilfully arranged matters that in a little excursion round the Nannau deer-run the peace-making ecclesiastics were left in the lurch, and Owen and his squire found themselves alone with their host and a couple of his gamekeepers.

As he now listened to the scratching of Rhisiart’s pen behind him, and the tinkle of goat-bells and the murmur of spring-floods in the valley before him, the whole foul business came back. Whether there had appeared some wild creature of the forest that gave the assassin his excuse he never knew. Rhisiart averred he saw nothing of the kind. But it wasn't till he caught the swing-round of that calmly-aiming figure, and felt the shock against his heart of the man's arrow, that he realized what had happened. He himself had been totally unarmed, but he could now see the red fires that danced before his eyes as he leapt on his assailant and grappled with him before he could draw his sword.

But oh, how clearly he could recall the way his first burst of fury, giving him super-human strength, changed, as he felt the man's bulk yield under his attack, to an ice-cold cruelty of vengeance.

What had he said to him as he bent his body backwards across a fallen tree and watched his contorted face grow whiter and whiter, while he heard the keepers break away, first one and then the other, from before Rhisiart's flashing dagger? What had he said to him? 'Twas queer he'd forgotten just that; but he knew well what he felt as he drew back from the dying man and straightened himself and wiped his forehead and panted like a beast.

He had felt a cold anger against God, against Fate, against Death, for taking his enemy out of his hands before — Before what? Before he had made him lick the dregs, before he had made him eat the mandrake, before he'd made him say: "My master, my master!"

He left him lying there with his back broken, and stood for a moment watching Rhisiart chase the keepers down the hill. How the lad ran! And how those terrified men, who evidently thought the magician's familiar spirit was after them, ran faster than their pursuer!

And then he caught sight — and it was only a few furlongs away — of a vast upstanding oak-trunk, hollow as a gigantic reed, though its diameter must have been at least a yard wide, and raising its great jagged mouth like a dragon's maw towards the sky.

He walked up to it. Yes, its mouth was about a man’s height from the ground; and it was hollow, clear down to the root, for there were several large holes in its lower surface through which the light showed. It was then, as he realized what he was going to do, that he began trembling with an unholy excitement. His desire that the man should know before death snatched him away that he was mastered, his desire that there should be the exchange of realization, “You have lost” and “I have won,” was now replaced by a totally different feeling, a darker, more inhuman, and much more agitating feeling.

But curiously enough the agitation of this new feeling came near to destroying his hatred of his dying enemy! He was going to do something now that he might have done to someone he didn’t hate at all, someone who only happened —

He looked into the valley. Rhisiart and the keepers were out of sight. He looked towards Nannau. Not a living soul visible! He returned to the man whose back he had broken. The man’s eyes were open and they were watching his enemy intently; but he was unable to speak, and there was a queer pulse beating beneath one of his staring eyes, a pulse that caused the skin to move up and down, as though there were a miniature mole at work below it.

The dying man’s sword was still half-way out of its sheath, and when he lifted him up it fell completely out, clattering down. That was the most curious and shocking thing of all, the look the man gave him, as with infernal care he replaced the weapon in its sheath. But he lifted him’ up again and carried him to the tree. It was only then that he realized that to hoist this living corpse in his raised arms and plunge it into that gaping mouth was beyond even the unholy strength which the devil at that moment was pouring through his muscles.

Ah! there was Rhisiart! “Here, lad,” he gasped. “We must bury him in this tree!”

Not a sound, not even another look; and the body was so limp in their hands that he said to himself, when it was done, that it was a corpse, as Rhisiart supposed. But the two of them at last, panting and sweating, were free to leave him behind, alive or dead, in his upright grave. “The shock must have killed him, broken as he was,” he kept repeating to himself, as they hurried back for their horses.

It wasn’t easy to get Seisyll and Griffin out of the stable without word reaching the hall, but they managed it somehow; and Owen could now see, as he watched the soft spring-darkness descend on Snowdon, the geir-falcon profile of his adherent as they spurred their steeds over the frozen passes and up the slippery ascents.

“The... shock... must... have... killed... him” was the tune to which those eight hooves thudded over the sunlit ridges and clanged against the blocks of ice in the glittering streams.

But he listened to Rhisiart’s legal advice all the way home — for the young Oxonian enlarged on several astute alternatives — as to what they should write to St. Asaph to explain Sele’s disappearance and their own precipitate departure.

But the worst of having a soul like his which could *exteriorize* itself, or at least could imagine it could, was that ever since that Feast of Stephen this wandering soul of his kept sending him messages from its perch on the hollow tree.

The one thing that he wanted to know — whether the man was killed by the shock of being flung into the tree — his wandering soul couldn’t reveal. In place of which it kept sending him back all sorts of ghastly details of what was happening to the corpse.

Not a single piece of news that was of practical importance did his soul report, save one only; namely, that though they themselves had escaped it by riding northward, a flurry of snow had come up that night from the sea, obliterating every trace of their encounter. Was the upturned face in the mouth of the tree covered by the snow that night? If he lived, his breath would have melted it, but if he was dead, what better catafalque?

One effect of this curious commerce between himself and what he thought of as his errant soul was that he began to feel that to have taken a revenge like that was a proof that what the English said of him was true and that he *had* sold himself to the Powers of Evil.

During the first month of the New Year, however, this feeling had in its turn been transformed into an arbitrary desire to prove to Christendom that a spirit accused of such a monstrous deed and accusing itself of such a monstrous deed could yet be the liberator of a nation. Enforced, save for his recent raid, into an idle winter, Owen had used his monstrous revenge as a spur to goad himself into more definite schemes for the benefit of his country than he had as yet formulated.

In this task he found a ready supporter in his new adherent, Master Brut; and night after night, in this room with the three lancet windows opening upon the peaks of Snowdon, rebel Prince and rebel Evangelist worked out elaborate systems for the Reformation of Welsh Religion and the Revival of Welsh Learning.

Rhisiart would get sleepy as soon as these discussions began; but there were some occasions during these long winter evenings when the Prince would take it into his head to summon Philip Sparrow to join their consultation; and these were occasions when Rhisiart’s sleepiness vanished and a pile of legal folios in the jargon of the Norman-French courts and of commentaries upon the Laws of Hywel the Good in ecclesiastical Latin forced Owen's books of magic to huddle together in dismay and aversion. Those indeed were gala-nights for the youthful admirer of Master Young; and it was all the Prince could do to prevent Broch's sarcastic attendant from leaving the chamber in a fury when his revolutionary dogmas were brought before the bar of so many Doctors of Jurisprudence.

The one point — and Owen made a mental note of this — where the Oxonian and Philip Sparrow seemed always to agree was in regard to the necessity, the moment the King of England's Writ no longer ran in the Principality, of summoning a Welsh Parliament. Master Sparrow, however, invariably became sardonic when the number of lawyers in Rhisiart's Public Assembly was found to outweigh every other type of representative.

Broch himself, with or without his belt of axes, seldom uttered a word till he and the Prince were alone; but as Owen insisted on his friend's sharing his chamber, the laconic giant had plenty of opportunities for expressing himself at length when he so desired.

As the winter went on Owen found the most difficult part of playing Prince was this business of keeping the peace between high-spirited advisers, each with his own conflicting notion as to what ought to be done. Where he found he had to call to his aid the roving black eye and casuistical discrimination of Father Pascentius was when — and it was the Lollard who always started this ticklish topic — the discussion between them ran upon the delicate matter of the founding and endowing of Welsh Universities.

The Lollard wanted Owen, in creating these important adjuncts to his Sovereign-State, to make them self-governing; but Rhisiart pointed out from the legal, and the learned Father from the theological, point of view, that such Free Debating Societies would soon become even more turbulent and unruly than the notorious University of Paris, whose teachers and students, as everyone knew, were always in revolt against King and Church.

"But it'll be you, dear my Lord," Master Brut would protest, "who'll be the King in this case; and enlightened and tolerant philosophers, like our good Father here, who'll be the Church! It is tyranny, it is oppression that leads to disturbance. The teachers and students of our Welsh Universities will be too free to feel the necessity for asserting themselves against authority. That was the whole trouble at Oxford over Master Wycliffe. If you, my learned Father, were the Archbishop of St. David's—"

But it generally happened at this point that Owen would hurriedly change the subject, for he hadn't forgotten his prophetic trance in the forest of Mathrafal and his imaginary interview with the anti-Pope; and it was clear to him that the best commentator in the world upon the *Summa Theologica* wasn't necessarily the person he would select as the head of his Welsh church.

But he turned from the window now at the sound of a reiterated knocking at the door that partook of the character of a signal. Rhisiart hurriedly left his work and went to investigate. They had found by experience in this over-crowded citadel that young Madoc ab Evan — more reconciled to Rhisiart's presence since the latter had exchanged sword for pen — was alone incapable of deciding who among the stream of people that kept seeking an audience with the Prince should be admitted and who should be refused; so it had been arranged between them that, at a particular knock from Madoc, Rhisiart should rush to the door.

On this occasion it was the shaven poll and gleaming half-shut eyes of Father Pascentius that were the problem.

"I must see the Prince, my son. I bring a word for his ear alone."

"One moment, Father, I'll tell him, Father. But you may have to give your message to me. The Prince is writing to King Robert and I expect he's too busy to see you to-night."

Father Pascentius bowed. “Go and ask him, my son, if you please.”

Rhisiart closed the door and found Owen standing in the middle of the room. The latter raised his eyebrows “It’s the Father, my Prince!”

“Not Rheinalt?”

“Oh no, my Prince; Father Pascentius.”

Owen sighed. He had begun to find the insatiable aplomb of the theologian’s gaze irritating and exhausting. “Between me and God,” he muttered now, “the man’s a vampire! But let him in. When I can’t stand it a moment longer I’ll throw a log on the fire and you must get him away. A blood-sucking vampire! One day, when he makes me angry, I’ll have those gloating little eyeballs burnt out!”

While the door was opened for the entrance of the monk, Rhisiart and Madoc exchanged glances. The former had felt malicious joy in hearing his ruler’s savage outburst. The substitution of this subtle casuist, who seemed to miss nothing that went on in that mountain court, for the simple-hearted father of Tegolin was as unpleasant to the younger element in the place as it was to their elders.

The Lollard alone, remembering with gratitude all the twists that this serpent of orthodoxy had made on his behalf round the English barons, felt no objection at having a subtle thinker as their palace confessor in place of one in whom patriotism had killed piety, and passion logic.

“Sit down, Father,” said the Prince, clasping his hands tightly behind his back, so as not to yield to his trick of stroking his beard.

But Father Pascentius refused to sit down; and though Rhisiart resumed his former position, and even ostensibly took up his pen, and though the Prince sank into the big chair by the fire, the man insisted in shuffling in his sandals up and down the bare flagstones and across the clumsily-woven rush-mat which little Catharine had made for her father. Thus and thus only, it seemed, could he reveal his news.

Owen unclasped his fingers from behind his back and proceeded to clasp them resolutely together below the crossing of his knees. He struggled against an uncivil inclination to shut his eyes so as not to meet the other's gloating pupils as they dilated.

How queer it was to be looked at, and looked through too, for the theologian was no fool, by eyeballs that were so totally devoid of human feeling!

"What a relief it must have been," he thought, "not only to your enemy the Abbot but to every monk in the place, when you put Saint Thomas on your pony and left for the mountains!"

"So you couldn't *help* catching the drift of their conversation as you walked up and down, Father?"

"As if in our cloisters, my son."

"And you heard something of importance to some of us?"

"To you, my son."

"And what was it you heard, Father?"

"It concerned Master Broch-o'-Meifod, my son," and the discreet theologian gave a quick glance in the direction of Rhisiart.

Owen made an attempt to convey by his expression that he had no secrets from his Secretary, but he was so shocked by this unexpected mention of his friend's name that little else but this shock had room to appear on his disturbed face.

"I gathered, my son," the Father continued, "that Master Broch and his servant went to catch a few trout in the lake, and found down there a messenger from Meifod who's been hanging about, they say for some while, in the hope of coming upon his master alone."

“Well, Father?” But it was easy enough to say, “Well, Father?” What wasn’t easy was to keep his mind from the absurd problem as to whether the shuffle of the man’s sandals would sound the same on Catharine’s mat as it did on the bare floor.

“And Master Broch and his servant, my son, were seen in the stables after that; and the stable-boys thought—”

“By my confession, Father!” cried the Prince leaping to his feet, “Tell me the worst, and have done with it! Has Master Broch gone back to Meifod?”

The theologian stood still, one sandal on Catharine’s mat, the other on the stone floor. He took in the yellow gleam from the fire, he took in the way the chilly breath of that spring thaw added something that was at once balmy and acrid to the log smoke, something that made the botanist in him think of the pink protrusions of that curious swamp plant called butter-burr which shoots up so satyrishly through the chaste mould!

He met without the least perturbation Owen’s angry stare. All he did was to allow his eyelids to narrow a little, so that what the indignant Prince was now questioning were a pair of shiny blacknesses peering out with indestructible vivacity from a thatched porch.

It was evident that to the brain behind those orbs, the Prince’s agitation was no displeasing portion of what they were enjoying; and they were enjoying so many things! Such things, for instance, as the shadow of the Secretary’s Norman nose thrown by the firelight on the back of a white vellum quarto; such things as the voice of a bullfrog from the edge of the lake outside; such things as the charmingly-painted initial letter at the beginning of the very paragraph over which Rhisiart was pondering.

The young man’s own ill-concealed concern over the Prince’s mounting indignation too fell into its place among all there was for those eyes to savour as the beautiful spring darkness, that tasted so different from anything else in the world, contended with the yellow firelight!

“Speak man, for Mary’s sake, unless you want me to whistle you back to your Prior!” Certain drops of sweat which were running down Owen’s cheek, and had reached his chin, and now seemed undecided whether to trickle to the left or the right, must have struck Father Pascentius as even more significant of the nature of the Absolute than the spring darkness that poured through the windows, for he contemplated them with quiet joy.

“The stable men told me,” he concluded calmly, “that only one horse had been taken, but that Master Broch and his servant had not yet—”

Another knock and Rhisiart was at the door again. This time there was no questioning or delay, and the gigantic figure of Broch-o’-Meifod himself entered the room.

“Pardon me, Owen ap Griffith,” he said, “but I’ve got Philip out there, on one of the black mares, waiting your leave of absence for a week. Morg ferch Lug has sent Llewelyn over to say that half-a-dozen Chirk foresters have encamped on the other side of the pond and have begun making themselves a nuisance, stealing sacks of corn and killing chickens. He says they haven’t meddled with the maids yet, and that our girls are all right. But the Pretty would never have sent Llewelyn all this distance if the look of things wasn’t—”

“Six of ’em did he say?” cried Owen. “Let him take a dozen of our best Sycharth troop! But I’m not going to spare Sparrow. He knows your ways, my friend, just as Cousin Rhisiart knows mine! ’Twould be no kindness to your wife to let Sparrow go. Is Meredith at hand, Rhisiart? Go and find him — there’s a dear lad! Tell him I want a dozen of our best men from home, and let Tom Evan lead them. Tell Meredith I can’t help it, but Tom and his dozen must stay at Maen-y-Meifod till further notice. Tell Meredith they must all have ponies and must take meat and drink to last ’em till May. And tell him Tom Evan’s responsible with his life for their good behaviour. No, better leave that out! Just tell Meredith about the demoiselles and the maids. He’ll know the men to pick.”

Rhisiart bowed without a word. But as he moved away he lightly twitched the monk’s habit, whispering to him as he did so that he had a confession of mortal sin for his private ear.

As soon as the two friends were alone Owen earnestly enquired of the laconic giant what instructions he’d better give Tom Evan as to the future. “Suppose the English decide to do to Maen-y-Meifod as they’ve done to Glyndyfrdwy and Sycharth? Tom’ll manage the foresters. But what if the Sheriff comes on the scene with his Shropshire levies? Could you bring yourself, Broch, to let the place go, and have your family up here?”

The bald Hercules blinked. Then he made several guttural sounds in his throat and gave his belt such a jerk that the blades of the axes tinkled.

“The Pretty — won’t — like — it,” he remarked slowly. “She’s put her heart into that wheel. But I think I’ll send her a word by your good Tom.”

So saying he moved over to Rhisiart’s desk and possessed himself both of the boy’s seat, which creaked under his weight, and of a loose fragment of parchment.

Thus prepared, he covered his great visage with his hands, leaning his elbows on the desk and pondering. The Prince walked to the door and opened it.

“Don’t let *anybody* in, lad,” he directed Madoc, the sentry, “until Meredith comes.” Then he discreetly returned to his seat by the fire and stared into its red depths.

The big man at the desk, meanwhile, was slowly and not without difficulty forming the following syllables:

Pretty of my heart, Owen ap Griffith is always ready and the Arglwyddes is always ready to welcome you and our girls to where they are now. He himself will soon be away, so you needn't think of the wheel. You can trust Tom Evan. He will bring you here as soon as it seems best. They may leave you in peace or they may not. If not, I bid you come before too late. Your old Badger — not yet "in the bag" — Broch-o'-Meifod.

The giant was so long composing this document — for the crucial word "bid," was only inserted after "beg," "entreat," "wish," "ask," "advise," "suggest," had each in turn been substituted for the one before it — that Owen had plenty of time to envisage in the red heart of his fire a surprise attack upon Maen-y-Meifod by an overwhelming English force.

He passed his hands up and down his shins, while through his black hose the heat penetrated his whole being. What a thing fire was! And how curious to think of that upright corpse — a corpse *now* anyway — with its face buried in snow and the foxes barking round it. If he did turn the English out, would he have the power to do for his people what Charles the Great did for his, or Alfred the Great for his? "I doubt it," he thought. "We pure-blooded Brythons, as that woman said, are good at a pinch, but we can't *keep it up."*

The warmth of the fire and the fragrance of that sweet alder-wood smoke seemed to make it possible for him to contemplate in calm detachment — he noticed this even as it was happening — the most outrageous and shocking things. "I shall turn them out," he thought. "Ffraid ferch Gloyw said that; and I've never doubted it. But when it comes to the Universities — and this Lollard says there must be two of 'em, a southern one and a northern — I don't know what to think! English Alfred had the genius of a commander and the learning of a monk; but who am I, who get so elated with triumph when I come back from a raid with fifty ponies' load of plunder! — Good Lord, Universities! There's a vein in you, Owen the Irresponsible, that's better adapted to burning markets and storming castles and making princes' courts on the slopes of Snowdon than to the founding of Universities! If only I had that man Young back again."

For a moment he gave himself up to the pure sensation of warmth. "How many rebel princes," he thought, "with their spearmen gathering, and their prophets prophesying, and their stars pointing the way, have let it all go in the warmth of a fire. It's a reversion with me, that's what it is, to the old cave-dwellers! A human skeleton, squatting on its buttocks, feeling nice and warm, how can Universities spring out of that? And one won't content you, you learned rascal, eh? You must have two of them!"

And the evangelical lineaments of Master Brut took shape in the heart of the fire. "What a man! He cares nothing about the Percies or the anti-Pope! All he cares for are class-rooms of heresy, with a dozen Master Wycliffes to every Seraphic Doctor. But that fellow Young's the man. I must get him back. And yet Wales could be — only my bards don't harp to that tune — the centre of a new epoch for the whole of Christendom!"

And there came to him as he sat there — while the giant behind him erased with Rhisiart's green ink the word "advise" and substituted the word "bid" in a blood-coloured red — an indescribable feeling of power. "I'm a medium of the gods for something," he thought. "I wish to the devil they'd make it clearer to me for what!"

It wasn't till towards eight of the clock that night that Owen, leaning upon the arm of his friend Broch and followed by Rhisiart and Madoc, entered, with a certain amount of feudal ceremony, the central hall of his motley court.

This was where the afternoon's banquet had been held, and well replenished it had been with fresh meats and viands pillaged from the rich

Vale of Clwyd; but the tables had all been removed now, and the various members of the rebel headquarters, men and women intermingled, were seated in relaxed positions, as taste and etiquette dictated, passing the long spring evening as agreeably as circumstances allowed.

The Arglwyddes, portly lady though she was, and Owen was always sighing over her carelessness about her appearance and her reluctance to submit to any tire-woman who was an artist, was now walking up and down before a great loom, busily engaged in weaving, while, like a flock of starlings around a stately ewe, her maids chattered in high-pitched excitement. Quite often they fell into uncontrollable laughing fits and even exchanged ribald jests, for the mother of all those tall sons was the most indulgent of matriarchs, and there were many young pages to amuse them. Rhisiart's old acquaintances at Glyndyfrdwy had been recently increased by the addition of his friends from Dinas Bran as well as by several newcomers, so that that court in Snowdon was a paradise of love and mischief.

On this occasion the Prince's numerous sons left what they were doing and gathered ceremoniously round their father as he took his seat, each one in turn making the customary genuflexion. Owen looked round the hall while he listened sympathetically to the young men's stories, which were mostly about hunting and fishing, and he noticed that not only was Meredith absent, which had clearly to do with the provisioning of Tom Evan's little troop, but his eldest son Griffith was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's your brother Griffith?" he enquired of one of the boys grouped round him.

The lad looked quickly at the others and hesitated. One of the pages broke in, "Griffith ab Owen has gone, my Prince, instead of Rhys Gethin to light the beacon on Carnedd Llewelyn."

The form of the Prince's visage changed and his eyes flashed. "But I told Rhys Gethin at dinner to get that done. Where has *he* gone then?"

"Rhys Gethin is over there, my Prince," said the page eagerly, while Owen's sons avoided their father's eyes. While the boy spoke he pointed to a secluded corner of the hall where the figure of a man and a woman could dimly be seen crouched over a fire of their own in deep and close conversation.

"Oh, I'm glad he's here," said Owen hurriedly. "I remember now it *was* Griffith I sent."

"He's been talking to Mistress Lowri ever since the sun went down," the page added, "and Master Simon's behind those soldiers. He always mends their armour when the torches burn well; and the torches are burning better than usual to-night."

"Mad Huw says, sir," broke in another page, "that the torches wouldn't be burning as they are if something weren't going to happen!"

One of Owen's sons, in order to dissipate their embarrassment over the matter of their elder brother, began to rebuke these officious pages, and even to push them away. "If the torches are burning extra bright to-night," he announced dogmatically as the pages sulkily went off, "it's only because Mother told the maids to put in some of the new oil."

The Prince rose to his feet at that, and crossing the room embraced his lady and complimented her on the brightness of the torches and on the progress of her weaving.

"No, that kiss wasn't meant for you, Mistress Sibli," he said lightly; but catching the look on the dwarf's face he hurriedly snatched at the little creature's hand. "What a dainty little hand!" he observed.

And while the small being flushed with pleasure and made a face at the giggling maids, "By my confession," he added, "the prettiest hand in the hall!”

Mad Huw now took the opportunity of coming up to him, dragging the Maid of Edeyrnion by the sleeve.

“She said I wasn’t to bother you, my Lord,” he cried earnestly, “but it’s right for you to know, since you’ve given Him shelter, that He Himself told me just now that there’s a sign on its way that when he sees it will drive the tyrant to despair. He said all the land would know of it, because — No! I *must* tell him, sister!”

“I know,” said Owen, smiling at Tegolin who was looking especially lovely that night, “who it is who’d make Harry of Lancaster envy us, poor barbarians! No, but seriously, Mistress,” he added, “I’m convinced the King of France himself hasn’t such an ornament to his court!”

The Grey Friar’s face lit up with pleasure. *“He’s* told her, too “he whispered, coming close to Owen. “That’s why she looks like an angel!”

The Prince surveyed him gravely, not humouring him but treating him like an obscure oracle. “What *kind* of sign is it that’s coming, little Brother?”

But while Mad Huw was explaining that it was probably a fiery sign Owen noticed that Broch-o’-Meifod, whose movements couldn’t very well be concealed from anyone, had seated himself among the troopers whose weapons the ex-Hog of Chirk was so industriously sharpening.

Simultaneously with this the Prince realized that Master Brut had been there all along, and was now turning from the amateur armourer to engage in a lively argument with the bald-headed giant.

A faint prick of jealousy assailed Owen when he took this in. But he upbraided himself for it. “I suppose you think, you dandified egoist, that because Broch’s your friend he’s not to be allowed to talk to anybody with a grain of intelligence! But oh, I’d like to know what those two are talking about!” He was still listening with half an ear to Mad Huw and still watching Tegolin as she now seated herself by Luned and took a corner of the latter’s embroidery on her lap, when, amid the general murmur of voices, he became aware of the rich girlish laughter of his favourite child.

“Between me and God!” he said to himself, “the little one’s talking to Rhisiart!” A vivid memory came over him, as he saw Catharine and Rhisiart standing together, of how when he’d first set eyes on the boy the lad had been standing side by side with the Maid of Edeyrnion. He glanced quickly at Tegolin. Yes, the red-haired girl was only half-interested in Luned’s work. Her grave, steady eyes, whenever they were lifted from her lap, turned invariably towards Rhisiart and Catharine. He did his best to assume the expression of one too deeply absorbed in the Friar’s words to see with intelligence what was going on before him.

But as he watched, with what he hoped resembled an unthinking stare, the look which Tegolin cast upon Rhisiart, “There’s something — though God only knows what it is—” he thought, “between these two. Tegolin *may* not be in love with him — but she certainly is involved with him. Who can tell what goes on in her mind as she fixes that look upon him? But whatever the feelings are that betray her, her soul is absolutely calm. Even if she’s caught that particular note in Catharine’s laugh she’s not going to let it torment her.”

What Catharine and Rhisiart were doing while they were thus watched by Owen and Tegolin was innocent enough, for they were listening to the Nurse. The old woman was seated near the fire, with her feet on a foot-stool, engaged in winding a skein of purple wool with the help of Alice of Ruthin. And as she wound she sang in her faint, high, cracked voice; and Owen well knew what she was singing — one of those plaintive, mournful dirges attributed to Heledd, daughter of Cynddylan. He could see just what had happened. The English maid holding that purple skein round her white wrists had asked some stupid question of the Nurse, and the aged woman, teased by the girl's ignorance, had made an old wife's sly retort, at which the young people's eyes had met, and Catharine had laughed aloud.

"Thank you, Brother," he said as courteously as he could, "I will remember your words and watch well to-night. God be with you, Brother." But though Mad Huw moved away then, quite content, the Prince remained standing where he was, lost in thought.

Knowing his tendency to these fits of abstraction, none cared to approach him, though the Arglwyddes glanced at him anxiously more than once as she moved up and down in front of her loom.

Meanwhile the old woman's quavering voice rose and fell; some of the household turning to look at her, some murmuring the well-known words, others indifferent and heedless, continuing their conversation.

Stafell Cynddylan ys tywyll heno,
Heb dan, heb gannwyll,
Namyn Duw, pwy a'm dyry pwyll!
The hall of Cynddylan is dark to-night,
Without fire, without candle,
And there is none but God to comfort me!

To Owen both words and tune were so familiar that they were like the sound of the Paternoster at Mass, no more than a gentle February wind, moving among branches and twigs that were already feeling the stir of the sap within them.

But though in his crafty self-consciousness he didn't scruple just then, as he stood at gaze in the centre of his *ystafell,* to feign the approach of one of his trances, his thoughts had never been more cynical or more shameless.

"They're both mine," he said to himself. "She's mine and he's mine. I mustn't, I *won't* spare them to each other. They're the best weapons I have. Shall I throw away my best weapons? That's what it would be if I let them melt together. It wouldn't be only one I'd lose."

There was rarely anything in the motion of his feelings, in the drift of his intentions, that Owen missed in himself. "You're a mirror-man — *drych dyn,"* old Iolo had often told him; and Broch himself had once said, and he remembered the very spot where he said it, that his was the only soul he knew that actually and without pretence obeyed the oracle "Know thyself." "But all you do," Broch had added, "is to push the unknown further in; and that only makes it darker than it was before. In fact," Broch had gone on, "your lantern of self-knowledge only creates more darkness. 'Light the candle, and you'll see how dark it is,' as the old Powys proverb says."

He always thought of these words of "the Badger of Meifod" when there obtruded into his decisions motives so abominable that he would never have dared to reveal them to a living creature.

"I must have that boy body and soul," he thought, "and I must have a Catherine virginal and intact, to use as my grand tribute to destiny!"

These thoughts were expressed in unspoken words, but they were clear and definite. Nevertheless, behind these thoughts, just where the darkness seemed thickest, there hovered the will-o'-the-wisp of a suggestion that it wasn't because he wanted to use Catharine as a "castle" in his chess-game with Bolingbroke, but because the thought of her marriage was a torture to him, that he shuddered to catch that love-note in her laugh. It was one of his shameless concessions to his unholier instinct that in any raid upon a town or village he never interfered with his men's behaviour to the girls of the place; but no suffering any demon could ever inflict on him was worse than what he endured when, taking him suddenly by surprise, his imagination conjured up a realistic vision of Catharine in the arms of a ravisher.

He had once been betrayed into supposing that the Arglwyddes would feel as he did; but when some reference to such a horror came he was confounded by the coolness of her tone. He shrugged his shoulders now and forced himself to look calmly and steadily about him.

The sweet wood-smoke, rising in undulating curves and wavering wisps above the heads of that crowded assembly, mingled its wholesome scent with a new fragrance that night, the fragrance of the brightly-burning oil.

"Yes," the Prince thought, "that boy of mine's right. It's the oil we got from that rich rogue at Bryn Saith Marchog! I suppose *his* hall's as dark as Cynddylan's to-night — but he'd be alive now, the fool, if he hadn't resisted. To know when to strike, and when to refrain from striking — I shan't get the English out of Wales till I learn that."

Well! In the case of Rhisiart and Catharine his instinct told him that he must "refrain"; yes, and that was the word too in the case of Lowri and Rhys Gethin "Time and chance and the envy of Heaven," he told himself, "are the powers that deal best with the attractions and repulsions of men. Lift a finger to intervene, and all's in a blaze."

Thus sobered, and cautioned too by something in his nature that his self-analysis couldn't altogether fathom, Owen disregarded the old Nurse and her young listeners, disregarded Lowri and Gethin, and sat down on a comfortable horse-block that somebody had brought in from the entrance-yard. Here he was near enough to the Lollard and his bald-headed friend to be able to join in their discussion; and here he could let the bitterness of his jealousy find a vent in harmless argument.

They were talking about Hell and Heaven; and it was no surprise to our Prince when he perceived that his own gravitation to a spot made somewhat noisy by the murmur of the troopers lying about on the floor while Simon worked was countered by the shuffling to the scene on his silent sandals of the ubiquitous Father Pascentius.

“Go on, go on, gentlemen,” Owen begged them, as he took his seat. “No, no! I’m quite comfortable. What were you saying, Master Brut?”

“I was saying, my Prince, that what our theologians call ‘the Fall’ was in reality simply a wrong turn taken by our remote ancestors. They weren’t altogether to blame; for it was only the continuance on this earth of a crack in creation that had begun much earlier, had begun in fact in Heaven. It’s because it goes so far back that we feel, as Saint Paul says, that all Nature shares it. Coming down the mountain this very day, spring-like though it is, I felt as I saw a mass of broken rocks and an old twisted thorn that they too were waiting and enduring. Enduring what?” He paused; then deepening his voice with intense conviction, *“Enduring Hell!”* he brought out.

There came at that moment such a curious expression into the countenance of Broch-o’-Meifod that both the Prince and the Lollard stared at him in wonder. The big man’s face under the torch-light was transformed and his heavy lips twitched as if about to speak. But what startled and even shocked the men about him was the nature of the change that had come over him. Perhaps the best description of it would be to say that the natural human light in the man’s eyes had gone out and a look had taken its place that resembled the endurance of rocks and stones and stumps.

“What’s happened to your eyes?” Owen longed to interject, while Master Brut’s words concerning the Fall, as they still hovered in the air, seemed to grow thin and brittle. They hung in that heavy-sweet smoke like the pitiful echoes of an oracle who had long ago been doomed.

But from Broch’s expressionless face there now came a series of slowly-uttered but quite intelligible words.

“No... they don’t... endure Hell, brother,” he murmured. “You felt like that today because of the warm, loving glow in your own heart. I have no such glow. I have no such heart. The Pretty often says, ‘I don’t believe you’re any more human than my wheel, Broch! And sometimes she says, and laughs and laughs as she says it, ‘I believe you’re a corpse, Broch, a corpse that’s been dead a thousand years, and some great lumbering, lubberly devil’s got into you and talks to me out of you — not a fire-devil, Broch, but a frozen mud-devil.’ So that’s what she thinks; and she’s not jesting either. What was I going to say? Oh yes — that you’re mistaken, Master, about that ‘enduring.’ And you’re mistaken too about that ‘crack in creation’ and about that ‘wrong turn.’

“You say things like that out of your warm, loving, human heart. You look at those rocks and you look at those stumps, Brut, and a chill goes through you! I know what you do. Sometimes you think to yourself, ‘At this very moment there’s a dead log in a frozen murky pool, where no one ever comes, or ever will come!’ And your loving soul shivers to think of what that log feels, with no one, not even a worm, ever coming near it.”

But the Lollard had recovered himself now. He had got more used to those deep eye-sockets in which the light had gone out. He could hardly keep his seat. “That’s it!” he cried. “That’s just what Saint Paul means! It’s for the manifestation of the Sons of God that your log’s waiting. And that means the Resurrection of Jesus and the Blessed Blood of Jesus. There is a crack in creation. We have taken the wrong turn; and it’s only—”

But the face under that enormous bald head had now become so shockingly inhuman that his words died away before it. “Not even a worm,” repeated Broch-o’-Meifod. “And the heart of Jesus is so full of love that it can’t feel what that log feels. Jesus is like you, Master Brut. His loving heart calls all night and all day to that loneliness out there. ‘Love me! Love me!’ it calls. And like you it thinks — that warm, human heart — that nothing but a ‘crack in creation,’ nothing but a ‘wrong turn’ taken long ago, is holding back that loneliness. But shall I tell you”, his voice sounded now more like the dropping of icicles into black water than a human tongue—“the Spirit is moving already to another and a different Revelation. None of us will live to see it. But those lonelinesses that trouble your human heart, Brut, are its messengers; they may be ‘enduring’; but as for Hell—”

The voice of Father Pascentius now became audible from where he stood leaning against a dark oak pillar. “If you’ll pardon a poor monk, gentlemen,” he said, and his words seemed to come from his” burning eyes rather than from his mouth, “I would like to make one small animadversion upon what we’ve just heard. May I speak, my Prince?”

Owen bit his lip under his beard, but he bowed politely; and as for Broch-o’-Meifod everybody could see how humbly and patiently he swung his great head round towards the Cistercian till his lightless eye-sockets confronted the burning orbs of the other.

“I’m a theologian, not a politician,” Father Pascentius went on, “but I must remind you, my sons, that King Harry and his archbishop are burning many sincere men — and I fear Oldcastle himself will be the next — for holding views far milder and less subversive of our Holy Catholic Faith than what we have just heard. I humbly submit, my Prince — though ’tis no more than the view of a poor scholar — that when the heresies we have been listening to begin to be bruited over the land, many patriotic Welshmen who are also good Catholics will say to themselves, ‘What will become of our souls if Owen ap Griffith keeps such persons about him?’ And for the King and his bigoted Archbishop this will be a supreme advantage! They already call our Prince a black magician. Now they’ll be able to say he has people about him who are advocates of anti-Christ.”

There was a frightened murmur of protest at this from among such of the troopers as had managed to keep their wits unfuddled; but Broch only bowed his head a little and made a groping gesture with one of his great hands towards the quarter of the horizon from which this spring-time thaw had apparently come.

“I have seen a letter to our Prior, now our Lord Abbot — may the holy saints long preserve him!—” went on the voice behind the eyes, “in which the sufferings of a recent heretic at the stake were described by an eyewitness; and I think, my Prince, and all of you, my Masters, it were well to remember that if, in the decrees of Providence, our cause was not successful—” He was interrupted by outcries from the men gathered about the industrious Simon. It was clear that he was troubling their minds for there was fear as well as anger in their protests.

But the monk continued as obstinately as if he were in his own vaulted chapter-house in Valle Crucis, “Master Brut spoke of the desolation he noted in certain generated things, from which the creator had withdrawn his creative energy. But Saint Thomas clearly proves that the incorporeal agent by whom all things, both corporeal and incorporeal, are created is God, from whom all things derive not only their form but also their matter; therefore, what Master Brut saw, when he gave way to the sin of desolation, was simply an illusion of the Devil, an illusion representing corporeal things as they would be supposing that, with the cessation of the divine operation, they fell into nothingness.”

Father Pascentius’s Phorkyad eyes now turned from the Lollard to the Master of Maen-y-Meifod. “As to the words that you” — there was no need for him to name the bald-headed giant— “have just uttered, Saint Thomas refutes them in a logic before which every Catholic must bow. No new Revelation, Saint Thomas declares, even if it were possible for it to be known, can be known, because it is impossible that the end of the present Revelation should be revealed except to him who has received the Revelation of the whole of divine predestination, that is, to Christ as man, through whom the whole predestination of the human race is fulfilled; even as it is clearly said in the Holy Gospel: ‘The Father loveth the Son and showeth him all things which—’”

He was interrupted by three shrill blasts of a horn from outside the main entrance, an entrance which opened straight into the banquet hall where they were now assembled. Everyone’s gaze turned instantly to the high folding doors, doors which in their massive portentousness nearly reached the beams of the ceiling. These great doors in their hand-wrought iron-work and blackened antiquity suggested that they had been brought from some old Snowdonian castle whose foundations existed before the departure of the Romans; but they also suggested by their surprising height that they had once defended a gateway through which riders could enter on horseback.

There is something about the concentration of a crowd of human beings upon some inanimate obstacle that dissolves the aforesaid obstacle into porous vapour, vapour through which the imagination draws forth out of the darkness monstrous images of the unknown event.

But the high doors were now being unbarred as if in response to a pre-arranged signal; and every soul in the hall strained forward to welcome the issue, some with dread, some with panic, some with dramatic exultation.

Half-a-dozen spearmen entered, led by Owen’s eldest son, and as the Prince, without rising from his seat, straightened himself to receive bad news — for it had become a lodged impression, or if you prefer a settled superstition, with him that his eldest son always brought him bad luck — Griffith hurried to his father’s side, carrying a large and carefully sealed letter.

Sinking down on one knee, though with anything but a courtier-like expression on his lowering and anxious face, he placed this document in the Prince's hands, and then with the words, "I expect you'll want to retire to your room with this," turned away from his father and crossed the hall to where the Arglwyddes was now seated by the side of her loom.

Such was the perpetual fretting discord and jarring contrariety between Owen and his first-born that it was quite enough, as very likely Griffith realized it would be, for the son to suggest that this ticklish document should be carried out of the hall, to make the father decide that there was every reason why he should open it at once before them all. So while Broch-o'-Meifod resumed his conversation with the Lollard, and while the monk turned his devouring gaze upon what Master Simon was doing, Owen managed to catch Rhisiart's eye and made a sign to him to approach.

The boy obeyed at once; while the old Nurse, who, just as if the girl were still a small child, ordered Catharine, in some drastic nursery fashion, to go and kiss her mother before she retired for the night.

Lowering his head above the big document, so as not to see his daughter bid his Secretary good-night, the Prince broke the seals one by one with a vicious and malicious pleasure in the mere destruction of sealing-wax.

There was an outer cover of plain parchment wrapped round the contents of the document upon which the address, "To Owen ap Griffith, commonly called Glendourdy, and now in his Castle in the Mountains of Snowdon, *these,"* was written in French. Then there appeared a brief letter, also in French, signed "Henry Don of Kidwelly," which the Prince proceeded to read to himself, while both Rhisiart — now standing with grave attention at his side — and Father Pascentius, leaning against his wooden pillar, surveyed him intently. "My gracious Lord and most honoured friend," Henry Don wrote, "I received by word of mouth from your trusty servant, from whose hands your letter had been stolen, but to whom, in case of such an accident, you had communicated its contents, that by the will of God you had risen to liberate the Welsh People from the bondage of their English enemies. I write to inform you, my gracious Lord and most dear friend, that I am making my way by such stages as these troubled times allow with certain moneys and a considerable following, to put myself at your honoured service. One of my party, a Welshman from London, cognizant of affairs in that city, brings me his account of certain oppressive and unrighteous measures voted by the King's Commons in Westminster for the destruction of Our People. These insolent proclamations I am enclosing herewith for your gracious consideration and that of your Council of Worthy and Faithful men. May the God of our fathers be your Support in adversity and your Guide to victory. Your devoted and humble servant, Henry Don."

Still seated on his horse-block by the central fire of the hall, and watched in silence now not only by the Lollard and the monk but by the majority of that vast household, Owen handed to Rhisiart the new Acts of Parliament, referred to by his friend, and commanded him to read them aloud.

"Do you wish me, my Prince," enquired the young man when he had examined the legal phraseology of the document, "to translate it into our Welsh tongue, so that all here present can follow these monstrous and unheard-of edicts?"

"If you can manage such a thing, my dear boy," replied Owen smiling.

Put on his mettle by this, and using the resonant and official tone that he had acquired in his Sheriff's Court at home, Rhisiart proceeded, though with some natural hesitation here and there, to make that crowded hall echo to the following words:

Hear and obey, all good liege subjects, the will and pleasure of your Sovereign Lord King Henry: No Englishman may be convicted in Wales by any Welshman, but only by other Englishmen of good fame. No waster, rhymer, minstrel, or vagabond may maintain himself by making gatherings upon the common people. No congregations, divinations, lies, and excitations may be held in Wales, save in the presence of English officers. No Welshman, not loyal to our Royal Allegiance, may bear arms or armour in any town, market, or church or in any highway. No victuals or arms may be imported into Wales except for the use of English Castles and English towns.

No Welshman, other than Bishops, may have castles or houses capable of defence beyond such as existed in the days of our gracious and sovereign Prince Edward, first of that name. No Englishman married to any Welshwoman of the amity or alliance of Owen ap Glendourdy, traitor to our Sovereign Lord, or to any other Welshwoman after the rebellion of the said Owen, or that in time to come marrieth himself to any Welshwoman, may be put into any office in Wales or in the Marches of the same.

Owen rose slowly to his feet. “Well, men of Gwynedd and Powys,” he cried in a ringing voice, “what is your answer to that?”

A terrific excitement ensued. The men-at-arms clashed their weapons upon their shields and raised them aloft. Many of the women tossed their arms above their heads and loosened the bands of their hair. Some of the more excitable among the younger girls, not contented with setting free their flowing locks, bared their breasts in their emotion, a gesture of feminine feeling which the Prince had never witnessed before, though he had often heard stories of such a thing being done when the women of Môn flung themselves upon the Roman legions.

Curiously enough he himself felt a little puzzled by this display of passion in the presence of a few mean and vindictive measures passed by the perturbed commonalty of Bolingbroke's business-like kingdom.

"And what a dramatic hurry these English are in!" he thought as he stood in silence listening to the wild acclamations about him. "They might at least have taken the trouble to have a Welsh clerk look over their vicious statute. *Owen 'ap' Glendourdy!* What? Do they take me for a river-sprite, and the actual child of my Glen of Divine Water? But a good friend, a good friend, that Don is! Though I wish he'd brought only money, and not more of these curst mouths to feed!"

Never had he felt colder, never less stirred of any sort of racial emotion than at that moment. There! Catharine was only just going to bed now. "How young girls do hate to go to bed! I suppose it's different when they're married — but not for long; no, no, not for long." And he began to tell himself a story about keeping Rhisiart up copying legal documents half the night so that he shouldn't disturb the sleep of a still beautiful wife whose heart had reverted to her father!

But he mustn't have her; never, never! She was his grand weapon, his "white queen" in his chess-game with Bolingbroke.

The clamour had died down now. But what was that? The old Bard playing on his harp? No! It was the sound of a pipe. And then he remembered that Lowri ferch Ffraid had been, ever since she arrived, anxious that the Arglwyddes should introduce the Dinas Bran custom, which had been dropped or perhaps had never existed in his more easy-going domains, with regard to the departure of the ladies from the hall. Yes, that was it! They were taking down the loom and collecting their things. But 'twas a silly custom! Much better were the homely border habits of the honest Hanmers. What put it into Lowri's head? Oh, no doubt a desire — he had noted this sort of thing in other cases — to make the Arglwyddes feel ashamed of her English blood — to trouble that simple lady's mind with the feeling that she ought to be grander in her ways, more ceremonious, more careful of the old Celtic traditions, now that her man was Prince of Wales.

A wave of vibrant tenderness for the mother of his children swept over him, and he cast a dangerous look towards the small fire at the extremity of the hall, which, when he had last seen it, had been monopolized by Lowri and Rhys Gethin. But they had disappeared. They must have taken advantage of that warm spring thaw to go out together.

He glanced quickly at Simon. The man was still hard at work, though the recent outburst of national feeling had deprived him of all spectators. Doggedly and obstinately he went on, polishing and hammering; using for his purpose the great central hearth of the hall when in his amateur labours as an armourer the heat of fire was necessary.

What had happened to the Hog of Chirk? Well, if it was Lollardry that had done this— "But she'd better not go too far! These convertites — I've known several in my time — if they're not mad, like poor Huw, are apt to burst out and risk Hell-fire! Rhys Gethin were wise to keep a weather-eye on you, my industrious Simon."

He couldn't resist a pang of jealousy when he saw how deep Master Broch and the Lollard had sunk out of hearing of all the world in their spiritual argument.

But the women were leaving the hall now, and though there was none but the family Bard to murmur in his quavering voice the traditional *"In Exitu Mulieres"* the old gentleman chanted the obscure words to the end.

Impatiently Owen strode across to the torch-lit stairway and was just in time to catch his wife in his arms as she was taking the first step.

The Arglwyddes was surprised, was even a little disturbed, by this unexpected demonstration; but she responded to it with an affectionate embrace, and as he watched her sturdy figure disappear leaning on Tegolin's arm, and with Mad Huw stumbling after them, he wondered if it were because she wished to conceal an unusual emotion that she didn't turn her head as she went up. Everything that this woman meant to him came over him now with a blind rush, and standing in the entrance to the stairs so that the maids couldn't easily pass, he fell into one of his queer reveries.

By the time he had shaken this off and was exchanging ribald jests with little Sibli he was astonished to see that pale English maid they called Alice struggling against the restraining arms of both Rhisiart and the Lollard, lost to everything in a violent fit of hysterics.

"Let me go to her — my mother, my dear mother!" the unhappy girl kept crying. "Let me go, I tell you! I will go; though I go through water and fire!"

"What is it? What's the matter with her? Tell me, child! Where do you want to go? Where's your mother?"

But the competent Luned came running up now with a jug of spring water, from which she mercilessly sprinkled the girl's face till the young woman slipped down from the men's arms and sank in a heap on the floor. There she lay piteously moaning, but no longer insane with grief.

Owen turned to Rhisiart, while Luned remained on her knees drying the girl's drenched hair and neck.

"A messenger has come to her, my Prince, with terrible news. He was only a lad, and was too frightened to stay; but it appears that Grey got it into his head that this girl's mother — she's a Welshwoman, my Prince, though the father's English — had thrown witchcraft over the young Lord, and that the said young Lord was wasting away. In reality, my Prince, it is for love of Alice that the young man is pining. But Grey sent his people to seize the girl's mother and have her condemned in his Manor-Court as a witch taken in the act. Alice's father resisted these men and was killed in his own house; but no one knows what's become of her mother. And it's this not knowing, my Prince, that has set the girl beside herself. I watched her while the lad told her — it was just now, when you were standing at the foot of the stairs, or you'd have seen what was going on — and it was this uncertainty, this not knowing what was happening to her mother, that broke the maid down."

Owen's interest and his wrath too were fully roused by this recital, roused as it had not been by the vindictive Acts of Parliament.

Rhisiart saw what his master was feeling and he went on boldly. "Had he a legal right to arrest her and take her life, my Prince? For I seem to have read that to punish the sin of witchcraft is a privilege of the ecclesiastical, not of the civil, courts. Has Grey's Manor-Court, my Prince, the right to try a person accused of witchcraft? Has it the right to usurp the Bishop's jurisdiction?"

"It has no such right!" cried Owen fiercely. "This is the sort of thing that's been going on for the last two hundred years! They build their castles; they fill them with devils; they do what they like with our people. Oh, great God in Heaven!" — and his voice resounding through the hall made every man present leap to his feet— "if you'll strengthen my hand now, only for twelve months, so that I can clear the land of them, just clear the land of them, from Bangor to St. David's, you can do what you will with me afterwards, and with all I love!"

Something seemed to crack within him, something that hitherto, like the bite of a black frost, had made an ice-barrier between his soul and such wrongs. But now he felt pouring through him, as if from the outraged heart of every victim of every castle in Wales, a torrential strength that nothing could resist!

Rhisiart looked at him in amazement. The boy was awed, but puzzled as well as awed. What had happened to excite his hero so? The girl was an English girl; and he'd seen with his own eyes how she treated that feckless young Lord. From the way she'd hypnotized Master Brut, too, he could well believe that her mother was a witch!

The lad wasn't old enough to realize how it can happen in life that a volcanic force that has been mounting and mounting for years, unseen and unknown, bursts forth at last under the impact of some minor shock with an explosion that shakes everything. And if he was astonished at Owen's unexpected emotion, his Norman intelligence was no less bewildered by the response it met with among all these men.

Even the girl herself ceased moaning as Luned lifted her to her feet. She caught at once — ah! she was a witch's daughter right enough! — the mood the Prince was in, and she rushed up to him and falling on her knees before him clutched at his hand, pressing it to her wet face.

"O save her, save her, Lord Owen!" she wept.

And the Prince raised her up before them all, and swore before them all on the handle of his sword that if her mother was still alive not a hair of her head should be harmed.

But what Rhisiart couldn't see or know was how, as the man stood there with his fingers meeting the English girl's fingers on the handle of his weapon, his curiously detached soul became suddenly icily remote from the whole scene. "Mortal men, mortal men all, whether Welsh or English!" he seemed to hear the voice of the great Oldcastle saying. "No more real difference between them than between your fingers and this woman's fingers!"

But it certainly seemed as if the absence of the Arglwyddes and her ladies had increased the nervous restlessness of the four-score armed warriors that filled the hall.

As Luned led Alice away — and the girl seemed greatly comforted, though it was hard for Rhisiart to see exactly why — Owen went back to his seat by the central fire where the Lollard and Broch-o'-Meifod had already resumed their blasphemous conversation.

Rhisiart settled himself upon a heap of dried ferns at his Lord's feet. Neither he nor Owen felt much inclination just then to listen to the daring and disturbing speculations of the two philosophers. Rhisiart had so much to think about that he found himself praying that his master would leave him in peace; and Owen was in the same case. But neither Prince nor Squire realized that in both the broad and the narrow skull the same image tyrannized.

It was therefore only with the surface of their minds that either of them became aware of the long series of enigmatic oracles that first one and then the other of these two sages uttered, between intervals of intense pondering.

But Father Pascentius was by no means content with such superficial attention. He had found a seat for himself now, at the end of a long bench occupied by the soldiery, and with his head propped on his two fists and his elbows resting on the angle of the bench, he had become one single exultant life-devouring eye. The countenance out of which this vision functioned was as negligible and commonplace as the Father's figure was unwieldy and shapeless. But just as Nature sometimes endows a blind man with senses of hearing and smelling far beyond the average, so, in Pascentius's case, his sight seemed to feel and smell and hear!

"Go on, go on! on Masters!" his look seemed to say. "How full of sweet odours is devilish heresy on a warm spring night!" Nor was the Father's portentous sense of sight devoid of its own special imagination. He saw — and saw with the reverse of displeasure — Lowri and Rhys Gethin amusing themselves under the conspiring heavens while Master Simon played the armourer. He saw — and saw without any pain — that Welsh witch, the mother of Alice, stealing through the furze bushes and wading across the rivers, with Grey's men after her!

But Father Pascentius had other interests than the madness of human beings; and as he listened to what Broch was now saying, he thrust his plump hand — the hand of a born commentator on Angelic Doctors — into a little pouch under his habit, and brought out a tiny withered stalk. This he held towards the fire-light, examining it closely; and the curious thing was that if that small wisp of vegetation had possessed consciousness it would have noted that over the pair of black orbs regarding it so fixedly there crept a film of tenderness, a suffusion of feeling, as the man stared. But since the stalk of a little rock-plant divorced from its root can hardly be supposed to possess such an endowment, it seems as if no one would ever know how different was the gaze the man now fixed upon the realm of vegetation from the one with which he regarded the realm of humanity.

Had the Father been damned for "botanizing on his mother's grave" the only defence that could have reached his Creator would have had to come from the sub-humanity of entities so minute and negligible that even *the Philosopher,* as Saint Thomas calls Aristotle, could not include them in his *Summa.*

But Master Broch was now revealing to the startled Lollard things that no monk — not even such an inebriate of the madness of life as this one was — could endure to hear.

"Saint Thomas," he interjected in a voice of such commanding authority that both Owen and Rhisiart were disturbed in their thoughts, "Saint

Thomas, quoting Saint Augustine, says that when a man thinks his false opinions to be the teaching of godliness, and dares obstinately to dogmatize about matters of which he is ignorant, he becomes a stumbling-block to others.” Then seeing that Broch was silent and that the Lollard was beginning to smile, he added, for the benefit of the troopers who were listening and of the Hog of Chirk who had paused in his work, “If anyone here had read that account of a death by burning that came to our Prior he would keep guard over his wandering thoughts. None — not even our noble Prince — can be sure of the future.

“One thing is certain. Henry of Lancaster and his Archbishop, whatever else we may think of them, have resolved to stamp out heresy with pains unspeakable. Therefore it were wise — even while we support our brave Prince in defending our ancient liberties — to beware lest we confuse civil and national freedom with that dangerous revolt against the Holy Catholic Faith which not only imperils our immortal souls but gives an opportunity to cruel and ambitious tyrants—” He paused for a moment to gauge the effect of his words; but a stony and inscrutable mask had fallen upon Owen’s face, while on Rhisiart’s all he could detect was the familiar expression of an impatient young novice listening to a tedious sermon.

He began afresh, turning his eyes this time towards the troopers, who in their respect for the power of the Church were looking not a little disturbed. “Why should we,” he went on, “lend our ears to what our two greatest minds call the dogmatic obstinacy of wilful men? The moment, my brave warriors, you turn from that rightful liberty for which it is your glory to fight, and wander in these dangerous paths of heresy and schism, you strengthen the hands of our oppressors, you give them what they desire most, you—”

But Owen was on his feet. His mask had fallen. His whole form was trembling. He looked wildly round him; and it could even be seen that his fingers were clutching his sword. All the suppressed emotions which had just now flickered up over the Ruthin girl seemed towering into a fiery cloud of smoke and flame!

"Listen, monk!" he cried, "and listen all of you. When we have driven every Englishman in Wales back whence they came, who will decide what Pope we recognize and what rule we observe? We shall decide for ourselves! Wasn't there a Church in Wales before we bowed to Rome? Mend your words, good Father, mend your words, lest there be a Church in Wales again that acknowledges neither Rome nor Canterbury; no! nor Avignon either!"

He drew a long breath; and Rhisiart, casting a quick glance about them, saw that the soldiers were really disturbed and troubled. In the lad's practical Norman mind rose a feeling of angry contempt for all these doctrinal discussions. And here was the Prince himself taking a part in them! "It's Master Young he needs," he said to himself, "to stop this mystical jargon!" He felt more indignant than ever when he heard Owen suddenly gasp out: "Is there no power in Heaven or earth that can give me a clear sign?"

But at that moment everyone swung round, for a kind of a sign, though it could hardly be called a clear one, did present itself. A half-clothed figure was seen rushing down the women's staircase, flinging himself through the midst of the men, and laying a desperate hand upon the Prince's wrist. Rhisiart knew him at once as Mad Huw; but it was clear that Owen was bewildered at first about his identity from the fact that he wasn't wearing the grey habit of his order.

But “It’s the Friar! It’s the Friar!” rose from all sides; and there occurred an instinctive movement to cut off the theologian’s escape. His recent words had frightened them not a little; and they longed to see him confronted by another spiritual authority, even by one crazed in his wits.

Everybody but Rhisiart, who was so new to Wales, knew that there was no love lost between the Franciscans and Cistercians; and all of them, as they crowded round, expected a fierce spiritual duel.

For a moment the man was too agitated and too much out of breath to speak. But as he clung panting to Owen’s wrist it began to dawn on the Prince that this unusual night-attire covered the hairy chest and bony legs of the champion of King Richard.

“I’ve been telling them, Brother,” murmured Father Pascentius before the man could speak, how different civil liberty is from religious liberty. I’ve been telling them that it’s only playing into King Harry’s hands to defy the Archbishop. The Archbishop is the representative of Christ in these Islands; and though our Prince is liberating our bodies from an earthly King, no man can liberate our souls from their heavenly King.

“One minute, good Brother! I’m sure no follower of Saint Francis could have been silent under the monstrous heresies I’ve been listening to-night; heresies that even” — he glanced at Master Broch whose head was sunk on his breast— “suggest aspersions upon the eternal procession of the Son of God!

“One more word, Brother; for you are under vows of obedience like myself! God, as Saint Thomas says, would not be perfect unless He were alive; and if He is alive we must attribute procession to Him, a procession of word and of love. And this — one minute I beg you, Brother! — this is the procession of the Son from the Father, for He is God’s word, and of the Holy Ghost, for He is God’s love. Brother, Brother, let me finish! Saint

Thomas says that Athanasius most wonderfully declared at the Council of Nicea that what the Arians really implied was — since the Son and the Holy Ghost aren't consubstantial with him — that God is not a living and intelligent being, but dead and unintelligent!"

In his desire to stop the panting Friar from uttering a word till he himself had finished, Father Pascentius had pushed so close to Owen's side that it seemed to Rhisiart as if his Prince were being rumpled and tumbled by a pair of frantic jackdaws.

But in the monk's appreciation of the beauty of Athanasian rhetoric his voice was raised to such a pitch, as he uttered the passage about God being "dead and unintelligent," that Owen's nerves revolted.

The Prince straightened himself, shaking off, with an obvious physical repulsion, his too close contact with both the excited men of God.

But, as the Cistercian drew back, Mad Huw poured forth in a torrent of confused words the great news he had come to bring. "I knew it, Prince," he cried. And then he turned in rapturous triumph to the whole company. "I told him," he shouted, "I told him it was going to happen. I felt it. I knew it. And it has happened. Quick! Come and see, all of you, what God has done. It's in the sky over the sea! It's in the sky over Mona! The army of the angels of the Lord is marching against the Tyrant. Like the Assyrians from the walls of Sion the enemies of God's chosen will be scattered! They will be broken like potsherds. They will be driven from Wales like a pestilence. They will flee when no man pursueth. I see their carcasses on the slopes of the mountains. I see the smoke of their burning rising to heaven. Open those doors, Owen ap Griffith. Come forth, you men of war, with your spears and with your bows. Over the forests of Mona, over the waters of the salt sea, it has come! It has come from the west. It has come from between the north and the west; the fiery army of the angels of the Lord!

"Open those doors, Owen ap Griffith. Come out, come out from here, all you people! For the Lord has heard His servant. The power of the Lord has justified His people. The angels of the Lord are moving through the firmament. The host of the Lord is marching through the sky to succour the sheep of His flock. My hero, my saint, my rose of Britain, Richard my King, was the one who showed me. He woke me from my sleep. He led me by the hand. He showed me the bright host, moving, marching across the sky! He bade me call you forth, Owen ap Griffith. Come then, come quick, and delay not; for the Lord has sent his angels to help us; and the oppressors of his people are as the snows that melt before the spring!"

So intense was the Friar's conviction, so prophet-like were his words, that the whole company rose as one man. The Prince, the Lollard, Broch-o'-Meifod, the Hog of Chirk, the commentator upon Saint Thomas, even Owen's sluggish and sceptical eldest son, rushed towards the door.

Here Rhisiart, who was the first to lay his hand on the great bolts, was aware of familiar voices outside; and when the doors were opened, there, grouped together on the hill-side and staring wildly towards the north-west, were Meredith and Master Sparrow and Mistress Lowri and Rhys Gethin!

Rhisiart's first thought when he turned his head towards the quarter of the sky at which they were all gazing was of Catharine. "Is she awake?" he said to himself. And then he thought, "But her window looks to the East."

As for Owen he had become praeternaturally calm. All excitement had left him, all anger, all passion, all ambition; all motive for living. He looked quietly and coldly, without a pulse of emotion, at the astounding spectacle before him. So calm, so collected had he suddenly grown that he was even able to turn his head aside, after the first glance, and deliberately note the effect of this stellar phenomenon upon his companions. He noted one curious thing, a thing that came back to his mind several times later that night, the fact that Lowri no sooner caught sight of her husband than she left Rhys Gethin and moved quickly to his side. Not only so — and he couldn't be deceived, for Simon was quite close to him and the realistic Master Sparrow had seen fit to bring a great blazing torch into the miraculously-lit night — those ill-assorted partners had snatched blindly at each others' hands; and — so it seemed to him — the amateur armourer was making the woman's white face wince and twist with pain as he crushed her fingers in his hot fist.

But what a spectacle! A vast meteoric body of burning flame was actually — Mad Huw hadn't exaggerated its sublime appearance — shivering and quivering in a blue-black gulf of space just above the north-western horizon. And not only so, but it was trailing behind it a huge fiery train of lesser meteoric lights, lights that seemed to be bound together, like a swarm of fire-atoms, in some vast nebulous gonfalon of the awakened ether.

Owen turned quickly to observe Rhisiart's profile and to see how such a celestial apparition affected that hatchet-shaped projectile of Norman insouciance; and he smiled under his beard to mark, in the light of Master Sparrow's torch, the manner in which his young secretary sucked in his lips, narrowed his eyelids, and glared at the comet as if he were putting to it a sequence of searching interrogations.

But he left Rhisiart now and walked over to where the Lollard and Master Broch were standing together. "Well?" he murmured, "so the Friar was right, eh? But, between me and God, what do you two mean by stirring up that monk to such a tune? He's no fool and we don't want — as he says — to give King Hal every point in the game."

The Lollard was silent. He had long recognized that there was a vein of unscrupulous secularity, and even of shameless cynicism, in Owen; but in face of that celestial portent sent by Heaven to the man's support he felt it an inappropriate moment to contradict him.

But Broch-o'-Meifod was less conciliatory. "Shall I tell you something, Owen ap Griffith?" he said. "For I've got my belt on to-night, and I feel as if I could make even the Pretty listen!"

Owen scrutinized him closely in the darkness. He began to suspect that his formidable ally had been drinking too much. But he bade him say what he had to say. "But make it short, my Master; make it short."

"That great luminary," said Broch, "at which we're all gazing has nothing to do with you, nothing to do with the King of England. It has nothing to do with the Pope, or with the anti-Pope either; nor with what the good Father just now called the 'procession' of God. That trailing messenger has come from beyond all the Nine Heavens; yes, from outside both the *Primum Mobile* and the Empyrean. Do'ee know whence it is, Owen ap Griffith? From a new-born Spirit in unknown spheres it is pushing upon our old degenerate world; and foolish Broch, clumsy Broch, cowardly Broch, runaway Broch, is its voice to-night!"

In the darkness, for the precious oil from Bryn Saith Marchog had burnt out in Master Sparrow's torch and the Prince could see a whitish glimmer upon his friend's bald skull, the man's startling words sounded to his strung-up nerves like music played behind secure battlements to a man fighting for his life in a blood-stained mist. Yes, he must get off alone somewhere! When fiery dragons rush out of infinity to a person's aid, a person *wants to think.*

That great naked skull before him — didn't the man ever cover it? — seemed always able to think, and to think aloud too! And to-night, as that blaze in the west dimmed the stars and diminished the torches, the immobility of the face beneath the skull became monstrous. The face became a featureless part of the skull! It was the skull that had uttered those startling words about a dispensation that was to replace the Christian one. Broch spoke to-night like the corpse-god of those old mound-people, like the Head of Bran when it made years seem like seconds to those under its spell.

"I must get away by myself; get away by myself!" He remembered how he had uttered those words thirty years ago when he and his brother had been welcomed as boys by his mother's princely family in South Wales.

He did begin moving away from Broch and Master Brut; but he hadn't gone far before he was brought to a standstill by the appearance of his old minstrel Griffith, whose heavy harp his own son Griffith was carrying behind the aged poet.

Owen's first feeling on encountering these two figures was that they might well have been strolling actors in some English morality play entitled *Passionate Age and Dispassionate Youth.* But he was touched, in spite of his troubled thoughts, by his eldest son's consideration for the old man. He did catch himself thinking, "But the Arglwyddes must have sent him!" But he dismissed that thought as ungenerous and unworthy.

"He's a kind fellow at bottom, and a brave one — but I shall never understand him as I do Meredith."

Greeting the old and the young Griffith with almost effusive gratitude Owen despatched a trooper to bring a stool from the hall for the Bard. "And a torch, too!" he added, not realising that a harpist of Griffith's experience could feel those precious strings in pitch-black darkness.

"What do you think of this comet, lad?" he enquired of his son, using the profane word deliberately, though he saw the old Bard wince at the sacrilege.

"Do you care what I think, sir?" the man replied at once, grave and sad.

But Owen refused to be abashed. “Tell me, boy! On your allegiance tell me!”

“I think,” said Griffith slowly, “that it’s no more wondrous than fire, and no more miraculous than an ordinary sunset. I think a time will come when astronomers will predict these things.”

“But they do, Griffith! They *have!”*

The man was silent.

“Haven’t they, Griffith?”

“Astrologers have, my Prince, not astronomers!”

Owen was glad to welcome the arrival of the stool and the torch. Griffith was so fond of tripping him up like that. But hadn’t astrologers always been the best astronomers?

Then the old Bard began to play and to improvise as he played. But a twinge of new vexation seized upon Owen as he listened. God in Heaven! if the man wasn’t actually improvising in the tricky modern style! That was a thing he’d never done before. And it was too much. The troopers had begun to crowd round them. On those gleaming harp-strings the dragon in the sky seemed laying the flickering point of its prophetic tongue.

The clue to everything might have come to-night; the secret of his race’s past, the mystery of Mathrafal, the sobbing cry full of a despair that wasn’t quite the despair of the dirge for Cyndylan — all these quivered on the verge of a new meaning between that light in the sky and those flickering strings! His own dim craving for something beyond battle and blood, and hearths made desolate — this might have been its voice, its solution!

But the Bard must needs let it all go; must needs balance his rhythms in this new tricky way and fill them with pious allusions to the star at the birth of Christ and the star at the birth of Uther Pendragon! He could have wept at a chance so lost. Huge, mystical, antique words, from the Songs of

Aneirin in that sacred book of his, rolled like bruised and baffled thunder at the back of his mind. Yes, it was too much. He must get away by himself. Craftily he pretended to be overcome by emotion. He *was* overcome by emotion, but not by this damned modern cleverness. But with his hands clapped to his face and his head bowed he made his way out of the press. Oh, how well he knew the triumphant hopes which that fiery creature — it really did resemble a dragon now, all burning head and burning tail — would stir up from one end of Wales to the other, and the terror it would rouse among the simple English!

Why then did it only make him sad, him for whom all men would suppose that its beauty and its terror had drawn earth-ward out of the angelic spheres?

"It must be," he thought, "that at the bottom of my heart I was hugging a hope that some way of peace would be found, even at the last, between Harry and me. But if the very firmament is going to breed Pendragons, war to the end it is; war and a plunge through a world on fire into utter darkness!"

And then, still aware, behind everything else, of a smouldering envy of his friend Broch's detachment, he began to feel a longing for Rhisiait's narrow face.

"Where is the lad?" he thought. He turned from the sky-dragon and began moving among his excited followers, looking for his squire. Nobody dared to speak to him, hardly to approach him. With that symbol of his destiny before their eyes he had become a consecrated figure — unearthly, hardly human. "He can't have gone back into the hall," he said to himself. "He must have wandered up the hill to get a better view."

He moved further into the darkness, following the upward slope of the ground where the older portion of this rambling mountain-fortress lifted its confused bulk to the eastern quarter of the sky. Suddenly he saw a light, not the light of a torch, but the dusky reddish flame of a small fire of dead ferns and twigs.

Four human figures were bending over this fire, a man of dwarfish but powerful stature and three young boys, one of whom was laboriously writing something on a fragment of parchment with a burnt stick.

Owen instantly dropped the prince and became in a second a hunted outlaw, a native of caves and forests! He became younger, too. A delicious sense of adventure, full of vague memories of old boyish escapades with his brother Tudor took possession of him. Clapping his hand to his sword and pressing it against his side, so that no metallic clink or jingle should betray his presence, he set himself to crawl forward on hands and knees towards the man, the three boys, and the fire.

No old mound-dweller could have squirmed on his belly through the primeval forest more silently! It is doubtful whether any other crowned prince in that civilized age could have played the cave-man as he did then. And the odd thing was that he felt happier and more himself as he did it than he had felt for years. Morg ferch Lug would have been surprised if she'd seen that forked beard thrusting itself between the dead stalks of the bracken! Had her pure Brython then, even he, a drop of the blood of the "older people"?

He was soon near enough to hear and see everything. He was so close to them that by stretching out his sword-arm he could have touched with the weapon's point the red flames of their small fire.

He knew now who the dwarfish man was — none other than David Gam! And it was clear to him that the fellow was terrorizing the boys; and he knew them, too. His own little page, Elphin, the prettiest child who'd ever served him, was the one whom Gam was compelling — the brute had reduced them all to a state of paralysed terror — to scrawl those letters with the burnt stick. The others — and he knew their names too — were Rawlff and Iago from Dinas Bran.

"You're safe from me to-night," he thought, contemplating his enemy. "I'm not going to shed blood to-night." But he set himself to listen.

"Have you finished, you devil's imp?" growled the little monster, and snatching the fragment of parchment from the boy he surveyed the black scrawls that covered it.

"What does it say? Read it, you whimpering baby, or I'll—"

And Elphin read in a high-pitched tremulous voice, like the voice of a helpless girl, the following ungentle words:

To Owen ap Griffith Fychan:

Nothing in heaven or earth will save you from David's knife.

It is in every bush, in every tree, in every room, in every closet. If I have to sharpen it for twenty years it'll be between your ribs. *Live therefore in fear.*

From one who has never missed his mark.

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the low sobs of Elphin. Then the man's voice was raised again. "What will happen to you if he doesn't get what you've written? Stop that noise, and say the words!"

In a low gasping voice the wretched Elphin repeated his lesson. "If...Owen...doesn't...get...what...I've...written... my...my..."

"Go on!" growled David Gam.

"My...my tongue will be cut out!"

"Well, do it then!" said the man fiercely, "and do it at once. If it weren't for that thing in the sky he'd have had it to-night: But no matter — he'll have it; and so will you — and so will all of you, if you don't do what I've said!"

Thus speaking he jumped to his feet, stamped out the fire, and was gone.

It was lucky for him that he departed up the slope instead of down, for had he actually stumbled upon Owen it is doubtful if the latter's resolution could have been kept. But as it was, Owen waited motionless for a minute or two, while the three boys, too frightened to move, murmured to each other in whispers.

Then, still on hands and knees, he slid away, keeping his fingers tight round the sheath of his sword. But once arrived at the southeastern angle of the dark mass of buildings he leaped to his feet. There was the fiery apparition still flaming in the quarter of the sky under which lay the Isle of Môn or Anglesea; and there were the dusky figures of his followers, still staring and wondering in scattered groups, while a hoarse susurration of low-voiced excitement rose up towards the comet-dimmed stars.

Humming audibly and casually a stave of that sorrowful dirge about the ruin of Pengwern he strolled back to where the pages were huddled.

Their aggressor hadn't succeeded in altogether quenching that small fire, and as its flames shot up again he could see by their helpless passivity, though they rose to their feet at his approach, how shaken the boys were.

"It's I, your Prince," he said in his calmest tone. "Something's frightened you children. Come tell me what's the matter. I'd forgive you, whatever it is! Only tell me everything."

They stood in a pitiful row before him with the revived flames between him and them; but he walked round the fire and laid his hand on the shoulder of the agitated Elphin.

"He rushed out on us," said Rawlff.

"We were up there," said Iago, pointing to a rocky crag above them where patches of snow still showed white in the starlight. Elphin, who still clutched the parchment, was too upset to utter a word.

“Please, sir, he made Elphin write a letter to you,” said Rawlff.

‘“Twas a burnt stick, weren’t it, Elphin, what he made you write with?” threw in Iago; and he nudged the effeminate boy’s ribs on the side opposite from Owen.

“Oh yes! I thought you were holding something, child,” Owen broke in, in his most matter-of-fact voice. “Here! let’s see it!” And taking the scrap of vellum, upon which Gam had made his vow, from Elphin’s numb fingers, he read it aloud as lightly as if he were engaged in a game of forfeits with the three boys.

“Well!” he said when he’d done, “I don’t think I’m destined to live in fear of that little red man.”

“Though his arms, sir, are like bars of Spanish steel,” threw in the diplomatic Rawlff, evidently on the way to recover his usual poise.

“Shall I say our Dinas Bran motto to Elphin, sir?” added Iago in a superior tone.

A little piqued by the fact that Dinas Bran seemed carrying things off with more of an air than Glyndyfrdwy, the Prince forgot himself so far as to remind these alien refugees that upon neither of them had the intruder laid a finger.

Elphin brightened up at this, while the bolder ones stared at each other in dismay. What a magician the chief was. He knew everything.

“He pinched me cruel, sir,” murmured Elphin. “Like hot irons his fingers were!”

But this was the first time the audacious Rawlff had ever been privileged to talk face to face with their leader. Obscure thoughts about becoming a belted knight swept through his ambitious brain, while like other youthful courtiers he suspected that the shortest path to distinction lay through flattering the great..

“I suppose, sir,” he said, with his brightest and most engaging air, *“you* aren’t afraid of the fire-dragon in the sky?”

“I tell you what I am afraid of,” said Owen curtly, “and that is that three boys I know will get into trouble with Madoc if they don’t hurry back into the hall. Take care of Elphin, you two,” he added, “and let him show that bruise to Nurse if she’s not asleep.”

But as the pages somewhat reluctantly proceeded to obey him, he patted Elphin on the head. “Your Prince is a wizard, my boy. Remember that! He sees everyone you talk to and hears everything you say. But I can tell you this, child, between me and God: if you repeat your Angelus properly every night no little red man will ever touch you again!”

They went off; and Owen, standing where they’d left him, watching the flames of the bonfire, felt a sudden weariness of the whole game of life. Struggling against it, however, he threw the piece of parchment into the fire and let his eyes wander along the ancient walls of the castellated building above his head.

“I wonder,” he thought, “if Catharine has seen the comet?” With his daughter in his mind he advanced a furlong or so up the rocky slope, still keeping an eye on the dark mass of buildings.

“This must be about where her chamber is,” he said to himself. He stood still, letting his gaze wander over the half-ruined ramparts and broken buttresses of this most ancient part of the fortress.

And then he clapped his hand to his sword; while against all his self-control a trembling fury of rage tugged at his vitals.

For he saw at the same moment two things: things in an unmistakeable and devastating relation to each other. And what neither the blazing comet nor the curse of Gam could do these two things did. They made him pray.

And he prayed as passionately as he had recommended Elphin to pray if he wished to be saved from dwarfs with fingers like Spanish steel.

“Mary, Joseph! Mary, Joseph! Mary, Joseph!”, he gasped in his beard, and thus he got the strength to turn sharply on his heel and stride back the way he had come.

He had seen a candle burning in a narrow arrow-slit high up in the dark wall; and he had seen the well-known figure of Rhisiart, gazing up at it, as if it were something more miraculous than any comet.

XIV. LOVE AND SHAME

THE MATERIAL DISAPPEARANCE of the comet by the end of March could hardly be called a complete departure. Unusual magnetic disturbances among the members of that Snowdonian court seemed to indicate that though the thing's visible presence had passed out of sight upon its spheric voyage, it had not altogether gone. Something of itself remained, a weight upon the atmosphere, a pressure upon human souls, a quickening of human pulses, queer criss-cross currents in the psychic air.

Coincident with an early and an exceptionally warm spring, after the cruel winter, there was a curious stir in that high retreat, that retreat which was at once a castle, a palace, an assembly-hall, and a camp.

And what made this stir in people's minds, this growing tension in their powers of will, a rather exceptional phenomenon, was the fact — and it is here that a meticulous observer might be forgiven if he detected the invisible wash of that meteoric vessel's wake — that the tension of purpose referred to divided the men from the women.

The pleasant relaxation brought by the balmy spring-airs, when that early April set in, in place of segregating the company into mutually attracted couples, had the surprising effect of drawing together most of the women into one isolated gathering; and most of the men into another.

What the patient Arglwyddes felt in her heart when the whole feminine group — all except Tegolin, who with Brother Huw seldom left her side — fell into the habit of congregating, immediately the afternoon meal was over, in the agreeable little apartment facing the south which had been made the bed-chamber of Mistress Lowri and her husband, nobody knew, except possibly Owen himself.

The impetuous Catharine, who had grown attached to Tegolin, scrupled not to express to the red-haired maid her suspicions of Mistress Lowri. “Your mother hates mine!” she would declare, as in the now frequent absences of Alice of Ruthin the two young people combed each other’s hair in Catharine’s turret-room, “and though it’s wrong to say it to you, I hate *her!”*

But Tegolin always sturdily maintained that these gatherings in the south chamber had nothing to do with her mother’s attitude to the Arglwyddes. “I think,” she would reply, “that she is lacking in proper respect; but in this case I don’t believe she’s responsible.”

“Who is responsible, then? For except for you and me and Myfanwy and Gwen, mother’s left alone with her weaving day after day!” But it was generally at this point the elder girl changed the conversation.

A week of the loveliest April weather had indeed passed over them before Tegolin was driven to defend her parent with evidence and circumstance and proof against her friend’s suspicions.

“I’ve heard,” she told Catharine one late afternoon as they stood by the latter’s twelfth-century window, surveying the sloping hill-side with its patches of freshly-sprouting bracken-fronds, “I’ve heard that it’s Alice’s mother they gather to listen to.”

“And she a witch?” cried Owen’s daughter, opening her eyes wide.

“Sit down, Catrin, and listen to me,” said the Maid of Edeyrnion.

And pushing back the excited young girl upon the edge of the couch-bed she lifted her hands to her own hair and proceeded to coil her already-braided locks carefully round her head. “We have no right,” she continued gravely, “to call Mistress Dilys a witch. She’s a fortune-teller, but so was my granny; and from what Luned says she and my mother have devised a most important plot, a plot upon which all your father's success may depend. Now listen to me, Catrin dearest," and she took her seat on the couch by the younger girl's side and tenderly stroked her flaxen hair, while she fixed her gaze on the other's eyes, which in their nervous excitement changed colour as often as Owen's did.

"This is between you and me and the Blessed Saints, dearest; and you mustn't breathe a word of it to the Arglwyddes, or to anyone else. Do you understand? Swear to me you won't."

Owen's daughter solemnly crossed herself and gave the required promise. The breath of that April afternoon crept in through the unglazed window and lightly stirred the listener's fair hair. The misty sun-shafts of the declining day had long since moved away to the westward; but their ruddy light, falling in a warm rich diffusion on the hill-side opposite, was countered, as that narrow window received its reflection, by a cavernous and mossy greenness, as if belonging to the interior of a cave, which hung about the heavily-pictured arras and about a clumsy wooden image of Saint Clare.

This austere piece of carving, which was of life-size, had followed the girl from her nursery at Sycharth to her bower at Glyndyfrdwy; and it now stared forth with its cold virginal eyes towards the yet colder peaks of Snowdon. The arras behind the wooden Saint Clare had also come from Sycharth, and as it caught a sudden glimmer from the fire, which all the year round the old Nurse had kept alight in that turret-room, its cave-like chilliness took on a motion of faint life. It became indeed the swaying branches of a green forest out of whose recesses the semblance of the antlers of a horned stag came forth.

That this beast was of no common lineage was proved by the fact that some faraway ancestress of Catharine had woven a rude cross between its antlers.

"You haven't forgotten," Tegolin was saying now, "how thrilled we all were when your father's men found Mistress Dilys half-dead in those Dyffryn woods, and brought her up here?"

"And you made Alice leave you," Catharine interjected, "though she didn't want to, and look after her mother."

Tegolin nodded. "Well, my precious, you know how we all love to hear our fortunes told, and poor mother" — Tegolin always spoke of the formidable Lowri since her return to her husband in this pitying tone— "has a passion for that sort of thing. But by degrees — I don't know who thought of it first, all of them together I suppose, but it's Luned who's told me — they worked out the most daring plot you ever heard, a plot to take both Grey and his son — the one who loves Alice." Catharine's lips opened so wide and her eyes grew so big that the red-haired girl kissed her anxiously; but after that, with one of her hands held tight in her own, she went on quickly.

"It's got quite far now, this plot of theirs; but they're waiting to tell your father till it's all absolutely ready. Mistress Dilys has lots of friends of her murdered husband — Englishmen they are, but men who hate Grey — and she's got an Irishman too who's the — what do they call it? — the messenger between them, and Luned told me last night that their plot is to tell Grey how he can surprise your father when he's raiding the Vale of Clwyd; but instead of your father being taken — you see, my precious? — it'll be Grey and his son who'll be taken! Isn't that a good plot? I think it's the best I ever heard of!" And Tegolin gave a queer little laugh.

Not for nothing was Catharine Owen's daughter. In some things she was hopelessly absent-minded, indeed her brother Griffith often called her stupid; but where nervous emotions were concerned she was morbidly quick-witted. She rose to her feet now, so that it was her turn to contemplate her companion from a superior height.

"Tegolin ferch Lowri," she began gravely. "I'm glad you've told me this, and of course I'll keep my vow; but you're holding back something. You're not happy about this plot, and you must trust me and tell me why."

The Maid of Edeyrnion stretched out her hand, and possessing herself of some silver-headed bodkins, which had been removed when her hair was combed, thoughtfully thrust them into her braided locks. With her arms raised to her head, her bosom looked as breathing-warm in that April air as that of the huntress Artemis. Very different did it look from the wooden infantile angles of the saintly form behind her!

But Catharine could see she was strongly moved; and with a quick glance, not at Saint Clare but at that horned head in the tapestry which she could remember from her cradle, she pleaded with her again.

"Aren't we friends enough," she said, "for you to tell me everything that's in your mind? I know Nurse treats me, and Mother too as if I was a child, but I'm not a child. I'm a grown-up girl, Tegolin ferch *Rheinalt."*

Down came the elder girl's hands at this, and Catharine was quite satisfied with the startled look she received, but she went on firmly.

"No, I'm grown-up, Tegolin dear. I think of a lot of things. I think, for instance, how odd it is that we two should be such friends, when we're both fond of the same person."

A rose-petal flush mounted up from the Maid's soft neck till it suffused both her cheeks. She had that particular kind of ivory-white skin that so often accompanies red hair; and it was in vain she covered her throat with one hand and smoothed out the creases from Catharine's pillow with the other.

"Brother Huw—" she began; but Owen's grown-up daughter looked so tall and dominant that she couldn't help meeting her eyes, eyes that kept changing in colour like the shifting lights in a rock-pool.

"No, not your Friar, Tegolin. I know about that too though it's been different with me. It's Rhisiart ab Owen I'm thinking of."

Tegolin escaped the eyes above her for a moment by bowing her head over her hands, which were now clasped tight in her lap. They were large, strong, almost boyish hands, but she pressed them together in no boyish way. She longed to press them against her ears, against her heart.

But the clear young voice above her went on remorselessly. "You're older, you're better than I am, Tegolin, and you're cleverer too; but when anyone grows up thinking only of one thing, they see a great deal, they see everything!"

Slowly and calmly, though not without an interior struggle, the Maid lifted her head; and the two young people stared gravely at each other, not exchanging thoughts, but each using the other's eyes as an open gate to a long perspective of troubled speculation.

"Yes, that's what's so wonderful," Catharine murmured at last, "that we should stay friends in spite of him; and we shall, shan't we?"

"Does anyone else think," the Maid couldn't help enquiring of this terrifying young oracle, "what you think about — all this?"

"No, no, no! Not a soul; except Father of course, and he doesn't count."

The Maid sighed, aware of a strange rush of conflicting feelings, one of which was a pang of blind prophetic pity. "Why doesn't he count?"

"Because, while he knows everything," cried the other eagerly, "he never interferes. If I were to go to him this very night and say, 'I want to marry

Rhisiart,' he wouldn't scold or get angry; and if I knew we didn't have his blessing, I should know too we'd never have his curse!"

Once more the Maid of Edeyrnion sighed, and this time more heavily still. As she looked into those sea-coloured reckless eyes she got no comfort, no reassurance, no premonition of peace or happiness for any of them — least of all for Rhisiart.

Catharine was the first to remove her gaze; for the steady direction of her friend's look, now that it was touched with sadness rather than with confusion, made her uneasy.

Was there more between Tegolin and Rhisiart than she had realized? Was the boy acting like an unscrupulous profligate, and playing with both their hearts? The daughter of Owen shook out the heavy folds of her brocaded gown, and catching them up with a sweep of her bare arm began crossing and recrossing the little room; a proceeding which was more ominous to Tegolin than anything else she could have done.

"He'd better not play with me!" the child was saying to herself, while her teeth pressed down upon her lower lip and her forehead grew distorted.

The only flaw to Catharine's beauty was the scantiness of her fair eyebrows; and this defect increased the youthful ferocity of the scowl she now assumed, as, forgetting Tegolin's presence altogether, she visualized an exposed and convicted Rhisiart cringing and shivering before the lash of her tongue.

By degrees, as the reflection of the sunset on the eastern slopes faded, Catharine's imaginary vengeance faded too; and pausing in her march, she relaxed her grasp of her heavy gown and, letting it fall over her shoes, gave it a few quiet kicks from inside to smoothe it out and keep it in order.

Then with a quick glance at Tegolin as the girl sat pondering, elbows on knees and chin on knuckles, she sank to the floor at her feet, and with extended arms, and Catharine's long arms always suggested the shape of her body, felt for her friend's fingers.

"Won't you tell me, now we understand each other, and don't hate each other as we might, considering" — all this was gasped out in one quick breath— "why you don't like this plot of Alice's mother and your mother to take Grey prisoner. It sounds to me is if it were a very good plot and couldn't fail; and I'm sure the men'll be delighted with it."

"Get up from the floor then. It's cold down there. And put some wood on the fire. And sit quietly by me here."

Catharine patiently obeyed her in all these details. "What a noise those crows are making," she said, as she sank down by the elder girl's side. "I expect they're young ones."

"What's troubling me is this," said Tegolin, disregarding the crows, and disregarding too, for neither of them could see it, the complete disappearance — into a moss-green enchanted forest that extended through the wall, through the fortress, through the mountain passes, through Conway and Carnarvon and Aber-Menai and all the Isle of Mona — the horned beast with the cross between its antlers. Yes, deep into this mystic forest of Catharine's first imaginings did that horned head recede. It receded where Merlin long ago receded. It receded where the spirit of the old Iolo receded; and where the figure of a youthful Rhisiart, taller than human, braver than human, more single-hearted than human, was forever receding.

"What's troubling me is this," said Tegolin. "We both have known well enough, though we haven't talked about it, that while the women have been plotting in my mother's room, the men have been plotting in the great hall. I expect mother knows what they're plotting *through that man."*

Catharine tightened her grasp upon the strong, cool fingers of her friend, so that the latter should be aware with what grown-up perception this reluctance to mention the Hog of Chirk was understood.

"But how do *you* know about it, Tegolin dear?

The Maid hesitated, and there was once more the danger of her tell-tale complexion indicating the fact that they were on dangerous ground. On no point in the world are deep-natured people more touchy than with regard to their relations with the man or with the woman who until now has been their ideal, when the irrepressible compass-needle of their heart shows that a different constellation is moving towards the north.

"The Friar goes in and out of the hall," she murmured gently, "and though on the subject of poor King Richard his mind does sometimes wander, in everything else he is wise. I've never known a wiser man!"

Catharine hastened to agree with this judgment. And indeed she did most heartily agree; for Mad Huw had endeared himself by purity and courtesy to every woman in that little court.

"Go on," she said, after a sad pause between them, in which the spring air, as it breathed upon their tense faces, seemed to both of them like the breath of destiny.

"Well, it appears that some of the men who have lately brought their ponies and spears to your father's allegiance say that in the mountains of Maelienydd to the north-east of Radnor, or Maesyfed as we call it, there's a strong, though secret movement in our favour; a movement that would give us, if a few good leaders went down there, the best chance we've had yet for striking a real blow at the cruel King."

Catharine pulled her hand away and jumped to her feet. "But this is grand news!" she cried. "Why can't I rush to Father's room now, and tell him what a good idea this is!"

Tegolin looked so horror-struck that the eager girl grew grave at once, and remembered her vow. But she didn't sit down. A violent restlessness seized her. She went to the fire and piled it up with wood, till the whole little chamber glowed in the twilight and her own impatient shadow — distorted so much that it actually did look like that Queen on his chessboard to which the Prince had compared her — bowed mockingly before the immovable Saint Clare and raced up and down the verge of that mystic forest.

But Catharine was the last person in the world to take any interest in the antics of a shadow, even if such a shadow possessed the power of locomotion without the aid of fins or wings or arms or legs. She turned to her motionless visitor who had bent forward again, her chin propped once more against the knuckles of her boyish hands.

"I can't understand you, Tegolin," she said earnestly. "No, I can't! Here are two perfect plots, either of which would help our cause better than anything yet thought of in that 'magician's room,' and instead of being thrilled by such news you're sad about it, and—"

But she clapped her hands to her mouth in the old dramatic gesture of catching oneself in some outrageous lapse. "Is it because *he* is with my father in that room," she brought out, "and you think their plans will be disturbed by this Ruthin idea, or this Maelienydd idea?"

Tegolin rose to her feet at this, a frank smile on her full lips. "It's you who're the magician, Catrin, not the Prince! On my life, child, you must be a thought-reader, like Mistress Dilys. But if I was thinking just what you said, it isn't only that. Oh, I don't know. It's so hard to explain." She stretched herself and yawned, covering her mouth with one hand while she extended the other into the air with her fingers clenched.

"I think it's like this," she said, after a second's concentrated thought. "I feel odd and queer with these consultations going on and they not hearing anything about them. How do those Maelienydd men know, how do these

Ruthin women know what your father and Rhisiart ab Owen have been planning for the cause, now that the warm weather's come? And Broch-o'-Meifod and Master Brut; they're in the Prince's counsels too; and I can't believe that thinkers and scholars like them aren't better advisers to your father than my poor mother and Mistress Dilys and Rhys Gethin and *that man!* And another thing too my dear. I know your father comes up every day to your mother's room and turns us all out while they talk. Well! don't you think your father's and mother's brains together are worth more than a conclave of ladies round a fortune-teller, or a group of troopers drinking mead while *that man* polishes their spears?"

Catharine looked at her sharply. They were facing each other now in the fading light of the window and the growing light of the fire. "Isn't a woman's instinct," Owen's daughter protested, "a better guide than a man's reason? And when women are gathered together—"

"The devil enters into them! No, I don't quite mean that, Catrin; though I've heard the Friar say it. But — oh, I can't explain the feeling I have; perhaps it's Mistress Dilys and my poor mother — but of the two plots I'd sooner trust the other one, for all the drinking, and *that man!"*

"Who's the Sheriff of Maesyfed?" asked Catharine, feeling a delicious thrill of excitement to be discussing affairs of state, like the daughter of a real ruler.

Tegolin frowned as she pondered. "The Friar did say his name. I'll tell you in a minute! He's a famous English Bard, the Friar said."

"Does he compose to the harp like old Griffith?"

Tegolin didn't smile at her friend's simplicity. She was in no smiling mood; but she hastened to assure her that in England poets only wrote down in books what they made up. "I heard Iolo tell about it once. They write for scholars and gentlemen over there. They don't play the harp for the common people. Oh, I remember the name now — Thomas Clanvow — and Iolo said he wrote about cuckoos and nightingales!”

“He can’t be much of a Sheriff,” commented the younger girl. “Rhys Gethin would soon settle him!”

But there fell a silence between them then; while the air through the window, blowing now, as darkness began to descend, with a gathering force, made the flames of the fire flicker, and caused a faint ripple, more like a movement upon deep water than the stir of leaves, to run shivering over the green forest on the wall.

Catharine broke the silence, but something about that sudden stir in the dim world of her childhood’s imaginings made her speak in a low grave voice.

“Who is the Lord of those parts where Maelienydd is?”

Instead of replying, Tegolin moved to an alcove in the room overhung with embroidered curtains and returned with a cloak which she wrapped tenderly round the other’s shoulders.

“Who is the Lord—” the young girl repeated, still in the same low voice, and quite oblivious of the fact that this rising gust might be chilling her friend too.

“Mortimer,” said Tegolin.

“Mortimer,” repeated Catharine.

There was another silence between them, during which the Maid of Edeyrnion went to the window and drew a heavy piece of tapestry across it. As she did so she felt as if she were shutting out the word “Mortimer” along with the night-wind.

“The Earl of March,” she said more cheerfully when this was done, “is only a little boy. But he has a claim to the throne; so Bolingbroke keeps him with his own children. Some say the Mortimers are as restless as the Percies under this cruel tyrant. If that's true I don't know whether 'twould be good policy or bad policy to attack their domain. Hotspur himself's in Denbigh now; and I know your father was careful to leave Denbigh alone when he raided the Vale of Clwyd. So it may be he won't hear of attacking Maelienydd."

She paused for a moment, watching the wind make that little piece of tapestry flap like a diminutive sail. "It's cold up here, Catrin," she said, "let's sit close to the fire."

The two girls began pulling along the floor a cushioned bench and settling it in front of the blaze; but the rising wind, causing their little curtain to bulge inwards, whirled a cloud of smoke into their faces.

"It's always like that," cried Catharine impatiently, pulling back her friend. "I just go to bed when it begins. Let's go down to Mother. She's still got some of that Turkish sweetmeat — unless Sibli's eaten it. Are there any others except the little Earl?"

"I believe there's an uncle," said Tegolin indifferently, "who's another Edmund," and she concluded with a yawn.

"Edmund who?" murmured Catharine peevishly, while with a shiver she clung to her friend, flinging a portion of her mantle over Tegolin.

"Mortimer," said the other. "And I expect he'll be more of a danger to us than the nightingale man."

"Lord Edmund?" whispered the child, still shivering.

"Lord, Count, Sir — I don't know! Plain 'Sir,' I expect. Catrin, I believe you've taken cold! Where's that iron guard? We oughtn't to leave the fire like this. Why did you put on so much?"

She found the protection required, and leaving that gusty and smoky turret, the two girls descended the stairs together. They were not destined, however, to reach the Arglwyddes' room as quickly as they hoped. They had to cross the big hall to reach it and ascend a different flight of stairs, but what they found in the hall completely paralysed all further intention.

There was an awestruck group of men, some holding torches, others pushing hastily forward between the torch-bearers, and then either drawing back in superstitious fear, or standing petrified and staring. The appearance of the two young women produced no little agitation on the outskirts of the group; though those in front were too awestruck to notice them.

"They've sent for the Prince," explained the officious Rawlff. "It's the Old Crow from Dinas Bran."

But the nervous Elphin, white and trembling, and too panic-stricken to realize what he did, actually clutched at Catharine's mantle. "Don't go near!" he whimpered. "They daren't touch him. He's got a sword through him. He's all blood!"

"Catharine!" And Owen himself, with Rhisiart behind him, was at their side. "Away with you, child! Away with you! How could—" and he turned angrily to reproach Tegolin; but the Maid had already pushed herself between the torch-bearers. "Take her to her mother, boy!" And leaving his daughter with his squire, he followed the Maid into the centre of the group.

If Catharine hadn't been already unnerved by the mortmain of that ominous wind in her green forest, it is doubtful whether she would have yielded to Rhisiart's pressure. But her flesh was weaker than her spirit, and she let him carry her, "he willing and she unwilling," as Homer would say, up the stairs to the Arglwyddes' chamber.

For a moment the Prince himself felt his stomach turn sick at what he saw. Face upwards on the ground with a trickle of blood oozing from his back and forming a little pool at some distance from him, for the floor was uneven, lay the Seneschal of Dinas Bran. His face beneath the torch-light was of a death-pallor but his eyes were wide open and Owen could see he knew him at once. Indeed his lips murmured his name. But what was so ghastly about it, what was causing even those indurated warriors to feel sick as they gazed, was the fact that the man's hind-quarters were actually transfixed by that monstrous relic of the Bronze Age which he had insisted on preserving as the sword of Eliseg.

The Prince saw at once that this abominable weapon had been deliberately thrust through the old gentleman's rump; and as he lay there, not mortally wounded but dying from pain and shame, his thin form in its grey clothes made with the sword that pierced him the shocking image of a bleeding cross.

Over him knelt the figures of Father Pascentius and Broch-o'-Meifod, while the Maid, crouching on the ground, had succeeded in clasping her hands beneath his head.

Owen knelt down too bending low over the dying man; and no sooner had he done so than the old gentleman in a very low but perfectly clear voice told him all that had happened. It seemed a comfort to him to talk: indeed it had always been a comfort to him to talk; but what troubled all his listeners now was that in every interval of his entirely coherent narrative his face took on an expression of unredeemed despair. It was like a mask speaking, speaking firmly and clearly; but at each moment when the voice paused the mask faded, and the image of a human soul damned by shame substituted itself for that voluble medium.

"I wanted to — make peace — make a lasting peace, Owen ap Griffith," he said, "and I talked to the Constable and I found that he also wanted peace between the two races. And so I took the sword of Eliseg out of its chest, for I durst not leave it, and I rode to Denbigh to talk to Hotspur. And I found that Hotspur also wanted peace between our races. So I rode on, carrying the sword. I had no other arms, and I had no one with me, but I rode on to come to you; for I wanted to talk to you about peace between the two races. I got as far as the foot of the mountains. My horse was strong and my heart was strong. But his spies must have told Lord Grey" — here something like a faint smile flickered for a second across the mask under which he covered the despair of his shame— "and the young Lord, he whose wits are turned, followed me with a band. They knew the mountains better than I and they waited till I was near you — your watchmen didn't see them — and then —"

A terrible ruffling of the mask of his despair took place at this point, like the ruffling by a crisscross wind of the surface of a dark stream. But he fixed his eyes on Owen's eyes, which were now close to his own, and, after a few convulsive spasms of pain which hardly seemed to reach his consciousness, he went on steadily. "He's out of his wits, the young Lord, from love or witchcraft, and 'twas he alone who thought of what to do. There was little light left, but enough for his purpose, enough to serve, enough to make the name of Adda ap Leurig a jest in men's mouths forever. His men wouldn't do it at first, but he threatened them with his father, and they — did it — at last."

Tegolin's hands were already pressed into her ears; while the Lollard, his eyes tight shut was muttering, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus."

Broch-o'-Meifod, his head wagging from side to side like the pendulum of a clock, had completely lost all human expression. Into the sockets of his lost eyeballs there had descended from the peaks of Snowdon the endurance of primordial matter, matter that had not stirred in its vigil since the last Ice Age.

But Owen, his thoughts racing through his skull like the men described by Aneirin who rode drunk to Cattraeth, allowed his soul to exteriorize itself, till it crouched like a small white bird upon the handle of the bronze sword, where it surveyed, with an unlidded stare, the blood and the excrement.

“They ran the sword sideways,” went on that supine mask, “so that — it should — it should only pierce the flesh — and then they left me alone — and went away. And I walked like that — till your people found me.”

“Yes he did!” interposed Rawlff, “for I saw him! He walked with the sword through his backside. He looked like—”

“Be quiet, boy!” cried the Prince fiercely. But the old man seemed glad to have this corroboration of his words. “I did — didn’t I, lad?” he repeated. “I walked — a long way — putting all — my life — to shame!” He paused and the men about him, and that one girl whose hands were tending him, drew the long relieved sigh that human beings draw when they know the worst.

But the worst was yet to be spoken as far as the proud old antiquary of Dinas Bran was concerned. “I couldn’t hold back,” he muttered in a low terrible voice. *“And my dirt’s on the sword of Eliseg.”*

This said, his mask fell away, and what those onlookers beheld were the features of a man who has desecrated his own idol.

“I wouldn’t let them pull out his sword,” this unmasked face now whispered, “till I saw you, Owen ap Griffith, with his belt.”

At that the man closed his eyes and gave himself up to the thought that as long as the Welsh language lasted — which would be as long as Snowdon lasted — his name would be a by-word and a jest. His name would be *Adda y Gwman,* “Adam the Rump.”

“Well,” he said to himself coldly, “Adam the Rump’s thoughts will end when they pull it out; it’s right that the sword of Eliseg should lie in the belt of Eliseg.”

And then with the calmness of someone whose life-illusion has been destroyed and before whose despair all is equal, the old peace-maker told himself that he ought to have gone straight to Bolingbroke with his peace-pact, and not merely to Hotspur.

Young Rhisiart meanwhile, who had been spared what the rest had endured, now re-appeared upon the scene, his face shining like a man who returns to earth after a vision of heaven; and indeed it had seemed more than heaven to him to carry Catharine in his arms, willing or unwilling, up all those stairs.

But Owen no sooner set eyes on him — the Prince was on his feet again now — than he despatched him to the "magician's chamber" to fetch the belt of the old king.

When the boy had gone the Prince turned impatiently to the three men who were still on their knees. "Shrive him, for Christ's sake, Father!" he cried earnestly to the monk. "He'll die when it's pulled out!"

Father Pascentius commenced automatically a deeply-intoned Latin psalm, to which the prostrate man paid no more attention than if it had been the tolling of a bell. But the monk interrupted himself and rose to his feet. "I must fetch the Last Sacraments," he muttered, rubbing at the blood upon him with the corner of his habit.

The result of this gesture was that not only one little rock-plant but several botanical specimens, along with a sprinkling of earth-mould, fell upon the body of the Seneschal.

But the Lollard — the monk once gone — snatched at this providential opportunity. "Jesus," he groaned, while the guileless earnestness of his imploring countenance held the old man's attention. "Jesus was humiliated worse than you! O think of it, my father, think of it, my dear lord! Think of His humiliation!"

But nothing save an infinite despair was in the flickering smile with which the old man responded. “Jesus was God,” he muttered. “What’s that to me?”

And Master Brut, choking in his helpless pity, for he had uttered his all, bowed his head and was silent.

Then it was the turn of Broch-o’-Meifod. Making a sweeping gesture with his hand which even the Prince obeyed, he made them all rise up and move back. “Listen, man,” he whispered, so that Adam alone could hear. “I’m going to pull out that bit of rusty iron; and then you’ll be dead before they come.”

So startling were these words that for a second the ice of despair round the old man’s soul cracked. Into this crack, before the ice could freeze again, Broch plunged his second bolt; aiming with Satanic insight, not at the man’s despair, but at the life-illusion whose death-pangs were causing that despair. He appealed from Adam the Antiquary to Adam the Pacifist; and as he beat down the one fixed idea he lifted the other from beneath its corpse.

“Bronze and rust, that’s all it is. A man’s dirt and a man’s blood are more precious than rusty bronze! And the belt — an old piece of saddle leather! And Eliseg — rest his bones under his pillar — foxes and crows have vented on *him* time out of mind! Men in after ages, Master Adam, will think less of swords and belts than of blood and dirt. Is Edward of Carnarvon a laughing-stock because they killed him with a red-hot clyster? No! No! He died for Gaveston, his darling, and that’s their tavern jest, if there is any!

“And shall I tell you—” It cannot have been his words, for the Badger of Meifod was a blundering and obscure speaker. It must have been that those deep eye-sockets into which the dying man was staring seemed full of the blood and excrement of the whole world suddenly become holy!

At any rate Master Adam's expression had now assumed the look of a man who has disgorged a snake's head and can breathe again. There was hardly any need to go on; but Broch-o'-Meifod went on. "And what will you die for? That's what'll live as long as Snowdon! You'll die for believing that a Welshman's bones are the same as an Englishman's. You'll die for believing that men are men first, and Welshmen and Englishmen afterwards. You'll die, Master Adam, for a future ten times further removed than Eliseg's past. You'll die—"

But the old man stopped him. "Pull it out; and let me die," he whispered, "while you look like that."

And then, lifting his hand feebly towards his face, where Tegolin's hair was brushing his cheek, "Who's that? The Maid? Kiss me, Maid — and say good-night — and then off with you!"

His voice had the old tone of authority of the Seneschal of Dinas Bran, and for the next second nobody could see his face, so covered was it by Tegolin's hair; but from where he stood in the torch-light it seemed to Owen that from the head of that living cross on the floor there had blossomed a great fiery flower.

When the girl was gone, Broch-o'-Meifod and the Prince exchanged a quick look. Owen hadn't caught what they'd whispered; but he now heard the voice of Father Pascentius, as the monk re-entered the hall, and that decided him. He nodded to his friend. Even the most hardened of the troopers turned away their heads, and the Lollard shut his eyes.

When it was done it was clear to all that the man was dying. The pageboy Rawlff, who alone hadn't turned away, whispered to his neighbour, "Who'd have thought that the Crow had so much blood in him?"

There was indeed only a little space left, close to the man's head, that was free from blood, and when at last Father Pascentius had finished his rites it was there he knelt. Broch-o'-Meifod, still on his knees, looked as he leant on the handle of the bronze sword like a Neolithic giant after some life-and-death struggle.

"Jesus, Joseph, and Mary, in peace with you I give up my ghost," murmured the monk, calling upon the Seneschal to repeat the words after him, but at that moment there was a disturbing movement among the onlookers, for Rhisiart had returned with the belt.

Supposing in his logical mind that nothing would make the old man give up the ghost more happily than to see these sacred objects re-united, the brave lad forgot for once to glance at his master. Advancing straight to Broch's side he held out what he had brought to the kneeling giant.

But Broch-o'-Meifod seemed completely oblivious of everything but the prostrate figure before him. It was old Adam himself who took in what was happening, and a most curious smile lit up his face. "Put them away, boy," he commanded faintly, "I — must go — I must go now — to the King."

Thus speaking this treacherous custodian of the sword of Eliseg closed his eyes, and a minute later set forth unattended on his final peace mission.

It was not much more than a week after the death of the Seneschal that the Prince actually departed to make trial of the bold stroke that those feminine conclaves had planned.

Rhys Gethin was unwilling to go. The less tricky and more purely military campaign against the Radnorshire lands of the Mortimers had by this time become an obsession with him. Owen did, however, swear on the hilt of Eliseg's sword, now safe in Eliseg's belt, that if he came back alive — with or without Lord Grey — his next move should be the one projected in the smoke of the hall-fire and under the inspiration of Nant Clwyd mead.

As for Rhisiart, his spirits had risen higher, and his confidence in himself had grown deeper, during these last months, than ever before in his life.

This was not merely due to the spring, or even to the sharp, sweet, springtime pangs of his feeling for Catharine. It was largely due to the fact that he found himself progressing fast — more to his own astonishment than might have been supposed — in those astute arts of statecraft and diplomacy which of all things he admired most in the world.

Owen's ways in these difficult paths exactly suited him. The master's imagination would go skimming between wind and tide, like a river ouzel, while the servant's more practical intelligence would work out with the shrewdness of a water-rat the details of the scheme.

Where the lad had been a real statesman, and had every reason to be surprised at his success, was in the case of Father Pascentius. The monk knew everything that went on in that mountain-court, as much among the women as among the men, nor had he missed one psychic current of the queer disturbance left in all their nerves by the passing of the comet. Rhisiart, therefore, following some inspired hint from his Prince, had resolved after their return from Nannau that he would stop at nothing to gain the confidence of the enigmatic person behind those all-devouring eyes.

It first occurred to him to play upon the theologian's vanity as a confessor; but he quickly found that his most secret vices — even to that dark quiver he derived from certain forms of cruelty — were sins so trifling and childish to a confessor from a monastery that he was driven to invention; and it soon became evident that not only had Providence deprived him of the more labyrinthine forms of evil, but it hadn't even endowed him with the power of inventing them.

His next idea was to feign an interest in theological metaphysic; but he couldn't carry this design very far for the simple reason that when he began to study the Father's Commentary upon Saint Thomas he came bolt up against his old Oxford difficulties with Aristotle.

"The philosopher isn't logical," he would groan as he went to sleep. "He may have invented logic; but it isn't the logic of Roman Law."

But his chance came at last. Quite by accident he encountered the Father one day upon one of his botanical excursions. Anything more removed from the study of Nature than our young friend's interests could hardly be imagined; but by good luck, among her other girlish caprices, Catharine ferch Owen had welcomed that warm spring weather by instituting a little secret garden of her own in a secluded spot among the mountain-birches. Here she would resort, and here Rhisiart soon acquired the habit of finding her; so that when he stumbled on this one weak spot in his learned man's armour he joyfully exploited it, not only for diplomatic reasons, but inspired by the glamour of Catharine's vernal retreat.

And here was one occasion where the subtle confessor of men cared nothing for hidden motives. It was so wonderful to him to find at last another human mind with which he could share his passion that in his excitement he forgot his normal discretion; and the pupil of Snowdonian flora began to tap little by little other secrets than those connected with the waywardness of rock-plants.

Thus it came about that Owen's secretary was not only acquainted with the double conclave going on, but was even able, through the medium of Luned in the one case, and of the officious Rawlff in the other, to inject various timely modifications into both the schemes, modifications that sprang from no lower source than the imagination of Owen himself.

And all this, running parallel with certain paradisic moments in Catharine's "garden," animated our friend's narrow features with such a triumphant gleam that poor little Sibli was driven to show that she too had her claim on him by sarcasms so lively that the laughter they caused among the Arglwyddes' maids made him shy of going near her.

With Father Pascentius propitiated, and the Prince away on his wild-goose chase, there was little to dread, during these warm mid-April days, when the lad paid his visits to Catharine's hillside refuge.

It is true that since old Adda's death the Arglwyddes felt a little nervous of letting her daughter leave the enclosure alone; but she contented herself with insisting that when the girl went up the hill the old Porter, Glew the Gryd, should go with her. But as Glew the Gryd was on duty at night he generally found for himself a sheltered spot under the birches; and though by his side lay the sharpest war-axe in the fortress, his head would soon sink forward upon his leather jerkin in profound unconsciousness.

Those were without doubt the happiest days in Catharine's life; and with that self-protective instinct that great creative Nature has given to girls in love she allowed herself to take the days as they passed without looking forward or backward. She went to sleep thinking of Rhisiart, and if her carved image of Saint Clare, as the fire-light flickered upon it, stared coldly into the gulf of darkness revealed through the arrow-slit window, she cared not.

Nor did she even care when the horned stag, with the cross between its antlers, began gliding like a pale ghost in and out of the branches of its green forest.

Rhisiart's presence was about her, his voice was in her ears, his arms were round her. The one tangible object in her room upon which she would fix her eyes as she knelt to tell her beads was neither her green forest nor her childhood's saint; it was a silver bowl full of celandines. She had come to associate Rhisiart with these hard, bright, metallic flowers. Their glittering bodiless comet-heads with shining spatulate leaves were more independent and more defiant than other plants. It only pleased Catharine that their stalks should be so chilly and that they had no scent! They resembled young warriors, she told herself, and young chancellors too, with their piercing starry eyes held so straight, and their smooth, cool, dark, queer-shaped foliage — just like Rhisiart's inscrutable and far-reaching thoughts!

It troubled her a little, when he talked to her of all the things that must be done, when the last Englishman had been driven out of the country, to make Wales the pride of Christendom, that she had been so remiss in her lessons. She had begged him to bring up to their hiding-place a specimen of his work in the magician's chamber; but when he brought her a copy of his Latin letter to the Irish chieftains with its illuminated capitals and all its curlicues and flourishes, and when he showed her her Father's name as *Owynus Princeps* and translated some of his most eloquent appeals, in the style, he told her, of the best letter-writers in Rome, the shame of her ignorance made a little teasing cloud upon her exultant pride in his powers.

"Shall I ever dare to tell him," she thought, "that I can hardly write 'Catharine ferch Owen' without making a mistake; and that I've only read the first page of the Consolations of Boethius which Iolo gave me before he died?"

The Prince had been away now for nearly a fortnight, and all manner of wild rumours about him kept rising up and dying down in hall and bower.

But Rhisiart remained cheerful and calm, always assuring her that Owen bore a charmed life, and that even if he didn't capture Lord Grey there was more danger of Henry invading Snowdon than of the Prince falling into the hands of his enemies.

One especially warm and windless day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the boy and the girl were seated on their favourite log, overlooking the little natural spring that rippled from its grey basin like a real fountain among the mosses and fronds and nameless rock-plants of this happy retreat.

Catharine had so arranged her garden that this stream wandered between her stitchworts and primroses and cuckoo-flowers before it reached her favourite bed of celandines. On this occasion they were aware of an intrusive wood-pigeon, who rustling down upon a mountain-ash behind them began its melodious moan.

They were both so happy in their love that day that they were fearful lest even a kiss should ruffle the smooth deep tide on whose wave they floated. One hand was in her lap now, held tight in Rhisiart's fingers, the other was hanging loose at her side, twisting and untwisting a spray of ivy that had strayed from their log among the bracken-fronds.

"Rhisiart!" He turned his head towards her. How flaxen her hair was; more, he told himself, like the daughter of a Norseman than of a British Prince!

"This bird's too happy," she whispered. "Do you like it, Rhisiart, going on like that — over and over — and those last two notes always left behind, as if it were hiding them before it flies away so that they'll be all hoarded and safe when it gets back? How can it be so happy, and yet so hiding and hoarding? It's too happy! Oh, they're greedy things! They eat and eat!"

With a rustling so heavy that it was almost a clatter the wood-pigeon flapped off.

"It heard you," said the lad. "I don't see why it shouldn't eat all it can get, and I don't see why it shouldn't drag out its song if it wants to."

"Rhisiart!"

He knew that he was going to receive some disturbing shock from the way her fingers tightened on his own; and he knew it too from another little sign, from the way she lifted her free arm and mechanically brushed from her brow, where it must have been tickling her, a long-stalked primrose that with no little trouble and pains he had twisted into her flaxen hair.

The rejected flower, its brittle pink stem broken, fluttered down on the black sleeve of Rhisiart's scholarly tunic where it rested under his eye; but he dare not make the least movement towards it, because the girl's mood frightened him, and he'd already discovered that, like the Prince, Catharine ferch Owen had to be handled with considerable tact.

Neither the wise Luned nor the sharp-witted Sibli would have believed it possible that two young people could love each other with such an absence of ordinary amorousness. But they were both very young, and they were both fanatical idealists; and if now and then Catharine's mind was disturbed by natural girlish longings, the fact that any sensuality to be an overpowering temptation to Rhisiart had to be associated with domination, if not with cruelty, kept his feelings with regard to his little Princess on such a level of pure romance that she had no inducement to give way to this yielding vein.

But she thought of him day and night. She would wake early and watch the indescribable greyness of the hour before dawn as it touched the cold mouldings of her narrow window and poured itself like a presence round her sleep-warmed limbs. And always diffused in their grey light were the looks and ways and tones of the boy she loved. The cry of a hoot-owl at night was a menace to their love; the chattering of the starlings, when the sun rose in the eastern sky, was an omen of its prosperous issue.

During all this perfect day — the happiest of her whole life — they had only kissed twice, and these kisses had been quick and hurried and fleeting, free from all clinging passion. And yet there hadn't been a morsel of food that the girl had tasted, or a single voyaging fragrance that had come to her out of the earth, or one petal-ful of yellow sunshine caught on her bare arm that hadn't melted her in a floating ecstasy of happiness.

And just as Owen had prayed on his knees before he was declared Prince that thick darkness might cover his future, so day after day, and today most of all, did his daughter hide her joy under an iridescent mist.

A spell was upon her that every motion in her being guarded from the peril of thought. In a warm, dark, oblivion, oblivion to yesterday, oblivion to tomorrow, she hid her happiness and nourished her love, keeping them back, holding them down, so that like daffodil bulbs under the sheltering mould their green shoot might expand unseen.

And Rhisiart, as he gazed anxiously at her now, struggling to read the mystery of her mood, trembling, fearing lest some unguessed-at quiver in the air should threaten the towers of his new Dinas Bran, kept thinking to himself how strange it was that he should be content to touch her — he who had had such wicked and sinister relations with other women!

"I shall tell her, of course, when we're married," he said to himself, "everything about Luned and Sibli and Mistress Lowri; but no need to do it yet! Girls are different from men." For some reason he felt it was no more incumbent upon him to tell her about Tegolin than about Modry or his mother. The Maid seemed a part of that natural background of a person's life that was outside Love's Confessional.

"Why do you think it is, Rhisiart," she burst out almost fiercely, "that I'm so afraid for our happiness? I didn't mean to tell you; but that greedy pigeon—"

The experienced profligate by her side drew an infinite sigh of relief. So after all it was only a girl's nonsense! He boldly replaced the broken flower in her hair and lifted her hand to his lips.

"I'm not afraid, Catharine. Your Father likes me. He depends on me. When we've driven the English out I'm going to see the great Master Young, and get him to be Chancellor to *Owynus Princeps.* Master Brut will be the head of our new Universities. But your Father will depend on me to revise the Laws of Hywel the Good. Hywel the Good was — what is it, Catharine? Don't you believe me? Why did you smile like that?"

But Owen's daughter had ceased smiling. "Just go and see — will you? — if Glew the Gryd is still asleep. I wouldn't like—" and she gave him one of those confederate glances out of her Glendower eyes that always enchanted him and reduced him to proud obedience. The minute he was lost in the tender green of the birches she jumped up from the log, tossed back her long straight hair, stretched herself, and uttered a queer whistling sound between her teeth that was neither a sigh nor a laugh nor a groan. What it really was was the body of a young girl lamenting to the birches and the stalks of the stitchworts and the spores of the mosses that the Laws of Hywel Dda couldn't beget children! But the mind of Catharine ferch Owen was too occupied in holding back the unknown future, against which she pressed her white arms as if against the scaly front of a dragon, to bother very much what her body was feeling. She did stoop down, however, and picked up the flower about which her lover had been so meticulous, hesitating whether or not to place it in her bosom.

As she held it between her finger and thumb she noticed that not only was its stalk broken but its petals were drooping. And it seemed to her as if that pale yellow flower, while it wilted between her fingers, began answering a complaint she had never uttered.

"Yes, boys are shy and difficult when they love," the yellow flower said. "When they don't love it's different. Then they don't care what blossoms they break."

Having delivered itself of this cold comfort, and comfort for a trouble of which Catharine, floating on the waves of her happiness, had been unaware, the selfish flower turned the conversation to its own affairs.

"I know," it said, "'tis a custom in stories for maidens to thrust us into their bosoms; and it's indeed a pure, soft, and fragrant death wherewith you're threatening me, Catharine; but I would far rather you threw me into the stream where I could enjoy the light of the blessed sun for a day or two longer!"

"But I'd have put you into the third page of Boethius," protested Catharine, "where's there's an illuminated 'R' in three colours."

But the primrose was silent. The tiny hairs on its pink stalk leaned sideways. Over its beautiful eye there crept a misty film. Its calices changed their hue. One of its petals began to curl inwards at the edge.

"I'll put you in a glass by yourself — not with the celandines. No, I can't do that; for Tegolin'll see you and know exactly why you're there. Very well then! I'll put you into my fountain; and when Rhisiart comes tomorrow I'll show him how fresh you are!"

She did in fact hurry to her fountain's brink and there search about till she found a little miniature bay in its stone margin. Here she arranged the wilted blossom, with its head against the stone and its long stalk, twisted now by reflection as well as by accident, deep in the water. Her hair swept the water as she bent down, but this did not prevent a tiny but fierce stickleback from biting at that bruised stalk, which it doubtless suspected of biological kinship with the patient tribe of worms.

The violent movement of the stickleback disturbed a water-beetle from its afternoon sleep by shaking off a little group of vegetation-parasites which still clung to the primrose-stalk. These unarmed miniscules of the land now drifted, clinging to each other in shivering apprehension, into the watery gulfs of unknown regions, regions which to their simple minds must have been full of all the hungry monarchs and all the torture-loving archbishops of the aquatic world.

But having arranged the wilted blossom to what she felt to be the flower’s complete satisfaction — and further than that how could the responsibility of the most beneficent goddess go? — she proceeded, still on her knees by her fountain, to remove various fragments of slaty stone that struck her as impeding rather than assisting the exploring tendrils of certain small rock-plants of which none but Father Pascentius could have named even the species.

Suddenly the ghastly thought struck her: “Suppose Lord Grey’s men have been prowling about here ever since they murdered old Adda!” She scrambled to her feet and with difficulty restrained herself from running wildly down the hill in the direction where the young man had vanished.

“Suppose David Gam” — for that lurid tale, told with savage exaggerations, had reached every girl in the fortress— “armed with his dedicated knife, were lying in wait?”

But she must stay where she was. If she set off to look for him they might miss. Probably Glew the Gryd had changed the place of his afternoon siesta. But oh, how completely all obscure fears of the future had vanished at the touch of this immediate terror!

She saw him lying on the ground like that Englishman she’d seen Rhys Gethin kill,’ and like that glimpse she’d had of old Adda in his pool of blood. ’Twas a pity Rhisiart couldn’t have stolen upon her at that moment as the prince had stolen upon Gam and the pages! He certainly would have seen her under an aspect completely new to him. Each particular hair of her flaxen weight of tresses seemed stirred by an electric wind; and her eyes were as big and her cheeks as white and pinched as if she were gazing at a scaffold.

It kept growing upon her more and more vividly that she saw Rhisiart lying in his blood. He was calling to her for help. Oh, she must fly to him! But no; she must stay where she was. Suddenly her whole body stiffened. It wasn’t Catharine, it was the statue of a paralysed wood-nymph that stood there. Yes! — again and again — distinct and clear through the misty sunshine — the sound of a horn!

Then, just as her rebellious blood was rushing to take her, whatever her reason might do, flying on the wind to her love, the birch-branches were moved aside. She leapt forward with a gasping cry — only to encounter the unwieldy form of Glew the Gryd, carrying his axe on his shoulder. How the sunlight made that bright weapon gleam!

“Don’t be frightened, Missy,” said the old man kindly, though Catharine could see he was trembling with excitement. ‘“Twas Master Rhisiart what sent me to ‘ee. ‘A told me to say to ‘ee that thee’d best get home-along, for the Prince be come back, and have brought with him, in good clanking chains, Lord Grey and young Grey, captives of his mighty spear!”

Nothing but the deep-instilled precepts of the wise Arglwyddes kept Catharine then from leaving Glew the Gryd in the lurch and running at top-speed to the castle-gate. As it was she reduced the Porter to breathlessness by the pace she set him. But it was with the panting old gentleman close at her side, bright-glittering axe and all, that she finally came upon the scene — and what a scene! Never to her dying day did she forget it.

The whole population of that mountain-court seemed to be assembled on the grassy slope in front of those great gates; and the cries of triumphant welcome that went up drowned all the eager questions and answers that kept passing from mouth to mouth.

There was her father; and oh! how magnificent he looked, mounted on old Seisyll, the long pennon of his tall lance fluttering in the sunshine, with the lion rampant of Mathrafal! And there was her Rhisiart — how glorious it was to meet his flashing eyes! — walking by Seisyll's side and waiting to help the Prince alight.

There was no sign of Broch-o'-Meifod; and there darted through Catharine's mind the thought, "He's Father's best friend; and yet he never comes on the scene unless there's trouble. I don't understand that man. He frightens me." She was surprised, too, not to see the familiar Cistercian habit of Father Pascentius. "I suppose he's off botanizing or writing his book; but I'm glad he's busy. He spoils everything with his staring eyes. Oh, there's Master Brut!" But in her eagerness to get a smile from the Prince she dodged asking herself the reason — perhaps her suspicion of "that witch's daughter," perhaps jealousy of his friendship with Rhisiart — why she was always so glad when Master Brut was not there!

"Room for the Princess Catharine!"

Who was it who had shouted that? It made her cheeks hot with excitement, and yet it gave her an uneasy feeling, too. It was the first time anyone had called her "Princess"; and she saw Lord Grey raise his head for a second in evident surprise. "Oh it's only that ridiculous Rawlff!" And she blushed again; this time for shame at her pleasure.

But the Prince had seen her now; he had dismounted, had given Rhisiart his lance, and was coming to meet her. Oh how proud she was as she embraced him before them all and helped him to unlace his helmet. And Rhisiart was only a few steps behind. Yes, she had them both to herself.

Such, however, is the tangled skein of mortal events that it's rare for one person's good moment not to be paid for by a bad moment for someone else. This absorption of the Prince in his daughter, for Griffith had gone, as he always did, straight into the hall to greet the Arglwyddes, and Meredith and Rhys Gethin were busy with the ponies and the plunder, made it possible for the captives' worst enemies to get close up to them.

Both the prisoners had their hands heavily manacled, but each of them was on horseback, the elder with his head sunk on his breast, the younger staring wildly about him. Lord Grey was a dark, gaunt-boned man of over middle age. He had a pale desolate face that this disaster had frozen into a mask of sullen hopelessness. Master Brut, as he looked at him, wondered what it had been in this gloomy unhappy man that had made him such a close intimate of the King's. When, however, the Earl lifted his head at Rawlff's unexpected cry of "Princess!" the Lollard got more light on the tyrant of Ruthin. Yes, he had the kind of merciless gaze into the blood-and-iron heart of things from which a usurper with his back to the wall might draw strength and support. But how different was this crazy youth!

Master Brut sighed, and told himself that it was the weakness of the heir to those unscalable red walls, more than any quarrel with any neighbour, that had embittered this proud man's heart. But what was the wretched boy so excited about now? He swung round and found himself at once face to face with the cause.

Alice and her mother! The two women were beside themselves with triumph and hate. They pushed past him without seeing him, without knowing him, and the elder one poured forth on Lord Grey such a torrent of imprecations as made the Lollard's blood run cold. The object of this savage vituperation seemed to disregard it completely as far as himself was concerned; but the Lollard could see from the troubled protective glance he threw on his son that what worried him wasn't the screams of the mother, but the deadlier whispers of the daughter, as she pressed herself against the young man's horse and toyed with the iron that bound his wrists.

The sounds that the youth himself emitted as he swayed about in his saddle and allowed his under-lip to hang down and his lower jaw to chatter. made the Lollard think of those words that he knew so well on the lips of Jesus: “And there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

“We know all about what you did to Master Adam, what you did to Master Adam,” he heard the girl repeat in what resembled a low-voiced chant. “And they’ll do the same to you; and they’ll do the same to you!”

There had gathered by this time a most threatening crowd about the two prisoners, a crowd composed not so much of troopers as of menservants and maidservants from the fortress. Reckless and ungracious individuals among these latter began urging on the mother and daughter, and even adding to their maledictions appalling details of the manner in which — so they assured the men in chains — it had been decided they should perish.

But, as we know, it was not in the nature of the owner of Lyde Manor to see two fellow-creatures tormented without interfering. Had that “great gulf’ divided him from them, to which Jesus refers in the story of Lazarus, it is probable that neither God nor Devil would have stopped him from attempting to jump across.

“Woman! Woman!” he cried, seizing Mistress Dilys by the arm and pulling her back. “He’s an old man; he’s suffered much. Can’t you see how much he’s suffered?”

But the crowd’s blood was up, and one of the cooks of the castle, a lusty fellow from Rhys Gethin’s Conway, struck the heretic’s arm with a skewer, compelling him to release the woman, who promptly returned to her post at the prisoner’s side.

Master Brut then seized upon Alice, and, evidently supposing that his pupil in the doctrines of Wycliffe would be more amenable than her parent, proceeded to drag away the struggling girl; explaining to her, as he dragged, that it was the Prince alone who would decide the fate of his prisoners.

This was the first time in their acquaintance that her instructor in the Gospels had ever laid hands on her; and such was the response of her voluptuous body to his virile grasp — for she was a big girl and struggled vigorously against his compulsion, forcing him to take her in his arms — that when an indignant scullion began assailing him with coarse abuse it was she and not Master Brut who retorted to the meddling fellow.

In his simplicity the Lollard hadn't the least idea that to be treated by him in this rough manner and to struggle helplessly against his strength had been the very image that night after night, since her mother had separated her from Tegolin, had made this excitable girl toss about in a fever of desire before she could relax in sleep. He could indeed only attribute it to the miraculous influence of Master Wycliffe when she consented with complete docility to return with him and drag her mother away.

But the Prince himself broke through the crowd now, and gave authoritative orders as to where the prisoners were to be taken. To the surprise of both the surly young Madoc and old Glew the Gryd, who were the officials selected as warders to the two captives, it appeared they were only to be chained to the wall of a chamber not far from Owen's own.

For the purpose of rivetting these chains, however, it was necessary for Master Simon to be called on the scene; but Rhisiart, to whom the Prince delegated the task of supervising this sinister process, was unable to resist the panic-stricken appeals of the younger prisoner, and did his best, in spite of the scowls of Madoc, to re-assure the youth, and make him understand that no physical torture was to be his fate.

As long, however, as Master Simon, with Lowri's evil-looking servant Lawnslot to help him, was at work over them with his burning brazier and his hammer and pincers, it was clear to Rhisiart that it wasn't only the son who was uneasy as to the fate in store for them.

But when the Hog and his assistant had done their work and meat and wine had been brought, and the captives had come to realize that not only was there a fire in their prison but that a channel of running water, to serve them for a latrine, flowed within reach of their chains, the countenance of the younger prisoner perceptibly brightened.

Lord Grey, however, though he remained seated on a wooden stool, with his back to the wall to which their manacles were attached, refused all refreshment save a sip of wine, and kept asking impatiently to see the "Baron Glendourdy."

Rhisiart, who couldn't help recalling how elated his Norman mother had been merely to offer refreshment to a "belted earl," felt that life was indeed an ironic procession of events. Here was he — but he broke off this thought to whisper to Glew the Gryd that it would be advisable if he took turns with Madoc to remain in the room, while the one not so engaged stood on guard outside the door.

It was curious how he himself kept making every excuse he could to stay longer in this room with the captives. He knew perfectly well that it was high time for him to dress for the banquet; and he knew that nothing annoyed the Prince more than lack of ceremony and formality in these old Welsh customs, especially in an adherent whose Norman blood might tend to make him supercilious towards them. And yet he couldn't tear himself away. Nor, down at the bottom of his consciousness, did he deceive himself about the cause of his attraction. It wasn't pity. It wasn't policy. It wasn't his dislike of "those Ruthin women." It was the sight of the chains! Yes, there was something about the idea of proud, well-bred men like Grey and his son being chained to the wall like dogs and having to manage with regard to the necessities of life like dogs that made that old dark nerve, which Lowri had discovered and played upon, quiver once again like the strings of a devil's fiddle.

How passionately he had poured out, in his informal confessions to Father Pascentius, his worst feelings in this kind! But never would he do this again. He had discovered that it is impossible to confess the particular evil with which our peculiar devil maddens us unless our confessor suffers from the same obsession. Short of that, it is as if we are uttering childish and ridiculous absurdities!

And all this while, as he made one silly excuse after another to postpone his departure, talking in English to the younger captive and in Welsh to the Porter, he knew well that the formidable intelligence of the Lord of Ruthin was weighing him up, wondering no doubt if this young Oxford fool couldn't be bribed. And there rushed through his own brain the thought that if only the great Master Young were here, what a chance this was to get such a ransom from this friend of the King that —

He felt so impatient to convey this statesman-like inspiration to Owen that he could hardly endure the thought of the triumphant banquet that he knew must be got through ere he had a chance to be alone with his hero.

"Was I lying to this terrified idiot," he thought, "when I said he was safe from death?" And an uncomfortable memory of how he had helped his master to dispose of one enemy in an extremely disturbing manner, and of the expression on the Prince's face as he went about this, caused a doubt to pass through him. "They'll all want him to put them to death," he thought. He now pretended to be taking from Glew the Gryd a few lessons in torch-making; but in reality he gave the old man a stern command, which he uttered as if it came straight from the Prince, that on no account must any woman be permitted to see the prisoners.

"That'll stop those two witches if they try their games!" he said to himself. "But I must talk to the cooks and scullions. Any real statesman like Master Young would take us for absolute madmen, if he heard we were thinking of killing these men. I wonder how much the Prince could ask? We'd keep the son as hostage, of course, while the father collected it. I suppose it would never do to ask a thousand marks? But why not? — for the King's friend — why not five, why not ten thousand?"

While he bent over the old Porter who had settled himself in a corner of the apartment with his materials for torch-making, Rhisiart couldn't help noticing the way the sallow-cheeked Earl, whose lips bore a clipped moustache as black as a raven's feather, and whose well-shaped teeth were as white as a wolf's, began at once arranging that part of their couch which was within reach of his son, so that as soon as the boy was so minded he could stretch himself out in comparative ease.

Our friend knew that it would be necessary for him to change his clothes before this triumphal banquet, when, as he sighed to think, he would certainly have to endure a prolonged improvisation by Griffith the Bard; and he decided, in order to do honour to his Prince, and incidentally to his own scheme on the Prince's behalf, to attire himself in a new suit of black velvet trimmed with silver, for the designing of which little Sibli, who scoffed at him on all such points, had made herself responsible.

How the small creature's eyes would shine when she saw him enter the hall! By reason of some quirk in his nature he cared nothing for pleasing Catharine in what he wore. It was by what he planned and dared that he wished to impress her! As to Tegolin — for the personality of his women always seemed to follow another in Rhisiart's thoughts, just as in his secretarial work one great legal name inevitably evoked another — he thought no more of how to please her, either by dress or achievement or daring, than he thought of pleasing the earth and the sky.

He couldn't imagine existence without being able to see Tegolin every day and receive her reassuring smile. He left the prison-chamber at last, and the first thing that struck him, when, attired in his court dress but too late to join the ceremonious entry, he made his way down the hall, was the fact that there were two new faces that afternoon.

One of these new-comers had been given the place of honour on the Arglwyddes's right, but it was a shock to him to see that the other was calmly seated in his own unalterable place by the Prince's side!

Owen, who wore what struck the Hereford boy as almost fantastically gorgeous attire, sat there like a golden image. But he had his eye on his belated squire; and Rhisiart, who knew his ways so well and with his Welsh-Norman blood knew so well how to handle him, had need to assume his must injured expression of woefully hurt feelings to induce the Prince to make room for him on his other side!

The guest of honour he saw at once was his old friend the Abbot of Caerleon; but who this spare, high-cheek-boned, hollow-cheeked, dark little man, with a neatly-trimmed pointed beard, might be, he had no notion.

He hadn't long to wait, however, for the Prince hastened to introduce them; and the syllables "Henry Don of Kidwelly" sank happily into the young statesman's mind.

"That means more money as well as more men," he thought, "and the fellow looks a scholar as well as a soldier. I shouldn't be surprised if Rhys Gethin's plan of campaign isn't changed a good deal now! I've always thought it a mistake to antagonize the Mortimers."

He determined to postpone his communication to Broch-o'-Meifod, who had moved to let him sit down, until the drinking began and the ladies were gone; but he couldn't resist — for Rhys Gethin was sitting opposite him and he greatly desired to convey to this fiery warrior, who so nearly had murdered the finest intellect in Wales, the innate superiority of the brain over the sword — the temptation of delicately sounding Henry Don upon this nice strategic point.

It was clear that Owen treated Don with the utmost respect; nor was this a surprise to our astute youth, for he recalled the letter they had received from him and how pleased the Prince had been. "He comes from as far South as the Abbot," he thought. "I hope he suggests a raid upon that quarter."

"Some of us, my Lord of Kidwelly," he began, "have been speculating as to whether it wouldn't be advisable to make a hurried descent upon South Wales. Some of us feel it's important not to annoy either the Percies or the Mortimers" — yes, Rhys Gethin had caught the word 'Mortimer'— "but in the South where you, my Lord of Kidwelly, have so much influence—"

"Master Henry Don is my name, sir," replied that gentleman curtly; and Rhisiart became aware — for he was addressing the new-comer across the golden bifurcation of the Prince's beard — that his master was smiling that particularly disconcerting smile which he knew by experience indicated disapproval. Oh, and worse still — what *had* he done? — he was certain he caught an exchange of looks between Rhys Gethin and the Prince.

This blow, a blow that was all the more bitter because it was so completely beyond his comprehension — had the Prince secrets, then, with that headstrong soldier that had never been revealed? oh, for Master Young, for Master Young! — threw Rhisiart into such gloom that when the ladies did depart, and the drinking did begin, he felt too deeply sunk in shame to carry out his plan of talking to Broch-o'-Meifod about the ransom.

He was so hurt in his self-esteem that he scarcely knew how long that monotonous chanting and harp-playing of old Griffith went on.

Why didn't the Prince come to his rescue? A few, friendly, intimate words would have been enough; would have soon shown both to Master Don and to Captain Rhys that there were brains, as well as men and money, in Owen's camp. To forget his bitterness he began drinking more than was his wont; so much more in fact that he hardly knew what to answer when in the height of the revelry he found his sleeve pulled by the pretty page Elphin.

"Who wants me?" he murmured crossly. "I can't come now."

"Mistress Tegolin sent Luned and me, Master Rhisiart, to fetch you," whispered the frightened boy in his ear. And then he added almost piteously, "You're not to talk loud. You're not to say anything. You're only to come!"

Rhisiart glanced about him. Broch-o'-Meifod, who was always the first to leave such revels, had already gone. The Prince was totally absorbed in what his friend from Kidwelly was telling him. Rhys Gethin was regarding Elphin with grim amusement.

Our friend pulled himself together, rose like a slim phantom in black and silver, and proceeded, though with steps rather stumbling than gliding, to follow the page out of the hall and up the staircase.

"I know perfectly well what's happening," he said to himself. "I'm not in the least drunk; but I'm very unhappy. I'm too unhappy to think."

They came at last to a small landing where one of the two torches that usually hung there had burnt itself out, and the other was rapidly following it. Dim as the light was he had no difficulty in recognizing the beguiling form of Luned who greeted him with a tender smile.

"Well done, Elphin!" she cried. "But you'd better run up and bring us a light." Then she whispered in the boy's ear that the young gentleman would stumble in the darkness.

"Get a candle from Mistress Tegolin, child, and say he's just coming. She knows what these banquets are!"

It was partly the mead he'd drunk and partly the fact that to be alone with Luned upon a staircase leading to a Ladies' tower brought back that night in Dinas Bran, but there was a yet simpler cause of his extraordinary behaviour, and that was shame. He had made a complete fool of himself before Rhys Gethin and before that fellow from South Wales. The Prince had discarded him from his secret counsels. He had shown himself, once for all, no more like Griffith Young than he was like Archbishop Becket! He had better give up statesmanship and practise the long-bow. It had been in his wanton revolt against Bran the Blessed and Ffraid ferch Gloyw that he had formerly seized on this yielding cinnamon-scented body as the best means of asserting his independence. "Well!" the Devil whispered to him now: "Try squeezing a salve for your disgrace out of the same soft sweet fruit, ready to yield at a touch!"

Taking advantage of the dying gleam that revealed only a blur of filmy whiteness — whiteness that made him think of that summer night — he now seized upon the girl without a word; and without a word they swayed together there under the spitting and spluttering torch.

He pressed her so closely to him that it was as if his shame had been some diabolic essence that he was eager to transfer from his veins to hers. But Luned was still the wise one; and though she gave herself up with the old languid abandonment to this recurrence of *l'amour d'escalier* she listened intently for any descending steps.

But there come occasions when the wisest are fooled by the impulses of the reckless. What she couldn't hear she couldn't guard against. And the quick impatient feet of Catharine in their soft shoes fell like the feathers of a swan's neck upon those treacherous stones.

The "light" which Luned had asked Elphin to bring was not far away; for now the clearly-sounding footsteps of the page became audible; and also, though only Luned caught that, the shuffle of Tegolin's sandals behind him.

But though Rhisiart's arms fell to his sides and Luned uttered a rich, panting, unashamed laugh, they both knew that Catharine had seen them. It was with the final blazing up of its loyal flame that the enduring torch, as hostile to vice as it was protective of virtue, revealed to them the expression on Catharine's face, her wide-open eyes, her distorted mouth. But it was out of a darkness not yet broken by the candle that was descending the stairs that her voice came.

"Rhisart!"

And it seemed to our hapless friend — from whose muddled wits the fumes of that fatal metheglin dissolved like smoke — that his protest was like the protest of a crushed worm, endowed in its destruction with superhuman lucidity that now filled the darkness.

"Catharine, it's all a mistake! I was — I have — I am—"

But her voice came calm and cold, while the first flicker from Elphin's candle lit the staircase above her head.

"Will you tell Tegolin, Rhisiart, that I've gone to my father. I can feel my way down. I've done it before. *I don't want any of you."*

Her final words rang out with all the pride and all the authority of the "Princess" Rawlff had called her; and they were clearly heard by both the young candle-bearer and the Maid; for when these two emerged upon the landing neither of them made any attempt to follow her.

Tegolin realized at once that the lovers had quarrelled; but she supposed it was only the renewal of some difference between them that had occurred earlier in the day. Luned greeted her with an innocence that had a touch of insolence' in it, but Tegolin was too occupied with Rhisiart to give her any close attention.

She had never seen such a Rhisiart as she saw now! A lock of the lad's black hair had fallen across his forehead in his struggle with Luned, and his lips, in place of being sucked-in showed all loose in the candle-light, showed even bloody against his ghastly face, as if he had received a blow in the mouth.

The Maid gave him one long look, swallowing her saliva as she did so with a faint clicking sound like the turning of a tiny key in a silver lock. Then she told Elphin to follow them with the light; and taking Rhisiart by the hand led him without a word up the staircase into Mad Huw's Chamber.

Here there were the dying embers of a wood-fire, a lancet window open to the west, a couch of straw, with a crucifix on the wall above it, and an alcove, concealed by a heavy curtain, where the Maid herself slept. Squatting cross-legged on the floor by the dying fire, with nothing on but a garment of coarse unbleached wool, sat the Apostle of King Richard. He leapt to his feet the moment they entered, and with the curious penetration he invariably showed where his obsession didn't arise he at once grasped the situation in its essentials.

He knew nothing of course of the part played by Luned, who with Elphin had now discreetly withdrawn, but he divined that this mute, stricken lad, who now sank down on a stool by the embers and hid his face in his hands, had disgraced himself with both the Prince and his daughter.

Tegolin cautiously closed the door of the room, drew the curtains yet closer across her alcove, and, carrying some wood to the smouldering ashes, knelt down by Rhisiart's side and fell to re-kindling the fire.

She was still in her blue banquet-dress, but she had taken off her ornamental slippers with their turquoise-coloured *calch,* or enamel work, and she had already braided her hair for the night. “He is unhappy,” she murmured, lifting her head from her task and glancing at the Friar, who towered above them both with his thin legs gleaming white in the flames she was conjuring up, “so I brought him to you.” “You did well, daughter; you did well.”

“How shall we make him understand, Father, that all of us — men and women alike — have to endure bitter shame, and yet go on living, go on struggling?”

Mad Huw shut his eyes and pondered; then he started pacing up and down the room. Then he stood still and stared at Rhisiart’s bowed head.

“Well, Father,” the girl repeated. “He’s very unhappy, and I’ve brought him to you.”

Mad Huw moved close to that crouching figure in its velvet and silver. The Friar’s white legs with their black hairs brushed again the Maid’s gown and were scraped by the silver tassels that Sibli had stitched to the lad’s tunic.

“My dear son,” he said, “do you realize that we two haven’t been alone with the Maid since you saved me from that poor madman of Chirk?”

Rhisiart *did* raise his head at this. But he covered it again after one despairing glance at his comforter.

“I didn’t save you,” he mumbled into his hands. “And she knows I didn’t.” And then in a scarcely audible voice, “I’m good for nothing but to be a drunken bowman under Rhys Gethin.”

Tegolin rose to her feet and gazed intently at the Friar. “Do you think, Father” — her lips formed the words slowly and gravely and her forehead wrinkled itself into a deep frown— "that if you were to — to pray to Our Lady—"

To her astonishment Mad Huw shook his head. "There is someone who could help him," he said, "but he isn't—"

"Do you mean his friend Master Brut?" An angry light gleamed at once in the man's eyes, not a mad light, but the obstinate sane light of implacable orthodoxy.

"That perverter of our Holy Faith!" he cried hoarsely, "that taker of our Blessed Lord's name in vain! Daughter, daughter, have you forgotten all my teaching?"

"Who could help him, Father? Tell me, oh tell me, for the love of Mary!"

His flash of anger died down at once in the presence of her emotion. But what he had to say didn't seem quite easy to him; and it was clear to her, who knew him so well, that the difficulty lay in his conscience rather than his wits. He began in a long roundabout manner that made the girl sigh. "Alack! alack! It's King Richard he's leading up to!"

But Mad Huw, as sometimes happened at a pinch, was not leading up to King Richard.

The Maid hadn't the remotest idea what he was hinting at, for he was now explaining that ever since Saint Joseph of Arimathea brought the Sangreal to Glastonbury, and Saint David built a wattle-chapel for its worship, there were particular persons in Wales, not necessarily priests, who had been given by the Holy Spirit certain miraculous powers — powers that were neither condemned by Holy Church, nor officially acknowledged — and it was his own secret thought that one of such persons was none other — Tegolin's eyes opened in amazement — than Master Broch-o'-Meifod. "Have you heard," he went on, "how that insolent Cistercian, who hates us poor Brothers of Saint Francis, goes about denouncing Master Broch? That alone proves him a man of worth. Whenever you hear a cloistered monk, who knows nothing of perils by land or of perils by water, or of taking the Lady Poverty as his bride, abuse any man or any King either—"

"Blessed Virgin keep one king away a *little* longer!" prayed Tegolin.

"You may be sure that that man is inspired by the Most High. Do you realize, my children," and the Friar began to stride up and down the room with the tails of his woollen shirt flapping about his legs, "that the old Welsh saints — such as Saint Collen, and such as Saint Tysilio of Broch's own *cantref* — were much more like the little Brothers of Saint Francis than these rich and learned cloistered monks! They were soldiers, too, like our brave Abbot who arrived to-night — he refuses to stay in the cloister — and many of them were quite unknown to Rome and the Holy Father. Well, children, that's the sort of man this Broch-o'-Meifod is! He doesn't quote the Gospel. He doesn't pervert the Faith of our Fathers with human learning, like that son of perdition, Brut. He leaves those matters to their proper custodians. But I tell you the man's a holy man. I know it. I have seen it. And you can't deceive a little Grey Brother in things of this kind! Holy Francis! If I weren't in my shirt I'd go and fetch him myself. Yes, my unhappy son," for the man's earnestness had made Rhisiart look up, "there are moments — and I've known them myself — when God works better through a layman than even through a begging friar, though begging friars are in a sense the laymen of Our Lady. Well! compared with cloistered monks they are!"

"I did have something," murmured Rhisiart — and perhaps it was as well that Mad Huw didn't notice Tegolin's radiance when she heard the boy's voice— "that I wanted to say to Master Broch. But I'd rather say it here than in the Prince's chamber."

"But you'll find Broch alone there if you go now," cried Tegolin eagerly. "All the men'll be at the banquet. Her father will be holding Catharine on his knee and letting her taste the loving-cup. He did that when she welcomed him a year ago, after his victory in Ceredigion."

Rhisiart turned his forlorn gaze from the Friar to the Maid. How her eyes were shining, and how her blue robe suited her! A tiny sprig of comfort began to lift its head, like the spear of a crocus, from the bottom of his bruised heart.

"Yes," he muttered, "that was when I composed — for a pilgrim to St. David's it was — my account of our rush down Hyddgant Mountain."

"That was before we came here," said Tegolin, "and I'm glad you wrote it down, for you and the Prince usually keep such things so dark."

Rhisiart could not help assuming the expression of one whose achievements rest in oblivion; and the little sprig of comfort waxed bigger.

"I think I will go and see Broch-o'-Meifod," he cried, jumping to his feet and pushing the lock of dark hair from his forehead. "May I come back for a minute before I go to bed?"

When he was gone, Mad Huw looked at the Maid with some uneasiness. "I wonder if I did right?" he whispered solemnly. "Do you think He would think I did right?"

"I know what He would think you ought to do now," said Edeyrnion's Maid with a smile. "And that is get to bed at once! You remember the Abbot wants to see you early tomorrow; and early with John ap Hywel means early."

Mad Huw's eyes shone. "He wants to ask me about the King. I saw it in his face. Did I say my office, daughter, before that sad young gentleman came in?"

The Maid lied to him like a mother, and kneeling for a second as she always did, to receive his blessing, withdrew into her alcove. Sunk deep in that unbreakable slumber that Nature grants only to her most favoured innocents was Richard's champion when the luckless monarch's namesake returned.

He knocked lightly and entered cautiously, carrying a lantern. The room was sweet with the mingling of cool night-air and fragrant woodsmoke. He found the Maid seated by the fire reading a French version of the adventures of *Sir Percival in the Castle Perilous.*

"Well?" she murmured, as he took his place by her side, stretching out his thin wrists and long fingers over the blaze, while his embroidered sleeves fell across her lap.

"I told him everything, Tegolin, as I would tell you, but you never have to be told; and he said I must begin again from the very bottom. He said I mustn't think of anything but improving my hand-writing and improving my style. He said everything in the world, including fish and birds and rocks and stones, were only happy when they were all the time being what they were. He said I must think of nothing but doing what I liked doing, and doing it better and better. He said I mustn't care what Owen thought of me, or Catharine, or anybody. He said God was beginning to reveal Himself in a new way that wasn't the Church's way and wasn't the Lollard's way. He said a lot about that, but it all went out of my head, because the way he said it got rid of my shame and made me feel — you know — so, to tell you the truth, I can't tell you what he said! But I know he made me feel I must think more about my hand-writing and less about Master Young."

"Did he — say — anything, Gwion Bach, about Catharine?"

He drew away from her a little and clasped his fingers tightly together. "Who was it," he enquired, watching her face intently, "who sent Luned and

Elphin to fetch me?"

She returned his gaze frankly; "I did, Gwion Bach, for I saw how things were; and I sent for Catharine, too. I didn't know she'd rush down the stairs like that. But I thought — I thought—"

Like a great salt wave that has drawn back only to advance again, the whole memory of that fatal moment on the landing swept over him.

"Catharine—" he gasped; and then, just as if his proud young head had been severed at the neck, he let it fall hard and heavy against her knees and began to shake with deep-drawn sobs.

XV. BRYN GLAS

THE GRAND INVASION of the rich territory of the Mortimers, inaugurated, as we have seen, as much over the mead-cups as was Aneirin's famous descent upon Cattraeth, threatened the ripening "bud of love" between Catharine and Rhisiart as if by a flash of David Gam's own knife.

Owen's mountain *"Llys"* was left under the care of his eldest son Griffith and his brother Tudor, aided by the imposing presence of the Abbot of Caerleon.

Against the Prince's wishes — but Rhys Gethin was obdurate; and in a sense this was his special adventure — Mistress Lowri, together with her husband, for none dared to meddle with the weird relations between those two, accompanied the expedition to Maelienydd; as did Broch-o'-Meifod, Master Brut, and our friend Rhisiart.

Henry Don of Kidwelly was to take a leading part in this campaign; but since he had a considerable body of horsemen with him he advanced separately from their main force, sometimes on one flank, sometimes on the other, and sometimes serving as a vanguard.

Rhys Gethin moved to and fro continually from one portion of their little army to another. The Prince himself walked by Broch's side, for he had left Seisyll behind; so that Rhisiart and the Lollard were once more thrown together, just as they had been at their first appearance in Wales. Both the young men were in low spirits; and both were in a mood to confide freely in each other.

It wasn't long, therefore, before Master Brut knew all about his friend's feeling for Catharine, while Rhisiart, not altogether to his surprise but to his no little dismay, learnt from the enamoured Wycliffite that he was already secretly affianced to the girl whom our friend in his heart styled "the witch-daughter of a witch-mother."

Round their bivouac fires in the long June twilights this small army of spearmen and archers and light-armed troopers found itself more inclined to sleep than to revel. Henry Don's horsemen, riding in loose formation till darkness set in, accounted for such a wide tract of country that they removed from every man's consciousness that disturbing sense of an unexpected encounter which tends to occupy the mind even if it doesn't upset the nerves. They had generally marched some twenty miles when evening fell, for everybody agreed with Rhys Gethin that the faster they moved the more contradictory would be the rumours that preceded them, and the more panic-stricken the King's subjects would grow.

Owen himself was for many reasons in a happier mood than he had been for many a month. He had taken his young Secretary's advice about the amount of ransom to be given before the two captives were released; and to his amazement he had already received half of this enormous sum; Grey himself being at large now, to collect the other half, while his son remained a hostage for its payment.

Everybody who had approached the two prisoners had been struck by the exceptional devotion of the father to his neurotic offspring; so that the Prince hadn't the least doubt that the remaining sum would be safe in his hands before the summer was over. He was thus relieved for the first time since he'd raised his standard of the most worrying of all his anxieties, the lack of money to pay his men; and though he still struggled to keep his vow not to consult "the spirits" about the future, he couldn't help being aware, as they advanced by these forced marches towards the Radnor mountains, that every omen they encountered was a favourable one.

The Prince never forgot this sequence of long warm summer days blessed by happy presentiments. Both he and Rhys Gethin were so sleepy with marching that when they encamped for the night there was little planning of any strategic moves for the campaign. Owen could see that his formidable Captain was in favour of taking things as they occurred, and trusting to luck; and this was the method after all that came most naturally to himself.

So all day long he and Broch-o'-Meifod philosophized together. Up hill and down dale they discussed the mystery of life; and so happily tired-out was Owen, both in mind and body, that every sunset after he had pledged his Captain in the best of the French wines the Arglwyddes had provided, he removed all his armour, save Iolo's mail-shirt, and sank at once into profound unconsciousness.

It was in the late afternoon of June the twenty-first, the Eve of Saint Alban, that Owen's adventurous force reached the village of Pilleth. Here the Prince was informed by Henry Don, whose horsemen had been scouting far and wide most of the day, that a great muster of English troops, led by Sir Edmund Mortimer himself, and accompanied by such knightly magnates of the border as Robert Whitney and Kinard de la Bere and Walter Devereux, not to speak of the Sheriff of the County, Thomas Clanvow, were on the march from Ludlow.

"There's a big force of Welsh archers with them, my Prince," Don's report concluded, "but I have a man here from the mountains — my people came on him and brought him in — who swears that if I release him and let him return to his fellows, he'll be able to swing them over to us at the first sign of success."

"Let him go, in the name of the Virgin, let him go!" cried the Prince at once, looking from Broch-o'-Meifod to Rhys Gethin The former nodded, but the latter shook his head.

“He’s a spy, caught in the act. Swing him over, I say; over a stout branch of ash-wood!”

Owen surveyed his impetuous subordinate with that slow sad smile that always made Rhisiart think of his friend Meredith. That disillusioned young chieftain was absent at the moment, being occupied, as he so often was, with some of the less picturesque aspects of a campaign; but it was impossible for Rhisiart to hold his tongue. He felt that he had already incurred the hostility of Rhys Gethin, simply by being what he was, a scholar and a statesman, one whose intelligence inevitably kept hot-headed militarists in their place; but he couldn’t listen to such brutal folly without protesting.

“My Prince, my Prince!” he broke in; “Master Brut and I were only saying last night that if every Welshman who’s a tenant of the Mortimers were loyal to Wales, the King would have to go to Salop and Hereford and Gloucester for his men. Suppose this person is a spy, what matter? Any chance, however remote, of the archers of an army turning their bows on their own leaders ought to be snatched at! That the fellow suggests such a thing at all shows that there is, among all Welshmen, a feeling spreading fast. It’s a matter of, a matter of—” The lad wanted to say it was a matter of mental seduction as against physical violence, but nothing save legal Latin terms came into his head; and to crush the Conway warrior with Latinity could serve no purpose.

But Owen had given him a sympathetic and understanding glance and Rhys Gethin had moved off with a shrug of his shoulders; so perhaps there was, after all, a place in the Wales that was dawning for intelligences who studied Aristotle and the civilized codes of Rome.

It was a triumphant moment for Rhisiart as he contemplated the haughty back of the retreating Captain; but the cup of his pride overflowed when their trimly-accoutred cavalry leader stepped up to him and congratulated him in a low emphatic voice upon his wise words.

It was indeed crowded with events memorable in the young man's life, that afternoon in the village of Pilleth; and on. subsequent occasions he would call up in his mind every detail of its happenings. There was only one house of any pretensions in the place, a semi-fortified mansion from which the owner had fled at their approach; and it was here that the Prince had established Mistress Lowri and her husband, while the grassy slopes before its gates, leading down to the banks of the river Lugg, lent themselves to the repose and refreshment of the rank-and-file.

It wasn't till nearly six o'clock, much later than their usual hour, that the patient Meredith, always with the same disenchanted look in his eyes and the same life-weary smile on his lips, announced to his father that the meal was ready.

Between the little manor-house where Lowri, the only high-born lady in their camp, was quartered and the softly-murmuring Lugg there stretched nearly a quarter of a mile of grassy sward; so that from the hearths of the village-hovels and from the kitchen of the mansion, it was easy to supply the whole body of men with better food than any bivouac fire had offered them since they left their northern fastness.

Meredith's picked band of old family retainers from Sycharth, reduced in numbers though they were by the expedition to Meifod, served, under the young chieftain's direction, as the ministrants of this open-air feast.

In the matter of drinks there occurred a little friction that evening between the young chief and Mistress Lowri; for she, as the only court lady in their camp, showed a natural feminine desire to humour the men by serving out from the stores so carefully prepared by the Arglwyddes headier and less diluted beverages than the cautious young man considered safe.

Rhisiart and his friend Master Brut were therefore given the privilege, when the gentlemen finally sat down to their meal at rough wooden tables under the walled terrace of the house, of watching at close quarters a fierce struggle to win the Prince over to one or other of these respective points of view.

As Meredith’s opinion prevailed, and the pouring out of the headier drink was forbidden, our friend received a double impression; first that the mother of Tegolin was in a most reckless and dangerous mood, and secondly that the Prince was so wrought-upon and excited that it was all he could do to treat the woman with his usual courtesy.

Everybody’s nerves that warm June evening seemed growing more and more tense. The loveliness of the hour as the sun descended, and as the sweet fragrances from the waving grasses and the white elder blossoms arose, increased rather than diminished this tension; and when at last, as if with some demonic intention of making trouble, a great white owl came flapping over their heads, it was necessary for Owen himself to leap to his feet and forbid, under threats of dire punishment, anyone to draw a bow at the intruder.

It almost seemed as if the ungracious bird, disturbed and distracted by the confused assembly, understood the meaning of this command, for no sooner had it flapped away in its heavy unwieldy motion down to the banks of the Lugg than it saw fit to return, and sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right of the men, grouped in their crowded companies on that sloping greensward, it went flapping, hovering now and then within a few feet of their heads, and producing the disturbing impression that with the great moon-daisy blinking eyes in its fluffy head it was surveying them all, and searching among them all for some particular person.

And though the Prince's command was obeyed there were many sullen mutterings, and even — so Rhisiart fancied — some uncivil suggestions that the ghostly visitor had a rendezvous with Father Pascentius! That ubiquitous confessor had ostensibly followed the expedition on the grounds of professional duty; but it seemed to both Rhisiart and Master Brut, between whom he was now discreetly seated, that his real motive in coming was to watch at close quarters the gathering dramatic crisis between Rhys Gethin and Master Simon in their electric relations with Mistress Lowri.

The Lollard kept assuring his friend that the converted Hog of Chirk was too steeped in the pure doctrines of Master Wycliffe to betray his feelings in any violent outburst; but Rhisiart, as he followed the botanist's Phorkyad eyes and contemplated Master Simon's expression as the fiery Captain flirted with his lady, was by no means convinced. The lad himself was aware, before the long meal was over, of a new and quite personal misgiving. His mind began reverting so vividly to Catharine that, as he sat there whispering to the Lollard and watching the owl, he began to feel that at any moment the girl herself might appear.

For some while, undeterred by any fear of attracting Master Brut's attention, for the Lollard was not very observant when Master Wycliffe's name was on his lips, he had been watching the curve of a white dusty foot-track along the side of one of the nearest mountains. It was along this track that he had already imagined Catharine riding. He had imagined her mounted on Seisyll and followed by the Abbot of Caerleon.

But it was danger, not love, that worried him now in connection with that track. Yes, he was convinced that his preoccupation with this faraway path had something to do with an imminent peril — not a peril to the Prince and his men; for there was no fear of the Ludlow army coming on them from that quarter — but a peril to himself. It could hardly have been the effect of the sunset that was now displaying itself in the west; for the great luminary had rejected any transformation into what is usually called "a ball of red fire" and was disappearing from the world in its normal splendour; but, whatever, its cause, that faraway track had begun to outline itself on the green hill-side in a manner so emphatic as to suggest that the path itself were a serpentine creature advancing with a fatal intention!

Quite rudely therefore — indeed for some reason Rhisiart was always being ungentlemanly in his behaviour to his friend — he turned from Master Brut and enquired of Father Pascentius whether that particular path were the way any ordinary traveller would naturally approach the village of Pilleth, coming from the north.

The pair of fabulous eyes moved at once whither they were directed. "There's a horse and a rider coming now down your path," he said, "but to save the beast's feet they're using the grass by the edge."

What madness leaps up in a lover's heart! No sooner had Rhisiart heard these words than he felt sure he saw Catharine mounted on Seisyll "using the grass by the edge"; but he beseeched the eyes again, and the eyes, by means of the heavy jowl that was their only mouthpiece, informed him that the rider was very young and was holding something very carefully as he rode.

Rhisiart couldn't restrain himself. "You're sure it's not a girl?" The Father didn't smile; and the eyes only screwed themselves up tighter. It was just as if the infatuated young man had been consulting some Chinese invention rather than a living theologian.

"It's a boy!" came the announcement at last, "and he's on a horse — not on a pony."

“Do you think it’s a message from Snowdon, Father?”

The theologian lifted one of his plump hands from his wine-cup and made his accustomed gesture of devastating nescience. The movement was slight; but as the man made it the sun went down, and a dark wave of dejection flowed over Rhisiart’s heart.

“What,” he thought, “if this great host from Ludlow led by such a man as Mortimer cuts us all to pieces? Or takes the Prince and me and Walter Brut prisoners? Where would we be, then? In the Tower of London we’d be; or with spikes through our heads on London Bridge!”

Though the sun was gone, the twilight of that Eve of Saint Alban seemed interminable. A natural restlessness kept the men awake beyond their accustomed hour; while at the same time Meredith’s stern resolve to limit their drinking on a night so charged with fate deprived them of the distraction of their usual carousal.

A crippled harp-player whose age and infirmity had kept him in the house when his patron, fearful of the advent of war, had fled, was persuaded to display his skill; but it seemed to Rhisiart as if the wistful jauntiness of the blackbirds, whose notes came from nowhere, and went floating down long avenues of feeling, drew the heart out of those inanimate strings.

And the owl continued to be an ominous trouble. It was all very well for the ribald troopers to jest about its seeking the monk. To Rhisiart’s mind it was behaving like a lost soul among a company of threatened ones, and it was an indescribable relief to him when Broch-o’-Meifod rose from his place with the evident intention of relieving them from this flapping demon. “How on earth will he do it?” the boy thought, as he watched the giant stroll down to the bank of the river, while the phantom light of that strange evening made the axe-blades about his waist gleam like the water-drops of his wife’s mill-wheel.

A pale mist was now rising from the surface of the stream; and it wasn't long before the figure of the man grew indistinct among the reeds and willows; and indeed after a while, as they watched, it vanished completely.

But the owl seemed disturbed. Rhisiart noticed he was flying higher and in wider circles. It was no longer possible to see that queer-shaped head, like the head of a minute air-whale, butting with its soft feathery weight against the air-waves.

Suddenly from the river-mists there came a low prolonged owl-cry, a sound so startling after the silent flappings of their visitor that the spellbound warriors stared at each other and some of them rose to their feet.

Again came this unearthly sound, and after its third repetition, lo! the great bird above their heads wheeled round with evident intention, and in an impetuous flight quite at variance with its former movements flung itself down the slope and was lost in the mist. Once more, but from higher up the valley and with a perceptibly different accent, came the cry; but that was the end. None of the little army saw the bird again; and when the giant returned from the river-bank even Mistress Lowri, who had been shivering a little, and wrapping her cloak round her, and falling into fits of silence, looked at the man with an added respect, much as the sun-witch must have looked at Odysseus, when he returned from conversing with "the weary heads of the dead."

Broch-o'-Meifod's return and their feathery persecutor's departure broke up that troubled session; and each man began making what preparations seemed proper in his own eyes, either to sleep or to await the dawn in the best comfort of soul he could muster.

Rhisiart was following the others into the house, the lower portion of which had been reserved for the Prince and his advisers; Mistress Lowri and Master Simon had already retired into their upper chamber, while the crippled harper had been led back to his hearth, when Madoc came up to inform Owen that a rider with no password had been detained for hours by a group of his sentries.

The Prince at once despatched Rhisiart to discover what had happened and why Madoc seemed so furtive and taciturn about it. “They tell me,” the Prince said to Rhys Gethin when Rhisiart was gone, “that your spy was a native of this place. So he may simply have been a deserter finding his way home! In which case it’s possible that we may benefit by releasing him.”

“I’ve never heard of any benefit, my Prince, coming from a serf of the Mortimers. All the men around here are cowardly time-servers. To get a stout and loyal Welshman you have to go to—”

“To Cwm Llanerch I’ve no doubt,” interjected Owen; and he grasped his cantankerous follower’s hand.

Rhisiart hadn’t far to go, but he made that short way shorter by his eagerness; and he was rewarded by arriving at the very nick of time. He soon discovered that Owen’s army was distinctly better adapted to rapid marching than to professional precautions when the march was over.

“Blessed Virgin!” cried the young lawyer in his heart, “if this is the way we prepare for the night before the battle there’ll not be a castle in the country without the Royal Standard; and as for our heads—” and he experienced an uncomfortable sensation in the nape of his neck. He now found himself explaining with some warmth to a drunken group of Cadair Idris spearmen that he had authority from the Prince to see this boy and his horse, neither of whom had given the password. His position was less secure than it might have been, since he himself hadn’t the remotest notion what the password was. It had been “Carrog” at their last bivouac; but Rhys Gethin changed it every night, and Rhisiart had been absent-minded when this had been done on their arrival at Pilleth.

There was a toll-gate and a high-walled enclosure where these unprofessional sentries were gambling with their half-groats; and it was peculiarly teasing to the anxious mind of an impatient scholar to hear the gross cry: “Who’ll *cover* her? Who’ll *uncover* her?” repeated with monotonous iteration. He gathered that both the boy and the horse must have been thrust into this enclosure; and all he demanded now was permission to enter and talk with them. “This ill-tongued young man has run away without the password and Crach Ffinnant says he must be tied up till morning. Tame enough I reckon ‘a’ll be if ‘a be alive then. *Who’ll cover her? Who’ll un*cover *her?”*

Rhisiart lost his temper completely. “If you don’t open that gate this moment I’ll get the Prince to hang you in a row on Pilleth churchtower with your whoreson groats between your damned teeth!”

Rhisiart’s own teeth gleamed so fierce in the twilight and his hooked nose looked so menacing that one of his hearers was reminded of how John Charlton of Castell Goch had that identical expression when he hanged fifty robbers on five oak-trees.

“Very well, Master, I’ll let’ee see ‘un. But remember ’tis Crach’s done it if ill-tongued young man be past talking wi’.”

“Where *is* that cowardly scum?”

“Drunk-asleep in pound, Master. ‘A watched till ill-tongued young man ceased hollerin’ and then he lay down snug and easy.”

The fellow got up, took an iron key from a hook on the wall and opened the gate of the enclosure.

The first thing Rhisiart saw was his old piebald Griffin, who at once manifested vigorous signs of both recognition and indignation. But he hadn’t time even to approach his old friend; for there, suspended in such an abominable manner that he would certainly have been dead before next morning, was his young acquaintance Rawlff.

With the aid of the now sobered gambler Rhisiart unloosed the boy’s bonds and lifted him to the ground.

“Get some water, for Our Lady’s sake,” he commanded, “and some eau de vie, if any of you have a drop,”

Whatever it may have been that the fellow produced, it had the desired effect. The boy opened his eyes, stretched his limbs with infinite relief, and smiled gratefully when his gaze met that of Rhisiart. Unluckily as his eyes wandered they lit on the hunched-up form of the Scab, who was lost to the world in a drunken coma. The mere sight of the disfigured prophet reminded the poor lad in a sickening spasm of what he’d endured at his hands and with a convulsion of his whole frame his consciousness was once more blackened out.

Rhisiart told his subdued companion to pour more of his liquor down the boy’s throat and going up to the unconscious Scab kicked him furiously and repeatedly. This treatment having but small effect, he seized the prophet unceremoniously by the heels, dragged him to the gate and deposited him on a dung-heap outside.

On returning he found the boy’s eyes open again.

“How could you people let that brute do such a thing to a servant of the Prince?” he whispered angrily, as they watched the lad’s recovery.

The man looked extremely uncomfortable. “Don’t’ee ask, Master, don’t’ee ask! If us don’t do what’a tells us, he puts the curse of Derfel on’s. Our cattle die, our girls have bastards, our crops fail! ’Tis when he’s drunk he does things like this. ’Tis the spirit of Derfel taking him, I reckon.”

“Well,” said Rhisiart, “I’ll do what I can for you anyway with the Prince. But I shall tell him the whole story.”

The fellow pulled him aside by the arm. “If I were you, Master,” he whispered, “I wouldn’t say naught to Owen ab Griffith till to-morrow night. There be too many of we from old ‘Cadair’; and Derfel’s a mighty one for putting strength in our arms against the English.”

Rhisiart gave him a long searching look. “What’s your name?” he enquired. “You seem to have more sense than some.”

“Ifan ap David, at your service, Master. Do’ee think, Master, us’ll be all dead men by tomorrow night?”

“You’ll be a dead man if you have anything more to do with that brute out there! Say your prayers, Ifan ap David; say your prayers to the Mother of God, and your women and your cattle need fear no Derfel, nor Devil either!”

Ifan crossed himself. “I’ve a-said that very thing many a time, Master; but ’tis hard to go contrary to them conjurers. There’s a conjurer now up our way who do—”

But Rhisiart left him abruptly. Rawlff had risen to his feet and had managed to shuffle stiffly, though with several groans of pain, to the side of the old piebald.

“Master Rhisiart,” the boy whispered. “Send that man away. I’ve got something for you.”

Our friend signed to Ifan to leave them alone; and as soon as the fellow was gone the two youths faced each other, each leaning against Griffin’s mottled back.

“Mistress Catharine sends you a letter,” murmured Rawlff hurriedly; “and Mistress Tegolin sends you your sword.” He paused, while our friend clutched eagerly at the familiar weapon laid along-side of Griffin’s saddle; and then the boy added in the conspiring and significant tone of one whose life might have been spent carrying messages between high-born ladies and their lovers, “I’ve hid the letter inside the sheath.”

Thus speaking he made a pathetic effort to unloose the withy-bands with which he had secured the sword to the saddle, but his fingers were so weak and his arms so bruised that he soon left this attempt to his excited companion.

Meanwhile old Griffin kept turning his head, twitching his ears, expanding his nostrils, evidently puzzled by his recovered master’s lack of attention.

Rhisiart responded mechanically to these overtures, but the expression in the old horse’s eyes said with unmistakeable plainness, “I’ve come all this way. I’ve brought you your sword. But you’ll never be the same to me till that girl is gone.”

But Rhisiart was hard at work pulling the blade from its sheath. Yes! there was a strip of the thinnest parchment he’d ever seen wrapped round the steel! It was no easy job to get the blade out, with that letter twisted round it, and once or twice he mentally cursed Rawlff’s romantic device.

The parchment was torn clean across when he did separate it from the steel; but there it was! He held in his hand the first love-letter he had ever received! Hurriedly, hardly glancing at it, he concealed it in the inside pocket of his tunic; but before sheathing the blade he couldn’t resist brandishing it in the air and making slashes with it over Griffin’s back at an imaginary Mortimer.

He insisted, however, on the boy’s getting up on the horse again; and as he helped him to mount he enquired for whom he had picked the two huge bundles of bluebells that dangled head-downwards from the saddle, their stalks death-white and oozing with vegetable sap, just as when he’d first pulled them up in some shady recess of mountain hazels.

Rawlff smiled a grown-up courtier's smile. This was the question to which he had been longing to reply, even since he'd picked those purple-headed blooms. "I brought them for Lowri ferch Ffraid," he whispered proudly. "Mistress Tegolin said her mother would be pleased if I picked something for her on the way."

Rhisiart stared at the boy in astonishment. Had that devilish enchantress begun to play her games with this lad, no sooner than she'd finished with himself?

He felt certain the boy was lying when he said that Tegolin had told him to pick flowers for her mother. Tegolin knew the woman too well to throw any youth in her way. Bluebells for Lowri on the Eve of Saint Alban! Would she strew them on Master Simon's pillow or hang them from Rhys Gethin's helmet?

With Rawlff on the piebald's back and himself at his head they emerged from the Pilleth pound. *"Cover her! Uncover her! Uncover her! Cover her!"* And by some providential interposition the young rider became at once so fascinated by the gambling that this crazy repetition distracted him from a sound and a sight that Rhisiart, tugging at Griffin's bridle, prayed to the Virgin he wouldn't notice.

The gamblers had lit a torch; and this torch, creating little islands of glowings and flickerings in the falling night, made an outlying island of the dung-heap. Here, squatting on his haunches and relieving his bladder so shamelessly that he resembled the image of a beast-god in prehistoric art, sat the unholy Scab; and as he sat he swayed, and as he swayed he uttered sounds, and by degrees these sounds became articulate words.

"Cover her! Uncover her! Uncover her! Cover her!" cried the gamblers.

Seeing Rawlff's intense desire to watch the game Rhisiart gave up his tugs at Griffin's bridle and lent an ear to the Scab's obscure chantings. He was past being shocked by the fellow. He had come to regard him as quite as sub-human as Derfel's phantom Horse neighing for virginities; but he was outraged all the same by the burden of this prophetic howl uttered just as the night was falling that could so easily be their last on earth.

To what particular demon the Bard was referring under the name Gwyn ap Nudd our friend had no idea; but the images called up by this oracle from the dung-heap disturbed him not a little. Everybody — even the Prince — had a half-belief in the Scab's prophetic power.

"Cover her! Uncover her! Uncover her! Cover her!" cried the gamblers; but when at last he did drag Griffin away, it wasn't that refrain, it was what the Scab was chanting that rattled about his ears like a rattle of bones:

Who can strew whiteness in summer while rivers run red?
Can Gwyn ap Nudd counting his fishes and furling his sails?
No! They're for Derfel, for Derfel, these dainty dead;
Stripped of their armour, like mackerel stripped of their scales!

Long before silence had fallen upon that little army Rhisiart had learnt his letter from Catharine by heart. It was a very short letter and its spelling was infantile. It was written entirely in capitals. The word "love" was spelt "luf", and the words "never forget thee" were spelt "nef vorgat the."

The girl had evidently experienced especial difficulty with her own name; for the end of the parchment was covered with erased attempts at "Catharine ferch Owen"; and at the very last she had contented herself with "Cat-Rin" followed by the syllables "thy luf."

In the shock of his unexpected reception by the tipsy sentries Rawlff had forgotten his grand excuse for his daring ride, which was nothing less than a letter to Rhisiart from his mother in Hereford.

This letter the astute young lawyer held in his hand when he presented his messenger to the Prince; and he scrupled not to break its seal before them all.

It ran as follows:

By the mercy of God and the departure for Wales of a servant of the esteemed John of Mawddwy, a loyal gentleman of the Marches, I write to send you my blessing, my unhappy son. May Our Lady and all the Saints keep you in health and bring you to a right state of mind, and a speedy return to your allegiance to our gracious and merciful Lord, King Henry. I do you to wit, dear son, that by the blessed intervention of Our Lady I have recently taken to myself a second lord and husband, namely, the good Knight, Sir James Monfoison, a gentleman of French descent but as highly esteemed in our City as in his native Provence. It is as much a grief to my dear husband as to myself that nothing but our gracious King's pardon for your unhappy errors will enable us to see your face again; but may Almighty God and Saint Ann, my revered Patroness, keep you in their merciful protection. Written at Hereford on this fifteenth day of the month of May at the command of Laura, Lady Montfoison, by Walter Hogpen, Clerk in Holy Orders.

Our friend, in his cunning craftiness, allowed it to appear that his mother's marriage was a grievous shock to him. As a matter of fact it was an immense relief; for more than once his conscience had pricked him for leaving so lively and amorous a lady with no natural defender.

It was only to Master Brut that he read the whole of this document, but he hesitated not to give the Prince an eloquent summary of its contents, and he nourished the hope that the pensive abstraction produced by Catharine's capital letters was put down to the clerkly penmanship of Father Hogpen.

Long after everybody else was asleep, at least trying to sleep, the Prince and his advisers were discussing their plans for the morrow. Bands of Henry Don's horsemen kept arriving with fresh news as the night wore on; but all their news pointed in the same direction, namely that the army from Ludlow was steadily pursuing the main highway across the Mortimer country, and using no cavalry to try out the preparations to meet them.

The impetuous Rhys Gethin was all for moving their force as rapidly as possible towards the enemy, trusting that pure luck, when they were near their foe, would provide them with some suitable ambuscade in the overhanging woods from which to make their attack.

Broch-o'-Meifod, however, to Rhisiart's great relief, insisted upon a strategy of a more concerted and calculated kind. The giant suggested that their wisest course would be to draw up their men on the summit of a long, slow-mounting hill to the west of Pilleth, a hill that bore the local name of Bryn Glas, and then, by a skilful use of their Kidwelly horsemen, to lure the Mortimer host to attempt the ascent of this eminence; thus making the encounter between them, while nothing was left to chance, an encounter between men above and men below.

"But surely, Broch," said Owen, who generally remained silent while these discussions went on, "surely Sir Edmund can't be such an absolute fool as to keep that great mass of heavy-armed men close together, following a track surrounded by hills? He must have some scouts abroad to keep their way clear?"

Henry Don broke in at this, somewhat piqued at his friend's distrust of his horsemen's news. "It's an army led by knights in armour, my Prince, I tell you! Heavy horses — heavy men. My people have watched them. They're riding so fast that their Welsh archers are running to keep up with them! It's a surprise attack. They hope to draw us down to meet them on their own level. They've no idea we have a cavalry arm in our force."

Broch-o'-Meifod wagged his great head. "There's never been an army led into Wales, Owen ap Griffith, since the days of Harold the Saxon, that wasn't too heavily armed. Harold chased us up the peaks of Snowdon with riders as fast as our own. But it's never been done since the Normans came. That's why the first Edward built castles. They trust in the thickness of their walls, these English, not in the nimbleness of their feet."

"What in the devil's name," cried Rhys Gethin, "are you fellows talking about? First you say they'll keep to the level, and then you say they'll begin climbing a great whoreson hill like Bryn Glas! Why should they climb it? What on earth would persuade them to climb it? How will they know we're waiting for them on the top? And if they do find out — by the beard of Dewi Sant, my good men, you're confusing Sir Edmund with his nephew, the baby Earl!"

"But doesn't the main highway go up Bryn Glas?" interposed Owen. "I took that for granted from the beginning. Is there any other track round here that heavily-armed knights could follow?"

Henry Don assured the Prince at once that the highway did ascend Bryn Glas and that unless the enemy had already taken a different route they had no alternative to climbing this hill.

"Well, gentlemen," said Owen, "what about dividing our men into three companies? Let one of them remain concealed at the top of the hill, let the two others wait in the woods to the left and the right; and wouldn't it be a good idea, Don, if your horsemen hid themselves in that thick fir-copse that we saw just now, on the other side of the Lugg, at the foot of Bryn Glas?"

"Does the Lugg cross the track they're following, Master Don?" threw in Meredith.

The cavalry leader looked blank. "God knows where the Lugg runs!" he groaned. "I know we had to follow its damned course for several miles before I'd trust a single rider among its rocks and pools!"

"If the highway crosses it," Rhisiart was moved to interject, "there must be a ford."

"Wise lad!" said Owen, while they all smiled. "But the point is, and it's the same whether Mortimer has to cross the Lugg or not, does that great fir-wood I saw down there border upon the track where it begins to ascend the hill?"

"It does! It does, my Prince!" cried the Lollard eagerly, "for Master Simon and I went for a little stroll at the foot of Bryn Glas after supper."

"To explore the country, Master Brut," threw in Father Pascentius, "or to refute Saint Thomas?"

"Yes, we'd all like to know," quoth Rhys Gethin, "what makes the Hog of Chirk swallow your God-damned heresies as if they were his native swill! I'm not as much for my beads as I should be," and the warrior crossed himself, "but if I don't confess myself to the Father to-night may the curse of Pelagius stick in my gullet!"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" protested the Prince. "Master Brut has come all the way from his estate in England to fight for his country."

"A lot of fighting he'll do!" growled Rhys Gethin. "Why I know on good authority that his curst Lollardry won't let him carry arms. He said himself to Master Simon—"

"May I ask," interrupted Rhisiart, "who is your 'good authority', Captain?"

There was a general laugh at this; and the enamoured warrior flushed angrily but held his peace.

"Well! it's decided then," concluded Owen. "We'll bestir ourselves before dawn, feed our men and our horses, and hear Mass. Then a third of us to the top of Bryn Glas with me! Another third to the left under you, Captain, and another under Meredith to the right. You, Don, will conceal your horsemen in that wood down there — letting the Lugg run where it will — and whatever happens, and whatever accidents occur, don’t let a man stir till I make the signal. I’ll rush them down the hill, Rhys and Meredith’ll burst in on their flanks, Don’ll cut off their retreat at the bottom, and ‘Saint Derfel for Wales’ shall be our — What’s that you’re muttering, Broch?”

“Nothing, nothing, Owen ap Griffith! Let those cry ‘Derfel’ who fear Derfel. For myself I have no cry. But if I had, ’twould be some Gaer-and-Gorsedd cry of the ancient people, the people of Mynydd-y-Gaer-yng-Nghorwen, and of the Gorsedd at Mathrafal, and of the Dragon-Mound at Meifod.”

Rhisiart watched the Prince’s face with intense interest. “If I were he,” he thought, “I’d burst out at Broch for that. I’d cry, ‘Damn your ancient people! We’re all Welshmen here to-night, fighting for a real, living, modern Wales, a Wales with its own laws, its own clergy, its own—’”

But fancying he detected on Owen’s bearded lips that disconcerting smile — so like Meredith’s — he dismissed, for the time being, the thought of the two Universities, and contented himself with suggesting in an unassuming tone that “Saint David for Wales,” or simply “Dewi Sant!” would he a more suitable cry than “Derfel”.

It was on the tip of his tongue to describe to them the lurid rhyme of that ghoulish creature on the dung-heap; but he restrained himself.

Rhys Gethin, however, suppressed his whole suggestion in a moment. “The men’ll cry ‘Derfel’ tomorrow,” he announced bluntly, “whatever we decide for them!”

Owen called for a midnight “stirrup-cup” at this point, and gathering round the great bowl in a less controversial temper they all began discussing the personal arms they would use. A vague notion that had been hovering in our young friend’s mind of charging down the slope of Bryn Glas upon Griffin’s back was soon dispelled by the Prince’s declaration that he himself would fight on foot with no weapon but his two-edged sword. Rhisiart at once resolved to content himself with his own antique weapon, now securely buckled round his waist, and to offer his precious dagger to his friend, the Lollard.

“Why do you use nothing but those axes?” he permitted himself, in the glow of this more intimate moment, to enquire of Broch-o’-Meifod.

‘“Tis a long story, child,” replied the giant kindly. “But the gist of it is, I’ve practised with my axes so long — I throw them you know — that I never leave an enemy hurt or wounded.”

“How do you leave them?”

“I leave them dead; but so quickly dead that they feel nothing.”

The Lollard, who had been listening to this with the gravest attention, broke in eagerly. “You’ve no scruple, then, about killing — only about causing pain?”

The giant nodded. “You’ve got it exactly, my friend! I am partial to death. I don’t regard death as an evil. But I regard pain as a monstrous and unnecessary evil.”

“But aren’t pain and suffering the basis of our religion?”

“Not of mine,” said Broch-o’-Meifod. “Death is the basis of my religion.”

“But isn’t death the ultimate outrage, the ultimate defeat?” murmured Owen in a low voice.

Father Pascentius forgot himself so far as to lift the great bowl to his lips in place of dipping his flagon into it. “If death hadn’t been the worst,” he spluttered, replacing the bowl on the table while his eyes devoured, face by face, everybody in sight, “the Son of God wouldn’t have died.”

"It isn't the worst; it's the best," said Broch-o'-Meifod. "He took the best," he added after a pause, and with a very strange note in his voice.

A silence followed this. Owen thought of his secretly cherished faith in his power of externalizing his soul. Rhisiart told himself a story of his mother, on the arm of her French husband, crossing London Bridge on her way to see the Coronation of Henry the Fifth; and how she would shudder at the sight of "a mouldering head with a pike through it, not knowing that it was the head of her little monk'."

The Lollard thought of the Florentine ring he had given to Mistress Alice, so choicely worked, and of how much she could sell it for if he were killed tomorrow.

"The Devil fly away with you all!" cried Rhys Gethin, rising to his feet. "I'm off into the fresh air to get a good sound sleep. If I'm not at your Mass tomorrow, Father, it'll be because I've got further to go than the Prince or Meredith."

"Not a string loosed, remember," Owen called to him as he went out, "till you see us rush on them."

"Don't shoot over their heads, Meredith ab Owen, as I've seen you do before now!" and with this final jibe the warrior went out.

Henry Don of Kidwelly was the only leader among them who made no attempt to sleep that night. After seeing his horsemen safely ensconced for the night, their unconscious forms stretched on the fir needles close to their tethered beasts, he himself, upon his favourite white mare who had a touch of Arabia in her blood, rode silently down the valley in the direction of the expected enemy. There was a pallid half-moon visible now and again; but the warm west wind, driving great lowering banks of clouds before it, kept obscuring this troubled voyager, and Don rode slowly, pondering in his mind many anxious thoughts.

He felt thoroughly uneasy as to the result of all these preparations. That last bitter word of Gethin's about the shooting of Meredith's archers especially teased his mind. He knew, too, a good deal more about the fighting capacity of these tourney-trained knights in armour than did any of Owen's advisers or of Owen's men.

He knew how extremely difficult it was to induce men on foot, even if fighting with all the advantage of higher ground, to approach these steel-clad gentlemen with their shields and their mighty lances. A chance arrow — rarely a carefully aimed one — might sometimes bring down a horse or a rider. But these trained war-steeds were as well armoured as their masters, and in any sort of equal contest their mere weight, with the long spears and armorial shields of the men mounted upon them, was enough to put panic into the hearts of all but the steadiest bowmen.

If the archers stood firm, he knew what the long-bow could do. But how rarely they did stand firm when armed knights charged them with levelled lances and plumes! Pensively and slowly Henry Don rode down that leafy glade. The cool night-wind stirred the heron's feather on his steel cap and blew through his trim black beard.

He felt, for all his anxious thoughts, a delicious relief in escaping from that noisy council-table and the fumes of that midnight bowl. Indescribably refreshing were the wood-smells that the wind brought as it rustled through the fir-branches.

When for a moment the half-moon swept into view, obscure shadows, that were themselves like sad and formless thoughts, not unhappy thoughts but thoughts with long vistas of memory, appeared before him.

Save for the rustling of the branches and the slow foot-fall on the mossy path of his white steed there was not a sound between earth and heaven. The thought did enter that trim head under the heron's feather that it was a pity that all this deep natural peace should be invaded by armed men bent upon a murderous struggle, but Don of Kidwelly was a practical though a lonely and thoughtful man, and his mind soon swung back to the matter in hand.

"They don't know," he said to himself, "none of them know, what they're facing tomorrow. Owen must be fifty; and his air isn't the air of a dare-devil patriot or a ruthless statesman. That Hereford boy's a typical Oxford scholar. Old Broch's a crazy mystic. The monk's little better. Rhys Gethin's a brave soldier, but you" — and he watched his mare's white mane as it stirred in the wind— "have as much intelligence as he has! Not one word have I heard from Owen as to the sort of princedom, if the common people do rise and help him, he'll establish in Wales. Has he given a thought, have any of them given a thought, as to what'll happen after his death? Will his eldest son succeed him? Or will he fall back on our fatal Welsh custom and divide the princedom between Griffith and Meredith? It won't last a year if he does, hardly a—"

His meditations were broken by the sight of a figure in front of him, the solitary figure of a man on foot with a bow drawn and an arrow on the string. Automatically he reined in the white mare, and horse and rider became one, the motionless image of a man upon a horse.

"A fine night!" he said quietly. "I am Henry Don of Kidwelly. Are you for Wales or for England?"

The figure in front of him unstrung his bow, returned the arrow into its quiver, and advanced without fear. "I thought it was you, Master Don," he said when he reached him. "Don't you remember me?"

Yes, the rider did remember him! It was the spy from Mortimer's army that he'd released that very day.

"You'd better ride back faster than you came, Master," said the fellow calmly. "They're not more than a couple of miles behind me."

"In what order?"

"In close array, Master. The gentlemen in front, then the troopers; and my mates in the rear."

"It's a surprise attack, then?"

"They know Owen's in Pilleth. They know he's waiting for them; but they hope to catch the fox asleep."

"It'll be dawn before they get there. It must be past three already."

"Dawn, yes; but it won't be light," remarked the fellow.

"They won't budge from the highway, will they?"

"I believe not, Master. They don't know the country. They think the village is the other side of Bryn Glas."

"And that Owen and his people are asleep in the village?"

The man nodded.

"Well, I'll be getting back," said Henry Don.

The two men stared at each other as the half-moon appeared between the branches.

"If — I — *can* — persuade my mates," said the fellow cautiously, "I suppose we'd better not join you till—"

"You mean you won't play them false till you're sure we're the winners?"

"Something like that," murmured the spy sullenly.

"Well, well," said the other in a friendly tone, "I'll see you're well rewarded, if you do bring them over. And I'll leave the moment to you."

"Master Don?"

"Well?"

"I'd like you to understand one thing before you go."

"Well?"

"If I bring them over, it won't be for you, or for Owen, or for any other fine gentleman; it'll be for the common folk of Wales!"

The man on the phantom-white mare gravely inclined his steel-capped head, listened intently for a second, as if he could hear the march of the enemy, and then, lightly swinging round, rode off at top speed in the direction of Pilleth.

The peasant with the long-bow turned also, but more slowly. "Will it do us any good?" he said to himself. "Philip Sparrow swore to me — but they all hold together, these whoreson gentry. Welsh, Norman, English — they're all alike!"

Meanwhile, riding rapidly up the narrow valley, came the army from Ludlow. Hereford men, most of them were, but some came from Salop, and some from the broad Radnor lands of the Mortimers. Sir Edmund himself, with Thomas Clanvow at his side, rode in front. Both were heavily-armed, both carried mighty lances, both were tall, personable men.

Clanvow, a good deal the elder of the two, was less weary and very much the more voluble. His head was bare, revealing to his companion every time the moon appeared a massive brow covered with thick curls, laughing, carefree eyes, and a strong soft neck, surrounded, above his mail surcote, by a rich collar of beaten gold.

The lean, anxious profile of the young Sir Edmund, with the short Mortimer upper lip drawn back a little from his clean-shaved mouth, kept turning in polite but troubled attention towards the cheerful countenance at his side.

"Well, at any rate," Clanvow was saying, "there were no horses wading in blood when I was born. My stars are all in good aspect for this encounter — and since we're brothers-in-arms for the adventure, what happens to me must happen to you! You take life too hard, Edmund. You're tired out now with all the worry you've made for yourself. Why weren't you content with our good shire-lads, without dragging all these damned Welsh tenants of yours into it? That speech you made to them this morning — staying awake half the night, I warrant, to compose it! — why, my sweet lad, not half of them understood what you were driving at! And why the devil did you write all that stuff to Harry Hotspur? He knows as well as you what a stingy miser King Harry is!

"You think too much, Edmund, that's what's the matter with you; and your thoughts run too far ahead. I suppose you're fancying a time'll come when the Percies will turn against the King and put your little nephew on the throne. 'Hotspur the King-maker,' and all that sort of thing!

"I tell you, my dear lad, here and now, you'd better put that stuff out of your head! Two to one that precious letter of yours is in the King's hands already. Take things as they come, lad, that's the trick. Our affair now is to get hold of Glendourdy and pack him off in chains to London. Put out of your mind all these silly thoughts of getting a ransom for him. He's an outlaw, and must be treated as such. Who's going to ransom him, I should like to know? King Richard's friends, the Franciscans? His estates are gone already, or soon will be. The fellow's a mere bandit, I tell you, from the caves of Snowdon! The King's mad to have let Grey buy himself off to such a tune. That's why Glendourdy's got such a rabble with him. When Grey's money's gone, they'll be gone. They're only a mob of Welsh thieves. There's not a gentleman among them.

"You say you're in want of money, and a good ransom for Glendourdy would pay your debts. But who was it I heard the other night telling Devereux that he oughtn't to evict his tenants? That's where your money's gone! What's the good of being a Mortimer if you can't collect your dues?"

While the lively poet was thus combining his enjoyment of the night’s adventure with a little practical advice, a few paces behind them, the three robust knights, Robert Whitney, Kinard de la Bere, and Walter Devereux, were exchanging vehement hopes that their evasive enemy would show himself and give battle.

“The great thing,” said de la Bere, “is to draw Glendourdy down from his hills. If we only once get him on level ground he won’t have a chance. You should have seen the Shropshire levies under Hugh Burnell rush him into Vyrnwy two years ago. You should have seen John Charlton of the Red Castle hustle him when he came near Welshpool. The man’s never once met any decent English troops without having to run like a hare. What worries me,” and the lusty old knight disturbed the roosting-place of a flock of small birds by the brandishings of his long lance, “is that we’re about as likely to get a sight of him this day as we are to get a sight of the gold that they say pilgrims have piled before the miraculous picture of Our Lady of Pilleth.”

“How will you fight,” enquired the portly Robert Whitney, “on horseback as we are, or on foot?”

“A good question, Master Whitney, a good question,” threw in Walter Devereux. “I’ll soon tell you how we’ll fight. First call our people to us — each of us his own — and then wait their attack. Not too near each other though. Let ’em break themselves on us, like whoreson waves on goodly rocks. Keep to your saddles for Mary’s sake, and run the whoreson knaves through with your lances! If your lance sticks and you’ve no one to pluck it from the varlet’s ribs, let it go, and have at them with your sword!”

As he spoke, Devereux removed his helmet, and hanging it on his saddle-bow glared at his friends as if they were the enemy. He had the most grotesque features, this pure-blooded Norman. Nature had given him an enormous hooked nose, thin indrawn lips hidden by a straggly black moustache, and a pointed chin as sharp as a witch-wife's.

Old de la Bere just shrugged his powerful shoulders and smiled in the man's face; but Whitney looked uneasily round as if to make sure that his retainers were within call.

Whitney was a newcomer among the magnates of the border. From the distaff side he did indeed boast a few drops of old Saxon blood, but his closed and clamped face, his crafty little eyes, his ponderous frame, all of them smacked rather of the justice's bench than of the battlefield. He had indeed been a mighty one for "adding field to field and house to house"; nor would he have joined this expedition at all had it not been that he was certain in his own mind that the Welshmen would vanish into their caves and that the King would reward so devoted a servant with many forfeited estates. The words "law and order" were the words most frequently upon the lips of Robert Whitney, and he had already managed to get it to the King's ears that he cordially approved of the policy of retaining all ransoms, especially of Scotch prisoners, in the royal hands; and that his tenants were always at the royal disposal if the Percies proved restive under this businesslike treatment.

All this lively chit-chat by the way insensibly lessened the speed with which Mortimer's force progressed; and by the time they reached the place where the horsemen from South Wales were hidden there began to be recognized, at least by the leader himself and his poet-friend, certain faint but unmistakeable indications that dawn was at hand.

It was at this moment that one of Henry Don's younger followers, unable to sleep, and prepared to risk disobeying his Lord's command if he could only be the first to bring news of the enemy, caused a rustling in the fir-branches. He had seen what he wanted to see, and he got clear away; but the sound of his horse's hasty retreat reached the five knights simultaneously. The woods were thick around them. No better place for an ambush could have been found.

"Mortimer, a Mortimer!" cried their leader. "Clanvow for Clanvow!" cried the poet; and while the other two knights, for the judicious Whitney had no claim to a cry, echoed with "a Devereux for Saint Ouen!" and "a de la Bere for Saint Martin!" their retainers hurried forward in an excited pell-mell and rallied in groups round their respective lords.

The main body of the shire-troopers followed more leisurely, while the Mortimer Welsh tenants, among whom was the friend of the revolutionary, Philip Sparrow, stood still to await events.

"Saint Mary! But this is foolishness if ever there was!" laughed Thomas Clanvow. "All right, John o'Dale, all right Peter Purvey — you can fall back again! Come on, Edmund lad. Tell 'em to fall back. We're a parcel of silly women. There's no ambush here. I've got a sixth sense for Welsh thieves. 'Twas a stag we disturbed. Those were a big animal's movements, not the feet of a horde of bare-foot scrubs! It was a stag, I tell you, or maybe a forest-pony."

So saying the curly-haired poet broke into a bawdy ditty, waved back his retainers with the steel helmet he'd been on the point of placing on his head, and proceeded to spur on his horse so fast that Mortimer had to gallop to keep pace with him.

The three other gentlemen glanced at one another with a smile and followed their example, while the heavily-accoutred men-at-arms who formed the main body of their force cursed freely as they quickened their march to a jog-trot.

The five knights, if the business-like Master Whitney could be called a knight, did, however, have the wit, if not the grace, to pause to breathe their horses, and to allow their followers to rest, when they reached the foot of Bryn Glas. The grey light in the east had now spread over the whole sky; and as they all rested there, many of the troopers easing themselves by removing the heavier pieces of their armour and some of them even sinking down upon the grass, there seemed to take possession of them all an unspoken desire to postpone ascending the hill till the dawn really began.

Clanvow was still restless; but Mortimer, as he watched the relief with which the troopers took advantage of this pause, became obdurate at his friend's impatience.

"I know, I know," he replied when the poet urged the importance of their attack being a surprise. "But men with no breath in their bodies can't surprise anybody."

And as they all rested there it seemed as if the miracle of the dawn drew their general consciousness towards itself, so that their life-sense ceased to be an individual thing and became a common thing, a multiple entity that had grown spell-bound by what was happening in the firmament.

Irregular blood-red streaks appeared now in the eastern quarter. One second and there were none of these; another second and there they were! And with the coming of these blood-red streaks the air that cooled their faces suddenly lost a certain damp chill that characterized it before; and though it didn't grow warm it carried with it a perceptible quality of livingness, as if those red streaks in the sky, wild and sad as they were, like a reflection from battle-fields of long-ago, brought with them something familiar, something steeped in old earth-memories, that drove back the mortal death-chill of the empty night.

By degrees, as they watched, they perceived that these dark-red streaks had changed their character. They didn't see them in the process of changing, for it is forbidden to the human eye to catch the actual movement of celestial presences, but where they'd been contemplating dark blood-streaks they were now contemplating rose-coloured clouds! Nor was it long as they watched — and even the five horses seemed to be expanding their nostrils towards the east — before that rose-tinge had spread over the whole sky till it reached the zenith, while in the quarter where the blood-streaks had first appeared it was as if some vast magic gates had opened, leading into an infinity of glorified distance, into a receding perspective of golden space.

It was still some while before the moment came for the orb of the sun itself to appear when Mortimer gave the signal to advance. He gave it as soon as he perceived that his Welsh bowmen, tenants of the Mortimer lands in Wales, had begun to wind their way into the open out of the gloomy umbrageousness of the fir-woods. These men, he assumed, being more lightly armed and inured to these mountainous tracks, would need no rest before ascending the long slope before them; but when, half-way up the ascent of Bryn Glas, he turned to look back at his devoted array he was surprised, though not particularly disturbed, to note that the Welshmen were resting at the foot of the hill.

Anxious to keep his own and his friends' horses as fresh as possible for their assault upon the village, Mortimer continued to restrain the impatience of his poetical friend. All five gentlemen were now riding together; and they advanced so slowly that there was plenty of time for conversation.

"It's all the fault of Reginald Grey," announced Devereux, "that Glendourdy has made this stir. His own relatives are against him. All the most civilized of the Welsh aristocracy are against him. What the thing really is, is a peasants' revolt. It wants putting down with a firm hand, that's all! These bards are the worst. They're all for the common herd. What the King should do is to stamp out this curst gibberish they call their language.

Language forsooth! Chatter of kites and crows it sounds to me. I can't stomach the whoreson tongue."

"That's what I say," acquiesced Robert Whitney sententiously. "There'll never be real law and order in these mountains till all the bards are hung and all the peasants forbidden to leave the estates they cultivate. Welsh gentlemen are like other gentlemen. I know many of them and they're ashamed to be heard talking this lingo of the common herd. Hang every bard in Wales I say."

"Sir Edmund don't agree with you," threw in Kinard de la Bere. "He's lived too long with these bare-foot savages. He's come to love 'em, as a man comes to love his hounds. No, no, Mortimer, you needn't try to deny it. But I tell'ee this, my boy; if your plottings with your precious brother-in-law — now don't look so sour, for everyone on the border knows it — did put your nephew on the throne, you and your friend Hotspur would love to do exactly what old Hal and young Hal are doing now: burn these savages' huts till they know their masters! What do you say, Clanvow?"

"I say," replied the poet, "that a gentleman who treats his tenants like a gentleman and isn't ashamed to be on easy terms with a good simple man because he's a Welsh herdsman or a Welsh ploughman—"

Devereux interrupted him with a burst of rude laughter. "We know you, Master Clanvow! What about that 'good simple man' you caused to be flogged to death?" Here the outraged realism of this grotesque-looking aristocrat, more contemptuous of the poet's literary gentility than he was of Whitney's business gentility, caused his pendulous nose to droop over his moustache, his left ear to twitch under his helmet, and the inhuman tip of a saurian tongue to appear for a second between his toothless gums.

When his laughing-fit was over he winked so comically at Kinard de la Bere that the worthy knight had to clap his gauntleted hand over his mouth.

The truth was that it was well known in Radnorshire that Thomas Clanvow's wife, wearying, as women sometimes do, of her lusty braggart of a poet, had played the wanton with his taciturn Welsh groom.

To escape their ridicule, from which Mortimer, who was watching intently a certain hill-ridge where the infinity of gold was rapidly thickening into a floating island of dazzling metallic brightness, alone remained aloof, Clanvow, for the second time that morning, spurred his steed forward, a move that made it necessary for Mortimer to follow him.

Thus it was brought about that though not a man throughout that whole English army, now straggling up the long half-mile slope of Bryn Glas, had missed one stage in the sun's premonitory approachings, its actual appearance was unseen by a single soul.

With a resounding shout of "Owen for Wales!" Glyn Dŵr and his men bounded from their shelter in the green bracken and swept down upon their enemy. Had a pair of ravens that were hovering above the crowded slope of Bryn Glas felt impelled to turn their eyes from the blazing orb of the sun and contemplate this onslaught, it might have seemed to them as if Owen's little band was simply swallowed up as it charged down into the very centre of the Ludlow army.

To the Prince himself, who was tall enough to see what was happening beyond the immediate melée, it seemed like an hour, though it was only three minutes, before Meredith's division, though they scampered like demons along the side of the slope, joined battle on the enemy's left, while it seemed two hours before Rhys Gethin's band had time to reach the scene on the enemy's right.

Owen and Rhisiart were swept forward so fast by the rush of their own momentum and the momentum of the men following them that it wasn't till they were in the thick of the heavy-armed shire-levies that their primary impetus was stayed.

Here, however, it was stayed with a vengeance, for they had outstripped all but a score of their most eager friends, and this little circle of devoted Welshmen found themselves surrounded and hemmed in by the pick of the stout yeomen from the fertile plains round the Castle of Ludlow.

With shout upon shout these powerful troopers drove in upon them, shortening their spears and furiously stabbing at them, as if they were a small pack of encircled wolves in the jaws of the wolf-hounds.

The figure of Owen was unmistakeable. “Have at him! Have at him!” Rhisiart heard them cry out on all sides. ‘“Tis Glendourdy himself!” The voice of a young freckled leader among them was especially audible. “A thousand silver groats,” he shouted, “to the man who takes Glendourdy — alive or dead!” This freckled youth himself did nothing but obstinately, constantly, and steadily drive his spear at the Prince.

Rhisiart watched his movements like a hawk, and at one second their eyes met, and to the astonishment of our friend he found himself actually exchanging a smile with this unknown Ludlow boy, just as if they’d been playing ball, instead of a game of life and death!

At last the boy’s foot slipped where someone’s entrails had strewn the grass and Rhisiart was on him in a flash with the first death-stroke he’d ever given. Thrusting straight at the freckled face that had smiled at him, he drove his great sword into the lad’s panting mouth, drove it with so much vigour that the point of it came out at the back of his enemy’s skull.

It struck him afterwards that he must have been in a kind of blood-daze; for he could remember putting his foot on that dead lad’s chest without a flicker of hesitation, and remorselessly dragging out his weapon, while the Prince’s Roman sword flashed above his head.

"We can't win! We can't win!" something in him kept repeating; but when he saw how Owen had perpetually to swing round he began to do what he saw Master Sparrow doing for his master — that is to say, guard at all costs the Prince's back.

Nothing of what was happening outside their own miniature battlefield reached him. Grimly, desperately, he set himself to that one sole task; and the result justified him; for, spared the necessity of swinging round on his heel, Owen with his practised wrist soon made a clearance of the press of spears in front of him.

The curious thing was that our friend didn't think once of Catharine. His brain was stupefied. But several times he thought of Griffin; and in some obscure way he felt as if Owen's back were a piebald thing, but a thing he had to guard while breath was in him.

This business couldn't, Rhisiart thought, last much longer. As a matter of fact it lasted for about ten minutes, after which they heard reassuring Welsh cries from the bowmen at the foot of the hill and felt a certain "give" in the spirit of their opponents. Yes, the enemy below them were being assailed from their rear by flight after flight of stinging arrow-shafts! Ten minutes can, however, be a long time when death is at your throat; and thinking it over afterwards our friend acknowledged that if Broch-o'-Meifod hadn't been with them both Owen and himself, along with Master Brut and Master Sparrow, would certainly have perished.

Owen fought like a madman with his two-edged sword and Rhisiart tried to imitate him with his relic of the Crusades but there was such terrific pressure all round them and so many blows struck at them at once from so many directions that our friend, till he realized that Mortimer's bowmen had changed sides, hardened his heart to meet his end.

Master Brut, who apparently had only accepted Rhisiart's dagger out of courtesy, showed incredible agility as a pugilist, and by his quick movements managed for a while to dodge the most murderous spears. But for an unarmed man to be in the centre of that stabbing and cracking and smashing was what Homer calls *hyper-moron* or a wilful rushing beyond the circle of your natural fate.

In the end Broch-o'-Meifod saved the Lollard's life in a very primitive manner. He brought down his own fist on the man's head with such drastic effect that he lay at their feet as though stone dead.

But it was Broch's skill with his axes that really saved them all; for though the Prince's Roman sword turned its deadly point and swung its double edge faster than the Hereford boy had ever seen a sword move, there came moments, even in that short time, when he only just escaped a murderous thrust.

Two of these thrusts Rhisiart, at no small risk, beat off himself; but there came a moment when his arm ached so much with the weight of his great sword that if he hadn't tripped over the still unconscious form of Master Brut, one of these spears would have pierced his own throat.

It was Broch's axes that saved them. The giant went on flinging them as if he were an iron engine of death rather than a man, and Rhisiart saw only one of them sink into the earth without its victim. But Broch couldn't have achieved this if the revolutionary Philip hadn't been standing back to back against him.

Nor was Master Sparrow's method of fighting much less singular than his master's; for he kept whirling round his head in each hand, and both his arms seemed to have the strength of an ordinary man's right arm, a gleaming pole-axe; and under the slashing blows of this unusual weapon the heads of many vicious spears and the bodies of more than one spearman lay on the ground before him. Though his boyish muscles were growing so numb under the weight of his sword that each time he struck he felt that he could never strike again, Rhisiart was still not quite oblivious of the general nature of the life-and-death struggle round him.

He felt its primitive race-quality. He felt its primitive beast-quality. He felt it was body against body, though with iron in place of claw. Yes, he felt rising from these straining Welsh bodies one single blind, frantic, desperate obsession; an obsession to tear, to rend, to overmaster these massive, struggling English bodies that by their sheer weight and oppressive obstinacy were beating them down.

It must, however, be confessed that when he tripped and fell, Rhisiart did, in his complete exhaustion, take advantage of his collapse across his stunned friend to remain on the ground for a perceptible breathing-space.

While on the ground with his face against a tuft of white clover he found himself sucking these honey-weeds, and as he sucked his breath came in spluttered gasps, “Hail Mary! Hail Mary! Hail Mary!” but in his mind he said to himself, “We may win yet! We may win yet!”

Just then a heavy weight fell against him, knocking for an instant all the breath out of him, and when he scrambled to his feet he saw it was Owen himself with an arrow in his chest. Blood was coming out of the chieftain’s mouth and trickling down both forks of his beard; and to Rhisiart’s horror their eyes had hardly met when the man fainted away.

“That’s a Welsh arrow,” remarked Broch-o’-Meifod in the dazed and confused ears of the recovered Lollard.

“Is he dead? Have we won?” gasped Rhisiart.

“He’s not dead, little Master,” replied Philip Sparrow, “and we have won. Their Welsh archers turned against them, that’s what decided it! It’s the beginning of the end. It’s the people’s victory! The people’s victory!”

Rhisiart saw now that Master Sparrow was correct in both his statements. Piteous groans, wild cries for mercy, yells of pain rose up from Bryn Glas and occupied the gap in space and time filled twenty minutes ago by that proud army from Ludlow. He could hear, dying away into the woods below, the clatter and curses of Don's horsemen, cutting off the fugitives.

And Owen's eyes were open again and he could speak now. "It's — under — my — collar-bone," he murmured. "I'm all right. We'll leave it there till to-night. My shirt turned its point."

"It's a Welsh arrow," repeated Broch-o'-Meifod with foolish iteration.

But the Lollard, pale, shaky, and though entirely himself again, totally ignorant as to what he owed his life, was extricating a bleeding form from among the victims of Owen's sword and Broch's axes. It made Rhisiart's heart cold to recognize in this piteously gashed creature none other than his faithful messenger, Rawlff.

The dying boy knew him. "I — shall — never be — a dubbed — knight — now," he whispered, as our friend bent over him.

Rhisiart glanced at Owen whose eyes were also on the boy. "Lend me your sword," said the Prince calmly. Rhisiart obeyed. "Help me to get to him," he added. It needed more strength than Rhisiart's, however, to carry out this last mandate; but they moved him by degrees, one of his own hands nervously clutching the shaft of the arrow whose head was buried in his chest.

"I, Owen ap Griffith, Prince of Wales, Knight of the most Royal Order of Richard of England, Second of that Name, do in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost dub thee, Rawlff ap Daffydd, Knight Companion of my new Order of Dewi Sant.... Rise Sir Rawlff!"

What "rose" was a spurt of arterial blood from the mouth of the new Knight; but Rhisiart never forgot the look of radiance on the boy's face as, murmuring something about “telling Luned,” his soul left its body. It was through a blood-stained mist, for his eyes, his ears, his nostrils, his fingers seemed all sticky with blood, that Rhisiart helped Broch and the Lollard to carry their wounded chief across the dead and the dying till they got him to the summit of Bryn Glas.

The lad had to give up his place at one point to Philip Sparrow, whose own long legs were dripping with blood from disregarded spear-thrusts. What set him vomiting was the sight of Lawnslot and Gwalchmai — both born executioners — moving among the rank and file of the dying to give them their coup de grace.

He had re-taken his place, however, at Owen’s head when they passed a hillock, slippery with blood, on the top of which beside his dead horse the incorrigible Devereux was still fighting for his life.

Sick of the sight of blood, and unwitting who this fantastic gentleman might be who refused to give up his sword, our friend lowered his eyes; so that it was from the Lollard he learnt later how the astonishing knight, his pendulous nose and insolent mouth twisted in one final defiance of everything in heaven and earth, laughed aloud, as with his death-blow he came near to cleaving poor young Madoc’s head clean from his neck.

On arriving at their headquarters the little group was jubilantly informed, though the Prince’s critical state soon quelled all tumultuous congratulations, that Mortimer and Clanvow, who had been surrounded and disarmed at the first rush, were prisoners of war.

For the remainder of that day Rhisiart stayed by Owen’s side. Indeed it was with his famous Toledo dagger, sharper than any knife, that some Pilleth “conjurer”, aided by the sobered Bard of Ffinnant, succeeded at last in extracting the arrow-head from the Prince’s collarbone.

How the lad longed for darkness to descend, the revelry to die down, and Owen to fall asleep! He made up his mind that before he himself slept he would read Catharine's letter syllable by syllable; and with each syllable he would say seven "Hail Marys" for the Knight Companion of Dewi Sant. This vow he meticulously kept, but for all his exhaustion of mind and body, sleep refused to come to him.

Weary of tossing from side to side, while he kept seeing the blood spurt out from Rawlff's mouth, and kept hearing the groans of the anonymous victims of Lawnslot and Gwalchmai, he decided at last to put on his clothes and go out into the night. Once in the air he felt calmer, and for a while happier, as he thought of Catharine receiving the news of her father's victory.

But the shapeless moon, throwing a phantom light upon the aerial landscape, drew him on against his will in the direction of the battlefield. It didn't take him long to reach the summit of Bryn Glas; but once there, looking down upon that field of slaughter, he felt as if he had been turned to stone. The realization of what he saw and of what it meant was beyond mortal belief.

Only twenty hours had passed since the battle began, but what had been done in that short time! The women of Pilleth — and he knew at once who had roused them to it, for there she was still, like a werewolf bitch among the dead — had, all that long summer twilight, been stripping the English corpses — and not only stripping them. "Can such things be," thought the poor lad, "and the Mother of God above all?"

He had vomited at the proceedings of Lawnslot and Gwalchmai, but this, the work of women, was an outrage beyond all physical reaction. Fiercely, desperately, for what he saw before him made a crack in his deepest faith, he tried to think the thing away by calling up the injury done to Wales by English oppression.

But this was beyond all human retribution, all human revenge. This was a work of insanity, of obsession by Satan. And that creature — surely she couldn't be human! — was at it still.

White with a whiteness like the whiteness of leprosy, those hapless bodies, bodies that twenty-four hours ago were living Englishmen, lay now, under that shapeless moon, transformed into lewd mockeries of flesh and blood. Or were these white obscenities not corpses at all, but fiends from Hell, called up out of the pit by this ghoulish half-moon, to make monstrous sport of the mysteries of procreation?

The moon's power was upon Rhisiart. Do what he could to turn away from these silent parodies of man's nakedness, he couldn't turn away! Had the corpse-loving moon injected a drop of her perverse frenzy into his own veins? Would he, Rhisiart ab Owen, be soon leaping down among those snow-white images of life's obscene origin, adding a new bestiality here, a new monstrosity there, dancing in and out of that woman's work, as if he were an initiate at a witches' Sabbath?

No! No! Things hadn't come to that. He was fascinated; but he was also outraged to the bottom of his soul! What troubled him as much as anything was the shamelessness of the distorted moon. Why didn't she hide her face? Instead of that she seemed pouring her light down with an hysterical exultation.

Rhisiart's own nerves were so affected by what he saw that he began to regard the ghastly sight not so much as the reprisals of Welsh women upon English men as the reprisals of all women, led by this labouring moon, upon all men; women in their mad perversity working obscene and monstrous blasphemy upon the very secrets of creation!

It was as if that declivity of Bryn Glas had suddenly upheaved in a devilish parody of the Last Day, and a host of lost souls, white with the leprous scurf of sin, were mutely offering to the oldest witch in Nature their unspeakable transformations!

There must have been as many as twenty or thirty women down there with Lowri; and their were-wolf madness, as far as our friend could see, was increasing rather than diminishing. The men must have carried away all the Welsh bodies from the battle-field during the day; and none had felt it his duty to bury their enemies.

"It's because Meredith's wounded as well as his father," our friend thought, "that this bitch has got such a free hand. Rhys Gethin's probably dead-drunk by this time, and Henry Don thinks it's none of his business. Owen ought never to have let that woman come down here, but women have too many rights in Wales; and that's certain."

It struck his mind as a curious thing that the Scab wasn't serving his demon among these helpless English; but no doubt he was drunk too; "Besides, a man would have to be pretty bold," concluded our friend, "To go down there among those mad witches!"

He had no sooner decided that even living men, and Welshmen to boot, might hesitate to present themselves before Lowri and her Maenads in their present mood, when he was aware of two men running towards him. They ran so fast that they were soon near enough for him to distinguish their identities. The man in front was Master Simon and the man behind was Master Brut.

Rhisiart turned to meet them. His first emotion was a curious one. It was burning shame. He felt his face grow hot. Had a blush on a swarthy cheek, and by moonlight too, been a recognizable sight Master Simon would have wondered at him.

But the ex-Hog of Chirk was past wondering at anything. The good-natured Lollard, who had offered to take the place of the luckless young Madoc, whose decapitation at one stroke had caused his slayer to die laughing, had been disturbed in his vigil at Owen's door by the furtive appearance of Master Simon. The reformed Hog was stealing down the stairs from his wife's apartment without his shoes and with a stare in his eyes so wild, so guilty, and so dominated by the Devil that Master Brut jumped up in dismay. The fellow's explanations were obviously lies and when the Lollard saw his back as it left the building, it presented itself to his Pauline eye as a back unmistakeably ridden by Satan; in other words as the back of a man possessed.

Dragging therefore into the house an extremely sleepy and sulkily puzzled trooper to take his place, the Lollard, who hadn't removed any article of his ordinary attire, which certainly couldn't be called a heavy battle-array, started in pursuit of Master Simon, who, quickly aware that his conscience was after him, ran like a rabbit.

It was Rhisiart's presence that facilitated the poor wretch's capture; and it was our friend's destiny to be present now at one of the most remarkable scenes he would ever be allowed to witness.

"She's my own wife," panted the obsessed prisoner, staring with a devouring intensity almost worthy of Father Pascentius at the Satanic charade revealed to him by the gloating moon.

Our friend's legal mind found it hard to resist this plea. "I don't see, Brut," he commenced, "how you can very well meddle—" His words died away in his throat; for in addressing his friend he caught a glimpse of his face with the moonlight full upon it. The power, it appeared, which controlled that gibbous moon forced it to throw the good into relief equally with the evil; and Rhisiart, for the first time in his life, was terrified of

Master Brut. An authority shone forth from this Hereford gentleman's face that was the flame of the Spirit. He must have seen what Lowri and her women were doing. He must have seen what they had done. But it was clear that his mind was so overpowered by the image of his suffering Man-God that the hysterical antics of these females were no more to him than if, gazing at his Redeemer, he had noted in the *dulce lignum* of His Cross the obscene proceedings of a few necrophiliac wood-lice.

Rhisiart now beheld an unseemly struggle between the two men, each of them powerfully built, each of them possessed by a force completely outside himself. Master Simon's face was convulsed with an emotion so great that its individual features in that pallid light seemed to merge into one another, seemed to become one single feature, a quivering, twitching, licking, straining tongue.

Suddenly Rhisiart saw his hand slide into his tunic and come out again with a glittering knife.

"Take—" the lad cried out sharply; but the heretic had seen his danger, and his method of "taking care" was as effective as it was startling. He brought down his fist with the weight of an iron hammer upon the head of his recalcitrant disciple.

Simon fell with a thud and lay as still as the Lollard himself had done under the fist of Broch-o'-Meifod.

"Let's get him to bed," remarked the Wycliffite quietly, "before he comes to himself. But his devil's left him. Didn't you hear it whizz past us?" And then a little later, "Have you noticed," he said, and this quaint remark was uttered in a perfectly calm and practical manner, while our friend helped him to convey his burden back to the house, as if the great victory of Bryn Glas had been no more than a riot in the street, "have you noticed how Our Lord never came face to face with a woman possessed by a devil?"

This was too much for Rhisiart, and he laughed aloud. “Do you mean,” he began; but neither then nor later, though as may be supposed his malicious mind often reverted to the Ruthin girl, did he dare to pursue that question with his friend.

His mind was feverishly active all the same. “I don’t believe I’ll ever sleep again!” he thought as they re-entered the building.

In examining his crusader’s sword he had noticed two or three minute dents in it, several inches from its point, and had remembered how a freckled, innocent-looking English boy had closed his teeth on that blade as he had driven it home, clean through the boy’s gullet.

“I must think of the two blows I’ve seen today different from that,” he said to himself, “the one when Broch saved Brut’s life, and the other when Brut saved—”

But though he tried hard to sleep it was always with the freckles on that boy’s face who had bitten his sword that Catharine’s letter kept spelling itself out on the darkness.

XVI. THE FORESTS OF TYWYN

THE NEWS OF the victory of Bryn Glas spread at incredible speed throughout Wales; and to Master Sparrow's revolutionary delight vast numbers of armed peasants, many of them travelling at their own charges, gathered to the Prince's standard from every quarter.

Before August of 1402, though both Glyndyfrdwy and Sycharth had long been blackened ruins, Owen had several separate armies, amounting in all to over ten thousand men, whose bivouac fires, moving as if by magic through all parts of Wales, caused desperate appeals to reach King Henry.

From Abergavenny and Usk, from Cardigan, from Caerleon, from Carmarthen, from Newport, from Cardiff, and even from Gwent, these cries for help came.

Owen's own hopes were as much increased as Master Sparrow's, and his purposes as much strengthened and hardened, by this accession to the cause of what was practically the whole mass of the common people of Wales. It was a peasants' revolt, as Robert Whitney had predicted it would be, and though no castle of any importance had yet fallen into their hands, the local peasants of Glamorgan and Gwent and even of Cardigan had avenged themselves with delicious joy for three centuries of contempt by pillaging and burning every single mansion where the landlord was an Englishman or a pro-English Welshman.

Outside the walls of the great castles, and outside the walls of the great commercial towns defended by castles, this general rising of the common people gave Owen the feeling that he really *was* Prince of Wales, and Prince of a Wales that hadn't been so united since the days of that other Owen who, as Owen Gwynedd, brought the whole country together against Henry the Second.

Analysing, as he did with everything that happened to him, all the causes that had led to the victory of Bryn Glas, he was only confirmed more strongly than ever in his monstrous fatalism. Totally out of proportion, it seemed to him, was the *effect* of this victory to the victory itself!

And such vast results following from so small an occasion gave him the feeling that there were forces on his side, obscure, unfathomable, tremendous, to which, if he only accepted the trivial and casual accidents by which they worked, he might resign himself with impunity.

Such a casual chance had now arisen again in the fact that Mortimer, whose nephew had a claim to Henry's crown, and who was Hotspur's brother-in-law, was a prisoner in his hands. What if he married him to Catharine? Such a move would have a double value, forging a link with the Percies, and giving him an intimate interest in the little Earl's claim to the throne.

To let such a chance pass would be a sacrilege against the high invisible Powers that were using him as a medium. And it wasn't as if he himself would escape suffering. The girl and Rhisiart would suffer cruelly enough, but they were young. They would console themselves. But he would never console himself! It may seem strange to some minds that a person like Owen, whose intelligence was so restless, and whose consciousness of everything that went on within him was so clear, should have allowed himself to come under the power of an obsession of this kind.

But it must be remembered that his habitual attitude to himself was of such detachment that it only needed an extension of this detachment, till it included all those connected with him, to create a temper essentially dangerous to human happiness.

It wasn't only Catharine and Rhisiart he was prepared to sacrifice. As the struggle went on, and one after another of his sons were slain, the Arglwyddes was shocked by the calm he displayed. This brave and simple-hearted woman never to the end of her days grasped the depths of abnormality that lay behind the courtly facade of her husband's nature. He alone knew what a transformation of his inner being had occurred that morning before his proclamation, when he destroyed his magic crystal!

He gave himself up *then,* trimmed and combed and anointed, into the hands of destiny; and his cherished faith in his power of exteriorizing his soul had only increased the appalling passivity with which upon the image of fate, as upon a dark on-rolling tidal wave, he let himself drift.

In that one supreme moment, when he prayed on his knees to be given the power to embrace the darkness, he had carried down with him, as in a doomed ship, every human creature he loved. Since that moment there had been a curious gulf between his feeling about what was happening and what actually was happening. His power, if it were a power, his fantasy, if it were a fantasy, in this matter of exteriorizing his soul, grew on him more than ever after the victory of Bryn Glas.

In what Rhisiart thought of as his "attacks," but which were more often, though not always, premeditated escapes of consciousness, he would sometimes fling his soul into what felt like a vast cool empty space, an ethereal twilight of being, altogether beyond the tumult of the world; but more often he would fling it into some quite definite exterior object — like that hollow tree into which he had cast the living body of his enemy!

In the pursuance of what in his obsession he regarded as an inescapable obedience to the event, instead of accompanying his now formidable armies in the movements directed by the strategic Abbot of Caerleon, the far-sighted Henry Don, and the impetuous Rhys Gethin, he arranged for the

Arglwyddes and Catharine to travel down to where, meeting them with his prisoners of war, he made use of the generous hospitality of a remarkable character of those parts, a gentleman who, whenever he put his seal to a document, signed his name as “Rhys ap Griffith ap Llewelyn ab Ieuan,” but who was commonly known in South Wales as Rhys the Black.

Rhys the Black possessed in his daughter Elliw a child who was remarkable for two things: her extravagantly long hair and her disconcerting intelligence. Her father — for her mother was dead — had got into the habit of shortening her rather unusual name into the monosyllable “Lu”. Rhys Ddu’s dwelling, which was six miles from Cardigan-town, was no very spacious or commodious a mansion, much-less an embattled castle. It possessed, however, an air of romantic antiquity, carrying the mind back — at least it carried Rhisiart’s mind back — beyond the age of castle-building, to that remote epoch when few, even among well-to-do gentlemen, possessed moats or battlements. The outer walls, it is true, of the Rhys homestead of Tywyn were composed of a species of rubble into the composition of which plenty of small stones had entered, but it was the time-blackened ancient wood-work, almost entirely of oak, that gave the place its air of immemorial antiquity.

Glyndyfrdwy was modern compared with Tywyn, and even the castellated portion of Owen’s Snowdon-fortress could hardly have been more than three hundred years old. Nor had Glyndyfrdwy any advantage of Tywyn in its mound or “gorsedd.” Tywyn possessed a mound — though it was in the centre of the Forests — second only in mythical importance to the famous one at Narberth, and associated, like the Narberth one, with the unlucky Pryderi, the much-enduring tutelary genius of the whole district.

And while something about the modest dimensions of the buildings at Tywyn enriched and mellowed their appeal to the imagination it was the unending expanse of woodland, the vast and ancient Forests of Tywyn, that most enchanted Rhisiart and Catharine.

They had hitherto only seen woods on hill-sides and in narrow valleys where the gloomy magnificence was broken by hills and gorges and by rocks and rivers; but the Forests of Tywyn, since they extended over comparatively level ground, seemed, and perhaps were, the primeval woods of Wales, from which aboriginal herdsmen had had to flee for safety to the hills.

Strange and prehistoric were the legends that lingered among the woodmen of Tywyn. Wild tales had been handed down from the remote ancestors of the dwellers here, tales that told of ancient wrongs suffered by the mythical powers of this land, where there still lingered remnants of some great, long-lost, peaceful civilization that had been destroyed by force and enchantment.

Rain and mist and the wild winds of autumn were, it was said, the retort of these primeval Forests of Tywyn to their aggressors, to the cruel “magicians” of the Age of Bronze.

Such invasions of the ancient twilight of the Great Mother were assisted in their violence by the red glare of the sun and by the white glimmer of the stars. The invaders cut down the forest-people along with their peaceful groves; until at last, so much did the Forests of Tywyn come to dread the clear skies, that that great white glitter of infinite disillusion which the classic races called “the Milky Way” was regarded in this region as “Caer Gwydion,” the un-numbered hosts of the supreme enemy of the defeated race!

It was in this strange “Deheubarth” that Owen’s mother had lived. It was in this land he had first seen the two twilights, those grey mists that he, life-lover though he was, preferred to either sun or stars.

The population of these dark Ceredigion Forests retained so lively a fear of iron and steel that they habitually expressed this instinct in the spontaneous cry of “touch oak,” or “touch wood,” when something ominous was toward.

Rhisiart himself had never been in South Wales; and though Modry’s tales had been full of its glamour and of its peaceful twilight illusions, all his own romantic cravings had been for waving plumes and embattled castles, for banners and horsemen and flashing steel! This was natural enough. All that was Welsh in him belonged to the North, all that was Norman in him belonged to the North; and though his feeling for Catharine seemed strong enough to bring warm sunshine into this twilight land, he was aware from the start of a certain vague spiritual unease such as he had never experienced on the banks of the swift-flowing Dee.

But at first they were very happy. They had no idea how far the Arglwyddes realized the feeling they had for each other. They assumed that Owen knew; and they soon began to divine, with the quick instinct of lovers, this new devastating direction along which his imagination was travelling. But if he had really decided, why was he still so loth to meddle with their love? Well! They could only hope for some chance — perhaps Mortimer himself would reluct at such a ransom! — that might yet intervene on their behalf. One thing was clear to Rhisiart. Both the Prince and the Arglwyddes understood their high-spirited daughter far too well to tease her with any ill-timed restrictions.

She and Rhisiart went on meeting as usual. Indeed their encounters were made easier and less marked than in the Snowdon fortress by the friendship that quickly sprang up between Catharine and Elliw. The two young girls would stroll together down one of the Tywyn forest paths, followed at a discreet distance by Glew the Gryd and an equally aged serving-man of the

Rhys household; and then on Rhisiart's appearance they would separate, Glew the Gryd following the lovers down any leafy alley their fancy chose, while the old Rhys retainer would remain with Elliw and her great wolfhound, Corbyn.

Inside the house it was less easy for them to snatch any moments alone; for the quarters were very limited, Rhys Ddu's hospitality being strained to the utmost to provide sleeping accommodation for so many guests.

But things went on happily enough through the warm summer months, which that year, even in those forests, were particularly free from wind and rain; nor had the love between the two changed at all from the high, romantic level of feeling that had characterized its first awakening.

It would have been natural enough had it been quite otherwise; but there was something in both these young people that predisposed them to the more romantic and less earthly levels of passion. How far Catharine would have yielded to her lover's emotion, had there been less of this ethereal quality in it, it is hard to say; but they were so intensely shy and proud that any sudden rush of ungovernable feeling, or even any emotional note in their tone towards each other different from the key in which their love had been originally pitched, seemed out of the question with both of them. All July and all August went by without any overt event disturbing the happiness of these daily encounters in the forest.

It did sometimes enter Rhisiart's head to wonder — for with all his courtesy to the proud girl and with all his romantic happiness in her company he had what might be called a "wicked imagination" — how he would feel and how Catharine would feel, if he gave Glew the Gryd the slip, and carrying her off into the depths of the trackless forest overcame — and sometimes his wayward mind conjured up scenes of disturbing violence — his true love's haughty shyness; but the curious thing is that it was always at night and when he was alone that these dangerous thoughts came to him. When actually in Catharine's presence — though of course it may be that the inescapable guardianship of Glew the Gryd played its part in this — there would descend such a magical mist of love upon him that he was more than content just to walk with her and to sit with her in the heavy red-gold flickerings and the mossy green-blue shadows, watching the deer and the squirrels and the rabbits and listening to the woodpeckers!

When September came, however, it was clear to him that Catharine had something on her mind beyond the usual far-off cloud on the horizon. The girl's cheeks, never very ruddy, grew whiter than their wont; her swinging step dragged a little, and there fell a lethargy on the movements of her young body. He would catch her, too, in queer fits of abstraction. One September afternoon he said something to her to which she made no reply at all; and when he looked at her he found her eyes fixed on a loosened ash-tree leaf among the Scotch firs and the spruce-firs, that having been the last to unclose its bud in the spring was the first to relax its hold in the autumn, and now was drifting in the air at some distance from its parent tree, drifting, indeed, where there were very few deciduous trees at all, and where it seemed reluctant to sink to the ground on an alien bed of pine-needles.

Rhisiart caught Catharine watching this leaf, which was only a portion of an ash-leaf, with a fixed gazed of such absorbed intensity that he was emboldened to ask her of what she was thinking.

They were seated together on a little mossy knoll at the end of one of these forest-paths, cut long ago by Rhys Ddu's ancestors for hunting purposes. Below them, several hundreds of yards away, they could see the reddish beams of the sinking September sun, turning the great axe of their venerable guardian into a flame of burning gold.

They could hear, not so far off, the deep-throated baying of Elliw's hound, and they could faintly catch, too, upon the sunset-air the poignant odour of peat-smoke from some woodman's hearth.

"Do you really want me to tell you, Rhisiart?" she said, turning towards him the same grave, intent look that she had fixed upon the drifting leaf.

A deep cold fear suddenly grew up like a chilly mushroom in the centre of his heart, draining as it rose the blood from his swarthy cheeks and causing his arm to tighten round her waist. He felt as if like that ash-leaf she might go floating away at any moment down the sunlit clearing. He nodded in silence.

"I'm sure now," she said, speaking slowly and in a very low voice. "I'm quite sure now."

"That the Prince wants you to marry Sir Edmund?"

"Worse than that, Rhisiart. We've known that a long time."

"That your mother wants it, too?"

"Worse than that! Oh, my dear, how can I tell you?"

Rhisiart drew his arm from her waist and leapt to his feet. "You don't mean," he cried fiercely and rudely, "that they've married you to him already?"

Catharine's sea-coloured eyes darkened with anger till they became almost as black as his own. "If you're going to say things like that," she retorted bitterly, "I shall feel that it's true, what Griffith says, that the old blood in you has worn thin."

"My mother's blood," cried the lad in a passion, "is the best Norman blood in all the—" But he couldn't go on. The sight of her there before him, with a wisp of her fair hair falling in unheeded disorder across one of her eyes and across her twisted mouth, melted his very soul. His knees loosened beneath him, and crouching there on the moss, not touching her, not looking at her, he began to utter those deep, dry, gasping sobs that in their men-children are, of all sounds, the most moving to women.

She bent forward and laid her hands on his head. “No, no, my only true love,” she whispered in a broken voice. “I’m not married to him yet.” Then, waiting for this, for this at least, to sink into his consciousness, she removed her hands, straightened herself as she sat a little above him on that green hillock, and repeated calmly, “Not yet, Rhisiart! The daughters of our race don’t marry in darkness and hugger-mugger, as they say Sir Edmund’s sister did, when Hotspur swung her on his saddle and dragged a priest from his prayers. No, no. Listen to me, Rhisiart, for Our Lady’s blessed sake! What I’m sure happened a week ago, on Saint Matthew’s day — for, remember, tomorrow’s the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels — was Sir Edmund asking me of my parents. What they said to him I don’t know; but from the way my mother’s treated me since — like a sick girl who must have things broken to her gently — I’m sure, I’m certain, that that’s what happened.”

Rhisiart, who was now swaying to and fro, hugging his knees and staring at her with a lamentable face, now burst out with a wounded querulousness that softened her by its weakness much more than his anger had hardened her by its rudeness.

“Why, oh why, didn’t you tell me this at once? You’ve made a fool of me, Catharine, by letting me be happy — like I’ve been — all these days — and you knowing this all the time!”

In her pity for his childishness — and oh, how much older than this hurt boy she felt! — she set to work — shutting away, deep down in her breast, what her own heart felt — to restore, soothe, and quicken his devastated feelings.

She reminded him that between Sir Edmund’s asking for her hand and the final issue of such a request there must be, considering her parents’ doting fondness, a great gulf. They would never rush her or hurry her. With them there would never be any of those familiar threats — like the threat to put her into a convent — by which in the old uncivilized days girls were forced into marriages they loathed.

She reminded him of the troubled times in which they lived; and how in a moment the whole military and political situation might be changed. Plenty of things, she told him, might happen that would make such a marriage as hers to Mortimer totally impossible.

She called to his mind all that her father had said in respect of his Secretary's immense and irreplaceable value to him; and how it was still possible, if she and he refused to yield, that the Prince — if not the Arglwyddes and Griffith — would soften towards them.

While she went on in this hope-against-hope tone his countenance cleared perceptibly. Soon he began making his way on his hands and knees from where he'd been sitting till he was recumbent by her side; and then it was she who was invoked, sitting cross-legged like an image with a fixed stare, as in question after question he pressed her, in his naive, eager, pragmatic way, to suggest what actually they could do if they did defy her parents. Could they take refuge in the kingdom of France, he asked her, or would the Duke of Brittany perhaps give them a place in his court? The truth is, however — only our friend's insight into the heart of a girl was hardly deeper after two years of worldly experience than it was when Tegolin slept by his side at the Tassel farm — that though she had been forgiving to his manly rudeness and though her heart had melted at his childish weakness there was something in this eager chatter about taking refuge in Brittany that made her soul withdraw into itself and feel cold and alone.

She didn’t altogether understand why his present tone — *and he wouldn’t stop;* he even began to talk about that great continent beyond the seas that Prince Madoc had discovered — chilled her feelings so much and made her feel so lonely. She attributed it to her sense of outrage, to her pride of race, to his not realizing, as every Welshman did, that as the daughter of a princely house she belonged to her family; but what really chilled her about it was an instinct of which she was herself scarcely conscious, a feeling that all this cheerful talk of his didn’t spring from the depths of his nature at all.

She kept giving him long, sad, puzzled looks out of her Glyn Dŵr eyes; but it seemed as if the excited lad couldn’t bring to a close his airy projects for this happy future abroad, projects in which she got such cold comfort, and in which, deep in her heart, she doubted if he himself really believed.

Slowly up the glade towards them came Glew the Gryd, his axe-blade blue-black in the gathering twilight; and as in his quavering old voice he hummed a sad South-Welsh ditty he had learnt in Rhys Ddu’s halls, whose lilt of flight and disaster and desolate resignation seemed to reach them like a troop of invisible mourners come to carry away the lad’s false hopes, what must the old Welsh gentleman do but repeatedly pause in his track and turn about and lean on his axe as if his bones, or perhaps his breath, felt a need for rest.

“The dew is falling, Catharine ferch Owen,” he cried in his high-pitched voice as he came near, “and Mistress Elliw awaits us. From where I stood I could see them, and Corbyn was straining at his leash.”

The young people rose to meet him and no sooner were they on their feet than the great hound himself came bounding up the slope, trailing his leash behind him. He rushed at once to Rhisiart, as the person least familiar to him in the party, but having sniffed at him with several deep breaths as if he’d been a crack at the bottom of a closed door, he turned to Catharine and nearly upset her balance by his eager caresses.

The girl unfastened his leash and handed it to the old man, and as they moved towards his young mistress he kept rushing from one group to the other, as if they were two little herds of deer that it was his duty to round up and keep together.

As was their wont on these occasions the two girls advanced side by side towards the house, the dog bounding happily round them, while Rhisiart soon left the two retainers together and debouched by a rougher and shorter path to a small back entrance which connected with the particular portion of the old time-worn place where Master Brut and he had their private quarters.

“Lu”, as Rhys Ddu called her, was a timid, retiring little maid, whom not all her father’s doting care had been able to make striking in appearance or seductive in manner. She had lived a lonely life in Tywyn, for her mother had died in giving her birth and her foster-mother had run away with a Flemish pedlar, and none of the lively serving girls by whom she was surrounded took the trouble to understand her.

Rhys Ddu’s own aged foster-mother ruled the establishment; but as she had never really accepted his youthful bride it would have needed all those seductive charms that were so noticeably absent in poor “Lu” for that bride’s daughter to have won her heart.

Angharad was the old housekeeper’s real name, but this had been shortened by Rhys Ddu, who seemed from infancy to have regarded the nature of ladies as best expressed in single syllables, into “Rad”, and “Mistress Rad” she had become to everyone in the place.

Mistress Rad had always predicted that the frail bride her foster-child brought home would never have the spirit to give him a son, and it may have been her satisfaction at the truth of this prediction that made her kinder to Lu than might have been expected. But she was a competent and busy old lady, and what the shy little girl wanted was understanding rather than indulgence; and this she had never had, no not even from her devoted father, till Catharine came upon the scene.

How Catharine understood her and how Catharine, while understanding her, could yet like her, was a perpetual miracle to Lu ferch Rhys, but she responded with her whole heart; and Corbyn, who quickly grasped the happy situation, responded with his whole heart, too.

Towards Rhisiart the dog felt very differently; but he didn't always feel the same. There were occasions when he condescended to take the young man on long hunting excursions far up into the forest. But it was clear he wasn't sure of Rhisiart; and our friend certainly wasn't sure of him. Once the boy even told himself a story of how, caught by Corbyn in the act of stealing Catharine away from Lu, the great hound flew at his throat, and he was compelled to lay him low with his dagger.

With the beginning of October the weather changed; and gales of wind and rain, quite apart from more serious causes, made it increasingly difficult for Catharine and Rhisiart to meet on their old terms. They generally succeeded in snatching, between sunrise and sunset, for after all they were still under the same roof, some sort of hurried and agitated encounter; but fate, acting not only through the girl's parents but through an unpredictable concatenation of events, seemed to take a devilish delight in making these spasmodic meetings at once more brief and more disturbing as day followed day.

In the privacy of their thick-walled chamber Rhisiart and his friend, the Lollard, shared each other's troubles. This wet autumn in Rhys Ddu's domain drew them closer than they'd ever been drawn before. Their respect for each other increased with their deeper knowledge; and as time went on, even Master Brut's interpretations of Wycliffe ceased to get on his friend's nerves. Rhisiart's tendency to make daring and drastic plans, wherewith to cut the entangled knots of both their love-affairs, met with grave attention from Master Brut; and in the worthy man's speculations as to how Alice could be persuaded to leave her mother in the Snowdon fortress and join the light-hearted damsels who served Mistress Angharad, Rhisiart noted with amusement that the geography of this rambling old mansion was as obscure to the lover of maps as it was to himself.

There were constant goings and comings between Tywyn and the Snowdon retreat and hardly a week went by without one or other of the lovers receiving some sort of written communication from Tegolin. The Abbot of Caerleon, though beginning to grow restless in so inactive a life, had taken complete charge of the fortress; and when Owen decided to keep quite a large army there as well as in Rhys Gethin's great camp in Cardigan the old warrior-bishop took heart.

Rhisiart couldn't help noticing how as long as they were discussing the chances of Alice's appearance among them the soul of the Hog of Chirk would dwindle in importance; whereas when Alice seemed irrevocably and hopelessly caught, in her caring for "that old witch up there," the spiritual perils of Master Simon, who was still with Lowri in Rhys Gethin's headquarters, grew more serious.

Rhisiart's penmanship — and he hadn't failed to take Broch's advice as to becoming a clerkly expert — was in great request that autumn. Closeted with the Prince and the Meifod giant for hours every morning, he had to increase day by day the epistles that messengers kept taking to one or other part of Wales, not to speak of communications with the Percies and with France, and with both Rome and Avignon.

But in the long evenings, when the great meal was over, and Mortimer was playing chess with Owen and the ladies had retired, both the young friends would compose letters to be taken to Snowdon, the Lollard imploring Alice to be faithful to him and to trust him, and Rhisiart confiding in Tegolin all his wildest hopes and fears.

The heavy rains of that wild October not only brought down the leaves of the Forests of Tywyn but quelled any active movement of the Prince's various armies. Owen was in possession now of the whole enormous sum of Grey's ransom. He had also obtained no negligible sum for the liberation of Clanvow, whose departure was an immense relief to the little court at Tywyn.

Mortimer not only knew Welsh, but displayed a lively desire to be initiated into every form of Welsh tradition; whereas the author of *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* behaved as did the famous poet Ovid among the Goths, treating Rhys Ddu's minstrels with ostentatious courtesy, but betraying in his handsome face such ironic condescension at all their harp-playing competitions, that to see the last of those bright curls and to hear the last of that boisterous laugh was as much of a comfort to the bardic fraternity as the gold by which his genteel admirers restored him to civilization was a boon to Owen's budget.

But though he had enough money on hand now to support his armies on the most liberal terms, certain fierce local quarrels between men from districts so widely divided were constantly demanding his presence. He would saddle Seisyll, whom he had sent for as soon as he got Rhys Ddu's invitation to Tywyn, and ride off alone, either to the force under Gethin, or to the stationary camp under the Abbot of Caerleon, or to Henry Don's troops in the further south. These lonely rides were the only happy times for the Prince during that rainy October.

As deeply set upon marrying Catharine to Mortimer as he was set upon retaining Rhisiart in his service, life at Tywyn had become a hair-shirt of such scraping jags and scratching tags that compared with it his harsh chain-armour vest was a silken luxury! Owen told himself bitterly again and again that until this fatal October he hadn't known what the pain of life was. He had known spasms and twinges and fits of suffering, both mental and physical; but he had never before awaked in the morning to find that his consciousness of life came near to containing a balance of pain over joy.

And there was no alternative. He had smashed his crystal. Iolo was lying in that stone sarcophagus in Valle Crucis. He had won the battle of Bryn Glas. He was committed to the event. Two of his younger sons had already been slain in his cause. Meredith himself remained in that house at Pilleth, still only slowly recovering from his wound. The young man was under the care of Crach Ffinnant the Derfelite, who allowed no other doctor or prophet or conjurer or priest anywhere near his patient; and the more the Prince thought of this the less he liked it.

In their hatred of the Scab, whom with some reason they regarded as second-cousin to the Devil, neither Father Rheinalt nor Father Pascentius would consent to beard him at Meredith's bedside.

"Little good it does me," thought Owen every time he sat down to dinner and watched the two Cistercians conversing so happily with Rhys Ddu, "to be Prince of Wales, if I can't even compel a couple of cropped heads to go to my son's assistance!"

The Arglwyddes was no help to him during this dark October. What he wanted to do was to be honest with Catharine. He wanted to implore her to let him thrust the sacrificial knife into her bosom as he had decided once and for all to thrust it into his own. "When you consented, child," he wanted to say to her, "that I should be proclaimed Prince of Wales you consented to lie down by my side before the altar of our gods; you consented to let them cover both of us with ‘the pall of death’.” He wanted to explain to her that since that day, though moments of exultation had reached him, the greater part of the hours of his life had been simple endurance, obstinate, uncomplaining un-selfpitying endurance. He would have liked to assure her that if she, held to his heart as she always was, would only consent to endure their sacrifice together, he could give her a love stronger, deeper, than that of — But always at that point his incurable honesty of analysis cut in two his self-justifications with an edge as sharp as Glew the Gryd’s axe.

What right had he to meddle with such a miracle as a girl’s first love? Was there, he asked himself morning by morning, as he combed his beard before his metal mirror and watched the dead leaves whirling in little eddies within the embrasure of his window, an evil jealousy in his heart that he should force her to marry a man she didn’t love rather than the one she did? And then, when he watched her abstracted eyes and cold, sad profile as she sat by his side at their daily banquet, pain took possession of him, pain worse than any pain he had ever known, the pain of one who can, but will not, give to the heart he loves its one and only desire!

There was a particular morning when he thrust his head as far as it would go through the narrow aperture that served as window in that ancient wall of blackened oak, so that the wind and rain undid in a moment the result of his elaborate toilet. It was one of Owen’s nervous peculiarities to poke his great fair head with its regal beard through the window of every chamber he used. And as he did so now and let the rain beat on his face he thought of the difference between his own philosophy and that of his friend from Meifod; and how strangely the giant’s feelings seemed to blend with these falling, whirling leaves, these groaning branches, these forests of death!

Life, not death, was what his own heart wanted, life that should survive — somehow, anyhow — these mortal struggles, these sad victories, this incurable pain!

And with the forks of his beard blowing in the wind, and wet now as the dead leaves themselves, he began to play his accustomed trick with his soul; letting it escape into the storm, through the storm, beyond the storm, till it rested like a ruffled starling by his son's bed in Pilleth! But he soon drew back both his head and his soul; for he remembered that Catharine hadn't learnt to play these tricks! A woman's soul was in her love; a woman's soul was in the very part of her which he had set himself to kill!

And the Arglwyddes didn't help him. How could a mother not be more affected by what they were doing to Catharine? The Arglwyddes always answered in the same way. "Marriage and children," she always said, "are the fulfilment of a girl's life. Love comes, love goes; but a husband and children remain." And then the wise lady would enlarge on Sir Edmund's good qualities, his gentleness, his courtesy, his patience. "And he is so sad," she would say. "I think he has had some love-affair that went wrong."

Certainly Sir Edmund was sad, at least he was sad for the accepted suitor of a girl as lovely as Catharine and the daughter of a reigning Prince — yes! he had noticed it himself. Had the young man detected that the girl's heart was already given? Was it that that saddened him?

But if this one particular morning was a purgatory to the Prince, there weren't many mornings of happiness for his daughter. Poor Catharine! She had another grief just then in addition to her love — too much, too much, coming together for a maid so young! — for her old Nurse, whom her mother had brought with her to Tywyn, was slowly dying.

The departure from Glyndyfrdwy had been more than the old woman could bear. She had hated that Snowdon place, and had shut herself up with her grief and her anger, seeing nobody but Mad Huw, letting all her interests and occupations fall away, and at last quite losing her old self and her busy spirit in helpless querulous complainings. The news that both Glyndyfrdwy and Sycharth had been burnt by the English was the final blow. They had tried to keep it from her, but the officious Rawlff, not yet a Knight of Dewi Sant, had blurted it out; and now in this mournful autumn, while those time-blackened buildings rocked under the wailing wind, she lay in her white bed, in her white coif and long white wimple like a marble figure in a church aisle. She knew well enough, the old Nurse, what was being done to her darling, and her wrath against the Arglwyddes, upon whom characteristically enough, for she regarded all men as children, she put the entire blame, was so bitter that she refused to allow her to enter her death-chamber.

Catharine would sit by her bed-side hour after hour, holding her bony hand, but rarely replying, except with silent tears, to her moans and her protests.

Several times she insisted on seeing Rhisiart, and these were the most distressing moments of all; for she would lie with one hand in his and one in Catharine’s, making at intervals feeble and pitiful movements to join their youthful fingers together.

“Where is that Grey Friar?” she would moan at such times. “He would end this nonsense by making you man and wife — and then, let them rage! They couldn’t undo what the man of God had done. Why doesn’t somebody go for the Grey Friar?”

Once, at a moment when the end seemed near, they brought Father Pascentius to her; but the old lady’s fury at the sight of him was so extreme that she even rose in her bed.

"Take your staring eyes into the Hell they came from!" she shrieked hoarsely. "My confessor is a saint, not a devil — a sweet Brother of Saint Francis he is, and a friend of King Richard; not a monking monk from a monkery of mummers!"

One early afternoon in this wild month, some hours before the great meal of the day, Rhisiart and Master Brut were sadly contemplating the thin rain and flying leaves from the window of their little chamber, when they were surprised by observing the unmistakeable figures of Catharine and Lu, accompanied by Corbyn, but unaccompanied by Glew the Gryd, leaving the house by the men's side-entrance and setting forth, with dark cloaks over their heads, down a vista in the forest where a long perspective of dripping beech-trunks lost itself in the distance.

"Blessed Mary!" cried our friend. "Where in the devil's name are those girls going? You don't think, Walter, that they've got an assignation with Sir Edmund?"

"No, no, lad, and I'll tell you why," replied the Lollard — yes! she does step out like a boy; and look how the other's clinging to her!— "because I saw Sir Edmund a minute ago when I was down there with Father Rheinalt at the fish-pond; and he was standing on the balcony in front of his window — he's up there you know, just above our room, and that's why — but you don't like my maps of places! — but at any rate if he's watching them now just as we are, he's not the object of their walk."

"Perhaps we'll see him in a minute or two going after them!"

The Lollard shook his head. "You must remember the man's still a prisoner-of-war. I've never seen him leave the house unattended. But I'm sure he's watching them, just as we are. You're not a perch-catcher like Father Rheinalt and me, or you'd know his ways. He stands for half the day on that balcony. It's roofed-over, but it faces the rain.

“I didn’t mean to refer to it, Rhisiart; but since you’ve brought it up yourself I may as well tell you. I think he’d be glad if he caught his death by exposing himself on that balcony! I don’t like seeing his black figure forever standing there, nor does Father Rheinalt. And you can see it from such a long way off! Down the pine-avenue you can see it. Down the linden-avenue you can see it. And you can see it from Merlin’s elm.”

“Have you spoken to him?” enquired Rhisiart, aware of his friend’s mania for talking to unhappy people. “Have you been up there to see him? I wish you’d told me this before, Walter — for there is — there are — certain things — which it is — behoveful to me — to say to him — sooner or later.”

“There are no such things, lad!” his friend asseverated with stern emphasis; “and if there were, you’d have to find another emissary than Walter Brut of Lyde to—”

Their colloquy was interrupted by the appearance of Father Rheinalt from among the pond-reeds. Anxious and perturbed he looked, and wild and ungainly too, considering that his black tonsured head was uncovered, his legs naked to his thighs, all smeared with mud and duck-weed, a great pole with a line attached to it flicking the air in his hand, and round his bare neck, dangling against his habit, the striped forms of half-a-dozen perch, each about a pound’s weight, strung together by their horny and tragic gills.

He evidently had caught sight of the young men’s heads peering out of their narrow window, and Rhisiart — his brain full of Mortimer — fancied he saw him respond to a greeting from the balcony above. But when he reached the path, instead of following it, he crossed it and walked straight through the drenched grass and the thorny blackberries till he stood on a level with them, only divided from their two eager faces by the thickness of that incredible wall of solid oak.

“I’ve just been summoned by the Arglwyddes,” he said. “Owen’s away and Griffith ab Owen’s away; and the Nurse is dying, and crying out for a priest.”

“I wouldn’t go, Father,” said Rhisiart eagerly. “I wouldn’t go! You’ve heard of the fury she got into with Father Pascentius, calling him a monking monk from a monkery of mummers? The Arglwyddes is mistaken; for I know — oh, dear Father, I swear to you I know! — she wants Mad Huw and no other!”

Father Rheinalt was silent. The puzzled bewilderment he turned on those two young heads was so touching that Rhisiart was hit to the heart. Something about the man’s guileless and incorruptible integrity made him think of Tegolin.

“What a good man he is!” he thought. “All of Tegolin comes from him — nothing from that she-devil!”

“But,” protested the strange figure before them, tapping the wood-work with his pole and entangling his line, “but, son, she’s dying and calling for a priest; and I — my vows — my duty to Holy Church, my—”

“But wouldn’t it be better,” interrupted the Lollard, and to our friend’s dismay he caught the familiar tone of controversy in his voice, “wouldn’t it be better for her soul to go to its Maker unshriven, than to go in a tempest of ungodly fury?”

Father Rheinalt’s swarthy face displayed such pure misery of indecision that Rhisiart felt inclined to advise him to go — even if the old woman did die cursing him. The young man was amazed afterwards to recall how some devil within him prompted him to repeat once more in the ears of this guileless fanatic those ribald words about “monking monkeries”. This was something the Lollard would never have done.

But Father Rheinalt was too involved in his conscientious dilemma to notice either this spurt of Hereford malice or the controversial tone of Master Brut. He tugged mechanically at his line till at last he broke it, so that only a few yards of it dangled from the end of his pole.

At that moment they became, all three of them, aware of the presence of Broch-o'-Meifod. The giant had shuffled out from the house to obey a pressing call of Nature; and there he was, hooking up his leather belt, and listening to their debate. "Listen, Father," he said gravely. "Listen, children! I think I can arrange this affair. Come with me all three of you! You're something of a physician, Master Brut, and the old lady loves Rhisiart. Come with me, Father. I think it's your duty to go."

The young men hurried out of their room and followed the two elder men up the winding staircases and down the intricate passages that led to the death-chamber. The door was ajar, and Broch-o'-Meifod, telling Father Rheinalt to wait on the threshold, went in, opening the door wide so that the torch above the old lady's head shone full on the extraordinary figure of the monk, still clutching the pole with the dangling line, and on the mud and the pond-weed still clinging to his bare legs.

"Have you brought him, Master Broch? Have you brought him?" quavered the dying woman, while two sturdy and not over-sympathetic damsels forced her back on her pillow.

Broch went straight up to the bed, his colossal form hiding the open door and figure on the threshold. "He has prayed to Saint Peter the Fisherman for you, Nurse — and the Saint has come himself!"

Something about Broch, as Rhisiart had noted long ago, was so native and endued to death that when the old woman met his inhuman gaze her confused brain accepted literally and without question what he told her.

"The Fisherman himself!" she murmured. "He's sent the Fisherman himself!"

Then Broch swung aside and beckoned to Father Rheinalt to approach.

The monk did make a fumbling movement with his hands, with a dim notion no doubt of propping his pole against some object. But there was no object except the bed, and on the bed struggled the departing soul. So to the bed he came, and standing there before her, began, without a second's hesitation, to call upon her to utter the words of confession so that he could absolve her from her sins.

Rhisiart was close behind him now and when he heard the familiar words— "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" — issuing from the lips of that passionate and simple man, with five mud-smelling fish hung round his neck and his legs slimy with pond-weed, he was more religiously stirred than he'd been since that Midsummer Day when he heard Mass with Tegolin and Mad Huw.

And in a way he couldn't explain, and never was able to explain, the authoritative apparition of this invoker of *"Pater-Filius-Spiritus,"* bursting out through the slime of a fish-pond and surrounded by the blood-stained gills of five perch— "all of them," as the good man was certain to boast ere long, "weighing nearly a pound" — added a new and paradoxical force to the irritable and inconsequential reactions roused in him by the convincing arguments of Master Brut.

How much the dying old woman understood of these magical words is doubtful; but they evidently seemed to her the sort of words that the Keeper of the Keys would naturally use; and when with a spasmodic jerk of her old bones the rigor mortis set in, Rhisiart, who was by Broch's side now, was convinced that he would never again behold a dead face so imprinted with the certainty of redemption.

They left the Father on his muddy knees while the astonished damsels closed the eyes of the dead; but as soon as they had shut the door the two young men turned towards the giant, each with a puzzled protest.

"The lie wasn't mine," replied Broch-o'-Meifod calmly. *"The lie was life's."* What the man meant by this, and how he'd dared to do as he did, was the subject of many a long discussion between the two friends in the months that followed; but both the young men decided at that moment that they must get into the air as quickly as possible.

It was afterwards that the emotional effect of the old woman's death came upon Rhisiart; came upon him as though the half-plighted troth of Catharine's hands and his hands, held so tight in the beldame's clutch, was a covenant that had been ratified by the kingdom of death, ratified in fact by that innumerable company of the deceased whom a fragment of Homer in his college library called "the powerless heads of the dead."

Led — among other impulses — by a feeling at the bottom of Rhisiart's heart that he would like to be the first to tell Catharine of her Nurse's death, the two friends, wrapped in heavy cloaks, set out together down the avenue where the girls and their dog had vanished.

"Are the Prince and Griffith to return to-night?" asked the Lollard before they were a bow-shot from the house.

"God knows!" sighed his friend. And then laying his hand on the Lollard's arm he broke out, "Don't look round, Walter, for Christ's sake! I can't stand seeing that black figure on his balcony. Let's pretend he's not there! There's a couple of hours before dinner. We're bound to meet them. I hope Corbyn won't fly at me in this damned mist."

Meanwhile the two girls, whose professed purpose was to meet Rhys Ddu returning from the hunt, had already gone several miles down that long clearing in the forest. The rain had subsided, and had been followed by a wet mist that clung to their mantles, in that grey light, like a phantasmal suffusion of some sprinkling from the Milky Way.

"If we don't meet him before we reach the Pryderi Tree we'll have to turn," said Elliw. "He won't like it for us not to have taken anybody with us — and if we're late for dinner too, I'm afraid he'll be really angry!"

"All right, my sweet," responded Owen's daughter absent-mindedly. "We'll turn at the tree." And then after a pause, "What's this legend about Pryderi, Lu?"

The other gazed at her in surprise. "Don't you know?" she said. "Why, every old wife in these parts knows that! But of course you're from the North. Pryderi was the Lord of all this land before the Romans. His ghost rides on the rain in the Forests of Tywyn. But listen, Catharine—"

"Yes, dear?"

"You remember how you asked me just now what was the gossip about you among the girls of the house?"

"Not only the girls!" protested the other. "I wanted to know how your house-people and how all the peasants round here regard Rhisiart and me." She gave a little quick sigh. "It ought to help, to know that!"

"Help?" repeated Lu, puzzled.

"Father's always taught me," said Catharine gravely, "that none of us can afford to neglect the voice of the common people. Not long ago I heard that man Sparrow who looks after Broch — you know the person I mean? — telling one of your porters that the only reason why the common people are for Owen is that there's going to be no more gentry."

"When Adam delved and Eve span who was then the gentleman?" interjected Elliw.

But Catharine was in no mood that day to take anything lightly. "Certainly," she declared, swinging forward with long strides like a young

Artemis, while her soft rain-sprinkled mantle clung in classic folds about her limbs, “certainly it’s wicked to hold down the peasants and treat them like serfs. But when it comes to governing a country, and summoning councils, and planning campaigns, and sending embassies to foreign kings, the common people depend on the gentry.”

“Wouldn’t it,” panted Lu, who was now clinging to the edge of her friend’s cloak and almost running to keep up with her, “wouldn’t it be truer to say that we all depend on the Church for these things?”

“What do you mean, little one? I’m talking about high state-policies and armies and navies and treaties and government and the making of laws. I’m not talking of religion. No, no, dear, no, no, darling,” and the tall girl strode faster than ever.

“No country can get on without its gentry. The gentry have education; and it’s education that counts.”

Lu’s panting became a long-drawn sigh. She thought of the good knight, her father, who could hardly sign his name. She thought of Catharine’s brother, Griffith, who if he had education was certainly at wondrous pains to conceal it. She thought of Rhys Gethin whom she had watched in their private chapel, with the secret amusement with which she watched all men whether young or old, holding his prayer book upside down.

And then she said to herself, “She’s thinking of the Prince and she’s thinking of Rhisiart! She hasn’t lived, like I have, for ten years with hunters and bards” — and Lu panted out her weariness of both schools of experts— “who can’t say a single word about anything interesting. Educated gentry? Gracious me! Why haven’t I the spirit to tell her that when I want someone to talk to I go to the peasants’ huts and listen to stories of Rhiannon and Pwyll Pen Annwn?”

"I'm afraid I interrupted you, Lu darling," Catharine now remarked, drawing her breath as quietly and easily as if she were seated before a warm hearth rather than striding through a wet mist. "You were going to tell me what your father's people say about Rhisiart and me."

Lu plucked at her friend's cloak and as she did so leant for a second against the dripping trunk of a beech-tree. "I don't — think — we ought to go any further, Catharine," she gasped. "I'm afraid of the darkness catching us before we get back. Father must have gone straight home a different way. Pryderi's Tree is further than I thought."

All the while she was uttering these innocent words the crafty little Lu was thinking in her heart, "She may forget about it; she may forget about it."

But though Catharine let her rest there, with her light weight poised against the wet beech-trunk, and though she made no attempt to override the decision to return, she didn't forget about it, and as soon as they began to retrace their steps she put her question once more to her reluctant friend, remarking that it was easier to talk, now they'd turned their backs to the quarter from which the mist came.

Lu's troubled little face under her hood began to resemble a crumpled leaf that had turned its back to the mist, but to give herself strength she took a firm hold of the tall girl's mantle, and thus supported drifted along at her side with swift-gliding steps, like an oarless boat towed by a ship in full sail.

"They say that Sir Edmund," she began, and her voice to her own ears, as she watched the ghostly form of her white hound trotting in front of them, seemed like the squeak of a mouse in a great forest full of enchanted stags and fairy princesses, "may be King of England one day if anything happens to the little Earl, and that if he isn't King there's no grander title in all Britain than what you'd have as Lady Mortimer. You'd be a sister then, they say, to Lady Percy, and the only chance your father has of liberating Wales is to be allied with the Mortimers and the—"

"Lu!" The force of this interruption was accentuated by Catharine's suddenly standing stone-still.

"You told me to tell you," murmured the frightened heiress of Rhys the Black.

But Catharine's voice was quite calm and tender. "I know. I wanted to hear. I thought it might help. But listen, Lu," and the proud young face was bent down towards her in the growing darkness, "what would you do if you loved anyone and that person wanted you to go away with him, and be married to him, and" — she found these final words difficult to utter as she recalled her doubt as to the fullness of the heart from which they'd come— "and live somewhere — abroad?"

Lu met the beautiful eyes looking down into her own for one brief instant. Then she turned to her dog, and calling him to her side fastened the leash to his collar. It was a comfort to her to press her ungloved knuckles against his furry coat. She was so little that his head reached her small cold breasts and she hugged it against them.

"I have never loved," she murmured aloud; and then, "oh you fool, you fool!" she cried in her heart, when she realized by the salt taste in her mouth that self-pitying tears were running down her cheeks.

But oh! how old the childish directness of her friend's next words made her feel, as with the white hound between their black-cloaked figures they stood under the wet trees.

"What would you do if you were me, Lu?"

"Nobody's ever said that to me before," was the response to this; and unclasping her tight clutch on her friend's cloak the daughter of Rhys Ddu ran her fingers along her dog's rain-soaked spine.

"But what would you do?" reiterated Catharine mercilessly.

"I'd do — *nothing"* whispered the other with bowed head. "I couldn't marry anyone I didn't love; and I would never run away from my father!"

Since Lu's face in the access of her discomfort was almost buried in her hound's fur there was nothing to prevent Catharine from giving way to her feelings. Biting her lip and turning upon the soaked twigs and the dripping branches above her with a look of savage desperation — such a look as her father had cast round him when those Salopian yeomen hemmed him in — she tore both her arms free of her cloak and raising them in the air above her head shook her young fists at the hoary sky.

Temporarily relieved of her throbbing tension by this unmaidenly gesture, for she had begun to feel as if there were none left, among gods or men, who weren't making mouths at her and wagging their heads at her, she gathered her cloak about her and they continued on their way.

"I sometimes think of asking my father," Catharine remarked presently, "whether he wouldn't let us go together — with a good escort of our people of course — to cheer up my brother at Pilleth."

Now for some while "my brother at Pilleth" — for Lu had never met Meredith — had been an inexhaustible topic between them. Catharine was always reticent about Rhisiart himself, though not at all about her love for him, but upon Meredith's intellect, beauty, originality, and recklessness, she had enlarged so freely and so often that the lonely little Lu had begun to take an interest in this romantic figure. It didn't happen at once. It happened after a certain talk they had one hot August evening in Lu's room when Catharine had admitted that except for herself there was no girl in Meredith's life.

After that, though she was too shy to ask any direct questions, Lu would hover round the subject, and almost always got some degree of satisfaction. Catharine not only talked of Meredith as other girls would talk of a lover but he was obviously her favourite of all topics! She couldn't think or speak of her father now without bringing up her own dilemma, but the image of Meredith had nothing about it save what was winning and fair.

No man could possibly have given the thousand and one little touches — many of them throwing into relief certain endearing weaknesses that only a girl would notice — with which Catharine painted the figure of the hero of her childhood.

The mirror in Lu's big chamber — for her father had long ago given her the best room in the house — was suspended at right angles to the window, and thus there could be seen in it, in addition to the shrinking little face of its owner, quite a few objects of the landscape below, chief among these being a fragment of the avenue leading to the main entrance of the building.

And it had become, long before that happy August ended, a morning habit with this little "bundle of fancies," as Rhys Ddu called her, to gaze at the leafy approach to her father's dwelling between the luxuriant cascades of her own brown hair.

The combing of Lu's hair, for she was too shy to allow any servant so much as to enter her room, took a very long time, partly because her hair was the most remarkable thing about her — indeed her nurse used to say that all her beauty had gone into her hair — and partly because she told herself such interminable stories about Catharine's Meredith, stories that always began with her suddenly catching sight of him in her mirror, between the dusky falls of her long hair, as in the flickering sunshine he rode up to the gate.

Thus when Catharine suddenly uttered this bold suggestion about their going together to Pilleth it was as if the radiant mirrored Meredith had suddenly turned into a pale, faint, pitiful Meredith, one to be protected rather than to protect. And this transformation was so serious to Lu that for a second or two she could make no reply.

When she did speak it was to merely mutter: “Thank you, Catharine dear. I should like it very much,” and even these platitudes were overpowered by the sudden straining and barking and excited tail-wagging of the great hound.

Lu straightened herself at once and instinctively renewed her clutch on her companion’s mantle; and then they advanced, the excited dog dragging them forward almost at a run.

“Rhisiart!”

“Catharine!”

And then, finding some kind of sanction in the presence of Lu and the Lollard, the lovers embraced more closely than they had done for many weeks. Whatever thoughts they were that went whirling about in his long and narrow cranium Corbyn took the opportunity of dragging his little mistress as fast as possible in the direction of home, and Master Brut hurried along at their side. The dog pulled and strained to such effect that they were soon out of sight in the mist.

Once again the lovers embraced; and Rhisiart became aware that the proud girl was in a softer, tenderer, more submissive mood than he had ever known. Her lips responded to his in a manner that sent an electric quiver through every fibre and nerve of his lean frame, and through both their cloaks he could feel that her body was given up to him as he had never known it to be given up before. This was the crisis in their fate — though neither of them knew it.

Catharine was a very young girl. She had lived a protected life. Proud and gallant as she was, she was like a beautiful spring-time shoot on the bough of her father's being. Her romantic love for Rhisiart had from the start been surrounded by a blank void; a void that as far as any future with him was concerned she had instinctively set herself to ignore, hoping blindly as the simplest child might have done, that the wizard father would find a way to give her her Love as he was giving Wales its Freedom.

Faced with the actual possibility of leaving her father in the midst of-his great struggle, and of going God-knew-where, to live among foreigners, everything in her, even her romantic love itself which after all was for a Rhisiart associated with the life she knew, drew back, with panic-stricken roots, as a water-plant would draw back from transplantation to a desert. Rhisiart was the background of her present life, but this Rhisiart-and-Catharine living as forlorn pensioners of the Duke of Brittany was an image as cheerless as it was inconceivable, an image that held scant joy.

But what she'd never counted on, for she'd instinctively kept their passion on a high romantic level, was the treachery of woman's nature. The idea of giving herself to her lover, apart from marriage, had never crossed the threshold of her consciousness. She was a young girl in love; but she was a young girl with unawakened senses.

But she had all a woman's awareness of the weaknesses of her lover; and between the real Rhisiart who was so transported by her presence and this other Rhisiart of plans and schemes there seemed a wide gulf. The pictures he painted of what struck her as a pair of pitiful ghosts at the court of Brittany only distressed her. He wasn't the Rhisiart she knew when he talked like that. He himself became as unreal as his talk.

But what she didn't know, and what Rhisiart didn't know, was the difference between a girl in love and a girl who has yielded to her lover.

The exultant happiness that her unexpected response roused in the lad nearly turned his head. A new emotion such as he had never experienced before raced through his heart. She was his! She was his! He felt strong enough to defy all the world. He let her go, and drew a long deep breath, keeping his hands on her shoulders.

It was the crucial moment between them. Had his passion been ever so little greater; had it possessed ever so little more flame and less tenderness, he could have carried her then and there beneath those dark tree-trunks and made the rain-drenched leaves their bed.

But the fate of their diverse natures, the terrible power of that undertide of inheritance, was too strong. Her Welsh blood might cry out to his Welsh blood, “Take me! Take me!” But the forward-looking, clearheaded Norman in him — since this wasn’t a case for brutal seduction — reverted irresistibly to practical decisions, to legal precautions, to well-laid schemes.

Alas! the only “scheme” that would have served him then was the prehistoric way of a man with a maid. But he dropped his hands; and under the pressure of three generations of sheriffs’ clerks in the shrewd City of Hereford he gasped forth, eagerly, feverishly, hurriedly: “He’s got another journey to make after this one! So we’ve plenty of time. I’ve thought it all out. We’ll begin collecting our things at once. I’ve got a hundred silver groats. You’ve got your jewels. I’ve been making a few enquiries. Ships from France leave our coast every month, whenever the weather’s calm. And there’s a priest in Cardigan-town, who for—”

But she stopped him with an imperative gesture. The back-flow of her yielded blood, of her yielded life, reverting inwards, ebbing inwards, under the shock of the withdrawal of his domination, froze her whole being.

But not for nothing was she Owen’s daughter. She might not — as her father in his remorse had told himself — possess his saving trick of exteriorizing the soul, but she was of the same proud race, and now at this crisis her will rose up, like a towering column of ice-cold mist from the crack in her heart.

“No silver of yours, Rhisiart,” she said in a low voice, drawing her cloak with both hands round her, “no jewel of mine, will that Cardigan priest ever see.” She paused for a moment, gazing at him as if from the other side of a gulf wider than that sea over which he’d said the ships sailed when the weather was calm. “Goodbye, my dear,” she whispered hoarsely. “Kiss me and let us go. We have had — Kiss me and let us go — Rhisiart, my only love!”

Heart-felt and solemn as was her tone, final and hopeless as were her words, the impatient child in him refused to understand. Instead of kissing her he fell to staring at her in indignant wonder. Casting about in his mind for something to distract her, for in his innocence he took this new mood as a mere vagary of girlish pride, what must he now do but begin blurting out the news of her Nurse’s death.

“And I wasn’t there! I wasn’t with her! Merciful God, what have I done? Oh misery! Why was I ever born! I bring unhappiness to everyone! Oh Nurse, darling, darling Nurse — and I wouldn’t wait with you one little hour! Quick! Let’s hurry! Let’s run! Perhaps she isn’t dead. Old people fall into these trances that look like death! Let me go to her. I want to go to her!”

Poor Rhisiart! If he’d fancied that an old woman’s death would set free a young woman’s heart from its unpredictable caprices, and bring it back to reality, he had blundered once again.

The girl was actually running now; and he was running by her side, explaining, imploring, consoling. Some women have room for more than one master-feeling at a great crisis; and if the dripping beech-tree trunks under which those two were running had been possessed of the power of reading thought they would have soon realized that the first shock of her nurse's death had already spent itself and that the boy's pitiful distress, as he panted out his explanations, was not without its effect.

The motion of her blood caused by her running was itself a redeeming agent in the unfreezing of that lump of ice which the too sudden withdrawal of his ravishing embrace had congealed in her bosom. She relaxed her speed. "Oh Rhisiart," she murmured. "Why weren't you and I born brother and sister so that we shouldn't ever have to be parted?"

"I'll never, never leave you!"

"Are you sure she died happily?"

"It was Broch's doing. But when we asked him why he did it he said it was life, not he, who lied. We couldn't understand what he said."

"I feel now that the sooner I'm married to Sir Edmund the better for both of us. I oughtn't to have let you love me. Deep down I knew it would come to nothing."

"I'll never, never leave you!"

Though the dark, dripping trunks of the beech-trees may have understood nothing of this dialogue, there was something in the girl corresponding to this dumb world of rain-soaked vegetation that didn't miss the curious effect of their voices as they hurried along. The wet vapours that moved with them were thinner and less palpable than rain, but they were chillier and even in a queer sense more watery. They were like the element of water in its essence, that essence through which all those vast Forests of Tywyn, with their dripping branches and fallen leaves, were compelled to endure whatever life brought.

And the voices of the boy and girl as they moved, sometimes running, sometimes moving as gently — so soft was the drenched moss — as if they were gliding without lifting their feet, struck this passivity in the girl with the effect of voices in a derelict boat, carried on a tide in which “near” and “far” have been drowned. There come moments in life when one accumulative aspect of Nature — in this case the drifting of rain-soaked leaves in desolate mist — permeates and possesses the human soul.

Catharine felt, as she glided along in that watery element, as if all the words she or her lover uttered were the murmurs of a couple of hollow straws floating on a dark tide. And although this feeling was in a measure due to the fact that they were both of them running, or almost running, it had the effect of bringing their souls together and of softening her heart towards him. And the further they went the tenderer did her heart grow; until it came to a point when she didn’t dare to pause in their advance lest she should sink recklessly into his arms and feel again that blind, dark, sweet yielding which had so nearly decided their fate.

What impulse was it in her that gave her so wild a satisfaction in murmuring to him yet again, “It’ll be best for us both that I marry him quickly”? Was it the vast, dumb acquiescence of those forests of rain-drenched vegetation? Or was it that as her limbs failed and her heart melted in the mist she was holding up between them, as a priest on the scaffold holds his crucifix to the lips of the condemned, that sad, black figure of the man on the balcony?

But what a long way she and Lu had penetrated into the forest! What if it were her destiny after she died — as a punishment for loving one man and marrying another — to run like this by Rhisiart’s side forever, through an eternal mist, towards a “figure on a balcony” who eternally receded as they advanced?

“You are absolutely sure Nurse was dead when you came away?”

Rhisiart repeated what he'd told her already; but he began, as he kept glancing at the ghostly face above the wearily hurrying figure, to have an inkling that it was only to put the dead woman, as she had already put the figure on the balcony, between herself and her life, that she kept up this ridiculous running.

But the wet grasses dragged at her feet, and the soaked mosses like great undulating sea-sponges dragged at her ankles, and the gaping tree-roots full of jet-black watery mouths sucked at her knees, and the tall trees waved mesmeric arms towards her thighs, and the down-sinking vapour drooped about her waist, and hung heavier and heavier upon her bosom, and inserted itself between the hood of her cloak and her bewildered brain: and— "Let him take you! Give up! Sink down! Make all the Forests of Tywyn your priest of Cardigan! Rhisiart is your life, your soul, yourself! Yield to him, yield to him! Sink down and give up! The Forests of Tywyn are yielding to the mist. The mist is about us, round us, in us. We have given up; and oh, the deep, deep sea! Give up, you also, Catharine ferch Owen!"

It isn't only the vapour that's round your waist, Catharine! It isn't only the mist that's heavy on your breast, Catharine! And as she stumbled on, and as Rhisiart kept pace with her, measure for measure, step for step, breath for breath, the proud virginal girl in the relentless treachery of her woman's senses felt as though the waiting figure on that balcony must wait forever and the waiting figure on that deathbed must wait forever.

The Forests of Tywyn had yielded, the mist had its will of them, their leaves had fallen, their trunks were encircled, their branches were still, their sap was sinking, and the correspondence between the element within them and the element without them was complete.

The girl sank down under an immense and absolutely immobile oak. Scarce any foliage had this tree lost, but from all its twigs and from many of its leaves the mist hung in whitish drops, drops that were forever quivering to their fall but which never fell.

Her lover breathed long and deep, gazing down at the vaporous blur that was her face and at the dusky shell-like curves that made up her unresisting form.

“Kiss me goodbye, Rhisiart!” Her words were simple; but much more so was the primordial appeal that rose up to him from that confused heap of breathing darkness. The half-life which was the woman’s called dumbly from the mist-ravished earth to the half-life which was the man’s.

Why then did he go on standing there mute, motionless, like a carved effigy above a tomb? Such was his nature that of these two appeals it was only to the articulate one he responded. Had she seen him as he now saw her in helpless weakness, or had she seen him rob, pillage, murder, burn, commit hideous sacrilege, and even appear like a gaping idiot before the execrations of a blind mob, she would have felt the same identity between them. She would have felt it beyond all his crimes, beneath all his cowardice.

But he was not made after that fashion. Reactions, fears, scruples, doubts poured into his mind. The very fact that this relaxed, abandoned, desperate heap before him was so different from the proud, indignant Catharine whose strength had gone suddenly weak under his embrace left a troubled empty space in his mind. And into this space with the glint of armour and the gleam of gold rushed the figure of Owen, as he had seen it when, below the walls of Dinas Bran, he sucked that arrow-wound.

All his passion, all his devotion had seemed too little then to lay upon that heroic breast. And now he was going to betray him, now he was going to strike him a deadly, cowardly, secret blow, as from the blade of David Gam!

Between him and that heap of mist-drenched clothes and that white face that seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper into those tree-root hollows of black rain the figure of Owen appeared to Rhisiart, as he had first seen it, with that air of being the symbolic victim in a tribal ritual, decked and adorned for sacrifice.

The lad knew well — indeed his had been the hand that penned these intricate plots — all that depended on the marriage of Catharine and Mortimer. The liberation of Wales depended on it; yes, more intimately than upon twenty such victories as Bryn Glas!

It wasn't as if all these thoughts followed one another in a stream through the boy's head; it was as if they were revealed to him, instantaneously and simultaneously, from their pre-existence in some over-dimension.

"Aren't you ever going to kiss me goodbye, Rhisiart?" The words were followed by the descent of a couple of faded oak-leaves which fluttered down upon that phantom face; and, immediately afterwards, certain whitish-coloured bird-droppings descended into the centre of that heap of clothes.

"Love me once more, Rhisiart; and then we'll go."

But at that instant he had to give her his hand in haste, and she had to take it and struggle to her feet; for there were horses and voices and the barking of dogs close upon them!

"Who goes there?" cried our friend.

"Rhys Ddu of Ceredigion!"

And then came the voice of the Lord of Tywyn himself "Catrin ferch Owen, can it be you? Master Rhisiart, God keep you in his caring! You've lost your company I see, my young friends, and your good men are all scattered, and your hounds all gone. 'Twas lucky I came upon you. What's that, Master? What's that, Princess? My little Lu has gone to find your lost people! Eh? Is that it? And under the protection of Master Brut? I hope, young sir, that Master Brut is as discreet and wise as some young men are — and not as foolhardy as others! But perhaps one of you Fathers will give the Princess the use of your horse. We're near home now. You won't have to walk far.

"This is Master Griffith Young, Princess," he went on, "Canon of Bangor; and this is Master Lewis Byford, our Roman Pontiff's choice, he tells me, for the episcopal throne of the said city. They bring, they tell me, important messages from my Lord of Northumberland and Harry Hotspur, and I think from the Scottish lords, too. Will the Prince your father, Mistress, be home to-night? These gentlemen intend to remain here for eight days I believe, and then go straight to my Lord of Northumberland; and after that, it may be, to France; and this, Master Canon, is —

"But you two know each other already! What a blundering old fool I am! Forgive me, Rhisiart. Do'ee know Master Byford, too? No, not Master Byford? But you learned clerks of the great world have none of our rustic shyness. 'All chins without beards and all hearts without windows,' as our Cardigan saying is!"

All this while Rhisiart kept casting furtive glances at Catharine, fearful lest the shock of Rhys Ddu's appearance with these great clerics would prostrate her. But on the contrary! Never had he seen her more completely the proud, self-contained Princess. Such was his own contrariness that it was even with a certain pique at her easy manner and her refusal to meet his eye that he plunged into conversation with Master Young.

With Catharine mounted on the good man's sturdy palfrey it was natural enough for the former acquaintances to walk side by side; and they began by exchanging impressions of Rhys Ddu.

Catharine had long ago confessed to Lu that this chieftain with his black curling beard reminded her of descriptions Rhisiart had given her of the Emperor of the East. Rhys' manners, though courtly, were in the large, free, grandiose, old-world style; and what Rhisiart had told Catharine about him — though this she had kept to herself — was that he was a better huntsman than statesman.

It was clear as he now rode by Catharine's side, his three big hounds sniffing at every patch of under-growth, that Rhys Ddu was glad enough to escape from his recent companions.

Rhisiart and Master Young therefore walked quietly by the side of the Rector of Byford, whose horse was a sluggish one, and it soon transpired that the Canon was very anxious to get our friend's support in the matter of his argument with his fellow-traveller.

"It may be, it may be, dear Canon," the Rector of Byford was soon retorting, "and I don't deny that Benedict, as a man, is easier to handle than Boniface. But what we have to consider in these delicate matters is not the present but the future. Benedict may be easier than Boniface, and his successor may be easier than Boniface's successor; but the fact remains, and I'm sure our young master here will agree with me, that it is impossible for any serious student of the history of Christendom to regard the Avignon schism as anything lasting. It'll pass, dear Canon, it'll pass; and what men like ourselves, who are the advisers of princes, have to consider is the future, when there will be once more one flock and one shepherd."

It was a considerable comfort to our friend to mark how straight Catharine sat upon the back of Master Young's steed, and it relieved him, too, when he heard her give vent to a quite natural little laugh at something Rhys Ddu said. The black-bearded Lord of the Forests of Tywyn seemed well-pleased to have Owen's daughter to himself; and it wasn't long before their two horses had put a perceptible distance between themselves and the rest.

"You two," remarked the Rector of Byford, who had no difficulty in keeping his horse to a walking pace, "are such old friends that I'm sure, Canon, you won't hesitate to question Master Rhisiart as to the interesting topic we were discussing just now."

Master Young turned upon his fellow ecclesiastic a very complicated look, a look that Rhisiart was quick enough to catch; and having caught it — for the situation was one exactly suited to his gifts — he scrupled not to take the bull by the horns.

"You were speaking, reverend sirs, if I mistake not," he remarked in his best Hereford Law-Court voice, "about the rumours that are spreading through Cardigan as to a marriage between the Prince's daughter and Sir Edmund Mortimer. You are men of the world as well as ornaments to the Church, so that I can speak freely; and let me hasten to confess that I myself — unknown as I am — am an aspirant for the hand of Catharine ferch Owen. But the Princess and I are so devoted to the cause of Wales that we have already begun to wonder — all this, my learned Fathers, is, as it were, under the seal of the confessional — as to the particular direction towards which our conscience points."

Master Young — too sly to be twice caught exchanging looks with his friend on horseback — turned his toothless countenance towards this frank and straight-forward young man.

"What you have just told us, Master Rhisiart — you must pardon me if I omit any title that your distinguished courage in the battle of Bryn Glas may have added to your name — jumps with what we have heard as we travelled. You have been pleased to call us — humble priests as we are— 'men of the world', and as such we cannot conceal from you that it has crossed our mind that young people like you and this spirited child must often ere now have thought of escaping from Wales — no! don't interrupt me — and taking ship for France. Such a course would be, my dear son" — and he hesitated for a moment, as if searching for an appropriate word— "such a course would be—"

But Rhisiart's brain, keyed up to a fine point of self-defence, had considered and rejected at least five different lines of possible policy during that pause. The one he finally selected really did do his shrewdness credit.

"Not only ships for France, Father," he replied lightly and carelessly, "but ships to the unknown country to which Prince Madoc sailed, have crossed my mind; but Owen is a magician, and from beginning to end of my friendship with his daughter he has read every thought that flitted through my head. I can hide nothing from him. And since he has made no attempt to separate us, aren't I justified in concluding that he himself is still a little undecided about the advantages of this Mortimer match? Neither he nor I ever refer to it. It is true I've noticed once or twice that he speaks as if Sir Edmund had already given up all hope of being ransomed by the House of Lancaster. In fact, I myself copied out quite recently a letter from Sir Edmund to his tenants hinting at a change of allegiance."

"Has that letter gone?" enquired Master Young with innocent abruptness.

"Well, no," replied our friend quite unperturbed. "There's been no opportunity to despatch it yet; and, as I say, Owen knows so well his daughter's affection and my own loyalty that he recognises there's no hurry. He discusses everything, as you know, with Master Broch of Meifod, and I'm not sure that Master Broch wouldn't sooner see the Princess married to a devoted Welshman than to a Mortimer."

The ecclesiastics were silent after that, and so was Rhisiart. "How on earth," the latter asked himself, "did they guess that we'd thought of running away? I must be careful; but I must give these men confidence in me; and I must be as frank with them as possible, else I'll never disarm them, or find out what they're after. Both for Owen's sake and Catharine's I must be open with them and yet be on guard."

It was clear to him that his unabashed simplicity and openness had already nonplussed the two churchmen; for Master Young began explaining with uncalled-for minuteness and with engaging confidence all the high state reasons which made it essential that Catharine should marry Mortimer.

"How lucky I took the line I did!" he kept saying to himself. "Merely by admitting what they already knew I am now completely one of them. They won't say anything to Owen that they don't say to me first. Master Young recognized me as a kindred-spirit that day Mad Huw saved him from Rhys Gethin. He'll tell me everything now; and that'll be to Owen's interest as well as to mine."

It never occurred to this "kindred spirit" of Master Young to be "on guard" against himself; but the truth is, as the Canon of Bangor went on revealing all the threads of the elaborate combination, of which he held the secret, as to the part to be played by Mortimer when married to Catharine, and as to the part to be played by Northumberland and his son, by Scotland, by Ireland, by France, our friend's mania for political intrigue and legal niceties began to go to his head. This element in Rhisiart had always been Catharine's worst rival. The sandal-wood sweetness of Luned was a bagatelle in comparison.

Once having been, as it were, "broken in" to the odious phrase, "Catharine and Mortimer," this "Catharine and Mortimer" ceased to have any vivid connection with himself and his love, but became simply a move in the great chess-game of World-Politics.

He was like a man who loves the chess-board so much that if during some desperate ride for life and death he were to find such a board by the fire of a wayside inn, he would be lost.

Lewis Byford's horse was of a dark chestnut, but on its left shoulder was a long curious scar upon which the hair had refused to grow. Upon this scar, when he got weary of Master Young's toothless mouth, Rhisiart now fixed his gaze; and as he gazed he began confusedly to wonder, for the scar was under the rider's nose, what the thoughts had been — thoughts rather concealed from than revealed to Master Young — which had associated themselves with this object in the mind of the Rector of Byford as he rode along.

Once or twice, as the Canon murmured his disclosures, he was sure he detected disapproval on the Rector's face — and what a face it was! Providence had given to Lewis ab Ieuan a square brow, a straight nose and enormous ears; but he himself by some ingrained habit of reticence had reduced his naturally capacious mouth to a downward-sinking curve of double-locked suppression.

It was from this locked-up mouth, which when it did open displayed quite a number of serviceable teeth, that the following words issued, the moment Master Young drew breath:

"As a Proctor in Litigation at the Roman court, Master Rhisiart, I cannot completely endorse our dear Canon's views. For my humble little church at Byford on the Wye — I don't know whether you're acquainted with the country round Hereford — the Holy Father has granted me so many privileges that I've been encouraged to take advantage of this recognition of my poor gifts and have dared to suggest that since the episcopal throne of Bangor is at present vacant it would be proper and seemly for His Holiness to 'provide,' as we say, a Welshman to it.

“As any friend here may believe, my first thought in these conversations with the Holy Father was to suggest *his* name. But since some crafty enemy of our race had apparently informed His Holiness of our friend’s association with the anti-Pope at Avignon my kind patron, I may even say my benefactor, was so partial to his poor Welsh Proctor that he hinted that if I obtained Owen’s sanction, assuming of course that our cause is triumphant, there might be a possibility that he would see his way to provide *me* to this vacant episcopal throne.”

Our friend glanced hurriedly at Master Young; but the mist was too thick to see anything but a round orifice in a white blur. “You see, Master Rhisiart, how you and I are destined,” were the words that now issued from this orifice, “to encounter each other on momentous occasions! In me, of course, Owen will meet only a humble candidate for the Archdeaconry of Merioneth, but in our learned Rector here he will find the Lord Bishop Elect of Bangor.”

Rhisiart began to feel happier than he had felt for nearly an hour, happier than he had felt since Catharine so indignantly rejected all his well-arranged plans. He couldn’t conceal from himself how perfectly he was equipped to cope with these two ambitious ecclesiastics.

“How much good and how much evil are mixed up in us all!” he said to himself. “Both the Rector and the Canon are patriotic Welshmen, but of course I can see that the Canon gambles on Benedict while the Rector gambles on Boniface; and that when it comes to bishoprics there’s a deadly rivalry between them!”

“I’m myself a native of Hereford,” he remarked aloud, addressing the Rector. “Perhaps you may be acquainted with my new step-father, Montfoison by name?”

The Rector of Byford shook his head; a gesture which brought very dark suspicions to our friend's mind. Was it possible that his susceptible parent had been deceived by some rascally French adventurer of no background at all?

"Did you hear anything," he went on, "of the trial of Master Brut for heresy? Master Brut is a great friend of mine, and has been appointed Owen's Librarian."

"My dear young gentleman," said the Rector gently, "you must realise that for several years I have been living in Rome. I assume this Brut you speak of was entirely acquitted of this deplorable obloquy?"

"At any rate he's high in Owen's favour," announced our friend proudly, "and even at this moment he is escorting the heiress of Rhys Ddu back to Tywyn."

"Alone?"

"Certainly, Rector, certainly alone!"

"May I enquire if the daughter of Rhys Ddu is affianced to any suitable young gentleman?"

"To none that I've ever heard of, Rector!"

"Really? Dear me! Perhaps then in that quarter — I have no wish to offend — a handsome young scholar like yourself might find—"

Rhisiart bit his lip in the darkness; and savagely transferred his whole religious allegiance from Rome to Avignon. Realizing his blunder the Rector of Byford took from his saddle-bow a daintily-carved flask, put it to his own lips and, courteously bending down as they moved, offered it to Rhisiart.

Naturally anxious to conceal the fact that he had in a single second selected a new Vicar of Christ, Rhisiart drank deeply of the fiery restorative offered him, a privilege which the cautious Master Young refused with a gesture.

Advancing in silence after this they all three became aware that with the deepening of twilight the mist had also thickened, it was only by the feel of the pathway under their feet and the density of the trees on both sides that they kept the track. But it was clear that if it got any darker the non-human senses of the chestnut-coloured horse with the scar on his shoulder would be their best hope.

Dazed by what he had drunk Rhisiart now began to reproduce in his narrow skull almost the precise feelings of the bewildered Catharine. He too visualized the black figure alone on his balcony. He too visualized the white figure alone in her bed. But in his youthful imagination he felt as if between himself and these singular harbour-marks there floated, over the waves of darkness, the shimmering *pali* in which he had first seen the form of his love.

Suddenly the horse stopped. They had reached a spot where the track divided.

“Are you sure we’re going the right way?” said the Rector. “Why has your horse stopped?” said Master Young.

And Rhisiart cursed the Forests of Tywyn as he had never cursed anything in all his life before.

“If we don’t appear,” said Master Young with grave assurance, “they’ll send back to find us. But if we take a wrong turn it won’t be easy to find us, I suggest we stay just where we are, even if an hour has to pass.”

The Rector of Byford, whose form on the back of his horse had now become to our friend a darkness within the darkness, began to murmur the inspired words of Zacharias in the Gospel, in which the Canon reverently joined.

“Ad dandam scientiam salutis plebi ejus” chanted the man on the horse.

“In remissionem peccatorum eorum,” answered the other.

“Per viscera misericordiae Dei nostri,” intoned the Rector.

“In quibus visitavit nos oriens ex alto,” continued the Canon.

“Inluminare his qui in tenebris et in umbra mortis sedent; Ad direngendos pedes nostros in viam pacis,” they concluded together.

The familiar psalmodic rhythm deepened rather than lessened the trouble in our friend’s brain. His whole soul felt drugged, distracted, amort. He longed to be sailing over unknown seas with Catharine, and at the same time he longed to be resting his head, pardoned and at peace, on the golden breast of her betrayed father. But here he was leaning against a horse whose whole body was nothing but a hairless ghostly scar: here he was listening while the phantom echoes of ecclesiastical unction sank out of hearing.

It seemed to him as if in that dense darkness the ghosts of those resonant Latin syllables were uttering querulous moans and plaintive whimperings as they settled down among the expectant black slugs, waiting for them on their balconies on the under-side of the fallen leaves!

And he was aware, too, of a persistent and mortuary smell of funguses. The Forests of Tywyn were famous for funguses. Autumn lasted longer in the Forests of Tywyn than anywhere else in the world. Summer turned quicker into autumn and autumn more slowly into winter! The Forests of Tywyn patiently suffered the spring and the summer and the winter. But their inmost soul responded to the autumn. It rose up then and sucked at the autumn, it drained the autumn, it metamorphosed itself into the autumn! And since the extent of the Forests of Tywyn was so vast, the mass of vegetation with its sweet, sickly, autumnal smell, never quite obliterated by the other seasons, was correspondingly vast; and so now on this particular day, when the wild winds sank down and the persistent rains ceased, the whole forest became one all-dissolving, all-absorbing, all-unfathomable fungus.

Yes, the Forests of Tywyn were well adapted to suck the life out of young hearts. Elliw ferch Rhys was their natural and congenital offspring. But what was that? Rhisiart's whole body stiffened and he listened intently. Ah! he knew what that was — the deep unmistakeable bay of Corbyn, the wolf-hound!

"You're right, Master," he cried joyfully, addressing the Canon. "They've not forgotten us! Mistress Lu's sent back her hound. Corbyn! Corbyn!—" and he raised his voice to its fullest pitch.

Contrary to expectation Owen did return that night; so that all the wanderers, at whose life-springs this Tywyn mist had been at work as though with the innumerable mouths of a colossal fungus, had plenty of time to warm themselves and to wash and change their clothes before the banquet began.

But all the days of that November were pitiable and shameful days for Rhisiart and indescribably tragic days for Catharine.

Owen reached such a point that though he wouldn't give in he couldn't look at her and could rarely bear to speak to her.

The Arglwyddes, however, behaved quite differently. Catharine's one desire was to get away and cry in solitude, but since the Arglwyddes persisted in making these escapes more and more difficult the girl's pride came to her aid. The one person from her earliest childhood before whom she had always refused to weep was her mother, and she felt the same about her brother Griffith; so that either of these persons had only to approach the door of her chamber, or of her friend Lu's chamber when she'd taken refuge there, and at once there was a cold, calm, cheerfully-smiling, though ghastly-white, Catharine ready to receive them.

Rhisiart supposed that after her formal troth had been pledged to Sir Edmund and their espousals drew near she would avoid him as the Prince avoided her. But the contrary of this proved to be the case. She managed — the Mother of God alone knows how! — to see more of Rhisiart than she had done before.

These encounters were pure misery and shame and embarrassment to our friend; but he made it a point of honour to follow her cue and copy her air as far as in him lay. Of their love she never spoke; and, when he spoke of it, all she did without looking away or betraying emotion was to slowly shake her head, while her mouth took on such a lamentable twist when he tried to press her that he hadn't the heart to persevere. He felt her eyes on him all the while. She treated him as she had formerly treated Meredith, who was still too weak to leave Pilleth, and she seemed totally unaware of the effect of this upon any onlookers. She kept gazing at him as if her marriage were to be her death and she wanted to impress his image upon her mind so as to carry it away with her into that unfamiliar realm.

One thing astonished our friend. She seemed to prefer the society of her future husband to everybody's in the place except his own, nor did it appear to cause her any particular distress, though Sir Edmund's melancholy perceptibly deepened, when it fell out that she was alone with the two of them.

From her parents, from the Rector of Byford who had been chosen by the Arglwyddes as the officiating priest at her wedding, from Master Young, from Broch-o'-Meifod and Master Brut, from the Fathers Rheinalt and Pascentius, she seemed to be always escaping to her cold, sad bridegroom, whose melancholy dignity had completely isolated him from everybody. She would be always at his side, with her ungloved hand on Mortimer's black sleeve, standing in the covered porch watching the rain, or seated together in some black oaken chair in the library with some great illuminated folio on their knees, but both pairs of eyes fixed upon vacancy.

Nobody ever saw them talk to each other. Catharine’s eyes would follow Rhisiart everywhere, and would search for him if he wasn’t there; while Mortimer’s eyes would be fixed on any object: a window, a door, a fragment of tapestry, a picture, through which he could stare into some receding horizon.

Mortimer’s courtesy towards her was exquisite. Rhisiart saw him do little things for her that he himself had never done. And though they never conversed, they often exchanged a word, or a look, or even a smile.

Once or twice it struck Master Brut, who hesitated not to observe them closely and who was always troubling about how thin she was growing, that Mortimer treated her with the tender reverence that a devoted servant would offer to a mad queen. It was the coming of the Rector and the Canon that hastened on the date of the wedding. And it was the presence of these much-travelled and politically-minded men that kept Rhisiart from dwelling any more upon ships for France or priests in Cardigan.

Owen was naturally reticent with his Secretary as to the advantages to be derived from the Mortimer alliance; but the two ecclesiastics talked to the lad of nothing else. They soon found out that the deepest element in Rhisiart’s life-illusion was his faith in himself as the guide, counsellor, minister, chancellor, secretary-of-state to an enlightened and civilized ruler of an independent Wales; and upon this they steadily, without pause or intermission, went on playing, till they felt sure that all furtive and reckless schemes had vanished from his mind.

As the fatal day drew nearer Catharine spent more and more time with her friend Lu. This young woman, indulged by her father in all her whims, had grown so eccentric and so much of a recluse that nobody, not even the

Arglwyddes herself, who after all was only a guest at Tywyn, dared to do so much as to knock at her chamber-door. On one occasion when the well-meaning Mistress Angharad had presumed to go as far as this, the queer little creature had fallen into hysterics and shrieked down the passage that she must be “left alone, alone, alone” — or she would kill herself!

At the very last Catharine seemed not only to avoid all contact with Sir Edmund but to have torn her eyes away from Rhisiart. On the last day of all nobody saw her but Lu and Father Rheinalt. Father Rheinalt was the only priest she would allow to approach her. She made her confession to him. She had no concealments from him. She must have felt that with his tragic and passionate past he knew better than anyone what love was.

Owen was careful to keep Rhisiart close at his side and to cover the table at which the lad worked with rough drafts of eloquent letters to every potentate in Christendom who had ever quarrelled with the House of Lancaster.

A few days before the wedding Rhisiart had rather a startling surprise. Owen’s most active leaders in the field, each with their separate army, the Abbot of Caerleon, Rhys Gethin, and Henry Don, weren’t able to be present; but day by day various adherents kept arriving, who had either to be provided with tents under the trees or lodging in the foresters’ huts.

It was when he was wearily and sadly ascending the front stair-case of the house to put himself in the dwarf’s hands that this surprise occurred. The tiny creature had for some time astonished him by her understanding of what he was going through. Never before, since their strange covenant in Dinas Bran, had she kept such a check upon her sharp tongue; and she allowed him to unburden his heart to her as he couldn’t do to another soul in the place — no! not even to the Lollard.

But on this occasion, while he had stopped for a moment to gaze out of a window that opened on that fatal forest-path up which he had followed his love after the Nurse’s death, he heard himself addressed by name, and there at his side stood the beautiful page, Elphin! The boy was dressed in white silk that fitted tight to his girlish body; and round his slender waist was a crimson sash.

The sight of him brought back so vividly his first day at Glyndyfrdwy — could he too be wearing *pali?* — that he recklessly embraced him and kissed him on the lips.

But extricating himself quickly from this embrace, Elphin began in his familiar faltering and nervous manner— “Oh, how fate repeats itself!” thought Rhisiart — a timid request that he would be nicer to Luned when he met her and not go on passing her by without a word or look.

“She promised that if you’d only see her once, and be kind to her like you used to be, she would let me hold her for five minutes by the great clock in the library.”

The perfume of sandal-wood swept over our friend with such an insidious wafture when he heard these words that he was forced to gasp and swallow his saliva. Was Providence beginning to imitate the ways of Saint Derfel? Was it its fault, or his own fault, that at every important crisis in his life, and always on a stair-case, this curst sandalwood smell should stir his senses?

“Tell Luned—” he began; and he was going to say something bitterly cruel to both her and poor Elphin. He was going to command the boy to declare to her — but suddenly he saw in the beautiful eyes of the page a look that completely disarmed him.

“Why he’s looking at me,” he thought, “just as I look at Mortimer! Tell Luned,” he said, “to come any day to the dwarf’s sewing-room. I’ll be glad to see her." And then he added, with a smile as melancholy as his rival's: "Will that purchase you your five minutes?"

"You — couldn't — possibly — see — her — alone, Master Rhisiart?"

At this our distracted friend did burst out, "No, I could not, you silly child! Oh, for Mary's sake, leave *me* alone!"

And as he ran up the stairs his mind reverted to Rawlff's last words on the battlefield. "Tell Luned — tell Luned — tell Luned," he muttered bitterly.

It fell to the lot of Mistress Angharad to arrange the details of the great day. It was the Arglwyddes who had sent to Snowdon for Luned and the dwarf, for she refused to trust any of Mistress Rad's maids in the delicate matter of bridal-dresses. Indifferent as to her own appearance, the good lady became more agitated than anyone had ever seen her over her youngest daughter's wedding. Sir Edmund's melancholy sweetness and courtly manners had made a deep impression on her and she alone of all the ladies concerned seemed conscious of the almost royal dignity of the proud House of Mortimer.

At one point there seemed a danger that Catharine might insist that Father Rheinalt should be among the officiating priests; but the poor man was so upset at the mere mention of such thing that the kindhearted girl quickly put it out of her mind.

It was Father Pascentius who was Mistress Rad's right hand in all her arrangements. His insatiable black eyes and unwieldy figure moved here and there at the house-wife's bidding like some obedient Genie or Jinn from an Arabian romance. All the patriotic gentry of that part of Wales rode over mountain and moor to be present at this great occasion, for, though the marriage itself was to be celebrated in his little ancestral chapel, Rhys Ddu had caused to be erected a vast rain-proof pavilion outside his mansion where a sort of after-ceremony in the traditional Welsh manner was to take place.

There were all manner of wild rumours in the air. All agreed that Hotspur, the new Lady Mortimer's brother-in-law, was on the verge of raising the great Percy standard against the King. French ships in aid of the movement were, it was said, only held up by the gales. Messages of congratulation kept arriving from all sorts of unexpected quarters. Even John Trevor, Bishop of St. Asaph, had allowed his Prior to represent him, King's man though he still was.

Do what he could to escape, Rhisiart soon found his own costume for the occasion the object of the special attention of his little friend with the purple beard. He had insisted on black as best suited to his mood, but this small tyrant, whose fingers were as deft as they were tiny, soon managed to slash his scholar's velvet with so much sky-blue and silver that before she had done with him he had more resemblance to the dazzling Sir Gawain than to the grave Sir Peredur.

Owen himself, as at his proclamation, shone resplendent in gold; but he bore on his flowing mantle of scarlet the solitary black lion of his paternal house.

One thing our friend couldn't bring himself to do and that was to enter the chapel while they were being married. Side by side with Master Brut, whose own attire was as rich as it was simple, he stood in the front rank of the spectators who in a covered way awaited the passing of the bridal procession from the chapel to the pavilion.

A deafening clamour greeted Sir Edmund and Catharine as they emerged from the ceremony, and it was this roar of wild excitement that made it possible — while the bridegroom paused to acknowledge the crowd's salutations and to say something to Master Brut — for Catharine and Rhisiart to exchange a word.

The girl was as white as her dress. Rhisiart feared she was on the point of fainting, but she managed to look straight into his eyes which were burning-dry above his hooked nose; and as he pressed the bare knuckles of the hand she gave him against his clenched teeth she had the strength even to whisper to him. He could feel her breath as she whispered. He could even catch its fragrance which was like that of a crushed briar-leaf; and well — too well — could he catch her words. “I shall call my first boy Rhisiart,” she said, and that was all. Then she tore her eyes away and passed on.

After the old Welsh custom they were to spend their bridal-night in the house of their marriage; and Rhys Ddu had resigned to them for this purpose his own private chamber, which was only a little less spacious, though a good deal plainer, than his daughter’s.

How he endured the hours that followed our friend would have been hard put to it to describe. He lacked even the heart to drown his feelings in drink, though mead flowed like water that night. One thing he marked, and there were the wildest rumours concerning this: both the Prince and Broch-o’-Meifod vanished from the scene long before the bride and bridegroom went to their chamber.

But the terrible hours passed at last, as all passes, and Rhisiart found himself with the rest of that great assembly — only this time anything but in the front row! — watching those two figures, hers and that other’s, grow more and more indistinct under the flickering of the torches, as they ascended the ancient stairs.

Then, frantically forcing his way through the gleaming crowd, that seemed to him like gorgeously attired dancers at a dance of death, he fled to the stables and buried his face in the familiar-smelling hide of Griffin. Deep blood-currents of comprehension and satisfaction quivered through those piebald sides at his having come to him and to him alone; nor was the old horse in the least astonished when, freeing him from his stall and wrapping his sack-cloth round his own finery, his master leapt on his back and rode him at a gallop down the nearest starlit avenue.

This, as it turned out, was the very one down which he and the Lollard had followed Catharine and Lu on that fatal day of the arrival of Master Young. How he had longed for the presence of that great statesman — and now he was reaping the benefit of his hero's farsighted schemes!

He urged the old horse on, recklessly, heedlessly. It was lucky for both Griffin and his rider that the night was frosty and clear. How the stars glimmered through the bare branches, endowing each one of them in its motionless age with the monumental glamour of something withdrawn, unearthly, expectant!

A faint cool air blew upon his face, an air so light and noiseless that the sounds of the forest, the stirring of sleepy birds, the scuttling of rabbits over the dead leaves and pine-needles, the barking of dogs in distant wood-men's huts, the hooting of night owls, the scampering panic of wild-wood ponies, only intensified the spaciousness of the silence.

The stars were so bright and the branches so still that he felt as if he and Griffin were moving together through some celestial Forest of Tywyn, a forest older than the earth, larger than the earth, with its own gleaming firmament above it and the leaves of centuries piled up beneath it.

He had already gone a good deal further than Catharine and Lu went, in their search for Pryderi's Tree, when suddenly he pulled Griffin up, pulled him up so violently that the old horse nearly collapsed.

There in front of them, gathering what looked like toad-stools at the root of a beech-tree was Broch-o'-Meifod.

"Oh it's another of you life-lovers, is it?" said the giant calmly. Rhisiart perceived even by the faint light of the stars that the man was more upset than he permitted to appear.

"Ride on, if you want to find him, laddie. He's playing his tricks at the Tree."

"Who, for Mary's sake?"

"Owen, Owen — I tell you. He's at Pryderi's Tree. He's punishing himself for this marriage. I can't do anything with him; but you're another of these—"

"But — Master Broch — how could you leave him? What can I do that you couldn't do?"

"Ride on, boy. It's not far. You'll soon see what he's been up to. I'll follow you in a moment. I'm getting something to stop the blood."

Rhisiart obeyed him without further protest; but his heart grew more and more ice-cold as his sweat mixed with Griffin's sweat. "This is the end of all," he said to himself. "Catharine gone, and now Owen gone. O Mary, Queen of Heaven, save him! It's for Owen, Griff; it's for Owen, old friend — faster — faster — faster!"

Though he had never seen them before, the mound and the Tree were unmistakeable when he reached them. They stood in a large clearing which itself lay above the level of all but the tallest trees; and as the clearing was above the forest, and the mound was above the clearing, so the Tree was above the mound.

Jumping off Griffin's back and leaving the old horse panting and exhausted, Rhisiart bolted up the bare hillock, scrambled up the mound, and then stopped, aghast and petrified at what he saw. On the top of the mound were the remains of a gigantic oak, an oak compared with which the one into whose heart he had helped his master to fling the Lord of Nannau was a mere sapling. Its girth, even in dissolution, was the greatest he'd ever seen of any forest growth. It was entirely hollow, and it gaped up at the stars like the jagged throat of some prehistoric monster that had upreared itself from the bowels of the earth to reproach the heavens.

Down upon its gaping jaws shone the glittering hosts of stars; and all the multitudinous branches of that vast forest waited at its feet in spellbound expectation. It was as if the Forests of Tywyn, burdened with the wrongs against which Pryderi had struggled in vain, were holding their breath until that mouth should utter its defiance of "Caer Gwydion", its challenge to the mocking immensity of the Milky Way!

Above the forest rose the mound. Above the mound rose the Tree. And out of the centre of the tree rose the figure of Owen. Pryderi's Tree was nothing but a ruined stump. The Prince had found no obstacle — save the superstitious fear of a whole countryside — in precipitating himself into that cavernous excrescence, the whole height of which could hardly have been more than five feet above the surface of the mound.

But Broch was right. The Prince had done something to himself! Only his torso was visible. He was leaning against the jagged rim of the orifice, his hands on its edge; but his head was flung back, as if, like the funnel in which he stood, he were lifting up a voiceless curse upon that starry expanse.

But what made our friend's knees weak and his stomach sick was that he could clearly see dark blotches upon that white throat under the lifted forked beard. Were they blood? He feared it, he greatly feared it.

"My Prince! My father!" he cried aloud; and his voice sounded so strange, so unlike any voice he'd ever heard, that the silence which followed it seemed full of ghostly echoes. Then something made him glance down to the ground. And there, just beneath the figure in the tree and just at his own feet, lay an object that he knew too well. He stooped hurriedly, picked it up and thrust it away amid the loops and embroideries of the dwarfs handiwork. It was his own dagger; and it came over him that he had left it in the Prince's room, lying upon his final copy of the letter to Mortimer's tenants: the letter that told them how Owen would place the Earl of March on the throne and how the border lordships of Maelienydd and Gwerthrynion and Rhayader and Arwystli and Cyfeiliog and Caer Einion must not be incommoded.

With a sick terror in his heart he now pressed his body close to the oak-stump and flung his arms about his master's shoulders.

"My Prince! My father!" he moaned hoarsely. "It's Rhisiart, my Prince — it's your own poor Rhisiart!"

Oh, Mother of God be thanked! Hail Mary, hail Mary! The man did bend down his head at this.

"Rhisiart?" The syllable came from his wounded throat like bubbles from a tree-root bole full of black water.

"It's I, my Prince, my father! It's your Rhisiart, come to bring you back to life, to Wales, to — to Catharine!" He knew the man had heard him, he knew the man had understood him; but the trance, or whatever it was, into which he had fallen broke under the too-sudden return of his soul to his body and his head fell forward, the blood from his hurt throat spurting against Rhisiart's face.

But a great human shadow rose up by their side now, and Broch-o'-Meifod, panting like a hunted mammoth, laid hold of the unconscious man. Together they dragged him out of the tree and laid him on the turf.

"Is he dead?" whispered Rhisiart. The giant didn't answer. He was busy with the wounds in his friend's throat into which he was pressing some sort of queer-smelling fungus-powder from the handful of toadstools he had garnered in the forest.

At last he rose from his knees. “No, lad, he’s not dead. Nor is he in the least danger of dying. He’s only been play-acting for conscience-sake.”

“I don’t believe it!” cried Rhisiart indignantly.

“No, you don’t believe it; because you love him without understanding him. He was only trying experiments! I know him. I tell you I know him better than I know myself. The man’s a life-worshipper. He’s wickedly alive!” He paused for a moment, staring at the silent figure on the turf. Then he said slowly, “What I can’t get him to understand, with all his tricks, is that this earth” — and he lifted one of his great heels and brought it down again like the hoof of a centaur— “with all these loves and wars and plots and counterplots on it, is no more than a distorted mirage of the reality! There — he’s coming back. Let’s carry him to your horse.”

At the moment when Rhisiart was setting off into the forest, Sir Edmund and the new Lady Mortimer heard the door of their chamber closed upon them.

“Turn away, if it please you, dear my Lord, till I’m in bed!” But there was no need for the Welsh bride to say this to her Norman bridegroom. A gentleman of the old tradition was Sir Edmund; and he was already moving to the small oratory concealed by heavy curtains, whither his personal possessions had been conveyed. Here, in almost complete darkness, he remained so long on his knees that a far less gallant girl than Catharine would have had all the respite she required.

As she lay in Rhys Ddu’s great ancestral bed, her sea-green eyes wide open and staring at the steady candle-flames reflected in a shield above the smouldering hearth, she could hear the click-click of Mortimer’s rosary as he told his beads.

"It won't be the pain I shall mind," she thought. "I'm glad it hurts. The more it hurts the better!" And she clenched her fingers into the palms of her hands as they lay at her sides, which was what Luned told her — though it was entirely from that queer one's imagination — all girls did under the sweet pain of ravishment. "I shall think of you, my only love," she said to herself, "all the time! Whatever he does I shall think of you. Whatever I endure I shall think of you. And I shan't cry out. Lu says all girls cry out, and that the maids will be waiting with bare feet outside the door to hear me. Well! Let them wait! They won't hear a sound."

"Shall I put out the candles or leave them?" he asked her. How grand and sad his head looked as he stood there in his long linen gown, a gown just like her own only of thicker stuff! She turned her head a little as she lay on her back under the wall — as close under the wall as she could get; for, for all the calm of her mind, her body kept yielding to curious little tremors and shiverings — and with her head thus turned to one side against the portion of the pillow that was covered with her flaxen hair she surveyed him with a thoughtful puckering of her brows.

"I hope my teeth won't begin chattering," she thought. "Lu didn't say whether girls' teeth chattered." And she began clenching her teeth just as tightly as she was clenching her fingers. But he had a noble head — and oh! how sad he looked!

This grave, melancholy silence, as he stood there in the chilly room, waiting till she chose to unclench her teeth and answer his question about the candles, now began in some fantastic manner to annoy her. It made her feel very lonely; and it made this clenching of her fingers seem childish and ridiculous. Why didn't he say something outrageous and obscene? Why didn't he say something sardonic and life-weary, as Meredith would have done? His grave, sad politeness made her feel as if she were going to give up her maidenhead in the chapter-house of Valle Crucis!

"Well, child," he said, "I'll put them out. I can easily light them again if you don't like the darkness."

Oh how silly her body was to shiver like this just because there was a man lying by her side! And he hadn't even touched her yet. The bed was so big, and she had made herself so small against the wall, that there must have been a dagger's length between them. A dagger's length? Rhisiart's dagger's length!

For a few wretched minutes, and these were certainly the worst of all she'd gone through that wretched day, they lay in Rhys Ddu's great bed without a movement, a word, a sound. The young man lay on his back staring at the unglazed window from which an air that seemed almost frosty was blowing in; and the young girl lay on her back staring at the tiny points of redness and the wisps of blue smoke of the extinguished candles, and at the fire-light shadows flickering about the walls.

At last she couldn't stand it a second longer. "Why are you so sad and so silent, dear my Lord? Do you hate it so much being married to a Welsh girl?"

"I'll tell you in a little while, Catharine," he said, pronouncing her name in the manner in which it was pronounced in France, "only you must let me do everything I want to first!"

Her relaxed fingers clenched themselves again and those tremblings recommenced. But this "everything" he wanted had apparently nothing to do with a girl's body, whether willing or unwilling; it had to do, it seemed, with re-lighting the candles, visiting the alcove where he had left his belongings and getting into bed again with a Provencal lute in his hand.

He now sat up in the bed, arranging his pillow behind his back and crossing his legs; and in this position, while the candle-flames were again reflected in the crusader’s shield, he began playing on the lute.

Catharine’s fingers relaxed, her mouth opened in wonder, her eyes got round, the blood returned to her cheeks. As he played — and she remembered with what interest he had listened to all their Welsh music and never breathed a word about his lute — he became a different person.

Flickerings of something resembling gaiety crossed his haughty profile, with its short upper lip, and its high retreating forehead passing into tight, small, dark-brown curls. One Provencal tune after another he played, and the faint smiles with which he became aware that with the motions of a timid bird, every time he began again, Catharine slid a little nearer, had a touch of mischief in them.

At last she was so near that as he commenced a melody known to all young people from Dublin to Constantinople, he felt her body touching his; and it was almost with the inevitableness of a movement in a dance that he slipped the hand that had been holding the lute round her form, so that when he grasped the instrument again it was in such a way that her breast was pressed against him.

One more ditty he played; and to the girl’s amazement it was a tune that she had heard her Nurse repeat to her a thousand times when she was an infant at Glyndyfrdwy. This loosened the flood-gates. All those tears that her mother wouldn’t let her shed and that she was too proud to shed before Lu began to pour down her cheeks.

Mortimer tossed the lute to the foot of the bed and drew her towards him till with her hair covering his chest and her face pressed against him she sobbed to her heart’s content.

The candles were guttering in their sconces and Mortimer's nightgown clung about his throat as if he'd been exposed to the rains of Tywyn before that fit of weeping was over. Then settling his pillow in its proper position and sinking down in the bed with his arm still under her he began to speak, "Do you still want to know why I've been so sad — Catharine?"

Once more that French pronunciation of her name gave her a curious relief. She began to feel as if the Catharine who loved Rhisiart needn't be so stern with this other Catharine whose name sounded so different!

"Tell me, dear my Lord," she whispered.

"Do you mind if I let the candles burn themselves out?"

She replied by the faintest possible movement towards him.

"Well, child, it's a long story and a piteous one," he said, "but I'll make it as short as I can. Before my elder brother died there was a girl I loved and who loved me. She was—"

"What was her name?"

"Her name was Bridget, and she was fair like you, only her eyes were different. She was of the people, but she was very proud. She refused to be what we call my paramour, and what she wanted I wanted."

"You wanted to marry?"

"We decided to marry and escape to Scotland where I had many friends."

Catharine was silent, thinking of those ships to France and of that easy priest in Cardigan-town. Then she said, "Did your brother find out?"

"Yes," he said simply. "He found out."

"Did he make you leave her?"

A prolonged silence followed, in the midst of which the candles flickered down and were extinguished. Then she became aware that the man in whose arms she lay was making proud and indignant efforts to keep his self-control. She could feel his chest heave, and she clung to him the closer. But he recovered himself and went on.

"I don't know what happened. I never spoke to my brother again, and he died soon after; but she — she was found drowned in the Severn."

Catharine made no movement. She lay as still as if she were drowned, too. She saw this Bridget with the cold, proud face and the hair like her own and the heart that they'd broken.

"Whether she did it herself," Mortimer went on, "or whether it was done by my brother's orders I shall never know."

Once more there was complete silence in the marriage-bed of Tywyn; while the air that blew upon their faces from the window grew yet more frosty, and the last red embers faded.

Suddenly, when the room was quite dark, Catharine said, very quietly, "If we have children, dear my Lord, I shall call our girl Bridget and our boy Rhisiart. But it's been worse for you than for me; and I shall never, never forget your having told me this!"

XVII. THE GOOSANDER

THE TWO YEARS that followed the marriage of Catharine and Mortimer were years of steadily increasing triumph both for Owen and for Wales. The year of grace 1405, the fifth year of the Prince's assumption of his title, opened for all Welshmen with what looked like an irresistible wave of victory. It is true that Mortimer's brother-in-law, Hotspur, was dead, slain at Shrewsbury as he faced the King and his son, but Hotspur's father, the old Earl, was still in arms against the House of Lancaster; and a new adherent, and a very crafty one, had recently declared for Owen in the person of Thomas, Lord Bardolf.

This Bardolf was a King's man who had turned against his master with that undying hatred which Henry the Fourth seems to have had the power to excite; and his grand passion now was to unite the King's enemies in one triumphant pact.

The popular Bishop of St. Asaph, John Trevor, whose heart had long been wavering towards the Welsh cause, had now openly joined it; and though, in the North, the castles of Carnarvon, Beaumaris, Conway, Rhuddlan, Denbigh, Flint and Welshpool remained in English hands, the far more strategic fortresses of Aberystwyth and Harlech were securely in Owen's possession.

The fortunes of war still swayed up and down, sometimes with the most tantalizing chances lost by the breadth of a hair to one side or the other; as, for instance, when in the beginning of February the notorious Lady Despenser, who had actually kidnapped the little Earl of March, the Mortimer claimant to the throne, was only caught at the last moment with her convoy at Cheltenham, as she rode post-haste towards a sanctuary in Wales.

Owen had already summoned one of those parliaments of the commonalty, towards which both Rhisiart and Rhisiart's legal ideal, Master Young, had been steadily urging him; but our youthful friend was now arranging for a much more extensive assembly, modelled not only upon the parliament of Hywel the Good, but upon the parliament at Westminster.

For weeks he had been drafting and issuing writs to all the *cantrefs* in the principality, and he was in high spirits over the response. This second parliament was to be held in the castle in a few days so as to enable the free-holders, among the "four good men" of each *commote,* to return to their farms for the March ploughing.

Our friend's old acquaintance, the Rector of Byford, had by this time used the hold he'd acquired over Boniface the Ninth to get himself promoted, as he had predicted in the Forests of Tywyn, to the See of Bangor; but Byford's Pope was now dead, and the new Roman Pontiff, Innocent the Seventh, found it as hard as his predecessor had done to cope with the Great Schism.

It was no doubt this change among the successors of the Fisherman that encouraged King Charles of France to send his private confessor, Hugh Eddouyer, a diplomatic preaching-friar, to make a personal appeal to the new Prince of Wales to transfer that country's spiritual allegiance from Rome to Avignon. This crafty messenger from Charles the Sixth timed his visit to a nicety; for he caused it to coincide with the return of Master Young, now Owen's official Chancellor, from Paris, bringing news of a great French fleet on the verge of sailing to give him substantial aid.

The ubiquitous Lord Bardolf, urged on in his devious ways not so much by love of the Welsh as by hatred for Henry, had persuaded the new Bishop of Bangor to appoint to the archidiaconal office in his diocese a mysterious young Welshman who called himself Father Ignotus, and who was reported to be a somewhat questionable relative of the Bishop's own; and it was arranged by this shrewd pair of plotters, lest Bishop Byford's hand should be too apparent in the matter, that instead of the episcopal palace in Bangor, the private house of the newly-ordained Archdeacon should be the trysting place between any emissaries that Owen might wish to send and the representatives of the Earl of Northumberland.

It was Master John Hanmer, the Arglwyddes' brother, who had been Owen's lay ambassador at the court of Charles; and it was he who now appeared at Harlech, in company with Brother Eddouyer and a couple of young French noblemen, to report on the success of the embassy to France.

Chancellor Young himself went straight to Owen's other headquarters, the impregnable castle at Aberystwyth, where he was to hold an ecclesiastical court of his own; but it was in Harlech that Owen's family, including Sir Edmund and Lady Mortimer, were now permanently established.

Almost all the devoted personal adherents of the Prince were gathered about him in these noble purlieus, the most ancient as well as the most romantic stronghold in the land; and it may well be that not only King Henry's Lodge at Berkhampstead but even King Charles' perambulatory court had less of the antique ritual of a royal residence than this great Castle by the Sea.

The vast space of its battlemented enclosure, the immense number of its chambers, its impregnable position, all these things rendered it an ideal sanctuary for a prince at war. Bran the Blessed himself, who was of such gigantic stature that no human erection could contain him, might have exercised his colossal limbs in the base-court; while the stairways and passages and banquet-halls and libraries and chapels with intricate ascents and descents everywhere, and with turrets crowded with arrow-slits looking across the water, made Harlech a world of its own, a world where dramas of love and birth and life and death could go on, and only the seagulls screaming about the battlements be aware of them, while from the infinite horizon where sea met sky any imaginary watcher on the ramparts might fancy he heard, when dawn rose or twilight fell, the far-off mystic song of the Birds of Rhiannon.

Rhys Gethin came and went, like an unpredictable thunderstorm, between his now well-seasoned army of spearmen and his perilous mistress, if such she were. Nobody knew how far this affair had gone. All that could be said was that Lowri still clung, in her perversity, for none could sound that strange heart, to Master Brut's converted, or half-converted, Hog of Chirk.

Lady Mortimer had kept her word. She had now a son of two years called Rhisiart and a little baby-daughter called Bridget, and, managing both her husband and her lover with a dangerous skill that made the Arglwyddes regard her with puzzled wonder, she had already begun to take her mother's place as the Great Lady of the Castle.

Catharine, and she alone in that embattled princedom, broke every rule of the prehistoric ritual with which Owen and his bards and his prophets had surrounded themselves. She insisted on nursing her infants herself, whereas from time immemorial such babes of a noble house had been handed over to the care of a foster-parent. She insisted on leaving the women's quarters; and with little Bridget at her breast and little Rhisiart clinging to her gown would move freely, wherever her fancy led, about this huge and intricate pile. She was often with Sir Edmund, but she was quite as often with her little son's namesake. But such was the proud beauty of her blossoming womanhood that not a flicker of any uncomely rumour floated across her path.

It was Owen's way to get rid of his overpowering emotions by some weird penance inflicted upon himself; and even if his Meifod friend had been correct in his supposition that those stabbings at his throat with Rhisiart's dagger had been well under control, they and his whole abandonment between Pryderi's Tree and the "Caer Gwydion" of the firmament had been real enough to work their purpose. He had felt remorse, and he had punished himself; and his love of life had gone on.

The Arglwyddes did notice a certain reserve between him and Catharine; but she couldn't detect the least sign of such a thing between him and Rhisiart.

Catharine herself didn't forget her girl-friends in this new half-royal life. To the joy of everyone in the place she made the Prince send to Snowdon for Tegolin and her Friar; and since Rhys Ddu was now fighting for Owen at some distance from Tywyn, she persuaded her friend Lu to share her many-storied turret fronting the Harlech waves.

Whether there was a definite purpose or not in her choice of the moment of Lu's arrival, which coincided with a second convalescence of Meredith, wounded again in battle and again committed, but this time under the eye of his father, into the hands of the Scab, neither Sir Edmund nor Rhisiart could decide.

It became a sort of half-humorous link between them, the discussion of this nice point, a link that to the watchful eyes of Father Pascentius presented itself as pure masculine jealousy over a friendship between two women.

But whether intended by Catharine or not, the mere physical conditions of Meredith's second recovery, in a chamber adjoining the Mortimer turret, made it impossible for even Lu's shyness to create a barrier; and very soon the queer-looking little creature, her long hair floating about her frail form like the dusky smoke about a bonfire of weeds, was accepted by everyone in the castle as the natural and unquestioned guardian of the invalid's pillow.

How Lu dealt with the Scab nobody but Catharine was ever told; but the complete absence from her timid personality of every kind of ordinary feminine appeal made it seem, even to Father Pascentius, that unless the prophet had a mania for mouse-coloured hair it was unlikely that he would treat this intruder at his patient's bed-side with anything worse than professional indifference.

As a matter of fact a couple of weeks had hardly passed before the Bard of Ffinnant began to interest himself in transactions that drew him for many hours every day from Meredith's side; and it wasn't long before the whole castle, Father Pascentius included, took for granted that that queer and eccentric young lady must have a knowledge of herbs and lotions and unguents and even of elixirs of life, hardly inferior to that of a real conjurer.

The Arglwyddes' brother, John, resembled his sister in almost every respect. In face and figure he was a middle-aged replica of her son Griffith, while in his calm, wise, unruffled nature he had the same power of steering his way through life as the Arglwyddes was destined to display to the bitter end.

John was on excellent terms with Father Rheinalt and he had equal respect for the monk's daughter whose presence in the castle he had welcomed from the first; but he could hardly bear the sight of Father Pascentius! He would complain to his sister that this spying monk from Valle Crucis spoilt Harlech for him. "I feel," he told her, "as if I were an heretical version of Saint Thomas that had to be revised from cover to cover!"

John Hanmer was heartily glad, too, when his fellow-ambassador to France betook himself to Aberystwyth. He had got thoroughly weary of the smooth gabble of that toothless mouth; and he had a private notion that the knavish tricks of these incalculable Frenchmen were countered more effectively by a laconic reserve than by the voluble protestations in which Master Young loved to indulge.

The high-born young gentlemen — they were scarcely older than pages — whom Charles the Sixth had deputed to convey his promises of help to the Prince were two youthful cousins, Gilles and Jean de Pirogue. Jean was a big, blond, imperturbable young aristocrat, of whose personal characteristics nothing was betrayed, save a passion for hunting, a genius for hurriedly-invented lies, and an unconcealed loathing for his cousin Gilles.

This Gilles was more of an agitation to our friend Rhisiart than he was to Owen. Owen treated him with a grave punctilious courtesy from which every personal reaction was excluded. He compelled the lad, whether he liked it or not, to go through the long, wearisome formality of the presentation of certain ornamental pieces of armour, triumphs of the art of the Parisian goldsmiths, which he had brought from the French King.

This ceremony, Rhisiart assumed, was organized by the Prince solely to impress these young scions of a noble French family, but it was hard for him to imagine Owen going through such a tedious ceremony if he hated it as much as he himself did. And how could he not hate it? To our friend's Norman taste such ceremonies were simply tiresome and ridiculous. He could see the giggling fits against which his naughty mother would have had to struggle at the sight of Owen kneeling down so humbly while this repulsive young man hooked and buckled the pieces of armour about him.

The longer this young Gilles de Pirogue remained in the castle the more agitated did Rhisiart become. Only a very short space of time passed before he discovered that his own worst vice — that sensual ecstasy he derived from the thought of particular kinds of cruelty — was shared by this unpleasing youth to a degree that amounted to insanity. And yet the boy wasn't insane. In everything else he was crafty and cold and calculating. On this path only he seemed prepared to take the maddest risks, whether to his honour or to his reputation or to his life.

The culminating revelation he got of this young aristocrat's peculiarity came, as might have been expected, from Father Pascentius. The Father called him one day into the smallest and most remote of Harlech's three libraries, where he had collected the rarest of all the books in the castle round his own desk. It was Candlemas Day, the second of February, the day devoted to the Purification of the Blessed Virgin; and Father Pascentius commenced by inquiring whether his fellow botanist had fasted from meat that morning.

"It's good to fast, my son, good to fast, good to fast," he repeated as he pushed his visitor into a chair by the fire and planted himself upon a wooden stool near him.

Rhisiart was amazed by the deft way the Father seized upon this three-legged object, shiny as an axe-handle from the daily pressure of his huge buttocks, and whipped it so neatly between his legs ere he lowered his weight upon it.

"Good to fast, my son!" and it seemed to our friend as if over one of those incorrigible eyes the eyelid perceptibly fell. Had the interpreter of

Saint Thomas winked at him? And then he remembered. Father Pascentius was making sport of the present Abbot of Valle Crucis!

"My soul shall magnify the Lord and my spirit shall rejoice," was his next utterance, half to himself and half aloud; and it was impossible for Rhisiart, after five years of Master Brut's friendship, not to wonder what the Virgin Mother, if she were watching this ungainly recorder of her Purification squatting on his stool, thought of his rendering of her Song of Conception.

"Well, my son, I expect you want to know what I bothered you about"; and, seizing his stool with both hands while still seated upon it, he caused it to hop along the edge of the cinder hearth, so that he could get closer to his interlocutor. "The matter is this," and he cast a cautious glance at the massive door of the chamber, "and it is an important—" And then quite suddenly, but not to Rhisiart's surprise, who had long since grown accustomed to his vagaries, he thrust a hand into his habit and brought out a tangled mass of minute plants. Dropping these into his capacious lap he selected one of them and held it at arm's length in the shaft of sun-motes that fell across the room.

"You see the genus of course," he said. "Of course you do! But this is a separate species. At first sight you mightn't think so, but I'm sure I'm not mistaken. It's a kind of bitter cress. Of course you see that, from the corymbose arrangement, but the common bitter cress never shows itself till March. I believe it will be necessary for me" — in his excitement he used a characteristic Welsh idiom— "necessary for me to put a name on it, and I have decided to name it *Cardamine Pascentius.* And since it may be hereafter the only plant to bear my name, I would be glad, my son, if, when I'm dead, you'd be good enough to plant it — *Cardamine Pascentius* — upon my grave."

Rhisiart dutifully rose, took the *Cardamine Pascentius* between his finger and thumb, and walking to the window surveyed the small object carefully.

"Blessed Mary!" he thought, "it looks like little Lu!" And he held it in such a way, framed in that narrow window, that it made a tiny dark pattern against the golden sun-path upon the in-rolling tide.

Then coming back to his seat by the hearth he returned it to its complacent god-father, who without moving from his stool thrust it back with the rest into the pocket of his habit.

"I shall remember, Father," our friend promised him. "But, if the Prince allows me, I hope in the next campaign—"

He crossed himself hurriedly; but the monk was now with the familiar gesture of his hands reducing all such relativities as human promises to the indifference of the absolute.

"What's your opinion, my dear son," and, though Rhisiart attributed the impression to the dazzlement of his eyes by that bright path on the waves, the fancy did cross his mind that a quite human glance of affection had reached him from the unwieldy figure on the stool, "with regard to this young Pirogue?"

"Jean, do you mean, Father?" our friend hastily murmured. "I believe he's out hunting already; though what he'll find at this time of year—"

"No, no, my son, the other one, the other one! What is your opinion of him?"

Rhisiart might as well have looked for enlightenment into the bottomless depths of Llyn Tegid as into the orbs that now confronted him. "Oh, I don't know, Father," he brought out carelessly. "He's got an unnaturally pale complexion, and his mouth makes me think of that water-snake we found the other day swallowing a frog."

"You remember, son, how in one of your early confessions to me, before you loved Lady Mortimer, you spoke of the bloodlust — well! not exactly that, but in the same category of mortal sin — which you found to be such an agitating temptation?"

Rhisiart nodded without speaking.

"Well! this Gilles *lives* for that! Nothing else on earth has interest for him. Everything else is done mechanically, seen mechanically, spoken mechanically. The lad's like a perambulatory corpse, I tell you, except for that."

Rhisiart bent his head frowning, gazing uneasily at the Father's ragged sandals. "Father," he enquired, "why do you suppose it is that such horrible temptations reach us in these modern days? Do you think there's been some marriage in Hell since that star with a tail appeared?"

"Marriage in Hell, my son?"

"I mean a new type of devil, born to betray us, such as was never known in the earlier times? Or do you think, Father, it's because of the anti-Pope at Avignon? Or is the Christian Faith gradually dying out, as Master Broch says?"

"Every age, my son," the monk replied quietly, "feels itself to be worse and more wicked than the preceding ones. Our age does, as you say, suffer from the breaking down of faith and chivalry and from the grievous imputations implied in the mere existence of the anti-Pope; but you must remember that all great virtues carry their defects, I might say their curse, with them. Things were done under the urge of faith that sicken us in these enlightened days. Between ourselves, my son, I think the worst aspect of our age is the *intelligence* of its cruelty. King Hal, for instance, in his burning of heretics, is influenced by no old-fashioned wrath against blasphemies. It's a pure political move, to gain favour with the —

"But I didn't come to lecture you, my dear boy, "I came to tell you that since Owen and Griffith and Sir Edmund have all gone hunting with Jean de Pirogue, there's no one left in this castle — for you know what Master Hanmer is! — that I can depend upon in the matter that's now come up. I don't want to go to Broch—"

Rhisiart leapt out of his chair with a bound. "You don't mean," he cried, "that Lord Talbot has rushed here from Hereford, or John Grendor from Glamorgan, and we've got to man the walls?"

"Tut, tut, lad! What are you talking about? Isn't the Abbot of Caerleon keeping at bay the last big army King Hal has the money to muster till his next parliament? You, the Prince's adviser, to talk so wildly!"

"But the Abbot may have been defeated! He may have been killed! Oh, for Mary's sake, Father, tell me what's happened! I'm only" — and the Secretary paused and groaned bitterly— "only a letter-copier, a clerk, a scribe, a wretched book-worm; but I have ridden a horse and drawn a sword in my time — and my horse is no fool either, though he is getting old. John Grendor's known to be the best captain in Christendom, and Lord Talbot runs him close. Our Rhys Gethin's a ramping madman compared with either! For Mary's sake, Father, what has happened? I'm sure it's John Grendor — I'm sure that's what it is. He must have raised the money and the men himself and decided to attack our main stronghold! It's just like him to have found out the day when the Prince would be hunting; for he always—"

But the Father had risen to his feet and in his impatience with his young friend had actually flung his stool against the wall. "Listen to me, Rhisiart, listen, boy! Your horse may be sensible enough, I don't deny it; but you yourself are a fantastical fool! Can't you believe me when I tell you that it's the doings of this damned French boy I've come about? So stop roaring of your swords and spears and your Talbots and Grendors! You’re as touchy as an old bowman from Crecy, who can do nothing but talk of the Black Prince’s horse-shoes. How can I trust you in a crisis when you behave like this?”

Rhisiart couldn’t help smiling at the monk’s reproaches. In his huge relief that it wasn’t an English army — for of course there was serious danger of this, as he alone in that castle realized — he would have continued to smile if the Father had struck him with his stool instead of flinging it against the wall.

But the monk was in a very serious mood; and the most curious evidence of this was that his eyes had that same odd film upon them — like thin flakes of transparent horn — which they had when he was speaking of the *Cardamine Pascentius.*

“Something’s happening that must be stopped, my son,” he said gravely. “There’s pain being inflicted in this castle that cannot be allowed. But I don’t want to go to the Prince about it!”

“Why not?” asked Rhisiart. “The Prince wouldn’t put up for a second with such things in Harlech.”

The eyes of Father Pascentius came to life; and like two ferrets whom their owner sends down a rabbit-burrow they plunged into the young man’s soul. “The Prince,” said the monk solemnly, “isn’t like you and me. He has himself in control as a rule — but not always! Cast your mind back, my son, and ask yourself, as others have asked themselves, what happened to Hywel Sele of Nannau.”

“Let’s go then!” cried Rhisiart impatiently. “Don’t let’s delay a moment! I ought to have a sword, though, oughtn’t I?”

“Have you your dagger?”

The young man showed it to him and concealed it again.

“I’ve worn it bare,” he said, “since we heard Davy Gam was on the prowl. ’Twould be out as quick as his knife if I saw him near Owen!”

“Come then,” said the monk in a low voice. “But remember we’ve only got to stop *this*. You know as well as I do that nothing must happen to King Charles’ envoy.”

The theologian shook down his habit, pulled his cowl over his head and pushed back the curtain, for the door of this particular retreat was rarely closed, and went out into the passage followed by his young friend. Up and down endless corridors and endless flights of narrow stone steps Rhisiart followed the cowled figure. Sometimes the passages they traversed were nearly dark, in spite of the sunlight that poured down against the seaward battlements. More than once they emerged into the open air, and Rhisiart turned to glance at the fishing boats on the glittering waves. He found himself growing more and more nervous. What kind of scene was awaiting them?

Rhisiart felt puzzled and sad. This great castle by the sea, over which now flew Owen’s new standard, the four lions rampant of Gwynedd, had it been built for one kind of greed and cruelty, only to prove a protection for another, a subtler and a worse? Master Sparrow was still in good spirits; but what had the common people really gained by being free of the English? The countryside, he knew, was burnt and ravaged in every direction. And what had Owen himself gained beyond those ramping lions on his armour, on his shields, on his horses’ trappings? In his imagination Rhisiart already began to hear the cries of that “pain” they were going to bring to an end. It must be something exceptional to have sent those deadly eyes of Father Pascentius voyaging down the sun-path. But what sort of a promise was it for the future when the Prince of Wales mustn’t be told of what was going on in his own castle?

While he watched the cowled figure before him dive through a narrow arch, leading down from these high ramparts, our friend, who was no longer an impulsive boy but an eccentric and anxious man, cast a final look at the glittering distance. He was too high up to see the beach, or the rocks, or even the little stone-jetty; but he noticed how far the tide was drawing back, leaving a great stretch of yellow sand.

“In Bran the Blessed’s time;” he said to himself, “the waves must have washed against the wall. The sea’s receded. A few hundred years more and all this sand may be tilled pastures!” He turned his head and glanced at the dark steps down which his guide had descended. The monk too had turned and was looking back at him. That meant they were at the end of their quest! He thrust his hand under his jerkin where he wore an “unseen belt. Yes! he could draw his dagger at a glance from the monk, at less than a glance, at the flicker of an eyelid!

“I must go,” he thought; but oh, how reluctant his body was to obey that command! Was he about to be seized by one of those attacks of black darkness, as when he drew his sword in front of the Chirk archers or followed the Lollard down that swinging rope? “But I did what I had to do,” he said to himself, “even though I didn’t know I was doing it! I killed that English boy at Bryn Glas — but that was with my sword. I’ve never stabbed anyone to the heart. Where is the heart? Under the left ribs? Blessed Virgin! I’ve become a monk myself with all my letter-writing!”

And as he bent his head to join his companion he heard the voice of his mother chaffing and laughing at him. “But what,” he retorted, “did you want with a lousy Frenchman? Montfoison is he? Oh the sly son of a whore! Oh the lecherous pretender! And to get the prettiest lady in Hereford for a nod and a kiss and a French song!”

Yes — there were sounds now — strange, appalling sounds! Mercy of God! Was the Frenchman turning Harlech into —

But there was Elphin, the pretty page, with his hands full of wet sea-weed, trembling like a wisp of shudder-grass! And there was Gwalchmai, that ill-favoured ostler Rhisiart had met when he first arrived at Glyndyfrdwy and had always detested, holding the lad by the wrist, while with his other hand he kept tapping at the bolted door.

The sounds from within the chamber, some of them human, some sub-human, not only made these tappings inaudible but muted the approach of our two friends.

Father Pascentius gave Rhisiart a look which the latter interpreted correctly. Leaping upon his ancient enemy, whom he'd suspected for months of ill-using the aging Griffin, he seized his ugly head by its thick locks and struck it — once, twice — with all his force against the granite door-post. Gwalchmai fell without so much as a groan; a stream of blood, blacker than the darkness, trickling from his skull.

Then Father Pascentius, who had clapped his hand over the page's mouth, began questioning him.

"Who are with him in there? Whom is he tormenting? If you scream—"

But Elphin, when the Father removed his plump hand, was nearer swooning than screaming. His awe of Father Pascentius kept his soul in his body, but it was in a gasping and piteous whisper that he revealed all they needed to know.

It was a stray hound Sieur Gilles had got in there, tied up for his experiments; and there was a man too he was tormenting — a wandering Jew-pedlar, Livius by name.

"He said," and the boy indicated the unconscious Gwalchmai, "that I was to bring him these—" and the sea-weeds slipped to the ground beside the trickle of blackness.

“Who’s with him?” asked the Cistercian.

“Mistress Lowri, Father, and Lawnslot’s with her. And the Scab’s there too and Mistress Sibli.”

The monk and Rhisiart exchanged glances. “We must get the door opened,” whispered the former; and he turned with stern authority upon the shivering boy.

“You’re going to shout to them till they draw the bolt, Elphin,” he said; “but the moment it opens you’re going to run as fast as you ever ran in your life; and you’re going to fetch Master Broch here. Do you understand? And you’re going to tell him to bring his poppy-drug. Do you understand? His poppy-drug.”

“Need I come back, Father?”

“You need do nothing but get Master Broch here! Do you understand now?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Then shout your loudest, and say you’ve got the sea-weed!”

At the back of his mind during all that followed Rhisiart kept thinking, “Could I have done that? Could I have sent for my greatest enemy at such a crisis?” And his respect for the discoverer of *Cardamine Pascentius* mounted to a point from which it never afterwards declined.

Whether the Jew had suffered as much as the dog he couldn’t tell, but the man hadn’t bitten his tormentor as he was thankful to perceive Sieur Gilles’ other victim had succeeded in doing. The sensation he got when he first entered the room was a revolting one. It was the smell of pain. Then the impression branded itself on his mind of two vortices of pain, vortices that issued screaming from both the tormented forms and filled the chamber, interweaving their fiery flukes, so that what was endured by the Jew, and had become the Jew's whole consciousness, mingled with what was endured by the dog, and had become the dog's whole consciousness.

Mistress Lowri had no need to give Rhisiart more than one quick glance; and after that, with the eyes of Father Pascentius boring — so it seemed to our friend — two livid holes through her yet shapely back she began to move to the door.

In a second Sieur Gilles made a bow worthy of a Lord Chamberlain and offered his arm to lead her away. But at that the Father rose to his full height, his ungainly figure made almost dignified by his Cistercian habit.

"A moment, a moment, my Lord de Pirogue!" he said. "You, Lawnslot, take the lady down; and remember, not a word—"

But at the opening of the door there came a groan from Lawnslot's prostrate mate; and seeing his fellow-servant bleeding so profusely the man paused irresolutely. Then a sudden wave of anger overcame him; for Gwalchmai was his only intimate in the place and they both came from Denbigh.

"It's you we've got to thank for this, you interloper, you traitor, you scribbler, you *Englishman*!" And advancing threateningly towards Rhisiart he made as though he would strike him. Something however about the look in our friend's eye and the quick movement of his hand into his tunic changed his intention.

"The Prince shall know of this," he muttered savagely, "and if Gwalchmai dies—"

But Mistress Lowri, who had taken the opportunity of examining her servant's hurt, now drew his indignant comrade away.

"I bid you god-den, Sieur Gilles," she said. "And I shall try not to forget the methods of your science. No, he won't die, man, he won't die. Master

Rhisiart isn't brave enough to strike a real blow. Why don't you see to your precious infidel, Father? Or is the mongrel your concern?"

She had the grace to bend down after that and to arrange her veil under the groaning man's head; but this done she hurried off taking Lawnslot with her.

Rhisiart meanwhile was untying the dog who, bleeding as he was, resigned himself to his hands. But when the creature was free he sank down on his haunches with nothing alive about him but the look in his eyeballs.

The Jew was a different case. The "scientific method" referred to by Lowri had done less vital harm to him than to the dog. Freed from his bonds by Father Pascentius he was able to pull his cloak about him and to stagger back on the same bench where he'd been recently outstretched.

All this while the prophet of Derfel had been edging himself in silence inch by inch along the wall towards the still open door, where little Sibli was now on her knees, wiping the blood as best she could from Gwalchmai's hairy skull.

Then for the first time Sieur Gilles himself spoke, turning from the window to which he had nonchalantly retired after offering his arm to the lady.

"If you were of suitable rank, Master," he said with a bow, addressing himself to Rhisiart, "I should take pleasure in giving you the chastisement your interference deserves. But a de Pirogue — I must ask your pardon for the ridiculous rules of a civilized country — cannot enter into personal conflict with — forgive me — a *petit clerc* or *sous-commis,* like yourself. At the same time — no! calm yourself, *mon ami* I too have a bagatelle of a *couteau-poignard* — at the same time since you are a little upset, how do you say it? a little *bouleversé,* and *quant à moi je suis* cool — cool as — as *la glace* — you would be, apart from your lack of habitude of the sports of gentlemen, you would be at a — how do you say it? — at a *désavantage* with me.”

Rhisiart withdrew his hand from his tunic. Past the white face, past the dead-black damp hair that framed it, his eyes fixed themselves, sadly, wearily, upon that wide expanse of yellow sand that he had recently imagined converted into green pastures.

What vast spaces of non-human elements there were still in the world, unaffected by the perversities and cruelties of men! It was the raised voice of Father Pascentius that made him turn at last, and both he and the young Frenchman surveyed with curiosity the scene that was taking place.

The monk had caught the Bard of Ffinnant just as he was on the point of edging himself out of the chamber; and concentrating upon the man’s roving blue eye the full force of his piercing gaze he was unloading upon him the accumulated indignation of a score of long years. Shamed and disgusted with himself as he was, Rhisiart was still youthful enough to be amused at this easy victory of the priest over the prophet.

Derfel indeed seemed completely to have deserted his champion. The Scab looked for help at the crouching figure of Lemuel Livius. He looked for help at the cowering form of the dog. He even shot from his single eye an appealing glance at Rhisiart.

But there came no help from any direction. He was compelled to listen in undefended trepidation to a mounting sequence of supernatural threats that were of a kind not at all dissimilar from those of his own armoury of holy terrors.

As Rhisiart contemplated these two singular figures, wondering whether it was just a lie of the Scab’s that — like Merlin — he was the son of a nun, and observing with unpardonable interest how the rose-marks on his face kept getting redder in various particular spots as if his terrified soul were hurrying about, just under his skin, with a red lantern, he thought how different from both these men the gigantic Broch-o'-Meifod was. "If he comes here now," he thought, "it'll be like the ghost of Bran come up from the sea!"

And then as he watched the Scab's unmistakeable discomfort while the monk drew shamelessly upon his erudition to describe in detail the proddings and pinchings, the scaldings and scorchings, the hookings and harrowings that were to be his lot the second his soul left its disfigured frame, it struck him as viciously typical of their modern life that in the breaking up of the old communal faith, everything had become personal, a personal mania, a personal obsession, a personal superstition! Here was the Scab who had blackmailed all the *cantrefs* of Ardudwy and Caer Einion; and for twenty years had crossed the Berwyns to gather his conjurer's rents, filled with just the very perturbation he himself habitually excited.

The wielder of Derfel's plagues was now learning what would happen to him at the hands of the Almighty the second his soul reached Hell. And the curious scene was made more significant by the unconcealed glee of Master Livius of Burgos, who as he stroked with his long Mesopotamian fingers the portion of his person to which Sieur Gilles had been applying his science gave vent to such low-voiced murmurs of approval as: "Father Abraham, it's the truth! Father Isaac, the holy man's read the Torah. Yes! yes! yes! to the good work, master devils! Don't let the false prophet escape! Father Jacob! see to it that he doesn't edge back across the gulf!"

But the final denunciations of the monk, as he drove the Scab into the passage, were attuned to the movements, not of a fly, but of little Sibli. Finding that Gwalchmai had ceased groaning, though whether this indicated his recovery, or the reverse, she had no idea, the devil in her small frame — and it was hard for our friend not to feel as if the combination implied more devil than dwarf — prompted the diminutive creature to cross the room and offer the sea-weeds, which Elphin had dropped, to Sieur Gilles de Pirogue.

This she did, while the full sunshine fell on her purple beard, with a mocking curtsey and a wicked glance at Rhisiart. The sea-brine that still clung about these slippery objects was mingled here and there with the wounded man's blood, but it was the smell of the salt sea they brought into the room, and it seemed to our friend, as he watched the Frenchman make a ceremonious bow and lay them on the window ledge, as if from the receding waters and the yellow sands there had come a token of the obliteration of all the tribes of men and their curst cruelties, a premonition of the end of an epoch, a hint of a new era.

At that moment Broch-o'-Meifod entered the chamber. The giant's familiar weapons gleamed like sea-shells about his waist. He had clearly come straight from the sea's edge, for his bare feet were caked with sand and several seagulls' feathers had been thrust between the shining axes in his belt.

"Mother of God!" thought Rhisiart, "he does look like Bran!" Broch gave the merchant from Burgos one quick glance and went straight to the crouching dog.

Rhisiart followed him anxiously. Had Elphin told him what to expect? Had he had time to get his drugs? But what the man first produced from his leather pocket was more necessary just then than any drug. He — and he alone — had thought of water. Pouring this element from a metal flask into one of his great palms he knelt down and held it to the dog's mouth.

Lap! Lap! Lap! There was no other sound for several minutes in that room. Twice, three times, four times, he filled his palm with water; while each time he did so the dog gave him a look that our friend to the end of his days couldn't forget. It was more, not less than, a look of human gratitude.

It was the look of one who finds God at the bottom of Hell. It was the look of one who finds a crack in a universe where all is allowed and nothing forbidden. And out of this crack water was coming.

Substituting at last a few diluted drops of what Father Pascentius had called his “poppy-drug”, Broch now spent some time in sending his patient to sleep. Meanwhile Sieur Gilles, who clearly was unaware of any crack in a world where all is permitted, was leaning out of the window.

Something made our friend follow the Frenchman’s investigations, and he soon realized that this particular window, an unusually wide one for Harlech, opened upon the roof of the castle chapel. He and Sieur Gilles turned simultaneously; and standing side by side they both began, as any onlookers at any embarrassing scene might have done, mechanically squeezing certain little slippery blobs in the sea-weed under their hands, till they caused these blobs to vent the air they contained, in inaudible pops.

The dwarf by this time had transferred her attention to the scene that now was proceeding between Broch and the Jew. Unlike his fellow victim, the merchant from Burgos showed no desire to accept the giant’s aid; and when the giant produced his drug he thrust it away, summoning to his aid from their sepulchres in the desert the mothers of his people, Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel. The mention of these sublime names seemed to excite implacable fury in little Sibli. She endeavoured to thrust her purple chin into his pain-exhausted body.

“Jew! Jew! Jew!” she kept crying; and when Broch flicked her off she danced up and down, making lewd gestures in front of the injured man and blaspheming those mothers of Israel he had invoked.

Broch drove her off mechanically till she worked herself up to such a pitch as actually to spit at the man’s face; and even then he only brushed her away with the flapping hem of his leather jacket. But she was drawn from the Jew now, as was our friend himself, for Broch-o'Meifod had turned his attention to the French envoy.

It was plain that the youth was staggered and puzzled by this queer friend of the Prince of Wales. Rhisiart who had gone out for a minute to satisfy himself as to Gwalchmai's condition, and had been relieved to find that Father Pascentius had effectually forestalled him and that both the Father and the wounded man had disappeared, returned to the room to find the Frenchman actually uttering a weird and monstrous defence of what he had been discovered doing.

There must have been something in the mere stature of Broch-o'-Meifod that awed him into this proceeding; and something too in the expressionless enormousness of Broch's face. Ever since as a child Gilles had begun his career of the infliction of pain, he had been put to it to harden his heart against the pity and wrath of others.

It was therefore in real desperation, though his hearers would never have guessed it, that he uttered this unexpected apologia. "It's that meddling *sous-commissaire,"* he cried, pointing an accusing finger at Rhisiart, "who brought that staring monk here! Madame and *le poète avec le visage de rose* were *très intéressés* in my little experiments. It is my *méthode scientifique,* Sieur Broch de Meifod. A little of pain I must give, that is true; but for what an end? That I may obtain the secret of life, the secret of not-dying! What is the pain of a stray dog, of a rascal Jew, if I can find by my *méthode scientifique* the elixir of life? Consider the logic, *mon cher* Broch de Meifod; perhaps a little nothing of pain, perhaps a little nothing of death even, to a useless dog, to an infidel Jew, to some unwanted brat of a peasant-slave — but consider the children of noble birth, so beautiful, Sieur Broch de Meifod, so beautiful and tender, who will live long lives because of my *méthode scientifique,* because of my discovery of the elixir! I give pain, yes! But I give life, too. It is the logic, Sieur Broch de Meifod, it is the logic to which I appeal!"

It was, however, as Rhisiart perceived, a "logic" that had scant effect upon the person addressed. Broch-o'-Meifod moved a few paces nearer to the envoy of King Charles. What the giant would have done when he reached this vivisecting prolonger of life was not clear. What was clear was Gilles de Pirogue's determination to risk no contact with superstition on so large a scale. He whirled round and with one bound was at the window, through which he had no difficulty in squeezing his elegant form. In a second, agile as a young monkey, he was on the roof of the chapel!

Broch himself had moved to the window now, so that Rhisiart missed the spectacle of this messiah of science scrambling down a flying buttress; but the youth's devilish laughter entered the chamber; and he even had the gall to refer to Elphin's sea-weed.

"There's plenty of sea-weed upon the coast of France," he screamed. "Enough for all my little experiments!" The truth is that the obsessed envoy had long since permitted his eyes to wander during Holy Mass, and he hadn't missed the fact that from any of the flying buttresses outside, into any of the chapel windows, there was, for jackdaw or devil, an easy entrance.

The state-banquet at Harlech that February afternoon was delayed several hours. The great hunting excursion, designed for the pleasure of the younger French envoy, had proved both tedious and disappointing; and Owen had returned in no very amiable mood. Nor did his spirits pick up during that long and formal meal. His friend Broch was unusually taciturn. Rhisiart excused himself as soon as the ladies retired, under the excuse of visiting the bedside of Meredith, while the elder envoy, who had been feverishly lively during the repast, left the hall before the drinking began, with an imperious request for a private interview that same night.

Now it happened that the Prince had already arranged for a similar interview with two other important persons. He had told Brother Eddouyer, the emissary from Benedict the Eighth at Avignon, that he would see him about the allegiance of Wales; and he had told the Archdeacon of Bangor, who brought the terms of the secret pact, that he would see him about the Tripartite Indenture. In regard to this latter affair it was essential to have the presence of Sir Edmund; and it was an added vexation to the harassed Prince when, on the top of this untimely demand for an immediate interview by Gilles, Mortimer announced that owing to some trifling indisposition of their infant Bridget he and Catharine could give only very hasty attention that night to business of state.

The Prince had been so diligently occupied in propitiating Gilles de Pirogue, who sat by his side during the banquet, and from whom he extracted a promise that his royal master wouldn’t fail to send James Bourbon, Count of La Marche as well as Jean de Hengest, Lord of Hugueville, with the expected expeditionary force, that he felt it essential to agree to the envoy’s request. After all, the French monarch had sent this ambassador, whether he was a *persona grata* or not.

But even these trials weren’t all. Fate indeed was set upon persecuting him that night. For what must his Secretary disclose at this juncture but the information that he intended to spend the evening with Meredith!

The Prince felt very indignant with Rhisiart for this selfishness. Naturally a young man would prefer to exchange ideas with the brilliant Meredith rather than to discuss a “Tripartite Indenture”. Heaven knows, he would prefer it himself! But, after all, Rhisiart was the Clerk of his Council-Chamber and he had no right to absent himself when matters so serious were in the air. The only flicker of irresponsible pleasure of which the Prince had recently been conscious amid all these worries came from the presence in the castle of the prophetic Bard of Gower, the famous Hopkin ap Thomas, whose mysterious and occult poems written on the banks of the Tawy and known by the name of *cywyddau brud* were being passed surreptitiously all over Wales. These weird verses predicted the most startling events, from the crowning of a Welsh prince in London to the anointing of a great King by a girl in armour; while some of them even went so far as to hint at the imminence of a suicidal war in which humanity itself would perish!

But even this pleasure had been rudely shaken. At first when this extraordinary personage — called by many of his contemporaries "the divine Hopkin" — appeared at Harlech, the Prince would hardly let him out of his sight. Broch-o'-Meifod, on the contrary, got so little joy of him that in avoiding his society he remained completely in the background; with the unfortunate result that in these important questions, the pact with Northumberland and the acknowledgment of the anti-Pope, Owen began to follow the advice of his new rather than of his old friend.

"The divine Hopkin" treated the Prince not so much as a ruling potentate as a fellow-magician, and this brought back, in one great overpowering wave of temptation, all that dangerous dabbling with the unknown future which Owen had shaken off when he destroyed his crystal.

Both the Arglwyddes and her eldest son were grievously troubled by the presence of this new prophet. Nor did the leaders of Owen's armies like it any better. They had grown accustomed to the peculiarities of the Scab; and since so many of them were men of Gwynedd and Merionydd it was one thing to accept oracles from Ffinnant, but quite another thing when they came from the Tawy!

But magicians are men; and men, when they acquire influence over other men, tend soon enough to carry matters too far. It was all very well to fascinate the Prince with *cywyddau brud* about the crowning of a Welshman in London; but when the present crowned King of that city sent the famous Talbot into Gwent, and Rhys Gethin's faithful troops had to oppose him, it was less of a pleasure to Owen to puzzle out riddling oracles to the effect that if the war ever approached the native district of "the divine Hopkin" himself, it would be the Prince, and not the prophet, whose life would be in danger!

This particular danger to Owen's life was — Hopkin ap Thomas kept repeating — to descend upon him under a black flag; and since Lord Grey of Codnor, a formidable namesake of the now impoverished Grey of Ruthin, did actually carry some "quarterings" that were, in heraldic language, sable, this "black flag" soon began to get upon Owen's nerves.

Grey of Codnor was as troublesome a King's man as were Talbot and Grendor; and it was upon this sable streak in the Codnor escutcheon that the Prince was meditating now as he sat in his "magician's chamber." He decided to let his son Griffith and his brother Tudor face the sable arms of the Lord of Codnor, while he himself took command of the forces collected by Henry Don and Rhys Ddu to oppose Talbot and Grendor.

It was towards the Usk rather than towards the Tawy that Codnor was now advancing; and it was due to this fact, as Owen sat alone, that there began to insinuate itself into his mind his first serious doubt as to the integrity of his new friend! "The divine Hopkin" had only yesterday informed him that he'd been inspired with a new prophecy about the victorious "virgin in armour". He had hinted that it might refer to some native Welsh maid; and Owen, as he gazed at his smouldering logs, conceived the not unnatural idea that it must apply to none other than the

Maid of Edeyrnion. This idea, as soon as it entered his head, absorbed him so much that he completely forgot the passing of time.

As he gazed into his fire the image of Mad Huw's Maid — whose legend had now, though the girl herself seemed quite oblivious of it, spread from the north to the south — clothed in bright armour, mounted on his own Seisyll, leading his troops in their victory over these Talbots and Grendors, began to dominate his imagination. That's what he wanted, that's what Wales wanted at this juncture, some moving bardic symbol, at once poetic and religious! What was the use of being the acknowledged Prince of Wales from Môn to Gwent, when at a word from Worcester or Hereford these accurst Grendors and Codnors could penetrate as far as the Usk?

The Abbot of Caerleon, it was true, was there to resist them, and a great patriot was he, but if only by the Abbot's side could appear a figure such as his imagination now conjured up, the figure of a Maid in whom all the heroic traditions of Welsh womanhood were embodied, the English wouldn't have a castle left in the land!

"I'd be then," he thought, "what I'm not yet, for all their flattery. I'd be a real sovereign of a free people!" He moved from the window and began pacing the room. "Dewi Sant!" he thought. "What a fool I've been not to think of this before! It'll enrapture Mad Huw. It'll bring the whole country round us! It'll do me more good than any pact with Benedict or any league with France. By God! That's what I'll do. Into your armour, Tegolin Goch! Into your armour, Tegolin Bach! So I'm not to put a foot on your damned Gower, eh, Master Hopkin? And I'm to perish under a black flag, am I? Well, we'll set word against word, and it shall be a Welsh virgin who shall drive the English out of Wales!"

He moved to the door and opened it. There sat Glew the Gryd, faithful as ever, silent as ever, and still, for all his fourscore years, polishing his great war-axe with an especial piece of holy stone.

“Anyone been here?”

“Only the Tawy man.”

“What did you tell him?”

“I told him you were calling up such spirits as he’d never seen nor ever would see, and that you couldn’t be troubled to-night.”

“Anyone else?”

“Only that white-faced French boy.”

“You didn’t send him away — after what I told you?”

“No, Owen ap Griffith Fychan.”

“What *did* you do?”

“Nothing, my Prince.”

“What did you say?”

“Nothing, my Prince.”

“And so he just went?”

“Yes, my Prince. When I looked up again there was nobody there, my Prince.”

“Has the guard at the end of the passage been changed yet?”

“Twice.”

“Mother of God, Glew! how long have I been calling up spirits?”

“I don’t know, my Prince.”

“Has the man from Bangor been here?”

“Three times, my Prince.”

Owen stroked his beard. “And the Friar Preacher from France — what’s his name? — Hugh Eddouyer?”

“Just gone, my Prince.”

“How long did *he* wait?”

“An hour or so, my Prince. He sat with me and talked.”

Owen looked down the passage. “Do you think he’s talking to the guard?”

“Yes, my Prince.”

“Go and fetch him, Glew. Tell him I’ll see him now. And make them send up some more logs, will you, Glew, and some more wine and goblets. Let them be alder-logs, Glew; and tell them the wine of Provence!”

Owen wasn’t long, as he sat opposite the much-travelled emissary from Benedict the Eighth, in taking a fancy to the man. “Jesu Maria!” he thought, “what a different fellow from that popinjay of an Italian who brought the indult from Rome when Iolo died!”

Hugh Eddouyer looked indeed, as he bent over the aromatic smoke of the alder-wood and sipped that rich wine of Provence, a rare specimen of his order. With a bright eye beneath a bulging brow, with thick lips forever twitching with ironic merriment, with a sandy beard that wagged as he jested, there was something in him, from his pilgrim indifference about his patched habit and frayed sandals to the careless way he rubbed his uncomely features with the palms of his hands, that inspired belief in his fundamental honesty.

It soon became clear to Owen that the man had a genuine respect for his master Benedict and an authentic belief that any nation that transferred its allegiance from Rome to Avignon would receive much more generous pontifical care than it could hope to get from Rome.

“You don’t object, Sire,” he was saying now, “if I show to King Charles — that is, if he’s well enough to attend to business — these little points we’ve just jotted down for the Holy Father?”

“Not at all, not all! The most Christian King is, or soon will be, our staunch ally against this tottering House of Lancaster. Show him everything! Keep nothing from him! Is he, may I ask, a sensible man when his infirmity leaves him?”

Hugh Eddouyer rubbed his broad nose and corrugated brow. “I couldn’t talk to him as I talk to you, Sire, if that’s what you mean. But I can talk to him as one talks to an intelligent — to an intelligent invalid — with flashes of fine intuition. I’m not at ease with him, if you understand, as I am with the Holy Father; but I feel — what shall I say? — a *tendresse* for him, a — a pulse *sympathétique.”*

Owen stretched out his long legs in their olive-green hose and surveyed his fantastically elongated slippers. A sprinkling of ashes had fallen upon one of these to which chance had given the shape of an “E”, and Owen’s thoughts rushed to the Maid of Edeyrnion.

“Read over the points we’ve agreed upon, Brother, will you?” he said.

The Friar, for he was short-sighted, lifted the document from beneath his wine-cup to where the light of the flickering lamp, swaying from the oaken beam above the hearth, helped his vision. “One,” he read out, in a voice intended to mock the gravity of a royal herald: “All oaths of obedience to the late Roman pontiffs Urban the Sixth and Boniface the Ninth to be annulled.

“Two: St. David’s to be a metropolitan church and its Bishop an Archbishop.

“Three: All grants of Welsh parishes to English monasteries and colleges to be annulled.

“Four: A Welsh University—”

“Two Welsh Universities,” broke in Owen with a chuckle, thinking of Master Brut.

“Hee! Hee! Hee!” laughed the travel-stained emissary. “Your gracious Mightiness has never seen a riot in *our* University!” But he duly made the correction and went on.

“Five: The campaign of liberation from the blasphemous destroyer of sacred edifices, Henry of Lancaster, to have the title of a Crusade or Holy War.

“Six: The Holy Father to grant plenary remission of all mortal sins, when, where, or how committed, for the duration of the war, to all those who fight on the Welsh side, provided they hold the—”

At this point Owen pulled in his legs with a jerk and interrupted. “Hold the orthodox faith, eh? But stop a moment, Brother. Suppose there arose — I don’t say it’s likely to arise, you understand; but suppose there arose a movement among us, a religious movement, perhaps in your own Order, for the Franciscans have always been our friends — a movement, shall we say, to greater freedom and simplicity in the worship of God? — would such a change, for Holy Church moves slowly in such things and Saint Francis had his opponents at first, *ipso facto* negate this blessed absolution?”

Hugh Eddouyer gave him a quick, shrewd, humorous glance, and turned his gaze-upon the burning logs. Then, after a moment’s thought, he lifted his wine to his lips.

“It is not,” he replied slowly, replacing the goblet on the table, “for a humble Friar like myself to answer for the Vicar of Christ; but I can certainly say to you, Prince Owen, that if I were His Holiness, and I have, up to a point, a certain influence at Avignon, the fact that the *de comburendo* edict, with all its implications of undue Dominican influence, has encouraged Henry of Lancaster in his subservience to a meddling Archbishop, would certainly make me lean to a milder policy.

“And since neither the word Lollard, nor the name Wycliffe, has passed between us, we may, I think, assume that as long as my master lives there will be no Papal inquisition made into the orthodoxy of your Welsh subjects. And as long as this is delayed there can be no question of anything but paternal indulgence to reckless patriotic brains, too occupied in their Holy War with sacrilegious usurpers to exercise that control over our erring human reason, which—"

"Enough, enough!" interrupted Owen. "We follow you, Brother; we follow you. His Holiness will have no occasion for burnings among our people. I can promise him that! Oh yes! And there's one other thing you might add to the points we've named." He paused to replenish both their goblets, looking straight into the man's eyes.

"What a strange face he's got!" thought the Friar Preacher. "They talked in France of his golden beard. It's grey now, anyway. Power and success! Power and success! That's how things go."

"The Holy Father," Owen began gravely, keeping his eyes fixed upon the man, "won't of course forget his faithful and devoted adherent, our learned and pious Chancellor Young, Archdeacon of Merionydd?'

The other uttered a rich chuckle, careless and roguish, straight in the Prince's face. "Archbishop of St. David's shall he be, my gracious Lord! Only I may as well warn you" — he paused and leant back, tilting his chair till his knees pressed against the table— "for I know the man as if he were my brother; once Archbishop, some of your good friends here had better leave the country!"

Owen tried for a moment to frown and tap the table and tug at his beard: but Master Eddouyer had seen too many hectoring princes of this world to he monarchized or brow-beaten; and his frank smile had its way.

"'Tis my turn, dear my Lord, to cry 'enough' now!" he remarked. "But don't forget the words of an old observer of spiritual magnates. Have a watch on the tongue of your worthy Librarian here, the good Master Brut. If he can keep his mouth shut, all will be well. But if not — don’t ask the Pope to make Young your Metropolitan!”

Owen stared past him at the closed door, and through the door down the passage, to where his men-at-arms were doubtless at that very moment talking gross Lollardry. Well did he know how there was that in Master Brut’s doctrines to which his Welshmen responded like wild-geese to the waters of Llyn Tegid.

“Have you had time in your travels,” he remarked now, anxious to turn the subject from episcopal peculiarities, “to note how few men there are without some irrational prejudice? You referred to my Librarian. Do you know, Brother, that wise scholar as he is, and a good tolerant man, he can’t abide our Castle of Harlech?”

“You astonish me, my Prince.”

“Can’t abide it; no, even though in a day or two his nuptials are to be celebrated in it.”

At this the traveller couldn’t restrain a sly grimace. “Perhaps that’s the reason.”

“Not at all. He adores the wench. The reason is that the place is soaked with sea-water legends. They say Bran the Blessed comes wading up with the tide when the moon’s full. Yes! A great ghost he comes, carrying on his back the ghosts of half-a-dozen bards. By the way, Brother, the moon’s full to-night, if my calendar’s not mistaken.”

Hugh Eddouyer shrugged his shoulders and turned to his wine. He had been warned on the Continent again and again that if he wished to please this strange new sovereign prince he would have to listen patiently to just such skimble-skamble stuff as this; but he couldn’t do it! He could put up with many absurdities, and in his journeyings he’d done so; but cock-and-bull stories of Welsh giants carrying bards on their backs — as if there weren’t enough of them in the place already! — were more than he could bear.

“I’ll tell my master,” he said to himself, “that if he wants to win this horned Welsh ram heart and soul to his flock he’d better send him not indulgences but a few books of magic.”

But Owen, paying not the slightest heed to the Friar’s lack of interest, rose from his seat and going to the window thrust his head through the narrow opening.

And in a second Brother Eddouyer, the Avignon Pope, Master Brut, and Chancellor Young, all were forgotten. What a sight met his eyes! The moon was full; and not only so, but the great brimming tide, carrying on its rippled surface what looked like an undulant highway to eternity, was bearing this moon-bright track close up to the castle-walls.

Owen could hear the splash of the waves against the castle-jetty. What this morning were rock-pools were now a portion of the sea’s bed, and it was hard for a man far deeper versed then Rhisiart’s Modry in the ancient tales not to behold riding upon that brimming tide the moonlit sails of the fleet of Matholwch, with the Irishmen’s great shields upturned in sign of peace, *a swch y taryan y vynyd yn arwyd tangneved!*

Peace? Peace? What prevented him now from making a final peace with Henry and ending this burning and despoiling? What prevented him? His own success prevented him! How could he stop now, when, if he went on a little longer —

But he had a strange feeling, as he stretched his head through this stone slit in the great wall and listened to the breaking of the waves, that all these blackened towns and ruined villages were the result of an enchantment, like that flung by the magicians upon the persecuted Pryderi; and that if only the clue-word, the exorcising word, could be uttered on such a night as this, all the waste-lands of ashes and blood would grow fresh and green again!

Moving his head, not without difficulty, for the masonry of the aperture grated against both sides of his skull, he gazed straight into that round orb of mystical whiteness. No, it wasn't whiteness! It was something for which there is no name. What he really felt was that there had been bored a great luminous hole in the swimming ether, a hole that resembled a hole in space; and that through this hole, and in his moon-mad fancies he felt as if the slit that was now scratching his ears was this mystic hole, it was possible to pass beyond space into whatever lay on the other side!

A real moon-intoxication began to seize upon him as he stared at that hypnotic rondure. No, it wasn't white at all! The night was white but this was different. There must be droves of gleaming fish below that moon-path drawn landward against all reason. What heavenly madness to plunge forward at the pull of that ravishing radiance!

There were certainly mother-of-pearl shells down there, deep down below those heaving undulations, which had fish within them, fish who were struggling to leave their protection, struggling to be caught up in that moon-tide, even though it meant death!

And how well he knew what the sea-weeds felt down there who were yearning, quivering, trembling upward; every drop of their oozy sap drawn upward, drawn with maddeningly-sweet spasms upward, to the moon-drenched ripples on the surface!

Tearing his dizzy eyes from that circle of circles, he could see in the moonlight some great somnolent sea-bird rocking up and down on the illuminated tide.

To his moon-drugged fancy the eye of this bird met his own. “What human greybeard is that,” the seagull's eye seemed to say to him, “straining like the fin-backs in their shoals, like the shell-fish in their shells, like millions of sea-weeds, like millions of sea-worms, towards our goddess, our darling, the great Whore of Eternity?”

If that rocking seagull had been endowed with the eye of a sea-hawk instead of with the round, simple, greedy eye of a goosander, it would doubtless, after its fashion, have registered astonishment at the appearance of that protruding white neck and well-combed beard thrust out from the huge embattled front of that sea-castle.

And if it caught the moon’s white glint upon the golden band round the skull of that outstretched head, it might have whistled softly to itself: “Whirrraroo! It’s Manawydan fab LJyr come to life again! Whirrraroo! Whirrraroo! We shall all be safe now from the clutches of Llwyd fab Kil Coet!”

To the round, mild, greedy-idiot eye of this simple goosander, whose personality reproduced to the smallest particular that of its ancestors of two thousand years ago, it appeared obvious that there was a sea-king in Harlech. The bird regarded the phenomenon of moonlight in two distinct ways; and it expressed this difference by the pose of its head. With its head erect, its view of such a night as this was grossly realistic. Shoals of fins and tails came crowding into the shallows that as a rule fluttered and waved and flapped and squirmed in unfathomable depths. Now the wakeful and contemplative goosander wasn’t a fish-eater; but there were certain small creatures that the fish brought up with them from the fathomless ooze, not to speak of certain minute sea-floor weeds broken from their roots by this lunar migration and rising as if by their own volition, which left an unequalled after-taste in its fastidious gullet.

But at this moment the goosander tilted its head a little to one side as it contemplated the huge grey front of Harlech and that solitary human skull projected from the centre of it; and the tilting of its head meant a more recondite train of thought. For there floated into its simple intelligence race-memories of sea-castles and sea-kings of thousands of years ago.

It had been driven from the north in search of unfrozen marshes and estuaries; but it already was conscious of more warmth than it liked, and it had decided a week ago that soon it would have to fly northward again.

But that head with its strong white neck and its forked beard and its golden circlet evoked strange, weird, obscure feelings in him. He didn't make any attempt to tell himself that the goosanders and mergansers of the early days of the world had seen just such persons, staring out of stone battlements over moonlit seas; but an indescribable feeling quivered through the roots of his feathers.

And the goosander's ecstasy only increased, as long as he kept his head tilted a little to one side, when the sea-foam swirling about the rocks grew still whiter in the moonlight, when the sea-anemones in the lost rock-pools, and the star-fish in the submerged shallows, and the sea-weeds in the furrows of the sea-floor, all grew white, white with a whiteness like the breasts of sea-queens, white with a whiteness that to the goosander's arctic blood was a beauty so extreme that it resembled the passing from love to death!

Thus did Owen's thoughts on that night of the Purification of the Virgin mingle with the thoughts of the goosander, and the goosander's thoughts with his.

And though the Prince forgot those eight hundred men-at-arms and those six hundred cross-bowmen, and those thousand and one light-armed troopers that Gilles de Pirogue had sworn were already assembled at Brest, and though he forgot the envoy from Bangor with his "Tripartite Pact", and though he forgot the danger to Master Brut of a Welsh Archbishop, there was something in this white night that brought Hopkin's *cywydd brud* about a Maid crowning a King most vividly to his mind. He had been extremely impressed by the beauty of Tegolin when she re-appeared at his court. "Her skin," he'd quoted to himself when he first saw her again after those eventful years, "is whiter than the spray of the meadow fountains."

The Friar's Maid had indeed blossomed forth from a brave, athletic, boyish wench into a surpassingly lovely girl. He hadn't seen much of her since she arrived; but what he had seen had stirred his senses and troubled his mind. The girl puzzled him completely. What were the actual relations between her and the mad Friar? The man clearly worshipped her, depended upon her, watched her every movement. Could it be said that after his own crazy fashion he was in love with her? The Prince caught himself indulging, more often than his reason or conscience approved, in all manner of unbridled thoughts. What, for instance, were her relations with Rhisiart? Here again Owen found himself baffled. They seemed to understand each other perfectly — that at least was evident; and it was evident that the two were entirely at ease with each other, and that the Maid had a strong protective feeling for the young man. But the Prince didn't fail to notice that it was towards Lady Mortimer rather than to the red-haired girl that the Secretary's eyes would turn when the three were together.

But — for the boy was a man now — perhaps he realized that he was being watched! It was still Owen's habit to analyse every flicker of emotion that came and went within him. To his most scandalous and shameless thoughts he always allowed free scope, merely noting with an inward ironic comment where his reason or his conscience disapproved.

His conscience, not his reason, had protested in the matter of Catharine's marriage; but he observed with sardonic interest that the feeling for his daughter which had killed all other wandering thoughts, from the Snowdon days to the days in Rhys Ddu’s forest, changed completely with the birth of her children. And how queer that was! Rhisiart apparently felt nothing of this reaction. *His* attitude, self-controlled and dignified as it was, seemed to have suffered no change; whereas — Yes! this moonlit sea, this white night, was certainly putting strange thoughts into his mind. A Maid in armour crowning a King! And that other *cywydd brud* of Hopkin’s, of a Welshman being crowned in London. Well! He had sacrificed himself and his children for Wales. Did the gods of his race intend to reward him with a triumphal entry — he and his French allies — into Lud’s town?

Were the Gwynedd lions destined to wave over that White Tower whither they’d carried Bran’s head from this very spot? How white Tegolin’s skin was — whiter than Catharine’s! They say it often happens so with red-haired maids.

But this Maid’s hair was more than red. *Couleur de flamme* it was! Red flame over pure snow! But to put those white limbs into golden armour; to have her riding by his side over the border, through Hereford, through Worcester, through Evesham, through Oxford — and finally, over London Bridge —

And then to take off that armour; to unclasp with his own hands that cuirass, that gorget, those greaves — yes, yes, she should wear the very things King Charles had sent him. Never mind if Hopkin were a liar about the black flag in Gwent. There would be no black flags in Hereford, in Worcester, in Evesham, in Oxford! Hopkin was a great prophet; but all prophets could be false prophets.

Oh, when would the French come? That de Pirogue boy swore they were at Brest now, only waiting for the right wind. Well! he must conjure up a wind for them. But meanwhile — into armour with her, into armour! With her at his side he could defy even Codnor and his sable arms. Yes, she should ride with him to the help of the Abbot! She should —

It was the opening of his door, accompanied by noisy protests from Glew the Gryd, that made him withdraw his head, not without some pain, from that narrow orifice; and there before his eyes was that French boy, cursing Glew to the devil while Eddouyer talked to him as fast and with such a Provencal accent that it was impossible to follow a word!

To appease the indignant old porter and get him out of the room was the Prince's first task. Then turning to the intruder he found that the white-faced boy, when once he'd bent the knee and kissed hands in his foreign fashion, chose to leave his business to the genial Franciscan, while he himself paced in pregnant silence, his hands clasped behind him, up and down the room.

Owen signed to Eddouyer to be seated, and sat down in his old position opposite him, glancing now and then with some apprehension at this perambulating image of wounded feelings.

"He says your Secretary insulted him. He says he was experimenting on a couple of unwanted animals for the benefit of humanity — in fact to find the elixir of life — when Master Secretary set a monk at him, and when that didn't stop him, Master Broch also was sent for to bully him; and he bullied him so much that he had not only to disappoint the ladies who had come to study his *'méthode scientifique',* but had hardly time to escape with his life by taking sanctuary in your Saint Chapelle. It was all Master Rhisiart's spitefulness, he says, because he caught this insolent clerk alone with the Maid of Edeyrnion. He doesn't blame Father Pascentius, he says, nor Master Broch de Meifod. They just believed the lies Master Rhisiart told them. He says Master Rhisiart drew a dagger on him, and if the man had been a *gentilhomme* he would have been forced—"

“Is this the truth?” cried Owen fiercely turning upon the perambulating envoy.

Gilles de Pirogue swung round, struck the heels of his fashionable upturned slippers together, and proceeded to make such a deep obeisance, bending himself so low from the waist, that his clammy black forelock hung suspended, while his slim form in its satin tunic took to itself the shape of a small but neatly-erected gallows, suitable for the execution of delinquent dolls. “By Saint Denis it is the truth, Sire!”

Owen made a haughty gesture with his hand as if dismissing to its play a tale-telling child, and the young nobleman, exchanging a quick glance with Brother Eddouyer, resumed his sullen march up and down the room.

It must have been by some leap of the devil’s own instinct in one or other of these Frenchmen that they introduced that touch about the Maid. Either the Pope’s envoy or the King’s must have noted, with a Frenchman’s eye for such things, the way the Prince looked at the girl. One thing was clear to Owen even in his agitation and that was that the genial, frank, friendly Eddouyer must have known this all evening, since they’d both been struggling to get an audience; known it and kept it as dark as if it had been the Pope’s death.

So this jesting tippler had the power of being your honest boon companion at one moment and the next of obliterating you from his slate! And although less interested in diplomacy than our friend Rhisiart, Owen did make a mental note that cynical and shameless bluntness could be the most effective of masks.

And what, in Our Lady’s name, had made them bring in that tale about Rhisiart and the Maid? Was the castle seething with gossip about her — about Rhisiart and himself being both in love with Mad Huw’s girl? Was this the price you had to pay for being a Prince, that every emotion you had was bandied about among the pages? "After Catharine, Tegolin!" Was that what they said? The Master and Man once again peering and spying and stealing marches on each other! Ho! ho! the Prince and his Secretary! Oh, the rare tale to spread through the *bythynnod* of Wales from Aberfraw to Gwent!

Tell me more of this, Brother Eddouyer, tell me more of this! Exactly how did you find them together? Was he combing her red hair? Was she sitting on his knee? Clerk Rhisiart has free entrance where Prince Owen must pass by! Dewi Sant! 'Tis like one of those bawdy ditties that that rollicking rogue of *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* used to trilla-lirra on his sweet tongue, to tickle the kitchen-knaves at Rhys Ddu's!

While these disturbing thoughts jigged and jangled in his mind, the triumphant ruler of Wales was pretending to listen to all manner of further innuendoes about his Secretary, conveyed to him through the smiling wine-stained lips of the envoy of Benedict.

"I must never be fooled again," he was saying to himself, "by this honest, too honest, knave of hearts! This fellow looks me in the eyes like a downright truth-teller; but I know he's lying."

There came a moment presently, however, when — Owen couldn't have said how — the Pope's envoy and the King's envoy were standing side by side at the door. And then he realized what, with his head full of moonlight, he hadn't grasped before, what indeed was so serious that he had pushed it to the back of his brain, namely that Eddouyer had been for some while outlining in a most disconcerting manner what he would have to report to the King of France's Pope with regard to the treatment received by the said King's ambassador.

It was then, and only then, and not till then, that the full weight of the blow fell, the full realization of the damage, perhaps the irretrievable damage, that Rhisiart's quarrel with Gilles de Pirogue, whatever justification for it there might be, had done to this French alliance, this alliance upon which so much — upon which all as far as striking a crushing blow at the House of Lancaster went — hung and depended!

Never had Owen's mind moved faster than it did at this moment. He was *de facto* — save for a few castles in the north and extreme west — master of Wales. He knew at the bottom of his heart that if he confined his ambition to Wales and performed the ancient *gwrogaeth,* or homage to the crowned King in London, he could end the war; but Hopkin and his dark *cywyddau* had upset all this, had aroused larger hopes; and it was to these hopes — to the idea that with a great French army behind him and the Maid of Edeyrnion at his side he himself might be the destined Welshman to be crowned in London — that Rhisiart's quarrel with Gilles struck such a blow.

But it was precisely at a point like this that the strange resources of this man were quick to show themselves. In prosperity he gave way to the most extravagant imaginations. In adversity he possessed what was almost like the power of cracking the wall of one dimension of life and passing through the crack into another! Perhaps it might be said that he was too much in love with life, as a thing of more than one level, ever to succeed in the manner in which his royal enemy succeeded. He took life too seriously to take success seriously. Thus it was the destruction of Glyndyfrdwy and Sycharth that had sent him to Snowdon; and it was as an outlaw from Snowdon that he had rushed, like the ramping lions on his shield, from victory to victory.

And now as he stood there, an imperturbable and incalculable figure towering above the two Frenchmen, he kept them both, by the mere magnetism of his presence, waiting while he made up his mind.

Gilles de Pirogue shivered and looked down at his fantastic shoes. Once again, as in the case of Broch-o'-Meifod, this strange young man's soul melted within him. Indeed it spilled itself, through all his nerves, like bilge-water seeping upwards from the hold of a sea-sick boat.

The "torture-insect" in him was too purely evil not to be as weak in the presence of a great life-lover as it had been in the presence of a great death-lover.

As for Brother Eddouyer, his mind reverted to an occasion when travelling in Eastern Europe to obtain help against the Turks he had met the Abbot of a monastery in the Aegean Sea. He recalled how this personage, by merely rising from his seat and surveying him as if he were insubstantial and immaterial, had driven all the irony out of him! This island-prince was doing the same thing now; and he remembered how an astrologer in Salamanca had told him that the crossing of water was unpropitious to French diplomacy.

All this while the Prince himself was calmly indulging in his old trick of "exteriorizing" his soul. He was thinking hard too, but he was thinking from some point in the moon-light outside the castle walls. He felt faintly surprised at himself that he wasn't more angry with Rhisiart for this blow to his far-flung designs. "But I shall punish him," he thought. "I shall send him to the Usk with Griffith and Tudor; and I'll follow later with the Maid. Rhisiart! Rhisiart! Well, you shall mount your horse again and draw your great sword! You're a brave man and I've kept you too long at this lawyer's job. As for Master Brut, he'll have to manage his parliament and his bride at the same time! And now to unloose this knot by a little stage-play. Up from the void with your spirits, old conjurer! Turn your wheel, Fate, turn your wheel!"

The first motion the Prince made on releasing his envoys from the paralysis into which he'd thrown them was to cajole them back to the seats by the fire, and to pour out more wine. Neither of them wished to stay; but it was just as if they were in a real magician's cell, the exit from which was guarded by some cabalistical sign to which they lacked the clue.

Seeing them settled down to their drink and their furtive whispering, the next thing the Prince did was to open the door and give orders to the still deeply offended axe-bearer that he was to summon from the guard at the end of the passage as many pages as he could lay hands on. He himself remained on the threshold till the old man returned, bringing Elphin, now grown into a grave and comely youth, and a couple of younger lads.

"Tell the Archdeacon of Bangor I will see him at once," he directed Elphin. "Tell him to bring the 'Indenture' and all that's necessary for signing and sealing. Then go to Sir Edmund and Lady Mortimer and say I request their presence at once for a matter of the first importance. Tell Sir Edmund it concerns the Pact with Northumberland; can you remember that? *The Pact with Northumberland."*

When Elphin was gone he despatched another lad for Rhisiart and Master Brut, and the remaining one for the Maid and her Friar. "And tell," he added to this final messenger, "tell Master Hopkin I wish to see him; and one thing more — tell him to bring his brazier and his divining-rod. Say our French guests would like to see a specimen of his art — do you understand? — and use just those words, boy. *A specimen of his art."*

Spending a minute or two after these drastic orders in conversing so tenderly and frankly with Glew that the cloud lifted from the old man's face, the Prince re-entered his chamber, glanced round to make sure there were seats enough for all these people, and walked thoughtfully to the window.

"I must rage at Rhisiart," he said to himself, "before them all. But I must give him — yes! and I'd better give Catharine too — a hint of what I'm doing, so that they won't take it too seriously."

Just as he'd done before he now squeezed his head through that narrow aperture and gazed out upon the moonlit sea. There was that same bird! Was it asleep upon the long in-rolling waves? "It doesn't look like a sea-bird," he said to himself. "It's a marsh-bird of some sort, come down the estuary. How queer it looks with its head sideways!"

But if the contemplative goosander looked queer as it rocked in the moon-light, Owen's own head, thus protruded from that vast grey pile, would have looked to any human eye more than queer. It would have looked grotesque. But neither for the organs of birds nor of fish, nor for the less complicated apprehensions of sea-anemones, can we conceive the category of the grotesque as an aspect of life.

Perhaps never again, till in the revolution of time Rhisiart's prediction of the retreat of the sea took place, would a grey forked beard and a forehead circled with gold confront from that mass of wave-defying masonry the round atavistic eye of one whose race-memory went back to Caer Sidi and Carbonek. But even so, even if a forked beard and gold-circled brow protruding from an arrow-slit and confronting a goosander never repeated themselves through all eternity, can we conceive such a sight presenting itself to the world-spirit as grotesque? The world-spirit and a moonlit starfish on Harlech sands must share, we feel, the same attitude to such occurrences — *all* grotesque; therefore *nothing* grotesque.

"I'd better warn the Maid, too," he thought, as with more care than before he extricated his head. "I don't want her to think me an irascible tyrant at the very moment when—"

Thank the Lord! It was Master Brut who first presented himself; and since a frigid nod was all that French etiquette permitted a de Pirogue to bestow on a *bibliothécaire* of questionable theological views he was able to enlighten the worthy man in a few whispered words as to the whole situation; begging him to convey to Rhisiart, as well as to both the ladies, that the tone they would presently hear him adopt was political rather than personal.

The Lollard received these instructions with his usual equanimity. There was, however, a certain eager abstraction about his manner, as he lent his ear, which the Prince quickly attributed to the correct cause.

"I hope," he reassured him with a friendly smile, "that the ladies will bring Mistress Alice with them. I know you would like in after years to be able to tell your children of the signing of this historic Pact. And this being so, you'd better hurry back to her. She was dressed very becomingly at dinner, so no change of clothes will be necessary, but remember she won't like passing the guard alone; so be sure Lady Mortimer waits for her. And tell Rhisiart and the ladies that this is a political, not a personal meeting." And then, as he pushed him out of the chamber, he repeated in tones so menacing that old Glew jumped to his feet: "No, no! We shall disgrace him before you all! We can't have guests of ours insulted in Harlech! We shall dismiss him from the castle. We shall send him to the Usk, where the Abbot is hard-pressed and the fighting's heaviest."

As Owen returned to the fire, Brother Eddouyer remarked with an almost maudlin tenderness that it was a thousand pities such a useful civil servant's career should come to an end. "But better in battle than in — other ways. It's extraordinary how men who're not of very ancient descent show some bad breeding sooner or later. It's a very good custom in our French civilization not to allow a gentleman to cross swords with such people. We don’t even execute them in the same way, do we, Sieur Gilles? ‘The rope for the serf; the axe for my lord,’ is the saying in Auvergne”; and the waggish Friar, fixing his clear, candid, confidential eye first on the Prince and then on de Pirogue, proceeded — for he had discovered what topics best pleased the clammy-haired boy during their tedious journey together — to relate in detail various public executions at which he had had the privilege of being present.

Owen himself, like a great golden cat, began to move stealthily about the room, lighting more candles and dragging out more chairs. His brain had never been so active or his nerves so calm. Whether he would be able to undo the damage done by Rhisiart he couldn’t tell; but in some queer way he felt pleased rather than troubled by the incident. To be generous to Rhisiart while he publicly denounced him gratified some perverse irony in his nature.

“I’ll indulge it now and analyse it later,” he thought. The truth is that what Broch’s elf-wife would have called his Brythonic pride had been outraged all along by King Charles having sent a couple of boys as his ambassadors; and whatever the quarrel may have been about, he wasn’t sorry that this furtive youth with his dank hair and corpse-like skin had been ruffled in his composure.

“As long as he doesn’t stop their fleet from sailing,” he said to himself, “I don’t care what he does. But oh, Rhisiart, Rhisiart! You’ve done me a scurvy turn over this business; and I hope you’ll feel a little ashamed as you ride off to aid the Abbot. But I warrant you won’t — with your old sword and your old horse!”

He paused in front of a polished shield in which he could dimly catch the outlines of his own face. “What are you smiling about now, old grey-beard? The ‘Indenture’? The anti-Pope? The ‘Maid in armour’? Not a one of them!

But you're wrong, Broch, old friend, it's life, not death, that's the thing; and there's more in life than Hopkin knows, with his crowned kings and his black flags. If Hal Bolingbroke had all Wales at his bidding, the soul of Owen and the soul of that bird out there would still be at large!"

And there fell upon him as he stood at gaze, hypnotized by his own sea-green eyes, one of those singular escapes from the pressure of the moment that Rhisiart always thought of as his "attacks"; but when he did turn, it was to find Master Brut arrayed in a brand-new court dress — so Alice's lover as well as Alice had realized the historic importance of the 'Indenture' — tugging obstinately at one of his flapping sleeves.

"Eh? Eh? what the — Oh they're here, are they? Well — let me think a minute, Brut! My grandfather — and they say it was the fashion at Griffith ap Madoc's court — used always to have a gentleman of noble blood at hand to call out the names of the guests at any great event. Do you think — would you mind — it wouldn't be hurtful to your dignity, would it, my friend" — and he laid hold of the Lollard's satin doublet— "acting as our herald to-night? You see I've played chamberlain myself in arranging the chairs, so it's only to open the door and call out the names as they enter. I trust you entirely about the order of their entering. You know how it would be on the Wye. Let's have the same order in Harlech!"

The Lollard bowed gravely and moved to the door while the Prince informed the Frenchmen that a Pact was now going to be signed between himself and the Percies and the Mortimers, dividing England into three parts.

This brought de Pirogue and Eddouyer at once to their feet, and had the innocent goosander observed the gleam in their eyes it would have undoubtedly concluded that "England" was a wicked dog-fish about to be cut up to feed meritorious mackerel.

"The signing of this Pact," Owen went on, "which of course will be in accordance with our own treaty with France, will take place at once; but the moment it's over you shall see our blundering and ill-advised Secretary dismissed in disgrace from our castle."

The Frenchmen glanced at each other. "These savages," their look said, "can do nothing without our aid. Well! they'll have to pay for it!"

Owen took his seat now beneath the window, and beckoned them to take their places beside him, Gilles de Pirogue on his left and the Friar Preacher on his right. But once more, as the door was opened by the squire of Lyde in his black satin, these exiles from civilization exchanged glances across the Prince. And perhaps on this occasion there was some excuse for them; for certainly in no court in Europe or Asia would ceremonious entrances into a sovereign's presence have been made as simple as Master Brut made them.

"The most noble and honourable Princess, the Lady Mortimer," announced the Lollard in the precise tone in which he would have preached before Master Wycliffe.

"The most worthy and puissant Knight, Sir Edmund Mortimer," he went on. "The most gracious and honourable Lady, Elliw ferch Rhys — the high and noble Ambassador from King Charles of France, Jean de Pirogue — his Reverence Father Ignotus, Archdeacon of Bangor — his Reverence Father Pascentius — his Reverence Brother Huw and the Maid of Edeyrnion, and — *and Mistress Alice.*"

Here there was a pause; while with many stately formalities and a good deal of what Broch-o'-Meifod would have called "bowing and scraping" this august company found appropriate seats.

The Lollard's bride, whose voluptuous figure was certainly shown to engaging advantage in a filmy rose-coloured gown, stood for a perceptible moment hesitating awkwardly by Tegolin's side; even going so far in her embarrassment as to imitate the shy little Lu, who in her bird-like fashion had taken a wisp of Catharine's fair hair between her finger and thumb. Thus Alice, with less delicacy but almost equal confusion, thrust her fingers into the flaming tresses of the Maid.

Even the two Frenchmen, however, were compelled to recognize a touch of civilized regality in the gesture and word with which the Prince directed the witch's daughter to sit down by the Maid's side.

"Hopkin ap Thomas ab Einion!" announced the Lollard now; and attended by Rhisiart, who, garbed in the robe of a student of civil law, was literally weighed down beneath the brazier and cinnamon-sticks and censer and inflammable oils of the great "Maister of Brut," there entered the chamber a figure so extraordinary that while Gilles de Pirogue drew in his breath, and Lu clung to Catherine, and Alice to Tegolin, a shiver of startled excitement ran through the nerves of them all.

The countenance of the "divine Hopkin" was of such a character that Rhisiart had long since assured the Lollard that the man's whole life must have followed the *tynghed,* or fate, which Nature had moulded into his physiognomy. He was as toothless as Chancellor Young, but he had a nose and a chin that were so prominent that the scurrilous pages of Harlech, watching him as he dined, swore that both these features plunged, in the manner of an open beak, into the meats he mumbled.

This singular countenance was now topped by a high-pointed cap upon which had been embroidered various terrifying symbols, while the black robe, through the slits of which his tight-sleeved arms emerged, was scrawled from collar to skirt with the signs of the zodiac. In his hand he carried a long ebony wand, the top of which bore a silver knob carved in the likeness of a serpent's head.

The Prince rose and indicated to this apparition the great oak-wood upright chair which he had reserved for his reception. Here the magician solemnly took his seat, his yellow-stockinged ankles and upward-curving slippers resembling the legs of a fantastic bird as he rested them on his footstool, while Rhisiart looking, as well he might, in spite of the Lollard's assurances, grave and gloomy, placed the man's paraphernalia in front of him and sat down by his side.

Meanwhile the Archdeacon of Bangor — whose face, as Rhisiart watched his proceedings, struck him as resembling the mask worn at Hereford Carnival by the impersonator of the Devil — had spread out upon the table, without bothering to remove either the wine or the goblets, a great fourteenth-century map of England and Wales wherein the projecting dominions of Owen were painted red, of Mortimer green, and of the Earl of Northumberland yellow.

Rising from their seats Owen and Sir Edmund now proceeded to examine this map, asking as they did so, a great many hurried and pertinent questions of the Archdeacon, questions that chiefly referred to the winding curves and disconcerting debouchings — marked as blue undulations full of whales and dolphins — of the river Trent.

Father Ignotus, Archdeacon of Bangor, as Rhisiart watched him from across the magic instruments of Master Hopkin, not only had the face of a mask in a morality-play: he had the voice, too. "Where on earth," thought our friend, "did Bishop Byford discover this youngest of Archdeacons? Can he have been a 'by-blow' of his own?"

Rhisiart felt as though at any moment this young automaton might slip out from behind both his voice and his face, and vanish in a cloud of vapour!

Whether it was the trouble on his mind about Gilles de Pirogue, or his proximity to Hopkin ap Thomas, or some unprecedented magic that was being worked by Owen, our friend now began to experience a sensation different from any he had ever known.

"It's the Prince," he said to himself. "I know him better than does anyone in the world save Broch-o'-Meifod. He has magical powers. He has all the powers that Hopkin pretends to have. He's punishing me now — in his own way!"

Whether it was the Prince "punishing" him or not, there was one person in that assembly who began to be seriously worried by the expression on the young man's narrow Norman face; and that was Tegolin.

"Is that blackness coming over him," she asked herself, "that he said he had when he drew his sword that day and when he climbed down that rope? No, no, no! It can't be that. His eyes are so bright; and he's staring so intently at the Archdeacon's map. But he's staring without seeing it. He's staring without seeing anything — unless — but that's silly! What's the matter with me to-night? But he does look as if he were seeing a ghost!"

When later that night Rhisiart was trying to explain to Master Brut what he really had gone through, he kept using the word "timeless". "I felt I'd got out of today and tomorrow, and out of yesterday too and the day before yesterday," he told the Lollard, who, while quoting comfortable sayings of Saint Paul, had his own private explanation of his friend's psychic experience.

"Did you feel like that before you saw anything or only afterwards?" he asked him.

"Oh, before, before!" Rhisiart firmly declared. "I suddenly felt as if the Archdeacon, and his map too, yes! and all of us there, were puppets in a masque that I'd seen — I don't know where!"

The Lollard smiled and sighed. “We’re all puppets of the great Predestinating Will,” he said.

“Yes, but I felt more than that, Walter.”

“Of course you did; you felt that our Lord—”

“I felt nothing about our Lord!” cried Rhisiart crossly. “I felt we were all parts of a — of a reality, Walter — that was like some — some timeless masquerade! There was a book in our library at Oxford, Walter, with bits out of Plato in it — not in Greek, you understand — in Latin — translated by a very dangerous scholar — so our lecturer said — but this was a piece about shadows on the wall of a cave; and it always gave me, when the man quoted it, the feeling that there was some hidden reality, of which everything that happens to us—”

“But who knows anything about this inner reality?” enquired the Lollard.

“That’s the point!” cried Rhisiart eagerly. “Whoever knows about it, you can be sure of one thing; Hopkin ap Thomas isn’t that man!”

“You mean it’s religious truth, that we can grasp if we want enough to grasp it?”

Rhisiart frowned. This wasn’t in the least what he meant but the worst of it was he wasn’t absolutely clear himself as to what he meant; but it had more to do with bards than with priests; but not with bards like Hopkin, or the Scab, or even old Iolo — not with *cywydd-makers* at all; but bards more like Merlin and Taliesin, if they ever could come again.

And yet not exactly that! Bards so great that they could discover the immortal essence which — in the timeless — lay behind everything that happened in time, and was the truth of it, and the reality of it, and, if you only were a bard great enough to catch it, existed in both the future and the past at the same moment!

Both the young men, while they sat on their bed that night talking about all this, had queer feelings about each other. The Lollard's face showed the passing of time much less than Rhisiart's. Remembering the causes of worry the man had, and from his point of view must be even then concealing, such as the de-virginating of that witch and all the tales about his heresies that Hugh Eddouyer would most certainly convey to Avignon, it was astonishing how youthful Brut remained!

Rhisiart, on the other hand, struck his friend as looking ten years older than he was, and this especially when he cast down his eyes; for then, in addition to his heavy eyelids, there seemed to wrinkle and fold and crease and gather certain leathery corrugations — almost like the scales over a dragon's eyes the Lollard thought — that gave to this down-looking something far more subtle than ordinary modesty, something indeed that was very formidable, and suggested that, when next that geir-falcon gaze was lifted, the glare of a great judge would blaze out!

But it was — and this made a deep impression on Master Brut — with his heavy eyelids still downcast that Rhisiart told him that night how he knew before the Presence uttered a word what the substance of his word would be; and yet when he'd listened to him in Dinas Bran the man had never referred to any river — certainly not to the Trent. "How then did I know," Rhisiart asked his friend, keeping his heavily-lidded eyes still lowered, as though to talk seriously about such things abashed his pride— "that he was going to protest about that particular boundary? Of course the way he protested was the way he would have protested, for that was the way he talked; but why was I sure it was going to be the Trent? Do you know, Walter, what it felt like when he did it? Like seeing a ghost out of the future! No, not a ghost out of the future" — and Rhisiart bent his head still lower as if his fantasies grew more and more humiliating— “like the truth of the present out of the future!”

Thus, hours later, Rhisiart described his feelings; but as he watched this equivocal Archdeacon and his great map it was before the man had said a word about the Trent that the thought of Hotspur came irresistibly to his mind.

“And what a thing,” he said to himself, “that when England is being once and for all divided into three parts under the complacent eyes of France, an event which affects our children’s children for generations, it shouldn’t be any Richard Coeur de Lion who conducts the transaction, or any Saint Louis either, but an Archdeacon of Bangor, a mask of parchments and seals!”

“By the terms of this everlasting Indenture,” the mask was declaring now, “the aforesaid high contracting parties, my Lords Northumberland, Mortimer and Glyn Dŵr, undertake to defend this Realm of England against all men, saving the oath of alliance which the last-named mighty Prince has sworn to the King of France.

“The map of the aforesaid Country and Nation of England, now displayed before you and before all men” — at this point the Archdeacon picked up from beside his map a little “sanctus bell” and tinkled it three times— “and henceforth divided forever before you and before all men and before Almighty God into three parts, never to be united again, shows clearly to all, and without question by any, how my Lord Mortimer’s dominion stretches from all the southern and western seas as far north as the Thames and as far west as the Severn; how my Lord Owen’s dominion follows the above-mentioned river to the north gate of the City of Worcester, thence to the group of ash trees on the high road from Bridgnorth prophesied of by Merlin to his sister Gwenddydd and commonly known as ‘Onennau Meigion’, thence by the old road running north to the source of the Trent, thence to the source of the Mersey and along that river to—”

But Rhisiart was suddenly too overpowered by what he now saw to pay any attention to where the Mersey ran! Apparently no other person present saw it, though everybody was staring at the Archdeacon’s map. The roots of his hair tingled, the flesh of his body became what children call “goose-flesh”; he clenched his teeth to stop their chattering.

His first instinct was to suspect some trick of Hopkin’s. No! the man’s black wand lay across his knees. Then he said to himself: “The Prince is calling up his spirits to punish me!” And what was that out there in the moonlight? He was sure he heard a long-drawn cry from the sea. Was Owen really a magician? But there it was — clear before him — and no one saw it but himself. Between Owen and Sir Edmund it was — its point upon the outspread map — the sword of Hotspur!

He knew at once. It was the “kind sword” he had seen in the man’s hand at Dinas Bran. “But he’s dead!” his pulses pounded. “He died at Shrewsbury!”

He shut his eyes for a second, telling himself that he was feverish, that it was a false creation of his brain. But no! There it was still — as palpable as Owen’s forked beard and Mortimer’s proud profile! He straightened himself, straining his fixed gaze. He knew where it was pointing. It was pointing at those whales and dolphins by which the Archdeacon had depicted the great river of the Midlands! He began to shiver. “Yes,” he thought, “he’s calling up his spirits to punish me!”

But suddenly he felt quite different. His hair ceased to tingle, his flesh became normal again. Slowly, slowly, the sword was fading away. But what restored him wasn’t the fading of the sword; it was the dead hero’s own voice in his ears. And the strange thing was, this voice seemed to come from the future as much as from the past. But it was Hotspur's voice; it was full of the dead man's impetuous humour.

But it came from a dimension so completely beyond the revolving spheres of this distracting world that it soothed him rather than troubled him. He had been, it must be confessed, disturbed by the Archdeacon's map and by those tripartite greens and reds and yellows; for, after all, though he had sworn to give Wales her liberty, he hadn't sworn to divide England between a Percy and a Mortimer to the delight of a de Pirogue! If this were a turning-point in history, as the Archdeacon declared, it was a deep comfort to him that this great and gallant ghost from God-knew-where — from some Shrewsbury beyond space and time — should utter such wanton, such whimsical, such careless words.

They gave the whole business a touch of the unreal as if time itself were unreal — and though he still smelt that mixture of an old bard's perspiration and an old magician's chemicals that emanated with such unpleasant actuality from the personage at his side — Well! whether that ghostly sword-point on the map and this ghostly voice in his ears were false creations of his brain or not, they certainly made —

'See how this river comes me cranking in,
And cuts me from the best of all my land
A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle out!'

— they certainly made this whole spectacle, as he watched it now — the fair hair of Catharine, the flaming hair of Tegolin, Mad Huw's bewildered face, Hopkin's fantastic cap and yellow hose, the morality-mask of the Archdeacon — fall back, fall away, fall into remote perspective, as if it had all happened before and would all happen again; while its real significance —

But the signing of the great Indenture had begun; and first the Archdeacon on behalf of the dead man's father, and then Mortimer on behalf, it would seem, not of the little Earl, but of himself and of — this made Rhisiart's cheeks grow hot — of Catharine's children, and finally Owen on behalf of Wales, put their names to this division of the Usurper's kingdom. Well! It was over now. "And now," thought our friend, '"he's going to turn on me!"

But while the Archdeacon was rolling up his great map with the Indenture inside it there came a series of violent but erratic knocks upon the door, knocks that seemed to be resisted even while they were delivered.

Rhisiart saw the Prince nod to the Lollard, who, this time without uttering a word of ceremony, admitted a figure staggering with exhaustion, his face bloody, his clothes disordered, his hair dishevelled, his eyes wildly staring round the chamber as he searched for the Prince.

Owen moved impetuously towards him and reached him just as he staggered and nearly fell. He would have fallen if the Prince hadn't held him up. There was first a deep hush, then excited murmurs, then questions and cries through the whole assembly.

It fell to Rhisiart's lot, for the Wizard of the Tawy had only seen the famous Captain at a distance, to explain to Hopkin that this scarce-recognizable figure of defeat and blood and fainting exhaustion was none other than the notorious Rhys Gethin.

"It must be a great disaster," he whispered, "a bloody battle lost, or he wouldn't be here!"

Hopkin ap Thomas began hurriedly asking where the battle had been. "I hope," he said, "it wasn't in Gower. For the Prince's sake I hope so. Oh! I hope it was anywhere but there."

"And for your own sake too you old humbug!" thought our friend. But all he said to the man was: "Shall I help you carry your things back to your chamber?"

Hopkin ap Thomas surveyed him with angry astonishment. "But Owen ap Griffith Fychan asked me particularly to bring my things! He said he wished to see a — a specimen of what he was pleased to call my — my art. You surely don't mean—"

But Rhisiart as he contemplated the feverish egotism under that peaked cap could no longer contain himself.

"I tell you a great battle has been lost!" he whispered savagely. "The King and the Prince and the Duke of York and Codnor and Grendor and Talbot must be marching straight for Harlech. There'll be some fine trials for treason here soon."

Meanwhile Owen himself, leaving the wounded man to the women, was thinking bitterly: "This finishes me in Môn! I know those Tudors — they'll rush for pardon to the King!" And his mind flew back over the years to his standard-raising in Edeyrnion and his visit to Mathrafal. "What did the man tell me? That he'd brought that child Efa with him here? Mother of God! I'll soon have all the princesses of Wales in Harlech! What do they think? That Manawydan fab LJyr is going to rise up out of the sea to fight for us! He said something else, too. But how did he know that? John ap Hywel already out-manoeuvred by Codnor, and his people deserting daily? No, no! Gethin thinks because he's hit the whole game's up. But the French fleet — ah! that's the rub! A few thousand cross-bowmen, a few hundred men-at-arms, a few seasoned knights, and with the Maid in her armour we'll cross London Bridge yet. Rhisiart! Rhisiart! How could you betray me on such a night?"

Rhys Gethin had been conveyed to a recess by the fire, where no less than three of the women present were gathered round him; but Owen, standing alone, seemed unable to do anything but stare into vacancy.

The appearance of his wounded Captain — and a terrible instinct told him he was hurt to death — together with the news he brought, was a crushing blow on this night of all nights! The man had left the battlefront on the Usk to go to the aid of the men of Anglesea, as the English called the famous Druidic island of Môn, but Stephen Scrope, the King's deputy, had not only recaptured Beaumaris Castle but had defeated Gethin with such devastating slaughter in the battle of Rhosymeirch that every Welshman who bore arms in those parts had fled to Snowdon, while the Shrine of St. Cybi, the glory of Holyhead, had been carried off to Dublin!

"Well! it only bears out what the Scab's been telling them all, that by turning away from Derfel I've done myself a fatal hurt. But Rhisiart, Rhisiart, son of my secret soul, there's a double need for shaming you now! That fleet must sail — even if I have to make you kneel down before this devil of a Pirogue! Well! I must announce the worst to them! But the worst is in that damned Frenchman's black skull. He's saying to himself now: 'I'll stop that fine fleet!'

"But what on earth's my Maid doing? Leaving her Friar to talk to that other Frenchman! Things are getting out of control. The moon's gone over to Bolingbroke; and that bird, free as my own soul, has deceived me!"

But he began to address them all now, though Catharine and Mortimer were in such deep colloquy that they didn't listen to him. "There's been a great defeat of our people in Môn," he said. "Beaumaris has fallen, and the sacred isle's declared for the Usurper. Not only so, but it seems that Codnor has already surrounded the Abbot's levies between the Usk and Severn. It'll be necessary to change many of our plans. We cannot postpone our parliament; so we ourselves must remain here for at least eight days; but neither the Usurper at Berkhampstead, nor his son at Hereford need think that these disasters will abate one jot of our resolution. In three days our parliament will assemble — such an assembly as has not been seen in Wales since the days of Hywel the Good, nearly five centuries ago! And our answer to these Grendors and Codnors and Talbots and Scropes, who deem that a few lost battles can quiet our determination, will be to have ourselves solemnly and before God — and in the presence of such envoys from France and Scotland and Castille as are expected daily — crowned and anointed Prince of all this land between Môn and Monmouth, between Trent and Tawy! Yea, and we'll do more than this. We'll declare to the world, before all the nations and courts of Christendom, that Henry of Lancaster, falsely called Henry of England, is a blasphemous and schismatical opponent of the only true Vicar of Christ, our most reverend Father-in-God, Benedict the Thirteenth, now in exile at Avignon!"

He paused and then turned suddenly and unexpectedly upon Rhisiart. "There is one other matter which must be settled to-night. There has come to our ears an act of unpardonable discourtesy committed upon the dignity and honour of one of our noble ambassadors from France. I regret to say that it has been traced to some insane prejudice entertained against this esteemed lord by my own confidential Secretary, Rhisiart ab Owen. *Stand forth. Rhisiart ab Owen*!*"*

It now became clear that what Sir Edmund and Catharine had been so earnestly discussing had nothing to do with the wounded Captain's news; for simultaneously with our friend's shame-faced advance into the centre of the chamber Mortimer approached the Prince. But Owen — though treating him with the politest respect — wouldn't listen to a word.

Making sure that he had caught the full attention of the two Frenchmen, he went on, taking a tone that made his daughter's cheeks blanch and Tegolin's mouth grow round with indignation. "Rhisiart ab Owen, we must dismiss you from attendance on our person as squire of our body and from attendance at our council-board. You have heard what we all have heard. Our Captain is wounded. The Abbot is in peril. The best place for an ill-advised adviser is at the front."

"He's talking like a Tartar or a Turk," thought the Lollard. "This is unseemly. This is degrading in a Christian prince. This is the sort of thing to which the Institution of Parliament was designed to put an end. No self-respecting Christian has a right to submit to such despotism. It's nonsense to think he can have it both ways! If I were Rhisiart I'd mount my horse and ride off to-night. Why doesn't Father Pascentius defend him? Rhisiart says he saw it all! And why isn't Broch-o'-Meifod here? By the blood, I've a mind to tell Owen that if Rhisiart goes I go, too! That de Pirogue — Christ forgive me — looks as if he were predestined to damnation!"

But Owen was speaking again now. He and Rhisiart were facing each other in the middle of the chamber and a curious psychic struggle was going on between them, a struggle which Catharine and Sir Edmund were watching closely; whereas the magician from Gwent, indifferent to everything but what he regarded as a personal affront, was sulkily gathering his belongings together and looking about for assistance in carrying them away.

As for Father Pascentius he had evidently decided that the wise monastic procedure was to postpone meddling with the course of events until they clarified themselves a little by their own momentum; for he had already vanished from the scene. Mad Huw, however, had not vanished from the scene; and although separated from his Maid many of those present heard him say, as if to himself: “He’s asleep, he’s asleep; but beware of him if he wakes.”

“The envoys from our cousin of France,” Owen was now declaring, “cannot be permitted to leave our court without witnessing a full reparation for the discourtesy of which they complain. We must therefore require of you, Rhisiart ab Owen, a formal return to us of the Great Seal of our Chancellor’s Court, with which we had endowed you, and with which the recent Pact has just been sealed.”

As he spoke he pointed to the table upon which the materials for the transaction still lay; and from which the mask-like Archdeacon, for whom formalities of this kind were a second nature, promptly picked up the object in question and held it out for Rhisiart to take.

All this while between Owen’s brain and Rhisiart’s brain there was proceeding an exchange of telepathic communication. Owen’s brain was saying: “Take it, take it, you idiot, and hand it to me on your knees — and that will end this absurd play-acting.”

“You took Catharine from me,” Rhisiart’s brain was answering, “but my honour you shall never take! This means an apology to that devil over there and I’ll die before I give it!”

Like two thunder-clouds, full of electricity of equal force, the willpower of the Master was confronted by the will-power of the Servant. But the damage that would have been done by the discharge of these electric bolts was destined to remain forever obscure; for an intervention came from a totally unexpected quarter. There was one person in that chamber who hated Gilles de Pirogue even more than Rhisiart had yet learnt to do, and that was Jean de Pirogue, and it was Jean who now came forward.

“Our royal Master, he said with a cold smile, “appointed not one but two ambassadors to this court. *Quant à moi* I shall inform our Sovereign Lord that we had had nothing to complain of here; and what is more, I can assure you, most mighty Prince de Galles, that King Charles knew very well what he was doing when he gave your humble servant *lettres de créance plénipotentiaire* equal to those of my cousin!"

Both the Prince and his Secretary drew a deep breath. "Saved!" thought Owen. "The fleet will sail."

"Saved!" thought Rhisiart, "and I didn't apologize!"

It was, however, with a sigh of disappointment that the Archdeacon allowed his outstretched hand, holding the Great Seal of the Principality, to sink down. "They're like a pack of women," he groaned. "Not a thing, not a thing can they do in order and in decency. I was a fool to leave the King's service. He knew what business is, and that's why—"

A few minutes later as Rhisiart was hurrying down the passage he heard the voice of Elliw ferch Rhys behind him. The little lady was alone and beckoning to him. "They're all busy over their own affairs," she said, "and none of them thinks of Meredith lying there. Griffith ab Owen and John Hanmer are with the Arglwyddes; Crach Ffinnant's with Mistress Lowri and Master Simon. Poor boy, lying there alone! He must feel the castle's full of rumours and alarms, and there's no one but me to tell him the news; and I never can get things straight. Please, please, Master Rhisiart, come with me to him! It's not behoveful anyway that I should wander about at this hour and the place full of refugees from the battle! Oh, why can't they leave us alone in our own boundaries, and we leave them alone in theirs? That's what puzzles me." And laying her infinitessimal leaf of a hand upon Rhisiart's arm and clinging so closely to him that her loose mass of mouse-coloured hair entangled itself in the dagger on his hip, she went on murmuring in her low querulous voice, that was like the wind in a wisp of grass on an exposed buttress, about how both she and Meredith thought that if only the Prince would keep out of England the King would keep out of Wales. "Why doesn't he sign a treaty with England? That's what we think. We think this wily Archdeacon's a mere tool of Henry's to lure us to destruction! What do we want with 'Tripartite Indentures'? Why can't the Prince do homage to the King, as they did in the days of Harold the Saxon and William the Bastard? Oh do look what's coming, Master Rhisiart—" and she pulled him back against the wall to permit a stretcher to be carried past. "The Maid sent for that — I heard her tell Alice to tell old Glew — It's for the Captain — he's got a bit of broken steel in his side — the Maid thinks he's worse than they know. She thinks of everything, the Maid does!

"Did you notice how she was talking to that fair-haired Frenchman before he came up to you and the Prince? What a world a great castle like this is! I've never been in one before. Do you think the White Castle in London's as big as this? You don't mind my chattering, Master Rhisiart? I never used to do it. I never spoke to anyone. But it tires Meredith to talk, and so I talk. Besides you're his friend. You and Master Brut are the only friends he has. And Master Brut's always with Alice now. Do you like Alice? Meredith and I haven't made up our minds whether we do or not. Oh yes, and I've always wanted a chance of asking you something, something very personal and very important, but I expect I'd better not ask you now; for you're — What is it, Master Rhisiart? No! no! Don't look in there! — that's where they put the dead before they know their names, before they take them to the chapel. Some of them are still warm. They came with the Captain. They just got here, and then went — like that! Father Rheinalt's been there all day keeping people off. They say he wouldn't let Mistress Lowri come near them. You don't like her, do you, Master Rhisiart? Meredith called her an Ellylles once, but I wouldn't have that — it's too like my own name!

“No! no! Take me on! I don’t want to look any more. He! Oh he’s nobody. He’s not a person. It isn’t him I mind. Catharine can’t bear him, but I don’t mind him at all! He’s what I often used to think about at home. I used to think I’d like him to do that for me when I was dead! There! He’s doing it for that dead boy! You needn’t be afraid, Master Rhisiart. He’s only eating bits of meat and bread laid on the boy’s chest. With a girl they put it between her breasts. I’ve never thought I’d mind the feeling of it. He mustn’t touch it with his fingers, Rhisiart! Look how he’s doing it — bending down — just like a wolf! What’s the matter, Master Rhisiart? You look ill. You’re not going to faint I hope! ’Twould be no good my calling for the *Sin-Eater* if you did — unless you were dead; for he mustn’t speak to a living person, ever again for the rest of his life; nor must a living person speak to him. I used to envy him when I was at home and people came chattering — like I’m chattering now! Rhisiart — Master Rhisiart — you’re not going to faint, are you? Oh, please come on! I told you to come on before.” And she pulled so hard at his black scholar’s sleeve that she was fain to give a scream; for her hair was twisted round his dagger!

Her scream made the Sin-Eater look up from the bread and meat between the boy’s bared ribs. He must have thought this hook-nosed young student had brought the girl here on purpose, to enjoy her the more in such a place. But the lifting of his face made Rhisiart certain of what he’d suspected before. The man thus regaling himself upon all the sins ever committed by this dead youth was the nameless pariah— “the Droog,” as the lay-brother from Scotland had called him — to whom he’d given that bone of blood at Valle Crucis!

Hooted out of society for causing the living to sin, he now took upon himself up and down the land the sins of the dead. Reduced by the harshness of humanity to sub-humanity, he was now transformed from sub-humanity to super-humanity. From being a creature below human pity he had become a god-like being who bore human sins. From being a leper reduced by men to a condition lower than Hell, he now stood like Aaron between God and the Devil, turning the wicked into the innocent by taking upon himself their guilt.

And as Rhisiart stared into this wolfish mediator's eyes, and saw his mouth looking just as he'd seen it at Valle Crucis, he wondered how the creature had the spirit to move from one nocturnal orgy to another, being as he must be, weighed down by the sins of so many!

But as little Elliw, using all the strength of her thin arms, drew him away, Rhisiart's mind trembled on the obscure brink of something that made him feel that if he could only once more mount Griffin and draw his sword for Owen it would —

But at that moment a torturing, deadly thought came to him. Hadn't Father Pascentius been speaking with the very voice of God when he hinted that more good would be done by sticking his dagger into the heart of Gilles de Pirogue than if he cut off the heads of a score of Greys of Codnor!

And how easy to waylay the French boy in the intricacies of a castle as big as this! He could kill him and bury him. Nobody would be the wiser. The cousin would be delighted.

And all the future victims of the "elixir of life" and the *"méthode scientifique"* would be spared! He felt as though he could see a multitudinous procession of frantic eyeballs imploring him to use his dagger before such a doctrine of devils hypnotized the gullible crowd.

Why then did he know with an absolute certainty that tomorrow he'd be riding to Caerleon; and Gilles de Pirogue, unharmed, would be sailing for France? "There are certain things," he said to himself, "that for each man born are impossibles; and to put my dagger into this vivisector's heart — though my deepest conscience bids me do it — is impossible to me!

"What then? Well! I must just forget him, and forget those frantic eyeballs left to their fate by letting him go. Life, with such as he abroad, has no defence, no justification, no redemption. Well! I must forget such a life in—"

They were moving along an arched passage now, just above the third line of battlements, for as Lu had justly remarked Harlech was more like a towering sea-city than a buttressed keep, and they came to an arrow-slit through which the full moon was pouring her radiance. With the moonlight came a wafture of sea-scents, sea-murmurs, sea-brine. The girl stopped and pulled him to this opening. She had hoped to look out; but it was only her forehead that touched the base of the aperture.

"Lift me up!" she whispered; and then: "One minute! My hair's caught in something."

He obeyed her, and held her so tight that his narrow visage and sucked-in lips were lost in that mouse-coloured moonlit cloud. "She's in love with Meredith," he said to himself, "and I with Catharine; and yet—"

But he had forgotten Gilles's victims when he put her down. "Life," he told the next sea-window, "cannot bear thinking on. Broch is right — not Owen"

And then he said: "Mistress Lu, may I tell you what someone used to lull me to sleep with, when — you know how it is sometimes?"

"Say it to me, Rhisiart."

"Then they went on to Harlech — and there came three birds, and began singing unto them a certain song, and all the songs they had ever heard were unpleasant compared thereto; and the birds seemed to them to be at a great distance from them over the sea, yet they appeared as distinct as if they were close by—"

"Rhisiart!'

"Yes, Lu."

"Catharine told me that Tegolin's got a treasure-box that has only one thing in it."

It was his turn now to drag her by the arm and quicken their speed. For some queer reason he felt furious with Tegolin for showing her treasure-box to Catharine.

He vented his anger on the speaker. "That's what I can't bear in you girls!" he burst out in the very tone of the Rhisiart of five years ago who rode between the arrows and the spears. "You show each other everything!"

Lu laughed a little tinkling laugh like the sound of a reef-bell as far away as the Birds of Rhiannon.

"There's one thing we don't always show, it seems."

"What are you talking about now?"

"Our hearts, Rhisiart ab Owen, our hearts."

XVIII. THE MAID IN ARMOUR

THE WEEK THAT followed that eventful Candlemas, of the fifth year of Owen's proclamation as Prince of Wales, was a week long remembered by the people of Ardudwy and Meirionydd.

But when it was over and the second parliament of his rule had come and gone, the Prince's after-thoughts were anything but enviable. The great assembly only sat for three days; a hurried despatch of business that was due to the dangerous number of English troops now invading Wales and to the deadly strategy of the gentlemen who commanded them.

Both these disastrous facts were, as Rhisiart alone in the castle realized, due to the rapidly-growing military genius of the young Prince Henry, from whose headquarters at Hereford there emanated measures for harassing Owen that proved far more effective than any of the grandiose invasions of Wales led by the King.

The unfortunate issue of every one of the Usurper's own Welsh campaigns had begun to have a noticeable psychological effect on his English subjects. The impression kept sinking deeper and deeper into the popular mind that this mysterious "Owen Glendourdy" really was possessed of supernatural powers, and could call upon the elements at will to overthrow his enemies.

In many an outlying homestead all along the eastern coast, from Yorkshire to Kent, English mothers would make their children obey by the threat "Glendourdy will have you!" while terrifying rumours ran through all the shires that this incalculable Welsh wizard, in league with all the forces of destruction in the unseen world, had threatened to exterminate, by his devilish power over water and fire and wind, the whole English race from the surface of the earth. It was his friend Master Brut who postponed Rhisiart's departure for the front. The fearless Lollard indignantly rejected the Prince's suggestion that he should manage the parliament alone. He threatened point-blank to leave the lady who was now Mistress Alice Brut of Lyde and gallop off with Rhisiart to the aid of the Abbot of Caerleon if his friend wasn't kept at Harlech till the parliament had dispersed.

For a moment Rhisiart feared that they were both going to be clapped into prison; but Chancellor Young, arriving post-haste from Aberystwyth, allowed his toothless gums to emit such a pontifical chuckle at the mere notion of dispensing with two such competent clerks, till their gifts had been exploited to the full, that the Prince became more reasonable.

It was Chancellor Young too who on the very eve of the coronation got rid of Hopkin ap Thomas. This he achieved by a method well known at most European courts but not yet practised at Owen's; the method of warning the victim of a plot against his life. Hopkin believed and fled. Nor has any prophet ever rejoiced at returning in safety to the home of his birth more than this inspired but timid magician when he beheld the silver Tawy again.

Each of the young Frenchmen being anxious, though from very different motives, to return to France, they were the first of the envoys to leave; and they hurried off directly the coronation was over; the representatives of Scotland and Castille lingering till the roads to the coast should be less invested by Owen's enemies.

Neither the parliament nor the coronation created as much enthusiasm as the Prince expected. This was chiefly due to the impossibility of concealing from the natives of Ardudwy the melancholy processions of wounded men who kept pouring into the neighbourhood. It was also due to the fact that while the Prince’s eldest son was away fighting, and his son Meredith was still confined to his chamber, Rhys Gethin’s hurt proved to be a mortal one. The great Captain took long to die; but that he was dying seemed indisputable.

As far as Owen’s own secret feelings were concerned there was one aspect of this sumptuous ceremony that hurt him far more than the presence of Bishop Trevor and Bishop Byford could give him pleasure, namely the absence of Broch-o’-Meifod. It wasn’t that the giant had rushed off to visit his wife and children. It was, in a sense, worse and more startling to Owen than that. “If he had gone to Maen-y-Meifod,” the Prince said to himself, “I could perfectly well understand it. He’s not one for ceremonies. But knowing what I feel about it and the importance I attach to such things, it does seem really treacherous to the link between us to choose to remain *perdu* when such a thing was going on.”

It soon became apparent that Chancellor Young’s constant presence in the castle of Aberystwyth was indispensable from an ecclesiastical point of view. If Harlech was the base of the military operations of the principality, Aberystwyth had already become the centre of its ecclesiastical polity. And just now the proposed transfer of Welsh devotion from the Pope to the anti-Pope, rumours of which were spreading through the country, was exciting a perilous agitation in all religious quarters.

The secular Welsh clergy were on the whole in favour of it; the monastic orders, with the exception of Owen’s faithful adherents, the Franciscans, bitterly opposed to it. Benedict the Eighth had already discovered that it was easier to dominate bishops and bishoprics than to meddle with abbots and monasteries. He was helped, however, by the vein of cynical materialism in the character of the English King, which had led to sacrilegious despoilings on the invaders' side worse than any of which Owen was guilty.

The couple of days that followed the dispersing of the parliament and the scattering of the coronation-guests were days of weary anxiety to Owen and of violent altercations between his advisers in that still overcrowded castle.

The Arglwyddes kept imploring him to start at once for the Usk to aid the hard-pressed Abbot. Much as she loved her son Griffith, she had little confidence in his ability as a leader; and it was only the steadiness of her nerves that kept her from spending hours at her tower-window, watching in maternal anxiety the bands of fugitives who kept drifting to that sea-coast from the fields of battle.

Meanwhile all manner of messengers arrived at Harlech with news, some bad, some good, some obviously false, some with the very impress and seal of truth; and, by degrees, as he tried to sift truth from falsehood the Prince slipped into the cynical and fatalistic attitude of believing none of them, either good or bad.

Henry Don, he surmised, was still holding his own in Glamorgan, for the rumours from that quarter remained contradictory; and as long as he got no news of a definite reverse from Rhys Ddu he kept up his hope that that seasoned warrior was keeping the enemy out of Carmarthen.

Shropshire, left to its own devices by the King, who apparently had ceased forwarding Sheriff Burnell any further pay for his troops, had taken its affairs into its own hands and was now openly sending Owen money to keep his raiders from crossing the border; while Pembrokeshire where the English were especially strong had for some while been buying him off.

"If only the French would sail — if only the French would sail," was the constant burden of his thought. With the French army behind him all might still be well; for his English prisoners kept assuring him that the terror of his name had travelled from Durham in the north to Chichester in the south.

Mortimer had begun to be an anxiety to him, from his growing impatience to take the field; but in this point Catharine was proving curiously obstinate. She had heard of so many castles being lost from lack of an effective leader within the walls that imaginative ideas about being left alone in Harlech with her mother and her children till the garrison gave them up to the English kept obsessing her mind.

Owen himself was extremely unwilling to let his half-royal son-in-law, upon whose life so much depended, go to the front. When the French came, and they all marched upon London, it would be a different thing; but to risk Mortimer's life in some trifling skirmish in the mountains seemed ridiculous.

It did strike the Prince more than once, as he wasted precious hours analysing his feelings in his room overlooking the sea, that it was strange he should feel far more anxious about the fate of his brother Tudor on the Usk than that of his eldest son. Tudor was an elderly man like himself. Like himself he wore his beard forked. Like himself he was meticulously careful of his appearance. Like himself his favourite colours were yellow and green. Tudor ap Griffith Fychan appeared, however, some-ten years younger, when in reality there wasn't twenty-four months between them. In the last five years Owen's hair had turned grey, while Tudor's remained as yellow as when they were boys. The chief difference between them lay in their eyes. Owen's were sea-green, mutable, equivocal, whereas Tudor's were a pure grey-blue, out of which a natural goodness of heart looked forth, faithful and unchanging.

Not only was the Arglwyddes made indignant and John Hanmer irritable by the queer lethargy which fell upon the Prince when his parliament and his ambassadors were gone; our friend Rhisiart was completely puzzled. Though the uncharacteristic rage he had fallen into with his Secretary and his Librarian soon vanished, Master Brut would often leave his bride's bed, both early and late, and visit Rhisiart's tower-room, where both the men tried in vain to get at the secret of their Prince's mood.

But the explanation came before a week had passed. The day was Friday; and Rhisiart in his almost legal superstition, that certainly was more Norman than Welsh, felt it was only viciously natural that he should wake on that chilly February dawn with anxieties going round and round in the revolving cage of his brain like a procession of agitated rats.

Some of these anxieties were purely political, some were very personal; and chief among the latter was a queer intangible estrangement that had made itself felt since her father's coronation between Lady Mortimer and himself.

And now in that dangerous clear air of the hour before dawn, when the nature-nourished illusions, upon which the life of all living things depend, grow thin and transparent, leaving nearly bare that naked reality which the Great Mother so tenderly pads and plasters with her imperishable pretences, Rhisiart beheld in sharp, cruel, self-accusing outlines the cause of this estrangement. The ignoble truth was that his own passionate love for the mother of Rhisiart and Bridget had cooled without his knowing it! But of late one of the results of this interior cooling had been an accession of exterior demonstration; and through this sweet treachery Catharine's sea-green eyes had pierced, as the Prince's lance might have done, to the heart of his false gesture; and it was this — not that his passion was less but that its romantic demonstration was more — that had given her tone this impalpable accretion of bitterness.

But as he lay there, inhaling the vague salt-water scents and enjoying the pre-dawn breath of the in-rolling tide, he began to be aware of some unusual stir going on in the castle, a stir, it seemed to him, both down in the base-court and within the walls. He listened intently, throwing off his Oxford sheepskin, tilting himself up, hugging his knees.

No, he heard no bugle, no trumpet, no word of command. It couldn't be the English then. What the devil was it? Had he forgotten some February saint's day, some local market? Had Lemuel Livius of Burgos been the fore-runner of a host of pedlars? They did come in crowds sometimes, and not only Jewish ones; and it was quite possible that the ladies of the castle had kept their knowledge of their coming a secret, lest Father Pascentius or John Hanmer — or even the Prince's Secretary — might, in their masculine prudence, have ordered them off.

But the stir continued and kept mounting up. "Curse your blood, Walter!" he muttered viciously to himself. "You can leave your clippings and cuddlings to tell me how your witch has learnt three words in Greek; but now, when the whole castle's in an uproar, you must turn her about, and e'en at it again. Oh, the witch, the witch! You're lost to me, brother; you're lost to me from now on — and the Prince is lost to me — and Catharine's lost to me. I'll have to botanize with Father Pascentius! I'll have to add the hundred and fifth article to the Tripartite Indenture and illuminate all its capitals!"

He jumped out of bed and rushed to both his windows. How many times he had done this since his first coming to Harlech, only to find that save for a strip of the sea's horizon from one of them and a couple of mountain peaks from the other they revealed nothing at all.

With some trouble, for he was a bad fire-lighter, just as he was a bad swimmer, a bad falconer, and no kind of an husbandman; fire, water, air, earth, all throwing him back to his desk! — he lit a candle and placed it in the window, wondering to himself, even as the flame blew inwards against his hand, how many other lights in the arrow-slits of Harlech could be seen at this hour from a boat at sea.

But the elements were, as usual, in conspiracy against the Secretary; and his candle, quietly, obstinately, resolutely flickered out. Lighting it again and -placing it on a stone bracket out of the draught, he heard the familiar cracked-metal sound of the old chapel bell strike the hour. Was it five or six? He'd let the strokes pass uncounted.

But he began now hurriedly pulling on his black Oxford-scholar's tunic, his original faded one, half-a-dozen years old, and much too tight for him. Little Sibli — who had made herself responsible for his clothes — liked this costume the best of all he had. It must have been for that reason that whenever she saw him in it her wit at his expense became lacerating. She would run her little hands all over his body and call upon Luned to see how he was growing, as she declared, "out of his clothes."

And some instinct in him today made him not only put on black but reject every sort of ornament. His dagger, still without its sheath, was concealed below his tunic, and though he mechanically picked up a beautiful piece of red embroidery that Sibli'd told him she'd held against her body all last All Souls' night to bring him luck, he soon laid it down.

But since the sounds increased, and Master Brut didn't come, he decided to go down into the corridor beneath his turret and ask the sentry there what the stir was about. As he hurried down the winding stairs with the candle in his hand he thought of Luned, the damsel whom he'd come, by reason of so many queer experiences, to call his "stair-case girl."

"Mary, Joseph!" he muttered. I'm certain she's in the corridor." So certain was he, that there actually came to his nostrils that particular cinnamon scent which he always associated with this young woman. “She’s like the one in Modry’s stories,” he said to himself, as he pushed open the turret-door; “only Modry made her keep changing, from ugly to pretty, and this one’s always the same!”

No, there was nobody in the corridor — not even the sentry. “He must have gone, like me, to find out what’s up,” and he stood still, listening, and guarding his candle-flame with his hand. Mary, Joseph! if there wasn’t a woman, with a candle just like his own, coming towards him — and it was Luned!

The encounter was less astonishing than it seemed to him just then, seeing that the girl had come expressly from the other end of the castle with the sole intention of finding him; but when the actual cinnamon scent was really about him he could think of nothing else but this piling up of coincidence into what couldn’t be coincidence!

“I was thinking of you,” he blurted out, as they simultaneously moved their candles so as to envisage each other’s faces.

It seemed so natural to Luned that the Secretary should be thinking of her at five o’clock in the morning that she didn’t even smile.

“Kiss me, Rhisiart!” she said quietly. “You can kiss me as much as you like now, and — and anything else,” she added significantly.

“What do you mean?” he whispered, when he had kissed her.

“Can’t you see?” and she moved her candle again so as to throw her figure into full relief.

Rhisiart might have been less stupid if Luned’s figure hadn’t always been so lavishly developed. But, as it was, he gave her one quick glance and then stared at the wall, where their candles were throwing two monstrous shadows. These shadows — one of which resembled a drooping heron with the head of a frog, and the other a tilted wine-cask out of which an angel was peeping — seemed, as he stared at them, to have taken the whole situation into their hands.

"No, I can't," he replied. "But *do* look at our shadows, Luned!"

"I'm going to have a child, Rhisiart!" At this the angel's head sank back into the wine-cask, and the frog's head leapt up to the roof, where it transformed itself into a flying-fish. "Look at me, dear! Do you know whose child it is?"

He did indeed look at her now; for a wild rush of alarm shot through his heart. Was she going to father her bastard on him?

"It ought to have been Rawlff's," he remarked coldly and rather cruelly.

"Bend down your head, dear!'

It was clearly no use being bitter or unkind to this cinnamon-scented bundle of feminine confidences, so he simply obeyed her; and with what seemed to him an unnecessary amount of warm breath and of tickling locks the syllables "Elphin" caressed his ears.

"Does he confess to it?" he enquired, in his most business-like sheriff's-office voice.

She shook her head, "That's what I've come to you about, Rhisiart."

"He denies it?"

She nodded sadly.

He surveyed her from head to foot. How queer it was that just when the Russian's curst "insect" ought to have made all this engaging and exciting it completely deserted him and he could only feel towards her as if she were some great soft-scented peony bud, ready to burst prematurely into bloom!

"You know what's done in — in some countries — to girls in my state when the man gives them the lie?"

"Don't be silly, Luned! We're in the fifteenth century not the fifth. The worst the Arglwyddes could do would be to send you back to Snowdon.

You'd better go to Cath — to Lady Mortimer, and tell her about it."

"Rhisiart, dear—"

"Well?"

"It's not easy to say this, Rhisiart; but if the Prince is sending you to the war anyway, and taking Tegolin to the war himself, it wouldn't make any difference — I mean it wouldn't hurt you any more than you're hurt already — if you were to—"

"What — *are* — you — saying, girl?"

Luned now began to cry. Her candle went out, and she scrupled not to hide her wet face against his shoulder. "I've been lying awake," she sobbed, "thinking of this all the night."

He was unable to resist her tender gesture because of the absolute necessity he was under not to let his candle go out. Coldly, angrily, helplessly, he remembered the Ladies' Tower at Dinas Bran. How things did come round!

But her mention of Tegolin had profoundly disturbed him. "Listen, Luned," he said, almost beseechingly. "For heaven's sake tell me what's going on in this castle?"

She raised her head and stopped crying. It was an appeal to her discretion, to her superior wisdom. His tone was boyish and plaintive. Her protective instinct was dominant, and in a moment she was happy. She laid re-assuring maternal fingers upon his wrist. "It's Mistress Alice, not I, who's been helping her to pack. I've only helped Sibli with her armour."

In a single flash the whole truth revealed itself to Rhisiart. The Prince had out-witted him. He was going to rob him of Tegolin just as he'd robbed him of Catharine! He suddenly felt very old and very reckless. "He'd better take care!" he thought; and shaking off the girl's fingers he plunged his hand into his tunic.

"But Mistress Alice is so fond of her," he murmured, staring past Luned into vacancy. Nor did his hearer miss the implication that to fling the Maid into the arms of the Prince was anything but an act of fondness.

It came sliding into his mind how passionately Alice of Ruthin had courted Tegolin when they first met; and how he'd caught her that night at the banquet clinging to her form with a look of ecstatic adoration. It was incredible to him that so simple a matter as the virtuous embraces of Walter Brut could have turned her against her former idol.

"But perhaps they're like that," he thought, "and when once they've got a man they're ready to outrage and desecrate their girlish ideal."

But if Dame Alice's treachery was a thing to ponder on, the change that had come over Luned since she'd taken control of the situation out of the hands of their shadows was quite as bewildering. And this change was such a relief to Rhisiart that he found he could endure quite cheerfully her feminine gossip.

Every tear she had shed had made him feel harder. If the Russian's "insect" had been roused ever so little it would have been different; for then he would have at least felt a wicked substitute for pity — something indeed that could have been transformed into pity!

But between the cold distaste her tears excited in him and every margin of pity a great gulf was fixed; and it was for this reason that the moment she began to gossip — even about Catharine and Tegolin — it was such a relief to escape the most unpleasant of all feelings, unsympathetic disgust, that he felt quite a friendly glow towards her, and was prepared to hear the most scandalous revelations without being offended.

He listened patiently, therefore, when she went so far as to assure him that Lady Mortimer was going to have another child, and that only a day or two ago the mere shock of encountering the Sin-Eater in one of the castle-corridors had caused her to faint away.

"I've always been unfair to this girl," he thought, as Luned went on telling him the most surprising things. She told him, for instance — while the imparting of such knowledge, as if by a clever mother to a stupid son, completely drove away her dread of becoming a mother — that the Arglwyddes was extremely upset by this whole project. There had been a dramatic scene, she told him, between the Prince and his wife only yesterday, with little Sibli as eavesdropper, but the Prince by a crafty appeal to his wife's patriotism had conquered; and the Arglwyddes had consented to allow the Maid an official farewell.

In the joy of telling him all this, Luned so far forgot her own trouble as to allow him to re-light her candle; and it was thus quite a harmless-looking conversation that the appearance of Master Brut finally interrupted.

With Luned's departure, and the men's ascent to the turret, candles proved no longer necessary; and by the time the two friends had got Rhisiart's fire burning the light of dawn was filling the room. They had just begun to break their fast upon beer and bread when they were astonished to hear a furtive knock at the door; and on the Lollard's opening it they were still more amazed to see the figure of the Grey Friar.

There had descended upon Mad Huw a state of emotional trouble quite different from any that Rhisiart had ever seen in him before. If his own appearance revealed the passing of time, the Friar's did so much more.

Neither of the men before whom he now presented himself had realized this change as they were compelled to realize it now. In that pale dawn-light, Mad Huw looked like an old man. Before letting him speak Rhisiart took the precaution of descending the stairs once more and bolting the door at their foot. The chamber smelt strongly of a bitter-sweet aroma; for the wind blowing in through one window and whirling off through another kept the apartment clear of smoke but not of the taste of smoke; and this may have reminded Mad Huw of his youth. At any rate, in combination with the brown ale it certainly loosened his tongue.

The curious thing was — and both the men noticed it, though they took care to avoid each other's eyes — that the shock the Friar had received made it possible for him to keep the late King out of his mind. And once *He* was expelled Brother Huw could hardly be regarded as mad at all.

But if not mad, he was clearly very much upset, though his words were intelligible enough. Indeed their calmness alarmed his hearers more than the wildest incoherence would have done.

"It was in confession to Father Rheinalt — I couldn't keep it back — for Saint Francis says 'keep nothing back' — and the Father said I was to tell you. The Father said: 'Tell this to Master Rhisiart. He'll know what to do.' But — God forgive me! — I couldn't tell you. I couldn't! I couldn't! You remember when the Prince kept back the Maid after Mass? No, no! You can't remember, for you weren't there. Nobody was there but Father Pascentius and me, and the Father was thinking of nothing but a plant he'd left in the sacristy — you know how he is — sometimes he sees everything, but when he's got a plant waiting for him — But the devil tempted me in the sacristy. He put his head out of the wash-basin. He said: 'Are you there, Brother Huw?' And I said, 'I am there, Brother Devil.' And then he said: 'You can spy on the Maid and the Prince! You can hear every word, too; if you stand on the chair behind the story of Bel and the Dragon.' And I said: 'Is that the truth, Brother Devil *Bach?'* And he said: 'It is the truth, Brother Huw *Bach!'*

"So I did what he said. Father Pascentius was writing down like he does, the place and the soil where he found the plant — I know what he writes, for he showed me once, and got cross with me when I said he oughtn't to write devils' names in the sacristy — so he didn't see me go — but the Prince was holding the Maid's hand and making her cry. He was telling her that Hopkin ap Thomas said she was to wear armour. He was telling her he'd had Master Simon make that golden armour the French King sent him smaller, so it would fit a maiden like her. He told her that he'd had it taken to her room and that Mistress Sibli was to help her put it on; and that when it was on she was to come down and he'd bring a horse for her into the base-court — and that when she could sit on the horse, all glittering and golden, and the French were here, she should ride by his side all through Hereford and Oxford and Worcester and over London Bridge. Then the Maid said: 'Will Brother Huw be with us in Hereford and Oxford and London?' And he said 'yes'. And then she said: 'Will Rhisiart be with us?' And he said he didn't know. And then he whispered something to her and held her hand.

"And he held her hand so hard that he made her cry; and when she cried my knees shook so that the chair fell down, and when I'd got it up again there was nobody there. When I told Father Rheinalt about it he asked me whether I thought the Prince loved the Maid, and I said 'yes'; and he asked me whether I thought the Maid loved the Prince, and I said 'no'. And then he said: 'You must go to Master Rhisiart and tell him all you've told me'."

The two men stared at Mad Huw — this form so familiar to them that seemed suddenly to have grown old — and as his beautiful womanish eyes, now so unnaturally bright, met their own, they were afraid, not of his insanity, but of his sanity.

The Friar was now sitting hunched up by the hearth on a roughly-carved chair, while both the men were on their feet watching him. He had lowered his head and they were presently conscious that big silent tears were running down his cheeks.

Rhisiart's face had grown hard and stern; but his dark eyes were blazing. Thoughts, images, memories whirled through his head in rapid succession. Tegolin kissing his sword — Tegolin putting the orchid into her braid — Tegolin asleep with him under his sheepskin — Tegolin hand in hand with him entering Glyndyfrdwy — Tegolin's voice calling him "Gwion Bach" — Tegolin comforting him after the scene with Luned — Tegolin sending him his sword before Bryn Glas. And those words of Elliw ferch Rhys came to him: "Catharine says Tegolin has only one thing in her treasure-box." What was that one thing? He hadn't let himself think what it was! But he had known very well, all the while.

"You took Catharine from me," he thought, "and now you want to take Tegolin." All these thoughts, images, feelings whirled in such rapid succession through his brain that it was as if he'd been drowning. And when he came back to watching those silent tears of Brother Huw it was as if he had drowned — and then been restored to life.

The Lollard, too was quite clearly passing through some interior mental struggle. When Rhisiart brought himself at last to glance at his face, it was anything but the calm, unruffled face to which he had grown so accustomed. It had gone haggard and drawn. It looked almost thin!

A silence fell upon the three of them now, a silence through which they could hear all manner of faint sounds. The silence seemed to mount up from the sea and sink down from the sky. It flowed around and around; buoying up the sounds that floated upon it, as if they'd been relaxed swimmers on a smooth tide; and the silence mingled with the sun-sparkles, too, that were rocking on the incoming waves, and with the rare sea-scents that kept entering that turret window. But the sounds were what the silence loved best of all; and they rose from all manner of different directions..

They were casual sounds, drifting sounds, accidental sounds, without order and without cohesion. But they were the music of life. Some came from fishermen drying their nets on the rocks, some from seagulls along the walls of the jetty, some from cattle and sheep in the castle meadows, some from horses and hounds in the castle-yard. They were fainter, more volatile, more ethereal than the living things that uttered them.

A cock-crow was less and more than any chanticleer, a lamb's bleat less and more than any actual lamb, a horse's neigh, or a rook's caw, or a seaman's whistle, was a voice rising from generations of horses, rooks, and fishermen!

Fused together, these isolated sounds evoked a sense of the continuity of life by sea and land, a continuity simple, tranquil, universal, detached from individual hunger or desire or pain or joy.

Mad Huw, crouching by their newly-lit fire, lost the effect of this awakening; but in Rhisiart and the Lollard, as they stood staring at his silent tears, there moved and stirred an obscure home-sickness for the streets of their native Hereford and for the green banks of the Wye.

"Where is the Maid now? Is she still asleep?" enquired Master Brut. Mad Huw scrambled to his feet and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "She's putting on that armour," he murmured hoarsely. "Mistress Luned and the dwarf are helping her; and the Prince is waiting for her with a big grey horse in the base-court."

Rhisiart's eyes had such a dangerous expression in them that the Lollard laid his hand on his arm. "Did you see the Prince in the courtyard?" he asked, clutching Rhisiart tightly.

Mad Huw nodded. “My black angel told me to look,” he added, with a nervous glance round the room. “He’s holding the horse by the bridle and walking it up and down. It’s got that frontlet on with the black lions that Master Simon made for the coronation.”

“It’s Seisyll!” muttered Rhisiart. “Let me go! What are you holding me for? I must go down to him!”

But the Lollard only tightened his grip. “Was she willing to put on the armour, Brother?”

“She cried and prayed all last night. I would have come to you last night, but I dursn’t leave her. She kept saying, ‘Oh God, tell me what’s right to do! Oh God, tell me what’s right to do!’”

Rhisiart flung his friend’s hand from his arm with a violent jerk. But he allowed Master Brut to put his back to the door without any protest. Indeed he didn’t seem to notice what the other was doing. His burning eyes remained fixed on the Friar’s.

“What else did she say last night?” he asked, in a queer, strained voice.

Once more Mad Huw glanced furtively about the room; and he did so with such an air of seeing more than his companions that they both automatically crossed themselves. “She talked of the shame. She asked me if it were not a shame for a maid to be seen of men in the armour of men.”

“What did you answer to that, Brother?” enquired the Lollard, his back still against the closed door.

The Friar gave him a steady, resolute look. It was clear that they were now on familiar ground, the ground of spiritual discrimination, in the niceties of which every religious man is professionally at home. “I told her the truth,” he replied simply. “Because — because I am a man, and she — is what she is, is that a reason why I should deceive her? I told her that the shame, if shame there were, lay in the lusts of the heart, not in what we put on or take off."

Rhisiart's feelings were in too dark a whirlpool of disturbance to evoke many clear thoughts, but he did say to himself: "That's where his honesty betrayed her! He should have told her that it was a shame. He should have remembered the damnable and lecherous wickedness in the mind of Owen ap Griffith!"

But the Friar's answer so greatly pleased the Lollard that in his fatal passion for theological controversy he went too far. "But if," he cried eagerly, forgetting that an advocate who had just slipped away from a love-exhausted bride was scarcely an unbiassed authority, "if the sight of a maid in armour should arouse—"

But the animal-like groan that this nice casuistical point, thus laid bare, drew from the smouldering bosom of his friend cut his words short; and he turned his innocent blue eyes, full of bewildered sympathy, from Rhisiart's distorted face to the Friar. "What did she say then, Brother?"

"She asked me if there was any danger of violence to her chastity from the Prince's love."

Expecting every second that his friend would fling himself upon him in an unbridled desire to rush down and face this lecherous despot, the Lollard's cautious murmur: "What did you answer to that?" sounded like a violent and disturbing sneeze at the moment of the Elevation of the Host.

Mad Huw's throat was evidently swallowing something that resembled a large round marble; but once more his training in the cloister compelled him to pronounce the confessional truth. "I told her that a thousand angels of God guarded the chastity of a true maid; and that if she herself, in the frailty of our human flesh, weakened not, the heat of the wickedest passion would turn to ice."

"God forgive you!" broke from Rhisiart's twisted mouth; but the Lollard, from his position at the door, stared at the Friar in astonished admiration.

"He loves her," he thought, "and yet he can say that!" And the worthy man sighed heavily, knowing that he could never have uttered such things to his Alice.

The curious thing now, in that scene between the three of them, was the manner in which the Friar's companions completely discounted his insanity; and not only so, but from the moment he brushed away his tears with the back of his hand, it was Mad Huw who dominated the situation.

All Rhisiart's belongings lay about him in that turret-room; and though Master Brut had moved most of his possessions, which were not many, into his bride's chamber, he had begged him to leave him the *Consolation* of Boethius. And as the Lollard went on questioning the Friar, Rhisiart's eyes moved from Boethius to his crusader's sword and from his crusader's sword back to Boethius. Boethius made him think of Catharine. In fact the image of Catharine suckling her first-born possessed itself of the space — for in thought space is malleable — occupied by that parchment volume with its illuminated title. The crusader's sword, however, remained in situ, but its sheath disappeared; and across its naked steel lay the red braid of Tegolin.

And little by little his blind anger against the prince receded, ebbing from his veins as if it had been his own blood. In fact he began to feel dizzy and faint and, like the eclipsing form of the moon darkening a segment of the sun, that curious "blackness" he had known once or twice in his life began again to invade his consciousness. But he struggled against this "blackness" and overcame it; and as he overcame it there swept through him, emanating from the Friar as the man answered the Lollard's questions, a feeling as though they all, Owen, Tegolin, Mad Huw and himself, were bound together by a fate that was larger and deeper than any anger he could indulge.

The Friar had never grudged him his share in the Maid — and what right had he? In the turbulence of what was happening in his own puzzled heart Rhisiart began to be aware of a childish humility before the victorious tourney that was reeling to its close under that grey habit — the victory of a faith beyond his comprehension over a love greater than his love! He suddenly found himself — just as he had always done with his trouble over Catharine — instinctively rushing to Tegolin for comfort and help, only to remember that it was about Tegolin that he needed this support!

"Does he want her to ride with him to the Usk," the Lollard was asking, "or the banks of the—"

But the unmistakeable notes of a horn, blown loud and clear in the court below, came through the window, breaking into the man's words; and simultaneously with this came a loud knocking at the foot of the tower.

It needed little insight on the part of Master Brut to realize that some sudden change had occurred in his friend's mood, and opening the door now without any apprehension he ran down the winding stairway. He returned with a handsome young man who was no other than the girlish Elphin, promoted since the coronation to the envied position of one of the Court Heralds.

"Everybody to the base-court!" this proud official declared in a breathless and extremely important voice; though it was evident that his surprise at not finding Rhisiart alone had chastened a little the jargon of his heraldic office.

"Has He decided to show himself to his people?" cried Mad Huw; and this reversion to the man's familiar mania seemed so pitifully natural that it was down an almost unnoticed glacier-slide that his madness merged, for Rhisiart at any rate, with the spiritual authority of his recent tone.

"The Maid of Edeyrnion is going into the battle," announced Elphin. And as he stood there with the light of the morning on his tabard, and on its "four lions, rampant and sable," Rhisiart couldn't repel a boyish surge of exultation, couldn't resist the triumphant thought: "Now we'll drive them over the Usk, over the Severn, over the Wye! Now we'll have a Wales for the Welsh!"

But immediately afterwards, when this resplendent young person followed up his first news by proclaiming with more professional circumlocution than was necessary that the Maid's sword and shield were now to be blessed by Holy Church and that all the liege subjects of "Owynus Princeps" within the walls, who were not at present sick or dying, were commanded on pain of their Prince's displeasure to be present at this sacred scene, a ribald vein of Norman profanity in our friend was stirred to its depths.

"You'd say your lesson to a different tune, my lad," he thought, "if it were you, and not my Tegolin, who were going into battle!"

But when they were all gathered in the court; and Elphin had even got Meredith himself carried down there on what, not very long before, must have been a bier, not only Rhisiart's anger, but his Hereford profanity, dissolved and melted away. And the strange thing was that the same effect was produced — save for one single exception — upon that whole motley company.

Long, long afterwards those who survived the troubles that followed remembered that scene in the Harlech court. And whenever they did remember it a curious mingling of infinite sorrow and proud exultation came into their minds.

As for the soldiers and the old retainers of the castle, most of whom had known the Maid before in her simple page's attire, none of them had the remotest idea into what startling beauty she had blossomed forth.

The castle was crowded with wounded men and with refugees from devastated areas who had nothing to do but wander about in melancholy indifference, pining for burnt homes and murdered mates; so that there was not lacking in this crowd that weight of anonymous resistance to a magnetic current, which is always what lends volume to any electric wave, capable of over-riding such elements of opposition and of carrying them away with the tide.

But the most remarkable aspect of the occasion was the manner in which all the particular individuals connected with the Maid's life responded unanimously to this sudden apotheosis of her beauty and her character.

Even Mistress Lowri — and this was as amazing to Rhisiart as it was to the Lollard — had tears in her eyes as with her hand on Master Simon's arm she stood apart from the Arglwyddes and the other women, staring at her daughter as if upon a vision.

Had Rhisiart been in a less exalted mood he would have been absorbed by the sight of a vivacious and demonstrative girl to whom both Luned and little Sibli were clinging in fascinated admiration.

But, as it was, several minutes passed — for she had changed bewilderingly in five years — ere he recognized in this striking young person his old acquaintance Efa ferch Tudor of the tower bed in Dinas Bran.

It was clear to Rhisiart that the Prince must have planned all this and sent his instructions through the castle after his Secretary had retired for the night; for though the custom at Harlech was for the inmates to break their fast at an early hour, the Arglwyddes was rarely visible till the sun was high and Mistress Lowri never left her chamber till noon.

Broch-o'-Meifod, whose stature alone made him an object of wonder to the crowd of refugees, who'd only seen him seated in the banquet hall, looked even more of a cynosure than usual that morning, because in the bright February sunshine he had left uncovered his great hairless head. His own attention just then was a little distracted from the Maid in armour by the presence of Gilles de Pirogue's victimized dog, who, though still weak and limping, insisted on following his rescuer wherever it was physically possible for him to go.

And as if the dog's presence were not enough, Broch-o'-Meifod's contemplation of this curious ceremony was further interrupted by the presence of his revolutionary henchman, Master Sparrow, who, though obviously impressed by the Maid's appearance, was anxious to compel his master to admit that these archaic rites though they might have their mystical interest were totally unsuited to a war like this, which was a war of the common people against feudal tyrants armed with modern weapons.

"Everybody knows," he was protesting, "that Prince Hal has got several of these new pieces of ordnance-cannon, Master, *cannon* I tell you, Master! And what could spear and shield do, even if blessed by the Holy Father, against what cannon can fling?"

The ascendency which Broch had established over his revolutionary adherent was proved by the manner in which Master Sparrow's realistic opinions were now expressed. The fellow looked chastened by these recent disasters and by the sight of the refugees; but the absence of contemptuous derision from his tone was not due to this. Broch had been listening to him now for five years, and listening with so much sympathetic interest that the man's pendulum-swing between sardonic silence and bitter invective had changed to a more normal tone.

As has been hinted, all in the castle, save the watchers on the ramparts and the severely wounded and dying, were present in the base-court; and only one of them — and this one was not Master Sparrow for all his talk of overpowering ordnance — remained unaffected by the startling loveliness of the Maid mounted upon Seisyll.

This one was Crach Ffinnant: and he was already making trouble. Moving furtively among the rank-and-file of the crowd, joining one group after another of the more truculent spirits among the refugees, whispering bawdy jests to the castle servants and Derfel-threats to the natives of Ardudwy, he was doing all he could, and none knew better than he how to do it, to counteract the wave of enthusiasm that was now mounting up.

Remembering what Mad Huw had said to him about Father Rheinalt and wondering how Tegolin's begetter could endure the presence of the girl's fatal mother, Rhisiart kept looking about him to catch a glimpse of the man; and at last he was successful. The monk wasn't in the courtyard, but he was looking on. He was high up above the whole scene, standing in the shadow of a buttress upon one of the narrow stone abutments used for flinging destruction on the heads of besiegers. He was too high up for our friend to see his face; but the way he balanced himself on that dizzy ledge, with his arms outstretched on either side of him, as his fingers clung to the projecting corbels, produced an uneasy impression on Rhisiart's mind.

As for Mad Huw, it was clear not only to Rhisiart but to all who knew him — indeed our friend could see from the way the girl kept turning her grey steed so as to keep as close to him as she could that she too recognized the danger — that the Friar was in the familiar state of excitement that usually portended an outburst.

It was Father Pascentius who represented the Church on this occasion, and he was supported by a group of choir-boys from the castle chapel who chanted in their high treble voices the psalmodic responses to his solemn words.

"The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost be upon this sword!"

And as the "sword-blessing" merged into the "shield-blessing," and as the "shield-blessing" merged into old Latin and Welsh war-prayers for victory, such as the whole concourse of people could join, it became hard for anyone in that assembly, save the unsubduable Scab, to gaze upon the Maid's figure without ecstatic awe.

And as the deep-rolling syllables chanted by so many voices rose and fell, in that queer blending of Latin and Welsh whose liturgical lilt, the bardic mystery embracing the Christian mystery, has such infinite seduction, the Maid herself seemed lifted up on the magnetic wave generated by the people's emotion. No one present had ever seen the beauty of a woman so heightened, isolated, thrown into intense and solitary relief, as Tegolin's beauty was then.

Owen had kept saying to himself all the day before: "No glory for you, old conjuror, but the glory of your Maid in armour!"

In his present mood, a mood that his subtlest introspection could scarcely follow, all the good in him and all the evil in him seemed to keep rising to the surface in one wild water-spout after another. What he was doing just now was making use of every mental art he possessed to reduce himself to non-existence by the side of Seisyll's new rider!

It is true that he himself was mounted; but he was mounted on the back of a horse he had chosen from the Harlech stables not for its significance but for its insignificance. It was a small dusky animal, hardly bigger than a Welsh pony, and though its back was broad and sturdy, it looked a commonplace nag compared with Seisyll. And not even content with this, Owen had rejected all armour, all weapons, and had attired himself completely in black.

Apparently he had tried to resemble some elderly master of ceremonies; but all he had succeeded in doing was giving himself the air — with his grizzled beard and ensorcerized eyes — of a demon-worshipping student of alchemy in some lonely tower in the Hartz Mountains.

Owen's mind had never moved with such pendulum-like alternation from pole to pole. The curious thing was that both these poles of psychic attraction were compounded of almost equally balanced ingredients. Nor for one instant was he able to stop the "tick-tick-tick" of his secret analysis of all he was feeling. He knew his longing to drive all these clever captains of Prince Henry out of Wales was as closely mingled with his passion for this girl as blue and yellow are mingled in the colour green.

He knew his Welshmen well enough too to be certain that he and she together would stir up a wave of sacred madness such as hadn't moved the country since Arthur's, or even since Boadicea's, time; and at the thought of this there surged through him a mighty afflatus of unconquerable power, as from the back of his dusky nag he gazed at her. He felt as if he himself were merely the medium through which some vast planetary force that was absolutely irresistible was pouring into the girl's form. He felt as if he were no longer a separate entity. He and his ignoble steed were melting into her and into Seisyll; they were endowing her and the grey horse with a supernatural strength that nothing could resist!

But what had he done with his soul — that live thing within him whose freedom from his body had been the secret struggle of all his days? This madness which was upon him, this dark power which was pouring through him into that white-and-gold form with its burning hair, took no more account of his soul than of a moth burnt in a torch!

He had no soul. But even as he moved closer towards her — his mind so deadly clear — it seemed to him as if against all his purpose and in spite of all his desire his will were bringing his soul back from God-knows-where.

“Yes, yes,” he thought, coldly and cruelly, “if I had the will to let her go, and to let this supreme chance of victory go, it would be a proof to me forever that my soul is outside my body and is able to be as free as that goosander I saw on the waves!”

But if Owen’s consciousness was playing these juggler’s tricks within the circle of itself, Rhisiart’s had never been more compact, more alert, more integrated. His narrow anxious face kept turning from the Prince to Tegolin, and from Tegolin to the Prince.

As for Father Pascentius and his beautifully attired choir of handsome lads, they were apparently prolonging the religious part of the scene far beyond what had been originally intended. Rhisiart wondered what on earth the man was up to now. He had heard a bugle outside the gates and he had seen one of the porters hand a missive of some sort to the Father; but since the Father was always receiving furtive messages from one quarter or other this incident carried no particular weight.

But Tegolin’s beauty as she held aloft that naked sword — and it crossed our friend’s mind to wish it had been the one he’d just left in his turret! — was beyond all he had ever imagined. There was Catharine, leaning upon Sir Edmund’s arm, with the little Rhisiart holding tight to his father’s hand, and fair as a queen she looked; but though he had never until this moment allowed such a thing to cross the threshold of his consciousness he caught himself with the thought — and the thought itself was like a sacred bird, a forbidden bird, that he had dared to shoot and now held warm and palpitating in his hand — that the Maid was the more lovely of the two!

The warm February sun fell full upon the loosened mass of the girl’s flaming hair, hair so thick that it almost hid the gleam of her cuirass, hair so long that it flowed down in blood-red waves upon Seisyll’s flanks; while the golden armour covering her breasts and guarding her thighs made all that was visible of her virgin flesh show white as the petals of wood-anemones exposed before their hour amid yellow leaves.

The bare arm that uplifted the sword — aye! but Rhisiart knew it now; it was the Roman sword the Prince had worn at Mathrafal! — passed through the leather straps of a heart-shaped, shell-bright shield, upon which was depicted, in vermilion enamel-work, the mystic Pendragon of Wales.

And it struck Rhisiart as he watched her that it needed all her strength to hold up that sword and shield. Her arm seemed quivering with the effort; and he felt — life-weary man as he was now, and one in whom the Russian’s “insect” had long ago been scotched — that both he and the Prince, yes! and her mother too and Father Rheinalt too, perched up there so perilously, all, all, except the Grey Friar, were, as in that sea-weed dance of five years ago, clapping their hands while she grew faint under the tension.

Yes, he felt as if the Prince and he were united now, united in keeping that bare white arm aloft, with its dragon and its sword! And suddenly he caught the eye of Mistress Lowri, and — Mary, Joseph! — a terrible revolution turned his whole heart round, as if on an interior pivot. He suddenly felt a spasm of ungovernable anger mount up from the pit of his stomach against the Prince. The eyes of the Maid’s mother were quite tearless now. They were worse than tearless. No, no; this whole thing was wicked. They had no right to keep that sword and shield so tremblingly erect. They had no right to let the Prince use Tegolin so!

But Owen’s dark figure upon that dusky, dwarfish horse seemed growing steadily more ominous and more dominant. The Father’s chanting was now at its height. The choir-boys' responses were shrill and clear. But something else was happening. A power was emanating from Owen that he couldn't understand. Was that dark figure with those sea-green eyes, mounted on that squat, goblinish creature, really possessed of supernatural power? He had never quite lost, in all his five years' association with him, a feeling that the man was different from other men, that he had, in an obscure sense he couldn't define, something unearthly about him. He found himself moving closer and closer to Seisyll and his rider. That bare uplifted arm, holding both sword and shield — too heavy, too heavy! she must let them sink if he didn't help! — was fatally drawing him.

It was the look in Mistress Lowri's eyes, the look in the Prince's eyes — oh, he must go to her help! One wild thought after another whirled through his brain. That witch-woman had thrust Alice just like this upon young Grey. It must be a mania with women to offer up their daughters — yes, a mania with them! Those tears he'd caught in the woman's eyes weren't for Tegolin at all. They were for Rhys Gethin, they were —

But his friend Brut was at his side now; and he too was angry; he too was outraged. In a moment he too would rush forward and help support that trembling arm. He suddenly felt impelled to glance up at Father Rheinalt. He was her father. How long could he endure to see the quivering of that white arm? Oh, the brave girl, the brave girl!

But somebody must rush in and stop it. Was Owen working some dreadful magic upon his enemies through that uplifted sword? Was the tide of battle on the Usk at this very second swaying, swaying, like a great sea-wave, uncertain where it would fall? Father Rheinalt couldn't — but where was the Father? Were his eyes dazzled by the Maid? No, he'd left that ledge. He'd climbed back — or fallen down. No! There he was, approaching them now, pushing his way through the crowd, saying something to the Scab.

And the Scab was coming with him now, and an angry tumultuous section of the crowd was following the two of them. Strange for him and the Lollard to be on the same side as the Scab! And Mad Huw too — Mad Huw was weeping again as he clutched at Seisyll's harness, that harness covered with gorgeous trappings across which the black lions ramped. Tears as big as wren's eggs were streaming down the Friar's face as he turned it now towards the Maid's begetter and towards the gesticulating prophet.

"He's fallen back. He's lost his vision," our friend thought. "If Owen takes her from him now, he'll resist. The man's as angry as I am! Yes, yes, call upon your King, Grey Friar! That's right! Call upon him! Master Simon's watching you; but he can't hurt you. Lowri's eyes can't hurt you. They can watch the *méthode scientifique* of Gilles de Pirogue; but if Brut and her Father and the Scab and all these Ardudwy men were to join with him now in one great rush to rescue his girl — for what was Tegolin if not his girl? — they could stop Owen from riding away with her to the battle! What right had he to—"

But what was that? Two young heralds were bringing the Prince his armour, his helmet, his great lance; and the keepers of the castle-gates were dragging them open. Slowly, slowly they were forcing them open, with the harsh, strange, musical sound of vast hinges turning, and with the rush of sea-scents and sea-murmurs, and with the clatter and trampling of a host of armed men! Spearmen, bowmen, men-at-arms — an army was pouring in! And as they came they raised shout upon shout. "With the Maid to the Usk! With the Maid to the battle! With the Maid to London-town!"

There! The chanting had ceased; the responses had died down; and Tegolin had endured to the end. With her sword and shield laid across

Seisyll’s back, and her head so drooping that her chin rested against the front of her cuirass, she now allowed Mad Huw to possess himself of her numb fingers; and these the good man rubbed between his own in so besotted and pitiful a manner, wetting them as he did so with such a flood of tears that there wasn’t a damsel, save little Sibli, among all the Arglwyddes’s ladies, but wept too for very sympathy with so passionate a love.

But little Sibli, after giving her tearful friend Luned a glance of sharp contempt, transferred her small person and the insatiable “insect” within it to the voluptuous side of Dame Alice of Lyde, as the witch’s daughter now insisted on being called. Rhisiart had taken advantage of the Prince’s movement towards the in-rushing soldiers to take hold of Seisyll’s bridle, thus enabling his rider to relax at her pleasure and devote herself entirely to the Friar; but he now became aware that the Lollard’s wife was dragging her husband aside and whispering God knows-what honeyed treacheries in his ear. That they were treacheries, to him, to the Lollard, to Mad Huw, to Tegolin, he divined easily enough, from the wicked delight which Mistress Sibli was manifesting.

Meanwhile the Prince, who had dismounted from his sorry nag, and had been armed by his pages in a resplendent suit of glittering mail, had leapt, all heavily armed as he was, upon the back of a horse Rhisiart had never seen before, a coal-black horse of menacing appearance and startling size. Thus mounted, and with his great lance in his hand, he looked indeed a formidable figure; and an involuntary cry of admiration and pride rose from the newly-entered troops.

“Owen and the Maid!” they shouted: “Owen and the Maid of Edeyrnion!”

It was then that Master Brut, breaking away from his bride, came up to Rhisiart's elbow. "He has thought of everything," he whispered. "Alice tells me all the Maid's things are packed on mule-back, ready to follow them. He's made up his mind to take her. Our last chance is Father Rheinalt. He's her father and a good man. Let him — let him say something to the people. Let him say something to *her!"*

Rhisiart cast a quick look round them, and then turned to Tegolin, tightening his hold on Seisyll's bridle. Something about the bend of her head and the way her hair fell across her cheek as she leaned down, comforting the Friar, brought back that Midsummer Day of five years ago so vividly that some inward band about his heart ripped and was rent, dividing itself like a strip of *pali.*

No! The Prince shouldn't have his will this time. He'd taken his love from him and he'd endured and lived. But Tegolin was more than his love. "She's part of me," he thought. "If he takes her away, if he makes her his own, that's the end. Blackness forever; blackness in this world, blackness in the next!"

The scene in that base-court of Harlech had certainly become a singular one. Our friend saw clearly enough that it had taken to itself the nature of one of those turning-points in life that are the heavier charged with fate, because, in the tragic tension, the good and the evil are by no means all in one camp. Owen with the Maid at his side would — both Rhisiart and the Lollard knew it well — raise such a tide of mystical loyalty that it might easily sweep these Grendors and Talbots and Codnors and Charltons out of the country once and for all!

And to clear Wales of the English — for what else had he left Oxford? But here he was — and the refugees from the Usk and the Tawy and Severn had already begun taunting the soldiers standing between Tegolin's mother and Tegolin's father, just as he had done five years ago! Here he was — and oh! how noble the Prince looked on his black horse and in his glittering arms! — prepared to put himself, his own life, which was Tegolin's, his own honour, which was Tegolin's, between his Prince and his one grand chance of saving Wales. Why didn't Tegolin look up? Why didn't she speak and help him and decide it all? It was always of the Friar she thought. It would be of the Friar to the end. And yet he knew, and she knew that he knew, what was the only thing in her treasure-box! Did she think the Prince would respect her maidenhead? Owen ap Griffith prove another Mad Huw? Or was she prepared for the sacrifice of everything to save the country?

Father Rheinalt was at their side now and so was the Scab — a nice partner to have in his defiance of his Prince! — and there was someone else here, too. Yes, he was here, that traitor ancestor whose infinite remorse had looked out of the smoke at him from that ruined wall in Dinas Bran. He became conscious now that his tight clutch upon Seisyll's bridle was only with his left hand. His right hand was in the folds of his scholar's tunic.

And if this crucial moment was a crisis in the life of Rhisiart, it was hardly less so in that of Walter Brut. The Lollard had already been troubled by his bride's attitude to the Maid's departure. He knew she'd helped Tegolin to put on that rich French armour. And now as she approached him and took her place by his side he sought in vain to get at the secret of what she felt, as she gazed so intensely at the girl in armour. Was it that she thought it was the grandest and most enviable lot that could fall to any girl, to ride into battle by the side of Owen? Or was it some subtle vicarious sensuality, some vice in women that was new and strange to him?

The man's guileless soul had already received several startling shocks from his intimacy with the witch's daughter; but what he saw now in the look she fixed on Tegolin troubled him in the depths of his nature.

“She and I are one now,” he thought as he watched her, “and her sin is my sin.” A curious and tragic sadness swept over him as he felt the complete strangeness of this human creature from whose obliquity, whatever it might turn out to be, he could never be separate again. “What the Prince is doing is wrong,” he said to himself, “and I shall oppose him, if I die for it! The look Alice has got on her face now as she watches her is an evil look. Well! we’re one now; and if her thoughts are evil and make her suffer — mine be the suffering! If she creates worse evil by her thoughts — mine be guilt! I used to think that a man who had a woman could save his soul alone. How little I knew how it would be!”

With these thoughts pursuing each other through his mind he pressed her arm against his side. “You are mine,” he thought, “and all the guilt and shame and suffering that such a look brings I must pay for; for you and I are one.”

Meanwhile Rhisiart, as he held fast to Seisyll’s bridle, felt a faint stirring of hope when he saw Broch-o’-Meifod move across, with Master Sparrow at his heels, to where, under the shadow of a buttress, the faithful little Lu was standing by Meredith’s stretcher.

The Arglwyddes, with her ladies gathered behind her like so many murmuring pigeons, was talking gravely and earnestly to Mortimer and Catharine. Was she, Rhisiart wondered, begging Catharine to interfere — to hold her father back from this fatal adventure?

For some curious reason, deep, oh! fathoms deep in his secretest soul, he found himself hoping that it wouldn’t be by Catharine’s intercession that this thing was stopped! Mistress Lowri — alone now — had moved near them. Had she sent Master Simon to watch Rhys Gethin die? Was she going to give her daughter a Judas kiss?

And then he started back a step, still holding the horse's bridle, still clutching his dagger under his tunic; for Father Rheinalt had thrust Mad Huw aside, and — for the first time in his life completely disregarding Mistress Lowri — had thrown back his cowl and flung his arms round Tegolin's neck. So he, even he, had, in his burning patriotism, accepted the girl's supreme sacrifice!

Buried like that in her father's embrace, would she never turn, would she never give him a look?

But the Prince on his black horse was approaching to take her now; and Father Rheinalt had let her go. She settled herself on Seisyll's back, lifted up her sword and shield again, inclined her head beneath Father Pascentius's formal blessing and then, in the full sight of them all, bent down and kissed the Secretary on the mouth.

On seeing this, Owen jerked at the bit of his black horse with such unnecessary violence that the animal shook his head, scraped the stones with one of his front hooves, and clapped back his ears. "Oh mild and everlasting *Mare,"* he groaned. "Mother of Creation! Thou who has given thy servant the magnanimous docility of thine own patient and all-enduring heart, save me from the power of this Prince of devils!"

The only individual in that company who took any notice of the offended feelings of a being whose inner vision beheld the lustrous eyes and flowing mane of the Queen of Heaven was Broch-o'-Meifod's dog.

He looked from the horse to his rescuer and from his rescuer to the horse in so emphatic a manner that the giant bent down over Meredith's stretcher, nodded to Master Sparrow to help him, and proceeded with this assistance to carry the wounded man into the open space that was still left between the opposing ranks.

And then as will often happen in a psychic crisis of this sort, when neither side wishes to take the final responsibility of precipitating the event, the electricity of action began to discharge itself in other ways.

For the crowd in that castle-yard had, clearly enough, divided itself into two indignantly tense parties; the newly-arrived soldiers clamouring to follow the Prince and the Maid, while the opposing ranks, led by Father Rheinalt and the Lollard, seemed resolute in their refusal to let the expedition start.

The Maid herself, after what she evidently felt to be her farewell gesture, began to make before them all a palpable effort to gather up her reins. This, however, she couldn't do; for Rhisiart had twisted the reins about one of his own hands, while he plunged the other into his tunic.

At the sight of his wounded son, thus placed — and placed by his best friend — between himself and the one thing on earth he wanted, Owen released his hold on his lance, letting its butt-end sink into the leather case in front of his saddle. Then bending his head over his horse's mane so low that the red feather in his helm pointed earthward he began talking to the prostrate man as if talking to himself. Breaking off this soliloquy he suddenly said in a low vibrant voice: "So you too my dear lad, are against our one chance until the French come!"

"Not against our one chance, Sire," replied the man on the stretcher, "but against our Prince leading it." He paused; and then in a much lower tone, while the Prince strained every nerve to catch his words: "She loves Rhisiart, Sire! Can't you see it? Let him go with her, and the monk and the Friar, too. My father, my father, think of the honour of our house!"

"I have thought," cried the Prince, rising suddenly to his full height. "I *have* thought!" he repeated in a loud and terrible voice, "and nothing, lad, *nothing,* I say, can turn me back!" His words were heard and their meaning fully caught by all present.

There rose a ringing and exultant shout from the armed crowd behind him; and he beckoned sternly with his hand for Broch and his servant to lift the stretcher out of the way. "Why does he move his arm up and down like that?" he thought. "If he touches one of his axes I'll ride over them all and take her."

But Broch-o'-Meifod wasn't touching any of his axes. He was moving one of his great bare hands up and down; moving it with all the fingers outspread from where it hung straight by his side till his enormous fore-arm was at right angles to his biceps. It was a queer movement; it seemed a meaningless movement. The man's face expressed nothing as he made it. He did it as if it were the automatic gesture of a mechanical colossus. Was it a signal to someone?

But to whom could it be a signal, for the crowd was dense round the two horses now, and little Lu was bending over Meredith, while the figures of Mortimer and Catharine hid the Arglwyddes.

"I can do what I like," Owen said to himself, watching that hand go up and down. "It's all in my will. I can take her. I can give her up."

And then as he watched that moving hand, which only himself from his position above them all, could possibly see, it seemed to him as if that hand weren't a hand at all but his own will, his own will deciding everything — *up down* — *down, up* — just as it chose!

"What I'll do," he thought, "shall be without cause, without reason, without motive. I'll do it just to prove to myself that I can do it. If I let her go they'll think I do it because of them. If I take her they'll think I do it because of my pride. But they'll be wrong. I'll take her because I want her more than my free will. But if I don't take her I'll prove to myself that my will can do — in a complete void — what it chooses — without cause or motive or reason! Just my will in a void, doing what it chooses! *Up-down, down-up* — like Broch's hand. They'll think I give her up because of them. But Broch will know — that's why his hand goes up and down like that! — Broch will know that I give her up because 'up-down' and 'down-up' are equal; and my will is my will. I could take her in a minute. She'd tell them herself she wished to come. She and I together could do anything. She'd know what love was if I took her, and there wouldn't be an Englishman left in Wales! And when the French came we'd ride through Hereford and Worcester and Oxford and over London Bridge, until — playing off the Mortimers against the Percies — and no one but I would take off your armour, you lovely one! — but that would tilt the balance — *up-down, down-up!* — with her for the motive, for the reason, for the cause! But if I don't take her — then, in an absolute void, my will will please itself. It will choose to sacrifice everything — everything but its own life; and thus it will show the power of its own life! Yes, yes, that's what it'll be — my will alone; my will where there's no 'up' — do you hear me, hand of Broch? — and no 'down'!

"So be it. And now, old conjurer, a little entertainment for you!" He patted the neck of his black horse; he waved to Catharine as if he had only just realized she was there; he made a quick gesture with his hand for Broch's benefit alone, which evidently completely satisfied the giant; and then, bending down over his son's stretcher, he uttered in the rustic dialect of Powys Fadog an old nursery jingle which means: "If you've won it's only because I've let you win!" Then he swung his horse round and facing the excited soldiers behind him lifted his arm for silence. So majestic did he look in his shining armour, with the long heraldic pennon of his lance streaming in the sea-wind, that not one of those war-fevered men, wrought up as they were, but lowered his weapons in submissive silence.

"Before we set out to battle, my comrades, it were well if we all, men and women, priests and laymen, gentles and commons, visit our castle-church, and there assembled consecrate our cause to Heaven, in the name of Cadwallader the Blessed, Bran the Blessed, Tysilio the great Saint, and Derfel Gadarn, our Patron and Protector. My family and my household will lead the way; and since it is the help of Christ and Our Lady and the Blessed Saints that we shall now invoke, I wish every man of you who cares to follow us to leave his arms behind him here — my pages will look to them — and to join our solemn procession to the chapel, chanting the Battle-Song of Uther Pendragon."

It was one of those extraordinary inspirations of the man, that made those who knew him best feel most astounded, that he should have set them upon intoning this particular war-hymn. Almost every national Welsh air had some local tradition behind it that would have clashed with others in a crowd drawn indiscriminately from north and south; but the deep Gregorian-like notes of this ancient Pendragon Psalm, familiar from childhood to every soul there present, was calculated above anything else he could have chosen to deepen patriotism to a religious intensity, and to draw upon a past so high and remote that all modern diversities and dissensions were lost in the unity of its ancestral grandeur.

It was none other than Father Pascentius — profoundly delighted at this twelfth-century turn given to what he had already decided to be a typical scene of fifteenth-century disorder and degeneracy — who promptly began intoning the harsh martial stanzas of this noble chant, whose rugged music might have risen to the Milky-Way from the summit of Cadair Idris or of Eryri.

As soon as Broch-o'-Meifod, who seemed completely unperturbed by this new turn of events, had with Master Sparrow's help got Meredith and his little Lu safe out of the press, there was such a confusion around the black horse and the grey horse that Rhisiart and the Lollard drew aside. They still suspected the Prince of some sinister design but there was clearly no immediate danger of Tegolin being spirited away.

Rhisiart felt a most devastating sense of incapacity and helplessness. The sight of Catharine and Tegolin talking to each other, which was now what was happening, caused a queer disturbance to take place under his ribs. It resembled shame; and yet it wasn't shame. It resembled the feeling of the most miserable kind of blushing; and yet it was deep below the surface of his skin! He felt as he watched that fair hair in actual contact with that flaming hair, as the one young woman looked up and the other leaned down, that if they were to kiss each other he would hate them both!

If he had had even so much as a spark of divine power he would have ordered it so that never more on earth should those two converse together! But it was hard not to look at them side by side. Where else should he look? For the Prince, holding Mad Huw in a low-voiced dialogue, was delaying the procession behind Father Pascentius; while Father Rheinalt was being compelled to lend an ear to the Scab who in his excitement was actually clutching the monk's habit.

But never had Rhisiart reached such a level of humiliation. What had he to fall back upon? He had lost his position as the Prince's legal adviser. He had forgotten how to use his sword. And here were the only two women in all the world he wanted to look up to him, to admire him, to watch what he could do, to listen to his knowledge, to wonder at his courage, conspiring together to treat him with maternal tenderness and consideration!

Inch by inch, like a sinking boat, all Rhisiart's passionate self-respect began to go down. It was what he'd endured in the tower at Dinas Bran; but this was far worse. What was he? A nameless nobody, an unwanted lawyer's clerk, the weak protege of a couple of fair women! Ah yes, of course! And here too was Luned; but he had no desire to-day to prove the freedom of his soul by making love to a bundle of sweet cinnamon! Who was the father of her child? No, no, it couldn't be Elphin. Elphin could play the herald manly enough; but to think of him — No, no! It was probably some soldier from the camp by the sea.

What on earth was the Prince talking about to Mad Huw? He could see both the flaxen head and the flaming head turned towards those two, waiting till they should have done, so as to follow Father Pascentius and his choir. Could they hear what the Prince was saying? Mary, Joseph! Both the girls' heads were turned towards himself now. No, no! No response while you're together from Rhisiart ab Owen!

"I'd far sooner," he said bitterly to himself, "make Efa ferch Tudor smile at me!"

But the Prince had beckoned to one of the pages who was pushing his way through the crowd. Ah! He was giving the lad the bridles of both horses; and both the riders were dismounting. Dismount? Let all the world dismount; for Rhisiart's occupation was gone!

Oh, never would he forget that dragging procession through all those same identical corridors and courts and balconies that he had passed — and passed behind that same unwieldy figure too — when he went to disturb the new ideal of knowledge through torture. "We scotched his little game," he remarked to Walter Brut under cover of the Pendragon Chant. "But he's up to some other mischief now. How clever the Scab was to make trouble between those refugees and the Ardudwy men! ’Twas that that stopped him. He hates downright brawls. He likes the ritual of power, not its—”

“Hush, lad! Hush, for Christ’s sake!” returned his friend. “You’re being brutally unjust! He was led by his desire for beauty. Have you never been? Have I never been? It was a sin; but he must have suffered horribly when he was hesitating just then. Didn’t you see how he looked? Man, man! He was wrestling with the Devil! What’s the matter with you, Rhisiart? I’ve been watching him closely, lad; and I saw him look at us just now with the face of an angel, over his old forked beard!”

The hoarse, martial notes of the great Pendragon Chant echoed round the two friends as they moved forward together, their neat Hereford clothes, faded during the last five years, separating them, as did their English accent, from the careless, sumptuous colours and wild, rich intonations all about them.

The crowd was so great that, though the austerity of what all were chanting held the excitement in check, soldiers of one rank or another kept pushing past them, most of them with a rough, casual greeting as they went: “God be with you, Clerk Walter! God be with you, Clerk Rhisiart!” — greetings which the Lollard answered spontaneously and naturally, and our friend with a heart-sick effort.

“Clerk Walter” was certainly in the right of it over his companion’s mood. Rhisiart was puzzled by it himself when he thought of it afterwards; but keen lawyer by nature as he was, and intelligent statesman as he had become, he had all the average Norman’s dislike of introspective analysis.

The truth was his emotional nature had only two natural outlets, both of them very narrow ones. He could lose himself in idolatrous devotion for a man much older than himself, a man like the Prince; but where women were concerned his romantic passion could be stirred only when the sense of power rioted in him with a feeling that *if he liked* he could be despotic and cruel! The only girl he had ever met whose nature seemed to beg her lover to be despotic and cruel was little Lu; but she was so obsessed by Meredith that he never let himself think of her in that way.

But just because he was a man, and they were girls, he had sometimes had moments, both with Tegolin and Catharine, when this despotic craving had had its free fling. At such moments he had been mysteriously happy, and his soul had hurled itself upon this weaker soul with an exultant abandonment; and, not only so, but even in retrospect, an indescribable tenderness had flowed through his veins at the mere thought of his relation with a girl who was at his mercy.

But now, as he sulked under his companion's rebuke and punished him by adding his bass notes to the chanting of the war-song whose archaic heathenism he knew displeased him, the sense of an understanding between the two girls, of which he was at once the object and the victim, tied an obscure knot of contrariety in his deepest soul against which he struggled in vain. Grown man though he was, he felt somewhere within him that blind, childish, angry humiliation, the only cure for which used to be to make Modry strike him; after which they would both burst into tears.

As may be expected this childish mood of his which could have been dissolved only by one of two things, either by risking his life for a man who was his master, or by becoming himself the master of a maid, was anything but lifted from him, when, as they overtook Tegolin and her Friar, the girl turned quickly towards him, and giving him one of her old steady glances, uttered the surprising words: "Well, Gwion Bach, what do you think of him now?"

All the Prince's household crowded into the chapel as soon as the Arglwyddes and the Mortimers had taken their places, and a considerable number of soldiers and refugees succeeded in getting in along with them and finding somewhere or other to stand and kneel. Some of the younger refugees from the Usk actually clambered up on the ledges of the high windows, through one of which the youthful Gilles had escaped from the chamber above; and in one way or another the building was soon so crowded with people that it was all Father Rheinalt and the group of parish-priests could do to force their way to where Father Pascentius was standing by the altar.

But the Prince kept back the Maid and the Friar from entering till Rhisiart and the Lollard arrived; and it was then, as the Master and Man met face to face, that Rhisiart realized the truth of his friend's words.

"We have decided, cousin," he began at once, "upon a little change of plan."

The blood rushed to Rhisiart's cheeks. They felt so burning — especially just above his cheek-bones — that, forgetting how swarthy he was and that no one could possibly see his confusion, he hung his head like a convicted school-boy.

There must have been something about the sight of this thin, lined, anxious face, with the dark moustache under the hooked nose, reduced to such an extremity of embarrassed shame, that was unbearable to Tegolin. She intervened hurriedly, begging the Prince to let Brother Huw tell him everything.

Master Brut, who still detected in Owen's expression a look which, if it wasn't the look of an angel, was certainly a look of unearthly self-conquest, now noted — with his evangelical interest in all such spiritual phenomena — that no flicker of the faintest smile crossed the Prince's face as he responded to the Maid.

The Maid, on the contrary, didn’t notice this. In fact, as the Prince saw clearly enough, she was in so radiant a mood that she had eyes for none but Rhisiart.

“Tell him, then, Brother Huw,” said Owen slowly, speaking in the flat expressionless tone that an idol in a temple might have used, “what we’ve decided between the three of us — though I wish you could tell him what the soldiers will feel when they hear our decision!”

These last words, though uttered aloud, were more like thoughts than words; but so intensely alive at that second were all Mad Huw’s senses that he caught their drift in a flash.

“Fear not, Owen ap Griffith,” he said solemnly. “I will take it on myself to make the men understand that the Maid’s marriage is a holy marriage, undertaken solely that she and I, a young woman and a witless preacher, should have an armed and clerkly man to protect us by night as well as by day as we march to restore the King!”

“But, Brother Huw, Brother Huw,” cried Owen, while, like a sailor whose hands clutch the rudder as he watches the prow of the boat, Tegolin watched Rhisiart’s face, “but Brother Huw, there’s only one kind of marriage on earth, whatever there may be in heaven; and since this ordinary, natural, human marriage is a sacrament of Holy Church we mustn’t—”

“I know, I know, Owen ap Griffith! But the Maid will be a maid still, though lawfully wedded, as she rides with us this morn to fight the battles of the King.” Here he lowered his voice and laid his fingers on Owen’s wrist. ‘“Tis the King himself tells me — for the man’s his godson you see — they should be wedded before she rides! And the King says — that — that” — here several big tears splashed upon the Prince’s armour and chased each other down its glittering surface, turning to gold as they ran— “that her Friar mustn’t think of it that way, else he’ll go mad. ‘Pray, Brother,' the King says. 'And when you pray stop thinking! Saint Francis is here with me,' the King says, 'and Saint Francis says, to love is better than — than to — than — to think!'"

Certainly it seemed that either the prodigal King or the poverty-wedded Saint did come to the Friar's rescue at that moment. For Mad Huw pulled himself up erect now, and calmly taking Tegolin's hand placed it in Rhisiart's.

All this while Rhisiart himself had been like one whose mental consciousness is fatally active while all his feelings have been struck numb and dead by a bolt of lightning. Once, however, his fingers clasped Tegolin's, and behold! this numbness came to an end, and his life-stream began flowing again!

And what was this? He suddenly felt as if he and Tegolin had always been holding hands like this, behind and beyond all that happened. He even felt that holding her hand he was beyond the bitter humiliation of that knot of frustration that had been recently damming up the channel of his spirit.

Meanwhile with exquisite punctiliousness, heedless of how Rhisiart and Tegolin lost themselves in their union, Owen was following with an ungauntleted finger the blurred track made upon his armour by the Friar's tears. Then, as if it were somebody else thinking a tiresome thought, he began vaguely wondering to himself what on earth the people would make of a married Maid of Edeyrnion.

"I must get these two, and the Friar with them," he thought, "straight up to the altar before this office ends! Better make one of these parish-priests marry them, while Pascentius and her father are witnesses."

As soon as he had decided this he noticed quite calmly — as a drugged sacrificial victim might notice the scent of the flowers round his neck —

that he was in a hurry to get them wedded, and in a hurry, too, to receive, like spears in his flesh, the looks of Catharine and the Arglwyddes.

"Cousin Rhisiart!" he found himself beginning.

But he spoke coldly, without giving either of them a smile. "Your wife must ride Seisyll, Cousin Rhisiart; and I'll have your things — the sword and the rest — put on my black charger. But I'll tell them to saddle your old horse; and then our friend here," and he turned to Master Brut, "or the Friar, as they please, can rest their feet. But you'll be moving pretty slowly, for all the troops save yourselves will be on foot. Rhys Ddu will meet you in Carmarthen and take command; and until then—"

"But my Prince," broke in the Lollard, "you're going with us yourself, aren't you? We shan't feel — the army won't feel—"

Owen gave him a quick startled look out of his sea-green eyes. No, the man couldn't be lying! And yet how could he possibly not be lying; for what could be pleasanter for the good man than to go to war alone with his friends?

"No," he said in a firm clear voice and a voice so loud that many of the soldiers at the back of the little chapel turned their heads. "No, we're not going to the Usk. We have other plans. And our other plans will hurt Hal Bolingbroke more than our going to the Usk. Kindly put your hand to this, will you, Master?" and turning a little as he spoke he indicated one of the fastenings of his helmet.

Master Brut's thoughts were singularly simple and direct, as struggling with this metal clasp he lifted both hands to Owen's neck. "This is Our Lord's doing, and it will give my little Alice the chance to go with us. But I don't think she will go with us! Some girls find travelling harder than others. Their bodies are softer and more delicate." He was careful to thrust to the back of his mind the formless, wordless thought that "some girls" had a much greater dread of battles than others and of being roughly handled by the enemy. “They’re more sensitive about jolting paths and hard saddles,” he repeated to himself; and without removing his fingers from the clasp with which he was busy, he stared with amorous guilelessness at Alice’s sturdy and voluptuous back.

“She has her faults,” were the thoughts that now kept twisting in and out of that obdurate fragment of gilded silver; “but any man who reads the words of Jesus — especially in Greek — knows that we must be indulgent without limit to others while to ourselves we behave as if we were dogs on a string, pulling ourselves away with a sharp jerk when we begin to feel—”

In order to unloosen this obstinate fastening Master Brut found it necessary to push back from the Prince’s shoulder the rim of his hidden mail-shirt; and upon a couple of the links of this object, the morning sun, gleaming through the red-and-blue dyes of a just-finished fourteenth-century window, threw a blaze of rich colours, colours that spread across the scar on the man’s neck, where, five years before, Rhisiart had sucked the blood.

The Prince himself all this while was explaining to Tegolin, gravely, coldly, and in clear-cut detail, exactly where, without going too far out of their way, they might get in touch with Henry Don. “I tell you this,” he insisted, while he felt as if it were Rhisiart’s eyes that were looking at him out of her face, and her eyes out of Rhisiart’s face, “because my cousin may be far too gone in love or drink to see where he’s going. Oh yes! and remember that when he last sent us news Henry Don was in the valley of the Monnow, with Grosmont as his goal. But he’ll have laid waste Grosmont completely by now no doubt. Most troublesome King’s men they were, though their homes are black enough by now, I doubt not! Don does what he does right well; and he’s got the men of Morgannwg with him too;

and they don't leave much behind! Grosmont's in ashes; there's no doubt of that. You can rest assured of that! Welshmen and yet King's men. Well, well. Their homes are ashes now anyway. Black ashes!

"Hark'ee, my pretty, as Broch calls his mistress, and I'll hammer you out a right clever *englyn* about black ashes and staunch King's men."

It wasn't only Tegolin and Rhisiart who now stared at the Prince in startled trouble. The Lollard with all his guilelessness and goodness had played the part of a lay-confessor to Master Simon and other neurotic spirits too long not to recognize this unbalanced note. His full lips assumed the shape of a knot that is not tied tight, while a faint susurration, almost approximating to a low whistle, issued from his mouth.

But Mad Huw intervened. "Hush, hush, Owen ap Griffith Fychan!" he cried, taking into his hands the Prince's helmet, now at last unfastened, and entrusting it to Elphin the Herald. "This is a day for a psalm, not an *englyn,* a day for the priest, not the bard! Take them to the altar, Owen ap Griffith! The office is finished. The Fathers are ready. The King has spoken. A moment, a moment, Daughter of my Soul! The Friar and none else shall be your armourer!"

Thus speaking, and as he had done in Rhisiart's turret, dominating them all by the force of his pure spirit, the devoted man knelt down before the Maid; and there and then, while the girl, still with her hand in Rhisiart's, bent her head above him, unloosed the straps that bound King Charles's greaves about her shins.

This was the worst moment of all for Owen; for the Friar hesitated not in his spiritual ecstasy to unwind the linen cloth beneath the armour, leaving the flesh bare.

There was one flickering second when he might have broken down; but not for nothing had he played his games with his soul since he was a child.

In absolute desperation he now went through the long-practised motion, the motion which, though none knew it but himself, was his real claim to being a magician. He did what felt to himself — though it would be easy to pretend he "imagined" the whole thing — like taking his soul, the entity within him that said to itself, "I am Owen Glyn Dŵr," and flung it — through one of those open windows through which Sieur Gilles had skipped like a devil — far out to sea.

There, on the rocking waves, though there was no goosander to rock by its side, his soul floated now free, detached, stripped of all desire — and yet capable, from where it floated, of directing with lucid precision every gesture of the glittering *eidolon* with the forked beard!

As they all five, escorted by the young herald carrying the Prince's helmet and the French King's golden greaves, pushed their way to the altar, the choir burst into a psalm that seemed to carry into the incense, into the rosy light from the painted windows, into the rich fourteenth century carving, something of the wild Pendragon Chant with which they had entered the chapel. And in the exultation of his mood it seemed to Rhisiart that Tegolin's hand trembled in his own. She was his! She was his! And — like the first woman given up to the first man — she was troubled, she was bewildered, she was dominated! She was no longer the Tegolin to whom he'd turned too long for comfort. She was his now — passive and docile. He was a man, a master, soon to lift upon old Griffin's back the sweet captive of his sword and his dagger!

The one thing lacking to his complete happiness was the thought of the Prince. It wasn't that he pitied him for losing Tegolin. It was something deeper, more personal, more intimate.

As they made their way slowly through the crowd there came to him, along with the heavy sweetness of the incense and along with the fragrance of the girl's loosened hair, a strange salty taste upon his lips and palate, the taste of blood, the taste of that blood of his master, when he'd sucked at his arrow-wound beneath the ramparts of Dinas Bran.

"Oh Mother of God!" he prayed. "Grant me to give my blood for his blood before I die!"

But having made his prayer it seemed easy to let this silent figure at their side, this imperturbable ghost to whom he had sworn allegiance, fade into a cloud, a shadow, a pillar of smoke, a thing without substance, without feeling. This reduction of the Prince's presence to something so phantasmal that it seemed lawful to disregard it enabled our friend to turn his full attention to his bride.

And what was this? Was it the sun-rays falling through cunningly painted windows, through all the modern foliated tracery that his Oxford friends so despised compared with the heaven-aspiring purity of the earlier style? Was it the stained windows that threw this deep rose-petal tinge on the soft curves of the Maid's cheek? If he had been excited before — this idea, this vision — imaginary or not — of Tegolin's sudden shyness, and shyness of him, made the pulses of his heart dance like the waves on those Harlech sands.

What a thing in the world — what a miracle such a blush was! That he'd caught this wise, strong, calm Tegolin, this unruffled second-self, whom he had leant upon, whom he had confided in, whom he had trusted for a thousand years, blushing like the little girl he'd once kissed in the unfinished cloisters of Tintern — oh! it made his blood race up and down his veins! — oh! it took that Russian's "insect" and turned it into a soaring eagle! So this was what the wisest woman was, when the primeval shyness in her was caught off guard and laid bare!

And as he stole glance after glance at that flushed profile, framed in its flaming hair — for the press was great and the Prince moved as if his mind were far away from the whole scene — he felt as if it were his prerogative and his privilege, his alone among all men alive, to catch in that rosy stain the aboriginal tremor of the female yielded up to the male, which made the very waves of the salt sea shiver and dazzle and redden to the power of their recurrent dawns!

Yes, he was sure the music he was hearing carried the lilt of that Pendragon Chant into the red glow from the windows and into the red stain on his girl's cheek!

It was fortunate for the whirling exultation in Rhisiart's narrow head that his romance with Catharine had remained on so rarified a level. The only woman whose body had ever lain by his body in the magic bonds of sleep was the woman now by his side. The Maid had known all the while the mystery of this bond, the fusion of their souls on that Midsummer night beneath the sub-rational, sub-passionate under-tides of sleep.

He had been oblivious of this. But it was this, and nothing less than this, that gave to his possession of her now this incredible feeling of recurrence, as if they were only returning, easily and naturally, to a link that had existed between them time out of mind.

Well! it was over now; and when the Maid of Edeyrnion, leaning on her husband's arm, but with her free hand twisted tight in her Friar's corded belt, emerged from the chapel, she noticed a squat, ungainly figure crouching by one of the door-posts.

The Prince, moving still like an abstracted armorial ghost, was on the further side of Mad Huw; the Lollard, with Alice at his side now, just behind them.

Then, in one blinding beat of time two startling things happened, and happened simultaneously. It must be remembered that our friend Rhisiart was the only one in that group of persons who could boast Norman blood. And the Norman in his narrow skull had been roused to its most alert activity by the ritual he'd just been through. His companions were absorbed, preoccupied, remote, lost in their feelings. But never in his whole life had the Maid's young lord been more dangerously alive to all that was around him. The subtlest necessity of his life-illusion — his feeling of power — was satisfied. But the effect of this satisfaction was not to drowse, drug, daze, or benumb; it was to rouse and quicken. Rhisiart's temper was at the extreme antipodes to that of his chief. Success stirred his faculties to their liveliest pitch; whereas Owen's powers mounted higher and higher in precise proportion to the piling up of disaster.

It was the leaping into deadly activity of two separate human forms that now crashed through Tegolin's consciousness. One of these forms was the crouching figure at the chapel-porch; the other was her husband. The Maid found herself actually staggering against Mad Huw, so sudden was the impetus with which Rhisiart freed himself.

Two gleaming blades — a devilish hunting-knife and a Toledo dagger — made quick-cross lightning-flashes; but neither of them seemed able to bury themselves in human flesh. Both of them whirled and gleamed; but all they pierced was the air. This was due to the fact that Gam's leap at the Prince's throat had been so effectually countered by Rhisiart's leap at Gam that the two men were locked so closely in each other's arms that both their weapons were ineffectual. The gleaming flashes of white death whirled about helplessly in the air while their owners spun round; Gam endeavouring to crush his adversary's bones, Rhisiart endeavouring to throw the assassin to the ground.

Chance had decided, or perhaps Rhisiart himself had decided, for never had his wits been clearer, that the weaker of the two had the under-grip; and this fact enabled our friend to fling a quick glance around him and to gasp out in a ringing voice: “Back, on your lives — avoid! avoid! — this — is — my quarrel!”

So nice, so punctilious were the new-fangled customs that had already spread into Owen’s court that even the Lollard drew back; and although little Sibli — heedless of modern etiquette — skipped past the Prince and began dancing like a demented elf round the combatants, no one else dared to intervene.

In contests of this sort, the psychic mood of the opponents has an incalculable influence; and Gam who had counted on one deadly blow — and had seen himself, with or without his knife, forcing his way down the stairs into the base-court with a second wild rush — was reduced to his old stupid, bear-like, bone-crushing hug, his impetus checked, his mind befuddled. Rhisiart, on the other hand, was strung up to a power and spirit far beyond his normal state; and it wasn’t long ere, by the use of an old Hereford trick with legs and feet, he’d tripped up his enemy and had him on the ground, the knife useless, and his own dagger at the man’s throat.

At that point both the Friar and the Lollard intervened; and our friend, his unblooded blade returned to its place in his tunic, rose from the ground, panting and radiant. Something in him kept up a drumming beat, a throbbing refrain “My heart’ll burst! Is it to me, is it to me, this moment’s come?”

The kind-hearted Lollard, as he relinquished the prisoner to the Prince’s guard, experienced the sensation of hot tears behind his eyeballs, as he noted his friend’s happiness. “He deserves it all!” he thought. “He’s never been satisfied till now.”

Walter Brut was right. The two irreconcilable longings that had consumed the young man for the last five years were assuaged at last. He was the master of his own true-love and he had saved his Prince, and as in a few minutes, for news of this kind travels faster than any herald’s voice, he heard the shouts of the army outside, acclaiming their Maid’s marriage to the saviour of their chief, his heart would have burst within him if, as he snatched at Owen’s hand and pressed it to his lips, he hadn’t caught sight of Lady Mortimer making a step towards him, and then staggering, swaying, and falling heavily to the ground.

XIX. TILL THE FRENCH SAIL

THREE DAYS AFTER the departure of the army, and at the very hour of day when Rhisiart had saved his life, Owen was standing at the narrow window in his chamber, looking across the sea. He was trying to recall every detail of the Maid’s farewell to him, as she and her husband, with the Friar and Master Brut in attendance, rode off at the head of those troops.

How instantaneously the news had flown that day of Rhisiart’s deed! It had been the one thing needful to reconcile the men to his own absence and to being led as they were now led! “I ought to have made him a Knight,” he thought. “It was due to him. Why didn’t I do it?” And then in his old inveterate way he set himself to analyse his motives in not knighting his Secretary. “Gam would have struck at my throat,” he thought, “and if he’d struck downwards Iolo’s shirt would have saved me. But if he’d struck upwards nothing could have saved me.”

Pondering on this nice point he couldn’t help recalling the similar insoluble doubt as to whether Hywel Sele was alive or dead when he left him in the tree. “My life,” he thought, “is like crossing the Eel Bridge — every step’s between fatal alternatives!”

He was beginning to follow his usual method of squeezing his head through his window, when the image of Tegolin as she looked when mounted on Seisyll seized upon him with such force that it severed the connection between his movement and its intention: and drawing back his head with an unconscious jerk he scraped his ear against the stone, breaking the skin and drawing blood.

Still unaware of what he did he automatically clapped his hand against his face, and feeling his fingers wet, stared at the blood upon them with a dazed, puzzled surprise. “What queer stuff blood is when you come to think of it!” he muttered. And then, forgetting about his ear, he picked up from the floor a letter he’d just received from France and had flung down in a rage.

It was a letter from the French Chancellor, Arnand de Corbie, and it informed Owen that the said de Corbie was despatching to him from Brittany, under the care of two noble gentlemen of France, “a marvellous great ape,” which he begged the Prince de Galles to accept as a token of his veneration. “I ask for an army and he sends me an ape!” Owen had cried as he read this; and he had become still more angry when the letter went on to say that the writer had begged this “Marvel of Creation” from his young friend, Gilles de Pirogue, whose purpose it had been to subject it to “pains unspeakable” for the prolongation of the lives of “high-born Christian babes.”

Still mechanically putting his fingers to the side of his head and mechanically staring at the blood upon them, Owen listened to the wind blowing in from the sea, and to the sound of the waves breaking on the rocks by the castle-jetty. And with the sea-sounds and the sea-smell he thought of a dead porpoise he’d seen the day before, stranded on the beach, with the seagulls greedily devouring it; and it came into his mind what a gulf there was between sea-creatures and land-creatures, and how the gulf was only bridged when they were both dead and eaten by the birds of the air! “I suppose,” he thought, “if this wondrous great ape, saved from the hands of my Lord Pirogue, were to fall into the sea the very fishes would refuse to eat it!” And for some reason the idea of a creature like an ape struggling for its life in the sea struck his mind with a curious pain.

Amid gills and fins and lidless eyes in jelly-like slime, and undulant slipperinesses gliding through ooze and silt, how painful to think of the struggles of a warm-blooded hairy ape!

And then, without any apparent cause, the solitary blue eye and rosy birth-marks of Crach Ffinnant came into his mind. “He’s my enemy,” he thought. “He’s a danger to me!” And then he thought: “What’s the use of being a Prince if I can’t get rid of an enemy like that?”

Up once more to the side of his head went his fingers; and again he muttered: “What queer stuff blood is!” Then he searched in the folds of his jerkin for a handkerchief, and even thrust his fingers with the same intention up one of his wide-flapping green sleeves; but unable to find what he wanted he rushed to his mirror and proceeded to dab the bleeding scratch with the ends of his carefully-combed hair, which he now wore after the newest of all the fashions, no longer reaching to his shoulders but cut evenly all the way round.

The sight of his familiar visage in the mirror brought him to himself as it always did; and in his habitual manner — and the custom had grown more heavily on him of late — he began a one-sided monologue addressed to this mirrored double.

“Fifty-five years old, old conjurer! And until these last days you’ve not even known what the bards meant when they talked of unreturned love! By Saint Francis, you know what they meant now, and a good deal more than they meant. And yet, what madness! Come down to reality, Master, and think what a woman actually and physically is. Think of her organism! Think of what she’s like — yes, *then* — yes, and *then* — don’t shirk it! and *then* too! But God help you, old fork-beard! It’s no use, and you know it’s no use! We can see her so — and we can see her *so* — and we can drag down her beauty low and low. But — curse her sweet blood! — it’s *not* her beauty. It’s something else. God knows what it is! It’s not our ideal of her. It’s her actual self. Isn’t it, old dotard? Isn’t it her actual self? It’s the turn of her head. It’s the way her lips don’t quite meet! It’s that little triangle of freckles above the corner of her mouth. And there’s a freckle by the side of her nose, too! That’s what happens with skins as white as hers. But we like her to be freckled — aye, old grey-beard? — we wouldn’t mind if she had freckles on her breast!” And as he and his double stared at each other the flicker of a smile passed between them; for they recalled a passionate obsession of theirs during these last days — a pure game of the imagination — in which they undressed her by this very mirror. But this smile of theirs soon died down; and the two masks of consciousness, the subjective one and the objective one, exchanged a grotesque grimace, distorting their features into the likeness of a pair of monstrous gargoyles.

The moment their features had relaxed, however, a quite different and still more complicated phenomenon occupied that portion of the magician’s chamber. For if the power possessed by the body of Owen of seeing itself in a mirror created one “mysterious double,” the power possessed by the mind of Owen of analysing its own thoughts created a second mysterious “double”; so that the Prince of Wales at that moment became a four-fold being, became, in fact, what might be called a *Quaternity.*

But the curious thing was that the existence of this four-fold Owen was of a very transitory duration; for it was not long before the soul of Owen in the absorption of its analysis of the mind of Owen reduced both the image in the mirror and the body before the mirror to complete nothingness. They would have been there had another person entered the room, but to the man’s soul that was analysing the man’s thoughts they were simply not there at all.

Without the least change of position, without any farewell being taken of one another, the body of the Prince of Wales and the reflection of the body of the Prince of Wales vanished away.

Owen's was the only consciousness in that magician's chamber, and to the consciousness of Owen there was now nothing in the mirror and nothing standing before the mirror. There was nothing there at all but what Owen was thinking and what was analysing what Owen was thinking. From a Quaternity the Prince had diminished into a Duality.

And what was the thought in his mind with which his analytical soul was then so busy that it had the power to annihilate both the man before and the man in the mirror? It was the thought of his enemy Gam, chained to the wall in a room next to his own.

So far he'd resisted the temptation to visit him; but such a dark, deadly, quivering sweetness rose up within him when he thought to himself, "He's absolutely in my power," that his soul was constrained to wonder why his giving up Tegolin should have left him vulnerable to so abominable an urge.

And pondering upon this he recalled a curious compendium of Roman history that with the aid of his friend Iolo he used to puzzle out, and he remembered how this chronicle declared that it was only when Tiberius was separated from the woman he loved that he discovered his appalling mania for cruelty.

Struggling against this devil's advocacy on the part of his analytical soul he allowed the red drops from his ear to trickle down disregarded, while to help him against such devilish excuses he deliberately called to mind an odd volume Meredith had shown him the night before which he'd bought from Lemuel Livius for fifty silver groats. The Jew, Meredith said, swore it was worth fifty ducats, but he'd let him have it at that low price because several pages of the script — itself only a portion of the whole work — had been obliterated by the blood of its former owner, on whose murdered body it had been found by the vendor.

Owen couldn’t recall the title of the poem; but it was a fragment in the Tuscan vernacular about Paradise; and it accepted without question the orthodox theory of the revolving spheres. Owen had seen enough of the dark-rolling sea just now, before bloodying his face, to realize that the day was a wet and gloomy one; and as he struggled against his impulse to visit Gam he tried to imagine himself mounting, as this Tuscan pretender declared he’d done, by the help of his sainted mistress, through heavenly circle after heavenly circle, towards the Empyrean.

He was still staring into the mirror; but all he saw there now was a nebulous reproduction of the Tuscan’s spheric heavens as he was whirled upwards! He imagined himself — and didn’t this Florentine, or was he a Sienese, say his mistress did it with her eyes? — drawn up in ecstasy by the very smile — yielding, impassioned, provocative, ravished — of his Maid in armour; and she didn’t stop at either the *Primum Mobile* or the Empyrean! Through both these divine areas Tegolin drew him — her red hair streaming across the firmament! — until they were — *mirabile dictu!* — outside Space altogether. He had always been a bold heretic in his magical astrological and alchemical studies. And he had often questioned this orthodox cosmology, so slavishly and ferociously reproduced in these Italian “triads.” And now it seemed to him as if in pure reaction from this conservative poet’s iron-bound universe he were exercising his old trick of exteriorizing his soul as he’d never dared to do it before. For he was exteriorizing Tegolin’s soul along with his! That was a thing he’d never even tried to do with Catharine. Did Rhisiart note — as he gazed into her eyes — that her soul wasn’t there at all? Yes, it was with Tegolin’s soul that he was striding now along the spheroid back of the whole cosmic orb, feeling the wind of outer space on his face, feeling it dry the wet blood on his ear, feeling it heal his longing.

Faster, faster he must stride, for he felt her begin to stir, to struggle, to resist! Rhisiart was enjoying her on the small round earth, and her soul wanted to be enjoyed too, along with her body. Oh, how Rhisiart was enjoying her. He was made for the act of love, that boy — the lean, hawk-nosed, sinewy young rogue — made for overcoming a girl's resistance!

So there you are, soul of Tegolin — struggling to get back to him, struggling to join your body! Well! he must let her go. Ah! there was his forked beard in the mirror again. But how he had loved that narrow-faced boy! Loved him more than anybody in the world except Catharine. Well! why couldn't he be pleased that the boy he loved had the girl he loved? It was the natural consummation — *youth to youth,* and the old man standing aside! Were they thinking of him at this very moment as they clung? Oh no! no! He didn't want them to think of him while they clung. Not like that — not as hunters think: "What a lovely creature he looked!" as they ate the venison. "Think of your Prince another time, maybe! but not while your kisses are so hot, not while your limbs are—"

His reverie was interrupted by the irritation of a violent tickling. Curse these whoreson fleas! If he'd caught one he'd caught a dozen since Hopkin ap Thomas had been so much in this room! There! He'd got that one anyway. How should he kill it? It was fairly caught. Safe between his finger and thumb. What a hard husk! It was in his power — just as Gam was in his power. What was it about lively independent things — fleas, murderers, or girls — being absolutely in your power, that had such a dark, delicious shiver in it?

Yes, he must visit Gam. A man oughtn't to be left cramped up like that so long. He must unlock the chain and let him stretch his legs. He hadn't had much water either. He must take him a drop of something. That cats' basin would do. Milk for cats, and milk for murderers! "All right my good flea, it's no use struggling: I've got you quite firmly! The question is, are you going to live or are you going to die? You don't know; and I don't know either; though I am your Fate, your Destiny, and your God. What's that you're saying, flea? That you want to live, because you have a lively and a skipping love? I had a love once myself — and I had a tall horse; but my horse is gone, flea, with my love on his back — and where is my servant Rhisiart? Aye? What's that? Talk a little louder, flea. You've got a faint voice for one who comes from the beard of Hopkin. Oh that's it, is it? Owen's between God's finger and thumb, as you're between Owen's? Well! And that's true too."

He moved to the door and opened it with his left hand. Glew the Gryd, grown heavy with years, had been permitted the privilege of a horse-block at Owen's door; and now, roused we might imagine by the indignant spirit of young Madoc, with his decapitated head hanging from its neck by a shred of ghostly skin, the old man blinked in bewildered astonishment to see his master flick something from his fingers into the air, while he uttered the enigmatic words: "May God do the same with me, then!"

"Herald Elphin has been here with news of battle, my Prince."

"Why didn't you let him in?"

"I knocked, but you didn't answer, my Prince."

'What did you say to him?"

"I told him you were engaged with the spirits."

"What else did you tell him?"

"I told him you might be back about noon."

"Back from where?"

"From riding with the spirits on the wings of the wind."

"Gryd—"

"Yes, Master Owen; yes, my Prince?"

"What do you think I am?"

The old man gave him a long, grave, drowsy, sly stare, screwing up his eyes as he did so. "I think you're the son of Griffith Fychan of Glyndyfrdwy, in the vill of Carrog, in the *cantref* of Edeyrnion."

"What about the spirits then?"

"The House of Powys Fadog has always been—"

"Speak up, old friend! Always been what?"

"Different from the House of Powys Mathrafal!"

"A lame conclusion, Gryd, and a foolish one; for as all the world knows, the belt and the sword of Eliseg — *Dewi Sant!* but what are you making me say? Off to the guard, my old friend, and tell them to send me Herald Elphin at once."

He closed his door and waited in the passage while the old man, leaving his axe behind him in his haste, hobbled off down the corridor.

"The Maid's victory!" he thought. "That's what it must be. But can they have reached the Usk in less than four days march?"

It was soon evident — when the two figures appeared — that the old one was actually dragging the young one. The Herald of Victory seemed strangely reluctant to speak his news.

"Well, Elphin lad — out with it! A silver groat if the tidings are good!"

"A great battle on the river Monnow, my Prince. Lord Talbot, William Newport, and John Grendor have utterly destroyed our army from Morgannwg, and have retaken with great slaughter the town and *cantref* of Grosmont."

"On whose authority comes this news?"

“My Prince, the wounded are pouring into Ardudwy, and some have just reached Harlech.”

“Thank you, Elphin. That’ll do. Will you tell Master Broch to come to me at once.”

As soon as Elphin had scampered away, which he did with a speed rather befitting a page than a tabard-bearer, the Prince turned to the old man. “When Broch comes,” he said, “let him into my chamber.”

He pushed open the door. “Get me that basin of milk, Gryd.”

“The cats’ basin, my Prince?”

Owen nodded.

“For *him?* Is he to live, then?”

But the Prince didn’t answer. Carrying the basin carefully so as not to spill a drop, he walked slowly down the passage, and entered the room where his enemy was chained to the wall. No sooner did Gam see the milk than he scrambled along the ground to the full length of his chain. He seemed to see nothing but the milk; and when Owen held the basin to his mouth he choked and spluttered as he gulped it down, spilling it over his hairy chest and making inarticulate animal noises.

“Gently, gently, man!” murmured Owen, moving back with the basin. But Gam, never a very human figure, continued to strain towards the milk with a countenance so distorted that it made the Prince think of the face of their Harlech Sin-Eater, whom it was the custom to keep only just alive until the bosom of some dead one served him as a table.

Owen let him scrabble for a second or two, not from cruelty, for that mood had passed, but in fascinated wonder. Then he approached him again and allowed him to empty the basin.

This time, the trusted servant of the House of Lancaster did glance up as he gulped and gurgled. “What arms he’s got!” thought the Prince. “Except

Broch's I've never seen such muscles!"

When the milk was gone, the man sat on his haunches and stared at his feeder. "You want to live then," murmured Glyn Dŵr in an abstracted tone, more to himself than to the other. "Have you got a love like Hopkin's flea, or are you a married man with a family, like King Harry of England?"

And then he became aware that Gam was prostrating himself before him and tapping the ground with his head.

"What are you doing, man?" he muttered in a low voice. "Have you forgotten how I killed Hywel Sele?"

Gam raised his head. "It's just because of that!" He spoke in a husky grumbling tone, but without any particular emotion. His animal spirits had already begun to feel the good of the milk; and as if accustomed to address superior beings from a position like that of a leashed dog, he proceeded to shuttle to the wall so as to have something against which to lean his back.

Owen mechanically stepped up to him and arranged his chain to his comfort, touching the padlock as he did so as if to test its fastening. Then — this time quite consciously — he slipped his fingers into the pouch of his belt to make sure he had the key. Assured of this fact, he dragged a bench from the hearth and sat down over against his captive, whose red arms, red chest, and touselled red head showed dark in the smoky light.

"What do you mean, 'Just because of that'?"

"I tried to kill you for it, but I couldn't. Your spirits were too strong. Now I know I never shall kill you. I serve the strongest. I served King Hal till your spirits drove him across the Severn. I served Hywel Sele till your spirits put him in the tree. I would have done for you, Prince, for I never strike twice; but your spirits saved you. And now it's you — not the King — not the ghost of Sele — who're my God." He was silent, stretching out his sturdy, leather-bound legs with a groan of physical relief, while the milk he'd gulped down made contented noises in his stomach.

Owen surveyed him thoughtfully.

"What do you think I'm going to do to you?" he asked.

The little red man shrugged his shoulders and made no reply. He seemed to feel that between a man and a man's new God silence was the indicated attitude.

"It's a curious feeling, Gam," Owen remarked, "to know you have an absolute power over another living person."

The ex-servant of King Henry settled himself still more comfortably; and only the faintest puckering of his heavy forehead indicated that he was giving this soliloquy of omnipotence any serious consideration.

"My Lord of Nannau," he brought out suddenly, "used to talk to me like a scholar — just as you do, Prince."

Owen sighed. It was clear that what might be called the metaphysical aspect of his relation to his prisoner was destined to remain a one-sided problem. He took a new line therefore.

"What would Hal Bolingbroke have done," he enquired, "if you'd tried to put your knife into him?"

David Gam's countenance brightened. This was talk he could understand.

"He'd have had fresh bread and fresh water brought to me every day, he replied, "and left just out of my reach."

Owen rose from his bench and regarded the man pensively for some moments. Satisfied by this scrutiny he drew forth the key from inside his jerkin and unlocked the prisoner's iron collar. Both collar and chain fell down with a loud metallic clang on the stone floor, and Gam after a second's pause made a rapturous but clumsy attempt to leap up into the air.

Then he stood before the Prince with his arms folded; but he evidently had something in his mind to say which he found too difficult. Twice he began; and for the first second or two Owen thought the joy of life had turned his head.

But with the third attempt he delivered himself of his trouble. It appeared he had a vague fear that Owen's "spirits," in whose power he considered himself inescapably to be, might begin tormenting him for their private satisfaction, unknown to their master.

"No fear of that, Gam; no fear of that. I swear to you" — and the Prince crossed himself— "on the bones of my mother, that any spirit who dared to disobey me would have to come himself — and none other — and tell me what he'd done."

"And then you'd make him suffer for it, eh?" And the ex-assassin gave himself up to an agreeable vision of this rebellious spirit "suffering for it".

But, attended by his new "familiar," the Prince now returned to his own apartment where he found his friend Broch awaiting him. Old Glew the Gryd certainly gave this red-haired "slave of the lamp" no very sympathetic stare; but he obeyed humbly enough when Owen told him to take the man to the soldiers of the guard and explain that they were to treat him well and give him arms, as a loyal adherent of the national cause.

The following day the truth of the Grosmont disaster was most lamentably confirmed; and not only so, but an unpleasant incident occurred in connection with it, for when the Prince encountered a group of these new refugees in the castle-yard, instead of greeting him with the enthusiasm usually shown by the commonalty to their leader, these unhappy fugitives actually burst into hostile and derisive murmurs, expressing the view that their new ruler from the north lacked the traditional valour and wisdom of their ancestral Arglwydd Rhys.

On the second day after the arrival of these indignant fugitives the castle was thrown into an uproar of excitement by the appearance of a distinguished-looking party of Englishmen bearing a white flag. This party turned out to include not only Denis Burnell from Dinas Bran, bearing Owen's tribute from Salop, but no less a personage than the famous Lollard, Sir John Oldcastle, who, unknown to his master the King, had taken advantage of Denis' business to come on a private mission of his own, which, when plainly put, amounted to little more than pure philosophical curiosity.

Oldcastle had, it is true, been in the field against the Welsh for the last five years, but he had the excuse of his ancient friendship with Owen as a law-student at the Inns of Court, not to speak of a learned correspondence that had passed between him and Master Brut during the latter's trial for heresy before the Bishop of Hereford.

No news of any kind had of late reached Harlech from the Usk. Whether the Abbot of Caerleon was still holding his own with Tudor's and Griffith's help and whether the new army under the Maid of Edeyrnion and Clerk Rhisiart had reached the scene of action was still completely obscure. No word had come from Henry Don either, or from Rhys Ddu; and from what could be gathered from the sullen fugitives from Grosmont it appeared that the defeated Morgannwg host had lacked any competent leadership save that of local free-holders of small experience in arms.

It was characteristic of Owen that the mere reverberation of so many accumulated shocks, and the mere oppression of so much ominous silence, increased rather than diminished his power of mental detachment. Where Henry of England would have been acutely conscious not only of the balance, to an inch, of the swing of the historic pendulum, but of the attitude towards him of his own court and parliament and people, Owen

Glyn Dŵr seemed completely indifferent even to what the Arglwyddes and Catharine thought of him and of the failure of his statecraft.

He received the murmurs of the fugitives from the Monnow with absolute equanimity. He disregarded with an amused smile the protests of both his son-in-law and his brother-in-law over this crazy "parole" allowed to the assassin Gam.

To crown it all he took no energetic measures, indeed he took no measures at all, to stop a movement of serious insubordination worked up by Crach Ffinnant. This ill-timed conspiracy came very near to actual insurrection. Jealousy of the spiritual leadership of the Maid was at the bottom of it. The Maid had always been an enemy of Derfel; nor was Derfel, to judge by the traditions concerning his cult, likely to be propitiated by the Maid.

At any rate Crach Ffinnant began to suggest both to the people of Ardudwy and to the soldiers of the castle that since Owen's handling of the Welsh cause had proved so ineffective it might be a good thing to take the leadership out of his hands and offer it to the Tudors of Môn, especially since the young man, her cousin, to whom Efa ferch Tudor was now affianced, had shown himself, though not a very successful warrior, at least an extremely crafty diplomat.

From this it may be seen that the reckless Scab had his eyes — or his eye, to speak more exactly — still fixed upon this sprightly young lady, once more sojourning among them, who alone among all damsels had actually wished to be Derfel's bride.

Conspiracies of this sort, the Scab told himself, though rising from small beginnings, could grow into world-events if directed by prophetic intuition; and he had found support for his idea that the Druidic "Mona" rather than the Bardic Edeyrnion was the true soil of Welsh victory in one of the mystic poems of the great Hopkin himself, a *cywydd* that definitely predicted that from Môn would come the red dragon who was destined to unite all Britain.

Everybody but Broch-o’-Meifod had been daily warning the Prince, since the Maid’s departure, of this dangerous activity of the Scab’s; but all the Prince did, as far as his little court could detect, was to devote more time himself to this attractive young woman whose betrothed was the heir of the oldest branch of the House of Tudor.

On the very day of the arrival of Denis and Sir John the besotted Scab had actually persuaded the little Tudor lady, herself of their purest blood and affianced to their craftiest chief, to accompany him to Derfel’s shrine, which was situated at Llandderfel in Meirion, a long day’s ride from Harlech.

The Arglwyddes protested in vain against this mad excursion; but the Prince was obdurate. “If the girl wants to go,” he declared, “let her go. We were responsible for her as a child. She’s a grown woman now. Her betrothed knew what she was doing when she came to us. He sent us no word. He let her follow her whim. Who are we to interfere?”

But worse — from the Arglwyddes’s point of view — was to follow. For when at early dawn, for the road was long and mountainous, the little cortege set out, it was discovered that the Prince had deputed none other than Gam — his late desperate assailant — to be of the party.

It is true that both Lawnslot and Gwalchmai, together with Herald Elphin and the page Iago, made part of Efa’s escort, and there was a small troop of soldiers besides; but if it had been anyone but this incorrigible young Tudor the Arglwyddes would have implored Sir Edmund to accompany them.

Before they set out, however, the thing had been rumoured so far and wide that the expedition took on the shape of a formal pilgrimage from Owen’s court to Llandderfel, for the purpose of consulting the oracle.

The late Abbot of Valle Crucis might talk of gods and demons; but as Father Pascentius said, when the Arglwyddes appeared to him, "No young Lord could object, even in our degenerate days, to his betrothed going on a pilgrimage." If rumour had been active throughout Ardudwy and Arwystli as to the organization of this journey, it spoke with ten times more emphasis and with ten times more lurid unction when the expedition ended as it did.

The most popular version of the tale was that the great statue of Derfel itself had descended from the Horse and attempted to ravish Efa ferch Tudor; while Crach Ffinnant wrestling with the lascivious idol had been miraculously slain.

Another version declared that no sooner had Derfel's Horse caught sight of David Gam than he neighed like a thousand stallions and would have torn him limb from limb, and that, in the struggle between them, the Scab being concealed *within* the Horse, received Gam's dagger in his heart!

Herald Elphin was the only member of the party who actually saw what happened, and he saw it through so small a chink that the spectacle must have been presented to him in broken segments.

It wasn't till the ride back to Harlech through the cloudy spring night that Herald Elphin had a chance of unburdening his mind of what weighed upon it; and he couldn't have done this if it hadn't been that young Iago from Dinas Bran was his companion. Born in the racial confusions of the border, trained by his ambitious friend Rawlff to listen with discretion and keep his thoughts to himself, constantly watching the artful ways of old Adda, that dove-like pacifist with the guile of the serpent, not Father Pascentius himself — and the Father had never yet been able to coax or bully one single genuine confession from this youthful courtier — was a better confidant than Iago for dangerous secrets.

In his relations with his friend, though he was five years the elder, Elphin was like an excitable girl compared with this thick-skinned youth. Poor Elphin! he was more than excited that night. It was a crisis in his life. He underwent — and he realized it in a measure, too — a complete psychological transformation.

All the castle — as these agitating days came and went — began to recognize the change; but the person who got the greatest benefit from it was Elphin himself, for his shocking vision, even through so small a chink, into the underflow of life, gave him what might be called the courage of his own timidity.

None but a born listener like the young Iago would have let him ramble on as he did, while they followed the wind-blown torches. Their track led them along a wild mountainous path, with the waters, first of Lake Tegid and then of the broad sea-estuary, lying dim and ghostly beneath them.

The cortege had to move very slowly; and, as it was, the soldiers who carried the corpse of the Scab were hard put to keep pace with the horses of the lady's escort, near whose person, acting as guide when they approached the estuary, strode the obedient servant of Owen's "spirits."

Elphin's listener soon discovered that there was to be no attempt by the relater of the weird tale that fell upon his ears, as the bare slopes and rocky ridges of Cadair Idris towered above them, to assume the heraldic tone of the professional announcer of dramatic events.

Elphin spoke simply and directly; concealing nothing of the less heroic moments of his behaviour or of his less honourable emotions. He explained that the curious Gothic *Betws,* or Oratory, built near the Llandderfel parish-church, outside which everybody but Efa ferch Tudor and Crach Ffinnant were compelled to wait, was the prehistoric headquarters of the worship of Saint Derfel.

“Derfel Gadarn fought by Arthur’s side at the Battle of Camlan,” Elphin kept repeating. Indeed the excitable young man, in his unending monologue, used this majestic sentence about “the Battle of Camlan” very much as the compilers of the Psalter used the syllables “Selah”, with the effect of a liturgical echo or muted antiphony after the Psalmist’s more passionate notes.

For all his calculated detachment in human affairs, the vigilant Iago wasn’t devoid of a certain lonely and quite special response to the subhuman elements in Nature; and it would have been an added shock to poor Elphin in his emotional confession had he realized the cold-blooded abstraction with which his hearer observed the majestical panorama of earth and sea. It was only at intervals, as they followed the estuary among the mountains, that with the lifting of the mist by some gust of south-west wind the unruffled stars of Idris, the Giant-Astronomer, rose into view above his rocky throne. But, when this did occur, the vision of that winding stretch of tidal water, as the dark mountain and white stars looked down upon it, appealed to something in him that he’d never revealed to anyone, and was convinced in his own mind that he never would reveal to anyone!

“Did they know Master Gam had entered the *Betws,* behind them?” enquired Iago, when the mountain mists once more swept over that phantom arm of the salt sea.

“I told you,” replied Elphin reproachfully. “Didn’t you hear what I said? I told you that I was sure Efa ferch Tudor knew that Master Gam was there! I could see her eyes shine when he first came in. He must have hidden behind a pillar. The place was full of pillars, like the dining-hall at Snowdon; only these were stone ones. He must have opened the door so quietly that the Scab didn’t hear.”

"No woman that I've ever known," threw in his cynical hearer, as if he were hoary with such experiences, "could see a man like Gam hide behind a pillar and not scream out."

"Luned wouldn't have screamed out."

"She certainly would," said the other. "Indeed she did."

"When?"

"Never mind when."

"You don't know anything about Luned!"

But Iago stared at the starlit water, as the wind once more swept the mist aside, and held his peace. He recalled without any sense of shame, but also without any particular feeling of pleasure, the occasion when he had completed the virile task from which his enamoured friend had shrunk.

But Elphin went on. The lad was shaking with so much excitement that neither the flickering torches nor the swaying corpse, no! nor even the horses and their riders, had any reality for him. He craved one thing only — to tell, to tell! He felt as if — until he'd told — something would burst in his heart and drown his life in blood.

"The *Betws* wasn't dark. It was only that I couldn't see anything but what was just in front of me. It was the Leper's window I think. The Scab couldn't take his eye off the lady. She was smiling at him. She was playing the whore with him."

The obscuring of the estuary had coincided at that moment with the disappearance, behind the next turn of the path, of the torches and their burden. There — the riders were out of sight, too! The lads were alone on the mountain-side.

Elphin laid his hand on his companion's wrist. "It's the eyes," he whispered hoarsely. "I can't get the eyes out of my mind."

"Whose eyes?"

"She was playing the whore with him. She was making him mad."

"Whose eyes?"

"I couldn't see the Saint's face — only his knees and his hands. He's on his Horse, you know. She was making him mad, I tell you! He was whispering to her — I couldn't hear — but he was wanting her to give herself up, to offer herself up."

"To him! And she a Tudor from Môn, and he—"

"No, no! It wasn't like that! Oh, can't I make you see how it was? Won't you see how it was, Iago? It's the eyes I can't get out of my head!"

"He's only got one."

"I'm not talking of him! I tell you she was making him mad. But it wasn't her. *She* didn't do it. And though I saw him strike with his knife, it wasn't Gam who killed him."

"What in heaven's name are you talking about, Elphin? Hurry up and tell me! We can't stand here all night." As he spoke, Iago turned his head to look at the estuary beneath them. The wind was faintly moaning just then through the branches of a Scotch fir above their heads; and through his sturdy frame Iago felt a surge of a curious exultation. "It's the sea-tide," he thought, as he gazed at the grey waters; and for some reason the idea of this alien salt stream forcing its way so far inland gave him extraordinary pleasure.

"Tell me quick, Elphin," he repeated. "We can't wait here forever. Did she lie down for him? Is it *her* eyes you're talking about — and she a Tudor of Môn and he—"

Elphin tightened his grasp upon the younger lad's wrist and tried to speak calmly. "It's not of her I'm talking, Iago, nor of the Scab. And I'm not speaking of the Saint either; for I could only see his knees and his hands and that great painted rod, like an axle-tree, which he carries. I'm talking," and here Elphin's voice grew so low that his friend had to strain his ear, "about Derfel's Horse. Have you ever seen those fish they bring up from the Bottomless Hole, *pwll diwaelod,* a mile out beyond Madoc's Haven — what *eyes* they have?

"They're the eyes of *y fagddu* and *yr abred*! They're the eyes of the abyss! And they were looking at him, at the Scab, as she led him on, as she played the whore upon him. *Her* eyes drew him, mocked him, maddened him, but the eyes of Derfel's Horse swallowed him up. They were dead eyes. Yes, they were the eyes of the Devourer of the Dead. They were the eyes, Iago, of the Sea-Horse of Annwn!"

"Let me tell you something, Elphin," and the youthful seducer of Luned deliberately extracted from his pouch a sweet-meat of a particular kind the girl was wont to make for both of them, and breaking it in his fingers, offered the half to his bosom-friend. "You're as much of a fool as our noble Prince! Why don't you imitate Clerk Rhisiart? There is a man! The accepted lover, one after the other, of the two most lovely women in the world. And all got by his brain. Do you understand, Elphin, you trembling fool? Got by his brain! Nobody who lives could call Clerk Rhisiart handsome. He can't ride anything but that old piebald. He can't hold a lance, or handle anything but his pen; and yet there he is, going off with the Maid of Edeyrnion — snatching her from the arms of Owen! It's brains we want in this world, my dear, not chatter about wooden-horses with the eyes of—"

But at this point the incalculable wind rose with a rush and howl and revealed to the eyes of this sagacious youth the one thing that had the power of reducing *his* brains to complete non-existence — the sight of his nature-estuary in clear starlight. It was indeed the vision of Elphin dragging Iago from his obsessed contemplation of this scene that met the suspicious eyes of Gwalchmai when in obedience to Master Gam he came to find out why the lads were lingering.

But the same south-west wind that gave Iago that fortunate moment soon covered everything with such a cloud that it was only the dullest simulacrum of a red glare that indicated where the torches were moving; while the horses of Efa and Gam were completely obscured.

And Elphin took advantage of this cloud, as they went on, to make it clear to Iago how the girl from Môn played upon the lechery of the luckless Scab till it was aroused to a point so desperate that, shameless coward as he was, he was prepared to risk everything to satisfy it.

It was only when his friend arrived, in the course of his feverish narrative, to the moment when the one-eyed man had actually got her down and was fumbling at her garments that the impervious Iago began to manifest any interest.

“Was she frightened? Did she struggle?” he asked.

“I’ve just been telling you,” complained Elphin crossly, “that to the very end she kept leading him on. I couldn’t see Master Gam till the last, but I think he had his knife in his hand and had left the pillar. I think she saw him all the while and knew what he was going to do! Do you know, Iago, I believe it had all been arranged by the Prince beforehand! Well — perhaps not all — for I don’t think the Prince could have believed any girl in the world would let a man like that go as far as she let him go before she made the sign. But what I don’t think any of them counted on was Derfel’s Horse. Of course I never saw the Saint’s face, for I could only see his hands and his knees and his rod of—”

“If you go through that business again,” interrupted his friend, “and say one more word about Derfel’s rod being like an axle-tree I’ll beat you like a dog!”

Elphin wondered what Luned would have thought had she heard this violent language uttered by a mere page-boy to the Castle Herald; he was himself far too girlish to take it amiss. He took it as a woman might take the threat of a blow from a rough but easily-managed mate. It endeared Iago to him, and indeed was one of the strongest links in the bond between them, that the latter should be able to threaten in that particular tone to "beat him like a dog."

The darkness at this point became so dense that they had to look to their feet as they went along; and the fact that the torches in front of them had come to resemble a number of blurred red bruises on the flesh of a troop of dusky tumblers indicated that the soldiers who were carrying Crach Ffinnant's corpse had had to lessen their pace and to change their position about their burden.

Unable to enjoy his favourite sight of the grey arm of the salt sea thrust between the precipices of the mountains, Iago began, one of his cheeks still bulging with Luned's sweet-meat, to press his friend as to how he was so certain that when her assailant's body was pulled away Efa ferch Tudor was still a maid.

"I think," replied the excited Herald, whose coveted rank was only indicated to-day by the now invisible black lions on his leather surcote, "I think that she had meant to make the sign sooner; but you must know, Iago" — and he addressed his companion in the superior tone of Luned's lover explaining matters to their boyish confidant— "that there comes a moment when to yield is such sweet abandonment to them that they can't—"

"I'm asking you whether—"

"If you interrupt any more, Iago, I'll never tell you another word!"

"One of the soldiers told me," threw in his companion, "that he heard Derfel's Horse neigh!"

“I’m the only person in this company, Iago, who saw and heard everything. She never made the sign, but Gam leapt on him; and I heard him go ‘ugh! ugh!’ — just like that — first when he struck him, and then when he flung his weight on the knife and thrust it in.”

“Did his blood—”

“Don’t interrupt me! What does it matter about his blood? She laughed as she got up.”

The two lads were now so put to it by the difficulty of keeping the torches in sight, as their path wound its way down to the sea’s edge, that they were forced to keep silence. And once on the level coast, with the lights from the fisher-huts shining on the shore-road their mood changed and they began to discuss the war.

“He’ll go when he’s got his storm-spirits ready, Iago. I know what he’s doing. No one in the castle but Master Broch and me knows what he’s doing. You can’t hurry Beings as awful as the ones he’s working with now. But you’ll see! When he’s ready, he’ll go, and his spirits with him. And — you’ll see! — there won’t be an Englishman left in Wales. Why do you whistle like that, Iago?”

“Because you’re such a fool, Elphin. He’s waiting for the French — they’re the ‘spirits’ he’s waiting for; and if they don’t come soon—”

“Well? Go on! What if they don’t come? Wales doesn’t depend on a scurvy rabble of cross-bowmen from Normandy and Brittany and Anjou.”

“You don’t think so?”

“‘No, I don’t think so! I think if the country goes on crowding to his standard he’ll have the biggest force in arms in all Europe, and the bravest too! Wait half a year longer, and you’ll see. We shall be marching over London Bridge before—”

Iago stopped whistling. “Elphin, listen. Do you know what Meredith ab Owen said to Mistress Lu the other night?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care! Meredith ab Owen can’t walk half across the court-yard without having to lean against the wall!”

“What’s that got to do with it? And only last night the dwarf told me that Rhys Gethin rose up in bed and said he saw the whole castle in flames and the Arglwyddes and Lady Mortimer carried away on mules.”

“Why on mules? How silly you are, Iago! If the English did take the castle they couldn’t burn it. Fire can’t burn stone. And why on mules? Rhys Gethin would do better to say his prayers and die in peace. Only a man in a fever could imagine the Arglwyddes on a mule!”

Iago sighed. “Now Clerk Rhisiart’s gone to battle,” he thought, “there’s not a soul in Harlech who uses his brains. I am the only one. Oh, Clerk Rhisiart, Clerk Rhisiart, what a great man you are! You’re our only real statesman. The Prince will come to destruction without you. So will we all. But if I escape I’ll imitate you, Clerk Rhisiart, in everything! I’ll rise slowly and steadily, by brains and by women. Yes, like Clerk Rhisiart, I’ll be the secret lover of several women at the same time and I’ll take for my Master the ruler who has the most brains and for my—”

His enlightened and logical train of thought was interrupted — as it had been so often that evening — by the darkness clearing from the surface of the estuary. The estuary’s mouth was now near; and a stone promontory could be seen with a lantern in its watch-tower, a lantern whose light flickered up and down on the waves along with a small boat, in whose stern a couple of fishermen slept, covered with sheepskin blankets. Iago’s whole being was promptly transported with a rush of ecstasy. Something in his blood and in the pit of his stomach responded blindly to this sight, and then and there it made a furtive league with the sea, promising itself to outwit every rational decision of his brain.

The pit of his stomach uttered its own language in his ears, using blunt and illogical predictions. “You’ll imitate no Rhisiart at all!” it said. “What you’ll do is to imitate Prince Madoc, and sail the four seas! That’s where Welshmen can get their liberty, whatever Welsh heads moulder on London Bridge! To sea, to sea, Iago ap Cynan!”

The morning that followed the death of Crach Ffinnant proved to be the darkest and most disastrous morning the Prince had ever known. Derfel’s prophet lay in the already crowded death-room of the castle when Owen went to say a prayer for his soul. Here the corpse must remain till the Sin-Eater had been well nourished from a capacious alms dish on its breast. Then and then only it would be removed to the chapel. There was no Father Rheinalt to keep Mistress Lowri — whose passion for mortality was well-known in the castle — from visiting this temporary mausoleum; but for some reason best known to her own secretive and capricious Tudor heart Efa herself — the direct cause of the man’s death — did public penance by remaining on her knees on the stone for more hours than any damsel of Owen’s court had ever known a woman kneel, whether old or young.

She was there — a huddled young figure — when the Prince appeared; and she didn’t move when he went up to the body; but it was at the moment when he lifted the cloth placed over the prophet’s face, and in his imagination was beholding one of the eyelids raised, and that predatory blue orb fixing him with a ribald stare, that Owen first heard the uproar outside the walls.

He replaced the face-cloth, passed the girl without a word, and hurried to a high window in the passage, the very window out of which his Secretary had helped little Lu to look. Here for the flickering of a second it was his destiny to know what Mad Huw's rejected monarch must so often have experienced.

Half the population of the township seemed to be gathered on the beach, and they were shouting for him, but shouting for him not with love or devotion, but with anger and contempt. The sea was calm and the tide far out; but it was a gloomy morning and the angry shouts of the mob took the place of the receding waters. Their clamour rose in waves against the grey walls; and the wild foam of their wrath beat against the buttresses and scaled the ramparts like the whirling wings of a host of screaming cormorants.

The Prince stood for one second watching and listening, while down the fibres of his thighs and legs ran an unaccustomed shiver, as if his warm woollen hose had suddenly been transformed into the scales of an ice-cold fish. But almost instantaneously his powerful will went through its mechanical gesture of recovery, a gesture which to his unconscionable self-analysis resembled the lifting of an interior dam.

"Well," he said to himself, "these are the experiences of all Princes! Gruffydd ap Cynan had to face worse things than this." Hurrying down the stairs he overtook Elphin and Iago, and caught the drift of their talk. Elphin was murmuring something about "the spirits," while Iago was regretting the absence of Rhisiart.

Arrived in the court-yard he found the Arglwyddes and John Hanmer already there. A crowd of soldiers about them were talking loudly and not very respectfully; and as they talked they perfunctorily armed themselves. Disregarding his wife and brother-in-law, he pushed his way to the postern that opened upon the sea-shore.

Here he found Meredith, unarmed and leaning on his stick; while at his side old Glew the Gryd was struggling with a great rusty bar that for years had been out of use, while the gate itself kept shivering from top to bottom with the blows it was receiving from outside.

Meredith and the Prince exchanged a quick look. Then they both smiled. "You'll risk it, I suppose, sir, and talk to them?"

"They won't rush us, my boy, will they?"

"It won't *be you,* sir, if they do!" and he turned to the old Porter. "Put down that iron thing, Glew, and open the gate. The Prince will talk to his subjects!"

The old man looked at his master in troubled dismay; but at Owen's nod he slowly removed what bolts there were and dragged the gate open. So suddenly was this done that the leaders of the mob who were striking at the door stumbled headlong into the court, while the billets of wood they carried fell heavily at the Prince's feet.

At the sight of Owen, towering there in that narrow entrance, their followers backed away, while they themselves, seeing the armed guards and the Arglwyddes in front of them, shrank in embarrassed discomfiture against the interior wall.

The foremost ranks of the crowd, however, though endeavouring to retreat, were pushed forward by those behind; while the howls from the rear rose unappeased and incessant. "Give us the murderer of our prophet! Saint Derfel for the Scab! Give us the murdering traitor!"

Owen raised his right hand. "Men of Harlech, men of Ardudwy—"

"Will he do it, will he, *will* he?" thought Meredith, propping himself against the open postern and trying to make out the nature and character of the rebels, and what local types they represented.

But even before the son had come to the conclusion that the leaders of the mob were a group of obstinate Derfelites who had been reluctant to follow the army of the Maid, fanatics such as Saint Jude calls "clouds without water," the Prince had hypnotized them into sullen, helpless, paralysed passivity. This, however, wasn't enough for him, and using the full force of his powerful voice and magnetic charm, he proceeded by a mixture of cajoling and pleading and threatening to change their mood into one so different, that as Meredith watched them they seemed to him like a great shoal of heaving porpoises, fascinated and allured by some majestic figure-head upon a vessel sailing close to the wind!

This day of evil for Owen had, however, only just begun; for no sooner was the riot about the dead prophet quelled than far worse and far more devastating troubles began. The insurrection of the Scab's mourners had come from the sea-entrance to the castle; but now there burst in from the main entrance, straight into the base-court, encountering the Prince as he was making his way to the Arglwyddes' side where Sir Edmund and Catharine already stood, a ghastly and pitiful fugitive.

Catharine was the first to see this figure, and big with child as she was she staggered into its arms. The man she thus greeted looked like some victim newly risen from the scaffold; for his clothes were sticky with blood and there were wisps of straw and of dead bracken clinging to him, while the hairs of his beard, which were of a week's growth, had turned white with what he'd been through.

Owen at first glance didn't recognize him at all, nor apparently did Sir Edmund; and it was left to the dwarf to cry out in her piercing voice. "It's the Father! It's the Father!" Nor did the little woman content herself with this; for no sooner had she realized the condition of the Maid's parent than she began to emit the most heart-rending sounds that the Prince had ever heard. To *his* ears they resembled the screams of a hare when the dogs are upon her; though Father Pascentius, who was now entering the court along with the two Englishmen, at once began looking about for Broch-o'-

Meifod’s dog, so much did these sub-human shrieks recall to him the *méthode scientifique* of Gilles de Pirogue.

Certainly it was like an animal and unlike a person, the power the dwarf possessed of emitting these sounds without falling into blind hysterics. But though the syllables with which she interspersed her cries consisted of nothing but the name “Rhisiart”, repeated over and over, the repetition of this name did humanize to some extent these painful howls.

It was no doubt the dwarf’s repetition of the name “Rhisiart,” conveying, as it did, to everybody present the notion that the man was dead, that made the Prince think it was one of her fainting-fits that left Lady Mortimer so long in the fugitive’s arms.

This, however, was by no means the case. If she wasn’t like her father, in his power of exteriorizing his soul, she was like him in being able to call up from some secret reservoir in her nature a spiritual force that seemed almost non-human.

And it was Catharine who now, disregarding both her parents exactly as the Prince was disregarding her mother, began questioning Father Rheinalt before them all. It was the monk who leaned against her, not she against him; and it was she, for his words were faint, who repeated them in a clear voice for the benefit of all present.

Herald Elphin was irresistibly reminded of the occasion when as a pageboy at Glyndyfrdwy he heard this same daughter of Owen rescue the last words of Iolo Goch from vanishing uninterpreted into the void. She held her head high while the exhausted monk clung to her arm, and she uttered the fatal words clearly.

“Our cause has had a terrible defeat. Codnor met our army at Pwll Melyn and drove it through the Usk into the forest of Monkswood. My — my lord Griffith — is — is a prisoner and—” But there rose a terrible cry from the

Arglwyddes, a cry rather of wrath than of grief; wrath taking grief by the hair and whirling her among the rocks and nailing her to the rocks! Never from that time on, though she softened to him again more than once, did the Arglwyddes from the very bottom of her heart forgive the sacrifice of her eldest son. Her maidens crowded round her, but she thrust them back. “What else, Catharine? What else can there be, Catharine?” they heard her moan; and everyone near them saw the terrible look she gave Owen, though if she said anything to him it was lost in the ring of her daughter’s voice.

“My Lord Tudor ap Griffith was slain in the battle. The Abbot of Caerleon was slain in the battle. But he says further” — here the girl had to make an heroic effort not to break down— “he says further that his daughter, Tegolin ferch Rheinalt, together with her husband, Rhisiart ab Owen, have been — have been taken prisoners.”

While Lady Mortimer was playing her part as the messenger of death and ruin and captivity, Father Pascentius, leaving Oldcastle and Denis to the care of Elphin, in whose heraldic lions they pretended a protracted interest, himself moved heavily forward towards the girl.

It was of Rhisiart and of Rhisiart alone he thought as he listened to her words. Not a single soul in the place cared a farthing for him, now Rhisiart was gone! There was nobody now, in the whole castle, to whom he could even mention the *Cardamine Pascentius.* The Prince, he knew, disliked and misunderstood him. To Broch-o’-Meifod he was merely a clumsy gloss upon Saint Thomas. Meredith always put on his most ironical mask when he approached.

Yes, Catharine might faint when she thought of her lover; but she had her children and her husband. Owen too had his favourite Meredith. But if the Herald were to announce tomorrow, “Father Pascentius lies a-dying in his cell,” not a soul in Harlech would as much as cross himself! How curious, when you came to think of it, that anyone who drank up the spectacle of life with the relish he did should be loved only by one person in the whole world!

“Oh, Rhisiart my son, my son Rhisiart! Will they torture you to get Owen’s secrets out of you? Are you dead already on some Hereford scaffold?”

But if a film gathered over Father Pascentius’ eyes as he heard this repetition of “slain in battle” and “prisoner of the English,” the thought of his brother caused Owen’s mouth to twitch like a child’s, and big tears to trickle shamelessly down upon his grey beard.

“She’s been ravished to death by now,” he said to himself. “It’s she who has perished under Hopkin’s ‘black flag.’” But though he told himself this, it was for Tudor not for her he wept; Tudor who had jumped that stream at which he himself had balked!

By degrees he became aware that Sir Edmund had carried Catharine away, that Father Pascentius had departed with Father Rheinalt, and that Luned— “How big her belly’s grown! I’ll be hearing tales of her soon!” — had managed to convey the heart-stricken dwarf from this arena of evil tidings.

The two English gentlemen, he now observed, not so accustomed as his own court to his reveries and abstractions, were slowly and sympathetically approaching him. He raised his hand to his beard — let it fall to his side — straightened his shoulders — and was preparing to greet them with a polite smile when the image of Rhisiart, torn from his bride to be horribly slain on the scaffold, so twisted his mouth that up to his face went his hand again, even as he made his bow.

But the forces of disaster — were they directed merely by some pure accident of planetary transit? — hadn’t yet reached the culmination; for while the two Englishmen were still some paces away, the Arglwyddes rushed between him and them, her countenance transfigured by blind wrath.

In all her years with Owen this was the one sole time when she lost her incomparable self-control. And just because of the uniqueness of the occasion it was the more shocking.

Nothing in the world but the fate of her eldest son could have roused her to such a pitch. John Hanmer was at her side trying in vain to calm her. Sir John Oldcastle and Denis Burnell drew back. But their previous discretion was lost. They drew back in a manner that betrayed an indignant masculine free-masonry. "Our wives," their expression said, "are under better control!"

But looking straight in the Prince's face, and making no attempt to lower her voice, the Arglwyddes poured forth the whole torrent of the fury that swirled up within her portly frame. Even in the tempest of her emotion she kept her head — as the most angry women know well how to do — sufficiently to pierce him where the armour was weakest and the flesh most sensitive. In one sentence she'd broken his skin, in two she'd touched the quick of his master-nerve, in three she'd so transfixed his soul that it was outraged beyond escape. Her grand taunt was cowardice. "You didn't dare, you didn't dare," she kept repeating, "to go to the Usk yourself because of Hopkin's prophecy. And so where you didn't dare to go you sent your son. No wonder King Harry despises you! He goes to battle himself and the blows he gets he takes — like the man he is! You're not a man. You're a false-prophet and a preacher of vain words! Oh yes! When it comes to lifting your hand and stroking your beard and acting the great monarch, you can do it to perfection. But when it comes to leading your men to the battlefield — you let your son do that! Why haven't you long ago put off that circle of gold from your well-combed grey hairs and let my brave unadorned Griffith be Prince? Then he'd be safe now, and not in Henry's hands, and you'd be in a cloister playing Saint Francis with that — with that girl as your holy Clare! But oh no! you won't do that; you'll be that conjurer, you'll be the magician — Ho there! Spirits of the Pit, rise to the aid of Prester Owen!—" and the poor lady, overcome by a flood of hysterical sobs, turned her back upon him, and supported by her brother moved off to the castle steps.

That night there was held a most lively discussion in Herald Elphin's chamber. He had persuaded Luned — for the Arglwyddes had retired early and the Prince sat long over his wine with the two Englishmen — to come and taste a special bottle of home-made cordial that had been sent him by his parents from Cruc in Edeyrnion. Iago ap Cynan was there too, and the young men were listening to a warm defence of the Arglwyddes from their girl-friend.

It was hard for Elphin to grasp the full import of the tragic news that had come that day. His mind kept wandering to what he had seen through that fatal chink in the Llandderfel *Betws.* He was also feeling proud of his new quarters; for the Castle Herald had an official chamber all his own, and upon its walls he had hung a rough picture he had himself daubed upon wood, of Luned caressing a unicorn. He had learnt the rudiments of painting at a monastic school; and in one of the castle libraries he had found a book devoted to the history of unicorns. And now in some vague and even mystic manner he had hesitated not to endow this beast, whose head was lifted to the sky, with an extremely human expression, an expression resembling that of a celestial Herald.

To this work of art he had endeavoured to call his companions' attention; not directly but indirectly, referring several times in the course of their discussion about the scene in the base-court to the general subject of heraldic beasts. He found it much easier, however, to draw Luned from the topic of mothers and sons by reverting to Efa ferch Tudor's prolonged vigil over the corpse of the Scab, and by alluding to the psychological question as to whether, when a maid has reached the very edge of yielding to a rape, there comes to be established between her and her assailant some dark, sweet, fatal passion-link that lingers on long after she has escaped the actual peril to her virtue.

This seemed a topic that gave a more piquant flavour to their Turkish sweet-meats and Cruc wine than the problem of the part played in heraldry by legendary beasts.

But Elphin's room that night seemed exceptionally appealing to the lad's own sensibility. A rough sketch upon parchment of a second unicorn, this one with its head between Luned's knees, lay upon a table under his window, and on the window-ledge, a rare possession in a Harlech chamber, was a flower-pot with snowdrops in it. He'd thrown some cedar-wood on his hearth under the excuse of entertaining a lady, and he felt like the Herald of all Britain when he rose from his seat to snuff the wicks of his two candles.

Luned settled herself luxuriously in her host's big embroidered chair by the fire. She threw back her mantle and stretched out her legs towards the hearth, making no attempt to conceal the life-bearing promise of her rounded belly. She joined in their talk, which grew every moment more wilful, critical, and passionate; but under all her prudent strictures upon Elphin's idealism and Iago's cynicism there ran a deep, undulating, brimming tide of unspoken exultation.

She didn't formulate her *Magnificat* in any definite thought, far less express it in words, but her inner consciousness kept setting the palpable weight of this new life within her, as if upon some invisible, planetary scales, against the lurid horrors of her companions’ talk.

The more comfortably did she settle herself, and the more luxurious did she feel, with the wine on her palate and the sticky sweet-meat on her lips, the deeper grew the delicious unease of her child’s movements within her body.

Without being aware of it, both the lads, as they argued with each other and showed off before her, drew the magnetism of their self-assertion from that gently-breathing, calmly-resting rondure above her dwindled lap. Her great belly, as the fire-light fell upon it, seemed to throw into a diminished perspective the tragic disasters the lads were discussing.

Without their knowing why it was so, the spread sail and lifted anchor of Iago’s escape over the sea, and that fabulous encircling of heraldic beasts by multitudinous spring-flowers which was Elphin’s ideal, kept waxing more and more dominant in the young men’s secret thoughts, for all their discussion of the “drawing and quartering” of Rhisiart, of the ravishing of Tegolin, of the death of Tudor, and of the last stand of the heroic Abbot of Caerleon.

This orbic promise of the unconquerable continuity of life, resting there heavy with the future between Luned’s diminished lap and expanding breasts, threw round every image that was evoked in those lads’ talk a muted remoteness, a softening of emphasis, a recession into far-off vistas of perspective. The girl’s own mind, as she sipped Elphin’s cordial and let the sweet-meats dissolve against her palate, languidly travelled back over the years of her life. She thought how she had always longed for a child; how she had loved Rhisiart; how she had hoped against hope that he might be her child’s father. She thought of poor Rawlff, how devoted to her he’d been, but how his ambition and his boastful arrogance had made a barrier between them.

And then as she listened to Elphin's talk about Owen and his familiar spirits a curious smile parted her lips. Many an amorous scene with this pretty lad floated across her mind. She had never loved him, she told herself — she had loved none but Rhisiart — but so much had she longed for a child that if he'd only been more of a man she would have let him do it. And then, still with the same vague maternal smile, the real recipient of which was the unborn being within her, she glanced at Iago. "If Elphin hadn't tantalized me so," she thought, "and stirred me up so, I'd never have yielded to you, you little know-all sailor-boy!"

And she smiled a rich, wine-scented, sweet-meat sticky smile, as her eyes met those of her young seducer. It was a much more equivocal smile, however, than the bold Iago supposed, as he thought to himself with treacherous satisfaction that she was his, and not his friend's. "No," her smile really said, "I used you, my good boy, to get my child, but if you think I love you, or that I'm your victim, mightily are you mistaken! Oh Rhisiart, Rhisiart, what are they doing to you as we sit here?"

But the queer thing was that she would envisage even Rhisiart's death without anything more than a gentle pity. "I suppose," she thought, as she puzzled over this, "that when a girl's like I am, and has these feelings within her, it's you," and she apostrophized her unborn, "who are the one — you, you, my darling, and nobody else!"

Meanwhile Elphin was assuring them with vehement words that it was impossible that Owen should ever really be defeated. The lad had removed his official costume and stood before them in white tunic and white hosen; and as he lifted up his impassioned face, with the curls falling upon his bare shoulders and the candlelight throwing into relief his rounded hips and slender thighs, it crossed Luned’s mind that he looked more like a Herald of Saint Gabriel than of any earthly prince.

“But a girl doesn’t want beauty in her child’s father, does she, my pet? She wants courage and wisdom, knightly courage and clerkly wisdom!” and she sighed deeply, thinking of Rhisiart on the scaffold.

“Owen’s great year,” declared Iago dogmatically, “was the year after Bryn Glas, the year before he took this castle. This castle’s been his ruin! There’s something about this castle that’s enervated him and turned him from war to magic. And I’ll tell another thing. Having a castle has given him a conventional court with a retinue and a sly Archdeacon Young, or Archbishop Young or Bishop Young, as he’ll soon be. And having a court he must needs listen to wind-bags like that rascal Hopkin, who’s far worse than poor old Crach” — and the lad crossed himself— “and he must needs think of Tegolin ferch Rheinalt, God guard her red hair! When we Welshmen are great is when we’ve got a leader who can move like a dark storm up and down the land — hit them here, hit them there, harry them day and night, and never meet them in formal battle-array. He’s thinking now — you mark my words! — of nothing but these damned Frenchmen. ‘When the French come,’ he’s thinking, ‘we’ll march on London’. But I tell you this, you two. What he ought to do is leave this curst Harlech, where there’s a spell and a *tynghed* on every stone, and go back to the wild woods and play the game he played at first — rushing about the country and rousing the common people — and looting the greasy merchants of the market-towns. What we want is a thunder-and-lightning leader in the field, not a magician in a closet! Never mind the whoreson castles, is what I say! Keep to the mountains; dodge their lumbering troops. Rule Wales from the good greenwood, until we tire the rogues out!”

He had been pacing up and down the room in his excitement; but, "Why does she smile at me like that?" he thought, as he sat down, leaving the whole chamber vibrating to his bold tones.

But though it was Iago and not Elphin who'd given her her unapproachable superiority, it was Elphin and not Iago who gazed with awe at that great belly, as if it were a planetary orb heavy with fate. She was wearing a garment of light green, very much like the leaves of the snowdrop in his flower-pot, and this particular colour intensified the rotundity it concealed.

Whatever the girl's own feelings were for the living creature that was the burden of her noble amplitude, to Elphin it wasn't so much the child within it, as the actual rondure of her belly itself, that was so beautiful, so miraculous. In the strength of his idealism he had from the start been trying to persuade himself that his own ineffectual embraces were the cause of this miracle; and his head was so full of unicorns surrounded by thousands of flowers that this miraculous rondure seemed like a great water lily in bud, and the girl's equivocal smile like a ripple upon a sacred pond that was his and his alone.

He grew more and more fascinated by the spacious curves of the serene convexity opposite him. And yet he thought, "How unashamed she is! I thought girls always wrapped mantles round them. And this thin green stuff's as filmy as a flower's calix! She feels like me when I've done a good piece of work and just sit back and think. I'm an artist as well as the cause of that big belly; and though I may be the youngest herald in 'Ynys Prydein' I'm the best heraldic painter north of the Severn. I can't, I know, compete yet with Master Trundle of Shoreditch" — and the lad recalled specimens of this expert's work that he'd seen at Saint Matthew's Fair— "but once let Owen's spirits give us peace and I'll soon challenge him!"

And Elphin’s thoughts ran upon all the rich artistic achievements of the flamboyant century just over.

“I was born too late,” he thought. “This modern age has no taste for art! All it cares for are the quarrels of Popes and Princes and the Inventing of Heresies and the Burning of Heretics. Oh! those exquisite windows in Valle Crucis! Who can do work like that today? Why didn’t Father Pascentius let me go on with the choir-stalls? Because he’s a perfect example of the science and logic of this age! He thinks of nothing but confuting Lollards.”

Gazing rapturously at the girl in the chair, and thinking of her form as his handiwork, he recalled certain beautiful grotesques he had designed for the chapel choir-stalls, but had never been allowed to use. Luned’s maternal curves in their green vesture began to assume for him symbolic shapes — shapes of life’s fecundity from all the elements of Nature. The girl’s belly became a capacious gourd in a rich stubble-field. It became a great satiny puff-ball carried over the fields on a warm south wind. It became an iridescent bubble, mounting up from a fern-shadowed fountain. It became a floating Nautilus, bright and gleaming, luring him towards a fairy estuary, where by the reeds of salt-marshes that were neither land nor sea, calm, tame, beautiful-eyed heraldic creatures grazed upon sea-grasses and horned poppies.

But if life under the girdle of Luned and in the enclosed garden of Elphin’s fancies seemed timeless and immortal, in the magician’s chamber of the Prince of Wales it was dark with fatality and sprinkled with the foam of all that rushed away.

Owen had exhausted his will-power in adjusting his mind to the death of his brother, and to the more lurid fate of Tegolin and Rhisiart; and he had no spirit left to play his last card with his wandering soul. Here it was — still the unconquerable soul of Owen but there was a troubled doubt upon it tonight, debarring it from leaving his tall frame and his imposing presence, “adorned,” as Rhisiart would have said, “for sacrifice.”

For an hour or two he had lingered over the wine with his English guests: but when he felt it was entirely polite and proper to do so, he let them pay certain state-visits; first to the apartment of the Mortimers and then to that of Meredith and Elliw. This last incorrigible pair — while the Arglwyddes was too stricken by Griffith’s death to take the least interest in what she regarded as the irresponsible selfishness of her only surviving son — had persuaded Father Pascentius who at least was no wanderer from his post, whatever his private griefs might be, to consecrate their union by a formal wedlock.

Catharine and Sir Edmund were the only witnesses to this lover-like retort to the ills that had descended upon the House of Powys Fadog; for though Father Pascentius duly informed the Prince of what was going on, it proved impossible to get from him, in his present unapproachable mood, anything more than an absent-minded blessing.

A piece of news that apparently troubled Owen a good deal more than his favourite son’s marriage was the fact that Morg ferch Lug, Broch’s tricksy wife, together with their three daughters, had suddenly arrived at the castle. Maen-y-Meifod had been burnt by the English and it had been all their Welsh guard could do to bring the ladies safe to Harlech. Thus it appeared that the disconcerting Lady of the Mill Wheel had proved obedient, after all these years, to the giant’s command from Snowdon, so carefully written with Rhisiart’s red and black pigments.

On this particular night the Prince was in such a dark mood that Father Pascentius, who was pining for Rhisiart, thought bitterly of King Saul bereft by his own fault of his servant David.

Old Glew the Gryd noticed with astonishment that instead of dismissing "Brith", one of the castle cats, a taciturn being of dingy tortoise-shell hue, after its accustomed dish of milk, the Prince allowed the creature to climb upon his knees and curl itself up to sleep.

Lady Mortimer who was worried about her father had implored her old friend to keep an eye upon him; and Glew the Gryd obeyed her literally in this, opening Owen's door at regular intervals and peering shamelessly into the room. Hard of hearing in his old age the devoted Porter could only note, as a bad sign to report to his young mistress, that he found Owen, each time he spied on him, talking aloud to the animal on his lap. What he was saying to the cat, though Catharine would have given much to know this, the old man couldn't hear.

The wind had dropped now and the rain had passed, and it was a calm starlit night, this night of Owen's accumulated disasters. As he stroked the soft fur of the sleeping Brith he could just see through his narrow window, for he had extinguished his candles in the flickering fire-light, a single bright star. What was that star's name? It shivered in its burning, so it wasn't a planet. Was it part of the ruling constellation of his enemy Bolingbroke, triumphing over him across the waves of Bran the Blessed? His mind kept reverting to Broch's wife. It was surely an evil day that had brought that woman here. "She's come to fetch him," he said to himself. "I feel it in my bones. First Rhisiart and then he! And Tudor's dead and Gethin's dying and the French haven't sailed."

It was curious the comfort he got from Brith remaining so sound asleep on his lap. Steadily he went on stroking him, for the calm of the cat and the vitality of the cat seemed to pass with a perpetually increasing power from that variegated fur into his own nerves.

Then he suddenly remembered that his brother had always made a pet of this particular cat. “Brith!” he murmured, “Brith! Where is he then? Where is he?”

And all at once he began to feel that Tudor ap Griffith was actually with him in that darkened room. But he went on stroking the cat and did not lift his eyes, for he felt that the presence so near him was no ghost that he could see, no ghost at all, but the consciousness of his boyhood’s companion close to his own consciousness, without form, without shape, the familiar identity of the man he knew so well impinging upon his identity.

He began to talk to Tudor now; though old Glew, whose head kept appearing round the door, like the man in the clock recently invented by a Glastonbury monk, thought he was talking to the cat. “I’m glad I didn’t play any games with my soul to-night, Brother. I must have known you’d come.”

The trouble was that instead of letting him enjoy in peace their closeness to each other, this presence which was nearer to him than his own hands and feet must needs compel him to use the new strength he’d got through the mediumship of Brith in a manner most distasteful to him. Matters were amiss in the castle that night, he seemed to gather from Tudor, or from Tudor’s pet animal, and it was his affair — so it seemed intimated to him — to deal with what was wrong.

He stealthily slipped his fingers beneath the sleeping cat with the intention of placing the creature on his bed. But a flood of devastating weariness came over him at that instant. He felt as if to sink forever, far deeper than Brith, under a thousand fathoms of forgetfulness was the most desirable thing in the world! But even as he relaxed in his chair, with his fingers under the cat’s warm body, and stretched out his legs, covered so smoothly in olive-green, he knew very well he would be soon exploring every part of the castle and facing just the very people he always found most hard to face.

"You lazy trickster!" he muttered aloud, apostrophizing himself. "Forgive me, Brother, if I find this quest you've put upon me too heavy for me to-night. I feel as if I could sleep, Brother, sound and still, for a thousand years!"

Then he thought — still holding his fingers under the sleeping cat— "There must be, in all the revolving worlds, a place where the soul can rest and be conscious that it's resting! Are you in such a place, Brother? Old Broch talks of death. But death's not what I want. Death's not rest. Not unless you're conscious of being dead! Are you resting, Brother, even while you make your Owen bestir himself?"

Very slowly, though under his olive-green hose he experienced what children call "pins-and-needles," but with the cat still held between his loose, flapping, scarlet-lined sleeves, he did rise now, and, walking gingerly to his bed, deposited the unconscious animal in the centre of it.

Then he looked round the room. "I'd better take my sword," he thought, "for you never know. Joseph, Mary!" he thought, "I must have left my sword in the hall. The stars are certainly against me today. It only needs Hopkin's black flag!"

He unhooked an unscabbarded weapon from the wall and tried its point and edge. It had been his grandfather's sword, and it was only a little less old-fashioned than Clerk Rhisiart's. But at the moment it suited him because its blade was so long and its handle terminated in such a spacious knob that an old man could have used it to support his steps. Owen felt like an old man as he moved to the door, emphasizing as he did so the clattering sound of the weapon's contact with the flag-stones.

On opening the door he was confronted by two figures. Father Pascentius was conversing with Glew the Gryd; and the Father looked unusually disturbed.

The Prince had never felt less inclined to encounter their castle confessor than he did at this moment.

The two men looked at each other, and the torch that burned above the door revealed their unwonted agitation. As they looked, Owen's sea-green eyes dilating against the coal-black orbs of the other, an irresistible wave of antagonism passed between them. The monk thought: "Here's the moody despot who's robbed me of Rhisiart"; while the Prince thought: "Here's the cunning priest who'd be glad to see the Broch desert me!"

"Well, Father," said Owen, leaning on his sword, "I suppose you've come to tell me of some wench who's in trouble, or of some lad who hasn't been to Mass."

For a moment the Father was compelled to swallow his saliva and utter a swift prayer to Saint Thomas for self-control. "Would it were no worse, my son," he said sternly. "Is it your pleasure that we enter your room; or—" and he gave a glance at the Porter.

"It's 'my pleasure' to hear what you've got to say, Father, in the fewest possible words. We have no secrets from our trusty servants."

"There's great dissatisfaction, my son, throughout the castle. The soldiers are murmuring that the slayer of their prophet — God be kinder to that rogue's soul than he deserves! — is treated at your command like a belted knight. But it isn't of the soldiers I've come to speak. There's a scene going on now over Rhys Gethin's death-bed that makes it impossible to give him the last rites. The man's end's come. Dead he'll be before morning; dead and unshriven, unless you interfere."

Owen wrote something with the point of his sword on the floor; but he didn't raise his head. "It's been going on for years, my son, as we all know; but some influence — God working in some roundabout manner for His own purposes — has brought it to a head, just as the man's dying."

"It? Brought *it* to a head? Stop speaking in riddles, man. Brought what to a head?"

"Simon's jealousy! And if you must have it in plain words, my son, I think Mistress Lowri's mind has broken down."

"Do you mean the woman's gone mad?"

"I don't think she knew me when I spoke to her just now, my son."

The Prince smiled. "There must be many in this place," he said bitterly, "who have good cause not to know their spiritual confessor."

"Do you wish me to tell you what I heard between her and Master Simon by Rhys Gethin's pillow?"

"I don't wish—" but the Prince broke off abruptly, and began drawing squares and circles on the stones with his sword's point. His nervous prejudice against this man changed at this single moment into a violent distaste and an implacable determination to get rid of him. "I've endured his tale-bearing and his spying long enough," he thought. "If I'm to be driven out into the mountains I'll begin by clearing my path."

Father Pascentius contemplated the movements of that sword-point and gave the folds of his cowl several quiet twitches as if to shelter the back of his neck from the chill of the passage.

"You took Rhisiart from me," he thought. But such was his relish for every aspect of the visible world that he couldn't help drinking up as he did so — as if the Prince were offering him a cup of golden wine instead of this angry hostility — the curious lights and shadows, some of them soft and dim like rich velvet, some of them opaque and hard like polished silver, that the torch-light above the door drew from Owen's embroidered tunic, from his scarlet-lined sleeves, from his antique weapon, and even from the forks of his grizzled beard.

"You took Rhisiart from me," his hidden heart repeated, like the striking of a muffled bell, while with his eyes on Owen's he obstinately went on. "There's another thing you ought to know, my son. Since the news came of our defeat on the Usk my Lady's dwarf has taken possession of Clerk Rhisiart's chamber, and the girls tell me she refuses to leave it. They say there've been lights burning all night, and they even say they've heard wild supplications up there, addressed, not to the Holy Trinity, but to the three most potent Devils in Hell, who have — as you know well, my son, and as several angelic Doctors attest — taken upon themselves to simulate the Divine Persons. They also say—"

"I also say," cried Owen, stepping back several paces from the man, and jerking up his arm in its flapping sleeve, and pointing westward with the point of his sword, "that tomorrow morning, Father, you'll choose any horse you like from our stable and any escort you like from our men — they'll be glad enough to leave us if what you say is true! — and ride off to pay our respects to Chancellor Young, Bishop-elect of Bangor. You'll find him at the Castle of Aberystwyth where our flag still flies, and you'll find plenty to do among his colleagues, both secular and religious; and you can take all the books you can carry, whether they deal with the Trinity above, or with the Trinity below. God speed you, and good luck to you, Father!"

And Owen strode off; holding his sword this time so that its point was at an obtuse angle to his flapping sleeve.

When he was gone the monk and the Porter looked at each for a moment without a word. Then Glew the Gryd shook his head sadly. "I told'ee how 'twould be, Father. I told'ee how 'twere with Owen ap Griffith. He's been a different man since the Maid went. She hurt the heart in him, that woman did; and Clerk Rhisiart turning on him killed it. I shouldn't wonder if 'tweren't not thee but him himself what sets out tomorrow. 'Tis this curst castle to my thinking what's done it! 'Twere better for us in the rocks of Snowdon; better in the Forests of Tywyn. Some say Harlech has never been the same place since they took Bran's head to London."

"Do you think he'll come and beg me to stay, after he's slept on it, Master Glew?"

"He may; and again he may not, Father. Owen ap Griffith be wonderful stubborn when 'a's done what 'a knows 'a shouldn't do. But so be all the High Ones of the earth I reckon. If I were you, Father, I'd get a lantern and ramble round the stables to-night. They be tricky devils, these Lawnslots and Gwalchmais, and no mortal person can tell what they'll be up to. Like enough if they hear you want a good horse there'll be none in Harlech to carry your weight till they've taken gold off you. But I wouldn't count on Owen ap Griffith's changing his mind. I've known him stubborn in times past; but his stubbornness, since Tudor ap Griffith have been slain, be past talking of! You saw yourself, Father, how he took umbrage at what you said touching that Trinity of Devils. That's because ever since Clerk Rhisiart and the Maid went he's been talking to devils; and there's not a trinity of their horned heads he doesn't know as well as we know him."

Father Pascentius wrinkled his nose, caused his upper lip to protrude by pressing his tongue against it, and scratched his ribs with his thumbnail.

"Silver groats are heavy when a Servant of God is travelling in haste, Master Glew," he remarked, "and gold nobles are heavier; and I expect I'll be leaving a few of such oddments to the friend who helps me to a good horse and picks me out a couple of trusty men on good horses, if the weather don't change tomorrow. So bear it in mind, Master Glew, and Saint Thomas make you die rich."

While this conversation was going on outside his room the Prince was proving the truth of every one of the monk's words. He felt as if his recent hours in that darkened chamber, wherein he had used the sleeping animal as a link between himself and his brother, had lasted for many years, and that it was as a *revenant* that he came back now, wandering with his naked blade through a generation that had forgotten him. Had he, like Pwyll Pen Annwn, been living for twelve months in some over-world of enchantment?

But Pwyll's people had been ruled in their lord's absence by an *eidolon* wiser than their lord, whereas to-night he was aware of grim silence and averted looks, of murmured insults and conspiring whispers. He passed guard-room after guard-room — for the castle was crowded with soldiers — where not a man rose to his feet to greet him; and where if he addressed them he was answered with silence.

By degrees he became aware that he was being treated as if he were already discrowned, dethroned, rejected; and as if the whole castle were only waiting in angry and sullen expectation the triumphant arrival of an English Prince of Wales.

In the last guard-room he entered, before ascending one of the flights of winding stairs to the passages above, he found David Gam sitting by himself over the fire, his heavy features wearing an expression of stupid bewilderment not unmixed with an animal-like dread. His fellow-soldiers had moved away from him as far as they could go, treating him like a leper, like the Sin-Eater himself! This palpable and visible sign of his commands being disregarded and his will flouted struck Owen the worst blow he had yet received. Wasn't it the essential prerogative of princes to raise up whom they pleased and to degrade whom they pleased?

Well! he had just degraded the most learned scholar in Wales. Now he would advance to honour the most unscrupulous bandit in Wales! He had sent his faithful Rhisiart to be cut to pieces on an English scaffold. He had sent the girl he loved to be ravished to death in an English camp.

And these things he'd done without explanation, reason or cause — solely to prove that he could will what he liked, even to the destruction of Wales, even to the death of his brother. He replied half-mechanically to Gam's greeting, though the little red man rose up at once to do him homage; but the sight of the way his men were isolating his new adherent in defiance of his will flung him down to the lowest depths of shame.

But the rock-bottom of pain and defeat and humiliation was always Glyn Dŵr's sounding-board for testing the resources of his spirit. The metallic tappings he now made with his sword-point, as he paused to speak to Gam, were so emphatic that they actually struck sparks from the stone; and even as they did this the living waters of his own defiance of fate spouted forth from the stony floor of his soul.

Gam was probably the most superstitious man of his brains as he was certainly the strongest man of his hands in all Wales. In a battle he would have been invaluable, because since it would never have occurred to him that the supernatural could take part in a battle he would have no fear of anything. What is commonly regarded as the magic of personality Gam interpreted as impersonal magic; and here in Harlech he was at once threatened and protected by the innumerable hosts of Owen's "spirits". He now felt — as his new master smiled at him as he left the guard-room — so completely indifferent to the hatred of his fellow-servants that his very insouciance imparted to his own personality something of the awe that he felt for Owen. They would have been reckless warriors, even from the

Scab's own district, who would have dared to meddle with the little red man from Brecon.

Continuing his ghostly round, and feeling more and more like a ghost as he made it, the Prince ascended one of the main stairways of the castle. As he passed the entrance to the Mortimer apartments he caught, through a half-open door, a glimpse of his daughter, in the loose robes of her pregnancy, conversing with a young woman in a becoming black gown whom he recognized at once as Dame Alice of Lyde. He couldn't help being struck by the clinging, adoring and infatuated look with which "the Ruthin girl," as Rhisiart used to call her, was tending Catharine.

"Is it nothing to you," he thought, "that your good man should fall into the King's hands and be burnt at the stake?"

Holding his sword horizontally now, and treading softly on his pointed deer-skin slippers, he advanced down the long dark corridor at the end of which Luned had implored Rhisiart to take upon himself the paternity of her child.

As it happened, Rhisiart's old enemy Gwalchmai was the torch-bearer in this passage to-night, and Owen was so struck by the fellow's surly response to his greeting that he grimly took his torch from him and bade him practise his scowls upon the darkness as he found his way out.

"If I can hold Harlech," he thought, "and if Rhys Ddu can hold Aberystwyth, till the French sail, all may yet be well. Our people are still free. From Aberfraw to Gwent our mountains, our forests, our moors are free. I wish the Usurper would raise money enough to invade us himself. It's these Codnors and Talbots; yes! and that boy at Hereford, who're the trouble. There's a *tynghed* on Henri Père whenever *he* crosses the Wye or the Severn."

He stood pondering, the torch in one hand, the sword in the other, and the feeling stole over him that if only he could make the ghostly heroes of his land understand where the danger lay, the invaders would be helpless. “They think it’s the foreign King we have to fear, because it was foreign kings in their time. They don’t understand how everything has changed; and how it’s strategy and skill and trade and money and swiftness of attack — not huge armies with royal banners and royal tents — that’s our trouble today.”

His mind reverted to Father Pascentius. “He’ll be all right at Aberystwyth,” he thought. “Young’ll use his learning and his staring eyes to better purpose than I can.”

And then he realized that he had intended all the while to visit Rhisiart’s tower-room about which the monk had told such tales. He tried the door at the foot of the steps. Yes! it was open. Very softly on his deer-skin shoes he crept up the stairs, the sword’s point in advance, the torch behind his back. Arrived at the top of the stairs he found a rusty iron sconce, a century old, driven into the wall. Into this he inserted his torch; and with his sword gripped tight and it must be confessed with a nervous twinge in his stomach, as if that organ contained a hidden hand that clutched and unclutched its fingers, he softly opened the door.

Not a sound greeted him; and his first impression was that the chamber was empty. Save for a faint whiteness from the starry sky, the only light in the place came from above the half-opened door from his torch outside. It took a second or two for his eyes to get accustomed to the obscurity, for the torch-rays from above the door had the effect of darkening rather than illuminating the rest of the room.

But when he did get his vision — that is to say when he saw the bed and what was in it — he received such a shock that ’twas a wonder he didn’t cry out. For Rhisiart himself lay on the bed!

Had Morg ferch Lug seen her “pure-blooded Brython” at that juncture it is hard not to think that she would have been compelled to admit that the new Prince of Wales had at least some drops of the blood of the “older people.”

Nothing — one might surely argue — but the prehistoric self-control of a race that had tracked mammoths and sabre-toothed tigers through the Forests of Tywyn could have prevented him at that moment from betraying his presence! But Owen ap Griffith didn’t even draw his breath in a sigh that was louder than natural. He lifted the point of his sword about four inches, while his scarlet-lined sleeve entered quickly and left more quickly the wavering path of the torch-rays from above the door.

And then it was given him — largely by reason of this Neolithic self-control of which none but a race with the blood of the aboriginals of the locality in its veins could have the secret — to take in the true reality of what he saw. It was — and was not — Rhisiart. It was his clothes; it was that gorgeous silver and blue costume that the dwarf herself had made for him to wear at Catharine’s wedding; and she had stuffed it out with a long, thin straw-bolster. The little creature herself lay fast asleep by the side of this image — this image of the only man who had ever seriously kissed her — her tiny little arms, like the arms of a doll, tightly clasping its neck, while her disfigured chin was buried in its breast.

The head of the image was a mere blob of rags, but its bed-fellow had drawn so cunningly over this featureless rag-head the neat scholar’s cap the man always wore at his clerkly labour that the Prince was astounded at the thing’s likeness to what he had so often seen — his Secretary asleep!

The moment Owen took in the full meaning of what he saw a transformation took place in him. He ceased to be an aboriginal. He became not only a “pure-blooded Brython” but a representative of the most courtly ruling house west of Constantinople. Automatically inclining his head, he swung round on his deer-skin heels and left the place as hastily and reverently as if it had been the bridal chamber of the Maid of Edeyrnion.

Having closed the door as silently as he’d opened it, he mechanically repossessed himself of his torch, and scarcely less mechanically, as he descended the stairs, lifted the chilly handle of his sword to his distorted face. He was of a far too introspective turn of mind to be long in shaking off this emotional mood, but the almost ghastly glimpse he had been given into the love of women found a crevice in his mental armour that a less grotesque exhibition would have missed.

What he had just seen had indeed one extremely practical effect upon him. It made him resolve that at whatever cost to his masculine pride he would effect on the morrow a reconciliation with the Arglwyddes.

At the moment, however, carrying his now smoking torch less carefully than before, and once more using his naked blade as a staff, he made his way to the death-chamber of Rhys Gethin. Before reaching his defeated Captain’s room it was necessary for him to pass an unfurnished and unaccommodated cell, usually devoted to the commoner sort of prisoners. From this place, reaching his ears through the heavily-barred door, there issued a long-drawn, moaning monotone, in a voice he recognized at once as that of Lowri ferch Ffraid. His torch was nearly out, but he could see a light streaming across the passage at the corner where it turned.

He beat with the handle of his sword against the barred door. “Lowri! Mistress Lowri!” he shouted. The monotone within went on just the same. It wasn’t the voice of wrath or despair or misery. It was the voice of reason, that ghastly monologue of pure reason with itself, when all the humble, natural sub-streams of life's irrational flow have been mentalized into a horrible avalanche of glacial logic.

He struck again at the door, and again shouted the woman's name. But no end arrived to the interminable monologue within; to this monstrous stream of crazy assertion, wherein the reason confided to the reason the causes and effects of irrational passion.

And then the Prince made a grimace at the closed door which separated him from that voice, that high-pitched argumentative voice of the mathematics of passion which he felt would soon sound to him as if it were the pendulum-tick of the whole cosmos: for he suddenly realized that it was barred only from outside; and that all he had to do was to push the bolts and enter!

He hastened to do this; but as he did so the draught between the door he'd opened and the window of the cell extinguished his torch and at first there was only blackness and the voice of the woman. But since there was light at the turn of the passage there was a dim glimmer in the place, which increased when the smoke from his dead torch floated away.

And he saw that there were two figures here, too; but whereas in the other sleeping-place of his nocturnal visitation one was a dummy and one a dwarf, here one was mad and the other a corpse. It didn't take him long to realize that the corpse was that of Master Simon; and he soon understood, too, what it was that the delirious woman was justifying to herself in this one-sided dialogue, while she piled on the Hog's bare chest every scrap of the food that had been thrown into her cell. She was proving to her victim with irresistible logic that their love was sealed by his death.

The curious thing was that in that dim light and with her loosened hair and exposed bosom the mother of Tegolin had never looked more beautiful. She had the look upon her face that women have when they are listening to the passionate words of their first lover. There was a rope lying by her side. But it had not been used; and it flashed upon Owen at once why it was that contrary to the new custom with mad persons — so different from the old way of letting them wander about to the terror and inconvenience of sane folk — Mistress Lowri had been allowed not only the privilege of mourning over her dead but the privilege of neither being chained nor bound.

The only armourer left in the castle was the dead man lying there before him, while the authority responsible for her restraint was the father of her child.

What had the most weird effect on Owen's mind, as throwing down his extinct torch he addressed her by name, was the fact that while she knew him perfectly well and kept calling him "My Prince" she never stopped for a moment her stream of monotonous argument addressed to the dead.

She knelt erect over Simon's body while one logical necessity followed another from her lips; and even in that obscurity her beautiful eyes seemed caressing, cajoling, and hypnotizing the dead man to accept without question this rational and inevitable seal upon their love.

How Simon had perished was as transparent as the reasons she gave for killing him; for if Father Rheinalt had forbidden them to touch her with cord or rope he must have also forbidden them to tear from her victim's heart the small Spanish dagger that had caused his death.

For the second time that night, but on this occasion with full consciousness of what he did, Owen inclined his head as he stepped backwards to the door. Realizing he was going, the woman made a slight gesture with her hand, and he even fancied he caught the whisper of a hurried benediction; but the logical argument with the dead went on; and it was going on without intermission when he closed the door, shot the bolt, and walked slowly away.

"If only I can hold this place and Aberystwyth," he said to himself, "till the French come, all may yet be well." And then he thought, "I'll drink some of that Malmsey presently that Sir John brought me. I'll be able to sleep after that, and forget Rhisiart on the scaffold and that girl. If I can hold out till the French come I may win yet! He's never been able to get into the heart of Wales. Twice he's been half drowned in the Wye; thrice he's lost everything in the Severn. Pull yourself together, old conjurer! This is what you embarked on; this is what you were to expect when you raised your flag. You've got to go on, on, *on* — till every head you've trusted lies low, and every heart you've loved is broken!"

But by this time he was leaning heavily on his sword, and as he turned the corner of the passage where a blaze of torches streamed out from Rhys Gethin's crowded death-chamber, he found he needed something more than the spirit to go blindly on. I shall see her early tomorrow," he said to himself, thinking of the Arglwyddes. "I've taken away from her all but Meredith; and that little *ellylles* has got him now. Love? Let it come! Let it go! But if you don't, tomorrow morning, take every shame she can pile up on you, till she melts in your arms, a miserable magician *you* are, Owen Glyn Dŵr!"

Oh, this room of Gethin's long dying, how well he knew it! He had made a point, during all these troubled days, of visiting for brief, painful, embarrassed moments his dying Captain.

Well! It was over now! He could see at once from the look of the figure on the bed, and indeed from the unrepressed relief on the faces of everyone there, that the great warrior had gone to his account.

He stood for a moment in the open doorway, leaning silently on his long sword. Then growing aware by the sudden hush that fell upon the people — and there were representatives there of every level of life in the castle, even of merchants and craftsmen from the town — that his presence had been perceived, he waited for some murmur of recognition, some sign of greeting and welcome to their Prince.

But no such sign was forthcoming. It was only too evident that the mysterious murder of Derfel's prophet, and the more mysterious enlargement of Gam, and now the spectacular decease of Gethin, had added the last bundle of fuel to the great smouldering bonfire of popular discontent which the disaster upon the Usk, the Abbot's death and the capture of the Maid had already ignited.

What was really going on in that death-chamber was a sort of Lying-in-State; an honour rarely given in Wales to any but lawful Princes of the blood of Cunedda and Rhodri Mawr.

Owen recognized quickly enough that this popular honour paid to the dead Captain wasn't without its implication of dishonour to the living Prince; but he made up his mind to disregard it, and disregard it he did so completely that it would have been hard for anyone to believe he noticed it at all.

Making no claim to any precedence therefore, he quietly moved up to the dead warrior in the patient line of those paying homage; though it is true that when he reached Gethin's bed he took advantage of his height and stood back a little, looking over the heads of the people as one by one they pushed past. The women who had washed the hero's body and closed his eyes had evidently had great difficulty in composing his features. They had forced the dead man's jaws nearly together, but they'd been loth to sever the still fingers with which he'd clung in his last struggle to an iron ring in the wall at his side.

It was the expression of his mouth, however, rather than that clutching hand, which most arrested the Prince. Owen had seen more dead men slain in battle than he could count, but he had never seen on any human face a look like the look on this man's.

He had seen it somewhere though. And where was that? Ah! he had it! It was a great pike he'd caught once in the river Dee; a pike that in place of leaping up from the grass, as most dying fish do, had straightened itself out and clenched its teeth and fixed its eyes upon the sky with a look of such abysmal fury of defiance that those gnashed teeth locked together had remained in its killer's consciousness for more than thirty years.

In addition to the fingers and the mouth, the women who had "laid out" this Hector of North Wales had had difficulty with the eyes.

The warrior must have been roused to such a pitch of passion by the behaviour of Lowri, who, it was said, scrupled not at the last to caress the Hog of Chirk in his presence, that his eyes seemed actually to retain the imprint of that shame as the Prince gazed upon them.

Owen was assured later that it was the visits of Lowri — and several times, they told him, she was accompanied by Simon — that had made Rhys Gethin's hurt incurable. The verdict of both bower and kitchen, of ladies and serving-men, was identical in this matter; namely, that had Crach Ffinnant tended him, and, as was his custom, kept everybody away, the warrior would have recovered.

A base and unpardonable impulse began stirring in Owen now; the impulse to turn from his old friend, the man who above everyone else was responsible for the victory of Bryn Glas, and depart without kissing him.

It was partly the desperate ferocity of the look that had been frozen upon the man's face that tempted him to shirk this natural courtesy. The cause of this look had been the woman he'd just seen; and there seemed something horrible in pressing his lips to such a look. And although he was the reverse of a squeamish person there were two other things that militated against this gesture. In the first place the skin of Gethin’s face wasn’t only whiter than is usual with the dead, but there were drops of death-dew still upon it that normally should have dried. In the second place the women who “laid out” this obstinate corpse had not been able to close the eyelids completely, so savagely had they been fixed upon the sight that killed him; and in the crevice, out of which the eyeballs peered, certain excretions of rheumy glue had formed themselves, that now, catching the light of the candles, gleamed like fragments of sardonyx.

The strain that was making the Prince’s inmost will vibrate like a cord at breaking-point brought it about that he was more sensitive to such things than was his wont. But, nevertheless, muttering “Mary! Joseph!” in his beard, he did at least make the sign of the cross over that scowling forehead.

“I *must* see Father Rheinalt,” he said to himself as he made his way through the murmuring crowd.

He enquired in vain of one person and another; but at last a little page from the hills, awed and delighted to be able to help the ruler of his land, directed him to the chapel.

Here in the vestibule he found the man he sought. Father Rheinalt was seated on a wooden bench, holding a large rough crucifix in his hands. He rose when Owen approached him and signed to the Prince to sit down by his side. A low-voiced murmur was going on within the chapel where several priests from the neighbourhood were muttering psalms over a row of pall-covered coffins; while from a chantry just within the edifice where a host of candles had been lit a stream of wavering radiance fell upon their two figures and upon the crucifix in the monk’s hand.

The Prince was astounded at the man’s self-control. He had intended to question him as tactfully as be could about Simon’s death; but he had never expected to find a person less wrought up, less confused, and much calmer that he was himself!

"I did what I could, my son," Father Rheinalt said. "It was pain to me to see what she was doing to herself as well as to those two. I think, after her fashion, she loved them both. I think Simon understood her; the other never! How could he — a simple soldier like that?"

"What made her kill him?" Owen didn't dare to look at his companion as he asked this question. He looked instead at the crucifix; but no sooner had he done so than it seemed to him that the face of the figure upon it resembled that of the man to whose words he was listening.

"What — made — her — kill — him?" repeated the monk slowly. "I think I can tell you that, my son, after all we've gone through. Knowledge comes at last, Owen ap Griffith, if we suffer long enough and deep enough. She killed him because with the best that was in him he *wanted* her to kill him! He understood her, my son — Christ have mercy on him! — as I never have, and as he never could. He thought — Simon I mean — that she'd lost her wits forever; and he couldn't bear to see it and live. I don't think she *has* lost her wits forever. I think if Denis Burnell takes her back to Dinas Bran she'll recover; but whether her heart'll change, Christ who knows all hearts alone can tell."

Owen lifted his eyes from the other Rheinalt, with the arms stretched out and the nail through his feet, and stared at his companion in amazement.

"Burnell doesn't think of taking her back, does he?" He suddenly felt as if he had been sleeping for a whole Platonic year, and had just awaked into all these people's lives — only to find he had lost every clue.

"I've been talking to Burnell, my son," declared Father Rheinalt, "and he says it was with the hope she would go back with him that he brought the tribute-money himself."

The Prince closed his fingers over the hilt of his sword and, pressing its point against the ground between his knees, gazed at the monk with the expression of a child who has turned the page of a lesson-book and found a picture of a boar-hunt. His grey-blue eyes became round with wonder and his bearded chin sank down on his clasped hands as if the monk were telling him something that transformed the bones of his skull to lead.

"And you—" he began. He longed to say, "How can you, who're the father of this woman's child, go straight from the murder of her husband and the death of her lover to encourage a fourth man to take her?"

But like an open psalter the monk read his thought; and having done so, he quickly moved his crucifix so that the candle-rays from the chantry flickered upon the figure's face.

"I like this one," he said, "better than any I've ever had. It belonged to Abbot Cust and on his death-bed he sent it me. The lay-brother who nursed him brought it — unknown to the present Abbot."

The sea-green eyes above the beard that covered the sword-hilt grew still more like those of an astonished child; for it was apparent to him that across Father Rheinalt's ravaged features there had actually flickered a smile.

The Prince turned back to the pain of the crucifix from this kindred pain that had the power of smiling. "I don't — see," he whispered hoarsely into his beard, as if rather to the hilt of his sword than to his companion, "how the sight of suffering like that — even if it is" and he muttered the syllables "Mary! Joseph!"— "the pain of the cross — could help anyone to go through what you've gone through."

Father Rheinalt bent his head and was silent. For some reason the unfathomable life-force that emanated from those glaucous eyes was harder to bear just then than what was in his mind.

"I don't suppose;" he said, without looking up, "that I can make it clear to you, my Prince; for" — and the man actually smiled again— "God hasn't given me the gift of our good Pascentius. But when you take pain as the — as the basis of human life — and — and — as — as the life of God — there comes up — for it isn't the whole of God — something from underneath — that is — but what am I saying? Who am I to talk like this?"

And to Owen's astonishment the monk lifted his head, clutched the crucifix as if it were a weapon, and striking its foot against the bench between them, uttered the identical words that Owen himself had been hearing in his heart all that night. "If only the French come, my Prince, all may yet be well!"

They rose simultaneously from their seat after that; and the Prince said with his old authority, "Go back now, Father, and see if she sleeps, and if there's water and wine where she is. If it's well with her, I wish you to spend the night with me in my room. Don't fail me, Father. We've got to decide what's to be done if — if the French don't come!"

It turned out that Lowri ferch Ffraid had fallen asleep, fallen asleep even while they'd been talking about her in the chapel; and it wasn't long before the two Welshmen's blood-and-iron discussion of new methods to deal with the enemy ended with the Father's falling asleep, too.

So heavy a drug was the wine Owen forced his temperate guest to drink that he had no difficulty in lifting him, unawaked as he was, upon his own bed, and covering him with as many "black lions rampant" as could warm the most ascetic bones!

The following morning broke with radiant sunshine over Harlech and the sea; and the Prince, though his bones were stiff and cramped from his bivouac on the floor, could feel the spring-warmth pouring strength and vitality into his blood. It was to the power of the sun and of the dancing sun-sparkles on the inflowing tide that he entered the Arglwyddes' room.

Father Rheinalt had passionately entreated him not to risk everything in some wild uncalculated move against the invaders, but to wait for a week or so. "At least," the Father had said, "till news comes from Rhys Ddu."

And this advice, proceeding from the most uncompromising Welshman in the castle, had had its weight with him. Indeed it had jumped shrewdly enough with his own instinct. "There'll be a time," he thought, "to avenge our dead, when we know for certain the French are not coming!"

Never in all their life had the heart of the Arglwyddes been more difficult to soften than it was that day. But he managed it at last, such was the power and vital force given him by that dazzling sun and those dancing waves.

As with Odysseus, when the goddess had made him "taller and fairer in form and in face," it was hard for the mother, even of all those lost sons, even of her lost eldest-born, to resist the man she loved when he wooed her as if she were a young girl, when he courted her with all the magnetic concentration of their first love.

It was characteristic of the Prince that his pleasure at being reconciled with the Arglwyddes ran like quicksilver through his veins and added yet another vibration to those which poured through him that morning from the sun and the sea.

Feelings, emotions, sensations such as he hadn't known since his childhood radiated through him; and his spirit felt so light, so integral, so compact and free that what had hitherto been a patient cult became a spontaneous joy. He kept flinging his soul — or, if you will, imagining that he flung his soul — far out to the horizon, where it seemed to hear clear and sweet, from a yet further horizon, the mystic song of the Birds of Rhiannon!

He even began to feel happier about the fate of the Maid and Rhisiart. Henry of Lancaster had his generous moments, and perhaps — Whereas where his dead brother was concerned, he felt his presence so vividly that it seemed to him as if he were eating for him, drinking for him, losing himself in the elements for him! His brother's nearness seemed to double his delight in the multitudinous sun-sparkles upon those in-rolling waves.

He had the feeling that something had broken — some dam, some barrier, some rampart within him — and that he could draw on a reservoir of power the depth of which he had never even suspected.

So boundless was his feeling of power that he didn't hesitate to snatch his friend Broch from under the very hands of the man's elfish wife; nor, with the assistance of Broch, did he hesitate to entertain Oldcastle and Denis by taking them to the rock-pools beyond the jetty where there were a number of sea-anemones of startling and incredible beauty. Whether it was due to the fact that a large portion of Owen's exalted mood came from the glittering sunshine and dazzling sea, or whether the spiritual forces he was drawing on were non-moral forces, the fact remains that his feelings were by no means all noble or righteous as with his bald-headed friend he escorted the two Englishmen along the shore. He felt outrageously thankful that he *had* instructed Gam — not without a hint to that unscrupulous young woman from Môn — to use his knife upon the Scab at any serious pinch.

It even occurred to him, and without a flicker of shame, that as he sat with Father Rheinalt in the porch of the chapel, and contemplated that row of coffins, he had completely forgotten that under one of those palls the single blue eye and the ruddy disfigurement of Derfel's prophet were already beginning to revert to the anonymous monochrome of the dust. Nor did he repent for a moment — but on the contrary stroked his beard with grim satisfaction — when Father Pascentius, mounted on one of the castle's best horses and attended by two of the castle's sturdiest guards, not to speak of a baggage-mule loaded with the most precious books of the castle libraries, came jogging and swaying past them along the shore-road.

Father Pascentius looked to him in no sense a pathetic figure. It would have needed the more sympathetic eye of Rhisiart to note the clumsy attempt of the man's plump fingers — entangled as they were with the reins he held — to make his familiar metaphysical gesture, reducing all the changes and chances of this mortal life to the infinite indifference of the Absolute.

Let us hope that the tremendous shade of Saint Thomas himself noticed that blundering attempt of the hands that had composed the great Cistercian Commentary to bid farewell to Harlech with an appropriate gesture. Some of the most piteous things in life are these same brave whistlings and drummings and hummings wherewith, when our stars are crossed, we mechanically save our faces and cover our retreats; and those of us who feel tenderer to the weaknesses of an orthodox Scholiast than Owen did may be permitted to hope that before getting very far on his road to face the toothless sarcasms of Chancellor Young the Father's roving eyes may light upon a wayside plant even more uncommon than the *Cardamine Pascentius.*

It was not long before the two Welshmen and the two Englishmen were seated upon a sun-warmed ledge above the now ebbing tide, listening to the gurglings and gaspings of the water as the in-flowing waves alternately brimmed and emptied the cavernous recesses below them, and covered or left exposed the jagged shell-bitten surfaces of the rocks.

The talk between the four men turned to the fate of Master Brut. "I suppose I'd recant in his place," Sir Thomas Oldcastle was saying, "for the Archbishop's as fond of the smell of burning flesh as he is of basting peacocks. But a man never knows! As a matter of breviary," he went on, with a whimsical glance at the retreating figure on horseback, "and in the Blessed Order of Holy Reason of which I'm a humble Brother, my *Credo* is to enjoy such wine as you gave us last night, to savour the heavenly essences of meats and fishes, to get drunk on the raptures of Venus and Priapus — and be ready to believe whatever the Archbishop believes! But, gentlemen, when I saw one of his Grace's latest burnings, I found myself worshipping not the correct theology of that cruel old time-server, but the divine spirit in any poor human breast that could bear such pain and yet not yield! On my life, gentlemen, that burning may be the cause of my burning! Till then, and this was but a few months ago, I was only a Lollard in what you might call a Platonic sense; that is to say, as a matter of ideal intellectual truth. But after watching those two faces — the face of that ambitious, selfish, soulless old man, and the face of that angelic young martyr — shall I tell you what I decided? I decided that even though the Archbishop's belief was true and the other's false, I was all for the other! I decided that it was better to die for the wrong than to torture for the right."

"Wouldn't the Lollards," interjected Denis Burnell, "torture us Catholics if they had the power?"

"Very likely," returned the other, "but not the young man I saw suffer. And that's the whole point. It isn't the Lollard's 'truth' or the Catholic's 'truth' that's the important thing. Truth itself's not the important thing. The important thing is the spirit to defy tyranny and pain. I can imagine" — he paused and chuckled— "only I'm such a whoreson coward! But I can imagine swearing I believed what I didn't believe and swearing I doubted what I didn't doubt, simply and solely to defy to the death the kind of person our present Archbishop is, and even the kind of—"

“This ledge you’ve brought us to, Sire,” interrupted Denis Burnell, fearful lest Sir John — who had already had several flagons of old metheglin — might say something indiscreet, “is such a striking spot that I’d like to know if it has any particular name.”

“It has indeed, Master,” replied Owen; and he looked quickly round to see if he dared, in the presence of his friend Broch, give full rein to his mystical pedantry. But Broch was staring at the two vessels in sight, each of them engaged in elaborate tacking movements against that difficult wind, so that neither encouragement nor disapproval could be got from him.

It wasn’t only that the Prince delighted in letting his imagination, which was considerable, and his learning, which even little Lu respected, have their free fling; he itched to impress Oldcastle, whom of all living Englishmen he most admired, with the superiority of Welsh legends over those of England. So he explained to his guests that this rocky ledge was called *Cadair Bran* and that it was here that the mysterious god of their fathers beheld the fleet of the King of Ireland. And, he went on, for the temptation in his present high spirits to dilate on this topic was irresistible, arguing that the only way, as you pursued the long reversion of demigods, by which the true Immortals could be reached, was to follow their traditional pedigrees to the end.

“Where,” he went on to explain, while the forks of his beard trembled in the listening breeze, “the pedigrees become silent — where, in fact, a name has no ‘fab’ or ‘ferch’ affixed to it — we touch the depths. I used to beg my friend Iolo to make a litany of the names thus reached, so that we might invoke them with the more reverence just because they have no father and no mother! I often think that the saints of whom we know least are the most powerful; and in the same way—”

But Broch-o’-Meifod hesitated not to interrupt him. “One of those ships is from Môn,” he announced. “I know her build. Those Tudors are the best ship-builders we have. I fancy, my Prince, she brings young Efa’s betrothed.”

But here Sir John broke in. “If Master Broch,” he said, “knows yonder fancy-rigged vessel that’s as high above the water as a church-porch and has a poop like a whoreson whale, I can tell you, Prince, what the other is. ’Tis a Frenchman or I’m no Englishman! Do’ee mark the height of that mast, Denis? And the weight of the sail they’re hauling down? There! They’ve got her! And in good time too, or over she’d have gone! Look, look, Masters, there’s her ensign going up! ’Tis as I said. She’s a French maid and a royal one too! Oh, that old Jack Horne of Deptford were here with his funny little — but what am I saying? Pardon me, Prince Glendourdy, but I never could look at a French ship without laughing. But ’tis the truth before God. This Western Sea don’t suit the cut of a French craft as well as it does ours, whether Welsh or English. Christ! They’re both off again! And if this breeze doesn’t drop they won’t be into harbour, no! by Christ, not your Welsh one nor my French one, for an hour yet! And even then, if yonder mole’s the best welcome you can give them — though I can’t speak about the ship from Môn for I don’t know that build of bow or how she answers to the helm — I can swear to you the boat I call French — though she may be one of those heavier Portuguese craft — I forget their fancy name! — will be mighty put to it to get near that jetty of yours or to cast even a long hawser on’t!”

“Sir John knows what he’s—” began Denis; but Broch-o’-Meifod cut him short with an involuntary “Well done, lads!” as both crews with equal success swung their vessels to the wind and sailed off on another tack.

The Prince tried to catch Broch-o’-Meifod’s eye, for he wanted to warn him that there was no reason why they should betray to their visitors the extreme importance to Harlech just now of any news from France. It was unlikely that Sir John, at any rate, could be ignorant of the assembling of that fleet at Brest; but he might be, and if there were a chance he was, it was silly to refer to it.

But Broch-o’-Meifod was a very difficult person to communicate with by looks. In the first place his eyes were so deeply set in his great bald head and were so peculiar in themselves that it was hard to exchange any quick glance of understanding with them. The chief peculiarity of Broch-o’-Meifod’s eyes was that both the pupils and the irises were so small in comparison with the white convexities out of which they appeared that when the least mist or watery film blurred them they assumed a dull, opaque, neutral tint, and became completely devoid of expression.

But since from the look of things there was, as Oldcastle had said, little chance of either of these ships reaching land for some while, Broch-o’-Meifod now proceeded to climb down from Bran’s Seat and, sinking on his knees, began to examine the contents of a rock-pool from which the retreating tide had only just withdrawn. There was evidently plenty of water still in this pool, for the Prince, who was seated between his two guests, saw his friend pull up one of the leather sleeves of his jerkin and plunge his arm between the glistening rocks.

Presently he held up a starfish to their sight, and while the sunshine danced and flickered in gleaming points of dazzlement up and down his great dripping muscles, “Dead!” he cried. “It’s dead!” And rising on his knees and making a tremendous sweep of his arm he flung the creature far out above the breaking waves, where it sank with a splash.

"What is it, Sir John?" the Prince allowed himself to ask; for Oldcastle's shoulders were shaking with laughter.

"What is it this time, Sir John?" echoed Denis in the tone of one who had been a little longer than he liked in the society of such a Democritus.

But Broch-o'-Meifod relapsed into a sitting posture on his heels, his bald head gleaming before them with a veritable aureole of sun-sparkles. "Out with it, Sir John!" he panted, for he had used most of his breath in disposing of the star-fish, "or I'll tell them myself, if you can't speak!"

"You're enough to make an Archbishop laugh!" gasped Oldcastle. "I've seen plenty of people in my time fish for live things in the sea and shout when they've killed them; but I've never seen anyone fish for the dead."

"Broch's got a mania for death, Sir John," explained Owen, thoughtfully pulling at his beard. "It's an old story with us who know him."

The visitor contemplated the squatting sage before him and hummed a tune. Wondering what the man was thinking, and a little ashamed of having dragged his old friend's eccentricity into the open like this, the Prince gazed at Sir John as Sir John was gazing at Broch.

"What a face he has!" he thought. "And it's the same face — but it's aged a lot more than mine!" And as he looked at the man scene after scene came back to his memory of their student days together in London at the Inns of Court. "It's all that stubbly hair," he thought, "that makes him look old."

Indeed Oldcastle's unruffled brow, full lips, and ruddy complexion were offset by a short rough growth of grey hair, hair that was almost too sheep-like to be called curly, but which, though it served the purpose of beard, moustache, and whiskers, gave a curiously harmless expression to his physiognomy; gave it, in fact, the look of a humorous and philosophic sheep-dog, from whose woolly visage a pair of whimsically affectionate brown eyes looked forth upon the world.

"So you're a death-lover, are you, Master Broch?" he said, leaning forward from Bran's Seat, with his sunburnt hands on his knees. "I've heard of such men in China and Cathay and I met a hermit once in Muscovy who spoke to the same tune. I take it that by 'death' you don't mean the loss of your identity, Master Broch, but rather the passing into—"

The great blurred head and gigantic torso in front of him composed themselves into an opaque and featureless monolith, out of which issued words, as if out of the statue of Memnon. It was only by blinking and screwing up their eyes that the three men on the ledge were able to face the dazzling sunshine which the sea-sparkles multitudinized into myriad pinpoints of blinding radiance.

"I do mean the loss of my identity!" were the words that now issued from the haloed rotundity on the top of this dusky plinth. "That's exactly what I do mean! By worshipping death instead of life I worship the opposite of life; and since the essence of life — ask my Prince over there — is the thing that's forever crying 'I! I! I!' death must be the extinction of this 'I'!"

Sir John's full lips emitted a low whistle, and his woolly countenance wrinkled itself into a courteous attempt to suppress a profane chuckle.

The Prince sighed, and stroked first one and then the other of the forks of the beard. "Is that a French vessel?" he thought. "And if it is, will it bring news from Brest?"

"But isn't it possible," remarked Denis — while in his mind he thought, "How tiresome all these grand dogmas are! We know nothing of life; how can we know anything of death? The more time these two waste in discussions of this kind, the sooner their rebellion'll be over"— "isn't it possible, Master Broch, that life and death are as closely connected as night and day, man and woman, good and evil? Isn't it possible that the reality of things includes them both and explains them both, just as what you call 'nothingness' is nothing, unless there's something to compare it with?"

The sun so dazzled the eyes of the three men seated on *Cadair Bran* that it was impossible to see the effect of these metaphysical subtleties upon the figure before them.

The Prince, however, as he turned his head towards the speaker caught the fact that what Denis said was on a completely different plane from what Denis thought.

As for Sir John, he was keeping all this while a shrewd weather eye on those two tacking vessels. But whether it was that both the handling of the ship with the crew from Môn and the handling of the ship with the crew from France were so different from the English way that it tickled his fancy, or whether it was that the spectacle of that dusky torso in front of them, with its dazzling halo, advocating death when it looked so preposterously alive, struck him as comical, the man never ceased his low chuckling laugh.

It needed all the respect he had for him to keep the Prince from feeling irritated by this unseasonable merriment; and as it went on the sensation grew upon him that not only he and his friend Broch, but their whole race, their whole cause, their whole country were being subjected to a detached and unsympathetic amusement.

"Mary, Joseph!" he groaned in his beard, and he prayed that Broch would stop philosophizing even if it meant that he had to move out of hearing and hunt for dead starfish among remoter rock-pools. Above all he prayed that the giant wouldn't punish him for starting this unfortunate conversation by any reference to his own mental peculiarities.

"We shall never understand these English," he thought, "and they'll never understand us. What a pity all civilized nations don't talk Latin!"

Several seagulls were whirling about the men's heads just then, their wings irradiated by the sun-glare and their wild screams reaching in sound the same pitch of quivering intensity reached by the sea-sparkles in light; and the fantastic notion crossed Owen's mind, while Sir John began answering Broch, that those scintillating birds that kept darting down and sheering off above them, were feeding on the shoals of thoughts rising from their four heads, spitting out the English thoughts like the bones of dog-fish, and digesting his own and Broch's like fresh mackerel!

"Don't you see, Master," Sir John was saying — and the shameless thought entered the Prince's wrought-up mind that the worthy knight as he leaned forward with his hands on his knees might have been using Bran's ledge as a close-stool— "don't you see that the bountiful Creator has been pleased in his inscrutable wisdom so to construct our mortal intelligence and fashion the frame-work of our terrestrial minds that all ultimate reasoning is impossible? How could we live, Master; how could we enjoy our meats and our wines and our venery, or the classic authors, or the Holy Scriptures, or the blessed light of the sun, if our Creator hadn't blackened out for us with the celestial juice of the sweet grapes of his divine Nescience all knowledge of these remote things? When we say 'Life' we might as well say 'Blub-a-Blub', like the Shoreditch idiot. When we say 'Death' we might as well say 'Ding-a-Dong', like the great bell of St. Martin's. All that is permitted to our intelligence, Master, all that our minds are made for, is to fear God and forgive — But pardon me, gentles all! Pardon me, *Prince de Galles et Prince de Bon Compères,* there's another ship in sight — and — by Christ — if she isn't—" and even while he uttered the words he was clambering eagerly, for all his portly figure, up the side of a slippery rock a little to the right of them and more seaward than Broch's pool.

"By the fig of the Pope if she isn't — yes! by Jesus, she is — old Jack Redcliffe of Bristol and his *Merry Moll!"*

But if the sight of the Bristol buccaneer — for Master Redcliffe was at once a King's man and a high-seas pirate — was a mischievous joy to the gallant knight, the sight of this group of personable gentry standing exactly where he had intended to land was evidently disconcerting to the Bristol captain. He was sailing close to the wind and near to the shore with the intention of carrying off what booty he could while bad news and local dissensions kept the Welsh court within its walls, when the sight of these four formidable gentlemen, apparently guarding the very landing-place for which he was steering, changed his intention. Straight out to sea, therefore, with the offshore wind filling her sails, he steered the *Merry Moll,* only to find himself in the direct sea-path of the high-bulwark'd French vessel, which was now, though very slowly and under thin canvas, working her way shoreward.

The redoubtable commander of the Bristol ship evidently regarded this foreign craft as a prize sent him by a sympathetic Providence, and from the stir on board it was clear he intended to show his gratitude.

As to the vessel from Môn it was soon obvious to all who were watching that she was hauling down the few sails she could use in that difficult wind; and indeed a minute or two later she dropped her anchor.

"Little Efa's betrothed," thought Owen, "is a true Tudor. He's decided to watch events!"

Meanwhile several local fishing-boats that had been launched before the *Merry Moll* appeared hurriedly put back to land; while, led by Broch-o'-Meifod, both the Prince and Denis joined Sir John on his high rock of observation.

Here the four tall men were in full sight of both French and English vessels; but it was soon plain that the two crews were far too occupied in their personal encounter to pay any attention to spectators.

“There, she flies the Fleur-de-Lys of France!” cried Sir John; “ha, yes! And d’ye see that? Do ye know what *that* is, my Masters?” He turned to the Prince, as he spoke, and Owen smiled back in response; and then he sighed heavily and a lump rose in his gullet, for what he now saw on that queer-shaped unwieldy vessel brought all his adventurous youth into his throat.

Up to the top of the highest mast of the ship there now slowly fluttered, till it waved well above the Fleur-de-Lys, a long streaming pendant of rich *couleur de rose* — the royal oriflamme of Saint Denis!

“That means we’re at war with France,” said Burnell quietly.

But the incorrigible Sir John had begun laughing again. “Look! Look!” he cried. “By Cock and Crish! if Jack’s not nailing up his old Bristol shop-sign, straight from the waterfront by the town bridge! Think of the rogue’s gall — taking to sea his old city merchant-mark! No! No! We know you’re no pirate, Jack. We know you’re a huffing and scruffing rope-maker of Bristol-town! You can’t see what he’s nailed up, Prince Owen; but I can tell you I’ve heard that piece of Gloucestershire pine-wood groan and creak and whine in the wind when you couldn’t smell the mud for the tide! He’s one of us, is Jack, the rope-merchant! I’ve heard him read a tract of Master Wycliffe’s from cover to cover in the old Bull’s Head at Bristol docks, and not a gospel-point did the man miss! ’Twas the Bishop’s Court that made a sea-thief of him. You watch, my Masters, you watch how he tumbles the Frenchmen!”

The Prince couldn’t help glancing at the great bald head at his side to see how his fellow-Welshman received this lively information; but Broch was too intent upon the exchange of bow-shots and catapult-shots and oaths and curses and howls of derision and yells of pain and triumph, and upon the ominous splashes in the water and upon the hideous scraping that the wooden sides of the two vessels made as they grated against each other, to give any heed to the talk of his fellow spectators.

Denis Burnell had been aware for some while of a crowd of armed men collecting at the foot of the castle and of a noisy exchange of shouts between them and the fishermen who were dragging up their boats; and it didn't now fail to cross his mind as he saw a group of these men rushing towards them, following what looked like a human butterfly, all black and red and brandishing a silver trumpet, that it was within the bounds of possibility that the bitterness against the Prince had culminated in a successful insurrection; in which case the chance that the rebels would respect the lives of Glendourdy's guests was small indeed!

But it wasn't only the bald philosopher of death who was watching what was going on in front of him with such spell-bound interest. Both the Prince and Sir John were far too absorbed in the struggle between the ships' crews to concern themselves with what transpired behind them.

To the Prince there was something painful and repulsive about this fight. It wasn't only that he regretted the Frenchmen's defeat, but Jack Redcliffe's men were such a rough piratical set, and so well used to this sort of attack, that the French noblemen, of whom there were several on board, and Owen even thought he recognized the arms of two of them, namely Gascoigne de la Roche and Varge-Deslormes, found themselves at a disadvantage that was distressing to see. "There must be something essentially gross about English humour," he thought, as he heard Sir John's chuckles when both these courtly gentlemen, unable to use their weapons at such close quarters, were overpowered by the Bristol crew, who with jubilant shouts were now clambering from one ship to the other.

And what was this? What in the Virgin's name were these ruffians doing now? His eyes beheld what was happening; but it was too monstrous, too grotesque to be real!

Down were coming both those haughty gonfalons and up was going every stitch of sail on the straining rigging of the *Merry Moll;* until, in Sir John's words, "With the breath of the Lord behind them and a good gospel-rope round the neck of my Lady," Jack Redcliffe steered out to sea with his rich chance-given prize!

Owen heard the shouts of his men behind him, but he heard them as sounds that were irrelevant and meaningless, like a chorus of humming midges on a hot day. The insolent triumph of those Bristol rogues dragged down his spirits till they sank in a moment as low as all that day they had been mounting high. He saw the ceremonious words on the special parchment used by Charles the Sixth. He saw the familiar Royal Seal of France fastened to the document in the delicate way the French Court always did such things. And he saw them being chuckled over by this scurrilous Jack, just as this equally profane Sir John had made sport of their distinguished bearers. They lacked all reverence, these English, whether high-born or lowborn. All they could do was to take and to keep; and laugh while they took and preach while they kept!

He now became aware of an object in the water, about a bow-shot from where he stood, that resembled a human head. Yes! it was a man in the sea. Suddenly it disappeared, but, a moment later, appeared again. It was certainly a swimmer, and a swimmer nigh to the limit of his endurance.

He surveyed this struggling "ego" on the verge of perishing, and he couldn't help glancing at Broch to see whether he'd seen it.

To his surprise, the giant, who was unable to swim, was deliberately advancing into the water; and while he advanced he waved his arms to encourage the swimmer to make a final effort.

Irritated by the cries behind him, for he wasn't in a mood just then to deal with his subjects, Owen swung round on his heel and fiercely ordered the crowd to stay where they were. Then he turned his eyes to the swimmer; and from him to his friend's bald head, which was all that could be seen of Broch-o'-Meifod, who was now standing in seven feet of sea; and in a flash there rushed into his mind the description of Bran's power of wading — *nyt oed uawr y weilgi yna, y ueis yd aeth ef:* "There wasn't much water there, and he went wading."

No one but the Prince himself caught the quick imploring look that reached him from that bald head; but he obeyed it without question and hurriedly began taking off his clothes.

Even while he did this — so quick is thought — he said to himself: "Owen is Owen still! Never dead nor alive shall Hal Bolingbroke, or any other Hal, or John, or Jack, tow *me* after him! And what I am, my Welsh are! They can out-sail us, out-fight us, out-trade us, out-laugh us — but they can't *out-last* us! It'll be from our mountains and in our tongue, when the world ends, that the last defiance of man's fate will rise!"

Stark naked now and stumbling over the slippery weeds and the sharp rock-jags and the cutting rock-shells he could see the bald skull of his friend like a shimmering bell-buoy in the water and, far out beyond it, the head of the swimmer whose strokes had now become those final black, blind, automatic motions of a life-pulse at bay, crying no! no! no! to the down-sucking fathoms of salt-swallowing death.

Denis Burnell, who oddly enough was nervous of the water and unable to swim, watched with interest the deliberate movements of his fellow-Englishman at this juncture: for, divested of his leather boots and his brocaded tunic, the burly knight, panting for breath, but still chuckling in wheezy gasps, was now himself in the sea and swimming with the easy aplomb of a porpoise.

The crowd from the castle, heedless of their Prince's command, had begun to swarm over the rocks; but Denis took no notice of them.

What absorbed his attention just then were the events taking place in that element from which he himself couldn't help shrinking.

He glanced at the two ships — the French prize and the Bristol pirate — and it struck him as one of the most disturbing attributes of this dazzling expanse of sea-water that it should blend the two vessels into one — one fantastically-shaped sea monster, heading for the horizon. Another phenomenon that arrested his attention was the inhuman appearance of certain exposed portions of the drowning creature now being dragged to land by the Prince. *Could* that be a human head? Could those hairy arms belong to a human being? The water around the two figures was kept in a perpetual turmoil by the Prince's struggles not to lose hold of his treasure-trove and yet not to be dragged down by its insensate struggles.

But there! They were both in contact with John now, whose rotund form seemed to be prepared, like an air-blown wine-skin, to support any number of exhausted swimmers.

Panting and spluttering and slipping many times on the sea-weed covered rocks, Sir John no sooner found his feet than he began making attempts to shout to Denis, but each time he reached some particular point, he would fall into such a paroxysm of laughter that, rocking and swaying as he stood, he would find it impossible to retain both his balance and his power of speech.

Nor was his merriment — though not very polite at that moment — without its excuse; for with mutterings and gabblings and chatterings and many disgorgings of swallowed salt-water, there sank down, on the first dry rock he reached, an enormous, almost human-sized chimpanzee.

The crowd from the castle, by no means all soldiers or even all grownup people, now began to gather in a nervous fascinated circle round this unusual object on the rock; and the sight of their stupefaction started Sir John off upon a renewed laughing-fit.

"Dyma, Maitre Jacques Bonhomme!" cried a cook from Brittany; and several more daring children began throwing stones at the frightened creature, but ceased at once when it uttered a jabbering defiance and rose on its hind legs.

The Prince and Broch-o'-Meifod had both joined Oldcastle now, but Denis hesitated to approach them till the Prince had re-assumed his clothes. He felt a little ashamed of himself with his dry hair and unruffled garments in the presence of these dripping heroes, even though they had rescued nothing but an ape.

He bent down and picked up a seagull's feather and began mechanically stroking it. He had a queerly complicated nature and he experienced no mental shock, nor did it strike him as at all inappropriate when, from the rescued pet of the French nobles, his thoughts fled to Mistress Lowri. "I shall get her," he said to himself, "and when the war's over I'll take her abroad for a while. I'll tell the King it's a pilgrimage." And he began for the hundredth time imagining what he would feel when he showed Mistress Lowri the wonders of the Continent.

While he was lost to all his surroundings in these thoughts of Mistress Lowri, the third vessel of this gathering of swift keels had been cleverly and expeditiously roped to the jetty, and a fashionably-dressed young chieftain, with a countenance as crafty as it was intelligent, was at this moment advancing straight towards him, evidently taking him for one of Owen’s adherents.

Still a little ruined in his self-respect by not being able to swim, and pondering whether, if he’d been in Owen’s place, he would have let that monkey drown, he found himself instinctively taking Owen’s part against this Tudor from Anglesea who had come to claim his bride. He had heard on all sides in the castle rumours of Crach Ffinnant’s choice of this man as the one destined to take the Prince’s place; and as he scrutinized him now he seemed to detect in his face every quality needed for remorseless but infinitely cautious ambition.

He turned his head. Ah! the Prince was being helped into his clothes now by that fellow Gam who’d become such a slave of his. There! He was handing over to him the rescued monkey. And it certainly looked as if the poor beast understood that henceforth he was to be as much a slave of Gam as Gam was a slave of Owen! “Were Gam as naked as the other,” thought Denis, “they’d make a fair pair!” And as he moved forward to greet the young chieftain he decided to hold him in conversation as long as possible, so as to give Owen a breathing-space. He was in complete possession of himself now; and as he greeted the man in the airy, frivolous manner that had become the fashion in place of the old chivalric courtesy, he said to himself, beneath his conventional words: “How anyone as sensible as Sir John can go off into such vulgar guffaws just because a beast’s saved in place of a man! Mother of God! As if we weren’t all monkeys, with our chatterings and our antics!” And while he kept his cold inscrutable grey stare fixed on the restless eyes of this proud youth, his mind reverted to the loosened hair and exposed breasts of the woman he had come to fetch — no wilful young Efa, but a mad sorceress — and his spirit faced his future with this strange being in perfect calmness.

"I shall subdue her again, as I did before," he thought, and all manner of intimate passages between them rose up in his mind. "It's because I'm neither excited by her, nor afraid of her. It's because I like her. It's because I'm fond of her. And I don't suppose anyone else in the world — certainly not her daughter — could say that! The monk loves her, but he doesn't like her. Think of only being liked by one person in the whole world! She becomes a young girl again with me. Nobody else does that for her. And that, after all, is the thing with a woman that outlasts everything else!"

"Exactly, my dear young sir," he was now saying; and there was something about his neatly-trimmed, pointed beard and about his Saxon *sang-froid* and his cold, detached, indifferent stare that made the Tudor feel as if the prow of his proud boat had struck an iceberg. "Like yourself," Denis went on, having made sure by a glance at the man he had left that Gam had gone off with his fellow "familiar," and that Owen's fantastic Herald, in his tabard of black lions, was delivering his message, "like yourself I am on my own business here. The Baron of Glendourdy has just picked up from the water a valuable present sent him by the King of France. From what I've seen of this treasure trove it ought to prove a most interesting addition to the castle's bestiary. Have you chanced to see in your travels, sir, the talking Ape of the Emperor Manuel? No court, of course, can be considered civilized without some rarities of this kind. Even King Harry has a white mule at Berkhampstead that breaks wind to each letter of the French King's name. I believe, if the word 'Glendower' is uttered in its presence, it—"

But it was no longer necessary to block the young man's audience with the Prince. Owen seemed completely himself now. He was apparently holding the Herald and the crowd at arm's length while he said goodbye to the sea-drenched Broch. Queer that he should be shaking hands with the man and giving him his blessing when the fellow was only retiring to the castle to change his clothes! Had Denis been nearer, however, he would have been astonished to see how calm two Welshmen can be when they are trying to break each other's hearts.

"So this is the end," Owen was thinking, "a monkey instead of a fleet; and my friend deserting me! Well, well, old conjurer, you've got to swim alone to land now, or sink forever! You knew what was coming when that woman arrived, and now it's come!"

But his words to Broch were calm. "No, no. It's all right, old friend. You needn't say anything. There are times when we're forced to make our choice. I made mine at Glyndyfrdwy when I broke my crystal. You made yours just now when you were tempted to let the sea cover your old skull and have done with it once and for all. Goodbye, my only friend. I fully understand. I know what you feel about Morg and the girls. No! no! Don't say any more. Take what men you need and off with you to Snowdon! In Snowdon you can defend your women against King Hal forever! No! we've discussed it enough. We part as we've lived — nearer to each other than any Welshmen have been since Arthur disappeared!"

The salt-water dripped from every curve and every angle of Broch's figure; and for some queer reason he'd been trying, ever since he came out of the sea, to make a great slippery sea-weed ribbon remain in position round one of his huge wrists.

But now he gave this up and threw the thing away. "You're being as cruel to me as you can, Owen ap Griffith," he said, spitting some brine out of his mouth. "But remember this, my love and Prince! We may be play-actors before each other, night and day, for fifty years; but a time comes when we have to act our part for ourselves alone. We shall meet again, my Prince — once again; and then—"

If there were two kinds of brine on Broch's face, as he pushed his way through the crowd past the Herald, who tried to hold him back, past Gam and the monkey, both of whom gave him an obscure greeting, to where Philip Sparrow awaited him at the postern-gate, there were *three* kinds on the face of the Prince, for the monkey, either in love or in bewilderment, had bitten his cheek as they struggled in the water, and the tears that flowed from his eyes were mingled with blood as well as with sea-salt.

But the impatient and agitated Elphin was now at last permitted to hand to his master the travel-stained letter, the foreign bearer of which, riding post-haste from Milford Haven, had already excited the castle to fever-pitch.

The Prince could see at once — as he raised his head after reading this hurried but ceremonious scrawl, signed by the famous names of Patrouillart de Trie and Robert de la Heuze, that the temper of his subjects had completely changed. He was their venerated leader again; and both Crach Ffinnant and his Demon-Saint were completely forgotten.

"May I announce it in the presence of these English noblemen, my Prince?" asked Elphin.

"You may announce it to the Irish Sea, my lad," laughed Owen. "All Ardudwy seems to know it already!"

And in the most resonant voice that had ever been heard on that Harlech beach the young man proclaimed: "To the Principality and Dominion of our high and mighty sovereign Lord, Owen ap Griffith Fychan, and to the Realm of England lately subject to the noble and gracious Prince Richard, the Second of that name, be it understood and known of all men in both these nations and in all the countries and provinces and continents and islands abroad that the royal army conveyed by the royal fleet of the *Royaume de France* has safely anchored in Milford Haven, to aid and assist to the best of its power in the downfall of that sacrilegious and treacherous usurper, Henry Bolingbroke, falsely called Henry the Fourth. *God save Prince Owen!"*

And so deafening was the shout that went up from the soldiers and people that it was only Denis, to whose side the dripping, fish-smelling Sir John had now shuffled, who heard what that incorrigible jester said.

"God save the King!" the old Lollard retorted. "And God confound the King's Archbishop!"

XX. KNIGHTS AND BISHOPS

THE SPRING HAD passed and most of the summer, when on Lammas Day, August the first, in the year of grace fourteen hundred and five, Herald Elphin and his young ally, Iago ap Cynan, stood together in the doorway of a large shepherd's hut, or *bwthyn,* overlooking the castle of Haverford West. The cottager, or *bwthynnwr,* to whom the hut belonged, was at their side, engaged at present in a political argument with Master Philip Sparrow to whose care, for both the Arglwyddes and Lady Mortimer had implored him to keep an eye on the lads during their first campaign, Owen had entrusted the two young friends.

It had been at Broch-o'-Meifod's express wish that Master Sparrow had remained with the Prince when he himself with his wife and daughters departed for Snowdon; and all the ladies, with whom the beautiful Elphin was such a favourite, had been delighted when the Prince — always indulgent in matters of this sort — had assigned the formidable Master Sparrow as body-guard to the Court Herald and his friend.

Elphin had just that moment turned to Master Sparrow, whose precise position with regard to them had not been made very clear, and had petulantly enquired how soon he supposed the professional summons, to announce the capture of the castle to the burghers of the town, might be expected to arrive.

To this question Master Sparrow had seen fit to return no answer; and the impatient Herald and his friend could do no better than listen to the argument that was going on between the two men.

"Penfro's more English than Welsh," the shepherd was declaring, "and where her's not Welsh her's Flemish; and what I say is—"

"But you're a Welshman as much as I am," protested Master Sparrow, his high-pitched Powys-Maelor accent rising sharper and shriller the more his feelings were aroused. "What you people of the South don't see is that Owen ap Griffith is fighting for something larger than just Wales against England! He's fighting for the common people against the gentry in all Ynys Prydain! Your Flemish weavers will gain by his victory as much as we. When once the red dragon flies over every castle in the land — when once — I tell you! — Wales is what Owen wants to make her, with her Parliament for the Commonalty and her colleges for poor scholars, these curst gentry behind their stone walls will have to come to terms!

"We'll have then, Master Twm-o'-Bryn, what we've never had yet in the world, a real nation of the common people! I don't care how many foreigners there are in Penfro. To the Devil with your foreigners! If their sweat fattens our soil, and their fingers weave the wool of our sheep, they're our brothers. They're born of women like us, aren't they? They eat, drink, sleep like us, don't they? And when they're dead they stink like us. What do they pay tribute to Owen for, save to be kept from the malice of the men of the castles?

"Do'ee think I'm proud of these French knights, with their *fol-de-rols* and *garde-a-tois,* their trilla-lirras and *fleur-de-luces?* I'm ashamed to the marrow of my bones that we had to have them! But Owen knows what he's about. He's using knighthood to crush knighthood and chivalry to end chivalry! He's going to Tenby next, they say; then off, over the Usk, to Caerleon and Llantarnam! You've got to take a long view, Tom Shepherd, when it comes to this war. It'll go on, I tell you, even if Owen fails. It'll go on as long as there's a shepherd or a herdsman left in the land!

"These Frenchmen won't do us any lasting good. They're not workers like your Flemings. They're just the old love-your-lady and couch-your-lance gentry that the long-bows have unsaddled already!

"Times have changed, Twm-o'-Bryn, times have changed. Owen's doing more than he knows — bless his fork-beard! He may fail — Dewi Sant grant he don't! — but he's already lit such a beacon in this old land that nothing can put it out! It may be lost for a season — buried under the cinders of your Penfro *bwthyn* and of my Meifod *bwthyn* — but once lit it can never be extinguished."

"Gently, gently, Master Sparrow," protested the shepherd, winking at Iago ap Cynan who had begun to give ear to their talk. "My wife's dad in there," and he jerked his thumb towards the interior of the hut, "can mind the Black Death; and the day when labouring men, such as we, were beat and tormented and hanged by the neck for leaving their masters' fields. He says of course he's old and dotty, but I've listened to 'un since I were a *bachgen* and I've never known him wrong — he says that the land-serfs rose in many places and killed their lords, but naught came o't, he says, save a speechless hatred, lying like a millstone at the bottom of our hearts. There've been, Dad says, poor men's revolts, since thousands of years before Jesus, but not a one of them have done no good! Them as has got the land has got the souls of them as has to live upon the land!"

"Master Sparrow!" interrupted Elphin who hadn't listened to a word of this talk, so intent were his eyes on the extremely obscure and bewilderingly confused segment of the skirmishing below that the morning mists were alternately revealing and concealing. "Do you think, Master Sparrow, that the time has come for us to go down and find the Prince? It seems to me that there's hardly any more resistance. He'll want me to announce his terms to his prisoners; as well as to those who aren't yet his prisoners! I'd hate not to be there when he wants me."

Both Master Sparrow and the owner of the *bwthyn* turned upon the young man faces of scorn. "Where are your eyes, lad?" the shepherd remarked, revealing, Elphin thought, a deplorable ignorance of the great world, and of how heralds were esteemed there. "Don't you see that that wall you're looking at between those trees isn't the town wall at all, but the castle wall! They've a-took the town hours ago — afore you gentlemen were awake! Didn't ye hear what *Taid* said to little Olwen a while since, when ye were making her cheeks so red by praising her cakes?"

"No, Master, I didn't hear," cried Elphin eagerly; and he approached closer to the shepherd, who regarded his excited young face with less sympathy than if it had been the face of a well-horned tup.

"What did the old gentleman say to Mistress Olwen?" the lad repeated.

"Said young David came along here afore dawn, wi'all his pigs, and 'a told 'n town were took — took in the night. Didn't ye hear? But 'twere when ye were asking little Olwen for more of her *bara brith* and her were toasting at the coals! 'Twere little Olwen's curls ye were thinking of, I reckon, more'n her grand-dad's talk."

Iago came forward at that point, casually and nonchalantly. He hadn't hesitated himself, during this eventful night, when the town of Haverford West was being pillaged, to lift aside the curtain of the alcove on the left side of the hearth where little Olwen slept. But the old *Taid* was as uneasy a sleeper as any amorous youth, and before the girl was even aware that the most unscrupulous page in her Prince's court was peering down upon her pillow a significant movement from the ragged deer-skin on the other side of the hearth had sent the discomforted amorist back to his place by his sleeping friend.

"I must not play the fool," was what crossed the boy's mind now, "with any more Luneds! I promised myself I wouldn't. It was only because— "And he tried to persuade himself, as he listened to Olwen's father repeating what the swineherd had said, that the girl had "given him a look" as she drew her curtain.

"No, it's you, it's you, Rhisiart ab Owen, that I must keep in mind. First the Princess and then the Maid in armour! No light-of-love could turn you aside. Nothing could turn you aside! They think the King has caught you. Not a bit of it! Or if he has, he's caught a Tartar."

So absorbed was Iago in the competent steering of his life that as soon as Olwen's father ceased mentioning the girl who had unloosed her black curls behind that curtain, after "giving him a look," there fell between him and the confused mêlée in the valley below a kind of pictured glass.

A parallel intervention, only this was a muting medium rather than a dimming one, rose between him and what Twm-o'-Bryn and Master Sparrow were saying to each other. These subjective transparencies — for a portion of his consciousness pierced through them — contained a procession of moving images and grandiose sounds that weren't very different, for they too were full of blood and iron, from the drama that was now being revealed in the more objective medium of the morning mist and commented upon by the men at his side.

It was thus through fluctuating projections of himself in various commanding situations that Iago heard the men's talk, and watched the mist-magnified weapons as besiegers and besieged struggled for the possession of that fragment of wall.

"I can tell ye, Twm," cried Master Sparrow, "who that tall knight is — there! he's down! No, he's up again! It's from the back of the castle he's trying to get in! He must have bridged the moat — it's narrow there, not more than a ditch! He'll do it! No he won't — he won't!"

Iago's mental mist was all gone now and his pictures of future glory gone with it. He was staring at that gap in the trees as eagerly as Elphin. Neither of them had ever seen such a desperate fighter as that tall knight, or one so reckless of wounds and death.

Presently the owner of the *bwthyn,* without displaying any particular emotion, said something in a low voice to Philip Sparrow who turned at once to the two lads. "Into the house with ye, gentlemen! My orders was clear — to keep ye both out of harm's way till we're on the march for London town! Then ye can show your mettle as ye will!"

Tom the Shepherd, or *Twm Bugail,* had already entered the hut and his voice could be heard talking to his bed-ridden wife; but Master Sparrow, recognising that this was a critical test of his authority, had to go about the task of getting his young charges into shelter with considerable tact. But the truth is the man hadn't lived for five years cheek by jowl with Broch-o'-Meifod without noticeable modifications of his former cantankerousness. Besides, he himself found difficulty in withdrawing from this exciting scene, for he knew the *bwthyn's* one small window would be a wretched substitute for the open hillside.

Thus he kept pulling Elphin by the sleeve towards the door while all the while his own head was twisted round towards that narrow stage of desperate battle.

"Yes! It's Patrouillart de Trie, their chief French champion! I know his black armour. Like all those fool-knights he's been itching, ever since he came over, to do some mad impossible thing. There! They're making a sortie against him — coming over the wall with ladders! Fool! If they begin that he hasn't a chance. He'd better get away while he can. There's not a

Welshman with him, look you! It's Patrouillart right enough. Can't you see his black armour? 'Tis the very mail he had on when we found them encamped at Milford. 'Tis a pretty suit. Our armourer can't hammer out all that fancy work. There, he's down! Yes, they've got him; and his men are running! Twm here knows the garrison well. Three were herdsmen from Somerset, he says, not to mention a dozen from Exmoor. Stout men of their hands, he says; and not over-fond of King Harry either. But they'll fight with any *coup de Dieus* or *grace de Maries* like cur-bitten badgers! Don't like the cut of a French beard, he says. Into the house with ye, gentlemen! Those were the orders. No, there's not a Welshman down there. French and English; nothing but them; so what's it to us *who's* prisoners?

"Patrouillart must have thought he could take the castle alone if he got in from the back. There! All quiet. How his household ran! He must be a prisoner. They made a sortie and finished his little game. Well! he's a man anyway. Fair play to him; he certainly is a man! Think of trying to take Castell Haverford West by his own strength! Into the house with ye, gentlemen; and bear witness how I kept my word to the Prince.

"Fight like a devil that Frenchman did; and what armour! Our armourers don't bother with all those fol-de-rols. But 'twas a pretty sight; and he's a prisoner now! A tirra-lirra gentleman — curse his whoreson soul! — but, fair play to him, a man for all that; and a prisoner. Who'll wear that armour now? His magnificence Francis de Court, no doubt, King Harry's pet! And Lady Joan will have those black ornaments made into bangles. Heigh ho! The great Patrouillart a prisoner! Into the house with ye, gentlemen, into the house!"

As they stooped to follow him under the low-hung lintel our two young friends had very different thoughts. Elphin said to himself: "Oh that I'd been sent by Patrouillart to tell the Prince of his plight!" While Iago thought: “Our worthy Sparrow’s torn between his peasants’ revolt and his love of heroes. He hates Patrouillart on principle and adores him in practice! This is what might have happened to me if I hadn’t acquired the philosophy of Rhisiart, that profound and penetrating man!”

Forcing himself, therefore, on the strength of what he considered his hero’s principles, to avoid the peril of those “looks” which he was certain Olwen was giving him, Iago deliberately sank into a concentrated speculation about his future life. The sight of the sea at Milford, though there were only a few French ships still anchored in the bay, had been not a little upsetting to him; and it was upon this overpowering attraction that he now brought to bear the full force of what he had come to call “Rhisiart’s philosophy.”

How could he find these highly-placed damsels — by whose aid he was resolved to rise to power and glory — if he yielded to his longing to go to sea? It is true his friend Elphin often spoke of mermaids; “But I might as well ride to success,” he thought, “on the back of a unicorn, as on the tail of a mermaid.”

The famous Prince Madoc had left the warring nations in disgust and had found some huge continent beyond the setting sun; but none had sailed there since, and even if he followed the example of that great man it was likely enough that there were no more continents to discover.

It almost seemed then that if he pursued the relentless path of Clerk Rhisiart he would have to give up not only the dark curls of the maidens of Penfro but the dark horizons of the sea as well, and this thought troubled him not a little.

“I feel,” he said to himself, “as if this campaign were the crisis of my life,” and he gave a quick sideways glance, full of the irritation of a person who is *suppressing* himself with a person who is *expressing* himself, at the illuminated countenance of his friend Elphin who, as they sat side by side on a bench that, by the notches upon it, had evidently served the purpose both of a butcher's block and a carpenter's table, was clearly absorbed in one thing only, the penetrating charm of this *bwthyn* interior.

The great Patrouillart, whether dead or alive, had passed completely from this young artist's mind. He too was forming resolutions; but these had only to do with certain changes he would make — when this campaign was over and he had proclaimed Owen's victory — in his Herald's Chamber at Harlech.

He had no idea that the shepherds' huts ever held such perfect specimens of twelfth-century carving as was the low bed, only raised a foot from the floor, upon which the sick woman was lying.

There were very few modern objects in the *bwthyn* of Twm-o'-Bryn. Indeed perhaps only one could be called so; and that was a particular kind of shepherd's crook, a kind that was now being made in Dorset in considerable quantity, and conveyed from Poole Harbour to Milford Haven by that enterprising burgess and ship-master, Dick Hussey of Wareham.

It was by marrying the old man's daughter that *Twm Bugail* had entered into possession of this homestead, whose name — *Tŷ-uwch-y-Llyn* — indicated that it had stood for centuries on the hill above the castle-moat.

It was spacious enough, this single room round which Elphin's eyes now wandered; and to the lad's mind it possessed a special dignity and beauty, for it reminded him of his own home, *y Grug* or "the Mound", bestowed on his ancestor by Griffith ap Cynan.

The mist-distorted image he had glimpsed just now of that tall figure in black armour hurled back into the moat and deserted by his men had sunk deeply into his imagination.

This was the first vision of real war he had seen except for that Bristol pirate and the French ship, and his heart leapt up to think that it had been his privilege to see the great Patrouillart, singly and alone — like Peredur ab Evrawc, or Owain ab Urien — assaulting a whole castle!

The worst of it was — and how mixed up the events of life were! — whenever the heroic Patrouillart appeared between him and all these gracious objects that revived memories of his home in Edeyrnion, a pulse of shame beat in his soul and a hot interior blush, though his friend couldn't see it, burned in his cheeks.

He ought to have rushed down the hill to the help of that noble knight, instead of letting himself be hustled into shelter along with these peasants and these women!

But Elphin's passion for a symbolic atmosphere soon overpowered his shame. "This scene," he said to himself, as he listened to Master Sparrow's prediction that the English labourers would throw off their lords' yoke the moment Owen crossed the border, "is a scene I'll never forget to my dying day. It'll most certainly affect the whole arrangement of my room when I get back to Harlech. And if only I could — oh! if only I could! — see all these heads as the heads of heraldic beasts!"

But whether he could give them an heraldic twist or not, the clear-cut classical lineaments of the sick woman as she rested immobile on her high pillows, the tumbled curls and mischievous mouth and restless eyes of Olwen, the long pointed nose and rough red hair of Twm, the familiar lanky black locks, pinched mouth and sunken eyes of Master Sparrow, along with the bowed grey head of the old man bending over the pot, made up a group of living creatures that roused an indescribable feeling in the lad's breast.

The walls were hung with old-fashioned bows and arrows, intermingled with the still carefully-polished harness of horses long since dead. A massive distaff and weaving-frame stood at the foot of the woman's bed. On the heavy oak table in the centre of the room was a large wooden bowl, surrounded by smaller ones of the same dark oak, rubbed smooth by a century's use, and each containing a battered wooden spoon.

There was a great bundle of dried furze-stalks piled up against the inner wall of the *bwthyn;* and every now and then the girl would cross the room to this pile and fetching a little bundle of these inflammable sticks throw them upon the hearth where the glowing bricks of peat caused them to break into flame.

But Elphin's artist-eye soon appreciated the fact that the real centre of the whole place wasn't so much the hearth itself as an enormous iron cauldron which stood on a tripod in front of the hearth.

Some extremely savoury stew was boiling in this cauldron; and the grand father, armed with a long wooden spoon, was engaged in stirring this steaming brew.

Elphin soon became teased by the fact that Tom Shepherd, the master of the house, kept approaching the cauldron, as if distrusting the competence of the old man. Elphin himself cared nothing about the brew or its stirring. All he desired was for everything and everybody to remain where they were forever. "This is life!" is what his whole nature was crying; though he made no attempt to put this feeling into words.

With a vague delicious sense of majestical far-off times, when cauldrons like this were mixed and stirred by beings of supernatural power, he would have liked to have immobilized this spectacle and shown to the world its immortal significance.

But Tom Shepherd suddenly cried out, "Take care, Grand-dad! Those daisy-eye bubbles be rising and bursting! Take care or broth will spoil!"

"See to't theeself, Twm!" muttered the old man, without lifting his head. "Stir'un theeself, if thee can't trust one as has stirred cauldrons in Castell Merddin avore thee were born!"

Elphin watched with intense interest these "daisy-eye bubbles" rising to the rim of this huge receptacle, which was so arranged on its iron tripod that the flames kindled by Olwen ardently licked its belly.

He soon perceived what the grandfather's dim eyes, made obstinately dimmer by his son-in-law's interference, had missed; namely, that a thin foam of broth was trickling down the side of the cauldron upon the hearthstone.

The girl, however, also saw this, and running for a cloth was soon on her knees wiping up the steaming drops; while, with the dying down of the flames she'd been feeding, the boiling in the pot subsided too.

"Why do women," thought the young Court Herald, "always go on so long scrubbing the place where anything's been spilt, after they've got it up?"

But Elphin was soon aware of a fidgetty unease on the bench beside him, where his friend was having some difficulty in following his recent adherence to the Rhisiartian philosophy of self-control.

Elphin himself was not indifferent — though being an artist his emotion was more diffused — to the engaging spectacle of Olwen scrubbing the floor at their very feet; but the whole scene was giving him such exquisite pleasure that the kneeling girl became only the final touch in a natural work of art so perfect that it was impossible to isolate any of its elements from the rest.

The whole *bwthyn,* with all its human figures, was grouped to the Herald's mind round the cauldron; and the longer Olwen scrubbed at that stone, and he began to wonder now if she weren't purposely tormenting

Iago with her proximity, the more the scene lost its prosaic reality and became the kind of symbolic truth that he had long longed to eternalize in some form of art.

Elphin had already been made obscurely aware of the presence in this great western promontory of something that answered a craving in him that he was unable to define. It had to do with a peculiar quality, a hidden virtue in the very texture of these rocks and marshes and mists and headlands; and it seemed to him as if this great cauldron that he now saw bubbling before him, with the girl kneeling beneath it and the old man bending above it, held the very secret he sought.

He even found himself wishing that he were the youngest in the place; so that in accordance with what he had heard was a custom in these parts he might be given the first taste of this magic brew!

His mind had just reverted to Luned and to a fantastic hope, a hope that grew more plausible the further off he was, that he might really be the father of her child, when the white-faced woman suddenly lifted herself up into a sitting posture and brought them all to their feet with a terrifying cry.

"He's at the door!" And Elphin realized then that ever since they had entered the *bwthyn,* they had all been expecting this, and that every word they had uttered and every gesture they had made had been a mystic prelude to this consummation.

With the woman sitting up straight in bed, with Olwen standing at her side clinging to her hand, with the old man crossing himself and muttering, "Mary, Joseph! Mary, Joseph!" they were all certain now — though no knock had come and no appeal had been made — that the tall figure in black armour was outside.

"Shall I bar the door, Nest?" enquired the man of the house, in a low husky voice, of the woman in the bed.

"Bar the door, do you say? You fool, you fool! Open it quick, for Christ's holy blood, or I'll do it myself!"

Twm of *Tŷ-uwch-y-Llyn* obeyed her without question; and there, on the threshold, and now stumbling forward into their midst, with bare head bent to enter, was the man who had fought alone against a castle! His long narrow face above his black gorget was white as death. He held a broken sword in his hand, which slipped from his fingers as he stood swaying there before them, and fell with a metallic ring upon the floor.

Iago ap Cynan moved stealthily past him and took it upon himself, unauthorized by anybody, to close and bolt the door. He even went to the window and looked out. "They've gone back," he said, addressing nobody in particular.

Patrouillart de Trie lifted his hands, both of which were bare, to his long death-white face and covered his eyes for a moment as if to give help to his bloodless brain in formulating its last and most difficult thoughts. When he removed his hands there were bloody smears across his thin forehead and it seemed to Elphin, who watched him in spellbound awe, that these crimson stains arranged themselves into a mystic monograph, like the mysterious name written on the foreheads of the army of martyrs in the Book of Revelation!

Elphin never forgot that moment. It was the culmination of all. He felt the presence of the wooden bowl in the centre of the table. He felt the presence of the smaller bowls each with its wooden spoon. He felt the presence of the great cauldron on its iron tripod. And now here was the Black Knight himself, the dedicated subject of all the romances he had ever read!

Elphin could not be called belligerent; but in his heart he cursed Iago just then with a ferocity that surprised himself. He uttered this vicious malediction on his friend’s head because, while everyone else was awaiting in hushed expectancy some word or sign from Patrouillart, whose right hand was up once more at his head, while his left was scrabbling grotesquely and impotently at his armoured breast as if the trunk of his body were a wire cage containing a fluttering bird, what must Iago do — and oh! how he hated that puckery face and those small black eyes! — but kick over a bucket of swill which Olwen, interrupted by their entrance, had forgotten to remove!

And as if this weren’t enough, the insensitive lad proceeded to save himself from a fall by touching with his hand the almost supernatural figure of the Black Knight.

Everybody but Iago was completely under the spell of this tottering and swaying form; and there quivered through Elphin a faint shivering fear, not of Patrouillart, but of the power of his friend to treat Patrouillart so calmly. The spilling of that bucket caused a sour garbage smell to pervade the place; and the unconcerned manner in which Iago was now actually assisting Patrouillart in his advance to the woman in the bed played the same part in the human dimension as the bucket played in the inanimate one, both of them joining to drag Elphin’s enchanted moment heavily to the ground.

It was an indescribable comfort to our young Herald when his friend, having so grossly presumed to meddle with this tragic apparition, did at last fall back, letting the figure sink on its knees at the side of the woman’s pillow.

Olwen too fell back; and it was a surprise to Elphin, though from the expression on that square face it was no surprise to Iago, when the girl’s fingers tightened upon that rogue’s wrist.

“Aux blanches mains — aux blanches mains!” murmured the Frenchman hoarsely; and then, “Tiens!” he groaned. “Désarmez! Délacez! Arrachez! Souffrez-moi que je meurs! Par l’amour de Dieu — cette pointe de lance!”

Whether the woman understood his words Elphin couldn’t tell, but that she understood his meaning was plain to all. Very gently she unlaced his gorget and laid it on the bed beside her. Then with more difficulty — but none of the onlookers, not even Iago as he stood by Olwen’s side, dared to offer help — she unhooked his breast-plate and pulled aside from the ghastly wound his blood-soaked shirt.

“She’ll faint now,” Elphin thought. “She can’t pull out that spearhead!”

But the man kept beseeching her; and it was clear that the pain was almost beyond his endurance. *“Arrachez la pointe de fer* — for the love of God!” he kept repeating. “Your hands are so small,” Elphin heard him moan. *“Mains petites — arrachez la pointe — souffrez-moi que je meurs — vite! vite! — aux blanches mains!”*

And then in the view of them all — those two faces, the man’s and the woman’s being as close as they were white and wide-eyed — she clenched her teeth and forcing her fingers into his bleeding flesh, while a choking, long-drawn, shuddering cry tore itself from both their throats, she wrenched the spear-head out of the wound.

Following it, in a dreadful spurt of red, his life-blood poured over her; over her arms, over her breast, over her pillow! His last words seemed to sink with his blood into the inmost being of this woman he had never seen before.

“Vièrge de Chartres! *”* Elphin heard him gasp twice over; and then: *“Pour le Royaume de France*! *”* and with this the head of Patrouillart de Trie straightened itself, jerked backward, jerked forward, and sank with the

death-convulsion of the man’s whole body against the carved edge of the woman’s bed.

The days that followed this event passed through the brain of Elphin like heraldic pictures embroidered on canvas by the hands of the Fates themselves.

“I don’t care now,” he thought, “even if we don’t crown Owen in London where Bran the Blessed was crowned! I have seen honour in the flesh. I have heard honour give its triumph-cry. And though it was its death-cry also, that doesn’t matter; that’s a bagatelle. *N’importe! Ce n’est pas grand’ chose.”*

Elphin held fast to the end of his days to this revelation of the spiritual character of French chivalry. He held fast too to his belief in his own capacity for heroism, though this latter faith was now to receive a considerable shock. The allied army — and it was a wonder to see that enormous host; for there must, all told, have been nearly fifteen thousand men embattled there under Owen — moved from Haverford West to Tenby and besieged the castle there. While thus engaged, the King’s courtier-captain, Francis de Court, who had managed by the help of his wife Joan to wheedle himself into the great Lordship of Pembrokeshire, brought into action against the allied host a curious and terrifying weapon.

De Court was a personable young favourite, frivolous and fantastic, and full of end-of-the-fourteenth-century disillusionment; but he took a lively and wanton interest in scientific experiment. Thus no sooner had the enormous allied host, with its numberless banners of France and Wales flaunting in the air, its emblazoned shields, its thousands of bowmen and spearmen, its masses of heavily accoutred men-at-arms, made its first assault upon the walls of Tenby than, with calm assurance and incredible levity, this same unconscionable de Court, perched upon a rampart that seemed impervious to all missiles, ignited a monstrous charge of gunpowder that caused to be flung for a distance as far as a stone's throw projectiles of such size that it was as if Jove himself with his thunderbolts were aiding the defenders.

But this was not the worst. For no sooner had the noise and smoke of this alarming cannonade drawn all the bravest commanders, including Owen and de la Heuze, the one-eyed French champion, to this menacing angle of the fortress than a far more agitating event struck panic-terror into the captainless rear of the allied army. This was nothing less than the appearance of a great fleet of English ships — thirty to fifty in number — in full sail for the landing-place!

The sea was calm, the wind was behind them, their decks were crowded. At the prows of each ship there waited dare-devil desperadoes, armed to the teeth, who looked as if they would leap to the shore the moment the ships touched land. But it was the horrid silence with which they approached, it was the absence of ordinary battle-cries, it was the lack of all the civilized paraphernalia of modern warfare, that made this fleet so terrifying.

In a few moments, all the advantage that Owen had snatched from the reckless de Court by a bold defiance of his cannonade was lost to the allies. The unfortunate thing was that this new attack threatened the less experienced portion of the straggling Welsh army. Their best men were all gathered under the castle walls; and it was their leaderless rear, trailing along the harbour's edge, that confronted the approach of this fleet. Sailing in on a favouring wind this armada looked larger than it actually was. The whole water seemed covered with swaying masts and swelling sails.

Elphin himself, it must be confessed, was among the first to take refuge in flight. The others followed him, and very soon the whole of that portion of the army was seized with a wild panic. It was as if this frivolous young de Court had countered Owen’s “spirits” with some appalling kind of *hud* or *lledrith,* some devilish illusion or enchantment, calculated to throw the noblest host into confusion!

As Master Sparrow and Iago ran by Elphin’s side, and as it became evident that the Prince and his vanguard had been compelled to follow their panic-stricken army, Elphin heard his friends breathlessly commenting on this untoward event. Their comments struck him almost as painfully as the phantom-fleet itself; for they both were presuming to criticize the Prince’s whole management of this great campaign. With gasps and groans Master Sparrow, who sweated freely as he ran, for he was no longer the lean and taciturn husbandman whom Broch had lured to Meifod from the Tassel Inn, hesitated not to accuse Owen of buckling to the Frenchmen’s love of display.

“Why the devil,” he panted, “aren’t we now halfway to Hereford, instead of parading our ridiculous pomp round these castles? Owen thinks too much of castles. It’s his curst gentility! He ought never to have left the mountains and forests. Above all he ought to have kept away from the sea. We’re not meant—”

But this aspersion, by a simple rustic, upon the element over which Prince Madoc had sailed to discover new worlds was too much for Iago; and Elphin, who could think of nothing just then but the unheard-of shame of a herald running away, was compelled to listen to a completely irrelevant defence of the fine seamanship of Welsh sailors.

“By Crish and Saint Ffraid!” groaned Master Sparrow soon. “I can’t run a step further. There, there! Enough my masters! Enough in God’s name!” They stopped and looked back. “’Tis as I thought,” the breathless fellow gasped. “Owen’s got ’em under control. There are his black lions! There’s his flamingo-feather!” He paused and rubbed his face with both hands. But the flamingo-feather had excited his spleen. “What does the man want, I ask ye, with all that flummery? To astonish the Frenchmen! That’s all it is. Oh these gentry, these gentry! Here, sit ye down, masters, sit ye down,” and he indicated a fallen tree. “I’ve a pretty little poppet of news for ye, if ye can bear any more.”

The two lads were glad enough to take his advice; and all three sank down in the bracken with their backs against the log, watching the flamingo-feather of their Prince and the white plume of the one-eyed de la Heuze flit about amid the disorganized ranks like a couple of majestic butterflies.

But neither of the young men felt the smallest desire to hear their companion’s “poppet of news”. Elphin had been out of sympathy with this champion of the people all along. The man’s tone made him feel like a pampered page rather than the youngest of the ancient and honourable Order of Court Heralds. It was an insult to his discretion as well as a slight upon his courage that he should have to put up with this cantankerous and crochetty body-guard.

As for Iago, his mind, as would soon have been detected by an observer more on the alert than either of his present companions, was almost oblivious to the impressive scene before him. It is true that his small, deep-set black eyes stared at those tossing banners and glittering spears just as his small, well-shaped ears listened to the shouts and the clamour of the reassembled host; but both sights and sounds were to him just then a negligible background, against which he saw the detestable red hair and inquisitive nose of the owner of that *bwthyn,* as these objects intruded themselves upon his farewell interview with little Olwen.

“It’s dark chestnut her curls are,” he thought, “not black as they looked in that smoky hovel. Mother of God! What a sneaking devil, to come round the house spying on a person!”

“Tis a wonderful sight, gentlemen, isn’t it,” Master Sparrow was saying, “to see all those spearmen and bowmen from the land of our fathers ready to march upon the city of London? Well! I’ll tell you what reached my ears last night, as I had a cup of mead with certain old mates of mine who’ve friends over the border. It seems there’s a real revolt brewing in Hereford and Worcester against the gentry. They’ve only to catch a glimpse of our people to hail Owen as their deliverer!”

Thus speaking he turned to his companions with the air of an oracle. But the young egoists at his side received this information with complete indifference.

Elphin said to himself: “Will my voice carry in the middle of those tall houses, when I proclaim to the London merchants that their lives and possessions will be respected?”

And Iago thought: “He must sometimes have snatched a little pleasure, on the side as it were, as he pursued his master-purpose. Besides, *my* princess, *my* maid in armour, hasn’t yet appeared; and even he must have allowed himself before he met the women he could use — an occasional—”

But their body-guard from the plough hadn’t lived with Broch-o’-Meifod for nothing. In place of falling into sardonic silence in the presence of these insolent young springalds as he would certainly have done at the Tassel, he contented himself with asking them if they’d heard why it was that the French knights had so few horses.

Both the lads turned quickly to him then; and having secured their attention he explained that several hundreds of their horses had died at sea from lack of water.

Elphin shuddered. His imagination pictured the heavy bodies of these dead and dying animals as they were thrown to the fishes; and he suddenly found himself yielding to a dark and chilly doubt as to whether he would, after all, lift up his voice in London-town.

“What do you think,” he enquired, “has become of those terrible looking men we saw on those ships? You don’t suppose they’ve landed, do you, and gone off by some long detour to intercept us?”

Iago gave his friend a quick glance. It was strange what practical thoughts could come into that girlish head!

But Master Sparrow re-assured them both. “English sailors,” he said, “never go far from their ships. Besides, gentlemen, not even the crews of fifty ships would dare to attack a whole army.”

Pondering on the peculiarities of English sailors, Iago decided that it would certainly be with a Welsh crew that he would sail to discover Prince Madoc’s continent and the hidden retreats of its eager princesses.

“How did the Black Knight come to be left so entirely alone, Master Sparrow?” Elphin now enquired. As he spoke he cast round the neighbouring hills the glance of a seasoned campaigner. He hadn’t missed his friend’s surprised look, and his tone was now the tone of one man with another, in the presence of a well-meaning but totally inexperienced youth.

The ex-herdsman of the Tassel found this question entirely to his taste. “These French gentry,” he explained, “are as different from ours as ours are from the English. Their chief desire is to win personal glory by performing some startling feat of arms. The Black Knight was alone for the simplest of all reasons: because he wanted to be alone. Nobody knew — neither Owen nor the others — what he was up to; and so of course they couldn’t—”

“But I have often heard you say, Master Sparrow,” Iago broke in, and there was a contrariness in his voice that made the herdsman’s fingers itch to give those little shining black eyes a resounding buffet, “that all gentry are the same; and that our campaign is as much to liberate the common people of England as the common—"

But the malicious lad now scrambled to his feet quite as precipitately as his listeners. None of the three, as they stretched out their legs in the sweet-scented bracken, watching at their ease the stirring spectacle before them and listening to the Welsh horns and the French trumpets, had noticed the approach from their rear of a little group of Harlech guards.

Well known to them all, these stealthy new-comers hesitated not to enhance the shock they gave them by considerable merriment at their expense; and thus when, under instructions from the Prince, our three friends were gathered into the Ardudwy contingent not far from his own person, and falling into their places were swept forward in the general advance, Elphin at any rate was aware of a dull throbbing bruise in the depths of his self-esteem which considerably spoilt the excitement he felt at having at last really and truly started on this historic, this memorable, this longed-for march to London.

As may be imagined, the various disturbing episodes, some romantic and marvellous, some shocking and painful, which that great march evoked, obliterated by degrees the youth's chagrin at having led — for in his heart he knew that he was the first to run — that panic-flight from those ships.

It took some days, all the same, to free his mind from that awe-inspiring sight. He may, he thought, have a little exaggerated the ogrish ferocity of the sailors, for of course they were too far-off for him to see their faces; but there must have been *something* weird and unnatural about them, or Master Sparrow and Iago wouldn't have run, too.

Hadn't Rhisiart told him a terrifying tale once, in their Snowdon fortress, about the great enchanter Gwydion ap Don calling up from the abyss a fleet that was pure illusion to over-awe the crafty Arianrod? Elphin remembered how Rhisiart had pinched his arm as he told him this story and how he'd said to himself, even while the tears filled his eyes, that the pain of the pinching was nothing to the awfulness of the vision described.

But if Elphin's feeling about the ships gradually died away as they marched, Iago's memories of the *bwthyn* of *Tŷ-uwch-y-Llyn* and those curls that were "rather chestnut than black" grew more and more obsessing.

Iago found that it was pain to him even so much as to speak to any red-haired Welshman in their troop because it brought back to his mind the red hairs that grew between the eyebrows of Twm-o'-Bryn; hairs that had presented themselves to his attention when he had almost decided that it wasn't necessary to have a purpose quite as clear-cut as that which suited such an unusual character as Rhisiart. "We can't all be Rhisiarts," he had said to himself on that occasion, with Olwen's dainty chin already between his finger and thumb.

But it was all spoilt by that whoreson foxy nose, with the red hairs above it, sniffing round the house. So absorbed in these thoughts did Iago become that Elphin decided again and again, as their victorious advance led them through many famous places, that when he returned to Harlech he would relate to Luned the whole engaging story of their boyish friend's initiation into the joys and pains of love.

"She'll have her child by then — our child!" he would say to himself; and he even went so far, when necessity compelled him to fall out from the ranks, as to fit the words "our child" to a wistful little ditty full of the old Welsh *cynghanedd,* or alliteration.

This production, which he kept scrupulously from Iago, who was naturally too young to associate romance with children, he would hum to a tune of his own; until the love of Luned and Elphin took the place, in many a border forest, of the bird-songs that had died away in that summer-heat.

The further he went from Harlech the easier he found it to thrust from his mind the teasing doubts of his paternity.

He would tell himself again and again that the importance of all those physical details, so distasteful to his nature, those details about which the dead Sir Rawlff so loved to discourse, was probably greatly exaggerated.

The most memorable pause the allied army made ere it left the confines of Wales was at Caerleon-upon-Usk. Elphin was moved more than he expected, when lingering behind the Prince’s guard he watched the impassioned ardour with which the French knights — mounted on Welsh ponies and cursing themselves for letting their own good steeds perish at sea — contemplated the famous earth-works where Arthur held his Jousts and his Round Table. Several of the foreign gentlemen displayed as lively an interest in our romantic-looking youth as they did in Arthur’s Table, but Elphin astonished his ambitious friend by the cold civility with which he received these flattering overtures.

Both he and Iago paid a dutiful visit to the grave of John ap Hywel in the precincts of the Abbey of Llantarnam; and as the two lads knelt side by side before that new tomb, as yet unmarked by any head-stone, they both thought of Rhisiart and the Maid, and prayed ardently for their safety, whether in this world or the next.

If Iago was surprised at his friend’s reception of the courtly interest taken in him by several famous French knights, Elphin in his turn was amazed by the deep abstraction that fell upon Iago when they were ferried across the tidal Usk and scrambled up its muddy banks. Not a word could he get from the boy on this point, not even when they were well away from that fatal river; and if the one lad was kept in ignorance of the birth-song to Luned’s offspring, the other certainly never knew of the deep, tearless heart-cries that went up from those mud-banks: “Rhisiart! Clerk Rhisiart! What has become of thee? Rhisiart, greatest and wisest of men, where is thy proud soul now?"

Perhaps the most glorious moment for both the young men was when this great host of Welshmen and Frenchmen entered in triumph the outskirts of the City of Hereford. With a grand fanfare of trumpets they marched in, and in one of the outlying parish-churches the longed-for deliverance from the usurping House of Lancaster was intoned by various rebellious priests. The leading clergy, the Bishop among them, had already fled to join the royal forces in Worcester; while from the ramparts of the impregnable Old Town, with its towering Norman cathedral and castellated keep, Owen and Robert de la Heuze wisely turned away. They were anxious to reach Worcester before Henry's shire-levies had time to assemble; and they were reluctant to waste their strength in a tedious siege merely for the satisfaction of hearing Mass in a Cathedral.

"Well, we are in England at last, lads," Owen cried, as he rode past them one morning, a day or two later, in his daily inspection of his Welsh forces, "but we must see to it we don't leave our bones in England! That might suit our ladies in Harlech — eh? — ha? — better than it suits us!"

"What made him say that, do you think?" said Elphin to his friend when the Prince had ridden on. "Doesn't that seem to you rather an odd thing to say? About our leaving our bones, and our ladies being glad? I tell you, Iago, I don't like his having said that! There's something funny about it — and his voice — didn't you notice his voice, how unnatural it sounded?"

Iago shifted his spear from his left to his right shoulder, and surveyed his friend across its polished shaft. Elphin had never carried a spear in his life, and now as a Court Herald he would be indefinitely excused from carrying one; but the down-right soldier-tone, so blunt and unaffected, assumed by Iago, simply because of that spear, had been irritating him all that morning as they marched together. The fruit-orchards of Worcestershire, with their blue hazy distances and their windless foregrounds of quivering heat-waves, seemed to be absorbing Iago’s attention to the destruction of all serious conversation; and to this remark about the Prince’s unnatural excitement, and his strange quip about bones and ladies, he returned no reply at all.

Elphin glanced at the stocky figure at his side, plodding along with that great spear over his shoulder. He himself felt tired and sad. There had been little resistance so far to the advance of the allies; but he couldn’t get out of his head one Worcestershire hamlet where requisitioning had been opposed, and where they had left behind them blackened ruins, unburied bodies, wailing and cursing, and cries to heaven for vengeance.

One horrible sight he had seen, a dead woman with a living child at her breast; and he found himself tormented by the thought that whenever in future he worked at his favourite subject of a unicorn surrounded by thousands of flowers, some devil would force him to depict that woman in place of an idealized Luned!

They were following an old Roman road now and the horizon was misty with heat and each step they made sank in heavy dust. Elphin began to find Iago’s way of making a cheerful little skip or hop every few steps almost more than he could bear. His friend’s manner of breathing annoyed him too. Iago seemed to delight in breathing as loudly as possible and making whistling sounds as he went along.

“How can he go on staring in front of him,” Elphin thought, “when there’s nothing but dull lines of mud-coloured clouds over there; and nothing between them and this dusty road except a welter of blue heat? He marches along like an animal; yes, like a beast! I’ve often seen horses and cows stare in front of them just as he does. That’s where I’m going to suffer, being with Iago; and I know, when the order comes to rest, he'll just sleep like a log!

"What can he see in this dull flat country to make him whistle? I have to have some real scenery, romantic, exciting, distinguished, like our mountains and moors, before I can invent my heraldic symbols and compose my *cynghaneddion.*"

Meanwhile Owen, riding now by the side of Robert de la Heuze, and listening to the Frenchman's elaborate plans for their strategy when they encountered the King's army, was giving way, at the back of his mind, to a discouragement profounder than he had ever known. What he now felt was even worse than what he'd suffered when he first heard of his brother's death. How was he to feed this great army advancing daily into a hostile country? The villagers, as it moved, kept driving their herds further and further afield, and butchering and burying what they couldn't drive off; and when he did meet Henry's forces face to face, and the grand encounter of his life did happen, what were his chances of a crushing victory?

The Frenchman at his side kept talking of the necessity of dividing their troops before the shock came. "We needn't," the man was assuring him now, "take any measures till our scouts bring us word he's within a few miles. Then all our mounted men must make an extensive detour and get behind him. That's the great thing, Sire! I've learnt it from a thousand historic campaigns. Without it there's no science of war at all, though there may be plenty of bloody skirmishes. We must take them in the rear, Sire. The whole art of strategy lies there. The rear, the rear! That puts it in a nutshell."

And Robert de la Heuze caused his heavy charger, one of the few that had survived the voyage, to caracole like a filly.

"That's exactly where it does put it," thought Owen savagely. "In a nutshell of neat words! But it would put us on spikes on London Bridge. *Divide?* Mother of God! And your French knights, I suppose, would be the mounted ones! A grand detour you'd make through country you're absolutely ignorant of; and can't I see my Welshmen's faces when they watch you prancing off!"

They presented a curious contrast, these two leaders, as they rode at the head of their motley host. Owen had given up, since meeting his allies, the modern Continental way of cutting his locks. Some deep instinct in him, perchance going back to the days when they buried Bran the Blessed's head in London, with its face turned to France, not as a friend but as an enemy, had effected a singular change in that portion of a man's life-illusion — and, as we know, this was a large portion in Owen's case — wherein his mood is reflected in his regard for, or disregard of, his personal appearance. This was indeed, and all the Prince's body-guard noticed it, the first time in his life that he had ever neglected to comb his beard or to trim his hair.

They noticed too, and Elphin regarded this with romantic delight, that since he'd left Harlech he'd ceased bearing on his arms the four black lions of Gwynedd, and in their place had substituted, and Elphin believed he'd found these arms in that ancient Caerleon Abbey, a shield and breast-plate and golden helm that bore the mystical red dragon of the old *gwledig* or chief ruler of Britain.

He rode a tall, gaunt white horse and carried a lance of a totally different kind from those carried by the French knights, much heavier in its shaft and with a head of bronze in place of steel. He still wore his famous flamingo-feather, but in the retaking of Merlin's citadel at Carmarthen half of this airy plume had been torn away, with the result that the golden circlet fastened round the golden helm — the metal of the one being very pale and of the other very glistering and burnished — carried with it, combined with the tangled forks of his now quite grey beard, an almost Arthurian look.

The man had grown much older and much sterner, and in the presence of these lively French nobles he had an expression that was almost ravaged, an expression as of one who was outliving his heart.

Robert de la Heuze, on the contrary, riding a dusky-coloured Arab charger that was all curves and curvettings and archings and prancings, was a swarthy little man with a bristling moustache and restless black eyes whose shield and pennon and horse's trappings were covered with such complicated armorial symbols that he resembled a figure from one of the newest stained-glass windows in some seignorial chapel of Auxerrois or Blois.

Owen kept inclining his massive head and golden helm towards the lively gentleman, who apparently was completely satisfied with the impression his strategic plans were making on this courtly revenant from the Round Table, but the thoughts that revolved beneath that torn feather and pallid circlet were wistful and sad.

The Prince was recalling the day he had ridden from Glyndyfrdwy to Mathrafal with his devoted Rhisiart behind him and little Efa on the back of his saddle; and he was thinking of other things too as he kept up his, "Yes, my dear Baron; yes, yes! *Vous avez des desseins à outrance.* You are a born Belisaire, my dear Baron! You invent such super-plans that I can hardly keep pace with you. Yes, of course. *Ma foi*! I never thought of that. Of course we must — Well, I shall give your words the most grateful and careful consideration!" He was thinking for example of that tombless grave of the Abbot of Caerleon. Aye! if he only had John ap Hywel by his side today! How that swarthy face would burn, and how that plain Welsh accent would ring out, in protest against all this fantastical *guerre gauloise!*

“What a fool I was,” he thought, “not to have realized how it would be between my mountaineers and these flowers of chivalry.”

He sighed bitterly into his untrimmed beard, as, bending his head to learn yet more about the art of campaigning in enemy territory, he decided that Robert de la Heuze had the expression of a one-eyed rat, licking its whiskers before gnawing through the final barrier to a well-stocked granary!

The truth was that there had always lain in Owen’s nature a vein of the arbitrary and the incalculable. He “followed his demon” in the old irrational sense of trusting the impulses and urges that came from the depths of his being rather than any rational motive.

Well might his body-guard from Ardudwy and his picked band of troopers from Edeyrnion wonder when they saw their leader, who had always been so punctilious in his courtly attire, revert to this primitive mode.

But they loved him for it! It pleased them more than anything he could have done. It fell in exactly with their own instinctive reaction from these sophisticated French gentlemen.

But Owen’s sadness had other causes than mere contrariness. For one thing, he had never felt more lonely. His Meifod friend had left him. His brother was dead. Rhisiart and the Maid were lost. Catharine was absorbed in her children, Meredith in his bride. And for another thing, unless he consented to take the advice of his ally and sack every town through which they passed he was at a loss to see what would happen when their supplies were exhausted.

Nor was the French force composed, as he’d hoped it would be, of a vast host of light-armed, quickly moving soldiers, against whose advance, till they reached London, all resistance would be impossible.

The new tactics of young Prince Hal, under the competent, unromantic leadership of his English captains, had shown fatally enough how a country should be invaded; and yet here were these proud fantastical knights, just like the ones he had defeated at Bryn Glas, planning the campaign as if it were a war against unarmed serfs instead of against the stout yeomen of the shires!

How sure he had felt of ultimate victory as he marched by Rhys Gethin's side over the mountains before that successful battle!

Where had he made his first mistake? Where had the tide begun to turn against him? The men behind him, Welsh and French alike, felt exultant and elated today. He alone was sad. And the mere fact that he, the leader, was the only one distrustful of the event, just when outwardly his fortunes were at their highest peak — how like fate it was!

Yes, he had had his dark moods before; but he had never felt quite as he did now. Something about the fact that he was staking everything on one grand throw of the dice deepened his congenital fatalism; and he began to be aware, too, of another curious psychic oppression.

He had never — not even when he served in the late King's wars — been at the head of such a host; and there came over him, from the very weight of his responsibility, from the very immensity of the mass of human emotions behind him, a feeling that no "tricks" with his individual soul, no tapping of supernatural powers in his own mind, could affect the practical issue. *He* might never submit to Hal Bolingbroke, nor to young Harry either, but what of Wales?

He felt just then like the only powerful swimmer on a ship doomed to sink. "Where did I make my mistake?" he kept asking himself; and as he struggled to find an answer he could only see the peaked wizard's cap and long ebony wand of the unconscionable Hopkin. "But that's absurd," he thought. “I was only playing with that old idiot’s predictions. I never really took them seriously.”

And then, all in a moment, he made up his mind where he had blundered. It was in that thrice-accurst “Tripartite Indenture”! But even that was not an isolated event. It had its own train of secret causes, one of which was his alliance with the Percies; and, by Our Lady, another was his marrying Catharine to that man! What he ought to have done after Bryn Glas was to have drawn back into Snowdon, left the Barons in their border-castles, and made an offensive and defensive alliance, not with the enemies of England, but with the crafty King himself!

They had now arrived at the summit of a small eminence; and he was disturbed in his ponderings by a change in the tone of his companion, and by the Frenchman’s suddenly fixing his one eye upon him with an exultant gleam and pointing with the end of his lance to a large compact village that lay, with a church in its centre, in the peaceful valley beneath them.

There was a considerable area of arable land about this village, land that was now composed of stubble-fields, upon which, as they looked down on them from above, the sun shone in a rich-golden haze.

The disturbing thought crossed Owen’s mind at that moment, as he encountered the Baron’s excited gaze, that one-eyed men were the cause of all his troubles! He suddenly felt an unholy pleasure in the Scab’s being safely under the sod and a shameless wish that his present companion had perished with the noble Patrouillart. “Yes,” he thought, “one-eyed men are my danger. If you were dead, you vicious little rat, I might have a chance still!”

He lifted his helmet from his forehead and wiped away the sweat, trying in vain to follow what the other was saying. “Sparrow may be right,” he thought. “There may be a rising of the peasants. But that young Harry’s my danger. He takes after his great-grandfather. Oh, Patrouillart, Patrouillart, why did you go and get killed? You're the one we'll need when we're face to face with that young fox! I'd like to see you challenge him to a single combat!" And as he stared at the golden stubble-fields the old French proverb came into his head: "In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king — *Au royaume des aveugles les borgnes sont rois!"* But he fell, after that, as he brushed a cloud of summer flies from his horse's neck with the helm he still held in his hand, into a daze of wonder as he thought what a maniac for glory and honour the deceased Patrouillart was. "There's no soil in the world," he thought, "like France for breeding such men. They die for honour as trout for flies! And yet you're a Frenchman, too, you one-eyed rat!"

At that moment, without any warning, his consciousness of the passing of time began to grow blurred. He recognized the sensation at once and knew what it portended. It was the usual prelude to what Rhisiart called one of his "attacks." He had taken off his helmet and held it in his hands and he now balanced it on his saddle-bow before him and looked round. Yes! There were those two lads. What a Providence at the particular moment! He heard his own voice calling, "Elphin! Iago!" just as a man might hear himself calling "Help! Help!" if he were drowning at sea.

Both the boys came running; and at the same instant, with a regular tourney-clatter and a jingling of accoutrements, the whole band of Frenchmen rode up. Robert le Borgne, after a quick glance at Owen and his attendants, advanced to meet the new arrivals. He had seen this happen to the Prince before; and the two lads didn't fail to mark the satisfaction with which he welcomed his compatriots, pointing his sword first at the helpless village below and then at the motionless figure on the white horse.

Meanwhile our two young friends, as they supported their chieftain, conversed in awed whispers across his horse's back. "A person can't," Elphin explained to Iago, "don the dragon of Uther without something happening. But I'm glad he did it, because it means we'll reach London and I'll proclaim him on Tower Hill, but it's a terrific strain for him. You heard what Master Sparrow said about his vomiting every night when the army-watchman calls twelve? Well! that's how it is! You remember what that monk said at Llantarnam — about Merlin in the shape of a pig-dealer conversing with him as he watched his arms by the Abbot's grave? Well! a man can't be visited by Merlin in these modern times without suffering for it."

In reply to his friend, Iago whispered that he'd heard at school about some ancient general who would remain for hours in the middle of a battle standing on one leg.

"But look, look! What are those French soldiers doing? They're entering the village without orders! Where's Master Sparrow? What's become of Master Don of Kidwelly?"

Elphin looked; and as he looked he became so agitated that his hands shook as he pressed them against the Prince's golden armour. "They're going to burn the whole place!" he thought.

But Iago went on. "They're going to loot every house down there! Elphin, look! This is a real war. This is a real — There! Did you hear that?"

But Elphin couldn't look and he longed to stop his ears. He thought of Luned. He thought of his parents in Edeyrnion. And then, as yells and cries increased and the smell of burning rose from the foot of the hill and he tried to harden his heart, fumbling with the Prince's accoutrements, he suddenly recalled a terrifying scene in the great hall at Snowdon. "Iago! Iago!" he whispered, fearful lest le Borgne should hear him, “he’s got on Eliseg’s belt and Eliseg’s sword!”

But Iago, who had less of the Prince’s weight to support, and was wholly absorbed in the confusion below, answered roughly, not troubling what he said, “The more fool he! Isn’t the bronze lance enough? Look! Look! This is real war. We’re seeing a real battle! Look! It’s burning! It’s burning! Can’t you smell the burning? Look, Elphin! Why don’t you look? They’re dragging some prisoners up the hill. But if Elphin hadn’t been supporting the Prince he would certainly have put his hands to his ears and shut his eyes. The only comfort he got as he countered the chieftain’s massive weight with all the strength of his thin arms was to rub his throbbing forehead against the handle of the bronze sword, and to shuffle his feet, in their leather thongs, between a clump of knapweed and a mole-hill to where his heels could touch the bronze spear.

Robert de la Heuze and his group of knights were watching the scene beneath them with as much interest as Iago. They had by this time grown used to these “attacks” of their formidable ally; but never before had the Prince become *hors de combat* at so convenient a moment as this! They decided at once to give him no time to shake off this providential seizure. The plundering of a place like this, lying amid its overflowing granaries like a rustic queen among her golden locks, was too tempting.

And the Prince sat on, motionless and still, supported by his pages on his white horse, with his shining helmet on the saddle before him, and the dragon pennon of his antique lance trailing amid the yellow hawkweed.

Nor was Iago mistaken about the prisoners. The three chief men of the village they were: Father Bertram, the Priest; old Sir Andrew Courtyce, the Justice of the Peace; and Master Staniforth, the Tanner; and as they were dragged before le Borgne, with their hands tied behind them, to be questioned brutally and cruelly, they stared with wonder at this bare-headed figure on his tall horse, his forked beard flowing down over his breast-plate, his dragon-helm clasped between his motionless hands, and his lance-point resting among the flowers.

"Everything, from every barn in the place, Master Justice," Robert de la Heuze was saying, while his confreres with gleaming teeth and shining eyes swore their confirmation of these wholesale words; "and everything from your good larder, Father, and everything from your rich store-house, Master Staniforth. And what's more, you three gentlemen must guide our men from house to house — we shall send our wagons — and you must give us — that goes without saying — everything in your stables. And you, Father, must bring us all your church-plate; and you, Master Justice, must open your chests to a learned clerk we'll be sending; and especially we shall require any letters you may of late have received from your pretended lord, Henry of Lancaster, showing the disposition of his forces; and further we shall require—"

All this was spoken in tolerable English but was accompanied by so much ferocity from le Borgne's single eye that each of the worthy men he was addressing felt that the worst was still unsaid.

"And what," replied old Sir Andrew, "will follow, if we refuse these monstrous demands, unheard of by the Law of Nations?"

"In the Holy name of Christ and His Mother," broke in Father Bertram, "I, God's humble priest, refuse, here and now — whatever follows!"

"And I am with you, Father," added Master Staniforth, struggling to loosen the cords that bound his hands, "and in the name of King Harry I protest—"

"What will happen, do you ask?" cried Robert le Borgne. The *droit de guerre* will happen. And you know what that means! There won't be a house, there won’t be a woman — *there!* My worthy friends, you’re too late already! You should have agreed at once; and not put us to the trouble of all this. *À la guerre comme à la guerre!* Our brave archers from Auvergne I perceive have taken things into their own hands! Here, Raoul, Sebastien, Jacquot! Take these men and keep them close — close I say! — till we’ve finished with their larders and their—”

It was now plain enough that it was hot only the Frenchmen from Auvergne who had anticipated the *droit de guerre* referred to by le Borgne; for clouds of black smoke were beginning to roll over the roofs of the village, and presently there reached that hilltop from the heart of the smoke one single piercing feminine scream that had a blood-curdling effect not only upon Elphin and Iago but upon many other young Welshmen who were within hearing, and who, though reckless enough in their own way, had not until now been permitted the privilege of witnessing Continental warfare.

“My girl! My girl! Devils! Oh devils! stop! stop! I’m coming, my child; your father’s coming! Let me go, I say! Devils! Oh devils!”

The desperate yells and savage struggles of Staniforth, the Tanner, were seconded in a yet more effective way by old Sir Andrew, who, when there arose a new series of feminine screams, not so piercing perhaps, but even more heart-rending, hesitated not to use both head and feet in a furious attempt to escape; and this he did with such unexpected alacrity that, bound though he was, the fellow who was holding him was laid by the heels; and since nothing more than a brutal laugh from between the teeth of le Borgne followed him down the hill, his hoarse shouts of “Nell! Nell! Wait, wait, you devils!” weren’t silenced till they were lost in the tumult below.

Aroused at last to what was going on, Glendower’s wits returned to him as fully armed as were his powerful hands. In an instant he took in the whole situation, and it was with wildly-beating hearts that both his boyish attendants rushed, tumbling and leaping, after the flying hooves of the white charger; and as the Prince, thundering out his commands, rode down the hill at break-neck speed into the smoke of the burning village, he was followed by a crowd of Welsh troopers.

Whatever the campaign may have gained in material supplies by the plunder of this place, as the march towards London was resumed, both our young friends agreed, as they discussed the episode during their evening bivouac, that nothing would ever really heal the rift that had yawned that day amid the smoke and the looting and the treatment of the women between the Welsh and their Continental allies. The lads had caught enough of the foreigners' fury at having their *droit de guerre* plucked away from under their very beards to realize that nothing but some resounding triumph over the Usurper would really unite them again. "It's London or nothing now, Iago!" Elphin assured his friend, as they shared in the chilly dews of the August twilight the last of the Turkish sweet-meats with which Luned had provided them.

"I tell you, Owen had to prick one of those lecherous devils with the point of his lance three or four times before he'd stop his game; and the woman he'd got down was no daisy neither! She was as old as Lady Mortimer, and she'd more children than she has; for I saw them myself beating at the fellow with their fists when their mother was giving up.

"But Owen would soon have done more than prick that itching rogue; and you should have seen how he treated the woman when the man had gone. He lifted her up and dried her eyes as if she'd been Lady Mortimer! And she was an ugly wench, too. If that bronze-head had been sharper — whew, lad! how he'd have made that son of a whore skip! Shall I tell you something else, Iago?"

“No, for Jesus’s sake! Can’t you see I’m saying my prayers?”

“You don’t often do that, Iago! It’s because of today you’re doing it. I’m older than you; and, as I’ve told you before, women—”

“If you say another word—”

“I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking of that girl. *There!* Did you hear? That was a fox! I didn’t know they had foxes here. Mary, Joseph, how cold it is in England! Lie closer, Iago — closer! closer! — like you did last night.”

But if this youthful pair, about whose safety the ladies of Harlech had plagued the Prince for days before he set out, were uneasy that evening, the Prince himself was more than uneasy. He had come to le Borgne’s tent to discuss their approaching encounter with the royal troops, and as he looked about him he decided that no painted window in any French cathedral could be more resplendent in armorial bearings than this knightly pavilion.

“They’ll undoubtedly come out of Worcester to attack us, Sire,” asseverated le Borgne. “Our prisoners confessed as much in my hearing.”

In the depths of his heart Owen had an instinct that the two Henries would not come out; but so painful was it to him to contemplate repetition of those *droit de guerre* scenes in a crowded town that he automatically suppressed this premonition.

“But of course if they don’t come out,” muttered the French leader in a lower tone, “though we have no siege-engines, I have Gascon troops here who’d stand on one another’s shoulders and fight like a pack of demons for the chance of a gala night of looting and raping in an English city!”

It seems to a superficial eye as though the whole course of human history often depends on the turn of a hair, on the tilt of an eyelid, on the fall of a feather; but to a more philosophical mind these trifles are only the instruments of what we call fate or destiny, a force for which in our nescience we have no adequate name.

Had Owen at that moment heard the words of his ally, uttered in that lower tone, it is probable enough that his pride in his Welsh followers would have relucted at their being regarded as less daring than le Borgne's Gascons. Providence however — to use the popular term — saw fit just then to incarnate itself in an extremely blood-thirsty gnat whose attack upon the Prince's face was so fierce that it caused him to leap from his seat with an oath, an oath that completely drowned his companion's words.

The crucial proposal passed therefore unheard; while le Borgne's pride in his own certainty that the King would come out forbade its repetition. In one sense thousands of lives depended upon the fact that from its shelter beneath a painted shield this ferocious insect attacked the Frenchman's guest; but in a deeper sense we may conjecture that if the gnat had failed its purpose fate would have found some other instrument, no less trifling, to carry out its shameless purpose of allowing Henry of Lancaster to die in his bed.

Yes, there come moments, even in the decisions of commanders of such a host as this, when a pressure, light as the impalpable air and ubiquitous as grains of sand before an invisible wind, urges the course of events in a certain direction, a direction either contrary to, or favourable to, drastic action.

The anxiety of a Worcestershire gnat to taste Welsh blood was only one manifestation of the impalpable force that was exercising its pressure upon these two men. To a superstitious mind it might almost have seemed as if the dead bones of King John, repentant for the injuries which during their life they had inflicted on that monarch's people, were projecting some numbing and drugging spell upon those who were conspiring against the walls that guarded his tomb.

At any rate as Owen lay that night upon a heap of rugs in his own tent, listening to the sounds his horse was making outside, he thought how strange had been the way he'd interfered with le Borgne's treatment of those villagers. In his young days, he thought, he had never felt such squeamishness.

"Something's come over me," he said to himself, "but what it is — Dewi Sant! I don't know! I feel as if Bolingbroke and I were tilting at each other in one of Richard's fancy tourneys. I feel as if even the crown in London wasn't worth—"

He hoisted himself up and listened intently to his horse; and there seemed to him something more real about the way it was cropping the grass out there than about all this marching and counter-marching; yes! more real, and with more life in it!

To whatever curious conclusion, however, the sacking and burning of a Worcestershire village in his march upon London might lead the eccentric mind of the Welsh leader, it was he, and not his one-eyed tutor in modern strategy, who finally got the allied army safely encamped at Woodbury Hill in the parish of Great Witley, over against the ancient city where lay the bones of the destroyer of Mathrafal.

Into Worcester itself the Usurper had already hurried; hurried with that amazing speed which was his chief characteristic as a warrior, and the summons had gone out to all the surrounding shires to rally to his support. Luckily for the burgesses of Worcester, and for their wives and daughters if le Borgne had his way, the two Henries, the father advancing from the south and the son retreating from Hereford, got safe within the walls of the city before the allied army reached Great Witley.

There was a grassy valley between Woodbury Camp and the walls of Worcester, and for over a week Owen behaved, as the scholarly Rhisiart would certainly have observed if Exeter College possessed that particular Homeric passage among its Latin translations, like Achilles sulking in his tent.

It was indeed the most miserable stretch of days that the Welsh Prince had known since he was a little child in the time of the Black Death, more than half a century ago. It made little difference that in his meticulous analysis of events he was unable to include the gnat. His conclusions were correct enough without that officious insect. His one chance of victory, he told himself, would have been to storm the walls of the city in overwhelming numbers the moment they reached the spot. It was too late now, with the sturdy shire-men gathering from all sides and his supplies failing. Why hadn't he stormed the city at once? He knew very well why he hadn't, though he shirked telling himself so in plain words. The savagery he'd seen in the burning of that unlucky village had bruised something in the depths of his nature; and it was this bruise, though he dodged it and avoided facing it, that had covered up *that* road, when they reached the cross-ways of their fate, with an impenetrable darkness.

They had far outnumbered the King's troops at first, though they didn't now. Why hadn't the French knights themselves insisted on storming the city without delay? Ah! for a very simple reason. For all their talk of strategy they were just medieval adventurers. A campaign to them meant tilting chivalrously against armed equals in the field, while they lived mercilessly upon the country they were invading.

But Owen couldn't keep his imagination from following the road he hadn't followed. The old bearded chieftain as he sulked in his tent caught himself in fantastic tales about taking both the Henries prisoner, and demanding as their ransom the crown of England. But it was all over now; and in his heart he knew it. It would be fortunate if he got his Welshmen safe back across the border without any appalling catastrophe.

One night he awoke just before dawn, for it was a peculiarity, a *cynneddf,* with all the descendants of Griffith ap Madoc to get their best inspirations at that hour, and he had a vision of besieging the King and his heir, however long the siege might last, till he starved them out. But not for long did that vision last. What of his own supplies? And what of the shire-levies in his rear? No, it was over! His chance had been given him; and something in his own nature had balked. He thrust his hand under his pillow of rugs and touched the rusty bronze that had been the death of that old peace-maker of Dinas Bran; and as he did so the impression came over him out of that vast stillness, a stillness unbroken even by a sentry's tread, that he and his people could afford to wait, could afford to wait till long after his bones were dust and Henry's bones were dust. He knew how his own soul could escape, escape without looting cities and ravishing women.

And was the soul of his people, the oldest of all the races where the sun sank into the sea, less able to wait than the soul of its leader? Well! his allies had had their taste of their *droit de guerre;* and he would leave them a day or two more to enjoy their chivalrous feats of arms in this play-acting tourney-ground of theirs between camp and city!

And then God give him the grace to get his great army back safe into Wales! So be it. At any rate there'd he no wailing and weeping in Edeyrnion and Ardudwy, in Gwent and Morgannwg, for Welsh corpses left to English crows!

He drew his hand away from old Adda's death-weapon and stretched out his arm so as to feel the central support of his tent, from which, suspended by a nail, hung that queer fragment of ink-black leather, ornamented with golden studs, that he'd been taught from his infancy to call "Eliseg's belt". Merely to touch this ancient object — and how well he knew its cold, damp, slippery texture, like the skin of some extinct amphibian! — was a comfort just then, and he felt happier as he pulled up the bed-cover.

"Three-score years I've lived, come Michaelmas," he thought. "And who'll remember me in three-score years to come? Well, we've certainly killed some Englishmen in these fantastical single combats. Like the old Knights Templar tilting with Saracens, they are; and how the Frenchmen love them! Mary! Joseph! And no wonder they love them! King Hal hasn't any such champions. A dozen English knights killed in a couple of days! Well! They'll have some pretty tales to tell when they get back to France; but all the tilting of all King Charles' court won't get us to London. Too many long-bows, too many yeomen! Aye, Master Sparrow, and where's your peasants' revolt now?"

He let his head sink back, thrust his fingers beneath his grey beard and carefully spread it out, as if over the edge of a shroud, above the blanket he'd pulled up to his chin.

So untrimmed had he let his hair grow that this beard of his could scarcely be called a forked beard any more. It was just any old man's beard; and as he lay on his back Owen felt as if he himself were any old man, "feeling," as they say, "his age." But the folds of his tent hung open about the width of a man's hand, and between them he could catch a glimpse of two small stars belonging to one of those northern constellations from which Ffraid ferch Gloyw had predicted that he would fail in arms but triumph in spirit.

Revealed between the hangings of his tent, with nothing but blue-black space above and beneath them, they seemed to him like the eyes of Destiny watching to see what he would do in the hour of his defeat.

"What did Arthur do to the Twrch Trwyth?" he said to himself. "There's a smell of the mud of the Severn upon the air. It must come up with the dawn when the tide draws back." And without a movement, save only the movement of his breath, he defied those small intent watchful eyes. "Eyes of Twrch Trwyth," he said to himself. "Pig of Hell," he said to himself, "Arthur drove you down the Severn into the deep sea!"

And it was brought about at that moment by the power to which some give the name of "chance" that a cloud swam across those glittering pinpricks in the dome of immensity; and the immediate effect of this was to cause an indescribable relaxing of the tension of the man's brain and at the same time to apply to his consciousness a gentle pressure, light as the fanning of a butterfly's wing, a pressure towards the slippery water-chute of sleep. But, ere he slept, memory after memory crossed the swaying lightship of his mind. He remembered the very occasion, on a sweltering August day, when Ffraid ferch Gloyw had uttered her enigmatic prediction. "Over your body, Cousin Owen," she had said, "our people will pass to their triumph; but it will be a triumph in the House of Saturn, not in the House of Mars."

And then he forgot Ffraid ferch Gloyw, and across his closed eyelids floated the image of Rhisiart's narrow Norman skull, as the lad's lips sucked at his arrow-wound. "I've dragged you all down," he thought, "and we sink together — so many — so many down the tide into the deep sea. But over us — over us—"

If the Prince himself found it hard, after all his clear realistic analysis, to understand why he hadn't risked everything in one grand fling, and hurled his ten thousand Welshmen and his two thousand Frenchmen against the walls of Worcester, it was much harder for Rhisiart and Master Brut to comprehend the cause of his unexpected retreat.

They knew of course in their room in the Bishop's prison what the allies could only guess at, namely the small number of men that made up the royal garrison. The younger Henry was more alarmed than he allowed his father to see when he welcomed the King into the city. He'd hoped for an army; but the Ruler of England had only his private guard, and a handful of horsemen he'd picked up as he rode through Oxford.

But the walls of the old city were strong, its gates massive, and it was unlikely that Owen and his Frenchmen had brought any siege furniture with them. Scaling-ladders, catapults, and assault-platforms, not to speak of the new ordnance inventions for explosive cannonading, were awkward things to convey through a hostile country.

And every day that passed — every hour even — was so much gain to the English. The thing that puzzled Prince Henry was that the enemy made no attempt to surround the city. The gates to the east, the roads from the east, were never in any danger; and it wasn't long before considerable bodies of shire-yeomen, already summoned post-haste by the King from every county through which he'd passed, began pouring into the town.

To an enterprising strategist like the younger Henry it seemed hardly short of a miracle when instead of either attacking the city or surrounding it the allied army contented itself with occupying an impregnable position on Woodbury Hill.

"They act as if we were the aggressors and they the defenders," Prince Hal told his father; but the weary old campaigner only replied caustically that all wise leaders were "defenders," unless like Hotspur they preferred to die in their glory.

At this the long white face of the young Prince had flushed; and after muttering something about badgers and mole-runs he enquired how many more men from the shires they must await before assaulting Woodbury Hill.

"There'll be no assault of Woodbury Hill while I'm in Worcester," the King had said; "and what's more, Hal, if you ride down again into that valley, I'll send you home with letters to the Parliament."

"But their tourney-tricks, Sire, their prancing tourney-tricks! And we not able to find one knight—"

"After to-morrow, Hal," said the King, *"no one shall go down that hill."*

"And let those popinjays wave their lances at us, and call us—"

"Hal, Hal! What has come over you? Ask Cousin York, ask Captain Shirley, whether, when a host like that is deliberately starving itself instead of attacking, there's any reason to throw away loyal men's lives for nothing. Let 'em tilt against the walls! Let 'em make their *jongleur* ditties for their ladies! What's the matter with you, Hal? I'll be thinking soon that all your Welsh victories came by accident — as indeed — God help me! — all the victories I've ever seen *have* come. Shut the gates, lad, and man the walls. Our good Commons will soon be voting their thanks again to the most puissant and renowned Prince, Harry of Monmouth!

"And remember this, boy, for the day when I'm gone. If you invade France, as these men are invading England — yes! and march into Paris with twice as many men — you'll never win. Sooner or later, out you'll go! Don't you see, boy, that the Lord himself is fighting for us against Sisera? Any morning now we may wake up and find them gone. Let those Frenchmen tilt against each other! Shut the gates, shut the gates. Let them tilt against the walls! Woodbury Hill will soon be as bare as a tennis-ball! Never mind their tilting, Hal. Let them play, let them play! We'll to business."

But the King was almost alone in all the City of Worcester to take this view of the situation. The people crowded into the churches. Monstrous images of Glendower, as a Devil with horns, were burnt in the squares.

Wild rumours spread through the streets of horrible cruelties habitually practised by the Welsh.

But there was a minority who held the view that since there’d been no attempt to stop the influx of loyal yeomen from the neighbouring shires it was clear that the number of the enemy had been ridiculously exaggerated. ’Twould make a bad impression upon the country, these hot-heads argued, if the King of England let himself be shut up in a walled town while a party of French courtiers and a rabble of Welsh serfs made sport of him in the heart of his own kingdom!

Prince Hal always spoke too freely in the taverns, and since there was a group of lively young squires who followed him everywhere, the rumour quickly spread through the town that though the King was sick and troubled with superstitious fears the Prince would soon on his own authority be making a desperate sortie upon Glendower’s camp. Nor were there lacking plenty of tale-bearers to make trouble between the two Henries; and as is usual in such cases the elder man completely misunderstood what was in the mind of his son.

And if his father misunderstood him, his tavern-cronies did so still more. As a matter of fact the daring young warrior had worked out a shrewd and startling plan of campaign, including a pretended frontal attack, followed by a pretended retreat and a second devastating sortie while the escape of the huge disorganized host was cut off by the best long-bows in the kingdom!

And this soldierly plan of his might have resulted, so his best captains, Crosby and Shirley, argued, in the death or capture of Glendower: had it not been that in his pique at the King’s tone towards him he let it all evaporate in the fumes of the city’s wine-shops.

It may be well imagined what wild stories of all that was occurring around them reached Rhisiart and Master Brut. The Bishop’s Palace was miles outside the city walls, but the Bishop’s prison where they were held was in the old castle keep, and had a moat around it. Only a couple of days before the allies moved their camp from Woodbury Hill and began their orderly but melancholy retreat, the unfortunate prisoners were discussing their chances of rescue with unusual fervour; but had Elphin and Iago seen their former friends at this moment they would have been hard put to it to know them as the same men.

They possessed only one suit of outer garments between them. And today it was Rhisiart’s turn to wear these rags of his old scholar’s suit. He himself had grown a straggly beard as black as his hollow eyes; and the effect of this, combined with the dark dishevelled locks that hung down over his ears, gave to his narrow face and drooping moustache a desolate dignity that would have broken the heart of Lady Mortimer. Master Brut, on the contrary, had persuaded their jailer’s child to steal for him a pair of scissors: and with this — though unable to shave — he had managed to reduce his beard to the limits of a hairy fringe round his smooth moon-face. This hairy fringe did, however, and in a very curious way, alter the man’s whole look. The Lollard’s left arm had been broken, and only hastily and improperly set, so that often, though not continuously, it caused him considerable pain, especially since he had had to have it bound tight to his waist with a strip of his shirt.

The two friends were securely though not heavily manacled and they had plenty of bread and water and even sometimes, when their jailer was in a good mood, a cup of wine and a fragment of meat. There was no latrine in the Bishop’s prison; but as the chamber was an extensive one, and they were not chained to the wall, they were spared any intolerable unpleasantness.

Master Brut's books had been taken from him. But their jailer, who couldn't read himself but who had an avid thirst for the sort of knowledge that comes from sensational chronicles, soon acquired the habit of bringing into their chamber various roughly-copied parchments describing the most blood-curdling of recent events, richly interspersed with pleasant though incredible marvels. These it was the privilege of our prisoners to read aloud by turns, a thing that Walter Brut did as eloquently as if in the presence of a crowded congregation of Gospel-men; while Clerk Rhisiart did it in a high-pitched, mock-judicial manner that had the double effect of relieving his own feelings and impressing the jailer with awe and reverence in the presence of such forensic power.

On this particular morning the prisoners were sitting opposite each other on wooden stools, with a third stool between them on which were the remains of two half-loaves of bread and two earthenware mugs of water. The Lollard had drawn on this third stool, with his unhurt hand and a burnt stick, a map of Woodbury Hill in its relation to the city walls, and it was at this map that the two men were now earnestly gazing.

"One thing is certain," said Rhisiart. "Owen'll never retreat, now he has once made the plunge! Besides, he must have an enormous army" — here he groaned and made an impatient movement on his stool; for he had a wound in his hip, which, though it had ostensibly healed, gave him now and again a lively twinge. Though he kept it to himself, for he knew his trouble was a pin's prick compared with what his friend endured from his broken arm, Rhisiart had come to indulge a morbid fantasy that his wound was a malevolent entity to whom had been given the power to plague him. He even went so far in his secret mind as to baptize this enemy with a Christian name. He called him "Sele" in honour of the Lord of Nannau.

"Even discounting Master Giggleswick's dramatic turn," he continued, when "Sele's" twinges diminished, "we can't put the allied army at less than twelve thousand men. Of course what I would do myself if I were Owen would be to pass by Worcester altogether, and rush forward by forced marches, living on the country as best I could, till I reached London. I'd dodge Warwick and Oxford and Banbury, too. In fact I wouldn't bother what towns or castles I left behind me. I'd get to London if I had no sleep for a week!"

His friend smiled and, having erased a section of his map with a crumb of bread, proceeded with calm deliberation, still smiling, to flick this missile out of their open window, where, falling into the Bishop's moat, it was instantaneously devoured by a watchful carp. It had been a natural custom for nearly a thousand years for the Bishop's prisoners to throw scraps to his carp. The Bishop in the time of King Stephen used to throw the prisoners themselves to these plump fish; and ever since his day the more waggish of his successors would exchange with their chaplains every Friday a somewhat lurid but entirely ecclesiastical jest about this custom, in which the Latin for corpses and the Latin for nourishment were felicitously sprinkled with parsley and washed down with Malmsey wine.

"Rhisiart!"

"Yes, Walter."

"Do you remember that story about Pharaoh's two servants in prison?"

Rhisiart sighed, uttered a curse under his breath, and, as he had done a thousand times since they'd been together, swore affectionately that he remembered the story well.

"You'll be pardoned, but I shall be burnt," said Master Brut in a decided voice, "but I wish, before they separate us, which may happen any day now, that you'd admit," and he put his finger upon a particular place in his charcoal map, “that I was right and you were wrong as to the position of Woodbury Hill. That child assured me the wind’s in the west; and you know how clearly we’ve heard the French trumpets today. Well! that means — you’re not looking, Rhisiart! Yes, there — just there! there’s been no interference with the English yeomen coming in. That child said they’ve been pouring in through what she called ‘East Gate’ for the last two days. Owen isn’t besieging the city. But neither has he left the city behind! He’s challenging them to battle from a position chosen by himself. If the two Henries are clever enough to wait behind their walls, and if Owen has encamped as I’ve got him *here”* — and moving a piece of crust to a black spot in the surface of the stool between them, he showed it complacently to his friend— “there’ll have to be a battle, *or*—”

“Or what?” sighed Rhisiart wearily, for as generally happened when the Lollard discoursed on his map his mind was reverting to Tegolin.

“Or he’ll have to retreat!”

This did arouse the man in black tatters; and he gazed with consternation at the unruffled countenance of the man in white rags. He did indeed sit up with such a start at the word “retreat” that he was forced to utter a sharp cry as “Sele” took the opportunity of giving him a twinge.

“He’ll never do that!” and Rhisiart’s voice rose as it used to do when he was disputing in his room at Oxford. The Lollard smiled and rubbed at his map with his piece of crust.

“Jesus Christ!” shouted Clerk Rhisiart. “I believe you’d sooner be right in your whoreson opinion than see the red dragon waving over Worcester gate!”

But before that day was over our two friends had been reduced to a graver mood. Their jailer, for one thing, had brought into their room an appalling account of the recent burning of a Lollard, when Prince Hal, still too young to understand such things, had had the heretic removed from the flames to give him a last chance of recanting, but had been forced by the Archbishop to see the already blackened body thrust back there again. They had also received a startling visit from Mad Huw bringing the news from Tegolin that she herself had obtained permission from the Bishop to have a brief interview with her husband after sunset that night.

This wasn't the first time Clerk Rhisiart had been allowed to see his wife who was now lodged by judicial consent in the house of the famous Worcester armourer, Master Dickon Shore. Room had been found in the same kindly quarters for the Mad Friar; but it had recently become doubtful whether this privilege would be continued — and for a sufficient reason.

The truth was, the poor Franciscan's mania had suffered a disconcerting change. Something about the present appearance of Rhisiart, with his straggling black beard, his tangled elflocks, and his hollow eyes, had so worked on the Grey Friar that he got it lodged in his brain that the prisoner in the Bishop's prison was none other than King Richard himself. Both Tegolin in the armourer's house and Rhisiart in the castle keep had done their utmost to disabuse the poor man of this new illusion; but Mad Huw had received so many shocks of late that his feelings had been driven inward; and though he no longer burst out into fits of wild excitement his mania in this new secretive and hidden form was less than ever open to reason.

The interview between Rhisiart and his young wife had been timed to coincide with a final examination of Master Brut before the Bishops of Worcester and Hereford. The latter magnate, fleeing from his residence on the Wye at Glendower's approach, was delighted beyond measure to find the heretic who had so cleverly escaped him five years before safe in the power of his fellow-prelate. Indeed, like Pilate and Herod with another

Prisoner, the two pontifical inquisitors, who before this had been inordinately jealous of each other, became, from this day on, close friends.

Nothing is a stronger bond, whether with time-serving prelates or with murderous footpads, than the sharing of a guilty conscience, and for several nights after dealing with the Lollard both ecclesiastics slept a sounder and less troubled sleep than they had done since they broke their vows to King Richard.

It had been by Master Shore's influence with Prince Hal that this particular interview between husband and wife had been permitted; and it was by the influence of the rich armourer's largesse that the jailer had gone a step further in locking them up alone.

Master Shore, though not a Lollard himself, was an easy man where religion was concerned, and a good friend of both Sir John Oldcastle and the youthful Prince. He might indeed — as far as the taverns of the city went — have been called a boon companion of these two. He was a widower with no official feminine dependent save his small daughter Julietta, between whom and little Nance, the jailer's offspring, there existed a childish friendship.

Julietta was ten and Nance a year older; but when Julietta came to play with Nance in the castle garden it was always she who took the lead in their games. Mad Huw had hardly appeared upon the scene than he won both the little girls' hearts, and the children would listen to him for hours as he would tell — with many mysterious hints as to Rhisiart's identity — how kind the renowned captain, Lord Grey of Codnor had been to them all, and how he had despatched them, as prisoners of the Church, under the escort of his own guard, to be judged by the Bishop of Worcester.

"He must have guessed who He was," the Grey Friar would whisper at this point, as the children made him tell them the story for the twentieth time, “and he knew he had to be tender to the Mistress and her poor Friar for His sake!”

But it was only when the two little girls were alone that Julietta explained to the awestruck Nance how it was that the beautiful lady and the holy man had come to their house.

“I know, for I heard Sir John ask Father to take them. Sir John laughed a great deal; and Father looked like he does when he sends me to bed because a lady’s coming to supper with him.”

“One’s white and one’s black,” Nance would reply when Julietta pressed her with questions about the two prisoners. “But sometimes the angel one’s black and the devil one’s white. I like the angel one best because he’s like my Spanish doll. I lent him my scissors to cut off his beard and I never laughed once when he did it. They both want sewing up; but they haven’t got no one to sew them up.”

On one unfortunate occasion when Julietta broached the subject as to what was going to happen to her friend’s angel and devil, little Nance began to cry.

“They’re going — to put — my one,” she sobbed, “into the fire — because he won’t say his *Ave Maria.* Father told me that — when I wouldn’t say mine because there was onion in my broth! I hate onion, don’t you?”

It was curious how the relations between Rhisiart and Tegolin remained unchanged after all they had experienced since they’d been married. She’d brought needle and thread with her, and though after they’d hugged each other he wanted her to sit on his knee she insisted on kneeling by his side and doing at once, as fast as her fingers would work, what little Nance had called “sewing him up.”

While she stitched she talked to him gravely and quietly, just as she’d done so many times when he was unhappy about Catharine or about his prestige with Owen; while Rhisiart, watching her with his mournful eyes through his tangled hair, thought how much more precious she was to him now than that Midsummer Day so long ago when they slept together under his sheepskin.

“I wish I’d put something,” he suddenly burst out, “if it were only a heap of stones — on his grave!”

“But you did — you did, Rhisiart! You put your dagger into the earth. I can see how its handle looked now, all dripping with the rain! That made a cross; and a cross is better than any stones.”

“But he wouldn’t know it was a cross! He’d think I’d just forgotten. He’d think I’d be coming back for it. And I never have gone back! Besides, anyone seeing it there would steal it. They couldn’t steal a heap of stones. How long do you think his skin will stay — like it was —?”

Tegolin thrust her needle through the piece of his shirt she was mending, and leaving the thread swaying there between them, like a gossamer across a narrow lane, possessed herself of his hand and pressed it to her lips.

“He had some happy days,” she said gently, “before he died. He was the least tired of all of us when we first saw the Usk. Think, Rhisiart, how fast he trotted down that hill. Everything on his back rattled, he went so fast!”

Rhisiart sighed and repeated secretly, not caring that even Tegolin should know what he was doing, a solemn prayer for the soul of Griffin the piebald.

She went on with her sewing again then; and the flesh of her rounded arm, as he hung his head above it as it drew the thread, smelt so sweet to him that he thought in his heart: “Would it spoil it all for her if I lifted her up from her knees?”

But he didn’t dare to do this. Nor was it only for fear of breaking her thread that he refrained. Upon his long thin features and emaciated cheeks there had come to be imprinted, during this fatal summer, lines of tenderness, such as his face had never displayed before. So he confined himself to caressing with the tips of his fingers the warmth and softness of her neck.

Lightly up and down, and cross-wise again, his fingers moved beneath her chin; and he thought in his heart: “I feel as if I’d lived with her for years; and yet I feel as if I’d only found her tonight!”

But he had been holding her in his arms — and the pain that it had given his wounded side to do so had been an excruciating sweetness to him, like a pain that passion demands ere it can reach its furthest tidal-mark — when at last with a long-drawn sob of weakness he let her sit down on the Lollard’s stool beside him and allowed his hand to sink heavily on her lap.

“Gwion Bach—”

“Yes, Tegolin ferch Rheinalt.”

“Do you know what I’ve brought for you?”

His expression at that moment was so like his look, when he used to await her decision about Catharine or the Prince or Mad Huw, that her eyes filled with tears.

But she drew from her bosom a tiny phial, which she had fastened round her neck by a long black ribbon, and without drawing its silver stopper held it out to him. He surveyed it with widely-staring eyes.

The Bishop’s prison was well lighted. Earlier Bishops had no doubt found it advisable to throw into relief under unusually strong illumination the faces of their victims when the necessity for calling back to the One Fold the perilous reasonings of the human mind made the infliction of pain indispensable.

“What is it?” he asked in an awed whisper.

"Death," the girl whispered. "Master Shore sent me to an alchemist's to get a sleeping draught for Julietta when the child was sick; and I gave the man — well never mind what I gave him. But he gave me this. It's the surest and quickest there is. It's only like water to look at. I had to buy this phial from him too. He was poor. He was grasping. But he swore, by the heart of Mary, that this was certain death. 'Death in thirty ticks of a French clock,' he said. And he said he could be hanged for giving it to me. Smell it, Rhisiart! It hasn't any smell at all."

Rhisiart took the thing from her, lifted the stopper, and bent his Norman nose over it, snuffing vigorously.

"Does it taste as little as it smells?" he asked her, still holding the little bottle to his nostrils and staring at her above it with feverish eyes.

"The man swore it had no taste at all and no colour at all. He said it could be put into water or wine or milk or anything and the person would be dead in thirty ticks of a French clock."

Rhisiart replaced the stopper, laid the phial on its side on the third stool, and asked her with a certain irritation in his tone why it had to be a *French* clock. "Can't we even take poison in our own way?" he said.

Tegolin flushed and tears of vexation came into her eyes. It was only a trifle; but since, as a woman would, she had repeated the shopman's exact words though there was no particular significance in them, there was something annoying in being caught up in a casual phrase like this.

Instead of dropping the topic Rhisiart must needs go on harping on it. The unspoken dread of their separation that lay at the bottom of "the lake of his heart" like a drowned animal in a sack sent up these bubbles of contradiction.

But she had something else in her mind to say to him, something that lay as heavy in her consciousness as an infant within a womb; but it was so hard a thing to say that she was now struggling with the temptation to leave it unsaid just five minutes longer, while he went on being cantankerous about the French clock just as he'd been about the way she wore her page's dress on that long ago Midsummer Day when she rode to Glyndyfrdwy on Griffin's back.

"Put it away!" she burst out, pointing at the phial. "For Mary's sake put it in your belt! It'll go in there, won't it? It must go in there!"

Since he still remained inert and motionless, just staring at her with an expression as if he had to make sure that another Rhisiart, already in a different world, was correctly imitating him, she snatched at the phial herself and tearing open the shirt she'd been mending, squeezed the thing impulsively between his body and his belt.

What she did was painful to Rhisiart in every conceivable way. It caused him anguish in his wounded side. It gave him the sensation that he was her helpless infant rather than her equal mate, and it seemed to emphasize their parting in a manner that was like a push down a precipice.

But the hurt look in his eyes, together with that very emanation of outraged childishness which his whole attitude betrayed, reminded her so irresistibly of the Rhisiart she had loved in secret in those early days that she flung her arms round his neck and, desperately clinging to him, gasped out a spasmodic succession of endearing words.

But she quickly saw how weak he was — far weaker than she had expected — and she realized too, for he could no longer conceal it, how vicious was the pain in his hip. Quickly she let him go. Quickly she made him lie down on his bed of straw; and while the tears trickled from her cheeks upon his beard she flung herself down by his side and, stroking his face, whispered half-inaudible murmurs of love into his ears.

"Don't look at me while I tell you something, Rhisiart," she said at last, after they had lain together in silence while time flowed over them as if it were made of something lighter than air and swifter than thought. "Shut your eyes, my only love, while I tell you what I have to tell you."

Rhisiart needed not her fingers pressed on his eyelids to make him obey her now. He felt weary of everything in the world except her presence. He wished in his heart that she would tell him nothing; that she would but shut her eyes too so that they might sleep side by side forever.

But by slow degrees her terrible words, each one sounding like a moaning plant torn up by the roots, pierced his drugged intelligence. It was about Master Shore she was speaking; and she told him that the armourer was a great favourite with the young Prince, that no one in the kingdom, save Sir John Oldcastle, had more influence with him. She told him that the man was a widower and had grown enamoured of her; that she herself felt no repulsion for him, and did feel considerable gratitude. She told him that Julietta had come to cling to her as to a mother, that she felt sorry for both father and child; and finally that the man had sworn by the heart of Mary that if she did consent to live with him he could obtain from Prince Hal, not a complete pardon, for the connection with Glendower was too public, but a mitigation of the sentence from death on the scaffold to imprisonment in the Tower of London.

All this she told him in a flat, even voice, and very rapidly. It was a voice Rhisiart had never heard from her till once or twice of late he had heard her say her beads aloud. And when she'd finished she still kept the fingers of both her hands pressed upon his closed eyelids. She was crouching above him now, with one of her knees on the straw of his bed and one on the flagstones; and as she bowed over him, the bodkin that held her braid about her head became unloosened, and the familiar coils slithered down like a living serpent across his face.

The touch of her hair, with its familiar fragrance, sent a sharp shudder through his frame, while its fall caused her to liberate his eyes from their enforced blindness. Then it became Tegolin's destiny to stare without blinking — for she'd always been one for straight and steady looks — into the eyes of the person to whom she had just offered the supreme test, the most crucial that a girl can put to a man, namely whether he considered his life more important than her honour.

Rhisiart lay without a movement; you would almost have thought without a breath. She felt as if his eyes were swimming like dark fish steadily, irresistibly, through wave after wave of her secret being.

Without removing her own eyes she now rose slowly, lifting one knee from the stones and the other from the straw; and even in the tension of that worst moment retaining such calm of nature that the curious thought flitted across her mind: "Do nuns have straw to kneel on, like cows in a shed?"

But she rose to her full height now, lifting her hands to her head to coil up her braid. To do this she removed another bodkin, and, because her fingers were busy, held it in her mouth till its time had come, staring at Rhisiart from above the tightened lips out of which it protruded. She had thrown her mantle aside when she first entered, and her pale blue gown, caught up below her breasts by a gold band, displayed to their best advantage her soft white throat and rounded arms, and even those tiny freckles on her skin of which Glyn Dŵr had made so much.

But though the eyes of these two were searching each others' souls like divers in deep seas, they both remained absolutely ignorant of what the other was thinking. So little did Rhisiart understand his wife that he hadn't the faintest suspicion that this whole tale of hers was retrospect, and she had already saved him from being hung, drawn, and quartered by going up into the armourer’s bed.

And if it was no more possible for Rhisiart to imagine his wife’s lying to him than it was possible for him to imagine her naked in bed with a man he’d never seen, it was unthinkable to Tegolin that a Norman Welsh gentleman, who had been to Oxford, and whom she herself had seen advancing on his fantastic horse in front of a line of arrows pointed at his heart, would be able to fish up from the shifting sands of moral casuistry a sufficient reason for the sacrifice of honour to life.

She had expected a violent refusal and a pitiful struggle between them. What she hadn’t realized was how far below all casuistry he had sunk in his weakness.

Tegolin was a warm-blooded girl, and she never had been a girl of morbidly virginal shrinkings. But save for her romantic idealizing of the Friar she had given herself to Rhisiart, body, soul, and spirit, to such an absolute tune that it would have been hard to make another woman — even Lady Mortimer — understand what she felt when she climbed those stairs to the armourer’s open door.

The worthy man had rallied her the next morning about the candlegrease with which the stairs were sprinkled; but she didn’t confess to him how many times she had descended, before the final blind rush that took her to the top.

But the truth was that Rhisiart, from the first time they met had been conscious of something in Tegolin that was stronger than himself; and upon this stronger power he had always unscrupulously leaned. And this leaning upon her had reached a sort of culminating ecstasy as he longed just now, in his weakness and his pain, to go to sleep forever upon her breast.

Thus when she talked of “giving herself” to armourer Shore, this “giving herself didn’t call up any image of his actual Tegolin, with her red braid pressed between her white shoulders and a strange bed, submitting to the final outrage. It rather called up a comfortable vision of Master Dickon’s hearth with a great bowl of venison stew — for the Lollard and he had been vying with each other lately in the images created by hunger — and with the lively Julietta, of whom he’d heard Nance talk, keeping a place for him too at the table; and only a dim benevolent cloudy blur, resembling God the Father, to show that Tegolin had “given herself” to anyone.

It was the weakness of his famished body that formed these dishonorable visions; and it was the escape from the barrels of tar and the red-hot prongs, and from the time it took to get it done, for he’d seen it at Hereford as a child, that made him sink into her strength as a tired seagull into an ocean-wave.

And as he looked at this beautiful being upon whom his life depended, and who was prepared to give him his life, he felt as if he were absolved by those soft breasts and those white arms from the whole burden of choice, from the necessity of any decision at all! A deep in-sucking tide of infantile gratitude drew all the manliness out of him; while the expression in his eyes made so great a contrast to his hollow, emaciated cheeks, his straggly beard, his pinched hawk-nose, his narrow forehead, that the girl began to feel as if a Rhisiart, younger even than the one who had allowed her to kiss his crusader’s sword and had teased her about her page’s dagger, was begging her to take him on her lap, to hold him to her breast, to save him from the wolves!

Without a quiver of his mouth or a movement of his manacled limbs, the big tears of absolute weakness began to form in his eyes and to trickle down upon his beard; and she knew that whether he understood or not the price she'd paid he accepted the life she'd given him.

Two days later Master Dickon Shore was seated with Sir John Oldcastle in the snug inner sanctum of the Rose and Crown talking of the unexpected retreat of the allied army from Woodbury Hill, when their host, with the self-conscious lack of ceremony that the Prince insisted upon, announced the presence of the heir to the throne. "Let him in then, you whoreson herald of woe!" roared Sir John. "Let the sweet lad in, without making such faces! And bring some of that *Lacrima Christi* of yours he praised the other night, and — mark you, Martin Glum! — write it down to me this time — dost hear? Master Shore and I aren't like those whoresons they tell of who tap royalty and hiss treason! Let the boy in, and then open a bottle of *Lacrima Christi* and keep both Hal and the wine from these burning logs. He brings news, or I'm a Polack! Put a chair for him away from the fire. His blood tingles enough as it is; keep that wine cool till he calls for it."

Dickon Shore, who was a man of caution, nodded significantly at his knightly friend when Martin was gone. "It'll be as I said," he remarked. "He wants to rush you off in pursuit of those French prancers and their barefoot Merlins! But beware of the old fox when you run with the young one! Well, well. A word in the nick is snuff for the wick! The Lord gives and the King takes. He may bring news; but I can tell you what he *won't* bring; he won't bring the head of Owen Glendourdy; and that's all *I'd* thank him for!"

"Let him—" But there was no need to ask their landlord to "let him", for Prince Henry came bursting in in a state of intense nervous excitement. There was a peculiar vein of the neurotic in the whole Lancastrian House. It showed itself in Henry the Fourth both outwardly and inwardly: outwardly in his desperate forced marches and inwardly in his religious superstition. No captain could get his men quicker from one end of England to another.

Since Harold Godwinson there'd never been such an adept in the rapid movement of troops. But Harold understood the Welsh as Henry never did. Henry's invasions were the laughing stock of that nation, while Harold penetrated even into the fastnesses of Snowdon.

The Prince entered the room dressed in full armour. There were drops of sweat on his long white face and burning fever-spots on his cheeks. His hazel eyes, which were not unlike his father's, gleamed with a consuming excitement, and his mouth above his narrow pointed chin was twisted awry, and even when he ceased speaking his thin lips kept up a queer twitching. Sir John and Master Shore had often been put to it, as they discussed the Prince, to account for this twitching; while the whores of the house, Madge Howlet and Bess Bolt, who were both girls of some poetic imagination, indulged in quite fanciful comparisons. Madge maintained that when he spoke it was like a moor-fowl crossing a stream: "The ripples go on spreading after the bird's flown!" Bess had a less homely comparison. She said it was like seeing an echo. "His lips," she assured them, "echo every word he utters, only without a sound!"

As Sir John and Master Shore now rose to greet Prince Henry, they did so with an anxious exchange of glances, the burly knight's ruddy cheeks distorting themselves like a face in a concave mirror, while the armourer's visage paled a shade or two, like a flagon of wine suddenly diluted with water.

Prince Hal addressed them as if they had been twice as far away as they were. "To horse, to horse, Sir John!" he cried. "I stopped at your lodgings. Your man is here with your harness. Not a moment to spare! Off you ride with orders from me to Codnor, to Grendor, to Talbot — Mother of God! to any man of them! orders to Beelzebub — as long as you get out of here with a whole skin! The Archbishop's arrived — hot on the trail of heretics.

He's with my father now. He's going to burn and burn and burn! That young stiver of Lollardry we took along with Glendower's Secretary is to suffer tomorrow. They're already piling up the bonfire in the market, and the next thing will be my father's warrant to have you taken! I'll ride with you for a mile or two— 'after Glendower' we'll tell the guard at the gate; and you, Dickon — you, Dickon — he paused while his lips moved in that same silent twitching that Madge and Bess had noticed even while he was making free with them— "and you, Dickon, had better get your wench's husband out of that place at once and pack him off to London."

He paused and bit his lip. It was clear to his friends that there was something on his mind more personal than Sir John's escape. "I've been talking," he said, "to the Archbishop. He thinks my father won't live many years longer. He thinks this worrying about his soul will kill him. He's very bad today." Two or three seconds passed while he thought how bad the King was. Then he began again. "The Archbishop says that when — that when my father's gone — I ought to invade France and end all this. He says I have a claim — a very good claim." And he began pacing the room in his clanging armour with the springy step of a young player at quarter-staff.

"Take Tom Crosby and his whole company — Here! I'll give you the order in writing — Martin! I say! Martin! No! By Crish! I've no time for liquour. Take the stuff away and give it to the wenches! — and bring me a tablet. Let Crosby put the fellow in the Tower along with Glendower's son."

While Prince Hal with ostentatious penmanship — for the bravest Prince in Christendom was prouder of his clerkly ability than of his prowess in arms — was laboriously inditing his commands "To our trusty and redoubtable captain, Master Thomas Crosby," the most perturbed personage in the Rose and Crown was certainly its landlord. This careful man saw the best customers he was ever likely to get in his lifetime dispersing like swallows in September. His only comfort lay in the thought that even if the Prince did call for Madge or Bess again the girls were such poor judges of wine that he would never know what had been substituted for his royal bounty.

At the very moment when Prince Hal was laboriously displaying his clerkly gifts at the Sign of the Rose and Crown, Rhisiart and Master Brut were having a poignant discussion in their spacious prison-house. They had come to understand each other with an understanding deeper than that of brothers; and their love had grown so diffused as to spread through them like the sap in the kindred branches of one tree-root.

When they had first got fond of each other at Glyndyfrdwy and Dinas Bran the relation between them was crude enough. Master Brut was a religious prig in those days and our friend Rhisiart a romantic egoist; but after all they had gone through, these peculiarities had been so modified and mellowed that in addition to the Lollard's indulgence to his friend's touchy pride, Rhisiart's maturer interest in religion endowed their friendship with many tender refinements.

In their earlier relation the boyish conceit of the young Oxford student had obscured what might be called the feminine element in his soul; but, as their love deepened, this element grew more and more apparent, until today, as they talked together about life and death, it was the man whose beard had been untouched by little Nance's scissors who played the woman's part, while the soul of the soft-cheeked Lollard showed itself both in its weakness and its strength to be masculine through and through.

The golden August sunshine, as heavy and mellow within their prison-chamber as it was outside, threw upon every object in that large, low room a peculiar kind of glory. But to Rhisiart's nerves there was something malign and dreadful about this reddish glow, especially when it fell upon an enormous life-size crucifix which occupied the middle of the wall opposite the door.

This great crucifix, which extended practically from ceiling to floor, hung at right angles to the window on one side, and on the other to that portion of their chamber which had been perforce converted into a latrine. The heavy sunshine had a curious effect on the facial expression of this hanging figure; converting the pain it was suffering into an unearthly desire to inflict pain upon the enemies of God. The words “And many are called but few are chosen,” together with the words “Wailing and gnashing of teeth,” were what to Master Brut at any rate this object represented. But in the downright virile manner of a sturdy Wycliffite he hesitated not to utter rough and even gross ribaldries in the presence of this dreadful figure, comparing it very unfavourably with what he assured his excitable friend was the real Saviour of the world, whose form emerged, like a blessed Jinn, out of the unsealed bottle of the original Greek.

The agitated sympathy of Rhisiart, who to do him justice forgot his own trouble in the worse horror that over-hung his friend, had the opposite effect from that his wife’s presence had had upon himself. It simply steadied the man’s courage. But Rhisiart found it impossible to take in the full import of Tegolin’s words. In his feverish weakness he kept thinking of Mortimer and Catharine; but there was nothing in him now of the jealous realism of a grown man’s natural emotion towards this shadowy Master Shore by whom she was to be dishonoured and he was to be rescued.

One thing puzzled him. Why, if he were not to be executed, had his wife brought him that little phial? He had been vividly aware of it, all these two long nights and days since her visit, pressing against his side; but a deep instinct, totally beyond any rational explanation, had caused him to say nothing to his friend of this death-bearing draught "clear and tasteless as water."

What amazed him about Master Brut was the way in which the man kept reverting to that revolting description of a fellow Lollard's burning which their illiterate jailor had made them read aloud.

"I know," Master Brut was saying now, after expressing what was to Rhisiart an incomprehensible concern as to the fate of "that damned Ruthin witch," "I know I shall lose my mind in the flames. But I've decided to cry, 'Jesus! Jesus!' — and that isn't *you*" — and he made a profane gesture towards the figure hanging above them— "as long as I don't go mad with pain. And my idea is" — and a look so curious crossed his smooth round face that it made Rhisiart think of the smile of the Man in the Moon— "that even if I do go mad, I mean if I become nothing but a blindly-shrieking pain, I shall mechanically, if you know what I mean, go on with that same cry."

This was too much for Rhisiart and he stumbled to his feet. He had been lying on his straw bed most of the day. Indeed, ever since Tegolin had lain down there by his side his bed had grown precious to him. He had caught on that occasion the shape of certain particular pieces of straw that were larger than the rest and had the empty husks of wheat still adhering to them; and these he had avoided disturbing, fearful lest they should be crushed or lost among the rest in their special position against the wall.

But he scrambled to his feet now, and shuffling up to his friend, whose turn it was that day to wear their only suit of clothes, he hugged him to his heart. "You'll — turn — me — into — a whoreson heretic soon!" he groaned as he hugged him; and to the end of his days he never forgot the grotesque expression of shy embarrassment that distorted that smooth countenance. How was it, he wondered, that a man who was going to be burnt alive could feel such discomfort, such embarrassment, such obvious misgiving, at being passionately embraced?

But what was that? Hurriedly they drew apart, both praying they would see the face of little Nance. But it was her father; and never had Master Giggleswick, since they'd first been brought here, showed so much agitation. To their amazement he waved them aside and, going hurriedly towards their extempore latrine, began fumigating it with burning charcoal, sprinkled with incense, that he was carrying in a brazier.

"The King is coming!" he muttered presently, turning towards them a face out of the midst of his fumes that was a convulsed image of horrified awe. "The Archbishop arrived this morning and they're both coming to see you. The King is in one of his moods."

"What do you mean, his moods?" asked Rhisiart.

The man stared at him in astonishment. Then a look of anger crossed his visage. "You'd be in a mood I reckon; if you hadn't slept for nigh a week!"

The Lollard's round face assumed once more the accustomed mask of patient placidity that his friend's burst of womanish emotion had disturbed.

"There's a stake being set up in Market Square," said Master Giggleswick, giving them a look of terrified commiseration, "and a scaffold, too." And with these words he went on resolutely swinging his censer above their piled-up excrement.

When he was gone, the Lollard shuffled over to Rhisiart and offered his unhurt arm to help him to rise. Neither of them could move faster than this awkward shuffle, for their ankles were bound by short chains about a foot long; but Master Brut helped the younger man to reach his accustomed stool, and then sitting down by his side began picking up with his finger and thumb various fragments of bread with which, on the stool that served as their table, he had been showing how the land lay between Glendower's camp and London.

"Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" Rhisiart caught him muttering, as he mechanically placed some of these fragments in his mouth and flicked others, in little neat pellets, against the legs of that oppressive and inquisitorial crucifix.

"He's thinking what he'll do," Rhisiart said to himself, "when the pain's unbearable."

And then he noticed that their jailer, in his fumblings with his brazier, had dropped upon the floor that filthy bit of parchment containing the lurid popular account of the burning of the last London heretic. He prayed Master Brut wouldn't notice it lying there. And then he began comparing — and he was pleased with himself for having such thoughts which he felt were worthy of an imprisoned diplomatist — what they'd been hearing of the casual ways of Henry's "entourage" with the stately formality of Owen's court. "And how different must be," he said to himself, "this 'mood' they talk of, compared with those strange trances of Owen's. Everybody seems to understand the caprices of this King; whereas I've lived with our Prince all these years and he's as mysterious to me as he was at the beginning!"

Presently, as he watched the Lollard obliterating his map, Rhisiart found himself trembling. "It's not the prongs and pitch this time," he thought. "It's seeing the King!" And in spite of himself the old traditional Norman respect for his feudal sovereign made him straighten his body as he turned his head towards the door. There! Voices and steps were now audible outside. The two men's eyes met; and to Rhisiart's relief his friend ceased muttering the name of his Saviour and remarked quite calmly: "I don't want you to intervene, dear lad, whatever the Archbishop says to me, or I to him. Do you understand?" Rhisiart had only time to nod when the door was flung open.

Both the prisoners rose to their feet and made the best obeisance they could, considering their chains. Behind the King and the Archbishop there entered, along with the jailer, a grotesquely-attired dwarf, and behind the dwarf, evidently uneasy, evidently disobeying his Master's command, a small white greyhound. Our friends had been told of this white dog who belonged to a breed brought from abroad by John of Gaunt; and little Nance had often talked to them about the dwarf, who, derisively called Hercule, was a privileged creature in the royal camp, as well as in Henry's lodge at Berkhampstead.

The Archbishop was dressed in the plain garb of a monk, and after acknowledging the two prisoners' genuflexion, he fell back with priestly propriety, leaving the situation in the hands of the temporal ruler of the realm.

Rhisiart was startled beyond all expectation by the appearance of England's monarch. The words of the jailer: "If you hadn't slept for nigh a week!" returned to his mind. To say he was shocked would be a mild expression of what he felt. He had heard rumours about Henry's strange illness, which some said was a form of leprosy, but the haggard and disfigured features that now regarded him with an expression of intolerable nervous tension from under their helmet — for this Prince when once he took the field rarely removed his armour — horrified him so much that in spite of his prejudice, and in spite of his loyalty to Wales, he felt a pang of painful pity.

Henry of Lancaster had an extremely long face like his eldest son, but there the resemblance between them ended; for Prince Hal's physiognomy conveyed a sense of vigorous and lively youth, whereas the King's countenance was haggard with premature old age.

As Henry looked round him now, after giving a hurried glance at his prisoners, Rhisiart made no attempt to conceal either his student's interest in an unhappy man or his inherited respect for England's monarch.

The King certainly had an eye of terrifying authority. Indeed the first impression our friend got of him was as startling as it was horrible. The man made him actually think of a corpse, in the early stages of decomposition, tottering under a suit of glittering steel. "I can understand the Battle of Shrewsbury now," he thought. And he had reason for the thought; for the energy that emanated from this sick and world-weary man was overpowering.

But if Rhisiart caught the unconquerable vitality of the English King, Master Brut, who, as we know, was more of a psychologist, detected at once the man's spiritual secret, the secret that was like a charnel-house rat gnawing at the tissues of his soul. "He's got a devil," said the Wycliffite to himself, "and its name is Remorse. And only the words of the living Jesus, not you, you monstrous parody!" — and the bold blasphemer made a motion in his mouth that brought his saliva to the tip of his tongue— "will ever cast that devil out!"

As for the Archbishop, upon whose face Rhisiart now turned his attention, no emotion that he called up could possibly be associated with pity. Nevertheless, none could deny that the successor of Anselm and Becket was a handsome old priest. But had a child made a comic picture of everything most antipathetic to childhood, this crafty and cruel face — like that of a horrible old woman employed in the punishment of whores — would have been that picture.

It was the face of the eternal Enemy of Freedom from the foundation of the world. His features struck our friend as being entirely composed of sinister and enigmatic curves. His massive nose resembled the bulb of an evil plant, while over his almost invisible eyes that seemed to be perpetually sucking at the nerve-centres of heretics there hung heavily-curved folds. These folds were repeated below his eyes, and hung suspended there like fungus growths beneath wood-pecker holes. His cheeks, his forehead, his chin — all were a series of equivocal curves. There wasn't, our friend hurriedly decided, from the top of that shaven poll to the bottom of that shaven jowl, one single honest straight line!

"You don't happen to know, Master Secretary," began the King, addressing Rhisiart, "how many Welsh gentlemen of any note or quality were with Glendourdy on Woodbury Hill?"

"No, Sire," replied our friend looking straight at the distressed and restless eyes which rested on him only for a moment as they turned from the greyhound to the dwarf and back again to the greyhound.

"Have you any idea how long this foolish rebellion is likely to last?"

"No, Sire."

"About how many men could Glendourdy count on if we ourselves were to march into this unhappy country to restore order?"

Rhisiart began to take heart. If there was anything, as we know, that he prided himself upon, it was his legal acumen. The only doubt in his mind was whether it was better to emphasize or to disparage the Welsh powers of resistance. He knew well that the one thing Owen *wasn't* afraid of was a formal invasion by the King in person. "It's just what he wants," he said to himself, as he pretended to be undergoing a painful mental struggle as to whether or not to betray his master.

He hurriedly decided that the larger Owen's forces were, the more likely was it that the King would come.

"I believe, Sire," he replied with gloomy intensity, as if the words were drawn out of him by the presence of a scaffold, "that the person your royal question refers to could raise at a pinch about twenty thousand spears.”

Master Brut couldn’t resist a gasp of astonishment, which wasn’t lost upon the Archbishop; but at this moment the entrance of a couple of soldiers with chairs that resembled judgment-seats for both Church and State postponed any comment he might have made.

If it was a relief to the prisoners to have their judges seated it was a positive joy to the dwarf and the dog. The sinking down of that troubled figure, in his unadorned breast-plate and polished greaves — for Henry, out of a deliberate and shrewd policy, wore the royal arms only on state occasions — proved too tempting an opportunity to be resisted by these devoted adherents.

Dressed entirely in blood-red the little Hercule held in his hand an enormous wooden sword, the tip of which, painted an ominous blood colour, he now proceeded to use as a jumping-pole, and began hopping about the chamber, ostentatiously approaching the Archbishop, and then, with no less fantastic ostentation, hopping away from him in pretended panic.

Master Giggleswick, without waiting a sign from Henry, had seen fit, in his discomfort and uneasiness, to take himself off along with the soldiers, so that the King and the Primate were now seated alone before their prisoners; while round and about them, and round and about the men in chains, who stood together in the fumes left by the brazier, hopped the restless Hercule, his proceedings resembling, had the frowning crucifix possessed the power of vision, the antics of a blood-red flea.

“What in your own opinion, young man,” began Henry again, “was the motive of these unhappy rebels in advancing so far into our realm? Surely they didn’t—”

"The King of France with thousands of his men," chanted Hercule, pausing for a second as he leant on his wooden sword, "climbed up the hill and then climbed down again!" And immediately afterwards in a low wistful voice: "You are sad, Sire Gossip, you are sad."

"We *are* sad," said the King, smiling at him and glancing meaningfully at the Archbishop. But the effect of this smile was to throw into such appalling relief the ravages of his strange disease that the dwarf skipped away with a gnat-like wail.

"I thought you were!" he shrilled with an hysterical scream. And then he went off hopping again, repeating in a weird crescendo: "I thought you were! I thought you were! I thought you were!"

It was at this point that the Archbishop intervened. "With your permission, my royal son," he began; and Rhisiart noticed that he didn't use his lips to speak. Indeed he seemed to have no lips. His cheeks had the power of folding themselves, without the mediation of lips, into the in-drawn orifice of the mouth out of which the words came.

"With my royal son's permission I should like to say one word to *you,* Master Walter Brut of Lyde in the County of Hereford." As he spoke he made a slight movement of his fingers upwards as if in an automatic blessing; but as soon as they reached the height of the cross on his stomach he projected two of them — and they were the whitest and most shapely hands our friend had ever seen — in the manner of a pair of horns towards Master Brut. This gesture terrified Rhisiart on behalf of his friend more than if he'd rolled out over the Lollard's head a volley of priestly curses.

"I wish the King to hear me offer you, my unhappy son, a last opportunity to reconcile yourself with the Church of Christ. Are you still obstinate in your blasphemous opinion that the Sacred Element used in Holy Mass is not the living Body of the—"

But Rhisiart couldn’t help intervening at this solemn point. “Oh, my Lord Archbishop!” he cried eagerly. “My friend has often said to me, while he’s been reading the Scriptures, that the centre of the Catholic Faith lies in the Holy Mass. I can testify, my Lord, from the bottom of my heart, that no one has ever attended Mass more reverently than Master Brut, or has lived a more good, a more kind, a more unselfish life!”

The Prelate’s eyes, as he heard this startling suggestion that mere human goodness could counterbalance an improper view of the Blessed Sacrament, sank so deep under the curves of his eyelids that their cavities came to resemble those round holes of in-sucking sand made by sea-worms.

“Do you still adhere, Master Brut, to your blasphemous opinion?” he said, taking no more notice of Rhisiart than he did of the antics of Hercule the dwarf.

“1 do, my Lord,” replied the Lollard calmly.

That the reply was much more satisfactory to the zealous supporter of the statute *De Heretico Comburendo* than would have been any tendency in Master Brut to recant was proved by the triumphant tone in which the Prelate now addressed the world-weary monarch, the droop of whose ravaged face against the metallic edge of his gorget suggested a longing rather to sleep forever himself than to vex the sleep of others.

“You see how it is, Sire!” he said loudly, while Henry gave a queer galvanic jerk as if he’d been pricked by a bodkin. “The same conceited tone, the same air of self-righteousness, the same contempt for tradition and authority! It was a happy day for the Church, Sire, when you were crowned King; and since the King rests on the Church, and the Church rests on God, you may be sure that our dear young Prince will live to walk in your steps; and his son to walk in his. I can see before me, Sire, your son’s son — a third Henry of Lancaster — reigning over a kingdom, Sire, wherein all heresy and all treason and all rebellion, together with all the malice of man’s wicked mind, have been crushed out!”

The Archbishop was not one for impulsive gestures. He moved his eyes without moving his head. He moved his hands without moving his arms. He moved his fingers without moving his hands. But when he uttered the syllables “crushed out!” he placed one clenched fist upon the other in his capacious lap, and as though they were “the upper and the nether millstone” of the Scriptures, he caused them to rotate, not rapidly, but quietly, slowly, irresistibly, as if they were crushing by leisurely progression the reckless soul of Master Wycliffe to powder.

As if mesmerized by this visual exhibition of the Mill of God to which it was his task to lend his weight, the King turned to the Lollard, and it seemed as if his words had no personal feeling behind them at all. He made a weary motion with his hand for both the prisoners to come nearer as he began to speak; and Rhisiart, who experienced a childish fascination for the patches of repulsive scurf that disfigured the royal features, felt as if they, and not the man behind them, were uttering judgment. “You have heard what the Archbishop has said, young man, and you’ll be wise to spend your last night on earth in remorse for your sin, for your most grievous sin, against the Laws of our Realm, against the Religion once for all delivered to the Saints and against the Vicar of Christ. We condemn your body to be burnt with fire until it is utterly consumed; and as for your unhappy soul, if the pang of — the pangs of—” But at that point there was a complete change in his intonation, and he uttered the word “remorse” with such a ghastly emphasis, and fell into such a strange muse the moment it had been uttered, that the dwarf who had been watching him intently came with three long hops to his feet, and crouching down there set up a moan like the howl of a dog.

“Hercule,” murmured the King, “Hercule.” His voice was so tender that the men in chains exchanged a quick glance and a longing to fall at the side of the dwarf and clasp the knees of a prince who could speak like that passed through both their minds.

But the small creature had scrambled to his feet again. “Sire Gossip?” he cried. “Can you answer a riddle?”

“Put it to us first,” said the King; and Rhisiart had a vision of this corpse in armour clinging to the jests of his fool as he swung above a dizzy gulf.

The dwarf picked up his wooden sword and after several attempts managed to insert it so firmly and deeply between two of the flagstones that he could play the acrobat upon it and with one hand on its cross-hilt could dangle his legs and point his finger at the seated churchman.

“Why, Sire Gossip, is an archbishop like a grid-iron?”

There was a jingle of chains as both the prisoners drew a step nearer. They all became aware now of excited voices outside the door and some kind of violent altercation. But Henry took no notice of this; and the Archbishop, though he moved his eyes and clasped his fingers, remained immobile.

It was clear to Rhisiart that the more his fool made sport of the Archbishop the easier it was for the King to forget his need for sleep. “His piety’s all politics,” thought our friend. “He’s got Richard on his brain as badly as Mad Huw; but he can forget all when Hercule’s at his tricks.”

“Why a grid-iron?” asked Henry softly, giving his chair a jerk so that he had his back to the crucifix and his face to the dwarf.

“Because,” began Hercule, who now bore a striking resemblance to a monkey on a pole, “because—”

But there he stopped, for the King had swung round towards Rhisiart. “As for you,” he burst out, turning his sick man’s gaze upon our astonished friend, “you may thank our good Dickon, and not us, that we’ve decided on the Tower for you, and with a whole skin!”

“Sire Gossip?”

“Well, Hercule?”

“An Archbishop is like a grid-iron because so much good gospel meat goes in red, and comes out—”

But the door was flung open at this point, and Jailer Giggleswick appeared, clinging desperately to the excited form of none other than Mad Huw.

“What’s this?” cried Henry angrily, struggling to his feet with his hand on the hilt of his sword. “I told you we were to be left alone. By my father’s soul, Master Jailer—”

But no sooner had Mad Huw set eyes on the angry monarch, now standing close to the figure in chains, who to the Friar’s demented fancy was no other than the dead Richard, than he shook off the hands of Master Giggleswick, glanced with a Welsh Franciscan’s contempt at the Archbishop, and, after inclining his head humbly and reverently in the direction of Rhisiart, began to pour forth a torrent of prophetic eloquence.

As Rhisiart had long ago discovered, there was a magnetic hypnotism about Mad Huw, when he let himself go, at once so tender and so terrifying that few hearers were able to do anything but hold their peace in awestruck silence.

“What will they do now?” our friend thought, glancing from the King to the Prelate.

But the Archbishop did nothing; though his eyes moved in his motionless head towards the troubled monarch and gave him one penetrating glance. Then they turned to their contemplation of the feet of the crucifix.

The white dog, after sniffing at the Friar's legs, settled himself on his thin haunches, and watched him intently, his delicate pointed head drooping a little to one side. "He acts," thought our friend, "as if it were Saint Francis himself."

But the Lollard had eyes for nobody but the King. He seemed to forget that this conscience-stricken figure had just condemned him to be burnt. The pathologist in him was touched to the quick; and well it might be. The extraordinary thing was that in his self-lacerating mood Henry was exerting his own powerful will to draw the speaker on.

An appalling reciprocity rose up in that Worcestershire prison between Richard's murderer and Richard's idolater. The same superstitious mania in the monarch that made him helpless in the Prelate's hands made him equally helpless before his accuser. And mingled with this nervous confederacy in his own indictment, there was, as both dog and dwarf seemed perfectly to understand, a malicious satisfaction in the discomfort which the Friar's words must needs be causing the Archbishop. That portly figure in the monk's garb, however, gave neither to Henry nor to Hercule the least sign of being disconcerted. All he did, while Mad Huw's words rang through the prison, was to assist the King to sink once more, with a dull metallic tinkle of his heavy armour, into the chair he'd vacated; but this done he quietly resumed his own seat, folded his hands in his lap, and fixing his eyes on the crucifix above him assumed the expression of inscrutable piety with which in his cathedral throne he was accustomed to await the close of some prolonged anthem.

The door of the Bishop's prison had been left open; and poor Master Giggleswick, whom Providence had intended rather for the role of a town-crier than a jailer, now beheld — as the last straw to his shame — the fair head of little Nance, accompanied by the fairer head of Julietta, peeping in with spell-bound curiosity!

Frantically the good man gesticulated to the children to go away, but instead of obeying him, for they were both the motherless darlings of indulgent men, they sidled into the room, and stood there, hand in hand, staring with delighted awe at the King, at the prisoners, and above all at the gesticulating Friar.

Rhisiart kept saying to himself: “Why doesn’t he stop predicting these woes for the House of Lancaster and say a word for Walter here?” He glanced at his friend. Was the man praying for a miracle under his breath? Was he anticipating his struggles, his pain, his cries of “Jesus”? He himself shook off as if it were a mortal sin the stir of sweetness in the depths of his nature at his escape from the prongs and the pitch. The thought came to him: “Mightn’t the sick King, in his present remorseful mood, cheat the Archbishop in return for some real information about Wales and its Prince?” And then he had a diplomatic afterthought: “Couldn’t I buy Walter’s pardon by inventing a master-secret that would do Owen no harm and cause this sick King intense satisfaction?”

But what a man Walter was! Why wouldn’t he let a person catch his eye? Was he fearful of anyone, even the friend of his heart, peering through the bloody sweat of his soul into the pain-dance within?

But what was this? The astonishing man was actually watching Hercule with lively interest — and, by Jesus, if he wasn’t smiling! No, no, no — this smile of Walter Brut’s, and how it had baffled him from their first encounter! rising to the surface just now, just when Tegolin — no! he refused to think of it! — it was too much. It made him angry. It almost made him hate the fellow. Oh blast, oh damn this skipping red flea! What was the whoreson up to now, just when the whirling predictions of the Friar were warning that corpse in armour that nothing, nothing he could do, could conquer the Welsh nation?

But it wasn't only to Rhisiart that Hercule's behaviour seemed inexplicable. Little Nance and Julietta were staring at him in an ecstasy. Indeed it looked as if they would soon be clapping their hands! What he was pretending to do was to catch in his cupped fingers the prophetic words that issued from the mouth of the Friar and then to convey them in that same imaginary receptacle to the abstracted Archbishop, and having made as if he'd emptied them there like burning coals, to go skipping back to Mad Huw where he held out his hands as if to obtain another handful of these scoriac words.

In this performance, to the children's delight, and apparently not to the King's displeasure, the butterfly-like little dog took a lively part, leaping up at the dwarf and exhibiting a moving vignette in scarlet and snow-white!

Had Elphin been there he would doubtless have caught the full effect of this weird picture, sketched by the heraldic artist, chance, for his masters, the fleeting hours; but, as it was, the particular way the sun shone across the chamber, making the King's steel armour gleam like glass and throwing into ghastly relief the yellow sores and grey scurf upon his ravaged face while it caused the grime upon the unwashed skin of the two prisoners to be transformed into beaten gold, found no human eye to note it. Master Brut had never been one for aesthetic effects; and though he might smile at the antics of a little white dog, his friend knew well what must be going on in his mind — the chain — the stake — the writhing flesh.

And all for what? All that one handsome old monk, without a straight line in his face, should get the Holy Father's blessing upon the House of Lancaster!

“Oh Richard, oh my Saint!” Mad Huw was intoning again; and Rhisiart began to feel that there was no parallel, in philosophy, or law, or politics, for the situation he was now compelled to confront. It was the monarch’s business to stop the Friar; and yet all he’d done was to make a signal to the jailer to let the man alone! He must be getting some monstrous satisfaction from having his tormented conscience objectified in the cries of a madman.

Meanwhile the wretched Giggleswick, helplessly watching those little girls at the door, made up his mind that he would resign his job and sweep the streets before he ran the risk of another scene like that.

But it wasn’t over yet; for though something, some psychic emanation from his victim-accomplice, had in a curious way muted the Friar’s tone, both the dwarf and the dog knew what the King was suffering. They had indeed been, so to speak, inside his nerves to a degree forbidden to any human creature and they knew that the man was approaching the verge of an hysterical outburst. They were unable to stop this outburst; but they could show what they felt by anticipating it. And this they did with a wild rush, leaping to his side, crouching at his feet and setting up simultaneously such a heart-rending howl of pitiful sympathy that the children fled, the Archbishop changed the position of his fingers, and Mad Huw, pointing at the crucifix, upon which the sun was certainly playing curious tricks, murmured in an awestruck and hoarse voice: “Who has done this? Who has put horns upon Christ’s head?”

This final word was too much for the over-wrought King. Rising from his chair, while his emotion caused several dark blood-drops to appear amid the sores on his face, he moved a step or two towards the Friar, and very quietly, while the terrified jailer shut his eyes and the Archbishop changed the position of his feet, uttered the surprising words: “It’s sleep you want, Brother Friar. Let’s go and look for it together, Brother. It’s sleep we all want. Richard has it. Hotspur has it. The Duke, my father, has it. Hercule and Seamew will have it tonight. He," and he made a gesture towards the Lollard, "will have it tomorrow. But who will give it to Henry of Hereford, Brother? To Henry of Lancaster, Brother? To Henry of England, Brother? Give me sleep, I pray thee — a feather of it, a grain of it — one little tiny fly's head of it, Brother! Sleep's an easy thing to find. It's cheaper than ale. It's commoner than bread. Sleep's everywhere; isn't it, Brother? Isn't it, Grey Brother? Sleep's as wide as the air, as deep as the sea! What have they done then with poor Harry's sleep? The King's tired, Brother. A man can't live and be as tired as the King. You're all my subjects! Aren't you my subjects? Then I command you — on your allegiance" — here the wretched man shook Mad Huw frantically by the arm— "go, hunt, look about, search! Say it's the King who sends; say it's the King who must know, and by night-fall too, who it is who's hoarding all the sleep in the world! Go and look, I tell ye! There must be somebody who's stolen the King's sleep!

"You there! Crosby! Denton! Talbot! Send out, and hunt him down! He's stolen the King's sleep and hidden it in a little hole! Yes, yes, good Seamew! Fetch it! Fetch it! Fetch it! Fetch it!" All this while the little white dog was leaping up at his master and pawing at his armour, as if he were fain to find his hurt and lick it.

As for Hercule, he seemed set upon one thing only — to break his wooden sword! With his foot upon it, groaning and panting, he had already broken it into three pieces; but the wood near the handle was too much for him. Like a child with a baffling toy he now began furiously beating it against the wall. Nobody else dared to stir or to speak. The Archbishop had gone as far as to thrust his hand into his habit to find his beads. But evidently fancying that the eyes of all Christendom were upon him, he let it remain there, and contented himself with a murmured *"Miserere nobis!"*

But there must have been something in the outstretched hand with which Mad Huw now boldly touched the sick monarch that carried a healing power. And the little dog at last succeeded in doing what it wanted to do. Its wordless distress reached the man's heart; and Henry took it up into his arms.

It was the turn of the two prisoners now to receive a shock; and a shock that they alone in all that place could receive. His hated enemy's remorse had done for the Friar what neither Tegolin nor Rhisiart had been able to do. To say that he no longer confused Rhisiart with King Richard would be going too far; but that Henry's hysterical outburst had restored to the former his association with Glyn Dŵr was proved by the calm and collected manner in which he now begged his life of the King. "The lad's no Lollard," he said. "He's a good lad and a true Catholic. He has been—"

The way in which the King interrupted him — though since Seamew was licking his master's face the prisoners heard nothing — must have satisfied the Friar, for he now was seen to make the sign of the cross over both monarch and dog; and the prisoners clearly heard him utter the words, and utter them in a tone of the most convincing authority: "Tonight, at least, Henry of Lancaster, Saint Francis will give you sleep."

Rhisiart's mind at that moment became so absorbed in an internal struggle of his own that what went on before him grew suddenly indistinct. He felt faint and dizzy with standing so long, so much so that it was almost with a tearful relief that he took the support of the arm his friend now offered him; but it was the contest in his mind, not the hurting of his wound, or even the danger of that old "blackness" overtaking him, that made him respond to Mad Huw with hardly a sign, when the jailer, mentally withdrawing his resolve to change his occupation, hustled the Friar away.

Yes, our friend was thinking of that little phial of death, "colourless as water and tasteless as air". Mightn't he have desperate need of it if they decided after they got him into the Tower to extract some real information from him about Owen and about Wales? But what of Walter? Nothing they could do in the Tower could be worse than what Walter was to suffer — and suffer tomorrow!

But had he a right to give away what Tegolin had brought him? Dewi Sant! but he was past thinking of that. His mind gave a queer jump, as if the pit of his stomach had become a single pulse of horror.

So this is what it had come to. There was no other way. Obscure memories of Roman and Greek heroes rose up in his mind.

But he felt anything but heroic. He felt odiously calm and clever. He felt as though he were the incarnation of cold-blooded practical common-sense. Was there any way he could dodge this calm, clear-headed, inevitable decision? No, there was no way. Walter would never kill *himself and* so — yes, he must do it. He loved him; and he must do it. "Thank God," he thought, "I'm an unscrupulous Catholic and not a fussy gospel-man!"

And then quite suddenly the old "blackness" did sweep over his wits. He seemed to see them chaining his friend to the stake— "*Walter!*"

When his consciousness returned he found himself alone with his friend. The Lollard's round moon-face was bending over him as he lay on his straw bed. And the man was actually looking happy because he'd opened his eyes. Christ! This was rather a moment to look happy when you *couldn't* open your eyes. When you'd never open your eyes again. But the jailer must have come and gone, and brought them their bread and water. There was the pitcher; there were their two mugs; all just as usual! There was the stool they used for a table.

And he found that he'd absolutely made up his mind. He must have made it up while the "blackness" was on him. Yes, his brain had never been clearer. And not for nothing had he his mother's unscrupulous Norman wits. He called up the image of his mother. Lady Montfoison! Well, at any rate, *she* wouldn't hesitate. Walter had to die anyhow; and he'd die now without ever knowing. Yes, yes — but he must do quickly what he had to do.

"Shall I bring you your supper, laddie?" It was Walter's voice — just his ordinary, kind, even voice. How he would hear it when he was in the Tower with Griffith ab Owen!

He pretended that he could only answer faintly. God! He felt strength enough to shout the place down. "Bring — the — whole — thing — over — here, my dear," he whispered. "We'll have our — our last supper."

The Lollard turned his back and began his jangling shuffle towards the bread and water. In a second Rhisiart extracted the phial, tried its stopper and held it under his rags. How slow the man was! He found it necessary to shut his eyes. Those slow, awkward movements were maddening. And what if — doing all this with his one hand — he dropped and broke the pitcher! Oh, he would never be able to carry that precious water balanced on that ricketty stool! But there! — he'd done it at last; and the stool, with their mugs and their half-loaves, rested safely by his side.

"Get — your — stool!" he whispered, with the air of a man who might faint again at any moment

Shuffle — shuffle — shuffle] How cleverly he'd managed! He felt so pleased with himself that he even took the time to kiss his hand to that familiar back as he poured out the water into their two glasses and emptied the phial into the one further from his bed.

Having replaced the little empty bottle in his belt he took the precaution to possess himself of his own mug. But he didn't lift it to his lips. He waited. Here was his friend jangling back; and clutching his mug he closed his eyes.

At last the man was seated opposite him and he could breathe freely. Not quite freely, all the same; for there was an odd sensation in his throat. He felt as if he were the one going to escape the Archbishop. "What shall we drink to?" he found himself saying in a loud and resonant voice; not at all the voice of a man who at any moment might faint away. Oh, the whoreson fool he was! He should have whispered that; for the innocent eyes opposite him opened wide.

"To Owen!" he murmured as quietly and as naturally as he could; and he lifted his mug. But his heart was shouting. Surely Walter must hear his heart. "Drink — drink — drink — drink!" thundered his heart, as if they were both inside the great horologe, invented by that Glastonbury monk, when it was striking the hour! There! the hand that he knew so well — every line and mark on it! — had taken the mug — was raising it — had raised it — to his lips— "Hail Mary! Hail Mary! Hail Mary!"— "tasteless as water". Drain it, for Christ's sake! No! no! Don't look at me over the rim, like children do! Don't—"

"To our wives!" And the Lollard put down the mug — empty. "I've been wondering," he said, "how soon a person faints with the pain; and whether —" He stopped suddenly, evidently mistaking the expression on his friend's face for unbearable fellow-feeling. "How selfish I am!" he cried, and stretched out his arm across the stool. But their fingers had barely touched when the man's face, body, limbs drew in upon themselves, self-locked in a deadly, constricting, stiffening spasm. Up, up his figure rose, as if there were a galvanic propulsion beneath it, and for one tick of that time-clock, inside of which Rhisiart, like the Glastonbury monk's automaton, was empty of all feeling, the convulsed form balanced itself on his toes; and

then, for Master Brut died as erect as if he had been chained to a stake, it fell forward across the stool and across Rhisiart's knees.

When Master Giggleswick entered the prison at midnight along with the executioner whose official duty it was to measure his victim for the iron band that was to encircle his waist, they found both prisoners extended on the same bed; but thanks to the precautions taken in Worcester that the Bishops might see the faces of their victims, the place was so easily lit up that it was soon clear that only one of them was enjoying that temporary cessation of consciousness that Mad Huw had promised the King. The other was in a deeper sleep.

For a short while, as the two men questioned him, it seemed as though a danger, quite unforeseen by our astute friend, was on the verge of arising; namely, the suspicion that there had been a quarrel in the prison; but so free from any bruise was the Lollard's corpse, and so realistic was the survivor's account of the shocking access of panic-stricken blasphemy that had resulted in this providential stroke, that the worst our friend had to endure were the long-winded accounts of similar incidents in that place exchanged between the two cronies.

"Well, Master Clerk, I'll be getting home," remarked the executioner at last, "and you, Ned, I can see are ready for Mother Goose's feathers. Give my love to London-town, Master, and accept a good Christian's congratulation! Of course, as a professional man — which is, as you might say, a good Christian writ backwards" — and the fellow gave Rhisiart an indescribable leer that was at once sympathetic and avaricious— "a man might complain, and Ned here knows it well, at having to rise with the cock to take down an unblooded scaffold and as pretty a pile of dry withies as this town has ever seen. But, as I've always said, 'tis the hand that signs the warrant, not the hand that piles the faggots, that keeps the smell of the burning in his beard."

Well, they were gone now; and Rhisiart, who never analysed his feelings, was quite unconscious of anything ironic in the fact that, as he lay with his arm across the body of the man he'd killed, his mind fretted so much because he'd lacked the silver groat that, as "a Christian writ backwards," the executioner had evidently expected; or that he was so worried because he had only these rags — even if he carried off their single outer garment — to ride in to London.

With his head full of the groat he hadn't possessed and of this problem of his rags, he kept staring at that monstrous crucifix, till, like a forest-ranger hanging dead hawks in sight of a heronry, he left these annoyances suspended on those wounded feet; and fumbling with his hot fingers till he got hold of the icy hand by his side, he began at last to think of Master Brut. But, really and truly, there was nothing to think about. He had met him by chance; he had killed him by intention; and let fate be the arbiter! What he really felt was that Master Brut had gone off altogether, goodness knows where, but *very far away!*

This ice-cold flesh he touched had no connection with his familiar friend. As for Walter's soul being in danger, it no more crossed his mind than it crossed his mind to regret killing him. The only positive feeling was a deep complacent malicious satisfaction at having robbed the Archbishop of at least one man's weight of protracted pain!

But though his emotions seemed to have grown as dead and numb as the ice-cold fingers he continued to clutch, there was one problem, as he heard the watchman beyond the moat calling the hours, round which his mind hovered like a tethered and blinded falcon.

“He must have quarrelled with the French,” he said to himself. “It was too splendid a chance for him not to have taken it! He could have burned the gates, sacked the town and captured both the Henries! He could have done it after the second day he camped on Woodbury Hill. Later than that I doubt it. From what Nance said, the shire-men were—”

But the affection that had grown up between Master Giggleswick’s little maid and Walter called his thoughts off that speculation as if it had been a bell-buoy.

The jailer had left several well-oiled torches burning in their sconces and this illumination inside his room made it hard for him to see the stars outside; especially since the flamboyant end-of-the-century window that recent episcopal taste had inserted was partly concealed by the projecting crucifix; and the law of association of ideas made it impossible for him to see the feet of this figure without thinking of the executioner’s groat-less face and of his own ride to London in rags.

Between the numbness of his heart and the number of things he had to avoid thinking Rhisiart must have slept again; for when he was next aware of the “realities”, as we call them, of this somewhat limited dimension of life, he was offered two noteworthy phenomena.

For one thing the light of dawn was endowing the torch-flames with that peculiarly mystic and consecrated effect that any Promethean light displays when it humbles itself before the presence of the sun; and for another thing, from the dead body at his side there now emanated, faintly but unmistakeably, unlike any other smell in the world, the dreadful sweetness of human mortality. He found also that in his sleep his friend’s fingers had so stiffened about his own that it needed an effort to disengage his hand. Scrambling over the stiff form at his side he got out of bed.

But he was shocked to see that neither of the men who’d examined the corpse had thought of closing its eyes or its mouth. It was too late now to do either of these things decently; but while he did what he could he kept murmuring aloud: “Don’t’ee mind, Walter; don’t’ee mind, Walter dear!”

He was thus engaged when he heard voices and steps outside, and then the noise of the key in the door. He sat down on the bed, one hand straightening the edge of the blanket he’d pulled over his friend’s chin, the other making sure that the empty phial was safe back in his belt. He must have appeared a sorry spectacle to the persons who now entered, with his black elf-locks, his ragged beard, his staring eyes.

But the Rhisiart inside these appearances was the same sagacious disciple of the diplomatic Master Young, now my Lord Bishop of Bangor, as he was when he helped that worthy to keep his seat on the piebald back of Griffin. This he showed by the dignified and self-possessed manner in which, with a polite apology for not rising, he received his visitor.

The gentleman who entered was as striking a figure as he was a completely unknown one. Master Giggleswick, who ushered him in, came straight to his prisoner and kneeling down without ceremony proceeded to free him from his fetters. Once more our friend had to go through the indignity of having nothing to offer the man save his hand to shake; and he felt convinced that the hasty glance which Master Giggleswick threw upon the dead said in plain words: “If *you’d* been alive there’d have been at least a gold noble forthcoming!”

Little Nance, whom her father now left behind as he went out, showed more interest in the newcomer than in her late friend’s survivor; but this interest Rhisiart soon began to share. The gentleman was carrying a large bundle; but he laid this down on the chair recently occupied by the King and proceeded to introduce himself.

“Palamedes Playter, of the County of Suffolk,” he announced with an inclination of his whole body; “Knight of St. John and officer of the King’s Guard, and, if I may add, the sworn and devoted servant of the beautiful Lady Tegolin. The Lady Tegolin has sent me,” he went on, “to bring you these clothes; and to tell you that she has had permission to bid you farewell; and will very shortly be here in person. Captain Crosby, whom in my military capacity I serve, is, I have to inform you, already mounted, his charger stamping, his men cursing, his banner raised. It is my privilege to invite you, with this little lady’s leave, to put on without further delay the — the contents of this poor bundle.”

“Please give me your rose!” This request was made in quite an impassioned tone by little Nance, whose cheeks were flushed, her blue eyes wild with excitement, and both her small hands clutching one of the Knight of St. John’s elaborate sleeves.

Rhisiart stood up, made the sign of the cross over the Lollard’s half-closed eyes, and shuffling with his feet, as if the irons were still about his ankles, bowed to Sir Palamedes and advanced to the chair that held the bundle.

But lively as was his interest in his own new attire he couldn’t help pausing to take in the fantastical garb of the gentleman from Suffolk. Sir Palamedes wore the most elaborately upturned shoes our friend had ever seen on human feet. His hosen reached upward from these shoes to the joint of his groin and were so tight in their fit and so thin in their texture that every muscle of his limbs was visible. “What a dancer he’d make!” thought Rhisiart.

The colour of Sir Palamedes’ hose was pale blue, his sleeves were silver edged with black; and his tunic was so short that though his codpiece was punctiliously treated according to the dictates of the most exquisite modesty, it is likely enough that Father Pascentius would have found his attire a flagrant example of the degeneracy of the age. He wore his hair rather after the Italian than the French manner, cut much lower behind the neck, for instance, than was the fashion at the French court; and treated as if for hair to curl, even with the smallest ripple, was a barbarous lapse from gentility.

He held a small hunting cap in his hand whose wild goose feather tickled little Nance’s bare arms as she clung to his sleeve; but what so attracted the child’s notice was a fresh white rose of rare beauty which he had pinned to his tightly-fitting embroidered collar. He smiled at Rhisiart over the little girl’s head now; and our friend, who was standing awkwardly before the bundle with his feet wide apart — exactly as they would have been had the chain been still there — was conscious of something about him that reminded him of the glimpse he’d had at Oxford of the Emperor Manuel.

“You must give me a red one in exchange,” said the Knight of St. John, tossing down his cap and unpinning the flower from his throat; and then, while little Nance frowned in bewilderment, he raised her chin with the tip of a finger and kissed her on the lips.

The child, having obtained her desired treasure, became so occupied with the task of fixing it to full effect upon her small person that the two men took the opportunity of opening the bundle; and before Nance had succeeded in discovering even the palest reflection of the white rose among the sinister objects in the room, our friend found himself, with the deft help of Tegolin’s messenger, dressed in a becoming black suit, with the professional velvet pouch suspended from his belt, of a well-to-do Student of Civil Law.

Drawing together the chairs left by the royal attendants the two men now fell into a friendly talk, and Rhisiart learned that it *was* from Constantinople that his new acquaintance's ancestors drew their paternal lineage.

"Tell me, Master Secretary, the young man enquired, delicately altering with a couple of pointed fingernails the outline of his smooth brown hair across his unwrinkled forehead, "what you think is going to be the end of this Welsh war. I was a lad when it began — is it five years ago? — but I begin to grow weary of it. It seems to me that all it does is to deprive both our nations of their bravest spirits, and to hasten our good King's end by rushing him about in these mad campaigns."

"That's what Owen's son, Meredith, thinks!" cried Rhisiart — delighted to find himself discussing state-affairs again with a person of the great world— "but you must remember that even if the war were brought to an end by a peace satisfactory to both sides, the trouble's certain to break forth again in another reign — I beg your pardon! — I mean under a different King of England."

"But what in your opinion," repeated Sir Palamedes, "would bring this unhappy struggle to a satisfactory close?"

Rhisiart gazed at the man's fantastical attire and at the mournful negligent brown eyes that were fixed upon him and a curious irritation seized him. What right had these elegant triflers — endearing though they were — to speak in this airy tone of matters that needed the experienced brains of the greatest statesmen? "Oh, if only," he thought, "I were back again in Harlech in the full confidence of our Prince."

Under his tangled locks his narrow face contracted into an intense faraway gaze, and the vision of an independent Wales with a well-directed chancery-court issuing orders to competent captains, compared with whom poor impetuous Rhys Gethin was a mere outlaw, flitted across his mind.

But the sallow oval face of the gentleman whose ancestors came from Constantinople wore such a mocking expression, and had by nature such wantonly-lifted eyebrows, that, as our friend caught the man's eye, everything came back to him. He became aware of the smell of mortality from the bed behind him. He remembered that he was to say goodbye to Tegolin. And with a spasm of pain that until now he had held at bay the price of his escape from the scaffold clutched at his heart.

Thus when his wife did come and, by the tact of the Knight of St. John who carried Nance and her rose away, he and she were left alone, he broke down completely.

"Don't, Rhisiart, don't, don't!" she cried, as he clung to her like a sobbing child, his head buried in her bosom. "Oh my only love," she murmured, her own eyes as dry as if all the fountains of tears had been drained away into that Worcester river, "don't, don't be like this! Rhisiart, Rhisiart, lift up your head and look at me! This may be — oh, we don't know when — and I want you to be — I want to *look at you,* Rhisiart!"

But he still went on sobbing. And he couldn't have told her why he sobbed, why he let himself go like this, or the indescribable relief it was! But it was as if the breasts he clung to had been the breasts that had nourished him as a child. To them his sobs told everything: told how he came to Wales on Griffin; told how he had planted his crusader's sword in the earth, how he had ridden between the spears and the bows, how he had served the Prince, how he had lost Catharine, how he had killed his only friend, how he ought never, never, *never* to have let her save him like this!

But he was wasting these unreturning moments. In the warmth of her breast he was forgetting everything, forgetting what he had to say, what she had to say, forgetting that it was the end, that it was the last time.

And the man who resembled the Emperor Manuel was already knocking at the door, and he hadn't even spoken to her, he hadn't even looked at her, and their time was over.

“Kiss me, Rhisiart”

Who had said that to him before?; and he hadn’t done it; and he didn’t do it now. He just clung to her, seeing only deep, lovely, infinite darkness, feeling only deep, sweet, infinite release.

But the knocking at the door had changed its character now. It had grown loud and violent. Captain Crosby had come himself, furious, relentless, impatient. Tegolin tore herself from him; thrust him back, for he had no strength left, into the chair that was full of his rags, and going over to the bed bent low down above it, and pressed her dry eyes and her cold mouth upon the face of the corpse. She did this on an impulse she couldn’t have explained. It was as though from the weakness and the unreality of life she turned for help to the strength and the reality of death. Life gives a fictitious warmth to the poor thin covering of a living skull; but when our lips touch the ice damp of a dead face we know by the feel of that skin, which we recognize now for the first time to be what it is, that this cast-off shell, this husk of matter, this puppet of shame, this moment of corruption, has no connection at all with the indestructible spirit we have lived with and have loved.

But it was, on this occasion, from what had perished, not from what survived, that Tegolin drew strength. She used the body of this heretic as priests used the relics of their saints.

“Rhisiart,” she said, coming back to him, collapsed upon his cast-off rags and breathing the long gasping breaths of a man who has sobbed his heart out, “Rhisiart, will — you — remember this?”

He gave her a desperate look out of his dark blurred eyes and formed his lips into a whispered consent.

But speaking quite quietly, almost as if she were speaking to herself, “I am going to the church by the East Gate now,” she said, “to pray for his soul. Whatever happens to us to the end of our lives, I want you to remember that you’re with me — *alive or dead* — and I’m with you. Will you remember this, Gwion Bach?”

This time he made his reply clear and distinct and in the Welsh tongue; and she, going to the door, with her head held high and without turning again, called to the men outside to enter.

XXI. DIFANCOLL

ONE WILD AUTUMN day towards the middle of November, in the year of Our Lord fourteen hundred and sixteen, the youthful parish-priest, newly appointed to the village of Corwen in the district of Edeyrnion, was seated in the commodious entrance-room of his school-house, occupied with his solitary pupil.

By an arrangement between the Bishop of St. Asaph and the Abbot of Valle Crucis the old ecclesiastical domicile attached to the Church of St. Sulien had been recently converted into a local College for the training of such lads of the neighbourhood as were anxious to enter the priesthood; but it had not been till the general amnesty proclaimed by the young King that these spiritual authorities had come to an agreement as to the most fitting candidate for the directorship of this new institution.

How far the Father they had finally appointed would be able to fulfil the chief requirement of the post — namely the recruiting for the Church of promising and clever pupils — remained still to be seen; for the boy he was at this moment teaching was his own ward-in-chancery, whom he had brought with him little more than a month ago when he took possession of the newly-erected “College.”

“You’ve forgotten what you promised, Father!” the boy in question was now protesting in an injured voice, as yet another page of the great illuminated volume before him was turned over.

“It’s you who’ve forgotten what I told you, Rhisiart,” said the other gently, laying his hand on the page to prevent the child’s closing it.

“That you painted this one, Father, like you did the last?”

The youthful priest smiled. “Well, I did, as it happens, paint this one too; but it wasn’t of that I was thinking. Don’t you remember what I told you about the great Doctor Pascentius, how he bequeathed this book to the Abbey on condition that I might use it? It was the Doctor on whose grave — what did I tell you, Rhisiart? — your godfather planted that cress.”

The boy’s eyes lit up with interest now. As long as the Father told him stories about the great *Commentary* he was quite happy. It was when he had to follow the book’s contents that life seemed to lose its savour.

“Wasn’t it he who made them open the castle gates,” cried the child eagerly, “when Owen cut off the head of Rhys Ddu of Cardigan?”

“Cut off his head? How can you say such things? Rhys Ddu lived till six years ago! He wasn’t taken till Owen’s last campaign; and you know when that was because I’ve often told you how old you were then.”

“How old was I?”

“Rhisiart! Think a little. I told you how to remember. It was when I took you to see old Glew the Gryd, who died in his sleep with his axe under his pillow.”

“I’ll be thirteen at the end of this month.”

“Well?”

“Seven! Seven! Seven!”

“That’s the lad! And when were you born?”

“I was born two years after the Great Comet,” repeated the boy in a dull mechanical voice, as if by constant repetition the words had lost all meaning for him. “My father was a brave English gentleman. My mother was a beautiful Welsh lady. I was born in wedlock. I’m an orphan of good family; and I’m the ward of Father Sulien. You weren’t christened Sulien, though!” he added in a more interested tone. “Your name was—”

But at that the Director of the College of Corwen closed the great *Commentary* himself; and did so with a display of emotion that overwhelmed the boy.

"If you ever say that again, Rhisiart—"

But it was clear from the tears in the lad's eyes, and the passionate quiver in his voice as he expressed his repentance, that a repetition of this lapse would be unintentional if it did occur.

Father Sulien softened at once. "My name in this earthly world died, Rhisiart dear. That's what you must say to yourself. And you must think of it as a secret between us. Do you see, my child? A deep secret."

The word "secret" caused the boy to snatch at his friend's hand and kiss it devotedly, as if sealing a memorable conspiracy.

"Is the man who said he was my godfather coming again today?" he asked, glancing first at the closed work on Saint Thomas, and then at the window.

The Head of the new College looked steadily at his only pupil. "They're all coming today," he said gravely, "and this time you must be a real gentleman and as polite to Lord Talbot and to Meredith ab Owen as you were to Master Rhisiart."

"Can Lord Talbot and Meredith ab Owen talk Latin like my godfather?"

"They've no need to, little son. Talbot's a soldier of the King, and Meredith ab Owen is on the King's business. Your godfather's a great Doctor of Law. It's his profession to talk Latin."

"He can write Latin too, when he wants to, as easily as Welsh or English!"

Father Sulien sighed. It was one of his constant humiliations that in their lessons together he found this writing of Latin almost as difficult as his pupil did.

A priest's life had many advantages over a herald's, but it had its disadvantages too; and one of the worst of these was the Church's mania for Latin.

"Master Rhisiart's the cleverest man in Wales and Scotland and France!" declared that gentleman's namesake roundly.

The Father made no attempt to deny this; but as if anxious that proficiency in Latin shouldn't retain the sole place of honour in his pupil's mind he asked him if he'd remembered during Mass to pray for Iago ap Cynan, the famous sailor, whose ship, following the traditional direction taken by Prince Madoc, hadn't been heard of since the spring.

"I can see you forgot, lad;" and he added sadly, thinking how foolish it was to try to convey to another human creature all those imponderable touches and colours and lights and shadows that go to make up a living person we ourselves have loved: "It was Iago who brought me that icon from Cyprus which I have above my bed."

Rhisiart made no comment upon this. He had come to know too well the particular vistas of memory that made the Father sad, and he had learnt caution. "Shall I go and see if there's anybody in the church?" he asked a moment later.

The ex-herald's mind came back to Corwen with a jerk, came back to it from a castle-turret overlooking the sea, where its owner was pensively rocking an infant's cradle with a baby girl in it, a girl whose features were the living image of Iago ap Cynan.

"Yes, yes! Run off and count them, lad! If there are more than half a dozen we'll chant the office in the Lady chapel."

He stood at the window, watching the boy thread his way through the graves till he reached the cross on the Druid Stone. "There!" he said to himself. “That’s what he always does! And I’ve told him a hundred times to wait till he’s in the church!”

The slender little figure had indeed paused at the great circular stone and had gravely dipped his fingers in one of its hollows and had touched his forehead with the rainwater it contained.

“What makes him do that?” thought the Father, as he watched the boy disappear into the church. “Children are funny creatures. You can’t tell what they get into their heads.”

But the boy came flying back in great excitement to say that there were several English soldiers in the church. “And all Mother Mali’s maids from the Inn are there too, and Mistress Gwerfil’s there, and Sir Hugo’s man from Gwerclas. I say, Father, you don’t think it’s possible there’s any news of *him* — to bring such a crowd?”

The priest shook his head. “I should have heard, sonny — I should have heard. If Meredith ab Owen knew anything I should have heard yesterday. You don’t think he’d let Talbot’s men find him before his own son, do you?”

Rhisiart bowed to the wisdom of his superior; but in his own heart he thought: “If the Father would only let me do what I want, I’d be the one to find him!”

But neither the priest nor his pupil, when their psalms were said and their talk with the Inn maids and with Mistress Gwerfil and with the man from Gwerclas was over, had found out any new clue to the hiding-place of the lost hero.

“In my opinion,” the man from Gwerclas had dogmatically announced, “he’s not in the north at all. And Sir Hugo agrees with me. Sir Hugo thinks he’s hidden in the Forests of Tywyn, where the foresters and swineherds were always loyal to him.”

"He's with Lady Scudamore in Herefordshire," affirmed Mistress Gwerfil. "There are no two opinions about it. That's why he married his girls off as he did — every one of them to some great English lord!"

Talbot's soldiers declared that he'd been dead and buried for four years. One of them went so far as to declare that he'd seen his grave in Bangor Cathedral.

It was only Mistress Mali's maids — Myfanwy Goch and Mair Wen — who dared to uphold the view of the common folk of Edeyrnion in the presence of all these competent authorities, the view that Owen ap Griffith Fychan was playing chess with King Arthur in the heart of Mynydd-y-Gaer. The girls first only giggled when Sir Hugo's man rallied them on this wild fancy; but upon being ordered by Mistress Mali to tell Mistress Gwerfil what they'd told *her,* they declared that they'd picked up a white knight and a red knight in a cornfield at the foot of Mynydd-y-Gaer.

There was such rude hilarity among Talbot's soldiers at this substantial evidence that Father Sulien gave his blessing to the ladies and led Rhisiart away; but the little boy was so bitterly reluctant to leave such an exciting discussion that the gentle-hearted priest suggested that since his visitors weren't expected till the evening they should then and there ascend the famous hill themselves. "We shan't find any chessmen, I'm afraid," he said. "But we may see the beacon fire on Bryn Saith Marchog. Do you remember why they always light a bonfire there at this season?"

But Rhisiart refused to search his brain at that moment for anything so remote as the Seven Horsemen.

The priest had to return to the "College" to change his clothes; and while dutifully helping him in this process the boy suddenly dropped the garment he was holding and stared at a carved chest by the side of the fireplace in a self-forgetting reverie.

"What is it, lad?"

"You know what you said you'd do next time we went up Mynydd-y-Gaer?"

Father Sulien followed the boy's gaze. "I know — I know!" he replied with obvious distress. "I've been thinking of that myself. It certainly is the place for reading it. It's a great, great secret: and you ought to open it far away from everybody. I wish the Hermit still lived up there so that we could open it in his cell."

Rhisiart's eyes flashed. "The — Hermit — *does* — live — there — still," he whispered solemnly.

Father Sulien stared at him in amazement, one arm thrust into his priest's under-coat, and the other hanging loose in his white shirt. "What's that you're saying?"

"He does live there still!"

The Head of the new College hurriedly finished dressing. Then, all prepared for their walk, he looked round for his house key, found it, together with a stout staff, which latter however he laid down as soon as he'd taken it up, and moving to the chest at which Rhisiart had been staring, removed from above it several parchment scripts, and proceeded to lift its heavy lid.

Rhisiart had an opportunity now of showing both his breeding and his training. He took full advantage of it. He remained absolutely motionless; displaying no curiosity as to the contents of the receptacle his guardian was ransacking, making no attempt to approach it, no sound to interrupt its exploration.

At last the priest turned to him, holding up a small leather case. "I oughtn't to have left it there," he said, "with the lid unlocked. Think if robbers had got in! But there it is. It's yours now. May I keep it for you till we're at the top of Mynydd-y-Gaer?"

The boy was too excited to utter a word. He nodded gravely, staring at the priest as he carefully concealed the leather object in an inner pocket. The word "robbers" had had an electric effect on him and had caused so many thrilling images to rush through his brain that his curiosity about the contents of the case receded for a time.

For some reason the occasion seemed a suitable one for asking a question that had been on the tip of his tongue ever since they'd come to the College.

"The last Corwen priest," he remarked, "was a Father Sulien, too. How was that?"

His friend smiled and drew a deep breath. "But I must find out," he said to himself, "how he knew about the Hermit."

"Whose church is it?" he enquired of the boy.

"St. Sulien's."

"Well then, what better name could any priest have?"

"For luck?"

"For luck — if you like, little son. But now I've answered your question, won't you tell me how you knew that the Gaer Hermit was still there?"

"Myfanwy told me — but I knew before that!"

The Father wisely decided that this wasn't the moment for disparaging the talk of Mistress Mali's maids.

"Before that? Dewi Sant! And what other fairy told you?"

The boy frowned. "Nobody told me," he said. "I can see his fire up there, from the top of Pen-y-Pigyn."

Once again the Father showed a discretion belonging rather to the court than the cloister; and he asked no question as to how it was that his ward should be exploring the rocky eminence above the village at an hour when it was dark enough to perceive a fire across the valley.

"Well — off we go!" he said; and then, glancing at the slender figure before him: "Get your leather jacket," he commanded. "It'll be chilly up there."

Rhisiart scowled, and used under his breath an improper expression, learned this time not from Myfanwy but from Mistress Mali herself. But he went off to their sleeping-room at the back of the College, and soon returned, sulkily pulling on the detested garment.

"When did Meredith ab Owen and Master Rhisiart say they'd come tonight?" the priest asked his companion as they crossed the wooden bridge over the swollen Dee. "After dark, Father."

"That's what I thought. I asked to make sure."

"And my godfather said you weren't to keep dinner for them, because they would leave their horses and have their dinner at the forester's house in Carrog."

But the Director of the College was still uneasy. "What if they come earlier than they said, and find the place locked?"

"They'll go to the inn, like they did last time. My godfather" — this was added with profound complacency— "drinks five beakers of Malmsey before he gets drunk."

"There's not much that goes on at the Inn, young man," thought Father Sulien, "that you don't know!"

Their path became steeper after crossing the river; and burdened by his winter coat the little boy began to flag. To distract him from the effort he was making, our friend the ex-herald — who well knew how exhausted the body can get when the spirit has gone too far ahead — plunged without preface into one of his interminable tales of the recent war.

“The question was, of course, how long we could hold out after the meat was gone. But Aberystwyth is as strong as Harlech. Its walls, lad — aye! aye! you should see how thick they are! And you must remember, child, Prince Henry had the Duke of York with him, as well as such captains as Talbot, Carew, Audley, and Grendor. Yes, and there was Sir John Oldcastle, too! But they could do nothing, for all their cannonading, but starve us out. Oh yes! I forgot about their getting the Chancellor of Oxford University. It was he, really — Courtenay was his name — who thought of the terms of the truce. We were to have a six weeks’ armistice; and then Owen was to have a week; the last week in October it was, and weather just like this! He was in the north, they say, somewhere round here, in Edeyrnion. And if he didn’t come in that week’s time, we were to give up the castle and do homage to—”

“You’ve forgotten about Rhys Ddu!”

How well the boy knew every word of this tale! He must have heard it so often that it had become his; but it was clear it didn’t come to life for him, didn’t take on flesh and blood for him, unless the Father related it. Only it must be related without the least change! It must be a reality independent of the relater and not to be tampered with by any human agency.

Father Sulien admitted that he’d reached the point in the story where a description of the strength and courage of Rhys the Black was called for. But he forgot that he’d never explained to the boy that when Chancellor Young, Owen’s Bishop of Bangor, sailed for France in the company of John Hanmer — and as far as he knew they were still in Paris after all these years — Rhys Ddu of Ceredigion had no one to counsel him; and if anyone had ever needed wise advice it was this brave but short-sighted warrior!

Rhisiart knew everything about Rhys the Black. He knew the particular way a single lock of hair fell across his forehead; he knew the rough, abrupt, careless manner of his speech; he knew the tears that would always come into his eyes when he spoke of “little Lu”; for our friend Elphin, for all his priestly anonymity, had remained an artist in verbal draftsmanship. The one thing his guardian had never disclosed to him before was the warrior’s helplessness when Owen’s Chancellor sailed for France.

This addition to the story was at once a painful shock to Rhisiart and a thrilling vista of new conceptions. The boy began to look so white, and so hot in his leather coat, that Father Sulien, who was quick as a woman in his perception of such things, made him sit on a mossy stone to rest, while he himself, leaning over the wall at his side, surveyed the undulating landscape below them.

“Owen had substituted Master Young for Master Byford as Bishop of Bangor,” he explained wearily, as his eye followed the recession of bare, round, grassy hills that flanked the entrance to the Vale of Clwyd. “But the Holy Father soon afterwards appointed a man of his own choice, a simple parish priest like me, whose name was Benedict Nicholls. He was the priest of a village in Dorset no bigger than Corwen — Stourbridge it was, or Stalbridge — and he proved in many ways a better—”

But whatever the Rector of Stalbridge may have proved in the registry of Bangor he proved infinitely wearisome to the small figure seated on the stone.

“Go on,” he interrupted, “to when you were eating dogs’ flesh, and to when the English were feasting over their fires, and when you heard them singing *The Rose of Northumberland,* and to when it was beginning to get dark, and to when you heard Owen’s trumpets far away in the woods and saw his men come rushing down from the mountains, and to when he swore he would cut off Rhys Ddu’s head if you didn’t open the gates, and to when the English marched off when they knew he had come, and to when you had meat and wine again, and to when Owen was — why are you laughing at me, Father?"

"I'm not laughing, my son."

"Why are you screwing up your mouth like that then?"

"I was thinking, Rhisiart."

"What about, Father?"

"Just thinking — that's all."

"I know what it was! It was about Owen's other castle being taken. Why don't you ever tell me more about that?"

The once youngest of court heralds certainly looked at that moment the saddest of parish-priests. Scene after tragic scene flashed with piteous rapidity through his mind as the child's figure melted under his fixed stare. He saw the wasted form of Sir Edmund and his hollow eyes, as he lay dying in his turret, looking over the English camp, over the English ships, to that far-off horizon of the sea, where the Birds of Rhiannon had sunk into silence forever. He heard the voice of the Arglwyddes weeping and refusing to be comforted. He saw the calm tragic eyes of Lady Mortimer, as she gave up to his care this same little boy whose form in his leather-coat was now the mirror of all this.

He saw the tender-hearted captain from Taunton who had sworn by Saint Mary of Glastonbury that he would save Luned and her child. He saw the looks of excited pleasure — yes! actually of pleasure — with which Mistress Brut of Lyde greeted the besiegers.

He was standing with the little Rhisiart outside the walls on that terrible day, wrapped in a cloak to hide the "lions rampant" on his tunic, when he saw what looked like the body of a large doll fall from the ramparts upon the rocks beyond him. He daren't attract notice by making a move at once from the buttress that concealed him, but he knew in his heart what had happened. Many a time had he heard Mistress Sibli swear in her wild fits that no English soldier should touch the true love of Rhisiart ab Owen; and later, when he did examine the dwarf's corpse he found that her tiny body, under her clothes, was wound about with parchments bearing Rhisiart's script.

While these memories were racing through Father Sulien's brain, his pupil had risen to his feet.

"There, there!" the boy now cried in a shrill voice. "Do you see, Father? There's his fire!"

The young priest looked in the direction indicated. Yes! In the autumn greyness there certainly was — rising unmistakeably from the crest of Mynydd-y-Gaer under the great prehistoric wall — a thin wisp of smoke.

The wild hope rushed through the ex-herald's heart that it might be his destiny and none other's, led by the instinct of the man's own grandson, to discover the lost hero! He snatched up his stick, took the boy's hand in his excitement and led the way, with rapid youthful steps, up the steep face of the aboriginal *mygedorth,* or fortress.

They climbed so fast, and both their hearts were beating so fast, that their first vision of the Hermit's fire, and of what else was there, was a blurred and confused one.

"There are two Hermits!" cried the boy. "No! only one — no! It's not a man at all — look, Father! It's only a rock!"

There was no need to conjure Father Sulien to look. His very soul was in his eyes. Was it a rock? It was rounder, smoother, less jagged, than any part of that ruined wall he had ever seen up there. But there certainly was a fire; and it was against red flames in that grey mist and greyer masonry that the round stone, so like a human head, projected.

If it *was* the Hermit, he must be seated with his back to them facing the fire. Whether rock or man, the figure they were approaching wasn't only motionless, it was very upright. How could a living man, even a man about whom such awestruck rumours had been circulating through all Edeyrnion, have a head like a great smooth, round granite ball, balanced on a pedestal?

But Rhisiart suddenly jerked at his friend's hand; and not content with that, tugged at his arm till he got the priest's head low enough — in spite of the gusts of wind that seemed to be sweeping round the Gaer like supernatural sentries — to be able to whisper in his ear.

"It's the Hermit!" he whispered. "It is, it is! I know by his bald head. Myfanwy told me about his head. It's as bald as a stone!"

The Hermit must have been deaf as well as bald; for he permitted the intruders to approach so near that they were compelled for very reverence to stand as motionless as he was sitting.

But Father Sulien felt ashamed to be caught spying upon a holy man; and incontinently he lifted up his voice. "The Lord be with thee!" he cried above the whistling of the wind.

"And with thy spirit," answered the figure at the fire, rising to his feet and facing them.

Rhisiart's fingers tightened upon the hand he held. Myfanwy had never told him that the Hermit was a giant! As for Father Sulien he felt like one to whom it is permitted to be present at the Resurrection from the Dead.

Edeyrnion was his native district and Powys Fadog his tribal *talaith,* or province. His ancestral home, the *Gruc,* or "the Mound", was even now facing the risen Hermit across the valley; but twenty years had passed since he had served the Arglwyddes at Glyndyfrdwy and he was now a stranger in the place. As preceptor of the newly-established College he held a position that repelled local confidence and gossip.

It flashed through his mind now: "I'm the one single man in Corwen who didn't know that *you* were the Hermit!"

"Mother of God!" cried the giant limping towards them. And to Rhisiart's complete astonishment, there was the holy man hugging and kissing the priest!

"It's little Elphin turned monk! It's our baby herald turned shaveling!"

"Master Broch, oh, Master Broch!" and the young preceptor's cheeks under the Hermit's kisses grew wet and hot. "Who — would — have — thought," he panted, as all the old days rushed back under this overpowering hug, "that we should — meet — here?"

While the two men were thus greeting each other, Rhisiart was aware of a desire to sink into the earth. He was used to being corrected; he was used to being punished but he had never before, in all his experience of life, been ignored. But as he surveyed the slender form of Father Sulien almost disappearing in the huge embrace of this *Cawr-y-Gaer,* this giant of the prehistoric *mygedorth,* it was precisely to this condition it was now his destiny to come. He was ignored to such a tune that he became non-existent. Where a minute or two ago two persons had been spying upon a third person there were only two persons left; and he, the centre person, wasn't one of them.

His short upper-lip, drawn back a little from his teeth in the true Mortimer manner, quivered violently.

Faint memories of the bald giant began to slide back into his own mind; but they were too vague to restore him to his self-respect; and in any case, between the shaven head and the bald head, one had totally forgotten him and the other considered him as nothing. Hurt to the heart, the little boy shut his eyes and endeavoured to call up the narrow face and hooked nose of his godfather. To him at least, he would always exist. No apparition from the dead would make his godfather forget him.

“Didn’t I see someone with you just now, Master Broch?” asked Father Sulien as they seated themselves by the fire and the Gaer Giant began pouring out wine into leaden mugs to warm and balancing a row of Spanish chestnuts on a half-burnt furze-root.

Broch chuckled. “Quick as ever with your eyes, Father Elphin! Yes, you did; and if our little master here would run away as far as that firwood and back, I’d tell ‘ee of somebody of whom many in these old islands would give—”

He had no need to finish the sentence. With burning tears in his eyes and without a glance at his guardian, Rhisiart scampered off, the flaps of his leather coat, which he had unlaced in the heat of the fire, flying behind him as he ran. When he came to the firwood he found it enclosed by a high fence; but by the simple method of removing his coat and leaving it on the larch needles that strewed the moss beneath this barrier, he was able to force himself between its planks.

Then, scrambling to his feet, he began pushing his way deep among the brown larches and the green pines, the latter scratching his face and hands, and the former leaving their needles in the creases of his tunic and even between his shirt and his skin.

At last he came to an open space in the wood where there was a great pile of loose stones. Even in the midst of his desolation and his outraged feelings he noticed that these stones had recently been moved; and it vaguely crossed his mind that it was odd that people should have been moving stones in the middle of a thick coppice.

But he was too young and too unhappy to give the phenomenon more than a passing glance, though what he saw might well have struck a boy’s mind as the sort of attempt to build a primitive “home” among the fir trees that a boy playing at being a hunted outlaw might with some difficulty and some industry have succeeded in constructing.

But what attracted his attention much more than this erection of stones was a clump of funguses growing on the northerly side of the enclosure. To these he now directed his steps; and falling down on his knees set himself to inhale their curious smell.

To do this was a more significant impulse of that small wounded heart than Father Sulien could possibly have understood. One of the things that the boy remembered most vividly of his childhood was a certain occasion when playing outside Harlech walls Lady Mortimer had scolded him for smelling funguses. He had vigorously protested; and during their altercation the Prince himself had approached and had expostulated with his daughter, justifying his grandson’s queer caprice.

The peculiar smell of funguses — especially the kind that grow under fir trees — always brought back this scene. He could see even now, as he scrabbled on his knees at the task of clearing away the larch-needles from these damp strange-smelling stalks, his grandfather’s forked beard and the band of gold round his forehead and the black lions on his breast-plate.

The Prince had launched out, in justification of his interference, into the tale of Gwydion the son of Don, and how by magic and sorcery, by *hud and lledrith,* this terrifying enchanter, whose memory still clings to the Milky Way above our heads and the wildest oracles of Taliesin under our feet, not only carried off the pigs of Annwn, but by his transformings of sea-sedge and fungus deceived and slew the mighty son of Annwn’s king.

The child never forgot the deep pity in the great man’s voice as he spoke of the victory of the magician from the north; and the smell of these particular funguses had become a secret passion with him ever since that day. It was almost as if, in his childish fashion, he dimly realized that everything in life is a symbol of the unseen and that the smell of funguses as much as anything else could be a writing on the wall.

"They sent me away," his heart kept repeating, as his face touched those chilly phantom-heads that were like things fallen from the moon. "They sent me away. I'm nothing to them. I'm nothing to anybody. *They've sent me away."*

He uttered this last lament aloud; and for a second he thought that some tremendous echo had caught up his moan and was repeating it, and the strange thing was that when he lifted his head and saw the tall tottering figure coming out of the wood towards him the remembered feelings of the child merged so completely into the present feelings of the boy that all fear, all amazement even, was swallowed up. A vast indescribable sense of refuge, of escape, of sanctuary, lifted him up and drew him forward; and long before he was in the Prince's arms his tears of desolation had been transformed, as if Gwydion's magic had been undone, as if the cold snouts of the recovered herds were all about him, as if the lost hero were alive again, into the sobs of one who out of a long darkness finds himself on the threshold of his home.

"They've sent me away," his grandfather repeated as he hugged Catharine's first-born to his heart. "They've sent both of us away; they've sent us all away."

Rhisiart could feel the old man's heart beating under Iolo Goch's chain-armour. But it was enough for him to catch the faint scent, bringing back all his childhood with it, like some far-flung aromatic incense, of the white beard that tickled his face; and he gave no heed to the murmured words that followed: "But — we — shall — all — come back — again."

Snow-white was the man's hair, for the Prince had endured so much and had wandered so far that he was prematurely old, but he had reverted to his former scrupulous tending of his person, and the forked beard was as meticulously trimmed as it used to be sixteen years ago, and the golden circlet round his forehead looked just as it had looked in the patriarchal days at Glyndyfrdwy, only the curls that fell around it were white instead of yellow.

Owen was bare-headed; and he wore the leather tunic, the leather belt, the leather bands twisted about his legs, of any ordinary farmworker; but the contrast between this simple rustic attire and the man's majestical lineaments enhanced his air of primeval dignity.

It may be imagined how tightly, as the Prince tottered slowly back to the men they had left, Rhisiart clung to his hand! The little boy had no fear that his grandfather would fail to take his part, whatever reception he got. It wasn't for that he clung to him. It was because he was home again, home with his lost parents. It was because he had got back his pride, his self-respect, his rightful place in the great, callous, hostile world.

"I mustn't call him grandfather," he was saying to himself, as the old man led him through a gate in the fence he had missed in his flight and told him to pick up his discarded jacket. "I must call him Sire."

"Sire!" he therefore began, and his voice had the proud confidence of one who is certain of the gravest attention. "Where hast thou" — he said "thou" rather than "you" from an instinct that the more formal pronoun went better with "Sire"— "been hiding from thy people all these years?"

Owen paused and leant heavily on the long shepherd's crook he was using as a staff. It was still light enough for him to see the child's features. "He's more like him than her," he thought. "Catharine's voice in a Mortimer body. 'Thy people' is Sir Edmund all over! She would have said 'from us.'

’Twas the Norman in him gave it that legal touch. He’s Rhisiart’s godson right enough!”

“Art thou the Hermit Myfanwy said lived in Mynydd-y-Gaer? Or is the bald giant the Hermit — Sire?”

The old man stroked the forks of his beard as he would have done twenty years ago. His infirmities had been so heavy on him of late that he rarely smiled; but he did smile now.

“Broch and I are both hermits, Rhisiart. But look, child! Do you see that?” As he spoke he pointed with his crook to a just perceptible curvature in the grass, like a magnified mole-run; only this particular ridge was covered with grass.

“I see it, Sire!”

“And you saw those stones in the wood?”

“Yes, Sire.”

He gazed at the boy intently, and as he did so a delicious shiver ran through Rhisiart’s veins. “It’s the secret! It’s the secret!” his heart cried. *“He* knows I can keep secrets!”

“Well,” murmured the old man hesitating; and it was almost as if he were thinking aloud. “I’ll be gone before winter, as far as I can go” — and Rhisiart thought he had never seen such a strange look in anybody’s face as his Prince had then— “and my son says Elliw can never have a child. It breaks the family law to tell you, little one, the law that’s come down among us *ym Mhowys* since Brochfael ab Eliseg, but I’m dying, and you’re my child’s son, and so I’ll tell you; and let it be on my own head. You must know that there are three hiding-places of our race that are indestructible and undiscoverable. One is under the mound at Glyndyfrdwy. One is under this fortress. And one is at Mathrafal. There were secret passages too; but most of these have fallen in and been lost. All these hiding-places and all these passages were dug by the ancient people conquered by Cunedda. Those ancient men were cunning in such digging, for they lived in underground dwellings. Iolo once told me — you've read his poems, I hope, Rhisiart? — that there was an entrance once to such a passage at Mathrafal but that when King John—"

"Mathrafal, Sire? Where is Mathrafal?" Now if Rhisiart ab Edmund was good at keeping secrets his power of discovering them was sorely limited by his years.

Here was a secret that he never found out to the end of his days — namely, that his grandfather's heart received a dagger's stab when he learnt that Catharine's first-born had never so much as heard of the royal *Llys* of his ancestors!

"Have you heard of the Halls of Cynddylan?" he enquired, not without an undertone of sad bitterness.

Rhisiart hastened to recite at random from the famous elegy in his best choirboy's voice. *"Ystafell,"* he chanted; and he made a little stiff movement to illustrate abandonment to hopeless grief. This he did by lifting one thin arm till it was bent at right angles at the elbow; and at that point sawing the air with his hand, while his small fingers remained stiffly outstretched like the indignant claws of a cat when it has wetted its paw; *"Ystafell Cynddylan"* he intoned, exactly as the children in the monk's school at Valle Crucis were taught to chant.

"Ystafell Cynddylan," answered the echo; while the sound of his boyish voice went drifting down the valley, following the scanty wisps of smoke from the Hermit's fire, following the forlorn deciduous leaves as they were blown across the larches, following the tattered banners of the mist as they streamed over the twenty-thousand-years-old masonry of Mynydd-y-Gaer, carrying the dirge, "It is darkness to-night"— "*Ys tywyll heno*!*"* — carrying

the undulant dirge for the children of Cyndrwyn— “for Cynan and Gwion and Gwyn” — over church, over college, over cross, over rain-soaked meadows, till it sank into the flowing of the dark water of Dyfrdwy, the divine water, where it disturbed the yellow-bellied salmon as they rested in the shallows, and troubled the white-breasted ouzels as they drooped their wings at the roots of the alders.

The effect of his grandson’s voice upon the old man — so young a voice and so sad a burden — was to make him murmur into his beard the dead-leaf moan of Llywarch Hen; but, digging his crook into the earth and leaning on Rhisiart’s shoulder, he shuffled on, and they were soon in the warmth of Broch’s furze-stalk fire.

“Room for Owen ap Griffith and Rhisiart ab Edmund!” laughed the giant. “Did you find each other where I predicted you would?”

But it was clear to the boy that Father Sulien was too shocked by the Prince’s state to join in any jest. He poured out wine for him at once, and both Broch and he made the old man as comfortable as they could, with his back against the foundations of some prehistoric guard-room, and the dead bracken piled up beneath him and about him.

But his comfort was short-lived, for the wine as it quickened his pulses brought on a horrible fit of coughing; which when once it had started seemed as if it would kill him before it ended.

When it did at last end, and the old Prince sank back exhausted against the wall, he began, in spite of the roaring bonfire before him, to shiver so pitiably with cold that Broch hurrying into his “hermit’s cave,” which was really the entrance to the secret passage of Cunedda’s mound-dwelling captives, brought out several Moorish rugs and also brought his Prince a flask of spirits so fiery that Owen choked and spluttered as he swallowed.

"How heavy these stones are!" cried Father Sulien presently, anxious to turn away their thoughts from topics gloomier and heavier than palaeolithic masonry.

As he spoke he made the gesture of weighing in his hand one of the smaller and rounder of the rain-washed pebbles about them. "Dewi Sant" he cried, "but it's as heavy as a thunderbolt!" This comparison of the Gaer-men's masonry to thunderbolts was highly agreeable to Rhisiart's mind; and sitting on his jacket instead of putting it on, for Broch's great bonfire warmed him through and through, he began throwing these meteoric objects into the blaze, an occupation that so absorbed him that the men fell to conversing together as if his presence were no more palpable than a small phantom-shape risen out of the mound-dwellers' passage behind them.

The giant's fiery cordial, whatever it may have been, soon loosened the old man's tongue, and the ex-herald, who asked questions that in former days he would never have dared to breathe to the wearer of four black lions rampant, listened to strange matters.

"How long, Sire, did you hold Davy Gam a prisoner?" was one of the least bold of these eager enquiries.

"Prisoner do you say, boy? Prisoner? Why I've never — No, my old friend" — this was to Broch who looked not a little uncomfortable— "I've never had a more faithful and devoted adherent!"

"But I heard he'd been ransomed, Sire, for two thousand marks!"

The great white head with the golden band amid its fleecy locks lifted itself erect with a leonine gesture. The old chieftain was clearly as proud of this singular prisoner's behaviour as of any triumph in his whole life. "You heard correctly, boy; you heard correctly. The worth of those marks — two thousand as you say — was brought to us in current coins of the realm of

England and the realm of Castille, together with certain moneys of the Royaume de France."

"This was before he went to the French wars?"

"Naturally, boy, naturally. But look ye! This is the point; and I can only say it shows what can go on between two Welshmen when they're hunted like the *Twrch Trwyth* from one end of Wales to the other. Gam was ransomed, you say; and correctly you say it. He was ransomed. Those who brought it saw him lay it at my feet and saw him armed, unshackled, and free. But would the man leave me? No, my boy; no, my little priest. He wouldn't leave me! We used that money to hire safe and trustworthy labourers to open up the passage here. We worked at it for years, I tell you! Gam was as strong as a bear. I was strong myself then; and we had good faithful men to work for us. Some of them died in grievous pains rather than betray to these new Lords of Chirk and Ruthin and Castell Goch what we were about or who we were.

"There have been many staunch Edeyrnion farmers — yes! and many honest craftsmen too in Corwen and Carrog and Bonwm — who knew our hiding-place. Do'ee think one of them betrayed us? Not a one, my pretty boy-father, not a one! The story of Glyn Dŵr will be a story for all the Welshmen who come afterwards — to the end of time! And in no other land in the wide world save Wales could it have happened. That's what we Welshmen are! They may conquer us in arms, they may outwit us in trade, they may out-mode us in fashions of science and art. One thing they cannot do. They cannot catch our souls!"

"Sire!"

It was the shrill voice of little Rhisiart. The child had ceased for some time throwing thunderbolts into the fire; and now with his impassioned eyes fixed on his grandfather's face the secret of his swelling heart burst forth.

"If I say I won't do homage to King Harry, shall I be killed for the sake of Wales? I *want* to be killed for the sake of Wales!"

The Prince turned to Father Sulien. "Does he know who he is?"

Our priestly friend hesitated, glancing from the excitable old man to the excitable little boy with some apprehension.

"Do you know who you are?" he said at last in a low nervous voice.

A crafty look, more characteristic of Rhisiart ab Owen than of either Catharine or Sir Edmund, came into the boy's face.

"Will you read to the Prince," he said, addressing his tutor, "that letter you've got in the leather case?"

Though our ex-herald was not possessed of an exceptionally penetrating mind he gave his pupil a quick startled look. "He's opened that chest and read that letter!" he said to himself; and then as a second thought, "but after all it's his own property and she's dead now!"

Glyn Dŵr leaned forward with an expression of intense interest in his sunken sea-green eyes. "Read it, Elphin — Father Sulien, I mean. Is it from her? Is it from Lady Mortimer?"

"It's from my mother to me!" cried the little boy, leaping to his feet and standing by his tutor's elbow. His face gleamed with pride; and he glanced at the old Prince with a look of exultant complicity. His heart was bursting with indefinable emotion. He felt as though the words of this message from the dead isolated them from the others and bound them together forever.

The bald-headed giant stared unheeding at the wide landscape spread out before him. It had long ago become a necessity for him to detach himself from the old man's turbulent and multifarious moods; and this vast autumnal expanse of rolling hills, sweeping away in one direction towards Cadair Idris, and in the other towards Snowdon, and narrowing itself in the immediate vicinity, eastward to the valley of the Dee, and westward to the valley of the Clwyd, was just then peculiarly adapted to his habitual train of thought.

The blaze of their bonfire had created a circle of light and warmth in the midst of a segment of the earth's surface which at that hour seemed to be reverting to what it must have been when the old inhabitants of Mynydd-y-Gaer gazed across it, thousands upon thousands of years ago! Reverting, so it seemed to Broch, in his strange yearning for the impersonal, for the non-human, to the primal supremacy of the grey slate, so unique among terrestrial formations, that familiar landscape had become during the early weeks of this sad November intensely congenial to his mind. He liked the way the grey rocks alternated with the patches of pale stubble and red bracken. He liked the way the whole landscape seemed to converge at this season towards some austere rock-bound ideal of its own secret engendering. It gave him a grim pleasure to see the rounded grassy hills forming themselves, as they rose above the leafless tree-tops, into vast terraces of green stepping-stones, along which the majestical spirits of the past might move in tremendous procession towards the far-off mountain-peaks, where not only trees and grass would be left behind but all the turbulent human lives as well; lives that sought their nourishment and contended for their feverish masteries among the sheep and the cattle and the horses and the swine that fed upon the fatness of these less purified places.

It was only by moving a little distance out of the blaze that Broch was able just then to satisfy his insatiable longing for the calm of the inanimate; but when he did manage to get the fire-light out of his eyes he was rewarded by a cold deathly chill that came up the slopes of Mynydd-y-Gaer from the flooded river below and as it came precipitated itself into a clammy vapour that settled on his naked skull in minute drops, each drop a perfect microcosm of all that desolate and dehumanized world, of wet mists upon grey rocks, towards which his spirit yearned.

Meanwhile the Prince was listening to his daughter's letter. "To my grately loafed leetle boy," began Father Sulien in his resonant heraldic voice; and though a furious protest surged up in the old man's heart against this emphasis upon Catharine's lack of scholarship, it was so precious to him to hear the actual words she had set down that he restrained himself from interrupting.

As for Rhisiart, his original surprise that his mother should be less skilful than himself in the difficult art of writing had long ago been dulled by familiarity. Like the elder Rhisiart on the bloody field of Bryn Glas with a similar document he knew every syllable of this production so completely by heart that he had come to take its peculiarities for granted, very much as a lost fledgeling might take for granted some familiar hoarseness in its parent bird's distracted call.

"Thy father died by Our Lady's Mercy before our fall, which cannot be far off: or send his blessing he would. Be honour; be courage; me leetle boy; say thy prayers to thy Mother in Heaven and remember gentilhomme Toujours. Writ by me very hand in Castell Harlech. Trust God his Mother — C. M."

Father Sulien preserved a double professional aplomb while he read this letter, the aplomb of a court-herald and the aplomb of a parish priest; but the instant he concluded his task both these complacences fell away and he became once more the shy and sensitive youth with whom our friend Rhisiart had flirted when he first arrived at Glyndyfrdwy. And it was doubtless this relapse into the diffidence of a pageboy that suddenly made him unable to look at the aged Prince. But there is nothing like extreme physical suffering for the mitigation of the emotionally poignant; and the Prince had been afflicted of late by increasingly acute spasms of pain.

By a devotion of the commonalty of those parts unparalleled in the history of nations Glyn Dŵr’s incognito, if such it could be called, which was a secret only to his foes, had been scrupulously respected since he returned, for the last five years of his life, to his Powys-Fadog patrimony. The element of the supernatural, or, let us say, of popular terror of the supernatural, had doubtless played its part in this miracle of concealment; but without the man’s own incredible vitality the thing would have been impossible. It would have been impossible too if the Prince hadn’t from his earliest manhood made a cult of those queer fits or trances which Rhisiart used to all his “attacks”.

These he had developed to such a point during his years of *difancoll,* or “disappearance,” that neither Gam nor Broch had any compunction about leaving him, when such was their wisest move, in a condition to all appearance like that of a dead man, in the mound-dwellers’ hiding place beneath the mystic walls of Mynydd-y-Gaer. The danger that any enemy might light upon him in these prolonged trances had been reduced to a minimum by the traditions of the supernatural which surrounded this prehistoric camp.

No doubt even this accumulation of conspiring elements would have been insufficient to guard against the invasion of his Merlin-like *esplumoir,* if he hadn’t been the man he was; that is, if he hadn’t been one of those singular persons who appear only at rare intervals in our human tribes, and then only among those that have clung to the same foothold upon the surface of our planet from time immemorial.

Broch-o’-Meifod’s disconcerting wife had upbraided Owen as a “pure-blooded Brython”, and this may have been a legitimate accusation as far as his paternal ancestry was concerned; but as Catharine had instinctively felt in the Forests of Tywyn there was another strain in his blood, a strain that went back to those prehistoric "Lords of Annwn" beyond whose rumoured presence at the beginning the boldest speculation cannot pass.

It may well have been from his mother that Owen inherited not only those strange magnetic powers that made poor Davy Gam believe he could call up spirits from the deep, but also those more realistic and less spiritual endowments which enable their possessors to alternate so bewilderingly between hunting and being hunted.

In the legends of no other land do these weird pursuits of something that cannot be caught play such a part. After the spore of the *Twrch Trwyth* and behind the panting of the "Questing Beast" all Welsh history trails!

The very geography of the land and its climatic peculiarities, the very nature of its mountains and rivers, the very falling and lifting of the mists that waver above them, all lend themselves, to a degree unknown in any other earthly region, to what might be called the mythology of escape. This is the secret of the land. This is the secret of the people of the land. Other races love and hate, conquer and are conquered. This race avoids and evades, pursues and is pursued. Its soul is forever making a double flight. It flees into a circuitous *Inward.* It retreats into a circuitous *Outward.*

You cannot force it to love you or to hate you. You can only watch it escaping from you. Alone among nations it builds no monuments to its princes, no tombs to its prophets. Its past is its future, for it lives by memories and in advance it recedes. The greatest of its heroes have no graves, for they will come again. Indeed they have not died; they have only disappeared. They have only ceased for a while from hunting and being hunted; ceased for a while from their "longing" that the world which *is* should be transformed into Annwn — the world which *is not* — and yet was and shall be!

But just now it was his physical pain that deadened for the old man the poignancy of his daughter's broken words.

"Put it away," he said to Father Sulien; and then after a pause, during which he groaned several times and changed his position against the ruined wall, he commanded his grandson to come to him. Although his pain had muted his own response to the pathos of Catharine's letter, it had not hindered him from watching with close attention the boy's attitude to his mother's words. Nor had he failed to observe, for he had always been one to notice these little things, what an easy, give-and-take relationship existed between the priest and his pupil. He had noticed how spontaneously the boy had leaned against the Father, and how naturally and irritably he had shaken off the Father's hand from his waist as he listened, shaken it off as children do only when they take for granted the affection of the grown-up person they treat so touchily.

"Come here, Rhisiart!"

He was obeyed at once; and it was clear to Father Sulien that the child hadn't the least fear of his grandfather. All he seemed to feel was a proud and confident trust in the old man. The Prince made him stand between his leather-bound knees; and in that position laid his hands on his head till his outstretched fingers hid completely the boy's compact skull.

"May the blessing of the Holy Trinity," he prayed, "and the blessing of Our Lady, and the blessing of the Souls of all the Faithful Departed, be with thee, my little son."

After that, he made an effort to rise and it was evident to the young Father as he hastened to help him that he was in serious pain. For this he now apologized as the former herald supported him. "We've got many comforts in there," he explained in reply to the priest's anxiety; "Davy Gam made them for us. With Davy to help, and my own people, it's all been easy, and the years have passed, Elphin, the years have passed! Prince of Annwn I've become, they'd say in my mother's *cantref.* It's quite warm in there, Elphin, and we've plenty of light. *She* — and he glanced at Broch — would be content with her 'pure Brython' now. Prince of the mound-dwellers I am! Driven to earth, Elphin, driven to earth. Broch's my fire-lighter under there. Broch can chop wood faster than Davy. But Davy was a good log-man though he's dead and rotten now. He was as good a captain to the King as he was slave to me. Slave to a Prince, Elphin, and captain to a King! But he was a man-royal as a horse. Derfel's horse neighing for maidenheads was a whoreson nag compared with Davy.

"And now, dead and rotten, Elphin lad; dead and rotten in the French Wars!"

"My Prince!"

"Well, boy-Father?"

"Are you going to accept the King's pardon?"

Glyn Dŵr flung away the arm that was supporting him and rose to his full height. "Dare you say that to me?" His voice was so hoarse and threatening that Father Sulien drew back a step, while Rhisiart, who had been listening intently, yielded to a fury that corresponded with the old man's and actually struck his tutor with his fist.

"Forgive me, Sire!" the priest cried hastily. "Forgive me, Rhisiart ab Edmund!"

For a second it looked as if neither the grandfather nor the grandson would ever forgive him, as the child clutching at the Prince's belt and the Prince supporting himself against the child's shoulder glared side by side at him. But the sensitive ex-herald’s remorse was so plain that their anger subsided as quickly as it had flamed up.

“No, no, boy — but you meant no harm,” murmured the chieftain; and then to Rhisiart, while he allowed the repentant priest to take the fierce champion’s place, “Run and fetch Broch to me, sonny, will you? He’s had long enough with his mists and rocks; and I want to ask him something.”

They watched the boy scamper off to where the man’s gigantic figure rose out of the mist. “I — think — I would — like you,” whispered the Prince faintly, “to see — how — we — accept — King Harry’s pardon.”

“I am at your service, my Prince. Only as I shall meet both Meredith ab Owen and my Lord Talbot — yes, and Clerk Rhisiart, too! — at the College to-night, it would seem—”

But the approach of Broch and the child interrupted him. The giant saw at once that the old man was near the limit of his endurance and he said as much to the priest in no roundabout manner.

“How unfair he is!” thought Father Sulien. “He’s used to managing the Prince, and he’s a powerful man anyway. What does he think I could have done?”

“I — was — telling — the Father,” gasped Owen while between his words a spasm of pain forced him to cry out sharply— “that — I would — like him to bring — Catharine’s boy — to see how — how we receive our — pardon — from the House of — Lancaster.”

Broch-o’-Meifod shot at the nervous ex-herald a look of uncompromising indignation from within the folds of his leathery eye-sockets. “Do you wish them to come here, my Prince?” he asked, slipping his powerful arms round Owen’s tottering form.

Glyn Dŵr gasped something that the others couldn’t hear.

“The Prince says,” Broch interpreted, “that you’re to come up here with the gentlemen you speak of, tomorrow about noon. Let Meredith ab Owen bring his horn and he’s to blow the Mathrafal call — not the Powys-Fadog one — do you understand? — when you reach this spot.”

But though Father Sulien was a timid man and Broch-o’-Meifod, supporting his groaning master, was an awe-inspiring sight, the sense of duty in the young priest’s heart was stronger than his fear.

Coming up close to the two men, while Rhisiart watched his proceedings in astonishment, he whispered in Broch’s unsympathetic ear how he felt it would be deplorably unwise to give so young a boy the kind of shock he must necessarily receive from such a disturbing scene.

“One minute, my Prince, one minute!” grumbled the giant. “I’ve got to make this fool obey you!”

Saying this he gently lowered the old man, who had now quite collapsed in his arms, on the bed of bracken, and pushing the boy towards his grandfather incontinently seized Father Sulien with an ogre’s grip and led him some paces aside.

“Don’t’ee mind our ways, laddie,” he said in a totally different tone, when he saw how troubled the priest was. “My Lord and I understand each other — but we’ve had a queer life — too much for both of us this last year; and we’re both unstrung. He’s at the end, Elphin my lad. I do what I can, but he moans in the night for Davy. Davy loved him with a dog’s love — more than a man’s, I tell you, more than a man’s! He’s got this crazy rejection of the King’s pardon on his brain. He was always one for ceremonies and scenes — mad life-lover as he is! — and he’s bent on carrying through something — I can’t tell you what — I’m a simple man compared with him; and what’s more, little Father, he and I take different views on this whole business of being alive on the earth. I think we might just as well before we die, Scots and Welsh and English together, hold hands like the children at Martinmas Fair and dance round the fire with the old song of the *baban* being washed:

Cover your eyes and pinch your nose!
And tell me which way the water goes!

"I know what you feel about the child, little Father. But the child we've got to think of now is *the one over there;* and I tell you this rejection of the King's pardon is—"

He was interrupted by a long clear note on the wind, the sound of a hunting-horn in the valley, and the two men stared at each other. "Meredith ab Owen!" murmured the younger man; and then he hurriedly added: "I'll bring him, Master Broch, I'll bring him tomorrow. But you'll remember how young he is; and keep your—" The giant touched him on the arm. Rhisiart was at their side, his small face a white blur in the darkness.

"He's asleep," he whispered softly. "But he keeps lifting up his arm and dropping it; and pulling up his leg and stretching it out! I think the pain hurts him in his sleep."

The giant turned.

"I'll see to him," he said; and he made a sign for them to be gone. Then, while they hesitated, "You *that* way — I *this* way," he repeated, in a queer intonation that Father Sulien never forgot, "but the same wheel carries us round."

They had begun to move away when they heard him calling after them. "Tell my Lord Talbot," he cried, "that he must be the only Englishman here!"

Lord Talbot was at any rate "the only Englishman" among the group that gathered that night round Father Sulien's fire. The little Rhisiart clung so passionately to his godfather that the soft-hearted priest couldn't bring himself to send the boy to bed. “I’ll get him back to his proper routine,” he thought, “when it’s all over”; and then feeling ashamed of the sinister implication of this thought he substituted the mental phrase “when we’re alone together again.”

But it was a memorable evening for the little boy as he sat on his wooden stool in his black satin suit enjoying the Moorish sweet-meats that the great Doctor of Civil Law had brought for him from London.

The priest soon perceived that it was a wonderful comfort to Clerk Rhisiart to talk freely to the child about the death of his mother and sisters; while to the young Rhisiart — as the ex-herald shrewdly noted — the death in the Tower of Lady Mortimer and her little girls was just an exciting story. He was too young to remember them with any detailed vividness or to feel any tragic emotion about them; but he wasn’t too young to derive a proud and delicious satisfaction from its being his mother and his sisters to whom the great Lawyer referred with such dramatic respect.

Just three years had passed, the elder Rhisiart explained, since he had been honoured with the privilege of attending the dying lady. The King had been in her case more liberal than usual, he told them with a humorous glance at Lord Talbot, and after being released from the Tower she had received each year, at her lodgings in Westminster, a substantial sum for her maintenance.

“Is — my mother — buried with — my father?” interrupted the little boy, jerking himself along the floor, with the aid of his own legs as well as those of his stool, till he was close to his godfather’s chair.

The great Doctor of Law continued for a few minutes describing minutely to the rest of the company how Lady Mortimer and her little girls — one of them named Bridget — were buried in Swithin’s Church; but when he’d finished he turned with the gravest politeness to the child at his side and explained that it had been at his own advice that Lady Mortimer had decided to lie in St. Swithin's Church rather than be conveyed to Montgomery to rest by her husband.

"Your mother died of the Plague, Rhisiart ab Edmund" — and his voice changed its tone as he bent down over the child— "and your sisters too; and there were" — he drew a deep breath— "there were difficulties about their interment."

At this point he seemed to forget the boy's presence altogether in his self-complacent memory of a fascinating legal problem; for he lifted his head and addressed the whole company in resonant professional tones. "By the mercy of God I was able to exercise a little pressure upon the Rector of St. Swithin's, owing to certain legal help I'd had the privilege of giving to the King's Council on the complicated problem of the — well! to tell you the truth — of the Salic Law."

To Father Sulien's horror the little Rhisiart leapt to his feet at this. "Haven't I some claim," he cried in a voice that rang through the chamber, "to my father's estates?"

Lord Talbot began fidgetting uneasily in the great carved chair in which, as the King's Special Messenger, the ex-herald had placed him. He was a lean, weather-beaten gentleman, taciturn in speech, reserved in manner, and with something about his build and expression that brought irresistibly to the young priest's mind an image of the animal known in heraldic language as the Wyvern.

The uneasy creaking of the chair of the King's emissary caused a faint smile to flicker across the face of Meredith ab Owen, who all this while had been staring into the fire as if he saw depicted there some faraway scene completely different from that which was now working itself out before him.

The scene he beheld was indeed one that rarely left his troubled memory. It was of his little Elliw mounted on her Cardigan pony, with the aged Angharad in a litter by her side, driving away the seagulls from a ghastly relic set up there in the eyes of all, whereon a few bleached hairs waving in the wind beneath a human skull were all that was left of the once majestic coal-black beard of Rhys Ddu of Tywyn.

But the great Doctor of Law turned his long thin face, with its hooked nose and drooping white moustache, towards his fellow-ambassador. Then he surveyed his excited godson; and his expressive countenance took on a look of such formidable judicial authority that both the heavy-lidded Wyvern stare of Lord Talbot and the proudly-lit Mortimer gaze of young Rhisiart were compelled to give him their full awe-struck attention.

"Oh, if only Iago were here!" thought their priestly host. "How he would be impressed by this learned Judge."

"The puissant House of Lancaster," announced the elder Rhisiart in measured tones, "whose present representative is our mighty and merciful Lord, King Henry, has, I am sorry to say, many reasons for regarding the Mortimers with less than confident trust. Renowned through Christendom for his clemency to the conquered, our God-appointed Sovereign of the Realm of England, France, and Ireland is bound in the interest of both his Welsh and English commonalty to weigh with studious caution those spontaneous impulses of magnanimity towards the ancient Border Houses to which his natural instinct predisposes him.

"You must remember, dear child" — and though he addressed the puzzled boy beside him his hawk's eye was fixed on Talbot— "that the elder branch of your renowned father's family is at the present moment more than suspected of making various claims that are inconsistent with that Established Royal Succession upon which the peace of our two nations depends.”

Having made this resounding declaration, which echoed through the new College with as many hollow reverberations as it did through the head of the institution’s single pupil, the learned Judge stretched his hand to the refectory table and possessed himself of his goblet of hot spiced wine.

Over the brim of his silver mug, as he raised it to his lips, he contemplated his godson, and although no one knew it but himself a sharp pang shot through his heart when the younger Rhisiart, quite as much hurt as he was puzzled, deliberately left his side and crossed over to Meredith ab Owen.

Meredith received him tenderly and put his arm round his waist as the boy settled himself on the edge of his uncle’s chair. “That’s right, lad, that’s right,” he murmured softly, “Aunt Lu is sure to ask me how you’ve grown and what books you read nowadays. We hoped once you’d have a new little cousin, but Our Lady hasn’t yet—”

And then again, as had been happening so often to him of late, the child became aware that the thoughts of his uncle, like all these other men’s thoughts, were only waiting to leave him in the lurch, only waiting to float away, like the ravens that so often hovered over his head on Pen-y-Pigyn after leading him by their repeated croakings to fancy they had some oracular message to deliver.

He began to experience a feeling he had come to know so well that it presented itself to his mind as a necessary aspect of life, as something that life could not be conceived without.

It was the feeling that there wasn’t, really and truly, one single human being in the whole world who would care if he were dead, or would care if he ran away to sea, like Iago ap Cynan!

And they were all the same. Father Sulien had let him stay up; but he might just as well be in bed! He really had thought Judge Rhisiart would be different. That’s why he’d asked him about the Mortimer estates. He never expected that all he would get from him would be a speech about the Lancastrian Succession.

And now no sooner had Meredith begun to tell him that Aunt Elliw might still give him a new cousin than his uncle’s arm grew limp and lax about his waist, and the man stared in front of him, apparently forgetting that there was such a person in the world as Rhisiart ab Edmund.

It was lucky that he had sat up so much later than his usual time; for sleepiness was the one thing that could make a man not care whether he was in the world or not.

But how clever uncle Meredith was! How could he know, and that too without being told, that anyone wanted to go to sleep? But here he was letting a person slide down upon his lap. And here he was changing his position in his arm-chair so that a person’s head had something to rest against.

“I believe,” said Meredith ab Owen presently, turning his head towards their host, but taking care not to disturb his sleeping nephew, “that there’s some disturbance going on in the churchyard.”

They all listened intently.

“Yes, you’d better see to it, Father — or, if you’ll take the child, I will.”

The head of the College for the Priesthood put down his cup of wine and rose unwillingly to his feet. He knew, better than any of his visitors, how many disturbances could occur in that consecrated enclosure, due to its proximity to the Inn, such as it were wisest to allow to die down of themselves!

But he snatched up his clerical traveller's cloak, wrapped it untidily and anyhow about his shoulders, and let himself out.

The second he was gone, for Rhisiart Junior was lost to the world and all his claims upon it, the three men began talking quick and fast. "It's Sparrow's revolt," sighed Meredith.

"I'm afraid that's what it is," agreed the Judge. "What'll you do, my Lord, if his peasants *have* managed to capture Dinas Bran? Denis has but a handful of men, and the walls are so ruinous that his only chance, in my view, would be to rush them down before they got to the top of the hill."

In the absence of their heraldic priest there was nobody to notice the Wyvern-like contortion of the leathery visage of the King's Pardon Bearer.

"I wish to God we'd heard nothing about it," Talbot groaned. "'Tis a Fitz-Alan affair, or a Charlton affair. 'Twould never have happened if the King's orders had been obeyed."

Meredith's eyebrows twitched and he tried to turn towards the window. Very gently he moved his limbs, for they were growing stiff under the boy's weight.

"What were the King's orders?" he asked wearily. "Do you know, Judge? Some greater folly still, I warrant!"

The grey-headed Rhisiart looked at his friend's swarthy face and the lock of black hair that fell across his brow; and there rushed through his mind a vivid memory of a scene in Glyndyfrdwy sixteen years ago when Master Brut and himself admitted this evasive spectator of human unwisdom into their youthful counsels. "Oh, Walter, Walter," he thought, "how you'd smile to hear your innocent pupil in the gospels called 'Judge'!"

But after listening for a moment to the wind moaning in the new college-chimney, he glanced at the brightly-coloured tapestries that reflected the firelight, and tried to explain to the son of Glyn Dŵr the attempts that the youthful monarch was making to limit legally, and above all judicially, the arbitrary tyrannies of the great barons.

Meredith softly stroked with his fingertips the dusky head of the slumbering child. “But didn’t Master Sparrow,” he said, “marry one of old Broch’s daughters? He must be an unusual man to risk losing that snug Meifod mill for the sake of his former friends.”

“Once a peasant — always a peasant,” threw in Lord Talbot, “and what’s more, I’ll tell you this. The King’s policy of propitiating the burgesses at the expense of the rest of us will upset everything, I don’t blame this Master Sparrow of yours for making trouble! If he’s married a miller’s daughter he’s been able to see for himself the difference between a peasant and a tradesman. The Guilds and the Crafts and the Master-Merchants are the great ones today. And as long as the House of Lancaster’s on the throne they’ll *be* the ones. That’s what none of these whoreson pretenders have the wit to see. If I were a great-grandson of Edward I’d do what Richard did, flout the Guilds and the Crafts and the City of London, and pay court to the peasants!”

The Englishman’s words met with an unexpected response from Glyn Dŵr’s son. Indeed he cried “bravo!” with such lively conviction that the little Rhisiart on his lap waved one of his hands in the air.

But the grey-haired Doctor of Civil Law, who bore the courtesy title of “Judge”, though he wasn’t yet upon any circuit, showed by the expression upon his face what he thought of this chatter of ignorant neophytes. The nostrils of his great hooked nose quivered, his moustache twitched, a big vein in his neck expanded. “Sirs!” he burst out, and it was only the fact that his godson was asleep that prevented his voice assuming a tone more adapted to Westminster Hall than a priest’s refectory. “What neither you nor our good Master Sparrow understands is that the real Government of these

Nations — I don't speak of France, because no sensible man — we're all friends here! — believes that the English Conquest will last like the Norman Conquest — the real Government, I say, of England and Wales is no longer a government of the Crown, or of the Barons, or of the Guilds, or of the Commonalty. It is a Government of—"

Our old friend's eyes were flashing so fiercely in the light of Father Sulien's candles that Talbot and Meredith exchanged whimsical glances. "Of the Church?" the latter interjected; but Judge Rhisiart swept this aside as dogmatically as Clerk Rhisiart would have done sixteen years ago.

"Of the Law!" he concluded in a tone worthy of Justinian. Whether the word "Law" roused to revolt the Mortimer blood in the younger Rhisiart or the blood of Catharine ferch Owen cannot be said, but it certainly wakened the child from his sleep. He opened his eyes, thrust aside his uncle's arm, and struggled to his feet.

"Where's the Father?" he asked in a querulous tone. "It must be time for me to say my prayers."

"Didn't I tell you, Judge?" sighed his uncle softly. "That's not the Crown or the Commonalty or the Law. That's — Mother of God! What's the matter, boy?"

The little Rhisiart was now standing where they could all see his face; and they all watched him in consternation. His eyes were wide; his mouth was open and twisted; his breath was coming in gasps. He was staring wildly at some point in the chamber that was mid-way between the window and the fire.

Meredith leapt to his feet. The elder Rhisiart clutched the arms of his chair. Lord Talbot muttered a blasphemous curse. But at that instant the old massive door that had belonged to the priest's house before the new college was built swung inwards, and Father Sulien appeared supporting a panic stricken, bare-legged young herdsman. Their appearance brought the boy to his senses in a moment. “Father!” he cried, rushing to his tutor and throwing himself weeping into his arms, “Oh Father! oh Father!”

“Give this man something to drink, my Masters,” said Father Sulien hastily; and then to the sobbing child: “What have they been doing to you, Rhisiart? What’s the matter with you? Come, come, come. If you’re a brave lad and can say your prayers I’ll stay with you till you’re in bed. Come, child! Come, my dear son.”

When the two of them had retired into their bedroom and both doors were shut, Meredith proceeded to obey the priest. He thrust the frightened and trembling youth into his own chair and poured him out a beaker of the spiced wine from the bowl on the hearth.

Talbot began questioning him at once; but Rhisiart intervened. “Let the fellow recover himself a bit. He’s all *égaré. Il s’effraie de peu de chose.”*

The three men, who were now all on their feet, moved together to the further side of the hearth and began discussing the little boy’s trouble. “The child saw something — that’s clear.”

“Not at all! Children are often like that when they’re suddenly waked.”

“No, no, he had some kind of vision. There’s no doubt of it. The question is, what was it he saw?”

It was Judge Rhisiart who at last drew up his chair close to the young herdsman. “I can’t help thinking,” he began, “that I’ve seen you before, my lad.”

“I don’t — know — Master. I’ve lived in these here parts all me life and I can’t exactly, if you understand me, recall what gentle-folk I have seen down St. Collen’s way; but I do seem to mind when I were a scrub—”

“By God, Meredith, I know him!” cried the Judge, forgetting both his dignity and his position in the wondrous sweetness of recalling the adventures of long-ago. "Tis the goose-boy I met on Midsummer Day, when with Tegolin and Mad Huw I was finding my way to Glyndyfrdwy! Listen, my lad, don't you remember, when you were little, being put once in charge of your sister's geese, and meeting some people with a beautiful horse, near St. Collen's Church — a horse of wonderful colours, a grand, tall, old horse, a law-abiding, obedient horse, the sort of horse that—"

But the young herdsman's shy face had lit up and he nodded vigorously. In some queer way the mere memory of Mad Huw's intervention on his behalf made him feel happier about his present situation. "Yes, sir, I do mind me of a strange Man of God," he declared hurriedly, speaking in Welsh and in the high-pitched accent of Powys Fadog, "who went about the land in them days. I were the only one that saw him close; to speak to — as you might say — and to touch his clothes. My dad wouldn't have been surprised if it 'tweren't King Richard himself. But it's the truth I'm telling'ee — I were little enough in them days but I talked to him, and touched him I did, with this very hand, same as I might touch you, sir!"

The learned lawyer from London fell into a muse as he stared at the world of memory behind the furtive eyes of this rustic lad. It was clear to him that in the passing of time the piebald horse, the geese, the girl, yes! and he himself had all sunk into oblivion — all been annihilated — while Mad Huw enjoyed a relative immortality. The warmth of the fire, together with the fumes of the spiced wine, soon created, now that his immediate fears were allayed, an irresistible tendency to nod on the part of the youth from the *Llan* of Saint Collen.

Nor were the three friends any longer in a mood to converse. Judge Rhisiart inserted the finger and thumb of his right hand into the capacious travelling-pouch that he wore beneath his stately velvet tunic. He saw the hilt of the dagger he'd thrust into the sod above the piebald horse; he saw the red braid of his wife and her lifted arms as she stood above him in the prison; he saw Mad Huw make the sign of the cross as he promised sleep to the sick King; and under his breath, while his fingers touched Tegolin's letter, he repeated the precise words that, if the saints were merciful, would take him to Worcester when this business of the pardon was done.

No lawyer in the kingdom had a better memory than Judge Rhisiart. But what puzzled him was Tegolin's fluency. He little knew how studiously she had shared all the lessons of their child. "I have been bereft," her letter ran, "of the kind friend you wot of. Julietta, dear my Lord, was wedded last Lammas Day to the worthy knight, Sir Palamedes. Brother Huw died a week after Master Shore; the one of a fever caught from the foul mud while fishing in the Severn, and the other from a surfeit of fish bred in the same. Our little Catharine can both read and write. Brother Huw taught her till within a few days of his death. Will you have time to see my poor mother? Dear my Lord, your last messenger reached me in four days. He says the roads are less dangerous than they were. I marked well what you said about my comeliness. Oh, Rhisiart, my dearest Rhisiart, what will you think when you see your Tegolin as she is? To her you will always be — Gwion Bach."

The Judge drew his fingers from his pouch and looked about him. There was a faint liturgical murmur from the room at the back. Father Sulien and the little Mortimer were evidently repeating the psalm for the night. What had the child seen? Well! Well! The visions of children are as hard to catch as the foam of the sea; and he had trained himself to avoid insoluble speculations. Let it go! And he set himself to ponder on an interview he'd had that morning with Father Rheinalt at Valle Crucis. The monk's sanctity, his guilelessness of heart and singleness of brain had overcome even Abbot Bevan's hostility; and the fierce old patriot had talked freely to his daughter's husband. And strange indeed was the tale Rhisiart heard!

The monk told him that Mistress Lowri was now obsessed by a morbid infatuation for Denis. Such was the peculiarity of her nature that ordinary love — as we say “natural” love — was impossible to her; and her mania now drove her to be the submissive and docile odalisque of the man who had brought her back to Dinas Bran. Every beat of the perilous perversity with which her veins pulsed had been quickened, the monk explained, into a new life by the thought of being Denis’ helpless slave.

Judge Rhisiart had found his interview with his wife’s father far less painful than he expected; but as he recalled it now, watching with half his consciousness Meredith’s melancholy broodings over the fire and Talbot’s dazed, wine-fuddled astonishment at their host’s tapestries, a dim mist-like feeling did fumble for entrance into his narrow skull that there were levels of human destiny totally outside his ken!

For all his learning in matters of law Judge Rhisiart was hardly more skilled in the perilous sphere of human aberrations than when he kissed the dwarf at the foot of the Ladies’ Tower; and he now began to feel obscurely uneasy as he thought of the sagacious legal questions he had presumed to put to Tegolin’s father.

But the monk had been strangely frank. He had even smiled once or twice at the questions put to him. He admitted freely that Mistress Lowri came frequently to the Abbey. He admitted that she forced him — in spite of the fact that she knew he loved her still — to listen to the wildest outpourings of her last obsession. He had gone so far — and that also with a smile that staggered his questioner — as actually to confess that in his love for this beautiful and tragic creature— “She’s simply a she-devil,” thought Judge Rhisiart — he had had to do penance for the fathomless pleasure that her coming to him gave him.

And the Judge, as he watched how the former goose-boy kept disturbing his own sleep by the noddings of his heavy head, recalled the gracious but jerky manner in which Abbot Bevan had entertained him.

“Walter, Walter!” thought the Judge. “How you’d have chuckled if you’d heard the way he told me about meeting Glyn Dŵr on the hill-side above the Abbey and assuring him — you may depend with his usual self-echoes — when the Prince commented on his early rising, that it was *he* who had risen too soon by a hundred years. But I certainly said a good word for Father Rheinalt! I’m glad I had the opportunity to do that; and I think I made the fellow open his eyes when I defended Welsh patriotism by appealing to the Abbot of Caerleon. How lucky I knew that Valle Crucis was one of the monasteries that applied for his canonization; even though it was, of course, for the sake of the Order.”

It was in the midst of thoughts like these — and indeed the Judge had begun to decide that, if he hadn’t accompanied Talbot, this ticklish business of the pardon would have been a complete fiasco — that a shock of supernatural terror, giving him the sensation of having his stomach plucked out of him in a rush of ice-cold air, forced him to jerk his chair backwards with such violence that both his companions leapt to their feet while the goose-man spilled his wine over the burning logs with a sound like the hissing of salamanders.

“My Prince, my Prince!” cried Judge Rhisiart. And he uttered this cry in such a tone that it made Meredith leap to the door, Talbot rush to the window, and Father Sulien, pallid and trembling, come flying out of his bedroom.

But, as we have already seen in the course of his turbulent career, Judge Rhisiart was always at his best when he was well pleased with himself. It was in disaster that his powers became less conspicuous. At this moment, with the news in his pocket of that providential catch of fish, his wits were as lively as the wits of Lady Montfoison when she paid her momentous visit to London to beg her "little monk's" release.

Probably in the whole history of Corwen, from the days when Mynydd-y-Gaer was the centre of its life, no man, woman, or child has ever been so little *bouleversé* by an apparition. Was it the mixture in his veins of Norman and Welsh blood — the former making him naturally sceptical, and the latter making him so addicted to marvels that they were no overpowering shock? Whatever it was, the change for the rest of them was amazing when the convulsed image of terror that had a second before confronted them was transformed into a narrow-faced, grey-haired gentleman, smiling at their concern, putting his own agitation to the most realistic account, and with the utmost nonchalance thrusting his arms into the sleeves of his travelling-cloak.

"I must have been cold, Father," he said lightly, "in spite of your good fire! Cold; I must have been cold." Then, nodding kindly at the timid goose-man who had made a motion to relinquish his seat, he proceeded to place his foot upon a brazen fire-dog, pulling up the skirt of his cloak as he did so, so as to keep its lining of rich grey vair from being scorched.

"It's an extraordinary thing, gentlemen," Judge Rhisiart now announced, including all his three friends in the same piercing gaze of his dark eyes, "how cold can affect the human body! And the cold here, of course, is something different from what it is in London. It's a more supernatural cold, if I can use such an expression."

His listeners didn't dare to exchange glances under the fierce stare he kept upon them.

But not one of them let him off.

"I've never seen your Honour so disturbed," hazarded Father Sulien.

"This whoreson cold of yours, Judge," remarked Lord Talbot, "seems to have affected your god-son too."

"What did you see, cousin?" Meredith asked him point-blank. "Was it my father?"

This made Rhisiart turn his hooked nose and flashing eyes upon the Prince's son; and the instant he did so Lord Talbot began whispering to the priest. There was a pause; during which the Judge collected his thoughts by taking in every detail of Meredith's appearance.

Elliw's husband had retained his dark locks untinged with grey. He was dressed in a tight-fitting black tunic with violet-coloured hosen and he carried in his silver belt not only the horn that had brought them down from Mynydd-y-Gaer but an exquisitely-mounted hunting knife in a purple sheath.

"It isn't sadness — not exactly sadness," thought Rhisiart. "I've never seen a human expression like it. He looks as if he knew the worst that could happen and was always cheerful when it didn't happen."

"Yes," he admitted gently, as if his scrutiny had taught him to hide nothing, "I did see the Prince. He was in chain-armour. His beard was white, but not unkempt. I suppose," he added turning to the priest, "our lad saw him too?"

Father Sulien nodded.

"Does this mean," broke in Talbot brusquely, "that Glendourdy's dead, and the King's pardon — wasted?"

His words instantaneously, without so much as the flicker of an eyelid between them, turned every Welshman present, including the goose-man who had understood the syllable "dead" though Talbot had spoken in French, into one single multiple personality. This composite Being withdrew, without a groan or a sigh, into a “secret passage” far deeper than that made by the mound-dwellers.

But Meredith smiled; and his smile caused Rhisiart to think of Sir Palamedes and his white rose.

“No, no, my father’s *not dead.”* He spoke with such conviction that the spell was broken and there were four separate Welshmen again, one of them a courtesy Judge of the King’s court; and though he couldn’t have explained it, a curious discomfort was lifted from Lord Talbot’s mind.

“I’m glad you say so!” he declared heartily. “It would have been a great pity if the pardon—”

He was interrupted by a series of heavy impatient blows at the door of the College.

The goose-man displayed extreme nervousness and looked wildly round the room as though seeking a hiding-place.

“It’s the Chirk men, Father — it’s the Chirk men, your Honour! They must have dragged him from the altar and killed him — and are now come for me!”

Father Sulien didn’t hesitate. “If you don’t make a sound so as to frighten the boy, you can go in there. Don’t go near the bed! Stand behind the door till I call you.”

He waited until all was silent in the College bedroom, then he flung the door open and three archers in the Fitz-Alan livery burst in dragging with them the redoubtable Master Sparrow. The peasants’ champion had only received a few scratches during the struggle to drag him from the church, but he was in a dangerous temper and indeed had no scruple in the presence of this notable company about denouncing his captors roundly.

“They’ve taken me from sanctuary, my Masters!” he shouted. “They’ve committed sacrilege, my Lords and Gentles! It’s Master Hardy who set them on — Master Hardy from Wessex. Yes it is, you Saxon pig!"

"One minute," began Judge Rhisiart, "let us get this clear. You are Master Hardy I presume?"

Never was there a more turbulent conflict of emotions on the face of an elderly bowman than those that contended with one another on the visage of the man from Wessex. "I be, Measter; but such a rogue as he baint to be found between Orkneys and Land's End. Hold him, mates! Hold him fast!" he added, addressing his companions; and then looking round stubbornly and sheepishly. "He's a desperate man, my Lords! He's a murderous and mutinous rebel, my Masters!"

"All lies! All lies! your Honour," cried Philip Sparrow appealing directly to Judge Rhisiart. "This man's the most vindictive and narrowminded liar in the kingdom. He knows as little of Shropshire as he does of Wales. He comes from a part of England that my wife says is still heathen!"

"Who is your wife?" enquired the Judge.

"Pardon me, Master Doctor, but you're asking what you must know already. My wife is Morg ferch Broch and our child John is heir to Meifod mill."

"He's a traitor to the King, my Lords," cried the man from Wessex, appealing to Lord Talbot. "We caught him in the act of stirring up the people. He's a cunning trouble-maker!"

"If this is true, Judge," threw in Talbot, "they were in the right of it. Many a time have I seen men dragged from sanctuary when—"

"They were not right!" cried Father Sulien indignantly. "As God is above the King, so the Church is above" — he caught himself up— "above all temporal power."

Judge Rhisiart turned again to the man from Wessex. "What were you going to do with him?"

“With thee’s permission, Measter” — it was clear that Master Hardy was less impressed by the furred robe than a Shropshire herdsman would have been— “us be teakin’ of ‘un to Chirk.”

“You’ll never take me there! — not alive!” panted Master Sparrow.

“Is your charge,” enquired Judge Rhisiart, “that he’s an agitator against the King made on account of his saying in public that Owen Glyn Dŵr, formerly called Prince of Wales, will return and claim his rights?”

The Wessex man’s eyes gleamed with unappeasable hatred and he fell at once into the trap prepared for him by our crafty friend.

“Eees, Measter,” he blurted out, “He do say and he do swear to all and sundry that this here conjuring devil, this here Measter Glendourdy, when ‘un do coom back, wull cut the weasand of every rich man in our wold island!”

The Judge looked significantly at Father Sulien.

“Kindly make a note for us, will you, Father, of the declaration just uttered.”

Father Sulien hurried off to get his tablets and pen; and, on his return, fell to jotting down as fast as he could the churning torrent of hatred that burst forth from the old Wessex archer. For sixteen long years had this avenging wrath burned unappeased in the man’s soul, burned there since in the banquet-hall of Dinas Bran he had seen Glendower’s arrow pierce the throat of his girl’s dad.

It was by one of those queer lapses of memory that are totally unaccountable that Rhisiart didn’t recognize this fellow, while the goose-man’s lineaments, which were those of a child at that time, came back to him so vividly.

It had begun by this time to dawn on the political wits of Master Sparrow that this Welsh Judge and this Welsh priest were up to something in his favour, so that, though the pain it cost him was great, he restrained himself from hotly declaring that the peasants' rising for which he'd been agitating was entirely un-racial.

For the thousandth time in his life he told himself that "gentlemen" were the same all the world over, and that it wouldn't be till there was found some way to unite the *gwerin,* the common people of every race, that their tricks would be ended.

At this moment, however, these "tricks" were being exercised in his favour; and because life had grown sweeter to him of late, and to be dragged to Chirk meant death, he held his peace.

"A Wyvern! A Wyvern!" thought our heraldic priest, as he glanced at the leathery countenance of Lord Talbot, who, with Glyn Dŵr's pardon in his pocket, was evidently hesitating as to his proper course of action.

There was indeed a serious conflict going on at that moment in this great Englishman's mind. "Oh these curst border-barons!" he thought, "it's just like them to hunt their rebels and pursue their private quarrels when the King has all he can do to hold his own across the Channel. You look as sturdy a rogue as ever I've seen, Master what's-your-name. But — *nom de Diable*! — how am I to persuade the arch-devil to accept the King's grace when these fool-barons go on hunting his nameless devilkins? God help me! I'm loth to let you go free, Master Obstinate, with your sulky airs; but I'm the King's representative here, and no Fitz-Alan or Charlton shall over-ride me with their hired bravos!"

With all this, and more than this, in his mind, the conqueror of Harlech turned sternly upon the devoted exile from Wessex and made it clear to him that the King's present purpose was propitiation, not punishment. "Leave the fellow here," he said, "and off with you to the Inn. Here's a couple of silver groats for your charges — which is more," he muttered to himself, as the indignant archer withdrew with his companions, “than any Fitz-Alan has ever given a man in my service for a night’s tippling!”

The early hours of the following day seemed deliberately conspiring, as the dying Prince sat by a fire of furze-stalks at the entrance to his hiding-place, to give him, as far as the elements were concerned, the right conditions for the ceremony he had planned. Broch and he had already broken their fast in their usual manner, drinking mead and eating cheese, and the Prince was wondering, as he sat there, from what direction his death-stroke would descend. He knew his hour was near; though whether his death would come from his heart, which had been his most menacing trouble of late, or from his lungs, which had been racking him all this damp autumn with exhausing spasms of coughing, or from what one Edeyrnion “conjurer” had diagnosed as a cancer in his stomach, troubled him not a whit.

It was a comfort to him, rather than the reverse, that his gigantic vitality should be thus beseiged from three directions at the same time. It removed those teasing speculations, always so fretting to an insatiable life-lover, as to whether if he’d taken this or that precaution all might yet have been well! If Death’s legions were scrambling over his defences from three sides at once it was clear that what was coming upon him came, as Homer would say, “according to Fate,” and not “contrary to Fate.”

This confluence of a triad of enemies closing in became something larger and more majestical than any one of them could possibly have been alone. In itself the growth in his stomach might be un-malignant, the cough that was wearing him out merely bronchial, and his heart trouble not of a deadly kind. But for their attack to be as simultaneous as this, Death must have got fate and chance and the will of the gods, all, all, all, as his irresistible allies!

The secret of the mound-dwellers' chamber at Mynydd-y-Gaer, handed down from father to son among the descendants of King Eliseg, just as it had been handed down to Eliseg himself, must now, the Prince decided, be lost forever — lost as he himself must be lost! Dead was his son Griffith who knew it. Dead was Davy Gam who knew it.

It would be against the whole nature of old Broch or of young Meredith to reveal what he wished should be concealed; and with them the secret would perish!

He was seated now in a comfortable old-man's chair covered with soft deer-skin; and his seat was so arranged that he could see the far-receding convolutions of the sacred river, twisting and coiling — as though its very flowing were a symbol of the Mystic Serpent of the mound-dwellers — towards Valle Crucis and Dinas Bran and the Shrines of St. Collen and St. Tysilio.

On his left, however, he could see the entrance to the well-kept "secret" of the long line of his ancestors. The chamber which served as a porch to the mound-dwellers' passage was a wide, low, rock-hewn cavern, with nothing of interest in it save a roughly-carved stone object in its centre; and even this at a first glance might have been taken, so confused were the markings on it, for a natural product of some remote glacial or volcanic antiquity.

A careful scrutiny would, however, have revealed that some of these markings were the runic straight lines of "Ogam," the Druidic alphabet, others criss-cross ribbon-patterns, like the intertwining of flattened-out snake-skins, others clumsily-carved reproductions of the foliated festoons of classic ornament; while various mediaeval attempts had obviously been more recently made to turn the thing into a Christian altar by the superimposition of dagger-like crosses.

An altar of some sort it may well have been, a relic perhaps of a race, of a religion, earlier than the mound-dwellers, and the portion of this stone palimpsest which had most arrested Owen’s attention, when as the heir of his House he had first seen it, was a crudely-shaped coil of mouldings at the back of the stone bearing a vague resemblance to the head of a serpent.

One thing had always struck Glyn Dŵr’s mind about this queer piece of antiquity; namely that there was no scooped-out hollow for blood! At the present moment, when the Prince turned his eyes in this direction, what he saw was the enormous figure of Broch-o’-Meifod, upon whose broad back the late November sun threw a long straight beam, causing the single axe which he still carried in his belt to gape and glow like a bleeding wound in his side.

Broch was busy just then replacing one of the small wooden wheels Davy Gam had fixed to a species of truck, by means of which that “slave of the spirits” had carried furze-stalks up the hill’s side.

“Broch!”

“Yes, my Prince.”

“Are you still sceptical of what I told you last night?”

The giant groaned, straightened his back, propped up the truck with its row of rattling wheels against one of the posts of the chamber, and coming to Owen’s side stretched himself out on a heap of straw. If they hadn’t been a pair of old countrymen, long accustomed to such bivouac blazes, there would have been a danger from sparks. As it was they both quickly measured in their minds the distance between the fire and the straw.

“I told you you’d tire yourself,” said the Prince querulously. “I wish you’d let that thing alone. It won’t have any more journeys to make! You’ll be at Meifod and I’ll be under the sod.”

With his eyes half shut and the sun turning his bald head into a great lump of gold, the giant was silent for a minute. Then he remarked obstinately, “I’m not going to meddle with fate, Owen ap Griffith Fychan. If you think I intend to help you to die, much as I want you dead, you’re mightily mistaken. I wouldn’t do it, even if by the lifting of a finger I could annihilate you without a second’s pain! I tell you it’s contrary to my whole nature to kill a man, except in battle, before he reaches his allotted destiny.”

Owen looked down at him lying there on the straw, and as he looked he pondered, and as he pondered he stroked first one and then the other of the forks of his snow-white beard.

“Broch, old friend.”

“Say on, my Prince.”

“Why did you say just now you wanted me dead? So that you can go back to Morg ferch Lug?”

“Of course! You’re my *other* self, Prince; but Morg’s myself. But there’s another reason too.”

“What’s that, Broch?”

“I don’t like pain. I never have, and I never will! I accept life and I accept death; but I don’t accept pain!”

“But we have to, Broch, we have to!”

“Oh, of course! In that sense we have to — I mean we have to get through it somehow, as best we can. But in the case of life and death it’s much more than just going *through* them! It’s making them part of us, it’s becoming part of them! I refuse to become part of pain. And I want you dead because when you’re dead I shall have you without your pain.”

“Have I showed it so much then? I was under the impression—”

Broch sat up and looked him in the face, and for some minutes the consciousness in the colourless orbs of the one lost itself in the consciousness behind the sea-green orbs of the other.

"Do you think, Prince," the giant burst out, "that I don't know every pulse and twitch and twinge of your old, soft, corrugated face? You don't have to wince and squirm and wriggle, you don't have to groan and squeal for me to know when the pain-devil's in possession! You can endure about twenty times what most of us can. But it's not a question of enduring. You can't share your *elixir vitae* when the pain-demon's draining it. Yes! you may sit there, stroking your old beard and looking like King Arthur; but I know very well, though you got over your coughing-fit pretty cleverly just now, and though you managed to do nothing but grind your teeth when your heart nearly stopped before dawn, I know very well, even as you're looking at me now — I know it by a pulse in your cheek — that your cancer, or whatever it is, is at this very second hurting you so much that the only strength left in you is just enough to play the dying actor with picking fingers. You're like a figure in a Martinmas Show, Owen ap Griffith Fychan, turning your head and smiling at the people, while inside of you the sawdust's already burning!

"Yes, you may smile and smile, dear my Prince; but if I didn't know that it was your destiny to hug your old life-bride till the death-rattle shakes you both, I'd — I'd use my last axe on you!"

Owen left stroking his beard, and slipped his fingers under his tunic till they reached the place where his cancer hurt him. At this spot, by long working at it, he had weakened and bent one of the links in Iolo's chain-armour. "'Twould be a pity to do that, Broch," he said, "before I find out whether any of them saw me last night."

The giant struggled to his feet and stood before his friend, literally swaying with wrath. "So you're at those old tricks again, are you? Isn't it enough to be torturing me with your endurance that you must go and paint your twitching face on the air of poor Elphin's College for God knows how many generations? *Saw you?* I pray to God they *didn't* see you! Why can't you spend your time getting used to being dead, Owen ap Griffith Fychan, instead of trying to break the only merciful law in the universe?"

The Prince grasped the arms of his chair and leaned forward a little, looking up at the unwieldy form above him with a majestically secretive smile. "I've got another trick, too," he whispered hoarsely. "I've been practising it ever since" — he turned his hands against his ribs and forced his knuckles into his side while his words came in gasps— "ever since Davy went away. Come nearer, Broch, nearer! I want to tell you."

Broch-o'-Meifod knelt down, so that his great shoulders hid the whole perspective of the flowing of the Dee, while his bald head hid half the wooded slopes above it.

"Let's have the worst," he murmured grimly. "I suppose you're plotting to give that horrible phantom of yours some sort of monstrous longevity. You say you saw your son in that room of Elphin's. That's no proof; for you knew he was there. You must give me better proof than that, my Prince."

Owen shut his eyes and spoke very slowly. "I — saw — my — grandson."

The bald head came nearer him. "Tell me, Owen ap Griffith Fychan, what's the use of all this? You saw your son. You saw your grandson. It's like a rhyme my girls used to sing when they played hide-and-seek.

"Tysilio sat on Tysilio's throne: His son and his grandson were all alone: Cry spy and catch me before I'm home!"

"He wasn't — in his bed — he was — on Meredith's knee — and I saw — Clerk Rhisiart."

"My Prince, my Prince—"

The man’s voice was so troubled that Owen opened his eyes. Then very feebly he raised his fingers from his side and stretching out his arm drew his friend’s head towards him and kissed him on the forehead.

The giant scrambled to his feet with a groan and went back to his heap of straw.

“Before I die,” and Owen spoke more rapidly and firmly, now that the bald head was further off, “I shall take my soul and mix it with all this” — and he waved his hand towards the horizon— “so that every Welshman from Ruthin to Llan Collen and from Carrog to Lake Tegid shall feel me in his bones.”

“My Prince—” began the other, still in the same troubled tone.

And it gradually dawned on Glyn Dŵr that Broch-o’-Meifod was afraid for his sanity. This was more vexing to the old man’s mind than any attitude his friend could possibly have taken. Hurriedly he tried to reassure him. “I must make this clear,” he thought. “If once I make him understand me he’ll see what I’m going to do.”

“Listen, Broch,” he said. “If, by sinking into Glyndyfrdwy and Dyffryn Clwyd and into all the land of Edeyrnion, I increase rather than lessen my power, why shouldn’t the whole race of Welshmen increase its power by sinking inwards, rather than by winning external victories?”

“It’s power, my Prince? Do you say it’s *power?”*

“It’s life, it’s life, Broch! Why shouldn’t we be the one single race — along with the Jews, of course! — who win by losing? Hopkin prophesied that a Welshman would be crowned King in London; and you remember Crach’s prediction about the Tudors of Môn? Well, my friend! Listen to your old Owen prophesying to a different tune.”

He leaned forward as he spoke, bolt upright against the sun-rays, and Broch was impressed once more, as he had been several times of late, by the fact that the old man’s sea-green eyes hardly blinked at all as they faced the sun. They even seemed in his excitement to gain more colour and more depth from the blaze they encountered, as if there existed between those eyes and that great furnace of light some fabulous reciprocity!

“Never mind,” he went on, “whether I sent my soul to the College last night or not. That’s not important. That’s nothing! What I’m doing now, and doing all the while, even when the pain’s at its worst, is what all Welshmen can do who’ve got the least drop of what your Morg calls the ancient people’s blood in their veins; sink, that’s to say, into the ‘Secret Passage’ of our race.” He paused, and fumbling among the folds of the deerskin, between his wasted flanks and the back of his chair, he lugged out a leather-bound parchment book.

“I’ve found several passages here,” he announced; and his tone was so youthful that Broch suppressed the groan of weariness with which as a rule he listened to his chief’s obscure renderings of yet more obscure rhymes, “that bear out exactly what I mean. No! you needn’t make that face! I’m only going to read you what Taliesin says happens to us Welshmen when we sink down into our spirit, down below all these wars. Listen now; and if you don’t like the word ‘God,’ you old Death-worshipper, you can substitute Annwn. When I read ‘God’ I read ‘Life’ not ‘Death,’ as you’re sick of my telling you! But I’m talking of our people now, not only of you and me! One minute — here it is — just this, Broch darling, and then I’ll stop. He’s talking of our people — three, five, *seven* centuries hence.”

He held up the book against the light, so that all Broch could see of his head was the gold band around it, a band that at that moment shone as bright as the great Bard’s own “shining brow”. There certainly had been little need to warn the husband of Morg ferch Lug that the word “God” was to be taken in some special sense. If the strange words held any piety at all it was clearly a piety that might have come up from the bottom of the Atlantic!

A weleist darogan dofydd?
Hast thou seen the prophecy of the Lord?
Buddyant uffern Ef dillyngwys.
Hell's prey He hath set free.
Y thwryf kaethnawt Ef kynnullwysl
Its captive host He hath gathered together!

The final words of this singular chant, especially the words *uffern* and *kaethnawt,* "hell" and "captive," the old man intoned as if they were part of some liturgy of the lost Atlantis.

Broch was sulky with him for dragging in that book just then. He was sulky with him for raising his voice and getting excited. "He could spit blood at any second!" Broch thought. But those words of Taliesin seemed to shake off, as Glyn Dŵr hurled them over Edeyrnion, everything that was weak and hopeless. They seemed to Broch just then to take to themselves quadruple wings and to become like flying fortresses of eternal escape, wind-blown bastions of the sort of refuge suggested by the old Brythonic words, *Mygedorth* and *Pedryollt,* that a travelling scholar once told him had been stolen from the ancient people.

The Prince himself seemed to be staring after the words he'd uttered, as if they'd been emanations from the peaks of Snowdon or had come up the salt estuary out of the open sea, and were returning whence they came. But he had replaced the book in the folds of the deer-skin and was speaking quite gently and reasonably now.

"Don't misunderstand me, Broch. I know how right our old Abbot was when he cursed us as a race for our tipsiness and amorousness. Le Borgne was astonished when he found we'd more bastards in Gwynedd and Powys than in all the Provinces of the Seine! But I'm not talking about our vices or our virtues. I'm talking about our souls. And I tell you this, old death-lover; our souls from the beginning have been" — here he was taken with a spasm of pain so acute that it distorted his face and caused him to jerk and twist in his chair, as if he'd been a great bearded fish that some devil-fisherman had hooked with a double barb; but pressing the links of Iolo's mail-shirt against his side with one hand, with the other he waved back his friend— "have been," and his voice seemed to shake the pain from it as Lleu-Llaw-Gyffes shook the rotting flesh from his eagle-bones, "have been able to escape into Annwn, into — into the" — his voice seemed shot like a quivering bolt from his jerking body; and Broch felt it whizz past his bald skull, as if it had been aimed straight at the sun— "into the world *outside the world!"*

The spasm subsiding, he sank back gasping, both arms hanging down on each side of his chair, like useless oars in a tide too strong for them, but he had something else he was trying to say, and Broch restrained himself from touching him. "Tell Morg," he murmured, "that I've got the — the blood — of the ancient people — in my veins — the people we conquered, as the Saxons did us, and the Normans them. It's the voice, tell her, of the ancient people that spoke through me just now — when I said — not by the sword but by the — by the—" But a horrible paroxysm of coughing seized him then, and staggering to his feet he clutched his friend's arm, while with bowed head and with blood and phlegm pouring from his mouth, he set himself to endure, while thought, feeling, identity were momently lost in the down-sucking drag and drain of unconscious matter.

But it was over at last; and the first thing the Prince did when he recovered was to inform his friend that he was worried by the fate of Griffith Llwyd, his ancient bard. "You heard what that man said, Broch?

That he's at the Tassel, and they're using him for money? Oh Broch, Broch! And I can do nothing — and he the bard of my house! He's a bad poet, I know, a tricky modern poet; but he's like a baby in any rogue's hands and as proud as the devil! Oh, Broch, to think of him at the Tassel; and so old — old and helpless!"

The giant muttered something about going down there himself one night; but he could see from the tears on his master's cheeks that he took such talk as of no value.

But what a beautiful November day! And how peaceful the two of them could have been if Owen's mania for this accurst ceremony hadn't spoilt it. Broch himself detested all ceremonies; and yet it was his destiny under the Prince's peevish instruction to do just the very things for which nature and inclination had most unfitted him.

It had especially pleased Glyn Dŵr that the prehistoric mound-dwellers' altar possessed no hollow place for blood; but it made the tips of Broch's great fingers tickle with nervous tension when it became his destiny to prop up and balance beneath those serpent-coils an appropriate selection of inflammable sticks and twigs. When their preparations were complete, and they had eaten their second meal, and had piled up such a fire that it became necessary to remove their heap of straw to a safer distance, the Prince fell, as was always happening in a moment of rest, into a heart-rending coughing-fit.

So violent was it that when it was over he lay back in his chair so ghastly-white and motionless that his friend was driven to put his hand against Iolo's mail shirt. This gesture, however, so amused, so touched, so roused the Prince that, though his lips under his moustache scarcely moved, Broch could detect by the lines about his eyes that he was smiling.

"I must have a mighty heart," he whispered, without opening his eyes, "if you can — feel it through an iron shirt."

Broch begged him to let him take off this hidden armour once and for all, and his irritable refusal struck the Meifod giant as the most crazy of all his inconsistencies. "Who does he think's going to stab him in this precious ceremony of his? Lord Talbot? Clerk Rhisiart? Father Sulien?"

But after this period of prostration the Prince's irrepressible life-force began pouring into him again and he sat up in his chair. "Give me my mirror, Broch. Give me my comb."

The giant obeyed him; but the weight of the polished metal, and the effort it required to use the comb, were beyond his strength; and his friend was forced in his blundering fashion — and it was the first time they had come to this — to attempt it for him; with the result that there were bitter tears in the Prince's eyes, and both objects were flung away.

"Sit down, for God's sake, man; and let me talk to you! If this goes on you'll have to do more than curl my beard!"

With the patient bald head obediently bent forward, like a great fossilized shell, Glyn Dŵr now began a series of detailed instructions. He told his friend he wished his body to be taken to Mynydd-y-Gaer and there burnt. "If you can't get a blaze hot enough to do it in twelve hours, Broch, there'll be the spine and the shanks and the skull and hands left; but the flesh'll be off them. They'll be just bones. And I want you to break these in pieces with your axe, and strew them — little pieces mind! — round the walls of the Gaer. But I want you to keep back a handful, say half-a-dozen bits; and of bone, remember, not cinders. Have you caught the drift of what I'm saying?"

Broch made a sound that resembled the noise of his wife's millwheel. "Drift, eh? It'll be you who'll be drifting off in smoke, Owen ap Griffith

Fychan, while I'm doing what you're telling me! But go on, for Christ's sake! This is just what I was wanting to know."

Owen tried to localize in his mind the mischief that was causing the Fisher-King's hook to tug at his vitals. He felt if only he could communicate to what Gam used to call his "spirits" exactly where the trouble lay, these powers could deal with it. But he had to content himself with feeling his soul to be a twisting and curling feather, lying on the lid of a cauldron of pain.

While he spoke to Broch the feather rose and fluttered a little above them both. "I'd like you to take a bone or two — just a few, Broch! — and go down to Corwen where there's that cross in the centre of the Druid mill-stone. Go on some dark night, Broch. Give yourself plenty of time. But take a spade with you and a mattock. Dig a hole — no bigger than a rabbit's — under the stone. Dig till you're below the centre of the stone and below the pillar of the cross; and there leave what you've got in your hand! Spit on them first, Broch old friend. They'll rest the better for that. And then back with the earth-mould and stamp it down! Afterwards will come the hardest part of it — and perhaps you'd better get little Elphin to help. For I want you to put grass-sods where you've disturbed the earth; so that only you, or only you and that boy-priest, will know there are bones under the stone.

"Trust nobody, Broch — do you understand? — who isn't entire Welsh! What happens to my flesh'll be the secret of Mynydd-y-Gaer; what happens to my bones'll be the secret of Broch-o'-Meifod; what happens to my soul" — and a light came into the old man's glaucous eyes that was boyish in its roguery— "we'll leave to the little priest of the College; but what happens to my spirit will be the secret of all entire Welshmen to the end of the—" Here he was taken with a spasm of pain of a new kind; of a kind that made it necessary for him to slide down from his chair upon the ground; and as he twisted there, like a king-salmon with a spear through him, he got his foot-stool under his belly; and this, for some reason, mightily eased him. In fact it eased him so much that he commanded his friend to let him lie; and Broch noted that though at first he scrabbled in the ground with his fingers, a second later, after he'd got the stool under him, he lay without a movement.

"That Cross in Corwen," Broch heard him mutter, in a voice to which the nearness of the earth to his mouth gave a low rumbling tone, like the sound of a bumble-bee in a broken ram's horn, "has the same snake's skin ornament as our mound-dwellers' altar — a mat of flattened out snake-skins it is, woven like a basket. The sort of mat it is that the Berbers in Marakesh sit cross-legged on, and are transported whither they will!

"Iolo — used to say — can you hear me — Broch? — that it was 'Mercian' — and not Welsh at all — but — but what do *you* — think, Broch?"

He was silent after that; and the bald-headed giant, who was now on his hands and knees by his side, was fain to place his head against his head to catch the sound of his breathing.

"Mercian!" the giant groaned in his heart, "Mercian, Persian, Tertian! O these life-lovers, these life-lovers!" Then after a pause Broch scrambled to his feet. "He's asleep," he said to himself. "He's worn-out with his pain and his fancies."

But glancing at the long diminishing perspective of the road that led towards Corwen he perceived afar off three men and a child approaching. "I'll have to rouse him," he said to himself. "He'll be furious else. Oh these ceremonies, these ceremonies!"

But such was the Prince's supernatural vitality that even this brief surcease of pain gave him renewed spirit.

“Come, Broch,” he cried unexpectedly, after the giant had carried his chair up the couple of stone steps in front of the altar, “let’s cross our water, as Tudor and I used to do, when we vowed to be friends forever.”

Broch-o’-Meifod had no scruple about obeying him; and the two elderly chieftains proceeded, solemnly and deliberately, to invoke the friends of their childhood in the manner suggested.

“How Morg would laugh!” thought Broch-o’-Meifod; and he recalled innumerable cases in their life together when he and his water-sprite wife had shocked their “pure Brython” neighbours by their aboriginal unfastidiousness. “They don’t understand,” he said to himself, as he resettled Owen in his chair — and his “they” applied to the Brythons and the Goidels as much as to the Normans and the Saxons— “what we ancient people know right well, that it’s only by accepting the maggots and the rats and the gob and the spue” — he was talking to himself in Welsh now— “and all the other ‘after-births’ of Nature that this ‘spirit’ they talk about can float clear away.”

“Are they near, Broch? Go and look once more! Tell me when they’ve got to the wooden bridge.”

Broch came to announce that they were even then crossing the wooden bridge.

“Listen, my friend!”

“I am listening, my Prince.”

“Do’ee know what I’ll do? I’ll make Rhisiart throw his King’s pardon into the fire.”

Broch lost his temper completely at this; and the outburst that followed had behind it all the suppressed irritation of their long clash of opposite temperaments. The giant never forgot how the Prince opened his sea-green eyes; opened them till they were, as children say, “wide as saucers,” under these unexpected reproaches.

And well might the old man open his eyes, for Broch at that moment was a disturbing sight. In the course of his incoherent outpouring, the bald head kept wagging from side to side and the enormous body kept swaying backwards and forwards; both body and head being composed, as Owen gazed up at them in the sunshine, of dazzling surfaces and dusky shadows.

Broch was trying to explain to the incorrigible old rebel that this whole business of burning the King’s pardon on the mound-dwellers’ altar was a ridiculous hocus-pocus.

“All this race-ritual’s just child’s play!” he shouted. “Life goes on being swallowed up in death; and death goes on spawning new life; and the reality is hidden by their struggle. What you’ve done all your days is to fight death; and the more you fight death the stronger death grows! You’ll make Clerk Rhisiart skip, you will! You’ll make the King’s messenger stare! You’ll turn young Elphin from priest to herald again, you will! You’ll make little Mortimer clap his hands! You’ll love, you’ll hate, you’ll laugh, you’ll cry, you’ll make Gam your slave and Rhisiart drink your blood! I — I — It’s — it’s — it’s more of life and love *than I can bear*! I—” and then, without a pause, and still muttering something that Owen couldn’t catch by reason of a noise that reached him like the sobbing of a wounded Behemoth, Broch collapsed towards him, whether to strike him or to embrace him the Prince never knew, for at that moment there resounded a familiar voice from the ruined courtyard outside, the voice of a priest and yet the voice of a herald.

Both the men became their natural selves in the beat of a pulse. Morg ferch Lug would certainly have clapped her hands at the sight and cried aloud: “The ancient people! The ancient people!” For thus, and in that manner and no otherwise, would the aboriginals of Mynydd-y-Gaer have dropped their quarrels and "touched wood" at the approach of the invader with "the pitiless bronze".

Experienced courtiers as they both were, Father Sulien and Judge Rhisiart wouldn't allow either the little Mortimer or Lord Talbot to advance a step — though they must all have heard the giant's incoherences — until Meredith ap Owen's hunting-horn had been, duly sounded.

"Get the torches lighted! Get your axe handy, in case the Sais — get the mead out and the flagon — the stirrup-cup, Broch, the stirrup-cup, not the loving-cup!"

When the Prince had settled himself in his chair, which now stood upon the dais with its back to the altar, he glanced first over his left and then over his right shoulder to make sure that the torches were properly burning in their iron sconces.

"They'll think he's as sound as a bell," said Broch to himself, "but the pain's got him again. He's making faces."

"The most worthy and worshipful Knight Gilbert, Lord Talbot of Goodrich!" Father Sulien was now announcing; for the temptation to unfrock himself in the presence of that prehistoric altar and that Arthur-like figure was too much for him.

The little Rhisiart clung to the Judge's hand while the conqueror of Harlech — looking to Elphin at that second so like a Wyvern that it would have seemed quite natural if he'd carried the royal pardon in his mouth — made a brusque soldier's bow and paused in extreme discomfort.

Seasoned warrior as he was, and battered campaigner, he now most heartily cursed King Hal for sending him on this fool's errand. He'd seen too many Welsh patriots, too many French prisoners, too many ambassadors from Scotland, not to feel convinced, as soon as he set eyes on that forked beard and that weird altar, that he had landed himself in a ridiculously false position.

“The devil fly away with you all!” he cried in his heart; and he tried to catch Judge Rhisiart’s eye with a suggestion that it was desirable they should not offer the pardon.

But Meredith was too quick for him. Risking his father’s anger, he respectfully but boldly climbed upon the dais, advanced to the old Prince, and kneeling on one knee kissed his hand.

Owen was just then, though he concealed it from all but Broch, suffering abominable pain. His forces were so absorbed in simple endurance that there was scarce any magnetic quicksilver left over with which to force to a conclusion the startling anticlimax upon which he had set his heart. All he had strength to do was to enquire of his son, in a tone that had more courtesy than feeling in it, about the Lady Elliw.

Now it had happened that since the execution of her father, little Lu had been subject to many wild fancies; and one of her fancies was that Owen himself, and not the King at all, was responsible for Rhys Ddu’s death. Instantly aware therefore, though the pain he was enduring caused a curious-tasting foam to burst in minute bubbles between his lips, that he had blundered in some way and hurt Meredith’s feelings, the Prince laid his hand tenderly on his son’s wrist and pulled him towards him so that he could whisper in his ear.

He soon allowed him to rise erect after that; but they all noticed that the two of them never again completely lost hold of each other. They didn’t exchange another word, nor did so much as a look pass between them, but such was their electric affinity that Broch as he observed them felt as if all that was needed to give them the power of thinking in common was that they should be, or at least their clothes should be, in some kind of physical contact.

Owen's pain lessened now; and though this lessening was accompanied by a new interior sensation that made the old man say to himself, "I know what that means. That means I'm done for," the relief to him was incredible. So intense was it that he began to feel happier than he had felt for months. It was as if his body, having received its journey-money from death, had made a present of it to his mind. He felt a sudden glow of affection towards this whole little group of people; especially towards the two Rhisiarts, whom he beckoned to come nearer.

Catharine's child, however, seemed curiously unwilling to release the Judge's hand. There was something about that pair of torches throwing weird shadows upon those serpentine coils — for Broch had by this time shut out almost all the light of day — that troubled the boy's mind; and he felt, without knowing why, the unnatural vibration of his grandfather's mood. The serpent-coils were very roughly carved; but one of the effects of this blend of torchlight with faint daylight was to give them a resemblance to the curves of a feminine body.

With the instinct of courtier rather than priest, Father Sulien now approached their Wyvern-like guest, who kept looking round him in sullen uneasiness, and began thanking him for his chivalrous behaviour to Mistress Luned on the occasion of the taking of Harlech. Whether it was the curves of those prehistoric mouldings or whether some primitive matriarchal aura emanated from that bloodless altar, it now became the destiny of all of them to think of the women of their lives.

The younger Rhisiart thought of his mother. The Judge thought of Tegolin. Meredith thought of Elliw. And it wasn't long before the Prince himself, in his mood of unnatural elation, followed Father Sulien's lead and began thanking Lord Talbot with grave dignity for the consideration he had displayed towards the Arglwyddes.

"I believe," he said mischievously, yielding still further to the hypnotic influence that was affecting them all, "that this old-fashioned welcome we're giving to the ambassador from London would have been more acceptable to him if our beautiful cousin, Mistress Lowri from Dinas Bran, had been able to be present. It is," he went on, and his voice began to assume such an unusual tone that Broch, who all this while had been idly lighting the twigs of furze-stalks and extinguishing them as soon as he'd lighted them, advanced a step or two towards him, "it is, I think, a recognized fact that our women of Wales have always — have always—"

He ceased abruptly; and there ensued a scene that not one of those present was able to forget. Supported on one side by Broch and on the other by Meredith, Owen rose slowly, painfully, menacingly, to his feet.

"It is, therefore," he gasped, "in the name of Arianrod ferch Don, in the name of Branwen ferch Llyr, in the name of — of — of—" Here his words became incoherent, like the falling of winged creatures, blind with blood; but some of those present thought they heard Catharine's name, others Tegolin's. All of them, save the little Rhisiart who had hidden his face in the Judge's furred sleeve, felt as they gazed at that uplifted white beard that they had suddenly come close to a crack in the visible; a crack through which the invisible was blowing an ice-cold blast on its phantom horn.

But Owen was now standing erect; and with outstretched arm was beckoning to Judge Rhisiart.

The Judge seemed to know what he meant; for gently disengaging himself from the little boy, who promptly clapped his hands to his face and began silently weeping, he moved across to Talbot, took from him the

King’s pardon, and with this in his hand gravely and deliberately ascended the steps.

But the Prince, supported by Meredith and Broch, made no sign that he had seen him, and acted now as if he were pushing away with that outstretched arm something different from the King’s pardon.

Meanwhile Judge Rhisiart paused quite naturally, as if he were certain of receiving further orders; while swinging from the parchment roll in his hand there swayed to and fro a massive seal. The tension in that low-roofed chamber of the ancient people grew almost intolerable. And it was suddenly accentuated by a curious convulsive jerk that Owen gave; a jerk that flung back his head so far that the forked white beard concealed his face.

At last, just as Rhisiart was saying to himself, “The blackness — the blackness,” and, after that, as if he’d been a youth again at the foot of Dinas Bran, “I want to suck out the poison,” there came a voice that reached them all.

To Father Sulien, who had laid his hand upon the shoulder of the little boy, it didn’t seem to come from the Prince at all, but to Talbot it did, and to Judge Rhisiart it certainly did.

But Glyn Dŵr still had his arm outstretched. “Prince of Powys — Prince of Gwynedd — Prince of Wales—” and then in a tone that made the boy stop crying and made even Lord Talbot cross himself, “Prince of Annwn!”

A deep silence followed and Father Sulien said to himself: “He was dead before he spoke. *A spirit spoke through him.* They’re holding up a dead weight now.”

If they were, Broch-o’-Meifod was powerful enough to do his part with one hand while with the other he deliberately removed one of the torches from its iron sconce and set light to the dry furze-stalks on the altar. These instantaneously burst into flame; and as the flames rose Judge Rhisiart was aware of an irresistible compulsion.

Lifting the hand that held the pardon high above his head, he flung it lightly, easily, and without effort into the heart of the fire.

“Where is my godfather, and Lord Talbot?” enquired the little Rhisiart of the priest, some ten minutes later, as they took the road to Corwen.

“God knows,” was Father Sulien’s answer. “God have mercy on us all, and forgive our sins — our most grievous sins.”

The gentlemen in question who had mysteriously hung back, so as to separate themselves from the child and his guardian, were now settling together a nice point of honour; and settling it in a manner that would have seemed strangely fantastic to the two Welshmen they’d left with the dead Prince on the top of Mynydd-y-Gaer.

Rhisiart was, as we know, only half a Welshman, and what Welsh blood he had was less mixed than his princely cousin’s. It was, therefore, with complete understanding that he recognized his fellow-ambassador’s duty to exact from his person at the point of some equal weapon the blood-debt he owed to their royal master. He was too proud to plead — as he might well have done — that the force which compelled him to burn King Henry’s seal had been a supernatural one — but all the same his was the lighter heart of the two when he faced his scrupulous opponent in an already darkening *llannerch* or clearing, among the gorse bushes.

Talbot gave him the choice of the pair of daggers he always wore and which, when meticulously measured, proved of the same length; and the fact that his challenge was understood and accepted banished in a moment from the great captain’s mind all personal feeling.

The matter could only sink into oblivion, however, after the insult to their sovereign had been atoned for in at least a few drops of blood, and he felt a glow of chivalrous admiration as well as satisfaction when the Judge hung his vair-lined mantle upon a gorse-bush.

But his complacency turned to surprise, and his surprise to gravity, when he found that the river-mist which accentuated the November twilight instead of bewildering his antagonist seemed to endow him with the eye of a lynx.

Though one of the best soldiers of his age as a strategist and commander, Lord Talbot was not only an elderly man but somewhat stiff of his joints.

Had the contest been with swords, our friend the Judge, whose life had been for the last ten years entirely pacific, would have been at the other's mercy; but a dagger is, of all weapons, as even women are aware, the least professional and certainly the least exacting of any special technical skill.

Thus, though Rhisiart's muscles had grown slack from want of exercise, the two men were on fairly equal terms; and for several moments, as they circled round each other and dodged and parried and shuffled this way and that in the growing dusk, there was no sign that any furred or feathered identity in the vicinity felt that instinctive premonition which we may assume most creatures of the earth feel when some tragic shedding of blood is imminent.

Something, however, about his cousin's death had revived in the Judge's nature that old romantic spirit that had driven him to leave Oxford; and the fact that this lean, wizened, war-battered veteran, whose artful attacks and well-counterfeited retreats showed a long experience of sword-play, wasn't only far less sharp-sighted than himself but was clearly playing with him and trying to draw his blood in some un-vital spot threw him into that vein of exultant alertness that he had displayed when he saved Owen from Gam's knife.

"I'll teach you to play with me!" he thought; and taking advantage of a yet darker cloud of mist rising from the river he made use, in one swift, well-timed rush, of his more flexible limbs, closed with the man, and pierced his dagger-hand with a neat downward stroke.

That was the end of it; and it was to the tune of what would have struck Broch-o'-Meifod as the silliest *fol-de-rol* of fantastical courtesy that the two gentlemen embraced each other and the rebellious lawyer's silken handkerchief was produced to staunch the flow of loyal blood.

"What in God's name, man," enquired Lord Talbot as, the matter of the pardon thus chivalrously if not amicably settled, they took the road to the forester's house where they'd left their horses, "did you cry out as you leapt at me like that?"

Our friend's cheeks flushed hot in the chilly darkness; for well he recalled the scandalous lapse from all the rules of the "Court of Love" of which he'd been guilty. In his excitement he had outrageously and harshly mixed together the musical syllables of Catharine's and Tegolin's names!

But not for nothing was he the son of the wittiest romancer in Hereford; and it was entirely in the spirit of Lady Montfoison that he gravely invented a paramour in Eastcheap whose name was as unusual as her appearance was bewitching.

Both the men fell silent after that; the indiscriminate charms of Dame "Catholin" having whirled their thoughts away, down secret passages as strange and as well-concealed as any in Powys Fadog.

Judge Rhisiart's mind went back to the first time he trod this road between Glyndyfrdwy and the Church of St. Collen. The figure of Tegolin returned to him as she looked when mounted on Griffin with Mad Huw by her side. Again and again he slipped his fingers under his fur robe, as if only by the actual feel of her letter could he realize that ere a week was over they would be together again!

But the thoughts of even the most honourable of lovers are wayward and shameless; for, as he went along in peaceful amity with the man who had captured Harlech, the image of Catharine as he had first seen her in that robe of glittering *pali* took the place of the pitiful prisoner in the Tower and the care-worn matron in that sad lodging on Ludgate Hill.

How could he have mixed up the names of the two loves of his life in that victory-cry with which he had, for all he knew, cut forever the fighting sinews of the best swordhand in England?

Women were so separate from each other, dead or alive! He had loved two of them and lost them both. But one was found again. And now that he was on his way to her, why should his mind keep reverting to the other?

"Would it be like this," he thought, "if they weren't Welsh? Why did he call out to those great dead ones at the last? But mine were his, and his were mine — Catharine and Tegolin, Tegolin and Catharine — and that day I drank his blood, and today I've drawn his enemy's."

That same enemy began indeed to feel a little uneasy just then as to the amount of blood he had drawn, for as he crooked the tips of his fingers so as to touch the Judge's handkerchief he found that the blood had already soaked through. He was puzzled by the abstracted silence which had fallen upon his late adversary. All he could make out of Rhisiart's profile in the darkness was his hooked nose; but as he glanced at the grizzled blur that represented his eyebrows and at the second blur that represented his moustache he received the impression that the great lawyer was walking with his eyes shut and mumbling to himself as he walked.

The truth was that our friend was wrestling with a problem for the solution of which neither Nature nor Providence had provided him with any clue. There was something, he pondered, about the mysterious beauty of a certain smile, of which all Welsh women seemed to have the secret, that suggested a common origin. Could it be that that was why Owen, while he thought of. Catharine and Tegolin, cried out the names of Branwen and Arianrod? Were the women of Wales, in their closer affinity with the original "Mothers," possessed of some love-charm, especially revealed in their smiling, that the younger races of the world had lost?

Both the wayfarers were relieved when at the village of Carrog they were able to mount their horses; but Talbot's attendants had been directed to await them at the Tassel, and with his hurt hand the Englishman had to ride with caution.

By the time they approached the spot where, sixteen years ago, Rhisiart and Tegolin and Mad Huw had enjoyed their meal of Midsummer cakes, the wind had risen behind them, and the air had grown chill with a vague prescience of snow.

Rhisiart noticed that his companion had begun to sway wearily and painfully in his saddle, once or twice raising his wounded hand to his lips and perceptibly shivering as the chilly gusts whistled about them and whirled the dead leaves round their horses' hooves.

So warm was his own blood and so sweet to him was the thought that his face was already set towards Worcester that when Talbot confessed that the blood had soaked through the handkerchief and was dripping from his hand, and that he felt a whoreson chill in his bones, he stealthily changed the hiding-place of Tegolin's letter, and with that to warm his own blood, snatched off his fur robe and wrapping it round the other's shoulders kept their horses neck to neck, while with his free hand he steadied the swaying form of his friend.

Thus they went along; Rhisiart repeating a few “Mary, Josephs” and a few “Hail Marys”, but concentrating his invocation upon the soul of his friend Walter, whom, combustible heretic though he was, he’d privately and unofficially canonized. But whether it was the Mother of God or the noble husband of that witch of Ruthin, our friend felt an imperative necessity to pray to *some* super-human power that night.

“Oh soul of Mad Huw!” was his final ejaculation, “for mercy’s sake, let’s get to the Tassel before he collapses!” But having relieved his feelings by these impulses of piety he fell to meditating upon his favourite topic. It was his turn now to feel the snowy wind, but in spite of his impatience to reach the Inn he suddenly felt inexpressibly happy. He was far too cold to analyse these feelings, nor in any case was the process of mental analysis one of his strong points; but he was just then seized with a new kind of exhilaration that had nothing to do with the sight of the Tassel’s lights ahead, nor with the letter in his pocket.

It may seem natural enough that when a Judge of the Realm feels a stir of pleasure in his vitals it should have to do with the idea of universal justice.

But Rhisiart was still — though indirectly — harping upon the pardon he had burnt. “The Law,” he assured himself, “is above all this race enmity and all these national contests. The Law is beyond all religions, all governments, all races, all peoples, all languages. The Law represents the human race; and is the voice of our common humanity. A time will come when it won’t be any more a case of Welshman against Englishman, or Frenchman against Spaniard, or Hungarian against Bohemian. It’ll be a case of universal Justice and the power and authority of universal Law!”

With this triumph of justice whirling through his brain and his wife’s love-letter pressing against his ribs Rhisiart’s spirits rose so high that they shook off, as if they were nothing, the various untoward events in his exciting life. The chief of these events was the fact that Griffin died by violence rather than of old age.

Thinking of Griffin, as with the familiar sound of the murmur of the Dee in his ears, they approached the Tassel, Judge Rhisiart was seized — it was probably the effect of the smell of the Tassel-stables — with a vivid sense of the presence of his old horse just behind him.

Risking the discomfiture of Lord Talbot he swung round, mechanically extending his free hand. He touched no warm piebald back; but, for all that, Griffin was there, and not only Griffin. Clear before him under the northern constellations rose as of old, magical and majestic the towers of Dinas Bran; and he couldn't help muttering a sort of prayer for that tormented spirit still enclosed in its walls who had fed with such deadly sweetness the "insect" within him.

He thought of Griffin again that night as he went round with a lantern to the Tassel stables to make sure that their horses would be fit for the morrow's journey. They were to ride together as far as Hereford; and Rhisiart had the mischievous intention of leaving the famous soldier under Lady Montfoison's care, secretly hoping that the man's nationwide renown as the conqueror of Harlech would so fascinate my lady that Monsieur's nose — if nothing more — would be put out of joint.

What with warm cordials and home-made ointments Lord Talbot's spirits soon returned to him that night; and indeed it wasn't long before the gallant soldier, looking anything but heraldic as the avaricious landlord plied him with expensive liquor, was all for exchanging bawdy ditties with anything that could breathe, from the great Tassel sow to the old blind falcon.

Rhisiart, however, in his black fireside suit and buck-skin slippers, was in no vein for such frivolities. He was in a curious mood that night, a mood in which the romantic feelings of youth seemed to blend with the fantastic intimations of old age. All the wine he drank turned to tender retrospect and all the mead to vague reverie.

But in the end he became restless; and the figure of the Prince, with his outstretched hand rejecting the pardon, and his voice, if it were his voice, calling to him from another world, began to trouble his mind.

In his lordly tipsiness Talbot took no more notice of the old landlord of the Tassel than if he'd been an ale-drawer at an Eastcheap tavern but the Judge couldn't help recalling Master Sparrow's indictment of this smug rogue, when, sixteen years ago, he and the Abbot forded the Dee.

The landlord's dame was just such another, with her pinched mouth and snatching eye; and remembering how these people had catered for Owen's enemies in those old days it sickened him that such rats should be prospering still when the lion lay dead.

His disgust quickened to wrath before midnight came. Talbot showed no inclination to go to bed; nor, as long as these wretches laughed at his drunken tales, did he seem to care who or what they were. When he became too fuddled to proceed with his own follies, however, what must they do but use another device to keep him drinking.

The Judge fancied he caught them muttering a name familiar to him, and — *nom de Dieu*! — if they weren't hauling into the room a great antique harp, and along with it, borne in a chair by two servingmen, none other than a ghastly simulacrum of his old acquaintance, Griffith Llwyd ap Dafydd ab Einion, whose voice he had last heard fourteen years before on the night of the comet.

If the old Bard had looked to him on that occasion like a withered grasshopper, he struck him now as something even less human. What was visible of his face was of the colour of ivory; but so preposterously had they allowed his hair to grow that when he was first carried in, and placed in the centre of the room, our friend was uncertain which was the front and which was the back of that pinkish skull covered with silky locks.

Subsequent enquiries revealed the fact that these miserly wretches had taken advantage of the immense age and failing intelligence of Owen's Bard to enrich themselves at his expense while pretending to offer him a charitable asylum.

That they would eventually have to bury him at their own charges didn't deter them. Old men had many infirmities; and when no device — and they spared few — could make him perform, there would be no necessity for further outlay.

The woman did have a few instinctive qualms that night about the attitude which the restless gentleman in black might take; but the man scoffed at her fears. Her feminine foresight proved, however, to be completely justified; for when their visitors left they not only carried away the ancient harpist but left behind a disturbing document; a document which was declared, though nobody at the Tassel could read it, to be a Summons to appear in the Shrewsbury court in the following spring, to answer a charge of so dark a character that apparently it could be expressed only in the Latin tongue.

But if the Judge suffered while he watched the soul of this lamentable cadaver being summoned by repulsive threats and vulgar entreaties to return to earth from its happy euthanasia, when at last with pains like the pains of a frozen creature brought back to life old Griffith Llwyd lifted up his croaking voice and plucked at the strings, the sight became intolerable.

He left the chamber while the old man was still playing, and ascended the stairs to his bedroom. Here, walking impatiently to the window, he could still hear from the floor below the sound of the harp-playing and even the old cracked voice accompanying it; both harp and voice, though all the Tassel was listening with a silent unspoken dread, became, when he reached the window and leaned out of it in the starlit night, something more than the evocation of a pantaloon-Samson, making sport for the enemies of his Lord. Those broken harp-notes and that old cracked voice became indeed a true death-dirge, a real *marwnad,* for a sovereign prince of the Cymru.

For there in the northern sky, beyond St. Collen and Glyndyfrdwy and Carrog, where he knew Mynydd-y-Gaer must be, there was a red light in the sky; and Rhisiart knew that this red light came from Glyn Dŵr's funeral-pyre.

And as he gazed at this light in the sky and listened to those pitiful notes he realized how he had loved what was dissolving in that red light. Faint was the light in the sky, but fainter still were the tones — like sounds from the other side of Lethe — of the old man's playing.

And very slowly a portion of Judge Rhisiart's consciousness that was neither his love nor his intelligence began to respond to that faint glow and those feeble sounds. Owen's body was dust; but a light came out of that dust. The tormented wraith of the old Bard made those strings weep; but the weeping was not the weeping of despair.

Rhisiart leant out of the window, staring at the glow in the sky while the harp-tones sank to a dull repetition, the heavy breathing of a dying man, whose consciousness, like the fin of a fish in shallow water, is already in another.

Why did Owen call himself Prince of Annwn? And Rhisiart suddenly thought of Modry, and how she would talk sometimes of what she called "the harrowing of Annwn" by King Arthur. While Owen lived, there had always been something about him that for a narrow legal skull was hard to understand; but this dull thrumming of the strings and this fading glow in the sky were like a simple childish hand copying the *Commentary* of some planetary Pascentius.

And he felt that no success or prosperity, no crashing disaster or devastating ruin, would henceforth ever make him forget he was a Welshman or that he knew with Welsh knowledge that the things which are seen are unessential compared with the things that are unseen. And he put it to himself, quaintly and characteristically in his secret colloquy with that red glow and those notes' dying-fall, that he was drawing up a new "Tripartite Indenture" between his soul and the soul of his master! And indeed for the rest of his days it was remarked of Judge Rhisiart, by foes as well as by friends, that it was to the overtones and undertones in a human controversy, to the pitiful prejudices which qualify and complicate a clash of opposed interests, rather than to the more obvious causes of quarrel that as an interpreter of the law he gave the most patient and most penetrating consideration.

It was not till the grey dawn, cold and sad, and full of the weariness of the outer spaces, began to fall upon Mynydd-y-Gaer that Meredith bade farewell to Broch and proceeded to descend the bracken-covered slopes that led to the forester's house in Carrog.

The giant had assured him that he could follow without assistance on the ensuing night all the Prince's instructions about the "handful of bones" to be buried beneath that strangely-shaped pillar, by some called a cross, and certainly bearing a Cross on its side, that rose from the centre of the Druid stone in the churchyard of Corwen.

Meredith had left his horse, as had the others, at the forester's house, and he was impatient to be gone. He had indeed a difficult quest in view — nothing less than an attempt to persuade a pro-English cousin of Rhys Ddu's, to whom the Tywyn estates had fallen, to hand over to Elliw and himself at a substantial price — for the man never came near the place — the ancient dwelling and its immediate surroundings.

Whether he could persuade little Lu to leave the vicinity of that ghastly spike on London Bridge which still supported a human skull, he doubted; but he played with the hope, since he had himself received the King's pardon, of obtaining permission to convey that sacred relic to its old Cardigan home.

Troubled were his thoughts as he descended that long dark slope in the grey dawn. Should he, or should he not, visit for the last time the blackened ruins of Glyndyfrdwy? Should he, or should he not, put his ear to that great stone placed by his father's grandfather at the entrance to their family-mound? Probably it was overgrown now with grass and ferns. Perhaps the very site of it was obscure, if not lost forever. Aye! but how well he remembered little Catharine stealing down that long corridor, past the Saracen's chamber, to listen to those strange sounds! Did anyone ever go there now to listen? Did the spirits of the dead themselves die as the world rolled on? No! he would let it go. He would ride due south; first along Lake Tegid, then over the mountains — straight to the Forests of Tywyn.

It was very dark still beneath his feet. He had to move cautiously because of thorn-stumps and furze-stalks and rabbit holes. But when he lifted his head, there was the eastern sky beyond Dinas Bran growing already golden! He couldn't distinguish the castle itself yet. But it had been always like that. Rising as it did at the valley's entrance, that ramparted hill-top ought to have been seen from many a hill above Corwen. But it rarely was! Indeed he himself had seen it only once from here. And yet it was there all the time. But the puzzle was to disentangle it from the Eglwyseg Rocks that rose behind it. Bran the Blessed! How characteristic of that *Deus*

Semi-Mortuus that his dwelling should be visible and yet invisible — a true open secret of "the Glen of the Divine Water"!

Aye! How many human feet had come down this hill since the days when the people of Mynydd-y-Gaer waited for that golden light! All gone — gone as his father was gone. What a man Broch-o'-Meifod was! None but he could have done what he'd done all that interminable night. But that body in the fire. The fire licking it before devouring it. The fire — but he must get certain sights, visible through those red flames, out of his mind now. Life had to be lived. A person had to go on. To force yourself to enjoy endurance — that was the pleasure of life!

Yes, you must bear the day's burden, thankful when the day ended. Yes! certain things had to be forgotten, else the sad play couldn't proceed; but the dead needn't be forgotten — they couldn't be. They were in us! While we lived our half-life, they lived their half-life. Dark, dark, dark — the life of the living, the life of the dead! And how dark it was underfoot! But the East was transforming itself now into receding gulfs of golden light. It was as if some huge planetary portcullis had been lifted, and the base-court of the Infinite exposed to view! Night and dawn! So the cycle revolved, so the wheel turned.

Yes, he was beginning already to forget "certain things"! Oh blessed, oh divine forgetfulness! Forgetfulness was greater than that dawn in the sky, than this darkness under his feet. Into this darkness his father had gone, and was there still; so that henceforth when either of the two twilights covered the earth — for the night blotted out all but itself! — he would find him.

But comfort from that golden light was an illusion. He knew that well enough. And yet he *was* comforted! What was it about such golden transparency that drew the soul out of its body and carried it down such an infinite regression!

Illusion! Illusion! But why should man be so made that the mere sensation of the boundless in this particular depth of transparent gold should have such an effect? The effect was upon him now; and what did he know? Perhaps the effect was nearer the truth than the cause! His path now led him through a small group of fir trees; and he was just emerging into the open again when he suddenly stopped, awestruck and spell-bound.

Absolutely motionless — with its head lifted as it sniffed the dawn air — there stood before him on an isolated rock a magnificently-horned stag. Meredith was enough of his father's son to turn himself, in a single pulse-beat, into a figure of such immobility that the forward gestures of foot and hand with which he was advancing remained frozen in the very act. That horned head, dark against infinite golden space, stamped itself upon his mind forever. Years after, through all the Forests of Tywyn, his wife's people knew him, in their curious parlance, as *yr Arglwydd heb saeth,* "the arrowless Lord".

He waited there breathless, till, by its own volition, the creature bounded away; but, as he went on down the hill, there gathered in upon his interior vision, summoned by that stag, a random crowd of kindred impressions from the misty shores of memory. A broken grey wall with a solitary mountain ram nibbling the grass beneath it; the outstretched branch of a wayside pine upon which as a child walking with his father he had seen a great buzzard taking its rest, red-brown as the branch beneath its folded wings; the sight of the double peaks of Snowdon, Wyddfa, the nameless tomb, and Carnedd Llewelyn, as he caught them once, towering up, forty miles away, above a white sea of undulating fog; the leap of a salmon from the dark swirl of the Dee waters beneath Glyndyfrdwy; the wild "tu-whit' of the owl he used to hear from his nursery at Sycharth — all these things came now with a strange comfort upon him, and he thought: "Like us, like him, these creatures of our land rise up, live for their hour and pass away, but our land remains; and while our land remains, as the prophet said, our speech will remain, and with our speech our spirit.” Meredith moved more lightly after this, but it would have been impossible for him to explain to anybody — aye! not even to Elliw ferch Rhys — the real undertone of what he felt.

From his birth he had been without any illusions about human life. Neither the faith of the earlier times nor the Lollardry of his own modern world had ever affected him. When he was first seen as an infant Owen had cried aloud: “He’s a changeling! Look how *triste* his eyes are!” But though his eyes were *triste* it was Meredith’s *cynneddf,* or “peculiarity,” as both Rhisiart and Walter Brut had often observed, to possess the secret of smiling a strange secret smile that seemed to come from outside the whole visible world!

And now, as the sight of those majestic horns against the dawn brought back memory upon memory, he felt that each one of these images — else why in the confusion of his days had they remained? — was much more than an owl’s cry, a buzzard’s vigil, a salmon’s leap, a mountain’s summit above the mist. What were they, what did they have in them, that they could bring such comfort?

“It’s their impersonality,” he thought. “It’s the fact that they’re the visions of thousands of generations of men living in these hills. They’re mine; and they’re not mine! With a host of other, commoner, simpler things they’re the experiences of our people throughout the generations. Something stores them up; a spirit that is more than just ourselves; and each one of them brings more than we know to what that spirit stores up!”

But there came over him now a vision of Arthur’s ship *Prydwen* sailing between Hell and Heaven, and yet motionless in the depths of a single soul, its great dragon wings reflected in fathomless water!

"Oh, my father, my father! A greater Welshman has never been; but greater than your greatness—"

"What is that sad-faced man smiling for?" cried the oldest winged creature in Edeyrnion, the croaking raven of Llangar, to his aged mate, as they swooped down over Meredith's quickened steps.

"Nis gwn! I don't know! *Nis gwn!'* croaked the other; and as the pair rose on their heavy-flapping wings and sailed away eastward, mounting up in huge spiral circles higher and higher as they followed the river's flow, it seemed to the man watching them as if there were something in that vast broken landscape that had echoed that hollow answer in his ears as long as he could remember.

But the great birds soared on, heedless of the echoes; soared on till to Meredith's vision they were dots and specks in the remote distance. He knew not where they were flying. But in his thoughts they were flying over the rocky crest of the Berwyns; they were flying over the fallen roof-tree of Sycharth; they were flying towards the mounded turf and the scattered stones that were all that was left of Mathrafal.

THE END

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

EDWARD III HAD been King of England for half a century; and after his death Richard “the Redeless”, the son of the Black Prince, was crowned King. This was in 1377 when Richard was a boy of eleven. When he was sixteen he was married to Anne, sister to the King of Bohemia who was also the Holy Roman Emperor. Anne died childless in 1394, and two years later he married Isabella, daughter of Charles VI, King of France. “She was at the time,” says Wylie, “a girl of eight years old, but she was formally crowned at Westminster as Queen of England and lived with the King as his wife.” The King was beautiful, charming, wayward, moody; as unscrupulous as he was reckless. Being childless he declared his heir apparent to be Roger Mortimer, Earl of March, grandson of the third son of Edward III.

But in September 1399, exactly a year before the rising of Owen Glyn Dŵr in Wales — Henry Plantagenet, named Bolingbroke from his birthplace in Lincolnshire, with the consent of Parliament and the support of the Commons deposed “this second Absalom”, as the chronicler calls the ill-starred Richard, and usurped the throne under the title of Henry IV.

Henry was the son of John of Gaunt or Ghent, who was the fourth son of Edward III, so that the Mortimer claimant, descended from the third son, had the prior right; but at the critical juncture this Mortimer claim had fallen to a child. Shakespeare’s description of the forced abdication of the unhappy Richard follows the facts as closely as the laws of drama allow. Wylie quotes from the chronicler the actual words of Henry’s first speech from the throne:

“Syres, I thank yow, espirituelx and temporelx, and alle the estates of the lond, and I do yow to wyte that it ys nought my wil that no man think that by wey of conquest y wolde desherte any man of hys herritage, fraunchis, or other ryghtes that hem ought to have, ne put hym out of that he hath had in gode lawes of this reiaulme except hem that have ben ageyn the gode purpos and the commune profyte of the reiaulme.”

There is no doubt that Henry’s most formidable supporter in all this was Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, a personal friend of the Pope at Rome. And it was he who became the new King’s Chancellor.

The circumstances of Richard’s death, which probably took place in Pontefract Castle in 1400, remain obscure to this day. Our best historian of Henry’s reign, Mr. James Hamilton Wylie, thinks it probable that he was murdered and that the body subsequently displayed and buried in London was his body. According to one account Henry had him starved to death. According to another he died of voluntary starvation. In Shakespeare’s version, which came from a French source, where because of Richard’s young French Queen there was every reason for giving the fullest details of a revolting crime, a certain Sir Pierce of Exton was Henry’s tool.

All this happened sixteen years after John Wycliffe died in 1384. His writings and sermons were of so bold and revolutionary a character that they set the minds of thousands of people questioning not only the theological but the social and moral conventions of the time. To quote Wylie, “He opened a new well of authority in his translation of the Scriptures into English; and by his strictness of life, his courage, his subtlety in wit and argument, he set ablaze a fire in men’s minds that could not be put out.”

The word Lollard means “tares,” or dangerous weeds sown by the Devil; and “under the common name of ‘Lollards’ were gathered together every species of religious malcontent.”

Henry’s father, John of Gaunt, had been favorably disposed to the Lollards, but the extraordinary power the Archbishop exercised over Henry’s conscience turned the King into a religious persecutor.

On his accession to the throne Henry appointed Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, to the position of Constable of England. This office, after the Chancellorship now held by Archbishop Arundel, was far the most important in the kingdom.

The family of Percy was supreme in the North of England and the hereditary enemy of the kingdom of Scotland. It had received its lands from William the Conqueror; and Wylie describes the Earl — and the description includes his son, Henry Hotspur — in these words:

“In his own country his will was supreme. He lived apart from English life, keeping court at Bamborough, Warkworth, Newcastle, and Berwick; a border robber, holding his lands by his sword; rough and unlettered himself, he loved the flatteries of his own bards and rhymers; a bitter hater or a steady friend, generous and faithless, merciless and brave, a loyal Englishman, not from love to England, but from hatred to the Scot.”

The safest authority on the “documented” events of Owen Glyn Dŵr’s life is Sir John E. Lloyd, the historian of Wales. He speaks of Owen as a student of law at Westminster at the end of the reign of Edward III; and later as a knight-at-arms in the Irish and Scotch wars of Richard II. He was a middle-aged man between forty and fifty in 1400; and it seems clear that the immediate cause of his taking up arms was a quarrel with Reginald Grey, Lord of Ruthin. His friend, the poet Iolo Goch, has described in detail the quiet patriarchal life which he led in his Sycharth domain. His wife, Sir John Lloyd tells us, was the daughter of Sir David Hanmer, one of the most distinguished Welshmen of the day; who in 1383 was appointed a Judge in the Court of King’s Bench. The Hanmer family itself was of English origin, but had long been settled on the border and had intermarried with the Welsh. Sir John Lloyd seems to think it doubtful that Glyn Dŵr would have raised the standard of Welsh independence if he had not been so unfairly and unjustly treated in his fierce personal quarrel; but on the final page of his careful biography we come upon the following words, which may be taken as indicating the position Glyn Dŵr holds, not only in the popular legends of Wales, but in the mind of a trained and judicious modern historian.

“He stands alone among the great figures in Welsh history in that no bard attempted to sing his elegy. This we must attribute, not merely to the mystery which shrouded his end, but also to the belief that he had but disappeared, and would rise again in his wrath in the hour of his country’s sorest need.”

In considering, however, the full scope of Owen’s background — for as Shakespeare reminds us he was one of the most cultivated figures of his age — it is necessary to give a brief glance at the general condition of Europe and the western world at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The period that formed the immediate background to the dramatic events related in this tale — 1400 to 1416 — saw the beginning of one of the most momentous and startling epochs of transition that the world has known: the transition from the more or less federated Christendom of the Middle Ages to the turbulent evolution of our modern sovereign states.

The fifteenth century, of which our story covers a little more than the first decade, witnessed the gradual rise of that individualistic spirit of commerce which did so much more than the religious Crusades of an earlier epoch to bring the far-flung continents of the world into relation with one another.

America seems to have been already discovered by the Norsemen, and according to Welsh tradition, rediscovered by Prince Madoc, the son of Owen Gwynedd of North Wales, who so successfully resisted the invasion of Henry II; but the adventures of its more “documented discoverers” were yet to come; and before these occurred the path of navigation was eastward rather than westward. After the Norsemen’s explorations and the more legendary voyages of the Welsh Prince, it was the new kingdom of Portugal that took the lead in these heroic if self-interested voyages; and in Portugal’s rise to sea-power the kings of England played no mean part. Portuguese navigators were, however, always more interested in reaching the East than the West Indies, but whatever Indies they aimed at it was Henry IV’s grandfather, Edward III, who by a royal proclamation commanded his subjects to abstain from all harm to the Portuguese; while only fifteen years before Owen Glendower’s rising an English army assisted in repelling from their commercial allies at Lisbon the peril of a Spanish invasion. A few years later King John of Portugal married Philippa, Henry IV’s sister, and what was called the Treaty of Windsor was signed between the two countries; after which, in the words of Mr. Saunderson, “the policy of Portugal was to maintain a close friendship with England and a cautious neutrality in Spanish affairs.”

At the time of Owen’s struggle for independence, however, it was the republic of Venice that dominated Europe’s eastern commerce and defended the trade-routes from the attacks of the Turks. At the very time when, according to my reading of his end, Owen was rejecting Henry’s pardon, Venice was defeating the Turks in the battle of Gallipoli. All this, it must be remembered, occurred more than half a century before the cessation of the wars between Castile and Aragon brought Spain to the front.

As for France, during Owen's struggle, in spite of the spiritual patriotism of her common people, she was passing through one of the most unhappy epochs in her history. Several of her provinces, including the famous towns of Calais and Bordeaux, were in the possession of the English, and she was not only constantly menaced by Burgundy, whose Duke exercised a feudal lordship over the riches of the Netherlands, but was weakened by quarrels between her own royal princes and by the intermittent mental prostration of her King Charles VI.

Russia had been overrun in the thirteenth century by hordes of Mongols under the Tatar conqueror, Genghis Khan, and not long before Glendower's revolt Moscow had been burned to the ground by one of this potentate's Mongolian successors.

This was the epoch that saw the rise to power of Poland as a formidable nation. It was 1410, when Owen's family had just been taken prisoner at the capture of Harlech, that there was fought one of the most bloody of all the battles of the early fifteenth century, in the marshes of Tannenberg. It was here that the Poles, aided by the Czechs, under their famous Prague leader, Ziska, and aided too by a vast host of Letts and Finns and Russians, defeated with a slaughter so horrible that all Europe was shocked and scandalized the powerful German Order of the Teutonic Knights. This defeat of a mediaeval religious order, designed to protect Christianity from the pagans, by the sovereign of an independent state, supported by formidable mercenaries, some baptized and some unbaptized, is as clear a symbol as we could find for the startling change that was passing over Europe in the beginning of the fifteenth century.

It seems that the Czech leader Ziska, who did most to crush the Teutonic Knights, used a novel military device that makes us think of what today are called "mechanized units"; for he invented "wagon-forts", or chariots linked together by strong iron chains. “These vehicles,” I quote Mr. Saunderson’s account of this famous battle, “were covered with steel or iron; and on each of them the best marksmen were placed next to the driver.” In addition to these “wagon-forts”, Ziska made use of the same sort of cannon and gunpowder with which Henry’s captains were eventually able to overcome the Welsh defenders of Harlech. Mediaeval swords and lances had already been outdated by the longbows of the yeomen, and the appearance of gunpowder was yet another milestone on the road along which Fate was marching.

As the religious feeling that had made an imponderable unity of Europe slackened, the spirit of national sovereignty grew stronger and less scrupulous. But the age of Owen Glendower was not only the age of the decline of feudalism; it was also the age of social upheavals. Wylie’s superb history points out that when Owen was a young man in the service of Richard II there were democratic popular risings in Ghent, in Languedoc, in Florence, in Paris and in Rouen. In England itself the House of Lancaster leaned more heavily upon popular support than any previous government. In a sense it might be said that Henry IV was the first of our Parliamentary kings. The middle class had supported him against Richard; and all through his reign the Mortimers represented, according to primogeniture, a nearer claim to the throne than his own. Indeed, it was the steady support of the merchants and yeomen of England that carried him through the almost incessant treacheries and troubles of that distracted time.

The King of England got his revenue partly from custom-duties on exports and imports, partly from direct taxation, and partly from his own great landed estates. The chief products exported from the country at that time were corn and honey and cloth and wool and sheepskins, along with salt and tin and lead. These products were sold to Lombard, Genoese, and

Catalan traders. “Wool,” Wylie quotes from a contemporary, “was the sovereign merchandise and jewel of the realm.” A single sack of wool was worth from five to six pounds, each sack weighing twenty-six stone, fourteen pounds to the stone. From the earliest times, Wylie reminds us, the King claimed half a mark — six shillings and eight pence — on each sack exported. This claim was never disputed.

It is a queer and a significant thing how it was the Commons themselves who — as long as it could be done without being taxed for foreign wars — urged the King to violent patriotic measures. In earlier days all noble children in Britain were taught to speak French, but as the King and the Commons together began to encroach upon the ancient feudal courtesies, the emotion that we now call nationalistic began to take the place of the old crusading zeal and the old religious unity. The hatred formerly directed against infidels was now directed against aliens; Parliament itself was always taking the lead in this: violently petitioning the King to enter upon a serious campaign against the menace of resident foreigners. The Commons even went so far as to quarrel with the presence of foreign ladies in the Queen’s household; and a statute was passed forbidding the use of French in the law-courts.

In the year 1406, when the French fleet sailed to the help of Owen, the English King was sore put to it for funds. His resources were sufficient in peacetime; but it was different in time of war, and in 1406 things looked very dark for the House of Lancaster. “The country,” says Mr. Wylie, “seemed at a low ebb in all respects and the Commons began vehemently protesting. Poverty was everywhere. Merchants were ruined. The counties were drained of archers in this incessant warfare. The French were sailing up the Thames.” In this serious situation the Commons debated so long that their turbulent session received — as did another famous sitting two and a half centuries later — the name of “the Long Parliament”. They actually sat, though not continuously, for 158 days.

The Speaker of the House in this eventful year, when with the French to the south and the Welsh to the west the situation was so critical, was Sir John Tiptot of the county of Cambridge; and Parliament had never been bolder in the language it used. And well it might be. There was chaos in Ireland where many of the English settlers joined with the native Irish against the government. Ireland was at that time governed by a deputy of the King, but his writ didn’t extend beyond a narrow strip of country on the south and east coasts.

The native Irish of the north, west and centre did not recognize his authority. Owen must have heard rumours in his childhood of Edward Ill’s “Statutes of Kilkenny” whereby war with the natives was enjoined as a duty for the English colonists, and marriages between the two races were forbidden. But these statutes were constantly disregarded.

In addition to this chaos in Ireland there was no security upon the seas where piracy was plundering lawful trade. Things were so bad that the Commons spoke of the King “otherwise than they ought.” Peace, they declared, was what they wanted when they put him on the throne; but there had been nothing but ceaseless war. They demanded an account of all public moneys; and when they got the curt reply, “Kings don’t give account”, they answered, “Then their officers must!” In the end an agreement was drawn up between the King and his Council on the one hand, and the “Merchants of England”, on the other. The merchants, seamen, and shipowners were to put their ships at the disposal of the country, armed with 2000 fighting men to protect the sea. They insisted that all prizes taken should be theirs and should be dealt with by themselves.

Now it must not be forgotten that in the last decade of the fourteenth century and the first of the fifteenth the craft-guilds and trade-guilds were still the arteries of English life and kept the community sound and healthy. This remained true even after the exports and imports of the rich merchants had begun to inaugurate the rudiments of international capitalism. Each separate craft formed a fraternity of self-defence. During the years of Owen's retreat to the mountains of Snowdon and of his victory at Bryn Glas, the city of York alone, Wylie discovers, possessed no less than 96 organized trades.

In one important respect the age of Glendower resembled our own — in the extreme variety of its seasons. While Owen was fighting his final and tragic struggle there came, with the season of 1407-8, the worst winter for a hundred years. From December to March the country was covered with snow; and the merles, mavises, fieldfares, plovers died off by the thousands. The official scribe, Wylie tells us, "could make no entry in his register; for the ink froze on his 'pointel' at every second word; though he kept his little copper chafer beside his chair."

It was only a year after this in the early spring of 1409 that the famous schism between the Roman Pope and the Avignon Pope reached its culmination. The majority of the Cardinals decided to end the scandal by electing a third Pope. And the French Chancellor, Gerson, took the lead in this movement. Pope Benedict thereupon fled to Spanish protection at Perpignan, while Pope Gregory left Rome a penniless fugitive.

The mediaeval system of European life implied a loose kind of federation with the dual authority of Pope and Holy Roman Emperor at its head; and it is clearly a sign that this system had begun to break down, under the combined pressure of nationalism and free thought, that not only should there be three Popes in that fatal year, but two Holy Roman Emperors, in addition to the one in Constantinople.

If this revolutionary attempt to restore the dignity of the Papacy was a sign of the changing times, still more so was the remarkable intellectual movement of that epoch to which might almost be given the name of the "National Renaissance," as distinct from the better-known Classical Renaissance which came more than half a century later. If Glendower was a disciple of the Welsh bardic lore, Henry IV was no mean patron of national literature. Wylie reminds us that he had the friendship of the poet Gower, old and blind; and that not only did the dying Chaucer receive an annuity of 40 marks, but Thomas Hoccleve, then a young clerk in a government office, got a pension of 10 pounds for life.

Matters were complicated by the fact that a serious crack had yawned in the other unifying principle of Christendom, the Holy Roman Empire, the one about which Dante had been so eloquent. In Owen's time there were two claimants for this distinction, both of them "Kings of the Romans", namely the German Rupert, Duke of Bavaria and Count Palatine of the Rhine, and the Czech Wenceslaus, or Wenzel, King of Bohemia.

But a much more serious menace to the unity of Christendom than the existence of the rival Popes and rival Emperors was to be found in the growth of startlingly new religious opinions at home. Wycliffe had not been dead many years before his revolutionary doctrines spread like quicksilver among the more progressive spirits. Oxford was riddled with Lollardry, and boldly defied the authorities; while the movement grew so rapidly that the Archbishop initiated the notorious statute, *De Heretico Comburendo*—"concerning the suppression of heresy by fire".

And if this extraordinary epoch was characterized by individualism in religion and nationalism in politics it was remarkable for its unscrupulous diplomacy. One aspect of this particular unscrupulousness shocked certain minds, even then: the marriages of children for diplomatic reasons. Both Henry IV's little daughters were married — just as Owen's youngest daughter was — to further the political aims of their parents.

If the Middle Ages had been passionate and poetic, the fifteenth century was fantastic and bizarre. At the very time when so many Welsh students at Oxford were flocking to Owen's standard a rare and exciting personality arrived on a visit to England. This was Manuel II, Emperor of the East. Officially he came to beg the help of the western nations against the Turks who were besieging Constantinople; but actually his visit gave rise to a sequence of the most fantastical pageantry ever recorded. The day of the old authentic chivalry was over; but its ghost pranced and caracoled and jousted in a Masque of Death. Manuel came from the most romantic city in the world. The Welsh bards called the place Taprobane; and they felt that Manuel himself must have had some drops of Constantine the Great's Welsh blood in his veins.

In the East of Europe Christianity was at the time of our story fighting for its life against Islam. Asia Minor was lost to the Turks already, and their hosts were now gathering round the Bosphorus. In his desperation Manuel had made peace with the Pope of Rome, but only four years before Owen raised his standard at Glyndyfrdwy, Sultan Bajazet I crushed a vast Western army at the Battle of Nicopolis. Henry of Lancaster was actually present at this defeat and barely escaped with his life. As the danger grew greater year by year the Pope called upon Christendom to help with money if it could not do so with arms. Wylie tells us how there were mayor's funds and collecting boxes in all the English cities. After the first lull in the Welsh trouble, Henry — now the recognized monarch in Richard's place — subscribed a thousand pounds for the rescue of Constantinople. At the very time when Owen was taking prisoner Lord Grey of Ruthin, the Eastern Emperor was being feted in Paris like a creature from another world.

Meanwhile one old ferocious nomad easily accomplished what all the princes of Europe had been unable to do: “Timur the Lame,” or Tamberlaine the Great, made one of his famous mountains of human skulls out of the heads of the dreaded Turks. Having thus saved civilization, the godless old man promptly despatched letters to the King of England from Samarcand, begging English traders to visit his dominions and promising them protection from all interference.

The beginning of the fifteenth century may justly be described as an era of degenerate faith and degenerate chivalry. It was an age of unscrupulous individualism but also an age when national self-consciousness under independent rulers superseded the old feudal ideal of a united Christendom under Emperor and Pope. The dominant note of the epoch was what might be called the cynical use of the masks and symbols of lost ideals to advance shameless personal ends. A simple religious faith had “kept the strong in awe”, but the simplicity of that faith was gone; and as yet no secular moral public opinion showed any sign of taking its place. And the age of Owen Glendower had to get worse before it could get better.

In its strange recurring spirals of advance and retreat our tragic caravan of human progress was taking just then one of its most dangerous “horseshoe curves”.

It was an age of restless adventure rather than of practical achievement; an age of fancy and imagination and ideal passion. Orthodoxy burnt without conscience; and heresy blasphemed without decency. But those mysterious movements of destiny that neither the strong can retard, nor the crafty sidetrack, were at work all the while.

What happened, as we see it now, was what none of the parties concerned expected, hoped, or imagined. It was what Fate intended; and whether we force ourselves to "love" the issue, as Nietzsche does, or sink beneath it to the life within, as Blake does, we can at least in either case do as the blind bard in the *Odyssey* did and take all these things as having happened in their beauty and in their pain "that there might be a song for those who come after".

John Cowper Powys
Corwen
North Wales
May, 1940

Porius (1951)

A ROMANCE OF THE DARK AGES

Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages was first published by Macdonald & Company in London, England in 1951. Despite his long and successful career, Powys had difficulty finding publishers to release the book. Simon and Schuster, the company that had published most of his novels in America since *Wolf Solent* (1929) rejected it as did his frequent UK publisher, The Bodley Head, who insisted that the novel must be reduced by a third for them to even consider it. The author agreed to their demands, but he found their offer far too low, eventually agreeing a deal with Macdonald. In 2007, the complete version of the unabridged novel was finally restored and published by Duckworth Overlook. It is also the version presented in this collection.

The tale is set against the backdrop of Edeyrnion in North Wales over the course of eight days in October 499 AD. The central character, Porius, is the only son of Prince Einion of Edeyrnion and heir to his house of Cunedda. As the novel opens, the region is in turmoil as Roman hegemony has ended and competing tribes, groups and peoples vie for control and supremacy. Porius' father — a Romanised Brython — finds his rule under threat from the oppressed indigenous 'forest people', the Cewri — giants of the land — the Gywddyl-Ffichti and most alarmingly, the Saxons. Prince Einion joins forces with King Arthur and Merlin against the Saxons, while Porius commences his journey towards self-discovery and maturity. The novel is saturated with mythology and history, as the author explores clashes of religion and beliefs.

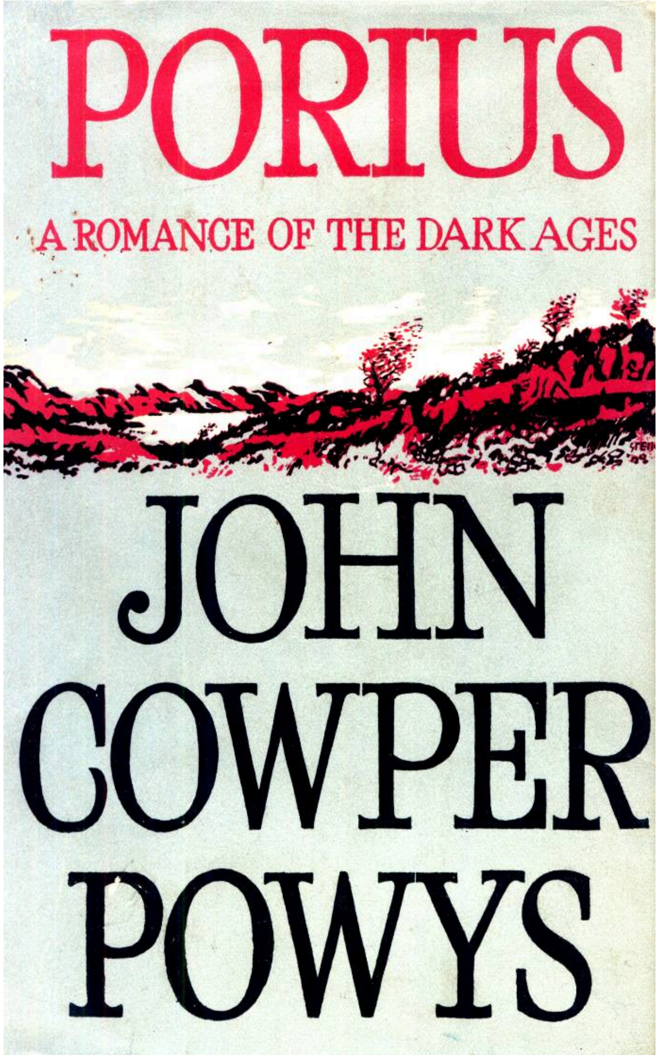
PORIUS
A ROMANCE OF THE DARK AGES
JOHN COWPER POWYS

The first edition

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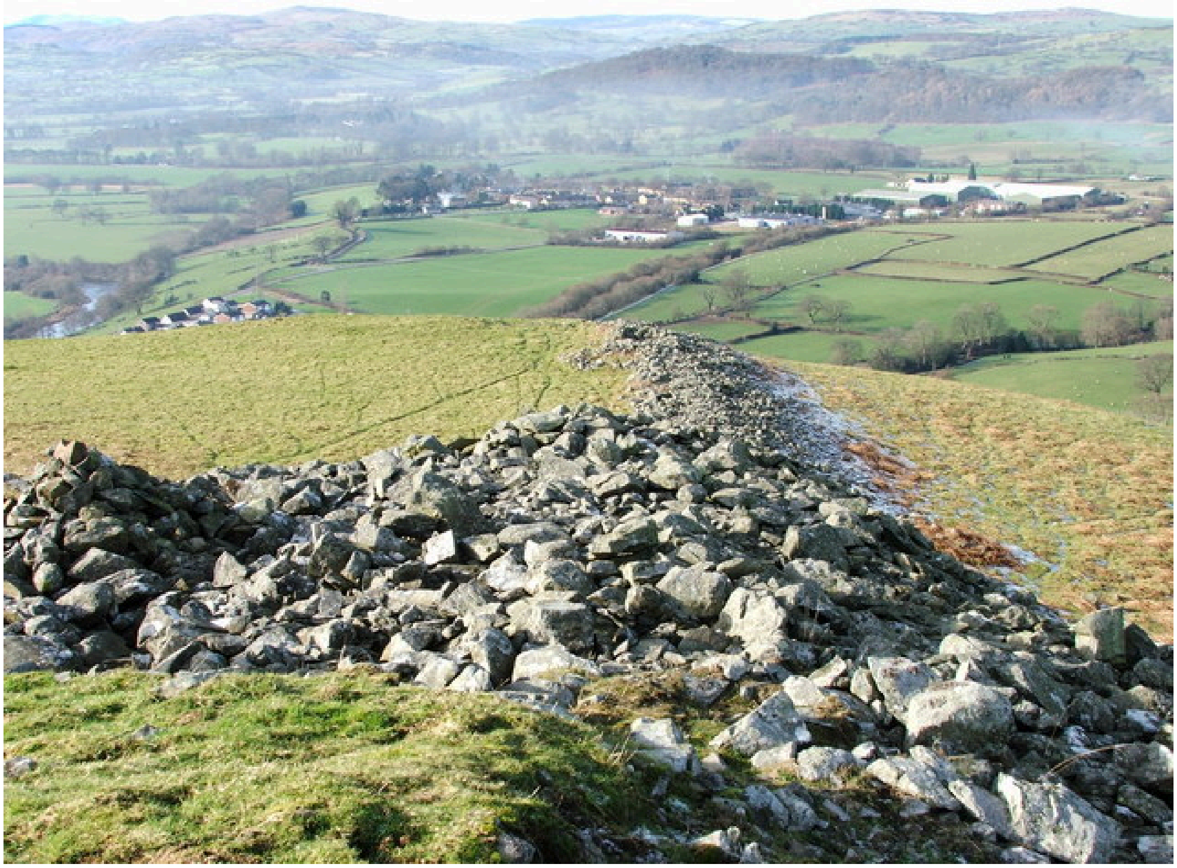

Caer Drewyn, Corwen, locally known as Mynydd-y-Gaer, the hill fort where Porius lives

HISTORIC BACKGROUND TO THE YEAR OF GRACE A.D. 499

THERE APPEARS TO BE an absolute blank, as far as documentary evidence goes, with regard to the history of Britain itself from the middle of the fifth century, when St. Patrick lived and wrote his *Confession* and preached in Ireland from 433 to 460, to the middle of the sixth century, when Gildas wrote as a fugitive monk in Little Britain in Gaul, expressing as a pro-Roman his querulous indignation against his fellow countrymen in Britain and their princes and chieftains. It seems, therefore, highly probable that this historic blank, as far as written documents go, was filled by Arthur's powerful and prosperous rule, this lack of documentary history being itself evidence that for one generation at least matters in this island were well under control.

As to the continent of Europe, however, at this critical moment of world history, there was certainly no lack of historical documents or of varied and very detailed information. There had recently come, as the fifth century drew to its close, a curious lull in the more disturbing migratory movements of semi-barbarous races pushing one another westward across the rapidly collapsing framework of the Western Roman Empire whose centre was Rome herself. Huns, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Central Goths, along with their barbarous heroes, customs, superstitions, cults, rituals, religions, and all their weird deities, were at this strange moment in European history jostling, mingling, and contending, on tribal battlefields and in individual souls, with the old classical altars and their ghostly deities, now sinking into oblivion, on the one hand; while the new Christian faith, on the other hand, commanding people to adore what they had been burning, and to burn what they had been adoring, swept forward with a reckless fanaticism that seemed to have the very spirit of the life force behind its unconquerable desperation.

This end-of-the-century lull in the more savage continental fighting came with a perceptible lessening of the pressure of the migratory hordes moving from east to west, and although it undoubtedly had many economic and geographic causes that were entirely impersonal, there was one minor cause for this desirable settling down of the fierce central European races into the districts which, with a few notable exceptions, still boast their blood. This was the crafty personal diplomacy and wise political sagacity of Theodoric the Ostrogoth, who for thirty-three years, however much the Roman Senate might intrigue with the Eastern Emperor in Constantinople, ruled Italy from Ravenna with shrewdness and tact. And of Theodoric’s methods of ruling, and of reconciling, in a rough commonsense manner, the old decadent civilization with the young barbaric races, and both of them with the leaders of the new faith, we have plenty of documentary history; so much so, indeed, that it makes us feel as if our own island were indeed an Ultima Thule glimpsed darkly and dimly through the salt mists blown across the waves of the unharvested ocean, and over the grave of the Lost Atlantis.

There are for example two extremely cultivated classical letter writers, each of whom was full of a desire to impress posterity — as indeed they have done — with their original turns and twists of fancy as well as with their power of describing the troubles of wise rulers and the shameful peculiarities both of the viciously civilized world and its ferocious and barbarous invaders. One of these is Apollinaris Sidonius Modestus, Prefect of Rome and Bishop of Arverna, and the other is Cassiodorus, Theodoric’s classical secretary of state; and though the former probably died before the particular week in the last October of the fifth century which I have selected for the events recorded here, and the latter was probably a child at that time, both these literary personalities can, it seems to me, be legitimately drawn upon to aid the naturalness of our presentation without straining too far the verisimilitude of historic fact.

And, finally, as far as Boethius is concerned, who was born about 480 and was imprisoned and executed by Theodoric about 524, he would have been nearly twenty by the autumn of 499, and therefore it would have been quite natural that a scholarly Brythonic chieftain from North Wales visiting Rome should have made friends with such a brilliant youth, who only ten years later became a consul and a senator, and twenty years later was murdered by the Gothic ruler.

The local details of the Arthurian mission here described, and the particular debouching of the "Saeson" — the Saxons under Colgrim — into Edeyrnion, together with Arthur's forced march to head them off, might justly be called *representative* rather than historical: but Professor Ifor Williams, in his illuminating preface written in Welsh to the famous poem of Aneirin, puts the seal of his authority upon the following passage quoted from Roman Britain by Collingwood and Myres: "The Celtic tribes... had no horses that could carry a man in battle... the Saxon invaders were infantry fighting with spears and having little or no body-armour... against such an enemy a small force of ordinary Roman cavalry resolutely led must prove invincible." Both Welsh and English historians agree that it was in the sixth century, and against the sons of the invading King Ida of Northumbria, that Owain the son of Uryen of Rheged fought the battles celebrated later by Taliesin. The Picts (Ffichtiaid) and the Scots (Gwyddylaid) were the grand enemies of the Romanized Brythons in the province of North Wales known then, as it is known still, as Edeyrnion. The name Edeyrn is derived from the Roman name Eternus, and all Cunedda’s sons had similar Roman names; such as Tacitus, from which comes Tegid, the present name for Bala Lake, the Marianus, from which comes Merioneth, the present name of the county.

As we contemplate this historic background to the autumn of the last year of the fifth century, it is impossible not to think of the background of human life from which today we watch the first half of the twentieth century dissolve into its second half. As the old gods were departing then, so the old gods are departing now. And as the future was dark with the terrifying possibilities of human disaster then, so, today, are we confronted by the possibility of catastrophic world events compared with which those that Arthur and his counsellor and his horsemen contended against seem, as the Hebrew poet said, “a very little thing.”

J. C. P.

THE CHARACTERS OF THE NOVEL

PRINCE EINION, REIGNING Prince of Edeyrnion, and great-grandson of Cunedda.

PRINCESS EURONWY, his wife, cousin of the Emperor Arthur.

PORIUS, their only child.

BROCHVAEL, brother of Prince Einion.

MORFYDD, his daughter, betrothed to Porius.

RHUN, son of Prince Einion’s sister, Alarch the Fair, foster-brother of Porius.

PORIUS MANLIUS, Roman Patrician, father of Princess Euronwy.

AULUS, ex-centurion, his servant.

NESTA FERCH AULUS, his daughter.

GWYTHYR, the Gaer Messenger, her husband.

KING ARTHUR, the Emperor (in Welsh *Amherawdr)* of Britain.

MYRDDIN WYLLT, or Merlin, the emperor’s counsellor.

GWENDYDD, his sister.

NINEUE, Tennyson’s Vivien, the enchantress loved by Merlin or Myrddin Wyllt.

NEB AP DIGON, a page of the emperor’s court, dedicated to the service of Myrddin Wyllt.

MEDRAWD, Tennyson’s Modred, a nephew of the Emperor Arthur.

TELERI, a half-witted girl at the Gaer who comes under the influence of Medrawd.

GALAHAUT, Tennyson’s Galahad, Prince of the Far Isles of Surluse.

MABSANT AP KAW, a noble horseman of King Arthur.

THE THREE AUNTIES, The Modrybedd, aged Princesses, aunts of Prince Einion and Brochvael:

ESYLLT

ERDDUD

TONWEN

CADAWG, the disinherited, Tonwen’s lover.

THE DERWYDD, or Druid of the forest people.

LLEW, his brother who lives with him.

DROM & MORGANT: their servants

SIBYLLA, a Gwyddyl-Ffichti girl, at one time the mistress of Prince Einion.

GUNTA, her daughter by Gunhorst the Saxon.

THE HENOG, a chronicler from Dyfed in South Wales.

TALIESIN, the Poet, spoken of as “Pen Beirdd, Ynys Prydein” or Head Bard of the Isle of Britain.

CYNAN AP CLYDNO, his patron.

BROTHER JOHN, an aged hermit, supporter of the Pelagian heresy, instructor of Porius.

Minnawc Gorsant, Christian priest of the Gaer.

A YOUNG PRIEST, his successor.

LOT-EL-AZZIZ, a wandering Jewish doctor.

ZORA, his wife.

GOG and MAGOG, his sons.

DION DIONIDES, an adventurous Greek merchant sea-captain.

AFAGDDU, an old retainer of the Princes of the Gaer.

OWAIN PEN UCHEL, a famous horse-breeder and trainer of hunting-dogs.

GWRGI & CANA FERCH GLAM: servants of Brochvael.

AMREU, steward of the Three Aunties.

ERIM, the silentiary, adviser to the Three Aunties.

FFLAM & TEGVAN: pages to Gwendydd.

THE CAWR, a giant of the race called Cewri.

THE CAWRES, his daughter, called Creiddylad by Porius.

THE CEWRI, aboriginal giants lingering in the mountains of Eryri (Snowdonia) and Cader Idris. Rhitta Gawr, their legendary ruler, was buried in the Gaer, and one of them called Creiddylad was the great-grandmother of Porius.

PLACE: The Valley of Edeyrnion in the North of Wales.

TIME: From October 18 to October 25, A.D. 499.

J. C. P.

CHAPTER I. The Watchtower

PORIUS STOOD UPON the low square tower above the southern gate of Mynydd-y-Gaer and looked down on the wide stretching valley below, a valley that was still covered by the aboriginal forest but which now bore the name Eternus or Edeyrn, the name of a favourite among the sons of the Brythonic chieftain Cunedda from whom Porius was the fifth in succession. “Eternus, Edernus, Edeyrn,” he was murmuring mechanically as he gazed down at that far-spread expanse of treetops. He was thinking of the pedantic way the old Roman, his mother’s father, from whom he had received his own name, would always catch them up over the pronunciation of such a word as “Eternus” and make them repeat it in the correct Roman manner.

It was on behalf of the elder Porius that he had to go down presently into that darkening forest and following the Path of the Dead that led to a prehistoric earth-work called y Grug or The Mound, bring back to Mynydd-y-Gaer, the hill fortress of their race, a pitcher of the holy water from the Fountain of Saint Julian, whose present guardian, the eccentric hermit Brother John, had been his friend from childhood.

The Mound on the way to the Fountain, with the Path of the Dead that led to it, had been an aboriginal burning-and-burying place; but the locality had been taken possession of several hundreds of years ago by a particularly ferocious clan of Gwyddyl-Ffichti, whose hold on the district had only been brought to an end a century ago by Porius’s own tribe led by the great Brythonic chieftain Cunedda.

For centuries had these Gwyddylaid, who intermarried with the Ffichti or Picts in a way the pure-blooded Brythons never did, been a menace to the peace imposed by Roman law. From very early days the forest people had found the Gwyddyl-Ffichti their worst plague. They had managed in their own mysterious fashion to survive the onslaughts of the Ffichtiaid taken alone.

But when these wild tribes joined forces with the Gwyddylaid, and together the two predatory races harassed them from both the west and the north, the forest people were constantly losing ground. The Roman invaders however allowed themselves to be propitiated into a haughty patience by these unconquerable yet unwarlike successors of the legendary giants who in the beginning possessed the land, though they rarely enrolled them in their legions as they were glad enough to enroll the warlike Brythonic Celts.

But the forest people, who were themselves Iberian wanderers from Africa, and who had been the first of all the tribes of men to intrude on the solitudes of the Ffichtiaid and the aboriginal giants, though they managed to propitiate the Romans, had always found it impossible to propitiate the Gwyddyl-Ffichti.

Not a tribe in all the long sequence of marauders who had invaded them proved to be such a menace. All but one of their immemorial devices for dealing with conquerors and oppressors failed them with these diabolical enemies. But this one device did not fail them; namely, their genius for thriving in inaccessible places and under lamentable conditions, and the art of emerging in secret and retreating in secret amid the impenetrable woods and mountains.

Yes, the Gwyddyl-Ffichti were the worst affliction they had ever suffered. Even the formidable survivors of Lost Atlantis, with their cult of the Great Serpent, even the mysterious race called Coranians who possessed some subhuman or superhuman power of gathering and exchanging news, and who swept across the country like a pestilence, were less destructive.

The Brythonic Celts rarely married with either the Gwyddyl-Ffichti or the forest people; but Porius's paternal great-grandfather, Edeyrn, had married an aboriginal giantess and thus had broken this racial taboo. His son Iddawc had broken it also and was called “the Apostate” for so doing. This latter had married a forest princess named Indeg who was descended from an Iberian royal house that receded into remote antiquity and had once ruled all the western lands from Marrakesh to Mona.

Porius himself, as he stood now motionless upon his tower, was not an exceptionally tall man. Indeed he was well under six feet. But his physical strength looked immense and was as a matter of fact even greater than it looked. His face was rugged rather than austere, striking rather than handsome, formidable rather than commanding.

It was late in the afternoon on the eighteenth of October in the year of Christ four hundred and ninety-nine that this only son of Einion ab Iddawc gazed down upon the valley from his watchtower over the gate.

Compared with the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, Porius's Brythonic Celts were now civilized and Romanized. Most of them were nominal Christians. A few were fanatical Christians. All of them were chivalrous and proud and revengeful.

It had indeed been their skill in modern warfare that had led one Roman magnate — some say none other than the great general Stilicho under the Emperor Theodosius — to promise their chief Cunedda a new realm, the most fertile between Uriconium and Mona, if he would consent to establish himself there in perpetuity and bring with him as settlers to this favoured but Gwyddylaid-infested spot a large colony of the more adventurous of his people.

Porius had recently passed an uneventful thirtieth birthday, but as he stared at the wide landscape before him he knew with every faculty of apprehension he possessed that he had reached the first great turning point in his life. Two disturbing pieces of news had reached him in the last twenty-four hours, either of them enough to break up more completely the order of his days than would have seemed possible a week ago. And the worst of it was that he had to take — for the first time in his life — full absolute solitary personal responsibility for a choice of action that would affect, and affect catastrophically, every person connected with him.

Thus as he pressed the front of his wrists against the high coping of the wide stone battlement and leaned forward in the posture of a raven contemplating a dizzy flight, he felt anything but at peace with an accepted destiny.

Full of troubled thoughts he gazed at that richly watered and verdurous valley. He stared at the dark heath-covered mountainous range guarding that valley's eastern approach. He stared at the leafy woods, forest piled above forest, that rose into the camp-entrenchments protecting that rich valley to the west. Anyone could see that the Romans had not deceived the Brythonic chief, but though the son of Cunedda had chosen his portion of the rich inheritance with a wise instinct, a Welsh chieftain's mind in the autumn of the year four hundred and ninety-nine had other cares than the sowing of barley or the pasturing of flocks. But Porius, preoccupied and perplexed as he was, was not oblivious of the landscape. As far as his vision could reach wound the serpentine curves of the sacred river, the river worshipped as a goddess still by many of the natives of that region. He could follow her course for nearly a score of miles; could follow it indeed until, dimmed by mist and obscured by distance, she was lost to sight between the descending ridges.

All along the banks of this mother of rivers, Dyfrdwy, Divine Water, stretched the fertile communal clearings of his family's domain. The furthest of these arable lands were visible to him now as dark ploughed-up patches of earth interspersed with stubble. The colour of this stubble under the afternoon's diffused light, for between the sky and the earth hung a film of floating vapour, was a colour to which Porius, even if he had had all his wits about him, could have given no name.

Compared with the dusky sepia-brown of the ploughed fields and the threatening greenish black of the timeless forest these far-off stubble fields showed almost white; but it was a whiteness that had nothing in it of the phantasmal or the unearthly — it was a friendly whiteness like the glint of silver at the mead-drinking he had just left.

And yet there was something else, something drawn from it or bestowed on it by the strangely steel-like surface of the river; something that might have suggested to a less troubled watcher the mother-of-pearl glimmerings in the hollow curves of some vast green-veined sea shell.

The remote uncertainty, however, of these shifting lights and attenuated contrasts vanished when Porius's gaze moved homeward, following the downstream flow of the river. What he saw then under the misty sky were things palpable and familiar. The eyeballs in his small yellowish green eyes had only to move the distance of the width of the smallest butterfly's antenna to bring back his vision from where the river lost itself beyond Lake Tegid to where, only a mile below his watchtower, it grew wide and noisy and shallow at the Ford of Mithras.

But no Mithraic raven or crow either from the fortress of Bran, though its wings bore it never so straight to its *ael,* or "goal," could have anticipated the speed with which his thoughts that afternoon — and they were neither particularly noble thoughts nor particularly sympathetic ones — followed and overtook his vision. His face wore the troubled expression of a young boy who has suddenly been thrust into a position of mature responsibility. He was surveying the township of Corwen now, with her Brythonic dwellings under the shadow of the high rocks, and her native huts under the lop-hewn oaks of what was left of the virgin forest.

Porius at one time had known both these civilized and these aboriginal dwellings in every smallest detail; for his foster-mother in whose abode, as behoved the son of a Brythonic chief, he had spent his boyhood, lived above the church of Saint Julian under one of those jagged rocks. Even now had a stranger questioned him about every building in sight he could have given some sort of answer; for though the town of Corwen had changed considerably, both in size and in civilization since, less than a hundred years ago, the great Pelagius came on his famous visit to the Fountain of Saint Julian, few erections whether of wood or stone lacked the curious distinguishing characteristics that marked the intense individuality of this part of North Wales.

Porius was facing due southwest from that squat tower above the Gaer gate, so that save for a few wooded hills that descended into the winding valleys beneath the Arenig Range and beneath Cader Idris there was no solid object between him as he stood there and the salt estuary that ran into the open sea.

It was one of those peculiar afternoons that arrive in late October or early November in this district and are entirely dominated by one natural phenomenon alone — the phenomenon of mist. Wavering and fluctuating in its advances and retreats and only tangible to the sensitive skin by a faint impact of wetness and chilliness the mist rises, it would appear, by its own volition, or by the will of the divine water, straight out of the river and, unaffected by wind or sun, assumes, weak creature as it is, the dominant and mastering control of a whole unreturning day. This rape of a day by the weakest of her children was more significant of that spot than any other of Nature’s methods.

The curious thing for our watcher above the gate about this particular October day in the last year of the fifth century was that the ambiguous colour assumed by those distant patches of stubble seemed to be slowly moving towards him, spreading up the slope of the sky with the persistence of a human presence.

It was a colour like that of an extremely pallid sunset and it was as if a segment of the western horizon had just now taken upon itself to anticipate the visual effect of the descent of the sun, only to do so in the reverse way, and were now retracing the sun’s declension and stealing up the firmament with the intention of reaching the zenith.

But the mist was already dimming it and would soon swallow it up. The mist had given and the mist would shortly take away. But if the peculiar colour that was now moving up the sky from those far-off stubble fields towards the watcher upon the gate was to be destroyed by the mist as it had been created by the mist, Porius himself, who had only just emerged from the low-roofed chambers and intricate stone corridors of Mynydd-y-Gaer, felt that a more arbitrary and more inscrutable power than any vapour between earth and heaven had risen from the stubble of the world’s past and was threatening not only his own future but the future of the two women who ruled his life.

His betrothed, who was also his cousin, was a special pet of the Three Aunties, as the forest people called the revered Modrybedd, his father’s aunts, who were the unmarried sisters of Indeg, Iddawc the Apostate’s wife; and since the girl’s father, Brochvael ab Iddawc, lived at a dwelling called Ty Cerrig in the direction of the Modrybedd’s forest palace she was constantly seeing them.

Alarch the Fair, who was at once Porius's aunt and foster-mother, was also the real mother of his cousin and closest friend, Rhun ap Gwrnach, but she and her husband were both dead, and Rhun now lived at the Gaer.

Porius was a man with an immense capacity for happiness but so far he was only beginning to adjust himself to certain contradictory strains in his blood that had worried and teased him from childhood.

One of his fixed ideas was that he was the kind of man to whom women could never be attracted and to whose opinions they never could pay attention. This self-distrust had undoubtedly something to do with his complete submission to the least wish, whim, caprice, or fancy of each of the two women of his manhood, that is to say, of his real mother the Lady of the Gaer, and of his betrothed, Morfydd ferch Brochvael.

Yes, the chief reason why, with so much massive egoism and so much sturdy power of enjoyment, he had had an uneasy life lay not in his nerves, which were unusually equable, but in his blood with its divided loyalties and contradictory traditions.

It was not that the Roman blood he inherited through his mother mixed badly with his Brythonic blood. Those two strains intermingled like wine and water, or honey and milk. The trouble with him, as with Einion his father, came from the aboriginal Berber blood that they derived from Indeg, the wife of Iddawc the Apostate, the elder sister of the Three Aunties.

The real prehistoric aboriginals of Wales were the legendary giants whose names still clung — and perhaps more than their names — to certain mountainous regions, but with the exception of the mysterious Ffichtiaid, of whom, before the Gwyddylaid intermarried with them, nothing is known, the natives of that part of Britain were the same evasive, imaginative, and unwarlike forest people who had found the giants here in the beginning, or imagined they found them, and had, so to say, played hide-and-seek with them ever since.

In their customs the forest people were totally different from both the Gwyddyl-Ffichti and the Brythons. In fact their whole way of life was non-Aryan and non-Celtic. It was communistic and matriarchal, tempered by the druidic magic that had reached them from the survivors of the lost continent of Atlantis.

Over the native quarter of Corwen, and over all the region west of the river extending to the fringes of the swamps and to the foothills of the mountains, the Three Modrybedd, colloquially known as the Three Aunties, exercised, like uncrowned princesses of a fallen dynasty, an occult, secretive, incalculable authority.

The more sophisticated of the Romanized Brythons, even among the descendants of Edeyrn the son of Cunedda, had now for several generations made a sort of aesthetic cult of the wildest superstitions of the forest people; till with Einion ab Iddawc, Porius's father, this cult became the one dominant passion of a humorous sceptic. But Einion's small princedom of Edeyrnion was but an epitome of what was going on throughout the whole of Britain. As long as Porius could remember, crisis had followed crisis, conspiracy conspiracy, feud feud, while the pirates from Germania were forever landing in fresh bands. After the death of his foster-mother and his return to the Gaer Porius's feelings had been constantly harrowed and his tact constantly put to the test by the bitter and complicated quarrels between his parents. His mother was a great-niece of Uthyr Pendragon, and consequently a cousin of the Emperor Arthur. Both she and the old Roman, her father, had been, ever since he grew to manhood, urging him to make a selection from their best fighting men and place them, along with his own strength and prestige, at the service of the emperor.

Porius’s father, on the contrary, whose authority as the hereditary head of their proud Brythonic tribe was absolute, forbade him to think of anything of the kind, and the Three Princesses threw the whole weight of their formidable if occult influence over the natives entirely on the chieftain’s side.

Their view was that the Emperor Arthur was himself half a Roman and that Porius and his contingent would only have to join his notorious Roman cavalry, which was always making wild rushes from one end of Britain to the other, leaving the Gwyddyl-Ffichti to emerge from concealment as soon as the noble horsemen had passed, and permitting the ships of the Saxons to sail on to a fresh attack on some other harbour town.

Porius’s betrothed, Morfydd ferch Brochvael, naturally took the view of the Three Princesses of Ogof-y-Gawr, the Giant’s Cave, and used all her power over him to undermine the influence of the Lady of Mynydd-y-Gaer. Self-distrustful in his devotion to these two resolute women, he was as candid and pliable in all matters of personal conduct as he was remote and detached in his secret thoughts. The shock to his whole nature of the death of his foster-mother who was the real mother of his only intimate friend, Rhun ap Gwrnach, had made his obedience to the woman who had given him birth resemble a lover’s loyalty to an unhappy and beautiful woman, rather than the familiar understanding of a son; and he was no sooner accepted as the betrothed of Morfydd than he began applying the same method of submissive obedience, tempered with inward reservations, to his ways with his betrothed.

Nor had these tendencies in him been decreased by his grown-up pity for both women, the elder of whom had been made unhappy by the constant infidelities of Einion ab Iddawc and the latter outraged and hurt in every nerve by the loss of her only brother. Einion ab Iddawc had always been as much of a puzzle to his only child as he had been a trial to the child's mother. The prince seemed to care for nothing but hunting and light-of-loves and listening to Indeg's three sisters talk of the heathen superstitions of their people.

By his light-of-loves and his drinking and even more by the devils and she-devils of the Three Aunties, Einion had driven his wife further and further into her only sanctuary, the unearthly piety and fanatical faith which she derived from Minnawc Gorsant, the inspired priest and actual builder with his own hands of the first Corwen church.

It was this priest with his spiritual threatenings and denunciation who had been the direct cause of the murder of Morfydd's brother. In fact Porius's whole life seemed fatally involved with this accursed ecclesiastic. Under the man's influence, combined with that of the incorrigible old Roman her father, who was a devoted Christian, the Lady of the Gaer had come to find in religion the only pleasure — save what the priest's own loyalty to her might mean — that she got out of life at all; while Morfydd could not endure the least reference to her brother's enemy. This meant that the two women of his life now rarely met. In fact he had had a painful struggle to prevent his betrothal being broken off because of Morvran ap Brochvael's death. It was only the unbreakable fraternal link between the chieftain and his brother that had saved the situation.

Having been a traveller in his time and a collector of rare books, Brochvael ab Iddawc had nothing mentally in common with his elder brother, but they were curiously attached to each other; and they both liked the idea of their only children being united. Morvran ap Brochvael had in real truth died a martyr to free thought, at any rate to the free expression of his godless thoughts, and Morfydd herself had always been his one intimate confidante. The murderous and superstitious riot, worked up by the priest, in which the young man had perished, had occurred among the more fanatical members of their own Brythonic tribe. The forest people had held quite aloof.

Nor would it ever have occurred if Brochvael ab Iddawc had not been too absorbed in his books, and Porius himself too absorbed in his own jealousy of the youth's influence over Morfydd, to notice what was going on.

As he now thought of the wretched boy's tragic end and of the priest who had caused it, he stared down on the fragmentary masonry of the unfinished church of Corwen with a cold and deadly anger. Up from the inmost recesses of his being surged the feeling, "I must escape once and for all from the religion of this man!" His small, deep-socketed, yellow-green eyes, eyes that when he was badgered became like the eyes of a badger or even a bear, gleamed dangerously from beneath his bristly eyebrows as he stared across the river at those heaps of piled-up stones below the rocky precipice.

"Those stones," he said to himself, "would look exactly the same from here — that is, from a mile away — *if they were ruins!* And ruins one day they *will* be — ruins and dust — dust and annihilation!"

As he went on staring at Saint Julian's unfinished walls, he began to fancy that he actually caught sight, for all it was a mile away, of that tucked-up monkish habit as the fellow clapped on slab after slab of *calch,* or whatever kind of mud it was, like a busy, stinging insect, for the daubing of his curst church. How sickening that their Brythonic-Roman township should be already baptized with a name put on it, as the forest people said, by a magic fate! Corwen, the "White Choir" — how he hated the word! The Ford of Mithras was what his foster-brother, Rhun ap Gwrnach, always called their town; but no one would have dared to speak of Mithras in his grandfather’s presence. The old Roman would have groaned if he’d heard that name and would have sighed and shaken his head and stared into vacancy, while his mother would have begged her son the moment they were alone to tell Rhun ap Gwrnach to keep Mithras to himself. “Your grandfather thinks,” she would have said, “that Mithras was the cause of the corruption of the empire.”

Porius had come out on the watchtower that evening while his father and the rest drank their mead to collect his thoughts a little before deciding on a course of action, for the two separate pieces of news that had just reached him might, he knew only too well, affect the whole of his life. Both pieces of news were indeed so serious that everything in him which dodged responsibility and shrank from drastic decision was tempted to postpone the moment of fatal choice. He took refuge now in this problem of naming places. “Some names,” he thought, “are beautifully congruous with what they depict; others are disjointed, arbitrary, accidental. What’s happening here is a struggle between two cohorts of invisible spirits; one trying to name our town by a heathen name and one by a Christian name.”

His thought seemed to merge itself in that colour moving up the sky. “It’ll be,” he said to himself, “the hut dwellers of the forest, not the house dwellers among those walls, who’ll give it the name that’ll last! And on what will *their* choice depend?” He shifted his position a little and looked north. Here he saw an undulating ridge of low mountains that rarely assumed any other colour than their own Special tint of dark blue, a ridge that bore the name of Moel y Famau, the Mountain of the Mothers!

“Not on Roman common sense,” he thought, “will the choice depend, nor on Brythonic romance; rather on fate and chance, rather on a mysterious magic in things, outside man’s control.”

He continued to stare at the mass of rough-hewn stone walls across the river as they lay in the peaceful hush of the long Brythonic dinner hour clustered beneath their protective precipice of steep and broken rocks, while he made out the familiar dwellings he knew so well. He found himself muttering, as he looked, a queer malediction under his breath, an ancient curse upon Gorsant the priest, a curse from which the passing of time had long since sucked out all intelligible meaning. He felt as he stared at those buildings as though he were looking at a deep-rooted island in the tossing ocean of time, and as though he couldn't look at it closely enough before his ship, with all her sails spread, had whirled him past!

A stranger suddenly emerging from the interior of this ancient hill fortress and finding himself confronted by the figure of Porius might well have cried in his heart: "What a Hercules of a man!" But had he proceeded, as Einion ab Iddawc's guests sometimes presumed to do, to try to draw out from this Hercules his views upon Constantinople and Rome, and upon the Saxon invaders, and upon the burning question of the great Monophysite Heresy, he would have had scant encouragement.

Plunged from infancy into the criss-cross eddies of racial and religious divergence, surrounded by mysterious treacheries, concealed hostilities, obscure conspiracies, the Herculean Porius had acquired an instinctive habit of sluggish and watchful reserve.

This reserve, which a slow-moving patience and phlegmatic caution had made so easy to him that it had become like a second nature, he kept up with his closest intimates. He kept it up with his betrothed, he kept it up with his mother, and as a rule he kept it up even with his foster-brother Rhun, who knew him better than anybody in the world except the old hermit of the Fountain. But below this reserve Porius's mind was the opposite of a sluggish one. It was abnormally restless. His nature was indeed singularly adapted — few of his generation more so — to the difficult exigencies of the year of grace, four hundred and ninety-nine.

His foster-brother Rhun, as far as he could tell, had not the faintest notion that his slow-moving massive strength — a strength for which he was as famous throughout Edeyrnion and Ardudwy as was his uncle Brochvael for a different cause throughout the book-markets of Gaul — concealed such an inquisitive, unquiet, sceptical intelligence; nor did Morfydd guess its existence, no! not even when, seated on his knee, she saw his small deep-set eyes change colour from grey-green to green and from green to the amber of a swollen torrent.

The truth — as he had once confessed to Brother John when the old man discoursed on his theory that their confused modern times produced a completely new type of human being — was that he had the physical characteristics of an easygoing giant whose consciousness had been invaded by an observant, evasive, and completely detached elf.

Easygoing? A sensation, as if an internal grimace of sardonic amusement were contracting the muscles of his stomach, passed through him, and he thought of the frequent occasions when he felt certain that he had inherited — and an instinct whispered to him through whom — at least a drop of the blood of the mysterious race whose habitations the forest people had discovered, and whose solitudes they had invaded. No! Not exactly, not precisely, "easygoing." At least he didn't feel like that *now* as he leaned on the rampart recalling scene by scene, encounter by encounter, face by face, the circumstances of Morvran ap Brochvael ab Iddawc's murder.

He felt as if — though it was a couple of miles — he actually could make out the familiar entrance to the Giant's Cave and see from where he stood the hollow stone the Three Aunties called "the stone of rebirth" and the other they called "the stone of sacrifice."

It was January, nine months ago, when Morvran was killed. Of the killing itself he knew nothing. It must have happened beyond the Swamp of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti.

But what he could vividly conjure up now was, one night, the man's mangled remains wailed over by the Three Princesses and then — another night — the three of them, the sacred Modrybedd — Esyllt, Erddud, and Tonwen — beautiful, desperate enchantresses, spectres with grey hair, bowing and swaying and murmuring unknown gibberish that might have been addressed to Satan, and the body of the dead gone, lost, vanished — the devil knew where — and those huge marks in the new-fallen snow that the forest people swore were gigantic footprints!

As Porius bent now over the rampart of his watchtower it seemed to him that the ghostly colour from those far-off stubble fields, which the grey shoulders of the mist had been carrying all that October afternoon, had been unloaded above those dwellings he knew so well, above the palace of the princesses, above the church of Christ, above the house of his betrothed, and hung suspended there, isolating from all the rest of the world those dwellings that in their harmonies and discords, in their manias and mysteries, made up the fatal ghost-bread of his life!

He was certainly in a queer mood that afternoon — and no wonder after those two pieces of news! In the power of his feelings — and he would have been puzzled to put into words exactly what he did feel — he set himself to imagine Morfydd transcribing some special Virgilian lines as she sat with her father among his books. Virgil had always been a favourite with her murdered brother, though neither he nor she had the absolute passion for learning that had made Brochvael ab Iddawc familiar to all the scholars of Gaul.

“I shall never be like Uncle Brochvael,” Porius said to himself, and he said it with a sigh of relief; for the idea of collecting books in Rome and Athens and Antioch, not to speak of the cities of southern Gaul, gave him at this moment an extremely uncomfortable feeling; a feeling as if his enormous strength — this strength which made him think of the giants of Cader Idris — were beginning to dry and rot and turn putrid and powdery, like the inside of swollen puffballs!

Something in his blood anyway, something that had remained un-Aryanized and un-Christianized suddenly began to cry out from the pit of his stomach. It cried out against these very decisions he had to make, yes! against these monstrous decisions, these blasphemous decisions, these decisions that descended to the very roots of his life. Why couldn’t he find ease for this cry of his giant’s blood by thinking of Morfydd? Her breasts were small but her hair was long; and it now occurred to him that the reason why he was so impressed by this particular colour in the sky was that under two conditions, under the condition of anger and the condition of weeping, there always occurred in the centre of her forehead, produced either by a suffusion of blood or a withdrawing of blood, a livid patch of just that precise tint.

Yes, it was when she was angry and when she began to weep that this dead stubble-field shadow made its appearance beneath her skin. Her eye sockets at these times seemed to increase in size and there would come into being round their edge, a dark recessive inward-curving ring like the circumference of a miniature crater out of the centre of which blazed her wrath.

And it was the same when her features distorted themselves into a pattern of heartbreaking quaintness when she was on the verge of tears. In both cases — such was her peculiarity — there shone forth this ivory frontlet between her arched eyebrows.

It was abundantly clear to him now why he had found this particular tint so irresistible. He had come to associate the poignancy of her abandonment to pity and wrath so completely with this particular token, that the sight of this stubble-field colour burdening the mist called up in him all those old familiar feelings with which since the days when she was five and Rhun was fifteen and he was ten he was wont to quiet her emotion.

Jesus Christ! But he had no decisions to make then! "I must go down and get hold of Rhun," he thought. "What the devil is keeping him? He can't be drinking."

But he felt reluctant to face the mead drinkers in the smoky hall. After the low-roofed chambers and stone corridors of the Gaer, the liberating obscurity of this immense catafalque of mist, as it went on unloading that ivory-coloured essence of ghostly corn as if it were the life sap of a dying goddess, though it did not heal his trouble nor solve his perplexity, gave him an inflow of strength from which he could draw enough force to get a certain humorous pleasure from the confused and conflicting currents of fate. Currents all the more disturbing since not only the issue of the crisis, but his own desire as to the issue, remained wavering and uncertain. "I can't wait for Rhun much longer," he said to himself, and then without warning he experienced the feeling that he had uttered those very same words before — he himself staring at a group of houses or at one single house while Rhun stared at a group of men or at one single man — and following this feeling as if it had all happened before, the thought came to him that it was as natural for Rhun to be a worshipper of the soldier's god Mithras, as it was for himself to have a secret sympathy with Auntie Tonwen's mania for propitiating their sacred river.

It was just as he left the banquet hall that he had noticed how his foster-brother was staring at their remarkable guest, the State Chronicler from Dyfed, whom the emperor had recently made Chief Narrator, or Henog, to his court, and commissioned to write the life of his philosopher and friend, the famous Myrddin Wyllt.

"Curse you, Rhun! I shan't wait for you much longer."

Rhun's interest in the long-lasting secret fraternity of warriors of every race and blood that had taken the Persian god as their saviour had of late — for some reason completely obscure to himself — profoundly irritated Porius.

Of one thing he was certain: there was nothing of the Roman orthodoxy of his grandfather about this annoyance. What it *felt* like was personal jealousy. But it was absurd to think he could be jealous of a Persian god. Besides —

In his irritation he half-resolved to descend the stair into the Gaer, get his spear and the water bottle, and set out. But even as he made his way to the north-west parapet of his watchtower he realized that the disturbing news he had received made it essential there should be two of them upon this particular quest, and almost essential that one of the two should be Rhun ap Gwrnach seeing that as a messenger he was twice as fast as any man of their tribe from Dinas Bran to Deganwy. But he moved all the same to the northwest rampart of the tower; and he had to move with some discretion, for it was just here where the stairway descended into the interior of the Gaer that the masonry of the platform round this descent was broken, loose, and uneven.

Arrived at this northwestern parapet, Porius surveyed the stretch of country now before him with an air that made him seem a different man. What in fact he now contemplated was a landscape associated in his mind with nothing but adventure and friendship. With this view before him he could forget all women and all gods.

To the west of the wide-stretching hills, covered with forests that rose like dusky waves in a billowy sea and swept the onlooker's imagination towards the mysterious mountain ranges that towered up, ridge by rocky ridge, to the high peaks of Eryri, lay the Fountain of Saint Julian — really a small lake — which was soon to be his goal.

Here abode Brother John, his friend and teacher from childhood; Brother John who himself had been the friend of a man who in *his* youth had been a disciple of the great Pelagius, condemned as a heretic by the Pope of Rome.

But whether gazing south or north, whether thinking of Brother John or playing with the vision of that ghost of the dead harvest, at the back of Porius's consciousness there always remained those two portentous pieces of news. Porius's father, the carefree irresponsible despot of their particular branch of the House of Cunedda, had of late enjoyed his eccentric life to such a tune that he had come to leave all the wartime precautions to the old Roman, his wife's father.

But though this old Patrician had his hand in most things there *were* certain administrative and executive matters that Einion ab Iddawc insisted should be attended to by the younger Porius and by nobody else.

Among these was the reception of important news brought by special watchers on all the borders of their province. This may have been a pathetically simple attempt of the Brythons to emulate those alarming intruders from the east called Coranians, who appear to have used the winds in *their* transmission of news.

It seems certain that the Gwyddyl-Ffichti knew nothing of this practise of border guards, though it was used against them; and the elder branch of the descendants of Cunedda, the ones who possessed Deganwy, never seem to have used it. The fact of Iddawc ab Edeyrn being himself the son of a daughter of the giants, and his own daring in marrying a native princess, had helped to accentuate this difference between the Edeyrnion branch of the family and the one that ruled over Deganwy.

Certain it is that at this particular moment of his life, aged thirty years and three weeks, the grandson of Iddawc the Apostate felt that neither the Brythonic nor the Roman strains in his blood had any real power over his destiny. It is probable too that neither of the women who dominated him would have had the least idea as to what he was thinking as he stood with his back to the descending steps and stared at the Swamp of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti and at the prehistoric avenue beyond it, called the Path of the Dead.

He was thinking that it would be a marvellous comfort if he could talk tonight to someone who really knew the best and the worst of him as Brother John alone knew these things.

"But I must tell Rhun," he said to himself. "Mithras or no Mithras, I must tell Rhun; for he'll have to go with me — he'll have to go with *us."*

Then all of a sudden, as happens with human consciousness when important decisions are being made, there occurred a vanishing away of the open space in the forest at which — with his small greenish yellow eyes screwed up — he had been gazing so long, and in its place rose the banquet hall of the Gaer and the image of his foster-brother moving to the side of the historian from the south, at whom he had been staring, and actually — the shy and awkward Rhun, grandson of a Greek freedman — entering into conversation with the State Chronicler from Dyfed, the newly appointed Henog to the Emperor Arthur.

Porius had been fascinated by this man from the first time he saw him, and though Sylvanus ap Bleheris had been with them now ever since the early summer, he found him just as difficult to understand and not at all less interesting than when he first appeared.

"He must have wanted to find out whether Rhun had heard of any new case of this Cader Idris business and have willed him to sit with him when the rest were drunk. I'm not going to worry about *him* tonight."

But Porius found it easier to call up the image of the emperor's Henog than to dismiss it when called up; and with that curious second consciousness that was always flapping its fantastic and reckless wings inside his muscular frame, while it watched with detached amusement his thoughts and sensations, he noted now how the autumnal forest before him with its varying shades where lay the Swamp of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti and the Path of the Dead, the whole of which had disappeared as he conjured up the scene between Rhun and the Henog, now began coming back; only coming back piecemeal and in arbitrary fragments, so that it was through an umbrageous mist of vegetation, out of which every now and then some particular oasis of familiar shape and colour would outline itself for a moment only to re-dissolve, that he pondered on the grey visage, the long pointed nose, and the warm black gown of the historian.

Nor was the forest, with its dissolving views of the Path of the Dead and the Swamp of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, content with carrying familiar fragments of its leafy reality into the midst of the wavering eidola of Porius's vision of the historian; it even invaded the phantasmagoric cloud of gods and devils and giants and magicians and monsters who, from the glimpses the Henog permitted of them, possessed congenial habitations within the man's extraordinarily shaped skull.

Porius had not been the only one of the family to fall under the spell of the Henog. It is true that the Lady of the Gaer and the elder Porius still held aloof, for Minnawc Gorsant, the priest, had interspersed his Masses all through that summer and autumn with the Church's fiercest denunciations of sorcery; but with Brochvael ab Iddawc the man had held long and intense colloquies from which Morfydd — presumably because they concerned the disappearance of her brother's body — was excluded.

With his hands on this northwestern parapet, Porius now squared his enormous shoulders and indulged himself to the limit in the sensation of possessing in his stupendous muscles — which still at thirty seemed gathering strength — the power of those prehistoric aboriginals.

It was known that the wife of the son of Cunedda, the mother of Iddawc the Apostate, was a giant-waif from Cader Idris. And it was not at all certain that this woman was the last of them.

Porius knew that after the vanishing of the mangled remains of Morvran, which had been the last of several such disappearances, his father had actually sent an expedition of youthful warriors to search all possible hiding places on the slopes of Cader Idris, in order to make sure that no scattered remnants of Gwyddyl-Ffichti, lurking in prehistoric caves and even in caverns beneath the mountain tarns, were responsible for this weird sequence of body-snatching.

Well! The shrewd chronicler from Dyfed had no doubt by this time heard every detail of the unhappy secrets of their House under the pretext of studying Brochvael ab Iddawc's books. He must have had long talks with Auntie Esyllt who probably told him how her niece Alarch ferch Iddawc had disgraced the family by marrying Gwrnach, the son of Agenor, a Greek slave. She must have told him too about his own betrothal to Morfydd and about the murder of Morvran and how the family was divided over the priest's having changed the name of their town from the Ford of Mithras to Corwen, the "White Choir."

What the man didn't hear from the Modrybedd he must have heard from the forest huts, for news could travel among them almost as quickly as it used to do among the old Coranians. The forest huts had kept alive for countless centuries a superstitious respect for the superhuman power of those original inhabitants of the mountain peaks.

No doubt the Three Aunties must have told the Henog about Gwrnach's Mithraic idolatry and how Rhun was secretly carrying it on. They must have explained how Gwrnach's father was a freed slave in the camp at Uriconium where Mithras was the recognized rival to Christ.

"Yes, that's what it is," he said to himself, as he stared at the distant clearing in the forest that marked the Path of the Dead. "The Henog is asking Rhun what *he* thinks about this disappearance of Morvran's body. God in Heaven! But I wish I'd followed Rhun's advice and burnt it to ashes whatever Morfydd said!"

And his mind reverted to an aspect of Rhun's character that had been puzzling him of late, namely, the motive that had induced this famous runner — for, like his father before him, Rhun with his Greek blood was the fleetest of all their tribe — to persuade Brother John of the Fount to teach him the actual words of that famous heretical chapter of the great Pelagius. What on earth was Mithras to Pelagius or Pelagius to Mithras? Did Rhun do it out of simple kindness to Brother John, knowing how the old man in his far-away boyhood had watched over Pelagius at the last?

And while the clearing in the forest before him, where the space between the oaks took on a paler green, returned to its proper three-dimensional substantiality and ceased to be an unreal, accidental assembling of meaningless colours and shapes, he began to murmur to himself a fragmentary sentence from the chapter in question which Auntie Esyllt had taught him as a child. "Neither Life nor Death nor Love nor Hate nor

Angels nor Devils nor Mind nor Matter nor Present nor Past — No! nor even the Blessed Trinity Itself — has any power to meddle with the *individual human will* or to—" But at this point he was interrupted in his thoughts; and swinging round he found himself confronted by the head, the shoulders, the load the man was carrying, and finally by Rhun ap Gwrnach himself.

"Were you talking to the Henog?"

But Rhun returned him no answer. Always taciturn at a pinch, he was at this moment so heavily loaded with his own and Porius's belongings that he could only shuffle to the eastern parapet and deposit his burden on its broad flat stones. As he staggered past him Porius realized that he was extremely agitated. The blood seemed to be beating up behind his eyeballs, causing his eyes to lose all natural expression; while his breath seemed coming in laboured gasps like the gasps of a toad who has just managed to squeeze through an aperture too small for more than the tip of the tongue of the pursuing snake.

With a groan of relief he finally set down among the other things a large empty water vessel that had at one time possessed a strap for a man's shoulder. This was the old Porius's field-service flask, such as the legionaries quartered at Uriconium were accustomed to carry when on the march; and it was always this particular container that in his hygienic religiosity the old man used to keep filled from the Fountain of Saint Julian.

Having propped a heavy hunting spear against the parapet, and thrown down upon it two massive hunting knives, Rhun looked at his foster-brother in grim expectancy and with the expression of a grown man awaiting orders from a boy. Could their playmate Morfydd, for all three of them were grandchildren of Iddawc the Apostate, have seen them now, as Porius moved over to Rhun's side and turned his head to talk to him, she would certainly have been struck — as everybody in Edeyrnion was constantly being struck — by the surprising facial resemblance between them. They had the same brown hair, the same deep-set hollow eye sockets, the same heavy corrugated brows, the same small greenish yellow eyes. And they dressed in almost the same clothes. Each wore a long leather tunic gathered at the waist by a leather belt, and beneath it a soft, thick, woollen shirt. Each wore leather breeches above short woollen drawers. Each wore high deerskin boots.

One small difference in their attire was that Porius's belt was inlaid with *calch lassar,* the particular kind of blue enamel for which Britain had been famous all over Europe before the mania of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti for mother-of-pearl and the passion of the legionaries for bronze had discouraged this dainty trade.

Another difference was that Porius's cap was made of the skin of an almost extinct animal, an especial breed of oxen called *ychen bannog* who were held sacred to the gods until the Brythons came. To see the chief physical difference between them, however, Morfydd would have had to have perched herself on a fragment of wooden rail which still lingered by the staircase up which Rhun had just come.

Since her brother's death she had frequently reminded Porius of a wild bird caught in a cage; and she had always made him think of *some* sort of bird, especially when she balanced herself in perilous positions. It had been the swift feet and the pedantry of some literary centurion that gained for Rhun's grandfather, the Greek slave at Uriconium, an almost Homeric *kudos* at the Gaer; and the Greek's son by a native woman had won for his bride, the princesses' niece, on the strength of a memorable life-and-death race with certain Gwyddyl-Ffichti assassins.

Had Morfydd really at that moment been watching her two playmates she might well have had all manner of ambiguous thoughts about this startling resemblance. Was her betrothed's real mother actually this calm sad daughter of Porius Manlius of the great Manlian *gens,* this proud relative of the Emperor Arthur, now doomed to submit to the incalculable whims and manias of Einion ab Iddawc?

Porius and Rhun had been suckled at the same breast, the breast of the beautiful Alarch daughter of Iddawc, but *that* wouldn't make them alike! They both had the blood of Iddawc the Apostate — but *that* wouldn't make them alike!

Why were they so alike? Morfydd might well indeed have asked herself that disturbing question. She might well have wondered whether she would not sooner have been sister to them both rather than the bride of either!

Thus indeed might Porius's caged bird have wished as she looked at the two men; but there was no Morfydd just then, whether in the form of a bird or of any other creature, on the watchtower of Mynydd-y-Gaer on that eighteenth of October in the year four hundred and ninety-nine.

Having left behind them in a crack between two loose stones one of their heavy hunting knives, Rhun carrying Porius's spear and Porius carrying the sacred water bottle, the two men furtively set forth down the slope towards the river. Had the old Patrician at whose behest they were going to the Fount watched them then he might have been reminded of a pair of gladiators.

As soon however as they reached the river, Rhun ap Gwrnach burst out and revealed all that was worrying him. He spoke as impetuously as if *he* had been the one, and not Porius, who was five years the younger. He confessed that only half an hour ago, when the meal had ended and the drinking hardly begun, he had let their famous guest, the Silurian Henog, slip away unnoticed on one of his exploring excursions among the natives.

“And you see, Porius ab Einion, he’s never been out of this house before; never after the meal, never in the evening. And he’s on foot, and he’s got nobody with him, not even a dog. He’s got no weapon, and he has no more idea than a child of the risks he runs. Every man in the forest has heard of him. It may be safe for him to do this sort of thing down there in the south. But he should understand he’s in the north now. Our people here have guessed he’s writing a book; and you know yourself, Porius, how ticklish this whole matter of Cader Idris is. They say one thing among themselves” — he made a gesture towards the forest huts— “but when *we* try to meddle — I tell you there isn’t one of them, including the princesses, and you know what *they* are, who at this actual moment isn’t in league against us — whatever it is” — and Rhun threw a furtive look towards the portion of the horizon where the descent of the sun was concealed by the mist— “whatever it is that comes down from the Cader—”

But Porius interrupted him. “Which way did he go? Don’t you see, man, what it would mean for Father, for me, for all our people in Edeyrnion and Meirion and Ardudwy, if the Henog came to harm through us? Myrddin Wyllt would put upon us such a *tynged* as would turn us into foxes or beavers or badgers! The Henog’s writing a Vita Merlini by command of the emperor and I wouldn’t be surprised if Myrddin Wyllt himself wasn’t... Jesus, brother! the emperor would send his horsemen to destroy us, or he’d let loose on us all his prisoners to lay our tribe low, if any harm came to the Henog. Which way did he go? Which way? Which way? Which way?”

While he jerked out these words, for he had seized him by the wrist, Porius kept moving the man’s arm up and down as though it were a bell rope, and as though he were rending the air with peal after peal of warning clamour.

Under the propulsion of the appalling possibilities suggested by his cousin, Rhun now tore himself free and waving his spear towards the west, towards that Path of the Dead that led to the ancient burial mound, he set off at a run.

Porius pressed the palm of his right hand against the bone handle of the hunting knife in his belt to make sure it was safely there. Then he swung his right arm free, while with his left hand he clutched the neck of the water flask. He knew exactly whither the other was heading. How natural it seemed to be doing just what they were! He kept recalling as they ran how when he was a child of nine or ten, and Rhun a boy of fourteen or fifteen, he had followed him at just such a sudden impulse!

The two of them knew every wolf's track, every deer's trail, every rabbit run, every badger hole in the district. They didn't know the thickets and undergrowths and the swamps as well as the lads of the forest huts, but they knew the rock caves on the slopes of the mountains a good deal better. Superstitious horrors of an incredible kind, connected with the caves in those remote places, made all the native boys unwilling to leave the maternal shelter of the forest with its huge protective trees.

From the very beginning of human life in these places the giants of the mountains when famished for food must have descended upon the hut-dwellers of the plain. And they must have forced their way through the forest much as he himself was doing now!

He couldn't help envying the easy beauty of Rhun's stride. The man was thirty-five but his limbs had the suppleness and grace of a boy's and his running was crafty and professional too; for he soon curtailed his first impulsive rush and subsided into that same fast-swinging steady trot, reverting no doubt to the Greek athletes of the old time, as one of whom his father Gwrnach had won the princess.

But no movements of a perfect athlete could stop Porius's agitated thoughts from dancing their grotesque dance. How should he — *that* was the question — lay bare the drift of this huge tidal-wave of news to Rhun? It would certainly be more natural and probably much wiser to put the case to him before revealing anything to his mother or Morfydd. All that he had to decide rose before him now like the twin peaks of Eryri.

For some reason the fate of the Henog didn't trouble him greatly. He had faith in Rhun's instinct as to the fellow's movements; and the mere strain of his muscles and quickening of breath and blood had the effect of dulling his nervous apprehensions. Yes, the further Rhun led him in their pursuit of the man the further the man himself receded into the background. Besides the fellow was a Silurian and he'd never heard of a Venedotian — as his grandfather persisted in calling the natives of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy — being a match for a Silurian, armed or unarmed.

But where in the name of Jesus was he off to now? Rhun had suddenly lessened his pace and now after a second's hesitation had left the path they had been following, which itself was anything but an unbroken one, and plunged into the pathless undergrowth!

Porius followed him without question just as he used to do in the old carefree days before any of these appalling responsibilities and decisions had to be faced. He longed to ask his leader what plan, what purpose, what idea he was pursuing in this wild goose chase; but they were both so completely out of breath, and this new struggle of beating their way through the underbrush — Rhun with Porius's spear and Porius with his bare hand and his Roman bottle — was so absorbing that not so much as a groan, a sigh, a laugh, a chuckle, passed between them.

But the younger man wasn’t following blindly. He knew to a few hundred yards exactly where they were and he divined that his foster-brother was taking this particular short cut so as to come out suddenly and unforeseen, upon the Path of the Dead.

This Path of the Dead was a wide mid-forest avenue, arched by enormous oaks and criss-crossed by intersecting ways, each one of which led to some particular moss-covered mound, while the main avenue, starting from the oldest and largest of these, the one called y Grug, came to an end at the western entrance of Mynydd-y-Gaer. Though a heavily moving runner compared with Rhun, Porius was a good deal less incommoded by the underbrush through which he was being led.

This was only partly due to his being in the rear. It was due quite as much to his power of beating off the bushes and brambles and branches with a sort of automatic aplomb, as if he really *were* the prehistoric giant he loved to imagine himself, while he pondered with a perfectly detached intelligence on the method he would follow in unburdening his mind to Rhun.

After they’d been forcing their passage in this rough manner for about a quarter of an hour, Rhun himself suddenly stopped dead, and turning round laid his finger upon his lips; then he pressed forward again but at a very different speed and with very different movements. This time he was as careful as a cat stalking a bird not to break a stick or crack a twig or strike a branch with the point of his spear.

As he pushed aside a particularly large bramble that like a serpent with the spiked scales of a dragon had fixed its hold upon the trunk of an ash that was already the victim of a treacherous ivy bride, Porius, panting close at his heels and so near that he could smell the peculiar smell of his sweat which had always struck him as resembling the smell of certain kinds of woodsap, was suddenly aware of a most illuminating idea; the idea, namely, that this interest displayed by Rhun in the philosophy of Pelagius was due to the former's conviction that the logical issue of Pelagianism was the rejection of Christ in favour of Mithras.

All Edeyrnion knew that Rhun had inherited, along with his father's ferryboat, some idolatrous ritual at the Ford of Mithras, and that he had a real Mithraic shrine in what was known as the Cave of the Dog was generally believed. But Porius was as phlegmatic and cautious in action as he was rapid and reckless in thought; and he foresaw endless trouble in Mynydd-y-Gaer if he broke his habitual custom of submission to his mother and her Roman father, each of whom regarded Mithras as anathema.

Prince Einion on the other hand, as befitted a son of Iddawc the Apostate, took neither Christ nor Mithras seriously. In fact the only Immortal, save Dyfrdwy, the sacred river herself, to whom Einion ab Iddawc felt any personal attraction was the forest people's goddess, Ceridwen, whose bloodless worship Gorsant the priest believed he had quite eradicated.

If Morfydd could have seen the two playmates of her childhood now, she would certainly have been amazed and perhaps a little touched by the deadly and feline stealthiness of their progress through that undergrowth.

But it wasn't long before Porius heard a sound that caused him to accelerate his movements till he was at Rhun's side; and he was there just in time! Before them as they peered through the screen of a small sycamore's branches, whose enormous leaves were already brown and covered with curious fungoid spots — black as a scribe's ink, black as if some Henog among the satyrs had deliberately dropped them from an over-full pen — was the Path of the Dead.

Moss of various sorts was mingled here in the soft grass with meadow sorrel; and where the ground grew marshy there were patches of sedge and cotton grass.

The air of this late autumn afternoon was as full of softly drifting, lightly undulating waves of terrestrial coolness as it was open over their heads to the motionless spaces of the untroubled sky. Through the death-sweet odours of toadstools, rotten wood, and dying leaves, through the salt sweat that trickled from their foreheads and the salt blood that oozed from their scratches, through the receding shadows that lay upon them of moss-green intricacies and amber-brown vaultings, they were now aware of a sight such as neither of them had ever thought to see in this place.

Down the centre of the avenue, mounted on a stately white horse, richly harnessed with green and gold, himself in green and gold and holding a lance with a green-and-gold pennon, its silver handle balanced on his right stirrup and its sharp point metal-grey against mist-grey, gleaming high above his helm, rode a young horseman of the new Arthurian cavalry.

"Nama, Nama, Sebesio!" gasped Rhun. But none of the normal life stirrings in that place, least of all the little cloud of October midges that at that moment was moving in undulant curves round Porius's hereditary cap of extinct oxskin, showed the least sign of awe at the sound of those sacred syllables. Sacred indeed! For what the guardian of the Cave of the Dog had dared to blurt out in his excitement was nothing less than the awe-inspiring conclusion of the prehistoric Mithraic Mysteries.

These were words that neither Rhun himself, nor his father, nor even his Greek grandfather, could have interpreted. They were lost words of the priestcraft of ancient Persia; and as often happens at dramatic moments upon earth, these particular sounds, although charged in their long history with far more dramatic interest than the waylaying of a man on a white horse by a man carrying a spear, and a man carrying a water bottle, were no more just then than the fall of a leaf.

Everything else at that particular point in space and time, as the two men moved into the path of the one man, was a dramatic cause followed by a dramatic effect; but although in its long and magical existence the cry *"Nama, Nama, Sebesio!"* possessed ten thousand times more interest than anything that could possibly occur at this spot on the eighteenth of October, four hundred and ninety-nine, it was destined to dissolve into absolute annihilation without being understood by anyone, without making an impression on anything, without producing as much effect upon the course of events as the smallest of that crowd of midges.

"Jesus Christ!" exclaimed Porius, adding with the next breath, "but he's a pretty fellow!"

"Well, brother," he went on, without troubling either to lower his voice or to raise it, and speaking in the peculiar Edeyrnion dialect which must have been as obscure to this young rider as if it had been a continuation of that mystic litany from Persia, "will you hold his horse while I talk to him?"

Both the men advanced at once into the middle of the road, and the natural result followed. The white horse gave one startled swerve, reared high on her hind legs, and began beating the air with hooves that seemed as they flashed against the grey sky and the brown oaks to be forged out of pure silver. Rhun, always a fool with horses, could do nothing with this ramping centaur; so Porius went to his help, and partly by brute force and partly by the use of words so old that the forest people may have used them to tame the wild asses of Arabia, they got the white mare under control.

But the youthful rider who, to do him justice, had displayed no mean horsemanship, now became haughty and truculent addressing them as *taeogion,* or “low-born serfs,” and sternly commanding them to get out of his way.

“I — have,” he announced dramatically; and though his words would have been more effective if he hadn’t been forced to bend down while he spoke to adjust the strap of one of his stirrups, his tone wasn’t without a certain dignity, “I have a letter from the Emperor Arthur to Prince Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda and I should be obliged if instead of frightening my horse one of you would be good enough to guide me to your prince’s palace. They tell me it’s in a place called Mons Castrum, near the church of Sanctus Julianus.” He stopped speaking, evidently expecting instant obedience.

Rhun, who was holding one side of the white horse’s bit, looked at his foster-brother, who was holding the other, and saw him put the water bottle carefully on to the ground.

“Hang on to the horse!” cried Porius, and with a gesture as violent and abrupt as his face and temper were unperturbed, he flung up his arms sent the long lance spinning across the avenue, lifted the lad as a woman might shake the dust from a broom, and held him aloft in the air for all his kicking and struggling. He held him as a man might tease an infant without realizing that the child is angry.

He did notice, however, and failed not to put it to the lad’s credit, that in all this desperate waving and jerking of his arms and legs the rider never uttered a single audible sound. “He doesn’t call for help,” Porius thought, “because he doesn’t want to be seen in this *position.”*

“What shall I do with him?” he enquired of Rhun in a pondering voice; but, as he watched the young man’s contortions, which he did as calmly as if the abnormal muscles of somebody else’s arms were quivering with the strain, there shot into his head like a bolt from empty space the grating and hurting Homeric word *"oiktistion"* the extreme of pitifulness, and he saw in his mind a certain look come into Morfydd's face. It was the look that came into it once when, as she was teaching him the Greek letters from the Alexandrian scroll that was the chief treasure in her father's house, they came bolt upon that Scylla horror which the hero confessed was the most pitiable thing he saw "while he explored the paths of the sea."

Both his arms and his hands, as he thus held aloft the dumbly struggling youth, were now twitching and quivering with the effort, and though the idea did cross his mind of flinging him amid the branches of the nearest oak tree, he decided, though not in any reckless hurry and quite as if the sinews that seemed as if they would soon break were somebody else's, that he would replace him on the grass.

He proceeded to do this at once, and to do it too with the utmost care, treating the youth as tenderly as if he'd been an infant and he himself an absentminded but conscientious nurse.

Not content with this, as soon as he had set the rider on his feet, he went across to where the lad's lance still lay half-hidden in the heart of a holly bush, and returning with it handed it back. He noticed without surprise as he did this that Rhun, instead of scrupulously abstaining from the least glance at the dumb-founded boy, was watching him with a good deal of alert and concentrated attention. That he should do this produced in Porius quite a number of rather complicated feelings, one of which was pure irritation that Rhun should be free to satisfy a curiosity of which he was aware in himself but despised as a vulgar grossness that must be indignantly suppressed.

It was therefore with a vague abstracted look, a look that saw nothing, that he now approached the youth.

"Give me your letter," he said gently, speaking in the old-fashioned colloquial Latin which he had learnt as a child from Brother John of the

Fount, and which was still used in most of the princes' courts and always at Caerleon and Caergwynt, but which the masses of the people couldn't understand.

"You needn't hesitate," he went on, "for to tell you the truth, I am Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc and I have a notion that the emperor's letter concerns me even more than it concerns the prince my father."

If it *were* the inherited drops of non-Aryan African blood in his veins that now caused Porius to leave that shame-stricken image of humiliation in green and gold, out of which he appeared to have conjured every vestige of self-respect, and go over to the lad's horse and begin talking to Rhun across the creature's neck, it was a delicacy that obviously didn't correspond to the kind of shame from which this lad suffered, for hearing a sound that made him return to his side Porius now found him fallen on his face on the ground and his whole body heaving with sobs.

"Disgraced! Disgraced! Disgraced!" was the only articulate word that Porius could catch when he stood over him and tried to console him.

At last the boy did lift his tear-blubbered face and heaving himself up by the palms of his hands, a gesture that gave him a very, very curious look. "False!" he cried, "false to my vows, to my race, to my emperor! How can I go back there? How can I look any of them in the face again? And so," he added after a deep-drawn breath, "and so you are Prince Porius. I've heard of your strength. We hear everything at court. The emperor himself told me about you. I was so — but I can never go back now! My life's ruined. You see yourself, Prince Porius, how it... is... with me! I don't know... what... I can do... or where... I can... go."

And with the palms of his hands still pressed against the damp earth his smooth face would have distorted itself into a new paroxysm of grief, if

Porius hadn't seized him by his arms and as calmly as when he hoisted him out of the saddle raised him to his feet and put his lance into his hands.

While doing this Porius found himself remembering how as a child he always got a peculiar thrill from playing with Morfydd's dolls, especially with a little boy doll called Morgan Tud, which was the name by which the Three Princesses always spoke of Pelagius. It was of Morgan Tud's wooden skull and of the monk's hood the Aunties had made for this philosophic cranium that he thought now as he straightened and tightened the leather straps of the great plumed helmet which the boy's frantic struggles when held aloft in the air, had disordered, loosened, and twisted awry.

"Give me the letter," he commanded; and the youth, completely in his power now, produced from between his steel breastplate and his silken tunic a small, compactly folded scroll of ivory-coloured parchment and placed it in Porius's hands, who hurriedly read it and refolding it returned it to him.

"What is your name, *my soul?"* he enquired, using the traditional Berber salutation which was as familiar in Dyfed as in Gwynedd.

The youth looked for advice toward his horse, but his glance only met the now totally abstracted and indifferent stare of the man who was holding it, while Porius, who had turned his head in the same direction, said to himself, "Rhun's wondering whether he'll coax me across his ferry tonight, after all this."

But aloud he said, addressing the discomforted lad, "You only have to follow this same path, without turning to right or left, whatever other ways you see, and you'll come to Mynydd-y-Gaer. When you get there, don't ask for my father, ask for my mother, the Princess Euronwy. Here! Take this knife and tell her I sent you! You needn't say a word about our encounter. Say your horse *fell,* if you like — I mean if you feel you want to say something. But tell her that it's possible I may stay the night with Brother

John. By the way, has a Greek sea captain called Dion Dionides turned up at the Fount yet, a sailor from Constantinople?"

The young man nodded eagerly. "Yes, yes," he affirmed, "that's his name — Dion Dionides. He talks to Brother John all the time. The master absents himself when he talks."

Porius glanced quickly at his foster-brother. "And who may the master be?"

Proudly the boy answered, "Myrddin ap Morfryn *alias* Myrddin Wyllt *alias* Myrddin Ambrosius *alias* Myrddin Emrys." And the faintest flicker of a smile crossed the lad's face.

Porius's small yellow-green eyes lit up and his thick eyebrows moved downwards towards the bridge of his Roman nose. *"What?"* he cried. "Did you hear *that,* Rhun? Myrddin Wyllt's at the Fountain!"

"Ask him," returned Rhun, "whether the Henog of Dyfed's at the Fountain."

"God!" cried Porius, "I'd forgotten the Henog altogether!"

"Yes! yes! yes!" the youth declared. "He got there just before I started. I heard him beginning an argument with Dion Dionides just as I jumped on Gwylan's back."

"Well! Up you get on Gwylan's back again, sonny. But you haven't yet" — for the young knight had now mounted, lance and all, with a most correct and elegant leap into the saddle— "told me your name!"

"Mabsant ap Kaw, first cousin to the captain of the guard!"

And leaving this proud boast to diffuse itself among the same dying leaves and the same wet brambles and the same rain-filled hollows of black water that had been present at his despair, the youth made Gwylan leap over the moss-covered corpse of a fallen oak and with the pennon flying from his lance, and the plume from his helm, and the horse’s mane and tail lifted by the wind of his speed, he disappeared in the mist at a reckless gallop.

CHAPTER II. The Cave of Mithras

LEFT TO THEMSELVES Porius picked up his water bottle and sighed heavily. Then he instinctively clapped his hand on the empty sheath of his hunting knife. Watching him closely, Rhun did not miss this gesture. “You don’t want your spear, I suppose?” he enquired.

“No, no! You keep that. I’ll find something just as good in a minute. Well, Rhun, which way shall we go? But I don’t care! There’s no hurry now. He’ll tell them at home and they won’t expect us. The old man will have to wait for his holy water till tomorrow.”

He moved a step or two towards an extremely ancient tree which was bowed almost to the ground. It was an enormous willow and Porius had been mixing this tree with several of his recent thoughts. He now gave it a little more — though still by no means all — of his attention.

The tree had only a few gnarled and deformed branches left, and these had been so harassed by the constant blowing down the broad avenue of the prevailing wind, that is to say, of the southwest wind, that their topmost twigs had acquired the trick of brushing with their withered leaves the tree’s own exposed and elongated root which extended itself quite a little distance from the original spot where as a sapling five hundred years ago in the days of Tiberius Caesar it had commenced its life.

With his back to Rhun Porius began abstractedly searching for any single one among the smaller branches of this ancestor of the forest that could conceivably be broken off to serve as a weapon. Porius’s actions and gestures were often divided from his thoughts by a curious lacuna. It was as if his Herculean body had a life of its own, a life which its enormous animal strength was able to protect and cater for independently of his thoughts.

His self-consciousness was abnormally alert, but his actions seemed hardly to draw upon it at all. It was as if his powerful body had its own deliberate and massively simple method of rendering him humorously impervious to the complicated play of his self-conscious mind. Thus at this moment as he ponderingly fumbled among the mossy limbs of this bent old tree he realized that beneath this whole episode of Mabsant ap Kaw and his horse he was drawing nearer to the decision not only to tell Rhun his disturbing news but to celebrate its arrival by visiting the shrine of the Persian sun-god.

He knew well enough that both these actions threatened two out of the three great umbilical cords of his life upon earth, the link with his mother and the link with his religion; leaving only the third, the link with his country, unmenaced and inviolate.

What he was really telling himself now was that if he wanted Rhun's full sympathy at this crisis it was a cowardly holding back not to give the man's religion a fair and honourable trial.

"But I won't act upon any sudden impulse," he told himself, having quite forgotten his lack of a weapon as he turned slowly away from the tree that had been an acorn when Christ died, "I will leave it to chance."

The curious thing was that when he came back to his foster-brother's side he never said to him: "We'll go by way of the river." He said nothing at all; neither did Rhun say anything. They simply re-entered the forest and again went through the wearisome effort of forcing a path for themselves through the thick brushwood.

But when at length they were once more on the river's bank Porius fell into a vein of thought that was as natural to him as it was to let his body go its own way and follow, apparently, its own animal sagacity. In this mood his mind seemed to detach itself a stage further, detach itself in fact from the intuitive purpose of his inmost being, and contemplate both that crafty entity and its secret intention with a good deal of amusement.

“There’s no *necessity* for crossing the Ford of Mithras,” his amused mind mocked, “since Saint Julian’s Fount is on this side. But sooner than not cross you’d pretend to be mad and make out that only Mithras could heal you!”

The grotesque pranks he’d have to play before Rhun’s astonished eyes ere that simple warrior grasped his condition struck him as a quaint fact. He noticed too as they leisurely followed the upstream flow of the river that his own silence was answered by a corresponding silence.

“He must be aware,” Porius thought, “that I’m in a reckless and dangerous mood. I wonder if Mithras has, like Christ, some particular curse for an ‘unpardonable sin’? Would it be such a sin to gaze at the Mysteries in a mocking and unbelieving mood?”

He was now between Rhun and the river as they walked in silence and he could not help observing all the casual bits of wood that were carried upon the tide, and he noticed that one of these fragments must have been part of a hen roost, for it was still grey with the droppings of the fowls, droppings that the purifying element was now carrying from an unknown homestead to an unknown destination.

The river was swollen by recent rains, and it was a peculiarity of the Dee to be extremely sensitive to any increase in its volume. By a single night’s rain its speed was increased from a scarcely perceptible current to a rapid and swirling torrent. There was still enough light in the sky to cause the surface of the river between the darkening banks to assume that strange metallic glint of a phantasmal whiteness which is the final response, whether caught upon pool or puddle or lake or pond or ditch or fen or moat or marsh, of the most receptive and evasive of all the elements to the most aggressive and emphatic of all — the farewell of water fading out of the fire of day.

"I like this time of twilight down here by the river," Porius said suddenly. "In the forest things are a bit too treacherous at this hour; and on the mountain you're always staring at the sky and watching for falling stars. Besides, the river seems more conscious of your existence than the woods and precipices. Brother John thinks it's a pity we don't go on worshipping the river as a symbol of the Mother of God. He swears he knows several people in the forest huts who *do* do this just as they did in the olden days. Do you know, Rhun, I believe you're much more of a Roman than I am! If I hadn't known your mother as well as I did I should never have believed she was Indeg's daughter; and I have an idea that the Three Modrybedd — certainly Auntie Esyllt — felt as I do! She was certainly the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, and though the Three Aunties *are* the Three Aunties and — well! you know what they are—"

Rhun looked him up and down with a flicker of something quizzical in his expression. "She couldn't have been very Roman," he remarked, "if she was your father's sister."

Rhun's tone was affectionately rallying, but Porius blushed in the darkness and decided to leave his tongue's misbegotten offspring where it fell, rather than make matters worse by picking it up.

"It's strange," he went on, "that this actual water that you and I know so well and in which we've caught so many salmon, was really *worshipped* by our grandmother Indeg" — he caught himself up, feeling he was still on dangerous ground; then plunged on with a rush— "worshipped, I mean, not merely as a symbol of the Blessed Virgin, but as" — once more he stopped, and then blurted out— "as a Divine Being in *Herself!"*

Rhun swung round, and both the men stood motionless for a moment, their heavy features taking on a wavering, fluctuating, and shapeless indistinctness, as if the twilight were adjusting its own special masks of protective vapour to their human lineaments.

"Do you remember," said Rhun abruptly, "how we used to wonder what my mother and your father really believed? We used to watch them when *your* mother and Porius Manlius were chanting the responses at Mass as if they would willingly die for their faith. And you always used to ask me to tell you about our grandmother's death when Porius Manlius brought your mother from Uriconium to be married to the prince, and about Porius Manlius insulting *my* father and calling him 'Graeculus' and about the Three Aunties refusing to come up to the Gaer till Porius Manlius had apologized. What you always wanted me to tell you, and what my mother could always keep you quiet by making me tell you, was about Porius Manlius throwing his father's sword into the river when Auntie Esyllt said that Bendigeitfran and Ceridwen were as worthy to be worshipped as any Catholic saint, and that Bendigeitfran *was* both a saint and a giant, and that Ceridwen — just as Brother John says about this water — was *the original* of the Blessed Mary."

"No, no! Not the original!" cried Porius. "I remember the whole thing! Your mother used to sing a lullaby about Ceridwen which brought in the Blessed Virgin but as somebody quite different! It was a sort of dialogue between the two."

"Can you still repeat it?" enquired Rhun. "Do you remember it?"

Remember it! Did Rhun know the crucial effect of that question? He must — and yet he couldn't! It was over that lullaby that he and Morfydd's brother had had their worst quarrel, the quarrel when Morfydd took her brother's side.

Like a blood-red flame, rushing from one inflammable stubble field to another, the possessive instinct in him, which as a rule was slower and more lethargic than in most human beings, flared up so violently that he actually shivered, and as he did so he reached a momentous conclusion. He decided that if he left his home to plunge into the great world he would make Morfydd marry him at once and take her with him! Yes! If he left his mother *she* must leave her father.

And he reached another decision also; namely, that here and now and at this very spot, with the river that the Three Aunties worshipped as a goddess flowing within a foot of their feet, he would tell Rhun what had happened. Remember the lullaby? He would remember everything they looked at *now:* that half-drowned alder branch, those half-submerged stone steps, that floating log, that grey boulder, that pallor of the swift current.

"I've got some news for you, brother." He had never called him that before — not in that way, hurriedly, naturally, spontaneously, and yet with a curious solemnity. He noticed that Rhun, instead of looking at him, lowered his head and pressed the butt end of the hunting spear against an alder root.

"Two messengers have come," Porius went on, "and I've got to decide what to do before I see Einion ab Iddawc or my mother." He paused for a second, expecting Rhun to lift his head, but the man only went on prodding the alder root with the handle of the spear. "I've got to decide what to do," he went on, "before we get to the Fountain tonight."

"You *have* decided," said Rhun in a curiously quiet and restrained voice.

"Yes, that's true. I *have* decided. Why shouldn't I? You've no idea I suppose *what* I've decided?"

Still Rhun didn't look up. Still he prodded the alder root with the spear. Then he did murmur something; but it seemed addressed rather to the river than to the man at his side.

"What did you say?"

"Only that I *have* an idea."

Porius opened his mouth and drew a deep breath. "Jesus! You have, have you? And what is it then?"

"You are going to marry."

"Rhun!"

"You are going to marry Morfydd."

The first thing Porius felt when these startling words set out on their wingless flight through the seven heavens towards the empyrean, was a tremor of anger, and anger too that he couldn't explain. Why in the name of Jesus did the extremely natural fact that the lifelong comrade he'd just that moment addressed as "brother" should have guessed that he had decided within that very hour to transform his betrothal into marriage send a stampede of angry humours through his veins? Hitherto he had always resigned himself to the arbitrary, intense, magnetic, fanciful, super-tragic moods of Morfydd, and it had never entered his head to think of himself as deciding anything where she was concerned.

He had derived a curious satisfaction from the sensation of feeling himself a helpless ship between the wind of his mother's will and the tide of his girl's will, a ship with slack sails or stretched sails, as it happened, but always caused by those contradictory forces. This submissiveness to the elements, however, did not mean he could respond with agreeable reciprocity when the son of a "Graeculus" predicted which way those winds and tides were going to carry him.

Thus it was brought about that the laconic brevity of Porius's long-pondered announcements to the man he'd just called "brother" was stiffened into a tone with which it is hard to imagine even one of the old historic members of the gens Manlius finding any fault. He bluntly told Rhun that he had received a letter from the Emperor Arthur, who was encamped outside Caergwynt, and that he had decided to join him in the winter campaign. There had also been forwarded to him, he told Rhun, a letter from Constantinople, signed by both the Emperor Anastasius and the Patriarch Macedonius asking that a mission from Britain should be sent at once to reopen the ancient Pelagian controversy with the intention of anathematizing the Pope of Rome for his confirmation of his predecessor's arbitrary and unjust condemnation of a Christian philosopher.

"I shall only remain with Arthur till the spring," he said. "The invaders seem to be falling to pieces. There'll be few of them left in Britain by the spring. Of course, more of them may land and the fortunes of war — you know how it is — may change many times before this island is at peace again, as it was before the Coranians came, and before the remnant from Atlantis came, and before *we* came, and before the Romans came!"

He paused for a moment, changed the water bottle from his right to his left hand, and glanced anxiously at his foster-brother's face. But these two grandsons of Iddawc the Apostate, though different in everything else, were curiously alike in the slow and sluggish manner in which their thoughts and feelings affected their facial expressions. It was as if an immense gap existed between their minds and those appendages of our flesh and blood which express what is within our minds.

Thus it was in an ordinary and dispassionate voice, though perhaps in a tone pitched a little lower than usual, that Rhun enquired whether he intended to take his wife to the emperor's camp at Caergwynt, and whether when the campaign was over he would proceed *alone* to Constantinople.

"Alone?" repeated Porius, and his voice as he pronounced these two syllables had something coldly aloof in it and also something dull, mechanical, impersonal, as if Rhun had asked him whether a modern Greek vessel had the same high poop that the ancient ones appear to have had.

"I mean," explained Rhun, "will you take your wife everywhere?"

Porius turned his head to the river and made no reply. His irrational anger had died down completely, but the feeling that had taken its place was, as far as his own ease of mind went, more disagreeable than anger. He felt as he often did under some outburst from Morfydd, the cause of which was entirely obscure to him but which doggedly and obstinately he attributed to her unhappiness about her brother.

One of his most characteristic mental peculiarities was to visualize every dramatic occasion or crisis or even personality that crossed his mind in terms of some particular physical sensation. The more constantly the particular thought or speculation or personality came into his brain, the more definite grew the physical impression that some mysterious mental process, quite apart from his will, had been slowly evoking, solidifying, stereotyping upon his consciousness.

This impression had always some curious connection of its own with the thought or circumstance it represented. But this connection would have been hopelessly obscure to anyone but Porius himself, so entirely had it been substituted for the thing it represented and so arbitrary were the impressions of scents and sounds and forms and colours that composed it. It became, in fact, an absolutely grotesque ritualistic symbol; a species of *Nama, Nama, Sebesio* in the sphere of the visible and the tactile.

As we have already had occasion to note in connection with that peculiar stubble field yellow whose voyage up the sky had so fascinated him as he looked down upon Minnawc Gorsant's new church, Porius's symbol for his girl's anger was identical with his symbol for her pitiful and fantastical crying fits. But the image that had begun to trouble him now, and which was at present much more nebulous than it would doubtless grow to be as time went on, didn't represent Morfydd alone. It represented the deadly subterranean struggle between Morfydd and his mother, and though it was at this moment somewhat blurred its main tendency of development, the *entelecheia,* so to say, of its future stereotyped existence was very unpleasant indeed.

Translated into anybody else's terms of visualization it might have been called disgusting. To him it was horrible.

As has been already hinted Porius and Rhun resembled each other in more things than their rugged countenances and greenish eyes. They both could think better and come to wiser conclusions when they were on the move, but to express or to exchange ideas their bodies had to be at rest.

With Rhun's words: "Will you take your wife everywhere?" hovering around them, like the last autumnal choir of small gnats, they both had instinctively sought to escape from the fatality of their dangerous thoughts by a pause in physical movement. Porius rested his left hand against the trunk of an alder, while Rhun leaned his whole weight so heavily on the long spear he was carrying that though it was the wooden shaft and not the steel head that was pointing downwards he caused it to sink half a foot into the earth.

The river still carried a weird metallic gleam upon its surface, and the effect of this gleam upon the two men's senses was to accentuate the inner excitement they were both feeling. The whiteness of the river seemed to

Porius at that moment in its livid forlornness to be the acme and epitome of desolation. It suggested lost battles and the blood-frozen corpses of innumerable dead men. It suggested that just beyond the horizon lay the walls of deserted cities and the chilly wharves of ruined harbours, where great ships lay waterlogged and dismasted upon mud banks that were phosphorescent with the whiteness of death.

The river that was worshipped as an immortal by living persons within a few miles from where they stood, gurgled and sucked and oozed and rippled and sighed, just as it had done when those strange ships, thousands of years ago, brought the remnant from the lost continent of Atlantis to its mouth.

It seemed struggling now in its incomprehensible murmurings to reveal to each of these two men that it was folly to try to understand each other's secret souls.

But they scarcely heard the river. Each was absorbed in his own thoughts; thoughts in which, just because they were living souls, there could be no sharing.

But suddenly Porius burst out abruptly, "Is it true that when Pelagius lay dying at Saint Julian's Fountain *the Derwydd came out* and was seen by seven men and two women, and that there is a Derwydd still alive hidden somewhere in the forest huts?"

Had the young rider upon the white horse, who at this moment was blowing his horn before the western gate of Mynydd-y-Gaer, been watching the heavy faces of these two grandsons of Iddawc he would have noticed a look of strange complicity exchanged between them, and he would have heard Rhun reply, as if in response to a ritualistic catechism: "It is beyond all doubt that the Derwydd came out; and none can deny that he was baptized by Pelagius at the Fountain of Saint Julian confessing his sins and acknowledging the Blessed Trinity."

Each of the men gave a long sigh of relief after this, and Porius gravely admitted that he had been waiting ever since the celebration of his birthday a month ago to find out whether Rhun, as one of the descendants of Princess Indeg, had been initiated into the great family secret of the Modrybedd, namely, that there still existed, somewhere among the forest huts, an authentic soothsayer of the ancient philosophy, a man skilled in all the magical arts and all the metaphysical doctrines of the prehistoric, druidic tradition.

"No one after this," Porius remarked, "can call us a babbling and boastful race like the Gwyddyl-Ffichti."

Rhun thrust his hand into a deep receptacle inside his tunic which served as a hunter's pocket and stared whimsically at the young chieftain.

"You'd never guess what I've got here!" he muttered with an odd sort of shamefaced pride.

"Your fire-lighter?"

"Yes, but something else too!" He kept his hand and his wrist hidden while he spoke. "Have you ever seen a Phrygian cap?"

Porius stared at him. "Was that what you clapped on your head when Auntie Esyllt showed you the marks in the snow after the disappearance of Morvran's body?"

Rhun nodded. "I don't want," he said, "to be superstitious; but my father — and this cap was his — said a person could get supernatural help in his struggle against evil if he had his god's token with him."

"Evil?" echoed the other. "But didn't the Aunties think that this abduction of the dead—"

He broke off and changed his tone. “But don’t let’s begin all that again, Rhun! I never really believed it was a giant’s footprint, and even if it was — but I must say this, Rhun, you make me think of Porius Manlius when you talk like that about the struggle against evil. I don’t see things in that light, and never shall. Do you mean that all the evil is on the side of these curst pirates, and all the good on the side of that young braggart on the white horse?”

His foster-brother’s retort to this was to produce the cap in question and shamelessly exchange it for the one already on his head, placing this latter where the other had been. Porius experienced anything but a superstitious feeling as he beheld this sight. He experienced a lively sense of the comic. The massive profile of his foster-brother under this extremely foreign and rather effeminate headgear looked absolutely grotesque. But he didn’t miss the rapid passing across that familiar face so grotesquely surmounted of a pathetic flicker of pain at the mockery it seemed to feel must be there, even though its owner tried so steadfastly to conceal it.

Porius meanwhile went on with his own thoughts on this matter of good and evil and on the striking resemblance between his grandfather’s attitude to Christ and Rhun’s to Mithras.

“May I ask you one thing more, Porius ab Einion?” enquired the troubled face under the Phrygian cap.

The younger man nodded emphatically.

“How long have you been *sure* that Minnawc Gorsant knows about Gogfran Derwydd being in the forest? I saw Gorsant that night — you remember — and he spoke to me afterwards. I suppose he’s working up the people as he did against Morvran?”

Both the men instinctively and automatically threw rapid glances round them to make sure they were not overheard or overlooked. Then Porius said, speaking in a low voice, as if hosts of Coranian listeners were in league with the priest of the new religion: "Yes, you've got it, Rhun! He has been at that same game. In all his recent harangues down there, and I've been to most of them with my mother, he has cursed Gogfran Derwydd — not directly you must understand; for he is too clever, even in the wicked fury of his damned orations, to give away all he knows, but indirectly, appealing to the popular fear of the vengeance of Christ upon our cattle and crops. He has troubled my mother already; I could see that well enough. And now the same old set among the *Gosgordd,* and they're some of our best fighters, are longing to hunt down like a wolf this enemy of Christ."

Rhun scowled. "But Pelagius baptized this druid's father. Do you know what he said, this old fanatic of the Trinity? He said the whole druid system came to this island, and from us to Iwerdon and Gaul, from Plato's lost continent of Atlantis. Think of that! Do you remember how Morfydd and Morvran used to paint the capital letters in Uncle's *Timaeus?* I wonder he let them do it, for it came from Gaul. It's one of the books given him by that Bishop of Arverne. But you know what Morfydd is over old books!"

The other looked across the river. "I wonder," Porius thought, "why it is that whenever I talk of Morfydd's knowing Latin or Greek Rhun gets angry. And yet she never teases *him* like she does me about his ignorance. It's because she's a woman. He doesn't like her knowing Greek and Latin. That's the religion of Mithras — to keep them ignorant! Oh, I know you, my angry friend! You'll end by being exactly like Porius Manlius. There's evil in books. There's the devil in them. And good soldiers of Christ and Mithras must keep the devil out of the hands of women and children!"

Rhun's face did certainly look dark and menacing at that moment, but perhaps the Phrygian cap created this expression. But what a queer thing in him it was to put on this extraordinary object in the open air, where there was no shrine, no ritual, no image; nothing but the flowing river! What a queer person Rhun was! He seemed to be muttering something now, and his eyes were staring into vacancy.

“He’s still angry with me,” thought Porius, “because I like women to learn Greek. But how simple he is! It’s easy to read his thoughts. Jesus Christ! Why does he wear that thing on his head?”

But suddenly in a low, hollow, monotonous voice, a voice that seemed as if it were not his own at all, Rhun began reciting that familiar chapter he had made Brother John help him to learn by heart from the last book written by Pelagius.

“He’s doing this,” thought Porius, “for some odd reason of his own. But I’m not going to bother about his reason. Pelagius is always Pelagius.”

Thus thinking, he gave himself up to the calm liberation of that familiar eloquence. He had come for many years to associate the great Brythonic heretic with what he well knew was his whole nature’s mature revolt against the combined authority of his mother and grandfather.

This revolt had been steadily growing in him ever since he returned as a grown man from the episcopal school beyond the Mountain of the Mothers. Nor had his friend Brother John done anything to hinder it.

There had been times when he regarded this secret revolt in the simple light of a temptation of the devil. There had been times when he regarded it as a sort of championship of his wayward and impious father.

Now, however, he felt differently towards it; and the longer he listened to Rhun’s monotonous intoning, the more differently he felt. He felt that this whole eventful day had in some strange manner been under the guidance of Pelagius. And it was on behalf of Pelagius that he and Morfydd would set sail for Constantinople when the Saxons were driven out!

The spirit of the liberty of every separate human soul seemed issuing from that simple mask beneath the Phrygian cap. And the fading white light upon the river that swept past them became to him now like something that was dying.

But what was dying was a false conscience, the pallid burden of that unreal imperative which had been pressing so long like a numbing vapour upon the free pulses of his life. And though his mind was full of Pelagius he found it wandering from his foster-brother’s actual words. He had indeed observed a peculiar fact about Rhun’s tone; namely, that it lacked all warmth of conviction. It was like a monotonous wafture of lukewarm air produced — for it would be improper to say created — by a colossal fan in the hands of a slave who himself got no refreshment from the stimulus he evoked.

But although Porius permitted the words of Pelagius thus rendered to be rather a musical accompaniment to thought than an originator of it, it mustn’t be supposed that he wasn’t thinking about the ideas of Pelagius, for he was thinking hard. The abysmal gulf between this British philosopher’s view of the Christian religion and the orthodox Roman one had been the chief theological topic at his school beyond the mountains, and he was familiar with every argument for and against the great Pelagian affirmation of the essential goodness of man’s nature; and consequent upon this of the primal part played by the human will in the historic march of fate.

And thus the monotonous rain of these dangerous words, falling from Rhun’s uncommitted lips, wrought upon him like the immersion of sun-dried seaweed in a rock pool by a high-water tide. His thoughts renewed themselves, expanded their cramped tendrils, glowed richly coral-red in their ancient sun-spawned freshness; while a spiritual bubble of interior excitement, drawn from the pool of his nethermost being that had been gathering in his soul all that day, floated off into the twilight.

Yes, he was capable now of defying his mother, capable now of challenging the Roman Porius, capable now of thwarting the ferocious Gorsant! He knew by a curious and rather paradoxical sign that he had made that day the most important decision of his life; by the fact, namely, that he felt in no immediate hurry to do any of the things he had decided to do! He felt in no hurry to join the emperor's forces. He felt in no hurry to sail for Constantinople. He felt in no hurry to marry Morfydd.

The devilish pain of having to decide was over. The earthquakes and forest fires of his mental revolution were over. From the simple skull under the Phrygian cap the oracle had spoken. What he had to do now if he were to alter his vessel's course with any real success was to throw oil on the water as he turned his rudder; or, if he came to the conclusion that he must steer for the magic mountain isle Auntie Tonwen was always talking about, take all possible measures to cover his track, not only from the dwellers on the coast but from the wild creatures on the peak.

Under the recoil from this double decision, his mind, like a released string when the shaft has left the bow, relaxed itself in a sudden physical movement.

He removed his hand from the trunk of the tree and picked up the old Roman's water jug. "We must be stirring!" he brought out. "Brother John's not one for late suppers."

Rhun's monologue ceased abruptly. Had there been light enough to see the man's features Porius would have detected the shock to his pride that these careless words produced. Rhun did mutter something, and Porius fancied it to be the word *"ansyberwyd."* If it really were that particular word it was a reproach to him such as was not often brought against the son of a chieftain of the House of Cunedda. It hinted at a discourtesy as meaningless to a stranger as it would have been significant to any Brython between Deganwy and Uriconium!

But the grandson of the Greek slave plucked the handle of the long hunting spear from between a serpentine alder root and a patch of withered grass and moved forward without another word.

Porius who saw his broad shoulders outlined against the west, felt conscious, as he also advanced, of two conflicting emotions. He felt that he had behaved badly to his friend, but he also — he couldn't tell why — felt a curious animal-like rage against him. Nothing would have pleased him more at that moment than to have a wrestling match with Rhun! There was something about that peaked Persian cap, combined with the dutiful and meticulous care with which he carried the precious hunting spear, that gave the younger man such a longing to squeeze that solid backbone and feel those lithe limbs struggling helplessly in his grasp, that perhaps it was fortunate that not only were their hands so full but the river path was so narrow that it became necessary as they quickened their steps to walk in single file.

What Porius really felt, as his mind began to work upon the eccentricity of his mood, was a longing to *dig his chin* into the muscular back before him, a longing that was accentuated by an odd feeling of their physical resemblance to each other.

By degrees, however, he became certain that Rhun had forgiven him his *ansyberwyd* and that under the influence of the gathering darkness his mind had wandered down long vistas of secret cogitation. The thought meanwhile entered his own head that had an ambuscade of Gwyddyl-Ffichti suddenly leapt upon them and flashed a blazing torch in their faces, the immediate assumption of these reckless savages would have been that the victims of their attack, though of unequal age, were sons of the same mother.

From now on no further word passed between them till they reached the Ford of Mithras where once -more they found themselves standing side by side. Here they both stared at the river.

For his part Porius couldn’t help noticing how the massive paving stones of the ancient highway between Uriconium and Mona were as little worn by the three hundred years of the rule of Rome as the water of the goddess river was affected by the purgings and baptisms of the two hundred years of the rule of Christ.

It had been for the more convenient fording of the stream at this point, so the older Porius had always told them, that a very special road-building cohort of a foreign legion from Libya had paved just here the river’s stony bed.

As they stood now however on the extreme edge of the western bank it became evident that the recent rains had so deepened the water and increased its speed that to cross the Ford tonight would mean either swimming or making use of the ferryboat.

This boat or barge, an ungainly flat-bottomed conveyance, capable of transporting a couple of horses as well as a couple of horsemen, was drawn up on the bank and fastened to the trunk of a large alder. On special feast days when pilgrims to Saint Julian’s Fountain gathered in considerable numbers here it was Rhun’s task to play the ferryman, but though the eighteenth of October in the year of Christ four hundred and ninety-nine was no feast day, Porius now beheld his foster-brother calmly proceeding to unloose the boat.

“What are you doing?” he asked. “Are you expecting anyone?”

"I won't keep you a moment, Porius ab Einion — I can hear Drudwyn howling."

Porius stared at the opposite bank listening. Yes, he too could catch the low unmistakable moan of a large dog.

"Is he tied up?" he asked stupidly. He felt vexed at this delay. But Rhun's hound was well known at the Gaer and he made no protest, nor did it cross his mind to let the man fetch his dog alone.

As he stepped into the flat-bottomed unbenched boat and watched his foster-brother pick up the bargepole it crossed his mind that here he was yielding again to the same queer compulsion that had dominated him all that eventful day!

On the surface of things this weakness of his, this dodging of finalities and drastic issues, this avoidance of decisions, this gaining time at all costs, this policy of drift, made him ashamed of himself. But below the surface it exhilarated him with a curious interior exultation!

Superficially he felt irritable and teased by this delay. Superficially the last thing he wanted was to he ferried due east when the object of their excursion lay due west. But below the surface all was different. For one thing, Drudwyn's pitiful moan seemed lifted up on a higher-pitched key than his memory of this noble dog's deep chest altogether justified.

"Something unusual is worrying him," he told himself as the sound rose higher above the sucking and gurgling of the swollen tide. "But what the devil," he asked himself, as his companion's Phrygian cap stood out in singular relief against the dark upward slope of the opposite bank, "does he think he can make me do? Partake of the Mithraic Sacrament? Become a believer in the Mithraic gulf between good and evil?"

Throwing down his pole and jumping out of the boat with more alacrity than he had shown all that evening, Rhun now twisted the rope round the nearest post of the little landing stage and without a glance behind him began calling his dog by name and clambering up the steep incline.

Porius followed him at a more leisurely pace. He began to experience a sudden impact of the most confused emotions. One dark thread among these, more definite than the rest, was the Pelagian idea, whether drawn from his father's discourses over the mead, or from Brother John's memories, or from Rhun's recent recitation, that a man should allow no preconception of any kind, consecrated or unconsecrated, to come between his soul and its instinctive striving.

Thus as he followed his foster-brother to the entrance of what from his childhood up he had taken for a spacious cave, the obscure compulsion springing from the doctrine of Minnawc Gorsant's most hated heretic gradually assumed the weight of an overwhelming impulse.

What if he were really to defy the devil and actually dare to follow this principle of emancipation? He noted that since he had last ascended this slope, somebody — probably his foster-brother — had unearthed, exposed, and cleaned from moss and rubble the old Roman steps made by the engineer brigade of the foreign legion at Uriconium.

Rhun had hastily preceded him, calling reassuringly to his dog as he approached the Cave, but at its threshold he turned and shouted down to him, using tones more authoritative than the young chieftain was accustomed to hear, bidding him wait outside the entrance till he re-emerged.

Never in afterlife did he forget the strange moments that followed. Arrived at the stone platform in front of the Cave he became aware of a dim, rich, flickering glow within its recesses, from the depth of which he could hear his foster-brother's voice speaking caressingly to Drudwyn.

But he turned his back upon all this, and meticulously doubling the folds of his tunic between his haunches and the stone platform, he sat down on the Roman steps and stared at the river. Every now and then a flickering glow from the fire in the Cave behind him threw a faint just-discernible bronze-coloured lustre upon the rocks and tree trunks between him and the river.

But these intermittent gleams grew moment by moment less and less. Indeed before five minutes had passed the only vestige of light to be seen was the pallid reflection of the chilly western sky lingering on the surface of the water. Emphasized thus in its undying flow, the essential being of the sacred river seemed to rise up before him out of the hollow reservoir of the twilight, and for the second time that evening he thought of the vanished generations who had actually worshipped that gliding flood of divine water, eternally the same and yet eternally different, as befitted an immortal who was also a woman.

All manner of broken fragments of childish memories floated up towards him, this and that half-furtive allusion from the lips of the old wives his foster-mother used to collect round her, dark secretive hints from many a devil-ridden old gossip, caught as they hummed over their three-legged iron cauldrons on their sooty hearths, each cauldron, Auntie Tonwen used to say, with its own special kind of wicked-innocent bubbles; and each bubble with its own prophetic vision of the expanding world before it burst and its own moon-ring of floating scum thereafter.

And in his mind, as his eye followed a particular white patch of drifting foam, there rose up the mocking words of his evasive father jeering and jibing and flouting, as was his wont, the whole consistory of gods, great and little, and along with them all the equivocal hosts of the air, all the

Elementals, Tenebrions, and Numina, all the mediators between heaven and earth!

Well! There was no need to invoke his father now or his father's levities. It was the great Pelagius who had liberated him, and Pelagius to the end had called himself a Christian. But what was the real meaning of the growing exultation he had been feeling all that afternoon, mounting and mounting and giving him so strange a sense of inward liberation? It came from Pelagius. He recognized that clearly enough, and now as he stared at the white foam on the river's surface he thought he knew just what it was! It was the idea that each solitary individual man had the power, from the very start of his conscious life, not so much by his will, for that was coerced by other wills, but by his free imagination, by the stories he told himself, to create his future.

Chance was always interfering, of course, but there was no hereditary curse descending upon him from Adam. He wasn't separated from God by any fatal predestination. But if Pelagius were right about the natural goodness of man, didn't that cut away the very root of Christianity, leaving its sacraments floating on the water of life like weeds without stalks?

All his thoughts just then seemed to take shapes that were prompted by the flow of the water before him, and it occurred to him that it might be possible that Christianity could survive without any root in the riverbed if the stalks were long enough; or still more if the stalks produced floating roots of their own.

One thing was certain. It was impossible that the feeling which had been growing upon him all that day meant nothing at all. He would find out what it meant! Well, one thing he *had* found out already. It meant the end of his unquestioning docility towards his mother and old Porius! But it meant much more than that. He felt sad rather than exultant at separating himself, even if it were only in his own mind, from that fine old Roman, to separate himself in so great a matter from a man he reverenced as much as he did his namesake, Porius Manlius, the man who had always taken him on his knees at the tribal banquets when his mother left the hall and his father was drunk — was this a cause for joy?

Why then had he this delicious quiver of excitement, different from anything he'd ever felt before? It seemed to him now that a faint murmuring sound was issuing from the Cave, interrupted at broken intervals by the unmistakable whining of the dog.

"What does Rhun think I am?" he said to himself. And then without any obvious cause he turned his head to what he supposed was the south, from where he sat, and called up the idea of his father. Why was it that it was always in this way that he thought of his father? He never used any of the usual endearing or even respectful appellations for him, and the odd thing was that wherever he himself might be when he formulated the idea of his father it was always to *the south,* and always in the same fantastic and arbitrary way as upon the southern horizon, that he saw what might be described as the man's exteriorized soul.

It had been on one of the many occasions when Einion ab Iddawc was discussing Rhun's mania for Mithras that this symbol of him had had its birth. The *man over there* had been dipping his drinking cup into the mead bowl, thrusting its silver brim between the little islands of dusky-coloured scum formed by the tiny grains of indissoluble spice that floated on the surface of the bowl, and there had trickled down the side of the cup a little yellow stream whose final drops, as the cup was lifted to the man's lips, shone in the firelight like beads of gold. Strange that until this moment Porius had never thought of asking himself why it was that his father, *the* *man over there,* should always be represented in his mind by golden drops issuing from a shapeless blur of vapour in the southern sky.

Now that he *had* thought of it, he realized that all the dominant urges and master influences of his interior life had come to take for him some material form or shape; not an intelligibly symbolic shape or a shape as he could have described to another person without being thought mad, but rather some accidental, chance-bestowed pattern of form and colour that in itself was quite meaningless and very often absurd.

Staring at the river below him now, and listening to that liturgical murmur from the Cave, a murmur that seemed, as it rose and sank, to be the very voice of the reddish gleam that was now flickering upon the little landing stage where their boat was straining at its rope, Porius couldn't help reverting to that old problem he had so often discussed with Brother John as to whether it was the actual river itself, the flowing continuity of the rushing volume of its swollen waters, that his aboriginal ancestors had worshipped, or whether they had visualized in their prayers *the* human *lineaments* of the great River-Mother.

He himself had come to visualize a form even more grotesque than the one which an unpredictable association had substituted for the bodily image of his father, for he thought of her in a manner that had originally been suggested by one particular stretch of flowing water, in which, from the vantage ground of a certain grassy slope below the Gaer, he was wont to see the reflected image of a dead alder stump, a stump whose natural bifurcation, worked upon by time and overgrown with moss, had acquired a startling resemblance to the flanks of a gigantic woman.

In the process of the years, however, this watery image had lost all connection with the rest of its body, all connection with anything intelligible, human or otherwise, and had become a simple blur of dusky opacity in a liquid medium, a blur that carried no more rational significance than a chance colour blot upon a disfigured manuscript.

"Porius ab Einion!" The voice of his foster-brother reaching him just at that moment when the surface shapes and formless patterns on the river tide, fluctuating and retroverting in that fabulous light, had thrown a curious spell over him, startled our friend not a little. Just because he was startled he instantaneously became irritable, and for a perceptible moment he neither stirred nor replied.

"Porius ab Einion!" repeated the voice. Even then the young chieftain made no move. It was not till Rhun's fourth appeal — an appeal now that had a touch of anger in it — that he got up and swinging the empty water bottle as violently as if it were an enemy's head, he hurried to the Cave's mouth.

Rhun presented a strange appearance to his foster-brother's unsympathetic stare. He still wore the same woollen cap, but he had turned up one of its folds, the one above his eyes, and by the blaze of a small torch he held in his left hand — his right was clutching the collar of the now furiously barking dog — Porius made out upon this fold of the cap a crudely embroidered image of a lion's head.

"Quiet, Drudwyn! Take his collar a moment, Porius ab Einion!"

Porius set down his water jug on the pavement and irritably obeyed him. The dog stopped barking the moment he felt the young chief's knuckles against the back of his neck. He clearly felt it to be his duty to challenge any approach to the Cave, but if his master saw fit — since the worship of Mithras included the sun-god's dog — to hand him over as a hostage to alien piety he was prepared to resign himself.

With his fingers therefore in the collar of Rhun's fellow priest, Porius addressed the strange figure before him in a grumbling protest. "I don't see

—” he began. And then, “What’s all this?” he demanded hoarsely, clearing his throat with a rough cough, for the other’s torch filled his throat with bitter smoke.

“I won’t hurt you, I won’t hurt you, I won’t hurt you, Porius ab Einion. It’s only — it’s only this — I want you to taste something.”

“All right, man! I’ll taste it! I’ll taste anything. Only you must be quick! Is it a drug you’ve been concocting all this time? Here — give it me — I’m in the mood for experiments tonight — only if it goes to my head you’ll be responsible — but for God’s sake be quick! We should look silly if all Brother John’s visitors had gone to bed when we got there. So this is why you recited Pelagius! You thought he’d make me — But bring out your Persian drug. I’ll swallow it if it kills me!”.

He could see Rhun’s eyes staring at him in amazement through the heavy smoke of the torch, and the thought crossed his mind: “He’s a true priest — first through the ear, then through the nostrils. It only needs the mouth—”

But excited though he was, Porius had never felt greater possession of himself. His excitement was both real and unreal. It was completely genuine and yet entirely superficial. It was like a fretful vapour of steam floating upon a wave of quicksilver. It stirred his nerves to such a tune that he made Drudwyn utter a high-pitched puzzled protest as he tightened his knuckles under the dog’s collar.

And yet in his mind he saw the whole occasion and everything connected with it under a light that was cold, clear, and humorously uncompromising. And the queer thing about it was the rapidity with which a critical map of all that day’s happenings unrolled itself before him. Every stretch, every stage, every section, every vista, every slope, every level, every perspective of his experience that day seemed etched by a dagger’s point upon a screen of wax.

It was natural that his map of the day's events should be crudely symbolic. Nor did he see anything strange in the fact that as the colour yellow was always connected with his father it should be connected also — though this was a different shade of yellow — with that moving mist that had fed on the stubble field. He had often been struck by the contrast between his heavy muscles and the will-o'-the-wisp thoughts that were always rushing through his skull, and now that the bittersweet smoke of this ritual torch was invading all the interstices of his brain, he was compelled to notice that the influence of Pelagius — for he discounted Rhun's military Mithras as completely as he discounted the elder Porius's militant Christ — gave him no clue as to *how* he was going to free himself from the influences of his two women.

As the smoke penetrated his brain, and his knuckles pressed still harder against Drudwyn's neck, he felt as though he were furtively, secretively, maliciously, snuffing up the intoxicating fumes of the wicked rapture of being for the first time in his life absolutely and uncompromisingly himself alone!

"Is this," he said to himself, "what Mithras felt *after he'd killed his* Bull? But don't you be afraid" — he was apostrophizing now that golden blur on the southern skyline— "nothing's going to keep me back henceforth from following my own will! I'm your son still, *you over there,* and I'm only playing with them."

And suddenly to the very tune with which Rhun's mother, the beautiful Alarch, used to sing him to sleep at her breast and which she used to call her "baby-devil's lullaby," he began humming audibly to this same Alarch's son: "playing with them — playing with them — only a game we're playing with them!"

Something in the expression on Porius's face as it hung in front of him in the glow of the smoking torch brought Rhun's purpose, whatever it may have been, to a temporary pause.

Drudwyn seemed aware of this, for he lifted his head and gazed at his master in puzzled expectancy. The tension of his outstretched neck suggested to Porius that at any moment he might give vent to the high-pitched wailing sound with which that particular breed of dogs responds to certain crises. The creature had been evidently expecting a word, a sign, a signal — if not a catastrophic event of some sort. And this had not come. Whether it was that the physical pressure of that stiffened throat under his fingers was communicating some secret knowledge shared between dogs and men before religion separated them, or whether he was tapping the long-suppressed nervous excitement in himself, Porius experienced at this moment such an overbrimming dynamic charge of magnetic power, and yet of power completely under control, that he found himself uttering words in his foster-brother's ear that astonished himself by their intense low-voiced authority.

"Pelagius," he heard himself saying, "is our only real druid today. He alone liberates us. He alone sets us free. And upon freedom to imagine, freedom to wish, freedom to imagine that what we wish comes true, is our soul nourished. Our soul is the flowing of a pure river with the yellow light of enjoyment upon it, a river that flows from the past into the future, a river that creates the future by wishing it, by imagining it, by creating a... a *tynged* for it!" He had meant to say "fate" or "fortune", in the Roman style used by his grandfather, but the Brythonic word had leapt to his lips. "This," he went on, speaking more slowly now and in a lower tone, "may be a temple of fire; but it will be by water we'll escape from it — in — the

— end. But give me your Sacrament, brother. Let it be a covenant between us. Put up your torch, brother, and give me your Sacrament.”

“You shall have it! Let the dog go.”

Porius removed his hand, and the white hound with a choking bark bounded to his master’s side, while Rhun himself, placing the now flaring and spluttering torch in an iron sconce on the wall, began searching for something in the darkness at the back of the Cave.

“Fool! Fool! Fool! Fool!” groaned Porius to himself, for no sooner had Rhun moved away and the hound after him than a singular reaction against his own solemn words took possession of him. He was indeed seized by a sensation he had experienced once or twice before since his return from the Bishop’s School on the other side of the Mountain of the Mothers; the feeling, namely, that this whole business of disputing with Rhun or with the old Porius or with his mother or with Morfydd or indeed with anybody about life and philosophy and religion was absurdly useless.

“Rhun!” he called out, staring at the obscure play of shadows in the rear of the Cave, but not moving from his position under the smoking torch. “Rhun ap Gwrnach! Come back! Come back here!” But the Mithras worshipper was silent, and not a single sound, not even the familiar panting from Drudwyn’s massive chest, broke the stillness of the place. All three of them might have been entombed in the bowels of the earth.

The old feeling of irritation against Rhun rose again within him. Had he worked himself up to the pitch of solemnly asking for a heathen sacrament from a high priest at a high altar, only to be kept waiting on the fussy pleasure of a madman in a dark cave?

“Come back, Rhun!” he yelled again, and after an unpleasant pause during which he tried to suppress an ignoble Brythonic pride that placed his foster-brother in a different category from the son of the chief of their tribe, he decided to break this Mithras covenant when the man came back.

“I won’t hurt his feelings,” he thought, “but there’s a moment when you can do a thing and there’s a moment when you *can’t* do a thing.”

“Rhun!” Again complete silence. But by this time his discomfort was causing him such throbs of humiliation that he could no longer restrain himself. There had flashed through his mind an incident from the past when he was a boy of ten and Rhun a lad of fifteen, and when in the midst of a game of hide-and-seek his companion had slipped out of his hiding place in a clump of bushes and had run, as only Rhun could run, in an unseen circle and had done it so stealthily as to be able to emerge suddenly from behind him and snatch him up in his arms.

The overwhelming shock of this and its backwash of devastating shame had made him so beside himself with blind rage that twisting round in his captor’s hands, he had beaten with his clenched fist so violently on the boy’s mouth that he had cut his antagonist’s lip and his own hand. He had never forgotten the feeling of that wet mouth nor the salt taste of the boy’s blood as in his own pain he licked his knuckles. It was in the very spirit of that old childish desperation that he now permitted himself to cry out at the top of his voice: “I was only fooling you, Rhun! Don’t disturb your Persian devil!”

A silence so ghastly in its indrawn absoluteness followed this brutal blasphemy that Porius himself shivered as the echo kept repeating itself: “Pers —— ian Dev —— il! Pers —— ian Devil!” until it seemed as if it would never die away; until it seemed as if it had become a living and hideous entity, the red mouth and wet nostrils of a great wounded Bull that went butting and bellowing into the bowels of the earth!

And there arose a necessity for Porius that he should listen intently to his own words in this terrible recession so that he might be sure they died away only because of the distance! He knew what must never be allowed to die away. He fancied he heard echoes from the bowels of the earth that really did sound like the bellowing of a bull. Well! The Mithraic Bull might bellow and bleed till it broke the adamantine chain of Time and Space; the important thing was that the human imagination that defied it, the human imagination that defied not *only it,* not only the Bull and the Slayer of the Bull, but the Crucified and the Slayer of the Crucified, yea! and all the God-Bearers and all the God-Slayers from the beginning of the world unto this hour, should never be robbed of its power to *tell itself other stories,* and thus create a different future.

But at this crucial moment, as the torch which Rhun had placed against the wall spluttered and grew dim, Porius had a physical shock that was quite different from the reverberation or cessation of any echo. This was the sudden impact of the cold nose of Drudwyn pressed against his hand.

Simultaneously with this it struck him that he was no longer carrying the water bottle. “I must have put it down somewhere,” he thought. “Now where the devil did I put it down?” And then, simply because of the fumbling movements he was making as he caressed the dog’s head, he discovered that his hand was trembling.

It was at this moment of all moments that he suddenly heard Rhun’s voice whispering to him! Not a sound of his approach had he caught, and even now it was of a voice rather than of a presence that he was so startlingly conscious. This low-pitched, deep-throated whisper produced in him the queerest feeling. It was a whisper of irresistible command, not an appeal, not an entreaty. “Taste and see,” whispered Rhun. And it was as if an oracle had spoken out of the heart of Matter itself.

That one of these men was the only son of the chief of his tribe and the other the grandson of a slave made no difference. *“Nama, Nama, Sebesio,”* was clearly an incantation which suffered no barriers to separate it from its object. It was also an oracle that could draw — with the help of a little honey and, in spite of the darkness, of cedarwood-scented smoke — the tip of a human tongue from between human lips.

Porius indeed on this occasion had hardly moved his head when Rhun’s forearm — and how damp and cold his foster-brother’s flesh was! — brushed his chin, and his mouth came into contact with the rim of some sort of bowl, beaker, goblet, cup, or chalice.

In telling Morfydd of all this later he tantalized and annoyed the girl by delaying so long over the question, which struck her as trifling, as to how it was that he came to know by the mere touch of his lips that this cup or chalice was not only of gold but was of extraordinary antiquity.

“I’m sure it was used,” he assured her, “by some *pater sacrorum* of the Mithras cult who had come with the legion from the east.” What he didn’t attempt to explain to her, and it was probably her instinct that he was keeping something back that made her angry, was the fact that the hot, thick, sticky substance that he was now licking with an eager tongue, and of which honey, but not *ordinary* honey, was the chief ingredient, had a queerly startling effect upon his sex-feelings. No, to the end of their days he never told Morfydd.

How could he possibly explain to such a girl that the mere impact of that cup whose rim, so he said to himself, must have touched the lips of thousands upon thousands of dedicated warriors, had the long-descended power of taking the deliciousness of sex sweetness from the soft limbs of women and transferring it to the inhuman but immortal elements? Still less would it have been possible to explain to a girl brought up on Homer that *with that taste* there came to him the feeling that the whole difference between good and evil was connected with some obscure struggle between man and woman.

What he *did* tell her, and tedious and tantalizing she found them in her longing to know what happened next, were the names of the flowers from which he decided by its smell the honey must have been made!

At the moment however he just blindly imbibed that sweetness and snuffed up that fragrance and he was further aware as he licked his lips that *the dog was doing the same.*

“So dogs and men are treated alike,” he thought, “in Rhun’s religion. I like that anyway; and I’m sure—”

But he could never remember — no! not for Morfydd or anybody else! — what it was he was sure of; for it was at that point his foster-brother now uttered the great mystic words: *“Accepto te sacratus, corax, miles, leo, perses!”* And as the grandson of the Greek slave thus made a *metechontes,* or “participant,” of the son of his prince, Porius couldn’t help noticing that for all the austere anti-feminism of the man’s *idea,* his *tone* had the same rich, lilting, ecstatic, African softness of the tone of the people of the forest huts when the priest made them chant the responses to his new god in his new church.

But not yet was the great Mithraic mystery over for him; for as he swallowed the sweetness that still clung to his tongue, and as the dog licked the fingers with which he caressed him, he began to be aware that his foster-brother had produced from about his person his specially contrived fire-lighter of iron and flint, together with an inflammably oiled wick that had been his pride since his boyhood, and was now deliberately proceeding to illumine a small oil lamp that stood upon a flat stone in an alcove in the wall. Behind and above the lamp — for the alcove was only about three feet square — Porius caught a glimpse of two small ivory and gold statuettes, neither of them more than six inches high, and he also beheld, ere in no more than a couple of minutes the light was blown out, his foster-brother on his knees before this shrine and tapping with the front of his skull a rough and jagged stone that jutted out from the wall below the two images.

Porius had just time to notice that one of these figures representing the roughly moulded body of an infant wearing the Phrygian cap, and rising waist-high out of a rock, bore the inscription *"Ave Invictus,"* while the other, a naked man with a lion's head and a snake twisted round his body, carried in large clear Greek letters the single word *"Cronos."*

Having muttered some inarticulate mumblings as he blew out the lamp Rhun had now moved to the further side of the Cave and Porius as he looked about him discovered to his relief that his own shameless detachment hadn't left him, but that he was still following the motions of his companion with an uncommitted alertness. Since tapping with his skull on that jagged stone Rhun had been seized by a taciturn energy. He began hurrying from spot to spot in the hollow darkness making rapid preparations for leaving both his dog and his god to a lonely night. He handed Porius the water flask and himself began the ticklish process of relighting the burnt-out torch in the wall by the aid of his precious contrivance.

What Porius now began to discover as he watched him was that both the god of eternity embraced by a serpent and the bull-slaying sun god rising from a rock left his religious sense completely cold.

But they touched another chord and for the first time in his life he felt a protective warmth for the Isle of Britain and a longing to try his strength against these Colgrims and Baldulfs and Cheldrics from Germania. It had never struck him before that the persistent struggle of the Romanized Arthur to free the whole island from these pirates was any concern of his. He had never doubted the emperor's power to get the intruders out, but then the emperor himself and all his famous horsemen seemed to his mind much more Roman than Brythonic.

"I can't understand it," he said to himself. "No, I can't understand it!" Mentally he surveyed the incomprehensible thing, and as it was with persons, so it was with ideas. He saw his mental dilemma as a grotesque blur of incongruous shapes and obscure colours.

What he couldn't understand was that this Mithraic experience though leaving his religious sense cold made him want to drive Colgrim and Baldulf and Cheldric back to the land from which they came. "I can't understand it!" he repeated. Under the spell of this Mazdean god, in whose power he didn't for a moment believe, he'd suddenly come to recognize that his real home was *Ynys Prydein,* and not just the princedom of Cunedda.

In the depths of this Cave and in a pulse beat of Cronos the Supreme Mystery, he had "touched bottom"; he had heard the echoes that move among the rock roots of the whole Island of Britain! No longer could he be shut up in the childish feeling that the forests and mountains and pastures and swamps of Edeyrnion were the be-all and the end-all of everything.

Well, there it was! Though the bull-slaying rock babe and the ultimate Cronos who begat him and must finally devour him were no more sacred to him now than Minnawc Gorsant's Three-Gods-in-One, there was no doubt that he *had* made some deep covenant with this grandson of a Greek freedman. With Rhun and Rhun's dog — and that the dog had shared it was a curious pleasure to him — he had touched rock bottom that eighteenth of October, four hundred and ninety-nine. They were brothers-in-arms henceforth in some cause, though just in what remained to be seen!

He stretched his muscles and drew a deep contented sigh. “After all,” he thought, “this Cave was once an aboriginal dwelling. Perhaps it was here that Edeyrn ap Cunedda found the woman he wedded, some infant girl left to perish by the giant brood of the Cader!”

Ah! The place was once more lighted, though very dimly. Rhun had at last succeeded, after causing much smoke and much spluttering, in getting the torch to burn. What in Jesus’s name was he doing now?

But it soon became only too clear what he was doing; and Porius disliked it with all his heart. He was engaged in tying up the dog for the night, a process which tested the wise creature’s philosophy almost beyond its powers of endurance. At this moment he was filling Drudwyn’s water trough with water while erratic spurts of light fell down spluttering the torch.

As these gleams of light descended they glided off the smooth leathery surface of the stooping man’s back and threw into relief infinitesimal ripples in the dog’s water trough; ripples which otherwise would have perished beyond recovery and been utterly lost, either in that desolate Limbo of inanimate matter, which Morfydd’s brother held was the end of everything, or in that happier reservoir of materials for the World Soul, concerning which the girl herself used to quote to him from Virgil.

These dancing ripples in Drudwyn’s water were rendered all the more noticeable by the pitiful sorrow in the eyes of the dog as from above those twitching nostrils and monumental paws they followed the man’s every movement.

Above the dog’s head hung a large carefully polished Roman shield, a legacy from Rhun’s Greek grandfather, and which had been the common soldier’s chief defensive weapon in that legion at Uriconium. The increasing torch flare brought it about that Rhun’s face — his hands were engaged in scraping into a wooden bowl some gobbets of flesh from the bone he had chosen for his dog's supper — was waveringly reflected in the shield's polished surface; while beside Rhun's face, less vividly but quite unmistakably, Porius's own features had begun to flicker.

How alike he and his foster-brother were! There was no gainsaying it. Not that he hadn't known it since his earliest days; for the Three Aunties had never been weary of referring to it and it had always caused him a peculiar sort of numb, dumb, sour-sweet, sodden, bruised discomfort, a discomfort like the taste of mouldy bread or of bruised pears.

But it had never occurred to him before to wonder what Morfydd thought of it! Wasn't it extremely disagreeable for her to be tied to a man whose double she was forever seeing?

The idea of Morfydd's weary distaste for this constant repetition of bony and heavily lowering foreheads, brooding underlips, rugged unclassic noses, deep-set greenish yellow eyes, was accentuated for him at this moment by the sudden memory — the brute thing was always catching him off-guard — of the bloody and mangled head of an ox he had once seen in a butcher's shop at the Deva market.

Since that day he and Rhun and that mangled head had rubbed against one another in his consciousness like imprisoned fish in a fish kettle. When he was most *himself,* as his foster-mother used to say, that is when he saw, felt, considered, and imagined things as he was "born and intended" to see and feel them, that ox's head was part of it, part *of himself.* And it was this not merely because by some fatality of sympathy he was bound to imagine what had been going on *behind* that look in the ox's eyes, but because he was bound to admit an actual resemblance between the bony corrugations above his own and Rhun's hollow and brooding eye sockets and those of that outraged beast head.

If the Mithras honey had linked them together and linked both of them with the dog, this older link was a more tragic one *and* went *further down.* Well! They were all children of Time, all children of Cronos, and henceforth he and Rhun and the dog and the mangled beast head had a bedrock understanding, even if their Mithraic fraternity enrolled for righteousness were a mirage and illusion.

He sighed heavily, feeling that this link with the chained, the devoured, the tortured, the sacrificed, weighed him down to the bottom. Had that giant-orphan, the bride of Cunedda's son, whom he could imagine so vividly here, looked about her helplessly in the darkness and given up all hope? With that beast head and those lost eyes he felt as though he saw everything in the world exactly as it was, yes, in all its unendurable reality.

"But this won't do," he thought. "This is life *seen as it is.* But this is madness. Moment by moment all that live re-create life and change this false reality!"

He was roused from his trance by Drudwyn. The dog had settled himself down to be left alone in a misery like that in which they had found him when they first came. But he now leapt to his feet, pricked up his ears, and uttered a series of excited barks. Rhun at once stopped scraping the bone he was holding and moved to the entrance of the Cave. Once arrived there he remained motionless in a concentrated intensity of listening.

Porius listened too, but he could hear nothing except the whisper of a rising wind, a faint rustle of dead leaves, and the murmurs of the swollen river.

Rhun now took off his Phrygian cap and put on his ordinary one. He possessed himself once more of Porius's hunting spear and handed over to him the water bottle and yet he kept on hesitating and delaying.

Meanwhile the torch above the dog's head was beginning to burn erratically, guttering, spluttering, hissing, and emitting jets of bitter smoke.

Porius still felt that his inmost life of sensations and imaginings had been threatened by some shocking vision of frozen reality. "But the animals," he thought, "change all reality every moment by the living energy in them. *They* create the world fresh every second just as we do! If Drudwyn saw things as I saw them just now he couldn't endure it. Body of God! But what's that?"

For an eyelid's flicker he thought of Morfydd in hysterics — flying wildly, desperately after him, fallen into the river while she fled from Minnawc Gorsant.

Seagulls! But who'd have expected seagulls tonight, when the weather was so calm? Had the wind veered? Was a storm coming up? But seagulls they certainly were, and a lot of them. Unmistakable those wild, high-pitched, unearthly cries, advancing and receding, rising and sinking, as they tossed and turned in the grey mist.

"Down, Drudwyn! Down, I tell you!" It was Rhun's voice. The dog had suddenly begun straining at his chain, pawing the air excitedly and giving vent to short, sharp, impassioned, and — strangest of all — extremely joyous barks!

But what on earth was Rhun doing now? Porius turned his back to the entrance of the Cave and stared with some uneasiness at his foster-brother. Something had come over Rhun just then that seemed inexplicable. What the man was engaged upon now, and engaged upon it gravely, resolutely, obstinately, was no less than grotesque.

He was automatically like a mechanised dummy engaged in *undoing* all that he had with such meticulous labour just done, and undoing it with the patient deliberate motions of a sleepwalker! He had just tied up the dog and here he was calmly, deliberately, mechanically, setting him free again!

The moment he *was* free Drudwyn shot past both the men with something between a hunting cry and a bark of recognition and disappeared in the misty twilight.

“Quick, Porius ab Einion!” cried Rhun. “There’s someone at the ferry!”

CHAPTER III. The Stranger

ARMED WITH THEIR ONLY WEAPON, Drudwyn's master followed the white hound, while, gripping the Roman water bottle with a force that would have broken any ordinary vessel, Porius followed his foster-brother. He was destined later to strip to its skin every impression of that confused moment, but this was one of those occasions when the dam of events has been pulled up so rapidly that the unsluiced imagination has difficulty in overtaking what the tide is carrying down.

Porius certainly needed every mental power he possessed to keep, mentally speaking, even a boat's length behind the rush of sensations. He was vividly aware of that special kind of shock that comes when a phenomenon that in itself is perfectly natural presses so hard against the sequence of things with which we're familiar that it discredits the very witness of the senses themselves.

Emerging from the Cave, Porius felt at once that the twilight was agitated by much more than the screams of a flock of seagulls. He thought he heard the bark of a fox. He was sure he saw the grey unshapely form of a badger; and the air seemed as ruffled by excited stirrings and flutterings as the earth seemed ransacked by wild scamperings and drummings.

He paused and gazed round him. It was one of the strangest sensations he had ever had. That yellow vapour was here again! Yes, that same stubble-coloured mist, like a conscious presence, whose motion across the sky he had followed from the Gaer gate, had left those dwellings by the church only to descend upon the Ford of Mithras!

His mind struggled to catch and clarify the confused ideas that came swimming into his consciousness as he listened to these scufflings in the undergrowth and cries in the air. And the more desperately he tried to get his sensations under control, the more this unnatural mist thickened about him. It could no longer be called stubble coloured. Twilight had darkened too far.

But the effect upon Porius was the same as if it could be so called; since there was something about it that differentiated it completely from the mist that cradled it and carried it. Thicker and thicker it gathered round him, till he began to wonder whether he was destined to reach Brother John at all that night.

And then all of a sudden he felt a genuine alarm. Had that curst Mithras business affected his brain? He certainly couldn't remember ever having a sensation like the one he had now! It was a chilly sensation and a frightening sensation. It was as if he felt the combined chill of heaps of bones piled upon heaps of bones, and heaps of leaves piled upon heaps of leaves, bones turning too slowly into dust, leaves turning too slowly into mould!

He was still groping his way slowly down hill, following Rhun as Rhun had followed the dog, and what he wanted above all was to keep his inner identity — the thing that said "I am Porius ab Einion" — intact. He wanted also to remember that he had the blood of the aboriginal giants in his veins as well as of the forest people! He uttered a kind of wordless appeal to the spirit of Creiddylad, the mother of Iddawc the Apostate.

The fear that troubled him most as he groped his way downward towards the river was the fear lest his human soul should suddenly lose its separate existence and merge itself into the souls of these agitated birds and beasts who were evidently yielding to some strange and unusual excitement.

What was happening down there by the Ford of Mithras? He felt as though it were something absolutely natural, not supernatural at all, but at the same time out of order, like an eclipse or an earthquake.

"We shall remember," he said to himself, "we shall remember this night in future time."

He could hear the dog now, down by the ferry, uttering the same quick excited barks; but the tone of these barks struck him as different in some way. They were barks of contentment, satisfaction, infinite relief.

"It's someone he knows," he thought, and he began following the sound down the slope, stepping very slowly and cautiously. As he went he tapped the Roman water flask against his thigh as if to reassure himself that he was what he was. He compelled first one and then the other of his deerskin-covered feet to carry the whole weight of his body. For some reason the rocks and stones beneath him seemed to be pulling and dragging at his legs.

The seagulls were still audible and a couple of rabbits had just dashed across his path, when suddenly the familiar cry of a nightjar, a sound that was entirely natural to both the hour and the place, infused into these other noises something weird, strange and almost shocking. He actually heard two or three splashes out of the darkness as if the very fish from the river were rising!

And then he saw the broad shoulders of Rhun himself emerging from the mist and beyond them the pallor of the flowing water the posts of the landing stage and the dusky shape of the ferryboat. Apparently the personage, whoever he was, with whom Rhun was in colloquy was crouching low down within the ferryboat.

Porius began instinctively behaving as if this personage were a wild animal that he was stalking, for he suddenly became absolutely motionless.

Nor was his immobility that of a casual hunter. It had the frozen rigidity of a predatory animal in the act of leaping upon its prey.

As he stood there it was impossible to catch the faintest glimpse of the creature in the ferryboat or even to be sure of its sex. All he could do was to listen to the dialogue, an extremely one-sided one, that was proceeding between the personage in the boat and the man at the side of the boat.

He felt no shame about listening in this manner, for, after all, as the son of his father he was used to listening carelessly and perfunctorily to the talk of tribesmen whose private affairs were no concern of his.

There was clearly some *cynneddf,* or "magical peculiarity," about this person in the ferryboat which like the presence of a large ship in a small harbour was causing all manner of vibratory disturbances!

Porius's senses were also aware at that moment of something else. This may not have had any connection with the stranger, nor, if the stranger had nothing to do with it, any connection with the agitation among the birds and beasts and fish, not to speak of Drudwyn, who was just then making extraordinary sounds of emotional satisfaction; but on the other hand, whether connected with the stranger or not, why shouldn't the cause of all this stir have an effect upon vegetable lives also? Why shouldn't it for instance draw out with a double intensity the peculiar death-and'Corruption stench of such an evil-smelling growth as the stinkhorn fungus?

Porius was certainly conscious of something at that moment very like the feverish, fetid, pestilential, and yet morbidly sexual smell of this weird cryptogamous growth, and the odour reached him just then exactly as *that* would have done, in wayward intermittent waftures.

"It's odd," thought Porius, "that Rhun should forget my existence like this!"

His foster-brother did indeed seem so completely absorbed in his colloquy with the man in the barge as to be oblivious of everything. He was telling the stranger now about their encounter with the young man on the white horse. He was telling it deliberately, slowly, and clumsily, but with an intense relish. The responses of the person in the ferryboat were inaudible, and Porius was not a little puzzled by his own restraint.

He didn't precisely shape the question to himself; but there was an uneasy tremor and twinge at some knotted nerve centre in him that amounted to a sense of humiliation. Why didn't he go straight up to them and announce to the stranger that he was the son of Prince Einion? But that would have been a moral humiliation worse than Rhun's neglect. He had not been a pupil of Brother John for nothing and as he listened to the screaming of the seagulls, the splashing of the fish, and the crying of the nightjar he blushed under his cheekbones at the pettiness of his pride. Had he forgotten Iddawc the Apostate's mother? Had he forgotten Einion's contempt for Brythonic tradition? But though he blushed at the unworthiness of his pride, his shame in it neither obliterated his obscure anger nor gave him the spirit to break the spell.

What was that? What he'd heard was the plunge of something much bigger than any fish. Had Rhun's interlocutor himself jumped out of the boat? No, Rhun was beginning to talk about the Cave. The other must be responding. Hadn't either of them heard the plunge?

Ah! He knew what that new sound was, that heavy breathing, that gurgling snort, that trembling of the massive flanks! And he could see the creature's horns — the majestic antlers of a full-grown stag. It was emerging from the river now.

There! It had leapt into the undergrowth only a score of yards from where Rhun was standing. But Rhun took no notice of the stag. He seemed to take no interest in anything in the world except giving the stranger a long and detailed history of the Cave of Mithras and its connection with that legion at Uriconium that had been the last to leave the country.

It was the tone of his voice and the unseasonable irrelevance of his discourse — just like that recitation from Pelagius which he had learnt by heart — that finally roused Porius into breaking the spell. His impatience to get away from the Ford of Mithras, his growing anxiety to reach Saint Julian's Fount before Brother John and his guests had gone to their sleeping quarters couldn't do it; but to have to listen to the praise of the legion at Uriconium compared with the legion at Deva, when he knew that there wasn't a real Roman in either of them, did it with a vengeance.

"A pilgrim for the Fount, eh?" he said. And then he added, addressing the river rather than anything else, "People keep the Brother up too late. He is old and he gets weary. God be with you" — he paused for a moment peering at the huge dark form that was hunched up within the barge, its back against the wooden stern and its legs stretched out in front— "God be with you, my Master."

"God be with you, Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda!" The man, who in that mist looked like a herdsman from far south of Lake Tegid, spoke in a low, hoarse, guttural whisper, like someone who had given up for long years the use of human speech.

He was clothed in a shaggy coat of coarse wool that descended below his knees but under this, twisted round his legs and reaching from his ankles halfway up his thighs, he wore rough cowhide leggings bleached and stained by weather. His sandals were bound to his feet by swathes of reeds, and round his ankles which otherwise would have been bare he had tied thin leather thongs round which he had twisted bracken stalks and river rushes. A straggly black beard was tucked inside his sheep's-wool coat and under his black bristly eyebrows his eyes in the darkness looked like the bosses of two metal shields seen on their concave or interior side.

After greeting him in this manner and receiving his greeting, Porius seated himself in the prow of the boat opposite the stranger, while Rhun, laying down the hunting spear in rather sulky silence as if grudging the breaking off of his discourse, untied the barge and began to use the punting pole. The grandson of Iddawc the Apostate and the black-haired traveller contemplated each other in silence.

The darkness, the flow of the current, their own mood, all this made the return crossing for both the foster-brothers a much slower business than the preceding one. Twice had Rhun to push out into mid-current and make a new attempt to bring the barge to the landing stage.

Dimly through the mist Porius could see, beyond the enormous dark head opposite him, the faint outline of the Roman steps descending to the river's brink. Was it from these or from the figure in front of him that there had been drawn out of that autumnal night a sudden ice-cold wafture that caused him to hug his knees, and sent an unmistakable shiver through his bones?

At a later time he tried to analyze just what it was that he experienced when he first sat down opposite this man; but beyond the association of this ice-cold shiver with the mysterious phenomenon known in most human tribes as "death" he never got any further in this analysis.

He began definitely to decide now however that the strange fungus smell he had noticed some minutes ago did proceed from the astonishing figure in front of him.

The man's head was bare of everything but a crop of coal-black hair and his ears were the largest appendages of that kind that Porius had ever seen.

All this he could clearly make out in spite of the obscurity. He could also make out as he bent forward a little to catch the fellow’s replies, which were still hoarse and husky, that his eyes were unnaturally circular in shape and so close together that when they flashed with an interior light, as they did several times during Rhun’s manoeuvres with the ferryboat, they created the illusion that they actually mingled with each other and became one, like the eye — Porius thought — of that monstrous Cyclops described in the Homeric scroll which Brochvael ab Iddawc had brought back from Alexandria and that Morfydd had patched with her needle as devotedly as her unfortunate brother had studied its tremendous contents.

The only weapon carried by this “herdsman from the south” — for so Porius tried hard to regard him — was the sort of fragment of a dead tree that Porius himself had been meaning to pick up ever since he gave that boyish rider his knife as a token.

It was a knobbed and knotted club, and nothing would have suited Porius better, he thought, as he contemplated it between the herdsman’s knees, than this ungainly weapon.

If the Emperor Arthur had told him to rush upon those Saxon pirates Colgrim and Baldulf with this club he would make fine play with it! Yes, for him too, as for this sulky herdsman, the weapons of the old giants of Cader Idris were still the best, though that curst magician Gwydion ap Don *had* killed the great Pryderi with his Gwyddyl-Ffichti javelin.

But Rhun had got his barge to the landing stage now, and Drudwyn, who had been lying at the stranger’s feet licking a particular place at the man’s ankles where between the swathes of bracken his skin showed bare, began tugging at the fellow’s garments to get him to move.

Before Porius rose to his feet he was aware of a sort of insect, a beetle or a spider it may have been, running across his hand, the hand that held the water bottle.

"Spiders too!" he said to himself. "God! I must challenge him for the truth; but I begin to be sure it *is* he." He rose up slowly.

As the representative of the chief it was the old Brythonic custom that he should be the last to leave the barge. Watching the "herdsman from the south" shuffle slowly out of the boat to the landing stage, the bent shoulders and his big woolly coat giving him the look of an enormous old woman, Porius's suspicions mounted to a certainty when he noted no less than three antlered heads silhouetted against the western sky on the top of the bank.

His excitement in this secret certainty, concerning which he felt sure Rhun was still in the dark, was now spoilt by the behaviour of Drudwyn. Rhun had already made fast the boat and it greatly troubled Porius as he watched him carrying their hunting spear up the slope to observe the distress of the white hound, as it hesitated whether to cling to this fatal intruder or follow its master.

Rhun decided the matter himself by seizing the dog by the collar and adjusting the chain of small steel links about his own wrist so that there could be no chance of their being separated; and as the pair of them thus linked together ascended the bank behind the herdsman the three antlered heads vanished.

But Porius now boldly overtook the traveller and brought out his challenge.

"Forgive me, my Lord, if it is an impoliteness" — he used the same Brythonic word *"ansyberwyd"* that Rhun had used earlier that evening— "but if I am not mistaken you are the emperor's famous counsellor, Myrddin ap Morfryn, known to some as Myrddin Wyllt, to others as Myrddin Emrys, and to yet others as Merlinus Ambrosius!"

The figure in sheepskins shrugged his shoulders and made an indescribable gesture with his free hand, while with his club he patted softly the palpitating sides of a young deer.

"I am what you see," he said in the same harsh, husky, muttering tone. "The creatures you see are *my* creatures. They know me and I know them. But I have come to bring you to the emperor's camp, and to bring Rhun ap Gwrnach to the emperor's camp. When Colgrim and Baldulf are dead, and when Cheldric is dead, there will be a ship in the Thames ready to take you where you will; but whether you will sail in that ship is hidden from me."

He sighed deeply. "Blind! Blind! Blind! Blind!" he muttered, and then repeated his old formula: "I am what you see and these creatures are what you see. They are *my* creatures, and before we go to the Fountain I must have fire to make them a sign."

Rhun with his hound chained to his wrist was now awaiting them at the top of the bank where he stood like a sulky sentry, erect, watchful, suspicious, jealous, indignant. Porius knew well what he was feeling. He was outraged by Drudwyn's obsession for Myrddin Wyllt. He was also angrily jealous of the prophet's transference of attention from himself to the younger man.

While finally the obscure hope he had been nourishing in his secret heart of making a convert of Porius to the Mithraic cult had been shattered to bits by the shock of this intrusion, Drudwyn's pitiful whinings and desperate strainings at his chain were clearly accentuating Rhun's irritation; and Porius's mind was divided between his excited interest in the emperor's famous counsellor and his fear lest in the growing darkness his foster-brother might shog off altogether.

Rhun had never done such a thing since they were boys, and it was hard to imagine him doing it now; but the two understood each other so well that, if it did happen now, each of them would know to a nicety *why* it had happened, and there would be no self-reproach about torturing the other's mind by enigmatic behaviour!

It was still that stubble-coloured mist within the mist that was making things strange for the young chieftain. From the time they left the Gaer that inner mist had been provoking, seducing, cajoling the long October twilight to turn into an unnatural darkness. The thought of the three of them suddenly becoming totally invisible to each other in a magic darkness at this particular point struck him now as not only a grotesque thought but an alarming and even shocking one.

As it was, the way the prophet kept on with this bewildering play of acting the part of a mad herdsman, when it was impossible to suppose he wasn't deliberately using the magnetic power he possessed to draw all these creatures towards him, was destructive of any ordinary understanding with him.

Porius felt he *must* do something without delay to bring these uneasy moments to an end; for the last of Drudwyn's desperate leaps had dragged Rhun forward and forced him to plunge the great spear in to the ground to steady himself.

"Did you say, Master, that you needed fire to make these creatures of day understand that night has fallen?"

"Yes, *fire!* Fire would be the best. Though I might... if it were not for... but fire... yes, *fire* would be the best."

"Rhun!" Porius had raised his voice so much louder than the distance between them demanded that the flutterings and screams above their heads, and the scamperings and snortings and patterings and scufflings in the bushes and bracken around them increased perceptibly, while the splashes in the water below became more frequent, one following another in rapid succession as if a large shoal of fish had been moving up the river in the darkness.

"The master wants your fire lighter, Rhun!"

Slowly the misty outline of the man approached them, pulling at the straining dog and using the butt of the long spear as a staff. When he was about a dozen yards away he stopped abruptly. "I'll throw them to you, Porius ab Einion. They're tied together." He dropped the spear and flung his arm about a birch tree and after a moment's fumbling with his leather pouch, while Myrddin Wyllt, who was all hunched up now in his rough garments and muttering and grumbling like an old witch-wife, gave himself up to caressing a young fawn for whom the agitated parents were waiting in the undergrowth in a turbulence of contrary instincts, the fire lighter flew through the air and landed at Porius's feet.

The prophet rose to his full height, a height which at that moment — for one of this singular personage's gifts was his power of causing people to see him as he wished them to see him — became, to Porius's fancy at least, a foot taller than Rhun.

"Give them to me, Porius ab Einion. I want to do it myself."

Released from his touch, the fawn he was caressing leapt so high that Porius had an uneasy sensation that he would drop dead from fright, but its second bound carried it well out of sight.

But the prophet now became an old woman again and began like any fussy witch-wife to grope about in the bushes for something inflammable wherewith to start a fire. Porius didn't like to help him in this, and he was content to remain quiescent now that he saw that Drudwyn was no longer straining and whining.

At last with the aid of fallen larch sticks and the rotten branches of a dead wild cherry the red flame was crackling and the pungent smoke was blowing this way and that.

But this wasn’t enough. Retaining his witch pose with all its accompaniment of grimaces and mutterings and complainings and groanings, the prophet now collected from the bushes round him the materials for a rough torch which, when he had got it together, he plunged into his bonfire till it was blazing freely, and then brandished it aloft in the air.

The strain of this action tore loose his woolly coat; and the result of this was that his black beard escaped and became free and as if it were a living thing stretched itself forth tense, quivering, alive, and by so doing changed at once, as if in some organic metastasis, his whole bodily appearance.

Porius confessed to Morfydd on a later occasion that he saw or had the hallucination of seeing a swarm of tiny fiery sparks fluttering amid the hairs of this distended beard!

“And did the birds fly away, and the fish sink down, and badgers and foxes go back to their holes?” was the girl’s next question; and the hardly perceptible irony of her tone was destined at that future moment to be accentuated by the mocking gravity with which, at intervals during their talk, she must needs quote for his amusement various characteristic passages from certain letters from the late Apollinaris Sidonius that she was copying for her father.

Porius was compelled to reply that he had been oblivious just then as to what *did* happen to these excited creatures. “There was certainly no more rustling or fluttering or scampering as we went on,” he said, “and Drudwyn was certainly quiet.”

But her mockery when he was telling her his adventures was not confined to the correspondence of the Prince-Bishop of Arverne. “I suppose it was what happened afterwards," she commented, "that put the stags and the badgers out of your mind."

After brandishing the torch and getting rid of his subhuman followers, Myrddin Wyllt relapsed into the same rough, silent herdsman he had seemed when stretched at the bottom of the barge.

What he was doing now was trampling out, with the meticulous care of an elderly forester, every spark of the fire. Had it been daylight the fire would have been reduced to blackness in a few minutes, but it was now so dark that there was forever reappearing some unexpected and annoying rebirth of blood-red flickerings that had a tendency to transfer themselves to the swathes of straw that bound the counsellor's feet.

But the interlude lasted long enough to give the foster-brothers an opportunity to have a private word together, an opportunity Rhun seemed delighted to take, for now that the dog had shaken off his insane infatuation, and the prophet was behaving in the ordinary manner of an elderly herdsman, and Porius was showing no wish to display authority either as a prince or a Christian, the grandson of Agenor y Gaethwas was in good heart again.

"If you'd prefer to go with him by yourself to Brother John," he hurriedly and eagerly whispered, "I could go back to the Ford for the night, or I could leave Drudwyn there and go to the Gaer for the night. Is there any message you want me to take?" He was silent but continued to stare anxiously into the obscure and mist-blurred outlines of Porius's face.

"He thinks I ought to send him to Ty Cerrig to reassure Morfydd," Porius said to himself, "in case Mother forgot to send down the news when the lad brought it; and I expect he's right. But it would be a shame for him to miss that Greek from Constantinople and miss seeing more of the emperor's men — and Morfydd might say I ought to have thought of that."

So he shook his head and was a good deal puzzled by the unconcealed sigh of disappointment with which this refusal to part with him was received by his boyhood's companion. But he had no opportunity to protest against the man's mood, no opportunity to give him full permission to hurry off if he felt disinclined to face all those strangers while his head was full of Mithras. He had barely time even to pick up the water bottle, which he had set down against a tree and of which he now suddenly thought. What *would* the old man say if his precious relic of civilization were lost in these heathen groves?

But there was no time now for anything but to plunge forward and obey a new gesture of the prophet who was now making a blind, groping, piteous appeal for help. The man had not so much been overstraining his nerves and overtaxing his magnetic power as putting too great a burden upon his physical endurance. As Porius realized clearly enough before nightfall Myrddin Wyllt's chief personal danger came always from the appalling tension placed upon his bodily frame by all these abnormal and superhuman mental gymnastics.

The whispered consultation between the foster-brothers had for a moment drawn their attention away from the figure trampling out the fire and they had missed the descent upon him of one of the curious physical collapses to which he was liable. On this occasion he seemed to have become for the moment completely blind, and it was queer to see him move towards them — and yet not straight towards them — in a crouching and stooping posture, muttering and grumbling and tapping the uneven ground with his club.

"My Lord! My Lord! What is it? Your eyes? The fire?"

For a moment the man made no coherent reply; but Porius noticed that he rejected Rhun's help and hung with his full weight upon the arms which first reached him. Many were the strange sensations, many the peculiar thoughts that Porius had as he held him there. He had supported far heavier men of his own tribe in the throes of the sacred sickness, and the emperor's counsellor was suffering, as far as he could make out, from no stroke or fit or seizure of any kind, sacred or profane.

He was suffering, our friend shrewdly guessed, from a collapse of the life force in his physical human body, a collapse which for the moment blotted out his sight.

"Jesus Christ," Porius prayed in his heart, "don't let the mist thicken any further!"

Indeed at that moment his chief fear was lest the normal mist, accentuated by the addition of the unnatural mist that had been playing tricks with him all that afternoon, should deepen into an impenetrable wall of darkness so that the three of them would have to take some desperate measures; perhaps even to tie themselves together and follow the white dog like ghosts through Hades.

The curious thing was that he found himself intimately suspecting that this collapse of the emperor's counsellor was only another piece of playacting, like his behaviour about the wild creatures, and like his choice of that savage club as a weapon. But playacting or not, he could hardly let this notorious personage sink to the ground for lack of an arm to hold him up. It was too dark to see more than the white blur of Rhun's face above the white blur of the dog's body, but it tickled his fancy to imagine his foster-brother's irritable disapproval while he watched him saving the counsellor of three generations of Christian monarchs from an ignominious collapse in the wilds of Edeyrnion.

Was it playacting? What if the strange being *had* really injured his mortal frame by all these magical antics? What if the emperor's counsellor were to die in his arms, here and now, within a bowshot of the sacred Dee? His father and the whole tribe would be held responsible. The emperor's vengeance would strike them all.

He stared obstinately at the two fading white blurs before him and decided that Rhun's face looked whiter than the white dog's body. From somewhere in his brain there arose the fantastic idea that out of their two bodies Myrddin Wyllt had made one body and that this monstrous new creation was even now preparing to set sail in a Greek ship for the book markets of Egypt. A crowd of fantastic notions now began to perch like moulting birds in the threshold of his brain.

Again he became conscious of the stinkhorn fungus smell, and of the ice-cold shudder that seemed to come from outside Time and Space.

"I must keep my head," he told himself, and he began to wonder whether Rhun really worshipped that god of Time with the head of a lion and a serpent twisted round its body. "Blood of Creiddylad!" he suddenly thought, "I would only have to hold him a little tighter—" Why was it that the idea of squeezing the emperor's adviser to death — as if the serpent of Time were to murder Time — gave him such a throb of peculiar shame? Was it because he knew it would please Minnawc Gorsant?

But before he could carry this problem any further the whole situation — with himself in the centre embracing the prophet — drew in and back and out and away. But though it drew away it became ten times more vivid, ten times more distinct.

His own consciousness — the identity of Porius ab Einion — seemed quietly and contentedly to approach so near to splitting itself into a multiple consciousness that it seemed to rock up and down in happy ease like a huge sea squid floating on a smooth invisible ocean.

There was nothing mystical, far less spiritual, in what he experienced as he thus came near to this squid-consciousness. “I mustn’t squeeze the life out of him,” he said to himself, “while I drain his thoughts.”

It was in fact just that, and nothing less, that he was doing! By contact with the man thus reduced, or pretending to be thus reduced, for it came to the same thing, he was tapping in some unknown way a great reservoir of magnetic ubiquity.

Morfydd’s complete lack of interest in all this when he tried to describe it compared with her avid curiosity about every detail of later happenings made him underrate its importance to himself; but he never forgot the impression it made on him at the moment it occurred.

What proved to him that there was no sorcery about it was the fact that all the time he was feeling it he was perfectly aware of a wafture of ground-ivy fragrance from under his feet and a lingering whiff of delicious pungency from some bed of water-mint on which he must have trodden as they came up from the river. The impressions of multiplicity for which he became a medium at this moment were as far-flung and telescopic as they were concentrated and microscopic.

He grew aware of vast continents and countries and cities. He grew aware of the unrolling of world-shaking events; of famines and plagues, of battles and migrations, of the births and deaths of whole civilizations.

And it seemed to him as he kept resisting the giant in his blood which would fain have tightened his powerful hold, that he shared the recession backward of the bones under his grasp into those animal worlds and vegetation worlds from which they had, it seemed only yesterday, emerged.

And by degrees the figure he was holding grew less self-contained, less buttressed-in upon himself, and the man’s very identity seemed slipping back into the elements.

The human frame he held became an organism whose *conscious recession* into its primordial beginnings extended far beyond the prophet's temporary existence. It was as if what he held, and what he could so easily have crushed, became a multiple entity composed of many separate lives, the lives of beasts and birds and reptiles and plants and trees, and even rocks and stones! This multiple entity was weak and helpless in his grasp and yet it was so much vaster, so much older, so much more enduring than himself that it awed him even while he dominated it.

There was a rich, deep, dangerous, sensual pleasure in feeling this tremendous entity, this huge composite earth creature, thus so helpless in his hands. How it yielded, and how much of it there was to yield!

In it was the dark greenness of leafy hollows and the dim passivity of ancient tree-trunks and the long endurance of rocks piled dumbly upon rocks; and yet there was in it too the fluttering of huge imprisoned wings, and the coiling of great serpents and the feverish relaxings of feline sinews and under it all the hushed growths of green mosses, yellow funguses, grey lichens, drawing their sustenance from the innumerable nipples of leaf mould and from the darkly scented pores of ribbed peat, and from the crumbling rubble of sandstone.

The restless mental observer who was hidden beneath Porius's giant muscles wouldn't allow him to remain content with the half-sexual pleasure he derived from his power over this captured god of Time.

It pushed him on to search into, to try to understand, to seek to share the power of this extraordinary being, the extent of whose underlife was so much larger than his own.

"I must fix in my mind," he told himself, "everything I am getting out of him. I must never forget it, now that I've once got it."

But what *had* he got? Anyway it was the extreme opposite of what Minnawc Gorsant preached every night in his “White Choir.”

Never had Porius’s restless mind felt more alert than it felt at this moment as it hovered like a hawk over the far-flung secrets with which his embrace was feeding his soul. His giant strength closed about the form of Myrddin Wyllt like the serpent round the body of crooked-counselling Cronos; but this devious wisdom he was dimly tracking down had to do with the inmost self within himself, had to do with the thought, as obscure as it was startling, that it was possible to enlarge a person’s identity till it embraced other identities, till it could escape at will into others, till it could even discover that all the while beneath the obstinate opacity of itself, it was on the verge of becoming these others.

Meanwhile there had always been those two white blurs in the mist before him that were his foster-brother’s face and his foster-brother’s dog; but now with the gradual return of his errant soul from its occult lesson in planetary metempsychosis he became aware that the two white blurs had advanced through the mist until they were well within the length of his own great spear in Rhun’s sulky hand.

“Porius ab Einion!” If Rhun’s appeal was that of a sulky and aggrieved man, Drudwyn’s was that of an indignant and suspicious dog. The way the white hound lifted his head to utter that one syllable, a rather high-pitched syllable that under normal conditions in this part of the forest would have meant the scent of a wild-boar, it was clear to Porius that if this delay in their progress continued, he might uplift in that unnatural mist a succession of those same long-drawn melancholy howls whose appeal to a far-away heaven their arrival at the Cave had interrupted.

“Quiet, Drudwyn!” he cried, addressing the animal and then to the man, “He’ll be all right now, Rhun. He’s coming to himself. He’s worn out. We’ll take him to Brother John's cell."

Whether or not the whole thing, as he had at first suspected, was a subtle piece of playacting, and his own recent excursion through Time and Space an illusion, Porius was not lying when he reassured both the man and the dog.

He would have been puzzled to explain to Morfydd, even if she had been interested enough to ask him, how it was that he knew that the conscious spirit of this mortality-smelling, death-cold burden in his arms was even now returning to its unsightly home; but know it he did, and what he had so recklessly announced as just going to occur, now did occur. And it occurred so suddenly as to cause Rhun to step back and Drudwyn to utter a growl.

The emperor's counsellor disengaged himself easily and naturally from Porius's arms; and that all his faculties were simultaneously restored to him was proved by the manner in which, bending down in the darkness, he fumbled about for his club.

Porius waited in patience till this singular "herdsman from the south" found what he had lost. But even then, instead of leading them forward, or letting them lead him, what must the man do but begin to pour out a stream of hurried, incoherent, disconnected words, but words of so ominous and alarming an import that Porius interrupted him.

"Master," he said, "do you wish both of us to hear all this?"

"I wish Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn to hear it; and I wish Rhun ap Gwrnach ab Agenor y Gaethwas to hear it."

At these words Rhun and the white hound came so close that Porius could feel the dog's tongue licking his free hand, while the hunting spear held by Rhun struck against the Roman water bottle with a sound like a suppressed malediction.

"You will find, Prince Porius, you will find, Rhun ap Gwrnach, what you least expect if you go tonight to Brother John's cell. The brother of Gogfran Derwydd, Llew ap Greidawl, is in the water, dead cold, lying on trestles that" — at this point both of his hearers uttered the name of God in such a long-drawn boyish whistle that Drudwyn howled in sympathy— "on trestles that I've raised in the water. Medrawd the emperor's nephew killed him. For twelve hours he has been cold. None knows how Medrawd killed him. His pretext was that he found the man trying to enter the tent of Nineue, my sister's handmaid. He is crazed with desire for my sister's handmaid, and well he may be! The slipperiness of her skin is like the smoothness of the leaf-shadows round the waist of Adam's first wife. The thirst for her must have drawn Llew ap Greidawl through the darkness as a newt is drawn up from the bottom of a pond by the petals of a water-lily! Only it is he, not she, who is lying dead on the top of the water now. That's why I had the trestles put there — to hold *him* and to keep *them* away."

Once more the white hound lifted up his head to howl but Rhun, catching him by the throat, knelt hurriedly by his side, murmuring threats and cajoleries.

"It was in fear of that," the prophet went on— "In fear of *what?"* thought Porius— "that I made the bier for the corpse on trestles — on trestles, I tell you — and raised it above the water — so that we should know if *they* came to carry it away."

The man's voice had become high-pitched and rasping. It had also become old and feeble. So feeble and husky had it become that Porius was reminded of the voices of the Modrybedd as the Three Aunties made their moan over the mutilated corpse of Morvran.

"How much longer," he thought, "will he go on murmuring about trestles and corpses and girls with satiny skins when, if this is true, we shall have

—”

He shifted the water bottle to his right hand, for it was his right arm that Myrddin Wyllt was now clutching in this access of volubility, but with his left hand he followed the surface of the spear till he could grasp Rhun’s wrist. This slight contact between them was quite enough to convey, each to each, their startled recognition of what it meant to them all if these crazy intruders had really murdered the druid’s brother.

“How much longer will he go on about satiny skins?”

But the prophet, dropping the arm he had clutched, called to Rhun in an authoritative voice to assist him once more with the fire lighter. The two Brythons were glad enough to exchange a comprehensive look when it became clear for what purpose he wanted this light. The extraordinary man had felt some small insect upon the handle of his club and he wished to make sure it wouldn’t meet an end that was contrary to its destiny.

While Rhun was occupied in flicking into the leaves no less than three small creatures, namely, a centipede, a woodlouse, and a dazed semi-hibernating moth, Porius was able to get a clearer and less equivocal glimpse of the counsellor’s physiognomy than he had yet been able to obtain. The prophet was certainly the ugliest individual he’d ever seen. The man’s ears were beyond all proportion in size. They were very hairy and resembled those of a horse. His mouth had a tendency to fall open like the mouth of one dead or asleep; while from his heavy and pendant lower lip there was a constant dribbling as if the healthy and mechanical motion by which we restrain ourselves from slobbering was in his case atrophied.

But what especially struck Porius was the colour of his eyes. These were of a greenish tint passing into the peculiar greenish blackness of forest twilights and further accentuated by thick black eyebrows and by that extreme closeness to each other of the eye sockets to which reference has already been made. He felt a curious interest in the prophet's eyes as the light of Rhun's glowworm taper caused them to appear and disappear; but it was an interest rather of a boy in a green beetle than of a Christian in the windows of an immortal soul.

It may be imagined therefore what he felt when, during these intermittent snatches of what was in truth a somewhat inhuman curiosity, their eyes chanced to meet! At that second the great-great-grandson of Cunedda felt his cheeks grow hot as Morfydd's might have done. And he didn't blush for embarrassment only.

In one piercing flash he recognized that Myrddin Wyllt had need of him, depended on him, and might very soon, if they remained together, come to cling to him!

Now the strange thing was that in place of this discovery giving him any pleasure he found it extremely distasteful. It not only made him shy and embarrassed; it made him obscurely hostile. He suddenly had a surge of longing to be alone with Morfydd again and to put himself more completely than he had ever done before at her disposal.

The words of that great passage from Pelagius concerning the creative power of the mind that imagines and tells itself stories about its own destiny came into his head, and he seemed to visualize the domination of Morfydd as a clear white sail behind which he could ride the dark waves of a free ocean, he and Rhun with him; liberated as much from the clinging honey of mystical caves as from the clinging greenness of prophetic groves!

And so while before his mind's eye rose the scene at the Fountain of Saint Julian conjured up by the prophet's words and an image of that ready expanse of enchanted water lying under an unnatural mist and surrounded by men and horses moving to and fro in gleaming armour, and among them the haggard lovesick nephew of the emperor, he was suddenly aware of a gross, rough, boyish impulse to call out to Rhun: “Come on, brother! Come on in the name of Alarch the Fair! Never mind the satiny skins of their court ladies! Let’s go back to Ogof-y-Gawr and ask the blessing of the Three Aunties! Let’s go back to Ty Cerrig and get hold of Morfydd! Let’s leave these pirates Colgrim and Baldulf and Cheldric to the horsemen of Arthur and the magic of Myrddin Wyllt! And with Morfydd and the blessing of the Aunties let’s go straight to that Greek ship in the port of London and hoist sail for the Bosporus!”

CHAPTER IV. The Tent

OF THE FOUR PERSONALITIES who were now approaching the neighbourhood of the famous Fountain of Saint Julian the white hound was the one who displayed the most lively signs of excitement.

The two men from Mynydd-y-Gaer were mentally as well as physically weary. Neither of them was accustomed to the expenditure of so much energy after the chief meal of the day, and though their encounter with Mabsant ap Kaw had disturbed Porius very little, and all this Myrddin Wyllt affair had been a gnat's bite to Rhun, their experiences in the Cave were a very different matter.

More than they realized they had been drained of magnetic energy and disturbed in their normal self-control in that weird place, and they had fallen into a mood that at very small provocation might grow explosive.

One thing they instinctively did in common, revealing the old crafty caveman blood in their veins. They put away to the back of their minds all thought of what the consequences would be if the emperor's nephew had really killed Llew ap Greidawl. Myrddin Wyllt himself had remained silent since his outburst about his sister's handmaid, so that it was round three very indrawn human beings that the white dog, now that he was liberated from the iron chain, was able to show his real feeling for his master accentuated by remorse for his recent lapse.

And so while Drudwyn gambolled, sniffed, scampered, and bounded, and the men wrapped themselves closer and closer in their own thoughts, the four of them advanced towards the west through the forest and the mist.

One remark alone, a remark that was practically a command, fell from the prophet as they went along. “I would like the ladies to see you both,” he said, “before you go to the Brother’s cell. Their tent has been pitched next to the Little Mound.”

It was too dark for Porius to *see* whether Rhun had caught the drift of these significant words, but in a moment he knew he had by his whispered command to Drudwyn.

“Y Bychan!” he murmured, as who should say, “The Little One!” and, perfectly aware of what was expected of him, the white dog fell into line at his heels.

The Little Mound was reputed to be the burying place of a certain Iscovan, whose mother was one of the forest people, but whose father was a Gwyddyl-Ffichti chieftain called Serigi whom Cunedda drove into Mona and there slew. But Iscovan became a hero among his mother’s people and lived to a great age. He was of small stature, hence the name “y Bychan,” or “the Little One”; but he was notorious for his strength and cunning, and, as long as he lived, was regarded by the legionaries at Uriconium as their most mischievous enemy.

The Mound of the Little One became therefore a rallying spot for all such local rebels as not only hated the Romans but had small love for the House of Cunedda; and the reverence in which it was held by the natives, combined with the uneasiness with which both Romans and Brythons regarded it, soon spread to the dogs of that neighbourhood who learnt to associate the place with an enforced quiescence.

Thus it was that by speaking of the Mound of the Little One as their destination Myrddin Wyllt cast a traditional restraint over the only one of the company who had regained his spirits.

It was no unfamiliar spectacle to Porius to see lights flickering through the trees as they approached y Bychan's Mound, for it had been a custom with the people of the forest, before Cunedda appeared on the scene, to celebrate the death of the Gwyddylaid outlaw with torchlit games; and the more youthful and daring among the hut dwellers still gathered here at the equinoctial seasons as a gesture of defiance to both the Romanized Arthur and his Brythonic representatives at the Gaer.

But the Gaer itself was different now, and the most rebellious could hardly accuse Prince Einion of Romanizing tendencies. Brought up by the Three Princesses and their beautiful niece to share the forest people's reverence for this place, it was no slight shock to Porius, when, at the end of a wide *llanerch,* or grass-covered expanse between the trees, he perceived the dusky bulk of a large pavilion from which several flickering lights were wavering into the forest.

It was really no more than a large tent, but the vast stretch of sailcloth of which it was made gave it an effect such as neither Porius nor Rhun had ever beheld before; the effect of a colossal fungus of a dusky brick-red colour. It was supported at the four corners by four enormous fir-tree posts and, inwards from these posts, the sailcloth sagged in shell-like curves.

It now became clear to Porius that, though the prophet's pavilion was so isolated from the tents of the other intruders, there was no guard or sentry, no watch or bonfire, anywhere about the place.

Porius's imagination kept transforming the shapes of the trees into stately horses, all coal black, cropping the dark wet grass, but it was not imagination that caused Drudwyn to utter a menacing growl. A couple of shaggy deerhounds, each of them of some dusky hue too vague to be distinguished in the mist, but each of them with a white breast, answered his growl; and if it had not been for three extremely active pages and the presence of Myrddin Wyllt their arrival might have been celebrated by the passing to Hades either of Drudwyn himself or more likely of both these handsome strangers.

But the prophet indicated to his visitors now that it behoved them to remain where they were.

“Porius ab Einion, one minute, Rhun ap Gwrnach, one minute, while I warn my sister.”

Never had Porius — no! not since he crossed the Mountain of the Mothers to go to the Bishop’s School — felt more thankful for a delay in the progress of events than when he saw the herdsman-prophet enter that illuminated pavilion. Two of the pages, each restraining a dog by its collar, held aside for that strange figure the thick folds of sailcloth that formed the entrance to the tent and vanished into the place behind him.

It became the destiny therefore of our two friends and their now docile companion, for the dog did not even utter the protest of a whine, to listen absent-mindedly, for they all three felt uneasy and embarrassed, to the lively discourse of the third page.

It was a comfort to Porius when he decided in his mind that the prophet had made a mistake, and that y Bychan’s Mound was after all a quarter of a mile away from where they now stood. The three visitors were too proud and too weary to attempt to take any sort of initiative; and they submitted like helpless chessmen when the wily page ushered them out of a particular stream of light that shot into the darkness from between the hanging folds of the tent’s entrance and, having got them into the thick darkness, became astoundingly indiscreet. He seemed to have no more fear of the great Myrddin Wyllt than the pages of the Gaer had of Einion ab Iddawc.

“Fflam and Tegvan,” he explained, and even Drudwyn seemed to comprehend that he was speaking of his fellow pages, “are envying me like the devil my attendance on you, Prince Porius — and on you, my Lord Rhun. Fflam serves the Lady Gwendydd and Tegvan the Lady Nineue; and though you might think Fflam's was the greater honour I can assure you, my Lords, that such is not the case. No! I should say not! The lowest turnspit and greasiest scullion in Arthur's court knows better. The Lady Nineue has more power than any woman in this island, more than the empress herself; for my master governs the emperor and the Lady Nineue governs my master.

"I expect you haven't heard but it's common news here — may I lose my soul if it isn't! — that the master is more besotted with the Lady Nineue than Prince Medrawd is with somebody else. You've heard of the killing of this imbecile brother or cousin or something of the local druid? Fflam and Tegvan say, and all the ostlers and all the outriders say, that the master did it himself and put the blame on Prince Medrawd. We know with whom Prince Medrawd is in love — not with the Lady Nineue but with somebody higher up. Fflam and Tegvan saw the poor man play Peeping Tom under the tent. He was up to no harm. And they saw Prince Medrawd walking up and down as he always does when he can't sleep and he never *can* sleep! Twas Prince Medrawd that found that man, all bloody and cold like a mallard in a swamp, but if *he* killed him you can cut out my tongue!

"We're the ones who saw him staring at him with his hollow eyes, and of course he had his tourney lance. He always does have that when he walks in the night. He uses it like a staff. It's funny, isn't it? The whole business is funny; and it's what's always happening. And Fflam and Tegvan and I are always looking on, looking on till we're tired of it; for when you've known Arthur's court you've known all there is; and all there is makes a person tired."

Porius broke in at this. “And what may your name be, Master Know-All?” He heard a gloomy chuckle from Rhun and something like an appreciative whimper from Drudwyn.

“Neb ap Digon,” replied the all-knowing one, unabashed.

“Aren’t you afraid, Neb ap Digon, of talking to strangers about the emperor’s counsellor?”

“Oh, *he* knows how I talk. He knows everything. And you see it’s like this; when a person knows everything it’s the same as if he knows nothing.”

Drudwyn expressed his opinion upon this aphorism by uttering a sound that resembled an uncomfortable sneeze.

But Porius laid his hand on the child’s shoulder.

“Let’s see your face,” he said, and began propelling him into the stream of light from the tent. Neb ap Digon looked about ten years old, but Porius decided that he must at least be twelve. Like his companions he was dressed in the imperial colours, that is to say, in green and yellow, and he wore his hair cropped close to his skull. His nose was long, his mouth pinched, bitter, and tight-lipped, but the presence of a pair of disarming dimples in his cheeks gave to his perpetual expression of satiric mockery a sort of whimsical and disarming stamp of innocence, as though Nature, who like Myrddin Wyllt knew everything, had been at pains to register this devilish infant as really quite harmless.

“Do *all* the pages in Arthur’s court,” enquired Porius, after surveying in silence the ambiguous little face before him, “talk to strangers as freely as you do?”

Neb ap Digon gave him a most curious look. “We can only say what we’re allowed to say,” he replied.

“Did you hear *that,* Rhun? On my soul, I believe the child’s right! I’ve been feeling all this time since we crossed the river that I too can only say what I’m allowed to say.”

But the colloquy was now brought to a close by a sudden drawing aside of one of the two heavy hangings that hid the entrance to the pavilion; and while the page they had heard designated as Fflam held back the hangings the other approached to usher them in.

Porius well understood what the hurried look meant which his foster-brother gave him now. He nodded emphatically, and Drudwyn, walking with grave solemn dignity, entered the pavilion with them. The warmth and fragrance of the place were an overpowering contrast to the cold mist outside. They heard at once the sound of ladies’ voices and they could see them too, but they were separated from them by a perforated screen.

The soldier of the Covenant of Mithras gave his comrade a second quick look, a look that seemed to say, “They’ve decided to cast a spell over us and he’s given them time to prepare it!”

But as Porius stared through the screen he felt disinclined to do anything except allow the dangerous charm exposed to his view, whether it was prepared or unprepared, to have its complete way with him.

The white hound also, though the hot and fragrant atmosphere caused drops of water to drip from his panting mouth, wagged his tail with as much pleasurable excitement as if he’d never tasted the Sacrament of Mithras.

And indeed, as Neb ap Digon took the water bottle from Porius’s hand, and little Fflam took the spear from Rhun’s, and the yet smaller Tegvan shifted the monstrous club of the “herdsman from the south” to make room for these objects, it rushed through Porius’s mind that Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd may well have experienced an ecstasy so intense as he peered through this screen that even had he known that the dagger, or whatever it was that Medrawd used, was already raised to despatch him, he still would have continued to stare, content to pay for such an experience with his life.

The truth was that what he now beheld through this rare object of Cretan workmanship, brought from Arthur’s *llys,* or “palace,” and presented to the emperor’s counsellor by a merchant from Constantinople, was a sight that might have disturbed the senses of Minnawc Gorsant himself.

Two beautiful young women were helping each other to put the final delicate touches to adornments that at Mynydd-y-Gaer went by the appropriate name of “love trappings.” One of them was fair in complexion to a degree beyond anything that Porius had imagined was possible in fair women. She was not only fair, but her skin was white in a completely different way from the whiteness of other women’s skin, different even from the whiteness of his adopted mother, Alarch the Fair.

This fair young woman wore a heavy black mantle which, as it hung loosely from her shoulders, displayed a tightly fitting vest of pale blue fastened at the throat by what looked, through the Cretan screen, like a massive brooch of ivory and gold.

Never had Porius seen such perfectly formed breasts as those which were outlined by that blue vest, while below the vest, which descended halfway to her knees, the soft lamb’s-wool drawers she wore only covered the upper part of her thighs and left her knees and legs completely bare, emphasizing the beauty of her golden sandals.

It was however towards the other young woman that the more lascivious portion of Porius’s attention was drawn, for though he certainly didn’t miss the unusual perfection of Gwendydd’s breasts, he had been taught by his mother to have such a poetic reverence for this portion of a girl’s body that to allow himself to concentrate upon simple amorous desire in connection with it would have shocked one of his deepest instincts.

Gwendydd’s head was modelled on large and grand proportions; and her long hair fell over her black mantle in two tightly twisted coils that had been braided so closely that they resembled a pair of shining and gleaming serpents descending from the shoulders of a caryatid.

The other beautiful creature offered the most lively and striking contrast to all this. In the first place her head was very small; and in the second place it was covered with dark brown boyish-looking curls. Seen through the fretwork of the Cretan screen this head of dusky enchantment seemed to be in perpetual movement, flickering and hovering and undulating like a bird's nest of dark twigs at the top of a slender tree. "And wherever that tree sways," thought the son of Einion, "there'll be a new skyline for somebody!"

She wore the colours of the emperor's court, those same unusual tints of yellow and green as appeared on the person of Neb ap Digon; only in her case the fabric was costlier and rarer and she wore it in a manner peculiar to herself. "Whatever she wears under that yellow and green," he thought, "it's as fine as moth's wings. And how on earth," he thought, "can stuff of those colours give the impression of concealing a soft, silky, slippery skin?"

Porius's youthful hero had always been Hercules and the most seductive story he used to tell himself at the Bishop's School was that one of the Hydra's heads had turned into a girl and had lovingly caressed the slayer of the others.

But he was now sure he knew what Myrddin Wyllt in his weakness and frenzy — or in his acting the part of these things — had been mumbling in that misty undergrowth to the woodlice and beetles and nightjars and badgers as they approached the Mound of Iscovan the Little. Wicked-innocent girls in the slim snake-shapes of liliths and lamias, twisting and turning and twining in the madness of unsatisfied desire, slid into his senses through every crack of the Cretan screen.

But the snake of eternity still embraced Mithras's Time god, and all these thoughts and images were apprehended not so much successively as simultaneously; for the pages had scarcely brushed the wisps of moss and cobwebs and wood rubble from the visitors' clothes and offered them water for their hands than the ladies could be seen moving slowly towards them. They only paused twice as they came, once to whisper something to Neb ap Digon, who had run to meet them, and once to enable Nineue to readjust the other's black mantle where it had slipped from one of her shoulders, but, as has already been hinted, Porius's thoughts were as rapid and reckless as his physical movements were cautious and slow, and at this juncture they had time to travel far.

They travelled faster than light. They followed an airy highway made up of the oddest memories; made up, for instance, even as he straightened his belt to face these women, of the memory of how his foster-mother, who was as fair as the one who was coming towards him now with her breasts under a blue vest, had given him a wooden sword and how his real mother, to counter his pleasure in this, had shown him the family's official sword, the sword of Cunedda, and of how Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda himself in his extreme old age took down this sword — it hung in the banquet hall — when there were symptoms of an uprising among the more Romanized of the Brythons against the growing power of the Three Modrybedd; and finally how his grandmother Indeg had shown him how much more could be reflected in this particular naked blade than in any Roman mirror!

"It reflects thoughts," she had said.

God! And what would the sword of Cunedda be reflecting *now* if it were balanced at the side of the spear and the bottle against that carved chest where Rhun was standing?

The two ladies had now reached the space between the perforated screen and the carved chest, and Gwendydd was already addressing him when there was a startling interruption. Drudwyn gave one short bark and began wagging his tail, and Porius swung around.

Emerging from the same entrance Rhun and he had just used was a totally unexpected but very familiar figure, that of the tall, simple, athletic youth whose special business it was to carry messages for the mistress of Mynydd-y-Gaer. The contrast between this homespun apparition, who showed himself totally unabashed, and the ironic civility of Neb the son of Digon cannot have been lost on the two ladies, both of whom now came forward so quickly that everybody met at the same second in these same close quarters between the screen and the downward droop of the tent.

The white hound seemed more pleased to greet the lad from the Gaer than the strange ladies; but the lad himself perceptibly lost his confidence in his startled surprise at being confronted by his mistress's son. With a deep blush and a stammered murmur about "my Lady," he hurriedly placed what he carried in Porius's hands and, after a stumbling attempt to step backwards, turned his broad shoulders on the whole company and began awkwardly fumbling with the hangings of the entrance through which the cold mist had followed him into that heated chamber.

The delay in the lad's escape however gave Rhun an unhoped-for opportunity and approaching the boy he explained to him that he wished him to take Drudwyn back to the Gaer.

Displaying as much indifference to the ladies as the rustic boy himself, Rhun now acted the part of the stern soldier of Mithras dedicated to the Blood of the Bull and the Honey of the Sun; and Porius, as he knelt to salute the counsellor's sister and turned to answer the greeting of her companion, was aware that Rhun also was on his knees, but not to either of the young women. He was on his knees by the white hound, eagerly, anxiously, remorsefully, explaining something into those noble and twitching ears; and what he explained soon became evident.

Porius, who had already guessed from the poor beast's lamentable eyes the general drift of this communication, was not surprised when he saw his foster-brother hand over the unhappy animal's chain to the youth before them and, pulling the tent hangings apart, dismiss them both with the sacrificial gesture of a stoical Mithraist into the darkness of the forest.

Porius had a pang of shame. The dog's eyes haunted him. Unless the prophet had grossly lied there was serious danger in the air. It had always been dangerous even for the Romans themselves to meddle with the druids. Cunedda had been warned against it and he had been careful to abide by the warning; so had Edeyrn, while Iddawc had actually used Cunedda's sword to protect the druid of *his* time.

It was therefore simply unthinkable that any company of men, even though they had Myrddin Wyllt among them, could commit a crime like this and get away unscathed.

Drudwyn's eyes as he followed the messenger struck him as saying: "You send me into the danger, while you and my master linger with the women!"

Gwendydd had indeed installed both himself and Rhun on a circular heap of Arabian rugs and cushions, arranged, after the Romanized manner of Arthur's court, around a burnished brazier of dusky bronze in the centre of the tent. Whether by previous arrangement between the two women, or by pure chance, or by some natural elective affinity at work upon these four young bodies, Porius found that Gwendydd quickly possessed herself of Rhun, while he was left to the dangerous attraction of "my sister's handmaid."

How different were Mistress Nineue’s eyes from those of Morfydd! Morfydd’s were brown, but so dark brown as to be almost black, whereas the eyes he was now contemplating were pure grey; not the grey that darkens under emotion or changes its hue according to the hour or according to the condition of light or shade, but a unique unearthly grey, a grey that never seemed to change, a grey such as he had never before seen in any human eyes. The girl’s eyebrows were as soft and brown as her skin and very flexible, but her long lashes were jet-black and this had the effect of accentuating the peculiar colour of the eyes beneath them.

It was their lack of all perceptible feeling that struck him most as he began asking her questions about Arthur’s court. The flexible eyebrows had intense expressiveness. So had every feature of her face, but the eyes never changed or altered their tint by the subtlest shade of difference.

Porius’s peculiar submissiveness to the women who dominated his outward life had been intensified by the religious discipline of the Bishop’s School beyond the Mountain of the Mothers and though he had never aimed at continence and had always been outrageously shameless in imagination, something in his temperament had protected him, before his betrothal to Morfydd, from getting involved with any of the Gaer ladies who surrounded his mother.

So it was no new thing for him to find himself, as he did now, faintly aware of a troubled irritability in his nerves, an irritability caused by the fact that while he had no difficulty in resisting the peculiar spell that the “brown lady” cast over him, the effort necessary for this resistance spoilt his pleasure in her company.

So while he kept his small greenish yellow eyes, eyes like those of a Russian bear, fixed on her face as she murmured on about the emperor’s various palaces, and how his guards preferred Caerleon because of the fishing and hunting, but the ladies preferred Caergwynt because of the romantic old-world villas in that region which even in their ruin and dilapidation retained a certain Roman magnificence and in some cases were actually inhabited by the descendants of the old patrician settlers, he tried to escape her attraction by a favourite trick of his, the trick of rapid mental journeys in various directions.

He knew that his fellow covenanter on the further side of this odorous brazier must be feeling remorseful about Drudwyn and as anxious as he was himself to get on to the Fountain and the Brother's cell; so, although he made no attempt to see Rhun's face through the brazier's fragrant smoke or to glance at the beautiful breasts under the blue vest, he set himself to make an interior effort to fling his soul to the support of Rhun's soul. Had he dared to risk the impoliteness of looking away from those unfeeling grey eyes he would have been put to the blush at his own calm moral assumption; for he would have seen an unquestionably happy and complacent Rhun, a Rhun who took that blue vest for granted, a Rhun who, as he stretched himself upon the cushions, felt he was being appreciated as it had seldom been his destiny to be.

Occupied as he was with Nineue ferch Avallach and not being able to gather from the tones of the others the true state of the case, he actually began in his innocence a silent repetition of the mystic syllables *"Nama, Nama, Sebesio"* trying to pass them on, like a talisman, to his foster-brother.

Nineue's brown curls and unearthly eyes were between him and what he now saw was a slit in the tent hangings at the back of the pavilion; and as he listened to a somewhat cynical description of the emperor's famous queen, he couldn't help imagining the ubiquitous offspring of Digon with the help of Fflam and Tegvan engaged in washing the feet, knees, thighs, chest, and neck of the prophetic "herdsman from the south" and his transformation into a figure more appropriate to ladies' society; while all the while, upon those trestles in the darkened lake, the dead face of the druid's brother stared upwards into the mist.

"To the devil with these Arthurian upstarts!" he thought. "If between them they have really murdered this man the fat'll be in the fire. But it *can't* be. They'd never dare!"

Meanwhile a word had passed between the two women, and Nineue, hurriedly rising from her cushion and circling round the brazier like a yellow-and-green moth, brought over to him — still unopened — his mother's letter.

"Read it aloud to us, please, Prince Porius," the counsellor's sister said.

He obeyed at once. He was glad enough for an excuse to end the tension of being compelled to resist this satin-skinned creature while what he longed to do was to get hold of Arthur's meddling horsemen and pick them out of their proud saddles like maggots out of apples!

Gwendydd had already broken the seal of the letter and had even unrolled it a few inches. Like other things in Mynydd-y-Gaer — like the mind of its mistress, for instance — the letter was extremely old-fashioned. It was written on an old bit of parchment in coloured inks, and it was rolled carefully round a polished ebony rod.

Nineue ferch Avallach remained standing behind him while he read; but as he went on and found certain of his mother's words hard to decipher, for Euronwy was an extremely poor speller and her stilted Brythonic archaisms, sprinkled with tags of Latin from Minnawc Gorsant's priestly ministrations, made her style in itself anything but simple, the girl bent over him, touching his shoulders with the tips of her fingers and whispering suggestions in his ear.

Even if the contents of this letter hadn't been so important to him these teasing interpretations and the feel of her breath on the back of his neck would have been, as long as he was resisting her, an intolerable irritation; but what his mother communicated, and there could be no doubt of its general drift, cleared the air, at least for the moment, of Syrian perfumes and Arabian oils.

"Since to know is to be prepared in advance, and since to be prepared in advance is to be prepared for the worst, the best way of avoiding danger is to take precautions in time."

"Mother! Mother!" thought the reader of these portentous words, as a whisper over his shoulder suggested, almost as if to itself, an extremely cynical interpretation, "you've gone to the old man, and he's brought out his Roman schoolbooks!"

But the letter soon began to grow more realistic. "In order therefore," it went on, "that you may know how... how..."— "How things are," murmured the voice at his ear— "it is my bounden duty as the second cousin of the Emperor Arthur's late father, to inform you that the sooner you and the Lady Nineue ferch Avallach, together with your brother Myrddin Ambrosius, or Myrddin Emrys, commonly known as Myrddin Wyllt, and together with all the ladies, knights, squires, men-at-arms, heralds, and pages"— "What on earth," thought Porius, "would Mother think of Neb ap Digon!"— "both on yourself and on Myrddin Ambrosius in duty and Christian service depending"— "The old man's schoolbooks again!"— "do promptly and presently, on receipt of this warning, set out, if possible this very... this very..."

"Sunrise," murmured the voice at his ear, while to himself he thought, "She *did* say 'night,' but the old man made her change it! I suppose Father's gone to the Modrybedd; he *would* be! and she's only got the old man,"—

"set out this very — this very next sunrise — for Castell Deganwy in Gwynedd to the counsellors, warriors, and churchmen of my husband's departed cousin and liege-lord, Caswallawn Llawhir, primary Prince of the House of Cunedda, and there beseech him, for the love of God, the honour of his House, and the salvation of his infant son Maglocunus, commonly called Maelgwn, to give you an asylum in his fortress until either the wrath of our people has died down or until the emperor sends a fleet to bring you home by sea.

"Were any treacherous adviser to persuade you to take refuge with my husband in Mynydd-y-Gaer, I must warn you, honoured Lady, that he would be playing the part of Judas; for here there is no refuge for those who have... who have done what we understand, from sure and certain news, *has* been done. The wrath of our people of the forest over the death of Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd has already spread to the mountains, and if you came to us the siege would be so sharp and last so long that your knights, your squires, your heralds, your pages, your horses, yes! and ourselves also, trying to do our duty to the emperor by defending you, would doubtless perish for lack of food and water.

"I beg you therefore to start immediately, on receipt of this warning, to Deganwy in Gwynedd and there demand sanctuary. You are lost if you try to return the way you came. But the way northwest is still open.

"Given at this our princely *llys* of Mynydd-y-Gaer on the eighteenth night of the month of October in the year of our Saviour and Redeemer four hundred and ninety-nine, under my own hand: Euronwy ferch Porius Manlius, *ord-patricii."*

There was a profound hush in the tent after the reading of this letter. Just because of the particular kind of irritation which his obstinate refusal to enjoy, even in the most cerebral manner, the bewitching Nineue had roused in him, Porius had read his mother's startling words with impressive dramatic effect.

He had been trained to read the Latin poets and orators while at the Bishop's School by an elderly rhetorician from the Gallic household of that famous writer of letters to posterity the Bishop of Arverne, and though no scholar himself he had inherited from Einion ab Iddawc a lively appreciation of verbal eloquence.

But the amount of feeling he put into his half-humorous emphasis of his mother's inhospitable words was not only due to erotic suppression; it was also due to the fact that this confirmation of his worst fears made him ashamed of lingering in this warm and fragrant place when such things were going on outside.

He was himself the first to break the silence, and he did so with obvious concern for the reputation of the House of Cunedda.

"My mother ought to have explained," he began, while the fact that the young women were so far apart, and one of them only just settled down again by his side, compelled him to make a rather awkward turn of his head and even a slight shifting of the balance of his whole body, "explained more clearly how it is that it should be possible for you to avoid trouble by riding northwest while it would be sheer madness to ride south or north or east. The reason is that although Mynydd-y-Gaer is in the centre of the plain of Edeyrnion, Edeyrnion itself is hedged round by inaccessible mountains and moors where isolated bands of Gwyddyl-Ffichti are still active, especially the remnants of the tribe of Vreichvras Llaw-goch into whose ghost-haunted alder swamps none of my father's people, whether Brython or Iberian, would dare to penetrate."

Mistress Nineue, who had again risen from the cushions at his side and was smoothing out the creases from a fold of her rich gown, turned quickly upon him with the abrupt and imperious question: "But how can it be when the Roman emperor himself appointed the House of Cunedda to clear these woods of Gwyddyl-Ffichti that this has not been done in three whole generations?"

Her words were clear and bold, and Porius and Rhun exchanged an uneasy glance. Then the former began speaking in his gentlest and quietest tone, a tone that compelled the Lady Gwendydd to look at him with grave intensity, while Mistress Nineue, stepping quickly across the room to her side, turned her back on both the men and waited impatiently for an opportunity to whisper something in her ear.

"Gwendydd ferch Morfryn," Porius began, "I am sure it will be clear to you that my dear mother wrote this and sent it off in great haste the moment she heard of this murder—"

At the sound of the word "murder" Nineue twisted about where she stood, with a movement that was so like that of an angry snake that Porius, though he went on speaking, thought of what his betrothed's brother, who was as critical of women as he was sceptical about God, used to tell him of the water snake whose poison festered in the foot of Philoctetes till the stench of it drove him into solitude.

"But this doesn't mean," he went on, "that my father hasn't by this time taken the necessary measures both to bring the murderer to justice and to ensure your safe return to Arthur's *llys.* My father is very rapid in his movements. He is revered by all the tribes of the forest except the tribe of Vreichvras Llaw-goch. None of you need have any fear but that the murderer of Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd will be found and punished, whoever *he may* be, and a large enough force summoned to put you all safely on your way.

"With the punishment of the murderer — and I would be greatly surprised if this has not already been achieved — the trouble will die down as quickly as it arose. So that I am in a position" — and as he spoke he rose from his seat and Rhun moved towards him— "to assure you that ladies like yourselves are in perfect safety in Edeyrnion and that my mother was ill-advised to suggest your departure for Deganwy. It may even be that I—"

It was on the tip of his tongue to add, "that I may conduct you myself to Arthur's camp," but at this moment all four of them became aware of peculiar sounds outside the entrance to the tent, sounds that struck them as human and yet not quite human.

The wild notion crossed Porius's mind that Myrddin Wyllt, driven mad by the image of the corpse propped up on those damned trestles, was scrabbling about on his hands and knees in the darkness making animal noises.

The foster-brothers were now standing side by side and they took the opportunity to exchange a curious look. It was like the look that one wild creature might give another when they are doubtful of the movements of the pack from which they have strayed.

Gwendydd too was on her feet now, strong and fair, her breath coming as evenly as ever, though with her rounded arms she made a movement to draw her mantle closer about her.

Nineue ferch Avallach's movements were on the contrary extremely premeditated. She glided to the back of the tent, drew aside the hangings, and listened intently for a moment. Then she went swiftly to her mistress's side, raised her small head of brown curls, whispered something into the other's ear, clutched with both hands a fold of the black mantle, and stared at the tent's entrance while her lithe quivering body in its green-and-yellow satin began to stiffen to so taut and tense a pitch of expectancy that it made

Porius, who by this time had been reassured about the sounds outside, once more think of the outstretched necks of that Hydra of Lerna whose poison tormented the best and last friend of Hercules.

Then the mystery was solved; for, half-dragging and half-dragged, lo! their eccentric guest at the Gaer, the Henog of Dyfed, about whose fate Rhun and he had had such agitating moments, was precipitated out of the darkness closely and confusedly entangled with Neb, Fflam, and Tegvan.

CHAPTER V. The Henog

THE UNFORTUNATE CHRONICLER from Dyfed after one hurried and bewildered glance round him stumbled forward towards the young women and fell on both his knees before Gwendydd. Having kissed her hand he made several attempts to rise but found his legs too weak. Nor would he allow Neb ap Digon or either of the other pages to approach him but beat them off with angry gestures, calling them in the Silurian dialect "newts and tadpoles of hell."

With the help of the two women, however, he was soon comfortably ensconced in a low carved chair by the brazier; and from this refuge he nodded familiarly, almost condescendingly, at Porius and Rhun.

"Lost! Lost! Lost!" he ejaculated. "Lost in this appalling mist! How dreadful, how Cimmerian, how Plutonian! I never thought the terrestrial air could thicken to such a density, or the darkness of Tartarus ascend so quick. On such a night a person needs a whole bodyguard of spirits; spirits that fear nothing but the Holy Trinity and the Illustrious Head of Bran the Blessed! To tell you the truth" — and he addressed himself confidentially to Mistress Nineue— "I don't believe even the counsellor could find his way on such a night. But I want to see him at once."

It was Gwendydd who answered. "Be content, Master Henog," she said. "We will enquire whether my brother is still sleeping or has begun to eat his supper. Perhaps the Lady Nineue will be generous enough to help us by finding this out. Neb ap Digon!"

The little creature was at her side in a second. "Run over to the Fountain, Neb, and collect all the news you can and come back as quickly as you can.

No! Leave the others! I shall have something equally important for them soon. Off with you now!” This was addressed to Fflam and Tegvan who scuttled off like brightly coloured beetles into the inner apartment, while Neb vanished by the way he had come.

Porius watched with an amusement that made his heavy features take on a specially stupid look, the peculiar manner in which “the brown lady” obeyed this unequivocal command. She behaved like a somnambulist; or perhaps to be more exact she moved like a person under a drug, a drug of such power that it rendered the relation between mistress and maid as negligible as that between two lotus eaters lying side by side on a waveless shore, indifferent to every mortal event, while ripple after ripple lap the yellow sands of their lotus isle in a scarcely audible monotone.

Porius began to take a sympathetic interest in this mask assumed by the girl. How could she be at once so seductive and so detached? What was she doing under that remote stare? Was she doing the sort of thing he did himself in that secret practise of his own which, thanks to a particular and peculiar experience, he had come after his odd custom to call by the fantastic name of “cavoseniargizing?”

“I ought to be getting on to the Fountain,” he told himself, “but the Brother will be asleep by now, and I’m not yet enough of a giant to meddle with dead men on trestles.”

When however the green-and-yellow lotus eater had followed the two little pages into the inner tent there was not only a relapse in his own feelings, back to common sense, but Rhun and the Henog, and even the counsellor’s sister, seemed also to become more themselves.

“Will you tell us now, Master Henog,” enquired Gwendydd, “what actually happened to you in the forest?”

This direct question seemed to break the spell cast over them by "my sister's handmaid" and one sign of such relief was the manner in which they all gathered closely round the brazier and began with a completely unembarrassed ease to rearrange the carelessly strewn rugs and cushions that surrounded it.

Another sign of relaxation came from the Lady Gwendydd herself. She had been busy for a minute or two but now she began moving quietly among the three of them, offering them with a most gracious smile crystallized fruit from the silver casket.

When she came to the Henog for the second time that gentleman took another sweetmeat but refrained from placing it in his mouth. "Let me enjoy myself to the full," he pleaded. He was luxuriously sucking, as he held it in one of his cadaverous cheeks, a sugary greengage, a greengage that only a year ago had been warmed into ripeness by the North African sun.

"Are you the prince's cousin?" enquired the lady, addressing herself to Rhun, but giving the preoccupied Henog a sympathetic smile as she seated herself on a pile of cushions beside the devotee of Mithras. "And does that beautiful dog I caught a glimpse of just now belong to you?"

Porius could not help noticing that this blue-robed, full-bosomed, gracious creature had managed to set his foster-brother more at his ease than he had seen him in the company of any woman except Morfydd. He was soon telling her, not only about Drudwyn, but quite simply casually and naturally about his cave.

Thus while the Henog sucked abstractedly at his greengage and while Rhun retained his plum in his fingers and politely nibbled at it as he had been taught to do by Alarch the Fair, Porius had an opportunity to relapse into the particular form of lotus eating which from boyhood he had always been accustomed to name to himself from his early years “cavoseniargizing.” He had once accompanied the elder Porius on an exploring expedition to the wild mountain slopes eastward and westward of Lake Tegid.

This excursion took place when after a serious illness the old man had decided that he ought to select a suitable place for his ashes. This classical way of disposing of the dead had from time immemorial been followed by the Manlian gens, and the family’s preference for burning over burying, in spite of his own fanatical adherence to the Christian faith, still dominated Porius Manlius.

Moreover he wanted his ashes to rest somewhere near Lake Tegid for a less traditional and more personal feeling; for the truth was that in this Lake Tegid district he was reminded of his ancestral estate on the edge of the wild Etrurian forests.

It is true that in selecting this portion of his son-in-law’s princedom for the repose of his ashes he had to control — *ultimus Romanorum* as he was — a by no means negligible dread, a dread that was as humiliating to his manhood as it was contemptible to his reason; his fear, namely, lest the old local divinities, turned now by the new faith into evil spirits but acknowledged to be more potent in this part of the country than anywhere else in Britain, should disturb his rest.

During this prolonged expedition undertaken in the laudable spirit of classic *pietas* and in which the boy Porius had a fascinated share, the old man had instinctively chosen two beautifully appropriate sites, only to find that in each case the spot had already been consecrated to two other Roman colonists, one of whom had raised an altar and the other a tombstone.

But the curious thing was that both these Roman colonists, who like old Porius had been reminded of Italy by Lake Tegid, had bequeathed the syllables *“cave!”* or “beware!,” as part of their patronymic inscription.

Thus it happened that round the puzzled ears of the child as they returned from their final choice of an unappropriated resting place, there had flowed and ebbed a lively discussion as to whether those two syllables represented a portion of the name of a family, possibly a Roman one, that had intermarried with the native lords of Penllyn, or were simply a warning to profane persons to hold aloof.

The secret use, however, to which the little boy put these debatable syllables had solely to do with his own most private feelings. He used the word as one of his precious sensation symbols and to serve as a description of those recurrent moments in his life when the gulf between the animal consciousness of his body, the body of a youthful Hercules, and the consciousness of his restless soul was temporarily bridged; so that his soul found itself able to follow every curve and ripple of his bodily sensations *and yet remain suspended above them.*

He had tried once to interest Morfydd in these feelings by explaining to her that they resembled what Homer describes in his catalogue of the ships, where he shows how the river Titaressus, as a branch of the Styx, flowed above the river Peneius "like unto olive oil" without mingling with its waters, but he had received no very reassuring impression as to how far she followed his blundering attempts to make this mystery acceptable.

But now as he recalled the way Nineue had passed into the adjoining tent it seemed to him that this girl, about whose satiny skin the great counsellor had mumbled such madness and who had made him think of one of the necks of the Hydra stretched to strike, must really be practising the same divinely delicious trick that in his own deepest mind he had come to regard as the wisest thing any human being could do! She was in fact playing his own secret game!

And that must be why she looked so detached and remote; for to feel this first and last sensation of the human body and soul in harmony you had at once to unite things and isolate things, to immerse yourself in things and to escape from things. It was anything but easy.

“I *must* wait,” he told himself, though his conscience was murmuring that Brother John might be waiting for him and not asleep at all, “till she comes back. It’s very important to me to find out whether she ‘cavoseniargizes’ or not!”

And now as he swallowed another fragment of Gwendydd’s sweetmeat and as he contemplated the bulge in the Henog’s hollow cheek growing smaller and smaller while the fragrant sweetness oozed down the man’s long sinewy throat and as he listened with a faint and faraway attention to the proud and happy responses of Rhun to Gwendydd’s questions, it presented itself to him as absolutely certain that “my sister’s handmaid” concealed behind that dazed, quiescent, obedient abstraction, with which she withdrew to seek Myrddin Wyllt, precisely the same mysterious sensation, exultantly maintained by an act of will, as he himself had revelled in all the days of his life since that occasion when even the stout heart of the elder Porius had failed before the invisible spirits of Lake Tegid.

Yes, he felt sure the daughter of Avallach was doing that very thing which Alarch the Fair had once made him confess to her he was doing when under the power of his delirious trance he had been deaf to some impatient command.

Of one thing he was certain. There was a secret in those remote grey eyes that neither the Henog, sucking so luxuriously at his crystallized greengage, nor the fair Gwendydd had the power to solve. But how did he know that Myrddin Wyllt, the invisible prophet in that inner tent, hadn't thrown a spell over them all?

How did he know he hadn't done what Alarch ferch Iddawc used to tell him the great Roman Empress Helena had done, thrown a love charm into the brazier?

He began watching the Henog with still greater attention. Yes! The queer fellow did look as if the fragrant heat from the red coals in that oriental firebox were throwing him into a mood in which the whole world was reduced to two things: candied fruit that was sweet in the mouth and scented smoke that was bitter in the belly.

Certainly the Henog was disturbed by nothing at that moment but how to obtain the fullest possible degree of warmth; and how to keep the thick black gown which he had twisted round his unathletic legs from being scorched by those red coals.

Crouching thus, the man resembled an ebony idol with an ivory head. He certainly did not look like a Christian historian. The shape of his skull was so grotesque that its conical shape, as the man struggled to reach the limit of skin warming without scorching himself, jerked Porius back just as he was beginning to "cavoseniargize."

And just because the spell was broken so suddenly our friend found himself analyzing, as he had never done before, the peculiar nature of this secret game of his.

It certainly was a non-human indulgence, but there was no malice or cruelty or pride or unkindness in it. It obliterated humanity as completely as it obliterated God. It obliterated the future. It obliterated every sort of worry and every sort of responsibility. It was above or below all love and all hate. It had nothing to do with any *anima mundi* or any soul of the world.

But why was it that certain dramatic and tragic, certain pitiable and comical things, if you didn't evade them, could — like this elongated up-narrowed skull before him — break the spell of his indulgence?

But the Henog was speaking now and speaking eloquently. Having gulped down the last of his greengage he had plunged without a moment's delay into a dramatic account of what had been happening at Saint Julian's Fount.

The story was so exciting and the events connected with it led to such vistas of agitation that Porius felt compelled as his father's representative to turn what public wits he had upon this whole dangerous situation and try to face its startling implications.

These implications were clearly nothing to the Henog! Solely, uniquely, exclusively, he was absorbed in what had happened. What *might* happen as a result of what had happened was clearly of no interest to him.

Porius looked at him in amazement as he spoke. He described everything with a certain laboured accuracy as though he were already practising the overtones and undertones of the words with which, as soon as he returned to the inks and pigments and books and parchments in his cell at the Gaer, he would chronicle those events for the benefit of men yet unborn.

As Porius listened to him and watched the eager attention of the lady, he began to wonder if her excited breathing, her parted lips, her heightened colour were entirely due to what the Henog was saying or had any connection with her interest in Rhun.

Surreptitiously now, and as far as his natural politeness and his long submission to women's rule permitted such a liberty, he stretched out his arms and legs among the cushions, a gesture which was accompanied by imagining himself wading up to the waist in the sacred lake of the Fountain, and with a hidden strength drawn from the mother of Iddawc tossing those horsemen of Arthur like leaves into the air and carrying off their victim, while the druid of the forest out-sorcerized Myrddin Wyllt.

But his attention soon returned to the Henog and his extraordinary discourse, and he began to wonder whether there might not be in the world of thought the same element of pure contrariness that existed between people in life; and whether it was not enough for them all to be overshadowed by the presence of the great prophet of the future to set this rival sage off on an impassioned eulogy of the past.

It certainly did seem as if the Henog attributed to every least detail of what had actually occurred a special and curious kind of consecration; as though *merely to have happened* made what *had* happened, whether tragic or comic, or even trifling and fortuitous, a sacred episode in a symbolic rite.

Whether the counsellor was at this moment being ensorcerized by his sister's handmaid or being bathed and anointed by Fflam and Tegvan, Porius couldn't resist the fancy that it was in defiance of his invisible presence, with its blind clutch upon the dubious things to be, that the elongated skull of the Henog was nodding its rhapsody upon the questionable things that *had* been.

But Gwendydd boldly interrupted the historian with a point-blank question.

"When did you first," she asked him, "find out that the corpse had gone?" Then the Henog stared at her. "When my brother left us," she explained, "before the mead drinking this afternoon it was still lying there in the midst of the water with its face uncovered, just as he had placed it."

But the Henog was too much in his element to be concerned with what other eyes saw.

"I never ceased," he replied, "thanking God that he had permitted me to see such wonders; but the truth is, Lady, that one thing followed another so naturally, so quietly, so surely, that it was as if they were not happening at all! Everything, if you understand me, was too silent in its approach to seem as if it were really approaching. Have you noticed, Lady" — the Henog said this in a curiously level and uncolloquial tone as if he were dictating a paragraph in a book, as if he were saying "Have you noticed, O dwellers in Britain a thousand years hence, how necessary for fresh life ashes and bones are?"— "Have you noticed, Lady, how the mind works when real events occur?"

Porius had certainly noticed that the lady kept smiling at Rhun, who though he leant back on his cushions as dumb as a great pike against the dam of a weir, was evidently as pleased with himself as when in his childhood Alarch ferch Iddawc let him take her queen at chess.

One absurd and contradictory aspect of the present coiling of the serpent of Time as far as Porius himself was concerned was the fact that he had become extremely sleepy. Here was he, as much concerned as anybody except his father with what was happening in their small dominion, listening while the man whom the Three Aunties called *goreu kyvarwyd yn y byd,* or "the best tale teller in the world," told of the most serious thing that had happened since the murder of Morfydd's brother, and all he could do was to let his head droop in sleep while the taste of the crystallized fruit followed the taste of the Mithraic honey through the stupefied cells of his "drugged senses!"

"The body's gone then," he thought. "The druid must be at work already." But though this was his thought, he still felt as if Rhun's *"Nama, Nama, Sebesio,"* and the parchment of his mother's fantastic letter, and the wavering smoke from the brazier at their knees, and Gwendydd's tight fitting blue vest were all murmuring their own mysterious comment upon every movement of the Henog's black sleeves, as if indeed there were some choreographic conspiracy among elementals and inanimates to lure him into a world where names were more real than things and sensations more real than names.

But he jerked up his head and shifted his legs and told himself that if he slept at this moment it would be to betray Morfydd. "I *must* keep my wits about me!" he thought. "I want them as never before in all my days!" He set himself to listen. The Henog was speaking now of the chance confusions that are part of reality; and how they were absent, or present, or both absent and present, in regard to what he'd just been witnessing.

Porius's efforts to rouse himself were certainly costing *him* at that moment one species of most vicious reality, the reality of actual physical pain at a particular place in the forefront of his skull; but he compelled himself to take advantage of a pause, in what was really only an oratorical question, to enquire: "Wasn't Brother John doing anything? I know you couldn't see much because of the mist. But didn't you hear his voice?"

The Henog had opened his mouth at this interruption and he continued to keep it open while he stared at Porius with an expression of helpless, guileless, inoffensive, puzzled reproach.

"Do go on, Sylvanus Is-Coed!" threw in the lady. "I too, like Prince Porius, am longing to know what Brother John did; but we don't want to hurry you. We want you to tell it in your own way. All famous *Kyvarwyddion,"* and she turned gravely to Porius, "tell their tales slowly. It is the final touch of their art. I wish my brother were here to hear this." As she spoke she looked vaguely towards the entrance to the inner tent, but to Porius's mind this gesture was somewhat made.

Then she added, and the sigh that accompanied *these* words did strike him as real: "My brother must be asleep, and Nineue must be watching till he wakes. But you can see," and once more she looked at Porius, "what subtle art the Henog uses in telling us all this by the way he keeps holding back the entrance of the chief actor."

The narrator closed his mouth, and screwing up his eyes and wrinkling their corners, along with the upper portions of his hollow cheeks, into a pose of respectful expectation, stared benignly and gratefully at the lady while a dark-lantern twist of his attention was automatically turned at regular intervals upon the impatient Porius.

"You mean I haven't brought in Prince Medrawd?" he hazarded cautiously, while Porius thought, "He's no more idea of all the intrigues and clashes and crosscurrents and convoluted abominations that are going on here than has that cynical baby, Neb. I don't believe Medrawd killed the man any more than did the counsellor. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he was still alive. I'd like to talk to Rhun about this. The body on those trestles may easily not have been his."

"No, no!" he cried aloud. "Not Medrawd! But we mustn't be so obstinate in our views of what's important. Go on, go on, Sylvanus ap Bleheris! I was only going to say that the chief actor at the Fount of Saint Julian tonight as far as I'm concerned is Dion Dionides, the messenger from Constantinople! I hope *he* comes into your report."

But it was the words: "Like a silent descent of copper coins thrown into the deep sea and sinking down through the grey water, some northward, some southward, some eastward, some westward, while the swift fish nibble at them as they sink" that reached Porius's ears, when, after his next struggle with the sleep siren whose chosen ground — and the battle was real pain — was still at that same precise spot between his eyebrows, he again shifted his limbs on those accursed cushions and tried to keep himself awake by imagining that the Henog's countenance was a heathery slope and his own attention was a sparrow hawk flying just above its surface.

The Henog was certainly sitting up now extraordinarily alert and erect on *his* cushions. The black mantle with the thin hem of silver braid was tucked up to the man's knees, and his bony hands were mechanically moving up and down over his shins in an attempt to attenuate the pleasant heat of the brazier.

"It must indeed," thought Porius in the pain of his dumb wrestling with the she-devil of sleep, "be some special kind of technique he's got, to catch the waves breaking, the smoke blowing, the birds hovering, the fish leaping, to catch men in the midst of battle, women in the midst of childbirth — it must be some special kind of technique he's got."

In his struggle to give the man his full attention he kept sliding so insensibly into sleep that it was left to sleep to visualize for him in unreal images what he himself was trying to get clear. No sooner had he thought of himself as flying like a hawk over the Henog's visage than sleep transformed this hawk into a cloud of fluttering feathers, among which the man's face began to fade away.

Sylvanus Is-Coed ap Bleheris Is-Coed had a trick of lifting and lowering his eyebrows to emphasize certain dramatic moments in his narration, and a way of thrusting out and drawing in his lips at certain pauses in the tale as if they'd been acrobats making complacent bows to the audience, and a habit of distending the nostrils of his curious-shaped nose as if he were testing by a completely different sense the rhythmic rise and fall of his sentences.

The Henog's eyes were pale blue; and when the man was struggling with this complicated art of narration their expression struck Porius as in some way helpless, pathetic, disarming.

Though it was narrow intensity that possessed the man, Porius decided that it was an intensity extremely serious to the fellow himself and appealing to a completely different set of mental values from those accepted by the Christian Church; a set of values, in fact, according to which the manner in which thought was expressed was more important than the thought, the narration of events more important than the events, the style of the narration more important than the narration; and according to which the real problems of life only emerged when a person turned his back upon the future and began to unravel in its illimitable recession the sacred scroll of the past.

But he must *not* let his head sink again. This man was describing events that might bring down the most tragic repercussions upon their House.

Well! Rhun, anyway, was being treated by the prophet’s sister as no woman had ever treated him before. But *what was that?* The wind must be rising. He looked round, fully awake in a moment, for there had always been something in the wind, yes! in the wind from any quarter, or from any segment of any quarter, of the whole round sempiternal sky, that roused up in him what he liked to think was the old Cader Idris blood.

Yes! yes! He knew without turning his head, and he knew that Rhun knew too without turning *his* head, that the loose folds of the tent hangings at the outer entrance, behind the screen from Crete, had begun to stir! Every sense in him was alert now. Hitherto for all the hours of that whole half day, ever since the stubble-coloured mist had moved up the sky from beyond Lake Tegid, his mind alone had been active.

Yes, his body had obeyed his mind when he lifted that boy-knight out of his saddle, but it had obeyed it mechanically and automatically; it had obeyed it sluggishly; it had obeyed it after a perceptible gap between command and obedience; it had obeyed it as it had obeyed his mother till a few years ago and since then as it had obeyed Morfydd.

But the wind had risen at last, really risen for the first time that day, and his body had come to life to answer it. He was more than alert now. He kept his eyes on the Henog as he spoke but he could see Gwendydd's face too. Not her breasts but her expression concerned him now. Did Rhun really attract her, as a man attracts a woman? Or was she merely pondering his mother's letter?

The rising of the wind had certainly quickened his wits, for he told himself now that it wasn't the old Roman who had inspired her letter. How could he have been so dull? He would have bidden these people to the Gaer and would have been ready to perish defending them.

No! It was her husband who encouraged her to write it. And there you are! It was probably the very best thing they could do! Why should descendants of Creiddylad die for this Romanized Arthur?

He was listening intently to the Henog now and beginning to grow aware too of a quite definite impatience, if not of a definite agitation, in the breathing beneath those lovely breasts! If the wind rose strong this damned mist would be lifted and the Fountain of Julian would be visible!

And not only the Fountain. Well did he know that this little camp of the emperor's men must be surrounded by this time on every side by the forest people. All Edeyrnion must have heard by now of the death of the druid's brother.

And was that body after all never on those trestles in the reeds and water, with its face to the sky? And if it was, *where is it now?* Did "something happen" to it, as with the body of Morfydd's brother? He stared into vacancy almost in the manner of the daughter of Avallach and as he stared he saw again those queer marks in the snow.

Suddenly without the least warning there was a resounding crash. The Henog ceased abruptly, his mouth open. Rhun leapt to his feet and then instantaneously— "how polite old Rhun has grown!" Porius had time to think — gave Gwendydd his hand to help her up too. As for Porius himself, alert now from head to foot, *his* instinct warned him to remain exactly where he was. But he turned his head and that was enough. He saw clearly what had caused the noise. The wind had blown the tent folds inward — Rhun had omitted to fasten them when he let out his dog — and one of those flapping tent skirts had curled round his heavy hunting spear and brought it down. And the spear in its turn, falling against the old man's Roman bottle, had brought that down too.

But it seemed as if this same gust of wind, not content with these achievements, wanted to see whether human beings were subject to the same forces as wood and earthenware, and so for pure sport flung through the aperture into the tent no less an object than Neb ap Digon, newly returned from his exploring excursion to the Fountain.

Neb presented himself before them so torn, so wet, so rumpled, so dirty, as to make it clear that he hadn't contented himself with a detached glimpse of what was going on but had boldly jumped down into the thick of the arena. The little creature was trembling with excitement but he was quite as self-contained, when it came to a description of his adventures, as the Henog had been in the manner of *his* narration.

"Some completely new technique," Porius thought, "must have swept the board at the emperor's court, some damned newfangled trick," he said to himself, "of describing the precise details of an occurrence without the display of the faintest feeling one way or the other, in fact with a sort of diabolical neutrality."

But at any rate Neb was the reverse of fastidious and the reverse of literary in his style. In fact he rattled on like a precocious infant who has become, by careful training, an antic at a public show. "I made a wide circle," he began, gesticulating with one of his thin arms from which the colours of the emperor hung in tatters, "and the mist helped me."

“Lucky child!” cried Rhun. “The mist makes most of us go in circles when we want to go straight!”

Porius gave him a slow, amused look, a look that said: “What’s this? Is this the influence of Cretan screens and Syrian fruit?” But Neb ap Digon rattled on. “I got behind the first lot of them — wiry devils they are too, my Lady, but short, very short, and with nothing but bows and arrows and javelins! They’re not only forest people. They’re Gwyddyl-Ffichti from the swamps and wild Ffichti from the mountains.”

“I expect they took you for one of themselves,” remarked the lady; and this comment upon his tale, though it didn’t disconcert him, was clearly a remark which self-respect made it advisable to ignore.

“They whispered to each other very low,” he went on. “Their talk isn’t quite the same as our southern forest folk’s, but I understood it; I understood it perfectly. Death *for Death* was what they were saying, and that’s the same from Caerleon to Caergwynt. Prince Medrawd’s name too, though they said it in a funny way, I could catch. I could hear hundreds more of them in the forest, all the way round! I could hear them murmuring and muttering and humming and whispering. The forest must be alive with them! If they weren’t absolutely under the authority of your revered father, Prince Porius — long may he live in the land! — or if we lifted a finger to save Prince Medrawd, I wouldn’t give the skeleton of a shrew mouse for the life of one of us, no! not even for yours, dear Mistress!”

Saying this he made a fantastical obeisance, thrusting out his elbows, straddling his legs, and letting the long streamers of his red hair, which was tied in several extravagant knots and to which there adhered a filmy wisp of corydalis, a tangle of bog moss, and some fragments of dead leaves, sway to and fro till it nearly swept the floor.

"No! I can't," thought Porius, "I can't feel tragic about all this! I can't feel there's any real danger to these women or to Myrddin Wyllt. And as for Medrawd, let him look to himself! But, God! I'd fight like Gwri Wallt Euryn before they touched a hair of Brother John's head!"

"And I heard them say, my Lady," Neb went on, "that the druid had himself got back his brother's body and that he was already putting life into him again! They kept repeating the words *'pair dadeni.'* If I heard those syllables once I heard them twenty times! Does it mean a 'kettle,' or does it mean a 'cradle,' Master Henog?"

Porius had long since become too tender of the Henog to enjoy seeing him fooled; and it did strike him that there was in the form of this question a touch of impertinent mockery. He never liked Sylvanus Is-Coed better than when with the utmost gravity he replied in a firm and emphatic tone, "Both the one and the other, my child! A *pair dadeni* is a cauldron of rebirth. There are only seven authentic ones in the whole world. From what they told me on market day here one of these seven is in Edeyrnion."

"But I've found something else, my Lady," murmured the wily page.

"What's that, my soul?" she responded, and as he listened Porius couldn't help making a humorous grimace of wonder. The word *"enaid"* or *"eneit,"* meaning the human "psyche", was never used in the Cunedda tribe in this familiarly friendly manner; nor, it must be confessed, would any of that prince's descendants address a dependent — least of all a page — in this affectionately personal manner. "God!" he thought, "I pray I shan't forget myself and turn into a savage in Arthur's camp! I'll have to watch myself, and copy *him over there,* when that time comes!"

The mere thought of his father at this present moment, followed by the familiar piety of the fumbling movement of his head that accompanied this thought, till he caught himself wondering where the south precisely was, was a queer relief to him just then.

He had detected the eccentric chieftain's hand in that letter of his mother's and he now found himself wondering whether after all his father would miss him when he sailed for the Bosporus. "I'd better not come back here," he thought, "when I've got rid of Colgrim and Baldulf and Cheldric and the other pirates from Germania. I'd better take that Greek ship without further delay."

All this passed through his mind during the first couple of sentences of Neb's reply to the lady's "tell me, my soul," but his attention shot forth like the horns of a giant snail when he gathered from the page's third sentence that there had been talk of the appearance of Gwyddyl-Ffichti from the swamps beneath the Hill of the Seven Horsemen.

Every year, since he could remember, his father had sent a special troop of picked fighters to scour these outlaws out of their supposed fastnesses; but no good had ever come of these expeditions, and the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, though always spoken of as fierce bands of marauders, were never met with save as aged grandparents in remote forest huts or solitary fishermen in lonely hovels on the coast.

He glanced quickly at Rhun, only to notice that he was watching the boy earnestly too, while conflicting emotions of mingled admiration and envy crossed the Henog's face.

"What do you think yourself is going to happen, my soul?" asked the lady again in her tenderest and most reassuring tone. It was clear that this white-skinned, red-haired, pointed-nosed urchin was a special pet of hers.

"I think Prince Medrawd will escape," replied the son of Digon, "but I think the people will hold the Feast of the Sowing along with the Feast of the Dead."

"The Feast of the Sowing!" Gwendydd repeated these words in a tone that betrayed considerable perturbation. All over Britain the wildest rumours had been spread for centuries about the way the forest people of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy were wont to keep this feast.

The Henog's alert eyes gleamed like a pair of translucent but extremely pale precious stones. "Will you tell me, my dear child," he said, bending down till the tip of his own expressive nose was within a dagger's length of the ivory-white visage of the little green-yellow antic, "what the precise ceremonies are in this part of the country when the Feast of the Sowing is kept?"

Neb shuffled back a pace or two, and turning his head to one side flung a whimsically appealing look towards his mistress, not exactly a childish look and certainly not a mischievous boyish look but rather the look of an elderly diplomat turning to his hostess for aid when some bucolic fellow guest has clumsily plunged into a dangerous topic.

"But wait, wait, wait!" repeated the fervent Henog eagerly, "and *you* wait, I beg you, gentlemen, and you too, Lady, if your lovely graciousness will so condescend. 'Tis clear from all he says that nothing very alarming is happening now — isn't it, isn't it clear? — so I don't think we need disturb his Magnificence the Counsellor just yet — and I did want to get everything, everything you said, child, and everything in this day's history into some degree of order. What's done in this feast is drawn from what was done a thousand years ago in a similar feast, and that again from what was done ten thousand years ago in the primeval feasts of these islands. So tell me all in order, child — all and everything; and in order — yes! yes! one after another and not pell-mell — for we must make a story of it, a story of what's happened up to the last moment. Yes, everything, child... with your gracious permission, Lady — for it's clear these gentlemen can do nothing just now — but I *can* and so— ‘each to his kingdom,’ as the toad said to the snake. For — there — is — nothing, nothing of what is contained in the chronicles of the thousands upon thousands of years before we were born, that isn’t important. It’s the only thing that *is* important! So let’s have all you saw and heard in due order, child, and I’ll just... I’ll just jot down a few scrawls, with your leave, Lady, to remind myself; and when I’m in my chamber later I’ll be — able — to — get — everything — into — order.”

While the Henog was speaking, and he was speaking faster and more eagerly than Porius had ever heard him speak, he was settling himself on a couple of cushions which he flung down on a mat and he was pulling a stool towards him to serve as a table and he was extracting his writing materials from beneath his black mantle, and with part of them on the stool at his feet and part on his knees, he was scrawling certain curious hieroglyphs such as would be totally unintelligible to any person, however learned, except himself.

Porius noticed that Gwendydd, who was now leaning heavily against the central pole of the pavilion with her eyes on the ground while Rhun was saying something that was only audible to her, kept lifting her head with a nervous jerk as if to remind herself of the existence of her handmaid Nineue.

The heavily scented smoke from the brazier wavered up in spirals towards the roof of the tent; and as these spirals rose they seemed to reach a point where the irresistible beauty of the lady’s long bare arm, lifted high and straight above her head as she clasped the pole while the mantle slipped from her shoulder, drew their vagrant smoke curves out of their natural ascent as they fluctuated and wavered till they seemed actually to form themselves into her shape like the cloud that deceived Ixion.

All this time Neb ap Digon, twisting his long hair in his thin white flexible fingers into two blood-red horns that stuck out on either side of his head, was talking very quickly; and from what he caught of it Porius soon became pretty sure that he was simply inventing; and inventing with more and more liveliness and excitement as he saw his inventions being so meticulously transmitted to posterity.

It was at that moment that the curtains at the side of the tent furthest from the Cretan screen were suddenly pulled aside, and Myrddin Wyllt with one hand resting heavily upon Nineue's shoulder stood before them.

As Porius faced him with the special inclination of the head and the special movement of the hands to his belt which had been taught him by his mother and the old Roman, for both his foster-mother and the Three Aunties had quite a different notion of what was proper from their prince's heir, he was distinctly conscious of that same ice-cold breath, that same mortality smell of fungoid vegetation, which had disturbed him before.

He was also aware of another curious though probably quite natural phenomenon, namely, the presence of a palpable indrawing suction accompanying that chilly breath, a suction that created a species of vortex in the surrounding air.

Curiously enough, Myrddin Wyllt's actual appearance produced upon Porius's mind just the same effect as it had produced when he lay opposite to him at the bottom of Rhun's ferryboat. He had heard from his earliest childhood at Mynydd-y-Gaer about this weird person's shape-shifting disguises; but he realized now that there was much less in them than the legend proclaimed. Myrddin Wyllt might put on a sheep's-wool jacket and hide his beard. He might trim his hair and tie ribbons in his boots. He might mount like a prince a well-appointed war horse or ride bare-back like a mad devil behind the horns of a stag. He might clothe himself in uncured skins like a savage or comb his beard like the King of Assyria; nothing could conceal the jet-black sheen of his glossy Africa-thick hair; nothing could conceal the green-black enormity of his cavernous eyes; nothing could disguise the apelike lowness of his primeval forehead or alter the subhuman manner in which his skull bulged out so monstrously behind his immense ears.

The man was dressed at this moment in a long garment of soft black *pali,* or Arabian satin, that reached nearly to his feet. He wore black stockings and black sandals. His robe was trimmed with gold thread and his glossy beard was tied in the middle by gold thread, the ends of which hung down in golden tassels. Black and green were the predominant colours of his appearance, though actually the only green things about him were his eyes which at this moment, as the torch flare lit them up, gleamed like a couple of mossy holes in an infinitely receding cavern.

Porius had never seen so long or indeed so glossy a beard as the man possessed; and the predominance of this beard in his appearance was enhanced by its being knotted in the centre by this gold thread.

But what Porius couldn't help noticing with a voluptuous sense of pleasure was the effect of the man's jet-black robe contrasted with the green-and-yellow court colours worn by both Nineue and the page.

"I must describe all this to Morfydd," he said to himself. "Perhaps she or Uncle Brochvael can find something about the effect of colour upon the soul in that *Timaeus* book!"

And then as he watched little Neb slip off behind the screen and Rhun move away from the lady's side and make his surly abbreviation of the extravagant salute taught him by the Three Aunties, it occurred to him as peculiarly characteristic of the blunders of these civilized persons that the emperor's counsellor, as he came shuffling into their presence with his hand on the girl's shoulder, should reveal his complete preoccupation with his own feelings by making the most honourable obeisance known at the most ceremonious of all courts, not to his sister Gwendydd, not to the heir of Prince Einion, but to the impervious and extremely unsympathetic Rhun, who, being one of the few last worshippers of Mithras in Britain, regarded this Christian magician very much as the older Porius regarded Pelagius, namely, as an insular medium for every kind of devilry.

What really did amaze Porius at this juncture was the imperturbable self-confidence of the old Henog who, after the most careless and negligent of nods to the newcomer and without rising from his cushions, bowed his head over his tablets and proceeded coolly and calmly to adjust the amazing facts that Neb had been relating to them to the abstract rhythm of his measured prose.

"What the devil is the matter with the man now?" thought Porius, as he watched the counsellor's shuffling, stumbling steps moving slowly forward. "It looks as if this whole business of prophesying were a malady, a kind of sick fever."

He could see, as the two figures passed him, that the soothsayer was leaning even more heavily than he had thought at first on the girl at his side. Not a moment of attention had *she* left in her to bestow on anyone else; and he even fancied she was drawing in her lips and narrowing her eyes with the strain of supporting such a weight. And she was leading him to the entrance of the tent. So it was clear the fellow wanted air.

Now a desire for air was a thing that Porius could completely understand. Certainly this richly fragrant pavilion was more adapted to the satiny skins and sensuous apprehensions of court ladies than to the temper of a man who had the power of drawing foxes and badgers out of their holes.

Meanwhile, Myrddin Wyllt was mumbling something to everybody present and, as it seemed to Porius, to some who were *not* present, in the same monotonous singsong he had used in the forest when he informed them that those creatures were *his* creatures, and when he spoke so complainingly of the slipperiness of Nineue's skin.

The curious thing about this impersonal monologue — and Porius wondered if the fellow went on in this same manner at Caergwynt and Caerleon — was that its unappealing monotone hindered people from listening to it. Did the abstracted girl upon whom he was leaning listen to it? Porius doubted it; and as for Gwendydd and Rhun, they were once more exchanging thoughts on something that clearly had no connection at all with these occult murmurings.

Although Nineue gave him no sign to do so, Porius now moved to the entrance and held the curtains apart. Aye! But how this heavenly wind had cleared the air! The mist was gone. He could clearly see the upper branches of a great bare ash from whose lower boughs the leaves had already been swept away but to whose topmost twigs several clusters of derelict seed vessels still adhered, and as he tried to catch a glimpse of some auspicious constellation, for he was always superstitious about the zodiacal signs, he was struck by the manner in which one particular one among these ash-tree seed clusters fluttered and shivered and shook.

"Stop!" he said to himself. "No more 'cavoseniargizing!' Wait till I've talked to Brother John."

But though he made certain motions of the will against this mania of his, motions which Brother John assured him had been practised by Pelagius, he didn't scruple to indulge himself, while the girl supported the counsellor and the counsellor talked to the cosmos, in a little further soliloquy with this particular cluster of whitish-yellow ash seeds.

“You’re a fine family,” he told these sturdy seeds. “You’re all brothers! You know each other’s ways, under the wind, under the rain, under the frost!”

“I want to ask you a question, Master! May I do so?”

These words were spoken suddenly, harshly, unexpectedly; and they were spoken not by the ash tree in the air but by the Henog on the floor, and when Porius turned his head he saw that the man was sitting bolt upright and had a bold, harsh, authoritative expression in his face. He repeated his question, and though he used the conventional word of homage, his tone implied complete equality with the counsellor; equality, that is to say, in everything that belonged to mental and moral weight.

Gwendydd broke off her conversation with Rhun and came forward. She did not however advance beyond a point that was about midway between the spot where the Henog was sitting so upright on his cushions clasping his tablets, and the spot where Myrddin Wyllt was leaning on the girl’s shoulder and muttering to the invisible wind.

The prophet swung round with such a vigorous jerk that Nineue staggered away from his side and almost or altogether lost her balance. Porius, who was watching them both, decided that she really did lose her balance at first but *only* at first. In a second — so he decided when he pondered on the incident a day or two later — she had not only recovered her balance but she was in complete control of all she did. She continued to stagger, however, and to stagger in the direction of Porius who, just as she would apparently have fallen, caught her in his arms.

With Morfydd, when his arms were round her, he was always aware of a whole little girlish figure from top to toe, aware of her feet, of her arms, her legs, her hips, her knees, her calves, her neck, her chin, and her forehead.

As a rule too he was aware of her spine and, below her round childish breasts, of her ribs.

But with Nineue it was as if he were pressing against himself something boneless, ribless, formless; something that was a yielding image of femininity in the abstract, the resilient, lithe, magnetic, slippery Platonic idea of all the evasive allurements in the world that are the objects of impersonal desire.

The form of Nineue, the softness of Nineue, the flexibility of Nineue, the colour of Nineue, the fragrance of Nineue, and a sort of immaterial emanation of the inmost identity of Nineue was embraced for those seconds by every portion of his body.

No part of him was favoured above any other part. All had their share, and not only their share. All had all. There was nothing of Nineue that was not deliciously capable of being absorbed. And in the absorption of Nineue even for those brief seconds *there was a sensation of the unfathomable and the infinite.*

If she had fallen into his arms before the wind got up he would probably have yielded; but his body and soul were unusually at one at this particular moment and he had no need for any of those Pelagian tricks for strengthening the will which Brother John had taught. The particular detail that really saved him at this moment were those ash tree "keys" with whom he had just had intercourse. Something about them had so nearly set him off on his secret practise of "cavoseniargizing" that in the hangover of that mood much that he otherwise would have felt towards the maddening creature thus yielded to his embrace was overlapped by the feeling that the ash tree with its wind-tossed seeds had aroused in him.

It therefore took his rapidly moving mind less than a second — for the whole thing passed in a few beats of his pulse against her body — not only to make *his* body stiff and chaste, but to suggest to the restless and impious consciousness, now fully alert within his Herculean muscles, the shrewdest line of action.

It wouldn't do to dislodge this ravishing nestling as he had done with the young gentleman on the white horse. A much better way presented itself. Accordingly he deliberately tightened his embrace, using all his intelligence to avoid seriously hurting her while at the same time he exerted sufficient pressure to make her glad enough to extricate herself, at her own volition, and without a pang to her self-esteem, to slip from his hug and betake herself to Gwendydd's side.

CHAPTER VI. The Prophet

IT WAS INDEED an amazing encounter that was now proceeding between Myrddin Wyllt and Sylvanus Is-Coed.

“Ask me what you like, my good friend.” The counsellor’s words were sober and quiet. They were even gentle. Porius looked at him in wonder; and glancing at Gwendydd he could almost hear her sigh of relief.

“I am what I am,” the man went on, “and this wind blowing upon me is the wind I have called up, and while it blows upon me it makes my destiny more than endurable. Ask me what you like.”

The Henog accepted this permission without apparently being in the least degree struck by the impressive way in which it was given.

“Will the emperor,” he enquired, “be satisfied if in this *‘Historia Veridica’* I am writing about you I confine myself to the truth?”

Myrddin Wyllt gave him a quiet, easy, almost affectionate look. It was a childish look too, in a certain sense, open, guileless, and disarming. “The emperor,” he said, “will certainly be satisfied with the truth, Sylvanus Is-Coed, and so would *he* and *he,* and *she* and *she,* and every sane man among the forest dwellers who surround us at this moment; but though the creatures of the earth are my creatures and the winds of the mountain are my winds, and the waves of the water are my waves, neither you nor I nor any other who ever lived, no! nor any who *will* ever live, can call the truth our own. The emperor would know it as the truth and so would every creature alive, did you place it in our hands, Henog.

“But you cannot place the truth in our hands. It flows like water. It melts like air. It burns itself out like fire. It covers itself *with itself* like the mud with the mud, the moss with the moss, the grass with the grass, the lichen with the lichen.

"Scribble on, scribble on, Henog of Cerrig Gwynt! Write your *'Historia Veridica'* at the command of him I have taught you to call the son of Uthyr Pendragon! Your Vita you will write; your Vita you will live; your death you will die; your wages you will keep; but when the age of Pisces is over and the age of Aquarius begins do you fancy that men *then,* men who can kill with balls of fire, men who can sail in ships of iron, men who can ride on horses of smoke, will give a *denarius* for a Vita of you or me, or an *obol* of brass to know what the Lady Gwendydd did or the Lady Nineue said, though all the forest *was* in arms around their tent?"

His voice died away, and the Henog straightened his long thin neck to answer, that neck which was the most characteristic part of him with its taut-knotted sinew, its jerking Adam's apple, its pulsing vein. Then suddenly, before uttering a word, he bent his head again and forced himself to complete the sentence he had been writing.

The two women by this time had slipped down upon their cushions, and Rhun with a freedom that astonished Porius had deliberately stretched himself out by their side. The incorrigible Neb had completely vanished. So had the other pages.

Porius himself as he stood holding open one of the flapping curtains of the tent's entrance so as to enjoy every breath he could catch of the newly risen wind could only see a small segment of the prophet's profile; but he could see the Henog's countenance face to face and he was amazed at the intensity of the emotion which Myrddin Wyllt's careless, incoherent, and irrational ramblings had summoned up in that queer visage.

"But what people these are!" he said to himself. "I know they're in no danger. But how, in heaven's name, do *they* know that? Here are these men arguing nice points in God knows what subtle metaphysic of past and future while all the while, in the immediate and most pressing present, the people of this place are gathering round them, gathering from far and near, threatening death for death!”

And then he felt, and felt as if it were an actual bruise in the recesses of his brain, that he ought never to have entered this tent tonight. His business was to have filled that Roman bottle at the Fountain, made sure that Brother John was all right, and got back to Mynydd-y-Gaer.

“I suppose Brother John,” he thought, “is sitting up all night, straining every nerve to soothe the alarm of Dion Dionides, who must be thinking he has indeed arrived at the ends of the earth.”

But as Myrddin Wyllt waited patiently for the Henog’s reply a much more unpleasant idea entered Porius’s mind. Suppose it were not merely the Feast of the Sowing that Gogfran Derwydd should decide upon? Suppose he decided to hold the Feast of the Fisher King at the same time?

Weird images of what he had seen, and alarming images of what he had heard, concerning both these ancient sex rituals passed through his mind. “The Sowing might be all right,” he thought. “But if it were *the other* — God help these people! We should indeed be forced to take them into the Gaer — and the Lord knows what would happen then!”

All this while he could not divest his mind of the notion that there was an unearthly war going on between the whole weight and pressure of the world’s past — thick and opaque and broken, but horribly clear-cut in its jagged edges — and the formless vaporous shapes of the unborn future, more formidable still because of their phantomlike terror!

He certainly found a peculiar fascination in watching the movements made by the Henog as he meticulously studied his own words, tracing with the end of his pen every line and dot and curve and flourish of every letter.

He thought about the snake twisted around the body of Cronos. Perhaps after all the best way was to impede, to hold back as long as possible the great curving spirals of Time! If in a few minutes they were all destined to be overwhelmed by a surging mob of the infuriated compatriots of the Modrybedd, didn't that in itself give to every moment of consciousness left to them a particular significance? Didn't it isolate it and hold it up in relief as though it were petrified or were like that dead body on the counsellor's trestles?

Suddenly to his startled surprise the Henog struggled to his feet, clutching tightly in his agitation not only his book and the special kind of pen he always used which was an invention of his own, but also his leather case containing silver-rimmed pots of black, red, and green pigments. "I cannot listen," he cried in a rasping high-pitched indignant voice, like the voice of a green woodpecker, "to such blasphemy against the greatest of the Muses, Clio the daughter of Mnemosyne! That I am writing your life, my Lord, the life of Ambrosianus, Chief Counsellor of Arturus Imperator, puts me under no obligation to yield to Myrddin Wyllt one single jot of my opinions!

"God has not given you, my Lord, his miraculous gift of seeing the future so that you should insult the past. And let me tell you this, Myrddin ap Morfryn; all that you see of the future are clouds and mists and vapours! All of it is dark and obscure. You see forms and features of gods and demons, of men and beasts, of men with the wings and horns and scales and claws of beasts, of beasts with the faces of angels, of gods with the faces of devils! All that you announce of the events of the future is doubtful and uncertain.

"Many are the interpretations of what you announce, and bitter to the end of Time will be the disputes between the interpreters; for the future does not yet exist. A dark gulf in Time and Space alone exists, a gulf that only in its hour, its day, its year, will be filled by what comes to pass.

“And when what comes to pass has arrived, why then, O son of Morfryn, it will be no more the future; it will have left *your* world and will have entered mine! From the past, upon which day and night I ponder and from which I seek — feebly and imperfectly but with all my mind and soul — to draw the truth, from the past, I say, comes all we have, all we are, all we shall be! It is there, O Master, it is there forever, firm, clear, unassailable, so that all our chroniclers and recorders of the future, some wiser than I am, some much less wise, may struggle to capture the living truth.

“And mark this, O illustrious Counsellor; these struggles of mine, and of others wiser than I am, to sift and winnow the truth from the falsehood in the great gold mine of the infinite past are themselves parts and portions of the mysterious power that out of the past — *not,* mark you, O Master, out of anything already existent in that dark obscure gulf — creates the as yet uncreated future!

“Your prophecies, O mysterious one, can never be more than the magical guesses of an inspired imagination! Many of them will come true. But what led you and leads you to hit on these? What pushed you on and still is pushing you on, O illustrious one, to guess so correctly? Nothing less, O Master, than your own long and sagacious brooding upon the past!”

Exhausted by his eloquence the Henog sank down once more into his former position; but Porius couldn’t help noticing how the chronicler’s hands so trembled with excitement that several drops of coloured liquid, shaken from the three small phials in his hand, fell upon the man’s rusty-black gown and even upon his black cowskin boots; so that it was as though, in his intense agitation, the sweat which poured down from his high conical skull was green and red and black!

But all eyes in that tent — and even Rhun turned away from the stately Gwendydd — were now fixed upon the prophet. Porius, who was nearest to him and who had already made acquaintance with some of his physical weaknesses, stepped quickly to his side and without a moment's hesitation threw one arm round his waist and the other round one of the large supporting poles upon which the weight of the pavilion rested; and in this position, like Samson in the Circus of Dagon, he straddled his legs and settled his feet to be ready for any shock.

But the shock did not come. Making a commanding gesture to Nineue to remain seated, the prophet's sister hurriedly approached them and laid her hand on her brother's shoulder. The wind was rushing into the tent in such wild gusts that as she began murmuring some eager appeal in a language Porius couldn't understand, though many of the words seemed half-familiar, her mantle was blown aside from the full length of her person, revealing its unequalled beauty in that sky-blue vest.

But a voice of awe-inspiring authority began now to issue from the swaying figure she was addressing. Sounding so near to him that he could feel its interior vibration in the body he supported, the startling power in the voice that now shook itself forth from this bearded victim of the future reached Porius's ears in a peculiar and unusual way.

He heard the voice in fact on three different levels of consciousness. He heard it through the troubled fungus-scented, charnel-chilly mass of flesh and blood he was supporting. He heard it in the actual words the prophet was using, words that in themselves were full of a weird, disturbing authority, like the authority of a person possessed of some absolute power over everything around him and yet helpless in the hands of the weakest.

But finally — and this was the most agitating of all the effects of this weird phenomenon — he heard it as if it were a voice multitudinous and manifold; a voice from the straining, labouring, struggling, pitifully grotesque hosts of the generations to be, and as if the terrible pathos of this cry from the future, backward-flung over its shoulders by the vanguard of the unborn till it pierced like a sword the outraged ears of the indignant past, were something that crushingly, deafeningly, and blindingly betrayed the last secret of life.

The counsellor made no attempt to answer the eloquent objections raised by the Henog. In a voice that was entirely his own, that was indeed more characteristically his own than any voice Porius had yet heard him use, this towering and toppling figure, whose repulsive body, as Porius pressed its left side against himself, seemed to reek of thousands upon thousands of earth chasms full of the black leaf mould of the original planetary forests, began uttering a sequence of sentences whose import was so momentous that it was lucky for Myrddin Wyllt that the man who was supporting him although not exactly phlegmatic was temperamentally sceptical, for otherwise he might easily have been hugged to death out of pure intensity of startled attention.

“My animals,” the man was declaring, “would understand me and they would come if I wanted them to come; for they are my animals and we understand one another. But I don’t want them to come; for the forest is full of the people from Africa, the people who put the verb before the noun and the mother before the father and who are ruled by witch-ghosts and unmarried women. Nobody understands me but my animals, and why should anybody understand me? *It were wiser not to!* Through my voice the Son of the Morning speaks, the god at whose word the heavens shiver and shake and all the angels hide their heads.

“Cronos is his name and he speaks through me; and my animals and my birds and my fishes hear his voice and rejoice; and the kings and the priests and the druids tremble! *He is the future,* and all the blind leaders of the blind and all the false astronomers and false prophets and all the kings and emperors are sick because of him, and their hearts melt within them because of him.

“This simple Arthur whose grandmother came from Africa and his grandfather from Rome will clear the land of the fair heads for a generation. Colgrim and Baldulf and Cheldric — all shall perish!

“This simple Arthur shall slaughter them all; and the black earth, nourished by their blood, shall grow thirty good harvests, rich and sweet and safely stored before their tribes from Germania come back again. But back they must come and possess all our land, they and the Black Pagans who will come after them.

“But our speech and our mountains and our mountain farms we shall keep; and they themselves will be conquered by others, crueller, craftier, and far cleverer than they are! One of our own they will take to rule over them, and he in return will try to destroy our speech, but to no avail. Driven from the plain and the sea-coast our speech will refuge itself in the mountains and from thence till the Day of Judgment it shall be heard!

“But when our Lord the Sun with his attendant planets has passed from the power of Pisces into the power of Aquarius the white dragon from Germania will cross the sea to trouble us again. This time it will not swim with its feet and with its tail through the water-breathing smoke and fire. It will... it will... that white dragon from Germania will... that white dragon will—”

He stopped for a moment, and there was an unpleasant gurgling in his throat as if blood was rushing into his mouth. There was something ghastly to Porius about those quiverings and tremblings and heavings and writhings of this fungus-reeking form whose life he literally held in his hands; for he could have squeezed him to death before either of the women guessed what was going on.

But why did this victim of prophesying suddenly stop short, gasping and gaping? Had that heaving body actually felt the first vibration of a catastrophic event that might take a thousand, or two thousand, or even three thousand years before it fell upon us?

Porius found himself forced not only to control his physical strength lest it should hurt this strange being who was now swaying like a colossal reed in the salt marshes of Cronos, but also to use all his will power to keep intact a remnant of his own humorous detachment.

“Comical! That’s what it is!” he said to himself, articulating the words under his breath as if to prove his detachment, “simply comical, that I should go on hugging this monster with his stinkhorn smell who’s been abusing all the three chief nations of Britain; Iberian, Brython, and Roman! Where does he come from himself, this bastard of the devil? From Lost Atlantis? Or is he perhaps the last of the Coranians who escaped destruction by Lludd ap Beli ap Manogan? He calls the emperor the ‘simple Arthur,’ and I suppose he’d call me the ‘simple Porius’; and all the time his own body stinks like ten thousand funguses, and he can’t move without leaning on a witch-girl!”

He ceased to articulate his feelings at this point, but the *inexpressible* feelings that followed this interior outburst completely contradicted everything he had just said. You could call them “feelings.” Strictly they were sensations, for they had to do with the ice-cold arctic breath which disturbed the air about this extraordinary person wherever he went; and Porius, try as he might to see the present situation as a ludicrous one, was aware of an uneasy, unearthly chill emanating from the being he clutched that seemed as if it were actually responding to a force outside human experience.

"But it's all too grotesque!" he said to himself. "If Arthur's 'simple,' what am I? A great Edeyrnion bear, I suppose, whose only weapon is muscle. This is the third of them I've had in my arms! First that silly boy, then that witch of a girl, and now the emperor's counsellor! Is this the way I'm going to behave when I reach Anastasius? Am I destined to hug *him* into good behaviour?"

The steadily rising wind was now beginning to make the folds of the tent hangings flap against his legs. "Could the time breath of Cronos," he thought, "really be caught as it blows backward from the remote future?"

Myrddin Wyllt's countenance at this juncture, as the man struggled for words, must have been such a painful spectacle to the Lady Gwendydd, that with a groan and a frantic gesture of her hands she drew away from him and began talking rapidly and in a low voice to Rhun.

Meanwhile the wind was blowing so gustily through the pavilion that Porius, who couldn't leave the afflicted man and who hesitated to interrupt Rhun's colloquy with the lady, began to think of addressing an appeal to Mistress Nineue, for at this particular moment the girl seemed isolated from everybody and appeared, as she bent over the brazier warming her hands, to be completely lost in her own thoughts. She looked to him very thinly clad to be exposed to this chilly wind.

"Where's that imp Neb?" he thought, and the idea did cross his mind that it would be only fair to interrupt the Henog, who had now calmly reseated himself, and to break up all his fussy preoccupation with his scroll and his three pigments by imploring *him,* as a sedentary scholar, to shut out this barbarous wind. But let it blow, and let the girl shiver!

Indeed he began to feel as if this wind were something that had reached them *through Time* as well as through Space, something that brought to this devil-bitten Decrepitude he was supporting an *authentic message,* just as those accurst Coranians used to get theirs, only this one was over the Limbo of unborn generations, over the waves of rising and sinking, sinking and rising uncounted centuries, and was answering phantom cravings and embryo hopes that in that uncreated future were no more than thrilling stories told by the gods to themselves!

But if the Henog were right and the future completely indetermined, why then there was no such thing as fate, and no such thing as a man's, or a nation's, or a world's destiny. All was chance, all was chaos, all was anarchy. "Nor am I quite certain," he said to himself, "that I wouldn't prefer it be so. I have a suspicion that such was the view of things natural to the giants of Eryri!"

At this moment he heard something on the wind which thoroughly disturbed him. It struck him with such force and as something so ominous that under the shock of it he came near to giving the counsellor a hug that would have plastered up forever this crack into the unknown and smoothed out forever the scales of the serpent of Time.

On the evening of his initiation into the traditional secret of his tribe Porius had been initiated into a still more dangerous and still older tradition, that of his grandmother Indeg and the Three Modrybedd. Both Rhun and he had been taught, what Einion and Alarch had learnt from *their* parents, certain primeval chants — obscurer even than the Mithraic *"Nama, Nama"* — taken from what was always referred to as "the Mystery of the Fisher King," a sex ritual whose origin reverted to North Africa. Only introduced at particular crises in their history, it was accounted the arbitrary privilege of the forest people's druid, if such a being existed among them, to insert this Mystery at any moment into the more normal ritual of the Feast of the Autumn Sowing; and it was one of the obscure incantations of this wild rite that Porius had caught upon the rising wind.

Had the man he was holding caught it too? With Myrddin Wyllt anything was possible. But if he *had* caught it, did he understand what it meant? He must at least have felt the nervous shock it gave his supporter, and it may well have been this that now broke the knot of psychic resistance that was restraining his utterance.

His whole frame heaved and shuddered; and Porius had for a second the sensation that what he was holding, and must at all cost be tender of, wasn't a man at all but a funnel or a vent through which — carried on a wave of ice-cold breath from this very future whose existence the Henog denied — there came some unimaginable intimation, an intimation confounding to human senses and staggering to human reason.

So overpowering indeed was the effect upon the man of the thing he was now being compelled to utter that its very violence, in the overcoming of the resistance offered to it, caused the unfortunate prophet such physical distress that as from a woman in childbirth there was wrung from him a rending cry, interspersed with strange words, among which all that his hearers could understand were the reiterated syllables: “Out of the air — out of the air!”

What he would have done had not Porius — now in full control of his own agitation — held fast to him, none of that group of people could tell. Perhaps he would have rushed out into the night, calling upon those wild creatures that he had declared alone understood him. In the end, however, it was not Porius or either of the women who brought him back to himself. It was nothing less than the grotesque and intense opposition of the Henog.

Without rising, but clutching against his lean ribs those precious utensils of his, and with the scanty wisp of hair on his narrow high-peaked cone-shaped skull rumpled up into an absurd tuft like the crest of a plover, the Henog began reciting, with the sort of voice in which a mummied scribe of Egypt might have repeated words dictated to him by some arch-priest of Ammon, a long traditional list of the first famous names ever recorded in this Island of Britain.

The list contained names of demigods and kings and bards and saints and lawgivers and magicians; the names in fact of all that the long memories and protracted studies of previous Henogs had been able to gather up from the past.

It was a peculiarity of this particular Henog to begin the relation of every new occurrence in the assiduity of his chronicling by a sort of invocation of these famous names. He had learned these by heart at his episcopal school just as Porius had done; for such repetitions, and not perhaps unwisely, considering their value in Egypt and China, were always the dominant note of Brythonic hieratic tuition, conscientiously exact and meticulously reverential.

To every Brythonic mind, educated or uneducated, each one of these names was a symbol of racial magic and racial power, and carried with it a disturbing aura of secret intimations revealed to the initiate and concealed from the profane. The mere utterance of these names, though their bearers may have been only men, and not angels, demons, genii, or gods, had an occult power, the power which gathers round any visible, audible, or tangible symbol that has — consciously or unconsciously — impressed the mind of many generations.

That the Henog should chant these names as a prelude to inaugurating a new chapter composed from the lies that Neb had just told him was, as

Porius well knew, a natural occurrence; but all the same the young chieftain couldn’t expel the impression that under all these glidings of green and yellow and around this brazier of red coals there had been created a whirling vortex of fatal and fearful tension, something resembling a cosmogonic tug-of-war between the magnetic pull of the past and the magnetic pull of the future.

But he had grown impatient of this psychic tournament between historian and prophet; and though he knew there was a risk that the counsellor might collapse upon the ground when he moved from his side, he deliberately set himself to shut out the invisible cause of the whole disturbance, namely, the rising wind.

As he struggled with this task and held one great bellying segment of sailcloth between his knees and dragged the rim of the other towards it, he began to ask himself whether this expulsion of the wind, the element of Nature which in his own heart he loved beyond earth or fire or water, was undertaken solely for the benefit of the thinly clad Nineue, now warming herself, with an expression of complete detachment, over the brazier.

“No, no!” he thought, as he drew the connecting cord in such a manner as to leave a slit between two of the points where it was threaded so that an arm or even a head could be inserted from outside, “No, no, it’s for all the women of my life. It’s for Mother and Aunt Alarch and the Three Aunties and all the generations of mothers and foster-mothers and aunties, back to Mycenae of Argolis and Marrakesh of the Berbers.”

Whether due to his recent covenant with the Lord of Bulls and of Dogs and of Soldiers, or whether due to a natural explosion of long-accumulated revolt, Porius felt at that moment as if all the women of Edeyrnion were gathering about him to shut *out the wind.* Women alive, women dead, women half-alive, women half-dead, phantom women, werewolf women, lemurs, liliths, and lamias, all seemed to be crowding round him and forcing him *to shut out the wind.*

As he now bent over this task he saw without seeing, he felt without turning towards them, how absorbed in each other Gwendydd and Rhun were. “Put this down in your tablets, Brother Henog,” he said to himself, “for it’s the truth. When a man and woman meet for the first time nobody — not even those who’ve known them all their lives — can tell what will happen!”

Porius mingled these reflections with the satisfactory look of the four neat loops of cord he had just fastened; and he soon began absentmindedly testing each of them with his finger and thumb. “No, I never thought old Rhun would be the first to betray the Bull Slayer and go over to them!”

All this had happened in a few seconds, and when he swung round again he was amazed to see how salutary and restorative the hostility of the Henog had proved to be in its effect upon the counsellor.

Instead of glaring indignantly at his adversary or even turning contemptuously away from him, Myrddin Wyllt behaved as if the clash between them — which to Porius was a battle of universes — was a mere difference of opinion, a question as to whether it was better to keep the wind out of the tent or to let it in!

The prophet was now facing the tent’s entrance from which Porius had just turned. Several of the torches had been extinguished by the inrushing wind, but others that had lately been emitting clouds of thick smoke were now burning brighter than before. From one of these the light fell sideways upon Myrddin’s face, minimizing as Porius watched him the greenish blackness of his eyes and concealing the most monstrous and freakish aspect of his countenance, the aspect wherein, by reason of his low forehead, his eye sockets seemed to unite in one deep-set Cyclopean eye.

Porius hadn’t realized how much the man under normal conditions was in the habit of stooping. He realized it now however when the prophet drew himself to his full height and stared past him at that narrow, shivering, undulant, pendulous slit that he had only now been at such pains to cord up against the breath of life.

But while the counsellor was staring into the darkness of the forest through that narrow aperture, Porius was staring into the darkness of his own life through the cavities of the counsellor’s skull. “No, I’m not going to follow any rule. I’m going to do what I will.”

Such was in actual substance, although the confused run of his thought was less obedient than this to the laws of language, what Porius imagined himself retorting as he asserted himself against his mother and Morfydd. Though he felt he had shut the wind out at their command, he now felt sure with no less certainty, in fact with the mischievous exaltation of a beast that shakes the glittering rain drops from his skin while the muttering of the retreating thunder is still dying away, that both Morfydd and his mother would have reproached him indignantly for dallying so long with these ladies and these madmen in this stuffy tent when the whole population of Edeyrnion was surging round invaders, and when the Mystery of the Fisher King was on the wind!

“All right, sweetheart!” he thought, concentrating upon his betrothed, “I’ll get out of here in a moment. I’ll kill Colgrim for the emperor and then I’ll carry you off to the city of Constantine where we’ll soon show Anastasius how to defy the pope and canonize Pelagius. Yes, I’ll be out of here in a moment!”

As if to prove the vanity of this declaration, he had no sooner made it than a sound of heavy animal breathing invaded his ears and drew his attention back to the entrance of the tent, where through those very slits he had left open, two unexpected apparitions now presented themselves.

One of these was the head of a horse and the other the head of a cow. It was clear that the appearance of these two heads, the horse's a couple of feet above the cow's, a pair of horns and a pair of ears and four liquid eyes full of inquisitive and ensorcerized vitality, was a profound comfort to Myrddin Wyllt, even if he hadn't deliberately summoned them.

Porius decided in a flash, since the man's form concealed them from the interior of the tent, to make no revealing sign to the others. "I've waited on events so long," he said to himself, half turning to glance at Rhun and the ladies, "that I may as well keep the poor devil's secret. These beasts of his will be driven away by the first person who catches sight of them. I'm not going to meddle in this."

It was indeed plain that the appearance of the two creatures had put the prophet into full command of his faculties. It had given backbone to his body and confidence to his soul. He must have flung forth on the wind a desperate appeal to a world of life that was totally different from the one conjured up by his antagonist, a world older even than the giants of Eryri and Cader, a world that needed for its invocation no portentous list of historic names.

What he proceeded to do now after giving Porius a furtive, half shamefaced, half-conspiring smile, was to step calmly and firmly straight up to the two heads, the horse's grey and the cow's black, and begin caressing them, one with his left hand and the other with his right.

Porius couldn't help noticing how the creatures responded, behaving as if he'd been the one who had looked after them and fed them from the days when they were calf and foal. In fact the homely sound of their contented snortings, together with the delicious sweetness of their breath, affected the counsellor like strong wine. And there was something now in the man's face that he had never seen there before. What a creature of masks and disguises he was!

No wonder so many of the emperor's subjects thought of him as "Myrddin Emrys," and to so many more he was "Myrddin Ambrosius," and to yet others "the savage herdsman." Was it all a deliberate masquerade, a mad series of fantastic motions to enthrall an infatuated ruler?

Porius recalled the suspicions he had had of him when they came up from the ferry. He remembered what he had felt about him when he summoned that wild crowd of what he called "his creatures," or lit the fire that dismissed them. He remembered those amazing words about Nineue and how he seemed to grow blind for a space from sheer excess of nervous excitement. Could it be that he was simply acting one extreme part after another, and all for some deliberate and secret purpose of his own?

No, what Porius had just heard and seen could not have been acting. Not an actor but a *medium* was what he was; a medium for unseen forces. Certainly what he could see of his face now as the torchlight fell across it carried a completely new expression. It was a mixture of confidential revelation and sly reserve. It suggested a sort of maudlin secretiveness. And yet it was in league with Nature. It reminded Porius of all the most magical and evasive aspects of the forest. It suggested grassy avenues whose lights and shades were forever waiting for feet that had already become dust.

It suggested reedy pools and moss-grown recesses wherein long-fallen, long-mouldering tree trunks sank slowly, season after season, autumn after autumn, into ever softer and ever gentler dissolution. It had about it the non-human silence and expectancy, and the faint insubstantial sigh of a patience that is beyond expectancy, such as he had sometimes noted rising from the fields when his enemy Minnawc Gorsant said Mass at dawn at their Gaer altar.

The man was fumbling now with those knots in the cords which Porius so recently and with so much difficulty had drawn tight.

"Can I help you, Master?" he enquired.

"I sent for them and now I want them to come in."

"To come in here?"

"Of course. Why not? It's Mari Llwyd and Eigr Mallt. They're my creatures. I know them and they know me. Eigr Mallt ought to be milked and Mari Llwyd ought to have her sweetmeats. They think it's dawn, though it's only a little after midnight. They must come in."

Following his instinctive habit of giantlike humorous servility to the arbitrament of all the women of his life, the arbitrament of the Three Modrybedd, of his foster-mother, of his betrothed, and of his real mother, Porius glanced towards the Lady Gwendydd.

He experienced an automatic desire to be guided by a smile, a nod, a shake of the head. The admission into that ladies' pavilion of the terrific gust of wind that would shortly whirl in, not to speak of the entrance along with it of Mari Llwyd and Eigr Mallt, was an event about which every lady with whom he had ever had anything to do would, he felt, hold an identical view.

But while Myrddin Wyllt, having undone one of the cords, was already fumbling at the other, Porius's attention, turning from Gwendydd's blue vest to Nineue's brown curls and yellow-and-green sandals, was arrested by that same withdrawn entranced look in this latter's eyes that he had noticed before.

Gwendydd's eyes were fixed with a grave concentrated interest upon Rhun, who was describing something to her with an unusual freedom of speech, but Nineue's were abstracted and absorbed as if they were being used in some entirely personal mental vision. Could it possibly be that when she fell into a trance like this she really was indulging in some subtle sensation like the one he was wont to describe to himself as "cavoseniargizing?"

This thought caused him a curious twinge and it was a twinge he knew only too well, for it always occurred when his erotic nerves were excited by something to which the rest of his nature refused to respond; and the last thing he wanted was to find that Nineue and himself had this "cavoseniargizing" trick in common.

In his nervous discomfort he flung away every thought of warning the women against the intrusion of the beasts. "If they were the Pigs of Annwn," he said to himself, "I'd not interfere!" and in his reaction against all the femininity that had so long enslaved him he hated the very curves of the brazier because they reminded him of soft despotic bodies, and the very dolphins on the Cretan screen because they had mermaids' tails.

He set himself desperately, as he stared at these objects, to embrace the whole gamut of life, thick and slab, as it was presented to him then. Oh, it was a mistake always to be making these rational efforts after order and uniformity, when the wisdom of every creature lay in reconciling itself as well as it could to that mysterious mingling of Nature's purposes with accident and chance, which is the only world we know.

CHAPTER VII. The Milk Offering

PORIUS HAD BARELY SUCCEEDED in getting his feelings into a wiser groove when he was aware of Myrddin Wyllt triumphantly leading his animals into the tent. The man walked between them holding the grey mare by the mane and the other by means of an arm thrown round her smooth black neck.

Brought up among women, save for his brief years at the Bishop's School, Porius certainly felt a shock at the contrast between the Byzantine luxury of this nomadic palace and the wild-wood presence of these two creatures.

"Gwendydd," he thought, "will never submit to this! It is too much!" One thing was a relief to him. The wind didn't rush wildly through the tent hangings and through the ivory latticework of the screen at his side. In its own arbitrary caprice the wind had grown tame.

All that entered in the wake of the animals was one of those gentle night winds that carry something wistfully oracular, as though a timid and unassuming nymph had been charged with a Sibylline message. But though there was no cold wind, the familiar tone of feminine disapproval was not wanting. Myrddin's sister protested vigorously and indignantly, even going so far as to use the word "outrage," while from Nineue came a vicious unkind laugh.

Porius's strongest desire at this moment was simply to escape and he incontinently followed this desire. Leaving the prophet to justify his behaviour as best he might, he turned his back on them all and standing between the fluttering hangings peered out into the forest.

No, there was no sound now of that ominous chant on the wind! Either the unseen voices had moved away to a remoter spot, or, in his own Modrybedd-like superstition, he had simply imagined hearing what most he dreaded to hear. As he stood there listening, his hands clutching the sailcloth on both sides of him, he began wondering what the motive or instinct or intimation really was that went on keeping him in this unnatural place.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "there's an instinct warning me that *here in this tent* is the real danger to my father and his tribe; and that, since we have nothing to fear any more from the Gwyddyl-Ffichti and since the forest people's druid is *our* druid, it is *here* in this mad prophet and his dangerous 'handmaid,' *here* in the presence among us of this murderous 'nephew,' that the peril lies. Old Rhun seems already bewitched. God grant they have left Brother John alone!"

Turning half round now, but still retaining his hold on the wind-stirred hangings, he peered through the interstices of the screen at the still preoccupied figure of the seated Henog, who all this while had remained crouched over his work, with his tablets upon his knees, his three pigments at his side, and his self-made pen which resembled an ordinary Roman *stilus* in size but had a curved and slightly hollowed point, a point which, as the final result of laborious experiments, might have been compared to the beak of a curlew and which he clutched with the intensity of a weapon of defence between his thumb and his first two fingers.

But as if he had known he was being watched, Sylvanus Is-Coed now suddenly rose to his feet and gravely and ceremoniously made three deep bows in different directions; one to Gwendydd, one to the prophet whose advance with his two beasts had been already halted, and one to Rhun whose hand was on the black cow's forelock. Then, gravely and hurriedly, he proceeded to pack his writing materials in their faded case of outlandish leather and without further words either of farewell or explanation strode up to Nineue, and took her by the arm.

"He must know her pretty well," Porius thought, as he watched their whispered colloquy. "He must know her *very* well," he concluded when, without so much as a glance at her mistress, the handmaid led the Henog out by the same interior entrance through which she had recently led the counsellor in.

But he now became aware that what he had expected would happen was already occurring. Gwendydd was protesting with considerable emphasis against the intrusion of the animals and was demanding their immediate expulsion. With Rhun at her side she was in fact barring their further progress towards the brazier.

It was indeed a curious scene and one which then and later struck him as adding a touch of fantastic and final grotesqueness to the impressions of that weird night.

He had seen both horses and cows before, yes! and even swine, escaped from their courtyard into one or other of the arched chambers of Mynydd-y-Gaer; but the primeval architecture of that ancient fortress lent itself to such occasional apparitions. Here amid the oriental rugs and the ivory and gold ornaments and in this heavily scented atmosphere, there was something that shocked and outraged and yet in a manner he could not understand *gratified* his secret soul. It was like the feeling he had had in Rhun's cave when the white hound shared their Mithraic Sacrament.

Unwilling to be involved in the dispute between brother and sister, and chuckling to himself at the thought of Rhun as the infatuated champion of domestic propriety, he deliberately slipped out into the air, letting the edges of the tent flap loose behind him. Wandering off for a little distance without any definite purpose save to escape an uncomfortable scene and shake off the impression left on his senses, and the curiosity aroused in his mind, by the personality of Nineue, he was suddenly seized by the notion of visiting the Mound of y Bychan.

It would be there, if anywhere round here, that the druid's people would instinctively gather, if "the call" had really gone forth as his mother's letter hinted. The wind had done its work in lifting the mist, both the natural October one and the straw-coloured other one, but the real darkness of the night had fallen now, and the sky, covered by a veil of dusky cloud, revealed no moon and no stars.

He moved with extreme caution, feeling that any second he might disturb some watchful group of forest people. He was aware of no particular alarm at such a prospect, but it was a possibility requiring caution, and he was unarmed.

Moving as lightly as he could and cursing his clumsiness when a stick broke under his soft tread, it was not long before he came upon one of the numerous mossy paths leading towards the place he sought. Yes! There it was, a dusky blur of darkness, thicker and more palpable than the night about it, the familiar burying ground of Iscovan ap Serigi, the Gwyddyl-Ffichti! He knew the Modrybedd were possessed by the idea that not only the spirit of the Little One, but the spirits of all the forest women who in their lifetime had been seduced by the diminutive rebel, reckless in love as he was in war, haunted this revered yet unhallowed spot; but it was not of ghosts he was thinking when, step by step, and every now and then touching some tussock of grass, or some clump of damp green moss, or dry grey lichen, or dead fern, or some exposed fragment of slippery rock surface, with outstretched fingers, he fumbled his way up the Bychan's Mound.

He was once more fancying he caught upon the air that special and peculiar refrain of the Fisher King's chant that had startled him before. It always had a peculiar effect upon him, this tune, ever since he first heard it at the funeral games in honour of Alarch ferch Iddawc.

His memory of the ceremony itself was faint, for in all the years he could remember of the Feast of the Sowing, only once, on the occasion of the death of Morfydd's mother, Kymeinvoll — and she was a Gwyddyl woman — had there been inserted into it this terrifying ritual of the Fisher King, and then he had been a child of five.

The ritual was a sexual one, its symbolic meaning obscure, but it always roused in him a singular emotion, the nature of which he had only revealed to one person, that is to say, to Alarch the Fair, Rhun's mother and his own foster-mother.

"You little Rhitta Gawr!" Alarch had cried with an indulgent laugh when he blurted it out. But that had been enough. After that he had held his peace.

The truth was that long before the Romans had used the tribe of Cunedda as a bulwark against the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, long before Edeyrn ap Cunedda had taken the place as his *llys,* or "palace fortress," the tradition had hung about Mynydd-y-Gaer that its primeval stones had once protected the cattle and sheep of Rhitta Gawr, the last of the giant-kings of Eryri.

The legend of Rhitta Gawr was one of the oldest in the province; and though none of the forest people doubted its literal truth, the descendants of Cunedda, with the exception of Iddawc the son of Creiddylad, took a different view. Naturally enough they tended to disparage the association of their rich inheritance, given to them for their own valour by Rome, with an aboriginal giant; and when it was discovered — Porius suspected by Creiddylad herself or at least by her Ffichtiaid nurse — that in a stone cist under the prehistoric slab that had served the Gaer ever since Edeyrn's time as a Christian altar there existed bits of human bones wrapped in fragmentary wisps of what seemed to be human hair, and when the rumour went through the forest that these were what was left of Rhitta Gawr's bones, wrapped in what was left of the robe he had caused to be made of the beards of his enemies, the purer blooded Brythons of the Gaer and all of Roman and Christian blood fell silent in contemptuous distaste.

But Porius had exulted; and "Little Ritta Gawr!" his foster-mother had cried with her indulgent smile.

And now alone on the summit of the Mound of y Bychan it was not of ghosts nor of Gwyddyl-Ffichti he thought, but of Eryri and Cader Idris. And at that moment, just as if he had been summoned by a pull at his navel string, he felt impelled to return to the tent.

Heedless now how many sticks cracked under his weight he hurled himself through the tangled brushwood, running in so straight a line that he was compelled more than once to thrust his fingers beneath his belt and bend his head low, lest when he reached his destination and discovered whether a prophet like Myrddin could persuade a lady of Arthur's court to allow the beasts of the field into her chamber, his face and hands should not be bleeding with scratches.

But fast as he ran, his thoughts moved faster. A new idea had just entered his head; for instead of exhausting him or making him long for nothing but sleep, all these agitating events, overlapping each other like breaking waves, as the Henog's past and the prophet's future seemed unable to do, gave his thought wings.

What if that straw-coloured mist that had followed him for so many hours and had only vanished with the freshening of the wind were at the back of all that was happening to him? Something was freeing him from all his accumulated submissions and pieties; hoisting them up, hauling them along, heaving them over, letting them drift!

Could it be that he was being noted, marked, selected, perhaps even summoned, by some secret descendant of those old sons of the mountain who were here before the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, before the Atlanteans, before the Coranians, before even the Modrybedd's forest people?

"I must open that cist," he said to himself, "before I sail for the Bosporus. Maybe a piece from those beards would win me favour with Anastasius. Like Rhitta Gawr's Island of Britain, Constantinople must be easy to invade though hard to conquer. He might find a saving virtue in those beards."

He couldn't have been away as long as he fancied; for it appeared that his absence had hardly been noticed. It was not even necessary for him to make any particular apology. Nobody accused him this time of *ansyberwyd,* that rustic incivility for which the tribe's distaste proved, so Morfydd's father argued, their descent from the Homeric Greeks.

It was at once clear to him that the sister's protests had been overridden, for Rhun was holding the mare while the black-robed figure of the emperor's counsellor was already crouched upon a stool beside the black cow, at whose head stood Gwendydd, pensively and patiently caressing its forehead and twisting into little wisps the black hairs with which it was studded. Of Nineue nothing was to be seen.

Exchanging a glance with Rhun over the mare's back, Porius moved quietly forward and stood waiting.

"He's been drawing me to him," he thought. "What's he up to now?"

But it was not long ere from beneath the fingers of the stooping prophet, who emphasized his success by a curious guttural accompaniment, there came the friendly arid unique sound of milk being squirted into a bowl.

Porius had had much less to do with horses than with cattle and sheep, but he had something of the horse in his own disposition and he was aware that in the matter of their excretory functions any sort of unwonted shock — and the milking of her friend Eigr Mallt in a place like this must have been such a shock — might lead to their dunging wherever they might be.

Thus it was neither a surprise nor a displeasure to him when, to the obvious discomfiture of Rhun, the long tail of Mari Llwyd was shamelessly uplifted and two noble globes of warm manure descended in a fragrant steam of vapour upon one of the Moorish mats that concealed the floor of the tent.

“Put her out, if you please, Rhun ap Gwrnach,” was Gwendydd’s only comment as she stood with her hand on Eigr Mallt’s black head. Our friend would have been puzzled to explain the connection between the effect upon him of this untoward event and his recent exultation about Rhitta Gawr, but as he went back to open the tent hangings for what he prayed might be the last time that night, he felt that the mare’s behaviour was yet another milestone on the road of his own liberation.

But as Rhun led Mari Llwyd to the entrance, guiding her by her flowing mane and talking to her in the broad friendly Brythonian dialect of Edeyrnion, Porius became aware that one black-green Cyclopean eye of the man who was milking Eigr Mallt was fixed upon the evicted animal with a most singular expression of concern.

He himself was so ignorant of horses that he first interpreted that tender look as no more than anxiety lest the animal should repeat her recent offence. As for Rhun, who was still less of an horseman, he displayed a tendency to treat the offending creature as if she were a reluctant sow and kept muttering the syllable “soch! soch!,” the old swineherd’s cry that kept the creatures moving.

Finally to hasten her departure the impatient Rhun— "his head's all dazed," thought Porius — gave her several heavy slaps upon the rump.

Under this rough treatment, Mari Llwyd turned her head and directed towards Eigr Mallt a look which expressed puzzled, surprised, but still trustful interrogation. "It's beyond me," the look said. "But when we meet later *you'll* be able to explain all." After this she burst through the aperture and went off at a gallop.

"That's how it, is when you've got a friend," Porius heard Myrddin Wyllt exclaim, as if he could follow the emotions of animals better than those of men. Porius himself stood for a while gazing into the night till the faint soft sound of the horse's hooves upon the grass died away and the free night breeze, unburdened by any further mortal trouble, carried its ferny coolness and mossy dampness into the interior of the tent.

"Soldiers of Mithras turned into herdsmen of Myrddin!" he found himself whispering a moment later in Rhun's ear when it was Eigr Mallt's turn to follow Mari Llwyd out of the tent and the foster-brothers rejoined the brother and sister.

The prophet was stooping over the earthenware vessel into which he had milked the black cow, and Gwendydd was offering him one after another various little mugs and wine cups and silver bowls so that he might select from among them whatever struck him as most suitable for his purpose.

Using an old device of theirs to which they often had resorted in their boyhood, Porius now began describing to Rhun in a clear emphatic voice how he had been to the Mound of y Bychan and found it undisturbed, but he took care to slide off at the end of each sentence into a murmured hint that there would be no need for Rhun to accompany him to the Fountain if they were invited to remain where they were, for, though he himself must go to

Brother John's cell, it might be just as well, in the interest of the tribe at this ticklish moment, to divide forces.

Rhun had looked sulky at first, but as soon as he caught this underdrift of the words, his eyes brightened. Poor old Rhun was surely spellbound by the sister if not by the magician!

But it must have been the magician who had called *him* just now, and the question was — for what? Surely not simply to see how curious those two globes of horse dung looked upon a mat from Arabia!

But for what then? For the sport of making a person look a fool? For the interest of seeing if you *could* make the grandson of Indeg and the great-grandson of Creiddylad run to your feet from the Mound of y Bychan? Is he going to take his chance, now that *that girl's* out of the way, of confessing the truth about the trestles and about the corpse in the water?

Suddenly he saw Gwendydd approach her brother who, to all appearance, as he kept scooping the foaming milk from the big earth bowl he had selected and pouring it back again while his black beard wagged above them both, had fallen into one of his queer trances. She boldly touched the wrist of the hand on the edge of the earth bowl and murmured a question into his ear; a question to which he instantly replied with a sardonic chuckle.

His reply evidently took her aback, for a puzzled and troubled look came into her face, and moving across to the foster-brothers she hurriedly said something in an apologetic tone to Rhun that Porius could not catch.

"She doesn't approve of what he's going to do," thought Porius. "What in the devil's name is the man up to now?"

But the counsellor straightened himself, his right hand holding the silver bowl, the other resting on the edge of the big earthen one, which itself was balanced, Porius now observed, on the carved base of what must once have been some sort of heathen image. Then he spoke slowly and in that same harsh unpleasant jeering manner in which he had chuckled when he answered Gwendydd.

And to Porius's disgust, for the whole affair had begun to appear ridiculous and grotesque, he found that the man was addressing his remarks to him.

"I expect you know already, Prince Porius," he began, "that it was you who brought me here. Neither my sister nor her handmaid understand me. But you called me to come. My animals called me to come. You and my animals understand me and called me. There's no need for words between us. As to the Cewri of Eryri and the Cader" — he paused for a moment after using this traditional Brythonic word for "giants" and Porius's heavy brows creased themselves into startled folds round his little green eyes— "I have nothing to tell you, for I know nothing.

"But since Eigr Mallt came running to be milked and since you came running to make me milk her and since Mari Llwyd came running to offer us of her dung, I am ready to make the milk offering. Only you must all remember that I know nothing. For all I know the last of them *may* still live in the caves up there, feeding on your dead, or they may all have been lost for a thousand years!

"What is it to me? I know my animals and they know me. I know nothing of your Cewri. Let that fool of a Henog write about them! But since you and my animals have come running to me and calling for me to do something, I'll do this at least. *I'll offer the milk offering.* Let them drink *that* and leave your dead alone!

"What's the hour of the night, sister? Where's that water clock you brought with you? No! Let it go now. It matters nothing. It's somewhere between two and three. I can get that much from the smell of the air.

Somewhere about two is a good hour for the milk offering. Sylvanus ap Bleheris, where art thou? Write of it, with a pen of gold on a tablet of iron! Write of it, Chronicler! Write of it, Henog!"

Thus speaking he dipped the little silver vessel in the milk, scooped up enough to half fill it, and proceeded to stare in solemn silence at the two men and one woman standing before him. A moment's silence followed; and in this silence Rhun behaved as he always did at Minnawc Gorsant's Mass at the Gaer altar. He hummed in his throat. It was so low a sound and so inanimate a sound that it could have been taken for a physical infirmity. But it sucked all the mystical value out of what was going on as completely as a wood pigeon's egg is sucked by a magpie. Gwendydd meanwhile kept an apprehensive eye on the interior entrance.

"She's scared of that girl coming back," Porius thought. He was surveying the counsellor's performance without a flicker of interest. "He's acting a part again," he said to himself, "only it's a different part this time."

The towering figure with the black beard tied in the middle — and by this time Porius was wondering what it really was about the man that caused his appearance to vary so from moment to moment — was now holding up the little silver vessel with both his hands high above his head and he was mumbling, as he did so, a long rigmarole in a low, rapid, automatic chant, most of which to Porius was totally unintelligible.

But at regular intervals there did come words that struck a familiar chord in him. They were Homeric words. He knew that. And he recognized them as something much nearer his bones and his blood than old Rhun's *"Nama, Nama, Sebesio!"* They were words he'd often heard from Morfydd's father, who had a trick of using them when most men of his tribe would have crossed themselves.

It was indeed the famous invocation to the “powerless heads of the dead” that “the daughter of the sun” bade Odysseus use if he wished to call up the prophet Tiresias. In their youthful mania for anything that was contrary to the teachings of Minnawc Gorsant, Morfydd and Morvran would go out at midnight, having prepared the necessary libation prescribed by Circe: “first milk and honey, then sweet wine, then water, and finally barley meal”; and kneeling together in the very place where a year later Morvran’s body lay outraged and dead, murmur in their passionate young voices a bold defiance to the new faith in the name of *nekuon ameneena kareena,* the powerless heads of the dead!

“I’ve tasted the honey already,” Porius thought. “It now remains to taste the milk.”

The black-bearded figure was now turning slowly round, pausing in that circular orbit for a few moments at each quarter of the horizon, and each time he paused giving the bowl he held a cautious shake so that he caused a sprinkling of the new milk to fall north, east, south, and west; and quite heedless — though Porius, conscious of Gwendydd’s disapproval, was anything but heedless — whether it fell on Arabian rug or Gallic cushion or only on the weather-worn sailcloth, large as the mainsail of an Athenian trireme, that covered the tent’s floor.

Having done this he bowed his head in the solemn manner of a Christian priest when he is giving the Communion and called out, still in an oddly harsh and unpleasant voice, his sister’s name and the names of Rhun and Porius, offering to each in turn as they approached him what remained of the milk in that small vessel.

Porius was a little surprised that neither he himself, nor Rhun, nor apparently the lady, was moved to bend the knee as they drank; and he even noticed that the bearded celebrant was compelled to snatch away the vessel from Rhun, who was the last to whom he offered it, so that he might pour the final drop down his own throat.

"To the Cewri!" the counsellor cried in a startlingly harsh and mocking voice, and Porius, watching him closely, was aware that with his tongue — and there was something indecent and curiously repulsive to the young chieftain in the appearance of this intimate member — he was licking with lascivious satisfaction the inside of the silver bowl.

A feeling of sick revulsion swept over Porius. "He doesn't believe for a moment in the giants. It's a farce! The fellow's playing the fool simply to impress Rhun and me. Well! Let it go! I must get out of this and find Brother John. God! I shall soon wish I'd run straight from the Gaer to the Fount, instead of from the Mound to the tent. Honey of Mithras? Milk of Myrddin? Body of Jesus! I've room for them both and more. I'm of the blood of Creiddylad. And when I've polished off Colgrim, Baldulf, and Cheldric I'll do what Brother John wants, sail for the Bosporus and recanonize Pelagius and then, maybe, bring Theodoric in chains to—"

His thoughts were interrupted by the counsellor himself, who after handing the silver bowl to Gwendydd came up to him and led him aside by the arm.

"Ha! Ha!" Porius said to himself. "I thought so! It's all designed for Rhun and me — to divide us from the forest people! But you don't know my father" — and even as he listened to the man he automatically, after his manner, gave his head a jerk towards the south— "nor by God do you know the Aunties!"

But the counsellor had taken him by the arm and had led him to the entrance behind the screen. "Listen, Prince Porius," he said. "No! Let those curtains flap! My sister likes fresh air sometimes, and Nineue ferch

Avallach must be helping our historian to bring his ‘Vita *Veridica’* up to date. But a word in your ear, Prince—”

It was lucky for our friend’s politeness that the man *did* utter the word “ear,” for it gave him an excuse for turning the organs of his other senses in a different direction. If he hadn’t achieved this it would have been simply impossible to conceal his shrinking from contact with that black beard and that fungoid smell. The turn of his head too enabled him to escape all but a whiff of that weird breath of ice-cold air which he found still more disturbing.

“Shall I tell you a secret?” the voice at his ear whispered. “Nineue ferch Avallach is afraid of the Cewri. She fancies they’re not all dead! It’s her only fear. She’s not afraid of me, nor of Arthur, nor of the queen. As for Medrawd, she positively *likes* tormenting him. But of the Cewri she’s mortally afraid! And the truth of the matter is her fear is racial. It’s in her blood. She comes of the original Ffichti. Not the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, you understand, but the pure-blooded Ffichti; those whose feud with the forest people is implacable. Did you know, Prince, that some old Henog writes that the Ffichti were here in the beginning — before the forest people — and that they were the slaves of the Cewri? The Cewri are of course all gone. Nobody at Arthur’s court believes in them. Your father used to send messages to Caerleon about them, but the emperor never believed such survivals were possible; and as for myself, my dear Prince, to tell you the truth, I take no interest in bones and cinders and fossils and ruins. That’s where Arthur misunderstands me.

“Did you know he calls me a magician? Jesus Christ! Whereas not only have I no belief in magic, I am devoid of the smallest interest in it. As for the history of magic which our good Henog thinks is the very pleroma of all *civilitas,* I tell you, Prince, I would rather make a collection of snail shells than bother with such trifles. Power I have, as you have felt and as my animals have felt, and I know things about the future that no other man knows, or ever will know, and I'll tell you this much, Prince, here and now I'll tell you, in these early hours of the nineteenth day of October of the year of Jesus four hundred and ninety-nine. And you will be astonished to hear it.

"But you'll soon find, if you try the experiment, that not a human soul you tell it to will believe it! Any more than I believe" — his enormous body gave vent to a deep, harsh, and yet almost hysterical chuckle— "than I believe in the Cewri!"

Struggling to endure the stinkhorn effluvia and stiffening himself against a temptation to give way to a few deeply heaved shudderings under the impact of what felt as if it came from outside Time and Space, Porius noted with malicious pleasure that in spite of it being the cold heart of the night and in spite of the tent's civilized luxury, a small greenish yellow fly had quietly settled in peace and comfort upon one of the capacious rondures of horse dung that had been so inopportunely dropped by Mari Llwyd.

Now it chanced that the flickering of the nearest torch as it fell upon this unseasonable scavenger brought it about that the insect's wings took on the identical tint of the imperial livery worn by Mistress Nineue. Had the torchlight transformed the dung fly into any other colour, Porius might have found enough will power in himself to endure the prophet's propinquity long enough to encourage him to proceed; but the thought of Nineue brought back to him such an exact reproduction of the mixture of pain and pleasure he had felt when he had to get her as quickly as possible out of his arms, that now, though with a different urge to escape, he turned his head towards the black beard.

"I'm afraid I'm stupid in these things, Master Counsellor." He spoke in a low voice, but it was well above a whisper; and glancing at Gwendydd and Rhun he was not surprised to see that the former's attention had been aroused, though the soldier of Mithras remained oblivious to everything but the fair form under the blue vest.

Myrddin Wyllt was not unaware of the rebuff, though its significance, its brutality even, passed over him as harmlessly as weir water over an otter.

"I tried in vain," the young man went on, for as a true Homeric Brython whose ancestors came, not, as they declared at Arthur's Romanized court, from Troy, but from the *other side* in that huge upheaval of nations, he had been the reverse of flattered by being called "Prince" when to be ab Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda was enough. That made him the equal of any king. "I tried in vain to follow those great words that you, my Lord, exchanged with Sylvanus Is-Coed ap Bleheris when he—"

The strangest look came into the green-black cavities into which he was trying to stare with a bluff carelessness. "Words?" mumbled the voice in that mighty beard. "Did you say 'words?' Gone! It's gone from me now what my animals and I alone know. I was going to tell you — when I thought you'd be as quiet as Mari Llwyd and Eigr Mallt — how the future is, how *all the futures* are, present with me day and night; and that's because —"

Porius moved a pace or two away from him, fumbling awkwardly with his empty belt. "I don't understand what you mean, my Lord," he protested brusquely, "by *many* futures, or by *all the futures.* How can there possibly be more than one? But I must be thanking you now, my Lord, and I must be thanking the Lady Gwendydd for this memorable night; but it is imperative before this night's over that I go on to the Fount. Brother John may be asleep. I hope he is. But he *may* be awake and waiting for me. In any case I ought—"

But the man he was addressing had ceased to listen. He was staring *through* him as if he were a hollow shell. He was staring through the whole forest round them, and through the whole rondure of the night around the forest. He was staring through the wall of mist into which that moment of Time was being carried.

"Only my animals," he was muttering, "only my animals! *They* know and I know. Many creatures, many worlds, many gods, many futures!"

In his present mood Porius felt sympathetic with this blasphemous declaration. "I must remember that phrase 'many futures,'" he thought quickly, "against the day I defend Pelagius in the Caer Cystennin."

His mind rushed back for a second to the Bishop's School beyond Moel y Famau and how teased he used to be by the tricky reasoning in Plato's *Timaeus* about the necessity of their being only one cosmos since the Creator's *paradeigma,* or "model," was one.

But more arresting than his sympathy with Myrddin Wyllt's many worlds was a startling suspicion that had suddenly rushed into his mind, the suspicion that it was not only Nineue who was scared of the Cewri!

What if the counsellor's wise hint about Arthur's court being too enlightened to believe such fancies was simply a cloak for a distaste of his own — possibly even an obscure dread — of any such disturbing survivals from the Henog's adored past?

Well! He must let these enigmas go now and be off to the Fount and Brother John. Something had drawn him pelting back from the Mound of y Bychan with his head full of Rhitta Gawr; but this business of the milk offering was probably a coincidence, another example of the man's playacting.

Leaving Myrddin Wyllt to his thoughts of many worlds and many futures, and wondering vaguely as he did so how a prophet under such conditions could predict at all, and what happened to the “futures” *that* never *came,* Porius now concentrated his attention upon Rhun and Gwendydd who were clearly absorbed in each other.

It was one of the occasions when his restless mind, returning from its exile from his cumbrous body and diffusing itself through that body, became once more considerate, propitiatory, even princely. Thus in order to avoid embarrassing the abstracted counsellor he moved silently and stealthily from his side; while in order that the prolonged dialogue between Gwendydd and Rhun should not be broken up in any awkward manner, he proceeded with a gradually increasing clatter and noise to pick up not only the old Roman’s campaigning bottle but his own hunting spear which hitherto Rhun had been carrying.

These objects he ostentatiously examined, shifting them carefully from hand to hand, and at the same time flicking his hunting cap, in spite of its being made of that precious extinct hide, noisily and violently against one after the other of his tight-fitting leather sleeves.

After this — for neither the Lady of the Gaer nor the younger Lady of Ty Cerrig approved of clumsy interruptions — he sought to attract Gwendydd’s attention by means of a slight drumming upon the Cretan screen.

This he accomplished by aid of the silver stopper of the Roman bottle which was attached to the neck of the vessel by a metal chain and had the power of evoking a not unpleasant tinkle when brought into contact with the upper row of carved dolphins that were the screen’s chief glory.

But that he had begun to be amazed at the shameless manner in which he had washed his hands of the blood of Llew ap Greidawl was proved by the fact that before he knew what he was doing he found himself tapping out in silvery tinklings on those dolphin backs the very rhythm of the chorus from the ritual of the Fisher King which he had fancied he caught on the night air.

Even when he realized what he was doing he did not at once cease doing it. It satisfied some deep mischief in him to disturb Gwendydd ferch Morfryn's pleasure in Rhun ap Gwrnach ab Agenor y Gaethwas by a tune that was older than the fall of Troy, a tune that ambassadors from the pharaohs must have dreaded to hear among the palm groves of Marrakesh of the Berbers!

Set going by this disturbing tune, his mania for introspection shook off every restraint. He had found out long ago what little effect the motions of his blasphemous and shameless thoughts had upon his pious and muscular body.

It was a constant delight to him, and not entirely a malicious one, to widen further and further the natural gulf between his submissive frame and his restless soul. For it was his body that decided his actions. He had never exerted much will, and as to what Galen calls the "neurodes" or nervous system between brain and senses it worked as easily and healthily with him as with an animal.

He had crossed the Ford of Mithras to please Rhun. He was here because the counsellor had brought him here. And now he was going to leave them, not because Edeyrnion was in danger but simply because Brother John expected him. Well! He would certainly have to grow more independent when he sailed for Constantinople in the cause of Pelagius.

But both Gwendydd and Rhun had begun to approach him as he stood by the screen, and so to his surprise had the counsellor.

"I must bid you farewell, Lady," he announced firmly with a grave bow. "I want to see Brother John before I sleep, and I must sleep soon or I shall be ashamed to meet my father tomorrow."

“Need your foster-brother go with you?” enquired the counsellor, whose eyes were now fixed expectantly on the entrance to the inner chamber where Nineue had vanished with the Henog. He spoke as if he were weary of the whole matter and cared not a jot whether Rhun went or didn’t go.

It struck the prince, not so much that the man was growing anxious about the non-reappearance of Mistress Nineue, as that he would have liked to listen once more to the feverish attacks of his biographer! Porius was aware of a distinctly uneasy sensation, which, though it was not exactly awe or fear, made him look sharply at this prophet of “many futures” who had asked whether Rhun “need” go.

The tone in which the man asked this question with his eyes fixed on that interior entrance suggested a knowledge that was already in a certain sense “as old as the hills” that Rhun *wouldn’t* go; and as Porius watched that anxious glance, the weary question accompanying it sounded to him as if it reached the tent from a future so remote that all the human feeling connected with the doubt as to whether Rhun “went” or “didn’t go” had ceased to be of interest.

“Let such details,” his tone suggested, “be inscribed in the triple-coloured inks of Sylvanus Is-Coed. I have no concern with them.”

“There is certainly no need for Rhun ap Gwrnach to go with me,” Porius replied, thinking in his heart that Myrddin Wyllt resembled a *deus mortuus,* or “corpse god,” who was only roused to any natural life at all by his weird mania for Nineue’s satiny skin, his feeling for his animals, and the necessity, or *“tynged,”* he was under to refute the Henog’s justifiable onslaughts upon whatever ghostly “future” it might be that like a succubus was exhausting his life force.

“Not a bit of need,” Porius went on, for the first time in this queer scene meeting Rhun’s eye, “but I do not know—”

But the Lady Gwendydd left Rhun’s side and came forward. “Myrddin Wyllt and I,” she said quickly, “will be delighted to keep Rhun ap Gwrnach here for the rest of the night. I won’t try to persuade you to stay yourself, Prince. Brother John, as you say, is expecting you and would be disappointed. But his cell is small, and I’m sure he’ll be glad for us to look after your cousin. It’s easier for women to manage these things, and there’s Neb ap Digon and the others; so you needn’t fear for his comfort. Neb will see to everything for him. Besides, we shall all sleep sounder with a warrior of your blood among us. My brother has his own methods in case of danger, but Mistress Nineue and I will feel doubly secure with your kinsman here.”

During the utterance of these words, which, though spoken quietly and in the manner of a gentle appeal, had an air of authority that would have made refusal difficult, Porius and Rhun exchanged a second glance. They knew each other so well that this was enough; nor was Porius at all displeased at the prospect of having his spiritual director entirely to himself when they arose in the morning.

“I mustn’t let him talk till he’s had his sleep out,” he said to himself. “I shall sleep at his feet, and we’ll talk tomorrow. Sleep... tomorrow... tomorrow... sleep.”

CHAPTER VIII. The Prince of Edeyrnion

AS HE LEFT THE TENT Porius was conscious of a moment’s irritable regret that it should have been the fashion just then in the princely households of the Romanized Brythons to confine the drinking of wine and mead to breakfast and supper; at which times both the men and the women formally sat down in the banquet hall. At supper the women left the hall when after the meat the serious drinking began, but to see that the supply of liquor was sufficient for the company was their affair, and at the beginning of both meals they tasted what they had provided.

Being the sophisticated traveller he was, Brochvael ab Iddawc disregarded this custom. His casual Gallic habits in the matter of drink had been encouraged by his wife the Gwyddyles, and after his betrothal to Morfydd Porius’s Brythonic rule had been considerably relaxed.

At this moment he would have given a gold piece, yes! even with the head of Caesar on it, for the smallest bottle of the fragrant Greek wine Morfydd used to pour out for him at any hour in the Stone House. His brain felt at the same time exhausted and overexcited by all he had experienced since he left his watchtower on Mynydd-y-Gaer. He felt he could call on his physical strength to any extent in any kind of struggle as long as this exertion implied no sort of mental effort, no! not so much effort as to decide where to hit or where to dodge, when to attack and when to retreat.

“If the forest people,” he thought, “are really out for blood these Arthurians are in the worst predicament of their lives! I *might* save them but it’s doubtful! If I did it would be by sheer force, not by any particular awe of me. I think they respect me but take me for a simpleton, and I dare say they’re right. I probably *am* a bit of a fool.”

His imagination went on to conjure up what he mentally suspected and reasonably expected was actually happening in this huge expanse of moonlit forest. He found it singularly difficult to conjure up and visualize with any precision what *was* happening. There had been other risings. The one in which Morvran perished was different, for it included some of their fiercest Brythons and was really a Christian riot. The Gaer conspiracy in the days of Iddawc ab Edeyrn was entirely Brythonic and was due to the tribe’s suspicion of Princess Indeg and her three native sisters. In the days of Iscovan y Bychan both the Romans and the Brythons lived in constant fear of marauding attacks; and these marauders, though led by an outlaw of Gwyddyl-Ffichti blood, were largely recruited from the forest people.

“But why can’t I visualize these people,” he thought, “as they actually are at this moment? I can’t imagine whether they’re struggling to keep awake or whether in tense excitement they are waiting for the word from their druid which would be passed along from group to group and from watcher to watcher? Or have they received orders to hide themselves closely all night, sleep till sunrise, and then make an overwhelming attack on the Arthurian camp from every quarter at the same moment?”

“I don’t know them! I don’t know them!” he thought, “while *he,”* and Porius made his habitual gesture towards what he took to be the south, “thinks like them, eats like them, hunts like them, lives like them, deceives like them, is secretive like them, cold-hearted like them, sensitive like them, superstitious like them, incalculable like them, always defeated like them, and, in the end, unconquerable like them! That’s what he *is,* though he looks like Huw Gadarn himself, the first Brython who came from Taprobani, the Summer Country, where Constantinople now stands!”

Though he took the shortest way to the Fountain he had to walk warily, for not only was the sky clear and even a few stars faintly visible, but the most shapeless moon — so it seemed to his taut, wrought-up, and sleep-starved brain — that he had ever seen or could imagine seeing was beginning to cast cold, clear-cut, marmoreal shadows upon his path.

He carried his spear by its centre just as if he were simply carrying a heavy pole, not as Arthur's riders bore their thick lances, nor as the forest people clutched their light javelins. But at least he held it so that the point of its long knifelike iron head preceded his steps.

Advancing cautiously in this manner it was not long before he began to descend a grassy incline from which all the brushwood and undergrowth had been carefully cleared, and where at this hour — only two or three hours before dawn — the tall trunks of a group of majestic pines led the eye, like parallel avenues of monumental pillars, down to the very edge of the miniature lake, or large pond, which, from the days when the survivors of Lost Atlantis were still landing from their strange ships and when the "people of the forest" had but newly arrived from their far-off home in North Africa, had always been the most sacred and revered spot between Cader Idris and the Mountain of the Mothers.

Absorbed in the sight of that moonlit water he began walking freely and carelessly down the very centre of this avenue, till suddenly he stopped. "I deserve," he thought, as he flung his left hand, the one that held the Roman bottle, round the trunk of a giant pine, and pressed himself with his great spear as closely as he could to its rough, tar-scented bark, "I deserve to get an arrow through my crazy skull!"

The shapeless half-moon behind him threw the triple shadow — a tree, a man, a spear — upon the slope before him, and made a long rippling path of silvery light upon the water below. But more magical than the fluttering of the reeds by which that luminous path was broken, more intense than the watchful expectancy of the pines, more primeval than the healing, astringent scent of the roughly indented pine bark pressed against his face, was at that crucial moment the simple presence of silence. Though the nineteenth of October, in that last year of the fifth century, had already inscribed itself on the Henog's tablets there were still some hours, to wait before dawn began.

Time and Space, in complete fraternity for once, had begun like entwined serpents their dual and diurnal suction at the breasts of life; but the moment had not yet come for those breasts to respond. That strange insinking, insliding, ingulfing motion, as though something were being drawn downwards into the mouth of a dark planetary funnel where the spirals of the life torrent curve inward with such smooth rapidity that the heart of the earth seems to have stopped beating and the lungs of the earth to have stopped breathing, struck Porius at that moment to be actually swallowing up the mystery of sound at its ultimate source.

As Porius leant still harder against the tree, pressing his cheek so closely to its surface that his princely oxenskin cap was pushed awry, he grew aware of a wonderful loosening and easing of the tension in his brain which had begun to reach such a point that every thought that came into his head quivered like the string of an overtight bow whose arrow might be discharged at random.

With his head thus tilted on one side as he stared at the lake he recalled how Auntie Erddud had once compared such a moon to the corpse of a woman whom a demon lover has drowned in order to forestall the birth of a child. Then Auntie Erddud's drowned lady transformed herself into a distorted image of that part of his thick tournament lance which young Mabsant was caressing so proudly when he had it knocked out of his hand.

It was so soothing to rest like this, armed and ready, but letting his fancies drift free, that he was only saved from a really startling and unpleasant surprise by a small horny-scaled beetle that had taken up its autumnal abode between two of the wrinkled and fibrous ridges of the pine trunk he was embracing. This hard-headed forest dweller did not differentiate between *Homo sapiens* and the beasts of the field.

As carrion they might both serve a conceivable purpose, but alive and in motion they were simply "unpredictable acts of God." Thus the fragment of tepid matter covering the left cheekbone of a Brythonic prince struck the beetle's intelligence as identical for all practical purposes with the wet, glistening, naked nose of Eigr Mallt or the hairy neck of Mari Llwyd, or the more dangerous surfaces of the pointed antlers of the great stag of Coed Sarn Elen. It divined that this compulsory roofing of its familiar resort was only temporary, but Nature impelled it to probe into the mystery at once. To the beetle this process may have seemed lengthy, but to human computation the time it took was briefer than the stabbing of Caesar, and the result of its investigation was startling.

Porius at once removed not only his cheek but the back of the fingers with which he held his spear in order to scratch his cheek. In the process of these movements he turned away his eyes from the bewitched water and at once perceived a tall human figure emerging from the nearest patch of undergrowth at the base of a wooded slope, about a thousand yards to the southwest of where he himself was standing.

Something about the figure seemed familiar to him, but in any case he was ready to meet friendship with friendship and hostility with hostility, as occasion served. With his Roman bottle in his left hand, therefore, and his spear grasped by the middle in his right, he advanced to meet the figure.

"Christ and God!" These three syllables leapt up from the surface of his mind like spouts of foam over a swirling vortex of confusion; but below the surge of their utterance there swept instantaneously before his vision an amorphous mass of drunken warriors and wooden trenchers and pools of spilt mead. For, as the distance between him and the approaching figure lessened, his suspicion thickened itself within him into a troubled belief; and belief soon hardened into an agitating certainty that the tall man who was striding to meet him was none other than Einion ab Iddawc himself.

The sudden necessity of gathering all his mental forces together to meet his father; and to meet him, of all places and of all moments, just here on this hillside and above the sacred water, cut away at the root with one crashing blow all the wavering speculations of philosophical detachment, all the semi-humorous introspections of self-analysis, all the dramatic condensations of poignant situations, in which he would naturally have indulged in the presence of this event.

The mere idea of his father at any time and in any place was always disturbing to Porius, and an encounter in the flesh just here, when his brain was already strained to the limit, was hardly bearable. He knew well how the least whisper between them would upset the balance between his patiently obedient physical nature and his restless and critical intelligence.

He had derived a certain pleasure at different times from the man's incorrigible levity, but his own soul for all its roving thoughts was essentially serious. His thoughts might question everything; and they might leap at top speed from one seriousness to another seriousness while himself and everybody else remained at bottom ludicrous and grotesque. But his father's levity was so elusive as to be weird. It wasn't earthy enough to be humorous. It was the mockery of everything in life, of life itself. It was the mood of a mountain sprite or a water elf. It had no heart. It was a *fata morgana,* an *ignis fatuus*!

All that Porius felt just then in this luckless encounter was enhanced by the nature of the silence that surrounded himself and the approaching apparition. This silence had been growing moment by moment more palpable and oppressive. It surrounded him now like a vast bubble that had reached the limit of its power of expansion. He felt as though the moment of its bursting had arrived. And with its bursting both his father and himself might vanish away.

With each step he took this feeling increased upon him. The time of the night, he told himself, must have something to do with it. It was the time when the life pulse was at its lowest, the time of the life ebb, the low-water time.

But it was of course the unseen presence of thousands of forest people watching and waiting in their hiding places that was making it worse. With the two of them together — his father's sword in his left hand, his own spear in his right hand — they had only arrows to fear. And whence could the arrows come? From the tall reeds of the lake? No, their figures would be recognized.

None but Gwyddyl-Ffichti would draw a bow against the prince and his son. Oh, they were safe enough, and in another moment he'd be imploring this madman with the drawn sword to give up some wild impossible project that would wreck them all! Was it, or was it not, the Fisher King's chant he had heard from that tent entrance? At the moment he had been sure of it, but he was doubtful now.

The fact that Einion ab Iddawc was bareheaded and was carrying that naked sword — *and what sword was it?* — suggested that he had been roused in haste and had left the Gaer without preparation. But when did the man leave anything *with* preparation? He was capable of getting straight out of bed, clapping on his cloak and his boots, and setting off on the first horse, colt, mule, or ass he could find, to the White Tower in London or the emperor's *llys* at Caergwynt!

But the point now was, and this did look really serious, that he carried his long blade — God and Christ! and it *was* that sword — in his left hand. Now, though all the family knew and all Edeyrnion knew that their prince was left-handed, they were so accustomed to see him either with a weapon in both hands, or with nothing in either but a long staff, that his son experienced as he reached him that peculiar shiver of discomfort with which children behold a parent entering upon some dangerous sport whereof *they* know, while he doesn't, the intimate perils of the game.

Taller by a head than Porius, Einion ab Iddawc was in appearance the perfect type of a pure-blooded Brython. His countenance was at once rugged in its outlines and softly moulded in its contours, while his eyes, as deeply set in his skull as Porius's own, were of a peculiar tint of grey.

As he placed his empty right hand on his son's left shoulder and bending down a little began whispering into his ear, Porius knew at once that his premonition had been correct as to the tone the man would assume. Airy derision, as if he'd been persuaded to watch a puppet show, was the cue, and most of the playfulness was directed, as Porius knew it would be, against himself, his mother, and the old Roman.

The first communication conveyed in this manner through the grizzled moustache had to do with the Gaer Lady's absurd desire to summon the *Gosgordd.* This last word came to" him so muffled by those once golden and even now not wholly grey hairs that a stranger might have supposed the laughter to be at the lady's wanting to call up Cronos; but her son knew well what was meant — a Brythonic chieftain’s full-armed bodyguard of three hundred trained warriors.

“I told her,” the prince went on, “that the forest hasn’t been roused to a pitch like this since my father’s time. Morvran’s murder was nothing to *this.* Jesus Christ! Here’s the Derwydd’s own brother killed by these lunatics within a furlough of the death mound, within a mile of y Bychan’s Mound, and by the edge of the Sacred Fount! This Myrddin Wyllt must be a madman. The Henog has told me as much; and Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch — I’ve got *him* anyway safe up there — thinks the same. He’s not a madman, lad, this son of Anna and heir to Arthur. He’s a deep one.

“And I’ll tell you this, my grave and moral son, and ‘lay it up in your heart’ as my brother would say. When *he* comes into his own there’ll be no more of this ‘Emperor of Britain’ business. There’ll be a return to the old free ways and the old tribal divisions. When Medrawd comes into his own this whole farce of Pendragons and Maxen Wledigs and Bendigeitfrans playing at Roman Caesars will be finished!”

The recipient of this seditious outburst only sighed. He knew the man too well. He recalled how quite recently over his mead he had sworn that these very Saeson under Colgrim coming from Germania were no worse pirates and oppressors than the Romans themselves under Julius and Claudius and Hadrianus and the rest!

He recalled how he’d heard him once say to Modryb Esyllt that when he’d driven out the Saeson the emperor would turn his precious horsemen against the whole House of Cunedda and reduce them to “Counts of the North,” who must do homage to Arthur in the city of Lludd! Everything was a joke to Einion ab Iddawc, even his own Edeyrnion.

But the muffled murmur at Porius’s ear was going on still. “I told her they’d raised ‘the Fisher King’ and that it had brought the Gwyddyl-Ffichti down from the mountains. This of course was a lie, for the fellow hasn't been dead for a dozen hours, and unless the Derwydd has a few Coranians in his train, or is more of a wizard than he looks, the news *couldn't* have got as far!

"No, lad, no! Now don't begin all that" — and he lifted the hand that rested on his son's shoulder and touched the bare flesh of Porius's neck with a couple of his long thin fingers— "for you know what your mother is. Did you read that crazy letter she sent to these people? Think of her advising them to go to Deganwy! Of course the only thing is for *us,* for *you and* me, to whistle them back whence they came. And that's what I'm doing now and that's what you must help me in."

He took breath at last and drew back a space, making a faint gesture, both with the beautifully moulded hilt of his bare blade and with his own beautifully moulded head, in the direction of the wood, a gesture which his son correctly interpreted as meaning that they were being closely watched; watched by friends perhaps, certainly by enemies.

Porius was now completely under the aura of the man's personality, under what he felt to be a palpable *projection* of the man's soul; and he was vividly aware, as always when in physical contact with his father, of the peculiarly wholesome smell that emanated from him, like the smell of well preserved hay in some dry and sun-exposed shed.

"She never told me," the prince went on, brushing his son's cheek again and giving him the sense of being swaddled in sweet hay, "about that letter till after I'd been asleep for five or six hours. She must have been sitting up in bed waiting for me to wake."

Nothing was more painful to Porius than to think of the various dramatic scenes that must, from year to year, have gone on in that princely bedchamber at Mynydd-y-Gaer, where his mother slept in the carved oaken bed of Iddawc the Apostate, and Einion ab Iddawc upon a heap of rugs between her and the fire, while a powerful middle-aged Roman lay stretched across the threshold outside.

On this occasion he saw with a heartbreaking clarity his mother's troubled eyes turning from the ghastly indifference of the sick and shapeless moon, like a hunted nun heavy with child, that she saw through the window, to the beautiful and bearded warrior, cold, heartless, treacherous, irresponsible, the spoilt darling of the Three Aunties of the Giant's Cave, who lay on his back with his long bare ivory-white arms stretched out at his side upon the coverlet.

But there was more pain for him, more pain yet to come as always when he took Einion ab Iddawc's side against his Arthurian mother and her Roman parent. And this new pain, which was like the thumb-jerk of a mischievous schoolboy pointing at a tragic face, this new pain had to do with the elder Porius.

"It was one of his Romans who told me," the prince whispered. "He told me that when Porius Manlius couldn't sleep"— "And oh!" thought the younger Porius, *"how* your old gods must favour you, that you smell of hay and not of mead!"— "thinking the Gaer would be besieged and we'd all be killed, what he did was to take out, when he thought nobody on earth could see him, that tiny little image of Caius Julius which he keeps in an old bronze box. He didn't burn incense to it, the fellow says, but marched it up and down, and tapped it against that picture of *Fortuna Victrix* that hangs over his pillow."

These two images — the one of his mother sitting up alone in that big carved bed with her thick masses of grey-dusted, straw-bleached hair framing her statuesque face, and the other of the old man, furtively, secretively, in the familiar moment of military peril, bringing upon the scene the great dictator’s bald head, pinched cheeks, and fear-nothing mouth — may have had something to do with the sudden abrupt manner in which he now asked the prince who it might be who was hidden up there in the wood.

His father and he were now so closely linked by their bodily contact that the habitual clash of their souls on the familiar psychic level where all rational articulation is lost began to intensify to a point that was both infanticidal and parricidal.

But the more he hated his father, the more beautiful did his father grow. His hate seemed perpetually to create afresh the beauty upon which it fed. The learned Brochvael always maintained that the prince was a living proof that the Romanized Brythons were only trying to propitiate their masters when they claimed to be descended from the Trojans. It was from the Greek side they came!

But Porius always felt, when the aura of his father’s personality invaded him like this, that for all his fair Homeric exterior the soul within him was as Iberian as the souls of the Modrybedd!

One thing was certain. Neither with his Homeric body nor with his Iberian soul could this wanton creature comprehend what was the secret of his son’s hidden life; no! nor have the remotest conception of what it meant to be conscious of that titanic brood in your blood that was older than Troy, older than Argos, older than Marrakesh itself, and which left one of its daughters behind when it vanished from Eryri and the Cader.

“Who is it,” Porius asked again in a louder whisper, “you’ve got hidden away up there?”

The tall man slowly lifted his right hand to his face, gave an ostentatiously apprehensive look towards the summit of the slope, pulled deliberately at the tip of his pointed beard and at both the tips of his drooping moustaches, and then murmured casually, “Oh, *they* can wait. But you should have seen how excited your mother looked when she got me awake at last, and you should have heard how she talked of the greatness of Arthur and how tragic it would be if anything happened to the counsellor or to his sister.

“I teased her about this girl they call Mistress Nineue, and I asked her whether it would be so terrible if *she* should be hurt! You know what they are, your mother and the old man, they think, because Myrddin ap Morfryn sometimes calls himself Myrddin Emrys and sometimes Myrddin Wyllt, he can be in two places at the same time; and they think — you know? — because in his fits he’s always talking about the air, that he can transport Arthur ab Uthyr and all his enchanted circus of horses and pretty ladies through that same air!

“Aye! Yes, you should have seen the solemn looks I got when she *did* wake meat last and told me about that crazy letter! She had one of her happiest moments, lad, just then; though of course she thinks of herself as one of the ‘three tragic women of Ynys Prydein!’”

“Who *is* it, up there?” Porius’s tone had become so irritable that Einion smiled with profound satisfaction.

“Only old Afagddu,” he jeered, “and Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch! Why do you look so grave at me? I tell you, I wouldn’t have pulled Medrawd out of our people’s hands for a cartload of gold if it had happened before I’d been to the Modrybedd. They sent for me. They knew everything. They hadn’t gone to bed. They’d got in touch with the druid. They’d persuaded him to revoke his first order. But they were very upset. They said the emperor would blot us out from the map of Ynys Prydein if that man didn’t return safe. So for once your mother and the Aunties said the same thing!

“Well! That being so, most grave and revered son, what in the name of the Virgin could I do? It was old Afagddu who took me to where they’d hid him. They caught Medrawd when the body disappeared. There’s something queer about *that.* They — the druid’s people, I mean — deny they took the body. None of them, as far as I can make out, ever identified it, though there *was* a corpse laid out in Saint Julian’s Fount.

“It was because they’ve not found the body that they let me have him — Medrawd, I mean — but no doubt Cunedda’s sword and the Modrybedd’s orders had *something* to do with it!

“Well! You’d better come with me and see this noble assassin. Afagddu won’t be content till you’ve given your mature blessing to my plan of campaign. So come along, only please don’t spoil your innocent dad’s half-wit scheme at the last moment by anything oversubtle!”

He continued talking in this nervous, half-rallying, and as far as his son was concerned altogether disconcerting manner, as they moved up the slope side by side.

Every now and then the prince paused to take breath; and whenever he did so Porius snatched the opportunity to swing round a little and survey the moonlit water. He had already discovered he could do this without breaking the thread of his father’s discourse. Oh, if only the wind would rise again!

For some reason — by one of those inexplicable chances that seemed to govern the movements of the power he worshipped beyond all the other elements — the wind had sunk to the faintest stir of air. Oh, how he longed for it to return in full strength! What there was of it was evidently still southwest, and if he associated the south with his father, he associated the southwest with Morfydd.

The girl had become, for reasons he could only partly understand, a particular favourite with the prince who had got into the habit, ever since her betrothal, of using her to coax any crucial piece of political or racial information he might particularly need out of his learned brother; while that sceptical traveller would doubtless be warned of any recrudescence of Christian fury.

It was Morfydd's brother who had spoilt the prince's delicate diplomatic adjustment between priest and druid. Morvran's rash habit of expressing his atheistic ideas to anybody who would listen, not to speak of his tendency to enter into philosophic disputes with all the intelligent visitors who came to Saint Julian's Fount, disturbed the whole balance of religion and politics in Edeyrnion.

Porius's natural restlessness of mind was accentuated just then by his brain's exhaustion. He began reverting to every detail of the ghastly story of Morvran's death. He asked himself for the thousandth time what he would have done if he'd known of the plot. Would he have interfered? Would he have thrown to the winds his submission to his mother and stood between those fanatical Brythons and their victim? Would his strength have been sufficient to snatch Morvran out of their hands?

Never once had Morfydd opened her lips about it to him and he had respected her silence. But sometimes he thought — but it was better not to think, not to think either of the lad's death nor of what happened afterwards to his body!

It began to seem to him as they climbed the ascent that the sword his father carried was a third person ascending that slope, a person who was alienated from both of them in that silence, a person who despised them both as traitors to the House of Cunedda.

The weariness of his mind and its desperate need of sleep began to extend itself to his body. If only the wind, *any* wind from *any* quarter, would rise to blow on those moonlit waters! There did seem some faint stir;

else how could there be those ripples of silver, shining scales, glittering sequins, wavering dazzlements, shell-like glimmers?

But they were all deathly cold, and the path they followed led always to that same distorted moon shape. He felt as though that shape were labouring to be delivered of some disastrous and baleful offspring, the offspring of parents who ought never to have embraced.

"I must take care," he said to himself. "I'm used to feeling a fool and I'm used to doing what I'm told. But I'm *not* used to getting the horrors. There's something wrong with me tonight."

It was just as if the sigh that accompanied the articulation of this thought had brushed by chance against the sensitive tip of one of the great outstretched wings of that particular wind, fallen now into so deep a trance, that from childhood he had associated with the man at his side.

Ever since they had been ascending this hill one particularly tall and sombre fir tree had thrown a long tapering shadow upon the path they were following, but suddenly the head of this tall tree made, or was driven to make, a sweeping inclination towards them, the immediate result of which was that a single glitter of moonlight struck the elder man's naked blade, which itself was the colour of water, causing, as Porius saw clearly enough and not greatly to his comfort, the distorted shape of the moon herself, that unearthly creature searching for the place of her deliverance, to be reflected under his father's very hand.

But it *was* the south wind, and its coming redeemed the night! He felt it on the bare skin of his cheekbones. He felt it on the bare skin of his forehead below the rim of his *ychen bannog* cap. He felt it on the still barer skin of his dry lips. He felt it on the crucially drawn-out, sleep-sick attenuation of his overwrought brain. It flowed over him, round him, through him; it bathed him in a release such as that very moon would have enjoyed, had she suddenly been delivered of her burden, had she suddenly become a crescent again.

It did for him more than any sacred waters could do. Myrddin Wyllt was right to lay the burden of his prophecy upon the air. It was out of the air that those strange Coranians from beyond Germania, from beyond even Dinas Cystennin, gathered the whispers of their enemies and thus could never be conquered.

He too felt unconquerable now, felt for the first time since they had met a power in him strong enough to deal as an equal with this tall man holding the sword of Cunedda and smiling with those obscure smiles that flittered and fluttered, and advanced and retired, like treacherous golden snakes, amid the intricacies of his beard.

CHAPTER IX. The Emperor’s Nephew

FATHER AND SON arrived simultaneously and side by side at the top of the slope. Pushing their way between the lower branches of a circle of pines they emerged into an open clearing, or *“llanerch”,* as the forest people called these retreats, an enclosure which in this case was as large as the bishop’s church on the other side of Moel y Famau. Here they both looked cautiously round them, the one leaning on the handle of his naked sword, the other on the shaft of his spear.

Porius could recognize at once that he was in the presence of at least three men and at least one tall powerful horse. One of the men was seated on the ground with his back to a rock and his gaze — for he was leaning far back — fixed abstractedly on the gaps amid the treetops, from one to another of which the shapeless moon was patiently gliding. The two others, one old and ugly and one youthful and handsome, but both of them proud, suspicious, self-absorbed, withdrawn, were trying without much success to soothe a tall black mare with a white mark on her forehead resembling the letter “W.”

While his father moved across to the seated man and began respectfully addressing him Porius gave himself up to drawing into his lungs, and indeed into every crevice of his body and soul, this blessed wind from the south. He hadn’t missed the fact that the old man, always an enigmatic and lonely individual, who had constituted himself some twenty-five years ago, when he was still with Alarch the Fair, his personal preceptor and attendant, was anxious to have a word alone with him. He hadn’t missed the fact that the proud youth too was stealing hurried glances at him of intense curiosity and reverence, but at the moment he felt as shamelessly preoccupied with his own profane sensations as if he were a priest at the altar with the body and blood of his redeemer.

He felt as though the south wind had liberated him from both his cumbrous body and his exhausted mind. He felt that his soul could move happily and indolently from one object about him to another, and lose and find itself in all. He felt as though the essence of himself, the real Porius ab Einion, need never again be harassed by his own confused purposes or by his father's complicated caprices. Porius's soul, revealed by the magic of this wind to Porius in its true identity, felt as though it had become a medium for all the sensations of the human race. He slowly shifted his long spear to his left hand which already held the water flask, thus leaving his right hand free.

His immediate purpose in doing so was to greet the expectant old man now awaiting him by the side of the black horse. Nobody knew this old man's real name or why he had, a little while before Porius's birth, come in to the service of Einion ab Iddawc.

The erratic prince had accepted his services, as he accepted all the accidents of his life, with an airy and sardonic indifference; and before the man undertook the training of the little boy in the martial exercises his chief peculiarities had been his devoted attachment to Einion's sister Alarch and his extraordinary skill as a swineherd.

He had let it be known at Mynydd-y-Gaer that the disfigurement which gave him such shocking and startling ugliness — earning for him the nickname of Afagddu, after the hideous son of the great goddess Ceridwen — was due to his nose having been slit from top to bottom by the javelin of a Gwyddyl-Ffichti.

It was lucky for Porius now as he approached his ancient master in the art of war that the wind had come in time to recover him. He had never looked stronger, more competent, more resourceful, more ready to face his destiny. Thus as he approached Afagddu and shook him by the hand he could see, even in that uncertain light, that the man's hideous features were illuminated with pride, wonder, admiration.

Before letting the hand go the swineherd raised it to his lips with a gesture so courtly that it once more set our friend off on the question that had baffled the whole Gaer, as to who this old man really was and whence he had come.

Only once in his whole experience had Porius been given so much as a hint, and he had come to the conclusion that nobody in the Gaer, unless it were Einion himself, knew anything about it. The hint he had been given had come, as might be expected, from the Henog, for whom Afagddu had displayed from the moment of his first arrival an unconcealed distaste, a distaste so strong that on one occasion he had actually got up from the table and left the drinking when the Henog began to discourse.

Not that the Henog had been loquacious about him. All he had said was — and that was said in a puzzled, conjectural, meditative tone, as if he were thinking aloud— "No one really knows what became of Pendaran Dyfed," when asked, however, who this Pendaran Dyfed was, he had turned the question away with a pedantic jest.

But even while Afagddu was mumbling and perhaps even weeping over his hand Porius became aware that his newfound strength was already faced with no small test of its power to bear shocks. He had seen his father standing respectfully above the figure that crouched against the grey rock, and he knew that his own presentation to him was the point of discussion.

But it was not this that bothered him, nor the fact that the emperor’s nephew neither rose to his feet to greet him nor even so much as glanced in his direction. Long ago had the Aunties explained to him that the childlessness of the empress was due to miraculous intervention, since it necessitated a break with the Brythonic custom of primogeniture. Great honour was accorded to the heir to his throne, whoever he was, by both races, and he had the right to remain seated in the presence of all rulers and princes, save only consecrated bishops and crowned kings.

It was on the point as to who should succeed the emperor that the Brythons of the Gaer and the Modrybedd took such different views. The Modrybedd held strongly that the ancient tradition of the forest people ought to be followed in Britain, since they, if the mythical giants were excluded, had possessed the land from the beginning; and they held that, in making the queen barren, Destiny had clearly decided to break the recent father-to-son tradition and to substitute the older African or Iberian method, a method which receded back to the Golden Age of Matriarchy, when it was not the king’s son — for who could be absolutely sure of a child’s *paternity?* — but the king’s sister’s son who was the king’s heir, since none could deny to a woman the fruit of her own womb.

No, Porius felt nothing at that moment of the touchy Brythonic pride that had made him so annoyed with Rhun when that honest Mithraic miles went on talking to the stranger in the ferryboat heedless of the presence of Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda.

But his new strength was in danger all the same, for he felt as if an abominable power were emanating from that figure under the moonlit rock whose upturned face was apparently listening with becoming attention to what the Prince of Edeyrnion was saying; nor could he explain to himself what it was that he felt. He allowed the devoted old swineherd to take from him both his spear and the Uriconium water bottle and place them beneath one of the monumental fir trunks that made that grove of trees resemble a pillared temple.

While he submitted to this and exchanged a few more words with the old man he became conscious of the fifth human presence among them, and along with it the form of a tall coal-black horse. Porius fancied he knew the youth with his arm through the horse's bridle, but they were both too much in the shadow for it to be possible to read his face.

Conscious that he was being looked at, the young man greeted him with a respectful inclination of his head but did not utter a sound. As for the black horse, which was not only tall but unusually strongly built, it showed evidence of extreme uneasiness, tossing its head, fidgeting with its ears, and even once or twice raising one of its hooves and stamping soundlessly on the tender hairlike grass which covered the generations of fir needles.

The old swineherd, named after the hideous son of the goddess, perceived Porius's exchange of greetings with the youth in the shadow and coming close up to him began whispering energetically in his ear.

Porius listened to him considerately, almost affectionately, giving his words just enough attention to gather that this boy had been chosen to help in guiding Medrawd back to the emperor at Caergwynt because he knew the way and the dangers of the way.

But all the while he was listening to Afagddu his eyes were fixed on Medrawd's upturned face, a face that he soon began to realize was as beautiful as the old swineherd's was hideous. God and Christ! What a difference there was between them! But it was not beauty or the lack of it that was troubling him now and causing him to listen with only half an ear to Afagddu's murmurings. Had the face under the grey rock been the swineherd’s, and the face so near his own been that of the heir to the throne of Britain, it would have been the same. Faces *were nothing!*

As Pelagius taught, it was all in the soul, and all souls were equal, and all souls had power over themselves to be good or bad; not absolute power of course, for neither gods nor demons had that, but power enough.

But the wind was bringing up a filmy cloud or two now, and there was no more than a pale diffused light over the grey rock and a pale diffused light over old Afagddu, so that under this chance-brought, chance-wrought, magical equalization both these human faces were transformed into that oblong blur of unearthly whiteness, ageless, sexless, tribeless, without class, or name, or number, or nation, that is the eidolon of Homo sapiens beneath the moon.

Porius was struggling, he knew well enough, against a power as inimical to him as was that of Minnawc Gorsant the priest. “My brain’s too tired,” he said to himself, “to think this out now. All I can do now is not to be seduced by this handsome devil!”

“Are you sure you’ll be able yourself to stand a journey like this,” he said gently to Afagddu, “even if *he,”* he nodded towards the youth with the black horse, “has such an instinct for the right way? And listen, my friend. If there’s anything I can lend you — I haven’t got my knife; I gave it to that lad Mabsant — but if there’s anything else—”

But Afagddu had come nearer to him and was murmuring what Porius knew well enough to be the laboured prelude of what the old gentleman regarded as a staggering if not a positively unholy request. Along with the smell of his clothes, which so closely resembled long-dried pine-wood resin that contact with him might have been contact with any of the tree trunks around them, there emerged from that blur of androgynous anonymity a series of gasped-out words, breathed so low as to be almost inarticulate.

He had never heard this self-appointed slave of the House of Cunedda whisper like this before. As a rule his whispers were peculiarly high-pitched, more like gusts through arrow-slit windows than murmurs in sea shells; and it gave him a feeling of something uncommonly like shame as he began to gather the drift of the old man's communication.

But while he heard these unfamiliar sounds with one ear, Porius was vainly endeavouring to catch something of what his father was saying to that other white blur beneath the now darkened rock. And there was another voice too, that of his own exhausted brain, stretched out once more like a quivering gut string, and whispering, "I want sleep! I want sleep!"

But at last he did grasp what the old man was telling him, namely, that Prince Einion had not yet given him any personal token to bear witness to his identity and to his right to represent the chief of their tribe in the presence of alien or hostile interference.

He straightened himself at once, gripped the swineherd's wrist reassuringly, and without a word went across to the figures by the rock. There he snatched off his cap, bowed ceremoniously to the seated man, apologized for interrupting them, murmured something about the headgear in his hand, felt an unpardonable impulse to flick with it that hay-scented beard that now again brushed his face, and demanded in a whisper from the ruler of Meirion and Edeyrnion and Arwystli and Ardudwy and Mawddwy something that would be more impressive than even an *ychen bannog* cap, something that would be accepted by all stray Brythons and most forest people as unquestionable proof of loyalty and good faith.

The tall man made a polite apology to Medrawd and murmured at once an affable assent to his son's anxious words. "I know how you're smiling, though," thought Porius, "and I know you're thinking I'm a fussy fool!" Indeed he could see, just as if the moon had been bright and full, the subtle

Iberian mockery that was flitting across those massive Brythonic features as the chieftain began easily and negligently complying with his son's request.

As unceremoniously as if it had been a spade or a pitchfork he thrust the sword of Cunedda into the earth. The white blur that was the face of Medrawd ap Llew might have contained no eyes at all so immovable did it remain, but Porius as he waited noted every one of his father's movements.

It was clear that the way the ancestral weapon sank into the earth — the man's first thought must have been simply to free his hands — gave Einion some special and peculiar pleasure. Through the grey rootless lichen, through the soft green moss, through the thick resilient floor of generations of pine needles, bleached and brown from many winters yet able still at this autumnal recession to supply nourishment for fungoid growths of incredible design, sank the great sword!

Porius watched him with amazement. Some irresistible vein of pure childishness seemed uppermost at that moment in this bearded man who had begotten him thirty years ago. Was he playing at plunging his blade into the bosom of the earth mother? That he should amuse himself thus at this moment of all moments... but Porius knew him. This was what he was, what he always had been.

With the naked symbol of their tribe in his hand and the heir to the throne of Britain by his side, and, for all he knew, thousands of poisoned arrows ready to be loosed from thousands of strung bows at the first sign of dawn, what must this grown-up infant do but amuse himself by leaning his full weight on the sword's cross handle just to see how deeply he could bury the blade!

But presently there was an ominous jerk and the chieftain, staggering forward over the handle of his loosened weapon, only saved himself from a fall by contact with one of his son's broad shoulders. Cursing and laughing he pulled out the blade and in the darkness felt its point. “Broken!” he muttered. “It must have hit a rock. Feel it, for Christ’s sake, boy!”

He held the weapon upright between them as it was the custom at Mynydd-y-Gaer for the priest to hold it when the prince lies dead and his son succeeds him; and Porius took the broken point between his fingers and felt it with his thumb. Yes, the extreme point was chipped off. How violently the man must have dug into the earth!

“It can be hammered into shape again as sharp as ever,” Porius muttered aloud. “Uncle Brochvael’s Gwrgi used to work an anvil. He’ll have to lend him to us for a week.” But he thought in his heart, “You’ll hang it up in its old place in the banquet hall and drown the bad luck in mead, and never let Gwrgi come near it!”

“And now,” he whispered almost peevishly, “for heaven’s sake give me something for Afagddu.”

Einion reversed the great blade and plunged its broken point again into the ground. Then he began fumbling beneath his beard. He appeared to have some difficulty in loosening the collar of his tunic and undoing the clasp of his woollen shirt; but it was done at last, and Porius, who could almost see his mocking smile, knew what this fumbling implied, for it was common knowledge at the Gaer that their chief wore more than one love token round his neck.

Porius felt weary and miserable. What a moment for an attack from the rebels, if there were rebels round them! He was certain that the emperor’s nephew was watching them both with his cold stare, and he was tempted to make a hurried clutch at his father’s hand and stop him before he did anything irretrievable.

“But what’s it to me,” he thought, “what he does? What’s it to me what he gives Afagddu? Oh, for God’s sake give me something for him and have done with it! Give me something they all know you wear!”

The chieftain unclasped a massive silver chain on which was hung a rough cross, carved after the Gwyddyl-Ffichti fashion. This he proceeded to swing to and fro in the air between them, very much as a parent might swing some glittering toy to amuse or tantalize an infant.

“He’s chosen Kymeinvoll’s chain,” said Porius to himself. “So that’s the one he can best spare — Morfydd’s mother’s. Well! So be it. That will certainly overawe any of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti who meddles with them. That’s probably just what he had in his mind. He’s at his shrewdest when you think he’s silliest. What a man for a person to have as his father!”

“Brochvael will be relieved it’s off my neck!” Einion muttered, and his voice had such mischief in it that it lifted his tone to something louder than a whisper. “Your mother always swore she wasn’t jealous of my wearing it, but that she couldn’t *like* my doing so because it was such an unlucky thing to do! I tell her it’s Alarch’s *gold* chain that’s the unlucky one! Yes, my grave son, make no mistake! It’s your foster-mother’s trinket that’s the danger, the lovely Alarch’s! God! How the gold one and the silver one hated each other! They’ll be glad to be parted — no more wet with the same man’s sweat. Well! Give me your cap!”

Thus speaking he took the sacred *ychen bannog* cap from his son, squeezed it into a roll with all his strength, twisted the silver chain tightly round it, leaving the Gwyddyl-Ffichti cross with its obscure inscription swinging from the little bundle, and handed it back to Porius with an audible laugh. *“Now* you and your Afagddu can be satisfied!”

But Porius did not even thank him. He held the little bundle in his fingers, pressing it against his ribs. He felt at the lowest ebb of his endurance. Even the south wind itself had dropped. It had deserted him. Its farewell sigh in the branches above them gave him no comfort. He felt as if he could burst into unmanly tears. Nobody but this man, nothing but his particular kind of mockery, could bring him so low.

“Well, silent one,” the chieftain said, drawing the chipped sword negligently from the earth and rising to his full height, “I must leave you now. I’ve got to go back to the Modrybedd. None of the three of them will have slept tonight. But they’ll know by this time, I’ve no doubt, whether Gogfran Derwydd will raise the cry at dawn on this nineteenth of October, four hundred and ninety-nine, or whether he will forbear! The Modrybedd thought he would forbear when I last saw them; but they’ve probably changed their opinion, and very likely *he’s* done the same! You’ll be sleeping in Brother John’s cell, I take it — eh? And you’ve left Rhun with the counsellor’s ladies? Very good. Most satisfactory. You have played at fate, my grave son, you have played hard at fate, and you have won! I bow to you as a successful player. Well! Sleep sound, my child, and remember that the heart’s the heaviest piece of luggage; and in these days we’ve got to travel light!”

Porius nodded grimly. He couldn’t trust himself to speak. His father’s power of humiliating him and making him feel a romantic imbecile had never been exerted more successfully. If he’d known for certain they’d both be dead before the dawn he couldn’t have uttered a sound. He watched the tall man bend the knee to Medrawd. He watched him lift the hilt of his sword to them all. He watched him leave the shelter of the fir trees and mount the hill in the direction contrary to that which led to the tent of Gwendydd. He watched him till a promontory of firs hid him totally from sight.

Then with a vague and weary inclination of his head in the direction of Medrawd as if to ask permission to defer his own farewell for a minute, he carried his double token, the cap of extinct oxskin and the Gwyddyl-Ffichti cross, to where old Afagddu and his watchful assistant were soothing their impatient black steed and making him ready to be mounted by this murderous heir to the throne of Britain.

“If I don’t get soon to Brother John’s,” he said to himself, while a couple of new thoughts, alighting on that taut bowstring that was his mind, pecked at it from opposite directions, “I shall go crazy.”

The first of these thoughts was an outrageous one, but just then it caused him pleasure rather than pain. It had to do with a scandal that had been current at the Gaer for years, the rumour, namely, that Einion ab Iddawc was the lover of Brochvael’s wife.

What then if Morfydd were his half-sister? He was neither shocked by this idea nor ashamed of not being shocked. He had brooded at intervals on this dark and riddling speculation ever since his public betrothal, and at this moment the idea of it gave him for some inexplicable reason a curious satisfaction.

But the second thought that twitched at that vibrating string was his remembrance of what he’d noted of his father’s farewell to that man under the rock.

Einion ab Iddawc had dropped on one knee before the seated man and had bowed his head. That much was clear; that much was natural and proper. But there may have been, he now felt, something else; only his own concern with the rustling of the branches by the twice-blessed south wind had prevented his being sure.

It was this second raven’s wing of ominous doubt that spoilt his pleasure in old Afagddu’s delight as he now proceeded to give him the double token. Afagddu’s disfigured countenance — though where they stood by the black horse there seemed no moonlight at all — conveyed the impression to

Porius that it was positively illuminated by gratitude and reverence as the old man put away the cap and chain in some hidden recess next his skin.

But Porius knew him so well that his imagination could have filled out the hollows, and his tenderness could have smoothed away the ridges in every portion of that familiar face, even if they had met in complete darkness. Moved by an impulse that was probably not entirely single hearted even if it were not merely the expression of a revolt in him against the mocking and cynical tone adopted by his father, he impulsively sealed his alliance with Medrawd's guide by a filial kiss; and with that, picking up his hunting spear and his Roman water flask, he strode across to the crouching figure beneath the rock, and coldly but politely making the customary obeisance, bade him adieu. But he left the man with that sinister doubt still tormenting his mind. *Had* the Prince of Edeyrnion actually done what his son's instinct hardly dared to formulate? Had he really taken that murderer's two hands and folded them above his own upon the man's thigh?

If he *had* — well! the grandson of Edeyrn the son of Cunedda had paid the homage of a Brythonic prince to the crowned King of all the Brythons, the homage that was the exclusive right of the emperor alone!

But whatever Einion had done he was gone now; and Medrawd, mounted now upon the black horse with that young man holding the bridle and old Afagddu striding in front, was gone too, and what was to be *would* be! Weary and sick in heart and brain, he now moved slowly down the slope towards the Fountain of Saint Julian. His mind as he went down the hill was obsessed by what he had seen of the emperor's nephew at that final moment.

He himself at any rate had not offered the man a jot or a tittle more of respect than was the due of so near a relative of Arthur; but, as he did what he did, the moon had shone full upon the man's face, and for the first time in his life he knew the authentic shudder of supernatural terror.

The expression in Medrawd's face, and it was the most beautiful face he had ever seen, had been absolutely terrifying! The man had a look that ought not, no! not by the inherent nature of things, to be seen on the countenance of any man born of woman! It wasn't that it was an especially cruel look; far less that it was an especially savage look. It wasn't that it was a look of diabolical craft. There may have been elements of all these things in it, but neither Porius's insatiable mind nor his clumsy Herculean body had the kind of sensitiveness that would have been especially outraged by either cruelty or cunning. No, no! As the son of Einion ab Iddawc came slowly down that characteristic Edeyrnion hillside, with its grey rocks, its yellow-brown, reddish purple bracken, dying or dead, its emerald green mosses, its saffron bog grass, all of them bloodsucked into a metallic shimmer by that unshapely moon, he felt that he had caught on Medrawd's face a look that was much more appalling.

It was neither his mind nor his body that was hit by what he'd seen; it was his soul. It had given him a shiver of what might be called psychic gooseflesh. And it excited in him a horrible kind of pity.

As he pushed his way through the stalks of the dying bracken, and every now and then clutched both the objects he carried with a hurting intensity, there came into his mind a rough clumsily painted Byzantine picture that hung in his mother's bedchamber. It was a picture of the infant Jesus playing with a snake. The little Jesus, a comically plump babe, was lovingly and obstinately thwarting the one supreme desire of his dangerous plaything, *the desire to escape.* This desire had smouldered into such a recoil of tragic desperation that even as a boy Porius had read in the one small saurian eye which alone was visible the shuddering resolve, *sooner than not to escape,* to drag the world's hope of redemption down with him!

"It wants to escape," Porius said to himself as he shifted the Roman bottle to his left hand and grasped the spear with his right. "It wants to escape into Nothingness; and if God won't let him, he's ready to drag Creation down with him!"

Porius felt just then as if the pressure of his fingers upon these two things were sulky and obstinate questions, addressed to the wind in his face and to the cordlike stalks of the bracken that caught at his feet. From the wind he would have liked to know whether his father *had* done homage to Medrawd, and from the bracken whether he himself was just being wicked in his present sympathy with the serpent in his mother's picture.

Perhaps it was the rounded-off and final completeness of the Holy Family in this picture, surrounded by a triple circle of golden light, that stirred the blood within him such a blind, deep rush of revolt against that infant with the snake.

"It wants to escape," he repeated to himself, as he shifted the Roman bottle to his left hand and grasped the spear with his right. "It wants to escape into Nothingness or else to drag everything down with it!"

And as he walked round the edge of that marshy expanse of water towards Brother John's solidly built cell, and noticed no sign of those trestles in the Fountain to which Myrddin Wyllt had referred, far less any sign of a dead body, he actually found himself playing with a profane sympathy for his father's gesture of homage.

"If Medrawd," he said to himself, "had only seen old Rhun's image of the Time snake twisted round Cronos, and had heard the Henog conjuring with its tail and Myrddin with its head, he'd have had some cause for his look!"

Then suddenly a craving sprang up in Porius that felt to him like a craving in the very pit of his stomach, the vain and useless wish that he had been born soon enough, or that she had lived long enough, for him to have actually seen in the flesh his grandfather's mother, Creiddylad.

"I warrant," he thought, "when she gave suck to Iddawc the Apostate she taught him some old Cader Idris trick of lifting this jealous past and crazy future off their feet while you hugged the present!"

He was moving more awkwardly now that he was upon level ground. His enormous weight caused his feet as well as the butt of the heavy spear upon which he leaned to sink deep into the wet mud that stretched for some distance all round Saint Julian's Fountain. The simultaneous sinking at this particular moment of both his feet and his spear in that evil-smelling sticky blackness was an occurrence that annoyed him out of all proportion. The mental agitation to which he had been subjected for so many consecutive hours seemed to have sucked the natural resilience from every muscle in his body.

"I want sleep!" cried his neck, his arms, his thighs, his legs, his hands, his knees, in a general chorus. And taking advantage of this conspiracy in his soul's praetorian guard all manner of demon intruders began to invade his spirit's citadel.

Supposing his father *had* really made the traditional gesture of homage, did that mean he must refuse to send any Brythonic warriors to help the emperor if they weren't placed under the direct command of this sinister heir?

Nothing in the world did Porius find more difficult than the niceties of social and political discretion. These things from boyhood had bothered, perplexed, and infuriated him. The Gwyddyl-Ffichti mother of Morfydd had been always having savage quarrels with Rhun's mother over such matters.

All Gwyddyl-Ffichti women made much of ritual and ceremony, whereas Alarch ferch Iddawc resembled her brother Brochvael in contempt for such things. At that moment, with his feet in wet mud, with cold hollow reeds swishing against his knees, with the spear and bottle weighing him down, the intrigues of Arthur's court seemed intolerable. "I must get a breath of wind," he muttered aloud. "I must get a breath of wind, or I can't stand it."

Only a few times in all his life had Porius talked aloud to himself like this. He certainly was at a low ebb. "I've got to do something," he said to himself. "Medrawd must have put a *tynged* on me, or Myrddin Wyllt is turning me into an 'Avanc!'" This last notion tickled his fancy a good deal, for tales about this fabulous creature were constantly passing from one Auntie to another among the Modrybedd, and he imagined himself when the transformation was complete, dragging his monstrous and scaly bulk — he felt like it now! — through the cracking and crashing branches of the forest till he came to the rocks above the little group of houses and huts round the old marketplace and the new church of the place which Gorsant the priest insisted on calling "Corwen." Beyond Ty Cerrig and beyond Ogof-y-Gawr was the Cave of the Avanc, a hiding place that had been appropriated by a mysterious wanderer under the protection of the Modrybedd. It amused him to wonder what this disinherited traveller would do at the sudden reappearance of the Cave's primal owner!

The idea of Ty Cerrig and of Brochvael and his books made him think of Pelagius. "What would *he* do," he said to himself, "caught in a swamp like this at the lowest ebb of a night like this? Do philosophers ever practise their ideas when brute matter's got them by the throat? What would Pelagius do? Would he imagine himself free till he was free?"

Porius set himself to imagine himself liberated from this bog, not by a desperate effort of will, nor by a frantic confession of human frailty, but in what Brother John insisted was the true Pelagian method; by letting his soul imagine his rescue by his friend, the south wind, the wind that came from Cader Idris!

Using therefore his whole exhausted being, from his mud-caked hunting shoes to the top of his bare head, as a living bowstring he imagined himself, as vividly as he could, sending his soul like a released arrow towards the mountain; and with a sigh of relief waited the result.

And the result came. Whether its coming had in reality antedated this gesture of his imagination he refrained from asking himself; but the wind he prayed for, or prayed to, or simply aroused by a motion of his own soul, certainly did come. Very soon as it blew upon him, befogged, bewildered, and bedevilled though he was, his natural force began to return.

And it was not only from the huge upshrugged shoulders of Cader Idris that it came. It came from beyond the waters of Lake Tegid, from beyond the birthplace of the sacred river, from beyond the sand dunes of Harlech. It came from the vast sea that no ship has ever crossed since the sinking of Atlantis. Huge swirling moonlit waves, undulating up and down and carrying with them seaweeds and sea creatures from the rocks of Carbonek and the caverns of Caer Sidi, were giving it its power.

Phantasmal eidola of colossal ruins, white with sea brine, sea spindrift, and sea scum, and lit by glimmerings of phosphorus in the waste of waters that rolled above Lost Atlantis, let their buried mystery loose upon this wind! Nor was it only from mountain summit and ocean ooze that the wind reached him.

He felt it had searched out the deepest hiding places of the giant-children of the Cader; that it had descended into dried-up tarns and lakes and hollow caverns under forgotten cairns; that it had actually gathered into itself, into its very substance, the dust of the bones of the race whose blood was his blood!

"I can't understand it," he thought. "My mind's tired out, my body's crying for sleep, and yet my soul can shoot off to the ends of the earth and bring back miracles. Pelagius is right. Man's imagination and not God's will is what creates."

Quite easily now he pulled his feet out of the mud, and forcing his way through the reeds, reached the outer wall of Brother John's cell. The wall was of no very great height but it was majestic in its blank, unbroken austerity, and in the manner in which it rose from the mass of reeds.

Whether it was the new strength he had drawn into his deepest being from the wind's response, or whether it was that his craving for sleep made the sight of Brother John's habitation seem like a haven after stormy seas, Porius derived indescribable satisfaction from the mere appearance of that unbroken wall. "It comes straight out of the reeds," he said to himself. "The reeds can't keep it back!"

And his mind began drowsily and dimly — just as if he was beginning to go to sleep in a standing position — to think of that smooth windowless wall as his grandfather's Rome, and of the swaying reeds beneath it as the wayward forest dwellers it strove to control.

But suddenly all his sleepiness left him and his whole body grew taut. He was convinced he'd heard the sound between himself and that grey wall of the breathing of a man. It was too late to retreat even if he had dared to turn his back. He had a most unpleasant sensation, the sensation that a pair of unseen arms were aiming an arrow at him, an arrow dipped in the most deadly of all the poisons known to the forest people.

He jerked his spear out of the mud, but what he lifted as a weapon at that moment was not the spear but the Roman bottle. Two men, both somewhat stout and both very short, and each as he had suspected with bowstring drawn, leapt up from where they'd been concealed, and in absolute silence, without a cry or a word or a glance towards him, bolted off through the reeds in the direction of the nearest brushwood.

Porius drew a deep breath of limitless relief. "Druid's men!" he said to himself. And then, as he went slowly forward towards that blank wall, "Druid's men!" he repeated, not uttering the syllables aloud but articulating them to himself with childish satisfaction. He was beyond smiling but he could feel a particular muscle in his face twitching with excited amusement.

The truth was the sight of those two men fulfilled a deep craving within him. These people were the true natives, they and the Ffichti, and the giants; and oh, how satisfactory to see them bewilder and confound both their Roman and Brython conquerors!

What other race could do such a thing? A wrong had been done their druid — perhaps only had been rumoured to have been done, for he himself doubted whether Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd was dead — and though the wrong-doer might be heir to the Emperor Arthur, and though the greatest magician in Britain was among them with the pick of Arthur's horsemen, it was a throw of the dice whether these proud invaders would ever see Caergwynt or Caerleon again!

Aye! But it pleased him to think of these great ones being surrounded by poisoned arrows! It pleased him to know that they would always surround — yes! by day or night, by sun or moon, by land or water, by moor or mountain, with their precipitate arrows and still more precipitate magic — any intruders of whatever race, power, position, authority, who dared to approach their Fisher King's Fount, or touch with alien hooves and heels their sacred mounds of ancient ghosts.

He began to murmur aloud now, in an audible voice, the traditional and totally unintelligible words of the Fisher King's mystic chant. He did this deliberately, thinking as he did so: "This'll save me from dying howling under their druid's poison!"

But all the same he felt gay with a primordial gaiety that turned that mud and those reeds into objects whose mere existence on the earth was enough to justify the whole tragicomedy of life. Then the moment passed, and as he strode forward to that blank wall, his mind began playing again its old recessional tricks.

Who was he, who had the blood of the lonely cave dwellers of Eryri and Cader, to make so much of their pygmy successors? Who was he, who had shared the honey of the sun god with the white hound and become the covenanted comrade of that Greek's grandson, to glory in a people who had let their women be raped by the Gwyddyl-Ffichti? Had he not learnt at the Bishop's School to despise these little brothers of the foxes and eagles and deer and salmon, with their *gorsedds* of ghosts and their secret druids and their devilries from Africa?

The moment had passed. But what he had felt he *had* felt. The Henog was right there! No fluctuant and indetermined future could change what had been; though it could change the result of what had been. And how silently those two shooters of poisoned arrows had vanished! Like wisps of vapour they'd gone, and the forest without a sign or a sound had swallowed them up!

But he was under the wall now, and he couldn't help wondering how on earth Saint Julian ever got people to carry these huge stones to this spot, and when he got them here how he managed to sink their foundation in this mud. The masonry of the wall as he reached it now looked indeed far older than it could possibly have been if Saint Julian really built it. So old did it look that he began to wonder if the saint had not found it there and just appropriated it! Mud, lichen, moss, ferns, reeds, and ancient alder stumps pressed against it on every side. Unnumbered generations of dead leaves, secular death piled upon secular death, gave to the black pools between the rushes a strange, rich, foul smell, evilly sweet, lecherously drugging, and sinking down into the pit of Porius's stomach as his feet sank down into that moonlit mud.

The stones of Brother John's cell descended straight and deep into that same black mud, and when Porius reached them, the spear clenched in one hand and the water bottle in the other, and touched them with his cold knuckles, it was a rough, blind expanse of stone he touched, where miniature armies of moss and tiny ferns and little round-leaved trailing plants and squadrons of grey lichen seemed in league with the swamp and the forest in their slow tireless vegetative determination to go on invading this solitary outpost of human civilization until they had swallowed it up.

His exhaustion, both mental and physical, began to return now as he leaned forward with his knuckles pressed against that mossy stonework. A weird fear assailed him lest this whole place, with all its surroundings and with himself bending forward over his spear and his bottle, should be carried down into some faintly lit, greenish black underworld, where one illusion melted into another illusion and where all definite shapes and all definite thoughts shifted and shimmered and waxed and waned in a phantasmagoric mist.

He was aroused by the neighing of a horse oh the further side of the building, a sound that was responded to by a similar neighing at some distance to his right. "I pray Brother John's cell's unbarred," he thought. "And I pray he'll be too sleepy to do more than greet me. I shall certainly be too sleepy to want anything to eat."

He moved back from the wall and straightened his body. Then he dragged his feet out of the wet mud; and lowering his head a little while he kept his shoulders erect, he plodded resolutely round the angle of the edifice. He soon found himself on the familiar pavement of flat stones in front of the cell. The entrance was so low and narrow between the huge slab of the lintel and the huge slab of the threshold that a full-sized man had to squeeze himself through it.

Thank the Lord! The small inner door of oak, so old that it had become black, yielded at once to his pressure; and there he was, safe once more in that spacious low room, the room he knew best in all the world save his own bedchamber in the eastern wall of Mynydd-y-Gaer! He could straighten his back now, though the roof was only a few inches above his head; and he could chuckle too and relax all the muscles of mind, body, and soul, and groan and laugh and weep and in fact be himself to the limit, as he could be nowhere else in the whole wide world; no, not even in Mynydd-y-Gaer.

There was a small yellow flame flickering from a blackened wick floating in oil in an earthen bowl above Brother John's sleeping place. This was a bracken-stuffed mattress raised above the floor and resting on a number of wooden blocks and covered with a couple of sheepskins whose unbleached wool, apparently left just as it was when the sheep were killed, may have been the cause of the curiously pleasant and yet curiously unpleasant smell that from boyhood Porius associated with the Brother's presence.

The old man's eyes were open, and Porius sank down at once on his knees before his teacher and seized his hand. He was piously kissing it when he realized how exhausted the old man was. It seemed to be with difficulty that the hermit hoisted himself up on his elbow to give his pupil his blessing, and as he sank down again the life-weary expression in his face as that small flame flickered upon his eye sockets alarmed his visitor.

"Are you all right, Brother John?"

"Of course I'm all right, foolish one. It's you who're at the end of your rope! I've never seen you so done for, and your legs are soaking wet. How's the fire going? Better put more wood on!"

Porius rose, went obediently to the further end of the room, stirred the fire with a charred stick, threw on a fresh log, and returned to the old man's side.

"There is some wine and some—" began the recluse feebly, but Porius cut him short. "You go to sleep, Master of my soul! I don't want anything to eat or to drink. I'll just take off my shoes and stockings and I'll be asleep as soon as you are. No, no! I don't want anything. If I *did* I'd know where to get it. All I want is to sleep. Good night, Brother John!"

"Good night, my dear son!"

Porius had already noticed the empty couch so carefully and neatly prepared for him on the right-hand side of the fireplace, and very soon after a perfunctory and customary prayer to repeat which he fell on his knees by the fire and pressed his hands against the wall, he gave himself up to the not very easy task of unlacing his boots and leggings. When this was done he dragged off his tunic and belt and hung them on an iron bar. Then rolling himself up luxuriously on the blankets which had been prepared for him, he let his head sink down with delicious gratitude upon what he knew must have been a special pillow reserved for visitors, so dainty was it with its silken edges, and so soft with its wild-goose feathers.

"How long," he pondered as he sank down into what seemed a barge of swans-down, rocking on the waves of the Bosporus, "how long do goose feathers stay sweet? Perhaps Pelagius had these very ones under his head when he lay in this cell.” He felt blissfully sad that the enchantment of this divine moment could not go on longer, and he tried to prolong it without changing it.

He watched the flickering glow of the fire upon the stone wall beside him. He watched the smoke whirling in spiral curves under the black crossbeams that supported the roof, and finally escaping through the two deep window slits above Brother John’s head. It came intermittently in irregular gusts as some particular one of the older logs gave up the ghost and some less charred one burst into fresh flame.

He began considering vaguely what line of argument Brother John would advise him to take with Anastasius when his voyage with Dion Dionides was over, and he felt as if these spirals of smoke were moonlit ripples moving from one shore of the Hellespont to the other.

For a passing moment he was jerked back to reality by a broken catch in the old man’s breathing when some wisp of the escaping smoke crossed his face; and as he watched the small yellow flame from the oil wick at his side fall upon that hooked nose, that low bulbous forehead, that long sinewy neck, and heard a sound as if the old man were masticating the smoke with a curious gusto, there came into his mind a question he used to ask himself as a boy about the Grecian prince who embraced a cloud!

Could a man with the blood of the giants in him embrace air, water, and fire as though they were a cloud, and embrace them without ravishing or devouring any beautiful goddess, as he was accustomed to do with the elements in what he called his “cavoseniargizing?”

But the cloud that he was embracing now, the cloud made up of the life of that little yellow flame, the life of that fragrant woodsmoke, the life of the goose feathers in the pillow of Pelagius, was beginning to take a shape that had neither Morfydd’s arms nor his mother’s breasts. To his waking reason such a vision would have been monstrous, but as his limbs relaxed and his mind dissolved into quiescence he derived no shame but rather a luxurious, though not exactly a voluptuous pleasure from embracing the great Myrddin Wyllt himself, while the emperor’s nephew in the form of a small snake, with infinite gratitude in its Saurian eyes, melted into a stubble-coloured mist.

CHAPTER X. Brochvael

TY CERRIG, OR the Stone House, had been fully and somewhat painfully awake long before the first glow of the risen sun struck the watchtower of Mynydd-y-Gaer on the opposite height.

Even now the sun would have to be quite high in the heaven before its beams lit up the dwelling of Brochvael ab Iddawc or warmed the heart of that learned traveller's daughter; and there would soon come a season when, with its still shorter winter arches, it sank down behind Cader Idris without touching the Stone House at all.

Though two years younger than Einion, Brochvael looked at least ten years older as he now sat with an open book before him as was his wont when he broke his fast. He sat in his library by a large log fire in his usual place; and the chair, whose massive uncarved arms, oaken seat, and straight back had been rendered more comfortable for his gaunt figure by sheepskins of undyed wool, looked as it always did to his daughter when she entered the chamber as if it were an integral part of his person.

She herself was carrying in both hands her own morning meal which was a mixture of hot milk and barley cake.

He looked up when she entered and pushed his table a few inches nearer the other side of the fire where there was a horse block covered with an embroidered cushion. "Gwrgi not back yet, eh?" he enquired wearily; and then, before she had time to answer, "Sit down, child," he added, "you look worn out."

"Do I?" she said, making the particular movement with her mouth that was her usual substitute for a smile; but as soon as she was seated opposite him and had put her spoon into the steaming bowl she looked at him sharply. “You’re surely going to eat more than that?”

He glanced wryly at the dish of minced mutton that had gone cold, and breaking in half one of the small round loaves in the centre of the table which he had been meticulously arranging in a neat circle, he hurriedly began picking out little gobbets of breadcrumb from each segment, dipping them in his flagon of the red Arvernian wine, and masticating them with the air of a person appeasing gnawing hunger.

When Morfydd frowned the whole of the upper part of her face went through a convulsion of minute unexpected lines, and this happened now. “You don’t imagine you can last till *hora decima* on bread and wine? And there may not be any *hora decima* or *hora undecima* either. Nobody knows what’s going to happen today. By tonight we may be groping through Gwyddylgwern with Arthur’s horsemen after us and the Modrybedd’s druid throwing the same sort of mist on us as Caswallawn threw on the Seven Horsemen when he murdered Cradawc ap Bran!”

“Get on then yourself, child, with your bread-and-milk!”

The girl sighed and obeyed, but the frown did not leave her face, and through her narrowed eyelids and through the steam that rose from her bowl and spoon she continued to stare sadly at the grotesque motions of her father’s jaws.

The man had once fallen, in his reckless search for books, into an Ostrogothic prison in Italy, where for every day he had refused to reveal the hiding place of his Byzantine guide they had gouged out a tooth; and Morfydd never felt tenderer to him than when he made those faces. It was as if his whole skull were at work.

Brochvael’s library was a low arched chamber with arrow-slit windows in both walls at right angles to the entrance arch, which was narrow and low, and also to the fire whose smoke on a windless morning formed itself into twisting curves and feathery wisps above their heads, but when the wind was east departed in serpentine coils out of the west window and when west out of the other.

Save his own chair and his daughter's cushioned horse block which stood beneath a projection of stone against which she could lean when so inclined, the only piece of furniture was an old Etruscan couch, hardly two feet wide but very long, for which Brochvael had paid more gold pieces than he now cared to remember.

Here Morfydd would spend many an hour lying on her back reading, while Canna ferch Glam, who in her moods and her furies called herself *gwrach-y-gogledd,* or "witch of the north," and who had helped out at the birth of both Morfydd and Morvran, worked in the kitchen or scrubbed the floor of Morfydd's room upstairs.

The old man had already swallowed the inside of three barley loaves, and the girl had tilted into her mouth the last drops from the milk bowl, when she suddenly enquired in a low clear voice, but with a casual inflexion as if it were careless thought: "Gwrgi heard no more up at the Gaer last night?"

"Not a word! Euronwy told him herself she'd heard nothing; nothing since Drudwyn came back with the boy. They were both in that tent then. That's all we know."

"Father, listen! Do you think the prince went back to the Gaer after you left him? Or do you think he stayed all night with the Modrybedd?"

He finished his wine slowly, staring at her over the heavy goblet before replying. But she left her stool and came round to his side. "Shall I fetch you half a flagon more?"

"No, no, child! I must keep my wits clear for, as you say, we don't know from hour to hour what's going to happen. I feel sorry for Euronwy."

"I don't!"

He put his arm round her and she balanced herself on his chair's edge. But in spite of these intimacies his voice was troubled. "I wish I knew what's really in your heart when you say a thing like that."

"Just what I say! I hate Euronwy."

"Morfydd!"

"Well, I do. What's the use of giving a person a thing, and then, the moment you remember how nice it is to have it, snatching it back? What's the use of *that,* Father?"

Brochvael stared at her for a second and then caught her meaning. She was thinking of her betrothed. "How can you say such things, and today of all days, when we don't know what's happened to them?"

"To them?"

"Uncle Einion should be over there looking for them, making sure they're all right and that Brother John's all right and that those silly courtiers with their lancings and prancings haven't done any more harm." He tightened his hold. "I like you, little one, extraordinarily well when you mock at young men; but I don't like your bitterness over *her* up there. What has that unhappy woman got except this great hulking man of yours? He's flesh and bone of hers, and you two aren't even man and wife yet! It's cruel of you not to understand. I tell you she has nobody else. No, no! I know" — this was in answer to the impatient movement with which she would have slipped out of his grasp— "I know what you're going to say — that she has *her* father as *you've* yours; but girl, girl! Fathers cannot, in the nature of things, be the same as mothers. You're the fruit of my seed; but that boy of yours—"

She did escape now and standing erect before him gave him a long, steady, desperate look out of eyes which as she stared darkened before him till they became as black as pine-wood ashes. “I — sometimes — wonder —” she began in a curiously deliberate manner, “if I—”

“Mistress! Mistress! Come quick! Here’s Gwrgi running!” It was the *gwrach-y-gogledd* in the curtained doorway, and the girl flew round the table and was at her side before Brochvael was on his feet. They disappeared, Morfydd first, the old woman shuffling after, and he knew they were climbing the steps that led to the girl’s chamber.

He was a tall man when he stood up; and when he peered out of the arrow slit which commanded the slope towards the rock ledge where was the abode of the Modrybedd, his head nearly touched the library’s roof. Yes! *There* of a surety was Gwrgi; but though the method by which he was accelerating his descent certainly differed from walking, it had little resemblance to running. It was in fact a series of scrambling hops, on hands and toes, varied by even more rapid slidings on back or side where the rock’s surface was smooth, but such as it was it got him down with surprising swiftness.

“I must go out to meet him to save her the shock,” he thought, but he felt compelled as he strode past the fire hurriedly to close the parchment-bound manuscript that lay open by his empty flagon, lest the old woman in clearing the table should spoil one of those perfect pages. Once let his fingers, however, come in contact with this treasure, which was one of the earliest specimens of the classic piety of Cassiodorus of Calabria, and there was a chance that though the voice of Gwrgi reached him in a piercing cry proclaiming the death of the emperor’s nephew and the advance against the Gaer of the whole of Arthur’s force, he still would have sunk for a final second into the artistry of that noble foundation, and while the doom of his

House hung suspended in the scales, have luxuriated in the lettering of *Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoseon Liber Primus!*

But that moment's delay was decisive and when, stooping under the chamber's arch, he emerged into the passage, it was only to find that Morfydd was before him and was already across the threshold of the House of Stone and racing down the pavemented path to meet the messenger's approach.

But Gwrgi was so agitated and breathless that when Brochvael reached the pair, followed at some distance by the aged nurse, he caught the drift of the good news quicker than did his daughter whose hurried and interrupting questions confused the man's mind.

As they all four moved back together Gwrgi enlarged upon what he'd heard. The prince had returned before dawn only to find what the Modrybedd already knew; that the druid's people had been recalled, that those who had reported the murder of Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd were now denying that the corpse exposed in the Fount was his at all, that by *hud* and *lledrith* the druid had restored his brother, and finally that Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch had been escorted out of the country by Afagddu the Hideous.

Pressed by Morfydd to give further details, especially with regard to Porius and Rhun, all he could be persuaded to say was that they were well where they were; and that where they were was with the emperor's friends.

"But Gwrgi, man!" cried the nurse, "do you mean to say that the Derwydd will allow Afagddu Hagr to help that wicked young man back to the emperor? From the tales of him I hear, the emperor sent him to us to get rid of him; and here we go guarding him home like a Queen of Gaul lest he see a drop of blood that's not of his own spilling and a glint of death iron that's not of his own sharpening!"

To his own complete surprise and to the consternation of Morfydd this speech threw Brochvael into a sudden rage.

"Gogfran Derwydd," he announced sternly, "will allow what the Prince of Edeyrnion allows him to allow! And I'll have you all remember this, while I live and the sword of Cunedda's unbroken, the Gaer, not the Giant's Cave, rules here. If the Stone House held to the Gaer while Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles lived, it's not going to kiss the ground before Gogfran ap Greidawl, or any other derwydd, when she's dead!"

So seldom did Brochvael lose his self-control that the shock of this outburst upon the two women was extreme. Gwrgi was startled too, but with him it merely served to emphasize a sullen anger with his master that had been steadily growing since Morvran's death. Had he, he asked himself, come sliding and shuffling down those rocks with this good news only to hear his people's princesses disparaged?

"These proud Brythons are all the same," he thought. "They insult each other. They rob and maim and murder each other. But let *us* assert ourselves — and in a moment they've joined forces, in a moment they've become one bone, one blood, one tongue, one purpose! The Romans were just the same, and they made all the nations of the earth obey them; but who rules Rome now? A crazy Goth, more ignorant than my old ox Blackie. They say he can't even read the letters of his own name!"

All sorts of vague instincts and obscure intimations were at that moment stirring in Gwrgi's consciousness. He was aware of the Brythons like blurred images of domination, ruling, and building and making laws; and then — gone like smoke! He was aware of the Romans conquering the Brythons, ruling and building and making laws; and then — gone like smoke!

“Does this Arthur really think he can play at emperor with a pack of proud boys on long-tailed Cernyw horses? The yellow heathen from Germania will pluck out their bowels, proud horses and proud boys alike, until some other race conquers them in their turn. Romans, Brythons, Saxons, they all depend on conquering. They can’t live without it.

“And what does that mean? It means they’re the slaves of slaves! It means they’re not independent like we are. My old ox may serve me, but I’m not Blackie’s slave. I may serve Brochvael, but Brochvael’s not my slave. *And why not?* Because though we’ve grown up together we’re independent of each other. Old Blackie’s got a free soul. He looks at me and says, ‘So far and no further, Gwrgi ap Cyngar!’

“And I say to him, ‘My ox goad has no point. I’m neither your slave nor your conqueror, Blackie. You and I are two free souls! We work together, of course, for we’ve got to live. We work for Brochvael, of course, for we’ve got to eat. But our souls are free. Yours doesn’t depend on mine. Mine doesn’t depend on yours. And we wouldn’t turn a hair if Brochvael sailed to Carthage and never came back!

‘“But the Romans can’t live without the Sons of Cunedda, and the Sons of Cunedda can’t live without the Romans; and neither of them can live without conquering the Saxons or being conquered by the Saxons. What have we to do with conquering people, Blackie? We never even conquered the giants!

‘“Why, when Rhitta Gawr took refuge in the Gaer we let him alone there. We let him die in peace there. It’s because I let *you* alone, Blackie, and don’t put iron in my goad to prod you with, that my soul’s free of your soul. Conquering’s a sweaty job, Blackie, and conquerors’ souls are sticky souls. But ours are free and independent. They wander where they please. They have no desire to rule Edeyrnion.

'"But Edeyrn the Brython can do no more than put his name on our land, just as Manlius the Roman can do no more than put a toga on Edeyrn, or the emperor do no more than send his nephew here to murder and be murdered.'"

While these consolatory thoughts passed through the mind of Gwrgi ap Cyngar, he instinctively avoided meeting the eyes of Edeyrn's grandson and occupied the moment by picking up a broken stick and automatically clearing away the rubble from certain Roman words he had many times carelessly noticed on a stone in this path, the words *"civis venedotius,"* a Venedotian citizen of Rome.

Brochvael himself had fallen into a fit of gloomy shame over his indiscreet words. He was standing where he had uttered them, staring straight across the river at the wooded ridge terminated by the wide circle of stone walls and the massive watchtower of Mynydd-y-Gaer.

What would his mother Indeg have done if she'd heard him speak in that proud Brythonic tone of her three sisters? But there it was! He couldn't change the marrow in his bones; and his bones, as that outburst showed, would till death be those of the House of Cunedda.

Gwrgi meanwhile, who had already scraped back with his heel the rubble he had just removed from the word "civis," was surprised to notice that the two female figures, the slight one and the squat one, had already reached the steps of the Stone House and were conversing with a tall lad who had suddenly appeared on the threshold.

"It's Gwythyr," he said to himself. "Something's happened at the Gaer! Like enough there'll be new trouble now for the master." And contemplating that silent, staring figure, a dim sense of pity stirred within him, and he found himself thinking that it was hard to quarrel for long with a man who had no teeth and whose voice when he lost his temper sounded so much like the wind in a cracked wall. “After all, he’s the son of Indeg,” he said to himself. “To the devil with this Emperor Arthur!”

“Well, Gwythyr!” said Brochvael presently, when they were all together on the steps, face to face with the same bucolic youth who had brought the letter to the tent and carried off Rhun’s white hound. “Has the prince got back? Is your lady well?”

“My Lady says,” replied the youth, making an awkward movement with a pair of dead geese he was carrying towards the old woman, who promptly took possession of this good gift, “that she’ll be obliged if Morfydd ferch Kymeinvoll will come to the Gaer as soon as may be to hear the news from Prince Porius.”

“Has he come back? Has Rhun ap Gwrnach come back?” It was Morfydd herself who asked these hurried questions, but Gwythyr was too simple and shy even to look at her. He kept his eyes fixed steadily and apprehensively on her father’s, and it was not until Brochvael repeated in a friendly voice the monosyllable “Well?” that the boy felt that whatever the mysterious authorities might be that ruled over the Stone House it was their destiny to be challenged now by the still more mysterious authorities that ruled over the Gaer.

“He haven’t seen him, nor he haven’t seen the other one, nor he haven’t heard nought that can be repeated; but there *be* a lot being said here and there, they tell him.”

There was no need to explain to Brochvael, nor indeed to any of the boy’s hearers, what this rigmarole meant, nor were they ignorant of the fact that when he said “he” it was only the forest people’s characteristic *alibi* from all personal responsibility. This “he” might be a “she”; or it might be the person, whether he or she, who was then speaking, or it might be the mass voice of the crowd.

Whoever "he" was, he was one who could not be blamed for anything. Nor did Gwythyr's hearers misinterpret his meaning; namely, that though not commissioned from headquarters to report on the event, the Gaer was, as a matter of fact, ringing and tinging with rumours about Porius and Rhun.

"You are a very good messenger, Gwythyr," said Brochvael warmly, "and since Gwrgi has just brought the good news I'll give *him* a piece of my Greek chain from Mitylene and *you* a piece of my African chain from Numidia. Wait a moment, Morfydd! I want you to touch them and put luck into them."

None of the three persons thus involved looked pleased. None of them even pretended to look pleased. But this did not prevent Canna ferch Glam from muttering with fury, "Why am I always the one to be left out? Why aren't women sent on such errands? *They* would bring home the real news!"

But Brochvael shared with the prince the Brythonic mania for scattering fragments of personal adornment upon their retainers; and so, while no one was discourteous enough to move away and even the old woman confined her protests to inarticulate mutterings, the toothless friend of Sidonius and Cassiodorus searched through the numerous pockets and pouches which were sewn inside the black Gallic mantle which he always wore over the customary leather tunic.

These receptacles were both wide and deep; and since the man carried them everywhere and derived such obvious satisfaction in distributing their contents, it was a puzzle to strangers why his local popularity was not overpowering. But overpowering it certainly was not. The murder of his only son, disciple of his studies and convert to his ideas, a deed he had neither forestalled nor avenged, provided a shadowy justification for this mysterious unpopularity, at the heart of which no doubt was the perilous rumour, encouraged by Gorsant the priest, that he dabbled in the black art.

Minnawc Gorsant had not been long in this vicinity before he began his campaign to have the name of the town changed from "Llan-Mithras" to "Corwen," and Brochvael's passion for Greek had offered just the sort of weak spot in the devil's armour that he was eminently qualified to turn to the advantage of Christ. That the owner of the House of Stone had lost his teeth in saving a Byzantine monk from the Goths made no difference. There was clearly some *tynged* upon him, what Homer would have called his *Keer,* that tempted him to play the very part most likely to bring him to destruction.

On this particular occasion Morfydd gave her father one quick, tender, hopeless glance and staring past him, with a look like and yet unlike his own just now, plunged again, as she fixed her eyes on the ramparts of the Gaer, into tragic pondering.

Forcing herself to smile on the unmoved recipients of the few broken silver and copper chain links which it was her destiny presently, on what Brochvael insisted was an historic moment in the life of Edeyrnion, to place in the hands of Gwrgi and Gwythyr, she turned his attention from the perfunctoriness of the men's response to an immediate and practical question.

Could she, she asked him, have the donkey saddled, so that Canna might accompany her to the Gaer? And would it be all right for Gwythyr to wait till they were ready to start?

He agreed cheerfully to the proposal. "You can both stay up there for the banquet if you like," he said cheerfully, visualizing a solitary traveller's repast, made by himself for himself, and eaten and drunk with the relish of the Metamorphoseon of Ovidius in that perfectly copied manuscript of the Gothic king's expert secretary.

Half an hour later, by the modern water clock, given him in Rome by Anicius Manlius Boethius — who like himself was rumoured to be a black magician — he watched the little party thread their way between the huts towards the narrow wooden bridge which led to the poorer part of the town. Here the river was flanked by the small wooden huts of such as lived by hunting and fishing, and by the somewhat more substantial dwellings of the semi-free serfs who worked for the owners of the barley and wheat fields. Gwythyr was walking a few paces in front of the donkey, whose bridle Morfydd held as she listened respectfully to the old woman's conversation.

He watched them till they were safely across the bridge, and when they vanished into one of the fragments of virgin forest which still clung about the eastern slope of the high promontory that terminated in Mynydd-y-Gaer, he turned his gaze upon the wide expanse of scattered wooden houses, larger than the fishermen's and hunters' huts, that from an era long before the coming of the Romans had constituted an important settlement of the forest people, and since that time had been considerably enlarged by the erection of the various stone edifices that Romanized Brythons regarded as necessary to civilization.

But it was not to the houses of men but to the house of the Christian god that Brochvael now directed his attention. And he fancied he saw, just as his nephew had done from his watch on the Gaer the previous day, the black-robed form — to him even more sinister than to Porius — of Gorsant the priest building his walls.

The walls had certainly grown both higher and wider in the last few months. Brochvael recalled them at midsummer when the heathen fires of the forest people to their ancient god Beli Mawr had been put out by the same fanatical Christians who murdered Morvran. “Yes,” he thought, “they’re a lot higher since then!”

And he saw this black-robed man building and still building and always building, and he saw these walls growing ever higher and wider, wider and higher; and he saw others worse than this man, and others again worse still; and he saw inside the walls horrible things being done; and he saw people like Morvran being tortured there because they had wiser and kindlier thoughts than those in power and because they spoke what they thought.

He had been looking forward to his afternoon meal with none but Ovidius Naso to share the Gallic wine and the cheese made by their “witch of the north,” but the thought of his son and the thought of those growing walls shutting out the natural world, and the thought of the power of fanaticism, whether spiritual or temporal, to pervert human nature and suppress the natural freedom of the soul fell upon him with a dark cloud of sadness. “I’ll help Gwrgi turning over that stubble,” he said to himself. “As long as I’ve got Morfydd, fate’s got me! Body of God! I wish she *were* safely married to Porius ab Einion!”

Repassing the front of his house and proceeding westward, he soon detected Gwrgi’s familiar figure standing by a black ox about a thousand yards off and he strolled leisurely in his direction. He was reluctant to pounce upon the plump little man at that particular juncture for he knew he rarely returned from the spacious chambers of the Giant’s Cave without a pitcher full of the heady elderberry wine, the making of which Auntie Erddud left to none, and the virtue of which none but a true Iberian like this son of Cyngar could properly savour. To a Roman after a draught of Falernian it would have been sickly sweet, and to a Brython after a draught of mead it would have been sickly sour. But to Gwrgi it was nectar.

He sometimes suspected Gwrgi of letting his ox, Blackie, have a taste of the princess's wine. The two were such close friends that he sometimes doubted whether the goad the man carried had any iron about it at all. At this moment the plough, the ox, and Gwrgi himself made one blurred image in the misty sunshine, and he was beginning to wonder just how in that curtained-off corner of Canna's kitchen where Gwrgi slept there could possibly be concealed such a token of the day's news as a silver trinket from Mitylene when a most exciting thought seized him. Why not write a letter in choice Latin to Cassiodorus himself and send it by the emperor's people? Arthur surely must have his own ships.

"What's the good," he said to himself, "of possessing all these letters of Sidonius, the greatest writer of modern times, and not use them to improve my own style from his lively touch? Cassiodorus would recognize it at once, of course. But why not? Sidonius Modestus — even though he *was* a bishop, permitting these innocent vanities — no doubt left copies for posthumous publication; but since I've got the originals?"

'"My servant Gwrgi,'" he began at once, pausing on the edge of the stubble field for the mental inditing of the projected epistle, "and I'd better add *'filius Cyngar'*— 'My servant Gwrgi, *filius Cyngar,* is a plump, undersized, middle-aged individual, with roving black eyes full of a gregarious and glowing curiosity' — no! Sidonius would do better than that — 'full of insatiable curiosity tempered by amiable mischief; and as I visit my fields after our northern harvest and watch the harnessing of an old ox to an old plough' — no! at this point I *must* be honest— 'watch the land how rough it is, and the soil how sour, and any chance of a good crop how faint, I have need of all my philosophy. My custom is to buy my grain from the farms along the river which like the ploughlands of the Nile grow fat upon the sediment left by the floods, and as I have not scrupled to confess to your paternal illustriousness on previous occasions, I have considered it best, following many notable masters in the art of cultivation, not to exhaust expensive beasts and modern implements for the sake of what is doomed to be barren.'"

It was at this point, just when he beheld with a vivid interior vision how well the epithet "barren" would look on the parchment at the beginning of the sentence, and how beautifully the verb "exhaust" would clinch and conclude it, that he remembered the artfulness with which Sidonius would introduce into a letter his actual sensations at the moment of writing; and he wondered how the sentence would look if he groaned in it about his books being a furlong away while he shuffled through wretched stubble, and about his morbid amusement at Gwrgi's passion for elderberry wine, and the man's conspiracy with Blackie and his inability to give him even the mildest prod.

But his imaginary letter — now it had become an entity — disregarded his literary conscience as completely as Blackie disregarded his economic one. "My servant," it proceeded, "is vigorously ploughing with a handsome ox as glossy black as his own head; and although the plough" — at this point his conscience burst in with a rush— "although the plough has not yet turned over as much as a grave's length of these meagre patches of pallid straw I can still admire the glossy blackness of these two heads, the human and the bovine, as I see them outlined against ferny rocks and mossy stumps, just as if the scene had no connection with my personal fate and no relation to the contests that drench the land in blood."

But the letter to Cassiodorus was not apparently the only bodiless entity hovering over that stubble field and possessed of the power to administer shocks to the absentminded; nor were such entities more disposed than others to remain content with a minor role. Tearing through the heart of the half-created letter like an airy dagger through an insubstantial scroll, there came rushing once more upon Brochvael's mind at this moment that wild cry of Morfydd's addressed to the Lady of the Gaer— "I hate her!"

Gloomily and remorsefully as he plodded on, he cursed the weakness of his character and his lack of proportion and sound judgment that had worked such havoc upon them all. When at last — no very difficult task — he had overtaken Gwrgi and Blackie and had expressed his grievance against his *Keer* by a weary kick at one of the upturned furrows, he caught sight of a small familiar flower that had been broken off after its untimely uprooting from the disturbed soil.

"Fumus Terrae! Smoke-of-the-Earth," he muttered, and Gwrgi glancing sideways displayed so much interest that the ox, after a few plunges, stood like an image of black granite. "Gwrgi—" began the master of the House of Stone.

"My Lord?"

"Do you suppose your young mistress confides much in Canna ferch Glam?"

"She says not."

"You mean Canna tells you she doesn't?"

Gwrgi's black eyes narrowed into two such thin slits that they made the fanciful Brochvael think of a couple of barbaric sword cuts in ivory-coloured parchment. They also made him forget his letter to Cassiodorus, a lapse which certainly would never have happened to the deceased Bishop of Arverne if *he* had been composing in the fields.

"She curses her secrecy night and day, my Lord. It hurts her to the heart. The poor old *gwrach* is always telling me so."

"She doesn't bear her a serious grudge for it, I hope? She and my wife — well! You know what they were!"

The slits in the parchment mask at his side — as Gwrgi thrust his amateur ox goad into the ground and proceeded to lean on it, his round well-shaven chin pressed hard upon his knuckles — widened a little, till they suggested to his troubled master two peepholes into the interior of a brazen image wherein burned jet-black flames.

He sighed heavily, remembering the savage feud that had gone on without surcease for all the years of the beautiful Gwyddyles' life. He remembered his sister Alarch's warning that if *that* woman didn't change her ways he'd find his wife one day dead in her bed.

Had the old *gwrach-y-gogledd* formed the same sort of conspiracy with Gwrgi against Morfydd? Had the two of them betrayed his son into the priest's hands? No! *That* at any rate was impossible! No daughter of Glam, no woman with brothers like hers, outlaws to the last against Rome, would betray children she had once nursed.

But Brochvael still felt troubled as he stared at the plump little man leaning on his goad. What *was* going on within that glossy black skull? "I must get her married," he thought. And then that cry "I *hate her"* and her look as she uttered it rushed on him again. "Thanks be to the gods, my brother likes her! The sooner they're married the better it'll please *him.* A fool, a fool! That's what I've been over both of them; and now he's dead and she's unhappy. It doesn't pay to be a reader of books, at least not of Greek ones, in this modern age. Instead of writing letters to Cassiodorus I ought to have imitated him and served Arthur in Caergwynt, as he serves the Ostrogoth in Ravenna!"

He had been thinking all this while with extreme rapidity as he gazed at the curious-shaped little plant he held in his hand, and it was therefore with a shock of surprise that he had no sooner held it to his own nose and directed it towards the nostrils of his companion when Gwrgi, unclasping his hands, snatched the plant away and stepping quickly to the head of the ox placed it between the creature's moist lips where it was soon crunched up and swallowed.

"What the devil—" began Brochvael angrily.

"Master, *please!* I did it for the Lady Morfydd! I could see you didn't know; and I feared you might—"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"It grew from the blood of the Avanc when Huw Gadarn's oxen pulled it out of Lake Tegid! 'Lucky for bread, fatal for bed' is the saying; and I know it's true from my own experience, and so does Canna ferch Glam for we've mentioned it only lately, and we're both blood relatives to girls who meddled with it, reading, as they say, the saying wrong. *They* thought what it said was: 'Lucky for bed, fatal for bread,' but of course it's the other way."

"Why 'of course?'" enquired the older man.

But Gwrgi was calm, even a little patronizing. "Because Smoke-of-the-Earth only grows where grain will grow, so it's lucky for grain; but the mist genders it without seed, so it's unlucky for offspring. That's the truth, Brochvael ab Iddawc, or may my bones be ploughed up by a Saxon plough!" He paused while the ox moved tentatively and cautiously a step or two forward, dragging the plough after him.

"Worrow! Hold on, can't you! What a doing, silly? Do'ee think Smoke-of-the-Earth only grows for *your* pleasure, Blackie? But there's something else, my Lord, if I may say so."

"Say on, Gwrgi."

"When I was *up there* just now," and Gwrgi gestured with his head in the direction of the Giant's Cave, "Erim ab Uchtryd *wasn't* there, but Amreu ap Ganion *was* there; and while I was waiting I heard him tell one of the maids that Arthur's people weren't to be let stay more than twenty-four hours, and if they weren't gone by then—"

"Are you absolutely sure you heard that, Gwrgi? I beg you to be careful in what you recall, more careful than you were that day when—"

Gwrgi interrupted him but lowered his voice to a whisper, as if afraid that Blackie might smell a whiff of the mist-gendered plant from the direction of his stall. "He said what I tell you, my Lord, and he said further that there wasn't a ford or a bridge where you take the Sarn Elen track that wasn't guarded by our best bowmen; and that there wasn't an arrow among them that hadn't been dipped by Gogfran Derwydd himself!"

Brochvael stared at the man, trying in vain to read what he had at the back of his mind, for well did he know the equivocations and indirections and tergiversations of his retainer. "He's been at that elderberry wine," he thought, "or he wouldn't be so loquacious. Must I go and find out?"

This perturbed question might have been addressed to the single liquid and lustrous eye, full of a mild and patient curiosity, which Blackie, by a tremendous twist of his neck, had just succeeded in turning upon him.

"What a life!" he inwardly groaned as the image of the wine from Arverne, and the Ovid from Brutium, and his sheepskin-covered chair, and his favourite cheese, swam before his mind.

"Yes," he replied to his own heart, for Gwrgi had resumed both rope and goad, and Blackie's head was in its normal position, "I must go. I should curse myself to hell if anything happened that I could have prevented by going."

Sadly and slowly he removed his unconventional mantle; that mantle which made his friends uneasy, his enemies derisive, and visitors to Edeyrnion more than suspicious. He had acquired it in Etruria, but that fact did not prevent Porius Manlius from regarding it with superstitious horror.

It made the old Roman think of a figure in his childhood from whom he and his youthful companions had always fled in panic. Like the Virgilian Sibyl, this being inhabited a lonely cavern and, like her, he knew the descent to Avernus.

“Take this home when you go, Gwrgi, and if you don’t mind I’d rather you didn’t strap it on Blackie’s back. You can put it on yourself to go home in if you like. And don’t let my fire or Canna’s either — but I needn’t tell you *that* — get too low.”

“Put it on?” muttered Gwrgi in Blackie’s ear when Brochvael was out of sight. “Put it on?” he repeated as he allowed the animal to lick up a drop of the princess’s wine out of the palm of his hand. “Did you hear *that,* Ox of Huw Gadarn? Put on the mantle of Satan’s master? Risk my spirit with the priest of Jesus, my soul with the priest of Mithras, and my skin with Gogfran Derwydd? Have I become as crazy as Brochvael ab Iddawc to take such risks? No, no, such is not *our* nature, is it, Blackie? But we’ll do what we’re told to do. ‘Watch the race and praise the winner’ is my motto. But as he says in his thoughtful care, we won’t strap it on you, we’ll just throw it across you, and leave the rest to Beli Mawr.”

Twenty minutes later Brochvael stood at the entrance to the dwelling of the Three Aunties. The Giant’s Cave had been so enlarged during the last three hundred years that its original nature was quite lost to a casual view. Its overarching stone roof was entirely covered with ancient oak beams, blackened now by the smoke of generations, and divided into many chambers, most of which had their own narrow window slits into the air and light. The main entrance was wide and a good deal higher than the more modern one that led into the House of Stone.

It was surmounted by a deeply carved inscription in ogham, that is to say, in letters composed of straight lines; but the words represented by these lines were neither in Greek nor Latin, neither in Gallic nor Brythonic, and their meaning had long since been lost.

Conversing together in lively excitement within this wide entrance was a considerable group of men and women, some retainers of one or other of the Three Modrybedd; others, as could be seen from their garb and their weapons, natives from the foothills of the mountains, or from the remoter recesses of the forest, or from the huts beyond the Gwern, or "Alder Swamp," a region that got its name from some specially pitiful slaughter in the struggle with the heathen Gwyddyl-Ffichti dating back to the first coming of the Sons of Cunedda, along with their Christianized Brythonic tribe.

At Brochvael's appearance there was a sudden hush, and several of those who had been most lively in their excited talk withdrew hurriedly into the interior of the building, while others, falling back, instinctively grouped themselves behind a striking-looking personage of enormous proportions who had been taking little part in the discussion but had been surveying it all and listening to it all with amused and genial satisfaction from a recumbent position under one of the gigantic doorposts, if such they could be called, that were really the two rocky sides of the prehistoric aperture, out of which in all probability, when the aboriginals first used the cave, flowed a subterranean river.

Slowly and lazily, but with an animal suppleness and grace, this person now rose to his feet, took a few easy steps forward, and saluted the prince's brother with a large and friendly and sweeping obeisance.

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee, Amreu ap Ganion!" responded the nephew of the Three Princesses. "Which of our revered Aunties would find it easiest to give me a few minutes? I don't want to bother Auntie Esyllt if she's busy. Perhaps Auntie Erddud could — you see, I'll probably be going over to the Gaer before nightfall, and if you wanted any news conveyed up there I'd be able to take it. You know what my brother is at banquet time; and I fancy I'm about the only person to whom my sister Euronwy grants the privilege of going up to her chamber after she's left the hall."

Amreu's gesture of welcome had been spontaneous and free, but the moment Brochvael spoke of conveying news to the Gaer the aspect of his countenance changed. And it was not only that he ceased to display his gleaming teeth in a heart-warming smile or to wrinkle up his swarthy cheeks into criss-cross channels for every kind of magnetic response; the huge bulk of the enormous man seemed actually to lessen and dwindle, to wither and shrink. Brochvael perceived in a flash that he had completely underestimated the power, in his father's princedom, of this rival court at the Giant's Cave. He had always known that the Modrybedd were a formidable influence in Edeyrnion.

He had indeed seen a glimpse of it in the tragedy of his son; and he had his youthful memories of Brythonic opposition to it, though this had been overcome, in the Gaer conspiracy against his own mother, the wife of Iddawc the Apostate.

But it was the Brython that was uppermost in himself now, the fierce pride of the blood, as he was never tired of assuring Morfydd, that ran in the race that sacked, not perpetuated, Troy; the race whose protectress was the spoil-bestowing aegis-bearer, not the amorous mother of dutiful Aeneas.

"I think I'd better have, yes, as a matter of fact I think it would be propitious for us all for me to have a little... a little confabulation" — he deliberately used the modern word *"confabulatio"* rather than the classical word *"colloquium,"* for he had noted how his friend the great Bishop Sidonius, saintly *artifex* and patrician *princeps* as he was, when he had to propitiate a despotic barbarian always hearted himself for the encounter by making use of this frivolous and rather fanciful expression— “a little confabulation with you yourself, Amreu ap Ganion. Could you take me into your private chamber? Or could we stroll for a few minutes on the eastern terrace?”

The imposing bulk of this full-lipped, narrow-hipped, dusky-skinned man, whose hair was almost as glossy as Gwrgi’s and much more curly, seemed to the fanciful eyes of the friend of Caius Sollius Modestus to be diminishing and dwindling moment by moment before his eyes.

“My... my room... “ he stammered, “is hardly fit... The... the terrace is... extremely frequented at this hour... nor do I quite know what—”

But Brochvael had no wish to torment any further his aunt’s handsome steward. He had caught enough to make it quite clear that in the interests of the House of Cunedda it was imperative he should see Modryb Esyllt and if possible Erddud and Tonwen as well.

“No need, no need,” he replied soothingly. “Of course, the terrace is crowded and the maids at this early noon haven’t tidied up. I’ll just wait a little and then go and look for Auntie Esyllt myself. I won’t bother you any more, Amreu ap Ganion. Besides, it was silly of me” — and he watched with pleasure the steward’s natural impressiveness and aplomb returning— “to talk about ‘the eastern terrace.’ There’s only one terrace here of course, and that looks due north. I was thinking of you. I was thinking how I envied you your” — he was going to say “teeth” but he thought better of it— “your beautiful smile, my friend.”

The smile he referred to had indeed begun to return to the steward’s expressive face; but it had hardly done so when it vanished again and with a gesture of something almost like panic the poor man murmured nervously, “I see Erim ab Uchtryd coming back, my Lord. Will you excuse me if I go to meet him and tell him you are here?”

Brochvael followed the steward's gaze and recognized the approaching figure. "I'll go and meet him myself," he said, and moved hastily towards the newcomer.

This was none other than the "silentiary" of the establishment, an official whose position in the Modrybedd's household had had its parallel at the court of Byzantium ever since the reign of Constantine; nor was the person whom Brochvael now proceeded to greet less remarkable in appearance than the famous ex-silentiary of that court, the Emperor Anastasius himself.

Erim ab Uchtryd was a frail-looking individual with a big forehead, thin hair, and hollow cheeks. He was extremely pale, but possessed eyes so lustrous that they were in themselves a sufficient justification for his promotion by Modryb Esyllt ten years ago from an extremely subordinate position in her service to his present dignified and important office.

For it was the business of Erim ab Uchtryd to do for the Three Princesses themselves what Amreu ap Ganion had to do for the whole household; in other words, he had not only to pour oil on three separate currents of troubled waters, but as the confidant of each, the interpreter of each to each, the diplomatic ambassador of all to the outside world, to preserve at least something, in the wilds of these mountains and the recesses of these forests, of the traditions of a race that had in its day treated Egypt as a rival, Phoenicia as an interloper, and Hellas as a youthful prodigy.

The silentiary greeted Brochvael with even more than his usual self-possession. Bowing courteously with just the right amount of respect — neither a shade more nor a shade less — due to the only brother of Edeyrnion's ruler, he escorted him at once to a small postern on the left of the main entrance, escorted him down a narrow passage running parallel with the outer wall, a passage so low that Brochvael, who like his brother was a tall man, had to bend his head the whole way; and then, holding aside a heavy purple curtain so that the visitor should enter first, ushered him into his own private chamber. Even here Brochvael, though he was able to stand upright, could without rising on tiptoe have touched the beams above his head with his hand.

In the centre of the room there were a couple of blackened flagstones sprinkled with ashes; and, although the beams of the ceiling above these stones were no blacker than the others, the visitor realized that not long ago, probably not later than last night, there had been a fire burning upon them. By the side of this now desolate hearth were two large heaps of piled-up calfskins, while at right angles to the entrance there stood, with their backs to the wall and covered with dusky embroidery threaded with gold thread, two small straight-backed chairs.

Upon one of these Brochvael was invited to sit, and as with a very poor measure of success he adjusted his lean haunches to the comfortless angle indicated and bent his head so that the shaft of sunlight that streamed through a slit in the wall should fall on his head rather than on his hooked nose and tired eyes, he saw that Amreu ap Ganion, who must have been following them down the passage, had also entered the chamber.

The odd thing was that Erim took not the smallest notice of the steward and it was a curious relief to Brochvael when, without even a nod from the silentiary, the big man relaxed upon one of the heaps of calfskins and proceeded to hug his knees and rest thereon his bowed head, so closely covered by its small tight curls as to resemble a ball of black cowslips.

Under the influence of his demon of untimely fancies, Brochvael could not help wondering, as he sought to twist his own high, narrow, deeply indented forehead out of that disturbing shaft of sunlight, whether the steward hadn’t decided that the surest way to dodge these painful shocks to his grandiose aplomb, which he must have felt through every pore of his skin had the power of actually diminishing his physical stature, was to assume the primordial attitude of the unborn child, helpless and grotesque but by no means altogether inert.

But the silentiary was speaking at last. “I needn’t bother you,” he said, “about your purpose in coming here this noon, my Lord. These disturbing events naturally draw us all together, and — as I took the liberty of mentioning this very morning to Euronwy ferch Manlius — draw together also our three chief centres of authority, the Gaer, the House of Stone, and the Giant’s Cave. This is natural. This is proper. This is one of the few redeeming characteristics that a state of war — that maimer of men and despoiler of women — produces in a community like ours. At the same time I am sure you will agree with me, my Lord, when I say—”

But Brochvael had grown impatient. “A state of war? Surely it isn’t as bad as that? I understood that the Derwydd has withdrawn his disturbing mandate; and besides, an embassy from the emperor, accompanied by his counsellor and even by his nephew, can hardly be described—”

But the silentiary, who had remained standing with his back to the shaft of light which was provoking his interlocutor, interrupted in his turn. “Blood,” he remarked, with a dangerous flash from his burning eyes, “blood, my Lord, has been shed. The princesses know it has been shed and they know why and by whom. They are, my Lord, in hourly touch with the Derwydd and from what they have learnt this morning—”

“After my messenger returned?”

“After Gwrgi ap Cyngar was sent back to you.”

Brochvael looked at the man. He himself was not a bit less self-conscious than his nephew Porius; but unlike the self-consciousness of Porius, his awareness of himself was no restless mind in a somnolent body. It was the very essence of his body. It was his body feeling, thinking, remembering, divining, predicting, comprehending, uniting, dividing, loathing, enjoying.

His nephew's consciousness was like a fast-burrowing mole with a glow-worm lamp in its skull that was forever making tunnels just under the surface of a huge moss-covered tumulus; whereas his own was like the consciousness of all the little weeds and plants and grasses and mosses of the tumulus itself.

He must have looked into the silentiary's burning eyes with an expression exactly corresponding to his actual feelings, that is to say, with a confused look, a puzzled look, an anxious look, a mildly uneasy look, and finally with what must have appeared to the silentiary as nothing less than a stupid look.

In actual reality Brochvael experienced at that moment what the quicker mind of his nephew might well have called the "sensation of stupidity," and which indeed was as much of a favourite sensation with the elder man as the curious process entitled "cavoseniargizing" was with the younger.

But Brochvael had the power not only of enjoying the "sensation of stupidity" — a sensation that made him feel like an animal cropping the grass of a secretive mound, a mound that *wanted* to make him worry over its mystery — but of using his stupidity to gain time while he took his bearings and smelt the air. And as he looked into the silentiary's eyes he became conscious that in his long absences from Britain, in his absorption in his books, in his preoccupation with the causes of his son's murder, he had lost touch with the tribal traditions of his mother and the Three Aunties.

The man opposite him was clearly obsessed with one single aim, that of outwitting and outmanoeuvering every open enemy of the forest people, and of compelling every traitor within its purlieus to betray his existence. It became clear to him that, apart from Medrawd's violence, the mere presence of the emperor’s horsemen within the confines of Edeyrnion, especially their sudden, secret, and unescorted appearance, was a firebrand of disturbance.

And the idea suddenly reached him before he averted a gaze that had already grown considerably less stupid, that Erim ab Uchtryd nourished thoughts in that smooth capacious forehead that went further than hostility to Arthur’s horsemen, went as far in fact as to imagine, if not the complete overthrow of the House of Cunedda, at least the supplanting of the younger Porius — with his Arthurian mother and his Roman grandfather — by some member of the family less involved in the Caergwynt court of Arthur ab Uthyr Pendragon, and more involved in the forest court of Gogfran ap Greidawl Derwydd.

Was it not the forest people’s custom for the son of the ruler’s sister to succeed him rather than the son of his wife? Didn’t they hold that a woman’s childbed was harder to hide than a woman’s love? Wasn’t the son of Alarch, for all his Mithraic madness, a skilful hunter and the fleetest footed of the whole tribe?

“Forgive me, Brochvael ab Iddawc,” were the words now issuing from the upper portion of the dusky presence so clearly outlined before him, as the uncomfortable chair continued to hurt his thin flanks and the dancing sun motes to menace his blinking eyes, “if I tell you things for which in your scholarly abstraction and your exalted and privileged seclusion you may perhaps be unprepared. But the truth is, things in Edeyrnion are moving faster than it is possible for you — or even perhaps, though for different reasons, for your princely brother — to follow with any confidence or assurance. Does it not sometimes occur to you—”

“Don’t become *too* insulting, my good man!” thought Brochvael. And he sighed bitterly, thinking how that affair of his son still clung to him and tied, as it were, his fighting hand.

" — that our Roman masters are just as deeply our enemies and exploiters as any pirates from Germania? The princess — I speak of course of Princess Esyllt — understands this. The princess has done me the indescribable honour" — here Erim ab Uchtryd actually swung half round and bowed towards the invisible object of his devotion across the ashes on the flagstones and across the curly head bent above them— "of taking me into her full confidence. No one, no mortal person, although they say he converses with the wise of our race who perished a thousand years ago, knows for certain what the mind of the Derwydd holds, but this I can tell you; to none has he revealed more of his mind than to Princess Esyllt, and it is straight from her very lips, my Lord, that I am now informing you as to the gravity of this crisis."

Very deliberately — for he had by now made up his mind that nothing should prevent his seeing his mother's sister before he left the Giant's Cave — Brochvael rose from his uneasy seat. As he did so he fancied he saw the enormous shoulders of the curly-headed steward quiver and shake a little. Was the man weeping? Had he himself or this flashing-eyed baldhead hurt in some fatal way his primitive Iberian self-respect?

"I must ask you," he was beginning, when there was a startling interruption. First came the sound of voices in the distance, then of voice answering voice much nearer, and then of a pair of feet scampering down the passage. And finally the curtain was pulled aside and a little boy, gasping with the glory of being the successful messenger, panted out the words: "Master Silentiary, to my Lady at once! Master Silentiary, at once, at once!"

Dragging the child by the arm and murmuring rapid questions to him as he hurried him away, Erim ab Uchtryd had only time to bid the steward go to the eastern gate, and to assure Brochvael of his own speedy return. It was then and then only, as the curtain folds fell into place, that Brochvael realized that the large indolent body of Amreu ap Ganion was convulsed not with weeping but with laughing. Evidently hugely tickled by something that completely restored his self-esteem, the big man showed his white teeth and rolled his Iberian eyes towards their visitor and for a moment appeared unable to speak. Then with a bow and a flourish of his hand: "You see, my Lord, what he thinks he is! And nothing but the bastard of a Gwyddyl-Ffichti! Telling *you,* my Lord, our prince's brother, *you,* my Lord, the father of our future Lady of the Gaer, about how to stand up to the Emperor of Ynys Prydein!

"To hear him boasting about what we will do, and the plots *we* will make, and the magic *we* will use! And all because his grandmother spent a rainy autumn under rock and canvas, under *carnedd* and cromlech, under oak and thorn tree, by torrent and tarn, with Iscovan y Bychan, when her husband was soldiering in the legion!

"As for me, 'I serve' is my motto. I am a Christ's man, I am! 'Tis the Princess Erddud herself who made me what I am. And do you know how she did it, my Lord? She gave me my Lela, her own Egyptian maid. And now Lela and I serve Christ and the princess. It's true we talk sometimes of serving the queen-empress at Caerleon or Caergwynt, for those who serve live longer than those who—"

"Listen, Amreu! If I were to go now, at this very minute, to see my aunt Erddud, your wife's mistress, could you tell me where I should be most likely to find her?"

The enormous presence lost its happy glory. The world-embracing smile vanished and a pair of black orbs rolled apprehensively round the room. The massive shoulders, recently heaving with suppressed laughter, sagged and shrank like withered globules of seaweed deserted by the tide. It was clear to Brochvael that if the incentive to serve a queen rather than a princess came from Lela the Egyptian, it would be important for that young woman to be at the steward's elbow when one authority pulled him by one arm and another by another.

But he felt no urge to press the man. He had not been to Constantinople for nothing, nor to Ravenna either. And all he had in his heart just then was a comic sense of the craziness of the whole business.

"Well! I expect I'd better change my mind," he remarked gently and without bitterness. "And I expect *you,* Amreu, my friend, had better go where he said — to the eastern gate, wasn't it? Is your wife in constant attendance upon my aunt Erddud?"

The servant of Christ faintly nodded. Then in a piteous effort to work himself up to the height of his contempt for the silentiary: "You saw how that madman bowed just now when he was talking of Princess Esyllt? Could anything reveal his folly more than that, when all the world knows that your brother the prince honours the Three Modrybedd equally, and that if he does prefer one of our ladies above the rest it is not Princess Esyllt, but my Lela's—"

At that moment there reached them from the distance a new clamour of voices, and Brochvael using his most peremptory Brythonic manner, bade the man be off to the eastern gate.

The moment the fellow was gone he himself tore aside the curtains and making sure the passage was empty hurried off in the direction opposite to the eastern gate. He was soon ascending a narrow flight of stairs leading to the next floor of the Giant's Cave. He had known this whole establishment well enough in his boyhood, but since his marriage and the constant quarrels between Kymeinvoll and the Modrybedd, he had lost touch with the labyrinthine intricacies of the old place.

"I must find Auntie Erddud or Auntie Tonwen," he thought. "This business is getting out of control. If Einion won't cope with it I must do something myself." He felt vague as to the precise direction his interference should take, but he must be guided, yes! he must be guided by *Tyche Soteer,* by Chance, the great Saviour of all things!

Not for the first time in his life did he mutter an inward prayer to the mysterious power, worshipped alone of all the gods by the first and greatest of the imperial invaders, by that Ul-Kessar or Julius Caesar, whom this burning-eyed Erim regarded as no better than the piratical Saxons.

At the top of the steps he found himself in a wider and higher passage than the one he had quitted. For a moment he hesitated in which direction to follow this dim corridor; but a stream of golden sunshine coming from an opening at the top of yet another flight of wooden steps decided him, and reaching the foot of these steps, which were little more than a balustraded ladder, he boldly ascended.

He now began to feel surer just where he was in the Giant's Cave. Memories of his childhood began returning across forty years of absence. "There's an outlook up here somewhere," he thought, "and I remember once—"

What he remembered came back with a rush now. It was Auntie Erddud who had — And there she was. And so the first Caesar's wanton divinity, the goddess, from the beginning, of all atheists, *had* heard his half-humorous prayer! There she was, Auntie Erddud herself, on her old knees against the high stone parapet, worshipping, it would seem, or at any rate watching with concentrated attention, the serpentine curves of the river-goddess as she flowed beneath the walls of Mynydd-y-Gaer and down the long narrow eastern valley, so different from the level fields of Edeyrnion, till she swept past the feet of Dinas Bran!

He saw her the moment his head reached the stone floor of the rampart, and the sight of her, just like that, with himself unseen, as had happened so often in his childhood, brought back those far days with such a rush of memory that tears rose behind his eyeballs and he found himself making a queer emotional grimace with the thin lips covering his gums, as he pressed his chin against the top rung of the ladder and his nose against the stone edge of the platform.

She was in an ash grey woollen garment, not the garment she slept in, nor the one she faced the world in, but the one she habitually wore in the privacy of her own rooms; for the Modrybedd lived quite separately, all of them with their own occupations, each with her own attendants, and only encountering one another at the general meal of the household at the end of the afternoon. Auntie Erddud’s hair was fuzzy rather than curly. It was snow-white and on this particular day it was so tightly gathered up above the nape of her neck, after the ancient fashion of the forest people, that it reminded Brochvael of the heads of certain Egyptian ladies, wives, and sisters of the keepers of the manuscripts, at whose houses he had been entertained in Alexandria.

He felt a pang of shame to have allowed his wife’s Gwyddyl-Ffichti jealousy to come between him and this faithful champion of his nervous and touchy boyhood. But a second later he pressed his toothless lips against that ladder rung and cursed himself for blaming his wife. No, it was time and chance and circumstance and his long absences, far more than Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles, and most of all it was his books. All three Modrybedd were hopelessly illiterate, and he had known for the last ten years that Erim ab

Uchtryd was only doing for Auntie Esyllt what he himself might quite well have done for Auntie Erddud.

No! It was fate. Poor Kymeinvoll was only a straw herself on the great tide. *Panta rhei*; “all passes”; nothing abides.

But how was he to approach his aunt without giving her too great a shock? How would she feel if, her prayers finished and glancing casually round on her way to the usual descent, she were suddenly arrested by the grizzled head of her favourite nephew protruding from this mouse hole?

It came to him with the dart of a swallow and very softly, first inaudibly, then just audibly— “I don’t even know,” he thought, “if Auntie Erddud has grown deaf — then at last to the old, sweet, wistful, gay tune, like a blackbird’s jaunty sob, with which she had so often comforted him after quarrels with the mocking Einion, and trilling the words as gently as he could, he broke into the *Pervigilium Veneris.*

“Cras amet, ‘let him love tomorrow,’” — and the old lady, turning at once but without rising from her knees, heard what looked to her dim eyes like the bodiless head of an unbearded warrior with a great nose trundle towards her along the ramparts— “*qui numquam amavit!,* ‘who has never loved before.’”

For the first second she was not frightened at all, and for a singular reason. Then, when the singing head was followed out of its hole by a man’s broad shoulders, she felt as if she had swallowed her heart, but before her senses had time to transfer the shock to her nerves a great wave of reassurance flooded her whole being.

“Brochvael!” she gasped, and with one thin bare arm extended along the battlements she stretched out the other towards him. He was by her side in a moment, and lifting her to her feet clasped her in his arms.

"Auntie, forgive me, forgive me! I didn't mean to scare you. I felt I must see you and down there they made such difficulty—"

But she had now completely regained her composure. "I know, I know," she whispered. "It's those men. Men are all the same. All stupid, all quite mad. You're the only sensible man, Brochvael, I've ever met except Father. Even Porius, now he's grown so big and is going to marry your little girl, has become like the rest. He thinks nobody knows how mad he's become because he hides it up and does just what Euronwy tells him, *and* just — don't be angry, Brochvael dear" — and she pressed his arm coaxingly as they leaned side by side against the wall with their backs to the Gaer and the winding river— "just what your dear child tells him! But I know — others may not, but I do — that, in spite of all, he's become as mad as the rest."

She couldn't see her nephew's face, either while she spoke or when she took breath, so she had no cue to the way he received it. But even if she had kept her dim eyes steadily upon him she would have detected nothing but reckless, irresponsible sympathy in the depths of his fascinated stare, and hopeless bewilderment in the criss-cross lines, confused as those above the lintel of the eastern gate, that deepened upon his forehead.

"You know, Auntie Erddud, you were wonderfully brave not to scream out when you first heard that old tune and saw my head."

She clutched his arm tightly. "Shall I tell you why I was so calm and quiet? Because I'd been praying to Bran the Blessed that he'd let me see the watchtower on his Mount before I went down; and as I prayed I thought of what that Henog from Dyfed told my sister when she went to the Gaer; that after Bran was killed by the Gwyddylaid he made his friends cut off his head, and the head was with them for many summers and winters at Harlech and the head prophesied to them so that they forgot their sorrows; and the birds of Rhiannon sang to them because the head was with them and their souls were content. And so when I first saw *your* head, and couldn't see your body, and heard that tune —

"But can you stay, Brochvael dear, for our general meal? We have it earlier than the prince does, and earlier I think than you do. We have it at the ancient *hora nona* at this time of the year — that's well before twilight — but of course with your water clock it's all different. You can keep the hours really carefully. But we still go by the old dial, and Amreu has his own ways of reading it. But he always blows the trumpet about half an hour before, so we know pretty well, and it doesn't matter. I wish you *would* stay, Brochvael. It's been so long since I've seen you eat a morsel."

But he shook his head. "I'm sorry, Auntie dear, but Morfydd's gone to the Gaer. If she stays for their meal I'll have to fetch her; and if she doesn't she'll want to find me at home. But please tell me *one* thing before I go. Does Auntie Esyllt really know about these murderings and uprisings and all these orders from the Derwydd and all these threats against the emperor's nephew? And if she *does* know, does she tell Einion what she knows?"

A most extraordinary change came upon the fragile old lady. Instantaneously she stiffened while her eyes lost their tender mist. Leaving the support of the wall she moved forward a step or two. Then she turned on him fiercely. "So that's what brought you here to find me! To ferret out our secrets from the one who loved you the most! To use our... our... our old" — he knew she meant the *Pervigilium* and a pang went through him— "to make me betray my sister, my ancestors, my people — yes! and this land which was ours long before you or the Romans or the Gwyddyl-Ffichti came. You can return, son of my sister, by the way you came! May our sacred river and our Mount of the thrice-blessed Bran change your false heart before you... you... come again with your songs to me!”

And with a contemptuous toss of her finely modelled head with its Egyptian knot she turned her back upon him. He made no attempt to interrupt her departure. He watched her figure pass from his sight as it moved proudly round the carved pedestal that hid the ascent to the rampart. Then with a wry twitching of his toothless mouth and a feeling as if one of the Derwydd’s poisoned arrows had struck a vein in his throat, he climbed down the ladder and followed the corridor by which he had come.

As he passed the entrance to the silentiary’s chamber he was moved by a sudden impulse, though he had no wish to face the bulbous forehead and obsessed eyes of Erim ab Uchtryd, to pull aside once again those dark heavy curtains. He hesitated, however, to follow this impulse when with hand outstretched he was aware of voices within the chamber.

For the first time in his whole life the descendant of Cunedda found himself — though he felt the blood mount so hotly to certain shame-shocked cavities beneath his cheek that he touched his face with his uplifted fingers — in the act of eavesdropping.

The prehistoric dilemma — insoluble by the subtlest casuistry — at what point it is lawful to act contrary to your conscience for the sake of your country or your cause held him in its iron clutch. All the blood he had in his body seemed to have gathered in his head where it apparently was stealing a march on his reason by usurping that power’s very citadel.

What he felt was that he had to stay long enough to find a place with his feet whence he could jump to firm ground; but by one of those paradoxes which fate had nailed to the mast of his Brythonic honour, the leaping-off moment of his rejection of further temptation was the moment that sent him striding down the passage, with his accusing blood rushing back to his heart, leaving his face pale, and with the one single purpose in his mind, that of getting in touch with Porius ab Einion before nightfall.

"It's no good going to Einion," he said to himself, "and the old Roman would only make trouble. That boy is square-headed. 'Twould have been better for my son if he were less so. 'Tis impossible for him to act on impulse. But he's trustworthy enough. And he's got Alarch's son Rhun to steady him, and for all his slave's blood and his Mithras nonsense, Rhun's a brave lad and a very shrewd one. I used to wonder sometimes if Morfydd —"

But the image of his daughter hastened his steps and strengthened his resolve. He had nothing of the waywardness of his father or his brother in this matter of race. It never entered his head that the maternal strain in a person's blood might account for as much or even for more than the other. That the girl should remind him of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles was natural and endearing, but that in any race struggle between Brython and Gwyddyl she should take the part of the latter was unthinkable.

This indeed was the point where his son had caused him his greatest trouble all through the lad's short life. Had Iscovan y Bychan not been dead ere he was old enough for such exploits, he might even — Brochvael had thought of that more than once — have run away to join the outlaw.

With the image of Morfydd as the mother of a prince of Edeyrnion, to whom the emperor of the future would owe the safety of the north, Brochvael passed under that thousand-year-old inscription and through the chattering crowd that always thronged the eastern gate of the Giant's Cave. He walked so fast and his face was so tense that all who saluted him turned when he had passed and looked significantly at one another.

"He's learnt something," was the general impression. "How much has he found out?" was a rarer comment. But "Has Princess Tonwen said anything?" was what a subordinate of the silentiary murmured to a subordinate of the steward.

It wasn't till he got altogether clear of the place and indeed not till he had begun climbing down that final series of rocky descents that Gwrgi's experience had discovered were better adapted to a crafty sliding on a person's flanks than a stumbling and slipping on a person's feet, that he dared to drag forth into full awareness — so that he could, as it were, see the monstrosity in the round and poke his fingers into its unspeakable shape and even look into its appalling visage — what Chance had forced him to hear.

Chance now, this favourite goddess of Julius Caesar, so arranged it that it was only when he had been reluctantly compelled to imitate Gwrgi, and had clutched with his fingers not only the dead heather but the cool fresh leaves of the plant called *Scabiosa succisa* with which Galen had cured leprosy, that he was able to force himself — the shock of his contact with the earth doubtless helping him — to repeat, and he did so aloud, the words he still hoped he had been unable to help hearing from behind that curtain in that low-roofed passage.

There had been two voices speaking, only two. One of them had been Erim's, and he could see, as he lay for a passive moment — as Gwrgi had *not* done — clutching the heather stalks and the leaves of the leprosy plant, that bulbous forehead and those burning eyes; but the other was unknown to him.

"Go straight to Colgrim and tell him—"

The slippery rock, the heather stalks, the cool soft leaves of *Scabiosa succisa,* and the October sun streaming mistily up along the shining river from Dinas Bran, received these fatal words without a shudder. And yet they were the very substance of the land those words betrayed.

“Go straight to Colgrim and tell him.” It was enough. No more was needed.

Auntie Erddud had said that her men were all mad. But what was this? Something worse than madness. Treachery! Treachery! Treachery!

“Go straight to—” He saw those words in the rock. He saw them in the heather stalks. He saw them in the leprosy plant. The stream of misty gold sunshine carried them like carrion on its breast. But still the Divine River flowed on; their weight did not impede her, though to him they were the corpses of all the years of the life he had lived by her side.

“Go straight to Colgrim and tell him.”

“I must go straight,” his heart said to his head as he scrambled to his feet and continued his descent, “I must go straight to Porius ab Einion!”

CHAPTER XI. Morfydd

MORFYDD'S HEART WAS in a turmoil as she watched Gwythyr lead the donkey away at the tower gate of the Gaer. The old dark familiar doubt in the depths of her being as to whether she had done right to let herself be betrothed, and what would come of it, for herself, for Porius, and for Rhun, remained as usual at the back of all else; but the immediate situation was what at this moment set her pulses beating. Though her nurse had made, throughout their lingering approach, all the attempts at her disposal to discover something definite, these attempts had been fruitless.

But something definite now — and not at all reassuring to this particular pair of women — was under their eyes as they approached the massive archway. Seated in negligent groups round the gate and occupying a space wide enough to suggest the presence of at least a hundred armed men was that phalanx of picked warriors called the *Gosgordd,* a bodyguard of experienced and pure-blooded Brythons, whose duty it had been from the days of Cunedda himself to assemble in arms when called upon by their prince.

At this moment they were resting carelessly and casually enough, some on wooden benches, some on the piles of roughly trimmed tree trunks that were always kept at that spot for the purpose of barricading the entrance in the face of an assault.

None of the Gaer people, in fact none of the people of Llan-Mithras or Corwen, could imagine the grassy slope in front of the tower gate without these tree trunks. Local tradition declared they had been there for centuries, had been there in the days beyond history when the race of giants ruled over by Rhitta Gawr could lift them in their arms as easily as the men of today could lift sacks of corn; and this was borne out, it was argued, by the number among them that were already resolved into ridges of weeds and rubble, mingled with yellow powdery dust.

The passing under the archway of the two women created a certain amount of stir. Some of the men even rose to their feet striking their round shields with the handles of their favourite weapons — long swords or short spears, as the individual warriors preferred, for javelins as well as bows and arrows they left to the forest people — as they recognized the betrothed of the son of their prince. Others raised their right hand in salutation. Others just stared at the pair and asked questions of their neighbours. A few scowled angrily and even spat on the grass between their knees.

These last manifestations were not lost upon old Canna, but when she gave her companion a sidelong glance she found it impossible to tell whether the girl, who seemed absorbed in her thoughts and walked quickly, looking straight in front of her, was aware of them or not.

Avoiding the spacious banquet hall, the three doors of which were wide open, displaying already lively preparations for the main meal of the day, they entered a long low-arched corridor flanked by several stone chambers, most of which were open, while others had their privacy protected by removable wooden screens, an innovation introduced by Euronwy herself when she and her father came to live there.

The corridor was so long that, as the chambers through which the daylight could enter grew fewer and finally ceased, it became almost dark. But before that pallid twilight quite died away the passage terminated in a pair of massive folding doors illuminated by a suspended oil lamp that was never allowed to go out. These doors were divided into panels of several different kinds of precious wood and were adorned with so many bars and bosses and knobs and handles of polished silver that they gleamed under the light of that flickering lamp like a perpendicular model of the celestial vault of autumnal stars that within a few hours would begin to overhang Edeyrnion.

Not greatly coveted in Mynydd-y-Gaer was the post of porter to my Lady’s chamber. In Princess Indeg’s time this dimly lit end of the passage, where the silver-shimmering doors, whether ajar or closed or wide open, gave the spot a curiously enchanted air, was wont to be crowded with loitering and chattering people just as was today the eastern gate of the Giant’s Cave; but Euronwy had introduced into the Gaer the simpler ways of the Roman villa at Uriconium where she had been brought up in the austere habits of the Manlian tradition, a tradition which had experienced little difficulty in substituting the puritanism of the Stoic principles for the refinements of the Christian faith.

At this particular hour of the day when Euronwy, as Morfydd and the nurse knew well, would be resting after superintending every detail in the kitchen and visiting every larder and pantry and scullery in the place, it happened that the guard at her door was an ex-centurion from the legion at Castrum Deva. Born in Mantua of free parents, he had served the family of Manlius in many capacities, and when the elder Porius was appointed second in command of the legion at Uriconium, he was in a position to get his old friend relieved of his military duties in order to become the general manager of the household at the Villa Nova Praeneste; and it was here with the impregnable camp in the background, and the comings and goings of soldiers from half the world in the foreground, that Euronwy’s girlhood was passed.

The two women, each of them with a deep admixture in her veins of Gwyddyl-Ffichti blood, could not resist a pang of jealous admiration for the noble dignity of this professional soldier’s pose as they approached him. He was wearing his centurion’s official garb, kept as beautifully fresh through all the years of Euronwy’s life as it was when Porius Manlius, lonely and heartsick at the death of his child’s mother in this remote and alien land, established the old man in Villa Nova Praeneste as his overseer and manager.

And if his garb was beautifully preserved, the short sword suspended at his side and the long gilded rod of his office were both so polished that they rivalled in their gleaming the silver adornments of the folding doors he guarded.

“My Lady expects you,” he said with a curt bow to Morfydd, keeping his clean-shaven old face as completely devoid of expression as if he were on the parade ground at Castrum Deva. “But she wishes to see you alone.”

The old woman and Morfydd exchanged a few hurried words. “May Canna ferch Glam go to the kitchen, Aulus?” enquired the latter.

But Aulus had already turned and was slowly and deliberately pushing back the heavy silver bar that kept the folding doors in place.

“My Lady gave me no instructions,” came from that decorous profile; while the doors, a little open now, emitted such a stream of pallid daylight that in its presence the lamplight dissolved like a cup of yellow wine in a grey pond.

“No instructions,” he repeated, keeping his arm, substituted now for the silver bar, still across the entrance while his old-fashioned legionary’s sword stuck out rather absurdly from the embossed leather belt beneath which were tucked the voluminous creases, scrupulously pressed into neat folds, of his loosely fitting *tunica.*

Morfydd’s mouth twitched, and the tiny lines in that miniature ogam that were her spirit’s declaration of war displayed themselves between her eyebrows. But at that moment a young girl's head, covered with black curls, dived under the old soldier's arm and was immediately followed by a lithe body already attired for the banquet in black and silver, the colours of the House of Cunedda, and accompanied by a cascade of chatter.

"My Lady sent me to bid you go straight in, while I am to take *you,* Mistress Canna, to the buttery for a pint of wine, then to the kitchen where you're to have a chair by the fire. You'll find my Lady," she added, addressing Morfydd, while she clutched Canna by the elbow with a frivolous familiarity, "in the little room." Then she added in a more serious tone, "If the place gets too full of smoke perhaps you wouldn't mind" — her voice became almost pleading now— "taking away the plank I've put over the window. My Lady never remembers till the smoke gets into her throat — the plank's only balanced. It's not heavy. And when it's away there's a fine draught and the fire burns as bright as hell."

Something resembling this beneficent plank had evidently been freshly removed from the old nurse's heart, for she went off with this girl in the best of spirits, asking question after question of the most shameless kind, and being as craftily reserved and as flagrantly garrulous in her response to the other's questions as the girl was in regard to hers.

But the doors were flung open wide enough now, and with a grave nod to the old legionary, Morfydd crossed the antechamber, swept aside the curtain in its western wall, and entered the reception room. Here she found a couple of elderly ladies, seated side by side on a cushioned bench at their embroidery frames, each of whom greeted her with grave recognition and motioned her with faint and rather nervous smiles into the chamber beyond.

When the hangings concealing this remoter retreat fell behind her she was at once aware that the girl's warning about "the little room" had not been a fanciful one.

The Lady of Mynydd-y-Gaer was seated alone in a stately high-backed chair in the centre of a small apartment. Before her feet, which rested on a square footstool, was a large flagstone raised above the floor on four clay bricks and bearing a brightly burning log fire, from which the fir-scented smoke was mounting intermittently in wavy columns to the vaulted roof.

"Thanks be to Christ you've come at last, child!" was the lady's greeting as Morfydd dutifully bent down and kissed her hand. "Bring up one of those stools, will you, dear? That's it! Now please sit down. No! A little nearer! We've much to talk about."

The girl sat down obediently, her hands folded on her lap, her eyes lowered.

"My son and Rhun ap Gwrnach are still at Saint Julian's Fount."

Morfydd tightened her clasped hands but did not raise her eyes.

"But the prince said they will probably be back before the end of dinner. What he meant by 'before the end' I don't know. I only saw him for a moment and he was — he generally is — in a great hurry. If I said 'before the end of dinner' to *you,* you'd understand me perfectly well. I should mean before everything there is to eat on the table has been eaten! But when a man's saying it — at least when the prince is saying it — the meaning might easily be 'before sunrise,' since to them the serious part doesn't begin till the drinking and that often lasts till dawn. Why don't you look at me, child? I tell you we've got to talk things over. Painful or not, we've got to! And that leads me to what I want to say."

The girl looked at her as she was bidden. What she saw was a figure so completely dedicated to a particular kind of proud acceptance of fate that everything about it — features, expression, complexion, bearing, even the very clothes it wore — coalesced and fused themselves together in one single effect, the effect of an acceptance of destiny so complete as to be a kind of revenge on destiny. For once in the long tumultuous chronicle of Mynydd-y-Gaer, for once between the primeval savagery of Rhitta Gawr and these Romanized modern times, the nectar of stately resignation was encouraged by its victim to fill the cup so full that no dregs, no scum, no foam, no bubble, no slightest drop of any alien element spoiled the perfection of that obsessing draught.

As for Morfydd, she simply felt she had so deep a justification for her hostile feelings towards this image of patient pride that her conscience had no right to reproach her, even though she piled up her condemnation of the woman's attitude with every obloquy she could scrape together.

Morfydd wasn't by any means unaware — indeed it increased her nervous irritation — of the quaint contrast the two of them made, and as she glanced at that orifice in the western wall, now dimmed by a rough piece of board, she began to feel an absurd dread lest the smoke should throw such a spell on them that they would sit in silence there, opposite each other, on those two seats, like pictures on Cretan vases for ever and ever.

All this while Morfydd had retained round her own head and shoulders her favourite black cloak. The stately image of heroic suffering opposite her had so far been too absorbed in awaiting the issue of what it was bent on revealing to think of helping her lay this object aside.

The girl performed this service now for herself and it gave her something to do with her active slender fingers when she set herself to smooth out those ruffled folds and arrange them neatly on her lap. She was now displayed, to the sad eyes regarding her, in her ordinary day-to-day attire wherein, though she was not one for being particularly self-conscious about clothes, she felt especially at ease. Her slender figure was not made less girlish by the fact that over her lamb's-wool vest she wore a single garment of unbleached linen caught in at the waist by a purple belt and reaching to where the soft straps of calfskin criss-crossed round her ankles and were fastened to her sandals.

Whatever were the grievous differences — grievous to him as well as to themselves — dividing the two women who dominated the life of Porius ab Einion, their behaviour on this momentous occasion proved that they had at least one thing in common. Emotional excitement — and this was the normal condition of both — obliterated their power of drawing conclusions of any kind, favourable or unfavourable, malicious or friendly, from what they detected around them, whether in things or in people. It didn’t of course prevent them from detecting things. They were women and they were intelligent. But it freed them from itching spites and petty sneers.

Thus when Morfydd condemned the melancholy priestesslike self-pity of Porius’s mother it never occurred to her to sneer at the preposterously old-fashioned robe, almost hieratic in its voluminous folds, of snow-white cloth which she was wearing, or at the sandals, snowy white as the robe and embossed with outlandish bronze ornaments, that rested on that antique footstool.

What the unloved wife of the Prince of Edeyrnion had indeed reverted to wearing were nothing less — though how could Morfydd know this? — than the fashionable robes of the Romanized matrons of half a century ago, such as Euronwy had seen in her extreme youth at the villa at Uriconium; but it was not the white robe nor the footstool nor the bronzes on the sandals that Porius’s betrothed loathed in this woman. It was her attitude to the tragedy of her life.

The girl knew as well as Porius himself how tragic that life was. She had on several occasions startled her betrothed by the tone of her references to it and by her wild hints as to what she would do if he ever treated her like this. But though she had recently approached the danger point with him she had never gone so far as to tell him what she really thought; namely, that Euronwy was in love with Gorsant the priest, and derived not only a morbid joy from letting him immolate her at the altar, but a morbid joy from following out to the very letter what he revealed to her as her duty towards her irresponsible husband.

Euronwy was speaking rapidly now in a low emphatic voice, a voice that was at once calmly self-controlled and intensely excited; and the purport of her words was such that Morfydd forgot her suspicious hatred of the proud woman's "Lady of Sorrows" pose, forgot the smoke, forgot the plank at the aperture in the wall, and listened with her brown eyes growing steadily larger and larger, and the curve of her left eyebrow, always the gnomonic sign of her attention, growing steadily higher and higher.

"The young *eques*—" the lady began.

"Why can't she say 'horseman' if she wants to be correct?" thought Morfydd. "These boys aren't equites; they're just young men on horseback."

But the lady went on, "The young *eques* who brought my son's knife as a token was the son of a man I knew well in the old days and I couldn't doubt him. Besides, he told me many things I know to be true about the court at Caergwynt. Well, child, it was from him I learnt the real purpose of this mission. And the importance of it is proved by the presence at its head not only of Arthur's counsellor but of Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch, the emperor's heir. I won't talk now of this miserable trouble that has arisen, for that's beside the point. We are only concerned — and in this I know you'll agree — with the question of how it affects Porius ab Einion. It appears that the Saxons from Germania have divided their forces. One force — the young *eques* was most explicit about this — under their chief, Baldulf, has fortified itself at Caer Badon, while another, under this horrible Colgrim, of whom we've heard so much and who's lately withdrawn from Caer Efrog, is hurrying south towards Caer Llyr with the purpose of joining Baldulf at Caer Badon. The young *eques* — and this he must have learnt from Myrddin Wyllt himself who can, they say, catch news from the air, like those Coranians of old — confided to me after dinner, for in Einion's absence I refrained from leaving the hall till after the mead had gone round, that he had last been heard of in the district of Pengwern and that—"

Here Morfydd interrupted. "But, *Arglwyddes,* but, my Lady, the road from Caer Efrog to Caer Llyr doesn't pass Pengwern. Surely to reach Pengwern, or anywhere near it, these Saxons must have debouched through many *cantrefs* to the west of their natural way south?"

A flicker of a smile crossed Euronwy's melancholy features. "You're a wise child, my dear, a wise child! But the truth is I thought of *that* myself and said as much to Mabsant. But he answered that in war an invader rarely proceeds by the natural way to the point at which he's aiming! And he added that what was certain was that the Saxons in the north were marching south, evidently to join the others at Caer Badon; and that what the emperor wanted — and this is what concerns you and me — was that my son should take the pick of our people, well armed and if possible *mounted* — but that of course is out of the question — and intercept these" — she was on the point of saying "heathen" but caught herself up, fearful of reminding the girl of her brother— "these accurst barbarians and toss Colgrim's head into Baldulf's camp!"

"Not a word till she's said all — not a word till she's said *all* — not a word— "Such were the commands uttered by Morfydd's soul to her heart as she clutched with her fingers at the folded mantle on her lap and squeezed it against the pit of her stomach, feeling as she did so as if she were throwing it over the wild and rebellious thoughts that were causing the brown of her eyes to darken, using it in fact as her mother, the Gwyddyles, was wont to use a similar one, for the quieting of caged birds.

"You see I am talking quite frankly to you, Morfydd ferch Brochvael, and I have every reason to do so, and don't you see why?"

She made the first physical gesture she had permitted herself to indulge in since this encounter began. She lifted the couple of priestesslike folds with which she had covered her head and let them fall against the back of her chair.

"Don't you see, child, that up to a remote point — a point that's far away at present — you and I want the same thing? Don't you see that our interests, our desires, our hearts' longings are the same?"

"Not a word till she's said *all* — not a word till she's said *all*!"

"The point is this, child. You know, for all the women in Edeyrnion know, how things are with the prince and me and what little influence I have over him. If something doesn't happen, soon — and all Edeyrnion knows this too — the Modrybedd will be the rulers of these forests from Dinas Bran to the Cader. Einion will remain prince in name for a while longer — and then... I'm more than twice your age, little one, and I've seen this happen with our princes of the north. I've seen it, I've seen it! This House isn't the only House of Cunedda. If Mynydd-y-Gaer was known across the four seas before Deganwy had a name put on it, the Lord of Gwynedd may end by being crowned king in the city of Lludd when wolves and ravens are lording it in the halls of Edeyrn.

"What can we do then? Your father's heart is the heart of a true Brython, but his head is the head of a Greek sage. He thinks he's a political figure like his friend the Bishop of Arverne. But you, my dear, know better than that. He could no more save this House, if it tottered to its fall, than... than my own dear father!

"We women know these things. And that's why I'm talking to you like this. Morfydd, Morfydd, listen to me." And to the girl's amazement she became aware of a strong white hand freeing itself from the heavy robe and laying a finger on one of her knees. "You and I together, child, you and I with one mind and one purpose — I tell you it's we, and we only, for my son will listen to us both — who can save this House and... and save *him* with it!"

"There's more yet — not a word yet!" But though she still kept silence and never ceased hugging her folded cloak the girl suddenly felt a queer new strength steal into her heart and from her heart begin to rise into her breast. It was a sign of this that she actually was able for the first time that evening to glance at the burning fir logs, at the gathering smoke, at that ridiculous piece of wood balanced in the window slit.

The thought swept across her mind: "Shall I touch her hand? No, no! Not yet — time for that later. Time for that when she has said *all!"*

"I've no fear for him with these Saxons," Euronwy went on. "Nor, I fancy, have you. We know his strength. We know his caution. None better than you and I! But we know too that while you and I draw him different ways, his power, his strength, his caution, his *tynged*, are only half what they might be. With us behind him, as one and no longer as two, there'd be no limit to his" — she stopped, drew her hand from the girl's knee, straightened herself in her chair and gave a series of short quick gasps as if she were swallowing in forced gulps and bitter mouthfuls something naturally revolting to the human palate— "no limit to the distance he'll go!"

Then with a quick movement of her wrists she disentangled her other hand from the folds of her mantle and clasped with it the one wherewith she had touched the girl's knee, and leaning forward, her fingers growing every second whiter as she pressed them together, she began speaking more rapidly than before, and so fast, that if her tone hadn't been intensely clear, and what she said so startling, and her face only an arm's length away, the girl might have had difficulty in following her.

"I want you to marry my son at once, *now,* as soon as possible! The marriage needn't be performed *here* or performed by... *him* down there. Brother John has priest's orders, though it isn't generally known. It was he, down there, when he was complaining about the Brother and saying he ought to be excommunicated for his Pelagian ideas, who told me. There'll be no difficulty from the prince. He's very fond of you. He'll hope to see more of you. You'll have no difficulty with your father, who's fond of my son — never mind what he thinks of me! Never mind what anyone thinks of *me!* It's my son we're considering. I'll tell you, girl, since Cunedda and his sons first came to the Gaer their House has never been in such danger!

"It, they, we, I tell you, are in danger of extinction. But once you two are married everything will right itself. Your marriage will add interest to the Feast of the Sowing. It'll upset the calculations of the druid. And above all it will be rousing news to all the Gwyddyl-Ffichti! There aren't many of *them* about here, I know, but in the mountains they say there are a lot left. And every one of them remembers your mother and worships her memory. I wouldn't be surprised if some of the old Iscovan band were still alive."

Here she stopped to take breath. "Mercy of God! But what would my poor father say if he heard me? When I was a little girl at Uriconium it was always 'y Bychan this,' and 'y Bychan that,' and 'y Bychan has burnt another village!' But I certainly never thought I'd be saying things like this to the daughter of Brochvael ab Iddawc. O girl, girl! You mustn't feel you've got to be a daughter to *me.* Get that out of your head. I'm not asking for your love; I'm not asking even for your consideration as my son's wife.

I’m only asking you to join your wits with mine and be one with me *where he’s concerned and for his sake.*

“You can hate me, you can despise me, like all the others do, apart from *him;* and when you have children of his and are the mother of a Prince of Edeyrnion you can send me away, you can do what you like with me, if only now, *now* at this fatal moment, you’ll let us be one in wit and will; one for once, my Morfydd! Don’t think I’m mad, child. My unhappiness hasn’t clouded my woman’s brain, nor my loneliness either... don’t look away, child! We’re nearer each other than you guess, you and I. We both love him well. You *do* love him well, don’t you? And your dear father — he’s been always kind to me — is, like *my* father, lost in a past that’s passed away! You are young, child, and I am — what I am. But in his interest youth and age are nothing! Let it be said of you and me by the Henogs of the future: ‘Those two forgot everything in that hour to strengthen the hand of the man they loved!’”

“She has said all,” thought Morfydd. “I can speak if I want to.” But before speaking she rose quickly, put down her cloak, and moved to the window slit. Then raising her bare arms above her head and standing on tiptoe she jerked the plank from its place in the ledge and let it fall with a crash on the stone floor.

With a strong eddy the thick cloud of smoke above their heads broke in the air that rushed in, broke and divided, some of it sweeping out through the exposed aperture, some of it escaping through the thin spaces left unfilled by the swaying curtain across the door. Then she came back to her place, picked up her cloak, and began very quietly and deliberately replacing it about her shoulders.

Euronwy also rose. Did she take the girl’s gesture as a sign of contemptuous rejection of her offer? Once on her feet she made a faint retreating movement and pressed one hand upon the high back of her chair. But if the woman did for a second think such a thing she was pathetically mistaken; for Morfydd hardly knew what she was doing. One confused feeling followed another, one wild doubt followed another, one desperate resolve followed another. For some seconds she stared at the tall white-robed figure before her with a frowning intentness.

Then she said, “I thought in all you did, my Lady, you obeyed *him* down there.”

“Gorsant, do you mean?” Euronwy’s relief in the respite gained from this was so great that she actually smiled. She hadn’t done this in Morfydd’s presence since the young woman had been engaged to Porius, an event which had been almost immediately followed by Morvran’s murder which had made the gulf between them impassable. The two women were looking now straight into each other’s eyes. Euronwy relaxed her hold upon the back of her chair, stiffened herself a little, and began speaking rapidly but in a much lower voice.

“You think,” she said, “and you have all thought, that because I... because I hear Mass so often and listen to his preaching, and believe in Christ as he does, and let him give me the Sacrament, that I’ve put my whole life in his hands. Child, it *is not true!* No one, I tell you, not he nor the blessed saints, *not Christ Himself,* comes between me and my son! My son has always come first and always will come first. What I give to Christ and His priest” — here she made a step forward and pressed both hands against her breast— “is what of my poor soul *is mine to give.* It is what — why should I hold this back from you who love him as I do? — who must love him as I do! — it is what his father has trampled on and thrown away! Girl, girl, would I tell you this if it wasn’t the truth? Ask... ask Christ’s Mother! It is for my son I live, for him, I tell you, that all of Euronwy that’s left feels, thinks, plans, and schemes. I want him to be himself, to be strong and powerful as he was born to be! I knew he wanted you — knew it before he did, before *you* did! I knew he needed a wife like you — like any of the others, and that is why — though the prince and your father are brothers and though ‘he down there’ opposed it, opposed it, I tell you, in... in ways you’d never guess at — I let the prince have his way. You have power over the prince... he has taken... but we won’t talk of that now — but once married to my son — I know Einion ab Iddawc through and through — you and he will have no trouble with him — you and he will have all, *all* I tell you, in your hands.

“Hear me, hear me, Morfydd! We are the two he loves — only us, none but us — and if we become one in this — I don’t ask you for more — I don’t ask you to love *me* — you can hate me if you like apart from him — but where he’s concerned, child, where he’s concerned, let us — I’m begging it of you as I’ve never begged anything of a living creature! — let us put away, let us put away and forget, *everything but him!”*

Her hands had left her breast and her fingers were clutching the front of the black cloak which the younger woman had automatically resumed and which now hung loose upon her.

Morfydd remained plunged in deep fathoms of thought; and the quaint thing was that in complete ignorance of what she was doing one of her own fingers began gently stroking in a monotonous seesaw the knuckles of the hands that were clenched upon her cloak. Thus the two of them stood, the younger frowning and thinking, the elder trembling and praying.

At length Morfydd began to speak. She spoke quietly and naturally, though rather wearily, as if the decision she had been compelled to reach had necessitated either an exhausting effort of thought or a life-draining outrage to her feelings.

"Do you mind if I put back that piece of wood? Your fire's lower now. I don't want our — *participatio* my father would call it — to be hurried."

The girl hardly knew what she was saying now for her mind, moving rapidly and resolutely from point to point, like a young gladiator in the Coliseum, was deciding on a daring and dramatic course of action.

Euronwy let her lead her back to her chair, but when the plank had been replaced and she had returned to meet those staring eyes again, she tried to feel that a final and tremendous gather, like an invisible cloud of something more invasive than smoke, had descended upon her. She had decided — even while she was covering, with anything she could lay hands on, the unbearable nakedness of this woman's exposure — exactly what she would say and do.

She also would be frank, but frank to definite effect, and if this daughter of Porius Manlius, this cousin of Uthyr Pendragon, could suggest their arranging for a future for the man they loved, she, the child of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles, must decide what precise future this should be. She must have no mere vague emotional "participation" between them but a fatal and inescapable pact!

Calm she certainly did feel, calm and resolute. But she had to confess to herself even in the brief moment during which she came back from that double effort, the physical one with the great piece of wood, and the mental one to be at rest with her decision, that at the bottom of her soul there still lay something, something that *she was standing upon* as she lifted the fallen plank to the window, which she must keep out of her thoughts if she was to do what she had determined to do.

"Arglwyddes," she said, looking into those dazed and tired eyes, "I do understand you much better now. You are a wise and a good woman and have lived in the great world. Until I loved Porius I lived only with books,

only with the thoughts of my father and the thoughts of my brother about books. Since the man down there made them... I mean since Morvran was killed... my father has shared his thoughts with me.

"Porius has been very good to me, and we've been happy together; and though Rhun ap Gwrnach is longer away at the Ford than he used to be he has not deserted us as so many have, and Porius says he will go with him when the time comes for serving the emperor."

"He *does* talk to you then of serving the emperor? He *will* be ready then to do what Arthur wants and drive Colgrim and his Saxons into the lion's mouth?"

The light had come again into Euronwy's eyes and she had ceased to lie back in her chair as though her very soul had been poured out on the ground. "He *has* talked to you then about serving the emperor?" she repeated eagerly.

"He certainly has, and I've often heard him discuss with Rhun ap Gwrnach what particular men he'd take with him if he decided to go."

"You're like me then? You're not afraid for him any more than I am with these Saxons?"

"I will be frank with you, Lady, as you've been with me. At least I shan't have to fear for him *here* since I have made up my mind *to go with him!"*

"With him?"

The girl nodded. "After we're married," she added, "though my nurse swears that many of the emperor's horsemen are maids in disguise! You, my Lady, have seen much more of the world than I have, and you must correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe things are very different in the court of Arthur — just as they are in the court of Anastasius — from what they were in the old times when Ul-Kessar and Gloyw-Kessar came here from Rome. Porius says Arthur's ladies go with him to all his camps; and it seems that this present trouble about Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd came about from Myrddin and Medrawd bringing their women with them to Saint Julian's Fount."

All this time Euronwy had displayed a steadily increasing relief and eagerness, a relief however that was still intermittently overclouded by waves of distrust and doubt, although the girl could see that these got rarer and rarer.

But now the Lady of the Gaer rose suddenly from her seat and stretched out her hand. The other clasped it, but straightened herself while she did so and even drew back a little, making it unmistakable that she had no intention of closing their agreement with an embrace.

"This," announced Morfydd in a hard, clear voice that made the older woman think of the girl's atheistic brother and how coldly he had retorted to her hesitating attempts to soften his unbelief when he first came back from the school' beyond the mountains, "this is only the first move between us. You are a lady of many courts and of wide experience. I am only a girl-student of old books; and I dare say this whole idea of mine is laughable and childish. But it *is* my idea, and like my brother — it must be our Gwyddyl blood — I'm absolutely fixed upon it and nothing anyone could say will turn me from it. Of course my poor father — the devil himself could talk *him* round if he quoted Plato!"

"What *is* your idea? I may not find it at all childish."

"May I really be frank with you, as if with... someone of my own age?"

"Of course."

"Well then, it's like this! You and I being what we are — you pure Brython and pure Roman and I such a mixture — it's *impossible,* as the mother and wife of the same man, however much our love for him conquers our jealousy, for us to trust each other's mere word. But trust something in each other we must, if we’re to have a real agreement and stop trying to pull him in half! And I have thought of a thing, a thing that we *can* trust, even if we feel ourselves hating each other and wishing we could do something terrible to each other!

“Countries and provinces, tribes and races on whom there’s a *tynged* that they should distrust and misunderstand each other like — well! like the Romans and the Gwyddyl-Ffichti! — when they make solemn promises to each other, make them *on* something, not of course on the *same* thing, for they hold nothing sacred in common, but each on their own special thing. Now you hold most sacred of all the altar of Christ; and I have come — never mind how — to hold sacred the relics, kept here in your Gaer chapel behind that altar, of Rhitta Gawr.”

Here the girl paused, watching intently the flickering expressions of wonder, bewilderment, fear, and hope that crossed the face before her. Then she went on calmly and resolutely.

“Let’s go together now then, while they’re all in the hall and the kitchen, and make our treaty in your chapel before Christ and *that other,* calling upon them both to rot the flesh from our bones if we break faith. But we mustn’t swear an inch further, no! not a word beyond a clear-cut simple practical promise to aim for the same good, the same kind of future, the same kind of success and happiness and greatness, for your son and my husband.”

Again she paused, but only to add in a grave but less certain voice: “And this of course means that, as over my immediate marriage and over my going with him, and over Rhun ap Gwrnach and the other picked men going with him — the things we’ve *already decided* — we should agree together, later as now, just what it is we do, both of us, want most for him. Does this seem silly and childish to you, Euronwy ferch Porius Manlius, or doesn't it?"

The final expression left now upon the face she'd been studying as she talked — studying even more closely than she was wont to pore over her brother's Virgil but with the same quaint lines in her forehead — was an astonishment to her and not a little disconcerting. For Euronwy was actually smiling, and smiling with a smile that puzzled her completely, for it was at once tender and profoundly amused. This was the last thing she expected, and in all her life nobody, not even her father, had looked at her just like that.

"Is it too silly — what I've been saying?" she burst out in an unexpected rush of confusion and shyness.

Euronwy shook her head. "Not silly at all, child. And we'll go at once and do what you want. But, God in Heaven, Rhitta Gawr! What a queer little girl you are!"

"No, I don't want anybody," the Lady of the Gaer said presently as they passed together through the anteroom. "Morfydd and I are going to find Canna ferch Glam."

They reached the small chapel at a moment that might have been bestowed on them as a special benediction by Brochvael's goddess of chance. There was no ordinary arrow slit into the open air through the wall of this place; but there was a round hole that looked as if Nature and not man had made it, and through this round hole at this particular moment the October sun, its rim nearly touching the mountains, showed as a red ball of fire.

So large was it, and so filled with its crimson bulk was that small orifice in the massive wall, that for a moment it gave the girl the impression that she was gazing down a deep well, not a perpendicular well but a horizontal one, a round trumpet-shaped hole in fact, leading only too quickly into a sea of blood. No ray from this circular postern into an ocean of blood penetrated the chapel, nor did its presence suggest a fiery furnace.

What it suggested was only blood; a sea of blood, a sky of blood, an infinite expanse of air composed of blood! The Gaer chapel was almost savagely bare. It contained no seat, no bench, no image, no picture. It contained nothing but a huge stone altar upon which was a golden cup of prodigious height standing on a golden platter. On each side of this cup and platter stood a roughly wrought golden sconce containing a small burning wick fed by fragrant oil.

The wall against which the altar had been placed was clearly a portion of some original stratum of rock that the builder of the Gaer — Rhitta Gawr himself, according to tradition — had left undisturbed. The altar was simply an exceptionally large and exceptionally smooth slab of the local stone, the then famous stone of Rhyd Mithras but now, since the priest had rebaptized the place, the stone of Corwen; and it stood on four square blocks of oak.

There was a yard of clear space behind the altar; and it was here, a little lower than the altar stone, that some cosmogonic movement of primordial elements sidetracked even in that remote epoch by some friendly caprice of Chance, the Saviour, had caused to be created a natural sarcophagus.

Here had been preserved by the men of old time, ancestors of the forest people, the famous relics of Rhitta Gawr. Euronwy looked calmly about her in that familiar place where the ministrations of Minnawc Gorsant had proved so deep a consolation. There lingered still about her lips that same faint smile that at the last had so disconcerted and puzzled Morfydd, nor was it dissipated by a dimly amused wonder as to how much longer her priest of Christ, whose impassioned features she could now visualize in imagination so clearly above those golden vessels, would be able to keep his reforming fingers off the profane relics of this heathen giant.

Certainly the christening of the place during the recent years had not destroyed the age-old atmosphere of prehistoric religion that still emanated from all but the golden platter and the golden cup. There was no image, no icon of Jesus. There was no semblance of a cross. There were no sacred books. All such things, though he possessed them in his newly built shrine by the river, the priest had shown a curious reluctance to leave behind him in the Gaer. In spite however of this heathen atmosphere, of the two women standing in that darkening chamber it was the elder, as she waited in patient amusement for what her surprising rival would do next, who was the more at peace with her own heart.

Morfydd on the contrary was once again in the throes of her darkest and secretest trouble. That blood-red hole in the wall was the thing that had revived it, now when above everything else it was necessary to crush it down. She had discovered what his mother had no idea of, the strange and peculiar spell that any mention of those mythical creatures, the giants of Eryri and the Cader, possessed for Porius. Would what she had decided upon just now, as she struggled to replace that grotesque piece of wood, finally and irrevocably commit her?

The scepticism she had so lightly acquired from her father and brother could deal easily enough with Euronwy's Christ. Could it deal with Porius's Rhitta Gawr?

"It's all fancy," she thought. "It's all the Modrybedd's superstition. Morvran would laugh at me."

Well! It was she herself who had decided. It was she herself who must now commit herself over these un-Christian relics! Sooner or later the time would have had to come. Well! It had come now, and by her own contrivance. Little did this white-robed woman, who stood there so calm and patient before the refuge of her ruined love, guess why her son’s bride was delaying so, delaying when she was in the very place she had wanted to be in, the place where both their *Mysteria* could be invoked!

But the woman seemed reluctant to shake off the brooding reverie into which those golden vessels had plunged her, and Morfydd could see that for her the place was so full of a mystic felicity that any bond to which she abandoned herself here would be as sacred, if not as super-sacred and final, as if it had been borne witness to by an angelic vision!

“You don’t know this place as well as I do,” Euronwy suddenly said, and she said it in so detached a tone that Morfydd could only give her a conventional nod full of every ingredient of distrust and reserve. “Don’t stop watching the sun go down,” she went on, “I’m so used to seeing that hole in the wall that it doesn’t seem as strange to me as it does to everybody else. Stand back a little further and you’ll see it better. I’ll say a prayer till you’re ready.”

She knelt down as she spoke with her clasped hands on the edge of the great stone and her forehead pressed against her hands.

Morfydd’s heart had become so oppressed by the sudden irresistible mounting up of the trouble she had all day been fighting that it was with a relief resembling that of a reprieve from execution that she now stepped back as instructed and surveyed the crimson hole from this new position.

But it was not at the hole, nor at the rim of the red orb, sunken enough now below the upper curve of the hole to reveal in the narrow arch of space set free from that fiery rondure an indescribable recession of blue nothingness growing darker and darker as it withdrew, nor was it at the weird greenish tint which the jagged edges of the hole had begun to assume as if the whole Gaer had been fathoms deep below the sea, that the girl was staring.

She was staring at a series of rocky ledges and mossy descents, a series of willows and birches, of secret brooks and miniature waterfalls, caught in quick succession one after another, as she fled, wildly, exultantly, recklessly, towards a far-off mountain torrent; a torrent that issued from an impenetrable recess in a wall of solid rock.

She was a grown-up girl when it happened, but the three of them were only playing the game they had always played, and Auntie Alarch — Rhun's mother and Porius's foster-mother — had never interfered, nor had her own mother, Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles, given it a thought.

The game was for her to hide and for the foster-brothers to hunt for her; and at the first glimpse either of them had of her, she had to race for home and try to get there before she was caught. Home was never the old wooden house of Gwrnach ab Agenor y Gaethwas between the shrine of Saint Julian and the river; nor was it the House of Stone. It was a little treeless rock-plateau covered with small flowering plants and masses of soft grey lichen and it was a "home" that gave a person the feeling of being in a jackdaw's nest, able to look down on the tops of the tallest trees.

The older she had grown, the more exciting she had found this game, and she seldom got caught because she took care never to be seen before she had an easy start.

On the rare occasions when Porius caught her he always did the same thing, picked her up in his arms and carried her home, selecting the longest way round he could think of, and ending up — if Rhun hadn't got home yet — by lifting her high above his head to look out for him.

But what she felt with her heart now, as with her eyes she watched the red rim vanish and the jagged edges of the hole lose their greenish tint and the small circle of space grow dim, was her first sight of Rhun climbing the slope towards her hiding place. What a chase had followed! Never, never, though Porius took her to the court of Anastasius, though she became the mother of a long line of princes, princes not only of Edeyrnion but of all Gwynedd, could she feel like that again!

She had thought afterwards and she thought now, “It’s the blood of Gwrnach; it’s the blood of Agenor the Greek slave that makes him the great runner! That’s what must have melted the bones of Auntie Alarch when his father saved the House of Cunedda by his godlike speed.” To be as swift as a deer, as a greyhound, as a wave of the sea, as the wings of the north wind, oh, how much more godlike that was than to be as strong as Hercules or Samson or even Rhitta Gawr!

And all the feelings she had been forcing down shook themselves loose and rushed upon her as she turned from that chilly hole in the wall to the white figure with its head against the stone slab!

She felt again how her knees had loosened beneath her as he drew near. And then he had caught her, and in his hands she was happier and more helpless than she was ever likely to be again! That was the way to be taken by a man — on the mountainside and after a desperate chase — not handed over by fathers and mothers and aunts and uncles like a bundle!

But Rhun *hadn’t* taken her; he hadn’t ravished her, as those young heroes ravished their Greek girls in the books. And though the memory of that heavenly chase and how he’d caught her and held her made her breasts tighten and her veins burn, and made delicious aching shiverings go up and down her body, Rhun had never seemed to know what he’d done to her.

After that day by a sort of instinct in all three of them they’d stopped playing that game. They’d found Porius waiting for them when they got home to their jackdaw rock; but he’d shown no jealousy. He never *did* show jealousy, either of Rhun or anyone else! It was his way. He took everything for granted. He seemed as fond of Rhun as ever and Rhun of him.

Neither of them seemed to forget that after the death of her second baby it had been Alarch, and not that woman there on her knees, who had suckled Porius! And when Rhun's father died and Rhun got this Mithras mania and was always away at the Ford, he too seemed to take it for granted, just like Porius himself, that she was to be Porius's wife.

How different from both of them Morvran had been! He never played their games. He never would even come to see their jackdaw rock. He shut himself up with his books and read and read — till he paid for his ideas with his life!

"Goodbye, Rhun!" It was the hidden thing in her heart that cried out that "goodbye," and it was almost as if the kneeling woman had heard it, for she got up now and looked at her — still with that same queer smile.

"Well, child?" she said gently.

The chapel was full of a deathly twilight now and a deathly silence; and it seemed to Morfydd, as she moved round the stone slab and laid her right hand on the rock behind it, that she stepped over something dead to reach that place.

"Lay your right hand on your most sacred thing, Lady, while mine's on this one. Touch the platter, where he turns bread into Christ's flesh!"

The elder woman stretched her arm quietly and patiently across the slab of stone and clasped with her fingers the long narrow stem of the cup.

"Wine into blood," she said in a clear voice, "is more sacred to me than bread into flesh."

"And now let's both say the same words!" And Morfydd paused, biting her underlip and frowning.

It was clear, Euronwy told herself, that this young priestess of Christ and Rhitta Gawr had not yet composed the words for their united invocation. “She must be pondering,” the Gaer Lady thought, “how on earth to reconcile the Son of God with this fabulous giant!”

But the girl lifted up her voice now, quite loud and clear. “If I don’t think of him,” she repeated, “in peace with you may I not be happy!”

It must have been with some vague idea of an invocation that should be both retrospective and prospective that Morfydd uttered this final sentence. For it was spoken in the accent of her nurse and it carried the lilt of an old ballad burden that Canna must have brought with her from the north. And patiently and humbly Euronwy began to repeat the fantastic words, but when she reached the “may I not be happy” her voice faltered.

She only got through that final heathen *tynged* by throwing her emotion into the desperate grip with which her fingers now tightened on the sacred cup. The moment it was said she withdrew her arm; but this she did so hastily that the golden cup, adhering for a second by reason of the warmth of her hand to the fingers that so hotly clutched it, fell down with a bell-like tinkle upon the platter.

She readjusted it at once, reverently enough, in its former position; but the accident completed the disruption of her peaceful mood.

Morfydd, on the contrary, as she came round the altar from that sarcophagus behind it which very well may have contained, amid its dust, relics of human bones and human hair, had succeeded in throwing off her trouble. Her eyes showed large and eager in the dim light, and their colour looked amber rather than brown.

“They may have come back already,” she cried excitedly, “while we were here taking our oath. Will the prince let them off the drinking tonight? If I stay, Father’s sure to come and fetch me, and Gwythyr could bring back

Canna and the donkey tomorrow! She'd adore to stay the night up here. Do you think they'll tell us everything that's happened? Oh, I pray the prince won't make them drink!"

"Them, child?"

And suddenly to Morfydd's astonishment this woman, who had just now been so calm and detached, lurched forward and caught her in her arms.

"You... don't... know... how... you hit me to the heart!" she sobbed out; and as the woman's breasts pressed closer and closer against her body, Morfydd could catch the sweet scent of the root dust of the special local plant that Canna also used in the washing of woollen garments.

"Child, child, don't you see how piteous life is — how cruel to us women! 'He'— 'them' — that's the way it always is! 'They' go — and we wait and wonder. 'They' come — and we plot and scheme. The mother's hand there — the wife's hand here — and what really do we know of them and their thoughts? Nothing! We know when they want us — we know when they don't want us — that's all we know, all we're allowed to know! Will the prince make them drink? — that's what you ask me! *What does the prince want to forget* in his drink? — that's what I ask you!"

She became silent then and gradually her weeping ceased; and Morfydd wondered vaguely why it was that this outburst left her own heart so cold. With her mind she pitied her. In her mind she felt sympathetic and even tender to her, but every nerve in her young body cried out to escape, to put an end to this. But this was all part of the rash bond into which she herself, with her crazy notion of getting things clear and clean-cut and final, had rushed them!

"She's right," she said to herself. "I'm a childish idiot! What do I know of the lives of men, or the lives of the mothers of men either?"

And then when she found Euronwy had let her go and was even trying to smile she thought, “Did I really say them instead of him? And has she guessed about Rhun? If she *has* guessed, she’s much cleverer as well as nicer than I ever imagined—”

But her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of familiar voices, then by the approach of heavy footsteps, and finally by the rattle of weapons in the passage outside their retreat.

Both women looked aghast and exchanged a significant glance. A wild rush of the same impulse seized them — to escape anyhow, anywhere, anyway, rather than be caught indulging in this unheard-of colloquy, off guard, dishevelled, exposed, squeezed in between Jesus and Rhitta Gawr, by a drunken husband and an agitated father! But this is precisely what they were destined to endure.

Closely attended, or to put it more correctly, preceded and followed by several excited striplings, full of pride in their new *Gosgordd* equipment, the prince and Brochvael burst with such a rush into the chapel that both the wife of the one and the daughter of the other found themselves swept back clean against the altar. Here they were forced to face the intruders, the woman with the long subsiding of her sobbing fit only just over, and the girl with her cloak dragging on the floor and a lock of loose hair trailing across cheek and shoulder.

The influx of the blazing torches carried by two of the guard increased the shock of this eruption, transforming that mystic twilight into a troubled pool, whose dark ripples and darker reflections were rendered dangerous and threatening by the yellow beams that rose and sank among them like leaping fish with glittering scales.

As for the Lady of the Gaer, her calm composure and gracious dignity as the two men approached her and kissed her hand struck the girl with positive awe, for all she could do herself was to tug impatiently at Brochvael's Etrurian cloak and implore him for news of Porius and Rhun. With him she had no hesitation about mentioning both their names, and the news that they were both safe at the Fount changed for her the whole atmosphere of the moment. In her liberation from her great dread she felt able to enjoy with an irresponsibility worthy of the prince himself the lighter aspects of the drama around her.

One of these aspects — though, as the girl knew well, it was tragic enough for the Lady of the Gaer — was the obvious fact that the prince had already been drinking. She didn't miss the looks exchanged between the young Gosgordd men when he began addressing his wife and everybody else in what, for all his charm of manner, was hardly less than a tipsy harangue. It was uttered with his usual mockery and it was thoroughly natural but, all the same, she caught in it a note she'd never detected in him before.

"He's had a shock," she said to herself, "and he's trying to carry it off." Her interest in the prince and his condition, and the effect of both on the lady, made it hard to listen to what her father was telling her, for though he couldn't have been accused just then of practising the epistolary style of the lively Sidonius, his intensity of feeling and his desire that she should share his feeling made him the reverse of laconic.

Thus it became the destiny of these extremely new feminine allies to pick up what truth they could about a crisis that affected them to the very depths, from the particular men who of all the inhabitants of that princedom who lived most removed from the things that necessity makes so real to women.

Less experienced than Euronwy in extracting this particular essence of the multicoloured bubble of life from an excited man's version of it, Morfydd permitted her attention, when once she was assured of “their” safety, to wander to the flickering torchlight as it wavered among the warriors’ accoutrements.

It was while the fading of her interest in Brochvael’s discovery of the treachery of Erim ab Uchtryd made her surroundings grow more arresting that she was suddenly struck with dismay by noticing that the prince was carrying the sword of Cunedda under his arm and that its point was broken clean off. Had he been attacked? No, he must have just been playing with it — the idiotic fool! Morfydd was more than a little horrified.

All her life she had been taught by her father to regard that sword, hanging in the banquet hall of the Gaer, as the symbol of the House of Cunedda’s lasting dominion over Edeyrnion. And now its point was missing! Poor Euronwy — had she noticed it? She *must* have; and yet here she was, smiling just the same, while that handsome clown went on with his tipsy tirade!

“You mustn’t think I was listening at Erim’s door,” her father was now assuring her, “nor did I wait to hear more than that one word about Colgrim, for though chance had given me—”

But the syllables “Colgrim” were to Morfydd at that moment no more than the tap of a blown leaf against the corrugated ruggedness of the prince’s forehead. How royal-looking the man was! Twenty times handsomer than poor old Porius! She could see a gleam of gold still lingering in the curls of his grizzled beard. His whole face had a curious softness, a sophisticated charm. “But he isn’t half the man Father is!”

And though at that moment, glancing instinctively at Euronwy, she caught a look that warned her that the supreme test of their new compact was at hand and that at any second they might be swept — not separately but together — into this weird council of war, she couldn't help feeling a thrill of pride in her father.

It wasn't the clear-cut reason that she regarded as her special characteristic that at this moment was so thrilled; it was her whole body and soul. With a sigh of relief she thanked the blest gods that she wasn't the daughter of the Prince of Edeyrnion but of this toothless old man hugging his cloak and leaning on his staff. For all his pedantries he was the man and not the other.

"If I were poor Euronwy," she thought, "I'd poison this heartless rogue! Is Canna right after all? Does she love that awful priest? Or has she grown too old for such feelings? If she's too old," she chanted bitterly to herself, "and I'm too young, why then — it's pure *tynged,* pure destiny, for women and girls alike! Men are different. They can love without fate. Whether seduced or seducing, it's all a mixture of chance and choice!

"But it's no more chance with us than it's choice. Neither we nor the men we love have anything to do with it. Of itself it comes. Of itself it goes. We don't choose it. *It* chooses us."

Suddenly Morfydd fancied she heard the sound of mocking girlish laughter wafted down the corridor from the entrance to the Gaer, and it made her think of the mischievous pleasure she'd been deriving of late from teasing this handsome fool by letting him take her on his knees. She had enjoyed teasing him, and as for feeling any fear of him — heavens! She had more fear of Porius.

There was that, voice again! And she knew it now. It was Sibylla's, and it came from some considerable distance behind the torch bearers; yes! almost, she fancied, beyond the entrance to the banquet hall. And the shrill voice of Sibylla was repeating over and over again: "I *will* see him! I *must* see him! He *told* me to see him!"

It was plain enough that neither the prince nor Brochvael heard these far-off sounds. But did Euronwy hear them? She glanced hurriedly to see, and their eyes met. But Euronwy's response had only to do with their private compact and all it signalled was: "Don't precipitate matters. Our moment will come."

But how well could Morfydd imagine what was happening out there! Sibylla was a Gwyddyl-Ffichti girl from beyond the Swamp whose amorous blood, bitter tongue, and wild tales of y Bychan must, with her youthful daring, have captivated the prince on his hunting excursions long before any open scandal began. No one could call Sibylla beautiful and Morfydd had heard Brython women describe her as ugly. But she was feared and respected by the forest people, and though the Romanized ladies despised her, they treated her with caution when they crossed her path at the market. Old Canna had known her from her infancy and Morfydd's own mother had made quite a pet of her. Sibylla's particular kind of devilry was exactly what would delight the irresponsible prince, while the prince's good looks and golden graces were dedicated to fascinate Sibylla.

Oh, how clearly Morfydd could envisage the girl's Gwyddyl-Ffichti fury at not being allowed to burst into the Gaer chapel heedless of what was going on! And how well too she could hear the derisive contempt in the prince's voice with which he would retort to every protest if such an event did occur!

But what was this? Her brown eyes positively widened in their sockets as she saw the expression on her father's face. She knew him so well, knew him in all his moods, and she could see now that he was listening with an intense and absorbed interest to what the prince was saying.

For herself, she hadn't given a thought to what he said, taking for granted that it was some silly drunken nonsense. Yet here was Brochvael, with his eyes narrowed and illuminated, his toothless lips a little sucked in, his hands alternately drawing his mantle tighter to his ribs and tapping the floor with his precious staff, the staff given him by the Gallic philosopher Claudianus!

It annoyed her that with that girl scolding outside, and probably biting and scratching to get in, this handsome idiot who had broken Euronwy's heart should have it in him to draw that look of inspired interest from a man as clever as her father. She had always laughed at Porius's fear of him and his talk. Was this the way he discoursed at those mead drinkings in the "shadowy hall?"

Well! She could only say his talk had absolutely no fascination for *her.* It made her think of Gwrgi talking to Blackie. In his tipsiness the handsome fool was just thinking aloud — and what muddled thoughts — not a single clear-cut, definite, lucid idea among them.

"It's only," he was saying now, "what I've been telling everybody for years, only nobody would listen. What's happening is simply what I've always said would happen. The age of our Brythonic glory is over — simply, naturally, and quite properly over. Why shouldn't it be? Isn't the glory of Rome over? Listen, Brochvael! Your friend Sidonius may pretend his Bishops of Rome are carrying on the Roman Empire. I tell you whatever they're doing — and heaven knows what they're doing — they're not doing *that.* Rome's done for, though I hate to tell *you* so, Euronwy" — and he made his wife one of his mocking bows— "and our New Rome on the Bosporus only lives, and *will* only live, even though Anastasius *does* recanonize our Pelagius — like the Blessed Bran at Harlech — as a *Caput Mortuum!* Every race has its Golden Age and then — ashes and dust!

"'All flows away,' as your son used to quote from somewhere, brother, 'and nothing abides.' The Modrybedd with their precious Derwydd are treating with the Saxons. Well! What of it? I would treat with the Saxons myself, as Gortheyrn Gortheneu did when Hengyst cried *'wasseil!'* and *'drincheil!,'* if they'd offer me — you must pardon me, beautiful niece!" — and this time he made his mocking bow to Morfydd— "such a bribe as from all accounts the girl Ronwen must have been! No, hear me out, brother; for though I talk like this, I've learnt my lesson and shall obey orders from now on. You'll say the forest people have had *their* 'Golden Age' too? Well, listen now to me, children all! The forest people have never *had* a 'Golden Age,' and never will. They're beyond it, like me; or beneath it, like Iscovan y Bychan! They don't want it anyway, and that's why we can't — why nobody ever will — really conquer them.

"All this business of their poisoned arrows and their Derwydd bringing them back to life and their giants from the mountains feeding on corpses is all foam on the surface. Their life, brother, is deeper than all that. They've *always known* — as our mother used to say when this mad Gorsant first came to trouble us — what we simple Brythons think was first revealed in Asia Minor in the year one! It was revealed in *Africa,* brother, in the year twenty thousand before Christ!"

He stopped suddenly and swung round. He had heard the shrill voice of his latest enchantress. Morfydd laid her hand hurriedly on her father's mantle. Euronwy and she exchanged a quick glance. The torch bearers turned their heads; and, as they turned, the flames they carried flickered wildly from face to face.

The prince paused as he moved away and said gravely and seriously and with a wave of his hand: "As I told you, Brochvael, I'll do in this matter whatever you decide. Euronwy will speak for our son. Morfydd will no doubt" — he gave his wife a mocking bow— "speak for him too. But from now on I'll meddle with none of you. What you" — and taking by its blade the broken sword from beneath his arm he offered the massive cross handle to his brother— “decide is best for me to do, I’ll do. What that mad counsellor is to Arthur you shall be to me, old friend. It’s a pity — and I’ve always known it — that you weren’t the first born! But since you’re not, the prince’s counsellor is what you are from now on! By my father’s head, you look the part, with that mystic cloak and Gallic staff! Hang up the sword in its place, brother, and tell me the *cyngor* of the counsellor over the mead tonight. No, stay here, you!” — this was to one of the torch bearers— “the ladies and the counsellor will want all the light they can get!”

His departure, along with that of all his followers save the one solitary torch bearer, had a bad effect on Morfydd’s nerves. Much as she despised him, she felt more at ease and for some odd reason safer while he and his mockery were the dominant element. Now that she was thrown back on herself she suddenly felt as if a powerful natural force, whose very waywardness was a support to her, had been removed. While the prince was there she had become a mischievous child again. She felt an impulse to behave like that wild Gwyddyl-Ffichti girl and cry out before them all: “Tell him to come back! I *must* have him back!”

The chapel itself seemed to miss that irresponsible and glittering presence. Something more than one of the torches was gone. The place had suddenly grown ghostly and cold, full of solemn vows and ominous finalities.

But she must pull herself out of this. She must think clearly and act decisively. She must get back her pride, her spirit! She must once more be the Morfydd she knew, the Morfydd who could face reality alone and unafraid. Her father was speaking to her now and Euronwy had her hand on her arm.

"Hold my staff, girl, will you?" Brochvael was saying and placing it in her hands he took the torch from the torch bearer who was evidently ill at ease and bade him be gone. Then holding the light clumsily above their three heads while its oil dripped on the stones and the flame grew dusky with smoke, he fumbled with the sword so as to get its injured point wrapped in the folds of his mantle.

Then Euronwy said, "Morfydd and I have been thinking, Brochvael, and we feel that the time has come—"

But something about her father's fumblings with the torch and sword had roused in Morfydd an absolute necessity for finding a mind as clear-cut and practical as her own; and she interrupted brusquely, and with a voice of almost harsh authority.

"We must go straight to your father, Lady, to Porius Manlius. He is the one to help us decide what to say to the prince." Then she turned to her father. "I know Porius ab Einion well enough," she said, "to have the right to speak for him, and I am certain" — while she spoke she was helping her father to adjust the sword under the mantle and lift the torch, whose smoke by this time was getting into all their eyes, into a perpendicular position— "that he wouldn't like us to decide anything, or advise the prince to decide anything, until we'd consulted Porius Manlius Patricius."

Pulling her own cloak as neatly as she could round both herself and the silver-tipped staff of Claudianus, she turned back now to Euronwy and respectfully rearranged the priestesslike folds of her robe.

"Shall we go at once to his room?" she enquired of the older woman. And it was then that it became her destiny to be the astonished recipient of the first gesture of impassioned gratitude that the Lady of the Gaer had had ever made to any woman of Edeyrnion. For, as Brochvael, moving forward in submission to his daughter's will, muttered wearily without turning his head or raising his voice, “While Rome’s still a name, we Brythons will cling to that name,” the shadow thrown backwards by the torch he was carrying swept both the women into darkness; and in this darkness Euronwy snatched at the cold fingers with which the girl was holding Claudian’s staff, and for one desperate moment pressed them, staff and all, against her love-starved lips.

CHAPTER XII. Porius Manlius

IT HAD BEEN FOR SOME years the custom of Porius Manlius to take his dinner alone in the chamber which had been his since his first coming to Mynydd-y-Gaer. Aulus brought up this repast to his old master from the kitchen and respectfully waited upon him while he partook of it, which he did in the traditional manner of his ancestors, reclining on his bed.

This bed, brought from the Villa Nova Praeneste, was supported upon four bronze feet, each designed in the shape of an eagle's claws grasping an orb. It was covered with a mattress and a pile of rugs and several cushions; and before the evening meal, which these two old men continued to call the *cena,* it was the duty of the ex-centurion to tilt up the bed an inch or two on the side furthest from the table by means of small blocks of wood placed beneath its feet.

The table itself was a little lower than the edge of the bed, and the effect of this tilt was to give the latter a convenient incline towards the former so that the old man, with his left elbow supported on a couple of cushions, could feed himself with his right hand.

In addition to giving his master's bed its appropriate slant, Aulus had to remove at dinnertime certain objects which impeded the spreading of the cloth. These objects which the ex-centurion crowded together on the portion of the table that was left uncovered consisted of a small statue of Fors Fortuna, which from its chaste and benign aspect, in spite of its origin in his pagan home, the old man had come to associate in his mind with the Mother of Jesus; an old-fashioned writing tablet; an antique incense tray, used only on certain particular feast days, for Porius Manlius was an austere Christian, to waft his homely piety to the throne of grace; and finally a few leather-bound volumes, the contents of which would have held small attraction either for Morfydd or her father.

Over the portion of the table, thus left clear for his master's *cena,* Aulus would spread a spotlessly white cloth; nor did he ever neglect to bring, along with this tablecloth, an equally spotless napkin, a silver bowl of fresh water, and several elegant spoons.

This last refinement from Uriconium, for none of the *equites* ever lifted their dishes to their lips, would have been impossible at the Gaer save for the respect throughout kitchen and scullery in which old Aulus was held.

Not a spoon disappeared. Sceptics maintained that this was due to fear of ill luck. But even the most sceptical seemed unwilling to try experiments.

On the evening of the nineteenth of October, more than twenty-four hours after the departure of his namesake with his precious water bottle, Porius Manlius, his repast over and the cloth removed, was enjoying, in punctilious sips from his army tin cup, his evening pint of red wine. The silver wine flagon from which this small cup was replenished was always carefully placed by Aulus midway between the statuette of the goddess of luck and the bronze incense tray, both of which were returned to their former stations, whereas it was the destiny of the books and the writing tablet to remain in exile until the wine was finished.

This event occurred every night just twice as soon as might have been expected owing to the fact that, though to make him sit down was impossible — for the only furniture in the room save the bed and the table was a tall lamp stand at one end of the bed and a capacious metal chest at the other — the old man insisted that Aulus, who was expected to bring with him his campaigning cup, should drink an equal portion of the wine.

What had made Euronwy select this chamber for her father was not merely its remoteness from the rest of the Gaer with which it was only connected by a long reed-thatched passage just inside the western wall, but also the fact that it had a balcony. The only window it contained was consequently the not very closely fitting upper portion of the thick wooden shutter opening on to this balcony, where had been inserted another civilized luxury, almost equal to the spoons, in the shape of an iron hinge.

"I hope," Porius Manlius was now remarking to his upright attendant, who stood gravely regarding him with his head a little bent and his tin cup in his hand, "I hope our young man hasn't forgotten in all these disturbances to fill my water flask."

"He is a good youth and a dutiful," replied the other.

They both raised their cups and drained them in simultaneous gulps.

"Is the fire all right?" enquired the Patrician.

Aulus reverently put down his cup on the extreme edge of the table so that it shouldn't obtrude its battered military presence in too close proximity to the chaste *Fortuna,* swung round as starkly as if fully armed and went over to a small brazier in the centre of the room raised on a couple of unpolished stones.

"It'll last till you're asleep, most honourable. But if it please you, I'll put on a small log."

"No, no, let it alone. We shall want all the wood they can spare us when the frosts begin. Do you remember, Aulus, that winter at the Villa when you and I had to sleep in the hall and my daughter in the kitchen?"

"And you told me, most honourable, about your illustrious grandfather, and how, when the barbarians invaded his house, he swam to an island and lived for a month in the stern of a stranded ship feeding on shellfish and tame sea birds and crabs."

“Aulus, tell me this. Tell me honestly what you think — no! fill them equally! — what you think yourself about all these rumours and counter-rumours?”

Both the aged men lifted their tin cups to their lips; and they did so with movements so exactly alike — an outward movement, a perpendicular movement, and a recessive movement — that they resembled the performance of a traditional drill.

Then, having drained the greater portion of the cups’ contents into which the last dregs of the silver goblet had been poured, they shook the remaining drops upon the stones in the direction of the balcony as if pouring a libation to a Presence in the upper air who was at once the Mother of the Elements and the Mother of God.

“My opinion, *honestissimus?”* asked the centurion in some surprise.

The one who reclined on the bed nodded.

“I am really to tell your honourableness what I think?”

“You *are,* Aulus.”

“I think, then, that the sooner a reliable messenger hastens to Brother John’s cell the better for us all.”

“With orders, you mean.”

“Naturally, most honourable, with orders from yourself.”

“Orders to whom?”

“Orders to *Princeps* Porius and that Greek idolater who goes about with him. I beg your pardon, *honestissimus,* I spoke as the kitchen speaks! I know he’s your son-in-law’s nephew; but I know too that if the ladies of the Giant’s Cave had their will, he and not Porius would be the next Prince of Edeyrnion. They’ve no laws, these people, no customs, no traditions! All they care for are poisoned arrows, magic cauldrons, and raising the dead.”

“Orders to do what?”

"To remain at their post, to remain where they are, throughout the night."

"And to keep careful watch, turn by turn?"

"Turn by turn, as your honourableness says, till they get *further* orders."

"But whom could we send? That is, of course, if my son-in-law took this advice?"

"He will take it. Make no mistake, most honourable."

"But he's never taken it before, and we have so often discussed plans of action for him. Sometimes — for we are getting old, Aulus — we may, I mean my daughter may, have even omitted to inform him of our decisions."

"My Lady and the Lady Morfydd were together this afternoon, and my Lady took her to the chapel. I won't trouble you, most honourable, with kitchen gossip; but I have reason to believe that the prince has never been more in need of advice than he is tonight — or more ready to listen to it."

"But whom could we send?" repeated Porius Manlius.

Aulus went to the door which opened into the reed-thatched tunnel that led to the hall and the chapel and the eastern gate. He opened the door a few inches and listened intently. From far down the long dark passage there reached his ears the sound of voices, a sound that started such a long sequence of thoughts in his mind that he waited there, pondering.

"It must be the lady herself bringing them all to see her father and to beg him to save them! That's how it happened when that bandit, Iscovan the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, burnt fifteen villages of the forest people. The forest people came near to revolting when they were told they had to fight against the Gwyddyl-Ffichti; and they would have done so too if the prince's brother hadn't married Kymeinvoll. And now they're in revolt again, and I know what they're up to. They're going to make a *princeps* of that idolatrous son of Alarch *filia* Iddawc in place of young Porius! I know their tricks; and what I know my master knows!"

"Aulus?"

"Adsum! I am here, most honourable," and softly closing the door he re-entered the chamber.

"You expect visitors here, my friend?"

"They are on the way, most honourable; not the prince but the Lady Euronwy and the blessed Jesus knows who else! They are frightened. They are coming to us because they're frightened. I heard the Lady Morfydd's voice."

He moved nearer to the bed where the Patrician lay in unruffled calm. Aulus had never respected his master more.

"Any one of these tricky islanders," he thought, "never mind from which of their curst tribes, would have been furious with me for not hurrying him through his dinner and giving him time to prepare his speech."

The two old men regarded each other gravely.

"Whom could we advise them to send to give those boys their orders?"

He had asked the centurion this question before; and now in his knowledge of the man he anticipated his response correctly.

"I would go myself."

"You, Aulus? On foot? But how would you get back?"

"In the same manner as I went! I would follow the method you yourself taught us when we hunted the bandit Iscovan over hill and dale. I'm not inexperienced, most honourable, in the tactics of colonial war. And I remember what you used to tell our scouts were the methods practised by Caius Julius in Gaul."

At this there *did* flit for a second across the clean-shaven countenance at the head of the tilted bed a look that might have been taken as a military substitute for a smile. But all he said was, "You'd better remove the props now, Aulus."

The ex-centurion went hurriedly round the bed and bent down between it and the wall.

"I'll get up," said Porius Manlius considerately.

When the props were taken away and the bed lowered and pushed back close to the wall, Aulus completed this part of his task by rearranging the rugs and cushions so as to afford comfortable seats for several persons. Then, placing the empty flagon and cups on the top of the metal chest, he proceeded to light all the five other oil wicks of the branching lamp stand from the one that was already burning.

That done, and with a quick glance at his master to make sure that the folds of the faded pallium hung properly from the old man's shoulders, he hurried to the door at which the visitors had already knocked and outside of which they had been holding a low-toned colloquy.

The centurion stood aside as they entered; but while they were exchanging courtesies with his master he took from Morfydd her father's precious staff, and from Brochvael the broken sword of Cunedda, and proceeded with scrupulous respect to balance the former against the bare wall and the latter against the embossed chest.

Euronwy could see, directly they came in, what a relief it was to her parent to find her brother-in-law rather than her husband crossing his threshold. Dutifully embracing the old man and commending Aulus for the neatness of the chamber, she might have seemed to the statue of Fors *Fortuna* an enlarged and modernized image of itself.

Knowing her father as no one else in the world, including even her dead Brythonic mother, had ever known him, Euronwy had not the faintest misgiving as to his reception of his new granddaughter. Like most old Roman officials Porius Manlius was especially partial to well-behaved young women, and there was something — she recognized this only too clearly — about the girl that endeared her, as by an immediate magnetic contact, to formidable grey-haired men.

But their impassioned covenant in the chapel, witnessed by Christ and Rhitta Gawr, must be kept at all costs; and so she forced herself to look on with a smile while her father kissed the daughter of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles tenderly on the forehead and even while he made a stiff little joke about youth and age and the two Poriuses, in the stately manner of a Roman ambassador doing honour to an Asiatic queen.

She was not even surprised, for the Manlii had been proconsuls for hundreds of years in all the three continents, when the old man began a series of quaintly elaborate manoeuvres to obtain a chance of speaking to Brochvael alone. To these manoeuvres she yielded so willingly that it was not long before she and Morfydd were more conveniently than comfortably settled, for the cushions were by no means swansdown, with their feet drawn up beneath them and their backs to the wall, upon the Patrician's bed; while Brochvael had been steered to a low wooden bench fixed in the angle between the lamp holder and the chest and quite out of their hearing.

Here the two fathers fell at once into a grave colloquy, the elder explaining to the younger without preamble or circumlocution the importance of Porius ab Einion remaining at Saint Julian's Fount.

Brochvael found himself more relieved than he expected by the massive shrewdness of this old man who belonged, he reflected, to the generation of his own parents and who would when Morfydd married Porius be his daughter's grandfather. He found himself too, in spite of the shocks he had received that day, in spite of all his nervous apprehensions, not a little amused by the spontaneous ease with which he sank back, just as the great Cunedda had done, into alliance with, and dependence upon, the power and competence of Rome.

"You're sure the prince was correct," the old soldier was soon enquiring, "in saying that the boy would be back before the end of dinner?"

"The prince and I heard it together," whispered Brochvael eagerly. "I was coming back from the Giant's Cave when I met him. He was going to tell them what he'd learnt of the situation — tell them *first,* my Lord Manlius, tell them before he told me or you or even his own wife! And as we were talking, and he was showing me, you know his way, how he had broken the point of Cunedda's sword" — here Brochvael made a motion of his head towards the weapon— "a young Gwyddyl-Ffichti lad, I forget his name, who had been skulking after the prince through the forest appeared with a message from Porius ab Einion written by Brother John himself on a page torn from a psalter.

"The prince threw it away or I'd show it to you; but it announced that Porius ab Einion and Rhun ap Gwrnach would be back in time for the end of dinner. That of course means before the drinking begins. The prince, whose Latin is poor, found the Brother's script hard to decipher.

"I doubt if he could have read it at all — though it was addressed to him. I told him at once how far things had gone and how dangerous the situation was; and for once he was roused and a little, not very much but I really do think a little, *ashamed.* He still refuses to take any initiative, though. That, he says, he leaves to his wife and to you and me. That's really why we've come to ask your advice. My daughter said at once, 'We must go to Porius Manlius!'"

There was an intense silence in the west chamber of Mynydd-y-Gaer. Then Aulus began gravely pacing up and down in front of the door, as though these treacherous rebels against Rome's right to give rivers and mountains, forests and wildernesses, to whom she pleased might at any moment come swarming with their poisoned javelins through every part of the Gaer.

Porius Manlius rose stiffly to his feet. “The moment seems to have arrived,” he said, speaking coldly and deliberately, as the agitated Brochvael rose too, “for breaking our old republican custom and for taking our children into consultation.” He had advanced halfway across the chamber and he now spoke as if he were addressing an assembly. “May I enquire of you two girls” — here Euronwy and Morfydd couldn’t resist a glance at each other— “just what on this nineteenth day of October, with the *Gosgordd* under arms and at our service, and the proconsular mission — if so I may term it — in considerable peril, and indeed, as I understand it, surrounded by ambuscades of indignant natives”— “He ought,” thought Brochvael, “to be wearing a toga rather than that faded Greek *himation”*— “just what you would suggest, since the prince sees fit to delegate the choice to us, it would be best to decide to do?”

The two women’s first response to this speech was to scramble as best they could from their not very dignified posture on the soldier’s couch and to advance hand in hand to where the old man stood.

Then Euronwy spoke quickly, pressing her companion’s fingers tightly in her own and keeping her steady gaze fixed upon her parent. “It *is,* Father, a moment for us to speak and I will speak plainly both to Morfydd’s father and to you. Morfydd and I feel that what the forest people need more than anything else to quell their anger is an immediate and overpowering proof that we are united among ourselves. Morfydd and my son are betrothed — well! Morfydd is ready for their marriage to be celebrated at once. I can answer for my husband. Brochvael can answer for himself. I find that Brother John of the Fount possesses priest’s orders, so that we can dispense with the services of Minnawc Gorsant and can select Brother John, and only

Brother John, to perform the ceremony. You know as well as I do, Father, that the Derwydd — Brochvael will pardon me — whom few of us have ever seen and whose existence some of us deny, decides, and he alone, the actions of the forest people. It is he who gives the signal for this holding of what here in Edeyrnion we call the Feast of the Sowing.

"Well! Nothing, I say to you, Father, *nothing* would please our people more, please *both* races among us more, than to have this marriage performed by Brother John at the Feast of the Sowing.

"But Derwydd or no Derwydd, Feast or no Feast, the marriage of these two and their marriage now — I *know* I'm right in this, Father — alone can save us. All the Gwyddyl-Ffichti — and there are lots of them still in the mountains and beyond the Swamp — will rally to us because of Morfydd, and that includes all the forest people with Gwyddyl-Ffichti blood and *they* are more, I fancy, than we always realize."

While his sister-in-law was uttering all this, Brochvael was regarding her with a mixture of admiration and astonishment. What on earth had happened that those two should stand there holding each other's hands, and that when the old Roman questioned the girl presently in his naively straightforward manner she didn't blush or display the least sign of hesitation as she confirmed what Euronwy had declared.

"But now we reach another question, my friends," Porius Manlius recommenced. "I have not" — he smiled as he spoke with a real flash of campfire amusement, for he heard his sentry's pacings suddenly cease and he knew the centurion was listening intently— "I have not to learn for the first time at this late hour that marriage and the mixing of blood is our grand modern secret for healing these tragic divisions. You will bear me out, Brochvael, when I say that at the Byzantine court the successors of Constantine let the love of women govern the empire.

“As for that Goth at Ravenna — and I think you told me yourself you had learnt this from your friend Cassiodorus — *he* keeps up the accurst power of his barbarians by means of his family’s marriages. But we’ve got a matter—”

He was interrupted by a far-off blast of trumpets from the watchtower over the eastern gate, a daily signal that was audible over the whole of the Gaer unless a strong west wind happened to be blowing.

Each father looked anxiously at his daughter, and the two women exchanged a startled look. Porius Manlius went on, “Your *gwledd* ready, eh? How long does that give you before you have to go in? Well — never mind! *We’ve got to settle this matter now,* even though it does mean keeping the prince and all his *Gosgordd* waiting. The post of danger for my grandson is clearly at the Fountain tonight, not here, when once the prince has called out the *Gosgordd.*

“That decision we may, I think, boldly assume will be considered by the rebels as a sign of weakness and will precipitate the crisis. What they’ll do, and my good friend who was a centurion at Castrum Deva will bear witness to the truth of an old soldier’s prediction” — here, to Aulus’s obvious satisfaction for the man jerked his right hand to his sword hilt in camp fashion and straightened his back, he indicated his retainer— “will be to attack, not us with our prince’s *Gosgordd* awaiting them, but the emperor’s horsemen at the Fountain whom they’ve already surrounded.” He paused and looked gravely and almost tenderly at Morfydd. “The place therefore where we need tonight our strongest and bravest, who is of course Porius ab Einion, is not here but at the Fountain.

“But Porius, though he probably won’t have left them yet, has promised to be here — his message said quite definitely ‘before the meal is over’ — in an hour or two, and thus can only be warned to remain where he is by an exceptionally rapid and experienced messenger. Who therefore is this messenger to be?" He paused once more, still looking with a frown of concern at Morfydd. Then he proceeded gravely, "Aulus here is no inexperienced—"

But Brochvael interrupted him. "I will go myself," he said. "I could find my way in pitch darkness and there'll be a half moon soon. Tell your man to replace that sword in the hall." Here he indicated the broken weapon propped against the chest, where the empty flagon and tin cups seemed at that moment to be edging away from the great cross handle.

"And you, my girl, keep an eye on my staff. Tell Einion, Euronwy, that we took your father's advice. He will agree — especially if you refrain from any mention — a restraint, sister, that I confess would be beyond *my* power — of that scandalous scene at the gate."

No sooner were those final words out of his mouth than he expressed by a grotesque inward suction of the lips his regret at having uttered them; and under their impact he saw her turn away from him to her father. But Porius Manlius had by this time stepped to Morfydd's side and was talking hurriedly to the girl in low gentle reassurance.

It was clear that the maid's beauty, combined with what must have struck the old man as hardly less than heroic dutifulness in this hurried marriage, had completely won that Roman heart; and for a fleeting second an icicle of jealousy shot through Brochvael's soul. And it left something behind. In the uneasy depths of his being he became aware of a minute splinter of icy loneliness.

"Yes," he thought, "if anyone's destined to perish in this crazy panic about the House of Cunedda I'm the one. But I'd like to see a boy born to Morfydd first, and that's the truth."

"*Father!*" Morfydd had been staring at him with large startled eyes as she listened to the old Roman; but those shocked eyes and that single cry were the only signs she made. "He knows every path through these woods," he heard Porius Manlius say. "He knows the forest people's tricks and all their jungles and swamps better than I ever knew our Uriconium textbooks of war! Aulus would willingly go. But he doesn't know the forest as your father does. And your father isn't going to fight. He isn't going even to defend himself with arms! He's going to make his way to the Fount by the quickest tracks. Even if they were to recognize him they wouldn't dare to draw their bows against him. But they won't recognize him. There'll be only the ghost of a moon, and I assure you your father will know exactly how to hide till the clouds blow across it again. You can hear the autumn wind, little maid, if you listen now! Nobody's going to shoot an arrow — poisoned or unpoisoned. I tell you as a soldier there'll be no arrow shooting tonight, not while this wind lasts and the sky's so dark."

Brochvael and Morfydd exchanged a long clinging look. Then a curious twitching of her brows took place that he knew well; and they simultaneously gave each other a little nod.

"Don't forget my staff!" he called out to her as he rushed from the chamber. His wizard's mantle, flapping behind him as he went, brushed against the old legionary's sword hilt, but the outraged Aulus remained motionless for a couple of seconds gazing at his master with an expression of dumb reproach.

Then he deliberately did what he only did when his master had not only behaved unpardonably towards an ex-centurion of the best disciplined legion north of Caerleon, but had behaved with egregious folly in a nice military dilemma. He acted independently, not necessarily contrary to, but independently of, any orders from his superior officer.

Without even glancing at the Lady of the Gaer, who now seemed in her turn to be trying to persuade Morfydd that Brochvael was in no real danger, and that the chances were strongly in favour of his reaching his *ael,* the Edeyrnion word for a goal, in time, he abruptly possessed himself of the broken sword and with an indignant heart went off to replace it in the banquet hall.

Meanwhile wrapping his mantle round him against the wind, Brochvael hurried out from the covered passage into the portion of the Gaer that remained open to the sky.

"I'm a fool to undertake this business," he told himself. "The gods alone know how it'll work out; but there come times to us all when we've got to be brave."

Then as the power of the southwest wind, reaching Mynydd-y-Gaer in accumulated strength, searching out the estuaries of the sea, buffeting the sides of the Cader, troubling Lake Tegid, rousing the sacred river, rustling through the treetops of the forest, caught him in its course, he felt a shiver of quite definite fear together with a faint but unmistakable thrill of exultation.

The wind prevented his thinking in words, but he thought on; and his thoughts, although expressed in long-drawn fluctuating waves of images, went wild and far, and these primeval hieroglyphs of human consciousness, trailing off in many places into animal and even vegetable awareness, would have been read by any invisible powers, inquisitive enough for such eavesdropping, as something corresponding to words like these: "Poisoned arrows on windy nights make a bad end; but all lives must end somehow and Porius will look after Morfydd if this is the end of mine."

Whether the invisible powers he always fancied as hovering about the Gaer comprehended the Homeric word *"aisima,"* which kept bobbing up and down like a calm classical cork among the wild waves of his thought, bringing back to him a chamber on the shores of the Bosporus and its curious translation from the lips of his Byzantine host as “decency in fate,” that went floating out over the Propontic waters, he had no time to question.

But even though no god, or demon, or angel, or ghost, or elemental sprite understood the drift of his thought, even though the soul of the whole stellar world, the *anima mundi* itself, neither understood it nor stored it up, even though the thought perished in inconceivable annihilation, such was the effect of this rushing wind upon his dread and his exultation that for a few seconds he stood motionless.

“Though the House of Cunedda does fall,” he thought, “and though the forest people betray the emperor to Colgrim as they betrayed Iscovan y Bychan to the Romans, yes! though Roman and Brython sink together into oblivion, it still remains that the pious fury that murdered my son is always wrong, and that *aisima* is always right.”

CHAPTER XIII. Sibylla

AFTER SKIRTING THE HURDLED pens of the cattle and sheep which occupied the larger portion of the summit of Mynydd-y-Gaer, Brochvael arrived at the postern gate that led to the western ascent. Here he accosted in his most authoritative tone the little group of young guards, not yet changed for the night, but already on the alert for that felicitous event, and demanded from them in the name of the prince the loan of some kind of weapon.

Astonished at the request but obedient to his authority, the lads offered him with respectful eagerness an immediate choice of all they had at their disposal. He made his selection in the shape of a short boar spear, such as he could use as a substitute for the staff of Claudianus, and a sharp, dangerous-looking, double-edged dagger that he could insert into his leather belt.

Thus accoutred, and wishing the men stout stomachs for a good *gwledd* and an undisturbed night when the meal was over, he passed through the postern gate and went quickly down the long descent of roughly hewn steps that led to the western foot of Mynydd-y-Gaer.

Here he paused to take stock of the weather. He quickly realized that Porius Manlius had been right in his comforting words to Morfydd, for the wind was blowing up for rain, the clouds were racing across the sky, and it was only at intervals through some ragged-edged rent or quickly eclipsed gulf in the dark volume of flying vapour that the misshapen moon made herself momently visible.

"I'll avoid the river way," he thought, "and I'll avoid the way to the Mound of the Dead, and I'll avoid most of all the way to the Mound of y Bychan. Which leaves me," he decided, "unless I force a passage through the forest — and I'm not one to succeed in that — only the path to the Swamp of the Gwyddyl, and thence from the edge of the Swamp up the Avenue of the Dead as far as Pelagius's Walk, and so down the Walk to the Brother's cell."

His route thus determined he wrapped his mantle round his shoulders to free himself for running and set out at a steady trot. He was going west and thus faced the wind; but the path made so many curves and the trees were so varied in size and in their manner of growth that the wildest gusts often came against his side, and once or twice some wayward eddy even caught him from behind, causing his mantle, for only in the coldest winter did Brochvael cover his head, to flap against his skull like the ruffled feathers of a buffeted bird.

But on he jogged, muttering over and over a special invocation to "Chance, the Saviour" that tickled his fancy since it made all piety and prayer a little comical, while at the same time it left all doors of mystery so wide open that the craftiest denial of anything beyond the senses was betrayed in the utterance.

He was so incurably a man of books that all sorts of philosophic tags crossed his mind as he ran; but it wasn't long before he concentrated upon one particular among these, the head and front of them all as far as his own secret taste was concerned, though he would never have dared to reveal this preference to the late Bishop of Arverne or to the great bibliophile Cassiodorus for he'd only seen it in a fragment supposed to be by Hesiod and preserved merely for luck by a fellow traveller at sea who had shown it to him in a storm: “Give’s a good bitch; but Take’s a harpy and brings death.”

Certainly he had seldom known so many delicate death odours, whatever it was that brought them, as he inhaled that night as he ran. Scents of dead and dying vegetation came to him, scents of growths that were born of death and fed upon death, scents of funguses and leaf mould, together with the rank sour smell emerging from the Swamp of the Gwyddyl, whose murky pools and half-submerged swamp mosses were already near.

He was a little surprised that he could keep up running so long. He was surprised too that he felt so little physical or mental fear. “Body of God!” he thought, “Is it my destiny at threescore years to display heroic courage? I hope not! Ovid over a blaze of pine logs is better than a race with poisoned arrows for the sake of a broken sword!”

With only the familiar sounds of the forest about him, an owl’s hooting, the bark of a fox, and further off, in the Swamp somewhere, the howl of a wolf, he began to wonder if all this imminent danger from the Derwydd’s people weren’t after all a mirage of their imagination.

“I’ve never seen this damned Gogfran nor his brother either,” he thought, as he struggled to keep up the steady lurch of his swinging trot, “and what Einion knows or imagines he knows will go to the grave with him! How on earth have these curst *Derwyddon* managed to hide from us all? Or does everybody except Morfydd and me, everybody except Euronwy and her two Poriuses, know all about them? What if Einion is right and the future of us all from Lludd’s Town to the Ford of Mithras is really in the hands of our forest people? We’re humbugged by them, all of us, and that’s the truth. But save for the giants, who may all be poets’ fables, they’re the owners of the land, and as Einion said last night they can’t be defeated, for they just sink back into themselves.”

He was panting heavily now. “I’ll get as far as the Avenue,” he thought, “and then I’ll walk.” But he soon came to realize that he might have to walk before he reached the Avenue. He began to fancy that these creatures, the owl, the wolf, and the fox, that kept up their noises so regularly all round him, might not be what they seemed; might on the contrary be the calls to one another of the Derwydd’s archers anointing their arrows and stringing their bows.

He didn’t want to think of them nor to think of a fourth sound that sometimes intervened, a sound much more erratic, wayward, and irregular, concerning which he found himself deciding gravely: “It’s a sea hawk from across Lake Tegid!”

But at every plunge forward through this world of green-black dissolution, where the silence itself seemed rotting and drifting earthward in wind-tossed fragments of moss-scented decay, these noises began to prove a curious help to him. He found himself compelled by the very fall of his own feet to concentrate on certain physical aspects of the creatures that made these sounds.

He visualized, for instance, the feathery ears of the owl, the broken stumps whence the fox had lost his more serviceable teeth, the fleck of foam clinging to the wet hairs of the grey jaws of the wolf! And he found it possible by a metamorphosis, beyond any transformation imagined by his favourite poet, to confuse these objects with the rapidly overtaken patches of moss and wood sorrel into which his sandals sank as he ran; and it helped his endurance, now that his exhaustion interfered with his rational power of thought, to feel he was successfully defying these disturbing sounds by treading on them as he struggled forward.

But this fancy speedily changed, as his panting increased and his strength weakened, into the illusion that the ghost of Iddawc the Apostate was running by his side, thanking his younger son for taking the elder's place in the struggle to save their House from ruin.

Suddenly he stopped dead. The wind at this moment was blowing straight up from the Swamp of the Gwyddyl, and the smell of stagnant water astonished him by the depth of its morbidity as it had done many times before at this particular spot.

He knew by the presence of a colossal oak stump, out of which all manner of green parasitic growths sprouted and trailed, that he was within a few hundred yards of the Avenue of the Dead.

Round the next curve of the path he would come upon it, leading south to Saint Julian's Fount, and north to the Mountain of the Mothers. It was a peculiarity of Brochvael ab Iddawc — some would regard it as a weakness, others as a sign of heroic power — that what he felt at any particular moment he felt with his whole nature. At such moments his body, his soul, his reason, his nerves, became one thing; an obsessed, absorbed, and entranced thing; a thing that felt to itself as if it were as transparent as air, as penetrating as fire, as inviolable as water!

None had ever known of this peculiarity except his dead wife, Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles, and it is possible that it would have taken a Gwyddyl-Ffichti bard, perhaps y Bychan himself, for the outlaw had been no mean minstrel, to find expression for the "weak strength" or "strong weakness" of this man who hadn't a drop of Gwyddyl-Ffichti blood in him!

Thus by that familiar stump whose entangled mass of unasked-for offspring looked as black at this moment as the deepest pool of stagnant water, Brochvael found his whole nature, nervous and emotional, physical and rational, swept together in one absorbing impulse.

What produced this effect, what set him plunging down that path with a more reckless speed even than when he descended the rocky precipice from the Giant's Cave, had nothing to do with the curious smell of corruption emanating from the invisible bronze-black pools, nor had it anything to do with poisoned arrows.

It was a sound more natural to human ears than the howl of a wolf, the bark of a fox, the hoot of an owl, or the scream of a sea eagle. What made him tighten his lax hold on that un-Homeric spear till the fingers that encircled it met, what made him throw off his exhaustion like a mask torn from ear to ear, was the unmistakable sound of a woman's sobbing.

The first thing that caught his eyes when he rushed round a group of bare tree trunks was the figure of a horse, and the next thing he saw was the huddled form of the girl who was uttering these pitiful sounds. She was sitting on a fallen tree trunk clinging to the horse's bridle rein, and she heard him before he reached her, and though the moon itself was obscured by the drifting clouds and by the darkness of the trees, she knew him at once and leapt to her feet with her hand on the horse's neck.

"Arglwydd Brochvael!" she gasped; he recognized her then as the Gwyddyl-Ffichti girl whose wild cries had drawn his brother from the chapel some hours before.

"Sibylla!"

"He... was... unkind... *Arglwydd* Brochvael!" she sobbed. "He wouldn't let me... he said I mustn't... he said I must wait till after... he said he would send wine for me to the kitchen! Does he think he can treat me like a whore, making me hang about with the servants till he's finished drinking? He doesn't know me! None of them know me. But you, *Arglwydd,* have been always kind — for your lady's sake no doubt — but you've been always kind... you have a heart... but his is of stone... *stone,* I tell you!" And she beat her hands miserably together.

"How did you get here, Sibylla? Whose horse is this?"

"It's his! I went to his stable. I took his best one! He never rides it, but it's his best one."

"You can ride?" His breath had returned to him. His panting had ceased along with Sibylla's sobs.

"Ride, *Arglwydd?* I should think I *could!* I could ride on a stag of six antlers, like Myrddin Wyllt! But I'll let him go now. He'll find his way — they always can — back to his stable. I want to show you something — to take you somewhere, *Arglwydd* Brochvael! For the sake of your dead I want to; for your own sake I want to; for the *Arglwyddes* Morfydd's sake I want to; and for the old days at Ty Cerrig!" Sibylla uttered all this very rapidly but in a tone only a little louder than a whisper, and when she ceased Brochvael stared at her with bewildered interest.

It was too dark to *see* the waves of feeling that must have been crossing her face, but he *felt* them as acutely as if he'd been endowed with the visual apprehension of a blind man, though as to what they revealed in regard to her purpose his vision was a total blank.

She was carefully twisting the reins round the horse's neck, but he noticed nothing about the horse except that it was small and apparently light-coloured, and he contemplated what she was doing with an extremely casual and uninitiated eye. Like all the men of the House of Cunedda, Brochvael knew nothing of horses. He could just ride without falling off as long as the animal did nothing unusual, and even this was more than his father Iddawc could manage, for that sly traitor to the Roman Church never mounted a horse all the days of his life.

On this occasion, however, it only faintly surprised the son of Iddawc that the girl should be fastening the reins so carefully round the neck of the creature, and that when she gave its rump a few friendly pats and the sort of push that a child might give a dog when it has grown weary of its company, the creature trotted off lightly and easily down the very path by which he himself had so painfully run.

“Is that spear all you’ve got, *Arglwydd* Brochvael?” she enquired now, still keeping her voice low, but above a whisper.

He smiled in the darkness and pulled his borrowed dagger from his belt.

“Give it to me,” she said.

He hesitated, trying the thing’s point upon the knuckles of the hand with which he held his spear.

“It’s deadly sharp,” he protested.

“Give it to me,” she repeated. She couldn’t see how grave his face became at this, but there was an appeal in her manner that he found impossible to resist, and reversing the weapon in his fingers he held it out to her.

She began fumbling with her clothes. “Here,” she whispered, and pulling aside her outer tunic she indicated to him the tight woollen band she wore beneath her breasts, which were childishly small and unusually wide apart, “put it in here.”

He let go his spear, encircling it with his arm, so as to have the use of both hands. Then, as tenderly and gently as he could, he made an attempt to do what she bade him, but the warmth of her body under his knuckles and the beating of her heart under that soft vest interfered with the deftness of his action.

Nor was his uneasiness lessened when a dim ray of moonlight flickering between the branches glittered on the bare blade of the dagger as it pressed against her, its point reaching to where, with only that soft vest between them, must have been the navel of her body. The idea of this was too much for him and he unceremoniously plucked out the weapon and made a move to replace it in his own belt.

"You'll be hurting yourself like that!" he muttered. "I can't let you have it."

For a second he thought she was going to struggle with him for it, but instead she addressed him in the coaxing tone of a child begging for a dangerous toy.

"Please, *Arglwydd!* I need it, I must have it, if I'm to show you what I've said I would!" She pulled at his wrist, not angrily or impatiently, but with that same childish coaxing air which still didn't strike him as a piece of acting or as in the least affected.

"Wait," she whispered, happy and confident in a new thought. "Wait! I'll make a sheath for it."

He let her take it from him for this bloodless purpose; and pulling up her outer tunic and using the weapon as a knife — for its edges were as sharp as its point — she expeditiously cut off a segment of her vest and wound it about the dagger, leaving only the handle free.

"Now, *Arglwydd* Brochvael," she whispered triumphantly, "you see how safe it is!" And before he had the heart to interfere she had replaced it under the band which zoned her body. "I could have it out bare in a flash!" she laughed, "but I can twist now in any kind of direction" — and she contorted her flexible form to show him— "without its hurting, and now you shall see what I can show you; what no one else could show you, no! not in all Edeyrnion!"

She pulled at his mantle, which in the course of this singular interview he had allowed to fall into its normal position, but he refused to move.

Sibylla saw, however, without seeing, that he was smiling at her with an amused, indulgent, and even tender smile. He ought to have known from his experience of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles that women of her race were quicker at sex divination than any others.

Even Morfydd, who resembled her Gwyddyl-Ffichti mother in certain occult perceptions, would have caught his mood at that moment, for all the darkness between them.

"But, my dear child," he whispered, as she tugged at his mantle, "I haven't told you yet what my quest is. I would be honoured — but I think you know *that* already — to be shown the marvel at which you hint, but I've got to reach Saint Julian's Fountain in time to stop my nephew Porius ab Einion and my other nephew Rhun ap Gwrnach from setting out tonight for the Gaer. The prince seems to have understood his son to say that they would reach the Gaer before the drinking began and my daughter"— "I'd better keep poor old Manlius out of this," he thought, "for these Gwyddyl-Ffichti hate the Romans worse than they do us"— "and my daughter wants them to stay where they are — at least for tonight. Even now they may have started, and I may be too late — don't you see, child, how it is?"

She shifted her hand from his mantle and clasped the fingers with which he held his spear.

"Listen, *Arglwydd* Brochvael! It was of this I was beginning to tell that man of no heart when he threw me from him just now. I was beginning to tell him that I knew the Derwydd had decided not to raise the cry nor to attack these horsemen and their whores until Sunday. The Derwydd thinks the whole thing's a struggle between himself and Myrddin Wyllt; and his brother — may the devil confound him! — is driving him on, so that he can get hold of Myrddin's woman. He nearly had her yesterday — only Myrddin set Prince Medrawd on him and he got half-killed for his pains! But now that Einion ab Iddawc has got Medrawd away — did you know he'd got Medrawd away? — *he* told me that! But I swear to you, Lord Brochvael, it's not the Derwydd himself, it's his accurst brother who's at the back of all this! That's what you'll see for yourself, Lord Brochvael, if you’re man enough to see it, man enough I mean to go with me and do exactly what I tell you!

“If you *are* man enough, and have the heart of youth still in you and the glory of life still before you, you’ll help your tribe far more by seeing what I will show you than by carrying any message! Please, please, come with me! Please let me take you there! — for the sake of your mother, the Princess Indeg, I beg you! — for the sake of your father who at his death — the saints keep him from devils! — refused to swallow the Body of God, I beg you!”

In her instinctive Gwyddyl-Ffichti knowledge of the weak places in his armour, Sibylla clung as she pleaded not only to the wrist of the hand that held the spear but also to the fingers, half-concealed in the thing’s folds, with which he was pulling his cloak about him.

She was even — an easy thing to do under those wind-swept branches — pressing closer and closer; nor was it long before the warmth and suppleness of her body, for he could even feel the handle of his own dagger rising and falling beneath her breasts, added the final touch to her supplication.

“She wants me to spy upon Gogfran ap Greidawl!” he thought. “She’s found the way to his hiding place.” So here was a fine concatenation of imperatives. If he went with her — God! and he would uncommonly like to know where this mysterious being he’d heard of all his life did actually conceal himself! — he would without question spoil his chance of reaching the Fountain in time.

On the other hand, Sibylla’s Gwyddyl-Ffichti fingers hadn’t failed to touch one chord that vibrated still, the advantage the Gaer would gain in its psychic mastery over Edeyrnion and Ardudwy if the hiding place of the forest people’s druid were no longer a sacrosanct secret.

But weak and irresolute though he might be, he knew well enough that there was one thing in his overcivilized nature that her flickering touch had not even approached; though whether this abstention sprang from a deeper wisdom than he cared at present to attribute to her or from — for that too was possible — a strain of guilelessness mingled with the passion of her cunning, he could not tell. She had avoided any allusion to his dead wife's never-ending quarrel with the Three Aunties!

He was aware — and he didn't attempt at this crucial moment to conceal it from his conscience — of an irrepressible desire to be avenged on the Modrybedd for the treachery about Colgrim, and of course there gathered round the name of Colgrim all the personal affronts and rebuffs he had himself received.

Perhaps the crucial moment in this temptation of Iddawc's second son was when in her impassioned pleading Sibylla loosened his fingers from his mantle and with both hands pressed them against her body above the handle of the dagger; for it was then that it would have been natural to throw round her shoulders the arm which held his spear, so that with both weapons between them he would feel master of her and of them at the same time.

His whole nature was hesitating now like a hunting dog at a crosspath. Had his wild rush to prevent the men leaving the Fount been from the start a pedantic piece of officious foolery, and had he only undertaken it to impress Euronwy and her father?

But before the pressure of that soft body and the repeated "Please, *please, Arglwydd* Brochvael!" had lasted for the passing of one cloud across the moon, or of one wind gust through the treetops, he was made aware that his tongue, as it moved about in his mouth in an unconscious effort to moisten his dry lips, had touched the sharp point of the one broken fragment of a tooth left in his mutilated gums. This whirled him back to what the

Goths had done to him; and he remembered how a long time before it was over he had doubted he could bear it, and how a *little* time before it was over the pain nerve in his brain had gone numb and dead; and instantaneously he decided to unclasp his fingers, twist his mantle about his neck, and set off once more on his race.

He permitted himself, however, a moment's breathing space wherein to impress upon his consciousness every detail of what he was giving up, murmuring, as he did so, whatever evasive objections came first into his head.

His surprise was startling therefore when the girl herself unclasped their fingers, and herself held his spear for him while he wrapped the mantle round his neck, and herself reminded him of the crossways where he would have to turn when it came to leaving the Avenue of the Dead.

"These Gwyddyl-Ffichti women are all thought readers," he told himself. "One of these days I *will* let her show me where the Derwydd hides and how it is that none of us except the Aunties have seen him."

But he was destined to receive yet another surprise; for it now transpired that it was her intention to accompany him to Saint Julian's Fount.

In pursuance of this purpose she made him help her to twist *her* upper garment about her neck so that she should be less impeded; and once started he soon found that it was he who had to make the effort to keep up with her.

Too breathless to speak and praying that neither of them would feel the sting and the burning pain of a poisoned arrow he found that at first — though even this changed after a while — he was able to regard the situation as an amusing one. He even thought of how often in their youth he had seen his daughter run races with Rhun ap Gwrnach.

"Alarch," he thought, "ran races with her handsome Greek once too often!" And then from Morfydd his mind turned to Morfydd's favourite poet. “She may soon be crying out like *his* Sibylla, *‘Procul, O procul este profani!’* Avaunt, you unholy devils! Yes, I feel rather like that solemn son of Aphrodite when it was all he could do — *passibus aequat* — to keep step.”

He was, however, as has been hinted, not only too occupied in “keeping step” with his youthful guide to wonder how these Gwyddyl-Ffichti women could read people’s thoughts as easily as the mysterious Coranians heard on the wind their enemies’ plans, but even to notice the magical effects of the drifting moon, as the shadows of the great branches above the Avenue of the Dead darkened and faded, approached and receded, as they ran.

He was too breathless and exhausted even to wonder whether she was deliberately punishing him by leading him such a dance. His thoughts became the efforts of his muscles, the stiffening of his thighs, the labouring of his lungs. By the time they reached the crossways and took the path leading directly to Brother John’s cell he was past everything save launching one foot in front of the other.

The path they now were following was an extremely winding one; and if, as the story ran, it had been a favourite with Pelagius, the theologian certainly preferred curves to straight lines. It swung left, it swung right; and he soon became conscious and derived a sort of blurred comfort from it that there was a strong smell of mud on the air.

Then suddenly she stopped, laying a hand upon his arm. He staggered and nearly fell, but she supported him, whispering something into his stunned ear. He felt as if he were nothing but a hollow case in which his heart, a huge bursting entity, was swallowing down and vomiting forth great gobbets of black darkness.

“I must” — and the “I” that articulated this thought was a subhuman thing, an inbreathing heart, an outbreathing heart with no purpose but one, no desire but one, no end but one, to *breathe,* to draw in and gasp out cool, healing, restoring air; *air,* not black darkness thick as blood!— “I must breathe in and breathe out, regularly, steadily, evenly, deeply,” this “I” that was himself, his nameless self, kept thinking. “In — out — in — out — in — out — that’s right! I’ll manage if I go on — I’ll get there if I go on.”

What this poor subhuman entity meant by “get there,” or *where* it was that it was so obstinately determined to “go,” nobody, no god, no man, no creature, no! not even the mysterious Coranians, no! not even a Gwyddyl-Ffichti woman would ever know. For this in-and-out-breathing heart, that was just then all that was left of a mind that had known Greek and Latin and had exchanged ideas with Caius Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius, surnamed Modestus, possessed no memory; nor had it any receptacle in which to store up its impressions for the benefit of future generations. It could only breathe in and out. In one particular world among the unfathomable Many, a self-conscious entity, aware of itself as an organ for breathing in and out, became also conscious of an obstinate determination to “go on breathing in and out” until it “got there.”

Such was this entity’s life history, a history emerging from nothingness when Sibylla stood still and returning to nothingness when Brochvael ap Iddawc became himself again, nor was this particular entity’s experience entirely unique. Other transitory and subhuman existences all over the world were thus appearing, thus struggling, thus disappearing. And this went blindly on, indifferent to the fact that philosophers were treading winding paths, or that Sidonius Modestus was courting posterity as an innocent letter writer.

The first thing Brochvael knew when he came to himself after this lapse in human consciousness was that Rhun ap Gwrnach was standing before him talking to Sibylla. The grandson of the Greek slave was courteously permitting him to regain his accustomed dignity.

"He says—" It was the girl speaking now, and rather to Brochvael's annoyance she had completely recovered *her* composure, if she had ever lost it. She had allowed her outer tunic to fall into its proper place and having possessed herself of Brochvael's spear was leaning upon it with perfect equanimity. "He says Brother John is ill and that Porius ab Einion refuses to leave him tonight."

Rhun turned to his uncle at that and bent his knee with respect, waiting for him to speak.

"I have come to tell you, Rhun," said Brochvael quietly, "only as you see I am not a born runner like you, that we all want you — I speak for the prince and my sister and... for Porius Manlius" — he felt himself bound in honour to add this— "want you and Porius to remain at the Fountain tonight. We have had news — I'll tell you all this later, only I must get back to the Gaer to reassure Euronwy — that there may be serious trouble down here before noon tomorrow."

"But my dear Lord!" protested Rhun. "My dear Uncle — you can't possibly go back there in this state."

"Oh, yes, I can — not alone perhaps — but with Sibylla — Sibylla is—"

But the young man and the girl interrupted him by a hurried exchange of whispers of which he could only catch the name "Gwendydd" and the single syllable "wine."

He caught at this. "I think perhaps," he murmured, as if speaking to himself rather than to them, "it *would* do me good to have a drop of wine and a piece of bread before we go back. We shan't be in such a hurry this time. At least I shan't!" And he looked significantly at Sibylla.

But at the moment Sibylla's chief concern was to obtain wine and food for her elderly charge; and as the two young people helped him along with affectionate solicitude, it never entered Brochvael's head that it was soon going to be his destiny to witness an encounter between a Gwyddyl-Ffichti girl of the northeast and the most fatal of all the pure-blooded Ffichtiaid women left in Ynys Prydein.

It had been only a few minutes ago that Rhun had taken his farewell of Gwendydd; and though it could not be called a poignant parting, it was certainly no common one. Both the man and the woman — whatever in these twenty-four hours they had come to feel for each other — were more than ordinarily sorry to separate, and they parted with eager assurances from Rhun that as far as he could anticipate events there were many good chances that they would meet again in the emperor's camp.

What happened now, however, was not at all what the son of Gwrnach expected. But few things are more upsetting to a woman when she has just said goodbye to a man who has begun to interest her, and said it with the precise words and in the precise tone most appropriate for the expression or the concealment of her feelings, than for the man to come rushing back.

Feminine souls, like ethereal silkworms, spin around them psychic cocoons, and these cocoons are easily shocked and ruffled by an outrage to what might be called the ritual of the heart; and under such a shock a woman's nerves grow jangled and she is liable to act capriciously and even discourteously.

If Rhun's training at the school across the mountains had been rounded off as Porius's had been by the discourses of an expert in Pelagian casuistry like Brother John, he might have comprehended better what now struck him as arrogant heartlessness.

Gwendydd had in fact sunk down on the cushions by the brazier, careless of what Nineue was thinking, and had begun to brood pensively and deliciously on the new feeling in her heart, when lo! — for she palpably saw him the moment she heard his voice — here he was back again, and not only back again but hot, agitated, breathless, and not thinking of her at all!

So filled indeed was his limited and artless consciousness by some warlike crisis in his own alien world that as she listened to his voice brutally bawling out the barbarous name of Brochvael — as if that meant anything to her! — and crying, "Wine! wine! wine! wine! wine!" she almost hated him.

Nervously she leapt to her feet. No! She would not rush out to meet him! No! She would *not* carry him wine for Brochvael! But Nineue had approached her to learn her pleasure, and Rhun must even now be holding back with his arm the heavy folds of the tent entrance for his imperious "wine for Brochvael ab Iddawc" rang through the whole pavilion.

Outwardly composed but inwardly nervous and irritable, Gwendydd rose haughtily from her cushions and began searching for wine. Neb ap Digon had now appeared from the inner chamber in his green-and-yellow garb and she felt he was watching her with his head on one side like a motley mushroom possessed by a demon of malicious curiosity. Nineue too was watching her from the further side of the brazier.

"Will you go, Nineue, please, and find out what he wants — no! wait till I see what we've got here. Do you think this man's hurt?" she continued talking in this disjointed strain as with trembling hands she searched for what she wanted. "Who *is* this Brochvael? These Gaer people are all heathen! You saw how young Porius behaved when my brother brought his beasts in here and played that blasphemous game with the milk? What are you standing there for, Neb, like an idiot? Go out to them at once and say...

Go out to them, boy! And say... say there's wine coming... Here, take some cushions for the man who's hurt!"

When Neb was gone and Rhun had ceased shouting, she went on talking to Nineue. But her voice was quieter now though, as she searched, her hands kept going to her hair and to her neck and her belt.

"We know what my brother's capable of in his crazy moods, but that stupid young Porius — didn't you think he looked like a gladiator? — took it all seriously! I saw his face. He took it seriously, I tell you, pouring out a heathen libation like that in a tent of the emperor's and to those Cewri of the Cader! Well, here's the last of that Greek wine the sea captain brought me! Here, *you'd* better take it. The man may be dying. I must—"

"Must put on something fine," was what Nineue's look said, as carrying the big leather-covered foreign wine flask she hurried round the Cretan screen, "to impress your heathen admirer!"

But Gwendydd put on nothing. Without even waiting to tighten her mantle about her, she followed Nineue round the screen and watched her push the hangings aside and emerge into the night. Caught in a gust of wind, the hangings did not immediately close, and Gwendydd coming behind her was able to approach near enough to the entrance to be able, unblinded by the illumination within, to see something of what was going on outside.

Not much assisted by a lantern which was swaying wildly about in the hands of Neb, nor much more by a moon which was constantly being blotted out by flying clouds, Gwendydd succeeded in catching fleeting glimpses of Rhun talking to an elderly man, much taller and thinner than himself, who was leaning heavily on a short hunting spear as if it were an old man's staff.

But this was not all she saw. Standing close to the elderly man, who certainly looked unhurt and quite at his ease, was a young woman, between whom and Rhun a dialogue appeared to be proceeding, so eager and intense as to render them, so it seemed, disinclined to interrupt it even to welcome Nineue with the Greek wine.

Ideas, as wild as the movements of Neb's lantern, rushed into Gwendydd's brain and made her head feel hot and her woollen vest insupportably tight. Was this some girlfriend of her famous runner? She retreated into the interior of the pavilion and began pacing up and down its whole length like a beautiful animal in a luxurious cage.

"What gave him the right," she asked herself angrily, "to come back here shouting for wine like that, as if some great prince had been wounded in battle? These Gaer people have no manners at all! The House of Cunedda must have intermarried with every aboriginal tribe in the place — especially with those 'Cewri of the Cader' my brother admires so much! A vicious little witch that woman was, more like a Gwyddyl-Ffichti than a Brython. No Trojan blood in *her* — or Roman blood either!"

While his unwilling hostess was indulging in these bitter thoughts, Brochvael was rapidly recovering from his exhaustion. He was amused at the whole situation, and since the worst of his personal effort was now over, he was prepared to take matters with complacent equanimity and leave the responsibility to fate.

In his present mood he felt no inclination to take advantage of the Egyptian cushions which Neb had placed at his feet, though their softness was seductively hinted at in the moonlight. Nor when that fantastic assistant, observing his reluctance, piled them up together and balanced on the top of them with exquisite care several heaps of oatmeal cakes, was he tempted to change his mood.

His unusual exertion seemed at once to have drained him of heroic activity and of all egoistic preoccupations. He felt that he had earned the right to be a philosophic spectator. He therefore indulged his humour to the limit, and, as was his wont, allowed his whole nature to flow into this relaxed vein. Certainly if his previous deadly exhaustion, combined with the satisfaction of having nearly killed himself for the honour of his family, had not left him in such a mood he would have been anything but entertained at the sight of this great alien tent, thus planted down as if by wicked magic between the Mound of y Bychan and the Mound of the Dead.

As it was, he contemplated this apparition with vague curiosity, wondering, as if it were part of a scene on a stage in Hades, whether it would be phantom Coranians or ghostly Atlanteans who would emerge from such a tent in answer to Rhun’s clamorous summons.

So far all that had appeared was a ridiculous little page who seemed to be playing some childish game with his lantern, dancing it about as if he were trying to draw back to earth some wanton ghost-moth that was fluttering towards the moon.

But what was this? A woman was now issuing from the tent, and in the blaze of light that came forth with her he could see another woman behind her, much taller than the first with very fair hair and an imperious aspect, wrapped in a long oriental-looking mantle. Then the canvas walls closed once more, and it looked as if at any minute the whole erection might be swallowed up by the earth.

Meanwhile the darkness that surrounded her, combined with the whirling lantern and the wind-tossed moon, seemed to be throwing the woman who was moving towards them into some sort of angry hesitation. It was clear that it was easier for him to see her than for her to see him, and he quickly realized she was young and handsome. It was also evident to him that she carried in her hands a large wineskin of a shape that he fancied he had seen before in some island-harbour of the Aegean.

But it was not only the fact that she was strikingly beautiful and carried a Greek wineskin that arrested his attention. The erratic lantern had now paused in its airy curves for a brief second, as if by the deliberate design of its bearer, and in this pause it shone full on the girl's face; and Brochvael was startled by the expression of savage malignity with which she was staring at Rhun. That she had already, in spite of the lantern light in her eyes and of the darkness around her, realized the presence of Sibylla was clear to him; but it seemed to him that it was not because of Sibylla that she looked at Rhun like that.

At first sight of this seductive apparition, dimly revealed by the waterlogged moon, he had begun, as befitted a faithful disciple of the modest Sidonius, composing a speech of courtly gratitude. All the while indeed that his bemused eyes were travelling over her beguiling figure his dry lips were moving silently in the forming of appropriate eloquence; but when in that startling lantern flash he caught her sinister expression he swallowed his unspoken words.

And he was glad enough he had swallowed them when the girl opened her mouth to speak. She might be addressing Rhun, but she plunged at once into a deliberate insult to Sibylla.

"Blood of Caesar!" he thought, "this must be the counsellor's whore who's at the bottom of the whole trouble and the cause of Medrawd's flight. But I'll have a sip of what's in that Greek wineskin, though it's full of all the drugs of Egypt!"

"The Lady Gwendydd," Nineue was now saying as Sibylla drew closer still to Rhun's side, "never allows her visitors' attendants to enter her private tent. But if you and your wounded relative will wait till I've informed my Lady, and if the young woman will trust herself to the care of — here she glanced at the lantern bearer whose sardonic impatience was manifest in every movement he made— “I dare say our pages will be able to accommodate her, or perhaps she—”

But Brochvael could endure no more. “Pardon me, Mistress Nineue,” he broke in, “I would like to ask you a curious little riddle that I heard once at the table of the emperor in Constantinople. It runs like this,” and he glanced at Sibylla as he spoke: “What is sharper than these three things — the point of a dagger, the tongue of a woman, the remorse of a saint?”

Nineue turned her beautiful head upon him as a dangerous snake might have done when suddenly threatened by an attack from a totally unexpected quarter; but in the light of the lantern which Neb, with judicial impartiality, flashed sometimes upon her and sometimes upon Sibylla, he had the satisfaction of seeing she was puzzled.

Rhun, who had himself been secretly wondering how to get rid of Sibylla without hurting her feelings, but whose wits, when riddles and daggers were the order of the day rather than strength or speed, were easily confused, now lifted up his powerful voice, and did so in a tone that displayed in equal proportions bewilderment and good will.

“Would the Lady Gwendydd,” he enquired of Nineue, “like to come forth from the pavilion for a moment to receive our thanks? The Lord Brochvael is himself again and desires to return at once to the Gaer. Mistress Sibylla is good enough to say she will take him safe back. I have just made her promise to do this for us. It will enable Prince Porius and me to remain here. The prince’s bodyguard is in arms at the Gaer. But the prince wishes me to remain with Porius ab Einion. If you *could* persuade the Lady Gwendydd to come out just for a moment it would be a kindness to us all!”

Few things are more irritating to the human mind than to be jerked without warning from a mood of philosophic contemplation into some agitating social crisis. Nor was Brochvael's indignation with Nineue lessened by the exquisite charm of her slender figure in that wavering light. On the contrary, it was increased. He had noted this phenomenon often before, but his knowledge of it was never able to save him from falling a victim to it.

The more his senses were stirred by a woman's beauty, the more apt he was to grow angry with her, and this at the smallest provocation, unless conspiring circumstances permitted him to concentrate his whole nature upon her.

It is possible that if the object of Nineue's malice had not been Sibylla this outburst of indignation, so startling to himself and so astonishing to Rhun, would not have occurred. But it is also possible it would not have occurred if the soft woollen fabric of which her delicately fitting tunic was made had not been so warm that she could afford to risk the chill of that October night by emerging without additional protection.

Little Neb — that experienced courtier — was not one to miss the faintest shade of contrarious emotion among these four persons. To him, for all it took place in a chilly forest and beneath a rainy moon, it was just the old familiar scene enacted so often in an antechamber of Caerleon or Caergwynt. Was it with the idea of making it yet more courtlike that the sly Neb now turned his lantern upon Brochvael's face at the precise moment when Rhun, having concluded his request that Nineue should ask her mistress to come out to them, was looking to see if this suggestion met with his uncle's approval? If it were so he was certainly disappointed; for what Rhun saw in Brochvael's face brought the whole scene abruptly to a close.

Rhun deeply respected his uncle and had done so from his childhood. His mother, Alarch the Fair, had found in her younger brother her chief champion when to the shocked surprise of their mother Indeg, and under the bitter scorn of Auntie Esyllt and Auntie Erddud and the complete indifference of Auntie Tonwen, she had insisted on marrying her Greek runner, for all he was the son of a freed slave.

Rhun had often seen his uncle peevish with Morvran and irritable with Morfydd. He had seen him angry with their mother, Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles. But he had never seen those toothless lineaments, whose outlines Sidonius's wife Papianilla used to compare with those of her imperial father, transformed by such dangerous wrath! So the riddle about the dagger was no joke. His uncle felt that these Arthurian ladies had insulted the House of Cunedda!

Without a second's hesitation Rhun began striding towards the tent, and this drastic move on his part, wiser in its simple directness than he knew, brought Nineue in hurried pursuit and forced her when she overtook him to clutch him by the arm.

There ensued between them a heated dialogue which might well, had not Brochvael grown too angry to notice such things, have seemed to him, with that Greek wineskin in such close proximity to them both, an encounter more fitting for ancient Thessaly than for modern Edeyrnion.

Instead of such fancies all he could think of was the outraged Sibylla, and throwing his arm round her shoulder and using his spear as if it were his familiar staff, he led her away towards the forest path by which they had come; while Neb, after a skip and a hop and a mocking indecent gesture, first in the direction of one pair and then of the other, picked up as many of the cakes as he could carry and ran after them.

It was in vain, however, that he tried to attract Brochvael's attention by squeezing a couple of cakes under the arm that held the spear. Brochvael was too occupied in keeping his other arm tightly round his companion lest she should be driven to return towards the object of their mutual indignation. He could see it was doubtful, with the wind making the whole forest rustle and murmur, that Nineue could catch anything more definite than that she was being roundly abused; but he couldn't resist his vindictive satisfaction when Sibylla repeated over and over again and in a high-pitched voice the same brief and unmistakable words.

"Ffichtiaid whore!" he heard her cry, "Bitch-slave of the Cewri! Get back to your Cader cavemen and leave decent people alone!"

In addition to the wind, what must have dulled if it did not prevent the impact of Sibylla's words was the fact that Rhun had raised *his* voice to such a tune that Nineue was angrily trying to shake off his hold upon her wrist.

Rhun himself however must have felt that there was danger in the air, for he now dropped the woman's wrist, permitted her to utter a shrill summons for Neb to follow, and watched her escape into the tent. This did not occur, however, before he had possessed himself of the wineskin, and with this in his hand he now ran at his accustomed speed to regain the others.

On reaching them he gave the wineskin to Sibylla, and sinking on one knee before his bewildered uncle began passionately kissing his hand. This hand, together with the spear it held, not to mention the cakes squeezed behind them by Neb, presented themselves now to Sibylla as things so curiously blurred with the kneeling man's corrugated brow that on several occasions after this her sleep was disturbed by grotesque conglomerations of these familiar objects, obscurely fused together by the evil eye of a witch. The crumbling down to the ground of Neb's cakes as Rhun poured forth his remorse soon turned her attention, however, to more practical matters.

“He must eat and drink something,” she thought; and bending down between them and gathering up what bits of cake she could find amid the moss and leaves, she proceeded to investigate the foreign-looking wineskin in order to discover its mouthpiece.

“My Lord! Dear my Lord!” cried Rhun, “Forgive me, oh, forgive me! I had no idea they wouldn’t welcome us all or I’d never have let you be so insulted. It wasn’t Gwendydd. She didn’t know or didn’t understand. And when Nineue wouldn’t bring us in and wouldn’t beg her to come out, there was nothing—”

But Brochvael let his spear follow the cakes to the ground and lifted the agitated man to his feet.

“It’s all right, my boy,” he said calmly and then with a chuckle, “but he must go back, mustn’t he, Sibylla, or our wild race’ will be wasted. Better see that lady who wouldn’t come out, lad, before you sleep, though; or she’ll be having an uneasy night alone with that woman. God’s body! So *that’s* the famous Nineue?, is it? That’s the sweet enchantress who’s come with Arthur’s picked horsemen, and with Medrawd and Myrddin, to carry off our boys to the war! No, no! Don’t apologize for her, lad — or for her mistress either. It’s clear you and Porius must have stirred up the imperial mission not a little! There’s more in this than the rudeness of a spoilt handmaid. But go back now, child. Give my love to Porius and Brother John. And don’t let these court beauties make too much trouble. I am in good hands. You’ll see more of us, *hear* more from us, tomorrow.

“But warn Porius to be on his guard. There are strange things afoot. But we’ll keep in touch with you; and I’ll tell Einion and Euronwy that you won’t, either of you, leave these people. After all, they do come from the emperor. No, no! Off with you, lad. Here's my full forgiveness, though I've nothing to forgive *you* about. Morfydd would say just the same."

And kissing him quickly and easily, for they were about the same height, he was on the point of giving him a friendly push when he realized that no word had yet been exchanged between him and Sibylla.

"Here, child!" he said to her. "Give the boy something to keep him safe from these Silurian devils!"

"Let him drink of their drugs first!" cried Sibylla; and lifting up the wineskin and removing its mouthpiece she suspiciously smelt its contents.

"Let the old drink to the young!" said Brochvael, taking it away from her and raising it to his mouth.

"It's real Greek wine, children," he muttered, after enjoying several long and deep draughts. "You must have a sip of it, Mistress, before he goes off with it. 'When all drink none are drunk' is a true proverb."

He held the skin to her lips but she spluttered and spat.

"Well, Rhun," he said, "you'll have to take it back to the ladies or drink it yourself. Have a taste now."

Rhun obeyed but unaccustomed to wine he only swallowed a few gulps. Sibylla meanwhile had begun searching about by the side of the path while the uncle and nephew watched her.

"She knows too much," murmured the elder, "a great deal too much! But I tell you, boy, I'm safe with her; and what's more" — and he breathed a little mock sigh— "I'm afraid she's safe with me!"

Sibylla now returned holding the stalk of what might have been almost any tallish ditch plant, withered and gone to seed. The two men watched her with silent interest. They both had enough of the blood of Princess Indeg in them to be respectful to any sort of herbal magic.

The first thing she did was to run the stalk through her closed fingers, stripping it bare of its seeds. Then with the stripped stalk held loosely in one hand, she stretched out the other towards Rhun.

The moon was obscured at that moment and all that could be seen — at least so it seemed to the forest people's vision in those two men — was that outstretched arm. Then, speaking in a low grave tone quite unlike her ordinary one, she bade Rhun select exactly four seeds, neither more nor less, from the confused number in her palm.

"Take hold of them, Rhun ap Gwrnach ab Agenor y Gaethwas," she said, "and beware of losing one!"

She ran back to the edge of the wet ditch by the path and with some kind of murmured invocation threw the stalk and the rest of the seeds away. Then, returning to Rhun, she took from him carefully, one by one, the four seeds he had selected and held them for a moment in her mouth. Then she replaced them in the man's hand. "Have you anywhere to put them?" she enquired.

Rhun never wore his cap for very long at a time, but he now produced from inside his tunic the one which twenty-four hours ago he had replaced by the Mithraic headdress, and inserting the four seeds in the interior of its folds asked her the name of the plant.

"Narthex," she said, "is what Llew ap Greidawl calls it, but I believe there are other names."

Brochvael could not hold his peace at this. *"Molu de min Kaleousi theoi,"* he quoted, "but the gods call it Moly."

The young people smiled at each other in the darkness.

"I thank you greatly, Lady," declared Rhun earnestly, "and I shall thank you, I hope, still more when all this trouble is past; that is" — here he made a quaint little bow— "if I am still alive." He straightened himself and arranged the wineskin under his arm as carefully as if it were a newborn babe. It was clear he regarded it as the sacred property of the lady of the pavilion.

"I will give Porius ab Einion your message, Uncle," he said, "and you may trust us to keep a good watch. There must be at least a score of young horsemen at the Fountain with swift horses. But—"

He left his speech unfinished as he turned away, but the shrug of his broad shoulders added enough; added, in fact, that Porius and himself without horses were more to be trusted at this crisis than all the cavalry of the emperor.

As he went off Sibylla could not restrain herself from a parting shot. She put some of the fragments of oatcake into her mouth. Then she spluttered, "Thank the ladies for their hospitality and tell them that the House of Cunedda will never forget its debt to the House of Caer Myrddin!"

CHAPTER XIV. The Derwydd

THEY STOOD FOR A MOMENT till Rhun’s figure vanished into the tent. Then Sibylla handed him the lion’s share of the crumbled oatcakes she had picked up, and he munched them obediently with his toothless gums.

“Come,” she whispered when he had disposed of these morsels, “I’m your guide again, my Lord, and I’ll be a better one this time.”

She put her arm in his as they turned away; and he was thankful to discover that with the help of the large draughts of wine he had swallowed he was back once more in that delicious mood of quiescent and yet reckless indifference, out of which he had been swept by this passing gust of anger.

“It doesn’t matter much,” he said to himself with a curious and almost sensual satisfaction, “what happens to me now. Morfydd’s lost after tomorrow, and after the Feast — anything! Meanwhile here I am, Brython of the Brythons, great-grandson of Cunedda, eternal ally of Rome, enemy to the end of Goths, Huns, Vandals, and Saxons; and now setting off to spy on the last of the druids under the guidance of my brother’s fancy girl!”

The stir in his senses caused by the alluring beauty of Nineue, though converted into another channel as far as she was concerned, had not left his nerves; and he soon found that he was deriving no small satisfaction from the youthful warmth and feminine softness of the arm he was holding. “Suppose she’s given up this druid hunt,” he thought, “and has decided to take me for the night to her own hut in the Swamp of the Gwyddyl?”

This idea was by no means disagreeable to him just then; but while he played with it he knew perfectly well that he would reject it since it was incumbent on him, especially if he slept heavily after these unusual exertions, to be at the Gaer to take Morfydd home.

They hadn’t proceeded far before the labouring moon was unveiled again and under its pale light he was arrested by the stump of an aged willow growing by the side of a mossy depression in the forest floor that must at some remote date have contained water.

From this old stump a small dead branch protruded that was of a most singular shape. It resembled some sort of flying serpent and yet it had no wings, and in place of any kind of snake’s head it had a long beak like a bird. It was a devilish-looking object, for it was attached to its parent stump by what might have been its belly, and its long twisted tail curled upwards, as if for the purpose of defence or attack; while its outstretched neck, from which head and beak were distended, rose into the air in the opposite direction, making a bow-shaped curve from the tip of its menacing tail.

A certain vein of primeval grossness in Brochvael, inherited no doubt through the Princess Indeg from immemorial Iberian antiquity, caused him, while in silence he pointed out to his companion the unpromising apparition, to think of it as a piece of trailing excrement dropped by some dragon’s spawn. “And it has taken,” he thought, “the shape of the creature whose vent expelled it.”

Then he thought of it as some extinct reptile, half-fish, half-bird, that when this whole forest was under water had writhed upwards in a vain effort to fly, and resting its belly upon some low branch of the willow had remained there ever since, its primeval saurian flesh transformed into wood by the magic vitality of the youthful tree.

“It’s only a swamp devil!” cried Sibylla, and spitting in its direction she pulled him on.

"Devil, eh?" thought Brochvael, as they advanced along the Walk of Pelagius. "That's how everyone thinks nowadays! But it's all wrong. God or the devil, Mithras or the other one, Jesus or Judas, to love or to hate — it's all wrong. Why should I love or hate anything or anyone? I am myself; they are themselves; an unfathomable multitude of creatures in an unfathomable multitude of worlds! Plato was wrong when he dragged in that Supreme Being with his Super Paradigm of Perfection. Drag in God and you'll soon get the devil! Love or hate? By the Mother of all the Gods! I won't do either. 'Give's a good bitch. But Take's a vicious cur and a guide to death!' Daughter of God! you can be a good honest creature after your kind without all this loving and hating!"

He turned suddenly upon Sibylla. "Well? And what now, my most secret of mysterious guides? Where do you propose to take me?"

She hesitated for a moment. Then she said, "I'm sorry I made you run so fast when we first met, my Lord. I didn't do it on purpose."

"You mean you didn't do it to tease an obstinate old man?"

Sibylla pondered. Then she said slowly, "I don't know why I did it."

"I forgive you, child, but will you tell me now quite clearly and finally, and before we go a step further, what it was you had in your mind to do before we started our mad run?"

"Are you quite strong again, dear my Lord?"

"Strong as I ever am — before I've had meat and mead."

"Oh, they'll give us something to eat if I ask them."

"Good God, girl! *Who* will? Come, my pretty one, and tell me in plain words what you want me to do. I'm all right again, thanks to that wine. Do you know, I believe it was Greek wine. And since that's meant to be mixed with water, we risked heaven knows what by drinking it raw! *You* only just tasted it, I could see, but I drank quite a lot. I'm not at all sure that it isn't the kind of wine whose effect is *gradual.* You must watch your old man, my dear, and listen carefully to what he's saying, else he may ruin all your clever scheme. But what is your scheme? Be as frank with me, Sibylla, as I am with you! And while you explain it we may as well sit down; it's no good wasting our energies."

She looked at him, pondering and hesitating. He had lived so long with his daughter that Morfydd's proud little face had become his one map of a woman's feelings, and from this small chart he calculated all the signs of this great ocean of contradiction. When Morfydd pondered in an abstracted mood her eyebrows contracted into what an enemy might have described as a sullen scowl; so that when, pondering on his suggestion that she should lay everything frankly before him, Sibylla's face remained perfectly calm and clear, and her meditation seemed rather — unless that was the effect of the moonlight — to dispel than deepen any traces of trouble, his natural conclusion was that, whatever she decided, the issue was not of serious consequence either to herself or to him. Never was he more mistaken! He ought to have remembered the possibility that Morfydd's anxious frown might be inherited from his own self-accusing nature. He ought to have remembered his wife's abstracted trances when Kymeinvoll became more like a nymph of the elements than the conscientious wife of a scholar.

"Well, I'll tell you, *Arglwydd* Brochvael," she said, "and I know exactly where we'll sit down — only we must go back a step or two."

"Lead on, Sibylla," he said, wrapping his mantle round him and grasping his spear so that it might serve as a staff. He was surprised, all the same, to find that this "step or two back" did not mean back in the direction of the Gaer. It meant back in the direction of the Fountain. But it evidently did not imply the same path, and he soon found that it was necessary for him to walk behind her, since this path quickly became too narrow for the two of them to walk abreast.

After walking in silence for a time and following many turns and twists of this narrow way, he began to realize that he had no longer the remotest idea where they were or in what direction lay either the Gaer or the Fountain.

Sibylla was leading him with some intention; but as far as he could tell, she might be leading him round and round in circles. But thinking of the serene calm of her face as he had seen it just now he couldn't find it in him to be anxious about her loyalty. He was physically weak and in great need of food, and he had only told her the truth when he said he'd begun to feel somewhat light-headed after that potent Greek wine.

He tried in vain to remember where it had been that some priest of Apollo gave Odysseus the wine that helped him to burn out the Cyclops's eye. "Old, I'm getting," he told himself. "I shall soon be finding out why Cadmus and old Tiresias made such fools of themselves, but I've forgotten which poet it was who said that the gods laugh at an old man who plays at love with a young girl."

He watched the lightly swaying figure before him as she brushed the impeding fir twigs aside and touched the moonlit tips of the tall ferns with her outstretched fingers. "It's queer," he thought, "that I should feel so satisfied with everything when Einion has broken our sword, when my son is dead, when Morfydd's going to leave me alone, and when the Modrybedd are trying to betray us to Colgrim."

Suddenly he saw his guide had stopped and was waiting for him. They were now in an open space between the trees, the sort of forest clearing that the Brythons called a *llanerch,* and in the midst of this clearing lay a huge fallen oak. Here they sat down side by side; and the very moment they were seated she began talking fast and freely.

"Where we are now, *Arglwydd* Brochvael," she said, "is near the Mound of y Bychan. You know how scared of the Mound your people are, only daring to come near it on some great feast day? You know how they say the ghosts of y Bychan's women can be seen at night ascending and descending the Mound? Well! I'll tell you something you *don't* know. Under that Mound — yes! dug by y Bychan himself it may be — there's a small underground chamber.

"Here was the chief hiding place of Greidawl Derwydd, the father of Gogfran and Llew, and here these two have lived for years, safely hidden away from all you Brythons under the terror of that haunted spot. Most of the forest people know they're there, but there's such a *tynged* on any man or a woman who speaks of it that only rumours ever reach the Gaer.

"There *are* cases of your Brythons having been told, even Brythons of the *Gosgordd;* but the man who's been told, and the fool who has told him, have never lived long afterwards. At least, this is how it was in Greidawl Derwydd's time. But since *his* death things have been different. More know of it, *many* more. Some say your brother himself knows. I thought he did when I spoke to him tonight and he wouldn't listen to me. But I tell you, *Arglwydd* Brochvael, I don't mind at all *now* that he wouldn't listen to me." Here she paused for breath and touched lightly with her hand the knee that was next to her as they sat on the fallen oak.

Over both Brochvael's knees, however, hung the Etrurian mantle in its heavy folds, serving tonight a purpose quite opposite to the one it was popularly accused of serving; and, though he marked the gesture and liked it, it conveyed to him at that moment no particular thrill of pleasure.

The truth is he was staggered by what he heard. Since he was a child — that is to say, for over half a century — he had felt about the *Derwyddon* of the forest very much as he felt about the Cewri of the Cader or the women's ghosts at y Bychan's Mound — a tremulous half-belief that darkened with thrilling terrors the wild tracks of the forest and warmed with delicious security the hearth-fires of the Gaer.

And now here he was listening quite calmly to his wife's young waif from the Swamp of the Gwyddyl while she declared that the sons of the god-devil of his boyhood were not only living men but were near him in this very moonlight, amid the ghosts of y Bychan's Mound!

"You were wrong about the weather, Porius Manlius," he thought, "and so were the rest of us. The wind's dropped and the sky's clearing."

In spite of this improvement, however, he soon found himself drawing what he called his Mantuan cloak more tightly about him while he wondered how chilly he ought to let himself grow before his Socratic conscience permitted him to press this warm-blooded penitent closely to his side.

For an impassioned penitent is what Sibylla had by this time become, and she was pouring out to him, just as if he were Minnawc Gorsant or at least Brother John, one of the wildest tales he'd ever heard.

She told him that this brother of the Derwydd, this egregious Llew ap Greidawl who had been the cause of all the trouble over what she called Myrddin Wyllt's "Ffichtiaid bitch," had in his lecherous wanderings found her out and grown enamoured of her. She explained that in his headlong pursuit of her he had thrown caution to the winds, defied his brother, and persuaded her to visit him in their hiding place at the Mound of the Little One.

She swore to her new friend, whom she still persisted in calling *“Arglwydd* Brochvael,” that she had succeeded in keeping her maidenhead intact under Llew’s gross attempts; just as she had hitherto done, she declared, under the greater temptation of the prince’s seductive charm.

All this she explained to her now almost shivering confessor in the most naive and childish manner, while she so repeatedly shifted her position on the oak trunk as to end by satisfying to an appreciable degree both the imperative of his conscience and the now stronger imperative of the autumnal air.

They were indeed sitting extremely close to each other when she reached the climax of her tale; nor was there any cloud or any overhanging branch in this lonely *llanerch* to come between his attentive gaze and the wavering expressions that crossed her face. She had, she told him, arrived at last at an astonishing agreement with her infatuated pursuer, an agreement in which she had had the prince’s interests more at heart than anything else. She had agreed that on the night in which he could persuade his brother to receive an authoritative ambassador from the ruling House to discuss terms for letting the emperor’s mission depart in peace, she would yield and let him have his will.

And this very night, she declared, was the night appointed, by a conjunction of chance and fate, for her sacrifice to be made.

“Do you mean to say, child, that these people are expecting you *now?* But how the devil can they possibly know you’ve got *me* with you?”

“They know I went to the Gaer and they’ll be sure I’ll be bringing someone.”

“Bringing what kind of someone?”

“Someone like you or Porius ab Einion or Rhun ap Gwrnach; someone who could speak in the name of the prince. I *had* hinted to them, *Arglwydd*

Brochvael, that I might even bring the prince himself."

Brochvael rose stiffly to his feet. The warmth of propinquity had in a moment transformed itself into the heat of angry pride. What was he doing here, listening to this waif of a Gwyddyl-Ffichti who had dared to assume she could persuade the Prince of Edeyrnion, third in descent from the imperial Cunedda, to go cringing among the hiding places of y Bychan and amid the wailing of his phantom women to beg mercy of their enemy for the emperor's counsellor and for twice a hundred of his most cherished knights?

Hurt, puzzled, bewildered, and completely unable to understand this sudden change of mood, Sibylla stared up at him from her seat on the oak trunk. The moonlight gave her an almost unearthly look, but her whole expression was that of a guileless child, outraged and shocked by the inexplicable behaviour of a grown-up person upon whose sympathy and power it has absolutely depended.

But it was a peculiarity of Brochvael ab Iddawc for these sudden outbursts of anger, especially when roused by some slight to his pride of race, to flicker out as quickly as they flared up. "It's simply comical," he now told himself, "that I should act the heroic brother of an heroic ruler when Einion's like what he is and when I'm like what I am! This girl is simply nearer to the reality of life and the reality of human nature than I am. The Gaer *is* helpless, *Gosgordd* or no *Gosgordd,* before a challenge like this. The forest people *have* surrounded these grandiose heroes, and in their fury at being at the mercy of such a dunghill rabble the Lord knows into what folly these proud lads with their horses and lances may not plunge."

Under the weight of these sobering thoughts, his anger ebbed and a quite different feeling stole over him. The girlish figure in the moonlight staring up at him as he stood leaning on his spear began now to strike him as much more helpless and pitiful than these proud horsemen with a thousand poisoned arrows pointed at their throats. What was in her mind that she should offer herself to this wretched Llew at such a price?

He sat down again at her side and took her hand, not amorously but tenderly and gravely. “What made you think I could possibly let you do such a thing, Sibylla? Good Lord! I’d be worse than this abominable Llew if I bought these people’s safety at such a price! Tell me honestly, Sibylla, tell me, as our Brython women say ‘across your heart,’ what it was that put this frightful idea into your head. Kymeinvoll was of your race. She would never let me call her a Gwyddyl-Ffichtiaid as she came from Iwerdon; but if the Ffichti came from Iwerdon to Alban there must have been heaps of them where she came from, as well as the sea robbers from Llychlyn. But Kymeinvoll I *know* would have had no fear of these *Derwyddon.”*

He paused for a second; and the girl, watching him as the wind switched the shadow of a fir branch back and forth between his face and the moon, was struck by the abstracted interest — just as if there had been no plots or counterplots, no *Gosgordd* spears or poisoned arrows within a hundred miles — with which he plunged into his favourite topic.

It would indeed have been clear to a much less experienced listener than Sibylla — and Sibylla had a notion that Sidonius Modestus was a Byzantine general — that this man had forgotten their quest, forgotten his son’s death, forgotten his daughter’s marriage, and was giving himself up to the quiet felicity of generalizing on race traditions.

“Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles,” he went on, “always assured me that in Iwerdon, where the Gwyddyl intermarried with the Norsemen or, as you call them, the Llychlynaid, the *Derwyddon* were always playing this sort of trick upon the women. They had, where she came from, she said, all sorts of devils’ devices to get what they wanted, just like your precious Llew! But the women over there, she said, weren't in the least afraid of them. They were ghastly afraid of the priests, though! The priests did whatever they liked with them. Kymeinvoll couldn't understand our ways over here, where only a few of us bother about the priests at all, but where the *Derwyddon* are the final mystery of awe and terror.

"It's all superstition and horror. I tell you, I hate it from the bottom of my heart! You've never heard, I expect, of the great Roman poet Lucretius? He's the one to expose them! It was when that murderous rogue down there heard I was teaching my son to read Lucretius that he had him killed. It was our Brythons, not the forest people, who did it. There's something in us Brythons — look at my unhappy sister-in-law! — that's heroic and fanatical, and these priests play on that. But what the forest people dread are only the ugly little magic tricks of these sons of Greidawl. It's all nonsense, my child. Be a good girl, as your own conscience teaches you, and send both priests and *Derwyddon* to the devil! And listen, Sibylla—"

She certainly seemed to be listening, and seemed as if she could have stood there looking up into his face till that oblong creature of a moon above their heads lost its brightness in the dawn. And it *is* true she was feeling no impatience. If *he* could forget that he was standing supperless and chilly in the heart of the forest talking to the witch-girl of Gwyddylwern as earnestly as he might have talked to the patrician guests in the palace of Sidonius, she was so accustomed to life in the open air that all the great moments of her life, her childish response to the kindness of Brochvael's lady, her admiration of Morfydd, her obsession for the prince, and now her complicated new feeling, so fiercely reverential, for the man she was guiding, were as intimately associated with leaves and mould and moss and mist as his were with his fireside at Ty Cerrig and Cassiodorus's version of Ovidius Naso.

“Listen, Sibylla!” She had heard those words not so much with her mind as with her whole body. Yes, and with more than her body! She had heard them with the obscure pressure of her thin sandals upon the dark soft moss. She had heard them with the now familiar pressure of the muffled dagger against her navel.

She had heard them with the motion of the wind at the roots of the damp hair she was now reluctant to push back from her forehead, lest the gesture disturb the flow of his learned talk. She knew he was beginning to be chilly by the way he tugged at his mantle, while she, so well used to these forest nights, was actually sweating a little.

“Listen, Sibylla!” Yes, she was listening, after her fashion; and hearing, amid oak stumps and pine-tree trunks and under that shapeless silveriness in the sky, more, it may well be, than he was saying.

“The reason,” he was now explaining, “why the forest people make better Christians than we Brythons or you Gwyddylaid — why, they take to it like wild geese to the swamps! — is because in their original home in Africa they, and they alone of all the ancient races of the world, found out for themselves what Jesus taught later, namely, that it is necessary to die in order to live; that to give is better than to take; and that in the long run the weak are mightier than the strong and the good more powerful than the evil! The forest people’s druids, unlike yours in Iwerdon, have always been prophets rather than magicians. Julius Caesar or, as you call him, Ul-Kessar, had as his counsellor a Derwydd from Gaul who told him that the Gaulish *Derwyddon* had to come to Britain — especially to Mona — to learn their philosophy. This was before Christ, but since then there has been... What are you smiling at, Sibylla?”

“At my thoughts, *Arglwydd* Brochvael.” She could hardly tell him that the impact of a couple of small weak moths who, interrupted on some languid autumnal errand by two anthropoids, were tickling her neck, had suddenly, in a way impossible to explain, made it seem comical that this learned man's interest in the difference between the *Derwyddon* of Gaul and those of Britain had put out of his mind the difference between a virgin Sibylla and a ravished Sibylla.

But her smile changed the current of his mood. "What put all this into your head?" he enquired.

"Put what into my head, my Lord?"

He picked up his spear from the grass at their feet. "Why," he said, "your absurd notion of letting this wretch have his will with you on condition of bringing Einion or me into the presence of the Derwydd."

"I thought the prince would be so grateful that he would... I mean I thought he might... I'm fond of the prince, *Arglwydd* Brochvael."

"You mean you love him?"

She lowered her head.

An unusual recklessness took possession of the friend of Sidonius. He rose to his feet and glanced impatiently round him. The moon was floating in a blue-black gulf just above their heads. The trees immediately round the *llanerch* were mostly small pines; but a few oddly grown stunted oaks could be seen among them to whose twisted branches the leaves still clung. The texture of these leaves in the moonlight looked quietly imperishable; and though the earth beneath them awaited their umbrageous dissolution nothing in their dusky enchantment broke the spell by which the mystery of living vegetation still asserted its presence.

"Come on, Sibylla," he said abruptly. "Where you can go I can go! What's at the back of your mind, I wonder? My mother used to tell Einion and me that the Derwydd would never hurt us *as long as we were with him* and were looking at him."

Sibylla rose from their log, raised her hands to her hair, and then tucked her tunic more tightly under her belt.

"You're not laughing at me, *Arglwydd* Brochvael?" she asked.

"Of course not. I never laugh at women and I don't often laugh at anything."

"No, I've heard you've never laughed since your son died."

"Where did you hear that?"

"In the huts by the alder swamp."

"My son was fond of you, wasn't he, Sibylla?"

"Perhaps... a little... not much."

"Do they know in the huts that my daughter is to be married to Porius in a few days — at the Feast of the Sowing?"

"What! Have they been sleeping together already? The Lady Morfydd is wiser and braver than any of us. May she be the mother of emperors!"

Brochvael knew that the marriage customs of the forest people were totally different from those of the Brythons, so he made no comment.

"Well," he said, "shall we go? Is it far to y Bychan's Mound? But you must tell me more, Sibylla, of what I shall find when I get there for you must remember I'm an old bookworm and only leave my study to catch fish sometimes or to help Gwrgi ploughing or reaping, and I don't do that very often.

"Is the Derwydd's lair directly under the Mound? But let's be off, child, for heaven's sake. We've wasted too much time already. You can tell me as we go just what you want me to do. In fact, we'd better make some very clear plans. But we can do that as we walk.

"Here! Hold to my wrist, will you, so I can manage this curst cloak. That's the girl! Is my dagger all right where you've got it?"

"Oh yes, I don't feel it at all, except — you know — it makes me feel safe."

"Well, on we go then, and hold tight to my wrist."

But instead of "making plans," clear or otherwise, Brochvael found himself visualizing with a forlorn and desperate distinctness his lonely life without Morfydd. No more would his halfhearted ploughing and reaping with Gwrgi and Blackie be sweetened by the thought of his welcome when he returned home. And half the pleasure would be gone from the Homeric fragments from Byzantium and the illuminated books from Brutium when there was no Morfydd to discourse to about them.

And what easy victories she'd win over the simple prejudices of Porius and the Pelagian fantasies of Brother John! "After tomorrow," he thought, "after the day after tomorrow, I'll be absolutely alone."

All of a sudden, as he stumbled over a snakelike bramble whose thorny tangles in the moonlight resembled black seaweed, this *absolutely alone* began to take the semblance of the wooden horse block opposite his goatskin chair whereon his daughter was wont to sit. *Nobody there* — nobody but old Canna and Gwrgi!

Whatever happened to the House of Cunedda, absolute loneliness was what *he* had to face. What did it matter what madness he undertook with this girl who was in love with Einion!

The shapeless moon, sliding in and out of the waving treetops like a broken shuttle, began to transform itself now before his distracted eyes into the familiar image of Mynydd-y-Gaer. But the Gaer he saw up there was desolate. Its hall was empty, its sword was broken, its *Gosgordd* was dispersed.

He saw the prince as a hopeless drunkard dependent upon the Modrybedd for his very sustenance. He saw the white-horse ensign of

Colgrim the Saxon pawing the air on every high place in Edeyrnion, while, with Brother John dead of his fever and the emperor's young riders slain by the forest people, the fall of the House of Cunedda was complete.

At last he broke the silence. "What are we going to find, my girl, when we reach the Bychan's Mound? Is their hiding place a large one? Will they have many guards?"

"Large, do you say, *Arglwydd* Brochvael? Oh no! They've only two small smoky chambers there with nothing but a blanket hung between them; and as for guards, I tell you, their people run back like foxes to their burrows when there's no plunder in view!"

Brochvael stopped and looked down into the white, blurred, concentrated face beside him. The obscure picture that had been hovering before his mind, and before the minds of them all in that hurried conclave in old Roman's chamber, began to waver under her words.

Had they all this while, all their lives in fact, been exaggerating the power of these invisible *Derwyddon?* Was he under this girl's guidance going to destroy the superstition of hundreds of years?

"Listen, Sibylla!" he said gravely. "I can't have you giving yourself to this rogue. If there aren't a crowd of guards with them, if we find the two of them nearly alone, you're to stay close to me while I talk to the Derwydd! I'm not going to let you out of my sight; do you understand?"

"There'll only be a dirty old blanket between us. You'll hear every word and I shall hear every word. Besides, though he makes him do things, Llew's afraid of his brother. He knows the Derwydd could turn him into a rutting stag if he wanted to. I've got your dagger. I can look after myself, *Arglwydd* Brochvael."

"But you said you promised him! You don't *want* him to take you, do you, Sibylla?"

"I can look after myself," she repeated doggedly.

"Well, come on," he said. "But I warn you, child, whatever's in your mind I'm responsible for you; and I'm not coming out of this business alive if I don't get you out of it with me, and unhurt too. So lay that to your heart, as Homer says!"

He quickened his pace after that, but so winding and so narrow had the path become that it was anything but easy going. At last they were confronted by an enormous pine tree, so black in the moonlight that its outstretched arms resembled great ridges of murderous thundercloud on a gashed and gaping horizon; and there, like a dusky cupola in the middle of this wounded horizon, rose the Mound of the Little One.

Without a second's hesitation the girl snatched her fingers from his wrist, fell down on her knees, and began fumbling in the moss at the tree's foot.

"There!" she cried in a moment or two, "I've got it!" and leaping to her feet she displayed to him what looked like a dark stone as she held it up.

"What is it?"

"Llew's arrowhead. It's their sign all's well and they expect us. They'll be glad it's you and not Einion. They're afraid of Einion."

"Of him?"

His surprise was natural and quite the reverse of contemptuous, but the idea of his irresponsible and satirical brother being an object of fear struck him as comical. Arbitrary, incalculable, and wayward as he was, the prince's rule of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy was probably the mildest and gentlest in all Britain; and Brochvael, after the things he'd seen and suffered in Europe, often felt ashamed of his lack of appreciation of his brother's undisturbed graciousness.

But it was hard to do justice to an indulgence that never put off its mask of unfeeling irony, and Brochvael by long experience had found it best to counter his brother’s airy shafts by the absentminded indifference of metaphysical abstraction.

“Oh yes!” Sibylla went on as she carefully replaced the arrowhead, this time with its point directed away from instead of towards the Bychan’s Mound. “The prince is the only man in the country they’re afraid of except Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch.”

“Aren’t they afraid of the emperor? Aren’t they afraid of Myrddin Wyllt?”

There was a lilt of genuine amusement in her voice as she replied to this: “Mary-mother, no! The emperor’s under some sort of vow — some ridiculous holy pledge to leave them alone — and Myrddin Wyllt’s never hurt a mouse since he was born! He’s one of God’s innocents, Myrddin Wyllt is, though of course that Ffichtiaid whore who trails about with his sister — but you’ve seen what *she* is, *Arglwydd* Brochvael! But quick! Come! or Llew ap Greidawl will be too drunk to let us in!”

She clutched her companion’s wrist again, this time with an earth-cold hand and moss-scented fingers. This was destined to be their last skin-to-skin contact before they plunged together into this perilous encounter.

Shivering from the October damp, Brochvael now drew his sleeveless mantle tightly round him, round, that is to say, everything but his right arm, whose hand held the spear.

“We’ll be saving all Edeyrnion tonight and all Ardudwy and all the Cader for the prince,” she whispered in his ear; and her voice, full of a rich and deep content, had a ripple of laughing satisfaction in it that reminded him of his dead wife’s when anything peculiarly pleasing happened to her.

“It’s the Gwyddylaid voice,” he thought. “Aye! But I like it! It’s gayer than any note our Brython women can summon up!”

It was much darker where she had begun propelling him and yet, when he raised his bare head, for he was stooping now, and endured the pricks of the dark fir needles beneath which they were pushing their way he could see the beautiful, distorted, silvery creature sailing through the jet-black gulf of ethereal Space.

There wasn't much undergrowth beneath these fir trees, trees that Brochvael fancied he recognized as a particular species he had come to know well in Italy, but their trunks grew so closely together and their broad fernlike branches swung so low that even the girl had to bend her head, and sometimes he could even feel her hair tickling the wrist by which she steered their course.

Suddenly he became conscious that they were confronted by a thick barricade of intertwisted branches, cut branches from whose splintered sections a resinous odour assailed his nostrils. Here Sibylla stopped and began pushing aside a roughly heaped pile of dead bracken from which arose an even more pungent and sweetly bitter smell.

"Come, *Arglwydd* Brochvael!" she whispered with dramatic gravity. "Here's the way in!"

She dropped his wrist as she spoke and allowed him to take the lead. By a discreet shifting of the loosely flung bracken pile at its entrance, she had revealed to his amazed eyes a narrow descending flight of stone steps. Step by step — and flinging back his mantle he took her right hand in his left while he gripped his spear with his own right — they descended these steps, he first and she behind him.

One Virgilian half-line after another came into his head as they went down. "This old cloak," he said to himself, "must be feeling — ah! here's the beast's lair!"

The acrid smoke of a hidden hearth fire began indeed to mount up round them, combined with a curiously pungent scent of animal skins, human sweat, and what in some obscure sense made Brochvael think of wine flung into a fire.

"Who's there?"

The voice that came up to them was at once husky and shrill, harsh and infantile. It might, Brochvael thought, have been the voice of some aboriginal cave dweller whose primeval life had in some way retarded his natural growth into manhood from childhood.

Sibylla replied by calling out her own name.

"Who's with you?"

Quick as sound following sight the girl turned and clapped her bare hand on Brochvael's mouth, and even in that rush of so many things happening together he was calm enough to appreciate the texture of this soft instrument of silence.

"One who waits for the word of fate!" she replied in clear tones, and the husky voice promptly answered.

"Fate is the word. Cross this threshold!"

Not a little to Brochvael's relief this gnomic exchange of solemn salutations was followed by a lively outrush of rapid speech. The sentences now exchanged were all in that peculiar mixture of Brythonic words and Berber syntax which was beginning just then throughout the long mountain ranges and umbrageous valleys, stretching south and west from Dinas Bran to Caergwynt, to be adopted as the language of Ynys Prydein.

To the further relief of the reckless traveller, upon whose bewildered intelligence and empty stomach the unmixed wine of Dion Dionides was playing all manner of erudite tricks, there was a complete absence of the terrifying and oracular solemnity he had been led to expect in this mystic consistory beneath the Mound of y Bychan. And as a final benediction from his special goddess, "Chance, the Saviour," he found to his surprise that the general interest, of the four persons into whose presence he now emerged from the smoky descent was concentrated not on himself but on his guide.

The friend of the late Sidonius had fortunately much more claim by natural temperament to the epithet "Modestus" than the princely Bishop of Arverne; and it was with a profound sigh of acquiescent relief that he sank down on a heap of discoloured blankets and contemplated undisturbed the strange scene before him.

He soon realized that his attitude of withdrawn and patient observation was shared by at least one of the persons among whom he had been plunged. This was an elderly man of small stature who, seated on a three-legged stool close to a log fire in the midst of the pillared obscurity, kept feeding the flames with chopped-up pieces of wood from a pile within the reach of his not very long right arm.

The peculiarity in this person's appearance that struck Brochvael first was the fact that he was completely bald. This baldness, combined with wide, enquiring amber-brown eyes, above which there curved a pair of guilelessly arched and innocently questioning eyebrows, was rendered characteristically Iberian by the neighbourhood of a long powerful ugly nose; a nose that claimed no connection with an animal's snout; a nose that was peculiarly and specially human; a nose that seemed to be there for many other purposes than mere olfaction; but a nose, all the same, that brought a curious kind of discord into the face.

Since there was no question as to who was the notorious Llew — for never had Brochvael set eyes on a human creature more born for, dedicated to, and victimized by, pure unmitigated sexual greed than the one who was now bandying amorous quips with Sibylla — it remained that the bald little man with the innocent eyebrows, feeding the fire, must be Gogfran ap Greidawl, the Derwydd himself, the last of the druids.

But the manner of the druid's brother was so grotesquely reminiscent of all the wild stories rumoured through the forest about him, and the man was clearly so lost in his obsession for Sibylla that since the Derwydd also seemed preoccupied, or wished to appear so, it was natural enough that Brochvael's contemplative mood, rendered almost Platonic by the slow-working Greek wine, concentrated itself on the more fantastic aspects of reality in this thaumaturgical badger's hole.

The place was filled with smoke, though Brochvael fancied he detected behind the Derwydd's bald head an outlet different from the one down which they had just descended, and it seemed to him that separate trails of smoke were feeling their way airward through both these apertures.

And *there* undoubtedly was the "dirty blanket" referred to by Sibylla, behind which was the sleeping place destined, at least in the mind of the less worthy of the sons of Greidawl, to witness the rape of Sibylla's virginity.

Absorbed in thought, while his innocently questioning eyebrows still expressed their abysmal and guileless wonder that the world was as it was, the druid's brown eyes continued to blink abstractedly at the small yellow flames he was slowly coaxing into greater exuberance.

With the patient instinct of an old traveller, who has learnt long ago the cautious politeness of a complete suppression of curiosity, Brochvael lay back on his pile of rugs, and giving himself up to a delicious feeling of drowsy warmth and reckless security, avoided even glancing at the Derwydd's brother and sought to detach himself from the hurt and pain of all these events. He had crossed his Rubicon. He had put his seal on

Morfydd’s marriage to that young Hercules of a nephew. In a day or two she would be lost to him and his hearth would be desolate. Well, let it be so!

The loss of his wife had been hard to bear but he had borne it. The loss of his son had been hard to bear but he had borne that also. And now he was going to lose his daughter. But he tried in vain to feel angry with this girl who had dragged him into this den to watch her games with this bawdy brute.

God! It was nothing to him that this monkey-man should enjoy her! Perhaps after all she wasn’t a virgin. Perhaps she’d lied to him when she swore she’d kept the man at a distance till now! Perhaps she’d lied about the prince too! When a woman once starts upon these tales, facts and fancies, fantasies and fables, she mixes them all up!

God! but the fellow had a hideous physiognomy. The way the wretch was whispering to her now showed a sickening infatuation such as he could scarce believe existed save in some underworld of God alone knew what subhuman life!

Without glancing in their direction, and they were both still on their feet, he got the impression that it was Sibylla who possessed the man, not the man Sibylla. But these *other two* — what a picture *they* made!

They were both men and they were playing chess. He saw their faces in profile from where he lay, with the fire between him and them, and the bald head of the crouching Derwydd hovering like an idol over the black-and-white board they held on their knees as they confronted each other.

Wisps of smoke from the flickering flames the man was feeding from the little heap of wood he could just reach out of the shadow behind him kept crossing that board on their knees. Yes, they were playing the immemorial, oriental game that the legionaries had long since introduced into Britain, with its variously shaped *latrunculi,* or chessmen, carved out of elder wood, arranged opposite one another on those black-and-white squares.

The whole scene became momently more dreamlike to his wine-dazed senses.

“Your turn, Drom,” murmured the elder to the other; and Brochvael recognized the husky voice that had challenged their entry. “But if you move your castle,” he went on with grim satisfaction, “I’ll move my queen.”

“Can’t I move my horse’s head to its rescue, Morgant?” The younger player’s voice was tame and flat in comparison with his fellow’s; a negligible, neutral voice, neither plaintive nor querulous, neither lively nor grave, a patient, passive, all-accepting voice.

But the one he called Morgant, whose features were rendered weirdly grotesque by a red scar that enlarged his mouth and by the fact half his ears had been cut away, replied with gruff complacency: “Of course you can’t, you idiot! Don’t you see my bishop’s ready for him?”

Brochvael, lying back on his dirty pile of rags, for they were in a state too tattered to be called blankets, felt at that moment as if his consciousness was so detached from all personal desires that nothing could alarm him and nothing could trouble him. He felt so removed from the whole arena of human wills and human contentions that it was as if he were already dead but were able, across his own dead body, to take an amused though rather aloof interest in all that went on about him.

He had sunk down with such infinite acquiescence into his resting place that he would have been puzzled to say at whose sign it was that he had collapsed into this corner by the smoking logs. He felt too much at peace to give more than a comfortable and carefree attention to the extraordinary difference between all that he'd been led to look for in this stronghold of the *Derwyddon* and what he now actually found.

Neither his mother, the Princess Indeg, nor any of the Modrybedd had ever given him, nor had perhaps ever possessed so as to be able to give him, a definite image of what the devout imagination of a thousand years had created. But from it, *whatever or wherever it was,* radiated the undying influence that had preserved the forest people's mysterious race consciousness alive.

And now here he was, in this grotesquely unhealthy and absurdly childish hole in the ground with the water oozing from the cracks of the mossy stones, with a lecherous clown trying to seduce a witch-waif from the Swamp of the Gwyddyl, and with a little bald-headed man, his bowed head over against a couple of chess players, feeding a smoky fire from a heap of chips!

What could a fellow student of Sidonius of Arverne and of Cassiodorus of Brutium make of a situation where a creation of popular rumour and old wives' tales could undergo a metamorphosis beyond the imagination of any Ovid?

Was this whole scene, as he regarded it now, this doting satyr adoring his teasing nymph and that queer pair playing chess, a prearranged background for some tremendous contest, occult and prophetic between himself and this absorbed little man throwing chips on a fire, a contest upon which the fate of the whole tribe of Cunedda from Caer Dathyl beyond Deganwy to Mur Castell on the borders of Dinodig might ultimately depend?

But, if so, what an absurdly ironical situation for the *anima mundi* if that was it, or the *demiurgos* if *that* was it, to have taken all this trouble to bring about! Old Porius Manlius and his servant Aulus had assuredly kept their heads in this confused crisis. And yet this mad adventure in which he was now immersed would never have happened if he hadn't, out of some crazy urge to self-immolation, offered himself as the emissary of their old-fashioned tactics!

At this point his drowsy speculations were interrupted by the abrupt conclusion of the game of chess. He had thought at first that these two curious servants dressed in such nondescript rags, the one with the scar and the clipped ears and an air of pontifical propriety, the other with an exceptionally beautiful face and figure and an expression of patient sweetness and docility, were undersized; but when, annoyed by Drom's obstinate slowness in being checkmated, Morgant swept the *latrunculi* into a leather pouch and rose to his feet, it was revealed that this latter was the tallest person in the place!

But if the height of Morgant was a surprise, the almost feminine beauty of his half-brother Drom had a disturbing effect upon Brochvael's wine-drugged senses. His travels in the classical countries and his interest in antique statuary had encouraged a certain congenital attraction in him towards the softer aspects of the masculine form, and he now began with drowsy gravity to imagine what it would be like to have Drom for his attendant. "If the bald man doesn't say something soon," he told himself, "Dion's wine will be sending me to sleep, and if I *do* go off I'm at their mercy — but I don't believe this Hylas of a Drom—"

He was roused from his torpor by a surprising conclusion to the lively dialogue between Sibylla and the infatuated Llew.

Looking at the two brothers nobody could doubt that they had at least one parent in common. But if Llew and this bald Derwydd, as Brochvael watched them now, sprang from the loins of Greidawl Hen, who was reported to have lived a hundred and nineteen summers in this forest without once being seen by any man or woman or child of the Brythons or

Romans or Gwyddyl or Ffichti, they must have had, he thought, very different mental experiences and quite possibly very different mothers!

"I must ask Sibylla about that," he told himself, "when we've got out of here," and he recalled how Sidonius used to argue that the *Derwyddon* were survivors from a worldwide Society of Pythagoreans.

"If so," he thought "preincarnation *is* very likely true with *them* though not with everybody; and when these men are asleep together behind that dirty blanket the immemorial family likeness returns, only to vanish again the moment they awake."

The brothers were certainly very much awake at the close of the amorous altercation between Sibylla and Llew. The smooth, damp, shiny, jet-black hair that covered Llew's skull, like a clump of unpleasant seaweed on a wave-washed post at the mouth of a sea drain, changed completely the character of the megacephalic forehead inherited from the patriarchal Greidawl; whereas the staring brown eyes and arched eyebrows inherited by them both took on an infinitely questioning and guilelessly astounded look in the case of Gogfran and a yearningly obsessed and almost cannibalistically doting look in the case of Llew.

What Brochvael witnessed now was an attempt of Llew to drag Sibylla towards the dirty blanket, that unappealing suspended object that served as a curtain to their sleeping quarters; and he beheld this attempt immediately frustrated by a stinging slap in the face from the girl's open hand.

At the very moment this blow was delivered the tall chess player had just succeeded in lighting an evil-smelling oil wick placed in a deep earthenware saucer on a wooden projection by the side of the dirty blanket; and, as the man turned at the sound, the spluttering flame fell on his scar-widened mouth and gave him the look of a gloating demon.

But there was little for him to gloat over, for Sibylla became suddenly remorseful. Even without this new light the upward-spurting flame from the fire tended by the Derwydd would have been in itself sufficient illumination to reveal the pitiful contortion, like that of a child about to cry, that convulsed Llew’s face; and her blow was followed by an immediate revulsion of pity, and snatching at his hand, the girl moved straight towards the dirty blanket leading him gently with her and not forgetting, as her eyes encountered Brochvael’s before the curtain closed behind them, to touch her breast with a significant smile, as if to remind her friend of the presence in that warm hiding place of his rag-sheathed dagger.

They were no sooner out of sight than the Derwydd rose quickly to his feet, summoned the two attendants, and gave them some hurried instructions in a voice too low for Brochvael to hear.

As they both listened to him it was impossible for the onlooker to tell whether the scar-widened grin on the face of Morgant or the submissive sweetness of Drom’s smile indicated pain or pleasure at the nature of his instructions.

At any rate, when he had done, they each snatched a piece of blanket from the heap on which they’d been sitting, and without further delay, covering their heads and shoulders with what they had picked up and not turning again to look either at Brochvael or the Derwydd, they hurried up the steps.

Brochvael noticed that while Morgant carelessly clutched at the minute black-stalked ferns and the delicate little grasses and unknown plants that grew by the side of the steps, Drom with a gesture equally automatic — a thing natural enough to a man with such a delicate figure — mechanically stroked these outraged and indignant growths with the tips of his slender fingers, as much as to say: “he’s only a clumsy boor, illustrious daughters of thunder, so don’t waste your divine power in causing such a fool to die in anguish!”

Thinking about it later Brochvael came to the conclusion that there must have been a considerable pause, after both the masculine legs swathed in rags and the bare, exquisitely moulded, boy-girl legs had completely vanished, before the Derwydd approached him and asked permission to sit down by his side “so that they might converse in private.”

“It’s funny,” he told Morfydd later, “but I don’t seem to remember the fellow sitting down between me and the fire. I remember his asking my leave to sit down and I remember his using the word ‘private’ — or was it ‘secret?’ Yes! I think it was our own word *‘dirgelwch’* — but I can’t remember seeing him bend his knees or make the motion of sitting.

“I must have been only half-awake till he finally did sit down. I can remember his bending over the fire and I can remember him giving orders to those two men; but the Greek sailor’s wine must have made me shut my eyes at that point. Yes, I’m sure there was quite a pause between those two pairs of legs vanishing up the steps and the innocently incredulous eyes staring at me like those of an amiable but all-questioning idol in the temple of Aporia, the goddess of doubt.”

But whatever Brochvael said later to Morfydd, it must have been during this “interval” as he called it that he got permission from the Derwydd to follow those four legs into the air so as to relieve himself; for though he didn’t enlarge on this to Morfydd, he could clearly remember the moon transforming his urine into what looked like the silver semen of Endymion, while it crossed his mind how much pleasanter the air was that emerged from a certain badger’s lair near his own Stone House than what came up out of the Derwydd’s retreat; and since he could recall suffering no embarrassment with regard to this excursion, it could only have taken place after Sibylla's abduction behind the dirty blanket.

When once the Derwydd began seriously talking to him, some powerful psychic aura about the man must have driven out the drugging effect of the Greek captain's wine, for he was able to recount to his daughter every word Gogfran uttered; and some of these utterances sank like plummet stones to the very bottom of the tidal flow of his mind.

The odd thing was that he felt no inclination to argue with the Derwydd. About *this* he must, he told himself, be very clear when he explained it all to Morfydd. He must explain how it came from that disarming questioning of the arched eyebrows above the guileless eyes.

The man looked, he must explain, as if he were completely detached from everything that happened and as if, though taking a leading, perhaps a decisive part, in what happened, he regarded the part he took impersonally, as though he were not responsible for it or for the effect of it.

"You, child," he must tell her, "have had a fresh start and you're not, as Einion and I were, brought up to hear the Modrybedd argue that the *Derwyddon* were more Christian than Minnawc Gorsant. Even Alarch the Fair" — yes, he must tell her all that— "tried to make her son Rhun and her foster-son Porius repeat some old forest people's catechism about the Derwydd and the Trinity."

But could you worship the Trinity without being a Christian? Oh, there was more he must tell her about the power in this man's face! He must tell her it was like a carved figurehead he'd seen once in some African port, carved in the shape of an Avanc, of that lizard-monster that they say came from the bottom of Lake Tegid.

Only an inanimate piece of wood it was, rotting in the prow of a stranded ship that the natives had sworn was Phoenician. But if it *were* Phoenician, why did he fancy he made out from its weather-battered stern the familiar name “Dyfnwal Moelmud,” the legendary king of these isles before even the Gwyddyl-Ffichti came?

But this imaginary conversation with Morfydd was now abruptly interrupted by the man himself speaking to him and speaking to startling effect. The face with the raised eyebrows and Avanc power was assuring him that it was as impossible for Arthur’s men to remain here as for an army from the emperor at Constantinople to invade Britain. “I’ll give them two days from tonight, Brochvael ab Iddawc,” he said, “and on the second day, that is to say, the day after tomorrow, they will have the privilege of seeing us celebrate the Feast of the Sowing; but when the Feast of the Sowing ends at noon they must be ready to start; for if they’re not out of our prince’s dominions, bag and baggage, by sunset on that day, Arthur will lose them all. Myrddin Wyllt cannot save them. It will be very interesting to see” — he spoke as if he were himself entirely detached from the whole business — “whether he’ll he able to *save himself.”*

At this point his resigned listener could not repress a protest.

“I hope he won’t bring down thunderbolts and lightning upon us all! I’ve never heard of Myrddin Wyllt being outwitted.”

Gogfran ap Greidawl smiled. His eyebrows twitched a little and their guileless wonder seemed like an innocent mockery of all the established reputations, human or divine, from the beginning of the world. Then his features stiffened into an inanimate piece of wood carved like a prehistoric lizard.

“I’ve no wish, Brochvael ab Iddawc,” he replied, “to be the instrument of the downfall of the greatest prophet of modern times, and indeed, as you quite properly suggest, there is always the chance that he may destroy me; but whoever it is he destroys — and, as you probably know, he tried without much success to destroy my brother — of one thing I am in a position to assure you, *Arglwydd* Brochvael, and that is that by the afternoon of the day after tomorrow there will be none of Arthur's mission left in Edeyrnion!

"Today is the nineteenth. That will therefore be the twenty-first. How curious and interesting it is, my Lord, that two and one should make three, and that three should be the number of the Trinity. Myrddin Wyllt's number is four. You know *that,* I expect?

"Think, my Lord, what a privilege it is for us to have lived long enough to see the great struggle reach its conclusion between three and four! Oh, how much more important the issue of this will be than any possible battle between Arthur and Colgrim!"

It was Brochvael's turn to smile now. "My aunts always swore to us you were a Christian, Gogfran Derwydd, and now I see they were right. May I enquire if you propose to call in the aid of Minnawc Gorsant, the priest, as he calls himself, of 'Corwen,' the 'White Choir,' in your contest with Myrddin Wyllt?"

A flicker of the most illuminated and almost rapturous interrogation flashed across the Derwydd's face. "Oh, if you could and if you would," he cried, "persuade *that man* to come to me here tomorrow, I can promise you that whatever the issue of this most fascinating contest, your daughter and Porius ab Einion will rule over Edeyrnion undisturbed. Bring him to me, oh, bring that man to me, *Arglwydd* Brochvael, and I will be your daughter's friend till the end of her days!"

"Ha, my friend," thought the exhausted and wine-drugged recipient of this surprising appeal, "so the Aunties weren't so wrong after all!" But what attended this conclusion in his confused mind was a queer feeling that what this extraordinary individual was really enjoying, even in anticipation, wasn't any possible success he might have himself against Myrddin Wyllt or against the emperor, but simply the fact that there should occur in the universe at all an event as stimulating as a life-and-death struggle between two such magicians as Gogfran Derwydd and Myrddin Wyllt, one representing the number *three* and the other the number *four*!

“Can he have guessed,” he thought, as he settled himself on his rugs and contemplated the face before him with puzzled interest, “that we’ve decided on marrying Morfydd and Porius at this Feast of the Sowing?”

As if reading his thoughts the Derwydd now remarked quite quietly and carelessly: “We’ve always had a marriage of some sort as long as I can remember at the Sowing. Why not have your daughter’s and Porius ab Einion’s? *That* would strengthen your House’s rule more than anything else, for it would be popular with the Gwyddyl-Ffichti and they’ve been increasing a good deal of late. They’re crossing from Iwerdon again, now that the legions have gone and the men from Lychlyn rule in Dulyn. And once here they seek the swamps and the mountains.

“But your Deganwy cousins in Gwynedd know their ways and are guarding all the approaches to Eryri; so they’ve been compelled to break up into small parties and follow the forest paths across the valleys, driving off cattle and sheep where they can, with the idea of settling on the slopes of the Cader. Many get killed but some get through. Our women have always had a tenderness for anyone from Iwerdon and some say the Ffichti served the Cewri in ancient days.”

At this Brochvael couldn’t resist a second interruption.

“You don’t believe these tales, Gogfran Derwydd, about the giants being still *up there,* and coming down when they smell death to carry off the dead?”

A look of the absolute illumination of pure dispassionate delight, like a look Brochvael had once seen on some exultant African faces in an old temple-court in the Atlas Mountains, came into the Derwydd's eyes.

"O *Arglwydd* Brochvael!" he cried — and his voice rose to such a shrill pitch that Brochvael distinctly heard a sudden pause in the constant murmur of amorous whisperings and endearments that were going on behind the blanket— "O my dear Lord, if you *could,* out of the fountain of your inexhaustible learning, and out of the experience of your unprecedented travels, reveal to me the historical and philosophical aspects of this wondrous question I should be eternally obliged. Is there any cause in Nature why this old race of giants should be extinct? Oh, it has been the hope of my life, *Arglwydd* Brochvael, that one day I might with my own eyes see a *cawr* of the Cader! We certainly live, *derwyddon, tywygion,* and *gwerin* — druids, princes, and people," he repeated, using the melodious intonation of Edeyrnion, "in the most exciting times the world has ever seen! What world-shaking events! What settings and risings of zodiacal aeons! What sinkings into irretrievable downfalls! What mountings into unbelievable restitutions!

"Do you know, my Lord Brochvael, I sometimes think that if the ineffable wheel whereby my father, Greidawl Derwydd, would always symbolize his worship of Three-in-One, would permit me after death to be a solitary and harmless fly on its uttermost rim — an *immortal* fly, you must understand, my dear Lord — I would fling away all the powers my father left me, and old Myrddin Wyllt might build an eel bridge from Saint Julian's Fount to the top of the Gaer; and the emperor's circus boys with their whores behind them might gallop over it, and over my dead body at the end of it!

"A little brown horrid-looking dung fly, my Lord Brochvael, is all I'd ask to be — only it would have to be *immortal,* you understand — an immortal dung fly with sticky feet. Sticky feet it must have, Brochvael ab

Iddawc, so that nothing, not even the milky moat of Caer Gwydion, could shake me off!”

There was something about all this, with its effect heightened by those everlastingly mocking eyebrows, that had begun to annoy Brochvael. In the depths of his Brythonic soul he felt an invincible distrust of this levity. Wasn’t the whole nature of human life, wasn’t its whole tragic purpose, only to be explained as an unceasing struggle between good and evil?

Brochvael’s moral sense, one of the deepest things in him, was outraged by the idea of being more anxious to enjoy the spectacle of these titanic struggles than to enjoy the good in the universe and fight against the evil.

“But oughtn’t Greidawl Derwydd,” he enquired earnestly, “to have believed that the circumference of his three-spoked wheel extended into infinity, and was therefore nowhere? And oughtn’t he to have believed that the mystic hub of his three spokes was omnipresent and was therefore everywhere? Isn’t that what Greidawl Derwydd ought to have believed?”

“Oh, that’s how it is, is it?” cried the other; and it was clear that his fascinated delight in such a boldly conceivable solution obliterated all annoyance at the criticism of his begetter’s fancy.

“Good Lord!” thought Brochvael. “What’ll this fool chuckle over next? Would he cry, ‘Oh, that’s how it is!’ if he were told that Myrddin Wyllt had invented a thundercloud that could destroy all Edeyrnion with a single bolt?”

“I hope our enemy—” he began, and then stopped short, startled at what he had said. Our enemy? This man himself, with his frivolous enjoyment of worldwide cataclysms, was our enemy.

“I mean,” he went on, “I hope Myrddin Wyllt won’t meddle with my daughter’s marriage on the twenty-first. What’s today? Yes! Venus Day. Well! The day after tomorrow will be Sunday. How did you know, Gogfran

Derwydd, that we were thinking of holding this marriage at the Sowing? We only settled upon it tonight."

Across the man's face there began to flicker something that was almost like reproachful surprise, but it was overtaken at once by the usual gleam of innocent interest, a gleam that had already begun to strike Brochvael's famished stomach as both absurd and annoying.

"You mustn't tell me your Gaer secrets, Brochvael ab Iddawc! For us worshippers of the Three-in-One, the keeping of secrets — how one and two, you know, can make three — is part of religion. It's the same with the religion of Mithras, as your nephew Rhun knows. Sunday is *his* great day of course as well as ours, and if *you* are interested to see what Myrddin Wyllt makes of our Feast, I shall be interested to see what Rhun ap Gwrnach, priest of Mithras, makes of his cousin's marriage."

This final hint that the man was aware of what Brochvael himself had only vaguely and obscurely divined and had indeed shrunk from facing, namely, that his girl's betrothal to Porius wasn't as wholehearted as he could have wished, was the greatest shock he had yet received in this weird encounter under y Bychan's Mound.

"Angels and devils!" he groaned in his heart, "the fellow can read our thoughts!"

But immediately afterwards there rose up in him a fierce defiant wave of the old Brythonic pride, the pride of the race that had brought its bronze swords from Crete and Argos and the vales of Ida and the coasts of Ilium.

"Tricks to catch eels," he thought, "this conjuring with thoughts! Tricks to win at *mercatio* as the sorcerers of Sicily teach! So this is all the Aunties' grand Derwydd can do, read a person's thoughts, like a Gwyddyl-Ffichti witch-wife!"

He was all alert now. The wine fumes were gone. His drowsiness was gone. And the thought came to him: "If he can read my thoughts to my hurt, why not *make* him read them to my gain?"

He sat up on his heap of rags, hugging his leather-bound shins, while his Etrurian mantle hung down on each side of him, trailing loose upon the smoke-darkened floor. The oil wick that had been lighted by the tall chess player, now that it was half-consumed, was burning quite brightly, throwing into relief not only the Derwydd's unnaturally bald head but something of the figure that supported this head. But even now with his own head clearer and the light more diffused, he found it hard to concentrate his attention upon any isolated details about him.

Between the smoky roof and the fire-blackened floor the Derwydd's head with its mildly ecstatic wonder seemed to hover in a void. The man's body seemed to inhale and exhale all its material surroundings. It actually seemed to lessen and increase in a vaporous fluctuation, devoid of bone and muscle as if it were made of grey smoke. His attire must have assisted in producing this effect, for as far as Brochvael could see it consisted in nothing but a long grey garment with loose sleeves.

Searching in his new clearness of mind for definite details, Brochvael asked himself whether the patches of colour at the man's waist which seemed to shift as he moved were just an ordinary faded belt made of the hide of an ox, and whether the hairy fringe round the neck of his garment was really the wolfskin it seemed to be.

Brochvael remembered that he'd had in his time the same difficulty in noting exactly what the monks from the Egyptian desert wore when he encountered them in Alexandria. They too, like this person, had such strikingly expressive faces that they became bodiless heads moving about those crowded streets.

In this case the whole smoky pungent-smelling room served as a vaporous body to clothe this connoisseur of gigantomachian catastrophes. Livelier and livelier did the yellow flame lit by the chess player flap and sway in its earthen saucer; and since the log fire was redder now, and the smoke clouds had gone, it even began throwing a faint simulacrum of the man's shadow upon the *clawr-yr-wyddb-wyll,* or "board of black-and-white squares," that Morgant had balanced above the Derwydd's head.

Brochvael had so often seen the throwing of dice on a board like this that he found the sight of it curiously restorative to his spirits. Chess might be a game that lent itself to superior cleverness, but there were no chessmen in sight, and those black-and-white squares suggested that even here, under the very shadow of this thought reader, the great impersonal goddess of pure chance still exercised her impious and unpredictable sway.

Behind the suspended blanket the sounds of amorous endearment had begun to grow more ardent; and the now alert visitor could clearly catch the pleading tones of the man and the protesting cries of the woman.

"Give me something to eat," he repeated over and over in his mind, putting all the mental force he could summon up into the words, "give me something to eat, you bald fly upon the wheel of fate!"

He felt a real thrill of triumph when he saw the man stir, rise, take a few steps towards the darkest corner of the chamber, fumble in the obscurity for a space, and finally return with a hunk of cheese and a bowl of goat's milk.

"Your pardon, my Lord Brochvael," the Derwydd said casually, "I'd forgot you came without your supper."

He reseated himself by his guest's side, and handing him the bowl proceeded to break the cheese into two halves.

"Eat, son of Iddawc! Eat the food of Gogfran ap Greidawl, and may your child be happier than you; and your children's children happier than your children!”

Brochvael was too hungry to treat these words with much attention. He had lived too long with Gwrgi ap Cyngar and had seen too much of the formal pieties of Greece and Italy not to take such things with a pinch of salt. But when he had finished his portion of the cheese and drained, after the other had tasted it, his bowl of goat’s milk, he felt so invigorated that he actually decided to ask his host a question that probably had never been asked of any druid in Britain for a hundred years.

It took him a minute or two — for even in this queer hiding place under the Mound of y Bychan he couldn’t forget that he was a disciple of Sidonius — to determine the best words to use in putting his question; and as he pondered he was so struck by the exultant intensity of his companion’s stare, that like the flight of an owl through the twilight across a confused conclave of rooks the thought struck him that the Derwydd fancied he’d won some occult advantage over him by this sharing of the milk and cheese.

“Not by eating your food, my friend,” he said to himself, “nor by warming myself at your fire, nor by tossing my thoughts into your lap will I fall into your power. That will only happen when I worship your god and chant your *Tris-Hagios*. Meanwhile, Master Fly-on-the-Wheel, I will ask you something.”

He sat up straight on his pile of rags and looked the man in the face. “What,” he asked him, “is your ultimate purpose, Gogfran ap Greidawl, in all this plotting and conspiring? Put aside the matter of the Arthurian mission, and let us suppose these horsemen *are* back safe in the south again, what do you want the forest people of Ynys Prydein to do? Throw off us Brythons and rule this land themselves? Is *that* why you are plotting with Colgrim and sending him our secrets? We Brythons are a small minority of the people of Britain. If *you* can stir up the forest people in Edeyrnion, Gogfran Derwydd, *somebody else* could stir them up all over Britain! And what if this new stirrer-up turned out to be the emperor's nephew, Medrawd ap Llew, in league with the Saeson to dethrone the emperor? You and yours would get short shrift, Gogfran Derwydd, from Medrawd ap Llew!"

Brochvael put his bowl on the floor and scrambled hastily to his feet. He hadn't the remotest idea why he had suddenly blurted out the name of the emperor's nephew. He knew no more than the rest of Edeyrnion about Medrawd. *What* had put it into his head to think of him as such an appalling traitor? He'd heard the usual rumours about the man's infatuation with the empress Gwenhwyvar; and one of the Modrybedd had told him that Medrawd, on the paternal side, had the blood of the forest people. But so had they all; and yet every Brython instinctively put faithfulness to their own proud race, to the race that brought to Britain the Homeric "pitiless bronze," before everything else.

He had taken for granted that where there was a Brython, *there* was loyalty to the emperor! Why then, in the names of all the separate devils of hell, had he said what he had said? This excitable pet insect of fate must have *thought it for him.* And now as the great wheel hummed and the whirling hub became invisible from its speed, the creature was clearly congratulating itself, with as much satisfaction as a purring cat, over what it had stirred up in its bewildered onlooker.

As Brochvael watched those eager eyebrows twitching and quivering, rising and falling, in the light of the yellow flame, he felt as if the Derwydd's fluttering thoughts were hardly able to await the airy wings that would turn them into words. The little bald man seemed eager to ask Destiny, Fate, Providence, Necessity, everything but the kind and wayward goddess who really decided how this mad chaos heaved and sank, for the clue as to what would happen next.

“Do you know, Brochvael ab Iddawc, I really do believe, whether you can or cannot succeed in persuading yourself to bring that ill-advised priest to see me tomorrow — and if you cannot I shall fully understand it — that the question you have raised as to whether the Trinity will inspire me to cajole the warlike Brython, outwit the savage Saeson, beguile the ferocious Gwyddyl-Ffichti, and even arouse our own peaceful natives, will be mysteriously answered at the Feast of the Sowing on the day after tomorrow. As you know, I was not responsible for your son’s death.

“If he had come to me, and he was given a chance to do so, I could have saved him. And now if you want your daughter to have a happy life, I implore you to see that all these people including Myrddin Wyllt and his women are over the border by sunset on Sunday. It’ll be your daughter who will pay the price, you know. It’s a night’s ride from here but they must be beyond the meeting of the waters where Sarn Elen turns west by time of sunset.”

“There is only one thing more then,” said Brochvael resolutely while his fingers hurriedly searched in the hidden wallet under his belt where he carried his treasures, for unlike Einion he never hung anything round his neck, “and that is—”

But he was interrupted by a ghastly howl of pain and panic from within the alcove. The blanket was torn aside; and the figure of the Derwydd’s brother, his face distorted with terror, his clothes half-off, his nakedness grossly and shamelessly exposed, stumbled, staggered, and finally collapsed at their feet, while close at his heels, repeating her stabs at his shrinking shoulders came Sibylla, the dagger clutched tight in her right hand, while with her left she struggled to conceal beneath her dishevelled tunic her bare breasts, which even at that crucial moment struck Brochvael as pathetically small and childish.

But he was quick enough to get between the girl and her victim; and after a few seconds of uneven struggle, in the course of which he was compelled to cry sharply: *"Now stop that, Sibylla!"* he succeeded in taking the dagger away from her and returning it to his own belt.

All this would have been easier for him if during their struggle the Derwydd's brother, who was still twisting and writhing on the ground from the smarting stabs which the dagger's point had inflicted, hadn't seized one of his ankles with the desperate clutch of a dying man.

"She's murdered me, brother! She's finished me! I'm done for! Llew's for the rats and crows! The pains of death have got hold of me! I am falling into black night. Give me a minute, dear God! in your mercy give me one minute, two minutes, three! — three sweet little heavenly, precious, eternal, everlasting minutes, in which to tell you how much I love you!

"Oh, I can love you *here,* dear God! I can love you *best* here! I don't have to see you to love you! I'll love you more — I swear I will! — if I don't have to go to you! I don't want to go to you yet, dear God! I'm not quite ready. But I'm ready to love you, more than anyone's ever loved you, if you'll let me do it down here."

Meanwhile the Derwydd was giving advice to Brochvael with the utmost calmness. Indeed so quietly was he speaking that his voice hardly rose above a whisper. Between his words, for he was now on his knees by his brother's side, there were spaces of silence, and Brochvael, whose panting as he held Sibylla made a sort of accompaniment to the girl's angry sobbing, felt an uncomfortable inclination to laugh. These dead silences in the midst of a scene that might have been tragic and which certainly was painful, struck his mind as comic. But the Derwydd seemed to have nerves of iron in the presence of all such occurrences.

“I suppose,” thought Brochvael, “that confounded wheel of his has to cross great gulfs of aboriginal chaos before its ‘immortal fly’ wakes up! Meanwhile how it hums and drums!”

“Don’t let her go till I’ve found if he’s seriously hurt. I don’t think he is. Don’t tread on his hands! He seems to take you for God by the way he clings to your foot. Wait, my Lord! There! You’re free now! Let the girl lie down over here” — and the Derwydd nodded his head to the rugs where his visitor had just put down his bowl of milk— “and you might bring the light, my Lord, and hold it for me while I look at his hurts.”

Carrying her to the place he had quitted, for Sibylla’s hysteria was apparently transforming itself into a tender quiescence, Brochvael was relieved to discover when he returned to the prostrate man that the Derwydd was correct in his surmise. Llew’s hurts were clearly, as his brother wiped the blood away, not of a nature calculated to convey him, at least at this time, into the presence he dreaded. Holding the earthen saucer with its flickering flame as low as he could, Brochvael was now struck by the fact that the Derwydd was extremely short-sighted.

This discovery, in some odd way, he found disarming, and he almost determined, as he helped him to make the writhing and whimpering man comfortable, to omit the little ceremony of polite retort upon which he had resolved. He had, however, only to recall the particular look of intense and almost gloating delight with which the bald man had spoken of that sharing of the milk and cheese to withdraw this weak concession.

“I must keep my head,” he said to himself. “It wouldn’t do for a house sparrow like me to halve a feast with the father of all carrion crows without paying my share!”

With these thoughts racing through his mind, as he held the light while Llew’s wounds were examined, he once more fumbled in his wallet.

Yes! There it was! He could feel the deeply cut impression with his fingers. There it was — the head of his favourite emperor, Hadrian!

More than any other recent figure within these confused and chaotic modern times, this great ruler had always possessed a peculiar attraction for him. And now in this murky and mystical hiding place, now in this citadel of all he most instinctively detested, of all that was occult, obscure, and treacherous, of all that was obscene, unclean, and barbarous, his mind turned to this sceptical and civilized ruler of the world with incredible relief and comfort. Here was an emperor who took religion and piety and patriotism and morals *as they* ought to *be taken,* with indulgent and humorous common sense. Here was an emperor prepared to number Jesus among the gods and yet prepared to build a temple to Venus on Mount Calvary!

Sceptical and tolerant, believing in nothing, yet believing in everything, the elegiac celebrant of his own pale and bewildered soul, the mere idea of Hadrian always gave Brochvael a reassuring sense of the triumph of good over evil and of tolerance over intolerance.

Holding the flickering flame so that the wounds inflicted by Sibylla — and he could see they were not very serious — could be wiped clear, both of blood and of bits of woollen fluff, he now decided, insult or no insult, that nothing should stop him from paying for this man’s equivocal hospitality with the head of the great imperial virtuoso, the symbol of a civilized life as against all these murky barbarisms!

This decision was not obliterated by the polite and easy tone with which the Derwydd — his perspiring face, as it was lifted up to the light, shining like that of a benevolent merman ministering to a wounded dogfish — enquired whether he would mind carrying the lamp into their sleeping quarters, opening a chest there, and bringing him a green phial of mandragora which that repository contained.

Brochvael lifted the lamp above his head and raised one knee from the floor. The removal of the light plunged both the brothers into profound shadow.

"Is it the only phial in the chest?" he asked.

"Certainly, my Lord, the only one there. It's made from a white bog moss that my mother used call *migwyn.* The moss grows on the stone Tyriawg, near Melenryd, where Pryderi the son of Pwyll lies buried."

Brochvael raised his other knee from the floor, not without difficulty, for his muscles had been exhausted by his run that evening, and as he struggled to his feet his joints perceptibly creaked.

"Pardon me!" cried the Derwydd eagerly, giving his groaning relative a soothing pat on the rump. "Did you hear that, brother? The bones of his body cried 'Hagios' three times! That's a sign of prophetic importance.

"Human bones have spoken in you, Lord Brochvael. They have uttered the number three, the sign of the All-Holy. Do you know what that means? It means that Minnawc Gorsant is coming to me of his own accord tomorrow so that he and I can invoke the Holy Trinity together, and join our forces in the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, against this heathen magician Myrddin Wyllt!"

Brochvael's anger at these words required more than his usual self-control. With a special and peculiar mental effort, an effort he had acquired during his imprisonment by the Ostrogoths, he reduced to invisibility the bald head and lively eyebrows of the Derwydd and concentrated his attention on a shadowy spot beneath them, where neither the wavering firelight nor the flickering lamp could display more than the bare back of

Sibylla's groaning victim and what might have been either a trickle of blood or a torn shred from a woollen vest.

Upon this blurred space he stared in silence, quite aware of the fact that what had roused this rush of anger was not so much reference to his son's murderer as what, in his Brythonic fastidiousness, seemed a shameless and almost indecent allusion to so intimate a thing as the creaking of a person's joints.

Then he began to speak, lifting the lamp so high as to cause the bald head beneath him to merge in the same shadow as the wounded back, and pinching the coin in his wallet as violently as if it had been the skull of Minnawc Gorsant himself.

"I think your brother could stand up now if he wanted to, but I'll get that drug. And I'll give the prince a full account of this interview. The day after tomorrow, Sunday the twenty-first, is the day of the Sowing; and at sunset on that day your ultimatum to the emperor's mission expires."

All this Brochvael uttered hurriedly and mechanically, as if before taking a dangerous plunge he were making sure of certain practical details. But his tone changed now and became the tone of a man whose words at any syllable might be cut short by violence.

Having been brought up by the Modrybedd, Brochvael knew very well that among the forest people the old non-classical, non-Celtic Berber tradition still continued, whereby the mother is the centre of the family and from the king's sister springs his heir, and that his aunts rather than his uncles are those who in his illness rule the tribe in his stead.

He knew that even to ask a question about the mother of a forest chieftain, still more about the mother of a Derwydd, was treading on dangerous ground. But for all that — so angry had he grown with these two men — he drove forward, still staring at that compound living shadow beneath him, still pinching the image of Hadrian against his ribs.

“One thing more, Gogfran Derwydd. With regard to this phial of mandragora made from the moss that grows on the stone Tyriawg, you did me the honour to speak of your revered mother. Will you do me the further honour before we separate now, very likely for the last time, of informing me of the name of this honourable lady and if you and your brother enjoy the great happiness of her being still alive?”

There was a tremendous silence in that underground chamber broken only by the dripping of water and the whimpering of the man on the floor.

“Alive or dead,” thought Brochvael, “I warrant the woman loved this absurd fool on the floor more than his elder brother!”

Then the Derwydd spoke, and spoke without the faintest flicker of a change in his eager, artless, buoyant, astonished, vividly pitched voice.

“What a curious stuff blood is, isn’t it, Brochvael ab Iddawc? And, do you know, the blood of our family has a taste all of its own? It’s neither salt nor sweet. You might even call it *fragrant*! It has a taste, yes, and a smell too! just like *rhedyn-un-goes,* or ‘bracken!’”

He put his finger against one of the hurts in the prostrate man’s back and put it into his mouth. “Yes, it’s strong tonight! You try it, my Lord Brochvael. I want you to try it so you can tell *your* brother you’ve tasted our blood! Or are you afraid it’ll poison you? Fear is a curious thing too when you come to think of it! Blood and fear — they are like incestuous brothers and sisters.”

The man was licking his lips now, gently and meditatively licking them, with the tip of his tongue, just as if his visitor’s cowardice were a delicious bowl of cream over which he was purring.

Brochvael couldn’t endure it. He felt absolutely reckless. “Sibylla,” he thought, “loves Einion. Einion’s son is to have Morfydd. It doesn’t matter what I do, or where I go, or whether I live or die.” He desperately fought down a rising of his gorge in a spasm of sickening nausea. He didn’t even bother to kneel again. Bending forward and holding the lamp as carefully as he could so that the oil shouldn’t be spilled on the man’s back, he wetted his fingers in Llew’s blood and licked them clean. Yes! The fellow hadn’t lied. The blood of Llew *did* taste like bracken!

But he refused to witness the triumph of the Derwydd. Swallowing little gulps of his own uncontaminated saliva to get the taste of Llew’s blood out of his mouth, he pushed aside what was left of what Sibylla had called “the dirty blanket” and entered a scene of so much litter and such curiously smelling confusion that it was as if the yellow flame he carried, so wildly did it wave and flap, was itself possessed by a panic-stricken spirit that kept imploring him to draw back!

But as he advanced, stumbling and groping, he soon caught sight of the object of which the Derwydd had spoken, a large black chest in the shape of a coffin, studded with huge bosses of discoloured bronze and by a silver handle.

Forcing the reluctant lamp to throw its yellow rays upon this sinister receptacle, he quickly pushed open the thing’s lid; and there, amid a miscellaneous collection of arrowheads and metal cups and knife-handled crystal goblets and birds’ feathers and the furry tails of squirrels and the slippery skins of snakes, was a large enamelled phial stopped with a golden stopper and carrying an unmistakable “M” in silver lettering upon its purplish belly, while from its whole appearance emanated an aura of occult alchemy.

With this in his hand and feeling so impatient to end this night's business that he didn't even pause to close the chest's lid, he was on the point of leaving this inmost lair of the sons of Greidawl when the oil-flame he carried fell upon four human legs apparently descending from the ceiling on the left side of the chamber he was re-entering.

Two were covered with twisted rags; two were not only bare but were scratched and bleeding. His first impression was that the Mound of y Bychan itself, wounded in its half-animate feelings by the outrages, physical and psychic, that had been offered to its subhuman soul tonight, *had fallen in,* and in its collapse had brought down with it all who had been caught standing erect upon its baleful eminence.

But the truth followed hard upon this self-imposed fantasy and resolved itself into the personalities of Morgant and Drom submitting themselves, the very second their feet touched the ground, to fresh and totally unexpected instructions from their master. And of what these instructions consisted soon became clear.

For brief as his absence had been, he found on his return that it was the wounded man who was now ensconced in the place recently occupied by himself, while Sibylla, "clothed," so to say, "and in her right mind"; in other words, with her outer tunic tucked into her belt and his own spear — where had *that* been all this while? — clutched against her eager body.

The Derwydd was on his feet too, explaining to the pair of chess players in rapid undertones the nature of their new task. It was now Brochvael's destiny, as he stood contemplating this scene and holding the mandragora in one hand and the lamp in the other, to be, as Homer would say, "divided in his mind," in a manner that troubled his soul to its very depths.

He had eaten of the Derwydd's food. He had tasted the blood of the Derwydd's brother. According to every latent superstition inherited from his mother he had now incurred what the Princess Indeg had taught him to call a *tynged,* that is to say, a fatal compulsion laid on him, not to offend the feelings of the Derwydd, not to defy the Derwydd, not to break loose from the Derwydd.

Within his body was the food, within his veins the blood of this mystic family, and yet from something also within him, something beyond and outside his physical body, there arose, powerful and strong, free of all such compulsions, the inalienable independence of his own personal spirit. To assert this independence seemed to him then the one essential thing, an urge that overpowered his natural politeness and swept away his natural consideration for another's feelings.

Resolutely he placed the mandragora in his host's hands, put down the lamp beside the chessboard, and clutched the coin in his fingers.

But the Derwydd was prepared for him. "You asked me my mother's name, Lord Brochvael. Her name — she has been dead many years — was Rhelemon; but our people were not content to know her by that name alone."

Brochvael bowed, bending his head a little to the left, as he had seen the silentiaries do in Constantinople. "We leave you now, Gogfran Derwydd," he said, "and I have only one last thing to do before we go. We may, or we may not, meet on the day of the Feast of the Sowing. We may, or we may not, see your triumph over Myrddin Wyllt. But now I have to pay you for your food and for your drink; now I have to pay you for my taste of your brother's blood. Here is a *denarius* with the head of Hadrian. Put *this* along with the rest in that chest of yours. I believe I forgot to close its lid."

Well! He had done it! He had outraged the most solemn tradition, the deepest mystical piety, of the oldest race in the land. To eat of these men's bread, to drink of their blood — and what had they done to him and his

House? His brother was still Prince of Edeyrnion. Sibylla was still unraped. No one had been even threatened but these intruders from Caergwynt and Caerleon. As for the blood spilt between them, it had all belonged to this ridiculous Llew!

It was the emperor's business, not theirs, to clear the land of Colgrim and Baldulf and these Saeson pirates. The emperor's business? No! No! That was going too far! Had the House of Cunedda, that at the bidding of Rome had cleared all Edeyrnion of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, descended as low as that?

He remembered the rush of indignation with which he'd caught the name Colgrim in the corridor of the Modrybedd. No! No! His weakness and confusion was carrying him too far. Even though that hurricane of daring thought that had swept through him from some large and remote horizon had dispersed now that the thing was done, at least it *was* done. His Cunedda blood had risen in its pride and challenged the ultimate piety of his mother's people. He had made his choice just as Morfydd had made hers. As a Brython he had lived; and as a Brython he had paid this enemy of the Emperor Arthur with Hadrian's *denarius!*

Well! He must get out of this place now and away back to the Gaer, and tomorrow he must take Morfydd home. He would at least have her to himself for the next twenty-four hours.

All these thoughts — each with its own comet's tail of agitating emotions — had barely rushed through his mind when he became aware of the unruffled equanimity with which the Derwydd had taken this final calculated affront.

The man's countenance was so adapted by Nature to express lively and fascinated wonder that Brochvael found it totally impossible to say whether the absorbed interest with which he accepted the coin and took it at once to the light to examine it, and finally, summoning both Morgant and Drom, explained to them what it was, was assumed or not. Hardly assumed at any rate could be the tone he was now using about the Great Wall built by this emperor, and about the forced labour that had constructed it, and how an ancestor of the Bychan of this very Mound had successfully flouted it by living with a band of Gwyddyl-Ffichti for months in a wattled hut, daubed with clay like a martin's nest, beneath its very ramparts!

"But this is indeed a treasure you have given me, Brochvael ab Iddawc," pronounced the Derwydd quietly. "I thank you for it, my Lord. It shall be a covenant between us. And if our memorable Feast on Sunday result, as you predict, in my destruction by Arthur's counsellor, I shall certainly see that it comes again into your hands. And now farewell, my Lord.

"My servants will guide you and will guide this lady whither you wish to go — you, I take it, to the Gaer and she to her home. You need not and *you* need not" — here he looked significantly at Sibylla— "have any anxiety about my brother. *This,"* and he pointed to the place where he had deposited the phial of mandragora, "cured the hurt he got yesterday and it will cure the hurt he got tonight. What a Ffichtiaid woman could not do is not destined to be done by a Gwyddyles. I might add that when you two together" — and as he said this, still standing close under the light beside the chess board, it seemed to the persons he was addressing that it was no mere trick of the yellow flame that one of his raised eyebrows hesitated to follow its fellow in their accustomed upward tilt— "that when you two together cross the threshold of Ty Cerrig it will be wise to remember that it was not from *our* people that my mother, Rhelemon, received the name of yr Ellylles, the 'she-devil!'"

Having spoken this final word — a word that came nearer to a personal threat than any he had yet uttered — the Derwydd turned to Morgant and Drom. "You men are responsible for these people tonight, wherever they wish to go! Do you understand, Morgant ap Cynfelyn? Do you understand, Drom ap Dinsol? You're not to leave them till they're safe where they wish to be!"

Having uttered these words he proceeded to behave as if all four of them were already out of sight. He began, in fact, a singular and not very appealing ritual on behalf of his injured brother; and since Sibylla was talking earnestly to Morgant about the various forest paths and about where it would be best for their ways to divide, Brochvael, still feeling uncomfortable and ashamed, watched his movements with sombre curiosity.

The first thing the Derwydd did was to wash out with meticulous care the bowl from which Brochvael had been drinking. This he did at a stone trough by the side of the steps they had first descended. Into this trough, dripping and oozing from a slippery wall of green moss, ran a steady trickle of iron-dark water, water which later drained itself away through a leak in the trough and vanished down a hole in the floor.

When the bowl was clean he filled the bottom of it from the phial of mandragora and diluted this with an equal portion of water. Then as Brochvael watched him with growing interest he was amazed to see him gravely and deliberately spit into the bowl three times.

"The Trinity again!" thought the traveller. "What triads there'll be when the priest and this fellow do get together!"

But further observation of the Derwydd's curative alchemy was now cut short. "Shall we be going, *Arglwydd* Brochvael?" Sibylla's voice was calm and her tunic was neatly girded up for the forest paths.

Brochvael instinctively made sure that the borrowed dagger used so recently to such potent effect was safe in his own belt. "Lead on then!" he responded; and with the dimunitive son of Dinsol bringing up the rear they ascended the steps.

Brochvael had not observed on their former acquaintance with this entrance how tightly in the course of years the roots of the huge pine tree had twisted themselves about these mossy steps. He couldn't resist pausing for a second to note the queer effect of these vast roots as the moonlight threw them into black relief between his face and the ankles of the girl above him, making him think of the arms of Briareus, the Titan.

"Would I have belonged," he thought, "to the earth-born rebels in that old struggle, or to the crafty rulers of the upper air?" But he had plenty of time to ponder on other matters than the war between Olympus and Othrys before they reached the dividing of their ways, for their guides gave them no opportunity till they arrived at this point to exchange a single private word together.

Nor were they alone then. Morgant, with whom the girl had been conversing as they went, now declared his intention of accompanying her to the *Gwern,* or "Alder Swamp" of the Gwyddylaid. "Move away for a moment then, both of you," he commanded, "while I bid the lady farewell. You needn't look so distressed. Just out of hearing is all I ask — no further than that tree; and then we'll separate, and you'll have obeyed your master to the letter."

With evident suspicion and extreme reluctance the men withdrew to the spot indicated; and once there they remained intensely alert, their dark figures in the moonlight resembling images of runners on tiptoe for a race.

The girl gazed up at him in silence, her face a pallid blur, inscrutably passive, waiting for him to speak.

"Whether we meet at the Feast on Sunday," he murmured, taking her hand and raising it to his lips, "is in the lap of the gods. But we've just had the Derwydd's own word that we're to meet at the Stone House on Monday, so I shall expect you, Sibylla."

“I will come, *Arglwydd* Brochvael.”

“If we’re alive.”

“If we’re alive, my Lord.”

CHAPTER XV. Myrddin Wyllt

SATURDAY, SATURN'S DAY, or the Day of Cronos, fell, that eventful week in Edeyrnion, on the twentieth of October and was ushered in at Saint Julian's Fount, where the tents and pavilions of the Arthurian mission still remained intact, by one of those light variable mists that are more characteristic of that part of the country than the thicker overshadowings.

This morning's mist had nothing about it, for instance, of that faint stubble-field tinge that had so arrested the attention of the younger Porius all the evening of Thursday. Nor did it in any way resemble the thick white fog that sometimes covered that valley as if by a death sheet.

In the case of this latter phenomenon any visitor who left the banks of the Divine River and climbed even a short way up the slope of the mountain would soon find himself clear altogether of the fog, which presently he would see below him like an undulating ocean of snow-white clouds rising in curving billows up the sides of the bigger hills, while the tops of the lesser hills and even the tops of trees would emerge from it as from a flood that was overspreading the whole land.

From the more transparent mist, however, that dominated this particular dawn no hill climber would be able to escape. And yet neither the higher mountains nor the far-off curves of the river were concealed by it. But it completely altered their appearance. It turned them into a background for a different type of human drama. It gave them an enchantment they lacked in the clearer air. It made the mountains less substantial and the river more diaphanous.

A traveller saw them emphatically enough, but he saw them through a re-creative medium, as at a different hour or on a different day he might see them through sunlight, or through moonlight, or even, under special conditions, through driving rain.

But if it were possible to see the far reaches of the Divine River transformed by this sort of transparent mist, just as you could see these same serpentine curves and the hills above them transformed by moonlight or by sunlight, it must be allowed that there was one form of the mystery of light in that district, and indeed throughout all Britain, that had the power of drawing attention to itself independently of anything beside itself or beyond itself.

I refer to the uniquely cold, uniquely sad, uniquely portentous light of early dawn. We cry glibly, “How the sun shines through the mist!” or “How the moon shines through the mist!” but the first light of dawn and the greyness of the mist it reveals strike us as independent phenomena simultaneously generated.

By imperceptible degrees the first infinitely faint change in the warm dark bosom of the night reaches us like the tolling of a bell under water and with a tragic greyness, far more deathlike than anything to be found in the comfortable embrace and kindly oblivion of darkness; and there comes into existence, thrusting itself between the familiar alternation of night and day, a death-cold, corpselike, alien entity newly arrived upon earth from heaven knows where.

And from the first moment we are conscious of the dawn we are conscious of it as a thing in itself, as personal as sunlight and moonlight, but in a curious way less natural than these two. There is indeed nothing on earth more supernatural than the first light of dawn. The life juices, the life sap in all living things, sink low with the approach of this stranger from beyond the border. This is the hour for which the dying wait so long, and at the coming of which the watchers by the bed shiver and stare at one another.

Thus while in relation to sunlight and moonlight the particular mist to which reference has been made, this most transparent of all our island mists, whose dedicated home is in Edeyrnion, appears as a magical transformer of rocks and streams and hillsides, in relation to the first greyness of the dawn it shows itself — if a traveller marks it at all — as a minor element in the background of an elemental tragedy. It is the supernatural fatality of this early light of the dawn that in itself, in the cold absoluteness of its stark acceptance of death, begins, fulfils, and ends this primeval tragedy.

With the first ray of the rising sun, or rather with the first streaks of yellow or crimson in the eastern horizon, this tragic elemental mystery play is over. These golden and rosy streaks are the warm lamps of the chattering exit when the diurnal theatre is left in its darkness. Forgotten by sun and moon, excluded from the huge heart of the all-obliterating night, the weird protagonist of that brief prehistoric drama has vanished.

But always when the appointed hours have rolled round and the day’s exhaustions and the night’s restorations are over, the tragic stranger reappears, his appearance preceded and followed by the kind of supernatural chill that needs something as stark as itself in the soul of the spectator who can welcome it without quailing.

If it had been possible for the ancestors of the forest people, in the days when Mynydd-y-Gaer was ruled by Rhitta the Giant, to explain to some merchant from Crete or Egypt how the sun and the moon were made, he would almost certainly have implied that this spectral light of dawn, with its phantom sense of drowned populations rising and falling on the grey waves of oceanic floods, was already in existence on the coasts of chaos long ere either sunlight or moonlight appeared; and it may well be that those of the human race who can watch with equanimity this death-cold stranger have something in them of the endurance of those primeval souls.

On this particular day of Saturn the grey light of which I speak appeared at all parts of that little portion of the earth's surface simultaneously. A moment or two ago everywhere in forest and swamp the velvet weight of the all-enfolding night had been pressing evenly upon grass and trees and bushes and moss and mud and reedy pools. Whereas now, all over that region, there suddenly appeared, as if born of the body of night herself, and in places where no eye could see any difference between east or west, that extraordinary ash grey effluence, which, while it is the precursor of the richest reassurance of all life, remains in itself by the power of some prehistoric mystery the saddest thing upon earth.

If there were differences at Saint Julian's Fount between the dawn's relation to particular rocks and stones and trees and even to particular movements of the mist, it would almost seem as though such differences could only be detected by certain wild animals or by a few peculiar human beings whose disposition resembled that of wild animals; but the chances are that these human creatures would be no better capable of expressing what they divined than the animals they resembled.

Did it strike any such creatures when the day of Saturn chanced to fall on the twentieth of October in the year four hundred and ninety-nine that this early dawn and this early mist were two living entities that strove together, and, independently of all the rocks and ridges and all the precipices and level pastures, found their variable victory or defeat according to the waxing and waning of their own inherent powers? What was the cause, for instance, that a fainter ripple of ash grey light appeared on one side of Saint Julian's Fountain than on the other, or that a more protracted lifting of the pressure of darkness took place on the summit of y Bychan's Mound than in the open space round Gwendydd's pavilion?

One of the creatures of earth in that region who might have been able to answer such questions concerning the retardings and accelerations of that ash grey dawn was Myrddin Wyllt.

As he lay on his back in the inner chamber of Gwendydd's pavilion he could see only a very narrow space of the forest outside through a square hole in the sailcloth of the tent. But through this square hole across which the upward-tapering twigs of the extreme end of an ash-tree bough were visible against the sky, Myrddin Wyllt was as competent as any wolf, or fox, or hare, or badger, or squirrel to estimate the precise significance of the infinitesimally faint changes in the air and in the sky round and about those ash-tree twigs that indicated the approach of the death-cold visitation whose presence, ever since human beings first observed it, must have evoked a sadness at once tender and absolute.

In a mood of complete relaxation and ineffable peace did the emperor's counsellor contemplate this square in the canvas of his tent, letting the phantom waters of the world flow past him, carrying the dead, carrying the living, carrying the unborn.

At last there came a faint twitter from some small bird, then after a few minutes another twitter, a little louder; and then, with its harshest cry — but compared with the pervasive deathly grey light that familiar harsh note sounded homely and reassuring — a crow flapped past the opening. Then there followed in succession, first a hound's troubled baying, then a horse's anxious whinny, and at last, careless and confident and full of a reckless defiance of death by life, the friendly crowing of a cock. But there was something else now that disturbed the abandoned passivity in which the counsellor lay. This was the breathing of a human creature at his bed's head.

“Is that you, Neb?” he whispered.

“Yes, great Master. There’s the sort of mist abroad today that never ends in rain. Have we got till noon as your Mightiness predicted?”

“Till noon, child. Just about five and a half hours. So we mustn’t linger over our refreshment too long. What have you brought?”

Both of them spoke in whispers that were lower than ordinary whispers. Both of them had an air of conspiracy and a tendency to glance apprehensively at the portion of the tent that separated them from the outer pavilion.

Raising himself on his pillows and casting a sidelong glance downwards to the left of his bed, Myrddin Wyllt was aware of what, in spite of the faint light, he quite correctly took for the upper portion of the boy’s face.

Neb’s eyes were indeed peering up at him over the rim of the Phoenician tray which the small creature had just carried in on his head and which he was now with some difficulty trying to balance upon the edge of the bed.

“Careful, little one! Let me help you!” And heaving himself up with as much discretion as he could, for at that particular moment to have sent that tray clattering to the floor might easily have produced the one result that was most of all dreaded by both of them, the counsellor, somewhat clumsily but not ineffectively, got the tray on the bed where it was under his control.

“Climb up at the foot, child,” he whispered, “and we’ll see what you’ve brought. But we mustn’t be long.”

Agile as a monkey, though the bed was as high as an altar and had been put together piece by piece, the son of Digon obeyed; and in less than a minute the enormous skull and broad low forehead and green-black eyes of the man at the head of the bed were confronted by the elflike features and impish gestures of the boy at the foot of the bed, both of them eating large slices of oatcake dipped in pots of honey and both of them drinking large gulps of yellow mead from deep earthenware goblets.

Not a whisper did either of them dare to utter with this distance between them, nor did they exchange more than a few significant signs while Neb assisted his awkward and unwieldy master to dress. So cautious were they both that it was only by a sign that the boy asked the man whether he intended to take his great herdsman's club with him, an object which was propped up at the bed's head; and only by a sign that the man signified his intention of taking no weapon of any kind.

It was just when they were ready to set forth that their inability to address each other above what was barely a whisper proved especially trying, because it then became necessary to decide two important strategic points: first, whether it was worth their while to arrange inside the bedclothes some sort of sham figure that to anyone peeping in would resemble a sleeping man; and second, how to get out of the place so as to leave it securely closed against all incomers before they themselves got back.

Both these sagacious moves presented insurmountable difficulties to the mind of the counsellor, but in the end, after several grotesque scenes of wordless gestures and desperate signs, they were both settled efficiently and expeditiously by the precocious Neb. Standing as closely against the ash tree as he could so that the outlines of his figure would blend in that grey light and phantom mist with the shape of its trunk, Myrddin Wyllt watched with wondering satisfaction his youthful worshipper worming himself out under the canvas of the tent and as soon as he was free replacing the peg he had removed and driving it back into the earth with all his puny strength.

Not till they were out of sight of the tent, however, did they exchange a word, and until that moment they made every use, in spite of the aid they got from the mist and the dim grey light, of all the trees and bushes they passed.

Once out of sight, however, and a subhuman exultation seemed to seize them both. The counsellor took Neb between his great hands and repeatedly flung him into the air and caught him as he came down; while Neb kept climbing the trees like a squirrel and skipping from one to another till he would finally descend with the leap of a wild cat upon the shoulder of his companion.

"When will you call your animals, Master?" the small creature at length enquired, after jumping to the ground from the man's shoulder.

"But I want to tell you first where we're going."

"You needn't tell me, O great Master, for I know."

Myrddin Wyllt gazed with wonder into the prematurely old countenance of his extraordinary companion, rendered still more unchildlike by the grey light of dawn.

"How *can* you know, Neb ap Digon?"

"By listening to you talking to yourself."

"When do I talk to myself?"

"At night, O mighty one."

"And you are there listening?"

"I am there, great Master."

"Where *are* we going?"

"To the Cave of Mithras."

"What else do you know?"

"I know how you fool *her,* and to see *that* going on makes me worship you most of all."

"You hate her then?"

"I hate them all."

"All women, you mean?"

"Yes, Master. I like to see her think you're afraid of her. I like to see her throw these enchantments over you that you make her think you can't break. I like to see you lying for days without moving and she coming to stare at you and going away so content, and you pretending all the time, and enjoying it more than anything else."

"How do you know I enjoy it, child?"

"Because, when she can't hear you, you talk about it to yourself. Will you make your animals come *now,* great Master?"

"I can't, child. Nothing will make them come into sight with you so close. Besides, I want your help at the Ford and at the Cave; and you'd run away if they came."

"I'd freeze like a rabbit."

"No, you'd run like a hare."

"If I kept stiller than a rabbit, Master, if I kept as still as a leaf, would they come?"

"Not into sight. But they'd be quite near."

The counsellor and his attendant walked on in silence, but very soon Neb became aware of tramplings and snortings and neighings and gruntings and hissings and chatterings and flappings and breathings and squeakings and scamperings; and it was not concealed from the counsellor that Neb had begun to tremble violently, since with a childish impulse he couldn't restrain he had taken possession of two of his master's fingers.

At last the little creature could stand it no longer. "I can hear a bull bellowing," he whispered. "I don't want *him* to come any nearer."

"I can't send one away without sending them all away."

This produced a few minutes of hesitation, but a renewed bellowing from the very direction towards which they were walking broke the small creature’s final pride.

“Please send them all away, great Master.”

Myrddin Wyllt displayed no irritation, nor indeed was there any need for any, for in the easy mental instructions he proceeded to give his animals there was one they all understood, understood to the very tips of all their scales, feathers, paws, tails; namely, that they could come as near as they liked without uttering a sound or causing a sound, or giving the human creature by his side the faintest inkling of their presence.

And henceforth, save for the increasing noise of water over stones as they approached the Ford, and a faint intermittent stirring in the dead bracken and the taller grasses and the fallen leaves, from a direction whence such stirrings were rare in that part of the country, there was a wondrous silence between the sacred Fount and the Divine River.

The rare event just referred to was a perceptible rising of the wind that was, of all the eight winds of heaven, the most uncommon in Edeyrnion, namely, the southeast wind.

Not only was the southeast wind a rare visitant in that valley where the prevailing wind was southwest and its usual alternative northeast, but for any wind from any quarter to arise upon a dawn already dominated by mist was more than unusual, it was phenomenal; and Myrddin Wyllt, as he recognized its presence, welcomed it as a special sign from the elemental powers.

“Nobody has been here,” he said to himself when he and his companion reached the riverbank, “since Thursday night when I crossed with those young men.” He knew this from the position of the punting pole which he had observed Rhun balancing against a particular alder stump and between two little shoots that in spite of the season had young leaves growing on them.

He now took the pole out of the hands of his page and proceeded to use it himself, anxious to cross quickly, and also anxious to spare the small creature the shame of being unable to struggle with the current. But after they had mounted the steep bank on the further side and had drawn near the mouth of the Cave, he paused to give the son of Digon a task more adapted to his strength.

"Have you flint and steel, little one?" he enquired. "And something you can set light to, so as to make yourself a torch?"

A radiant smile lit up Neb's downcast face. Nodding expressively, his tiny hands went straight to some secret pocket beneath his fantastic Arthurian livery, out of which he produced every conceivable modern invention for reenacting the great Promethean defiance of the jealous ruler of gods and men.

Myrddin Wyllt surveyed him with approval. He himself was attired in the same rough sheepskin and rustic leggings as he had worn when he first encountered the young worshipper of Mithras and his kinsman-convert.

"You're not afraid to go into the Cave with me?"

"Not with you, great Master."

"Come on, then."

But the page pulled at the man's sleeve to arrest his full attention.

"What is it, child?"

"I always tell everybody that you're afraid of her. I told Prince Porius and Rhun ap Gwrnach."

The counsellor made a motion as if to tug at his great beard, but that characteristic adjunct was so securely tucked away that all he could reach to assist his thinking was a woolly and strong-smelling lining.

"Quite right," he responded gravely, "as long as you tell it mischievously and secretively and don't just babble it. But to one person you *may* babble it, and add all you like to invent of her power over me."

The wizened little face lifted up to confront those two great cavernous green-black eyes under the broad low forehead was alive with excitement.

"I can guess who!" he cried.

"Who then?"

"The Henog of Dyfed."

"By Hecate, you've said the word! How in the name of heaven did you arrive at *him?"*

Neb gave the only being he respected an impish wink.

"I know he's writing about you, mighty one, for the people of the future. I heard you say yourself that people two thousand years hence will read about you in what the Henog of Dyfed says. I know it was you because I didn't know what 'hence' meant and I know what everybody else's words mean."

"Do you know why I want the Henog of Dyfed to tell posterity that Myrddin Wyllt was helpless in the power of Nineue ferch Avallach?"

Neb gave his master another impish wink.

"You *do,* little one? Well, on my soul, I believe you do!"

"Because as long as the Three-in-One rule in heaven, cruelty and love and lies rule on earth."

The counsellor's green-black eyes seemed to sink inwards into his skull, and, as they sank, the bridge of the nose dividing them seemed to sink away also, so that as they increased in depth they not only increased in size but displayed a tendency to coalesce and become Cyclopean.

"Did you hear me say that?"

Again Neb nodded.

"Tell me, little one, what is it that makes you serve me as you do?"

Never had Neb's face looked so grave.

“Because you were God before the Three-in-One conquered heaven, and you made people happy before cruelty and love and lies ruled the earth.”

Myrddin Wyllt said not a word in response to this, but he offered two of his fingers for the small creature’s comfort and support, and hand in hand they entered the Cave.

Once inside and appealed to by his master for light, Neb ap Digon came more fully into his own than he had yet done in all his short life.

He lost all his fear at once. He dropped the fingers of his master; and so well did he manipulate his flint and steel that before long there were torches burning in their sconces in all parts of the Cave, and Rhun’s supply of oil had been discovered, and the wick replenished in the small votive lamp that hung before the image of the child Mithras wearing his Phrygian cap and the image of Cronos wound round about by his serpentine symbol of unending Time.

Having accomplished all this, his eyes gleaming in the torchlight and something approaching a flush in the pale cheeks, Neb now proceeded at a hint from his master to gather enough kindling and odds and ends of dry wood to make a comfortable fire within the Cave’s entrance, not far from the spot where a couple of days before the devoted white hound had crouched on guard, awaiting the sound of Rhun’s voice from the river below.

By the side of this fire, his head propped up on a heap of bracken and his face turned towards the Cave’s mouth, Myrddin Wyllt now laid himself down.

“Bring me that image, child, will you, of the old god with the serpent twined about him.”

Neb looked at him with consternation. “But, mighty one,” he protested, “that’s your own image, before the cruel ones made you what you are now.”

Myrddin Wyllt felt so confounded with astonishment that all he could do was to fumble desperately with his herdsman's garment till he really did succeed in getting hold of his great beard. He even managed to pluck it forth not only from beneath his outer garment but from beneath the woollen vest he wore next to his skin; nor was he content till it lay in full view upon his spacious chest, covering the sheepskin completely and descending below his belt.

With all his fingers at work toying with this mass of jet-black hair he felt better able to fix his green-black eyes upon the pinched countenance before him, the countenance of the only worshipper he had left upon earth after ten thousand years of the tyranny of the Olympian, and four hundred and ninety-nine years of the tyranny of the Three-in-One.

"Who was the god who long ago gave mankind and all the creatures of earth a Golden Age of Happiness?"

Neb held his peace, but he pointed significantly with the index finger of his right hand at the centre of the great beard before him.

"Who is the god who one day — perhaps ten thousand years from now — will again give mankind and all the creatures of earth a Golden Age of Happiness?"

Again Neb lifted his thin arm clothed in the grotesque imperial livery and pointed at the exposed beard before him.

"Whose tomb is it they made on the top of the highest peak of Eryri, the peak they call yr Wyddfa?"

"The tomb of Cronos."

"What do the Romans call Cronos?"

His ability to deal with this important point so enchanted the wizened infant that he made three skips from sheer joy, causing some stray wisps of half-burnt bracken stalks to grow red again and emit their fragrant smoke.

While his prostrate divinity coughed a little under this infliction, the son of Digon explained that in their pride and insolence the Romans had changed the name of the god of the Golden Age from Cronos to Saturn, but had been compelled by the *plebs,* or common people of every land, to hold at the end of every year a feast called the Saturnalia, when in anticipation — Neb used a cruder word — of the Golden Age to come, all masters became slaves and all slaves became masters.

Still coughing from the smoke raised by his worshipper's dance of joy, Myrddin Wyllt thought in his heart: "Why have I taken this child's understanding for granted ever since I gave him to Gwendydd to rear? Has he served me in all my incarnations? Has he hated some woman like Nineue in every life we have shared, since the beginning? *And who was he at the beginning?"* The prophet coughed, choked, spluttered, and sighed heavily.

"What a thing," he thought, "that even I, the son of earth and heaven, even I, the liberator of earth from heaven, should have no more idea what existence is, or what life is, or what death is, or what cosmos and chaos are, than this funny little creature who must have been my companion every two thousand years since the beginning, that is to say, if there ever *was* a beginning!" — and he thought of the twisted serpent with his tail in his mouth.

"Run now, will you, and get me that image of myself with the snake round me? Yes, little one, you know about as much as your old Saturn knows as to what life really is — whether it's the life of gods or men. You can leave Mithras where he is with his lamp burning. It's no good for us rebels not to respect one another. For all of us sons of earth, the enemy is the reigning despot of heaven, whether that despot is the Olympian, as he has been for the last ten thousand years, or this new Triad of Cruelty, Love, and Lies, who will rule for the next two thousand years. But get me that image of myself."

The moment Neb was gone Myrddin Wyllt uttered a long, low, faint whistle, a whistle inaudible to the retreating messenger, but a whistle that found its way through the air in smooth vibratory spirals out of the Cave's mouth.

It was answered at once. There was a quick movement among the grasses outside, followed by a quiver among the heaps of stray leaves that lay all about the entrance, and by an undulant rustle, like the motion of a mole under the earth, beneath the scattered wisps of half-burnt bracken that surrounded the prostrate man.

Finally, and long before Neb had returned, a small but unusually active slowworm slid across the prophet's arm and wound itself like a living bracelet about his wrist. Making sure that the creature was comfortable, satisfied, and secure, Myrddin Wyllt concealed his wrist in his enormous beard.

"*Angulo-meetis*," he murmured complacently, "crooked counselling Cronos still!"

On Neb's return with the image, he took it from the boy with his free hand and laid it on the ground by his side.

"Get me a couple of big stones."

With evident reluctance the small creature obeyed. It was clear that the destruction of an image, even though carried out by the original of that image, caused him some obscure distress of mind.

"Listen, child," said the prophet gently. "You know and I know, and it's the same whether we've had an hundred incarnations in the last ten thousand years or only one brief life, and it's the same whether we are worms or fishes or birds or animals or gods or men, that we are all the victims of pain and desire and hunger and madness and weariness and sickness and misery.

"And the worst of these things is the hatred and cruelty between the families and tribes and races and nations that dwell on the earth. Did the Olympian stop these cruelties with his thunder and his lightning? He *did not!* Has the Three-in-One stopped these cruelties with his rewards and punishments, with his love and his hate and his lies? He *has* not! Child, queer one, little one, ancient companion of twenty thousand years, will you tell me who *did* stop these hatreds and these wars and cruelties between men?"

Neb laid down the two heavy stones he was hugging in his arms and once more pointed the first finger of his right hand at the centre of the vast beard before him, under which the prophet's hidden wrist seemed to be making somewhat unnatural movements for that portion of a man's frame.

"And when will the next Golden Age be?"

"When you rule the world again, my Master and my God!"

"And shall I tell you, Neb ap Digon, how I made the first Golden Age, and how — only it's all a mystery and a riddle — I hope one day to make the second?"

The little creature nodded vigorously.

"By putting an end to all tyrants, dictators, despots, rulers, kings, priests, and governments. By putting an end to myself — *as a god* — and leaving men and all the children of earth — alone!"

"A fine example I'm showing," thought Myrddin Wyllt, "of 'crooked counselling!' Aye! I know it! The whole thing, all my half-memories, all my super visions, may be pure imagination."

An intense gravity seemed to be tightening and screwing up the mischievous little face that was watching him.

“My only believer, my only friend,” he thought, “is this funny little manikin! For what does Arthur know, save to chase Saxon pirates into the sea with Roman cavalry?”

The counsellor’s green-black, eyes grew larger and darker and closer together as they encountered the intense stare of Neb ap Digon.

The child’s lips suddenly moved. “May I ask you something, Master?”

“Anything! Anything! Only remember this, little one. At bottom — whether I begot that thundering Olympian or not, and whether the Olympian begot this new Three-in-One or not — I know no more of these mysteries than you do. No! Not a bit more!”

Neb permitted the shadow of a flicker of a smile to cross his young-old face as he listened to the echo in the recesses of the Cave of Mithras repeating the counsellor’s deep-throated “not a bit more!” But neither the words nor their echo stopped his question.

“They all keep talking of the devil, Master. Who is the devil?”

The latest incarnation of the god of the Golden Age made a sound between a chuckle and a groan.

“Listen, child. Do you think obedience is a good thing?”

“Am I to say the truth?”

“Of course.”

And Neb the son of Digon boldly shook his impish head. “No, Master. I don’t. It’s what cruel people do to children and animals.”

The resurrected one from yr Wyddfa positively clapped his hands at this reply.

“Well then, the devil is every god who exacts obedience.”

“What turns a god into a devil, Master?”

“Power, my son. Nobody in the world, nobody beyond the world, can be trusted with power, unless perhaps it be our mother the earth; but I doubt whether even she can. The Golden Age can never come again till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to unmake themselves as I did, and leave men and women to themselves! And don't *you* be deceived, little one, by this new religion's talk of 'love.' I tell you, wherever there is what they call 'love' there is hatred too and a lust for obedience! What the world wants is more common sense, more kindness, more indulgence, more leaving people alone.

"But let them talk! This new Three-in-One with its prisons and its love and its lies will only last two thousand years. The thunderer I begot — and I'd have swallowed him if his mother hadn't given me a stone instead — lasted for ten thousand years. But none of them lasts forever. That's the hope of the world. The earth lasts and man lasts, and the animals and birds and fishes last, but gods and governments perish!

"And now, little one, I want you to see how I have a real right to break up the image of one god at least. You mustn't be frightened if I show you how my pet snake — it has to be a little one because real snakes are rare round here, and this was the only one near enough to hear me whistle — twines itself round my wrist and tries to put its tail into its mouth. A slowworm can act unending Time as well as a sea serpent. You won't be afraid, Neb ap Digon?"

"No, Master!"

And the small creature really did show no sign of uneasiness as the being who declared he had been buried on yr Wyddfa revealed his wrist with the slowworm twisted round it so tightly that its tail did give the impression of entering its mouth.

But the counsellor now began murmuring something in a language that was apparently more difficult for his human listener to understand than for the slowworm, for that intelligent reptile promptly untwisted itself from his wrist, glided across his beard, and crawling along one of his legs made its way silently and rapidly into the open air.

It was then that Neb ap Digon gazed with such an unhappy countenance from the stones he had placed beside his master to the image that was now in his master's hand, that Myrddin Wyllt felt a sudden throb of pity.

"Very good, my child," he said gently. "Your idol shall remain. Whether I was Cronos or not I never took arms against anything but the tyranny of heaven. There! Take the thing back. Blow out both the lamps and put out the torches. I want to see the rising of the sun."

With a look of gratitude and worship such as few idols and still fewer living divinities have ever received from their votaries, the son of Digon snatched up the image and rushed into the interior of the Cave. When he returned his master was already outside and was climbing the slope above the entrance.

The child followed him and soon realized why the man was walking so quickly. The whole eastern sky, now that the wind had driven away every trace of mist, had become an unfathomably receding gulf of Space, of Space that had assumed a pale green colour.

And it became clear to Neb ap Digon that the point at which his master and his god was pointing was a rocky ridge covered with nothing but dead bracken; and the child knew that from this ridge a certain wide concavity in the foothills above the House of Stone and the Giant's Cave allowed a glimpse of the valley through which, after it had turned in its course, the sacred river flowed directly eastward.

Panting and perspiring, and using his thin arms almost as much as his thin legs as he went, running and crawling and climbing, and dragging himself up by every possible vantage that offered itself among tree roots and heather stalks, Neb kept gasping out his voiceless prayers between his heartbeats to his master-god that he might be permitted to overtake him before he reached the ridge at which he was aiming.

But it was evident that this bearded enemy of heavenly despotism — whether his rebellious incarnations reverted back to crooked counselling Cronos or not — was prepared to apply the “Golden Age” method of letting the unfortunate creatures of earth have their little pleasures, such as they were, undisturbed by celestial discipline or mystical schooling, even in such minor occasions as waiting for the smallest of worshippers; for he suddenly swung round, waved his hands to indicate to his follower that there was no need for him to come so fast, and, throwing himself down on the ground, began — so it appeared to the panting Neb as he advanced less violently — to scrabble with his hands among the slaty stones upon a barren patch of the hillside where there was no earth out of which grass or ferns or heather could grow.

When at last he sank down, breathing hard but happily triumphant by the counsellor’s side, he heard Myrddin Wyllt give a deep-throated groan of satisfaction and saw him extract from among the stones a huge fragment of slate with jagged edges.

Seated on the ground with this formidable object across his knees the counsellor proceeded to feel with his fingers these slaty teeth, muttering as he did so the words *“adamas karcharos”* and gazing alternately at the wide landscape immediately beneath him and at those green gulfs of Space away to his right. He was so absorbed that by the time Neb had regained his breath the child’s satisfaction at having overtaken his master was seriously shaken by his conviction that the man had become completely unconscious of his presence. Nor was his uneasiness altogether alleviated when Myrddin Wyllt, evidently making an effort to throw off his abstraction, pointed to the unwieldy shape of the waning moon floating now like an overloaded, waterlogged, drifting ship in the less luminous sky to their left, and began murmuring, half to the child and half to himself, an obscure and confused monologue — Neb couldn't tell whether its drift was praise or obloquy — addressed to this shapeless creature.

At last, and with an obvious effort that was distressing to Neb to witness, the counsellor flung away his memory trance, or whatever it was, as a man might tear an arrowhead from his own flesh.

"You go on up there, little one," he said, "and see the sun rise. Don't stare at it if it's too bright and don't be frightened if you see anyone coming. They'll be a long way off and I'll be here. But see how long it takes for it to rise above the hill; you might count — one — two — three — four — only don't count too quickly. See if you can count a hundred!"

Neb jumped up with alacrity. Then an alarming thought crossed his mind.

"You swear you'll be here when I come back, Master? And you'll be in sight all the time when I look round, and you won't vanish away?"

The crooked-counselling enemy of high heaven smiled.

"I swear I'll be here. And I swear I won't vanish. I *swear by the Styx."*

More reassured by his master's smile than by his reference to the Styx, Neb ap Digon went off, climbing, scrambling, crawling, and pulling himself up as before, though at about half his former speed and with periodic pauses to look back.

At last he reached the desired ridge, and less out of breath but much less pleased with himself than when he overtook the counsellor, he glanced hurriedly at the wide gap above the eastward-flowing river beyond which a circular hilltop outlined itself darkly against the receding gulf of pallid green sky. He was in time. There was no sign yet of the sun.

With a sigh of relief he turned to make sure his master was still where he had left him, but what he saw down there made him give vent to a sharp little cry.

The counsellor was standing erect with one arm raised above his head, and it looked to Neb as if he were making savage movements with the great jagged piece of slate-rock, slashing the air with it in fierce cuts and jabs.

The man must have exerted a formidable energy in this appalling gesture, for Neb now saw him fling the stone away and sink down upon the earth, evidently totally exhausted. It was not that "obedience" which he'd just heard his master reprobating that enabled the little boy at this crisis to restrain himself from turning his back on the green sky and rushing to the man's aid. It was in fact something that had happened to the sky itself, and an instinctive awareness of this made him hurriedly turn to see if those green gulfs were still there.

Yes, they were there, but across them now were two long sinister streaks of blood-red crimson, and as he looked Neb could not resist the feeling that those streaks of crimson blood were in some way connected with the counsellor's brandishing that jagged-toothed fragment of adamantine stone.

But even while he was staring at them, those crimson streaks grew dim. Presently they faded away altogether, and almost at once their place was taken by feathery wisps of shining gold; and, simultaneously with the appearance of these, there arose above that curved hill a point of blazing white light accompanied by dazzling rays, like pointed javelins, which radiated down the slope of the hill as if they were defending it from some shadowy rearguard of darkness invisible to human eye.

Although the number of times Neb turned his back upon the resplendent lord of light now rising before him, to make sure that the prostrate figure on the unillumined hillside behind him hadn't sunk into the earth, might have served as a rough method of calculating how long this blazing circle was taking to rise, whose circumference now began to be filled, not so much with burning white fire as with a mysterious vacuum, in the creation of which fire had given place to a blazing whiteness that was whiter than light itself, it must be allowed that in the matter of counting the minutes it took for this phenomenon to occur he did definitely follow his mysterious friend's ideas and threw obedience to the wind.

When, however, the fiery circle had completely freed itself from the curve of that far-away hill there shot through him, like one of those first rays, the memory of what the counsellor had said about not being frightened if he saw anyone coming — for there, only about a quarter of a mile away and crossing a platform of bare rock directly between his own ridge and the now dazzling sun, appeared three human figures, two women and a little girl.

Without giving them a second glance he had already begun his precipitous descent when he noticed that the counsellor was no longer lying on the ground, but was standing erect with his face turned towards the Ford across the river where Rhun's barge still lay.

This sight, while it relieved his anxiety about his great friend, had also the instantaneous effect of arousing in him his natural, and since he'd been a court foundling from infancy it might also be said his professional instinct, to discover who these women were before he announced their presence.

Back therefore he went; but this time he took care to make a cautious and circuitous approach to the nearest point of observation which was a patch of perishing and yellowing bracken that had not yet sunk level with the ground.

Peering at the newcomers as he lay prone under this ferny screen he was astonished to note that one was a young and beautiful girl, bearing every sign — for the son of Digon was a virtuoso in these niceties — of being the sort of woman whom tribal tradition, family power, and her own self-esteem has made a privileged figure.

Down the hill he now scrambled at top speed, making not the faintest attempt to diminish the disturbing noise which even the descent of so small a creature was bound to make. This he did by reason of the fact that the thing of all things that he himself dreaded most was to be surprised off-guard; and consequently he treated his friend, whether devil or god, whether conjurer or magician, as he preferred to be treated himself.

Myrddin Wyllt swung round to greet him, and Neb noticed that the queer man had forgotten since he came out of the Cave to conceal his black beard under his herdsman's sheepskin.

"I saw the whole of the sunrise, great Master!" he panted, "and I didn't count the time! But the blood in the sky turned to golden foam before it rose. And there are two women coming and a girl-child with them, and one of the women comes from the north — I know by her dress — and I think she is the other's nurse. But the other is beautiful and young, but not like the ladies of the court. But I can tell she is a high-born lady all the same; and I think she may be Morfydd ferch Brochvael herself, who is to marry Porius ab Einion."

"Who is the child?"

"I don't know, great Master. But I would say from the look of her a Gwyddyl-Ffichti child."

"What makes you say that?"

"She runs by herself, Master, and looks about her, and stops behind them, and picks up things, and runs ahead. Brython children have learnt from the Romans how to behave. If she'd been a Brython she'd be holding one of those women's hands and listening as they talked to each other — not looking for toads and frogs and calling to the crows. Besides she wouldn't have given her doll to the old woman to hold. A Brython child never trusts her doll to anyone else."

"God's blood! But you must have been near to them to see all this, Neb ap Digon."

"Not so *very* near. It's long practise, great Master, and knowing the ways of women."

"Well, my young friend, if you're right and it is Morfydd ferch Brochvael, she's probably sent a message to young Porius to meet her here."

"To Porius ab Einion, did you say, Master? The man she's going to marry?"

The counsellor's green-black eyes grew smaller and endless little wrinkles formed themselves round their corners. Neb couldn't see his mouth for his beard.

"Well, my child," he said, "I'll leave you here to show the Lady Morfydd the Cave of Mithras. Only don't frighten that little girl by starting echoes. It's as bad as the mouth of Tartarus, that Cave, for the echoes it makes. I wouldn't be surprised if it went down to Tartarus."

"You're not going back without me, Master?"

Neb's voice clearly indicated that he was much more dismayed at the prospect of being left with two women and a little girl than at the thought of the Cave of Mithras being connected with Tartarus.

"No, no, my friend! I'm only going to take the boat over so that the princess's friend can cross the river if she *has* arranged a tryst in this place. If I don't return soon it'll only mean I'm waiting for him on the other side.

We still have about three hours left us. Listen, child! If I don’t appear with somebody before the sun reaches the mouth of the Cave, you must bring them down to the ferry and we’ll see what’s to be done. One thing is certain. You and I must be safe back in my tent by noon.”

Neb nodded with the infinite comprehension of an age-old conspirator.

“Better hunt round the Cave before they come and find something for them to eat and drink. These Mithras worshippers are women haters like yourself, little one. But a taste of his sacred honey — Don’t be frightened now! I swear I won’t leave the ferry.”

Slowly and heavily the “herdsman from the south” walked down the slope. As he passed the Cave’s entrance a wisp of smoke on the wind indicated to him that their fire was not yet extinct, and glancing round he was able to wave reassuringly to his only worshipper as that goblinish little figure lingeringly and reluctantly disappeared. On reaching the river he entered the boat, took the pole, and mechanically punted himself across. He soon realized he had begun slipping into one of his periodic fits of abstraction, but why not yield to it since in any case he had to wait?

Seated therefore on one of the benches with the great pole across his knees, he allowed his mind to float back over spaces of Time that would have made his present biographer, the erudite Henog of Dyfed, gasp with amazement.

It was not that these far-flung excursions of his mind could in any sense be called mystical trances. He could pull himself out of them at any moment, and he could pause at any moment to resume his consciousness of what was occurring in his immediate vicinity. Nor were they always of the past. They were more often of the future. But if his journeys forward and backward through these huge spaces of Time were more like ponderings over obscure memories, and travelling through imagined scenes that were only dimly realized, than they were like any kind of mystical vision, he always regarded them as an essential part of his life.

Almost querulously he made the familiar motion of his mind by which he commanded all his animals and his birds and his fishes and his reptiles to leave him alone and in peace.

"I'm too old," he told himself as he bent over the punting pole and listened to the gurgling of the water, and repeated his order to his animals to leave him alone, "I'm too old to go on wondering why I should be what I am, and not be what I might be, and always be divided by such a gulf from everybody else."

He'd been about the age of Neb ap Digon when his mother had died and left him to the care of the rulers of Britain. Her tale to him about his father had been the same as what she told everybody; namely, that he was a glorious vision of beauty, made of shining light, and more like an angel than a man; nor had she hesitated to let her small son perceive that she herself was puzzled, shocked, and even horrified to find that so heavenly a lover should have caused her to give birth to such an ungainly and hideous progeny.

"No," he said to himself as he released his hold for a moment upon the punting pole on his knees in order to thrust back his great beard beneath his sheepskin, "I'm too old to tread any more that old winepress of vain questioning— 'why am I what I am?' I am what I am, and I shall *be* what I am; until once again I force high heaven and all its messiahs and prophets and heroes and emperors and kings and druids and priests and rulers to leave the poor creatures of earth alone and let them enjoy themselves together in peace! What'll happen to me *then,* who can say? I shall probably have too much longing for rest and sleep to care!"

Letting his head sink a little over the punting pole and rocked by the motion of the sacred river under the keelless boat, he allowed his mind to drift back, like one of the alder leaves blown lightly past him, to the moment when — and as his memory fumbled its way among those vast dim immensities of the beginning of things he felt still a weary necessity to remind himself that it might easily all be, just as his mother's story might easily all have been, simply imagination — to the moment when as the "crooked-counselling" child of earth he had seized that sickle of adamantine flint, so vast and jagged, *pelorion karcharodonta,* and not only dismembered the heavenly despot but driven those monstrous brethren of his own, Cottus and Briareus and Gyes, beyond the nine circles of Oceanus, and even further than that; yes, beyond the lost tenth stream where the black water drips down into the cave of the goddess Styx.

"Is it memory," he thought, as with his half-shut eyes bent down above the punting pole on his knees he envisaged all this, "or do I just imagine it? O human Mother of my hideous flesh, who gave me life only to loathe and despise me, and you, great Mother of us all, mysterious Earth, who yourself have given birth to all the tyrants of heaven from the beginning, why will neither of you ever tell me who I am and whether I imagine these things or not? Mother! Mother!"

This final appeal was uttered in a groaning whisper; and as he uttered it he raised his head an inch or two and his green-black eyes opened wide again, and, as always happened when he was excited, their dark full orbs drew together as if they were about to coalesce in Cyclopean oneness.

But all he saw was the worn gunwale of Rhun's old battered ferryboat and the swirling current of the cold grey water, untouched as yet by any ray of the sun.

“Can’t *you* explain to me,” he groaned, “you they call Divine Water, why no woman in any of my lives, no woman when I brought stones from Gwent to that southern plain, no woman when I served Gortheyrn Gortheneu, no woman when I gave to men and beasts and birds and reptiles and trees and plants an aeon’s space wherein to enjoy their life, has ever cared for me? Gwendydd shrinks from me just as her mother did! Nineue hates me just as Rhaea did at the beginning of all things, when she gave me a stone to swallow in place of that accurst Olympian! Oh, that I’d been a real ‘crooked counsellor!’ But you also, you the great Earth yourself, took the side of my tyrant son!”

Again his head sank down over the punting pole across his knees, and again his memory went back to that slashing blow with the sickle of jagged flint, which liberated the faithless mother of us all from her heavenly tyrant.

And he saw in his mind the monstrous forms of his brethren, born oppressors of the weak, as he drove them before him with his parricidal weapon beyond the nine circles of Oceanus, “beyond even chaos,” as his old Aeolian biographer, exiled among the crude Boeotians like his present chronicler in Edeyrnion, wrote of him, twice as long *before* the birth of Christ as the present year is *after* that crucial event!

Once more he felt himself standing in that terrible grey mist on the ultimate ridges of the world. Once more he surveyed the gulf of Tartarus and the bronze threshold of Hades. Once more he saw the abode of Death and Sleep, once more the dwelling of Styx, “eldest daughter of backward-flowing Ocean.”

And it was only because he had dared this impious deed, only because he had dismembered the tyrant of heaven and driven his monstrous progeny beyond chaos, that he had the power — he, the *angulo-meetis,* the “crooked counselling” — to give the race of men and the poor creatures of earth their first Golden Age.

“But,” his thoughts ran on, “the Thunderer ended it all. He brought back those monsters, Briareus and Cottus and Gyes, to help him destroy it. O Mother, Mother, are all my voyages into the future to end like that also? Can there be no lasting Golden Age for the children of an earth so faithless, of an earth so ready to conceive, so ready to enthrone, ever new tyrants?”

And what a hideous answer to his prayer it was that even as he called upon his “mother” — and this was one of those curious moments in the life of Myrddin Wyllt when he confused according to what he called his “imagination” the proud, pure nun, loved by that celestial visitor, with the enormous earth mother herself who had helped Rhaea to save the Olympian — there should have come into his mind what in all his flights down the years he had never recalled till this moment, the actual countenance of Styx, “the eldest daughter of backward-flowing Ocean.”

He was standing on the misty ridge at the end of the world between the precipices leading to the mouth of Tartarus and the cavernous entrance to Hades, listening to the dying away of the rumbling retreat and thundering execrations of the monsters who were destined to help his son destroy the Golden Age, when he found his eyes fixed on a vast smooth wall of jet-black rock against which the mist kept blowing in ice-cold gusts as it issued, driven by spiral volleys of wind that were incessantly whirling up, from the mouth of Tartarus. Half of these volleying winds were no sooner clear of the slippery precipices surrounding this abyss than they were caught by an irresistible indrawing suction, a suction that drew them, with a never-ceasing, low-murmuring roar, into the archway that led to Hades, from out of which, as they were sucked in, there arose a dark-throated gurgling noise, like the noise of a deeply buried weir.

But the other half of these whirling eddies of ice-cold air struck against this huge wall of jet-black rock and visibly raced along its surface, for their contact with it precipitated a kind of icy film, which, as it moved beneath their impulse, created all manner of fantastic scrawls and curlicues and hieroglyphs, all of them to be dissolved as soon as they appeared, but only to be re-formed again in endless and infinite succession.

These Tartarean winds, thus brought into interminable visibility by reason of their icy chill, swept up the surface of the rock as well as down, but their downward movement was necessarily unseen by the watcher since he was separated from the face of the rock by a gaping precipitous chasm, which, because of its narrowness and because of the queer movements of this perpetually shifting ice-cold scurf that was forever forming and dissolving and re-forming upon the rock, must have struck his mind, and must now have returned to his memory, as far more repellent than either the precipices leading to Tartarus or the weir-gurgling archway that led to Hades.

Among other things he had forgotten till now was how there had been aroused in him a curious and fantastic pity for the shifting hieroglyphs forming and dissolving, dissolving and re-forming, that were eternally being carried down this narrow chasm between the platform on which he stood and the smooth face of this windswept rock.

In two places only — and here the water had made for itself, during the long aeons of Time in which it had been falling, grooves so deep that the icy winds could not reach it — did the mysterious tenth stream of backward-flowing Oceanus descend, over which the eldest of Ocean’s daughters held rule; and it was as he looked upwards, searching through the freezing mist for the abode of that strange Being, that he caught the unforgettable glimpse of her face.

There was a thousand-year-old stump of some long-dead tree — an ash tree he told himself now — that stretched out, grey and lonely and unutterably sad, from some high orifice far above his head in that vast rock surface.

And why did a thing like this come back to him so clear if it were all imagination? And what had he, the hideous son of a holy nun, or what had he, the servant of Gortheyrn Gortheneu, or what had he, the bearer of the sacred stones to the great plain in the south, or what had he, the counsellor of Uthyr Pendragon, to do with the goddess Styx who dwelt, as the old Greek Henog wrote, "beyond mist-enshrouded chaos," and how was it that he could remember the very words of the tale of what he had done, if he'd never done it? But these Henogs, whether of Dyfed or of Aeolia, were all the same! This one of Arthur's would no doubt describe this very Cave of Mithras as "beyond mist-enshrouded chaos."

But why did this interminable jet-black rock, lost in the mists above his head and with that horrible chasm at its base, now, very now, aeons of ages after, come back so vividly to his mind? Had that old Aeolian Henog imagined it so strongly about him that it had forced him to imagine it about himself?

No! *He remembered.* He must have read that old Henog's stories long afterwards. Very likely this modern Henog knew all those old ones by heart! And that was what had started him off trying to rival them with his own.

No! He remembered. It was he himself who had seen for a moment — oh, there could be no mistake! Henogs, old or new, could never have put that into his head — the face of Styx herself, eldest daughter of backward-flowing Ocean, leaning out from her cave and peering down at him over her clenched knuckles through that grey ghost of an ash stump.

It all returned to him now, and well might the new gods fear to swear by the water that ran past that face! Those eyes had seen the roots of the earth and the fountains of all the seas; they had seen the ultimate floor of Tartarus; they had seen to the uttermost ends of Hades... They had seen where I flung that sickle of adamant when those monsters fled before my face and I freed earth from the tyranny of heaven!

And having seen all this there remained but one thing, one thing only, only one thing, in the eyes that stared down into mine over the grey ruins of that phantom ash.

And that one thing was death. “From death,” those eyes said, “all that exists has sprung; and to death all that exists will return. Death was the beginning. Death will be the end. It will be the end of gods and men. It will be the end of the starry heaven and the enormous earth. It will be the end of even that which is beyond mist-enshrouded chaos. Give up,” those eyes said, “striving so hard to give men and women and beasts and fishes and birds, and all that feels pain and draws breath, a Golden Age without the meddling of gods and rulers. Give up — let go — have done. It all comes to the same thing in the end.”

Myrddin Wyllt’s enormous head had always a peculiar and even rather savage look when he concealed his beard. His face became rougher and more untamed. The impression he then conveyed was not so much that of a dangerous tribesman belonging to a wild tribe, as of the wandering and lonely herdsman of sheep or goats who has been so accustomed to follow his flock through untraversed and unfrequented regions that he has grown shy and suspicious and even a little inhuman.

At this particular moment, with his head sinking down over his knees and with this curious broadening of his face and obliteration of his chin combining with the shaggy roughness of his hair, he might have given the impression to a stranger come suddenly upon him of being some species of saviour beast or animal redeemer who had that moment accepted on behalf of all the beasts in the world the sentence of the slaughterhouse, and was weighed down by the appalling weight of the burden he had undertaken.

The emperor's counsellor was in plain truth struggling at that moment under a destiny almost too heavy to endure. His eyes were tight shut and the little black hairs on his subhumanly large ears stirred in the wind from the southeast like the antennae of minute insects.

"Death, death, death, death," he said to himself; and again the face of the eldest daughter of backward-flowing Ocean, as he had seen it through the ribs of that grey ruin of an ash tree, returned upon him with a sense of inescapable doom.

Suddenly he became aware of a curious sensation upon the knuckles of one of his hands as they rested on the punting pole. It was half a tickling and half a scraping sensation, and it was accompanied by quite definite scratching on the back of his wrist. Without a movement of any kind and guarding with exquisite care the very drawing of his breath, he slowly lifted by an infinitesimal degree one of his heavy eyelids. And there, curled up upon the back of his hand, its hind feet steadying its cold, wet, plump body, was a bright-eyed water-rat, assiduously and with absorbed and intense concentration licking his knuckle.

An incredible feeling of warmth rushed through him. Starting from the determined motion of that small tongue, it suffused itself through the whole of his body. It revived his brain. It comforted his heart. It steadied his nerves.

"So you, water rat," he thought, "you alone of all my creatures have dared to disobey me! For this disobedience may your children and your children's children, even unto the third and fourth generation, have luck upon luck upon luck in finding their food and safety beyond safety from all their enemies!"

As cautiously as he had lifted it he let his eyelid fall again so that thick darkness covered him. But the darkness that covered him now though it accepted death, and included death, and in a sense was as it *were* death, seemed to be so permeated by the sensation of satisfaction under the licking of that tiny tongue and under the precise balancing of that cold wet plump body, that it sufficed as an answer — though he could not have explained to anyone but his friend Neb just how it did — an answer from all the doomed creatures of earth to the eldest daughter of backward-flowing Oceanus.

"Pray for the death of a mortal woman, old Mother," he cried in his heart, "and for poor Myrddin Wyllt, the death of a mortal man!"

But now there was a scamper and a splash, and the rat was gone. Footsteps were approaching the river from the direction of Saint Julian's Fount. Instantaneously, with the animal instinct of an old herdsman, he knew that these steps were those of a man in the prime of life.

"Porius," he thought; and then, remembering the look on Neb's cynical face, "or that young worshipper of Mithras."

Rhun ap Gwrnach was quite prepared to find his ferryboat exactly where he had left it the day before yesterday; but he was not a little surprised to find the crouching form of the emperor's counsellor, whom he supposed to be still asleep in the inner tent, and whose sleep he had been assured was never disturbed till noon, seated in the boat and nodding quietly over the punting pole.

But as usual Rhun was silent about these personal reactions, nor did he give his errant host — if this questionable conjurer deserved so normal a designation — the remotest hint as to the cause of his sudden appearance. He carried no weapon save a formidable hunting knife; but as that was almost as long as old Aulus's Roman sword and hung with something of the same air of authoritative aggressiveness from his belt and kept thumping, as it swung, against his thigh, it served to correct any illusion a stranger might entertain that Rhun was one with whom you could meddle with impunity.

Laconically but respectfully he saluted the man; and as he jumped into the boat he used all his agility so as not to unbalance it or incommode its occupant. With natural ease and very gravely and carefully, as if he were ferrying the counsellor across a darker and more dangerous stream than the sacred Dee, he took possession of the pole, and moving to the front of the boat began leisurely punting.

But he had barely got clear of the bank when Myrddin Wyllt suddenly asked an unexpected and disturbing question.

"Was Brother John still alive last night?"

"Alive, my Lord?"

Rhun was so startled that he had a moment's difficulty with his pole. After he'd got it clear he stared at the man in expectant silence, waiting for him to say more.

"His devils must have told him something," he said to himself.

But Myrddin Wyllt remained silent while his eyes which were only half open, drowsily and with what to Rhun looked like humorous amusement, contemplated the ascending slope on the further side of the river where wisps of white smoke now kept appearing, growing larger and larger, and finally drifting away in a northwesterly direction.

Rhun broke the silence. "Have you heard anything during the night?"

But the man only gazed at those wisps of smoke across the river.

"When I left him," Rhun continued, "he was answering Porius ab Einion's questions about Pelagius, explaining how it was that the things Pelagius taught were contradicted by the priest of Christ at the Gaer. My father wasn't a Christian, you must understand, my Lord, and so the warmth of the Brother's cell made me sleepy, and I got up and slipped away. You've heard nothing in the night, my Lord, nothing else?"

"Else? No, no! Certainly not; certainly nothing else."

"You've not been told anything by your spirits?"

To this there was no reply; and Rhun, as he swung his pole and saw the smoke issuing from his Cave, was aware of a vague wish that he was more than a simple soldier of his father's god. "If I were one of the *Metechontes,"* he thought, "if I were a 'participant' of the Mysteries, I'd soon exorcize his devils and *make* him answer!"

Rhun had not missed the man's obvious amusement at the smoke issuing from the sacred Cave.

"He's half an atheist and half a Christian like all these Romanized Brythons. Oh, if I were only a 'participant' I'd stop his jeering forever!"

In his indignation Rhun's mind went back to their first encounter only the day before yesterday and how the fellow had murmured about "trestles" and had said it was upon trestles that he'd put the corpse of the man murdered by Medrawd — put it in the centre of Saint Julian's Fount! And then a minute or two later the detestable dwarf Neb confessed that it was the accurst conjurer himself who had killed the man.

"Trestles?" This whole mission from the emperor was a thing of trestles and mist! No, it was impossible to get at the truth of anything with people like this. And as he recalled how moment after moment in that weird pavilion his natural apprehension of reality, and his normal sense of what was happening to him, had been invaded and routed by his feeling for Gwendydd, it seemed as if something very sweet and something very salt were mingling in his mouth.

He might have been floating on the fresh water of a clear stream, and suddenly there was the taste of the salt of the sea! “Oh, it’s a tragic fate this poor girl has to bear, being the sister of such a shape-shifting, time-serving, cowardly liar!”

A few more thrusts of the pole, made with sulky vehemence, brought them to the opposite bank. Here as he tied the boat to the nearest alder stump his apprehensions about Brother John began to subside.

“They’re all like this at Arthur’s court,” he thought, “all liars; and encouraged in it too by that old pedantic false chronicler of a Henog who solemnly writes down as true history every tale they tell him! If Porius and I go to Constantinople I suppose we’ll find the same there — women and conjurers and conceited boys on horseback, and gullible historians writing fables about them! That’s how the world goes in these modern times now that the servants of Mithras are so few!”

And there throbbed in Rhun’s heart a proud and complacent thrill of satisfaction that he had so soon detected what the pure-minded Gwendydd had to endure among these wretches and from a brother who brought horses and cows into her chamber and poured libations to the Cewri!

“Do you wish to remain where you are, my Lord?” he enquired as soon as he had jumped ashore. “I don’t think I’ll be away long, and I shall be glad to ferry you across again. And then if you cared for my company I could escort you back to the tent. I am at your service, my Lord, but I expect you have not come here to worship Mithras.”

The man he addressed made a faint movement with his hand that might have been a sign of acquiescence or a sign of indifference or a sign of dismissal. Rhun accepted it as a token of all these things and began quickly ascending the slope. He had been neither surprised nor disturbed when Gwythyr, the Lady of the Gaer’s special messenger, had appeared before dawn with a brief and imperative command from Morfydd that he should meet her at his god's shrine.

He knew that according to old Brythonic tradition, rigorously followed by the House of Cunedda, any sort of meeting between bride and bridegroom on the day before their marriage was out of the question; but that farewell visits by the girl to members of her own family were not only in order but were encouraged by ancient usage.

As her first cousin and as the foster-brother of her husband, Rhun knew that outside the Gaer and the House of Stone he was her nearest of kin. Even the Modrybedd as her great-aunts were more remote.

All this he naturally and properly took for granted, and yet it cannot be said that as he ascended the incline towards those disturbing wisps of smoke his mind was quite at peace. Anyone indisposed to be indulgent to a simple soldier of Mithras, whose ascetic ideal had justified him in assuming the Phrygian cap even though he *was* no "participant," might have challenged him to confess as he climbed this slope that his conscience was not altogether easy about the softening influences of Gwendydd's tent.

It is even possible that Brother John himself, about whose welfare he had just received such a shock, might have warned him that according to the insight of Pelagius it was possible that his righteous indignation with the man in the boat was accentuated by some hidden uneasiness in his own conscience.

When, an hour earlier, Neb ap Digon had been left by *his* lord and god to a sacrilegious profaning of the shrine of Mithras, the boy had felt anything but elated. His chief concern was anxiety lest something should occur to delay their return to the tent before their absence was discovered.

"My master," he thought, "may be the wisest ever. A great one he may have been before Eryri and Cader were raised up and before Atlantis was thrust down; but when he begins to think ’tis easy to deceive a female he’s no wiser than that little snake he whistled round his wrist!”

It must have been his long experience of the fatal ease with which these same females can persuade a man to talk of that concerning which a man had best hold his tongue that induced Neb to confine his ministrations to Morfydd ferch Brochvael and Canna ferch Glam to the piling of a fire for them, the spreading of a couch of bracken leaves for them, the robbing Mithras of all the sacred honey he could find for them, and the lighting of several fresh torches above their heads.

In vain he hunted for wine and bread. Doubtless this false god from Persia devoured such sacraments the moment his worshippers departed and was, like Neb himself, thoroughly tired of honey.

Keeping therefore carefully out of hearing of the two women, Neb concentrated his attention on the little girl. For her benefit and that of her doll, he constructed a special fire just beneath the little statues of Mithras rising from a rock and of Cronos surrounded by a serpent with its tail in its mouth. It had not been Neb’s privilege to know any little girls during the conscious decade of his chequered career, and he was not therefore at all surprised to find this one as totally without nervous fears as he was himself. Nor did her playacting about the comfort of her doll strike him as in any way silly. In fact he sympathized with it. With the cynicism induced by ten years of court life it struck him as perfectly natural and even perfectly philosophical to prefer the society of the inanimate to that of the animate.

“What is her name?” he enquired gravely, leaning forward from his carefully adjusted cushion of bracken and surveying with complacency a Mazdean incense burner turned upside down which he had converted into a seat for the doll.

The doll’s mother was in no hurry to reply. She was examining the son of Digon with careful and critical but not unfriendly deliberation.

“She’s Lynette,” she said at last; and then in a whisper so that Lynette, who was all ears, shouldn’t hear, “she doesn’t know I’m her mother.”

“What does she call you then?”

“Gunta, of course.”

“Is that your name?”

“I don’t know. It’s what everyone calls me.”

“What’s *your* mother’s name?” he asked.

These direct personal questions didn’t seem to embarrass the little girl in the least; but on the other hand they seemed to retard the conversation till after a further scrutiny of the questioner.

For his part Neb was either much more rapid and secretive in his summings-up or much less interested in new personalities; for what seemed to preoccupy his attention was an almost fussy desire to make these two young women physically comfortable.

But Gunta had now evidently decided upon a daring venture. “My mother doesn’t think,” she whispered, bending towards him so that Lynette shouldn’t hear, “that I know.”

“You mean she doesn’t know you know she’s your mother?”

Gunta nodded.

Neb gave her his oldest and most conspiring smile full of the cynicism of ten years at court.

“That’s the best way,” he said, and added, “nor that you know your father’s either,” indicating by a sympathetic glance that in her place he also would conceal these premature flashes of insight. Gunta’s hair was very long and very flaxen and without a curl or a ripple in it. She wore nothing that Neb could see but a ragged tunic of very thick wool dyed black, and white woollen drawers. Her legs and feet were bare.

“My father knew I knew,” she whispered, clasping her hands over her knees, “because I told him when he went away.”

Neb shook his head and made a grimace that said better than words could have done: “Dangerous, very dangerous! The only path of wisdom is to watch, ponder, decide, and say nothing.”

“My father’s a Sais,” Gunta said. “His name’s Gunhorst.”

“A slave or a spy — I mean an advance guard — of Colgrim?”

“I hope I corrected myself in time,” he thought, and he hastened to add, “Her over there” — and he wagged his head in the direction of Morfydd— “is expecting Rhun ap Gwrnach soon; and they tell me his father’s father was a slave. Kings’ sons *can* be slaves,” he added pensively. “It depends on the fortune of battle.”

“My father’s a great warrior,” said Gunta proudly, forgetting the necessity of whispering. “And what I hope is that the Saeson kill the emperor and possess the whole land!”

Neb contemplated his guest with unconcealed admiration.

“How brave she is!” he thought, but what he said was: “I hope if he does kill the emperor he’ll take all the ladies of Caerleon back with him to Germania!”

Gunta fixed her grey eyes full upon him. “If he kills him,” she pronounced, “he’ll never go back to Germania.”

Neb shrugged his thin shoulders and made a vague motion of his hands. “I’ve heard that word ‘never’ before,” his gesture said, “but for wise people like you and me ’tis a word better unspoken than spoken.”

To seduce those grey eyes into the softer mood, he now began rocking the daughter of Gunhorst up and down with both his hands. The seat he had arranged for her was a three-legged cauldron. He had dragged this out from beneath the two images and placed it in such a position between the upturned incense burner and his own heap of bracken that the torchlight above the images caused its rusty bronze curves to glow like red flames.

It pleased the satiric Neb to make a see-saw of this sacred utensil and to rock the daughter of an emperor-killer backwards and forwards to the tune of the crackling sticks of a profane bonfire kindled in the presence of the Cave's divinity.

But his experience as a courtier warned him that though rocking might distract, it could not absorb a visitor. So he returned to personalities.

"You haven't asked me about *my* father."

She disregarded this.

"Why... are... you... dressed... in... that... funny tunic?" Her words came out in jerks as first one and then another of the cauldron's outstretched legs hit the floor.

"Green and yellow are the emperor's colours," Neb replied proudly.

"I thought only slaves wore kings' colours," said Gunta the daughter of Gunhorst. "And I don't believe you know," she mocked, "who your mother was!"

Neb went on rocking her. "I must act like my master," he thought, "like my master. I must let her have her way."

"I don't believe you've ever seen her!" laughed the flaxen-haired rider on the cauldron.

"How did you guess?" asked Neb, trying to assume a tone of awestruck wonder. "They say only the cleverest people in the world have the power to recognize an orphan." And he went on rocking her.

"I *was* a very little one when I was born," he confessed with crafty sadness.

"As little as Lynette?"

He turned to the fixed eyes of the battered little person balanced on the incense burner. "Almost," he admitted gloomily.

"And who was your father Digon?"

Neb looked down for a second at the fringe of his green-and-yellow tunic. Then he lifted his head and made the plunge.

"I don't believe," he whispered, "there was any such person!"

"You... don't... know... who... was your own father!"

He shook his head.

Gunta's eyes looked horrified. "That's worse," she said in a shocked voice, "than not knowing about your mother."

"She's a Saesnes, sure enough," thought Neb, and all the stories he'd ever heard the forest people tell about unnatural mothers who put *tyngedion* on their children stirred in his mind.

"When I was born," he said, "I was as little as Llew when Gwydion ap Don picked him up from the floor."

The grey eyes of Lynette's mother widened. "Why, that's the story Sibylla tells me," she cried excitedly. "In the Gaer they call it a low, wicked, filthy, disgusting story. It's about Arianrod jumping over Math's wand and two children falling out of her — Dylan and that little one! I think it's a wonderful story and so does Sibylla." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "Sibylla is like Arianrod, you know, only I don't tell her so. I have to take care of Sibylla now my father's away. It's a secret between him and me. We're both fond of her; but oh, she's so hard to look after! She acts so foolish and talks so silly. It doesn't do to tell her things."

Neb accelerated the rocking till the three legs of the cauldron hit the ground one after another with a metallic ring.

"Yes," he repeated, "when I was born I was as little as Llew when Gwydion ap Don put him into a chest at the foot of his bed.

I know not who bore me nor who begot;
I was found in the empress's chamber pot!"

Neb uttered these words in a plaintive chant, while in place of tears he stared into the darkness. If only he could risk one glance at the serpent-wreathed Cronos he might yet get through this crisis in his life!

"Stop rocking me!" ordered Gunta. Her voice had changed. It had taken on a queer husky sound as if she were trying to whistle through a straw that had a hole in it.

At once he brought to an end the seesaw swaying of the bronze cauldron, and she slid to the ground.

"Careful now!" Neb's experience warned him. "Remember what you fear for your master!"

In a subdued voice and in a tone quite different from any she had used to him yet, and different too from any he could imagine her using to Lynette, she asked him when his birthday was.

Neb wanted to look anywhere away from those steady grey eyes framed in that fall of flaxen hair. Even if to appeal to the image with the serpent were forbidden him, it would be something to snatch a glimpse of the defiant Phrygian cap of the god of the Roman legions.

"I'd better tell her I'm thirteen," he said to himself. But even while his mind was finishing the word "thirteen" he was telling her the truth. "I'll be eleven on the first of November."

Her mouth opened with a little gasping cry. "Why, I shall be eight on the first of November. Our birthdays are on the same day!"

For a fleeting second the son of the non-existent Digon felt as if his own existence as the free armour bearer of the Lord of Time were in peril, but the little girl's excitement over this not at all astonishing coincidence saved the Persian god's shrine from further profanation.

Whatever softening of her feminine nature had been brought about by this new friend's confession found at this critical moment a queer and surprising outlet; for with a hurried movement she snatched up Lynette — the only thing that entirely belonged to her — and thrust it into his arms! This she had hardly done when a man's voice — grown familiar enough now to Neb — broke with shattering emphasis into the low-murmured whisperings of Morfydd and her nurse.

"Quick! We mustn't be caught here! He'd kill me. It's his innermost shrine, this is! *Here"* — and he thrust back the doll into her arms— "keep close behind me. Catch hold of my belt or something. No! Hush, wait! Take care of your bare feet! Beat out those sparks with something for heaven's sake! I must put—"

Standing on tiptoe and extending his arms, he extinguished both the torch and the small oil flame; and then in the dim light that remained he smote the smouldering sticks of their little fire into black ashes with the rim of the incense burner.

In spite of his agitation, something about the metallic contact of this rim with the half-blackened sticks, as under its pressure their final vital sparks were scattered into the darkness, made him think of that great piece of jagged rock which he had lately seen in the hands of his master.

The daughter of Gunhorst the Sais, swinging Lynette by her one solitary garment, kept tight hold upon her new friend's green-and-yellow tunic and found no difficulty in imitating the stealthy shuffle becoming at last a silent run by which, following the obscurer wall of the Cave, he led her to its entrance unchallenged. Indeed neither Morfydd nor her nurse, least of all the outraged and indignant soldier of Mithras, had any attention left to bestow upon them. They were too fully occupied with their own emotions.

Both the women were on their feet now by the ashes of their extinct fire, the dying of which they had been too absorbed in their talk to heed; while Rhun ap Gwrnach, his fingers on the hilt of his hunting knife, his head in the Phrygian cap, towering above them, and his lithe athlete's legs poised as if ready for a leap into the outraged sanctuary of his god, struggled to give expression to his inarticulate feelings.

"I've always wanted to bring you here," he cried, "and you always refused. I wanted to show you what I had done; how I had carried on the religion of my father and of *his* father! I wanted to show you how I had kept the sacred fire alive when everywhere else in Ynys Prydein it had perished. I wanted to show you the sacred image that my father's father, Agenor y Gaethwas, brought from the ancient city of the Great King — yes! and the image of Cronos that he brought from Athens! For years and years I've longed for the day you would come and I could show you these things. And now you *have* come — you and Canna ferch Glam — and what do I find?"

His wrath so shook him that it became clear to Neb, and even to the little Saesnes, as they stood close together that the man would soon break into a fit of rending sobs or into some terrible violence.

"His Mithras worship," thought Neb with a faint spasm of pity, "must be to this simple fool what serving my master is to me. Mother of God! but I wish my master would come! I don't want to see a man cry like a baby, and I don't want to see a bride killed like a whore."

But Canna ferch Glam was not an old nurse for nothing. She now spoke up without showing the least fear of the infuriated wearer of that extraordinary headdress. "She never touched your heathen honey," she announced resolutely. “I kept offering it to her and she never would taste one least lick of it!”

Rhun looked from the proud pale face of Morfydd to the unblinking eyes of the old woman.

“Who told *you* to scour about in my father’s temple?”

Quick to take advantage of this transference of his anger from her nurseling to herself, Canna hurried to take up the challenge. “What for did you go and leave your temple then for two long nights and days? I warrant Prince Porius didn’t need you, and he watching the bedside of Brother John till the glory of the Feast.”

Rhun made a step towards her, then stopped short and stared at her sullenly, his angry eyes sinking inwards into their deep sockets and the heavy folds of his lowering forehead wrinkling downwards.

“If I come to a place like this,” the old woman went on, “and find all in a hurly-burly just as though some drunken cattle dealer or some great old horned bull had been rampaging around, aren’t I to act natural as anybody would and begin clearing up?”

“But... woman... no one... in Edeyrnion... would *dare*—”

Rhun had been not a little disturbed when she spoke of the Bull. Blunderingly and fumblingly his simple slow-moving mind began groping towards the possibility that this old woman, who had known them all from childhood, had heard from his father or even from his grandfather some vague reference to the sacrificial mysteries of their cherished deity.

“Minnawc Gorsant,” went on the nurse, giving Morfydd a quick anxious glance, “would never have left his Christian fol-de-lols for any stray cattlemen to fool with, like you’ve left this place.”

At this point the wise Neb, who in the shadow of one side of the entrance had been listening to every word of this, whispered to Gunta, “Look for me tomorrow by the Fount. We may all be gone by noon! Go straight in to them now!"

"Remember our—" the little Saxon began; but before the word "birthday" could issue from her lips he was gone, and at that very moment, just as if the great luminary had been looking for them down here and now had found them, the first rays of the ascending sun struck the mouth of the Cave.

The little girl sighed as with maternal irritation she straightened Lynette's rumpled garment, arranged the doll properly against her ribs, and advanced calmly towards the man with the odd thing on his head who was now acting just as her father so often acted with Sibylla.

"Come, nurse!" said Morfydd suddenly. "We must go back to the Gaer. This blazing sun will wake my father and he'll be wanting to go home. Goodbye, Rhun. I wanted to see you and I *have* seen you."

She had chosen a good moment to move past him and get out of the Cave; for presented with the totally unexpected apparition of a flaxen-haired little girl holding a doll, the not very mobile wits of the soldier of Mithras were plunged into complete confusion. The wildest ideas rushed through his head, ideas to which not only his complete ignorance of women, but certain vistas of life's possibilities which he had recently glimpsed between the Syrian-perfumed brazier and the Cretan screen, contributed fantastic encouragement. He suddenly had a dreadful doubt about the virtue of Porius's bride, a doubt that completely threw into the background the question of the sacrilege in the Cave.

So devastating to Rhun's austere and rigid morality was the wild thought that the playmate of his boyhood was an unmarried mother that the three feminine figures had begun to ascend the hill towards the ridge from which

Neb had spied on them before he recovered from the shock sufficiently to run after them.

At the sound of his running — and what memories did *that* sound evoke in her breast! — Morfydd turned quickly and came down the hill to meet him.

"Who," he panted, his breath failing him, not from his haste but from the horror of his crazy fancies, "who is this child?"

The ghost of a smile flickered over Morfydd's mouth, not a bitter or ironic smile but the sort of sad indulgent smile with which the little Saesnes she had just left must have often have regarded the heroic Gunhorst. But then without a word or a sign of warning she leapt towards Rhun, flung her arms tight round the back of his head, and buried her face in his bare, perspiring, pulse-throbbing, muscular throat.

No one who knew Rhun ap Gwrnach could have told her — and it is doubtful if he could have told her himself — what he would have done when she tore herself away and fled up the slope to rejoin the old woman and the child, if his action had not been decided by an occurrence completely beyond his control.

For at that moment a summons reached him from the ferry; and there was the detestable form of that "herdsman from the south," suddenly risen up in full view of them all! Not only so, but the damned conjurer was beckoning to him that he wished to cross the river. And, as if this wasn't enough, by the side of the counsellor — and how did *he* get across the river? — was none other than that imp of Satan they called Neb ap Digon!

Rhun snatched the Phrygian cap from his head and proceeded to conceal it beneath his tunic. While he did this, and he did it as carefully as the man who was waiting for him below had concealed his great beard, his shocked, confused, and stunned senses played a trick upon him not unworthy of the very serpent of Cronos. For so dazed had he been by his whole encounter with Morfydd, and especially by that wild embrace with which she had left him, that in the confused impression of cold cheeks, tickling hair, hot lips, and clinging arms his memory ceased to be memory and the present was as completely penetrated by the past as the fennel stalk of Prometheus was penetrated by the stolen fire.

Thus it came about that when he raised his fingers to his throat, feeling a sharp stab of pain, and when he put them to his lips and tasted his own salt blood, it was as if at that very second, instead of striding down the slope behind the grotesque forms of that conjurer and his dwarf, he were standing with Morfydd's arms still round his neck, realizing the startling and inexplicable fact that she had bitten him while she had been embracing him and must, very now, have that same salt taste in *her* mouth. She had in fact — bride of his foster-brother though she was — mixed her blood with his!

Perhaps if he had been a worshipper of the Three-in-One rather than of the Bull-loving and Bull-slaying Mithras, he would have tossed the whole incident aside as the legitimate fury of a hot-tempered maid whom he'd unfairly accused of sacrilege.

But his father, the half Greek, and his grandfather, the pure Greek, had by degrees got it lodged in his slow brooding mind that the mixing of blood, whether it were a man's or an animal's, was one of the most fatal of all mysterious covenants.

Whatever else that embrace had done — and it was more than once before he reached the river that he touched the place in his neck — it had made him feel profoundly ashamed of the outrageous fancy that had rushed through his brain when he first caught sight of that fair-haired little girl.

It was his disgust at having been visited by such madness at all, yes! even for a single second, which, far more than his anger at the supposed sacrilege over the sacred honey, reduced him to a mood of such bewildered humility by the time they were in the boat that Neb and Neb's master could not help being aware of the change. He struck them as friendlier and less reserved.

Not that he initiated any topic of conversation; but if Neb uttered a cry when a trout darted under the boat or the counsellor commented on the shifting of the wind from southeast to east, Rhun smiled as any other ferryman might have done and added some natural comment of his own.

It was Neb himself who was the gloomy and pensive one on their homeward walk. He had spent every second of the precious moments during which he had had the counsellor to himself in impressing upon him the necessity for inventing some clear and compact and simple story explaining their encounter with Rhun, and their return in his company. He had gone further. He had taken upon himself to offer such a story for his master's consideration; namely, that by means of what his enemies called his "devils," the counsellor had anticipated the errand of the messenger from the Gaer and had summoned Neb to accompany him to the ferry to cope with any possible danger.

"Did he take in what I told him to say?" thought Neb anxiously as he looked up at his master's face during their walk through the undergrowth, dreading lest it should assume that particular expression of vacant abstraction which he feared most of all.

"Well, if he *doesn't* say what I told him to say," the fussy little conspirator groaned, "he'll just have to play his old trick of pretending to be so frightened of that she-devil's anger that he's in danger of falling into one of his fits, and Gwendydd will have to come to our rescue then."

Neb had indeed some justification for his anxiety, for seldom had Myrddin Wyllt been so absorbed by the mere look of that wild stretch of woodland between the Fount and the ferry as he was on that walk back while all the dials in Edeyrnion indicated high noon. They had to pass through many open spaces where there were but few tall trees, and where the sun had free scope to play upon funguses and lichens, upon ferny rocks and mossy stumps, upon nameless graves and the scattered stones of ancient enclosures, edifices that had fallen into ruin long before the followers of Iscovan y Bychan had sought refuge here from the legionaries of Uriconium or Deva.

What was seducing Myrddin Wyllt into his mood of abstraction as their three shadows moved in front of them, a tall shapeless darkness, a tall athletic darkness, and a thin childish darkness, was the golden warmth that had arisen and had fallen everywhere. He had seen many autumns since his infancy in Caer Myrddin, and if his memory were to be trusted many more long before that; but he could never remember seeing any October decked for its grave in cerements as golden as this.

Vaguely he was conscious of some small teasing thought that just kept him from full abandonment to this golden noon. Was it his little friend’s fussy anxiety about Nineue’s wrath? No, no! He could deal with *that* when the occasion came. Ah! He had it! Tomorrow at dawn was the forest people’s Feast of the Sowing when this marriage that was to crown it would include at least one chant, so they’d assured him, from their old orgiastic Fisher King’s mystery.

Yes, he was weary of being warned of the effect of this chant and of the power of their druid to stir them up to revolt. But it was not the power of the druid that worried him or the fury of the forest people. He had been overtaken this last couple of days by menacing warnings from quite a different quarter, warnings that confirmed the original impulse by which he’d made the emperor send him on this mission to the Prince of Edeyrnion.

No, no! The obstinate, dark spot in this day's golden noon came from Colgrim the Sais.

What if Colgrim were *not* trying to join Baldulf? What if he were imitating the Romans and were intending to overrun Edeyrnion and all the Venedotian coast on his way to Mona? "Well, anyway," he thought, "Arthur must rule Britain for at least a generation. I gave my word to Uthyr Pendragon for that, and if it's in my power so shall it be; but I'm a marsh reed to lean upon these days, old and feeble, not what I was, not even what I was in Gortheyrn's time when the Saeson had to bribe him with Ronwen.

"But old as I am, I think I can do it. Yes, old Isle of Cronos, I think I can make you endure Roman law and Roman horsemen, and Brython fury and Brython fancy, for a generation longer! You'll have the Henog of Dyfed to record it, and the Three-in-One to work miracles for it; and then — adieu! The Saeson are bound to have their day, but they'll yield to another, and still the forest people will be the same."

By this time he knew that his companions were getting impatient. Hitherto he had walked as fast as either of them but he was beginning to loiter now and how could he help it?

"I want my animals," he thought, "and I want to listen to the earth. Shall I play at madness?" he thought, "or shall I play at losing consciousness? No, no! It would scare the child too much. Besides, it would spoil the scene between Gwendydd and this innocent sun worshipper. No, I must humour them and get ahead."

Had Neb been able to overhear these cogitations of his master he would have been furious with him. He would have regarded this consideration for himself as totally irrelevant; and as for the meeting between Gwendydd and her admirer it would have struck him as fantastic to give a thought to such side issues.

So the three of them moved on proceeded by their three shadows, and the counsellor had to make what he could of the golden sunlight before they reached the trunks of the taller trees. No, since his mother sent him forth from Caer Myrddin to the *llys* of Gortheyrn he had never seen at the end of October such a day of Saturn.

There was not one red leaf in sight, either on the ground or on the bushes. Every single one of them was pure gold.

“These are the colours of the earth,” he thought. “Brown and green and grey and gold, now as in the days of old; green and brown and gold and grey, today, tomorrow, yesterday!”

Every now and then a shower of golden leaves would flutter down, disturbed by this unusual wind, this wind that was now moving backwards, so it seemed to him, like backward-flowing Oceanus.

“Each leaf as it falls,” he thought, “must have its own sound to the creatures who hear it. They must fall like trees of different size to the ears of shrew mice, and like avalanches of heavier or of lighter rock to the apprehension of beetles — there!” And he himself heard the fall of one particular golden leaf which fluttered down on a slab of stone as yet uncovered by moss or lichen; and it seemed to him to make a thin scraping sound that had in it, for all its vegetable substance, an infinitely faint tinkle.

“Like a curl of gold leaf,” he thought, “slipping from a goldsmith’s fingers upon the lap of the image it’s about to cover!” Nor in the October noon and amid these intricacies of flickering sunlight was there room for anything but gold upon grey, gold upon green, gold upon brown.

And every leaf whether crinkled or withered, whether torn or twisted, whether crumpled or soft with sap, was a leaf of gold. Some were floating down from their place of growth, others were swaying and undulating on their stems. All were alive, all alert with meaning, like quivering scrolls of prophetic mystery unrolled by this east wind!

And if there was no trace of red or crimson or any hint of blood among the grey stones, green mosses, and brown trunks of earth, so there was no room in the sky, so dazzling were the sun's rays, for any translucent, deep-receding pools of blue. The sky was as blanched above their three heads and their three shadows by that blaze of golden light as the fallen branches beneath their feet were burnished and bronzed by its radiance!

Starting in the pit of his stomach and mounting up to the low, apelike, corrugated bar above his deep eye sockets, there now trembled a great shiver of exultation. This golden forest was *his* forest, of all the forests of the world it was his, *his* in a special, peculiar, and unique sense, for it was the virgin heart of those aboriginal forests of the western isles beyond the Pillars of Hercules to which the lost leaders of the Golden Age had fled, when with lust and lies and thunder Olympus conquered Othrys, and where they would remain hidden, while with thunder and love and lies Calvary conquered Olympus.

And beyond and beneath it all and round and about it was his mother the earth, Gaia Peloria, the immense, the enormous, the incalculable! She it was who had invented and found within herself that "vast jagged sickle of the element of adamant" with which he had dismembered the heavenly tyrant and caused the Cytherean to be born out of the crimsoned foam. The earth it was whose innumerable progeny of gods and men and beasts and birds and fishes and reptiles he had made happy and had caused to enjoy their first Golden Age.

But for life, for inhuman miserable life, to go on on any terms and to change perpetually and to take ever new forms, was dearer to her than for her progeny to enjoy themselves, free from bloody tyrants and false prophets and dying priests!

“O Mother, Mother! O deep, sweet, mysterious treacherous Mother! Can you feel this golden sunshine warming your heart through the virgin forest of your first worshippers and not hear us?”

But the lurching and swaying figure of Myrddin Wyllt, together with those of his impatient companions, was no longer in sunshine, no longer were there three shadows advancing in front of these three figures; for they had entered the last belt of towering pine trees that surrounded the tangled approaches to y Bychan’s Mound.

It would have been hard for Neb, had he known of the druidic hiding’ place under this same Mound, to refrain from puzzling and agitating his careful mind as to whether his master knew of it also. But Neb did not know of it, nor did Rhun; and if the counsellor knew of it, or *could* have known of it if he’d wanted to, his mood was such just then that the whole question of the druid was of less importance to him than that the wind had moved from southeast to east.

The counsellor was now lumbering forward between the trunks of the tall pines with the swaying motion of a drunken man. Gropingly and fumblingly he was trying to explain to himself the treachery of his first great mother. He felt as if he were walking like an upright ape or goat or even a fish with legs, upon her enormous and cavernous body, the body of Gaia *Apeirona,* “the earth without end.”

And what he wanted to say to her now was what he had always lacked the courage, or the unscrupulous recklessness, to say to his Caer Myrddin mother: “Take me as your child and be honest with me.” The golden leaves had ceased falling under the dark pines, but still the counsellor went on crying: “Tell me the secrets of your deep heart! What *is* your purpose in bearing tyrant after tyrant? What is your purpose in giving your progeny to this new triple despot of thunder and love and lies? And when *his* time, or *their* time is over, what new tyranny will you devise before which the unlucky creatures of your spawning must crouch and cringe?"

Both Rhun and Neb were watching him with anxiety as he lurched and lumbered forward. It crossed the latter's mind, as he watched those long arms swaying before the stooping figure and those great fingers closing and unclosing, that the counsellor might at any moment fall down upon his hands and knees, and scramble off on all fours, to meet his animals and be welcomed by them! Neb felt as if he already heard the gruntings and neighings and hissings and chatterings and squeakings and bellowings and howlings of the man's real mates as they crowded about him!

But all this while as the three of them came within a bowshot of y Bychan's Mound, the counsellor kept on swaying and heaving and groaning and stooping towards the earth; kept on thrusting his soul down into the earth; kept on crying to the earth that if only she would take him into her secrets and explain *why* she had supported the children of her son against her own children, and the children of her daughter against her own children, and *why* she had supported this new tyranny of law and love and lies against the freedom and enjoyment of all her children, he might be able to forgive her the wrong she had done him.

"You whispered to me how to overcome my father, and you whispered to my son how to overcome me, and you whispered to the Three-in-One how to overcome the Olympian. Have you grown too old, *Gaia Peloria,* grown too old, great Mother of gods and men, to whisper to me, your son, *for the second* time?"

Had but only one among the fourscore round, feathery, innocent eyes belonging to the triangular-shaped flock of wild geese, which at that moment was flying before the east wind towards the salt marshes of Venedotia, been endowed with the ocular vision of the most short-sighted of sea birds it would have seen, and no doubt supposed he was searching for food amid the forest rubble, the counsellor of the Emperor of Britain falling suddenly on his hands and knees and pressing his forehead into the earth. It would also have seen, probably a second or two before they were seen by the counsellor's two companions, a large and stealthy company of bowmen, with their bows drawn, their arrows tense on the taut strings ready to be released, encircling these three persons, encircling them ten or twenty deep and to the number of several hundreds.

The counsellor had fallen to the earth without a sound, and was now without a sound burying his low, broad, apelike forehead in the earth; and it was equally without a sound — at least without a sound audible to anything but the smaller four-footed creatures of the forest — that these bowmen with drawn bows had made their appearance.

Both Rhun and Neb felt for a second's pulsebeat that their last moment had come, and for a second quite independently of their minds their bodies prepared to meet it with indrawn breath, stiffened muscles, and contracted nerves. They both had seen the counsellor fall to the earth and bury his forehead in the rubble; but since he had been staggering along with down-swinging arms and drooping head for some while, they both took it for granted that he had neither seen nor foreseen the deadly ambush into which he had fallen.

As soon as their wits returned to them and they realized that the arrows directed towards their hearts were still firmly gripped by the archers' fingers and that some sort of command was evidently awaited, Rhun and Neb acted according to their different natures. After a quick glance round him, a glance that was enough to show that from those encircling arrowpoints, upon which here and there the golden rays of the sun glittered, there was not the smallest loophole of escape, Neb ap Digon bolted like a rabbit to his master's side and kneeling there tried desperately to arouse his attention.

Rhun on the other hand stood his ground, laid one hand on the hilt of his hunting knife, and thrusting the other deep into the breast of his tunic clutched tightly with his fingers his Phrygian cap. The various shocks he had received that day, the summons from Morfydd, the question in the boat about Brother John, his anger about the sacred honey, his momentary suspicion about the fair-haired little girl, that desperate embrace of Morfydd's and the biting kiss that had left his blood on her lips, his vague uneasy memories of the hours he'd spent with Gwendydd between the Syrian-scented brazier and the Cretan screen, his bewildered and helpless consciousness of himself as a blundering and idiotic fool, all these now receded into the background, merged together, and finally vanished away.

What remained was Rhun ap Gwrnach, the swiftest footed Brython in Edeyrnion, Rhun the son of Alarch ferch Iddawc, Rhun the sworn soldier of Mithras, Rhun at bay.

He thought quickly to himself: "If I leapt straight in upon them, slashing left and right with my knife, I might get through! The druid can hardly have poisoned *all* their arrows, and once through I'd bring those young horsemen on them before they'd finished with the conjurer and his devils!"

An inarticulate rage rose up in his heart and shook him from head to feet. Every drop of his Greek blood tingled with contempt for this rabblement of barbarians who were daring to hunt down a soldier of Mithras, a soldier of the great god of all the imperial legions of Rome from Persepolis to Damascus and from Damascus to Macedon, just as if he were a wolf or a wild boar!

And then directly before him the rank of this wild rabble of arrow shooters divided, parted to left and right, and through this gap two figures emerged, each of them holding something aloft, and each of them having an air of tremendous mystery and devastating authority.

The two men were about the same height and about the same build, neither tall nor short, neither plump nor lean. One was clad in a long grey robe of some very dirty weather-stained woollen material reaching almost to his feet. This one, though only guessed at by Rhun and Neb for neither had ever seen him, was Gogfran Derwydd; and it must have been only now, as he led the other through the underbrush, that the Derwydd had broken off the end of the small oak bough covered with fresh un-yellowing leaves which he held above his great shining bald head.

But it certainly wasn't only just now, but by premeditated intention, that when Minnawc Gorsant left his half-built church above the marketplace of the ancient *will* he had so lately rechristened "White Choir," he had brought with him that morning an enormous silver cross mounted on a long wooden pole.

"What does all this mean?" cried Rhun boldly; advancing towards the two men. "Is this a revolt against Einion ab Iddawc? Is this a revolt against the emperor and his counsellor? Or is it that these brave bandits with their hundreds of arrows pointing at two unarmed men and a boy have had orders from you two Christians to murder me as you murdered Morvran ap Brochvael? This *rabble"* — and he made a contemptuous gesture with his free hand at the crowd of bowmen, while he still clutched tightly the Phrygian cap under his tunic— "cannot be men of the forests of Edeyrnion. Gwyddyl-Ffichti they must be from the hills and the swamps! If you *are* men of Edeyrnion, unstring, I tell you, those bows of yours! Am I the son of Alarch ferch Iddawc ab Edeyrn for nothing? Unstring those bows, I tell you, or I'll have you hunted out of your caves and your swamps as our father Cunedda did the Gwyddylaid bandits of his day!"

His bold words were not without their effect. Neb, kneeling by his master's huge dark head which was still buried face down in the pine needles and moss, glancing quickly round noticed several of the less raggedly attired among their assailants looking dubiously at one another, while in several places he could see that the arrows were pointing downward and earthward.

The druid and the priest turned haughtily away from Rhun and moved towards the huddled figure of the counsellor.

"Is he ill? Is he conscious? Is it one of his fits?" Gogfran enquired of Neb.

To this question the counsellor's small servant esteemed it wisest to make no answer. He paused and stood up, opposing his small body between the two robed figures — for Minnawc Gorsant was wearing his longest and blackest mantle — and his master's buried and oblivious head.

"He is invoking Beelzebub," said the priest angrily. "And I thought you called for me" — here his fanatical emotion turned upon his companion— "to bear witness to Christ and the Holy Trinity before a large company of unbelievers."

Neb sucked in his lips with a long soundless interior whistle, and with his eye still on those alarming arrowpoints he noticed with indescribable relief that nearly all of them were now pointing to the earth.

"I summoned you to help me in exorcizing more than one devil," responded the Derwydd softly. "I wanted you to confront this man now on his knees before you, who has been for years corrupting the emperor by the help of Satan into serving his worst designs; but since it now appears that you have only to lift your cross above your head and this man bows down at your feet, I must not let you waste your time further with *him.*

"Many of these brave men, all faithful subjects of the Prince of Edeyrnion, though our hot-tempered Greek idolater here accuses them of being Gwyddyl-Ffichti, have for long craved to know exactly where my own humble interpretations of the tremendous mystery of the Blessed Trinity have — as of course they must have — fallen short of the divine truth. They will now therefore, with your holy permission, await us on the summit of that Mound of unhappy memories usually known as y Bychan's, where I will take upon myself to be the interpreter of their chief difficulties in regard to that Threefold Mystery which is, in my school of interpretation, represented by three divergent straight lines descending from one invisible point."

The "invisible point" at which Neb ap Digon was staring now was the point behind the burning blue eyes, set deep within their hollow sockets, of Minnawc Gorsant, as he stood with all his ten fingers passionately clasping to his breast the tall pole of his silver cross, the invisible point where the human mind, whether of a priest, or of a druid, or of an idolater, or even of an "imp of Satan" like Neb himself, makes its unaccountable and arbitrary decisions.

But Gogfran Derwydd ap Greidawl Derwydd, with such a sudden and startling movement that it made Rhun clap his hand once more to his knife hilt, whirled round several times on his heel till both his oak branch and his grey robe fluttered awkwardly about him as if they'd been a pair of immense wind-blown butterflies linked in uneasy love, and as he turned he stretched out his leafy branch to every quarter of the circle and cried aloud in a shrill voice: "To the Mound! To the Mound!"

The instantaneous obedience of all these wild-looking and undisciplined men was an amazement to Rhun. When the Derwydd had begun his dance of dismissal the wood was full of them; now there was not one!

But he had hardly time to assure himself that the men had really gone when the Derwydd came quickly towards him, carelessly switching the bushes as he came with his green branch, as if, its official work finished, it had become an ordinary stick such as anybody might pick up.

Rhun watched him as apprehensively as Neb was watching the priest, who simultaneously approaching the figure crouching on the ground had lifted up his cross to the full height of both his arms and was chanting: *"Illumina quaesumus Domine Deus tenebras nostras!"*

On reaching Rhun, who had dropped his right hand from the hilt of his knife but still kept his left hand within his tunic, the Derwydd with an air of casualness and complacency reversed his hold upon the branch; and taking it lightly by its leafy twigs proceeded to give the portion of Rhun's tunic beneath which the Phrygian cap was concealed several playful prods.

"Trusting in *him* still, eh, Rhun ap Gwrnach? Well, well! We never know! I'm not one myself to deny *any* possibility. The Persian was a great Being in his day and — well! There's always a chance— '*Nama, Nama, Sebesio!'* So you see, I'm not as ignorant as some of our colleagues in the Triadic Truth!"

And he nodded his bald head in the direction of the priest who, his chanting over, appeared to be invoking what was visible of the sky at the expense of the man at his feet.

Rhun had stared with bewilderment as he heard those mysterious syllables, uncontaminated in their unknown meaning and their unknown potency through the interminable histories of at least three buried civilizations. And in his bewilderment the fantastic idea crossed his mind:

"Suppose this Derwydd, in whom all the forest people believe, were himself one of the great 'participants' of the Mysteries?"

But no, that was a blasphemous and wicked thought, like his thought about the little girl!

"What's come over me," he said to himself, "that I've had such crazy thoughts in the last few days?"

But the druid was still speaking; and to Rhun's surprise, as he spoke, he casually and indifferently threw away the oak branch as if it were of no importance.

"I do not know, my young friend," he said, "any more than you do or than he does, or *he* either" — and he nodded once more with his bald head in the direction of the erect priest and the humped-up counsellor— "what will come of our contest tomorrow! Most curious, most fascinating, my young friend, will it be to see what *does* come of it! That's the whole interest of life, isn't it, for people like you and me, who are temperate in their desires and totally without ambition?

"But of this I can assure you: if the Arthurian mission is sent back by the way it came, the shrine of the great Mithras will suffer no hurt either from your people or mine. I shall see to that myself!"

For a second Rhun had the feeling that the man was about to whirl round in another dizzy circle as a confirmation of this amazing assurance, but he went off as casually as he'd come.

He left Rhun, however, so bewildered that not only did his right hand but the hand that had been clutching the Phrygian cap sink helplessly to his side, while the wild thought again slid, like a night owl's pellet in mid-noon, into the lake of his consciousness: "Suppose Gogfran Derwydd, unknown to the Three Aunties, unknown to any of these superstitious forest people and whose bald head has never been seen by either Porius or

Morfydd, should now be revealing himself — and to me alone — as a high and secret 'participant?'"

The priest, lowering his cross, turned at the other's approach and advanced to meet him.

"How marvellous it is," whispered the Derwydd eagerly, laying a couple of enthusiastic fingers on the clenched knuckles that supported the cross, "that there should be no escape for any of these people from the power of the Divine Triad! One of them," and he nodded towards Rhun, "seems to have been stuck to the earth by me; while this other" — and he jerked a contemptuous thumb at the counsellor— "seems to be calling upon the earth to hide him from you. But come, brother, come now, brother. Your congregation awaits you. They've no idea of the power the Holy Three have given you. They're waiting now on that accurst Mound. Who knows but the Mound itself may rise up beneath you to testify to the—"

The priest's nose was large and curiously shaped, and its nostrils so abnormally distended that they seemed created for the tracking down of devils, but his ears were less acute, and it was Neb, listening intently to this exultant whispering, who caught the queer words— "to testify to the triumph of *three* over *four!"* with which the Derwydd concluded.

But though he lost — and perhaps his colleague in the faith intended him to lose — the less solemn import of these final syllables, the priest must have obscurely divined the presence of some sort of frivolity upon the air, for his mouth hardened, and as the other propelled him away he flung from his burning blue eye at the bright noon sky an almost reproachful look, as if demanding of the eternal heavens why it was that their cause compelled a man to make use of such contemptible allies.

The same Christian diplomacy that had brought him to seek the druid was, however, strong enough to restrain him from striking that bald head a resounding blow with the handle of his cross; and it was not till just before they disappeared among the trees that he permitted his obscure irritation to find some sort of vent. Then indeed he did shake off the Derwydd's fingers, and swinging round and lifting the cross high in the air he shouted, *"Hagion! Tris Hagion! Tris Hagion!"*

They were no sooner out of sight than Rhun positively leapt and skipped out of the paralyzed condition into which his last "crazy idea" had plunged him; and if ever his Greek legs carried him swiftly, they carried him now, just as if it had been the last spurt of a deadly race, to the counsellor's side. His sense of relief was so imperative that he even seized Neb by the waist and began jumping him up and down like an infant.

But Neb had no mind, no heart, no feeling for anything but his friend. Once free, he didn't waste a curse or even a glance on their excited escort, but lying on the ground by the counsellor's side called out into his ear: "We must get back to the tent, Master! We must get back to the tent!"

Without the delay of a pulsebeat the crouching man staggered to his hands and feet, and thence with a few groaning ejaculations caused by the stiffness of his cramped muscles stood straight upright before them with his hand on Neb's shoulder.

"Neb!" he murmured.

"Yes, Master."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Yes, Master."

"From the earth?"

Neb was silent but his eyes shone with understanding.

Here Rhun intervened. "The Derwydd and the priest came upon us, my Lord Counsellor, with a mob of bowmen and—"

But Myrddin Wyllt made a gesture that dismissed this piece of information as totally irrelevant. “They shall enjoy themselves yet,” he murmured, “men and beasts and birds and all! As long as the earth remains there’s hope for us all. They shall let us alone at last, these gods and priests and druids and kings and rulers! I have heard her whisper. The enormous earth has spoken.”

CHAPTER XVI. The Youngest Princess

IF THE TWENTIETH OF OCTOBER in the year four hundred and ninety-nine was an eventful day for Rhun the son of Alarch the Fair, it was still more so for that dead lady's three aunts, the Modrybedd of Ogof-y-Gawr.

To do justice to the fanatical tribalism that had impelled the Aunties, at least the two elder of them, together with their devoted silentiary, the tight-lipped Erim, to embark on their "treachery" to the House of Cunedda and on their shameless negotiations with the invaders of Britain, it is necessary to remember that for thousands of years this curious matriarchal family had been accustomed to receive royal honours and royal privileges.

They had received these honours, even to the levying of tithes and taxes, though these were usually paid in kind rather than in silver or gold, from all the forest people who called themselves Venedotians and Ordovices.

It is necessary also to remember that centuries before the Brythons had appeared in Britain this struggle between the forest people and the Ffichtiaid had been going on, a struggle that had been intensified when the Gwyddylaid came on the scene and intermarried so easily, so freely, so promiscuously with the Ffichtiaid that it was hard not to believe in some sort of blood relationship between these two races. But the Brythons were totally different. *They* had no difficulty about intermarrying with the Romans, a thing that rarely happened in the case of the forest people and still more rarely in the case of either the Gwyddylaid or the Ffichtiaid.

Indeed the Brythons had enough in common with the Romans to justify, though not enough to prove, their common descent from such of the heroes of Troy as escaped from the Greeks. Both at any rate were Aryan; whereas, whatever the Gwyddyl-Ffichti may have been, the forest people's ancestors were non-Aryan and Iberian, first cousins to the Egyptians. And whereas with the Brythons the rule of descent was through men and from father to son, with the forest people it was always through women, and if by any chance a man became king, his successor was not *his* son but — if he had a sister — his sister's son.

Thus for generations upon generations the matriarchal mothers and grandmothers and sisters and aunts of the household of Ogof-y-Gawr had, we must not say "ruled" the land, for the forest people, on the strength of a tradition from Africa far older than Christianity, were at once anarchical and peaceful, but had guided and inspired their imaginations and had supported their druidic observances.

Nor had the half-royal House of Ogof-y-Gawr found any difficulty in procuring husbands and lovers to keep their inheritance alive and provide them with descendants. Nor had they lacked means — so strong was the matriarchal and communistic tradition among this people — to forestall any attempt on behalf of their temporary husbands and fathers to interrupt their feminine jurisdiction. At least, so it had been worked out until the marriage of the Princess Indeg to Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda, the apostate son of the giantess Creiddylad. From that day the influence of Mynydd-y-Gaer increased and the influence of Ogof-y-Gawr declined.

On the morning of which we speak, this day of Saturn the twentieth of October, the whole household of the Three Modrybedd, aunts of Einion and Brochvael and great-aunts of Porius, Rhun, and Morfydd, was disturbed throughout its "shadowy halls" by the arrival of their ambitious silentiary, Erim, bringing as an ambassador from the dreaded Colgrim himself none other than Gunhorst Sais, the crafty progenitor of Neb's little friend Gunta.

The news carried by this ambassador was indeed startling. Colgrim himself, he announced, followed by his Saeson army, had debouched westwards from Pengwern and was already advancing straight upon Edeyrnion which he hoped speedily to conquer on his way to Deganwy and Aberffraw and the harbours of Mona!

This agitating, and to Esyllt, the eldest auntie, this exultant news was received by the three ladies in accordance with their different characters; while for the reception of Gunhorst, their unknown liberator from Germania, each of the Modrybedd put on her favourite robe. Tonwen, the youngest, wore black; Erddud, the middle one, wore grey; and Esyllt, the eldest, wore a rich shade of bronze-tinted gold. Their dark-complexioned steward, Amreu, with his curly hair and ingratiating smile, was very soon going about among all the hungry retainers of Ogof-y-Gawr, bearing as delicately as possible the unwelcome news that the usual day's banquet had been postponed by Princess Esyllt's orders until the return of a special messenger recently despatched to Mynydd-y-Gaer.

This messenger was none other than Erim ab Uchtryd himself, for the arch-conspirator knew well, none better, that the essential thing at this juncture was to forestall all the unofficial rumours that were sure to be spreading through the countryside, and what he had in his mind was to appeal to Prince Einion to come himself to the Giant's Cave and discuss terms with Colgrim's envoy.

Knowing that the sympathies of the prince were rather with the Modrybedd and the forest people than with his own Romanized Brythons, the silentiary's private hope was that after crushing what the Derwydd's poisoned arrows might leave alive of the Arthurian horsemen, Colgrim and his Saxons would turn Edeyrnion and perhaps all Venedotia into a forest people's province, ruled ostensibly by the easygoing Einion but in reality by himself, the Modrybedd, and the druid.

Erim's patriotic imagination went even further. He had been telling himself stories lately as he lay on his back in bed, his formidable eyes fixed on the arched obscurity of the smoke-darkened roof, of a day in the future when Prince Medrawd, the emperor's heir, whose hostility to the Romanized Brythons was well known and between whom and Colgrim some sort of secret understanding was more than suspected, would allow Venedotia to become an independent forest people's kingdom from whose pastoral valleys and mountain uplands Romans and Brythons alike should be expelled.

The point at which in these impassioned imaginings Erim ab Uchtryd was wont to be overcome by sleep was when he tried to imagine the extermination of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti. He himself at the bottom of his heart detested the Gwyddyl-Ffichti more even than the Romans or the Brythons; but though his devouring eyes pierced the roof with a magnetic force disturbing to spiders and devastating to bats, the problem of these lawless people, children of the mingling of races *that ought never to have mingled,* born to follow bandits rather than statesmen, outlaws rather than lawgivers, and their own personal loves and hates rather than the sacred mysteries of ancestral traditions, seemed always to cause Erim such complexity of puzzled resentment that to escape from it he had to let the bats and spiders go free from his magnetic glare and close his eyes.

Amreu, himself the purest-blooded Iberian in the Modrybedd's whole retinue, used to assure his wife that Erim's mother was a Gwyddyl and his grandmother a Ffichti, and that both these ladies had run away from their husbands to join the camp followers of Iscovan y Bychan.

It was Auntie Tonwen to whose lot it fell to convey their Gaer letter to the silentiary in this same chamber in whose smoky arches there must have still hung among the cobwebs so many of his desperate dreams. Neither Auntie Esyllt, whose composition the letter was, nor Auntie Erddud, who actually transcribed it, would allow any man — not even their handsome dark steward — to place this document in the hands of Erim. Erim himself, so jealous were the princesses of their perilous prerogative, had been dismissed from this final act of dictation and transcription, though the plan of it had come, as most of their plans, from his brain alone.

It was the youngest auntie, therefore, who was also the thinnest, the most eccentric, and in a sense the least formidable of the three, who nearly a couple of hours after noon, with the wind steadily shifting from southeast to east, knocked lightly at Erim's door. He was awaiting the summons with drawn face and staring eyes, and at the sound he rushed to the door and dragging it open stood back to let her in.

But Princess Tonwen had no inclination to cross Erim's threshold. She disliked and distrusted him as profoundly as he disliked and distrusted the Gwyddyl-Ffichti. Besides, she wished to go out, to leave Ogof-y-Gawr for an hour or two, on an affair of her own. If their meal was to be postponed till Erim came back from Mynydd-y-Gaer — and Erim had not yet started — she had plenty of time for anything she might want to do.

She placed the precious letter in his hand, therefore, merely saying, "This is for you to take to the prince," and giving him a little grave bow and a faint, wan, wry smile left him there and went down the corridor.

Issuing from the main entrance she suddenly heard their steward's rich propitiatory voice and his gusts of over-exuberant laughter. These sounds were issuing from the midst of a group of persons who seemed anything but converted by his jovial arguments in favour of the indefinite postponing of their one substantial meal of the day.

There was a general movement to avoid seeing her as she went by. This was no new thing to the youngest princess who would be seventy-three that January. Indeed, it jumped with her own humour; for one of the chief necessities of her life, whether it were morning, noon, afternoon, or night, and most especially during the two twilights, was to feel invisible, to feel she could see everybody without being seen by anybody.

Her elder sister Esyllt, who though in her seventy-ninth year was the most energetic of the three, was far too occupied with the secret purposes of the Derwydd and the elaborate schemes of the silentiary to give any attention to such personal matters; but Erddud, who was only a couple of years older than Tonwen and was herself proud and fastidious, was completely puzzled. She could well understand Tonwen's avoidance of people; but why people should avoid Tonwen, and Erddud was forced to admit they did, was an insoluble mystery.

When Gunhorst, the Sais from Germania, was first presented to the youngest princess he took her for a holy woman who for religious reasons was starving herself and whose trances and ecstasies had already unsettled her mind. A little later in broken and halting conversation with Erddud — for Gunhorst, who had been carried off from his home as a child and had spent his boyhood in Gaul, knew more Latin than any of the Aunties — he expressed, not very tactfully, his amazement that she was an old lady. "I took her for your sister's daughter — *filia sororis,"* he explained with a glance at the formidable Esyllt.

It was no surprise to Erddud to recognize the incredulity with which a stranger to Ogof-y-Gawr learnt the age of the youngest princess. To herself it was an old story; for being next to her in age and more often with her than with Esyllt, she had grown accustomed to Tonwen's inability — or was it refusal? — to grow up.

She knew, of course, as indeed did all their populous household, that this light-footed, youthful-looking septuagenarian had only one real friend in all Edeyrnion; for both their nephews, different as they were from each other, were equally shy of Auntie Tonwen, and neither Porius nor Rhun, and still less their young playmate Morfydd, had made any attempt to break down the inscrutable barrier she threw around her.

The deep-natured, passionate Erddud, after deciding for the hundredth time that her sister might have been one of the "ice-maidens" of the tales that old Canna ferch Glam brought from the north, tales that lost nothing in the telling when they spread from the nursery of Ty Cerrig to the banquet hall of Ogof-y-Gawr, would always remind herself that no one had ever borne with her own tempestuous fits of temper and listened to her outpourings of unhappy passion as gently and tenderly as had Tonwen. Gently and tenderly — that was the point! — never sympathetically.

But at least Tonwen never pretended sympathy, as some people did. She treated you not only as if she weren't your sister but as if she were of a completely different species. She never looked down on you. On the contrary, she brought it about that *you* looked down on her.

But she made you feel her difference from you, and that's what everybody must feel. "Haven't I talked to her since we were both little?" Erddud would say to herself. "Many's the time I've sat with her over the red embers telling her everything on the nights they took Esyllt and me into the hall when Iddawc and Indeg came to the banquet. And it was never as if she looked down on me or despised me. And she always understood — understood without understanding!

"It was like talking to a wild seagull who'd come to live with you of its own accord and that looked up to you and wanted to understand you, but never *could* understand you, because of the barrier between it and you."

And if Erddud was puzzled by the youngest princess's attitude to herself, she was still more puzzled by Tonwen's attitude to her one and only intimate. The friendship between this odd couple had lasted so long that Erddud tried in vain to recall the particular moment when it began. This was made more difficult by the immense age of the friend in question.

"Well over a hundred," she would say to herself, "that man must be, for Mother used to take us to Ogof-yr-Avanc to visit him. He was certainly a great friend of Mother's and — Heaven knows — perhaps of Grandmother's too!"

And Erddud, time and again but always in vain, would try to imagine what went on between Cadawg ab Idris and her sister as they sat in his little boat on the river, he fishing and she dabbling her hands in the water. Did Tonwen listen to a constant stream of impassioned revelations from the old man such as she, Erddud, had so often poured into those docile ears? Or were these the sole occasions when this strange young-old creature unsealed the scroll of her own thoughts and pulled up the dam of her own feelings?

Erddud herself knew — none better — how the prehistoric matriarchal custom, grown through the ages into an absolute law, of their' semi-royal Berber descent, had turned the intimacy of a man's tenderness into something like a forbidden paradise that the women of their blood had to snatch for themselves in desperate and passionate secrecy. Their mother had snatched at it as the birth of the four of them proved; for it needs a man to beget a girl, whereas any boy can beget a boy.

How then had she allowed Indeg to break the tradition by which the matriarchs of Ogof-y-Gawr had for generations taken their man and dismissed their men? By Indeg's marriage with the son of Edeyrn ap Cunedda and Creiddylad y Gawres the matriarchy of Ogof-y-Gawr had been broken forever.

Had she not herself ever since he first grew up loved her nephew Brochvael with more than an auntie's love? If she had followed the old Berber tradition she would have seduced Brochvael and made him give her a child. She ought to have done this, and done it long before Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles came on the scene. And it was no Christian notion of the wickedness of incest that held her back; it was her own passion! She loved him too much to be able to do the thing with him that if she hadn't loved him she would certainly have done — and done with ease and joy, for she was a woman of hot blood — with some other man.

But her love had made her shy, had made her — God knows what — in his presence; and thus between the three of them, she from too great passion, Esyllt from too little, and Tonwen out of her insane indifference, they had handed over their traditions and would be soon handing over, for they were all so old, Ogof-y-Gawr itself to some descendant of Cunedda the Brython!

Yes, their very memory, together with every stick and stone of their ancient matriarchal abode, would soon become an appendage of Mynydd-y-Gaer. While such thoughts as these — and she brooded over them daily — hovered in the background of Erddud's attempt on this occasion to interpret Gunhorst's Gallic-Germanic Latin to her elder sister, her younger sister was approaching the dwelling of Cadawg ab Idris.

The peculiarity of Cadawg's small domain was that his goats, pigs, and chickens lived in much more imposing and a great deal more accessible quarters than he did himself. This also applied to the oats and clover which grew on his two acres of arable land, not to speak of the ferns and mosses and grasses and wild plants upon which his goats nourished themselves.

But Cadawg ab Idris himself lived in Ogof-yr-Avanc, or the Avanc's Cave, a place that may or may not have really been a refuge in the days of the first human intruders for the huge, scaly, lizardlike monster with long saurian head such as the old legends described.

This retreat was on the side of a rocky and somewhat precipitous hill about a mile to the north of Ogof-y-Gawr, a hill that descended by degrees and with less and less precipitancy to the narrow pastoral valley through which the Divine River flowed eastward towards Dinas Bran.

Cadawg Hen, or Cadawg the Old, had long ago made for himself, partly by cutting steps in the slate-rock and partly by driving in stakes and connecting them by ropes of twisted cord, a fairly easy descent and ascent to the Avanc's Cave; but by drawing these ropes with him into his retreat he made it difficult if not impossible for marauders to take him by surprise.

This precaution, as the youngest princess now hurriedly reminded the old man, was rendered especially advisable since with the arrival of Gunhorst the approach of the implacable Colgrim was declared near.

The light-footed, young-old lady, whose ceremonial black robe was now carried on her arm, and who appeared in the Cave's mouth in a long cream-coloured woollen tunic held at the waist by a thin silver chain, came upon her old friend in the act of washing his hands.

Nature had provided the Avanc's successor with a diminutive waterfall that descended from the roof on the western side of the entrance and ran in a conveniently narrow channel down the precipice below. But in addition to this, the original cataclysm that had created — perhaps to remain unchanged till the obliteration of the planet — this rock-bound chamber whose eastern and southern walls, extending solidly into a great mountain range, must have been scores of miles thick, had so arranged it that a narrow fissure in the western wall, reaching into the open air, made it unusual for the smoke from Cadawg Hen's hearth fire to cause him any inconvenience, even when the wooden planks with which he barricaded the entrance were all in position.

Cadawg the Old was just under six feet in height, but the unnatural number of years that had passed over him had given him a perceptible stoop. His head was wrinkled and rugged, its shape square rather than long, his eyes were small and very dark blue; while in spite of his snow-white beard which he took pains to keep neatly trimmed, the effect conveyed by his massive nose and low forehead was rather that of a warrior than of a philosophical hermit or religious recluse.

Morfydd ferch Brochvael, whose mother the Gwyddyles and whose nurse from the north had between them filled her head with demigods and heroes, thought of Cadawg Hen at once when she first heard tell of Pwyll Pen Annwn; nor did any old wife in Edeyrnion ever speak of him as a holy man or a sorcerer.

Canna ferch Glam used to assure Morfydd that it was not so much Pwyll Pen Annwn he resembled as Manawyddan fab Llyr; and that like Manawyddan he was one of the *lledyf unben* of these islands, in other words a great chieftain who'd been "disinherited" or had "gone awry."

At the sound of the visitor's light steps the old man began to speed up the ritualistic process of washing his hands; but as this ritual was complicated by the smallness of the bowl in which he caught the thinly descending water and also by the danger that a drop should fall into the sacred cauldron that stood hard by, and finally by the fact that the rough oatmeal with which he cleansed his fingers required a good deal of squeezing and kneading before it served its purpose, the youngest princess was upon him before he had finished.

“Don’t stop!” she cried at once. “We can talk while you wash.”

The massiye skull, which had an ageless look under its leathery wrinkled skin, was now turned humorously towards her.

“How pretty you look in your white flannel and silver belt! Put your robe down — hang it across that cord over there, if you want to keep it clean. Oh, never mind my vest! It’s been well washed. Put the robe on the top of it.”

Erddud would have been profoundly interested, perhaps even rendered a little jealous, by the easy familiarity with which her sister, looking decidedly prettier and much more animated than she usually did at Ogof-y-Gawr, treated this *lledyf unben,* or “disinherited chieftain.”

“Do you always wash your hands so carefully?” she enquired, from the back of the Cave, turning her head with a smile as she rearranged his shirt and stretched out her robe on the cord he had designated.

Cadawg’s bent back was the most grievous sign of his unusual age. With this exception he might have been described as active and even agile. He now swung round and faced her. But he made no motion to dry his hands. On the contrary, he continued rubbing his thin long fingers with the wet oatmeal and ostentatiously squeezing them and rinsing them and wringing them out.

“Don’t!” cried the youngest princess with genuine uneasiness. “You look like Pilate washing his hands!”

He turned back to his bowl and this time did not smile; and though he washed away all trace of the oatmeal, he refrained from drying his hands. This he would ordinarily have done with a piece of embroidered Syrian cloth that he kept for that purpose, though she had given it to him five years ago to serve as a tablecloth; but instead of touching this sumptuous if rather faded object he moved to the fire, now almost entirely composed of red embers and emitting hardly any smoke, and called her to him.

“Come and sit down for a moment, only for a moment, while I tell you about my hand-washing. We’ve got plenty of time.”

Had their emissary from the ferocious Colgrim, to whom little Gunta had applied the ambiguous title of “father” in her crucial talk with the fatherless Neb, chanced in the course of his dubious mission to follow the youngest princess into this Cave, he would undoubtedly have taken her for the old man’s daughter as she settled herself affectionately by his side on a seat in front of these smouldering logs and watched him extend towards them his wet hands.

“The truth, my dear, is” — and he looked from his long thin fingers to her face and back again to his fingers— “that you’ve caught me in the only ritual we’ve never shared.”

His visitor’s face expressed a frank uneasiness; and to her sister Erddud this intensity of interest and even of concern as she leant towards him would have been both startling and significant. Erddud would have interpreted it according to the language of her own heart. She would have taken for granted that the youngest of the Modrybedd was, for all her seventy years, in love with this man. But her interpretation would have been incorrect. The youngest princess and Cadawg Hen were not in Erddud’s passionate sense in love at all.

They were not so *now,* when the man was over a hundred and the woman was over seventy, and they had not been so *then* when the man was nearly seventy and the woman was a young girl.

The relation between them, however, whatever it may have been, had at any rate thus much common with love at first sight — and here it had an advantage over Erddud’s passion for the son of her sister — that it had been completely and irrevocably established at their first encounter and had gone on increasing for more than half a century.

“Has it anything to do with the cauldron?” Tonwen enquired; for she was, as her sister would no doubt have detected, unwilling to break the current of her friend’s confession by committing herself too quickly.

He bent forward still further towards the smouldering logs, advancing and withdrawing his fingers, as if he were playing a game with the scorching heat.

“No,” he replied in a low detached tone, as though even while he spoke his mind were occupied with something else, “no, not directly with the cauldron or with Ceridwen. It’s more to do with the cauldron of rebirth; though I suppose the great goddess is the power behind *that* too. But as we’ve only got the ‘wisdom’ one here, I have to make it also serve for the ‘rebirth’ one, the *pair dadeni.”* He paused and continued his queer game with the red logs, advancing and withdrawing his long fingers.

She watched him with still more concern. Then she rose. “Don’t you want the cauldron nearer?” she enquired timidly.

“It might be a good thing,” he murmured without turning round. “Can you move it?”

“Of course,” she said, and hurrying to the Cave’s entrance began dragging the great bronze receptacle towards the fire.

The sound of the thing’s scraping against the stone floor as with all the force of her thin arms she pulled it after her, walking backwards, did at last rouse him, and he leapt to his feet like a young man and taking it from her placed it close to the logs. Here, though it took all his strength to do so, he tipped the cauldron over on its side and tapped it several times against the ground. Then, setting it on its feet again, he picked up by their unburnt ends such of the smaller logs as were still burning and threw them into it. The contact with one another and with the belly of the cauldron evoked some bright sparks, a few little blue flames, and a considerable wisp of smoke.

This latter now began rising, undulant and pendulous but in a thin perpendicular column, straight towards the roof. The disinherited chieftain and the youngest princess made, each of them, an automatic inclination of the head.

This obeisance may have been — though had Tonwen's two nephews been discussing so curious a point the prince would probably have denied it — the very last gesture of disinterested worship that this once great Ordovician and Venedotian goddess was destined to receive upon the earth until the destruction of the earth itself!

But the man of over a hundred years of consciousness and the woman of over seventy sat down again by their diminished fire with the same spontaneous relief in emerging from religious solemnity into a more easy and perhaps wiser enjoyment of life as their predecessor, the monstrous Avanc itself, must often have felt when it turned its awestruck saurian eyes away from blinking at the mysterious omnipotent sun, and, giving its scaly tail a wanton twist, scrabbled off to look for its equally mysterious but somewhat less omnipotent mate.

"I hope," gasped the youngest princess, a little breathless from her effort with the cauldron, "that all the insects *did* fall out when you shook it just now."

"You don't believe in its power of rebirth for small creatures then — only for big ones! But I didn't only shake it, child; I *hit* it against the floor. I've dinted the rim of it ere now in saving a centipede."

"Well, I can see clearly enough" — and this time Tonwen's smile had something definitely mischievous in it— "that you're ready to do more for

Ceridwen and her cauldrons — whichever of the two it may be — than you are for our Blessed Mother, the Divine River."

"What on earth are you talking about? It was *you* who suggested the cauldron."

But the tone of his words was as tender as their pitch was abrupt; and so, though her smile flickered like a lamp in a doorway, it did not go out.

"You didn't sweep out the Cave this time," she said, with mock old-maidish severity, "before you made the cauldron smoke."

"Do you honestly want me to tell you why, my dear?" he retorted.

"Of course, Cadawg."

"Because when you cleaned this place out for me last week you scattered to the winds a precious bit of paper that's now lost forever."

"You're teasing me, Cadawg."

"Not at all! But fortunately I had learnt both versions — one was on one side of the paper and one on the other — by heart."

"What was it? But I know what you're doing. You're trying to put off telling me about washing your hands."

"No! The two things are connected, and both have a sort of connection with this smoke! It really does smell sacred today, don't you think so?"

The youngest princess *had* been thinking exactly that very thing as the smoke from Ceridwen's cauldron floated down like a half-visible spirit round their heads and crept into their nostrils.

There was a pause while sitting together in silence they inhaled this miraculously fragrant smoke. Then the old man burst out profanely enough. "The rebirth one," he said, "can't have smelt like this when it was resuscitating dead bodies!"

But Tonwen wasn't over seventy for nothing. Long past was the epoch when to follow her friend's realistic imaginations was a painful pleasure.

She returned to the subject.

“I must know the connection, Cadawg, between my sweeping away that bit of paper and you washing your hands like Pilate. Come now! What *was* written on it?”

“It’s in your nephew’s hand! Perhaps you don’t want to hear anything written by him.”

“Brochvael, I suppose you mean. Everybody’s ready to hear anything about the prince.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. When Brochvael came to ask my advice about his son, we talked for some while about death and he quoted a verse from Horace. This verse you shall hear if I can remember it. But do you mind if I walk up and down? I remember things easier when I’m not looking at anybody and am on the move.

Omnes eodem cogimur; omnium
Versatur uma; serius, ocius,
Sors exitura, et nos in aeternum
Exilium impositura cumbae.

This your nephew translated into a sort of Brythonic jingle which you certainly won’t want to hear.”

“But I do, I do!” protested the princess. “I’m no good at Latin. The only words I could follow were *‘urna’* and *‘exilium.’”*

“Well, listen then,” said the old man, “but don’t blame me if you don’t like it. He wrote it straight off, mark you, when I asked him. You ought to be proud of a man like that.”

“I know he’s travelled a great deal,” she said, but to herself she thought, “I must tell Erddud about this.”

But when she heard the faltering lines the old man now repeated, without even the measured solemnity in which he had intoned the original, she decided to conceal from her sister all reference to Brochvael's Brythonic version of the Roman acceptance of death.

Driven to it, all of us,
When shakes the urn for us;
Sooner or later, each in his turn.
For exile dolorous
Leaps out the lot for us;
And Charon's the boat for us
Without return.

He now sat down by her side again and she said to herself, "I can't stand it if there's silence between us now! It'll be a silence of terrible omen." And she murmured his name aloud.

"What is it, my friend?" he responded gently.

"I'm glad I swept that paper away! And I don't care what the connection is between Horace's urn and our cauldron. Let's leave all that, and you tell me, plain and outright, what this hand-washing of yours really means."

"All right. I will tell you. Only first of all I must confess that it only has to do with Ceridwen in so far as she inspires her servants with wisdom. Nor has it — but I can see you've guessed *that* already — anything more to do with our Blessed Mother Dyfrdwy than the fact of my having gone to her side with you for seventy years—"

"Not seventy, Cadawg! I never saw you till I was ten and I never got into your boat till I was fifteen!"

"Fifty-five years then. For fifty-five years you've worshipped the Mother of Rivers and I've held your hand! No, it's really nothing to do with either Ceridwen or with Dyfrdwy. They're women, like you, and have always been kind to me *of themselves,* without oblation, libation, prostration, or purification! So also, for the matter of that, has the goddess of the

Christians, the Mother of Jesus, been kind to me. No, this washing my hands with meal and water, and drying them with fire, is the only way I know of getting even with the most powerful of all the immortals, who is not a woman at all!"

The youngest of the princesses stared at the wrinkled profile beside her, upon which flickered up a faint rosy glow from the smouldering logs.

"Is he a god?" she asked.

Her companion nodded. "He's a god all right, but I won't tantalize you any more, my dear. I am talking about Death. It is for Death I wash my hands. It is in honour of Death, in praise of Death, in hope of Death, and to prepare for Death! And I wash them with meal and with water, and I dry them with fire, because life springs from the earth like grain and dissolves in the air like smoke and is sustained by water and fire."

"Cadawg," said Tonwen, gently pushing a blackened log towards the burning heap with the toe of her right foot; "Cadawg," she repeated, as she crossed her slender ankles and stretched them out towards the warmth, their white skin showing flushed by the red glow between the yellow straps of her deerskin sandals; "Cadawg, when you say this are you thinking of what happens to us after death?"

"After death? Certainly not! At least I don't think I am. We're men and women, not gods. All we know, all we feel, all we desire, all we imagine is bound up with our earthly life. No, no! When I wash my hands like Pilate, it has nothing to do with any 'after.' Nor is it only to worship and praise and honour Death; it is to get even with him! He hears nothing but curses from Christians, and if he feels that pagans only propitiate him because they're afraid of him he may leave us forever, and cease to bring our pain and grief and labour and sorrow to a blessed end.

"Death is the greatest of all the gods, for he alone makes life endurable. Think, little lady — but it is unthinkable — of the appalling horror of not to *die!* But with this great god, Death, only waiting to liberate us from all our pain, from all our fear, from all our misery and madness, we can lift up our hearts once more and enjoy what good moments are left us, of sun and earth and air and water, before the end comes!"

The youngest princess uncrossed her ankles, and drawing her feet beneath her and hugging her knees with her thin bare arms, jerked herself round, so that she could see more of her companion's face than his snow-white eyebrows, the humorous lines radiating from his eyes, and his carefully trimmed beard.

"But, dear friend," she said quickly, "your worship of Death doesn't explain the way you rinsed and scoured and wrung out your hands just now. What's your reason for doing that?"

At this he laid one of these same well-scoured hands upon her knees, and so closely were these latter pressed together, and so daintily had Nature moulded them, and so small an effect upon this daintiness had seventy-three Octobers been able to make, that his long fingers covered them both in a simultaneous grip. And for the first time since she'd entered the Avanc's Cave, her aged friend fairly chuckled.

"Of course I've a reason, and a very good one. Why do we instinctively kneel down when we pray? Answer me that, you little worshipper of Dyfrdwy, the Divine River! You're never quite happy till you're on your knees down there, whether at the bottom of my boat, or on the bank, or on the mud, or on those pebblestones she's washed so smooth and round! Well, I tell you, this rinsing of my hands is as instinctive as your kneeling! And I do it daily so as to impress on my mind the necessity of looking forward to Death. I rinse and scour my fingers, Princess, not only to cleanse them after feeding my goats and my pigs, and grubbing up stalks and leaves for boiling, but that my inmost self may remind itself to shake off as much as it can of the aching, itching, scrabbling, scratching, and snatching ‘I’ that has managed, through its vitality and cunning, to live as long as I’ve managed to live! Do you know what I say to myself as I wash my hands? I say, ‘Melt into fire, Cadawg! Melt into water, Cadawg! Melt into air, Cadawg!’”

Tonwen unclasped her hands from her knees and straightened her back, gazing at him with wide eyes. Then she gave her head a jerk; and raising her hands took out four large silver hairpins and deliberately loosened the Greek knot of her masses of white hair. With deft fingers she shook down this cloudy mass till it fell, whiter and more filmy than morning mist, over her thin shoulders.

The grey smoke from the cauldron and the red glow from the fire mingling with this white cloud gave it a strangely elemental appearance, not exactly unearthly — the red glow saved it from being that — nor exactly phantomlike, since through the undulating smoke the cloudless expanse of the eastern sky gave a reassuring human warmth to her cream-coloured tunic as the afternoon light reached her from the mouth of the Cave, but a look as if it were an insubstantial bond between a beautiful woman in a youthful tunic and all those non-human elements into which her friend, as he washed his hands, prayed to be dissolved.

“But you’ve left out the earth, Cadawg! What would Ceridwen say to that?”

The emotion in his eyes under his thick white eyebrows shot forth a flame that was almost savage.

“All that she’ll get of me,” he cried fiercely, “will be ashes! Let any of their priests only try to put Cadawg Hen under the earth and they’ll see what they’ll get! The maggots that’ll eat *me* will be nothing to the scorpions that'll plague them! Burnt I'll be, I tell you, heart of my heart! Burnt to ashes and a few white bones!"

She bent towards him, covering his arm with her hair, and stroked his hand. "Burnt you *shall* be, Cadawg, if Tonwen's still alive!"

At that they both, as if with a single thought, rose from their seat. Then in a cold, quiet voice, and speaking as if it were her duty to tell him but as if it affected neither of them very much, she revealed to him her eldest sister's treachery to the House of Cunedda, and how Erddud had joined in the betrayal, and how she herself had made no move to counter it.

She went on to reveal the result of Esyllt's and the Derwydd's scheming, and how that very day Gunhorst the Sais had arrived with the news that Colgrim was on the march from Pengwern to Edeyrnion, with the idea of possessing himself of Deganwy and the ports of Mona.

All this the old man received as if it were something happening in Gaul or Italy, something that scarcely affected the Avanc's Cave at all. But, the moment she ceased speaking, silence fell again, nor did they look at each other while she coiled up her hair in its accustomed Grecian knot, and while he searched vaguely about for one of the silver hairpins. Finally it was without a smile that she insisted on carrying her black ceremonial robe, so that he might carry his woodman's coat as well as his boar spear.

Even when they left the Cave and began to descend the precipice, preparatory to crossing the expanse of brushwood and bracken that separated the foothills of the mountain from the fields by the river, they both felt the same impulse not only to avoid looking back, but, though they were walking hand in hand, to keep their faces turned away from each other.

The path they took had been familiar to them for so long — indeed they had made it themselves by the pressure of their own feet — that as they approached an enormous ash tree which stretched out its remaining proportion of pale loose leaves from its hardly less pale upturned twigs, twigs that seemed to grope and fumble at the air as though belonging to a creature that was trying to grow roots out of its head so as to draw its sustenance from the very conduits of the clouds and to tap with the desperate suction of its tendrils the very sluices of the rain, each of them automatically went through their habitual motions of half a century's repetition.

These motions that by their constant recurrence, spring after spring and autumn after autumn, had come to partake of the monotone of mysterious satisfaction enjoyed by the subhuman and the inanimate, were simple enough.

He released her hand so that she could embrace that primeval tree, whose whole being was straining upwards like an imprisoned Titan, and she dropped her robe to the ground so that she could press her body against its grey trunk while her lips touched its indented bark.

On their arrival at the river the old man was the first to break this curious shyness about meeting each other's eyes that had fallen upon them since she did up her hair in the Cave.

Nor was it without a serious concern that he now looked at her face, for he felt she was behaving as she had never behaved before in all those fifty-five years.

Whether in wild gusts of wind and rain, or in freezing cold, or in overpowering snow, or in hot July sunshine, the youngest princess had always been driven to leave his side; driven to rush to the bank where his boat was fastened, driven to clamber into it without help, and once within it compelled to fall on her knees and to plunge her arms into the flowing water.

But today everything she did was done as if in a trance, or rather as if she were moving through a Cimmerian mist like the one through which this morning's grey light had first dawned.

Cadawg himself had something of the same feeling; but with his boar spear in his right hand and his woodman's coat over his left arm, fortified moreover by the consciousness of being clad in as stout a leather jerkin with bronze-embossed frontlet and as good a pair of oxhide leggings as any disinherited chieftain of his years could desire, he was confident that he could break the spell at any moment.

But he grew more and more uneasy as he watched his companion. She seemed to him to be moving through some dim Limbo of her own vision across the margin of which he could not pass, and towards an issue he could neither see nor imagine. He gave her his hand to help her into the boat and was startled by its coldness. And how strange it was to be helping her — of all women in the world — with this conventional modern politeness!

It had become a second nature with him, in this curious unimpassioned alliance of theirs to which Erddud would certainly have scrupled to give the name of "love," to regard his young friend — for what to *him* was seventy years? — as both more and less than human. He had come to associate her so closely with two magical and mysterious phenomena: with ash trees, the oldest of earthly trees, and with this divine water, that to treat her as an ordinary lady seemed a derogation.

Had he ever helped her into his boat since the day in her childhood when he had first shown it to her? He couldn't remember a single occasion when he had done such a thing. Always lighter footed than he, she would never wait for him to do it!

But this taking of her cold hand as she jumped into the boat brought chillily to his mind the poet's *"impositura cumbae,"* and he wished to the gods he could receive one warm familiar look from her, even if it were a grim and stoical one!

But once clear of the bank she didn’t even turn her face. Without impulse or eagerness, lost in some interior vision, she automatically obeyed her accustomed routine and kneeling in the bottom of the boat leant over its edge and plunged her bare arms into the water.

There beneath him now as of old was the oval head he knew so well! And how often, while enjoying its delicate contours and the shadowy curves of the neck that supported them, had his excited imagination, seeking an outlet for the overflowing of his exultant delight in her companionship, allowed itself to tease itself with some horrible image of that Grecian knot of filmy hair, grotesquely attached to some last remnant of withered skin and hanging over his boat’s gunwale from an eyeless and grinning skull! An immense wave of tenderness for this woman — still a *young* woman to him — surged up in this man of over a century of springs and autumns.

He couldn’t remember ever feeling as strong and formidable as he felt now. He’d use his woodman’s cloak as a shield with one hand while with the other he’d plunge his boar spear into the heart of the, strongest Gunhorst or Colgrim or treacherous Derwydd who might threaten her peace!

He glanced at the winding path, something between a cattle track and a market road, that followed the river from the foot of Mynydd-y-Gaer to the foot of Dinas Bran and there left it to thread its way through the thick forests between Llan Tysilio Sant and the ancient fortress of Pengwern.

“Once through those forests,” he thought, “and the Saxons will have an easy enough march. But what places for ambushing them! Down the slope from the Avanc’s Cave in front of them! Down the slope from Moel Gamlin behind them! Mother of Heaven! But what devil put it into Esyllt’s head to follow this mad Derwydd in destroying us all? Do they fancy for a minute, these women and these druids, that Colgrim will keep any terms they've offered him? I must go to the Gaer tonight. I must see the prince. Our only chance is to collect all our fighting men inside the Gaer and stand a siege, while we send messengers to Arthur. And tomorrow's the Feast. Tomorrow the druid's people hope to massacre every man and ravish every woman of Arthur's mission! *That* ought to bring him here anyway, Saxons or no Saxons, the moment he hears. But, Mother of Heaven! How *is* he to hear? By the time the rumour reaches him the Gaer will be starved out, Deganwy fallen, and the Saxons in Mona.

"I must go to the Gaer tonight. Brochvael will listen to me, and if the prince does what his aunt wants and meets Colgrim's man at their banquet, all the better! I shall have the field to myself. Euronwy anyway will be on my side, and the old Roman. Mother of Heaven! Before the prince gets back tonight we'll have all the *Gosgordd* with us, and then to hell with Colgrim! It's of Gortheyrn the prince is thinking! I know him. He hopes for another flaxen-haired Ronwen straight from Germania!"

The old man looked up the river path towards the Gaer and down the river path towards Dinas Bran. Then another thought entered his head and he struck the butt end of his boar spear against the ground.

"The prince is an unaccountable creature," he said to himself. "Blow hot, blow cold; blow east, blow west! And it *may* be that in his moods and his fancies, especially if he's had a few flagons of mead, he'll smell out the trick of these Saxon pirates, send his aunts to the devil, and man the walls himself! With him, as the Christians say of their god, all things are possible. But I shall go to the Gaer."

He stepped quietly into his boat, doing as he had done for a quarter of a century, done in fact ever since he had hammered into the bank his second pinewood stake after the old one had been rotted by the floods.

He pressed heavily with the palm of his left hand, impeded though it was by the cloak he carried, upon the rounded top of his post. He always had the same feeling when he did this as if he were embarking in some enchanted barge. He had trimmed this pinewood knob to make it smooth, and contact with his hand, as he came here daily to fish, had made it slippery as silk.

The youngest princess was still absorbed in her worship of the Divine Water. What she precisely did at these times, whether she prayed to this mother of rivers for definite things or whether she simply merged her human soul with the stream's superhuman one till she became as united with it as the Christian monks in the desert claimed to be united to *their* god, he had no idea; but he saw she had drawn her arms out of the water and was resting her chin upon her clenched fingers as her elbows rested on the edge of the boat. He could not, even yet, see her face, for her head was turned a little downstream; and where he stood now, which was upon the seat at the stern of the boat, while his fingers, the cloak dangling from his forearm, still rested on the familiar pine-post knob, he was facing the opposite bank.

It was while he paused like this, reluctant to disturb her by taking the final step into the body of the boat, that it was his destiny to experience one of the decisive moments of his long life. What practical decision he himself now made, as a result of this climax to more than a century of personal impressions, he would have been hard put to say; but the experience itself, though a concatenation of several minute particulars, was a clear and definite one.

And it was because of the strange exaltation which transported him as he balanced himself there that he did his utmost to prolong it. A reckless movement would not only destroy his friend's trance, it would bring to an end this supreme crisis of his own earthly days.

And so he continued staring at the opposite bank, between which and himself, in fact only a few yards from the boat, hovered wavering clouds of small midges whose wings, like minute sails, were conveying them, under the gentle pressure of the upstream wind, upon their own secret affairs. And while he stood there, moving nothing but the palm of his left hand as he adjusted his fingers for his greater comfort to the smooth knob and heard the creaking sighs of the rope that fastened the boat to the post, he saw a seagull that had been floating with alert upraised head on the river-current suddenly rise with a startled splash and flap off with heavy wings.

And the *lledyf unben,* or "disinherited chieftain," suddenly felt that long ago and far away this knob under his hand had been part of the balustrade of a flight of steps leading to an enchanted embarkation!

The cloud of gnats had also been a part of it. So had the startled seagull. But what part in it had that white profile propped on those thin arms? And into what waters did those steps lead? To Brochvael's *aeternum exilium?* "Eternal exile" was a paradoxical name for the exultant thrill of homesickness swallowed up in a sensation of homecoming too delicious for words.

Curse *it!* He'd begun to question, begun to analyze, begun to reason upon what that magical pinewood knob, cut, carried, and carved by himself, a bit of wood among other bits of wood but a veritable Hermes' wand for stealing secrets from the gods, was actually conveying to him through his hand and down his arm, across which hung his old woodman's cloak!

And with this accurst questioning the whole mystery began to fade. Anxiously he tried to cling to its departing skirts, which, unlike his now somewhat too obtrusive cloak, were vanishing moment by moment.

"O Divine Water!" he prayed in his heart. "Whither do those stairs lead? What does this happiness mean?"

He glanced up and down the river, then along the river road towards Mynydd-y-Gaer, then along the river road towards Dinas Bran. “Why do I keep feeling,” he said to himself, “that someone or something is coming?”

Once more he looked at the immobile figure of his friend, still on her knees, still gazing fixedly at the stream. Then, although his arm was aching a little and he felt a faint apprehension lest his precious cloak should slip down and fall between boat and bank, he set himself to recall other aspects of this sacred water that was now turning cold and grey under a darkening sky.

He saw it when the newly risen sun flickering through a clump of alders threw dazzling splashes of radiance upon it, radiance that floated, or seemed to float, upon a tide that had suddenly turned black. He saw, when the sun rode higher, innumerable little ripples, as the wind blew against the current, that were transformed when you looked more closely into delicately cupped shells with shadowy interstices and sparkling rims.

He saw the long trailing emerald green weeds at the bottom of the shallower places. He saw the mosses, hardly less brilliantly green, covering the limbs of the dead willows that had not yet grown indistinguishable from the mud or been washed down by the rain-swollen stream.

Grey as the autumn light had grown, it was still possible to make out the dark reflections in the river of the clump of alders eastward and of a large and ancient willow tree westward, bending low above the water.

Reflections and shadows! All his long years of earthly impressions — over a century of them! — were no more than that! But how often it had occurred to him to wonder and be puzzled at the difference between a reflection and a shadow; both of them the projection of a person or a beast or a bird or a tree, both of them dependent on the light in the sky, but one of them dependent on sun or moon or lamp! Could the moon reveal the reflection of anything but herself in the water? Could you see the shadow of a thing and its reflection at the same time?

No, he supposed not! First the shadow — if shadows were in evidence — and afterwards, by some change of position, the reflection. Or — he supposed this at least was possible — the shadow of one thing and the reflection of another, at the same instant. Mother of the Gods! How ignorant a man can be — and a man too who's lived for a whole century in touch with Nature — of the simplest things!

But a curse on his questions! Here he was staring at the dim reflection of that old willow tree, and still clinging obstinately to his pine knob, when — But he suddenly withdrew his hand, saved his cloak from slipping from his arm, and jumped down precipitously into the boat.

"Tonwen!" he cried.

She rose as quickly as he had descended, and all the reflections and shadows of his long life dissolved like mist in the comfort of seeing her smile. She was herself again. His ash tree nymph, his river maid, was once more his woman.

"Look, child!" he cried in intense excitement, pointing westward with his boar spear along the road to the Gaer. "Who's *that?* One of those Arthurian boys, is it? He's coming at a walking pace, but he's carrying a lance. Look! And there's a man with him, holding the horse by the bridle. It's a grey horse; no! dapple-grey, and a tall one too! And the man riding it is tall. But look, child! He sits so stiff and straight. He can't be one of Arthur's men. *They* are all young and sit so easy on their horses you'd think they were part of them! Real *horsemen* they are, my girl, like centaurs. I know, for I was one myself in my young days, though it wasn't with Arthur but with Gorthevyr Bendigeit, before Ronwen the Saesnes poisoned him and brought back Gortheyrn Gortheneu."

The youngest princess had come to his side now; but what the passionate Erddud would have made of the wistful ghost of a smile that flickered across her face, as she heard this Nestor-like boast from her old friend, is a doubtful question. But she too none the less was watching the approaching group with interest, though not with the intense excitement of the *lledyf unben.*

For him a whole century was fading away like smoke. He was staring at the first real battle lance he had seen since the death of Gorthevyr the Blessed. His heart was crying aloud within him, to all the powers of air and sky, that once more before he died he might be mounted on such a horse and hold such a lance in his hand!

CHAPTER XVII. Amherawdr Arthur

NEARER AND NEARER to the two friends standing in the boat came the great dapple-grey horse with its towering rider. The man who walked by the rider's side now showed himself to be at the horse's head and with a hand on the animal's bridle rein.

"What in the name of Earth's Mother," gasped the old chieftain, "is the matter with the man? He sits as stiff as if any moment he might fall off! Is he hurt? Is he dead? Who on earth is he?"

They both gazed in silence for some minutes. Then the youngest princess cried out, "It's Einion himself! It's the prince! Let's go and meet him."

Cadawg helped her out of the boat, and they advanced into the middle of the path. Their sudden appearance, for the willow tree on the bank had hitherto concealed them, brought horse, rider, and man to an abrupt pause.

But recognition soon followed. The prince raised his great lance to the full height of his long arm, and on they came again.

"Einion!"

"Auntie Tonwen!"

And then the prince, with a friendly gesture of salutation that almost unseated him, turned to Cadawg. *"Cressaw Duw wrthyt, eneit!* The greeting of heaven be unto thee, my soul!"

The old man bowed ceremoniously. Then he enquired in the same modern speech, wherein the Brythonic words were arranged according to the ancient Iberian manner of the forest people: *"Arglwydd, pa gerdet yssyd arnat ti?* My Lord, whither do you travel?"

"Ha, *lledyf unben,"* responded the prince, "Ha, noble Incognito! I'll answer your question and Auntie Tonwen's too, though hers is unspoken. Only I must get off this beast first. Here! Take the lance, Owain Pen Uchel, and hold steady!"

Einion looked such a magnificent figure of a man, as he now paused for a second before plunging into the effort of dismounting, that the thought came to both Cadawg and Tonwen, as it had already come to Owain Pen Uchel, that it was a thousand pities he was so helpless a horseman.

His long legs were crisscrossed by golden-fringed straps of deerskin; his flexible sandals were embossed with gold; his warm perfectly fitting tunic of dusky leather was tightened at the waist by a belt of massive golden links, among which had been inserted, above both his hips, pierced leather holsters, from which hung on one side a long Gaulish sword and from the other a large bejewelled dagger. His soft yet rugged features, between the greying yellow hair of his trimmed beard and his eagle-feathered cap of rare oxskin, were illuminated by his amusement at this fortunate encounter.

"I've come straight from the Gaer," he began, the instant his long legs had resumed their natural dignity on the motionless earth, "and I was coming to see *you,* my Lord Cadawg." Here he turned to Owain Pen Uchel and with the' utmost courtesy begged him, as if it were a special favour he were asking, to take both horse and lance a little further down the path. "I can't talk freely to the *lledyf unben,* my dear lad, with this terrifying animal and this symbol of imperial power listening to every word. I'll tell *you,* of course, all we've said to each other later on, and all we decide."

Owain Pen Uchel looked a little disappointed and a little disapproving, but it did not appear that his personal feelings were hurt, for he nodded at the prince and walking down the road till he was well out of hearing, sat down on a lichen-covered stone, laid the lance beside him, and let the horse crop what it could.

"Come with us into my boat, my Lord, if that pleases *you,* Princess?" And the old man glanced enquiringly at his friend.

But Tonwen addressed her nephew. "Better tell him everything at once," she said, "He doesn't like delay, and I've kept him too long down here as it is."

The prince obeyed her and turning to the old man, *"pennaf neges vu ymi, keissaw dy welet ti,"* he said, "my first quest was to seek you yourself."

The old man looked what he felt, extremely uneasy. "Tell him in the fewest possible words, Einion," interposed the youngest princess. "He never likes being flattered, and he prefers to know the worst."

"How do you know there *is* a worst, Auntie Tonwen?" But watching her as he spoke he saw that this was no moment for levity; and, much more easily than she could have believed possible in him, he suddenly became so serious that if his wife had been present she would have thought he had gone mad or was on the point of falling dead at their feet.

"In the first place I have to announce to you, *lledyf unben,* that I have had a letter about you from the emperor."

The youngest princess moved close up to her aged friend.

"What emperor?" enquired the old man hoarsely, and the princess began comparing the pointed beards of the two men that now faced each other across the magnetic tension of this dramatic moment, the golden one touched with grey and the silver one with the whiteness of snow, but both so carefully cut.

"My soul," said the prince gently, "you know, as I do, there are only two emperors in the world, now that the Goths rule in Rome; and I have no correspondence with Anastasius. The Emperor Arthur's letter begins by—"

"I've never recognized Arthur as emperor!" broke in the other, not so much angrily as petulantly.

But the prince went on without heeding. "I tell you, *lledyf unben,* the man's a military genius. Porius Manlius assures me he writes in the manner of Julius Caesar, Ul-Kessar as we call him, all pithy and to the point, and talking of himself as if he were somebody else, and he begins by explaining the precise position of the invaders and of his own dispositions in defence of Ynys Prydein."

The youngest princess pressed so close now to the disinherited chief that the prince, who had his back to the west, couldn't detect the thinnest slit of eastern sky between them. But though he wondered a little at this proximity, he had — at least for tonight — to attend to business, so he threw into his countenance an ambassadorial expression in which nothing but the exaggerated seriousness betrayed his characteristic irony.

But the emperor's operational dispositions, much as they may have resembled those of Ul-Kessar, failed to absorb at that critical moment all Cadawg's attention.

"What's the use," he asked himself, "of being more than a hundred years old if I can't take news, even heartburning news, like a man? Down, down with you, heart! Stop that heaving and throbbing there, you devil in the pit of my old stomach!"

He surveyed the stately personage in front of him, who was clearly well pleased with himself for being able to explain just how the Arthurian legions were able to gather both from the west and from the east at the same time, and begin marching simultaneously upon Mons Badonicus in the southwest and Mona in the north-west, and it occurred to him that had the prince been facing the rising sun instead of having the sinking one at his back, he would have looked like an image of gold. From the thought of gold the mind of the *lledyf unben* was directed by the chance of association back to the thought of the golden spangles of the sunrise that so often he'd seen transform the tide of the sacred river into a moving mirror of dazzlements; dazzlements that so soon became pools of liquid gold floating upon water that was as black as jet.

The old man's mind now clung fixedly to this image of golden fire floating calm and solitary upon black water, and he resolved to defy what the world deified, and to deify what the world despised. "Not for nothing," so the old warrior's thoughts heaved up from the depths of his being, "have I the blood of all the ancient races; the blood of the Cewri, the blood of the forest people, the blood of the Ffichtiaid, the blood of the Gwyddylaid, and not one drop of the blood of these Brythons and Romans. What fate and destiny lay on me I can endure, and on the tides of destruction I can ride!"

His mind came back with a leap when he caught the word "Pengwern." *What* was it this image of gold was saying? The heart of the youngest princess must have leapt also, for he felt her fingers laid on his wrist. He now listened with his whole nature, while the fingers on his wrist remained deathly still.

"The dispositions made as I have described," went on the prince, "the emperor writes that he himself with a considerable body of horse, led by some of his most skilful e*quites,* is advancing rapidly, riding by night as well as by day, to make a surprise attack upon Colgrim, of whose sudden swing to the west he has just heard.

"He can hardly know as much as *we* know, with this damned Gunhorst already in our midst and Colgrim halfway, but it's amazing how much he knows; and it looks to me as if Ul-Kessar's ghost had better look to its laurels! The emperor says he doesn't think, from what his messengers tell him, that he has any chance of reaching us before Colgrim reaches us; but what he wants from us is news of Colgrim. Now what he doesn't know — and the old Afagddu I sent with Medrawd has no chance of reaching him, going the way they are — is that our own forest people have turned against his mission and surrounded it, while our vagabond Derwydd, with the help of Auntie Tonwen's sisters, has opened negotiations with Colgrim.

"But the strange thing, my dear *lledyf unben,* the strange thing, my pretty Auntie" — here the prince, unable to keep up his ambassadorial tone and yet resolved not to resort to irony, fell into a vein of almost maudlin geniality— "is that the emperor takes for granted that all these handsome young equites of his mission are unavailable as messengers! Does he suppose they've done their work, got hold of my Hercules of a son and half my Gosgordd, and already departed by the way they came?

"Taking this for granted — and I swear to you, my dear friends, I'm almost tempted myself to believe that he communicates with this precious counsellor of his in some unnatural manner — what does our modern Ul-Kessar do? He implores me to call upon you, Cadawg, to join him at Pengwern and there inform him in detail of what's happening up here, so that he can take measures accordingly."

Here the prince stopped. He was surprised by the calm with which his hearers regarded him in the now gathering dusk. He could not see that beneath the ceremonial robe she carried on *her* arm, and the woodman's cloak he carried on *his* arm, their fingers were now tightly clasped together.

"And so," continued the prince, this time in a more guarded tone as if even *his* assurance had begun to require the support of a certain restraint, "we come to the end of the emperor's letter. Here he reveals at last to us, most honoured *lledyf unben*, at least he reveals to me, for Auntie Tonwen is no doubt already aware of it, the real identity of the hero to whom, under the name of Cadawg, my father Iddawc offered a sanctuary in the Cave of the Avanc.

"I now know — what naturally nobody but myself and the translator of this letter knows — that you, *unben,* are in reality a son of the immortal Gorthevyr Bendigeit ap Gortheyrn, whom Ronwen the Saesnes slew by poison. Were you really aware, Auntie Tonwen, all this while, of our great unknown's identity?"

This abrupt question addressed to his aunt was due to Einion's incredibly quick and subtly imaginative tact, for he saw that the old man was wrestling with himself under the shock of what had been said.

Cadawg was indeed desperately forcing himself to feel nothing, see nothing, think of nothing, save the liquid super-gold of so many Edeyrnion dawns floating over the jet-black river. "Fire on water — fire on water — fire on water — fire on water!" This was the image, this was the invocation, this was the secret, these were the magic words to keep events in their place and the soul of a living man in its place.

So though it was impossible to conceal from the observant personage in front of him that what he had heard had the effect of making his shoulders bend lower, his pulses beat faster, his eyes grow less clear, and his head feel dizzy; yet by the process of visualizing those floating sun pools upon the black tide, it was almost at once that he was able to speak quite calmly.

"And so Arthur will dispense with my homage if I serve him as a timely messenger? Correct me, Prince, if I mistake the drift of his communication."

"You do not mistake it, *unben,"* returned the prince, "but if he has revealed to his whole imperial court what he has revealed in this letter, for all Britain knows that Gorthevyr the Blessed is our greatest warrior since Bendigeitfran, you'll receive, unben, such honour, such *anrhydedd,* from these people as... as would turn a frivolous head like mine completely; besides—”

He stopped suddenly for the white beard before him was now lowered against the old man’s chest, while the woman’s profile, turned towards it, had become like an image in white marble.

“Between me and God! *Y rof i a Duw!”* he cried to himself, “I struck a wrong note there! Be careful now, Master, or you’ll spoil it all!”

But as can happen with the politest person in the world when he is considerate out of general good nature rather than from actual fellow feeling, the prince, from being too frivolous and familiar, now became too serious and formal.

“Yes, *unben,”* he protested, “you’ll have honour from Gwenhwyvar and all her maidens, and from Garanwyn the son of Kai, and from the great Kai himself, and from Morvudd the daughter of Uryen Rheged, and from Clydno the father of Cynan, and from Cynan himself. All these will honour thee, *unben,* both for thine own sake and for the sake of Gorthevyr the Blessed, saviour of Ynys Prydein! And there will be no question, *unben,* of doing homage. Arthur will embrace the son of Gorthevyr like an equal.

“But I’m sure my aunt thinks I’m guilty of a wretched discourtesy in not paying due honour to the son of Gorthevyr myself, now that I know him for what he is.”

Having thus spoken, the prince gravely and ceremoniously sank upon his knees, and snatching at the knuckles of the old man’s only available hand pressed upon them a reverential kiss. This gesture, which a century earlier would have been offered to none save a crowned king, broke down what remained of the old man’s dignified restraint.

A sound like the creaking of one of the stunted pines in front of the Avanc’s Cave reached the ears of the youngest princess, and to the astonishment of her nephew who was on his feet now, courteous and discreet as ever, it wasn't against him that her unaccountable anger broke forth but against the son of Gorthevyr himself. In fact she jerked the old man's arm up and down so violently that his woodman's cloak fell to the ground, and if it had not been that it was caught in the folds of the robe she was herself carrying, his boar spear would have fallen too.

"Cadawg! Cadawg! I'm ashamed of you! Don't you know what Einion is? He's playing a part all the time! He cares for nothing and nobody but his own pleasures! We all know him here, and none of us takes him seriously. The Gaer is ruled by Euronwy and the forest by Esyllt. Einion would kneel before *you* today, before Arthur tomorrow, before Colgrim on Monday! I tell you, he's laughing at us both. He's despising us both. He's—"

But the prince moved her gently aside, laid his hand on the old man's shoulder, and, as the latter lifted his head, looked straight into his eyes.

And there passed between them as their eyes met — as much from the contact of male body with male body as from what they caught in each other's glance — a deep masculine understanding.

"She is my woman," the old man's look said. "They say you don't live with *yours* and they say you've had so many that it's like having none. But there it is! Conventions, symbols, logic, ritual, reason, even *words* themselves, are nothing to them! They live by some wild, free, natural reality underneath these things, the very reality perhaps from which we protect ourselves by these laws and rules and traditions and rituals."

"I too would have struggled, *unben,"* the prince's look said, "just as you Struggled, to give no sign. But we are weak when it's a matter of *anrhydedd!* I should have given way long before you did! But you and Arthur will understand each other; and you and I know that it will be neither

Euronwy at the Gaer nor Esyllt in the forest who'll deal with Colgrim and decide the future of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy."

Thus by a wordless process of masculine magnetism, that might have been passing between the point of the white beard and the point of the golden beard, did these two warriors take refuge, the one in the wisdom of his inheritance, and the other of his disinheritance, from the mysterious anger of the youngest princess.

Moving away from them now the prince called to Owain Pen Uchel to bring the horse. But before the man had lifted the lance from the ground or made a move to secure the horse's bridle, the princess, who had been exchanging whispers with her companion, flung her robe round her shoulders in a manner roughly like that of a clumsily arranged toga and announced her intention of accompanying the *lledyf unben.*

Nothing had ever caused Auntie Tonwen as much human irritation as her relations with her eldest nephew. She had always liked Brochvael and would have seen more of him if she hadn't feared the jealousy of Erddud; but Einion's everlasting irony, his perpetual light-of-loves, his vaunted detachment from all responsibility, his neglect — though she had no interest in the woman — of the Lady of the Gaer, combined with a secret sense at the back of her mind that he regarded his youngest aunt as absurdly deficient in dignity and decorum, had at last begun to create in her an attitude so hostile that in many things it became totally unjust and unfair. It was unfair now. Her astonishment was overwhelming when she discovered that in place of being horrified at what she assumed he would regard as a silly, hysterical, and even insane caprice, he was delighted at the idea.

"It'll just make the whole difference," he declared emphatically. "You'll be able to announce the *unben's* real rank much better than he could do it for himself. What forest people you meet between Tysilio Sant and

Pengwern will acknowledge you as their princess, as they'd never acknowledge any Brython. And when you meet the emperor you'll be able as the *unben's* friend to say a good word for Esyllt, and possibly even for the Derwydd, who at the Feast tomorrow may be tempted — Body of God! I don't know what he *mayn't* be tempted to do!"

While the prince was thus astonishing his aunt by applauding a project which he had secretly been wishing could be brought to pass ever since he had found them there together, a rich, soft thudding of hooves, whose very sound suggested the smell of river mud and aromatic water mint, indicated the arrival of Owain Pen Uchel. Lightly he jumped from the tall steed's back and watched while the animal nuzzled up to Tonwen in easy and familiar response to her caress.

"The mare's taken a liking to you, Princess," he said, "an unusual thing for her. She came to us from Deganwy, where they hoped she'd be quiet enough for the boy-prince, but he was scared of her height, being a small child himself, and she threw him twice, for she never took to him, and none of the Deganwy ladies took to *her;* so as I didn't want her to leave the House of Cunedda and didn't want to leave it myself, I brought her to the Ford of Mithras, I mean to the Gaer of Corwen."

"What's her name?" enquired the youngest princess.

Owain Pen Uchel looked sharply at her. Then he said with obvious nervousness and hesitation: "I call her Brithlas," he said, "but since both my parents — as they know well at Deganwy — were forest people, I believe in keeping horses, and children too, *unnamed* until they win names for themselves. My parents, for instance, called me Owain for convenience, as I call her" — and he patted the mare who took not the smallest notice of him — "Brithlas, but when I was the first to climb—"

“Pardon me, *eneit,* forgive me, good soul,” cried the disinherited chief. “Your mare must get us past Tysilio Sant and well into the forest before the twilight’s gone, for the moon’s not yet nearly full and we might tumble into the scouts of the Saeson. But here — before we’re off — I’d like to give you this little spear of mine, as a memento.”

Owain’s eyes shone and he received the gift with a respectful obeisance.

“And now,” said Cadawg, “may I lift you up, Lady?”

The prince stepped back politely. But as Homer, and indeed as the Henog of Dyfed might have expressed it, the youngest princess “took other counsel.”

“You’d better put that on, Cadawg” — and she touched the cloak on his arm— “the wind’s moved east and we’ll be facing it.”

With a certain peevish impatience the old man obeyed her. Then, as if fifty years of planting oats and feeding pigs at the Avanc’s Cave had been the passing of a summer’s day, he lifted her on the mare’s rump and with the help of Owain’s bent knee mounted in front.

“Hold fast round my waist, Lady! I’ll want my hands free.”

The youngest princess clasped him firmly with both arms.

“Now the lance!” he cried to Owain, “and Brithlas, I can promise you, will soon find a name for herself.”

He gathered up the reins firmly and swung the lance into position with unexpected ease. A gleam of intense pleasure crossed his old face.

“Farewell, Prince!” he cried, “and if I don’t serve the House of Cunedda well for all it has done for me, may Ynys Prydein disinherit me forever!”

“Farewell, *unben!”* replied the other; but Tonwen, freeing one of her arms and half turning, called her nephew to her side, while Cadawg arrested the mare’s leap forward.

“Are you going to the banquet up there to meet the Sais?” she asked in a low voice.

Einion nodded. “I shall do everything I can, short of killing the fellow, to delay his proceedings and hold up Colgrim, but you can tell Arthur that at a pinch we can hold the Gaer till help comes. You can tell him too — though all that will be over before you see him — that I’ll do my best for his counsellor as I did for his nephew; but all I can *promise,* tell him, is to hold the Gaer till help comes.”

He was silent, but he felt that his aunt had something else to say, and that she found difficulty in saying it. When she spoke at last it was to do what she had never done in her whole life before. She asked advice of the man she held so frivolous and so false.

“What message shall I send to my sisters? They’ll be wondering why I’m not at the banquet.”

“Will you leave all that to me, Auntie Tonwen?”

She looked at him gravely. “You’re sure to be there?”

“I’m going straight there now! Do I usually dress up like this?”

“Very well. Tell them what you like. Goodbye, Einion!”

She clasped her arms once more round as much of her friend as she could get hold of, now that his gaunt frame was thickened by the leather coat; but though the coat smelt as if its wearer never carried anything on his back but dead foxes, the youngest princess felt happier than she had ever felt in her life.

The touch of her arms made the son of Gorthevyr know that all was well, and with a bound the dapple-grey sprang forward. It was certainly a good thing that she’d made him put on his fox-smelling coat, and a good thing too, even with the protection of his shoulders, she had twisted her great robe of ceremony so closely round herself. The wind on that day of Saturn, the twentieth of October, had moved from southeast to due east, and it smote cuttingly against their faces as they rode. It was not equally strong, however, all the way to the domain of Tysilio Sant.

Indeed there were times, as they followed the Divine River by the winding road she had made for herself between precipitous woods and ferny slopes and inaccessible rocky peaks, when they were in comparative shelter. But they were both thankful when they reached the hostelry of the saint. It was among a group of huts clustered round what had been the cell of the converted warrior that they found this resting place. It had a homely and natural, if a secular, origin.

A rich miller of the neighbourhood, anxious to leave his millstone to his newly married son, had been inspired by the idea of establishing an inn for the lodging and refreshment of pilgrims to the new saint's shrine; and his project had flourished.

Here Cadawg pulled up Brithlas and helped the lady to dismount. While she entered the inn he dutifully proceeded, for he had caught something of Owain of the High Peak's solicitude for the nameless mare, to certain new sheds at the back of the establishment where he hoped to find assistance. Here he waited patiently, talking to Brithlas at the entrance to a most promising-looking 'empty stall.

"You and I must win place and name tonight, old girl! It's tonight or never, I fancy, for us twain! Yes, old lady, it's our night, this night! Mother of Heaven! and I believe you understand every word! A name for the nameless and a place for the *lledyf;* that's what it is, aye?"

His patience was rewarded at last, for not only one man but several men came rushing forth. From kitchen, scullery, bakehouse, and cellar they came to look after the horse of the escort of Princess Tonwen.

When he returned at last to the front of the inn, satisfied that the needs of a rare creature like Brithlas were understood at the miller's inn, he found that the quality of the still rarer creature Brithlas had carried had also been comprehended by these wise exploiters of the sanctity of Tysilio.

Never had the youngest princess looked more beautiful, or indeed more royal, as she did with her white hair combed and caught in its Greek knot, and her great robe of ceremony trailing at her feet, as she sat in a chair of carved oakwood black with age, by a blazing fire.

It had been the excitement of her arrival, for not a man or woman of the forest people's blood from Castrum Deva to Castrum Uriconium, and even as far south as Dinas Llyr, but knew the Three Princesses of Ogof-y-Gawr.

As to the identity of her aged companion, the whole place was in an uproar of guesses. Some said he was Myrddin Wyllt; others that he was the famous Kai, bosom friend and chief seneschal of the emperor; others even hazarded the conjecture that he was Gortheyrn Gortheneu himself, the treacherous lover of Ronwen Saesnes, come back to life! It was this last guess that caused the princess and the unknown *unben* to glance at each other with most significance, as indeed was natural, considering that the long-lived traitor in question was no other than the father of the Blessed Gorthevyr, and therefore Cadawg's grandfather.

While they were refreshing themselves, the old man with meat and mead, and his companion with oatcakes and wine, the hubbub in the little community caused by their arrival reached its climax. About a dozen men, all armed with javelins and bows and arrows, flung themselves and their rattling arms at the lady's feet and with a clamour of excited voices offered to follow her against Sais, or Brython, or Gwyddyl, or Ffichti, or even against the dreaded Rhufeinwyr, or "Romans!"

It was after the youngest princess had dismissed them with the sort of royal dismissal they understood best and had managed, by the rapid opening of a little wallet inside her cream-coloured tunic, and by the bestowal upon each of a small silver coin with the head of Constantine upon it, to make her rejection of their offer seem to their glowing hearts as its happiest acceptance, that the mysterious silver-bearded *unben* at her side uttered the words that were so long remembered among the miller's inn people, and so often repeated to strangers and pilgrims at the shrine of Tysilio Sant.

"Three things together," he said, "are unconquerable — an old man with a good lance, a young horse with a good back, a beautiful lady with a good seat, but 'tis a fourth thing that gives the victory — good means to a good end!"

And it was after the echoing silence that followed this declaration by the mysterious *lledyf unben* as to what alone in this confused world brings lasting victory, that the old man, now risen to his feet and gazing sadly at their excited faces, told them the bad news of the approach of Colgrim's savage army.

"You'd better keep," he said, "a good watch night and day, and when the Saeson are near you'd better take to the forest. 'Tis no use thinking of resisting those great battleaxes with arrows and javelins. Take to the forest, my friends! But if I were you, I'd leave behind all the barrels of mead you can spare; and then perhaps, when the place is full of drunken men — but *all that* I must leave to you!"

Whether any of Cadawg's hearers were scrupulous enough to question how far the use of barrels of mead could be regarded as "good means" to the "good end" of defending Ynys Prydein is doubtful. But there is no doubt that when the visitors mounted their great nameless horse and rode away, they left behind them many sobered and disquieted hearts.

The waxing moon, grown big between her silver horns with the burden of her own shapeless body, seemed to those two riders to shine upon them ever more weirdly and more ominously as they plunged deeper and deeper into that huge forest. Not a wolf, not a fox disturbed the silence, not an owl, not a nighthawk.

Nothing was audible but the steady hoof fall of the dapple-grey thudding upon moss soft as sleep, upon grass fine as hair, upon marsh sedge fragrant with water mint, upon wind-ruffled drifts of dying leaves, upon muddy beds of last season's dead leaves; nothing but the old man's deep-drawn breaths and the sigh of the wind — for she had pulled out her hairpins and untied her Greek knot — in the woman's long hair as it floated silvery white behind her.

Hour after hour seemed to be passing over their heads, charged with strange meanings; and they felt as if all the years they had been friends together were returning on soundless wings to reassure them, to let them know that in this their supreme moment they were not alone, but that all their shared memories like guardian spirits were about them, risen up alive from their *pair dadeni,* the imperishable cauldron of rebirth.

Suddenly the youngest princess clasped him tightly, and her voice in his ear was like one of those far-borne whispers across the forest in which her people said the mysterious Coranians sent their warnings.

"Don't you hear, Cadawg? Isn't that the clash of arms in front of us?"

He pulled up at once. "Yes!" he muttered, "the clash of arms and the groans and cries of men."

Then she spoke eagerly and quickly. "I shall not leave you, Cadawg, and I must ask a great privilege from you before we go on."

"What privilege, my Princess?" he asked gently.

Both of them took for granted that whatever lay before them they were going to ride straight forward. It was their day, their night, their hour, Saturn's night on the twentieth day of October!

"Let me draw your knife from its sheath, Cadawg! I can feel its handle."

"Draw it," he cried exultantly, "and wave it high above our heads!"

She obeyed and drew it; and as he urged the nameless one to a gallop the glittering blade, nearly as long as a Roman sword, flashed bright in the moonlight over her streaming hair.

On they plunged, the mossy turf falling away behind them and the shapeless moon lurching and lifting and swimming and swaying between the dark boughs before them. All at once he pulled up the mare and pointed excitedly with his lance.

"There!" he gasped; and for a second she lowered her weapon to lean sideways and see what he saw. He had stopped just in time for themselves not to be seen; but what he and the woman clinging to him saw neither of them ever forgot.

On a grassy mound before them, doubtless some old warrior's burial mound, was one tall figure standing erect. He was sweeping round him, as he resisted the attack of some half a dozen desperate assailants, the longest, heaviest, and brightest sword that the princess had ever seen in her life.

He was a very tall man, and all they could see of his face, as he struck blow after terrible blow at those who were attacking him, was that it was beardless, and all they could see of his bare head was that it was abnormally elongated in shape and that it was covered by thick, closely cropped dark hair.

Tonwen could feel the beating of the old man's heart under his leather coat. For a second longer they watched, and then Cadawg uttered one single word: “Caledvwlch!” Well did the princess know what *that* word meant — the sword of Arthur. It was the emperor himself.

Then they saw that while the tall man on the mound, having disposed of three of his assailants, was absorbed in resisting a savage onslaught from the three remaining ones, there had suddenly appeared from the forest behind the mound a fresh crowd of men, more than a score of them, led by a gigantic warrior with flowing locks, locks that must have been yellow though they showed pallid in the moonlight, on the point of making a rush upon him from the rear.

Cadawg couched his lance, the mare leapt forward, and the youngest princess brandished her blade. Straight at the giant who led this new attack galloped the dapple-grey, bearing that mighty lance with the old man humped above it like a black cloud behind a shaft of lightning, and behind the man a wild-floating trail of long white hair, and above the hair the glint of a gleaming blade in an upraised arm!

In dazed confusion the giant mechanically lifted his shield to protect himself and awkwardly lifted his great war axe; but his doom was upon him. A shout of terror, not physical terror but supernatural terror, burst from his lips and was echoed in chorus by all the warriors behind him as they turned and fled:

“Woden is against us! The Valkyrie! The Valkyrie! Woden is against us!”

Shrewdly aimed by the old man and with the accumulated impetus of the horse, its two riders, and the rush of their onset, the lance pierced through everything that opposed it; and burying its point deep in the earth tore itself out of Cadawg’s hands with such violence that the mare sank on her haunches, throwing both her riders to the ground.

It was not till Caledvwlch, that sword with which all Britain was already familiar, had sent to Valhalla or to Horace’s *aeternum exilium* his two companions, that the last of the emperor’s assailants limped off, unmolested and disregarded, in pursuit of his friends. Between the upright shaft of Cadawg’s lance and the bloodstained turf rested hushed and still in the cold moonlight an embossed Saxon shield, an iron-plated Saxon tunic, and a death-cold Saxon heart.

Before she found herself lifted from the ground, with the hunting knife still in her hand, the thought crossed the youngest princess’s mind with what far-off prayers, in those dark unknown forests of Germania, that heart, that tunic, that shield, yes! and that great iron axe that looked as if it were made of black stone, had been sent on their way by some Saxon woman.

But it was not Cadawg who was lifting her up; it was the tall man from the mound. Cadawg himself, half-stunned, was struggling to his feet, and she noted with approval that his first care was for their horse. As tenderly as the great emperor was caring for her the disinherited one was caring for the nameless one.

But the mare was also on her feet now, trembling and wet with sweat, and with foam on her lips and nostrils; but her liquid eyes in that unearthly moonlight showed neither bloodshot nor panic-struck.

“If it is my Lord’s pleasure,” the old man heard the princess say, as in a curious fit of shyness he hid his forehead and eyes behind the dapple-grey flanks he was rubbing down with the skirt of his leather coat, “would it not be right to lay these four men side by side, and sprinkle leaves over them, lest their unhappy spirits become a curse to this place?”

“The lady is right, Cadawg ap Gorthevyr,” said the emperor gently, moving to the mare’s side and laying his hand on the old man’s shoulder, “and since I’m the younger of us two, you mustn’t take it as a discourtesy if I draw out your lance.”

He went over to the dead man and took hold of the long upright shaft. The princess shuddered and started forward. The old man with his eyes on her face knew well what she feared. But in a second she was reassured; for instead of placing his foot on the dead man's shield, the emperor knelt on it, and, though in the position the pull was a harder one, his arms were strong enough for the purpose, and he quickly rose to his feet, the lance in his hand.

"Tis as tough a one as Rhongomyant," he declared, examining the weapon, "and only an inch or two shorter. You know you saved my life, *unben,"* he added in a low tone, and plucking a handful of grass from the base of the mound he proceeded to wipe away from the lance's point the blood of the dead Sais and the wet earth mould.

While the princess murmured the gratitude of them all in the responsive ears of the still trembling mare, the two men laid the bodies of the four Saeson, one on the one side and two on the other of their gigantic leader, under the trunk of a mighty wych elm.

Then Tonwen began collecting dead leaves. "This is a woman's work among my people," she said, "as I expect it is in the forests of Germania. My hands tonight," she repeated dreamily, as she moved from tree root to tree root, filling the gathered-up folds of her black robe with leaves, "must serve for the hands of four German women."

Meanwhile the emperor climbed the mound to where he had thrust the sword Caledvwlch into the turf. Pulling it forth and seating himself where he found it, he soon appeared completely absorbed in the process of cleaning its long blade.

"I've always heard," whispered the princess to her friend, as she closed the eyes of the four men and made Cadawg help her to strew the leaves over their bodies, "that he was the most courteous warlord in the world. I think he’s waiting up there now lest in his ignorance of our customs he should impiously spoil the ancient rites of the dead with some Christian novelty.”

When all that could be seen in the moonlight of the four dead Saeson were their white upturned faces and closed eyes, she drew the old man — who had begun muttering something in the language of Rome, though whether they were pagan or Christian words she could not tell — away from the wych elm and back to the emperor, who rose and descended the mound to meet them.

“Amherawdr,” said the disinherited chief gravely, using the Brythonic word in place of the Roman Imperator, “God give you good! I have a boon to ask of you, *negessawl wyf wrthyt.”*

“What is it, *Arglwydd?”* responded the tall man kindly.

“This dapple-grey mare, who has saved you from death and all Ynys Prydein from unspeakable loss, has as yet no name. The boon, the *neges,* I beg of you is that you give her a name.”

The princess drew near with more pleasure in her eyes than Cadawg had ever seen in them.

“Willingly will I do what you ask, son of Gorthevyr Bendigeit — but on two conditions.”

“And what are they, *Amherawdr* Arthur?”

“The first condition is that you and I dismiss from our souls all past misunderstandings and all question of ‘offering homage.’ And the second condition is that the *Arglwyddes* here, when I have learnt *her* name, should bestow the name I select upon the horse.”

“To the first, Arthur ab Uthyr, I willingly agree,” and he glanced enquiringly at Tonwen. Receiving a nod from her he at once went on, “This lady is the youngest of the Modrybedd of Ogof-y-Gawr, that is to say, of the aunts of Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda, Prince of Edeyrnion.

They are the only direct descendants of the old matriarchal queens of the forest people of Ynys Prydein. She is the Princess Tonwen."

Never had either of them seen such a courtly obeisance as Arthur made. Solemnly he possessed himself of the lady's hand. He had brought Caledvwlch down from the mound, and its long blade shimmered as white as Tonwen's waving hair as he closed her fingers upon its immense cross handle.

Then he led her to the mare's side.

"Her name," he said, "was given her out of the throats of our enemies. Did you hear what they yelled as they turned and ran? 'Valkyrie!' they cried. Her name is Valkyrie."

The youngest princess touched the mare as if with the feather of a white heron. Four times she touched her; and the dapple-grey, accepting the salute as though from its godmother, nuzzled against her breast.

Then the emperor stroked the creature's bent head. "In the name of Llamrei my mare," he murmured, "and of Caledvwlch my sword, and of Rhongomyant my lance, and of Wynebgwrthucher my shield, and of Carnwenhau my dagger, I offer you, Valkyrie, the thanks of the Princess Tonwen and the thanks of the *Arglwydd* Cadawg and the thanks of Arthur!"

It was then, and for the first time since they had left the hostelry of Tysilio Sant, that the youngest princess moved to the old man's side and took his hand. But Arthur looked carefully round him, peering this way and that into the moonlit forest.

"My camp is quite close," he said, "and I'll be your guide. But before we go — for there'll be rejoicings and clamourings and much talk when we're there — I must beg you both to give me a little help out of your knowledge of this district. Come! I need your advice, your *cyngor.* Come, if you please, my souls; we'll sit down as we take counsel."

Thus speaking he thrust Caledvwlch into its place at his side, where its hilt reached nearly to his collarbone and its point nearly to his knee; and letting Valkyrie's bridle trail along the trodden and bloodstained turf he led her by her mane, reassuring her when she turned her head to see that the others were following, a little way further along the path, till they came to one of the earth-stooping willow trees, still green, but bowing low towards its final resting place, whereof all those forests contained so many.

Here he motioned them to be seated while he produced from a slit inside the lining of his tight-fitting tunic a roll of soft leather scrolls, bleached white for script. Selecting one which his companions could see was a rough military map of that whole district, he brought out a blackened stick of charcoal with a sharp point, and holding this between his finger and thumb spread out the map before them on his knees.

They bent their heads over it, and since he had seated himself between them, the old man's beard on one side and the lady's hair on the other made in the moonlight a wavering white frame for the map's white surface.

It was soon plain, however, that the old man's eyes weren't good enough to read the marks on the scroll before them; but undiscouraged by this difficulty the indefatigable emperor, after a little more fumbling beneath his tightly strapped tunic, drew forth the flint and steel of a device similar to the one which was the pride of Rhun ap Gwrnach, together with a tiny silver cup with a close-fitting lid containing a wick floating in thick oil. This he now ignited; and holding it over the scroll with one hand while he waved the piece of charcoal with the other, he proceeded with absorbed intensity to verify, supplement, and correct by their help the precise positions of hills and streams, mountains and fountains, rock caverns and hill camps within all the boundaries of Edeyrnion.

The emperor’s passionate interest in his map was contagious. Even Valkyrie, undismayed by the moving light, drew near enough to breathe a few deep breaths against the scroll’s rim.

The man indeed had completely changed. With his piece of charcoal, with his campaigner’s lamp, he was now an obsessed war craftsman crouching with inhuman concentration over the strip of moonlit parchment. The fabulous hero with that historic sword was gone. The courtly emperor bestowing names upon brave steeds and learning the names of beautiful ladies was gone too. The man who dominated them now was a man of pure, undiluted generalship, realistic, practical, and competent.

Sitting on the branch of a willow in an aboriginal forest he was a superlative master of the art of war, a trained military technician, one who would have had little or nothing to learn from Ul-Kessar or even from the great Hannibal. The long sword by his side, the men he had just slain, all had vanished from his consciousness. He was no longer addressing an old revivified warrior and a proud lady; he was playing an absorbing game of chess with a dangerous antagonist.

Both his human listeners — and it almost looked as if the newly christened Valkyrie felt the same — were suddenly aware that he was exerting upon them the irresistible pressure that the fingers of a great chess player exert upon pawns and knights and bishops and castles, and even upon kings and queens.

They felt as if that little bit of charcoal, following the motions of that miniature oil lamp, were tracing the outlines of a master purpose that compelled obedience with the force of an inevitable destiny, a destiny that could be obeyed willingly or unwillingly but that could not be resisted.

He was soon asking them a series of quick decisive questions, in the course of which he learnt how Einion had placed Medrawd under the care of the experienced Afagddu, who would probably be guiding him southward to Caer Myrddin and thence across Mor Hafren, the great tidal estuary from the ocean, to Gwlad-yr-Haf, “the Land of Summer,” with the idea of finding the imperial camp at Mons Badonicus; and how the Derwydd of the forest people had warned the counsellor and the whole mission that there would not be a man of them left alive if by noon tomorrow, after the Feast of the Sowing, they hadn’t retreated by the way they came; and finally how there was no man or woman, of any tribe or race or religion in all Edeyrnion, who didn’t fear the Derwydd or didn’t believe he could do what he threatened.

“We have always believed,” the princess assured their questioner, “that the Derwydd has at his disposal a secret host of archers, recruited from both the forest people and from what are left of the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, and that at the moment he summons these men they must gather at once from all the woods and swamps and mountains of Edeyrnion ready to obey his orders. We also believe that the Derwydd can, when he wishes, furnish a deadly poison for the anointing of these men’s arrows and javelins.”

“Do *you* believe this, *unben?”*

“I have never doubted it,” was the reply; but as he spoke a certain humorous detachment from the Derwydd’s poisoned arrows revealed itself in a faint shrug of his shoulders.

“I think,” the old man went on, “that what really disturbed the nice balance of our tribes and customs was the appearance of a fanatical priest at Mynydd-y-Gaer called Minnawc Gorsant, who at once renamed our Ford of Mithras, calling it Cor-wen or Cor-waun or Corvayne. Whether the fellow meant ‘White Choir’ or ‘Dwarf Mound’ I don’t know. But what I *do* know is that he’s cleverer in church Latin than he is in Brython, whether spoken as the Romans speak it or as the forest people speak it. Until this priest came to us the House of Cunedda—"

But the emperor made an impatient movement with his charcoal as though dismissing the House of Cunedda for the present, and the princess intervened. "We believe in the Derwydd's blessings and poisons, *Amherawdr,"* she said, "as Christians believe in miracles. My sisters are old, very old. We have no one to succeed us. The Derwydd has no one to succeed *him.* My sisters are the last of our family and the Derwydd is the last of the druids. It is this that has led him and has led them into plotting against our nephews and against you.

"It is this that has brought Colgrim's envoy to Ogof-y-Gawr. We are at an end, *Amherawdr,* and the Derwydd is at an end. When ruins fall they drag down with them many fresh and living things. After the gods and yourself, *Amherawdr,* Edeyrnion has one hope. Cadawg will know what I'm trying to tell you. I mean the marriage of Porius ab Einion and Morfydd ferch Brochvael. Porius is anxious to serve you, my Lord, and to unite all Ynys Prydein under you; and Morfydd's father has been to Italy and Greece and Constantinople, and receives letters from many foreign men of learning, both Christian and Platonist.

"If only this marriage can be brought about, *Amherawdr,* Edeyrnion will settle down in peace, whatever happens to the last" — the youngest princess's voice trembled a little— "of *us,* or to the last of the druids!"

The emperor was silent for a moment, holding his lamp and his charcoal suspended above his map, and looking from one to another with grave intensity. Then he said, speaking slowly at first but soon very rapidly: "You have saved my life, you two, and I am going to assume that you are ready at any cost to yourselves to save Ynys Prydein. Tonight you shall sleep in my camp for six hours. At dawn tomorrow you shall choose whom you like of my people to ride with you, and you shall return" — here both lamp and charcoal moved as rapidly as his mind and became stationary in the centre of the map— "by this mountain path marked here, to the Cave of Mithras, and thence, fording the river, to the Fountain of Saint Julian. You will reach my counsellor's people before this Derwydd's ultimatum expires, that is to say, before noon tomorrow. You will take a letter from me in which I shall tell the counsellor and his ladies to take refuge in the Gaer along with this Porius of yours and his bride, and in which I shall tell my horsemen to disregard these poisoned arrows and to watch for the approach of the Saeson along that road by which you have just come; watch, I mean, between the Gaer and Dinas Bran, and harass Colgrim's approach.

"Meanwhile I shall harass his rear till he gets too far to retreat; and then — but I will explain all this to Myrddin Wyllt in my letter, and indeed he may receive the gist of it tonight for he has taught me how to catch his attention, however far off he is; and then, when Colgrim has begun seriously to attack the Gaer, I shall come up with all the horsemen I've got and make my serious attack upon *him.* You will do this for me, son of Gorthevyr the Blessed? You will do this for me, Princess of my forest people?"

Without even a glance at each other, the two friends, to whom Erddud would still, we must suppose, refuse the title of "lovers," bent their heads in agreement. And at once with a pleased nod he plunged again into his map and his military dispositions.

Tonwen was naturally the first to grow weary of the concentrated attention required for these projected operations, but she found enough to keep her mind from roving, in the glimpses she got of the personal appearance of this master artist in the art of war.

The emperor’s figure was what most struck her. He seemed literally all bone and muscle. His neck was long, but she got a queer impression that his spinal column, tough and flexible as iron, was continued up through his neck, clean into his head; so that his skull, in place of loosely wagging and nodding as do most human skulls on the top of their skeletons, seemed to move naturally and easily with the whole rhythm of the bony structure of his body.

She decided that he was the extreme opposite of what the Jewish scriptures call “stiff-necked,” and one particular peculiarity, or *“cynneddf* of his gave her special pleasure, the unusual depth of the little indented hollow between the small bones just above his neck at the back of his head.

His head was of the strangest shape; so strange indeed that it would have come near to deformity had not the attention been distracted from it by the extraordinary expressiveness of his face. And not only was his head abnormally long; it was covered by closely cropped thick brown hair, hair that naturally formed itself into small tight nut brown curls. He had extremely thick dark eyebrows pointing upwards towards the centre of the forehead, not downwards, as is more usual, towards the bridge of the nose.

His eyes were the most remarkable thing about him. They were of a deep umber, a brown so dark and rich and yet so luminous that they made his hair look like the brown of dead leaves. There was not a trace of gold in either the brown of his hair or the brown of his eyes. He had a hooked nose of a dominant size and of a distinctly Roman cast; but what wasn’t Roman about him was his mouth. This feature she could observe now at her leisure, and there was that about it that absolutely fascinated her.

His upper lip was long, a great deal longer than his chin, which was the reverse of what might have been expected in a great military leader. It was a small chin, and a very gentle and retiring one, showing not so much weakness — though it did perhaps show a complete absence of that massive obstinacy that is so often taken for strength — as an almost feminine sensitivity.

He was clean-shaven; and she felt as she watched that everything about him indicated whatever it might be in the sphere of character, thought, counsel, or action, that went most appropriately with a clean-shaven rather than a bearded man.

“Well!” And his voice which certainly rang out with the clarity of a silver horn drew her with a start out of her ponderings. “And now to guide our reappeared son of Gorthevyr and our youngest princess of the forest people, mounted, each of them, upon Valkyrie, to what refreshment we can offer. Only first — for all my warriors will want to touch it — we must pick up the *unben’s* lance. I only hope it won’t make Rhongomyant jealous!”

The emperor raised Valkyrie’s trailing reins, lifted Tonwen lightly on the mare’s back, offered a bent knee as naturally as Owain had done, as a mounting block for the old man, and handed him the reins and the lance.

Thus equipped, with map and charcoal and oil box returned to their place inside his tunic, he led them forward, his brown eyes searching the moonlit glades to right and left as he walked and his hand on the hilt of Caledvwlch.

The princess’s fingers could not help straying now and again to the handle of her friend’s hunting knife as they advanced, and she was amused at herself for this.

“River Divine!” she thought, “am I becoming like that old Queen of the Iceni in the early days? But that’s the way it is! We think we’re modern; we take our newfangled civilization as something established forever, and then behold! In a moment the wheel swings back, and we’re the same old men and women we always were!”

Just as if fate itself had been anxious to verify this, the tall man at her side suddenly stopped and laid his hand on Cadawg’s wrist, who promptly pulled up the mare.

“There’s a fellow with a bow behind that pine tree over there,” he said softly. “He’ll be shooting at us in a second.”

In her new and fanciful recklessness Tonwen wasn’t surprised to discover that she felt excitement rather than misgiving at these words. “This must be just like what that old Iceni woman felt,” she said to herself, “only she’d be rushing at the man with a spear!”

But the emperor’s brown eyes as he turned them upon her now were as serious as an experienced hunter stalking a stag, and gay as a boy steering a canoe.

Even at this moment when any of them, including Valkyrie and herself, might feel the stinging pain of an arrow and perhaps the descent of eternal darkness, she was compelled to note the queer new shape assumed by the man’s mouth. As a military expert poring with concentrated gravity on that map, his upper lip had pouted grotesquely over the lower. But now his full lips were drawn apart a little, and delicate upward curves of sheer humorous enjoyment showed at their corners.

She had hitherto associated a life of warlike activity and political statecraft with grim implacable chins, heavy jaws, and tightly closed mouths turning down at the corners. She had associated these things with Esyllt’s austere preoccupation and with Erim ab Uchtryd’s fanatical gravity. But here was this man, whom she’d heard, only half a dozen hours ago, compared with Ul-Kessar himself as a master in the art of war, with a smile as gay and humorous as a boy’s above a chin a good deal more feminine and relaxed than her own! Nor could she see a trace of the irony she was so used to in the prince.

Danger and the rush of contest seemed simply to throw him into the highest good spirits, just as those military maps had plunged him into the concentrated gravity of a game of chess.

Mother of Earth! But what was that? There'd come a horrible whirring and swishing sound, and then an ugly shock. Cadawg had difficulty in keeping Valkyrie from rearing up and bolting; and across the man's face she had been watching came a spasm of pain, and behold! just beneath her a great feathered arrow, its shaft quivering and its point fixed in the emperor's thigh, just above his knee!

She saw him bend down, jerk the arrow out, and lay it carefully on the grass. "Don't touch that thing," he commanded, "and don't, for God's sake, throw it away! I'll want to examine it when I get back."

Swish — *whirr* — *swish* — another arrow whizzed among them, but this one swerved when it struck the iron clasp of Cadawg's leather coat, slid sideways grazing the horse's neck, and buried itself in the root of a tree.

Arthur now issued his orders to them quick and fast, his mind, Tonwen felt, working by some infallible instinct that was almost automatic.

"Tumble off, both of you, as if hit," he cried, "and lie still, with your hands on your daggers, but don't touch him till he touches you! Yes! Away with you, my girl" — this last word was to Valkyrie— "and don't forget the way back when you're tired!"

Valkyrie bounded off straight down the path, and the princess never forgot the convulsed combination in the emperor's face of sharp pain and lively amusement.

"I'm going to round up that fellow," he said. "I think he's" — the sentence remained suspended while another arrow whizzed past him, grazing his shoulder— "alone, and not anxious to lose his arrows either!

But I'll be with you as soon as he is; and for God's sake, *unben,* don't move, or let the lady move, till he touches you!"

Silence then fell upon those two; but so often had it fallen upon them, as they lay side by side on the bank of the Divine River, that they felt nothing incongruous or grotesque in the situation.

Presently, however, she became aware of a curious sound issuing from the leather-covered form by her side, and hastily she stretched out her hand. From their present position, which in obedience to their singular Ul-Kessar's extremely rapid "operational dispositions," they had had no time to select and had been forbidden to change, all she could do in her concern was to touch with the tips of her fingers the *lledyf unben's* belt, and here she felt to her consternation the sort of spasmodic heaving that the human frame suffers when it is vomiting.

"What is it?" she whispered. "Are you sick, Cadawg? Because if you—"

But there she broke off, realizing what it was. The son of Gorthevyr Bendigeit had been seized by an uncontrollable fit of laughter and was burying his face in the mossy turf to conceal the sound. Some hidden Iberian nerve in the old man, as full of the childish laughter of the desert as were those of their curly-haired seneschal at Ogof-y-Gawr, had been tickled to the limit by the difference between this real *Amherawdr* Arthur and the insolent young popinjay conjured up by the magic of Myrddin Wyllt, whose fabulous claims he had rejected on hearsay and whose face he had refused to see.

Wondering as much at the laughter of men as Cadawg and Einion had wondered at the anger of women, she now tried to count the number of the arrows that were still flying over their heads or sinking into the ground beside them.

But she had not reached half a dozen when she heard a wild cry of alarm from the forest, followed by the sound of a scuffle ending with a second cry in a lower tone from the same voice.

Immediately after came the gay though rather breathless voice of the emperor. “All’s well, *unben!* All’s well, Princess! I’ve got the rascal!”

Then as they scrambled to their feet they heard his voice calling again, this time not to them but Valkyrie.

“Will *she* hear him?” Tonwen thought.

Whether she did or not, there she was, back again, nuzzling against her godmother’s thin chest in happy contentment. And then the *amherawdr* arrived, carrying a now quite passive prisoner, unwounded and unbruised, in his muscular arms. He placed the man on his feet, retaining a strong hold however upon his right arm.

While the *lledyf unben* occupied himself in rubbing the sweat from the exhausted mare and removing the twigs entangled in her mane, the emperor, as pleased with himself as a boy who has won a prize, and having learnt that neither of them had been hit, picked up the arrow he had drawn from his own flesh and showed it to his prisoner, asking him a series of rapid questions, some in colloquial Latin and some in the rather archaic Brython fashionable at court. But the prisoner seemed completely puzzled.

Arthur turned helplessly to Tonwen. *“Arglwyddes,”* he implored almost querulously, “do make him understand that I’m going to let him go, only I want to know, first who he is and of what tribe, and second whether he poisons his arrows.”

And so the princess plunged into her first essay at formal interpretation, and such a queer exchange of broken words took place between her and this tangled-haired, panic-stricken creature of the woods, that Cadawg, and apparently Valkyrie too, drew near to listen.

It was clear to Cadawg, whose pride in his friend reached one of its highest points as he watched her, that the first question as to this queer being's identity had been satisfactorily answered.

"What a number of Gwyddyl-Ffichti words she must know!" he thought, "and more of the forest people's dialects than any Derwydd or Henog among them!"

It was, however, her solution of the question about the arrow poison that roused his admiration the most. This she obtained purely by dumb show. She took the arrowhead from the emperor and plucking some stalks from the grass made as if squeezing their juice upon its point. Then she pretended to prick herself with it and immediately afterwards distorted her face and twisted her body as if in extreme pain.

She was evidently not quite content with the emphatic shaking of the prisoner's head in answer to this performance, and the emperor and Cadawg watched her with something more like awe than amusement as she went through a sort of symbolic act of solemn invocation, touching the earth with her right hand then raising both her arms towards the moon, and concluding her prayer that the gods should bear witness to the truth of the man's words by gravely laying her fingers upon the arrowpoint.

So impressed was the emperor by all this that he released his hold upon the prisoner's arm, who instead of taking this chance to escape deliberately imitated the princess's performance, and then stood before her with cast-down head and folded arms.

Arthur, however, took immediate advantage of his own freedom of movement by untwisting the bloodied straps from his wounded leg, a proceeding which ended with a wry face and a groan as he attempted in vain to pull off the particular strap that covered the wound.

“Well, *Arglwyddes,”* he enquired, looking up from this attempt, while the boyish lips under his great hooked nose continued to twitch with the pain he had caused himself, “what does he say?”

“He says,” explained the princess, “that he lives with his father, his mother, his grandfather, his wife, and his six sons, alone in the forest. He says he is a pure-blood Ffichti, the last of his tribe. He says—” She broke off quickly. “Please, my Lord, leave your hurt alone till I can see to it! In these things a woman—” But when she saw he obeyed her and confined himself to dabbing at the trickling blood which, black in the moonlight, was writhing like a snake across the whiteness of his thigh, she went on with her interpretation.

“He says he hates the Gwyddylaid as much as he hates the Rhufeiniaid — he means the Romans, of course — and that he and his family have already killed with their arrows several Saeson. He says he’s afraid to shoot at any of the forest people because they have a great Derwydd hidden away somewhere, to whom every wind that blows brings news of what happens to his people, and who sends sudden death to all who hurt them.

“As to poisoning arrows, he says that no Ffichti is permitted by his gods to do such a wicked thing. He says that even if the forest people’s Derwydd began to use poison, the gods would be angry and he would be the last Derwydd in Ynys Prydein. He swore by the earth and by the moon that the arrow you pulled out would do you no harm save loss of blood.”

“I thank you from... from my heart, Princess; and I beg you to tell him he can go back... back... to his... to his family. If I didn’t feel at this moment a little... a little dizzy... I’d have given him something... Have you... perhaps... Princess?”

Tonwen snatched at her tunic, drew out a little wallet, and flung it to the old *unben.* “One of Cystennin’s silver coins, Cadawg!” she cried as she ran to Arthur’s side.

The Ffichti outlaw received the gift of the Brythonized emperor’s profile with superstitious awe, pressed it to his lips, bit it, and nervously dropped it into the bottom of the empty quiver that still hung from his neck. Then he proceeded to tap the ground with his tousled head three or four times before Valkyrie, whom he appeared to regard as the only one of these mysterious intruders he had not so far properly propitiated. This having been done, and Valkyrie having contemplated him with friendly surprise and breathed warmly at him through distended nostrils, he bounded off and was no more seen.

Only for a second after helping the injured man to relax on the grass was the princess at a loss what to do. She saw his fingers move feebly to his side, and she snatched quickly at what they sought. In his belt on the opposite side of where Caledvwlch hung was a small Roman wine flask.

Untwisting its stopper, she held this flask to his mouth with one hand while with the other she raised his head. He choked a little at first, and some of the wine ran down from the corners of his mouth to his chin and even below his chin.

In the moonlight this spilt wine assumed the appearance of those long moustaches that had been so fashionable among the Brythons in the days of Uthyr Pendragon. But the princess wiped it away with the nearest thing available, a strand of her own hair, and again tilted the Roman flask. This time he gulped it down properly, as she could see from the motion of the muscles in his long neck, and when she let his head sink on the grass again he smiled at her contentedly.

At this moment Cadawg came up to them. “It wasn’t poisoned after all, I hope,” he said.

For the second time that day the princess's anger flashed out in a look she turned on him. But all she said was, "I would stake my life on his oath!"

One cause of her look lay in the fact that since the emperor had turned faint like this she had been reproaching herself for letting him go to "round up" their lonely assailant.

"Why did I take for granted," she asked herself, "that the arrow wasn't poisoned?"

"I'll be all right in a second, *unben,"* Arthur was now saying. "Oh, no! I'm subject to this weakness. That's why I carry the flask. Give me one more good pull at it, Lady, and you'll see!"

Tonwen obeyed, putting the flask into his hands. She now felt an impulse to fasten up her hair, and she began trying to find her hairpins and found only two; but with the help of these she got her long tresses into some sort a rough substitute for the Grecian knot, and as soon as this was accomplished some mysteriously lost virtue seemed at once to return to her and she answered the old man's anxious glance with a natural smile.

"Now, Lady," said the emperor, sitting up. "I'll lean against this molehill — it's not an anthill, is it? — and bite my lip while you tear off that strap and tie up my leg with something or other — anything you've got handy!"

The son of Gorthevyr the Blessed had to turn away his head when he heard that. As when the two of them were crouching on the turf with the Ffichti's arrows flying over them, his Iberian capacity for stomach-hurting laughing fits — final spurts it may be of the life force within him that had enabled him to live so long — was suddenly tickled by the sight of an emperor, as famous as any in Constantinople, propped up against a molehill, while his forest princess of the riverboat tore at her clothes to find a rag to bandage his thigh.

"I'll go and see if there's any water under those trees," he announced. "I can see some rushes there. A drop of water, even if not too clean, would be good for that hurt, *Amherawdr,* and *you'll* have to be the one to ride Valkyrie this time. Finish the wine, *Amherawdr.* Then you won't see what she's doing. And I'll try to fill the flask with water, if it's only from a — Mother of Heaven and Earth! *What's this?* Are the dead coming to life?"

With Tonwen's trailing bandage hanging loose from his bare leg Arthur leapt to his feet. The eyes of the princess opened wide, and her lips parted in a gasp.

Coming straight towards them from the direction of the mound, where they had first seen the sweeping blows of Caledvwlch, was indeed a veritable figure of death. Out of a ghastly white face, as the moonlight fell full upon it, stared a pair of pale fixedly staring eyes, the eyes of something other than a sleepwalker, other than a madman, the eyes of the dead come to life!

His clothes, especially those across his breast, down one side of which hung a bloodstained tangle of fair hair, were so caked with blood that the leaves that had been strewn upon him still adhered to his body, giving him a look as though some wild creature of the forest had been prematurely dragged forth from its annual hibernation.

He was repeating some articulate words over and over again, and he moved as if propelled by a soul struggling for release, but a soul that could not, without some exterior aid stronger than itself, stronger even than the power of death, find such release.

Never had the princess, as a piece of torn flax-spun fabric fluttered to the ground from her fingers, felt such a shock of supernatural horror.

Never had the old *unben,* as in complete ignorance of what he was doing he beat the belly of the wine flask against the front of his woodman's cloak, in all the days of his long life, seen a thing like the thing he saw now.

But what amazed them both was the way the emperor behaved. “He acted,” Cadawg declared to Tonwen later, “as if he’d been dead himself many times and knew exactly—” To which the princess, interrupting her friend, retorted, “Rather as if he were used to being a king among the dead.”

It was Arthur himself who explained to them later as he limped by Valkyrie’s side, for no persuasion could induce him to mount, how he came to understand the words the man kept repeating, and what he wanted. It was, he told them, his custom to spend an hour or two every day in the portion of his camp allotted to Saxon prisoners. He was anxious, he said, to learn all he could of their ways and customs and even to pick up if possible a few words of their outlandish tongue. In the profession of arms, he told them, knowledge of the enemy’s mind is worth the taking of many of his cities.

At this moment, however, Cadawg and Tonwen were agitated and troubled as well as puzzled by what they beheld. The staring eyes of this living corpse saw nobody but the emperor. Towards him he moved, not staggering and lurching, but walking mechanically, as if he were impelled by a force that acted upon rather than *through* his body.

And it was brought about by the great goddess Chance that the youngest princess heard the three syllables, repeated now over and over again by the emperor, that she herself was destined to repeat at the hour of her death.

“So be it,” the emperor kept on repeating in a voice of solemn authority as the two men met, “so be it, so be it, so be it. I release you, Ulric, son of Wolf, in the name of Colgrim! I release you, Ulric, son of Wolf, in the name of Baldulf!”

He then took the living dead in his arms and laid him gently on the ground and knelt beside him, the bandage trailing from his thigh and his own warm blood dripping upon the cold caked blood of the other.

Then he stooped down and kissed him; and as he kissed him he uttered his final words: “Ulric, son of Wolf, I release you in *the name of Cheldric!”*

It was then, and only then, that the end came. A smile of unbelievable gratitude and contentment crossed the man’s face. There was a quick convulsion of the limbs, the mouth fell open, the eyeballs receded, and the body straightened itself in the stiffness of death.

The two friends, whose hands had instinctively sought each other, separated now and rushed forward to help the emperor to his feet.

“He said,” the emperor whispered, “he couldn’t die till his king had released him from his post. He said his name was Ulric Wolfson. I tell you, *unben,* I tell you, dear Princess, that if only we could disarm and cajole these common soldiers of these queer Saeson and kill off their curst chieftains, we’d have as good and as law-abiding a set of colonists among us as any — No! Leave him as he is — and let us pray that his soul has gone to Valhalla!”

CHAPTER XVIII. The Doctor

AT THE VERY MOMENT when the appearance of Colgrim's emissary was causing such excitement in Ogof-y-Gawr and such agitation and desperate consultation at Mynydd-y-Gaer, the lady of this latter fortress was so far from forgetting the marriage of Porius and Morfydd that she found time to despatch her personal maid, or *morwyn,* together with her personal serving boy, or *gwas,* to prepare, in as close proximity as possible to the cell of the Brother who was to unite them, the couple's marriage tent and marriage bed.

The two youthful messengers employed on this important mission were none other than the silent and apparently stupid young Gwythyr who had been made responsible for the care of Rhun ap Gwrnach's white hound, and the sagacious and pretty Nesta, daughter of the Roman Aulus, who had carried off old Canna to the Gaer kitchen on the occasion when it was so necessary for Morfydd to be alone with Porius's mother.

These two, like Porius and Morfydd themselves, were betrothed to each other and were hoping — though rather vaguely and apprehensively — to seal their tribal and secular union by an official Christian marriage at the hands of the aged disciple of Pelagius.

At first sight Nesta's dark complexion would have suggested the Iberian blood of the forest people. Her eyes, however, were of that rich blue-black common among the women of the Brythonic race, while Brochvael ab Iddawc had always assured Aulus that his daughter's colouring was not Iberian at all but pure Italian, and that there were thousands of dark beauties in the Etruscan vineyards with exactly her hair and skin.

In any case, whatever was the colouring of her skin, her feelings beneath it had the natural intensity and simple loyalty of the old centurion; nor had she lacked the wit to recognize what no other woman — probably not even his mother — had discovered, the fact, namely, that the odd-looking, absentminded lad she had taken for her own possessed several disturbing ideas in his heavy skull.

These ideas, never uttered to a soul till the centurion’s daughter fell in love with him, were of a rebellious character; were in fact allied with the ideas that at various crises in the history of human slavery, even after Saint Paul had insisted on the Christian duty of submission to constituted authority, had recurrently inflamed the minds of those victims of injustice whose fate it is to serve others in the name of duty and custom.

Young Gwythyr, in fact, though their easygoing prince would never have beaten him as Thersites was beaten, far less crucified him as modern rebels were crucified, harboured thoughts of a kind more natural to the Cewri of the Cader than to a patient *gwas* at Mynydd-y-Gaer.

In person Gwythyr was powerfully built though only of medium height. He had a heavy protruding forehead, a small upturned nose quite out of proportion to his other features, and a large mouth whose curiously protruding upper lip gave his profile a resemblance to that of a gigantic rabbit. His forehead, however, was his most characteristic feature, for upon it was a concentrated frown of brooding questioning; not so much questioning any particular complication as the whole contrarious gamut of the piled-up unfairnesses of fate.

What Nesta had discovered, by her beautiful Brythonic eyes, whether aided or unaided by the instinctive pores of her Italian skin, was the fact that her betrothed had the power of so exaggerating his shy silences in the presence of his superiors that he reduced his rabbitlike countenance to a mask of almost idiotic stupidity. This, she soon discovered, he was wont to achieve by the simple device of opening his mouth extremely wide and letting his lower lip hang down.

It was nearly sunset when these two young people arrived at the Fount. They were pleased with their chance of being together on this momentous eve but they were also a little scared; and they were this, not only because of the responsibility of the task before them, but because of their own private and personal apprehensions about tomorrow’s dawn and the Feast of the Sowing.

They had long been fond of each other, but it was only recently that they had actually been betrothed; and now, in accordance with the Edeyrnion custom, they, like many other couples, including Porius and Morfydd, were to consummate their union at the great Feast. But they were anxious and disturbed about this; for although they had already, under the influence of the sex custom of the forest people, made love in bed, Nesta was still a virgin, and they had been worried by a talk the girl had had with old Canna ferch Glam.

All the young folk of Edeyrnion went in their sex difficulties to this old woman, and Canna had told them that it would be unsafe for Nesta to bear children. This worry was naturally not far from the surface of their minds as they shared their task, but since the light had already begun to fade and they had now only two hours before it would be quite dark, they set about their business with single-hearted alacrity.

The first thing they did was to borrow from the camp of Arthur’s emissaries a small unused tent made of a material lighter and more elegant than any sailcloth known at the Gaer, a material that had been freshly dyed in the court colours of green and yellow. With the help of a couple of camp servants it did not take the sturdy young Gwythyr long to get the tent he had procured fixed in the soft ground on the edge of the lake within only a short distance of the cell of the priestly Brother.

Marriage among the masses of the forest people still tended to be rather a tribal than a religious affair, though both the more pious and the more superstitious were prone enough to welcome a priest's services if a priest were forthcoming.

Left to themselves at last in that fading light, where the lapping of the lake water and the sigh of the wind made the intermittent sounds from the Arthurian camp ring out more intrusively than ever, the lovers were now able to intersperse something of their own personal feelings into the traditional arrangements they had come to make.

They had decided to offer as their own contribution to the marriage bed of their prince's son a golden coin with the head of Caius Julius upon it which Aulus had long ago given his daughter, and for which the old man had himself spent many a winter evening carving a wooden frame. This sacred relic Nesta now decided to suspend by a cord from the bedpost nearest to the tent's entrance, so that the great emperor's impassive profile might drive away any evil spirit ere it approached so much as the outer one of the two pillows.

"Did you hear what that *Cymry* boy said when he was hammering the tent pegs, Gwythyr?"

"No, my sweet, not a word! I was so afraid he wouldn't get the entrance facing the east and the bed's head facing the entrance that I missed his chatter."

"He said they had a very good Jewish doctor in their camp, a friend of the Greek merchant, and he says this man goes every few hours to Brother John's cell to keep the old man alive till he can marry us all. What about catching him as he goes past? He *has* to pass; that *Cymry* boy said he was so friendly and comical that you’d never believe he was a doctor. Would you be scared of stopping him, Gwythyr?”

Gwythyr looked up quickly from an earthen bowl in which he was arranging an elaborate floral pattern composed of red funguses standing erect in bog moss, round which he had twisted the filigree-foliage of the wild corydalis, fragile as the hair of forest nymphs, and bearing amid its trailing filaments minute flowers of the colour of ivory.

The use of any kind of mushroom growths as a symbol of fecundity came naturally to the forest people, but it wasn’t the first time Nesta had been impressed by her lover’s peculiar passion for such vegetative decorations.

“By the Mother!” he cried, “I *will* stop him! You girls believe every word Mistress Canna tells you. Amreu, up there at Ogof-y-Gawr, told me only yesterday that he’d forbidden Lela going to see her again — only I can’t imagine that woman obeying him!”

Nesta became immobile, her eyes grown large.

“What did Canna tell *her?”* she enquired.

“What do you think? What she *wanted* to be told, of course. You can guess what! That Master Curly-Head had better leave her alone for a bit.”

“Did she really tell Amreu Canna had said that?”

“That’s what he said. You’ll never come, I hope, Nesta, to wanting me to leave *you* alone.”

Nesta patted the smaller of the two embroidered pillows round one of which she had been arranging sprigs of ivy and round the other a festoon of heather.

“I must wait till we’re married, *cariad,* before I can promise anything!”

“Well, I shall certainly stop that Jew and hear what *he* says! Keep an eye on the path, sweetheart, so we don’t miss him. I can’t see from here.”

Nesta began thumping the bigger pillow — the one with heather round it — almost viciously.

"What if he wants to examine me?" she said. "Canna told me real doctors put their fingers everywhere."

"I don't care where he puts his fingers if he lets me—"

"Hush, love! You mustn't talk like that."

"It'll be more than talk, pretty one, tomorrow."

She threw this aside with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Gwythyr—"

"What, sweetheart?"

"Do you think there's any truth in what they say in the kitchen about something between our young lady and Rhun ap Gwrnach?"

"I only know what old Gwrgi says, and I've told you that a hundred times."

"Why is she marrying Porius ab Einion then?"

"Why do all these people do the things they do? I tell you, if the whole lot of them, and all Arthur's court too, battled with the Saeson till there wasn't one left, we *Cymry* would be no worse off!"

"Gwythyr, I won't have you say such things! The Saeson would make slaves of us all."

"Well! What are we now?"

"Oh, but to our own people!"

"My pretty, it makes no difference. We Cymry all over the land, whether we're Brythons or forest people or Gwyddyl-Ffichti, if we had any spirit would get rid of all these lords and ladies, these *tywysogion* and *tywysogesau,* and have the earth and its fruits for ourselves! God gave the earth to us all, not to *them* only!"

Nesta’s hands in the chilly darkness fell to her sides while her mouth opened to emit a low whistle.

“Don’t let anyone but me hear you say such things, Gwythyr!”

“The Cymry say them all over this island.”

“How have our masters and mistresses then,” the girl whispered, feeling braver now that it had become so dark that both their faces had turned into small oval-shaped floating clouds hovering over the head and foot of the bed, “taken the treasures of the earth away from us, like you say they have?”

“You know as well as I do, Nesta! Who started all this quarrelling and plotting and threatening, all these horsemen with lances, all these forest people with bows and arrows? We *Cymry* didn’t. You know that, my sweet. Some of us are forest people, some Brythons, some Gwyddyl-Ffichti, and we’re all comrades; but they — keep — us — *down.”*

He spoke slowly and solemnly while over the trodden path between the tent and the lake reeds the twilight was already gathering.

“And they do it,” he went on, “by dividing us, by making us hate one another. That’s their great trick. They turn blood against blood. The Three Princesses and their Derwydd make us hate the Brythons. Iscovan y Bychan made his Gwyddyl-Ffichti hate the Romans. Our Cunedda princes join with the emperor — aren’t they doing that now, and isn’t that what this marriage is for? — to keep the forest people in subjection and prevent them from following the Three Princesses and the Derwydd, or making *Cymry* of the Saeson instead of driving them out!

“I tell you we *all* came here in the beginning like these Saeson — all foreigners and invaders, every tribe of us! And yet even among us *Cymry* — and don’t think I don’t feel it myself! — there’s this same blood-hate ready to explode! And the emperor plays upon it. He doesn’t bother about us enough *yet* to cry out to us: *'Cymry* of Ynys Prydein! Let all comrades join hands to keep out the foreigner!'

"But mark me well, my girl, he soon will. Yes, he soon will. And why? So that he and his courtiers may rule the country undisturbed! Foreigners? We were all foreigners once! Who are the true possessors of these woods and mountains, Nesta? You know as well as I do. The *Cewri!* And, if you go further back still, the wild beasts or the old gods! Nobody knows because nobody was there! I don't often say what I think, my pretty. I hold my tongue. I'm taken for a fool. Gwythyr, the orphan, good for nothing but carrying messages from one *arglwydd* to another *arglwydd!* But I have my thoughts; and this bed, this night, and our marriage tomorrow have lugged them out of me, Nesta ferch Aulus!"

As far as he could catch the expression on the face of the girl at the head of the bed, it was one that he knew only too well. And quaintly inappropriate it was, this familiar expression, as it appeared on the phantomlike oval face, disembodied as that of a spirit, that hovered before him. It was a tender and caressing expression; but its tenderness was so maternal that it seemed to absorb with the delicate suction of a beautiful sea sponge all the secret springs of his natural masculine pride in his daring thoughts.

"O Gwythyr," she began, "no one knows, when they listen to you, how far you're going to take a person, or what you're going—" she broke off suddenly and slapped her hand over her mouth. Then he saw her rush to the tent entrance and peer out. "Hush!" she murmured in a loud clear whisper, holding the folds of the tent apart and leaning sideways towards him, "I believe that Jew's coming. Are you really going to dare to stop him, Gwythyr? Mind you, I've not promised to let him examine me. But I would love to show up old Canna! Besides, we do want to know" — Gwythyr was by her side now, and this was murmured into his ear— "whether it's all right about our having children."

"Sure, I'll stop him! I'll bring him in here. Oh, and you'd better start up both those torches, Nesta. The lighters are in that sack over there. We'll have to make sure anyway they're not liable to smoke or raise a stink before we leave the place, and we might as well do it now."

If Julius Caesar's erratic goddess Chance had decided that though Gwythyr's mask of resolute stupidity might fool his human masters, there was no reason why it should fool those masters' masters, namely, the fatal powers of accident and occasion, she could hardly have proved her point better than by bringing it about that no sooner had the Jew arrived opposite their newly raised tent and paused to regard it with surprise and curiosity than there was a sound of hooves, a lively and challenging shout of greeting, and the bold young Mabsant, mounted on the same beautiful white horse from whose back he had been lifted so unceremoniously only three days ago, pulled up with more noise and stir and rattling and jangling and scraping and clattering than the irritable Gwythyr — in no case very sympathetic to the youthful vagaries of high-class blood — felt suitable to the occasion.

"Curse the conceited fool!" he said to himself. "Does he treat everybody he speaks to as if they were ambassadors from an enemy king?"

"Doctor! Doctor!" cried the young horseman in great excitement. "I suppose you heard everything before you left the camp? What do *you* think will—"

But Lot-el-Azziz had raised his right arm — his left being pressed against the curves of an exceptionally twisted ram's horn which protruded from the folds of the loose sash he wore round his waist — and to Gwythr's astonishment had addressed a remark to him while he restrained with lifted hand the excited volubility of the boy on the white horse.

"Did you want to speak to me?" he enquired. "I seem to know your face very well, though I can't recall your name."

Gwythyr looked over the Jew's head at the proud young figure on the white horse, and as he did so, though it was too dark to meet the lad's eyes, his own countenance automatically assumed that expression of awed and wondering idiocy which he had found so acceptable among his rulers. Then, lowering his glance to the oriental physiognomy in front of him: "It is my wife, my Lord," he murmured, "who is anxious to see you, Nesta ferch Aulus, from the Gaer. She is in that tent, my Lord. We have been preparing it for tomorrow. It is Prince Porius's marriage tent. But we thought if you could give us a moment... it's about... about our life together, Master Doctor."

Lot-el-Azziz made no attempt to conceal his humorous enjoyment of this double encounter.

"This young man," he announced, addressing the rider on the white horse, "has a lady hidden away in Prince Porius's bridal tent that he wants me to see. So I fear I must put off hearing the news unless you can tell me in a single sentence! I'm a doctor, you know, my dear Mabsant, first and foremost."

"I *can* tell you in a single sentence," protested the horseman eagerly. "Colgrim the Sais with a huge army from Germania has outmanoeuvred the emperor and is marching direct for Edeyrnion! The counsellor has learnt this as he learns everything else; and at this very moment—"

But the Jewish doctor had for the second time lifted his arm; and although both the young men were quivering with impatience, there was a magnetic intensity about the man that compelled their attention.

“When the moon rises red,” he cried, “much blood will be shed! Neither of you boys knows the Cabbala or the Talmud, and I am only a scribe of the outer gate, a worm in the lintel of the porch of the Holy Ones; but when I see—”

He stopped abruptly. His whole appearance had suddenly changed. His enormous nose, his retreating stubbly chin, his jet-black projecting eyebrows, his thick underhanging underlip that was almost a deformity, were now lifted up and seemed to be mounted, as with certain antique busts, upon a pedestal whose size was enhanced by its faded and weather-worn material. His stature was of medium height and his outer garment, though appropriate enough to his calling, was of a dingy and dirty brown. But what he was now contemplating so transformed his every aspect that the two young men stared at him in fascinated astonishment.

Gwythyr had to move a step or two sideways so as to see what it was that so absorbed the doctor; and even then, since he saw it against the horse’s rump, and against the creature’s untrimmed and irritably switching tail, he felt little affected by it. Mabsant also had twisted round with a jerk, but neither was he greatly moved by what he beheld.

This indeed was no more than the unwieldy moon, still grotesquely lacking her full rondure, but, as she now rose from among the reeds on the further side of the water, revealing a shape so reddened by the terrestrial atmosphere of this particular place and occasion that she presented the aspect of a sinking sun, but a sun that from suffering some mysterious stellar shock had collapsed before it had completed the first quarter of its diurnal round.

To some far-drawn strain of rabbinical fantasy in the doctor’s consciousness the rising of this blood-red moon out of what at that moment, and from where he watched it, might well have been a subtellurian Limbo of mist and mud and water and the roots of enchanted reeds, had an unearthly effect upon every object animate or inanimate, human or subhuman, within the marginal influence of that prehistoric lake.

Towards this bloodstained apparition the secret souls of trees and plants, of ferns and mosses, as well as of men and beasts, seemed to him magnetically attracted. Lot-el-Azziz knew nothing of the legends which surrounded Saint Julian's Fount, nothing of the influence that emanated from it. He had heard once or twice, since their arrival at this strange forest lake, of a place called the Avanc's Cave near the *llys* of the Three Princesses, but so far he had not picked up from any of the local persons who had come to him for secret healing the tradition that it was from the unfathomable depths of this holy-unholy expanse of water that that prehistoric saurian had originally emerged.

But too many of Lot's ancestors had been learned Talmudists and subtle rabbinical scribes for him not to possess, even though he had been employed by a Greek sea captain, a psychic power that could dominate with equal ease a *gwas* like Gwythyr and a court princeling like Mabsant.

And not only dominate them. For the extraordinary thing that happened just then, as the doctor watched that bloodstained moon rise from amid the roots of reeds that aeons ago had served as pasture for prehistoric monsters, was that he felt able to seize hold of both these human souls at the same time, the soul of this excited young warrior, leaning down towards him with his terrific news and stroking so nervously the neck of his white horse, and the soul of this agitated young *gwas* whose wife "wanted to see him in the tent," and whom every now and then he caught staring at the other young man with the sullen ferocity of an idiot.

And he felt as if he had the power to engage these two young souls in an enforced embrace, an embrace that would pour into them an abandoned and flowing equality of life-enjoyment.

The image of that moon rising so red out of the reeds had plunged his own soul into an undersea of mysterious satisfaction such as he would have found difficulty in analyzing or interpreting. He felt, however, that it was connected in some way with his pleasure in his domestic life, with his undisturbed appreciation of the qualities of his wife Zora, of the attractiveness of their son Gog, of his hopeful expectation that the unborn progeny with which she was now pregnant should be a second son, worthy of the name Magog.

He felt as though the same cosmogonic compulsion that was now forcing that bloodstained image, reluctant still, it would seem, to relinquish its shapelessness and accept its brief destiny of perfect rondure, to rise out of that watery Limbo and take possession of air and sky, might at any moment compel him to indulge in some grotesque physical gesture, in the contagion of which this unnatural difference, this tortuous embarrassment between *eques* and gwas which now surrounded him, would dissolve like the arbitrary and fantastic shapes assumed by foam-froth on troubled water!

El-Azziz kept his black hair cut short save for the centre of his skull. Here he allowed it to grow into a curious horn, not altogether unlike the twisted ram’s horn he was accustomed to carry about wherever he went, and which he generally kept concealed on his left hip under the folds of the scarf he wore round his waist.

And Lot-el-Azziz made use of both these objects — the one of hair and the one of horn — for purely personal purposes. The ram’s horn he used to increase the sound and the carrying distance of his own voice, and in some cases of others’ voices, while the horn of hair on the crown of his closely cropped skull he used for nothing less than the psychological, or you might even say the pathological, purpose of reminding himself when the animal magnetism that surged up within his excitable nerves grew uncontrollable, of the particular individuals among his patients into whose absent souls he wished to project certain magnetic waves of comfort and healing.

The more discomfort he inflicted upon himself by tugging at this luckless twist of thick coarse black hair, the more therapeutic magic — so in his fabulous fancifying he tried to believe — he could project into these unfortunate people.

“Red from the reeds! Red from the reeds! Red from the reeds!” Lot-el-Azziz now began chanting in the voice that his employer, the Greek sea captain, used to call his “orgiastic” voice; and as he chanted he tugged viciously at that twist of hair with one hand, while with the other he pressed the mouthpiece of the ram’s horn to his ear and its orifice to the side of the white horse. He felt no surprise, for his rooted faith in his psychic power had been strengthened by many such experiences, and he certainly felt no increase of self-esteem, for to be made into a laughingstock by youth is no gratifying sensation, when he became obscurely aware, though it was too dark to catch them exchanging humorous glances, of a conscious reciprocity of amusement — conventional amusement in both cases — between the young *eques* and the young *gwas* at the sight of that horn pressed against the horse’s side and those painful tugs administered to that wisp of hair.

Before the Jew had finished indulging in this grotesque performance there had risen from that spot — apart from the consciousness of the horse whose faint pantings were now only audible to the ear at the mouthpiece of the horn — three towering and quivering spirits of human desire; namely, Mabsant’s desire to tell the doctor that Myrddin Wyllt must be even now deciding whom to appoint as their captain at this crisis; Gwythyr’s desire to end forever the nervous apprehension created in Nesta’s mind by the old nurse’s words; and finally the doctor’s own passionate craving that his Zora’s living burden should turn out to be no other than their son Magog, a proper mate and natural companion for their son Gog.

“Blood red through the reeds! Blood red through the reeds!” his lips kept repeating; while at incredible speed all manner of curious thoughts rushed through his skull, thoughts that were completely unaffected by the position of his head.

That the body of the horse was now between him and the blood-red moon meant little to him, for he felt as if he possessed a power of visualization independent of his physical eyesight. He felt as if he could see these world-old waters, that people had come to call Saint Julian’s Fount, descending to the very centre of this planetary globe. And what was this bloodstained moon, that seemed so reluctant to attain its destined rondure, if not the precursor of a turbulent host of life-obsessed entities struggling up from those depths in obedience to the erotic summons of tomorrow’s Feast. The Feast of the Sowing? What could there be in this simple forest mystery to make him think of the desert and the smell of incense and the taste of unleavened bread?

“Blood red through the reeds!” And he suddenly recalled a passage in one of the oldest Cabbalistical commentators explaining the precise process, excited by which the faith of any population in any place could generate enough erotic magnetism to draw unborn souls out of the *Limbo of water,* though not perhaps out of that of *air* or that of *fire.*

“Blood red through the reeds!” And giving his topknot a tug so violent that it caused his luckless cranium a really vicious twinge, he straightened his back and replaced his ram’s horn in the fold of the sash about his waist.

“Which one of us at the camp,” cried the young rider, the moment he felt the older man’s psychic power relax, “would *you* advise the counsellor to appoint as chief over us, now that the moment has come?"

"I wonder," replied the Jew deliberately, "what answer our friend Gwythyr here would give to that question! Unlike us, he's a native of these parts and a Gaer man too. But perhaps you haven't seen enough of us yet, lad" — and he gave the *gwas* a smile that implied at once a special confraternity with him as opposed to young Mabsant, and a general confraternity with all skilled workmen and patient professionals as opposed to princes and courtiers and spectacular heroes— "to be able to decide such a nice point. I am myself inclined to think that the counsellor will be making a great mistake if he delegates his authority to anybody at all. 'Let him play captain himself is what *I* say; and I know that's what Zora-and-Gog would say too; and when it comes to appointing men to rule over men, women are the best judges."

The moon had by this time risen clear above the reeds, and in doing so appeared to have left behind her in the water all those stains of blood; and as Lot-el-Azziz drew out his ram's horn again from the sash that muffled it at his hip, and after licking one of his fingers set himself to rubbing first the small mother-of-pearl mouthpiece and then, yet more carefully, the wider unadorned orifice, it began to seem to him as if the attempt he had been making to bridge, by the oldest and most familiar trick in Cabbalistic art, this ridiculous gulf between master class and serf class, which had no parallel among the tents of Israel, had already achieved a sort of half-success.

The expression that was so often on his lips, "Zora-and-Gog," had, by the law of euphonious repetition, recently developed into the sonorous single word "Zorangog," a word which, as they caught it now, "crossing the barrier of his teeth," struck both these boys — the Gaer serf and the imperial horseman — as extremely comical; and in the relaxed fusion of this comicality they were momently united.

But the ironic thing was that this silent coming together of the souls of *eques* and *gwas* promptly thrust into the doctor's mind — for intrinsically they were as crude and simple a pair of lads as could be found west of the Apennines — the ribald question as to what would happen at Constantinople, or indeed before they reached it, if this great shy Samson of a Porius, together with his touchy Mithraic cousin, both of them in love, as the camp gossips swore they were, with the former's bride, did really sail with Dion Dionides and himself?

What would "Zorangog" make of such companions? And from Zora-and-Gog his thoughts naturally turned to the expected Magog. Would Magog be as good a sailor as his elder brother had proved himself? And then as he raised one of his hands for a second to pass his fingers gently round the roots of the lock on his skull, where he was now aware of a natural tenderness in the skin, he began wondering about this great British philosopher Pelagius of whom Brother John had been the pupil.

One of his local patients had sworn to him that Pelagius used to come at night to this lake — a much larger stretch of water, the man declared, in those days — and preach to the lake spirits and lake maidens and lake monsters, and even to the lake gods, who might still, for to a philosopher everything was possible, have their existence here.

"But how on earth," he thought, "will this hulking young Samson of a Gaer Prince defend this wild preacher to lake spirits and lake monsters against a legal-minded pope and before the most theological of all Byzantine emperors?"

Whether there could be found in any commentary on the Cabbala an explanation of the occult cause that at this crucial second, as his fingers returned from his head to his ram’s horn, flung into his mind a new inspiration as how to bridge the gulf between *gwas* and *eques* is more than doubtful; but such an inspiration certainly came. And in good time it came, for this social gulf had been for years on all his visits to Britain a deep nervous annoyance to Lot-el-Azziz, in fact the most troublesome of all the drawbacks to his ease and pleasure in this island.

The truth is he was a man who derived a curious satisfaction from the overflowing of his soul into the souls of others, and from the consciousness that there was going on around him a similar overflowing.

“Weren’t you asking someone at dinner last night, Mabsant, how you could get hold of a hound-puppy?”

“I certainly was, Doctor, I certainly was. Do *you* know anybody who’s got one?”

The Jew turned lazily round and surveyed the bridal tent. This erection had assumed just then a very special and peculiar look. The newness of its fabric, though its imperial colours of green and yellow showed in the moonlight merely as black and white, the shock of its appearance in a spot that had remained unchanged for a thousand years, the knowledge that its purpose was to protect the seclusion of one particular woman from the ritualistic licence of the Feast of the Sowing — all these things gave Porius’s bridal tent the look of a frightened modern creature lost in the twilight of an antiquity to which it could not adapt itself, but against which it could only utter stiff and awkward and bewildered protests.

Indeed it seemed to be summoning to its aid just then — at least such was the doctor’s memory of his impression of it, for at the moment he made no attempt to articulate what he felt — every influence of the night that was sympathetic to human courtesy, as against the chaotic heathen powers that were even now rising behind that bloodstained moon like phantom leeches licked up out of unfathomable mud by some monstrous Avanc's saurian tongue.

"Do you know anyone round here who's got one?"

Whether the young rider's question had been repeated more than once the doctor would have been hard put to it to say; but his reply was firm and clear, and the gesture with which he now pulled Gwythyr forward was dominant and compelling.

"Our friend here," he said, "was chosen by Rhun ap Gwrnach — I heard this from little Neb who saw it happen — to take care of that great white hound Drudwyn that he used to keep in the Cave of Mithras to guard its treasures. You're keeping it still for him somewhere in the Gaer, aren't you, my lad?"

But the ancient wisdom of the desert had worked its spell. There was no need for further bridging of gulfs by outsiders. Gwythyr began telling Mabsant more about white hounds, together with their bitches and their puppies and how best to feed them, than Lot-el-Azziz supposed the lake and the reeds and the moonlight and that weirdly alien tent could ever have tolerated at that enchanted hour.

He hardly had the patience to wait till the two young men had arranged to meet again; for as far as they were concerned the Feast of the Sowing and the approach of the Saeson seemed to recede beyond some misty and wavering horizon now that Drudwyn, the white hound, occupied the foreground, but he decided that since his ancient desert tricks had really begun to exert their spell, it would be a pity not to give them their full chance. So he waited, licking one of his fingers and stroking with its wet tip the tender skin round the roots of his persecuted topknot.

"From what I've seen of him," he said to himself, watching the curious effect of the moon as it hung above the undulant ridge of the horse's back, “this old Brother of theirs can’t last much longer. The creature inside him’s got its claws into his vitals. Sucking his lifeblood it’ll soon be, the vicious death crab! He had better be giving their young Hercules his final instructions as to Pelagius. I would tell him, if I were he, that Pelagius was an out-and-out Monophysite! I’d make him add the words: ‘Who was crucified for us’ to his *Tris-Hagion!”*

But the Jew’s thoughts were now interrupted. For Gwythyr’s pride in his new role as an authority on dog breeding and Mabsant’s fascinated interest in what his fellow Brython — *eques* versus *gwas* notwithstanding — could tell him of white hounds, white bitches, and white puppies, were holding both the youths so absorbed in each other that it was the foreigner and not the natives who now heard the sound of a horn from the direction of the mission camp.

The suddenness of the sound, its warlike implication of attack and defence, the rush of reckless and heroical memories it conjured up, swung the doctor’s apprehensive mind to the news he had just received of the approach of Colgrim.

“I don’t believe it,” he thought. “Twould be a masterly stroke of those yellow-haired savages, but they never could have outwitted and outmarched the emperor to such a tune!”

His ram’s horn was back upon his hip now, held close to his body by the brown scarf that was of almost the same dead-leaf shade as his neat professional habit, and the fingers of both his hands, resting on the horse’s back, were moving mechanically up and down as though smoothing out the wrinkles from a badly tied bandage.

“The old Brother with that death crab in his vitals,” he thought, “can never be moved! If Colgrim *has* outmarched us and is *really* near, we’ll all have to crowd into the Gaer, I suppose, or make a bolt for it through the forest! But which side will the forest people take? Are their princesses and druids ready to be the serfs of the Sais?”

With his fingers stroking the back of the horse, and with his heavy eyebrows and long pendulous nose tilted up so high that the moon, which looked as if it had not only purged itself of all stains of blood but by some creative potency in the higher air had rounded itself into premature plenitude, began to daze and drug him, Lot-el-Azziz fell to comparing his sea life, alone with Dion Dionides and Zora-and-Gog, with all these bewildering tribal agitations; and he recalled how much more disturbed he had been at some ominous change in the wind than he was now when he and his friends were in danger of being caught between Christian arrows and heathen axes.

“But maybe that only shows,” he thought, “what a true Jew I am, completely at ease in the maddest tribal confusions on land, but scared as a wild goat of Horeb by the flapping of a sail at sea!”

He was roused from his trance by a second horn blast from the camp, a blast that was even more warlike and menacing than the first. This time Mabsant heard it.

“I must go and see what’s up!” he cried, catching at his reins while the horse lifted his head. “God knows what the counsellor has decided! See you tomorrow or on Monday, Gwythyr! See you later at the camp, Doctor! Who would have thought these Saeson could fool the emperor so?”

His final murmur of puzzled indignation was lost in the leap of his horse and the rattle of his accoutrements. And at last Gwythyr was free to lead Lot-el-Azziz into the tent.

Meanwhile within this newly erected retreat Nesta ferch Aulus was struggling helplessly, irritably, and finally quite hopelessly, with the torches fastened to the bedposts. Both of these kept emitting thick fumes of extremely foul-smelling smoke, and nothing she seemed able to do short of extinguishing them could stop this disastrous phenomenon.

With tears of vexation in her eyes, as she tried desperately in one way after another to arrest this evil smoke, the girl imagined herself in the place of Morfydd ferch Brochvael, feeling as that proud girl would doubtless feel if these torches revolted like this just at the moment when Prince Porius laid her on her marriage bed.

Between her imaginative fears of being "examined" and her desperate vexation over this devastating smoke, Nesta came near to losing not only her inherited self-possession but her instinctive Italian aplomb and grace.

But Lot-el-Azziz displayed not the faintest sign of being aware of her agitated distress. He bowed to her, indeed, with oriental courtesy — bowed lower than anyone had ever bowed to the old centurion's daughter — but his smile was so frank and disarming and his manner so easy and direct that, as he sat down by her side upon the bed, the tears of vexation that still glittered on her eyelids were insensibly enlarged by a new emotion, that of incredible relief.

"Pull the tent curtains tight, Gwythyr, will you," el-Azziz said, "and for God's sake trim the wicks of those torches! We don't want any of these young *equites* peering in, but we mustn't suffocate your bride with smoke."

It was with anything but a firm and indifferent hand that Gwythyr obeyed this command and proceeded to busy himself with the torches; for though he kept his back turned, he had no doubt from what he could catch at such close quarters that the bridal couch of the House of Cunedda was being used for *some* sort of medical investigation.

To his surprise he found that the knowledge of this caused him serious agitation and nervous uneasiness. But the care of torches was a speciality of his; and in his determination not to think of what was going on behind him, he forced himself to concentrate so effectively on his task that long before they were ready for him to turn round both torches were burning with a beautiful smoothness, sweetness, and clarity.

There followed some anxious and pregnant moments; and to help them to pass he proceeded to busy himself — not mechanically or absentmindedly, but with the eager concentration of a boy of twelve — in cutting out with the point of his hunting knife a small peephole through the sailcloth of the tent.

He instinctively selected one particular strip of green material for the ground of his attack, a strip that had by some accident been dyed a deeper green than the others and in which, therefore, the slit he was making was less observable than it would have been elsewhere since what it opened upon was a clump of small evergreen pines.

He had indeed been the one to decide the position of the tent, which was octagonal in shape, but this ocular justification of his intuitive confidence that the slit he was making would face this group of firs gave him a curious glow of self-confidence. It was therefore with some surprise that Nesta noted the unexpected ease with which he did finally rejoin them and the lack of awkwardness with which he received the friendly quip wherewith the doctor assured him that his wife could give birth, without hurting herself or disgracing him, to as many sons as Leah bare to Jacob.

It was indeed to his own surprise as well as to Nesta's that Gwythyr found himself standing so much at ease before the two of them as they sat side by side on the edge of the bed, found himself talking as freely and naturally to this learned man as he might have done to their friend Amreu of Ogof-y-Gawr, or even to old Gwrgi at Ty Cerrig.

The light of the torches, that were now burning with perfect smoothness and exhaling a delicious fragrance, fell most happily upon the doctor's form as he sat with his right hand resting upon Nesta’s knee and his left caressing with the infatuated tenderness of a fetish worshipper his precious thrice-curved ram’s horn, a horn that had been clamped round in so many places by silver ornamentation that there was little of its original material left visible.

What the torchlight really did, for the light of both torches fell on the same side of the man, was to divide his face into clear-cut outlines of emphatic contours and hollow shadows, an emphasis that lent itself peculiarly well to his enormous downward-curving nose, to his narrow retreating forehead, to his lean neck with its curiously knotted, ropelike protuberances, protuberances that seemed to distend or diminish according to the degree of mental intensity in the brainwaves within the skull above them, and above all to that tormented lock of twisted black hair which still swung about on the top of his head, though he had made its roots so tender that he was trying to stop twisting it at every sort of odd moment between finger and thumb.

Upon both these objects, the ram’s horn in the man’s hand and the horn of hair on the top of his head, the light of Morfydd’s nuptial torches shone resplendently, but it seemed to Gwythyr as he stood in front of all these features that it was upon the man’s great drooping nose, with its shadow resting upon Nesta’s shoulder, that this illumination fell with its friendliest unction and benediction.

There was something curiously reassuring to Gwythyr about the curve of that nose. It would have puzzled him to explain what it was. Indeed, when he tried to do so later to Nesta, the girl’s amusement so disconcerted him that he gave it up as hopeless. But what he was trying to express when she couldn’t help laughing at him was that the doctor’s nose made him think of vague rumours that had come to him about pyramids and sphinxes and palm trees and camels.

Another thing in addition to these subtler beneficent influences that made him feel at ease with Lot-el-Azziz was the man's way of talking about his wife and child and their expectation of having another child ere long. The doctor explained to Gwythyr and Nesta that their son Gog was already three years old and that when their unborn son Magog saw the light — which they anticipated would happen any day now — there would be exactly the proper distance between them; so that Magog would look up to Gog, and the wisdom of Gog's ways would be enhanced in conformity with Magog's ideal of him.

"I heard from the *Cymry* at your camp, my Lord Doctor," Gwythyr threw in, "about your son, Gog. All the serfs and servants up there seem to think the world of him, and they tell me it's wonderful how he keeps his good manners and isn't spoilt by being noticed so much."

"By the way, my friend," Lot-el-Azziz threw in, "I've heard others beside yourself all over this island, yes, even among my own Punic relatives in Cornwall, talking of *Cymry,* or 'Comrades'. Now am I right in assuming that by this word you refer to the ordinary inhabitants of Ynys Prydein, who are neither Roman aristocrats nor Brythonic princes nor Gwyddyl-Ffichti outlaws? You people all seem to use the word naturally and casually, but I've never seen it in writing; and when I asked this learned chronicler, the Henog from Dyfed, he said it was a vulgar expression, popular at the moment in certain districts of the country among the forest people, but of no permanent importance, and not likely to survive the present wars and invasions."

Gwythyr and Nesta exchanged glances. "I think I could best make it clear to our Lord Doctor," he said quickly, addressing his wife as well as

Lot-el-Azziz, "if I explained that it's a word we use to mark the difference between us who have been in the country from the beginning and yet now have to serve others, and all these upstarts and invaders, like this same House of Cunedda about whom the trouble is going on now, not to mention these proud Arthurian princes who ride over us as if we were as new to the land as these yellow-haired Saeson from Germania!"

Lot-el-Azziz now rose to his feet muttering what certainly sounded like "Zorangog." But a second later he was speaking more distinctly. "Zora and Gog," he was saying, "will want to hear all about my visit to you two. They're interested in everything and everybody round here. Zora thinks Edeyrnion's a much nicer place than Caerleon or even Caergwynt, and Gog's always asking about the Derwydd and the Three Princesses. Well, children, I must hurry on. Young Porius will be anxious for my appearance at Brother John's so that he can get off to dine at the camp. I hope he likes our modern dishes. Is it true that at the Gaer you still stew your venison and spice your mead as you did in the days of Rhitta Gawr?"

Gwythyr and Nesta exchanged a quick look. "Keep Prince Porius as long as you can, Lord Doctor," cried the girl, "so that we can fix up everything here and be clear away before he comes!"

El-Azziz looked from one to another and smiled at them both.

"I find it hard," he said, "to imagine friend Porius taking the least interest in his wedding tent. In fact I'm prepared to wager you, Mistress, and you too, Master Gwythyr, that your young Samson of a chieftain will pass this place on his way to the camp without so much as a look. What he'll be thinking of, if I've got his character right, will be the danger of the druid's people attacking the camp. He'll want to find out just what we'll do if we are attacked. He'll want to find out who'll lead us and arrange our defence and give orders to our young horsemen when to advance and when to retreat. No, I don’t think you need have the least fear that he’ll give your labours in this tent a single thought! But I’ll keep him, all the same, as long as I can.”

He moved away to the tent door. “If I were you, Gwythyr,” he added, pausing at the threshold, while the curious resemblance between the lock of hair on the top of his skull and the twisted ram’s horn under his arm became grotesquely emphatic, “I’d put out those torches at once, so that whenever they’re wanted tomorrow, though of course that may not be till nightfall, they’ll burn as well as they’re doing now. The moon’s already high over the water, so you won’t lose your way back to the Gaer!”

Both the young people came instinctively to the entrance and stood there watching his departure. His figure was anyway an extraordinary one, but its strangeness was doubled by the effect of the moonlight that was now pouring across the lake.

At the camp they had grown by now fairly accustomed to his appearance, but few of the Gaer *Cymry* had ever seen him, and Gwythyr and Nesta stared after him in fascinated interest.

“Now *that’s* what I call a real philosopher!” murmured Gwythyr.

“And what a clever doctor he is!” whispered Nesta.

The moonlight certainly threw the retreating figure into magical relief; and the further he removed himself from them, the more remarkable did his personality seem. Of the two, Nesta was the more impressed. The bridal tent, the water and the reeds, the moon, so nearly at its full, floating like a lost heavily tinted shield on a tidal drift of ragged yellow vapour, had lured her mind back to her earliest romantic memories. She recalled how once, when left alone in Ty Cerrig with old Canna, she had looked at some grotesque illustrations of one of Brochvael’s monk-edited classic scrolls, where fantastically garbed human shapes were sailing in strange ships up fabulous harbours, and the feeling invaded her that she and Gwythyr were now voyaging in such a ship, up such a harbour — or perhaps out of it — and that it was among the moss-grown stumps of the trees of forgotten gardens, and the wave-washed bases of the pillars of unknown shrines, that she saw the figure of Lot-el-Azziz recede; recede until the horn protruding from his head and the horn protruding from his hip were both indistinguishable from the remainder of his vanishing form.

It was Gwythyr's voice that broke the spell.

"Shall we do what he said," he whispered, "put out the torches and clear off?"

But Nesta seemed unable to make any move, either physical or mental. Apparently all she could do was to watch the dwindling into nothingness between trees and water of a small, subhuman shadow that seemed to her to be gliding from the world without any movement of its legs.

"Is his wife a Jewess?" she suddenly enquired of Gwythyr.

He looked at her quickly. "How the devil do I know? I've never set eyes on her, nor on her boy either. Think of calling those boys Gog and Magog! And how sure he is that the unborn one's a boy! He'll feel silly if it's a girl."

Nesta looked at him with a vague smile.

"I wonder," she said, "if *our* first one will be a boy or a girl?"

"It'll be a girl if you go on staring into this moonlight! Well! I'll put the torches out and collect our things. You don't want to leave any of those sacks behind, do you? Anyway, if you do, we can throw them away in the forest."

He left her and re-entered the tent; but he was soon by her side again.

"Do you think those logs will be dry enough? They swore at the camp that they came from the pile at the back of the kitchen. And do you think I've left enough bracken and kindling?"

Nesta's tone was cross when she replied to these questions.

"How fussy you are, Gwythyr! You're always telling me the *Cymry* are put upon by these Cunedda people and here you are fussing and fretting for fear Prince Porius won't be warm on his wedding night! He'll have his bride to keep him warm, won't he?"

He made no retort to this and continued silent while he folded up one empty sack and moved another that had several heavy things in it from his left shoulder to his right.

"Come on, girl," he said when he'd made these preparations. "If Prince Porius finds us here the Lord knows what he'll think up for us to do! Don't you remember the triad, the three worst things for a lord: a *cantref* that pays no tax, a cow that gives no milk, and a servant that does nothing?"

"Gwythyr!"

"Yes, my dear?"

"Do you think the doctor's wife is as old as the doctor, or do you suppose she's much younger?"

His only answer to this was to fling round her a motley mantle, made of patches of wolfskin and foxskin and wildcatskin, in the making of which he had been both hunter and tailor, and which he hadn't forgotten to bring with them in view of their return by night.

The adjustment of this mantle took a minute or two as they were both proud of it; but Nesta could still see in her mind the vanishing figure of the doctor departing like a harmless Chimaera, horned both at head and at waist, amid the moonlit trees, so she allowed its maker to smooth down its creases and ruffle out its furs in passive abstraction. They were just setting off — not hand in hand, for Gwythyr had too much to carry, but in good spirits and side by side — when they were disturbed by laughter and cries, voices, and the sound of horses' hooves, from the direction of the camp.

Two richly attired young horsemen, each of them brandishing a long lance ornamented with a resplendent pennon, came riding up, side by side, on two black horses, the moonlight throwing both themselves and their lances into unearthly prominence. They were both very youthful and both full of the wildest gaiety and recklessness. One of them held a young woman against his breast whose short and engagingly moulded form he had evidently only that minute snatched up from the ground. The woman's husband — who was none other than Amreu, the laughing curly-headed steward of Ogof-y-Gawr — was running along by the side of the second young man, evidently more concerned about obtaining a favourable response to some appeal he was making than about what was happening to his wife.

In fact, as the party caught up with Gwythyr and Nesta, Nesta heard Amreu call out almost reproachfully: "It's all right, Lela, you silly! Can't you look after yourself for *one* moment? I've got something to say to my Lord Peredur. I'll lift you down in a second! Prince Galahaut's only giving you a ride" — and then when a scream, obviously not devoid of real alarm, went wavering like the startling splash of a moorhen across the water— "the prince is only teasing you, Lela! Don't be such a little goose! For Jesus' sake let me finish with Lord Peredur! It's only for a minute. I'll lift you down before anything can—"

But Lela had now recognized her friends from the Gaer and was crying out to them to help her; and Gwythyr, feeling that this was a dedicated moment for impressing Nesta with both his principles and his spirit, advanced so boldly upon the abductor that his horse began rearing up.

"God's holy spittle!" cried the angry boy. "What impertinence is here? Get back, villain! Get back, you ill-begotten son of a water rat!"

But the presence of Nesta, wrapped round in the wild skins he had himself sown together for her, so worked upon him, that, in place of drawing back, Gwythyr actually went so far as to lay his hand upon the horse's bridle. This produced an electric result; for the agitation of the horse under this strange touch combined with the writhings and twistings of Lela, and the man's own complete astonishment that one of these Edeyrnion *taeogau,* one of those churlish serfs of the north, should presume to meddle with the little pleasures of Prince Galahaut of Surluse, caused that idiotic youth to tighten his grip upon his lance to such a degree that it relaxed his hold upon the reins.

This instinctive and angry concentration upon his great weapon had another result. It diminished the firmness of his hold on the soft body of Lela. Of this relaxation the girl took immediate advantage; and slipping down to the ground she plunged into a torrent of half-indignant, half-provocative raillery, to which his difficulties with his enormous lance and his agitated steed, not to mention the interference of Gwythyr, completely prevented the young rider from retorting.

The Prince of Surluse became in fact speechless with embarrassed fury. To the observant Nesta, whose only fear was that Gwythyr should fall into a hand-to-hand struggle with one or other of these reckless lads, it was a revelation as to the careless rough-and-tumble life of these Arthurian horsemen when she noted how little the conversation between Amreu and Peredur was affected by all this disturbance.

Peredur's lance remained in its resting place at the back of his saddle, while his hands were so firmly on the reins that without letting his horse move away a yard from its plunging and struggling companion he kept it in absolute control. Nor was this control merely the effect of the young rider's firm will and firmer hand. It was a psychic phenomenon. Peredur's soul had indeed a good deal in common with the soul of a horse.

It had a quality that kept certain particular human nerves — especially those connected with sex, race, and religion — in an unruffled state of beatific harmlessness. It had the power not only of numbing these dangerous nerves, but of transforming and transferring the magnetic urge behind them till it increased the physical sensations of sight and touch and smell, especially where the face of the earth was concerned, to a degree of unbelievably intense animal enjoyment.

It was a great comfort to Nesta when Gwythyr let go the bridle of Prince Galahaut's horse and drew both herself and Lela out of reach of its plunging hooves. Galahaut himself, she could see, was still in a furious temper but she could see too that he was now, with an angry boy's vanity, pretending to be polishing the silver circlets that strengthened the naked ash wood of his great weapon, pretending, in fact, that the incident of Lela's escape had already sunk into oblivion.

Gwythyr too had begun to listen with interest to the talk between the big steward of Ogof-y-Gawr and the good-natured Peredur.

"But how on earth did you know the counsellor would make me chief of the emperor's men?" this latter was asking now.

"He has, hasn't he?" repeated the other.

"Well, Amreu, my friend, as a matter of fact he *has;* but he has only just done so, done so this very evening, and it's a mystery to me how you and your wife heard of it so quickly."

"Lela heard the Derwydd tell the eldest princess."

The simple countenance of the newly appointed representative of the emperor expressed puzzled incredulity.

"When did she hear him tell her?"

"Early this afternoon."

"But, my friend, the counsellor only left me an hour ago when the sun was already low."

Amreu's dark-complexioned face assumed the self-satisfied expression of an older child who knows the termination of a tale whose confused occurrences have begun to be too much for a younger listener.

The comfortable smile of benevolent unction which creased the corners of his full lips as he stroked the horse and gazed up at its young rider endowed his face with the premonition of a complacent double chin.

"The Derwydd," he murmured proudly, "must have known it before it happened."

Peredur's frown of bewilderment deepened.

"Do you mean," he said, "when I was in the stables and the counsellor was in his sister's tent?"

Amreu nodded.

"But, man," protested Peredur, "I had no idea of it then myself."

In Amreu's lustrous dark eyes appeared a look of exultant pity. He evidently felt that this sturdy champion from the emperor's court had been brought up in disgraceful ignorance of the druids of Edeyrnion.

"You believe," said Peredur, uttering the words nervously and with hesitation as if even to speak of so great and mysterious a being as the counsellor concentrating his thoughts upon an inexperienced young horseman like himself was improper and immodest, "you believe that he was thinking so hard about me at that moment that the Derwydd caught it out of the air?"

The ex-steward of the Three Princesses nodded vigorously; and then, as if recognizing that the flame of this surprising boy's secret pride needed some especial fanning, he declared, "The counsellor must have been saying to himself: ‘As soon as the sun goes down I shall go over to the camp and tell Peredur that I’ve decided to appoint him its leader; for I can see he’s the only one there who can keep his head in a crisis and think quickly what to do.’”

In his warm desire to stir up the self-esteem of the man he had selected as his future master, Amreu had raised his voice, and this caused Peredur to cast a nervous glance at his fellow horseman.

But the Prince of Surluse had apparently succeeded in attaining that point of philosophical indifference which was known to the Stoics as *ataraxia;* for now that his horse was quiescent it seemed as important to him that the moonlight should be perfectly reflected in the polished silver upon his lance as that the emperor’s camp should find a clear-headed leader.

“But how did the Derwydd know,” enquired Peredur in a whisper, “that I would obey the counsellor?”

There was something about this question that so tickled Amreu’s fancy that he had difficulty in suppressing one of his prehistoric outbursts of laughter, such as might have come from some Iberian camel driver between Marrakesh and the Mountains of Atlas. Lela and Nesta smiled at each other as they listened.

“What did he say?” their white faces asked each other in the moonlight as the runaway steward clinched his argument with the old Iberian proverb: “When a prophet understands a prophet, the stars move.”

It was at this point that Gwythyr made an impolite attempt to interrupt the whispered dialogue that was now proceeding between the two women. But his rough effort to drag Nesta away was frustrated not only by an angry “Hush!” from one of the girls and a murmured “Just one minute!” from the other, but by an unexpected spasm of human curiosity in his own impatient breast.

For Amreu, as heedless of the claim to seniority of the absorbed adventurer from Surluse as the counsellor himself, had reverted to the impassioned appeal that had been disturbed by Galahaut's behaviour to Lela. The man went into all the most personal aspects of his and Lela's flight from Ogof-y-Gawr. He confessed his hatred of violence, and his personal lack of courage. He confessed his profound distrust of the silentiary to whose secret machinations with the Derwydd he attributed this sudden coming of the Saxons, every detail of which had already spread through the forest as if carried by Coranian magic.

He poured out to the new captain of the camp the passionate faith that both he and his wife had in the cause of the emperor; and he ended by declaring — and tears big as wrens' eggs ran down his cheeks as with convincing sincerity he sobbed out this admission — that he and Lela hated every sort of war and confusion; that when they were both young they had been converted to the real spirit of Christ by the teaching of Brother John, who himself had been taught by the great Pelagius; that they had been for many months dissatisfied with the way things were going at Ogof-y-Gawr; but that it was the appearance that very morning of Gunhorst the Sais along with the treacherous silentiary that had decided them; and at the risk of being left without any master or any service or any roof to cover their heads they had fled from that fatal place!

What they wanted, for he would be frank with the young captain, yes, what they wanted in the depths of their hearts — and here, as in his reference to the teaching of Brother John, there was a quiver of real emotion in the man's voice — was to serve, not the House of Cunedda — and it was at this point that he lowered his tone and made a scarcely perceptible movement with his head in the direction of Nesta and Gwythyr, as much as to say: “You see what poor prospects there are in that quarter!” — but in the household of the Emperor of Ynys Prydein himself.

It was at this point that the guileless Peredur showed how correctly the counsellor had divined the vein of shrewd common sense that mingled with his boyish simplicity. It was indeed by a stroke worthy of the tact of a born statesman that he now broke up the awkward silence that fell upon them all, following the ex-steward’s confession; a silence enhanced by the fact that the two girls and young Gwythyr were fairly caught in their absorbed attention while even the Prince of Surluse revealed by the expression on his face that philosophical polishing did not necessarily exclude suspicious listening.

“Well, Amreu,” cried the camp’s new leader, “you and your wife will be doing me a great favour if you’ll help us with our banquet tonight, and you’ll be doing us all a particular courtesy if you’ll tell our friends in the kitchen that Prince Porius as well as his cousin Rhun will be dining with us, and that they should be seated next to the counsellor’s chair even if the counsellor himself is absent.”

He paused as if in profound cogitation. Then he added, “With the experience you’ve had you will know how to arrange these seats so as not to hurt the feelings of either the Henog of Dyfed or Rhun ap Gwrnach. They should neither of them be placed below Dion Dionides or above Doctor Lot-el-Azziz. Oh, yes! and we mustn’t put Rhun ap Gwrnach next to the doctor either, for the Jewish god and the Persian god loathe each other; and Rhun hates a joke, while the doctor’s always joking.”

Then the youth turned to his friend. “Well, Galahaut, have we time to ride round the lake?”

His companion lifted his head, tightened his reins, and twisting round in his seat fitted the handle of his lance, whose silver bands now glittered like the bands of Orion, within the leather saddle strap beside him, thus leaving both his hands free.

“We’ll take it, anyway,” he responded, “and for Christ’s sake let’s be off, or we’ll be caught by this hulking idiot of a Gaer Prince!”

The riders on the two black horses were however spared the undesired encounter with the great-grandson of Creiddylad the giantess; for though when they plunged into the mud and reeds to reach the northern end of the water they passed close to the walls of the sick Brother’s cell, there was no sign of any man leaving, nor indeed of any man entering that massive retreat.

Brother John had never seemed very different to Porius from what he looked now. His old teacher had always been for him of a gaunt and skeletonlike frame, and the features of his face had always seemed to emerge with a startling directness, almost independent of flesh and blood, from the osseous structure of the skull. From childhood he had been familiar with the bony leanness of the arms and legs now lying before him so motionless beneath the blankets; nor was there anything new to him in the intensity of the disturbing eyes, gazing so meditatively and judicially, first at the doctor and then at himself, as if it had been *their* souls, and not the man’s own, that waited on the brink of a plunge into the abyss.

Brother John’s head — so skull-like save for its prominent nose, protruding chin, and sensitive equine ears — rested on what his pupil recognized at once as his second best pillow, not the one stuffed with wild-goose feathers but the one stuffed with bog moss.

Porius could see he was thinking of other things than those which el-Azziz was explaining to him, and yet he clearly wasn’t oblivious to what the doctor was saying.

Porius himself *was* oblivious to the Jew's fantastic talk about a dangerous insatiable living creature that was feeding on the old man's lifeblood. Not that he didn't know his master's days were numbered. He had known it ever since the middle of last night when he had been on the brink of summoning Myrddin Wyllt to the Brother's side, and indeed would have done so if the old man hadn't sternly forbade him. But he had so long regarded his master as one who had an absolute power of life and death over the gaunt and aged image that called itself Brother John that when, soon after midnight, the old man had cried out in a loud voice, a greater voice than any he'd ever before heard from his lips, that he would be dead before the magic of Myrddin Wyllt had overcome the Derwydd of Edeyrnion, he assumed that his friend had decided, in his sick weariness of these everlasting contests, to return his soul to a god whose miraculous power reduced all human magic to impotence.

"He'll live to marry Morfydd and me," Porius thought, as the doctor, caressing his ram's horn and bending his high forehead, his great pendulous nose, his swaying topknot towards the spot beneath the blankets where was the dying man's navel, transformed his warnings about the "death crab" addressed to his patient into a Cabbalistical exhortation directed to the creature itself, not so much exorcizing it from its present vantage ground as commanding it to turn its scorpion's sting against itself and perish where it was by its own volition.

Porius was seated on his own bed as he watched all this, with his heels drawn up beneath him and his hands clasped round his ankles; and for the reason that his enormous bodily strength was so absolutely quiescent his mind became abnormally active.

And, in proportion as its activity increased, this cold-blooded mind in him seemed more and more able to regard both his own emotions and the emotions of others with a curiously inhuman detachment. This detachment did not, oddly enough, apply at all to the inanimate objects surrounding his quiescent form in the Brother's cell. The low-curved stone arches of the roof, black with the smoke of ancient fires, the darkly protruding ends of the oak beams, blacker with a more velvety blackness than the arches, the numerous iron hooks, brazen bars, wooden cupboards with which a simple human necessity for unspoilt books, dry clothes, and unmouldy bread had transformed those grey walls, all these accentuated by the disturbing stare of the old man's eyes as Porius surveyed them with inconsequent casualness seemed perfectly adapted to afford wooden, iron, or brazen *forms* for the imponderable essences of his reckless, unscrupulous, shameless thoughts. So also did the greenish light emanating from an unusual sort of ship's lantern which the doctor had persuaded the sea merchant from the Piraeus to lend him for the dying man's use. So not less did the warm red glow of the alder logs on the cindery flagstones near the foot of his own bed. All these presences, including certain wavering wisps of smoke under the arches, seemed to become only too willing bodies for his unregulated thoughts.

He turned for instance his analytical intelligence with a cold fury of disillusionment upon his feelings of only a couple of evenings ago when, in the company of Rhun, he had visited the Cave of Mithras. And now — for the two women between them had finally got the whole story out of little Neb — he had to face the fact that, on the final day of her maidenhood, his bride had rushed across hill and dale at dawn to a tryst with his best friend.

"I must have a talk with old Rhun after supper tonight," he thought, while the Piraean ship's lantern at the sick man's side became an untimely and unholy hearth fire, lit by himself in his bridal tent; while the pain-quelling drug which just then Lot-el-Azziz was persuading Brother John to swallow became a great bowl of mead, borrowed — for he was already making up his mind what he was going to do and how he would bring matters to a head — from the Arthurian camp, over which two sworn *milites* of Mithras must settle their differences about a woman by the side of that woman's marriage bed. For where else could they be alone? And alone — he had definitely made up his mind on that point — he and old Rhun must be.

A low-voiced murmur now came from the lips of the dying man, and Porius interpreted it as the natural question: "When will this devil crab reach my heart and finish me off?"

But el-Azziz, twisting his head round so as to see Porius's face, explained in a hurried and fretful tone that in these cases no doctor could possibly predict the day or the hour; all he could do was to excite the fury of the creature to such a pitch by the use of the proper conjurations that it would either turn its sting against itself or strike at its victim's heart with such desperate violence that the man's death would be instantaneous and painless.

For all the incoherence of Brother John's words and for all his wild and excited stare, it was plain to Porius that even before he swallowed whatever it may have been that el-Azziz produced from some interior pocket in his brown habit, his old friend wasn't in any acute distress either of mind or body.

What Porius couldn't know was that so far from being "incoherent," as in his quiet assurance he had assumed his teacher to be, and so far from making frantic enquiries as to how many more days he had to live, as the doctor interpreted his utterance, Brother John was in reality carrying on a quiet, reasonable, and self-possessed conversation.

The mistake the old Brother made was a purely technical one. He fancied he was using the inaudible speech of thought, when in reality he was uttering grotesque and gabbling syllables neither agreeable to the ear nor intelligible to the mind. But Brother John wasn't merely thinking. He was talking. He was talking to Pelagius. He was assuring Pelagius that there was no need for him to be anxious or uneasy. He was giving Pelagius a careful and exact account of how he dealt with the pain caused by the devil crab.

"You must remember," he was saying, "I don't think of *him* at all. I reduce *him* to nothingness. He doesn't exist. What exists is only the pain — the pain alone, Pelagius, my Master! And the pain, Pelagius, is a material thing. It is an element, my Master. But it is a Protean element. It is colour, substance, texture, taste, smell — all of them by turns! And I who move about in this element change too. I swim, I fly, I wade, I float. Very often I climb.

"What I've learnt to know, Pelagius, are the weather signs in this element, signs that tell you what's best to do. Sometimes it's best to wriggle like a snake in the grass; sometimes it's best to curl up like a hedgehog. And there *are* times, Pelagius, when the only thing for me to do is to grow numb and dumb and mum, and in that condition jerk myself round, first on one side, then on the other! And it's even a good thing now and again to catch hold of your ankles — of one of them at any rate, Master, and with all your fingers cling fast and tight! You'd never guess what assuagement it is to the bites of the creature. It's a case of bone to bone; as you always used to say, a man's not a man till he lives from his bones.

"At its worst, Master, the pain's shot through in a very odd way with black and white coruscations; and then it's best to stretch yourself out as stiffly as you can. But I always know when it's going to lessen, because then it turns into a curious pinkish mass, like a huge sandbank of solid paste made of chopped-up shells; and then I can stroke its surface with my hand and pat it gently and smooth it down, till it’s as soft as velvet!

“Don’t be too sorry for me, Master, for I very, very often have moments when not to be in pain is so perfectly delicious that I feel as if my old heart would burst for the happiness of life. It’s at those moments that I try to bribe God, Master. Don’t be angry with me for this, Pelagius! You know how it is with me. I’m never as much at ease with him as you are, and I try to bribe him not to come back upon me with his pain by feeding him with nuggets of my happiness. Sometimes when I can feel he’s coming back I positively *throw* my happiness away! ‘Here! Here!’ I cry. ‘Anyone can have this who wants it!’”

It was at this particular moment in Brother John’s cell, when the old Brother was making the scientific mistake of supposing he was only *thinking* the sensible thoughts just recorded, when all the while there was automatically issuing from his gullet a sequence of irrational sounds such as the few moths and spiders as had escaped the brooms of his boy-pupils must have confused with the bubbling of bubbles, the boiling of barley, the cracking of sticks, the pattering of rain, the moaning of wind, the creaking of bolts, the dripping of oil, the squeaking of mice, the gibbering of phantoms, together with all the other subhuman utterances that such insects can hardly fail to catch issuing from the objects of straw, of wood, of iron, of brass, of silver, of clay, that give to any human habitation its peculiar character, that Lot-el-Azziz, whose conjurations of the “devil crab” within his patient had been followed by the application of one end of his ram’s horn to that patient’s navel and of the other to his own lowered head, grew aware that somebody or something was moving about on the flagstones outside.

Brother John's dialogue with Pelagius prevented him from catching this sound, while Porius was too absorbed in imagining what he and Rhun would say to each other about Morfydd to hear anything but the burning of the fire over which they would face each other that night in Morfydd's bridal tent.

"I believe there's somebody at the door!" cried the Jew at last, thrusting the ram's horn into its place at his hip and hurriedly rising to his feet. "May I see who it is? There may have been an accident at the camp and they want me at once."

"I'll soon see," said Porius, rising more slowly. "It's more likely somebody for the Brother who doesn't know he's ill."

It turned out to be nobody less than the Henog from Dyfed; and since the man was his father's official guest at the Gaer, Porius felt compelled to let him enter, rapidly explaining to him as he did so how ill the old Brother was.

The Henog was completely undisturbed. He had come from the camp to the cell moved by the same fixed purpose as the one that had driven him from the Gaer to the camp. He might waver in his manner of approach and be sidetracked a hundred times, but no man in the world could make the Henog forget what at the back of his mind was his main purpose.

"They tell me you're coming to the camp for dinner, Prince," he said, repelling with a wave of his hand Porius's offer of a seat on his bed, "so *we* can talk about it as we walk over there together, but what I wanted to ask Brother John is a quite plain and simple question that no sickness could hinder a man from answering. It's a question that has to do with—"

Here the old Brother himself, making a feeble and quite ineffectual attempt to lift himself up on his elbow but fixing a gaze of the liveliest intelligence upon the man, broke into his sentence. "To do with Pelagius?

Anything to do with Pelagius I am ready to answer... It is the one thing I want to do thoroughly and completely before my end comes... It is the one thing I have been commanded, by the powers above us all, to do before I leave this world. What is it then, Master Henog, that you want to know about Pelagius? Are you also thinking of visiting Constantinople on this great mission of justice?”

It became clear at once to Porius — though not so to the Jewish doctor who had had less opportunity of studying the ways of the chronicler from the south — that the man had in his mind no question of any sort about Pelagius.

It was not that the Henog, as he stood there before the three of them, with the curious greenish lustre of the ship’s lamp from the Piraeus enveloping his dedicated and sacerdotal figure, looked in the smallest degree staggered or ruffled or confused. He looked patiently and indulgently expectant. He looked as if the dying man’s frivolity, in thus dragging in theological controversy when the very foundations of human civilization, that is to say, the facts and fables of history, were awaiting discussion, must soon yield, if he remained quiescent, to a seriousness more proper to the occasion.

And his faith was soon justified; for Brother John, with the psychic clairvoyance of a dying man, quickly realized that there was something in the mind of this singular intruder which had nothing at all to do with Pelagius.

Some while before either el-Azziz or Porius could realize what he wanted, the old man had begun making frantic signs to them; and Porius, who had known him as few sons know their fathers, saw that their inability to catch the drift of these signs was making him really angry.

Suddenly he understood. He wanted them to leave him alone with the Henog. This was something he felt very reluctant to do; but taking the doctor by the arm he did at least go so far as to draw him into the portion of the entrance that was invisible to the man in the bed. Here he held him by the arm, and the doctor thought, “I must look at my arm tonight. I warrant he’s bruised it. What a grip the fellow has!” And then he thought, “It’s his feeling for the old man. He’s hurt by his end; and his end it’ll be, unless the devil turns on itself first. But you don’t know your own strength. That’s what’s the matter with you, Prince Porius of Edeyrnion!”

But whether he dropped the man’s arm consciously or unconsciously, the great-grandson of the giantess Creiddylad was now destined to pass through an experience which pushed the dark tide level of the Brother’s death bed with all its broken shells into a momentary oblivion.

What in fact the Henog was boldly and bluntly enquiring of Brother John, without hesitation, without circumlocution, without asking leave of anyone, was a crucial enquiry that Porius himself had often longed to put to Prince Einion. Yes, his father would have been a far subtler and more comprehensive authority on this matter than any pupil of Pelagius, more subtle in fact and more likely to come near the truth than Pelagius himself, yet something had always prevented him from asking his father this crucial question. This “something” was in fact the darkest, deepest, most inexplicable inhibition to be found in the whole of Edeyrnion. Probably nowhere else in Europe had the Lethean influence of Christianity worked so like a magical nepenthe or mandragora in bringing forgetfulness of the old incestuous gods of magic and illusion.

The forest people had acquired crazy and painful and repulsive manias and had been burdened by insane obligations, because of these old gods of theirs. In place of being a proud memory or a storehouse of fabulous beauty, their ancient religions had become for them a dark horrible sensitive bruise lying at the bottom of their soul; a bruise upon which the new cult of the gentle physician-god of Bethlehem and Calvary was forever pouring oil and spreading the poppied ointment of oblivion.

With the forest people who “embraced” Christianity, their conversion was literally an “embrace.” It was an embrace of their souls by Christianity to such an extent that while the Romanized Brythons in other portions of Ynys Prydein were the most secular and irreligious “Christians” in all Christendom, the forest people from Dinas Bran to Saint David’s became the most utterly Christian race in the world.

And this they became in the most natural way in the world — from a terrific desire to escape the ferocious heathenism which had been thrust upon them by historic conditions, conditions that were totally alien to their natural introverted pacifism and inborn harmlessness.

This inherited inhibition, this bruise in the racial psyche that made everybody in Edeyrnion reluctant to speak of Math or Gwydion or Arianrod, was well known to Porius. He had suffered from it from his childhood in others, and he felt it deeply in himself. It was akin to his most personal, most secret, most private reluctance to confess to anyone his feeling about the giants of Cader Idris, his abnormal interest in everything he could pick up about Rhitta Gawr, his weird mania for the south-west wind, and above all, or rather *below* all, his nostalgic longing for some vague feminine creature inhabiting the mountains whom he could associate with his ancestress Creiddylad.

Already by slow degrees in the passage of the centuries, as generation after generation of children were discouraged from asking questions about Math and Gwydion or about their victim Pryderi, as if merely to name these names might bring down some appalling disaster, this dark race bruise was disappearing; but enough of it remained to constitute what the forest people called a *tynged;* in other words, a neurotic inhibition against the whole topic.

But the Henog of Dyfed had no such inhibition. How should he have? He came from the part of Ynys Prydein that had known Pryderi under his happier appellation of Gwri Wallt Euryn, and his soul was free from any *tynged* concerning this mysterious god's victimization and death.

Thus he had already made up his mind that, when his official *Life of Myrddin Wyllt* was finished for the emperor, he would at once undertake — introducing every fragment of information he could scrape together from every quarter — a patched-up history imperfect and uneven — for what could you hope for? — of that dim, far-off, mysterious struggle between the beneficent gods of the south, Pwyll the husband of Rhiannon and Pryderi her son, and the older, darker, less human deities of the magical north, who though their temporary abode might be Caer Dathyl in Arfon, and though they might call themselves Lords of Gwynedd, really came from a north that was far further away.

Stronger in their magic and in their savagery than Pwyll Pen Annwn and his son Pryderi were these terrible gods of the northern mists, and their women were like unto them; and the Henog felt that destiny had dedicated him to write of these things.

What at this moment caused Porius to drop the doctor's arm and move forward was the effect upon the man in the bed of the Henog's words. Porius kept his head however and only advanced a step. The last thing he desired was to create a diversion by drawing Brother John's attention to himself. But as he watched the sick man's extreme excitement it was anything but easy to hold himself back. In fact he couldn't have done so if it hadn't been that the exceptional gulf between his somnolent Herculean body and his alert and restless mind made the retarding of all impulsive responses a natural instinct with him.

A muttered exclamation from el-Azziz conveying to him, however, in a lightning flash that the doctor would interfere if he weren't immediately prevented, made him hurriedly step back to the latter's side and resume his clutch on his arm. This was bruise on bruise, but there was nothing else to be done.

His knowledge of the Henog was limited; but his knowledge of Brother John, if not unlimited, was sufficient to teach him that the most skilful meddling with the tide of events, the most tactful attempt to dam the current of destiny, was at this particular moment likely to be disastrous.

Thus he held himself, as well as Lot-el-Azziz, in firm control while he watched what was going on and heard what was being uttered. How well he knew every object in this ancient chamber! And not only the separate and separable objects. For he knew too all manner of curious marks and stains and curves and projections and angles and shadows and blotches and convexities and concavities such as the original builders of the chamber could never have foreseen, either in regard to effects by day or in regard to effects — as now — by firelight or lamplight.

What had not been anticipated by the old workers in stone, who so roughly — but oh, so cunningly! — had hammered out those massively curving arches and those delicately moulded recesses, was that the work of their Edeyrnion-born hands and brains should ever come to be illuminated by the Greek lantern of a sea-voyaging vessel built in the Piraeus!

But now it swept like a darting seagull's wing across Porius's consciousness that the greenish light emitted by this foreign ship's lantern gave an unholy effect to everything in the chamber. Something startling was happening. For no sooner had Brother John grasped what the Henog was saying than his whole countenance changed. In fact his whole head and body changed. His skull-like cranium, which in any case tended to resemble the outermost rind of some sun-bleached melon from the south of Gaul which the owners of an ancient villa have set up upon a broken herm to scare away thieves by means of a burning taper shining horribly through its eye sockets, looked now as though the two eye holes which pierced it were emitting a blaze of emotion such as the laws of Nature forbade to normal human heads.

Had all those cunningly moulded arches and all those blackened oak beams, now illuminated by that Piraean lantern, possessed the power of articulating the confused contrarieties about good and evil and free will and chance, to which they had been listening for centuries, a movement like the movement of the waves of the sea might well have flowed through that ancient cell; and had it done so the mystic excitement flaming from the eyes of Brother John as he turned from the "devil crab" in his vitals to confront those "devil crabs" in the cosmos, Math the son of Mathonwy and Gwydion the son of Don, would have been like the streaming light from some rock-based Pharos in the Aegean Sea!

Nor was this all. For with the holes in his skull blazing in this manner, and his thin hands shaking, and the tight-stretched skin over his ravaged stomach pulsating with excitement, Brother John actually struggled to his knees on the bed and lifted up his arms with the fists clenched high above his head, "just as though" — so Lot-el-Azziz explained later to the astonished Zora-and-Gog— "the wicked magicians of Caer Dathyl were descending upon the moonlit roof."

And in this position, while Porius held back el-Azziz from interfering, and the Henog's lean frame beneath its closely fitting black robe turned cold and stiff with the intensity of his mind's receptivity, the old theologian poured forth a scoriac flood of mythological passion. “Oh, if only,” thought Porius, “oh, if only he would carry Pelagius a little further and be brave enough to challenge and defy their One God, and his slave-love universe!” But once having realized the full meaning of what was happening, Porius’s restless soul sank quietly down upon his quiescent and somnolent muscles, and he found himself feeling not altogether displeased that these two outsiders, this clever Asiatic and this learned visitor from Dyfed, should hear what formidable storms of prophetic fury were still possible in Edeyrnion!

And the Henog’s attitude under this torrent of wild and desperate interpretation struck him as worthy of note. The man had been holding all the while some sort of leather-covered tablet and he was now mechanically scratching the cover of this with the fingernail of his first finger.

“The fellow’s whole being,” Porius thought, “has become one terrific indrawing, insucking whirlpool of insatiable attention, while, like some chance-drifting fragment of wood or some casually blown piece of straw, his physical body is carried in circles round and round and round the revolving and all-swallowing gullet of his mental apprehension.”

But Porius himself was now listening with almost equal concentration, and what he heard was no small shock to him. He had prided himself on knowing his old master better than anyone in the whole world knew him. But *what was this?* Brother John was throwing into a passionate, eloquent, mystical defence of Pwyll and Pryderi, as against Math and Gwydion, a savage intensity of emotion that Porius had never seen in him before; no, not even when he was championing Pelagius against the pope.

And the memory flashed through Porius’s head of how even the simple-minded Rhun had quoted to him a passage from Pelagius as they walked by the river a couple of days ago with the clear intention of making it serve as a prelude for his own revelations on the subject of Mithras.

Did the ideas of Pelagius, then, and the whole influence of the Pelagian method of thinking, as these things spread through the world after his death, inevitably disturb, counteract, and undermine the Christian faith?

Was a man whose soul was *naturally* Pelagian always liable to drift into becoming a devoted miles, or "participant," of Mithras, or a passionate champion of Pryderi, or even into what the young Pen Beirdd, Taliesin, was accused of being by those who believed the fantastic tales of his infancy in Caer Einion, an actual worshipper of the earth goddess, Ceridwen?

A little shocked and startled in what his reason soon told him was nothing but childish and even conventional respect for his master, Porius's mind took some wild leaps as he listened to the old man's unexpected outburst. Was his own secret mania for the southwest wind, was his obsession for Iddawc's mother, Creiddylad y Gawres of the Cader, a natural result of the influence of Pelagius, or was it something deeper still, something that, like the practise of "cavoseniargizing," was integral to his whole nature?

"Where will you find the truth about Pryderi, do you say?"

The old Brother's voice was weaker now, and his hands had fallen to his side. But his eyes in his grey, drawn, skull-bone face had still the look of burning tapers inside a hollow mask; and still as he swayed backwards and forwards upon his knees he addressed his words entirely to the bewitched Henog, who in his petrified immobility had become a creature of one sense only, a stone image, a stone dolphin, you might say, whose sole life was the catching of water drops from a fountain.

"Where will you find it? You'll find it, if you're the man with the *tynged* on him to find it, across every threshold and at every hearthstone in our

land! You'll find it in Edeyrnion; in Ardudwy and Eivionydd; you'll find it in Aberffraw and Pengwern; you'll find it in Maenor-Coed-Alun and Nantcoll. You'll find it from Nantcoll to Dol-Pen-Maen — and from there to... to... to Maen Tyriawc above Melenryd, where he was slain and buried!"

When Brother John came in his mounting agitation to the stream known as Nantcoll and the fatal field called Dol-Pen-Maen, his voice was broken by deep-breathed sobs; and when he came to "the rock Tyriawc above Melenryd," he could scarcely articulate the words.

"And *there,"* he added, in a voice so twisted and contorted by the emotion he felt that it almost ceased to be a human voice at all, and became like a far-drawn cry of lamentation from the ridges and peaks and caves and cairns and tarns and precipices of the Arans and the Arenigs and from the yet more unearthly recesses of Cader Idris— "*and there is his grave...* until... until..." — but here his power failed him and he sank heavily down upon his side.

At this both Porius and el-Azziz rushed forward; while the Henog, still standing close to the bed, remained as if paralyzed. Porius in fact pushed past him as if he had really been an open-mouthed marble dolphin left in patient quiescence when its fountain had ceased to play. For the Henog's eyes continued to stare at the prostrate figure on the bed, whose legs were hidden but whose mouth in the unconscious skull that was hanging over the bed's edge emitted a thin dribble of saliva which trickled drop by drop to the stone floor, where it formed a miniature pool into which an infinitesimally small insect promptly thrust a bold pair of tentative antennae.

"He's alive then?" whispered Porius after they'd got the Brother's head on his pillow, and the doctor nodded. From the heart of that emaciated body, which had now assumed the look of the everlasting acquiescence of a granite figure in an open sarcophagus, he had extracted a faint indication that the rhythm of life had not yet been superseded by the less familiar rhythm of death.

“Yes, and will sleep most of this night now, I fancy,” concluded the Jew. “If the end had to come tonight it would have come already. I would predict you’ll not be disturbed. He’ll sleep like an infant after that outburst and awake tomorrow morning ready to marry you all!”

This not very well-timed jocularity was, all the same, a considerable comfort to Porius, whose faith in the physician was accentuated now by the even breathing of the exhausted Brother. The lightness of the Jew’s tone had the additional effect of rousing the Henog from his stone-dolphin trance.

“You don’t think our young *equites* will mind,” he murmured, addressing Lot-el-Azziz, “if I leave their board tonight before the drinking begins?”

The Jew replied with an oriental shrug of his shoulders and a careless flip of his ram’s horn against one of his knees.

“I’m a foreigner, you know, my Lord, so you’d better not ask me such a question. But I should have supposed” — and he turned his rabbinical profile towards Porius, bowing over the side of the bed upon which one of the Brother’s hollow cheeks was now indenting the fern-stuffed pillow as if it might rest there for thousands of years and eventually leave its impress in the shape of a petrified fossil— “I should have supposed that a renowned historian like the Henog of Dyfed” — and the implication Porius received at this point from the smile beneath the long pendulous nose, a smile which was accentuated by the thick, Mesopotamian, heavily drooping underlip, was that to a descendant of the patriarchal tribe of Isaac and Jacob the social touchiness of a troop of wild mead-drinking riders from the hill fortresses of Caergwynt or Caerleon was scarcely a matter for serious consideration— “and an historian too,” he went on, “who has been given the task of collecting the sad and sacred *mneesikakia,* or the memories of wrongs, wrongs done to the heroic and unhappy god of an ancient people, was of such honourable distinction that like my Zora's ancestor, Rabbi Penuel Zodotokos, at the court of the Great King, he — I mean *you,* my revered Lord Henog — could come and go as it suited yourself, and as it was most convenient for the celestial visitations, whether frequent or infrequent, of your divine Muse."

The Henog gave el-Azziz a pretty searching look after this flattering oration, but he showed no sign of being anything but fully content with what he beheld in that kindly but extremely un-European physiognomy. At any rate, he began putting question after question to the doctor about the sleeping man's condition and the chances of his surviving the agitations of the morrow's dramatic happenings.

Indeed the two of them proceeded to enter into such a learned discussion as to the dark and ambiguous borderland between life and death, and how long this strange condition could be induced to last, and whether there were any authentic cases in history of it ending in a return to life, that Porius decided to delay his departure no longer. El-Azziz had promised to look after Brother John till he returned, and though he knew that as a rule the man dined at the camp table, he felt no compunction about making *him* too late for this meal. The doctor's wife and little boy had a tent of their own, and a woman would always be able to give her husband some sort of supper.

Where he did feel compunction was in the matter of the Henog, for *he* had no wife to see that he didn't go hungry to bed. For himself on this night of all nights, which was the eve of his union with Morfydd, what he must do was to swallow some sort of a hurried meal with those young *equites* at the camp, get hold of old Rhun, get hold of some mead for them both to drink, find some logs — young Gwythyr was sure to have forgotten *them* — and then, for that was the crux of this fatal night, find out just *why* Morfydd had gone to the Cave of Mithras; and after he knew that — well, if she did prefer old Rhun to him — he would see!

The question was, what would old Rhun say for himself, with his weird notions of Mithraic comradeship and his absurd infatuation for that proud image of chastity, the counsellor's sister?

"No, I won't interrupt them," he said to himself as he saw el-Azziz graciously make room for the still somewhat dazed Henog and induce him to sit down by his side on the edge of Brother John's bed. When he reached the entrance, however, he turned again, still hesitating.

"How do I know," he said to himself, "that she and old Rhun didn't go through some crazy Mithraic marriage, of which I shan't hear a word till she forbids me her bed tomorrow?"

His doubt as to whether to take the Henog off with him went on increasing till it amounted to a fury of indecision.

"Curse it!" he groaned. "Not to be able to decide a little thing like this is the devil!" He saw himself dragging away his father's guest from this congenial discussion and realized how helpless he'd feel as they walked side by side to the camp, while the Henog questioned *him* about Pwyll and Pryderi. Mother of God! He'd be tempted to answer him in the mocking intonation of that drunken voice which always made him think of yellow mist and the urine of cattle!

Yes, his father had always mocked and jeered at Henogs and Mabinogs of every kind. His father despised historians, chroniclers, and bards as much as he despised priests and theologians. It is true Brother John had always been an exception with him. But the Brother was not so much a theologian as a preacher.

But it was against bards that Einion had his chief prejudice. Porius could remember the angry disputes and disturbances there had been in the Gaer when, only a year ago, his father had refused to take the youthful bard Taliesin into his service when that proud young poet's passion for independence had driven him to quarrel with the elder branch of the House of Cunedda and turn his back upon the massive towers of Deganwy.

This Einion had done in face of the fact that the inspired boy's obscure modern chants were being carried, you might almost say, on the wind he worshipped, from Caer to Caer and *llys* to *llys* throughout the whole of the north. But though he refused so obstinately to take this troublesome genius into his household, Einion seemed to understand the lad's productions better than anybody else. At any rate he kept very carefully every verse he could lay hold of, and it wasn't long before he knew several of them by heart.

The more obscure they were the more he seemed to enjoy them, and the more he enjoyed them the more he mocked at them, especially when he was drunk. Yes! Porius could see himself walking in the moonlight by the side of the Henog and struggling to answer his questions patiently.

But what effect upon this devoted fanatic would his own secret fancies about Pryderi have, if he could bring himself to reveal them? Would the man turn again into a petrified dolphin of enchanted attention under this very different fountain of mystical intimation? And what would the Henog think if he quoted to him the new bard's obscurities with the very intonation of the prince's mockery when he was drunk and blaspheming?

Ys kyweir vyg kadeir ygkaer sidi
Nis plawd heint a heneint a vo yndi:
Ys gwyr manawyt a phryderi!
Complete is my chair in Caer Sidi
Disease and old age hurt no one in it,

They know — Manawyddan and Pryderi!

At that moment in the restless uneasiness of his indecision, he caught sight of the elder Porius's Roman water bottle which he had left in Brother John's porch; and either because he associated this object with the proud endurance of the legionaries who had used it, or because it reminded him of his feelings a couple of nights ago when, as if in answer to his prayer to the southwest wind, the wind itself came to him from Cader Idris, he suddenly made up his mind. With a final hurried glance at the two men sitting on the bed, he picked up the bottle and departed.

CHAPTER XIX. Taliesin Pen Beirdd

ON LEAVING BROTHER JOHN'S CELL Porius set off at a run. It was at a run he passed his marriage tent; not with the idea of avoiding it, whether out of sentiment, or out of piety, or out of superstition — for he had already decided, nor was the decision a very hard one for him, to throw these inhibitions to the crows — but out of a desire to visit the camp's buttery and obtain a goodly supply of mead while the pressure of satisfying the diners with cooked meats occupied the whole attention of the kitchen.

He couldn't help chuckling to himself as he ran, swallowing deep gulps of moonlit air and giving way to the feeling that he was swimming through the gleaming water rather than running by its side, when he thought of old Rhun's embarrassment at having to submit to the questioning he had in his mind. And luck was with him that night. For when he reached the camp he obtained a huge vessel of mead without difficulty, and it was mead too for which the honey of Gwlad-yr-Haf and the honey of Gwent had each supplied their quota of southern sweetness; nor did he and Rhun experience any difficulty in finding seats side by side, nor in satisfying their hunger long before the bulk of the company had begun to turn their attention from food to drink.

"If only those young people of Mother's," he was soon saying to himself as Rhun and he walked back in silence to the tent, "have remembered to pile up plenty of kindling and to trim and oil the torches, I'll get to the bottom of this meeting at dawn, and to the bottom of Myrddin Wyllt and young Neb being on the scene at the same time. You're a silent one, Rhun, old friend, but we generally end by understanding each other pretty well!"

In the business of lighting the fire and torches, in the business of filling his Roman flask from the great stone vessel which by thrusting an oak stick through its double handles they had carried between them, in the business of getting Rhun comfortably ensconced on a pile of rugs facing the bed, while he arranged for himself a somewhat harder seat on a couple of logs, with his back against the bed, Porius's attention was completely occupied for the first twenty minutes of this unusual session.

And not only so, but "Mother of God!" he found himself able to murmur with easy satisfaction as he handed back the legion's flask to his foster-brother across the crackling sticks and the sweet-smelling smoke, "but this southern drink has a better taste than ours! Don't you think so, Rhun?"

Rhun nodded. "I'll know better in a minute or two," he said. "My taste is slower than yours."

And Porius, as he watched him sipping and frowning and staring at the fire, couldn't help wondering how far old Rhun's feelings were "slower" than his own in other aspects of life.

"I'm glad the future's so far out of our reach," he thought. And he was even aware of a vague trouble in his mind that had little or nothing to do with Morfydd or with their union tomorrow; little or nothing to do with that heavy frowning face bending over the drink and over the swift-footed Grecian limbs that could carry that heavy face across all the moors and mountains and rivers and swamps of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy and Eivionydd before tomorrow's dawn.

What he really felt at that moment — and what a moment to feel it! — was that in these last two days, in fact ever since he'd known of that letter from Anastasius, he had broken loose from his whole past.

As one wisp of smoke after another rose up between himself and the familiar figure opposite him, he felt as if by some weird accident he had flung upon this particular fire a magic branch of balsam fir, under the impact of whose enchanted smoke he was doomed to see all the people of his life, conjured up there before him, one after another; and each one as self-absorbed, as remote from him and his real feelings as if they were images formed from clouds in the air, Rhun yielding place to Morfydd, Morfydd to his mother, his mother to Porius Manlius; till finally nothing would be left to him in that sweet-smelling smoke but the Henog and the Jew seated on the deathbed of Brother John.

Leaning back, so that his head rested against the edge of the bed, he began to wonder whether, in spite of his unlimited physical strength and his restless mind, he had grown to be so submissive to his mother and Morfydd as to be at a complete loss if neither the one nor the other was directing his course of action.

He was so dazed and confused by the weird sensation that had fallen upon him, as if he himself were turning into an image of vapour, that it was with something of a shock that he felt the legion's water flask tapping his knee and saw Rhun's arm stretched out towards him.

"What if I sailed away *alone* with Dion Dionides," he thought, "and left Morfydd and Rhun to console each other?"

But he must find out about this morning's visit to the Cave. It was no use leaving everything unsettled.

"Rhun, old friend!"

"Yes, Porius ab Einion."

"Have you talked at all yet with this Jew who came with Dion Dionides?"

"The doctor?"

Porius nodded, handing back the flask after a long gulp.

Rhun smiled rather wryly.

"Well, yes! I have once or twice. But the last time I didn't behave very nicely to him... in fact I got angry with him... in fact I... threatened him."

The corrugated countenance on the other side of the fire began to look uncomfortable.

"And now you wish you hadn't?"

"I didn't hit him, Porius ab Einion."

"What did he say to annoy you?"

"It was about religion."

"About Mithras?"

"I can't explain in one word, Porius. I'm bad at explaining things like this. Besides, you'd have to know a lot more. You'd have to know how he was drinking and how I was drinking. You'd have to know what those lads had been saying before it began. I think really, Porius, it was those silly boys started the whole thing — worked us up, as you might say, for their own sport. I didn't see it then. But now I do, and I've been thinking I'd like to tell the man so. They were making fools of us both — well, a fool of me anyhow! I think it's hard to make a fool of *him* because he's always making a fool of himself; and he does it on purpose, if you see what I mean, and I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't secretly, in his own mind, you know, making fools of those lads! They're a queer lot, Porius ab Einion, these horsemen of Arthur's! They're certainly very proud. And they're brave. I can't deny that. Mind you, I haven't seen with my own eyes anything particular *in that way,* but — you know how it is? — you can get a good idea of what men are from the way they talk to each other and the way they talk *about* each other and the way—"

Porius suddenly stood up and emptied the Roman flask with an angry swing of his arm into the fire. Then, while the logs hissed and spluttered, he said in an oddly brusque tone: "Libation to Mithras *that* was, and a serious one too! May all the gods ever worshipped in Edeyrnion plague these skipping rogues! 'Proud,' are they? 'Brave,' are they? I tell you, brother, there's more real courage in our old Afagddu, or in Uncle Brochvael's crazy-dazy Gwrgi, than in this whole pack of young daredevils wild with wine and war and witchery and wonders! And as for real pride, why, brother, my brother, you yourself, when you're thinking of your father whom Uncle Brochvael swore was descended from the son of Peleus, and when your own feet are in the wind rut of the race, why, you live in a pulse of life worth the heart throbs of a score of these capering horseflies!"

Rhun sighed a long sigh of relief as Porius sat down again and began tilting the great stone vessel to one side as he poured out more mead into the empty flask. A vague anxiety had been troubling the older man since he had been invited into this marriage tent.

All that afternoon he had expected an interrogation of some sort from somebody; but Gwendydd had avoided him, Nineue had courted him and made much of him in a most puzzling manner but had asked him no questions, and of what, even now, was in Porius's mind he had no idea. It was therefore with considerable though rather obscure comfort that he had listened to his foster-brother's outburst about his courtly companions, for it would have taken a Platonic Timaeus to detect that the cause of his cousin's diatribe was completely unconnected with its ostensible subject.

"Yes, you're right there," Porius gtumbled, ashamed of his outburst. "I fancy this Lot-el-Azziz does enjoy playing the fool! He annoys many people by it. He carries it too far. But he can be serious. And he knows much more than he lets people see. Of that I'm certain. He's a clever physician; and if he sees you're listening to him and treating him respectfully he'll tell many strange things. If anybody could save Brother

John’s life he could. I don’t believe Dion Dionides does him justice at all. He treats him more like a servant than a friend.

“One day I shall ask el-Azziz why he goes about with a man who doesn’t treat him as he deserves. Any discerning prince would be proud to have him, and Dion after all is only a merchant-captain, though he says he’s the cousin of a philosopher in Athens. Why didn’t Arthur bribe el-Azziz to leave this Greek? There’s something queer about it, Rhun. It’s not natural; a man who could live with Anastasius or Arthur sharing the sea trips of a trader in dates and olives!”

Dimly, faintly, and from somewhere down deep among the nerve centres of his paternal blood, there arose in Rhun an unuttered protest against his cousin’s slighting words.

Dates and olives and wine and oil — wasn’t it a privilege to carry these precious delights to the misty coasts of the rain-soaked islands of the west? Didn’t it need as much philosophy and inspiration to sail from the Piraeus to the Pillars of Hercules as to sit by the bedsides of emperors and harlots, purging their surfeits, cooling their fevers, and mixing poisons for their rivals?

All this and a good deal more, though without articulation, rose up in a groundswell of protest in Rhun’s heart; and just as Porius had expressed his own secret discomforts by his abuse of Arthur’s horsemen, so Rhun found himself fostering an irrelevant if not an irrational anger against this Jew who “enjoyed making a fool of himself,” but was too great a medicine man to serve the master of the Greek ship *Calypso,* carrying olives and wine and purple blankets and amber beads and the scrolls of tragedies and comedies to island chiefs who couldn’t write their own names!

“This man swore,” Rhun now declared, staring through the smoke so gravely that Porius was aroused to a faint alertness, “that the priests of

Babylon changed our Mysteries. He said the changes came from Jews who had been taken captive by the Babylonians. He said the god of the Jews was older than the gods of Persia."

The flicker of interest in the mind of Porius died down as quickly as it had risen; and this solemnly uttered, sulkily downright grievance sounded more remote to his ears than the sighing of the wind in the reeds.

"What if all the time till now," he thought, "my real life has been in this 'cavoseniargizing?' What if I've just done what Mother and Morfydd have made me do — first one and then the other — while all the while —? What if I've propitiated Porius Manlius, dodged Father's mockery, patronized old Rhun, been betrothed to Morfydd, when all the while, by some weird *tynged,* my real, secret life has been more like what Iddawc's mother, the giantess from the Cader, would understand?"

"Did you hit him?" Had he asked Rhun this question before? He felt as if he had done so a thousand years ago and he could clearly see the grotesque scene. He could see the blow and the reeling figure of Lot, and the man's gasping laugh at the whole absurdity of their misunderstanding! But he didn't wait for the answer. He had to say what he had brought Rhun into his tent to say, and he now plunged into it.

"Were you surprised," he asked him, bending down while he spoke and beating up the logs into flame with the nearest half-burnt one under his hand, "when Morfydd sent Gwythyr to tell you to meet her at the Cave this morning?"

Rhun's answer was direct and immediate; but he too, on his side of the fire, bent down and struck at it with a half-burnt stick. It was as if the arbitrary, wilful, incalculable soul of the girl between them might escape from them both and drift away in smoke over the moonlit water if they let those red flames die down.

"Yes, Porius ab Einion, I was."

"Did she come alone?"

"Oh, no! Old Canna was with her, and a fair-haired little girl I'd never seen before."

What Rhun was poking at now with his stick was that shameful suspicion about their playmate that had crossed his mind like a wicked shadow. He knocked that bit of blackness into the red gulf.

"I can't think why they brought her," he said. "She had a doll in her arms."

At that moment he would have given a good deal to know more about that doll. It would have been a comfort to enlarge upon it. But Porius was speaking again. "Morfydd wasn't upset about our marriage tomorrow?"

Both the men's heads were now bent so low over the fire that it was as if they were talking to its flames rather than to each other. Any observer watching them would have been impressed by their striking resemblance; and this resemblance was enhanced rather than diminished by the ascending smoke which seemed to emphasize the massive weight of their low corrugated foreheads while it obscured the yellow glint in Porius's little bearish eyes and darkened the other's wider and greyer and sadder stare.

"She *was* rather upset," replied Rhun simply, thinking to himself, "I'm ready to tell him everything except about the blood."

"She didn't say anything about being forced into it," Porius went on, "I mean so quickly, you know, and at the Feast too, when there's all this excitement, forced into it, I mean, by *my* mother and *her* father?"

Rhun uttered a heartfelt sigh of relief at this, and lifting his head looked straight across the flames at the other's lowered brow.

"No," he replied firmly and calmly, "no, she said nothing about it at all. From her manner I got the impression that it was her own doing, her own wish. But she didn’t say a word. She seemed in that mood — you know the way she is — when she has made up her mind. She said she wanted to see me and say goodbye. She didn’t say she wanted to talk about it. And she didn’t talk about it. From what Uncle Brochvael said I got the impression that she and your mother had made up their minds before they told him or the prince or your grandfather.”

Rhun paused for a second after this long speech and then he added, “She came to say goodbye to me; that was all.”

Porius rose slowly to his feet. “I want time to think this out,” he said to himself. His foster-brother’s reiterated “to say goodbye to me” could be taken in more ways than one. “I want time,” he thought, “to get this clear. We’ve always been three. It was only in that last year before they killed him that Morfydd and Morvran were so much together.”

He swung round and surveyed their marriage bed. Raised from the earth floor on wooden boards to the height of about three feet, the heavy black-and-gold rug that covered it suggested death rather than life. He became aware now, as he had not been before in the first rush of his impulse to talk to Rhun, that there was something unnatural in this intimate encounter of two comrades-in-arms taking place beside the marriage bed of their boyhood’s playmate. But perhaps it was only those two torches that made the scene so profane.

“We’d have light enough by the fire to finish our drink, brother, wouldn’t we?” he said, looking across at Rhun. “What about putting out those torches?”

Rhun made a motion to rise. He was accustomed to being the one to do the things that had to be done when the two of them were together. But he repressed this instinctive movement and sank again on his heap of rugs leaning his back against one of the tent pegs.

“If you lit them,” he said gravely, “it oughtn’t to be unlucky to put them out.”

Porius removed one of the torches from its sconce, extinguished it in a bowl of water, and returned it to its place. But when he did the same thing with the other, the black-and-gold coverlet assumed a look as if what had lain beneath it had sunk into the earth.

“Christ and God!” he cried, “the place certainly does look gloomy! Let’s make a real blaze! And I’ll let out the smoke.” He pulled open the tent folds and fastened them so that they shouldn’t flap every time the wind stirred. But the wind became audible at once, rustling each tall reed against its neighbour and causing the long ripples from the deeper water to make a faint lapping sound against the half-submerged stumps of the leafless willows.

The two men stirred the fire and flung upon it all the remaining logs. Flames and smoke rose together. “Hold the bottle, Rhun, while I empty this.”

Clumsily and carelessly he lifted up the huge stone vessel, and tilting it so awkwardly that he spilled half its contents over the other’s hands and down on the floor, he filled the Roman flask to overflowing.

“You first,” he muttered, putting it into Rhun’s hands, “and drink deep! Who can tell when you and I will drink alone together, again?”

They exchanged the bottle several times in silence, while the wind, driving the smoke round their heads and the flames against their knees, made a low protracted wailing through the interstices of the tent.

“I was angry with her,” said Rhun suddenly. “It wasn’t a happy goodbye. I got angry and spoilt it.”

Porius could not help noting, though not without a faint shame at what he noted, that there was a feeling of elation mounting up within him. So

Rhun had quarrelled with Morfydd on the occasion of her "coming to say goodbye." A secret complacency, and a complacency all the more satisfactory because it really had a solid justification in his whole temperament, assured him that if their position had been reversed, no impulse, blunder, outburst, collapse, or reproach could have made *him* angry.

"Do you want to tell me how she annoyed you? Don't if you don't want to."

There was something about Rhun's expression as the blaze of their fire lit up his face that made Porius think of one occasion at their favourite rock-peak game, when Morfydd had run away to her real "home" instead of to their imaginary one, and he had uttered these very same words. He had felt *then* that if there were secrets between Morfydd and Rhun he didn't want to know what they were; and he had felt then, as he felt now, that such secrets, even though they implied her running in her recklessness to her real "home" rather than to her pretended one, or her having angry "goodbyes" before her wedding day, need not alter the destined course of events, nor even, if handled as he naturally and instinctively would always handle them, lead to tragedy.

"I don't mind telling you, Porius ab Einion," announced the other gravely and stubbornly. "I thought she had eaten the honey of Mithras."

Porius suppressed an inclination to burst into a gross laugh. "Well? And *hadn't* she? After all, people can't blaspheme what they don't believe."

"No," confessed his foster-brother gloomily, leaving the latter portion of these words unregarded, "she hadn't. Old Canna wanted her to, but she wouldn't."

"And she didn't like to be accused of this... 'sacrilege', when she'd come so far and so early to see you? I can certainly understand that."

A long silence fell between them, only broken by the flames of the fire as they licked the logs within the tent, and by the ripples of the water as it lapped against-the stumps of the ancient willows outside the tent. Ever since the two men had bent their heads over the logs that were burning between them, Porius had been aware of the movements of a small, faint, scarcely perceptible wind, that seemed to be blowing the ashes across his feet and every now and then lifting and letting fall the embroidered fringe of the black-and-gold coverlet behind his neck. But this little wind had now ceased from making the faintest stir. Either it had fallen asleep on the dark coverlet behind him or it had returned to its moonlit bed among the reeds.

Rhun too, though no stirring and subsiding of a breath of air from the lake's surface had disturbed him, felt troubled and perplexed. There arose within him a dumb protest against the unfairness with which Mithras was treating him. Why should a loyal and faithful *miles,* whose sole desire was to be a single-hearted servant of the god of all true soldiers, find himself torn like this between the only two people on earth whom he really loved, and *had* loved since his boyhood? Morfydd's outburst of feeling had frightened him by its intensity.

There could be no mistaking the nature of that embrace, or what was implied in that exchange of blood. But to the desperateness of the girl's gesture he felt no reciprocal response. Not a jot. What he actually did feel was a faintly superstitious and somewhat shameful fear that in tasting his blood she had fatally linked their destinies together by a *tynged,* from which he could never escape. He had only to think of Gwendydd to realize how little of a lover's emotion there was in his feeling for Morfydd. Not even in the heat of those youthful games when his swift-foot pursuit had overtaken her had he felt anything resembling what in these last two days he had come to feel for the sister of Myrddin Wyllt.

The emotion he experienced in the presence of this proud and ambitious girl, who struck his imagination as so nobly and tragically alone in a corrupt and degenerate court, and whose peace of mind he felt sure was perpetually being outraged by the manias and exactions of her brother and by the serpentine treacheries of her handmaid, was an emotion he had to struggle to keep within bounds. After all, though not yet a "participant", he had the privilege of wearing a Phrygian cap, and a soldier of Mithras, though not sworn to celibacy, was dedicated by his vows to take love very seriously.

Well! A legitimate aspect of this seriousness was, he naturally felt, such plans and considerations about the future as marriage, whether Christian or Mithraic, must entail; and to these plans, as he shifted his position a little so as to offer a different portion of the small of his back to the unyielding tent peg against which he leaned, he now gave himself up with a delicious recklessness.

His foster-brother — whether satisfied or not by his cursory account of the morning's happenings — had clearly decided to ask him no more questions but at the same time appeared reluctant, while any mead remained in their stone jug, to relieve the Jew from his vigil at the bedside of Brother John.

Thus as he allowed the smouldering logs to darken at his feet Rhun began telling himself a long and complicated story about himself and Gwendydd, and how when the emperor's campaign against the invaders was over, and Porius, released from active service, took Morfydd to Constantinople, he himself would take Gwendydd to that same city and renew his service of Mithras in a spot nearer the god's own home. He had not failed to notice the way in which the girl's eyes lit up with interest whenever he talked about Anastasius's letter and about Porius's quest for the reopening of the Pelagian case.

She had countered his questions about what life was like at Caergwynt and Caerleon by her excited eagerness to find out all he knew about the shores of the Bosporus and the Sea of Marmora.

It was indeed to the rocking of no western waves that the descendant of the athletic clan of the Attic Agenorides allowed his head to nod as he thought of Gwendydd's excitement in those royal cities and magic harbours.

Drugged by the fragrant smell of the smouldering fir logs and too drowsy at last to take his turn at the enchanted mead of Gwlad-yr-Haf, for the stone vessel seemed inexhaustible, it was not long before he was fast asleep.

Porius remained wakeful enough, but with his back to the black-and-gold bed and his senses strangely at peace as he watched the stream of moonlight floating in from the entrance and slowly approaching his foster-brother's outstretched legs, he gave himself up to his old secret trick, that peculiar embrace of the material elements and objects that happened to be around him at the moment, for which, through his boyish awareness of a chance occurrence when searching the hills with the elder Porius, he had invented the odd verb "cavoseniargize."

From where he now sat he could discern a small patch of ground between the folds of the tent where the grass, intersected by wheel tracks and trodden into mud by the hooves of cattle and the feet of men, was flooded by the unsympathetic lustre of the coldly remote moon. This he could see through an opening just above the smouldering logs that were still faintly red but were waiting their turn to grow as black as the rest; while a little to the right or the north of these logs a certain bulging of the canvas above his companion's drooping head suggested a suction of cold from outside the tent, or an expansion of heat within the tent, or perhaps some boldly wandering eddy of air from clear across the lake.

He could see the intermittent reflections of spurts of small flickering red flames on the smooth side of the almost empty mead jug. In the centre of all this was the hunched-up, gently heaving breast and the athletic outstretched limbs of the man in front of him.

And the whole pressure of the moment as he gave himself up to his “cavoseniargizing” was fragrant with the odour of pines, was pungent with the sour-smelling mud at the roots of the reeds, was aromatic with the autumnal growths between the stumps of the willows.

He had a subtle philosophical motive in making much of this ridiculous word, and in thinking of his secret pleasure in this absurd way, for by so doing he drained it of all religious mysticism and purged it of all spiritual illusions. And tonight, for instance, without being in the faintest degree mystical, it came much nearer than he had ever known it to the circumstances of his life and his attitude to the people of his life.

What vaguely insinuated itself into him at that moment, and did so rather into his blood and bones than into his conscience, was the notion that if there was something in the unselected, indiscriminate impact of inanimate elements and inanimate objects upon his senses which gave him such intense pleasure that he was unable to imagine any pleasure that was more intense, it was foolishness to plot and plan for ends and purposes that had nothing to do with “cavoseniargizing” and nothing about them that could increase his opportunities for “cavoseniargizing.”

And if, thus his obscure thoughts drifted on, the real pleasure of his life was a lonely and solitary pleasure and completely independent of the people of his life, while the happiness of the people of his life depended so much — at least that was what he had been brought up to believe — on the way he behaved to them, was not his instinctive habit of doing obediently, patiently, and without malice or irony, all that he was told to do, all that he was wanted to do, all that it was taken for granted he would do, the precise sort of behaviour, the precise method of conducting his affairs, to which not only Nature, by giving him such responsive senses, not only common sense by enabling him to live at peace with his mother and his wife, not only animal caution and vegetative placidity by saving him from human agitations, but the subtle scope offered to a life devoid of personal passions and ambitious aims, all pointed?

If it was true, as he had been assured, that both the women wanted this marriage to take place tomorrow in accordance with the old tradition — well! he would obey them; but if he found that Morfydd loved old Rhun and wished to be the mother of Rhun's child rather than of his — well! he would see what he would do! When the day and the hour came, whatever the Erinyes did then or after, he would deal with the day and the hour!

With his thoughts at this particular point and his eyes fixed upon the crisscross leather straps that enhanced the Attic beauty of his foster-brother's long legs, he was suddenly aware of a tall dark form blotting out the moonlight.

"My *Lords!"* murmured the intruder in a low hoarse voice.

Porius had just time to note the swift wild-animal leap to his feet of his dazed companion ere more leisurely he himself scrambled up.

Myrddin Wyllt was dressed in his long black mantle; and at the place where his great beard reached the level of his navel it was tied with the usual gold thread whose tassels hung down to his knees. His head was bare, and his bony fingers at the end of his long curved arms were making slow majestic movements as if writing upon the interior darkness of the tent. He gave the impression that he had been searching anxiously and even desperately for some time for just such an expanse of darkness untroubled by human-made lamps and lanterns or even by the light of the moon. It was as if he were inscribing runic letters in the manner of one who carves a prophecy in the ogam script.

But it soon occurred to Porius that what the man was doing lent itself to another and quite different interpretation; namely, that instead of inscribing things on the air now that he had found a hollow place dark enough for his purpose, he was *tracing out* things that had already been written upon it!

The foster-brothers stood awkwardly by the big man's side as he went through this singular performance. "He needs no one to hold him up tonight," thought Porius.

"Has Gwendydd sent him for me?" thought Rhun.

Then the prophet dropped his hands and turned upon them with a question that embarrassed them even more than his reading with his fingers like a blind man what destiny had written on the air.

"What woman has been weeping here?"

The man's hearers exchanged uneasy looks which the moonlight on their faces — for they were both between him and the head of the bed — rendered startlingly clear. But he moved a step forward and laid one hand on the shoulder of one of them and the other hand on the shoulder of the other.

"My Lords," he murmured, and his voice was gentle and almost cajoling, "which of you two strong men wants to give an old wanderer a brand from those warm embers? I can see some of them are still alive, well! alive as a woman's heart, and *they* — when there *is* one, there isn't always; sometimes there's a cold stone instead — did you know that, my Lords? — a stone that's been dripped upon for ten thousand years by the waters of grandmother Styx — can endure water and air and earth and yet can go on burning; and I'll tell you something else, my Lords, that you *can't* know, because a man's got to be old to know this, that the more ashes there are on the top of a living heart the longer it'll burn. Oh, thank you, Rhun ap Gwrnach. You're my true friend indeed! This is the second time today you've come to the rescue of the wanderer — there! it'll burn now — no! one of them's enough — one torch, one bed, one heart! — *there!* you've lit it; it'll burn now till dawn."

Both the foster-brothers had endeavoured to do what he'd asked; but whether because Porius was more alive to the words of the queer monologue that accompanied their attempts, or because he was less of an adept in the ways of fire than the soldier of Mithras, he was as poor a second in this torch-lighting race as he had been in the races where Morfydd was concerned.

Planks, boards, posts, logs, sticks, roots, and twigs — they all had to be very considerably burnt for Rhun not to recognize them, and not to know their nature and their particular behaviour as they passed on their fiery journey to the Limbo of departed trees.

Porius, therefore, throwing down the flaring alder branch he had just succeeded in igniting, could only stand and stare as Rhun, slowly and solemnly as if he were still in the Cave of Mithras, illuminated Morfydd's bridal bed.

The next words uttered by the counsellor were of a simple and practical kind. "My sister," he said, embracing both of them in a glance of such godlike geniality that his eyes in the newly lit torchlight shone like a couple of emeralds in the head of an African idol, "my sister has a wonder to show you two, a curious wonder, a striking marvel; but she says she can only show it you over the pouring out of Greek wine. The Lady Nineue wants to pledge you both too in wine of another kind — though exactly in *what* kind I can't" — here he paused and the light went out of his green eyes, and his hearers could not help becoming aware of the extraordinary lowness of his forehead and the shocking enormity of his ears— “I can’t... for you know how it is with me, my Lords... I can’t at this moment... for I am what I am, and what I am I have made myself always by the help of the Great Mother... and what I am I can’t at this moment tell you... another moment I *might* tell you, but at this moment I can’t tell you... nor what Nineue’s wine is.”

Again there came into Porius’s head, as he thought of Nineue and the wine of Annwn, his father’s drunken voice, at once jeering and ecstatic, as it chanted the obscure verses of this modern Pen Beirdd, their Deganwy cousins’ discovery, “the runaway ‘Stir-the-Pot’ from Caer Einion” as his defeated rivals called him when his genius put them to shame:

Ar ffynnhawn ffrwythlawn yssyd oduchti;
Ys whegach nor gwin gwyn yllyn yndi.
And above it is a fruitful fountain;
Sweeter than white wine is the liquor in it.

So far neither of the foster-brothers had addressed a word to their visitor; but Porius had kept his wits about him, and in spite of the mead from Gwlad-yr-Haf his mind was clear.

“You must entreat the ladies to excuse me tonight, *Arglwydd,”* he said quietly. “I dare not leave Brother John any longer. Lot-el-Azziz is with him and the Henog of Dyfed may be there too. But neither of them have had their dinner, and how they are going to get any supper as late as this I don’t know, unless the doctor takes the Henog to his own tent. But all this only affects myself. I am sure my cousin will rejoice to come. Isn’t that true, Rhun?”

All that could be seen of the dutiful *miles* of Mithras, as he stood between the torchlit bed and the moonlit sky, revealed that it *was* true. From the springing alacrity of his lithe figure to the irrepressible eagerness on his guileless face there emanated such a rush of pleasure that his nervously grateful words were quite unnecessary: “Indeed and I will; and indeed and I do thank you, my Lord.”

At this the counsellor, taking Rhun by the arm, moved incontinently out of the tent; and Porius for the moment was left alone. He was aware that the prophet had been anything but pleased by his refusal to follow him and his lack of interest in the “wonder” to be revealed by Gwendydd. “I can’t help it!” he thought. “There’ll be plenty of time before I’ve done with him! In fact, I’d have him leaning too heavily on me if I went with them now. There’s a link between us, a link that goes far back; and where this link operates I’m stronger than he is — and not in physical strength only!”

He proceeded without haste to put out the torch and to empty the last drop of mead from the stone jug upon the only log from which smoke still rose. Then, with the jug in one hand and his grandfather’s bottle in the other, he too went out, letting the tent folds fall behind him.

He was prepared to find that the counsellor had carried Rhun off, but he had not done so and they were standing there in silence side by side, evidently waiting to bid him good night.

“So it was the Jew,” said Myrddin Wyllt, “who brought the old Brother back to life? I had an instinct something was wrong and I very nearly came myself. I’m a wretchedly poor prophet, but I am what I am, and the earth is always murmuring and muttering in my ears. Yes, she is telling me things all the time; only I’m so foolish and feeble and weak and muddle-headed and mad that I miss the drift of half the things she tells me. I’m a poor magician, Prince Porius, and a bad prophet and a crazy counsellor; but none of this worries me. Why not, do you say? Because I am what I am and my fate is what it is. It’s my creatures who worry me. Sometimes I feel they might just as well not be born at all. Too much pain, Prince Porius, too much pain, and not enough pleasure. But tell me about this Jew, Prince Porius. Is it still in his mind to sail with the Greek?"

"That's what he says, my Lord."

It was at that point that Myrddin Wyllt began to lean quite heavily on Rhun's arm; so heavily in fact that the son of Gwrnach was forced to shift one of his feet to steady himself, and Porius was surprised to find himself experiencing a faint spasm of jealous anger as he watched these harmless movements.

"Good night, my Lord Counsellor," he said as he turned to go, and "Good night, Rhun," he added.

But Myrddin Wyllt's face was already distorted in one of his paroxysms, and he had begun with outstretched arm and extended fingers writing, or as Porius had decided it was, *reading,* invisible runes on the air. Porius watched the scene curiously but offered no help, although it was plain that his foster-brother was hard put to it to support that extremely heavy and now so shaken and so violently gesticulating form.

"If he wants proud and ambitious court beauties," he thought, "let him pay the price."

But "the price" this time proved both light in substance and brief in passage. The counsellor was in fact very soon in complete possession of himself; but he had had, he explained, a communication which made it necessary for him to go to the camp again and take counsel at once with Peredur ab Evrawc.

"Colgrim is nearer than any of us thought," he said, and there was something in the hoarse chuckle that shook his unwieldy body that suggested to Porius with irresistible force the gurgling sound of a certain underground stream that kept appearing and disappearing beneath the grassy tussocks of a marshy field at the foot of Mynydd-y-Gaer.

"If you don't mind, my Lord," he added, addressing Rhun, "you might go straight on to my sister and tell her the news and warn her that I'll be back late tonight. And now with your permission, Prince Porius, I think I'll accompany you to the Brother's cell and carry off the doctor and the Henog."

Porius stared at him. What did he mean by "carry off?" The doctor would be there still, but surely the Henog would be gone? Hunger alone would have — and besides what did a foreigner like el-Azziz know of Pwyll and Pryderi or the white wine of Caer Sidi?

"I'll give your message, sir, to the ladies. Good night, Porius!" Rhun was far too excited to let his departure be chilled by the small attention it aroused.

Myrddin Wyllt seemed delighted by a sudden idea that had come into his head. "The truth is," he said, "the moment you spoke just now of these men not having had their supper I thought of young Taliesin. I don't know whether you know — probably not, as it must be a delicate subject with you all — that since the boy-bard quarrelled with your cousins at Deganwy he has attached himself to Cynan ap Clydno, Owain ab Uryen's closest friend. In Cynan's service he sees Owain constantly and he hears all the latest news about the Lord of yr Echwydd whom in his imaginative hero worship he has turned into a sort of demigod.

"Incidentally he is such an extremely good cook that nothing will ever induce Cynan to part with him, and being thus secure in a position that has nothing to do with poetry he can write what poetry he likes, and as much and little of it as he likes, and at any time he likes. Nor can any Uryen or any Arthur or any prince of the House of Cunedda take the bread out of his mouth if he does not please him.

"You know how it is with us, my Lord: all our bards have been, until this new age, absolutely dependent on their patrons. But in these days with this religion of Christ like a flood tide in every direction, everything is changing. We're living in revolutionary days, Prince Porius, and we've got to face the fact that things are going to be very different from what they were. Our ancient heroes, if not demigods themselves, listened to the wisdom of prophets and were inspired by the Muses. But Uryen of Rheged is completely illiterate. It would be absurd for him to have anything to do with judging the value of poetry.

"This Deganwy bard of yours has been wise in establishing himself with young Cynan. He's the richest of all our princes, but almost as illiterate as Uryen and his brave son; and I tell you, Prince, the less a patron knows about poetry the less he'll meddle with his poet. Cynan isn't as rash and adventurous as young Owain ab Uryen. In fact, Cynan is a deep one; few of his friends realize *how* deep. But he's an impassioned friend of Owain, and both the young men are sociable and gregarious and extremely fond of good meals.

"So all the Caer Einion bard has to do, if your relations don't drag him back by force which they wouldn't find an easy job, is to satisfy this fantastical pair with his cooking. And it appears he's an astonishingly good cook! Meanwhile he can write all the obscure, modern poetry he likes — for the benefit, as Homer would say, 'of men yet unborn!' It's a queer kind of writing, Prince Porius; as different from Hesiod — did your Bishop's School over the mountains read Hesiod with you? — as it is from Homer. I sometimes feel as if it were the sort of writing the old Greek prophet Tiresias might have dictated to his disciples.

"But I must't keep you standing any longer in this chilly wind. It's clear that what the wise Henog and your worthy doctor want at this juncture is their supper; and I can't believe that this young prodigy would have come so vividly into my mind if there weren't a good chance of such a meal at Cynan ap Clydno's tent. Taliesin's reputation has travelled already to all Arthur's camps; and though Arthur himself is too practical a soldier to understand this new style, the ladies of his court have been quick to see that something new has come into the world. Women are quicker than men in these things."

Porius made no comment on all this. It had been a shock to him when Einion refused the Gaer's hospitality to this runaway from Deganwy, and he felt touchy about finding the boy in the service of the son of Clydno. But when a little later — for the doctor and the Henog soon reached the point in their intercourse when a distraction from outside is welcome — the counsellor had carried off both of them to the camp and Porius was left alone with the sleeping Brother, the assuaging understanding that passed between him and every material object surrounding that motionless form, together with the soothing effect of slowly divesting himself of his outer garments ere lying down by the fire, seemed to give his soul a sort of golden embarkation upon the mysterious outflowing tide of all his secret desires; desires that were vague and nebulous, desires that in some strange way were connected with Cader Idris and with Creiddylad's gigantic race, desires that had little to do with Morfydd or his marriage tent.

The warmth of the fire so close to his couch, the quiet breathing of the sleeping Brother, the decision he had already reached of leaving the question of the consummation of their marriage entirely to Morfydd, all these things combined to make a gently sliding avalanche of fallen leaves, sweet-scented and soft and deep, upon which he sank into oblivion.

As he approached the borderline of unconsciousness it seemed to him that the wind veered from the east to the quarter he loved best and began to reach the Brother's cell from the southwest! And he wondered vaguely whether it was in the scope of some stretched-out *cantref* of possibility that there were women among the last remnants of the old race of Cewri — the true owners of Ynys Prydein — and that sometimes, by some incredible miracle of magnetic attraction, these beautiful children of Eryri and Cader, fairer and larger than the daughters of the ordinary tribes of men, and with all the mists of those mountain chasms, and all the depths and silences of those mountain tarns, and all the sun radiances of those mountain ridges, and all the moon remotenesses of those mountain peaks gathered up into their flesh and blood, might come down into the forest and be seen and known of such as, like himself, had been calling to them for so long!

Porius's unsympathetic mood had not been lost on Myrddin Wyllt, and his mind reverted to it as he escorted the doctor and the historian along the edge of the lake.

"Once again," he thought, "I've babbled where I ought to have held my tongue! What a fool I am! It wasn't my tongue that gave the creatures of the earth their first Golden Age, and it won't be my tongue, if I'm still the 'crooked counsellor' that'll give them their second. The Great Mother put it into my head then and she will do so again. But there's some link between this young Porius and me. That's why I babble to him like a fool! What a Venedotian Hercules the man is! Our association must go back a long way, but what he was to me or what he's destined to be to me the Mother alone knows!"

The agitated prophet seemed to himself increasingly foolish and incompetent as he walked between the Silurian and the Jew. Nor was the mood of the two men at that particular moment calculated to restore his self-respect.

It was of the coming of Magog in relation to the well-being of Zora and Gog that el-Azziz was thinking as he serenely caressed the ram's horn at his hip and lifted his topknot to the moon; nor had the Henog given up hope that by roundabout means, even if he had to compare the rocks of Sinai with the forests of Gwent and to ask his questions about the past across the unwieldy bulk of this maniac for the future, he might yet get some light from the learned foreigner as to why it was that Pendaran of Dyfed should be old enough to have the deciding word about Pryderi's heathen name being changed to his Christian name, and yet young enough to act as page for those *Saith Marchog,* or Seven Horsemen, when Caradoc the son of Bran died of a broken heart.

Meanwhile, either by pure chance or by that strange pressure upon destiny which his soul seemed to exert independently of his will and which Myrddin Wyllt had come at last wearily to accept as a necessary part of his exhausting existence, the youngest bard of Ynys Prydein was really and actually preparing, as if the emperor's counsellor *had* arranged the whole thing, a most exquisite late meal for his rich young patron and for that patron's bosom crony, the eccentric and vagabond son of Uryen of Rheged. The tent of Cynan the son of Clydno was the largest of all the tents in that camp of princely young *equites,* larger even than that of Prince Galahaut of Surluse.

The colours of its canvas were black and silver and it was supported upon six posts of a special sort of black oak brought from Iwerdon, while the kitchen, of which this formidable young poet was the supreme ruler, was a completely separate erection; but there was still to be discovered, large as this annexe was and with plenty of sleeping space for two persons, any man or any boy bold enough to work there under the orders of Taliesin the bard.

As for Cynan ap Clydno, while his glory with the modern-minded as a patron of the new poetry was increased by the excellence of his prodigy's cooking, he was not the kind of man to feel the faintest annoyance, though for his life he dared not enter his own kitchen. But when one of his much prized meals was over and his guests — for the more fashionable of the young *equites* always regarded his invitations as more desirable than any banquet that was common to all — were at their mead or their wine, it was his custom to call upon Taliesin to recite some of the more daring, modern, and mystical verses he might recently have composed.

At the very moment — such was Myrddin Wyllt's premonition or, shall we say, predestination — when that ambiguous prognosticator was escorting along the water's edge, like Hermes conducting a pair of souls to Hades, the Henog and the doctor, the youthful Taliesin had just laid before Cynan ap Clydno and Owain ab Uryen the first course of one of his most daintily contrived suppers.

He himself partook of these meals alone, casually, negligently, and as a rule sparingly, though there were occasions when, the dish being a favourite, he ate of it silently, greedily, and very fast.

When Cynan ap Clydno's guests wanted to hear some new stanzas, or, as sometimes happened, he himself wanted to try out upon them some specially daring experiment in assonance and alliteration, they had to wait till he had washed the dishes, put away or thrown away what was left, and by cooling his head for a while in the air or by draining a flask over his fire in a brief moment of trancelike beatitude, had got himself into a mood when he cared nothing for anything except the expression of his visions, his inventions, his sensations.

Not unfrequently it was when he was actually feeling this mood coming on that Cynan and Owain got their most perfectly cooked meal. The young man's genius seemed to brim over at those times, and the inspiration that was fulfilling itself in his poem flowed outwards naturally and spontaneously into the preparation of the meal.

And when he sank down by the fire or on his bench in the air, caring nothing how long he kept these young chieftains waiting, it seemed to his curiously sensitized nerves that the two wooden water troughs he had come to call Adam and Eve, and the saucepan he called Claudius Caesar, and the bronze pot hung over the fire he called Zeno, and the oven he called Satan, were as much aware of the intense feelings that vibrated through him as he was himself.

He derived in fact, the longer he remained in this smoky annexe of the great black-and-silver tent, an exquisite satisfaction from his curiously occult familiarity with every knife and every spoon, every platter and every pot with which he was in a daily habit of working.

To imagine himself into all the inanimate things to which the earth gives birth or which man makes with his hands was his liveliest delight, and there were few of these inanimates through which he had not at one time or another felt the stream of mortal lives and the rush of mortal worlds pass by.

Taliesin was small in stature but very muscular and wiry. He wore his hair cropped unusually close to his skull, and he not only scraped all the hair from his face but as far as he was able to do so from every other portion of his body. In addition to projecting his soul from its physical envelope, he seemed to use all the power of his imagination to project the whole of his small, slight, fibrous, and sinewy identity into the particular inanimate or elemental substance whose existence he was at that moment anxious to share.

But the most curious thing about Cynan ap Clydno's unusual king of the kitchen was that he had no relations or friends. He seemed to have no sex either. He resembled not so much an hermaphroditic idol come to conscious life with the vivid intensity of both its sexes as an elemental creature entirely devoid of all sex instincts and of both the sex organs.

Thus he was enabled to compose a species of poetry whose peculiarity was that it was not only absolutely “a-sexual,” or devoid of sex, but devoid of all the emotions connected with religion and piety where sex enters.

Myrddin Wyllt’s comment upon this youthful prodigy was that Taliesin was *an undying child;* and it may well have been that it was this childishness, showing itself in a stripped and naked objectivity, that explained the magical appeal of the boy-bard and his victory over his rivals. So primeval, so artless, so unadorned, so content with the immediate impression of the object or situation or event was Taliesin’s verse that it left upon the mind a curious feeling of paradisic obscurity, the ecstatic sufficiency in fact of pure sensation about which it is impossible to say anything except what is implied in those childish proclamations so often repeated: “I was,” or “I was there,” or “I was with,” or “I saw.”

It would seem that the idea that Myrddin Wyllt had in his mind when he uttered the word “childishness” was that what so many practical, logical, and rational people called Taliesin’s “mysticism” was not mysticism at all but, on the contrary, an almost babyish abandonment to pure unadulterated sensation.

Myrddin Wyllt appears to have thought that Taliesin’s poetry was the enjoyment of a particular essence, an essence to be found not only in things and persons but in historical and mythological events, and that this essence could best be reached by so close and intimate an identification of the poet with the thing alluded to or with the event described, that it was as if, stripped to the skin but not disembodied, he plunged into the thing’s essential being and became a conscious part of it, carrying the impressionability of his human senses into something which to the uninitiated might be merely a drop of lifeless water, or a piece of inanimate wood, or some formal grouping of traditional symbols grown fabulous and dim in the remote past.

What Myrddin Wyllt's clue word "childish" brought to light is focussed in the boy-bard's absolute immunity to all the human emotions where sex plays a dominant part, as it does in love, in hate, in race, in religion, and in almost all forms of cruelty; and the curious thrill of pleasure, as of a new exciting sensation that his poetry produced, showed what a mass of subjects is left when sex is cut out.

On this particular night of Saturn, the twentieth of October, four hundred and ninety-nine, Taliesin's brain was so full of the experiments in assonance and alliteration which he had been making in relation, not only to certain physical tones, but to the psychological effect of these same physical tones in various processes of repetition, that he served Cynan ap Clydno's guests in what really was a completely abstracted, though automatically competent, trance. When he was in this mood he used his materials with extravagant carelessness, and it bothered him not in the least that a lot of well-cooked food should be given to beggars or even to pigs.

One of the peculiarities for which his fellow retainers used to mock him in the halls and kitchens of Deganwy was a trick he had of preserving in pots and jars the petals and leaves of various wild shrubs and flowers, plucked in their tender freshness but kept till they were withered, crumbling, black, and quite unrecognizable.

Upon spoonfuls of this aromatic dust he would subsequently pour boiling water, and then he would sip for hours the fragrant drink thus distilled, nibbling as he did so certain special loaves of bread baked by himself from barley and rye. Caught tonight in his inspired mood on this moonlit eve of the Feast of the Sowing, Taliesin barely tasted the dishes he laid before Cynan's guests, nor cared greatly how many guests or dishes there were. At intervals he made his drink of dried petals and leaves. At intervals he nibbled his special bread.

But if Myrddin Wyllt could have watched his thin little body, his bony face, his cropped skull, and all the deft mechanical movements with which he went on preparing an exquisite meal for an uncertain number of people, while with the taste of that aromatic infusion on his tongue he was enjoying an orgy of secret poetical sensations, he might well have thought: "Here is one who could lift up his voice in prophecy!"

But Taliesin was as totally indifferent to prophecy as he was indifferent to love and religion. The cold and formal obeisance he sometimes made to the Christian faith, and especially to the doctrine of the Trinity, resembled the uneasy respect of a heathen priest in the presence of an alien ritual. What he was striving for was a particular magic of measured metre, upon which he could ride or sail or float or sink into the essence of the thing, or event, or encounter, or situation, about which he was concerned.

To so ravish the symbolic essences of certain primeval objects by the magic of his verse that all who heard him should share his intimations was what he wanted. There is no doubt that something in the mysterious personality of Uryen had a peculiar fascination for him. It was not merely because the Lord of Rheged or of yr Echwydd had saved him from his Deganwy humiliations that he addressed such passionate eulogies to him; nor did he compose his elaborate eulogies upon Owain ab Uryen simply because the young man had got him a job in the luxurious kitchen of the rich son of Clydno.

But what he constantly and exultantly felt in the depths of his half-mad soul was that he himself, Taliesin Pen Beirdd, was a being set apart from others, a being whose mission it was to reveal to the world what only the mystery poetry *could* reveal, that is to say, a certain secret life of planetary sensation, totally independent of love and religion and nationality and power and fame and glory and learning, a life of sensation that lifted the elements to the level of vegetation, vegetation to the level of animals, animals to the level of men, and men not only to the level of one another but to the level of the immortal gods.

The much mocked and cruelly humiliated ex-kitchen boy from Deganwy had indeed discovered his own way of life a couple of years before, and in the frenzy of his devotion he flung himself at the feet of his childhood's hero. He had discovered the very thing that life itself conspired with destiny to verify from every angle of his knowledge of Uryen of Rheged.

It was at the zenith of Uryen's strange powers, at the beginning, that is to say, of his thirty-fifth year, and when his son Owain was only a year older than Taliesin himself, that this desperate suppliant approached him; and it was with a royal and grandiose gesture that the reckless hero promptly replied by despatching the two lads together to the emperor's camp.

It established a queer relation between the young men, this act of Uryen's, but it justified itself thanks to the magnanimity of all concerned. Owain ab Uryen had no difficulty in persuading his bosom crony, Cynan ap Clydno, to accept his new friend as his bard and cook; and both the young lords were swept away by the magnetic charm, not to speak of his popularity with their sophisticated friends, of this astonishing Pen Beirdd.

Taliesin had indeed worked out for himself, quite apart from his power of expressing it in such assonances and alliterations as had never been heard before, a really startling philosophy of his own. This philosophy depended upon a particular and special use of sensation; and its secret had the power of rendering all matter sacred and pleasure-giving to the individual soul.

And it had the power — at least, that is what its youthful exponent held — of fusing the immense past with the immeasurable future and of doing this, moreover, not by means of an “eternity” beyond experience and imagination, but by means of a quivering, vibrating, yet infinitely quiescent moment of real Time, a moment of Time so satisfying that it surpassed all the pleasures of sex, while it reduced to something unnatural, distorted, and perverted, every scruple of chastity.

By slow degrees under his double concentration upon an almost equally subtle art of cooking and art of assonance, the poison of the mockery he had suffered at Deganwy — all their references to the cauldron of Ceridwen and the wild hunt after the little boy from Caer Einion — disappeared. The hunted glare in his excited eyes grew daily less and less. Save for inspiring or entertaining Cynan’s friends — chief of whom was his own friend Owain — he was left absolutely alone with his cooking and his poetry.

Thus on this night of the eve of the Feast, in order that he might enjoy in peace his infusion of dried petals from a curiously moulded earthenware mug which he had long ago appropriated to his private use from the kitchens of Deganwy, he pulled his four-legged wooden stool into a position so nicely calculated that he who sat upon it felt the full warmth of the fire and also saw the glittering path of moonlight on the wind-ruffled water.

From this position there could also be seen not only a towering pine whose trunk, reddish in the daylight, was now, with the lake behind it, black as night, but also, outlined clearly against the moonlit water, what looked like a grave-mound cross, but what really was an ancestral sword of Cynan ap Clydno, thrust to the depth of half its blade, in the buried stump of a vanished oak tree.

Here, happily ensconced, while the talk of Cynan ap Clydno’s guests came only as a soothing sea shell murmur to his ears, and while from the lap of the pigskin apron between his knees he kept picking out morsels from one of his favourite barley loaves, concentrating on the underside of the thick crust, and presenting, as he lifted these fragments to his lips, the sulky appearance of an unsociable monkey who in defiance of its tribe has got at last what it wants.

The wind was still blowing from the east as it had done all day, and it carried upon it no trace of that sickly reek of human ordure — for the camp had had no time to deal adequately with its refuse — by which his nostrils were so often assailed. He was therefore in just the mood to repeat to himself to make sure he remembered it, even in the mood perhaps to continue a little further, the rough, harsh, tentative beginning of one of his queer litanies of metamorphosical metaphysic, which he had been composing and improving and scribbling down and learning by heart for the last couple of weeks.

His eyes, as he sat nibbling his loaf and sipping the steaming contents of his Deganwy mug, were fixed on a small black excrescence on one of the higher branches of the pine in front of him. A hawk’s nest he took this to be; but whether of last spring’s building, or of more than one spring, and whether it had ever contained eggs or nestlings, he had no notion.

Indeed it is doubtful even if it had been the spring feast rather than the autumn one, whether any mother hawk would have been aware of a human voice at the entrance to the kitchen in any way different from those that were rising from the supper board so close by. The crosshandle of the embedded sword had certainly at that moment more of an air of attention than the nest in the tree, but any sort of thing happening near a cross, not to speak of a sword, always seems in some odd way to be *watched* — if not heard and guarded against.

And indeed, considering the nature of both sword and cross, the moonlit space between that figure on the four-legged stool and Clydno's rusty weapon may well have vibrated with occult currents of dangerous antipathy as the words "the Mothers" and "Nothingness" and "Annwfyn" floated away towards the lake:

With the roots of a thousand worlds dangling beneath me,
With the mouths of a thousand worlds sucking the nipples
Of Nothingness round me, I've fled from the Mothers
To ride on the life winds that whirl round Annwfyn!
Take the grey from the dawn, take the red from the sunset,
Take the purple-black bloom from the vine press of thunder,
And pour them all out in the swine troughs of Annwn!
I'd darkened those beaches with the shadow of my main sail —
Sea drift and sea wrack and seaweeds and sea shells! —
Ere another ship's keel on Caer Sidi had grounded
Or another ship anchored by Carbonek's wharf.
I was the blood bubble in the throat of the Kraken
When the spout of its bursting engulfed Lost Atlantis:
I was the last thought in the mind of Tithonus
Ere he turned to cold stone on the breast of the morning;
I was the first word on the lips of Tiresias
When he lapped at the blood between Ocean and Hades;
Have I herded the worms of the earth in their millions
Have I followed the eels in their ocean migrations
Have I crouched with the curving of the wave crests that covered
The gulf-swallowed coast cliffs of continents sunken
Not to share with the cliffs and the waves and the whirlpools
Not to share with the eels in their twists and their turnings

Not to share with the swine at the troughs of Annwfyn
Not to share with the spout from the throat of the Kraken
Not to share with the worms of the earth in their gropings
Not to share with the roots of the worlds in their fumblings
Not to share with the life winds that whirl round Annwfyn
Not to share with the last thought that came to Tithonus
Not to share with the first word that came to Tiresias
The thing none can utter, the thing inexpressible,
That bird-wing and man-skin and fish-scale conniving
Convey to all lost souls curled up in their prisons,
Like Mabon ap Modron in his prison at Caerloyw,
The thing that was known from before the beginning,
And will be still known when the end is forgotten;
Known to starfish and sunfish and seaworms and earthworms,
Known to sky gods and earthmen and all living creatures!
He knew it, Pelagius, and I, Taliesin,
Who praise till I perish the Lord of yr Echwydd
Who serve, while strength's in me, the feast-giving Cynan,
I know it from pond slime and frog spawn and grub spit,
From bracken's green coral, white lichen, yellow mosses,
Newts sinking with their arms out to reedy pools' bottoms,
Swords rusting in their oak stumps, wrapped in the long rains,
Eggs rotting in their lost nests, enjoying the wild mists,
I know it from all these, and to men I proclaim it:
The ending forever of the Guilt sense and God sense,
The ending forever of the Sin sense and Shame sense,
The ending forever of the Love sense and Loss sense,
The beginning forever of the Peace paradisic,

The “I feel” without question, the “I am” without purpose,
The “It is” that leads nowhere, the life with no climax,
The “Enough” that leads forward to no consummation,
The answer to all things, that yet answers nothing,
The centre of all things, yet all on the surface,
The secret of Nature, yet Nature goes blabbing it
With all of her voices from earth, fire, air, water!
Whence comes it? Whither goes it? It is nameless; it is shameless;
It is Time free at last from its Ghostly Accuser,
Time haunted no more by a Phantom Eternal;
It is godless; but its gods are as sea sands in number;
It’s the Square with four sides that encloses all circles;
Four horizons hath this Tetrad that swallows all Triads;
It includes every creature that Nature can summon.
It excludes from Annwfyn nor man, beast, nor woman!”

It was a curious thing, but a thing not inexplicable in the light of the wonders he had survived in Caer Einion and the outrages to his deepest soul he had suffered in Deganwy, but in place of experiencing any particular exaltation after rounding off in this wholesale manner his fabulous and exhaustive litany, he simply felt the familiar sensation, for it was one that usually followed these windy gusts of oracular obsession, of entering into an intimate relation with some small inanimate object that happened by the purest chance to be just then under his eye!

On this occasion the object that met the gaze of Cynan ap Clydno’s bard was a straw of wheat, dirty and split, crooked and crushed flat, with only a couple of empty husks adhering to its head end, and its tail end not only flattened out beyond all semblance of the hollow reed it once had been, but polished, in its enforced travels over the earth, to such a degree of thinness, smoothness, and whiteness, as to be almost transparent.

Taliesin swallowed a mouthful of bread, drained carefully the last and sweetest drops of his leaf-petal drug — for the honey he always put into it had a tendency to sink to the bottom — and laying both mug and loaf crust on the ground and clasping his strong, square, spatulate fingers round his knees, stared in comatose reverie at the straw. And by degrees, though of course the chances were entirely in favour of it being a one-sided affair, a relation began to establish itself between the man in his quiescence on the warm dry stool and the straw in its quiescence on the damp ground.

The young bard let his whole soul sink into a multiple consciousness of the material of our planet in its various immediate manifestations. The petal-scented honey still lingering on his tongue, the barley bread dissolving at its leisure in his stomach, the dry resinous odours from the distant fir trees, the vague aromatic fragrances from various growths at the water's edge, the feeling of the empty air receding into fabulous distances in every direction, the feeling of the wet, deep-sunken rocks, sprawled over by the cool roots of vegetation, but leading down at last, ledge by vertiginous ledge, to the dry scoriac bones of the Great Mother, all these — though he was himself a somewhat voluble oracle, and the straw had been flattened out too long to permit of a single breath passing through it — all these Taliesin seemed to share on something like equal terms with his unresponsive fellow tellurian. But the mere fact that chance had led him to single out a particular piece of inanimate but organic matter, a wind-tossed wheat stalk, whose non-sentience was on a par with that of any fragment from his own skeleton when once that skeleton was scattered to the winds, gave him a reason for saying "you and I" or "you and me" to this lifeless object.

It was while he was communing in such one-sided fashion with this fellow occupier of Space and Time that he was disturbed by the voice of an extremely babyish but extremely self-assured little boy, and by a response to the child from a woman who was obviously as little perturbed as her son, either by the presence of the black-and-silver tent and its crowded and stately supper table, or by the solitary figure at the entrance to the kitchen.

Rising to his feet with a muttered curse the bard beheld advancing towards him a plump, short, and, as far as he could make out, handsome young woman in advanced pregnancy, who, though she wore no veil, showed at once by the richly gilded ornaments twisted amid the masses of magnificent black hair which she wore coiled up round her head, as well as by the lavish folds of her flowing garments, so fantastically unsuitable to the hour, the occasion, and the place, that she belonged to none of the tribes of Ynys Prydein.

“But why mustn’t I go to my dad, Mummy?” the little boy kept repeating. “And why didn’t my dad answer when I called out to him? I know he heard me, for I saw Myrddin Wyllt look at him after he’d looked at me! Can Myrddin Wyllt see out of the back of his head, Mummy? Didn’t my dad want us to come and find him, Mummy? Was he hiding from us?”

These questions were asked in the particular dialect of the Brythonic tongue used in the coastal harbours of Gwent from which the Roman, Greek, and Carthaginian merchants were in the habit of replenishing their crews; but the caressing syllables with which Zora subdued and soothed, if she didn’t satisfy, the puzzled intelligence of Gog had no significance for Taliesin for they were uttered in Hebrew.

“You’ve come for Lot-el-Azziz, Lady, I expect,” the young man began hurriedly, “and you couldn’t have come at a better time.”

“Mummy wants my dad—” Gog brought out before he had glimpsed the face or the speaker. But when he had taken in something of the extraordinary countenance confronting him he became silent and stared with wide eyes and open mouth.

“I don’t want to make a disturbance,” the woman began. Then she too stopped. Describing it later to her husband she said it was like being shown your course by a fire at the mast’s head. “I could no more have argued with him,” she said, “than with one of those Northern Lights.”

“But I’ll tell you why it’s such a good time,” the young bard went on. “Because I’ve got to go in to them myself now, and I’ll send the doctor out to you.”

“Oh, don’t trouble yourself, young man,” cried Zora. “I don’t want to make a disturbance. I only thought if somebody could sneak in on tiptoe and whisper in Lot’s ear that Zor-n’-Gog were outside, he could slip away like God’s smoke and nobody be the worse.”

Taliesin picked up his stool with one hand and his mug and loaf crust with the other.

“Come to the fire while I get ready,” he said, “and I’ll soon send him out to you.”

He seated them on a bench by the big cauldron and brought them two little platters of the sweetmeat he’d prepared for Cynan’s guests. He took it for granted, as indeed his visitors did too, that there was no need that the few small changes he had to make in his attire should interrupt their colloquy.

“Why didn’t God make my dad a cook instead of a doctor?” enquired Gog gravely and pensively, the Brythonic syllables with their Aegean intonation forcing their way through the spongy substance that filled his mouth.

“You don’t get *all* his meals for Cynan ap Clydno, do you?” enquired Zora with painful sympathy.

“Oh, no, *Arglwyddes,* no! no! On about half the days of the week he dines with the others at the general board.”

“And you too, I suppose?”

“Holy Jesus! I should hope not!” And the youthful philosopher made a grimace of unfeigned horror. “Oh, no, beautiful Lady! When Cynan ap Clydno dines with the others in the general hall, Owain ab Uryen and I have a private picnic here. Even when both of them have to go, I stay. People disturb my mind, *Arglwyddes.”*

“Are you really the Pen Beirdd of Ynys Prydein?”

“That’s not for anyone to say, beautiful Lady. In two thousand years perhaps — but not very likely even then.”

“What do you think of these frightening stories they tell us about tomorrow?”

“What stories, beautiful Lady?”

“That every woman round here will be... in danger from Colgrim. That the druid has a host of archers with poisoned arrows. That at noon tomorrow when the Feast’s over and all the women have been outraged there’ll be a general massacre.”

“What does ‘outrage’ really mean, Mummy? When I asked Neb ap Digon he said it meant giving people what they like best of all. If the forest people give you figs in honey will you let me have some?”

Taliesin tied the twisted bardic cord with its green tassels round his waist and surveyed them both with a smile. “Shall I tell your pretty mummy what I predict will happen tomorrow?”

Gog clapped his hands. “I know what you’re going to say!”

“What, sonny?” asked the young man in genuine gravity.

"What, you little demon?" asked the young woman with equal seriousness.

"You're going to say that the emperor will come and save Mummy and my dad, and cut off Colgrim's head and make the druid throw his arrows in the lake!"

The young Pen Beirdd looked at Zora. "I *was* going to say something like that, something that amounts to the same thing. I was going to say what I *know* for certain." He was so grave now that the little Gog opened his eyes till they grew round again and his mouth till its corners dribbled.

"I was going to prophesy that Myrddin Wyllt will astonish us all tomorrow!"

At this he made so low a bow to the doctor's young wife that though she could discuss intelligently with any Greek sailor every wind and current in the Mediterranean, she hadn't the remotest notion whether he was impressed by her or whether he was mocking her.

"Well! I leave you in possession, Lady!" he said lightly as he went out. "And I'll tell the doctor where to find you. He won't be missing much. Our Brythonic poetry is no more like the Psalms of David than it's like Homer; and I've quite a long poem to recite to them and discuss with them tonight, for it's my time for entertaining them, you understand, after their supper. They sleep the better for it. And if they sleep while it's going on I don't mind. I get new ideas from hearing my own voice, and I'm never annoyed at anybody's going to sleep. Going to sleep is one of the things we all enjoy best in the world — like Neb's 'outrage.'

"For myself I like it more than any possible 'outrage.' But I'm old-fashioned in these things. I'm old-fashioned in everything except writing poetry for future generations; and sometimes even then! One thing I'm fond of doing which I expect you'll think a very funny thing, Lady. I like shouting the poems I invent into those deep cracks you see in rocks and into those holes you see in hollow trees.

"Only the other day a woman told me that if she ever came to love a man she would work such a spell on him as to keep him shut up, as the Witches of Caerloyw kept Mabon ap Modron, where she could always go to him, but he couldn't get out, and no one else could ever find him.

"Well! What I like doing, pretty Lady, with my verses is the opposite of that. I like freeing people from love. Instead of keeping them shut up for thousands and thousands of years, I tell them to rush out when the winds blow free, especially my favourite wind, the northeast wind, and to fill all they meet, with the magic of liberation!

"Well! Good night, sweet Lady, and maybe goodbye! I caught a glimpse of Myrddin Wyllt just now, and I can tell *from the look of that man's body,* and the way it jerked and heaved and swayed and shivered as he greeted Cynan ap Clydno, we may find tomorrow what we least expect! I tell you, when that man looks-like that anything may happen. I'll be sending the doctor in a few minutes. Take care of Mummy, Gog!"

If the Pen Beirdd of Ynys Prydein had assumed too great a liberty in calling the young wife of Lot-el-Azziz "pretty lady," it cannot be denied that with the putting off of his pigskin apron and the putting on of his poetic mantle Taliesin did more than drop the scullery for the court; he became a courtier, and a courtier of a perfection that only Gallic and Brythonic poets can ever reach.

Thus it was not long before Lot-el-Azziz, with the amiable consent of his host, a gratified smile from the Greek captain, a significant nod from the counsellor, and an anxious wish from the Henog that they might soon meet again, had been ushered out; nor was it long before the whole atmosphere of the supper table had been changed for the better.

Whether as chieftain and bard or as master and servant, both Cynan and Taliesin were so impetuous and extravagant, that when in addition to Owain ab Uryen and the merchant-captain from Athens who had been especially invited Myrddin Wyllt appeared with the Henog and the doctor, so that there were few scraps of food left when the meal was over and the drinking began, neither of the two congratulated himself on things falling out so evenly and luckily. In one quite unexpected way the presence of the emperor's counsellor at Cynan's board that night was a stroke of luck; for when after the doctor's departure Taliesin began his performance — and performance it was, although it was constantly being interrupted by puzzled interrogations, startled criticisms, subtle interpretations, and eloquent justifications — the five men who were listening to him in that black-and-silver tent were disturbed by such an excited inrush of a breathless personage from the Gaer that it needed Myrddin Wyllt's calm to balance their various reactions.

When the man first appeared — and he was none other than Owain Pen Uchel, the owner of the dapple-grey mare upon whom that very afternoon the emperor himself had bestowed the name of Valkyrie — he was so breathless and agitated and began talking so wildly that all of them save Myrddin Wyllt leapt to their feet.

Taliesin, however, with his long sharp nose, his pointed satyrlike ears, his retreating chin reduced to negligible and unnoticeable appendages by the dangerous gleam in his blue eyes, sank down on the arm of the chair vacated by the Greek and scowled at the agitated horse breeder from Deganwy.

All the old insults and humiliations, all the old savageries and mockeries and rebuffs, all the old desperate rivalries, all the old miserable struggles for bardic supremacy swept over him in a sudden dark wave at the sight of Owain Pen Uchel.

Valkyrie’s trainer was, however, too obsessed by what he had to announce to do more than recognize the rebel runaway from the elder branch of the House of Cunedda, but in this case recognition was enough; for like some deliberately discordant note in the young man’s daring modern poetry the mere presence of the scullion-bard’s singular physiognomy in the midst of this company, though neither fully realized nor entirely unexpected, brought an obscure reminder of ancient feuds, follies, and furies that tended to increase rather than diminish the turbulence of the man’s feelings.

Spluttering and gasping and talking so fast as hardly to be coherent, Owain Pen Uchel’s gaze wandered in vain from one face to another of the men before him, searching for the sort of sympathy of which he felt in such desperate need.

With senses quickened by this need — which indeed was one that asked for moral support rather than anything else — he looked at the warm glowing dusky face of his namesake Owain, whose upper lip, young as he was, showed the beginning of that dark, heavy, drooping moustache that the heroic defenders of yr Echwydd were to know so well as the years went on. He looked at the pale, white, proud face of Cynan ap Clydno, with its large, placid, violet-coloured eyes, and its small, carefully trimmed, glossy black, pointed beard.

He looked at the clean-shaven, weather-beaten, inscrutable face of Dion Dionides, from whose inhumanly pale eyes — eyes that seemed from long staring into the four winds to have been drained of every tinge of colour — few men and fewer women would have sought comfort. At all these faces did the breathless and agitated trainer of horses throw a pathetically appealing glance, while he stammered out his disturbing news; but it was to his namesake, the son of Uryen, that he instinctively drew near.

"What are you saying?" cried the master of the tent. "Calm yourself, for God's sake. Gather your wits together, man! Where's Taliesin? Oh, there you are! If you love me, sonny, give this fellow a cup of mead. None, do you say? None of it left? Well, a cup of wine then, and quickly too, for Jesus' sake! What does he say, Owain ab Uryen? Have we got to spend the night in the saddle? That's what *you* have been hoping for, for weeks! Has he come here against the prince's orders? Make him swallow down that stuff, Taliesin, for Jesus' sake! Make him whisper his trouble to you or to Owain ab Uryen, if he doesn't want to blurt it out to us all!"

But Taliesin had already left the son of Uryen to deal with the man alone and was back at his master's side.

"It's about that envoy from Colgrim," he told Cynan. "He's killed him or imprisoned him or something; and this man's sure that to treat an envoy like that will bring ruin on us all. Listen, my Lord — you can hear what they're saying. Owain ab Uryen's arguing with him now. He's telling him that though the princesses and the druid may have made the man a protected, pledged, and privileged person, this didn't affect the Prince of Edeyrnion. Nor *does* it affect him — nor us either! Colgrim should have sent his envoy to us here if he wanted to talk of terms. He wanted treachery, Cynan ap Clydno, that's what he wanted; and as far as I can see that's what he's found! If all these rumours aren't lies, and I don't see how they can be, we" — he glanced quickly round; Myrddin Wyllt had stretched himself out backwards in his chair with his hand over his eyes and seemed oblivious to everything— "we're not going to have a very comfortable time of it tomorrow, Cynan ap Clydno! It looks as if *you* were right in taking it seriously, and I was wrong in swearing it would all die down to nothing.

We're all foreigners to Edeyrnion and its ways, and that's the truth! You see how this fool of a horse breeder is rattled. Shocked in his conscience — Holy Jesus! — is what he is, in his conscience and his sense of order and decency and civilization! Don't let him see I'm talking about him" — here the Pen Beirdd lowered his voice to a whisper— "but for God's sake look at him now! He's begging Owain ab Uryen to take him into his service, and why? Simply because the Prince of Edeyrnion has had Colgrim's envoy killed or clapped into gaol. That's what they don't do to ambassadors in Deganwy; and therefore it makes this sturdy rogue feel as if all human decency were crashing down, and the devil have him if he didn't bolt from Mynydd-y-Gaer!

"Don't turn your head, my Lord, or let them see you're looking at them. *There!* Dion Dionides is weary of it and is sitting down by the Henog. Good God! I believe Owain ab Uryen — angels guard his sweet soul — is going to agree and take him on! Well! Owain's in need of a good horse. He's never had a good horse — I know *that.* So perhaps it's not only mercy and kindness!

"But about tomorrow, my dear Lord — I tell you we're *all* foreigners to the people here. They're the most primeval and prehistoric set of people in all this land! I don't know them; and in Caer Einion, where I was born only just across these mountains, all these orgies and crazy rituals, all these marriage mummeries and maidenhead mummeries, all this business of making the corn seed grow by pouring out human seed, would appear pure savagery and monstrous heathenism!"

He had lowered his voice by this time to such a conspiring whisper that out of Cynan ap Clydno's white, plump visage his imperturbable violet eyes contemplated his bard with a sort of quizzical enjoyment, as if the young man’s nervous apprehensions and excited qualms were more amusing than any possible event that could occur to justify them.

“Sit down here with me for a second, sonny,” Cynan said. “Your scullion activities can very well wait till midnight. None of us will sleep much tonight anyway, I expect; and I want to ask you something, for you’re as discerning as a woman in certain things. Have you gathered from the counsellor’s words and silences since you’ve been with us that he’s worried or not worried, by the nearness of Colgrim?”

Relapsing eagerly into the place indicated, Taliesin promptly plunged into an elaborate and complicated interpretation of the one single sentence uttered by Myrddin Wyllt which he had been in time to hear.

“You can ask me anything you please,” he had caught the counsellor saying, “and I’m never too proud to risk a prediction, but when you’re begetting a child it is not of him you’re thinking; and, when he’s born, ugly and formless are his features.”

Largely due to the mead being exhausted and his having been given wine, a drink to which he was totally unused, but also due to Owain ab Uryen’s impulsive kindness and his interest in a breeder and trainer of horses, it was not long before Owain Pen Uchel, too drunk to know anything but that he had appealed to the right person and was in great good luck, had been carried off by his namesake, the son of Uryen of Rheged, to the young adventurer’s own tent.

Meanwhile seated in full view of the abstracted Myrddin Wyllt, who had now removed his hand from his eyes and was gazing up at certain wisps of torch smoke and wood smoke that were waving and undulating in a sort of mystic dance under the incitement of a flicker of moonlight, the Henog of Dyfed, who alone among Cynan’s guests retained, unaffected by mead or wine, the normal activity of his mind, was increasing his vast treasure of memorable events by interrogating a new source of historic information. This was none other than Dion Dionides; and if the counsellor was too absorbed in his own thoughts to observe this quaint encounter, Cynan and his Pen Beirdd smiled at each other more than once as they noted its quaint growth in intensity and intimacy.

The much-enduring wily Greek trader, owner as well as captain of the Athenian ship *Calypso,* now in dock in London, was feeling the usual effect upon him of drinking wine on the top of mead, and his brain was growing abnormally alert while his body experienced an extreme unwillingness to make the smallest move.

The implication behind the looks exchanged between Cynan and Taliesin was that here was a perfect case of guileless curiosity, eliciting extravagant inventions and cynical lies; but this was a totally mistaken summary of the situation, and the questioning was by no means confined to one side.

“What I can’t understand in this extraordinary country of yours—” the Greek was saying, when the Henog cut him short. “Don’t call it my country, Dion Dionides! You forget what I’ve been telling you about Gwri Walk Euryn, otherwise Pryderi. He was a *real* god of our people, kind and humane like your Prometheus, but he came from Dyfed, and these northern druids and magicians killed him.”

“But surely, Lord Henog, with Colgrim’s Saeson marching fast upon the place all the Edeyrnion tribes ought to join up against him.”

“You don’t understand, Dion Dionides, how we aboriginals regard these Romanized Brythons who at present rule us and of whom” — he glanced at the broad low forehead and inhumanly green eyes of the abstracted counsellor, but they were still fixed on the undulating smoke— “of whom the emperor is the only real military brain. I’m a chronicler, not a prophet. I study the past and in it seek the causes of the present and the possibilities of the future. My interest in *him"* — and he made a slight motion of his head towards Myrddin Wyllt— "is in the events of his life, not in his predictions. And what I am continually finding in the past are dramatic moments just like tonight, with some Gwyddyl invasion, some Brython invasion, some Roman invasion, interrupting, as Colgrim's Saeson are doing now, some old religious orgy, earth worship, magic fertilizing of the ploughed-up fields."

The Greek's pale eyes wandered from the long stringy neck before him to the chronicler's fanatical visage, which made him think of the preposterous faces — grave and intent in their grotesque peering — that used to be carved on phallic poles in his boyhood and carried through the by-streets of the Piraeus; poles that were denounced by the respectable, cursed by the priests, winked at by the authorities, and mystically interpreted by the few remaining successors of Plato.

"But, my dear Lord, do for Christ's sake consider the situation we're in tonight in this crazy and barbarous corner of your precious island. Here we are, with our horses and lances and luxurious tents, absolutely surrounded, so everybody assures me, though, mind you, I've not myself seen a single one of these gentry, by thousands of sharpshooters with poisoned arrows, all under the authority of people who are in league with Colgrim just as Gortheyrn was in league with Hengyst.

"What do you yourself really think of this Prince Einion whose Hercules of a son is to sail with me to Constantinople? You're his guest, I understand, and have been quite a long time at the Gaer, so you must have observed him pretty closely. Besides, you must be a great discerner of spirits, Lord Henog, or the emperor would never have entrusted you with the *Life* of our friend over there."

He nodded towards the abstracted figure in front of them, but the soul of Myrddin Wyllt was still undulating with the undulating smoke in the roof of the tent; so that, though there was one particular torch which gave the prophet's green eyes something of the same luminosity that night by night in the cabin of the *Calypso* emanated from the emeralds in the lion-headed image of Cronos before Dion extinguished his swaying lantern, neither the historian nor the voyager felt that their words were heard, their thoughts caught, or even their presence recognized.

"You don't suppose, do you — mind you, I don't suggest it, but these Edeyrnion forests, this Gaer, these mountains, this river that catches the sun and the moon like a torrent of giants' shields, strike a sailor's mind as a world where the subtlest, wildest, and most motiveless treacheries and betrayals could occur! — that the prince is himself in league with Colgrim and ready to yield up the Gaer to him the moment his yellow-haired plunderers reach its foot?

"Have you seen enough of the man during your visit, my dear Lord Henog, to assure me that such a thing is out of the question? He must anyway have given permission to these forest people to hold their old orgiastic seminal earth-feast while we were here, and pregnant as it is with causes of violence between us!

"And what in the devil's name is the meaning of this marriage of which we hear so much? I've brought a handsomely copied script, by the way, of all the Eleven Comedies of Aristophanes as a present from my uncle Damascius, from whose work on 'The Beginning of Things' showing that both the origin of the world and its inner truth are entirely unknowable he has already received several chapters, to this bride's father, Brochvael ab Iddawc; but, 'by the two goddesses!' as the women in Aristophanes are forever swearing, we may be all in Hades by this time tomorrow, and some yellow-haired Sais or druid's drab may be lighting fires with the *Lysistrata!"*

Watching closely what he could make out in the flickering torchlight of the Henog’s expression, the crafty captain was aware of an unpleasant jar to his own deepest self-esteem.

If there was anything upon which he prided himself beyond his cleverly calculated moves in the great chess game of worldly success, it was his light touch in intellectual matters. In this subtle sphere he regarded himself as no mean conversationalist, and where he felt himself to be especially effective was in the casually dropped literary allusion.

No fifth cousin of a Roman emperor, even if this latter had been master of the legions for no more than a month, could have made a more artful use of such an imperial connection than Dion Dionides did of his academic uncle. He had in reality read nothing of the great ribald pacifist save a few passages like that of the seduction of the Scythian official by Euripides’ dancing girl at the end of the *Thesmophoriazusae;* but it caused him a real twinge in his self-lover’s most touchy nerve to note how little his reference to the *Lysistrata* or to his relative’s proof of the necessity of agnosticism impressed the biographer of Myrddin Wyllt.

It was under the pressure of this hurt nerve that the Greek became more reckless as to what he said to this insensitive old pedant, and after a quick glance to make sure the green eyes under the low forehead were still staring in lost abstraction at the smoke spirals in the canvas roof, he asked the historian point blank a crucial question that had really been bothering him for the last twelve hours. Did he think, from his knowledge of this weird place, that there was any danger for “our women,” danger for the Jewish doctor’s wife, for instance, or for the counsellor’s sister? He threw all the airy casualness he could assume into these words, but his thoughts behind them were of a drastic and formidable intensity.

He knew well that the counsellor's sister held a somewhat equivocal position at Arthur's court; but it had more than once crossed his long-sighted and far-calculating intelligence that for that very reason this beautiful and *lonely* woman — for the Athenian hadn't missed what he regarded as the fatal power over her possessed by her handmaid Nineue — might be in her hidden mind as calmly and desperately ambitious as he was himself.

His voyages had not been for love of the sea or for love of travel. They had been for the piling up of *drachmas* as a preliminary preparation for the sort of political career open to all rich men, but especially open to unscrupulous rich men in the present conditions of the imperial household at Constantinople.

During the last three or four days he hadn't hesitated to divest himself of almost all the rare and precious wines, sweetmeats, and delicacies which he had brought with him to this barbarous place with a view to propitiating this desirable woman to whom he felt sure Constantinople would open her secretest chambers. He had not failed to mark the lady's interest in Rhun ap Gwrnach; but he had an inkling that if it came to offers of marriage a rich merchant with connections all over the Eastern Empire had nothing to dread from an officer of the *Gosgordd* of Mynydd-y-Gaer, or a mere *miles* of the god Mithras!

What bothered him just now was tomorrow's accurst sex orgy. He didn't know — and he gave credit to none of the popular rumours or tales or legends that he heard on the subject from all sides — how far these barbarians were likely to go in their mad parodies of the Hellenic Mysteries, nor what might happen to a woman as beautiful as that green-eyed magician's sister if the revellers got out of hand. But he had never felt as sure as he felt tonight that with her by his side he could go as far as the *daimon* in him incited him to go; and that might be very far indeed!

He decided that from this moment he would give up all attempts to analyze the various elements in his resolve to get hold of this woman and to link their destiny forever. He had seen enough of her to know that she lived — just as he did — in secret purposes of her own, and he suspected, as was the case with himself, that these purposes were practical and external rather than emotional or sensual.

Heavens! How long this Henog took answering his simple question about the danger to their women! He turned his sea-mist eyes from the Henog to the prophet, and from the prophet to the Henog. What extraordinary people these natives of this mad Ultima Thule were!

Then he shifted his glance to the more distant forms of his young host and the still younger bard. These two were now bending their heads close to each other and trying to hide their laughter, just as a couple of young women might have done.

While Dion Dionides thus awaited his answer, the Henog was pondering hard and long on the most suitable words wherewith to respond to this ticklish question about the "danger" that tomorrow's mystery orgy might bring to their women.

The Henog found it not only a delicate question but a question about which by reason of something in his own temperament he disliked being forced to think. So distasteful to him personally was all intercourse with the opposite sex that for a women to be forcibly ravished was no more painful to him than for her to be possessed by a man under the most normal circumstances. The thought of any kind of contact between the two had in fact under certain conditions the power of making him feel physically sick.

“You will pardon me, Master Dion,” he said, “if I answer the questions that seem most upon your mind tonight in the reverse order, and if I answer as an historian. And first as to Prince Einion. You saw the shock that man from the Gaer had received — and I’m sure you’ll agree he wasn’t pretending — from the slaying or even from the imprisoning of an official ambassador. Well, if the prince *were,* as you suggested just now, secretly on the side of Colgrim, he could never have done that. And in the same way with what you fear for our women.

“Neither the natural desire to drive imperial horsemen out of Edeyrnion — and to these people, you must remember, Dyfed and Gwent are places of menacing remoteness — nor the orgiastic spirit of the Feast could ever be strong enough to destroy the traditional bar that protects, in our island, women of these ladies’ rank.

“But apart altogether from these trifles, I want you to realize, Master Dion, exactly what I mean when I say ‘as an historian’. You may think I mean a careful sifting of fact from fable. I *mean* nothing *of* the kind! A true historian records fact and fable with philosophic indiscrimination. Who is he to decide between them? He leaves posterity to do that. Besides, he knows well that there are plenty of fables that in reality are far more” — here the Henog paused and frowned, pondering on the appropriate word; he even went so far as to begin a quaint fumbling movement of his hand towards the writing tablet at his belt but he caught himself up— “far more revealing of Nature’s secrets than many verified facts and unquestionable events.”

“I understand you completely, Lord Henog. Your method was the rule with Herodotus and in a large measure with Thucydides and Plutarch; and what I would like to have your opinion upon now *as an historian* is a very crucial point and one which, since few of us, I fancy, will get any sleep tonight, it may be worth discussing at large before we separate. The point is this: will the priest of Mynydd-y-Gaer and — what's the name of his new church here? — of Cor-weyn, take our side, I mean the imperial side, tomorrow, or the side of these Edeyrnion rebels?"

For the first time that evening, indeed for the first time that day, the Henog of Dyfed laughed aloud.

"Are your Greek ecclesiastics so different from our Roman and Brython ones that you don't know the answer to that? Of course the priest will side with the emperor, even though" — and he glanced at the motionless figure with its eyes still fixed on the dissolving smoke— "the emperor had a thousand devils at his command."

It was the Greek's turn to be amused, but his pale eyes only grew a shade paler still.

"Do you know, Master Historian," he said, "I think your — how shall I put it? — your professional prejudice runs away with you there. I had a word tonight with that red-headed young fool, Galahaut of Surluse, who had just heard, through Peredur ab Evrawc, who's our captain now, and who'd just heard from *him"* — and Dion nodded towards the abstracted prophet— "that the priest and the druid were in full accord. I'm not sure he didn't say that the priest had baptized the druid; but it may have been the other way round!

"Anyway, there are cases in history of God and the devil signing a pact against Caesar! I confess I agree with my relative, Damascius, in a striking new book of his, that there's nothing for any thinking man to be in these modern days but a complete agnostic. All the same, do let me ask you this, Lord Henog, quite apart from which side tomorrow morning the Church will take — and by the gods I wish it were now *tomorrow* evening, and you and I with whole skins and not too remorseful consciences discussing the complete overthrow of all the emperor’s enemies! — how long do you give this last and craziest of human religions to endure on the surface of the earth?”

“Do you mean the religion of Christ?”

“Of course, what else?”

“Do you ask me as an historian?”

“I ask you as an historian.”

“Well then, I will answer in round numbers, Master — about two thousand years.”

The Greek trader made a half-humorous gesture of despair. “As long as that?” he groaned. “And are we destined, my dear. Lord Henog, for two thousand more years to endure nights like this; nights with dawns hanging over us full of poisoned arrows, and the shrieks of raped women, and the howls of barbarians, and the burning of our houses and histories, our tragedies and our comedies, over our heads?”

But before the Henog, whether he decided to speak as a chronicler or as a Christian, could reply to this there came a vibration on the air, which, though as irrelevant and inconsequent as the counsellor’s random wisps of oil smoke and wood smoke, produced a much more startling effect.

This was the baying, just outside the tent, of some large deep-throated dog. In a second the whole pattern of things within that expanse of silver-and-black canvas changed its shape.

The staring green eyes of the emperor’s counsellor relaxed into normal alertness, while the man himself, rising unsteadily from his seat, tightened the tassels about his waist, shook out the creases of his black robe, straightened his heavy shoulders, and looked anxiously about him.

With equal suddenness Cynan and Taliesin ceased their whispering and began moving one after the other, down the side of the long table towards their chief guest. This latter movement was from necessity as well as from strategic politeness a somewhat slow one; for they had to project themselves sideways between the backs of the chairs and the sloping canvas of the tent.

"That dog howls as if it were lost!" thought the sea captain; and then as he watched the two young men squeezing themselves behind the elaborately carved backs of those princely chairs he told himself that Clydno must have left his son a fine hoard of gold pieces. "Good craftsmen in chairs," he thought, "are rarer in these disturbed times than good silversmiths or saddlers."

Thus by the time the equable-tempered son of the sagacious Clydno, followed by the Pen Beirdd of Ynys Prydein, had reached the tent's entrance, the chronicler from Dyfed, the trader from Athens, and the now fully aroused "crooked counsellor," who alone knew the measure of his difference from other counsellors, were already gathering about them their mantles and their weapons, preparatory to their return to their own quarters.

It was, however, to all the five men, Cynan and Taliesin having come forth into the night, not only to bid their visitors farewell but to discover what hound it was who had so deep-chested a voice, that Rhun ap Gwrnach, in a state of considerable irritation and holding Drudwyn by his own belt in place of a leash, told how the dog had sought him out, but instead of being at peace now that he'd found him was still restless and had insisted in dragging him about the camp in search of somebody else.

It was the youngest of the five who turned at once to Myrddin Wyllt, as the one who would know, since an animal was concerned.

"Take him to Owain ab Uryen," said the counsellor. "He's looking for a man from Deganwy who breeds horses. It's a horse the dog wants."

CHAPTER XX. The House of Stone

WHETHER DUE TO THE CHANGE in the wind, that blowing all night from the south as if it were following the tide of Dyfrdwy, the Divine River, had brought down from the ridges and precipices of Cader Idris the same curious straw-coloured mist that Porius had watched from the gate tower of the Gaer, or whether due to the tension of the feelings by which her heart was torn and his mind was troubled, neither Morfydd nor her father, at the close of their last day together, found themselves, when midnight caught them still seated opposite each other over Brochvael's fire, inclined to be first to bid the other good night.

During one of his visits to Rome in search of books, Brochvael had been presented by a certain rich and clever young aristocrat he met there called Boethius, then a lad still in his teens, with a carefully constructed water clock, put together by the boy himself and designed to work with greater precision than the commoner kind recently introduced at various European courts. It was to this clock that Brochvael felt at last impelled to direct his daughter's attention.

"You'll be as white tomorrow as sea foam, sweetheart," he said, "if you don't get *some* rest. The princesses, if not Einion himself, will be calling for us by six. Maybe they'll *both* come with all their followers, and we'll have a fight to the death at Ty Cerrig between our *Gosgordd* and the Derwydd's archers before any Fisher King's cry is raised, or any lance is ready for the plunge!

"A nice Feast of Seed scattering it'll be when all the strong men lie dead in their blood, and only maids like you and old dotards like me are left alive! Don’t ‘ee smile so sadly, honey. That’s the way your mother used to smile when I talked politics! All may yet be well. The old Gaer and the House of Cunedda have survived worse moments than this.”

Morfydd loosened her hair as naturally and unconcernedly as if she’d been with her nurse rather than her father. Then she stretched out both her thin bare arms above her head with what was at once an exhausted animal’s half-yawn and a proud sophisticated woman’s hopeless sigh. Then she let her arms sink down on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses,* a book that almost covered the small wooden table, and leant forward with a puckered forehead and twitching mouth.

“Canna says Gwrgi says,” she brought out bitterly, “that Colgrim and his Saeson will be here by dawn, and that the forest people will all go over to them, and that together they’ll massacre us all, men, women, and children — *and I hope they will!”*

Brochvael lifted *his* arm when he heard that and gently stroked with his long lean fingers the girl’s tightly twisted knuckles resting on the beautifully copied text of the myth-loving poet.

The light from a single small torch in a silver sconce above her father’s head fell upon the girl’s face, and Brochvael was shocked at the violence of the feeling he saw in it.

He drew back his hand from the unnoticed and rejected caress and straightened his shoulders.

“Morfydd!” he began very seriously.

“Oh, what’s the use of talking, Father?”

“I’m not talking,” he countered gently. “I’m making a suggestion, and I must ask my girl to give what I say her fullest attention.”

The faintest flicker of interest — the first he had seen in her all that long evening — wavered across Morfydd’s face.

“Well, Father dear,” she whispered. “I’m ready to consider *anything;* even if you’re going to explain to me what will be the quickest and easiest way for a couple of good Romanized Brythons to commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of barbarians.”

Her tone was so hopeless and so reckless that Brochvael spoke rapidly as well as gravely.

“I don’t know whether you know it, child,” he said, “but I’ve got quite a good sum of Roman money hidden away — and it’s gold that could carry us anywhere — and if tomorrow’s marriage is as hateful to you as I think it *must* be from your mood tonight, why don’t we carry off Canna, or even Gwrgi *and* Canna, and take refuge in Arverne with my friend Sidonius? I don’t believe Einion would be greatly upset or would feel we were deserting him. You know better than I do what Porius would feel; but I confess I don’t see him breaking his heart.”

Before he’d reached the words “better than I do,” the girl on the other side of that rich Ovidian scroll covered her face with her hands.

Did she do this to conceal an emotion — and what sort of emotion? — that she felt it imperative he shouldn’t see? Or did she do it to make it easier for her to think quickly, clearly, desperately, decisively? Brochvael had not the faintest inkling of a clue. So he did the best he could. He had had enough of long hopeless silences that night; and even if his words were indiscreet, if they were intrusive, insensitive, ill-advised, if they were such as to make her seriously angry with him, he felt impelled to risk it.

“You see, child,” he continued, addressing the delicately outlined knuckles of those uplifted hands and the strip of white forehead above the tips of her fingers and the glossy tints, deepened by the flickerings of the firelight, in the filmy brown hair that now hung loose on her shoulders and even fell, lustrous and warm, on the illuminated text of the amorous poet.

"You see, child, things have changed a good deal in these last twelve hours; and the grand advantage to us all of you and Porius getting quickly married isn't any longer what you might call the 'queen's move' in our chess game. I almost feel, child, as if you couldn't have been listening to all that Einion told us when he was here just now! Didn't you hear how he'd chained Colgrim's ambassador to the wall, and how Auntie Esyllt's whole household had deserted her, some to the forest, some to the Gaer, but most of them, wily devils that they are, to Saint Julian's Fount? Didn't you take it in that Auntie Tonwen and her old mystery man of the Avanc's Cave have ridden off to meet the emperor?"

At the mention of the youngest princess, for whom Morfydd had always felt an unrevealed, unformulated attraction, she removed her hands from her face; but it was on the fire, not on him, that she fixed her gaze.

"Didn't you hear," he continued, "what he said about Colgrim having already got to Saint Tysilio's? But of course your first feeling, like mine, was a grievance against the emperor! Well! Anyway, that's what happens to people like us when we meddle in politics. Old Einion was much wiser. He just waited on events. Besides, he understands the forest people better than we do.

"And I warrant he knows the Gwyddyl-Ffichti better than *you* do, though your mother was half of one herself! It gave me a shock at first when he said all that about what he'd done to this wretch Gunhorst. But your grandfather Iddawc would probably have killed the fellow. Cunedda certainly would! When I caught that glimpse of him myself I thought him more like a spy than an ambassador. Well, never mind that! What I'm saying is that everything's changed since you and Euronwy and the old man packed me off to tell Porius that your marriage must be tomorrow!

"As things look now it's a case of fighting for our lives, all of us — forest people and Brythons and Gwyddyl-Ffichti, Gaer men and emperor men — for our lives, I tell you, against these Saeson! We've heard about these people, you remember, from Sidonius. In one letter he said that for savage fighting they've no rivals this side of the Bosporus. I fancy this must be the first time the emperor's been fairly outwitted in military strategy. He thought Colgrim was marching day and night to meet his brother at Badon, when all the while the man was debouching with still greater speed to conquer Edeyrnion, Deganwy, and Mona!

"But *that's* not at all what I wanted to say to my only child before Boethius's water clock tells us that the first hour of Sunday the twenty-first of October is drowned in oblivion. Your old dad may be a fool at understanding women — especially a clever girl like you — but he'd be an absolute idiot not to see that this marriage with Porius is doing worse than upsetting you. It's driving you crazy. I've never seen you like this before! I don't believe you realize how completely you're giving yourself away. At least you are to me, who've watched you from your infancy. Come now, look at me, Morfydd. That's the girl!

"You'd much better confide in me completely. Morvran never did, I know. It's the custom these days for children to keep their own counsel. You'd think it hopelessly old-fashioned to ask my advice where your heart's concerned. I doubt if you'd ask your mother's, if she were with us today! But I'm not blind. And, as things are now, I swear I could give you very excellent advice.

"This whole business, my dear, of your betrothal to Porius was a mistake. I see it clearly now! I was led away by Euronwy; and so, apparently, have you been — and Porius himself, I dare say! It's Euronwy's idea — well! it's the old Roman idea and our Brythonic one too — that the power and peace of tribes and nations are cemented by marriages. Looking at you now and thinking of the damage done to Ynys Prydein by Ronwen ferch Hengyst, I'm prepared to say: 'Let it all go! Break it off! Tell Porius you've changed your mind.' And, as I say, if you shrink from Euronwy's anger and want to avoid Porius and make him forget you, I'm quite ready to be cursed by everyone as a coward — old Einion and the Modrybedd would know better; at least Erddud would, though I'm not so sure about Esyllt! — and carry you off this very day to Dover and across Gaul to Sidonius!

"You're all I've got in the world, my dear, and I'd willingly sell my reputation for heroism and patriotism and all the rest to see you happy again and as you were in the old days. Who can tell what destiny may be waiting for you over there; and as you know — as you've seen — I'm not one to be a drag on you in my old age."

But the tears that were in his eyes as he concluded this speech, and leaning forward stretched out one of his hands towards her, were dried suddenly and unexpectedly. *Her* hands had been dropped side by side like a couple of dead poplar leaves upon the illuminated volume that lay open before her, and such was the erratic nature of Brochvael's mind that even after she had given him the look that made him draw back, he couldn't help wondering what particular passage those hands were concealing.

He wondered too, in a lapse of time far too rapid for its passing to be registered by his Boethian water clock, what drastic "metamorphosis" was affecting a small ivory-coloured moth that, resisting the temptation to flutter round the torch flame above their heads, was now nervously and tentatively crossing a beautifully tinted capital letter at the beginning of a fresh imaginative flight by the amorous poet.

But the look that so abruptly cut short Brochvael's emotional gesture was only the first out-jetting from a dammed-up weir of accumulated repressions and seething miseries of revolt. The girl followed it by rising to her feet, and with clenched hands held taut to her sides and the lines on her forehead forming so deep and dark an angle that it added years to her age, she pierced him with a flash of such furious contempt that his whole identity drew back into itself and underwent a process not unlike that peculiar curling up which can be observed in thin shavings of dry wood when left near an oven, or in the curving tails of certain dead fish when the pan containing them reaches a particular and special degree of heat.

"What do you think I am?" she cried. "If you hadn't let them murder Morvran, at least I'd have *one* person now who understood! You've left me to these plotting and scheming women — oh, yes! you can make a pet of me sweetly enough when it suits your pleasure and when you need somebody to read your precious books with you; but when it comes to the heart — yes! my Lord and Master, there *is* such a thing in women as the heart! — you turn me over, you always *have* turned me over, to your darling and loving Auntie Erddud, whose mad passion for you everybody who knows her must see; and then, when Auntie Erddud joins up with Auntie Esyllt and her Derwydd, and plots against us all, you leave me to Euronwy, who for her dear Porius's sake would willingly see me raped by the whole *Gosgordd!"* She stopped for breath, swaying a little from side to side, her grey eyes grown so dark as to be almost pitch-black, her arms held straight and stiff against her body, the fingers clenched tight, while her wrath and pride seemed to drain from the very air all peace, all quiet, all acceptance.

While this storm went on, lashing the core of his cowering identity as if with a rain of the Derwydd's poisoned arrows, two small streams of saliva trickled down Brochvael's chin, one from the left side of his open lips and one from the right. The physical cause of this phenomenon was, of course, that since his gums contained no teeth it was harder for him than for most people not to dribble when his mouth was open and he was thunderstruck by something. But the shock that reduced him to this humiliating state was the sense of bewildered shame and paralyzing remorse into which her indictment flung him.

He was so confounded by this completely unexpected view of things, thus revealed to him as if by a flash of lightning, that for the moment he could do nothing but accept it as the horrid reality which his self-centred egoism and thick-skinned obtuseness had till that moment concealed from him.

"What do you think I am?" she burst out, the tide of her self-pity catching her up again and lifting her from her feet in its shoreward surge. "What I vowed in that chapel when the prince found me with Euronwy I'm not going to throw away because of the first hurt, or trap, or ambush, or madness, or misery, or pit of despair, into which its performance leads!

"Do you think I'm going to run away to Gaul with you like a sweet, pure, timid, shrinking virgin, whose heart flutters so at the words 'marriage bed' that she doesn't know whether she loves enough, or *he* loves enough, or anyone loves enough, to justify such things? Do you realize that I swore an oath in that chapel that no one has dared to swear for hundreds, maybe thousands, of years? Did you think I was a good, faithful, devoted daughter of the House of Cunedda, *and that was all*?

"They always called Mother the 'Gwyddyles,' and you let them call her that! What would they have thought if they'd known what Mother whispered in my ears the night Morvran was born — that she was a *Gwyddyl-Ffichti?* Yes, you may well look like that! You didn't realize, did you, that you'd got a daughter of the oldest race in Ynys Prydein, except the Cewri? One of those too, who when they served the Cewri, it was the Cewri that were afraid of *them,* not the other way round!

"You didn't realize, did you — though you may find it out before long! — that your 'Gwyddyles' was of the same race as Nineue, the famous whore who everybody says will one day put such a *tynged* on Myrddin Wyllt that he'll vanish from all men's sight but hers and be never seen again!

"Did you think — does Euronwy think — that the heart of a woman can be turned into a blood covenant, into a life-and-death contract, between two nations, *and nothing happen to it?* I tell you, the Morfydd you want to carry off so romantically, so easily, to a new life in Gaul *is already dead* — yes! dead as your other Gwyddyl-Ffichti child! Call to her to take ship with you and there'll be no answer! Tell her about all those gold coins of old Rome you've got hidden away — and there'll be no answer! Dead in her coffin is *that* girl with her maiden strewments of tags from Virgil, and scenes from Ovid, and pious memories of a Gwyddyles mother, and tender visions of the pure heart of Auntie Erddud! Sprinkled thick like the first with these holy fictions of yours, Father, is the body of your second child; and soon, perhaps, as Porius thinks happened to Morvran, the Cewri of the Cader will come down and carry the stinking thing away to their caves!"

Again Morfydd stopped, and this time the man rose slowly to his feet. Something was flowing back now into his veins and into the most intimate fibres of his outraged nature, something that made him know beyond reason or argument that, self-centred as he may have been, some sort of an injustice was being done to him.

"You've said enough," he brought out indignantly. "You have absolutely no right — and you *know* you have no right — to drag Morvran into all this! No one has ever suggested before that I could have saved him. God's Mother, girl! I might as well turn on you and ask you why you didn't save him, or why he didn't save himself, and so save us all, by joining Arthur's horsemen when the emperor wrote to Mynydd-y-Gaer, asking about him!

"No, no! We all know who stirred up those people to murder your brother. I've never spoken to that man since; nor have you, but we've always taken it, I thought, as something nobody could possibly have foreseen. To bring up our great trouble against me now and say these unjust things — just because you've let yourself in for a situation that hurts your feelings in some way — I think it's unworthy of your mother's child, my girl!"

His voice had grown more assured as he heard his own words, and the initial shock produced upon him by her startling and unexpected attack having diminished, his expression reassumed its patient air of philosophic self-respect.

This was unfortunate for him. It cannot be called, since his life illusion was philosophical rather than dramatic, a gross and clumsy mistake; but it certainly was unfortunate. It roused a new tide of anger in her, which if he had remained obviously ruffled and upset might have died down.

"Unworthy of my mother's child?" she repeated, throwing such a mocking emphasis into the words that like a stone thrown at a reflection in water they completely disturbed his returning dignity. "And what an effort," she went on, "it must have cost you to be so worthy of my mother — even if she *were* a Gwyddyl-Ffichti — as to offer to take me to Gaul when you've asked Uncle Einion's cast-off whore — another Gwyddyl-Ffichti like my mother and me! — to come here to console you when I've gone off with Porius! Oh, you needn't begin explaining! Canna couldn't wait to tell of all the preparations you've told her to make! She'd thought, you know — silly old woman! — that Porius would let her stay with me, but evidently she's to stay here to wait on my mother's successor! What a noble effort it must have cost you to think of taking Canna and Gwrgi — for you *did* mention that little plan, didn't you? — with us to Gaul! Perhaps you thought—"

"Morfydd!" And he broke into her string of laboured sarcasms, that were already dragging a little, with a hurried earnestness, speaking in a whisper. "I believe I heard a crackling of sticks in the kitchen just then. Our dispute must have roused those two in there! For Christ's sake, or your mother's sake, or your own sake — I feel so confused and troubled about you I don't know what to appeal to! — let's end all this; and you go up and get some sleep. You won't have a nerve left for tomorrow, whatever tomorrow brings, if you don't get a *little* sleep. Besides, you remember what Einion said about coming—"

He stopped abruptly, listening, and she listened too, the tension in her nerves clearly eased a little by the necessity for caution, and together they certainly did hear the various familiar sounds that indicated the emergence of Gwrgi from behind his curtain, and his opening and shutting of the back door of Ty Cerrig as he went out to relieve himself and on his return began attending to the fire, which, in that warm chamber, was never allowed to go out completely, but was nightly kept alive under a sprinkling of ashes.

The father and daughter were unable to help exchanging the ghost of a smile as they listened to these sounds, sounds which they were accustomed to hear as they lay luxuriously half-awake in the early morning; and to each of them it was clear that the other was prepared to prolong this moment indefinitely — a moment pregnant beyond the computation of any Boethian invention — and which easily might prove, as both knew well, the last time they would stand like this alone together, bidding each other good night over the pages of a poet of the ancient world.

So long in fact did they stand motionless together, Brochvael with his gaze fixed on a small crack between two of the most discoloured stones in the old wall that separated them from the kitchen, and Morfydd contemplating her father's face with a look that was still reproachful, but into which there had now crept a trace of mocking affection if not of tender indulgence, that when with the ebbing of her furious anger and the lapsing into hopeless fatalism of his not very formidable self-respect, she half-forgetfully, half-forgivingly, bent towards him and touched his elbow with her feverish forehead, the intensity of the kiss he pressed against her small skull, though it stirred no response in the magnetism of her brown hair, enabled her to escape to her room on the floor above without turning again and at least with a partially assuaged conscience.

But it did not enable Brochvael to sleep. More than a couple of hours later, according to the un-Christian magic of the youthful senator of Rome, as soon as he knew by the murmur of their voices that Gwrgi and Canna were exchanging dark and ravishing tales of wilder mysteries — come down to them from far-off Africa — than were likely to be performed between earth and sky in Edeyrnion, he kicked off his sandals, lest, soft as they were, they should betray his anxiety to the old couple, and stole up the narrow little staircase to his daughter's room.

Yes, she was asleep. He didn't dare to cross the threshold; but since the iron-barred and iron-nailed door had never possessed any sort of hinge, and since even in autumn, when the east wind loved to shriek across the Avanc's Cave and the Giant's Cave and to wail and whistle round that small turret, it remained open, and the rather sinister entrance to her chamber was protected by nothing more solid than a thick woollen curtain, he soon learnt through her steady breathing that she was safe out of reach of the demons of hysteria, if not of anxious and repulsive dreams.

He crept down the stone stairway again and sat for yet another hour over his fire of fragrant fir logs. Gwrgi peeped in once — sent by "yonder old *gwrach,"* he explained, "to find out if your nobleness needed aught, whether warm or cold, or liquid or solid, till morning dawn" — but Brochvael wanted nothing but to sit on by the fire, thinking, thinking, thinking. He even gathered up from the table Cassiodorus's beautifully copied Metamorphoses and laid it reverently but unfalteringly on a silk-lined shelf against the wall.

There had arrived for him, it was clear enough, a moment in his life when nothing but thought, thought analytic, thought retrospective, thought premonitory, could satisfy the demands of the situation and win back for him that self-respecting continuity of emotion upon which his daughter had laid such violent hands.

Log after log, as he sat there, did he watch go through all its various metamorphoses, of blind smoke, of tongues of flames, of crackling flame, of burning flame, of red combustion, and of black cinders, but at last he too — like his daughter behind her immovably open door at the top of the stone steps — began to breathe heavily, steadily, monotonously, unconsciously, as far as this dimension was concerned, while invisibly he threaded his way, anxious and preoccupied, among the people and things of a world as intensely real as it was grotesquely fabulous.

Suddenly he found himself sitting up erect in his goatskin chair and staring across a dying fire and beneath a flickering and guttering torch at the small dark square of the window. The window was open to the night, save for a wooden shutter of antique design and elaborate carving, between which and the wall a space of several inches had been left.

And it was with the kind of confused yet concentrated attention which differs from the startled terror of the shocks we get when we are fully awake by being at once much less surprising and a good deal more fantastic, that Brochvael was now aware of a muscular arm and bony wrist, terminating in a fumbling hand and groping fingers, that were moving to and fro along the interior surface of the wall immediately opposite him.

The conclusion he arrived at with regard to this apparition was naturally reached; namely, that an unknown person, at present *outside* Ty Cerrig, was desirous of getting *inside,* and of doing so with as little disturbance as might be to those that lived within those walls. Whether it was his unusual personal experiences as a traveller through Gaul, Italy, the Peloponnese, and the Aegean Isles, or some congenital phlegm in his disposition as a princely Brython, or simply that he had been so stripped and exposed by Morfydd that he had reached a point of reckless indifference, the plain fact is that he got up noiselessly from his chair and for the second time that evening kicked off his sandals, and advancing hurriedly to the window, cautiously drew the shutter inwards, and even before he caught a glimpse of the intruder's face, laid a warning finger on his own lips and bade him in a whisper be silent.

Ready enough to obey this command was the person — none other in fact than Brochvael's nephew Rhun — who now scrambled into the room, and laying down carefully the heavy spear he was carrying — which as a matter of fact was not his own but Porius's and indeed had been given to Porius by the prince — laying it down with exquisite care upon the only soft receptacle he could see, which was a Gallic mat of woven cords thick enough to deaden the tinkle of any weapon, proceeded to bring to the table by the fire a singular-looking object wrapped up in a piece of blanket, an object which he gravely placed in the older man's hands with a gesture that was at once respectful and impersonal.

"It's an old Greek script, Uncle," he whispered, "that Dion Dionides gave me a few hours ago to hand over to you. He said it contained eleven plays of the Athenian Aristophanes, and was sent to you by his uncle, Damascius, the Platonic philosopher. I met him by chance outside the tent of one of those luxurious young horsemen who'd been entertaining Myrddin Wyllt.

"I couldn't get my dog to settle down. He kept dragging me round the whole camp. I was fairly unsettled myself. In fact I'd given up all thought of sleep. But Myrddin Wyllt told me to go and see Owain ab Uryen. And Dion Dionides went with me to show me the way, and as we passed his own tent, he asked if I knew any reliable person who might be passing your house. He said he wanted to get his uncle's present safe and sound into your hands before the Saeson barbarians reached the Gaer.

"I told him of course it would be quite impossible on a day like this, and with all these confusions, to find anybody to take it. But I said if Drudwyn settled down quietly to sleep as Myrddin Wyllt swore he would if I took him to that tent — and I have found out *that* much, Uncle, about our damned magician: he can read the minds of animals as easily as you can read Greek — and I still felt as restless as I did then, I would take it myself. So he said he'd give me half an hour to see what happened, and the dog *did* settle down. In fact he only blinked once with one eye and only tapped once with his tail when he saw me go. So you see what Myrddin Wyllt is with animals! Whether he's the same with people I don't know, and I greatly doubt it. But here's the Greek book, Uncle, though I doubt if any of your modern scholars would call it a book. It's more like one of those old Roman scrolls that Porius ab Einion used to bring back from the Bishop's School."

"Sit you down, boy, sit you down," whispered Brochvael. "Sit you down quietly, lad, for all our sakes!" And he pushed his nephew into the goatskin chair. Then with a sensation of indescribable relief, such as only a real bookworm knows when, clambering upon a literary raft, he allows all the troubles of life to roll past him whither they will, he turned to peer lovingly and intensely at the glimpses of curved and elongated lettering that were revealed to him through the shameful rents in the travel-stained strip of linen in which Dion or his pseudo-uncle — for the learned successor of the great Marinus, who was a pupil of the still greater Proclus, had himself informed him when he was in Athens that the ambitious merchant captain was no more than the son of Damascius's second cousin — had prepared this precious scroll for its hyperborean journey among barbarians in no more effective way than by wrapping it up in a flimsy covering that smelt of Arabian spices and Syrian oils.

Brochvael did, however, postpone this most blest escape till he had impressed on this nephew in a voice so low as to be nearly inaudible that they must talk in whispers, since not only was it essential not to disturb the exhausted Morfydd, but it would be wise to conceal his arrival as long as possible from the two old people in the kitchen.

When, however, the soldier of Mithras was comfortably ensconced for the second time that night in front of a fragrant-smelling fire and had consented to swallow a mouthful of Sidonius's Gallic wine out of his host's cup, Morfydd's incorrigible parent tore aside the tattered linen that surrounded Damascius's present and began eagerly unrolling the precious script upon the table, smoothing it out where the *Metamorphoses* had so lately been.

"You look as if you were taking the sortes *Virgilianae,* uncle," whispered Rhun complacently. He had been fearing he knew not what, nor had he cared to examine the curious urge, deeper than the wish to oblige a weather-beaten merchant or to give a literary thrill to Morfydd's much-travelled progenitor, that had led him in his sleepless excitement on this night of nights to break into the House of Stone like an outlawed thief; but warm and at ease, with this sweet heady wine under his hand and his uncle thrown into a trance of fascination by what he had brought, and no decision of any kind expected of him in regard to Morfydd, he felt more at one with himself and at one with his past than he had done for days.

Myrddin's sister was the first woman who had come near to "turning his head," as they called it in the horsemen's camp, or to putting a *tynged* on him, as they would say at Mynydd-y-Gaer; and intoxicating though the experience had been, and still was, it had been anything but "all honey." It had come near at moments to making a complete fool of him, as on that occasion when this very uncle of his had brought that message to him and Porius.

Here, with Brochvael drowned in Aristophanes and the incalculable Morfydd fast asleep, *he knew where he was,* as he had never quite done in the luxurious pavilion of those two court ladies. The sight of an elderly relative entranced in a Greek scroll seemed less alien to him just then than sucking crystallized sweetmeats from Lesbos and sipping spiced wine from Cyprus! And yet what a noble creature Gwendydd was — so proud and pure and simple and alone — among all those vicious and sophisticated people!

"I expect you're thinking," whispered the older man suddenly, "that I'm the most self-centred egoist you've ever known! Well! Perhaps I *am,* Rhun, my dear lad, yes, perhaps I am!" He turned back to the closely written passage he was scrutinizing and then again lifted his head.

"What about this in the *Lysistrata,* my boy, when you think of the attempts both Christian tyrants and heathen tyrants are always making to end our freedom of thought and speech, and to compel us by force to follow their particular principles and dogmas; yes! compel us by imprisonment and torture, and even the threat of death, to think and feel as they and not as we ourselves naturally think and feel! Listen to this, my dear lad—” And he murmured the syllables: “The use of force is the most horrible of all things.”

How far, even if the time and occasion had been under the influence of a different atmosphere, our moralistic ferryman of the Ford of Mithras would have responded with even a qualified agreement to this great saying is doubtful; but it was thus and not otherwise that he responded now, and not only responded but continued to touch the particular string of reciprocity, and to hold the special note of psychic sympathy with his uncle’s words in such uninterrupted assent that it was not long, as the older man went on examining his treasure trove, ere the same sort of comfortable sleep, which Drudwyn had found so hard to win till he regained the company of the dapple-grey mare’s trainer, fell upon Drudwyn’s master.

Brochvael, meanwhile, balanced less comfortably on Morfydd’s converted horse block, with his arms and chin stretched out above the Greek text, felt no desire for sleep, felt indeed nothing but the absorbed fascination that was drawing him on from headland to headland, ridge to ridge, glade to glade, of the enchanted continent of the supreme comedian’s imagination; though we must confess there were at the back of his consciousness certain vague, remote, obscure doubts as to what would happen when his household came to normal life again!

It must come to life — there was no avoiding that — and it would be wise — his obscure doubts did dally a little with this advisability — to stir it into activity before there was a chance of any of his relatives, either from the Gaer or from the Giant’s Cave, appearing on the scene.

But, meanwhile, here he was — and very quietly he got to his feet to make sure his one and only torch wouldn't go out till morning — in possession for the first time in his life of all the Eleven comedies of the greatest humorist there had ever been, or that there was ever likely to be, in our anxious world.

Turning from the *Lysistrata,* a comedy he was more familiar with than some of the others, he began searching for certain passages that had especially fascinated him when he had the temporary use of this scroll in his various Roman and Athenian friends' libraries, in such less known and more heavily entitled plays as the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Ecclesiazusae.*

It took him nearly an hour by his young Roman friend's water clock to find the particular wave crest of oceanic ribaldry wherein the pedantry and pomposity of men, and the naturalness and rebelliousness of women, and the confusion piled on confusion produced by the wayward gusts of temper from the puffed-out cheeks of the meddling gods, reached the sort of ultimate vortices and waterspouts of chaotic profanity that especially appealed to him.

And by the time some of the most recurrent revelations of human folly and indecency had been drained of their philosophic implications, and by the time some of the maddest human insanities — like those of nationalism and war — had been squeezed dry like ooze-grown sponges of the salty deep, yet another irrevocable hour had ebbed away.

"I must stop enjoying myself," he thought, "and come back to the accurst unreality of reality! It'll begin to get light in a moment, and those people will be here."

His muscles relaxed and tightened with several uneasy twinges as he straightened his back and stood up, and one of his bones creaked as if he were already an old man.

He looked at the sleeping Rhun and listened to his breathing. He looked at the entrance to the stone stairs. He looked at the entrance to the kitchen.

"Queer," he thought, "that I should be destined to await this dawn of all dawns, with *her* asleep up there and this *one* asleep down here! I wonder what Sibylla is doing at this moment? Sleeping? I doubt it! Carrying bread and wine more likely to that savage in Einion's dungeon! God! I'd like to know if Canna's got it right about that child being hers and about that Sais having been here in the days of Ronwen? Sibylla's a first-class liar, of course. I know *that* well enough. And if the child *is* hers she's a lot older than I thought.

"But what matter? She suits me, and I've always liked that little girl. They'll say, of course, that I've got her 'after Einion,' and that she snatched at me the moment Einion cast her off. But if she doesn't quarrel with Canna or tease Gwrgi, I don't see why I shouldn't have her here. It's this curst Gunhorst that's the cloud on the horizon. Will Einion set him free when Colgrim's dead or fled? And will she want to go back to him if he does?"

It seemed to him as if he could actually see Sibylla seated in the dark on the steps leading down to that dungeon-cave in the hillside of Mynydd-y-Gaer, full of pity for the man chained to the wall — the father of little Gunta — and with "her mind divided," as Homer would say, whether to settle down at the House of Stone, now devoid of a mistress, or to go on with her careless, irresponsible life as she was living it now. "If she does decide to come," he thought, as he began rolling up those eleven rhapsodies on the enthralling follies of human life, preparatory to cradling them on the *Metamorphoses,* "it won't be for love of me. It'll be to give Gunta a home and be in a position to help her beloved savage. But what do our motives matter? What matters is something quite different—" Here he placed the triumphant comedian on the top of the exiled amorist, and it seemed to his fanciful mind as if there instantaneously commenced a dialogue between the two, as though between two enormous drowsily subsiding moths, each well-satisfied to extol the sweetness of the honeyed juices of his long night's forage, but each content to keep the method of his pillaging locked in his own heart.

"I *must* have a word with those two in there," Brochvael said to himself. "Heavens! I wish this night could grow and expand like one of those great scarlet funguses I used to carry home for Auntie Erddud when I was young, grow and expand till it turns into tomorrow, and this curst day finds itself crowded out and over before it has time to do harm to anyone!"

He turned to his visitor with a grave and prolonged scrutiny. Yes! He was deeply and heavily asleep. And he had a nice honest rugged reliable face with his eyes fast shut.

And Morfydd was asleep upstairs too! What was it to anybody whether Sibylla was asleep or not? It all depended on what she felt for that Sais. A person could, he supposed, be the father of your child without taking your sleep away, even if he were chained to a wall dripping with water under Mynydd-y-Gaer!

By this time his dragging feet — for he had never felt so disinclined for any activity — were already conveying him into the kitchen of Ty Cerrig.

He found it warmer, lighter, and a great deal cheerfuller than the room he had just left. It was a large, low room, crowded with every sort of domestic and culinary utensil and with many objects of horticultural and even agricultural use — for it was Gwrgi's bedroom as well as Canna's kitchen; and, if it gleamed with polished copper and brass, these shining receptacles were rendered less awe inspiring by being seen through a comfortable haze of friendly smoke charged with the delicious fumes of stewed rabbit, which emerged from a battered and sooty pot of prodigious size suspended above the fire.

Coming in at that moment he couldn't help thinking — for his soul was still swimming in the halcyon sea of the great humorist's detached observation — how much more intimately the kitchen of Ty Cerrig, as he saw it now, seemed to respond to the tastes of Canna and Gwrgi than the room he had just left responded to his own.

"Canna's got a lot of *her* things in here," he told himself, thinking of his children's mother, "and Morfydd's got a lot of Morvran's treasures upstairs. I've always fought against women's tendency to get so cluttered up out of sentiment or whatever it is, but on my soul when I see—"

What broke off his ponderings at that precise moment was his sudden consciousness — though it had taken the best part of a minute for this consciousness to catch up with the flow of his subsequent impressions — that the two old people, with their subhuman, almost rodentlike sensitivity to what went on in the front part of the house, had missed nothing of Rhun's surreptitious entrance and indeed had been eagerly discussing all that it might imply, when his own movements made them break off and separate.

He knew them both so well that all manner of airy signs and imponderable tokens, such as none but an inmate of Ty Cerrig could possibly have detected, had gathered themselves into a cloud of evidence by the time what he had noticed without thinking about it overtook his awareness.

He had indeed drifted into this bright, warm, smoky, snug, rabbit-broth-fragrant retreat as if he'd been a somnambulist emerging from the mysterious but coherent symbols of the world of imagination into the equally mysterious, but a good deal less coherent, world of reality.

"It'll be a day of *niwl,* of what we call 'corpse-heavy mist,' my Lord," were the words with which Gwrgi greeted him.

The old man was now innocently polishing an agricultural instrument at some distance from both the swaying iron pot full of warm broth and this nodding female head full of warm scandal; and it seemed to Brochvael in his present mood, a mood prepared for the startling and hoping to escape the overwhelming, that it was a natural part of life's sequence of unpredictable shocks, endured amid unintelligible shapes and transformations, that Gwrgi should now put down his work and insist on his master's following him out of the house, even if it were only by the back entrance, so that the truth of his statement concerning the mist might be verified.

Once out in the air he entirely accepted the old man's view. The ghastly substitute for normal twilight that confronted him as he peered down the slope towards the river and the new church suggested that some elemental presence had come between the moon and the earth, and between the sky and the dawn; and when Gwrgi thickened out his discovery, by making him visit the uneasy donkey and the still uneasier ox, Brochvael was forced to confess, cautiously indeed to Gwrgi, but recklessly and with a kind of comforting violence to himself, that the Feast of the Sowing was going to be so darkened that it would be difficult for those at large in the forest, or in huts unprovided with Boethian water clocks, to know just when this fatal dawn, or this noon of which the Derwydd had made so much, were arising or descending upon Edeyrnion.

Gwrgi seemed reluctant to leave the shed where the ox and the ass had their stalls side by side, and it struck Brochvael that he was unwilling to let *him* leave this spot either. It was as if he wanted to give his gossip Canna a leisurely opportunity to carry to its furtive conclusion some domestic task more suitable to be concealed than revealed.

The two creatures had come to know each other's peculiarities as intimately on the animal level as Gwrgi and Canna knew *theirs* on the human one; and Brochvael, watching the mist, watching this wet, faintly yellowish presence, this bodiless alien intruder that was possessed of its own obscure, indefinite, inescapable identity, an identity not necessarily hostile but at this particular moment menacingly insistent, as if it had come seeking something that had been taken away from it and that it wanted back, felt that the two beasts were avoiding its intrusion by retreating behind Gwrgi's strokings, thumpings, scratchings, rubbings, and ticklings and were jealously watching each other's responses; as if the ox were thinking: "If I could only move my ears as dramatically as you do, you little hairy lubber, he'd go on scratching my forehead!" and as if the ass were thinking: "If only my nose were as cool and smooth and wet and slippery as yours, you great cloven-footed devil, he'd never stop standing between me and this smoke-dragon from the mountains!"

And as he pensively and abstractedly set himself to caress first one and then the other of these immemorial companions of man's planetary toil, and the two beasts showed their intelligence by treating these scholarly attentions with no more interest than if they were being brushed against, in her search for security, by a pregnant cat, some very curious thoughts began to cross Brochvael's brain.

"They know perfectly well," he told himself, "who's in the house. They've got me out here on purpose. Well! So be it! Now I *am* out here I'm not going to hurry to go in. I'm not the girl's mother, nor am I her husband. Let her look to herself. Gwrgi!"

"What are my Lord's commands?"

"You're quite right about the day. It's going to be the darkest Sowing Feast you and I've ever seen! You go in now and help Canna. I want her to be ready with some hot mead and hot milk and hot cakes before Erim and the princesses come. I'll wait a bit longer here, I think. I want to see if the sunrise makes any difference. I don't expect a ball of fire or anything; but this ghastly stuff ought to turn a little yellower when the sun's up, even if it doesn't clear off all day."

He could see nothing of Gwrgi's face, as they stood together in that shed where the smell of ox dung and ass dung mixed with the smell of hay and straw, save the presentation of a blur of oval greyness hanging suspended above an opaque image of oblong blackness.

But the psychic emanation of complete bewilderment, combined with guileless wonder, crafty confusion, profound suspicion, and a general wavering and hovering treachery that was ready like a salt-marsh estuary to turn in any direction, that reached him from that oval greyness above that oblong blackness compelled him to add: "My nephew Rhun is already here. He brought a message from the emperor's horsemen. He's asleep in my chair."

"Jesus Holy!" murmured Gwrgi. "And my Lady Morfydd asleep in her chamber, and she only waiting to be married to Prince Porius, and Lord Rhun the vowed priest of Mithras!"

With this he went off; and Brochvael, with his back against the worm-eaten post which terminated the single wooden bar between the two stalls, was left to stare through the open shed-door into the mist.

The door faced a gap in the tumbled and jagged rocks that immediately surrounded Ty Cerrig, a gap through which, if it hadn't been for the mist, he would have seen, as the moonlight faded in the more comfortable and serviceable light of day, an alluring segment of the winding river as it went curving away on its eastern course between the hills.

A curious fatalism had taken possession of him. He felt that nothing would induce him to meddle, at least today, with the stream of events. Who was he to fight against Destiny, that great god, or against Chance, that still greater one? Let Morfydd's honour go; let Porius's pride go; let the reputation of the House of Cunedda go! Let happen what *would* happen — to him, to Sibylla, to those poor, mad, misled, besotted Aunties! If Colgrim and his barbarians *did* outmarch the emperor and reach Edeyrnion, and if the forest people *did* revolt and join them — well! he could die fighting. He might have a worse end.

In any case Sibylla would probably drive him mad with her love affairs; and on the other hand to live alone with Canna and Gwrgi — even if he wrote *scholia* after *scholia* on Aristophanes — would it satisfy him, would it be enough of a life?

He stretched out his arms, as he leant against that worm-eaten post, stretched them as wide and as far backward as he could, so as to touch with the tips of his fingers the tails of both the tethered creatures. There was no perceptible wind, but two or three dead leaves came drifting in at the open door; and with them, from a strip of the old, damp, mossy woodland that no human axe whether of flint or bronze or iron had yet touched, came a strong lechery-sweet smell of funguses.

And with these things there rose upon him the feeling of all the weight of all the accumulated masses of dead leaves, falling and fallen, moving and still, that the deep forest about him had shaken from its swaying and dripping branches to the wet ground.

Miles and miles of dead leaves, either drifting, wayward and restless, like living things that are feverish and sick, or lying in piled-up heaps, corpse-cold and motionless, entering, it might seem, with some interior ecstasy too deep to betray itself by the faintest quiver, the huge dark dumb mysterious process, reeking with sepulchre-sweet rot and fetid with lust-satisfying decay, of the enormous vegetable dissolution, out of which, autumn by recurrent autumn, the organic life of the earth is renewed.

And with this sense of the piling up of mountainous vast earth ridges of dead leaves, from whose decomposition emanated a deadly sweet sexual longing that seemed to be diffused through the whole approach of this unnatural mist from the precipices of Cader Idris, he imagined he detected the faint but unique odour, more sex-drugged than any piling up of dead leaves, of fungus growths upon the air.

All through the last couple of months he had noticed by the side of the forest paths more of these fungus growths than usual, and he had told himself that their striking colours, scarlet, brown, olive green, white, yellow, with every possible gradation of tint, meant the accentuation of something that year, either in the elements or in man, that was curious and exceptional; and now he realized what that something was.

It was simply that this year's Feast of the Autumn Sowing was to be more heavily charged with the deep sex-urge that forced life forward and stirred up the hidden secrets of the tribal passions of man than he had ever known it since his boyhood!

"The Derwydd must have felt it coming," he thought, "and Myrddin Wyllt must have divined it the moment *he* came on the scene! Mother of God! And it's likely enough that his own yielding to it, with that Ffichtiaid she-demon of his, is what's distracted his mind and helped Colgrim to outwit the emperor! Something's queer with Edeyrnion this autumn — queer in Nature and queer in man! Well! I'm not going to meddle with either of them. I'm going to read Aristophanes and make love to Sibylla!"

But it was neither upon Aristophanes nor upon Sibylla that his mind seized next, as both his four-footed companions moved their backs out of reach of his mechanical fumblings.

It was upon an experience which he had had, just a week ago, before Colgrim had made his fatal debouch westwards and before the emperor's horsemen had arrived at the Fount. It was a simple thing — just an encounter with a semen-smelling fungus! It was a fungus that may have belonged to the genus usually entitled "stinkhorn" but in any case it had been of a texture — its colour was indescribable, though ivory-white and olive-green were elements in it — that caused him to derive some deep prehistoric pleasure from squeezing its corpse — for he hadn't come upon it till it was dead — between his fingers, while he inhaled, with a crazy inbreathing of his whole being, its unholy essence!

What his mind and senses recalled now, as he instinctively plucked at his leather jerkin so that by pulling it tightly round him he might counteract the chilliness of the mist, was not so much the irresistible fungus-flesh charged with erotic sweetness, as it was the weird and delicious sensation, different from any he had ever known, that came when its essence — you might almost say its soul — thus savagely appropriated and drawn into his blood like some heathen sacrament, had melted and dissolved within him and become one with his spirit!

This sensation — and he knew he made no mistake here — *partook of the nature of death.* It was in fact — and this he fully recognized — the unequalled sensuality of being immersed in death without its pain, without its loss, without, in a word, its "sting."

And then it happened, by one of those extraordinarily lucky chances that when they occurred in his favour always made Brochvael vow to imitate Caius Julius and take Fortune as his one and only deity, that the god of all gods himself, the majestic master of life whose Persian representative's modest champion was at that moment asleep — but *was* he? — in Brochvael's goatskin chair, made his appearance through the yellow mist.

It was only by a deepening, but it was a *concentrated* deepening, of this straw-coloured mist, that he realized that what he had been longing for — that what all Edeyrnion had been longing and praying for — had actually happened, and that the sun had risen free from rain on that twenty-first of October in the last year of the fifth century, but his certainty of the fact was absolute; and he was aware of an impulse to lift up such a mighty shout that all Edeyrnion should hear and rejoice with him.

Others, less watchful of the weather signs than he, might not know, but he knew without a possibility of doubt what that visible thickening of the yellow haze at one particular spot, where the Divine River skirted a rocky promontory on her way to Dinas Bran, signified.

The whole expanse of the mist contained a suffusion of yellowness; but at that particular spot, and Brochvael needed no Boethian science to tell him that this spot was due east from where he stood, the yellowness seemed moment by moment intensifying itself, precipitating itself, solidifying itself, until against the very shoulder of the queer-shaped rock where this transformation took place it thickened itself into something palpable and opaque, into something resembling — so he allowed his imagination to tell him — the golden lid of a golden cauldron!

Here indeed was the very cauldron *of Ceridwen* about which Auntie Tonwen used to tell him such tales and which still played its incredible part in the rumours that had been flitting of late from the Gaer to Ogof-y-Gawr, and from thence to the kitchen of Ty Cerrig, about the boyish Pen Beirdd whom the heir to the treasures of Clydno had brought with him to Saint Julian's Fount!

"I must go into the house and tell them!" he said to himself as he stared at the uplifted lid of gold between the river and the rock. "Into the house to tell them," he repeated, turning his back upon the golden object and patting with an eager obsequiousness, as if they had been sacred animals, first the rump of the ass, and then the rump of the ox. But he felt an extreme reluctance to do what he talked of doing!

As the image of his familiar goatskin chair rose before him with the deep wooden shelves behind it containing his books and scrolls and all his modern monastic copies of the ancient texts, together with all the vaguely sweet sensations that hung about the darkened firebricks on the floor where so many fragrant logs had smouldered to ashes and so many forgotten thoughts had come and gone, he realized how deeply Morfydd's attack had lodged itself in his soul and how fatally henceforth it would be associated with his thoughts in that chair.

"I'll feel," he told himself, "like some old wooden decoy-duck tied to a post in the salt marshes of Ardudwy by one of these forest archers with an itch to shoot a sea eagle with his poisoned arrows; but I shall be a decoy whose destiny it is to be found by a young sea hawk who incontinently leaps upon it, digs its claws into it, and proceeds to tear out its inmost heart of sawdust and shavings, and to scatter its poor pretentious painted feathers to the wind and the water and the reeds and the mud!"

But he shook off this self-pitying vein with a grim jerk and proceeded to ask himself a very direct and searching question. Was it in some secret jealousy of Porius, and in some nervous hostility to the fellow's huge, careless, casual, slow-moving, giantlike ways, that he had all this while been subtly conspiring with Gwrgi and old Canna to give those two sleepers, the girl at the top of the stone stairs of the House of Stone and the man at the bottom, the one solitary chance they were ever likely to get in this life to come together?

In a few hours, according to the old tradition brought from Africa, the monstrous phallic lance would be plunged into the waters of Saint Julian's Fount, and the orgiastic cry of the Fisher King would be raised.

And at that moment, married as chastely as you please, married twice over if necessary, once by the priest who murdered Morvran, and again by the priest who buried Pelagius, the young giant would surely discover, as he embraced his bride, that she had been ravished already! *Alethe*! *alethe*! *binetiomen*! Thus did the wise Lysistrata, releaser of the world from war, make her obeisance to reality: "It's the truth! It's the truth! We want to be ravished!"

He had arrived at this point in his thoughts and was feeling as if from now on to the end of his days the cry Binetiomen! would be inscribed on the rocky bulge of the obtrusive crag which at this spot prevented his enjoying a clear vision of Dinas Bran, when he became aware that he was being summoned by his brother Einion.

"Brochvael! Brochvael! Where, in Christ's name, are you hiding?"

Never had the ruler of Edeyrnion showed himself more princely and debonair; never had he looked freer from anxiety, responsibility, concern, and trouble. His soft, rugged, incredibly handsome face with its carefully trimmed beard, his slow, easy, complacent movements, the imperturbable aplomb of his tone, the airy mockery of every word he uttered, were all enhanced to a level of positive enchantment by the golden light in the east which was now piercing, as if with the lance of the Fisher King himself, the undulant mist that had overwhelmed the valley from the southwest.

"I can't wait for you, brother, and that's the truth; and I can't wait for the bride either! She'll have to come — much as she'll hate it — with the

Aunties and that rogue Erim. The Derwydd will be down by the water by now, and you can imagine the host of rascals he'll have with him! You can also imagine the size and thickness of the lance they'll have been polishing and painting for months for this day's business! He'll be saying to himself — and he may very well be right — that this'll be the last Autumn Feast ever celebrated in Edeyrnion. Do you know what I've found out lately, brother?"

Brochvael expressed suitable ignorance, but he thought, "And I can make a fair guess in what quarter you found it!"

"I've found out," the prince went on, "that he's not going to follow any particular ritual or routine *today* in the Ravishing of the Waters! From dawn to noon he'll have that great lance plunged as the spirits tell him, and it won't be only one sort of spirit that'll tell him either — I can assure you of that — it'll be all the kinds there are! Holy Jesus will tell him; Gwyn ap Nudd will tell him; Gwydion ap Don will tell him; and I wouldn't be surprised if our own pious Gorsant gave him a nod too! As long as all's done in the name of the Trinity; as long, I tell you, as we don't forget that the Church is the Bride of Christ, it's wonderful what's allowed! And I like to see it, brother. The more wine's mixed with the water, the more the love of women's poured into the love of God, the sooner will our old earth come back to her senses!

"By the way, I saw my son's hunting spear in your room. I always know it because I gave it to him when he killed his first wolf. I made old Afagddu put five circles of silver round it. It shows how little of a hunter the man is, to have kept his schoolboy spear unbroken all these years and to still carry it about with him! It amused me to see it there *today,* though! The old man and Euronwy made such a fuss — and you too, brother — about getting them publicly and promptly married to impress the forest people and propitiate the Gwyddyl-Ffichti before the Saeson were on us, that I saw the pair of them led to the altar like sacrificial lambs! Yet here we have our amorous offspring unable to await either the holy hand of the priest or the magic cry of the druid, and deciding to sow the good seed independently of both of them!

"Well, Brochvael, I must go. I don't suppose my hot-blooded son found time to tell you how Brother John is? I hope the honest old fellow's not dead? What would *he* say, I wonder, to this snatching of the fruit before the ladder's been put to the tree?"

As if this were to be the final word between them, Einion now turned away from his brother with a mischievous smile and a valedictory lifting of his right hand. As he did so, his handsome features and majestic figure seemed to draw to themselves all the most precious drops of the liquid gold that was stretching out to them from that far-away dawn; and even after he had begun to follow the forest path leading down to the Fount, some projected essence of the nebulous radiance that was now advancing from Dinas Bran seemed to fling glory about his head and shoulders.

An unpleasant sensation of being meaner, smaller, poorer, weaker, and altogether less of a personality than this careless and reckless brother of his came over Brochvael; but among the imperatives that now made him hurry after the retreating man was undoubtedly a longing to retrieve himself with himself in the matter of personal integrity.

As large-natured, as golden in regal magnificence as Einion he would never be able to be. The die was cast, the mould was hardened, the bolt was shot in that direction. But at least he could preserve the virtues of his narrower, smaller inheritance intact.

Nor was it only one of these minor virtues that sent him pell-mell after that broad back, now as golden as Memnon's image in the dawn. There was also a plain and simple fear of being exposed in an unworthy concealment of a scandalous secret, for it certainly would have been humiliating beyond anything that had ever happened to him if his brother discovered the identity of Morfydd's visitor from other lips than his own. He made several rapid strides after the stately creature and clapped a hand on the figure's wrist as it turned.

"Einion!"

"Holy Jesus, man! What's up now? I thought you were — God! you gave me a start."

"I'm sorry! I should have called out to you. But there's something I ought to tell you at once, though I never quite know how you'll take anything. But however you take this I can't let you go without telling you. It wasn't *Porius* who was up those stairs with Morfydd. It was Rhun. And it's Rhun, unless he's rushed off, leaving his spear behind him, who's up there now. How Rhun came to have Porius's spear I can't tell you — save that being always together they may have exchanged weapons.

"Mind you, Einion, I've been out of the house some while. I left the house — oh, it must have been an hour ago! — and it's possible, I can't say more than that, that Rhun has rushed off and given no thought to what he'd been carrying. He came scrabbling at my window in the dead of the night with a book for me that Dion Dionides had brought from Athens. I put him in my chair and he went to sleep almost at once. He was asleep when I came out. And so was she at the top of her stairs!"

For a second the two men faced each other without a word, and to Brochvael the silence between them resembled the pain at the base of his skull at one particular stage of the gouging out of his teeth by the Ostrogoth's agents.

Then Einion thrust his spear deep into the earth, making his companion think of what he'd been told of the breaking of the sword of Cunedda. Was weapon-breaking a habit of this queer man when his feelings were affected in a certain way? But apparently he only wanted to free his hands; for he now proceeded to smite these members together with a sound of huge exultant merriment, while he uttered inarticulate noises of amusement such as in their boyhood forty years ago had been a cause of considerable irritation to Brochvael's nerves.

On this occasion with his own face in darkness and the prince's in golden light, it cannot be denied that a secret ground swell of anger — though whether the anger was directed towards the incorrigible personage before him or towards the absent Porius, he would have found it hard to say — heaved and rumbled in the centre of his being. But Prince Einion gave him no opportunity for further comment.

"Well, you old Athenian brothel-keeper — no! no! don't go off — I'm only teasing you, Brochvael! I know we're not sons of Iddawc the Apostate for nothing! I know that neither of us will speak of this to anybody, least of all to my poor dear wife! No, no! Don't go off in a rage, my dear! I'd love to come in with you and break my fast on your Gallic wine and Canna's cakes and see who *does* come down those stairs. But I must go. I can't leave the Gaer for long today. And if I'm not down there for the Ravishing of the Waters, these crazy forest people may do anything. I want to get them and the Derwydd well under control before the Aunties arrive, so if they come to visit you, keep them with you, brother, keep them with you for as long as you possibly can! But I must go. You can guess who'll be waiting for me, and with my breakfast too, I dare say, down by the water! All of us to our free choice is the word today, eh? Isn't it so, brother? — to our free choice, eh? Wherever our spears may be — and wherever our hearts!"

And with this he lifted his head so high that all the grey hairs in his beard showed as golden as his skin; and jerking his spear out of the ground, and brandishing it in the air without so much as a glance to make sure its point wasn't caked with mould he swung off into the forest at a pace that looked as if it might soon turn into a run.

Meanwhile Brochvael, remaining absolutely motionless till the mist swallowed up both man and spear, continued with no less absorption to stare fixedly at the vacant recessive oblong space in this same mist through which the tall figure had vanished.

"So that's the price Sibylla's got to pay," he thought, "for the Sais's life!" and he promptly associated this idea with the forms of several half trees he could see down by the river, whose trunks were invisible in the thick white vapour, but whose branches were not only clearly outlined but were touched by a coppery lustre that isolated them — while they remained palpably soft and organic — and islanded them in an enchanted element that was at once lighter than water and heavier than air.

But as soon as he turned and began walking slowly back to the House of Stone he felt as if his former vision of Sibylla crouching outside the dungeon of Rhitta Gawr, till they let her carry wine and bread to the man chained against the wall, had actually travelled through the air and was now — her living figure, that is to say, for he had not visualized her face — waiting in the same alert and yet docile attitude among the reeds and willow stumps of Saint Julian's Waters for the careless prince who had chained her man to the wall.

Long before the brothers had thus met and parted, in fact just about the time when Brochvael, standing in the shed between the hindquarters of the two beasts, first caught sight of the visible presence of dawn, Rhun ap Gwrnach, aroused from his sleep by Canna, was observed by that old lady with an expression on her face beyond the description not only of the greatest Byzantine artists but even of the most skilful of the ancient Greek ones, very slowly, stone step by stone step, mounting the stairs to Morfydd’s room.

It would hardly be fantastic to offer as one reason for the slowness of his physical movements the complicated burden of conflicting emotions that his athletic figure carried with it up that flight of stairs.

“Why aren’t you wearing your Phrygian cap?” the demon of mockery whispered in his ear at the first step he took. “Is this the way to become a ‘participant?’” echoed his conscience at the second step. “So your ‘carefully considered’ attitude to sex amounts to this, does it, Master Miles?” repeated the mocker, as the regular breathing of the girl came through the unclosed door. “Haven’t you, in a thousand romantic hints, given Gwendydd to understand that your heart is free, your ideals chaste, your senses under masterful control?” re-echoed his conscience, when he realized there was a light in her room.

No, he had not supposed there would be a gentle illumination at the top of those demon-possessed spiral steps, at least not till he had nearly reached the last one of all. Then he noticed with a curious moral relief — for it made his intrusion seem less like the rape of a girlish stranger than like a boyish trick played on a confederate and consenting playmate — that a friendly and welcoming gleam shone on the chilly pillar round which the steps curved.

Once he was inside the small arch-roofed chamber, however, and standing above her bed while she still lay in a deep untroubled sleep, a completely different emotion seized him.

It was indeed in a tumultuous whirl of many emotions that he found himself struggling; and caught with him in this vortex, he soon realized that the small oil lamp that hung suspended by a chain just above her head was in itself a cause of nervous vexation to him.

It gave him an uneasy feeling that at any second it might drop burning oil upon her face, or at least upon her hair. It was as if one of the demons who had teased him on the stairs had followed him to the girl's bedside to make sure that, whatever the upshot of all this might be, fate was going to permit no unruffled moment of poetic romance to delay the swiftly running current of malignant fatality.

It was from a crack between a couple of large stones in the arched roof that the iron chain hung down, and the modern hook that had been hammered into this crack was of the kind that had only lately appeared in Gallic and Brythonic kitchens to assist in the acceleration of pot boiling.

Morfydd was lying on her back, one long bare arm stretched out at her side above the coverlet, while the other was not — as the soldier of Mithras, when he imagined Gwendydd asleep, always visualized *both of hers* to be — bent at the elbow between her head and the pillow, but was likewise stretched out straight at her side; only this arm lay under the pair of purple blankets that she had inherited from her grandmother, the eldest sister of the Three Aunties.

The head of the girl's bed lay east and its foot west, and whatever stir of air there was, and there wasn't much, came directly towards her from the west, through a small orifice artfully and cunningly concealed beneath the carved snout of some devilish-looking monster— "an Avanc, I expect!" thought Rhun — and thus caused the chain to sway very slowly backwards and forwards, and the lamp that hung from it to cast a moving shadow upon the floor where the foot of the bed intercepted its pallid ray.

His devotion from boyhood to his father's chaste and warlike sun god had so purged and limited Rhun's erotic experience that his first sight of the sleeping girl filled him with something much more like awe than lust. The magical softness of her skin possessed an indescribable bloom all its own, a bloom that was quite different from that which lay upon the surface of any fruit or any leaf, a bloom that, though less porous than that upon a flower petal and less easily bruised than that upon a butterfly's wing, possessed some psychic quality that made it more impressive than these; and this unique bloom, lying so vulnerable in its perfect unconsciousness, was at that moment nothing less than a revelation to him.

The purer essence of Morfydd's soul — in the sense of freedom from worry and irritation and nervous annoyance and wounded feelings — had, by the aid of a few hours' absolute oblivion, diffused itself so completely through the porous and responsive chemistry of her youthful flesh as to create a living and breathing eidolon of loveliness that seemed for that moment outside the injurious shocks of both Space and Time.

But now it was that one of the most startling differences between the masculine and feminine response to the mystery of sex was presented by the chance of that occasion with a fatal opportunity to assert itself.

The misfortune was that the very simplicity of this particular initiate of the Phrygian cap debarred him from the mental detachment necessary for any wise grasp of such a situation. Yielding to his first emotion of pure awe in the presence of this motionless image of helpless loveliness, the swiftest footed runner in the whole island of Ynys Prydein sank down with a sigh upon his knees by the bed.

Simple and natural as was this act of reverence, the causes of it were deep. The condition of sleep was in itself the chief of these causes, endowing the youthful sleeper with an ideal remoteness from all that is transitory and ignoble in our nature, while it emphasized the primordial pity of the general human situation.

It did in fact what only death can likewise do. It absorbed the comic tragedy of the individual in the poetic pathos of the species. And then in a second all was different. The girl opened her eyes.

This faint movement of those fragile lids, behind which the whole mystery of life can be hidden, changed in a flash the heart of the situation. Hitherto the consciousness of Rhun had supplied everything, supplied the actor, supplied the accompaniment, supplied the audience; but what the lifting of Morfydd's eyelids brought upon the scene was another consciousness, also supplying, or about to supply, every one of these things.

To put it differently and more crudely, a new and opposed world had rushed into this particular oasis of Time and Space, where it confronted the one that was already in possession.

And at once these two worlds, brought into contact by two pairs of eyes, began their ancient play of creation, amalgamation, and destruction; a process which would have resembled, if the little oil lamp swinging in that misty air had possessed anything approaching enough human intelligence to note it, the mutual demarcation, cohesion, and absorption of two such opposites as night and day, sunlight and moonlight, sound and silence, birth and death!

At the moment it seemed quite natural to Rhun that, as she awakened to his presence, she made no startled gesture nor uttered any agitated cry. He took it for granted that, out of the unfathomable waters of such deep sleep, the old youthful intimacy between them had risen without a splash like a great, gentle, shiny-finned fish, and now buoyed her up upon its broad back till she was, so to say, riding side by side with him as he floated on the full, easy, natural tide of their early association.

"Morfydd!"

"So you've come, have you, Rhun?"

At these words he snatched at her exposed wrist, and clasping it tightly with one hand flung his other hand round the back of her neck, and drawing her head towards him across the pillow, kissed her on the lips.

And it was then that the all-conquering Eros seized on them both according to the different natures of men and women.

“Rhun, my dear, my dear!” she whispered. “I knew you would come!” And with this she began stroking his face with her free hand and murmuring over and over, “And now you have — and now you have — and now you have!”

Her tone was infinitely tender, and it ought to have been clear to him that her emotion was of the kind that left her in full control of herself and in no mood for yielding to overpowering passion. Had he been in love with her, their feelings would have had more chance to flow together, and all the abysmal difference between a man and a woman, a difference that descends — as if our very souls possessed members and functions consonant with and corresponding to the members and functions of our bodies — into the darkest recesses of fathomless being, all this difference between them, I say, might itself have been turned into an agent of ecstatic union.

But, as it was, the fact that he was not in love with her, the fact that all his more romantic cravings and idealized emotions had come to be absorbed in the personality of Gwendydd, left in him nothing strong enough to curb his simple and powerful masculinity, nothing strong enough to calm, refine, sublimate, or subdue its primordial and reckless impulse.

And so, towards his boyhood’s playmate as she traced with the tender fingers of infinite contentment the rugged contours of his hot cheeks, instead of the worshipful idolatry that would have quivered through him had the bed across which his arms were stretched been Gwendydd’s, what he felt was a simple rush of primitive and predatory lust.

It was — as so often happens — a small and a slight thing that finally became the cause of the flaring up of the flames. From the exposed wrist, of which he had possessed himself, the sleeve of her nightdress was drawn tightly back over the tender skin; and it was the trifling accident that beneath his fingers he was able to feel at one and the same moment both her soft flesh, risen as it were to life's surface after its restorative bath in the fountain of oblivion, and that tightly drawn sleeve, faintly damp from the warmth of her sleeping body; and from the conjunction of these things he was rapt away by an irresistible enticement, and draining to the dregs the maddeningly sweet draught of impersonal femininity, he gave himself up to all the brutality of the primeval male.

And she, watching his face in the swinging lamplight, became instantaneously aware that there was no flicker of response in his heart to the depth of her love, and that all she had done by her caress was to stir up in him the immemorial caveman leap of predatory passion.

Realizing all this in a single pulse beat, and recognizing that by answering her long-enduring love with this mere outburst of momentary lust he was in fact rejecting it and tossing it away, she grew icily cold, contemptuously calm, and anxious only to escape.

Thus had the crisis between them reached its fruition. Meanwhile it should be remembered that both the Gaer priest and the forest druid would from their opposite angles of vision have attributed Rhun's access of savagery to the erotic emanations of that particular day, to the aphrodisiac effluvia brewed in the mouldering crucibles of those millions of dying leaves, to the inebriating odours distilled all night from those fantastical stinkhorns and fabulous funguses.

On the other hand, Rhun's recent antagonist, the Jewish doctor, would with almost equal certainty have ascribed his momentary madness to a natural reaction from the prolonged service of a god of heroic chastity.

What is certain is that the raptorial beauty of the almost feline leap which the unequalled muscles of this son of a Greek athlete made possible, as Rhun exchanged the cold floor of the upper chamber of Ty Cerrig for the bed of his foster-brother's bride, passed unseen and unrecognized by its would-be prey. Of one feeling alone was Morfydd conscious, as with all her strength she flung him off, flung him back, flung him away, flung him down with such unexpected violence that, entangled in the purple blanket and thus unable to retain his balance, he fell with a thud that made a peculiar sound upon the stone floor, a sound not unpleasant to her ice-cold anger.

All the same if she hadn't sprung up too, jumped from the bed, rushed past him before he could clutch at her nightgown, and from the top of the steps called in a clear strong voice to Canna, she wouldn't have escaped him. His blood was up. His anger was as burning as hers was cold. To overpower her proud feminine spirit and dominate her feminine weakness by an antipodal outpouring of male brutality was the compulsion that filled at that black second the whole world of his consciousness.

Had this scene in the upper chamber of Ty Cerrig been witnessed by the Cabbalistic sage who was the father of Gog and the expectant father of Magog, it would have been Morfydd's desperate need to escape, even to the point of shooting an arrow through the throat of this springing wild beast, as against Rhun's obsession to ravish this proud Artemis into helpless docility, that would have chiefly impressed him.

As a psychotherapeutic student of the ancient books he would have quoted his favourite rabbi to the effect that every living creature — from insects so small as to be invisible to human eyesight, to huge pythons and sea serpents — holds in its consciousness a whole universe, perhaps more than a universe, and he would have detected that Rhun's universe had at that moment room for nothing but the forcible rape of his childhood's playmate, and that every horizon of this constricted universe was blocked by a thick blackness shot through by streaks of crimson blood.

But this terrible world, as devoid of expanding horizons as it was devoid of all height and all depth, this red-black world that contained nothing but the image of a smoking spear of phallic fury rushing upon a resistant blur of whiteness, was not destined to survive very long.

It was brought to an end by the concatenation of two other worlds of human consciousness, neither of which were as intense as itself, or as creative or destructive as itself, but in which there existed at that moment those unrestricted horizons upon which normal human consciousness depends.

Rhun's madness was in fact brought to an end by the sound of the voices of both Canna and Gwrgi answering the appeal, or perhaps it ought to be called — for Morfydd's tone was more imperative than desperate — the *command* of their young mistress.

It is doubtful if any of the foreign artists met by her father in his travels could have reproduced the facial expressions of Canna and Gwrgi while they were waiting and listening at the foot of the stairs. It is certain that not even the cleverest draughtsman in Byzantium could have reproduced the significance of the look that was exchanged between the two when they heard Morfydd's voice.

Rhun himself couldn't see anything but the slender figure standing in the doorway with its one long wisp of hair staining, like a dark shadow upon snow, the nightgown over which it fell; but, if he *had* seen that look, it could hardly have broken into smaller fragments the bloodstained passion-mirage that enclosed him than did those two old voices.

And the man with averted face who now slipped past Morfydd as if she'd been a spirit, and, dashing down the circular stairway, tore his way between Gwrgi and Canna, and forgetting his lance, or rather Porius's lance, which he had recently laid down so carefully on the softest mat in Brochvael's chamber, rushed forth from the House of Stone as if a thousand devils were after him and hurried away towards Saint Julian's Fount, was not only the man who had forced an entrance this preceding night, holding the eleven plays of Aristophanes in his arms as carefully as if they had been that author's Acharnian girl-pigs, and not only the man who, impelled by the madness of Eros, had just made that frustrated leap from a cold grey floor to a warm bed with a purple coverlet, and not only the man who in the course of a couple of days had come to dote upon a farsighted, ambitious, fashionable woman of the imperial court, idealizing her into an innocent victim, but was also the man, and *remained* also the man, who was the same humble, upright, simplehearted, heroic soldier-priest of the Bull-sacrificing, Bull-embodying, Sun-conquering, Sun-absorbing god of the Persians.

And written clearly enough on the face which old Canna turned to old Gwrgi when the man was gone, a man she had known as an infant, known as a boy, known as a lad, known all his days, was the particular kind of indignant and yet tender reproach, not untouched by a sort of maternal amusement, which the amorous urges, reckless and violent as they may be, of the men they have known from childhood are wont to excite in elderly women.

"Has he—" began the puzzled Gwrgi; but the experienced eye he kept on his friend's face warned him to keep his comments to himself.

"*Cau dy geg"* were the expressive monosyllables with which the old nurse bade him "shut his mouth"; but after staring at him for a minute in silence, she added with a sound that might have been a sob and might have been a chuckle: “Today is today with us all, my good man, and tomorrow is tomorrow.”

CHAPTER XXI. The Aboriginals

THE FIRST RISING OF THE SUN beyond Dinas Bran on Sunday the twenty-first of October in the year four hundred and ninety-nine was a battle with the mist; but an hour after Rhun ap Gwrnach left Ty Cerrig it was from beneath a victorious sun and a sky crossed only by cloud wisps of wind-tossed vapour that Brochvael, re-entering his house, found the fire burning brightly in his room and his daughter resolute and calm, eating her breakfast in her accustomed place, appropriately attired for her marriage to the son of the Prince of Edeyrnion, and even laughing a little as she talked easily and naturally with Canna, who had perched herself like a cheerful old pet raven on the arm of his own goatskin armchair.

The old woman would have hurried off at once on his entrance, but Morfydd stopped her by calmly asking, while she turned her steady eyes from one to the other of them, whether it wouldn't be a good thing "to put that spear out of the way."

"It might," she explained, nor could her hearers, though they were of course the two persons in all the world who knew her best, detect any awkwardness or embarrassment in her tone, "be noticed by the Aunties or at least by the silentiary, and its presence might be misunderstood."

At this remark Brochvael and Canna exchanged very grave looks, and while the former began, "I think we might put it—" the latter hastily approached the suspicious object and possessed herself of it, declaring as she did so that it would do no harm in the kitchen if they put it behind a few of Gwrgi's rakes and hoes. This might have been an occasion for both father and daughter to smile, but neither of them did so.

However, they didn't interfere in any way with the old woman as she carried off the tell-tale weapon. When she was gone there did arise between them a few uncomfortable moments of embarrassment; but these were soon dispersed when she came back with a jug of wine, some of yesterday's oatcakes, cold, but not unpalatable, and a little butter and honey.

Thus it was in the midst of a perfectly natural and normal scene that the two princesses and their political adviser presently made their excited appearance.

It soon became clear to Brochvael that both the princesses were more agitated and excited than he had ever seen them. Gwrgi had dragged from the kitchen not only a massive wooden bench but a portentously tall chair, suggestive of the authority of an extremely primitive monarch; and after the visitors had settled down, Esyllt in Brochvael's goatskin chair, Erddud in what might have been the very judgment seat of Rhitta Gawr, and Erim upon Morfydd's horse block, father and daughter seated themselves side by side upon the bench that Gwrgi had extricated from the kitchen.

As for the two old retainers, they were obviously enjoying to the full every succulent moment of this historic and richly dramatic occasion, and it was with the air of attendants at a ceremony that partook at once of the solemnity of a funeral and the cheerfulness of a birth that they presented to everyone present a large wooden platter of cold oatcakes and a two-handled heavily carved silver loving cup full of a sweet, rich, fragrant red wine, on whose surface floated thin flakes of the aromatic peel of a particular species of lemon from southern Gaul.

They all tilted the silver cup to their lips. They all mechanically nibbled the cakes. But they all seemed unaware of what they were doing; and Esyllt, the elder princess, kept putting to the silentiary various quick, hurried, arbitrary, impatient questions which evidently struck the close-lipped, sagacious Erim as untimely and even disconcerting.

The proud old lady's royal Iberian blood was clearly in a ferment, and it looked as if she felt that with the Saxons so near and the emperor so far, and her traditional subjects, the forest people, so entirely under the influence of her friend the Derwydd, the Brythonic domination of Edeyrnion by Mynydd-y-Gaer was now at last destined to collapse, and the ancient glory of Ogof-y-Gawr destined to take its place.

Brochvael was, however, far too occupied in watching his daughter and wondering whether it would be, or whether it would not be, as a maid that her cousin would lead her that day into Brother John's cell, to have much attention to spare for the behaviour of his aunts.

He *was* aware — but that was no new thing — that Erddud had done nothing since they first entered but stare at him with a delirious intensity of emotion. The old lady's lips were trembling and her face twitching; and as he watched the wine come round to Morfydd again he saw the girl surreptitiously remove, with the help of a small squeezed-up pinch of oatcake, a thin trickle of saliva from the side of the richly carved goblet that had "escaped," in Homeric language, "the barrier" of the agitated old woman's teeth.

It wasn't till Canna had taken the goblet from the girl and put it into his own hands, as they sat uncomfortably side by side on Gwrgi's bench, that the father and daughter exchanged the first private, secret, and sympathetic look that had passed between them for a day and a night.

But in this look the whole turbulent tradition of the House of Cunedda, in greater danger at that moment than it had been since the Romans first brought its fierce tribal sons to this rebellious district to do the work that experienced hunting dogs are accustomed to do for wise masters, rose up, rallied itself, concentrated itself, gathered its forces together, and resolutely entrenched behind its *ffos* or *vallum,* prepared to do battle alone against three quarters of the world!

Brochvael drew a sigh of relief from the very bottom of his soul. He might blunder and make a complete fool of himself in his clumsy and ill-considered attempts to understand her where the fevers of Eros were concerned, but this — thanks be to the gods! — was another matter.

Here they were really father and daughter; here they were as one against all their enemies; and this fanatical old fury, Auntie Esyllt, and this doting old madwoman, Auntie Erddud, were, as much as their obsessed silentiary and their equivocal Derwydd, a pair of treacherous and unscrupulous enemies.

Meanwhile in heart and senses and nerves — not to speak of soul and spirit — the indomitable Auntie Erddud abandoned herself to a mental orgy of that ideal and impassioned love about which she had been dreaming, and for the satisfaction of which she had been praying for half a lifetime.

Ever since her recent interview with him when they had clashed so desperately, and as it seemed to him so finally, on the eastern battlements of Ogof-y-Gawr, the old lady had been unable to sleep save in snatches of overpowering exhaustion.

The austere Esyllt — though her confidence in her extraordinary advisers was as abnormal if not as mad as Erddud’s feeling for her nephew — was too absorbed in her schemes to notice what was happening to her sister. She gave little enough thought to the departure of the youngest princess with the hermit of Ogof-yr-Avanc; but now that Prince Einion had imprisoned the Saxon envoy, contrary, Erim kept telling her, to the unwritten laws of all the tribes of men, she thought of nothing but revenge.

And it was around a revenge so bloody, so remorseless, so wholesale that her brooding thoughts kept circling that they became almost impersonal. They became at any rate so racial as to cover up beneath a torrent of tribal lava every vestige of natural human feeling, every scruple of natural family consideration.

In vision after vision did this matriarchal Amazon queen, following human instincts older than any in Europe and at least as old as any in Asia, see the emperor’s horsemen perishing, horses and men rolled in bloody heaps together, under the poisoned arrows of the forest people.

In vision after vision did she see her wild subjects standing at gaze, awed and drugged with terror and pleasure, while the Germanic invaders slaughtered the Brythonic invaders — those crafty pets of Rome — or flung them into Rhitta Gawr’s aboriginal dungeons.

To the Princess Esyllt, as to Erim ab Uchtryd, the day of the Feast of the Sowing, instead of being a Saturnalia older than the Pyramids, wherein life’s traditional burden of sex restraint was for a few hours blown away, and the urge that replenishes our human world was rendered blameless and given limitless scope, became merely and solely the final chance for liberating Edeyrnion from the House of Cunedda and re-establishing the dominance of Ogof-y-Gawr.

Very different were the thoughts and feelings that now reached their culmination in the almost equally extravagant brain of Auntie Erddud.

“He’s too worried,” she said to herself, “he’s too worried to notice what I’ve got on,” and she glanced down at her long woollen robe of an indescribably beautiful green, against which showed to perfection the massive gold ornaments she wore, chains and chains of variegated pendants and all of them making a rich tinkling sound when she moved.

“But then,” her thoughts ran on, “I don’t believe he’s even noticed that Esyllt’s wearing the old royal purple that Iddawc wouldn’t let Indeg wear, lest they should say it was she, and not he, who ought to be ruling Edeyrnion. How pale and unhappy Morfydd looks, and what a silly mantle she’s got on! Well! At any rate it’s better than all those showy Gwyddyl things her mother used to wear. But she looks more like a religious woman than a bride.

“Everybody says she’s madly in love with Rhun ap Gwrnach and simply hates that great stupid ox of a Porius! Esyllt wants Rhun, not Porius, to be Einion’s heir, because none can deny that Alarch was Indeg’s daughter and none can deny that Rhun is Alarch’s son. But who knows, as Esyllt says, who was the father of Porius? We’ve got nothing but Euronwy’s word that it was Einion. It may easily have been one of those Cader Idris giants he’s always talking about.”

The thought of her niece-in-law submitting to the embraces of a Cader Idris giant caused Auntie Erddud such curious satisfaction that she discovered in herself enough strength of will, while Time’s pulse quivered for a whole minute, to turn away her eyes from her idol and stare so intently at every detail of Morfydd’s appearance that even Erim, occupied as he was with anything rather than the effect produced by a young woman upon an old one, received the impression that if she weren’t putting a *tynged* on the girl she was bewitching her with an intensely evil eye.

But nothing he looked at at that moment, whether in the form of a person or in the form of a thing, impinged upon the slippery, fishlike texture of Erim’s consciousness further than what might be called scale-deep.

It wasn’t that he was vaguely calling up the results of Colgrim’s impending victory. He was staring with his inner eye as intently at that victory as Erddud was staring with her outer one at an elaborate legal document which the Saxon victor would have to sign, whether he could read or not, by which, in the name of the Three Princesses, Erim ab Uchtryd would be the ruler of Edeyrnion.

"I wonder if he'd have noticed me," thought Auntie Erddud, "if I'd worn my black robe with the silver border? But I *couldn't*! If I'd worn black for the Autumn Sowing, Esyllt would have made me change — so it's no use thinking about *that*!"

But though she could make herself stop thinking about her black robe, she couldn't make herself stop thinking about her nephew. His nearness to her now realized all the wild ecstasy she had been anticipating for so long.

And as she clung to him with her eyes she knew with more and more certainty that a fatal submission to the destiny of love, whatever that destiny might prove to be, was now her life and would remain her life to the last.

Suppose this feeling she had for him burst all bounds, suppose at the moment she got him to herself she just cried out with a great cry: "I love you! I love you! I love you!" and suppose in his anger and his horror and his shame — for he must needs see what kind of love it was, and these Romanized Brythons had crazy notions — he struck her to death for it, what better death could she die? To be killed by her true love because — well! because fate had hampered their love — what better end to the sole interest, purpose, motive, meaning of her life?

She had no sooner reached this conclusion than they were all reduced to a solemn and intensely silent listening by a distinct yet distant sound. It was what so many of the forest people had been waiting for, longing for, thinking of, and talking of, for nearly twelve months — for every week in fact since it was last heard — the *raising of the Fisher* King's *chant!*

Brochvael and Morfydd, according to the custom of the House of Cunedda, remained seated side by side on their bench; but the two princesses and their silentiary rose to their feet, while Gwrgi and Canna hurriedly freed their hands of what they were carrying, and clasping their fingers shut their eyes as if in prayer.

Since both the wine and the cakes came to rest on Brochvael's table, it was certainly lucky that he had removed both Ovid and Aristophanes; though it is likely enough that, even had he not done this, neither of these heathen ghosts would have regarded a few wine stains and grease marks as insulting to their memories.

But round and about that Brythonic father and daughter as they sat uncomfortably side by side on their bench the religious hush that now fell on them all was no mere convention. The enchanted tune that came faintly to their ears had by reason of its immense antiquity the sort of magic power that could cast a spell over the lightest hearted, and awe the most frivolous with an overwhelming sense of mystery.

Traditionally critical of what they regarded as aboriginal superstition the father and daughter were, all the same, by no means immune to the emotion that surrounded them; and thus it came about that there arose from the consciousness of those seven people, four women and three men, a conflicting chaos of silent and yet passionately extravagant responses.

"Will she let Prince Porius touch her... after... whatever it was... that Master Rhun did?" thought the old nurse.

"Will Colgrim give me enough land to live upon, or will he hang me by the neck?" thought Gwrgi.

"It would be best for us all if *both* Einion and Brochvael were killed defending the Gaer," thought Auntie Esyllt, "for then we'd have no difficulty in dealing with this blundering fool Porius."

"The first thing I must do when the Gaer's taken," thought Erim ab Uchtryd, "is to send word to Medrawd ap Llew that Arthur's been put to flight, and that he'd better gather all the men he can and try to waylay him before he reaches Caergwynt."

"I suppose Einion," thought Brochvael, "is enjoying Sibylla at this very moment. Well! The question for me is: what difference will that make, if she comes to live with me here?"

Meanwhile Auntie Erddud was saying to herself, "I mustn't give way, I mustn't give way, I mustn't give way before he touches me! Oh, when will Esyllt take this girl off?"

"I swore by Rhitta Gawr," thought Morfydd, "and it certainly would be strange if Porius were right, and there really *were* giants on Cader Idris!"

She stared past her father's characteristically Brythonic profile, the lines of which had so changed, however, in the process of adjusting themselves to the loss of his teeth that they were no longer a true revelation of his character. In fact they now suggested a self-control, a restraint, a reserved power, that in reality he was far from possessing.

But it was not at her father's clear-cut profile that Morfydd now stared, but at the window, the aperture through which, some six hours before, with the Eleven Comedies under his arm, Rhun had so boldly clambered. And it seemed to her that there came through that window on the southwest wind not only the Fisher King's chant, but a sadder, fainter, more wistful sound than any of those disturbing refrains that were lifting the forest branches and reviving the ebbing sap in their inmost veins; and this new sound, this different sound, was one she had heard from her girlhood in the forest — for a child of the forest she was for all her proud Brythonic blood — and it always seemed to come especially for her own ears alone, and her own secret heart alone, and it was an indescribable comfort to her to hear it now, so entirely distinct from that ancient orgiastic chant.

That had originated in the desert; but this came from the forest, and when the forest was cut down would never be heard again. What it resembled to Morfydd's imagination was the sobbing and laughing of the animate souls of oak trees and ash trees, of alder trees and pine trees, subhuman souls, so absorbed in their own elemental pleasures and primitive pains that they were totally unmoved by the human passions and conspiracies for which Auntie Esyllt and Erim, not to mention the fatal and frivolous Derwydd, were prepared to give their lives.

But it was not only these two presences, the voice of the Fisher King's chant and the voice of the oak spirits, ash spirits, and pine spirits, that were now entering that hushed room with its five erect and two seated figures.

The last trailing wisps of the now almost evaporated ivory-coloured mist entered with those two voices. Morfydd couldn't help noticing how there was something in the mist that corresponded with the Fisher King's chant, almost as if the mist were some impalpable instrument accompanying the chant or were even the physical embodiment of its psychic appeal.

But driving the insubstantial remnants of the mist before it, as though they were the scattered ghosts of the proud flocks of Rhitta Gawr, the final invader of that hushed room was Porius's southwest wind. It was of this that Morfydd was now aware, ruffling Auntie Erddud's green robe, brushing past her father's toothless profile, cooling her own forehead, and stirring her hair.

It was probably this final intruder whose touch opened the small interior secret gate through which the girl suddenly found she could look into her own deepest soul. And what she saw there startled her not a little. She found that by rejecting Rhun's rush of natural passion she had won an immeasurable advantage and shifted to an incredible degree in her own favour the wavering balance of the relations between them.

She actually felt that in place of losing all hold on him because of what had happened she had won a hold on him, a hold she had never had before. And she discovered to her tremendous relief another thing also. She discovered that instead of suffering from her former nervous shrinking at the idea of being possessed by Porius, instead of dreading it as nothing but pain and shame and humiliation, she had actually gained, by rejecting Rhun, a power, not only over him, but over Porius too.

She had gained in fact a power over life, a power so exultant that the idea of giving herself to Porius receded as an image of shame, and grew larger and bolder as a defiance of feminine weakness. The whole business in fact had become something more than a merely feminine victory over the two men by shaking herself free from both of them; though such a victory certainly entered into it, since it wasn't out of love that she would give herself to Porius, and it was in spite of love that she had torn herself from Rhun.

Her struggle, in fact, had been and would still be a struggle with life; and if it became a victory, on this day of all days, it would be the victory of one solitary girl over the spirit of a race orgy that had lasted for ten thousand years.

It was Morfydd herself, therefore, whether under the impact of the southwest wind or under the secret stress of some Artemis mood drawn from the fierce independence of her Brythonic blood, who now rose to her feet and declared that the time had arrived for them to start! Brochvael looked at her in wonder and astonishment, and so did the silentiary; while even Gwrgi threw a puzzled and questioning glance at his friend Canna.

But the old princesses, understanding a woman's ways better than could any of these men, took it all as perfectly natural, tacitly assuming that the girl was following some deeply laid plan of her own.

In any case they were in no position to intervene; nor did either of them feel for a moment that their great-niece's union with Porius could possibly save the House of Cunedda at this terrific crisis if it were destined to fall.

Looking back at a later time upon her mood of this wild morning of the twenty-first of October, four hundred and ninety-nine, it seemed to Morfydd as if the exultation she felt as she hastened through the forest, with Erim on her left and her great-aunt Esyllt on her right, had been something beyond the limits of sanity.

In that later and calmer mood, she attributed her excitement to the triumphant pride of will that had given her the strength to resist that direct physical contact with a man's passion to which, by a law of Nature designed for the continuance of the race, the senses of women are so fatally susceptible.

As she hurried through the forest with the southwest wind blowing between the branches, wetting her face and leaving on the grey hood she had tied round her head a fringe of raindrops that were the final legacy of the departed mist, she experienced the strange feeling that it was she herself, in her triumph over the passion of the man she loved, who had driven this wild mist, this *caddug* from the Cader, back whence it came! White as wool it was just now, before she and the sun overcame it.

Shifting shapes and treacherous portents had been engendered in it by last night's moon. But it had been in last night's twilight, before she had defied her father, and with her father the whole multitude of living men, that this mist had revealed its inherent nature.

And it had revealed itself, weirdly enough, in the pallid yellow tint of their Edeyrnion stubble fields when the corn has been cut, the yellow that is neither tender gold nor shadowy ivory, but a tint peculiar to itself and one that clearly had the power of drawing forth strange responses from human nerves.

Her mood grew momently more and more intense. She could easily have left the old princess, to whose concentrated but rather painful advance the excited silentiary was now devoting all his attention, and have rushed forward like a bacchanal through the mist-drenched trees, to plunge savagely and without a second's hesitation into Porius's formidable embrace.

She had never been more aware of the familiar forest rubble under her feet, or of the swaying branches above her head, or of the showery water drops that came scattering down against her cheeks from the drenched fir cones. She kept noticing little brownish grey drooping funguses with their heads fallen sideways upon the wet pine needles. She kept noticing the stumps of old fallen trees where, in the rain-blackened interstices between ribs of sepia-brown bark, little coral-like funguses grew, not red but yellow as pale amber, and completely headless, as if they'd been golden pillars set up upon the memorial cairns of infinitesimally small elves.

She kept noticing the stumps of still older trees, or rather the prostrate trunk boles of trees that had no moss on them at all, nor grass nor lichen, nor saxifrage nor stonecrop, trunk-boles that had fallen away from their parent stumps and that had now, twice removed from their life-giving roots, little resemblance to any vegetable substance, save that they retained their outward insubstantial tree-trunk *shapes,* while made up entirely now of soft powdery dust that would sprinkle itself over the intrusive hand or arm that so much as brushed against it, or at a more violent contact was scattered to the winds.

Had Euronwy's Gaer priest, who at this moment armed with his wooden cross and his book of psalms had already arrived at Saint Julian's Fount, and was repeating to himself the formidable Latin words of the rite of exorcism, seen the look of exultation in her face at that moment and noted the lightness of her step, he would have put these things down to the angelic aid that had given her the power to resist the greatest temptation to which a woman can be subjected.

Had Euronwy herself seen her son's bride just then, she would, divining the girl's love for Rhun, have attributed her excited radiance to some crazy heathen faith in the power of those bones of Rhitta Gawr, upon which the girl had sworn when she herself with her hand on the chalice invoked the Son of God.

As for Rhun, had the counsellor's sister been clever enough to drag out of him his real thought, he would have admitted his certainty that his old playmate was happy at last because she had discovered that in spite of Mithras, and in spite of Gwendydd, and in spite of their brotherly and sisterly past together, he had wanted to make her his own.

Even the girl herself, as for the eleventh or twelfth time she slackened her speed to keep pace with her preoccupied companions, began to wonder, as her spirits continued to rise and she found that the prospect of union with her Herculean betrothed held no longer any terror for her, and began to grow puzzled at the careless, reckless happiness of her present mood.

"What has happened to me?" she thought. "Do I love Rhun less, and Porius more, than I supposed when I went up those stairs last night?"

With a shock such as she had never had before, she found herself facing in baffled wonder the intricate, complicated, and organic knot of mystery in which the living roots and fibres of her heart were lost. But her heart left behind, it was extraordinary how she kept noticing every smallest and least significant aspect of this forest path! This was of course partly due to the fact that the three of them — for her father and her great-aunt Erddud had been left far behind — had their backs to the risen sun.

Every tiniest piece of moss or lichen was illuminated; and illuminated too by a light that was not only richly golden but was perpetually flickering and fluctuating by reason of the trunks of the trees through which the path twisted and turned.

It was this no doubt that brought it about that the little things she kept noticing stood out in such marked relief and separated themselves from the things that were left unnoticed, these latter remaining not only in a merely relative, but in an absolute obscurity.

She noticed for instance how the sprays of the spreading brambles that were too adventurous to bear blackberries crept rebelliously, flat on their bellies, across the moss and the pine needles, and how they projected, with a mathematical regularity that suggested human arrangement, their oval-shaped leaves in clusters of three, and yet how these triadic sproutings, that in their prone and surreptitious advances over the wrinkled forest floor seemed invoking the support of a god who, like themselves, possessed the peculiarity of being three-in-one, yielded with equally regular periodicity to an impulse that every now and then flung forth profane and defiant clusters of five!

How was it that on this particular day, when in so strange a manner she had swung out into the open spaces of life beyond both love and passion and could take her own body, as if it were a slippery and glittering fish, and fling it with a splash into the brimming flood, she should notice with such curious feelings, just as if they were the Great Mother’s own soothsayings, written on a free daughter’s flesh with ecstasy for them both, how, as the boy-bard Taliesin wrote:

The wandering brambles,

When the horses of the sun burst through the forest,
Turn triads into quincunxes or threes into fives?

Of whatever elements her present excitement was composed it certainly had the effect of making her senses and her powers of observation almost unnaturally acute.

She began to feel *with* everything she looked at as if she were made of a material more porous than ordinary human flesh. They had, for instance, all three of them, to step across a little rivulet, in which the water, though it was only a couple of feet wide, was churned up, by reason of a series of minute waterfalls, into constant bubbles of restless foam; and instead of crossing this little stream as Esyllt and the silentiary did, with a mind too absorbed even to catch the sound of its dallying with its alternately sun-bright and fern-shadowed pebbles, she paused and turned and stared down in fascinated wonder while a particular sequence of tiny bubbles met and lost themselves in a larger one, and indeed kept on increasing the size of this larger one till it came to resemble a subhuman and at the same time a superhuman eye!

It became in fact *the living eye* of the whole chemical substratum of planetary elements, out of which water, earth, and air draw the fluidity, the solidity, the imponderable vacuity of their essential beings.

The girl bent down as she crossed this little stream and stared steadily into one of these constantly growing bubbles; and this arbitrarily chosen eye of the whole inorganic world stared back at her — *the eye of matter itself* responding in subconscious or perhaps superconscious indifference to the eye in a human skull!

In this eye bubble, for the sun was still behind her, she saw herself reflected. She tried experiments with this singular mirror! She lifted an arm to her head and watched the image in the floating eye bubble lift its arm to its head! It gave her a curious satisfaction to count how many times this phantom creature within this water bubble could gesticulate in this innocent manner before it broke into nothingness and became once more a portion of the flowing stream.

During this process she possessed two selves, and the eye bubble, within which one of these selves was making signals to the other, managed somehow at the moment of its dissolution to give that "other" a farewell wink of sardonic amusement.

And she remembered how delighted her dead brother had been when their father repeated the saying of Heraclitus: "*Panta rhei kai ouden menai,* all flows away and nothing remains"; and at the thought of her brother her mouth began twitching, and no sooner had this happened than in one of her cheeks — a thing that always annoyed her for she could feel it, as you might say, *from within* — a nerve began twitching in sympathy with her mouth; and she began thinking of all their father might have done and never *did* do, to save the boy's life.

"If only our mother hadn't died! Oh, if only our mother hadn't died!"

She quickened her pace to overtake her great-aunt, for she hadn't failed to notice that the silentiary of Ogof-y-Gawr, upon whose arm the old lady had now begun to lean more heavily, had turned his head once or twice, since she stopped to stare at those bubbles, as if to make sure she hadn't deserted them and returned to her father.

But it wasn't long before she was compelled to pause again by the appearance of another and an even more curious phenomenon of Nature.

The level rays of the sun behind her were now projecting her shadow in such a manner as to cause it to resemble a second Morfydd, a less solid and opaque Morfydd, but one in whom had been engendered a more gallant, defiant, and adventurous temper.

And it happened that this better-constituted, less life-outraged Morfydd — who, though not immortal like its begetter, was still an authentic daughter of the sun — was at this moment blotting out from the eyes of its more human *alter ego* one of Nature's accidental miracles of transcendent glory.

The girl's shadow was in fact passing now in front of a minute waterfall which the sun's horizontal rays had turned into a million blazing diamonds, diamonds as dazzling as if poured forth from a fabulous casket of some legendary queen of Marrakesh.

It was a moss-grown rock which evoked this effect, for in its grey interstices there were veins of dazzling white quartz and over both quartz and moss, turning the latter into a soft mass of water-soaked sponge that clung to the rock like a skin, and turning the former into a blaze of gems, trickled one of the many little streams that ran into Saint Julian's Lake.

And because her defiant and light-stepping shadow with its head held so high blotted out for a second this dazzling scintillation, the blaze of it when it came back was more resplendent than before and indeed was more resplendent than where at the final termination of this forest path the great sun itself, the intolerable origin of these unearthly dazzlements, plunged into the lake and floated there, rising and falling with the smallest ripple, in his own tremendous image.

This vortex of dazzlement might well have stayed the steps of any mortal maid, and after Morfydd had watched her reckless shadow — which was certainly as much braver as it was much lighter and less substantial than herself — plunge boldly into this blaze, blot it out for a second and pass on, she herself stood still, not unaware of a second's irrational surprise when her pause called a halt to this second self's irresponsible flittings.

But no sooner were she and her shadow motionless for a moment in the presence of this accidental embrace of the four elements, this casual encounter of air and water and rock and fire, than there occurred another of these miracles of chance.

For it happened that where this small rivulet sank into the grass there was surviving from the late summer a solitary specimen of the extremely aromatic plant which her father had taught her to call *Mentha hirsuta,* and from this plant as her foot brushed against it there now arose the familiar pungent smell. And in a twinkling her memory had been seized upon by this pungent fragrance and swept back to an occasion when, in the absence of her father on one of his journeys in search of books, her Gwyddyl-Ffichti mother had taken Morvran's side in a quarrel, and she had gone off by herself into the forest and there by herself had come upon a similar fortuitous clash of the four elements whirled together in just such a dazzling conjunction as this, and had been caught up in an ecstasy of pleasure.

An ecstasy of power too, and of more than that: an ecstasy of faith in her power to retain until she died the indescribable strength — strength rather than illumination or revelation — which that moment had brought.

She felt such a thrill now, that gathering up the folds of the heavy garments that the primeval custom of Edeyrnion had compelled her to assume, she ran at top speed — faster than she had done since she fled from Porius and Rhun in those old home-rock races — to catch up with the silentiary and her great-aunt.

And as she ran she felt accumulating in her heart, in her blood, and in her brain the same sort of strength as on that first occasion. It would be incorrect to call what she felt by any other name than "strength"; but she concentrated this strength just then on two things: on her indignant repudiation of Rhun's gesture of lust, and on her resolute anticipation of Porius's gesture of possession.

Even after she had overtaken her preoccupied great-aunt and the anxious silentiary her thoughts remained entirely occupied with her personal feelings.

Auntie Esyllt would not have believed it possible that a granddaughter of the Princess Indeg *could,* at such a crisis and with all the life of Edeyrnion in the balance, be concerned so exclusively with her own affairs. She sometimes even suspected with a certain uneasiness that it was because the ideas of her Herculean betrothed were so different from Morvran's that towards the end of her brother's life there had been a coolness between them.

Morvran's hostility to Christianity was a furious, one-sided, atheistic revolt, whereas Porius had a way of suspending his own judgment completely on every subject except his immediate sensations while he enjoyed with the liveliest satisfaction the almost infinite process of analyzing the beliefs and customs of everybody else, their occult causes and psychic repercussions, together with all the practical justifications for submitting to them or rebelling against them.

But although it was with her own affairs that the daughter of Brochvael was concerned on that critical day, there *had* been a bride brought into this family once, of an earlier generation, namely, Creiddylad y Gawres, who would heartily have approved of one form at least that this concern took, that is to say, the girl's perpetual preoccupation with her vow on the relics of Rhitta Gawr.

It would no doubt have required the erotic insight of a goddess like Myrddin's chthonian Styx to explain why it was that, with all her feeling for him, Rhun's simple ideas about life and death, and about good and evil, had never had the faintest influence upon her, or indeed the remotest interest for her; whereas every one of Porius's thoughts and prejudices and manias — some of which were not only inconsistent with each other but extremely subtle and complicated — had always thrilled her with a fascinated curiosity.

As things were at the moment she was certainly contemplating her future life as narrowly, clearly, and practically as if Colgrim the Sais were still sitting in judgment in Germania, and as if it had never entered the head of Erim ab Uchtryd or of the last of the druids to turn the unstable forest people against the House of Cunedda. Nor was it only of her outward life that she was thinking.

She saw herself loving Rhun to the end of her days but refusing to let him touch her. She saw herself bearing children of whom not only Euronwy but Euronwy's father would be proud She saw herself humouring her own father, though not without private reservations that need not be seen, by encouraging him to have not only Sibylla but Sibylla's child to live with him.

And finally she decided — for her instinct told her to put an end to *this* scheme, whoever was responsible for it — that never should Porius sail for Constantinople, whether with this Greek or with anyone else, even if by not doing so he put an end forever to the rehabilitation or even to the canonization of Pelagius.

"Brother John," she told herself, as she lifted her bridal robe out of reach of what once had been the living branch of a mountain ash, but that had lain in one spot for so long without losing its natural shape in that ten-thousand-year's old forest that it had at last become a powdery mass of soft adhesive dust, "Brother John thinks only of the making of saints — for that's what he swore when he took his vows — but I've got to think of the making of people capable of defending Mynydd-y-Gaer, for that's what I swore when I took *my* vow!"

While lingering no longer, but walking resolutely now, step by step with Auntie Esyllt, Morfydd was approaching Saint Julian's Fount, the obsessed Auntie Erddud was frantically using every sort of subterfuge, however obvious or transparent, that could be possibly turned into a reason for allowing the others to leave Brochvael and herself behind.

Oblivious to these simple tricks the old lady's nephew certainly was not. But he felt no strong urge — indeed he felt no urge at all — to deny her the satisfaction she craved. Was there any connection between this weakness in his blood, this lack of instinctive moral fastidiousness, and the Feast they were celebrating?

He certainly felt at the lowest level of his psychic vitality just then, with no heart for anything save just giving himself up to the sensation of the moment; and of all the forces in the world, natural or supernatural, the one most easy to give yourself up to is the power and splendour of the blazing creature whose warmth falling upon their backs as they moved forward together, linked by the arm he had thrown round her shoulder, created in him the vague, curious, erotic fancy that those powerful level rays that seemed to be melting the very opacity of his bones were not only doing the same for hers, but were in some extraordinary and special way fusing a pair of elderly skeletons, and out of them making a new single, fresh, much younger skeleton. This weird fancy urged him to throw down his Gallic staff and to hold her in both his arms. And no sooner had he done this than Princess Erddud's consciousness recognized that the moment of Time, the moment for which, ever since her desire had become a madness she had so desperately yearned, had really come at last; and this recognition broke down not only all her power of resistance but every reason she had for resisting.

"Take me! Take me!" was the cry of each living portion of her old body. She could feel along with his arm about her — both his arms about her — the same conquering sunshine, sunshine that was more than sunshine, that he was feeling himself; and not only so, but the old familiar elemental illusion that the great flaming orb was much nearer to earth at this moment than it would be in the heat of noon took possession of her.

She felt as if that desperate wordless cry of hers had actually won sympathy and found a response in the ancient femininity of the earth itself, that immortal goddess-creature beneath her feet, older as well as so much less fastidious than all its superhuman titanic children and all its monstrous megatherian beast-brood that cropped its aboriginal mosses!

And Erddud felt as though she were rapidly becoming part of that old immortal mother of gods and monsters. Through every nerve and fibre within her old flesh, and with every inch of the flesh that covered her bones, yes! and with every bone beneath those nerves and fibres, she felt as though she were yielding, just as the old earth had always yielded, to the sun-man or the man's sun in whom was the seed of life.

In the dizzy heart of darkness within the blazing obsession that possessed her she felt that she could drain into herself with frantic inebriation every drop of all the golden rays which the flaming entity that had seized upon her had in its loins to bestow; yes! drain them into herself to their final dregs!

In the richness of that singular irony, which seems to be one of the chief humours of all cosmic changes, it was on this particular day and in the person of this particular woman that one of the most obscure mysteries of the Christian Trinity was now revealed.

For even while Erddud was abandoning herself as a daughter of the earth to what seemed to her then to be the very embrace of the sun in heaven, she was also giving herself up, with a reciprocity of sensual ecstasy that was beyond the compass of any man's power to feel, to her one and only man's total possession of her.

Thus in the very core of the impersonality of her desperation there existed a sweet and vivid consciousness of Brochvael's actual identity as she had known it and loved it so long; a consciousness of his face, so different from all other faces, a consciousness of his hands, of his arms, of his neck, of his skin, even of his toothless mouth — at the sight of which Morfydd's mother had winced and shuddered and indeed had never *quite* ceased wincing and shuddering till the day of her death.

But emotions as intense as those which were now destroying this aged descendant of the queens of Marrakesh leave their impress upon the elements.

One thing is certain; namely, that both this particular plot of earth where the culmination of Auntie Erddud's life occurred, and the ethereal space immediately above it, received at that moment an imprint upon the inmost substance of their twin identities, an imprint so totally beyond the obliterations of season or weather, an imprint of such supreme happiness, that thousands of years afterwards, men and women crossing that random patch of ground and passing through that random hollow of air have felt a mysterious elation, lifting up their hearts and redeeming their sorrows.

At intervals of Time whole centuries apart, and by persons totally unknown to each other, has this vibration of triumphant joy been experienced at this spot; nor have there been lacking cases where the experience of it has changed the entire course of a person's life.

But whatever miracles may have been worked centuries later by Auntie Erddud's passion, at that actual moment the old woman's feelings were grotesquely crippled by the pitiableness of her years. Her words grew incoherent as she clung to him; her scanty white hair got caught in the metal clasp of his mantle and was dragged and twisted about and even torn out of her skull by the fury with which she clung to him. She clung to him not only with her thin arms but with every part of her frame.

He could feel, through her clothes, every pulse in her whole person throbbing wildly against him; and very soon in place of the wild torrent of verbal endearments she had at first poured out, he was aware that she was uttering curious low-pitched moaning sounds of a significance beyond the reach of words. He even imagined he caught, proceeding from her lips, certain unintelligible syllables suggesting the rhythms of orgiastic African music, such as he himself had heard ere now when anchored off the shores of old Roman harbours on the outer edge of that great mystical continent.

But it was only after he had felt her give three or four gasping breaths that were not sobs nor moans nor cries, but were more like the ghastly ejaculations of an ecstasy paid for in jets of arterial blood, that he lifted her off the ground and hugged her hard against his navel.

Whether her incestuous passion, as the old princess indulged it now without a thought of anything else, was itself enough to plunge her into the gulf of nothingness, or whether it received, in some automatic response from the senses of the man who was holding her, the final shock that pushed her over the brink, it seems likely that they both must have heard at that desperate moment, with ears sensitized by the feeling of that forest at dawn, certain particular strains from the Fisher King's chant which from the beginning of Time seem to have had some peculiar power over the nerves of the daughters of the desert.

All Brochvael knew was that when the spasmodic ecstasy of the princess reached a particular climax, a shuddering convulsion contorted her whole body; and after a horrible jerk like the snapping of a bent bow, he knew with his brain she was dead, though with his heart against which she was now so fiercely pressed he refused to accept this ghastly termination of an affection which, however guilty in the eyes of Minnawc Gorsant, "the Slave of Christ," possessed elements that were as noble and exalted as they were unbalanced and insane.

But the flight of the living soul from the bodily shape we are holding in our arms is soon bound to freeze, unless we are obsessed — as Brochvael certainly was not — by some insane necrophiliastic emotion, the human warmth of our embrace; and in a second or two Auntie Erddud's nephew felt as starkly aloof and wearily indifferent to all human happenings as did the distorted image of an old woman in a beautiful green robe that he now laid gently on the ground. But he set himself all the same to do all he could think of to make the old body and disturbed face, ere they grew stiff and cold, present the appearance she would have wanted them to present to those who might now approach her when she was unable to smooth out a crease from her garment or a wrinkle from her skin.

He could hear the strains of the "Fisher King" growing louder and wilder as the gusts of the southwest wind tossed them towards him over the creaking fir branches and carried them away towards Ty Cerrig and the Gaer; but their sound, in place of rousing the faintest response in him, only increased his indifference to all human loves and hates.

He found himself picturing his new friend Sibylla, clinging in the frenzy of lechery or the recklessness of ambition to the tall form of his brother, the prince, as the latter carried her with amorous intention into the deeper undergrowth; and yet the lascivious imaginations he conjured up excited no jealousy in his heart or agitation in his senses.

He felt as if, where all women were concerned, they ought to be left absolutely free, to love or not to love, as their impulse or caprice dictated.

“If Einion doesn’t want her,” he thought, “she’ll turn up at Ty Cerrig tomorrow, and I shan’t send her away. But I could live all right without her; and what Einion gives me from his land rents and his protection dues will be more than enough to keep Gwrgi and Canna. Oh, I shall get on, even if Einion does want to help her and she goes back to him — that is, if these Saeson leave any of us alive!”

He shivered a little as he abstractedly straightened out the creases from the carefully selected green robe she had chosen for this supreme day of her life. But he soon jerked his Italian mantle more tightly round him, and shuffling on his hands and knees along the grass at her side he folded her embroidered garment about her shoulders and neck so as to keep her, too, from the chill of the wind.

He was kneeling by her side in a particular glade of the forest whose peculiarity it was — by one of those chances he had come long ago to associate with the most important moments in his life — to confront unimpeded by any tree trunk or undergrowth the now fully risen sun; while in the opposite direction the southwest wind from Cader Idris was likewise unimpeded in its impact upon them.

Thus he was aware of a confused and simultaneous obligation to keep the sun from scorching the face and the wind from ruffling the garments of this tall emaciated doll in green that had been his aunt. He himself felt at that moment a sullen and inhuman sympathy with both the indifferent wind and the indifferent sun.

Even while he was arranging the rich collar of her robe so that her face, grown less troubled, now grown even calm, might not suffer from the sun, and pulling the fringe of her robe round her ankles to protect them from the wind, down at the very bottom of his solitary soul he was praying to the sun to dry up the whole bloody jungle swamp of his native Edeyrnion, and to the wind to carry him who had lost Morfydd and would soon lose Sibylla, him and this waxen image that claimed so preposterously to be Modryb Erddud, down the long centuries of the past till they reached the old primeval simple days, before there were ships to bring migratory savages into Ynys Prydein, and before there were emperors in purple or pendragons in red, and before there were counsellors who dressed like herdsmen and rode on wild stags and could call up thunder, and before there were princely lancers mounted like Roman horsemen with kisses on their lips from Christian ladies, and before there were druids in hidden caves who believed in the Trinity, and before there were priests in Gaer chapels who murdered your sons.

He bent his head and touched with his face the dead woman's face.

"Mother of God!" he thought, "how cold she feels! Will *my* skin feel like this when Colgrim's savages tear off my clothes? God! But what a curious coldness it is! Not like anything else."

Again he touched her face with his mouth. "Like funguses," he said to himself, "like funguses grown in the dark."

Suddenly he stood up and looked down at the body. "It isn't Auntie Erddud at all!" he thought. "This quietness is unnatural. It isn't the quietness of sleep. It isn't the quietness of rocks or stones. It's the quietness of something *underneath* matter, something startling and shocking, something outside Nature."

He went on staring at the corpse. “This thing’s a husk without its seed,” he thought, “a shell without its fish, a cast-off skin. We can’t have it both ways. If we throw Holy Jesus to the crows we’ve got to live alone. But what it means to live alone is what heathen philosophers never tell us. Aristophanes comes nearer telling us than Plato. I must make a philosophy for living alone out of Homer and Aristophanes, and then perhaps there’ll be—” here his sequence of thought had a discomfortable jar, for the wind brought from Saint Julian’s Fount the sound of a chorus of voices; and by nature of this chorus he knew exactly — as everybody else in Edeyrnion knew — what point in the age-old ritual had been reached.

It was the first uplifting *above* the water and the first downplunging into the water of the huge ritualistic lance — of the size of seven ordinary lances, for it was made out of the trunk of a tall tree — to whose phallic symbolism, lost in African antiquity, three sorts of progressive mysticism, Gnostic, Mithraic, and Christian, had given a redemptive interpretation.

But the annual repetition, from his childhood up, of this occult gibberish, whose curious drummings, harsh screamings, and prolonged murmurs of subhuman incantation had so dulled Brochvael’s mind to any sort of articulate meaning, whether pious or impious, that all he felt now was an access of nervous irritation.

As the sounds increased, this irritation, which flapped about like a great death moth, in the windowless chamber of his present disillusionment, caused him to start prodding the fog-drenched moss and the little threefold leaves of the wood sorrel with vicious prods of his ebony staff.

And with each prod into that bed of dark green moss and light green sorrel, whose natural tints made a striking contrast with the dead woman’s green dress, he lifted up his voice in a groan of defiance towards whatever powers they might be, divine, or demonic, or, as Democritus would have declared, simply chemical, who had brought this accurst humanity into being, on this infected planet.

It was only when a flurry of dead leaves, blown across her body, and now caught in the hood over her white hair, broke into his paroxysm that he realized that he had repeated over and over again, at each thud of his Gallic staff, the single syllable *“Sais!”*

It was just as if he had beheld in a fit of furious second sight some flaxen-haired follower of Colgrim, savagely cleansing Edeyrnion of the last taint of Berber, Gwyddyl, Brython, and Roman, and just as if he himself had been strengthening those heathen hands with each prod of his Gallic staff!

But he had no sooner disentangled the dead leaves from the dead woman’s hair than he heard sounds on the wind that struck his ear as different from the familiar chanting. He hurriedly stood up and with his back to the corpse set himself to listen intently.

“Something serious is happening down there,” he said to himself; and casting a quaintly supplicating look at Erddud’s body, as though begging it not to move till he returned, he hastened off at a run, down the open clearing that led in the direction of the lake.

Nor had he gone far before he got at least some intimation of what was occurring. He stopped at a point where the path turned sharp to the eastward so as to avoid a somewhat precipitous descent to the water’s edge. It was a climb he had often dared as a boy, and he would have been prepared to scramble down now. He stopped for a moment, however, between two pine trunks to collect his thoughts, his legs hidden by bracken and his head by a small fresh growth of prickly pine needles emerging like a spout of green blood from the side of the tallest of the fir trees.

What he expected to see down there was an old story to him, and he took its appearance for granted; but what else he saw from this natural and inaccessible vantage ground was as unexpected as it was startling.

The sun was now sufficiently lifted above the horizontal to have the power to distort Brochvael’s own shadow to strangely wavering dimensions as the wind stirred the trees on which it fell. But after throwing its grotesquely distorted outline upon a staircaselike sequence of receding tree trunks, it seemed to glory in using those shadows as a jumping-off place from which to reach the surface of the lake, where it proceeded to make a divinely glittering pathway as if for the feet of some gigantic aboriginal — Rhitta Gawr himself perhaps — returning at last from Cader Idris. In the process of doing this, however, these same sun rays seemed deliberately to accentuate and darken, to a degree of horrible significance, the chief symbolic object of this whole ancient mystery, causing it to look as if it were caked all over with a rusty, long-ago-dried crust of black-red blood.

This object, a huge seven-times-elongated African spear, was a most monstrous-looking thing. It was carved in certain respects to convey the impression of a colossal and hideous phallus, and Brochvael now watched it being lifted up, watched it being swayed to and fro to the tune of the Fisher King’s chant, and watched it being plunged into the water.

For standing at the top of this minor precipice, whose descent was varied by moss-covered rocks, low-voiced rivulets, and old fragments of fallen branches that Time had reduced to mouldering dust, he quickly realized, for he had the advantage of the sun behind him and was therefore undazzled by light and unconfused by shadow, that it was in the midst of a scene of wild disturbance and angry fighting that this hideous blood-rusted object was being lifted up into the sky and plunged down into the water!

From the frantic movements of wounded men it now became clear to him that many flying arrows were increasing the tumult. Horses were rearing, men falling, and spears being thrown. It had only just begun; yet now in a moment howls and screams were rising, such as cut and cleft the air, even as the flesh from which they rose was torn and cut and cleft by the heartless iron and “pitiless bronze.”

Brochvael hesitated. He felt automatically drawn forward and automatically pulled backwards. The dispersal of his normal identity by the shock of Auntie Erddud’s death, though only a temporary disturbance, followed so quick upon the loss of Morfydd and the murder of his son that it seemed to suck out of him the very pith and marrow of his life endurance.

But slowly, little by little, as if it were a floating island, composed of materials that had to be brought together by more than one ocean current from more than one remote shore, his submerged life illusion returned to him and he became once more the brother of the Prince of Edeyrnion and the great-grandson of Cunedda.

And good need he had to be all this, judging from what he saw just then down there by the Waters of Saint Julian. In his imagination he felt himself descending the precipice before him to the level of that deadly and crowded strand. He could feel the sickening impact of those terrible arrows, under the rain of which horses were rearing and plunging, men were staggering and cursing, and the emperor’s mission to Edeyrnion was being wiped out by the Derwydd’s archers. “Wiped out” were the actual words he now muttered aloud, while with his free hands, though both his arms were embracing the two tree trunks between which he stood, he began mechanically removing the black leaf mould that still clung to the end of his Gallic staff.

“I must show somebody where I left her,” he said to himself, as if repeating a lesson, “so that they can take her to Ty Cerrig.”

It was at that moment that three separate impressions reached him, each one of them enough to strike his consciousness with the force of a physical blow and to leave the imprint of an emotional bruise that would take some time to disappear.

One was the sight of a large white dog, rushing in and out of the confusion at the foot of the precipice. Another was the sudden appearance of three human figures advancing towards him along the path that skirted the descent above which he stood. These were a man and woman supporting between them a youth who was apparently badly wounded; for though he was able to walk he kept up a loud self-pitying monologue interspersed with groans and lamentations, as his companions, or at least as his feminine companion, helped him along.

His male companion appeared to be vigorously protesting against this tenderness in the woman and imploring her to forsake the young man, so that they might do together the more quickly whatever it was they had in their minds to do.

It was the third impression, however, that sank the deepest into Brochvael’s consciousness. The white hound’s rapid movements amid the confusion of men and horses and murderous arrows, the approaching couple quarrelling over their groaning companion, were apparitions that retreated into the background of his mind compared with this third thing.

The white dog, like the men and horses, was a moving object in the midst of other moving objects. The three figures approaching him were moving objects in the midst of rocks and trees and bracken. But what arrested and absorbed his attention now were two motionless figures down there in the very centre of the confusion. The first was the figure of a kneeling man, of large and ungainly stature, wrapped in a black mantle, and the second was the figure of a sparely built youth, seated so close to the other that no space was visible between them. The man was crouching on his knees, all hunched up with his skull pressed into the earth. The youth was sitting cross-legged and so near the hunched-up man that if the light hadn't been propitious, and Brochvael's vision far-sighted, they would have looked like one enormously corpulent and abnormally broad-shouldered human being grovelling in the mud before some supernatural presence.

"Grovelling" may be too strong a word, but the person down there was engaged in some kind of absorbing worship or abstracted prayer; though what his youthful companion was doing it was impossible to guess. Sharpening a weapon? Drawing a picture? Reading or writing something? No! From the youth's proximity to him that ponderous-looking figure in the mantle — and the mantle belonged to a much older tradition in soothsayers' garments than his own Etrurian one — could hardly, our agitated watcher decided, be other than the emperor's counsellor himself, and if the youth was his attendant the chances were in favour of his being absorbed in the concentrated and elaborate working but of some fatal magic spell!

Brochvael had barely reached this shrewd conclusion when all three impressions — the white dog, the couple arguing over the groaning man, and this hunched-up figure in a mantle with the slim youth at his side — became inextricably linked by a new occurrence of startling and alarming significance.

A tall dapple-grey horse, beside itself with terror, its bridle trailing along the ground, was now rushing round and round in ever-narrowing circles, between the arrow shooters and the horsemen with their lances, like a mad creature; and it was being closely followed by the white dog, who kept leaping up at it and uttering long-drawn, heart-stricken howls.

Both these fate-bearing creatures, the dapple-grey one and the white one, came at length to a pause, the horse moving slowly and feebly round the points of the compass in an apparent attempt to keep its head in proximity with the head of its agitated and obsessed companion.

But it was clear to all four watchers, for the woman had propped the wounded youth against the trunk of one of the two pines, while the man was whispering in Brochvael's ear things of which he heard not a single word, that the apparition of the dapple-grey horse thus welcomed by the white hound had changed the whole situation and brought — if not peace between the conflicting parties — at least a tragic and pitiful, though it might be only momentary, suspension of conflict.

The man who had had his skull pressed against the earth was now staggering, grotesquely, dizzily, clumsily, to his feet; while the youth who had been so intensely absorbed in his. Platonic calculation or his sorcerer's art was on his feet too and had rushed to stop a man who was trying to catch the horse by its trailing bridle, apparently to expostulate with him for interfering with the occult purposes of inspired animals.

But now both sides in the conflict were all intermingled and indistinguishable, while starting from some point on the outskirts a cry of grief commenced, a cry which quickly increased in volume, till it reached at last something that was little different from a universal lamentation.

"What is it? Do *you* know what it is? They haven't killed my brother, have they?" Brochvael addressed this question to the dark curly-headed personage at his side.

But the pacific lord of the impressionable Lela seemed only able to lurch nervously from side to side, lacking words to speak. In plain fact the laughing philosopher from Ogof-y-Gawr was at that moment on the brink of bursting into great heaving sobs.

“Do *you* understand what’s happened?” This time Brochvael addressed the woman who was bending over the groaning man, solicitously following with her fingers the rumpled passage through his tunic and vest to the bandaged wound in his hip against which he kept pressing his hand.

“There!” she murmured, with an absorbed tenderness that showed how little *she* cared about the problem as to what had caused all this uproar. “There! You can feel yourself that the blood’s not coming through! I told you I’d put something round it that would soak it up. The arrow’s only cut the flesh. It went out as cleanly as it went in.”

“But it hurts! It hurts! You don’t know how it hurts!” moaned the young man. “It’s the poison! I know it’s the poison!” he went on. “I can feel it beginning to creep through all my veins.”

The woman turned her anxious face towards Brochvael now, but she completely disregarded the question he had put to her.

“Will you please tell him, my Lord,” she pitifully begged, “that arrow wounds *always* hurt like that, especially when the shaft’s gone clean through and there’s nothing left in the flesh. It’s the air getting in that makes the smarting so bad.” And she added in a different tone for Brochvael’s benefit: “Canna always says that arrow wounds want the air kept out. It’s Prince Galahaut of Surluse,” she went on in a whisper. “He’s only a boy,” she added gently. “He’s been softly reared, you know, and isn’t as used to this dreadful fighting as some of them down there are. He’s very sensitive. It’s his skin. His skin’s so terribly soft. It’s much softer, you know, my Lord, than most of them up this way.”

She paused and then added, in a tone of grave and dreamy awe: “He really *is* the Prince of Surluse, and I know who it was who hit him! I saw him single him out — the mean coward! — I saw him draw his bow and what’s more I know—”

But at this point Amreu ap Ganion brushed his wife aside.

"The horse, the horse, my Lord! It's Owain Pen Uchel's dapple-grey mare. He spoke to me just now. He says Princess Tonwen and the Gwr yr Avanc went off yesterday together on that horse to find the emperor. He says the Saeson have murdered them both! He knows because he gave them the horse. And my Lord Rhun's Drudwyn knows too, because he's been stabled since Thursday with the horse. And with your permission, *Arglwydd* Brochvael, I'd like to say this: I am thankful to God I shan't be the one to tell Princess Erddud that her sister's dead or taken by the Saeson! Why do you look at me like that, *Arglwydd* Brochvael? I'm no friend of Erim, the Brython hater, who has got Princess Esyllt to make a pact with Colgrim.

"It wasn't because of the *Three* Princesses, you understand, *Arglwydd* Brochvael, that Lela and I left Ogof-y-Gawr last night. It was only because of Erim's hold on Princess Esyllt, and what he was leading her into: sinning against Jesus, Lela and I call it; for he who doesn't believe that the Lamb is the Lamp of Peace, and that all who love fighting are damning themselves out of the light of that Lamp, and out of the presence of that Lamb, and out of the—"

He was interrupted at this point by a panic-stricken cry from the Prince of Surluse that brought Lela down on both her knees, and drew both her hands to the place in the young man's clothes where his frantic apprehension was once more endangering the value of her carefully folded bandage.

"Listen to me, Amreu ap Ganion."

Brochvael's tone had become a tone of authority, the tone of a brother of the Prince of Edeyrnion, and no sooner had the ex-steward caught that tone than he promptly turned his back on the frightened lad and the over-sympathetic woman and was at the service of the possessor of such a voice.

“Neither you nor anyone else, Amreu ap Ganion, will tell the Princess Erddud anything about the Princess Tonwen.”

He paused, for he saw the thick Iberian lips twitch ominously and the warm Iberian eyes begin to fill again with tears. But he added with a sudden exasperation: “And if the emperor doesn’t get here quickly, or my brother doesn’t send half of his bodyguard to Ogof-y-Gawr, it’ll need all her Derwydd’s arts to save the Princess Esyllt from her Saeson friends! But listen, Amreu, for I want to *go down there* now; and I want you to help me. Will you do exactly what I say?”

“Exactly, my Lord — except to go back *down there,* or to join any sort of un-Christian fighting anywhere.”

“Well then, it’s like this. You’ll find the Princess Erddud’s body by the side of this path” — he gave a jerk with his head— “a furlong or two from Ty Cerrig. I want you to carry her to Ty Cerrig. Will you do that? If Canna and Gwrgi aren’t there, you and Lela must make yourselves at home. Get any refreshment for yourselves you like, and for him too” — and he nodded towards Prince Galahaut— “but if you feel uneasy there — or Lela feels scared — with the Saeson so near — the best thing to do would be to lay the body on the ass you’ll find in the shed and carry the princess, and this wretched boy too, straight on to the Gaer, where I expect by this time my brother has begun getting our defences in order. You’ve followed exactly all I’ve said, Amreu?”

He spoke gently to the man for it was clear that these two deaths coming together had upset the soft-hearted steward. But the discerner of masterful tones put this gentleness to its proper account and hurriedly replied that he would obey him to the letter.

It was clear from the look on the man’s face while Brochvael gave him further instructions as to what to do with the dead princess of Ogof-y-Gawr and with the wounded prince of the land of Surluse that it was an indescribable and immediate relief to him to be under clear, definite, and comprehensible orders, and orders given him, too, neither by a rival servant like Erim, nor by an arbitrary and fanatical old woman like Erim's mistress.

"I understand you are Prince Galahaut?" said Brochvael, addressing the wounded youth and speaking gravely and respectfully, though without any warm sympathy. But seeing from the boy's expression that he had no thought to spare for anything but the smarting of his hurt and his mental dread that his wound was poisoned, he confined himself to informing him that he was going to be taken at once either to a house built of stone, and with comfortable weatherproof chambers, or to the Gaer itself, where the Prince of Edeyrnion would be responsible to the emperor for his welfare.

Before leaving them Brochvael turned once more to the ex-steward of the Three Modrybedd, now reduced to one, and enquired sternly whether he understood exactly what he had to do and exactly where Erddud's body lay.

The deep full sound of the double-dyed affirmative *iawn* was the most significant portion of the man's reply; and as this was accompanied by one of the richest and most radiant of his smiles, and by one of the most devoted and doglike of the looks of which his luminous brown eyes were capable, Brochvael felt certain that he would be obeyed.

"Jesus be in your bread, *Arglwydd*!" was the response he received to the nod he gave him as he turned away; but both the finality of that reverberating *iawn,* and the heroic undertone, like the primitive hospitality of a nomad's tent, of the mingling of the word "bread" with the word "Jesus," made his struggle with that risky climb of his boyhood a lot easier than he had expected.

It turned him aside, when he was nearly at the bottom, from the straight descent he remembered so well, and led him down a less precipitous slope, drawing him on, easily and naturally enough, along a forgotten sidetrack, till he came to a sort of terrace, where he found himself confronted by the stone of a ruined sheepfold, overgrown by a covering of deep, soft, emerald green moss.

He was quite close to the bottom of the slope now, quite near to what was going on, but it seemed impossible to him at that moment to do anything but stop and gaze at the spectacle presented to him over the surface of those mossy stones.

Was it the reverberation of that trouble-quelling, soul-satisfying *iawn* or was it some verbal magic about the association of the word “Jesus” with the word “bread” that plunged him just then into a trance of atrophied but not unhappy quiescence? Or was it neither of these things, but the far-off, world-distant calling to him of the bewildered *animula vagula* of Auntie Erddud, wrenched too quickly and too violently from its life socket by its own desperate bursting into flame?

The scene he was now staring at was indeed a startling one for any grandson of Edeyrn ap Cunedda; but with the fate of his House, his home, his race, his prince, his emperor, not to speak of his own daughter, in the balance, he had enough imagination to ask himself whether it wasn’t a little unnatural, in fact whether it wasn’t altogether monstrous, that he could lean his chin on that moss-cushioned parapet and fall into a detachment as complete as if he’d been dipped in Lethe?

He actually found himself noting with something akin to malicious amusement, though as he yielded to this emotion he seemed in some odd way to be identifying himself with the grey slab of ancient masonry of whose rough edges he was dreamily conscious as they protruded themselves beyond the green moss, how unsympathetic and even hostile to the human scene now presented to him were the sounds he could hear proceeding from the four feathery throats at the back of four brittle beaks, that were at that sunlit hour uttering their harsh, discordant, and it would almost seem derisive disapproval.

"That croak is a raven's," he told himself, "that scream is a jay's, that cry's a jackdaw's, and that angry jeering's a green woodpecker's. The doves and the pigeons are quite dumb. They must be tired of trying to soothe and soften our human madness."

It was indeed as if, with those four querulous voices as its background — and Brochvael having so recently unrolled the Comedy of *The Birds* could add the voice of the *epops* to that wrangling succession — the whole drama of what he was seeing had been pushed backwards both in Time and Space, so that between him and it there came to exist a misty haze that had the power of dimming what he saw and muting what he heard to a vanishing point of indistinctness and unreality.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "those eyebrows of the Derwydd are still lifted in wonder as to whether it will be he or the counsellor that will survive this contest. *That* must be the counsellor standing over there like a great tremulous black-feathered hen, guarding those lads and horses as if they were its chickens! Mother of God! And there *is* the Derwydd along with Auntie Esyllt and that damned Erim — Christ in Heaven! and our precious priest too! And there must be at least a couple of hundred archers and javelin throwers with them.

"That little band of horsemen wouldn't have a chance — not a chance — against that crowd, if they really closed round them! And they're only waiting for the word. That crazy dapple-grey horse, and Rhun's white dog jumping round it, have brought a momentary lull — but it'll begin again in a minute!

“It certainly looks as if Auntie Tonwen were dead. But maybe that hermit of hers has simply carried her off. Poor old Auntie Esyllt! She looks as if she were dead too — dead and buried, many times over!

“Oh, the devil! She drew away then from that infernal priest as if she’d seen him murdering my son! Yes, yes, Auntie Esyllt! Get safe the other side of your Derwydd, and let your clever silentiary deal with our damned priest! But, Mother of God! What’s that counsellor up to now? Is he hurt? Has *he* been hit by a poisoned arrow? No! He’s on the ground again. He’s praying again, or whatever he does! Morfydd and Porius must be married by now. There’s that boy again. By the gods, it’s a tablet for writing he’s got in his hands! He must be that boy bard, Taliesin, whom Einion refused to have in the Gaer. He seems to be taking things coolly enough now, strolling about and asking questions, as if he were at the market rather than on a battlefield! And who the devil — oh, it’s that Jewish doctor Canna told me about.

“And by heaven she was right! He *has* got a ram’s horn, or some kind of a horn, in his hand. But what’s this? Are they going to let that murdering priest speak? Yes, *they are!* The Derwydd’s pulling Auntie Esyllt back, and the archers are unstringing their bows.

“And the horsemen themselves are moving nearer to hear. What a chance for a real orator to swing them all into line! ‘*Equites* and archers, emperor’s men, and Derwydd’s men, I’m calling on you—’ someone really ought to have the power to rush them together in one great wave against the Saeson!”

His fingers were twitching at the edge of the sun-warmed stone where the moss came to an end. And the odd thing was he saw this moment, quite clearly, quite calmly, quite coldly, as one of the critical moments of his life. Should he throw his Gallic staff over the wall now, very now, and hoist himself up, and scramble across these mossy stones, and rush down the grassy slope, and fling himself between the two parties, and toss the priest aside, and implore them all, Brythons, Romans, and Iberians for the sake of Ynys Prydein, their island home, to follow the Prince of Edeyrnion against the invader?

"No," he told himself, "I cannot do it. And what's more I cannot blame myself for not being able to do it."

And calmly, quietly, coolly, and even with a certain earthy, animal-like satisfaction, certainly without the faintest trace of remorse or shame or self-lacerating discomfort, he decided that there were certain limitations to his character where heroism and initiative were concerned that it would be, to use the Homeric expression, more in accordance with "the propriety of destiny" to accept than to try to transcend them by frantic and desperate efforts.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "when that great hunched-up idiot of a counsellor hears the fellow's voice he'll stop praying to Pluto for an earthquake and set in motion some really effective spell. Or perhaps the wretch will see how Esyllt and the Derwydd have drawn away from him, and lose heart."

But Brochvael was soon being forced to confess that a priest who in the ancient land of the Ordovices, the tribe of all tribes in Ynys Prydein the most touchy and truculent about names, had dared to change the "Ford of Mithras" into "Corwen," was not likely to be deterred from following what the Ordovician Brythons used to call his *ael,* or "goal," by the lifted eyebrow of the last of the forest druids or by the cold aversion of the last of the forest princesses, least of all by the silent praying to unknown chthonian demons of an old animal-taming conjurer like Myrddin Wyllt!

And as if all this wasn't enough, here he himself was, behind this mossy wall, compelled to listen to an harangue that his intellect — whatever his instincts might feel — couldn't help recognizing as a masterpiece of crafty argument, just the same kind of argument — didn't he know it well? — as had set them murdering his son.

"It is there," yelled the priest, "it is *there,* in that cowering crouching figure, who for so long has been perverting the mind of our Lord the Emperor, that we must look for the poison, the plague spot, the festering sore, the devil's canker, the subtle medium for the fumes and stenches and reeking pits of pestilence by which our land is blighted!

"Ride your horses over that spawn of hell, my brave boys! Look at him, how he crouches there, gross, hideous, excremental, obscene! A corrupting taint he is upon the pure shore of this sacred water! Ride over him! Tread him into the mud with your horses' hooves! 'Tis he, he, he, not any of *you,* that these indignant ones here, my devoted and most faithful children of the Holy Forest, cannot abide should remain on this sacred soil!

"Just pull your horses back a little, brothers of mine, and you'll soon see, from the showers of arrows that'll be poured into him, yes! into the loathsome lump of offal, that leprous heap of fetid defilement, huddling so vilely there in his filthy panic and calling upon his devils to help him, what our Christ-worshipping forest people feel on this day of their ancient Feast of the Autumn Sowing!

"Oh, how that unholy, huddled-up, monstrous toad over there hates the very name of the Blessed Trinity! He has even dared to declare, as Christ's poor servants in Caergwynt and Caerleon and Caerloyw and Caerlyr have told me, that one of the worst of these devils in human flesh that those thrice-accurst Greeks called 'Philosophers,' a prize devil, a master devil, a dragon-tailed devil, a great ramping, roaring, ram's-horn devil called

Pythagoras swore that the number *four* and not the number *three* was the secret of God's most holy cosmos. Yes! yes! yes! That cowering lump of Satan's dung over there, calling in vain upon Hell to aid him — he is the cause, he alone and only he is the cause, of the landing of the Saeson on these shores! Ride over him, horsemen of the emperor! Loose your arrows upon him, people of the forest!

"For even as I speak to you on the brink of this lake, even as that archdevil crouches before you there like a squatting spawn of the ancient dragon escaped for a time and a time and half-a-time from beneath the lake of fire, the Saeson are already — the voice of Christ in my heart tells me so, and the death of Princess Tonwen bears witness to its truth! — within a few furlongs of this water! Let us therefore, O soldiers of Christ, let us in the name of the Blessed Mystery of the Trinity and in the miraculous power of the most holy number *three,* fling to these savages what's left of this enemy of the human race, whose devilish magic even they, unbaptized heathen as they are, loathe as much as we do!

"We will make the Saeson respect our wives and children by throwing to them the fleshly fragments of this devil in human shape, to whom no less than three holy fathers, good and loyal friends of my own, have sworn to me, yes! on the nails of the cross, that the emperor has sold his soul!

"Only one man at his court, they assure me, and he is Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch, the emperor's nephew, has defied the arts of this spawn of Satan, peering down now into the Pit and calling upon his legions! Ride over him, ride over him, ride over him, Lords and Masters of the emperor's guard! Pierce him with your arrows, my faithful forest people, so that none may know him, he'll be so covered with your shafts!

"Yes, let us save our holy places from profanation and our daughters from desecration! Let us fling to these Cerberuses such a devil's sop that they'll spew up their unbaptized souls for Hell to snatch at! Ride him down, my Lords and gentlemen! Riddle him with your arrows, my free friends of the forest!

"You all know well how he came — and who gave him the chance to cajole the emperor to bid him come! He came at the request of this Antichrist called John; this John who is now dying in his unredeemed guilt and adding to his own sin that of all the couples he's been pretending this day to unite! This man John has no right to marry anyone. He's an accurst heretic, seduced by that blasphemer Pelagius, for whom there's no such thing as the Fall, no such thing as Original Sin!

"Come now, you soldiers of Christ, come now, you avengers of Christ upon the workers of iniquity! When we've dealt with this hellish magician here, we'll go on to the cell of this lecherous old monkey who called himself John, this Brother of the drivelling dotage of Pelagius, this Brother of the Order of the Deed of Darkness, this Brother of the Convent of Free Will, this Brother who denies predestination, this Brother who believes that man is naturally good, this Brother who teaches that those of us who hate, loathe, and void our excrement upon the evil thing, those of us who live to crush it under our feet and under the feet of our horses are lacking in Christian *charity*!

"Yes, when we've finished with the Antichrist of Magic we'll go on to the Antichrist of Reason, and we'll never stop till — till Christ and the Soldiers of Christ rule Ynys Prydein from coast to coast!"

Thus the priest's voice resounded westwards over the surface of the lake; thus it resounded eastwards over Brochvael's head; thus it resounded over the rocks of the precipice behind him; and the further the voice went on its way, the more remote from human emotions it became, and the more charged it became with an unearthly force.

It was in fact as if some deep, impersonal, metaphysical vibration had been set working by the voice, a vibration that the priest's demiurge had at its creation inserted into this complicated world in order that at a skilful touch it should at once begin to indicate the inevitable perdition of the advocates of the number *four,* and the inevitable redemption of the advocates of the number *three.*

Like the harsh cry of a supernatural raven 'mid the squawks of homely jackdaws it went resounding on, growing, as it went, more and more inhuman, and more and more remote from all ordinary reality.

Finally the priest's voice reached the spot where lay the body of Auntie Erddud. Whether a dead body has power of absorbing and neutralizing a deadly curse is an open question; but the fact remains that no sooner had the voice arrived at the old woman's corpse than it ceased to travel through Space, and lost itself in that absolute nothingness which is so appalling to some minds and so comforting to others. The voice was lost in fact with that sort of abrupt shock that we experience when we unexpectedly touch the ice that is called cat *ice,* from beneath which all the water has been drawn away.

But ere this occurred, and while the priest's voice was still uttering his fearful maledictions and his fatal injunctions to blot out the evildoers from the face of the earth, injunctions to which it seemed that the dead alone could be impervious, Brochvael, who was mentally doing his utmost to range himself with these happy dead in his obliviousness to his son's murderer, and was hoping and praying that the curly-headed steward, who associated Jesus with peace and bread, rather than with the Trinity and Blood, was even then lifting Auntie Erddud from the ground, became aware, as indeed did every living thing within what might roughly be called a mile of Saint Julian's Fount, of a startling change in the atmosphere.

Tightening his Italian mantle round him and beginning to shiver a little, Brochvael could see that Auntie Esyllt was saying something to Erim, and that the Derwydd was saying something to Auntie Esyllt, and that the staring excited crowd of the Derwydd's followers were letting their bows sink down to their sides and removing the arrows from their strings.

He could see that the emperor's horsemen were nervously stroking the necks of their horses, settling themselves in their saddles, and turning their proud young heads and the points of their enormous lances in the extreme opposite direction from that towards which this frantic champion of the Mystery of Three against the Magic of Four was throwing his deadly indictment.

Nor was this change in the atmosphere a merely physical phenomenon. It was a psychic one, and it affected everybody. Long ere his summons to the catastrophic crushing of magic and heresy in the name of Christ had reached even an approach to its final climax, which when it arrived was broken off as abruptly, as miserably, as finally, as a mistletoe-bearing bough in an equinoctial storm, the impassioned priest became himself aware of this phenomenal change.

A chill of a peculiar kind, of a unique and unnatural kind, had fallen upon that portion of Edeyrnion. And it was accompanied by the rapid arrival upon the scene from the direction of Cader Idris of a wet, cold, clammy, straw-coloured mist, a mist that was unmistakably of the kind that can only be described poetically since any scientific description would require a lifetime of chemical analysis based on minute daily physiognomic observation.

A mist of this sort can be delineated however by some poetical image, or better still perhaps by some description of its physical effect that is at once very homely, very traditional, and very popular, such as the expression “struck by the mortal chill of a death sweat.”

Some sort of “mortal chill” — and there *were* unquestionably drops of sweat issuing from his feverish skin — did undoubtedly take possession just then of this inspired enemy of heathenism. The unfortunate man had worked himself up into such an abnormal heat — and who can tell what overstrainings, what desperate rendings and crackings of his vital instrument had taken place as he played this mad final tune on the chords of his inmost being? — that at this moment when his eloquence died down under the corpse-like chill of this unnatural *niwl,* or “death fog,” the shock was more than any life force could bear; and from the chattering of teeth, from the bony concussion of knees knocking together, from the violent pitilessness of shivering fits, that shook him as an arctic wolf might have shaken a desert dog, we may suspect that his poor human soul was thankful enough to receive its *exeat* or *missa est,* and to pass from the mystery of life to the mystery of death. Of one thing we may be sure, namely, that the priest’s disciples and pupils, and the whole inner circle of his Brythonic fellow Christians who laid him that same night before the altar of his unfinished church, did not grudge him the glory and honour and immortal memory of a martyr of the Catholic faith.

Shivering not a little himself and clutching his Gallic staff tightly by the middle, as if it were no staff at all but a short spear, Brochvael now clambered over the wall and was hurrying recklessly into the throng when his heart gave a jump in his body like the jump made by a fish at the bottom of a deep pond when it first feels the hook at the end of the line.

Standing dead still, as if the thick leather straps that he always preferred to sandals were frozen to the damp moss between two tussocks or, as Auntie

Tonwen had told him to call them, *tyweirch,* of swamp grass, he was suddenly conscious of two gigantic figures passing him by.

They were passing quite near to him and they were moving rapidly in the direction of Brother John's cell. They had — there was no mistake about this, even if they were a visual illusion called up by Myrddin Wyllt — the shape of human creatures. The larger one — for there was great difference in size between them — had the shape of a man, the smaller that of a woman.

Both seemed to be dressed in the skins of beasts. Neither carried any weapon. And it seemed to him that he was *conscious of their smell* as they passed him, a smell that struck him as strangely and mysteriously attractive, *alluring,* you might almost say, and such as, once inhaled, might leave behind a very curious craving, a desperate, unspeakable craving, a craving such as a particular kind of person, whether man or woman, might follow to destruction.

A few minutes later, when the chilly mist had departed and the sun had appeared again, Brochvael found himself explaining to none other than the Jewish doctor with the ram's horn that what they had both seen might possibly be only a mirage created by the projection of a pair of normal human shapes upon some unusual kind of mountain mist. He found himself engaged in an animated and confidential dialogue with this man before he realized that he had approached him; and he was obscurely slow in grasping the fact that it was he himself, and not the individual with the ram's horn, who had dilated at some length upon the scientific potentialities of illusory reflections upon mist.

He admitted to this intelligent stranger, to whom in his agitated mood it proved so easy to talk blindly, hardly knowing what he said, that what they had just seen had "given him a shock."

"And from that crowd over there it looks as if it's given our priest more than a shock. Well! I don't know what *your* ideas may be, Master, but if it turns out that that man has burst his heart by his fury, or had it burst for him by his terror of... whatever it *is* we've just seen, he won't be lamented by me!

"I don't know how much you know of us here, Master Doctor, but" — he stopped abruptly for it seemed clear to him from the look of things now that the priest really had given up the ghost— "but when I tell you that it was *my son* he worked on them to kill, you can understand — yes," he went on more quietly, "I don't know what *your* ideas are, but we must remember it's possible — and you can see," and he pointed to the crouching figure still huddled up with his forehead against the earth, "he's still doing something — possible, I say, that Myrddin Wyllt simply ensorcerized us all by his *hud* and *lledrith* — by his enchantments, I mean — into seeing those shapes."

"Yes, I know perfectly well what you mean, Brochvael ab Iddawc, but you must remember that 'those shapes,' as you call them, were very, very — what shall I say? — *solid* and quite different from the effect usually produced by witchcraft and magic, which, although physical enough, is physical *with a difference.* I am not speaking lightly or casually, Lord Brochvael, for our old Hebrew books that deal in these things include — well! pretty well everything that the human race had discovered in that realm!"

"But, Master, my Master," protested Brochvael, "you yourself received a terrific shock from what we both saw just now! I don't see why it *shouldn't* have been the work of a magician, forcing us to see — forcing us mentally, of course — to see what we saw. Your own face just now was white as chalk — did you know that? — yes! white as chalk, and your fingers, on that horn you're holding there, were shaking as if you had the palsy.

"And another thing you were doing, Doctor, probably without knowing it — but since you were the person I saw when Myrddin's enchantment, or whatever it was, released me, I naturally noticed you a good deal — you were tugging at your head as if you were trying to pull your hair out — yes! pull it out by its roots."

The Jew had begun to watch him closely as these details — somewhat insulting details — followed one another. And the truth is that later in the day, Brochvael himself felt he had been uncivil to this learned stranger.

"Well?" And he murmured this question rather peevishly: "How the devil do *you yourself,* Master, explain those two monstrosities?"

The Jew looked at him still more closely and then began speaking slowly and very carefully. "Suppose," he said, "you and I were two grass-eating oxen and were suddenly confronted by some earlier and more monstrous creature, a behemoth, let's say? Or suppose we were normal desert men suddenly faced by the sight of two of those beings called in Hebrew 'the sons of God,' from whose union with the daughters of men the Anakim were descended, striding over the sands and shoals and pools and swamps of Mesopotamia, wouldn't we turn 'as white as chalk,' wouldn't we open our mouths till we dribbled like idiots, Brochvael ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn?

"Or suppose we were a couple of languid, drowsily floating conger eels, drifting bellies up in the warm sunshine, and were suddenly conscious that the appalling head of a sea serpent with a horrible, scaly, naked neck, tufted with stinking seaweed like black horsehair, had stretched itself out of the waves at our side. Wouldn't we look queerly at each other when we met safe and sound at the bottom of the sea ooze? The truth is, my Lord Brochvael, you western peoples are too far removed from the lands where man first appeared. You’ve forgotten those swamps and shoals. You’ve forgotten what was sometimes seen in those sandstorms.

“You’ve forgotten those caves where the Anakim lived. You’ve forgotten those dead seas and what moved upon their margins. You’ve forgotten those forests of stone trees and the dragons in the reedy pools among those ruined habitations of men not *made as we are made.* You’ve forgotten—”

But Brochvael had had time to recover himself, and, as was natural with him, his mind reverted to his favourite books. He interrupted the doctor with a curiously complacent chuckle, a physical manifestation of the consciousness of superior knowledge, which always had a peculiarly irritating effect upon his son, though it rather endeared him than otherwise to his daughter.

“Mother of Earth!” he cried out, in the high-pitched voice he always used when quoting his favourite ancients. “I’ll tell you, stranger, what Hesiod would have called those giants, if giants they were. ‘Men of the Third Race’ he would have called them, whose armour was of bronze, whose houses were of bronze, whose implements were of bronze, and among whom ‘there was no black iron.’”

The Jewish doctor tapped with his knuckles on his ram’s horn. He tapped upon it a little Arabian lullaby, with which his wife was accustomed to lull their son Gog to sleep; and as he did this a rather wistful smile crossed his lips, an immemorially old desert smile, that put into their proportionate place, in the long history of humanity, not only Hesiod’s “bronze” race but his “silver” one too, and even perhaps his “golden” one.

But before he had time to comment on Brochvael’s words and while he was in the act of saying to himself, “The man’s quite happy, now that he’s plastered that rent in his nerves with some pedantic salve or some poetic lotion," they both became aware of a sudden uproar and a turbulent rushing together of the emperor's horsemen and the druid's archers.

That it was a very special rushing together they realized the second they were conscious of it. What they now saw was indeed a scene of wild and exultant reconciliation and fraternization. Many of the horsemen had even leapt from their horses and were talking eagerly and passionately to little attentive groups of their former enemies.

But suddenly there was a deep hush; and Brochvael and the doctor could clearly make out the dark, enormous, unwieldy head of Myrddin Wyllt swaying a little from side to side as it uttered its mandates, as if it were the head of an inanimate automaton or at least of a *deus mortuus,* or a "corpse god," risen from its tomb, but towering now by reason of its height over them all.

The phrase Pen Annwn, "Head of Hades," floated into Brochvael's mind as he tried to catch what this dark swaying head was uttering. But at last a word did reach him, and reach his companion too, nor was it the first time since his arrival in Edeyrnion that the Jew had heard those particular syllables.

They were familiar enough to Brochvael, of course, as a sort of slang word for the unclassified ordinary men and women of Ynys Prydein, such as were neither Romanized rulers nor privileged Brythonic princes of Castell or Cantref, of Dinas or Gaer, nor yet unscrupulous invaders from the North Sea, nor yet uncivilized marauders of Gwyddyl-Ffichti descent.

But just because they were so familiar to him, so colloquially, so diurnally familiar to him, just because they carried with them for him so prehistoric an undertone of communal existence, just because they were so steeped in all the planetary usages, the immemorial human usages, of the kindly generations, unblighted by what Homer calls "the pitiless bronze of tearful war," he had never imagined as conceivable that they — of all racial syllables in the wide world the least aggressive and the most evasive — should become a trumpet call of defence and a rallying cry of refuge.

The word was the word *"Cymry";* and no sooner had it been flung out upon the air by Myrddin Wyllt's enormous head — that darkly looming head with its great flapping animal-like ears that was swaying now from side to side, above spearmen and archers, above horses and riders, as if it were the decapitated head of Bendigeitfran, the head of the never-dying yet eternally dead Being, whose destined nature it was to be the ghastly but imperishable medium between the buried past and the newborn future — than it was caught up in a thundering shout from thousands of ecstatic throats — *Cymry! Cymry! Cymry! Cymry!* — and went echoing away over Saint Julian's Water towards the up-tide current of the Divine River, the current that ran unchanged through the centre of Tegid's Lake, echoing far away on the further side of that lake, echoing up the gorges and tarns and precipices of the Cader itself, whither those monstrous shapes of the true aboriginals of Ynys Prydein had, as so many now believed, actually come and gone!

CHAPTER XXII. The Marriage Tent

IT MUST HAVE BEEN several minutes before the dapple-grey mare, riderless, crazed with fright, and encircled by the leaps and bounds of the white hound, had shamed the combatants into quiescence, that Porius lifted Morfydd across the entrance to their bridal tent. His favourite southwest wind, by carrying away all sound of the violence that had arisen, spared him the necessity of choosing at that crisis between love and war.

The Fisher King's chant had been the signal for a general rushing together of the sexes, and a great number of these encounters were undoubtedly taking place at the same moment, not all of them by any means at the same distance from the uproar or spared awareness of it by the same relation to the wind.

Porius's heavy bodily movements were accompanied this morning as they always were — and never indeed more so than at this crucial occasion of his life — by the most erratic, the most wayward, the most fantastic thoughts. Never had any woman, in all the long years of human history in this part of the forest, sacrificed her virginity to so small a portion of her lover's personality.

But this suited Morfydd's present mood very well. He was what he had always been, her calm, patient, considerate, submissive, affectionate subject. She knew that even now, at this supreme consummation of their betrothal, she had only to make the faintest sign of repugnance, of distaste, of resistance, of a desire to put off this moment, to put it off — it might be — *for good and all,* and he would obey her without a protest, without growing sulky, without getting angry, without making any desperate appeal.

And not only so; but she knew, if her distaste amounted to a necessity for their separation, he would defend her to the uttermost against all and sundry and take upon himself full responsibility for the consequence.

And this submissiveness of her good-natured Hercules suited her just then almost startlingly well. She too was living her life in her own way. If it suited *his* method of existence to take possession of her with no more than a tenth part of his personality, it suited *hers* to be so taken. It left her free. And henceforth to the end of her days she intended to remain free.

She felt still, even while she was suffering the pain of her ravishment, she felt still, even while she realized there was more blood than she expected, she felt still, even while she was caught in the sex-drugged abandonment of her own response, that she could never love this powerful and submissive man as she loved Rhun; but in a manner that surprised herself she felt proud that by her will and her spirit and her vow — in fact by all that was most individual about her, all that was most intimately herself, all that was the essential Morfydd within her — she had conquered, and on this day of all days too, the old ancestral aboriginal *tynged* laid upon women by the irresponsible god of love.

The knowledge that she had an absolute power over this remote, mysterious "strong man" of their tribe, under whose inviolable protection she and her children would be safe from their enemies, gave her the feeling that henceforward she would be able to do what she liked in life; yes! even to — though she stopped herself *there* with the deliciously sweet sensation of a curious sort of interior guile — even to giving the moral complacency of friend Rhun a few subtle jolts.

And it was just because this was not Rhun, just because she was not in love with this formidable, docile, absentminded Hercules, against whose ribs, while intermittent nervous vibrations still followed each other through her limbs, she now drowsily cuddled, that she could let herself be herself, lazily, carelessly, heedlessly, indifferently, inconsiderately, treating him in fact as if he were a huge, docile animal, whose feelings she could assume to be friendly, whose behaviour she could govern with a nod or a murmur, and whose devotion to herself, without the need for her to make the faintest effort to retain it, remained an unfailing background.

A most actual and living background he assuredly was at this moment, as he lay with his left arm securely round her body, while, with his profile turned away from her brown hair and brittle skull, which were resting on his chest, he kept his small bear's eyes lazily open, watching the entrance of the tent.

He couldn't turn completely round, because, in the reaction from their amorous embraces, his own head had sunk into the space between their two pillows, a space into which there had descended by this time such an entanglement of Nesta's verdurous decorations as not only to tickle his neck and his cheeks, but, in the case of one twisted spray of darkly veined ivy, to cling to his hair in a manner that suggested Thessaly rather than Edeyrnion.

Morfydd was asleep now — the best sign she could have given him that she was free from agitation and discomfort — and he could let his mind wander over the whole cosmos of his consciousness while a delicious drowsiness invaded his satisfied senses.

He had often lain like this before but never with a woman whose virginity he had just taken, and it pleased him to fancy that these long, slow, tranquilly rolling ripples of sex satisfaction resembled those other drowsily curving time waves, though he never pretended to himself he could remember them, rocking so gently upon the brimming sea of contentment, such as every child born into the world may be imagined feeling, in its first independent falling asleep after its navel string is cut.

In his present mood of drowsy deliciousness, with no thought of any duty save not to go entirely to sleep, and no visible object demanding his attention save the flapping tent edges at the entrance to his sanctuary, he found that the primordial phenomenon of fighting and killing, as opposed to the equally primeval phenomenon of begetting and being born, had the power, at least for a deeply satisfied animal nature like his and especially when this nature was half-lulled to sleep, of presenting a nebulous picture of a vast upheaving life-and-death struggle between gigantic sluggish aboriginals and desperate prehistoric invaders, a picture in which, though he had no difficulty about identifying the aboriginals with the Cewri of Cader Idris, he was left uncertain whether the invaders who were attacking these easygoing Goliaths with showers of javelins and arrows were Romanized Brythons like himself or early tribes of savage Ffichti as yet undisturbed by the “pitiless bronze” of the first migratory Gwyddyl.

It was indeed through a narrow chink “between sleep and wake” that he watched this prehistoric struggle, out of whose arena he could imagine certain embraces of love that were destined to bring forth some world-saving birth. But it was all suddenly dispersed into a vapour of obscure shapes. And in place of it came the real world. Sharply he caught the voices, high-pitched and even childish, but overlaid with a rather ghastly overtone, an accent obviously acquired at court, of those two little pages called Fflam and Tegvan whom he had seen so many times in the company of Neb ap Digon.

They were standing together just outside the opening of the tent, and he could imagine with beautiful precision the cause of their appearance. They had been sent by that infernal witch Nineue solely for the purpose of spying on him and his bride in their first sleep!

The torches at his bed's head had long ago burnt themselves out and the logs on the floor had been extinct for hours, but the sun entered with such a golden blaze of light and through such a large opening in the tent's mouth, that though to *his* eyes, contemplating them from above the rounded ridge of his outer pillow, a ridge that in that stream of dazzlement took the form of a dark curving line that might have been the horizon of an arctic sea of frozen whiteness, their childish heads appeared like little round balls of solid darkness floating in a transparent waterfall of golden motes, to *their* eyes the sleepily amused smile that flickered across his heavy face when he caught sight of them was a signal for an impassioned colloquy between them, every word of which was distinctly audible to him, as to whether they should address him or not.

"Fflam!" he whispered as loudly as he dared. "Tegvan!" he added in the tremendous silence that followed. And instantaneously those two little round black balls in the golden blaze of that swaying space between the tent's hangings drew together, and he felt that all four eyes were fixed intently upon him.

Nor did it escape him that there was something almost comical in the fact that such extremely small personages should, by ceasing their birdlike chatter and concentrating so intently their childish observation, be able to evoke such a deep silence.

And the odd thing was that this same silence which seemed to emanate from the blaze of golden light, in which wavered those two black dots, which had come to resemble a couple of wild plums suspended in a luminous haze, was only deepened for him, and not broken at all, by sundry little movements and uneven breathings that Morfydd made in her deep sleep.

There were really — though none knew it but herself — no less than three nights of disturbed sleep, to be made up for in the hidden economy of the girl’s spirit, and now that she had let herself sink into happy quiescence like a blissful little mackerel between the fins of a great sturgeon, Nature’s blind obstinacy of recovery was asserting itself irrespective of everything else.

“Come in, Fflam!” he whispered. “Come in, Tegvan!” he repeated.

With the caution of two microscopic pawns come suddenly to life upon a golden chessboard the small creatures, whose faded court colours of yellow and green looked blacker than ever in that blaze of sunshine, slipped across the threshold and stared with the dilated eyes of dragonfly grubs at what they saw in front of them.

“Will you go on a couple of errands for me, Fflam and Tegvan?” he whispered. They both nodded furiously. “Well, children,” he went on, “the first thing I want you to do is to run across to Brother John’s cell and find out if he’s still conscious of what he’s saying, and if the Henog of Dyfed, and Taliesin Pen Beirdd, who were with him at dawn when the Lady Morfydd and I were married, are still there, or whether the Jewish doctor has taken their place? The second thing I want you to do is to go down to the shore where the Derwydd is, and bring me the last news. I’m getting up soon, but I don’t want to wake my wife till I’m forced to.”

Both the little creatures resumed their violent noddings. Then, becoming suddenly stiff and very grave, they advanced a few feet along the floor and began to speak. And Fflam said, “The trouble’s got worse down there where the Derwydd is and the chanting.” And Tegvan said, “They’ve started shooting arrows at our young lords and killing their horses.” And Fflam said, “The counsellor is there; but he does nothing but kneel on the ground and hide his head in the earth.”

Porius made a sign for them to come closer, and when they did so they held each other's hands, as if to support each other in this risky enterprise.

"If either of you," he said, "would like to earn a golden coin as big as *that one* over there with the head of Caesar" — and he made a motion with his own head in the direction of Aulus's marriage gift— "you'll only have to go, first to the Brother's cell, and then to where they've been dipping *the lance,* and bring me news of what's happening. You needn't go close, you know, just near enough to see if they're still fighting, and whether my lords, the emperor's riders, are still holding their own, and whether it looks as if it would go on till nightfall. I *may* get up and come and see for myself. And if I do we'll probably meet; but if we don't meet, you might come back here and tell my wife what you've seen, and she'll tell me when I've come back from Brother John's."

The living pawns in their green-and-yellow colours exchanged a rapid look.

"Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd is outside," began Tegvan, taking the initiative for the first time. In doing this he called Porius's attention to the fact that between the two little round faces, under the almost identical curly, reddish hair it was Tegvan's eyes that had the friendlier expression, Fflam's the shrewder.

And the man in the bed also noticed that at this moment Fflam's eyes were invisible under their screwed-up lids. "He wasn't going to tell me a word of this!" thought Porius.

"And Morgant the Derwydd's man with him," added Fflam.

"Drom, their other man," went on Tegvan, "holds to the Derwydd still, but the Derwydd's brother says 'all is up,' and Morgant says 'all is up,' and they're sitting on the stump of a willow by the water, waiting."

"*Waiting*? What for?" enquired Porius.

There was something that caused him a faint irritation in this picture of Llew and Morgant seated irresponsibly on a willow stump awaiting destiny. But Fflam's spiteful reply caused him to feel ashamed of this envious annoyance.

"For another master," said Fflam. "For *you,* Prince Porius."

"Well," he said, "off you go, little ones! And if you want a piece of gold bring me news from where they *dipped the lance;* but anyway bring me news from the Brother's cell."

When they were gone he listened with intense attention to his wife's breathing. No, she was sunk as deep in the undersea of sleep as Pwyll Pen Dyfed in the bed of the Queen of Annwn, when for courtesy's sake he neither spoke to her nor touched her till the twelve months were over.

Tighter than ever he pressed the girl against his side. His left arm had begun to hurt him a good deal, having been under her so long, but it hadn't gone numb, and the knowledge that he would *have* to extricate it soon and get out of bed made him very unwilling to make any superogatory move.

"All is up," he repeated, wondering how much the treble voices of Fflam and Tegvan changed the peculiar intonation with which the shamefaced brother of the last of the druids of Edeyrnion must have uttered those three syllables full of a pessimism so absolute that it sounded astronomical.

"All is up," he repeated, "and that applies," he thought, "to the Roman Empire as much as to druidism! And now comes Christianity advancing from shoal to shoal, like water seeking its level! But what'll happen when it finds its level? *That* is the question! What will the stars have for us next?"

And Porius remembered how once he'd heard the Henog arguing that the rise and fall of religions depended on the signs of the zodiac. "It's the zodiacal signs that rule the world today. They are the divine powers." And then he remembered how the Henog maintained that it was *Pisces* that had now begun to exert its force. “Pisces must rule for two thousand years,” the Henog had said, “and then Aquarius must take its place.”

The pain in the arm on which Morfydd slept, her head rising and falling with every breath he took, and her own breath growing momently smoother and more completely escaped from all sublunary misery, the pain, I say, in his arm now became quite a prominent element in his contemplations.

“Of course in real truth,” he said to himself, “my actual philosophy of life is purely and simply my ‘cavoseniargizing.’ And I’ve got to face the fact that when extreme pain comes on the scene ‘all’s up,’ and instead of our consciousness filling the mental field the demon of pain’s consciousness covers the ground, sucking the marrow out of our bones, eating the eyes out of our sockets, licking the lifeblood out of our veins. No! ‘Cavoseniargizing’ isn’t a philosophy. And thank goodness it isn’t.

“No man can have a philosophy that covers the whole of life. It’s not intended by Nature. No, sweetheart!” and he invoked the body that was hurting his arm and the head that lay on his chest and the steady breathing that from infancy had so often reassured old Canna. “You, along with every other wise woman, know that!”

He now set himself to push the hurting in his arm to the back of his consciousness while he gave himself up to a minor orgy of his cherished “cavoseniargizing”. And as he did this he vaguely wondered how far the drunkenness, greediness, and amorousness of the Hercules of tradition were attributes that naturally accompanied the especial kind of muscular strength he possessed.

And his inability to “take sides” too, perhaps! “But how can I take sides?” he thought, “when I loathe poisoned arrows and, not a bit less, hate tournament lances, Roman horses, stirrup cups, and ladies’ favours?”

And he set himself to take possession of his immediate surroundings with all his senses, beginning with his wife's soft breathing and including, for it was part of his life worship to include certain things, or at least segments of certain things, which naturally caused him disgust rather than satisfaction, the small malicious screwed-up eyelids of Fflam, for instance, when Tegvan was telling about Llew ap Greidawl waiting his destiny on the willow stump!

And in order to give this process its full scope he imagined himself taking hold of this absurd pain in his arm, which he could have brought to an end in a minute by the simple process of getting out of bed, and having got hold of it he imagined himself making it hop like a rabbit up and down the emphatic rim of that snowy, billowy, feather-lined eminence of a pillow's edge across which his dazzled eyes had to focus their way out from the valley between Morfydd's pillow and his own, that fantastical geographical rim which had just taken on in the morning sunlight such an exuberant mixture of gamboge yellow and vermilion red.

"It's odd," he thought, "how certain I am that between us all, in some way or another, Colgrim and his Saeson will be disposed of. In my heart I don't think this poor sod from Germania has a chance! I couldn't explain this feeling to anybody, and I'm glad Morfydd hasn't asked me what I predict is going to happen. But my feeling is that *much less* is going to happen than we expect."

With his pain — for a minute or two anyway — successfully exiled upon that gamboge-yellow pillow ridge, he forced himself to enjoy with concentrated attention the delicious warmth of his wife's body and her peaceful breathing.

Out of these two things — warmth felt and breathing heard — he made himself a sanctuary like the one in which Brother John was at this moment confusing Pryderi with Jesus.

"It's odd," he said to himself, "how few people realize what incredible good fortune it is, simply and solely not to be worried, harassed, anxious, or in great pain!" And he remembered how it was only last Thursday that, setting out with old Rhun from the Gaer, he had been ready to sail away to Constantinople, and so well-satisfied with himself for having shaken off — as he felt he'd finally done — the power over him of his mother and Morfydd.

"I don't need," he thought, "to shake them off now! I've learnt a trick better than that! As long as you have to shake people off, and things off, and places off, and repulsive thoughts and images off, you're still a slave of them all! The thing to do is to remain *just where you are* and carry them all, as Atlas carried the whole world. *Then* — and then only — you're free from them all!"

Steadily, evenly, rose the childlike, little-girl breathing from the brittle, lightly resting head on his chest. And deliberately permitting the pain in his arm to leave its rabbit dance on the pillow and to invade as much of his consciousness as it could, he went further with this same thought.

"It's silly," he said to himself, "to think I've changed so much since Thursday! These things were all in me before Thursday. It's only that, after Thursday, they've been coming out of me, one by one, and perching like seagulls, on my ship's rigging! *Ship's?* There's no ship in *my* story, the life of Porius, the son of Euronwy, the daughter of Porius Manlius Romanus!"

It was at this point that the pain in his arm became so acute that he was forced to make a curious sucking noise by drawing in his lower lip; and simultaneously with the pain he became aware of a faint stir in his bowels, a stir remote enough so far, but with his wife's head on his chest sufficiently disturbing to his whole field of consciousness.

Had such a sensation, however faint, invaded the consciousness of his uncle Brochvael — now his father-in-law — that incorrigible bookworm would no doubt have got the thing into proportion by conjuring up some grotesque episode from Aristophanes.

But what Porius was compelled to conjure up just then was neither Brochvael nor Aristophanes. By some infernal planetary malice it was the handsome jeering face of his father, the prince. And this image, once invoked, seemed to take the devil's own delight in holding the front of the stage.

And it became such an exquisite discomfort to him to associate his father with what he felt at this moment, whether in his bowels, or on his arm, or in his nerves, or in his heart, that it was as if all these troubling feelings in being approached by his begetter's ironic smile were like familiar ingredients in the cauldron of Ceridwen suddenly approached by an acid that made them hiss and seethe and bubble and foam.

With not a few interior groanings and creakings he hoisted himself up, and freeing his arm from beneath her body, and transferring her head to the centre of her own pillow, he bent over her, and with his lips a little twisted and twitching from the spasm of pain caused by this muscular movement after such long quiescence kissed her on the forehead, heaved himself awkwardly out of bed, and began putting on his clothes.

The girl opened her eyes wide and sitting up looked hastily round.

"What's the matter, Porius? What's happened? Do they want us? Hadn't I better dress too?"

She looked so attractive in her sudden spasmodic return to consciousness from the first satisfying sleep she had had for several days that he felt a strong desire to embrace her again and lie down with her again.

But he succeeded in overcoming this desire, as with his eyes sometimes upon her and sometimes upon the tent's entrance, he wavered there before her, his unbelted tunic hanging loose over one shoulder, his broad deerskin straps trailing from his knees, one of his sandals on and one off, and every now and then touching his Roman water bottle with one foot or the other; for it had become in the last twelve hours a superstition with him to keep it near him till he could return it to Porius Manlius, and as he touched it now he did so half-defiantly and half-appealingly.

Then he moved to her side, and taking her softly by her shoulders made her lie down again and pulled the purple blanket under her chin.

"No, no, no, my true love," he said with as much authority as he dared assume. "Better stay where you are for a bit! If I can find Nesta ferch Aulus I'll send her to you. But if she doesn't come, let's say in about half an hour, you *had* better dress. Anyway, you'd better come when you are ready to the Brother's cell. There's a chance, you know, that Gwendydd may leave us that grand pavilion of hers just as it is. At least the counsellor began murmuring something of the kind. And he told me" — here he moved a little away from the head of the bed— "late last night, my dear, a serious piece of news for you and me." She could see he was no longer swinging his unsandalled foot against the water bottle but had begun seriously and effectively to twist the straps round his legs. While he did so he spoke slowly and emphatically but without looking at her. "Dion Dionides, it seems, the Greek merchant, you know, who was going to take us — and Rhun too — to Constantinople, has asked for leave to marry Gwendydd and carry *her* off with him. This will, I suppose, put an end to the rehabilitation of Pelagius; but it will leave" — here he spoke still more slowly and still more emphatically— "old Rhun safe with us, unless the loss of you and

Gwendydd at one blow causes him to rush over to Gaul and take the vows of a Mithraic ‘participant!’

“Mind you, I’ve got nothing but the word of Myrddin Wyllt for all this; and it wasn’t clear to me when he spoke of it whether the Greek had really asked him, or whether it was only that he knew by his magic that he was *going* to ask him. But you know what they say of Myrddin Wyllt: that he never, in all his long life, has uttered a false—”

He jumped to his feet now, for there — holding back the entrance hangings — were Fflam and Tegvan! The girl in the bed was thus enabled to do what her nurse’s favourite proverb called “killing two birds with one stone.” For by promptly turning her face to the wall and pulling the purple blanket close round the back of her neck so that only a patch of brown hair was visible, she not only avoided having to make any comment on her husband’s information about Rhun, but she avoided supplying any new items to fill the leaky scandal-sack of Fflam and Tegvan.

“Well, children, what news?”

Tegvan was the first to reply, and the news he brought was, as generally happened with him, extremely reassuring.

“The Henog of Dyfed is with Brother John. He is sitting on the Brother’s bed reading to him from his tablets. Brother John looks very pleased with what he is reading.”

“What *is* he reading? Could you hear?”

A swift flicker of delight crossed Tegvan’s face followed by a frown of concentrated memory. “It was wonderful!” he cried. “It was about Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed and Gwawl the son of Clud, how they plotted with Gwrgwst the son of Hafgan against Pryderi. It was wonderful; they were the wickedest magicians in the world, and Gwydion the son of Don joined in their plot and they all swore they would drink no wine and eat no meat till

Pryderi had the knockers of the gate of Llwyd's *llys* about his neck, and until Pryderi's mother, Rhiannon, had the collars of Llwyd's asses, after they had been carrying hay, about her neck."

"Well, well! *That* certainly is good news, that the Henog is collecting those old tales and sifting out their truth from their falsehood, and that Brother John approves of the way he is doing it. But what more news have you, little ones? Could you get near where they are plunging the lance? Has any trouble started yet between our people and the emperor's horsemen?"

Fflam and Tegvan looked sharply at each other. Then they looked past Porius at the rigid form under the purple blanket. From their intimate service of court ladies, under all manner of perilous and piquant conditions, they were both of them a good deal more alive to the behaviour of brides than was this bride's groom.

Thus neither of them missed the fact that the sunlight in falling upon the bed flung a special lustre upon a couple of white knuckles whose function at that particular second appeared to be an infinitesimal lifting of the purple blanket where it fell across the orifice of a small but alert ear.

"You tell him," suggested the sluggish, heavily drooping eyelids of Fflam. "You're just the sort of person dedicated to reveal to a sovereign prince's son the death of a sovereign prince's aunt."

And obediently and timidly the sympathetic Tegvan described how they had been stopped by Gwythyr who had just been despatched by Einion to the Gaer to warn Euronwy as to the course of events. It was through Gwythyr they learnt how the crazy struggle between bowmen and horsemen had been interrupted by the desperate and riderless dapple-grey mare and her effect on Rhun's white dog.

It was Gwythyr who finally told them to hurry back to the Brother's cell and warn him that the Gaer priest was at that very moment making a ferocious appeal to them to turn upon Myrddin Wyllt and free the emperor from him, and when that was done to follow it up by freeing Edeyrnion from Brother John.

Tegvan had hitherto expressed himself frankly, freely, quickly, easily; but there now came a point when he stopped and hesitated, behaving in such a queer, nervous manner that Porius turned instinctively to the bed, seeking, as he had done from childhood, instruction and direction from the particular kind of wisdom offered at a crisis by the feminine mind.

By what channel — for though her ears might be alert, her eyes were hopelessly removed from the scene — it was communicated to Morfydd that her Hercules was in special need of her, or, whether in need of her or not, that there was danger for both of them on the wind, it is impossible to say; but it certainly looked as if Tegvan's troubled hesitations, and the quaint signals of distress he had begun to make to the self-possessed Fflam, were what caused the girl to swing round under the purple blanket, and furthermore caused her, starting from that position and having snatched a quick view of the general situation, to sit up in bed and take her share in this queer scene.

"There'd have been more trouble — make no doubt of that—" repeated Tegvan, as if Fflam was prompting him.

"Stand away from him, you!" came suddenly from this uprisen figure. "And give me something to put on, Porius." This was added more quietly and gently; and with evident relief at her intervention he took her at her word and wrapped carefully round her the man's woollen nightshirt which had been provided for him by Euronwy but which he had never used.

"He's waiting, I expect," he murmured, addressing his wife, "for the piece of gold I promised them if they brought news from the Ravishing of the Waters."

“Have you got a piece of gold?” she asked quickly.

His hand went to his neck. “Why, no!” he replied. “By heaven, no! I forgot. No, I’ve got nothing. But I’ve seen one lately — somewhere — just now. Oh, yes! But it’s in a sort of case. Here!” And he tore down from its ledge the carefully carved frame containing Nesta’s present.

Morfydd frowned. “But that’s old Aulus’s work. I saw him at it all last winter. He took great pains with it!”

Under the pressure of Porius’s powerful fingers the girl perceived the laboriously carved object begin to crack.

“Stop!” she cried. “I can’t let them have that! Aulus would be terribly hurt.”

Agitated, inquisitive, puzzled, perhaps a little frightened, Fflam and Tegvan drew nearer, their eyes riveted on the object in the man’s hands. The sunlight streaming in through the opening in the tent fell full upon the profile of the first Caesar; and Porius couldn’t help being struck by the severe intensity, so far removed from contempt or indifference, with which the strenuous preoccupied conqueror gazed out upon the world.

“But I promised them—” he muttered, transferring what he held into her keeping but continuing to stand lumberingly before her, his arms hanging down.

“Each of them?” she enquired.

He had not thought of that, but he nodded and smiled grimly. It was her turn now to lift her hands to her neck; and after fumbling there for a while and letting the profile of Caesar in its cracked frame fall on the purple blanket, she stretched out her arm to him. A long, thin, golden chain was swinging from her fingers.

“Break it in half!” she commanded. “We mustn’t begin by forgetting our promises.”

"But my mother—" he blurted out.

"Oh, yes, I know it was *her* mother's, a Pendragon bequest and so on, but you and I have to aim higher. *We've* got to follow beings greater than any Pendragon. Ask Brother John. Ask the Henog. Ask this crazy boy they've got with them here who calls himself Pen Beirdd. We've got to follow Pryderi, son of Pwyll Pen Annwn! Do you think I've forgotten, my Lord, all you've told me about Rhitta Gawr?"

Hearing her utter this last name, Porius stared at her confounded. He had — it was true — in his softer, more amorous, more melting moods confided to her things of his secret life that he revealed to no one else, not even to Rhun. But somehow — and the quiet way she'd taken these revelations justified his doubt — he had never supposed she took what he said seriously enough to remember any details. Had he heard of — still more had he *seen* — that compact between the two women in the Gaer chapel he would have been dismayed, disturbed, awed, *frightened* even.

"It's getting cold; the sun's almost gone," were her next words. "I've a feeling that it's one of your Cader mists. Break the chain, my Lord, while there is yet time, and let the boys go."

If her tone, and the gravity with which she spoke, and her use of the words "my Lord," and the whole notion of dividing his mother's heirloom between these grotesque little strangers created a confused impression that was disturbing to Porius, the effect upon him of the change in the weather was more serious still.

Yes! His wife was right. It *had* grown chilly, and the sun *had* gone, and there *was* an ambiguous obscurity that might well — only he must get out of this place before he could be sure — emanate from the stubble-coloured mist. He broke the chain in silence.

“Well, children!” he said, concealing half of the chain in one closed fist and half in the other and extending both towards them, “choose which you’ll have!”

Fflam made a movement that might have been the beginning of an indication that he had decided to select the right-hand one of the two extended fists; but as Tegvan spoke he cut short this gesture.

“My Lord Prince Porius,” said Tegvan, “I want to tell that when we got to the willow stump where Llew ap Greidawl Derwydd and his man Morgant had been sitting, we found them standing; and they were—”

“You’ll have to choose quickly,” Porius broke in, “or you’ll just have to scramble for these bits of chain.”

“ — standing on the stump and staring westward. The stump made them much taller and helped them to see much further. Fflam and me wanted to see what Morgant and Llew ap Greidawl were seeing, so we climbed up on another willow stump and looked where they were looking.”

Here Tegvan stopped and moving still closer to his companion — though they were already as close as two puppets on one wire — whispered something in his ear.

“And what did you see?” asked the girl from the bed in an imperious tone.

“For God’s sake, children, *choose*!” cried Porius. “Choose which hand you’ll have, and take your piece of gold and clear off!”

Both the small creatures were now displaying signs of irrepressible discomfort. Tegvan even turned his head and glanced at the tent’s entrance as if he contemplated an unrewarded panic-stricken flight from those extended fists.

Finally it was Fflam who spoke the word.

“The Cewri! — I saw them. Tegvan didn’t, but I did. I saw them clearly; a big one and a little one. They were the other side of the water when I saw them, but they were coming round — round the edge of the water. They were coming very slowly. The big one was pulling the little one after him by the hand. I think they were afraid, for I saw them—”

“Afraid? Did you say ‘afraid’?”

This question was interjected by the girl in the bed; but before Fflam could reply Porius had carelessly twisted half of the Pendragon chain round one small neck and half round the other and was bending over them and giving them quickly spoken advice.

“Better get back to Mistress Gwendydd and Mistress Nineue as quick as you can. Myrddin Wyllt won’t let any *cawr,* whether big or little, hurt you when safe with *them.* And don’t go by the water, or by the Mound, or by *any* path where you can be seen. Go straight through the thickest undergrowth. You’ll survive a few scratches! But better tie those chains tight round your necks or you’ll be leaving them on the brambles!”

But though with a hand on the back of each head he ushered them forth, he wasn’t left with the last word.

“I expect those Cewri have gone back by now. I could see they were afraid of the Derwydd’s archers. Any fool could see that. And no wonder! Even our *equites* are afraid of them. It’s the poison, my Lord Porius — the poison they put on their arrows. Oh, I forgot that Gwythyr said he saw young Mabsant killed before his eyes. He said he jumped into the air like a cat when he was hit, and Gwythyr said when he was dead he was like a hedgehog; he had so many arrows in him. If you want to know, my Lord, where Llew ap Greidawl and Morgant are now, I’d say they were ‘under the reeds’. They didn’t wait to ask me if I’d seen anything. They just sank down. Oh! You should have seen the way they sank down! ‘Fast as the lightning, sudden as the dew, the bolt that's got your name on it is the bolt that gets you.'"

Porius heard Fflam's voice repeating and repeating this prehistoric jingle as the two small figures dived obediently into the brushwood; but before he could catch more out of the air than a vague smell of lake mud and the death damp of the yellow mist, lo and behold! according to that favourite phrase of the Henog's, "with a clap of thunder, a fall of mist, and the appearance of a wonder," Gwythyr and Nesta stood before him.

"In a good hour, Nesta!" he exclaimed warmly. "God, but I'm glad to see you! And if *you,* Gwythyr, are off to the Gaer, will you please tell my mother that Mistress Morfydd and I are safe and sound and that we'll send someone later with further news, or perhaps even come ourselves.

"Yes, yes, do go in, Nesta, and see what you can do for my wife. I expect she'll be getting up now. Oh, yes, and when she's ready, bring her round, will you, to the Brother's cell, and wait there for me, both of you, will you, Nesta?"

But it was at this point that Morfydd's voice once more made itself heard from beneath the purple blanket, under which, automatically fumbling with the cracked frame of Caesar's head, she now lay on her back, stretched out and still.

"Has my Lord Porius got a weapon, Gwythyr? If not, could you lend him one of yours?"

This request, or command, if so it was to be taken, brought Nesta back with a light, noiseless rush to *her* husband's side, and there was an extremely rapid exchange of wordless looks and gestures between them as to whether it should be his short battle spear, or the long knife he carried in his belt, that was to be loaned to the son of his prince. In his own secret heart Gwythyr would have preferred to keep the spear, as a more dignified weapon for a man, and to have lent his lord his knife, but the centurion's daughter knew well that not only was the knife always at his side whereas the spear might be left anywhere, but that for all his pride as a man of war, her youthful philosopher was a good deal more at home with the knife than with the spear.

"Did *you* see these Cewri, Gwythyr?" enquired Porius, as he mechanically accepted the spear, hardly aware of what he did, without a nod or a smile.

"Yes, *Arglwydd,* I saw them. And I beg you to forgive my plain speaking, my Lord, when I say that I hope to heaven none of these grand riders of the emperor meddle with them where they are now."

The colour left Nesta's cheeks and her Etrurian eyes grew as deep and dark and as full of earth secrets as a couple of water-rat holes in a moonlit riverbank. How could she know that this reserved and silent boy had gone through a mental crisis that very day in which he had resolved to act no longer the patient ass with these people but to assert himself?

But Porius saw nothing and felt nothing but what he read in Gwythyr's laconic face.

"Where *are* they now?" he enquired.

"They've hidden themselves by the water, behind Craig Hen, and they're cracking the bones of some poor devil that these prancing gentry have speared like an eel! They'll go straight back to their mountain to sleep when they're sated; and it'll be lucky if they don't carry off — at least that's what our old people say — twice as much carrion as they've already gulped down! What they're afraid of are the Derwydd's arrows. They think nothing of these mounted gentry's fine lances and—"

But the imposing figure of the prince himself had appeared in the tent's entrance.

“So you *haven’t* gone, and you’re both still here. Well, well, well! Am I to offer thanks to Brother John’s Pryderi for this, or to our family’s natural amorousness?”

Never had the appearance of the Prince of Edeyrnion, though it was always an event calculated to produce some kind of psychic shock, been more disturbing than at this moment. Gwythyr backed away from the tent’s entrance but did not dare to stir further. Nesta sprang to the bed’s head and squeezed herself against one of the bedposts as if desirous of attaining some magical strength from the polished texture of its fragrant cypress wood.

As for the prince’s son, he just stood where he was, his feet resting on the blackened portion of the floor where the fire had been, his right hand drawing lines and curves and squares among the burnt ashes with Gwythyr’s spear, while the fingers of his left, with bent knuckles, were fumbling at an exterior spot just below his waist where he had recently fancied he felt a faint threat of a possible motion of his bowels.

Einion ab Iddawc walked straight over to the bed; and Porius noticed with a grim clarity that could hardly be called interest that *his* only weapon consisted of that same ancestral sword of Cunedda whose point he had himself seen the man break in his colloquy with the emperor’s nephew.

This sword, with its two-edged blade jaggedly uneven at the point, protruded from the prince’s embroidered belt as he bent over the bed in a fashion that struck the imagination of that same son as grotesquely like a satyr’s tail.

Einion lifted both the girl’s hands to his lips in so sudden and sweeping a gesture that the golden coin, disengaged from its frame, would have rolled on the floor, if she hadn’t, by a quick movement of one of her legs, made of the blanket’s fold a happy valley between her knees.

With the same grim clarity and the same lack of interest Porius noted how easily and instinctively she threw off the absurd nightshirt he had cast round her shoulders and with what perfect composure she responded, naturally, wittily, free from all affectation, to his effusive gallantry.

He swung round now, however, and faced his son while his manner, still faintly mocking, grew majestical and commanding. Porius saw that he still held one of the girl's hands fast in one of his own, nor did it escape the younger man that this effort to hold tight to her and yet to turn about and confront her husband was occasioned by a certain nervous strain in the prince which accentuated the warrior in him and eliminated the irresponsible jester.

"It's clear, my boy," he said, "that you and I will have to divide our forces; and what I think would be—"

But at this point Porius was astonished to hear himself interrupt his father.

"Did you see them, my Lord?" he asked.

The prince shot at him the look — oh, how well its victim knew it! — with which had been derided from his son's infancy all the artless, shameless, unblushing, blurted-out innocences of indiscretion of which the boy had been guilty.

"See *what?"* Einion asked. "Oh, you mean those two Cewri? Yes, of course I saw them! Who could help seeing them? And I can tell you, my good lad, I spent an uncomfortable five minutes going from our *Cymry,* who were itching to shoot their arrows into them, to the emperor's young nobles who were burning to cut off their heads and carry them to Arthur!

"But the Mother of God be praised! What I begged, implored, commanded, wept, cajoled, abjured them to do they finally did, with the stale, flat, dull, tedious, commonplace, ordinary instincts of frightened animals — did in fact just exactly what these romantic Cewri you've been asking me about all your life did *themselves* when they saw those shining arrow points and lance points! In plain words they *did nothing.*

"The man-eating giants squatted down behind a rock to crack the bones of a few dead men; while we heroic *Cymry,* as the counsellor tells us we must all consider ourselves in future, looked anxiously, patiently, sternly, eagerly hopefully, intently — in *the opposite* direction! Yes, that's the truth, noble son. While the Cewri crunched our brothers' bones in the west, we ran — crying out, 'We're all brothers today!' — to the east."

"Thank you, my Lord," said Porius. "I just wanted to know whether you saw them."

"Oh, I *saw* them all right! But the question at this juncture, my romantic son, and even your mother would agree with me here — is how to drive off the biggest rabble of invaders that we've ever seen in Ynys Prydein since the time of Ronwen ferch Hengyst! And if to do this we have to call off our dogs from these great filthy carrion eaters, that's what we *have* to do!

"Oh, they'll skulk back all right to the Cader! You needn't be afraid our men or our dogs will finish them off. You'll have plenty of other chances of satisfying your curiosity. They're certainly queer objects to look at when the sun shines on them!

"You may be sure, like carrion crows, they've got some secret instinct that draws them to any place where we insane human beings intend to provide a lively 'slaughter. But these two *may* be the last of the whole brood; just as I fancy our friend the Derwydd *will* be the last of his occupation! The world is changing, my philosophic son, the world is changing! And if we don't want to perish like mangy wolves who've lost their good heart and their strong white teeth, we've got to let the dead bury their dead."

While he spoke Einion kept his eyes on his son, but, for all that, he didn't release his niece's hand. It was, however, at this strained and tense moment that what to Porius was a wholly unexpected and even startling ripple manifested itself on the swift-flowing stream of Time.

In plain words Morfydd made a face at him. It was done swiftly, surreptitiously, mischievously, confidentially. It was done entirely between themselves. But that childish screwing up of her face and that deliberate projection of the pointed tip of her tongue between her small teeth had an effect upon him out of all proportion to her intention. He never forgot it. By the simple process of "making a face," she had in some queer psychic sense consummated and consecrated their marriage.

Her "face" had said to him: "Don't take any notice, my dear, of how he makes me behave before your mother and before the old man and before the rest of them — yes! *and even before Rhun* — for the truth is, after what's happened between us, we've got a bond and a link more important than love or custom or anything else."

But even while she was making this face, and while the equivocal mischief in it was flickering into existence and flickering out of existence, the man who was holding her hand had begun issuing his princely orders.

"What I propose," he announced, "is that your wife should go straight back with me to the Gaer and be a support to your mother and to us all, till we know at what these damned Saeson are really aiming — and that you should stay here with Rhun and a few of our younger *Gosgordd,* so that if Colgrim surrounds the Gaer there'll be some of us well outside! I'll be off to see Brother John now, and I'll wait for your wife there; but I'd like you, if you don't mind, my dear boy, to get hold of Myrddin Wyllt and tell him to let me know at once if he hears anything from the emperor. Rhun himself might act the messenger between us. Nobody knows the forest better than

Rhun, and there's not a Sais born who could catch up with him when once started.

"Don't fail, all the same, my son, to get it lodged in his crazy conscience that for all our sakes, and specially — *that* may appeal to him if nothing else can! — for the sake of the spirit of his mother Alarch he mustn't take any improper risks. Get it into that overconscientious skull of his that Mithras can't afford to lose his only adherent, that I can't afford to lose my only nephew, and that your wife here — we all know I can speak for her — can't afford to lose — now that she's married *you* — her only cousin! But heaven knows what's going on while we're talking!

"I saw that white dog of Rhun's sniffing about round the Craig Hen. Rhun had better look out, or those monsters will leave their human carrion to crunch that dog's bones! Better see what's happening over there, my wise son, before you try to find Myrddin Wyllt. Off with you now — and remember that all I said about Rhun — and again, I say, I speak for your wife as much as for myself — applies doubly to you! We can't afford any crazy risks. If the Sais must have blood he'll have to get it drop by drop, do you understand? That's what I've just told them about these bodysnatchers from the Cader. Let them crunch our bones when we're dead as long as we drive the Sais into the sea while we're alive!"

In his dazed and confused state, Porius, as he inclined his head and turned to go, found himself vaguely wondering what the daughter of the ex-centurion was thinking of this family she served, as she leaned in discreet anonymity against one of the bedposts she had decorated with such care.

He had never felt so dull to the particular impressions of his physical surroundings as he felt at this second, as he turned his back upon the purple bed, upon Morfydd's outstretched girlish arm, upon the reckless, resplendent figure with the broken sword, and upon that water flask from

Uriconium which in all these agitating days had become a sort of fetish with him, so obstinately had he made it a mental point of scrupulous piety that he should return it to the old Roman.

All these impressions gave him in their portentous combination the queer feeling that he was the victim of an unnatural dream. As he pushed aside with his new spear, however, the imperial green-and-yellow hangings of the tent and saw Gwythyr sharpening on a birch trunk the boy's sole remaining weapon, there rushed into his mind the particular moment in Gwendydd's sumptuous pavilion when Myrddin Wyllt, having poured a libation of milk to the aboriginals, gazed about him with a look that seemed to make all the tent hangings of all the imperial armies in the world quiver like the fins of frightened fish in shoreless oceans and the feathers of birds in fathomless spaces.

CHAPTER XXIII. The Cewri

THE FIRST IMPRESSION Porius received from the outside world powerful enough to pierce the network of personal feelings that had been hemming him in was the impression of damp stubble-coloured mist.

This mist was not so thick that it hid the view, nor so chilly as to make a person shiver, but it brought to his mind his vigil of Thursday evening above the eastern gate of the Gaer.

“He told me,” he said to himself, as he walked rapidly towards the edge of the lake, “to go first to Craig Hen,” and then as he recalled the prince’s words about the dog sniffing round Craig Hen the impulsive thought rushed into his head: “Why not go clear round Saint Julian’s Water and come upon *them* alone and unobserved — myself and *those two* separated by Craig Hen from all the rest of the world?”

It must not be supposed that when this idea took possession of him it brought with it any rapturous excitement conformable with the possibility that now at last, on this twenty-first of October, four hundred and ninety-nine, he might be really destined to meet in the flesh an actual living Creiddylad, a Creiddylad from the same Cewri of the Cader among whom Edeyrn the son of Cunedda had found his bride.

The reapproach of the yellow mist, drawn down as it seemed from the very peaks of the Cader by the release of druidic arrows and imperial spears, had occurred so simultaneously with the consummation of his marriage and the consequent exhaustion of the *energeia erotica* of his life force that, full as this possibility of meeting a second Creiddylad was of the vague, rich, inchoate magic and nameless sweetness of the underdreams of his entire life, it rendered his rapidly moving mind dazed and drugged, if not exactly reduced to a condition of stunned passivity.

Yes, he would go round the water and come up with them from behind Craig Hen! This sagacious decision he held clearly, firmly, obstinately, before his mind. But it did not give him the exultation that a course of action so clear, definite, and inescapable ought to have given him. He would steal cautiously round the lake. He would come upon them suddenly and unexpectedly from behind Craig Hen. He would catch them by surprise.

This was decided. This was settled. And yet there hung about the whole project something dreamlike and unsubstantial, not so much unreal as *subreal,* like a decision under water, or in the soft persistent falling of snow upon snow!

The thought of going straight to Craig Hen was an unquestionable clue in this misty clouding of his normal wits, and he had instinctively clutched at it. And the idea of walking round Saint Julian’s Water and reaching Craig Hen from the other side and finding them alone, he alone with them alone, and where he and they would be hidden from all the world, was the thing to which this clue had now led.

It was like throwing out from a boat a thin tentative line in a fog at sea, a line that would eventually return to the boat securely fastened to a thick rope covered with green seaweed, shining fish scales, yellow spray, and patches of black paint from the bulwarks of a great ship. He hadn’t got very far from the tent, however, when he came upon a thick reedbed extending into the lake for about a hundred yards and so closely grown that it hid the water altogether.

The water itself, owing to undulations in the level of the mud, varied in depth from a few inches to a couple of feet, and on the edge of the reeds there were several willow stumps; and clinging to one of these in a singular manner were two human figures whom he divined at once to be Llew, the Derwydd's brother, along with Morgant his man.

Llew was lying on his stomach along the only remaining branch of a nearly prostrate willow whose immense age had brought it about that the main rondure of its rooted stump was covered with richly green, cushion-soft moss, while from a couple of projecting excrescences that bulged forth from the base of the branch on which the man lay, there had broken off and swung loose, and finally at intervals, as far removed from each other as a couple of generations of human life, dropped into the water various fragments of rotten wood, full of the soft substance of vegetable decay, destined to float for a week, to lie on the mud for a decade, and to resolve themselves into the elements in half a century.

Seated upon this central stump, with his long legs twisted round the two excrescences and his face towards the nearest slope of the mountain ridge that was dimly visible through the mist, the Derwydd's servant was murmuring over and over again the "Hagios, *Hagios, Hagios,* who was crucified for us!" of the Monophysite chant, and at every "Holy," with its implication that it was the Father of Men himself who was crucified for man, he drummed on the mighty buttocks of the Derwydd's brother.

"What are you doing, *Arglwydd?* Where are you going?" cried the *Hagios* chanter. Don't you know that the Cewri have come down from Cader and are eating the dead behind the Old Stone?"

"I know it very well," replied Porius. "But what I don't know is why you and Llew ap Greidawl have left Gogfran Derwydd, nor why Llew ap Greidawl is lying on that bough, nor what the sounds mean that are now issuing from his mouth."

The man Morgant with several creakings and groanings disentangled his stiff limbs from the mossy stump and stood before Porius while his bare arms, neither very muscular nor very hairy — in fact eminently suggestive of his long and devoted attendance in those dark underground chambers beneath the Mound of the Outlaw — hung down at his sides, the droop of their dark veins and the misty modelling of their dim curves answering to the downward drag of the graven furrows in the lean and cadaverous face.

"Gogfran Derwydd is not alone," said the man slowly, giving his head a couple of jerks and stretching his long neck sideways as though to pierce the recesses of the mist that extended beyond his questioner in the direction of the Craig Hen.

"Not alone in any sense, *Arglwydd,* for he has gone to Ogof-y-Gawr with Princess Esyllt; and Erim ab Uchtryd and my own half-brother Drom have gone with them to attend on them."

While Morgant was making these reasonable explanations and striving to pierce with his gloomy, heavy eyes, as if they'd been a pair of ship's lanterns, the hollow spaces of mist that separated them from the Old Stone, his questioner was endeavouring to make some sense of the extraordinary sounds that were issuing from the mouth of Llew ap Greidawl.

Porius had never seen either of the sons of the mysterious Greidawl until now. In the last twenty-four hours he had heard from several quarters of the Derwydd's philosophic calm and imperturbable detachment from the stream of events. He had also heard of the man's doting indulgence for the incredible sluggishness, only prevented by the man's timidity from becoming absolute brutishness, of Llew ap Greidawl.

It soon became clear to Porius that the grotesque figure prone on its face on that fallen bough — a bough that even now wasn't only a bed for several sorts of thick moss but for several sorts of small plants, some of which, in their slow, indirect, vegetative way, were already thanking the earth-mother that their pliable little stalks had the power of bending down so naturally under oppression that even the protruding belly of Llew couldn't break them — was uttering no mere gibberish, no mere ejaculatory balderdash, but rationally joined syllables, such as, in their rhythmical permutations and combinations, attained the dignity and mystery of human language.

Downward hung Morgant's long-veined wrists. Downward drooped the gloomy lines of the deeply channelled furrows of Morgant's face.

"Not so, *Arglwydd*," Morgant said. "Gogfran Derwydd has Drom with him; and I know Drom. It is undeniable we had different fathers. But we had the same mother. Drom is short but faithful, small but faithful, weak but faithful, simple but faithful, innocent but faithful, foolish but faithful, soft but faithful, ridiculous but faithful, frightened but faithful, idiotic but faithful. I am different from my half-brother Drom. The heavenly powers have endowed me with intelligence. I ask questions. And my questions confuse the heavenly powers. It is because of my questions that they have made me a servant and a servant I am. Very well. So be it. But I still ask questions. I ask for instance whether it's better to serve the falling or the rising, one who is doomed to fall or one who is doomed to rise."

Porius kept making vague reassuring gestures with the butt end of Gwythyr's hunting spear towards that lank figure, towards those furrowed lines from nostrils to mouth, towards those long fingers hanging so helplessly; but he was only half listening to the man's talk. He was struggling all the time to catch some sort of revealing glimpse of the distorted profile of the weirdly voluble Llew.

But aye! what an extraordinary language it was — if it really *were* a human language — whose words were now bursting out, like huge breaking bubbles, one after another, from that contorted mouth pressed in such panic against that mossy bough!

Lowering the butt end of Gwythyr’s weapon, Porius now came up close to Morgant and putting his mouth to his ear asked him point blank what language it was that this poor wretch, crazed by panic to such a point, was spluttering out.

The tall man drew himself away from his questioner with the unmistakable movement of a lonely person who does not relish being touched.

“It’s *their* language,” he replied wearily. “It’s the language of the Cewri. I think he’s begging them to spare him when they kill the rest of us. I think he’s telling them he knows about the willow being their sacred tree, and that he’s making love to it as to a woman, and that he’ll make love to no other till he dies if they’ll only spare his life. I know the meaning of Cewri words better than Drom does because Drom was born simple.

“There are more words about making love in the Cewri language than about anything else; and that’s why *he”* — and he jerked his thumb towards the figure on the bough— “took to it. Drom makes a god of the Derwydd and an inferior god of this one” — and again he jerked his thumb towards Llew.

“I’m different. I was born intelligent. I know when a man is a man, and when a man is a god. In the earliest days there *were* gods in Ynys Prydein. There were bad gods and good gods. Pwyll and Pryderi were good gods. Llwyd ap Cil-Coed and Gwawl ap Clud were bad ones; but the worst ones of all were the sons and daughters of Don.

“Greidawl Derwydd didn’t know the language of the gods; so he couldn’t teach it to Gogfran Derwydd, but Myrddin Wyllt knows it well. When Myrddin Wyllt doesn’t know what to do, he puts his head on the earth and the underground gods tell him what to do, and he understands what they tell him and tells the emperor what to do. That’s why, having been born with intelligence and not being simple like Drom, I have left the service of the Derwydd. Of course I would prefer to serve someone who, like Myrddin Wyllt, understands the language of the gods; but the only servant *he'll* ever have is Neb ap Digon. There's nobody so simple as not to know *that."*

For a second the question rose in Porius's mind how it came about that everyone, in whatever part of Ynys Prydein they might live, knew every detail concerning the personal life of the emperor's counsellor, knew about his sister — all save old Rhun who seemed as simple and faithful as Drom! — knew about his seizures or fits, knew about the fatal power over him of Nineue the Ffichtiaid, knew about his attraction for animals and birds and reptiles and fishes, knew about his travelling disguise as a savage "herdsman from the south," and not only knew about these things but felt instinctively — and it was this queer aspect of the case that specially arrested Porius — that neither the man himself nor the gods whose language he understood could change one jot or one tittle, one dot or one iota, of the destiny or *tynged,* which had been laid upon him from the beginning.

Everyone knew that they could change their own life, and either by force or by guile change the life of others, but all the rumours about Myrddin Wyllt seemed to take for granted that nothing could change his preordained fate; and was not a rumour of this sort, spread wide among the simplest people, in itself a proof that the man really was not like other men but had something about him that set him apart?

"Morgant" — Porius's words were a good deal more casual and unconcerned than the feelings that dictated them— "could you possibly repeat to me — before I go — any phrase or sentence — or even any single word — belonging to this language?"

The drooping visage in front of him seemed in that yellow mist as if it belonged to some Boethian time-measuring machine possessed of a mechanical fist that at regular intervals drummed on the rump of the man on the bough; but a flicker crossed it, all the same, of sardonic amusement, when it coolly enquired of its questioner whether he was referring to giants or gods.

“To the Cewri, of course.”

“All I know are the two sentences that Drom is always using. He’s so proud of knowing them that he repeats them when nobody wants to hear them.”

“What are they?”

It was Morgant’s turn to whisper now, but it was clear he was deadly afraid lest Llew should catch his words.

“Please say that again, Morgant.”

“Thumberol Gongquod... Tungerong larry ong,” murmured the other, whispering each weird syllable as clearly as he dared.

“Did Drom know what that meant?”

“Two sentences they are, *Arglwydd.* Drom used to repeat the first when he was comfortable and the second when he was uncomfortable. I was always forgetting what he told me they meant and always asking him again. But in the end I learnt the answer. *‘Gongquod’* means ‘the earth,’ and *‘thumberol’* means ‘to tread amorously.’ Drom used to say that deformed dwarfs could understand the giants better than proper-sized persons could. He said that he understands the word *‘thumberol’* perfectly and that it meant ‘making love with the soles of your feet’.”

“And the other? What does the other sentence mean — the one that ends with ‘ong?’”

The channels in the tall man's face, that looked as if they had been furrowed by all the tears of all the primeval races of the world, appeared to deepen and grow more haggard still as he replied.

"Drom said *'Tungerong'* means 'endure,' and *'larry'* means 'until,' and *'ong'* means 'the end.' So *'Tungerong larry ong'* means 'endure until the end.' Drom used to say it whenever we were sent to hunt wolves. He said he said it for the wolves."

"For the wolves?"

"That's what he said, but he wasn't born intelligent. If he'd been born intelligent he'd be here now with me ready to serve you or any other friend of the emperor. Instead of which he's gone to Ogof-y-Gawr with Gogfran Derwydd and Erim ab Uchtryd and Princess Esyllt."

"But maybe," suggested Porius, who had already come to the conclusion that beneath this mask of guileful intelligence his gloomy friend was already profoundly homesick for his half-brother, "but maybe it'll be here, and not at the Cave at all, that the Saeson will make their first appearance. They must already regard the princesses as their allies."

The tall man gave the prostrate Llew a weary thump. "When before its hour," he declared pontifically, "the tide of the salt sea stops and turns, then will a Saeson chief and a Saeson host keep their word to their allies."

But Porius's mind was too full of what he might soon discover at Craig Hen to argue about the newcomers from across the sea.

"Do you know," he enquired, "how Greidawl Derwydd learnt the language of the Cewri?"

The tall man looked round into the mist with the air of one mentioning secrets that the very elements were on edge to hear. Then he murmured the word "Ffichtiaid."

"The Derwydd," he said, "assured me that the Ffichtiaid made friends with the Cewri and became their slaves, just as later they made friends with the Gwyddylaid and became *their* slaves. The Derwydd swore that when the world was first created the Ffichtiaid travelled from sea to sea, becoming the slaves of all the fiercest races, but that after a few generations the races they served began to grow weak and in the end died out.

"But before they died out they became more afraid of their slaves than they were of their worst enemies. The Derwydd told Drom and me that nobody knew from what country the Ffichtiaid came. But he said that when he *and him"* — and Morgant indicated, with a thump that was at once less necessary and less mechanical than usual, the mumbling creature at their side— "were children, their mam told them that it was Pwyll Pen Annwn who brought the Ffichtiaid here, lured them and coaxed them here, from the depths of Annwn, along with the swine. But I myself think 'twas Gwydion ap Don fetched them up, not Pwyll."

As the tall man's voice died away it seemed to Porius as if those terrible channels in his long bony face must" have been caused by these fatal Ffichtiaid, whose complicated treacheries had at last drained the very fountains of natural tears.

"Tungerong larry ong, endure till death" — the words drummed at Porius's ears with a dulled and reiterated drumming. "Are those fits and seizures of Myrddin Wyllt," he thought, "all part of some devilishly destructive *tynged* laid upon him by Mistress Nineue?"

He began to feel faintly ashamed of the physical attraction which he had felt for Mistress Nineue, but only faintly ashamed of it and not for long; for his attraction had been anything but uncontrollable. What soon overtook and overlapped that first feeling, however, was an emotion totally different, an emotion far removed from anything remotely resembling shame. It was a feeling of jealous and indignant outrage — a very curious feeling. And what caused it was the clear memory of how only three days ago — yes! it was on Thursday night in Gwendydd's tent — he had been startled by catching this same Nineue calmly practising — oh, he was sure of it! he knew the signs and the symptoms too well to be mistaken — nothing less than his own secretive psycho-sensuous trick of ravishing the four elements with the five senses, and of doing it with these latter so fused together that it was like making love to the earth-mother herself, precisely as the story described Jasion doing, when Zeus in the fury of his jealousy murdered him with a thunderbolt.

If it hadn't been that something within him — some master nerve that underlay all his reactions and responses to life — was too distracted by what was happening at the Old Stone to give anything but a dreamy and perfunctory attention to this willow-tree encounter, he would have carried further his mental analysis of why it was that it should be such a tingling pain to him to think of Mistress Nineue — vicious, cruel, inhuman succubus as she was! — practising his precious cosmogonic art of "cavoseniargizing."

"Tungerong larry ong!" The words seemed to go on drumming upon Porius's ears. "Endure until the end, endure until the end, endure until the end, endure until the end."

Like great gobbets of half-digested vomit the thick bubbles of aboriginal sound, as if they had been bubbles of Odyssean wine from the heaving gorge of the Cyclops, rose and burst between Llew's swollen lips and the moss-covered branch.

"I must get on," he told himself, "I must get on," and with an unpleasant spasm of self-discovery he realized that the attraction that was drawing him to the Old Stone was not unmixed with a rather ghastly terror, and that it was to postpone his departure that he was asking Morgant all these curious questions.

"Well!" he said aloud. "The best thing you two can do now is to wait for me in the porch of Brother John's cell. Make Llew understand he'll be much safer there than he is here. Tell him I make myself responsible for him. Tell him I promise to find the right man for you both to serve. And listen, Morgant! When you get to the cell don't fail to ask anybody who's there for a blanket so that this madman can be properly wrapped up. Somebody there will give you something to eat, and I'll be with you ere so very long."

Morgant looked so disconsolate and appeared so extremely doubtful if anyone in these desperate days could be trusted to keep *any* civilized appointment that Porius came near to uttering a grim chuckle.

"Do you want me to help you heaving him up?" he enquired; but when the tall man had moved his lamentable and yet resigned physiognomy on the pivot of his long spine in a negative fashion, he took his spear by its centre as if it were a dagger and incontinently bade them farewell.

"How much heavier," he thought, "are people's souls than their bodies. Compared with their souls their bodies are light as feathers!" And he imagined himself retreating to the Brother's cell with the body of the melancholy Morgant under one arm and the body of the obstreperous Llew under the other, while he left their heavy souls beneath this willow stump!

What he became most conscious of in a physical sense as he rounded the southwestern end of Saint Julian's Water was a peculiar smell carried on the mist.

"It's *their* smell," he told himself; and he would have found it hard to say whether it struck him as alluring or revolting. At any rate he could hardly call it unique, for it made him think of several smells that, without effort, he could conjure up. It reminded him for instance of the smell of the tadpoles — especially when they were dying or dead — which he had carried as a child to certain wayside puddles at the foot of the Gaer.

It also reminded him of the smell of an octopus that one of the learned monks in that school beyond Moel y Famau kept in a bucket and used to feed with fragments of meat, fragments which he carried from the refectory table in a particular fold of his habit.

And it called up a strange but not altogether unpleasing smell that on certain days used to hover over a salt estuary near that same Bishop's School, and which several old fishermen of that *cantref* swore by the heads of their mothers was the smell of the sea god Dylan.

He made no attempt to force himself to advance as fast as he could. "If I am afraid," he told himself, "of Creiddylad's people I am afraid of them! It's no good pretending I'm not; and it's no good playing the Brythonic hero over it, or the Mithraic hero either! It's a natural fear; and though I may be as strong as Hercules I'm a natural coward." And he set himself to recall certain vivid and memorable glimpses he had had as a child of his grandfather Iddawc, and he struggled with a vague and groping desperation to conjure up from these glimpses of Iddawc some sort of dim image of Iddawc's mother.

And then all suddenly in that inhuman mist he fancied he heard the sound of human weeping, and it seemed to him that the sobs he heard were not those of a woman nor of a child but of a man. In his excited mood and with his head full of Cewri and the daughters of Cewri this unexpected sound was a painful shock to him.

It had not often happened to him in his life to hear a man weep. With so much Roman blood in her veins his mother scarcely ever shed tears. Never once had he seen her cry because of his father's frivolous infidelities, nor had he failed to note how a special and peculiar look came into her face when in the galleries of the Gaer she had come upon some young Brython of the *Gosgordd* or some young serving woman from the forest people indulging in this sweetly healing relief.

He stood still and looked around him listening intently. No! Whatever it was he had heard, or imagined he heard, had ceased now altogether. Aye! But how well he knew the particular sound that had *not* ceased, but that monotonously, regularly, mathematically, repeated itself in his ears — the lapping of lake water!

There was something in this particular sound that always roused in him a mood of vague and obscure uneasiness. Of all sounds it was the sound he disliked the most. The little promontory of oozy mud in which he was now sinking was almost entirely surrounded by tall reeds. And among these reeds the water kept advancing and retreating with all manner of curious gurglings and lappings and suckings.

Still holding Gwythyr's spear tightly by the middle, as he was accustomed to do when hunting wild boars, Porius tried in vain to catch through the mist some glimpse of the notoriously ancient Craig Hen which just then was his *ael,* or "goal." He made no attempt to suppress his nervous apprehension. From his earliest childhood, and this applied to all children born in Edeyrnion, Craig Hen was a spot of holy terror. It was more "haunted" even than the Mound of y Bychan, the Roman-feared bandit.

Above Craig Hen, it was said, a descendant of the oak tree grew from whose branches the wicked enchanter Gwydion, who killed Pryderi, by *hud* and *lledrith* coaxed his own sister's son, Llew Llaw Gyffes, who bore the shape of a wounded eagle, with rhymes learnt from the Muses themselves, to come down to the ground.

And now it was his destiny, urged by an element in his nature that he could not understand, chosen for the task by his own father the prince who mocked them all, dragged love-weary out of the very arms of his bride, to creep through this strange-smelling mist with the lapping sound in his ears and the oozing mud in his sandals so as, if it might be done, to come face to face with creatures whose existence he had doubted all his life, creatures whose ancestors, twenty-five thousand years ago, must have crouched shivering in these very reeds while the awe-inspiring Rhitta Gawr passed on his way from the peaks of Eryri to the ridges of the Cader, and where, centuries upon centuries earlier, the enchanter Gwydion, coming from Maenor in Arfon, overtook the great sow who fed on the flesh of the eagle.

Once more there came upon him — only it seemed weaker and fainter this time — the weird fancy that he heard the sound of a man weeping.

"It's no good," he told himself, "this ridiculous standing on one leg in these reeds, till my flesh turns putrid for Gwydion's sow! I must get ahead and get on with this business. If I don't see that curst Old Stone soon I'll begin to think Pryderi's enemy's putting a spell on me too."

"Tungerong *larry* ong, endure until the end." Certainly there did seem to be some occult power in the sound of these words. Very slowly and very cautiously he advanced. And at last it seemed to him that he *did* really see the ghostly bulk of a great fragment of rock standing between land and water and dominating both these elements with its phantasmal enormity.

What teased his mind to its depths just then, as he struggled on towards this shadowy image, taunting his thoughts and towering over his self-respect, was the interior fact that he had allowed his inner nature to confuse itself with his outer nature; had in fact permitted the instinctive continuity of the tide of his life illusion to be so tossed about upon so many contrary winds and crisscrossed by so many arbitrary currents, that the simple primeval voices of “I love” and “I hate,” or “I want” and “I don’t want,” or “I will” and “I *never* will,” had grown to be as confused as the soughing of these reeds and the gurglings of this lapping water.

And it was as much without shame at this change, as it was without exultation, that Porius now faced the startling fact that the two dominant emotions of his life — his pleasure in completely yielding to the will of Morfydd, and the secret stories he told himself about imitating his ancestor, Edeyrn ap Cunedda, and carrying off a daughter of the Cewri — had lost their unwavering edges and clear outlines.

It was not that they had lost their separate identity or had mingled with each other. It was rather that they had assumed different positions in relation to each other and had allowed something completely alien to each of them, an attitude to life and the elements in which human relations played little part, to move forward and establish itself ahead of them both.

This new thing was naturally an old thing, or it wouldn’t have had the strength to dominate his life illusion; but it had taken to itself a completely new power and he saw it under a completely new light.

Sucking, gurgling, and lapping, the water at his feet eddied about the stalks of the reeds, while their roots, hidden deep below the surface, drew down through their clammy veins life-giving nourishment from the elements of the air.

Step by step he moved slowly forward, discommoded by his weight and his natural clumsiness as much as by the confusion of his thoughts. At any moment now he might see with his actual living eyes this second Creiddylad, this imaginary Creiddylad of the secret craving of his whole youth.

But what had happened to him? All he felt at this high, pregnant, never-to-return moment was an uneasy dread, mingled with an almost comical sense of having left — he the one strong, serious Samson of their tribe — the whole business of repelling this ferocious Colgrim, with a numerous army of savage Saeson, to his mocking and frivolous father.

His thoughts moved as rapidly and as shamelessly as they always did as he lifted first his right foot and then his left foot out of the mud, carefully avoiding the places where the reeds were thick so that they shouldn't make any susurrating sound as they beat against his legs.

Again he seemed to hear— "Blest gods! But this *must* be my fancy!" he thought — the disturbing sound of a man weeping; and this time there came with it the memory of that picture in his mother's room of the baby Jesus with a snake, and of the expression on the snake's face. That expression was unmistakable.

He had understood it before he could pronounce any articulate word. "I protest," it said, "against this whole apotheosis of Love which you as God are now inaugurating. Love is the craftiest sublimation of the possessive instinct. I admit it gives with both hands. But what it does it always does for a reward. It lays up treasure. I tell you," so it had seemed to him this snake's eye said, "one touch of freedom is worth a king's ransom of love."

Mother of God, yes! He knew now what it was that had started him thinking of that snake's eye and all it contained. It was this curst Saint Julian's Water and its sticky mud and whispering reeds! When was it — three years ago? — by Christ, no! only last Thursday — that he had parted from his father when he broke their sword and had done — or was *all that an hallucination?* — some sort of act of homage to Medrawd! "Then it was only last Thursday," he thought. "But Holy Jesus! the whole thing's crazy! It's like the spell laid by Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed to avenge Gwawl, about which that boy said the Henog was reading to Brother John this morning! And yet it was only last Thursday that old Rhun made me taste his sun god's honey that'll make us brothers-in-arms for life! Well! We're brothers for life all right, but it's brothers-in-love rather than brothers-in-war. *However!* Whether by the honey of Mithras or by the kiss of Morfydd, old Rhun and I *are* linked up — and if the link's cut it won't be by me!"

It was at that particular moment, by some occult movement of omnipotent Chance, that a faint shifting of the wind from southwest to due west took place by means of which a slight lifting of the mist permitted the gigantic outlines of Craig Hen to tower up unmistakably before him a good deal nearer and sooner than he had expected.

He took three long abstracted strides through the reeds, staring intently at the huge natural battlements before him and entirely forgetting his previous caution about the noise the reeds made switching against the leather of the straps round his legs. This unexpected shifting of the wind had brought it about that, though the lower portion of the Old Stone was still cloudy and obscure, its upper part was revealed in all the jaggedness of its origin.

In fact it was presented to Porius in the precise way it had been left when the original cosmic convulsion had cracked its heart, wrenched it from its foundations, shattered its symmetry, splintered its curves into gaping chasms, and with the peculiar ecstatic delight wherein Chance, the greatest of all artists, extemporizes her creations, carved signs and symbols upon its furrowed forehead that only the final race upon earth would probably — if even they — possess the wisdom to read.

More clearly than ever he now heard the sound he had taken for a man's weeping. He stood stone-still in the wet mud in an effort to make out whether what he heard came from the upheaved fragment of chaos before him, or from among the pine trees that grew here in scattered groups, on ledge after ledge of the terraced hillside, until they were swallowed up by the forest.

"By God!" he thought. "I believe that man *is* up there among those trees, and not at the Old Stone!"

It gave him an intense feeling of relief that this weeper should not be at the Craig Hen; and he knew very well that one of the more natural causes of this relief was simply the excuse it gave him for delay.

During the whole of this morning's quest, passed on to him so airily and perfunctorily by his light-hearted parent, he had been aware that his youthful mania for the Cewri and his manhood's craving to beget a child on the gigantically sweet body of some Creiddylad of his own finding was not what it had been, was indeed completely different from what it had been; and now as he stood staring at the Craig Hen and listening to *that* sound, there formed itself in his mind, for the power he possessed of rapid self-analysis, though diminished by his recent reckless lavishing of the life force in his bridal bed, was still operative in him, the knowledge that he had at last, while he'd been stalking these Cewri, stalking them like wild beasts round this old familiar little muddy lake, found out what he, Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn, really *was* — Mother of God, yes! — and really wanted!

He lugged his feet out of the mud now and moved on, cautiously still, but perceptibly quicker than before. He decided he'd leave that unhappy man up there among the fir trees *till he'd seen the Cewri.*

And it was at this moment that he began to realize that the particular portion of the Old Stone nearest to the ground, where there was a circular space not unlike a cave but open to all the winds save the one from the northeast, was just now clouded by something that was different from the yellow mist.

Smoke! Cannibalistic monsters that they were, they had evidently lit a natural human friendly bivouac fire in their hiding place! He moved forward a few more paces, grasping Gwythyr's spear by its centre and staring fixedly into the hollow space at the foot of the Old Stone whence the smoke was emerging.

Again he heard *that sound* — whatever it was — and he could not make up his mind even now whether after all it came from the hillside or from the hole in the rock.

He had long ago noted as a *cynneddf,* or "peculiarity", in himself that under the pressure of any disturbing crisis or of any exceptionally agitating occasion that might turn out to be a crisis, his mind had an automatic tendency to take critical stock of its strength and weakness as an instrument for coping with life, and he often reached at such times conclusions that in calmer conditions would never have emerged.

And he told himself now as he stole forward towards the smoke, with that sound of a man weeping on his right hand, with that loathsome lapping of lake water on his left hand, and with shapes in the smoke out of which his imagination had no difficulty in conjuring up beautiful, terrible, majestical faces, that what he wanted in the depths of his being was simply to be left alone to enjoy his own thoughts and sensations and to watch and wait, here in Edeyrnion — and to hell with the Bosporus! — submitting to Morfydd and going about with Rhun, what the future had in store — *tungerong larry ong*!— "enduring until the end."

What, however, actually happened then remained, until that same "end," a wild series of broken, inchoate, inconsequent, inconclusive impressions. It was a hoarse cry — more like the howl of a sentinel wolf than of a human watchman — from the weeping man among the trees, that must have warned the *cawr* and *cawres* of Porius's approach.

And these two must have taken him for the first of a silent pack of men and dogs with bows and arrows and spears and hunting knives, if not with that terrible magic water that Lludd sprinkled upon the Coranians and destroyed their whole race!

For incontinently they left their fire and their feast and came forth, fleeing towards the Cader, and they passed so close to Porius that he could see the features of the half-devoured corpse the *cawr* was carrying away, and he knew those features as the features of the young Mabsant, formerly of the emperor's court, whose mission to the Gaer he had himself so rudely interrupted only three days ago!

Little had this spirited lad — and indeed little had he himself when he lifted him from his saddle — guessed to what a *tynged,* or, in the Cewri language, to what an *ong,* his Edeyrnion quest would carry him!

But the figure of the *cawres* who followed at the heels of this devourer of beautiful young men drew Porius's attention with an absorption that was irresistible from the ghastly and pitiful burden the *cawr* was carrying. The countenance of the *cawres,* for she was the man's daughter and not his wife, bore not the faintest resemblance to that of her father. He indeed looked exactly what he was, the last of the cavemen of the mountains, last of the creatures who had lived on the slopes of Eryri and the Cader long before the Ffichtiaid appeared as if out of the bowels of the earth with their treacherous servility, or the Gwyddylaid had crossed the sea with their weapons of "pitiless bronze."

But the things that absorbed Porius's attention about the majestic feminine creature who followed this savage old aboriginal were not at first the monumental outlines of her figure or the elemental proportions of her face. They were her clothes. The old *cawr* who preceded her was dressed in sheepskins with the wool left just as it was when the animal was killed, but this young *cawres* displayed quite a perceptible discrimination in what she wore, having a loincloth, if so it could be called, made of moleskins that had been carefully cured before they were sewn together, and in place of sheepskins wearing several very flexible and particularly soft deerskins, put on one above another, not in a rough hugger-mugger manner, but with considerable awareness of their general effect.

It was as if she, the last of the aboriginals of Ynys Prydein, had been led by Nature to show to the woods and lakes and precipices and caverns, if not to the wolves and eagles and ravens and foxes, what the sheer instinct of femininity could achieve, in and by and for itself, without any help from outside.

The young *cawres* had even twisted her heavy straw-coloured hair into great massive yellow braids, braids that gleamed and glittered when the sun shone upon them with a metallic lustre, braids which waved and tossed round her neck as she moved, falling sometimes between her shoulders and sometimes between her breasts.

Although the young *cawres* followed her father in their retreat, she didn't follow close behind; and it was clear that she was by no means bent, as he was, on escape at any cost.

For a second Porius stood like a stump of ice, cold, squat, and repellent. At least that was how his frozen quiescence struck the young giantess. But a second later something entered his blood that changed this ice into stone, so that he seemed to her like a pillar of basaltic slate, not repellent any more but hard as iron.

Her father had not, for all she could tell, caught a glimpse of this motionless broad-shouldered man, whose small yellow-green eyes seemed in a flash to take possession of her, body and soul. It could hardly be called a look or a glance, the rush of magnetic intimation that passed so instantaneously between them; for what their natures felt was a mutual assimilation of each other's sex as complete as the melting of a cloud into the yellow-green space of evening or the mingling of a far-drawn inland river with the salt sea.

No, her impression was that her father had not seen the man; but the young *cawres* had not yet, for all her life at his side, sounded the abysmal animal cunning of the ancient savage who begat her.

The last of the Cewri had shrewdly enough, with the corner of his crafty left eye, under its drooping lid, taken his own measure of the terrific muscular power of this motionless man’s arms and shoulders; nor had he gone past him by much more than three times his own length than he began — apparently quite naturally and casually — making signs to his daughter to follow him more closely.

Several times after that, Porius saw him turn round to see if she were still safely behind him and not lingering; but when he had satisfied himself that his fears were groundless and had realized that the young *cawres* was moving, if anything, still closer to him the further he got from the water, these anxious turnings and peremptory wavings entirely ceased.

And then there came to Porius, as he watched them ascend one by one the long series of steep rock ridges leading to the foothills of the mountains, what was really an extremely complicated crisis in his life. It *could* be called a moral crisis; but it was much more than that. It could also have been called an aesthetic or even perhaps a metaphysical crisis.

But it was really more than any of these things. It concerned his whole life as a living organism. What the extraordinary encounter that had just taken place had done for him was something that even the experience of holding Myrddin Wyllt in his arms had been unable to do. It had so increased the division between his mind and his body that his mind had suddenly felt powerful enough to put an end once and for all to the disconcerting *equality* between these two antagonists, powerful enough to assert itself once for all as the dominant partner.

He became conscious of his mind as a living entity, using his body but distinct from his body. His mind felt as if it had suddenly become a new creature, strung up in itself, flexible and porous in itself, compact and resilient from centre to circumference, and able, as it had never been able before, to choose between opposite possibilities of action, and taking hold of its lumbering brother-in-arms to use that simple companion for purposes that must seem to it both fantastic and obscure.

The shock he had received as his eyes met those of the *cawres* was different from anything that had ever happened to him before or would ever happen to him again. Through each pair of eyes, as through double gulfs in thick banks of clouds that have unaccountably risen to face each other across the firmament, the primal mystery of the differing consciousness of male and female as it tore its way through Time and Space struck his whole organism such a transforming blow that his brain began to work with a sensitive grasp that in itself was a new experience.

He measured the time the two Cewri would take to reach the rocky platform upon the skyline, beyond whose surface stretched a dense forest of pines leading eventually through the wildest and loneliest stretch of country in all Edeyrnion to the foothills of the Cader.

Putting aside the possibility of the old *cawr* being seized with a fit of such desperate animal panic that he'd be compelled to relinquish the half-eaten corpse and carry the young *cawres* instead, Porius saw that it was humanly impossible for them to get out of his sight for the next half an hour.

With a speed almost worthy of Rhun himself he set out therefore at a run, jumping over every sort of obstacle that could be so treated and steering his course to that portion of the hillside where he had heard the weeping man.

As he went he kept glancing at those two figures, mounting, ridge after ridge towards that bare platform where the forest began. It is true they were less clearly outlined against the dying bracken and dead heather than they'd have been against the new growths of the spring, but they were more distinct than he could have ever imagined it conceivable that such a sight could be.

"I've plenty of time," he told himself, "if I have any luck."

And Uncle Brochvael's goddess of fortune gave him the luck he required; though how to reconcile such pure chance with the deep-flowing current of destiny would need a chronicler more learned in what the young Taliesin always called "the wisdom of Africa" than any Henog of these isles.

Yes, there it was — the curious sound of a strong, formidable, elderly man indulging in a passionate and apparently unquenchable fit of weeping.

"He's leaning against one of those trees," Porius said to himself. "I'll soon find him."

But as he moved from the foot of one fir tree to the foot of another he couldn't get the young *cawres* out of his mind; and the natural but ungracious thought came into his head that it was strange that, after embracing his bride all those hours and lavishing on her so much of his life force, he could feel all he felt for that young aboriginal climbing from ridge to ridge so close behind her father but every now and then turning round hurriedly and furtively and flinging a glance in his direction.

"She knows what I'm doing," he said to himself. "Does she guess what I'm going to do?"

Suddenly he was actually touching the man he sought; and to his amazement it was none other than his old friend Afagddu, Afagddu of the hideously mutilated countenance, whom only three days ago he had watched setting off with the emperor's nephew in company with a lad whose name, though he could see his face almost as clearly as he saw Afagddu's at this moment, he had entirely forgotten.

There were no tears on the monstrously deformed face, but it took the soul within the man several long seconds before he could bring under control the muscles and nerves of that distorted visage and that knotted gullet that were flinging forth these reverberating sobs.

And even when he had succeeded in quieting himself and quelling his lamentation, he could explain nothing nor reveal anything till he had extracted from beneath his clothing the precious chain which Porius had forced the prince to hand over to him, and the princely cap made of the skin of those extinct oxen which he had himself removed from his own head to place in his keeping.

The conscience-lacerated man was in fact unable to explain anything till the oxhide cap covered Porius's skull and the prince's chain was round Porius's throat.

But when this transaction was over, though even then he seemed to find crouching on the pine needles under that corrugated trunk a more fitting posture for a confessed traitor than standing on his feet, he poured forth in a torrent of eloquence the whole pitiful story.

It was through his patriotism that the old warrior had finally been seduced, his patriotism for the cause of the forest people and for the cause, along with the forest people, of all those in Ynys Prydein who were neither Romans, nor Brythonic princes and nobles in league with Romans, those, in fact, who as even strangers like the Jewish doctor were beginning to recognize, *called themselves* Cymry.

It was with some restraint and hesitation that the old man revealed the subtlest of Medrawd's arguments, among them the powerful one that apparently had seduced the silent youth whose name Porius forgot, namely, that Prince Einion himself— "Ha!" thought Porius. "So that wasn't missed, eh?" — went through the motion of doing homage to Medrawd as Arthur's heir.

As in the minds of the unfortunate Princesses of Ogof-y-Gawr, it was a rooted and grounded tradition with the forest people that a ruler's heir was the king's nephew and not the king's son.

Thus no child of the emperor's could possibly, in the public opinion of the *Cymry,* put forward a claim to succeed him stronger than Medrawd's. Indeed to Afagddu, as to the Aunties, Arthur's own position, whether as the son of Uthyr Pendragon the great Brythonic prince, or as Comes of the British coast in the interest of Rome, had always been — as Porius realized it still was with Einion ab Iddawc — an extremely doubtful one.

But what Afagddu finally revealed — and the shudder with which he did so made the black recesses in the dark red hollows of his revoltingly mangled face grow still more horrible — was a much greater surprise to Porius than the unfortunate man's divided allegiance. He helped him to his feet at once and bade him hurry off without delay to the Gaer to convey his news to the prince.

And then as the two men, under the influence of that curious necessity, amounting to an intimate craving felt by those who have been separated under dramatic conditions and brought together again under circumstances still more startling, stared at each other as they silently divested themselves of the ghostly wrappings that concealed the bleeding wound where their loyalty had been wrenched apart, there rushed into Porius's mind a real Brythonic inspiration.

"You're the same old friend of mine as ever, Afagddu," he murmured, "and it is to none but my father that you must give back his chain!" And with this he rapidly bent forward, and kissing him at the base of his forehead just above his deformed nose, he squeezed the chain, though not without some difficulty, over his corrugated forehead and protruding ears and with a swift glance at the two climbers who were even then a long distance from the last of the rocky terraces, he broke away from the man's emotion and went off at what to himself seemed a fast run.

He was not, however, any more than were his prototypes Samson and Hercules, much of a runner; and though the sight of his "Creiddylad," for in his secret senses she was already installed under the name of the mother of Iddawc ab Edeyrn, gave him the power, not given to all, of running uphill, his speed was not only retarded by lack of the energy he had lavished in the bed of his bride, but by his amazement at Afagddu's news.

In a physical sense his heart must have been as strong as the heart of one of those extinct oxen whose hide was now once again pulled tightly over his closely cropped skull, for though the jerky leaps and violent bounds with which he pursued his youthful *cawres* were anything but the easy movements of a classic athlete, they would have been impossible to any living organism whose heart was not more like the heart of a wild boar than of a man.

It was through a confused enough mass of material impressions that the full impact of this news had to force its way. The contact of his lips with Afagddu's face had in itself left behind it an obstructing amalgam of such impressions, sweat, tears, blackness, redness, hairiness, and the acrid smell of unwashed masculine flesh, while the slippery knots of the exposed roots of heather, the burnished stalks of bracken, the dead blackness of crowberries, the scaly surfaces of yellow-green lichens, the orange-pink clumps of stonecrop, upon which the soles of his sandals kept pressing as his deep-drawn gasps grew more and more heavy in his upward rush, were all contributions to the entangled screen that imposed itself between his intelligence and this astonishing news.

And what news it was! He had just learnt from Afagddu that Medrawd had been concealed at the Old Stone for the last couple of nights and had been having constant interviews with Erim and the Derwydd, and even — and this clearly had struck Afagddu as the most ominous thing of all — with Mistress Nineue, the handmaid of the counsellor's sister!

Afagddu had confessed moreover that he himself suspected — though he had no evidence to support this ultimate and final treachery of his seducer — that Medrawd had, during these two nights and days, secretly met — and perhaps even was, at this very moment, hurrying off to join — emissaries and envoys of the bloodthirsty Sais!

Certainly the face of the emperor's nephew, as he had seen it three days ago, ran with Porius now as he ran, climbed with him now as he climbed, stumbled and slipped and fell with him, and struggled on again, nearer and nearer to this beautiful *cawres,* whose name he felt surer with every step he took was and must be Creiddylad.

Long after the nature of Time had brought it about that this particular day, this day that came to occupy a special dimension of its own in his memory, had been, as the Jewish doctor would express it, "gathered to its fathers," Porius could remember certain moments of it as vividly as if he had slept only one night since his consciousness passed through them.

The present chronicler of this same consciousness has already recorded how, as the only son of Einion and Euronwy and also as the foster-child of Rhun's mother, Alarch the Fair, Porius had learnt the trick at a very early age of separating the docile and obedient routine of his outward actions by a considerable gulf, both from his secret physical sensations and from his secret mental commentaries.

And the older he had grown, the wider had become this gulf; for both these personal responses were of the kind in which he could indulge without rippling the surface, far less disturbing the depths, of the massive docility of his life.

But it was doubtless due to this curious psychic lacuna, this steadily widening magnetic gap, between what might be called the nerve centres of his consciousness and the motions, and emotions too, in a patient and plodding sense, of his behaviour, that he fell into the abnormal habit, already alluded to, of substituting in his own mind some arbitrary, accidental, and fantastically irrelevant substance or colour or shape for some human person, or for his reaction to some human person by whom his life was at the moment troubled.

With his heart pounding, his pulses beating, his breath coming in gasps, and the salt sweat running down into his eyes, he now began to visualize the palpable and physical aspect of the rape to which he was being whirled by his own will, while the young *cawres* lingered for him up there, dodging that savage old Titan, her monstrous begetter.

Horribly and beautifully he visualized it. And the beauty was reached through horror, and the horror was reached through beauty.

And both the beauty and the horror came from the same causes — from the majestic stature of this goddess-giant and from his having found her so soon after leaving his bridal bed that no overpowering rush of passion could blind him.

Thus the present chronicler is by truth compelled to be more explicit than that cunning artist, the Henog of Dyfed, had been in his account of the dark enemies of Pryderi. For the rape of the young giantess now presented itself to her Herculean pursuer as a reproduction, with a difference, of what he'd seen when he pressed his face against the face of Afagddu.

It became in fact a swirling bottomless pool, wherein there whirled round and round a terrible vortex of all the beautiful and horrible waves and eddies and ground swells of black blood and crimson blood, mingled with slime and scum and ooze and seaweedlike hair, that cover the shoals and porches of the threshold of life.

When he reached the rock platform it was with a lively shock of crafty relief that he found that the *cawres* had left it. Ah! The wise Creiddylad! She realized what she was doing! For Porius, who knew every stick and stone of these particular foothills, as well as any *cawres* of the Cader, was well aware that between this platform and one of the loneliest and most hidden of the small mountain lakes that waylaid and sidetracked the foolhardy stranger who fancied he could discover an ascent to the Cader through the impenetrable forests of this northeastern approach, there was a mass of undergrowth so ancient and so thick that if two persons attempted to thread its mazes and keep together they would have to remain in close physical contact.

Oh, she was a woman all right, *cawres* or no *cawres*! For here was the place, and the only place till they got above the trees altogether, where that formidable old Titan of a father could be given the slip!

He stood still, panting; and so extreme was the mingling of his excitement and exhaustion that he felt as if his heart, not himself, were the conscious creature who had brought him here; and as if he himself, his brain, his feelings, his desires, even his very muscles, were like a bundle of gristle to which dead leaves and bits of rubble and the wilting feathers of small birds killed by buzzards stuck fast, and whose only reason of existence was to guard that tell-tale master of life, his thumping heart!

But, he told himself, here was the kind of special moment for which that same *tynged* which made him what he was, so sensitive to his father's mockery, so submissive to the wishes of his mother and his bride, so closely bound to old Rhun, had, ever since Alarch the Fair first bent over his pillow, armed and prepared him.

He promptly decided that it would be mad to plunge blindly forward into the dense thicket which surrounded that platform with a half-circle of entangled branches and thorns and briars. And yet were he to shout, the father as well as the daughter would hear him and come bolting back ready to wring his neck!

That the old *cawr* could do for him in any hand-to-hand tussle he had no doubt; finish him off he could, and he certainly *would* if he got the chance, and afterwards carry him away under his left arm as a counterpoise to the half-devoured corpse under his right. And as he stood there hesitating and getting his breath, and letting the thumping of his heart subside, the grotesque image butted its gross way into his consciousness of the savage old caveman compelling his daughter to eat the flesh of this Brythonic Samson for whose sake she had stayed behind.

Had the Henog of Dyfed been the chronicler of these events the chances are that he would, according to his Silurian tradition, have hesitated to describe Porius as feeling particularly proud of his unusual strength or as giving utterance in his heart to a wish to test this strength against a real living *cawr y Cader,* but there is no doubt he would have managed to give the episode the sort of romantic twist it would have attained had he allowed the old monster to contend in a life-and-death struggle with Porius while the young Creiddylad looked on.

As a matter of fact the only occasions in his life when Porius had ever thought about his strength were when his mind ran upon the original

Creiddylad, and he felt a thrill of excitement at the thought of inheriting the blood of the real aboriginals of Ynys Prydein.

Apart from these occasions he just instinctively used the consciousness of his strength as an assurance of security, as a pledge that one cautious and cowardly observer of the stream of life, at least, should have a peaceful and untroubled existence. It is very doubtful whether the Henog would have seen that Porius's eager response to the voyage to the Bosporus was entirely due to his natural craving to be free from an overloving mother and an overcontemptuous father.

The Henog would have taken for granted that what urged him to undertake this embassy was a pure craving for adventure. But he would have been wholly wrong. Porius was so constituted that almost all his pleasure in existence consisted of two parallel activities — his active enjoyment of the simplest sensations of living and his active enjoyment of the subtlest analysis of life. For adventure, as adventure, he cared nothing.

As he stood there now on this platform of rock listening intently to the strange moanings that the wind was making in the various kinds of trees — like the waves of the sea through the pines, like the rushing of wings through the birches, like the rustling of garments through the hawthorns — he began to wonder what he would do if the *cawres* had not waited for him. Would he just give up and go off upon his errand from Einion to Myrddin Wyllt?

And then — without the faintest sound that a man, or even an animal-like old *cawr,* could possibly associate with the passage of so stately a figure through so thick a wood; and how she did it, save perhaps by "waiting upon the wind," and only moving when the wind moved, and in exact proportion to the lesser or greater intensity of the wind's movements, who could say? — the *cawres* herself, the very "Creiddylad" of his secretest broodings, and yet a real, living, breathing, goddesslike young girl, came forth from that thick chaos of autumnal vegetation and stood before him, with one finger pressing her lips in the immemorial gesture of feminine warning, and with the other loosening her belt of plaited reeds in the immemorial gesture of feminine complicity and consent.

There was a strip of moss and grass, mixed with delicate small ferns and the foliage of wood sorrel and corydalis, that extended the whole length of the rocky platform on which they were standing, separating its saxifrage and stonecrop and yellow-green lichen from the dark wall of trees and undergrowth from which she had just emerged. Upon this tender and yielding couch the *cawres* now laid herself down; and Porius, with deliberate movements that well might have shocked a less primordial partner in the art of love, stripped both himself and his large-limbed companion of every strip of clothing that impeded their complete union, and throwing himself upon her heavily breathing supine body, which seemed to his bewildered senses like a great field that the Immortals had blessed, he succeeded, after a struggle in which he might easily have failed, in mingling his life with hers, and, grotesque as it would have appeared to his own derisive begetter, discovered for the second time on that day of stubble-coloured mist and of southwest wind what it meant to take a ravisher's possession of yielded virgin soil.

If the taking of Morfydd had been rendered easy by the girl's gallant and heroic passivity, the rape of this last cawres of the Cader was rendered difficult by the goddesslike creature's own overpowering passion.

But he was not a Hercules for nothing, and it was accomplished at last; and they both lay there, between rock and wood, in an exhaustion that was as indescribably Time sweet as it was unutterably Space deep; and over Porius's senses there floated that same ineffable Cewri scent that Morfydd's father had noticed when the coming of the pair interrupted the priest's call for vengeance.

But his vital force soon began to return to him; and, when it did so, it seemed to reach him through the living and breathing body of this great beautiful creature, the mere momentary possession of whom had flung him upon an enchanted shore of deep and fathomless rest. It was she who had drained him of his strength, but it was now she who was restoring it to him, restoring it out of those elemental depths of planetary substance, substance of air, substance of water, substance of fire, substance of earth, into which, beyond and beneath the living substance of flesh, extended the great paradisic division of male and female.

And as his strength returned, though he still lay against her just where he had turned himself half-about after their supreme embrace, he suddenly heard her voice whispering something. Her voice was deep and sweet, but not flutelike or clear. It was more like the sound of rain upon innumerable leaves.

But it was uttering now a particular collocation of tender syllabic sounds that as he listened did not seem altogether unfamiliar. Throwing a tone of imploring supplication into his request he begged her to repeat those words.

She lifted herself upon her elbow and looked at him as if to make sure he was serious. Then she sat up erect, pulling her vest of doeskin across her bosom and her shimmering loincloth across her lap and coiling the heavy braids of massive yellow hair round the top of her head.

Then with an emotion so intense that it brought a double frown to her broad low forehead and caused two tears as big as hailstones to roll down her cheeks, she repeated three or four times over, chanting it as if it were the burden of a song, the double word, "*cariad-digon*," syllables that so hit just where he least expected to be hit, the nerve of imaginative romance in his heart, that he scrambled to his knees by her side and twisting his fingers in her hair kissed her hard on the mouth, while his own tears mixed with hers.

"Tungerong larry ong," he gasped as their loud sobs rose and fell in grotesque alternation, while his mind, moving now as rapidly as it had ever done, decided that this double word, *cariad-digon*— "love is enough" — had very likely been handed down among the Cewri as an occult, mystical saying, in the manner of old Rhun's Persian *Nama, Nama, Sebesio,* ever since Edeyrn the son of Cunedda taught his Creiddylad to repeat it in some hidden cave of the Cader before he carried her off.

Ill-advised for Creiddylad the Second was his making her repeat those words this day; for their united sobs now became louder than those of the weeping man he had left below. He would never have been so drawn, as he had been all his conscious days, to the obscurely transmitted eidolon of his ancestress from the Cader, never have been so drawn to the idea of the daughters of the Cewri, if there hadn't been something in his inmost identity which descended from them and belonged to them, something really aboriginal in him that made the Ffichtiaid seem of the day before yesterday, the Gwyddylaid and the forest people seem of yesterday, and his own Romanized Brythons seem of a mechanical, rhetorical, loud-echoing, noisy *today*!

Yes, there was a magnetic reciprocity between him and this aboriginal creature from the caves of the mountains that united them as the tide coming in from the sea unites the water pools in the salt marshes, raising the level of the water and lifting it above its banks of mud.

An unfulfilled craving was in each of them — the deep sex-yearning of one primeval form of matter for another primeval form of matter. And it was the satisfaction of this craving that now broke forth in these mighty sobs.

It was as when some deluge of ancient rains, long accumulated in the rock chasms above an overbrimmed river, is liberated at last from bondage and rolls down the slope and meets and mingles with the flood below; and as it descends, and as the river rises to meet it, their two voices become one sound, and the one sound their voices become is the sound of a joy that can only be expressed in lamentation.

But even the expression of a feeling too primeval for anything but passionate sobs or howling bursts of laughter was not permitted by the exacting destinies of that corner of Edeyrnion to last for long.

Even though the wind carried their emotion eastward rather than westward, their happy lamentation was, as Homer would say, so like the desperate crying of a pair of sea eagles that it was not long before it brought the old *cawr* upon them. Together they leapt to their feet to meet him, and Porius glanced hurriedly round to see where he'd dropped Gwythyr's spear. Dropped it he had at the first appearance of Creiddylad, and he could see it now lying on a bed of fading stonecrop with the sun glittering on its iron point.

Never in all the days of his life had he needed a spear so desperately as now. In his longing for a spear he could *feel* a spear in his hand. Even one of those great ridiculous lances borne by the *equites* of the emperor — he would have given all the relics of Rhitta Gawr for any one of them!

Ail this while there was a spear in full view. But how in the name of the Mother of God was he to get hold of it? The *cawr* was after him now, and he had to dodge and skip and dance for his life. The old monster's gigantic arms were free of the corpse. The wrenched-up trunk of a pine tree, along with its straggly root, whose corrugated excrescences and compressed knobs were hard as quarried marble, was clutched in those horny hands, while a veritable frenzy of fury distorted that enormous visage.

With the most primitive of all weapons whirling at his head, first from the north and then from the south, the giant pursued him, up and down the whole length of that platform of rock. He found himself calling out again and again to the *cawres,* “Pick up my spear! Pick up my spear!” But of course these syllables were mere gibberish to the second Creiddylad, who at first, till the huge creature shook her off so violently that she lay for a moment stunned, tried to cling to his arm and his waist.

After this she made use of more cunning tactics. She began repeatedly running between her father and her lover, so that the old giant couldn’t aim his tree trunk at the man’s head with any ease or freedom.

But even this made little difference, and the grotesque dance went on till at last Porius began to feel completely exhausted. He had never been a runner like Rhun. Rhun would have led this monstrous creature such a dance that before it was over he would have been able in full sight of him to stoop and pick up that thrice-blest piece of wood with an iron point.

Iron! That was the one thing needful in dealing with monsters like this! The voice of his foster-mother, Aunt Alarch the Fair, rose up within him, playing a game called “Touch Wood!”

But wearily and for the thousandth time he jerked himself aside to avoid the swing of that frightful tree trunk with its octopus root. And wearily and for the thousandth time he asked himself whether he would have even a faint chance if he ran in under that brandished tree and seized the giant by the waist.

Not the faintest chance! All the muscles of Samson and Hercules together would be helpless before a Goliath like this. To wrestle with this creature would be like wrestling with yr Wyddfa, the peak tomb of Cronos.

A man couldn’t wrestle with a mountain. “I can’t go on,” he said to himself. “I’m done for! She’ll feel funny when she sees him carry me off under his arm as a counterweight to — *Creiddylad*!”

But his cry was too late to save her. She had seen his exhaustion. She had seen the rapidly decreasing energy of his leapings aside; and now, when a particularly savage descent of the tree trunk took advantage of his weariness, she just flung herself between him and the blow.

One of the most hammerlike bulgings of that knotted root struck her on the side of the head. Her skull cracked like a floating sea shell struck by the prow of a powerfully rowed boat. Porius could see the blood and more than the blood. The whole side of her head was cracked, crushed, and smitten in. Broken bits of her skull, to which were adhering blood-soaked strands of yellow hair, hung down against her shoulder.

Porius could see these sickening details more clearly than the giant himself who now dropped the tree trunk, and snatching up his daughter in both his arms, where he held her as a mother holds an infant, flung at his enemy — and these were the first sounds Porius had heard him utter — a wild and terrible word, the reverberation of which no living man at whom it was aimed could ever forget; and Porius never did forget its psychic vibration, though of the syllables that composed it he remembered nothing, for it was a long scaly word like the prolonged hissing of a dragon heard through miles of marshy reeds; and Porius could feel its deadly venom, like the spittle of an insane incubus, strike ice-cold against his cheek.

His one desire now was, for once, simple and direct and of a devouring rapacity in regard to alternative possibilities. It swallowed them as a hydra might swallow its own eggs! He must get his Creiddylad — his *cawres* now for ever — into his own hands. And with this thought filling his whole being, body and soul, he staggered over to where Gwythyr’s spear lay upon the faded clump of stonecrop, snatched it up, brandished it with a shaking arm, for his skipping life-and-death dance of escape had left him weak, and, trembling and tottering as he was, stumbled with frantic desperation straight at the old *cawr.*

An instinctive seizure of something very nearly approaching panic took possession of the huge creature the moment he caught sight of that iron point. Had the sun been glittering upon it, it would have been less menacing. But the dense wall of forest trees that fronted them already concealed the late October sun and the wan, cold, livid, heartless, deadly look of that iron spear point struck a nerve of superstitious fear in the old *cawr,* as he hugged his daughter, that went back thousands of generations to what his race suffered in the beginning from the "pitiless bronze" and the "grey iron."

So the old *cawr* fled in panic-terror by the path by which he had come, for by returning along the track he had originally taken, he had made, such was his colossal size, as if an Avanc had been forcing its way through the forest, a quite perceptible track; and behind him, sometimes gaining on him and sometimes distanced by him, Porius, with reckless desperation, a crushed skull swimming before him and a grey spear point giving strength to his feeble knees, came lurching and lumbering, staggering and stumbling, wanting only to possess in death what had been given him in life.

Several times he tripped and came near falling, but he caught himself up in time, for he knew by an instinct in his bones that once on the ground he would have found it hard if not impossible to resume this obstinate jog-trot of grey iron seeking red blood. And then, all suddenly, the mad race was over and done. There appeared an opening in the dense wood; and first the *cawr* with the *cawres* in his arms and then the exhausted descendant of the older Creiddylad passed through this opening, Porius catching sight, as he did so, of the ghastly half-devoured body of Mabsant, whose eyes, staring up at him from among the delicate ferns where he'd been flung, had the horrible *damned* look of the eyes of some hunted creature brought, head and all, to a human feast, impaled on a platter.

And there before them under the open sky, with the sun illuminating its deep clear water, was the first, and also the secretest and most hidden, of all the mysterious and fathomless lakes or tarns, that from the beginning of Time, at least from an upheaval worked by some planetary catastrophe unrecorded in Time, seem to have been designed by Nature herself to protect the security of her primal offspring.

The *cawr* paused and looked back over his shoulder at his pursuer. This, and the glimpse he had had of the half-devoured boy, drew Porius on in a final surge of desire to hold the goddesslike creature, whose blood was trickling down the old giant's body, safe in his own arms:

So he hurled himself forward, with the iron-pointed spear raised to strike, and in a second the old *cawr* had done what may well have been at the back of his mind to do ever since he took his dead child in his arms.

Plunging head foremost without a cry or a curse he leapt with her into those sun-illumined depths of emerald green water, and such was the violence and weight of his plunge — with the *cawres* clutched so tight to his ribs that had she been alive his hug would have killed her — that he sank, like a landslide, clear down to where a great splintered rock, projecting itself from the side of that underwater cavern, blocked the way.

Had this obstacle not obtruded itself he and the *cawres* would doubtless have sunk clear down to the bottom, though it is probable they would have floated up to the top again in the passing of a couple of days and nights.

They sank so rapidly and heavily, however, that when they struck this projection of splintered rock their weight forced them through an orifice between two jagged teeth of slaty stone, that had been broken at such an angle by the original upheaval that what once passed through them could never come forth again.

The hollow space below the teeth-barrier of this earthquake-sculptured Avanc was spacious enough for the natural laws that govern bodies floating in water to assert themselves; and it was hardly a minute after the shock of striking this obstacle had broken their fall, and in doing so had crushed the father's skull as the pine tree had crushed the daughter's, that Porius, pressing his weight on Gwythyr's spear till the "grey iron" vanished from sight in the mud, was confronted by two ghastly apparitions that seemed to his imagination to be staring up at him through the green water.

At first he tried to separate and distinguish the two pairs of up-gazing eyes; but he soon reached the conclusion that all he could really see were no eyes at all, only a mixture of yellow hair and grey hair swaying like a submerged tangle of weeds amid clots of blood.

And then it was that an immense weariness took possession of him, numbing his power of feeling and launching his mind upon fantastical voyages of far-fetched thought.

"There *must* be a consciousness in Chance," he said to himself; and then as he formed the thought, his hand slid down the whole length of his spear handle, now fixed firmly upright, and he subsided upon the fading bracken with his knees almost touching a trickle of water in which the leaves of a plant that Brother John had taught him to call *potamogeton,* or "neighbour to a river," serenely floated.

And the river of Time carried him away up the centuries, up thousands upon thousands of centuries, till he was permitted to behold in his own person the terrestrial catastrophe which caused this almost bottomless mountain lake to be formed, and this prison of submerged rock to make captive these two corpses.

"If there's no consciousness," his thought went on, "in these chance events, there's *something parallel to it* that may work even better!"

He must have slept after that, for his limbs were so stiff when at last he got up to go that it was with real physical pain that he limped away along the trail left by the passage of the *cawr*.

He paused by the disfigured body of Mabsant and told himself he would send young Gwythyr up here, or someone else he could absolutely trust — perhaps old Afagddu — to bury the lad properly and place a stone to mark the spot.

Meanwhile, in case he himself were killed by Colgrim's Saeson before he could arrange such matters, he knelt down, groaning and cursing from the pain in his joints, and with what dead leaves were within reach he covered the worst of the boy's mutilations; and scratching up some leaf mould from the roots of the ferns where he was kneeling he sprinkled it on those portions of that ill-used body which had been left more intact than the rest.

"Rise to immortality and intense happiness, Mabsant, my child!" was what he muttered as he rose from his knees and limped off; for it had always been a friendly matter of dispute between him and Brother John whether the prayer for "eternal rest in peace" did or did not imply a secret instinctive faith in the blest relief of annihilation.

"Eternal rest — immortality and intense happiness—" He went on muttering both sets of words, as he returned to that fatal platform and limped hurriedly across it. The physical pain with which he would now have to struggle if he were to force his aching body to carry him to Gwendydd's tent before sunset so as to meet the counsellor and old Rhun and convey to them both the prince's instructions, had now, in his emotional and physical exhaustion, become his only companion. He began talking to his pain as if it were a person, though stabs and spasms and cramps were the only response he got in reply.

But that he had this pain to contend with and argue with and make sport of, as he staggered slowly down the series of terraced rocks towards Saint Julian’s Water, was a real distraction to him and he amused himself by disparaging it.

And he went on applying this pain like an actual ointment, like the ointment which Homer says the good physician applied to the wound of Menelaus, applying it to the dark throbbing of a portion of his consciousness which he had now to carry with him wherever he went, a portion of his consciousness where a fathomless pool of green water hid the bodies of the last of the Cewri of the Cader.

CHAPTER XXIV. Birth and Death

PORIUS OBEYED HIS FATHER quite literally in regard to that portion of his instructions according to which he was to see what was going on now where the ritual of the Ravishing of the Waters had taken place to the maddening repetition of the Fisher King's chant. To reach this spot, unless he went completely round Saint Julian's Fount by the way he had come, and he felt very reluctant to do this, he would have to pass the Old Stone.

"I ought to go in there," he told himself, "on the remote chance, though it's one in a million, that Medrawd may be there still." What he would say to the man, what he would do with him, he had not a notion nor any spirit to imagine. All he felt able to arouse to activity just then were his aching limbs.

His orders to his mind were simple, that it should remain quiescent behind splintered rocks under twenty feet of emerald green water. Obstinately, stolidly, heavily, wearily, he entered the double-arched cave in the heart of the Old Stone, only to find a repulsive and, in some corners of it, a revolting litter.

But it was not the litter, nor was it the appearance of a bloodstained bone, unpleasantly suggesting a human arm broken off at the elbow, nor was it a curious inscription in the old Brython language scrawled recently upon one of the interior walls— "I bide my time" — that caused a feeling of tears at the back of his-eyeballs. No, it was the strange cuttlefish smell of the Cewri of the Cader.

And precisely the same was his experience at the place of ritual through which the Cewri had passed ere they took refuge at the Old Stone. Here, where so recently the emperor’s horsemen had confronted the Derwydd’s bowmen, not a living soul was in sight; while whole beds of tall rushes, clumps of faded bracken, and every variety of ferns and mosses and grasses had been trodden by horses’ hooves and by the feet of men into a lamentable mud of forlorn desolation.

After leaving these pitiable scenes and rounding the eastern extremity of the water, Porius became aware that a new struggle was going on in the portion of his consciousness that had not been left in the green depths under the splintered rock.

“These yellow-haired invaders,” he thought, “may even now have surrounded the Gaer, and Father may be fighting for his life in some desperate sortie! And yet here am I not even on guard in the horsemen’s camp! I surely am the least heroic and most unpatriotic offspring of a Brythonic chieftain ever born!”

He called up in detail every instruction his father had given him; how he was to go to Gwendydd’s pavilion and take counsel with Myrddin Wyllt, and how he was to tell Rhun to hold himself in readiness to act as a messenger, and he was half-prepared to let all else go and hurry up thither at once.

But this obedient purpose was countered by a boyish craving to see Brother John and to tell him, even though in his dying delusions the old Brother confused Pwyll Pen Annwn with the Son of God, the whole desperate story of his recent encounter with the Cewri.

He experienced at that moment the curious sensation of being so evenly balanced between two decisions as to be counselled to watch his own feet, as if to see whither, thus left forlorn of any master, they would carry him. They carried him towards Saint Julian's cell.

As he approached the familiar entrance to this ancient retreat he noticed an object lying on the grass in front of his own bridal tent, and taking the twenty steps or so necessary to reach it, he found it was nothing less than his grandfather's Roman flask, an object which he had been carrying about so piously and so obstinately during the last few days that it had come to be endowed for him with a sort of symbolic significance.

He stood over it for a moment, glancing at the familiar appearance of the reeds and willow stumps and water from this point and even forcing himself to take a long look at the tent.

And then, as he bent to pick it up, his attention was called to a chance-made little square in the grass beside it, formed by the entirely accidental approach to one another of four tiny willow twigs. He had always had a peculiar fancy for the auguries and omens and hieroglyphical portents that can be deduced from the arbitrary and entirely accidental arrangements of what might be called Nature's windrow or the husks and chippings and sawdust and rubble of her workshop; and though in the free scope of what he persisted in calling to himself his "cavoseniargizing" he took such phenomena, as you might say, in his stride, it was natural to him to be always noting these things even if they were blotted out the very next second by other impressions.

But he had been listening of late in Gwendydd's tent to certain murmurings of Myrddin Wyllt's about the magical nature of the Pythagorean number *four* as opposed to the mystical nature of the Christian number *three;* and his sudden glimpse of this chance-flung square of little willow twigs had a startling effect upon him.

He picked up the Roman flask, with the number upon it of the legion to which it belonged, and using *it* rather than the point of Gwythyr's spear for this purpose, he pushed the twigs about until they fell into a perfectly even-sided square.

The steps he then retook, some twenty or so of them, to reach the Brother's cell were this time taken very slowly; and had the Henog of Dyfed been writing the *buchedd,* or "life history," of Porius he would have introduced some magical encounter at this juncture to account for the slowness.

Indeed had Porius himself been relating the experience long afterwards to a son or a grandson he would no doubt have hesitated whether to attribute these slow pondering steps to the empty flask, or to the empty tent, or to the empty little pattern of twigs on the grass, or to admit that his dazed consciousness had at that point begun the secret healing process of a return to his old trick of "cavoseniargizing," even though he had hold of the Roman's water bottle in one hand and Gwythyr's spear in the other.

"Tungerong *larry ong,* endure until the end," he said to himself, as he entered the porch of the Brother's cell.

The first objects that met his eyes as he entered were the extravagantly emphasized buttocks and testicles, under their tightly stretched drawers of deerskin, belonging to Llew ap Greidawl, who was contentedly reposing on the wide flagstone bench, half in sight of and half out of sight of the adjoining chamber, where Brother John lay on his deathbed.

Llew was resting on his back, while his knees which were uplifted so high as to be on a level with his head, were supported in their strained position by his wrists and clasped fingers. The life-weary figure and gloom-engraved visage of the wise Morgant, half-brother to the unwise Drom, hung like a devoted phantom above the reclining Llew, as if to ward off the treacherous cheerfulness of evil-intentioned devils.

Of the inside of the death chamber, from the spot where Porius now paused to interrogate the human consciousness attached to those aggressive testicles and buttocks, all he could see was the head of the dying man's bed, together with the shoulder and arm and profile, this last with an extremely long nose and with something in the modelling of the little that could be seen of cheeks and forehead that suggested some sort of facial deformity, of a completely strange youth.

It was from the invisible lips of this personage that there was now proceeding the only sound audible in the chamber, evidently the eloquent reading or the dramatic recitation of an extremely obscure poem.

With the portion of his mind that was not yet drugged by the stubble-coloured mist, or the cuttlefish smell, or the staring eyes imprisoned by the splintered rock under the green water, Porius decided that this reciter of poetry must be the youthful Taliesin, about whom Myrddin Wyllt had spoken, and who would be no doubt keeping guard tonight over the rich young Cynan's treasures and probably making elaborate preparations of meat and drink with a view to the victorious return of that young master along with his bosom friend, Owain the son of Uryen, when Colgrim's army had been put to flight.

"All these young springalds," Porius thought, "underrate our enemies. I shouldn't be surprised if they've left their whole camp in the hands of bards and doctors and women and children! But I made a lucky hit in sending these fellows here. I'll tell this boy-bard in his own fashion that these two are looking for three things: for a great bard, for a generous master, and for a chance of waiting upon heroes! And if he asks about their special gifts, I'll tell him they've never spilt a drop in pouring out mead!"

He pondered gravely, all the same, as to whether it would be wise to confess to the poet that Llew ap Greidawl was brother to the last Derwydd of Edeyrnion. “Yes, I think I’ll tell him,” he decided at last. “Dead or alive, young or old, and whether they believe it or not, bards and druids have the same deadly and eternal enemy, the Church of Christ!”

Both the melancholy Morgant and the reclining Llew had, all this while, been watching him in shrewd silence and with a certain nervous apprehension. He read in their faces that they suspected him of having escaped from the Cewri by some crafty trick, possibly by enrolling himself in their service as a sort of spy or even as a bodysnatcher.

“Tungerong larry ong,” he told himself, “and ‘cavoseniargize’ to the end!” He forced himself now to shake off with a violent jerk the enchanted circle in the midst of which he knelt with this same spear in his hand and nothing in front of him but green water; and he forced himself to bend forward till his own face was so close to the drooping furrows in Morgant’s face that a pair of tiny little scrawls arrested his attention in the midst of those deeper channels, one of them white and the other red, that seemed to him like two dragons linked in an unnatural embrace of love!

“Ask Llew ap Greidawl,” he whispered, “what the phrase ‘enjoy to the end’ would be in the language of the Cewri.”

Morgant turned his head, certain protruding hairs among his thick eyebrows tickling the other’s cheek as he did so, and there ensued a murmured colloquy between the man on his feet and the man on his back. Then the gloomy watcher, turning again towards Porius, once more tickled his cheek with his rebellious hairs.

“He says ‘to enjoy’ in the language of the Cewri is *‘gorsorb.’* He says ‘to enjoy to the end’ would be ‘*gorsorb larry ong.’”*

Porius patiently and humbly repeated these strange syllables: *"Gorsorb larry ong — gorsorb larry ong."*

But Morgant already turned away from him and was occupied in communicating some piece of news to his sluggish-minded companion. He was indeed bending down over the recumbent Llew and tapping gently upon one of the man's knees.

Porius heard him whisper, "The Chief Bard of Ynys Prydein is going to recite one of the best poems he has composed this autumn, and it behoves us to give him our most reverent attention."

Neither Porius's own thoughts nor his own feelings were free enough at that moment to respond in any very subtle manner to what was going on around him here; but it was impossible not be struck by the tone of Morgant's words, and it was certainly clear that these words had an immediate effect upon the person to whom they were addressed.

The druid's brother straightened his back, brought his legs to the ground, and pulled his loosened jerkin tightly round him.

Porius was astonished at what he beheld. It was as if this unbalanced, loose-limbed, unsatisfactory individual were treating himself as a showman of puppets might treat one of his least appealing dolls, out of whose belly the straw and sawdust had begun to escape! By tightening his garments about him Llew ap Greidawl appeared to be withdrawing the dissipated forces of his personality from the kitchens and butteries of life and forcing the poor devils to man the ramparts.

"And all this," Porius said to himself, "because Cynan's poetical cake maker has started reciting one of his obscure modern rhapsodies." Porius had never understood the curious mingling in the mind of his father of a strong aesthetic appreciation of the poetry of this grotesquely youthful

Chief Bard with an equally strong objection to giving him a domicile in the Gaer.

"The paradox must either be due," he told himself, "to some complicated tribal reverence for the elder branch of the descendants of Cunedda, or to some nice extravagance of personal pique directed against this same elder branch!" But if his father's attitude to the young Taliesin puzzled him, Myrddin Wyllt's tone about the youth completely bewildered him.

"I must be lacking in some sort of psychic intelligence in these matters," he said to himself as he recalled the counsellor's enigmatically humble acceptance of the young poet's arrogant claim to be the prophetic announcer of hidden truths. "Yes, there's something lacking in me. And it's the same with—" He was going to compare his lack of the power of appreciating poetry with his lack of success with women when the memory of Creiddylad's deep-throated gasping cry rose up within him, and he swallowed a groan of misery.

Gathering himself together with the sort of crouching movement indicated in Homer by the expressive word "*aleis*," Porius now made Morgant sit down by his side on the same ledge where Llew was sitting, causing that beleaguered scarecrow to sit up straighter still and drag yet tighter the folds of his garments.

For the voice of the Chief Bard of Ynys Prydein was now resounding through Saint Julian's cell, and, in spite of that "lack of psychic intelligence" of which he had complained, Porius's attention was powerfully arrested by what Chance was compelling him to hear.

"Is Brother John listening to all this?" he wondered. "Or is this a dirge over his corpse?"

But what that penetrating young voice was repeating certainly did not sound like a dirge. The boy-bard was explaining — whether to the Jewish doctor as well as to the Henog of Dyfed Porius could not tell — that the inspiration under which his poems were composed came from Africa rather than from Asia. The tone in which he uttered this explanation struck Porius as somewhat harsh and defiant, though there was a queer kind of authority, like the obscure phrasing of a mystical oracle, about the words he uttered.

But what most of all arrested Porius's attention was the surprising change in the lad's voice — and it was evident that the two listeners at his side were not oblivious of this — when he came to the verses themselves. The young poet made them sound as if he himself were only a medium for the chanting of some inanimate element, like the sea or the wind.

I was old when the night fell
On the spread wings of Gabriel:
I was young when Eve's milk mild
Turned to gall in her first child:
I was old when in sea foam
Love's queen lost her gold comb:
I was young when in sun's red
They caught her in War's bed.
Cad Goddeu! What mad wrath
When Gwydion and old Math
For the sake of Amaethon
Despoiled Annwn's Arawn.
Cad Goddeu! What sap spilt
When the trees of the Coed Gwyllt
For the sake of a bitch dog
Were lost in the peat bog!
At the holly rushed the whinberry:
At the willow charged the wild cherry:

From the pine fled the slender birch
When the hazel left her in the lurch:
While the oak, huge in history,
Stalked alone in his mystery
And the ash tree's grey stare
Filled with phantoms the air.
But I Taliesin
Go out as I go in:
Through life in its whole span
From doomed worms to doomed man:
Worlds laugh as I leap on them:
Worlds weep as I pass them by:
I neither laugh nor weep;
Too sweet is life's idiocy!
Air, fire, earth, water
Are worth more than a kiss.
Through earth's earthquake daughter
I ravish the abyss!
I go in at one end
And come out at the other:
My slain is my dearest friend:
My slayer is my brother:
When Math's magic shook me
To Gwydion I betook me;
Though 'gainst Arawn I fought,
It was Annwn I sought.
I drained sap from the bracken
For the battle of Achren,

And to plum trees and privet
I thundered to give it;
But at elder tree’s order,
That magic Recorder,
I gave bracken back
All I’d caused her to lack.
There are sighings that pass
From the gorze to the grass
When the alder swamp’s moan
Turns the heart into stone;
And though Gwydion transform me
Into sprigs of the thorn tree
And with oak apples lay me
On the ruins of Deganwy
I’ll still worship Arawn
The dark King of Annwn,
I’ll still praise the unwary
Song-enchanted Pryderi!
For as Jesus, the Crocaw,
Can pass over all law,
So I Taliesin
Can go out and go in!
With Dylan the wave’s lord
My chess board’s a pearl board:
For bereft Manawyddan
The sea’s caves shall glisten:
And with coral and amber
I’ll build him a chamber!

Though as free as the stalk
Of the wind flower in the wind
When in wild wood I walk
’Tis with Judas who sinned.
Man’s deep spirit-mind
Has a dead blank behind,
Absolutely dark!
Nil, nihil, not a spark!
There to Nothing all drops:
There the mind simply stops.
But fear fills that space
With God’s ghoulish face
And in Nothing’s dead ruck
Lo! the Vampire doth suck!
Where no eye can squinny
Comes the Nightmare’s whinny:
And where Being is not
The Ghost Horse doth trot.
But with Nothing within
And with Chaos without
I, the Chief Bard, still win
As I go in and out!
For where my thoughts go
Fall the walls of Jericho
And Jerusalem soon or late
Opens her every gate!
Not a tomb, not a tomb of Jesus
Into which we cannot squeeze us!

Not a Trinity Ship so vast
That we cannot ride on its mast!
I was the crack in the mould
Of Behemoth's final stride:
I was the pebble that rolled
On Leviathan when he died:
I was the feather blown high
From the helmet of Diomed:
I was the flame in the sky
Over Trojan Hector's head!
Things ugly and little
From frog spawn to spittle
To me like the rest
Take their place with the best:
All matter is dung:
All our death knells are rung:
We must eat what we've got:
We must sleep when we can:
Man is born for his lot:
And his lot's born with man:
From the cankers and scriggles
Of the leaf worm that wriggles
Come the runes I compose
To make redder the rose:
Down each curve of each shell
I've descended to Hell
And no weed in the sea
Withholds secrets from me:

Not as waves, but like waves,
Not as flames, but like flames,
Rolls the chaos that raves
Round the shore without names:
But I Taliesin
Go out as I go in;
And where nothing can be said
I behave as the dead:
I ride on strange creatures
Who have winds for their features
And waves for their hair
And are there and not there:
For beneath every skin
Is the gooseflesh of doubt
But 1, Taliesin
Go in and go out.

The second the bard's voice died away Porius heard the much more and much less oracular voice of the Henog; for it was clear that the bard and the storyteller had already clashed. But other voices were now raised also, and raised, it was clear, more in an attempt to propitiate both the indignant specialists than to take either side.

Porius got up stiffly to his feet and so did Morgant. Llew ap Greidawl on the contrary made the first motion, by lifting one of his ponderous legs upon the vacated ledge still warm from the bodies of the others, towards the resumption of his favourite horizontal position.

"You heard?" cried the angry bard, too excited to realize anything save the presence of three new members of his audience. "You heard the *ansyberwyd,* the *sarhad,* the laughable insult, which I, and through me all

the tribes of the forests of Edeyrnion, have suffered from this man, this Henog, who behaves like the most ignorant Mabinog of the most savage forests of Gwent!"

It was then that he became conscious he was addressing the newly married heir to these same savage forests of Edeyrnion, and he stopped abruptly. It was almost as if the druid's brother, with one foot on the flagstone ledge and the other on the stone floor, had uttered — only it was hard to conceive of Llew ap Greidawl having even the energy needed for the working of the simplest charm — some sort of magic incantation; for the effect upon Porius of this encounter with the boy bard from Deganwy was as instantaneous as it was unexpected.

Porius was a man of rooted, primitive, very simple, almost childish prejudices, and one of these prejudices was against bards and priests and druids. This may have been a tincture in his veins of the ancient Roman stoicism of the House of Manlius, or it may have reverted to the more defiant blasphemy of his father's father.

But whatever its origin there existed in him side by side with this a superimposed destiny to become, in the beat of a pulse, a formidable protector of the imaginatively eccentric, the emotionally weak, the mentally disturbed, the nervously deranged.

And the curious thing was that all his life such abnormal persons had felt this and had instinctively clung to him for protection. Myrddin Wyllt, for instance, had clung desperately to him; whereas such self-centred intellectuals as Brochvael and Morvran, and such enigmatic, self-contradictory humorists as his own father, regarded him as a simpleminded, slow-witted, muscular fool.

Rhun had a very different idea of him, but, like other ideas of Rhun's, this was hidden, along with the sacred honey of the god of soldiers, in

Rhun’s heart and Rhun’s cave.

Thus it happened that when the boy-bard came forth, indignant and hurt, from the Henog’s caustic criticisms, his hands shaking, his upper lip quivering, and a distracted look in his eyes, his outraged soul flung itself, with the instinctive movement of a wounded creature, upon the responsive breast, so to speak, of Porius’s powerful and sympathetic personality.

And thus, as Porius’s new father-in-law would have said, it was arranged by a pure stroke of *agathe tyche,* or Chance in her divine mood, that Taliesin never in his whole life felt a thrill of deeper gratitude than he felt towards this Hercules of Edeyrnion, when falling, so to say, like a weeping child on a strong man’s breast, he was greeted in the particular manner which among all possible consolations soothes a poet the most.

He was greeted in fact by a line from his own poetry. This oracular line, as magical as it was obscure, was one that Porius had caught on his father’s lips when the prince was too drunk to remember anything more.

“Ys kyweir vyg kadeir ygkaer sidi.”

“Complete is my chair in Caer Sidi,” quoted Porius, in a voice sufficiently loud and sufficiently emphatic to carry the implication to every person in the inner room that, for all his youth, this bard of the Battle of the Trees had already drunk so deep of the sweet white wine of the four-cornered paradise beyond the sea that he was safely ensconced on his poetic throne, far away from all carping quips and cavilling strictures.

Nor, though he realized from the twitching tension of the face before him how near the boy was to convulsive tears, did he fail to snatch the particular advantage from the sudden bond between them upon which, with the cunning of a primordial instinct worthy of the caves of the Cader, he felt he could count; for with Morgant’s help he hastily got the Derwydd’s brother to his feet, and murmuring to all three of them his conviction that it would be a light undertaking for the wealthy Cynan to make an addition to his household, he gave a private hint to that good man's new adherents that their bardic introducer had accumulated a considerable store of wine and mead against the warrior's return; and twisting this final image like a pair of ghostly vine wreaths about the couple's heads he got the bard and the two men out of the cell together, and well upon their way to Cynan's hospitable kitchen, before they understood what was happening to them.

When he turned back into the portico he could hear that the Henog was still speaking, and the man's voice struck him as peculiarly querulous and rasping.

"History *versus* Poetry," he thought wearily. "It was History versus Prophecy last Thursday, and it was the counsellor then who got the better of the Henog's argument, if not of the Henog's temper. Well! There *is* something about this boy bard's mystical arrogance that would be bound to irritate an old collector of legends. Well! I mustn't interrupt him. Is Brother John asleep? Or is he dead? I feel as if I were asleep or dead myself!"

It was certainly a curious weariness that came over Porius just then. It was not a despairing feeling. It was not a hopeless feeling. It was indeed a feeling not entirely devoid of a subtle sweetness. But he felt as if he could sleep for a thousand years. The heat of the fire in the adjoining overcrowded chamber began to make even this portico too hot for his taste. He removed his outer garment and spreading it over the flagstone ledge sank down upon it almost as heavily as Llew ap Greidawl had done earlier that afternoon.

But unlike Llew he remained in a sitting posture, his legs stretched out in front of him and his eyes fixed on three objects, two of which he must himself have propped against the third when he came in just now.

This third object was nothing less than the great earthenware vessel with two handles which had contained all that heady Gwlad-yr-Haf mead which

Rhun and he had carried together to his bridal tent and there drained it to the bottom. Nesta ferch Aulus must have placed this against the wall, while against it in its turn he had propped young Gwythyr's spear as well as the legion's water bottle.

Looking at the spear, he began to feel again the precise sensation he had had when, with his fingers sliding down its shaft, he had sunk on the moss in front of that clear green water and had seen those two pairs of eyes staring up at him through clotted blood and drowned hair. But suddenly, clean through the blood and the hair and the staring eyes, a chasm opened into something deeper yet, an ecstasy of life worship indescribable in words. He felt indeed an extraordinary sensation; a sensation that to the end of his life he would try to reproduce in any crisis. It was nothing less than an ecstasy of enjoyment, of exactly the same nature as his familiar "cavoseniargizing." Only there was this difference. *This* ecstasy included every experience he had ever had; for he had never been in pain so unendurable that he couldn't detach himself from it, nor had he ever seen horrors so appalling that he couldn't face them without losing consciousness. It was a feeling, he decided later, that embraced the whole world as if it were something under water, something that included not only staring eyes and pieces of bone, but ourselves also, as if we lived under water and saw ourselves, and everybody else, as weeds, stones, reeds, minnows, newts, water beetles, mud!

And he set himself to try to analyze the real causes of the queer ecstasy he had just had. "Probably," he thought, staring at the two shadows on the floor, the shadow of the spear and the shadow of the legion's water flask, "probably it was simply due to some absurd pride in having fixed up this boy's hurt feelings by quoting his own weird words." And he repeated to himself once more: “Ys *kyweir vyg kadeir yghkaer Sidi* — Complete is my seat in Caer Sidi.”

And then he thought, “How this child-poet and this Henog do hate each other! Mother of God, but I’m as much on the side of the old storyteller as Father’s on the side of the little poet! I’ve no music in me, no poetry in me, no love in me. And yet I had an ecstasy just then. I *can* have an ecstasy as well as another, though I *have* no music, no poetry, no love, and enjoy nothing in life but life and trying to analyze it!”

He stared at the earthenware handles of the vessel that had held their mead. “It sent Rhun to sleep,” he thought, and an old song a beggar from Ceredigion used to sing in the Gaer kitchen came into his head about “reaping ferns in the Land of Summer where black dogs shit butter.”

From the apple juices and halcyon seas of the Land of Summer his mind turned to Creiddylad and death. “Did *those two* enjoy their life?” he thought. “And where are their living souls now? Gone as completely as Brother John’s will soon be gone! Ask for Brother John of Saint Julian’s Fount, and some honest Henog of the future will tell of a lean skeleton in a forest grave with a nest of baby moles cuddling under its hollow ribs. Ask for the giant-girl who could cry out as she was raped: ‘cariad-digon! cariad-digon! love is enough!’ and you’ll find a pair of broken skulls tapping against a scoriac splinter!”

He stretched out his legs till the toe of one of his sandals touched the base of the huge earthen jar in front of him, while with his left hand he possessed himself of a stout piece of firewood that someone had dropped and beat it idly upon the flagstone.

“My killing her,” he thought, “began three days ago. It began on the day of Jove the Thunderer, when from above our eastern gate I watched the straw-coloured mist from the Cader follow the windings of the Divine River."

All this while he could hear the tense, strained, carefully modulated voice of the Henog of Dyfed, and he now began to make an effort to use his habitual "cavoseniargizing" in a manner he had never used before; that is to say, to include in its scope not only the fullest realization of death as meaning and implying his soul's complete annihilation, but, along with death, all those nervous manias and horrors and terrors and morbid fears that had ere now come near to causing him — though he suffered less from them at thirty than he had done at twenty — to long to lose himself in that same blessed annihilation.

The shock of his rape of the *cawres,* and her death so quickly after, had roused forces within him which he felt were enlarging if not altering the whole nature of his consciousness. One of these forces seemed to be the power — and it may possibly have been his exultation in this that had produced his ecstasy — of including in the sweep of his "cavoseniargizing" both the idea of death as the end of all and the whole array of these secret nervous afflictions of which his mother and Morfydd knew very little and Rhun nothing at all.

It may have been something in the curious disharmony between his sluggish body with its Herculean muscles and the almost unnatural rapidity of his conscious thoughts that produced these morbid effects. They were not always present with him, and sometimes for months he had been entirely free from them; but it was only as he gradually outgrew not merely his adolescence but his complete dependence on three formidable women, on his foster-mother, Alarch the Fair, the mother of Rhun, on his real mother, Euronwy, the daughter of Porius Manlius, and finally on his playmate

Morfydd, who today had become his wife, that he began to shake off these nervous afflictions.

They could not *all* be explained as a result of his abnormal self-consciousness, but some of them certainly could. What in fact was his worst horror, needing all sorts of mental tricks to overcome, was the simple physical fact of his eyelids having to blink, his pulses having to throb and his heart having to beat, not to speak of his having to obey the diurnal necessity of voiding his natural excretions.

Thus what made this strange ecstasy such an important moment in his life, as he sat alone that evening in the familiar portico of his dying teacher's cell, was the fact that in place of contenting himself, as he would have done only a couple of days ago, with his old "cavoseniargizing," forcing himself to enjoy the general and particular aspects of the time and the place, he now made an effort of will to include not only his eyes blinking, his pulses throbbing, his heart beating, not only the fact that when he made water before crossing this threshold his urine had possessed an uncanny smell, but also the reckless and daredevil notion of the complete annihilation of his conscious soul in endless death. In plain words what he set himself to do, as he listened to the voice of the Henog and held himself back from disturbing Brother John till the fellow had finished his tale of magic, was to force himself to enjoy both the outward world, with all its forms and colours, its splintered rocks, jagged spikes, dizzy peaks, slippery precipices, and the inward world with all its prickings and ticklings, its messings up and missings out, its throbbing and pulsings, its heavings and spasms, all that the mind whistled to him, all that the conscience clamped down upon within him.

"I can go on *now* doing anything that Mother and Morfydd want me to do," he told himself. And he pulled up his legs with a jerk and slowly and stiffly rose to his feet and put on again the garment he had removed. He felt as if the sight of those two pairs of open eyes staring up at him through blood and hair and green water — a sight which from henceforth he could call up at any moment — was more than a substitute for a voyage to the Bosporus. That sight and his eternally varying reactions to it would from henceforth be his voyage into another world, *his* visit to Caer Sidi!

He was standing up now with one hand against the wall and with his eyes shut. "I *must* see Brother John," he thought, "and then I must go round the camp before reporting to Myrddin Wyllt. I expect I'll find Rhun with Gwendydd."

It was not because he felt shame at having delayed so long in obeying his father, nor was it because he felt dizzy from lack of food, that he shut his eyes. It was because — by one of those pure strokes of chance that so delighted his wife's father — the tale the Henog was telling had grown so relevant to his special case that he was like a native of Dodona who, as he was collecting acorns for his pigs, found he had suddenly entered the sacred grove and was listening spellbound to an oracle from Zeus himself.

"And on the fifth morning after they had hunted together in this fine forest, Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed noticed that the countenance of his friend, Gwawl the son of Clud, was heavily cast down, as though he mourned the loss of some rich possession or of some beautiful lady; and forthwith he enquired of him the reason for his grief.

"'I mourn,' he said, 'because this Forest of Gwent-Is-Coed is richer in deer and richer in well-stocked streams than any district in my own land. Moreover, its lord hath in his stable the most beautiful mare in the whole world, and on every first of May this mare bears a foal.'

"'To whom does this forest belong?' asked Llwyd.

"'It belongs,' replied the other, 'to Teirnyon Twryf Vliant.'

"'Were it not better for you, my Lord,' said Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed, 'if you asked counsel on this matter?'

"'It would be better.'

"'My counsel would be that you should borrow the Avanc of Arfon that my kinsman Gwydion the son of Don keeps by enchantment till its claws are as long as those of the dragon of Eryri, and I myself would work a marvel on your behalf.'

"'What marvel would you work?'

"'I would cause that Teirnyon Twryf Vliant should leave his stable in the care of nobody but old men who drink mead; and I would bring it about that a clap of thunder, a fall of mist, and a mighty tumult should cause these old men to run away. Then when the foal was born I would cause the Avanc to thrust his claw through the window of the stable and carry the creature off. Does this counsel seem good unto thee, my Lord? For if it does not we will travel together to Caer Dathyl and ask help of Math the son of Mathonwy.'

"'The counsel does seem good to me.'

"'Why then, my Lord, is your countenance still downcast?'

"'I call heaven to witness that I have good cause to be still sad, even though in your friendship you work this wonder, that the claw of the Avanc of Arfon should enter this stable in Gwent-Is-Coed and should carry off this foal.'

"'What cause have you, my Lord?'

"'Between me and God, I'll tell you the cause,' said he. 'There is only one woman in all the world that I desire for my wife, a maiden so light of foot that she can tread upon the crests of waves without breaking them into foam, and upon the petals of flowers without spilling a grain of their pollen. This maiden is Rhiannon, the daughter of Heveydd Hen. Her father, when in my debt for many services, promised her to me but now I find he has broken his covenant and has betrothed her to Pwyll Pen Annwn.'

"When he had thus spoken Gwawl the son of Clud breathed the heaviest sigh that had been heard since the beginning of Time in the forest of Gwent-Is-Coed.

"'Is it thy pleasure, my soul, that I give thee further counsel in this matter?'

"'Between me and God,' said Gwawl, 'right thankful would I be for any counsel.'

"And Llwyd blew upon his bugle four times, and there was no sound from the bugle that a man could hear, but the dogs of both of them heard it and of themselves they made one pack and of themselves they went as fast as the wind, with no man behind them and no stag in front of them. Northward they went for a week and a day till they came to Rhuddlan Teifi in Ceredigion where Pwyll Pen Annwn had one of his hunting lodges, and there they stayed.

"And such was the power of Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed that where they stayed no eye could see them save the eyes of the creatures they killed for food and the eyes of the carrion crows who followed them for the sake of the off-scouring from the creatures they killed.

"And when he had finished sounding his bugle Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed looked at his companion; but Gwawl's face was like the face of a stone.

"And Llwyd said: 'I will show thee friendship more perfect than this. Between me and God there is an Annwn of Illusion and Enchantment that is richer and easier to reach than the real one which Arawn, its ruler, shares with Pwyll. Into this Second Annwn, this Annwn of Illusion and Enchantment created by Math the son of Mathonwy and by Gwydion the son of Don, there is a way that leads under land and water from Caer Dathyl. It is a way that goeth by the north, leaving Dinas Arianrod to the south.'

"'I call heaven to witness,' said Gwawl the son of Clud, 'that if you bring me the aid of this Second Annwn I will support you with all my possessions.'

"'You will only need to support me in one matter,' said Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed, 'and one thing only I shall require of you.'

"'What is that one thing?'

"'I will tell you freely and will conceal nothing from you. In their false Annwn of Illusion Math and Gwydion have caused chains of enchantment to be suspended from the deep sky in such a manner as to descend into the lowest chamber of Caer Sidi — for you must understand there is now a Caer Sidi of Illusion as well as the real one. Between me and God, my soul, this is all that is required of you if you desire my help and the help of Gwydion the son of Don against Pwyll and Arawn. When any man or any woman asks you concerning the real Annwn and the real Cader Sidi you must answer them as if they were asking you about the false ones, those that were made out of sedge and seaweed by the enchantments of Gwydion the son of Don.

"'Thus, as the years flow by, when one man asks another, as he ploughs or fishes or hunts by his side, whether the prisoners in Caer Sidi are really bound in heavy chains, the other will answer: "Let us pray to Gwydion the son of Don to preserve us from the *mynweir,* or 'beast-collar,' with which the enemies of Gwawl the son of Clud and Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed are —"'"

Here the words of the Henog suddenly ceased and there arose a general murmur of excited voices, out of the midst of which Porius sought in vain for any indication that his old teacher was conscious or unconscious, asleep or attentive, dead or alive.

So with an effort greater mentally and more painful, for some obscure reason, even after all that had happened to him, than any effort he had made that whole long day, he entered Brother John's warm, spacious, and crowded cell.

Yes, there was the old man's bed as he had always known it; and there — close to the big fire — was the bed he himself had slept in before rising to meet his bride.

Seated on this bed was the Jewish doctor and by his side, also seated, was the dark-eyed, vivacious Nesta ferch Aulus, evidently enjoying herself extremely, and displaying her natural and graceful charm with an added aplomb — so it seemed to Porius — due to her marriage and the loss of her virginity, even though these events had occurred so recently.

Behind her, chopping logs for the fire with some difficulty since the only instrument he had for this task was an antique bronze axe that must have been preserved by some special chance, or possibly — since this had been a heathen shrine long before it became a Christian one — by some special intention, was the young owner of that borrowed spear he had left in the porch, that spear whose short thick shaft and broad double-edged point he would remember to the end of his days.

The person nearest to him as he entered was the Henog of Dyfed, who, however, kept his seat on the bed and giving him no more than one shrewdly alert and scrutinizing glance continued screwing on the tops of his small bottles of writing pigments and twisting little pieces of twine carefully round his tablets.

Porius could not help noticing how very quickly that sharp shrewd self-protective glance with which his entrance had been greeted faded away from that singular face while the man's earlier look, which had for a second been superseded, returned undiminished.

This prevailing expression upon the Henog's countenance caused Porius a contradictory mixture of friendly indulgence and irritation. It was the special expression naturally assumed, he remembered, by most of the reciters and storytellers when they made some popular hit over the mead at Mynydd-y-Gaer; and Porius derived a vicious amusement from noticing how the same maudlin complacency which rested, as thick as flies upon newly dropped dung, on every feature of the Henog of Dyfed differed so little from the tipsy satisfaction of the simple revellers whose pride in their innocent successes he knew so well.

He noticed however that, unlike the popular reaction of the gregarious reciters at his father's banquets, this afterglow of the Henog's satisfaction in his own performance was a lonely and solitary thing and completely independent of all outward response or recognition.

Thus, as across the unconscious form of the dying man he made low-voiced enquiries of the Jewish doctor who had risen to his feet to greet him, Porius's rapidly moving consciousness filled every gap in these solemn questions and answers with his mental reaction to this amazing chronicler, who seemed in the pride of his storytelling to be literally pushing the unconscious Brother John out of his own deathbed, what struck him as especially astonishing was what he now learnt from the presence of those pens and pigments and tablets; namely, that the man had been reading from a passage he had just written.

He had in fact been reading from *what he was in the midst of composing.* And in doing this he was absolutely self-centred and self-sufficient. "He must be," thought Porius, "in the habit of reading aloud to rocks and trees. The doctor over there, with that extraordinary object in his hand, must have served him as a holly tree, that dark-eyed girl as an elder bush, and friend Gwythyr as a truculent ivy stump! The fellow's quite mad," Porius told himself, "or he is the most original chronicler of events there's ever been! He does it purely and solely for his own satisfaction! Mother of Heaven! But I'd give a lot to know how much of it he invents and how much he picks up as he goes about. And I'd give a lot to know whether the old Brother heard a word of it before he slept.

"And what does the Jew think? Does the Jew say to himself, 'God of Moses, but this is marvellous; this is like the History of Ruth; this is like the History of Elijah and the prophets of Baal!' or does he groan and curse in his heart the frivolous fairy tales of the heathen?"

Porius soon decided that nothing that any of them felt was of any importance at all to the Henog! What did he care whether Gwythyr and Nesta had understood or hadn't understood his tale? For all he cared, Llwyd and Gwawl might have seemed to those young people like a couple of conspiring badgers, and to the Jewish doctor like the savage sons of Zeruiah!

There was clearly not the faintest reason why Porius himself should make any special effort to be courteous to the man about his performance. Disregarding the Henog completely, therefore, he turned to the doctor. "He might die then, you consider, at any moment?"

Lot-el-Azziz gave him a penetrating look across the chronicler's bottles and tablets.

"When the devourer in his bowels," he replied, "feels his own death imminent, and I have heard through this" — and he tapped his ram's horn— "that it *is* near, he will leap at his heart."

But even while those words — as words sometimes will after they've been uttered — went bowing and nodding and winking at one another across that loaded bed, Porius was wondering in his heart which of the two, the Henog discovering a second Caer Sidi among the aboriginal legends in a cloudy and complacent void, or that sensitive boy, with his wounded life illusion all quivering and bleeding, flying for refuge to a real Caer Sidi in his own heart, held the true secret, the real *cyfrinach* of the past?

Through the twilight of his ponderings his own uncomfortably rapid mind had ample time — for the doctor was now describing to him at some length the proceedings of the invisible enemy within the body of Brother John — to note the pathetically furtive attempts of the young Gwythyr and his bride to come into some sort of natural flesh-and-blood contact in spite of all the ghostly mysteries of all the bards and chroniclers in the world.

But as twilight deepened in that chamber and those young bodies cunningly drew closer to each other, Porius's own grotesque and tragic lavishing of love's seed on this day of the sun made the whole business of erotic attraction seem sad and perilous.

"I wager," he thought, "that cry, *cariad-digon*!— 'love is enough!' — was picked up by 'them' up there — caught in fact like the plague! — from our deluded and treacherous race. No, no, no! Love is certainly not enough! It needs pity and common sense and a lot more if it's not to breed hate and jealousy and suspicion and loathing and murder!"

But the Henog had by this time collected his writing materials and was ready to depart; nor could Porius, as he escorted him in silence through the portico to the entrance and nodded a simple farewell, refrain from a sigh of immense gratitude to the man, that there was no wounded life illusion here for him to heal.

The Henog departed into the twilight with the same expression of inscrutable satisfaction as he had worn when he first ceased reading. "He's alone in Space," Porius thought, "and only Space has the power of reflecting his stories in such a manner that all their faults are lost and all their virtues remain. In the eternally empty Space round him he sees the perfection he aimed at and gives himself the credit for having attained it; and maybe, in some cosmic ideal sense, he *has* attained it."

And Porius's clouded memory struggled with dim recollections of how Brother John had interpreted certain words of Pelagius about Plato. "Everybody who listens to the Henog," he thought, "is resolved into this paradigm or perfect pattern of an ideal myth; and, by becoming a part of it himself, is transformed into the very perfection of which in his critical hostility he refused to see so much as the fragment of a shadow! Thus while the Henog's hearers" — and Porius found himself staring as if from an immense distance at the spear and the bottle and the two-handled vessel— "may actually be tearing to pieces the tale he is telling them, they are themselves, as far as the storyteller is concerned, irresistibly compelled to assume the role of small and unimportant portions of the perfect pattern of his vision."

Porius indeed was now destined to experience the queer sensation of being himself a person in one of the Henog's tales; for as he re-entered Brother John's cell and found the married lovers completely absorbed in each other, and the doctor on his knees at the bedside, he heard a patter of light-running feet and on swinging round was confronted by the small page Neb ap Digon.

At the sight of the little creature Porius had a vivid remembrance of the first time he'd seen him, only three days ago, outside Gwendydd's pavilion; and a whole series of pictures with Gwendydd and old Rhun in the foreground, that alluring demon of a Ffichtiaid in the middle distance, and in the background that poor, hunted, harassed counsellor, tottering to and fro like a sick and yet solid ghost, flitted across his brain.

Before the little page had done more than begin to catch his startled attention, the boy's mere presence brought back sharply to his mind the occasions when he had been forced to support the faltering magician in his arms; brought back even the corpselike smell of which he had been aware at those queer moments.

"Roaring drunk through the whole camp, do you say? Insulting the body of Princess Tonwen? Carrying the head of the disinherited chief at his belt? Where is Rhun ap Gwrnach? Who is with the Lady Gwendydd? Where is Dion Dionides? — Who did you say? Are you sure about that? How do you know when a woman—"

But by this time the doctor had joined them, and though Neb had kept his head in the presence of Porius's agitation, under the interrogation of Lot-el-Azziz he began to utter sounds more like the hysterical sobs of a baby centaur than any human sound.

"It *must* be she," the doctor cried, speaking very rapidly and in a tone of angry desperation, while he hurriedly adjusted the fastenings of his long brown professional robe and jerked back his head to get his elongated topknot out of the way. "Where did you say? Near Prince Porius's new tent? And the boy with her? Did the boy speak to you? But never mind that — I must go at once — I must—"

His words were cut off by the entrance of the woman herself. She was dragging her body along the flagstones on all fours, giving vent as she did so to convulsive and spasmodic sounds that were like groans uttered not by a woman at all but by a nameless animal.

In spite of all this she kept articulating quite intelligible sentences to the child who accompanied her. She must have seen the doctor, but she disregarded him completely. She rose on one knee and began working her way, her right hand on the foot rail of Brother John's bed and her left still on the floor, towards Nesta ferch Aulus. The only person who seemed to divine her intention was her little boy, Gog. He ran forward to Nesta and pulled violently at her belt, crying in a shrill voice, “Magog’s knocking to come out! Magog’s kicking to come out!”

Never had Porius felt such a helpless fool; but what astonished him was that the Jewess’s husband seemed equally at a loss. Instead of leaping with professional assurance to the aid of the woman in labour, Lot-el-Azziz appeared totally dazed. He even began unfastening his long brown robe as if it were himself, rather than his wife, who was in need of delivery. Gog, and Gog alone, at this juncture, showed a sound instinct, an instinct which was promptly supported, though rather faintly and feebly, by young Gwythyr, as to the person to whom to look for help.

“Do what Nesta says,” this latter youth kept repeating in a low-pitched nervous voice but with a reiterated obstinacy that augmented with each repetition. “Do what Nesta says!”

What followed forced itself with overwhelming clearness upon Porius’s mind and struck him as the deepest of all the causes that enabled the Romans to conquer the world. He had himself turned to Nesta ferch Aulus, and he remembered long afterwards how as he watched the look in her eyes a sense of complete confidence swept over him as to the fate of the woman and as to the whole issue of the affair.

Whether it was Roman staunchness in her or simply the old Italian earth wisdom from the heart of the immemorial peninsula of citrons and cypresses and classic gardens and rustic gods, one thing was certain: the competence of the centurion’s daughter soon changed the whole complexion of that old room under the Gothic arches!

It soon became clear that if the Henog could turn the Brother’s cell into a negligible portion of a vast dome of empty Space in which the story of

Gwawl the son of Clud and Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed wrote itself upon the air, Nesta ferch Aulus could turn it into a traditional lady’s bower of Ynys Prydein devoted to the natural functions of birth, of life, of sleep, of death.

Porius himself, leaning forward over the unconscious body of Brother John, and indeed pressing more of his weight upon it than was decent or right, watched spellbound from beginning to end the rapid, primeval, competent movements of the centurion’s daughter, who herself, hardly more than a dozen hours earlier, had been an unravished maid.

He noticed how she was helped at every turn by that familiar of ladies’ bowers, the sophisticated Neb, who himself was followed by little Gog, who kept his eyes fixed upon him in awed wonder and fascinated respect as if he’d been a wooden doll endowed with the miraculous power of human action.

It may have been his instinctive male horror of the convulsive spasms and crushing pains of childbirth that brought it about, but Porius found, as he leant forward over his old teacher’s motionless body, that he had to struggle quite violently once or twice with a sensation that was extremely distasteful to him and against which he always fought fiercely; namely, the feeling that he was moving from the past into the future like a shadow upon a dial, a dial that was too enormous to be seen as a circle but along which he moved through a fatal series of happenings that stretched ahead in predetermined succession.

Nor was it long before he was looking, as he had looked once before that day, through a mist of water and wet hair and torn flesh, at a human head smeared with blood; only it was one head now and not two, and there were only two eyes now, two tiny little ones, and those tight shut, not four great staring ones capable of following him anywhere and of peering at him through walls of stone.

It was indeed upon Porius's mattress on the floor by the fire that the woman was finally delivered of her "knocking" and "kicking" Magog; and as he saw her lying there at peace at last, while with water warmed in a familiar cauldron he himself constantly used, and brought in from outside by the active Neb in the Gwlad-y-Haf mead vessel, young Nesta, like some Etruscan goddess of birth, washed the small descendant of Abraham.

That diminutive nomad's voice was now lifted up — like the shriek, Porius thought, of a filmy-winged bat from the fathomless darkness outside, caught in the confines of a human cave — though it was hard to say whether its protests were directed against human life in general, or against fate's choice of the queer person now murmuring over it what sounded like an incantation in the language of devils as its human progenitor.

But at this moment it was the mother and newborn baby that obsessed Porius's attention rather than the doctor-father. He heard the woman say something to Nesta in a husky deep-throated murmur like the sound of the first hoarse notes of an early blackbird.

But what an extraordinary creature a newborn infant was! "Has that shockingly naked little blob of helplessness," he asked himself, "got a soul like mine? And will its soul change, as mine has changed in the last twenty-four hours, from thinking of itself as the centre of everything to thinking of itself as akin to the souls of dogs and badgers and horses and weasels and foxes — yes! and of worms and gnats?

"Curse it all! Could there be a greater fool than I've been all these years, thinking myself God knows what, because an old patriarchal hunter of wolves and harasser of Gwyddyl-Ffichti was crafty enough to have himself baptized and to propitiate a Roman general! Oh, Master, Master," his thoughts ran on as he bent down lower over the man in the bed so as to catch a glimpse of some portion of the well-known features, "why didn't you teach me how to arrange my mind and my feelings so as to endure life and enjoy life, instead of teaching me what Pelagius thought, or what Plato thought, or what the difference is between Mithras and Christ?

"Why didn't you teach me that when I die it's the end, and that until I die it doesn't matter who I am or with what arms or speech or name or tradition I face life as long as I do face it, and fulfil it, and befriend it, and defend it, and extend it, and am ready in spite of it to accept death as its natural conclusion?"

As Porius cried out all this about himself and to himself, he was aware that the doctor had left the sleeping woman in the care of Gog — who indeed was guarding her like a watchman at the gate of Jerusalem — and had approached the bed and had begun to fumble under the sleeping man's blankets with the intention evidently of feeling his heart or his pulse. He was also aware that Lot-el-Azziz was not only trembling and perspiring and showing signs every now and then of being seized by a convulsive shiver, but was so wrenched out of himself that he flung down his ram's horn on Brother John's pillow close to the sick man's head and allowed the obstreperous wisp of hair on the top of his own skull to hang down over his narrow forehead like a black snake suspended by its tail.

Porius had just seen Nesta making signs to Gwythyr and Neb to be quieter in their movements, now that mother and child were both asleep, so that it was in a low whisper that he began congratulating the doctor on Magog's birth.

"You surely won't sail with the Greek now?" he whispered to him, but when he found that the man either did not hear him or was too agitated to understand him, his own mind swung back to what he had just seen which was the first birth he had ever witnessed in his life.

He had differed since his infancy from all previous members of the prolific Cunedda family by taking no interest in animals. Of horses, of dogs, of sheep, of cattle he knew as little as it was physically possible for the only child of a born huntsman like Einion ab Iddawc to know. Thus as he had been entirely removed from the circumstance of any birth in his association with his mother, his foster-mother, and his betrothed, his knowledge of the singular and startling accompaniments of birth was practically nil.

Of course he had heard tell of this and that; so what naturally came into his head to wonder now was whether it was in some shocking connection with the uncomfortable phenomena he had heard described as the “navel string” and the “afterbirth” that Nesta had at a certain moment wiped Gwythyr’s hunting knife with a piece of stuff clipped from the tail of its owner’s vest, or whether the knife had only been used to cut from this same useful garment a band broad and soft enough to wind round the tender belly of the newborn.

What he felt now, as his eyes followed the eyes of the doctor to the narrow and dark orifice under the blanket where he held the Brother’s wrist, was an obscure impression that if he could only plunge his soul into some mysterious underworld of *real reality,* out of which those four open eyes had emerged from a spume of blood, and those two closed eyes had emerged from the torn and bleeding centre of a woman’s body, he would find that the secret of life included within its immeasurable orbit the secret of death.

It was at this moment that he saw the doctor fall back in startled alarm; and it was also at this moment that he himself — owing to the fact that he had been leaning so much of his weight upon the Brother’s body — fell back in shocked and dizzy helplessness. For there suddenly happened two bewildering events. There appeared on the threshold of the chamber the flaxen-haired figure of Gunta, the eight-year-old little daughter of Gunhorst the Sais and of Sibylla the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, and as she entered she called upon the name of Neb ap Digon. At the same moment, with a sudden and shockingly unexpected jerk of his whole body, Brother John heaved himself up in his bed by the help of his two hands into a sitting posture, and cried aloud: “It doesn’t matter! It doesn’t matter! It doesn’t matter!” and then fell silent but remained in a sitting position.

Swift as an arrow Neb ap Digon rushed to the side of the little girl and took her hand. They neither of them showed the least awareness of Brother John. As far as he was concerned they might have been a couple of living dolls, chattering during the Eleusinian Mysteries or the Christian Sacrament, but they were both too proud and too self-conscious to chatter, and they showed no sign of their acquaintanceship before all these people beyond holding hands.

The flaxen-haired little girl, who had realized at once with a woman’s life instinct that there was a newly born infant in the room, opened her blue eyes wide with interest when she realized that if she stood on tiptoe she could just see the child lying asleep in the round tin basin in which for the last thirty years Brother John had taken his monthly bath.

Having satisfied herself that her instinct had been correct, and that there *was* a baby in the room, the little Saxon raised one of her bare arms, and drawing Neb’s head close to her own began whispering vehemently in his ear. Neb’s features during this process became like those of a stiff archaic statue of Hermes subjected to restoration or alteration by some nervous and fanatical modern Byzantine.

After a quick exchange of further whispers during which the two small creatures were watched intently, not only by the doctor and Porius who were supporting the dying man, the one on his right hand and the other on his left, but by Brother John himself, who kept making violent but futile efforts to speak, Neb left the little girl's side, and hastily approaching Porius, though after a courtly obeisance coming no nearer than about twice the length of his own height, commenced, in the perfect style of a practised imperial courtier, to deliver his horrifying and indeed appalling news.

Brother John, his head twisted awkwardly with concentrated attention, listened to every word the boy uttered; and as he listened he relinquished, to Porius's infinite relief, any attempt to utter another word.

Neb told how a considerable body of Saxon invaders had taken undisputed possession of the central tents of the horsemen's camp, and had met with little resistance, for all the equites were away fighting, and the men that were left — and well did Porius know that! — were anything but natural fighters. Worse than this, and here Neb's voice assumed a tone that doubtless followed some austere tradition that went back to ancient Rome, the leader of the band was the same Saxon who had previously waylaid and killed both the Princess Tonwen and her disinherited friend of the Avanc's Cave, who now is known to have been the son of Gorthevyr the Blessed, himself the son of Gortheyrn the Accursed, the lover of Ronwen.

Worse still, these same savage Saeson had discovered, and some false traitor must have shown them its entrance, the place where the camp's wine and mead were stored, so that they were now as drunk and as wickedly mad with drink as the worst devils in hell, and when Gunta ferch Sibylla saw them — but here Porius interrupted:

"You mean to say that this little girl herself saw these things going on?" and Neb ap Digon acknowledged with a faint but very courtly bow, just as if he were relating some magical adventure to a group of spellbound ladies-in-waiting, that his youthful girlfriend *had* been present in person at these savage deeds.

“When she saw them dancing so furious and so wild, and their yellow hair tossing so madly,” Neb continued, “she climbed up into one of those fir trees in front of the camp kitchen, and being so small of stature and those Saeson devils so huge and so drunk, not a soul of them saw her. But, my Lord, I have to tell you something else that is... that will... that will make you—”

The hesitation assumed by Neb at this moment was as dramatic as if the adventurer addressing the court ladies had suddenly perceived the queen herself entering the circle of his audience; and he lowered his voice to such a pitch that Porius, instead of angrily bidding him tell the worst quickly and have done with it, glanced round at Brother John’s profile and at the rim of the improvised cradle.

What Porius really felt at that moment would have shocked every living soul in all Edeyrnion except Neb himself and his great master. He felt as though, since the purposes of destiny would be fulfilled whatever anybody did or didn’t do, that it was more than lawful, that it was natural and wise, to enjoy the spectacle of the rushing torrent of good and evil and let what *would be, be.*

What would have been difficult at any time, and was impossible in his present mood, for his nature to grasp, was the depth of Neb’s cynicism and inhumanity. Save for Myrddin Wyllt and Gunta ferch Gunhorst Neb did not give a damn for god or man. His dramatic gestures and pauses, his lowerings of the voice, this “something else that is... that will... that will make you... “ were in reality pure melodramatic playacting.

But the hollowest reed if thrown into the dangerously smooth water above a waterfall can make a perceptible splash; and Neb’s “something else that is... that will... that will make you... “ served to precipitate over the brink the troubled soul of the man in the bed.

Brother John had been listening intently to all Neb said, and though the words were ostensibly spoken to Porius alone, and spoken in a stage whisper too, he had heard them all.

And the curious thing was that when he began speaking now, his total unawareness of the fact that the enemy within him had at that very second gathered itself up for its last leap was so complete that as it was carried to his hearers upon the powerful vibration of his tone, which was a tone of life and not of death, they too were hypnotized into forgetting that he was dying.

"You must forgive me, Porius, and you others," he said in curious spasmodic jerks, dropping the words like round smooth pebbles into the astonished silence of the whole room, "if I can't see you and if I'm interrupting anyone; but I've never been so short of breath, and I've never felt such a thick cloud of mist — what we used to call a *niwl* — over my eyes. And I've never been so heavy with sleep. I've got a lot to do yet before I die or I'd like to sleep for a thousand years — to sleep, you understand, Porius *filius,* just simply to sleep.

"But the things those children are telling you, Porius, my son, are enough to keep us awake till doomsday. You've brought me a good doctor, Porius, a very good doctor. But Death's a better one. If I hadn't got such a lot to do I'd like to die now. But I want to tell you something, and I've no time to explain what I want to tell you. I can only tell you, and you must take my word for it, Porius *filius,* that if I *had* time I could explain. No one is to be blamed for all this horror except everybody and everything. That's what I want to say. Nobody is to blame more than we all are; and nobody is to be punished more than we all are!

"Do you hear, Porius *filius*? No one is to be punished. None, I say, none! We are all good and we are all bad; we are all angels and we are all devils.

The good is always stronger than the bad. But we don't see it till the end because we don't know the one from the other.

"And however bad the pain Death can always stop it; and nobody, I say to you, *nobody* can stop Death coming and bringing it to an end. One minute the pain's there, and the next it's gone for ever and it is Death that has done it! So let us give thanks, neither to good nor to evil, neither to God nor to Satan, but only to Death!

"I'll be better soon, I expect, Porius *filius*, when this *niwl's* gone and I can see clearer. I've got a lot to do; otherwise I could sleep for ages. No, no, no, no! You needn't call for Pryderi, or for Jesus, or for Pelagius! I can do what's needed myself, since there's nobody to blame and nobody to be punished. Absolvo — omnes, omnes, omnes, omnes!"

The almost supernatural jerk that followed these words was so violent that it caused the doctor's ram's horn to roll off the bed. One second, as the old Brother had himself just said, and his living soul was solidly there, deeply entrenched within him; *another second* and it was gone, absolutely, and what was left was a striking mask, an impressive image, an imposing likeness, something that had been deserted by the world of Nature and taken over by the world of plastic moulds, monumental mimes, mummied mockeries, and mortuary mementos.

Porius felt as if the same jerk with which the living soul had torn itself out of his old friend's body had taken place, a thousand times modified, in his own case. The difference between the man's last words and what he could now see of the head hanging loose and falling sideways, and of the face drawn awry and distorted, was a bitter commentary on the way things went in this world.

As he held the dead body by its shoulders while Lot-el-Azziz smoothed the pillow to receive it, the view he got of the Brother's features was naturally broken and fragmentary, but it was sufficiently startling to disturb him more than he expected.

The scene that followed, however, was a proof to him of how impossible it is to predict what the combined forces of fate and chance, playing upon the nerves of a particular group, can conjure up in the shape of an edifice of atmospheric emotion.

As far as Porius was concerned, his one and only thought — and considering his present drifting, detached, and half-drugged state, and considering the ghastly pause in Neb's narration and the unspoken horrors that had been hinted at before that narration ceased, this was the last thing he would have predicted — was to catch his old master before he got too far away and to tell him that the distorted form under his hands, as he helped Lot-el-Azziz lower it down on the pillow, was not *he* at all, and that he couldn't think of this lifeless thing as anything but an *it.*

"Yes," he thought, as he left the doctor to get Nesta's help in closing the eyes of this simulacrum and straightening its limbs, "you are as real as we are who cast shadows and break wind and eat oatmeal upon the earth! By Jesus and Pryderi, you are as real as we are!"

He stood, lumbering and lurching and swaying for a moment, his thumbs in his belt, his head nodding like a grotesque idol, and his hands hanging down like those of a great ape. He hadn't had the least idea he would feel the old Brother's death like this; and the discovery that he couldn't predict his own emotions increased his sense of being in a boat on a far more unknown sea than any Bosporus.

While these were the most articulate of Porius's feelings, to the newly born Magog the presence of death had not even risen to the reality of a sneeze or a gurgle. He had been making curious little pathetic animal noises in his extemporized cradle, but he now fell into a delicious Elysium of sleep deeper than he had experienced since he had been lugged from his warm soft nest in his mother's body. He had had his rebellious moods even there, and his fits of restless dissatisfaction, but of these no fibre, no nerve, no cell awoke to trouble his new sanctuary in the dead man's washing basin.

And there came across that fluctuating invisible something that was next to nothing, that wavering edifice of emotion, made up of the feelings of all the persons in that death chamber, a sudden backrush and tidal return of the old caveman life of the Gaer long before the Romanized House of Cunedda refined and Christianized it.

Over those two unconscious bodies, the body of the newly dead and the body of the newly born, this backwash of prehistoric life swirled and heaved. And its focal point was the renewed contact between the rapidly moving lips of the daughter of Sibylla and the attentive ear of the cynical Neb.

And while Porius, standing erect now and scowling with absorbed intensity at the stone arch above Magog's cradle, tried indignantly and inconsistently to hold back the escaping soul of Brother John and make it forgive everything of which it knew nothing, Magog's brother, with no less gravity but much less inconsistency, clutched anxiously at the most available corner of his mother's nearest garment while he kept his eyes fixed in awe and wonder upon the flaxen-haired little girl.

It was Neb ap Digon who broke the spell. Porius's attempt to force back the dial shadow of fate and to burden the dead with the unbearable load of the living was a lapse into the sort of irrational emotion which, in his convoluted experience of the heart affairs of the imperial court, this small creature had come to regard with the contempt of an arctic fish for a tropical fish.

His attitude to Porius was already a little dubious, if not actually hostile. That there was some sort of a psychic bond, hard to define and possibly destined never to be defined, between his great master and Porius, had already struck Neb's attention; nor had he been free from pangs of actual jealousy on the occasions when it had been Porius's impulse to offer physical support to the magician.

In addition to all this, Neb's protective instinct on behalf of Myrddin Wyllt had been roused to a dangerous point when he noticed what seemed to his sardonic mind to be a subtle lecherous understanding between Porius and that fatal woman from whom he felt it to be his first purpose in life to protect his master.

There was therefore at the back of what the small creature now did an urge beyond the urge of the moment. He rushed forward, completely disregarding the angry reprimand of Lot-el-Azziz, who was engaged with the corpse, and seizing Porius by his belt began dragging him, with a force that was as astonishing to himself as it was to his victim, across the flagstones towards the portico.

Meanwhile Gunta, noticing that the initial bewilderment on Porius's face had turned to a puzzled irritation and that this, in its turn, was changing into anger, made the scene worse by snatching at one of Porius's wrists and throwing her whole weight upon it.

At this point little Gog, though clinging now with both hands to his mother's sleeve, began to laugh with intense sympathy at what he fancied, for the doctor played it sometimes with him, was a game of "giants" between this small boy and girl, and Porius. The only reason, he thought, that the three of them weren't laughing out loud was that the old man in his rumpled bed and Magog in his tin cradle were both fast asleep.

It therefore may easily have been some mental vibration between Gog's brain and his own that suddenly compelled Porius, when he felt this pressure from both the little beings, to treat the occurrence not only as laughable but as a definite sign from the goddess of chance pointing to what it were best for him to do.

What he did, therefore, under the influence of this view of things, was to lift them both gently and firmly from their feet and carry them bodily, Neb under his right arm and Gunta under his left, clean through the portico, which he knew so well, and out into the open air.

CHAPTER XXV. Better Nothing Than This!

THE SHOCK OF FINDING IT much colder and much darker than he had anticipated had the effect of deepening the primeval play impulse communicated to Porius from the Judaic soul of Gog, brother of Magog. He mentally let go his hold upon the spirit of his dead teacher, a spirit that immediately — so it seemed to his imagination — mounted aloft in great spiral circles into the vast curve of the sky.

But he replaced gently upon the ground both his prisoners, taking care however to retain his hold of each small hand, one of which, Neb's, was very warm, and the other, Gunta's, very cold. And he bent low and looked ponderingly into each face, smoothing down in turn as he did so a disturbed lock of hair on each head.

It was then that for once in their mutual life, which was destined to be both long and eventful, the wise and worldly Neb proved himself a poor discerner of character compared with the scaramouch daughter of the reckless Sibylla.

Neb had reacted unfavourably to the experience of being carried under the arm of "that great hulking Gaer ass," as he had heard Dion Dionides describe Porius; and now that he was released, to have his hand taken as if he'd been a child and to see his girl's hand seized in exactly the same way, was maddening to every dangerous nerve of his intimate pride.

But that one look combined with that one touch was quite enough for little Gunta. From henceforth to the end of her days she regarded Porius as the only absolutely good and reliable man fate had ever thrown in her way.

"You won't get too tired and too hot in that cloak, my dear, will you, if we go and take a look at those drunken devils?"

This remark of her "good and reliable" one had the effect of turning Gunta's mind to the safety of Neb. It wasn't that she wished *he* had a cloak as warm as hers, for she knew that his profession as a page kept him so constantly in and out of sheltered places that his bodily temperature had come to resemble that of a cat; it was that she distrusted his ability to climb trees with the monkeylike swiftness and assurance that she herself possessed.

And if they were to conduct this "reliable" giant into the presence of her Saxon relatives' dance of death, it would be necessary for them to witness these murderous men's fate — for she had been brought up to regard the son of her mother's prince as invincible — from a safe vantage ground.

But before any further move was made it occurred to Gunta ferch Sibylla that if the solitary "good man" of her life — for into nothing less than this that one look and touch, combined with a delicious sense of helplessness such as she could naturally never feel with Neb, had already converted our Herculean friend — was to be stirred up to that real anger, which Gaer gossip assured her was necessary if he were to destroy his enemies, it was advisable that she should do what it was totally against her nature to do, namely, convey to him the abominable horrors she had witnessed during the last six hours. It is possible that if even her friend Neb had seen the things Gunta had seen he would have been too upset to speak of them. But having resolved for all their sakes to make this placid Hercules angry, the little girl, with her fair hair blowing in the southwest wind as they walked faster and faster along the lake's edge, thrust her big doll more securely under the belt beneath her cloak and proceeded to relate, baldly and bleakly, and in a shrill reedy voice like the piping of a curlew between seashore and salt marsh, how a band of the Saeson had brought into the camp the decapitated bodies of Princess Tonwen and the son of Gorthevyr Bendigeit, commonly known as “the man in the Ogof’s Cave,” and how they had forced their way into the camp’s kitchen, and how they had got drunk on the heady mead of the west and on the rich wines of the emperor’s cellar.

From the branch of a pine tree it was, she told Porius, that she had watched the beginning of these horrors — only the beginning, she explained in her monotonous piping voice, for she had seen worse things that day than drunken brutes dancing round two corpses, even though one of them *was* the son of Gorthevyr the Blessed and the other the youngest princess of Ogof-y-Gawr.

“What worse things?” Porius enquired abruptly and not without a spasm of irritation, for he had been aware for some while that Neb was attempting, by means of the simple expedient of digging his nails into the hand that held him, to shake himself free and escape; and though Neb’s nails were neither as sharp nor as long as those of his fellow pages, they had begun to cause his captor no little discomfort, not to speak of making him aware of a wetness in the palm of his hand that was beyond perspiration.

But, from this point on, both the pain and the blood drops ceased; and they ceased because both the little girl’s companions stopped in awestruck amazement at what she now began to relate.

And the queer thing was, though it sprang from quite opposite causes, that the strong man of Edeyrnion and the wise child of Caerleon felt quivering through their souls the same feeling, a feeling composed, in almost equal portions, of revenge and shame.

Neb felt ashamed that he had left for a single second, though at the man’s express command, his weak, helpless, and victimized counsellor. Porius felt shame that while he had been occupied, and worse than occupied, while he had been absorbed, possessed, obsessed, angel-hunted, devil-ridden, by the tragedy of the new Creiddylad and by the death of his old teacher, these savage invaders of Ynys Prydein had been murdering his people, polluting his sacred places, befouling his life-giving shrines, and for all he knew capturing Mynydd-y-Gaer itself!

Nor was the little offspring of Gunhorst the Sais and Sibylla the Gwyddyl-Ffichti oblivious of the effect of her dramatic narration. Had Brochvael been there to hear, and he alone in all Edeyrnion would have caught the full significance of her tale, he might well have been reminded of some Homeric scene when it was the duty of Iris to reveal some ghastly aspect of human destiny to which the son of crooked-counselling Cronos had nodded his assent.

But though she had never heard of Iris little Gunta was of the same sex, and at this moment with her back to the darkening water and to the purplish ridges on the other side of the water where the rocky terraces rose above Craig Hen, she resembled Iris in being able, beyond the power of either Neb or Porius or both of them together, not only to see but to describe abominable happenings without allowing them to leave, or at any rate without their leaving, any wound or scar or bruise upon her feminine mind.

"I followed Sibylla" — the child always spoke of her mother in this impersonal way— "when she went to join my father. She thought and my father thought that I should go with them — either back to Germania if they lost, or on to Caergwynt and Bryn Badon if *we* lost. But I had other ideas. When the prince let my father go on his vow to abstain from the war, and he broke his vow and took Sibylla with him and met the Saeson and led them against Ogof-y-Gawr I pretended to be going with them. But I ran ahead and got first to Ogof-y-Gawr where the princess and the Derwydd and Erim ab Uchtryd had taken refuge, but where there wasn't a single solitary man to defend them.

"I told them I'd guide them here to the Brother's cell, or, if they liked, I'd take them to Gwern-y-Gwyddyl, where they could hide for days and months with Sibylla's people. I begged and begged. I took Princess Esyllt's hand and cried and cried. But she wouldn't and the Derwydd wouldn't. But I frightened Erim ab Uchtryd at last by telling him how angry my father was with the prince for chaining him to the wall in Rhitta Gawr's Hole, and how he would make the Saeson kill them without mercy. I think Erim would have come with me quite alone, but his conscience wouldn't let him. So if it was my father who killed the others, it was Erim's conscience that killed *him.*

"Ogof-y-Gawr was empty — everybody had gone. I went in and stood at a window overlooking the entrance. In the entrance the princess and Erim and the Derwydd waited for my father and his Saeson. Sibylla came with them and stood at the back all the time, her hands over her eyes. My father had joined the same band who had killed Princess Tonwen and the chieftain of the Avanc's Cave and whose leader is the one you're now going to kill. His name's Thorson, and he's a terrible one with both axe and spear.

"The princess made a speech to them, a biting, railing, violent speech and a speech full of as much contempt for us as for them; a speech against Roman, German, Brython, Gwyddyl-Ffichti; against all in fact except her own forest people, who, she said, had killed all the giants and had inherited Ynys Prydein from them. The princess wore the same royal robe she'd worn at the Feast of the Fisher King, and the Derwydd had on all his arch-druid's garments.

"After the princess had spoken the Derwydd spoke, if you could call it speaking. But it wasn't like ordinary speaking. It wasn't talking to anybody, neither to my father nor to Thorson, nor to the men. It was more like asking questions into the air; but it wasn't *exactly* like that.

"And the Derwydd wasn't angry like the princess, or frightened like Erim. He was smiling. But he wasn't smiling at anybody. He was just smiling, like I used to smile when my doll was asleep and I didn't know when she'd wake up. I can hear his voice now; and when those things began happening I didn't cover up my eyes like I saw Sibylla doing. I only repeated over and over again what the Derwydd was saying to the air. 'Nothing,' he was saying, 'is interesting save to see what happens next.' It was Thorson with his spear who did it; but he didn't throw his spear. He just walked up to the Derwydd and with all his strength ran the spear straight through him and pinned him to the ground. Then he did the same with the princess and Erim; but those two he pinned to the ground with the same spear.

"Fear made Erim laugh out loud. Fear made him laugh like a woman. Fear made him ashamed of nothing. He acted like a baby, playing round the princess's skirts till the princess thought he'd gone mad; and I could see by her face she was annoyed with him, and when he held her skirts she tried to push him away.

"But *I* knew what it was and I was sorry. But I was glad when he laughed like that; because I know from myself that *when you laugh like that* you don't care for anything! That's what I wanted to say to fear: 'Fear,' I wanted to say, 'you're a fool! You've frightened him so much that he's not afraid any more! That's all *you've* done with your frights!'

"Thorson pinned the Derwydd to the ground with one spear and then called for another. And when one of his men gave him another he came up to the princess when Erim was behind her, clinging to her, and when he was laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks and when he was jumping the princess, who is very thin though she’s so tall, up and down, as I jump my doll sometimes. And suddenly my father told Thorson in a funny kind of voice not to put the spear through the princess because the Derwydd, though he was pinned to the ground, was still smiling and telling the air about its being ‘interesting to see what happens.’ I could see my father was troubled with fear; yet not enough fear to give him a laughing fit.

“When the same spear was pinning them both to the ground Erim stopped laughing and began to scream. This made me feel sick; and I could see it annoyed my father, for he took an axe from one of Thorson’s men and lifting the princess’s head out of the way, and I could see from the window she was dead, he chopped his skull in half.

“Then my father thought of a strange thing. I could see Thorson didn’t much like it. I think he was frightened of it. I think he knew it would bring him ill luck. But though he’s stronger than Father he hasn’t got Father’s brain. So Father made Thorson’s men do what he wanted; and they fastened some sort of oily stuff round the two spears — round the spear that pinned the dead princess and the dead Erim to the earth, and round the spear that pinned to the earth the last of the druids. Then they brought fire and set light to these two spears, so that above three bodies pillars of fire rose, and as they rose, their flaming horns waved in the air.

“I couldn’t see the Derwydd’s face any more now because of the smoke, but I don’t believe he was dead and I imagined I heard his voice coming out of the smoke and still saying over and over: ‘Nothing is interesting save to see what happens next,’ and before I slipped out of Ogof-y-Gawr and ran away I went round Thorson’s men to Sibylla, who still had her hands over her face; and I picked a tuft of fescue grass, for in our huts at Gwyddylgwern we throw it after them when a man takes a woman away, for fescue grass binds them together and keeps the man kind, and I threw it against her but too lightly for her to feel it; and then I gave a last look at those two pillars of smoke and kissed my hand to Sibylla's back and ran."

It was extraordinary, when she had done, how the effect of her words flowed and ebbed, ebbed and flowed, across the conscious personalities of Porius and Neb. Thousands of mysteries of feminine self-expression in all their proud and pitiful essences were incarnated in this flaxen-haired child as she clutched about her shoulders half of an untrimmed sheepskin and shifted the position of the big doll she kept strapped against her side under her leather belt.

"Come! Let us go!" cried Porius; and as for Neb he gave his girlfriend a series of congratulatory little nods as much as to say: "You've worked the trick, my dear. The devils are done for now."

And the little girl, as they all three went on, proceeded to relate how when in her flight she reached Porius's marriage tent she had found the door open, climbed on to the bed, and there slept for more hours than she could tell.

It was in this way that she'd given her parents time to make any vain search for her they may have felt impelled to make ere they went off together to join Colgrim; and it was thus that when she finally wandered into the horsemen's camp she perceived from her vantage point in the fir tree that the gigantic Thorson and his small band were still at their marauding games.

"Come on! As quick as you can, children!" whispered Porius, "and as quietly as you can. Let me and not you be the one to make the noise that'll disturb them!"

What Gunta felt when they reached the scene of these gruesome revels and, letting Porius go forward alone, stood hand in hand with Neb, was exactly what she would have felt had their friend been an angel of heaven with a weapon in his hand from a celestial armoury.

What Neb felt was much less imaginative. Weighing the situation in the most rational balances, he decided that heathen barbarians of this kind would be more terrified of a man like Porius with empty hands than of half a dozen men like themselves armed with battleaxes and spears.

But Chance is nothing if not capricious; and the event that actually occurred fulfilled neither Neb's premonition nor Gunta's presupposition. For as it happened the drunken band of Saeson, in number about a score, were lying on the dew-wet darkening grass at the feet of the gigantic Thorson, who, with his axe by his side and his back to the ramshackle wooden structure which the imperial horsemen had put up to serve as a kitchen, was drowned fathom-deep in sleep.

Porius moved slowly forward. His feelings at that moment were curiously sluggish and languid. No particular emotion of any kind stirred in him, not even that of righteous anger. He often found it difficult to get angry when "the occasion," as people told him, "called for it," and he supposed the occasion was making its humble uproar at this very moment.

But a drowsy kind of fatalism about these men's crimes and a vague, confused, anxious sense of being a prize fool himself, both in regard to his achievements and in regard to his misdeeds, were all he felt.

And indeed as he moved forward towards a heap of stones that separated him from these twenty sleepers, he began actually to feel a dim sense of pleasure in the fact that he was no longer called upon to display any feeling; in fact that all he had to do was to exert his strength in opposition to the strength of twenty peacefully oblivious Saeson! That this exertion of strength would necessarily imply wounding and killing remained a blur at the back of his exhausted brain and was no part of the motive force behind his huge and abnormal muscles.

But suddenly he stopped, stopped like a creature frozen motionless, stopped like a rabbit in the presence of a weasel. He had reached the heap of stones which had not been high enough to conceal the group of men who were lying in all sorts of quaint postures at the feet of their gigantic leader but had been just high enough to conceal what lay immediately behind it. And it was this that froze him into motionless horror. The dapple-grey mare — whose name had been given her only twenty-four hours ago by the emperor himself — lay there dead while a thick, slowly oozing stream of blood, that looked jet black in the waning light, had begun to gather at a spot in her side and to trickle down over the smooth curve of her belly till it collected in a pool between her legs.

Himself transfixed by a long spear which had been left in his body, but not in a vulnerable spot, and which now trailed at his side leaving dark ribbon-shaped lines in the dew-soaked grass, crouched the familiar form of Drudwyn, Rhun’s white hound.

Drudwyn was licking the cold nose of the dead mare about whose nostrils and eye sockets crawled several black ants, while a tiny brown insect whose identity, had Porius tried to verify a matter of such subhuman interest in that dim light, would have struck him as belonging rather to the race of beetles than to that of flies, kept approaching the slippery surface crossed by the dog’s devoted tongue and then again precipitately retreating.

But there was a cause much stronger than the dimness of the hour or the minuteness of the insect to sweep Porius forward now from horror to horror; for beyond the dead mare and the wounded dog there lay side by side two human figures, if human they could still be called who had been so monstrously manhandled. They were the figure of Princess Tonwen of

Ogof-y-Gawr and the figure of the disinherited son of Gorthevyr Bendigeit of Ogof-yr-Avanc.

But it was not only the fact that these figures were lying in complete nakedness side by side that gave him this ultimate shock. It was the further abomination that their severed heads had been exchanged, so that to the naked body of the youngest princess — who was an old woman over seventy — had been joined the head of the son of the saintly Gorthevyr, while the body of the disinherited recluse looked out upon the twilight through the proud, aloof, death-enamoured eyes of the woman who loved him.

Kneeling down by their side Porius lifted up the severed head of the woman, kissed it, laid it on the grass, and did the same with the man's. Then he joined each body to its own proper head, following as closely as he could the organic adjustments of Nature. Then removing his outer garment he laid it carefully over the two bodies, and having brushed away the leaves and insects from the faces of the dead, he rose to his feet.

At that moment he became aware that some half a dozen of the Saeson were on their feet too, and having possessed themselves of their weapons, were standing in a row before Thorson, calling on him to awake, and even indulging in tentative, cautious, and hesitating prods with the butt ends of their spears to hasten this event.

As if aware of new danger in the wind the white hound lifted his head from licking the nose of the dead and holding up his snout uttered a miserable howl. Something in the effort required for this requiem to his friend completed what the spear had begun; and with one long convulsive shiver the soul of Drudwyn was gathered to his fathers.

"Jesus Holy!" cried the heart of Porius to the brain of Porius, "I must get that spear out of him!"

Hurriedly he moved over to the dog's side, and without kneeling or forgetting to face his enemy while he was thus engaged, he managed, by pressing one large hand on Drudwyn's back, to pull out the spear.

Meanwhile the majestic Thorson had risen to his full height and was moving his clenched fingers up and down the long handle of his axe so as to get the precise hold on it he wanted; while one of the others, the bravest in spirit though the smallest in stature of them all, seizing his own spear by the middle and holding it as if he were attacking a wolf, rushed blindly forward against their enemy.

Now it happened that the particular spear that Porius had pulled from the corpse of Drudwyn had not been brought across the sea from Germania but had been cut from a grove of ash trees near Dinas Efrog, and had had a *tynged* put on it by one of the wild Ffichtiaid of those regions that it should be a deadly killer but be able to kill none save Saeson.

Its appetite for blood therefore had been roused but not satisfied by its sojourn in the bowels of Drudwyn, and being possessed of the mysterious peculiarity that in the beginning had been injected into the sap of these weird trees by Melian Nymphs who were themselves, as Hesiod relates, of no normal origin, it made a quivering and vibrant use of the spontaneous thrust given to it by Porius and passed easily and naturally and exultantly through the heart of the smallest and bravest of Thorson's little band, killing him instantaneously.

And it was then that our Brythonic Hercules performed the exploit about which all Ynys Prydein was destined to hear, not by the whisperings of goblinish Coranians but by natural rumour, before the year five hundred Anno Domini was far advanced.

The huge Thorson, whirling his axe round and round and grasping its long handle with both hands, came casually and deliberately striding towards Porius, who as all could see was now entirely weaponless, since the spear that had been released from an animal body was now incarcerated in a human one.

Thorson was evidently not hurrying himself. The death of his smallest and bravest follower had no more excited in *him* any pseudomoral spirit of honourable retribution or of righteous revenge than the sight of his atrocities had excited such feelings in Porius. He seemed to know by instinct that Porius wouldn’t run away; and with his twenty men — only nineteen now — supporting him, he must have felt he had all the time in the world to chop their enemy in pieces.

A sick amazement that was speedily transformed into a headlong panic took possession of every Seisnig heart when they saw that enemy bend down and pick up their dead man by the heels, the spear still transfixing him, and proceed to use this small corpse as a grievous and deadly weapon.

Before Thorson had time to bring down his great swinging axe from the whirligigs and curlicues he was weaving with it in the air, Porius with his corpse club had struck him to earth, stunned and senseless, the axe knocked from his grasp. After that it was all as easy for our friend as if he had been contending with helpless human-sized chessmen. He kept mowing them down with the corpse of their comrade till only four were left erect; and finally when he advanced against these, brandishing round his head the battered, broken, mangled, and almost indistinguishable body of the bravest Sais who had entered Edeyrnion, they all four threw down their shields and spears and fled weaponless up the slope of the mountain.

With no motive force now in his exhausted mind save an obscure preference for being surrounded by dead Saeson rather than by wounded ones, Porius picked up Thorson’s great axe and beginning with that axe’s owner went heavily, wearily, doggedly, round the whole circle of his enemies, smashing their skulls; nor was it until, save for Neb and Gunta, he was the only human being left alive in or near the dining hall, kitchen, buttery, and dormitory of the emperor's *equites,* that he summoned those two little creatures to rejoin him.

Thus it was brought about that when at last in the early hours of the following morning the vast disk of the full moon rode high in the sky over the waters of Saint Julian's Fount, it was on the outer margin of a considerable expanse of smouldering wood ashes that Porius — wrapped in a blanket discovered by Gunta in an alcove of the horsemen's kitchen, for he had turned his outer tunic into a shroud — slept and waked, waked and slept, while on the inner edge this same expanse, surrounded by a motley confusion of silver bowls, wooden trenchers, fragments of bread and cake, together with cedar boxes of Greek currants and Syrian caskets of dates and figs.

Neb and Gunta, those precocious children of zodiacal antagonisms and planetary cross purposes, tightly intertwined in each other's arms, free from hope and fear and desire and regret and apprehension and expectation, slept an untroubled sleep.

"Am I lacking," thought Porius, as he watched the magic satellite of the earth disentangling herself from the tops of the fir trees and staring down at her image in the water, "am I lacking in some essential element of natural feeling, that I so meekly obey *him over there* about staying down here among dead dogs and dead horses, among chamber pots and kitchen pots, among nursery bards and druid brothers, instead of hurrying home to the Gaer to join him, whether he likes it or not, and to fight after my own fashion on his side?"

Porius was now watching with a curious interest two tall reed stalks with feathery tops that were swaying a little in a faint night wind wavering from the west, from the direction, not of the Cader, but of yr Wyddfa.

And there seemed to him to have detached itself from one or other of these swaying stalks a pair of seed husks that by some chance, possibly by a wandering gossamer thread, possibly by a weft of spiderweb, had got stuck together, and now made a hair's breadth bridge leading from one stalk to the other.

By yet another chance this bridge of gossamer seed lifted up its twin angles of triune lines exactly in the centre of the moon's reflection, and once established there took on the appearance of a gallows. And as he watched this sinister shape framed in the wavering reflection of that circle of mystic light, a final accidental happening occurred; for there was brought thither, carried on some reckless breath of wind, a leaf or a twig, or it may even have been a tired and battered or possibly lifeless moth.

This weak or even inanimate wanderer destiny now proceeded, with the same weary indifference that Porius himself had used towards his prostrate enemies, to hang on that lunar-rippling horizontal bar.

And as he watched this hanging of a leaf, or a twig, or a feather, or a straw, or maybe of an already dead moth, on this gallows of reed stalks within this wind-rippled lunar reflection he made a discovery and a decision.

His discovery was that everything in the-world is a fluctuating and wavering image in wind-stirred water; and that what is called truth is simply the particular aspect of this image as it strikes a man, or a woman, or a dog, or a horse, or a fish, or a snake, or a worm, or a bird, or an insect, or even a plant or reed.

His decision was that never after this hour, an hour that he knew must be something like three or four in the early morning of the twenty-second of October in the year four hundred and ninety-nine, would he indulge himself in feelings of remorse for anything he himself had done, or nourish righteous indignation towards, or inflict justifiable vengeance upon, other people who had committed crimes. He was by his bodily nature and constitution so easygoing, in fact so sluggish and slow moving, that in spite of the rapid ideas that whirled through his mind he needed no special revelations or resolutions, nor any particular aid from Mithras or Christ, to hold him in patient submission to the way of life along which fate and chance appeared anxious to conduct him.

What the cumulative impact of this day’s extravagant events — Morfydd, Creiddylad, Brother John, the birth of Magog, his own recent remorseless killing of all these Saeson — had really done to him was to leave him like a planetary body that had been struck by another body and had had a great fragment torn out of it, so that a scoriac crater yawned in his side, a crater that no dead chemistry, nothing but the organic vegetation of the living seasons, could ever cover.

It was in fact the slow and almost saurian enjoyment of sense life congenial to his Herculean muscles, fibres, and sinews that came to his mind’s rescue at this crisis and set itself now to feed a prehistoric instinct in him that seemed only able to assert itself when he obstinately reduced his activities to an enduring and patient submission to a mother and a wife — tempered by all the inward irony he could muster up.

The yawning and jagged crater carved out of his inmost being by the death of his Creiddylad could be — and his sluggish and gigantic muscles seemed to be aware of this — filled up with leaf mould and the wandering seeds of life’s natural and healing vegetation. But these could be caught, nourished, and matured there, only by a life of obstinate and yet ironic submission.

"There's a couple of hours more," he thought, "before dawn; and it's the twenty-second already! The eighteenth it was when Rhun and I ate that honey together in his cave. Jesus Holy! And what things have happened in these four days!"

He had got as far as this in his thoughts when he began to feel sleepy again. The ebbing tide of tragic memory drew back to the horizon, and he began to remember all the little things that had happened before he slept.

Neb and Gunta had soon discovered all sorts of kitchen supplies and cellar supplies completely missed by Thorson and his band of marauders. To counteract their nearness to the lake, and to take the chilliness from the wind, the three of them had quickly lit a glowing fire, and the red flames of this blaze could probably be seen from the whole length of the opposite bank, and certainly by anyone who happened to be awake in the cavernous recesses of Craig Hen.

There had been quite an argument among the three of them as to whether they should spend the night inside the walls of the camp's kitchen or outside, the luxurious Neb casting his vote for the former, but the little girl, her Gwyddyl-Ffichti love of the open air being reinforced by her Seisnig blood, was all for making use of this particular outbuilding where they now were, which was sheltered from the west wind by the main building and possessed a roof though no walls.

As he now settled himself to sleep again, in steady contemplation of this reed gallows against the lunar ripples, he would have been more peaceful if something about this hanging scene enclosed in the circle of the floating moon hadn't made him think of that Byzantine picture in his mother's room representing the infant Christ caressing a snake. Was it not, he drowsily asked himself, on the edge of this same water, only then in sight of the cell where the Brother now lay dead, that four days ago, in connection with the emperor's nephew, he had thought so vividly of that picture?

It was now Monday morning and not since Thursday had he looked on that picture, and yet he would see it now with devilish clearness, and the snake was still like the emperor's nephew, and he still felt more sympathy with it than with the Holy Infant or the Virgin Mother.

And why *did* he feel this sympathy with it? Why had he felt, and why had his father so clearly felt, no loathing, no horror, no hatred, for this snake in the emperor's bosom? Was it because of Medrawd's close connection on *his* father's side with the ancient princes of the forest people? Was it because the man had conspired so long with the dead Esyllt and the dead Derwydd? Or was it because something in himself — the blood of Princess Indeg perhaps? — had always drawn him away from the House of Cunedda, away from his mother's Roman father and Pendragon people, towards Ogof-y-Gawr and the Three Aunties?

"That snake," he thought drowsily before he slept, "wants... to... wriggle... away... and be really free... wants... to... escape... from God—"

Porius's innermost *cynneddf,* or most characteristic "peculiarity," was undoubtedly the extreme *compactness* and the corresponding rapidity of movement possessed by his conscious soul. The inherited landscape, however, over which his soul like a swift-winged bird had to fly, contained a number of inherited camps of opposed reactions, contrarious enclosures, hostile climates, all of which, in the blurred and scrawled-over map of his psychological inheritance, were perpetually trying to lure his light-flitting uncommitted psyche to descend and be caught in some fowler's net. But the rapid mobility and feathery compactness of Porius's conscious soul made it possible for him to move across the map of his mental inheritance with a greater speed and a lighter weight than most.

Thus as he finally awaked on this morning of the twenty-second of October, his first conscious thought had to do with the struggle that had gone on all his life between the Gaer and Ogof-y-Gawr; and he thought wearily of this struggle as something that had been perpetually draining the spirit out of him, since in the nature of things it was impossible for him to give himself up wholeheartedly to either of the two. And the day that was now beginning seemed to him to resemble the uninspired condition of his divided sympathy.

It was neither rainy, nor misty, nor windy, nor thundery, nor even cloudless. It was as lacking in distinction of any kind as he himself, at least so he felt just then, was lacking.

"Of course, all this," he told himself, "has nothing to do with Colgrim and his Saeson; nothing to do with the emperor." And then, as the immensity of the neutrality of the universe rose and expanded about him, even the emperor himself seemed like a martial-visaged dragonfly among grotesque beetles; and what he had felt just then of the weariness and drabness and lack of distinction in himself and in everything else changed completely, for now in this dawn it really looked as if, while he had been asleep, the earth and sky had reached some tremendous solution, a solution of all the discordances in the world, and had resolved them all in some vast astronomical secret understanding!

It was as if the grey earth had become the mystery of Time, and the grey sky had become the mystery of Space, and as if all that the inhabitants of the earth had to do now was to drink of the sky and eat of the earth and conduct their affairs in peace and quietness and common sense between the one and the other.

"What powerful beings," he thought, "the thinnest and filmiest of grey clouds are! Jesus Holy! How they bring down the pride of the sun and the moon and the stars! It’s these grey clouds, *Semnai theai,* as Brochvael calls them, ‘most sacred goddesses,’ who are keeping us now from knowing whether or not the sun has risen, whether or not it’s even now above the lake, above the river, above old Rhun’s cave with no Drudwyn to guard it, above Ogof-y-Gawr, deserted, empty, silent; above the sacking and looting hordes of the victorious Colgrim, above the routed and ruined emperor!”

So murmured Porius’s buzzardlike consciousness as it hovered over the particular portion of his field of vision inherited from the elder sister of the three dead princesses!

But he scrambled heavily to his feet after that, and without disturbing the sleeping children, who had reverted to their true age in their unconsciousness, he proceeded to fetch logs and sticks and a capacious three-legged cauldron, and to collect up what loaves he could find and all the butter on which he could lay hold.

He couldn’t set light to his fire, for their only fire lighter was in the possession of Neb, but when their breakfast was ready it amused him to summon them to share it with a repeated *tu-whit-tu-who*! in exact imitation — a trick of his that always delighted Morfydd — of the hooting of an owl.

Their meal over he decided to accompany them back to Gwendydd’s tent. His father’s command had been clear and definite; that he should keep in touch with Myrddin Wyllt and make use of Rhun’s swiftness as a messenger between Gaer and camp, and this was clearly the moment to obey it.

They were all three on the point of setting out when he saw, what was impossible for his companions to see by reason of their small stature and the height of the reeds, the very figure he had so much on his mind during that protracted night, the figure of Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch, the emperor's nephew, the man who according to the forest people's notions of royal inheritance, was heir to the throne of Ynys Prydein.

"Listen, children," he announced as casually as he could, "I think after all I'd prefer to wait here just now, in case any more Saeson turn up, and let you two go on alone to Mistress Gwendydd's tent; but when you've heard the news I'd be very grateful if you'd come straight back and let me hear it. But keep together, for Christ's sake, you two! I don't want to hear that either of you have been hurt."

The two precocious ones exchanged a somewhat long glance. But after that, each of them giving him a hurried, intelligent, obedient nod, they set off hand in hand at a rapid pace without looking round.

"He's coming from the Craig Hen," he told himself. "He must have slept there and seen our fire across the water! He must think it's the Saeson, and that having killed all the serfs and cripples and raped all the women they've been making a night of it."

He moved back behind some jutting-out planks where the horsemen had left their outbuildings unfinished, and from this vantage point he watched the man's approach.

Yes, it was Medrawd without question; and as Porius watched him he felt as if he was not alone in regarding his slow, dogged, obstinate advance with a feeling of discomfort. He had several times been struck both in childhood and boyhood — he even recalled an occasion when he had attempted, but quite in vain, to convey what he felt to his foster-mother Alarch — how certain people possess a magnetic force of personality that imposes itself as much on the inanimate about them as upon their rivals in the human struggle.

And now, as the emperor's nephew approached, he couldn't resist the impression that the vague uneasiness he himself experienced was shared by the water, by the reeds, by the divine clouds, and even by unseen presences composed of invisible air, in that calm and neutral dawn.

All these elemental entities struck him as drawing back into themselves, as shrinking inwards upon themselves, as gathering themselves together within themselves, as if they sought, in the curves and rondures of their various retreats, to avoid, as he himself had an instinct to do, the threatening vibrations of this man's approach.

It was not indeed until the heir to the throne of Ynys Prydein had stood for some while dumbly staring at the smouldering ashes and dumbly taking in, though without any change in the tragic beauty of his sombre features, the steaming cauldron and the three empty goblets, that Porius emerged from his concealment.

Swift as the flight of an arrow went the man's hand to the hilt of his weapon, and a long, thin, double-edged sword directed its point with automatic precision at Porius's heart. Porius made a grave inclination of his head and with it a carelessly fatigued movement of one of his hands as if brushing off an intrusive wasp.

"Put that away, my good Lord," he said, and he said it with much more weight of authority than he felt, "and sit down here, and let us talk for a while. You are our emperor's successor, and it is better that I should offer you rest and refreshment than contend with you in the play of swords."

He bent down after uttering these words; and taking up the blanket Gunta had found for him he spread it out over the blackened ground. He didn't however take his eyes — no! not for the smallest half-beat of Time's swift wings — from the eyes of the man before him, and he rehearsed in his mind the precise jerk of the arm wherewith he would send that gleaming blade whirling among the reeds!

But Medrawd with the same impassive expression returned the weapon to its sheath, and uttering a heavy sigh as if the mere thought of a talk with this wooden-headed barbarian were a tedium beyond words, stretched himself out on the offered blanket.

Meanwhile Porius, with his empty hands hanging loosely against his thighs, remained on his feet, staring down at the mask of calculating despair beneath him, and with the curious kind of cunning which he shared with many powerful animals making as if he were twenty times more puzzled than he was — for actually and in truth he was hardly puzzled at all — by putting on an expression of asinine bewilderment, almost in the manner of young Gwythyr, only what *he* put on was idiocy rather than stupidity, and by frowning with such a show of intense effort of thought that his little greenish bear's eyes nearly disappeared under his brooding brows.

At last he spoke and spoke slowly. "What was it, my Lord," he enquired with patient rather than eager curiosity, "that originally prompted and predisposed you to rebellion against your uncle?"

Porius assumed an almost academic tone in uttering these words, a tone that suggested the expectation of some incredibly subtle statement such as could only be refuted by a process of sophisticated reasoning totally out of the power of a fool like himself.

"What," he went on, "I've long wanted to ask you face to face, Prince Medrawd, is this: how are you planning to get rid of these invaders from Germania when they've served your purpose? Isn't there a danger that they'll use you as they used Gortheyrn? And aren't you running a great risk, my Lord, in associating yourself with a Ffichtiaid witch like Mistress Nineue? Isn't she as likely to betray *you* as she's betrayed, as everybody but the man himself knows, your uncle's counsellor?

“If you’ll allow me to say so, Prince Medrawd, wouldn’t it have been better, as your uncle’s heir, not to have given the benefit of your help to such a crazy venture as that of our unhappy Modrybedd who have paid for it with their lives; and not only so but have dragged down with them the last Derwydd of Ynys Prydein?

“I’m not saying these things, my Lord, in any spirit of *ansyberwyd,* or ‘discourtesy,’ but as matters of lively interest in these difficult times.”

Medrawd lifted himself up a little on his blanket, and without looking at Porius began slowly drawing forth his long thin sword out of its sheath till he had it in his right hand, its blade naked across his body.

“Why did you do that?” asked Porius, seating himself on a dilapidated and sticky box that had once contained dried figs from the shores of the Mediterranean. To have the point of this naked sword pointing directly at him, while with his weaponless hands he tightened his clothes round him and thought of Auntie Tonwen and her friend of the Avanc’s Cave feeling nothing in their nakedness under his warm tunic, was to Porius a stimulating rather than an unpleasant experience. His unease with this man was an impalpable thing, not a physical thing, and he got solid comfort from thinking how easily, with a mere jerk of his elbow, he could knock that blade aside even after it had pricked him, and proceed to break its owner’s bones as you might strip the twigs one by one from a particular branch you wished to use as a staff.

“Why did you do that?” he enquired for the second time.

Medrawd tightened his hold upon the sword.

“Because last night I slept with your mother.”

Never had the abnormal gap between his rapidly moving mind and his phlegmatic body stood Porius in better stead than at this moment. He felt as if his conscious soul were flying swiftly round him, and round the sticky fig box beneath him, warding off all intelligible messages and all vibrations of psychic contact between his dangerous muscles and the words just uttered.

Some people might be astonished that he should have thus believed, implicitly, absolutely, what the man said. For believe it he did; and the speed of his mind's movements can indeed hardly be estimated in any attempt to follow them.

His first reaction of all would have delighted Auntie Esyllt, had she not been lying dead, pinned to the body of Erim ab Uchtryd by a charred and blackened spear whose parent tree, yellow with autumn leaves, was still flourishing in its native Germanic forest. To put therefore Porius's first reaction to Medrawd's boast into plain words, what he felt was that his mother's body was her own and that what she did with it was no business of his. This cold-blooded, impious, un-Christian reaction, which doubtless sprang from that particular region in the inherited landscape of his consciousness ruled over by that primeval matriarchy of Ogof-y-Gawr which Iddawc had brought into the House of Cunedda by his fatal marriage with the Princess Indeg, was quickly followed by an extraordinary series of others.

Although for Euronwy, daughter of a Roman Patrician and cousin to Uthyr Pendragon, to take into her bed, while her husband and father were fighting, the unusually handsome heir of the Emperor of Ynys Prydein might not in itself be for her only child an unbearable blow, the news of it, coming like this from the seducer's own lips, set that only child's emotions dancing to curious music.

He couldn't resist a malicious surge of shameless wondering as to how *he over there* — and for once from that mead-coloured stretch of sky there emerged the blurred image of a mocking human countenance — would enjoy being pricked with his own dart!

The time occupied by these thoughts was briefer than a thunderclap followed by a spout of rain. But in this short movement he was sufficiently shocked by his own cold-bloodedness to be driven to excuse himself by the reflection that had it been his foster-mother Alarch, she who had suckled him and rocked his cradle, whom the emperor's nephew had seduced, he would have taken it very differently.

Staring as calmly as possible all this while into the desolate and desolating ghastliness of the fellow's beautiful face, the incorrigible mind of Porius now raced scandalously on in an attempt to think of this face as pressed against his mother's in the final spasm and paroxysm of ecstatic copulation; but though he believed absolutely in the truth of the man's boast, his visual imagination completely failed him when he tried to see it as a reality.

"It would have been different with Alarch the Fair," he thought; and indeed he found himself drawing back in sacrilegious horror, as if from some mythic bestiality, at the idea of this beautiful devil's face on the same pillow as that of Alarch the Fair.

After what seemed to himself an unblinking stare of half a day, he turned his eyes aside from the man, released the undertunic which he had been squeezing round his ribs as if to keep them from contact with an iceberg, jerked the sticky fig box an inch or two nearer the point of the fellow's sword, and clasping his fingers over one of his knees while he tilted the box backwards he said, "Why have you told me this?"

"I don't know."

"Did you think I'd try to kill you?"

"Yes."

"Do you still think I shall try?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you're not a Christian."

"What *am* I?"

"I don't know."

"Will you stay where you are while I go to find something to put round me? I took off my tunic to cover the dead and I feel cold."

Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch nodded without speaking; and Porius, feeling as he rose from the sticky box as if he were an ape leaving behind him the skin of his rump, returned in less than a couple of minutes not only with a great purple blanket wrapped about him in the technical and rather difficult fashion of a Roman toga, but with a wickerwork case containing a flask of Greek wine.

This latter he handed to his visitor. "Break the wax yourself and drink first," he said. "You can see I haven't poisoned it."

While the emperor's nephew was breaking the seal of the bottle with the point of his sword by holding the blade, thus shortened into a dagger, with a corner of the blanket on which he lay, Porius settled himself comfortably, with his back to the woodwork of the kitchen in the sort of *gwal ysgyfamog,* or "hare's form," where Neb and Gunta had been sleeping. From this position he could see the path by the water in both directions: towards the Craig Hen and east towards the cell where Brother John lay dead. But from where the emperor's nephew lay nothing could be seen but the bed of unusually tall reeds behind which the children had disappeared.

The two men remained within an arm's length of each other, so that they could exchange the wine, but quite twenty minutes if not more had passed before the flask was even half-empty.

This was not merely due to the fact that they both possessed the civilized virtue of prudence, nor to the fact that the precious vintages selected by the sagacious Dion were specially heady. It was much more due to the peculiar nature of the startling and indeed demonic matters revealed to Porius by the emperor's nephew. Neither of them had the least notion that a time might come in the history of Ynys Prydein when one of them would be justified by the movements of destiny in asking the other — supposing they could meet at that far-off time — whether he remembered this startling conversation.

But whether or not that future encounter was ever fated to take place, one thing was certain now; namely, that Medrawd permitted himself to go further than Porius supposed any mortal man had ever dared to go before, in the depth of his pessimism and in the desperation of his loathing of life.

"And why to me?" This was the question that Porius kept asking himself, just as he had asked himself the same question with regard to the emperor's counsellor.

Was it, he wondered, because the weird gap between his abnormally active consciousness and his abnormally sluggish body left a slit in his psychic armour through which the strangest communications could pass without encountering resistance, yes! and not only could *pass;* could in fact encamp there and finding some kindred inherited ground, whether barren or fertile, mingle with it and engender strange offspring there, offspring *like,* yet *unlike,* to either of the entities from which it sprang.

If it was through a slit in the psychic armour of his personality that the magical energy of this weird individual entered his soul and won his sympathy, he soon forgot himself altogether in his fascinated interest in watching the man while he talked and in listening to what he said.

Medrawd had half-risen now and was supporting himself by the help of his long sword, which he held with the point upwards, the blade still wrapped round with a corner of his blanket while the hilt or handle of the weapon rested on the ground.

In his free hand Medrawd held the Greek flask, still in its wicker case, but all the while he spoke he made no motion to put it to his lips.

“You want to know why I am talking to you, Porius ab Einion?” he was saying. “Well, I’ll tell you, just as I told your mother last night when she asked me why I embraced her. It was, and it is, *to get even with life.* I won’t talk about the gods to you, Porius ab Einion, for we all know that it’s only as accounting for life, a good accounting or a bad accounting, that we bring the gods into it at all. That old life worshipper Myrddin is fooling Arthur just as he fooled Uthyr Pendragon and as he fooled Gorthevyr Bendigeit. Bendigeit Hell Pigs! Moch-Annwn to Moch-Nant! Do you think I don’t know how your ladies carry their hearts under their shifts as they queen it along with the Mistress of Arawn?

“O you proud Romans, how I loathe you! O you pure-blooded Brythons, how I despise you! I know *you,* Porius, son of Einion ab Iddawc, have other blood. Yes, I know it, for all that blanket-toga of yours! And shall I tell you something? Something very interesting? Something that nobody but Myrddin knows? I, who speak to you at this moment, am the true grandson of the only Ffichtiaid princess known in Ynys Prydein since the coming of the Gwyddylaid. Cynfarch found her in a cave of the chalk cliffs not far from Caer Keint, and it was her *hud* and *lledrith,* her ‘magic’ and her ‘spells,’ that enabled her son to marry my mother. But it was not till Llew got made King of Llychlyn that she began her secret war!

“My grandfather never knew till he had slept with her *why she was like she was.* But he knew *then;* just as your mother knows now. The Ffichtiaid, though they talk the language of other men, are not like other men. They did not come from Troy like the Romans, nor from Argos, Crete, and Samothrace, like the Brythons, nor from Iwerdon like the Gwyddylaid.

"Do you know, Porius ab Einion, whence my grandmother's people came? From *Annwn,* I tell you! Yes, from Annwn!" Here Medrawd made certain curious movements of the body, not jumping hops like a frog, but awkward little jerks like a toad, movements that consorted absurdly enough with his beautiful tragic face and with the menacing gleam of the shining blade and bronze hilt upon which he leapt; and it was clear to Porius that these grotesque jerks were purely automatic and had as their object the releasing of a little more of the faded blanket from beneath his buttocks, with a view to lifting the Greek flask in its wicker case to the highest stretch of his arm, while he kept his grip on the gleaming blade by using what he could clutch of that corner of the blanket as an unwieldy gauntlet.

What exactly this paradoxical creature had in his mind to express by this gesture, or why it seemed so important to him to keep his arm outstretched so long, Porius couldn't imagine. Could he have caught old Rhun's eye at that moment there might have been a danger of an explosion of politely suppressed schoolboy mirth, but he was alone with the man and, to confess the queer truth, he actually felt — was it the Princess Indeg in his blood? — some sort of crazy sympathy with him.

Medrawd had now begun speaking again and was giving his listener — and Porius found it necessary to keep the thought of Rhun more resolutely than ever out of his mind — what really amounted to a historical discourse on the mysterious Ffichtiaid people. "And do you know, Porius ab Einion," he was saying, "that from their first appearance as slaves of the Cewri to this very hour the Ffichtiaid have conspired against — well, never mind God or the gods — against *life*!

"That double-dyed ass of a Ceredigion conjurer, Myrddin, fancies he's got I don't know what kind of an arch-devil or lost angel on his side to fight the emperor's battles; but it'll all be to no purpose! I shall win in the end. Don't misunderstand me. I shall yield *now,* of course. Mistress Nineue will keep me in touch with every move Arthur makes, and with every move these wooden-headed Saeson make. I'm young yet, you know, and have got, as we say — and a pretty word it is, Porius *filius meus,* or don't you think so? — got 'my whole life before me,' whereas Arthur's bound to get weaker and weaker as he gets older and older. The Saeson will on the other hand get stronger and stronger. He'll keep them off for ten years, twenty years, thirty perhaps!

"But if he lives to be as old as your sweet mother's idol, Uthyr Pendragon, they'll come back — back and back and back again! They'll come back till all the land is theirs except — so Nineue tells me he says — but never mind the 'excepts,' and never mind what she tells me he says about *another* people who'll come when five hundred years are gone!

"The point is, Porius ab Einion, that she'll go on telling me things till he's dead. For when he can't tell her anything more he'll die like your old Aunties' Derwydd. Here! For your mother's sake and for Christ's mother's sake, take this wine, my good man! My arm's got cramp, and this blade'll be cutting my fingers soon. God! I believe there *is* blood! Do *you* see blood?"

But Porius as he took the flask from him and helped him to rise and to seat himself by his side couldn't make out the faintest speck of red on either the blanket or on the sword or on the man's hand. But all three of these objects, one by one, Medrawd now began examining with the utmost nicety as he rested his back against the kitchen shed.

“What exactly do you mean by hating life and fighting against life?” enquired Porius, but as he asked the question his eyes were not on the beautiful but troubled profile at his side, but on the reedy edge of the water, where he now — to his considerable disturbance of mind — saw the figure of a man running, a man who carried a weapon, at least that is how it looked to him, in each of his hands, a man who was running with a slow, heavy, dogged resolution, but a man who appeared so stumbling, so drooping, so exhausted, that it seemed as if he had already come very near the end of his endurance.

“My meaning,” replied Medrawd ap Llew irritably, “is clear enough; and only a Brython — pardon me for speaking plainly — only a Brython imitating the Romans and full of pride at killing a few Saeson bandits could miss it. *There!* I’m sure I did feel something just now, but I can’t *see* any blood — my meaning is that it would have been much better if life had never begun; but since it *has* begun — no! I can’t find any cut in my hand. I must have seen blood somewhere else — *on* something else — and with someone else — it’s all very curious!

“But since it has begun, the sooner it’s brought to an end the better, and the quickest of all ways to bring it to an end *is war*! In life there’s more pain than pleasure, more ugliness than beauty, more lies than truth, more misery than happiness, more cruelty than pity, more illusion than reality. So I have condemned life to die, and I have appointed war its executioner.

“The twin children of life, Hate-Love and Love-Hate, I have likewise condemned to death with war as their executioner. I am come that the world should have death; and I am strong because death is more powerful than life, higher than life, larger than life, older than life, and deeper than life.

“It existed before life appeared and it will exist after life has disappeared. When I slept with your mother last night and thought how probable it was that both your father and her father were dead, and how likely it was that remorse for what I was making her do would bring her to death, and how probable it was that you—" but the rest of his words were snatched away before they had passed, as Homer would say, "the barrier of his teeth"; but whence the harpy came who in startling fashion reduced them to thin air was a mystery to Medrawd ap Llew.

It was — though unpleasant enough and totally contrary to his education as a civilized ruler — no mystery at all to Porius. It was indeed nothing less than a convulsive fit of choking brought on by his struggle not to burst out — for again he had imagined himself catching his foster-brother's eye — into a brutally youthful laughing fit.

He apologized humbly enough, but his coughing had done its work, and the thread of Medrawd's eloquence was broken.

But a queer thing happened then; for the man's subsequent words, interjected and incoherent as they were, fell like a series of sword blades into the Saint Julian's Fount of his disturbed mind and affected him more than any coherent eloquence could have done. In fact the desperation of Medrawd's ghastly integrity, as he blurted out these nihilistic revelations with his back to the wall, became for Porius the man's most formidable witness; and, what is more, Porius really did feel with something akin to a dark, savage, devilish relief, as though he were permitted the terrible privilege of beholding from his watchtower above the gate not only the stubble-coloured mist he had seen wavering down from the Cader, but an unfathomable black flood of some unknown element, an element as different from water as it was different from fire and as different from fire as it was different from air, an element that was as free from blood as it was free from tears; an all-obliterating, all-annihilating will to perish, a will that every conceivable condition under which this universe could reappear should perish, that ultimate *will,* in fact, that all that is, was, or *could* be, should be swallowed up in irretrievable *nothingness*!

But he had no sooner responded thus with a psychic outrush of reciprocal black bile and a spouting forth of Acherontic spume from that portion of his mental landscape inherited from Indeg, and through Indeg from disenchantments coeval with the first ice age, and through Indeg from desperations deep as the ocean ooze that sucked down the foundations of Atlantis, and through Indeg from the old innumerable death worships of the great continent of Africa, that continent destined to howl out the ultimate cry of the human race as it curses God and dies, than Medrawd, as if perfectly aware of the effect his philosophy of death was having upon him, took up his Minoan thread again in a coherent manner.

"Cannot you see," he said, "gathered in groups and conclaves on all the planets and on all the chief stars of the zodiacal signs, each group within its own particular Gwaith Emrys, or nameless 'Stone Circle,' the dedicated mediums of all the stellar consciousnesses, from demigods to sea anemones and from sea serpents to caddis worms, in a simultaneous, instinctive, disorganized, scattered, chaos-huddled, chance-impelled revolt of the will to death against the will to life?"

But Porius only answered by taking the wine flask from him and heaving him up upon his feet. "Quick, my Lord!" he whispered. "You have only just got time to escape! You see those tall reeds? Yes? Well, go to the right of them — to the west of them, I say! — do you understand? Are you listening to me, my Lord? Yes, to the right of those tall reeds — and to the right of those willows — round the corner of the water — but don't go again to Craig Hen, my Lord, for God's Mother's sake! They'll get you there for sure! Go straight up the mountain — by all those terraces of rock — do you see? Are you listening? And then keep the high Cader peaks on your right while you go to the left of them. To the left, left, *left,* my Lord! Yes, to the east of the Cader! Have you got that clear, my Lord? And you'll soon be out of danger!

"Oh, you can deal — I know *that* perfectly well, my Lord — with either Colgrim's pirates or Arthur's *equites,* but at this moment you're in a different kind of danger, danger from what up here in the north we call family vengeance! You're in danger, let me tell you, of losing a great deal, Master, a very great deal, of that spectacular juice which ordinary life lovers call *blood*! Man's semen and woman's blood together, Master, make the wicked old mill race that turns life's wheel! And if you're to live long enough to stop that wheel turning you'll have to — God's Mother, man! You're leaving your sword! *Here* — never mind sheathing it! Hold it in your hand for Jesus's sake and run for dear life — or *death* if you like! — as long as you run!"

Like many another native of Ynys Prydein who had met this nephew of the emperor, Porius had completely misunderstood this strange creature's horror of blood. He had noticed it quickly enough and had bluntly and brutally attributed it to cowardice. Now this was entirely unfair. Medrawd's horror of blood hadn't the remotest connection with care for his own skin. It was a *mystic horror,* like the loathing of the smell of fish which certain demons are said to share with certain animals.

He was therefore considerably startled and indeed compelled to feel like the blustering hero of some artificial pseudoheroic Roman epic admonishing some ghostly survivor from the siege of Troy, when, instead of hurrying off in the direction indicated, Medrawd received his sword with a nod and a smile and proceeded with the utmost coolness and deliberation to retreat into the interior of the building.

"Don't agitate yourself, Porius ab Einion," he said quietly. "I shan't forget your landmarks. The Cader's not easy to miss. But I'll follow the river, I think, till I reach Lake Tegid. It may be ten, or it may be twenty, or it may be thirty, but however many years it's going to be, a day will come when your life-loving emperor and his nephew will meet on equal terms; and then, if I die, I may — don't upset yourself, I'm off — I *may* take him with me!"

The man's sandals must have been of the softest leather for all sound of his retreat had died away before Brochvael, supporting himself with his Gallic staff but clutching in his right hand a most murderous-looking hunting knife, staggered up the slope.

"Is he here? Have you got him? Have you killed him? Tell me you've killed him, Porius, and it'll balance all!"

"Sit down a second, Uncle, for heaven's sake. You're half-dead yourself! It'll be you who'll be killed if you go a step further. Lie down here, for Christ's sake, and take a sip of this!"

But Brochvael was staring at him in growing amazement and in growing wrath. "You... don't... know... then," he gasped. "You don't know *who he is* and what he's done? Hasn't he been here at all? Hasn't anyone been here? The man called Drom, who served the Derwydd and got hurt trying to save the princess, hasn't *he* been here? He was lame and bleeding in several places, but he swore he'd help me to find him when I told him what had happened. They all say the same thing at the Gaer: that he spent the night with Euronwy. I begged him to help me find him and give him the death he deserves, and he obeyed me at once like a legionary from Uriconium.

"He's a good youth, this Drom, and afraid of nothing; but I don't say I understand him, Porius. But I didn't come here to talk about *him.* And you know, Porius, how hard it is for me to speak to you of this Medrawd. Where has he gone if he hasn’t come here? It’s a queer thing, Porius, but he makes me think — Drom, I mean — of a slave in the household of the young Boethius, a slave who came from a family who had given more martyrs to the catacombs than any free-born gens in Rome. So I told him to go and see if this mad devil — for mad he must be, whatever we may think of his devilishness — had gone back to his refuge in Craig Hen or had broken into your marriage tent.

“In either case he would almost certainly — after this appalling crime — find the fellow asleep and be able, without difficulty or compunction, to paunch him like a vicious pike and throw his guts to the eels! So you’ve not seen anybody? So you refuse, even though I’ve pledged you my word for its truth, to believe this atrocity? You see, I want to get this matter clear between us, for it’s between *us* now, yes, between *us;* between my child’s husband and her father!”

His face was contorted with both exhaustion and anger, and his pantings and gaspings made him at that moment a grotesque rather than an imposing figure. But imposing or not, he now began rubbing the blade of his horrible knife up and down the surface of his ebony staff, a proceeding that would have left a sinister impression on anyone’s mind, but as matters stood, had an especially unpleasant effect upon Porius, who had a real respect for his uncle and had never seen him in a mood as dishonouring to his dignity as this.

“Have a sip of wine, anyway,” he repeated, holding out the flask to him again with all the calm courtesy he could assume.

But the mere look of that particular wine in that particular wicker case brought back with a rush to Brochvael’s mind not only Mistress Nineue’s insulting behaviour after his exhausting run, but all he had suffered much more recently from the loyal disloyalty of the wanton Sibylla!

What he did now showed clearly to Porius how near the man had come to throwing away every vestige of self-control. He actually struck at the hand that was holding out the wine to him so that the flask fell violently to the ground, a red stream pouring from its uncovered mouth and incontinently dividing into a delta of small trickles.

Porius watched these trickles as they made their way down the incline towards the lake, some of them being submerged in the ashes, others in the grasses, others again forming minute pools in the hollows of flat stones. From one of these latter — for he felt it to be wiser, after that blow, not to return his uncle's distorted stare — he could actually make out, as he bent down to pick up the now empty flask, a small spider with an enormous balloonlike body and very short legs scuttling away from what to *it* must have been a cosmic catastrophe, and concerning which — Porius couldn't resist thinking — there may have been woven, into many a prophetic web of its ancestors, ghastly prophecies predicting the submergence of their Spider Atlantis under a tidal wave of supernatural blood!

His own world felt shaky enough at that moment, and he had to make a particular movement of the mind which he hadn't made since the days when old Rhun, half in fun and half in irritation with this intruder at his mother's breasts, used to threaten to "beat him like a dog" if it chanced to rain on one of their adventurous excursions.

By this mental gesture, or gesture of the will, he "cavoseniargized" so furiously and desperately that he forced himself spiritually to devour the whole spectacle presented to his attention as if he'd been an antediluvian monster making a cataclysmic hole in its native earth.

Doing his best by means of this mental diversion to reduce his uncle to thin air, he proceeded to lay himself down on Gunta's faded blanket while he wrapped with extreme care about his waist the Capitolian toga he had himself picked up. The psychic purpose of these somewhat theatrical preparations for the overcoming of irritation was naturally lost upon Brochvael, who, with his back to the lake and still panting from exhaustion, laid his murderous knife across the silver knob of his staff, clasped his hands together above them both, and rested his chin upon his hands. From his shoulder hung his familiar black mantle, endowing him with an appearance that was, spontaneously and quite accidentally, a good deal more dramatic than his son-in-law's deliberate pose.

And from this position, though his speech came forth in violent jerks and without the logic even of rhetoric, Brochvael released, as he had rarely done in all his life before, an outdarting jet from the cistern of black bile which, like all Brythons, he had the habit of storing up in the recesses of his being for long epochs of time. He would have had this reservoir of maliciousness within him, no doubt, whatever the outward events of his life had been, but it was his son's death that first weakened its banks, and now his daughter's marriage hastened its overflowing.

And it was one of those occasions when Chance in her most drifting and careless mood seems to be possessed by a veritable devil. For if Porius hadn't used his warm tunic as a shroud for Auntie Tonwen and for the son of Gorthevyr Bendigeit, he wouldn't have been impelled to wrap himself up in this grotesquely theatrical toga, the mere appearance of which, reminding Brochvael, as his innocent nephew couldn't possibly understand, of things that had outraged his very body and soul during his stay in Italy, sent quivering through him magnetic shivers of nervous fury.

"Your mother's honour's just nothing to you, I can see!" he jerked out. Then after a pause during which it would have been hard to say whether it was exhaustion or anger that dragged such deep-throated pantings from him, "But, of course," he sneered, "you have just the same godlike, superhuman indifference about your own marriage bed. I know all you've told my daughter to explain your not coming to the aid of her brother. I suppose your wise caution in *that* case was wrapped up in the same noble toga of stoic indifference! I don't suppose it'll disturb you in the least to be told that both Gwrgi and Canna are witnesses to the fact — and no doubt it's all over the Gaer by now — that your foster-brother Rhun forced his way into my house on the night before your marriage?"

These final words flung forth from the heaving human heart between the flapping black wings of that Etrurian mantle might have roused the devil in Porius, for all his toga and his desperate "cavoseniargizing", if it had not been for two things: first, that Morfydd, being aware in her feminine wisdom that it would sooner or later come to his ear, had told him in general terms, though she took all the blame on herself and shielded Rhun, about that night; and second, that from his bride's pain and blood, and also from — despite her gallant spirit — her shyness and tension, he had recognized that he was ravishing a maiden. But it was, all the same, with a noticeable indrawing of breath and lips, and such a wrinkling of his forehead as caused his eyes to grow as small as worm holes in an oaken rafter, that Porius received these vicious words. But his unbroken silence was evidently so unexpected by the other that by pressing too hard upon his ugly weapon, balanced, as it was, somewhat ticklishly on the top of his Gallic staff, he caused it to fall with a crash and the staff with it.

Brochvael ab Iddawc tottered forward and caught himself up, tottered again, and again caught himself up, tottered for the third time and this time would' certainly have fallen, had not Porius, who had by now scrambled to his own feet, steadied him with his arm.

As soon as he realized he could stand, Porius, to avoid looking at him, hurriedly bent down and proceeded to spend much longer than was necessary in the simple task of picking up and restoring to him these objects. No sooner was he erect again and the two men standing side by side, Brochvael's eyes instinctively turning to the east in hope of seeing that faithful servant, the young man Drom, Porius's to the west in hope of seeing the figure of Medrawd too far off to be recognized by anyone, than Brochvael's anger began to ooze away, or, to put it more exactly, Brochvael's exasperated nerves ceased to hold open the weir dam within him through which his reservoir of Brythonic malice had spouted forth.

Trickle by trickle, like the Greek wine he had spilt, the wrath of Brochvael ab Iddawc sank into the sands of forgetfulness. It wasn't that he felt remorse. It wasn't that he felt fear lest he had hurt his son-in-law beyond forgiveness. It wasn't that he felt ashamed of betraying Morfydd and Rhun. It wasn't that he was so personally concerned about Euronwy or so troubled to think what she must be suffering after this outrage. Porius, with his perpetual sensuousness and his perpetual analysis of what he actually felt, mean, crazy, wicked, shameless, though it might be, and Morfydd with her own impassioned self-knowledge, if they had been questioned, would have put down his anger to habit, custom, public opinion, and the conventional ideas of family pride.

But they would have been wrong. There *were* what the late Brother John would have called "underlying causes of wrath," for there are few human contacts lacking in these; but the immediate cause of his outburst was a matter entirely of nerves. One nerve was itching and aching with the loss of Sibylla. Another nerve, and that not a very distant one, for it also belonged to his erotic organism, quivered and vibrated with a new admiration, not unmixed with abnormal attraction, that had obsessed him during the last twenty-four hours! This nervous disturbance had come upon him when, after the murder of the oldest princess and her druid and silentiary, he had found Drom, the brother of Morgant, drawing the charred spears from those three desecrated bodies; and as happened so often with this essentially lonely student — of whom it might have been said that his impetuous dives into real life always resulted in alternative predicaments, that of hugging to himself people who wanted to get rid of him, and that of disentangling himself from people of whom he wanted to get rid — he had dived with one desperate dive into a sudden and peculiar love for this strange man.

His first meeting with Drom in the druid's chamber came back to him in every detail! Drom playing chess, Drom crawling up that ladder amid fir-tree roots and forest rubble, Drom bidding him goodbye at the parting of the ways. He suddenly became aware that there was a beauty in Drom — not only a physical beauty, but a spiritual beauty — of so engrossing and absorbing a kind that he would give anything for the privilege of living with him to the end of his days!

And so he had begun to use this innocent of God, this faithful and loyal Drom, as a sort of human ointment wherewith alone he could heal the wound made in his feelings by Sibylla. Thus it happened that it was neither Christian remorse nor stoical self-respect that led to the closing of his malice dam and the oozing away of his outburst of fury. Compared with Porius, as Porius himself knew very well, Brochvael had that respect for scholarship, that reverence for the institutions of the past, that profound distrust of popular judgment, that preference for logical reason over intuition, which constitute, at least in the opinion of academicians, the essential attributes of the philosophic mind.

To Porius, on the other hand, Nature had given an earthy animal instinct, as well as a weathercock intelligence, and with the help of both of these organs he had been able to free himself not only from respectful awe at the mention of great literary names, but from all the recondite limitations imposed on human feeling by the processes of reason and logic. He was just the one dedicated to understand, if only he had known about it, exactly the way the elder man's emotional mania for Drom was working upon him, and exactly how, the moment it relaxed its distracting hold upon him, all the logical justifications of his nervous rage came flowing back.

Knowing already from Morgant something of the mysterious virtues of Drom, Porius, if only he had realized this new emotion in his father-in-law, would have quickly made use of it. As it was, there was something comical in the way these two civilized and Romanized Brythons contemplated each other.

Side by side, they were not very different in height, and with the small deep-set eyes, the heavy, overhanging forehead, the bushy eyebrows, the massive vulturelike nose, of all the descendants of Edeyrn ap Cunedda, they were in a sense almost humorously alike.

The lineaments of Edeyrn had been skipped in the case of the handsome Prince Einion, but they were the lineaments that came down from Cunedda; and in the elder branch at Deganwy, as much as in the younger branch at the Gaer, they were the dominant features of this proud House.

But the Drom infatuation having ebbed a little, the Brythonic malice began to trickle again drop by wicked drop from the weir in Brochvael's soul.

"No! I don't know how you can endure it, letting my brother and the old Roman face Colgrim's savages, while you loll in safety out here along with the servants and the women and the sick and the wounded, drinking Greek wine and enjoying your life!"

But Porius was a person who, if he had once made up his mind not to get angry, was extremely difficult to rouse to wrath. And he now began putting a few simple questions to his enraged uncle.

"Did Morfydd know about the emperor's nephew last night? Was he feasted in our hall before he went in to my mother? Colgrim hasn't attacked the Gaer then, I take it, nor have my father and the old man attacked *him*? Or is it that the emperor's advancing to cut off his retreat has sent him off at a run? Is that how things are going?"

Had the Jewish doctor been listening to these two he would probably have assumed — according to the saying of the great Jewish monarch "a soft answer turneth away wrath" — that the nephew's coyness to the uncle's anger would have shamed the uncle into a gentler mood. But not at all! No sooner had Porius ceased speaking than the elder man swung round with such fury in his eyes that the younger stepped quickly back. And it was natural enough that he did so; for the enraged student of Aristophanes, whirling his repulsive knife round and round his head, had apparently, for the second time that morning, lost all control of himself.

But it might be questioned if he really had; for in place of using the knife as a dagger or even as a missile, he flung it with all his strength towards the lake and in place of violence had recourse once more to the wounding power by the tongue.

"Morfydd, did you say? The brave husband asks of the unarmed father where is the bride? How should I know, my fine boy? I spent all last night searching for the murderers of Auntie Esyllt. No doubt your wife *was* at the Gaer; but what she knew about your mother, or what she knows now about Medrawd ap Llew, you'll have to ask your friend Rhun. Rhun's been greatly to the fore all this long night — I can tell you that much, my lad! He's covered incredible distances. They say he's even been to the emperor himself. That I do not believe. But he's been backwards and forwards between young Peredur with our horsemen and your father with the *Gosgordd.* I only saw him once when he told me I need have no fear of going to Ogof-y-Gawr because the Saeson had already gutted the place, leaving Auntie Esyllt dead. You see I'm like you, nephew. I don't believe in running my head into unnecessary danger. But there it is! All three of them are dead now. That's what we've got to think of, Porius ab Einion. Not just simply of death, but of *why* we die. And the feeble old Modrybedd have beaten you and me at that game! You and I are alive, my wise nephew; whereas the Aunties and my son are dead.

"Even Minnawc Gorsant — may his bones rot and his soul perish! — burst his heart in his hate of the enemies of Christ. That's what we've got to think of; not simply of death, but of what there is to die for! That's what makes you and me so careful of our skin. We think too much of death and not enough of what to die for!

"That faithful servant I was telling you about whose name is Drom, and who was helping me all last night burying the dead, has a new philosophy of his own. He says it was playing chess taught it to him: watching the *eques* jump to his mark, and the bishop go sideways to his mark, and the queen go straight to her mark.

"It hasn't got a name, and he says it never will have a name. He says what divides a truth from a falsehood is such a hair's breadth that it's unsafe to give it a name. He says there are as many truths as there are grains of sand upon the seashore. He says they're like the gossamer threads that spiders hang in the air in autumn and that you can only see when there's a heavy dew. He says we give things names to get power over them, and we give ourselves names to get power over others; and that there's not one of the innumerable truths that surround us that's strong enough to bear the weight of a name without being falsified and forced to look different from what it is. And do you know what he does every morning?"

Porius's mind, which had passed from Drom to Morgant, and from Morgant to the Derwydd's brother, and from the Derwydd's brother to Medrawd, and from Medrawd to that mountain lake containing those four staring eyes, came back with a jerk.

"What Drom himself does, you mean?"

"Yes, what he does when he first wakes up, for we slept in the same chamber of the deserted Ogof-y-Gawr, and I felt as if I couldn't watch him long enough or closely enough. It was like sleeping with a saint and watching an angel put on his clothes."

Once more Porius called his errant mind back from the Cewri. "Uncle's fairly hit." he said to himself, and then he thought, "If this Drom is really as faithful as brother Morgant says he is, why then, Brochvael ab Iddawc, you've set your heart in a safe quarter!"

It was almost as if Brochvael had caught the unspoken words "in a safe quarter," for he suddenly added, "But before I tell you what he does, shall I tell you what he feels? He feels that Jesus Christ has got into his soul and is there instead of himself. Yes! Drom feels that it isn't Drom who does the good things he does but Jesus in him!"

Porius felt a curious sense of disgust when he heard this and an obscure reaction against Drom. It seemed to him as if the innermost freedom and integrity of his soul sickened at the notion of being possessed by any god. He hurriedly offered his arm to the older man.

"Lean on me, I beg you, Uncle," he said, "while you tell me what it is that Drom does when he isn't feeling that his soul's not his own."

Hardly thinking what he did and making use of this flesh-and-blood support as if it had been the branch of a badly grown tree that he had half-decided to cut down, Brochvael explained that it was the habit of Drom, the brother of Morgant, to kneel down and tap his skull on the ground in the direction of the sunrise.

“Why, you’ll have to bring him to Rhun’s cave, Uncle,” commented Porius a little brutally. What he had heard about Drom’s possessed soul had filled him with a distaste he couldn’t get rid of. “What a pity,” he went on, “Brother John’s not alive to hear this! He used to say that everyone who prayed to any god whatsoever, even to terrible and horrible gods — always excepting Gwydion the son of Don and Arianrod the daughter of Don — had a right to call themselves Christians.”

This comment on what he’d just told him caused Brochvael nothing but obscure pain. But he was too much now under the spell of his absent friend to be able to be angry any more. He had already begun to imagine this servant-philosopher filling the place of Sibylla in the Stone House and of supplying at least some of those indescribable requisites without which a student’s life, even with the Eleven Comedies added to his shelves and with a chamber adjoining the kitchen of Canna and Gwrgi, was bound to be incomplete.

On the other hand, when an elderly man talks to a much younger man about another *man* younger still, and receives in return a rough, casual, bantering, ill-considered response, what he experiences is a shock to his inmost personal feelings so extreme that it is almost like the lash of a whip.

“God! So we return to Mithras!” groaned Brochvael to himself. “I have only to mention the sun, and the Bull roar of Rhun’s cave rumbles through this lad’s simple brain!”

And Porius felt he had struck a discordant note. His boyhood’s experience of the Modrybedd, his childhood’s recollections of Alarch the Fair, his more recent subjection to his own mother, all these had taught him that the older generation had to be handled with very delicate care; and he now begged his uncle to be pleased to rest for a space while he went to find out if there'd been any unauthorized meddling with certain dead bodies.

He announced this with the utmost gravity and moved off with a firm and decisive step; but he was aware, all the same, that the winds of feeling from a mental firmament that was more than half a century old blew with such erratic and unaccountable vehemence that it was possible Brochvael might burst out with a "What's *this? What* dead bodies are being hidden away from me?" Or on the other hand, he might begin accusing himself and cursing his son-in-law as being the accomplices in their incompetence of all these cruel forces of disaster.

But the older man allowed him to go and himself proceeded to lean against a portion of the kitchen stockade. Porius could see he had some fanciful repugnance about lying down on the blanket. Did it smell of those children — or possibly even of the emperor's nephew? "What a quaint old fellow he is! He's never really happy unless reading or writing; and yet he's never written a book! Does he think his old cronies in Gaul and Italy will make a book of his letters when he's dead? Not they! They're far too busy with their own immortality to bother about his! But get angry with the old boy I won't! This whole business of getting angry makes fools of us all. It's far worse than being thrown off a horse or knocked over by a wild boar. It always puts you at a disadvantage."

Such were Porius's thoughts as he crossed the floor of the kitchen and entered the wooden anteroom of the banquet tent. He was looking for something to put on. Ah! Here was Chance playing into his hand!

One of these reckless horsemen, either in a drunken fever or on some sudden amorous quest, had tossed his elegant new-fashioned mantle — and it was warm as well as smart — over one of the biggest of the unused cauldrons. He picked it up at once and put it on.

No sooner had he done so than he realized he wasn’t alone in this deserted antechamber. A figure only too familiar to him was crouching between a couple of wicker crates that stood side by side under the wall.

Yes, here was the Derwydd’s brother again; and Porius, who only a minute ago had decided that the one fatal way of making a complete fool of yourself was to fall into a rage, found himself throwing into his protest “What on earth are *you* doing here?” an anger out of all proportion to the ungainly Llew’s trespass, if trespass it were.

But this man’s personality had come to have a curious effect upon him. He tried hard to speak more kindly to him now, but even as he did so he felt that nothing would give him greater satisfaction than to take up those two crates and bang his head between them till they were shivered to bits and the head had become unrecognizable. If he could stand over him, unfeatured, disfigured, *dead,* the spell would be broken; but as it was, and all this passed with astonishing rapidity through his mind, where was the magic that could lift the burden? Was it his *tynged* until he died or until the fellow died, that this lolling, languid, supersensual, subhuman slug should hang round his neck, liable to go slop-flop, flop-slop, against his ribs, whenever he went forth to fight the world?

“Have you looked at those bodies out there?” he asked him in a voice that he hoped was too low to penetrate the wall of the building; for he had no trust in Brochvael’s self-control in the presence of those aged and outraged lovers.

But the man between the crates shouted his drunken answer so loudly that it could have been heard on the edge of the lake. “Taliesin and Morgant, and Owain from Deganwy, and a couple of old men from the stables, and three or four women from the wash house were up here before dawn, and they carried them to the tent of Owain ab Uryen.”

"What else did they do?"

"They stripped the Saeson."

"What else?"

"They thought there would be no harm in removing a few mouldy cheeses and a few bottles that were not keeping very well — too many bubbles in them, Porius ab Einion, liable to burst, great Prince, very liable to burst — and the general opinion was that it would be a great pity for the emperor's beautiful bottles to burst."

"What else?"

"Owain Pen Uchel began to dig and made me help him till... till I had to stop and lie down for a little while."

"To dig, you say?"

"Yes, noble Prince, to dig the deepest grave in Ynys Prydein under the Seven Pines."

"Those trees by the tent of Owain ab Uryen?"

"Yes, my Prince, those very trees, those very tall and beautiful trees."

"Not for Princess Tonwen, I hope?"

"The deepest grave in Ynys Prydein!" he shouted, and this time it was as if he wanted to make the whole place ring and ting with this information. Porius felt as if he saw the contempt on his uncle's tired face, the contempt of a man who had discussed the condition of the world with the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople.

"Not for the princess, I hope?" he repeated.

"For no woman, nor *any man either!* He dug that grave, and I helped him dig that grave, for his dead dapple-grey mare, and for my Lord Rhun's dead hound."

"And you buried them then, the grey horse and white hound? Buried them deep?"

"Deep? No dead ever deeper! No, not in all Gwynedd and Edeyrnion! Deep-buried they are, horse and dog, and in two thousand years their bones will be earth; and from that earth will spring corn, and of that corn will be made bread."

Porius stared at the crumpled torso that had huddled itself between those crates and from the unintelligent extremity of which small gusts of foul air kept emanating, while, from the other end, words by no means devoid of human wisdom were hurled into space.

"I must try to remember what I feel at this moment," he thought, "for I've got hold of *something,* though what it precisely *is* I can't clearly say. It isn't only to do with this confounded idiot, nor with Auntie Tonwen and her old lover, nor with the horse and hound, nor with the passing of two thousand years, nor with earth and bread! And yet these all come into it. Curse it! I can't catch the thing."

And indeed a few minutes later, after watching the Derwydd's brother compose himself to sleep, the thing *had* escaped him completely. Before leaving that friendly slope, however, under the western stockade of the camp's kitchen, he succeeded in persuading his uncle to drink a little Gwlad-y-Haf mead and to munch a few pieces of hard barley bread. He also had the satisfaction, while the other was relieving himself under a willow tree, of indulging in a little private ritual of his own, namely, the delineation with his thumb, after licking that member till it had the texture of a pond-wet batrachian, of a couple of small, scarcely visible squares upon the woodwork of that hospitable erection.

This he did with the grateful and humble scrupulosity of an enchanted ass who is anxious to take a memorable leave of some inanimate stretch of wall or plank, against which at intervals, during an unusually happy night, it has rubbed its rump.

CHAPTER XXVI. “Off and Away Can Afford to Stay”

AS THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW advanced eastward along the water’s edge, Porius told himself that he surely couldn’t miss seeing Neb and Gunta as long as he remained in sight of the lake, while Brochvael told himself that he must take care not to pass tent, cell, forest hut, or pavilion, before he had made sure that the faithful Drom had not paused to rest there or been seduced there by some crafty devil of a counsellor or merchant or doctor or courtier into entering an unphilosophic and possibly a depraved service.

And then there came to pass the very thing that all accomplished chroniclers are so chary of recording, lest in spite of their devotion to truth their scrupulous and cautious narrative should take on the treacherous shimmer of fabulous invention. For just as if the concentrated thought of Porius had really and truly brought Neb and Gunta upon the scene, while the concentrated thought of Brochvael had done the same with his admired Drom, the unmistakable figures of all these persons suddenly appeared on an elevated *llanerch,* or “open space,” where several forest paths intersected one another.

But unfortunately they did not appear alone. They appeared as three *dramatis personae* in a desperate scene that contained five persons, a scene that was confused, complicated, confounding. The other two persons were Sibylla and her liberated Sais.

Never had Gunhorst’s tumbled hair looked yellower than it looked now as it shone in the sun. Never had any human figure radiated more joyously the ecstasy of battle than did his. And yet the astonishing Sibylla was evidently defying this exultant warrior with a feminine spirit that matched if it didn’t overpower his own.

It looked as if the man and the woman were both holding fast to the unlucky Drom, who, it seemed, was making no effort to free himself; but whereas Gunhorst was attempting to tie the captive’s wrists together, the woman, or so it appeared at a distance, was doing her best to untie them! Thus it was brought about that the play of their fingers in this moving knot of contrariety resembled more and more, as the newcomers approached, the coupling of passionate snakes; and this resemblance was not lessened by the furious glances which their two heads, both of them far too absorbed in each other to notice the approach of the uncle and nephew, kept exchanging, as if in the love-hate conflict of a yellow hydra with a black lamia.

Big men though the uncle and nephew were, they both shared something of that skirmishing instinct in their tribe, for the sake of whose value against the Gwyddyl-Ffichti the Romans had originally brought them down from the north, bribing the heathen Cunedda with the rich lands flooded by the sacred river.

So, at this juncture, when without question Porius Manlius and his centurion Aulus would have uttered a shout and rushed forward in a frontal attack, our Brythons, though advancing scarcely less rapidly, did so more circuitously, taking advantage of such willows, alders, and patches of tall reeds as lent themselves to the obscuring of their approach.

Some minutes before they reached the group, Gunta and Neb, who, as it may be imagined had seen them long before they were themselves seen, had detached their small persons from the others and had slipped away to meet them.

Brochvael was far too disturbed by the presence of Sibylla and Drom in such close proximity to take any notice of the little creatures. Had there been three pairs of Guntas and Nebs instead of only one they would have meant no more to him at that moment than if they'd been rabbits. Porius, however, welcomed them with immense relief and signed to them to hang back as he went forward to meet Gunhorst, who had already broken away from the woman and the prisoner and was awaiting him with exultation.

Action of one sort or another was Gunhorst's very existence. The most painful epoch of his whole life was when he had struggled as a captive in Gaul to learn from his fellow captives certain colloquial Roman phrases that would enable him to make his way through the more civilized provinces of Ynys Prydein, in case he were called to do so by the chief of his tribe.

Active brutality rather than erotic cruelty was the worst thing into which the surging urge of the invisible force which swept him forward drove Gunhorst. Once or twice when sleeping with him on a fresh bed of straw in the communal cowshed of the Gwyddyl-Swamp where her relatives lived, Sibylla had asked him how he got so much pleasure from destroying men and women who were weaker than himself; and it would have interested Brother John in one of his less theological moods, and even perhaps struck him as pathetic, to hear how simply Gunhorst answered her. "But *every* enemy, when I've been fighting him for some time, becomes weaker than I am. Am I to stop and bind up the wounds he's got from trying to kill me, and only then go on and kill *him*? As for women, never in my life have I killed a woman whom I could possibly love; and there are very few—"

"I believe you there!" cried Sibylla, finishing his sentence for him.

Thus when Gunhorst now beheld a man, without any weapon at all, or any shield, or any armour, calmly stop as they came towards each other and pull up by the roots a quite well-grown young ash tree, he felt as if he had been fighting against this man from the very beginning of the world. For it was not concealed from Gunhorst that a man who could, quite casually, as he came into battle, pull up a well-grown young ash tree by its roots to use as a weapon was a man of unusual and rather disconcerting physical strength.

Gunhorst was powerful enough, but not exceptionally so; and what his life experience both in Germania and in Gaul had impressed on his mind was that the thing which enables the tribes who have wise chieftains to overcome their enemies is not the strength of individual warriors but the superiority of *weapons.*

He had, therefore, in all the ups and downs of his adventurous career, been very much alive to every type of new weapon; and recently, not many weeks after landing with Colgrim in Britain, he had been converted to a particular kind of light battle-axe as the best weapon for the sort of fighting into which this invasion of Britain had plunged him. He especially esteemed the particular axe he was swinging aloft at this moment; for, among other attributes, it possessed some peculiar proportion or balance in its shape and moulding which made it an extremely effective missile when flung by a skilled hand.

Gunhorst was not ambitious. He rebelled against being treated as a slave and would never have endured to live out his life like many of his relatives who were peasant-serfs, bound to the acres they cultivated. But he had no desire to be in any way different from what he was. He hadn’t the faintest wish to attain wealth or power or influence.

And as for glory, all the glory he wanted was the extremely simple one of being praised by a woman for killing a man, and by his chief for killing several men. He was affectionate after his fashion; and, though faithfulness didn’t emerge between them, Sibylla knew that he would never weary of her and that she would be his woman, and he her man, until the end of their days.

And so, as Porius approached, holding his tree for a club, with its roots dropping earth mould and even earthworms as he shook it, Gunhorst had a strange, almost mystical feeling that he, with some kind of superior weapon, had been for thousands of years contending against this man whose strength was in his arms and who like the giants of Jotunheim could fight with his bare hands.

Cautious warrior as he was, Gunhorst recognized that he had one considerable advantage over his opponent, namely, that the sun at that particular hour, though shining from a cloudless heaven, was by no means shining perpendicularly down on both their heads. It was in fact shining so definitely in Porius's face that Gunhorst observed, as the Gaer champion drew near, that his eyes were almost closed in the wrinkling of his heavy brows.

"He can't do me much harm with his tree," Gunhorst thought, "and I don't believe I *will* throw the axe. If he is the son of the prince—"

Sibylla had cried out to him this information as she went on untying Drom's wrists, and Gunhorst said to himself: "Colgrim will value this man's head more than any slave's hands. But what's come to the woman over that idiot?"

The inexplicable consideration shown by Sibylla for Drom added a drop of definite, though rather obscure, jealousy to Gunhorst's general urge to kill. Glancing round, as a wise combatant instinctively does, so that he might make sure of the precise position of the rocks and trees around him, Gunhorst's eyes chanced to fall on a particularly tiny bird which he had known in his native German forests as a "treecreeper." This small creature was pecking furiously at the bark of a willow tree, pitting the agility of its thin beak against the self-protective instinct of certain succulent and somnolent insects to whom a tree was a universe; and just as the inexplicable tenderness of his woman to their idiot-captive strengthened his hand, so also did the lively strokes of this tiny bird's beak.

Gunhorst felt as if the rich autumnal sun — to his Germanic senses as feminine as Sibylla herself — were twining warm golden fingers round his enemy's head, confusing as well as blinding his eyes so that his strength should be diminished.

"No! I won't throw at him," he decided. "One of my best straight-down strokes shall do it!"

Concentrated as he had been all his fighting days on the relative efficacy of various weapons, he took for granted that when a man came into battle carrying a tree he intended to make that tree serve him as a club. That he himself had recently practised axe throwing with assiduous diligence made no difference. *That* was his own premeditated contribution to the use of a new weapon in this sort of loose war.

But that a man, however muscular, should contemplate, and that too without having practised it, the use of an uprooted tree as a missile was beyond his power of imagination. But, as Einion ab Iddawc was wont to complain to his guests at the Gaer, his son Porius was as ignorant of the art of war as he was unskilled in the art of the chase and unpractised in the art of love.

And the Prince of Edeyrnion was right. From his childhood Porius had acted in every crisis into which he drifted in the way he acted now. He followed his momentary inspiration; and by doing this he somehow managed to tap that mysterious life-preservative instinct which seems as if it were only available in a matter of life and death.

For just as Gunhorst was clutching his axe and drawing a deep breath, preparatory to his deadly rush, Porius flung the tree. He managed his throw in such a way that it was the entangled roots of the little ash, matted and caked with earth and small stones, that struck Gunhorst full in the face and brought him to the ground while the axe fell from his loosened grasp. Possessing himself of his fallen antagonist's weapon, Porius leisurely proceeded to help the man to his feet, while he calmed his lively fear of being incontinently put to death.

By the time he had got Gunhorst on his feet and had reassured the agitated Sibylla and had called Gunta and Neb to his side, Brochvael and Drom had evidently reached between them some important conclusion about their mutual plans for the future; for approaching together in an atmosphere of comprehensive understanding, they both showed signs of considerable relief when Sibylla took not the slightest notice of either of them.

Having come so lately from the presence of one of Drom's former masters, Porius, content to keep a firm hold upon the wrist of his conquered Sais, couldn't help speculating on the secret of the obvious spell cast, and quite independently cast, upon such different persons as his scholarly uncle and his father's fancy girl.

"He must be," he decided, "a sort of primitive Christian, able to make use of the magic of Christ just as old Rhun would like to make use of the magic of Mithras."

But it was now Porius's privilege to witness an emotional scene whose subtle poignancy he never afterwards forgot. Sibylla and Gunta were bidding each other farewell forever; and in the course of this farewell, which clearly stirred them both to the depths of their natures, all the contradictory strings that had been strung by destiny in and out, out and in, between this mother and this daughter, were plucked at with merciless fingers!

The climax of this scene occurred when both mother and daughter joined in a sort of tragic antiphony of infantile memories, recalling to each other the manner in which they used to repeat some ancient jingle about breadmaking, and trying to remind each other of the various turns and quips and gestures of this antique play, slapping each other's hands and murmuring unintelligible fragments of weird half-forgotten incantations.

Disputing over some portion of this game, they fell at last, however, into what — to all their masculine onlookers save the experienced Neb — was an inexplicable and furious quarrel in which, the bread-baking game totally forgotten, they began accusing each other of treacheries, secrecies, stupidities, blindnesses, crudities, and finally of things of which it was unthinkable that either of them should be guilty.

This finally reached such a point that Sibylla, apparently hardly conscious of what she did, struck her daughter's face with her clenched hand, first on one side, causing her to reel to the east, and then on the other, causing her to reel to the west. She did this just as if Gunta had been some annoying inanimate entity like the child's own doll, whose head and feet — objects that for some minutes had been puzzling the contemplative Porius — protruded from the gathered-up folds of her mistress's woollen cloak.

But after striking her in this way, Sibylla's anger, and apparently the little girl's too, died down completely, and the child's flaxen head was soon tightly squeezed against her mother's breast. And while with both hands Sibylla thus pressed her offspring against her body it almost seemed as if she were struggling to merge their two natures into one nature, in fact to force them back into what they had been before the child's birth.

And while they clung to each other in this way, Sibylla began to call upon the air and the earth and the sky to bear witness to the truth of her feeling. Certainly no one could deny the intensity of her feeling, nor that she was powerfully moved; but considering her audience at that dramatic crisis, the possibility of distinguishing between the various emotional channels that mingled in her passion was faint indeed.

"I can't blame *him over there*," thought Porius, still visualizing his begetter, even today, as a blur of spilled mead on the far horizon, "for loving this woman. She certainly has an appeal that's peculiarly her own."

And he was right. With her thin expressive features upraised towards the sun, with her finely cut lips parted, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, with the torrent of lamentable invective she was now pouring forth on the head of her defeated Sais, Sibylla at that moment — and even Gunhorst himself watched her with a half-sulky awe — became the centre of that whole group.

Neb alone, from his complicated if brief experience of court circles, remained unmoved and detached. Indeed he made use of the whole episode as if it were a cloudy horse block from which he could mount into the saddle of his own winged imagination.

"My master's in great danger," he thought, "but if with Gunta's help I don't put a spoke in Mistress Nineue's wheel, may the devil fly off with me!"

And then an event took place that changed everything; and though it was not till the tide of Time had tossed up out of its waves a considerable shoal of that queer stuff that is called Space that Porius realized what he now beheld. For it happened that Chance had arranged it that the spot where these four men were staring in fascinated silence at Sibylla was the precise spot where Brochvael had halted with this very Sibylla when they both were running at that exhausting pace to carry the order to Porius and Rhun *to stay where they were.*

This indeed was the crucial meeting place where the path between the Gaer and Saint Julian’s Fount was intersected by several other well-trodden forest paths; and it was from this spot and towards this spot that Porius now saw the well-known forms of Gwythyr and Nesta escorting none other than the Lady of the Gaer herself.

Gwythyr and Nesta at once fell back from the meeting between mother and son, a meeting sufficiently painful and awkward in itself, and naturally rendered more so by the fact that wherever Porius moved he had to drag the captive Gunhorst after him.

“Your father’s hurt, Porius. We must pray to the Blessed Christ that it’s not worse than that. Rhun ran all the way from his side to bring me the news. I sent him back to him to say I was coming at once. You’ll come with me, my dear, won’t you, now we know where he is? They’ve carried him to the Craig Hen, but Rhun says they’re afraid of taking him any further. Rhun says they saw someone belonging to the emperor leave Craig Hen just before they got there. But anyway that’s where they took your father, and that’s where I’m going. Why are you holding this man? He can’t do more harm than he’s done already. You’d better let him go, and this woman with him. Your grandfather’s badly hurt, Porius. He was down almost as soon as he left the Gaer. Nothing could hold him back. Aulus saved his life. He’d have been killed if Aulus hadn’t kept them off. But he’s badly hurt. It’ll be a miracle if he recovers. He thinks himself he’s going to die, and he keeps talking about his monument and how he *must* have the words *‘Christianus fuit’* engraved on it, and how he wants it to be where he picked up that legionary’s flask he was so fond of. He can’t lift his right arm. He can’t get out of bed. Aulus has to do everything for him. He insisted on seeing the emperor. Do, for God’s sake, Porius, let that man go, and send this woman away!

"Yes, the emperor sent to say he was coming; and he *did* come, but only for a few hours. And all that time, save for a minute or two, he was studying maps and giving orders. Colgrim's army's in full retreat — not scattered, you understand, but avoiding battle — and off to join his brother, the emperor told me that himself, in his off-hand way, to join his brother at Badon Hill. That's just what, he says, he meant him to do all along. He said Colgrim has gained nothing by his invasion of Edeyrnion — nothing but causing the death of his own friends. I suppose by that the emperor meant the Three Princesses and the druid, but he oughtn't to have said that; and those nearest to him felt he made a mistake in saying it!"

"Those nearest him?" thought Porius. "So that's been Medrawd's line with her!"

"For God's sake, Porius, let that man go; and let him take that insolent woman away with him."

"In a minute, Mother, but where was Father hurt?"

"Do you mean in what part of his body? Or do you mean in what part of the forest? I have no idea. All I know is what Rhun told Morfydd and what Morfydd told me. My own feeling is that your father's hurt isn't as bad as your grandfather's. But Christ must indeed be trying my faith and tempting me to sin by sending me both these disasters at the same time and following so quick" — here she lowered her voice a little so that Brochvael couldn't hear— "so quick upon the death of Minnawc Gorsant! Oh, I wish he were with us now to pray for them both! Oh dear! I know what he would tell me to do. He would tell me to stop talking and to pray! But I've got so much to tell you, haven't I, Porius? For I haven't seen you since Thursday, and it's Monday today.

"For one thing the new priest has come. He's the same young man who — Morfydd's been wonderful! She's been doing everything for me, as well as I could do it myself. It's she being there that's made it possible for me to go to Einion at Craig Hen. And now, Porius, for the third or fourth time I beg you, let these terrible people go. What's the matter with that woman? Is she ill? Is that her child?"

Never had Porius felt less attraction to women in general — to all women — than he did at this moment. His imagination had been playing him the most monstrous tricks all the time she had been speaking. A strange and terrifying sex horror had laid hold of him, and he felt as if women were not only of a different sex but of a different species.

What had seized him as he listened to his mother, hearing her and yet not hearing her, was a different feeling altogether from what had reached him from that bottomless water hole, that Erebus of the Cader, whence he had seen Creiddylad's eyes staring up at him through the blood-clotted greenness. *That* was the terror and horror of the truth of Nature. But to feel this appalling suspicion of his own mother, suspicion that everything about her was false, that she deceived herself through and through, that she had no honesty in her, that she was false in her deepest spirit, this was something quite different from her seduction by Medrawd.

"The emperor had sent to say he was coming." *Had sent whom?* Well, had sent Medrawd. Oh, she had known Medrawd all her crafty woman's life! She had been brought up with him! He was the son-cousin, the son-nephew, the son-darling of Uthyr Pendragon, whose pet she'd herself been at that corrupt, degenerate, Romanized court! He could see this grave, resolute, competent, spiritual face change its expression as Medrawd had his way with her.

Yes, he could see it all! And he could forgive Medrawd. What he couldn't forgive *her* was her falsity in herself and to herself. The abnormally active consciousness with which destiny, moulded by fate and twisted by chance, had endowed him, had led him among other curious mental habits into a way of saying to himself: "I must try to remember exactly how this scene looked, just *here and just now,* so that, years later and long afterwards, when I pass this way I can say to myself 'Well! I got through *that* anyway,' or 'Life has turned many corners since then,' or 'Not a single one of all *those* faces are now left above ground,' or 'By the Mother of God, I won't make a fool of myself *like that* again!'"

The level of the small *llanerch,* or "open space," in the forest, where Gunta had just faced her mother, and where he was now facing *his* mother, was lifted above its surroundings just enough for a glimpse to be offered of that reedy and muddy corner of the lake's edge into which the massive masonry of the eastern wall of the dead Brother's cell projected so far as to create a curious and quite special kind of *loneliness,* the haunted and magical loneliness where some deep-foundationed work of men's hands is reinvaded by the wilderness it has dominated for so long. It was through these reeds and this mud that he had himself forced his way after his first encounter with the emperor's nephew; and now, after trying for the second time to save this tragic creature's life, here he was, looking down upon this mud and these reeds over the tear-stained faces of Euronwy and Sibylla!

That the spot where he was now listening to his own mother, as he kept his eyes on the white face of Gunta's mother, was indeed a regular meeting place of Edeyrnion forest paths was conclusively proved to him, as he stood there holding his prisoner and looking quite as lethargic and dull as his father had always considered him or had pretended to consider him, by one not very pleasing piece of evidence. For there, not far from where he was standing as if he and his prisoner had been chained together, was a large fresh deposit of human excrement.

The man who had eased himself there — and he must have had bowels that badly required easing — had partially concealed the shining red-brown heap, of which hosts of brilliant coloured flies were already aware, by throwing down a piece of rag upon it; but instead of concealing what he had done at these immemorial crossways, sacred to older deities than either Jesus or Mithras, this unhappy Manichean rag emphasized the sacrilege, neither discouraging the flies nor obliterating the disgust.

But his mother was still talking. She was explaining how it had come about that she had permitted Porius Manlius to go down into the valley beyond the walls. She was explaining how in his weak condition the old man kept reverting to his wish to be buried on the exact spot where he had picked up the water flask of his favourite vanished legion, and also to the nature of his tombstone upon which he wanted it recorded, for the information of future generations, that he was a Christian.

How well Porius could remember that excursion when he was a boy in order that his grandfather might mark out with little white stones the place where he had found his precious flask!

It was on that day — though he had seen the old-fashioned lettering many times since — that the crazy verb "to cavoseniargize" had first got lodged in his mind.

And then he suddenly wondered, just as if the mere idea of his sacred-secret practise made him unwilling to believe in such wickedness, whether Medrawd might after all have lied? But what conceivable motive could he have had for lying? And why had Brochvael assumed that the outrage to which the man had confessed had taken place? Of course, Medrawd *might* have lied to Brochvael too and deliberately given a false impression to the whole Gaer. The primeval snake escaped from the baby Jesus was quite capable of twisting the natural courtesies between hostess and guest, between cousin and cousin, into anything that suited his purpose. But what *was* his purpose? Only this madness about fighting life in the interest of death?

His eyes turned now from Euronwy's face to Sibylla's. The girl was ghastly white and trembling from head to foot. He glanced at the profile of his prisoner. Yes! Gunhorst was suffering from the same interpretation as his own of Sibylla's look. Then she really *had* loved the prince! He had no sooner reached this conclusion than the man he was holding by the arm made a violent lurch towards the girl, while Neb, clearly afraid lest matters might get out of control, seized Gunta by *her* arm.

At that point Euronwy spoke with decisive authority, and Porius, thankful enough to give himself a momentary respite from responsibility and mocking himself in his heart for his weakness and recklessness, obeyed her to the letter.

"Let the man loose, Porius! Let him take the woman and go! Make him leave the child with us. She's too young to follow."

"And thus," as the Henog of Dyfed in his best vein would have put it, "and thus it was done."

But very different from the more picturesque effects of that inspired narrator was what followed Gunhorst's release. Its stage setting was in fact dominantly mental, and nothing could have been calmer, more commonplace, more ordinary, more natural, than the picture presented by Gunhorst as, without so much as a sideways glance at Porius to divine his intentions, he stepped hurriedly forward, picked up Sibylla, who had slipped from her daughter's thin arms, and carried her off at a run. He ran with her straight down the slope towards the lake; and Porius noted with interest the shrewd practical care he took to avoid getting entangled in that tricky expanse of reeds and mud and yet to convey his burden towards the eastern end of the lake, where the unfrequented moorland began which led towards the great free forest that stretched away to the west of Saint Tysilio's shrine.

And then it was Porius's turn to assert himself. "If he's badly hurt," he announced in a raised voice, "all the more reason for my doing exactly what he told me when he took Morfydd to the Gaer and left me to look after things here. No, Mother, I cannot go. But Uncle Brochvael and our good friend Drom here will help Gwythyr and Nesta — it would be a shame to separate them — in escorting you whither he is. I only wish" — here he just uttered what came into his head at that second rather than any considered suggestion— "I only — wish — I — could — get — that — Jewish — doctor — to — go — with — you."

As he uttered this, pondering these things aloud, Porius became aware of a vibration of suppressed magnetic emotion in his immediate neighbourhood. He was so self-centred and impervious to social shocks that it took a heavy bolt of this sort of psychic thunder to pierce his defences, and he stared round him now with a quaintly puzzled and reproachful air as if someone were making a fool of him.

And then his eyes met those of the silent and embarrassed Gwythyr and he knew it was from him that this voiceless appeal had come.

"Well, my lad?" he said, speaking more gently than the youth expected; for Gwythyr, unlike Afagddu and a few others of the older Gaer men who had known Porius as the foster-child of Alarch, misinterpreted his sluggish self-absorption as family pride, his shyness and ungregariousness as inhumanity, and his lack of humour and of quick and easy repartee as a stiff and stilted attempt to copy the reserve of his Roman grandfather. "Well, my lad?"

“I think, my Lord, that Lot-el-Azziz would willingly come if Nesta went to look after the child and the foreign woman.”

Gwythyr was astonished at the simple gratitude with which Porius responded to these words, as if this suggestion of his had solved the hardest of all problems in this present confusion of moves and countermoves.

“Oh, please *do* go — both of you! — that’s the thing to do, isn’t it, Mother? The man’s a most experienced doctor and a very clever one. I’ve seen him with Brother John.”

Although the assent they received from their mistress was little more than a faint shrug of the shoulders and a self-pitying gesture, in the shape of a weary adjustment of the carefully folded satiny strip of *pali* she wore round her head and allowed to descend over the front of her robe as far as her left breast, the newly married pair darted off down the slope towards the southwest with as much alacrity and naturalness as Gunhorst the Sais with his woman in his arms had hurried down the parallel slope towards the southeast.

Euronwy now turned to Brochvael, who was talking to his new friend Drom, and sought to catch his eye with a statuesque expression of resignation.

“Even though my unkind son,” her look said, “dismisses all my servants, I shall still go forward alone whither Destiny beckons.”

“Neb!” called Porius suddenly.

“Yes, my Lord!” the son of Digon answered; and an echo carried those two syllables “Neb! Yes! Neb! Yes! Neb! Yes!” over the lake, over the dead Brother’s cell, over the Cave of Mithras, over the deserted camp, over the rock ridges towards the Cader, over the shrine of Tysilio Sant, over the church of Collen Sant, till they died away beyond the deserted unlit hall of Pengwern, among the ruined heights and the grassy hollows, haunted by owls and badgers and wolves and foxes, of Porius Manlius's vanished Uriconium.

"Go back quickly to Myrddin Wyllt — no! never mind what he told you to tell me; I have a feeling that he himself is in danger — and tell him I'll be at his tent in a few minutes! Tell him about my father and about the Patrician and do what you can for him, and don't let him out of your sight *till* I *come.* No, don't be afraid about Gunta, lad! I'll keep Gunta safe with me. Don't you worry about *her.* I'll bring her along with me in a few minutes. But I want you to be free to look after Myrddin Wyllt till I come. I have a strong feeling — yes, and *you* have too; I can see that! — that he wants help from you and me, *now* at this very second! You know what he is, and how he can — but go! go! go!"

And Neb, whose eyes had grown big under his words, showed himself for once too agitated even to make an obeisance and rushed off.

When he was gone, and Porius was left alone with little Gunta, watching his mother whispering to Brochvael something that was clearly of great importance to them both and probably — so he told himself — had to do with Morfydd, he deliberately set himself to play one of his earliest boyhood's tricks, a trick which had been forced upon him by the natural submissiveness of his phlegmatic strength combined with the unnatural liveliness of his rebellious mind, as these things were affected by the fatality of his having always lived with persons of a more dominant and more self-assertive will than his own.

By this trick he metamorphosed himself into a drowsy, well-meaning, and rather babyish animal, an animal who has been deposited by chance into a scene of high mysterious dramatic tension, the protagonists and antagonists of which could argue and dispute and contend across him and around him without having the slightest effect on his sense-absorbed identity.

Every now and then, as they whispered together now, Euronwy or Brochvael would glance at him as he sat with his back to the copper-coloured blob of excrement, and their attitude suggested, as the object of these glances well understood, that this curious trick bequeathed to him from his troubled boyhood made not the slightest difference to the manner in which they regarded him.

"There's a *tynged* on me," he told himself with a not entirely mock-dolorous plaintiveness, "as there was on Llew Llaw Gyffes, a *tynged* that sets me outside the ordinary human relations. Why the devil don't I feel more upset about what's happened to *him over* there? I wonder whether I'm the coldest-hearted wretch in Edeyrnion! I don't *feel* as if I were. I feel as if —"

His thoughts were interrupted by little Gunta, who now approached him so boldly and recklessly that he cried out to her, with a sweeping movement of his arm: "For God's sake be careful, child! There's a patch of awful filth behind me here! We ought to clear out of this curst crossways place. It's a regular cloaca!"

Gunta took no more notice of his outburst than if she'd been a bluebottle fly. With a hurried spontaneity that betrayed the move as purely due to a faintly felt pang of loneliness, she settled herself down at his side, made use of his legs as a holster for the back of her neck, sighed contentedly, and closed her eyes.

"If anything happens—" she murmured.

"What did you say, child?"

"If anything happens to Neb I shall bite her throat and suck her blood till she's dead."

"Of course you will! Of course you will!" he whispered stroking her hair. "Of course you'll bite her throat!

When the wife of the devil kisses a man
There's more than fish in the frying pan."

And with this he also began, as he stroked that flaxen hair, to feel extremely sleepy. But it was to the rocking of a giant nurse that he found himself falling to sleep with a Sais child leaning against him, his father and grandfather wounded to death, his mother seduced, his bride in love with his friend, and he himself the clumsy murderer of the great ghost that lulled him.

He was awaked with a start to discover that he hadn't the faintest notion how long he'd slept. The customary sequences that we call laws of Nature would have accounted equally well for half a minute's or half an hour's interim.

At any rate it was his mother's voice, announcing the return of Gwythyr with Lot-el-Azziz, that brought him back to life; and glancing quickly round to make sure that the heap of excrement was as it was, for he had established himself as a sort of organic pharos, or living watchtower, against that hapless phenomenon, he scrambled to his feet, only to find that the flaxen head of the little Gwyddyl-Sais was no longer near him but was flitting about like a sulphur-winged butterfly in and out of the figures that surrounded the newly arrived doctor.

Porius was however a trifle shocked by the doctor's present mood. Had the man already been drinking in spite of it being, as he could tell by the sun, only halfway between one and two of the afternoon?

No! On the whole, as he listened, he thought not; but el-Azziz was certainly behaving in an odd way and talking with a lack of restraint that seemed totally unfitting to his profession.

"Gog and Magog, great Princess," he was now saying, "existed in my wife's mind as ideas before they existed in her womb as persons. Magog's happy birth, of course, changes everything. Now we shall not sail with Dion Dionides. It is therefore my happy privilege, great Princess, to offer you, on this twenty-second day of October in this year of the Son of David four hundred and ninety-nine, my humble services as the royal, I mean the princely, physician in your Dinas-Gaer, I mean your Mynydd-y-Gaer household, of the king, I mean of the prince, of this northern province of Britain."

Deep into the nature of the rebellious Gwythyr had sunk the fact that it was by his advice that Nesta had been left to look after the Jewess and the Jewess's baby and that Lot-el-Azziz had been brought here.

All this gave him deep satisfaction; but he had now to confess to having refrained from using physical force to prevent el-Azziz from doing what as a professional physician as well as a scrupulous Jewish parent the man had felt impelled to do; and Gwythyr was conscious of no small nervousness.

He looked at his mistress as she began to make a quiet and courteous reply to the doctor's cautious startling offer. He looked at Brochvael who had snatched at the opportunity to take Drom a few paces apart, so as to discuss with him further exciting details of their settling down together in Ty Cerrig.

Finally he looked at Porius, who suddenly struck him as deliberately acting at that moment as he himself was so often driven to act, that is to say, acting the part of a prize fool. For it struck the intelligence of Gwythyr, quickened as that intelligence now was by a feeling of justifiable self-confidence, that Porius was pretending to have a great deal less alertness as to what was happening about him than he really had.

And this flash of insight gave him the courage to do a thing that Nesta would have been astonished to see him do. He went straight up to the apparently dazed and staring Porius, asked boldly whether he had permission to speak, received this permission, and in a clear and rapid whisper told him how Lot-el-Azziz had spent five hours that morning — indeed from the hour of five to the hour of ten — digging a deep grave for Brother John just outside the entrance to the porch of his cell.

Porius listened intently to every word of this and made no sign whether of approval or disapproval, though Gwythyr felt he had his wits about him, since at one point, when in his own anxiety to explain exactly where the grave was the younger man moved a random step or two, the other plucked at his sleeve indicating the unburied excrement.

Gwythyr was right. Porius had seldom had his wits about him more definitely than at this moment, and more than his wits. His memory raced back along the years, calling up one impression after another of his old friend's face and forcing himself to see that face lying at the bottom of this deep hole. Rapidly he decided that this sudden impious and sacrilegious disposal of Brother John's lean bones and haggard features was the best thing that could have happened.

He had thrust away when he left the cell all wish to see the old man's dead face again; and if he'd been himself the one to decide on the place wherein, if they did not burn the body, it might decompose in peace, he would have selected this very spot.

And there was another reason for his satisfaction in what he had just heard; namely, his deep and secret attitude — secret in a curious and subtle sense even to himself except at certain extremely painful moments — towards the young man his father had chosen to accompany Afagddu in the task of escorting Medrawd out of the provinces of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy.

Thus it was in no mood of cruelty or even of careless teasing that he kept Gwythyr waiting for his verdict on this grave dug in five hours outside the Brother's cell for the Brother's corpse. His eyes were fixed on a clump of greenish white moss that clung to the edge of a small trickle of water, a trickle whose drip-drop made so faint a sound that it was only audible in the pauses of their human talk.

But this particular species of white moss — already familiar to him, as it was to all Brythons, as a substance most precious in the staunching of blood and the binding up of wounds — was destined to the end of his days to be associated with the painful glimpse he now had into his feeling about this nameless young man.

Well did he know now why the self-healing instinct of his deepest soul — with its fatal tendency, as with all the descendants of Cunedda, to a quite special kind of nervous insanity — kept this youth nameless.

His consciousness hovered now like a swift black butterfly over the purple bruise whose surface was still liable to be speckled by minute out-jetting spurts of red blood when a certain idea brushed it with its wings!

His mother — under the influence of Minnawc Gorsant — had sent this boy, who was one of the leaders of the orthodox gang who had murdered Morvran, to learn church Latin and be consecrated priest by the bishop in Porius's own old school beyond Moel y Famau.

His knowledge that at the bottom of her heart Morfydd had never entirely absolved him from a share, remote enough and merely negative, but still a share in her brother's death, was constantly intensifying his own secret remorse and causing renewed outspurtings of bloody drops from that particular bruise. Thus the self-created tendency to be pursued by the very association of ideas from which he shrank away was always forcing him to employ all manner of curious devices; and he had, indeed, become a successful adept in a thousand self-healing tricks to help him escape his self-created devils. One of these tricks was the extremely simple one of forcing himself to forget what to himself he would call “the horror.”

But another was to pile up a monstrous mountain of appallingness, so that it became possible to deal with it, so to say, on its *own terms;* in other words to imagine *himself* to be a compounded identity of monstrosities so shocking that he became a veritable leviathan whose maw was terrific enough to dispose of any conceivable behemoth.

In most cases, however, the tricks he employed in this self-healing magical ritual partook of *both wisdoms;* firstly the wisdom of running away himself, and secondly the wisdom of transforming himself into a monster of such appalling desperation that any spectre he could possibly encounter would be the one to flee.

Moreover, since accident and chance only provided the occasions out of which his self-tormenting soul invented its own obstinately returning secret horror, so fate and destiny, endowing him with his parents, with his wife, with his teacher, with his foster-brother, and even with the ancestral Creiddylad, had fixed the boundaries and set up the barriers that of necessity limited the stage of his interior comic tragedy.

And now as he surveyed that trickle of water and that patch of greenish white moss he gave vent in his heart to a soundless howl of exultation over the fact that in a world where the foundations had been laid so long ago, and where necessity and chance vied with each other to reduce the amount of plastic life clay at the disposal of a person’s individual will, there were yet such unbelievable opportunities for asserting oneself craftily, powerfully, and effectively.

And certainly, he felt, he *had* asserted himself during these last four days and not without power, though in one case with disastrous enough results, and this forcing himself to forget the name of the young priest was, he now felt, a real evidence of his accomplished success in the art of mental escape.

It certainly did seem to Gwythyr, as he watched Porius at that moment, that he was watching the face of a man for whom an authentic crack had yawned in the familiar system of things, letting *something else show through.*

Whether, as Porius later was inclined to think, the exceptional effort he had made to dominate with his will the workings of his mind in the matter of the new priest's name, was the cause of this illumination, or whether it was a metaphysical reward for the obstinate animal tenacity of his "cavoseniargizing," the truth was that to his own consciousness, while Gwythyr stared at him, waiting a verdict on Brother John's grave, it seemed as if that greenish white moss were a greenish white passage leading straight into the secret roots of life.

And never to the end of his days did he forget exactly *how* he saw the mystery of life at that second. He invented many obscure emblems and many grotesque parables after that; but the particular vision of things as he apprehended it at that moment remained with him as the authentic response of the secret self of Porius ab Einion to the mirage known as human existence.

And just as he had been successful in destroying a natural habit of the mind by forgetting that boy's name, so now he set himself to inject all the crafty ignorance and all the cautious doubt he could muster up into every drop of rational explanation offered by every teacher he had ever had, and by Brother John most of all, of the mystery of things. For in this glimpse of reality seen through this white moss he saw existence not as one creation, or as one world, but as *many worlds,* and he saw all the innumerable consciousnesses of these worlds as possessed of creative power.

He saw all creatures, even as Brother John had seen them in the calm of his death-ecstasy, as composed of a natural human clay and of a natural human spirit activating that clay, activating it and motivating it with desires, purposes, instincts, impulses that on the whole were not only natural but absolutely necessary if the individuals composing the human race were to enjoy as well as endure their short and troubled lives.

Such were the thoughts that visited the mind of Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc on this twenty-second of October in the year four hundred and ninety-nine. And if the confused events which had brought to Edeyrnion from the battlegrounds of Ynys Prydein both Colgrim and the emperor had deepened in their most secret sluices and most recondite reservoirs the feelings of Porius, they had worked quite as remarkable a change upon the sensitivity of Gwythyr, the husband of Nesta ferch Aulus.

That young man was at this moment watching Porius's face with an attention so absorbed and intense that Porius couldn't help being aware, for the second time that afternoon, of the stream of magnetic energy directed upon him.

"Was Brother John," he enquired, "laid there at once — I mean in that deep hole you had dug?"

Gwythyr gathered together the weight of his newly born self-confidence. "Yes, my Lord," he announced, speaking frankly and firmly, "I helped lift him into it."

"How did you lower him down?"

Gwythyr's reply was given with the faintest flicker of a smile. "The doctor had thought of that," he said. "The doctor mentioned the cave that Abraham bought. I forget from whom he bought it or how much he gave for it, my Lord!"

"You mean the man actually told you how much gold or silver Abraham paid for his grave?"

"Yes, my Lord, he spoke of it twice."

"Then you didn't have to lower the body down?"

"Oh, no, my Lord, the doctor explained carefully to me that in the time of Abraham graves were so large that people could walk about in them. That's why it took us so long to dig; and when it was finished the doctor's little boy Gog held the torch for us, and I stood in the grave, and the doctor lifted the body down to me."

"Is the grave filled in?"

"Yes, my Lord."

Porius gave a great sigh; and it was a sigh of unfathomable relief. He had been dreading all the while that it would be his duty to kneel on the brink of that huge grave, dug as they dug them in the days of Abraham, and see Brother John gazing up at him from down there with a look he would never be able to understand.

"You have done very well indeed, Gwythyr, you and the doctor. You have done exactly right."

This moment was one of the happiest moments of Gwythyr's life. He felt that the fate of the House of Cunedda, so inextricably bound up with his own, was set upon the right path. But they were now, both of them, compelled to turn from ideal patterns of life and death to such practical concerns as a suitable residence' for Gog and Magog; for it had already become clear to Porius that his mother had no urgent desire to see her destiny associated with that of Lot-el-Azziz.

This excited personage was now pacing up and down between the proud and sorrowful figure of the Lady of the Gaer and the self-absorbed figure of little Gunta. Euronwy was standing now on the highest spot where the various paths converged and was lost — so her son told himself — in some patient and intricate calculation that included the manipulation of human entities, whether dead or alive, with as much competent authority as if they were fish in a weir.

Little Gunta, on the other hand, had snatched at the opportunity of combing her doll's hair with the withered stalk of a dead thistle, and of arranging the few particular hairs she had pulled from the doll's head into squares and triangles on the globular dome of a spotted toadstool.

Never had Porius's mind raced round and round its cage of the moment's fatality with a more savage fastidiousness. He had no wish to change everything, but he had a great wish to enjoy the status quo more than seemed possible just then. It seemed as if his conscience had been aroused from its usual quiescence by the sight of Gunta combing her doll's hair. He felt as if he had been combing a great many dolls' hair while his mocking father and his taciturn grandfather had both got themselves wounded, probably to death, in defence of Ynys Prydein.

But what in the devil's name was this mad Jew doing now? Lot-el-Azziz was actually dancing! Yes, dancing a solemn dance of religious ecstasy; just such a dance as David is described as dancing before the Ark of the Covenant.

"It's over that little human Ark, Magog," thought Porius; and as he watched the physician's antics and saw how he lifted his legs under his brown robe and waved his ram's horn, and how he tugged violently at the twist of hair in the centre of his skull, and how he cried aloud in his glorying, "The Lord — He is the God! The Lord — He is the God!" it crossed his mind that Edeyrnion was a very small portion of Ynys Prydein, and that Ynys Prydein itself was but a mouthful compared with the whole planet.

That an enemy spear had entered the body of the ruler of the small tribe to whose service he had just dedicated himself clearly meant nothing to Lot-el-Azziz. A daughter of Moab had been impregnated with the seed of Judah; and unto Gog had been added Magog.

"But what on earth," Porius asked himself, "is keeping Mother now? She's got the doctor, and here's Gwythyr ready to start, and Uncle Brochvael. Well! I'll be off anyway; and I'll just carry away Gunta and go straight to Gwendydd's tent! Mistress Nineue is up to something. God! I pray she won't hurt little Neb. What a devil the woman is!"

With a vehemence that was unusual in him his imagination now got to work; and he felt as if there were a long invisible thread, one end of which had been tied to his midriff and the other twisted round Myrddin's thumb, and that this thread had been giving several vicious jerks. "We've both got a *tynged,"* he thought, "from the same dark star."

It was at this moment that there entered the brain of the elated Gwythyr a yet bolder idea; and once more he moved close up to Porius.

"My Lord!"

"What is it, lad?"

"I think the foreign doctor is praying to his gods."

"Well, lad, why not?"

"I think he's praying that you, my Lord, may with a final and deciding voice accept him as the physician of the Gaer household."

Had the exultant Gwythyr consulted his bride about the wisdom of this presumptuous utterance, she would have been horrified and would have thought he had gone mad. And her horror would have been a good example of the completely erroneous view of Porius's nature held by those who had seen him daily since the death of his foster-mother, Alarch the Fair.

For so far from being annoyed by Gwythyr's forwardness, Porius smiled at him with genuine gratitude; and he thought in his heart: "If *he over there* did die of this hurt, what a thing to have a sensible, intelligent, and quick-noticing boy like this to keep me in touch with reality and prevent my making a fool of myself!"

And he promptly proceeded to discuss with Gwythyr which of the two long unoccupied and spirit-haunted chambers in the interior of the Gaer wall would be best adapted for the initiation into life upon earth of Magog the son of el-Azziz of the tribe of Judah.

Meanwhile Gunta, holding her doll in one hand and her thistle comb in the other, was showing herself as bold as Gwythyr. What however was bothering *her* had nothing to do with the Jew's prayers or with his gratitude to his god. It had to do with the man's Asiatic notion of offering up the pain in his own body in thanksgiving to heaven.

Nor perhaps would even this pain offering to Jehovah have offended the small creature if it had not had to do with the celebrant's hair. It was entirely connected with the frantic, shocking, and crucial tugs, which had grown more and more intolerable, at that unfortunate topknot growing from the apex of the man's Semitic skull.

In his exalted ecstasy, doubtless a religious characteristic for thousands of years of his particular branch of the tribe of Judah, Lot-el-Azziz evidently fancied that Gunta, with her flowing yellow hair and her great doll, had caught his infectious aberration and was developing it according to the rites of some primordial hyperborean Amazonian race which, in its reluctance to shed blood, sacrificed images of wood and wax, painted to resemble children.

El-Azziz was indeed so carried away by this notion which lent itself so perfectly to his mood that he allowed himself, as though under the hypnosis of a mystic dance dominated by a small child and a big doll, to imitate precisely Gunta’s treatment of her doll’s hair in his own behaviour to his unlucky topknot. The oddly consorted pair of celebrants were indeed so absorbed in their ritual that when Porius lifted up his voice, and to the evident surprise and distress of his mother, declared in louder and more authoritative tones than she, or anyone else, had ever heard issuing from his lips, that from now on, “Lot-el-Azziz of the tribe of David is henceforth to be accepted as the official physician of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy, with his domicile at Mynydd-y-Gaer, and the right to meat and drink at the prince’s cost,” so startling was it to everyone present to hear this new voice of authority from such a quarter that in the deep silence that followed there was actually audible a faint but distinct echo.

“Prince’s cost! Prince’s cost!” repeated the echo.

This phenomenon naturally produced a vague uneasiness in the minds of its hearers, an uneasiness that was increased rather than diminished when in the silence that followed there descended from the high ridges above Craig Hen the harsh note of a solitary raven. It was the Lady of the Gaer who broke the spell.

“Come!” Euronwy said. “Let us be going! Brochvael, give me your arm. Doctor, you will be pleased to attend us. Gwythyr, you will need some weapon if you’re to escort us to any purpose. And you too, my man. What did you tell me your name was? Oh yes, I remember, Drom. Drom’s a good name, and borne, I am quite sure, by one worthy of it. How is it I’ve never seen you before, Master Drom?”

Now Porius knew perfectly well, as sons always *do* know with their mothers, and husbands with their wives, that the Lady of the Gaer was deeply disappointed in him. Well did he know that she longed for him to take command of the situation, and to show himself a man, a hero, an irresistible and overpowering force. But so contradictory was the element of obstinate animal maliciousness diffused through his natural docility that merely to know this was enough to make him emotionally hostile to it. In other words, though he outwardly obeyed, he inwardly mocked at his own obedience; and though he did what his fate called upon him to do, he did it with the air of old Gwrgi, ploughing behind his ox rather than with the mystic discipline of a soldier of Mithras or the romantic emotion of a servant of Christ.

But though his irritation with the woman for wanting him to be a clever hero protecting a tragic mother, when he felt like a stupid *cawr* teased by a household of Ffichtiaid slaves, was intensified by his doubts of her integrity, he obeyed her patiently, looking about till he found Gunhorst's axe, and when he had picked it up from the ground presenting it with a smile to Gwythyr.

Meanwhile Brochvael, shifting his ebony staff to his right hand and letting Drom have his spear, began to lead Euronwy down the incline. Matters were at this stage, and Euronwy, leaning ever so lightly on Brochvael's arm, had already arranged the *pali* scarf that covered her head, and with a resigned, tender, and only faintly reproachful gesture had waved farewell to her son, when they all became aware of voices reaching them upon the wind, and coming too from a quite different quarter from the one to which they were setting out.

"Mother! Mother!" Porius cried. "Did you hear that? It's *Rhun!* He must be carrying him! He must be bringing him here! They must have found out where you were. Wait, Mother dear! Wait exactly where you are! I'll bring him to you. Yes, you can trust me to bring him. Only don't let anyone stir a step from here."

“May I come with you?” enquired little Gunta eagerly. “I can run very fast.”

But Porius shook his head.

“No, child,” he said, tightening his belt and straightening the leather straps round his legs. “It isn’t only a matter of running. There are a lot of other things to be thought of. Besides I want you to be here if Neb comes back with the counsellor.”

In spite of his words about its “not being a matter of running,” it is certain that Gunta couldn’t have kept up with him on that particular occasion, as he rushed from the side of the woman who bore him to the side of the man who begat him. Probably nobody in Mynydd-y-Gaer could just then have kept up with him unless it were Rhun.

As he ran he wondered desperately what he would see and how he would see it. There was no question of the direction; for Rhun’s voice came on the east wind, and came characteristically enough, in steady, unagitated, measured repetitions. And yet when he did see them it proved an experience completely different from anything he’d yet known.

What he first saw was a white object jolted or being jolted, swinging or being swung, and moving at some speed about a foot from the ground; and as it moved, being crossed at frequent intervals by a couple of human shapes that seemed at once connected and completely independent of it.

“My father’s face!” he thought. “It’s as white as death!” And when he came up with them it seemed to him that Rhun gave him an angrily exhausted, and yet an almost amused, look as much as to say: “So you *can* do it when you *want* to do it!”

Porius was too much out of breath to do more than sign to them to go on as they were doing, nor was there any opportunity for him to exchange more than a glance with Rhun as he went along at their side.

Three times he tried to interrupt the feeble stream of delirious words that kept issuing from the wounded man's mouth; but it was a vain attempt. Either Einion didn't recognize him, or his presence only increased the incoherence of those feeble outpourings. It was one of the most painful experiences of Porius's whole life, and so many contradictory emotions swept over him that his features assumed an expression as he walked along that was very unusual to him.

It was indeed a matter of small wonder that Porius should undergo sensations at this minute that distorted his features; for it would have been painful to a complete stranger to note the feeble struggles Einion kept making to roll off the hurdle on which he was stretched and to tumble to the ground. He must have been moved by some obscure Antaean feeling that if only he could touch the actual soil he would be cured of his hurt. The man's ghastly pallor would have been disturbing to anybody; but it was the obstinate intensity of the efforts he kept making, contrasted with his hopeless impotence to achieve his purpose, that made his state so peculiarly pitiful to his son.

"I don't see how he can survive this," Porius kept saying to himself. "I don't see how he can survive this."

But the prince was not only struggling to slip off the hurdle on which he was being carried; he was also pouring forth an unending stream of wild incoherent words, and he was doing this in a curiously high-pitched tone, a tone different from his ordinary one, but resembling a little the tone he used when he was drunk.

And though the man didn't look at his son as he rambled on in this delirium it wasn't long before Porius fancied he was conscious of his being there, and that his presence was in some way disturbing to him.

At least that was the excuse he gave to himself as with an audible groan of relief he fell back, and walking behind that swaying and jolting hurdle, which was carried between Rhun's right shoulder and Afagddu's left, began to try to realize what was happening. No, not to realize! To do *that,* ever since his suckling by Einion's romantic sister Alarch, had been impossible to Porius. He lived as much in his immediate sensations as his half-brother Rhun lived in his immediate mystical piety.

Porius's whole life had been one long series of private sensations limited by domestic authority and tempered by tribal responsibility. And now as he contemplated the bare heads of the two men who were carrying his father, the brown locks of the one and the grey curls round the sunburnt skull of the other, in place of what the world calls "realizing what has happened," in other words, in place of pondering upon the fact that his father was dying in front of him on a swaying hurdle, what Porius gave himself up to was a weird feeling that some sort of slippery caul or filmy cocoon had been torn from his father's habitual consciousness, so that what was apprehended now, what was in fact *heard* now, from the motions of that consciousness, was some kind of underlying machinery, whose working, like Uncle Brochvael's Boethian water clock, had always been going on under the surface but had hitherto been decently, elegantly, and discreetly covered up.

"Soul of Creiddylad," he groaned in his heart, still seeing, though more dimly than before, those eyes under the green water, "don't let me die talking. Let me die in silence!"

But there came over him now a curious sense of something monstrously grotesque in the way he was plodding — left leg, right leg, left leg, right leg, left leg, right leg — behind this death-stricken creature who couldn't stop talking.

He quickened his pace a little so that he could catch a glimpse of his father’s face. How horribly, how sickeningly white it was! “It’s as if a living skin has been stripped off,” he thought, “and some horrible *underskin,* like a foul scab or scum or film of corruption, has risen to the surface drawn by the approaching shadow of death. And what will happen now between him and Mother? Will the shock of finding her here bring him to his senses? Will he blurt out the truth before he dies that they’ve grown to hate each other?”

A wave of childish anger against both these creators of his life rolled over him, accompanied by an impious regret that they hadn’t gone off happily together like the parents of Gunta.

“And what about me?” he thought, comparing himself with the little Magog, whose parents would always dote upon him as they did upon each other. “What about me if they can’t restrain themselves from some outburst of pent-up fury?”

Thus did Porius commune with himself as they approached the spot where his mother was awaiting them. But the kindest of the immortals, the great goddess Chance, behaved as is so often her wont and rattled the dice to a completely unexpected upshot; for Einion ap Iddawc either was or was pretending to be drowned in fathom-deep sleep when they reached their companions.

And this enabled his newly appointed court physician to win a hushed and awed respect for himself by an elaborate handling of the ram’s horn and a decisive announcement that the prince still breathed.

It was then that some curious fatality at this dramatic moment in the history of the House of Cunedda placed it in the power of old Afagddu to become the mouthpiece of their recent triumph.

Driven to speak by an accumulated remorse that had by this time assumed ungovernable proportions, Afagddu snatched the opportunity offered by this particular audience to give them a lively description of the rout of Colgrim by the emperor, of the outstanding gallantry of Porius Manlius, and of the way in which the old man had seemed unable to think of anything as they carried him back into the Gaer but where he wished to be buried and what he wanted written on his tombstone.

Watching his mother's face as she knelt down and bowed her head in prayer, while her fingers clasped and unclasped themselves without touching the prostrate form beneath them, Porius experienced the feeling of being so far away from both these persons — from the conscious one equally with the unconscious one — that he found himself wondering, and not for the first time, whether he oughtn't to be horrified by his inhumanity and regard himself as some sort of monster.

He fervently wished Afagddu would cease his penitential discourse and brush away the cloud of midges that hovered over the dying prince making the rich October sunshine seem still more heavy and sultry. He couldn't help recalling, now that the wind had dropped, that sultry October day in his boyhood, when, near the place that was still named "Helen's Causeway," he had picked up and presented to his grandfather, who was delighted to possess it, the Roman flask, dropped years before by some careless legionary from Uriconium, and which, during the desperate and tragic confusion of these last few days, he had, rather ridiculously perhaps but with a genuine instinct of piety, dragged about with him wherever he went.

How vividly he could see that flask at this moment, and how palpably he could feel it, just as if he held it in his hand! And how odd and weird was this whole business of the unreal reality of the *thoughts* in a person's mind! He remembered Brother John explaining to him once how Plato in his

Timaeus holds that there is an image of the universe in the mind of God which serves as the pattern and model of all perfection. If such were God's "thoughts," they were certainly very different from his!

Suddenly into his own fantastic and morbid mind the unpleasant idea entered: "What if to certain avidly greedy insects certain thoughts in certain minds possessed the same sort of attractive taste as this shining heap of excrement? Why shouldn't certain thoughts, which could be as vivid and palpable as mine of that Uriconian flask, possess enough of the substance of matter to be actually nibbled at by greedy flies?"

And Porius suddenly began to see his own thoughts and those of the whole group gathered round the wounded prince as offering to these bronze-coloured dung flies an entertainment richer than the ordure of kings. And into the morbid circle of this weird fancy he went so far as to drag certain small, feeble, end-of-the-season brown moths, who with a weak lurching movement were fumbling round about that same clump of white moss that had already proved a leaping-off place to his own ideas, and he allowed his imagination to dally with the conceited notion that while the bronze-coloured dung flies and the bluebottle blowflies were nibbling at the ordinary human thoughts of his father and his mother, his own more philosophical thoughts and his uncle Brochvael's more literary thoughts were proving a temptation to these languid brown moths.

There is no doubt, however, that had the servant of the late druid, who was soon to be established in Ty Cerrig, used all the thought-reading power he possessed he would have been in a position to show that, instead of Euronwy's and Einion's thoughts being fit food for lively dung flies while the uncle's and the nephew's were worthy of languid moths, it was, in the judgment of higher beings, just the other way round.

Both Porius and Brochvael were at that moment projecting thought clouds into the autumnal sunshine by no means marked by any superiority over those of the wounded man or his wife. Porius's moral advantage over his mother was just then, as if Chance were determined to put him to shame, associated with one of her bare ankles, clearly visible now as she knelt, from which the sandal strap had slipped.

This ankle happened to be both slightly swollen and slightly reddened, and without any remotely rational justification Porius both grossly and morbidly linked it with her seduction by Medrawd. Brochvael too was dallying with an ignoble thought; for he who had let the Ostrogoths of Ravenna drag out every one of his teeth rather than betray a literary colleague indulged himself now in a self-satisfied, secret, animal satisfaction that while his courtly, lucky, amorous, witty brother had got his death blow, he, the awkward eccentric one, whom women regarded as a fastidious fool and men as a coward, had a good chance to look forward, now that the emperor had defeated Colgrim, and now that Morfydd ruled in the Gaer, to some heavenly years of translating Aristophanes into the purest Brython, with careful sprinklings of this new colloquial *Cymraeg,* while his Platonic emotion, as his young Roman friend Boethius used to call it, would be more than satisfied by the companionship of his new friend.

On the other hand, the kneeling Euronwy — whatever may have been the cause of her swollen and reddened ankle — was with closed eyes and clasped hands throwing herself upon the mercy of the living God in whom she felt convinced she "lived and moved and had her being" and imploring him to make her his own.

As for the dying Einion, had Drom turned his attention to *his* thoughts, he would have been found vaguely and obscurely but quite unmistakably to be given up to a struggle to shake off his allegiance to Time and Space preparatory to entering some completely unguessed at dimension of life outside them both.

Thus would the occult perception of the servant Drom in that sun-misted forest clearing have detected, whether the flying things about the excrement or the flying things about the clump of moss responded to them or not, that among the four thought clouds projected into the air, those of Euronwy and Einion were inherently philosophical while those of Porius and Brochvael were inherently unphilosophical; a contrast which, could it have been brought to the attention of the uncle and nephew, would have astonished them not a little.

A great many events were happening at that moment within that oddly assorted group, as they watched Lot-el-Azziz put his ram’s hom to a series of surprising medical uses, and while some of these events were, as we have hinted, purely mental, and, if noted at all, noted only by beings considerably below or considerably above the level of human intelligence, there were others that clearly belonged, at least in large part, to the visible world.

The most striking of these latter was the sudden appearance upon the scene of a completely new figure, that of a formidable-looking young man in the garb of a priest, whose arrival had an instantaneous effect.

The Lady of the Gaer rose to her feet. Brochvael moved a step nearer to Drom, while Porius and Rhun instinctively drew together. This new personage had evidently been sent for by Afagddu, for the remorseful old man broke off at once his confused account of the recent battle beneath the walls of the Gaer, hurried to meet him, saluted him with profound respect, went so far as to propel him with superstitious haste and veneration, as if his touch might work a miracle, towards the prostrate prince, and proceeded to watch with open-mouthed awe while the newcomer uttered a few authoritative words to Euronwy and in undisguised disregard of Porius and ostentatious disregard of Lot-el-Azziz began murmuring a series of Latin sentences over the closed eyelids of the man on the ground.

Not altogether to Porius's surprise, he found himself recognizing this formidable young priest as the silent youth whose inauspicious name, hovering in the recesses of his consciousness, he had so obstinately, so viciously, so maliciously, and, above all, so successfully refused to let himself recall.

Now that he again saw the fellow before his eyes, instead of finding it harder to forget his name, he found it much easier. In fact he came extremely near to really forgetting it! But aye! How clearly, how horribly clearly, he recalled the young man's face and the way he had looked at him last Thursday night, the night Einion had broken his sword and had made towards Medrawd that particular gesture which seemed so like the traditional gesture of homage!

And it came over him now — and he could see in his foster-brother's confused and troubled expression that this feeling was shared — how absolutely unknown to one another, in any group of friends and relatives and companions, however intimately bound together, the really dominant intensities of thought and feeling are.

He noticed that his uncle, with the courtesy of a traveller and of one who has lived in the classic cities, had beckoned to the Jewish doctor to join himself and Drom in some grave philosophical discussion concerning the living value of such rites for the dead as were practised by modern Christians and ancient Greeks.

Now since the tender-hearted Gunta had already moved up close to Gwythyr, who was clearly so afraid of getting into trouble over his hasty disposal of Brother John's corpse as to be unable just then to think of anything but what this masterful young priest might do next, and since

Euronwy seemed to have given up her whole soul into this man's keeping, Porius had a moment to himself in which to collect his thoughts and to try to realize — giving the fellow's *name* to the devil — just what it was he felt about him.

It was certainly a surprising thing for the grandson of Iddawc the Apostate to have to confess, but he soon acknowledged frankly to himself that there was a mental atmosphere about this mysterious young man that filled him with a curious fear as well as with an instinctive loathing.

If he had been forced to reveal in ordinary human language what he felt, it is possible that the very fantasy of it would have broken the spell, and he would have seen the mood as the crazy superstition it probably was.

But superstition or not, since at this moment he could only glance from Rhun's well-known features to the priest's strange ones, he could put nothing of what he felt into words. Though the man was muttering his psalms to himself and was keeping his head bent, he was so near that any reference to him made in their talk would almost certainly reach his ears.

As Porius exchanged glances with Rhun, who seemed too tired and worried to be embarrassed or self-conscious, he decided he must have another long and intimate talk with him and challenge him frankly about Morfydd. He felt as his glance hovered over those familiar features that were so like his own that it was extraordinarily unfair that he and Rhun should be able to exchange their thoughts and feelings so completely about Mithras and Myrddin Wyllt and their own mission to Byzantium, and yet that he might die without knowing whether they had, or had not, possessed the same woman!

And then his thoughts took another turn and a more curious one still. "If this is the end of *him"* — and he glanced at the figure lying as motionless under the murmurings and motions of the priest as if it were already a corpse— “and I keep you” — and his eyes returned to his foster-brother— “from going off with that Greek, and we live together as before, why shan’t I shrink from Morfydd *because of you* as I do from Mother because of Medrawd? Do adulterous mothers hurt us so much worse then than adulterous wives? No, it’s impossible! It can’t be. But that’s how I feel!”

But he now became aware that old Rhun had given him a heavy, sluggish, friendly, and most natural nod, as much as to say: “The young fellow over there acts as if he were the Pope himself. But it’s no use making a fuss. Soldiers of Mithras can put up with worse silliness than this!”

Porius met his nod with a smile. It was clear to him that his foster-brother was too worried over his own affairs to realize that this was the first word they’d exchanged since the night before the Feast of the Sowing.

What was not clear to him, and indeed what would have been a startling revelation to him if Rhun had blurted it out, was that Gwendydd had already confessed she had agreed to marry Dion Dionides and at the same time had assuaged Rhun’s outraged pride by a long and intimate account of her early life as Myrddin’s half-sister. She admitted that their mother would never reveal to her the secret of the prophet’s paternity. She made a frank acknowledgment of her own humble birth.

“I am not worthy,” she told him, “of marrying a son of Alarch the Fair and a grandson of Iddawc ab Edeyrn; but if I marry this elderly sea captain” — thus, it seemed to Rhun, he had forced her to let him tear out the truth by its roots from her reluctant heart— “if I marry this clever merchant, and if, in the absence of Porius, for it is clear that Arthur will never let him go while the Saeson keep landing on these coasts, you, my sweet friend, consent to let us take *you* in place of him to the feet of Anastasius, we shall find, I doubt not, many heaven-sent opportunities to talk of the Mysteries of Mithras.”

Now the truth was that Rhun's deep gravity and troubled silence under this provocative suggestion had puzzled the ambitious court lady, who saw herself reaching heights on the Bosporus she could never have attained on the Usk as completely as his absentminded camaraderie at this moment puzzled his foster-brother.

But Porius was puzzled by other things than "old Rhun's" ponderous and weary familiarity. He had begun to be aware of something grotesque, indeed of something almost comical, in the manner in which they were all standing in that unholy circle round their dying prince. The impious vision darted through his brain of his mocking begetter suddenly leaping from the ground, tossing the priest head over tail, lifting the lady to her feet, and indicating that he'd been playing a trick upon the whole lot of them.

But the eyes of the ruler of Edeyrnion remained closed. No one knew then, no one knew later, no one ever knew, whether while that sonorous Latin was murmured over him he was conscious or unconscious. Porius experienced a shiver of unexpected loneliness as his glance wandered from this haughty hard-faced young priest chanting his psalms to the excited doctor scratching with his ram's horn the ticklish spot on the top of his elongated skull where the hair was twisted.

"Is the fellow," he thought, as he noted the glazed stare on the man's face, "wondering how soon Magog's mother will let him circumcize that imp of Bashan?"

Nor did his mood of irritable reaction against the characteristic gestures of each one of these people at this crucial moment stop there.

"Why do they all," he thought, "from Mother to old Afagddu make me feel so savage? Is it because at the sight of *him* sinking into the dark their natural human self-assertion grows furtive, secretive, and pitifully indirect? O Creiddylad! O Creiddylad! But could I have gone on with her, even had I managed to kill the old *cawr*? Could I have kept her hidden in a cave up there for the rest of my life? Perdition! I doubt it — I greatly doubt it! But it must be the other one in my blood that makes me so sick of them all and so longing to have her back!"

He turned to Rhun; but his foster-brother, having given him that one familiar nod, as if they were still boys, had retreated into as thick a cloud of his own private concerns as that which had already closed in upon Lot-el-Azziz.

"O Creiddylad!" he groaned, and there came upon him not exactly a desolate sense, but a grim sense of loneliness. He felt as if he were swimming round and round the solemn figureheads of a flotilla of ships stranded on a hidden reef; and it was with a sense of humorous relief that he suddenly noticed that his uncle was deriving some queer kind of mystic-erotic satisfaction from keeping the handle of his Gallic staff, as he held it loosely by its ferrule end, in contact with the desirable person of Drom, who himself, judging from the faint smile on his lips, was not wholly unresponsive.

But what with the immobility of the prince, the agitated piety of the lady, the rigid ceremoniousness of the priest, the self-absorbed trances of Rhun and the doctor, it was a comfort to Porius, in his present Cewri mood, to be confronted — even though manifested through a philosopher's staff — with some sign that the living sap of the world hadn't altogether dried up.

Then quite suddenly and, as it seemed, beyond all human volition, the long drawn-out dramatic tension, stretched to the breaking point at that parting of the ways, cracked clean across. What actually happened to break the spell was simple enough. There came from the prostrate man the unmistakable sound of breaking wind, followed immediately afterwards by a querulously pitiful appeal in plain unashamed words such as a child might make to its mother. But the effect was startling. It was as if before a host of worshippers a sacrosanct but entirely new altar had been heaved up from the seaweed-strewn and shell-strewn windrow where it had been erected in all innocence on the sleeping head of a huge scaly antediluvian monster who was now, after many centuries, beginning to reawake.

The tension that had been holding them all relaxed at once. The Lady of the Gaer swayed like a great white doe that has heard the hounds. Porius never forgot the series of spasmodic movements, more like those of a startled vestal than of a Venedotian princess, with which she addressed herself to the priest.

She had grown so stiff from her long kneeling that the priest was impelled to take her by the arm and support her, while in passionate whispers she began to supplicate something from him which — so it seemed to her son — the man was not at all reluctant to grant.

The doctor and old Afagddu were now flinging themselves down by the side of the dying prince, and Porius was already beginning to protest against further applications of the ram's horn when he felt himself twitched by the sleeve. With an angry gesture he straightened his back and swung round, only to find himself, to his horrified astonishment, confronted by Neb ap Digon. The expression of the small creature's face had lost at that moment all its self-confident shrewdness. The boy's features were pinched, and the skin was, or gave the impression of being, drawn as tightly over the small bones as if the soul beneath the flesh had endured months rather than a couple of hours of harrowing agitation and anxiety.

Sinking down on one knee, Porius pulled Neb towards him with one hand, while with the other he fumbled awkwardly between Einion and the doctor, till, touching the latter's ram's horn, his fingers closed over it.

"What's happened?" he whispered. "Tell me quick, Neb, only very quietly, for Jesus' sake!"

The little page began whispering rapidly, though he had to stop at intervals, to recapture his breath.

"She got out of him," he whispered, "all about that stone on the top of yr Wyddfa under which he's going to disappear! He called it his Road to *Annwn.* I said that word over and over, so as to be sure of it. And that's what it was — the *Road to* Annwn. She's never been able to get that out of him before; and I could see it put the devil's own candlelight into her head. And since the moment he told her, the same sort of light has gone out in him. He looks like a corpse moving about among living people. You know, Prince Porius, he's often talked to me about the stone that hides the *Road to* Annwn. But he's never told me where it was.

"But now, when once he's gone down that hole, however long he may have been down there, she'll know where to find him when she wants to be loved, and she'll do just what I've always known she had in her mind to do; she'll fasten the stone down so that no one but she can lift it. And then she'll have him really to herself. She'll go to him whenever she wants his love; and she alone in all the whole world will know where he is, and he'll never be able to come out. You know, Porius ab Einion, what at the bottom of my mind I've always dreaded? That in the end, in spite of all his tricks, she'd be too much for him! And I tell you it looks as if the end was beginning now."

He stared pitifully at Porius, who, though he was aware that Lot-el-Azziz was giving violent tugs at his ram's horn and was making increasingly vigorous protests, remained outwardly unmoved. But his soul was torn within him. Never had the peculiar and special pain with which the gods have afflicted us by giving us freedom of will seized upon him more savagely.

He felt as if to leave this spot while his father remained alive would be a culminating act of irresponsible impiety. And yet to send Neb back whence he had come — wouldn't that be to betray the counsellor, to desert Neb, and to let this vampire of a Ffichti witch suck the blood of the greatest magician in the world?

"Curse this free will!" he cried in his heart. "Curse it! Curse it!" And he remembered how he had once listened, like a great hulking *cawr,* dumb and silent, while Brochvael tried to explain to Morfydd how much the characters in Homer suffered when their minds were "divided in opposite directions" and how gladly they accepted the will of the gods; just as the gods — even Zeus himself, father of gods and men — gladly accepted the will of destiny.

"There's no pain," Brochvael had declared on that occasion, "worse than the pain of free will." And thinking of that saying now Porius was tempted to echo it, tempted so strongly to echo it, that he let go the ram's horn, and swinging clean round towards Neb, took upon himself the shape of a humped jug with wide-extended handles, and sticking out his elbows awkwardly to right and left and keeping his face so lowered over Neb's face that there was no possibility of anybody else hearing his words, he groaned out in a harsh, husky, emphatic whisper that he couldn't possibly come until the prince was either better or dead.

Neb's distress at hearing this was so extreme that Porius couldn't help murmuring aloud to the small boy portions of the metaphysical dialogue that was going on in his own painfully divided soul.

"Don't curse me, child," he whispered. "Don't you hear the prince? He's muttering his death mutter. I tell you I know that sound. It's the *death voice.*

I heard it yesterday before Brother John died. After all, he's my father. And *she* here too. And that vulture of a priest waiting to arrange everything! *Please* understand how it is, little one. And go back to him quick now, child, and do what you can.

"I don't *think* Gwendydd will be able to get round the Lord Rhun. Oh, you needn't tell me my fate's mixed with the fate of Myrddin Wyllt. I know well of myself it is! I've known it longer than you have, my little son! And you needn't tell me I'm risking the life of a man who is like a god; for that too I know of myself, Neb ap Digon.

"And you needn't tell me that in this world we have to let the dead bury their dead, and to follow Nature and leave our parents to the parents of us all — to the earth and the sky! I know all this, Neb, my child, as well as I know how you'd give your life for your great master. But there come moments, child—"

But with his face so close to the page's face, as he bent there above him with his hands pressed against his knees, he saw such anxiety and concern in Neb's expression that, bending lower still, he instinctively took the page's small face between the palms of his two hands and held that small skull as if his words were wine that he was pouring from a larger vessel into a smaller one.

"There come moments, child," he went on, "when we simply don't know whether the part of our 'divided mind' that we've had to follow is the part of good or evil, of strength or weakness, of courage or cowardice, of wisdom or folly. All we know, my little one, is that it's *the part of fate.* So go, my dear friend, go quick for the sake of all we hold—"

But he was interrupted by the projection into their crucial moment of a small thin arm, an arm which terminated in a warm and competent hand which proceeded, resolutely and calmly, to detach Porius's fingers from the boy's face.

"Yes! You'd better go back, Neb," cried the little girl. "But I swear to you on my dying oath that when Porius ab Einion's ready to come, I'll come with him."

She drew her arm away and with both her hands began rocking her doll.

Neb straightened his thin shoulders and with the knuckles of his left hand and the wrist of his right hand rubbed his forehead and his eyes.

"It... wouldn't... do... " he murmured hesitatingly, addressing himself to Porius, "for her... to come... with me?"

Once again the pain of free will caught Porius by his most sensitive nerve and shook him where he stood. Once more his soul became like one of those Homeric souls that between one choice and another are torn in two. But it was the little girl herself who answered firmly:

"No, Neb, I should only be in the way. But when they've decided what they're going to do, and when the master is left alone again with you, I'll be of use to you *then;* but just now I'd only be a drag, and she" — here she bent her head over the doll and smoothed the hair, above its staring eyes— "doesn't want me to go. She's from Germania like my dad. She loves the Gwyddylaid but hates the Ffichtiaid and *they* hate her. She thinks Mistress Nineue would sprinkle her with berry water and turn her skin black, like the Ffichtiaid did in old times to every *baban-y-gawr* they found by itself."

Neb looked at Gunta with a puzzled, grave, speculative, but only faintly reproachful look, a look that said: "Why do clever girls who know so much and understand these difficult modern times go on still with this business of dolls?"

Then with a shrug of his shoulders worthy of the halls of Caerleon he turned to Porius.

"If by ill chance, my Lord, I were to lose touch with you or you with me, before night falls, will you appoint a place of meeting?"

Porius felt a pang of shame that he hadn't envisaged the confused misery of night descending on the most important of all his unfulfilled projects, the rescue of the emperor's counsellor from *that woman;* and that he had left it to this child to suggest the comfort of possessing an alternative plan in case the worst came to the worst.

"I'm a fool at these precautions," he whispered, loud and hoarse, "but let's say Brother John's cell; for that's where, unless things go differently from the way they're going now, I seem likely to spend *this damned end to a damned day*!"

Both Gunta and Neb looked at each other significantly enough; for in place of whispering these last words he had uttered them so loud that the eyes of all the company, including the Lady of the Gaer and the priest and Lot-el-Azziz, were drawn to the three of them.

Gunta gave Neb a little push with her left hand; and with a second courtier-like shrug of his shoulders he scampered off, the slender figure, with the sun haze upon its green-and-yellow livery, looking like a fledgeling greenfinch that a magician had just turned into the last dragonfly of the year.

Gunta watched this dragonfly as it vanished with so much concentrated attention that if her doll had been a real *baban-y-gawr* it would probably have slipped to the ground. Then she ran off to continue her imperceptible and unofficial attendance upon Euronwy.

Porius made an ogrish grimace. "Why can't I," he thought, "shrug my shoulders like Neb, and, while I keep my wits about me, let the world drift as it will, turn as it may, and end as it must? I have obeyed my mother. I have honoured my father. I have lost my teacher. I have married my playmate. I have killed my love. And now I have most likely left to the mercy of that succubus, that vampire, that she-devil, the only true prophet there's been on this planet since Tiresias! If Christ is God, why has he a devil for his priest? If Mithras is God, why has he old Rhun for his priest? It's fate. That's what it is. Not God, not Christ, not Mithras — simply fate — and I am the fool of fate!"

CHAPTER XXVII. The Homage of Drom

IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST unpleasant moments in Porius's life when he turned his back on the departing Neb and called upon all the magnetic energy he possessed to meet face to face at these crossroads the man who despised him and the woman he despised.

Well! He was once more under the old bondage, the bondage that had come to fit his powerful frame more easily than the lightest yoke that Gwrgi could have invented for his ox, but still a bondage that would have branded with humiliation a prouder man.

But strangely enough his sudden decision to relax on the giant curves of fate's current, rather than to use the power of his will to swim against the tide, had given him a completely unexpected inrush of nervous energy.

Even if he was fate's fool there was nothing to prevent him enjoying fate, nothing to prevent him "cavoseniargizing" fate. *"Tungerong larry ong*!" as the Cewri would say.

Meanwhile the prince had followed up his pitiful cry with a ghastly series of gasped-out incoherences of which Porius could make nothing. But it soon appeared that it was not from his son that the prince was seeking understanding.

Urged by some far-off vaguely remembered impulse the dying man's eyes sought out and fixed themselves upon his brother; and Brochvael, realizing this, moved close up to him, and crouching low down at his side began not only listening to him but actually answering him.

It was then that Porius, unwilling as he was to assume any masterful role in what was going on, couldn't resist stepping forward and laying a hand on the shoulder of Lot-el-Azziz, who having got possession of his ram's horn was beginning to loosen the prince's vest.

"No! No! No! No!" Porius protested. "If this is the end you mustn't torment him any more with that thing!"

Meanwhile, though she still clung to the priest with one of her beautifully moulded and gleaming white arms, Euronwy leaned forward as if she wanted to lose no syllable of this incoherent colloquy of the two brothers.

"She'd like to throw herself between them!" thought Porius.

But she was now addressing a rapid and passionate appeal to the young priest; and Porius, who was not only holding back the doctor but was also listening to the murmured rush of boyish memories that was reuniting the brothers, divined correctly — for, except for this affair with Medrawd, yes, *always except for Medrawd,* he knew her pretty well — that she was straining and stretching every fibre of her nature, in a sort of psychophysical dive, to force her way into those fraternal secrets that so tantalized her, even while she was pleading, passionately, persistently, and rapidly, though in a very low voice, with the representative of her god.

Nor did her son miss — though in the process of listening to his father he couldn't catch every word — the general drift of her appeal, which was indeed simple enough, though it concerned one of the most dangerous and controversial points possible at that moment, that is to say, whether, in the case of Einion's hurt proving fatal, he should be buried with his fathers in the centre of the Gaer, or by himself, but with a place at his side *left for her,* in the choir of the newly erected church. To overhear his mother making this particular appeal at this particular moment brought back all his anger against her.

As he well knew, it had for long been the idea of Minnawc Gorsant to add a tribal consecration to his precious new building by burying there the remains of at least one of the Princes of Edeyrnion.

Well enough did Porius know that *he over there,* who was now murmuring his childish memories to his childhood's companion, would have laughed at his grave son's grave prejudices and given this lonely woman, so neglected in his life, all the pleasure she could get out of the disposal of his bones.

But it was all very well for *him. He* hadn't caught the gleam of triumph in the eyes of Gorsant's successor. He hadn't heard the whispered syllables of unctuous affirmation from those pontifical lips.

And then the idea entered Porius's head, and it brought him a respite from anger and a sense of extraordinary relief, though he knew it was a cowardly idea if not a base one, that he might strike a bargain with this devil of a priest, and let *him* bury Einion's remains where he pleased, as long as he consented to leave Brother John's wasted carcase unmolested.

But the atmosphere among them all had changed greatly. The unaccountable relaxation that had followed their unnatural tension had separated them once more into pairs. Quite freely and calmly they were waiting for something to happen. If this "something" were not to be the death of their prince, it could hardly help being something equally momentous.

Was the man going to rise up even now, burst into a sardonic laugh, and declare the whole thing a joke? The eldest son of Iddawc the Apostate was not incapable of such a proceeding.

At any rate the Lady of the Gaer had given up the attempt to catch her lord's last words; and Lot-el-Azziz, the trumpeting horses of his Hebraic soul once more harnessed to their fiery chariot, had been whirled away from all these moist sub-mergings and shadowy obscurings of twilight suns in dying leaves, and was once more glorying in having sown the seed of Abraham in a Canaanitish womb so that Gog might be followed by Magog, and the Lord justified of his servant in the land of idolatry!

A sideways glance at Rhun's profile was quite sufficient to make it clear to Porius that that simple soldier of the sun god was as absorbed in the emotion out of which children are born as was the Jewish doctor in the emotion into which their birth flings us.

"Has that woman broken with her Greek? Has she decided to cast in her lot with old Rhun? How strange," he thought, "that I can caress with my eyes this rugged profile, so like my own, and yet not be able to catch a single one of the thoughts that are even now racing through that corrugated head!"

This gulf between what was going on in his own mind and what was going on in his foster-brother's mind struck him at that moment with double force because of the curious pleasure those two old heads, each of them so nearly touching the ground, were obviously deriving from their memories of childhood.

Rhun and he, he thought, had never understood each other as the owners of those elderly skulls had done. No, for all their nurture at the same breast they didn't possess those mutual animal memories, shamelessly gross and scandalously intimate, such as, from what he could overhear, these two sons of Princess Indeg shared.

Brochvael was now hunched up like a great human toad, as he crouched on the ground beside the prince, with his beardless chin and toothless mouth only a few inches above the other's beard. Whatever it was they were whispering they were as completely oblivious of him as he bent over them as they were oblivious of the doctor and the priest and the lady. Names, places, events, occasions, passed like bubbles between them, forming and reforming on the tide of their memories. Encounters with men, with ghosts, with snakes, with wolves, with sorcerers, with madmen, with King Eliseg of the Rocks, with Prince Uryen of Rheged, all these came rising up from the dark waters of oblivion, came gathering into form and shape from the shelves and shoals and sand-locked estuaries of more than half a century of forgetfulness.

Derelict toys, lost weapons, forgotten games, images of blood and phlegm, of horns and hobbyhorses, of bottomless ponds and haunted pools, of hollow trees and secret chambers, were recalled in gasps and hinted at in groans, while their days together became something sacred and miraculous and supernatural, something lived in a light that had been lost from the common earth.

It had been, of course, Einion's son told himself, the personality of Princess Indeg, following her old Berber custom in defiance of the Brythonic tradition, that had procured for Einion and Brochvael all these mutual memories.

And gradually, as his gaze followed a little swarm of autumnal gnats that rose and fell on a faint breath of air that was too imperceptible to be of service to anything heavier than a fleet of midges, he felt aware of a power within him capable of *actually enjoying* — as if he had swallowed the nepenthe that Helen of Troy put into the wine of Telemachus — this spectacle of the death of his father and the treacherous piety of his mother; yes, of a power within him that could enjoy not only the bodily presence of all these people but also the distracting pressure of their thoughts, such as he imagined them to be.

He suddenly got the feeling that he possessed, or that his soul possessed, the head of a huge Avanc, out of whose mouth projected a forked tongue, a tongue that licked with a sort of ecstasy the spiritual shapes of these various thoughts!

All the thoughts in this forest clearing were in the same dimension of Space; and they were all directed towards the same division of Time, namely, the past; all, that is to say, except the thoughts of the priest, of the little girl, and of the little girl's doll.

The priest looked frantically and furiously forward — at least that is how Porius took his measure — to the world being under the domination of Christ for the rest of its interstellar existence.

Little Gunta looked forward to her future with Neb ap Digon and told herself clear-cut, minutely detailed stories about their life together; sometimes in the palace on the river Usk, sometimes in the palace on the river Camel, sometimes in the camp at Badon, sometimes in the imperial hunting lodge at Caergwynt. Her doll also, with that dim, vague, blurred, vicarious, secondary consciousness of a soul embodied in an intensely loved but inanimate companion, looked forward to encountering, in one or other of these palaces, the legendary doll of dolls, the princely Morddwyd Tyllyon!

But all the other human thoughts that Porius imagined to be mounting up past his flickering saurian tongue were slaves to the past. Euronwy, for all her eager talk with the priest about Einion's burial, was contentedly letting her mind sink back and away to her first love affair with Medrawd in the empress's garden house.

Young Gwythyr kept caressing in *his* mind the breasts of Nesta ferch Aulus and even reproducing the awed and thrilled and reverential wonder with which he felt those breasts respond to his touch.

Lot-el-Azziz was naturally recalling every single momentous second, so glorious for him, so painful for her, that followed each other in Brother

John's cell during Magog's birth. As for Drom, who like the rest of the company, had no thought for anything but the past, what he thought of was a particular day in the service of the last druid of Edeyrnion when, as he heard Minnawc Gorsant describing Saint Paul's conversion, he actually felt a delicious shock of uncovenanted reality; nothing less than the soul of the Lord entering into him and dwelling within him, the very soul of the Lord Jesus, so that from henceforth he never felt sure whether the thoughts and deeds that proceeded from him were his own or the Lord's.

Although neither the mysterious, formidableness of the beautiful young man who called himself Drom, a word that in the Brythonic tongue signifies "glimpse," nor the secret of this young man's influence over Brochvael, were at all clear to Porius, he felt sorry for him at this particular juncture; for he fancied he caught in his eye the expression of that peculiar kind of pang such as afflicts small dogs when their master caresses another and a much larger dog.

Thus with a view to consoling the deserted Drom and also of leaving the two brothers undisturbed in their exchange of childish memories, Porius tossed away his drowsy fantasy of being a forked-tongued monster, and turning to Drom enquired of him, in as low and penetrating a voice as he could command, what the word was in the language of the Cewri for "struggling to the last."

"There *is* such a word," he declared to Drom, who moved at once towards him and gave him his full attention, "and it is a word of only one syllable; but at the moment it has escaped me. I heard it from your half-brother — at least I think so — but that's of no consequence. It doesn't matter *where* I heard it, does it? The important thing is to get hold of it again. It's like one of those flying fish we read of, that jump upon the deck of a ship, radiate for a second the colours of the rainbow, and then, leaving behind like a small comet a trail of fiery vapour, jump overboard again and vanish from sight. But I'm sure it's a word of only one syllable, and I'm sure it has a very complicated though a very imaginative meaning. I *think* it means to enjoy fighting, and to be fond too of what you're fighting *for,* or of what you're fighting *against.* But about *that* point I'm a little vague.

"At any rate it means enjoying life to the end or at least fighting to enjoy life to the end. In fact what I liked about the word, Master Drom — I don't know whether you've talked to my uncle about it — is that it seemed to declare in one breath that you were glad to have lived and that you'd struggle to the last to feel you were glad, in fact *fight* to the last to feel it; to feel, I mean, that weak as you might be, that defeated as you might be, that humiliated as you might be, that feeble and ridiculous as you might be, and as much like a wounded insect as you might be, you still refused to curse life."

The odd thing about Drom's expression as he listened respectfully to all this was its gentle pity. Porius received the impression that this ex-servant of the secret druid felt towards him, towards the man who would soon — if Einion died — be their prince, and who undoubtedly was — though he had never been specially proud of it — the Samson or Hercules of their race, a profound and sorrowful *pity.*

It would be untrue to say that this expression in Drom's face didn't disturb Porius. It didn't disturb him very much, but it *did* disturb him a *little;* for there was something about Drom that made it impossible to discount any emotion he might display. *Why* did Drom pity him, and why did this particular request of his bring this pity to a head?

"I seem to recall," Porius went on, "that the word your brother tried to repeat to me — but of course he may not have got it right — had a sound not altogether unlike the quacking of ducks."

The habitual expression of the ex-servant of the dead druid was full of such benignity and amiability that the fact that he never smiled was rarely noticeable. But when Porius saw that this casual reference to the quacking of ducks hadn't drawn from him the faintest smile, he began to feel a little more disturbed.

"I think the word you mean must be *'gwork,'*" said Drom quietly. "Yes, I'm sure that's what my brother told you; and it does mean fighting and struggling and not yielding. Yes, and it *is* a word a person might use who felt that, though life had been cruel to him, he wouldn't curse it, but for a secret reason would force himself to praise it. Yes, it is that kind of word."

"Why don't you like the word yourself then, Master Drom?" enquired Porius, who couldn't help noticing that across those calm and comely features as the man uttered that single queer syllable there had passed a sort of shiver, like a winged insect ruffling a placid pool.

"Gwork... Gwork... Gwork... *Gwork!"* repeated Porius in a humorously harsh whisper, as if he were teasing both himself and the disquieted Drom. "But no! I'll tell you exactly what I feel 'gwork' means, as sure as if I were one of the Cewri of the Cader myself! It means using the soul in us to fight and enjoy the universe at the same time.

"And to achieve this trick we've got to feel the soul in us as if it were in some sort of way independent of the body, although not necessarily, you understand me, capable of surviving the death of the body. We've got to feel it as if it were an unconquerable generator of energy within us, as if it were a self-quickening pulse of power and force, like a bodiless living creature, a creature of an airy rather than of a fluid or fiery essence, but a creature we *can feel* — if you understand me, Master Drom — in our two hands, our two legs, our sex organs and all our senses; and yet — if you understand me, Master Drom—"

But here Porius stopped, for he suddenly realized that he had been talking too fast about his sense of his own soul, and he began to feel as if his soul and his body were quite loosely connected, and as if he, the strong man of their tribe and likely enough soon to be their ruler, had touched as he hung about in his heavy, hulking way for the death of his father, some magic stone or stump or root or fallen thunderbolt, that had worked this loosening!

Was it a certain placidity about the countenance of the man he was addressing that made him irritable and self-depreciating, that made him feel as if his enormous strength — *the* strength *he had never fully put forth* — was irrelevant compared with any contest of men's souls, compared with such a contest for instance as he could easily imagine happening between the self-possessed Drom and that imperious young priest over there now playing the stern Christ with Euronwy?

He let his gaze move slowly round the circle of these faces. The wind seemed to have dropped, and the warm, golden mist, for the sun's rays were now nearly horizontal, seemed to be assisting the voice of the priest in throwing a drowsy spell over them all.

"Why is it, Master Drom," he enquired in a voice that was louder than was quite appropriate to the occasion, "that you don't like the word *'gwork*?' I could see you didn't, you know, and I could see another thing too!"

Drom's eyes shone with benevolent interest.

"What could you see?" he enquired.

"I could see," replied Porius, "that you had more reasons than one for your dislike of my interpretation of the word."

Not a flicker of annoyance or indignation crossed the placid features opposite him.

“Go on, Master Drom,” he cried, “and tell me just exactly where I went wrong.”

But Drom astonished him by what he did then; though indeed if the whole group of them, if the two sons of Indeg with their memories, if the doctor with his ram’s horn, if Gwythyr with his worship of the daughter of Aulus, if Gunta and her doll, if the Gaer Lady and her priest, had followed his example it would have seemed almost natural, so deeply as a group did they appear to have lapsed, whatever their physical position, into a sort of weird unanimity.

Drom, the son of Twryf Mawr, or “the great tumultuous one,” shut his eyes tight and kept them so all the time he was speaking.

“‘Gwork,’” said Drom, “does mean what you say, but in these matters, for we are all weak, we must listen to the splash of the stone, to the whirr of the arrow, to the rustle of the wind, to the flapping of the flame, as these sounds gradually die away, and we must think of them as more than stone, or arrow, or wind, or flame. And this *‘more’”* — here the man’s words became so low that Porius had to move forward a step or two to catch them — “this ‘more’ is what goes against the grain with me. For there is a defiance of God in this ‘more’ and in the word which expresses it, a lack of submission to the Will of God, a determination to enjoy yourself at all costs, whereas—”

But the man who had been converted on the road to the Gaer seemed unwilling to continue.

“Has he,” Porius asked himself, “lost the thread of his doctrine at the critical moment?”

At any rate Drom opened his eyes and looked placidly at his interlocutor with an expression that said, “The Lord has spoken and the Lord has stopped speaking; *and that’s how it is.*”

But Porius hadn’t stopped speaking. He stared at Drom while the broken fragments of speech still reached him from the crouching figures of the two sons of Iddawc; and the more continuous murmur of the colloquy between his mother and the priest flowed round them all, like a foamless wave round rocking boats.

And then quite suddenly there slid into his head another Cewri word, only he couldn’t remember where or from whom he’d picked it up. It was the word *“ruggerug”;* and, as he reproduced this aboriginal growl, he pronounced the twice-repeated syllable *“rug”* as if it rhymed with “hug.”

Out of some lost chasm in his memory this queer word scrabbled forth, like an Avanc aroused from sleep, and it was presently joined by the word *“gwork”;* and these two words took hands and became one word, so that he was soon repeating, with no little satisfaction and quite loudly: *“Gwork ruggerug*! *Gwork ruggerug*! *Gwork ruggerug!”*

The effect upon Drom of this startling outburst, with its catapulted sequence of raucous “*ruggerugs*,” was very noticeable. But it was the last sort of effect that Porius desired. The young man Drom advanced a step nearer to him, grasped his hand, lifted it to his lips, and kissed it several times, kissed it with a kiss that made neither the scarcely audible susurration of one class of kisses nor the genial smacking noise of another.

The kisses of Drom were as unusual as his other actions. And their sound was peculiar. It bore an odd resemblance to the popping of certain seed vessels that swell to explosion when they grow ripe. But never had the druid’s servant been nearer death than he was at that moment. A blind rush of furious anger convulsed Porius, and he jerked up his hand. There was something about the kiss of Drom that excited in him a murderous fury. But he restrained himself. He dropped his hand. Then he turned sideways and stared like a man dazed by some mortal shock straight into the sun.

By a fortunate chance the full circle of the descending luminary could be seen clearly between two fir trunks; nor had its atmospheric aura been in the smallest degree reddened. To his confused eyes its outer rim was composed of a ring of indescribable blue fire, while its interior body seemed made of a white light so dazzling as to bear the same relation to fire as fire did to diffused daylight.

With physical relief he turned from this dazzlement to the moist coolness of that greenish white moss. For the kiss of Drom had been the last straw. Porius's wild-animal fastidiousness was outraged as if by a spiritual rape; and his psychic struggle to recover his equanimity brought him to one of the most crucial occasions in the whole life of his thirty-years-old soul.

Drom indeed had withdrawn himself to the further side of the dying prince. He had clearly done so in order to think; and it would have been of intense interest to Brochvael, though of very little to Porius, could these thoughts have been apprehended by some occult process. Such a process, even if only faintly successful, would have revealed the fact that Drom was unable to decide whether that impulsive and pitying kiss, which had so clearly offended its recipient, had been given by himself at his own initiative or by Jesus Christ, using him as a medium.

Porius, on the contrary, who was prepared to accept complete responsibility for his violent acts as well as for his erotic ones, sought desperately to conceal his revulsion. It must have been, he told himself, as he stared at that greenish white moss, the blood of the first Creiddylad in his veins; but even as he thought of this, something in him cried aloud for the hardly begotten, barely conceived offspring of his rape of the second Creiddylad, that shapeless *baban-y-gawr* so abortively drowned and lost forever under scoriac rock and greenish water!

Everything important in his mental life always took on some simple, sensuous, physical embodiment. He couldn't help this. It wasn't his choice. It was what his uncle, that traveller in classic lands, would have called his *anangke,* or "fatal necessity."

Even now, though the man was dying only a few yards away, he found himself inevitably mingling with that white-faced figure a floating and fading residue of the honey yellow vapour on the horizon which from his boyhood had been to him like an exteriorized projection of his begetter's soul.

Well! The best thing he could do with this loving kiss of Drom, which he would have liked to have washed from his knuckles with the loving blood of its bestower, was to make it just one more horrible experience among all the other things in life he found revolting, loathsome, unspeakable.

Yes, from now on, to the end of his days — exactly as that clump of wet moss suggested — it would be a good thing to pile up in a mighty mound in his imagination all the things that horrified him; not only his own secretest loathings and manias, not only other people's treacheries, stupidities, idiocies, ferocities, but all such disgusting objects — like that bronze-coloured excrement covered with livid flies that was now visible to him again between Afagddu's bare ankles and the muscular legs of Gwythyr in their leather straps — as humanity has agreed to keep out of sight.

The "Mound of Horror" then was to be kept quite consciously and deliberately at the back of his mind, and it might even be associated with some definite spot in the landscape, like that far-away hollow in the hills where, if he understood Afagddu rightly, the Patrician wished to be buried.

But anyway it was to be kept there; and when some new addition attached itself leechlike to his shuddering senses it was his business to drive it back into the mass of the mound with obstinate blows. He didn't need just then to analyze very far what it was that made the homage of Drom so horrible to him.

The kiss of Judas crossed his mind, only to be rejected at once. There was no treachery, no cruelty, no hypocrisy about Drom's kiss. *It was worse.* It enslaved the person kissed to the person kissing. It took away the former's ultimate human right — the abysmal *right to choose,* to choose *not* to love Drom, or any other living creature, if he preferred to live alone, and finally to choose death if he preferred death to life.

The kiss of Drom condemned him to the holy glory of life if he longed for the unblest anonymity of death. The kiss of Drom was not the kiss of a corpse god, or "deus mortuus," whose embrace sucked the lifeblood from both the tragedy of life and the tragedy of death, nor was it the kiss of a god who wanted to die but couldn't die and who wished to share his horrible immortality with as many as possible.

It was simply the kiss of life without the possibility of evil or the possibility of death. It was the kiss of that which couldn't mock, of that which couldn't cry, of that which had forever wiped away all laughter and all tears. It was the kiss of that which lives forever in the ecstatic contemplation of itself. It was the kiss of rounded identity, of perfect balance, of the reconciliation of all opposites, the kiss of absolute peace, the kiss of unutterable sameness, the kiss of pure divinity, the kiss of *anti-man.*

The only thing he could do therefore was to fling the kiss of Drom upon his Mound of Horror and so get rid of it, and with it get rid of the appalling fit of loathing it had stirred up within him; and get rid too of something worse than that, a ghastly feeling of sinking down through the floor of the world into pure insanity.

He began to stare now at the clump of white moss as if it really were something to cling to on the edge of a precipice. But the revelation that reached him through it soon swept the precipice away. It taught him just what his peculiar kind of imagination needed, namely, a mental symbol to clutch at when the Horror heaved up.

And it gave him this symbol. It gave him the symbol of striking this imaginary Mound of Horror with his not less imaginary hunting spear. He was doing this very thing now in his mind under the magic hint of his clump of white moss!

He was doing it with the hunting spear Einion had given him in his boyhood, the hunting spear Rhun carried for him, the one whose silver bands had sunk so deep into the wood that he could always feel with his hand the perceptible irregularities they had made.

Mentally clutching this spear now and caressing those indents with the inside of his fingers he struck fiercely, so that his whole thought world rocked with the imaginary blows, at this so dreadfully powerful kiss of Drom, resting there like a great shadowy cuttlefish on the Mound of Horror.

So absorbed had Porius grown as he stood in the centre of that group of people, all of them awaiting, as if under some vast raven’s wing of death, the event they felt was approaching, and so lost was he in conjuring up that Mound of Horror and in beating down upon it Drom’s dangerous kiss and in answering Drom with the primeval ejaculations of giants of the Cader that it was only by degrees he became aware that old Afagddu had been addressing him for some time and repeating some particular thing which he was clearly very anxious should reach his ears. Like other older Brythons of the Gaer, however, Afagddu had so long tried to imitate the laconic words of command of the Roman legionaries who were left, particularly of a few old Spanish veterans, still living in Deva, who had taken Brythonic women to wife, that he had acquired the habit of communicating the most intimate piece of news as if it were an order on a battlefield, not loud enough for the enemy to hear, but in curiously level tones that quelled all lively curiosity.

But Porius smiled at his old friend now and tried to indicate to him with a gesture of mock hopelessness that all these events coming so thick and fast, one on the top of another, had reduced him to a state of dazed confusion.

At any rate the old warrior, satisfied that now he had got his young master's full attention, went on in his deep discordant voice to relate in detail Porius Manlius's fatal wounding and how he himself had assisted Aulus in carrying the Patrician back into the Gaer.

"One minute, old friend," interrupted the younger Porius, turning to Rhun while Drom discreetly effaced himself. "Did you hear *that*? Afagddu and Aulus have learnt from my grandfather what he wants inscribed on his tomb in case he dies of this hurt."

Rhun's wandering thoughts were brought back with a jerk; but they still required a little assistance before they could get the full significance of this information. Porius saw him screwing up the muscles of his heavy brows, as he gradually gave the matter his full attention. The shadows of the leaves that flitted across that familiar face, as the autumn air stirred the boughs, gave Porius the feeling that certain elemental powers were at their antics in this particular spot where the paths had crossed for centuries.

This was an impression that had crossed his mind several times in the last twenty-four hours, in fact ever since the deaths, in different places but all about the same time, of those Three Princesses of the far-away Iberian past.

And now it was hard to resist the feeling that these palpitating leaf shadows that flickered across Rhun's face were deliberately teasing the poor man, just as the sun's rays, that fell a little more — though not much more

— perpendicularly down into his eyes, were purposely trying to confuse his wits.

But Rhun's brain functioned at last in spite of the shadows and the dazzling sun rays.

"What *does* he want written?" he enquired.

"Yes, what does he, Afagddu?" echoed the other.

Under the direct scrutiny of both these young men, who had learnt to hunt wolves and shoot stags and train dogs under his instruction, old Afagddu became unnaturally excited. He was obviously very proud of his knowledge but at the same time extremely uncomfortable at having to communicate it in intelligible words and at such a crisis.

"What does he want written?" repeated Porius.

"It was Master Aulus," the old man began blunderingly to explain, feeling, as Porius could clearly see, as if Euronwy were listening to him more than to the priest, Gwythyr more than to the doctor, Brochvael more than to his brother, and Gunta more than to her doll, "it was Master Aulus who heard the words and he of course understands Latin as well as they do at Rhufein, though whenever I ask him if he understands Greek he says he doesn't believe they talk in that tongue any more. He says it died out in the days of Ul-Kessar. Though he says that before that emperor's time there were those in Caer Cystennin who knew it well."

"Does the Patrician," enquired the practical Rhun who had joined in the common chat of the *Gosgordd* a good deal more than his foster-brother, "want it written in Latin? Or will it be enough to put it into the *Coelbren-y-Beirdd*?"

The exultant hideousness of Afagddu's countenance changed into a harassed look. It was evident he felt himself to be treading on slippery ice. The limitations of Porius's knowledge had become clear to him. But who could sound the secrets of a sun worshipper like the Lord Rhun? Rhun's father was a Greek and his grandfather a slave. Afagddu could even remember seeing this same grandfather once in the legion's camp at Uriconium. He was sharing the contents of an enormous jar of olives with his mates, and Afagddu never could see any classic coin since that day without being reminded of that handsome and reckless profile.

The tone therefore — and perhaps more than the tone — of Rhun's direct question brought the old man's spirits down by several pegs.

"The Patrician," he said, "made Master Aulus say the words over till Master Aulus knew them; and Master Aulus told them to me."

"Can you repeat them?" enquired Rhun.

Old Afagddu uttered a curious humming noise. This was evidently a method he had been taught at the old Bishop's School across the mountains for the evocation of difficult words.

"Don't disturb him, Rhun," whispered Porius. "He'll tell us in a second." And Porius was right.

But what hadn't been foreseen by either of the foster-brothers was the tremendous voice in which the disfigured old warrior repeated his lesson. In his youth, when such customs still lingered among the Ordovices, Afagddu had been the official herald of his tribe; so that now when he uttered these Latin words they startled every living person in that spellbound circle.

"Porius hic in tumulo iacet
Homo Christianus fuit."

The sentence was uttered slowly and solemnly, but quite evidently without the faintest comprehension of its meaning; for the two words that Afagddu emphasized as the most important were the words *"in tumulo"* and *"fuit,"* that is to say, "in the mound" and "he was"; just as though the fact that the old Roman was dead was the essence of the situation, not the fact that being a Christian he had hope of overcoming death.

The reverberations of that heraldic voice were carried — by reason of the configuration of the ground and the direction of the wind — as far as Gwendydd's pavilion. Indeed they must have been audible to every member of the singular company gathered about Myrddin Wyllt; that is to say, to his sister Gwendydd and to Nineue ferch Avallach and to Dion Dionides and to Fflam and Tegvan and to the anxious Neb ap Digon.

And the odd notion entered Porius's head as he heard an echo repeating the word "*fuit,*" that just as the sounds made by various birds, such as crows and wild geese and curlews and seagulls, were carried to varying distances according to the air-dividing *shape* of each particular cry, so it was with human language, and that of all languages the Latin tongue carried the furthest!

"Why can't I detect," he thought, "from the sound of that echo, whether Afagddu's shout entered a deserted and desolate tent, without lamp or candle or cushion or screen, or whether it found the place full of human company?"

That the violence of Afagddu's announcement had in fact brought back no more than a curiously furtive and secretive echo gave him no clue. He wondered if his dead Creiddylad had ever hunted in the mossy swamps of her mountain for a fallen and dying echo?

He remembered how his foster-mother, Alarch, used to make certain echoes answer her, and how she told him once that if you found a dying echo and promised to build a *betws,* or "chantry," for it when it was dead you could persuade it to tell you all manner of extraordinary secrets.

He was interrupted in his interrogation of the echo of "*fuit*" by a phenomenon which, though it may have had a natural cause, partook of many of the aspects of a supernatural marvel. There suddenly commenced a palpable movement from all points of the circumference of their little group, a movement forwards and inwards towards its centre.

This centre comprised the wounded but still elegant form of the ruler of Edeyrnion and the unwounded but ungainly figure of his toothless brother, while above them, like the Pillars of Hercules, stood the son and foster-son of Alarch the Fair.

The curious thing about this movement was that it was wholly and purely a masculine one, and did not include Euronwy or Gunta or Gunta's doll. And it was just as if there were moving forward with these men a potent magnetic force, a force stronger than any prayer to a dead giantess or to a perishing echo, a force that was bent on some actual contact with Einion's departing soul.

Had it a message for that receding soul trireme, whose lantern, in spite of the mellow sunshine, was already lit in face of the absolute night? Pushed forward, as it seemed to Porius, by this revolt against the appalling *acquiescence* to which Euronwy and Gunta in their feminine realism had abandoned themselves, and of which the terrible submission in the doll's staring eyes had become a symbol, old Afagddu now advanced yet nearer.

"Master Aulus," he murmured, "was mightily vexed because he wasn't wounded like his master; but I told him" — here out of his distorted features the old man gave Porius what was perhaps the subtlest look he had ever seen on a human face— "I told him that considering how the world went in these latter days he was lucky not to have betrayed his master like Judas; so that he'd never see a sound branch on a sound tree without seeing himself hanging from it."

Afagddu uttered these words in something approaching his heraldic voice; but once having uttered them he drew back with a heavy sigh. What would have alone satisfied him at that moment would have been for the dying man to have cried out: “Take this bowl of mead to my faithful servant Afagddu!”

But the prince didn’t even know his servant *hadn’t* been faithful, and there was no mead at these crossroads. Moreover, the occult attempt that seemed to be taking place to cast on the deck of that anchor-heaving ship of a departing soul some message to its unknown destination was now proving a failure. Nature and the natural feminine acquiescence of Euronwy and Gunta and the doll were having the final word.

Porius began to realize that two new things were happening. Brochvael had straightened his back and was now kneeling at his brother’s side, while Euronwy was making a series of violent tugs at the priest’s vestment. At this juncture he met the eye of the Jewish doctor, but what on earth was the man thinking?

“Is my father dead?” he asked himself. “If so, the fellow ought in courtesy to tell me. But all our thoughts are—” He broke off abruptly for his own thoughts had begun to descend, amid clots of blood and tangles of hair, into an abyss of greenish water.

He began repeating to himself the words “Damn you, damn you, damn you, *is* my father dead?” but felt tongue-tied under the doctor’s stare.

But suddenly the dying man opened his eyes and began struggling to lift himself up, supporting the weight of his head and shoulders on the palms of his hands. Brochvael rose from his knees to help him, while the doctor dropped his absurd horn and placed both hands behind the prince’s shoulders.

Einion now uttered a husky pitiful heartrending cry, like the painful scaly sound a big fish will sometimes make when the hook is jerked from its gills.

"Mother! Mother! Mother!" he cried; and then, sinking back with the doctor's hands under his head, "She *will* turn out the lamp!" he whispered reproachfully, though with a faint amusement in his tone, and as if he were taking the whole of Edeyrnion into his confidence. "But I've learnt how to checkmate her! Do you know what I do? I simply shut my eyes. With my eyes shut I see all sorts of lights — more than she knows exist! But she oughtn't to do it! She oughtn't to be *let* do it! It's not fair for a man to have to shut his eyes to see the light! Not fair, not fair—"

His voice rose querulously and with a queerly high-pitched intonation. Then he drew several long and very deep breaths, each one of which was accompanied by a curiously harsh sound, not unlike the sound uttered by a grouse as it whirls up, but with a certain gurgling afternoise resembling the clucking of a hen-pheasant when it is guiding its young over difficult ground.

By one of those mysterious certainties which take possession of the consciousness of all men at certain moments, independently of their reason or even of the evidence of their senses, everybody who heard these sounds knew them for what they were, a man's death rattle.

When they ceased and Einion's jaw had fallen, there wasn't a soul present who didn't take it for granted that the priest should kneel at the head of the corpse and murmur his appropriate singsong; and that the doctor should bare the breast of the corpse and apply his appropriate ram's horn.

Nor was there a soul present — except perhaps her own — that was surprised when the Lady of the Gaer stepped forward and with her hands tightly clasped high above her head burst into the ancient Brythonic funeral wail for a princely warrior.

It had been the custom in the tribe of Cunedda long before the first Christians appeared, a custom that Brochvael with his mania for the ancient

Greeks always swore was an Homeric one, that while the wife of the dead uttered this catastrophic cry every member of the princely household knelt on one knee with his head bowed against the spear or axe or staff or shield or bow's end or whatever else he might be holding, forming in this manner an architectural monument, carved, as it were, out of the very bosom of the earth and culminating in the grandly outlined figure of this woman of sorrow.

This ceremonial gesture was so natural to most of them as to be almost automatic, but the two aliens among them were rendered uneasy by it; and Lot-el-Azziz sought to conceal this uneasiness by behaving as if he and the corpse had been alone in the desert and it was his affair to close the man's eyes and fasten a strap about his head and chin.

But the other alien, the little daughter of the Sais invader, who all this while had been watching Euronwy very intently and even pointing her out to her doll, was so astonished at the formation of this motionless and multiple monument surmounted by that white-robed figure with uplifted arms, that clutching her doll to her breast and covering its head with her hands, so as to save it from seeing this disturbing vision, she moved slowly, as if in a trance, towards those uplifted arms.

The traditional thing that Porius would soon have to do if he did what Einion had done when Indeg was the Gaer Lady, or what Iddawc had done when the figure above the mounded shields was none other than the original Creiddylad, was to lift his mother bodily from the ground with one arm, while with the other he brandished over all those bowed heads whatever weapon he might at the moment be carrying or might be willing to accept from one or other of their number.

For all his mockery and irresponsibility Einion had never rejected the old customs; nor, for all her piety and pride, had Euronwy shaken them off.

But Porius couldn't remember when he hadn't inwardly rebelled against these ancient ways. Outwardly he had submitted; but today, holding in his mind what that green water held, he glanced stubbornly and grimly about him, praying that *something* — yes, that little Gunta and her doll if nothing else — might break up with some fresh and unfamiliar gesture this whole compulsion of the tyrannical past.

Nor was his prayer — or possibly the massive magnetism of his phlegmatic will — expended in vain. Threading her way among those motionless and absorbed figures the compassionate little girl, who must have obscurely divined that Euronwy's ritualistic lamentations were the flowing veils of an older and bitterer grief than any sorrow for the death of Einion, didn't pause a moment in her advance till she reached that white-robed figure whose bare arms lifted to heaven looked so statuelike in the misty sunshine.

Then with the firm unfretful decision of a girl who lays an infant down to cope with an elder child, Gunta thrust her inanimate charge under her sheepskin and flung both her thin arms round Euronwy's hips.

Had the common gesture by which Einion's death was accepted been less instinctive and automatic this daring interruption would probably have been swept aside. But, as it was, so relaxed after its long tension was the whole group, that when Euronwy hesitated, wavered, and finally yielding, dropped her arms, bent down, and began stroking Gunta's yellow hair, all the kneeling men rose heavily and wearily and with sighs of relief, uttered in as many varieties of susurration as there were lungs to utter them, moved — save for the priest who remained busy with the repose of the soul, and for the doctor who remained busy with the repose of the body — straight towards Porius whom they now proceeded formally to recognize as their new lord.

Each one of them, when they reached him, lightly made the motion of pressing the ground with one knee while they touched one of his hands with their own, and it would have interested the courtly Neb to note the mixture of grave taciturnity and shy embarrassment in each separate offerer of homage as they followed each other, the taciturnity being especially emphatic in the case of Brochvael and Rhun, and the embarrassment most disarming in the case of young Gwythyr and old Afagddu.

Porius's responses to these informal acts of homage were easy and sincere, but below the surface he felt towards Gunta, for saving him by the skin of his teeth from that traditional ceremony, a gratitude that was quite desperately intense.

Deep though his relief was it didn't prevent his mind from playing its usual tricks. Indeed at the very time this informal recognition of his accession to the chieftainship was going on his brain was at work harassing him with more than one complicated problem.

He could catch glimpses all this while of the corpse stretched out on the ground; and he soon began, after his curious fashion, associating the pointed beard of the dead man, which, even under the hands of Lot-el-Azziz, had been only slightly deflected from the perfection of its courtly shape, with the dangerous contest he felt was bound to break out, whatever happened to himself, between the new priest and Morfydd, just as it had done between the old priest and Morfydd's brother.

His father's beard kept appearing and disappearing under, above, between, or beside the heads and shoulders and backs and bellies of the men who were now swearing allegiance to the heavy-handed fool whom the dead man had mocked all his days.

And was he destined to go on in this forest till his own hair was grey, associating the look of that beard, as he saw it now, with his struggle against the religion of Christ?

One thing was certain. The whole Gaer would be divided into two camps from now on. On one side would be Morfydd, her father, and old Rhun, that is to say if Gwendydd went off with Dion, and on the other, Euronwy and the priest.

And here was he, receiving these vows of service from them all, and with no more idea of what was going to happen to them all than if he'd been Gwrgi's ox!

How monstrous was the impenetrable darkness that covered up the whole future! He felt he could actually touch it with his fingers, this darkness. It covered up the next year, the next month, the next week, the next day, the next quarter of an hour!

As he listened to his friends' vows and felt their heavy breathing on the back of his hand he saw this unknown future like a towering black wall of falling water, whose thick density and the very speed of its descent gave it the appearance of smooth but absolutely impenetrable basalt; and it struck his mind how at this same second all over the world there were human creatures like himself facing some crisis in their lives and confronted by this same impenetrable blackness.

What a world to be born into! And the past absolutely unchangeable, whether like this priest he swallowed the creed of the Bishop's School, or, with old Rhun, licked the honey of Mithras, or, like Uncle Brochvael, translated the Eleven Comedies.

And as for the future, so his thoughts twisted in and out of his friends' homage, this black wall of nescience must be an illusion. Possibly the fact that the sweat of each of these men, as they remained in contact with him for their allotted moment, brought such different smells to his nostrils had something to do with the direction his thoughts began now to take.

Yes, he had only to imagine this black wall against the future receding in front of him moment by moment as the march went forward of the iron-shod elephants of time, while he and all other living things fulfilled their quota of world creating, to realize that in one sense this black wall was a pure illusion.

While he looked at it he was already *through* it, was already creating, for his own particular universe on the other side of it, his own particular ego!

Yes, the whole idea of the black wall dividing him from a future already determined was one of those *dramatic illusions* that the wily old World Henog loved to create, as he carried his myriads of creators forward and chronicled their shape-shifting creation.

"Every living creature," he told himself now, "is groping, fumbling, gliding, scrambling, hopping, stumbling, crawling forward, or marching — yes! marching like a brave soldier of Mithras — *into the future,* and, once there, there is no black wall at all. Well, what is there? There's a dizzy empty space, my friend! In fact I rather think there's a glimpse into the ultimate void, into the abyss where—"

His thoughts were not so much *interrupted* by the particular vow of fealty he was receiving now, which was from none other than Lot-el-Azziz, as they were *draped* by the oriental panegyric upon the House of Cunedda in which the doctor was then indulging— "into the abyss where moved the myriads of new beings" — for as the doctor's eulogy grew more grandiloquent Porius's speculations grew more extravagant— "each smallest living entity, of the psychophysical procession we call the world, adding something to the aeons-old creation of new forms."

When it became young Gwythyr's turn to go through the traditional ritual these confused thoughts of the new ruler of Edeyrnion were brought back from their imaginings by the sudden conviction that it was this lad's

Italian bride who was destined to tip the scales in Morfydd's favour and to outmanoeuvre the campaign on behalf of Christ.

So powerful was this odd prophetic feeling, and so suddenly did it rush into his mind, that in place of the dead man's pointed beard his acceptance of Gwythyr's homage reached him across the rounded breasts of the daughter of Aulus.

"Where the devil did this idea come from?" he thought, and he dismissed with a faint weariness and even a little distaste the notion that he could himself be concealing some sensual attraction to the Italian girl.

"Somebody or something has put it into my head," he thought. And then, as he kept Gwythyr at his side asking him questions in a low voice about the burying of Brother John, he suddenly remembered exactly how the impression had originally reached him. It was during the trouble over Morvran's murder. It was when Minnawc Gorsant was endeavouring to justify the manner in which his fiery preaching had worked upon the more religious of the Brythonic *Gosgordd.*

Not the faintest idea had young Gwythyr why it was that his new prince whose hand now rested on his arm suddenly tightened his grasp as if he had caught sight of the horns of a stag between the trees. But it was a mental vision that had arrested Porius, the memory of a scene that made him aware of what indescribable value to the heathen side in their Gaer struggle with this formidable representative of Christ Nesta ferch Aulus might prove.

It was during an explosive encounter between old Aulus and Minnawc Gorsant that she had intervened, and he now recalled, though he had been a very young man and the girl little more than a child, how amazed he had been at her wisdom. How much of it was instinctive diplomacy, how much of it feminine piety, he couldn't tell then, and in retrospect it was equally obscure.

But she quelled the anger between the two men simply by making use of an ordinary Italian woman's natural feeling for the Mother of God. It was like watching her walk upon stormy water to see her work this miracle.

And so it was brought about that as he let Gwythyr go and turned to announce his own pressing business with Myrddin Wyllt and to issue his first authoritative orders as Prince of Edeyrnion, it was not the excitement nor the nervousness of playing the ruler that gave a certain abruptness to his tone, but the simple annoyance within him that there was no longer any Brother John to whom he could explain his theory that, though this reconciliation between heathen and Christian had been brought about almost by accident, there *was* something in the idea of the *theotokos,* or "god bearer," which had the power of reconciling extremely conflicting atmospheres of feeling.

"Listen, Rhun," he whispered, making a sign to Gwythyr to remain near them. "This is what I want you to do. My uncle will take the body to the Gaer and look after my mother. What I want" — and he drew Gwythyr close to them both— "is for you to tell the Lady Morfydd that if the Patrician dies before I can get back to the Gaer she must let Aulus, with Gwythyr's help and the help of anyone Gwythyr can trust, bring the old man's body to the Brother's cell at Saint Julian's and wait for me there. Nesta ferch Aulus will still be there — won't she, Gwythyr? — for she'll be with the foreign woman and her child. But what you must make Morfydd understand," — and the new ruler of Edeyrnion reduced his tone to a yet lower pitch— "is that I want her to keep the priest out of the Patrician's chamber and to keep the Patrician's condition out of the priest's hearing."

"Out of the priest's hearing," repeated Rhun, echoing his foster-brother's words in a dull, flat, even voice. "I must get ready for a run, then. You'll excuse me, Porius ab Einion."

Thus speaking he began loosening the straps of his leather thongs and tucking certain folds of his woollen jerkin with meticulous care into his embroidered belt. Apart from their relationship, Rhun evidently felt privileged as a professional runner to sit down in the presence of his new chief in order to shake out of his sandals every fragment of moss, leaf, twig, gravel, or snail shell, that could conceivably affect the motion of his feet.

It was upon the lower portion of the same bank where grew the clumps of white moss that had recently struck the eye and stirred the imagination of his foster-brother that Rhun seated himself.

But Porius was not too stupid to perceive that it was in more than loosening his ankle straps or shaking out his sandals that the son of Alarch the Fair was absorbed as he crouched under that mossy bank with heavily drooping head. The faithfullest of the few surviving adherents of Mithras between Caer Efrog and Caerleon was indeed at that moment under the fatal necessity of making the supreme choice of his life.

And the choice had been already made. The choice had been made, though by a blessed dispensation of Nature Rhun hadn’t realized it, even while he was still listening to Gwendydd’s cajoleries in that pavilion of sorcery. She had fallen into the great mistake of taking him into her confidence with regard to her real attitude to Dion Dionides. And this had turned her into a different being. And yet his feeling for her remained. It had, in fact, become a ghost ship, sailing over other seas than those famous classic ones; as if the vessel of Dion Dionides, still so safe at the wharf under the White Tower, with the tide gurgling about its prow and the Thames seagulls circling round its helm, had secretly slipped away, dodged the Pillars of Hercules, and was steering for the Isles of the Blessed.

“I’m only saying you’d better tell Morfydd that I’ve explained everything quite fully to Gwythyr, and what he doesn’t know Nesta will be able to tell her father when the moment comes."

But Rhun had never shaken his sandals clean, or eased his ankle straps for running, with a mind so torn into two halves as he felt it torn within him now. "For if," he'd been shrewd enough to say to himself when she was telling him all this, though he had lacked the gall to utter any final ultimatum to the lady, "for if she can marry this man without loving him and yet can make him think she loves him, how do I know that she isn't fooling me too? What's to prevent her using *him* to get to the Sea of Marmora, and then using *me,* when she's got there, to establish herself with the empress and perhaps even with the emperor? Arthur's camps are no mean school for court ladies, and Byzantium can't be much more corrupt than Caerleon."

And now, as he flicked the ash stump beneath him with one of his leg straps and stared at a depression nearby where somebody apparently had lately been lying full length upon the grass, he felt a sudden cold shiver of something extremely like nervous panic.

"Woman's love," he told himself, "is a tricky thing, whether it's hers for us, or ours for her." The very simplicity of his nature rendered this dividing of heart more drastic. If only he had more time! But he had no more time. The choice had to be made *very now,* as he sat on this rotten ash stump; amid dry birch leaves and wet moss, with so many smells he knew and so many he didn't know, and something about this heavy misty sunshine that made him feel sick in his stomach.

Well enough did he realize that though Porius was prolonging his instructions to Gwythyr he had his eye on him, even as *he* had his on *him.* They knew each other so well, knew each other much better than they'd done when they were Morfydd's playmates.

Indeed, by a curious irony the strain and tension of these last days, each day containing a triple quantity of drawn-out crises, had in some odd manner, a manner to which Morfydd alone could have done justice, rendered their heavily moulded faces more like each other than they had ever been before.

But even at this crucial moment in their ticklish relationship the difference between them was grotesquely emphasized by the workings of Porius's mind. That wayward organism, which might have been using, to intensify its concentration, some daylight lantern of Boethian invention, was so painfully aware of the struggle in Rhun's heart that the notion flitted across it that so intense a struggle would inevitably leave on the psychic atmosphere of these crossways an impression capable of manifesting itself long afterwards, at least for sensitive persons who passed that way.

And he now became aware of an odd coincidence. For although he himself was ostensibly occupied in repeating and enlarging upon his instructions to Gwythyr, and although Rhun was ostensibly occupied in the business of getting his ankle straps exactly as he wanted them, he knew perfectly well that they both had been simultaneously struck by the same oblong impression left on the soft woodland grass, as if some delicate human form had only recently — perhaps only within the last twenty-four hours — been lifted up from that spot and carried away.

Several slender grass blades, delicate as human hair, for there is no grass in Ynys Prydein as filmy and tenuous as the grass in the forest of Edeyrnion, had already raised themselves up, but the greater mass of them remained just as they were when the body that had lain there had originally pressed them down.

"If there's to be," Porius thought, "anything left in this clearing capable of bringing a traveller to a pause in future times, it won't be the bronze-coloured excrement, it won't be that bruise on the grass, it won't be the stare of Gunta's doll, it won't be Mother's thoughts about Medrawd, it won't be Father's thoughts about his mother, that'll catch this traveller by the throat. It'll be my decision to put Mother and Morfydd and the Gaer out of my mind and serve the Emperor of Ynys Prydein! It'll be Rhun's decision to put the Emperor of Caer Cystennin out of his mind and serve Mithras and Morfydd! But what, in the name of all our forest devils, makes old Rhun so magnetized by that mark in the grass?"

It was a hard question to answer, though the fact that he himself was also attracted to the same mark might have given him a clue, might at least have made it occur to him that something out of this place was crying aloud to one or other of them. But prolific in the stirring up of problems as Porius's mind was, it was not a skilful machine for settling them after they'd *been* stirred up.

A more practised thaumaturge than he in psychic mysteries might have guessed that it was in some daydreaming or preoccupied brain nearby that the solution lay; but so far, what with the attraction of Drom and the death of the prince, the responsible Brochvael had so far failed to recognize the spot where he himself before noon on the previous day left the love-slain body of the second of the Three Princesses unprotected upon the ground.

In any event, to follow up Porius's idea about something more than impressions on tender forest grass being left in particular places by the mental stress of human decisions, it cannot be denied that of Morfydd's two playmates at that moment it was Rhun's corrugated skull that concealed the more painful turning point.

It was indeed only the accumulated psychic force that hung about the name of Mithras and had been gathered there by means of the discipline of so many heroic soldier-souls throughout the entire Roman world that enabled Rhun to call to his aid out of the universal air a Macedonian phalanx of defence for his ancient loyalty and so fortify and back up the decision he had already made.

But the pain of resolving not to sail for the Bosporus with Gwendydd and her Greek was so freezing and numbing to the life force in his blood that he felt, as he established this crucial decision, as if every fibre of his torso, every muscle of his thighs and ankles, had contracted and coagulated into a substance opaque as stone.

He went on finishing his preparations, however, without any flagrant sign of what he suffered. And when he was ready he rose without a groan to his feet.

“So I’m to tell Morfydd,” he murmured in a voice so low that even Porius who stood quite close to him could barely hear what he said, “that the moment the Patrician dies Gwythyr is to help Aulus carry the body to Brother John’s cell and wait there for further orders.”

He then turned to Gwythyr. “You’ll stop me, lad, won’t you, if I run too fast? When I think of things while I’m running I forget I’m not alone.”

Nesta’s youthful husband gave the famous athlete a quick respectful glance. “I’ll tell you, my Lord Rhun,” he said.

“Well then,” gasped Rhun, as if he were already out of breath with running or had been pulling a mandrake up by its root, “we may as well be off,” and without another word, and in full view of Euronwy and the priest who exchanged a questioning and perturbed glance, the two of them set off side by side at a swinging trot.

This was a signal for everybody to move; and as Drom and Afagddu, helped by Lot-el-Azziz, took up the hurdle with the body upon it, and as Brochvael drew his sister-in-law’s arm through his own, and as little Gunta, clutching her doll to her ribs and smoothing out its hair and its skirts with the concern of a harassed great-aunt in a besieged castle, hurried, in obedience to a wave of Porius's arm, to join him where he stood, this latter became aware of a man running towards them.

He certainly was not approaching them from the direction of the Gaer, but, even if he had been, the configuration of woodside and hillside was such that he could easily have reached them unseen by the two runners who were now themselves out of sight.

When the man came within a few hundred yards of the dispersing group he stopped short, evidently taking stock of the persons who were moving away and making up his mind as to which of them he should approach.

Porius beckoned to him, and he promptly obeyed the signal. But as he came towards Porius, the priest, who was clearly intending to follow the dead body, and as he followed it, to chant an appropriate psalm from a psalter he had produced from some slit in his garments, made an attempt to intercept him.

Porius, observing this attempt, moved quickly forward to counter it; and after another hesitation, this time under the conflicting magnetism of two pairs of commanding eyes, the messenger, whom Porius now saw to be the man from Deganwy named Owain Pen Uchel, whose horse had been rechristened Valkyrie by the emperor himself, disregarded the priest and came straight up to the new prince.

Even now there was a chance that Euronwy might intervene; for she had seen the messenger and seen the priest's movement to intercept him, and her eyes were now fixed indignantly on her son with the sort of appeal to him he found it most difficult to disobey.

But just when, according to the old Brythonic catchword, the turn of a hair could make all the difference, Brochvael asserted himself. He had given his support to his sister-in-law in spontaneous courtesy, but, to confess the truth, he had nothing at that critical moment but the most vague consciousness of her existence. His head was too full of Drom. This mystical reincarnation of Jesus Christ — for Drom's attitude to the Son of God differed materially from both Saint Paul's and Saint John's — possessed without doubt a figure of striking beauty; nor were the curves of his almost too feminine form rendered less appealing by the grace with which, as he assisted the disfigured Afagddu, he bent over Einion's corpse.

And it was to retain this agreeable sight within the reach of his vision that Brochvael instinctively dragged Euronwy forward, dragged her in fact to a point from which, although a great deal more of the landscape was visible than had been visible before, the face of the priest had become invisible.

"With this intelligent and beautiful creature at my side," said Brochvael to himself, as he supported Euronwy and thought of Drom, "I don't see why I shouldn't make a translation of the Eleven Comedies into Brythonic as will delight every scholar in Gaul, and perhaps even be carried across Italy to Cassiodorus, to be bound into a book by his monks."

What Brochvael didn't say to himself but left to that imprint in the grass which remained to him only an imprint in the grass, was that, whatever portion of the soul of Aristophanes may have been brought to Edeyrnion by Dion Dionides, one portion of it had not been brought; for there was no eye to see, no tongue to taste, no throat to swallow, no belly to digest, no prophet to spew out, what might be called the Aristophanic *Twelfth Comedy,* the comedy of the way the things we call "dramatic events" swoop down like hungry vultures to devour the religion-sweetened straws of premeditated sequence that connect our rational purposes with their irrational upshots.

It was given to Porius now to have a clear glimpse of what lay before him if he continued to set himself against this young priest of Christ whose name he had for the last twenty-four hours struggled to forget. The young man had been occupied in turning the massive gold-encrusted pages of his psalter, all gules and argent and azure in the gnat-swarming, horizontal sunshine, preparatory to following the corpse of the dead prince; but his lack of success in intercepting the messenger from the Gaer so bit into his soul that before he hurried after the bearers, with the book still open but the page he sought unfound, he threw at the new prince a look so branding, so blasting, so blighting that the latter experienced the sensation of using a large dark-brown puffball upon which his eyes fell, when he looked away, as a protective retreat.

He had evidently been allowed this anticipatory flame from the Pit, so that he might not be without a hint of the nature of what awaited him. And he was glad to have had this warning, glad to have drawn from his enemy even so small a flash of premonitory vengeance. That look may have given him only a faint smell of his own scorched flesh, but it had shown him in what quarter of the sky to look for such bolts.

And he seemed to see clearly now that to fight this priest with anything resembling the man’s own undying frenzy of love-hate would be impossible, and that the only hope, as had already crossed his mind, would be to use the feminine element in the heart of the religion itself, an element that would in the end resolve everything back into Nature.

But he turned now from staring at the retreating figure of his enemy to greet the newcomer, who was considerably out of breath and kept panting and pressing his knuckles into the pit of his stomach. In spite of this temporary exhaustion the messenger was so clearly attracted to Gunta that he managed to combine an introduction to her doll with his salute to Porius.

“Get your breath first, Owain Pen Uchel, while I guess at your news.”

“The Patrician is dead, my Lord.”

“And so is my father, Owain. Dead, both of them dead. Did Mistress Morfydd send you to tell me? Did you meet Rhun ap Gwrnach and Gwythyr?”

“My Lord, then it is yourself who are now ruler of Edeyrnion? I vow to serve—” and the man from Deganwy bent his knee.

But Porius interrupted him. “No, no, friend, there’ll be time for that later. If it weren’t for the emperor there’d be nobody to serve and no Edeyrnion to be served. Did you meet Rhun ap Gwrnach?”

“No, my Lord — I mean, no, my Prince! But I confess I came a little out of my way. I came by the camp. I wanted to see where they’d buried my horse and my Lord Rhun’s dog.”

Gunta bent her head, lowered her doll till she could hold it between her knees, and then began ostentatiously smoothing its hair with both her hands. Like a true woman she was ready to draw upon herself any threatening storm pressure between these two, and to her it was obvious that this lover of dogs and horses had put his fancy before his duty.

But Porius seemed only amused.

“A *little* out of the way! Why, you must have passed quite close to us, that is, if you didn’t go all round by Craig Hen.”

With a sigh of relief that seemed to mount up and sink down the whole distance between the top of his head and the soles of his feet, Owain of the Hilltop admitted that he *had* been round by Craig Hen.

“Well, now that you *are* here,” announced his new lord, “you’d better stay and play armour bearer for me. I shall want somebody; and these young ladies” — he nodded at Gunta and her doll— “are bent on carrying off the young man who is my chief support. But come, Owain, what we’ve got to do now is to hand over these little ones to their proper protector, who is squire to the counsellor. Then we've got to see the counsellor on his way. Then we've got to go to Brother John's cell — I suppose you've heard of the Brother's death? — and see to it that the Patrician is buried exactly as he wished. So come, my friend, come, my child!"

With Gunta's hand in his and with the horse tamer keeping step on the other side of the little girl, Porius moved away at last from that eventful *llanerch,* or "forest clearing," where so many paths met, crossed, mingled, began, and ended.

"There's not," he said to himself, "a single strip of earth in Edeyrnion that hasn't a magic power of its own, a power you can feel if you stay for more than a second, but this one has more than its share. Well, so the old Roman is dead! Another Manlius lost among barbarians, and it's my lot to bury him! What a world!" Pondering on his namesake, he led them down the slope towards the shore of the water, following no particular path but directing his steps towards that pavilion of Gwendydd where Rhun and he had first met the counsellor's sister and the fatal Nineue.

"Is Myrddin Wyllt," he thought, "in actual danger from that girl? I'd give a lot to know the nature of her power over him. But I doubt if I ever shall! We've got a destiny, or *tynged*, in common; but their secret is *their* secret."

He then became conscious that there was a fresh wind in the branches from the southeast and that a light procession of ragged clouds had swallowed up the sinking sun.

This wind, though it came from a direction a little to the south of the Cader, soon made him think of the Cewri; and since Owain Pen Uchel, who, like most adepts with horses, had an instantaneous power over children, had already slipped into a whispered conversation with Gunta, he was at liberty to follow his thoughts to the limit.

It was the image of Nineue, and the idea of her proving a ghastly and horrible danger to the counsellor, that supplied these thoughts with their present direction.

"This corner of the land," he thought, "for miles round the Cader must have been saturated for aeons before the forest people came — and *they* must have come a thousand years before the Gwyddyl — with the tricks those Ffichtiaid slaves played on their Cewri masters; magic tricks, wicked tricks, appalling tricks, and yet I could see that woman was still afraid of the Cewri."

The wind as they advanced towards the water was growing colder and colder. It seemed to Porius to be outside the world and to be blowing the world out of its proper position in Space.

"And a good thing too!" he thought. "No! No! No!" his soul cried from under his ribs, "I can't go on living here, struggling day and night for years against this priest of Jesus, and with only old Rhun and his Persian god to help me; and with Morfydd, for all I know, bearing children to Rhun, and with Mother, for all I know, meeting Medrawd and plotting against the emperor. No! No! No! No! I shall go to the emperor at Badon, tell him I'm his man from now on, and just see — double-dyed fool though *he* considered me — whether I can't outwit, outplot, and certainly outfight the worst enemies of this old isle!"

They were approaching the water now, and a grey mist came out of the water and closed round them, and the mist was very cold. And within the mist, though quite distinct from the mist, there were white vaporous shapes that were of the size and form of small men and women. And these shapes moved to and fro within the mist and remained distinct from it; and as they moved they made grotesque signs and antic signals to one another.

And the nearer Porius and his companions approached the water, the greyer grew the mist and the whiter grew the vaporous shapes that gesticulated to one another within the mist. And by degrees Porius began to discern, as if through gulfs that, as Homer says, had been “wrenched out of the mist into the unspeakable ether,” huge, dim, faraway clouds, rank upon rank, ridge upon ridge, battalion upon battalion, that were heavily and slowly moving forward, impelled by the wind. But more to the southwest than the west, and where no Homeric gulfs had been “wrenched out of the mist into the unspeakable ether,” Porius suddenly became aware that he could detect the enormous bulk of Craig Hen, heaped and humped, and, as it seemed, on the point of toppling forward into the water.

At the sight of Craig Hen the image of Creiddylad came upon him with such overpowering force that it seemed to roll up all his past and present into one huge bundle of fatal experience as gigantic as the beautiful creature herself, and he felt as if he could fling that bundle of his destiny recklessly, desperately, and his soul after it, into those “wrenched-out gulfs” of the *aspetos aitheer*.

It was partly, no doubt, the rushing down of the wind in a sudden whirling gust from the peaks of the Cader that had this effect upon him; but he suddenly felt as if everything in life — the earth, the sky, the water, the sun, the moon, the signs of the zodiac, and all the beings dwelling among them, himself with the least of them and his thoughts with the least of their thoughts — was not as wholly, as hopelessly, as desperately real as, with the horrors of reality on him, he imagined it to be.

And the odd thing was he felt at that moment that no fellow Brython in the world, no fellow Roman in the world, no Gwyddyl-Ffichti in the world, could understand what he was feeling as well as this deep-natured little Sais.

And the truth was that Gunta was not so caught by the charm of the horse tamer from Deganwy as not to feel, through the hand that held her hand, that her strongest and wisest of mortals was hit to the heart. With weird long-drawn shrieks the gusts of wind from the mountains were whirling round the three of them now; and Porius was made aware, gradually, steadily, irresistibly, of yet another Cewri utterance, this time the last he was ever destined to learn.

It had a quality very different from the wild-goose cry of "*gwork*, *gwork*," and equally different from that "*ruggerug*" noise, as if a Cyclops' jaws were cracking human bones. For curiously enough the sound that now came into his head, or was being blown round his head by these reckless gusts, was totally incapable of being represented by any signs or any syllables.

Porius felt as though his memory for words were one of the things that he had just flung into the *aspetos aitheer.* Nevertheless the subtle essence of certain sensations, salt as the roots of mountains covered by the sea for aeons of winters, bitter sweet as the sap of forests nourished by the leaf mould of centuries of summers, had been gathered up and distilled in the strange tune he now chanted.

It must have been from the lips of Creiddylad he had caught it; but as this wind from the Cader whirled away the grey mists and the white vapours and even lifted up the limitless earth with one tremendous heave and launched it like an ice-bound ship, keel-free in infinite Space, he felt as if it emanated from the whole body of his *cawres-cariad,* and from her living soul. It was the tune of the wind from the Cader; and it must have been the power of that wind that made it seem to him perfectly natural that both the child of the Sais from the forests of Germania and the breeder of the mare that the emperor had named Valkyrie should echo the word as if it had been an incantation.

And grotesque though it sounded in the man’s bass and the child’s treble it seemed to Porius that his decision to serve the emperor was rounded off when his companions joined him in tossing that wordless cry into the “unspeakable ether.”

CHAPTER XXVIII. Burial and Sleep

IT WAS WITH A SIGH of profound relief that Porius let fall one of the military spades brought by Aulus and Owain Pen Uchel to the spot designated by the Patrician for his burying. The three of them had been digging for well nigh an hour; and now that before them lay the result of their labour, an oblong hole of about five feet deep and two feet wide, the bright moonlight and the cool air and the fragrance of the upturned mould, threaded intermittently by the straggling roots of small forgotten trees that had long ago perished in the cold winds of this exposed place, created an atmosphere of such detached and islanded tranquillity that he felt as if he could throw himself down by the side of the spade, where the grass remained untouched, and there sleep an untimely sleep, while the powerful horse to whose back the Patrician's body had been corded moved slowly round the open grave in an uneven circle nibbling waveringly at patches of particular grasses or at leaves of particular plants that tempted its nocturnal fancy.

The moon herself was not yet visible, but being nearly full she had begun to pour forth, as if from a transparent porphyry sluice beyond the rondure of the horizon, a stream of pallid luminosity, which when once it reached the firmament spread into a delta of pearl-coloured watercourses, all of them feeling their way out of cloudy mudflats into an expanding estuary of lunar transparence.

It was a grey horse of enormous though sluggish strength somewhat like Porius's own that had brought the Patrician's body, and if Porius had not been so ignorant of horses he would have known that the animal had surpassed itself on this particular night.

He had indeed recognized that, along with the corpse on its back, the horse was dragging in a wheeled cart another and yet heavier object, an object which had been carefully concealed in a purple blanket. It was with this object that Aulus the ex-centurion, now that they had dug the grave, was concerning himself, while Owain Pen Uchel, also on his knees hard by, was arranging, according to the unclassical notions of the stables at Deganwy, the historic folds of the old Roman's toga, an immaculate relic of the Manlian gens.

Aulus had no sooner dropped his spade than he had set to work industriously cleaning with water tilted out from that same old legionary flask so well known to both grandfather and grandson every single letter of the inscription which he himself, the moment his master was dead, had caused to be chipped out, for he knew every word by heart, with the man's sharpest chisel at the Gaer stonecutter's bench.

In that diffused moonlight, for though the goddess's form was still invisible the pallid radiance she was diffusing grew more luminous and more unearthly every moment, it gave Porius many strange feelings to see the impenetrable visage of his grandfather's old friend bent thus assiduously over the words *"Porius hic in tumulo iacet."*

He had already at Saint Julian's cell studied every feature of the Patrician's dead face and wondered not a little at the odd effect produced by a slight wound — it was not the serious hurt from which he had died — between the right-hand corner of his mouth and his right nostril. It was a nasty gash, and though made by a Sais javelin that had already spent its force and been turned aside it was disfiguring enough in its effect on the Patrician's countenance.

And the curious thing was it brought out the old rugged rustic strain of Italian farmers that lay — though a good deal more than skin deep — below the urban pseudo-Greek sophistication of the ruling class of the world's capital.

It certainly made the old man's face less cultured and cosmopolitan; but it gave it an autochthonous dignity. In making it rougher and more rural it made it more Italian.

"What a barbarian I am," thought Porius as he contemplated the Brythonic tamer of horses arranging with such artistic grace — for every now and then in that ghostly light Owain Pen Uchel would step back a pace or two and gaze at the dead man as if he had been modelling him out of clay instead of preparing him for dissolution *under* clay — and arranging too with as much simple ignorance as poetic reverence the immemorial lines, curves, and folds of the public dress of a Roman senator, and as he turned from the tamer of horses to the tamer of men and watched the sternly impassive profile of Aulus as the old man cleansed with the sacred water and a scrap of rag every letter of that inscription. "One of them's interested," he thought, "in how the old man will look when the mud and the gravel rattle down, while the other's wondering what travellers will feel who come this way and spell out *'Porius hic in tumulo iacet.'* But all I can think of is whether Morfydd's children will look like me or like old Rhun."

He picked up the purple rug which had been wrapped round the newly inscribed stone and spreading it out on the grass by the edge of the upturned mould sat down on it hugging his knees.

One peculiarity of the spot selected by the Patrician for his burial was its limited horizon. It was surrounded by grassy ridges that hid the distance in every direction. But this very fact of the exclusion of distance had an effect entirely opposite to what might have been expected. Instead of producing the impression of anything enclosed this unique place of burial produced the impression of being a shallow bowl, or perhaps a deep saucer, full of waving grasses, illuminated by unearthly light, and suspended between earth and heaven. It produced the effect, indeed, as though the last of the great House of Manlius had not been interred at all but had been hung by invisible cords in illimitable Space.

Porius had his wits sufficiently about him, when over the northern rim of this grassy bowl the figures of old Afagddu and young Gwythyr appeared, each of them leading a horse by its bridle, to note with curious interest the shock of pleasure he derived from the fact that here was an excuse to postpone the lowering down of his grandfather into that gaping hole.

Though the moonlight and the darkness reduced the external difference between the living grass and this scooped-out cavity in the earth mother's flesh, it left the essential difference between the mysterious texture of vegetation and the much less miraculous substance of gravel and mould unaffected.

And Porius began to be more vividly aware of this difference than he could remember ever having been in the whole of his life. And it struck him with a ghastly intensity that between the flesh of this body of a man and the various substances composing the body of our planet there was a scraping and rasping discordance even more pronounced than between stony earth mould and pliant vegetation.

He began to experience an unexpected shrinking from the necessary contact of his grandfather's face, however wrapped in his toga, with the gritty mould they would so shortly be shovelling down upon it.

Thus it was with the deliberate purpose of delaying the impact upon those proud old features he knew so well of the mould and gravel and stones and roots and snail shells and earthworms which were shortly to be spaded in on the top of them, that after warmly greeting both the newcomers he left old Afagddu gazing in awed wonder at Aulus, as the ex-centurion went on with his slow meticulous task of removing every speck of dirt from the precious inscription with the fringe of his military cloak, and in addition to this, and not without irritable glances to the quarter of their amphitheatre where the moon's appearance was imminent, of trying in vain — for his old-fashioned knife was as unsuited to such work as was his notion of the formation of letters — to improve the shape of the aspirate in the inscription's *"Hic"* and "Homo." But having given Owain instructions as to how he wanted the stone set up, Porius now felt justified in drawing Gwythyr aside and asking him for more details about the death banquet for Einion ab Iddawc at the Gaer.

He had already heard something of this ceremony when he met the lad at the dead Brother's cell, but what he began to hear now proved so startling that it broke up his sensitivity about the weight of that menacing five feet of rubble bearing down upon the Manlian eye sockets, consular nose, and proconsular mouth, as the old man's skull, resting upon the water bottle he had entrusted to his grandson four days ago, prepared to resign itself to putting off the chemistry of the organic and putting on the chemistry of the inorganic. In fact Porius now issued an abrupt, and to Aulus and Afagddu so startling and disconcerting an order, that they looked at each other in dismay before obeying it; the order, in fact, that they should lower the body into the grave at once and postpone the death prayer until the grave was filled in.

"Where were you sitting yourself when you saw the man you thought was the emperor's nephew?"

"I wasn't sitting at all, my Prince. I was standing. I was standing just behind him at the back of the hall. The hall was crowded. Lots of us younger ones had no seat. We ate and drank standing. It was the most crowded death banquet I've ever known, and I've known three — no! *four,* my Prince; yes! I've known four."

"But this man — tell me, Gwythyr. Did you see the emperor's nephew closely when he was at the Gaer that first time? Are you sure you'd know him again?"

"Not as closely as I saw this man tonight, but near enough to refuse to trust my eyes again, my Prince, if this wasn't the man."

"Did anyone else notice him or know who he was?"

"I can't say for sure, my Prince, but I don't think so. Everybody was watching what was going on. There was anger in the air, my Prince, and more than anger. There was murder in the air."

"Was the priest at the death feast?"

"Yes, my Prince."

"And both my mother and my wife?"

"Yes, my Prince."

"Were you in his chamber when the Patrician died?"

"Yes, my Prince."

"And you heard the Patrician tell my mother that Aulus was to bury him out here, and that the priest wasn't to come near him?"

"Oh yes, my Prince! And when he was dead and the Lady Morfydd was talking to Aulus, I saw the Lady Euronwy kneel down by the Patrician and pray over him. My Lady Euronwy was crying pitifully, my Prince."

"He was her father."

"I swear to you, my Prince, by my own mother's head, and I would swear it before God and the emperor, that the Lady Euronwy was glad that the Patrician's will should be done, and that he should be buried as he told

Aulus, and that the scribe in the tomb shed should set down on the stone the words he'd made Aulus learn."

"Do you think the priest understood that my mother knew about it and agreed to it?"

"I don't think so, my Prince."

"You mean he supposed it was done without her knowledge?"

"I'm sure that's what he thought, my Prince."

"But the trouble at the death feast? You say that had nothing to do with the Patrician?"

"Oh no, my Prince! That was about Einion ab Iddawc being buried in the new church. It was Brochvael ab Iddawc who objected; and the Lady Morfydd supported him."

"This was after Aulus and Afagddu had brought the body away to Brother John's cell?"

"Oh, my Prince! They started before the death feast began. The Lady Morfydd told me to wait so that I could tell you what was decided about your father."

"And nothing was decided?"

"Not a thing, my Prince, not a thing. It came near to blood and murder, and then — I told you at the Brother's cell how it was — then it all suddenly... suddenly stopped."

"When Nesta cried out on the Mother of God?"

Gwythyr nodded.

Porius could see that the lad had been deeply moved by what had happened. He had already gathered as much from the words the youth had dropped at the Brother's cell earlier on this eventful night. He had even divined from Gwythyr's reticence about it that he, and probably others beside, felt that a miracle had actually happened and that the Blessed Virgin had answered Nesta's appeal by appearing in person.

As he faced the girl's husband now he suppressed a question that had risen to his lips as to how it happened that Nesta, whom he understood to be looking after Magog's mother, could be at the Gaer at all? He had been aware of her absence at the Brother's cell, but he had been too concerned in getting the Patrician's body safely away to give it much thought. But he was amused to notice in himself now the instinctive Brythonic prince's assumption that while it was natural for himself to spend his time hunting and fishing and exploring the forest when he wasn't serving the emperor or fighting his enemies, it was wholly improper for serving girls and serving boys to leave their work without special permission.

"Holy Jesus!" his philosophical self retorted to his princely self. "Why shouldn't the boy have his wife with him at the tribe's death feast?"

He glanced at the three men to make sure they were obeying his unaccountable orders and were really filling in the grave. When he was sure of this, though he could see they were doing it stubbornly, broodingly, and in an outraged silence, he told Gwythyr to bring him the purple blanket in which the inscribed stone had been wrapped; and as they sat down side by side upon this and tightened their cloaks round them against the chill of the autumn night they saw Afagddu pause in his work and stretch out his arm.

Aulus and Owain stopped too and straightened their backs to see at what he was pointing. Thus all three men became outlined against the half-circle of the craterlike ridge, that henceforth was destined to confront the buried Roman until his bones were indistinguishable from the earth piled on them.

The motion of the tall grasses shivering in the night wind gave Porius the impression that in their waving to and fro these grassy sentinels were trying to utter certain obscure half-thoughts to the unheeding clouds.

And as for the three men, they assumed for him just then an appearance of such unsubstantial unearthliness that they might have been a group of nameless prehistoric Ffichtiaid drawn back from the dead to bury once more in vaporous recurrence on this night of the full moon some bewitched *cawr* they had in the far-off past ensorcerized to his destruction.

And then both he and Gwythyr realized suddenly at what it was that Afagddu had pointed. Like a dethroned goddess released from captivity and able to ride with absolute assurance to where a thousand years before she had ruled over a race lost in the gulfs of Time, the full moon, that had risen like this, month after month, though not upon a scene as momentous as this, from times before Ynys Prydein was an island at all, mounted the ridge, allowed the grasses waving their confused half-thoughts to throw their gnomic pattern against her breast, and swept into her royal highway.

But in thus repossessing this particular air province of her domination the full moon of Monday the twenty-second of October in the year four hundred and ninety-nine proved her power by exorcizing the demons of hostility from the minds of every one of these five men.

With this divine visitant above their heads Aulus and Afagddu and Owain began in earnest, to fill up the Patrician's grave, free now from the sense that they were breaking a sacred custom of a thousand years.

And Porius suddenly thought of how his cynical father, when he was drunk, had persisted in quoting those crazy modern verses of that mad boy. Indeed one of the queerest of Taliesin's poems drifted through his mind even now as he watched the men's spades reflect the glitter of the full moon. The poem was concerned with just such a night as this; and several disturbing fragments of its obscure cadences came back to him, recording old intimacies of his with the moon and declaring how heavenly it was to forget the human race in the mystic alterations of the lunar hours. "Greatest of all the enchantments of Annwn is the full moon," one of these fragments said, "for the full moon changes everything. It lifts up the low and brings down the high. It steals their fluidity from the waves of the sea and their solidity from the peaks of the mountains. It makes murder a sound far off and birth a wailing upon the air. It makes yesterday's love seem like laughter in another life and yesterday's hate like an owl hooting over the rooftops of a city of ghosts. It turns death into the crying of kings' daughters forgotten in frozen forests; and it turns the battles of old races into the sinking of deserted cities lost in the sand."

Back again by young Gwythyr's side, and seated once more on the blanket, Porius felt as if the immediate presence of the moon, so utterly removed from all human values, gave to the human race and to all the individuals he knew a sort of endearing grotesqueness. He felt disinclined now to attribute calculating and crafty rather than spontaneous and impulsive motives to the opposing figures, known so well to them both, who had come so near that night, as he was learning now for the first time, into turning that death banquet in the Gaer into a scene of wild and frantic contention.

Porius implored his young retainer not to hurry too fast through his startling narrative. How clearly as he listened could he see every detail of what went on! Vividly before him rose their low-roofed hall which he hadn't seen since he set out with Rhun four days ago.

He said to himself, *"That's* it; that's what has been growing on me all day!" And what he meant was that he had a weird prophetic feeling that it might be months and months before he entered that hall again.

Vividly could he see, as he listened to Gwythyr, the dais at the northern end of the chamber on which there were always two throne chairs. Hugging his knees as he sat on the blanket at Porius's side, and with his face turned eagerly towards him, Gwythyr was now explaining to him what he could have explained without seeing it to Gwythyr, namely, that at the ceremony that night one of those throne chairs was empty, while in the other sat the Lady Morfydd. The Lady Euronwy, Gwythyr told him, sat on the other side of the throne chair upon an informal and quite ordinary seat, a seat that had been unceremoniously brought there from her own private chamber.

"Are you perfectly sure, lad," Porius murmured, "that my mother had no idea of the emperor's nephew being there?"

"As far as a person of my age and my position can be sure," replied the young man, "of anything concerning so great a lady as your mother. I've been her special messenger" — as he said this he turned away his head from the great lady's son, and one of those looks that the moon alone of all the immortals seems able to call up, or to comprehend when it is called up, came into his face— "since I was fifteen. No, my Prince, according to my way of looking at it she *couldn't* have known. Of course *after* the death feast he may have revealed himself to her. No one can speak one way or the other in regard to that, and I wouldn't want to be the one to try. But that she didn't recognize him while the feast was going on I *am certain.*

"But you must remember, my Prince, that there were so many crosscurrents in the Gaer that it's hard to follow them; rumour upon rumour, my Prince, and plot upon plot, and vengeance upon vengeance, and many of them going back so far that the ones who use the words don't hardly know what the words mean. Things have changed a lot in these modern times, my Prince, and yet there are people who still don't see what's happening when the signs are all round them."

Nesta ferch Aulus, wise as she was, and great as was her magnetic power, would have been astounded to hear the free and easy manner in which her youthful husband was talking to the great-grandson of Edeyrn ap Cunedda.

But the truth was that Porius's removal as an infant, according to custom, to the house of his foster-mother, followed by his long years at the Bishop's School on the other side of Moel y Famau, and that again by his betrothal to Morfydd, had had the effect, combined with his introspective nature, of cutting him off from the day-to-day life of their tribal fortress.

His only companions, apart from his teachers, had been his boyhood's playmates, that is to say, for Morvran had always been a lonely scholar, Morfydd and Rhun. Thus to have revealed to him, practically for the first time, just as he had become ruler of the province and at the same time had decided to leave the province in order to serve the emperor and the whole Island of Britain, to have, I say, revealed to him what might be called the Gaer's political and social secrets was, although so ironically late, of absorbing interest. He continued questioning Gwythyr so closely and learning from him things so amazing, that long after the men had finished their job and the inscribed stone had been put up at the grave's head, and the three gravediggers had themselves fallen into an excited argument, this intense low-voiced dialogue between the two of them was still going on.

"Do you mean to tell me, lad," Porius protested at length, "that this matter of burying my father in Minnawc Gorsant's new church of Saint Julian in the centre of his new town of Corwen divided them all tonight into who were for the emperor and who were against him?"

"It was when the Lady Morfydd called upon my Lord Brochvael to support her against my Lady your mother, and my Lord Brochvael got angry because the priest made reference to his son, and Master Drom said it was directly through Christ himself and not through any priest that we knew the will of God, and it was when my Lady your mother—"

"But for mercy's sake, son, what's all this got to do with the emperor?"

"It's like this, my Prince. The party in the *Gosgordd* who followed the old priest weren't really for the emperor at all. They always said as much as that. They said they were soldiers of Christ, not of any prince or king or emperor! I know what I am saying, my Prince, for when I was younger" — he caught himself up with an embarrassed little laugh— "I know I'm not very old yet—" but Porius had laid his hand on his knee.

"Was there any surprise among them," he enquired, "at my absence?"

In spite of the floating effluence of lunar enchantment all around them the young man's face became perceptibly clouded with misgiving.

"Do you command me to speak frankly, my Prince?"

"God, no! I don't command you anything, lad. Talk to me as your friend; for if we're not that by this time we never shall be."

"None of our Gaer people, my Prince, have the faintest notion of what you're like. There are the maddest stories going about among us concerning you. Now that I know you — and even Nesta, clever as she is, doesn't know you as well as I do — I find these stories ridiculous."

"What stories?"

"Well, the commonest one is that you are sold yourself, body, soul, and spirit, to the devil. Those who say this believe that Myrddin Wyllt has revealed to you all his secrets and that you are to be his successor with the emperor."

"But the counsellor isn't an old man."

"They say he's going back whence he came, now that the Saeson are driven back whence *they* came! They say when he leaves here he'll go straight to Caer Sidi."

"Who says that?"

Porius's question was abrupt and imperative. Being now in the position of a despot he had already discovered the importance of personal detail.

"Nobody in particular, my Prince. We all say it and we all question it. And it's the same with yourself! Nobody expects you to be an ordinary Prince of Edeyrnion any more than we expect the emperor to be an ordinary crowned King of Ynys Prydein. Oh, I don't know *how* to make you see the way it is, my Prince! I can only say it seemed quite natural to us to look at that empty chair at the end of the hall, now that your father's gone. But if you'd suddenly appeared seated in that chair, my Prince, that also would have seemed natural! Everybody knows that Brother John taught you all the wisdom of the enchanter Pelagius who died in his arms and was a much more powerful magician than Myrddin Wyllt."

Porius removed his reassuring touch from the young man's knee at his side. He looked at the three figures before them, who were now seated upon the long-dead trunk of a perished mountain ash, much of which had already resolved itself into dry powdery dust, and, with their backs to the old Roman upon whose face and chest and belly and legs they had just thrown a cartload of British earth, were absorbed in a game of Roman dice, the numbers upon whose cubes, produced from a pouch at the ex-centurion's belt, were apparently discernible at the bottom of this magic ocean of moonlight.

And he looked through these figures, dicing there with their backs to the buried Patrician. He looked through them as if they had been transparent phantoms. And he saw the Gaer hall, with Morfydd in his mother's place, and his father's place waiting for himself to fill; emptily waiting, as for some unknown sorcerer-prince liable to appear or disappear at any moment. And as through the forms of these dicers he saw the familiar Gaer hall grown so strange, with Morfydd on the dais and the religious and irreligious parties of the *Gosgordd* disputing across their meat and their mead, so through the Gaer hall, as if it too, like the dicers, were a thing of vapour, moon-gendered and moon-nourished, he could see another vision, this one being simply his own clear memory of what he himself had seen that very day.

He saw little Gunta's floating hair and felt her hand snatched away as she rushed to meet Neb ap Digon. He saw Neb himself slip hurriedly from off the back of a plump roan horse and proceed to drag the animal towards him, proudly requesting him, as if the small page and not himself had been the ruler of the land, to lift them both from the ground and place them on that broad, sleek, inviting back.

And he saw Dion Dionides on a jet-black horse and Gwendydd on a snow-white horse; and with them he saw their diminutive retainers Fflam and Tegvan. He saw these alert beings seated upon an animal that arrested his attention, not only because of its colour which was of a shade of sorrel he had never seen before but because of the fact that it only had one eye. It appeared to be an eye, however, that was prepared resolutely yet cautiously, impracticably yet shrewdly, to find the way to the Port of London.

At that moment it struck him that there was something queer about being able to see all this through the bodies of three men dicing on his grandfather's grave, as well as through the walls of their familiar, yet now so strange, Gaer hall. But the thing of all things that rose most vividly before him out of the unusual group of persons and animals he was now conjuring up was the extraordinary figure of Myrddin Wyllt in his rough disguise as a "herdsman of the south."

The magician was seated on an enormous grey horse, that for all he knew might even have been a stallion, while behind him, balanced sideways on the creature's rump, with her long bare arms tightly clasped round his waist, he saw the handmaid Nineue. The mysterious Ffichtiaid was clothed in a warm, soft, tight-fitting garment reaching below her knees and made entirely of moleskins. Yes! There she was, the creature from whom it was his fate to protect this man. But who among us can predict the particular intensity of any single mental picture in a crowd of others?

Porius was not only surprised to find that the image of this woman stood out more clearly now than any other. He was surprised at the particular nature of the impression he received. The lissom outlines of her seductive body from the moment he first saw her had sensually attracted him. And now what he expected when their eyes met was a cruel and voluptuous gleam of triumph; but he got nothing of the sort.

She smiled her recognition, but the smile passed at once, without any sort of mocking defiance; and a calm, dreamy, somnolent look, the look of one who is too deeply absorbed in some immediate personal sensation to feel either love or hate, either cruel exultation or delicious laceration, either contempt or uneasiness, the look in fact that corresponded with what he himself felt when he was too absorbed in "cavoseniargizing" to notice anything, hear anything, or be aware of anything, beyond the magical ecstasy of mingling his whole being with the elements!

In plain words Nineue, the Ffichtiaid, Nineue, the notorious she-devil, was losing herself in earth and air and water and — sweetest release of all — in the afterglow of fire. For the sun had set; and this same afterglow, lying upon the reeds and the mud and the lake, was producing an effect that gave to the whole vision of things, extending from the ground at their horses' feet to every rim and verge and ridge of the landscape round them, a golden insubstantiality.

The reeds and the water and that tall grey horse and Nineue, with her white arms round Myrddin Wyllt's waist, were indeed the last things to melt away as his consciousness, retreating now from its airy propulsion, left this scene that had come floating up from a mere fathom's depth of memory, passed once more through that familiar yet strange Gaer hall described just now by the lad from whose knee he had withdrawn his hand, and found itself once more aware of the three men dicing with their backs to the filled-in grave, and of Gwythyr's white face and earnest moonlight-mystified eyes.

"So it seemed natural to you, lad," he murmured gently, making a movement to rise but remaining for a second half-risen, supporting his weight on the palm of his outstretched right arm, "to see my father's seat empty? I'm glad to hear it, for it's likely enough that more than a few days may pass before I take my place in that seat."

So saying, and with a groan caused by a sudden spasm of cramp, he stood erect. Once on his feet, however, he found himself staring at the three figures dicing about the buried Patrician as if they were the final fragment of a broken dream that refused to dissolve into the moonlight.

But the grasses waving on the top of the ridge behind them were real enough, and it struck him as a typical reality of this mortal world that five feet of rubble and clay and peat and dirt and stones should be lying with all their weight on the toga-wrapped Manlian nose and eyelids, and the tightly closed Manlian mouth.

Porius shivered and felt a natural relief when Gwythyr, who also was now on his feet, bent down and handed him the blanket on which they had been sitting.

"You're cold, my Prince. Wrap this round your neck. I know," he went on, "I am young. But that doesn't make me as stupid as some of us. I know we ought to expect you to come and go in quite a different way from your father. They say in the Gaer kitchen that you're more like your grandfather than Prince Einion, and *he* certainly used to come and go; nobody knew how!

"The Church has got a hold on us today, my Prince, yes! on both Gaer and town as it never had in Prince Iddawc's time. I'm too young myself to remember the days of Prince Iddawc and Princess Indeg. No, I can't speak for myself. But I can tell you *this,* my Prince, and you can lay it to heart, for it's the very truth. The trouble nowadays is all about the future and it is all *between the young and the young.* The older people are too settled in their ways to care one way or the other.

"And I'll tell you something else, my Lord — I mean my Prince — something that everybody doesn't know. The *Gosgordd* boys who laid that ambush for Morvran ap Brochvael after Minnawc Gorsant's sermon against the enemies of Christ were the youngest of the stable boys. I'd have been one of them myself; only I used to go boar hunting with Morvran ap Brochvael, and he had told me, while we were waiting for the boar to charge, and while we didn't know whether we'd come out of it alive or dead — you know what those boar tusks are, my Prince — that all the learned books his dad brought back from Rome and Constantinople and Athens — yes! every single one of them — said that the religion of Christ had been invented by madmen who believed that the end of the world was at hand; and he would say that there never had been and never could be *three gods in one;* and he would say" — here Gwythyr impulsively and instinctively gave an irreligious twist to his revolutionary feelings— "if Christ was a god, Mithras was an older and much stronger god! *That's* what my Lord Morvran used to say when he took me out hunting.

"You see, my Prince, all of us who worked in the kitchen in those days, carrying the dishes into the hall and carrying them back when the feast was over, were the quiet and religious ones. The wild and wicked ones, the ones who hated everything to do with religion, the ones who mostly used to go about with Morvran, worked in the armoury or in the stables. You wouldn't know *them,* my Prince, for you and my Lord Rhun ap Gwrnach were grown-up men when we were all boys; so it's not betraying them to you for me to mention them, though I only mention them to cry shame on the mothers who bore them!

"Only a few of the ones who worked in the kitchen were big or strong enough to join the *Gosgordd.* I expect you know *them,* my Prince. *They* are Tudor and Rhydderch and Rhisiart and Jorwerth and Sieffre and Adda; and *they* are still on my side and would always do what I tell them, so if ever you—"

"Pardon me, lad, for interrupting you, but do you remember the prayers for the dead who die in the Lord?"

Gwythyr's expression in the moonlight looked so completely confounded by this question that the impious thought flashed through Porius's mind: "Suppose he says, 'Which lord, my Prince?' How shall I answer then?"

If it hadn't been for the full moon, and for the waving grasses on the ridge, and for the sound of Aulus's Roman dice tinkling against a particular stone which had been lucky enough, if it *was* luck to an entity as inanimate as a stone, to escape reburial, the primeval simplicity of the boy's answer, when it came at last, might have had a different effect.

As it was it made him feel completely ashamed. In fact it smote his whole life illusion just as the old *cawr* had done with Creiddylad, broke it in pieces, and "dashed it," as the Psalmist says, "against the stones."

And over a pool of green water, whence a horrible redness behind a bar of scoriac adamant pitilessly watched him, he decided that all this while he had simply been making use of the mysterious tynged that linked him with

Myrddin Wyllt in order to escape the necessity of returning to face his mother and Morfydd. But to have left, as he had done yesterday and today, the cruelty of the father of the gods to have its way unchallenged with both his wife and his mother struck him as he thought of it now in this unearthly light as something so monstrously inhuman that it put him outside the tribes of men.

It was to Cader Idris he belonged, and the sooner he went back there the better.

"I only know three Latin words, my Prince," had been Gwythyr's answer. "But I think the Patrician would be glad if you said them over him before we went away."

"What is this thing," thought Porius, as he went back to the grave with Gwythyr beside him and made a sign to the three men to go on with their game till it was over. "What *is* this thing I call my life illusion? Aren't I still myself when it's utterly destroyed *as* it is *now*?

"Oh, but I'm deceiving myself! The second it's destroyed it starts growing again — only on different ground. *Perdition!* Am I forced by the power of life itself into this childish vanity? Is this what Jesus meant by becoming like a child, like a vain showing-off child?

"What I've got to do is to kill this life illusion of mine so that it can't start growing again! But what exactly *is* it I've got to kill? That's the question. *There!* Afagddu's thrown a double four! 'In eight days,' as we used to say at the Bishop's School, 'there'll be a new emperor!' It's a sort of diffused conceit of yourself, that's what it is; a sort of feeling that to be what *you* are and to feel as *you* feel makes you a person in some peculiar way superior to the people you meet. In reality, of course, it only makes you *different.* And since every creature is different from every other creature, and since, as Brother John told me, according to Pelagius, there's *experi*mentation *in values going on all the time,* a person who wants to be wise must analyze and criticize, even while he obeys, the values he's received from the past."

With a sharp tinkle the little oblong cube of Roman numbers was again flung on the stone, this time by the horse tamer from Deganwy.

"Well done, Master Owain!" cried Gwythyr in high excitement. "It's double six, isn't it?"

But Aulus rose to his feet laughing, and the others laughed with him. He replaced his dice and poured meticulously into the same receptacle a considerable number of small silver coins, the final one of which seemed as it disappeared to have been clinging piteously to the ex-centurion's sweaty palm.

And it struck Porius as though the wretched little thing, with its familiar Caesarean profile, were offering, ere it sank into darkness, all it could purchase for one moment more of moonlight!

"It did look like that, my boy," Aulus muttered, "but it's the one I showed them when we began! It's lost its enamel in two places and its losing *that* makes it look like double six."

"Can you remember, Aulus," enquired Porius earnestly, but without the faintest trace of reproach, "those words that you used to recite when I was little and you came to our house in the town forum with a message from the Patrician to Alarch the Fair? I don't mean any church psalm. I mean those words you always told Rhun ap Gwrnach and me that the old captain of the guard at Uriconium used to chant when he buried the ashes of one of his soldiers."

Aulus looked at him sharply with a most peculiar expression and with his lips sucked in to such an extent as to endow his visage with the air of one of those drinking troughs that have been taken for granted so long that it would give even a horse a nervous shock to credit it with any human feeling.

“But those were old Roman words,” he said, “words of divine sleep after long toil, words of eternal peace in the bosom of *alma mater terra* in place of bloody war on behalf of *Senatus Populusque Romanus.”*

There was something in the tone of his wife’s father that caused Gwythyr to throw upon the new prince a hurried, anxious, and almost protective look. His own long-suppressed feelings of revolt against both Roman and Brython, feelings that had of late been disarmed by Porius’s unexpected friendliness, had found a fresh channel in a young man’s general religious hostility to the particular religious ideas that surround his youth. Gwythyr’s revolt was no longer against the emperor and his princes. It was against God and his priests.

But if there was anyone in Edeyrnion qualified to catch the most intimate implications in the old centurion’s outburst it was the Patrician’s grandson. Infinitely less scholarly than Brochvael, Porius had what the other lacked, a living stream of actual Roman blood in his Ultima Thule veins; and having this he could recognize what Morfydd’s father, for all his books and his travels and his Greek comedies, could never have done, the appalling weight of the *infinita potestas orbis terrarum,* the limitless empire that was at that very moment ebbing hoarsely back, down the steep slimy shingles and the long shell-strewn sands of the coasts of time, and against the burden of which this too-faithful servant of the *Urbs Beata* was relieving his soul in tragic bitterness.

The ex-centurion must have uttered what he uttered spontaneously enough. How could he possibly have had an answer ready for so completely an unexpected request? But he had spoken so solemnly and slowly, and in a tone so profoundly sad that the man from Deganwy and old Afagddu regarded each other with a look that seemed to say: “If a Roman centurion from the Uriconium legion and one who has served in a *castrum* as rich and luxurious as the one at Deva can be as unhappy as this man sounds we may as well thank the gods that we are the conquered and not the conquerors!”

But Porius spoke again, and as quietly as he could. As he spoke and as he looked from face to face in the moonlight he was fully conscious of that *other* face watching him from the bottom of the grave and carrying such a weight of rubble upon it that it was hard to imagine it retaining its familiar features.

“How long does the *animula vagula”* he wondered in the pauses of what he was saying, “hover about its guest and comrade?”

But whether the Patrician’s soul had utterly perished with its body or, naked and pallid in some new embryonic state, was already shivering on the threshold of a new dimension of life, there is no doubt that, though the authoritative spirit of the Manlian *gens* had only reached him through the evasive channel of an emotional woman, Porius did suddenly feel rushing through every portion of his being a magnetic quiver of irresistible command.

“Recite those Roman sentences slowly, if you please, Aulus,” he said, “and Afagddu and Owain and Gwythyr and I will repeat them after you as well as we can.”

All the men glanced quickly at him; and then instead of looking at one another they kept their eyes fixed on his face while Aulus without a moment’s pause began with the words the Twentieth Legion must have known so well: *“lmperator ait* — the emperor declares.” So long was it since the centurion had repeated these words, and so much longer was it since he had actually heard them uttered, that their significance had grown faded and dim. Indeed the words themselves, entombed in an old man’s memory, had become discontinuous and fragmentary. But there were still so many Latin phrases, Latin aphorisms, Latin proverbs, not to speak of snatches of the liturgical Latin of the Church, floating on the surface and even melting into the stream of the common people's new Cymric, that though for Aulus himself the words he recited were blurred by half a lifetime of Christian invocation they carried many familiar overtones to each one of his hearers.

What Porius himself derived from them was vague enough, but they seemed to declare that by some imperial edict any ground must be venerated as holy ground whether it were a shrine, an altar, the ground of a standard, a special place, or anything else that had been dedicated and consecrated as sacred to the gods; and as for the sepulchres of those who had died for their country and for their children's children, they must be held sacred for evermore.

And indeed as Aulus went on playing one part, so perfectly suited to him, of a soldier-priest, these ancient Roman words, breaking the silence of that phantasmal moonlight, gave Porius the feeling of an invisible confraternity of free souls binding together the living and the dead, and building the foundation, in the midst of all life's chaos of destruction and disaster, of an imperishable city of justice and security.

"lmperator ait sacrum esse quocunque modo atque instituto civitates consecratum sit, sive aedis, sive ara, sive signum, sive locus, sive quid aliud quod deis dedicatum atque consecratum sit; pro patria, pro liberis, pro aris, atque focis suis, loquenti consecrata et sepulchra defendimus."

The whole scene left a quite special impression on Porius's mind. At moments indeed the antique solemnity of the centurion's tone, combined with the emotional tension they were all feeling, brought him very near laughter as well as tears; for there was something that struck him as extraordinarily quaint in the pedantic pronunciation of the horse tamer from Deganwy compared with the old-fashioned forest-people’s accent of Afagddu, for whom the syllables were just magic gibberish, and each of these compared with the guttural consonants and far-drawn, poetical vowel sounds of Gwythyr’s modern *Cymric.*

But it was when it was all over, and himself and Gwythyr and the Deganwy horse tamer were riding off, leaving Aulus and Afagddu, who preferred to walk for five hours rather than ride for one and who had friends who would give them shelter for the night among the tents by the lake, that the new Prince of Edeyrnion got the full impact of his slowly accumulating thoughts. The Deganwy man had chosen a horse for him that was as steady as it was strong; for his knowledge of horses was nil, and he rode a little ahead of the others, neither of whom, though they knew horses, knew the sheep tracks across the moors as he did. And, as he rode, his soul hardened in its resolution to leave his new responsibility and to follow the emperor, even as the emperor was following Colgrim.

“Colgrim,” he told himself, “is clearly against giving battle till he has joined his brother; and the emperor’s horsemen are too few to do more than harass his march till he reaches Baldulf at Caer Badon.”

What he remembered later of this moonlit ride, during which, as far as his horse was concerned, he might have been mounted on a centaur who knew every mile of the way, were chiefly his thoughts about Creiddylad. He was heading now for the Brother’s cell, whither he had earlier that evening commanded little Neb, with Gunta mounted behind him on that plump roan horse, to meet him that night for food and sleep; and he kept thinking as he constantly had to pull up and look back, so as to keep the horse tamer and young Gwythyr in sight, how fate in four days, Thursday night to Friday night, Friday night to Saturday night, Saturday to Sunday, and Sunday to Monday, had changed his whole life and his whole life's future.

"What that Sais felt for Gunta's mother," he said to himself, "what Mother feels for Medrawd, what Brochvael feels for Sibylla, what Morfydd feels for old Rhun, I feel for Creiddylad! And she'd be alive now if it weren't for me. That's the way life goes. That's what life is. And a person has to face it. I shall enjoy myself still. I shall 'cavoseniargize' to the end of my days. But my Creiddylad is dead; whereas Edeyrn ap Cunedda's Creiddylad lives in her great-grandson, that is, in me."

It was by the edge of Lake Tegid that his longest pause was made, for an unexpected mist had come down from the Cader and the moonlight was obscured. It was a white mist that had descended, not a yellow one like that which he had seen on Thursday when he watched the river from above the Gaer gate. And it did not conceal every stretch of the horizon, but it produced, all the same for that, and in a sense *because of that,* an effect that increased the feeling he had that this night was destined to be a turning point in his life.

What the mist really did was to reduce the particular segment of the solid planetary orb upon which he stood to the quality of the airy space above it. This it did by taking the waters of Lake Tegid into partnership and by using them on this particular night as a magician might have used some powerful magnetic force to reverse at this special point in Space and Time the normal processes of Nature.

Certainly what Porius felt, as half a mile off on the mountainside the two horsemen who were following him appeared and disappeared and again reappeared, was that all the men and women he knew — his mocking progenitor excepted perhaps — were acting like madmen in the seriousness with which they took this business of life. "What does it matter," he asked himself, as he played with the fancy that a circle of rocks rising out of the water near him might be that actual cauldron of Ceridwen turned to stone for a thousand years, that cauldron upon which the boy Taliesin had brooded so long that he had come to believe the great goddess to have carried him in her womb, "what does it matter that I love Creiddylad, and that my mother loves Medrawd, and that Morfydd loves Rhun? Why should I take it so seriously that, as I stand here with the power of swimming backwards through Time or of flying upwards through Space, I have decided against going home to the Gaer? Why should there be in the world at all such tiresome actualities as Time stretching backwards without end, and Space stretching outward without end? Why should there be such a grotesque concatenation of incongruities as this clumsy Herculean fool that calls himself Porius ab Einion standing between Space without end and Time without end and holding it a tragic and important matter whether he, a dark-haired skeleton, covered with powerful muscles and hard flesh, should decide to fight against light-haired skeletons, also covered with powerful muscles and hard flesh, rather than stay at home and see his mother love his emperor's enemy, his wife love his own friend, and this same friend struggle to make Mynydd-y-Gaer, with all its relics of Rhitta Gawr, love the Persian Mithras more than the Jewish Jesus?

"Uncle Brochvael would be wiser," so his thoughts ran on, "to let me carry off Master Drom to Caergwynt, and go back to his chair by the fire, with Aristophanes on the table and Morfydd's old nurse within call.

"No, no! The real madness in this world is to take *anything* too seriously. Heaven help me, if that's not just what I'm doing now! How he *over* there would laugh at his solemn son turned mocker! The Lord help me, no! What I'll do for the rest of my days is neither to love nor laugh nor curse nor cry.

I'll pretend to be a god, a god who can create something out of nothing and can enjoy anything."

He remained by his imaginary cauldron of Ceridwen till Owain and Gwythyr reached him; and from there to Saint Julian's Fount — a distance of less than ten miles — he explained his intention of leaving Edeyrnion for an indefinite time.

Owain Pen Uchel made no precise comment; for he had the peculiarity, a useful one in his occupation, of expressing himself by extremely slight movements of hands and features, body and head. But his intermittent way of breaking the silence by subtle gradations of inarticulate sighs, groans, grunts, murmurs, and whistlings indicated that he possessed levels and layers of feeling from the recesses of which what he had just heard could hardly be accepted at its face value.

But it was a totally different thing with Gwythyr. Porius was affected a great deal more than he had supposed possible by the way Gwythyr received his cautious confession. He forgot that his thirty years of hunting and fishing and learning Latin and acquiring philosophy from Brother John struck Gwythyr as the life experience of a statesman. Not having the faintest notion how utterly his self-conscious reserve and his inability to mix easily had been misunderstood at both Mynydd-y-Gaer and Ogof-y-Gawr, it never occurred to him that a thoughtful and rebellious youth to whom his indulgent good nature had been a revelation could in this short space of time grow as devoted to him as was, with the natural difference of their age and sex, little Gunta herself.

"I'm a fool in every kind of way," he thought, when he actually caught a choking sound in the agitated protests of Nesta's youthful husband. "I ought to have kissed that cauldron-shaped rock in Tegid Lake; and then maybe I'd have got a sprinkling of the great goddess's wisdom and known how to deal with that touchy Pen Beirdd and with this sweet-natured boy too!"

Very soon, as they followed the curves of the sacred river, in order to distract Gwythyr's mind from their separation he began again asking him questions about the trouble at the death feast. This had the instantaneous effect of making the horse tamer drop behind. "Well! I shall take *him* with me. Our old Gaer stables can get on without experts. Besides, being used to Deganwy, he'll help me with the emperor's court."

"Yes, my Prince," Gwythyr was soon proudly saying. "I didn't see Her myself. But when the priest began calling on the crowd at the back where Nesta and I were standing to bear witness to the piety in our river town and to the pleasure we all got down there from building the church to Saint Julian and from the changing of the name from Mithras Market to Corwen or the White Choir, and some of us began supporting Master Drom and shouting that a Christian like him who followed the teachings of the learned Pelagius was far nearer to the truth than an upstart boy from the Bishop's School across the Mountain of the Mothers. She'd been whispering to me for some time what she felt, and when the old woman from Ty Cerrig shouted in the hearing of them all that the death of the Three Princesses and the murder of the druid and the plundering of Ogof-y-Gawr and Ogof-yr-Avanc by the Saeson were signs that the great powers of the forest and the river were angry and needed to be appeased, I couldn't restrain her; nor, my Prince, for I see you can endure all truths, did I try to restrain her. And she spoke like an inspired prophetess. She knew her father was away burying the Patrician, or I expect she wouldn't have dared to do as she did. And she knew the Lady Morfydd and not the Lady Euronwy was our ruler now.

"'Men of Edeyrnion,' she kept crying to them, 'why must you entoil and moil yourselves over difficult points of doctrine, disputing among yourselves whether the bishops are right or that saintly one from the sea the Greeks call Pelagius, and whether the Son of Man is best revealed in the marvel of a voice in a man's soul or the marvel of holy bread on the altar, when all the while we women know that it is the Mother of Jesus, the most pure, the most wise, the most merciful Mary, who can alone read the heart of her blessed Son and understand the will of the heavenly Father? What's the matter with you that these things are concealed from you and revealed to a girl like me?'

"And it was *then,* my Prince, as she cried those words aloud, that she suddenly began pointing with her finger to the part of the hall that was most shadowy, the part opposite to where the Lady Morfydd was sitting on the dais and the Lady Euronwy was sitting on that ordinary chair from her chamber, and as she pointed she cried, and I can hear her cry still, my Prince.

"'There!' she cried. 'I've called to her and she has come! I've prayed to her, and she has answered. There! There! — Look! Oh, look!' And at that she sank on the ground, covering her face and crying: 'Mother of God, save us! Mother of God, save us!' I was ready to kneel with her; though, as I say, my Prince, I had seen nothing, but the old nurse from Ty Cerrig pulled me aside and began undoing her clothes and slapping her hands, and acting as if she had a fit or something like that."

Out of respect for the lad's feeling Porius had been letting their horses move so slowly that it was not long after Gwythyr's narrative came to an end that he realized that the horse tamer from Deganwy had pulled up and was waiting for them. Indeed, when they reached him he fancied he detected an extremely cynical expression on the fellow's face.

"It's a trick of the moonlight," he told himself; but he had an uneasy feeling that the court which surrounded the present child-Prince of

Deganwy, though not as yet as sophisticated as that which surrounded the emperor, was on the way to becoming so.

Arthur’s perpetual absence on his campaigns corresponded with this little boy’s perpetual absence on his pony or on his hobbyhorse; the result in both cases coming to resemble what was going on in Constantinople, namely, the rule of savage warriors and cruel despots alternating with that of passionate women and crafty priests. Thus though that curious look on the horse tamer’s face, when they caught him up and all three rode on abreast, might have been an effect of the moonlight, it might also have had to do, Porius decided, with the effect produced on the Deganwy man’s mind by the close link which had obviously come about between the new prince and his youthful retainer in the absence of their newly enjoyed wives.

It was anyway due to this link, whatever its nature, as well as due to Porius’s wretched horsemanship, that they had ridden so gently; and this had brought it about that their horses had remained quite fresh, so that now, when he would have liked to forget everything and to drown his feelings in the pure sensation of rapid movement, he couldn’t satisfy this craving because of a simple fear of being thrown from the animal’s back. Nevertheless, he did derive a quite peculiar and special satisfaction from pretending to himself he was crushing under his horse’s hooves all manner of thought excrescences and feeling excrescences that, like the toadstools the forest people called frog food, seemed to him, under the keel of that white moon-ship, to be dropping to the ground, like the diseased flesh of Gwydion’s wounded eagle who was in reality his incestuous son.

Along the well-known edge of Saint Julian’s Water he was leading his companions now, his consciousness as detached from that of the creature he rode as if they had been animals of different planets.

Under the wooden walls of the camp kitchen he went, and along by the edge of the water where the reed stalks had gathered to themselves out of the moonlight an unearthly tint that was neither green nor grey nor black nor brown, and could only be described by the adjective "Cimmerian," and, as his companions followed him, the hooves of their three horses struck against isolated pieces of wood and stone, splashed through water, and sank into mud; and though the sound they made in doing so was a confused one and could hardly be described by any of the usual poetical terms, the thudding past those ramshackle erections of what Homer might have called a dozen uncloven hooves would certainly have been audible to anyone lying awake, watching the moonlight, and listening to the lapping of the water, from the security of Craig Hen.

When at length they reached his own nuptial shelter the younger of his companions arrested his attention by the interest he showed in this small pavilion with the result that he himself, swerving in his seat and forgetting what he was doing, gave a blind and thoughtless jerk to his horse's head and came extremely near having a dangerous fall.

So near did he come to this undignified disaster that he pulled up altogether and jerked himself stiffly and awkwardly from the saddle to the ground.

"You two had better ride on," he said, with no attempt to excuse, or apologize for, the shock he had given them and given his horse. "Unless the ladies especially desire to see you — and of course it's possible they may — my advice to you both is to go to sleep *as soon* as you possibly can and for *as long* as you possibly can. Leave all drastic decisions till tomorrow. Don't think of dangerous things or of horrible things. Just go to sleep up there, thinking of nothing at all! Only remember I shall need you both back here by noon tomorrow and on horseback, though not necessarily on the same horses; fresh ones might be better. Don't tell different stories to the two ladies. In fact you'd better tell them the truth. But, truth or untruth, for God's sake *tell them the same thing."*

There was indeed a certain element of hesitation and reluctance about leaving him in both the men's manners. Porius dallied with the idea that it was pure personal affection for him on the part of Gwythyr and pure self-interest, though of a kind too subtle for him to follow, on the part of the man from Deganwy. One difference he could clearly gather from their words and behaviour: Gwythyr would have liked to have shared his wife's bed at the Gaer even if it were now nearly dawn; while Owain Pen Uchel would have been glad enough to tie up his horse outside Brother John's cell and to have enjoyed a pleasant midnight's colloquy with the new Gaer physician. Porius could read in his crafty but very expressive face his hope of finding somebody beside baby Magog celebrating the passing of midnight by a warm Jewish hearth where — though both mother and infant would doubtless be hushed in natural sleep — there might well be some savoury Israelitish brew, or at least some richly spiced Arabian drink, that had been solacing the occult studies of the learned doctor.

But Porius, suddenly attacked by all manner of alarms and apprehensions, had recourse now to his most taciturn, reserved, and aloof manner, begging them to be as silent as they could and to take his horse as well as their own back to the Gaer. As long as he could catch the faintest sound of their departure he remained motionless as an upright wooden post between the reeds and the blank wall of stone. But when, save for the faint lapping of the water, there was nothing to be heard but those infinitesimal night noises, for the naming of which there would be needed — on a moonlit night as much as on any other — the concentrated ear of a being as superior to man, in its apprehensive senses, as to any bird or beast, noises which might have been the faint squeals of shrew mice dreaming of predatory claws, or the languid ascendings to the surface of immature pond newts dimly stirred by the inescapable motions of Eros, or the sliding down into the watchful grasses of oak apples emptied of their softest dust, or the breaking of minute eel bubbles between the reed stalks, or the relaxing of bent leaves as the warm bodies of sleeping birds press closer to the branches, or the escape with a stir indescribable, yet not unworthy of being called a sound, of a feathery moth, whose desperate thirst for the last drop of perishing sweetness in some old dark-hidden, half-sucked poison berry had made it defiant of the shameless moon, then, indeed, save for the lapping of the water and these faint intermittent sounds of the creatures of the night, he was as completely surrounded by silence as the prow of an ice-bound ship in a frozen sea.

The curious feeling came over him as he stood there that he had entered an enchanted bubble of quiescence, gathered up for himself of his own volition, and hung by himself — though he had the power of entering into it — between the horns of Time and Space.

And he remembered how during all his years at the Bishop's School across the mountains when the talk ran upon the mysterious personality of Myrddin Wyllt there would be mention of some newfangled Gaulish word sounding — though it couldn't have been exactly that — like the syllables *"esplumeoir."* The feeling he had now was certainly connected with Myrddin Wyllt, and it suggested to his mind some interminable epoch during which he, along with Myrddin Wyllt, would be waiting for the arrival of some year, some day, some moment of time, that would prove the signal or the opportunity for a tremendous achievement which they were fated by an inescapable *tynged,* or "destiny," to accomplish together.

He looked at the massive silent grey wall of the Brother's cell. "It's still only Monday night," he thought, "and it was Thursday when I ate the Mithras honey with old Rhun and came here to sleep, my head full of Medrawd and that snake picture. Well! If it weren't for the emperor there'd be more of us dead than *those* two and the Modrybedd."

But it wasn't "those two" nor the Three Aunties who dominated his mind as he moved to the familiar entrance. It was Brother John himself. Fresh from the Patrician's grave he noticed at once the disturbed earth and the strange collection of pious offerings which at the order of Lot-el-Azziz, or of the recumbent Moabitess, or even perhaps, by the look of certain small objects, from the hands of the youthful Gog, decorated the edge of the newly replaced stones and gravel.

And then he was aware of an aspect of his feelings that struck him as a curious phenomenon. He hadn't seen the Patrician die; whereas he *had* seen Brother John die. Was it for this very reason that in spite of his much greater intimacy with the latter he felt far less concerned about *his* face than he had felt just now up there on the mountains.

He felt as though there was nothing really essential of the old Brother's identity that had been laid away in that pit. But he had scarcely come to this conclusion than he heard a horse — or it may have even been two horses — make some small uneasy movements in the old shed, beyond the left-hand doorpost, and he had barely advanced a step in the direction of this sound than he found himself facing quite a large group of sleeping forms. There indeed were the horses — all three of them — just as he had left them outside Gwendydd's pavilion; and crouching beside these animals, their heads pillowed on fresh-cut bracken, were the immobile figures of Neb ap Digon and Gunta ferch Gunhorst.

Both the children were so deeply asleep that they might have been dead. Gunta's right arm lay across the boy's chest, and her own face was pressed against the deep mass of green bracken under their heads, while the relentless moon, like an Egyptian spirit of judgment, made clear by the way the doll's feet were protruding from beneath its mistress's cloak that she had overlaid it in her sleep.

Neb was lying on his back, his little pinched face carrying upon its indrawn lines and hollow cavities such a weight of responsibility that Porius hurriedly tiptoed backwards and bending down to avoid the low stone lintel entered the portico.

"The poor child! The poor child!" he thought. "May I be damned as deep as Medrawd if I add to his cares tonight!"

And that small face, tossed back against the moonlit heap of heavily scented bracken, the face of some infantile descendant of ten generations of world rulers, hovered at the back of his mind during all the impressions he received that night and only melted away when he too was asleep.

It seemed indeed that it was into the very citadel and sanctuary of sleep that he entered now. The Moabitess was asleep by the fire with the newborn in her arms and little Gog on the floor at her feet. Stretched out on the bed where the Brother had died and propped up by every pillow in the place, including the one that was stuffed with the softest feathers and kept for royal or at least for courtly visitors, was Myrddin Wyllt; while Lot-el-Azziz, balanced on the edge of the bed, was rubbing the counsellor's legs and every now and then listening intently through his familiar ram's horn to his formidable patient's heart throbs.

Reposing on the couch Porius himself had so often used and on the side of the fire opposite to the daughter of Moab, lay, and *she* at least was fully awake, the perilous and lovely Nineue. The fire was burning warmly and steadily, for there was peat mixed with the wood, but at this particular moment there were few flames, and the only light in that chamber of sleep came from a torch just above Nineue's head with its brown curls and wide-open eyes.

There was something in the mere fact that the couch on which the beautiful Ffichtiaid lay was on the floor and not raised up, as was the bed beneath the centre arch of the chamber, that intensified the attraction of that prostrate figure by making it, as it were, the magnetic pearl at the bottom of a shadowy wooden bowl, the meaning of which was that the whole circumference of this softly curving rondure drew a stranger down to the shell-like loveliness ensconced in its depths.

Porius noticed at once that at the head of the raised bed under the central arch there was a tall table whereon rested a massive silver bowl full of steaming mead on the surface of which floated two small cups, from which it looked probable that at increasingly short intervals both patient and doctor had been heavily drinking.

The doctor in truth was already nodding over his task, and the counsellor was unmistakably in one of those semi-trances from the depth of which he might utter any tremendous planetary oracle, or, on the other hand, might start babbling some incoherent gibberish that sounded like ancient Greek.

Nobody but the doctor seated on the edge of the bed and the Ffichtiaid woman lying on the floor by the fire seemed to notice Porius's entrance; and, of these, the doctor merely made a helpless shrug and a deprecating gesture, indicating his complete inability to suggest in what portion of this hall of sleep the newcomer could find a place, while Nineue, without beckoning to him or smiling at him, deliberately and quietly made room for him on the couch by her side.

No sooner had he made an answering gesture to this unequivocal though mute signal than the doctor went back to rubbing the magician's legs, while Myrddin Wyllt, apparently unaware of his presence, went on muttering a sentence in Greek which he knew from his schooling on the other side of the Mountain of the Mothers must refer to the huge earth hiding something.

Hiding what? But in truth such an overpowering longing for sleep had begun to fall upon him that he cared not what it hid. All he desired just then, all he could endure without pain just then, was to sink down to the uttermost floor of the universe and sleep there while aeons of time moved through their fatal spirals.

But there was not for Porius at that moment a single moth's-wing shiver of hesitation as to what he should do. He crossed over to the couch on the floor of the chamber just as if it had been on the floor of the universe, and he met the grey eyes of Nineue under that single torch as if they had been the eyes of the mother of Cronos.

But the strange thing was that when he stood before Nineue and shamelessly began undressing as if they had been alone in that place and had known each other for four years rather than for only four days, though he was craving for the release of sleep as if it were the removal of an iron band from his forehead, he was not in the least drugged in his wits or confused in his senses. The movements of his muscles as he took off his clothes and untwisted the deerskin straps from his legs were accompanied by the rapid movements of thoughts so detached, so uninvolved, so independent, that it was a wonder they didn't paralyze the natural reactions of his senses or reduce them to a tantalized sullenness.

But there was no such effect. His mind moved actively on *its* plane and his senses abandoned themselves on *their* plane. And there was an easy and natural interplay between them. Had his mind been less active his senses would not have been led on as they were nor have recorded what they did. And yet it would be untrue to say that the man's conscious self behind his thoughts and behind his senses was happy that night. It was unhappy. It was a self in pain; it was a self with an iron bar round its forehead; it was a self that behind its thought dancing and sense swimming had only one infinite longing — the longing to go to sleep.

Among the thoughts that raced through his mind as he lay down by Nineue, and for several minutes contented himself with thrusting his left arm beneath her body so that he had her so to speak at his disposal, was a somewhat poignant awareness of the comic element, that element so cruel and merciless and universal, which the refining of human lechery for good and evil by the Christian revelation had introduced into the bed of Eros.

He was also aware as he lay there of a thing that struck him as very odd; namely, that whenever he met her eyes under the single torch — for, turned towards her now, he had begun stroking her side as if she were a feathered creature liable at any second to take flight — he got the impression that his caresses were only a minor element in a long-drawn-out, quietly muted ecstasy to which she had begun to abandon herself before he appeared on the scene at all, a subsexual sensuous ecstasy, practically identical with his self-centred "cavoseniargizing."

And this suited Porius perfectly. Nothing indeed could have been easier for him just then than to fall in with such a mood if only, yes, if only he were not so sick for sleep.

But, for all that, if this strange being desired to enjoy every subtle delight of the first approaches of male to female before she would let him sleep, if indeed Nature had given her a skin as uniquely responsive and delicate to the touch and as slippery-soft as Aphrodite's own, for no other purpose than that the deliciousness of sex free from all passion should be added to the planetary sensations he called “cavoseniargizing,” who was he to reject such delicate sharing, even if, for still another painful moment, he had to hold sleep at bay?

He was never able afterwards — intensely as he tried at a later time and painfully distinct though all his thoughts were in retrospect — to trace the connection between the look of his grandfather’s closely cropped and proudly moulded Roman head as he caught a glimpse of it on the back of the horse when, holding in his hand the loaf of Jewish bread he was devouring, for he had been hungry for hours, he hurried out to meet the two who had brought the body, between, in fact, the look of the old man’s skull as he saw it then and the taste of the honey Sacrament he had shared with Rhun in the Cave.

But that there was such a connection he felt certain; and he trusted, as he might have done in a dream, that all would presently be made clear. As the distracting and maddening silkiness of her yielded body began to make dalliance predatory and desire rapacious, he found that his desperate craving for sleep which a moment ago had become a band of iron round his head had dissolved away. Its place was taken, however, by a dance of thought that was as frantic in its desperation as it was shameless in its direction.

And yet as he recalled his feelings later in cold blood he recognized that at the moment when his embrace of that Persephonean form was in the act of being perfected he received from some divine power — *from which* of the divine powers how the devil was *he* to know? — a lighthouse-clear intimation as to his affection for Morfydd and reckless love of Creiddylad. For he recognized now what the real cause was of the fate, or *tynged*, laid on him never to know what normally is called love.

Yes, at the age of thirty he had to accept the fact that he could never know the famous passion as his mother knew it for Medrawd, and Morfydd for Rhun, and Rhun for Gwendydd, and even, if the Gaer rumour could be trusted, Sibylla for the late prince.

And the cause was that with him all erotic feelings were distinct and separate, and, though he could feel many different emotions for the same object and even at the same moment, they never coalesced or were fused into one; whereas it was out of the fusion into a single burning flame of many different elements that what is called "the passion of love" comes into existence.

And now under that torch and to the tune of the steady breathing of the exhausted Moabitess and her two sons varied by the guttural invocations of the doctor as he murmured an ancient Rabbinical prayer for the punctual appearance of a divinely directed sunrise, the new ruler of Edeyrnion drew from that form between his hands in the ravishing of which he seemed to be ravishing, or the perilous full moon was indeed fooling him, all the waters of the Divine River itself and all the enchanted swamps and forests between Deganwy and Eryri, such a revelation about his fate in regard to the women of his life as he had never imagined could be revealed about what Brother John used to call *ta erotica,* or "the things of Eros," by any woman to any mortal man!

And these things were not revealed to him in words by Nineue, nor by looks, nor by the passage of *her* thoughts into *his.* She, as he knew well, was "cavoseniargizing" in his own fashion. That is to say, she was drawing into herself the torchlight on the rafters, the oriental abandonment to the peace of the desert of the mother of Gog and Magog, the boyish fits and starts of Gog, the impenetrable serenity, like the moon on the Lake of Galilee, of Magog's slumber, the extraordinary, hardly human shadows, thrown upon the wall beyond the bed of the doctor and the magician, physically so closely involved, but mentally further apart than the Pillars of Hercules and the Sea of Marmora; and beyond all these she was drawing into herself the whole vast moonlit night outside this place, and the ridges beyond ridges of rocks and precipices and forests and hilltops and mountaintops, including those across which — played hither, played thither, by the great chess-playing emperor to whom the game of war was the breath of life — those simple-minded young horsemen were even now driving and decoying and coaxing and again driving the savage yellow-heads of Colgrim the Sais, driving them towards Badon Mount in Gwlad-yr-Haf, yes! and including scenes of which she could know nothing, such as that appalling mountain tarn, not so far away from here, whose horror, of all the dwellers in Edeyrnion he alone knew, knew indeed so well that he had only to shut his eyes at this moment to see it clearly and completely.

"Yes," he thought, "she's enjoying herself just as I do. There's the difference, of course, that she draws into herself the things she enjoys, whereas I fling myself into the things I enjoy. But that's only because she's a woman and I'm a man. Otherwise our enjoyment's the same. Sex is a side issue with both of us. I knew it directly I first saw her. I guessed it when the old counsellor first spoke of her to Rhun and me on our way to Gwendydd's tent."

Once more the taste of that Jewish loaf he was so ravenously munching when he heard the horses and went out to meet Gwythyr and the other with the old Roman's body came back to him. He had swallowed the whole of that loaf before he rode on with them, and it was twice as large as those of the Gaer kitchen, thrice as large as those made by the old woman at Ty Cerrig.

Magog’s mother must have baked it just before her pains came on — perhaps while they were actually beginning. It was Jewish bread and it was family bread, and how remote, how absolutely alien to his whole world of sensation was *the family* — the holy, sacred, must-be-preserved, must-be-obeyed family!

“I’m like *him over there,”* he said to himself, “in this business of the family. Only I yield to it entirely when I’m in it and run away from it altogether when I get the chance; whereas he defied it, treated it with open irony, and acted as if it didn’t exist.”

And then it occurred to him that the very manner of making love to her in which he was at this moment indulging, was, though full of the particular kind of imaginative and poetic subtlety that evidently suited them both so well, more like the lovemaking of one of the saurian monsters that his prototype Hercules was always slaying than it was like the furious rush of erotic obsession which marked that hero’s amours.

“Am I so like this she-devil, this *ellylles*,” he said to himself, “that I can leave Morfydd, shake off my mother, treat the tragic death of the Three Aunties as if it had happened when I was a baby instead of yesterday, separate myself from old Rhun with whom I entered into a covenant of brothers-in-arms, and finally — and finally—” But at that point he became aware of a singular fact. The image of his mother, the image of Morfydd, the image of Rhun could all float up and down on the tide of his present dalliance, but the desperate gasping cry of passion and pain with which Creiddylad had yielded to him, and that false, old, stupid, Christian tag about “love” being “enough” which she had so proudly and pitifully allowed to be torn from her heart, these things he had to hold off; and as a man in a boat on a swift stream pushes away with his oar across the dark water some huge floating log that otherwise would sink his light craft, so he had to thrust from his mind the thought of Creiddylad.

But what he couldn't shut from his mind was the figure of Myrddin Wyllt as he lay on Brother John's bed throwing a monstrous shadow that was divided into two halves. He remembered how last Thursday night from that same bed Brother John had jested about the Homeric epithet for the *father of the father* of gods and men! "Crooked counselling" enough looked the emperor's counsellor, as he lay there in his huge unwieldiness, but his shadow was different. His shadow divided itself into two portions, one of which fell on the stone arch, just beyond the bed, and the other on the broad wooden rafter, above the window slit that faced east.

And Porius found himself, as he thrust both his hunger and his dead giantess out of his mind and went on making love, more in the procrastinating manner of one of Hercules' monsters than of their slayer, catching a glimpse, if he turned his head away from Nineue for a moment, of an aspect of the counsellor's face — and this appeared more in the shadow than in the face itself — that would, he thought, have aroused awe even in the prejudiced Rhun or the exacting Brochvael.

The man's actual features, as Porius caught them at this particular moment of his own shameless preoccupation, were just as ugly, just as monstrous even, as he had noted them at his first encounter, but they were something else.

Lot-el-Azziz was sound asleep now, his high forehead resting on his ram's horn, which itself, either by chance or providential intervention, was neatly and firmly balanced upon the counsellor's bare chest, and his breath coming as evenly and quietly as the sleeping breath of a wild ass, safe in a cave on the slopes of Mount Hermon.

But the weight of that rabbinical forehead seemed to cause not the slightest discomfort to the counsellor. *His* breath also rose and fell evenly, causing the oddly shaped head upon his breast to rise and fall with it; but it was not his impenetrable quietness that gave Porius this strange feeling of awe and that animated with so majestic a dignity the counsellor's subhuman features. An emanation of some tremendous magnetic force — some godlike force Porius was tempted to call it — radiated from that monstrous physiognomy.

It was as if quite lazily, languidly, carelessly, easily, naturally, the counsellor was in the act, at that very moment, of playing the part of some pre-Olympian creator of cosmic powers and shapes and essences.

What in fact soon became a kind of background to his "cavoseniargizing, "as that itself was already the background of his dalliance with Nineue, was the sense of being upheld, he and Nineue alike, and all the rest with them, on a cloud of magnetic power, that might take, if the god who was moulding it and directing it so willed, the familiar forms and colours of the world to which they were accustomed, but which might also, at the fiat of the same power, assume startlingly unfamiliar and overwhelmingly new forms and shapes!

It did just flicker once across his consciousness before this semi-rational condition vanished in sleep that it proved how correctly *he over there* had estimated the intelligence of his offspring, that he who had undertaken, he who had felt himself entrusted by the emperor and by all Ynys Prydein to undertake the protection of the counsellor, and who had sworn to associate himself with Neb ap Digon in the same task, should now have given himself up to this she-devil; given himself up to her who was, after Colgrim the Sais, and after Medrawd the madman, and after the nameless young priest, the worst enemy the counsellor had, and maybe that all Ynys Prydein had!

Why then didn’t he feel compunction at sleeping with Nineue like this? Why didn’t he feel the faintest prick of conscience? Once more he turned his head round a little and surveyed that tremendous shape with the Jewish doctor’s high forehead rising and falling with every breath the figure drew.

Yes! There was the reason! He and this woman, together with Neb and Gunta outside, and all of them within this place, and together no doubt, if the “herdsman from the south” cared to summon them, with all the birds and beasts and reptiles of the neighbourhood, were completely in this mysterious being’s power.

Nineue herself — ah! she must have known *that* all along! — couldn’t really hurt her titanic lover against his own will. What Porius felt for Nineue was certainly not love. But on the other hand it could not be called unmixed lust. The odd thing about it was that it revealed itself — this queer strong link between them — as naturally, and easily, and as completely without shyness, as if they had been disembarking upon a familiar shore every inch of which they had known in former times and known together.

Whether she fell asleep before he did he never discovered. Probably their separate consciousness faded into oblivion simultaneously; but at any rate for Porius, as he sank into nothingness at her side, there came, just before he slept, a sensation that had to do with poplar leaves, poplar leaves that were whirling and circling, eddying and circling, drifting and circling, quivering and circling, and were finally lying at rest; lying at rest among the willow leaves that had drawn them there, and that themselves had come to rest upon a moss that is softer than any leaves, the soft white moss that grows on the bank of the ocean-river, across which, however long you look, you cannot see the bank on the other side.

CHAPTER XXIX. The Half-Woman

IN HER ANXIETY TO FIND EURONWY, so as to ask her advice about the agitations of that disturbed death feast, Morfydd hurried from end to end of the dimly lit corridors of the Gaer. After seeking her in vain in her chamber she began looking for her and asking for her in the eastern part of the great fortress.

Glancing into the littered and desolate banquet hall, which, save for dead bodies and spilt blood, resembled the hall of Aegisthus after the murder, she was startled to see a man talking surreptitiously and furtively, but with an eager, nervous, shivering intensity, to a group of young men belonging to the *Gosgordd* who were helping to clear the hall. There were several serving girls in the open doorway watching and listening; and since her own head was covered — as were the heads of the other girls — so that her features in that shadowy torchlight were neutralized to an obscure white blur, she didn't hesitate to advance among the other loiterers a little nearer to the man so as to catch something of what he was saying. She had inherited from her mother not only a bold light step but a bold light spirit and a mind prepared for unexpected and even improbable events.

So that when she recognized in the man, though he was specially dressed to avoid such recognition, the features of Medrawd the emperor's nephew, heir to the sovereignty of Ynys Prydein, she retained her presence of mind in a manner that few Brython maids could have shown. She pulled her shawl still closer about her head and moved up near to the group.

At the first she had suspected treachery; and she soon found that Medrawd was explaining to the young men the total impossibility of the emperor’s overtaking Colgrim before he joined his brother at Mount Badon, the certainty that the combined armies of the Saeson would be unassailable in that particular spot, and his own secret information from friends in Northern Gaul who knew the ways of the Saeson in their native land that since their population was increasing so rapidly, and increasing in proportion to their *growing skill in ship building,* there wasn’t the faintest chance that the emperor would be able permanently to keep them out. Colgrim’s invasion was nothing, she heard him explain, to what would follow.

The important thing was that all the Brythons who were sick of the House of Cunedda and sick of the other Christian princes in the south who resembled them should join with the forest people in calling themselves “comrades,” or *“Cymry,”* and be prepared, when the signal was sent round, to act as the great Gortheyrn did and cry *“Drincheil!”* and drive out Rome and her Christian bishops and return to the *Derwyddon* and the ancient ways.

“Yes,” she heard in that low clear deadly voice, “yes, we must do more than Gortheyrn did! The great Gortheyrn’s work was undone by his son Gorthevyr Bendigeit, who brought back all those curst foreign priests and bishops before Ronwen had time to stop his mouth forever. But we must do better! We must kill off not only the leaders but all their perverted followers.”

Morfydd had the wit to slip out of the hall before the heir to Arthur’s throne had finished explaining his plans for the transformation of the people he wished to rule, by the massacre of half of them and the introduction of thousands of fair-haired Ronwens from the forests of the north for the founding of a new and less scrupulous nation; but she was now assaulted by many troublesome doubts.

Did Euronwy know of Medrawd’s presence here? And, if she did, what was she going to do? Did she know how far his treacheries went? “I must find my father,” Morfydd thought. “And if I can’t find him I must just swallow my pride and send somebody to get hold of Rhun. This is without question what they call a man’s business.”

She smiled as she moved slowly down the corridor, her feet instinctively seeking the chapel, for without troubling to give her feeling the form of words she thought vaguely of various occasions when she would have liked the chance of settling such “businesses” out of hand.

But she followed her instinct and moved slowly down the torchlit passage, trying to compel her thoughts to settle themselves into some sort of practical direction. “I wonder,” she thought, “whether Mother felt like this when she first came to Ty Cerrig. I’d give something to know what she’d do in my place.”

But these thoughts were only ripples crisscrossing the surface of her mind, and below them there went on, swimming backwards and forwards, like two great dark-finned fish, the question “Would that one single night with Porius result in a child?” and the question “If not — for it was too soon to know yet — and if Porius remained away with the emperor for half a year, would she have the courage and spirit to make Rhun give her the child she *must* have?”

And then as she came to the chapel door and smelt a distinct wafture of this morning’s incense still hovering about the place, she remembered the vow she and Euronwy had made there together, she on the relics of Rhitta Gawr, and Euronwy on the Holy Sacrament.

Standing now on the threshold, but sufficiently in the shade of the doorpost for her presence to be invisible to anyone within the chapel, she remembered exactly the terms of her own vow, for she had obeyed every one of these terms, in spirit and to the letter.

She had sworn to exert herself to the limit on behalf of Porius as a warrior and a prince and a descendant of Cunedda; and she had done so. Euronwy had sworn the same. But had *she* done so? If the rumours that ran through the Gaer were true she scarcely had. At least the old Patrician wouldn't have considered she had; nor would Porius himself, if he'd heard what his wife had just heard from the emperor's nephew!

That same wife who might, for all she herself knew so far, have the embryo of a new descendant of Cunedda within her, now found herself staring at her own shadow as it was waveringly and dimly thrown by a smoking torch suspended in a bronze sconce by an iron hook in the wall a little to the left of her sheltering doorpost.

"You've got to be brave," she told herself. "If you can only be brave and can manage to *stay* brave, anything may happen! But you must know what you'd like to happen, you who threw the man you wanted out of your bed to keep yourself for the man who doesn't want you! You must know what you'd *like* to happen, and that's not so easy!"

"Not so easy!" repeated that fluttering shadow of a girlish Gwyddyles with a Brythonic cloak over her small head, as the new Gaer Princess straightened her shoulders, swung round the doorpost, and crossed the *trothwy,* or "threshold," of that prehistoric place of worship. Rededicated to the Trinity as it had been since the days of Edeyrn, in the heart of the old fortress of Pen-y-Gewri, where reposed the relics of Rhitta Gawr, King of Kings, this rock cavern had gathered into itself, fold upon tremendous fold, the hierarchic mantle of the sacred terrors of aeons of Time.

True child of her mother in this, for, as Prince Einion used to declare from his knowledge of Sibylla, every Gwyddyles is a walking weathervane of response to the supernatural, Morfydd had taken very seriously her covenant with Euronwy to build up the career of Porius as the heroic strong man of the House of Cunedda.

So seriously had she taken it that, during the recent eventful days, she had avoided like a sacrilege the entrance to this ancient shrine. And even now, had her shadow been able to watch her movements, it would have noticed that her long white wrist and nervous fingers clung with a lingering caress to the time-worn doorpost of the chapel as though it needed an effort to leave even that poor protection.

There *was* someone in this consecrated retreat, but instead of it being Euronwy, whom she expected to find there — lo! it was Rhun! And what on earth was Rhun doing at this hour and in this place? She stood motionless, watching him in petrified silence, praying desperately that the steps she kept hearing in the passage she had just traversed wouldn't approach this threshold. Nobody but herself and Porius — for her dead brother regarded him as a superstitious fanatic — could possibly know how unnatural, how weird, how beyond all rational possibility it was to find this faithful soldier of Mithras in a place where the new worship of Jesus overlapped with the prehistoric cult of Rhitta Gawr.

But it was clear to her, though it wouldn't have been clear to anyone else in the world, that Rhun wasn't thinking of his hero-god or of *any* god, heroic or otherwise, at that moment. He was sitting on the kneeling bench with his back to the double shrine, a broken sword across his knees, broken in half it would seem, with the pointed end clutched in his hand and his head drooping above it, and he was crying like a small boy. The difference, however, between the crying of a grown man and that of a boy is a difference hard to describe because there is more in it than the contrast in mere weight and volume of feeling.

Though Homer compares the expression of heroic grief to the wailing of sea eagles, there could be found a nearer likeness for a strong man shaken by a storm of feeling in the swaying trunk of a knotted tree that shudders to its roots under the rush of a storm, or even in the groaning bulk of a vast ship yielding to the pressure of monstrous waves. It was not only the yellowish rays that spread out into the chapel from the torch above Morfydd's head that gave to this primeval shrine its unusual appearance.

Although the moon itself was invisible it was impossible not to feel the unearthly influence of moonlight. There was indeed a weird atmosphere in the place that was almost like the atmosphere that hangs about a corpse. A ghost herself, the invisible moon seemed to have sucked out the whole inward life, the pith, the sap, the blood juice, of this heart of the old Gaer fortress. In some odd way the Gaer itself seemed to have been detached by some magnetic pull of moon suction from the rest of the earth, as if the moon were anxious to draw it into herself so that it might soothe the icy ache of one of those hollow breasts of extinct craters.

And if the moon were thus sucking the blood from the Gaer, she was doing the same thing to a couple of faint, barely perceptible stars that were just visible to Morfydd through the arrow-slit window. These stars appeared to be receding, and receding under the compulsion of some secret purpose of their own, into an infinity of moon-sucked, life-drained, corpse-grey Space.

If Morfydd neither advanced instantaneously towards Rhun, nor retreated as quietly as she had come, it was not because she lost her self-control or suffered any diminution of her initiative. On the contrary, the self within her that had the power of watching and criticizing her active and instinctive self, hurriedly, suddenly, and with a shock of astonishment, noticed the fact that the sight of Rhun with his head bowed over his broken sword and big tears falling between his knees, instead of driving her to collapse into an emotional chaos, heartened, strengthened, and solidified to an incredible concentration of power and confidence the force of her love for him.

And this was not all. The sight of his weakness not only put strength into her; it rendered that strength calm, resourceful, and disinterested. This moment's pause, therefore, during which she took with her whole soul a deep restorative breath was one of formidable illumination. And it was on the strength of this that she acted at once. She recrossed the chapel threshold and standing on tiptoe on the stone bench under the wall succeeded in disengaging the solitary torch from its support. With this she re-entered the chapel; and after closing the double doors with an iron bar thrust the light she carried into an ancient silver sconce that projected from the wall and going straight up to her old playmate, slid down on the bench by his side, and heedless of the sword on his knees threw her arms round his neck and pulled his head against her shoulder.

And the odd thing was that though she had done this spontaneously she told herself with convincing force that Rhun had counted on her appearance, had *willed her* to join him here, and with a blind, simple, animal-like instinct had drawn her to his side on the bench.

And with that spluttering, smoking, spitting, shadow-throwing torch full in her eyes, and his forehead against her chin, what she now felt was that he was doing the thing he had come to do, namely, to pour out in a torrent of hurt and outraged feelings the whole accumulation of his wrath against Gwendydd.

And Morfydd had good need of the deep reservoir of strength upon which, to her own growing surprise, she found herself able to draw. Rhun was certainly letting himself go as he had rarely done even in their old childish days. His bitterness against Gwendydd kept expressing itself in animal-like groans of pain.

“She simply led me on,” he kept groaning, “from start to finish. She must have taken me for a prize fool, for a gullible fool, for a double-dyed, uneducated, rustic fool, in fact for the tribe’s pet idiot! She intended just simply to use me and our whole quest about Pelagius to establish her and her damned Greek pirate in the favour of their emperor!”

But if Morfydd’s natural human tendency — feminine realist though she was — to give Rhun’s feelings the imponderable turn that suited her best was fully alive, as he confessed his infatuation for Gwendydd, and his shameful sins against the Sacrament of Mithras, she couldn’t help detecting that he was able to tell her all this only because the kind of brother-and-sister comrade trust he had for her precluded the shyer, more complicated, more touchy aspects of sex relationship.

And when he came to tell her about Sibylla’s return and what had been happening that very evening she withdrew her arm from his neck and allowed him to sit straight up on their bench and face her. She had noted his absence from the death feast, but no rumour had reached her as to why he’d been absent.

But he was blurting it all out to her now, shamelessly, pitifully, recklessly, just as if she had been one of those select “participants” in the secret Mithraic rites who were the spiritual “directors” and “sin absolvers” of the humbler “soldiers” of Mithras.

“It was when your father,” he was telling her now, “with that handsome idiot he drags about with him had gone back to Ty Cerrig after leaving the prince’s body in the church. I had a feeling that Porius ab Einion had treated me unfairly; leaving me to fight with this thrice-accurst Jesus man for the honour of our House while he — you don’t mind my talking like this, do you? — was defending Ynys Prydein and going about with the emperor! I tried to tell Porius ab Einion what I felt when I was doing him homage — you don’t mind my talking like this, my dear, do you? — but you know how oddly remote and inhuman — *superhuman* you could almost say — our Porius can be when you tell him things outside the scope of his own interests, things I mean that haven’t to do with Rhitta Gawr, or with Pwyll Pen Annwn, or the Cewri of the Cader?”

Rhun was sitting erect and facing her now, and only at agitating moments when she asked direct questions did he lower his head or fix his eyes on his broken sword. The bronze point of this sword was a dancing place now for two separate reflected flames from the torch in front of them, flames which kept advancing by mutual leaps and bounds only to vanish into nothingness where the point ended.

She couldn’t help smiling when Rhun spoke of Porius’s inhuman aloofness and absorption in his own reactions, and she felt no treachery to her husband in nodding her sympathetic agreement with this philosophical discovery.

Rhun went on to tell her how he had always recognized this same characteristic in Porius’s father.

“It was because of this feeling of mine,” he explained, “that I had no heart for Einion’s death feast. *You’ve* always defended Einion ab Iddawc; but I’ve never — peace to his soul! — understood him, nor he me. Nor do I think he understood my mother, his own sister. You never used to agree when I told you that Porius was more like him than either of them realized — but we won’t argue about *that* now! Anyway the idea came into my head that you and Porius would want somebody to keep Ogof-y-Gawr from falling to bits. I don’t mean keep it, of course, anything like what it’s been with the Aunties there; but not let it fall into complete ruin; and I thought I'd go over there anyway and see what the place looked like."

He paused and gave her an almost sharp look in the flickering light that was suspended opposite them. Yes, it seemed to him that her attention *was* grave and sympathetic. She wasn't despising him or laughing at him, even if she wasn't, and naturally couldn't, go on feeling, in spite of that morning at the Cave, fond of him in the way girls can go on feeling fond of men.

"Well! Do you know what I found? And you must remember, Morfydd, that I was upset, really upset, though I feel so different now that I can scarcely believe I'm the same person as I was when we left Einion ab Iddawc in the church. I found Sibylla, the Gwyddyles! Yes, the mother of that little girl you brought to my cave. Yes, Sibylla herself, your mother's pet! I was feeling desperate, Morfydd. In fact I was feeling — for I don't mind telling *you,* who know me so well, everything I felt — I was feeling as if I couldn't go on with my duty to Mithras, or with my duty to Porius, or with my duty to the emperor. And then suddenly I came upon her. She was — well! it doesn't matter exactly where — but she was on the threshold of Ogof-y-Gawr. Amreu ap Ganion was standing over her, staring and smiling — you know the way he smiles — and he was smiling still when I bade him take himself off and told him I'd question her myself as to what had happened and what she hoped was going to happen. Amreu and his wife seem to have gone back to Ogof-y-Gawr directly the Saeson left. Your father had put that wounded High Prince from the Southern Isles under their care at Ty Cerrig, but old Canna took one of her crazy dislikes to the fellow, abusing him shamefully, accusing him of cowardice, and declaring that he ought to be driven into the sea along with the Saeson, and saying—"

But Morfydd interrupted him impatiently. "Never mind the High Prince, Rhun," she cried. "Go on about Sibylla! I suppose you're going to live with *her* now?"

To her startled sight she actually beheld Rhun give a grave little nod.

The new Lady of the Gaer leapt to her feet and swung round to face him while he remained still seated, doing his best to assume a careless and nonchalant air. But she looked over his head at the deep aperture of the window through which it was still possible to see one of the two stars. This star was still travelling on and on, travelling where anything was possible except an end to possibility. And as her eyes followed that small mistily visible speck of quivering light, while her knees touching his knees caused the broken sword to give a shiver, she realized that this was a crisis.

If she gave way to a weak outburst of jealousy at this moment her whole command of the situation — Porius carried off by this mad magician, her father lost in this fantastical Drom, Euronwy under the spell of this treacherous Medrawd, and now Rhun, in his fury with Gwendydd, caught by a returned Sibylla — yes! her whole command of the situation might be lost. Backwards and forwards her whole body swayed. Her emotional agitation wasn't perceptible to him; but it would have been perceptible to the spirits of the long-dead invokers of Pwyll Pen Annwn, and of Pryderi the son of Rhiannon, and of Ceridwen of the magic cauldron, and of the all-powerful Rhitta Gawr.

The air in that ancient sanctuary of her father's people seemed full of witnesses as her vow with Euronwy came back to her. If Euronwy, the daughter of a Christian Patrician, could break her vow, she, the descendant of the heathen Cunedda, would not break hers. "But it isn't the vow," she thought. "And it isn't that Porius has gone to the emperor without seeing me again, or that you can't love me, and it isn't that you" — and she caused the sword to slip a little further towards her— "are so easy a prey for *that woman.* It's that—" And she only half-listened while Rhun told her how he had found Sibylla so worn-out and so pitifully still, so ragged and dishevelled and half-naked, and yet "with something about her."

Ah, how well Morfydd knew that "something about her!" *That* was the "something" that had caught Einion ab Iddawc and had come so near to catching Brochvael ab Iddawc too!

And had the Henog of Dyfed been describing her feelings at that moment he would have made her tell herself in bold Silurian words: "I shall require no one to demand my rights but myself."

But she did wonder a little at that moment, so clear-headed was the realistic Gwyddyles in her blood, how long he could go on talking to her two breasts, both of which seemed more conscious than usual of the pressure of the garment that covered them, while she continued to stare out of the window at the solitary star that was still slowly and obstinately pursuing the vanished one.

What *was* the fantastic relief that this childish creature, whom fate had made her one of all, found he derived from telling her all this? For he was actually confessing to her now how he had carried this tragic wanderer, half-naked as she was, into the bedchamber nearest to the porch, the chamber that had once been the murdered Erim's, and how he had seduced her there, or been seduced by her there, and how he had left her with a promise to seek permission to carry out a daring plan of hers.

At this point Morfydd caused the broken sword between them to slip down with a clang upon the stone floor, and at last their eyes did meet.

"What daring plan of hers?" she enquired as calmly as she could.

And he began to explain, looking into her face as freely and happily as if they'd been at the home rock waiting for the slow-running Porius, how it was really a plan of the smiling Amreu's— "or of his laughing wife," thought Morfydd, "or more likely still of Sibylla herself' — and how in his own opinion it was a very wise one, as far as the interest of the House of Cunedda was concerned; the idea, namely, that Ogof-y-Gawr should once more become the dominant centre of the forest people, with the son of Alarch the Fair, daughter of Princess Indeg, as its head, and he, if possible, with a Gwyddyles for his wife.

Morfydd let him go on with all this talk about a new era of history for the old *llys* of the Aunties, but, as he talked, something in the depths of her soul rose up in proud independence, in defiance of him, and of her husband, and of her father, and of them all.

"Though Porius *has* gone," she told herself, "and though Rhun *is* like this, and though Dad's caught by that Jesus pimp of a man-girl, and though Euronwy's broken her vow and gone over to Medrawd, I'll be myself still! After all, I've got the power I've always told myself stories about. I've got my vow to Rhitta Gawr. I'll show them I can rule Mynydd-y-Gaer and Edeyrnion and Ardudwy. I'll show them I'm not like that baby, Malcunus of Gwynedd. Come what may between my soul and my life. Let there be wall after wall of deadly mist! I'll never give up what I've got. I'll fight for it to the last!"

She had no sooner allowed this thought to sweep with its dark-flapping wings through every corridor of her heart when an unexpected fountain of life force suddenly burst up and out through a crack in the very floor of her soul, and in strength of it she felt that she could rule, like any of the great queens of antiquity, a far wider dominion than Edeyrnion.

And as she met Rhun's imploring gaze and noticed that his face had begun to twitch a little as if with the approach of some new access of agitation and shame, she experienced an odd sense of almost humorous tenderness for him. She actually bent down and pressed his skull between her fingers — God! and how like in shape it was to Porius's; for she had once taken *that* in her hands and in a mode too not so very different from this, when he had turned to her like an exhausted animal after some amorous excess; but, as she did this now to Rhun and kissed the rough stiff hairs of his forelock, a totally different impulse assailed her, and in a flash she imagined herself stealing away with him through the deserted passages of the Gaer until she brought him to her chamber, which at present was the one occupied by Nesta before her marriage. She even went so far — while hardly knowing what she was saying she promised on behalf of Porius that he and Sibylla should be put in possession of the *llys* of the three dead Aunties — as to imagine undoing the knots in her clothes the moment they were alone so as to put her body entirely at his disposal. She even went further in her unashamed thoughts, while Rhun explained, talking more and more freely and naturally and with the old *craig-y-gartref* abandonment, how he wished Gwendydd could know how happy he was with Sibylla, while she was being treated like a Cretan slave by that Greek pirate.

Morfydd even went as far, though her cheeks got a little hot as she did it, as to use her vivid memories of Porius's caresses on their bridal bed, to which she had heroically rather than amorously submitted, as a starting point to help her imagination as she conjured up these sweeter violations.

What broke up this perilous vista of delights, forbidden as much by wanton Eros as by stern necessity, was the sound of steps outside the barred doors and a faint rattling of the doors themselves. Someone was clearly on the point of interrupting them! The sound was a faint one and was not repeated; nor was any attempt made to push the door open, but the shock was enough to fling her back upon her natural, critical, observant, energetic self.

She drew in her breath with an angry sigh. She felt as if she could stamp indignantly on the floor of her soul, on the floor of the whole planetary system, on the floor of that Platonic *idea* of the universe about which her father used to argue with Morvran; in fact so extreme was her revolt as a woman at that moment against the foundation of everything, that she felt she could show how little it mattered to her what any of these men did just by her reckless supporting of Rhun's mad wish to be put into possession of Ogof-y-Gawr, only that he might fling the matriarchal *llys* of the dead Modrybedd into the lap of Sibylla!

This was a crisis in her life, and well she knew it! This was the moment that she had at the back of her mind — no! of her heart — always known must come, sooner or later, when she had to disgorge, like some enchanted Avanc, that drop of her true love's blood she had swallowed on the morning of eating the honey of Mithras.

Rhun was on his feet now. They were both on their feet. They were going to separate. The last star had escaped from that curiously shaped orifice that looked down over the Divine River, and far away across the perilous forests towards the old camp of Uriconium.

She was assuring him now in a calm friendly natural voice that Porius would undoubtedly agree to let him install Sibylla as his wife and as mistress of the place in the old palace of the Modrybedd.

It was only when his steps began to die away down the corridor leading to the northeast gate of the Gaer that she replaced the guttering torch in its original sconce.

But even after she had done this she could still hear his dying-away steps. Why didn't they stop dying away? Why didn't they die? Her feet seemed putting out roots that buried themselves in a bottomless crack between the flagstones!

But those feet that were retreating down the passage were the feet of Rhun, *her* Rhun, who could run faster than any man or boy in all Ynys

Prydein. They were the feet of the man whose flesh she had bitten so as to swallow his blood and make them one for ever! She would find out in a few days, she knew that *much* anyway, whether her night with Porius had been enough to start a child.

Oh, why couldn't she run after Rhun now, throw her arms round him, and make him see that all this business with Gwendydd had been silliness? Why couldn't she tell him now that he'd only have to wait till she was sure *that night* had made no difference; and then, since Porius had joined the emperor, he could give her a child himself, Rhun's child, grandchild of Alarch the Fair, and great-grandchild of Indeg.

But Rhun's steps had died away at last — and a good thing too! Let them die away till she was sure that *that night* had made no difference. Well, she could lift her feet out of the floor now and go where she liked. And once more she thought of Medrawd and his treachery. But no! She had no heart to challenge Euronwy about Medrawd tonight, even if the two of them were not together. To do anything about *them* tonight would be what her father used always to tell Morvran his Lucretian outbursts against the Church were — hypermoron, beyond what was indicated by destiny! "I'll go," she told herself, "to Nesta's old room, for she'll be with Gwythyr, *and sleep for ten hours!* Tomorrow I'll go down to Ty Cerrig, and tell Father about Rhun and Sibylla. In his dotage over this Jesus lad I don't suppose he'll care a bit! But if he *does* — well! let *him* look to it! I can't carry my father's burdens."

As she repassed the entrance to the hall she picked up one of the rushlights that were kept on a ledge there alongside a perpetually burning oil lamp. Carrying this light in one hand and sheltering it with the other she hurried through the dark and draughty passages until she reached her destination.

As soon as she was safely inside Nesta’s virgin chamber, which, though not far from Euronwy’s, possessed such thick walls that they excluded every sound from both without and within, she set herself to light the Etruscan lamp that stood on a bracket in the wall to the left of the bed’s head. As she did so she glanced with satisfaction at the luxurious Roman blankets which still covered the bed, telling herself that if their owner was happy in a man’s arms it was only fair that somebody else should at least be warm.

It took her quite a while to get the Etruscan night lamp to burn; for the oil in its head was dusty and old, while the fragment of newly twisted cord that floated in its belly kept igniting before it was saturated.

Morfydd’s attention while engaged on this task — for, though she had barred the door, and the only window was a narrow arrow slit, she felt reluctant to fall asleep in absolute darkness — was caught by the exquisitely carved creature that served as the lamp’s handle. This creature was Chimaera, the terrible daughter of the yet more appalling, because the slightly more human monster, whom the ancients called Echidna; but so skilfully had the nameless artist blended the nature of the lion with the nature of the serpent, and both with the nature of the nanny goat, that the primeval horror of the whole conception of such creatures was in some strange manner transmuted and transformed — transfigured, you might almost say — by the incredible enchantment of a delicate if demonic beauty.

But near the Chimaera lamp, which Morfydd had now at last really succeeded in lighting, there stood a very different sort of idol. This was nothing less than a very small but mysteriously lovely image of the Virgin Mary, carved in a sort of semi-transparent porcelain.

The face of this image had a most curious and haunting expression and what at once attracted and teased Morfydd about it was that it reminded her of someone; and she could not think who the person was! When at last the Chimaera lamp was lit and she had blown out her rushlight, whose extinction resulted in the passage through the chamber of a trailing wisp of most evil-smelling smoke, she felt such an overpowering longing for sleep that without removing her clothes she slipped beneath Nesta's Roman blankets and sank into the swift undertide of dreams, into that flowing tide of mirrored reflections which, as we sink into it, seems the surcease of all that has form or shape or purpose or trouble, and yet, when it has once swept us away, turns out to be the same old river, only madder, queerer, more cantankerous, and even less ready to accept the wicked as damned, the good as saved, or the dead as dead!

How she was first aroused from this world of dreams, which, though full of its own madness, has the power of so ineffably healing the hurts of ours, remained a mystery to her, for though, over and over, she seemed on the edge of recalling it, a blackness came down and it always escaped.

But she must have lain, whatever her dreams may have been, between Nesta's blankets for five or six hours in undisturbed sleep, watched over by the terrible and yet exquisite Chimaera and by the lovely and yet haunting Mother of God; though what it was that whirled her back into life, when those hours ended, remained completely dark.

All she could tell her father concerning it, when she was with him later at Ty Cerrig, was that the dawn had already begun — *that* she knew by the cold grey light lying on the stones of the arrow-slit window — when she threw off the blankets that covered her and opened the door.

"No!" she replied to Brochvael's irritably repeated question. "No! I don't remember any voices, or any knocking, or any fall, or any noise! I

only remember opening the door and finding the girl outside."

Oh! It would have been impossible to tell her father, and impossible to tell Rhun, all she had experienced that morning and all she had felt, and all the thoughts she had had. And yet, strangely enough, she felt as if she might, if she had him to herself — only it seemed as if the last person you could have to yourself in *this* day and age was the man you'd just married — yes! she felt she might have told Porius a great deal about this whole event, and a great deal about her feelings concerning it now that it was all over; only Porius would have had to have liked her enough to spend a second night with her before leaving for the war. But even with him she could have remembered nothing before opening the door. It all began when she found the girl out there. After that every smallest occurrence, every faintest impression, seemed to have possessed itself of its own appropriate tool and inscribed itself on the living skin of her consciousness.

The girl was crouching against the door, too weak to stand up, and indeed already dying. It was clear that she had been attacked — probably assaulted and raped — for her clothes were disordered and stained with blood. She behaved as if she had drained some deadly philtre and knew that at any second it might kill her but was desperately eager before she died to unburden herself of a secret that would drag her soul back and impede the wings of its flight to freedom.

"It's Teleri, isn't it? It's Teleri, isn't it?" Morfydd kept repeating; and then, realizing this was a stupid question, like asking the girl if she were herself, she substituted for it an utterance hardly less absurd: "You'll soon be better! You'll soon be better!" gasped over the body in her arms, as she lifted it and dragged it and swayed and staggered and stumbled beneath it, while the odd idea came into her dazed mind that it might be a law of psychic gravitation that dying people were heavier than either the living or the dead.

But though these questions were a foolish accompaniment to the girl's stream of words, they didn't dam up or muddy up or in any way affect the parallel tide of Morfydd's own thoughts, which were extremely active as she straightened the girl's garments, caressed her hands, and smoothed back the hair from her forehead.

She looked round the room once or twice from where she sat by Teleri's side, but there was nothing she could lay hold of to dip into the heavy double-handed vessel of water that stood against the opposite wall; nor did she know whether that jug of water was fresh. But, as the girl's voice grew fainter and her face became a more ghastly white, she began to wonder whether she oughtn't to leave her for a minute while she roused Euronwy or one of Euronwy's women.

"But I *can't* leave her like this! I can't! Anyway, not till she's finished her tale!" What certainly made it harder to leave the dying Teleri was that the latter had begun to clutch her hand with that peculiar tenacity in which the power of a departing soul seems to make itself felt with a force beyond what it ever reached in its lifetime.

Even had the watchful Chimaera, whose polybestial curves composed the handle of the now needless lamp at their side, been able to record what it saw it is doubtful whether it could have described the subtle difference between the two girls, as the one, so full of heroic vitality, bent over the other, so voluble with the urge to die.

The Brythonic element was obvious in the hair and eyes of each; but Morfydd herself had already recognized something about Teleri that was totally beyond the intelligence of any daughter of the half-woman Echidna, namely, the quite startling resemblance between Teleri's features and those of the image of the Virgin Mary, beneath whose fixed and indescribable stare she herself had been sleeping all night, and upon whose unearthly expression both the white light of the dawn and the yellow light of the Chimaera lamp were at this moment concentrated.

As Teleri lay there stretched out beneath her, murmuring so fast that the sentences followed each other like overlapping ripples, and her eyes clung to *her* eyes as desperately as her hand to *her* hand, Morfydd began to realize that she had vaguely been aware of this unearthly and shadowy girl's existence for several months, in fact ever since she had been betrothed to Porius. No one had told her about her, and on her own visits to the Gaer she had been too agitated and preoccupied to ask questions.

But now as she listened to her and stroked her forehead and every now and then lifted the fingers she held to her lips she realized that, as a passing image crossing her path here and there as she went about her affairs, she had accepted this lonely woman as a part, an obscure part, but still a part, of her life as the betrothed of Porius.

But now another and much more serious speculation came into her mind. Was it possible that Nesta's vision of the Virgin during that riotous and even sanguinary disturbance with which the death feast had ended, that vision which some had seen, some had half-seen, and some had indignantly denied, was not a vision at all but a flesh-and-blood reality; and that Nesta's passionate Italian piety had created out of the real Teleri the miraculous witness she required?

"He said he knew what I felt," Teleri was murmuring now. "He said he knew that when they pitied me for having no mother and no father and being funny in my head it was at them I was laughing. He said he laughed at everybody who thought him wicked because he didn't want to keep Ynys Prydein for the Romans and Brythons but wanted the forest people to have it and the Gwyddylaid people and the Ffichtiaid and the Saeson from Germania too — why not? — and the Coranians if they wanted to come back!

“Since God was one and the earth was one, he said, all the nations were one too. But he said there was a better one than God and a better place than earth and in this one all were equal, and in this place all were free, and this one was quiet death, and this place was comforting and soothing nothingness.

“He said it was silly of them to say I was wicked because I thought it was dreadful to be alive and lovely to be dead. He said the head bard, Taliesin, who served Cynan ap Clydno and Owain ab Uryen Rheged, was younger than me and yet he too said life was hell and death was paradise; and that was because like me he has no mother and no father and because like me he’s always been funny in the head after he swallowed a drop from the cauldron of Ceridwen. He said if I’d let him do you-know-what he’d give me the same drops from the same cauldron as turned the head bard from boy to man. So I said, ‘Give me the drops *now* and you can do what you like afterwards!’ So he gave me the drops and did what he wanted, and the drops put me to sleep. And when I woke he was gone; and I knew they were death drops he had given me. Then I knew I was on the brink of Paradise. What he did to me hurt me and made me bleed, but I didn’t mind because I knew the drops from the cauldron of Ceridwen would soon send me to Paradise.

“He didn’t know I knew he was the emperor’s nephew, and that’s because having no father nor mother has made me funny like they say it’s made the head bard funny; and that’s because having no mother nor father turns a girl too *quick* into a woman and turns a boy too *quick* into a man. But it’s everybody knowing I’m funny that’s let me sleep in the day and go about in the night; and it's going about in the night that's helped me to meet him so often. He used to say to me: 'I'm the big ghost, Teleri, and you're the little ghost!' and I liked the way he said 'Teleri' just in the same tone he said 'Euronwy' when he was in my Lady's chamber. They say in the kitchen my Lady lets him into her bed, but down there they don't know anything.

"I know because having no father and mother has made me hate daytime and life, and made me love nighttime and death. And I know my Lady never has and never will let him into her warm bed. He walks round it. He sits on the end of it. He shivers and shakes till you'd think she couldn't bear it. I couldn't bear it, but I'm only half a woman.

"But my Lady can bear anything, for my Lady is as strong as three women and that's because my Lady had a Roman Patrician for her father and a niece of Uthyr Pendragon for her mother. Holding hands we are, aren't we, Morfydd ferch Brochvael, and you helping Teleri over the eel bridge! You took me into your warm bed; but now I want to go, you're not holding me back, are you, Morfydd ferch Brochvael? You mustn't mind if I shake because the mud's so cold, or if I shiver because the spray's on my face. It's coming and it's what I've wanted as long as I can remember! He never guessed I knew who he was when we met night after night in the passages; but he said he was the big ghost and I was the little ghost.

"My Lady kept him shivering and shaking at the end of her bed; so you see when he begged I had to let him do it, because I couldn't be cruel like proper women can be. Your tears are cold, Morfydd ferch Brochvael, but your fingers are warm, and you've taken me into your warm bed as my Lady wouldn't take the other one.

"Oh, you must never blame him for anything! He gave me the drops of death, and the drops are lovely, lovely, lovely! It's coming now, Morfydd ferch Brochvael. It’s coming now, and oh, the happiness! Never, never, never blame him... oh, this is... this is—”

When her visitor lay dead on her bed none knew better than Morfydd what it behoved her to do according to custom. She had to tell the news to three persons. She had to tell it to the prince or to his “representative”; and this was easy because she herself was the “representative”. She had to tell it to the head bard; and this was easy because the young Taliesin was still to be found in the pavilion of Cynan ap Clydno, though Cynan himself was away with the emperor. But finally she had to tell it to the head druid or the head priest so that measures could be taken for the deceased’s entombment. This was not only difficult but next to impossible, considering the feud between her father and the new priest and considering that the last of the druids was dead.

But easy or difficult she now decided to do none of these things. Standing over this dead girl she made up her mind that this should be a turning point in her life. She was the Princess of Edeyrnion. Whether her husband wanted to live with her or not, he certainly trusted her, and he wanted her to assert herself. And assert herself she would.

In the matter of serving the emperor she and Porius were absolutely at one; and here she knew well that her vow over the relics of Rhitta Gawr would hold her up. She had put her pride and her life into that vow. In some queer way it had become her religion. It was stronger than love. It was life itself. Well, she would assert herself now. She would defy this new priest. She would make the obsequies of Teleri the half-woman an entirely feminine affair. She would seek out young Nesta and warn her that her virgin chamber was occupied by the dead and tell her she wished Gwythyr to put himself at the disposal of old Canna whom she would send up to the Gaer from Ty Cerrig.

Yes, she would go at once to her old home, despatch Canna up here, tell her to close the half-woman's eyes and lay her out, and tell her to see to it that young Gwythyr, with a man or two to help him, dug a grave for her in the Gaer burying place.

But there was something that she felt she wanted to do herself for the dead girl before leaving her to Canna or even to Nesta and this she set to work to accomplish at once. With some difficulty she succeeded in divesting Teleri of her underclothes, and then, boldly stripping herself so that in her outer garments she now appeared startlingly thin, she clothed her in her own. She had no sooner taken in her hands the least oppressive covering she could find in the room wherewith to cover the girl's face, for the staring eyes looked so unnaturally, so appallingly large than she was suddenly seized with a reluctance to put anything between those terrible watchers, judges, and condemners, and the light of that sun they *had seen through.*

As to the emperor's nephew, here again Morfydd was aware of a knot of complicated feelings that she could no more have attempted to communicate to her father than she could have attempted to communicate them to the man she loved.

And here again she felt she *could* have made her runaway husband — and him alone in all the world — understand certain subtle and startling and shameless thoughts that had come into her head, since Teleri's death, about Medrawd. Since Teleri's death?

As she stood motionless now, glancing from the girlish shape on the bed to the bestial shape on the handle of the night lamp and thence to the ineffably sad features of the Mother of Jesus, she felt that the vow she had made those days ago over the relics of Rhitta Gawr had become a springing fountain of new life within her that was not bound by any set of rules.

One of young Nesta's most treasured possessions was an inherited Italian cloak; and in this cloak Morfydd now wrapped herself and moved close up to the bed with the intention of taking a final farewell of that covered shape by touching it with her lips; but suddenly feeling the compulsion of a different mood, she hurried to the door, unbarred it, and let herself out, closing it quietly behind her in the grey dawn light that came in through that arrow slit in the wall.

She was lucky in being able to leave the Gaer unseen of anyone but the old watchman at the eastern gate who knew her too well, and had known her parents too well, to respond to her greeting with any questions, as he hammered back the massive bronze bar, wrought in the rough rondure of a serpent, and pushed the heavy gates apart.

Whether young Nesta had purposely left her Italian cloak for the new princess and had been too shy to say so, she couldn't tell. She may have left it simply in case those blankets didn't suffice. At any rate Morfydd felt extremely thankful to have it as she faced the chilly cloud of autumnal mist mounting up from the river. Straight into this white mist she went, hugging Nesta's cloak tightly about her, stumbling now and then over old grass-grown molehills, sliding sometimes when her too-smooth sandals encountered declivities made slippery by cartwheels, but getting a youthful pleasure from the dramatic effect of particular trees and roofs and hilltops which rose out of this undulating sea of mist like islands emerging from snow-white waves.

She took for granted that it was too early to expect to find any ferryman at the Ford, so she hurried on to the wooden bridge which was further upstream and just beyond the curve to the east of the Divine River. Halfway across the bridge she couldn't resist an impulse to stop for a minute to lean over the ancient oak-wood rail. She was now aware that a slight wind had suddenly begun to blow, a wind that was more disturbing to the mist, which, now she was within it, was no longer white but desolately grey, than it was to her.

Troubled and wild were the shapes the mist was beginning to take as the wind scattered it. All along the surface of that flowing water grey ghosts were twisting and turning. They were greyer than the water; not a single one of them was white any more — in fact, the bubbles of foam on the river's surface were the only white things she could see.

Grey were all the shifting shapes her fancy could name as that wind fell upon them and troubled them. Eagles' feathers, lions' manes, the waving tails of wild horses, and frantic ghosts in fluttering shrouds, all were grey as death. And among these imagined shapes as she leant over that rail she saw Rhun embracing Sibylla.

"Are *all* women as ignorant of themselves as I am?" she thought. "Are they all astonished at what they feel?"

What wrung this cry out of her was the fact that she felt no spasm of jealousy, indeed hardly any anger in this matter of Sibylla. She had felt little over Gwendydd, but she had attributed this to the woman being so much older than herself. But Sibylla was about her own age, twenty-two at most, which would make her only four years older. "Would I," she asked herself, "put a *tynged* on that girl so that she should never bear a child to Rhun?"

Staring down into that tumultuous procession of shapes as it passed beneath the bridge, and clutching impatiently with three fingers and a thumb the fluttering corner of Nesta's cloak, which by its flapping obscured her vision, Morfydd tried desperately to do what to her own mind she called "seeing the thing in proper proportion."

"No," she thought, "if I had the power to put such a *tynged* on that girl, I *wouldn't* do it!"

She removed her fingers from the flapping cloak and her hand from the rail. “No, I wouldn’t,” she repeated, “though goodness knows what that implies! But I don’t care what it implies. I don’t care whether it means I’m a heathen and not a Christian or whether it means I’m such a funny sort of Christian as to be no better than a heretic.”

She lifted her hands, which were very cold, and pressed their palms, first the right one and then the left one, to her mouth. And then, while she imagined herself, the childless princess of a childless prince, bending over the cradle of a baby Rhun, a most surprising and indeed rather a shameless wish came into her mind that she might have a long and perfectly free talk with Porius about all these things; about what as a woman she wanted to happen and about what both he and Rhun, as men, wanted to happen.

“Am I,” she thought, “different from other women, or are we all alike in things like this, that I can talk perfectly easily with Porius and am dumb as a fish with Rhun?”

With one hand clutching the rail of that wooden bridge and with the other squeezing Nesta’s mantle tight round her throat, she looked with interest to see what effect this newly risen wind would have upon the mist that covered the old houses and the new church.

Yes! There were gaps and fissures in this tattered grey cloak already; and through the first of these she could now clearly see the childhood’s home of both her men, suckled as they both were at the bosom of Alarch the Fair, for though the *llys* of Gwrnach and Alarch had been partially destroyed and partially incorporated into the edifice of the new church, enough of its massive antiquity was left to remind her of many a long summer afternoon spent down there with her aunt and her boy cousins.

All she could see of Ty Cerrig was the extreme tip of the little stone tower containing her own room, which was, as she had discovered with great interest not many years ago, just discernible, and only just, from the centre of this bridge, though not from either bank of the Divine River. Of Ogof-y-Gawr she could see nothing; although the hill beyond it, which ended in the precipice where the Avanc's Cave of Auntie Tonwen's mysterious friend looked out upon the valley, was now clearly visible through a gap in the mist.

Whether due to the sight of this hill or to the mere fact that her mind was hovering round Ogof-y-Gawr, Morfydd now felt upon her the full force of the complete disappearance, just as if they'd been swallowed up by an earthquake, of the Three Aunties. Careless whether such feelings were, or were not, reconcilable with her vow in the *betws* of the Gaer, she gave herself up to a sudden surge of wild and passionate tenderness for those three dead women. They were right, the Aunties!

This uncontrolled conviction within her seemed to ride like a Maenad the maddest of the cloud shapes that were whirling away beneath her, around her, above her. Her mother, the Gwyddyles, always used to tell her that though the matriarchy of the Modrybedd was too primitive for these civilized times, in the pith and sap and pulse of everyday life women *were* the rulers.

"Where I come from" — and she always made mention of the city of Dulyn in Iwerdon— "it's known and acknowledged as the truth. We're nearer Nature than men; and the only safe test we shall ever have, little daughter, as to what is true in life, is nearness to Nature." Thus would her mother express herself, when they were alone in her tower bedroom, after listening to Brochvael, fresh from some visit to Gaul, lamenting the effect of feminine influence in hastening the decline of Latin literature.

What would her mother think — what *did* she think, were the dead alive — seeing her suspended above the Divine River between the Gaer and

Ogof-y-Gawr, between Porius and Rhun, between being her father's pupil in Greek and fighting for the House of Cunedda against the religion of Rome, between innocent daydreams in that Ty Cerrig tower and ruling Edeyrnion by cunning and wit?

Clutching Nesta's cloak at her throat with her left hand and drawing the tip of the third finger of her right hand along the rail, she completed her crossing of the wooden bridge.

"The Modrybedd are right," she thought, "and Mother is right, and I dare say Sibylla is right! The steering of events from day to day is with us and not with men! Teleri knew Medrawd better than the emperor will ever know him. And I know Rhun as Rhun will never know himself. There isn't a man in the world who doesn't cling to *some* woman — though she may be a dead woman — but *all* men are children to women — every one of them! And every woman, yes, even the most virginal of maids, at the bottom of her heart is a mother to the whole world, and, like Nature, absolutely alone!"

With this in her mind Morfydd made her way, without looking back, straight to her father's house.

CHAPTER XXX. The Home Rock

LONG BEFORE MORFYDD REACHED her father's house she found she had grown extremely hungry. She also realized that she had lingered so long in the mist with her exciting thoughts that the day's business in the market between river and church was already beginning.

She threaded her way hurriedly between the booths, skirted the new church wall, too occupied with her purpose to look to see, as she generally did, how far the transformation of the old *llys* of Alarch the Fair, where Porius and Rhun had been boys together, into an ecclesiastical annexe had proceeded, and set to work to climb with resolute and rapid steps the rough ascent to Ty Cerrig.

She entered the house quietly by the back entrance and was delighted to discover that her old nurse, having waited on the master and got *his* meal disposed of, was prolonging her own and Gwrgi's breakfast by a lively discussion of the rumours, that had already reached the kitchen but had not yet been communicated to Brochvael, about Sibylla's return.

Her father at this moment, she learnt to her great annoyance, had a visitor with him who was none other than the new priest, and while old Canna buttered hot cakes for her and made her taste a little of what Gwrgi was enjoying as a special treat, namely, her father's Gallic wine warmed on the fire and sweetened with honey, she was able not only to relate to the pair of cronies the tale of Teleri's death but to enter fully into all the details of what she wanted them both to do.

It was the first time that as their lawful tribal princess, beyond being the cherished daughter of the house, she had had occasion to appeal to their loyalty; and, since each of the old couple was all alert to serve her, it was soon arranged that Gwrgi should saddle the donkey and lead it with Canna on its back up the Gaer hill, and that while Canna duly prepared the corpse of the dead girl for burial Gwrgi should get what help he needed and dig a grave in the official tribal burying ground outside the fortress's northeastern wall.

She was surprised to find that the old couple's attitude to the handsome Drom was much less hostile than she had anticipated. "He must have learnt some devilry from the druid," she thought. "Why, he must have bewitched them!"

They left her to rest by the fire, sipping Brochvael's warmed-up wine, while they made ready for their expedition; and she found her thoughts still turning to Teleri. What with the wine and the cakes and the warm kitchen and her disturbed night she could very easily have fallen asleep, but she forced herself to stay awake in the most effective of all possible ways, namely, by imagining all the reactions her father could conceivably display, and these were as numerous as they were violent, to the establishment of Rhun at the Modrybedd's palace, with Sibylla as its mistress and Mithras as its tutelary genius.

But though she struggled against a strong tendency to fall into a deep sleep and thus to forget entirely the unburied Teleri and the agitated Rhun, and her own susceptible parent and this devil of a Drom who pretended to be possessed by the mind of the living Jesus, she couldn't help feeling strong, confident, and happy.

But how curious this was, that the death of Teleri, the life hater, had brought to her, the life lover, such a rush of energy that she felt almost ashamed, as if she had absorbed into herself part of the very substance of the dead girl's being, only to use it for the purpose opposite to hers, that is for life, not death. “But I must just take it as a mystery,” she told herself, “as an absolute mystery.”

But to call this feeling of happiness and power a “mystery” didn’t explain it. It was as if the desperation of Teleri’s hatred of life which now seemed to hang about her clothes, her hair, her skin, her lips, her throat, like an exhalation from the marshes of Annwn, possessed such imaginative force that without being neutralized or appeased it could be used as a powerful weapon by one who loved life well enough to remain like Agenor at the Scaean Gate when he stood *aleis,* or “with all his forces gathered together,” to await his doom, and, although “far weaker,” ready, *alla kai empes,* “all the same for that,” for whatever fate brought.

But when finally she took up the struggle again and entered Brochvael’s room, her first glimpse of the scene she interrupted was something she never forgot. Her father, with the majestically bound volume of the Eleven Comedies open before him, was leaning back in a chair whose hairy tassels gleaming and enchanted in the firelight looked as if forgotten fragments of the “aegis” itself had been woven into them. He was hugging his knees with his clasped hands and looking up at the priest with an expression of petulant contempt; while at his side leaning upon the charred rod with which he’d stirred the fire, his beautiful womanish eyelids modestly lowered, his gaze fixed upon the flame and his lips parted in a dreamy smile, Drom permitted his whole personality to murmur in silence that the sensation of being denounced was sweeter than the figs of Lemnos!

In her present mood of Gaer Princess, freshly initiated into the role of all women by a dying half-woman, Morfydd felt an impatient impulse to dismiss both the priest and Drom with a negligent word and a wave of the hand and as soon as they were alone to relate to Brochvael the story of Sibylla’s return; but a warning glance from the man in the chair restrained her, and shrugging her shoulders she went over to the window and stood with her back to them staring at the heathery slope of the rocky ascent towards Ogof-y-Gawr.

“I refuse to argue that point or any other point,” she heard the priest declare in his harsh official voice. “I have already sent messengers round the neighbourhood announcing that the funeral rites for the deceased prince will take place at noon today. I have had the grave dug to the right of the altar; and one of the men in the Gaer workshop who is a really devout Christian worked by torchlight all last night upon the monumental stone — flat upon the ground, of course — that will cover it. The place in front of the altar has already been consecrated, and quite properly so, by the remains of that saintly man Minnawc Gorsant whom I might call a blessed martyr, for he broke his heart denouncing heresy, idolatry, and devilry.”

At the mention of the instigator of his son’s murder, Morfydd, who had now swung round and was facing the three of them, saw her father close his folio of Aristophanes with a violent gesture and proceed to clutch it with the fingers of his right hand very much as Homer describes Athene doing, when she seized the huge stone placed by men of old time as the boundary of a field with which she presently knocked all desire for fighting out of the god of war.

She saw the propitiatory Drom throw down his blackened staff, balance his lithe and lissom body against the back of Brochvael’s chair, and lay an affectionately restraining hand upon the fingers that clutched the folio.

Hitherto the young priest had not taken the slightest notice of her entrance — a neglect which astonished her, for was she not now the reigning Princess of Edeyrnion? — but he now turned upon her a cold, apathetic, and extremely lacklustre glance, a glance, in fact, that stopped short of her skin, stopped at less than the surface of her being, and displayed not the faintest intention, either for the sake of malice or for the sake of understanding, to advance a thousandth part of an inch further.

"I am fully aware," he went on, "for our revered bishop, when he selected me for this great work as the successor to Gorsant the martyr, made it clear to me what I had to face in the infidelity and hostility to Christ and His Blessed Mother of the present descendants of Cunedda. The lord bishop has been kept fully informed by the blessed Gorsant of how that great man came near to baptizing and confirming in the faith — blessed be the Holy Trinity! — that converted sorcerer who called himself a Derwydd and of whom you" — and the young man's thin white face with its burning eyes became concentrated upon the figure of Drom— "are the degenerate servant. I can't tell how far the immoral and heathen books among which I find the brother of the deceased and the wife of his successor are the cause of this falling away from the Christian faith; but the bishop is not ignorant of the manner in which the insidious and corrupting heresy of that devil in human shape the abominable Pelagius has been propagated until yesterday by that false hermit of Saint Julian's cell who called himself John.

"And now I am to understand that you, the servant of a convicted and converted sorcerer, have been teaching in the kitchens and sculleries of your Gaer and in the marketplaces of your town, some of the very worst of the sly, subtle, and corrosive heresies of this demon Pelagius. And when I call upon you in the name of our bishop, that is to say, in the name of the successor of Saint Peter to whom the God of all worlds has given the keys to heaven and hell, you answer me with the most horrible blasphemy of all, the blasphemy of blasphemies, the heresy of heresies, namely, the devilish claim that you, Master Drom, contain within you the living personality of Jesus Christ Himself, yes! of that God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, who has taken to himself as his eternal Bride the One Church with its One Head! It is to Christ's Church as a whole, Master Drom, not to any single blighted, blasted, blinded, blaspheming individual, that the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity reveals the one hope and the one truth and the one faith that saves us from damnation!"

At this point Morfydd began to move to the door, and during a momentary silent beat of their pulses Morfydd and her father exchanged looks. Brochvael tried in his look to indicate that he intended to keep calm under every conceivable ecclesiastical tempest, and that everything would be the same when it was over as it was before it began. She herself tried to express something even more definite, namely, that when she had given certain instructions to Canna and Gwrgi she would return to his support, yes! and would support him against Pope and Church and if necessary against the Holy Trinity itself!

The significant look that passed between father and daughter was intercepted by the priest as he paused to take breath; and since he was no fool it reduced him to silence. Moreover it clearly crossed his mind that if he were to make any impression on this man and this woman he would have to deal with them separately. With this in his mind therefore he began to argue with Brochvael in a different tone. Meanwhile Morfydd had found the old couple, as she well knew she would, listening in the passage, and she managed to smile sympathetically when Gwrgi thrust his thumb between his first and second finger and pointed it at a place in the wall that might have been considered on a level with the priest's head.

When, however, she had got them safe out of the house with the donkey's saddle and bridle in the old man's hands and Canna with the particular unguents she used for laying out corpses, it became her turn to listen in the passage. Assured that her father was holding his own she took the opportunity to climb as silently as she could the staircase leading to her own former room.

This room she had not entered since her struggle with Rhun, and the sight of it brought back her childhood and girlhood so vividly that she had to shut her eyes and even to press the back of one of her wrists against her mouth and bite it, before she could control herself enough to do what she'd come to do.

Her emotion once conquered, however, she derived a definite pleasure from dislodging a small piece of wood from one of the lowest of the sloping rafters and from extracting from this hiding place a child's necklace of snail shells, which, as a sign of something she couldn't have explained even to the runaway Porius, she had decided to plant, as if they were flowers, on Teleri's grave.

"Yes," she said to herself, as she descended with the snail shells uncomfortably cold between her breasts, for she still wore, under the cloak she now had on, the high-belted banquet robe in which she had slept; "yes," she said to herself, placing each foot very slowly on each step and recalling the look on Canna's and Gwrgi's faces after Rhun's flight in the early hours of Sunday, "just as I can't help loving Rhun, so I can't help liking Porius a lot better than Rhun and missing him as much as I missed Morvran! In fact" — and her left foot, as if anxious to give its twin slave an equal chance to listen to their mistress's shameless soliloquy, swayed with rhythmic negligence from heel to toe till the other had joined it, when side by side they swayed together, all their mistress's weight on their insteps now, the balance kept by a long bare wrist thrust through a slit in the mantle so that a couple of fingers could just touch the stone wall, while the girl's gaze was fixed on a strip of red sky just visible — and oh! how long, as long as she could remember, had she known that streak of visibility! — through an oblong space above the front door— "In fact," she concluded, "I believe I miss him *more* than Morvran! Morvran always wanted me to listen to him just as Rhun does; whereas Porius likes listening to me."

Her first thought on re-entering her father's chamber had to do with the difference between men and women. Here were these three men exactly as she had left them twenty minutes ago! Physically they were in the same positions, and mentally they were swinging up and down in the same logical dilemmas, and delivering the same ideal blows at the same shadow-puppet notions, as when she had slipped out.

Once again not one of the three men *seemed* to notice her entrance; though this time she was convinced that her father at least had done so, though for "reasons of state" he didn't dare to greet her!

As before, she crossed the room and proceeded to stand with her back to the window facing them. This time she was struck even more than on the first occasion by the impassioned fanaticism of the young priest's face as he denounced the falling away from the religion of Christ of both branches of the House of Cunedda.

"You at the Gaer," he declared, "are sunk into a worse state than they are at Deganwy, and *they* have the excuse of their prince being a child. Their condition is just the old heathen state which our great Mother the Church and her Holy Head in Rome have found ways of leading to the Blessed Truth.

"But here — as Minnawc Gorsant used to swear to the bishop, though the bishop could hardly believe such a thing to be possible — here it is much, much worse than the old heathenism. Spiritual perversions of the religion of Christ are far more dangerous than the old ignorant idolatries.

"Minnawc Gorsant himself told me he had lost his first hope of being able to convert that magic-mongering druid" — here the priest gave the still dreamy, still docile, still tenderly smiling Drom a flashing glance— "who was, I understand, *your* master; and I know for myself that *your* husband" — here for the first time since she had entered the man turned full upon Morfydd— "is the pupil of the heretical old man who without any authority from Rome dared to call himself 'Brother' and moreover dared to defend that dragon of spiritual perversity, the twice excommunicated and thrice-damned Pelagius."

At this point Brochvael gave his daughter a quite humorously beseeching look, as much as to say: "Well! If he starts attacking Porius, who has only married you to desert you, we needn't bother to answer him!"

But the priest waited for no answer. "If," he went on, with another severe glance at Morfydd, "your husband were here now do you know what I should recite to him? I should recite to him a prophecy truer than any devilish gabble howled forth by Myrddin Wyllt, that son of a fiend. I should recite to him the prophecy concerning this very day and age uttered by the Apostle Paul. *'Know this,'* the Apostle says. 'In these last days dangerous times shall come — in *novissimis diebus instabunt tempora periculosa* — men shall be covetous, they shall be boastful, haughty railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, criminal, without natural affection — *cupidi, elati, superbi blasphemi, parentibus inobedientes, ingrati, scelesti, sine affectione* — without self-control, fierce, without goodness, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasures more than God — *incontinentes, inimici, sine benignitate, proditores, protervi, tumidi, voluptatem amatores magis quam Dei'* — and I would go on to tell him—"

Here the priest lifted his head higher still, and looking no longer at any of them in that chamber, nor even, Morfydd felt, at her invisible husband, rather, it seemed to her, looking over centuries upon centuries of human history, began to speak in a new tone, a tone that arrested her astonished attention, a tone that, though it caused her to breathe so hard in her revolt against him that both her breasts pressed against the snail shells, struck her as being appallingly charged with the dreadful blood dew of destiny.

"I would go on to tell him," he cried, "that there is nothing, whether in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, that can stop the City of God, with Jesus as its absolute King, from reigning over the whole earth! His enemies will howl in vain in hell forever! Lo! It is Jesus Himself who tells us so! — and the blessed ones will hear their howling; and the sound of their howling and the gnashing of their teeth — *fletus* et *stridor dentium* — will mount up forever!

"Yes, He must reign till He has made His enemies His footstool! And what Christ commands me to tell your husband is this: that the reading of heathen books" — and the priest gave a quick hurried blasting look at the Comedies of Aristophanes on Brochvael's knee— "must, under his rule, be a punishable offence; that blasphemy — the worst of all sins! — must be punished so publicly and so penitentially that all those subject to him will be afraid to breathe a syllable against Christ or against Christ's sacrosanct state which has absolute authority over the whole world!

"It is Christ Himself who enjoins your husband to consider himself Christ's regent in these forests of Edeyrnion and to rule in such a way that every man, woman, and child shall confess with contrition every single thought that enters their heads that does not redound to the glory of... to the glory of—"

But the words suddenly faded from his lips and melted like a mist that has been caught up and lost in sunlight. And Morfydd, who had been watching his face, realized that he was so completely dominated by some interior vision that he had altogether lost the sense of words.

“I *must*,” she thought, “fix in my mind this man’s expression and the queer feeling it gives me, so that I can tell Porius about it when we’re next together.”

It struck her then that it was somewhat ironical that, while she was only waiting for the fellow’s departure to discuss with her father Sibylla’s reappearance and to get his support for Rhun’s establishing himself in the *llys* of the dead princesses, what she longed for most in the world at that moment was to describe to her husband this priest’s madness and implore him to explain it.

Thus when the young man returned to normal consciousness after his spiritual ecstasy, she began to wonder as she listened to his recovered words whether she really and truly was in the strange state of loving two men at the same time. And with the simple realism of a woman, compared with which the humorous shamelessness of men is either savage fastidiousness or philosophical fooling, she began to compare her present feeling for Porius with what she had felt before he had possessed her; and she admitted to herself that she felt quite differently now.

“And yet,” she thought, “I still love Rhun. Am I therefore an unnatural girl, or are all women like me, and does being forced into carrying a man’s seed turn the man himself into our child?”

But what was this? Brochvael was now slowly wagging his head from side to side over Aristophanes, whom he had, apparently, while she was absorbed in watching the priest, dared to reopen. Drom, on the other hand, having relapsed into a more comfortable position, wore on his unruffled, tenderly moulded face an infinitely sweet smile of compassionate pity.

“What on earth,” Morfydd thought, “is amusing that lackadaisical lad now about this crazy man?” And she told herself that it was tragic how cruelly unfair every human being was to every other.

Meanwhile having recovered his voice the priest was repeating a passage from Ignatius's famous letter to his fellow Christians in heathen Rome. This awe-inspiring document was not unknown to Morfydd. Porius had more than once repeated it to her as an example of the self-lacerating atmosphere at the Bishop's School beyond Moel y Famau, never forgetting to inform her that the wise Pelagius, according to Brother John, had called it "a dangerous vein of insanity in the faith."

But now as she heard it from this man she began again desperately longing to discuss the whole subject with Porius. She felt as if Teleri's soul were murmuring on to her still out of the air, and, by defending the emperor's nephew, to be defending worse fanatics, defending even— "what crazy ideas are coming into my head!" — defending even that murderer of Morvran!

"Teleri," she thought, "could never smile at anyone as this self-satisfied Drom is doing — effeminate little Narcissus! I'd sooner be as she is — dead on Nesta's bed — than be a man like Drom. Yes! You little eunuch, magnetizing your master to love you and loving yourself as few girls love themselves! I'd sooner be Gorsant, Morvran's murderer, than I'd be you."

Meanwhile the priest recited: "From Syria unto Rome I fight with wild beasts, being bound and tied to ten leopards, I mean the soldiers appointed as guards who grow more cruel by our kindnesses... O *salutaris bestias!* O beasts of Salvation! When will they come? *Quando emittentur*? When will they be let out? When will it be free for them to enjoy my flesh?... If they delay I will force them to it; I shall rush upon them! Bear with me; *ego novi quid expediat mihi.* I know what is expedient for me. *Nunc incipio esse Christi discipulus.* Now I begin to be a disciple of Christ."

It seemed to Morfydd as she watched him that this hollow-cheeked young man with eyes like black fire was actually feeling the lions' teeth he talked about tearing his flesh, and that some force beyond the stretch of the whole visible world was pouring through him and turning excruciating pain into the quivering triumph of far-away trumpets!

But suddenly there came a change in the tension of his voice. A strange relaxation loosened his limbs and he lurched and slackened where he stood. Morfydd could feel that the words he was murmuring now, in this odd sermon addressed to a doting scholar, a deserted wife, and a sorcerer's pimp, were penetrated by a curious atmosphere of exhausted humility, a startling contrast to his previous exultation.

He was now murmuring a quotation from the Book of Amos; and as he uttered the words, "not a prophet's son but a goatherd plucking the fruit of sycamores," his voice trembled with a certain youthful weakness and a pathetic simplicity, and there passed into it a distinct sense of the struggle he had gone through as the chosen pupil of Minnawc Gorsant, and as the soldier of Christ selected by the bishop to carry on the fight, and Morfydd was definitely touched.

He was a younger man than Gorsant, and he hadn't, she felt sure, been one of the *actual* murderers of Morvran. Besides, she had too much of a woman's common sense not to know that Morvran had allowed his eloquent atheism to become a nuisance to the older people in Mynydd-y-Gaer and a real offence to the naturally religious people in all Edeyrnion, whether old or young.

Nodding casually at Brochvael and Drom, as if they had been a pair of pillared capitals on either side of the hearth, the priest now crossed the threshold and disappeared in the narrow dark passage between Brochvael's chamber and the kitchen.

Here, after she had caught a glimpse of Drom straightening his shoulders and clasping his shapely wrists and soft fingers round the back of his skull and after she had replied with a conciliatory gesture to Brochvael's "Don't go back with him, for heaven's sake, child! He doesn't want *you* at Einion's grave!" she overtook the young priest and clutched at his belt.

"There's been a death up at the Gaer," she whispered. "Last night it was; and I want you if you will — I can speak for my husband in this — to let the girl lie in ground that's not under a curse! I don't mean necessarily in consecrated ground, you understand, but I don't want her put in that swampy place by the Gwyddyl huts where they say" — here she paused for a second, tightening, however, rather than relaxing, her hold on the young man's belt— "anyway where Canna ferch Glam says, the devils come up from hell to play the game called 'hunt the souls' and chase them like rabbits round and round those pools of black water and in and out of those reed beds."

The young priest released his belt from her hot dry fingers. "It's that wretched Teleri you're talking of, I suppose? Yes, I've heard all about that unhappy creature. She's been fed by your family since her childhood and hasn't done one day's honest work to pay for it — no, not all her life! 'Kept in luxury' is what they say of *her* in your kitchens; and they tell me — you see a low-born priest in a scullery hears more truth in a day than a high-born lady in her bower hears in a year — they tell me she's been having a bad influence over Nesta ferch Aulus."

"Whoever told you that—"

"Don't interrupt me, Princess, and please speak quietly. There's no need to disturb your father. But the chief thing I've heard in these humble quarters — where a man like me who's lived like Amos on fruits and berries, *vellicans sycamoros,* knows how to search for the precious jewel of truth — is that this wretched female has been acting as a spy for that arch-enemy of our bishop and of our emperor and of Rome and of Jesus Christ, that incestuous son — so they say — of the emperor's sister, that friend of the druids, that adept in all the black sciences of Africa — Medrawd ap Llew! And this abominable treachery performed every day and night while your family are giving her meat and drink and shelter! Biting the hand that fed her she was — the wicked snake!"

Long before this indictment was over Morfydd had gathered up her indignation like a ball of scarlet thread and hid it against her heart, hid it deeper even than those brittle snail shells, now warm from their place between her breasts; and with a light step and a burning cheek she led the priest forth, out of Ty Cerrig, and out of the hearing of her father. Then she turned on him. Once clear of the place and once satisfied that Gwrgi's ox was the only denizen of the shed, she unwound to the full her scarlet ball of moral indignation.

"Bit the hand that fed her, has she? What better thing *could* she bite? Fed her! Fed her! Fed her! Fed her! Thus are justified all the abominable oppressions, all the burdens, all the dead weights, all the leaden monotonies, all the dusty samenesses, all the loaded dice, all the gilded harnesses, all the branded backs, all the rights of pastors and masters, parents and grandparents, corpses and carrion! *The hand that feeds us?* What else *should* we bite?"

Her voice was so crystal clear and her face so illuminated that the priest's eyes narrowed into slits of suspicious astonishment. It was clear to Morfydd that he considered her plainly and simply out of her mind.

His brow was furrowed in the naive process of agitated thought. "He's wondering," she told herself, "whether it mightn't be possible to use a completely mad Princess of Edeyrnion to great religious advantage. Not that it's clear to him yet *how* to get Porius ab Einion's insane consort into his power. So it'll have to be this questionable 'how' that I must dally with, and tantalize, and prolong, if we're to keep the status quo till Porius comes back!"

She let the priest depart in this mood of contemplative silence without adding a word either to increase or to diminish the effect upon him of her interesting lack of normal human intelligence. She had in fact begun to do with this young man what her Gwyddyles mother used to do with people and things; that is to say, to float over them and under them and into them till she could, so to say, lead them "by the lining of their souls."

But as she watched him recede further and further down the hill towards the church she grew aware that his departing form was being dodged by a new arrival. This was none other, as she knew at once, than the small page, Neb ap Digon. Rather to her surprise her heart began to beat quite excitedly.

"This," she thought, "can only mean one thing, a message from Porius," and seeing that the priest was now out of sight, she threw dignity and custom to the devil and hurried to meet the little page. Yes, he *had* brought a letter! It was inscribed on a fragment of parchment torn from some old medical prescription in a language she took for Arabic. But Porius's words were in simple Brythonic and were written in the clear, round, boyish hand he had used at school and that all his education with Brother John had been unable to change.

Neb watched her face intently as she read and he could see that the words were as few as they were distinct. A more living script was also distinct to the eyes of a page from the court of Arthur! For as the new princess read her husband's letter the blood slowly spread over her face — a face that her long vigil by the dying Teleri had left noticeably strained and white — and having drawn her underlip for a second into her mouth as if it were a bite from an apple of the Hesperides, she proceeded to lick both her lips with the scarce-visible tip of her tongue, a proceeding that gave to her countenance, at least in the eyes of Neb ap Digon, a touchingly natural, girlish expression of intimate surprise and delight.

“I shall be,” the letter ran, “in a few minutes at our old home rock, *craig-y-gartref,* and I beseech you to meet me there. I’ve got the start this time, so don’t be surprised if I get there first!”

There was no signature, but she knew it was a peculiarity of Porius to assume that he was the only man in Edeyrnion who could write a letter.

“Any answer, Princess?” and Neb’s gaze gave her the feeling that he was reading not only her unexpressed thoughts but her *inexpressible* thoughts.

“Say I’ll be there,” she replied, “as soon as I’ve told my father about Lord Rhun and Ogof-y-Gawr.”

On hearing this Neb ap Digon gave her a very sharp look and made a motion of shrugging his small shoulders, as who should say: “I can’t see the necessity for going into these details, but if you insist—”

The new princess *did* insist, and, as she turned away from her husband’s sophisticated messenger and ran back without feeling the ground under her feet to her father’s house, she invented to the tune of her own beating heart a proud and high-pitched lie, such as would have confounded Neb himself. *She would tell Brochvael* that she *was going* to meet Rhun. At all events she would keep from him, as if it were a ritual secret, the identity of the person she was really going to meet.

She had divined, with an occult intuition for such matters inherited from her Gwyddyles mother, that Brochvael would be more puzzled than agitated by the reappearance of Sibylla. For herself she didn’t feel in the least puzzled. It was indeed what she had told herself more than once was extremely likely to happen. But she did feel a lively desire to witness Sibylla’s discomfiture by the smiling Drom.

But this malicious joy would have to be put off for the present. Meanwhile — oh, how much she had to tell Porius! She heard a sorrowful noise from Gwrgi's ox as she passed the shed and she went in to stroke the creature and move some fresh hay within its reach. But the solitary beast recommenced its moan before she was out of the shed.

"It's saying," she thought, "'I know you're a well-meaning girl and all that; but you're not an ass, and you never can be an ass, and in these things I am a slave of habit.'"

It gave her a queer sensation to pass through the kitchen and find it empty. "They haven't had time to get to the Gaer yet," she thought. "Teleri's still lying on Nesta's bed waiting."

She thrust her left hand as far down her neck as she could and gave the string of snail shells a shake so that it shouldn't scrape quite so uncomfortably against her skin.

"I'll have," she thought, "to tell Porius everything and to get his leave to do what I decide is best in all these troublesome affairs."

"Morfydd!" It was her father calling. He must have heard her. Well! She mustn't stand staring at Gwrgi's tools and at the few faded and tattered pages which were all that was left of Canna's "Book of Prognostications," which lying on its particular shelf, along with a pot of fragrant ointment, she had from infancy associated with the old woman.

But this meeting with Porius was a thing she wanted to think about in undisturbed calm. The last thing she felt she could endure, with her nerves strung up as they were, was an encounter with a young man who contained in his actual body the spirit of Jesus.

She had accepted the fellow without giving much thought to his relation with her father. She had heard that his chief *cynneddf,* or "magical peculiarity," was a power of carrying about with him in mysterious secrecy, the actual personality of Jesus of Nazareth and carrying it so closely and intimately that when he spoke or made any move, or loved or hated, or accepted or rejected, it was difficult to be sure whether it were he or Jesus who was speaking, acting, or feeling.

Morfydd had indeed regarded the young man with a careless and casual eye as only another infatuation of her inflammable parent and no more worthy of him than was the impassioned Sibylla. In the flickering wing beats of attention she had given him she had put him down as a simple, pious, undesigning catamite, upon whom had fallen the fate of being an innocent accomplice of the designs of the treacherous druid and who was probably as surprised as anyone else at Brochvael's interest in him.

She had imbibed so much of the paganism of her father and brother — nor was Rhun, nor Rhun's mother, nor any of the Aunties a counterbalance to the influences round her — that for a young serving man to harbour the notion that his body was a dwelling place for Jesus Christ no more arrested her attention as a marvel than it would have arrested the attention of some energetic young sister of the youthful Boethius with her head full of political schemes for freeing Rome from the Ostrogoth, had Drom appeared in *their* senatorial household.

"Morfydd!"

"Coming, Father!" and snatching up and throwing down a polished silver plate of Canna's in which the old lady had shown her to herself from infancy, she rushed into the passage between kitchen and chamber out of which ascended the stone steps to her tower bedroom. The obscurity of this narrow corridor was at this time of the morning pierced by a stream of sunlight, which, entering through the orifice above the massive outer door, ran along the whole passage till it broke like a golden wave upon the lowest step of the winding staircase.

It was with their heads and shoulders equally flooded by this shaft of yellow light that Morfydd and Drom met, and this meeting, casual though it was, and quickly past and gone, was so full of significance for Morfydd that she found herself describing it to Porius an hour or so later with an interest that compelled her hearer’s closest attention.

But Neb’s message had turned the least thing she noticed into a kind of winged boat landing her through wind and wave upon the shore of the home rock.

And this magic conveyor of inanimate mysteries brought into the sun ray as she passed Drom an old mark — well! a mark of ten years ago — that she herself had made, when, as a little girl, in the act of showing her brother a store of small but very heavy quartz stones she’d collected for the sham battle she was waging with Porius and Rhun, she had been so flouted by this young philosopher as a disturbing child that in a fury she had barely missed his face with one of the heaviest and sharpest of these missiles; and yet the sight of this dint in that stone doorpost brought her nothing but pleasure and the feel of the grey lichen on the surface of *craig-y-gartref.*

Only half-aware of what she was experiencing, since everything wove itself into an air bridge to the home rock, the experiences were nevertheless vivid enough, and her mind commented on them as they came and went, though in a manner that even Porius might have found somewhat confusing.

Obscure visions of two imperial courts, for instance, Arthur’s and the one at Constantinople, both of them very vague and phantasmal, for the only real courts she had ever seen were the extremely primitive ones of the Gaer and Ogof-y-Gawr, kept offering themselves, without any attempt at relevancy, as an explanation of the astonishing politeness, so deft, so discreet, and so profoundly delicate, with which Drom was now moving out of her way, stepping backward and bowing low as he did so. He certainly had the power, this weird servant of her father's, of reducing at will the amount of psychic and physical weight possessed by his personality, as if some vessel arriving at a particular wharf could enlarge or lessen the amount of water it displaced; and it suddenly came to her to ask herself an odd question: "Did our inmost soul have any sex at all?"

This was the first time she had been alone with Drom, and though they were together only for the few pulse beats during which they crossed each other's path in that sun-pierced corridor, something, she told herself in her aroused susceptibility, passed between them that, though it tossed her up like the rest on the home rock, failed not to leave a shell, a feather, a shining scale, on the sands of its withdrawal.

But once past that stream of sunlight, with the dint in the doorpost and the bowing Drom, everything became painfully real. No sooner had she crossed the threshold into her father's room than she saw in a flash that he was in no easy mood. She hurried to his chair and kissed him on the forehead, leaning, as she did so, so low over the Aristophanes that the snail shells for Teleri pressed uncomfortably against one of her breasts.

But he was clearly in a querulous state, and it annoyed her to see that for him to be left for a moment without Drom implied a loss in the sufferance of which to be alone with his daughter was poor comfort.

But with the home rock in the offing she was prepared to be generous. Giving Aristophanes a firm but respectful push she flung open her cloak and seated herself in front of Brochvael, her legs swinging against his knees.

"I've got some news for you, Father," she began, thinking, while she watched his drooping glance turn obstinately and sulkily back to the open page by her side, how absurdly ignorant she was of women's feelings! Canna had always told her every possible thing she could, but she had never told her that being taken by a man made a girl want to be with him so much! And yet she didn't love him as she did Rhun. She couldn't understand herself.

"When's your man coming back to you? That's all the news I want to hear! How does he suppose we're going to prevent that precious mother of his joining up with Prince Medrawd? No! Don't interrupt! I know Medrawd's up there. Several of the *Gosgordd* have come expressly to tell me they've seen him. I don't know whether you realize it was to your man he went when I first found out about him. He took it all quite calmly, your man did! And now I don't suppose it would bother him a bit, eh, if his mother and Medrawd were to join forces?"

"What's *that* word, Father?" she enquired impatiently, pointing to the top of the page on which his gaze was fixed.

"It's the name of the play, girl," he responded, and added grimly, "and it wouldn't do you any harm, or Euronwy either, to read a little of it."

"What a word!" she murmured, "*Ecclesiazusae*!" And then she thought, "But why does he hate Porius so? Why did he let us marry if he's going to do his best to spoil our marriage?" And feeling no shame at a growing impulse to tear a few pages out of the *Ecclesiazusae* in the face of that peevish, toothless, cantankerous, grey head, and thinking, "And *now for Sibylla!"* "You haven't heard yet, Father," she announced in a clear, cheerful voice, throwing her head back, and catching up one of her knees between her folded fingers, "about the return of Sibylla, have you, Mother's Gwyddyles-girl, the one they say was so in love with Uncle Einion?"

She was avenged already. He was visibly agitated. And there was no Drom at hand to convey vicariously to his too-human nerves the godlike magnetism of the Son of Mary. His hand actually trembled as he tightened finger and thumb upon the parchment edge of the *Ecclesiazusae,* concealing thereby a most beautiful "E."

"Rhun found her," Morfydd remorselessly went on, delighting in giving him the impression that she too was seething with furious jealousy, though as a matter of fact — and it was to her own astonishment that thus it was — she felt no particular anger either against Sibylla or against Rhun.

"Rhun found her and they've joined up together; whether she killed her Sais or just ran away from him I don't know, and whether Rhun will ever tell me I don't know. But I know that in Rhun, as long as she doesn't spit at Mithras, she's got a man she can do anything she likes with — one of her own age and one who—"

"One who's got the blood of that slave's son," interrupted Brochvael, "who seduced my sister! But, girl, girl, tell me *this* in the devil's name! Where do these faithful and loyal friends of ours intend to set up house? Alarch's place— 'Llys Gwrnach,' Einion and I used to call it, to tease her! — well, we all know what's happened to that, since Gorsant got hold of it. None of us can bear to go near the thing! 'Gorsant's Latrine,' Gwrgi calls it. And that's what it looks like, from all I can see of it, when I go to the market! But where *can* they go? The whole place is gone. 'Twas Mynydd-y-Gaer and Rhyd-y-Gawr once. Before that it was Gaer-y-Gawr and Rhitta-Trefnant. After that it was the Market of Mithras. But now, thanks to Morvran's murderer, it's become Cor-wen, the 'White Choir' — *Corwen*!" And he repeated the two syllables with a sigh of bitter contempt, squeezing as he did so the first letter of *Ecclesiazusae* so violently that his thumbnail turned white as an oyster shell.

Then, after a moment's silence, "However! One thing I *do* know: Einion will be laughing in his beard at everything they do, and Jesus will have joined the Titans in Tartarus! But in the devil's name, child, where *will* they live? She wouldn't like it in that cave of his and I can't imagine—"

But his daughter had slipped off the table and had pushed past him. “What a pair we are!” she thought. “But he’s much nicer than I am! He really wants them both to be happy. I’d like to see her madly jealous of Drom, if not of me!”

She ran to the window. The shutters must have been opened by Canna when she brought the two men their daybreak loving cup and with it a bite of cheesecake; for there were a few yellow drops of the former and a few crumbs of the latter.

The two must have stood there, side by side, sipping and nibbling and watching the sun come up. She hoisted herself by the help of her wrists and the tips of her toes and leaned over the sill. The autumn air blew cool against her cheeks. She had never been a girl to be specially conscious of her feminine attributes, and the way she now thrust her hair back from her forehead and held it there was a good deal more of a direct and practical gesture than would have been made by most young men.

As she leant there the wind seemed to be blowing from a little to the right of the sun; so it was southeast. Well! It blew from the direction of the *llys* of the three dead Modrybedd. But it was as characteristic of the daughter just then that she didn’t give a thought to Ogof-y-Gawr, either in relation to the dead princesses or to the living Rhun, as it was characteristic of the father that, having released the beautifully turned “E” from the duress to which it had been subjected, he plunged at once, bearing apparently no grudge against anyone in the world, into the unalloyed pleasure of hearing Praxagora’s democratic rehearsal and her spirited declaration: “I have an equal share with you in this country and I am vexed and annoyed at all your public transactions.”

And if his daughter found at that moment that the touch of the dead Teleri’s snail shells against her breast was like a caress and that the world-shaking mischiefs murmured by the toothless mouth behind her were as friendly as the grey lichen and purple heather of the home rock, Brochvael beneath his rhythmic muttering was thinking of one domicile after another that might possibly satisfy the romantic Sibylla.

Neither father nor daughter can have been completely unaware of the curious irony that had brought them to this particular turning point in the changes of their human hearts; and in so small a space, and in so short a time! Would the genial ghost of Kymeinvoll the Gwyddyles have smiled wryly at them, thinking how much shorter she could have made their path to this makeshift wisdom, such as it was, had she been permitted to live as long as old Canna?

Probably her smile would have been amused and tender and not wry at all; but it is also probable that the high-handed semi-royal impetuosity, a little capricious but quite shrewd, with which her daughter seemed fully able to play the part of Princess of the Gaer, would have astonished the superstitious woman from across the water.

"Why did I lie to him?" Morfydd thought as she took the shortest cut she knew — and she knew them all — that led to *craig-y-gartref.* "There was no purpose in it, no reason for it! A silly motiveless falsehood it was!"

She had told Brochvael she was going to Ogof-y-Gawr to assure Rhun that she could promise him the full support of both her husband and her father. There was no falsehood about this support. Porius, she knew, would give all of it at her asking. And she had found, as she expected, that her father was fully alive to the political value of establishing a strong new branch of the House of Cunedda in the ancient palace of the forest people whence the traditions went back to Marrakesh of the Berbers.

"He was scared, the darling old fool," she said to herself, "that Rhun and I would be making trouble for the tribe. But I think I made him see that if

Rhun has children by Sibylla and keeps up the glory of Ogof-y-Gawr it'll be a support for us all, not a falling away! But why did I say I was going straight to Ogof-y-Gawr to tell Rhun? He certainly looked pleased! How did I know for a surety he would be? Not to make *her* jealous! No, it's always for the same reason. It's always Porius! Why *does* he hate Porius so? Is it perhaps because he wishes he'd been *his* son and not Uncle Einion's? Is it because of Morvran? I shall never know! Well, there it is! But *why did* I *lie?"*

She suddenly stopped, panting, for she had been running. There, before her, huddled up, curiously reduced in size, not so much out of fear as out of shame and humiliation and extreme unease, was a blinking, cowering, whitish grey owl!

"Blodeuwedd!" gasped Morfydd, and the two of them, the excited girl and the agitated owl, stared at each other in absolute stillness.

For both these two-legged beings, for the creature with soft breasts and brown hair, and for the creature with hooked beak and greyish white feathers, the two great cosmic motions as Brochvael's Aristotelian boyfriend in Rome might have put it, of the *energeia akinesis,* "the motion without motion," that eternally moves the world — the motion which is the stream of events in Time, and the motion which is the growth of events in Space — appeared to stop dead. Then in the hearing of them both a faded poplar leaf fluttered down upon the moss; and once more the causeless, indetermined fluctuations of *anangke and tyche*, of "necessity and chance," flowed and wavered on.

"I know, if *you* don't know," the owl seemed to be saying, "why you lied like that!"

"You don't, you don't, you don't!" Morfydd's very soul longed to cry out.

But her heart couldn’t utter the words, for deep within itself it knew the owl was right. “If I did,” she whispered, “it was the other way round from you. I turned from my light-of-love to my mate. You turned from your mate to your light-of-love.”

“And I’d do it again! And I’d do it again!” cried the owl. “Gwydion created me for his own glory and for the glory of his choice. Oh yes! You’re listening to me now, Gwydion son of Don! But I shall defy you forever! And I shall have my choice forever! *Erre! Erre! Erre! Erre!”* And screaming that “Begone! Begone! Begone!” by which Homer’s demigods despatched their enemies to Erebus, the bird tore herself out of the tangled mass of holly and poplar from which she had been blinking at the sun and swept away towards the river.

And Morfydd went on, following the upward slope of the winding track that led to the home rock, but she ceased running, and as she went she knew well that she had never before reached quite such a point of unashamed candour with herself. Indeed she proved this to herself by the realism of what she now proceeded to do. “I want him to make love to me,” she said to herself, “and I don’t want our love disturbed by his finding the snail shells on me!”

She waited therefore till she came to the neighbourhood of the home rock where two paths converged. Here, or not far from here, had been, since her earliest childhood, a series of large badgers’ holes. It had been one of the Iberian peculiarities of Princess Indeg, her father’s mother, the elder sister of the Three Aunties, to regard badgers as sacred animals.

Einion ab Iddawc had, in his humorous way, encouraged this humane superstition, so that Morfydd had been brought up to regard badger baiting as an indecent bestiality, only excusable because to the ancient forest people all these Celtic invaders, whether Gwyddylaid or Brythonaid, were no better than ignorant barbarians.

When therefore she reached this crossing of paths she wasn’t at all surprised to find stray shreds of old scattered wasps’ nests lying about. But at this spot, at the foot of one particular fir tree, there was a different sort of orifice altogether. This was a miniature cave, so clear of dead leaves and rainwater and bird droppings and fungus that the general effect of the place resembled that of an antechamber to an elves’ winter palace. And it was here that kneeling on the moss she pulled out the snail-shell necklace and arranged it in a circle, even going so far as to place the under-part of each shell, from which the owner had vanished into the immeasurable Hades of all the forgotten crustaceans of the world, face down; so that in case there *were* any inhabitants of this minute sanctuary the intrusion would be pleasing and not disturbing.

It was while she was thus engaged that she suddenly heard voices approaching. A party of men — for the voices were all male — was rapidly drawing near, coming up the one of the two paths that led from the direction of Brother John’s cell. Her decision was rapid, helped out, so Chance had willed, by the fact that she was already crouching down on hands and knees. She moved forward very cautiously, first on one knee and then on the other, straddling her fairy circle of shells, and forcing her way onward, like a diver at the bottom of entangled marine seaweeds, under hollies and willows and birches and alders, till, sinking down on a bed of this year’s dead ferns and last year’s dead leaves, she lay dead still, trying to breathe inaudibly, but feeling as if her very heartbeats must betray her.

Before she curled up in her harelike form she had caught Porius’s voice. Of the two others, for she was soon aware that there were only two of them, she felt sure at once by his foreign voice that one was the Jewish doctor, and by the drift and burden of the third one's words she wasn't long in guessing that it was this strange boy-poet whom Einion had refused to receive into his household.

It was no displeasure to her to find she could follow the precise feelings of Porius by the tone of his voice; and it was an exquisite pleasure to discover from these same tones that his feelings were identical with what hers had been ever since Neb had delivered his message.

He was evidently exercising something of the same sullen but massive and patient self-control that Gwrgi's ox was wont to exercise when he had to swing his back round one more time on the darkened east and see the glow in the west touch the stubble stalks before him with a flicker of red ere the plough he was dragging turned them over into eternal night.

The arguments of these disputing men were having the same effect upon Porius as her father's recent reception of the news about Ogof-y-Gawr had had upon her. As she had done with her father he seemed to be laboriously defending with the help of all manner of propitiatory side issues a course of action which he had already determined to take for some quite solid, sensible, practical, and utilitarian reason.

"My wife spoke to me very earnestly on the matter only last night," the doctor was saying. "She feels that Gog and Magog are too young to be plunged into a crowded community like that of the Gaer. She feels that I myself would do better work as the Gaer's physician if I had a home a few miles off — if in fact I was permitted to settle permanently where our son Magog was born and where we at present *are.* In fact, she says she has had a clear token from the gods of her tribe — for she is, as I have explained to you, a woman of Moab, and her respect for the only true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is, I am sorry to confess to you, extremely undeveloped — a token from her gods, false gods no doubt, but false gods can, alas! give signs and tokens — such is the measure of the power allowed them — that are not as false as themselves; a clear token, she says, that there is danger to Magog, if not to Gog, if she and her children leave the place where they are and move to the Gaer."

"A bard doesn't beg for lodging like a beggar!" the high-pitched voice of the boy-poet broke in. "But I must, if you please, and if the prince will let me, say just this. Your wife's gods are no doubt powerful gods. I'm glad to learn about them. I respect them, as I respect all powerful divinities. But with yourself to feed — and a wise healer needs to nourish in his own body the magic with which he heals — and with such offspring, for I've noted those rounded limbs from the rose gardens of the sun — and with the fountains of her own bosom to be fed from the breasts of the earth — won't there be a lack of that surplusage of meats and sweetmeats, of delicacies and dainties, with which, placed on clean and polished platters on the thresholds of human habitation, we are wont to soften the hearts of the invisible ones?

"As they used to say in Caer Einion: 'The richer the steam from the pot on the fire, the greater the gods that are drawn to the door!' And what I say to you, Lot-el-Azziz, Healer of Judah, with due submission to our prince, who holds all our fates in his hands, is simply this. Suppose your wife's gods do compel you to remain in Saint Julian's cell."

The boy-bard's voice suddenly became inhumanly shrill. It became like the voice of an angry water ouzel; in fact, it rose to such a thin and piercing scream that Morfydd grew aware of a personal, almost a physical, shrinking from this unseen semi-human being who owned a voice like the squeak of a Tartarean bat flying in and out of the oozy chasms in the black rock face above the waters of the witch-goddess Styx.

“Yes,” screamed the boy-bard of Ynys Prydein, “why, I ask you, O Doctor of Devils, shouldn’t I share your abode with you? I can make tasty and savoury dishes as well as any daughter of Moab. With me in that place, your Moabitess would rest from her labour, her gods while she slept would pour their precious ointments upon her head, you and your children would grow fat before the Lord, and all the rulers of Ynys Prydein would send offerings. Gold and silver would be accounted nothing of in Saint Julian’s cell; for let me tell you *this,* Doctor, and do thou lay it to heart: the gifts that reach the cup and platter of the Chief of the Bards of Britain are such as no curer of palsy, or leprosy, or even of the sacred sickness itself, ever sets eyes upon in all the days of his life!”

It was then that Morfydd softly lifted herself up upon her elbow and listened intently while a vibration of delicious thankfulness quivered through her, for Porius’s answer to the two men was exactly the answer she would have given herself.

“Surely,” she thought, “the evils of marriage are past when the man does what the woman wants without a word passing between them!”

But, all the same, hearing Porius’s words she sighed. “He must be harassed to the breaking point,” she thought, “to take this flippant tone.”

“In the name, therefore,” cried Porius, in a tone worthy of his father, so ironical and careless it was, “of all the gods that the Church of Christ is destined to swallow up alive in all the mountains and rivers and forests and valleys of Ynys Prydein, I appoint thee, Taliesin, Pen Beirdd of Ynys Prydein, to be keeper and guardian of the *Betws* of Pelagius, sometimes called Ty-Llys-Sulian, and otherwise known as Brother John’s Cell, while I give and bestow by the right and authority of my ancestors to the Physician of my Household at Mynydd-y-Gaer in the Princedom of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy, that is to say, to Lot-el-Azziz of the Tribe of Judah in the Regions of the Jordan the special usage, licence, right, custom, privilege, perquisite, and prerogative, of eating and drinking and sleeping with his wife and cherishing the offspring of their two bodies within the precincts of the said cell of Brother John, whereof I have appointed the said Bard to be the honourable Keeper; and may he who breaks this solemn compact and covenant hereby proclaimed at the Holes of the Badgers in this Forest of Edeyrnion, where the path from Ty Cerrig crosses the path from Ogof-y-Gawr, fall dead as Brother John is dead, and be damned as Minnawc Gorsant was certain Brother John was damned!"

She was sitting erect now in her hiding place, scooping up handfuls of rubble with both hands and letting it fall like dust or sand through her fingers. It was a curiously composite rubble that surrounded her here, a rubble in which few creatures save moles and mice and beetles and slowworms took any interest, but which was already proving the best nourishment in the world for a particular species of large, dusky brown, dung-coloured fungus, the victim of or perhaps the happy wearer of a marvellous worn-white mould which surrounded its rim and half covered the interior of its concave saucer like a fairy leprosy.

Morfydd stared at this infected or hymeneally invested growth without seeing it, or rather while she saw it, substituting for all the things called up by it all the other very different things called up by the tone of her husband's voice. How well she knew that tone! In the depths of his being he was happy; but on the surface he was irritable and irresponsible. Everything except his interior happiness was irrelevant.

Above all, he was in a mood almost as cynical as the prevailing mood of his father, the dead prince, a mood she had always enjoyed and indeed had encouraged in Einion but had hardly dared to hope to see in Einion's son.

She herself had got it in her to be a very competent ruler; and of this power in herself she had already begun to enjoy the taste.

And along with this power she undoubtedly inherited from her grandmother enough of the old Iberian strain in the matriarchy of the Aunties to feel a certain humorous gratification when formidable men — her father with his Aristophanes, her husband with his Herculean muscles, Rhun with his sun god — showed themselves so ignorant of the real realities of life, so led astray by childish distractions.

She felt an intense desire to laugh aloud when she heard the way in which Porius was prepared to settle this dispute. “Does he suppose,” she thought as she stared at that white-blotched fungus, “does he suppose that a woman from the tents of the desert will submit to suckle her baby on a pile of pillows, while a boy with a voice like the shriek of a bat is stirring her cauldron at her fire?”

Since, however, there was no visible woman on the scene during this princely proclamation at the “Holes of the Badgers” it soon became clear to the listening girl that her formidable dispenser of hearth space and roof space in the province of Edeyrnion had not only succeeded in pacifying the rival claimants to Brother John’s cell but had actually put them into an extremely good temper; for the doctor could be heard murmuring some resonant and rhythmical chant that she supposed was Hebrew, while the high-pitched voice of the young Pen Beirdd was without question uttering jubilant self-congratulations over his new status as an independent, unattached sharer of domestic satisfactions.

She couldn’t catch the doctor’s words, and even if she *had* done so she wouldn’t have understood the rabbinical symbols that floated in and out and round and about every syllable the man was uttering; but the young bard’s song of gratitude to the new Prince of Edeyrnion seemed to be proceeding from a totally different dimension of human emotion from the one that gave birth to this ancient vibration of Hebrew piety.

Kwrw to drink and a lovely dwelling!
Kwrw yfet a chein trefret!

carolled the boy-bard in childish exultation.

And she soon heard him improvising verses to a tune that might well have been called "the autumn song of the yaffle," so joyously and jocundly was it adapted to the pine-scented, sun-warmed wind that was whispering through the branches:

It is meat that he gives to me, to me,
That he kills, that he hangs, that he rears, that he feeds,
That he feeds, that he rears, that he kills again,
Yt ladd, yt gryc, yt vac, yt vyc,
Yt vyc, yt vac, yt ladd, yn rac!
Kwrw to drink and a lovely dwelling!
Kwrw yfet a chein trefret!
Though the olives ripen on Olivet!

"Is he silenced," the girl thought, "by his own daring in introducing the Mount of Olives into his thanksgiving?"

And she couldn't repress a sigh of relief when the boyish and high-pitched voice took up the strain again:

A noble giver is he, is he
Who gives of his bounty to me, to me
To live with the greatest marvels three,
With a Healer, with a Mother, with a Babe on knee;
A bed to sleep in, an oven to bake in,
Willows and waters and winds to wake in;
While fire can warm and water can wet,

And olives can ripen on Olivet,
The fate of a man can still be met!
Kwrw yfet a chein trefret!

Thus was Morfydd's appreciation of her husband's diplomacy in reconciling a Wandering Jew with the Pen Beirdd of Ynys Prydein justified by the Muses themselves. But her pride was short-lived; in fact, it was changed into heartbeating agitation, when, upon the two rivals' departure, this same husband summoned her in a whisper to leave her hiding place.

"*Porius*! How on earth did you know I was here?"

"Know, sweetheart? Haven't I been spying on you ever since you left Ty Cerrig?"

There was nothing for her to do but obey him; and as soon as she was in his arms he lifted her off the ground and began carrying her towards their childhood's home rock.

Previous to her giving her father the false impression that she was off to Ogof-y-Gawr, Brochvael had informed her — for he always seemed to be announcing to her the direction of the wind at the moments when she was most conscious of the wind of fate — that it was blowing that morning from the southwest. So that when Porius lifted her up and cried in high spirits, "There'll be a fine wind blowing at *craig-y-gartref,* for it's due west today!" she felt a contrarious impulse to raise her hand — for he was holding her high up against his chin — twist her fingers tight in his hair, give it so vicious a tug that he'd be driven to drop her, and then, once on the ground, outrun him, as she *and Rhun* always could outrun him, and take refuge in Ogof-y-Gawr!

When, however, they entered the part of the forest that surrounded the home rock, where the trees were mostly pines, he was compelled by necessity to lower her body to the level of his ribs and to take a tighter hold of her.

Now there was something about this tighter hold that changed the whole current of her mood. It wasn't that her irrational revolt collapsed in the presence of reason. It wasn't that her resistance ceased in the presence of superior strength. There was a much more intimate cause. Though he was only clasping her in the bend of his left arm with his left hand against her body, Chance arranged it that he held her now precisely in the manner in which in her earliest and vaguest young-girl reveries her imaginary lovers had always embraced her.

During their whole betrothal he had never held her quite like this. As Homer would say, "it loosened her knees." And it was her first experience of the real feminine ecstasy of yielding, for on her bridal night she had blindly, resolutely, and almost heroically forced herself to submit to him. On that night, as far as she was concerned, there had been no delicious tantalizations, no tremulously sweet delays, no advances and retreats, no entranced hoverings on the brink of surrender. But now, owing to the way he was holding her while his free hand brushed from her face the fragrant sharp-pointed fir foliage, and while her intelligence, fluttering like a light-winged butterfly round them both as he carried her, missed no single pulse beat of this experience, her whole body was reduced to a quivering cloud of delicious yieldingness. And, moreover, though she dodged all attempts to penetrate into the secrets of his male lovemaking, she knew very well that with nobody else in the world — certainly not with poor dear Rhun — could she discuss the things of love.

This also was a new discovery for her. "I could almost," she thought, "tell him what I feel for Rhun!" and after wondering why this thought gave her just then no twinge of pain: "But I'm certain things have happened to him in these last days, and things about women too, that he couldn't bring himself to confess *to me* for anything."

Her father had often described to her the figure of Eros with which, between the scrolls of Plato and Aristotle, his young friend Boethius, of no greater age than the boy-bard Taliesin, had caused his ivory bookshelf to be adorned; and something now about the rush of the wind in her face as they came out from the trees made her recall her girlish imagination of that divine figure.

It was lucky for them both perhaps that there was no beautiful and inquisitive Eros flying with them at that moment, as they emerged into the clearing at the foot of *craig-y-gartref.* Such a fatally wise presence, its head full of every aspect of the amorous experiences of each of them, might have revealed to Morfydd that when it came to pure sensuality neither she nor Creiddylad could compare, in satisfying the voluptuous demands of Porius's exacting nature, with the mysterious and dangerous Nineue.

Whether even Eros could have revealed to Porius the secrets of Morfydd's heart is doubtful; but it was certainly lucky that such a visitor from Cytherean shores would have been too scared of Aristophanes to visit Ty Cerrig and reveal to Brochvael that in the last couple of days this Hercules of a son-in-law had, in the very vein of that virile hero, embraced, in addition to his bride, a *cawres* from the caves of the Cader and a Ffichtiaid from the Gulfs of Annwn!

But this same Eros, whether in the spiritual shape wherein Boethius's artist had imagined him, or diffused, by the mystery that moves our world, not only through these married lovers' nerves, but through each "guest and companion" of their excited bodies, suddenly decided against the home rock as a bed for love; and "taking," as Homer would say, "other counsel," compelled Morfydd's enamoured centaur to lay his living burden, whose heart was now beating as fast if not faster than his own, on a soft expanse of lavishly grown lichen that flourished at the foot of the rock.

This was a dedicated bed for such a purpose for the lichen that grew there was of the rare kind, characteristic of the margin between forest and mountain, that had always made Morfydd think of the bottom of the sea.

Out of the sea had risen the fatal Aphrodite; and it was because of the deep sea of loneliness in that hidden spot that Porius, urged by Eros, had been impelled to turn from the windy eminence of their playtime resort and lay her down here. Once or twice his hot excited fingers met hers — feverishly, shamelessly occupied now, hers as well as his, in loosening her garments — but, if their fingers met, their separate consciousnesses, impalpable, indefinable, without form or shape, but forced to function no less than their excited fingers within those ghost-god mysteries of Time and Space that dominate our particular world, exchanged those alternations of sex excitement that with the quiver of sun flames, air clouds, sea waves upon the sweet resistance of earth furrows make a fusion of the sexes and press forward to the supersexual.

At no point save the infliction of sudden death is the difference between the feelings of participator and onlooker wider than in the act of love. Had the young priest of the Gaer, now busy with the obsequies of the mocking Einion, been despatched by the Furies to behold this amorous scene, what would have obsessed his brain had he possessed the facts of the case would have been the thought: “Now with her and yesterday with a Ffichtiaid of Eryri and the day before with a cawres of the Cader!”

He would have visualized those others with the implacable fury of the self-denying for the self-satisfying; and, while he turned his eyes away from the attraction of this lascivious scene, to his indignant chastity Nineue would have appeared a devilish succubus and the second Creiddylad a loathsome corpse-devouring she-ogre.

It is even doubtful whether the great Myrddin Wyllt himself would have been able to feel with them, though a deep green gap in the drooping fir trees above these lovers combined with the azure sky of that October afternoon to create a cosmic arena by means of which the four elements of Space drew nourishment from the union of these children of Time, and enhanced the rapture they were enjoying.

Certainly, with his pre-human, million-years experience, the counsellor would have seen much that they were missing. He would have seen how their shared playmate memories — just as if it had been incest between brother and sister — took much of the sweet strangeness of love away. He would have seen how their unusual mental intimacy — so lucky an addition in other respects — was likely to lessen the elemental tragedy, at once so beautiful and so terrible, such as Porius had drunk to the dregs in the blood of the *cawres,* and Morfydd had tasted along with the honey of Mithras.

And finally he would have seen that their simple affection for each other would cause them to miss all that subhuman, almost saurian, sensuality such as Porius enjoyed in his protracted dalliance with the cold-blooded Nineue.

But even the prophetic insight of Myrddin Wyllt, deepened by prehistoric memories of one Golden Age, and inspired by mysterious intimations of another, even could it have been concentrated upon their reckless though most lawful union, would almost certainly have missed the one thing which each of them felt would have been nonexistent without the recognition of it by the other.

This was nothing less than the thing of all things that romantic lovers most dread to feel. It was in fact the thing, the secret of which Morfydd's father was at that very moment trying to extricate from the Eleven Comedies. It was their mutual recognition of the whole business of sex being *comical,* being in fact Nature's savage joke, inflicted for her own purpose upon her bewildered offspring, but a joke which, could it be turned upon its maker, either by a delicious and impious sensuality devoid of all passion or by a golden interchange of affectionate and humorous understanding, might be transformed into the possibility of a supersexual happiness in some undreamt-of future.

The first great advantage as lovers possessed by Porius and Morfydd was their mutual mania for a shameless and outrageous analysis of all their feelings, however scandalous; while their second great advantage was the one possessed by the incestuous rulers of Egypt, namely, the fact that having been familiar from childhood with each other's personalities they were able to plunge into the perilous salt sea of love without being distracted by anything strange in each other's character beyond the eternal strangeness of male to female and female to male.

They had played games together so long that their betrothal had only been a new and a rather more difficult game of which their bridal night was the complicated climax. Their present encounter was more than a game, however; it was a reality, and their enjoying each other on this grey lichen bed, guarded by these dark-bowing, obsequious, moss-scented fir boughs, was a private reality of their own, free from playing prince and princess, free from everything that implied a care, a duty, a piety, a purpose, a principle, or an obligation.

She had been absorbed in planning the happiness of the man with whom she was in love. He had been absorbed in enjoying sensations which he had come to feel were independent of his relation to any human being.

But now in their human enjoyment of the immortal absurdity of sex, of which gods and men can see the joke but which the ravishing sun as he beats down upon the earth, and the awakened earth as she lays bare the fecundity of her furrows to the sun, receive and accept with such huge solemnity, and which animals and birds and fishes and reptiles along with the whole world of vegetation and the whole world of mineral attractions and elemental repulsions accept as eternal necessity, their minds were so alike in their release from everything but their momentary pleasure in each other that they were perfectly ready to treat this encounter of theirs with a naturalness that was as humorous as it was free from every sort of afterthought.

Thus the larger part of their delight was purely the old simple human-animal ecstasy of conscious male with conscious female, that ancient rapture wherein the cunning craftiness of Nature has loaded the immemorial dice.

But Nature encouraged them to have their separate marginal feelings. He felt as if he were recklessly taking possession of much more than a desirable girlish body. He felt as if his inmost identity were piercing with a quivering shaft of palpable light, like the rush of a meteor, a deep rich gathered-up cloud of undulating mist, a cloud of sea mist and land mist, a cloud of earth vapour and sea foam.

Her feelings were less elemental and more realistic. She felt she was yielding up to the creature she knew best in the world, and liked best in the world, and with whom she had most in common in the world, everything that was hers to yield, everything, that is to say, except the evasive “I am I” within her that must stay itself whatever happened, so that *his* “I am I” she liked so well might stay itself also.

Thus it was that on this chaotic twenty-third of October, four hundred and ninety-nine, and on a bed of lichen that was not even within sight of their old playtime "home," the new rulers of Edeyrnion paid their tribute to Eros. Had the shadowy, scarcely human ghost of the death-desiring Teleri, noticing, as such a ghost might easily have done, that the snail-shell necklace destined to adorn her death lay among the twisted roots by the "Holes of the Badgers," come drifting past those two so locked together, it might have observed certain curious details about them. It might have observed, for instance, that Porius's eyes were fixed, not on Morfydd's face, but on a patch of brilliant yellow-green fungus mould, growing on a half-hidden rock to the left of the girl's closed eyelids. It might also have observed that Morfydd's tightly clenched fingers, at the end of one of her outflung arms, were clutching a fallen but still green pine cone, a pine cone that the descent of their two bodies into this unruffled retreat had broken from its parent branch.

But those fingers relaxed at last; and Porius, scrambling to his feet, began an outburst of rather futile and rather foolish farewell talk.

"I've got to leave you now, my angel, and God knows when you'll see me again! Before December, I *hope,* but it'll be the longest parting we've ever had since I used to cross Moel y Famau to go to school. I *had* to have you to myself before I went off, but off's the word now. God! We know whose legs I ought to have if I'm to get back to Saint Julian's before the counsellor leaves."

She let him pull her up to her feet, and they hugged each other blindly, without speaking or kissing. Then freeing herself she said, "There's one thing, my dear, and that's about Rhun."

"I don't care," he answered, *"what* it is about Rhun. Of course I'd like your first child to be mine. But if it isn't I shan't put a *tynged* on either of you. I know old Rhun and I know you. And I'd sooner never see either of you again than play the jealous Lord of the Gaer. Besides, I have no right. I haven't—"

But she interrupted him. "Hush now! That's enough! I know what these days have been, and I know what it means to be the strong man of the tribe! I forgive you all you've done and all you *will* do! No, it isn't *that.* It's only that Sibylla's left her Sais — killed him or run away from him — and come back here. She's started living with Rhun at Ogof-y-Gawr, and Rhun wants your leave for them to go on living there. He says, now that the Aunties are dead, that one of us ought to be on guard there; and since *you'll* be with the emperor, and my father will be alone save for this weird creature Drom, and there ought to be a woman at Ogof-y-Gawr, I told him I thought you wouldn't mind. Of course, you don't know Sibylla as well as I do. And I don't know what really goes on in her head, or what her secret thoughts and ambitions really are. I always believed she loved that Sais and was only playing with your father, and afterwards, when your father shook her off, with *my* father. And of course that still *may* be the truth!

"You can't tell from a girl's actions what she feels deep down in her heart. It's possible she was scared of going to Germania with him. She may have jumped into the sea and swam ashore the moment he got her into one of those awful-looking boats. Or maybe she escaped when he and his friends were all drunk. What *is* clear to me is that Rhun found her just at the moment when he was hit to the heart by that woman's going off — as I suppose she *has* gone off — with Dion Dionides."

Porius looked at her with a heavy, tender, glowering amusement. What on earth had happened between her and old Rhun that she could talk about him in this way, and take so calmly his settling down with this crazy Gwyddyles in the deserted halls of the Modrybedd?

But, as he continued to stare at her, the humorous expression in his face died away, and what was to him just then an extremely disturbing thought emerged from one of the side wings of his mind's proscenium and proceeded to hop like a black toad across the front of the stage, the thought, namely, that the love into which she had just plunged so deliciously with him had been only a desperate drug in which she had tried to drown her feeling for Rhun.

Women were, he told himself, liable to take these violent remedies when they were unhappy; and wasn't it possible that if Rhun had decided to forget Gwendydd in the arms of Sibylla Morfydd had decided to forget Rhun in the arms of her husband?

"I know what you're thinking, Porius," she murmured, as, allowing her to stand once more on her own feet, he perceptibly drew away a little, "but this has nothing — I swear it across my heart, my dear — *to do with us,* save that we've got to do our best for Rhun. I don't want him at the Gaer and I can't have him alone at the Ford, or in that woman's pavilion, if they've left it standing. But I wouldn't mind his being at Ogof-y-Gawr keeping up, along with Mithras, those old customs your mother hates so, and the priest hates so, and my father doesn't understand at all! That's where *your* father was so different. I know he took nothing seriously but he understood the people — *Cymry* as they call themselves now — and the Gwyddylaid too. He was a great man, Porius, in some ways, your father."

"He was mighty fond of *you,* sweetheart, I know that much!"

"And so he was, *in his heart,"* she retorted, "of you!"

He shook his head. But he had recovered his good humour. "She is fond of me," he told himself. "And when two people understand each other as well as we do that's surely enough."

"Morfydd," he began.

“Yes, my dear?”

“You *will* let your first child be ours?”

“Ours?” she cried, brushing a little cloud of midges from her forehead with the back of her hand and uttering the words in a tone he always fancied she must have got from her mother the Gwyddyles. “Goodness no! My *first* child must be the son of that immortal youth imprisoned in Caer Sidi of whose beauty that boy-bard was chanting, imagining it was himself. And my second child — oh, *I* don’t know! — somebody or other from our old gods — Pryderi perhaps, or even Manawyddan, if I could dispose of Rhiannon! But I’ve got too many serious affairs of state to discuss with you, my good man, to bother about children today.”

But Porius was quite satisfied with the look she’d given him. It was the look, combined with the indulgent tone, of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles, when as a boy he would drift into Ty Cerrig to beg for a piece of the sugared ginger she alone had the secret of making. So all he said was: “You don’t think, do you, that our friend Sibylla will be converted to Mithraism? The Bull-killer’s a fine deity for us men, but Brother John used to tell most revolting tales of his effect on women.”

“Do you *really* want to know what I think, Porius?”

He nodded. “Though I can guess at it,” he added.

“I think it’ll be Sibylla and not Rhun who’ll strike the note that the forest people — I beg their pardon, the *Cymry* — will follow at the Aunties’ old *llys.* I know they know her as a Gwyddyles from the Swamp and as Gunhorst’s woman and as the mother of little Gunta; but they know her also as my mother’s pet and your father’s favourite; and Canna swears that if Gunhorst hadn’t carried her off Father would have made her mistress of Ty Cerrig. Her path hasn’t often crossed mine, and I wouldn’t say I exactly like her, but I *have* a sort of admiration for her. They say in the Gaer that the

Derwydd's brother was under her thumb. I can only pray that Father isn't under the thumb of the Derwydd's servant! Porius, listen!"

"Well?"

"Aren't you going to see your mother before you go?"

"No, I'm *not."*

"Just because of these Medrawd rumours?"

"They're not rumours. They're facts."

"That your mother and Medrawd are lovers?"

He nodded.

She put out her hand and touched his wrist with the tips of two of her fingers. "Why are you so hard on her, Porius? Aren't we all under the same kind of fate?"

His whole face darkened and grew cloudy, while the wrinkled folds of his corrugated forehead created deep little shadowy hollows above and below his sunken eyes.

Automatically he seized the hand that had touched him, treating it as an absentminded fowler might treat a rare but useless bird, before deciding whether to let it fly away or to wring its neck.

"No, my dear," he burst out with sudden, uncouth impatience, "we're *not* all in the same fate. There's nothing treacherous to the emperor in Rhun's affair with Sibylla, nor in your visiting him at the Ford on the morning of our marriage, nor in Rhun's making love to Gwendydd, nor in... nor in—"

But she interrupted him. "Nor in your doing the same I suppose with that Ffichti-witch who waits on her and who — so the *Cymry* in the Gaer swear — has put a *tynged* on the emperor's counsellor!"

"But, sweetheart, think! Oh, I beg you to think! Oughtn't she at least, in common decency, to have waited till my father was under that great altar stone which her priests have been polishing for years before calling on this traitor to share her bed?"

She made an ineffective effort — more as a gesture of natural independence than as an emotional reaction — to free herself from his grasp; but it was as if her fingers had been caught between two millstones, each of them as gentle as sleep and each of them as unyielding as the anvil of Hephaestus, but such was the under-tide of her feeling for him just then that a delicious tremor of abandonment to his strength streamed like a sweet fatality through her whole being.

"Listen, Porius," she whispered. "If I were to give you unquestionable proof that your mother hasn't let this man into her bed, would you stop hating her like this, even if you don't see her before you go away?"

"Girl! Girl! How *could* you give me such proof? Besides, if you could, what would such proof be against this man's own word? I tell you, my sweet, he came to me and boasted of it! But whether he had her in bed or not, how can I forgive her treachery to the emperor in letting this traitor—"

But Morfydd stopped him with an impatient wave of her free hand. "You great humbug!" she cried. "How can you talk like that? You know very well how mixed-up everything is with us these days, in Edeyrnion, in this island, in the whole world! Aren't you always telling me yourself that because Medrawd is a child of Arthur's sister he has a far better right to succeed Arthur than any of Arthur's own bastards? You've even told me that the Modrybedd considered Rhun, not *you,* the natural heir to your father because of Alarch the Fair. And anyway I never like it, Porius, when you talk in that tone about the emperor. Serve him, fight for him, by all means. Do anything for him you want to do, but don't copy Rhun, my dear, and justify your own loves and hates by dragging in 'loyalty to the emperor' or 'treachery to Ynys Prydein.'

"But let go my hand and I'll say no more about your mother. I certainly wouldn't like you" — and her hand was free now and there was flickering across her face as much of a smile as is possible with a girl whose fingers are pressed into her mouth— "to decide for me how to treat Father! But just tell me this—"

And it occurred to Porius as he looked at her that it was going against Nature for *any lovers,* even though their minds beat in as close a rhythm as a pair of Boethius's water clocks, to say *simply everything* to each other! "No," he told himself, "she came near just now to revealing something about Mother, but decided to keep it dark—"

"Just tell me," she went on, "what you do in your mind when things get out of control, and you feel you're at the limit of your endurance?"

Without a word he seized her head in his two hands and kissed her so impetuously on the mouth that he could taste blood as he drew away. Nor was she, who at that moment recalled, and did so with a sensation like the splitting of a tablet of living stone in her breast, the taste of Rhun's blood, quite sure whose lip this time had been hurt nor whose teeth this time had drawn the blood.

"That's what I like to do!" he gasped. "But that's hardly in my mind, is it? Well! Do you really want to know, my dear?"

And in face of her serious nod, he went on with what she could see— "but it's too late to stop him now!" she thought — was a wrenching effort, a rending and tearing effort. "What I do," he declared, dragging each syllable out of his very vitals by the hair of its head and holding it up as if to show her how its roots dripped with blood, "is to repeat an incantation that has been handed down in the caves of the Cader since the day of the great Master of all Star Gazers, Idris, whose name your father told me was by itself proof enough that the Ffichtiaid were Greeks who after the Trojan War tried desperately and recklessly to find their way home by sailing between Scylla and Charybdis; and instead of getting home found themselves, after passing the Pillars of Hercules, on the beaches and rocks of these islands where they were seized by the Cewri and made their slaves."

There was something in the tone of his voice and the look on his face, and in the fact that he had shut his eyes just as a child might do in the process of reciting its lesson, that caused Morfydd, drenched though she was in that warm October sun, to shiver from head to foot.

If what she had felt a minute or two ago had resembled the breaking of a vase of precious odours in her bosom, this shutting of Porius's eyes and this murmuring of the word "Cewri" gave her the sensation that in place of the feel of the snail shells, now at the badger holes, against her skin, what she felt now — and the more she pressed her knuckles against her heart the sharper she felt it — was a splinter of ice.

"The words sound to us," he explained with his eyes tight shut — and she thought, "He's like a boy confessing he killed a deer when he ought to have been hunting wolves"— "the words sound to us like absolute gibberish, but they have an odd effect on me, an effect I've tested and proved again and again. Do you want to know what that effect is?"

The girl nodded gravely.

"Well! It's as though when things get desperate, when in fact they're beginning to beat you down, you could change the whole situation by muttering these words, either silently or aloud. There's something in the mere sound of the syllables — and of course there *is* magic in it *whether you've wanted to have it there or* not! — that gives us the power to throw off mountains of miseries and to beat back oceans of troubles."

"Let's have them!" Morfydd cried. "Let's have them for heaven's sake! Don't go on and on and on tantalizing me!"

And Porius, feeling as if he were plunging his naked arm clean up to the shoulder in deep green water covered by a scum of blood, enunciated, in clear, ringing, unnecessarily loud tones, treating the elemental sounds as if they were all one single, world-threatening, cosmos-shaking, Aristophanic conjuration, all he had learnt of the language of the Cewri, from the druid's brother, from Drom's brother, and from Drom himself.

"Thumberol gongquod tungerong larry ruggerug gwork ong gorsorb ong!"

Once uttered in this manner, it seemed to him that all the potency, all the magic, all the mystery vanished from these words and that they drifted off on the wind like so many seed husks that were lighter than gossamer and emptier than chaff.

Morfydd waited for a second until the monstrous sounds died down, then, drawing back a few paces and turning her face away, she began in extreme haste and with trembling fingers to get her garments into order.

And watching the curve of her back and how her head hung sideways as she smoothed out her clothes, and noting the way the sunshine kept throwing into relief one of her small ears making it gleam like a fragment of quartz as the west wind lifted up, let fall, and lifted up again a chestnut-coloured tress that momently concealed it, Porius said to himself: "I *must* keep them separate in my mind — that's the only way; separate — that's the thing! Dead ones and living ones *can* be kept separate! But suppose we could be as close in our thoughts as we were just now in our bodies, couldn't it —? No! It wouldn't work! It would spoil the whole difference between men and women. It would spoil the mystery on which all depends! Or am I just fooling myself because I can't and won't tell her? No — no — no — no! It would spoil everything to tell her. Besides, I *couldn't say the words*. No, no, no! It isn't deceiving her. It isn't lying to her. It's keeping things that are naturally apart, apart. There *are* things that must always be kept apart. No! I mustn't let myself think about it any more. Death is death; and life is life, and that's all."

Fiercely he forced his consciousness to leave that region of his mind where there was green water and a chasmed confusion of blood and hair; and in order to keep it away from that region he compelled himself to think of his mother and Medrawd. "I *must* come to some conclusion," he thought, "why it is that I'm so outraged by Mother and Medrawd and so little troubled by Morfydd and Rhun."

Hovering there in that heavy, sultry October sunshine he now, with one drastic sweep of his mind's wings, like a seahawk descending upon the swell of a curving wave, forced his attention to concentrate once more on their recent embrace.

But it was at this moment that he received a shock that would have totally upset a man of a different race; but it was not for nothing he was the son of Einion ab Iddawc. Though still within the enchanted circle of the "now" and the "near," something — he knew not what — made him glance at a low thick clump of small birch trees that grew close to where they had been lying. And then it was that what his father-in-law might well have called his *daimon agathe,* or "good genius," helped him with wondrous rapidity to prove himself a true descendant of Cunedda.

Without betraying by the faintest quiver of hand or face what he had seen, he allowed his eyes to wander carelessly and casually back to the girl and then back again to the clump of birches.

But there, behind that clump of birches, was the thing of all things that a man whose woman was at that very moment reclothing herself after a prolonged enjoyment of the act of love would be the most outraged to see — the gloating and infatuated stare of another man!

It is true that there was something obsessed about this face in the birches, something strained and desperate, something that reduced the man's features, though naturally handsome, to an expression almost inhuman; and it is true that this wild, mad look contrasted quite startlingly with the handsome face it transformed. And it was no doubt this spirit of mad obsession, squatting there behind the handsome eyes, behind the princely nose, behind the beautifully modelled mouth that blunted the edge of Porius's anger and left him, as soon as he had taken a few more casual and cautious glances at the face and had decided to whom it belonged, with very little feeling about it save a rather brutal humorous amusement.

But his wits were now of necessity absorbed in the task of deciding how he was to deal with this madman without giving Morfydd too great a shock. His decision was as rapid as was the action that followed it.

"Don't be upset, my treasure," he said, keeping his eye on the face in the birch grove, "but we've got an onlooker here!" And as the startled girl drew herself up and jumped back he lurched heavily forward, plunged like an angry ox through the clump of birches and got hold of the intruder by the hair of his head. It would have been difficult for Morfydd to tell anybody, difficult to tell even Porius, and impossible to tell her old nurse, Canna, all the painful feelings that reduced her sensibility at that moment to a set of raw dangling nerves. These nerves she had a good deal more difficulty in getting under control than she had in dealing with her ruffled attire.

But if Porius was able, for all his relaxed muscles, to become in a flash a true descendant of Cunedda, the girl wasn't for nothing the daughter of Kymeinvoll the Gwyddyles.

Suppressing the humiliating thought that the grotesque creature, whose distorted features in a face white with terror she could just see, as his pearl-bordered mantle gleamed and flapped in that sultry sunshine, had actually been sharing with fascinated intensity every detail of Porius's enjoyment of her, she rushed forward now, afraid lest the wretch should meet his death. She suspected the moment she glimpsed the extravagance of his clothes that he belonged to the emperor's court; and although this increased her feeling of personal shame it made her more anxious to avoid bloodshed.

"Don't hurt him! Don't hurt him!" she cried again and again.

But Porius had already shifted his grip from the man's hair to the gorgeous belt beneath his fantastic mantle. This mantle, the girl could see, was actually stiff all the way round its edges with minute pearls set in purple pleats; Porius had recognized the squirming figure within its folds as none other than Prince Galahaut, the High Prince, as they called him, from the far-away isles and the ocean promontories of Surluse.

Prince Galahaut was the very man, in fact, who, wounded in that early skirmish between the forest people and the emperor's horsemen, had found an asylum among the former, where in retired safety at Ty Cerrig he had told stories of adventures that never happened and of characters who never lived to all who would listen.

"Oh, no! I won't hurt him!" Porius muttered. "I'm not hurting you, am I, my fine dancing cock?" And tightening his hold on the High Prince's silver belt, whose massive links amid the greenery of the dark fir branches gleamed in the sultry sunshine with an almost sacrificial solemnity, he hoisted him into the air exactly as he had done with that luckless boy whose destiny it was to encounter the last of the Cewri. Nor was this all. Once having got him in the air what must Porius do but toss him up and down in the random manner used by affectionate but rough fathers with their infants.

Never did Morfydd forget how the High Prince looked as he rose and fell in the air with his mantle waving; but, as sometimes happens in situations of this sort, where the effect upon those who watch the humiliation of a penance sufferer is completely different from what might have been expected, this sudden and brutal contact with the unregenerate world outside the circle of their discovery of each other shook them both into a recognition of the limits of their mutual confidence; made it clear to *him* that he could never tell her about Creiddylad and clear to *her* that if she told him about Teleri there might come a complete scattering of the cloud that divided him from his mother, a cloud that might be of benefit to him at this juncture and was undoubtedly of great benefit to herself.

But at the very moment when the lust-distorted face of the High Prince was shaking both Porius's and Morfydd's illusion that when you love you can "tell everything," so that Porius was saying to himself, "I shall never tell her about Creiddylad," and Morfydd was saying to herself, "I needn't tell him about Teleri because, if Euronwy hasn't let that man into her bed yet, she *will*!" the froglike leapings of the lithe goddess of chance, clothed in the paleolithic *pali* of slippery green, wherein she threads the most tangled recesses of life and follows each new encheiresis of multifarious Nature, were introducing a second and a completely unexpected interruption.

No sooner, in fact, had Porius replaced the ruler of far-off Surluse upon his doeskin sandals and picked up for him and thrust into its sheath a jewelled dagger that under such rough handling had naturally slipped from the silver belt, than a disturbing and puzzling series of distant cries became audible. These disturbing and unexpected shouts as they drew nearer resolved themselves into two voices, one of which was instantly recognizable as that of the Henog of Dyfed, while the other — though it was at the sound of this one that the exile from Surluse betrayed most agitation — was altogether strange both to Porius and Morfydd.

"Is the Henog searching for you?" enquired the new ruler, glancing at his captive. But the man appeared still too dazed even to rearrange the folds of his gorgeous mantle or to pull his silver belt into position.

"Cretinloy of Gaul," he gasped at last.

Porius's expression at hearing these words might easily have been snatched from the youthful countenance of Nesta's husband, so deliberately stupid was it, so rustic in its bewildered insensitivity.

Morfydd moved up to them. "I think the prince refers," she threw in, "to some chronicler of his own from his country across the sea."

Turning her head quickly away from the doglike glance the uneasy creature gave her, "I seem," she murmured to Porius, who was now listening so intently to the approaching voices that he hardly heard her hurried words, "I seem to remember someone with a name like that in the letters of Father's Gallic bishop, some chronicler—" She never became quite clear in her mind, as she recalled this moment later, what it was in her intervention that irritated Porius so; but he suddenly ceased listening to the two men, whom they could almost see now, coming towards them through the trees, and, turning to her, burst out with an embarrassing discourtesy.

"Your father's letter writers — I hate them all, and their artful chronicles! Conceited mixtures of magpie Gallic, and of monkish Latin, flattering everyone at the court and recounting impossible prodigies performed by fantastical popinjays—"

But the two men were saluting them now, not as surprised as the girl expected them to be, at discovering their runaway in the company of the new ruler of Edeyrnion, nor at all disturbed by finding that ruler indulging in a fit of boorish rudeness.

But in such a peculiar condition of mind was the Henog of Dyfed that the emotional outburst of his princely host passed through his consciousness like a succession of pebbles dropped into flowing water, while he himself proceeded to convey to Porius and Morfydd in that oldest of all languages, the language of signs, that it was absolutely essential to propitiate, for reasons into which it was unessential to go, both the High Prince and Cretinloy his chronicler, and this without any reference at all to the merit or demerit of the stories involved, even though — and here the gesticulation became extremely complicated — even though the stories were pure fabrication and the telling of them so tedious that no listener could possibly care whether such preposterous happenings were reality or invention.

Morfydd felt as she gazed at the Henog in his faded green-black cloak and curiously shaped green-black headdress that there was an old-fashioned stateliness about the man that really was quaint and endearing. On the contrary, the whole personality of Cretinloy, the Gaul, repelled her. He was a big stout man; and though not quite as tall as the Henog his robust and sturdy figure reduced the form of Prince Galahaut to an effeminate frailty and brittleness under its rich garb.

Cretinloy was dressed in what Morfydd took to be the official court colours of that far-off Surluse washed by the western sea, an appealing mixture, the girl thought, of pale purple and dark green, but, blotched as it was now with the blood stains of hunting and the wine stains of drinking, suggestive rather of crowded supper tables than of the silence of solitary inspiration.

Cretinloy's face was sunburnt as well as fleshy, and his lively pigs' eyes, raspberry-red mouth, and protruding underlip indicated a successful narrowing down of a chronicler's concern to the events immediately preceding and immediately following the narrator's personal appearance upon the scene.

While she drew back from the four men and watched Porius's impatient attempts to cope with what was clearly a teasing and difficult situation, she suddenly found herself liking him better than she had ever done before. He was perplexed, he was troubled, he was out of his element, he was confused and sullen; but when she looked at the eccentric old Henog, when she met the haunted eyes of the High Prince, when she acceded with a grave courtesy to the exuberant admiration of the self-confident Cretinloy, she knew that her imminent separation from her playmate-husband-lover was going to be by far the worst thing she had ever had to suffer in her life.

And she realized that what was at the bottom of Porius's sullen mood and of his clumsy and clouded attention to the communications of the Henog was the fact that he too was feeling the nearness of their separation. It came over her as a certainty that just as she was dreading her contest with Euronwy and the priest, with the complications introduced by the presence of Medrawd, with the new situation at Ogof-y-Gawr, with her father's life at Ty Cerrig, so *he* was dreading the imperial court and the imperial camp, his contact with all those clever, subtle, and worldly people, of which this Cretinloy of Gaul was a perfect type, and all this without her help, just as she had to manage without his.

She indeed kept meeting his eyes as he stood there bare-headed and bare-handed in his leather tunic, while the Henog, having dropped his secret signs, was elaborately and pedantically explaining to him what he ought to do with regard to the extraordinary condition of things at the deserted camp of the emperor's horsemen. And, fancying at last that there was a definite appeal in the glance he was giving her, she came boldly forward into the midst of the group.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," she said, "but as I have to leave my husband now, in order to attend the Church's rites over the prince, his father, I must beg you to let me draw him aside for a second? You can await him here. I won’t take him far.”

She spoke with the authority of a true granddaughter of Iddawc the Apostate, that arbitrary and despotic ruler, who was able to hold his own even with the eldest of the matriarchal Modrybedd; and Porius, realizing as he hadn’t quite done before how spontaneously her character had responded to her new responsibility, followed her among the trees as obediently as the others remained quiescent where they were.

She was so impatient to get their parting over that, forgetting their difference in height and weight, she slipped in front of him like a young forest doe, diving under the thick-grown fir branches, dodging the prickly brambles, jumping the mouldering alder stumps, squeezing between the slender birches, and swinging across swampy places by the aid of the dusky red trunks of lonely and erratic pines.

At last, gasping for breath, she turned and waited for him; nor was he far behind, but there were blood drops on his forehead and a scratch at the side of his mouth, and the deerskin strap twisted round one of his legs was trailing on the ground.

But contrary to the touchiness of her father or of Morvran or of Rhun or of the late prince, Porius’s awareness of what was happening to his body was divided by a peculiar chasm or gulf from what was going on in his mind. He could obliterate this gulf if he set himself to do so; and when it was obliterated he was at his happiest, but it required a conscious effort, and circumstances, as at this moment, often impeded such a solution.

“Little fool that I am!” she whispered to him now; for she had a feeling that Prince Galahaut and his chronicler, and even the stately old Henog, were all listening, the former with mouth, ears, nostrils, and every pore of his skin open, wide open and indrawing, with the insatiable suction of an insane Charybdis.

“No! Wait a second, my only one! Wait while I—”

They were together in a damp and muddy clearing and she snatched up a great flapping burdock leaf, shook from its surface a couple of tiny insects, and used it to wipe the blood from his scratched face. Then stooping down she rapidly retwisted the leather strap round his leg, and having done this was on the point of rising, but instead of doing so, moved by a sudden impulse, she clasped his bare knee in both her hands and all hunched-up as she was pressed her lips against its bony surface.

Long after this some accidental association was apt to bring back to Porius not only how her kiss felt upon the hard bone and callous skin of his knee, but the way the heavy sunshine, as it fell on her bowed head, gave to her hair the coppery glint of an old Caesarean coin. But at the moment all he could do was to hold back an impulse to burst into shaking and heaving sobs.

But they were her tears, not his, that were on both their faces when, after a silent embrace from which she felt she was being torn away as old Canna used to tear certain fabrics into two halves, torn away by fate *with an audible* sound, they simultaneously turned their backs on each other and plunged into the forest.

CHAPTER XXXI. The Little One

IT COULD HARDLY BE CALLED curious or unnatural the extreme reluctance felt by the new Prince of Edeyrnion to act as the necessity of his peculiar situation compelled him, or so he thought it did, in thus returning, with the three men who were awaiting him, to the deserted tents of the emperor's horsemen.

That final wild pressure of salt-tasting mouths and clinging arms, struggling in vain to retain in spite of fate the moment's mystery of two-in-one, remained with him as he went. Like the reiterated breaking of the same sea wave over the stupefied senses of a man who, just escaped from drowning, has to stumble heavily across leagues of sand, that moment went with him. But, through this salt mist, Porius had to face, willy-nilly and for all his loathing, what he had known was waiting for him ever since he had seen his father die, namely, the repulsive subhuman chaos of the deserted, yet by no means empty, imperial camp.

It was horrible to him to have to re-enter all those familiar tents in each one of which some piteous relic of oriental sweetmeat, of half-drained wine flask testified both to the hurry of its late owner's departure and to the lack of thoroughness in the random scavengers who had plundered these courtly caravans.

That there had been plundering on a large if indiscriminate and disorderly scale was evident enough; and it was also evident that his three companions, though in three very different ways, were resolved that, as the person now alone responsible for order and decency in Edeyrnion, he should be made inescapably aware of what was going on.

The deserted camp was indeed just then a spectacle shocking to the fastidious, revolting to the sensitive, and extremely disturbing to the orderly and the virtuous. Many of the pavilions and tents lay on, the ground, sodden and discoloured with rain and disfigured by the droppings of birds and cattle. Others, whose supports were still standing, presented, when Porius was ushered inside, interiors that caused the distinguished features of the High Prince to twist themselves up into contortions of an aesthetic disgust that amounted to physical pain.

As for the Henog, Porius knew the old gentleman's style of storytelling well enough to imagine the sort of sentences in which he would work it out; so he wasn't at all surprised to catch from his lips various asides that showed how he was extracting from all this litter and ordure and decomposition of food and pollution of drink the particular quality of purified horror that he required for his artfully artless work.

As the three men led him from tent to tent the Henog interspersed his aesthetic reactions to what they encountered with the same obscure nods and gestures and signals whenever the attention of the others wandered.

That the Henog was referring in these signs to the relation between the High Prince and that gentleman's Gallic chronicler was made clear to Porius by the fact that at one point the crafty old man actually winked at him as they listened to Cretinloy's realistic account, brutally, tediously, monotonously drawn out, of the horrors of deserted Roman camps in Gaul, where — just as seemed to be happening here — weird half-human creatures, too weak to be outlaws and too independent to be the followers of any prince, fluttered down like carrion crows from their crannies in the hills or pattered up like rats from their holes in the cellars; but whether flapping or scampering, these poor wretches moved from rain-soaked desolation to rain-soaked desolation, and, quick as the plague, devoured all that attracted them, befouled all that repelled them, and carried off all they could carry or dared to lift from its place.

The absentminded Porius was forced at last to embrace the full nature of the present situation in this familiar region of his princedom before the Prince of Surluse and his blustering chronicler departed to enjoy their afternoon's repast and their night's repose.

These satisfactory events took place in the only tent which the scavengers had been compelled to leave intact, namely, the tent of Cynan, the bosom crony of Owain ab Uryen, which had been taken possession of on behalf of the Derwydd's lethargic brother, by that singular retainer, Morgant, the contemptuous relative of the Jesus-inspired Drom.

It was then, and then only; that the enigmatic Henog put his signs and signals into simple words.

"The emperor," he explained to Porius, "gave me a hint before he followed those barbarians south that for many reasons he had no desire to delay any longer the return of Prince Galahaut to the far-off shores of Surluse. In plain words, my dear Prince, the emperor has had enough of him. There is no need for me to enlarge on what our great monarch explained in detail; I mean the nature, in regard to both cowardice and lechery, not to speak of fantastic falsehood, of the prince's influence on court and camp. It was, in fact, in the hope of transferring this distinguished person to Gaul that the emperor obtained for him this Gallic historian, who, as you can see, will be fully able to transform the most cowardly retreats into heroic deeds and the most lecherous obsessions into emotions of piety and purity."

Porius gazed in some perplexity at the quaint figure before him.

"Did the emperor," he enquired, "wish me to arrest this mad fool and send him to Badon under guard?"

The old adept in artless-artful storytelling looked a little shocked and considerably amused.

“Heavens no, my dear young man! Certainly not, nothing of the sort! Knowing no doubt the state in which their camps are always left by these young noblemen and how, for months afterwards, all the rapscallions of the neighbourhood dig their holes in such rubbish heaps, it occurred to him, I believe, that with your permission the elevated post of ‘King of the Off-scourings’ might keep this trembling tyrant of the faraway Isles occupied and amused and his extraordinary lechery stimulated and satisfied, till, with your aid, Ynys Prydein had been cleared of the last of the Saeson. In fact — you know how courteous and yet how laconic he is — he gave me a hint to this effect: that to be ‘King of the Ash Heaps’ here would keep the High Prince busy with marvels that wouldn’t go further than his own imagination and keep this Cretinloy busy turning these marvels into Gallic rhymes.”

The deep-set yellowish green eyes of the Prince of Edeyrnion, instead of opening wide under this revelation, almost disappeared as though to convey the news to some more crafty identity concealed in his skull.

“What you have told me, great Henog,” he replied, “requires some careful thinking. I confess at first hearing it sounds a little too much” — he spoke slowly, screwing up the corrugated folds of his rugged brows and cheeks round the twin holes into which his eyes had retreated— “too much like one of those satirical Roman tricks that have been played so often on us simple islanders. But I will think it over, Henog; I will think it over. At the same time I must tell you that I can’t see myself handing over for an indefinite period this Fount of Saint Julian, that I have known since my childhood, to be a rogues’ refuge and a thieves’ sanctuary, breeding pestilence, and attracting every Ffichtiaid witch and every Gwyddylaid assassin out of their caves. But I will think it over, Henog. I will think it over."

He kept his word, if his subsequent silence was a sign of thought; and it wasn't till they had made the complete circuit of the whole scene of desolation and were standing with their backs to the burnt and trodden patch of ground, less than a hundred feet from the lake, where only a couple of days ago had been his own bridal tent that he recovered his speech sufficiently to make a few taciturn comments upon this minor shock. The tent itself was totally gone. Nothing but a few holes in its grassy circumference where the pegs had been pulled out, nothing but blackened earth and grey wood ashes where the fire had been, remained to mark those few cubits' space of thin air that had been so vibrant with human feeling.

He couldn't help glancing curiously at that couple of square yards of black mould interspersed with wind-blown grey ashes where he and Rhun had sat over their fire drinking mead from Porius Manlius's Roman flask and hovering nervously in their talk round and about that equivocal incident — how little it bothered him now! — of the girl's morning visit to the Cave of Mithras.

But where exactly did their bed stand? If *she* were with him now, instead of this weird old figure, would she know just where their two heads had been, and just how far his feet, her feet, had stretched over that flattened-out patch of broad-leafed lakeside grass, across which at this moment a feeble daddy-longlegs, preserved for another twelve hours of helpless sprawling by the day's warmth, danced its patient, private, hieroglyphical old insect's death dance to a sun god that had looked down on the earth for a million years without seeing a sign of any real Mithras? Or would she be as reduced to numbness as he was?

"You're intending, I hope, great Henog," Porius burst out suddenly, feeling that this was hardly a moment for further indulgence in personal feelings, "to be present tonight where unfortunately I cannot accompany you, for certain people await me at Brother John's cell? I mean, you'll be making your way presently, I hope, to sup at the Gaer. They may possibly be a little late in returning from my father's burial — for that also is debarred me by what I have to do at the Brother's cell — but there'll be according to custom in our House, preparations in both meat and wine that will have their interest for you, both as an historian of old ceremonies and as an authority on old wine.

"I don't suggest you should attend my father's funeral, for this new priest would only annoy your good sense, but I do trust, great Henog, that you will honour our Gaer board, even though my business with the emperor's counsellor, whom I have presently to meet at Brother John's cell, forbids my own presence at either grave or banquet. Will you show me, Master Sylvanus Bleheris, that you bear me no grudge for all my youthful ignorances and stupidities by directing your steps here and now towards the Gaer?"

The Henog didn't smile, nor, to confess the truth, did he look particularly pleased. But he bowed courteously and declared he would set off at once. And it was at that moment while Porius was helping him arrange a little more conveniently his somewhat awkward, though not precisely heavy, bundle of writing materials, that they were both startled by the sound — not strange to either of them — of the far-carrying, high-pitched voice of the youthful Pen Beirdd.

They looked at each other significantly, and on this occasion the old Henog *did* smile. He did more. He uttered a guttural cackle of hoarse goblinish laughter. With the ends of his scholastic mantle fluttering in the faintly stirring air, and with the now horizontal rays of the sun intensifying the greenish tint of what was visible of his tightly fitting black tunic, as he clutched his tablets to his breast as if afraid that the mere voice of the poet would steal them away, he resembled a portentous old crow, scared by the cat cries of an aggressive young kestrel.

"Those aren't his own verses," Porius whispered, "are they, my Lord Henog? Surely a boy like that couldn't have imagined such things, far less have put them into words?"

But the Henog only wagged his high narrow head and caused his peaked cap to sway sorrowfully from side to side. He had clearly suffered so much already from the malicious cleverness of the young that he was prepared for the worst.

In painful silence the old man set himself to listen, and so also did Porius.

"If only," sighed this latter to himself, "I knew she'd got safe through that funeral!" And he felt a sudden longing to prove to his old teacher, so safely out of it at the bottom of Gwythyr's deep hole, how much happier this life would be if the idea of future lives, and all the rites, rituals, traditions, and speculations about future lives were regarded as pleasant dreams and poetical fancies.

"Curse this incredible boy!" was what both the men were feeling. But Taliesin's voice rose higher and higher, and as his voice rose his rhymes seemed to swim and fly as if beyond all reason they were transformed into some living creature that possessed fins for swimming through Time and feathers for flying through Space!

Bu carchar Gwair ygkaer Sidi!

The prison of Gwair's in Caer Sidi!

Cadwyn dromlas cywir was cedwi —

A heavy chain for a true youth to carry
Worlds before Jesus was born of Mary! —
Neb cyn nog ef aeth iddi —
None before him came there to be —
And Pwyll knows it and Pryderi
In Caer Veddwit and Caer Vanddwy,
In Pedryvan over the magic sea —
Bu carchar Gwair ygkaer *Sidi* —
The prison of Gwair's in Caer Sidi!

The voice died down as suddenly as it had risen; and Porius, on the point of asking the Henog about this mysterious being referred to as "Gwair," of whom he vaguely fancied he had heard before, was caught, before he uttered a word, by the expression on the old chronicler's face.

The Henog had clearly had some sudden inspiration, but of what nature it was impossible to guess.

Porius waited in silence.

At last the old man, still pressing with one hand his tablets, pigments, brushes, and pens against his stomach, began tracing with his free hand letters of some sort or just meaningless signs upon the upper portion of his forehead, where his high peaked cap had been pushed back. While he traced these hieroglyphs upon his own skull he kept his eyes fixed on the ridges of the mountain; but a moment later, dropping his raised arm and clasping his professional utensils tightly with all his fingers, he turned his gleaming dark eyes full on his companion.

"I have decided," he announced, and Porius had the feeling that he was listening to an ancient heathen oracle rather than to a mere Henog of Dyfed, "I have decided to omit all mention of Gwair from my *buchedd,* or 'mystical chronicle', of Pryderi the son of Pwyll and Rhiannon. For it suddenly came into my head that this ridiculous High Prince of Surluse — for they no doubt taught you at school, as they did me, what Caesar said about Britain and the transmigration of souls — is no one else than this very same mysterious prisoner in Caer Sidi!

“This would explain everything about him — his frights, his panics, his horrors, his nerves, his mad lust for women, and finally his grotesque impotence when in their beds! All these things are just what we’d expect in a soul so haunted by the memory of one fatal incarnation that all subsequent ones become nothing but recurrent stages in one long desperate struggle to forget.”

Porius sighed. He had hoped from the look in the Henog’s face that he was to be shown a method by which he could obliterate forever all traces of this ill-omened camp that had been a curse — for all the defeat of the Saeson — from its first arrival a couple of weeks ago, until now.

But the man went on. “Assume that this poor wretch *is* none other than the unhappy one who in a former incarnation was the imprisoned Gwair; what better could restore his peace of mind than the idea that he still has some special part to play in the Christian Mysteries?

“This part needn’t be specified. We can trust to his own imagination for its particulars and to this scamp of a Cretinloy for turning these particulars into Gallic rhyme. All I shall need before putting the notion, drawn from this boy-bard’s *awen,* into the High Prince’s mind is my own knowledge that the emperor’s counsellor is not kept in ignorance of what I am doing. Mind you, Prince, I’m not asking his *permission.* I’m only seeing to it *that he knows.* He’ll be meeting the emperor shortly — in fact they have ways of communicating with each other at any moment and over any distance — but the point is that neither of them likes *to be kept in the dark.* They don’t mind — and you’d be wise to take that to heart, Prince — they don’t mind what any of us do, as long *as they know.* It's their ignorance of what's in *his* mind that makes Prince Medrawd such a trouble to them. That, and — at least so I think myself — some prophetic knowledge of the counsellor that the emperor's final fate is bound up with Medrawd's."

He paused; and then moving nearer to Porius, to whom he was already very close, he disentangled two fingers from the ten with which he was so tenaciously clutching the tools of his trade and twitching Porius's leather belt uttered the following words: "I would like you to make it quite clear to the counsellor when you see him that I fully admit that my motives are not disinterested. The more the High Prince disassociates himself from the Life of Pryderi and associates himself with the Life of Christ, the more space there'll be for me and for *my* work. I have no prejudice against Christ. I have no prejudice against Mithras. But I have a natural deep-rooted south-Dyfed prejudice against these devils of the north, these starfish idols, Gwydion and Arianrod, the incestuous spawn of that Gwyddylaid succubus, Don, with their subhuman whelp, Llew Llaw Gyffes, who was brother to the wolves and upon the maggots of whose feathered soul fed the great sow of Maenor Penardd.

"So my chief request to you tonight, Prince Porius" — and pushing forward his lean figure closer still so that the smell of his garments struck his listener as combining the fragrance of cinnamon with the sourness of the droppings of seagulls, the Henog tightened the clutch upon the other's belt of those two clawlike fingers— "is that you make it clear to the counsellor that I have no wish to give him or the emperor any false impression; and that what I shall try to put into the heads of this unfortunate creature and this rogue of a chronicler will be done very largely — though not entirely — with the express purpose of wafting them away from *my* subject, which is of course the Life and Death of Pryderi, the son of Pwyll Pen Annwn."

What the old gentleman would have done had Porius refused to carry out his wish it would be hard to imagine, but receiving an emphatic promise to obey him, he promptly unhooked his two fingers, added them to the eight already engaged, bowed politely and with extreme formality, and started off in the direction of the Gaer.

With a sigh from the very bottom of his soul, Porius watched his departure. He had begun to feel as if the inmost pith of his being was being nibbled away by the rats of purposeless dissolution, so that before he had even started to join the emperor all his clear intentions were growing blurred and all his sound instincts becoming infected.

He envied the Henog his simple, unvarying, direct devotion to his art. And as he watched the tall figure fade phantomlike among the trees he experienced a shuddering sense that, compared with the life of a person like this, the foundations of his own existence were shaky and insecure.

As he approached the Brother's cell he suddenly realized that a man and woman were in the act of leaving it. They evidently knew him at once, for they stopped when they caught sight of him and began exchanging excited words. He quickened his steps till he reached them, and then, as was natural to him, he greeted them with rather exaggerated familiarity.

"Why! It's *you,* Amreu ap Ganion! I never thought to meet you two here again! And how is the lovely Lela? Lela, I'd been praying I might see your face again before I went south. I can see she's as beautiful as ever, Amreu! But what's this? What's the matter, my dear girl? Has anyone insulted you? I can't believe Amreu's been unkind to you. What's troubling her, Amreu? For Christ's sake tell me, one or the other of you!"

His tone of sympathy seemed all that was required to cause the girl to breakdown. A fit of sobbing took possession of her, shaking her from head to foot. Her black-haired companion hugged her tenderly, pressing her head against his enormous chest, while Porius, after his fashion for noting side issues, noted that the last horizontal ray of the sinking sun, falling upon the two of them, was suddenly extinguished, even as he watched it.

But Porius also noted in his incurable mania for these natural omens that the curly-headed son of Ganion defied the disappearance of the sun over his girl's sobs with a mysterious smile of cosmic optimism, an optimism which took for granted that this chief of his tribe now confronting him would share his secret Iberian faith that all such feminine tears were the tears of life itself paying tribute to death as long as it could enjoy itself *as itself* and thus turn even tragedy to account.

"It was because," Amreu explained — while Porius experienced a queer feeling that, after all, even if he wasn't killing Saeson, he was, by the mere fact of merging himself in this man's incomprehensible smile, placing himself on the right side in some life-and-death struggle whereof the nature as well as the issue was unknown— "it was because Sibylla the Gwyddyles couldn't endure another woman in the same kitchen or at the same board. Lela's not proud any more than I am, but—" At this point the dark head appeared to be subjected to so much affectionate pressure that Porius felt as if it might at any moment actually disappear within that majestic torso.

But the son of Ganion went on addressing him over that sobbing head and giving him some very shameful details with regard to what had happened at Ogof-y-Gawr in this clash between Iberian and Gwyddylaid femininity.

"And so," Amreu summed it all up, "and so we came away." The smile with which he spoke of their desperate escapade seemed to Porius to follow that final sun ray as it retreated over the rim of the world, as if the man had sent it — that mysterious smile which long before the fall of Babylon had been smiled in Marrakesh of the Berbers — to sustain and re-create in vital continuity a flame that had existed when the divine babe Mithras still slept in the bosom of his maternal rock.

"Do you want me," cried Porius, "to find you some sort of a job in the Gaer?" He looked at the curly-headed smiling man, who confronted him above the weeping woman, expecting a burst of gratitude. That so emphatic a return to the old-fashioned favouritism of his House should be refused by anyone in Edeyrnion was unthinkable to him; but this is just what happened.

Amreu ap Ganion, still clutching that dark head against his breast, and still supporting, like the broad seabed the heavings of the deep sea, that soft sob-shaken daughter of desire, began now to explain that the girl's despair was not only due to their leaving Ogof-y-Gawr, but also to the fact that she had no child; and that this inability to conceive — since, as the man's rich smile in the twilight made entirely clear, it was unthinkable that the fault could be with him — must be due to a *tynged*, or a "destiny," cast on her by an enemy, and that this *tynged* could be attributed to one person only; namely, to Nesta ferch Aulus, who along with her Italian blood had unquestionably inherited Italian witchcraft. It would therefore be clear to the all-powerful and all-merciful son of Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn that for them to live in any portion of Mynydd-y-Gaer would be quite impossible.

Free from touchiness as Porius was, he could not suppress a gesture of annoyance. He had begun to feel completely tired out, both in mind and body. Was he never going to be free from all these teasing entanglements and able to plunge into his real task, of clearing Ynys Prydein of the Saeson? He looked round him in a kind of irritable desperation as if, in default of his usual support from earth and water and air and fire, he were calling upon unknown gods.

To stand thus helplessly before the helplessness of two such large, soft, robust, tender, devoted, human bodies was extremely painful to him. If they'd been enemies at his mercy he could have killed them painlessly and instantaneously or bade them run off into the forest. But they were not enemies; and they had been faithful and loyal servants of the Modrybedd. He began to feel as desperate as Lela herself.

"Where the devil," he cried in his heart, "are the gods of Marrakesh of the Berbers?" Whether the desperateness of his need evoked an occult response or whether it was all a matter of pure chance it is certain that if he hadn't looked so wildly round him he wouldn't have noticed at that critical moment the Mound of the Little One. "I shall establish them," he told himself, "in the druid's chamber." And addressing them both in the most emphatic and authoritative tone he could command, he began filling up with imaginative personal details his vague knowledge of the place, a knowledge which had been already thickened out by every gossip in the Gaer since the death of the druid.

Listening to him, Lela's tears now dried on her cheeks, and her eyes opened wider and wider.

"But how shall we live, and what will Amreu ap Ganion do?"

Porius entered into further matters in reply to this and managed to conceal the unutterable weariness of the whole business that just then was assailing his heart in wave after chilly wave. Leading them as if they were children he conducted them towards the haunted mound beneath which was the druid's chamber.

He had in fact succeeded, even before he got them to the entrance to the place, in convincing the girl that the *tynged* put on her by Nesta ferch Aulus would be in no danger of being strengthened — indeed, might easily be diminished — by Amreu's going every afternoon to superintend, as he would be able to do better than anybody, the great daily banquet at the Gaer.

The chief thing he feared was lest the girl should find this underground chamber with its hidden entrance and damp cavernous roof a horrible place to inhabit after Ogof-y-Gawr's torchlit corridors, firelit halls, and fragrant kitchens. On the other hand — for his restless mind, no doubt just because it was so nervously tired, seemed compelled to envisage every facet or possibility — on the other hand, it might be that the feminine instinct for making into a pleasant place a place that was absolutely and entirely her own would give her such a strong new sense of *cartref,* or "home," that forgetting all about Italian incantations she would conceive her first-born in the druid's lair.

Porius had always liked Amreu ap Ganion, but never had there been so close a link between them as when together they helped the agitated Lela down into that curious sanctuary. Amreu had the power of throwing round his lightest physical contact with another man a peculiar magnetic glow; and this was especially the case when he was dealing with his social superiors. He now conjured up this chemical and magnetic fraternization and applied it with a subtle good temper and tact that Porius found indescribably reassuring. And the curly-haired dark man followed it up by producing from his wallet a typical house steward's "lighter" of flint and iron and oil-soaked rag.

"All's ready for us — looks so!" he laughed, setting light to one of the druid's little earthenware hand lamps which remained just where it had been blown out during Brochvael's visit, when the two brothers left the place forever.

"Have you any drink on you, 'soul?'" Porius enquired, looking almost imploringly into the man's smouldering brown eyes and using the prehistoric word *"eneit"* as proof of the right kind of Iberian good fellowship.

For the first time since they had met that night, Lela's perfect lips, looking more than rose-red by the newly lit lampflame, parted in an amused smile.

"He's always got a whole cellar of drinks under his cloak!" she whispered.

Seldom have two men been more relieved and pleased at the softening of a girl's mood. But the great goddess Chance, pursuing, it would seem, some subhuman or superhuman purpose of her own, gave now an entirely new turn to events. For as Lela with an almost complacent feminine satisfaction gazed round at her new home, safe beyond the reach of any Etruscan *tynged,* she suddenly astonished both the men by rushing forward towards the inner chamber whose gloom was only faintly lifted by the newly lit lamp.

On the threshold of this inner room she stopped, frozen it would appear into immobility like a scared animal, and, half-turning, made a gesture to the men to do as she did. Amreu, however, who was standing close to the flickering little flame permitted himself to break the suspense. He boldly picked up the small lamp and raised it high above his head.

What he and Porius now beheld caused them both to utter queer sounds in their throats. These were very different sounds, but they were expressive in each case of the limit of masculine astonishment. For, ensconced on the lid of the chest in that secluded inner room, on the very chest, in fact, that Brochvael had opened under the instructions of the druid, there sat cross-legged, clutching a broken terracotta image of a wolf cub, a cub that had lost its tail and its ears and its front legs but was still quite manifestly of authentic classical modelling, a redheaded little boy who looked about four or five years old. The odd thing was that the child showed no alarm or astonishment at all at this unexpected meeting.

From the expression on its face and from the words it uttered it might have been waiting for them and expecting them; indeed it might have known in advance that this handsome dark lady and this curly-headed dark man had long been intending to bring into its presence the new ruler of Edeyrnion and that, therefore, their appearance tonight was no more remarkable than if for days they had been burning the fires of hospitality in this queer spot and had returned at nightfall quite as usual to its primeval shelter.

No, this grotesque little being showed not the very faintest surprise nor the very smallest agitation at their sudden appearance. What it *did* do, however, could hardly be called spontaneous or natural. It was more like the forced repetition of a lesson, or a charm, or a conjuration, that it had got by heart and had been waiting to deliver.

For one thing, it spoke at once of itself in the third person, as some inanimate image or idol or doll might have done. The small creature itself was as grey as a badger as to its garments, and this gave the impression of their not being garments at all but simply wood painted to represent grey wool.

“Y Bychan,” announced this miniature image of automatic heroism, allowing its gaze to wander quite calmly from the girl immediately in front of it to the two men who were further away, and Porius felt as if he were listening to heroic words from the emperor’s sword, in the absence of the emperor’s fingers, or a defiant challenge from the emperor’s saddle, in the absence of the emperor’s buttocks. “Y Bychan is the one you must beat, not Bleiddyn the Wolf-Cub. Y Bychan will not cry, however much it hurts, but if you beat Bleiddyn, y Bychan will cry so loud it will bring the Derwydd out of his grave. And if you don't stop beating Bleiddyn the Derwydd will give Bleiddyn the power to *bite your heart out*!"

The ferocity of these final words was in some odd way that Porius couldn't explain intensified rather than diminished by the flat level expressionless monotone in which it was uttered. But what at this odd moment chiefly affected Porius was a strong desire to burst out laughing, accompanied by a vivid compulsion warning him that if he yielded to this and *did* laugh it would be the most unlucky laugh in the history of Ynys Prydein.

To keep himself from laughing, therefore, and also to exorcize from all devils this resort of the Derwydd, he repeated in his heart the Cewri incantation: *"Tungerong larry ong*! Endure until the end!"

Though by this means he was able to suppress his inclination to laugh, his mind, below the silent syllables of "Tungerong *larry* ong," kept racing off, up all sorts of expanding vistas. He thought of Morfydd at his father's funeral and funeral feast, wondering whether this latter would equal the man's death feast in its wild uproar and spilt blood. He thought of the old Henog, with his tablets and brushes and pens and pigments, all pressed against his stomach, as he disappeared among the trees, a stiff, fanatical-fantastical pedant perhaps, but, compared with the voluble Cretinloy, what a true prose-Homer of Ynys Prydein!

And it came into his mind to wonder how he himself, had this absurd and ridiculous incident occurred in some *Buchedd,* or "Memorable Life," on which he were engaged, would treat this crazy dominance of a magic child, if it *were* a creation of the dead druid, over three such vigorous, youthful, sturdy personalities as Amreu, Lela, and himself.

There must be, he told himself, some very queer concatenation of occult forces in this deserted hiding place to compel the easygoing son of Ganion to keep his arm so stiffly uplifted holding that tiny lamp, to compel the passionate young Lela to freeze into a statue for so long, and to forbid himself, prince of the whole province, from uttering a word or moving a step.

Precisely in the same monotonously level voice, just as if it had been Gunta's doll talking, the redheaded child went on. And it was, Porius noted too, just exactly as if it had been talking to itself. "Was the little creature," he wondered, "created by the Derwydd out of seaweed and fungus and white bog moss and left by him here, solely for the purpose of keeping intruders away?"

The red-haired child certainly behaved as if it were some earth aboriginal, older than the Ffichtiaid, older than the Cewri, and perhaps the last of a race who had been less human than any of these; and who as long as they were not destroyed by a magic stronger than their own might be destined to outlast all other races in Ynys Prydein!

At any rate this queer infant behaved as if it had no human fear in the world except for the safety of the great terra-cotta wolf cub now in its arms; and Porius tried hard to imagine how — without any druid magic — that broken and battered wolf cub of old Rome had managed to enslave so sturdy and redheaded a native. He had only an obscure memory today of how he had left Gwendydd's pavilion last Thursday evening and stood on y Bychan's Mound; but he had been brought up to think of y Bychan as the implacable enemy of Rome.

To whom then, in heaven's name, had this image belonged before this new y Bychan got hold of it? Could it have been a temple ornament from the great Uriconium camp? And was this child a real offspring of the outlawed Little One of the Mound?

His thoughts were interrupted by the subject of them. Down came Amreu's arm replacing the lamp on a tripod table side by side with what Porius could now see was a large chessboard, while the lamp flame flickered dangerously high.

With a timidly relaxed gesture Lela let the child pass her by, as, almost hidden by the battered wolf cub it was so passionately hugging, it moved towards the lamp. Depositing its burden on the crowded wooden tripod that now supported the chessboard, the wolf cub, and the lamp, all in close contact, the child, whose hair lost its red gleam every moment it was out of the direct rays of the lamp, moved straight up to Porius. The little creature stood sufficiently close to Porius to be able to catch hold of the lappet of his tunic, while at the same time, by stretching his legs, like a doll with stiff joints, till he got them wide apart, he just managed to touch the tip of the broken tail of his Roman cub.

Porius instantaneously made a slight movement with his left hand. The impulse prompting this was the very natural one and indeed, considering their difference in height, the almost inevitable one, of placing his hand on the top of that enormous head, whose redness, with the lamplight full upon it and emphasized by the fact that the child was clothed entirely in grey, had now become startling.

But though he kept his hand on the little creature's head he soon clenched his fingers and let them remain there in that less tender position. Whether there was really something unnatural in the child or something out of the proper order of things about the whole place, the fact was that instead of making any friendly or familiar movement such as playing with the red locks of the being that called itself y Bychan he turned his attention to the three inanimate objects on the tripod; and as he did so he became aware that Lela had stolen up to the side of her husband and had clutched one of his fingers — not the man's whole hand, he could make out *that* much without turning, but probably his little finger — and was clinging to it for protection against what seemed a wild impulse to some extravagant maternal weakness.

"Bleiddyn may rest in peace now, in peace now, in peace now," chanted the child in a tone so calm and self-satisfied that it might have belonged to a small red-headed grey bird who had swallowed the father of all fir-tree grubs.

"In peace," repeated the grey child; while Porius became aware that the tall dark man by his side had moved so close to himself that their bare elbows were actually touching. "How hot-blooded he is!" he thought, "but I expect he is saying to himself: 'How cold-blooded *he* is!'"

"Rest in peace," repeated the child. And as Porius followed the infant's inscrutably steady gaze which was fixed on the three-legged wooden table, he became aware that there was a fourth object there, an object prostrate between the lamp and the wolf cub, namely, a black bishop from the bottom of the chess box. This poor prelate must have been overlooked when Morgant and Drom finished their game a few short days ago. The bishop now stared upward in chaste consternation at the rudely chipped male organ, the hairy penis of the Roman cub, just above his head, and did his level best — poor image! — to press his ribs against the altarlike pediment of the sacred-smelling little lamp.

And it suddenly struck Porius that as the child was in contact with the wolf cub, and the wolf cub with the black bishop, and the black bishop with the lamp, and the lamp with the chessboard, so Lela was in contact with Amreu, and Amreu with himself, and himself with the child.

He began to feel puzzled at the queer directions his thoughts were taking. But were they *his thoughts*? Weren't they rather fragments of *himself,* or more likely — for how could a fragment think? — mightn't they be a drifting swarm *of selves,* like so many gnats or midges?

"I'm dead tired," he told himself. "I've reached the point of just having to wait quietly and see what thoughts come into my head. Who can tell? Tired thoughts like stones instead of pieces of paper sometimes sink deep. Fresh thoughts sail like paper boats till a puff of wind turns them of a sudden into drifting scraps of sodden fibre! Whereas, once at the bottom of the water, stones can lie quiet beneath the wind-blown reflections of sun, moon, and stars."

Besides, if his thoughts *were* a swarm of separate selves, like a cloud of midges, what harm would there be in that? It would be a great deal harder to put an end to him, and he'd have a far wider scope for the enjoyment of his senses. His most eccentric desires could fly about in all directions. There'd be a hundred, or even a thousand Poriuses, all "cavoseniargizing" to their hearts' content.

But the new ruler of Edeyrnion wasn't destined to escape into the ether from this deserted dwelling of the druid in the form of a swarm of gnats.

Once again this surprising child's mechanical *logoi* began to rise like iridescent bubbles into that underground place. "When Bleiddyn is obeyed," the child now declared, "there'll be no difference between Brython and Gwyddyl or between Ffichtiaid and Coranian. All will be equal. All will be one. All will be the same. It will be as if Bleiddyn had bitten their hearts out."

And once more y Bychan's voice died down, while through the mouldy dampness and moss-smelling darkness that surrounded the flickering and uneven glimmer of the little lamp there reached Porius's senses from the funnel-like aperture down which they had descended the faint faraway stir of rustling leaves. Painfully he tried to snatch from this natural forest sound something to revive his normal state of consciousness.

"It's simply tiredness," he told himself again. "This child's been brought down here from the mountains, and if its voice sounds queer it's only because—"

But his ponderings were interrupted by what seemed to him like some kind of magnetic jerk or supernatural pull, as if the physical contact between them all had created some sort of invisible link, or bond, or cord, something that ran from the feminine body of Lela at one end of their line to the vegetable substance of the chessboard at the other.

And what disturbed him about this shock, or jerk, or pull, or whatever it was, was the fact that it interrupted his return to normal consciousness. Normal consciousness to him always meant, if he was to enjoy himself, the particular plunge into Nature, or the particular taking Nature into himself, which he called "cavoseniargizing", and it was to this that the sound of rustling leaves in the forest ought to have led him. But the magnetic jerk he had just suffered caught him off guard and taking advantage of his nervous and mental exhaustion dragged him across a sort of eel bridge out of normal consciousness together.

He had a helpless feeling that the child who called himself y Bychan had begun to play tricks with Time and Space! In fact he suddenly felt — though he said to himself, "It's my tiredness! It's my ridiculous tiredness!" — as if y Bychan had transported him to the reedy margin of a much larger water than Saint Julian's. And though he could see and hear, he couldn't make his presence felt by any physical movement.

And it was a devilish cruelty to him that he couldn't move because what he saw seemed to him — if he were powerless to stop it — to be the end of everything. The water was visible — just as Saint Julian's Water was —

through masses of waving reeds, but instead of lying or standing among fir trees, for he really didn't know what he was doing for it was as if his body were just a wisp of vapour inhabited by a horribly alert mind, he was hovering about in an enormous orchard of apple trees, every tree weighed down by heavy yellow-coloured fruit and the whole terrible scene surrounded by a mockingly lovely, grey-blue twilight mist.

What he saw were two huge mounds of dead bodies rising up side by side, and on the top of one of them stood the emperor and on the top of the other stood the emperor's nephew; and each held a vast black spear. And the spear in each figure's hand had transfixed the heart of the other figure, so that both the men were dead. Indeed it seemed to him, as he watched them, that they had been corpses for days, perhaps for weeks, just as the dead piled up beneath them had been corpses for days and weeks.

And as he watched all this, too dazed and numb and mute and paralyzed to intervene, it suddenly struck his bewildered brain that there was something monstrously unnatural in the fact that neither the emperor nor his nephew fell down and rolled over, rolled over till he reached the bottom of the heap of dead men upon which they had both been standing.

But as he stared at the horrible mound of corpses with those two figures upright above them, he felt that though the two were doubtless held erect by some natural law of balance as well as by the deadly thrust of their spears it was not for nothing that their figures thus united formed a hieroglyph of the first letter of his own name and of the name of Ynys Prydein as this letter appears in Greek, formed in fact the representation of a trilithic portal, confronting him now, as he gazed upon it, as if it were a living conjunction of heaven and hell, and a spiritual truce between God and the devil, in the shape of a new entrance gate to Annwn, across the reeds and ripples of Avalon's inland sea.

And it seemed to him, as he watched them, that those two figures drew into themselves, as they hung there transfixed by each other's spears, all the desperate opposites in the world whose fanatic teeth are at each other's throats and must be at each other's throats until the end of Time; just those very opposites that Nature was always whispering to him to dodge, evade, avoid, and circumvent.

But what often happened to him in the most lucid moments of his life began to happen to him now. Certain chance-flung or destiny-flung blotches and blurs of drifting shapes and shifting colours distracted his attention from that primeval Homeric letter shaped like a megalithic porch into some mystic paradise of the dead.

What he now saw was a lustreless grey-brown heap of dead leaves, leaves that had lost all recognizable colour save a sort of leaden metallic opacity through which no light shone and from which no gleam radiated. This heap of leaves seemed to him in his paralyzed state to represent, or indeed in some queer sense to *be,* his old friend Afagddu, only it was an Afagddu who had arrived at such a degree of decomposition as to be hardly recognizable as a human being.

Approaching this heap of leaves was an undulating body of white foam, as beautiful to look upon as it was insubstantial to touch and incalculable in duration; and though it would have been impossible for Porius to have explained to Morfydd, much less to the laughing Amreu or the impassioned Lela, what it was that made him know all this, he knew suddenly with absolute certainty that this wavering body of foam was no other than y Bychan — still a child, but a child-soul on the shore of Limbo.

And it was only when he had at last got it clear to his numb and paralyzed mind that this heap of rotting leaves and this mass of insubstantial foam were really and truly a decomposing but yet living old man and a scarce-embodied but yet living child that the spell which was binding him to Amreu and Lela and this red-haired infant was broken.

"God!" he groaned heavily, "I've been asleep!" And moving blindly and blunderingly, and battling with a convulsive mass of heaving corpses, and oppressed by the fantasy that he was polarizing in his own flesh each of the two spears on which those two had been impaled, he dragged his feet across the soggy ground of that weird chamber and finally shouldered himself free from both its tangible and intangible confusions.

The second he was himself at liberty he realized that the same thing had happened to the others. Amreu's smile had an unusual and what might have been called an *immediate* significance. And what had been on the shifting, sliding, undulating brink of happening ever since they had entered the place now happened.

The infant's nature in y Bychan broke loose from its Derwydd-imposed self-control. The small creature left his wolf cub on the tripod table, along with the lamp and the black bishop and the chessboard, and rushed to Lela who clasped him passionately to her breast.

Porius looked at them gravely, his corrugated countenance wearing that particular expression of responsible, confused, bewildered, puzzled concern, which more than anything else about him always touched Morfydd's heart.

He came up close to Amreu. "Does this settle your problem then?" he whispered in the man's ear. "Will she let you come to the Gaer every afternoon?"

"Will she let me?" responded the son of Ganion in the same undertone; and then as he assisted his new master to mount the difficult ascent into the forest, the ex-steward of the Modrybedd assumed the look and tone of a specially privileged servant of Pharaoh who falls with diplomatic aplomb

into the conspiratorial tone of male amusement confronted by the agreeable spectacle of feminine mutability.

“Come back at the next moon, my Lord Prince, and you’ll see what you’ll see!”

CHAPTER XXXII. Blodeuwedd

WHEN THE LONG CHANTINGS and the desperate prayers and the monotonous requiems for the dead were finished, and the fiercely Christian inner circle of the *Gosgordd* had gathered about the half-filled hole by the side of the altar, at the bottom of which lay the body of her husband, Euronwy ferch Porius Manlius suddenly realized that, though the troubles connected with Einion's death were safely over, there were other troubles on the wind that were likely to affect her hardly less nearly.

They were filling up the grave incredibly quickly, these devoted young believers in the resurrection, and as she stood with her gaze fixed steadily upon the stones and rubble falling upon the man who had neglected her, her thoughts were clearer and firmer and more definite than she could ever remember them to have been.

With a proud satisfaction, a satisfaction that she felt it would be un-Christian to fondle and cherish, but which it was only fair to herself to enjoy in passing, she recalled how night by night she had rejected the pitiful implorings of the emperor's nephew to let him share her bed.

At the bottom of her heart as she watched the faces of the devoted young men — the grave being filled up now and made level with the choir floor — as they began dragging to the spot the large flat stone that was to conceal the particular crevice in holy ground where the most unholy lips in Ynys Prydein were stopped with dust, at the bottom of her heart she was wondering just how she should put before this young priest, who was clearly more of a zealot than a theologian, all the questionable thoughts she was engaged in strangling.

An hour ago she had passed on her way here the ancient Gaer burying ground and had been astonished to encounter the two old servants from Ty Cerrig, Canna and Gwrgi, removing, with the help a couple of farm boys, the first layer of turf from an oblong patch of grass which they had clearly just marked out to receive the corpse of a young woman that lay there in helpless passivity waiting interment.

Euronwy recognized the face of the corpse at once as that of the wretched creature, Teleri, whose nocturnal wanderings and mysterious origin had long been subjects of fearful and shocking interest among her female attendants.

On this occasion, finding that her daughter-in-law's old nurse and her brother-in-law's old retainer were under instructions from the new princess, she had left them with the congenial advice to be content with a topsoil interment and to hide the disturbed earth by replacing the turf they'd removed.

But the matter had not remained at that point. Indeed, the chief cause of the inspired and dedicated look on the faces of the youths who were now, down here in the church, handling Einion's tombstone, chipping its edges so that it fitted into its place, and, where they dare not risk cracking it, inserting smaller stones at its side, was due to the burning words that the young priest, preaching now to the whole funeral crowd, was pouring forth from the top of half a dozen unfinished steps.

The grey October twilight had already begun, and Euronwy, as she stood there, knowing well how many eyes were fixed upon her, experienced the same sort of defiant satisfaction in the feeling of her loneliness, of her stateliness, of her statuesque dignity, as she did in the strength of her sexual purity and as she did in the image, that had grown to be something like an obsession with her, of Medrawd kneeling night by night on the floor beside her pillow.

Standing there with her gaze fixed steadily on Einion’s grave, it came over her that Medrawd’s eyes beneath her Roman lamp had been night after night like the eyes of a lost soul, a soul in hell, that kept clinging to the down-drooping wing of her unmoved, unperturbed, implacable virtue. And then, just as if the mocking smile of the dead man had begun to reach her in spite of all that was heaped over it, she felt suddenly impelled to defy that smile, to avenge herself on that smile, to drag that smile in chains behind her chariot, so that her mocking husband might realize, out of the dust, that she was strong enough in her Christian stoicism to face the eyes of the whole of Edeyrnion, and yet, daughter of the great house of Manlius as she was, and niece as she was of Uthyr Pendragon, to yield no jot of her dignity and to remain infinitely greater in her retirement than this daughter of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles could possibly be with all her self-assertion and her springing youth.

It was at this moment that she began to grow vaguely aware of what the priest was actually saying. The young men had paused in their work and were listening intently; and Euronwy, watching their faces rather than his, for the new priest clearly took no personal interest in her, and this settled her attitude to him once for all, became aware that this negligible cleric was saying something that it concerned her to know.

The truth is that Euronwy lived in her enforced retirement from the dominant place in the Gaer precisely as she had always lived; lived in fact for a few simple, massive, august, austere, personal sensations.

Her late spiritual director, Minnawc Gorsant, was wont in his affectionate, half-humorous way to make her confess to each one of these: to the sensation of pride at her immunity to sex, to the sensation of being mysterious and inscrutable and utterly unapproachable, and finally to the sensation of feeling that no one could injure her or neglect her with impunity or without coming to a bad end.

Her late director had always done his best to exploit the authentic affection that existed between them in the interest of her immortal soul; and he had succeeded in grafting something of the mystical idea of chastity upon the Roman stoicism she had inherited from her father.

At this moment Euronwy felt she had need of her dead priest as never before. She knew he would have disapproved of the way she was indulging her thirty years' grievance against her husband as she brooded upon the image of the man's mocking beauty, dead, disfigured, done for, under all that rubble and with this mighty flagstone sealing it down forever.

But the intensity of her insatiable grievance balanced against the intensity of her desire to please her dead priest by suppressing any feeling but pious resignation would have been difficult to weigh even in celestial scales; and although she still enjoyed the sensation of feeling herself cold and stately, unapproachable and inscrutable, under the eyes of at least a thousand of her son's subjects, her attention did now begin to flutter away a little from the thirty years' outrage to her pride and from the derisive face under that heavy stone that she would forever associate with it.

But the spectacle upon which she looked from her vantage ground beneath the altar, and within some twenty feet of the flight of unfinished steps on which the young priest stood, was not unworthy to distract even a descendant of the Manlii and a niece of Uthyr Pendragon from the sweet bitterness of personal wrongs. Though the sun had gone, and the autumn twilight was chilly and damp, the sky above the Gaer was not only clear of clouds but revealed a recession of yellow-green space into a depth of ether that had no conceivable or imaginable end.

And moving, so it seemed, out of this yellow-green infinitude, and growing, so it seemed, less faint as they advanced towards the rim of the Gaer — that familiar skyline rim to the northeast, that every frequenter of this old marketplace by the Divine River had come to know so well — she could just see a cluster of stars, visitors from aerial Appian Ways unknown to any Manlius, wanderers from impalpable Caer Dathyls unknown to any Gwydion, stars that brought with them, the immediate second they became visible, a strange sense of the complete removal or entire dissolution of one whole dimension of reality by the introduction of a single elementary atom belonging to another.

And, like a wandering star from a mental dimension wholly different from the one where a single young man's earnestness could cause a thousand people to listen breathlessly to theological words, Euronwy was now aware of the wild and constantly repeated cries of a hoot-owl wheeling about among the high woods and mossy rocks somewhere between Ty Cerrig and Ogof-y-Gawr.

And it struck her faintly, struck her without creating within her the dimmest pulse of *real* interest, that the impassioned young preacher was now saying something that had caught the fixed attention of the whole mass of his listeners and to which she ought to listen. "It is a warrior and a hunter whose death we are celebrating," he was saying, "and I am speaking to the men here, to the younger men, more than to you women, whether old or young!

"Yes, it is to the men I am speaking, and I call on you to understand that the whole Catholic Church from pole to pole requires of you men that you fling your lives, your feelings, your ideas, your passions, your loves, and your hates into the one sole task of conquering the world for Christ!

"I want you to realize that until every living knee on this planet bows before Christ, and every thought, fancy, hope, imagination, desire, purpose, interest in every individual soul is completely bound and chained to Christ, your victory will not have come!

"It is a battle just as ruthless, just as desperate as the victory our emperor is even now winning over these lost and doomed heathen; and you must fight, we must all fight, with no other purpose in our minds save to compel every living creature in this whole world to fall down and worship Christ!"

In the pause that followed this appeal, the wildly hooting owl, that hitherto had been flapping and fluttering round the heaped-up rocks, the jagged-splintered rocks, the deep-chasmed rocks, between Ogof-y-Gawr and Ty Cerrig, came perceptibly nearer. Was it that the intense human silence of so large a crowd created a fathomless psychic void, a void as infinite as the fading one above the Gaer, but a void with an indrawing, insucking power, a power felt like a whirlpool by this great agitated fluttering creature with its small bones and incredible mass of feathers?

Or was it that a tall and very striking personage, whom Euronwy from her solitary place below the altar could clearly detect descending those hills by a path that came from the direction of Saint Julian's, was alluring this agitated bird, and by some invisible enchantment, some special *hud* or *lledrith,* drawing it towards the church and the river?

At any rate the preacher was suddenly inspired by one of those rapid inspirations that born orators alone receive; and at the owl's "tu-whit-tu-who" he made a daring clutch and mingled it boldly with his passionate appeal. Euronwy was torn, in one distressing jerk after another, out of her obstinate feelings.

"Where in heaven's name," she asked herself, "have I seen the person who looks like that and walks like that?"

And then, in a flash, she knew! It was the emperor's counsellor. It was Myrddin Wyllt. "What in the name of all the devils," she thought, "does that man want down here?" And a sudden shudder of fear ran through her. No antiquary studying the varieties of runic or ogamic letters on ancient stones could have been as interested as Euronwy was in her own shudder of fear. "I've only once," she thought, "in all my life before, felt like that. And that was after that woman" — she always thought of Nineue in that way to herself— "had told the empress that the reason I wanted to marry Medrawd was because if the emperor — but that man's bringing that owl nearer."

But it wasn't the owl nor "the man bringing the owl" that interrupted her thoughts. It was the peculiar manner in which the priest was speaking of the owl. It wasn't that he actually challenged the bird's weird cry, which now came nearer and nearer; but he managed by some subtle facial contortion and some wild toss-back of his close-cropped young head, which Euronwy admitted to herself *was* beautifully shaped, to convey to that Edeyrnion crowd the impression of some terribly inspired force gathering itself together ferociously, against the life of that nocturnal creature.

But the hooting of the owl as an accompaniment to the preacher had naturally aroused in some of the rougher and more impious among that mass of people an irresistible sense of the comic. This finally burst out, in one small group of hearers, into a series of noisy but not particularly owlish "tu-whit-tu-whos," and Euronwy fancied, though the twilight was deepening now, that she recognized, on this profane margin of the crowd, the figures of Rhun ap Gwrnach and Sibylla y Gwyddyles.

Whether the young priest let himself be affected by these improprieties Euronwy couldn't tell. What he did was suddenly to direct his discourse into a channel familiar to them all and launch out into extravagant praise of the noble morality of Gwydion the son of Don in punishing the unfortunate

Blodeuwedd for her murderous infidelity to the man whose desires she had been created to satisfy.

"Rightly considered," cried the eloquent young preacher — while the owl's "tu-whits" and the human "tu-whits" seemed as they answered one another to be making that pale un-glittering cluster of timid stars, who had begun to look as if they might sink to sleep for the whole winter on the calm shoulder of the Gaer, take a maidenly if somewhat scandalized interest in this human owl baiting— "rightly considered," cried the priest, "that tremendous conception of your ancestral imagination, whose name you have even, in your beautiful bardic blasphemy, not knowing what you did, given to the thrice-holy *Urbs Beata,* that far-scattered starry mystery above your heads, the very ramparts of the Blessed Trinity itself; rightly considered, I say," went on the preacher, "the punishment was justly given to this adulteress whose soulless life was only bestowed upon her to satisfy the natural desire of a noble ruler, a ruler high in the hierarchy of God-appointed rulers, a ruler who, instead of being served in docile humble obedience as Christ must be served by His Church, was treacherously murdered by this woman's adulterous lover!"

Long before the priest's voice ceased, Euronwy's soul had returned from its unnatural attempt to follow him and was back in its warm nest in her soft bosom, cosseted and cuddled by her habitual consciousness. But it found itself this time not quite alone. Both her father and her son were there!

Was the younger Porius there because at that identical second, as he gave instructions to Neb ap Digon not to let Myrddin Wyllt out of his sight, he was yielding to a completely irrational fury with his mother over her imagined love affair with Medrawd?

It is likely enough that no occult magic would have brought her son so vividly into her bosom when the twilight was at once uniting and separating the river and the Gaer, and when her own queenlike figure between altar and priest would soon be scarcely visible to that dark crowd, if Porius hadn't, in his excess of indignation, indulged himself in a vicious interior regret that someone, though he would have shrunk from doing it himself, hadn't betrayed this passion of hers to Porius Manlius.

And not only to the Patrician. And here was another occult cause of this symposium of ghosts in the self-loving bosom of the niece of the Pendragon. For as her indignant son revengefully and rather meanly imagined himself telling tales of her to his grandfather, so he longed at that second to scramble down into Brother John's grave and pour out his indignant feelings to him also.

And because all these emotions had to do with death as much as with love it struck the younger Porius how astonishing it was that only five days ago, when he had stood above the eastern gate at this hour, all these three men had been alive and perfectly well. There was certainly something weird as well as something eminently characteristic of this woman in the way the mental eidola of her father and her son were hugged to her heart now, and in the way she felt about these images, which, while retaining their mature appearance, were necessarily reduced in physical size and mental dignity to the stature and texture of tender human-faced toadstools.

And it was clear enough, as she petted and cuddled them, while that "flower-faced" demon was still hooting over her husband's grave, that she actually *absorbed them* — for all that one of them had been her own father — *into herself,* into her insatiable, though constantly frustrated, maternal substance.

But the descendant of ten generations of Roman matrons was allowed scant time to absorb the eidola of her men, whether living or buried. Something dramatic and disturbing had begun, something dangerous, perhaps even revolutionary, in that great crowd. There were cries and countercries. There were surgings and heavings and swift eddies, as when, in a narrow river's mouth, the outflowing stream encounters the inflowing tide.

Groups of excited people kept running in and out of the small wooden sheds and warehouses, in and out of the reed huts and the dilapidated stone houses with ancient stone steps that led down to the river's edge. The darkness began to be broken by the flare of torches and of lanterns swinging from poles. The shouts grew louder and more angry, and there were new incursions into the heart of the crowd and into the wide expanse of the big roofless church surrounded by unfinished walls at whose altar Euronwy was still standing.

Presently she saw her son's wife not far off, and then, coming from the opposite direction, she was astonished to see Rhun and Sibylla. But the faster the people rushed from their houses, and the more torches and lanterns were brought out, the harder it became for the contending groups to separate themselves from the general mass of the crowd and the closer everybody was welded together.

But this condition of distracting nearness by no means eased the situation. Persons were desperately hemmed in against one another who had no connection at all, whereas others, separated from their friends, were compelled to utter angry and indignant cries before they could get in touch with them. The curious thing was that in spite of the confusion a certain natural and spontaneous coming together of men and women belonging to the same familiar and social groups began to appear; but this again was soon modified by the much less spontaneous and more organized movements of the armed elements in the crowd.

Rhun and Sibylla, for instance, who seemed in an incredibly short space of time to have gathered about them quite a number of the dispersed retainers of the dead Modrybedd, were already within a few hundred yards of Morfydd, about whose girlish figure Euronwy could detect, as the smoky torch flares blew this way and that, a larger though a much less well-armed portion of the *Gosgordd* than the one which she felt, now that Einion's grave was filled in, was staunchly and loyally and religiously gathering round herself.

But Euronwy had not lived for half a century among Romanized Brythons, of whom she herself was a supremely characteristic embodiment, without being susceptible to the subtlest vibration of public emotion.

And what she became suddenly aware of now was the unexpected arrival upon the scene of the definite shiver, infectious and alarming, that follows upon the discovery of some deed of horror and shame, some outrage to natural human feeling, some shocking defiance of the decencies of custom. The gravest and most formidable of the *Gosgordd* youths pressing around her were the first to respond to this rumour of horror and began hurriedly gathering round the priest.

The mother of one Porius and the daughter of another had a shrewd test of her quality, when, on the crest of a wave of excited people, starting apparently from the Gaer side of the concourse and sweeping wildly to where she and the priest were surrounded by the most devoted of their followers, came a group of men dragging with them the expostulating Canna and the still more indignant Gwrgi.

The priest came down the steps and Euronwy forced her way forward, and it was explained to them both that Canna and Gwrgi had been caught in the act of allowing Medrawd ap Llew to commit a monstrous outrage upon the newly buried corpse of the mad girl Teleri. Among the literary treasures that, with the help of the young Boethius and the old Cassiodorus, Morfydd's father had brought to Ty Cerrig there was no copy of the *Bacchae;* and had there been such a copy its toothless owner would probably have missed the connection.

But no adjective could have been found more suitable for the particular shiver of horror that was now running through that Ultima Thule crowd than the adjective "Euripidean." And yet, despite her knowledge of both Medrawd and Teleri, Euronwy's first reaction to what she heard was anything but a painful one. In fact, if that great, honest, atmospheric artist, Sylvanus Bleheris, the Henog of Dyfed, who had just paused at the market ferry on his way to the Gaer to investigate these shouts, these lights, and all this confused uproar, had been the one describing Euronwy's feelings when news came of this outrage to the corpse of Teleri, he would have felt compelled by his literary conscience to describe it as one of pleasure.

The image of the emperor's nephew, who had been wandering, like a shivering lost soul, round and round her warm bed ever since years ago, so it seemed to her now, her mocking husband had amused himself by being killed, the image of this desperate lust-maddened creature, tantalized and driven crazy by her inscrutable chastity, scrabbling in the grave of a dead whore, and wreaking his passion upon her corpse, must surely have been, so the shameless Henog would feel he *had* to suggest, the cause of a quickening not a lowering in the beat of Euronwy's steady pulse.

But neither the former Lady of the Gaer nor the youthful present one had much time allowed them at this crucial moment to suffer pleasure or pain, so distracting were the dramatic encounters that now began with shocking speed to crowd on one another and to overlap with one another.

Morfydd, who had not forgotten to repossess herself of the chain of snail shells, *had* forgotten to replace it between her breasts; and clutched tight in her right hand, it now became the destiny of those shells, once such laborious travellers up and down the stalks of flowers, to swing furiously through the air as with the indignant Canna and Gwrgi before her she overawed their accusers, interpreted the general gist of their testimony, and divined for herself what actually had occurred.

But she soon became aware that quite new and very disturbing things were happening. She hadn’t heard the earlier hootings of this immense owl that persisted in fluttering closer and closer over the unfinished choir of the roofless and half-built church but she now realized what the great infatuated bird was doing. It was circling over the head of Myrddin Wyllt, brushing him with its wings and apparently trying to settle on one or other of his shoulders.

When at last she had succeeded not only in releasing Canna and Gwrgi from the over-officious warriors who had arrested them, but — a much harder task — in coaxing and scaring and compelling these two victims of pious injustice to extricate themselves from this exciting disturbance and hurry quietly home to Ty Cerrig, and when, with anxious eyes, she was following their departure, she received a new shock.

She caught sight, under a sudden blazing torch flare, of a figure she felt sure she recognized. Yes! It was — it must be — none other than that perilous Ffichtiaid woman, the fatal Nineue! Nineue was standing by herself along with a couple of torch bearers, each of whom held a large grey horse by the bridle; and she appeared even more concerned with the flappings of the great owl round the counsellor’s shoulders than were the priest and Euronwy.

But this was not all. Following with her eyes the retreat of her old nurse and sternly waving her on, each time she lingered to look back, for it was evident that while the cautious Gwrgi couldn’t escape fast enough, it wasn’t at all to the old lady's liking to have to leave this surging crowd at a moment when anything might happen, Morfydd perceived that just as Nineue with her torch-bearing bodyguard was intensely absorbed in what the counsellor was doing with the owl, so a small figure flitting about in the shadows behind the two horses was intensely absorbed in Nineue's behaviour in relation to the counsellor.

But Morfydd suddenly sighed as deeply as it is possible for any young woman to sigh; and as she did so she allowed the hand that held Teleri's snail shells to sink down at her side. With an instinctive movement to get comfort from the elements — for she had suddenly thought, "When, in pity's name, am I going to see Porius again?" — she looked across all these waving lights, these white patches of intermittent faces, these glintings of murderous weapons, to the dark vague masses of forest slopes beyond the whitish flow of the river.

The moon was invisible; but the girl felt, and it was probably rather as the daughter of Kymeinvoll the Gwyddyles than of Brochvael the Brython that she felt this, that though it was invisible it had more power to penetrate this portion of Ynys Prydein than if it had been visible.

By remaining hidden — and Morfydd couldn't tell whether it was hidden by clouds or by a film of vapour, or whether the hour had not yet come for its phantomlike glide over the crests of the hills — it proved itself possessed of the power to substitute a totally different element as a darkness disperser from that of either daylight or torchlight.

Indeed it was just because the body of the moon was hidden that this effect of enchantment became so prominent. It was as if an occult entity, to which common speech gave the name of "moonlight," was now being softly diffused from all the pores of the old earth's patient skin.

And not only from the earth’s skin did it pour forth. From exposed roots, from bare branches, from naked rocks, from precipitous gorges, from silvery stretches of river water, from mountain summits and ferny slopes, there rose, in a sacred silence all its own, this magic element, an emanation which, once having emerged, floated away among the zodiacal signs, to dim by its native luminosity the glittering pinpricks of galaxies of stars too remote for thought.

But Morfydd had only time just then to breathe a single heart sigh into that bodiless moonlight, a sigh out of which the phantom of Teleri, occupied now in comforting Medrawd as if he were a hunted fox hidden under her shroud, instantaneously made one more ghostly snail shell!

What she now noticed was the rapid coming together of all the different groups of armed men, each group forcing its way — as was easy enough amid that mass of unarmed people — towards the place where she was standing. And simultaneously with this discovery she recognized its cause. By her side now, after the reluctant departure of Canna, was Nesta the daughter of Aulus and her husband Gwythyr. This latter had brought with him, at Nesta’s suggestion, for the Italian girl had foreseen trouble at Einion’s interment, nothing less than the ex-centurion’s old-fashioned legionary trumpet.

And now it was the notes of this trumpet, which Gwythyr could sound though he could not blow it properly, that was drawing the less disciplined, less well-armed, less Christian, less Brythonic, but much the most numerous portion of the *Gosgordd* close around her. In fact she was already the centre, the acknowledged chief, the arbitrary leader, of the largest of the armed groups between the river and the roofless church.

Euronwy herself, with the priest at her side and surrounded by their small band of the devoted Christians, the leaders of whom had been responsible for the death of Morfydd's brother, was now within speaking distance of her and had paused, in what might easily have become a hand-against-hand conflict, in direct touch with her supporters.

And while this happened on the river side of Morfydd's position, on the other side, the side towards Ogof-y-Gawr, Rhun and Sibylla and their followers of the last twelve hours — a motley set, it is true, and a somewhat predatory one, but a group that at least possessed something of the old Iberian tradition of the Modrybedd — were moving towards her.

Rhun, indeed, was soon near enough for her to catch a few of his words as he addressed his tatterdemalion adherents, but she couldn't hear what he said to Sibylla; and neither he nor Sibylla had yet made any overt signal of recognition in her direction.

But what had answered Aulus's trumpet more definitely and distinctly than any member of the *Gosgordd,* whether Christian or heathen, was the owl.

What Morfydd felt about the wild flappings of this creature may of course have been simply due to love longing for Porius. Certainly that life-deep sigh the moonlight had drawn out of her had been followed, in spite of all the necessity for shrewd and unencumbered decisions, by several seconds of lost-to-reality starings into white lichen and black-green spruce foliage, during which she forgot to be a high-spirited and responsible princess and just simply gave herself up to the memory of those delicious abandonments below the old home rock, or *craig-y-gartref.*

But it was with a strange exultation, inexplicable to herself, and to mention which to Canna, say, or to Rhun, or to her father, would have caused her acute pain, that she watched the wild excitement of this bird as it fluttered round the head of Myrddin Wyllt, who, in his disguise as a savage "herdsman from the south," now came forward slowly towards her, looking larger than human in those tossing torch flares which certainly had a weird effect as seen in that indescribable substitute for daylight or darkness which now filled the valley.

“The owl has gone mad,” she muttered to herself, never thinking for a second that it was an unusual thing to conceive of feathered creatures “going mad” as animals go mad. But as the counsellor came towards her she could see that his eyes were fixed on nobody but Nineue, who, standing between those enormous horses and clutching each of them by its mane, was leaning forward with her whole body taut and stiff.

And then the girl became aware that, roused by that old Uriconium trumpet, the whole assembly of people was straining forward, very much in the same manner as Nineue herself. Suddenly the counsellor uttered a hoarse cry, a cry that could never have been heard if it had not been for a deep and portentous silence that had suddenly fallen upon the whole gathering. Out of the heart of that silence which seemed to draw into itself the very soul of the moonlight, that enormous man in his savage garb lifted both his arms and slowly, powerfully, masterfully, irresistibly, took the bird in his hands and drew it, flapping frantically, under his herdsman’s cloak.

And the silence of that crowd deepened to a level that was like the silence at the bottom of the ocean, and as if through some planetary sluice at the bottom of the ocean the lives of men and animals and birds and fishes, yes! and of plants and trees also, drained away, and nothing was left within that river curve of the Vale of Edeyrnion save the four elements, save the air filled with the mystery of moonlight, save Dyfrdwy, the Divine Water full of the mystery of life, save the waving torch fires full of the mystery of death, save the earth herself, mother of both the darkness of life and the darkness of death.

And as the torches wavered in the moonlight feeding on their own smoke like drunken flowers on their own fragrance, and as all the people waited, expecting a miracle, there came what sounded like the howl of a frustrated wolf from the throat of the young priest who now rushed forward, as if to throw himself in a frantic death hug full upon the counsellor; but he was held back by invisible arms.

"Whore from the beginning of the world!" he screamed; but like Taliesin's mysterious young Gwair, struggling against the *cadwyn dromlas,* "that heavy grey chain," that kept him prisoner in Caer Sidi, or like Rhiannon with the *mynweir,* or "horse collar," round her neck, he now stood helpless, motionless, dumb.

Morfydd had her eyes on his face and she could see his blank stupefaction at this sudden paralysis. He was a fearless youth. He had faith. He must have felt that all the devils in hell couldn't stop the impetus of his attack on this defender of lost souls. And yet something had stopped him. But Morfydd's attention suddenly turned to Euronwy, who was now a step or two in advance of the motionless priest. Euronwy had taken no notice of her companion's paralysis. She took no notice now of Myrddin Wyllt. She showed no interest in what was happening under that cloak, that cloak which had become the magnet, the centre, the cynosure, the loadstone, of that whole hushed and fascinated crowd. Morfydd recognized in her the same woman by whom she had stood in that little Gaer chapel, swearing each of them their vow by what each of them held most sacred.

Watching her at this crucial moment the question flashed across her: "Which of us has kept her oath?" But Euronwy was coming towards her now and taking no more notice of her than she had taken of the paralyzed priest or of the miracle that Myrddin Wyllt was working under his cloak. What was she going to do? At whom *was* she looking?

She was passing her now and Morfydd turned quickly from the counsellor’s cloak, which had begun to bulge and rumple itself and diminish itself and enlarge itself in a different way from the way it had reacted at first under the owl’s flapping wings. Wouldn’t their eyes meet for one single second? “I could,” she thought, “if I’d told him what Teleri said, have made him see her before he went.”

No, she had passed her without a word or a sign, just as if she hadn’t seen her! And then all at once she knew what the woman was doing and at whom she had been looking all this time! She had caught sight of Nineue, that fatal Ffichtiaid devil, standing up there with those two towering horses; and with her instinct for strategy on a large scale and for statecraft on a large scale, she had divined that there was danger to her son in what this sorceress had in mind.

And being, as Morfydd knew, absolutely without fear, what she was doing wasn’t as incredible as might seem. She was going to confront Nineue face to face and challenge her! But the magnetic pull of the miracle Myrddin Wyllt was working, indeed *had* worked, drew the girl’s attention now. The spell, or whatever it was, that he had cast upon the priest had clearly relaxed so that the man could move again, but it was evident that he was at present far too dazed by what had happened to him to do more than look about him with a puzzled and boyishly indignant stare.

She threw a hurried, half hurt, half self-reproachful look after Euronwy’s Roman-matron form advancing so calmly against that woman with the horses, that woman so accurately divined, by the infallible instinct of a mother bird, to be the real danger to her son. “She might at least have smiled at me,” Morfydd thought almost pathetically, as she herself swung round to the worker of miracles.

The Christian group in the *Gosgordd,* who hadn't left the priest's side for a second, now watched with horrified intensity every movement of the great magician. There began to emerge from beneath that queerly agitated cloak a pair of long, naked, beautiful, girlish legs. There was still something remotely birdlike about the girl's feet which emerged first, emerged indeed as in some improper and unsatisfactory human birth the feet might precede the head. The creature's hips followed, and then the arms folded across the waist. The girl's hands were clasped tightly together, the knuckles showing deadly white, and there was a lustrous softness, with a maddening appeal to the senses of any male who beheld it, emanating from those tightly folded arms and from that exquisitely tender neck, lacking every sort of ornament, on each side of which a long pair of tightly twisted shining braids— "and what earthly power," Morfydd thought, as with round eyes, open mouth, and panting breath, she stared spellbound, "could have braided that shining stuff in *there*?" — swayed and swung in the glory of their moonlit beauty, as if in exultant defiance of the dark intention of a second primary world ruler, one to whom everything connected with the pleasure of sex was totally and entirely evil.

Normally feminine as was her whole nature, Morfydd wasn't oblivious to the magic of femininity in its softest, delicatest, and most alluring essence; and at the rebirth of this lost and condemned Blodeuwedd, as if the counsellor's mantle had been a maternal womb, she was fully aware that the faint down of incomparably soft feathers round the thighs and between the thighs of the re-created maid, and the delicately secretive and inviolably shy intimacy of the way the hands of the resuscitated were folded, as if in obedience to some mysterious wisdom, too old to be remembered except by such a sign — yes! she was fully aware that all these things were indisputable evidence that every feminine creature in the whole world had at last found a real champion, even if he were only a magician and not a god.

Certainly while this newly created being remained for a moment or two poised on her feet, ready to use her arms as wings for her restored and reconstituted flights, back and forth, in defiance of the vengeance of Gwydion and of the Church that had accepted such vengeance as its own, over the valleys that were now hers once more to delight in, with or without the soul of Gronwy, with or without any other soul of her choice, between Caer Dathyl and Mur Castell, from one end of Edeyrnion to the other, Morfydd felt a strange outrush of sympathy for her, of sympathy so strong that she never forgot it all her days.

The creature was beyond all words beautiful, in that wild-tossed torchlight under that far-flung moonlight. Her form hadn't only taken into itself the springtime blossoms of its first engendering; it had taken into itself all the moss-deep unfoldings and unsheathings of the loneliest places, all the fibrous disentanglings of velvety filaments from the undersides of silvery-veined boughs, all the tangled growths that hide the secret processes of new life between the dark retreats of marsh waters and the still darker retreats of ancient forests.

But what was this? Morfydd moved straight up to the creature. She had met its eyes; and though its eyes were large as moon daisies they reminded her of Teleri. And the image of Teleri made her think of the snail shells she still held in her hand. Those moon-daisy eyes were asking her for something; and it was as if in the first moment of its elemental freedom the soul of this strange creature craved pitifully for some human touch to give it confidence in its inhuman loneliness, ere it entered its new transformation.

Soon it would become the nightly visitor that could fly through any secluded ramparts between Caer Dathyl and Mur Castell to respond to, to reciprocate, to realize, to satisfy the desperate imaginations of youthful longings and hopeless lusts, tossing on unshared pillows between Deganwy and Bontdu; but before its new transformation the creature seemed to implore her to give it some human recognition, something to link it with reality ere its flights began from dream lover to dream lover.

Those great, round, moon-daisy eyes begged and implored her, and *through them* it seemed to her that all the underlayers of earth life implored her; that dim existences in mud and moss implored her; and that newts and blindworms implored her; and that fish and frogs implored her; that faint presences too delicate to be caught in the shadows cast by the moon or in the shadows thrown by the torch flares implored her; and finally that Teleri herself from the bottom of her violated grave implored her; and it came over Morfydd, as she yielded to those eyes, that by re-creating Blodeuwedd the counsellor had in some queer way liberated the souls of all the Teleris in the world.

Feeling therefore the necklace of snail shells swaying in her fingers, Morfydd impulsively tore the thing in half, unstrung half the shells and replaced them, loose as they now were, in her own bosom, and proceeded to tie the ends of the string on which the rest were threaded as tight as she could round the nearest of these two golden braids, which was the one that hung across the creature’s left breast, the beautifullest breast in Ynys Prydein, from the Isles of Surluse to the carved tombstones of Iona, and there, twisted into the gold, that had been twisted out of its creator’s life, she left it in the hair of the wanderer — the only ornament she had ever really loved.

And thus adorned, the re-created, unransomed, unredeemed bird maiden swept away over their heads till she was lost in what *might* have been a cloud chariot made to receive her, save that it had a simpler origin and was in fact a cloud of black smoke sent down the wind from the erratic torches of the wild camp followers of Rhun and Sibylla.

Taking no more notice of her than Euronwy had done, the emperor’s counsellor, wrapping his magic cloak about his shoulders and looking especially ill-favoured and savage in his befouled jerkin blotched with every sort of unappealing stains of the chase, now began hurrying at a speed that was almost comical for a man of such unwieldy bulk towards Nineue and the two big horses. His pace was no doubt accelerated by what Morfydd could now see to be an absorbing encounter between the two formidable women; an encounter which, as far as she could make out, was still undecided.

But it was decided now, and by no means in Nineue’s favour, nor could Morfydd suppress a certain stir of pride in Porius’s mother as she watched her, for her figure was clearly outlined against the pine trees behind her, possess herself of the bridle of one of those enormous horses and draw the animal several yards away from its mate.

It was clearly because of this move that the ungainly form of the counsellor was now to be seen scrambling up the slope with grotesque desperation so that he might help his friend in time. But even so he was too late. With a calculated adroitness, that Morfydd couldn’t help but note with wonder and respect, Euronwy, who had succeeded in leading the horse to the entrance of a long narrow grassy path that plunged from the hilltop into one of the western valleys, now snatched up a fir branch and striking the animal with it sent the great beast thundering down that descent in a panic of terror.

What happened then to Nineue and the counsellor Morfydd no longer cared, but she did catch a sufficient glimpse of them against the moonlit sky to be conscious of two impressions: first, that a group of just visible stars that had an air of being there by more than pure coincidence seemed, from where she stood, to be moving off with them as, mounted together on the remaining great horse, they cantered over the crest of the hill and sank out of sight; and second, that leaping from his hiding place among the pines there suddenly appeared a small boyish figure, who, after a moment's pause, evidently to make out towards what quarter of the horizon that noticeable pair were riding, bolted off himself in the direction of Saint Julian's Fount.

The priest was now lurching unsteadily, just as if he were drunk or drugged, towards the stately figure of Euronwy as she came calmly and triumphantly down the slope; and Morfydd was beginning to gather together her faithful portion of the *Gosgordd,* with a view to leading them back to the Gaer, when she found herself confronted by two tall men who were absorbingly occupied in the business of carrying a third, whose unwieldy form was at first sight not so much limp and lifeless as tense and stiff in a sort of grown-up childish tantrum.

One of the bearers of this grotesque burden was none other than Lot-el-Azziz; and though Morfydd hadn't seen enough of the doctor to be as weary, as Porius had come to be, of his precious ram's horn, she felt instinctively that the man was completely outside the particular circle of her vital concerns.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked, trying to keep her irritation under control. "Who *is* this man?" she went on sternly, "and what is the matter with him?"

"In God's name, Princess," began the doctor gravely; but at that point he suddenly stopped, and stooping sideways away from his sulky patient, proceeded to run his thumb up and down the stalk of a plant that had survived the first two months of autumn. "It's a curious order, the

Hypericineae," he murmured aloud. "Good for a purgative, you know, as well as for a tonic! This one's stalk's square, as I expected, not round as they are in Gaul." And then, relinquishing this square-stalked specimen of the Hypericineae: "In God's name, Princess, I can't answer your question till I've examined—" Here the physician, having released the stalk, took a firmer hold on his instrument. But at that point Morgant, the brother of Drom, intervened with a rush of such fierce indignant words that the girl was compelled to listen.

"Porius ab Einion," he explained, "ordered me to take him — he's the son and brother of a dead Derwydd, honoured Princess, and, though he's what he is, he's all we've got, all we've got left, O great Princess, of his sacred House — to take him to the tent of the Lord Cynan who's still with the emperor, but the High Prince of Surluse has appeared with an insulting rapscallion of an ignorant Gaul who knows no more of the honour due to the *Derwyddon* of Ynys Prydein than a pig-hog in Tref-y-Glawdd; and it is because of this ruffian, honoured Princess — I say nothing against the High Prince — we all know *him* and how he comes from the Blessed Isles and how it's unlucky to reproach him, and I don't reproach him; I mention shame on his servant, shame on this bragging Gaul, shame on—"

But Morfydd interrupted him. "Lay the man down!" she ordered abruptly. "Pardon me, Doctor, but I'm sure you must be exhausted. This man's very heavy and anyone can see he's no corpse. In fact it seems to me there's plenty of life in him, and I don't—"

Drom's brother obeyed her so precipitously that she was interrupted by a peevish and indignant groan from the inert personage now lying full-length upon the ground; and the doctor, kneeling beside him, moved the fellow's heavy head from the sloping side of a molehill till it rested on a *tywarch,* or "tussock," of grass. Here he lay, muttering and grumbling, but, unless his druidic inheritance had enabled him to become a superhuman humorist, not in any particular discomfort.

"Can you hear what I say, Master?" enquired Morfydd. But the druid's brother contented himself with muttering, "Wine, *wine, wine,"* as if it were the name, not of a drink made from the juice of grapes, but of a pitiful and powerful deity, whose peculiarity it was to appear among men whenever torchlight and moonlight met.

But Morfydd, unperturbed by his rudeness, went on addressing him. "Don't you think, Master," she said, "if you were lifted up and took the doctor's arm, you could walk on your own feet?"

At this the druid's brother did throw upon her a definitely answering glance, and hoarsely and grimly, but with something about his tone that was not entirely removed from the sardonic, replied in a couple of monosyllables.

"Walk where?"

At this, as Morfydd's eyes met those of Lot-el-Azziz, she couldn't help smiling. But, as at the same moment she became aware that the polite space round them was rapidly diminishing and that the well-armed and well-disciplined core of the *Gosgordd* who supported the priest, acting as if it were a miniature Macedonian phalanx, was wedging into them, she felt impelled to think rapidly, decide rapidly, and not only so but announce her decision as if it had been the result of a month's rather than a moment's consideration.

"We can't have you two at the Gaer," she remarked emphatically, and speaking this time not to the druid's brother but to Drom's brother, "but there may be," she said, "down by the river — a vacant house — or hut — which — with a little — practical assistance — could be—"

It was the man on the ground who spoke now, and spoke quietly, firmly, and a little wearily, as an accomplished actor might speak in a whisper to his fellow about some mutual private affair when it was his stage duty to be dramatically, decently, and portentously dumb.

“The place I want to go to,” he said, “is the Avanc’s Cave, where the disinherited son of the Blessed One used to live who was loved by Princess Tonwen and killed by the same Sais who killed my brother. The Avanc’s Cave is a comfortable place. It is a convenient place. It is an honoured place. It is also a deserted place. No one would dare to live in the Avanc’s Cave because of the son of the Blessed One’s ghost. Morgant here is no more afraid of the son of the Blessed One’s ghost than I am, or of Princess Tonwen’s ghost either. Are you, Morgant? Tell the princess you’re not.”

And Morgant, the brother of Drom, repeated the word “not.” “Tell her what you *are* afraid of, Morgant,” commanded the druid’s brother.

And Morgant announced with an oath that he was afraid of nothing. The man on the ground promptly sat up and made a face at his follower.

“He’s afraid of women!” he shouted angrily. “Yes, you are! You know you are! You know what you used to call them in the old days.”

The brother of Drom looked from the doctor to Morfydd and from Morfydd to the doctor. Then he boldly blurted out, “That was for him, all for him! It was to save him from Sibylla Gwyddyles who’s now with my Lord Rhun.”

At this word Morfydd turned to the nearest loyal members of the *Gosgordd* and ordered a couple of them to conduct the disputing master and servant to Ogof-y-Gawr.

“They can get food and blankets there,” she said, “and then go to the other place. And you’ll be free tomorrow, Doctor,” she added, “to visit the man there if you feel you should; but now I want you to return to the Gaer with me to tell me if this girl's body has really been tampered with."

Lot-el-Azziz bowed before the daughter of Brochvael ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn as if she had been the daughter of Pharaoh. By this time the enormous moon had succeeded in surmounting the massive barrier of hills beyond the river; but no sooner had she overcome this obstacle, in obedience — so the brother of Drom implicitly believed — to some private instructions from the petulant individual who lurched along by his side, than she was lost to view in a thick bank of cloud that appeared to have rolled across the valley especially to meet her.

The vast crowd of people had already begun to thin out a little. The overlapping waves of excitement, caused first by the news about Teleri's ravished grave, and then by the counsellor's redemption of Blodeuwedd, had perceptibly died down. The owl's flapping wings and its wild "tu-who!" had been lost in the flower-born girl's recaptured love cry and her enchanted leap into the abiding heaven of the unsatisfied; and for a while this wave-tossing psychic tide of blind reaction and blinder counter-reaction was enjoying the rare sensation of a complete lull in its alternate ebb and flow.

But Sibylla Gwyddyles was the reverse of pleased to observe the relief upon Rhun's furrowed countenance when this lull began, and to note how the relapse into equilibrium of that disturbed soul-sea seemed to answer some psychic need in the rugged Brythonic warriors about her. That it answered no such need in her own *"anima* Gwyddyles" led her to suspect that the daughter of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles was equally immune to the lulling sorcery of pardon and peace.

And when, having intercepted Morgant and the druid's brother on their way to obtain food and fuel for the Avanc's Cave, she had interpreted this move according to her own instinctive ways and had decided that the daughter of Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles was up to some crafty game, she made up her mind to arouse new wrath between Christian and heathen.

With this intent she hurriedly sent round word, leaving Rhun to think what he liked and do what he pleased, to all the ragtag crew who had gathered round the ruined memories of the Modrybedd, calling upon them to chant the forest people's death dirge. Einion ab Iddawc was dead, who was the son of the oldest of the princesses. Why then hadn't it been heard, that dark, ominous, perilous, reckless lilt, that with its insane despair wailing over the rocks and morasses had discomforted the Gwyddylaid themselves, when, thousands of years ago, they hewed their way into the forests with their bronze swords, while the carrion crows croaked over the slain: "Touch wood! Touch wood! Touch wood!"?

The rapid darkening of the landscape by the obscuring of the moon brought the scattered red flames of the torches into relief; and it was from flame to flame of these fiery squadrons that this dirge-wail of flight and disaster now came rising and falling upon the wind, and as it swelled in volume it mounted in fury, and as it mounted in fury it gathered to itself the power to sweep the whole mass of men and women along with it.

And the heart of its effect was upon the young. It stirred the spirit of young girls with every kind of emotion. It stirred the spirit of young men with every kind of passion; and as it stirred them it swept them all in the same direction, that is to say, from southeast to northwest, from the direction of the three peaks of Cader Idris in the direction of the three familiar clefts or indents in the rounded bosom of the Gaer.

The dirge-wail of the forest people had already been a menace and a peril to three successive waves of formidable invaders. All these invaders had sought to suppress it. Every subsequent settled government had sought to suppress it. It was the lilt, the rhythm, the tune that set free the imprisoned devils of centuries and let the buried fires loose; for as the language changed with the years the actual words came to mean little or nothing. It was possible to chant it or to wail it or to shriek it to *any words!* In vain had the House of Cunedda, with its association with the Romans and later with its association with the emperor, struggled to stamp out this life cry, death cry, earth cry, of the forest people!

For into it had been dropped, somewhere, sometime, somehow, far back in the darkness of prehistory, drops from the terrible semen of Uranus, when the sky above all things was divided from its mother below all things, and its voice could never be altogether hushed.

At least Morfydd was not left alone to watch the impact of it now upon the inflammable people she was destined to rule, for, apart from Lot-el-Azziz, her staunchest and faithfullest supporters, Gwythyr and Nesta ferch Aulus, were with her. With Gwythyr at her right and Nesta at her left, and with the Hebrew doctor peering into his horn of Moses, as if it had the power — and perhaps it had — of magnifying things seen as well as things heard, just behind her, Morfydd could afford to contemplate with equanimity the way the priest and Euronwy — like a black and a white idol washed from a temple court in a flood — were bobbing stiffly and gravely up and down as the rush of the people swept them across the marketplace towards the river.

It had become necessary for Rhun to use his sword hilt as if it were a dagger to extricate himself and Sibylla from the excited pressure of their superstitious adherents. It soon became clear however as Morfydd directed her own little group of more respectable retainers towards the ferry of Rhyd-y-Gaer, where a freed Greek slave from the camp at Uriconium, whose name had been Brythonized into “Non Hen,” earned a farthing, or a *hatling,* a time for the use of his barge, that the more Christian and consequently the better-armed of the *Gosgordd,* who had already crossed the old wooden bridge known as Pons Castrum, had carried off with them most of the torches; and this, for the moon was now totally lost under the rolling masses of piled-up clouds, left nothing but a few flickering lanterns, jerked about on poles, to illumine the riverbank at this less frequented spot.

Here they found, impatiently protesting at the extremely long pause made by Non Hen on the Gaer side of the river, none other than the Henog of Dyfed. The Henog was seated on a not altogether uncomfortable bench which old experience had taught the ferryman to provide for his own use on both riverbanks; but as it was too dark to read or write, this greatest artist in words since Homer was fain to sit crouched up like a malevolent toad, flinging curse after curse across the dark-flowing tide.

No sooner however had Morfydd and her companions arrived on the scene than the situation between the two old figures seated in the darkness, with what looked like Time itself flowing between them, began to come to a head and at the same time began to resolve itself. But as with many another crisis the solution introduced new complications.

Although Non Hen's century of autumns in a barbarous Ultima Thule had removed from him much of the ordinary intelligence and not a little of the ordinary appearance of a human being, he could recognize a princess even of an isle like this without the aid of any stronger light than a few waving lanterns. Hastily he rose up; hastily he clambered into his vessel; hastily he plunged his pole into the bank.

But so hastily did he plunge it, and so contrary to his usual habit and custom was this haste, that an event occurred out of all memory and experience in his life as a ferryman. His pole stuck fast. Nothing that he could do was able to release it; and ere long, indicating the uselessness of further effort by a resigned waving of his hands in the air, he sat down in the barge and awaited the progress of events.

“Gwythyr,” said Morfydd, “you’d better go round by the bridge and help him. We’ll all wait here.”

“I’m not going,” she thought, “to risk being caught by Euronwy on my way to that grave,” and she resolutely pressed her knuckles against the place where the unstrung snail shells were scratching and tickling her skin.

But it was easier to say “We’ll all wait here” than to do it with any degree of patience; and as she stood there by Nesta’s side, wondering how soon the Henog would lift up his head, or raise his eyes, or make any move to offer her his seat, or to salute her as his hostess, an extremely worrying thought rushed like a rat across her mind: “What if the whole kitchen and scullery and buttery up yonder have decamped to the funeral and let all the fires go out as they did that day after the Saeson were gone, when the emperor was with us?”

But worries about the kitchen and about what she might see in Teleri’s grave were soon thrust into the background as she shared with Nesta the latter’s warm Etrurian cloak; and into the same background she now drove away that disturbing incident of Blodeuwedd and the owl. “It’s better,” she decided, “not to try to explain things like that! Morvran always used to say some people can make people see things that aren’t there at all.” And then it was that her consciousness was suddenly submerged by the thought of Porius. “Is there any chance,” she said to herself, “that the emperor may *send Porius back* when he hears of all the trouble his nephew’s been making? No! No chance at all! What’s the matter with me? All the emperor cares for is getting rid of the Saeson; and there’s none can help him in *that* like Porius.”

Meanwhile in Nesta's head, though they were so close together that the wavy hair of the one touched the curly hair of the other, a totally different landscape took shape, a landscape in which the philosophical Gwythyr had been enabled to arrange, without compromising his principles and as a sort of revolutionary Maecenas under the emperor, every aspect of the lives of all the uncommon ones among the common people.

"Master Henog!" It cannot be denied that Morfydd cried out his name in a more ringing voice than was quite necessary; but she was growing weary of watching the reflections in the river thrown by the swaying lanterns behind her and of speculating upon which of the self-absorbed old men, one on each side of the stream, the erratic flicker would fall next.

Her voice must have had at that moment a quite vicious "carrying" quality, for the aged Greek jerked himself to his feet and ran his fingers up and down the middle of his embedded pole as though her words had been adhesive projectiles smeared with corrosive acid.

And the Henog also got up, though with more deliberation. "Did you address me, Princess? Your husband invited me. My stomach drives me. My imagination reproaches me. My hunger and thirst offer sacrifice within me to my invention and your husband's intention. I gave up attending the late prince's funeral so as not to miss the well-cooked meats of your famous Gaer table. I gave up pouring out wine to the dead so as not to miss—"

"Master *Doctor!"* Once more her voice rang out so resonantly clear that the ancient ferryman on the further side of the Divine River experienced a second shock. This time, in place of causing him to stroke his embedded pole, it made him collapse again on the edge of his barge.

But Lot-el-Azziz had stepped forward and was bending attentively now by the two young female heads that emerged from Nesta's warm mantle.

"Please explain to our honoured guest, Master Doctor, that the barge will be with us in a minute. Better both of you sit down. Nesta and I are all right as we are."

And so once more as the sacred water gurgled and swallowed and whimpered and splashed and moaned past them, and while the lantern lights caused to leap into momentary vision whirling and swirling gobbets of snow-white foam, Morfydd was able, warmed by the warmth of Nesta's nearness, and Nesta was able, warmed by the warmth of Morfydd's nearness, to tell themselves stories of the future triumphs of their men.

Thus occupied they took as little notice of the deep-toned discussion that soon rose between the doctor and the Henog as they did of the jests and cries and arguments in which the armed lantern bearers behind them were indulging.

"But if you," asseverated the Henog, observing with puzzled interest the heroic efforts the doctor was making to stop himself each time his hand mechanically went up to his black velvet cap, for the poor man had still to contend with that old curst compulsion to tug at his tender topknot, "persist in dragging in Aristotle and Plato in defence of your one eternal perfect model of a universe in the mind of your one eternal First Cause, why isn't it lawful for me to refer to the indestructible elements of Empedocles, the everlasting numbers of Pythagoras, and the well-hooked atoms of Democritus? And if you say the ultimate reality is the One, and I say it is the Many, who is there who can decide between us?"

But it was as if the black tide, full of gurglings and suckings and moanings, lit up by flickering points of lanternlight and bearing on its rapidly moving surface circles and triangles and squares of chance-drawn patterns of swirling foam, did its best to suggest to these disputatious *potamogetoi,* or "river neighbours," that though it might be impossible for the human brain to imagine such things it was still within the bounds of possibility that the ultimate reality was neither One nor Many, nor even a mysterious mingling of them both, however much helped out, so a few riverbed gurglings seemed to interject, by the Holy Trinity, but was something completely and absolutely *different.*

“You seem to have completely misunderstood,” retorted the doctor, “every word I said. I wasn’t thinking of such phantasmagoric make-believes as One, or Two, or Three, or Four, or as-many-as-you-like-ad-infinitum. I was thinking of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of how all that playacting we were watching just now, all those magpie tricks of owls and maidens, of dapple-grey horses and outraged sepulchres, would have been torn to fragments at the voice of his thunder and shattered to bits at the shock of his lightning. I was thinking how, while in the depths of our own souls, which is the only force we know *from the inside,* we feel a power capable of... capable of—”

“Of giving piles to the Philistines!” interrupted the Henog.

But all the doctor did to him under that confused light of a moon heaped over by mountainous cloud ridges and mocked by nodding lanterns was to turn towards him with both hands from where he held it on his knees the round orifice of his indispensable ram’s horn.

“Capable,” he cried, “while you sons of Japhet draw your triangles and measure your paradigms and cast your horoscopes and conjure up your owl girls, capable of tossing continents into the air from whose scattered fragments cataracts of liquid fire will pour down and from whose shaggy promontories great forests will hang head downwards by their roots!”

His raised hand got as far as his chin, but he remembered his vow and dropped it. “Capable,” he burst out again in a still louder tone, “of flinging cascading oceans sky high; yes! oceans full of deep-sea whales, whose lashing tails will curve like tight-strung bows as they fly upward; yes! and full too of vast sea serpents who will wriggle like sand eels and tie themselves in squirming and slithering knots as the Lord of Hosts makes them fly upwards — all, all, all under the invincible power of his might!”

The Henog was clearly impressed by the emotion that might have come direct from the sands of the Red Sea to the banks of Rhyd-y-Gaer. Bent low over his ram’s horn was the doctor now; and very slowly the Henog rose to his feet and passing behind the two women persuaded, after a moment’s explanation, one of the young men to remove the lantern from his pole.

With this in his possession he hurried back to their bench. Seated there again by the doctor’s side he hurriedly opened his tablets and without a moment’s hesitation wrote rapidly a sentence of about a dozen words. As he did this the light of the borrowed lantern flashed up and down the dark figure of his companion; but neither he nor anyone else followed the antics of this lantern, and it thus remained unknown — unless the God of Abraham was as omnipresent as he was powerful — that a strange tribal homesickness affected at that moment the heart of the father of Magog so that a tear as salt as if it had come from the Dead Sea fell upon the ram’s horn.

And in like manner, unless Pryderi the son of Pwyll Pen Annwn had been present in the form of a minute half-dead autumnal moth that fell from the edge of the lantern upon his tablet, it is certain that it will never be known what particular sentence it was, written as a retort to the all-powerful god of the desert, that the Henog, with his insanely intense and incorruptible concentration on the mystery of words, inserted in the portion of Pryden’s life on which he was just then engaged, namely, the god’s imprisonment by some sort of devil in official sheep’s wool who fastened the *mynordd,* or “door knocker,” of hell’s headquarters securely round his neck.

But there was a simultaneous stir now on both banks of the river, for Gwythyr had arrived at the ferryman's side and the barge was moving across the stream.

"I hear," whispered the doctor to the Henog as they both stepped back behind the two young women, "that the High Prince of Surluse has returned to the camp and brought with him a famous Gallic poet. Is this true, Master? And may I also ask, Master, how it is that you are on this side of the river at all? Didn't you come from the camp?"

"Certainly. But I crossed to see what was going on and then decided that since I was to sup at the Gaer I'd be wiser to await you all here."

The youth from whom the lantern had been borrowed, now that the ladies were already seated in the barge, withdrew it gently from under the Henog's arm and having rehung it on his pole assisted the two men to take their places.

"You were writing something?" enquired the doctor.

"Only my life of a local deity whose name in your moral manner you would probably interpret as 'Sorrow the son of Wisdom.'"

"How do *you* interpret it?" asked the other.

But in the confusion of their scrambling up the bank and of paying the ferryman, some very carefully murmured words that appeared to the puzzled doctor to resemble the dissolving river foam that was floating away from the barge pole, words that suggested that a woman's fancy, a breath of chance, a touch of magic, and a fluttering leaf could make both wisdom and sorrow cry aloud for their old grandad folly, were lost in the night.

But the doctor and the Henog were destined to forget their dispute sooner than they expected; for as they followed Morfydd and Nesta up the familiar Gaer path, and would soon be reaching the outskirts of the graveyard where

Teleri lay, they were witnesses of a scene so agitating that it swept both the Lord of Hosts and the Lord of Annwn out of their minds.

The path that led to the main eastern gate from Rhyd-y-Gaer was joined, just before reaching the graveyard, by the path that came up from the old wooden bridge; and at this point, whether by chance or by intention, Morfydd and Nesta, along with Gwythyr and a few *Gosgordd* friends of his, were met fair and square on the open hillside by Rhun and Sibylla with a much larger though a much more ragged crowd of followers.

No one in either of the opposed groups took the least notice of the dark forms of the doctor and Henog who, like a lean and observant pair of old devils, might have decided to travel together through the world, to collect support, the one for the totalitarian and the other for the pluralistic college of the Via Perdita of the Infernal City. But the doctor thought, "Surely the Lord will manage better when Magog is grown up," and the Henog thought, "Something tragic and heroic and beautiful and crazy is bound to happen now. Oh, if I can catch it for future generations I shall die happy!"

Fate had decided that at least the moon that night was to have no share in the responsibility for the issue of this encounter; for from zenith to horizon in all the four quarters of the sky dark clouds concealed her from view. This did not mean, however, that the mingling of light and darkness on this eastern slope of the Gaer that night was the same as if the strange influence of that mirror of madness had been entirely absent. There was an interfusion of a ghostly element in the soft autumnal airs that moved and met and parted and met again round the bare shoulders of that grassy promontory, suspended there in eternal vigilance above the concourse of four famous valleys, each of which advanced out of the unknown, and each of which retreated into the unknown, like four immemorial messengers, whose messages were monotonously the same and yet majestically different; and even this ghostly element, carried up and down by these soft airs and enlarged by these messenger valleys, was experienced in oddly various ways by everyone there; but to all it was more like an odour, a taste, a feeling, than it was like a visual thing.

"Think well what you are going to do, Morfydd ferch Brochvael!" cried Rhun in a voice Morfydd had never heard him use before. But she remembered even at that crucial moment in a lightning flash of Time's lantern just exactly where she *had* heard that particular tone. It was when she was a very young child and had come to spend the day with Alarch the Fair, her father's sister, in that old house that had been half pulled to pieces and half incorporated in the new church buildings, and the voice that uttered it wasn't the voice of the small Rhun, who was fixing a bowstring to his first ash bow, nor was it the voice of the still smaller Porius who, with his hand in his mother's, was observing with puckered brow and shy but intense concentration the appearance of his infant cousin.

It was the voice of Gwrnach, Rhun's father, the son of the Greek slave; and it rang out now across this ascent to the old fortress with the accent of some young Spartan shouting a terrible threat to Andromache across the Scaean gate!

Morfydd moved forward to meet him, while Nesta and Gwythyr followed close behind; whereas Sibylla noticeably held back among their outlawlike band of retainers, whose appearance caused the question to shoot through Morfydd's mind: "Was it pure wicked mischief in me to send the druid's brother to the Avanc's Cave? Have I got from Mother that same vein of devilish revenge in me that Sibylla's got from the Gwyddylaid of the Gwern?" Her own voice was quite calm though her heart was beating fast as she made her reply.

“Rhun, Rhun! I’m going to do nothing but find out whether anyone’s been meddling with this girl’s body. Till Porius comes back I’m in my place here and am alone responsible to the emperor. You know what that priest wants done, and I should have thought it would be as monstrous and inhuman to you as it is to me. He wants her body thrown out of the graveyard and treated like... like those who’ve committed the worst kind of bestiality! If the emperor’s nephew *has* outraged this corpse, as both Gwrgi and Canna swear he has, it’s Porius’s business — that’s to say, it’s my business — to refuse to have him within the boundaries of Edeyrnion and Ardudwy; and if he won’t leave, to hunt him down like a dangerous beast and put him to death.

“We both of us know this woman, and Euronwy ferch Porius Manlius knows her as well as we do. She’s been queer in her mind ever since we’ve known her. It’s cruel and monstrous of this new priest who knows our customs, for he served in our halls, to do this thing. Rhun, Rhun, you know perfectly well he would destroy Mithras, and all that belongs to Mithras, out of the land, if he dared! You know as well as I do that if Einion ab Iddawc were still alive, or if Porius hadn’t been wanted by the emperor, Prince Medrawd would never have dared to come here at all!

“What am I going to do? I’m going to do justice, as the wife of Porius ab Einion, in the land he rules in his father’s stead! *That’s* what I’m going to do, Rhun ap Gwrnach, and nothing and no one can stop me.

“Rhun, Rhun! Be reasonable, my Rhun! We’ve known each other from our childhood. We understand each other. We both love Porius. Mithras is as much in danger from this priest as Pryderi and Pwyll and Rhiannon and Manawyddan. This priest is a friend of that horrible devil, Gwydion the son of Don. I needn’t remind you who else he’s a friend of! *That other one,* that demon Minnawc Gorsant! The one who worked up those pious assassins to murder Morvran!

“Rhun, my dear friend Rhun, Porius’s second self, faithful soldier of Mithras, surely in this struggle for the liberty of all of us from the tyranny of Christ, you are not going to take the wrong side? Hasn’t Ogof-y-Gawr always been a *llys* of the forest people? And what of the dead Modrybedd? Which side would *they* take? Would they take the side of a priest of *Christus Romanus* against a *woman,* against the ghost of a woman, against the violated corpse of a woman, against the outraged grave of a woman?

“Which side would Auntie Tonwen take and her friend the son of the Blessed One? Would she let a Christian priest throw a woman’s body to the crows? Rhun, Rhun, I beg of you, my friend, my more than... than cousin, stand by me in this thing!”

The doctor and the Henog who had been hovering together side by side on the edge of the circle of light thrown by three separate torches among the Ogof-y-Gawr people and by one single lantern in the hands of Morfydd’s friends, and who to the less involved members of either group must have appeared like a couple of supernatural beings deposited by some magic power upon that familiar slope, were so greatly moved by something in the girl’s appeal, in the special tone of it, and in the slight gesture accompanying her final words, which she made with her right arm and her right hand, that they instinctively moved forward to her support.

So also did one of the oldest and most dilapidated of the hangers-on of Ogof-y-Gawr, a dwarf called Erb, who answered to the name of Paun Bach, or the “Little Peacock,” but who was able to bring with him just then to Morfydd’s aid something more important than his own size or strength, namely, a large, flaming, and well-oiled torch.

And it was by the light of this flaring illumination — for the Little Peacock was an adept at handling it so that its smoke never obscured its blaze — that the Henog and the doctor beheld what then occurred.

Something in her voice, that seemed to force its way through the obstacles that deadened it, resembled the heart-stricken gasp with which Porius had begun his recital of those monstrous Cewri words. For any record of other resemblances you would have to search page by page through the Book of Annwn, that Plutonian chronicle of all the invocations of mankind which have been totally, helplessly, and absolutely forgotten, save when one of those infinitesimally tiny insects, smaller than lice, who are bred in the scalp of the Mother of the Muses, is, once perhaps in every hundred years, caught between its pages.

But so it was now, under that flaring torch of the Little Peacock, that Rhun, hit to the heart, he too, by that vibration in her voice and by that broken and fragmentary gesture of her arm and her hand, made several steps forward towards her.

But Sibylla was too quick for him. With a bound she was upon him, and with one arm twisted tight round his legs she was on the ground behind him and with the other was clutching desperately at any stalk or tuft of bracken that offered itself to her wildly groping fingers.

It was perhaps fortunate for Sibylla, and — who can tell? — perhaps in the end fortunate for Rhun, that it was the Henog and not the doctor that under the blaze of the Little Peacock's torch caught a glimpse of Rhun's face.

Lot-el-Azziz was, for all his science, a hot-blooded child of the desert. Besides he knew not the animal-like cunning of that royal tribe of Brythons, nor the heroic ferocity of the Gwyddylaid of the Alder Swamp. So that the chances were that had *he* seen what the Henog saw at that moment in Rhun's face he would have rushed forward and interfered.

But the Henog had disciplined himself for half a century in restraining all emotions, save the emotional idea of getting his emotions completely out of the way, while he forced those eidola we call "words" to become dumb transparencies through which the lovely and terrible grotesqueries of the reality *beyond* words should be suggested *by* words and seen as he — the dedicated medium between man and man's life on earth — was allowed to see them.

Thus the Henog, even at that fearful moment, relucted at interfering with chance or destiny or the divine mystery of the feminine heart, when he beheld Morfydd fling one deadly look at the clinging figure on the ground, turn her back to Rhun, and, with a brief command to the torch-bearing dwarf to stay at her side, start to climb the rest of the slope towards the graveyard.

All about her, straining and scrambling, pushing and whispering, turning their heads and making covert signs to one another, went her little band; Nesta and Gwythyr, with a consideration that the observant old chronicler failed not to miss, keeping well behind, and keeping also a sharp eye upon the Ogof-y-Gawr crowd they were leaving.

But that motley crew had stopped in total confusion. Sibylla, on her feet again, was shouting at them excitedly, but it was clear that, in their disorganized uproar, they were not listening.

There was no torch near the athletic figure of Rhun. Nor was such a light any further necessary as far as the Henog was concerned. That conjurer with words had seen what he had seen and was already pondering what words he would use to set it down. His method was to get these same troublesome words gathered and scattered, sifted and collected, like a flock of sheep by an imaginative sheepdog, till every ledge in the mental *clawdd poncen* of his vision — that "upland dyke" connecting what he sees with all its associated ideas — fluttered with those magical wisps of wool out of which alone the many-coloured coat of the essential reality he sought could be woven.

And now the great chronicler was helped beyond all hope by the simple-natural man whose bewildered confounding he had just witnessed. For though it was impossible for him to see Rhun's face, which was still turned towards the retreating torch of the Little Peacock, he had by this time moved up so close to him that he could hear what he was saying. For Rhun was talking to someone, though there was no one, as far as Rhun knew, to hear what he said.

Totally unaware of the Henog's presence, he went on staring after that hill-climbing, red-flaming torch, surrounded by those excited figures, among whom, though only at moments, and first one and then the other, could be discerned the two women.

But Rhun was talking, not to Morfydd, but to Porius. He was obstinately, blunderingly, and with many repetitions, explaining to Porius on what grounds he had undertaken the task of being the successor of the Three Aunties; and how it was that, being now practically married to Sibylla, he could not desert her, even to help Morfydd against the priest.

But in the midst of his explanation, apparently addressed to an invisible Porius through whose transparent body could be seen that red meteoric flare, whose far-tossed column of smoke was lost in the darkness as it paused at the entrance to the graveyard, Rhun became aware of two obstinately repeated sounds that were battering against his ear from opposite directions, one from due north and one from due south. The southern one was from only a few yards away in fact from Sibylla, and it desired him, in no uncertain terms, to turn round and rejoin her; but the other one came down the slope from the animal stockade where there were steers and heifers, a stockade which had been relegated, in the casual use-and-wont habits of the centuries, to a cuplike hollow in the shoulder of the promontory just outside the fortress's massive walls and closely adjoining the graveyard.

From here there now floated down the slope, to the ears of Rhun and to the ears of the Henog, the lamentable complaint of some agitated steer, who either had its own troubles to confide to the hidden moon or had simply been disturbed by Paun Bach's unusual torch. And thus there was flung like a stone from a sling into the soul of the astounded storyteller his final problem concerning this weird encounter.

For quite clearly and unmistakably he now heard, proceeding from the lips of that paralyzed figure, the following blasphemous words, words uttered quietly and in a low voice and with the puzzled hurt tone of an indignant little boy: "Mithras, Mithras! Why hast thou forsaken me?"

But, after that, Rhun shook his head; shook it to the left with three little jerks, shook it to the right without any more jerks, and then went down as silently to join Sibylla as the Henog went up to join Morfydd.

But the Henog thought as he went: "It was that red flame and the noise of that bullock. Why can't I pray to Pryderi as well as write about him, as the priest prays to Jesus, the Jew to Jehovah, and this madman to his Dog-and-Bull sun god? I know Pryderi's as much a god as Jesus or Jehovah, and a good deal more of one than Mithras. Why then can't I pray to him? Is it *because I know him too well?* Is it easier to worship foreign gods and gods we don't know? Is that why the Romans have deserted Mercury and Venus for Jesus and Mary?"

Stumbling and slipping in the deep-trenched cart tracks of this century-old ascent, and feeling as if he were swallowing with each breath a peculiar certainty of the presence of the invisible moon, just as if that far-floating ether-poised luminary on the further side of the cloud roof had been a vast orb of overripe autumnal fruit diffusing a supernatural fragrance, to breathe which was like inhaling the sweet and secret madness of a calm interior illumination, this querulous chronicler of a god who was too well known to be worshipped arrived at the graveyard.

Here the torches and lanterns and raised voices, and the wild-tossed reflections of fire upon bronze and iron, and the overlapping of distorted shadows and angry human faces, drove both Mithras and Pryderi out of the Henog's mind. From where he paused on the outskirts of the opposing groups he couldn't see any new-made grave. In fact the crowd was so thick that he couldn't see any grave at all. But he saw a compact phalanx of well-armed Brythonic spearmen with the dangerous excitement of religious fanaticism in their faces, and, confronting them, Morfydd and Nesta, with Gwythyr and a few other faithful ones.

And as he stood there in weary and anxious concern rather than agitation it struck the Henog that there was real danger of a bloody conflict breaking out among these graves. The Henog was not an excitable man and he was a man who possessed at a crisis a rather startling power of self-control, but the incredible words he had heard Rhun utter had upset him; and here he was confronted, even in the midst of these graves by just the same sort of rumbling thunder.

He had trained himself to hold all his stronger emotions in control — and this accounted for his increasing peevishness and querulousness over minor contradictions — but as he thought of Rhun's feeling for Mithras and of the stark bedrock gulf yawning here now before his face between the friends of the daughter of the sceptical Brochvael and these fierce young soldiers of Christ burning with the certainty that theirs was the secret of life he felt that he had been left behind.

"My gods," he said to himself, "have never demanded these final intensities and absolute devotions. They have been magical and magnanimous. They have been faithful to their friends, but they have never divided the world into opposed camps of the good and the evil."

He shivered. He had sweated as he climbed the slope; but now he felt as if a score of underground passages were breathing out mortal chills upon him. Various disquieting memories of certain hints he'd had from Brother John, who declared he'd had them from Pelagius, about the Eleusinian Mysteries began to trouble his mind. There were no Mysteries, surely, of that *sort* in connection with Annwn or Caer Sidi?

But his uneasiness and discomfort increased. He imagined that he could smell breaths of charnel-house corruption reaching him from underground in wafture after wafture of dissolution and decomposition.

"Surely," he told himself, "whatever Brother John might have fancied in his death fever or might have heard Pelagius fancying in *his* death fever, the Classic Mysteries were like our Festival of the Sowing, the very opposite of purity, chastity, sanctity, and holiness."

Once more he shivered. And once more he experienced that uneasy feeling of being left behind. "Curse it all!" he said to himself, "I'm not bound to accept Myrddin Wyllt's nonsense about the future because I'm writing his life, nor am I bound to un-deify Pryderi because he had another god's door knocker hung round his neck. Are there to be no gods at all except the sort who fight against Nature and follow chastity and purity and holiness?"

He suddenly began to feel a petulant irritation with Porius for having left his wife at this crucial hour. “If the man’s not a coward,” he thought, “he’s an imbecile! This girl will never get those fanatical young madmen to get out of her way or do what she wants.”

The uneasy Henog was not the only one in that place who hesitated about the issue of this conflict. Gwythyr himself began to feel more than a little doubtful.

But Morfydd continued confident, though attempt after attempt to make these young images of implacable resolution stir from their stand round that open grave had already failed. But she alone knew the secret cause of her confidence. She had suddenly become convinced that the power of the emperor’s counsellor was upon her and the magic of his presence was about her, for something had happened when she first reached the spot that to the end of her days she would never forget.

She and Nesta had outrun the rest and reached Teleri’s violated grave before that half-dozen of formidably well-armed warrior-Christians, hurriedly despatched by the priest, had appeared on the scene at all. The grave had hardly been filled in when the appalling sacrilege was committed, and Teleri’s body, covered with what old Canna had wrapped round her and with what must have been Medrawd’s own mantle, lay on its side only about six inches down.

The two young women met with no difficulty in uncovering the face of the corpse; but what Morfydd saw, when with her excited fingers clutching at the unstrung snail shells in her bosom she lifted the wrapping from the girl’s throat, was the thing that gave her — with a shock that she was never able, even to Porius, to describe adequately — this supernatural confidence. For *there,* neatly folded under the girl’s chin, lay the string of snail shells which she herself had tied round one of the owl girl’s braids!

From where he stood, however, the weary and dejected Henog couldn't even see the half-empty grave in which the body of Teleri, wrapped about once more in the cloak of the emperor's nephew, lay in untroubled peace, as indifferent to all that had happened as it was indifferent to all that did not happen. It had been this indifference — too extreme to be called contemptuous and too elemental to be called remote — that had caused Morfydd, when Nesta was preparing to mend the broken thread and to lift up the dead girl's head to place it round her neck, to insist on leaving both the strung and the unstrung shells just as they were, heaped together between the cold chin and the cold breasts, to insist on wrapping the necrophiliast's cloak once more around her, and finally to insist on climbing, without further delay, out of the grave, so as to be ready to resist with equanimity any further attack upon the abysmally indifferent dead either by the righteous or the unrighteous.

Sick of the whole business of being the prose Homer of Ynys Prydein the Henog of Dyfed, not in sardonic irony but in a mood of weary, only half-serious, totally irresponsible experiment, did what he had never done in his life before and what Brother John certainly would have assured him nobody of their generation was ever likely to do again. He *prayed,* and prayed in definite, articulate, though absolutely silent words, to Pryderi son of Pwyll Pen Annwn that Morfydd ferch Brochvael ab Iddawc might work her will upon events, whatever that will, when she discovered in herself what it was, might turn out to be.

It was certainly curious how confident Morfydd herself felt, against all appearances, that she *would* have her way. Three times, with all the menacing dignity and grave authority she could assume, she had implored these men, who, with their polished battle spears and bull's-hide shields and their young faces aflame with fanaticism in the torchlight, stood staring in front of them like a row of bronze statues, to get back to the Gaer and attend the banquet, the hour for which had already long passed.

But her entreaties had been of no avail. What made the situation harder for her was that'none of these young men seemed to be the leader. She just knew their faces by sight, but that was all. Living at Ty Cerrig she had had no opportunity to become personally acquainted with any of them, and though treating her with respect as the new Lady of the Gaer she felt they regarded her authority in moral matters as of less weight than the antennae of a butterfly. They had told her when they first appeared what the priest's commands had been. They were to keep watch, fasting as they were, till all but themselves had left the spot. Then they were to remove the body, carry it to the bank of the river, dismember it as the Church decreed devil-possessed witches should be dismembered, and cast its remnants into the water.

The weary and disheartened Henog felt his indignation on her behalf increasing in proportion as he realized more and more fully the hopelessness of the situation. And if the Church, in the person of this autocratic young priest, overcame her now, what hope would there be for her in the future if her husband continued absent? How could she possibly resist the combined power of Euronwy and the Church?

But the astonishing young woman seemed certain she would win in the end. What on earth gave her this confidence? It hadn't occurred to *her* — that was certain — to utter, even in silence, experimental prayers to Pryderi.

What followed remained indeed for the Henog of Dyfed, observing all this beneath a sky where piled-up, overlapping clouds, ridges upon ridges of them, couldn't prevent something from the full moon — the gods alone knew *what* — pouring down upon this primeval fortress of Rhitta Gawr, what followed remained for this honest and bewildered chronicler, this disillusioned old adept in the difficult art of word hunting and the still more difficult art of god hunting, an experience he wouldn't have missed for all the *Pedeir Sarnau,* or "four sacred steps," that lead to that "seat in Caer Sidi" which he felt in his heart of hearts was his by right whatever *that boy* might say, or *that Jew,* or even Myrddin Wyllt himself; for this was an experience that confirmed him, tired and disenchanted as he was and weary as he was in his whole trade of chronicling life, confirmed him in his certainty that there was no such thing as a "One God," or a "One Absolute Being," but that life was an everlasting succession of many worlds and of innumerable creative and destructive gods and demigods. This night was indeed one of the nights that gave the Henog of Dyfed the culminating inspiration of his life, the inspiration that enabled him to go on to extreme old age polishing, revising, and adding more and yet more to the "four branches" of his prose poem concerning Pryderi.

And yet while he stood there on the edge of an angrily murmuring crowd, that seemed to need only a word from their new princess to fling themselves like wild cats against that little line of pointed spears and implacable profiles, he was so tired out, both mentally and physically, as to feel sceptical about every solid fact, and every rational explanation of every solid fact, offered to his attention. He was so tired that he began to feel a little light-headed. Petulant and querulous rather than unhappy, he felt as if the whole panorama of this fantastic scene were a dream within a dream!

Light-headed was the precise word, and he knew it was, for what he felt about this crazy spectacle, and about these human dolls who took their gestures, and the stage on which they made their gestures, so portentously! What absurd nonsense it all was! Why couldn't people see that the whole business was a lively, amusing, horrible comical, pitiful, cruel *Incomprehensibility!* For that was what it was. Not a tragedy, for it was too pitiful. Not a farce, for it was too cruel. Not a mystery, for the physical was too thick, and our capacity for response to everything else too quickly at its limit.

It clearly couldn't be very serious or matter very much. We were all comparatively soon dead; and meanwhile life could be deliciously pleasant and appallingly unpleasant. It could be endurable. It could be unendurable. It could be first the one and then the other. Good and evil in it were hopelessly mixed up, as also were justice and injustice.

An *Incomprehensibility* — that's the only word for it! And what applies to men applies to the gods also. "If I could magic myself into an eagle of Zeus and carry all these people up through those black clouds into the moonlight on my wings, would I do it?" he thought. "No, I would not do it! Why should I do it?"

It would only be from one incomprehensible dream into another! "It certainly is incredible," so the thoughts of the light-headed Henog ran on, "how that girl *can* go on being so sure of herself, and so sure she can outwit those savage infants. If I stay here much longer I'll be growing into a bard like young Taliesin! God! But those boys under that fiery torch look like a ring of blood-red roses! How about 'The Ring of Life,' my philosophical Doctor, as a subject for a philosophical poem? But what, in the devil's name, are you up to now?"

For he had suddenly become conscious that the begetter of Magog was making extraordinary noises through his ram's horn; was treating it, in fact, as if it really were a musical instrument. "Well," thought the exhausted Henog, looking vaguely round for a grave on which he could sit down, "I'll show the boy-bard he's not the only one who can tap out tunes.

"But what's the doctor doing now? Calling on Jehovah to scatter these cherubs? The ring! The ring! The ring! I can make rhymes for 'The Ring of

Life' as well as another!
Make it and don't let it make you!
Wear it and don't let it wear you!
Leave it and don't let it leave you!
Let the last word that's uttered between you
Be yours on it, not its upon you!
Bendigeitfran! But I want my supper!"

At this point the Little Peacock, seized with a bold idea of his own, felt it advisable — in spite of the blazing torch he held — to turn his head so as to get some notion of the number of people that Gwythyr and Nesta could count on to make a concerted attack on these pious young gladiators supposing it happened that some unimportant and easily spared person felt a crazy impulse to gather an armful of spears into his own body, making thereby a yawning gap in that formidable half circle!

In the process of counting the crowd he perceived the tall dark form of the Henog hovering waveringly behind the rest; and at the moment he did so he saw the man totter and stoop and sink on his knees and begin groping on all fours in the dim, down-trodden, ghost-coloured grass. The truth was that feeling faint from want of food, dizzy from the unusual task of composing rhymes, and confused by the amount of rich material for his art that kept pouring in when his winnowing flail was out of order, the unfortunate Henog had allowed to slip from his fingers to the ground a particular *graphis,* or "scribbling pen," with which he was accustomed to make hurried hieroglyphical jottings of special impressions; and for this precious tool of his trade he was now searching with a nervous, irritable, absorbed intensity, which reminded Paun Bach of the way he had once seen his mother go on making bread when the friends and enemies of Gorthevyr Bendigeit were slaughtering each other in the next hamlet.

He handed his torch to his nearest neighbour who gladly accepted it, thinking, as Paun Bach could clearly detect in the fellow's eye by the light of this same torch, that at any moment there might be a stampede from the spot and it might fall to his lot in the general confusion to find himself at his own door with this exceptionally good torch still in his hands.

But free now, and of slight stature as he was, it was easy for the little man to slip round the anxious crowd of Gwythyr's comrades, and approaching the groping and crawling Henog not only with a respectful whisper to join in his search, but, just as if he had brought his torch with him, to find the lost object.

And now, even while the tall man was bending down, almost as low as before, to murmur to the tiny creature what this help meant to him, Paun Bach interrupted him with an excited, "Hush, Master Henog! Listen!"

The Henog straightened his lean dark figure and proceeded to obey his small mentor. And assuredly if every eye in that surging and shouting crowd hadn't been fixed on the young princess and her antagonists there would have been a stir of derisive whispering and nudging, and of neighbour pointing out to neighbour the humorous effect of that tiny elfin figure staring across the river and compelling his tall companion to listen to some sound in the distance with the intensity of a horned lamb directing the attention of its mother ewe to some startling phenomenon. But the "tu-whit-tu-who!" came now quite distinct from across the river, so that the Little Peacock and the Henog of Dyfed weren't the only ones who heard it.

But the Henog soon became aware that the little man by his side had something more to communicate, for Paun Bach began tugging so hard at one of his long sleeves that the chronicler, who was feeling more and more dizzy and shaky, very nearly fell over, and though he regained his balance he had to bend down in an almost painful attempt to catch, amid the shouts and lurchings forward and back shufflings of the crowd, what the small creature was so anxious to tell him.

And indeed the dialogue that now ensued would have needed for its interpretation a person as learned in mythology as Ul-Kessar, or Julius Caesar, and even he would have had to glance now and again at his attendant druid. For what the Little Peacock was desperately trying to make clear to this tall dark tottering person was nothing less than the deep element of the *inexplicable* in the events of his own life, an element which he suddenly felt an upsurging longing to justify to at least one lonely scholar of Ynys Prydein as a thing that could endure the sifting and winnowing, the raking and shaking, of all the sciences of Greece and Rome without losing a single grain or drop of its original mystery!

The most striking of these experiences had had to do with this same owl-girl who had made the cruel Gwydion and his sharpshooting incestuous offspring, Llew, look a fine pair of fools by proving to them that though any clever god can create a woman no god can command the emotions of a woman's heart when once she is created. Sympathetic though he was with Paun Bach's notions of what constitutes the supernatural, as he listened to the little man's broken, interjected, and fragmentary words, reaching him on the fringe of that sullen crowd like the thin pattering of persistent rain through the rumblings of thunder and the groanings of branches, the exhausted historian had a dreamy feeling that these intermittent pattering drops of revelation, subhuman though they were, really did, in that Gaer graveyard, convey one at least of the magical secrets of life.

Peevishly disputing with Myrddin Wyllt, in favour of the past as against the future, whenever they met, and less awed by this mysterious being than any other man of Brythonic blood, Sylvanus Bleheris, Henog of Dyfed, was as fully convinced of the importance of magic as was its great practitioner.

And now as the crowd grew momently more agitated and as Morfydd's entreaties, addressed to that half circle of Christ-enchanted youths, grew obviously more hopeless, the thing the Henog did gather from the dwarf's words was indeed a thing most germane to the present situation, namely, that in this part of Edeyrnion what the pureblooded Brython feared more than anything else, feared in fact with panic-terror, was the hooting of an owl, and more — oh, much more — than its hooting, any near approach of the owl itself!

"No Silurian in Dyfed or Gwent," said the Henog to himself, as he listened with his empty stomach, his dizzy brain, his shaky legs, to the Little Peacock's impassioned revelations, "would believe such foolishness possible! There must be more Ffichtiaid blood, more Gwyddylaid blood, or — heaven alone knows — more Cewri blood — up here than there is with us in the—"

But he suddenly interrupted himself: "And more magic too!" And straightening his back with a groan he gazed down with genuine wonder on the pygmy at his side. For the little man had suddenly begun hooting like an owl; and, as he did so, not only did half the crowd swing round with a hoarse confusion of frightened cries, but the owl itself, obviously as completely fooled as the crowd, came flapping towards them.

And in good hour did it come; for to the faithful Gwythyr and Nesta it had begun to seem as though the end of this protracted psychic struggle over an outraged grave were at hand, and that good had been defeated by evil. Nor was it concealed from them, nor from Lot-el-Azziz either, that if the new Gaer Princess was defeated tonight it would be the Church of Rome and not the House of Cunedda who would rule Edeyrnion, and it would be the Church too who would henceforth decide for the people where lay the difference between the evil and the good.

What was it in Morfydd that enabled her, in face of all this, "not to yield," as el-Azziz told himself, "a jot or a tittle?" This was the question that Nesta hesitated not to ask Morfydd herself that night when she was leaving her in that very room where the now securely buried Teleri had given up the ghost.

And Morfydd could only reply in a variety of simple phrases all of which meant the same thing. "I just felt strong," she told Nesta. "I just felt as if they *couldn't* do us down." And then again: "No, I don't believe I thought of my husband, nor of my father. I don't believe I thought of anyone. I just knew that those half a dozen boys feeling so fierce and pious and noble, and not a single one of them without a secret temptation to ponder on what it would be like when the moment came for cutting up a girl's body as food for fishes — I tell you, Nesta, I just knew it! — those boys weren't a match for you and me!"

"But," Nesta went on pressing her, "but didn't you feel all was lost when Gwythyr's war cry failed and even the doctor failed?"

And hearing her like this, as their talk lingered on by the light of the Chimaera lamp, while they decided that since Gwythyr must be already fast asleep they could give themselves another five minutes, Morfydd wondered whether after all she *was* speaking the truth. "Yes," she thought, when the Italian girl had gone and she had put out the lamp, "I do believe I was." And in the darkness, for the clouds still blotted out even the thin shaft of moonlight that usually entered Nesta's chamber at this hour, it came over her, without any particular thrill of pleasure, but also without any confused sense of apprehension or dread, that during all her girlhood she had had a queer feeling that to be really herself she needed some large free scope for action.

Often and often she had had the impression that her real self was half-asleep, untouched and unaffected by the practical interests and emotional preoccupations of her life at Ty Cerrig. Even after her betrothal to Porius, even after acknowledging to herself her love for Rhun, she hadn't felt herself to *be* herself as she did now. "No! I don't believe I lied to Nesta," she told herself, and in order to satisfy her critical mind she went over every episode out there by Teleri's grave. It was certainly all clear enough still, clear enough in the most grotesque and comical aspects of some of it.

She recalled how, after whispered consultations among themselves, Gwythyr and Nesta and the Jewish doctor had tried first one trick and then another to scare, cajole, wheedle, decoy, persuade, or compel those devoted bodysnatchers to forsake their post. Lot-el-Azziz at one point had even put his ram's horn to its natural and dedicated use. His figure limned itself now upon that portion of the obscurity around her into which the arrow slit in the thick wall was introducing a faint dilution of darkness, and there came back upon her the extraordinary effect he produced, as he stood upright and bareheaded before them all, blowing upon his horn, while the tuft on his head seemed to enlarge itself and straighten itself by its own volition. For a moment she thought he really was going to drive those holy executioners from the girl's grave; for she could feel the extreme tension which these strange shrill sounds created among them, weird and discordant sounds suggesting terrifying sandstorms crossing the changing-unchanging desert.

But the grim young profiles at her side, staring obstinately across those far-stretching arable uplands that extended westward from ridge to valley and from valley to ridge till they reached the foothills of Eryri, staring obstinately over these things at a remorseless vacancy, a vacancy palpitating with the temptation to anticipate the moment when they would be at work on Teleri's defenceless body, remained heroically unmoved.

And out of that same alleviated and diluted oblong of half-conquered darkness she re-visioned the grand final attempt made by Gwythyr to sweep away these angelic-looking young demons from their necrophagous vigil.

Whether Nesta knew what he was going to attempt or whether she didn't, Morfydd couldn't decide, but she was inclined to think she didn't; for the special new feeling, revolutionary and popular, and yet, in a strange sense, religious and mystical, that was beginning to cling, like a cloud of pungent incense, round the word *"Cymry,"* and to leave a spiritual overtone behind it that suggested fraternity in trouble, had already begun by reason of something rather masculine than feminine in its composition to appeal more to men than to women.

But how well she now could see, in that portion of the darkness of the chamber where the night air was entering, the figure of young Gwythyr as he made this particular appeal. As she hugged herself under Nesta's blankets to drive out the chill of this bed where the reckless half-woman had given up the ghost, she found herself envying her friend, if nothing else, at least the warmth of her husband's body.

Twice did Gwythyr call upon those obsessed lads as fellow *Cymry,* but in vain. Three times did he call upon that close-packed crowd as fellow Cymry, summoning them to rush upon these treacherous convertites to Rome and overwhelm them, but in vain.

It was not that the crowd was unmoved by his appeal. It was deeply moved. Incoherent and inarticulate spasms of feeling passed through them, and she got glimpses in the torchlight of some faces that looked more than tense with excitement, looked in fact pitifully convulsed with what they were feeling.

But though each time Gwythyr lifted up in his clear youthful voice, using a particular lilt he had himself invented, and repeating the syllables as if they were the notes of a silver trumpet, the new *"Cymry* cry," there surged and shivered among his hearers, clearly affecting, though they struggled against it, even the young spearmen at the grave, irresistible ground swells of emotion that curved and crested and scooped and careered through the most complicated channels of their hearts, no part of this response, no flicker of this disturbance, showed the faintest tendency to express itself in action. Gwythyr might cry himself hoarse with his *Cymry! Cymry!* — and she still could hear, even in the silent darkness of Nesta's room, even with the faint odour of Teleri's death in her nostrils, the resounding power of his young voice — but not a man, not a woman, in that whole crowd could be roused to action.

And she remembered how when she spoke of this to the Henog — whom because of his exhausted condition she had taken care to keep close to her at that night's banquet — he had drifted off into an explanation so complicated by doubts and twists and hesitations that the mere thought of it now caused a thousand little black diamonds to cross and recross the dense darkness of the room and even turn into vague grey squares where the air was coming through the arrow slit opposite her half-turned head.

But though as soon as she had made sure that the meat and the wine had restored the Henog to his normal condition, she had allowed her attention to wander, curious broken fragments of his discourse came back to her now, came back along with the memory in the darkness of the special horn goblet rimmed with silver she had caused to be brought to him, a goblet that she visualized now rather painfully because, in his excitement, the Henog had let it be filled to such an overbrimming that the wine ran down the cup to the edge of the table and thence to the floor between her and him.

One thing that the man had said she could recall clearly; namely, that the word "Cymry," or "comrades," came into existence by a very curious magic that carried a *tynged,* or “special destiny,” with it, the *tynged,* namely, that the unity it evoked could only be used for things that belonged to peace and never for things that belonged to war.

But Morfydd now began to suffer from a nervous trouble that was one of the very few things that could — and it only happened very rarely — keep her from going to sleep the moment she desired to do so. This was a tendency for some physical object, like the horn cup rimmed with silver out of which the Henog had spilt that wine, some object associated with an accident, a tribulation, a blunder, a sacrilege, an impious deed, or simply with a malicious and vindictive deed, to obsess her brain so that the more or less thick darkness about her bulged and bellied and billowed with the object in question, and she would feel — such was the horrid fancy — that this accurst devil of an ordinary object was bent on persecuting her and with this purpose went on and on projecting itself into her inmost being, into her flesh, so it seemed to her, and into her consciousness too, until her soul felt like a mouse, surrounded on all sides by grinning cats.

Tonight these obsessing objects were very simple ones: goblets of wine with the wine spilling over the edges. With a resolute heave she swung her neatly moulded skull, with its thick, wavy brown hair, clear away from the chink in the darkness where the night air was blowing in through the arrow slit, clear away from the door, as well as from the extinguished Chimaera lamp, clear away, in fact, from all she had previously been facing, until her forehead was only a few inches from the inner wall of Nesta’s room.

Here, though the impression on the atmosphere left by Teleri’s death was stronger than before, the horn goblets with wine running over their edges were left behind. And to summon sleep to come to her she called up the final scene at Teleri’s grave. In her nostrils was the smell of the oily smoke from the fast-burning torch which she herself had snatched from the man to whom it had been entrusted, before, in his wild terror, the fellow had had time to throw it away.

She saw again the terrifying manner in which the great grey-white owl, still hooting and flapping its wings, had kept beating against the brink of the grave, as if the creature had been a monstrous moth to whose madness the girl's body was a magnet. She saw again that amazing little pygmy supporting the tottering Henog. She heard again the howls of terror with which the whole crowd had fled. Men, women, and children had scampered away, as if from a burning city; and she remembered how queer it had seemed to her that they should have fled *uphill,* towards the Gaer, instead of downhill, towards the river! And now as she faced the safe inner wall of her friend's room she extricated both her hands from the warm blankets and with clasped fingers beat a resolute tune on that smooth death-cold surface. For she saw those half a dozen youthful warriors of Christ, who had been terrorizing that simple crowd, bolt like rabbits to their burrows! Pell-mell, hell for leather, they fled up the hill, outstripping the people, flinging the people aside, some of them even throwing away their weapons as they ran, and each one of them transported out of himself in a blind surge of panic-terror!

She remembered how she and Nesta, with the now almost prostrate Henog, had exultantly waited while with the doctor's help Gwythyr, who was himself trembling a little, filled up the grave; and how the tiny Paun Bach, after listening intently till the last hootings of the owl had died away, adjusted with exquisite care one single owl's feather between a couple of heavy quartzlike stones.

"But feather or no feather," the little man had muttered as they turned away from the girl's grave, "not a man between Deganwy and Llyn Tegid will dare to come within ten yards of this place; no! not till we are all as dead and buried as that poor wrapped-up thing we've left to itself!"

And so beneath her warm blankets Morfydd's hands were folded. Peacefully relaxed, they were folded under her chin; and all the trouble in her nerves was soothed away. She had the feeling that she was floating upon two storm-drifting tree trunks bound together by unbreakable cords. Riding upon these she was carried down the river towards the ocean of sleep, and she knew one of them to be the vow she had made to Rhitta Gawr and she knew the other to be the child she would bear to Porius.

CHAPTER XXXIII. Cronos

WHAT MOST ASTONISHED the horse tamer from Deganwy, who was Porius's new armour bearer and general attendant, about his Herculean master was that master's complete ignorance of animals. And considering how the two of them, themselves not too badly mounted, though Neb was riding with the one and Gunta with the other, were now advancing at a fairly fast trot only about a furlong behind the fantastically large horse that carried the counsellor and his Ffichtiaid sorceress, and were thus exposed to the confused backrush of the various forest creatures who as usual made impetuous if spasmodic and convulsive efforts to obey the attraction of their mysterious fellow exile from the Age of Gold, it was clear to the man that the new Prince of Edeyrnion would have been helpless without him.

Ignorant of animals, whether wild or tame, Porius certainly was, but the dejected look and disordered droop and drift of these creatures' behaviour as they loped away increased his conviction that this man was no ordinary magician, and even might be — for, as Morfydd once told him, her father used to quote from the *Eirene* of that comedian of his, "a mass of things escapes us" — *some* sort of super natural being.

He was compelled at one point, humiliating as it was, with little Gunta holding on to him and missing nothing, to let Owain Pen Uchel catch hold of his horse's bridle; for the creature became extremely restive when a couple of excited deer, a screaming jay, a flapping and fluttering magpie whose agitation was expressed in sounds that were almost human, a long-snouted badger, a pair of wildly leaping hares, a frantically chattering squirrel, dispersed just in front of them, east, west, and north.

Nor was it easy for him, even when his horse-taming retainer had released his hold, to listen to what Neb, who was diplomatically taking advantage of the Deganwy man's concern about the horses to discuss more momentous events, now began to reveal with regard to the counsellor's intentions.

"He wants," Neb explained, "to go under a stone for two thousand years. For he says that by that time Ynys Prydein will be entering a different zodiacal sign which will end in a second Golden Age wherein men and animals and birds and fishes will live in peace, and both the god of thunder and the god of hell will be driven away to a far-off island from which they'll never come back."

Never had Porius's philosophy of equanimity been tested more cruelly than during this first part of that ride. On his feet, tired as his body might have been, his mind would have been patient and long-suffering, possibly even, under the present conditions, a good deal amused, by the quaint way in which Neb described the intentions of Myrddin Wyllt; but astride on this uncomfortably living back he felt so much out of his element that an unforgettable irritation chafed him and fretted him all the time, an irritation caused by the fact that he couldn't give himself up to what Neb was saying, nor wholly and entirely to anything at all save to an obstinate determination, as massively biological as the back he bestrode, to accept without protest the whole destiny of ease and unease, comprehensibility and incomprehensibility, as these entangled opposites presented themselves in ever new and ever more complicated combinations.

As time went on and their track through that devious forest among the mountains began its long and gradual ascent to the foothills of Eryri, the most muscular as well as the most clumsy of all the princes who had ever moved in that direction between Caer Einion and Caer Dathyl began to find things a little easier.

"No!" he kept saying to himself. "I shan't try to see Morfydd again until there's not a Sais left in Ynys Prydein! But that can't, no! it absolutely can't, take more than six months. So if not at Christmas, at Easter, and if not at Easter, at Pentecost, and if not at Pentecost, by John Baptist's Day!

"Oh, I shall come back to her before the summer's over! But how odd it is" — for after riding steadily for several hours and holding little Gunta firmly in front of him as he rode, his mind felt freer to take stock of things, especially when he realized that the little girl, with her doll squeezed under her belt, was by this time fast asleep— "how odd it is that while we ride on like this, with those two weird figures on that enormous horse in front of us, not one of us grasps the absolutely fantastic, crazy, insane situation we're in, all four of us, two men and two — what can I call these small creatures? — two changelings! It's the future" — so his thoughts raced on, accompanying the thud on grass, the clink on stone, the crack on sticks, the "plugalog" in wet mud, the "suckaglob" in reedy marshes, the brushing of living fir needles, the rustling of dead beech leaves, and finally the long-drawn hoarse susurration from the treetop branches of the tall pines above their heads— "it's this thrice-accurst unknown *future* that gulps down our life blood as we ride!"

He scowled at the great drops of sweat on the neck of his horse; he squinnied down at the disordered bright hair sprayed out against his chest; he gathered up, as if it were a material thing, his power of sensuous contemplation, and using it like the flat surface of a great echoing bronze sword kept striking it upon the threefold object moving in front of them, that man, that woman, and that colossal horse, as if they were a vast inanimate statue possessed of a tremendous secret movement as well as of some tremendous secret of reverberation from which, as from Memnon's statue, a vibration could be struck that could go thundering across the edges of the entire world.

He glanced sideways at the horse tamer from Deganwy to whom Neb seemed to have been relating for hours some complicated tale of shameful intrigue connected with the imperial stables somewhere in Gwlad-y-Haf.

"Neb's enjoying himself by astonishing him," he thought, "and *he's* enjoying his own astonishment as if he were at a play. This little golden head against my hard heart is having, let's hope, nice dreams; but the odd thing is that in front of us all, and moving as we move, is the black adamantine wall separating us from the future! I can see the thing. I can touch the thing. It's black as basalt, black as that slate stone, black as that rarest of water-dripping precipices, the rock above the river Styx that Neb says the counsellor's always talking about as if it were his ultimate horror. I can almost feel it too, yes! I can," he thought, "but I can't see *through* it, no! not one little inch!"

At that moment he became aware of a faint desire to make water; and this set him wondering what the little girl in his lap would do if *she* felt more than a faint desire of the same nature, and, from this, crossing in the maze of his brain a psychic bridge of hours and seasons, he reminded himself that the night he'd just passed, in what was now no longer Brother John's cell but the abode of a learned Jew, a prolific Moabitess, a lusty Gog and a suckling Magog, together with the youthful Pen Beirdd of Ynys Prydein, a night in which he had had his couch to himself, for Nineue had slept with the counsellor, a night in which Lot-el-Azziz, too tired to be particular, had wrapped a blanket about him and thrown himself on the floor as close as he could to his wife and his newborn son, and as far as he could from the inspired bard, was as a matter of fact the night of what this little yellowhead would, in the language of her dad’s Seisnig, call “Woden’s day,” while he himself, in his Romanized Brythonic, preferred to call it *dydd Mercher,* or “Mercury’s day.”

So it had, Porius now reminded himself, come round full-circle this eventful week; for it was only last Thursday, Jove’s day or Thor’s day, the day anyway of a wielder of thunderbolts and a destroyer of the Age of Gold, that he had stood on the platform above the eastern gate of the Gaer and sworn to escape! And now tomorrow would again be Jove’s day or Thor’s day, and he felt such a need for supernatural aid that it stirred in him a sort of petulance to think that unless he defied this whole business of sacred days, if he were now to lift up his spirit in prayer it would have to be to a Christian version of Lot-el-Azziz’s Jehovah, or to Porius Manlius’s Jupiter, or to Gunta’s Thor! Why hadn’t he got some tribal god of his own to turn to at this troublesome moment?

Old Rhun’s honey Sacrament had bound him to Rhun, but it had left him singularly unaffected by Mithras. And then, as he saw that huge unwieldy nonhuman back, encircled by that deadly white arm and mounted on that superequine rump, catch on its surface the first golden rays of the sunrise, while their own grotesque shadows, Pen Uchel’s and Neb’s like a centaur with two heads, and his and Gunta’s like that nameless sea creature Homer simply calls “the Monster,” it struck him that this “unknown future” into which they were all advancing would have as much cause, if their portentous shadows preceded them, for dreading their arrival, as *they* had for dreading what they found!

And then he thought, “But what madness to make our state of mind at the moment depend on our fears or hopes about the future! It’s just as crazy as to make it depend on our memories of the past.”

And he tried to remember with whom it was that his father had been talking when he suddenly heard him say, “If you start playing with Life, my good lad, there’ll come a time when you’ll have to catch her by the hair or she’ll strangle you!” “He *over there,”* he now rather wistfully thought, “sure *was* clever, much cleverer than I’ll ever be! But I don’t envy him the power to utter aphorisms like that.”

He sighed as he watched the overlapping rims of their two grotesque shadows begin a slow and solemn dance upon the swaying but unruffled surface of the counsellor’s back.

“Oh, why did he die, just when I needed him most?” he cried in his heart thinking of Brother John.

And he remembered a certain morning in October, soon after he had returned home from his long years at the Bishop’s School across the mountains, when he was present at the final dispute between Minnawc Gorsant and Brother John. From that time on these two men had kept up a mortal contest which had culminated on the day the young zealots of the Gaer murdered Morvran ap Brochvael. Brother John was very old even then. He must have been over ninety when he died.

But he was no mean philosophical disputant. It was on this occasion that he related to Minnawc Gorsant the whole story, told to him by Pelagius himself, of that great thinker’s encounter with the popular Dewi Sant. Pelagius at that time was an extremely old man and in complete obscurity — indeed in a kind of anonymous retreat from orthodox vengeance — and his natural philosophy had been recently startlingly challenged by the burning zeal of the youthful saint; and of course Brother John was very young then, for indeed the sum of the combined lives of these two sages covered the best years of a couple of centuries.

On this occasion Porius himself had been so scared of being dismissed by one or other of the disputants as too young to understand that he had withdrawn into the shadow, not precisely "hiding his head" but making himself as indistinguishable as he could.

It had been into that familiar portico of Saint Julian's cell that he had withdrawn; and, as he called up the scene now, it was still so vivid to him that the noise of the hooves of the horse beneath him and of the horse in front of him and the voices of Neb and Pen Uchel were transformed into the lapping of lake water and into the rustling of a mighty wind in the close-grown pines.

But it would indeed have needed a subtler ear than his in that elemental background to have distinguished the voice of the water from the voice of the wind. The old Brother had remembered every word of that tremendous dispute between Pelagius and Dewi Sant; and Porius recalled the dramatic force with which the old man compelled Minnawc Gorsant to follow it as if it had happened the day before.

He told Minnawc Gorsant how Pelagius had ridiculed the horrible idea of predestination and how he had denounced as an invention of the devil in the hearts of designing priests the notion that man's heart is desperately evil.

"The heart of man," Brother John had cried, "is *naturally good!* And what's more," the old man had gone on, confusing in his indignation Pelagius's feelings with his own, "what you priests and bishops from Rome are aiming at now in the tossing floods of the world is to lure us into the Ark of the Church by the magnetic loadstone of the Horror of Sin! Yes, you picture the simple minds of our ordinary Gaer people and our ordinary Ogof-y-Gawr people as containing deep hell pools and dark Tartaruses of abominations of which they themselves are totally ignorant save when huge, horrible, hairy heads come to the top out of these hidden depths!"

On and on Porius jogged, in that singular ride, so extremely uncomfortable and so miserably stiff, pressing Gunta to his chest, and watching their four weird shadows crossing and recrossing the forms of the counsellor and Nineue, while the heavy "thud-thud" of those three big horses, one of them leading and two of them following, became a rhythmic accompaniment to his memory of Brother John's words.

"You pile up the horrors of our sin and the miracles of Christ's mercy," the old man had shouted at the Gaer priest, "in order to draw us into your power! It is a tricky lie to say that simple Gaer men and women, and harmless Ogof-y-Gawr men and women, carry about in their souls without knowing it, engendered by the Fall and eternally reproduced from the slimy spawn of the loathsome seed of Adam, blood-sucking dragons and flesh-devouring Avancs, yes! and titanic apparitions too, like Typhoeus, Cottus, and Gyges, like Briareus and the Gorgons, like Orthus and Echidna, like Hydra and Geryones and the Harpies!"

Porius certainly derived a peculiar satisfaction in reciting to himself, across the little girl's golden head, these incongruous names, names as monstrous in the mention as their possessors were in the imagination; and it tickled his fancy to note that though he had learnt enough in Saint Julian's cell and in the school across the mountains to be able to rattle off these Hesiodic horrors he had completely forgotten the conclusion of the old Brother's outburst and how he had analyzed the nature of the soul so as to rid it of all these unspeakably alien "selves," for the reception of which, taking advantage of the victim's unconsciousness, these clever ones had lowered into those innocent depths enormous Stygian tanks and Acherontic cisterns.

But here he was, still jog trotting on, and feeling more and more uncomfortable; and he couldn't help thinking how nice it was to be Gunta or even Gunta's doll, since they had nothing to do but "to rest in peace," like the blessed dead, the one against a man's belly and the other against a man's chest, not only completely indifferent as to whether the devil's eggs had been spawned by the soul and in the soul, or been deposited there by some wily theological crocodile, but completely indifferent as to whether there were such a thing as the soul at all.

But as the hours went on, Porius began to recognize that he was destined to lose, as often happened at this season of the year, the pleasure of seeing the sun float free in the high inhuman ether, unvexed by man's dreams of zodiacal monsters, happy in its elemental loneliness, in the organic chemistry of its primordial being, for between him now and the sky's concave zenith there had suddenly gathered a jagged-edged,, indigo-coloured cloud; and the high-pitched boyish voice of Neb and the murmured astonishment, half-real and half-assumed, of the cautious animal trainer had both of them sunk into silence.

Something was being discussed — that much he could clearly make out — between the counsellor and Nineue; for the great unwieldy head with its abnormally large ears was several times impatiently lifted heavenwards, as if its owner had a piled-up private account to settle with the arbitrary sky god, whether that deity was, as Homer has it, the father of Apollo, or, as Saint Paul declared, the father of Jesus.

But the three horses and their six riders still moved on, all silent now, and the one among them who might well have been regarded as far the most at ease was, without question, far the most uncomfortable.

But a change had now appeared in the character of their surroundings. The oaks and alders and birches and beeches had been left behind, and they were following a path between scattered fir trees and moss-covered slaty rocks. Moreover they had perceptibly begun to ascend. They had clearly arrived at the foothills of Eryri and, from now on, the ascent would grow steeper and steeper.

It was then that Porius's whole soul, the part that had been occupied with the monsters squeezed alive into those terrible tanks, as well as the part that had been watching the indigo-black cloud, gathered itself together with a sudden convulsive movement and began to heave itself up, clumsily, awkwardly, inarticulately, but resolutely, and with a single-hearted purpose in view.

Had he been called upon to describe the precise conditions of this sudden heaving up he'd have had difficulty in doing so. But in his groping, fumbling, sense-thick way he would probably have explained that the urge to make such a move came primarily from the necessity of escaping extreme physical discomfort, the aching of the bones, the devilish soreness of his buttocks, and an infernal stiffness that caused all the muscles in the lower part of his body to produce the impression on his brain that they were giving vent to a horrid succession of whimpering squeals.

The odd thing was, so he would have struggled to make plain to anyone he could have got to listen to him, that there was never a moment when some interior entity, or self, or rational consciousness within him, such as the Athenians would have called his nous or reasonable intelligence, made up its mind to issue orders to his body to lift the little girl from his lap and dismount from the horse. Body, mind, soul, spirit, will, desire, consciousness, and intention, all seemed to be heaving up together in one confused inchoate movement.

But once on the ground, helping little Gunta to balance herself on that broad perspiring back, and a whole rush of clear essential decisions took shape within him. What had started this activity may well have been simply an instinctive animal-like urge to put an end to discomfort; but, although, as we have seen, it was unusual for Porius's mind and body to coalesce and move in a closely knit unity, on this rare occasion, whatever it was that set them off, they proved as working partners surprisingly resolute and rapid.

And the curious thing was that though the initial upheaval in which he shook off his numb lethargy and aching stiffness gave him the sense of wrenching himself out of his own skin and leaving it glued to the horse, the moment he was free of the creature and, with his arm thrust through its bridle, was supporting the disturbed, somewhat apprehensive, and not a little petulant Gunta, who took at that second no pleasure at all in balancing herself by herself on that broad back, his whole being became more at one with itself and more under the control of his deepest identity than he could remember ever before having felt it to have been.

He called across the back of the horse and across the awkwardly straddling legs of the child and the protruding feet of the unruffled doll, begging Owain and Neb who had already reined up at their side to dismount too.

"The ground rises from now on — eh?" he said, in as low a voice as he could; for the horse in front of them had also been reduced to a walking pace and Porius got the impression that Nineue, if not her companion, was alert to catch the drift of their little council of war.

Owain agreed that save for a few miles of level ground, between two small hamlets he named, the ground rose steadily, growing steeper and steeper till it reached the foot of yr Wyddfa, "the Tomb," which was the summit of Eryri.

"In that case," Porius went on, speaking quietly and slowly, but in a tone of authority that was unusual to him, "in that case I think we'd better separate at this point. And I'll tell you what I've decided. I want *you,* Owain, taking both these horses, to carry Neb and Gunta back to the Gaer. I couldn't have got as far as this without a horse, and it's certain I couldn't have ridden a horse without your help. But I can manage on my feet now till we meet again. And what I want *you* to do is this, Owain, and I'll tell Neb and Gunta in a second what I want *them* to do.

"I want you, Owain, when you've left them at the Gaer, to take two horses again, *these* or others — I leave that entirely to you — and ride as slowly as you please, for as I shall be on foot there'll be no hurry, and wait for me at the old *llys* in Harlech in Ardudwy. Make all the preparations you need for a long ride and come with whatever arms you may prefer for yourself — and will you greet the Princess Morfydd, please, and tell her that for me you might bring a *short* hunting spear and the shortest Roman sword you can find, and for yourself, remember, whatever you fancy most, and make sure you get it, Owain Pen Uchel, make sure you get it! But you *will,* if you greet the princess from me, and tell her I want you to have just what it is you want.

"Bring any cold meat and bread and so forth you'll need for yourself and plenty of cheese for me, that's all I'll want, plenty of cheese, but of course if you *could* bring us each a flask of wine it would be best of all! I don't know whether the princess could get hold of a couple of the sort of flasks my father used to carry about with him? I don't want, tell her, another of the big Roman ones."

The man from Deganwy listened in silence to all this; nor could Neb, who watched his face attentively, gather from its expression whether he was pleased or displeased. And Neb politely let him hear it to the end before he said a word himself. Then, however, he burst out; and with a torrent of cajoling, protesting, deprecating, imploring, and almost hysterical appeals he implored Porius that he and Gunta might remain with Myrddin Wyllt.

“I’m his *gwas,”* he cried, “his servant, his squire, his armour bearer, his messenger, his watchman, his observer. I’m everything to him! I’m all his senses, eyes, ears, taste, touch, smell! Without me” — here he reached up to whisper in Porius’s ear— “he’ll never be able to get out from under that stone, however much he wants to. And she’ll” — here he glanced at the now stationary horse of the two they were following and made a grimace at Porius— “she’ll pretend it’s all right and that he knows the countercharm perfectly well; when really he doesn’t know it at all and he knows that only she in the whole wide world knows it. He’s pretending to her now, all this time, that he knows it, and sometimes she thinks he *does,* and sometimes she’s sure he doesn’t!

“It’s a funny business between those two, my Lord, I mean my Prince, and I often feel certain that neither the one nor the other of them knows how it’s going to end. But I mustn’t, I mustn’t, I mustn’t leave him now; and as for *this one”* — and he nodded at Gunta who, ready for all upshots, had squeezed the doll’s protruding ankles and neat woollen sandals more closely under her belt and was sitting sideways, ready to slip off at a sign, and was murmuring over and over: “Quiet, good horse, quiet now, good horse!” as if the animal had been made of painted wood and possessed ears, eyes, nostrils, and even teeth that could be rubbed and scrubbed like the ones her dad had devised for the toy pony kept in her doll’s stable— “as for *her,* of course she’s only a girl, but I’ve known her explain things that I myself couldn’t explain; and I’m sure, while you, my Prince, are cutting off the heads of Saeson, the master will have need of her and me.”

The long narrow face of the tamer of dogs and horses stared hopelessly at Porius. It was evident that, as far as this business went, he regarded the prince as a baffled, frustrated, and defeated man, and that he viewed the situation as one that could only have one issue, namely, that of leaving the counsellor to Nineue's mercy and conveying these inconvenient youngsters to the place from which they came, the antechamber of Caergwynt or Caerleon.

"And the souls I'll pray for," thought Owain Pen Uchel, "when I'm in the great church at Caergwynt won't be those of *these* urchins, even if we have to leave them to the Witches of Caerloyw. It'll be those of the horse the prince gave to the son of the Blessed One and the hound my Lord Rhun kept in the Cave of the Ford!"

What puzzled the horse tamer at this moment was the fact that Porius had suddenly shut his eyes. How could the man know that the pupil of Brother John was desperately trying to remember the names of half a dozen at least of the daughters of Nereus? How could he know that the relief of having his feet on the earth again was so intense that his body and mind felt a harmony that was impossible to them when hoisted up on a great quadruped's back? And they *were* now in full swing together!

He turned to Gunta. "Neb doesn't know," he said, "though why he doesn't I can't understand, for he knows the Henog well from whom I heard it only yesterday; but Neb doesn't know that where Myrddin Wyllt is going, after I get him out from under the stone on yr Wyddfa, is to an island in the sea where he'll be served and tended by the fifty beautiful daughters of the Old Man of the Sea, very young and very lovely young girls, *who never grow up,* and among whom the cleverest are Amphitrite, Eudore, Galene, Glauce, Thetis, Cymothoe, Melite, Agave, and Doris."

Gunta stopped tapping her heels against the belly of the horse. She stopped patting its perspiring back with her small competent hands. She ceased looking round to catch the latest fleeting expression on the countenance of Neb. She contemplated with a grave frown the ground beneath her swinging sandals, as if deciding whether to make a jump to the left or a jump to the right.

It was at this point that the horse trainer from Deganwy "felt it incumbent upon him," as he had often heard the youthful Malcunus's tutor say when he brought the boy to the stables, to speak up and give expression to his feelings. "If I'm really," he thought, "destined to serve this mad scholar whom, just for a joke, the gods of his fathers have made the strongest as well as the craziest man in Ynys Prydein, I'd better begin at once by treating him as I treat my best-bred horses, that is to say, by keeping children and idiots out of the stable yard."

"May I speak, my Prince?" he enquired gravely, leading his horse, with Neb upon it, round the flanks of the one on which Gunta — very quiet now and though not precisely repeating the alluring syllables "Cymothoe, Melite, Agave, Doris" clearly giving their melodious suggestiveness her fullest attention — sat motionless with her eyes on the ground.

"Of course," replied Porius, moving aside a little so as to keep the counsellor and Nineue in uninterrupted view. "Of course you must say just what you think, Owain, only for Christ's sake keep your voice low!"

"I think," declared the man, and it was clear that the art of conveying important matters in a whisper was no more popular at Deganwy than it was at Caer Dathyl, "I think that the sooner these children are taken back to the empress's nursery the better for them and the better for us all."

Down came Gunta with a leap to the ground, and down slid Neb from *his* steed no less rapidly; and in a second, with their heads close together and their excited hands and fingers emphasizing what their lips murmured, the two were in deep colloquy.

The two men watched them in silence, and so apparently did the two horses; and, if Porius's wary eye was to be trusted, so also did Myrddin Wyllt and Nineue. In fact at that moment, for the wind had dropped and there was no sound from wolf or fox or raven or crow or woodpecker, no sound from waterfall or brook, no crash, no start, no plunge into the undergrowth of stag or of deer, it struck Porius that the whole wide-stretching forest from the pretended grave of the deathless Pryderi at Maen-Tyriawc-uch-y-Velenryt to the foot of yr Wyddfa was waiting with held-in breath the result of this consultation between Neb and Gunta.

And it had to wait quite a perceptible while. It had to wait long enough for Owain Pen Uchel to loosen a leather strap on the horse he'd been riding and to tighten one on the horse from whose back Gunta had just jumped, and long enough for Porius to imagine at some length the various scenes that the Muse of Chance would be bound to play on the stage of her private mirror when Morfydd's encounter with Neb and Gunta was reflected in its ephemeral recess.

But if the huge autumnal forest between the pretended grave of Pryderi and the pretended grave of a far more powerful deity than any son of Pwyll Pen Annwn *had* been waiting for the upshot of the talk between Neb the son of Digon and Gunta the daughter of Gunhorst, it would have understood it clearly enough when it came. For when it came it seemed to turn autumn into spring and was like the note of a bullfrog in the marshes of Cattraeth answering a reed warbler from the sedges of Rhydant.

"Gunta and I will go with Owain Pen Uchel to the Gaer, great Prince, and when there we will serve my Lady Morfydd until my master the counsellor calls us in his own voice and in his own language to come to him in his sea fortress."

Porius was surprised by his feelings when he gave a farewell kiss to Neb and Gunta, the girl on the top of her head and the boy on his high pale forehead. But that these feelings had more to do with Morfydd than with them was proved by the fact that, when the two horses carrying the three of them were out of hearing, his imagination was so dominated by the image of his wife that it wasn't till he had reached the spot where the counsellor and Nineue had been watching them that he realized they had gone off at a gallop and were out of sight.

This, however, caused him no distress. All that fate held for him to do on behalf of this strange being, at once so powerful and so weak, so godlike and so animal-like, was simply, as he had known at the back of his mind since they first met, to break the bonds, whatever these might prove to be, that were now threatening to imprison him, as Neb ap Digon had put it, "under a stone."

And this "stone" could only be at one place, that is to say, at the topmost peak of yr Wyddfa. Right well he knew, in the marrow of his bones, in the pit of his stomach, in the zodiacal loadstone of his skull, how to reach the summit of yr Wyddfa. Besides, was there any reason to suppose that the whole range of Eryri would be covered with the darkest of mists or with the thickest of clouds?

It wasn't even essential that he reach the summit this night of the day that for his grandfather was dedicated to Mercury and for Gunta's father to Woden, this night of October the twenty-fourth. No, no; if he reached it tomorrow, seven days since he and Rhun had set out from the Gaer to meet the emperor's mission, the imperative of his inner compulsion would be satisfied.

The ground under his feet as he went forward grew steeper and steeper. He was impeded by rocks, by rushing torrents, by falling cataracts, by precipitous and slippery gorges. Two or three times he suffered an extremely disagreeable fall. As his path — for, though there were no longer any hoof marks, there still was a path to follow — began to show signs of leading him to what might be fairly described as a mountain slope, the pines and birches, the sycamores and mountain ashes fell away; and first in obscure glimpses, and then by wider and wider expanses of unfolding visions, the tremendous prospect of what Brochvael always swore was a grander natural panorama than anything in Gaul or Italy, that is to say, the up-shouldering, up-heaving, up-curving, up-gathering, up-toppling, up-towering ascent of the supreme ridge, and, in the midst of that ridge, the supreme peak of the mountains of Eryri was revealed.

When at last, near to the base of the final ascent to the summit, Porius sat down to rest, he could see, less than a quarter of a mile away, one of the deepest, though also one of the smallest, of all Eryri's mountain tarns. A lemon-coloured phantom of a sun, looking larger than natural in its dimmed luminosity, seemed to be riding at anchor behind a thin screen of transparent vapour.

Clearly visible though it was, the sun was rendered completely shadowless by this filmy screen. Porius stretched himself out luxuriously in this lucky spot with the back of his skull against a mossy rock and nothing beneath him but dead dry bracken. And a languid wonder stole over him as to the difficulty these word artists, like his friend the Henog, or that Gallic flatterer of the High Prince, or the youthful Taliesin, must experience when confronted by an effect as delicate as this windless expanse under a luminary you could contemplate in comfort and free from all dazzlement. He even went so far in his mood of aesthetic lassitude as to try to select the sort of rarefied Brythonic words with which the Henog might describe his hero Pryderi awaiting on such a mountainside the approach of some messenger from his fatal enemy, the son of Don.

"What he'd have to aim at," Porius told himself in his analytical lethargy, "would be to capture the atmosphere produced by this occulted and tempered sunlight. He'd have to capture it in a net of words woven differently from the kind that could catch a flock of birds. It would have to be an atmosphere net, not a fowler's net."

And as he flung out his arms on both sides of him, his fingers lax and loose, and his muscles so blessedly free from the burden of any weapon or the strain of any struggle, he carelessly fished up such words as "fine-spun," "winnowed," "attenuated," "purged," "smokeless," "vapourless," only to toss them back as totally inadequate.

"It's this October softening the burning sun," he thought, "that fills the air with a new element, an element like a great melted pearl, through which you see everything."

He felt something that was like sleep falling upon him; but it wasn't sleep, and he knew that it wasn't. What was it? And then in place of any answer coming to him out of that windless air he suddenly thought of Rhun. What brought the image of Rhun to his mind he didn't bother to question. The thought of Rhun was independent of the vast wide-stretched landscape laid bare before him, north, east, and south — his back was to the west — for his spirit to embrace, to merge with, to lose himself in — to "cavoseniargize", if he could!

Yes, the thought of Rhun was "outside" — or perhaps he ought rather to call it "inside" — all this floating, swimming, hovering, and yet so strangely solid spectacle about him, these forests upon forests, these hills upon hills, and in front of him, all naked, all clear-cut, against this vast-stretched leaf-dropping umbrageousness islanded by fir trees, this hard cold granite-bastioned basin of dark green water. Yes, the thought of Rhun, whether “outside” or “inside” all this tremendous vision, was totally divided from it.

Again Porius had the sensation of falling asleep. “There!” he sighed with a curious satisfaction, “I was nearly off then!” But he was not off. He was still on the brink, awaiting his embarkation. For it was with his waking eyes that he could still see that hard granite basin of green water; while beyond it, in one great receding panorama of rolling forests crossed by silvery gleams of lakes and marshes and rivers, stretched the land over which he had inherited the rule.

“I-suppose,” he thought, “I couldn’t possibly see the Divine River from here, or Lake Tegid either, or Saint Julian’s Fount. No, there are too many hills between.” And then he thought, “But the whole view looks like an enormous ethereal bridge. I’m resting my head on a ridge of Eryri at one end of it, and from here it spans the whole gulf of air, clear away to that misty triple-peaked crest on the horizon that for all I know may be Cader Idris!”

And then once more his mind reverted to Rhun. He thought of Rhun’s figure, of Rhun’s way of speech, of his way of looking at things, his way of deciding what was right and what was wrong, yes and by God, his way of getting what he wanted by a timely use, like his father before him, of his speed of foot!

And not only did the thought of Rhun dominate his mind, and an “idea” it certainly was rather than a presence, and this fact saved him from the least suspicion that any accident might have befallen his foster-brother, but this “idea” was entirely independent of the tremendous vision that lay stretched out before him.

It was independent of the veiled sun, however potent that Mithraic lord of light might be. But if the thought of old Rhun, carrying with it all his integrity and intense religious feeling, as well as all his innocence and simplicity, were something so independent of these mountains and forests that you could imagine it existing in an empty void, "what," Porius asked himself, "of that queer notion Brother John told me once he had got from Pelagius, that notion that so shocked Minnawc Gorsant, about Time being so much more real than Space that it might be called the Begetter of the Illusion of Space?"

Languidly he lifted his outstretched wrists and let them fall again. There seemed to be, for some mysterious reason, a delicious human satisfaction, in defiance of so many austere and implacable metaphysicians, in thinking of Time, Time the alter-ego of crooked-counselling Cronos, as the creator of all the value and beauty there was in Space, if not of Space itself!

Porius's countenance in that windless air and under that veiled sun had already assumed — as his head rested, like the head of Lot-el-Azziz's ancestor, the patriarch Jacob, against a cracked and jagged stone — that particular expression of clouded and puzzled bewilderment that always so touched the heart of Morfydd.

But though he felt that his brain, especially in this delicious lethargy of his body, was totally unequal to the task of weighing in the scales the claim of Time against the claim of Space, as life's dominant reality, he had no doubt about his memory being correct when he visualized Minnawc Gorsant's face convulsed with emotion and heard his voice quivering with indignation as he cried aloud that the Christian faith demanded and exacted not only the external reality of Space, that noumenal matrix of all life, but the complete dependence upon it of the inferior phenomenon, nay! the wretched necessity, of this half-unreal, half-untrue thing, Time!

“Upon what great word,” Minnawc Gorsant had cried out, “does our Christian faith depend?” Porius could remember how the shadow of a cracked and crooked rafter with a bunch of dried herbs suspended from it by a nail gave to Brother John’s old face, as this question was flung at him, an extremely odd expression. But the priest answered it himself. “Eternity!” he shouted. “And it is this,” he went on, “that makes all ancient and modern wisdom, all human progress, all the triumphs of Greek science so completely unimportant!

“And what does eternity destroy? Not Space, for it needs and requires Space; indeed, in a sense it might be called the Apotheosis of Space. No! What eternity destroys — swallows up, rather! — is this contemptible, this miserable, this wretchedly human thing, Time!

“I am afraid, Brother” — and Porius could well remember the playfully sorrowful air with which the priest uttered this— “that you are yourself a little tempted — I only say a little — to the special and peculiar sin of Ynys Prydein, the heresy of Pelagius.

“I fear, I grievously suspect and fear, that you believe in human progress, that you are labouring under the fatal and wicked error that man is naturally good; and that he even can, under favourable conditions, actually become better. It is clear to me” — and Porius could well recall the queer little laugh that accompanied these words— “that you think the human race was created for some other purpose altogether than the true one. The human race wasn’t created to be happy, or to be good, or to be wise, or to improve its lot. The human race was created, purely, solely, exclusively, arbitrarily, absolutely, for the glory of God, and for that alone.

“These Pelagian ideas of yours, Brother, may be enlightened ideas, may be clever ideas, may be pretty ideas. One thing I can tell you, and I beg you to lay it to heart, they are not Christian ideas!”

Lying out of reach, as he was, of any priest, especially of the late priest of Corwen, who had died a martyr to his zeal for the Church of Christ, Porius felt at that moment so hostile to the man whose words he recalled that he began pounding with one hand a plant growing beside him, the proper name of which his uncle Brochvael had learnt from a botanist in Rome to be *Empetrum nigrum,* and with the other a plant that the same authority had declared to be *Calluna vulgaris;* but since both these plants had been dead for several weeks his wrath had small effect.

As if aware of the folly of revenging himself on dead men by attacking dead plants he now stiffened his formidable muscles and sat up.

"I must think this out," he said to himself, clasping his fingers round his knees and staring at that far-away ridge with three peaks that he pretended to himself was Cader Idris. "Time and Space aren't a monopoly of theologians."

The first detail his eyes encountered when he surveyed the world from this more potent position was the quite ordinary spectacle — about half a mile beyond the granite tarn — of three black moving objects crossing an open stubble field between two dark patches of fir forest. Wondering vaguely whether these objects were cows or sheep or men or women or dogs or wolves, he obstinately set himself to consider the nature of Time and Space as if it were as simple and natural an undertaking as to cut and bend and string an ash bow.

He determined to start at the very beginning or in other words at the very bottom of the inescapable process used by his own mind and for that reason necessarily observable and describable by his own mind.

Had his foster-mother, Alarch the Fair, seen him as he sat there frowning and hugging his knees, she would have been irresistibly reminded of a particular occasion where, returning to him from some necessary absence with her son Rhun, she had found him, this eccentric infant nephew whom she had suckled as her own, fallen into a sort of trance of wonder as he contemplated a row of six wooden letters forming his own name that had been arranged for him on the floor.

The child seemed unable to explain to her the cause of this rapturous trance; but Brother John, who was the township's sole spiritual interpreter in those days for it was before the time of Minnawc Gorsant, assured her, not entirely correctly, but in the direction of the truth, that the child had felt inexpressible delight in the idea that, small though he was, there was something in him, different from hand or foot or neck or chin or eye or ear, and different from everybody else in the world, that could be expressed by a row of wooden shapes put side by side on the floor, so that anyone who saw them would say, "Why, that's Porius — that's the little boy who has the great runner Rhun ap Gwrnach for a foster-brother."

But what Porius was saying to himself as he clasped his hands round his knees and stared at those black dots crossing the stubble field was this: "The thing in me that says I am I can divide itself into two and yet be the same. It can say 'you' to itself when there's nothing but itself there."

It remains a question whether Alarch the Fair, who, like her brothers Einion and Brochvael, had inherited plenty of intelligence from Iddawc and Indeg, if she had actually been watching at that moment the infant she had suckled, would have smiled or sighed to observe the complacent satisfaction, for it could hardly be called "ecstasy," with which his frown disappeared as he muttered to himself: "It can say 'you' to itself when there's nothing but itself there," and added: *"That's* the first step!"

"And the second step," so this self-satisfied Hercules continued philosophizing, "is to note that the 'I' who can say 'you' to itself *can* imagine itself and very often *does* imagine itself moving through Space quite independently of its body, that is to say, if it is the ‘I-you’ who usually inhabits Porius’s body, it can imagine itself leaving Porius’s body and taking an airy journey to the top of yr Wyddfa, ‘the Tomb’. But though it can imagine itself flying about outside its body it cannot imagine itself escaping from Space. Wherever it imagines itself flying it cannot imagine itself ridding itself of the idea that it *is still somewhere,* that is to say, somewhere in Space. But the third step” — so the new ruler of Edeyrnion went on, in his metaphysical catechism at the foot of the final ascent to yr Wyddfa— “is to note that although it is easy to imagine this ‘I am I’ leaving its body and moving from one spot in Space to another it is impossible to imagine this ‘I am I’ as totally devoid of any point of localization; though this ‘point’ need be no more than a moving speck.”

Here, in the simplicity of his philosophizing, the great-grandson of Edeyrn ap Cunedda and of Creiddylad y Gawres became aware that the “moving specks” he had observed crossing the cornfield between the two fir copses had now advanced and were so much nearer that their three heads, all three of them bareheaded, could be seen like three round black knobs approaching the further rim of that granite tarn; and not only approaching it, for as he watched them he could make out that two of them remained in close proximity and, though they bobbed up and down in a queer manner, their distance from one another remained unchanged while the distance between them and the third knob kept altering and shifting; this third one being sometimes on the west of the other two and sometimes on the east.

As often happens, however, with a person who is absorbed in a special train of thought, Porius’s awareness of these three objects was a double one. With one part of his consciousness he noted that these approaching objects were not wolves or sheep or dogs or cattle but human beings and that this fact in this lonely spot and with a view to his present quest was something that must shortly be faced.

With the more active part of his mind, however, he just swept these advancing objects — treating them as inanimate knobs rather than human heads — into his present sequence of thought, where they fell into place as organic illustrations of the dynamic importance of Time compared with the cumbrous necessity of Space.

“The ‘I am I’ in us all” — so his mind forced itself to advance in hops like a colossal frog, though it didn’t get ahead much quicker than it had done on the day when Alarch the Fair found him in a childish “glory trance” over those wooden letters on the floor— “is forced to give itself some sort of material embodiment so as to obtain for itself this necessary localization in Space. We can imagine this embodiment as reaching the ultimate limit of the insubstantial. We can imagine it composed of a bubble of the thinnest air, or, if you please, as nothing more tangible than a moving point in Space; but what we *cannot* do is to think away, or imagine away, or conceive as nonexistent, *some* kind of faint, dim, intangible, impalpable, atmospheric ‘presence’ as the spatial accompaniment of the ‘I am I,’ even if it be no more than a wave of vibration upon the air.”

It was just then that this metaphysical foster-child of Alarch the Fair whom fate had made the Herculean inheritor of the muscles as well as the fortress of Rhitta Gawr began to recognize as by no means unknown to him the three heads and shoulders that now manifested themselves over the brink of the eastern ridge of the granite tarn; but the part of his mind that achieved this recognition was by no means the dominant part. It was in fact much less than half of his consciousness.

So that although this watchman on the tower reported that there was danger on the wind, the wind itself continued obstinately to blow straight from southwest to northeast, and as it blew it seemed to this simple thinker on the slopes of Eryri that it was calling upon him in the name of Pelagius, the sea-born philosopher of Ynys Prydein, to prove to birds and beasts and men and gods that Time had more of the magic of life in it than Space.

"But if what in me says 'I am I,'" so his simple logic continued, "is something that cannot imagine itself without *some* localization in Space even if that localization be reduced to a moving point, another assumption is far more important to its life and activity, namely, the more personal, more subjective, more intimate conditions in the midst of which and inspired by which it draws the energy to go on living, that is to say, the condition of Time. For even if the 'I am I' of that crafty creature *Homo sapiens* had not invented water clocks for measuring the hours of night and the hours of day there would still be the endless recession of Time past and the endless procession of Time future, without which that immortal urge to burst out, to break down, to grow, to act, to commit crime, to rescue the perishing, to unbind Prometheus, to free Cronos from the chains of Zeus, would lack the will to take the initial plunge, make the original start, and thus get into motion at all.

"For if the condition of Space supplies the air and the freedom, the expanse and the scope, the height, depth, breadth, length, and all the boundless emptiness above and beneath, within which the embodiments of every conceivable sort of 'I am I,' whether these be wholly self-conscious or whether they be elemental existences that are barely conscious at all, can enlarge or diminish, retreat or advance, flourish or fade, survive or perish, the condition of Time is the inner, subjective condition *within which* every conceivable 'I am I' has to function the moment it asserts its living existence. If the 'I am I' cannot imagine itself free of its usual body without localizing itself in a point of Space, it cannot imagine itself acting in any way at all or thinking in any way at all without a fatal conditioning of that single act or thought or of that sequence of many acts and of many thoughts by the necessity of placing it *somewhere* between the infinite ‘backward’ and the infinite ‘forward’ of the mystery of Time.”

It was at this point that Porius’s mind, usually preternaturally swift in its movements, found the heave and tug of his philosophizing beyond the strength of his mental muscles. This was no doubt partly due to the fact that the portion of his mind, which just then was obstinately holding back what his eyes had revealed to it, by its very inability to assist his laborious digging and heaving, as he hugged his knees on that ridge of Eryri, had enfeebled his mental energy. He might be thinking with a good deal more than half his mind but he wasn’t thinking with the whole of it. And thus it was that in his violent desire to prove the superiority of Time over Space he suddenly unclasped his fingers and scrambled to his feet. And this move was fatal to his intention.

It is true that the physical stimulus of the leap to his feet brought back the natural swiftness of his mind; but in a flash he saw that he had only been doing on the side of Time precisely what the theologians had been doing on the side of Space, that is to say, transforming a condition into an entity. If they had been entities it would have been lawful enough to argue that Time was the male partner, and Space the female, but they were not; and to turn either of them into a demiurge capable of creating or devouring the other was to exalt the two conditions of there being anything at all into formidable things in themselves.

But he saw more than this now and he saw it in a different dimension of sight. He saw that the three men who were standing on the further edge of the small lake in front of him were, each one of them, well known to him.

Two of the black dots whom he had watched crossing that stubble field between the fir trees were Medrawd and Afagddu, their hands tied and bound together by a cord that trailed loosely between them, while the third black dot, evidently their captor and guard, was none other than Rhun himself. “So this,” thought Porius, “is why he’s been forcing me to think of him for the last two hours!”

He waved his right arm at once to them from where he stood, and they all three came rapidly towards him. While he awaited them he wondered how he’d best behave to them, and by the time they had saluted him, the emperor’s nephew with a sulky nod and the others with a quick bending into the bracken of their left knees and an hasty upward fling of their right arms, he had decided exactly on the line he would take.

“Rhun!”

“My Prince?”

“Do you mind going back to the water down there for a bit, while I talk with Medrawd ap Llew ap Cynfarch and with our friend Afagddu? Only before you go, Rhun, you might leave me that dagger of yours — I’ll give it back to you — but I *may* decide to cut their cords. No! I said ‘cords,’ not ‘throats,’ Afagddu, so you needn’t agitate your new master!”

Without a word Rhun drew from his belt the large hunting knife, familiar to both of them from boyhood as a gift of their grandmother Indeg, drew it from its sheath by its handle, and straightway handed it to his foster-brother by its blade. Then he turned in silence, and presently they saw him settle himself down with his back to them on the nearest bank of the circular tarn. They had all three instinctively turned in their nervousness to watch Rhun descend the slope to the water; but now that he was disposed of they swung round and faced each other.

"Bid Afagddu sit down, Prince, and sit down yourself, for we need have no secrets from so faithful a servant. I've only got a few questions to ask you, and then we'll go upon our several quests."

The son of Anna ferch Uthyr made a faint affirmative sign to Afagddu, and both men with no further glance at each other did as Porius suggested. Afagddu's countenance appeared to be as furrowed with misery as it was carved and graved and scooped out in its appalling ugliness.

He sat now with his bound wrists on his gaunt knees, with his powerful shoulders hunched up and bent forward, with his straggly grey hairs nearly touching his bony knuckles, and with his eyes fixed upon one of his sandalled feet upon the bare instep of which a little trickle of blood had dried into the shape of the Greek letter gamma.

Medrawd looked up at Porius who had remained on his feet. "What kind of question do you want to ask me, Porius ab Einion, and what kind of punishment do you have in mind for that idiot of a Mithras worshipper down there, who thought he acquired merit with his Bull god, or *kudos* with his slave ancestor, I really don't know which, by tying a piece of string round the wrists of the grandson of Uthyr Pendragon."

"To which of the emperor's courts," enquired Porius patiently and rather formally, "are you proposing to make your way?"

Instead of replying to this calm question Medrawd lay back against a molehill and proceeded to give three intermittent tugs to the cord by which his two wrists were tied to Afagddu's two wrists. These tugs punctuated like cautious semicolons the astonishing statements he now made, and at each one of the three tugs poor old Afagddu gave a jerk, as if his wounded conscience were pulsing within him like a second heart, a heart situated under his right ribs it might be, or peradventure in his bowels.

"I told you, didn't I," Medrawd went on, "how I seduced your lady mother?" — here Afagddu gave his first jerk— "She is the third woman of renowned loveliness and chastity whose sweet citadel I have taken" — at this a second jerk came from Afagddu— "and I told you too, didn't I, upon what philosophical principle I bring these proud creatures down to earth?" — here it was from the very bottom of his conscience that Afagddu's jerk came— "namely, the principle that death is better than life and that it would have been better if life had never been started at all. I don't suppose in these wilds you've ever heard," Medrawd went on, looking up at Porius, "a ditty about certain chaste and lovely ladies that begins with a reference to the wife of Catgor?"

Porius shook his head. But old Afagddu, by making a barely perceptible movement of his neck, was just able to envisage at one glimpse both the two men, his former master, and, if he remained true to his dishonour, his future one. And he never forgot the sight. Medrawd's beautiful and pallid features, with their habitual expression of ghastly insomnia, as if he had been a wandering and sleepless ghost for two thousand years, presented the most extraordinary appearance as they protruded from the gold torque of the House of Pendragon. The man's shoulders, one of them permanently a little higher than the other, still rested against the molehill of freshly turned brown earth, which a very slight black frost had hardened just sufficiently for the excrescences of its surface to have coagulated into a scaly cushion; and it may well have been the scaly surface of this molehill, hardened by last night's frost and softened by today's veiled sun, that caused old Afagddu, as he squinnied sideways at this disturbing encounter of his two masters, to receive a singular and a very disconcerting impression.

The impression he got was indeed a characteristic one; in fact it was an outward and visible manifestation of his own feelings, for it struck him that the dead-weary, dead-lost, dead-indifferent, death-embracing eye that fixed itself upon Porius ab Einion from the cadaverous skull surmounting that saurian neck was nothing less than *the eye of an Avanc,* the eye of that creature about whom, surviving from prehuman, prehistoric times and suspected of still haunting the pools and caves of Eryri, there breathed such a salt-marsh atmosphere of haunting terror that Brythonic mothers, who without hesitation would scare their offspring with tales of enchanters and devils, kept silent.

And silent was Afagddu now as he shut his eyes and prayed to a composite deity he had himself invented. He invented this composite god — so he would explain to the boys in the Gaer armoury — out of all the gods he was told to pray to. This queer divinity Afagddu had scrupled not to patch together from the divine attributes that struck him as most likely to imply a merciful attitude to nervous and remorseful old men, cruelly tempted to serve two masters.

The name of the all-powerful and all-merciful deity invented by Afagddu was "Jehovahtimamlu," and on several occasions — very memorable to Afagddu if to no one else — Jehovahtimamlu had favourably responded to the prayers of his conscience-stricken creator.

Yes, with his eyes shut like this, he could no longer see the lowering brows and the small greenish yellow eyes of his old legal master, this silent inscrutable strong man, on the one hand the grandson of a Roman Patrician and on the other the great-grandson of a yet more mysterious creature, an authentic *cawres* of the Cader!

Nor, while he prayed to Jehovahtimamlu with his eyes shut so tight, could he see the ghastly profile of his new illegal master, this unspeakable Man-Avanc from some bottomless pool in Gwent, whose mother — for Afagddu obscurely imagined the emperor, whom he had seen at the Gaer but had hardly dared to look upon for fear of being struck by a thunderbolt, as having, like other demigods, a succubus for his sister-spouse — whose mother came straight from Acheron.

But Jehovahtimamlu lacked the power, and perhaps the will, to make his votary deaf, so that the luckless Afagddu was now compelled to listen to Medrawd's childish bawdiness.

"Yes, with Arddun gwraig Catgor our ditty began," went on Medrawd, "and shall I tell you who the others were? The other chaste ladies in our poem were Efiliau gwraig Gwydyr Drwm and Emerchred gwraig Mabon ap Dewein Hen. And shall I tell you what happened to these chaste ladies, Porius ab Einion? Exactly the same as happened a few days ago, as I told you, to Euronwy ferch Porius Manlius! They were all three brought down, down, down, down! And now that you and I are together again, Porius ab Einion, wouldn't you like to know what the 'half woman,' as she called herself, of your own Gaer, was able to teach *me,* the heir to Ynys Prydein? You would? Oh, you can shake your head and frown as much as you like; you know very well you would! Your Gaer 'half woman' taught me when she was a corpse, you know — oh, yes! and when she'd begun to stink too — that it's possible — did you know that it's possible, Porius ab Einion? — for the death spirit to ravish the death body?"

There was a long pause, during which Afagddu expected the earth to open and swallow up both his two masters and himself. But the earth remained as usual, and when the man without a nose opened his eyes as well as his ears it were only to find the great-grandson of the *cawres* on his knees by his side cutting Rhun's cord with Rhun's dagger.

And not only so; the Prince of Edeyrnion was talking to him in a friendly natural voice, while the emperor's nephew was already on his feet licking his wrists where the cord had been pulled too tight.

“Do you understand what I’m saying to you, Afagddu?”

The disfigured man bent his head. Big tears had already begun to slide, one after another, down his defeatured cheeks. But Porius went on, “I want you to remember this moment till we—”

He stopped suddenly, and Afagddu saw him rise and stand on his feet and listen intently. If he’d seen him stand on his head the old man couldn’t have been more bewildered. For it seemed to his confused old brain that he also heard a sound on the air; and it seemed to him that the sound he heard was like the sound of a human voice.

And torn as he was between his awe of the great-grandson of a *cawres* and his awe of a son of the emperor’s sister, it was a relief to revert to an ordinary supernatural event of which he had heard rumours since he was an apprehensive but docile infant. To watch Porius ab Einion’s face as it appeared now, reduced to a frozen hush, and, as you might say, transfixed by its intense listening, brought back to old Afagddu’s mind the words of his mother when in relating to him for the hundredth time the familiar tale of “Lludd and Llevelys” she came to the part about those strange invaders called the Coranians. *“Ac nat oed ymadrawd,* ‘and there was no talk,’” she whispered, *“dros wyneb yr ynys,* ‘over the face of the island,’ *yr isset ydywettit os kyvarffei ygwynt ac ef nys gwypynt,* ‘however low it was spoken; if the wind met it, it would be known.’”

The curious thing was that the whole psychic situation between these three men had grown suddenly quite different; indeed, in a sense you might say it had become completely reversed. When Porius sent Rhun down to the water and was left alone with the two captives, he felt in high spirits. His brain had been wrestling with the teasing dependence of the human mind upon its inescapable framework of Time and Space; and to be forced to plunge down from this slippery eel bridge of the ultimate *anangke* into the swirling foam of the confused mingling of good and evil and compelled to swim for his life had so magnetized and energized him that he felt in a mood of such psychological well-being that he could afford to patronize with a sort of magnanimous humour, not unlike that of his ironical begetter, both Medrawd's insane devilry and Afagddu's morbid remorse.

But now, here was Medrawd licking his wrist with an air of detached common sense and Afagddu agreeably recalling the superstitions of his childhood, while he himself — but what shift of the wind, or motion of the mist, or weird acoustic peculiarity of their last resting place before the final ascent to yr Wyddfa had brought to his ears this murmured reply of Myrddin Wyllt to some unheard question uttered by his companion?

"All three of them," were the words he heard, "all three of them with the emperor and on a day three times ten years from today, and this *tynged* none can change except themselves—" and then, though he remained stiff and still, like a crouching stag listening to a horn, or the soul of a newly dead warrior to the dogs of Gwyn ap Nudd, the only other sound he could catch was the word "Camlan."

"Camlan," he repeated and stared stupidly at his self-absorbed companion; and then as often happens with human beings, and probably with animals too, when a sound that is similar to another sound, and yet belongs to a totally different level of sounds, repeats from this other level an echo of the first, it seemed to his bewildered sense that from Medrawd also there came the word "Camlan," whereas all that really came from Medrawd, who was still licking his chafed wrist, was a sucking noise that might as easily have resembled "Ramlan" as "Camlan."

Thus it was with an angry feeling of having been made a fool of that Porius turned to Afagddu who by this time was on his feet. Porius had already decided what he intended to do in this remorseful old traitor's case.

He intended to overcome the man's remorse by *commanding* him to serve the emperor's nephew till the hour came when Medrawd took up arms against the emperor.

And the mere thought of doing this had thrown him into a childish glow of moral satisfaction. Could the ghost of Alarch the Fair have seen her foster-child's expression when he thought of what he was going to say to Afagddu she would have remembered how once when she enquired why he looked so happy the little boy had replied that it was because he was good. "I am good, *I* am!" he had told her when Rhun had been behaving badly; but it was immediately after that, when Rhun's father had left the body of a newly killed wolf on their threshold and Rhun had let it lie there, that the little Porius, without a thought of "being good," heaved it over his small shoulder and carried it away.

But now the psychological contrast between instinctive goodness and self-conscious goodness occurred in the reverse order; for his irritation that the sucking noise Medrawd was making with his lips and his wrist resembled the word "Camlan" was transformed once more into complacency when he turned to Afagddu.

"Is there anything," he asked the old man, "that I could say to you at this moment of our parting that would make your conscience absolutely clear?"

The old man looked at him with a look he remembered to his dying day and to his dying day was totally unable to explain.

"Is there such a word, Afagddu?" he repeated.

But the emperor's nephew intervened. "Come!" he commanded, and Afagddu obeyed. Quietly, submissively, resolutely, and passively, he obeyed. And in some odd way Porius got the feeling that he obeyed with an indescribable sense of relief.

And the feeling also reached him that the old traitor had seen through the self-satisfied magnanimity of his gesture and preferred to serve henceforth and until the end a disillusioned devil rather than a patronizing moralist.

"We'll go back *first,"* Medrawd added, "to that hut where the Mithras ruffian made us leave our money and weapons. You may be sure that old couple have kept them well out of sight and hidden away. Go ahead, Afagddu, yes! straight ahead towards that field in the wood! You can see it from here. I'll follow you in a minute."

The old servant did what he was told without once turning his head. "You see what a thought reader I am, Porius ab Einion," said Medrawd as soon as they were alone. "I know what you were going to tell him. You were going to tell him he could serve me now with a free mind because it would be at your command."

Like a badger and a fox who have met in a clearing by pure accident the two men glanced furtively at each other. Then Porius said, "May I ask you one thing, Prince Medrawd?"

"Ask me as many things as you like."

"Why is it that in you and me good and evil are so mixed up, whereas in others—"

"Good and evil? I don't know what you mean, Porius ab Einion. Your good's what *you* want; *mine's* what I want. And it's the same with evil. Good is what benefits us. Evil is what hurts us. There are only two *real* opposites, life and death. And your good is life; and my good is death."

"What about Nature? What about the gods?"

"Do you know, Porius ab Einion, I sometimes wonder, if you didn't stop growing up when you were ten."

"Did all the gods die when I was eleven?"

"You know perfectly well that there is and *can* be only one god."

“Who says so?

“Jesus says so. Paul says so. The emperor says so. Your mother says so. Every woman I’ve ever loved has said so. Yes, my worthy Prince of Lakes and Caves and Forests, you are too primitive to comprehend what an intelligent man means when he says there are only two real opposites — life and death! Your good is life; my good is death.”

Porius’s retort to this was prompt though he looked a little puzzled. “What of guarding Ynys Prydein from her enemies? What of serving the emperor?”

Forgetting all about his tender wrist Medrawd actually made a gesture as if to clap his hands, while a faint flicker, like the last glow of an extinct crater, crossed his beautiful deep-sunken eyes.

“You talk like a child, my good man,” he said. “How on earth do you know that it’s best for this island to be ruled by the bastard of Uthyr Pendragon? How do you know that it wouldn’t be a good thing for Ynys Prydein if the forest people, helped by the Gwyddylaid and Ffichtiaid, and for all we know by those clever devils they call the *genedyl-y-Carraneit,* were to rise in revolt and drive you Romanized Brythons and Brythonized Romans with all your sacerdoting pontifexes into the salt sea, as you want to drive these Seisnig towheads back to Germania? And how do you know it wouldn’t be the best thing for Ynys Prydein if the Saeson *did* conquer us? They’d soon learn that God is One and that he is life! They’d soon learn that the Devil is One and that he is death! ‘No Devil, no God,’ as the saying is! All your people believe that I serve the Devil. You believe it yourself! It’s no use pretending you don’t. You’re on the way now to the top of yr Wyddfa to rescue a man from a woman, whereas, as any sensible person knows, the embracing of women by men is the best worship of life. But you can take my word for it that you yourself are on the last lap of your ridiculous life. Your Mithras friend down there thinks you're running away from your own woman. That old man down there thinks you've done homage to me in place of the son of Uthyr. Your mother is on my side already. Your Brother John is dead. Your Gaer is helpless against the Church. You're still too stupid to recognize that all you've got, that all you've ever had, that all you will ever have, is your love of life, that is to say, your love of God; for God is life and life is God, and the opposite is simply death. Oh, you ten-year-old boy! Can't you yet see the truth of what I'm saying?"

Porius lowered his head like an ass who has been harnessed to a load meant for a horse. He stared at a patch of bracken that had not yet turned brown. Then he said speaking very slowly: "What I feel about these things, Medrawd ap Llew, is hard to put into words. I thought just now — but I dare say it was all in my own brain — that I heard a voice that told me that you and I and that old man yonder would meet again in thirty years at some place that sounded like Ramlan or Kamlan — something of that sort — and that the emperor would be there too! But whether you and I are or are not fated to live for thirty years more isn't the point. The point is whether you are right or whether you are wrong in thinking that there's nothing in the world but this eternal God and his eternal opposite."

He stopped and glanced down at the two other figures on that mountain slope under that veiled sun, the one seated by the water and the other moving towards the open field in the enclosed wood. To his surprise Medrawd had ceased to argue and was now chanting in a dull toneless voice some unintelligible Ffichtiaid chant that was like a dirge over a drowned world, or at least over a submerged continent.

But Porius said slowly, "Medrawd, I don't believe in your eternal opposites. I don't believe in your God or in your Devil. I've seen plenty of living things turn into dead things, and I've seen plenty of living things born out of dead things, and I've seen living things that wished to die and dying things that wished to live, and I've seen plenty of good deeds and plenty of evil deeds, but I've never seen what you call life or what you call death or what you call God or what you call the Devil. What I feel is that everything that exists is the private experience — shared only very superficially and very casually by others — *of a particular consciousness* with its own particular powers of awareness."

Here he stopped for a second and moving up very close to Medrawd flicked away with a rough gesture of his finger and thumb a small insect whose field of experience just then was a sultry and salty path between the right-hand corner of the right eye of this enemy of life and an infinitesimal bare scar in the centre of that eye's eyebrow.

"Pardon me," he cried, "but the point is this. Isn't it safer and more sensible, as well as kinder to ourselves and others, to take things as we feel them and see them? Isn't it better to take for granted that there's a host of worlds and a host of gods and a host of consciousnesses and more universes than we can imagine; and get rid, once and for all, of the unnatural and confining notion, however logical and rational it may be, that there's only one God and only one opposite of God? Don't you see, Medrawd, what you take for the whole of reality isn't even one tiny little corner of what really exists. It's only a tedious alphabetical catalogue of hollow meaningless abstractions. I grant that your metaphysical world, neatly composed of one God and one Devil, and one good and one evil, may be what you call 'logical'; I grant that it may have an interesting philosophical history.

"It may even very likely — where can I get the knowledge to deny it? — have its own sort of puppet-show-doll's-house *Urim-Thummim, mynweir* and *mynord,* cat's-cradle corner of meaning; but in this vast fathomless congeries of souls and bodies, of worlds and creators of worlds, of dreams within dreams within dreams within dreams, of multiverses beyond multiverses, it seems to me, Medrawd ap Llew, that this mania for polishing things off so roundly with these logical opposites of yours, with this intolerable horrible contemptible life on the one hand, and this lovely liberating redeeming death on the other, this blessed good and this accursed evil, this One God, who is everything, and this One Devil, who is nothing, doesn't... doesn't... oh, I don't know how to put all that I feel!... doesn't seem... I'm not a philosopher, Prince Medrawd... doesn't seem... well! let me put it plainly, doesn't seem complicated or multifarious or scattered or mixed-up enough! In fact, your God-life on one hand, and your Devil-death on the other, to tell you the honest truth, Prince, doesn't strike me as *mysterious* enough!

"I'm not trying to be clever, Prince, but it does seem to me there's a very wide gulf between your view of what's going on in this world and the view of that gnat I knocked off your face a minute ago; nor is there anyone to tell us which set of impressions — the gnat's or yours — is the more objective and the less distorted by emotion."

He stopped and gazed stupidly at the man opposite him, like an animal that has made a spring and brought down his prey, and then, instead of letting it lie, has struck at it again, only to find that, as Arawn Pen Annwn found over the body of Hafgan, King of the other half of Annwn, his second stroke has spoilt the effect of the first and indeed has healed the quarry completely; so that the creature has bounded off, safe and sound, with more energy than before!

But Medrawd merely smiled at him, a sad gentle smile; and shaking his head as if deploring the fact that this strong man with the muscles of

Hercules should share the philosophy of a gnat, turned his back upon him and hastened after Afagddu.

A few minutes later, when, having joined Rhun by the edge of that mountain pond, he was talking to him as freely as he had ever done in their earliest youth, he wondered in his heart on which side of this "Life and Death Struggle" he and his foster-brother were now ranging themselves. And were they on the same side?

He turned from studying Rhun's face to glance at the whole tremendous up-towering of Eryri, with yr Wyddfa crouching like a titanic dragon foetus, its scaly tail twisted about it in a womb of rock but ready to claw its way forth and hurl itself through the air leaving behind it a fiery scoriac scurf of smouldering afterbirth, and it seemed to him that for all the beautiful, hollow-staring, world-despairing eyes of the emperor's nephew, neither his God nor his Devil, neither his good nor his evil, were mysterious enough to correspond with the multitudinous waves of the oceans of being that wash us up and suck us down along the shores of the boundless.

Rhun and he had soon seated themselves on the edge of that solitary circle of water and were exchanging their experiences as if the unruffled element before them were a magic mirror that by its primeval power reflected realities in their natures unknown even to themselves.

"Didn't you tell any of this to Morfydd?" Porius asked him, feeling no more difficulty in speaking of her to Rhun than he would have felt if fifteen years had been lifted away from the piled-up account of what he had decided was the mere "condition" of Time's "necessity" in the framework of life.

"I've told you what I told her," replied Rhun, throwing a small flat stone into the water in such a way as to make it skim the surface and raise four little splashes ere it sank, "but of course you can't tell her everything. I told her about my living with Sibylla and about our wanting to live, if you approved, at Ogof-y-Gawr. But though I saw her looking at my broken sword I didn't tell her how it was broken. Of course, she could see I was still upset about the scurvy way Gwendydd behaved, running off with that Greek pirate, and prepared to pretend that they are emissaries from Ynys Prydein concerning the revising of the condemnation of Pelagius, and I made no attempt to hide how upset I was. You know what Morfydd is, and how she can get anything out of a person. I'm afraid I just let myself go, and she was sweet to me. She thought it was only about Gwendydd, but it wasn't only about Gwendydd; though Gwendydd came into it."

They were now lying stretched out on the sloping bank so near to that small lake that their sandals almost touched the water; in fact, at certain moments stirred into existence by the breath of a faint breeze, a ripple did just touch one of Rhun's heels. This Porius observed. And as his gaze wandered up the man's form till it reached the well-known profile and then descended again till, from Rhun's grandly shaped Greek-athlete's legs, it rested on the water, he couldn't help thinking, "One of the deities that Medrawd's God-Devil, life-death, chip-chop, see-saw, one-is-three-and-three-is-one vision of things leaves out entirely is Uncle Brochvael's bitch queen of the dice, the great goddess Chance!

"If it isn't Chance that with a puff of air suddenly sends a ripple nearer old Rhun's heel than the rest, what is it? And isn't it infinitely better to be creatures dependent on Chance than creatures pulled in half all the time between good and evil and God and the Devil, especially when you're always catching the *same expression* whether under the crown or under the horns?

"Medrawd, I suppose, would argue that it's our ignorance *of causes* that blots out the sequence of minute events that led up to a ripple long enough to wet old Rhun's heel; but where is there an atom in the world that hasn't some sort of a soul of its own? Where a will is, *there* a chance is; for as the proverb says, 'While Chance hides, will bides, and, when Chance hollos, will follows.'"

This not strikingly logical victory over the emperor's nephew combined beautifully with the indescribable comfort of being free and at ease with Rhun; and the two things together soon set Porius off "cavoseniargizing" in a more rapturous way than he'd ever done in his life before! He really did feel as if he positively had the power, and were actually using it, of entering into the inner existence of all the natural entities and all the primeval elements that wavered and flickered, hung suspended or lay inert, in this vast landscape under this veiled sun.

In the rush of happiness that came over him and in a blundering, obscure desire to re-establish the simple boy-to-boy relationship of their life in that *llys* of Alarch the Fair that Minnawc Gorsant had appropriated for his new church he now began tightening the deerskin straps that crossed one another over Rhun's ankles, and as he did so he didn't hesitate to give a powerful jerk to the ankle nearest that incoming ripple, whose inrush, whether due to some unpredictable elemental "will," or to Brochvael's goddess of pure chance, was already washing against the man's foot.

But Rhun drew up both his feet and turning on his side towards his foster-brother began talking rapidly. Porius had so seldom heard him talk rapidly that he knew at once that all this had been seething in his brain for the last twelve hours. He even suspected him of having tracked him down, independently of Medrawd and Afagddu, in order to release his conscience from some particular load.

"Oh, these consciences!" he thought. "Here's even old Rhun justifying the madness of that liar I've just left! Oh, how long it takes us all to learn the trick of 'laying down the law', as they say, *'each for himself,'* and of carrying about with us the responsibility for ourselves like a good slice of bread to feed upon! That's the thing to do — *live upon the stuff of your conscience* and see to it that you keep it fresh and wholesome!"

But Rhun, in too awkward a posture to throw any more stones into the tarn, was now relieving his conscience with a vengeance.

"What brought him there," he was saying, "I've no more notion than *that* thing has!" And he pointed to a gaunt, dead, three-month-old thistle whose fleshless spikes seemed to have been turned to metal so that they might reflect more of the veiled sun than was permitted to anything except a skeleton. "But there he was, that new priest from the Bishop's School, who hates us all so much and has been sent here only to make trouble; and of course he must needs appear just when I was picking up Sibylla who had fallen exhausted just where — you know how it is at Ogof-y-Gawr — just where there's a turn in the approach to the porch and some of the old steps are worn away.

"He must have known her well; for they say — though *I* don't remember him — that Minnawc Gorsant took him out of the kitchen to send him to that school. But anyway, he no sooner saw her than he took upon himself to order a couple of lads he'd just caught with a horse and cart stealing things from the Modrybedd's roomsto lift her in and carry her for him to the church prison. Naturally I came between them, sent the boys off, and told the fellow I intended — in your name, Porius, of course! — to take possession of the Aunties' *llys* and to live there myself; and as to Sibylla I told him I would give her sanctuary there and look after her there until I heard from you, or from Morfydd, of course, what you wished done with her. The fellow became arrogant; he said I'd no right to the Aunties' *llys*; he said the emperor always gave a deserted palace like this — a conquered rebel's palace — to the Church; and he finally said, if the Church didn't have it, that a dangerous centre of druidism of this sort, a hotbed of all the worst heathenism of the forest people, now that by the will of God it was deserted, ought to be destroyed by fire. Here I confess I couldn't restrain my anger and when I saw those two boys, with their thievish cart and horse, clearly hoping to atone for their rascality by obeying the fellow, start laying hands on Sibylla, who, half-dead with exhaustion and terror, couldn't speak a word, I drew my sword and waved them off with it. But it was what happened after that which upset me so. I tell you, Porius, I was so ashamed and humiliated that I cried like a child. I hardly know what started me off.

"It was that man's arrogance, I suppose, and his insulting Mithras, and a feeling in my heart — by the Dog and the Bull I could cry again when I think of it! — that I'd betrayed Mithras and shamed all my vows. I was blubbering like a baby when Morfydd found me in the chapel, and she must have seen my broken sword. But do you know, Porius, I *couldn't* tell her! You're cleverer than I am, with your schooling and Brother John and all that, and you probably know better than I just *why* I couldn't tell her. But I made out — for women understand feelings *like* that! — that it was because Gwendydd had gone off with the Greek. That may have made me — you know, Porius? — a bit jumpy. I don't say it didn't. But it wasn't *that* which made me cry. It was breaking my sword. You see, it was like this, Porius. I'd lowered my sword to argue with the priest — with Sibylla on the grass between us — when the biggest of the boys with the cart started again to take hold of her with the idea of heaving her into the cart as the priest had bidden. You see, he wanted to have her shut up in the church prison and kept there away from us all till he'd sent a letter to the bishop about her. He forgot that there is such a thing as a prince in Edeyrnion!

"It was then that I really went for them with my sword; and I dare say I *did* look like a crazy Phrygian. I dare say I wrinkled my phiz into one of those 'Babylonish faces' you and Morfydd used to tease me about. But at any rate the two lads snatched up whatever came to their hand out of their precious cart while their old horse looked round at me as much as to say: 'Better humour them, my friend, as I always do! They're very young and very stupid!'

"'Twould have been a good thing, I dare say, if I'd taken that old horse's advice, but I didn't. For do you know what I heard? I heard the priest mumble a prayer, yes! a prayer to his god, that I should break my sword! And by the blessed gods, Porius ab Einion, that's just what I did!

"Both lads were standing up to me and one had a pitchfork, and the other some kind of an iron thing — I couldn't see what it was — and with these they were hitting back and trying to crack my skull! The priest kept on: 'Break his sword, Lord Christ! Break his sword, Lord Christ!' And the repetition of this — you know how it is with certain sounds, Porius, when you're wrought up? — so maddened me that I forgot the humorous advice of that old horse and I let drive at them like the devil.

"It wasn't worthy of me, nor of the House of Cunedda, nor of you, nor of Morfydd, and it was shameful in a servant of Mithras, but by the Power and the Dog, Porius, I struck at those two young scamps as if they'd been great lusty, yellow-haired Saeson — and brave boys they were too, to stand up to me! — and at last, on that curst iron thing one of them had, my sword broke in half! You should have heard the cry the boy uttered, and you should have seen the priest's face! He was dumb with surprise at his own damned miracle. But he sent them off after that and he went off himself, but I heard him tell that boy to publish it through all Edeyrnion that Christ had conquered Mithras.

"I couldn't think of anything at first when they'd gone but of comforting Sibylla. And I tell you, Porius, I never knew that a woman *could* be as sweet to a man as she was to me. But later when I was alone in the Gaer chapel a terrible shame came over me about my forgetting myself and aiming at the boy's face and breaking my sword and disgracing Mithras. Do you know what I did, Porius? I made out to Morfydd that it was about Gwendydd I was unhappy when really I couldn't bear my shame over breaking my sword and bringing disgrace on Mithras. Why do you think I did that, Porius? Sometimes I do things that I can't understand."

And at this point without a moment's pause, Rhun leapt to his feet. "But there's another thing, Porius ab Einion," he cried, "that I've got to tell you! Last night, after your father's funeral, but before the Gaer banquet, and before our first real supper at Ogof-y-Gawr, things happened that you ought to know everything about. I would, all the same, Porius, greatly prefer, if you don't mind, *not* to be the one to tell you about them."

Here Rhun bent down, as was his habit when embarrassed, and proceeded to occupy himself with a meticulous smoothing out of every crease in the leather folds of his tunic and an elimination, by a series of obstinate boyish jerks, of every wrinkle in his tight-fitting, delicately woven drawers, as if it had been solely for this purpose that he had risen to his feet.

Very deliberately too and as if he were weighing the significance of every least movement he made, Porius also rose to his feet, and the two cousins and foster-brothers faced each other in silence.

Then Porius said, "You are older than I am, Rhun, and your ideas haven't been confused like mine by going to that school across the mountains and listening to the talk of Brother John. I can quite imagine the sort of trouble at my father's funeral to which you refer — the old, old trouble between Gaer and Church — but I don't see what can possibly have happened in this old dispute of sufficient importance for you to be loth to speak of it. But, let it go, old friend, let it go! If you, as a sworn soldier of Mithras, could neither champion Morfydd against my mother nor my mother against Morfydd — for I got an idea of how things were going from Neb ap Digon — I'm not prepared to blame you for it at this last moment. I knew my father's funeral *might* lead to a clash and I just played the coward and kept out of it. So if anyone's to blame for deserting Morfydd at a pinch, it's her husband, not you."

Rhun's relief was so palpably and pathetically expressed in the sudden relaxing of his heavy scowl of distress that Porius then and there made up his mind that he had taken the right line.

"If my mother and this infernal priest," he thought, "had forced the thing to a showdown and done Morfydd's position any dangerous harm with the people, he'd have known it and would have told me. He wouldn't let me go if she were in any really serious trouble. It must have been something between the two of them. He didn't tell *her* all; and I dare say she didn't tell *me* all."

Thus did Porius's mind race to and fro, like a builder with heavy stones, building up at top speed the narrow entrance to the court of his conscience towards which — and he fancied he could catch the creature's breathing upon the air — the guilt-hound of Medrawd's God-Devil was already sniffing his way. And yet it remains that if the perilous Nineue, who was doubtless preparing even now her fatal *esplumeoir,* as the High Prince's chronicler would have called it, for her magician-lover, had, in her malice against more normal human feelings, transported Morfydd invisibly to this spot, where each of her old playmates was suffering at the bottom of his heart a faint uneasy feeling that he ought to be at her side rather than on this lofty slope of Eryri, it is possible, such is the nature of that incalculable mystery, a woman's heart, that instead of a shuddering pulse beat of loathing for the sickening stupidity of the male animal, or a vibrant head toss of ice-cold contempt for his selfishness, the girl would have felt nothing but a humorous and tender indulgence for the uncertain emotions expressed in each of those two clouded and bewildered countenances.

"Well!" and Porius hurriedly addressed himself to the relief he saw in Rhun's face, "I've got to follow Myrddin Wylk to the top of yr Wyddfa, and then on with him, if he hasn't come to disaster, which the gods forbid! — to the emperor at Mount Badon. And you, brother, have to get back to Sibylla. But I'd like to know before we part" — and at this point had Morfydd really been watching them she would have seen a similar discomfort and a similar embarrassed concentration in both faces, an embarrassment that was betrayed in the way Porius lifted one foot and began scraping the side of one sandal against the side of the other, and in the way Rhun began mechanically putting the tips of his fingers in his mouth and cleaning with them the silver buckle of his belt— "I'd like to know whether you think I'm talking like a fool when I say that it's not easy for any man to satisfy any woman or for any woman to satisfy any man."

Having uttered these words just as if, instead of pondering on the mystery of Space and Time, he had for several hours been struggling with the desperate contradictions of sex, Porius fixed his gaze upon that three-peaked ridge in the remote distance that he had been trying for some while to believe was Cader Idris.

"I mean," he went on, weighing his words as if he and Rhun were rowing in a boat together towards the last shore of the last ocean of this ultimate secret, "I mean that the difference between us — between men and women — is far wider than we usually realize. *That* sounds simple enough, I know, and a bit silly; but what I mean is that it's crazy to argue with women at all on our own terms and in our own language.

"We can't of course properly understand theirs but we must in some sort of way translate ours into a blundering interpretation of theirs. I don't mean that there's any *better* or any *worse* in it, or that there's any superiority or any inferiority in it. What I mean is that there is simply an unfathomable difference.

"This can be proved by the fact that women always feel especially friendly to us in two situations — I am excluding lovemaking now, you understand — first, when we strike them as inscrutable and mysterious, and second, when we strike them as absurdly and humorously simple. And the queer thing is that it is exactly the same with us! We feel most friendly to them, on the one hand when they are most difficult to understand, and on the other when they are most absurdly simple. And that's why — as I expect we've all noticed — each of us loves to think of the other as childish, as like a child. But it's this mystery part of it we've got to think about, brother Rhun; for we can't be always playing at children. And my idea about it is this. And I'll just tell you, and then I must go; and you can think whether you agree with me when I'm gone.

"I think *their* 'mystery' forces them to try to possess us, to surround us with themselves, to draw us into themselves, to make us part of themselves, in a word to swallow us. But — and *here* comes the extraordinary contradiction — in their deepest selves they want us always to *escape* being swallowed! Therefore the thing we've got to do is never to cease running away, never to cease escaping being swallowed! And it's our 'mystery' that we are able to do this and thus to give them the undying pleasure of an endless pursuit."

At this point Porius received two shocks, both of them visual ones, and, in a certain sense, both mythological ones. For he suddenly became conscious that there had appeared a slit or rent in the veiled sky, and that through this slit or rent the sun was shooting a dazzling ray of blinding light; and simultaneously with this he became aware that Rhun's eyes had ceased to be half screwed-up as was their wont, and that, for he had his back to this Mithraic invader, they were almost wide open with wonder.

"But, Porius," he protested, "isn't it *we* who pursue them?"

"Certainly," said the other, turning his head almost irritably to escape the sun, "certainly we pursue them, for of course there is pursuit on both sides; but the 'mystery' of women is the opposite of the 'mystery' of men, and what suits women best is... is—"

But here as he moved his head with blinking lids to dodge that fierce sun ray and perceived how wide open Rhun's eyes had become, he made a very odd noise at the back of his throat; a noise that to his own ears sounded like a rather forced chuckle but to Rhun's like a somewhat brutal oath, and he abruptly concluded, " — is to be caught!"

The moment he'd finished speaking a queer shyness seized him; and all he wanted to do was to cover up a feeling he knew only too well, a feeling he had so often suffered from as a boy, the feeling, namely, that the idea he was struggling to express was a foolish one, if not an absolutely insane one.

But what he did now had a simpler motive than any covering up; it was to blot out from his mind the appalling thought — a thought that needed more mental strength than he possessed to endure — that he and old Rhun might never meet again. It was to blot out this possibility by a strong physical gesture that he now flung his arms round the man and hugged him to his heart, kissing him with fierce and hard kisses full on the mouth.

In spite of this oblivious plunge, however, into the simple Lethe pool of a completely un-erotic, un-Socratic, brother-in-arms affection, it was not till he was within a few hundred yards of the summit of yr Wyddfa that Porius ceased revolving over and over in his mind his relations with Rhun since his first awareness of his comings and goings from his own place of infantile safety in the lap of Alarch the Fair.

What swept Rhun out of his mind and everything else but the immediate occasion was the ice-cold mist that covered that lonely peak. Not only had the sun disappeared, but in its passing it had carried off the whole sky. It had wrapped the whole sky round itself like a shroud and had dived into Space. Head first it had dived, like a self-executioner hugging his drowning stone; and now it was wholly gone.

Porius was so icily aware of being left on the bare up-slope of those last hundred yards absolutely alone, alone without a sky as well as without a sun, that a very queer feeling began to assail him, the feeling of being a thing of sport to the whole universe, a stalking horse and a laughingstock for the derision of the elements, for gods and demigods. In fact he began to feel as he climbed, as he very slowly climbed, lifting up each leg, at each upward move, as if it were made of stone, a weird impression that it wasn't Space at all through which he was moving, but Time; that he was in fact tramping across great yawning gulfs of Time, surrounded by a solitude that was much more than loneliness since there was now no longer any Space in which to be lonely. The sun had drawn to itself either some iron-ribbed meteoric stone or some huge lava-cold scoriac stone and hugging this to its burning heart had plunged and sunk.

And it had dragged the sky down with it! That was the thing that made climbing this last hundred yards of yr Wyddfa such an odd experience. He was alone in a world without a sky. But this was not all. "What," he asked himself, *"was* the boundless sky?" Only another name for Space! It was Space then, Space, that body of the one God, which the sun had carried down with it, down into — well! into Tartarus, let us say!

But if the sun and the sky, and even Space itself, were all gone, what was he doing here, lifting up first one heavy leg and then another heavy leg as he ascended yr Wyddfa? And it was this feeling, not so much of physical as of psychic dizziness, this feeling of crossing with each step he took great gaping gulfs and jagged chasms of Time and yet of being perfectly aware all the while that in a few minutes, possibly in exactly five minutes, he would reach the top, that made what he had come here to do seem, as he mounted up step by step, step by leaden step, step by iron step, step by adamantine step, as if it were something he had had to accomplish aeons of Time ago, something he had had to achieve before the ages of iron and bronze and silver gathered up their offspring, like death mounds of multitudinous leaves, and swept them into the whirlpools of the waters and into the winnowing fans of the winds.

As he approached the summit the mist around him seemed to be thinning out a little. "But it isn't mist at all!" he thought, trying to join in this elemental joke at his expense. "It's only that like all other strong men of the tribe I am a fool in the clouds!"

But he had no time to reconcile his fancy about the sun hugging some magic loadstone to its heart and plunging with the whole of Space wrapped round it into the abyss with the fact that now that he had really reached the summit not only did the air become clearer but a faint gleam of pale but unmistakably real sunlight fell on that stony death mound of whatever being it was who had been buried with this whole peak upon him, as if only a mountain could hold him down and a range of mountains be his final sepulchre; for Porius suddenly realized that he was no longer alone. There, outlined somewhat obscurely before him but not more than thirty feet away, sat Nineue herself on her gigantic horse.

And then it was that, with an effort that seemed to blend itself as he made it with the titanic-moulded hindquarters and mist-defying shoulders of the great horse upon which the woman sat, he set himself to shake off as far as he could certain invisible doubts and troubling hesitations that had been afflicting him ever since he had sent Neb and Gunta back to the Gaer. It had even crossed his mind that this had been a mistake and that what he needed at this moment were a few shrewd suggestions from the son of Digon. But what about Gunta? Wouldn't she be better at the Gaer than on the top of yr Wyddfa? But he was thinking like a fool. Gunta would take care of herself wherever she was!

No, what troubled him was his old trouble, a peculiar kind of uncertainty about the value of all powerful and formidable and persevering efforts; a doubt in fact as to whether, whatever he did, his help would really be of any lasting use to Myrddin Wyllt. But the worst trouble was a certain confusion in his own mind and a fear lest, after all, he should miss, by reason of his natural absentmindedness, doing the thing he had set out to do. He had the strength of an Hercules. He knew *that.* But had he, down at the bottom of his heart, any clear notion of what fate intended him to do?

The honest truth was he didn't believe in *that* sort of fate. He was vaguely aware of some curious link binding his destiny with the counsellor's; a link that seemed to come from some previous life, but he knew he wasn't on the top of Eryri, and facing that woman on that horse, simply because of former events in some remote and inconceivable past.

What was his purpose now? His purpose was as misty as this huge peak of Eryri, and as obscure as the titanic outlines of the animal before him with that woman on its back. He stood stock still, hoping for an inspiration from somewhere in this ice-cold mist through which, carried there, it seemed, on intermittent gusts of desolately whistling wind, there flickered at intervals momentary gleams of yellow sunlight, gleams that fell on the form of the woman and on the form of the horse, and on the form, hardly less arresting, of a queer pile of huge stones that rose behind the woman and the horse.

These stones were certainly banked up together in close contact, but, as the yellow gleams struck at them through the mist, they presented themselves as four-sided, as in fact a *bedd pedryal,* or "four-sided grave." Nineue must have seen him — she must be watching him — but for the moment she made no sign. She just let the horse move about at its will, searching, he supposed, for something to nibble, though there was no grass nor moss nor lichen on these bare stones, nothing but patches of some sort of greenish mould.

And where was Myrddin Wyllt? Had this sorceress disposed of him already? Was he even now under that great *bedd pedryal* with all this natural *carnedd* of solid rock heaped above his head? Was it too late to help him now? Had the wavering modern Hercules delayed too long in reaching yr Wyddfa?

"Tungerong larry ong! Endure to the end!" he muttered. It was odd the comfort he got from the simple repetition of this obstinate saying; and it was still more odd the way he kept associating his confidence with the unnaturally powerful haunches and shoulders of this great dim misty animal on which the Ffichtiaid woman was seated. Was this big horse a stallion, and was there something about the treachery planned and perhaps executed by this corrupter of Cewri that automatically leagued against her every male entity she encountered?

This thought, the moment it sprang up in Porius's brain, created — such was the contrariness of his nature — a dangerous reaction in Nineue's favour! If she had no other friend in the whole wide world, what was he that he should join the wolves against her?

Dominated by this new feeling he now actually began moving towards the woman on the horse, and, as he moved, he felt as if he were drawing from the mountain under his feet a greater strength than he had ever possessed before. It was not a purely physical strength that he felt; for his mind seemed ever lighter and quicker and more mercurial than it was wont to be, and it had always been an ill-assorted "guest and companion" for his Herculean muscles, but it came with the premonition that there was that on the wind, or on some leaf scroll shaken by the wind, that would soon be offering him the opportunity he had longed for all his life of using his great strength in a region more planetary, more astronomical, and much nearer the real substance of things than Chance had hitherto allowed.

And as he moved towards the woman on the horse, stepping slowly and cautiously, for he felt as if he were crossing a scoriac crust below which a fiery eruption might at any second burst forth, he cursed himself yet once more for his ignorance of horses. A proper fool indeed, in this modern age, not even to know whether the great beast before him really were the stallion he imagined it to be! In his ignorance he didn't even know whether women ever rode on stallions!

But Nineue had suddenly waved to him and was changing her position on the horse. She was smiling her recognition of him. She was treating that great horse's back as if it were a couch of love and she were waiting there for his embrace. No! It couldn't be an ordinary horse or it wouldn't be moving as slowly and majestically as a monstrous ox and sniffing those bare misty stones as if searching for something to eat!

He was himself walking now as slowly as the horse, and since the horse, as it sniffed at the stones, began making erratic and arbitrary changes in its direction, he began to feel as if the whole occasion had got out of rational control and had even become a little comic, like a solemn, crazy, erotic dance on the summit of Eryri!

He thought, "If I go up to her and touch her, it's certain I shan't be able to stop there. I'll be pulling her to the ground and loving her to the limit; and the question then will be: is it possible that she could respond to such an extent" — here Alarch the Fair would have seen her foster-child's face assume the expression she had caught on it when he was playing with those letters on the floor— "that Nature would make her pregnant; and, if so, if the Ffichtiaid woman could bear me a child, and did bear me a child, wouldn't *that* be the best of all possible ways of distracting her attention from this infernal scheme of making Myrddin Wyllt her prisoner of love?"

"What I'm scared of," he thought, as he continued his slow grotesque erotic encircling of these two creatures, for it had now become nothing less, "is that by taking her I shall be lavishing so much strength that the thing I've been waiting for all day — I don't know what it is; but I know it'll need all the power I've got — will be... will be beyond—"

But the great goddess of chance must have made herself at that moment an accomplice of this Ffichtiaid seducer of giants. A yellow flicker from what looked, in the richness of its gold, a final ray of the already sinking sun fell upon horse and rider; and taking instantaneous advantage of the fact that this miraculous glow coincided with a pause in the great beast's placid movements the provocative girl stretched herself out at full length on that sun-flecked back, like a mermaid on a golden reef, and went so far even in that ice-cold air as to loosen some of the garments she wore, as if their warmth discommoded her, and to allow one of her soft wrists and delicate hands to sink negligently down upon the curve of a thigh worthy of

Aphrodite on the bed of Hephaestus as she stirred to madness the longing of Ares.

With a rush Porius was at her side, one hand on the beast's rump and one on the woman's knee, and in that last flicker of the sunset his eyes met hers, and up to those arrow slits his whole soul climbed and peered into her soul and was on the edge of forcing itself through those slits into her soul and of plunging down.

But even on that edge he waited; for the long habit of his whole conscious life kept the time gap still gaping between his slow obedient big-beast muscles, and his swift-exploring, light-feathered, Hermes-heeled thoughts.

Indeed it is likely enough that had the temptation to take her been less powerful he would have yielded to it at once and let his thoughts wander as they would. It was the very strength of desire that pulled him up and halted him there on the edge of satisfaction. For his light-winged mind began weighing results, just as it used to do as a child when he played with Rhun and Morfydd at the home rock.

Even on this summit of Eryri and with his hand on Nineue's knee, his mind left his great lust-aroused muscles like a seagull leaving the rocky ledges of its home and set itself to explore the currents of the surrounding tide as they entered the mouth of an unknown river. In other words, his mind began weighing the effect of a presumably accomplished fact before the process necessary to accomplish it had been set in motion.

It had been this innate habit of his that had made him so superficially easy and so profoundly difficult for both Euronwy and Morfydd to influence. It had been this that had made Einion despise him and Rhun open his eyes in bewilderment at him. It was the presence in him at one and the same time of the blood of Iddawc the Apostate and the blood of Creiddylad, Iddawc's mother.

And so it happened now. Just, it might almost seem, to tease and taunt himself, on this day that Gunhorst would have called Woden's and Porius Manlius Mercury's, he began, as he pressed that woman's knee and that horse's rump, to mutter aloud all the words he had learnt of the ancient language of the Cewri.

And the curious thing was that as he muttered in a low, rapid, mumbling murmur these weird syllables of the aboriginal tongue of Ynys Prydein, it seemed to him that his thoughts were completely independent of the sounds that were issuing from his mouth; just as if these sounds were not *words* at all, but reverberations — element against element — of what was being done by earthquake and whirlpool and avalanche and torrent and hurricane.

But as he muttered this primordial incantation and kept repeating it till the horse twitched its tail and the woman's eyes lost their brilliance, his thoughts began to drift like a tossing cloud of Eryri ravens down into the valleys of the limitless earth. Round and round they whirled, so it felt to him, round and round a titanic *stele,* in this case the oar of a trireme, dragged inland from the sea and set up as the turning post in a multitudinous foot race with all the valleys of the limitless earth as its course and all the children of men forced to take part in it.

Yes, whether they ran, or tripped, or danced, or tottered, or limped, or hobbled, or crept, all the generations of men, from the beginning of Time, were forced to compete in that race. And the great power with which they competed was neither *tynged,* nor fate, nor necessity. It was a power with thighs as beautiful and eyes as inscrutable, and a hand as deadly and inert as Nineue's. It was a power that like Nineue was carried on the back of a great beast, a beast whose movements were erratic as they were casual and slow, but who could turn at the post where the ravens circled and cover the course and arrive at the end, against the strongest and the weakest, the oldest and the youngest, the wisest and the most foolish.

Held up by Eryri's summit above the four quarters of the winds and the four quarters of the seas, one hand still on Nineue's knee and one still on the horse's rump, Porius felt that it was infinitely preferable for the unnumbered gods and men and spirits and elementals and beasts and birds and fishes and reptiles and worms and insects and all vegetation and for the air and the earth and the sun and the stars and all the waters to have nothing to struggle with beyond themselves, and nothing to compete with beyond themselves, and nothing to punish them or reward them beyond themselves, save only that mystery of mysteries, that liberator of liberators, that everlasting friend of the Many against the One, *Tyche Soteer,* "Chance, the Saviour".

Beat! Beat! Beat! Beat! went the pulse of Time in Porius's veins; but fast as his thoughts were moving there was still enough delay in his action for Nineue's eyes to begin to grow glazed. And still, like a magical-mechanical incantation to a Time *Tune* whose pulses were in himself that he might assert free will against all those false fates and sham destinies that the priests of the One God and the priests of the One Devil are always turning into One Necessity, his voice went on, as if it were the voice of every living creature protesting the freedom of its free choice: *Thumberol gonquod tungerong larry ruggerug gwork ong!*

"Beat! Beat! Beat! Beat!" went the Time pulses in Porius's own veins. And suddenly as if the sun were stretching out a last passionate pharos ray in search of some invisible *stele,* or "death pillar," on the very summit of yr Wyddfa, Nineue's figure under Porius's hand became transmuted into glowing gold.

And, though her eyes remained glazed, just as if, Porius thought, she had been "cavoseniargizing" and forgetting his presence, she now deliberately, heedless of the icy air about her, for the red-gold light only *looked* warm, exposed one of her breasts. *Tungerong larry ong!* So the inanimate noise sounds of the Cewri tongue *had* propitiated the Mystery of Chance.

For the truth is that by reason of some obscure babyish association, in the process of his foster-suckling by Rhun's mother, Porius was attracted to fully and largely developed breasts in women only when their nipples were abnormally small, as indeed had been the case with his luckless giant girl.

But Chance must have nursed a grudge against this Ffichtiaid enemy of the Cewri; for in her absentminded enjoyment of the sun's last rays, Nineue's amorous spirit had slipped away from behind the arrow slit of her eyes and lost itself in response to this more tremendous lover. Thus, when, in amorous answer to that golden glow, there appeared an unusually large nipple in the midst of an unusually small breast, in place of being excited beyond endurance the opposite result ensued, and the attraction that had drawn him to her side was utterly broken.

But it was then, and not till then, and only then, that he became fully aware of the element of primordial grandeur in the personality of this seducer of prophets. For in place of being angry or showing the least sense of affront in the presence of the worst insult which femininity can suffer, this extraordinary woman smiled at him more indulgently than he had ever seen her smile, and, as she covered up the exposed breast with its erring nipple, she drew forth from between her unequalled thighs a small, hard, heavy, pear-shaped lump of iron ore and handed it to him.

As she did so he noticed that the ice-cold air about them caused a delicate wafture of faint grey steam — so warm had the thing grown against her flesh — to float away between them.

"He gave it to me," she whispered. "It has been in his body since the lightning struck him on the day he fell. You can give it back to him now. He has escaped from the wheel that turns."

But Porius, without relaxing the clutch of his fingers on the meteorite she had given him, pressed the back of his knuckles against her body and implored and entreated her to tell him where the counsellor was.

At first she was silent under his fervent supplication, and he went on imploring her in that golden light and repeating: "One word, Nineue! Just one word!" And then when he grew weary of all speech and simply implored her in intense and silent entreaty to tell him where her companion was, a singular trance fell upon him and he began to feel that there was some close connection between this extraordinary person and the planetary earth.

He remembered afterwards exactly how he felt, for he "went over" in his mind for the next thirty years, over and over, every least detail of what happened on this Wednesday the twenty-fourth of October, four hundred and ninety-nine, and he didn't feel that Nineue shared with the planetary earth the teeming maternity of that mother of all. What she shared with the earth — with Nature, with the great Her of this present visible world — was a quite special sort of pitiless craft and cunning, with the power of using every kind of mirage, illusion, phantasmagoria, and enchantment.

He must have been in some kind of trance just then for, as he looked into her eyes imploring her and beseeching her to reveal what sorcery she had used upon Myrddin Wyllt, he felt as if both of them, and the horse too, were larger than the men, women, and horses he was accustomed to, and as if the four-square *carnedd* behind horse and rider was larger than the burial mounds of Edeyrnion, or, it might be, than the burial mounds of the whole of Ynys Prydein.

And he felt something much more definite than this; something that had to do, it seemed to him, with that ironstone fallen from the sky which she had given him, warm from her body and so recently taken from Myrddin Wyllt's body, and which he himself was clutching tightly in the fingers he was pressing against that seductive breast he had just rejected. He was praying with all the power he had to the soul within her, and though she rejected him she was also indulgent to him, indulgent to him with a supernatural planetary indulgence totally beyond anything humanly maternal, but not impossible to associate with the boundless earth, mother of the Titans, nor impossible to associate with her who betrayed Uranus to crooked-counselling Cronos, and then again Cronos to the hurler of thunderbolts.

If Porius was ignorant of horses, his real insight into what might be called "the Feminine Principle in Life" was liable to be obscured by lapses that were pathetically grotesque. What must he do now but actually begin to throw into his appeal to this superhistoric creature the sort of servile abandonment of all dignity that a goose girl would scorn in a shepherd boy.

Nineue's indulgent smile turned into a deep-throated mocking laugh, a laugh so shrill that at the sound of it two drastic things happened simultaneously. The yellow light went out, just as if an arrow had pierced the sun; and the horse, or the stallion, if such it were, lifted its head from licking the stones of yr Wyddfa and uttered a resounding neigh.

This concatenation of events broke rudely into the time gap, always existing but at this crucial moment unusually wide, between Porius's senses and his intelligence; and the nervous disturbance within him, produced by this divergence, resulted in a burst of extravagant violence as surprising to himself as it was to the woman.

He tore himself from her side and from the side of the horse, just as if she and the horse and himself had been for twenty thousand years some primordial outcropping of earth’s rocky ribs, resembling, by pure cosmogonic chance, the fearful mate of the terrible sky in the act of being implored by a cloudy Herculean shape to have mercy on her own offspring; while now in catastrophic upheaval, this fragment of elemental sculpture had rent itself out of those earth ribs; and lo! the sculptured rock that was the man had divided itself from the rock that was the woman and the horse, and had flung itself into the gulf that had been Space.

Having thus torn himself free, Porius actually did fling himself headlong against the grey monolith resting on the four horizontal stones — all of them half-sunk now by the process of Time into the ground — that had come at last to form the *bedd pedryal* that had given its name to yr Wyddfa. None of these four stones were completely buried in the ground but they were all fixed and stationed as if they had not been moved since the last convulsion that had shaken Eryri’s peaks and ridges, promontories and precipices, into their present planetary position. All except one! Yes, one of the four, as, in that ice-cold twilight, he fumbled and groped on his hands and knees, growling the words *“Thumberol gongquod”* with a curious animal noise that startled his own ears, for it reminded him of a sound that during their desperate encounter he had heard in the throat of the old *cawr,* Creiddylad’s father, one of the four *had* been moved — he could feel it. He could even faintly see it. And now that he came to touch it he found that the stone itself was unmistakably loose.

Trembling in that icy mist, and contorting his face in the shivering compulsion of his excitement, he seized the corner of that loose stone, and kneeling on the ground, and bending his back like an Iberian bow strung to the limit, he heaved and tugged and strained and wrenched and shook it.

But for all the heavings of his enormous muscles that *has anaidees,* that “obstinately stubborn stone,” refused to move.

In order to use his full strength upon the stone he was compelled to find a place for the thunderbolt Nineue had given him. Automatically opening his jaws wide, like a bewildered animal, he squeezed the rough and hoary and wrinkled iron ball between his tongue and the roof of his mouth. Thus he set himself to wrestle with the greatest task that any human frame or any human muscles had dared to take in hand in that place since the central fires subsided into quiescence or the towering upsurge of the waters receded.

“Stone!” he growled in his subhuman frenzy, *“has anaidees!* Most obstinate of stones! Your moment of defeat has come!”

And then there occurred in his mind a convulsive movement parallel to the appalling efforts he was making with his superhuman muscles. But unlike *those* efforts this mental convulsion landed him upon a curious psychic ledge, resting quite calmly on which, as upon a centre point in the midst of appearing and disappearing universes, he enjoyed for the moment, even at the core of his heartbreaking heavings and strainings, a mad delicious sensation that he held Time itself in his hands! “Not an atom in the whole of Space,” he thought, “but has its moment, its hour, its century, its aeon, of tragic differentiation and mutation! And now *you”* he told himself, “who for thousands of centuries have waited here on the summit of Eryri, feeling yourself secure, feeling that what the cloud gatherer and the lightning hurler had flung down, and what the father of gods and men had hidden, would never be lifted out, would never be uncovered, *shall* be exposed and laid bare!” He swayed to and fro now in the extremity of his straining as if he were no longer a mind or a body but some impersonal force of Nature. “Exposed and laid bare,” his thoughts groaned and shuddered on, till they almost cracked his skull, "scooped and scored and scoured to the uttermost!"

And now there came to his ears, sharply, distinctly, louder than the far-off terrible screams of eagles, the metallic strokes, like some mineral Space clock, matching the motion of Time's water clock, of the hoof beats of Nineue's horse as it carried her away.

The sound increased the fury of his efforts. He felt as if he was tugging at some huge tap root of the whole of Eryri. Sweat streamed down his back and trickled down his face. He began making a queer moaning sound as if he were a beast whose single offspring was buried under this *has anaidees.* And then quite suddenly the stone yielded. It toppled sideways, remained horribly balanced for a second, and then lay upside down. It lay indeed so motionlessly upside down that its whiteness in that perishing twilight had a positively ghastly quality, at once phantomlike and phosphorescent.

For a second or two he was too exhausted and too dazed to do more than sway backwards and forwards and stare helplessly down into that shocking gulf. Then he realized that he was staring straight into the eyes of Myrddin Wyllt, who in a hideously ungainly posture was stretched across a cloven rock, a cloven slab of slate rock, that had no less than three inch-wide clefts in it, each of which appeared to descend down immeasurable depths. And what at once fascinated and horrified Porius was the fact that these chasms, of which the two outer ones were under the prostrate man's armpits and the middle one under the nape of his neck and the fork of his body, instead of being in the complete and pitchy darkness that anyone would have expected, were faintly illuminated as they all three descended, for he could catch a glimpse of that subterranean phosphorescence between the man's thighs. "If only it was black darkness!" he thought with a shrinking that struck him as being *very old,* as if it had descended uncounted aeons of Time to reach him.

"He *has grown smaller!"* was his next thought as he stared through the grey icy mist at that dark figure outstretched above those three cracks in the solidity of the boundless earth; and indeed Myrddin Wyllt had the look of a petrified creature whose natural bulk had been reduced by the endurance of aeons of both water and ice.

But he had the same familiar awe-inspiring hideousness that Porius had by this time come to find almost endearing. His ears were as unnaturally large, his forehead as unnaturally low, his greenish black eyes as magnetic as ever. As he looked down on him Porius had the odd fancy that he could even catch, above those great flapping ears, the visible rudiments of horns!

And though those greenish black orbs beneath their shaggy eyebrows stared back at him in ghastly reciprocity he got the feeling that there was no perception, no understanding, no recognition in them. Was the man dead? Had Nineue with the aid of some unearthly magnet and by drawing out of his inmost vitals that fatal thunderbolt brought his weird half-human life to an end?

While keeping his own small yellowish green bear's eyes, with their brows corrugated and wrinkled now even beyond their wont, fixed steadily upon that terrible stare, Porius opened his mouth and disembogued, though not without stretching his jaws nigh to the breaking point, that iron-ribbed meteorite.

Anxious to rouse the counsellor from his trance and naturally fearful of adding his own weight to the other's upon that rock ledge above the glimmerings of Tartarus, he took that smallest of thunderbolts in his right hand and swinging his arm back and forth over the mouth of the gulf hesitated as to the portion of the figure beneath him at which it were best to aim.

And as he swung his arm backwards and forwards he felt that this highest peak of Eryri must indeed have been named yr Wyddfa, “the Tomb,” by destiny itself. He decided that it must be one of the four great gates into that World of the Dead to which Brochvael had once told him certain Cisalpine Gallic tribes used to offer large four-square barley cakes made without milk and without the shedding of blood.

He felt as if he stood on an earth crust that covered a cosmogonic cavern wherein the bones and ashes and the mouldering dust of gods and men and beasts and birds and fishes and reptiles had been gathered into a multitudinous congregated compost, out of which by the creative energy of Time new life could be eternally spawned; spawned, it might be, for the use of other universes, when this one had been dissolved.

Balanced as he was above this motionless figure in the form of a man, from beneath which rose a phosphorescent gleam of inconceivable decomposition, Porius, as he swung his thunderbolt, had the feeling that he was suspended above the whole rondure of the earth, and that worlds upon worlds of every sort surrounded him, and that he, the child of Time, was absolutely alone with this physical mirage, this primordial abyss, this necessary illusion, this holy nothing, that is called Space.

And he became aware of an unfathomable power within him, a power that was at once divine and human, animal and elemental, a power that could be drawn upon at will, not to create or to destroy, but simply *to enjoy: gorsorb larry ong,* “enjoy to the end.”

He felt as if the rock-ledge on which he stood, swinging his meteorite above that being in the Pit, were itself rising, rising, rising through illimitable distances of empty blackness. “This,” he thought, “is what I’ve often feared as pure madness. And yet it doesn't seem madness now; or is it that" — and he began swinging the meteorite more slowly in the intensity of his thought— "is it that a person *can* enjoy being alone in absolute darkness? I must remember to ask Morfydd whether she thinks a person can be mad and yet not mad; alone among millions of universes and yet enjoying himself, as small and weak and helpless in the abysses of existence as a worm or a fly, and yet able to rescue a god?"

Whether it was his sudden feeling of deep content that he had someone to whom he could relate all this that unsettled him, or whether it was that he had sweated so much that he was now taken with a shivering fit; anyway, his arm suddenly ceased to swing, his hand and his fingers relaxed, and he dropped the meteorite. Full upon the forehead of Myrddin Wyllt it fell, and from off that uneven resting place it rolled, without a sound, down into the abyss.

Then Porius, trembling like a poplar leaf on the very edge of the Cimmerian gulf, saw that grand hideous terrible visage contort itself. A convulsion passed across it, and the being to whom it belonged began using the muscles of chest, abdomen, and neck, to heave itself up. Far away, down the slopes and the precipices and the rocks and the caverns, Porius was aware of a sound he knew well — the screaming of eagles.

He felt as if he *saw* this sound enter the great flapping, shaggy, animal-like ears of the being beneath him.

"They know me," whispered the counsellor, "but they've never been my friends! They've always been the friends of the tyrants. They know me, the eagles, and they're afraid!"

Even while he was speaking he was using his enormous hands and feet to get himself upright; and then with Porius's help he had no difficulty in clambering up to the side of his very human and very shivering rescuer.

And once out of that living tomb, once out of yr Wyddfa, it was he who did all that had to be done. The first thing he did was to twist his huge form with all its heavy garments of goatskin and sheepskin round and round, until, like that famous four-sided island tower in the waters of Annwn, it seemed palpably to counterbalance that *bedd pedryal* from whose gorge it had been excavated. And the next thing he did was to extricate with the help of his rescuer from some hidden wallet in the lining of one of these garments an extremely greasy leather bottle.

On the opening of this bottle it was found to contain a fluid so potent that it not only quelled Porius's ague fit but submerged that collapsed Hercules in the most delicious ocean of dreams he had ever known.

More and more steadily and firmly the counsellor took control. He made his exhausted and shivering rescuer recline against a lichen-covered rock that had nothing to do with the *bedd pedryal,* while he himself began filling up and sealing down that gaping hole with the clear intention that it should never be uncovered again as long as the earth lasted. The large mouthfuls Porius was swallowing from the counsellor's mysterious and perhaps divine bottle did not overpower his consciousness all at once. He could recall later most of his impressions, and many of his conclusions.

The image in the twilight of that extraordinary figure with its vast bulk, its eyes so sunken that they resembled the eye holes of a skull into which two burning green-black lamps had been inserted, the great flapping ears, the indescribable mouth that was at once a tragic classic mask and the distended lips of a wild stag in desperate flight, the wind-blown garments waving steadily northwest as the wind blew from the Cader towards Conway, would be forever associated with one word at least that he heard the man muttering as he toiled at this task of sealing up forever the gaping mouth of yr Wyddfa.

Myrddin Wyllt groaned forth other words; but it was the echoing, iron-jarring, primeval-metallic sound of this particular word that caused it to come back to Porius all the rest of his life. It was the word *“karcharodonta”;* and Porius, recalling it all later, remembered that as the man uttered this word along with the others he scowled up at the grey clouds with features contorted by a terrible and immortal defiance; “jagged” was the word; “jagged” the weapon; “jagged” the man’s face.

More and more strongly did Porius get the feeling that in his isolation on this peak of the planet by the side of this titanic creature of whose essential being he knew so little, and even felt disinclined to know more, he was reliving an experience he had had long ago when the world was young.

He could still hear the far-away screaming of eagles, but the sound had grown so faint that it seemed as if Myrddin Wyllt had been correct in declaring that those great Birds of Absolute Power had felt some *counterbolt* whistling past their small, cruel, beautiful, imperial, exquisitely feathered skulls!

And as he listened, watching the great beast ears above him quiver like sails in that icy wind, he fancied he could catch moving up to that mountaintop a vast, indescribable, multitudinous murmur, groping up, fumbling up, like a mist among mists, from all the forests and valleys of Ynys Prydein, the response of innumerable weak and terrified and unbeautiful and unconsidered and unprotected creatures, for whom this first-born and first-betrayed of the wily earth, this ancient accomplice of Time, this *angulo-meetis* of subtle counsels, was still plotting a second Age of Gold.

And as he went on swallowing that Saturnian nepenthe Porius saw, and saw as clearly as if it were down there between his sandals, the floating blood and the strewn hair and the green water in those foothills of the Cader.

“O Creiddylad! O Creiddylad!” he groaned within himself. *“Tungerong larry ong!”* And he thought how absolutely alone in this chaos of things was every single soul, whether of insect or worm or reptile or fish or beast or bird or man or god.

“There’s nothing I can do,” he said to himself, “but just accept this crazy loneliness in this unbounded chaos, and hope for the best among all the other crazy lonely selves! And why not? Such a chance-ruled chaos of souls, none of them without *some* fellow feeling, *some* kindliness, at least to their offspring, at least to their mates, at least to their friends, is a better thing than a world of blind authority, a world ruled by one Caesar, or one God, or one—”

But it was at this point, at least as far as his intermittent memory served him, that the counsellor’s divine bottle blotted out his thought. Nor, when the morning of Thursday the twenty-fifth of October in the year of Christ four hundred and ninety-nine struck his senses and his mind as a reality, and he found himself, as his friend the Henog of Dyfed says in his Life of Pryderi, *“ar garrec Harlech uch penn y weilgi,* “““on a rock at Harlech above the sea,” was he in the least startled or bewildered by this magical transportation in the course of one night, nor by finding himself completely alone.

Nor indeed was he greatly vexed by the fact that so heavy a mist covered the sea that although he heard its waves breaking a few hundred yards beneath him, he could catch no glimpse of it at all. The truth of the matter was that, with his back against the broken wall of some ancient fortress and his belly and legs well covered with the shaggy goatskin of a “herdsman from the south," Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda felt warm and comfortable and content.

"I needn't bother to think of moving from here for hours," he told himself. "Owain Pen Uchel can't possibly get here till sunset, and I don't feel hungry or thirsty or anything. I don't even feel sleepy. I'll just enjoy the mist and the smell of seaweed and try to think how to tell Morfydd what I've decided about Myrddin Wyllt. There are many gods; and I have served a great one. She alone will understand."

Other Novels

Sherborne School, Dorset, which has been in continuous operation on the same site for over 1,300 years — where Powys was educated as a boy

Wood and Stone (1915)

Wood and Stone was first published in 1915 by G. Arnold Shaw in New York, USA and by William Heinemann in Britain in 1917. It was the author's debut novel, written when he was already in his early forties. He had begun his literary career as a young man in his twenties releasing *Odes and Other Poems* in 1896 followed by *Poems* in 1899. However, over the course of the next fifteen years he had little opportunity to write as he spent most of his time and energy on the lecture circuit, travelling across the USA. In 1914, the political and philosophical text *The War and Culture* (1914) was published and in 1915 a collection of essays of literary criticism entitled *Visions and Revisions* was released.

Wood and Stone is set in the fictional village of Nevilton, near the border between Somerset and Dorset. Powys based Nevilton on his memories and experiences of Montacute, the village where his father was the vicar for more than thirty years. The novel focuses on the lives and dynamics of the characters and the tensions that arise in a community where power and sadism confront gentleness and acts of self-sacrifice. Nature and the landscape form a vital and intrinsic element to the narrative, as does the history and mythology of the region. Powys dedicated the book to Thomas Hardy, a clear influence on his writings, whom he describes as 'the greatest poet and novelist of our age'.

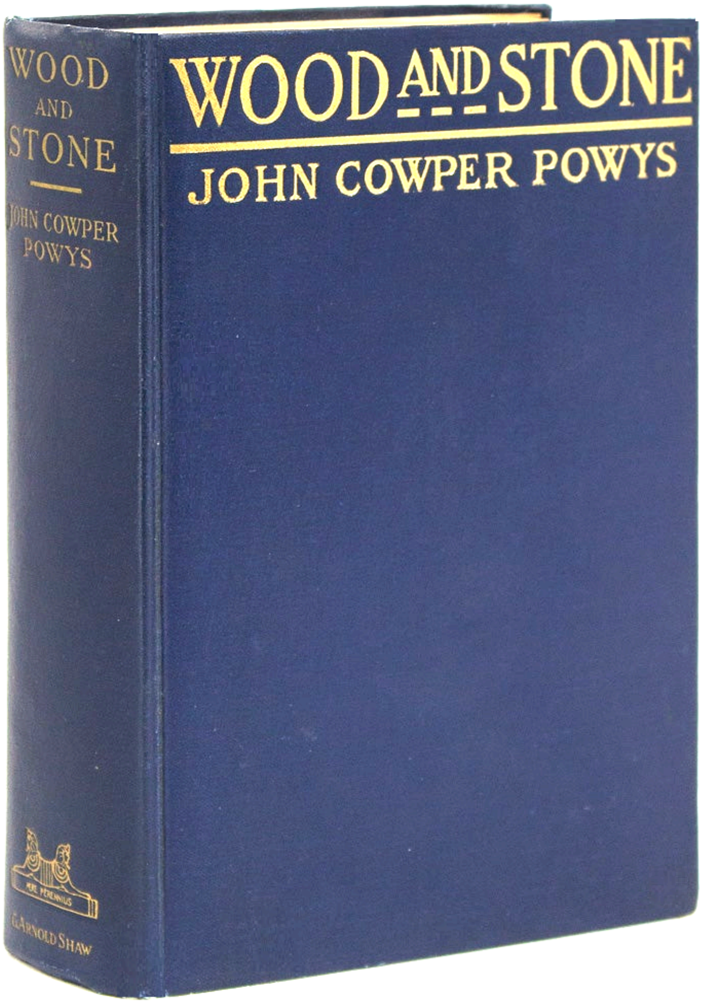
WOOD AND STONE
JOHN COWPER POWYS
WOOD AND STONE
JOHN COWPER POWYS
G. ARNOLD SHAW

The first edition

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Powys as a young man

The dedicatee, Thomas Hardy, 1915

DEDICATED

WITH DEVOTED ADMIRATION

TO THE GREATEST POET AND NOVELIST

OF OUR AGE

THOMAS HARDY

PREFACE

THE FOLLOWING NARRATIVE gathers itself round what is, perhaps, one of the most absorbing and difficult problems of our age; the problem namely of getting to the bottom of that world-old struggle between the "well-constituted" and the "ill-constituted," which the writings of Nietzsche have recently called so startlingly to our attention.

Is there such a thing at all as Nietzsche's born and trained aristocracy? In other words, is the secret of the universe to be reached only along the lines of Power, Courage, and Pride? Or, — on the contrary, — is the hidden and basic law of things, not Power but Sacrifice, not Pride but Love?

Granting, for the moment, that this latter alternative is the true one, what becomes of the drastic distinction between "well-constituted" and "ill-constituted"?

In a universe whose secret is not self-assertion, but self-abandonment, might not the "well-constituted" be regarded as the vanquished, and the "ill-constituted" as the victors? In other words, who, in such a universe, *are* the "well-constituted"?

But the difficulty does not end here. Supposing we rule out of our calculation both of these antipodal possibilities, — both the universe whose inner fatality is the striving towards Power, and the universe whose inner fatality is the striving towards Love, — will there not be found to remain two other rational hypotheses, either, namely, that there is no inner fatality about it at all, that the whole thing is a blind, fantastic, chance-drifting chaos; or that the true secret lies in some subtle and difficult reconciliation, between the will to Power and the will to Love?

The present chronicle is an attempt to give an answer, inevitably a very tentative one, to this formidable question; the writer, feeling that, as in all these matters, where the elusiveness of human nature plays so prominent a part, there is more hope of approaching the truth, indirectly, and by means of the imaginative mirror of art, than directly, and by means of rational theorizing.

The whole question is indeed so intimately associated with the actual panorama of life and the evasive caprices of flesh and blood, that every kind of drastic and clinching formula breaks down under its pressure.

Art, alone, — that mysterious daughter of Life, — has the secret of following the incalculable movements of the Force to which she is so near akin. A story which grossly points its moral with fixed indicative finger is a story which, in the very strain of that premature articulation, has lost the magic of its probability. The secret of our days flies from our attempts at making it fit such clumsy categories, and the maddening flavour of the cosmic cup refuses to be imprisoned in any laboratory.

At this particular moment in the history of our planet it is above all important to protest against this prostituting of art to pseudo-science. It must not be allowed to these hasty philosophical conclusions and spasmodic ethical systems, to block up and close in, as they are so ready to do, the large free horizons of humour and poetry. The magic of the World, mocking both our gravity and our flippancy, withdraws itself from our shrewd rationalizations, only to take refuge all the deeper in our intrinsic and evasive hearts.

In this story the author has been led to interest himself in the curious labyrinthine subtleties which mark the difference, — a difference to be observed in actual life, quite apart from moral values, — between the type of person who might be regarded as born to rule, and the type of person who might be regarded as born to be ruled over. The grand Nietzschean distinction is, in a sense, rejected here upon its own ground, a ground often inconsequently deserted by those who make it their business to condemn it. Such persons are apt to forget that the whole assumption of this distinction lies in a substitution of *æsthetic* values, for the values more commonly applied.

The pivotal point of the ensuing narrative might be described as an attempt to suggest, granting such an æsthetic test, that the hearts of "ill-constituted" persons, — the hearts of slaves, Pariahs, cowards, outcasts, and other victims of fate, — may be at least as *interesting*, in their bizarre convolutions, as the hearts of the bravest and gayest among us. And *interest*, after all, is the supreme exigency of the æsthetic sense!

In order to thrust back from its free horizons these invasions of its prerogatives by alien powers, Art must prove itself able to evoke the very tang and salt and bitter-sweetness of the actual pell-mell of life — its unfolding spaces, its shell-strewn depths. She must defend herself from those insidious traitors in her own camp who would betray her into the hands of the system-makers, by proving that she can approach nearer to the magic of the world, without a system, than all these are able to do, with all of theirs! She must keep the horizons open — that must be her main concern. She must hold fast to poetry and humour, and about her creations there must be a certain spirit of *liberation*, and the presence of large tolerant after-thoughts.

The curious thing about so many modern writers is, that in their earnest preoccupation with philosophical and social problems, they grow strained and thin and sententious, losing the mass and volume, as well as the elusive-blown airs, of the flowing tide. On the other hand there is an irritating tendency, among some of the cleverest, to recover their lost balance after these dogmatic speculations, by foolish indulgence in sheer burlesque — burlesque which is the antithesis of all true humour.

Heaven help us! It is easy enough to criticize the lath and plaster which, in so many books, takes the place of flesh and blood. It is less easy to catch, for oneself, the breath of the ineffable spirit!

Perhaps the deplorable thinness and sententiousness, to which reference has been made, may be due to the fact that in the excitement of modern controversy, our enterprising writers have no time to read. It is a strange thing, but one really feels as though, among all modern English authors, the only one who brings with him an atmosphere of the large mellow leisurely humanists of the past, — of the true classics, in fact, — is Mr. Thomas Hardy.

It is for this reason, for the reason that with this great genius, life is approached in the old ample ironic way, that the narrator of the following tale has taken the liberty of putting Mr. Hardy's name upon his title-page. In any case mere courtesy and decency called for such a recognition. One could hardly have the audacity to plant one's poor standard in the heart of Wessex without obeisance being paid to the literary over-lord of that suggestive region.

It must be understood, however, that the temerity of the author does not carry him so far as to regard his eccentric story as in any sense an attempted imitation of the Wessex novelist. Mr. Hardy cannot be imitated. The mention of his admirable name at the beginning of this book is no more than a humble salutation addressed to the monarch of that particular country, by a wayward nomad, lighting a bivouac-fire, for a brief moment, in the heart of a land that is not his.

CHAPTER I. LEO'S HILL

MIDWAY BETWEEN GLASTONBURY and Bridport, at the point where the eastern plains of Somersetshire merge into the western valleys of Dorsetshire, stands a prominent and noticeable hill; a hill resembling the figure of a crouching lion.

East of the hill, nestling at the base of a cone-shaped eminence overgrown with trees and topped by a thin Thyrsus-like tower, lies the village of Nevilton.

Were it not for the neighbourhood of the more massive promontory this conical protuberance would itself have stood out as an emphatic landmark; but Leo's Hill detracts from its emphasis, as it detracts from the emphasis of all other deviations from the sea-level, between Yeoborough and the foot of the Quantocks.

It was on the apex of Nevilton Mount that the Holy Rood of Waltham was first found; but with whatever spiritual influence this event may have endowed the gentler summit, it is not to it, but to Leo's Hill, that the lives and destinies of the people of Nevilton have come to gravitate. One might indeed without difficulty conceive of a strange supernatural conflict going on between the consecrated repository of Christian tradition guarding its little flock, and the impious heathen fortress to which day by day that flock is driven, to seek their material sustenance.

Even in Pre-Celtic times those formidably dug trenches and frowning slopes must have looked down on the surrounding valley; and to this day it is the same suggestion of tyrannical military dominance, which, in spite of quarries and cranes and fragrant yellow gorse, gives the place its prevailing character.

The rounded escarpments have for centuries been covered with pleasant turf and browsed upon by sheep; but patient antiquarian research constantly brings to light its coins, torques, urns, arrow-heads, amulets; and rumour hints that yet more precious things lie concealed under those grassy mounds.

The aboriginal tribes have been succeeded by the Celt; the Celt by the Roman; the Roman by the Saxon; without any change in the place's inherent character, and without any lessening of its tyranny over the surrounding country. For though Leo's Hill dominates no longer by means of its external strength, it dominates, quite as completely, by means of its interior riches.

It is, in fact, a huge rock-island, washed by the leafy waves of the encircling valleys, and containing, as its hid treasure, stone enough to rebuild Babylon.

In that particular corner of the West Country, so distinct and deep-rooted are the legendary survivals, it is hard not to feel as though some vast spiritual conflict were still proceeding between the two opposed Mythologies — the one drawing its strength from the impulse to Power, and the other from the impulse to Sacrifice.

A village-dweller in Nevilton might, if he were philosophically disposed, be just as much a percipient of this cosmic struggle, as if he stood between the Palatine and St. Peter's.

Let him linger among the cranes and pulleys of this heathen promontory, and look westward to the shrine of the Holy Grail, or eastward to where rested the Holy Rood, and it would be strange if he did not become conscious of the presence of eternal spiritual antagonists, wrestling for the mastery.

He would at any rate be made aware of the fatal force of Inanimate Objects over human destiny.

There would seem to him something positively monstrous and sinister about the manner in which this brute mass of inert sandstone had possessed itself of the lives of the generations. It had come to this at last; that those who owned the Hill owned the dwellers beneath the Hill; and the Hill itself owned them that owned it.

The name by which the thing had come to be known indicated sufficiently well its nature.

Like a couchant desert-lion it overlooked its prey; and would continue to do so, as long as the planet lasted.

Out of its inexhaustible bowels the tawny monster fed the cities of seven countries — cities whose halls, churches, theatres, and markets, mocked the caprices of rain and sun as obdurately as their earth-bound parent herself.

The sandstone of Leo's Hill remains, so architects tell us, the only rival of granite, as a means for the perpetuation of human monuments. Even granite wears less well than this, in respect to the assaults of rain and flood. The solitary mysterious monoliths of Stonehenge, with their unknown, alien origin, alone seem to surpass it in their eternal perdurance.

As far as Nevilton itself is concerned everything in the place owes its persuasive texture to this resistant yet soft material. From the lordly Elizabethan mansion to the humblest pig-stye, they all proceed from the entrails of Leo's Hill; and they all still wear — these motley whelps of the great dumb beast — its tawny skin, its malleable sturdiness, its enduring consistence.

Who can resist a momentary wonder at the strange mutability of the fate that governs these things? The actual slabs, for example, out of which the high shafts and slender pinnacles of the church-tower were originally hewn, must once have lain in littered heaps for children to scramble upon, and dogs to rub against. And now they are the windy resting-places, and airy "coigns of vantage," of all the feathered tribes in their migrations!

What especially separates the Stone of Leo's Hill from its various local rivals, is its chameleon-like power of taking tone and colour from every element it touches. While Purbeck marble, for instance, must always remain the same dark, opaque, slippery thing it was when it left its Dorset coast; while Portland stone can do nothing but grow gloomier and gloomier, in its ashen-grey moroseness, under the weight of the London fogs; the tawny progeny of this tyrant of the western vales becomes amber-streaked when it restricts the play of fountains, orange-tinted when it protects herbacious borders, and rich as a petrified sunset when it drinks the evening light from the mellow front of a Cathedral Tower.

Apart from any geological affinity, it might almost seem as though this Leonian stone possessed some weird occult relation to those deep alluvial deposits which render the lanes and fields about Nevilton so thick with heavy earth.

Though closer in its texture to sand than to clay, it is with clay that its local usage is more generally associated, and it is into a clay-bed that it crumbles at last, when the earth retakes her own. Its prevailing colour is rather the colour of clay than of sand, and no material that could be found could lend itself more congruously to the clinging consistence of a clay floor.

It would be impossible to conceive of a temple of marble or Portland stone rising out of the embrace of the thick Nevilton soil. But Leonian sandstone seems no more than a concentrated petrifaction of such soil — its natural evocation, its organic expression. The soil calls out upon it day and night with friendly recognition, and day and night it answers the call. There is thus no escape for the human victims of these two accomplices. In confederate reciprocity the stone receives them from the clay, and the clay receives them from the stone. They pass from homes built irretrievably of the one, into smaller and more permanent houses, dug irretrievably out of the other.

The character of the soil in that corner of Somersetshire is marked, beyond everything else, by the clinging tenacity of its soft, damp, treacherous earth. It is a spot loved by the west-wind, and by the rains brought by the west-wind. Overshadowed by the lavish fertility of its abounding foliage, it never seems to experience enough sunshine to draw out of it the eternal presence of this oppressive dampness. The lush pastures may thicken, the rich gardens blossom, the ancient orchards ripen; but an enduring sense of something depressing and deep and treacherous lurks ever in the background of these pleasant things. Not a field but has its overshadowing trees; and not a tree but has its roots loosely buried in that special kind of soft, heavy earth, which an hour's rain can change into clinging mud.

It is in the Nevilton churchyard, when a new grave is being dug, that this sinister peculiarity of the earth-floor is especially noticeable. The sight of those raw, rough heaps of yellow clay, tossed out upon grass and flowers, is enough to make the living shrink back in terror from the oblong hole into which they have consigned their dead. All human cemeteries smell, like the hands of the Shakespearean king, of forlorn mortality; but such mortality seems more palpably, more oppressively emphasized among the graves of Nevilton than in other repositories of the dead. To be buried in many a burying-ground one knows, would be no more than a negative terror; no more than to be deprived, as Homer puts it, of the sweet privilege of the blessed air. But to be buried in Nevilton clay has a positive element in its dreadfulness. It is not so much to be buried, as to be sucked in, drawn down, devoured, absorbed. Never in any place does the peculiar congruity between the yellowness of the local clay and the yellowness of the local stone show so luridly as among these patient hillocks.

The tombstones here do not relieve the pressure of fate by appealing, in marble whiteness, away from the anthropophagous earth, to the free clouds of heaven. They are of the earth, and they conspire with the earth. They yearn to the soil, and the soil yearns to them. They weigh down upon the poor relics consigned to their care, in a hideous partnership with the clay that is working its will upon them.

And the rank vegetation of the place assists this treachery. Orange-tinted lichen and rusty-red weather-stains alternate with the encroachments of moss and weeds in reducing each separate protruding slab into conformity with what is about it and beneath it. This churchyard, whose stone and clay so cunningly intermingle, is in an intimate sense the very navel and centre of the village. Above it rises the tall perpendicular tower of St. Catharine's church; and beyond it, on the further side of a strip of pasture, a stagnant pond, and a solitary sycamore, stands the farm that is locally named "the Priory." This house, the most imposing of all in the village except the Manor, has as its immediate background the umbrageous conical eminence where the Holy Rood was found. It is a place adapted to modern usage from a noble fragment of monastic ruin. Here, in mediæval days, rose a rich Cistercian abbey, to which, doubtless, the pyramidal mount, in the background, offered a store of consecrated legends.

North of the churchyard, beyond the main village street with its formal town-like compactness, the ground slopes imperceptibly up, past a few enclosed cottage-orchards, to where, embosomed in gracious trees and Italianated gardens, stands the pride and glory of Nevilton, its stately Elizabethan house.

This house, founded in the reign of Henry VIII, synchronized in its foundation with the overthrow of the Cistercian Order, and was constructed entirely of Leonian stone, removed for the purpose of building it from the scene of the Priory's destruction. Twice over, then, in their human history, since they left the entrails of that brooding monster over which the Nevilton people see the sun set each day, had these carved pieces of sandstone contributed to the pride of the rulers of men.

Their first use had not been attended with an altogether propitious destiny. How far their present use will prove of happier omen remains a secret of the adamantine Fates. The imaginary weaving of events, upon which we are just now engaged, may perhaps serve, as certain liturgical formulæ of propitiation served in former days, as a means of averting the wrath of the Eumenides. For though made use of again and again for fair and pious purposes, something of the old heathen malignity of the Druid hill still seems to hang about the stone it yields; and over the substance of that stone's destiny the two Mythologies still struggle; Power and Sacrifice dividing the living and the dead.

CHAPTER II. NEVILTON

UNTIL WITHIN SOME twenty years of the date with which we are now concerned, the distinguished family who originally received the monastic estates from the royal despot had held them intact and unassailed. By an evil chance however, the property had extended itself, during the eighteenth century, so as to include the larger portion of Leo's Hill; and since that day its possession had been attended by misfortune. The ancient aboriginal fortress proved as fatal to its modern invaders as it had proved in remoter times to Roman, Saxon and Norman.

A fanciful imagination might indeed have amused itself with the curious dream, that some weird Druidic curse had been laid upon that grass-grown island of yellow rock, bringing disaster and eclipse to all who meddled with it. Such an imagination would have been able to fortify its fancy by recalling the suggestive fact that at the bottom of the large woodland pond, indicated in this narrative under the name of Auber Lake, was discovered, not many years before, an immense slab of Leonian stone, inscribed with symbols baffling interpretation, but suggesting, to one antiquarian mind at least, a hint of prehistoric Devil-Worship. However this may be, it is certain that the family of Seldom found themselves finally faced with the alternative of selling the place they loved or of seeing it lapse under their hands into confusion and neglect. Of these evil alternatives they chose the former; and thus the estates, properties, royalties, and appurtenances, of the historic Manor of Nevilton fell into the hands of a clever financier from Lombard Street.

The family of Mr. Mortimer Romer had never at any time bowed its knee in kings' houses. Nor were its religious antecedents marked by orthodox reputation. Mr. Romer was indeed in every sense of the word a "self-made man." But though neither Christian nor Jew, — for his grandfather, the fishmonger of Soho, had been of the Unitarian persuasion — it cannot be denied that he possessed the art of making himself thoroughly respected by both the baptized and the circumcised. He indeed pursued his main purpose, which was the acquiring of power, with an unscrupulousness worthy of a Roman Emperor. Possibly it was this Roman tenacity in him, combined with his heathen indifference to current theology, which propitiated the avenging deities of Leo's Hill. So far at any rate he had been eminently successful in his speculations. He had secured complete possession of every quarry on the formidable eminence; and the company of which he was both director and president was pursuing its activities in a hundred new directions. It had, in the few last years, gone so far as to begin certain engineering assaults upon those remote portions of the ancient escarpments that had been left untouched since the legions of Claudius Cæsar encamped under their protection.

The bulk of Mr. Romer's stone-works were on the Hill itself; but others, intended for the more delicate finishing touches, were situated in a convenient spot close to Nevilton Station. Out of these sheds and yards, built along the railway-track, arose, from morning to night, the monotonous, not unpleasing, murmur of wheels and saws and grindstones. The contrast between these sounds and the sylvan quietness of the vicarage garden, which sloped down towards them, was one of the most significant indications of the clash of the Two Mythologies in this place. The priest meditating among his roses upon the vanity of all but "heavenly habitations" might have been in danger of being too obtrusively reminded of the pride of the houses that are very definitely “made with hands.” Perhaps this was one of the reasons why the present incumbent of Nevilton had preferred a more undisturbed retreat.

The general manager of Mortimer Romer’s quarries was a certain Mr. Lickwit, who served also as his confidential adviser in many other spheres.

The works at Nevilton Station were left to the superintendence of two brothers named Andersen, skilled stone-cutters, sons of the famous Gideon Andersen known to architects all over the kingdom for his designs in Leonian stone. Both Gideon and his wife Naomi were buried in Nevilton churchyard, and the brothers were condemned in the village as persons of an almost scandalous piety because of their innocent habit of lingering on warm summer evenings over their parents’ grave. They lived together, these two, as lodgers with the station-master, in a newly built cottage close to their work. Their social position in the place was a curious and anomalous one. Their father’s reputation as a sculptor had brought him into touch with every grade of society; and the woman who became his wife was by birth what is usually termed a lady. Gideon himself had been a rough and gross fellow; and after his wife’s death had hastened to take his sons away from school and apprentice them to his own trade. They were in many respects a noteworthy pair, though scarcely favourites, either with their fellow-workmen or their manager.

James Andersen, the elder by some ten years, was of a morose, reserved temper, and though a capable workman never seemed happy in the work-shop. Luke, on the contrary, possessed a peculiarly sunny and serene spirit.

They were both striking in appearance. The younger approximated to that conventional type of beauty which is popularly known as being “like a Greek god.” The elder, tall, swarthy, and sinister, suggested rather the image of some gloomy idol carved on the wall of an Assyrian temple. What, however, was much more remarkable than their appearance was their devoted attachment to one another. They lived, worked, ate, drank, walked and slept together. It was impossible to separate them. Had Mr. Lickwit dismissed James, Luke would immediately have thrown down his tools. Had Luke been the banished one, James would have followed him into exile.

It had fallen to Mr. Romer, some seven years before our narrative begins, to appoint a new vicar to Nevilton; and he had appointed one of such fierce ascetic zeal and such pronounced socialistic sympathies, that he had done nothing since but vehemently and bitterly repent his choice.

The Promoter of Companies had been betrayed into this blunder by the impulse of revengeful caprice, the only impulse in his otherwise well-balanced nature that might be termed dangerous to himself.

He had quarrelled with the bishop over some matter connected with his stone-works; and in order to cause this distinguished prelate grief and annoyance he had looked about for someone to honour who was under the episcopal ban. The bishop, however, was of so discreet a temper and so popular in his diocese that the only rebel to his authority that could be discovered was one of the curates of a church at Yeoborough who had insisted upon preaching the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation.

The matter would probably have lapsed into quiescence, save for the crafty interference in the local newspaper of a group of aggressive Nonconformists, who took this opportunity of sowing desirable dissension between the higher and lower orders of the hated Establishment.

Mr. Romer, who, like Gallio, cared for none of these things, and was at heart a good deal worse than a Nonconformist, seized upon the chance offered by the death of Nevilton’s vicar; and installed as his successor this rebel to ecclesiastical authority.

Once installed, however, the Rev. Hugh Clavering speedily came to an understanding with his bishop; compromised on the matter of preaching Transubstantiation; and apparently was allowed to go on believing in it.

And it was then that the Promoter of Companies learned for the first time how much easier it is to make a priest than to unmake him. For situation after situation arose in which the master of the Leonian quarries found himself confronted by an alien Power — a Power that refused to worship Sandstone. Before this rupture, however, the young Priest had persuaded Mr. Romer to let him live in the Old Vicarage, a small but cheerful house just opposite the church door. The orthodox vicarage, a rambling Early Victorian structure standing in its own grounds at the end of the West Drive, was let — once more at the Priest's suggestion — to the last living representatives of the dispossessed Seldoms.

It indicated a good deal of spirit on the part of Valentia Seldom and her daughter thus to return to the home of their ancestors.

Mrs. Seldom was a cousin of the man who had sold the estate. Her daughter Vennie, brought up in a school at Florence, had never seen Nevilton, and it was with the idea of taking advantage for the girl's sake of their old prestige in that corner of England that Valentia accepted Mr. Romer's offer and became the vicarage tenant.

The quarry-owner himself was influenced in carrying through this affair, by his anxiety, for the sake of *his* daughter, to secure a firmer footing with the aristocracy of the neighborhood. Here again, however, he was destined to disappointment: for once in possession of her twenty years' lease the old lady showed not the least intention of letting herself be used as a social stepping-stone.

She had, indeed, under her own roof, cause enough for preoccupation and concern.

Her daughter — a little ghost-moth of a girl, of fragile delicacy — seemed entirely devoid of that mysterious magnetic attraction which lures to the side of most virgins the devotion of the opposite sex. She appeared perfectly content to remain forever in her tender maidenhood, and refused to exert the slightest effort to be "nice" to the charming young people her mother threw in her way. She belonged to that class of young girls who seem to be set apart by nature for other purposes than those of the propagation of the race.

Her wistful spirit, shrinking into itself like the leaves of a sensitive plant at the least approach of a rough hand, responded only to one passionate impulse, the impulse of religion.

She grew indeed so estranged from the normal world, that it was not only Valentia who concealed the thought that when she left the earth the ancient race of Seldoms would leave it with her.

Nor was it only in regard to her child's religious obsession that the lady suffered. She had flatly refused to let her enter into anything but the coldest relations with "those dreadful people at the House"; and it was with a peculiar shock of dismay that she found that the girl was not literally obeying her. It was not, however, to the Romers themselves that Vennie made her shy overtures, but to a luckless little relative of that family now domiciled with them as companion to Gladys Romer.

This young dependent, reputed in the village to be of Italian origin, struck the gentle heart of the last of the Seldoms with indescribable pity. She could not altogether define the impression the girl produced upon her, but it was a singularly oppressive one, and it vexed and troubled her.

The situation was wretchedly complicated. It was extremely difficult to get a word with the little companion without encountering Gladys; and any approach to intimacy with “the Romer girl” would have meant an impossible scene with Mrs. Seldom. Nor was it a light undertaking, in such hurried interviews as she did manage to secure, to induce the child to drop her reserve. She would fix her great brown foreign eyes — her name was Lacrima Traffio — on Vennie’s face, and make curious little helpless gestures with her hands when questions were asked her; but speak of herself she would not.

It was clear she was absolutely dependent on her cousins. Vennie gathered as much as that, as she once talked with her under the church wall, when Gladys was chatting with the vicar. A reference to her own people had nearly resulted in an outburst of tears. Vennie had had to be content with a broken whisper: “We come from Rapallo — they are all dead.” There was nothing, it appeared, that could be added to this.

It was perhaps a little inconsistent in the old lady to be so resolute against her daughter’s overtures to Lacrima, as she herself had no hesitation in making a sort of protégé of another of Mr. Romer’s tribe.

This was an eccentric middle-aged bachelor who had drifted into the place soon after the new-comer’s arrival and had established himself in a dilapidated cottage on the outskirts of the Auber woods.

Remotely related to Mrs. Romer, he had in some way become dependent on her husband, whose financial advantage over him was not, it seemed, as time went on, exerted in a very considerate manner.

Maurice Quincunx, for such was his unusual name, was an illegitimate descendant of one of the most historic houses in the neighborhood, but both his poverty and his opinions caused him to live what was practically the life of a hermit, and made him shrink away, even more nervously than little Vennie Seldom, from any intercourse with his equals.

The present possessors of his queer ancient name were now the Lords of Glastonbury, and had probably never so much as heard of Maurice's existence.

He would come by stealth to pay Valentia visits, preferring the evening hours when in the summer she used to sit with her work, on a terrace overlooking a sloping orchard, and watch Vennie water her roses.

The vicarage terrace was a place of extraordinary quiet and peace, eminently adapted to the low-voiced, nervous ramblings of a recluse of Maurice Quincunx's timidity.

The old lady by degrees quite won this eccentric's heart; and the queerly assorted friends would pace up and down for hours in the cool of the evening talking of things in no way connected either with Mr. Romer or the Church — the two subjects about which Mr. Quincunx held dangerously strong views.

Apart from this quaint outcast and the youthful parson, Mrs. Seldom's only other intimate in the place was a certain John Francis Taxater, a gentleman of independent means, living by himself with an old housekeeper in a cottage called The Gables, situated about half-way between the vicarage and the village.

Mr. Taxater was a Catholic and also a philosopher; these two peculiarities affording the solution to what otherwise would have been an insoluble psychic riddle. Even as it was, Mr. Taxater's mind was of so subtle and complicated an order, that he was at once the attraction and the despair of all the religious thinkers of that epoch. For it must be understood that though quietly resident under the shadow of Nevilton Mount, the least essay from Mr. Taxater's pen was eagerly perused by persons interested in religious controversy in all the countries of Europe.

He wrote for philosophical journals in London, Paris, Rome and New York; and there often appeared at The Gables most surprising visitors from Germany and Italy and Spain.

He had a powerful following among the more subtle-minded of the Catholics of England; and was highly respected by important personages in the social, as well as the literary circles, of Catholic society.

The profundity of his mind may be gauged from the fact that he was able to steer his way successfully through the perilous reefs of “modernistic” discussion, without either committing himself to heretical doctrine or being accused of reactionary ultramontanism.

Mr. Taxater’s written works were, however, but a trifling portion of his personality. His intellectual interests were as rich and varied as those of some great humanist of the Italian Renaissance, and his personal habits were as involved and original as his thoughts were complicated and deep.

He was perpetually engaged in converting the philosopher in him to Catholicism, and the Catholic in him to philosophy — yet he never permitted either of these obsessions to interfere with his enjoyment of life.

Luke Andersen, who was perhaps of all the inhabitants of Nevilton most conscious of the drama played around him, used to maintain that it was impossible to tell in the last resort whether Mr. Taxater’s place was with the adherents of Christ or with the adherents of Anti-Christ. Like his prototype, the evasive Erasmus, he seemed able to be on both sides at the same time.

Perhaps it was a secret consciousness of the singular position of Nevilton, planted, as it were, between two streams of opposing legend, that originally led Mr. Taxater to take up his abode in so secluded a spot.

It is impossible to tell. In this as in all other transactions of his life he combined an unworldly simplicity with a Machiavellian astuteness. If the Day of Judgment revealed him as being on the side of the angels, it might also reveal him as having exercised, in the microcosmic Nevilton drama, as well as in his wider sphere, one of the most subtle influences against the Powers of Darkness that those Powers ever encountered in their invisible activity.

At the moment when the present narrative takes up the woven threads of these various persons' lives there seemed every prospect that in external nature at least there was going to be an auspicious and halcyon season. June had opened with abnormal pleasantness. Exquisite odours were in the air, wafted from woods and fields and gardens. White dust, alternating with tender spots of coolness where the shadows of trees fell, lent the roads in the vicinity that leisured gala-day expectancy which one notes in the roads of France and Spain, but which is so rare in England.

It seemed almost as though the damp sub-soil of the place had relaxed its malign influence; as though the yellow clay in the churchyard had ceased its calling for victims; and as though the brooding monster in the sunset, from which every day half the men of the village returned with their spades and picks, had put aside, as irrelevant to a new and kindlier epoch, its ancient hostility to the Christian dwellers in that quiet valley.

CHAPTER III. OLYMPIAN CONSPIRACY

THE DEPTHS OF Mr. Romer’s mind, as he paced up and down the Leonian pavement under the east front of his house on one of the early days of this propitious June, were seething with predatory projects. The last of the independent quarries on the Hill had just fallen into his hands after a legal process of more than usual chicanery, conducted in person by the invaluable Mr. Lickwit.

He was now occupied in pushing through Parliament a bill for the reduction of railway freight charges, so that the expense of carrying his stone to its various destinations might be materially reduced. But it was not only of financial power that he thought as the smell of the roses from the sun-baked walls floated in upon him across the garden.

The man’s commercial preoccupations had not by any means, as so often happens, led to the atrophy of his more personal instincts.

His erotic appetite, for instance, remained as insatiable as ever. Age did not dull, nor finance wither, that primordial craving. The aphrodisiac instincts in Mortimer Romer were, however, much less simple than might be supposed.

In this hyper-sensual region he had more claim to artistic subtlety than his enemies realized. He rarely allowed himself the direct expansion of frank and downright lasciviousness. His little pleasures were indirect, elaborate, far-fetched.

He afforded really the interesting spectacle of one whose mind was normal, energetic, dynamic; but whose senses were slow, complicated, fastidious. He was a formidable forward-marching machine, with a heart of elaborate perversity. He was a thick-skinned philistine with the sensuality of a sybarite.

I do not mean to imply that there was any lack of rapacity in the senses of Mr. Romer. His senses were indeed unfathomable in their devouring depths. But they were liable to fantastic caprices. They were not the simple animal senses of a Gothic barbarian. They assumed imperial contortions.

The main eccentricity of the erotic tendencies of this remarkable man lay in the elaborate pleasure he derived from his sense of power. The actual lure of the flesh had little attraction for him. What pleased him was a slow tightening of his grip upon people — upon their wills, their freedom, their personality.

Any impression a person might make upon Mr. Romer's senses was at once transformed into a desire to have that person absolutely at his mercy. The thought that he held such a one reduced to complete spiritual helplessness alone satisfied him.

The first time he had encountered Lacrima Traffio he had been struck by her appealing eyes, her fragile figure, her frightened gestures. Deep in his perverted heart he had desired her; but his desire, under the psychic law I have endeavoured to explain, quickly resolved itself into a resolution to take possession of her, not as his mistress, but as his slave.

Nor did the subtle elaboration of his perversity stop there. It were easy and superficial to dominate in his own person so helpless a dependent. What was less easy was to reduce her to submission to the despotic caprices of his daughter, a girl only a few years older than herself.

The enjoyment of a sense of vicarious power was a satisfaction curiously provocative to his predatory craving. Nor did subtlety of the situation stop at that point. It was not only necessary that the girl who attracted him should be at his daughter's mercy; it was necessary that his daughter should not be unconscious of the rôle she herself played. It was necessary that they should be in a sense confederates in this game of cat-and-mouse.

As Mr. Romer paced the terrace of his imposing mansion a yet profounder triumph presented itself in the recesses of his imperial nature.

He had lately introduced into his "entourage" a certain brother-in-law of his, the widower of his sister, a man named John Goring. This individual was of a much simpler, grosser type than the recondite quarry-owner. He was, indeed, no more than a narrow-minded, insolent, avaricious animal. He lacked even the superficial gentility of his formidable relation. Nor had his concentrated but unintelligent avarice brought him, so far, any great wealth. He still remained, in spite of Romer's help, what he had been born, an English farmer of unpropitiating manners and supernal greed.

The Promoter of Companies was, however, not unaware, any more than was Augustus Cæsar, of the advantage accruing to a despot from the possession of devoted, if unattractive, tools; and contemptuously risking the shock to his social prestige of such an apparition in the neighborhood, he had secured Mr. Goring as a permanent tenant of the largest farm on his estate. This was no other than the Priory Farm, with its gentle monastic memories. What the last Prior of Nevilton would have thought could he have left his grave under St. Catharine's altar and reappeared among his dove-cotes it is distressing to surmise. He would doubtless have drawn from the sight of John Goring a profoundly edifying moral as to the results of royal interference with Christ's Holy Church. Nor is it likely that an encounter with Mr. Romer himself would have caused less astonishment to his mediæval spirit. He would, indeed, have recognized that what is now called Progress is no mere scientific phrase; but a most devastating reality. He would have found that Nevilton had "progressed" very far. He would have believed that the queer stone-devils that his monks had carved, half emerging from the eaves of the church-roof, had got quite loose and gone abroad among men. Had he probed, in the manner of clairvoyant saints, the troubled recesses of Mr. Romer's mind as that gentleman inhaled the sweet noon air, he would have cried aloud his indignation and made the sign of the cross as if over a mortuary of spiritual decomposition.

For as the mid-day sun of that hot June morning culminated, and the clear hard shadows fell, sharp and thin, upon the orange-tinted pavement, it entered Mr. Romer's head that he might make a more personal use of his farmer-brother than had until now been possible.

With this idea in his brain he entered the house and sought his wife in her accustomed place at the corner of the large reception-hall. He sat down forthright by the side of her mahogany table and lit a cigar. As Mr. Romer was the species of male animal that might be written down in the guidebook of some Martian visitor as "the cigar-smoking variety" his wife would have taken her place among "the sedentary knitting ones."

She was a large, fair, plump, woman, as smooth and pallid as her husband was grizzled and ruddy. Her obsequious deference to her lord's views was only surpassed by her lethargic animal indolence. She was like a great, tame, overgrown, white-skinned Puma. Her eyes had the greenish tint of feline eyes, and something of their daylight contraction. Her use of spectacles did not modify this tendency, but rather increased it; for the effect of the round glass orbs pushed up upon her forehead was to enhance the malicious gleam of the little narrow-lidded slits that peered out beneath them.

It may be imagined with what weary and ironical detachment the solemn historic portraits of the ancient Seldoms — for the pictures and furniture had been sold with the house — looked out from their gilded frames upon these ambiguous intruders. But neither husband nor wife felt the least touch of "compunctuous visiting" as they made themselves at ease under that immense contempt.

"I have been thinking," said Mr. Romer, puffing a thick cloud of defiant smoke into the air, so that it went sailing up to the very feet of a delicate Reynolds portrait; "I have been thinking that I am really quite unjustified in going on with that allowance to Quincunx. He ought to realize that he has completely exhausted the money your aunt left him. He ought to face the situation, instead of quietly accepting our gift as if it were his right. And they tell me he does not even keep a civil tongue in his head. Lickwit was only complaining the other day about his tampering with our workmen. He has been going about for some time with those damned Andersen fellows, and no doubt encouraging them in their confounded impertinence.

"I don't like the man, my dear; — that is the plain truth. I have never liked him; and he has certainly never even attempted to conceal his dislike of me."

"He is very polite to your face, Mortimer," murmured the lady.

"Exactly," Mr. Romer rejoined, "to my face he is more than polite. He is obsequious; he is cringing. But behind my back — damn him! — the rascal is a rattlesnake."

"Well, dear, no doubt it has all worked out for the best"; purred the plump woman, softly counting the threads of her knitting. "You were in need of Aunt's money at the time — in great need of it."

"I know I was," replied the Promoter of Companies, "I know I was; and he knows I was. That is why I have been giving him six per cent on what he lent me. But the fellow has had more than that. He has had more by this time than the whole original sum; and I tell you, Susan, it's got to end; — it's got to end here, now, and forever!"

Mr. Romer's cigar-smoke had now floated up above the feet of the Reynolds Portrait and was invading its gentle and melancholy face. It was a portrait of a young girl in the court-dress of the time, but with such pathetic nun-like features that it was clear that little Vennie was not the only one of her race to have grown weary of this rough world.

"It is a providential thing, dear," whispered the knitting female, "that there were no horrid documents drawn up about that money. Maurice cannot impose upon us in that way."

"He is doing worse," answered her husband. "He is imposing upon us on the strength of a disgusting sort of sickly sentiment. He has had all his money back and more; and he knows he has. But he wants to go on living on my money while he abuses me on every occasion. Do you know, he even preaches in that confounded social meeting? I shall have that affair put a stop to, one of these days. It is only an excuse for spreading dissatisfaction in the village. Lickwit has complained to me about it more than once. He says that Socialistic scoundrel Wone is simply using the meeting to canvass for his election. You know he is going to stand, in place of Sir Herbert Ratcliffe? What the Liberal Party is doing I cannot conceive — pandering to these slimy windbags! And your blessed relation backs him up. The thing is monstrous, outrageous! Here am I, allowing this fellow a hundred a year to live in idleness; and he is plotting against me at my very doorstep."

"Perhaps he does not know that the Conservative member is going to retire in your favour," insinuated the lady.

"Know? Of course he knows! All the village knows. All the country knows. You can never hide things of that kind. He knows, and he is deliberately working against me."

"It would be nice if he could get a place as a clerk," suggested Mr. Quincunx's relative, pensively. "It certainly does not seem fair that you, who work so hard for the money you make, should support him in complete idleness."

Mr. Romer looked at her thoughtfully, knocking the ashes from his cigar. "I believe you have hit it there, my dear," he said. Then he smiled in a manner peculiarly malignant. "Yes, it would be very nice if he could get a place as a clerk — a place where he would have plenty of simple office work — a place where he would be kept to his desk, and not allowed to roam the country corrupting honest workmen. Yes, you are quite right, Susan; a clerk's place is what this Quincunx wants. And, by Heaven, what he shall have! I'll bring the affair to a head at once. I'll put it to him that your aunt's money is at an end, and that I have already paid him back in full all that he lent me. I'll put it to him that he is now in my debt. In fact, that he is now entirely dependent on me to the tune of a hundred a year. And I'll explain to him that he must either go out into the world and shift for himself, as better men than he have had to do, or enter Lickwit's office, either in Yeoborough or on the Hill."

"He will enter the office, Mortimer," murmured the lady; "he will enter the office. Maurice is not the man to emigrate, or do anything of that kind. Besides he has a reason" — here her voice became so extremely mellifluous that it might almost be said to have liquefied— "to stay in Nevilton."

"What's this?" cried Romer, getting up and throwing his cigar out of the window. "You don't mean to tell me — eh? — that this scarecrow is in love with Gladys?"

The lady purred softly and replaced her spectacles. "Oh dear no! What an idea! Oh certainly, certainly not! But Gladys, you know, is not the only girl in Nevilton."

"Who the devil is it then? Not Vennie Seldom, surely?"

"Look nearer, Mortimer, look nearer"; murmured the lady with sibilant sweetness.

"Not Lacrima! You don't mean to say—"

"Why, dear, you needn't be so surprised. You look more angry than if it had been Gladys herself. Yes, of course it is Lacrima. Hadn't you observed it? But you dear men are so stupid, aren't you, in these things?"

Mrs. Romer rubbed one white hand over the other; and beamed upon her husband through her spectacles.

Mr. Romer frowned. "But the Traffio girl is so, so — you know what I mean."

"So quiet and unimpressionable. Ah! my dear, it is just these quiet girls who are the very ones to be enjoying themselves on the sly."

"How far has this thing gone, Susan?"

"Oh you needn't get excited, Mortimer. It has not really 'gone' anywhere. It has hardly begun. In fact I have not the least authority for saying that she cares for him at all. I think she does a little, though. I *think* she does. But one never can tell. I can, however, give you my word that he cares for her. And that is what we were talking about, weren't we?"

"I shall pack him off to my office in London," said Mr. Romer.

"He wouldn't go, my dear. I tell you he wouldn't go."

"But he can't live on nothing."

"He can. He will. Sooner than leave Nevilton Maurice would eat grass. He would become lay-reader or something. He would sponge on Mrs. Seldom."

"Well, then he shall walk to Yeoborough and back every day. That will cool his blood for him."

"That will do him a great deal of good, dear; a great deal of good. Auntie always used to say that Maurice ought to take more exercise."

"Lickwit will exercise him! Make no mistake about that."

"How you do look round you, dear, in all these things! How impossible it is for anyone to fool *you*, Mortimer!"

As Mrs. Romer uttered these words she glanced up at the Reynolds portrait above their heads, as if half-suspecting that such fawning flattery would bring down the mockery of the little Lady-in-Waiting.

"I can't help thinking Lacrima would make a very good wife to some hard-working sensible man," Mr. Romer remarked.

His lady looked a little puzzled. "It would be difficult to find so suitable a companion for Gladys," she said.

"Oh, of course I don't mean till Gladys is married," said the quarry-owner quickly. "By the way, when *is* she going to accept that young fool of an Ilminster?"

"All in good time, my dear, all in good time," purred his wife. "He has not proposed to her yet."

"It's very curious," remarked Mr. Romer pensively, "that a young man of such high connections should *wish* to marry our daughter."

"What things you say, Mortimer! Isn't Gladys going to inherit all this property? Don't you suppose that a younger son of Lord Tintinhull would jump at the idea of being master of this house?"

"He won't be master of it while *I* live," said Mr. Romer grimly.

"In my opinion he never will be"; added the lady. "I don't think Gladys really intends to accept him."

"She'll marry somebody, I hope?" said the master sharply.

"O yes she'll marry, soon enough. Only it'll be a cleverer man, and a richer man, than young Ilminster."

"Have you any other pleasant little romance to fling at me?"

"O no. But I know what our dear Gladys is. I know what she is looking out for."

"When she does marry," said Mr. Romer, "we shall have to think seriously what is to become of Lacrima. Look here, my dear," — it was wonderful, the pleasant ejaculatory manner in which this flash of inspiration was thrown out,— "why not marry her to John? She would be just the person for a farmer's wife."

Mrs. Romer, to do her justice, showed signs of being a little shocked at this proposal.

"But John," — she stammered;— "John — is not — exactly — a marrying person, is he?"

"He is — what I wish him to be"; was her husband's haughty answer.

"Oh well, of course, dear, it's as you think best. Certainly" — the good woman could not resist this little thrust— "it's John's only chance of marrying a lady. For Lacrima is *that* — with all her faults."

"I shall talk to John about it"; said the Promoter of Companies. Feline thing though she was, Susan Romer could not refrain from certain inward qualms when she thought of the fragile hyper-sensitive Italian in the embraces of John Goring. What on earth set her husband dreaming of such a thing? But he was subject to strange caprices now and then; and it was more dangerous to balk him in these things than in his most elaborate financial plots. She had found that out already. So, on the present occasion, she made no further remark, than a reiterated— "How you do look all round you, Mortimer! It is not easy for anyone to fool *you*."

She rose from her seat and collected her knitting. “I must go and see where Gladys is,” she said.

Mr. Romer followed her to the door, and went out again upon the terrace. The little nun-like Lady-in-Waiting looked steadily out across the room, her pinched attenuated features expressing nothing but patient weariness of all the ways of this mortal world.

CHAPTER IV. REPRISALS FROM BELOW

IT WAS APPROACHING the moment consecrated to the close of the day’s labour in the stone-works by Nevilton railway-station. The sky was cloudless; the air windless. It was one of those magical arrests of the gliding feet of time, which afternoons in June sometimes bring with them, holding back, as it were, all living processes of life, in sweet and lingering suspense. The steel tracks of the railway-line glittered in the sun. In the fields, that sloped away beyond them, the browsing cattle wore that unruffled air of abysmal indifference, which seems to make one day in their sight to be as a thousand years. To these placid earth-children, drawing the centuries together in solemn continuity, the tribes of men and their turbulent drama were but as vapours that came and went. The high elms in the hedges had already assumed that dark monotonous foliage which gives to their patient stillness on such a day an atmosphere of monumental expectancy. A flock of newly-sheared sheep, clean and shining in the hot sun, drifted in crowded procession down the narrow road, leaving a cloud of white dust behind them that remained stationary in the air long after they had passed. In the open stone-yard close to the road the brothers Andersen were working together, chipping and hammering with bare arms at an enormous Leonian slab, carving its edges into delicate mouldings. The younger of the two wore no hat, and his closely clipped fair curls and loose shirt open at the throat, lent him, as he moved about his work with easy gestures, a grace and charm well adapted to that auspicious hour.

A more sombre form by his brother’s side, his broad brimmed hat low down over his forehead, the elder Andersen went on with his carving, in imperturbable morose absorption.

Watching them with languid interest, their arms linked together, stood the figures of two girls. The yellow dust from the sandstone rose intermittently into the air, mingling with the white dust from the road and settling, as it sank earthward, upon the leaves of the yet unbudded knapweed and scabious which grew in the thin dusty grass.

Between Gladys and her cousin — for the girls had wandered as far as this in search of distraction after their lazy tea on the great lawn — a curious contrast was now displayed.

Gladys, with slow provocative interest, was intent on every movement of Luke's graceful figure. Lacrima's attention wandered wistfully away, to the cattle and the orchards, and then to the sheep, which now were being penned in a low line of spacious railway trucks.

Luke himself was by no means unaware of the condescending interest of his master's daughter. He paused in his work once or twice. He turned up his shirt-sleeves still higher. He bent down, to blow away the dust from the moulding he had made. Something very like a flash of amorous admiration passed across his blue eyes as he permitted them slyly to wander from Gladys' head to her waist, and from her waist to her shoes. She certainly was an alluring figure as she stood there in her thin white dress. The hand which pulled her skirt away from the dust showed as soft and warm as if it were pleading for a caress, and the rounded contours of her bosom looked as if they had ripened with the early peaches, under the walls of her stately garden. She presently unlinked her arm from her companion's, and sliding it softly round Lacrima's side drew the girl close against her. As she did this she permitted a slow amorous glance of deliberate tantalization to play upon the young carver. How well Luke Andersen knew that especial device of maidens when they are together — that way they have of making their playful, innocent caresses such a teasing incentive! And Luke knew well how to answer all this. Nothing could have surpassed in subtle diplomacy the manner in which he responded, without responding, to the amorous girl's overtures. He let her realize that he himself understood precisely the limits of the situation; that she was perfectly at liberty to enter a mock-flirtation with him, without the remotest risk of any "faux pas" on his part spoiling the delicacy of their relations.

What was indeed obvious to her, without the necessity of any such unspoken protestation, was the fact that he found her eminently desirable. Nor did her pride as "the girl up at the house" quarrel with her vanity as the simple object of Luke's admiration. She wanted him to desire her as a girl; — to desire her to madness. And then she wanted to flout him, with her pretensions as a lady. This particular occasion was by no means the first time she had drifted casually down the vicarage hill and lingered beside the stone-cutters. It was, however, an epoch in their curious relations. For the first time since she had been attracted to him, she deliberately moved close up to the stone he worked at, and entered into conversation. While this occurred, Lacrima, released from her rôle as the accomplice of amorous teasing, wandered away, picking listlessly the first red poppies of the year, which though less flaunting in their bold splendour than those of her childhood's memories, were at least the same immortal classical flowers.

As she bent down in this assuaging pastime, letting her thoughts wander so far from Nevilton and its tyrants, Lacrima became suddenly conscious that James Andersen had laid down his tools, resumed his coat, and was standing by her side.

"A beautiful evening, Miss"; he said respectfully, holding his hat in his hand and regarding her with grave gentleness.

“Yes, isn’t it?” she answered at once; and then was silent; while a sigh she could not suppress rose from the depths of her heart. For her thoughts reverted to another fair evening, in the days when England was no more than a name; and a sudden overpowering longing for kind voices, and the shadows of olives on warm hill-sides, rushed, like a wave, over her.

“This must be near the Angelus-hour,” she thought; and somehow the dark grave eyes of the man beside her and his swarthy complexion made her think of those familiar forms that used to pass driving their goats before them up the rocky paths of the Apennine range.

“You are unhappy, Miss,” said James in a low voice; and these words, the only ones of genuine personal tenderness, except for poor Maurice’s, that had struck her sense for the last twelve months, brought tears to her eyes. Vennie Seldom had spoken kindly to her; but — God knows — there is a difference between the kindness even of the gentlest saint and this direct spontaneous outflow of one heart to another. She smiled; a little mournful smile.

“Yes; I was thinking of my own country,” she murmured.

“You are an Italian, Miss; I know it”; continued Andersen, instinctively leading her further away from the two golden heads that now were bending so close together over the Leonian stone.

“I often think of Italy,” he went on; “I think I should be at home in Italy. I love everything I hear of it, everything I read of it. It comes from my mother, this feeling. She was a lady, you know Miss, as well born as any and with a passionate love of books. She used to read Dante in that little ‘Temple’ Series, which perhaps you have seen, with the Italian on one side and the English on the other. I never look at that book without thinking of her.”

"You have many books yourself, I expect, — Mr. — Andersen. You see I know your name." And Lacrima smiled, the first perfectly happy smile she had been betrayed into for many months.

"It is not a very nice name," said James, a little plaintively. "I wish I had a name like yours Miss — Traffio."

"Why, I think yours is quite as nice," she answered gravely. "It makes me think of the man who wrote the fairy stories."

James Andersen frowned, "I don't like fairy stories," he said almost gruffly. "They tease and fret me. I like Thomas Hardy's books. Do you know Thomas Hardy?" Lacrima made a little involuntary gesture of depreciation. As a matter of fact her reading, until very lately, had been as conventual as that of a young nun. Vennie Seldom or the demure Reynolds girl could not have been more innocent of the darker side of literature. Hardy's books she had seen in the hands of Gladys, and the association repelled her. Pathetically anxious to brush away this little cloud, she began hurriedly talking to her new friend of Italy; of its cities, its sea-coasts, its monasteries, its churches. James Andersen listened with reverential attention, every now and then asking a question which showed how deeply his mother's love of the classical country had sunk into his nature.

By this time they had wandered along the road as far as a little stone bridge with low parapets which crosses there a muddy Somersetshire stream. From this point the road rises quite steeply to the beginning of the vicarage garden. Leaning against the parapet of the little bridge, and looking back, they saw to their surprise that Gladys and Luke had not only not followed them but had completely disappeared.

The last of the unskilled workmen from the sheds, trailing up the road together laughing and chatting, turned when they passed, and gazed back, as our two companions were doing, at the work-shops they had left, acknowledging Lacrima’s gentle “good-night” with a rather shifty salutation. — This girl was after all only a dependent like themselves. — They had hardly gone many steps before they burst into a loud rough guffaw of rustic impertinence.

Lacrima struck the ground nervously with her parasol. “What has happened?” she asked; “where has Gladys gone?”

James Andersen shrugged his shoulders, “I expect they have wandered into the shed,” he rejoined, “to look at my brother’s work there.”

She glanced nervously up and down the road; gave a quaint little sigh and made an expressive gesture with her hands as if disclaiming all responsibility for her cousin’s doings. Then, quite suddenly, she smiled at Andersen with a delicious childish smile that transfigured her face.

“Well, I am glad I am not left alone at any rate,” she said.

“I have a presentiment,” the stone-cutter answered, “that this is not the last time you will be thrown upon my poor company.”

The girl blushed, and smiled confidingly. Her manner was the manner of a child, who has at last found a safe protector. Then all of a sudden she became very grave. “I hope,” she said, “that you are one of the people who are kind to Mr. Quincunx. He is a *great* friend of mine.”

Never had the melancholy intimation, that one could not hope to hold anything but the second place in a woman’s heart, been more tenderly or more directly conveyed!

James Andersen bowed his head.

“Mr. Quincunx has always been very kind to *me*,” he said, “and certainly, after what you say, I shall do all in my power to help him. But I can do very little. I believe Mrs. Seldom understands him better than anyone else.”

He had hardly finished speaking when the figures of two men made themselves visible opposite the back entrance of the vicarage. They were leisurely strolling down the road, and every now and then they would pause, as if the interest of their conversation was more than the interest of the way.

"Why! There *is* Mr. Quincunx," cried the Italian; and she made an instinctive movement as if to put a little further space between herself and her companion. "Who is that person with him?" she added.

"It looks like George Wone," answered the stone-cutter. "Yes, it is George; and he is talking as usual at the top of his voice. You'd suppose he wanted to be heard by all Nevilton."

Lacrima hesitated and looked very embarrassed. She evidently did not know whether to advance in the direction of the new-comers or to remain where she was. Andersen came to her rescue.

"Perhaps," said he, "it would be better if I went back and told Miss Romer you are waiting for her." Lacrima gave him a quick glance of responsive gratitude.

"O, that would be really kind of you, Mr. Andersen," she said.

The moment he had gone, however, she felt annoyed that she had let him go. It looked so odd, she thought, his leaving her so suddenly, directly Maurice came on the scene. Besides, what would Gladys say at this interruption of her pleasure? She would suppose she had done it out of pure spitefulness! The moments seemed very long to her as she waited at the little bridge, tracing indecipherable hieroglyphics in the dust with the end of her parasol. She kept her eyes steadily fixed on the tall retreating figure of the stone-cutter as he slouched with his long shambling stride towards the work-shop. The two men were not, however, really long in approaching. Maurice had seen her from the beginning, and his replies to Mr. Wone's oratory had grown proportionally brief.

When they reached her, the girl shook hands with Maurice and bowed rather coldly to Mr. Wone. That gentleman was not however in the least quelled or suppressed. It was one of his most marked characteristics to have absolutely no consciousness of season or situation. When less clever people would have wished the earth to swallow them up, Mr. Wone remained imperviously self-satisfied. Having exchanged greetings, Lacrima hastened to explain that she was waiting at this spot till Miss Romer should rejoin her. “Luke Andersen is showing her his work,” she said, “and James has gone to tell her I am waiting.”

Mr. Wone became voluble at this. “It is a shame to keep a young lady like yourself waiting in the middle of the road.” He turned to Mr. Quincunx. “We must not say all we think, must we? But begging this young lady’s pardon, it is just like the family. No consideration! No consideration for anyone! It is the same with his treatment of the poor. I am talking of Mr. Romer, you know, Miss. I would say the same thing to his face. Why is it that hard-working clever fellows, like these Andersens for instance, should do all the labour, and he get all the profits? It isn’t fair. It’s unjust. It’s an insult to God’s beautiful earth, which is free to all.” He paused to take breath, and looked to Maurice for confirmation of his words.

“You are quite right, Wone; you are quite right,” muttered the recluse in his beard, furtively glancing at Lacrima.

Mr. Wone continued his discourse, making large and eloquent allusion to the general relations in England between employer and employed, and implying plainly enough his full knowledge that at least one of his hearers belonged to the latter class. His air, as he spoke, betrayed a certain disordered fanaticism, quite genuine and deeply felt, but queerly mingled with an indescribable element of complacent self-conceit. Lacrima, in spite of considerable sympathy with much that he said, felt that there was, in the man himself, something so slipshod, so limp, so vague, and so patently vulgar, that both her respect for his sincerity and her interest in his opinions were reduced to nothing. Not only was he narrow-minded and ignorant; but there was also about him, in spite of the aggressive violence of his expressions, an odd sort of deprecatory, apologetic air, as though he were perpetually endeavouring to cajole his audience, by tacit references to his deferential respect for them. There was indeed more than a little in him of the sleek unction of the nonconformist preacher; and one could well understand how he might combine, precisely as Mr. Lickwit suspected, the divergent functions of the politician and the evangelist.

"I tell you," he was saying, "the country will not long put up with this sort of thing. There is a movement, a tendency, a volcanic upheaval, a stirring of waters, which these plutocrats do not realize. There is a surging up from the depths of — of—" He paused for a word.

"Of mud," murmured Mr. Quincunx.

" — Of righteous revolt against these atrocious inequalities! The working people are asleep no longer. They're roused. The movement's begun. The thunder's gathering on the horizon. The armies of the exploited are feeling the impulse of their own strength, of that noble, that splendid anger, which, when it is conceived, will bring forth — will bring forth—"

"Damnation," murmured Mr. Quincunx.

The three figures as they stood, thus consorted, on the little stone bridge, made up a dramatic group. The sinking sun threw their shadows in long wavering lines upon the white road, distorting them to so grotesque a length that they nearly reached the open gates of the station.

Human shadows! What a queer half-mocking commentary they make upon the vanity of our passionate excitements, roused by anything, quieted by nothing, as the world moves round!

Lacrima, in her shadow, was not beautiful at all. She was an elongated wisp of darkness. The beard of Mr. Quincunx looked as if it belonged to a mammoth goat, and the neck of Mr. Wone seemed to support, not a human cranium at all, but a round, wagging mushroom.

The hushed fields on each side of the way began to assume that magical softness which renders them, at such an hour, insubstantial, unreal, remote, transformed. One felt as though the earth might indeed be worthy of better destinies than those that traced their fantastic trails up and down its peaceful surface. Something deeply withheld, seemed as though it only needed the coming of one god-like spirit to set it free forever, and, with it, all the troubled hearts of men. It was one of those moments which, whether the participants in them recognize them or not, at the actual time, are bound to recur, long afterwards, to their memory.

Lacrima, half-listening to Mr. Wone, kept her head anxiously turned in the direction of the sheds, into one of which she had observed James Andersen enter.

Maurice Quincunx, his mood clogged and clotted by jealousy, watched her with great melancholy grey eyes, while with his nervous fingers he plucked at his beard.

“The time is coming — the time is coming”; cried Mr. Wone, striking with the back of his fist, the parapet against which he leaned, “when this exploitation of the poor by the rich will end once for all!” The warmth of his feeling was so great, that large drops of sweat trickled down his sallow cheeks, and hanging for a moment at the end of his narrow chin, fell into the dust. The man was genuinely moved; though in his watery blue eyes no trace of any fire was visible. He looked, in his emotion, like an hypnotized sick person, talking in the stress of a morbid fever. It was the revolt of one who carried the obsequious slavery of generations in his blood, and could only rebel in galvanized moribund spasms. The fellow was unpleasing, uninspiring: not the savage leader of a race of stern revolutionary devotees fired by the iron logic of their cause, but the inchoate inarticulate voice of clumsy protest, apologizing and propitiating, even while it protested. The vulgarity and meanness of the candidate's tone made one wonder how such a one as he could ever have been selected by the obscure working of the Spirit of Sacrifice, to undertake this titanic struggle against the Spirit of Power. One turned away instinctively from his febrile rhetoric, to cast involuntary incense at the feet of the masterful enemy he opposed. He had no reticence in his enthusiasm, no reserve, no decency.

"You may perhaps not know," he blundered on; "that the General Election is much nearer than people think. Mr. Romer will find this out; he will find it out; he will find it out! I have good authority for what I say. I speak of what I know, young lady." This was said rather severely, for Lacrima's attention was so obviously wandering.— "Of course you will not breathe a word of this, up there," — he nodded in the direction of the House. "It would not do. But the truth is, he is making a great mistake. I am prepared for this campaign, and he is not. He is even thinking of reducing the men's wages still further. The fool — the fool — the fool! For he *is* a fool, you know, though he thinks he is so clever."

Even Mr. Wone would scarcely have dared to utter these bold asseverations in the ear of Gladys Romer's cousin, if Maurice's innate indiscretion had not made it the gossip of the village that the Italian was ill-treated "among those people." To the pathetic man's poor vulgar turn of mind there was something soothing in this confidential abuse of the lord of Nevilton Manor to his own relation. It had a squalid piquancy. It was itself a sort of revenge.

Once more he began his spasmodic enunciation of those sad economic platitudes that are the refuge of the oppressed; but Mr. Quincunx had crossed the road, in the pursuit of a decrepit tiger-moth, and was listening no more. Lacrima's attention was completely withdrawn.

"Well, dear friends," he concluded, "I must really be getting back to my supper. Mrs. Wone will be unbearable if I am late." He hesitated a moment as if wondering whether the occasion called for any further domestic jocosity, to let these high matters lightly down to earth; but he contented himself with shaking hands with Mr. Quincunx and removing his hat to Lacrima.

"Good night, dear friends," he repeated, drifting off, up the road, humming a hymn tune.

"Poor man!" whispered the girl, "he means well."

"He ought to be shot!" was the unexpected response of the hermit of Dead Man's Cottage, as he let the tiger-moth flutter down into the edge of the field. "He is no better than the rest. He is an idiot. He ought to learn Latin."

They moved together towards the station.

"I don't like the way you agree with people to their face," said Lacrima, "and abuse them behind their backs."

"I don't like the way you hang about the roads with handsome stone-cutters," was Mr. Quincunx's surly retort.

Meanwhile, a quite interesting little drama had been unfolding itself in the neighbourhood of the half-carved block of sandstone. Instructed, by a swift flash of perception, into what the situation implied, Luke's quick magnetic fingers soon drew from his companion's an electric responsive clasp, as they leant together over the mouldings. The warmth and pliable softness of the girl's body seemed to challenge the man with intimations of how quickly it would yield. He pointed to the shed-door, wide open behind them.

"I will show you my work, in there, in a moment," he murmured, "as soon as they have gone."

Her breast rose and fell under the increased excitement of her breathing. Violent quivers ran up and down her frame and communicated themselves to him. Their hearts beat fiercely in reciprocal agitation. Luke's voice, as he continued his conventional summary of the quality and destination of the stone, shook a little, and sounded queer and detached.

"It is for Shaftesbury church," he said, "for the base of the column that supports the arch. This particular moulding is one which my father designed. You must remember that upon it will rest a great deal of the weight of the roof."

His fellow workmen had now collected their tools and were shuffling nervously past them. It required all Gladys' sang-froid to give them the casual nod due from the daughter of the House to those who laboured in its service. As soon as they were well upon their way, with a quick glance at the distant figures of Lacrima and James, Gladys turned rapidly to her companion.

"Show me," she said.

He went before her and stood in the entrance of the work-shop. When she had passed him into its interior, he casually closed behind them one of the rough folding doors. The contrast from the horizontal sun outside, turning the sandstone blocks into ruddy gold, to the shadowy twilight within, was strangely emphatic. He began to speak; saying he hardly knew what — some kind of stammered nonsense about the bases and capitals and carved mouldings that lay around them. But Gladys, true to her feminine prerogative, swept all this aside. With a bold audacity she began at once.

“How nice to be alone and free, for a little while!”

Then, moving still further into the shadow, and standing, as if absorbed in interest, before the rough beginnings of a fluted pillar which reached as high as the roof —

“What kind of top are you going to put on to that thing?”

As she spoke she leant against the pillar with a soft, weary relaxation of her whole form.

“Come near and tell me about it,” she whispered, as if her breath caught in her throat.

Luke recognized the tone — the tone that said, so much more distinctly than words, “I am ready. Why are you so slow?” He came behind her, and as gently and lightly as he could, though his arms trembled, let his fingers slide caressingly round her flexible figure. Her breath came in quick gasps, and one hot small hand met his own and pressed it against her side. Encouraged by this response, he boldly drew her towards him. She struggled a little; a shy girlish struggle, more than half conventional — and then, sliding round in his arms with a quick feline movement, she abandoned herself to her craving, and embraced him shamelessly and passionately. When at last in sheer weariness her arms relaxed and she sank down, with her hands pressed to her burning cheeks, upon an unfinished font, Luke Andersen thought that never to his dying day would he forget the serpentine clinging of that supple form and the pressure of those insatiable lips. He turned, a little foolishly, towards the door and kicked with his foot a fragment of a carved reredos. Then he went back to her and half-playfully, half-amorously, tried to remove her hands from her face.

“Don’t touch me! I hate you!” she said.

"Please," he whispered, "please don't be unkind now. I shall never, never forget how sweet you've been."

"Tell me more about this work of yours," she suddenly remarked, in a completely changed voice, rising to her feet. "I have always understood that you were one of our best workmen. I shall tell my father how highly I think of what you're doing — you and your brother. I am sure he will be glad to know what artists he has among his men."

She gave her head a proud little toss and raised negligent deliberate hands to her disarranged fair hair, smoothing it down and readjusting her wide-brimmed hat. She had become the grand lady again and Luke had become the ordinary young stone-mason. Superficially, and with a charming grace, he adapted himself to this change, continuing his conventional remarks about fonts, pillars, crosses, and capitals; and calling her "Miss" or "Miss Gladys," with scrupulous discretion. But in his heart, all the while, he was registering a deep and vindictive vow — a vow that, at whatever risk and at whatever cost, he would make this fair young despot suffer for her caprice. Gladys had indeed, quite unwittingly, entered into a struggle with a nature as remorseless and unscrupulous as her own. She had dreamed, in her imperial way, of using this boy for her amusement, and then throwing him aside. She did not for a moment intend to get entangled in any sentimental relations with him. A passing "amour," leading to nothing, and in no way committing her, was what she had instinctively counted on. For the rest, in snatching fiercely at any pleasure her fervent senses craved, she was as conscienceless and antinomian, as a young tiger out of the jungle. Nor had she the remotest sense of danger in this exciting sport. Corrupt and insensitive as any amorous courtezan of a pagan age, she trusted to her freedom from innocence to assure her of freedom from disaster. Vaguely enough in her own mind she had assumed, as these masterful "blond beasts" are inclined to assume, that in pouncing on this new prey she was only dealing once more with that malleable and timorous humanity she had found so easy to mould to her purpose in other quarters. She reckoned, with a pathetic simplicity, that Luke would be clay in her hands. As a matter of fact this spoiled child of the wealth produced by the Leonian stone had audaciously flung down her challenge to one who had as much in him as herself of that stone's tenacity and imperviousness. The daughter of sandstone met the carver of sandstone; and none, who knew the two, would have dared to predict the issue of such an encounter.

The young man was still urbanely and discreetly discoursing to his lady-visitor upon the contents of the work-shop, when the tall figure of James Andersen darkened the door.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said to Gladys, "but Miss Lacrima asked me to tell you that she was waiting for you on the bridge."

"Thank you, James," answered the girl simply, "I will come. I am afraid my interest in all the things your brother has been so kindly showing me has made you both late. I am sorry." Here she actually went so far as to fumble in her skirt for her purse. After an awkward pause, during which the two men waited at either side of the door, she found what she sought, and tripping lightly by, turned as she passed Luke and placed in his hand, the hand that so recently had been clasped about her person, the insolent recompense of a piece of silver. Bidding them both good-night, she hurried away to rejoin Lacrima, who, having by this time got rid of Mr. Quincunx, moved down the road to meet her.

Luke closed and locked the door of the shed without a word. Then to the astonishment of James Andersen he proceeded to dance a kind of grotesque war-dance, ending it with a suppressed half-mocking howl, as he leant exhausted against the wall of the building.

“I’ve got her, I’ve got her, I’ve got her!” he repeated. “James, my darling Daddy James, I’ve got this girl in the palm of my hand!” He humorously proceeded to toss the coin she had given him high in the air. “Heads or tails?” he cried, as the thing fell among the weeds. “Heads! It’s heads, my boy! That means that Miss Gladys Romer will be sorry she ever stepped inside this work-shop of ours. Come, let’s wash and eat, my brother; for the gods have been good to us today.”

CHAPTER V. FRANCIS TAXATER

THE DAY FOLLOWING the one whose persuasive influence we have just recorded was not less auspicious. The weather seemed to have effected a transference of its accustomed quality, bringing to the banks of the Yeo and the Parret the atmospheric conditions belonging to those of the Loire or the Arno.

Having finished her tea Valentia Seldom was strolling meditatively up and down the vicarage terrace, alternately stopping to pick off the petals of a dead flower, or to gaze, with a little gloomy frown, upon the grass of the orchard.

Her slender upright figure, in her black silk dress, made a fine contrast to the rich green foliage about her, set on one side with ruby-coloured roses and on the other with yellow buttercups. But the old lady was in no peaceful frame of mind. Every now and then she tapped the gravel impatiently with her ebony stick; and the hand that toyed with the trinkets at her side mechanically closed and unclosed its fingers under the wrist-band of Mechlin lace. It was with something of an irritable start, that she turned round to greet Francis Taxater, as led by the little servant he presented himself to her attention. He moved to greet her with his usual imperturbable gravity, walking sedately along the edge of the flowery border; with one shoulder a little higher than the other and his eyes on the ground.

His formidable prelatical chin seemed more than ever firmly set that afternoon, and his grey waistcoat, under his shabby black coat, was tightly drawn across his emphatic stomach. His coal-black eyes, darkened yet further by the shadow of his hat, glanced furtively to right and left of him as he advanced. In the manner peculiar to persons disciplined by Catholic self-control, his head never followed, by the least movement, the shrewd explorations of these diplomatic eyes.

One would have taken him for a French bishop, of aristocratic race, masquerading, for purposes of discretion, in the dress of a secular scholar.

Everything about Francis Taxater, from the noble intellectual contours of his forehead, down to his small satyr-like feet, smacked of the courtier and the priest; of the learned student, and the urbane frequenter of sacred conclaves. His small white hand, plump and exquisitely shaped, rested heavily on his cane. He carried with him in every movement and gesture that curious air of dramatic weight and importance which men of diplomatic experience are alone able to use without letting it degenerate into mannerism. It was obvious that he, at any rate, according to Mr. Quincunx's favourite discrimination, "knew Latin." He seemed to have slid, as it were, into this commercial modern world, from among the contemporaries of Bossuet. One felt that his authors were not Ibsen or Tolstoy, but Horace and Cicero.

One felt also, however, that in sheer psychological astuteness not even Mr. Romer himself would be a match for him. Between those two, the man of modern wisdom and the man of ancient wisdom, any struggle that might chance to occur would be a singularly curious one. If Mr. Taxater really was "on the side of the angels," he was certainly there with the full weight of organized hierarchies. If he did exert his strength upon the side of "meekness," it would be a strength of no feverish, spasmodic eruption.

If Satan threw a Borgia in Mr. Taxater's path, that Borgia, it appeared, would find his Machiavel.

"Yes, it is a lovely day again," said the old lady, leading her visitor to a seat and placing herself by his side. "But what is our naughty Monsignor doing, playing truant from his consistory? I thought you would be in London this week — at the Eucharist Conference your people are holding? Is it to the loveliness of the weather that we owe this pleasant surprise?"

One almost expected — so formal and old-fashioned were the two interlocutors — that Mr. Taxater would have replied, in the tone of Ivanhoe or the Talisman, "A truce to such jesting, Madam!" No doubt if he had, the lady would hardly have discerned any anachronism. As a matter of fact he did not answer her question at all, but substituted one of his own.

"I met Vennie in the village," he said. "Do you think she is happier now, in her new English circle?"

"Ah! my friend," cried the old lady, in a nervous voice, "it is of Vennie that I have been thinking all this afternoon. No, I cannot say I think she is happier. I wonder if it is one thing; and then I wonder if it is another. I cannot get to the bottom of it and it worries me."

"I expect it is her nerves," said the diplomatist. "Though the sun is so warm, there has been a constant east wind lately; and, as you know, I put down most of our agitations to the presence of east wind."

"It will not do, Mr. Taxater; it will not do! It may be the east wind with you and me. It is not the east wind with Vennie. Something is troubling her. I wish I could discern what it is?"

"She isn't by any chance being vexed by some theological dispute with the Vicar, is she? I know how seriously she takes all his views. And his views are, if I may say so, decidedly confusing. Don't misunderstand me, dear lady. I respect Mr. Clavering and admire him. I like the shape of his head; especially when he wears his beretta. But I cannot feel much confidence in his wisdom in dealing with a sensitive child like your daughter. He is too impulsive. He is too dogmatic. He lives too entirely in the world of doctrinal controversy. It is dangerous"; here Mr. Taxater luxuriously stretched out his legs and lit a cigarette; “it is dangerous to live only for theology. We have to learn to live for Religion; and that is a much more elaborate affair. *That* extends very far, Mrs. Seldom.” The old lady let her stick slide to the ground and clasped her hands together. “I want to ask you one thing, Mr. Taxater. And I implore you to be quite direct with me. You do not think, do you, that my girl is tending towards *your* church — towards Rome? I confess it would be a heavy blow to me, one of the heaviest I have ever had, if anything of that kind happened. I know you are tolerant enough to let me speak like this without scruple. I like *you*, my dear friend—” Here a soft flush spread over Valentia’s ivory-coloured cheeks and she made a little movement as if to put her hand on her companion’s arm. “I like you yourself, and have the utmost confidence in you. But Oh, it would be a terrible shock to me if Vennie became a Roman Catholic. She would enter a convent; I *know* she would enter a convent and that would be more than I could bear.” The accumulated distress of many years was in the old lady’s voice and tears stood in her eyes. “I know it is silly,” she went on as Mr. Taxater steadily regarded the landscape. “But I cannot help it. I do so hope — Oh, I can’t tell you how much — that Vennie will marry and have children. It is the secret burden of my life, the thought that, with this frail little thing, our ancient race should disappear. I feel it my deepest duty — my duty to the Past and my duty to the Future — to arrange a happy marriage for her. If only that could be achieved, I should be able to die content.”

“You have no evidence, no authority for thinking,” said Mr. Taxater gravely, “that she is meditating any approach to *my* church, as you call it, have you?”

“Oh no!” cried the old lady, “quite the contrary. She seems absorbed in the services here. She works with Mr. Clavering, she discusses everything with Mr. Clavering, she helps Mr. Clavering with the poor. I believe" — here Valentia lowered her voice; "I believe she confesses to Mr. Clavering."

Francis Taxater smiled — the smile of the heir of Christendom's classic faith at these pathetic fumblings of heresy — and carefully knocked the ashes from his cigarette against the handle of his cane.

"You don't think, dear lady," he said, "that by any chance — girls are curiously subtle in these little things — she is 'in love,' as they call it, with our nice handsome Vicar?"

Valentia gave an involuntary little start. In her heart there rose up the shadow of a shadow of questioning, whether in this last remark the great secular diplomatist had not lapsed into something approaching a "faux pas."

"Certainly not," she answered. "Vennie is not a girl to mix up her religion with things of that sort."

Francis Taxater permitted the flicker of a smile to cross his face. He slightly protruded his lower lip which gave his countenance a rather sinister expression. His look said, more clearly than words, that in his opinion there was no woman on earth who did not "mix up these things" with her religion.

"I have not yet made my request to you," continued the old lady, with a certain nervous hesitation. "I am so afraid lest you should think it an evidence of a lack of confidence. It isn't so! It really isn't so. I only do it to relieve my mind; — to make my food taste better, if you understand? — and to stop this throbbing in my head." She paused for a moment, and picking up her stick, prodded the gravel with it, with lowered face. The voices of not less than three wood-pigeons were audible from the apple-orchard. And this soft accompaniment to her words seemed to give her courage. Fate could not, surely, altogether betray her prayers, in a place so brooded over by "the wings of the dove." In the exquisite hush of the afternoon the birds' rich voices seemed to take an almost liturgical tone — as though they were the ministers of a great natural temple. To make a solemn request of a dear friend under such conditions was almost as though one were exacting a sacred vow under the very shadow of the altar.

So at least Valentia felt, as she uttered her serious petition; though it may well be that Mr. Taxater, skilled in the mental discipline of Saint Ignatius, knew better how to keep the distracting influences of mere "Nature," in their proper secondary place.

"I want you faithfully to promise me," she said, "that you will in no way — in no way at all — use your influence over Vennie to draw her from her English faith." The old lady's voice became quite husky in her emotion. "It would be dreadful to me to think, — I could not bear to think" — she went on, "that you should in the smallest degree use your great powers of mind to disturb the child's present attitude. If she is not happy, it is not — Oh, I assure you, it is not — in any sense due to her being dissatisfied with her religion. It must be something quite different. What it is, I cannot guess; but it must be something quite different from *that*. Well, dear friend," and she did now, quite definitely, lay her hand on his arm, "will you promise this for me? You will? I know you will."

Francis Taxater rose from his seat and stood over her very gravely, leaning upon his cane.

"You have done well to tell me this, Mrs. Seldom," he said. "Most certainly I shall make no attempt to influence Vennie. It would be indeed contrary to all that I regard as wise and suitable in the relations between us. I never convert people. I believe you will find that very few of those who are born Catholics ever interfere in that way. It is the impetuosity of new-comers into the church that gives us this bad name. They often carry into their new faith the turbulent theological zeal which distinguished them in their old one. I, at any rate, am not like that. I leave people alone. I prefer to watch them develop on their own lines. The last thing I should wish to do would be to meddle with Vennie's religious taste. It would be a blunder as well as an impertinence. Vennie would be the first to resist any such proceeding. It would destroy her respect for me. It might even destroy her affection for me. It certainly would not move her. Indeed, dear lady, if I wished to plant the child's soul irrevocably in the soil prepared by our good vicar I could not do anything more effective than try to persuade her of its deficiencies. No, no! You may rely upon me to stand completely aside in this matter. If Vennie *were* led to join us — which for your sake, dear Mrs. Seldom, I hope will never happen, — you may accept my word of honour it will be from her own spontaneous impulse. I shall make not the least movement in the direction you fear. *That* I can devoutly promise."

He turned away his head and regarded with calm, placid detachment the rich, shadowy orchard and the golden buttercups.

The contours of his profile were so noble, and the pose of his head so majestic, that the agitated mother was soothed and awed into complete confidence.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "*That* fear, at any rate, has passed. I shall be grateful to you forever, dear friend, for what you have just now said. It is a direct answer to my prayers."

"May I, in my turn," said Mr. Taxater, resuming his seat by her side, "ask you a bold and uncalled for question? What would you do, if in the changes and chances of this life, Vennie *did* come to regard Mr. Clavering with favour? Would you for a moment consider their union as a possible one?"

Valentia looked not a little embarrassed. Once more, in her heart, she accused the urbane scholar of a lack of delicacy and discretion. These little questions are not the ones to put to a perturbed mother.

However, she answered him plainly enough. “I should not like it, I confess. It would disappoint me. I am not ambitious, but sometimes I catch myself desiring, for my beloved child, a marriage that would give her the position she deserves, the position — pardon a woman’s weakness, sir! — that her ancestors held in this place. But then, again, I am only anxious for her happiness. No, Mr. Taxater. If such a thing did occur I should not oppose it, Mr. Clavering is a gentleman, though a poor one and, in a sense, an eccentric one. But I have no prejudice against the marriage of our clergy. In fact I think they ought to marry. It is so suitable, you know, to have a sensible woman endowed with such opportunities for making her influence felt. I would not wish Vennie to marry beneath her, but sooner than not see her married — well! — That is the kind of feeling I have about it, Mr. Taxater.”

“Thank you — thank you. I fear my question was impertinent; but in return for the solemn oath you exacted from me, I think I deserved some reward, don’t you? But seriously, Mrs. Seldom, I do not think that any of these less desirable fates will befall our dear child. I think she will marry a pillar of the aristocracy, and remain herself a pillar of the Anglican Church! I trust she will not, whatever happens, lose her regard for her old Catholic friend.”

He rose as he spoke and held out his hand. Mrs. Seldom took it in her own and held it for a moment with some emotion. Had he been a real Monsignor, he could not have looked more calm, more tolerant, more kind, than he looked at that moment. He wore the expression that high ecclesiastics must come to wear, when devoted but somewhat troublesome daughters of the church press close to kiss the amethystine ring.

A few minutes later he was passing out of the vicarage gate. The new brood of warblers that flitted about the tall bushes at that spot heard — with perfect unconcern — a mysterious Latin quotation issue from that restrained mouth. They could hardly be blamed for not understanding, even though they had migrated to these fields of heresy from more classic places, that the plain English interpretation of the dark saying was that all things are lawful to him whose motive is the "Potestas Civitatis Dei!"

He crossed the dusty road and was proceeding towards his own house, which was hardly more than a hundred yards away, when he saw through a wide gap in the hedge a pleasant and familiar sight. It was a hay-field, in the final stage of its "making," surrendering to a great loose stack, built up beneath enormous elm-trees, the last windrows of its sweet-scented harvest.

Pausing for a moment to observe more closely this pleasant scene — for hay-making in Dorsal Field amounted to a village ritual — Mr. Taxater became aware that among the figures scattered in groups about the meadow were the very two whose relation to one another he had just been discussing. Vennie and the young clergyman were engaged in an animated conversation with three of the farm-boys.

Mr. Taxater at once climbed through the gap, and crossing the field approached the group unobserved. It was not till he was quite close that Vennie caught sight of him. Her pale, pinched little face, under its large hat, flushed slightly as she held out her hand; but her great steady grey eyes were full of friendly welcome.

Mr. Clavering too was effusive and demonstrative in his greeting. They chatted a little of indifferent matters, and the theologian was introduced to the shy farm-boys, who stared at him in rustic wonder.

Then Hugh Clavering said, “If you’ll pardon me for a moment, I think I ought to go across and speak to John Goring,” and he indicated the farmer’s figure bending over a new gleaning-machine, at the opposite end of the field. “Don’t go away, please, Mr. Taxater, till I come back. You will keep him, won’t you, Miss Seldom?”

He strode off; and the boys drifted away after him, leaving Mr. Taxater and the girl together, under the unfinished hay-stack. “I was so much wanting to speak to you,” began Vennie at once. “I very nearly ran in to the Gables; but I saw Mrs. Wotnot over the wall, and she told me you were out. I am in serious need of advice upon a thing that is troubling me, and you are the only person who can really help.”

The expression of Mr. Taxater’s face at that moment was so sympathetic, and yet so grave, that one would hardly have been surprised to hear him utter the conventional formula of a priest awaiting confession. Though unuttered, the sacred formula must have been telepathically communicated, for Vennie continued without a pause, holding her hands behind her back, and looking on the ground. “Ever since our last serious conversation — do you remember? — after Easter, I have been thinking so much about that phrase of yours, referring to the Pope, as the eternal living defender of the idea of Love as the secret of the universe. Mr. Clavering talks to me about love — you know what I mean,” she smiled and blushed prettily, with a quick lifting of her head, “but he never gives me the feeling of something real and actual which we can approach on earth — something personal, I mean. And I have been feeling so much lately that this is what I want. Mr. Clavering is very gentle with me when I try to explain my difficulties to him; but I don’t think he really understands. The way he talks is beautiful and inspiring — but it somehow sounds like poetry. It does not give me anything to lay hands on.” And she looked into Mr. Taxater’s face with a pathetic wide-eyed appeal, as if he were able to call down angels from heaven.

“Dear child,” said the diplomatist, “I know only too well what you mean. Yes, that is the unfortunate and necessary limitation of a heretical church. It can only offer mystic and poetic consolations. It has lost touch with the one true Vine, and consequently the full stream of life-giving sap cannot flow through its veins.”

“But I have felt so strengthened,” said Vennie mournfully, “by the sacrament in our Church; so strengthened and inspired! It seems dreadful that it should all be a sort of mockery.”

“Do not speak like that, dear child,” said Mr. Taxater. “God is good; and in his knowledge of our weakness he permits us to taste of his mystery even in forbidden cups. The motive in your heart, the faith in your soul, have been pure; and God has given to them some measure, though but an imperfect one, of what he will grant to your complete obedience.”

Vennie bent down and picking up a swathe of sweet-scented hay twisted it thoughtfully in her fingers. “God has indeed been working miracles on your behalf,” continued Mr. Taxater. “It must have been your guardian angel that led me to speak to you as I did at that time. For in future, I regret to say, I shall be less free. But the good work has been done. The seed has been sown. What follows must be at your own initiative.”

Vennie looked at him, puzzled, and rather alarmed. “Why do you say you will be less free? Are we going to have no more lovely conversations at the bottom of our orchard? Are you going to be too busy to see me at all?”

Mr. Taxater smiled. “Oh no, it isn’t as bad as that,” he said. “It is only that I have just faithfully promised your mother not to convert you to Catholicism.”

“Mother had no right to make you give any such promise,” cried the girl indignantly.

“No,” responded the diplomatist, “she had no such right. No one has a right to demand promises of that kind. It is one of the worst and subtlest forms of persecution.”

“But you did not promise? You surely did not promise?”

“There was no escaping it,” replied Mr. Taxater. “If I had not done so she would have given you no peace, and your future movements would have been mercilessly watched. However,” he went on, smilingly, “a promise exacted under that kind of compulsion must be interpreted in a very large and liberal way. Relatively I must avoid discussing these things with you. In a higher and more absolute sense we will combine our thoughts about them, day and night, until we worship at the same altar.”

Vennie was silent. The noble and exalted sophistry of the subtle scholar puzzled and bewildered her. “But I have no idea of what to do next,” she protested. “I know no Catholics but you. I should feel very nervous on going to the priest in Yeoborough. Besides, I don’t at all like the look of him. And the people here say he is often drunk. You wouldn’t send me to a man like that, would you? Oh, I feel so angry with mother! She had no right to go to you behind my back.”

Francis Taxater laid his hand gently on the girl’s shoulder. “There is no reason for haste,” he said. “There is no cause to agitate yourself. Just remain quietly as you are. Say nothing to your mother. It would only cause her unnecessary distress. I never promised not to lend you books. All my shelves are at your service. Read, my dear Vennie, read and think. My books will supply the place of my words. Indeed, they will serve the purpose much better. In this way we shall at once be obeying your earthly mother, and not disobeying your heavenly mother, who is now — Ave Maria gratiæ plena! — drawing you so strongly towards her."

"Shall I say anything to Mr. Clavering?"

"Not a word! not a word! And enter as little as possible into argument with him. If he fancies, from your silence, that he has quelled your doubts, let him fancy so. The mistake will be due to his own pride and not to any deception. It is wrong to lie — but we are not called upon to dispel illusions arising from the self-conceit of others."

"But you — will — think — of me?" pleaded little Vennie. "I may know that you have not deserted me? That you are always ready — always there?"

Mr. Taxater smiled benignly. "Of course I shall be ready, dear child. And you must be ready. That is why I only ask you to read and think. God will answer your prayers if you show patience. He has taught his church never to clamour for hurried conversions. But to wait, with all her reservoirs of mysteries, till they come to her of their own accord. You will come, Vennie, you will come! But it will be in God's hour and not in ours."

Vennie Seldom thanked him with a timid glance of infinite gratitude and confidence. A soft luminous happiness suffused her being, into which the scents and sounds of that felicitous hour poured their offerings of subtle contentment. In after years, in strange and remote places, she never forgot the high thrilling exultation, calm, yet passionate as an indrawn wave, of that unrecurring moment.

The security that filled her passed, indeed, only too quickly away. Her face clouded and a little anxious frown puckered her narrow white forehead.

"There is something else I wanted to ask you," she said hurriedly, "and I must say it quickly because I am afraid of Mr. Clavering coming back. It has to do with Mr. Clavering. I do not think you realize what influence you have over people, what powerful influence! Mr. Clavering adores you. He would do anything for you. He respects you as a thinker. He venerates you as a good man. Now, Mr. Taxater, please, please, use your influence with him to save him — to save him—" She stopped abruptly, and a flood of colour rushed to her cheeks.

"To save him from what, dear child? I am afraid there is no hope of Mr. Clavering coming to our way of thinking."

"It isn't that, Mr. Taxater! It's something else; — something to do with his own happiness, with his own life. Oh, it is so hard for me to tell you!" She clenched her hands tightly together and looked steadily away from him as she spoke. "It is that that dreadful Gladys Romer has been plaguing him so — tempting him to flirt with her, to be silly about her, and all that sort of thing. He does not really like her at all. That I *know*. But he is passionate and excitable, and easily led away by a girl like that. Oh, it all sounds so absurd, as I say it," cried poor Vennie, with cheeks that were by this time flaming, "but it's much, much more serious than it sounds. You see, I know Mr. Clavering very well. I know how simple and pure-minded he is. And I know how desperately he prays against being led away — like this. Gladys does not care for him really a bit. She only does it to amuse herself; to satisfy her wicked, wicked nature! She would like to lead him as far as she possibly could, and then to turn upon him and make him thoroughly miserable. She is the kind of girl — Oh what am I saying to you, Mr. Taxater? — that men always are attracted by. Some men I believe would even call her beautiful. I don't think she's that at all. I think she is gross, fleshly, and horrid! But I know what a danger she is to Mr. Clavering. I know the dreadful struggle that goes on in his mind; and the horrible temptation she is to him. I know that after seeing her he always suffers the most cruel remorse. Now, Mr. Taxater, use your influence to strengthen him against this girl’s treachery. She only means him harm, I know she does! And if a person like you, whom he loves and admires so much, talked to him seriously about it, it would be such a help to him. He is so young. He is a mere boy, and absolutely ignorant of the world. He does not even realize that the village has already begun its horrid gossip about them. Do — do, do something, Mr. Taxater. It is like that young Parsifal, in the play, being tempted by the enchantress.”

“But how do they meet?” asked the diplomatist, with unchanged gravity. “I do not see how they are ever alone together.”

“She has arranged it. She is so clever; the bad, bad girl! She goes to him for confirmation lessons. He teaches her in his study twice a week — separately from the others.”

“But her father is a Unitarian.”

“That does not interfere. She does what she likes with Mr. Romer. Her game now is to want to be baptized into our church. She is going to be baptized first, and then confirmed.”

“And the preparation for baptism is as dangerous as the preparation for confirmation,” remarked the scholar; straightening the muscles of his mouth, after the discipline of St. Ignatius.

“The whole thing is horrible — dreadful! It frets me every hour of the day. He is so good and so innocent. He has no idea where she is leading him.”

“But I cannot prevent her wanting to be baptized,” said Mr. Taxater.

“You can talk to him,” answered Vennie, with intense conviction. “You can talk to him and he will listen to you. You can tell him the danger he is in of being made miserable for life.” She drew her breath deeply. “Oh the remorse he will feel; the horrible, horrible remorse!”

Mr. Taxater glanced across the hay-field. The sun, a red globe of fire, was resting on the extreme edge of Leo's Hill, and seemed like a great blood-shot eye regarding them with lurid interest. Long cool shadows, thrown across the field by the elms in the hedge and by the stack beside them, melted magically into one another, and made the hillocks of still ungathered grass soft and intangible as fairy graves.

"I will do my best," said the scholar. "I will do my best." And indicating to Vennie, who was absorbed in her nervous gratitude, the near approach of the object of their saintly conspiracy, he led her forward to meet the young clergyman with an appropriate air of friendly and casual nonchalance.

"I am sorry to have to say it," was Mr. Clavering's greeting, "but that farmer-fellow is the only person in my parish for whom I have a complete detestation. I wish to goodness Mr. Romer had never brought him into the place!"

"I don't like the look of his back, I must say," answered the theologian, following with his eyes the retreating figure of Mr. John Goring.

"He is," said the young priest, "without exception the most repulsive human being I have ever met in my life. Our worthy Romer is an angel of light compared with him."

With Mr. Goring still as their topic, they strolled amicably together towards the same gap in the hedge, through which the apologist of the papacy had emerged an hour before. There they separated; Vennie returning to the vicarage, and the young clergyman carrying off Mr. Taxater to supper with him in his house by the church.

Clavering's establishment consisted of a middle-aged woman of inordinate volubility, and the woman's daughter, a girl of twelve.

The supper offered by the priest to his guest was "light and choice" — nor did it lack its mellow accompaniment of carefully selected, if not

"Attic," wine. Of this wine Mr. Taxater did not hesitate to partake freely, sitting, when the meal was over, opposite his host at the open window, through which the pleasant murmurs of the evening, and the voices of the village-street, soothingly and harmoniously floated.

The famous theologian was in an excellent temper. Rich recondite jests pursued one another from his smiling lips, and his white hands folded themselves complacently above the cross on his watch-chain.

Lottie Fringe, the child of Clavering's servant, tripped sportively in and out of the room, encouraged in her girlish coquetries by the amiable scholar. She was not yet too old to be the kittenish plaything of the lighter moments of a wise and scholarly man, and it was pleasant to watch the zest with which the vicar's visitor entered into her sportive audacities. Mr. Taxater made her fill and refill his glass, and taking her playfully on his knee, kissed her and fondled her many times. It was the vicar himself, who finally, a little embarrassed by these levities, sent the girl off to the kitchen, apologizing to his guest for the freedom she displayed.

"Do not apologize, dear Mr. Clavering," said the theologian. "I love all children, especially when they are girls. There is something about the kisses of a young girl — at once amorous and innocent — which reconciles one to the universe, and keeps death at a distance. Could one for a moment think of death, when holding a young thing, so full of life and beauty, on one's knee?"

The young priest's face clouded. "To be quite honest with you, Mr. Taxater," he murmured, in a troubled voice, "I cannot say that I altogether agree. We are both unconventional people, so I may speak freely. I do not think that one does a child any good by encouraging her to be playful and forward, in that particular way. You live with your books; but I live with my people, and I have known so many sad cases of girls being completely ruined by getting a premature taste for coquetry of that kind.”

“I am afraid, my friend,” answered Mr. Taxater, “that the worst of all heresies is lodged deep in your heart.”

“Heresies? God knows,” sighed the priest, “I have enough evil in my heart — but heresies? I am at a loss to catch your meaning.”

In the absence of his playful Clerica — to use the Pantagruelian allusion — the great Homenas of Nevilton was compelled to fill his “tall-boy of extravagant wine” with his own hand. He did so, and continued his explanation.

“By the worst of all heresies I mean the dangerous Puritan idea that pleasure itself is evil and a thing detestable to God. The Catholic doctrine, as I understand it, is that all these things are entirely relative to the persons concerned. Pleasure in itself is, in the Aristotelian sense, a supreme good. Everyone has a right to it. Everyone must have it. The whole thing is a matter of proportion and expediency. If an innocent playful game, of the kind you have just witnessed, was likely in this definite particular case to lead to harm, then you would be justified in your anxiety. But there must be no laying down of hard general rules. There must be no making a virtue of the mere denying ourselves pleasure.”

Mr. Clavering could hardly wait for his guest to finish.

“Then, according to your theory,” he exclaimed, “it would be right for you, or whoever you will, — pardon my making the thing so personal — to indulge in casual levities with any pretty barmaid, as long as you vaguely surmised that she was a sensible girl and would not be harmed?”

“Certainly it would be right,” replied the papal apologist, sipping his wine and inhaling the perfume of the garden, “and not only right, but a plain duty. It is our duty, Mr. Clavering, to make the world happier while we live in it; and the way to make girls happier, especially when their occupations are laborious, is to kiss them; to give them innocent and admiring embraces.”

“I am afraid you are not quite serious, Mr. Taxater,” said the clergyman. “I have an absurd way of being direct and literal in these discussions.”

“Certainly, I am serious. Do you not know — young puritan — that some of the noblest spirits in history have not hesitated to increase the pleasure of girls’ lives by giving them frequent kisses? In the Greek days he who could give the most charming kiss was awarded a public prize. In the Elizabethan days all the great and heroic souls, whose exquisite wit and passionate imagination put us still to shame, held large and liberal views on this matter. In the eighteenth century the courtly and moral Joseph Addison used never to leave a coffee-house, however humble and poor, without bestowing a friendly embrace upon every woman in it. The religious Doctor Johnson — a man of your own faith — was notoriously in the habit of taking his prettier visitors upon his knee, and tenderly kissing them. It is no doubt due to this fact, that the great lexicographer was so frequently visited; — especially by young Quakers. When we come to our own age, it is well known that the late Archbishop Taraton, the refuter of Darwin, was never so happy as when romping round the raspberry-canes in his garden with a crowd of playful girls.

“These great and wise men have all recognized the fact that pleasure is not an evil but a good. A good, however, that must be used discreetly and according to the Christian self-control of which God has given his Church the secret. The senses are not under a curse, Mr. Clavering. They are not given us simply to tempt and perplex us. They are given for our wise and moderate enjoyment.”

Francis Taxater once more lifted his glass to his lips.

“To the devil with this Protestant Puritanism of yours! It has darkened the sun in heaven. It is the cause of all the squalid vice and gross excesses of our forlorn England. It is the cause of the deplorable perversities that one sees around one. It is the cause of that odious hypocrisy that makes us the laughing-stock of the great civilized nations of France, Italy and Spain.” The theologian drew a deep breath, and continued. “I notice, Mr. Clavering, that you have by your side, still unfinished, your second glass of wine. That is a mistake. That is an insult to Providence. Whatever may be your attitude towards these butterfly-wenches, it cannot, as a matter of poetic economy, be right to leave a wine, as delicate, as delicious as this, to spoil in the glass.

“I suppose it has never occurred to you, Mr. Clavering, to go and sit, with the more interesting of your flock, at the Seldom Arms? It never has? So I imagined from my knowledge of your uncivilized English ways.

“The European café, sir, is the universal school of refined and intellectual pleasure. It was from his seat in a Roman café — a place not unknown to me myself — that the great Gibbon was accustomed to survey the summer moon, rising above the Pantheon.

“It is the same in the matter of wine as in the other matter. It is your hypocritical and puritanical fear of pleasure that leads to the gross imbibing of villainous spirits and the subterranean slavery of prostitution. If you allowed yourselves, freely, naturally, and with Christian moderation, to enjoy the admirable gifts of the supreme giver, there would no longer be any need for this deplorable plunging into insane vice. As it is — in this appalling country of yours — one can understand every form of debauchery.”

At this point Mr. Clavering intervened with an eager and passionate question. He had been listening intently to his visitor’s words, and his clear-cut, mobile face had changed its expression more than once during this long discourse.

“You do not, then, think,” said he, in a tone of something like supplication, “that there is anything wrong in giving ourselves up to the intense emotion which the presence of beauty and charm is able to excite?”

“Wrong?” said Mr. Taxater. “It is wrong to suppress such feelings! It is all a matter of proportion, my good sir, a matter of proportion and common sense. A little psychological insight will soon make us aware whether the emotion you speak of is likely to prove injurious to the object of our admiration.”

“But oneself — what about oneself?” cried the young priest. “Is there not a terrible danger, in all these things, lest one’s spiritual ideal should become blurred and blighted?”

To this question Mr. Taxater returned an answer so formidable and final, that the conversation was brought to an abrupt close.

“What,” he said, “has God given us the Blessed Sacraments for?”

Hugh Clavering escorted his visitor to the corner of the street and bade him good-night there. As he re-entered his little garden, he turned for a moment to look at the slender tower of St. Catharine’s church, rising calm and still into the hot June sky. Between him and it, flitted like the ghost of a dead Thaïs or Phryne, the pallid shadow of an impassioned temptress holding out provocative arms. The form of the figure seemed woven of all the vapours of unbridled poetic fantasy, but the heavy yellow hair which most of all hid the tower from his view was the hair of Gladys Romer.

The apologist of the papacy strolled slowly and meditatively back to his own house with the easy step of one who was in complete harmony both with gods and men. Above him the early stars began, one by one, to shine down upon the earth, but as he glanced up towards them, removing his hat and passing his hand across his forehead, the great diplomatist appeared quite untroubled by the ineffable littleness of all earthly considerations, under the remoteness of those austere watchers.

The barking of dogs, in distant unknown yards, the melancholy cry of new-shorn lambs, somewhere far across the pastures, the soft, low, intermittent breathing, full of whispers and odours, of the whole mysterious night, seemed only to throw Mr. Taxater back more completely and securely upon that firm ecclesiastical tradition which takes the hearts of men in its hands and turns them away from the Outer Darkness.

He let himself quietly into the Gables garden, by the little gate in the wall, and entered his house. He was surprised to find the door unlocked and a light burning in the kitchen. The careful Mrs. Wotnot was accustomed to retire to rest at a much earlier hour. He found the good woman extended at full length upon three hard chairs, her head supported by a bundle of shawls. She was suffering from one of her chronic rheumatic attacks, and was in considerable distress.

To a less equable and humane spirit there might have been something rather irritating than pathetic about this unexpected finale to a harmonious day. But Mr. Taxater's face expressed no sign of any feeling but that of grave and gentle concern.

With some difficulty, for the muscles of her body were twisted by nervous spasms, the theologian supported the old woman up the stairs, to her room under the eaves. Here he laid her upon the bed, and for the rest of the night refused to leave her room, rubbing with his white plump hands her thin old legs, and applying brandy to her lips at the moments when the nervous contractions that assailed her seemed most extreme. The delicate light of dawn showed its soft bluish pallour at the small casemented window before the old lady fell asleep; but it was not till relieved by a woman who appeared, several hours later, with their morning’s milk, that the defender of the Catholic Faith in Nevilton retired to his well-earned repose.

CHAPTER VI. THE PARIAHS

MR. QUINCUNX WAS digging in his garden. The wind, a little stronger than on the previous days and still blowing from the east, buffeted his attenuated figure and ruffled his pointed beard, tinged with premature grey. He dug up all manner of weeds, some large, some small, and shaking them carefully free of the adhesive earth, flung them into a wheel-barrow by his side.

It was approaching noon, and in spite of the chilly gusts of wind, the sun beat down hotly upon the exposed front of Dead Man's Cottage. Every now and then Mr. Quincunx would leave his work; and retiring into his kitchen, proceed with elaborate nicety to stir a small pot of broth which simmered over the fire. He was a queer mixture of epicurean preciseness and ascetic indifference in these matters, but, on the whole, the epicurean tendency predominated, owing to a subtle poetic passion in the eccentric man, for the symbolic charm of all these little necessities of life. The lighting of his fire in the morning, the crackling of the burning sticks, and their fragrant smell, gave Mr. Quincunx probably as much pleasure as anything else in the world.

Every bowl of that fresh milk and brown bread, which, prepared with meticulous care, formed his staple diet, was enjoyed by him with more ceremonious concentration than most gourmands devote to their daintiest meat and wine.

The broiling of his chicken on Sunday was a function of solemn ritual. Mr. Quincunx bent over the bird, basting it with butter, in the absorbed manner of a priest preparing the sacrament.

The digging up of onions or lettuces in his garden, and the stripping them of their outer leaves, was a ceremony to be performed in no light or casual haste, but with a prepared and concentrated spirit.

No profane hand ever touched the little canister of tea from which Mr. Quincunx, at the same precise hour every day, replenished his tea-pot.

In all these material things his scrupulous and punctilious nicety never suffered the smallest diminution. His mind might be agitated to a point bordering upon despair, but he still, with mechanical foresight, sawed the fagots in his wood-shed and drew the water from his well.

As he pulled up weed after weed, on this particular morning, his mind was in a state of extreme nervous agitation. Mr. Romer had called him up the night before to the House, and had announced that his present income — the sum regarded by the recluse as absolutely secure — was now entirely to cease, and in the place of it he was destined to receive, in return for horrible clerical work performed in Yeoborough, a considerably smaller sum, as Mr. Romer’s paid dependent.

The idea of working in an office was more distasteful to Mr. Quincunx than it is possible to indicate to any person not actually acquainted with him. His exquisitely characteristic hand, admirably adapted to the meticulous diary he had kept for years, was entirely unsuited to competing with type-writing machines and machine-like type-writers. The walk to Yeoborough too, — a matter of some four or five miles — loomed upon him as a hideous purgatory. Walking tired him much more than working in his garden; and he had a nervous dread of those casual encounters and salutations on the way, which the habitual use of the same road to one’s work necessarily must imply.

His mind anticipated with hideous minuteness every detail of his future dreary life. He decided that even at the cost of the sacrifice of the last of his little luxuries he would make a point of going one way at least by train. That walk, twice a day, through the depressing suburbs of Yeoborough was more than he could bear to contemplate. It was characteristic of him that he never for a moment considered the possibility of an appeal to law. Law and lawyers were for Mr. Quincunx, with his instincts of an amiable anarchist, simply the engines through which the rich and powerful worked their will upon the weak and helpless.

It was equally characteristic of him that it never entered his head to throw up his cottage, pack his scanty possessions and seek his fortune in another place. It was not only Lacrima that held him from such a resolution. It was as impossible for him to think of striking out in a new soil as it would have been for an aged frog to leave the pond of its nativity and sally forth across the fields in search of new waters. It was this inability to “strike out” and grapple with the world on equal terms, that had led, in the beginning, to his curious relation to the Romers. He clung to Susan Romer for no other reason than that she supplied a link between his past and his present.

His lips trembled with anger and his hand shook, as he recalled the interview of the preceding night. The wife had annoyed him almost more than the husband. His brutality had been gross and frank. The lascivious joy of a strong nature, in deliberately outraging a weaker one, had gleamed forth from his jeering eyes.

But there had been an unction, an hypocritical sentimentality, about Mrs. Romer’s tone, that had made him hate her the more bitterly of the two. The fact that she also — stupid lump of fawning obesity as she was! — was a victim of this imperial tyrant, did not in the least assuage him. The helot who is under the lash hates the helot who crouches by the master’s chair, more deeply than he hates the master. It is because of this unhappy law of nature that there are so few successful revolts among our social Pariahs.

The well-constituted ruler of men divides his serfs into those who hold the whip and those who are whipped. Yes, he hated her the most. But how he hated them both!

The heart of your true Pariah is a strange and dark place, concealing depths of rancorous animosity, which those who over-ride and discount such feelings rarely calculate upon. It is a mistake to assume that this curious rôle — the rôle of being a Pariah upon our planet — is one confined to the submerged, the outcast, the criminal.

There are Pariahs in every village. It might be said that there are Pariahs in every family. The Pariah is one who is born with an innate inability to deal vigorously and effectively with his fellow animals. One sees these unfortunates every day — on the street, in the office, at the domestic hearth. One knows them by the queer look in their eyes; the look of animals who have been crushed rather than tamed.

It is not only that they are weaker than the rest and less effectual. They are *different*. It is in their difference that the tragedy of their fate lies. Commonplace weaklings, who are not born Pariahs, have in their hearts the same standards, the same ambitions, the same prejudices, as those who rule the world. Such weaklings venerate, admire, and even *love* the strong unscrupulous hands, the crafty unscrupulous brains, who push them to and fro like pawns.

But the Pariah does not venerate the Power that oppresses him. He despises it and hates it. Long-accumulated loathing rankles in his heart. He is crushed but not won. He is penned, like a shorn sheep; but his thoughts “wander through Eternity.”

And it is this difference, separating him from the rest, that excites such fury in those who oppress him. The healthy-minded prosperous man is irritated beyond endurance by this stranger within the gate — this incorrigible, ineffectual critic, cumbering his road. The mob, too, always ready, like spiteful, cawing rooks, to fall upon a wounded comrade, howl remorselessly for his destruction. The Pariah is seldom able to retain the sweetness of his natural affections.

Buffeted by the unconscious brutality of those about him, he retorts with conscious and unfathomable hatred. His soul festers and gangrenes within him, and the loneliness of his place among his fellows leads him to turn upon them all — like a rat in a gin. The pure-minded capable man, perceiving the rancorous misanthropy of this sick spirit, longs to trample him into the mud, to obliterate him, to forget him. But the man whose strength and cunning is associated with lascivious perversity, wishes to have him by his side, to humiliate, to degrade, to outrage. A taste to be surrounded by Pariahs is an interesting peculiarity of a certain successful class. Such companionship is to them a perpetual and pleasing reminder of their own power.

Mr. Quincunx was a true Pariah in his miserable combination of inability to strike back at the people who injured him, and inability to forget their injuries. He propitiated their tastes, bent to their will, conciliated their pride, agreed with their opinions, and hated them with demoniacal hatred.

As he pulled up his weeds in the hot sun, this particular morning, Maurice Quincunx fantastically consoled himself by imagining all manner of disasters to his enemies. Every time he touched with his hands the soft-crumbling earth, he uttered a kind of half-conscious prayer that, in precisely such a way, the foundations of Nevilton House should crumble and yield. Under his hat — for he was hypochondriacally apprehensive about sunstrokes — flapped and waved in the wind a large cabbage leaf, placed carefully at the back of his head to protect his neck as he bent down. The shadow of this cabbage leaf, as it was thrown across the dusty path, assumed singular and sinister shapes, giving the impression sometimes that the head of Mr. Quincunx was gnome-like or goblin-like in its proportions.

Perhaps the most unfortunate characteristic of Pariahs is that though they cling instinctively to one another they are irritated and provoked by each other's peculiarities.

This unhappy tendency was now to receive sad confirmation in our weed-puller's case, for he was suddenly interrupted by the appearance at his gate of Lacrima Traffio.

He rose to meet her, and without inviting her to pass the entrance, for he was extremely nervous of village gossip, and one never knew what a casual passer-by might think, he leant over the low wall and talked with her from that security.

She seemed in a very depressed and pitiable mood and the large dark eyes that fixed themselves upon her friend's face were full of an inarticulate appeal.

"I cannot endure it much longer," she said. "It gets worse and worse every day."

Maurice Quincunx knew perfectly well what she meant, but the curious irritation to which I have just referred drove him to rejoin:

"What gets worse?"

"Their unkindness," answered the girl with a quick reproachful look, "their perpetual unkindness."

"But they feed you well, don't they?" said the hermit, removing his hat and rearranging the cabbage-leaf so as to adapt it to the new angle of the sun. "And they don't beat you. You haven't to scrub floors or mend clothes.

People, like you and I, must be thankful for being allowed to eat and sleep at all on this badly-arranged earth."

"I keep thinking of Italy," murmured Lacrima. "I think it is your English ways that trouble me. I don't believe — I can't believe — they always mean to be unkind. But English people are so heartless!"

"You seemed to like that Andersen fellow well enough," grumbled Mr. Quincunx.

"How can you be so silly, Maurice?" cried the girl, slipping through the gate in spite of its owner's furtive glances down the road. "How can you be so silly?"

She moved past him, up the path, and seated herself upon the edge of the wheel-barrow.

"You can go on with your weeding," she said, "I can talk to you while you work."

"Of course," murmured Mr. Quincunx, making no effort to resume his labour, "you naturally find a handsome fellow like that, a more pleasant companion than me. I don't blame you. I understand it very well."

Lacrima impatiently took up a handful of groundsel and spurge from the dusty heap by her side and flung them into the path.

"You make me quite angry with you, Maurice," she cried. "How can you say such things after all that has happened between us?"

"That's the way," jeered the man bitterly, plucking at his beard. "That's the way! Go on abusing me because you are not living at your full pleasure, like a stall-fed upper-class lady!"

"I shan't stay with you another moment," cried Lacrima, with tears in her eyes, "if you are so unkind."

As soon as he had reduced her to this point, Mr. Quincunx instantaneously became gentle and tender. This is one of the profoundest laws of a Pariah’s being. He resents it when his companion in helplessness shows a spirit beyond his own, but directly such a one has been driven into reciprocal wretchedness, his own equanimity is automatically regained.

After only the briefest glance at the gate, he put his arms round the girl and kissed her affectionately. She returned his embrace with interest, disarranging as she did so the cabbage-leaf in his hat, and causing it to flutter down upon the path. They leant together for a while in silence, against the edge of the wheel-barrow, their hands joined.

Thus associated they would have appeared, to the dreaded passer-by, in the light of a pair of extremely sentimental lovers, whose passion had passed into the stage of delicious melancholia. The wind whirled the dust in little eddies around them and the sun beat down upon their heads.

“You must be kind to me when I come to tell you how unhappy I am,” said the Italian. “You are the only real friend I have in the world.”

It is sad to have to relate that these tender words brought a certain thrill of alarm into the heart of Mr. Quincunx. He felt a sudden apprehension lest she might indicate that it was his duty to run away with her, and face the world in remote regions.

No one but a born Pariah could have endured the confiding clasp of that little hand and the memory of so ardent a kiss without being roused to an impetuosity of passion ready to dare anything to make her its own.

Instead of pursuing any further the question of his friend’s troubles, Mr. Quincunx brought the conversation round to his own.

“The worst that could happen to me has happened,” he said, and he told her of his interview with the Romers the day before. The girl flushed with anger.

"But this is abominable!" she cried, "simply abominable! You'd better go at once and talk it over with Mrs. Seldom. Surely, surely, something can be done! It is clear they have robbed you of your money. It is a disgraceful thing! Santa Maria — what a country this is!"

"It is no use," sighed the man helplessly. "Mrs. Seldom can't help me. She is poor enough herself. And she will know as well as I do that in the matter of law I am entirely in their hands. My aunt had absolute confidence in Mr. Romer and no confidence in me. No doubt she arranged it with them that they were to dole me out the money like a charity. Mr. Romer did once talk about my *lending* it to him, and his paying interest on it, and so forth; but he managed all my aunt's affairs, and I don't know what arrangement he made with her. My aunt never liked me really. I think if she were alive now she would probably support them in what they are doing. She would certainly say, — she always used to say — that it would do me good to do a little honest work." He pronounced the words "honest work" with concentrated bitterness.

"Probably," he went on, "Mrs. Seldom would say the same. I know I should be extremely unwilling to try and make her see how horrible to me the idea of work of this kind is. She would never understand. She would think it was only that I wanted to remain a "gentleman" and not to lose caste. She would probably tell me that a great many gentlemen have worked in offices before now. I daresay they have, and I hope they enjoyed it! I know what these gentlemen-workers are, and how easy things are made for them. They won't be made easy for me. I can tell you that, Lacrima!"

The girl drew a deep sigh, and walked slowly a few paces down the path, meditating, with her hands behind her. Presently she turned.

"Perhaps after all," she said, "it won't be as bad as you fancy. I know the head-clerk in Mr. Romer's Yeoborough office and he is quite a nice man —

altogether different from that Lickwit."

Mr. Quincunx stroked his beard with a trembling hand. "Of course I knew you'd say that, Lacrima. You are just like the rest. You women all think, at the bottom of your hearts, that men are no good if they can't make money. I believe you have an idea that I ought to do what people call 'get on a bit in the world.' If you think that, it only shows how little you understand me. I have no intention of 'getting on.' I *won't* 'get on'! I would sooner walk into Auber Lake and end the whole business!"

The suddenness and injustice of this attack really did rouse the Italian to anger. "Good-bye," she said with a dark flash in her eyes. "I see it's no use talking to you when you are in this mood. You have never, *never* spoken to me in that tone before. Good-bye! I can open the gate for myself, thank you."

She walked away from him and passed out into the lane. He stood watching her with a queer haggard look on his face, his sorrowful grey eyes staring in front of him, as if in the presence of an apparition. Then, very slowly, he resumed his work, leaving however the fallen cabbage-leaf unnoticed on the ground.

The weeds in the wheel-barrow, the straight banked-up lines of potatoes and lettuces, wore, as he returned to them, that curious air of forlorn desertion which is one of nature's bitterest commentaries upon the folly of such scenes.

A sickening sense of emptiness took possession of him, and in a moment or two became unendurable. He flung a handful of weeds to the ground and ran impetuously to the gate and out into the lane. It was too late. A group of farm-labourers laughing and shouting, and driving before them a herd of black pigs, blocked up the road. He could not bring himself to pass them, thus hatless and in his shirt-sleeves. Besides, they must have seen the girl, and they would know he was pursuing her.

He returned slowly up the path to his house, and — to avoid being seen by the men — entered his kitchen, and sat gloomily down upon a chair. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked with contemptuous unconcern. The room had that smell of mortuary dust which rooms in small houses often acquire in the summer. He sat down once more on a chair, his hands upon his knees, and stared vacantly in front of him. A thrush outside the window was cracking a snail upon a stone. When the shouts of the men died away, this was the only sound that came to him, except the continual "tick — tick — tick — tick" of the clock, which seemed to be occupied in driving nails into the heavy coffin-lid of every mortal joy that time had ever brought forth.

That same night in Nevilton House was a night of wretched hours for Lacrima, but of hours of a wretchedness more active than that which made the hermit of Dead Man's Cottage pull the clothes over his head and turn his face to the wall, long ere the twilight had vanished from his garden.

On leaving her friend thus abruptly, her heart full of angry revolt, Lacrima had seen the crowd of men and animals approaching, and to escape them had scrambled into a field on the border of the road. Following a little path which led across it, and crossing two more meadows, she flung herself down under the shadow of some great elms, in a sort of grassy hollow beneath an overgrown hedge, and gave full vent to her grief. The hollow in which she hid herself was a secluded and lonely spot, and no sound reached her but the monotonous summer-murmur of the flies and the rustle of the wind-troubled branches. Lying thus, prone on her face, her broad-brimmed hat with its poppy-trimmings thrown down at her side, and her limbs trembling with the violence of her sobs, Lacrima seemed to insert into that alien landscape an element of passionate feeling quite foreign to its sluggish fertility. Not alien to the spot, however, was another human form, that at the same hour had been led to wander among those lush meadows.

The field behind the high bank and thick-set hedge which overshadowed the unhappy girl, was a large and spacious one, “put up,” as country people say, “for hay,” but as yet untouched by the mowers’ machines. Here, in the heat of the noon, walked the acquisitive Mr. John Goring, calculating the value of this crop of grass, and deciding upon the appropriate date of its cutting.

What curious irony is it, in the blind march of events, which so frequently draws to the place of our exclusive sorrow the one particular spectator that we would most avoid? One talks lightly of coincidence and of chance; but who that has walked through life observingly has not been driven to pause with sad questioning before accidents and occurrences that seem as though some conscious malignity in things had *arranged* them? Are there, perhaps, actual telepathic vibrations at work about us, drawing the hunter to his prey — the prey to the hunter? Is the innocent object of persecution, hiding from its persecutors, compelled by a fatal psychic law — the law of its own terror — to call subconsciously upon the very power it is fleeing from; to betray, against its will, the path of its own retreat? Lacrima in any case, as she lay thus prostrate, her poppy-trimmed hat beside her, and her brown curls flecked with spots of sun and shadow, brought into that English landscape a strangely remote touch, — a touch of tragic and passionate colour. A sweet bruised exile, she seemed, from another region, flung down, among all this umbrageous rankness, to droop like a transplanted flower. Certainly the sinister magic, whatever it was, that had drawn Mr. Goring in that fatal direction, was a magic compounded of the attraction of contrary elements.

If Mr. Romer represented the occult power of the sandstone hill, his brother-in-law was the very epitome and culmination of the valley’s inert clay. The man breathed clay, looked clay, smelt clay, understood clay, exploited clay, and in a literal sense *was* clay.

If there is any truth in the scientific formula about the “survival” of those most “adapted” to their “environment,” Mr. Goring was sure of a prolonged and triumphant sojourn on this mortal globe. For his “environment” was certainly one of clay — and to clay he certainly was most prosperously “adapted.”

It was not long before the tragic sobs of the unhappy Lacrima, borne across the field on the east-wind, arrested the farmer’s attention. He stood still, and listened, snuffing the air, like a great jungle-boar. Then with rapid but furtive steps he crossed over to where the sound proceeded, and slipping down cautiously through a gap in the hedge, made his way towards the secluded hollow, breathing heavily like an animal on a trail.

Her fit of crying having subsided, Lacrima turned round on her back, and remained motionless, gazing up at the blue sky. Extended thus on the ruffled grass, her little fingers nervously plucking at its roots and her breast still heaving, the young girl offered a pitiful enough picture to any casual intruder. Slight and fragile though she was, the softness and charm of her figure witnessed to her Latin origin. With her dusky curls and olive complexion, she might, but for her English dress, have been taken for a strayed gipsy, recovering from some passionate quarrel with her Romany lover.

“What’s the matter, Miss Lacrima?” was the farmer’s greeting as his gross form obtruded itself against the sky-line.

The girl started violently, and scrambled rapidly to her feet. Mr. Goring stepped awkwardly down the grassy slope and held out his hand.

“Good morning,” he said without removing his hat. “I should have thought ’twas time for you to be up at the House. ’Tis past a quarter of one.”

“I was just resting,” stammered the girl. “I hope I have not hurt your grass.” She looked apprehensively down at the pathetic imprint on the ground.

“No, no! Missie,” said the man. “That’s nothing. ’Tis hard to cut, in a place like this. May-be they’ll let it alone. Besides, this field ain’t for hay. The cows will be in here tomorrow.”

Lacrima looked at the watch on her wrist.

“Yes, you are right,” she said. “I am late. I must be running back. Your brother does not like our being out when he comes in to lunch.” She picked up her hat and made as if she would pass him. But he barred her way.

“Not so quick, lassie, not so quick,” he said. “Those that come into farmers’ fields must not be too proud to pass the time of day with the farmer.”

As he spoke he permitted his little voracious pig’s eyes to devour her with an amorous leer. All manner of curious thoughts passed through his head. It was only yesterday that his brother-in-law had been talking to him of this girl. Certainly it would be extremely satisfactory to be the complete master of that supple, shrinking figure, and of that frightened little bosom, that rose and fell now, like the heart of a panting hare.

After all, she was only a sort of superior servant, and with servants of every kind the manner of the rapacious Mr. Goring was alternately brutal and endearing. Encouraged by the isolation of the spot and the shrinking alarm of the girl, he advanced still nearer and laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"Come, little wench," he said, "I will answer for it if you're late, up at the House. Sit down a bit with me, and let's make ourselves nice and comfortable."

Lacrima trembled with terror. She was afraid to push him away, and try to scramble out of the hollow, lest in doing so she should put herself still further at his mercy. She wondered if anyone in the road would hear if she screamed aloud. Her quick Latin brain resorted mechanically to a diplomatic subterfuge. "What kind of field have you got over that hedge?" she asked, with a quiver in her voice.

"A very nice field for hay, my dear," replied the farmer, removing his hand from her shoulder and thinking in his heart that these foreign girls were wonderfully easy to manage.

"I'll show it to you if you like. There's a pretty little place for people like you and me to have a chat in, up along over there." He pointed through the hedge to a small copse of larches that grew green and thick at the corner of the hay-field.

She let him give her his hand and pull her out of the hollow. Quite passively, too, she followed him, as he sought the easiest spot through which he might help her to surmount the difficulties of the intervening hedge.

When he had at last decided upon the place, "Go first, please, Mr. Goring," she murmured, "and then you can pull me up."

He turned his back upon her and began laboriously ascending the bank, dragging himself forward by the aid of roots and ferns. It had been easy enough to slide down this declivity. It was much less easy to climb up. At length, however, stung by nettles and pricked by thorns, and with earth in his mouth, he swung himself round at the top, ready to help her to follow him.

A vigorous oath escaped his lips. She was already a third of the way across the field, running madly and desperately, towards the gate into the lane.

Mr. Goring shook his fist after her retreating figure. “All right, Missie,” he muttered aloud, “all right! If you had been kind to the poor farmer, he might have let you off. But now” — and he dug his stick viciously into the earth— “There’ll be no dilly-dallying or nonsense about this business. I’ll tell Romer I’m ready for this marriage-affair as soon as he likes. I’ll teach you — my pretty darling!”

That night the massive Leonian masonry of Nevilton House seemed especially heavy and antipathetic to the child of the Apennines, as it rose, somnolent and oppressive about her, in the hot midsummer air.

In their spacious rooms, looking out upon the east court with its dove-cotes and herbacious borders, the two girls were awake and together.

The wind had fallen, and the silence about the place was as oppressive to Lacrima’s mind as the shadow of some colossal raven’s wing.

The door which separated their chambers was ajar, and Gladys, her yellow hair loose upon her shoulders, had flung herself negligently down in a deep wicker-chair at the side of her companion’s bed.

The luckless Pariah, her brown curls tied back from her pale forehead by a dark ribbon, was lying supine upon her pillows with a look of troubled terror in her wide-open eyes. One long thin arm lay upon the coverlet, the fingers tightened upon an open book.

At the beginning of her “visit” to Nevilton House she had clung desperately to these precious night-hours, when the great establishment was asleep; and she had even been so audacious as to draw the bolt of the door which separated her from her cousin. But that wilful young tyrant had pretended to her mother that she often "got frightened" in the night, so orders had gone out that the offending bolt should be removed.

After this, Gladys had her associate quite at her mercy, and the occasions were rare when the pleasure of being allowed to read herself to sleep was permitted to the younger girl.

It was curiously irritating to the yellow-haired despot to observe the pleasure which Lacrima derived from these solitary readings. Gladys got into the habit of chattering on, far into the night, so as to make sure that, when she did retire, her cousin would be too weary to do anything but fall asleep.

As the two girls lay thus side by side, the one in her chair, and the other in her bed, under the weight of the night's sombre expectancy, the contrast between them was emphasized to a fine dramatic point. The large-winged bat that fluttered every now and then across the window might have caught, if for a brief moment it could have been endowed with human vision, a strange sense of the tragic power of one human being over another, when the restriction of a common roof compels their propinquity.

One sometimes seeks to delude oneself in the fond belief that our European domestic hearths are places of peace and freedom, compared with the dark haunts of savagery in remoter lands. It is not true! The long-evolved system that, with us, groups together, under one common authority, beings as widely sundered as the poles, is a system that, for all its external charm, conceals, more often than anyone could suppose, subtle and gloomy secrets, as dark and heathen as any in those less favoured spots.

The nervous organization of many frail human animals is such that the mere fact of being compelled, out of custom and usage and economic helplessness, to live in close relation with others, is itself a tragic purgatory.

It is often airily assumed that the obstinate and terrible struggles of life are encountered abroad — far from home — in desolate contention with the elements or with enemies. It is not so! The most obstinate and desperate struggles of all — struggles for the preservation of one's most sacred identity, of one's inmost liberty of action and feeling — take place, and have their advances and retreats, their treacheries and their betrayals, under the hypocritical calm of the domestic roof. Those who passionately resent any agitation, any free thought, any legislative interference, which might cause these fortresses of seclusion to enlarge their boundaries, forget, in their poetic idealization of the Gods of the Hearth, that tragedies are often enacted under that fair consecration which would dim the sinister repute of Argos or of Thebes. The Platonic speculations which, all through human history, have erected their fanciful protests against these perils, may often be unscientific and ill-considered. But there is a smouldering passion of heroic revolt behind such dreams, which it is not always wise to overlook.

As these two girls, the fair-haired and the dark-haired, let the solemn burden of the night thus press unheeded upon them, they would have needed no fantastic imagination, in an invisible observer, to be aware of the tense vibration between them of some formidable spiritual encounter.

High up above the mass of Leonian stone which we have named Nevilton House, the Milky Way trailed its mystery of far-off brightness across the incredible gulfs. What to it was the fact that one human heart should tremble like a captured bird in the remorseless power of another?

It was not to this indifferent sky, stretched equally over all, that hands could be lifted. And yet the scene between the girls must have appeared, to such an invisible watcher, as linked to a dramatic contest above and beyond their immediate human personalities.

In this quiet room the “Two Mythologies” were grappling; each drawing its strength from forces of an origin as baffling to reason as the very immensity of those spaces above, so indifferent to both!

The hatred that Gladys bore to Lacrima’s enjoyment of her midnight readings was a characteristic indication of the relations between the girls. It is always infuriating to a well-constituted nature to observe these little pathetic devices of pleasure in a person who has no firm grip upon life. It excites the same healthy annoyance as when one sees some absurd animal that ought, properly speaking, not to be alive at all, deriving ridiculous satisfaction from some fantastic movement incredible to sound senses.

The Pariah had, as a matter of fact, defeated her healthy-minded cousin by using one of those sly tricks which Pariahs alone indulge in; and had craftily acquired the habit of slipping away earlier to her room, and snatching little oases of solitary happiness before the imperious young woman came upstairs. It was in revenge for these evasions that Gladys was even now announcing to her companion a new and calculated outrage upon her slave’s peace of mind.

Every Pariah has some especial and peculiar dread, — some nervous mania. Lacrima had several innate terrors. The strongest of all was a shuddering dread of the supernatural. Next to this, what she most feared was the idea of deep cold water. Lakes, rivers, and chilly inland streams, always rather alarmed than inspired her. The thought of mill-ponds, as they eddied and gurgled in the darkness, often came to her as a supreme fear, and the image of indrawn dark waters, sucked down beneath weirs and dams, was a thing she could not contemplate without trembling. It was no doubt the Genoese blood in her, crying aloud for the warm blue waves of the Mediterranean and shrinking from the chill of our English ditches, that accounted for this peculiarity. The poor child had done her best to conceal her feeling, but Gladys, alert as all healthy minded people are, to seize upon the silly terrors of the ill-constituted, had not let it pass unobserved, and was now serenely prepared to make good use of it, as a heaven-sent opportunity for revenge.

It must be noted, that in the centre of the north garden of Nevilton House, surrounded by cypress-bordered lawns and encircled by a low hedge of carefully clipped rosemary, was a deep round pond.

This pond, built entirely of Leonian stone, lent itself to the playing of a splendid fountain — a fountain which projected from an ornamental island, covered with overhanging ferns.

The fountain only played on state occasions, and the coolness and depth of the water, combined with the fact that the pond had a stone bottom, gave the place admirable possibilities for bathing. Gladys herself, full of animal courage and buoyant energy, had made a custom during the recent hot weather of rising from her bed early in the morning, before the servants were up, and enjoying a matutinal plunge.

She was a practised swimmer and had been lately learning to dive; and the sensation of slipping out of the silent house, garbed in a bathing-dress, with sandals on her feet, and an opera-cloak over her shoulders, was thrilling to every nerve of her healthy young body. Impervious animal as she was, she would hardly have been human if those dew-drenched lawns and exquisite morning odours had not at least crossed the margin of her consciousness. She had hitherto been satisfied with a proud sense of superiority over her timid companion, and Lacrima so far, had been undisturbed by these excursions, except in the welcoming of her cousin on her return, dripping and laughing, and full of whimsical stories of how she had peeped down over the terrace-wall, and seen the milk-men, in the field below, driving in their cattle.

Looking about, however, in her deliberate feline way, for some method of pleasant revenge, she had suddenly hit upon this bathing adventure as a heaven-inspired opportunity. The thought of it when it first came to her as she languidly sunned herself, like a great cat, on the hot parapet of the pond, had made her positively laugh for joy. She would compel her cousin to accompany her on these occasions!

Lacrima was not only terrified of water, but was abnormally reluctant and shy with regard to any risk of being observed in strange or unusual garments.

Gladys had stretched herself out on the Leonian margin of the pond with a thrilling sense of delight at the prospect thus offered. She would be able to gratify, at one and the same time, her profound need to excel in the presence of an inferior, and her insatiable craving to outrage that inferior's reserve.

The sun-warmed slabs of Leonian stone, upon which she had so often basked in voluptuous contentment seemed dumbly to encourage and stimulate her in this heathen design. How entirely they were the accomplices of all that was dominant in her destiny — these yellow blocks of stone that had so enriched her house! They answered to her own blond beauty, to her own sluggish remorselessness. She loved their tawny colour, their sandy texture, their enduring strength. She loved to see them around and about her, built into walls, courts, terraces and roofs. They gave support and weight to all her pretensions.

Thus it had been with an almost mystical thrill of exultation that she had felt the warmth of the Leonian slabs caress her limbs, as this new and exciting scheme passed through her mind.

And now, luxuriously seated in her low chair by her friend's side she was beginning to taste the reward of her inspiration.

“Yes,” she said, crossing her hands negligently over her knees, “it is so dull bathing alone. I really think you’ll have to do it with me, dear! You’ll like it all right when once you begin. It is only the effort of starting. The water isn’t so very cold, and where the sun warms the parapet it is lovely.”

“I can’t, Gladys,” pleaded the other, from her bed, “I can’t — I can’t!”

“Nonsense, child. Don’t be so silly! I tell you, you’ll enjoy it. Besides, there’s nothing like bathing to keep one healthy. Mother was only saying last night to father how much she wished you would begin it.”

Lacrima’s fingers let her book slip through them. It slid down unnoticed upon the floor and lay open there.

She sat up and faced her cousin.

“Gladys,” she said, with grave intensity, “if you make your mother insist on my doing this, you are more wicked than I ever dreamed you would be.”

Gladys regarded her with indolent interest.

“It’s only at first the water feels cold,” she said. “You get used to it, after the first dip. I always race round the lawn afterwards, to get warm. What’s the matter now, baby?”

These final words were due to the fact that the Pariah had suddenly put up her hands to her face and was shaking with sobs. Gladys rose and bent over her. “Silly child,” she said, “must I kiss its tears away? Must I pet it and cosset it?”

She pulled impatiently at the resisting fingers, and loosening them, after a struggle, did actually go so far as to touch the girl’s cheek with her lips. Then sinking back into her chair she resumed her interrupted discourse.

The taste of salt tears had not, it seemed, softened her into any weak compliance. Really strong and healthy natures learn the art, by degrees, of proving adamant, to the insidious cunning of these persuasions.

"Girls of our class," she announced sententiously, "must set the lower orders in England an example of hardiness. Father says it is dreadful how effeminate the labouring people are becoming. They are afraid of work, afraid of fresh air, afraid of cold water, afraid of discipline. They only think of getting more to eat and drink."

The Pariah turned her face to the wall and lay motionless, contemplating the cracks and crevices in the oak panelling.

Under the same indifferent stars the other Pariah of Nevilton was also staring hopelessly at the wall. What secrets these impassive surfaces, near the pillows of sleepers, could reveal, if they could only speak!

"Father says that what we all want is more physical training," Gladys went on. "This next winter you and I must do some practising in the Yeoborough Gymnasium. It is our superior physical training, father says, which enables us to hold the mob in check. Just look at these workmen and peasants, how clumsily they slouch about!"

Lacrima turned round at this. "Your father and his friends are shamefully hard on their workmen. I wish they would strike again!"

Gladys smiled complacently. The scene was really beginning to surpass even what she had hoped.

"Why are you such a baby, Lacrima?" she said. "Stop a moment. I will show you the things you shall wear."

She glided off into her own room, and presently returned with a child's bathing dress.

"Look, dear! Isn't it lucky? I've had these in my wardrobe ever since we were at Eastbourne, years and years ago. They will not be a bit too small for you. Or if they are — it doesn't matter. No one will see us. And I'll lend you my mackintosh to go out in."

Lacrima's head sank back upon her pillows and she stared at her cousin with a look of helpless terror.

"You needn't look so horrified, you silly little thing. There's nothing to be afraid of. Besides, people oughtn't to give way to their feelings. They ought to be brave and show spirit. It's lucky for you you did come to us. There's no knowing what a cowardly little thing you'd have grown into, if you hadn't. Mother is quite right. It will do you ever so much good to bathe with me. You can't be drowned, you know. The water isn't out of your depth anywhere. Father says every girl in England ought to learn to swim, so as to be able to rescue people. He says that this is the great new idea of the Empire — that we should all join in making the race braver and stronger. You are English now, you know — not Italian any more. I am going to take fencing lessons soon. Father says you never can tell what may happen, and we ought all to be prepared."

Lacrima did not speak. A vision of a fierce aggressive crowd of hard, hostile, healthy young persons, drilling, riding, shooting, fencing, and dragging such renegades as herself remorselessly along with them, blocked every vista of her mind.

"I hate the Empire!" she cried at last. Gladys had subsided once more into her chair — the little bathing-suit, symbol of our natural supremacy, clasped fondly in her lap.

"I know," she said, "where you get your socialistic nonsense from. Yes, I do! You needn't shake your head. You get it from Maurice Quincunx."

"I don't get it from anybody," protested the Pariah; and then, in a weak murmur, "it grows up naturally, in my heart."

"What is that you're saying?" cried Gladys. "Sometimes I think you are really not right in your mind. You mutter so. You mutter, and talk to yourself. It irritates me more than I can say. It would irritate a saint."

"I am sorry if I annoy you, cousin."

"Annoy me? It would take more than a little coward like you to annoy me! But I am not going to argue about it. Father says arguing is only fit for feeble people. He says we Romers never argue. We think, and then we *do*. I'm going to bed. So there's your book! I hope you'll enjoy it Miss Socialism!"

She picked up the volume from the floor and flung it into her cousin's lap. The gesture of contempt with which she did this would admirably have suited some Roman Drusilla tossing aside the culture of slaves.

An hour later the door between the two rooms was hesitatingly opened, and a white figure stole to the head of Gladys' couch. "You're not asleep, dear, are you? Oh Gladys, darling! Please, please, please, don't make me bathe with you! You don't know how I dread it."

But the daughter of the Romers vouchsafed no reply to this appeal, beyond a drowsy "Nonsense — nonsense — let's only pray tomorrow will be fine."

The night-owls, that swept, on heavy, flapping wings, over the village, from the tower of St. Catharine's Church to the pinnacles of the manor, brought no miraculous intervention from the resting-place of the Holy-Rood. What was St. Catharine doing that she had thus deserted the sanctuary of her name? Perhaps the Alexandrian saint found the magic of the heathen hill too strong for her; or perhaps because of its rank heresy, she had blotted her former shrine altogether from her tender memory.

CHAPTER VII. IDYLLIC PLEASURES

MORTIMER ROMER COULD not be called a many-sided man. His dominant lust for power filled his life so completely that he had little room for excursions into the worlds of art or literature. He was, however, by no means narrow or stupid in these matters. He had at least the shrewdness to recognize the depth of their influence over other people. Indeed, as he was so constantly occupied with this very question of influence, with the problem of what precise motives and impulses did actually stir and drive the average mass of humanity, it was natural that he should, sooner or later, have to assume some kind of definite attitude towards these things. The attitude he finally hit upon, as most harmonious with his temperament, was that of active and genial patronage combined with a modest denial of the possession of any personal knowledge or taste. He recognized that an occasion might easily arise, when some association with the æsthetic world, even of this modest and external kind, might prove extremely useful to him. He might find it advisable to make use of these alien forces, just as Napoleon found it necessary to make use of religion. The fact that he himself was devoid of ideal emotions, whether religious or æsthetic, mattered nothing. Only fools confined their psychological interest within the narrow limits of their subjective tastes. Humanity was influenced by these things, and Romer was concerned with influencing humanity. Not that these deviations into artistic by-paths carried him very far. He would invite "cultivated" people to stay with him in his noble House — at least they would appreciate that! — and then hand them over to the care of his charming daughter, a method of hospitality which, it must be confessed, seemed to meet with complete approval on the part of those concerned. Thus the name of the owner of Leo's Hill came to be associated, in many artistic and literary circles, with the names of such admirable and friendly patrons of these pursuits, as could be counted upon for practical and efficient, if not for intellectual aid, in the contest with an unsympathetic and materialistic world. It was not perhaps the more struggling and less prosperous artists who found him their friend. To most of these his attitude, though kind and attentive, was hardly cordial. He knew too little of the questions at issue, to risk giving his support to the Pariahs and Anarchists of Art. It was among the well-known and the successful that Mr. Romer's patronage was most evident. Success was a quality he admired in every field; and while, as has been hinted, his personal taste remained quite untouched, he was clever enough to pick up the more fashionable catch-words of current criticism, and to use them, when occasion served, with effective naturalness and apparent conviction.

Among other celebrities or semi-celebrities, across whose track he came, while on his periodic visits to London, was a certain Ralph Dangelis, an American artist, whose masterly and audacious work was just then coming into vogue. True to his imperial instinct of surrounding himself with brilliant and prosperous clients, if such they could be called, he promptly invited the famous Westerner to come down and stay with him in Nevilton.

The American, who knew nothing of English country life, and was an impassioned and desperate pursuer of all new experiences, accepted this invitation, and appeared, among the quiet Somersetshire orchards, like a bolt from the blue; falling into the very centre of the small quaintly involved drama, whose acts and scenes we are now recording. Thus plunged into a completely new circle the distinguished adventurer very soon made himself most felicitously at home. He was of a frank and friendly disposition; at heart an obdurate and impenetrable egoist, but on the surface affable and kind to a quite exceptional degree. He had spent several years in both Paris and Rome, and hence it was in his power to adapt himself easily and naturally to European, if not to English ways. One result of his protracted visits to foreign cities was the faculty of casting off at pleasure his native accent — the accent of a citizen of Toledo, Ohio. He did not always do this. Sometimes it was his humour, especially in intercourse with ladies, to revert to most free and fearless provincialisms, and a certain boyish gaiety in him made him mischievously addicted to use such expressions when they seemed least of all acceptable, but under normal conditions it would have been difficult to gather from the tone of his language that he was anything but an extremely well-travelled gentleman of Anglo-Saxon birth. He speedily made a fast friend of Gladys, who found his airy persiflage and elaborate courtesy eminently to her liking; and as the long summer days succeeded one another and brought the visitor into more and more familiar relation with Nevilton ways and customs, it seemed as though his sojourn in that peaceful retreat was likely to be indefinitely prolonged. It may be well believed that their guest's attraction to Gladys did not escape the notice of the girl's parents. Mr. Romer took the trouble to make sundry investigations as to the status of Mr. Dangelis in his native Ohio; and it was with unmixed satisfaction that both he and his wife received the intelligence that he was the son and the only son of one of Toledo's most "prominent" citizens, a gentleman actively and effectively engaged in furthering the progress of civilization by the manufacturing of automobiles. Dangelis was, indeed, a prospective, if not an actual, millionaire, and, from all that could be learned, it appeared that the prominent citizen of Toledo handed over to his son an annual allowance equal to the income of many crowned heads.

The Pariah of Nevilton House — the luckless child of the Apennines — found little to admire in this energetic wanderer. His oratorical manner, his abrupt, aggressive courtesies, his exuberant high spirits, the sweep and swing of his vigorous personality, the extraordinary mixture in him of pedantry and gaiety, jarred upon her sensitive over-strung nerves. In his boyish desire to please her, hearing that she came from Italy, the good-natured artist would frequently turn the conversation round to the beauty and romance of that "garden of the world," as he was pleased to style her home; but the tone of these discourses increased rather than diminished Lacrima's obstinate reserve. He had a habit of referring to her country as if it were a place whose inhabitants only existed, by a considerate dispensation of Providence, to furnish a charming background for certain invaluable relics of antiquity. These precious fragments, according to this easy view of things, appeared to survive, together with their appropriate guardians, solely with the object of enlarging and inspiring the voracious "mentality" of wayfarers from London and New York. Grateful as Lacrima was for the respite the artist brought her from the despotism of her cousin, she could not bring herself to regard him, so far as she herself was concerned, with anything but extreme reserve and caution.

One peculiarity he displayed, filled her with shy dismay. Dangelis had a trick of staring at the people with whom he associated, as if with a kind of quizzical analysis. He threw her into a turmoil of wretched embarrassment by some of his glances. She was troubled and frightened, without being able to get at the secret of her agitation. Sometimes she fancied that he was wondering what he could make of her as a model. The idea that anything of this kind should be expected of her filled her with nervous dread. At other times the wild idea passed through her brain that he was making covert overtures to her, of an amorous character. She thought she intercepted once or twice a look upon his face of the particular kind which always filled her with shrinking apprehension. This illusion — if it were an illusion — was far more alarming than any tendency he might display to pounce on her for æsthetic purposes; for the Pariah's association with the inhabitants of Nevilton House had not given her a pleasing impression of human amorousness.

Shortly after Dangelis' arrival, Mr. Romer found it necessary to visit London again for a few days; and the artist was rather relieved than otherwise by his departure. He felt freer, and more at liberty to express his ideas, when left alone with the three women. For himself, however varied their attitude to him might be, he found them all, in their different ways, full of stimulating interest. With Mrs. Romer he soon became perfectly at home; and discovered a mischievous and profane pleasure in the process of exciting and encouraging all her least lady-like characteristics. He would follow her into the spacious Nevilton kitchens, where the good lady was much more at home than in her stately drawing room; and watch with unconventional interest her rambling domestic colloquies with Mrs. Murphy the housekeeper, Jane the cook, and Lily the house-maid.

The men-servants, of whom Mr. Romer kept two, always avoided, with scrupulous refinement, these unusual gatherings. They discoursed, in the pantry, upon their mistress' dubious behavior, and came to the conclusion that she was no more of a "real lady" than her visitor from America was a "real gentleman."

Dangelis made some new and amazing discovery in Susan Romer's character every day. In all his experiences from San Francisco to New York, and from Paris to Vienna, he had never encountered anything in the least resembling her.

He could never make out how deep her apparent simplicity went, nor how ingrained and innate was her lethargic submission to circumstances. Nothing in the woman shocked him; neither her vulgarity nor her grossness. And as for her sly, sleepy, feline malice, he loved to excite and provoke it, as he would have loved to have excited a slumbering animal in a cage. He delighted in the way she wrinkled up her eyes. He delighted in the way she smacked her lips over her food. He loved watching her settling herself to sleep in her high-backed Sheraton chair in the kitchen, or in her more modern lounge in the great entrance hall. He never grew tired of asking her questions about the various personages of Nevilton, their relation to Mr. Romer, and Mr. Romer's relation to them. He used to watch her sometimes, as in drowsy sensual enjoyment she would bask in the hot sunshine on the terrace, or drift in her slow stealthy manner about the garden-paths, as if she were a great fascinating tame puma. He made endless sketches of her, in his little note-books, some of them of the most fantastic, and even Rabelaisean character. He had certainly never anticipated just this, when he accepted the shrewd financier's invitation to his Elizabethan home. And if Susan Romer delighted him, Gladys Romer absolutely bewitched him. He treated her as if she were no grown-up young lady, but a romping and quite unscrupulous child; and the wily Gladys, quickly perceiving how greatly he was pleased by any naive display of youthful malice, or greed, or sensuality, or vanity, took good care to put no rein upon herself in the expression of her primitive emotions.

It was with Lacrima that Ralph Dangelis found himself on ground that was less secure, but in the genial aplomb of his all-embracing good-fellowships, it was only by degrees that he became conscious even of this. He found the place not only extraordinarily harmonious to his general temper, but extremely inspiring to his imaginative work. It only needed the securing of a few mechanical contrivances, a studio, for instance, with a north-light, to have made his sojourn at Nevilton one of the most prolific summers, in regard to his art, that he had experienced since his student days in Rome. He began vaguely to wish in the depths of his mind that it were possible for these good Romers to bestow upon him in perpetuity some pleasant airy chamber in their great house, so that he might not have to lose, for many summers to come, these agreeable and scandalous gossippings with the mother and these still more agreeable flirtations with the delicious daughter. This bold and fantastic idea was less a fabric of airy speculation than might have been supposed; for if the American was enchanted with his entertainers, his entertainers, at any rate the mother and the daughter, were extremely well pleased with him. The free sweep of his capacious sympathy, the absence in him of any punctilious gentility, the large and benignant atmosphere he diffused round him, and the mixture of cynical realism with considerate chivalry, were things so different from anything they had been accustomed to, that they both of them would willingly have offered him a suite of apartments in the house, if he could have accepted such an offer.

Dangelis was particularly lucky in arriving at Nevilton at this especial moment. An abnormally retarded spring had led to the most delicious overlapping in the varied flora of the place. Though June had begun, there were still many flowers lingering in the shadier spots of the woods and ditches, which properly belonged not only to May, but to very early May. Certain, even, of April's progeny had not completely faded from the late-flowering lanes.

The artist found himself surrounded by a riotous revel of leafy exuberance. The year's "primal burst" had occurred, not in reluctant spasmodic fits and starts, as is usual in our intermittent fine weather, but in a grand universal outpouring of the earth’s sap. His imagination answered spontaneously to this appeal, and his note-books were speedily filled with hurried passionate sketches, made at all hours of the long bright days, and full of suggestive charm. One particularly lovely afternoon the American found himself wandering slowly up the hill from the little Nevilton station, after a brief excursion to Yeoborough in search of pigments and canvas. He was hoping to take advantage of this auspicious stirring of his imaginative senses, by entering upon some more important and more continuous work. The Nevilton ladies had assured him that it would be quite impossible to find in the little town the kind of materials he needed; and he was returning in high spirits to assure them that he had completely falsified their prediction. He suspected Gladys of having invented this difficulty with a view to confining his labours to such easily shared sketching-trips as she might accompany him upon, but though the fascination of the romping and toying girl still retained, and had even increased, its power over him; he was, in this case, impelled and driven by a force stronger and more dominant than any sensual attraction. He was in a better mood for painting than he had ever been in his life, and nothing could interfere with his resolution to exploit this mood to its utmost limit. With the most precious of his newly purchased materials under his arm and the more bulky ones promised him that same evening, Dangelis, as he drifted slowly up the sunny road chatting amicably with such rural marketers as overtook him, felt in a peculiarly harmonious temper.

He had recently, in the western cities of the States, won a certain fiercely contested notoriety in the art of portrait-painting, an art which he had come more and more to practise according to the very latest of those daring modern theories, which are summed up sometimes under the not very illuminative title of Post-impressionism, and he had, during the last few days, indulged in a natural and irresistible wish to associate this new departure with his personal experiences at Nevilton.

Gossiping nonchalantly with the village-wives, as he ascended the dusty road, by the vicarage wall, his thoughts ran swiftly over the motley-coloured map of his past life, and the deviating track across the world which he had been led to follow. He congratulated himself in his heart, as he indulged in easy persiflage with his fellow-wayfarers, upon his consistent freedom from everything that might choke or restrain the freedom of his will.

How fortunate, how incredibly fortunate, that he should, in weather like this, and in so abounding a mood of creative energy, be completely his own master, except for the need of propitiating two naive and amusing women! He entertained himself by the thought of how little they really knew him, — these friendly Romers — how little they sounded his real purposes, his essential feelings! To them no doubt, he was no more than he was to these excellent villagers, — a tall, fair, slouching, bony figure, with a face, — if they went as far as his face, — massively heavy and irregular, with dreamy humorous eyes and a mouth addicted to nervous twitching.

A clump of dandelions, obtruding their golden indifference to human drama, into the dust of the road at his feet, mixed oddly, at that moment, in these obscure workings of his brain, with a sort of savage caress of self-complacent congratulation which he suddenly bestowed on his interior self; as, beneath his pleasant chatter with his rural companions, he thought how imperturbable, how ferocious, his secret egoism was, and how well he concealed it under his indolent good-nature! He had passed now the entrance to the vicarage garden, and in the adjoining field he observed with a curious thrill of psychic sympathy the tenacious grip with which a viciously-knotted ash-tree held to the earth with its sturdy roots. Outwalked at last by all the other returned travellers, Dangelis glanced without pausing down the long Italianated avenue, at the end of which shone red, in the afternoon sun, the mullioned windows of the great house. He preferred to prolong his stroll, by taking the circuitous way, round by the village. He knew the expression of that famous west front too well now, to linger in admiration over its picturesque repose in the afternoon sunshine. As a matter of fact a slight chill of curious antipathy crossed his consciousness as he quickened his steps.

Happily situated though he was, in his pleasant lodging beneath that capacious roof, the famous edifice itself had not altogether won his affection. The thing suggested to his wayward and prairie-nurtured soul, a stately product rather of convention than of life. He felt oddly conscious of it as something symbolic of what would be always intrinsically opposed to him, of what would willingly, if it were able, suppress him and render him helpless.

Dangelis belonged to quite a different type of trans-Atlantic visitor, from the kind that hover with exuberant delight over everything that is “old” or “English” or “European.” He was essentially rather an artist than an antiquary, rather an energetic workman than an epicurean sentimentalist. Once out of sight of the Elizabethan pile, the curious chill passed from his mind, and as he approached the first cottages of the village he looked round for more reassuring tokens. Such tokens were not lacking. They crowded in upon him, indeed, from every side. Stopping for a moment, ere the houses actually blocked his view, and leaning over a gate which faced westward, Dangelis looked out across the great Somersetshire plain, to which Leo’s Hill and Nevilton Mount serve the office of watchful sentinels. Tall, closely-clipped elm-trees, bordering every field, gave the country on this side of the horizon, a queer artificial look, as if it had been one huge landscape-garden, arranged according to the arbitrary pleasure of some fantastic artist, whose perversion it was to reduce every natural extravagance to the meticulous rhythm of his own formal taste.

This impression, the impression of something willed and intentional in the very formation of Nature, gave our eccentric onlooker a caressing and delicate pleasure, a sense as of a thing peculiarly harmonious to his own spirit. The formality of Nevilton House depressed and chilled him, but the formality of age-trimmed trees and hedges liberated his imagination, as some perverse work of a Picasso or a Matisse might have done. He wondered vaguely to himself what was the precise cause of the psychic antipathy which rendered him so cold to the grandeur of Elizabethan architecture, while the other features of his present dwelling remained so attractive, and he came to the temporary solution, as he took his arms from the top of the gate, that it was because that particular kind of magnificence expressed the pride of a class, rather than of an individual, whereas he himself was all for individual self-assertion in everything — in everything! The problem was still teasing him, when, a few minutes later, he passed the graceful tower of St. Catharine’s church.

This strangely organic, this curiously anonymous Gothic art — was not this also, the suppression of the individual, in the presence of something larger and deeper, of something that demanded the sacrifice of mere transient personality, as the very condition of its appearance? At all events it was less humiliating, less of an insult, to the claims of the individual will, when the thing was done in the interest of religion, than when it was done in the interests of a class. The impersonality of the former, resembled the impersonality of rocks and flowers; that of the latter, the impersonality of fashions in dress.

“But away with them both!” muttered Dangelis to himself, as he strode viciously down the central street of Nevilton. The American was in very truth, and he felt he was, for all his artistic receptivity, an alien and a foreigner in the midst of these time-worn traditions. In spite of their beauty he knew himself profoundly opposed to them. They excited fibres of opposition and rebellion in him, that went down to the very depths of his nature. If, allowing full scope to our speculative fancy — and who knows upon what occult truths these wandering thoughts sometimes stumble? — we image the opposing “streams of tendency,” in Nevilton village, as focussed and summed up, in the form of the Gothic church, guarded by the consecrated Mount, and the form of the Elizabethan house, owned by the owner of Leo’s Hill, it is clear that this wanderer, from the shores of the Great Lakes, was equally antagonistic to both of them. He brought into the place a certain large and elemental indifference. To the child of the winds and storms of the Great Lakes, as, so one might think, to the high fixed stars themselves, this local strife of opposed mythologies must needs appear a matter of but trifling importance.

The American was not permitted, on this occasion, to pursue his meditations uninterrupted to the end of his walk. Half-way down the south drive he was overtaken by Gladys, returning from the village post-office. “Hullo! How have you got on?” she cried. “I suppose you’ll believe me another time? You know now, I expect, how impossible the Yeoborough shops are!”

“On the contrary,” said the artist smiling, “I have found them extremely good. Perhaps I am less exacting,” he added, “than some artists.”

“I am exacting in everything,” said Gladys, “especially in people. That is why I get on so well with you. You are a new experience to me.”

Dangelis made no reply to this and they paced in silence under the tall exotic cedars until they reached the house.

"There's mother!" cried the girl, pushing open the door that led into the kitchen premises, and pulling the American unceremoniously in after her. They found Mrs. Romer before a large oak table, set in the mullioned window of the housekeeper's little room. She was arranging flowers for the evening's dinner-table. The plump lady welcomed Dangelis effusively and made him sit down upon a Queen Anne settle of polished mahogany which stood in the corner of the fire-place. Gladys remained standing, a tall softly-moulded figure, appealingly girlish in her light muslin frock. She swayed slightly, backwards and forwards, pouting capriciously at her mother's naive discourse, and loosening her belt with both her hands.

"Why should you ever go back to America?" Mrs. Romer was saying. "Don't go, dear Mr. Dangelis. Stay with us here till the end of the summer. The Red room in the south passage was getting quite damp before you came. Please, don't go! Gladys and I are getting so fond of you, so used to your ways and all that. Aren't we Gladys? Why should you go? There are plenty of lovely bits of scenery about here. And you can have a studio built! Yes! Why not? Couldn't he, Gladys? The lumber-room in the south passage — opposite where Lily sleeps — would make a splendid place for painting in hot weather. I suppose a north light, though, would be impossible. But some kind of glass arrangement might be made. I must talk to Mortimer about it. I suppose you rich Americans think nothing of calling in builders and putting up studios. I suppose you do it everywhere. America must be full of north light. But perhaps something of the kind could be done. I really don't understand architecture, but Mortimer does. Mortimer understands everything. I daresay it wouldn't be very expensive. It would only mean buying the glass."

The admirable woman, whose large fair face and double chin had grown quite creased and shiny with excitement, turned at last to her daughter who had been coquettishly and dreamily staring at the smiling artist.

“Why don’t you say something, Gladys? You don’t want Mr. Dangelis to go, any more than I do, do you?”

The girl moved to the table and picking up a large peony stuck it wantonly and capriciously into her dress. “I have my confirmation lesson tonight,” she said. “I must be at Mr. Clavering’s by six. What’s the time now?” She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. “Why, it’s nearly half-past four! I wonder where Lacrima is. Never mind! We must have tea without her. I’m sure Mr. Dangelis is dying for tea. Let’s have it out on the terrace.”

“At six?” repeated Mrs. Romer. “I thought the class was always at seven. It was given out to be seven. I heard the notice on Sunday.”

Gladys looked smilingly at the American as she answered her mother. “Don’t be silly, dear. You know Mr. Clavering takes me separately from the others. The others are all village people.”

Mrs. Romer rose from her seat with something between a sigh and a chuckle. “I hadn’t the least idea,” she said, “that he took you separately. You’ve been going to these classes for three weeks and you’ve never mentioned such a thing until this moment. Well — never mind! I expect Mr. Dangelis will not object to strolling down the drive with you. You’d better both get ready for tea now. I’ll go and tell somebody we want it.”

She had no sooner departed than Gladys began flicking the American, in playful childish sport, with a spray of early roses. He entered willingly into the game, and a pleasant tussle ensued between them as he sought to snatch the flowers out of her hands. She resisted but he pushed her backwards, and held her imprisoned against the edge of the table, teasing her as if she were a romping child of twelve.

“So you are going to these classes alone, are you?” he said. “I see that your English clergymen are allowed extraordinary privileges. I expect you cause him a good deal of agitation, poor dear man, if you flirt with him as shamelessly as you do with me. Well, go ahead! I’m not responsible for you. In fact I’m all for spurring you on. It’ll amuse me to see what happens. But no doubt all sorts of things have happened already! I suppose you’ve made Mr. Clavering desperately in love with you. I expect you persecute him unmercifully. I know you. I know your ways.” He playfully pinched her arm. “But go on. It’ll be an amusement to me to watch the result of all this. I like being a sort of sympathetic onlooker, in these things. I like the idea of hiding behind the scenes, and watching the tricks of a naughty little flirt like you, set upon troubling the mind of a poor harmless minister.”

The reply made by the daughter of the House to this challenge was a simple but effective one. Like a mischievous infant caught in some unpardonable act, she flagrantly and shamelessly put out her tongue at him. Long afterwards, with curious feelings, Dangelis recalled this gesture. He associated it to the end of his life with the indefinable smell of cut flowers, with their stalks in water, and the pungency of peony-petals.

Tea, when it reached our friends upon the stately east terrace, proved a gay and festive meal. The absence of the reserved and nervous Italian, and also of the master of Nevilton, rendered all three persons more completely and freely at their ease, than they had ever been since the American’s first appearance. The grass was being cut at that corner of the park, and the fresh delicious smell, full of the very sap of the earth, poured in upon them across the sunny flower beds. The chattering of young starlings, the cawing of young rooks, blended pleasantly with the swish of the scythes and the laughter of the hay-makers; and from the distant village floated softly to their ears all those vague and characteristic sounds which accompany the close of a hot day, and the release from labour of men and beasts. As they devoured their bread and butter with that naive greediness which is part of the natural atmosphere of this privileged hour in an English home, the three friends indicated by their playful temper and gay discourse that they each had secret reasons for self-congratulation.

Dangelis felt an exquisite sense of new possibilities in his art, drawn from the seduction of these surroundings and the frank animalism of his cheerful companions. He sat between them, watching their looks and ways, very much as Rubens or Franz Hals might have watched the rounded bosoms and spacious gestures of two admirable burgess-women in some country house of Holland.

Mrs. Romer, below her garrulous chatter, nourished fantastic and rose-colored dreams, in which inestimable piles of dollars, and limitless rows of golden haired grand-children, played the predominant part. Gladys, flushed and excited, gave herself up to the imagined exercise of every sort of wanton and wilful power, with the desire for which the flowing sap of the year's exuberance filled her responsive veins.

Tea over, Dangelis suggested that he should accompany the girl to Mr. Clavering's door.

"You needn't be there for three quarters of an hour," he said, "let's go across to the mill copse first, and see if there are any blue-bells left."

Gladys willingly consented, and Susan Romer, remaining pensive in her low cane chair, watched their youthful figures retreating across the sunlit park with a sigh of profound thankfulness addressed vaguely and obscurely to Omnipotence. This was indeed the sort of son-in-law she craved. How much more desirable than that reserved and haughty young Ilminster! Gladys would be, three times over, a fool if she let him escape.

A few minutes later the artist and his girl-friend reached the mill spinney. He helped her over the stream and the black thorn hedge without too much damage to her frock and he was rewarded for his efforts by the thrill of vibrating pleasure with which she plunged her hands among the oozy stalks of those ineffable blue flowers.

“No wonder young Hyacinth was too beautiful to live,” he remarked.

“Shut up,” was the young woman’s reply, as she breathlessly stretched herself along the length of a fallen branch, and endeavoured to reach the damp moist stalks and cool leaves with her forehead and lips.

“How silly it is, having one’s hair done up,” she cried presently, raising herself on her hands from her prone position, and kicking the branch viciously with her foot.

“You’d have liked me with my hair down, Mr. Dangelis,” she continued. “Lying like this,” and she once more embraced the fallen bough, “it would have got mixed up with all those blue-bells and then you *would* have had something to paint!”

“Bad girl!” cried the artist playfully, switching her lightly with a willow wand from which he had been stripping the bark. “I would have made you do your hair up, tight round your head, years and years ago.”

He offered her his hand and lifted her up. Once in possession of those ardent youthful fingers, he seemed to consider himself justified in retaining them and, as the girl made no sign of dissent, they advanced hand in hand through the thick undergrowth.

The place was indeed a little epitome of the season’s prolific growth. Above and about them, elder-bushes and hazels met in entangled profusion; while at their feet the marshy soil was covered with a mass of moss and cool-rooted leafy plants. Golden-green burdocks grew there, and dark dog-mercury; while mixed with aromatic water-mint and ground ivy, crowds of sturdy red campions lifted up their rose-coloured heads. The undergrowth was so thick, and the roots of the willows and alders so betraying, that over and over again he had to make a path for her, and hold back with his hand some threatening withy-switch or prickly thorn branch, that appeared likely to invade her face or body.

The indescribable charm of the hour, as the broken sunlight, almost horizontal now, threw red patches, like the blood of wounded satyrs, upon tree-trunks and mossy stumps, and made the little marsh-pools gleam as if filled with fairy wine, found its completest expression in the long-drawn flute-music, at the same time frivolously gay and exquisitely sad, of the blackbird's song. An angry cuckoo, crying its familiar cry as it flew, flapped away from some hidden perch, just above their heads.

Not many more blackbird's notes and not many more cuckoo's cries would that diminutive jungle hear, before the great midsummer silence descended upon it, to be broken only by the less magical sounds of the later season. Nothing but the auspicious accident of the extreme lateness of the spring had given to the visitor from Ohio these revelations of enchantment. It was one of those unequalled moments when the earth seems to breathe out from its most secret heart perfumes and scents that seem to belong to a more felicitous planet than our planet, murmurs and voices adapted to more responsive ears than our ears.

It was doubtless, so Dangelis thought, on such an evening as this, that the first notion of the presence in such places of beings of a finer and yet a grosser texture than man's, first entered the imagination of humanity. In such a spot were the earth-gods born.

Many feathered things, besides blackbirds and cuckoos abounded in the mill spinney.

They had scarcely reached the opposite end of the little wood, when with a sudden cry of excitement and a quick sinking on her knees, the girl turned to him with a young thrush in her hand. It was big enough to be capable of flying and, as she held it in her soft white fingers, it struggled desperately and uttered little cries. She held it tightly in one hand, and with the other caressed its ruffled feathers, looking sideways at her companion, as she did so, with dreamy, half-shut, voluptuous eyes.

"Little darling," she whispered. And then, with a breathless gasp in her voice,— "Kiss its head, Mr. Dangelis. It can't get away." He stooped over her as she held the bird up to him, and if in obeying her he brushed with his lips fingers as well as feathers, the accident was not one he could bring himself to regret.

"It can't get away," she repeated, in a low soft murmur.

The bird did, however, get away, a moment afterwards, and went fluttering off through the brushwood, with that delicious, awkward violence, which young thrushes share with so many other youthful things.

In the deep ditch which they now had to cross, the artist caught sight of a solitary half-faded primrose, the very last, perhaps, of its delicate tribe. He showed it to Gladys, gently smoothing away, as he did so, the heavy leaves which seemed to be overshadowing its last days of life.

The girl pushed him aside impetuously, and plucking the faded flower deliberately thrust it into her mouth.

"I love eating them," she cried, "I used to do it when I was ever so little and I do it still when I am alone. You've no idea how nice they taste!"

At that moment they heard the sound of the church clock striking six.

"Quick!" cried Gladys. "Mr. Clavering will be waiting. He'll be cross if I'm too dreadfully late."

They emerged from the wood and followed the grass-grown lane, round by the small mill-pond. Crossing the park once more, they entered the village by the Yeoborough road.

"What a girl!" said Dangelis to himself, in a voice of unmitigated admiration, as he held open for her, at last, the little gate of the old vicarage garden, and waved his good-bye.

"What a girl! Heaven help that unfortunate Mr. Clavering! If he's as susceptible as most of these young Englishmen, she'll make havoc of his poor heart. Will he read the 'Imitation' with her, I wonder?"

He strolled slowly back, the way they had come, the personality of the insidious Gladys pressing less and less heavily upon him as his thought reverted to his painting. He resolved that he would throw all these recent impressions together in some large and sumptuous picture, that should give to these modern human figures something of the ample suggestion and noble aplomb, the secret of which seemed to have been lost to the world with the old Flemish and Venetian masters.

What in his soul he vaguely imaged as his task, was an attempt to eliminate all mystic and symbolic attitudes from his works, and to catch, in their place, if the inspiration came to him, something of the lavish prodigality, superbly material, and yet possessed of ineffable vistas, of the large careless evocations of nature herself.

His imaginative purpose, as it defined itself more and more clearly in his mind, during his solitary return through the evening light, seemed to imply an attempted reproduction of those aspects of the human drama, in such a place as this, which carried upon their surface the air of things that could not happen otherwise, and which, in their large inevitableness, over-brimmed and over-flowed all traditional distinctions. He would have liked to have given, in this way, to the figures of Gladys and her mother, something of the superb non-moral "insouciance," springing, like the movements of animals and the fragrance of plants, out of the bosom of an earth innocent of both introspection and renunciation, which one observes in the forms of Attic sculpture, or in the creations of Venetian colourists. Below the high ornamental wall of Nevilton garden he paused a moment before entering the little postern-gate, to admire the indescribable greenness and luxuriousness of the heavy grass devoted in this place, not to hay-makers but to cattle. There was a sort of poetry, he humorously told himself, even about the great black heaps of cow-dung which alternated here with the golden clumps of drowsy buttercups. They also, — why not? — might be brought into the kind of picture he visioned, just as Veronese brought his mongrels and curs to the very feet of the Saviour!

Dangelis lifted his eyes, to where, through a gap in the leafy uplands, the more distant hills were visible. He could make out clearly, in the rich purple light, the long curving lines of the Corton downs, as they melted, little by little, in a floating lake of aerial blue-grey vapour, the exhalation of the great valley's day-long breathing.

He could even mark, at the end of the Corton range — and the sight of it gave him a thrilling sense of the invincible continuity of life in these regions — the famous tree-crested circle of Cadbury Camp, the authentic site of the Arthurian Camelot.

What a lodging this Nevilton was, to pass one's days in, to work in, and to love and dream! What enchantments were all around him! What memories! What dumb voices!

CHAPTER VIII. THE MYTHOLOGY OF SACRIFICE

JUNE, IN NEVILTON, that summer, seemed debarred by some strange interdiction from regaining its normal dampness and rainy discomfort.

It continued unnaturally hot and dry — so dry, that though the hay-harvest was still in full session, the farmers were growing seriously anxious and impatient for the long-delayed showers. It had been, as we have already noted, an unusual season. Not only were there so many blue-bells lingering in the shadowy places in the woods, but among the later flowers there were curious over-lappings.

The little milk-wort blossoms, for instance, on Leo's Hill, were overtaken, before they perished, by premature out-croppings of yellow trefoil and purple thyme.

The walnut-trees had still something left of their spring freshness, while in the hedges along the roads, covered, all of them, with a soft coating of thin white dust, the wild-roses and the feathery grasses suggested the heart of the year's prime.

It was about eight o'clock, in the evening of a day towards the end of the second week in this unusual month, that Mr. Hugh Clavering emerged from the entrance of the Old Vicarage with a concentrated and brooding expression. His heart was indeed rent and torn within him by opposite and contrary emotions. With one portion of his sensitive nature he was craving desperately for the next day's interview with Gladys; with the other portion he was making firm and drastic resolutions to avoid it and escape from it. She was due to come to his house in the afternoon — less than twenty-four hours’ time from this actual moment! But the more rigorous half of his being had formed the austere plan of sending her a note in the morning begging her to appear, along with the other candidates, at a later hour. He had written the note and it still remained, propped up against the little Arundel print of the Transfiguration, on the mantelpiece of his room.

He went up the street with bowed, absorbed head, hardly noticing the salutations of the easy loiterers gathered outside the door of the Goat and Boy, — the one of Nevilton’s two taverns which just at present attracted the most custom. Passing between the tavern and the churchyard wall, he pushed open the gate leading into the priory farm-yard, and striding hurriedly through it began the ascent of the grassy slope at the base of Nevilton Mount.

The wind had sunk with the sinking of the sun, and an immense quietness lay like a catafalque of sacred interposition on the fields and roofs and orchards of the valley. A delicious smell of new-mown grass blent itself with the heavy perfume of the great white blossoms of the elder bushes — held out, like so many consecrated chalices to catch the last drops of soft-lingering light, before it faded away.

Hugh Clavering went over the impending situation again and again; first from one point of view, then from another. The devil whispered to him — if it were the devil — that he had no right to sacrifice his spiritual influence over this disconcerting pupil, out of a mere personal embarrassment. If he gave her her lesson along with the rest, all that special effort he had bestowed upon her thought, her reading, her understanding, might so easily be thrown away! She was different, obviously different, from the simple village maids, and to put her now, at this late hour, with the confirmation only a few weeks off, into the common class, would be to undo the work of several months. He could not alter his method with the others for her sake, and she would be forced to listen to teaching which to her would be elementary and platitudinous. He would be throwing her back in her spiritual development. He would be forcing her to return to the mere alphabet of theology at the moment when she had just begun to grow interested in its subtle and beautiful literature. She would no doubt be both bored and teased. Her nerves would be ruffled, her interest diminished, her curiosity dulled. She would be angry, too, at being treated exactly as were these rustic maidens — and anger was not a desirable attribute in a gentle catechumen.

Besides, her case was different from theirs on quite technical grounds. She was preparing for baptism as well as confirmation, and he, as her priest, was bound to make this, the most essential of all Christian sacraments, the head and front of his instruction. It was hardly to the point to say that the other girls knew quite as little of the importance of this sacred rite as she did. His explanations of it to them, his emphasis upon the blessing it had already been to them, would be necessarily too simple and childish for her quicker, maturer understanding.

As he reached the actual beginning of the woody eminence and turned for a moment to inhale the magical softness of the invading twilight, it occurred to him that from a logically ecclesiastical standpoint it was a monstrous thing that he should be serenely and coldly debating the cutting off of his spiritual assistance from this poor thirsty flower of the heathen desert. She was unbaptized — and to be unbaptized, according to true doctrine, meant, with all our Christian opportunities, a definite peril, a grave and assured peril, to her immortal soul. Who was he that he should play with such a formidable risk — such a risk to such a lamb of the Great Shepherd? It was quite probable — he knew it was probable — that, angry with him for deserting her so causelessly and unreasonably, she would refuse to go further in the sacred business. She would say, and say justly, that since the affair seemed of so little importance to him she would make it of little importance to herself. Suppose he were to call in some colleague from Yeoborough, and make over this too exciting neophyte to some other pastor of souls — would she agree to such a casual transference? He knew well enough that she would not.

How unfortunate it was that the peculiar constitution of his English Church made these things so difficult! The individual personality of the priest mattered so much in Anglican circles! The nobler self in him envied bitterly at that moment the stricter and yet more malleable organization of the Mother Church. How easy it would be were he a Roman priest. A word to his superior in office, and all would arrange itself! It was impossible to imagine himself speaking such a word to the Right Reverend the Bishop of Glastonbury. The mere idea of such a thing, in our England of discreet propriety, made him smile in the midst of his distress.

The thought of the Roman Church brought into his mind the plausible figure of Mr. Taxater. How that profound and subtle humanist would chuckle over his present dilemma! He would probably regard it as a proper and ironical punishment upon him for his heretical assumption of this traditional office.

Tradition! That was the thing. Tradition and organization. After all, it was only to Hugh Clavering, as a nameless impersonal priest of God, that this lovely outcast lamb came begging to be enfolded. He had no right to dally with the question at all. There *was* no question. As the priest of Nevilton it was his clear pastoral duty to give every possible spiritual assistance to every person in his flock. What if the pursuit of this duty did throw temptation — intolerable temptation — in his way? His business was not to try and escape from such a struggle; but to face it, to wrestle with it, to overcome it! He was like a sentinel at his post in a great war. Was he to leave his post and retreat to the rear because the shells were bursting so thickly round him?

He sat down on the grass with his back to an ancient thorn-tree and gazed upon the tower of his beloved church. Would he not be false to that Church — false to his vows of ordination — if he were now to draw back from the firing-line of the battle and give up the struggle by a cowardly retreat? Even supposing the temptation were more than he could endure — even supposing that he fell — would not God prefer his suffering such a fall with his face to the foe, sword in hand, rather than that he should be saved, his consecrated weapon dropped from his fingers, in squalid ignoble flight?

So much for the arguments whispered in his ear by the angel of darkness! But he had lately been visited by another angel — surely not of darkness — and he recalled the plausible reasonings of the great champion of the papacy, as he sat in that pleasant window sipping his wine. Why should he agitate himself so furiously over this little matter? After all, why not enjoy the pleasure of this exquisite being's society? He was in no danger of doing her any harm — he knew Gladys at least well enough by now to know that! — and what harm could she do him? There was no harm in being attracted irresistibly to something so surpassingly attractive! Suppose he fell really in love with her? Well! There was no religious rule — certainly none in the church he belonged to — against falling in love with a lovable and desirable girl. But it was not a matter of falling in love. He knew that well enough. There was very little of the romantic or the sentimental about the feelings she aroused in him. It was just a simple, sensuous, amorous attraction to a provocative and alluring daughter of Eve.

Just a simple sensuous attraction — so simple, so natural, as to be almost "innocent," as Mr. Taxater would put it.

So he argued with himself; but the Tower of the Church opposite seemed to invade the mists of these subtle reasonings with a stern emphasis of clear-cut protest. He knew well enough that his peculiar nature was not of the kind that might be called "sensuous" or "amorous," but of quite a different sort. The feelings that had lately been excited in him were as concentrated and passionate as his feelings for the altar he served. They were indeed a sort of temporal inversion of this sacred ardour; or, as the cynical Mr. Quincunx in his blunt manner would have expressed it, this sacred fire itself was only a form taken by the more earthly flame. But a "flame" it was, — not any gentle toying with soft sensation, — a flame, a madness, a vice, an obsession.

In no ideal sense could he be said to be "in love" with Gladys. He was intoxicated with her. His senses craved for her as they might have craved for some sort of maddening drug. In his heart of hearts he knew well that the emotion he felt was closely allied to a curious kind of antagonism. He thought of her with little tenderness, with no gentle, responsible consideration. Her warm insidious charm maddened and perturbed him. It did not diffuse itself through his senses like a tender fragrance. It provoked, disturbed, and tantalized. She was no Rose of Sharon, to be worshipped forever. She was a Rose of Shiraz, to be seized, pressed against his face, and flung aside! The appeal she made to him was an appeal to what was perverse, vicious, dangerous devastating, in his nature. To call his attraction to her beauty "innocent" — in Mr. Taxater's phrase — was a mere hypercritical white-washing of the brutal fact.

His mind, in its whirling agitation, conjured up the image of himself as married to her, as legally and absolutely possessed of her. The image was like fuel to his flame, but it brought no solution of the problem. Marriage, though permitted by his church, was as directly contrary to his own interpretation of his duty as a priest, as any mortal sin might be. To him it would have been a mortal sin — the betrayal of his profoundest ideal. In the perversity — if you will — of his ecclesiastical conscience, he felt towards such a solution the feeling a man might have if the selling of his soul were to be a thing transacted in cold blood, rather than in the tempest of the moment. To marry Gladys would be to summon the very sacraments of his church to bless with a blasphemous consecration his treachery to their appeal.

Rent and torn by all these conflicting thoughts, the poor clergyman scrambled once more to his feet, pushed his way recklessly through the intervening fence, and began ascending the steep side of the pyramidal hill. As he struggled upward, through burdocks, nettles, tall grasses, red-campion, and newly planted firs, his soul felt within him as if it were something fleeing from an invincible pursuer. The rank aromatic smell of torn elder-boughs and the pungent odour of trodden ground-ivy filled his nostrils. His clothes were sprinkled with feathery seed-dust. Closely-sticking burs clung to his legs and arms. Outstretched branches switched his face with their leaves. His feet stumbled over young fern-fronds, bent earthwards in their elaborate unsheathing.

He vaguely associated with his thoughts, as he struggled on, certain queer purple markings which he noticed on the stalks of the thickly-grown hemlocks, and the bind-weed, which entwined itself round many of the slenderer tree-stems, became a symbol of the power that assailed him. To escape — to be free! This was the burden of his soul’s crying as he plunged forward through all these dim leafy obstructions.

Gradually, as he drew nearer the hill's summit, there formed in his mind the only real sanctuary of refuge, the only genuine deliverance. He must obey his innate conscience; and let the result be as God willed. At all costs he must shake himself clear of this hot, sweet, luscious bind-weed, that was choking the growth of his soul. His own soul — that, after all, was his first care, his predominant concern. To keep *that*, pure and undefiled, and let all else go! Confused by the subtle arguments of the serpent, he would cling only the more passionately to the actual figure of the God-Man, and obey his profound command in its literal simplicity. Ecclesiastical casuistry might say what it pleased about the danger he plunged Gladys into, in thus neglecting her. The matter had gone deeper than casuistry, deeper, far deeper, than points of doctrine. It had become a direct personal struggle between his own soul and Satan; a struggle in which, as he well knew, the only victory lay in flight. On other fields he might be commanded by his celestial Captain to hold his post to the last; but in the arena of this temptation, to hold the field was to desert the field; to escape from it, to win it.

He paused breathlessly under a clump of larches, and stretching out his arms, seized — like Samson in the temple of Dagon — two of the slender-growing trunks. "Let all this insidious growth of Nature," he thought, "all this teeming and prolific exuberance of godless life, be thrust into oblivion, as long as the great translunar Secret be kept inviolable!" Exhausted by the struggle within him he sank down in the green twilight of that leafy security, and crossed his hands over his knees. Through a gap in the foliage he could perceive the valley below; he could even perceive the outline of the roof of Nevilton House. But against the magic of those carved pinnacles he had found a counter-charm. In the hushed stillness about him, he seemed conscious of the power of all these entangled growing things as a sinister heathen influence pulling him earthward.

Men differ curiously from one another in this respect. To some among them the influences of what we call Nature are in harmony with all that is good in them, and have a soothing and mystical effect. Others seem to disentangle themselves from every natural surrounding, and to stand out, against the background of their own spiritual horizons, clear-edged, opaque, and resistant.

Clavering was entirely of this latter type. Nature to him was always full of hidden dangers and secret perils. He found her power a magical, not a mystical, one. He resented the spell she cast over him. It seemed to lend itself, all too willingly, to the vicious demons that delighted to waylay his unguarded hours. His instinctive attitude to these enchanting natural forces was that of a mediæval monk. Their bewitching shapes, their lovely colours, their penetrating odours, were all permeated for him by a subtle diffusion of something evil there; something capable of leading one's spirit desperately, miserably far — if one allowed it the smallest welcome. Against all these siren-voices rumouring and whispering so treacherously around us, against all this shifting and flitting wizardry, one defence alone availed; — the clear-cut, absolute authority, of Him who makes the clouds his chariot and the earth his footstool.

As Clavering sat crouching there under his tent of larches, the spirit of the Christ he served seemed to pass surging through him like a passionate flood. He drew deep breaths of exquisite relief and comfort. The problem was solved, — was indeed no problem at all; for he had nothing to do but to obey the absolute authority, the soul-piercing word. Who was he to question results? The same God who commanded him to flee from temptation was able — beyond the mystery of his own divine method — to save her who tempted him, whether baptized or unbaptized!

He leapt to his feet, and no more like one pursued, but rather like one pursuing, pushed his way to the summit of the Mount. The space at the top was flat and circular; not unlike, in its smooth level surface, the top of the mountain in that very Transfiguration picture which was now overshadowing his letter to his enchantress. In the centre of this open space rose the thin Thyrsus-shaped tower. He advanced to the eastern edge of the hill and looked down over the wide-spread landscape.

The flat elm-fringed meadows of the great mid-Somerset plain stretched softly away, till they lost themselves in a purple mist. Never had the formidable outline of the Leonian promontory looked more emphatic and sinister than it looked in this deepening twilight. The sky above it was of a pale green tint, flecked here and there by feathery streaks of carmine. The whole sky-dome was still lit by the pallid reflection of the dead sunset; and on the far northern horizon, where the Mendip hills rise above the plain, a livid whitish glimmer touched the rim of an enormous range of sombre clouds.

The priest stood, hushed, and motionless as a statue, contemplating this suggestive panorama. But little of its transparent beauty passed the surface of his consciousness. He was absorbed, rapt, intent. But the cause of his abstraction was not the diaphanous air-spaces above him or the dark earth beneath him; it was the pouring of the waves of divine love through his inmost being; it was his fusion with that great Spirit of the Beyond which renders its votaries independent of space and time.

After long exquisite moments of this high exultation, his mind gradually resumed its normal functioning. A cynical interpreter of this sublime experience would doubtless have attributed the whole phenomenon to a natural reaction of the priest, back to his habitual moral temper, from the turbulent perturbations of the recent days. Would such a one have found it a mere coincidence that at the moment of regaining his natural vision the clergyman's attention was arrested by the slow passage of a huge white cloud towards the Leonian promontory, a cloud that assumed, as it moved, gigantic and almost human lineaments?

Coincidence or not, Clavering's attention was not allowed to remain fixed upon this interesting spectacle. It seemed as though his return to ordinary human consciousness was destined to be attended by the reappearance of ordinary humanity. He perceived in the great sloping field on the eastern side of the mount the white figure of a woman, walking alone. For the moment his heart stood still; but a second glance reassured him. He knew that figure, even in the dying light. It was little Vennie Seldom. Simultaneously with this discovery he was suddenly aware that he was no longer the only frequenter of the woody solitudes of Nevilton Hill. On a sort of terrace, about a hundred yards below him, there suddenly moved into sight a boy and a girl, walking closely interlinked and whispering softly. Acting mechanically, and as if impelled by an impulse from an external power, he sank down upon his knees and spied upon them. They too slipped into a semi-recumbent posture, apparently upon the branches of a fallen tree, and proceeded, in blissful unconsciousness of any spectator, to indulge in a long and passionate embrace. From where he crouched Clavering could actually discern these innocents' kisses, and catch the little pathetic murmurings of their amorous happiness. His heart beat wildly and strangely. In his fingers he clutched great handfuls of earth. His thoughts played him satyrish and fantastic tricks. Suddenly he leapt to his feet and stumbled away, like an animal that has been wounded. He encountered the Thyrsus-shaped tower — that queer fancy of eighteenth century leisure — and beat with his hands upon its hard smooth surface. After a second or two, however, he recovered his self-control; and to afford some excuse to his own mind for his mad behaviour, he walked deliberately round the edifice, looking for its entrance. This he presently found, and stood observing it, with scowling interest, in the growing darkness. He had recognized the lovers down there. They were both youngsters of his parish. He made a detached mental resolve to talk tomorrow to the girl's mother. These flirtations during the hay-harvest often led to trouble.

There was just enough light left for him to remark some obscure lettering above the little locked door of this fanciful erection. It annoyed him that he could not read it. With trembling hand he fumbled in his pocket — produced a match-box and lit a match. There was no difficulty now in reading what it had been the humour of some eighteenth century Seldom to have carved on this site of the discovery of the Holy Rood. "Carpe Diem" he spelt out, before the flutterings of an agitated moth extinguished the light he held. This then was the oracle he had climbed the sacred Mount to hear!

With quick steps, steps over which his mind seemed no longer to have control, he returned to his point of observation. The boy and girl had disappeared, but Vennie Seldom was still visible in her white dress, pacing up and down the meadow. What was she doing there? — he wondered. Did she often slip away, after the little formal dinner with her mother, and wander at large through the evening shadows? An unaccountable rage against her besieged his heart. He felt he should soon begin to hate her if he watched her much longer; so, with a more collected and calm step and a sigh that rose from the depths of his soul he moved away to where the path descended.

As it happened, however, the path he had to follow now, for it was too dark to return as he had come, emerged, after many windings round the circle of the hill, precisely into the very field, in which Vennie was walking. He moved straight towards her. She gave a little start when she saw him, but waited passively, in that patient drooping pose so natural to her, till he was by her side.

“You too,” she said, touching his hand, “feel the necessity of being alone a little while before the day ends. I always do. Mother sometimes protests. But it is no good. There are certain little pleasures that we have a right to enjoy — haven’t we?”

They moved together along the base of the hill following its circuit in the northerly direction. Clavering felt as though, after a backward plunge into the Inferno, he had encountered a reproachful angel of light. He half expected her to say to him, in the crushing austerity of Beatrice, “Lift up your chin and answer me face to face.” The gentle power of her pure spirit over him was so persuasive that in the after-ebb of this second turbulent reaction he could not refrain from striking the confessional note.

“I wish I were as good as you, Miss Seldom,” he said. “I fear the power of evil in me goes beyond anything you could possibly conceive.”

“There are few things I cannot conceive, Mr. Clavering,” the girl answered, with that helpless droop of her little head that had so winning a pathos. “We people who live such secluded lives are not as ignorant of the great storms as you may imagine.”

Clavering’s voice shook as he responded to this.

“I wish I could talk quite freely to you. This convention that forbids friends such as we are from being frank with one another, seems to me sometimes an invention of the devil.”

The girl lifted her head. He could not see in the darkness that had now fallen upon them, how her mouth quivered and her cheeks grew scarlet.

"I think I can guess at what is worrying you, my friend," she murmured gently.

He trembled from head to foot with a curious shame. "You think it is about Gladys Romer," he burst out. "Well it is! I find her one of the greatest difficulties I have ever had in my life."

"I am afraid," said Vennie timidly, "she intends to be a difficulty to you. It is wrong to say so, but I have always been suspicious of her motives in this desire to enter our church."

"God knows what her motives are!" sighed the priest, "I only know she makes it as hard for me as she can."

As soon as he had uttered these words a queer observing sense of having been treacherous to Gladys rose in his heart. Once more he had to suppress an emotion of hatred for the little saint by his side.

"I know," murmured Vennie, "I know. She tries to play upon your good-nature. She tries to make you over-fond of her. I suppose" — she paused for a moment— "I suppose she is like that. It is not her fault. It is her — her character. She has a mad craving for admiration and is ready to play it off on anybody."

"It makes it very difficult to help her," said the priest evasively.

Vennie peered anxiously at his face. "It is not as though she really was fond of *you*," she boldly added. "I doubt whether she is fond of anyone. She loves troubling people's minds and making them unhappy."

"Don't mistake me, Miss Seldom," cried Clavering. "I am not in the least sentimental about her — it is only — only" — Vennie smoothed his path for him.

"It is only that she makes it impossible for you to teach her," she hazarded, following his lead. "I know something of that difficulty myself.

These wayward pleasure-loving people make it very hard for us all sometimes.”

Mr. Clavering shook his stick defiantly into the darkness, whether as a movement directed against the powers of evil or against the powers of good, he would himself have found it hard to say. Queer thoughts of a humourous frivolity passed through his mind. Something in the girl’s grave tone had an irritating effect upon him. It is always a little annoying, even to the best of men, to feel themselves being guided and directed by women, unless they are in love with them. Clavering was certainly not in love with Vennie; and though in his emotional agitation he had gone so far in confiding in her, he was by no means unconscious of something incongruous and even ridiculous in the situation. This queer new frivolity in him, which now peered forth from some twisted corner of his nature, like a rat out of a hole, found this whole interview intolerably absurd. He suddenly experienced the sensation of being led along at Vennie’s side like a convicted school-boy. He found himself rebelling against all women in his heart, both good and bad, and recalling, humorously and sadly, the old sweet scandalous attitude of contempt for the whole sex, of his irresponsible Cambridge days. Perhaps, dimly and unconsciously, he was reacting now, after all this interval, to the subtle influence of Mr. Taxater. He knew perfectly well that the very idea of a man — not to speak of a priest — confiding his amorous weaknesses to a woman, would have excited that epicurean sage to voluble fury. Everything that was mediæval and monkish in him rose up too, in support of this interior outburst of Rabelaisean spleen.

It would be interesting to know if Vennie had any inkling, as she walked in the darkness by his side, of this new and unexpected veering of his mood. Certainly she refrained from pressing him for any further confessions. Perhaps with the genuine clairvoyance of a saint she was conscious of her danger. At any rate she began speaking to him of herself, of her difficulties with her mother and her mother's friends, of her desire to be of more use to Lacrima Traffio, and of the obstacles in the way of that.

Conversing with friendly familiarity on these less poignant topics they arrived at last at the gates of the Priory farm and the entrance to the church. Mr. Clavering was proceeding to escort her home, when she suddenly stopped in the road, and said in a quick hurried whisper, "I should dearly love to walk once round the churchyard before I go back."

The cheerful light from the windows of the Goat and Boy showed, as it shone upon his face, his surprise as well as his disinclination. The truth is, that by a subtle reversion of logic he had now reached the idea that it was at once absurd and unkind to send that letter to Gladys. He was trembling to tear it in pieces, and burn the pieces in his kitchen-fire! Vennie however, did not look at his face. She looked at the solemn tower of St. Catharine's church.

"Please get the key," she said, "and let us walk once round."

He was compelled to obey her, and knocking at the door of the clerk's cottage aroused that astonished and scandalized official into throwing the object required out of his bedroom window. Once inside the churchyard however, the strange and mystical power of the spot brought his mood into nearer conformity with his companion's.

They stopped, as everyone who visits Nevilton churchyard is induced to stop, before the extraordinary tomb of Gideon and Naomi Andersen. The thing had been constructed from the eccentric old carver's own design, and had proved one of the keenest pleasures of his last hours.

Like the whimsical poet Donne, he had derived a sardonic and not altogether holy delight in contemplating before his end the actual slab of earthly consistence that was to make his bodily resurrection so emphatically miraculous. Clavering and Vennie stood for several minutes in mute contemplation before this strange monument. It was composed of a huge, solid block of Leonian stone, carved at the top into the likeness of an enormous human skull, and ornamented, below the skull, by a deeply cut cross surrounded by a circle. This last addition gave to the sacred symbol within it a certain heathen and ungodly look, making it seem as though it were no cross at all, but a pagan hieroglyph from some remote unconsecrated antiquity. The girl laid her fragile hand on the monstrous image of death, which the gloom around them made all the more threatening.

“It is wonderful,” she said, “how the power of Christ can change even the darkest objects into beauty. I like to think of Him striking His hand straight through the clumsy half-laws of Man and Nature, and holding out to us the promise of things far beyond all this morbid dissolution.”

“You are right, my friend,” answered the priest.

“I think the world is really a dark and dreadful place,” she went on. “I cannot help saying so. I know there are people who only see its beauty and joy. I cannot feel like that. If it wasn’t for Him I should be utterly miserable. I think I should go mad. There is too much unhappiness — too much to be borne! But this strong hand of His, struck clean down to us from outside the whole wretched confusion, — I cling to that; and it saves me. I know there are lots of happy people, but I cannot forget the others! I think of them in the night. I think of them always. They are so many — so many!”

“Dear child!” murmured the priest, his interlude of casual frivolity melting away like mist under the flame of her conviction.

“Do you think,” she continued, “that if we were able to hear the weeping of all those who suffer and have suffered since the beginning of the world, we could endure the idea of going on living? It would be too much! The burden of those tears would darken the sun and hide the moon. It is only His presence in the midst of us, — His presence, coming in from outside, that makes it possible for us to endure and have patience."

"Yes, He must come in from *outside*," murmured the priest, "or He cannot help us. He must be able to break every law and custom and rule of nature and man. He must strike at the whole miserable entanglement from outside it — from outside it!"

Clavering's voice rose almost to a shout as he uttered these last words. He felt as though he were refuting in one tremendous cry of passionate certainty all those "modernistic" theories with which he loved sometimes to play. He was completely under Vennie's influence now.

"And we must help Him," said the girl, "by entering into His Sacrifice. Only by sacrifice — by the sacrifice of everything — can we enable Him to work the miracle which He would accomplish!"

Clavering could do nothing but echo her words.

"The sacrifice of everything," he whispered, and abstractedly laid *his* hand upon the image of death carved by the old artist. Moved apparently by an unexpected impulse, Vennie seized, with her own, the hand thus extended.

"I have thought," she cried, "of a way out of your difficulty. Give her her lessons in the church! That will not hurt her feelings, and it will save you. It will prevent her from distracting your mind, and it will concentrate her attention upon your teaching. It will save you both!"

Clavering held the little hand, thus innocently given him, tenderly and solemnly in both of his.

"You are right, my friend," he said, and then, gravely and emphatically as if repeating a vow,— "I will take her in the church. That will settle everything."

Vennie seemed thrilled with spiritual joy at his acquiescence in her happy inspiration. She walked so rapidly as they recrossed the churchyard that he could hardly keep pace with her. She seemed to long to escape, to the solitude of her own home, of her own room, in order to give full vent to her feelings. He locked the gate of the porch behind them, and put the key in his pocket. Very quickly and in complete silence they made their way up the road to the entrance of the Vicarage garden.

Here they separated, with one more significant and solemn hand-clasp. It was as if the spirit of St. Catharine herself was in the girl, so ethereal did she look, so transported by unearthly emotion, as the gate swung behind her.

As for the vicar of Nevilton, he strode back impetuously to his own house, and there, from its place beneath the print of the transfiguration, he took the letter, and tore it into many pieces; but he tore it with a different intention from that which, an hour before, had ruled his brain; and the sleep which awaited him, as soon as his head touched his pillow, was the soundest and sweetest he had known since first he came to the village.

CHAPTER IX. THE MYTHOLOGY OF POWER

IT WAS LATE in the afternoon of the day following the events just described. Mrs. Fringe was passing in and out of Clavering's sitting-room making the removal of his tea an opportunity for interminable discourse.

"They say Eliza Wotnot's had a bad week of it with one thing and another. They say she be as yellow as a lemon-pip in her body, as you might call it, and grey as ash-heaps in her old face. I never cared for the woman myself, and I don't gather as she was desperate liked in the village, but a Christian's a Christian when they be laid low in the Lord's pleasure, though they be as surly-tongued as Satan."

"I know, I know," said the clergyman impatiently.

"They say Mr. Taxater sits up with her night after night as if he was a trained nurse. Why he don't have a nurse I can't think, 'cept it be some papist practice. The poor gentleman will be getting woeful thin, if this goes on. He's not one for losing his sleep and his regular meals."

"Sally Birch is doing all that for him, Mrs. Fringe," said Clavering. "I have seen to it myself."

"Sally Birch knows as much about cooking a gentleman's meals as my Lottie, and that's not saying a great deal."

"Thank you, Mrs. Fringe, thank you," said Clavering. "You need not move the table."

"Oh, of course, 'tis Miss Gladys' lesson-day. They say she's given young Mr. Ilminster the go-by, sir. 'Tis strange and wonderful how some people be made by the holy Lord to have their whole blessed pleasure in this world. Providence do love the ones as loves themselves, and those that seeks what they want shall find it! I expect, between ourselves, sir, the young lady have got someone else in her eye. They tell me some great thundering swell from London is staying in the House."

"That'll do, Mrs. Fringe, that'll do. You can leave those flowers a little longer."

"I ought to let you know, sir, that old Jimmy Pringle has gone off wandering again. I saw Witch-Bessie at his door when I went to the shop this morning and she told me he was talking and talking, as badly as ever he did. Far gone, poor old sinner, Witch-Bessie said he was."

"He is a religious minded man, I believe, at bottom," said the clergyman.

"He be stark mad, sir, if that's what you mean! As to the rest, they say his carryings on with that harlotry down in Yeoborough was a disgrace to a Christian country."

"I know," said Clavering, "I know, but we all have our temptations, Mrs. Fringe."

"Temptations, sir?" and the sandy complexioned female snorted with contempt. "And is those as takes no drop of liquor, and looks at no man edge-ways, though their own lawful partner be a stiff corpse of seven years' burying, to be put in the same class with them as goes rampaging with harlotries?"

"He has repented, Mrs. Fringe, he has repented. He told me so himself when I met him last week."

"Repented!" groaned the indignant woman; "he repents well who repents when he can't sin no more. His talk, if you ask me, sir, is more scandalous than religious. Witch-Bessie told me she heard him say that he had seen the Lord Himself. I am not a learned scholar like you, sir, but I know this, that when the Lord does go about the earth he doesn't visit hoary old villains like Jimmy Pringle — except to tell them they be damned."

"Did he really say that?" asked the clergyman, feeling a growing interest in Mr. Pringle's revelations.

"Yes, sir, he did, sir! Said he met God, — those were his very words, and indecent enough words I call them! — out along by Captain Whiffley's drive-gate. You should have heard Witch-Bessie tell me. He frightened her, he did, the wicked old man! God, he said, came to him, as I might come to you, sir, quite ordinary and familiar-like. 'Jimmy,' said God, all sudden, as if he were a person passing the time of day, 'I have come to see you, Jimmy.'

"'And who may you be, Mister?' said the wicked old man, just as though the Lord above were a casual decent-dressed gentleman.

"'I am God, Jimmy,' said the Vision. 'And I be come to tell 'ee how dearly I loves 'ee, spite of Satan and all his works.' Witch-Bessie told me," Mrs. Fringe continued, "how as the old man said things to her as she never thought to hear from human lips, so dreadful they were."

"And what happened then?" asked Clavering eagerly.

"What happened then? Why God went away, he said, in a great cloud of roaring fire, and he was left alone, all dazed-like. Did you ever hear such a scimble-scamble story in your life, sir? And all by Captain Whiffley's drive-gate!"

"Well, Mrs. Fringe," said the clergyman, "I think we must postpone the rest of this interesting conversation till supper-time. I have several things I want to do."

"I know you have, sir, I know you have. It isn't easy to find out from all them books ways and means of keeping young ladies like Miss Gladys in the path of salvation. How does she get on, sir, if I might be so bold? I fear she don't learn her catechism as quiet and patient as I used to learn mine, under old Mr. Ravelin, God forgive him!"

"Oh, I think Miss Romer is quite as good a pupil as you used to be, Mrs. Fringe," said Clavering, rising and gently ushering her out of the door.

"She's as good as some of these new-fangled village hussies, anyway," retorted the irrepressible lady, turning on the threshold. "They tell me that Lucy Vare was off again last night with that rascally Tom Mooring. She'll be in trouble, that young girl, before she wants to be."

"I know, I know," sighed the clergyman sadly, fumbling with the door handle.

"You don't know all you *ought* to know, sir, if you'll pardon my boldness," returned the woman, making a step backwards.

"I know, because I saw them!" shouted Clavering, closing the door with irritable violence.

"Goodness me!" muttered Mrs. Fringe, returning to her kitchen, "if the poor young man knew what this parish was really like, he wouldn't talk so freely about 'seeing' people!"

Left to himself, Clavering moved uneasily round his room, taking down first one book and then another, and looking anxiously at his shelves as if seeking something from them more efficient than eloquent words.

"As soon as she comes," he said to himself, "I shall take her across to the church."

He had not long to wait. The door at the end of the garden-path clicked. Light-tripping steps followed, and Gladys Romer's well-known figure made itself visible through the open window. He hastened out to meet her, hoping to forestall the hospitable Mrs. Fringe. In this, however, he was unsuccessful. His housekeeper was already in the porch, taking from the girl her parasol and gloves. How these little things, these chance-thrown little things, always intervene between our good resolutions and their accomplishment! He ought to have been ready in his garden, on the watch for her. Surely he had not intentionally remained in his room? No, it was the fault of Mrs. Fringe; of Mrs. Fringe and her stories about Jimmy Pringle and God. He wished that “a roaring cloud of fire” would rise between him and this voluptuous temptress. But probably, priest though he was, he lacked the faith of that ancient reprobate. He stood aside to let her enter. The words “I think it would be better if we went over to the church,” stuck, unuttered, to the roof of his mouth. She held out her white ungloved hand, and then, as soon as the door was closed, began very deliberately removing her hat.

He stood before her smiling, that rather inept smile, which indicates the complete paralysis of every faculty, except the faculty of admiration. He could hardly now suggest a move to the church. He could not trouble her to re-assume that charming hat. Besides, what reason could he give? He did, however, give a somewhat ambiguous reason for following out Vennie’s heroic plan on another — a different — occasion. In the tone we use when allaying the pricks of conscience by tacitly treating that sacred monitor as if its intelligence were of an inferior order: “One of these days,” he said, “we must have our lesson in the church. It would be so nice and cool there, wouldn’t it?”

There was a scent of burning weeds in the front-room of the old Vicarage, when master and neophyte sat down together, at the round oak table, before the extended works of Pusey and Newman. Sombre were the bindings of these repositories of orthodoxy, but the pleasant afternoon sun streamed wantonly over them and illumined their gloom.

Gladys had seated herself so that the light fell caressingly upon her yellow hair and deepened into exquisite attractiveness the soft shadows of her throat and neck. Her arms were sleeveless; and as she leaned them against the table, their whiteness and roundness were enhanced by the warm glow.

The priest spoke in a low monotonous voice, explaining doctrines, elucidating mysteries, and emphasizing moral lessons. He spoke of baptism. He described the manner in which the Church had appropriated to her own purpose so many ancient pagan customs. He showed how the immemorial heathen usages of "immersion" and "ablution" had become, in her hands, wonderful and suggestive symbols of the purifying power of the nobler elements. He used words that he had come, by frequent repetition, to know by heart. In order that he might point out to her passages in his authors which lent themselves to the subject, he brought his chair round to her side.

The sound of her gentle breathing, and the terrible attraction of her whole figure, as she leant forward, in sweet girlish attention to what he was saying, maddened the poor priest.

In her secret heart Gladys hardly understood a single word. The phrase "immersion," whenever it occurred, gave her an irresistible desire to laugh. She could not help thinking of her favourite round pond. The pond set her thinking of Lacrima and how amusing it was to frighten her. But this lesson with the young clergyman was even more amusing. She felt instinctively that it was upon herself his attention rested, whatever mysterious words might pass his lips.

Once, as they were leaning together over the "Development of Christian Doctrine," and he was enlarging upon the gradual evolution of one sacred implication after another, she let her arm slide lightly over the back of his hand; and a savage thrill of triumph rose in her heart, as she felt an answering magnetic shiver run through his whole frame.

“The worship of the Body of our Saviour,” he said — using his own words as a shield against her— “allows no subterfuges, no reserves. It gathers to itself, as it sweeps down the ages, every emotion, every ardour, every passion of man. It appropriates all that is noble in these things to its own high purpose, and it makes even of the evil in them a means to yet more subtle good.”

As he spoke, with an imperceptible gesture of liberation he rose from his seat by her side and set himself to pace the room. The struggle he was making caused his fingers to clench and re-clench themselves in the palms of his hands, as though he were squeezing the perfume from handfuls of scented leaves.

The high-spirited girl knew by instinct the suffering she was causing, but she did not yield to any ridiculous pity. She only felt the necessity of holding him yet more firmly. So she too rose from her chair, and, slipping softly to the window, seated herself sideways upon its ledge. Balanced charmingly here — like some wood-nymph stolen from the forest to tease the solitude of some luckless hermit — she stretched one arm out of the window, and pulling towards her a delicate branch of yellow roses, pressed it against her breast.

The pose of her figure, as she balanced herself thus, was one of provoking attractiveness, and with a furtive look of feline patience in her half-shut eyes she waited while it threw its spell over him.

The scent of burning weeds floated into the room. Clavering’s thoughts whirled to and fro in his head like whipped chaff. “I must go on speaking,” he thought; “and I must not look at her. If I look at her I am lost.” He paced the room like a caged animal. His soul cried out within him to be liberated from the body of this death. He thought of the strange tombstone of Gideon Andersen, and wished he too were buried under it, and free forever!

"Yet is it not my duty to look at her?" the devil in his heart whispered. "How can I teach her, how can I influence her for good, if I do not see the effect of my words? Is it not an insult to the Master Himself, and His Divine power, to be thus cowardly and afraid?"

His steps faltered and he leant against the table.

"Christ," he found his lips repeating, "is the explanation of all mysteries. He is the secret root of all natural impulses in us. All emerge from Him and all return to Him. He is to us what their ancient god Pan was to the Greeks. He is in a true sense our *All* — for in him is all we are, all we have, and all we hope. All our passions are His. Touched by Him, their true originator, they lose their dross, are purged of their evil, and give forth sweet-smelling, sweet-breathing — yellow roses!"

He had not intended to say "yellow roses." The sentence had rounded itself off so, apart from his conscious will.

The girl gravely indicated that she heard him; and then smiled dreamily, acquiescingly — the sort of smile that yields to a spiritual idea, as if it were a physical caress.

The scent of burning weeds continued to float in through the window. "Oh, it has gone!" she cried suddenly, as, released from her fingers, the branch swung back to its place against the sandstone wall.

"I must have it again," she added, bending her supple body backwards. She made one or two ineffectual efforts and then gave up, panting. "I can't reach it," she said. "But go on, Mr. Clavering. I can listen to you like this. It is so nice out here."

Strange unfathomable thoughts surged up in the depths of Clavering's soul. He found himself wishing that he had authority over her, that he might tame her wilful spirit, and lay her under the yoke of some austere penance. Why was she free to provoke him thus, with her merciless fragility? The madness she was arousing grew steadily upon him. He stumbled awkwardly round the edge of the table and approached her. The scent of burning weeds became yet more emphatic. To make his nearness to her less obvious, and out of a queer mechanical instinct to allay his own conscience, he continued his spiritual admonitions, even when he was quite close — even when he could have touched her with his hand. And it would be so easy to touch her! The playful perilousness of her position in the window made such a movement natural, justifiable, almost conventional.

"The true doctrine of the Incarnation," his lips repeated, "is not that something contrary to nature has happened; it is that the innermost secret of Nature has been revealed. And this secret," — here his fingers closed feverishly on the casement-latch— "is identical with the force that swings the furthest star, and drives the sap through the veins of all living things."

It would have been of considerable interest to a student of religious psychology — like Mr. Taxater for example — to observe how the phrases that mechanically passed Clavering's lips at this juncture were all phrases drawn from the works of rationalistic modernists. He had recently been reading the charming and subtle essays of Father Mervyn; and the soft and melodious harmonies of that clever theologian's thought had accumulated in some hidden corner of his brain. The authentic religious emotion in him being superseded by a more powerful impulse, his mind mechanically reverted to the large, dim regions of mystical speculation. A certain instinct in him — the instinct of his clamorous senses — made him careful to blur, confuse, and keep far back, that lovely and terrible "Power from Outside," the hem of Whose garments he had clung to, the night before. "Christ," he went on, "is, as it were, the centre and pivot of the whole universe, and every revelation granted to us of His nature is a revelation from the system of things itself. I want you to understand that our true attitude towards this great mystery, ought to be the attitude of scientific explorers, who in searching for hidden causes have come upon the one, the unique Cause."

The girl's only indication that she embraced the significance of these solemn words was to make a sudden gliding serpentine movement which brought her into a position more easy to be retained, and yet one that made it still more unnatural that he should refuse her some kind of playful and affectionate support.

The poor priest's heart beat tumultuously. He began to lose all consciousness of everything except his propinquity to his provoker. He was aware with appalling distinctness of the precise texture of the light frock that she wore. It was of a soft fawn colour, crossed by wavy lines of a darker tint. He watched the way these wavy lines followed the curves of her figure. They began at her side, and ended where her skirt hung loose over her little swinging ankles. He wished these lines had sloped upwards, instead of downwards; then it would have been so much easier for him to follow the argument of the "Development of Christian Doctrine."

Still that scent of burning weeds! Why must his neighbours set fire to their rubbish, on this particular afternoon?

With a fierce mental effort he tried to suppress the thought that those voluptuous lips only waited for him to overcome his ridiculous scruples. Why must she wait like this so pitilessly passive, laying all the burden of the struggle upon him? If she would only make a little — a very little — movement, his conscience would be able to recover its equilibrium, whatever happened. He tried to unmagnetize her attraction, by visualizing the fact that under this desirable form — so near his touch — lurked nothing but that bleak, bare, last outline of mortality, to which all flesh must come. He tried to see her forehead, her closed eyes, her parted lips, as they would look if resting in a coffin. Like his monkish predecessors in the world-old struggle against Satan, he sought to save himself by clutching fast to the grinning skull.

All this while his lips went on repeating their liturgical formula. “We must learn to look upon the Redemption, as a natural, not a supernatural fact. We must learn to see in it the motive-force of the whole stream of evolution. We must remember that things *are* what they have it in them to *become*. It is the purpose, the end, which is the true truth — not the process or the method. Christ is the end of all things. He is therefore the beginning of all things. All things find their meaning, their place, their explanation, only in relation to Him. He is the reality of the illusion which we call Nature, and of the illusion which we call Life. In Him the universe becomes real and living — which else were a mere engine of destruction.” How much longer he would have continued in this strain — conquered yet still resisting — it were impossible to say. All these noble words, into the rhythm of which so much passionate modern thought had been poured, fell from his lips like sand out of a sieve.

The girl herself interrupted him. With a quick movement she suddenly jerked herself from her recumbent position; jumped, without his help, lightly down upon the floor, and resumed her former place at the table. The explanation of this virtuous retreat soon made itself known in the person of a visitor advancing up the garden. Clavering, who had stumbled foolishly aside as she changed her place, now opened the door and went to meet the new-comer.

It was Romer’s manager, Mr. Thomas Lickwit, discreet, obsequious, fawning, as ever, — but with a covert malignity in his hurried words. “Sorry to disturb you, sir. I see it is Miss Gladys’ lesson. I hope the young lady is getting on nicely, sir. I won’t detain you for more than a moment. I have just a little matter that couldn’t wait. Business is business, you know.”

Clavering felt as though he had heard this last observation repeated "ad nauseam" by all the disgusting sycophants in all the sensational novels he had ever read. It occurred to him how closely Mr. Lickwit really did resemble all these monotonously unpleasant people.

"Yes," went on the amiable man, "business is business — even with reverend gentlemen like yourself who have better things to attend to." Clavering forced himself to smile in genial appreciation of this airy wit, and beckoned the manager into his study. He then returned to the front room. "I am afraid our lesson must end for tonight, Miss Romer," he said. "You know enough of this lieutenant of your father's to guess that he will not be easy to get rid of. The worst of a parson's life are these interruptions."

There was no smile upon his face as he said this, but the girl laughed merrily. She adjusted her hat with a deliciously coquettish glance at him through the permissible medium of the gilt-framed mirror. Then she turned and held out her hand. "Till next week, then, Mr. Clavering. And I will read all those books you sent up for me — even the great big black one!"

He gravely opened the door for her, and with a sigh from a heart "sorely charged," returned to face Mr. Lickwit.

He found that gentleman comfortably ensconced in the only arm-chair. "It is like this, sir," said the man, when Clavering had taken a seat opposite him. "Mr. Romer thinks it would be a good thing if this Social Meeting were put a stop to. There has been talk, sir. I will not conceal it from you. There has been talk. The people say that you have allied yourself with that troublesome agitator. You know the man I refer to, sir, that wretched Wone.

"Mr. Romer doesn't approve of what he hears of these meetings. He doesn't see as how they serve any good purpose. He thinks they promote discord in the place, and set one class against another. He does not like the way, neither, that Mr. Quincunx has been going on down there; nor to say the truth, sir, do *I* like that gentleman’s doings very well. He speaks too free, does Mr. Quincunx, much too free, considering how he is situated as you might say.”

Clavering leapt to his feet, trembling with anger. “I cannot understand this,” he said, “Someone has been misleading Mr. Romer. The Social Meeting is an old institution of this village; and though it is not exactly a church affair, I believe it is almost entirely frequented by church-goers. I have always felt that it served an invaluable purpose in this place. It is indeed the only occasion when priest and people can meet on equal terms and discuss these great questions man to man. No — no, Lickwit, I cannot for a moment consent to the closing of the Social Meeting. It would undo the work of years. It would be utterly unwise. In fact it would be wrong. I cannot think how you can come to me with such a proposal.”

Mr. Lickwit made no movement beyond causing his hat to twirl round on the top of the stick he held between his knees.

“You will think better of it, sir. You will think better of it,” he said. “The election is coming on, and Mr. Romer expects all supporters of Church and State to help him in his campaign. You have heard he is standing, sir, I suppose?”

Mr. Lickwit uttered the word “standing” in a tone which suggested to Clavering’s mind a grotesque image of the British Constitution resting like an enormous cornucopia on the head of the owner of Leo’s Hill. He nodded and resumed his seat. The manager continued. “That old Methodist chapel where those meetings are held, belongs, as you know, to Mr. Romer. He is thinking of having it pulled down — not only because of Wone’s and Quincunx’s goings on there, but because he wants the ground. He’s thinking of building an estate-office on that corner. We are pressed for room, up at the Hill, sir.”

Once more Clavering rose to his feet. “This is too much!” he cried. “I wonder you have the impertinence to come here and tell me such things. I am not to be bullied, Lickwit. Understand that! I am not to be bullied.”

“Then I may tell the master,” said the man sneeringly, rising in his turn and making for the door, “that Mr. Parson won’t have nothing to do with our little plan?”

“You may tell him what you please, Lickwit. I shall go over myself at once to the House and see Mr. Romer.” He glanced at his watch. “It is not seven yet, and I know he does not dine till eight.”

“By all means, sir, by all means! He’ll be extremely glad to see you. You couldn’t do better, sir. You’ll excuse me if I don’t walk up with you. I have to run across and speak to Mr. Goring.”

He bowed himself out and hurried off. Clavering seized his hat and followed him, turning, however, when once in the street, in the direction of the south drive. It took him scarcely a couple of minutes to reach the village square where the drive emerged. In the centre of the square stood a solid erection of Leonian stone adapted to the double purpose of a horse-trough and a drinking fountain. Here the girls came to draw water, and here the lads came to chat and flirt with the girls. Mr. Clavering could not help pausing in his determined march to watch a group of young people engaged in animated and laughing frivolity at this spot. It was a man and two girls. He recognized the man at once by his slight figure and lively gestures. It was Luke Andersen. “That fellow has a bad influence in this place,” he said to himself. “He takes advantage of his superior education to unsettle these children’s minds. I must stop this.” He moved slowly towards the fountain. Luke Andersen looked indeed as reckless and engaging as a young faun out of a heathen story. He was making a cup of his two hands and whimsically holding up the water to the lips of the younger of his companions, while the other one giggled and fluttered round them. Had the priest been in a poetic humour at that moment, he might have been reminded of those queer mediæval legends of the wanderings of the old dispossessed divinities. The young stone-carver, with his classic profile and fair curly hair, might have passed for a disguised Dionysus seducing to his perilous service the women of some rustic Thessalian hamlet. No pleasing image of this kind crossed Hugh Clavering's vision. All he saw, as he approached the fountain, was another youthful incarnation of the dangerous Power he had been wrestling with all the afternoon. He advanced towards the engaging Luke, much as Christian might have advanced towards Apollyon. "Good evening, Andersen," he said, with a certain professional severity. "Using the fountain, I see? We must be careful, though, not to waste the water this hot summer."

The girl who was drinking rose up with a little start, and stood blushing and embarrassed. Luke appeared entirely at his ease. He leant negligently against the edge of the stone trough, and pushed his hat to the back of his head. In this particular pose he resembled to an extraordinary degree the famous Capitolian statue.

"It is hardly wasting the water, Mr. Clavering," he said with a smile, "offering it to a beautiful mouth. Why don't you curtsey to Mr. Clavering, Annie? I thought all you girls curtsied when clergymen spoke to you."

The priest frowned. The audacious aplomb of the young man unnerved and disconcerted him.

"Water in a stone fountain like this," went on the shameless youth, "has a peculiar charm these hot evenings. It makes you almost fancy you are in Seville. Seville is a place in Spain, Annie. Mr. Clavering will tell you all about it."

"I think Annie had better run in to her mother now," said the priest severely.

"Oh, that's all right," replied the youth with unruffled urbanity. "Her mother has gone shopping in Yeoborough and I have to see that Annie behaves properly till she comes back."

Clavering looked reproachfully at the girl. Something about him — his very inability perhaps to cope with this seductive Dionysus — struck her simple intelligence as pathetic. She made a movement as if to join her companion, who remained roguishly giggling a few paces off. But Luke boldly restrained her. Putting his hand on her shoulder he said laughingly to the priest, "She will be a heart-breaker one of these days, Mr. Clavering, will our Annie here! You wouldn't think she was eighteen, would you, sir?"

Under other circumstances the young clergyman would have unhesitatingly commanded the girl to go home. But his recent experiences had loosened the fibre of his moral courage. Besides, what was there to prevent this incorrigible young man from walking off after her? One could hardly — at least in Protestant England — make one's flock moral by sheer force.

"Well — good-night to you all," he said, and moved away, thinking to himself that at any rate there was safety in publicity. "But what a dangerous person that Andersen is! One never knows how to deal with these half-and-half people. If he were a village-boy it would be different. And it would be different if he were a gentleman. But he is neither one thing or the other. Seville! Who would have thought to have heard Seville referred to, in the middle of Nevilton Square?"

He reached the carved entrance of the House with its deeply-cut armorial bearings — the Seldom falcon with the arrow in its beak. "No more will *that* bird fly," he thought, as he waited for the door to open.

He was ushered into the spacious entrance hall, the usual place of reception for Mr. Romer's less favoured guests. The quarry-owner was alone. He shook hands affably with his visitor and motioned him to a seat.

"I have come about that question of the Social Meeting—" he began.

Mr. Romer cut him short. "It is no longer a question," he said. "It is a 'fait accompli.' I have given orders to have the place pulled down next week. I want the space for building purposes."

Clavering turned white with anger. "We shall have to find another room then," he said. "I cannot have those meetings dropping out from our village life. They keep the thoughtful people together as nothing else can."

Mr. Romer smiled grimly. "You will find it difficult to discover another place," he remarked.

"Then I shall have them in my own house," said the vicar of Nevilton.

Mr. Romer crossed his hands and threw back his head; looking, with the air of one who watches the development of precisely foreseen events, straight into the sad eyes of the little Royal Servant on the wall.

"Pardon such a question, my friend," said he, "but may I ask you what your personal income is, at this moment?"

"You know that well enough," returned the other. "I have nothing beyond the hundred and fifty pounds I receive as vicar of this place."

"And what," pursued the Quarry-owner, "may your expenditure amount to?"

"That, also, you know well," replied Clavering. "I give away about eighty pounds, every year, to the poor of this village."

"And where does this eighty pounds come from?" went on the Squire. The priest was silent.

"I will tell you where it comes from," pronounced the other. "It comes from me. It is my contribution, out of the tithes which I receive as lay-rector. And it is the larger part of them."

The priest was still silent.

"When I first came here," his interlocutor continued, "I gave up these tithes as an offering to our village necessities; and I have not yet withdrawn them. If this Social Meeting, Mr. Clavering, is not brought to an end, I shall withdraw them. And no one will be able to blame me."

Hugh jumped up on his feet with a gesture of fury. "I call this," he shouted, "nothing short of sacrilege! Yes, sacrilege and tyranny! I shall proclaim it abroad. I shall write to the papers. I shall appeal to the bishop — to the country!"

"As you please," said Mr. Romer quietly, "as you please. I should only like to point out that any action of this kind will tie up my purse-strings forever. You will not be popular with your flock, my friend. I know something of our dear Nevilton people; and I shall have only to make it plain to them that it is their vicar who has reduced this charity; and you will not find yourself greatly loved!"

Clavering fell back into his chair with a groan. He knew too well the truth of the man's words. He knew also the straits into which this lack of money would plunge half his benevolent activities in the parish. He hung his head gloomily and stared at the floor. What would he not have given, at that moment, to have been able to meet this despot, man to man, unencumbered by his duty to his people!

"Let me assure you, my dear sir," said Mr. Romer quietly, "that you are not by any means fighting the cause of your church, in supporting this wretched Meeting. If I were bidding you interrupt your services or your sacraments, it would be another matter. This Social Meeting has strong anticlerical prejudices. You know that, as well as I. It is conducted entirely on nonconformist lines. I happen to be aware," he added, "since you talk of appealing to the bishop, that the good man has already, on more than one occasion, protested vigorously against the association of his clergy with this kind of organization. I do not know whether you ever glance at that excellent paper the Guardian; but if so you will find, in this last week's issue, a very interesting case, quite parallel to ours, in which the bishop's sympathies were by no means on the side you are advocating."

The young priest rose and bowed. "There is, at any rate, no necessity for me to trouble you any further," he said. "So I will bid you good-night."

He left the hall hastily, picked up his hat, and let himself out, before his host had time to reply. All the way down the drive his thoughts reverted to the seductive wiles of this despot's daughter. "The saints are deserting me," he thought, "by reason of my sin."

He was not, even then, destined to escape his temptress. Gladys, who doubtless had been expecting this sudden retreat, emerged from the shadow of the trees and intercepted him. "I will walk to the gate with you," she said. The power of feminine attraction is never more insidious than at the moment of bitter remorse. The mind reverts so easily, so willingly, then, back to the dangerous way. The mere fact of its having lost its pride of resistance, its vanity of virtue, makes it yield to a new assault with terrible facility. She drew him into the dusky twilight of the scented exotic cedars which bordered the way, on the excuse of inhaling their fragrance more closely.

She made him pull down a great perfumed cypress-bough, of some unusual species, so that they might press their faces against it. They stood so closely together that she could feel through her thin evening-gown the furious trembling that seized him. She knew that he had completely lost his self-control, and was quite at her mercy. But Gladys had not the least intention of yielding herself to the emotion she had excited. What she intended was that he should desire her to desperation, not that, by the least touch, his desire should be gratified. In another half-second, as she well knew, the poor priest would have seized her in his arms. In place of permitting this, what she did was to imprint a fleeting kiss with her warm lips upon the back of his hand, and then to leap out of danger with a ringing laugh. "Good-bye!" she called back at him, as she ran off. "I'll come in good time next week."

It may be imagined in what a turbulence of miserable feelings Hugh Clavering repassed the village square. He glanced quickly at the fountain. Yes! Luke Andersen was still loitering in the same place, and the little bursts of suppressed screams and laughter, and the little fluttering struggles, of the group around him, indicated that he was still, in his manner, corrupting the maidens of Nevilton. The priest longed to put his hands to his ears and run down the street, even as Christian ran from the city of Destruction. What was this power — this invincible, all-pervasive power — against which he had committed himself to contend? He felt as though he were trying, with his poor human strength, to hold back the sea-tide, so that it should not cover the sands.

Could it be that, after all, the whole theory of the church was wrong, and that the great Life-Force was against her, and punishing her, for seeking, with her vain superstitions, to alter the stars in their courses?

Could it be that this fierce pleasure-lust, which he felt so fatally in Gladys, and saw in Luke, and was seduced by in his own veins, was after all the true secret of Nature, and, to contend against it, madness and impossible folly? Was he, and not they, the really morbid and infatuated one — morbid with the arbitrary pride of a desperate tradition of perverted heroic souls?

He moved along the pavement under the church wall and looked up at its grand immovable tower. “Are you, too,” he thought, “but the symbol of an insane caprice in the mad human race, seeking, in fond recklessness, to alter the basic laws of the great World?”

The casuistical philosophy of Mr. Taxater returned to his mind. What would the papal apologist say to him now, thus torn and tugged at by all the forces of hell? He felt a curious doubt in his heart as to the side on which, in this mad struggle, the astute theologian really stood. Perhaps, for all his learning, the man was no more Christian in his true soul, than had been many of those historic popes whose office he defended. In his desperate mood Clavering longed to get as near as possible to the altar of this God of his, who thus bade him confront the whole power of nature and all the wisdom of the world. He looked up and down the street. Two men were talking outside The Goat and Boy, but their backs were turned. With a quick sudden movement he put his hands on the top of the wall and scrambled hastily over, scraping his shins as he did so on a sharp stone at the top. He moved rapidly to the place where rose the strange tombstone designed by the atheist carver. It was here that Vennie and he had entered into their heroic covenant only twenty-four hours before. He looked at the enormous skull so powerfully carved and at the encircled cross beneath it. He laid his hand upon the skull, precisely as he had done the night before; only this time there were no little cold fingers to instil pure devotion into him. Instead of the touch of such fingers he felt the burning contact of Gladys’ soft lips.

No! it was an impossible task that his God had laid upon him. Why not give up the struggle? Why not throw over this mad idol of purity he had raised for his worship, and yield himself to the great stream? The blood rushed to his head with the alluring images that this thought evoked.

Perhaps, after all, Gladys would marry him, and then — why, then, he could revert to the humourous wisdom of Mr. Taxater, and cultivate the sweet mystical speculations of modernism; reconciling, pleasantly and easily, the natural pleasures of the senses, with the natural exigencies of the soul!

He left Gideon's grave and walked back to the church-porch. It was now nearly dark and without fear of being observed by any one through the iron bars of the outer gate, he entered the porch and stood before the closed door. He wished he had brought the key with him. How he longed, at that moment, to fling himself down before the altar and cry aloud to his God!

By his side stood the wheeled parish bier, ornamented by a gilt inscription, informing the casual intruder that it had been presented to the place in honour of the accession of King George the Fifth. There was not light enough to read these touching words, but the gilt plate containing them gave forth a faint scintillating glimmer.

Worn out by the day-long struggle in his heart, Clavering sat down upon this grim "memento mori"; and then, after a minute or two, finding that position uncomfortable, deliberately stretched himself out at full length upon the thing's bare surface. Lying here, with the bats flitting in and out above his head, the struggle in his mind continued. Supposing he did yield, — not altogether, of course; his whole nature was against that, and his public position stood in the way, — but just a little, just a hair's breadth, could he not enjoy a light playful flirtation with Gladys, such as she was so obviously prepared for, even if it were impossible to marry her? The worst of it was that his imagination so enlarged upon the pleasures of this "playful flirtation," that it very quickly became an obsessing desire. He propped himself up upon his strange couch and looked forth into the night. The stars were just beginning to appear, and he could see one or two constellations whose names he knew. How indifferent they were, those far-off lights!

What did it matter to them whether he yielded or did not yield? He had the curious sensation that the whole conflict in which he was entangled belonged to a terrestrial sphere infinitely below those heavenly luminaries. Not only the Power against which he contended, but the Power on whose side he fought, seemed out-distanced and derided by those calm watchers.

He sank back again and gazed up at the carved stone roof above him. A dull inert weariness stole over his brain; a sick disgust of the whole mad business of a man's life upon earth. Why was he born into the world with passions that he must not satisfy and ideals that he could not hold? Better not to have been born at all; or, being born, better to lie quiet and untroubled, with all these placid churchyard people, under the heavy clay! The mental weariness that assailed him gradually changed into sheer physical drowsiness. His head sought instinctively a more easy position and soon found what it sought. His eyes closed; and there, upon the parish bier, worn out with his struggle against Apollyon, the vicar of Nevilton slept. When he returned to consciousness he found himself cramped, cold and miserable. Hurriedly he scrambled to his feet, stretched his stiff limbs and listened. The clock in the Tower above him began to strike. It struck one — two — and then stopped. He had slept for nearly five hours.

CHAPTER X. THE ORCHARD

Every natural locality has its hour of special self-assertion; its hour, when the peculiar qualities and characteristics which belong to it emphasize themselves, and attain a sort of temporary apogee or culmination. It is then that such localities — be they forests or moors, hill-sides or valleys — seem to gather themselves together and bring themselves into focus, waiting expectantly, it might almost seem, for some answering dramatic crisis in human affairs which should find in them an inevitable background.

One of the chief features of our English climate is that no two successive days, even in a spell of the warmest weather, are exactly alike. What one might call the culminant day of that summer, for the orchards of Nevilton, arrived shortly after Mr. Clavering's unfortunate defeat. Every hour of this day seemed to add something more and more expressive to their hushed and expectant solitudes.

Though the hay had been cut, or was being cut, in the open fields, in these shadowy recesses the grass was permitted to grow lush and long, at its own unimpeded will.

Between the ancient trunks of the moss-grown apple-trees hung a soft blue vapour; and the flickering sunlight that pierced the denser foliage, threw shadows upon the heavy grass that were as deeply purple as the waves of the mid-atlantic. There was indeed something so remote from the ordinary movements of the day about this underworld of dim, rich seclusion, that the image of a sleepy wave-lulled land, long sunken out of reach of human invasion, under the ebbing and flowing tide, seemed borne in naturally upon the imagination.

It was towards the close of the afternoon of this particular segment of time that the drowsy languor of these orchards reached its richest and most luxurious moment. Grass, moss, lichen, mistletoe, gnarled trunks, and knotted roots, all seemed to cry aloud, at this privileged hour, for some human recognition of their unique quality; some human event which should give that quality its dramatic value, its planetary proportion. Not since the Hesperidean Dragon guarded its sacred charge, in the classic story, has a more responsive background offered itself to what Catullus calls the "furtive loves" of mortal men.

About six o'clock, on this day of the apogee of the orchards, Mr. Romer, seated on the north terrace of his house, caught sight of his daughter and her companion crossing the near corner of the park. He got up at once, and walked across the garden to intercept them. The sight of the Italian's slender drooping figure, as she lingered a little behind her cousin, roused into vivid consciousness all manner of subterranean emotions in the quarry-owner's mind. He felt as an oriental pasha might feel, when under the stress of some political or monetary transaction, he is compelled to hand over his favorite girl-slave to an obsequious dependent. The worst of it was that he could not be absolutely sure of Mr. Goring's continued adherence. It was within the bounds of possibility that once in possession of Lacrima, the farmer might breathe against him gross Thersites-like defiance, and carry off his captive to another county. He experienced, at that moment, a sharp pang of inverted remorse at the thought of having to relinquish his prey.

As he strode along by the edge of the herbaceous borders, where the blue spikes of the delphiniums were already in bud, his mind swung rapidly from point to point in the confused arena of his various contests and struggles.

Mixed strangely enough with his direct Napoleonic pursuit of wealth and power, there was latent in Mr. Romer, as we have already hinted, a certain dark and perverse sensuality, which was capable of betraying and distorting, in very curious ways, the massive force of his intelligence.

At this particular moment, as he emerged into the park, he found himself beginning to regret his conversation with his brother-in-law. But, after all, he thought, when Gladys married, it would be difficult to find any reason for keeping Lacrima at his side. His feelings towards the girl were a curious mixture of attraction and hatred. And what could better gratify this mixed emotion than a plan which would keep her within his reach and at the same time humiliate and degrade her? To do the master of Nevilton justice, he was not, at that moment, as he passed under a group of Spanish chestnuts and observed the object of his conspiracy rendered gentler and more fragile than ever by the loveliness of her surroundings, altogether devoid of a certain remote feeling of compunction. He crushed it down, however, by his usual thought of the brevity and futility of all these things, and the folly of yielding to weak commiseration, when, in so short a time, nothing, one way or the other, would matter in the least! He had long ago trained himself to make use of these materialistic reasonings to suppress any irrelevant prickings of conscience which might interfere with the bias of his will. The whole world, looked at with the bold cynical eye of one who was not afraid to face the truth, was, after all, a mad, wild, unmeaning struggle; and, in the confused arena of this struggle, one could be sure of nothing but the pleasure one derived from the sensation of one’s own power. He tried, as he walked towards the girls, to imagine to himself what his feelings would be, supposing he yielded to these remote scruples, and let Lacrima go, giving her money, for instance, to enable her to live independently in her own country, or to marry whom she pleased. She would no doubt marry that damned fool Quincunx! Lack of money was, assuredly, all that stood in the way. And how could he contemplate an idea of that kind with any pleasure? He wondered, in a grim humourous manner, what sort of compensation these self-sacrificing ones really got? What satisfaction would *he* get, for instance, in the consciousness that he had thrown a girl who attracted him, into the arms of an idiot who excited his hate?

He looked long at Lacrima, as she stood with Gladys, under a sycamore, waiting his approach. It was curious, he said to himself, — very curious, — the sort of feelings she excited in him. It was not that he wished to possess her. He was scornfully cynical of that sort of gratification. He wished to do more than possess her. He wished to humiliate her, to degrade her, to put her to shame in her inmost spirit. He wished her to know that he knew that she was suffering this shame, and that he was the cause of it. He wished her to feel herself absolutely in his power, not bodily — that was nothing! — but morally, and spiritually.

The owner of Leo's Hill had the faculty of detaching himself from his own darkest thoughts, and of observing them with a humourous and cynical eye. It struck him as not a little grotesque, that he, the manipulater of far-flung financial intrigues, the ambitious politician, the formidable captain of industry, should be thus scheming and plotting to satisfy the caprice of a mere whim, upon the destiny of a penniless dependent. It *was* grotesque — grotesque and ridiculous. Let it be! The whole business of living was grotesque and ridiculous. One snatched fiercely at this thing or the other, as the world moved round; and one was not bound always to present oneself in a dignified mask before one's own tribunal. It was enough that this or that fantasy of the dominant power-instinct demanded a certain course of action. Let it be as grotesque as it might! He, and none other, was the judge of his pleasure, of what he pleased to do, or to refrain from doing. It was his humour; — and that ended it! He lived to fulfil his humour. There was nothing else to live for, in this fantastic chaotic world! Meditating in this manner he approached the girls.

“It occurred to me,” he said, breathing a little hard, and addressing his daughter, “that you might be seeing Mr. Clavering again tonight. If so, perhaps you would give him a message from me, or rather, — how shall I put it? — a suggestion, a gentle hint.”

“What are you driving at, father?” asked Gladys, pouting her lips and swinging her parasol.

“It is a message best delivered by mouth,” Mr. Romer went on, “and by your mouth.”

Then as if to turn this last remark into a delicate compliment, he playfully lifted up the girl’s chin with his finger and made as if to kiss her. Gladys, however, lightly evaded him, and tossing her head mischievously, burst out laughing. “I know you, father, I know you,” she cried. “You want me to do some intriguing for you. You never kiss me like that, unless you do!”

Lacrima glanced apprehensively at the two of them. Standing there, in the midst of that charming English scene, they represented to her mind all that was remorseless, pitiless and implacable in this island of her enforced adoption. Swiftly, from those ruddy pinnacles of the great house behind them, her mind reverted to the little white huts in a certain Apennine valley and the tinkling bells of the goats led back from pasture. Oh how she hated all this heavy foliage and these eternally murmuring doves!

“Well,” said Mr. Romer, as Gladys waited mockingly, “I do want you to do something. I want you to hint to our dear clergyman that this ceremony of your reception into his church is dependent upon his good behaviour. Not *your* good behavior,” he repeated smiling, “but *his*. The truth is, dear child, if I may speak quite plainly, I know the persuasive power of your pretty face over all these young men; and I want you to make it plain to this worthy priest that if you are to continue being nice to him, he must be very nice to *me*. Do you catch my meaning, my plump little bird?" As he spoke he encircled her waist with his arm. Lacrima, watching them, thought how singularly alike father and daughter were, and was conscious of an instinctive desire to run and warn this new victim of conspiracy.

"Why, what has he been doing, father?" asked the fair girl, shaking herself free, and opening her parasol.

"He has been supporting that fellow Wone. And he has been talking nonsense about Quincunx, — yes, about your friend Quincunx," he added, nodding ironically towards Lacrima.

"And I am to punish him, am I?" laughed Gladys. "That is lovely! I love punishing people, especially people like Mr. Clavering who think they are so wonderfully good!"

Mr. Romer smiled. "Not exactly punish him, dear, but lead him gently into the right path. Lead him, in fact, to see that the party to belong to in this village is the party of capacity — not the party of chatter."

Gladys looked at her father seriously. "You don't mean that you are actually afraid of losing this election?" she said. Mr. Romer stretched out his arm and rested himself against the umbrageous sycamore, pressing his large firm hand upon its trunk.

"Losing it, child? No, I shan't lose it. But these idiots do really annoy me. They are all such cowards and such sentimental babies. It is people like these who have to be ruled with a firm hand. They cringe and whimper when you talk to them; and then the moment your back is turned they grow voluble and impertinent. My workmen are no better. They owe everything to me. If it wasn't for me, half those quarries would be shut down tomorrow and they'd be out of a job. But do you think they are grateful? Not a bit of it!" His tone grew more angry. He felt a need of venting the suppressed rage of many months. "Yes, you needn't put on that unconscious look, Lacrima. I know well enough where *your* sympathies lie. The fact is, in these rotten days, it is the incapable and miserable who give the tone to everyone! No one thinks for himself. No one goes to the bottom of things. It is all talk — talk — talk; talk about equality, about liberty, about kindness to the weak. I hate the weak; and I refuse to let them interfere with me! Look at the faces of these people. Well, — you know, Gladys, what they are like. They are all feeble, bloodless, sneaking, fawning idiots! I hate the faces of these Nevilton fools. They are always making me think of slugs and worms. This Wone is typical. His disgusting complexion and flabby mouth is characteristic of them all. No one of them has the spirit to hit one properly back, face to face. And their odious, sentimental religion! — This Clavering of yours ought to know better. He is not quite devoid of intelligence. He showed some spirit when I talked with him. But he is besotted, too, with this silly nonsense about humouring the people, and considering the people, and treating the people in a Christian spirit! As though you could treat worms and slugs in any other spirit than the spirit of trampling upon them. They are born to be trampled upon — born for it — I tell you! You have only to look at them!" He glared forth over the soft rich fields; and continued, still more bitterly:

"It's no good your pretending not to hear me, Lacrima! I can read your thoughts like an open book. You are quoting to yourself, no doubt, at this very moment, some of the pretty speeches of your friend Quincunx. A nice fellow, he is, for a girl's teacher! A fellow with no idea of his own in his head! A fellow afraid to raise his eyes above one's boot-laces! Why the other day, when I was out shooting and met him in the lane, he turned straight round, and walked back on his tracks — simply from fear of passing me. I hate these sneaking cowards! I hate their cunning, miserable, little ways! I should like to trample them all out of existence! That is the worst of being strong in this world. One is worried to death by a lot of fools who are not worth the effort spent on them.”

Lacrima uttered no word, but looked sadly away, over the fair landscape. In her heart, in spite of her detestation of the man, she felt a strange fantastic sympathy with a good deal of what he said. Women, especially women of Latin races, have no great respect for democratic sentiments when they do not issue in definite deeds. Her private idea of a revolutionary leader was something very far removed from the voluble local candidate, and she had suffered too much herself from the frail petulance of Maurice Quincunx not to feel a secret longing that somewhere, somehow, this aggressive tyrant should be faced by a strength as firm, as capable, as fearless, as his own.

Mr. Romer, with his swarthy imperial face and powerful figure, seemed to her, as he leant against the tree, so to impress himself upon that yielding landscape, that there appeared reason enough for his complaint that he could find no antagonist worthy of his steel. In the true manner of a Pariah, who turns, with swift contempt, upon her own class, the girl was conscious of a rising tide of revolt in her heart against the incompetent weakness of her friend. What would she not give to be able, even once, to see this man outfaced and outwitted! She was impressed too, poor girl, as she shrank silently aside from his sarcasm, by the horrible indifference of these charming sunlit fields to the brutality of the man’s challenge. They cared nothing — nothing! It was impossible to make them care. Hundreds of years ago they had slumbered, just as dreamily, just as indifferently, as they did now. If even at this moment she were to plunge a knife into the man's heart, so that he fell a mass of senseless clay at her feet, that impervious wood-pigeon would go on murmuring its monotonous ditty, just as peacefully, just as serenely! There was something really terrifying to her in this callous indifference of Nature. It was like living perpetually in close contact with a person who was deaf and dumb and blind; and who, while the most tragic events were being transacted, went on cheerfully and imperturbably humming some merry tune. It would be almost better, thought the girl, if that tree-trunk against which the quarry-owner pressed his heavy hand were really in league with him. Anything were better than this smiling indifference which seemed to keep on repeating in a voice as monotonous as the pigeon's— "Everything is permitted. Nothing is forbidden. Nothing is forbidden. Everything is permitted." like the silly reiterated whirring of some monstrous placid shuttle. It was strange, the rebellious inconsistent thoughts, which passed through her mind! She wondered why Hugh Clavering was thus to be waylaid and persuaded. Had he dared to rise in genuine opposition? No, she did not believe it. He had probably talked religion, just as Maurice talked anarchy and Wone talked socialism. It was all talk! Romer was quite right. They had no spirit in them, these English people. She thought of the fierce atheistic rebels of her own country. *They*, at any rate, understood that evil had to be resisted by action, and not by vague protestations of unctuous sentiment!

When Mr. Romer left them and returned to his seat on the terrace, the girls did not at once proceed on their way, but waited, hesitating; and amused themselves by pulling down the lower branches of a lime and trying to anticipate the sweetness of its yet unbudded fragrance.

"Let's stroll down the drive first," said Gladys presently, "till we are out of sight, and then we can cross the mill mead and get into the orchard that way." They followed this design with elaborate caution, and only when quite concealed from the windows of the house, turned quickly northward and left the park for the orchards. Between the wall, of the north garden and the railway, lay some of the oldest and least frequented of these shadowy places, completely out of the ordinary paths of traffic, and only accessible by field-ways. Into the smallest and most secluded of all these the girls wandered, gliding noiselessly between the thick hedges and heavy grass, like two frail phantoms of the upper world visiting some Elysian solitude.

Gladys laid her hand on her companion's arm. "We had better wait here," she said, "where we can see the whole orchard. They ought to know, by now, where to come."

They seated themselves on the bowed trunk of an ancient apple-tree that by long decline had at last reached a horizontal position. The flowering season was practically over, though here and there a late cider-tree, growing more in shadow than the rest, still carried its delicate burden of clustered blossoms.

"How many times is it that we have met them here?" whispered the fair girl, snatching off her hat and tossing it on the grass. "This is the fifth time, isn't it? What dear things they are! I think it's much more exciting, this sort of thing, — don't you? — than dull tennis parties with silly idiots like young Ilminster."

The Italian nodded. "It is a good thing that James and I get on so well," she said. "It would be awkward if we were as afraid of one another as when we first met."

Gladys put her hand caressingly on her companion's knee and looked into her face with a slow seductive smile.

"You are forgetting your Mr. Quincunx a little, just a little, these days, aren't you, darling? Don't be shy, now — or look cross. You know you are! You can't deny it. Your boy is almost as nice as mine. He doesn't like me, though. I can see that! But I like *him*. I like him awfully! You'd better take care, child. If ever I get tired of my Luke—"

"James isn't a boy," protested Lacrima.

"Silly!" cried Gladys. "Of course he is. Who cares about age? They are all the same. I always call them boys when they attract me. I like the word. I like to say it. It makes me feel as if I were one of those girls in London. You know what I mean!"

Lacrima looked at her gravely. "I always feel as if James Andersen were much older than I," she said.

"But your Mr. Quincunx," repeated the fair creature, slipping her soft fingers into her friend's hand, "your Mr. Quincunx is not quite what he was to you, before we began these adventures?"

"I wish you wouldn't say that, Gladys!" rejoined the Italian, freeing her hands and clasping them passionately together. "It is wicked of you to say that! You know I only talk to James so that you can do what you like. I shall always be Maurice's friend. I shall be his friend to the last!"

Gladys laughed merrily. "That is what I wanted," she retorted. "I wanted to make you burst out. When people burst out, they are always doubtful in their hearts. Ah, little puritan! so we are already in the position of having two sweethearts, are we? — and not knowing which of the two we really like best? That is a very pretty situation to be in. It is where we all are! I hope you enjoy it!"

Lacrima let her hands fall helplessly to her side, against the grey bark of the apple-tree. "Why do you hate Mr. Quincunx so?" she asked, looking gravely into her friend's face.

"Why do I hate him?" said Gladys. "Oh, I really don't know! I didn't know I did. If I do, it's because he's such a weak wretched creature. He has no more spirit than a sick dog. He talks such nonsense too! I am glad he has to walk to Yeoborough every day and do a little work. You ought to be glad too! He could never marry if he didn't make some money."

"He doesn't want to marry," murmured Lacrima. "He only wants to be left alone."

"A nice friend he seems to be," cried the other, "for a girl like you! I suppose he kisses you and that sort of thing, doesn't he? I shouldn't like to be kissed by a silly old man like that, with a great stupid beard."

"You mustn't say these things to me, Gladys, you mustn't! I won't hear them. Mr. Quincunx isn't an old man! He is younger than James Andersen. He is not forty yet."

"He looks fifty, if he looks a day," said Gladys, "and the colour of his beard is disgusting! It's like dirty water. Fancy having a horrid thing like that pressed against your face! And I suppose he cries and slobbers over you, doesn't he? I have seen him cry. I hate a man who cries. He cried the other night, — father told me so — when he found he had spent all his money."

Lacrima got up and walked a few paces away. She loathed this placid golden-haired creature, at that moment, so intensely, that it was all she could do to refrain from leaping upon her and burying her teeth in her soft neck. She leant against one of the trees and pressed her head upon its grey lichen. Gladys slipped down into a more luxurious position. She looked complacently around her. No spot could have been better adapted for a romantic encounter.

The gnarled and time-worn trunks of the old apple-trees, each looking as if it had lingered there, full of remote memories, from an age coeval with the age of those very druids whose sacred mistletoe still clung in patches to their boughs, formed a strange fantastic array of twisted and distorted natural pillars, upon which the foliage, meeting everywhere above their heads, leaned in shadowy security, like the roof of a heathen temple. The buttercups and cuckoo-flowers, which, here and there, sprinkled the heavy grass, were different from those in the open meadows. The golden hue of the one, and the lavender tint of the other, took on, in this diurnal gloom, a chilly and tender pallour, both colours approximating to white. The grey lichen hung down in loose festoons from the higher portions of the knotted trunks, and crept, thick and close, round the moss at their roots. There could hardly be conceived a spot more suggestive of absolute and eternal security than this Hesperidean enclosure.

The very fact of the remote but constant presence of humanity there, as a vague dreamy background of immemorial tending, increased this sense. One felt that the easy invasions of grafting-time and gathering-time, returning perennially in their seasons, only intensified the long delicious solitudes of the intervals between, when, in rich, hushed languor, the blossoms bud and bloom and fall; and the fruit ripens and sweetens; and the leaves flutter down. That exquisite seductive charm, the charm of places full of quietness, yet bordering on the edge of the days' labour, hung like a heavy atmosphere of contentment over the shadowy aisles of this temple of peace. The wood-pigeons keep up a perpetual murmur, all the summer long, in these untrodden spots. No eyes see them. It is as though they never saw one another. But their drowsy liturgical repetitions answer and answer again, as if from the unfathomable depths of some dim green underworld, worshipping the gods of silence with sounds that give silence itself a richer, a fuller weight.

"There they are!" cried Gladys suddenly, as the figures of the Andersen brothers made themselves visible on the further side of the orchard.

The girls advanced to meet them through the thick grass, swinging their summer-hats in their hands and bending their heads, now and then, to avoid the overhanging boughs. The meeting between these four persons would have made a pleasant and appropriate subject for one of those richly-coloured old-fashioned prints which one sometimes observes in early Victorian parlours. Gladys grew quite pale with excitement, and her voice assumed a vibrant tenderness when she accosted Luke, which made Lacrima give a little start of surprise, as she shook hands with the elder brother. Had her persecutor then, got, after all, some living tissue in the place where the heart beat?

Luke's manner had materially altered since he had submitted so urbanely to the fair girl's insulting airs at the close of their first encounter. His way of treating her now was casual, flippant, abrupt — almost indifferent. Instead of following the pathetic pressure of her arm and hand, which at once bade him hasten the separation of the group, he deliberately lingered, chatting amicably with Lacrima and asking her questions about Italy. It seemed that the plausible Luke knew quite as much about Genoa and Florence and Venice as his more taciturn brother, and all he knew he was well able to turn into effective use. He was indeed a most engaging and irresistible conversationalist; and Gladys grew paler and paler, as she watched the animation of his face and listened to his pleasant and modulated voice.

It caused sheer suffering to her fiercely impetuous nature, this long-drawn out delay. Every moment that passed diminished the time they would have together. Her nerves ached for the touch of his arms about her, and a savage desire to press her mouth to his, and satiate herself with kisses, throbbed in her every vein. Why would he not stop this irrelevant stream of talk? What did she care about the narrow streets of Genoa, — or the encrusted façade of San Marco? It had been their custom to separate immediately on meeting, and for Luke to carry her off to a charming hiding-place they had discovered. With the fierce pantherish craving of a love-scorched animal her soul cried out to be clasped close to her friend in this secluded spot, having her will of those maddening youthful lips with their proud Grecian curve! Still he must go on talking!

James and Lacrima, lending themselves, naturally and easily, to the mood of the moment, were already seated at the foot of a twisted and ancestral apple-tree. Soon Luke, still absorbed in his conversation with the Italian, shook off Gladys' arm and settled himself beside them, plucking a handful of grass, as he did so, and inhaling its fragrance with sybarite pleasure.

"St. Mark's is the only church in the world for me," Luke was saying. "I have pictures of it from every conceivable angle. It is quite a mania with me collecting such things. I have dozens of them; haven't I, James?"

"Do you mean those post-cards father sent home when he went over there to work?" answered the elder brother, one of whose special peculiarities was a curious pleasure in emphasizing, in the presence of the "upper classes," the humility of his origin.

Luke laughed. "Well — yes — those — and others," he said. "*You* haven't the least idea what I keep in my drawer of secret treasures; you know you haven't! I've got some lovely letters there among other things. Letters that I wouldn't let anyone see for the world!" He glanced smilingly at Gladys, who was pacing up and down in front of them, like a beautiful tigress.

"Look here, my friends," she said. "The time is slipping away frightfully. We are not going to sit here all the while, are we, talking nonsense, like people at a garden party?"

"It's so lovely here," said Luke with a slow smile. "I really don't think that your favourite corner is so much nicer. I am in no hurry to move. Are you, Miss Traffio?"

Lacrima saw a look upon her cousin's face that boded ill for their future relations if she did not make some kind of effort. She rose to her feet.

"Come, Mr. Andersen," she said, giving James a wistful look. "Let us take a little stroll, and then return again to these young people."

James rose obediently, and they walked off together. They passed from the orchards belonging to Mr. Romer's tenant, and entered those immediately at the foot of the vicarage garden. Here, through a gap in the hedge they were attracted by the sight of a queer bed of weeds growing at the edge of a potato-patch. They were very curious weeds, rather resembling sea-plants than land-plants; in colour of a dull glaucous green, and in shape grotesquely elongated.

"What are those things?" said Lacrima. "I think I have never seen such evil-looking plants. Why do they let them grow there?"

James surveyed the objects. "They certainly have a queer look," he said, "but you know, in old days, there was a grave-yard here, of a peculiar kind. It is only in the last fifty years that they have dug it up and included it in this garden."

Lacrima shuddered. "I would not eat those potatoes for anything! You know I think I come to dislike more and more the look of your English vegetable gardens, with their horrid, heavy leaves, so damp and oozy and disgusting!"

"I agree with you there," returned the wood-carver. "I have always hated Nevilton, and every aspect of it; but I think I hate these overgrown gardens most of all."

"They look as if they were fed from churchyards, don't they?" went on the girl. "Look at those heavy laurel bushes over there, and those dreadful fir-trees! I should cut them all down if this place belonged to me. Oh, how I long for olives and vine-yards! These orchards are all very well, but they seem to me as if they were made to keep out the sun and the wholesome air."

James Andersen smiled grimly. "Orchards and potato gardens!" he muttered. "Yes, these are typical of this country of clay. And these Vicarage shrubberies! I think a shrubbery is the last limit of depression and desolation. I am sure all the murders committed in this country are planned in shrubberies, and under the shade of damp laurel-bushes."

"In our country we grow corn between the fruit-trees," said Lacrima.

"Yes, corn—" returned Andersen, "corn and wine and oil! Those are the natural, the beautiful, products of the earth. Things that are fed upon sun and air — not upon the bones of the dead! All these Nevilton places, however luxuriant, seem to me to smell of death."

"But was this corner really a churchyard?" asked the Italian. "I hope Mrs. Seldom won't stroll down this way and see us!"

"Mrs. Seldom is well suited to the place she lives in," returned the other. "She lives upon the Past, just as her garden does — just as her potatoes do! These English vicarages are dreadful places. They have all the melancholy of age without its historic glamour. And how morbid they are! Any of your cheerful Latin curés would die in them, simply of damp and despair."

"But do tell me about this spot," repeated Lacrima, with a little shiver. "Why did you say it was a peculiar churchyard?"

“It was the place where they buried unbaptized children,” answered Andersen, and added, in a lower tone, “how cold it is getting! It must be the shadow we are in.”

“But you haven’t yet,” murmured Lacrima, “you haven’t yet told me, what those weeds are.”

“Well — we call them ‘mares’-tails’ about here,” answered the stone-carver, “I don’t know their proper name.”

“But why don’t they dig them up? Look! They are growing all among the potatoes.”

“They can’t dig them up,” returned the man. “They can’t get at their roots. They are the worst and most obstinate weed there is. They grow in all the Nevilton gardens. They are the typical Nevilton flora. They must have grown here in the days of the druids.”

“But how absurd!” cried Lacrima. “I feel as if I could pull them up with my hands. The earth looks so soft.”

“The earth is soft enough,” replied Andersen, “but the roots of these weeds adhere fast to the rock underneath. The rock, you know, the sandstone rock, lies only a short distance beneath our feet.”

“The same stone as Nevilton house is built of?”

“Certainly the same. Our stone, Mr. Romer’s stone, the stone upon which we all live here — except those who till the fields.”

“I hate the thing!” cried Lacrima, in curious agitation.

“You do? Well — to tell you the honest truth, so do I. I associate it with my father.”

“I associate it with Gladys,” whispered Lacrima.

“I can believe it. We both associate it with houses of tyranny, of wretched persecution. Perhaps I have never told you that my father was directly the cause of my mother's death?"

"You have hinted it," murmured the girl. "I suspected it. But Luke loves the stone, doesn't he? He always speaks as if the mere handling of it, in his work-shop, gave him exquisite pleasure."

"A great many things give Luke exquisite pleasure," returned the other grimly. "Luke lives for exquisite pleasure."

A quick step on the grass behind them made them swing suddenly round. It was Vennie Seldom, who, unobserved, had been watching them from the vicarage terrace. A few paces behind her came Mr. Taxater, walking cautiously and deliberately, with the air of a Lord Chesterfield returning from an audience at St. James'. Mr. Taxater had already met the Italian on one or two occasions. He had sat next to her once, when dining at Nevilton House, and he was considerably interested in her.

"What a lovely evening, Miss Traffio," said Vennie shyly, but without embarrassment. Vennie was always shy, but nothing ever interfered with her self-possession.

"I am glad you are showing Mr. Andersen these orchards of ours. I always think they are the most secluded place in the whole village."

"Ha!" said Mr. Taxater, when he had greeted them with elaborate and friendly courtesy, "I thought you two were bound to make friends sooner or later! I call you my two companions in exile, among our dear Anglo-Saxons. Miss Traffio I know is Latin, and you, sir, must have some kind of foreign blood. I am right, am I not, Mr. Andersen?"

James looked at him humorously, though a little grimly. He was always pleased to be addressed by Mr. Taxater, as indeed was everybody who knew him. The great scholar's detached intellectualism gave him an air of complete aloofness from all social distinctions.

"Perhaps I may have," he answered. "My mother used to hint at something of the kind. She was always very fond of foreign books. I rather fancy that I once heard her say something about a strain of Spanish blood."

"I thought so! I thought so!" cried Mr. Taxater, pulling his hat over his eyes and protruding his chin and under-lip, in the manner peculiar to him when especially pleased.

"I thought there was something Spanish in you. How extraordinarily interesting! Spain, — there is no country like it in the world! You must go to Spain, Mr. Andersen. You would go there in a different spirit from these wretched sight-seers who carry their own vulgarity with them. You would go with that feeling of reverence for the great things of civilization, which is inseparable from the least drop of Latin blood."

"Would *you* like to see Spain, Miss Traffio?" enquired Vennie. "Mr. Taxater, I notice, always leaves out us women, when he makes his attractive proposals. I think he thinks that we have no capacity for understanding this civilization he talks of."

"I think you understand everything, better than any man could," murmured Lacrima, conscious of an extraordinary depth of sympathy emanating from this frail figure.

"Miss Seldom has been trying to make me appreciate the beauty of these orchards," went on Mr. Taxater, addressing James. "But I am afraid I am not very easily converted. I have a prejudice against orchards. For some reason or other, I associate them with dragons and serpents."

"Miss Seldom has every reason to love the beautiful aspects of our Nevilton scenery," said the stone-carver. "Her ancestors possessed all these fields and orchards so long, that it would be strange if their descendant did not have an instinctive passion for them." He uttered these words with that curious undertone of bitterness which marked all his references to aristocratic pretension.

Little Vennie brushed the sarcasm gently aside, as if it had been a fluttering moth.

“Yes, I do love them in a sense,” she said, “but you must remember that I, too, was educated in a Latin country. So, you see, we four are all outsiders and heretics! I fancy your brother, Mr. Andersen, is an ingrained Neviltonian.”

James smiled in a kindly, almost paternal manner, at the little descendant of the Tudor courtiers. Her sweetness and artless goodness made him feel ashamed of his furtive truculence.

“I wish you would come in and see my mother and me, one of these evenings,” said Vennie, looking rather wistfully at Lacrima and putting a more tender solicitation into her tone than the mere words implied.

Lacrima hesitated. “I am afraid I cannot promise,” she said nervously. “My cousin generally wants me in the evening.”

“Perhaps,” put in Mr. Taxater, with his most Talleyrand-like air, “a similar occasion to the present one may arise again, when with Mr. Andersen’s permission, we may all adjourn to the vicarage garden.”

Lacrima, rather uncomfortably, looked down at the grass.

“We four, being, as we have admitted, all outsiders here,” went on the diplomatist, “ought to have no secrets from one another. I think” — he looked at Vennie— “we may just as well confess to our friends that we quite realize the little — charming— ‘friendship,’ shall I say? — that has sprung up between this gentleman’s brother and Miss Romer.”

“I think,” said James Andersen hurriedly, in order to relieve Lacrima’s embarrassment, “I think the real bond between Luke and Miss Gladys is their mutual pleasure in all this luxuriant scenery. Somehow I feel as if you, Sir, and Miss Seldom, were quite separate from it and outside it."

"Yes," cried Vennie eagerly, "and Lacrima is outside it, because she is half-Italian, and you are outside it because you are half-Spanish."

"It is clear, then," said Mr. Taxater, "that we four must form a sort of secret alliance, an alliance based upon the fact that even Miss Seldom's lovely orchards do not altogether make us forget what civilization means!"

Neither of the two girls seemed quite to understand what the theologian implied, but Andersen shot at him a gleam of appreciative gratitude.

"I was telling Miss Traffio," he said, "that under this grass, not very many feet down, a remarkable layer of sandstone obtrudes itself."

"An orchard based on rock," murmured Mr. Taxater, "that, I think, is an admirable symbol of what this place represents. Clay at the top and sandstone at the bottom! I wonder whether it is better, in this world, to be clay or stone? We four poor foreigners have, I suspect, a preference for a material very different from both of these. Our element would be marble. Eh, Andersen? Marble that can resist all these corrupting natural forces and throw them back, and hold them down. I always think that marble is the appropriate medium of civilization's retort to instinct and savagery. The Latin races have always built in marble. It was certainly of marble that our Lord was thinking when he used his celebrated metaphor about the founding of the Church."

The stone-carver made no answer. He had noticed a quick supplicating glance from Lacrima's dark eyes.

"Well," — he said, "I think I must be looking for my brother, and I expect our young lady is waiting for Miss Traffio."

They bade their friends good-night and moved off.

"I am always at your service," were Mr. Taxater's last words, "if ever either of you care to appeal to the free-masonry of the children of marble against the children of clay."

As they retraced their steps Andersen remarked to his companion how curious it was, that neither Vennie nor Mr. Taxater seemed in the least aware of anything extraordinary or unconventional in this surreptitious friendship between the girls from the House and their father's workmen.

"Yes, I wonder what Mrs. Seldom would think of us," rejoined Lacrima, "but she probably thinks Gladys is capable of anything and that I am as bad as she is. But I do like that little Vennie! I believe she is a real saint. She gives me such a queer feeling of being different from everyone."

"Mr. Taxater no doubt is making a convert of her," said the stone-carver. "And I have a suspicion that he hopes to convert Gladys too, probably through your influence."

"I don't like to think that of him," replied the girl. "He seems to me to admire Vennie for herself and to be kind to us for ourselves. I think he is a thoroughly good man."

"Possibly — possibly," muttered James, "but I don't trust him. I never have trusted him."

They said no more, and threaded their way slowly through the orchard to the place where they had left the others. The wind had dropped and there was a dull, obstinate expectancy in the atmosphere. Every leaf and grass blade seemed to be intently alert and listening.

In her heart Lacrima was conscious of an unusual sense of foreboding and apprehension. Surely there could be nothing worse in store for her than what she already suffered. She wondered what Maurice Quincunx was doing at that moment. Was he thinking of her, and were his thoughts the cause of this strange oppression in the air? Poor Maurice! She longed to be free to devote herself to him, to smooth his path, to distract his mind. Would fate ever make such a thing possible? How unfair Gladys was in her suspicions!

She liked James Andersen and was very grateful to him, but he did not need her as Maurice needed her!

“I see them!” she cried suddenly. “But how odd they look! They’re not speaking a word. Have they quarrelled, I wonder?”

The two fair-haired amorists appeared indeed extremely gloomy and melancholy, as they sat, with a little space between them, on the fallen tree. They rose with an air of relief at the others’ approach.

“I thought you were never coming,” said Gladys. “How long you have been! We have been waiting for hours. Come along. We must go straight back and dress or we shall be late for dinner. No time for good-byes! Au revoir, you two! Come along, girl, quick! We’d better run.”

She seized her cousin’s hand and dragged her off and they were quickly out of sight.

The two brothers watched them disappear and then turned and walked away together. “Don’t let’s go home yet,” said Luke. “Let’s go to the churchyard first. The sun will have set, but it won’t be dark for a long time. And I love the churchyard in the twilight.”

James nodded. “It is our garden, isn’t it, — and our orchard? It is the only spot in Nevilton where no one can interfere with us.”

“That, and the Seldom Arms,” added the younger brother.

They paced side by side in silence till they reached the road. The orchards, left to themselves, relapsed into their accustomed reserve. Whatever secrets they concealed of the confused struggles of ephemeral mortals, they concealed in inviolable discretion.

CHAPTER XI. ART AND NATURE

The early days of June, all of them of the same quality of golden weather, were hardly over, before our wanderer from Ohio found himself on terms of quite pleasant familiarity with the celibate vicar of Nevilton, whose relations with his friend Gladys so immensely interested him.

The conscientious vicar had sought him out, on the very day after his visit to the mill copse and the artist had found the priest more to his fancy than he had imagined possible.

The American's painting had begun in serious earnest. A studio had been constructed for him in one of the sheds near the conservatory, a place much more full of light and air and pleasant garden smells, than would have been the lumber-room referred to by Mrs. Romer, adjoining the chaste slumbers of the laborious Lily. Here for several long mornings he had worked at high pressure and in a vein of imaginative expansion.

Something of the seething sap of these incomparable days seemed to pass into his blood. He plunged into a bold and original series of Dionysic "impressions," seeking to represent, in accordance with his new vision, those legendary episodes in the life of the divine Wanderer which seemed most capable of lending themselves to a half-realistic, half-fantastic transmutation, of the people and places immediately around him. He sought to introduce into these pictures the very impetus and pressure of the exuberant earth-force, as he felt it stirring and fermenting in his own veins, and in those of the persons and animals about him. He strove to clothe the shadowy poetic outline of the classical story with fragments and morsels of actual experience as one by one his imaginative intellect absorbed them.

Here, too, under the sycamores and elms of Nevilton, the old world-madness followed the alternations of sun and moon, with the same tragic swiftness and the same ambiguous beauty, as when, with tossing arms and bared throats, the virgins of Thessaly flung themselves into the dew-starred thickets.

Dangelis began by making cautious and tentative use of such village children as he found it possible to lay hands upon, as models in his work, but this method did not prove very satisfactory.

The children, when their alarm and inquisitiveness wore off, grew tired and turbulent; and on more than one occasion the artist had to submit to astonishing visits from confused and angry parents who called him a “foreigner” and a “Yankee,” and qualified these appellations with epithets so astoundingly gross, that Dangelis was driven to wonder from what simple city-bred fancy the illusion of rural innocence had first proceeded.

At length, as the days went on, the bold idea came into his head of persuading Gladys herself to act as his model.

His relations with her had firmly established themselves now on the secure ground of playful camaraderie, and he knew enough of her to feel tolerably certain that he had only to broach such a scheme, to have it welcomed with enthusiastic ardour.

He made the suggestion one evening as they walked home together after her spiritual lesson. “I find that last picture of mine extremely difficult to manage,” he said.

“Why! I think it’s the best of them all!” cried Gladys. “You’ve got a lovely look of longing in the eyes of your queer god; and the sail of Theseus’ ship, as you see it against the blue sea, is wonderful. The little bushes and things, too, you’ve put in; I like them particularly. They remind me of that wood down by the mill, where I caught the thrush. I suppose you’ve forgotten all about that day,” she added, giving him a quick sidelong glance.

The artist seized his opportunity. “They would remind you still more of our wood,” he said eagerly, “if you let me put you in as Ariadne! Do, Gladys,” — he had called her Gladys for some days— “you will make a simply adorable Ariadne. As she is now, she is wooden, grotesque, archaic — nothing but drapery and white ankles!”

The girl had flushed with pleasure as soon as she caught the drift of his request. Now she glanced mischievously and mockingly at him.

“*My* ankles,” she murmured laughing, “are not so very, very beautiful!”

“Please be serious, Gladys,” he said, “I am really quite in earnest. It will just make the difference between a masterpiece and a fiasco.”

“You are very conceited,” she retorted teasingly, “but I suppose I oughtn’t to say that, ought I, as my precious ankles are to be a part of this masterpiece?”

She ran in front of him down the drive, and, as if to give him an exhibition of her goddess-like agility, caught at an overhanging bough and swung herself backwards and forwards.

“What fun!” she cried, as he approached. “Of course I’ll do it, Mr. Dangelis.” Then, with a sudden change of tone and a very malign expression, as she let the branch swing back and resumed her place at his side, “Mr. Clavering must see me posing for you. He must say whether he thinks I’m good enough for Ariadne.”

The artist looked a shade disconcerted by this unexpected turn to the project, but he was too anxious to make sure of his model to raise any premature objections. “But you must please understand,” was all he said, “that I am very much in earnest about this picture. If anybody but myself *does* see you, there must be no teasing and fooling.”

"Oh, I long for him to see me!" cried the girl. "I can just imagine his face, I can just imagine it!"

The artist frowned. "This is not a joke, Gladys. Mind you, if I do let Clavering into our secret, it'll be only on condition that you promise not to flirt with him. I shall want you to stay very still, — just as I put you."

Dangelis had never indicated before quite so plainly his blunt and unvarnished view of her relations with her spiritual adviser, and he now looked rather nervously at her to see how she received this intimation.

"I *love* teasing Mr. Clavering!" she cried savagely, "I should like to tease him so much, that he never, never, would forget it!"

This extreme expression of feeling was a surprise, and by no means a pleasant one, to Ralph Dangelis.

"Why do you want so much to upset our friend?" he enquired.

"I suppose," she answered, still instinctively playing up to his idea of her naiveté and childishness, "it is because he thinks himself so good and so perfectly safe from falling in love with anyone — and that annoys me."

"Ha!" chuckled Dangelis, "so that's it, is it?" and he paced in thoughtful silence by her side until they reached the house.

The morning that followed this conversation was as warm as the preceding ones, but a strong southern wind had risen, with a remote touch of the sea in its gusty violence. The trees in the park, as the artist and his girl-friend watched them from the terrace, while Mr. Romer, who had now returned from town worked in his study, and Lacrima helped Mrs. Romer to "do the flowers," swayed and rustled ominously in the eddying gusts.

Clouds of dust kept blowing across the gates from the surface of the drive and the delphiniums bent low on their long stalks. The wind was of that peculiar character which, though hot and full of balmy scents, conveys a feeling of uneasiness and troubled expectation. It suggested thunder and with and beyond that, something threatening, calamitous and fatal.

Gladys was preoccupied and gloomy that morning. She was growing a little, just a little, tired of the American's conversation. Even the excitement of arranging about the purchase in Yeoborough of suitable materials for her Ariadne costume did not serve to lift the shadow from her brow.

She was getting tired of her rôle as the naive, impetuous and childish innocent; and though mentally still quite resolved upon following her mother's frequent and unblushing hints, and doing her best to "catch" this æsthetic master of a million dollars, the burden of the task was proving considerably irksome.

Ralph's growing tendency to take her into his confidence in the matter of the philosophy of his art, she found peculiarly annoying.

Philosophy of any kind was detestable to Gladys, and this particular sort of philosophy especially depressed her, by reducing the attraction of physical beauty to a kind of dispassionate analysis, against the chilling virtue of which all her amorous wiles hopelessly collapsed. It was becoming increasingly difficult, too, to secure her furtive interviews with Luke — interviews in which her cynical sensuality, suppressed in the society of the American, was allowed full swing.

Her thoughts, at this very moment, turned passionately and vehemently towards the young stone-carver, who had achieved, at last, the enviable triumph of seriously ruffling and disturbing her egoistic self-reliance.

Unused to suffering the least thwarting in what she desired, it fretted and chafed her intolerably to be forced to go on playing her coquettish part with this good-natured but inaccessible admirer, while all the time her soul yearned so desperately for the shameless kisses that made her forget everything in the world but the ecstacy of passion.

It was all very well to plan this posing as Ariadne and to listen to Dangelis discoursing on the beauty of pagan myths. The artist might talk endlessly about dryads and fauns. The faun she longed to be pursued by, this wind-swept morning, was now engaged in hammering Leonian stone, in her father's dusty work-shops.

She knew, she told herself, far better than the cleverest citizen of Ohio, what a real Greek god was like, both in his kindness and his unkindness; and her nerves quivered with irritation, as the hot southern wind blew upon her, to think that she would only be able, and even then for a miserably few minutes, to steal off to her true Dionysus, after submitting for a whole long day to this æsthetic foolery.

"It must have been a wind like this," remarked Dangelis, quite unobservant of his companion's moroseness, "which rocked the doomed palace of the blaspheming Pentheus and drove him forth to his fate." He paused a moment, pondering, and then added, "I shall paint a picture of this, Gladys. I shall bring in Tiresias and the other old men, feeling the madness coming upon them."

"I know all about that," the girl felt compelled to answer. "They danced, didn't they? They couldn't help dancing, though they were so old and weak?"

Dangelis hardly required this encouragement, to launch into a long discourse upon the subject of Dionysian madness, its true symbolic meaning, its religious significance, its survival in modern times.

He quite forgot, as he gave himself up to this interesting topic, his recent resolution to exclude drastically from his work all these more definitely intellectualized symbols.

His companion’s answers to this harangue became, by degrees, so obviously forced and perfunctory, that even the good-tempered westerner found himself a little relieved when the appearance of Lacrima upon the scene gave him a different audience.

When Lacrima appeared, Gladys slipped away and Dangelis was left to do what he could to overcome the Italian’s habitual shyness.

“One of these days,” he said, looking with a kindly smile into the girl’s frightened eyes, “I’m going to ask you, Miss Traffio, to take me to see your friend Mr. Quincunx.”

Lacrima started violently. This was the last name she expected to hear mentioned on the Nevilton terrace.

“I — I—” she stammered, “I should be very glad to take you. I didn’t know they had told you about him.”

“Oh, they only told me — you can guess the kind of thing! — that he’s a queer fellow who lives by himself in a cottage in Dead Man’s Lane, and does nothing but dig in his garden and talk to old women over the wall. He’s evidently one of these odd out-of-the-way characters, that your English — Oh, I beg your pardon! — your European villages produce. Mr. Clavering told me he is the only man in the place he never goes to see. Apparently he once insulted the good vicar.”

“He didn’t insult him!” cried Lacrima with flashing eyes. “He only asked him not to walk on his potatoes. Mr. Clavering is too touchy.”

“Well — anyway, do take me, sometime, to see this interesting person. Why shouldn’t we go this afternoon? This wind seems to have driven all the ideas out of my head, as well as made your cousin extremely bad-tempered! So do take me to see your friend, Miss Traffio! We might go now — this moment — why not?”

Lacrima shook her head, but she looked grateful and not displeased. As a matter of fact she was particularly anxious to introduce the American to Mr. Quincunx. In that vague subtle way which is a peculiarity, not only of the Pariah-type, but of human nature in general, she was anxious that Dangelis should be given at least a passing glimpse of another view of the Romer family from that which he seemed to have imbibed.

It was not that she was definitely plotting against her cousin or trying to undermine her position with her artist-friend, but she felt a natural human desire that this sympathetic and good-tempered man should be put, to some extent at least, upon his guard.

She was, at any rate, not at all unwilling to initiate him into the mysteries of Mr. Quincunx' mind, hoping, perhaps, in an obscure sort of way, that such an initiation would throw her own position, in this strange household, into a light more evocative of considerate interest.

She had been so often made conscious of late that in his absorption in Gladys he had swept her brusquely aside as a dull and tiresome spoil-sport, that it was not without a certain feminine eagerness that she embraced the thought of his being compelled to listen to what she well knew Mr. Quincunx would have to say upon the matter.

It was also an agreeable thought that in doing justice to the originality and depth of the recluse's intelligence, the American would be driven to recognize the essentially unintellectual tone of conversation at Nevilton House.

She instinctively felt sure that the same generous and comprehensive sympathy that led him to condone the vulgar lapses of these "new people," would lead him to embrace with more than toleration the eccentricities and aberration of the forlorn relative of the Lords of Glastonbury.

With these thoughts passing rapidly through her brain, Lacrima found herself, after a little further hesitation, agreeing demurely to the American's proposal to visit the tenant of Dead Man's Lane before the end of the day. She left it uncertain at what precise hour they should go — probably between tea and dinner — because she was anxious, for her own sake, dreading her cousin's anger, to make the adventure synchronize, if possible, with the latter's assignation with Luke, trusting that the good turn she thus did her, by removing her artistic admirer at a critical juncture, would propitiate the fair-haired tyrant's wrath.

This matter having been satisfactorily settled, the Italian began to feel, as she observed the artist's bold and challenging glance embracing her from head to foot, while he continued to this new and more attentive listener his interrupted monologue, that species of shy and nervous restraint which invariably embarrassed her when left alone in his society.

Inexperienced at detecting the difference between æsthetic interest and emotional interest, and associating the latter with nothing but what was brutal and gross, Lacrima experienced a disconcerting sort of shame when under the scrutiny of his eyes.

Her timid comments upon his observations showed, however, so much more subtle insight into his meaning than Gladys had ever displayed, that it was with a genuine sense of regret that he accepted at last some trifling excuse she offered and let her wander away. Feeling restless and in need of distraction he returned to the house and sought the society of Mrs. Romer.

He discovered this good lady seated in the housekeeper's room, perusing an illustrated paper and commenting upon its contents to the portly Mrs. Murphy. The latter discreetly withdrew on the appearance of the guest of the house, and Dangelis entered into conversation with his hostess.

"Maurice Quincunx!" she cried, as soon as her visitor mentioned the recluse's queer name, "you don't mean to say that Lacrima's going to take you to see *him*? Well — of all the nonsensical ideas I ever heard! You'd better not tell Mortimer where you're going. He's just now very angry with Maurice. It won't please him at all, her taking you there. Maurice is related to me, you know, not to Mr. Romer. Mr. Romer has never liked him, and lately — but there! I needn't go into all that. We used to see quite a lot of him in the old days, when we first came to Nevilton. I like to have someone about, you know, and Maurice was somebody to talk to, when Mr. Romer was away; but lately things have been quite different. It is all very sad and very tiresome, you know, but what can a person do?"

This was the nearest approach to a hint of divergence between the master and mistress of Nevilton that Dangelis had ever been witness to, and even this may have been misleading, for the shrewd little eyes, out of which the lady peered at him, over her spectacles, were more expressive of mild malignity than of moral indignation.

"But what kind of person is this Mr. Quincunx?" enquired the American. "I confess I can't, so far, get any clear vision of his personality. Won't you tell me something more definite about him, something that will 'give me a line on him,' as we say in the States?"

Mrs. Romer looked a trifle bewildered. It seemed that the personality of Mr. Quincunx was not a topic that excited her conversational powers.

"I never really cared for him," she finally remarked. "He used to talk so unnaturally. He'd come over here, you know, almost every day — when Gladys was a little girl, — and talk and talk and talk. I used to think sometimes he wasn't quite right here," — the good lady tapped her forehead with her fore-finger,— "but in some things he was very sensible. I don't mean that he spoke loud or shouted or was noisy. Sometimes he didn't say very much; but even when he didn't speak, his listening was like talking. Gladys used to be quite fond of him when she was a little girl. He used to play hide-and-seek with her in the garden. I think he helped me to keep her out of mischief more than any of her governesses did. Once, you know, he beat Tom Raggles — the miller's son — because he followed her across the park — beat him over the head, they say, with an iron pick. The lying wretch of a lad swore that she had encouraged him, and we were driven to hush the matter up, but I believe Mr. Quincunx had to see the inspector in Yeoborough."

Beyond this somewhat obscure incident, Dangelis found it impossible to draw from Mrs. Romer any intelligible answer to his questions. The figure of the evasive tenant of the cottage in Dead Man's Lane remained as misty as ever.

A little irritated by the ill success of his psychological investigations, the artist, conscious that he was wasting the morning, began, out of sheer capricious wilfulness, to expound his æsthetic ideas to this third interlocutor.

His nerves were in a morbid and unbalanced state, due partly to a lapse in his creative energy, and partly to the fact that in the depths of his mind he was engaged in a half-conscious struggle to suppress and keep in its proper place the insidious physical attraction which Gladys had already begun to exert upon him.

But the destiny of poor Dangelis, this inauspicious morning, was, it seemed, to become a bore and a pedant to everyone he encountered; for the lady had hardly listened for two minutes to his discourse when she also left him, with some suitable apology, and went off to perform more practical household duties. "What did this worthy Quincunx talk about, that you used to find so tiresome?" the artist flung after her, as she left the room.

Mrs. Romer turned on the threshold. “He talked of nothing but the bible,” she said. “The bible and our blessed Lord. You can’t blame me, Mr. Dangelis, for objecting to that sort of thing, can you? I call it blasphemy, nothing short of blasphemy!”

Dangelis wondered, as he strolled out again into the air, intending to seek solace for his irritable nerves in a solitary walk, whether, if it were blasphemy in Nevilton House to refer to the Redeemer of men, and a nuisance and a bore to refer to heathen idolatries, what kind of topic it might be that the place’s mental atmosphere demanded.

He came to the conclusion, as he proceeded down the west drive, that the Romer family was more stimulating to watch, than edifying to converse with.

After tea that evening, as Lacrima had hoped, Gladys announced her intention of going down to the mill to sketch. This — to Lacrima’s initiated ears — meant an assignation with Luke, and she glanced quickly at Dangelis, with a shy smile, to indicate that their projected visit was possible. As soon as her cousin had departed they set out. Their expedition seemed likely to prove a complete success. They found Mr. Quincunx in one of his gayest moods. Had he been expecting the appearance of the American he would probably have worked himself up into a miserable state of nervous apprehension; but the introduction thus suddenly thrust upon him, the genial simplicity of the Westerner’s manners and his honest openness of speech disarmed him completely. In a mood of this kind the recluse became a charming companion.

Dangelis was immensely delighted with him. His original remarks, and the quaint chuckling bursts of sardonic laughter which accompanied his irresistible sallies, struck the artist as something completely different from what he had expected. He had looked to see a listless preoccupied mystic, ready to flood him with dreamy and wearisome monologues upon "the simple life," and in place of this he found an entertaining and gracious gentleman, full of delicious malice, and uttering quip after quip of sly, half-innocent, half-subtle, Rabelaisean humour, in the most natural manner in the world.

Not quite able to bring his affability to the point of inviting them into his kitchen, Mr. Quincunx carried out, into a sheltered corner, three rickety chairs and a small deal table. Here, protected from the gusty wind, he offered them cups of exquisitely prepared cocoa and little oatmeal biscuits. He asked the American question after question about his life in the remote continent, putting into his enquiries such naive and childlike eagerness, that Dangelis congratulated himself upon having at last discovered an Englishman who was not superior to the charming vice of curiosity. Had the artist possessed less of that large and careless aplomb which makes the utmost of every situation and never teases itself with criticism, he might have regarded the recluse's effusiveness as too deprecatory and propitiatory in its tone. This, however, never occurred to him and he swallowed the solitary's flattery with joy and gratitude, especially as it followed so quickly upon the conversational deficiencies of Nevilton House.

"I live in the mud here," said Mr. Quincunx, "and that makes it so excellent of you two people from the upper world to slip down into the mud with me."

"I think you live very happily and very sensibly, Maurice!" cried Lacrima, looking with tender affection upon her friend. "I wish we could all live as you do."

The recluse waved his hand. "There must be lions and antelopes in the world," he said, "as well as frogs and toads. I expect this friend of yours, who has seen the great cities, is at this moment wishing he were in a café in

New York or Paris, rather than sitting on a shaky chair drinking my bad cocoa."

"That's not very complimentary to me, is it, Mr. Dangelis?" said Lacrima.

"Mr. Quincunx is much to be envied," remarked the American. "He is living the sort of life that every man of sense would wish to live. It's outrageous, the way we let ourselves become slave to objects and circumstances and people."

Lacrima, anxious in the depths of her heart to give the American the benefit of Mr. Quincunx's insight into character, turned the conversation in the direction of the rumored political contest between Romer and Wone. She was not quite pleased with the result of this manœuvre, however, as it at once diminished the solitary's high spirits and led to his adoption of the familiar querulous tone of peevish carping.

Mr. Quincunx spoke of his remoteness from the life around him. He referred with bitter sarcasm to the obsequious worship of power from which every inhabitant of the village of Nevilton suffered.

"I laugh," he said, "when our good socialist Wone gives vent to his eloquent protestations. Really, in his heart, he is liable to just the same cringing to power as all the rest. Let Romer make overtures to him, — only he despises him too much to do that, — and you'd soon see how quickly he'd swing round! Give him a position of power, Dangelis — I expect you know from your experience in your own country how this works out, — and you would soon find him just as tyrannical, just as obdurate."

"I think you're quite wrong, Maurice," cried Lacrima impetuously. "Mr. Wone is not an educated man as you are, but he's entirely sincere. You've only to listen to him to understand his sincerity."

A grievous shadow of irritation and pique crossed the recluse's face. Nothing annoyed him more than this kind of direct opposition. He waved the objection aside. Lacrima's outburst of honest feeling had already undone the subtle purpose with which she had brought the American. Her evasive Balaam was, it appeared, inclined, out of pure wilfulness, to bless rather than curse their grand enemy.

"It's all injured vanity," Mr. Quincunx went on, throwing at his luckless girl-friend a look of quite disproportioned anger. "It's all his outraged power-instinct that drives him to take up this pose. I know what I'm talking about, for I often argue with him. Whenever I dispute the smallest point of his theories, he bursts out like a demon and despises me as a downright fool. He'd have got me turned out of the Social Meetings, because I contradicted him there, if our worthy clergyman hadn't intervened. You've no idea how deep this power-instinct goes. You must remember, Mr. Dangelis, you see a village like ours entirely from the outside and you think it beautiful, and the people charming and gentle. I tell you it's a nest of rattlesnakes! It's a narrow, poisonous cage, full of deadly vindictiveness and concentrated malice. Of course we know what human nature is, wherever you find it, but if you want to find it at its very worst, come to Nevilton!"

"But you yourself," protested the artist, "are you not one of these same people? I understand that you—"

Mr. Quincunx rose to his feet, his expressive nostrils quivering with anger. "I don't allow anyone to say that of me!" he cried "I may have my faults, but I'm as different from all these rats, as a guillemot is different from a cormorant!"

He sat down again and his voice took almost a pleading tone. "You know I'm different. You must know I'm different! How could I see all these things as clearly as I do if it wasn't so? I've undergone what that German calls ‘the Great Renunciation.’ I’ve escaped the will to live. I neither care to acquire myself this accursed power — or to revolt, in jealous envy, against those who possess it.”

He relapsed into silence and contemplated his garden and its enclosing hedge, with a look of profound melancholy. Dangelis had been considerably distracted during the latter part of this discourse by his artistic interest in the delicate lines of Lacrima’s figure and the wistful sadness of her expression. It was borne in upon him that he had somewhat neglected this shy cousin of his exuberant young friend. He promised himself to see more of the Italian, as occasion served. Perhaps — if only Gladys would agree to it — he might make use of her, also, in his Dionysian impressions.

“Surely,” he remarked, speaking with the surface of his intelligence, and pondering all the while upon the secret of Lacrima’s charm, “whatever this man may be, he’s not a hypocrite, — is he? From all I hear he’s pathetically in earnest.”

“Of course we know he’s in earnest,” answered Maurice. “What I maintain is, that it is his personal vindictiveness that creates his opinions. I believe he would derive genuine pleasure from seeing Nevilton House burnt to the ground, and every one of the people in it reduced to ashes!”

“That proves his sincerity,” answered the American, keeping his gaze fixed so intently upon Lacrima that the girl began to be embarrassed.

“He takes the view-point, no doubt, that if the present oligarchy in England were entirely destroyed, a new and happier epoch would begin at once.”

“I’m sure Mr. Wone is opposed to every kind of violence,” threw in Lacrima.

“Nonsense!” cried Mr. Quincunx abruptly. “He may not like violence because he’s afraid of it reacting on himself. But what he wants to do is to humiliate everyone above him, to disturb them, to prod them, to harass and distress them, and if possible to bring them down to his own level. He's got his thumb on Lacrima's friends over there," — he waved his hand in the direction of Nevilton House,— "because they happen to be at the top of the tree at this moment. But if you or I were there, it would be just the same. It's all jealousy. That's what it is, — jealousy and envy! He wants to make every one who's prosperous and eats meat, and drinks champagne, know what it is to live a dog's life, as he has known it himself! I understand his feelings very well. We poor toads, who live in the mud, get extraordinary pleasure when any of you grand gentlemen slip by accident into our dirty pond. He sees such people enjoying themselves and being happy and he wants to stick a few pins into them!"

"But why not, my good sir?" answered the American. "Why shouldn't Wone use all his energy to crush Romer, just as Romer uses all his energy to crush Wone?"

Lacrima sighed. "I don't think either of you make this world seem a very nice place," she observed.

"A nice place?" cried Mr. Quincunx. "It's a place poisoned at the root — a place full of gall and wormwood!"

"In my humble opinion," said the American, "it's a splendid world. I love to see these little struggles and contests going on. I love to see the delicious inconsistencies and self-deceptions that we're all guilty of. I play the game myself, and I love to see others play it. It's the only thing I do love, except—" he added after a pause— "except my pictures."

"I loathe the game," retorted the recluse, "and I find it impossible to live with people who do not loathe it too."

"Well — all I can say, my friend," observed Dangelis, "is that this business of 'renouncing,' of which you talk, doesn't appeal to me. It strikes me as a backing down and scurrying away, from the splendid adventure of being alive at all. What are you alive for," he added, "if you are going to condemn the natural combative instinct of men and women as evil and horrible? They are the instincts by which we live. They are the motives that propel the whole universe."

"Mr. Wone would say," interposed Lacrima, "and I'm not sure that I don't agree with him, that the real secret of the universe is deeper than all these unhappy struggles. I don't like the unctuous way he puts these things, but he may be right all the same."

"There's no secret of the universe, Miss Traffio," the American threw in. "There are many things we don't understand. But no one principle, — not even the principle of love itself, can be allowed to monopolize the whole field. Life, I always feel, is better interpreted by Art than by anything else, and Art is equally interested in every kind of energy."

Lacrima's face clouded, and her hands fell wearily upon her lap.

"Some sorts of energy," she observed, in a low voice, "are brutal and dreadful. If Art expresses that kind, I'm afraid I don't care for Art."

The American gave her a quick, puzzled glance. There was a sorrowful intensity about her tone which he found difficult to understand.

"What I meant was," he said, "that logically we can only do one of two things, — either join in the game and fight fiercely and craftily for our own hand, or take a convenient drop of poison and end the whole affair."

The melancholy eyes of Mr. Quincunx opened very wide at this, and a fluttering smile twitched the corners of his mouth.

"We poor dogs," he said, "who are not wanted in this world, and don't believe in any other, are just the people who are most unwilling to finish ourselves off in the way you suggest. We can't help a sort of sneaking hope, that somehow or another, through no effort of our own, things will become better for us. The same cowardice that makes us draw back from life, makes us draw back from the thought of death. Can't you understand that, — you American citizen?"

Dangelis looked from one to another of his companions. He could not help thinking in his heart of the gay animated crowds, who, at that very moment, in the streets of Toledo, Ohio, were pouring along the side-walks and flooding the picture shows. These quaint Europeans, for all their historic surroundings, were certainly lacking in the joy of life.

"I can't conceive," remarked Mr. Quincunx suddenly, and with that amazing candour which distinguished him, "how a person as artistic and sensitive as you are, can stay with those people over there. Anyone can see that you're as different from them as light from darkness."

"My dear sir," replied the American, interrupting a feeble little protest which Lacrima was beginning to make at the indiscretion of her friend, "I may or may not understand your wonder. The point is, that my whole principle of life is to deal boldly and freely with every kind of person. Can't you see that I like to look on at the spectacle of Mr. Romer's energy and prosperity, just as I like to look on at the revolt against these things in the mind of our friend Wone. I tell you it tickles my fancy to touch this human pantomime on every possible side. The more unjust Romer is towards Wone, the more I am amused. And the more unjust Wone is towards Romer, the more I am amused. It is out of the clash of these opposite injustices that nature, — how shall I put it? — that nature expands and grows."

Mr. Quincunx gazed at the utterer of these antinomian sentiments, with humorous interest. Dangelis gathered, from the twitching of his heavy moustache, that he was chuckling like a goblin. The queer fellow had a way of emerging out of his melancholy, at certain moments, like a badger out of his hole; and at such times he would bring the most ideal or speculative conversation down with a jerk to the very bed-rock of reality.

"What's amusing you so?" enquired the citizen of Ohio.

"I was only thinking," chuckled Mr. Quincunx, stroking his beard, and glancing sardonically at Lacrima, "that the real reason of your enjoying yourself at Nevilton House, is quite a different one from any you have mentioned."

Dangelis was for the moment quite confused. "Confound the fellow!" he muttered to himself, "I'm curst if I'm sorry he's under the thumb of our friend Romer!"

His equanimity was soon restored, however, and he covered his confusion by assuming a light and flippant air.

"Ha! ha!" he exclaimed, "so you're thinking I've been caught by this young lady's cousin? Well! I don't mind confessing that we get on beautifully together. But as for anything else, I think Miss Traffio will bear witness that I am quite as devoted to the mother as the daughter. But Gladys Romer must be admitted a very attractive girl, — mustn't she Miss Traffio? I suppose our friend here is not so stern an ascetic as to refuse an artist like me the pleasure of admiring such adorable suppleness as your cousin possesses; such a — such a—" he waved his hand vaguely in the air, "such a free and flexible sort of grace?"

Mr. Quincunx picked up a rough ash stick which lay on the ground and prodded the earth. His face showed signs of growing once more convulsed with indecent merriment.

"Why do you use all those long words?" he said. "We country dogs go more straight to the point in these matters. Flexible grace! Can't you confess that you're bitten by the old Satan, which we all have in us? Adorable suppleness! Why can't you say a buxom wench, a roguish wench, a playful wanton wench? We country fellows don't understand your subtle artistic expressions. But we know what it is when an honest foreigner like yourself goes walking and talking with a person like Madame Gladys!"

Glancing apprehensively at the American's face Lacrima saw that her friend's rudeness had made him, this time, seriously angry.

She rose from her chair. "We must be getting back," she said, "or we shall be late. I hope you and Mr. Dangelis will know more of one another, before he has to leave Nevilton. I'm sure you'll find that you've quite a lot in common, when you really begin to understand each other."

The gravity and earnestness with which she uttered these words made both her companions feel a little ashamed.

"After all," thought the artist, "he is a typical Englishman."

"After all," thought Mr. Quincunx, "I've always been told that Americans treat women as if they were made of tissue-paper."

Their parting from the recluse at his garden gate was friendly and natural. Mr. Quincunx reverted to his politest manner, and the artist's good temper seemed quite restored.

In retrospect, after the passing of a couple of days, spent by Dangelis in preparing the accessories of his Ariadne picture, and by Gladys in unpacking certain mysterious parcels telegraphed for to London, the American found himself recalling his visit to Dead Man's Cottage with none but amiable feelings. The third morning which followed this visit, dawned upon Nevilton with peculiar propitiousness. The air was windless and full of delicious fragrance. The bright clear sunshine seemed to penetrate every portion of the spacious Elizabethan mansion and to turn its corridors and halls, filled with freshly plucked flowers, into a sort of colossal garden house.

Dangelis rose that morning with a more than normal desire to plunge into his work. He was considerably annoyed, however, to find that Gladys had actually arranged to have Mr. Clavering invited to lunch and had gone so far as to add a pencilled scrawl of her own — she herself laughingly confessed as much — to her mother's formal note, begging him to appear in the middle of the forenoon, as she had a "surprise" in store for him.

The American's anxiety to begin work as soon as possible with his attractive model, made him suffer miseries of impatience, while Gladys amused herself with her Ariadne draperies, making Lacrima dress and undress her twenty times, behind the screens of the studio.

She appeared at last, however, and the artist, looking up at her from his canvas, was for the moment staggered by her beauty. The instinctive taste of her cousin's Latin fingers was shown in the exquisite skill with which the classical folds of the dress she wore accentuated the natural charm of her young form.

The stuff of which her chief garment was made was of a deep gentian blue and the contrast between this color and the dazzling whiteness of her neck and arms was enough to ravish not only the æsthetic soul in the man but his more human senses also. Her bare feet were encased in white sandals, bound by slender leathern straps, which were twisted round her legs almost as high as the knee. A thin metal band, of burnished bronze, was clasped about her head and over and under this, her magnificent sun-coloured hair flowed, in easy and natural waves, to where it was caught up, in a Grecian knot, above the nape of her neck. Save for this band round her head she wore no clasps or jewelry of any kind, and the softness of her flesh was made more emphatic by the somewhat rough and coarse texture of her loosely folded drapery. Dangelis was so lost in admiration of this delicious apparition, that he hardly noticed Lacrima's timid farewell, as the Italian slipped away into the garden and left them together. It was indeed not till Gladys had descended from the little wooden platform and coyly approached the side of his easel, that the artist recovered himself.

“Upon my soul, but you look perfectly wonderful!” he cried enthusiastically. “Quick! Let’s to business. I want to get well started, before we have any interruption.”

He led her back to the platform, and made her lean in a semi-recumbent position upon a cushioned bench which he had prepared for the purpose. He took a long time to satisfy himself as to her precise pose, but at last, with a lucky flash of inspiration, and not without assistance from Gladys herself, whose want of æsthetic feeling was compensated for in this case by the profoundest of all feminine instincts, he found for her the inevitable, the supremely effective, position. It was with a thrill of exquisite sweetness, pervading both soul and senses, that he began painting her. He felt as though this were one of the few flawless and unalloyed moments of his life. Everything in him and about him seemed to vibrate and quiver in response to the breath of beauty and youth. Penetrated by the delicate glow of a passion which was free, at present, from the sting of sensual craving, he felt as though all the accumulative impressions, of a long procession of harmonious days, were summed up and focussed in this fortunate hour. The loveliness of the young girl, as he transferred it, curve by curve, shadow by shadow, to his canvas, seemed expressive of a reserved secret of enchantment, until this moment withheld and concealed from him. The ravishing contours of her lithe figure seemed to open up, to his magnetized imagination, vistas and corridors of emotion, such as he had never even dreamed of experiencing. She was more than a supremely lovely girl. She was the very epitome and incarnation of all those sunward striving forces and impulses, which, rising from the creative heart of the universe, struggle upwards through the resisting darkness. She was a Sun-child, a creature of air and earth and fire, a daughter of Circe and Dionysus; and as he drained the so frankly offered philtre of her intoxicating beauty, and flung his whole soul's response to it in glowing color upon the canvas, he felt that he would never again thus catch the fates asleep, or thus plunge his hands into the nectar of the supreme gods.

The world presented itself to him at that moment, while he swept his brush with fierce passionate energy across the canvas, as bathed in translucent and unclouded ether. Everything it contained, of weakness and decadence, of gloom and misgiving, seemed to be transfigured, illuminated, swallowed up. He felt as though, in thus touching the very secret of divine joy, held in the lap of the abysmal mothers, nothing but energy and beauty and creative force would ever concern or occupy him again. All else, — all scruples, all questions, all problems, all renunciations — seemed but irrelevant and negligible vapour, compared with this glorious and sunlit stream of life. He worked on feverishly at his task. By degrees, and in so incredibly a short time that Gladys herself was astonished when he told her she could rest and stretch herself a little, the figure of the Ariadne he had seen in his imagination limned itself against the expectant background. He was preparing to resume his labour, and Gladys, after a boyish scramble into the neighbouring conservatory, and an eager return to the artist's side with a handful of early strawberries, was just re-mounting the platform, when the door of the studio opened and Hugh Clavering entered.

He had been almost inclined, — in so morbid a condition were his nerves — to knock at the door before coming in, but a lucky after-thought had reminded him that such an action would have been scandalously inappropriate.

Assuming an air of boyish familiarity, which harmonized better perhaps with her leather-bound ankles than with her girlish figure, Gladys jumped down at once from the little stage and ran gaily to welcome him. She held out her hand, and then, raising both her arms to her head and smoothing back her bright hair beneath its circlet of bronze, she inquired of him, in a soft low murmur, whether he thought she looked "nice."

Clavering was struck dumb. He had all those shivering sensations of trembling agitation which are described with such realistic emphasis in the fragmentary poem of Sappho. The playful girl, her fair cheeks flushed with excitement and a treacherous light in her blue eyes, swung herself upon the rough oak table that stood in the middle of the room, and sat there, smiling coyly at him, dangling her sandalled feet. She still held in her hand the strawberries she had picked; and as, with childish gusto, she put one after another of these between her lips, she looked at him with an indescribable air of mischievous, challenging defiance.

"So this is the pagan thing," thought the poor priest, "that it is my duty to initiate into the religion of sacrifice!"

He could not prevent the passing through his brain of a grotesque and fantastic vision in which he saw himself, like a second hermit of the Thebaid, leading this equivocal modern Thaïs to the waters of Jordan. Certainly the association of such a mocking white-armed darling of errant gods with the ceremony of confirmation was an image somewhat difficult to embrace! The impatient artist, apologizing profusely to the embarrassed visitor, soon dragged off his model to her couch on the platform, and it fell to the lot of the infatuated priest to subside in paralyzed helplessness, on a modest seat at the back of the room. What thoughts, what wild unpermitted thoughts, chased one another in strange procession through his soul, as he stared at the beautiful heathen figure thus presented to his gaze!

The movements of the artist, the heavy stream of sunlight falling aslant the room, the sweet exotic smells borne in from the window opening on the conservatory, seemed all to float and waver about him, as though they were things felt by a deep-sea diver beneath a weight of humming waters. He gave himself up completely to what that moment brought.

Faith, piety, sacrifice, devotion, became for him mere words and phrases — broken, fragmentary, unmeaning — sounds heard in the shadow-land of sleep, vague and indistinct like the murmur of drowned bells under a brimming tide.

It may well be believed that the langourously reclining model was not in the least oblivious to the effect she produced. This was, indeed, one of Gladys' supreme moments, and she let no single drop of its honeyed distillation pass undrained. She permitted her heavy-lidded blue eyes, suffused with a soft dreamy mist, to rest tenderly on her impassioned lover; and as if in response to the desperate longing in his look, a light-fluttering, half-wistful smile crossed her parted lips, like a ripple upon a shadowy stream.

The girl's vivid consciousness of the ecstasy of power was indeed, in spite of her apparent lethargic passivity, never more insanely aroused. Lurking beneath the dreamy sweetness of the look with which she responded to Clavering's magnetized gaze, were furtive depths of Circean remorselessness. Under her gentian-blue robe her youthful breast trembled with exultant pleasure, and she felt as though, with every delicious breath she drew, she were drinking to the dregs the very wine of the immortals.

"I must give Mr. Clavering some strawberries!" she suddenly cried, jumping to her feet, and breaking both the emotional and the æsthetic spell as if they were gossamer-threads. "He looks bored and tired."

In vain the disconcerted artist uttered an imploring groan of dismay, as thus, at the critical moment, his model betrayed him. In vain the bewildered priest professed his complete innocence of any wish for strawberries.

The wayward girl clambered once more through the conservatory window, at the risk of spoiling her Olympian attire, and returning with a handful of fruit, tripped coquettishly up to both of them in turn and insisted on their dividing the spoil.

Had either of the two men been in a mood for classical reminiscences, the famous image of Circe feeding her transformed lovers might have been irresistibly evoked. They were all three thus occupied, — the girl in the highest spirits, and both men feeling a little sulky and embarrassed, when, to the general consternation, the door began slowly to open, and a withered female figure, clad in a ragged shawl and a still more dilapidated skirt made its entry into the room.

“Why, it’s Witch-Bessie!” cried Gladys, involuntarily clutching at Clavering’s arm. “Wicked old thing! She gave me quite a start. Well, Bessie, what do you want here? Don’t you know the way to the back door? You mustn’t come round to the front like this. What do you want?”

Each of the model’s companions made a characteristic movement. Dangelis began feeling in his pocket for some suitable coin, and Clavering raised his hand with an half-reproachful, half-conciliatory, and altogether pastoral gesture, as if at the same time threatening and welcoming a lost sheep of his flock.

But Witch-Bessie had only eyes for Gladys. She stared in petrified amazement at the gentian-blue robe and the boyish sandals.

“Send her away!” whispered the girl to Mr. Clavering. “Tell her to go to the back door. They’ll give her food and things there.”

The cadaverous stare of the old woman relaxed at last. Fixing her colourless eyes on the two men, and pointing at Gladys with her skinny hand, she cried, in a shrill, querulous voice, that rang unpleasantly through the studio, “What be she then, touzled up in like of this? What be she then, with her Jezebel face and her shameless looks? Round to back door, is it, ‘ee ‘d have me sent? I do know who you be, well enough, Master Clavering, and I do guess this gentleman be him as they say does bide here; but what be she, tricketed up in them outlandish clothes, like a Gypoo from Roger-town Fair? Be she Miss Gladys Romer, or baint she?”

“Come, Bessie,” said Clavering in propitiatory tone. “Do as the young lady says and go round to the back. I’ll go with you if you like. I expect they’ll have plenty of scraps for you in that big kitchen.”

He laid his hand on the old woman’s shoulder and tried to usher her out. But she turned on him angrily. “Scraps!” she cried. “Scraps thee own self! What does the like of a pair of gentlemen such as ye be, flitter-mousing and flandering round, with a hussy like she?”

She turned furiously upon Gladys, waving aside with a snort of contempt the silver coin which Dangelis, with a vague notion that “typical English beggars” should be cajoled with gifts, sought to press into her hand.

“’Twas to speak a bit of my mind to ‘ee, not to beg at your blarsted back door that I did come this fine morning! Us that do travel by night and by day hears precious strange things sometimes. What for, my fine lady, did ye go and swear to policeman Frank, down in Nevilton, that ’twas I took your God-darned pigeons? Your dad may be a swinking magistrate, what can send poor folks to gaol for snaring rabbities, or putting a partridge in the pot to make the cabbage tasty, but what right does that give a hussy like thee to send policeman Frank swearing he'll lock up old Bessie? It don't suit wi' I, this kind of flummery; so I do tell 'ee plain and straight. It don't suit wi' I!"

"Come, clear out of this, my good woman!" cried the indignant clergyman, seizing the trembling old creature by the arm.

"Don't hurt her! Don't hurt her!" exclaimed Gladys. "She'll put the evil eye on me. She did it to Nance Purvis and she's been mad ever since."

"It's a lie!" whimpered the old woman, struggling feebly as Clavering pulled her towards the door.

"It's your own dad and Nance's dad with their ugly ways what have driven that poor lass moon-crazy. Mark Purvis do whip her with withy sticks — all the country knows it. Darn 'ee, for a black devil's spawn, and no blessed minister, pulling and harrying an old woman!"

This last ejaculation was addressed to the furious Mr. Clavering, who was now thrusting her by bodily force through the open door. With one final effort Witch-Bessie broke loose from him and turned on the threshold. "Ye *shall* have the evil eye, since ye've called for it," she shrieked, making a wild gesture in the air, in the direction of the shrinking Ariadne. "And what if I let these two gentlemen know with whom it was ye were out walking the other night? I did see 'ee, and I do know what I did see! I'm a pigeon-stealer am I, ye flaunting flandering Gypoo? Let me tell these dear gentlemen how as—" Her voice died suddenly away in an incoherent splutter, as the vicar of Nevilton, with his hand upon her mouth, swung her out of the door.

Gladys sank down upon a chair pale and trembling.

As soon, however, as the old woman's departure seemed final, she began to recover her equanimity. She gave vent to a rather forced and uneasy laugh. "Silly old thing!" she exclaimed. "This comes of mother's getting rid of the dogs. She never used to come here when we had the dogs. They scented her out in a minute. I wish we had them now to let loose at her! They’d make her skip.”

“I do hope, my dear child,” said Dangelis anxiously, “that she has not really frightened you? What a terrible old creature! I’ve always longed to see a typical English witch, but bless my heart if I want to see another!”

“She’s gone now,” announced Mr. Clavering, returning hot and breathless. “I saw her half-way down the drive. She’ll be out of sight directly. I expect you don’t want to see any more of her, else, if you come out here a step or two, you can see her slinking away.”

Gladys thanked him warmly for his energetic defence of her, but denied having the least wish to witness her enemy’s retreat.

“It must be getting near lunch time,” she said. “If you don’t mind waiting a moment, I’ll change my dress.” And she tripped off behind the screens.

CHAPTER XII. AUBER LAKE

THE PRESENCE OF Ralph Dangelis in Nevilton House had altered, in more than one respect, the relations between Gladys and her cousin.

The girls saw much less of each other, and Lacrima was left comparatively at liberty to follow her own devices.

On several occasions, however, when they were all three together, it chanced that the American had made himself extremely agreeable to the younger girl, even going so far as to take her part, quite energetically, in certain lively discussions. These occasions were not forgotten by Gladys, and she hated the Italian with a hatred more deep-rooted than ever.

As soon as her first interest in the American's society began to pall a little, she cast about in her mind for some further way of causing discomfort and agitation to the object of her hatred.

Only those who have taken the trouble to watch carefully what might be called the "magnetic antagonism," between feminine animals condemned to live in close relations with one another, will understand the full intensity of what this young person felt. It was not necessarily a sign of any abnormal morbidity in our fair-haired friend.

For a man in whom one is interested, even though such interest be mild and casual, to show a definite tendency to take sides against one, on behalf of one's friend, is a sufficient justification, — at least so nature seems to indicate — for the awakening in one's heart of an intense desire for revenge. Such desire is often aroused in the most well-constituted temperaments among us, and in this case it might be said that the sound physical nerves of the daughter of the Romers craved the satisfaction of such an impulse with the same stolid persistence as her flesh and blood craved for air and sun. But how to achieve it? What new and elaborate humiliation to devise for this irritating partner of her days?

The bathing episode was beginning to lose its piquancy. Custom, with its kindly obliviousness, had already considerably modified Lacrima's fears, and there had ceased to be for Gladys any further pleasure in displaying her aquarian agility before a companion so occupied with the beauty of lawn and garden at that magical hour.

Fate, however, partial, as it often is, to such patient tenacity of emotion, let fall at last, at her very feet, the opportunity she craved.

She had just begun to experience that miserable sensation, so sickeningly oppressive to a happy disposition, of hating where she could not hurt, when, one evening, news was brought to the house by Mark Purvis the game-keeper that a wandering flock of wild-geese had taken up its temporary abode amid the reeds of Auber Lake. Mr. Romer himself soon brought confirmation of this fact.

The birds appeared to leave the place during the day and fly far westward, possibly as far as the marshes of Sedgemoor, but they always returned at night-fall to this new tarrying ground.

The very evening of this exciting discovery, Gladys' active mind formulated a thrilling and absorbing project, which she positively trembled with longing to communicate to Lacrima. She found the long dinner that night, and the subsequent chatter with Dangelis on the terrace, almost too tedious to be endured; and it was at an unusually early hour that she surprised her cousin by joining her in her room.

The Pariah was seated at her mirror, wearily reducing to order her entangled curls, when Gladys entered. She looked very fragile in her white bodice and the little uplifted arms, that the mirror reflected, showed unnaturally long and thin. When one hates a person with the sort of massive hatred such as, at that time, beat sullenly under Gladys' rounded bosom, every little physical characteristic in the object of our emotion is an added incentive to our revengeful purpose.

This Saturnian planetary law is unfortunately not confined to antipathies between persons of the same sex. Sometimes the most unhappy results have been known to spring from the manner in which one or another, even of two lovers, has lifted chin or head, or moved characteristically across a room.

Thus it were almost impossible to exaggerate the loathing with which this high-spirited girl contemplated the pale oval face and slender swaying arms of her friend, as full of her new project she flung herself into her favourite arm chair and met Lacrima's frightened eyes in the gilded Georgian mirror. She began her attack with elaborate feline obliquity.

"They say Mark Purvis' crazy daughter has been giving trouble again. He was up this morning, talking to father about it."

"Why don't you send her away?" said the Italian, without turning round.

"Send her away? She has to do all the house-work down there! Mark has no one else, you know, and the poor man does not want the expense of hiring a woman."

"Isn't it rather a lonely place for a child like that?"

"Lonely? I should think it is lonely! But what would you have? Somebody must keep that cottage clean; and it's just as well a wretched mad girl, of no use to anyone, should do it, as that a sound person should lose her wits in such a god-forsaken spot!"

"What does she do at — at these times? Is she violent?"

"Oh, she gets out in the night and roams about the woods. She was once found up to her knees in the water. No, she isn't exactly violent. But she is a great nuisance."

"It must be terrible for her father!"

"Well — in a way it does bother him. But he is not the man to stand much nonsense."

"I hope he is kind to her."

Gladys laughed. "What a soft-hearted darling you are! I expect he finds sometimes that you can't manage mad people, any more than you can manage children, without using the stick. But I fancy, on the whole, he doesn't treat her badly. He's a fairly good-natured man."

The Pariah sighed. "I think Mr. Romer ought to send her away at once to some kind of home, and pay someone to take her place."

"I daresay you do! If you had your way, father wouldn't have a penny left in the bank."

The Pariah rose from her seat, crossed over to the window, and looked out into the sultry night. What a world this was! All the gentle and troubled beings in it seemed over-ridden by gigantic merciless wheels!

A little awed, in spite of herself, by the solemnity of her companion, Gladys sought to bring her back out of this translunar mood by capricious playfulness. She stretched herself out at full length in her low chair, and calling the girl to her side, began caressing her, pulling her down at last upon her lap.

"Guess what has happened!" she murmured softly, as the quick beating of the Pariah's heart communicated itself to her, and made her own still harder.

"Oh, I know it's something I shan't like, something that I shall dread!" cried the younger girl, making a feeble effort to escape.

"Shall I tell you what it is?" Gladys went on, easily overcoming this slight movement. "You know, don't you, that there's a flock of wild-geese settled on the island in the middle of Auber Lake? Well! I have got a lovely plan. I’ve never yet seen those birds, because they don’t come back till the evening. What you and I are going to do, darling, is to slip away out of the house, next time Mr. Dangelis goes to see that friend of yours, and make straight to Auber Lake! I’ve never been into those woods by night, and it’ll be extraordinarily thrilling to see what Auber Lake looks like with the moon gleaming on it. And then we may be able to make the wild-geese rise, by throwing sticks or something, into the water. Oh, it’ll be simply lovely! Don’t you think so, darling? Aren’t you quite thrilled by the idea?”

The Pariah liberated herself by a sudden effort and stood erect on the floor.

“I think you are the wickedest girl that God ever made!” she said solemnly. And then, as the full implication of the proposed adventure grew upon her, she clasped her hands convulsively. “You cannot mean it!” she cried. “You cannot mean it! You are teasing me, Gladys. You are only saying it to tease me.”

“Why, you’re not such a coward as all that!” her cousin replied. “Think what it must be for Nance Purvis, who always lives down there! I shouldn’t like to be more cowardly than a poor crazy labouring girl. We really *ought* to visit the place, once in a way, to see if these stories are true about her escaping out of the house. One can never tell from what Mark says. He may have been drinking and imagining it all.”

Lacrima turned away and began rapidly undressing. Without a word she arranged the books on her table, moving about like a person in a trance, and without a word she slipped into bed and turned her face to the wall.

Gladys smiled, stretched herself luxuriously, and continued speaking.

“Auber Lake by moonlight would well be worth a night walk. You know it’s supposed to be the most romantic spot in Somersetshire? They say it’s incredibly old. Some people think it was used in prehistoric times by the druids as a place of worship. The villagers never dare to go near it after dark. They say that very curious noises are heard there. But of course that may only be the mad—”

She was not allowed to go on. The silent figure in the bed suddenly sat straight up, with wide-staring eyes fixed upon her, and said slowly and solemnly, “If I come with you to this place, will you faithfully promise me that your father will send that girl into a home?”

Gladys was so surprised by this unexpected utterance that she made an inarticulate gasping noise in her throat.

“Yes,” she answered, mesmerized by the Pariah’s fixed glance. “Yes — most certainly. If you come with me to see those wild-geese, I’ll make any promise you like about that girl!”

Lacrima continued for a moment fixing her with wide-dilated pupils.

Then, with a shiver that passed from head to foot, she slowly sank back on her pillows and closed her eyes.

Gladys rose a little uneasily from her chair. “But of course,” she said, “you understand she may not *want* to go away. She is quite crazy, you know. And she may prefer wandering about freely among dark woods to being locked up in a nice white-washed asylum, under the care of fat motherly nurses!”

With this parting shot she went off into her own room feeling in a curious vague manner that somehow or another the edge of her delectation had been taken off. In this unexpected resolution of the Italian, the Mythology of Sacrifice had suddenly struck a staggering blow at the Mythology of Power. Like the point of a bright silver sword, this unforseen vein of heroism in the Pariah cleared the sultry air of that hot night with a magical freshness and coolness. A planetary onlooker might have been conscious at that moment of strange spiritual vibrations passing to and fro over the sleeping roofs of Nevilton. But perhaps such a one would also have been conscious of the abysmal indifference to either stream of opposing influence, of the high, cold galaxy of the Milky Way, stretched contemptuously above them all!

All we are able to be certain of is, that as the fair-haired daughter of the house prepared for bed she muttered sullenly to herself. “I’ll make her go anyway. It will be lovely to feel her shiver, when we pass under those thick laurels! That mad girl won’t leave the place, unless they drag her by force.”

Left alone, Lacrima remained, for nearly two hours, motionless and with closed eyes. She was not asleep, however. Strange and desperate thoughts pursued one another through her brain. She wondered if she, too, like the girl of Auber Lake, were destined to find relief from this merciless world in the unhinging of her reason. She reverted again and again in her mind to her cousin’s final malicious suggestion. That would be indeed, she thought, a bitter example of life’s irony, if after going through all this to save the poor wretch, such sacrifice only meant worse misery for her. But no! God could not be as unkind as that.

She stretched out her arm for a book with which to still the troublesome palpitation of her heart.

The book she seized by chance turned out to be Andersen’s Fairy Stories, and she read herself to sleep with the tale of the little princess who wove coats of nettles for her enchanted brothers, and all night long she dreamed of mad unhappy girls struggling amid entwining branches, of bottomless lakes full of terrible drowned faces, and of flocks of wild-geese that were all of them kings’ sons!

The Saturday following this eventful colloquy between the cousins was a day of concentrated gloom. There was thunder in the vicinity and, although no rain had actually fallen in Nevilton, there was a brooding presence of it in the heavy atmosphere.

The night seemed to descend that evening more quickly than usual. By eight o'clock a strange unnatural twilight spread itself over the landscape. The trees in the park submitted forlornly to a burden of sultry indistinction and seemed, in their pregnant stillness, to be trying in vain to make mysterious signals to one another.

Dinner in the gracious Elizabethan dining-room was an oppressive and discomfortable meal to all concerned. Mrs. Romer was full of tremors and apprehensions over the idea of a possible thunder-storm.

The quarry-owner was silent and preoccupied, his mind reviewing all the complicated issues of a new financial scheme. Dangelis kept looking at his watch. He had promised to be at Dead Man's Lane by nine o'clock, and the meal seemed to drag itself out longer than he had anticipated.

He was a little apprehensive, too, as to what reception he would receive when he did arrive at Mr. Quincunx's threshold.

Their last encounter had been so extremely controversial, that he feared lest the sensitive recluse might be harbouring one of his obstinate psychic reactions at his expense.

He was very unwilling to risk the loss of Mr. Quincunx's society. There was no one in Nevilton to whom he could discourse quite as freely and philosophically as he could to the conscripted office-clerk, and his American interest in a "representative type" found inexhaustible satisfaction in listening to the cynical murmurings of this eccentric being.

Lacrima was calm and self-contained, but she ate hardly anything; and the hand with which she raised her glass to her lips trembled in spite of all her efforts.

Gladys herself was exuberant with suppressed excitement. Every now and then she glanced furtively at the window, and at other times, when there was no reason for such an outburst, she gave vent to a low feline laugh. She was of the type of animal that the approach of thunder, and the presence of electricity in the air, fills with magnetic nervous exaltation.

The meal was over at last, and the various persons of the group hastened to separate, each of them weighed upon, as if by an atmospheric hand, with the burden of their own purposes and apprehensions.

The two girls retired to their rooms. Mrs. Romer retreated to her favourite corner in the entrance hall, and then, uneasy even here, took refuge in the assuaging society of her friend the housekeeper.

Romer himself marched away gloomily to his study; and Dangelis, snatching up his coat and hat, made off across the south garden.

It did not take the American long to reach the low hedge which separated Mr. Quincunx's garden from the lane. The recluse was awaiting him, and joined him at once at the gate, giving him no invitation to enter, and taking for granted that their conversation was to be a pedestrian one.

Mr. Quincunx experienced a curious reluctance to allow any of his friends to cross his threshold. The only one completely privileged in this matter was young Luke Andersen, whose gay urbanity was so insidious that it would have overcome the resistance of a Trappist monk.

"Well, where are you proposing to take me tonight?" enquired Dangelis, when they had advanced in silence some distance up the hill.

"To a place that will interest you, if your damned artistic tastes haven't quite spoiled your pleasure in little things!"

"Not to the Seven Ashes again?" protested the American. "I know this lane leads up there."

"You wait a little. We shall turn off presently," muttered his companion. "The truth is I am taking you on a sort of scouting expedition tonight."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well — if you must know, you shall know! I saw Miss Traffio yesterday and she asked me to keep an eye on Auber Lake tonight."

"What? That place they were talking of? Where the wild-geese are?"

Mr. Quincunx nodded. "It may, for all I know, be a wild-goose chase. But I find your friend Gladys is up to her little tricks again — frightening people and upsetting their minds. And I promised Lacrima that you and I would stroll round that way — just to see that the girls don't come to any harm. Only we mustn't let them know we're there. Lacrima would never forgive me if Gladys saw us."

"Do you mean to say that those two children are going to wander about these confounded damp woods of yours alone?" cried the American.

"Look here, Mr. Dangelis, please understand this quite clearly. If you ever say a word to your precious Miss Gladys about this little scouting expedition, that's an end of our talks, forever and a day!"

The citizen of Ohio bowed with a mock heroic gesture, removing his hat as he did so.

"I submit to your conditions, Don Quixote. I am entirely at your service. Is it the idea that we should track our friends on hands and knees? I am quite ready even for that, but I know what these woods of yours are like."

Mr. Quincunx vouchsafed no reply to this ill-timed jocosity. He was anxiously surveying the tall hedge upon their right hand. "Here's the way," he suddenly exclaimed. “Here’s the path. We can hit a short-cut here that brings us straight through Camel’s Cover, up to Wild Pine. Then we can slip down into Badger’s Bottom and so into the Auber Woods.”

“But I thought the Auber Woods were much nearer than that. You told me the other day that you could get into the heart of them, in a quarter of an hour from your own garden!”

“And so I can, my friend,” replied Mr. Quincunx, scrambling up the bank into the field, and turning to offer his hand to his companion. “But it happens that this is the way those girls are coming. At any rate that is what she said. They were going to avoid my lane but they were going to enter the woods from the Seven Ashes side, just because it is so much nearer.”

“I submit, I submit,” muttered the artist blandly. “I only hope this scouting business needn’t commence till we have got well through Camel’s Cover and Badger’s Bottom! I must confess I am not altogether in love with the sound of those places, though no doubt they are harmless enough. But you people do certainly select the most extraordinary names for your localities. Our own little lapses in these things are classical compared with your Badgers and Camels and Ashes and Dead Men!”

Mr. Quincunx did not condescend to reply to this. He continued to plough his way across the field, every now and then glancing nervously at the sky, which grew more and more threatening. Walking behind him and a little on one side, the American was singularly impressed by the appearance he presented, especially when the faint light of the pallid and cloud-flecked moon fell on his uplifted profile. With his corrugated brow and his pointed beard, Mr. Quincunx was a noticeable figure at any time, but under the present atmospheric conditions his lean form and striking head made a picture of forlorn desolation worthy of the sombre genius of a Bewick.

Dangelis conceived the idea of a picture, which he himself might be capable of evoking, with this melancholy, solitary figure as its protagonist.

He wondered vaguely what background he would select as worthy of the resolute hopelessness in Mr. Quincunx's forlorn mien.

It was only after they had traversed the sloping recesses of Camel's Cover, and had arrived at the crest of the Wild Pine ridge, that he was able to answer this question. Then he knew at once. The true pictorial background for his eccentric companion could be nothing less than that line of wind-shaken, rain-washed Scotch firs, which, visible from all portions of Nevilton, had gathered to themselves the very essence of its historic tragedy.

These trees, like Mr. Quincunx, seemed to derive a grim satisfaction from their submission to destiny. Like him, they submitted with a definite volition of resolution. They took, as he took, the line of least resistance with a sort of stark voluptuousness. They did not simply bow to the winds and rains that oppressed them. They positively welcomed them. And yet all the while, just as he did, they emitted a low melancholy murmur of protest, a murmur as completely different from the howling eloquence of the ashes and elms, as it was different from the low querulous sob of the larches and elders. The rusty-red stain, too, in the rough bark of their trunks, was also singularly congruous with a certain reddish tinge, which often darkened the countenance of the recluse, especially when his fits of goblin-humour shook him into convulsive merriment.

As they paused for a moment on this melancholy ridge, looking back at the flickering lights of the village, and down into the darkness in front of them, the painter made a mental vow that before he left Nevilton he would sublimate his vision of Mr. Quincunx into a genuine masterpiece. Plunging once more into the shadows, they followed a dark lane which finally emerged into a wide-sloping valley. In the depths of this was the secluded hollow, full of long grass and tufted reeds, which was the place known as Badger's Bottom.

The entrance to Auber Wood was now at hand; and as they reached its sinister outskirts, they both instinctively paused to take stock of their surroundings. The night was more sultry than ever. The leaves and grasses swayed with an almost imperceptible movement, as if stirred, not by the wind, but by the actual heavy breathing of the Earth herself, troubled and agitated in her planetary sleep.

Sombre banks of clouds moved intermittently over the face of a blurred moon, and, out of the soil at their feet, rose up damp exotic odours, giving the whole valley the atmosphere of an enormous hot-house.

It was one of those hushed, steamy nights, pregnant and listening, which the peculiar conditions of our English climate do not often produce, and which are for that very reason often quite startling in their emotional appeal. The path which the two men took, after once they had entered the wood, was one that led them through a gloomy tunnel of gigantic, overhanging laurel-bushes.

All the chief entrances to Auber Wood were edged with these exotics. Some capricious eighteenth-century Seldom, — perhaps the one who raised the Tower of Pleasure on the site of the resting-place of the Holy Rood — had planted them there, and for more than a hundred years they had grown and multiplied.

Auber Lake itself was the centre of a circumference of thick jungle-like brushwood which itself was overshadowed by high sloping hills. These hills, also heavily wooded, formed a sort of gigantic cup or basin, and the level expanse of undergrowth they enclosed was itself the margin of a yet deeper concavity, in the middle of which was the lake-bed.

Mingling curiously with the more indigenous trees in this place were several unusual and alien importations. Some of these, like the huge laurels they were now passing under, belonged more properly to gardens than to woods. Others were of a still stranger and more foreign nature, and produced a very bizarre effect where they grew, as though one had suddenly come upon the circle of some heathen grove, in the midst of an English forest. Auber Lake was certainly a spot of an unusual character. Once it had been drained, and a large monolith, of the same stone as that produced by Leo's Hill, had been discovered embedded in the mud. Traces were said to have been discerned upon this of ancient human carving, but local antiquarianism had contradicted this rumour. At least it may be said that nowhere else on the Romer estate, except perhaps in Nevilton churchyard, was the tawny-colored clay which bore so close a symbolic, if not a geological, relation to the famous yellow sandstone, more heavily and malignantly clinging, in its oozy consistence.

Dangelis and Mr. Quincunx advanced slowly, and in profound silence, along their overshadowed path.

An occasional wood-pigeon, disturbed in its roosting, flapped awkwardly through the branches; and far away, in another part of the wood, sounded at intervals the melancholy cry of a screech-owl.

Great leather-winged bats flitted over their heads with queer unearthly little cries; and every now and then some agitated moth, from the under-bushes, fluttered heavily across their faces. Sometimes in the darkness their feet stumbled upon a dead branch, but more often they slipped uneasily in the deep ruts left in the mud by the woodmen's carts.

All the various intermittent noises they heard only threw the palpable stillness of the place into heavier relief.

The artist from the wind-swept plains of Ohio felt as though he had never plunged so deeply into the indrawn recesses of the earth-powers as he was doing now. It seemed to him as though they were approaching the guarded precincts of some dark and crouching idol. It was as if, by some ill-omened mistake, they had stumbled unawares upon a spot that through interminable ages had been forbidden to human tread.

And yet the place seemed to expect them, to await them; to have in reserve for them some laboured pregnancy of woeful significance.

Once more, as he walked behind Mr. Quincunx, Dangelis was startled by the extraordinary congruity of that forlorn figure with the occasion and the scene. The form of the recluse seemed to exhale a reciprocity of fearful brooding. Auber Wood seemed aware of him, and ready to welcome him, in consentaneous sympathy. He might have been the long-expected priest of some immemorial rites transacted there, the priest of some old heathen worship, perhaps the worship of generations of dead people, buried under those damp leaves.

It seemed a long while to Ralph Dangelis, in spite of the breathless quickening of his imagination, before the laurel-tunnel thinned away, and the two men were able to walk side by side between the trunks of the larger trees. Here again they encountered Scotch firs.

What strange dream, of what fantastic possessor of this solitude, had shaped itself into the planting of these moorland giants, among the native-born oaks and beeches of this weird place?

The open spaces at the foot of the tree-trunks were filled with an obscure mass of oozy stalks and heavily drooping leaves. The obscurity of the spot made it difficult to discern the differences between these rank growths; but the ghostly flowers of enormous hemlocks stood forth from among the rest. Fungoid excrescences, of some sort or another, were certainly prolific here.

Their charnel-house odour set Dangelis thinking of a morgue he had once visited.

At last — and with quite startling suddenness — the path they followed emerged into a wide open expanse; and there, — under the diffused light of the cloud-darkened moon — they saw stretched at their feet the dim surface of Auber Lake.

Mr. Quincunx stood for a moment motionless and silent, leaning upon his stick. Then he turned to his companion; and the American noticed how vague and shadowy his face looked, as if it were a face seen through some more opaque medium than that of air.

They sat down together upon a fallen log; and out of an instinctive desire to break the tension of the spell that lay on him Dangelis lit a cigarette.

He had smoked in silence for some moments, when Mr. Quincunx, who had been listening attentively, raised his hand. “Hark!” he said, “do you hear anything?”

Across the stillness of the water came a low blood-curdling wail. It was hardly a human sound, and yet it was not like the voice of any bird or beast. It seemed to unsettle the drowsy natives of the spot; for a harsh twittering of sedge-birds answered it, and a great water-rat splashed down into the lake.

“God! they were right then,” whispered the American. “They spoke of some mad girl living down here, but I did not believe them. It seemed incredible that such a thing should be allowed. Quick, my friend! — we ought to warn those girls at once and get them away. This is not the sort of thing for them to hear.”

They both rose and listened intently, but the sound was not repeated; only a hot gust of wind coming, as it were, out of the lake itself, went quivering through the reeds.

"I don't imagine," said Mr. Quincunx calmly, "that *your* young lady will be much alarmed. I fancy she has less fear of this kind of thing than that water-rat we heard just now. It'll terrify Lacrima, though. But I understand that your charming sweetheart gets a good deal of amusement from causing people to feel terror!"

Dangelis was so accustomed to the plain-spoken utterances of the hermit of Dead Man's Lane that he received this indictment of his enchantress with complete equanimity.

"All the same," he remarked, "I think we'd better go and meet them, if you know the direction they're coming. It's not a very pleasant proposition, any way, to face escaped lunatics in a place like this."

"I tell you," muttered Mr. Quincunx crossly, "your darling Gladys is coming here for no other reason than to hear that girl's cries. The more they terrify Lacrima, the better she'll be pleased."

"I don't know about Lacrima," answered Dangelis. "I know that devil of a noise will scare *me* if I hear it again."

Mr. Quincunx did not reply. With his hand on his companion's arm he was once more listening intently. At the back of his mind was gradually forming a grim remote wish that some overt act and palpable revelation of Gladys Romer's interesting character might effect a change of heart in the citizen of Ohio.

Such a wish had been obscurely present in his brain ever since they started on this expedition; and now that the situation was developing, it took a more vivid shape.

"I believe," he remarked at last, "I hear them coming down the path. Listen! It's on the other side of the pond, — over there." He pointed across the water to the left-hand corner of the lake. It was from the right-hand corner, where the keeper's cottage stood, that the poor mad girl's voice had proceeded.

"Yes; I am sure!" he whispered after a moment's pause. "Come! quick! get in here; then they won't see us even if they walk round this way."

He pulled Dangelis beneath the overhanging boughs of a large weeping willow. The droop of this tree's delicate foliage made, in the semi-darkness in which they were, a complete and impenetrable hiding-place; and yet from between the trailing branches, when they held them apart with their hands, they had a free and unimpeded view of the whole surface of the lake.

The sound of distant voices struck clearly now upon their ears; and a moment after, nudging his companion, Mr. Quincunx pointed to two cloaked figures advancing across the open space towards the water's edge.

"Hush!" whispered the recluse. "They are bound to come this way now."

The two girls were, however, for the moment, apparently occupied with another intention. The taller of the two stopped and picked up something from the ground, and then approaching close to the lake's edge raised her arm and flung it far into the water.

The object she threw must have been a stick or a stone of considerable size, for the splash it produced was startling.

The result was also startling. From a little island in the middle of the lake, rose suddenly, with a tremendous flapping, several large and broad-winged birds. They flew in heavy circles, at first, over the island; and then, descending to the water's level, went splashing and flapping across its surface, uttering strange cries.

The noise made by these birds had hardly subsided, as they settled down in a thick bed of reeds, when, once more, that terrible inhuman wail rang out upon the night. Both men peered forth anxiously from their hiding-place, to see the effect of this sound upon their two friends.

They could see that they both stood stone-still for a moment as if petrified by terror.

Then they noticed that the taller of the two drew her companion still nearer to the water’s edge.

“If that yell begins again,” whispered the American, “I shall go out and speak to them.”

Mr. Quincunx made no answer. He prayed in his heart that something would occur to initiate this innocent Westerner a little more closely into the workings of his inamorata’s mind. It seemed indeed quite within the bounds of possibility that the recluse might be gratified in this wish, for the girls began rapidly advancing towards them, skirting the edge of the lake.

The two men watched their approach in silence, the artist savouring with a deep imaginative excitement the mystical glamour of the scene.

He felt it would be indelibly and forever imprinted on his mind, this hot heavily scented night, this pallid-glimmering lake, those uneasy stirrings of the wild-geese in their obscure reed-bed, and the frightful hush of the listening woods, as they seemed to await a repetition of that unearthly cry.

The girls had actually paused at the verge of the lake, just in front of their hiding-place; so near, in fact, that by stretching out his arm, from behind his willowy screen, Dangelis could have touched Gladys on the shoulder, when the fearfully expected voice broke forth again upon the night.

The men could see the visible tremor of panic-fear quiver through Lacrima’s slight frame.

“Oh, let us go! — let us go!” she pleaded, pulling with feverish fingers at her companion’s cloak.

But Gladys folded her arms and flung back her head.

"Little coward!" she murmured in a low unshaken voice. "I am not afraid of a mad girl's yelling. Look! there's one of those birds going back to the island!"

Once more the inhuman wail trembled across the water.

"Gladys! Gladys dear!" cried the panic-stricken girl, "I cannot endure it! I shall go mad myself if we do not go! I'll do anything you ask me! I'll go anywhere with you! Only — please — let us go away now!"

The sound was repeated again, and this time it proceeded from a quarter much nearer them. All four listeners held their breath. Presently the Italian made a terrified gesture and pointed frantically to the right bank of the lake.

"I see her!" she cried, "I see her! She is coming towards us!"

The frightened girl made a movement as if she would break away from her companion and flee into the darkness of the trees.

Gladys clasped her firmly in her arms.

"No — no!" she said, "no running off! Remember our agreement! There's nothing really to be afraid of. I'm not afraid."

A slight quiver in her voice a little belied the calmness of this statement. She was indeed torn at that moment between a very natural desire to escape herself and an insatiable craving to prolong her companion's agitation.

In her convulsive terror the Italian, unable to free herself from the elder girl's enfolding arms, buried her head in the other's cloak.

Thus linked, the two might have posed for a picture of heroic sisterly solicitude, in the presence of extreme danger.

Once more that ghastly cry resounded through the silence; and several nocturnal birds, from distant portions of the wood, replied to it with their melancholy hootings.

The white-garbed figure of the mad girl, her arms tossed tragically above her head, came swaying towards them. She moved unevenly, and staggered in her advance, as if her volition had not complete power over her movements. Gladys was evidently considerably alarmed herself now. She clutched at a chance of combining escape with triumph.

“Say you let me off that promise!” she whispered hoarsely, “and we’ll run together! We’re quite close to the way out.”

Who can read the obscure recesses of the human mind, or gauge the supernatural strength that lurks amid the frailest nerves?

This reference to her sublime contract was the one thing needed to rouse the abandoned soul of the Pariah. For one brief second more the powers of darkness struggled over her bowed head with the powers of light.

Then with a desperate movement the Italian rose erect, flung aside her cousin’s arms, turned boldly towards the approaching maniac, and ran straight to meet her. Her unexpected appearance produced an immediate effect upon the unhappy girl. Her wildly-tossing arms fell to her side. Her wailing died away in pathetic sobs, and these also quickly ceased.

Lacrima seemed to act like one possessed of some invincible magic. One might have dreamed that now for the first time for uncounted ages this unholy shrine of heathen tradition was invaded by an emissary of the true Faith.

Gladys, who had reeled bewildered against the wood-work of an ancient weir, that formed the outlet to the lake, leaned in complete prostration of astonishment upon this support, and gazed helplessly and dumbly at the two figures. She was too petrified with amazement to notice the appearance of Ralph and Maurice, who, also absorbed in watching this strange encounter, had half-emerged from their concealment.

The three onlookers saw the Italian lay her hands upon the girl’s forehead, smooth back her hair, kiss her gently on the brow, and fling her own cloak over her bare shoulders. They heard her murmuring again and again some soft repetition of soothing words. Dangelis caught the liquid syllables of the Tuscan tongue. Evidently in her excitement the child of Genoa the Superb had reverted to the language of her fathers.

The next thing they saw was the slow retreat of the two together, towards the keeper's cottage; the arm of the Italian clinging tenderly round the maniac's waist.

At this point Dangelis stepped forward and made himself known to Gladys.

The expression on the face of Mr. Romer's daughter, when she recognized the American, was a palimpsest of conflicting emotions. Her surprise was still more intense when Mr. Quincunx stepped out from the shadow of the drooping tree and raised his hat to her. Her eyes for the moment looked positively scared; and her mouth opened, like the mouth of a bewildered infant. The tone with which the citizen of Ohio addressed the confused young lady made the heart of Mr. Quincunx leap for joy.

"I am astonished at you," he said. "I should not have believed such a thing possible! Your only excuse is that this infernal jest of yours has turned out so well for the people concerned, and so shamefully for yourself. How could you treat that brave foreign child so brutally? Why — I saw her trembling and trembling, and trying to get away; and you were holding — actually holding her — while that poor mad thing came nearer! It's a good thing for you that the Catholic spirit in her burst out at last. Do you know what spell she used to bring that girl to her senses? A spell that you will never understand, my friend, for all this baptism and confirmation business! Why — she quoted passages out of the Litany of Our Lady! I heard her clearly, and I recognized the words. I am a damned atheist myself, but if ever I felt religion to be justified it was when your cousin stopped that girl's crying. It was like real magic. You ought to be thoroughly proud of her! I shall tell her when I see her what I feel about her."

Gladys rose from her seat on the weir and faced them haughtily. Her surprise once over, and the rebuke having fallen, she became mistress of herself again.

"I suppose," she said, completely ignoring Mr. Quincunx, "we'd better follow those two, and see if Lacrima gets her safely into the house. I fancy she'll have no difficulty about it. Of course if she had not done this I should have had to do it myself. But not knowing Italian" — she added this with a sneer— "I am not so suitable a mad-house nurse."

"It was her good heart, Gladys," responded the American; "not her Italian, nor her Litany, that soothed that girl's mind. I wish your heart, my friend, were half as good."

"Well," returned the fair girl quite cheerfully, "we'll leave my heart for the present, and see how Lacrima has got on."

She took the arm which Dangelis had not offered, but which his chivalry forbade him to refuse, and together they proceeded to follow the heroic Genoese.

Mr. Quincunx shuffled unregarded behind them.

They had hardly reached the keeper's cottage, a desolate and ancient erection, of the usual stone material, darkened with damp and overshadowed by a moss-grown oak, when Lacrima herself came towards them.

She started with surprise at seeing, in the shadowy obscurity, the figures of the two men.

Her surprise changed to pleasure when she recognized their identity.

“Ah!” she said. “You come too late. Gladys and I have had quite an adventure, haven’t we, cousin?”

Mr. Quincunx glanced at the American to see if he embraced the full generosity of the turn she gave to the situation.

Gladys took advantage of it in a moment. “You see I was right after all,” she remarked. “I knew you would lose your alarm directly you saw that girl! When it came to the point you were braver than I. You dear thing!” She kissed the Italian ostentatiously, and then retook possession of her admirer’s arm.

“I got her up to her room without waking her father,” said Lacrima. “She had left the door wide open. Gladys is going to ask Mr. Romer to have her sent away to some sort of home. I believe they’ll be able to cure her. She talked quite sensibly to me. I am sure she only wants to be treated gently. I’m afraid her father’s unkind to her. You are going to arrange for her being sent away, aren’t you, Gladys?”

The elder girl turned. “Of course, my dear, of course. I don’t go back on my word.”

The four friends proceeded to take the nearest path through the wood. One by one the frightened wild-geese returned to their roosting-place on the island. The water-rats resumed uninterrupted their night-prowls along the reedy edge of the lake, and the wood-pigeons settled down in peace upon their high branches.

Long before Dead Man’s Lane was reached the two couples had drifted conveniently apart in their lingering return.

Mr. Quincunx had seldom been more tender towards his little friend than he was that night; and Lacrima, still strangely happy in the after-ebb of her supernatural exultation, nestled closely to his side as they drifted leisurely across the fields.

In what precise manner the deeply-betrayed Gladys regained the confidence of her lover need not be related. The artist from Ohio would have been adamantine indeed, could he have resisted the appeal which the amorous telepathy of this magnetic young person gave her the power of expressing.

Meanwhile, in her low-pitched room, with the shadow of the oak-tree coming and going across her face, as the moonlight shone out or faded, Nance Purvis lay placidly asleep, dreaming no more of strange phantoms or of stinging whips, but of gentle spirits from some translunar region, who caressed her forehead with hands softer than moth's wings and spoke to her in a tongue that was like the moonlight itself made audible.

CHAPTER XIII. LACRIMA

MR. JOHN GORING was feeding his rabbits. In the gross texture of his clayish nature there were one or two curious layers of a pleasanter material. One of these, for instance, was now shown in the friendly equanimity with which he permitted a round-headed awkward youth, more than half idiotic, to assist him at this innocent task.

Between Mr. Goring and Bert Leerd there existed one of those inexplicable friendships, which so often, to the bewilderment of moral philosophers, bring a twilight of humanity into the most sinister mental caves. The farmer had saved this youth from a conspiracy of Poor-Law officials who were on the point of consigning him to an asylum. He had assumed responsibility for his good-behaviour and had given him a lodging — his parents being both dead — in the Priory itself.

Not a few young servant-girls, selected by Mr. Goring rather for their appearance than their disposition, had been dismissed from his service, after violent and wrathful scenes, for being caught teasing this unfortunate; and even the cook, a female of the most taciturn and sombre temper, was compelled to treat him with comparative consideration. The gossips of Nevilton swore, as one may believe, that the farmer, in being kind to this boy, was only obeying the mandate of nature; but no one who had ever beheld Bert's mother, gave the least credence to such a story.

Another of Mr. Goring's softer aspects was his mania for tame rabbits. These he kept in commodious and spacious hutches at the back of his house, and every year wonderful and interesting additions were added to their number.

On this particular morning both the farmer and his idiot were absorbed and rapt in contemplation before the gambols of two large new pets — great silky lop-eared things — who had arrived the night before. Mr. Goring was feeding them with fresh lettuces, carefully handed to him by his assistant, who divested these plants of their rough outer leaves and dried them on the palms of his hands.

"The little 'un do lap 'em up fastest, master," remarked the boy. "I mind how those others, with them girt ears, did love a fresh lettuce."

Mr. Goring watched with mute satisfaction the quivering nostrils and nibbling mouth of the dainty voracious creature.

"Mustn't let them have more than three at a time, Bert," he remarked. "But they do love them, as you say."

"What be going to call this little 'un, master?" asked the boy.

Mr. Goring straightened his back and drew a deep breath.

"What do you think, Bert, my boy?" he cried, in a husky excited tone, prodding his assistant jocosely with the handle of his riding-whip; "What do you think? What would you call her?"

"Ah! I knew she were a she, master!" chuckled the idiot. "I knew that, afore she were out of the packer-case! Call 'er?" and the boy leered an indescribable leer. "By gum! I can tell 'ee that fast enough. Call 'er Missy Lacrima, pretty little Missy Lacrima, wot lives up at the House, and wot is going to be missus 'ere afore long."

Mr. Goring surveyed his protégé for a moment with sublime contentment, and then humorously flicked at his ears with his whip.

"Right! my imp of Satan. Right! my spawn of Belial. That is just what I *was* thinking."

"She be silky and soft to handle," went on the idiot, "and her, up at the House, be no contrary, or I'm darned mistaken."

Mr. Goring expressed his satisfaction at his friend’s intelligence by giving him a push that nearly threw him backwards.

“And I’ll tell you this, my boy,” he remarked confidentially, surveying the long line of well-filled hutches, “we’ve never yet bought such a rabbit, as this foreign one will turn out, or you and I be damned fools.”

“The young lady’ll get mighty fond of these ’ere long-ears, looks so to me,” observed the youth. “Hope she won’t be a feeding ’em with wet cabbage, same as maids most often do.”

The farmer grew even more confidential, drawing close to his assistant and addressing him in the tone customary with him on market-days, when feeling the ribs of fatted cattle.

“That same young lady is coming up here this morning, Bert,” he remarked significantly. “The squire’s giving her a note to bring along.”

“And you be going to bring matters to a head, master,” rejoined the boy. “That’s wise and thoughtful of ‘ee, choosing time, like, and season, as the Book says. Maids be wonderful sly when the sun’s down, while of mornings they be meek as guinea-fowls.”

The appearance of the Priory servant — no very demure figure — put a sudden stop to these touching confidences.

“Miss Lacrima, with a note, in the front Parlour!” the damsel shouted.

“You needn’t call so loud, girl,” grumbled the farmer. “And how often must I tell you to say ‘Miss Traffio,’ not ‘Miss Lacrima’?”

The girl tossed her head and pouted her lips.

“A person isn’t used to waiting on foreigners,” she muttered.

Mr. Goring’s only reply to this remark was to pinch her arm unmercifully. He then pushed her aside, and entering the kitchen, walked rapidly through to the front of the house. The front parlour in the Priory was nothing more or less than the old entrance-gate of the Cistercian Monastery, preserved through four centuries, with hardly a change.

The roof was high and vaulted. In the centre of the vault a great many-petalled rose, carved in Leonian stone, seemed to gather all the curves and lines of the masonry together, and hold them in religious concentration.

The fire-place — a thing of more recent, but still sufficiently ancient date — displayed the delicate and gracious fantasy of some local Jacobean artist, who had lavished upon its ornate mouldings a more personal feeling than one is usually aware of in these things. In place of a fire the wide grate was, at this moment, full of new-grown bracken fronds, evidently recently picked, for they were still fresh and green.

In front of the fire-place stood Lacrima with the letter in her hand. Had Mr. Goring been a little less persuaded of the “meekness” of this young person, he would have recognized something not altogether friendly to himself and his plans in the strained white face she raised to him and the stiff gloved hand she extended.

He begged her to be seated. She waved aside the chair he offered, and handed him the letter. He tore this open and glanced carelessly at its contents.

The letter was indeed brief enough, containing nothing but the following gnomic words: “Refusal or no refusal,” signed with an imperial flourish.

He flung it down on the table, and came to business at once.

“You mustn’t let that little mistake of Auber Great Meadow mean anything, missie,” he said. “You were too hasty with a fellow that time — too hasty and coy-like. Those be queer maids’ tricks, that crying and running! But, bless my heart! I don’t bear you any grudge for it. You needn’t think it.”

He advanced a step — while she retreated, very pale and very calm, her little fingers clasped nervously together. She managed to keep the table between them, so that, barring a grotesque and obvious pursuit of her, she was well out of his reach.

“I have a plain and simple offer to make to you, my dear,” he continued, “and it is one that can do you no hurt or shame. I am not one of those who waste words in courting a girl, least of all a young lady of education like yourself. The fact is, I am a lonely man — without wife or child — and as far as I know no relations on earth, except brother Mortimer. And I have a pretty tidy sum laid up in Yeoborough Bank, and the farm is a good farm. I do not say that the house is all that could be wished; but ’tis a pretty house, too, and one that could stand improvement. In plain words, dearie, what I want you to say now is ‘yes,’ and no nonsense, — for what I am doing,” his voice became quite husky at this point, as if her propinquity really did cause him some emotion, “is asking you, point-blank, and no beating about the bush, whether you will marry me!”

Lacrima’s face during this long harangue would have formed a strange picture for any old Cistercian monk shadowing that ancient room. At first she had kept unmoved her strained and tensely-strung impassivity. But by degrees, as the astounding character of the man’s communication began to dawn upon her, her look changed into one of sheer blind terror. When the final fatal word crossed the farmer’s lips, she put her hand to her throat as though to suppress an actual cry. She had never looked for this; — not in her wildest dreams of what destiny, in this curst place, could inflict upon her. This surpassed the worst of possible imagination! It was a deep below the deep. She found herself at first completely unable to utter a word. She could only make a vague helpless gesture with her hand as though dumbly waving the whole world away.

Then at last with a terrible effort she broke the silence.

“What you say is utterly — utterly impossible! It is — it is too—”

She could not go on. But she had said enough to carry, even to a brain composed of pure clay, the conviction that the acquiescence he demanded was not a thing to be easily won. He thought of his brother-in-law’s enigmatic note. Possibly the owner of Leo’s Hill had ways of persuading recalcitrant foreign girls that were quite hidden from him. The psychological irony of the thing lay in the fact that in proportion as her terror increased, his desire for her increased proportionally. Had she been willing, — had she been even passive and indifferent, — the curious temperament of Mr. Goring would have been scarcely stirred. He might have gone on pursuing her, out of spite or out of obstinacy; but the pursuit would have been no more than an interlude, a distraction, among his other affairs.

But that look of absolute terror on her face — the look of a hunted animal under the hot breath of the hounds — appealed to something profoundly deep in his nature. Oddly enough — such are the eccentricities of the human mind — the very craving to possess her which her terror excited, was accompanied by a rush of extraordinary pity for himself as the object of her distaste.

He let her pass — making no movement to interrupt her escape. He let her hurry out of the garden and into the road — without a word; but as soon as she was gone, he sat down on the wooden seat under the front of the house and resting his head upon his chin began blubbering like a great baby. Big salt tears fell from his small pig’s eyes, rolled down his tanned cheeks, and falling upon the dust caked it into little curious globules.

Two wandering ants of a yellowish species, dragging prisoner after them one of a black kind, encountered these minute globes of sand and sorrow, and explored them with interrogatory feelers.

Mingled with this feeling of pity for himself under the girl's disdain was a remarkable wave of immense tenderness and consideration for her. Short of letting her escape him, how delicately he would cherish, how tenderly he would pet and fondle her, how assiduously he would care for her! The consciousness of this emotion of soft tenderness towards the girl increased his pity for himself under the weight of the girl's contempt. How ungrateful she was! And yet that very look of terror, that stifled cry of the hunted hare, which made him so resolved to win her, produced in him an exquisite feeling of melting regard for her youth, her softness, her fragility. When she did belong to him, oh how tenderly he would treat her! How he would humour her and give her everything she could want!

The shadowy Cistercian monks would no doubt, from their clairvoyant catholic knowledge of the subtleties of the human soul, have quite understood the cause of those absurd tears caking the dust under that wooden seat. But the yellowish ants continued to be very perplexed and confused by their presence. Thunder-drops tasting of salt were no doubt as strange to them as hail-stones tasting of wine would have been to Mr. Goring. But the ants were not the only creatures amazed at this new development in the psychology of the man of clay. From one corner of the house peeped the servant-girl, full of tremulous curiosity, and from another the idiot Bert shuffled and spied, full of most anxious and perturbed concern.

Meanwhile the innocent cause of this little drama was making her way with drooping head and dragging steps down the south drive. When she reached the house she was immediately informed by one of the servants that Mr. Romer wished to see her in the study.

She was so dazed and broken, so forlorn and indifferent, that she made her way straight to this room without pause or question.

She found Mr. Romer in a most lively and affable mood. He made her sit down opposite him, and handed her chocolates out of a decorative Parisian box which lay on the table.

“Well, young lady,” he said, “I know, without your telling me, that an important event has occurred! Indeed, to confess the truth, I have, for a long time, foreseen its occurrence. And what did you answer to my worthy brother’s flattering proposal? It isn’t every girl, in your peculiar position, who is as lucky as this. Come — don’t be shy! There is no need for shyness with me. What did you say to him?”

Lacrima looked straight in front of her out of the window. She saw the waving branches of a great dark yew-tree and above it the white clouds. She felt like one whose guardian-angel has deserted her, leaving her the prey of blind elemental forces. She thought vaguely in her mind that she would make a desperate appeal to Vennie Seldom. Something in Vennie gave her a consciousness of strength. To this strength, at the worst, she would cling for help. She was thus in a measure fortified in advance against any outburst in which her employer might indulge. But Mr. Romer indulged in no outburst.

“I suppose,” he said calmly, “that I may take for granted that you have refused my good brother’s offer?”

Lacrima nodded, without speaking.

“That is quite what I expected. You would not be yourself if you had not done so. And since you have done so it is of course quite impossible for me to put any pressure upon you.”

He paused and carefully selecting the special kind of chocolate that appealed to him put it deliberately in his mouth.

Lacrima was so amazed at the mild tone he used and at the drift of his words, that she turned full upon him her large liquid eyes with an expression in them of something almost like gratitude. The corners of her mouth twitched. The reaction was too great. She felt she could not keep back her tears.

Mr. Romer quietly continued.

“In all these things, my dear young lady, the world presents itself as a series of bargains and compromises. My brother has made you his offer — a flattering and suitable one. In the girlish excitement of the first shock you have totally refused to listen to him. But the world moves round. Such natural moods do not last forever. They often do not last beyond the next day! In order to help you — to make it easier for you — to bring such a mood to an end, I also, in my turn, have a little proposal to make.”

Lacrima’s expression changed with terrible rapidity; she stared at him panic-stricken.

“My proposal is this,” said Mr. Romer, quietly handing her the box of chocolates, and smiling as she waved it away. “As I said just now, the world is a place of bargains and compromises. Nothing ever occurs between human beings which is not the result of some unuttered transaction of occult diplomacy. Led by your instincts you reject my brother’s offer. Led by my instincts I offer you the following persuasion to overcome your refusal.”

He placed another chocolate in his mouth.

“I know well,” he went on, “your regard and fondness — I might use even stronger words — for our friend Maurice Quincunx. Now what I propose is this. I will settle upon Maurice, — you shall see the draft itself and my signature upon it, — an income sufficient to enable him to live comfortably and happily, wherever he pleases, without doing a stroke of work, and without the least anxiety. I will arrange it so that he cannot touch the capital of the sum I make over to him, and has nothing to do but to sign receipts for each quarter's dividend, as the bank makes them over to him.

"The sum I will give him will be so considerable, that the income from it will amount to not less than three hundred pounds a year. With this at his disposal he will be able to live wherever he likes, either here or elsewhere. And what is more," — here Mr. Romer looked intently and significantly at the trembling girl— "what is more, he will be in a position to *marry* whenever he may desire to do so. I believe" — he could not refrain from a tone of sardonic irony as he added this— "that you have found him not particularly well able to look after himself. I shall sign this document, rendering your friend free from financial anxiety for the rest of his life, on the day when you are married to Mr. Goring."

When he had finished speaking Lacrima continued to stare at him with a wide horror-struck gaze.

Mechanically she noticed the peculiar way in which his eyebrows met one another across a scar on his forehead. This scar and the little grey bristles that crossed it remained in her mind long afterwards, indelibly associated with the thoughts that then passed through her brain. Chief among these thoughts was a deep-lurking, heart-clutching dread of her own conscience, and a terrible shapeless fear that this subterranean conscience might debar her from the *right* to make her appeal to Vennie. From Mr. Romer's persecution she could appeal; but how could she appeal against his benevolence to her friend, even though the path of that benevolence lay over her own body?

She rose from her seat, too troubled and confused even to hate the man who thus played the part of an ironic Providence.

“Let me go,” she said, waving aside once more the bright-coloured box of chocolates which he had the diabolical effrontery to offer her again. “Let me go. I want to be alone. I want to think.”

He opened the door for her, and she passed out. Once out of his presence she rushed madly upstairs to her own room, flung herself on the bed, and remained, for what seemed to her like centuries of horror, without movement and without tears, staring up at the ceiling.

The luncheon bell sounded, but she did not heed it. From the open window floated in the smell of the white cluster-roses, scented like old wine, which encircled the terrace pillars. Blending with this fragrance came the interminable voice of the wood-pigeons, and every now and then a sharp wild cry, from the peacocks on the east lawn. Two — three hours passed thus, and still she did not move. A certain queer-shaped crack above the door occupied her superficial attention, very much in the same way as the scar on Mr. Romer’s forehead. Any very precise formulation of her thoughts during this long period would be difficult to state.

Her mind had fallen into that confused and feverish bewilderment that comes to us in hours between sleeping and waking. The clearest image that shaped itself to her consciousness during these hours was the image of herself as dead, and, by means of her death, of Maurice Quincunx being freed from his hated office-work, and enabled to live according to his pleasure. She saw him walking to and fro among rows of evening primroses — his favourite flowers — and in place of a cabbage-leaf — so fantastic were her dreams — she saw his heavy head ornamented with a broad, new Panama-hat, purchased with the price of her death.

Her mind gave no definite shape or form to this image of herself dying. The thought of it followed so naturally from the idea of a union with the Priory-tenant, that there seemed no need to separate the two things. To marry Mr. John Goring was just a simple sentence of death. The only thing to make sure of, was that before she actually died, this precious document, liberating her friend forever, should be signed and sealed. Oddly enough she never for a moment doubted Mr. Romer's intention of carrying out his part of the contract if she carried out hers. As he had said, the world was designed and arranged for bargains between men and women; and if her great bargain meant the putting of life itself into the scale — well! she was ready.

Strangely enough, the final issue of her feverish self-communings was a sense of deep and indescribable peace. It was more of a relief to her than anyone not acquainted with the peculiar texture of a Pariah's mind could realize, to be spared that desperate appeal to Vennie Seldom. In a dumb inarticulate way she felt that, without making such an appeal, the spirit of the Nevilton nun was supporting and strengthening her. Did Vennie know of her dilemma, she would be compelled to resort to some drastic step to stop the sacrifice, just as one would be compelled to hold out a hand of rescue to some determined suicide. But she felt in the depths of her heart that if Vennie were in her position she would make the same choice.

The long afternoon was still only half over, when — comforted and at peace with herself, as a devoted patriot might be at peace, when the throw of the dice has appointed him as his country's liberator — she rose from her recumbent position, and sitting on the edge of her bed turned over the pages of her tiny edition of St. Thomas à Kempis.

It had been long since she had opened this volume. Indeed, isolated from contact with any Catholic influence except that of the philosophical Mr.

Taxater, Lacrima had been recently drifting rather far away from the church of her fathers. This complete upheaval of her whole life threw her back upon her old faith.

Like so many other women of suppressed romantic emotions, when the moment came for some heroic sacrifice for the sake of her friend, she at once threw into the troubled waters the consecrated oil that had anointed the half-forgotten piety of her childhood.

One curious and interesting psychological fact in connection with this new trend of feeling in her, was the fact that the actual realistic horror of being, in a literal and material sense, at the mercy of Mr. John Goring never presented itself to her mind at all. Its very dreadfulness, being a thing that amounted to sheer death, blurred and softened its tangible and palpable image.

Yet it must not be supposed that she meditated definitely upon any special line of action. She formulated no plan of self-destruction. For some strange reason, it was much less the bodily terror of the idea that rose up awful and threatening before her, than its spiritual and moral counterpart.

Had Lacrima been compelled, like poor Sonia in the Russian novel, to become a harlot for the sake of those she loved, it would have been the mental rather than the physical outrage that would have weighed upon her.

She was of that curious human type which separates the body from the soul, in all these things. She had always approached life rather through her mind than through her senses, and it was in the imagination that she found both her catastrophes and recoveries. In this particular case, the obsessing image of death had for the moment quite obliterated the more purely realistic aspect of what she was contemplating. Her feeling may perhaps be best described by saying that whenever she imaged the farmer’s possession of her, it was always as if what he possessed was no more than a dead inert corpse, about whose fate none, least of all herself, could have any further care.

She had just counted the strokes of the church clock striking four, when she heard Gladys' steps in the adjoining room. She hurriedly concealed the little purple-covered volume, and lay back once more upon her pillows. She fervently prayed in her heart that Gladys might be ignorant of what had occurred, but her knowledge of the relations between father and daughter made this a very forlorn hope.

Such as it was, it was entirely dispelled as soon as the fair-haired creature glided in and sat down at the foot of her bed.

Gladys looked at her cousin with intent and luxurious interest; her expression being very much what one might suppose the countenance of a young pagan priestess to have worn, as she gazed, dreamily and sweetly, in a pause of the sacrificial procession, at some doomed heifer "lowing at the skies, and all her silken flanks with garlands dressed."

"So I hear that you are going to be married," she began at once, speaking in a slow, liquid voice, and toying indolently with her friend's shoe-strings.

"Please — please don't talk about it," murmured the Italian. "Nothing is settled yet. I would so much rather not think of it now."

"But, how silly!" cried the other, with a melodious little laugh. "Of course we must talk about it. It is so extremely exciting! I shall be seeing uncle John today and I must congratulate him. I am sure he doesn't half know how lucky he is."

Lacrima jumped up from where she lay and stepping to the window looked out over the sunlit park.

Gladys rose too, and standing behind her cousin, put her arms round her waist.

“No, I am sure he doesn’t realize how sweet you are,” she whispered. “You darling little thing, — you little, shy, frightened thing — you must tell me all about it! I’ll try not to tease you — I really will! What a clever, naughty little girl, it has been, peeping and glancing at a poor elderly farmer and inflaming his simple heart! But all your friends are rather well advanced in age, aren’t they, dear? I expect uncle John is really no older than Mr. Quincunx or James Andersen. What tricks do you use, darling, to attract all these people?

“I’ll tell you what it is! It’s the way you clasp your fingers, and keep groping with your hands in the air in front of you, as if you were blind. I’ve noticed that trick of yours for a long time. I expect it attracts them awfully! I expect they all long to take those little wrists and hold them tight! And the drooping, dragging way you walk, too; that no doubt they find quite enthralling. It has often irritated *me*, but I can quite see now why you do it. It must make them long to support you in their strong arms! What a crafty little puss she is! And I have sometimes taken her for no better than a little simpleton! I see I shall not for long be the only person allowed to kiss our charming Lacrima! So I must make the best of my opportunities, mustn’t I?”

Suiting her action to her words she turned the girl towards her with a vigorous movement, and overcoming her reluctance, embraced her softly, whispering, as she kissed her averted mouth, —

“Uncle John won’t do this half so prettily as I do, will he? But oh, how you must have played your tricks upon him — cunning, cunning little thing!”

Lacrima had by this time reached the end of her endurance. With a sudden flash of genuine Italian anger she flung her cousin back, with such unexpected violence, that the elder girl would actually have fallen to the floor, if she had not encountered in her collapse the arm of the wicker chair which stood behind her.

She rose silent and malignant.

"So that's what we gentle, wily ones do, is it, when we lose our little tempers! All right, my friend, all right! I shall remember."

She walked haughtily to the door that divided their rooms.

"The sooner I am married," she cried, as a final hit, "the sooner *you* will be — and I shall be married soon — soon — soon; perhaps before this summer is out!"

Lacrima stood for some moments rigid and unmoving. Then there came over her an irresistible longing to escape from this house, and flee far off, anywhere, anyhow, so long as she could be alone with her misery, alone with her tragic resolution.

The invasion of Gladys had made this resolution a very different thing from what it had seemed an hour ago. But she must recover herself! She must see things again in the clearer, larger light of sublime sacrifice. She must purge the baseness of her cousin's sensual magnetism out of her brain and her heart!

She hurriedly fastened on her hat, took her faded parasol, slipped the tiny St. Thomas into her dress, and ran down the great oak staircase. She hurried past the entrance without turning aside to greet the impassive Mrs. Romer, seated as usual in her accustomed place, and skirting the east lawns emerged from the little postern-gate into the park. Crossing a half-cut hay-field and responding gravely and gently to the friendly greetings of the hay-makers, she entered the Yeoborough road just below the steep ascent, between high overshadowing hedges, of Dead Man's Lane.

Whether from her first exit from the house, she had intended to follow this path, she could hardly herself have told. It was the instinct of a woman at bay, seeking out, not the strong that could help her, but the weak that she herself could help. It was also perhaps the true Pariah impulse, which drives these victims of the powerful and the well-constituted, to find rehabilitation in the society of one another.

As she ascended the shadowy lane with its crumbling banks of sandy soil and its overhanging trees, she felt once again how persistently this heavy luxuriant landscape dragged her earthwards and clogged the wings of her spirit. The tall grasses growing thick by the way-side enlaced themselves with the elder-bushes and dog-wood, which in their turn blended indissolubly with the lower branches of the elms. The lane itself was but a deep shadowy path dividing a flowing sea of foliage, which seemed to pour, in a tidal wave of suffocating fertility, over the whole valley.

The Italian struggled in vain against the depressing influence of all these rank and umbrageous growths, spreading out leafy arms to catch her and groping towards her with moist adhesive tendrils. The lane was full of a warm steamy vapour, like that of a hot-house, to the heavy odour of which, every sort of verdurous growing thing offered its contribution.

There was a vague smell of funguses in the air, though none were visible; and the idea of them may only have been due to the presence of decaying wood or the moist drooping stalks of the dead flowers of the earlier season. Now and again the girl caught, wafted upon a sudden stir of wind, the indescribably sweet scent of honey-suckle — a sweetness almost overpowering in its penetrating voluptuous approach. Once, high up above her head, she saw a spray of this fragrant parasite; not golden yellow, as it is where the sun shines full upon it, but pallid and ivory-white. In a curious way it seemed as if this Nevilton scenery offered her no escape from the insidious sensuality she fled.

The indolent luxuriousness of Gladys seemed to breathe from every mossy spore and to over-hang every unclosing frond. And if Gladys was in the leaves and grass, the remoter terror of Mr. Goring was in the earth and clay. Between the two they monopolized this whole corner of the planet, and made everything between zenith and nadir their privileged pasture.

As she drew nearer to where Mr. Quincunx lived, her burdened mind sought relief in focussing itself upon him. She would be sure to find him in his garden. That she knew, because the day was Saturday. Should she tell him what had happened to her?

Ah! that was indeed the crucial question! Was it necessary that she should sacrifice herself for him without his even knowing what she did?

But he would have to know, sooner or later, of this marriage. Everyone would be talking of it. It would be bound to come to his ears.

And what would he think of her if she said nothing? What would he think of her, in any case, having accepted such a degradation?

Not to tell him at all, would throw a completely false light upon the whole transaction. It would make her appear treacherous, fickle, worldly-minded, shameless — wickedly false to her unwritten covenant with himself.

To tell him, without giving him the true motive of her sacrifice, would be, she felt sure, to bring down his bitterest reproaches on her head.

For a passing second she felt a wave of indignation against him surge up in her heart. This, however, she passionately suppressed, with the instinctive desire of a woman who is sacrificing herself to feel the object of such sacrifice worthy of what is offered.

It was not long before she reached the gate of Mr. Quincunx's garden. Yes, — there he was — with his wheel-barrow and his hoe — bending over his potatoes. She opened the gate and walked quite close up to him before he observed her. He greeted her in his usual manner, with a smile of half-cynical, half-affectionate welcome, and taking her by the hand as he might have taken a child, he led her to the one shady spot in his garden, where, under a weeping ash, he had constructed a rough bench.

"I didn't expect you," he said, when they were seated. "I never do expect you. People like me who have only Saturday afternoons to enjoy themselves in don't expect visitors. They count the hours which are left to them before the night comes."

"But you have Sunday, my friend," she said, laying her hand upon his.

"Sunday!" Mr. Quincunx muttered. "Do you call Sunday a day? I regard Sunday as a sort of prison-exercise, when all the convicts go walking up and down and showing off their best clothes. I can neither work nor read nor think on Sunday. I have to put on my best clothes like the rest, and stand at my gate, staring at the weather and wondering what the hay-crop will be. The only interesting moments I have on Sunday are when that silly-faced Wone, or one of the Andersens, drifts this way, and we lean over my wall and abuse the gentry."

"Poor dear!" said the girl pityingly. "I expect the real truth is that you are so tired with your work all the week, that you are glad enough to rest and do nothing."

Mr. Quincunx's nostrils dilated, and his drooping moustache quivered. A smile of delicious and sardonic humour wavered over the lower portion of his face, while his grey eyes lost their sadness and gleamed with a goblin-like merriment.

"I am getting quite popular at the office," he said. "I have learnt the secret of it now."

"And what is the secret?" asked Lacrima, suppressing a queer little gasp in her throat.

"Sucking up," Mr. Quincunx answered, his face flickering with subterranean amusement, "sucking up to everyone in the place, from the manager to the office boy."

Lacrima returned to him a very wan little smile.

"I suppose you mean ingratiating yourself," she said; "you English have such funny expressions."

"Yes, ingratiating myself, pandering to them, flattering them, agreeing with them, anticipating their wishes, doing their work for them, telling lies for them, abusing God to make them laugh, introducing them to Guy de Maupassant, and even making a few light references, now and again, to what Shakespeare calls 'country-matters.'"

"I don't believe a word you say," protested Lacrima in rather a quavering voice. "I believe you hate them all and that they are all unkind to you. But I can quite imagine you have to do more work than your own."

Mr. Quincunx's countenance lost its merriment instantaneously.

"I believe you are as annoyed as Mr. Romer," he said, "that I should get on in the office. But I am past being affected by that. I know what human nature is! We are all really pleased when other people get on badly, and are sorry when they do well."

Lacrima felt as though the trees in the field opposite had suddenly reversed themselves and were waving their roots in the air.

She gave a little shiver and pressed her hand to her side.

Mr. Quincunx continued.

"Of course you don't like it when I tell you the truth. Nobody likes to hear the truth. Human beings lap up lies as pigs lap up milk. And women are worst of all in that! No woman really can love a person — not, at any rate, for long — who tells her the truth! That is why women love clergymen, because clergymen are brought up to lie. I saw you laughing and amusing yourself the other evening with Mr. Clavering — you and your friend Gladys. I went the other way, so as not to interrupt such a merry conversation."

Lacrima turned upon him at this.

"I cannot understand how you can say such things of me!" she cried. "It is too much. I won't — I won't listen to it!"

Her over-strained nerves broke down at last, and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a fit of convulsive sobs.

Mr. Quincunx rose and stood gazing at her, gloomily plucking at his beard.

"And such are women!" he thought to himself. "One can never tell them the least truth but they burst into tears."

He waited thus in silence for one or two moments, and then an expression of exquisite tenderness and sympathy came into his face. His patient grey eyes looked at her bowed head with the look of a sorrowful god. Gently he sat down beside her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Lacrima — dear — I am sorry — I oughtn't to have said that. I didn't mean it. On my solemn oath I didn't mean it! Lacrima, please don't cry. I can't bear it when you cry. It was all absolute nonsense what I said just now. It is the devil that gets into me and makes me say those things! Lacrima — darling Lacrima — we won't tease one another any more."

Her sobs diminished under the obvious sincerity of his words. She lifted up a tear-stained face and threw her arms passionately round his neck.

“I’ve no one but you,” she cried, “no one, no one!”

For several minutes they embraced each other in silence — the girl’s breast quivering with the after-sighs of her emotion and their tears mingling together and falling on Mr. Quincunx’s beard. Had Gladys Romer beheld them at that moment she would certainly have been strengthened in her healthy-minded mocking contempt for sentimental “slobbering.”

When they had resumed a more normal mood their conversation continued gently and quietly.

“Of course you are right,” said Mr. Quincunx. “I am not really happy at the office. Who *could* be happy in a place of that kind? But it is my life — and one has to do what one can with one’s life! I have to pretend to myself that they like me there, and that I am making myself useful — otherwise I simply could not go on. I have to pretend. That’s what it is! It is my pet illusion, my little fairy-story. It was that that made me get angry with you — that and the devil. One doesn’t like to have one’s fairy-stories broken into by the brutal truth.”

“Poor dear!” said Lacrima softly, stroking his hand with a gesture of maternal tenderness.

“If there was any hope of this wretched business coming to an end,” Maurice went on, “it would be different. Then I would curse all these people to hell and have done with it. But what can I do? I am already past middle age. I shouldn’t be able to get anything else if I gave it up. And I don’t want to leave Nevilton while you are here.”

The girl looked intently at him. Then she folded her hands on her lap and began gravely.

“I have something to tell you, Maurice dear. Something very important. What would you say if I told you that it was in my power to set you free from all this and make you happy and comfortable for the rest of your life?”

An invisible watcher from some more clairvoyant planet than ours would have been interested at that moment in reading the double weakness of two poor Pariah hearts. Lacrima, brought back from the half-insane attitudes of her heroic resolution by the intermission of natural human emotion, found herself on the brink of half-hoping that her friend would completely and indignantly refuse this shameful sacrifice.

“Surely,” her heart whispered, “some other path of escape must offer itself for them both. Perhaps, after all, Vennie Seldom might discover some way.”

Mr. Quincunx, on the other hand, was most thoroughly alarmed by her opening words. He feared that she was going to propose some desperate scheme by which, fleeing from Nevilton together, she was to help him earn money enough for their mutual support.

“What should I say?” he answered aloud, to the girl’s question. “It would depend upon the manner in which you worked this wonderful miracle. But I warn you I am not hopeful. Things might be worse. After all I have a house to return to. I have food. I have my books. I have you to come and pay me visits. I have my garden. In this world, when a person has a roof over his head, and someone to talk to every other day, he had better remain still and not attract the attention of the gods.”

Silence followed his words. Instead of speaking, Lacrima took off her hat, and smoothed her hair away from her forehead, keeping her eyes fixed upon the ground. An immense temptation seized her to let the moment pass without revealing her secret. She could easily substitute any imaginary suggestion in place of the terrible reality. Her friend’s morbid nerves would help her deception. The matter would be glossed over and be as if it had never been: be, in fact, no more than it was, a hideous nightmare of her own insane and diseased conscience.

But could the thing be so suppressed? Would it be like Nevilton to let even the possible image of such a drama pass unsnatched at by voluble tongues, unenlarged upon by malicious gossip?

He would be bound to hear of Mr. Goring's offer. That, at least, could not be concealed. And what assurance had she that Mr. Romer would not himself communicate to him the full nature of the hideous bargain? The quarry-owner might think it diplomatic to trade upon Maurice's weakness.

No — there was no help for it. She must tell him; — only praying now, in the profound depths of her poor heart, that he would not consider such an infamy even for a second. So she told him the whole story, in a low monotonous voice, keeping her head lowered and watching the progress of a minute snail laboriously ascending a stalk of grass.

Maurice Quincunx had never twiddled the point of his Elizabethan beard with more detached absorption than while listening to this astounding narration. When she had quite finished, he regarded her from head to foot with a very curious expression.

The girl breathed hard. What was he thinking? He did not at once, in a burst of righteous indignation, fling the monstrous suggestion to the winds. What was he thinking? As a matter of fact the thoughts of Mr. Quincunx had taken an extraordinary turn.

Being in his personal relation to feminine charm, of a somewhat cold temper, he had never, for all his imaginative sentiment towards his little friend, been at all swayed by any violent sensuous attraction. But the idea of such attraction having seized so strongly upon another person reacted upon him, and he looked at her, perhaps for the first time since they had met, with eyes of something more than purely sentimental regard.

This new element in his attitude towards her did not, however, issue in any excess of physical jealousy. What it did lead to, unluckily for Lacrima, was a certain queer diminution of his ideal respect for her personality. In place of focussing his attention upon the sublime sacrifice she contemplated for his sake, the events she narrated concentrated his mind upon the mere brutal and accidental fact that Mr. Goring had so desperately desired her. The mere fact of her having been so desired by such a man, changed her in his eyes. His cynical distrust of all women led him to conceive the monstrous and grotesque idea that she must in her heart be gratified by having aroused this passion in the farmer. It did not carry him quite so far as to make him believe that she had consciously excited such emotion; but it led him to the very brink of that outrageous fantasy. Had Lacrima come to him with a shame-faced confession that she had let herself be seduced by the Priory-tenant he could hardly have gazed at her with more changed and troubled eyes. He felt the same curious mixture of sorrowful pity and remote unlawful attraction to the object of his pity, that he would have felt in a casual conversation with some luckless child of the streets. By being the occasion of Mr. Goring's passion, she became for him no less than such an unfortunate; the purer sentiment he had hitherto cherished changing into quite a different mood.

He lifted her up by the wrists and pressed her closely to him, kissing her again and again. The girl's heart went on anxiously beating. She could hardly restrain her impatience for him to speak. Why did he not speak?

Disentangling herself from his embrace with a quick feminine instinct that something was wrong, she pulled him down upon the bench by her side and taking his hand in hers looked with pitiful bewilderment into his face.

“So when this thing happens,” she said, “all your troubles will be over. You will be free forever from that horrid office.”

“And you,” said Mr. Quincunx — his mood changing again, and his goblin-like smile twitching his nostrils,— “You will be the mistress of the Priory. Well! I suppose you will not desert me altogether when that happens!”

So that was the tone he adopted! He could afford to turn the thing into a jest — into God knows what! She let his hand drop and stared into empty space, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, understanding nothing.

This time Maurice realized that he had disappointed her; that his cynicism had carried him too far. Unfortunately the same instinct that told him he had made a fool of himself pushed him on to seek an issue from the situation by wading still further into it.

“Come — come,” he said. “You and I must face this matter like people who are really free spirits, and not slaves to any ridiculous superstition. It is noble, it is sweet of you to think of marrying that brute so as to set me free. Of course if I *was* free, and you were up at the Priory, we should see a great deal more of each other than we do now. I could take one of those vacant cottages close to the church.

“Don’t think — Lacrima dear,” he went on, possessing himself of one of her cold hands and trying to recall her attention, “don’t think that I don’t realize what it is to you to have to submit to such a frightful thing. Of course we know how outrageous it is that such a marriage should be forced on you. But, after all, you and I are above these absurd popular superstitions about all these things. Every girl sooner or later hates the man she marries. It is human nature to hate the people we have to live with; and when it comes down to actual reality, all human beings are much the same. If you were forced to marry me, you would probably hate me just as much as you'll hate this poor devil. After all, what is this business of being married to people and bearing them children? It doesn't touch your mind. It doesn't affect your soul. As old Marcus Aurelius says, our bodies are nothing! They are wretched corpses, anyway, dragged hither and thither by our imprisoned souls. It is these damned clergymen, with their lies about 'sin' and so forth, that upset women's minds. For you to be married to a man you hate, would only be like my having to go to this Yeoborough office with people I hate. You will always have, as that honest fellow Epictetus says, your own soul to retire into, whatever happens. Heavens! it strikes me as a bit of humorous revenge," — here his nostrils twitched again and the hobgoblin look reappeared— "this thought of you and me living peacefully at our ease, so near one another, and at these confounded rascals' expense!"

Lacrima staggered to her feet. "Let me go," she said. "I want to go back — away — anywhere."

Her look, her gesture, her broken words gave Mr. Quincunx a poignant shock. In one sudden illuminating flash he saw himself as he was, and his recent remarks in their true light. We all have sometimes these psychic search-light flashes of introspection; but the more healthy-minded and well-balanced among us know how to keep them in their place and how to expel them promptly and effectively.

Mr. Quincunx was not healthy-minded. He had the morbid sensitive mind of a neurotic Pariah. Hence, in place of suppressing this spiritual illumination, he allowed it to irradiate the gloomiest caverns of his being. He rose with a look of abject and miserable concern.

"Stop," he cried huskily.

She looked at him wondering, the blood returning a little to her cheeks.

"It is the Devil!" he exclaimed. "I must have the Devil in me, to say such things and to treat you like this. You are the bravest, sweetest girl in the world, and I am a brutal idiot — worse than Mr. Romer!"

He struck himself several blows upon the forehead, knocking off his hat. Lacrima could not help noticing that in place of the usual protection, some small rhubarb-leaves ornamented the interior of this appendage.

She smiled at him, through a rain of happy tears, — the first smile that day had seen upon her face.

"We are both of us absurd people, I suppose," she said, laying her hands upon his shoulders. "We ought to have some friend with a clear solid head to keep us straight."

Mr. Quincunx kissed her on the forehead and stooped down for his hat.

"Yes," he said. "We are a queer pair. I suppose we are really both a little mad. I wish there was someone we could go to."

"Couldn't you — perhaps—" said Lacrima, "say something to Mrs. Seldom? And yet I would much rather she didn't know. I would much rather no one knew!"

"I might," murmured Maurice thoughtfully; "I might tell her. But the unlucky thing is, she is so narrow-minded that she can't separate you in her thoughts from those frightful people."

"Shall I try Vennie?" whispered the girl, "or shall we—" here she looked him boldly in the face with eager, brightening eyes— "shall we run away to London, and be married, and risk the future?"

Poor little Italian! She had never made a greater tactical blunder than when she uttered these words. Maurice Quincunx's mystic illumination had made it possible for him to exorcise his evil spirit. It could not put into his nature an energy he had not been born with. His countenance clouded.

"You don't know what you're saying," he remarked. "You don't know what a sour-tempered devil I am, and how I am sure to make any girl who lives with me miserable. You would hate me in a month more than you hate Mr. Romer, and in a year I should have either worried you into your grave or you would have run away from me. No — no — no! I should be a criminal fool to let you subject yourself to such a risk as that."

"But," pleaded the girl, with flushed cheeks, "we should be sure to find something! I could teach Italian, — and you could — oh, I am sure there are endless things you could do! Please, please, Maurice dear, let us go. Anything is better than this misery. I have got quite enough money for the journey. Look!"

She pulled out from beneath her dress a little chain purse, that hung, by a small silver chain, round her slender neck. She opened it and shook three sovereigns into the palm of her hand. "Enough for the journey," she said, "and enough to keep us for a week if we are economical. We should be sure to find something by that time."

Mr. Quincunx shook his head. It was an ironical piece of psychic malice that the very illumination which had made him remorseful and sympathetic should have also reduced to the old level of tender sentiment the momentary passion he had felt. It was the absence in him of this sensual impulse which made the scheme she proposed seem so impossible. Had he been of a more animal nature, or had she possessed the power of arousing his senses to a more violent craving, instead of brooding, as he did, upon the mere material difficulties of such a plan, he would have plunged desperately into it and carried her off without further argument. The very purity of his temperament was her worst enemy.

Poor Lacrima! Her hands dropped once more helplessly to her side, and the old hopeless depression began to invade her heart. It seemed impossible to make her friend realize that if she refused the farmer and things went on as before, her position in Mr. Romer’s establishment would become more impossible than ever. What — for instance — would become of her when this long-discussed marriage of Gladys with young Ilminster took place? Could she conceive herself going on living under that roof, with Mr. Romer continually harassing her, and his brother-in-law haunting every field she wandered into?

“It was noble of you,” began her bearded friend again, resuming his work at the weeds, while she, as on a former occasion, leant against his wheel-barrow, “to think of enduring this wretched marriage for my sake. But I cannot let you do it. I should not be happy in letting you do it. I have some conscience — though you may not think so — and it would worry me to feel you were putting up with that fool’s companionship just to make me comfortable. It would spoil my enjoyment of my freedom, to know that you were not equally free. Of course it would be paradise to me to have the money you speak of. I should be able to live exactly as I like, and these damned villagers would treat me with proper respect then. But I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t take my pleasure at the expense of such a strain on you. It would spoil everything!

“I don’t deny, however,” he went on, evidently deriving more and more virtuous satisfaction from his somewhat indecisive rejection of her sacrifice, “that it is a temptation to me. I hate that office so profoundly! You were quite right there, Lacrima. All I said about getting on with those people was damned bluff. I loathe them and they loathe me. It is simply like a kind of death, my life in that place. Yes, what you suggest is a temptation to me. I can’t help feeling rather like that poor brother of the girl in ‘Measure for Measure’ when she comes to say that she could save his life by the loss of her virtue, and he talks about his feelings on the subject of death. She put him down fiercely enough, poor dog! She evidently thought her virtue was much more important than his life. I am glad you are just the opposite of that puritanical young woman. I shouldn't like you very much if you took her line!

"But just because you don't do that, my dear," Mr. Quincunx went on, tugging at the obstinate roots of a great dock, "I couldn't think of letting you sacrifice yourself. If you *were* like that woman in the play, and made all that damned silly fuss about your confounded virtue, I should be inclined to wish that Mr. Goring had got his hands upon you. Women who think as much of themselves as that, *ought* to be given over to honest fellows like Mr. Goring. It's the sort of punishment they deserve for their superstitious selfishness. For it's all selfishness, of course. We know that well enough!"

He flung the defeated weed so vindictively upon his barrow that some of the earth from its roots was sprinkled into Lacrima's lap. He came to help her brush it away, and took the opportunity to kiss her again, — this time a shade more amorously.

"All this business of 'love,'" he went on, returning to his potatoes, "is nothing but the old eternal wickedness of man's nature. The only kind of love which is worth anything is the love that gets rid of sex altogether, and becomes calm and quiet and distant — like the love of a planetary spirit. Apart from this love, which is not like human love at all, everything in us is selfish. Even a mother's care for its child is selfish."

"I shall never have a child," said Lacrima in a low voice.

"I wonder what your friend James Andersen would say to all this," continued Mr. Quincunx. "Why, by the way, don't you get *him* to marry you? He would do it, no doubt, like a shot, if you gave him a little encouragement; and then make you work all day in his kitchen, as his father made his mother, so they say."

Lacrima made a hopeless gesture, and looked at the watch upon her wrist. She began to feel dizzy and sick for want of food. She had had nothing since breakfast, and the shadows were beginning to grow long.

"I know what Luke Andersen would say if we asked him," added Mr. Quincunx. "He would advise you to marry this damned farmer, wheedle his money out of him, and then sheer off with some fine youth and never see Nevilton again! Luke Andersen's the fellow for giving a person advice in these little matters. He has a head upon his shoulders, that boy! I tell you what it is, my dear, your precious Miss Gladys had better be careful! She'll be getting herself into trouble with that honest youth if she doesn't look out. I know him. He cares for no mortal soul in the world, or above the world. He's a master in the art of life! We are all infants compared with him. If you do need anyone to help you, or to help me either, I tell you Luke Andersen's the one to go to. He has more influence in this village than any living person except Romer himself, and I should be sorry for Romer if his selfishness clashed with the selfishness of that young Machiavel!"

"Do you mind," said Lacrima suddenly, "if I go into your kitchen and make myself a cup of tea? I feel rather exhausted. I expect it is the heat."

Mr. Quincunx looked intently at her, leaning upon his hoe. He had only once before — on an exceptionally cold winter's day — allowed the girl to enter the cottage.

He had a vague feeling that if he did so he would in some way commit himself, and be betrayed into a false position. He almost felt as though, if she were once comfortably established there, he would never be able to get her out again! He was nervous, too, about her seeing all his little household peculiarities. If she saw, for instance, how cheaply, how very cheaply, he managed to live, eating no meat and economizing in sugar and butter, she might be encouraged still further in her attempts to persuade him to run away.

He was also strangely reluctant that she should get upon the track of his queer little lonely epicurean pleasures, such as his carefully guarded bottle of Scotch whiskey; his favourite shelf of mystical and Rabelaisian books; his jar of tobacco, with a piece of bread under its lid, to keep the contents moist and cool; his elaborate arrangements for holding draughts out; his polished pewter; his dainty writing-desk with its piled-up, vellum-bound journals, all labelled and laid in order; his queer-coloured oriental slippers; his array of scrupulously scrubbed pots and pans. Mr. Quincunx was extremely unwilling that his lady-love should poke her pretty fingers into all these mysteries.

What he liked, was to live in two distinct worlds: his world of sentiment with Lacrima as its solitary centre, and his world of sacramental epicurism with his kitchen-fire as its solitary centre. He was extremely unwilling that the several circumferences of these centres should intersect one another. Both were equally necessary to him. When days passed without a visit from his friend he became miserably depressed. But he saw no reason for any inartistic attempt to unite these two spheres of interest. A psychologist who defined Mr. Quincunx's temper as the temper of a hermit would have been far astray. He was profoundly dependent on human sympathy. But he liked human sympathy that kept its place. He did not like human *society*. Perhaps of all well-known psychological types, the type of the philosopher Rousseau was the one to which he most nearly approximated. And yet, had he possessed children, Mr. Quincunx would certainly never have been persuaded to leave them at the foundling hospital. He would have lived apart from them, but he would never have parted with them. He was really a domestic sentimentalist, who loved the exquisite sensation of being alone with his own thoughts.

With all this in mind, one need feel no particular surprise that the response he gave to Lacrima’s sudden request was a somewhat reluctant one. However, he did respond; and opening the cottage-doors for her, ushered her into the kitchen and put the kettle on the fire.

It puzzled him a little that she should feel no embarrassment at being alone with him in this secluded place! In the depths of his heart — like many philosophers — Mr. Quincunx, in spite of his anarchistic theories, possessed no slight vein of conventional timidity. He did not realize this in the least. Women, according to his cynical code, were the sole props of conventionality. Without women, there would be no such thing in the world. But now, brought face to face with the reckless detachment of a woman fighting for her living soul, he felt confused, uncomfortable, and disconcerted.

Lacrima waited in patient passivity, too exhausted to make any further mental or moral effort, while her friend made the tea and cut the bread-and-butter.

As soon as she had partaken of these things, her exhaustion gave place to a delicious sense — the first she had known for many weeks — of peaceful and happy security. She put far away, into the remote background of her mind, all melancholy and tragic thoughts, and gave herself up to the peacefulness of the moment. The hands of Mr. Quincunx’s clock pointed to half-past six. She had therefore a clear thirty minutes left, before she need set out on her return walk, in order to have time to dress for dinner.

“I wonder if your Miss Gladys,” remarked Lacrima’s host, lighting a cigarette as he sipped his tea, “will marry the Honourable Mr. Ilminster after all, or whistle him down the wind, and make up to our American friend? I notice that Dangelis is already considerably absorbed in her."

"Please, dear, don't let us talk any more about these people," begged Lacrima softly. "Let me be happy for a little while."

Mr. Quincunx stroked his beard. "You are a queer little girl," he said. "But what I should do if the gods took you away from me I have not the least idea. I should not care then whether I worked in an office or in a factory. I should not care what I did."

The girl jumped up impulsively from her seat and went over to him. Mr. Quincunx took her upon his knees as he might have taken a child and fondled her gravely and gently. The smoke of his cigarette ascended in a thin blue column above their two heads.

At that moment there was a mocking laugh at the window. Lacrima slid out of his arms and they both rose to their feet and turned indignantly.

The laughing face of Gladys Romer peered in upon them, her eyes shining with delighted malevolence. "I saw you," she cried. "But you needn't look so cross! I like to see these things. I have been watching you for quite a long time! It has been such fun! I only hoped I could keep quiet for longer still, till one of you began to cry, or something. But you looked so funny that I couldn't help laughing. And that spoilt it all. Mr. Dangelis is at the gate. Shall I call him up? He came with me across the park. He tried to stop me from pouncing on you, but I wouldn't listen to him. He said it was a 'low-down stunt.' You know the way he talks, Lacrima!"

The two friends stood staring at the intruder in petrified horror. Then without a word they quickly issued from the cottage and crossed the garden. Neither of them spoke to Gladys; and Mr. Quincunx immediately returned to his house as soon as he saw the American advance to greet Lacrima with his usual friendly nonchalance.

The three went off down the lane together; and the poor philosopher, staring disconsolately at the empty tea-cups of his profaned sanctuary, cursed himself, his friend, his fate, and the Powers that had appointed that fate from the beginning of the world.

CHAPTER XIV. UNDER-CURRENTS

JUNE WAS DRAWING to an end, and the days, though still free from rain, grew less and less bright. A thin veil of greyish vapour, which never became thick enough or sank low enough to resolve itself into definite clouds, offered a perpetual hindrance to the shining of the sun. The sun was present. Its influence was felt in the warmth of the air; but when it became visible, it was only in the form of a large misty disc, at which the weakest eyes might gaze without distress or discomfort.

On a certain evening when this vaporous obscurity made it impossible to ascertain the exact moment of the sun's descent and when it might be said that afternoon became twilight before men or cattle realized that the day was over, Mr. Wone was assisting his son Philip in planting geraniums in his back garden.

The Wone house was neither a cottage nor a villa. It was one of those nondescript and modest residences, which, erected in the mid-epoch of Victoria's reign, when money was circulating freely among the middle-classes, win a kind of gentle secondary mellowness in the twentieth century by reason of something solid and liberal in their original construction. It stood at the corner of the upper end of Nevilton, where, beyond the fountain-square, the road from Yeoborough takes a certain angular turn to the north. The garden at the back of it, as with many of the cottages of the place, was larger than might have been expected, and over the low hedge which separated it from the meadows behind, the long ridge of wooded upland, with its emphatic lines of tall Scotch firs that made the southern boundary of the valley, was pleasantly and reassuringly visible.

Philip Wone worked in Yeoborough. He was a kind of junior partner in a small local firm of tombstone makers — the very firm, in fact, which under the direction of the famous Gideon, had constructed the most remarkable monument in Nevilton churchyard. It was doubtful whether he would ever attain the position of full partner in this concern, for his manner of life was eccentric, and neither his ways nor his appearance were those of a youth who succeeds in business. He was a tall pallid creature. His dark coarse hair fell in a heavy wave over his white forehead, and his hands were thin and delicate as the hands of an invalid.

He was an omnivorous reader and made incessant use of every subscription library that Yeoborough offered. His reading was of two kinds. He read romantic novels of every sort — good, bad, and indifferent — and he read the history of revolutions. There can hardly have been, in any portion of the earth's surface, a revolution with whose characters and incidents Philip was unacquainted. His chief passion was for the great French Revolution, the personalities of which were more real to him than the majority of his own friends.

Philip was by temperament and conviction an ardent anarchist; not an anarchist of Mr. Quincunx's mild and speculative type, but of a much more formidable brand. He had also long ago consigned the idea of any Providential interference with the sequence of events upon earth, into the limbo of outworn superstitions.

It was Philip's notion, this, of planting geraniums in the back-garden. Dressed nearly always in black, and wearing a crimson tie, it was his one luxurious sensuality to place in his button-hole, as long as they were possibly available, some specimen or other of the geranium tribe, with a preference for the most flaming varieties.

The Christian Candidate regarded his son with a mixture of contempt and apprehension. He despised his lack of business ability, and he viewed his intellectual opinions as the wilful caprices of a sulky and disagreeable temper.

It was as a sort of pitying concession to the whim of a lunatic that Mr. Wone was now assisting Philip in planting these absurd geraniums. His own idea was that flower-gardens ought to be abolished altogether. He associated them with gentility and toryism and private property in land. Under the régime he would have liked to have established, all decent householders would have had liberal small holdings, where they would grow nothing but vegetables. Mr. Wone liked vegetables and ate of them very freely in their season. Flowers he regarded as the invention of the upper classes, so that their privately owned world might be decorated with exclusive festoons.

"I shall go round presently," he said to his son, "and visit all these people. I see no reason why Taxater and Clavering, as well as the two Andersens, should not make themselves of considerable use to me. I am tired of talking to these Leo's Hill labourers. One day they *will* strike, and the next they *won't*. All they think of is their own quarrel with Lickwit. They have no thought of the general interest of the country."

"No thought of your interests, you mean," put in the son.

"With these others it is different," went on Mr. Wone, oblivious of the interruption. "It would be a real help to me if the more educated people of the place came out definitely on my side. They ought to do it. They know what this Romer is. They are thinking men. They must see that what the country wants is a real representative of the people."

"What the country wants is a little more honesty and a little less hypocrisy," remarked the son.

"It is abominable, this suppression of our Social Meeting. You have heard about that, I suppose?" pursued the candidate.

"Putting an end to your appeals to Providence, eh?" said Philip, pressing the earth down round the roots of a brilliant flower.

"I forbid you to talk like that," cried his father. "I might at least expect that *you* would do something for me. You have done nothing, since my campaign opened, but make these silly remarks."

"Why don't you pray about it?" jeered the irrepressible young man. "Mr Romer has not suppressed prayer, has he, as well as Political Prayer-Meetings?"

"They were not political!" protested the aggrieved parent. "They were profoundly religious. What you young people do not seem to realize nowadays is that the soul of this country is still God-fearing and religious-minded. I should myself have no hope at all for the success of this election, if I were not sure that God was intending to make His hand felt."

"Why don't you canvass God, then?" muttered the profane boy.

"I cannot allow you to talk to me in this way, Philip!" cried Mr. Wone, flinging down his trowel. "You know perfectly well that you believe as firmly as I do, in your heart. It is only that you think it impressive and original to make these silly jokes."

"Thank you, father," replied Philip. "You certainly remove my doubts with an invincible argument! But I assure you I am quite serious. Nobody with any brain believes in God in these days. God died about the same time as Mr. Gladstone."

The Christian Candidate lost his temper. "I must beg you," he said, "to keep your infidel nonsense to yourself. Your mother and I are sick of it! You had better stay in Yeoborough, and not come home at all, if you can't behave like an ordinary person and keep a civil tongue."

Philip made no answer to this ultimatum, but smiled sardonically and went on planting geraniums.

But his father was loath to let the matter drop.

"What would the state of the country be like, I wonder," he continued, "if people lost their faith in the love of a merciful Father? It is only because we feel, in spite of all appearances, the love of God must triumph in the end, that we can go on with our great movement. The love of God, young man, whatever you foolish infidels may say, is at the bottom of all attempts to raise the people to better things. Do you think I would labour as I do in this excellent cause if I did not feel that I had the loving power of a great Heavenly Father behind me? Why do I trouble myself with politics? Because His love constrains me. Why have I brought you up so carefully — though to little profit it seems! — and have been so considerate to your mother — who, as you know, isn't always very cheerful? Because His love constrains me. Without the knowledge that His love is at the bottom of everything that happens, do you think I could endure to live at all?"

Philip Wone lifted up his head from the flower-border.

"Let me just tell you this, father, it is not the love of God, or of anyone else, that's at the bottom of our grotesque world. There is nothing at the bottom! The world goes back — without limit or boundary — upwards and downwards, and everywhere. It has no bottom, and no top either! It is all quite mad and we are all quite mad. Love? Who knows anything of love, except lovers and madmen? If these Romers and Lickwits are to be crushed, they must be crushed by force. By force, I tell you! This love of an imaginary Heavenly Father has never done anything for the revolution and never will!"

Mr. Wone, catching at a verbal triumph, regained his placable equanimity.

"Because, dear boy," he remarked, "it is not revolution that we want, but reconstruction. Force may destroy. It is only love that can rebuild."

No words can describe the self-satisfied unction with which the Christian Candidate pronounced this oracular saying.

"Well, boy," he added, "I must be off. I want to see Taxater and Clavering and both the Andersens tonight. I might see Quincunx too. Not that I think *he* can do very much."

"There's only one way you'll get James Andersen to help you," remarked Philip, "and I doubt whether you'll bring yourself to use that."

"I suppose you mean," returned his father, "that Traffio girl, up at the House. I have heard that they have been seen together. But I thought she was going to marry John Goring."

"No, I don't mean her," said the son. "She's all right. She's a fine girl, and I am sorry for her, whether she marries Goring or not. The person I mean is little Ninsy Lintot, up at Wild Pine. She's the only one in this place who can get a civil word out of Jim Andersen."

"Ninsy?" echoed his father, "but I thought Ninsy was dead and buried. There was some one died up at Wild Pine last spring, and I made sure 'twas her."

"That was her sister Glory," affirmed Philip. "But Ninsy is delicate, too. A bad heart, they say — too bad for any thoughts of marrying. But she and Jim Andersen have been what you might call sweethearts ever since she was in short frocks."

"I have never heard of this," said Mr. Wone.

"Nor have many other people here," returned Philip, "but 'tis true, none the less. And anyone who wants to get at friend James must go to him through Ninsy Lintot."

“I am extremely surprised at what you tell me,” said Mr. Wone. “Do you really mean that if I got this sick child to promise me Andersen’s help, he really would give it?”

“Certainly I do,” replied Philip. “And what is more, he would bring his brother with him.”

“But his brother is thick with Miss Romer. All the village is talking about them.”

“Never mind the village — father! You think too much of the village and its talk. I tell you — Miss Romer or no Miss Romer — if you get James to help you, you get Luke. I know something of the ways of those two.”

A look of foxy cunning crossed the countenance of the Christian Candidate.

“Do *you* happen to have any influence with this poor Ninsy?” he asked abruptly, peering into his son’s face.

Philip’s pale cheeks betrayed no embarrassment.

“I know her,” he said. “I like her. I lend her books. She will die before Christmas.”

“I wish you would go up and see her for me then,” said Mr. Wone eagerly. “It would be an excellent thing if we *could* secure the Andersens. They must have a lot of influence with the men they work with.”

Philip glanced across the rich sloping meadows which led up to the base of the wooded ridge. From where they stood he could see the gloomy clump of firs and beeches which surrounded the little group of cottages known as Wild Pine.

“Very well,” he said. “I don’t mind. But no more of this nonsense about my not coming home! I prefer for the present” — and he gave vent to rather an ominous laugh— “to live with my dear parents. But, mind — I can’t promise anything. These Andersens are queer fellows. One never knows how things will strike them. However, we shall see. If anyone could persuade our friend James, it would be Ninsy."

The affair being thus settled, the geraniums were abandoned; and while the father proceeded down the village towards the Gables, the son mounted the slope of the hill in the direction of Wild Pine.

The path Philip followed soon became a narrow lane running between two high sandy banks, overtopped by enormous beeches. At all hours, and on every kind of day, this miniature gorge between the wooded fields was a dark and forlorn spot. On an evening of a day like the present one, it was nothing less than sinister. The sky being doubly dark above, dark with the coming on of night, and dark with the persistent cloud-veil, the accumulated shadows of this sombre road intensified the gloom to a pitch of darkness capable of exciting, in agitated nerves, an emotion bordering upon terror. Though the sun had barely sunk over Leo's Hill, between these ivy-hung banks it was as obscure as if night had already fallen.

But the obscurity of Root-Thatch Lane was nothing to the sombreness that awaited him when, arrived at the hill-top, he entered Nevil's Gully. This was a hollow basin of close-growing beech-trees, surrounded on both sides by impenetrable thickets of bramble and elder, and crossed by the path that led to Wild Pine cottages. Every geographical district has its typical and representative centre, — some characteristic spot which sums up, as it were, and focuses, in limited bounds, qualities and attributes that are diffused in diverse proportions through the larger area. Such a centre of the Nevilton district was the place through which Philip Wone now hurried.

Nevil's Gully, however dry the weather, was never free from an overpowering sense of dampness. The soil under foot was now no longer sand but clay, and clay of a particularly adhesive kind. The beech roots, according to their habit, had created an empty space about them — a sort of blackened floor, spotted with green moss and pallid fungi. Out of this, their cold, smooth trunks emerged, like silent pillars in the crypt of a mausoleum.

The most characteristic thing, as we have noted, in the scenery of Nevilton, is its prevalent weight of heavy oppressive moisture. For some climatic or geographical reason the foliage of the place seems chillier, damper, and more filled with oozy sap, than in other localities of the West of England. Though there may have been no rain for weeks — as there had been none this particular June — the woods in this district always give one the impression of retaining an inordinate reserve of atmospheric moisture. It is this moisture, this ubiquitous dampness, that to a certain type of sun-loving nature makes the region so antipathetic, so disintegrating. Such persons have constantly the feeling of being dragged earthward by some steady centripedal pull, against which they struggle in vain. Earthward they are pulled, and the earth, that seems waiting to receive them, breathes heavy damp breaths of in-drawing voracity, like the mouth of some monster of the slime.

And if this is true of the general conditions of Nevilton geography, it is especially and accumulatively true of Nevil's Gully, which, for some reason or other, is a very epitome of such sinister gravitation. If one's latent mortality feels the drag of its clayish affinity in all quarters of this district, in Nevil's Gully it becomes conscious of such oppression as a definite demonic presence. For above the Gully and above the cottages to which the Gully leads, the umbrageous mass of entangled leafiness hangs, fold upon fold, as if it had not known the woodman's axe since the foot of man first penetrated these recesses. The beeches, to which reference has been made, are overtopped on the higher ground by ashes and sycamores, and these, in their turn, are surmounted, on the highest level of all, by colossal Scotch firs, whose forlorn grandeur gives the cottages their name.

Philip hurried, in the growing darkness, across the sepulchral gully, and pushed open the gate of the secluded cattle-yard which was the original cause of this human hamlet. The houses of men in rural districts follow the habitations of beasts. Where cattle and the stacks that supply their food can conveniently be located, there must the dwelling be of those whose business it is to tend them. The convenience of Wild Pine as a site for a spacious and protected farm-yard was sufficient reason for the erection of a human shelter for the hands by whose labour such places are maintained.

He crossed the yard with quick steps. A light burned in one of the sheds, throwing a fitful flicker upon the heaps of straw and the pools of dung-coloured water. Some animal, there — a horse or a cow or a pig — was probably giving birth to young.

From the farm-yard he emerged into the cottage-garden, and stumbling across this, he knocked at the first door he reached. There was not the least sound in answer. Dead unbroken stillness reigned, except for an intermittent shuffling and stamping from the watcher or the watched in the farm-yard behind.

He knocked again, and even the sounds in the yard ceased. Only, high up among the trees above him, some large nocturnal bird fluttered heavily from bough to bough.

For the third time he knocked and then the door of the next house opened suddenly, emitting a long stream of light into which several startled moths instantly flew. Following the light came a woman's figure.

"If thee wants Lintot," said the voice of this figure, "thee can't see 'im till along of most an hour. He be tending a terrible sick beast."

"I want to see Ninsy," shouted Philip, knocking again on the closed door.

“Then thee must walk in and have done with it,” returned the woman. “The maid be laid up with heart-spasms again and can open no doors this night, not if the Lord his own self were hammering.”

Philip boldly followed her advice and entered the cottage, closing the door behind him. A faint voice from a room at the back asked him what he wanted and who he was.

“It is Philip,” he answered, “may I come in and see you, Ninsy? It is Philip — Philip Wone.”

He gathered from the girl’s low-voiced murmur that he was welcome, and crossing the kitchen he opened the door of the further room.

He found Ninsy dressed and smiling, but lying in complete prostration upon a low horse-hair sofa. He closed the door, and moving a chair to her side, sat down in silence, gazing upon her wistfully with his great melancholy eyes.

“Don’t look so peaked and pining, Philip-boy,” she said, laying her white hand upon his and smiling into his face. “’Tis only the old trouble. ’Tis nothing more than what I expect. I shall be about again tomorrow or the day after. But I be real glad to see ‘ee here! Father’s biding down in the yard, and ’tis a lonesome place to be laid-up in, this poor old house.”

Ninsy looked exquisitely fragile and slender, lying back in this tender helplessness, her chestnut-coloured hair all loose over her pillow. Philip was filled with a flood of romantic emotion. The girl had always attracted him but never so much as now. It was one of his ingrained peculiarities to find hurt and unhappy people more engaging than healthy and contented ones. He almost wished Ninsy would stop smiling and chattering so pleasantly. It only needed that she should shed tears, to turn the young man’s commiseration into passion.

But Ninsy did not shed tears. She continued chatting to him in the most cheerful vein. It was only by the faintest shadow that crossed her face at intervals, that one could have known that anything serious was the matter with her. She spoke of the books he had lent her. She spoke of the probable break-up of the weather. She talked of Lacrima Traffio.

“I think,” she said, speaking with extreme earnestness, “the young foreign lady is lovely to look at. I hope she’ll be happy in this marriage. They do say, poor dear, she is being driven to it. But with the gentry you never know. They aren’t like us. Father says they have all their marriages thought out for them, same as royalty. I wonder who Miss Gladys will marry after all! Father has met her several times lately, walking with that American gentleman.”

“Has Jim Andersen been up to see you, Ninsy,” put in Mr. Wone’s emissary, “since this last attack of yours?”

The fact that this question left his lips simultaneously with a rising current of emotion in his heart towards her is a proof of the fantastic complication of feeling in the young anarchist.

He fretted and chafed under the stream of her gentle impersonal talk. He longed to rouse in her some definite agitation, even though it meant the introduction of his rival’s image. The fact that such agitation was likely to be a shock to her did not weigh with him. Objective consideration for people’s bodily health was not one of Philip’s weaknesses. His experiment met with complete success. At the mention of James Andersen’s name a scarlet flush came into the girl’s cheeks.

“No — yes — no!” she answered stammering. “That is — I mean — not since I have been ill. But before — several times — lately. Why do you look at me like that, Philip? You’re not angry with me, are you?”

Philip’s mind was a confused arena of contradictory emotions. Among the rest, two stood out and asserted themselves — this unpardonable and remorseless desire to trouble her, to embarrass her, to make her blush yet more deeply — and a strange wild longing to be himself as ill as she was, and of the same disease, so that they might die together!

“My father wanted me to ask you,” he blurted out, “whether you would use your influence over Jim to get him to help in this election business. I told my father Jim would do anything you asked him.”

The girl’s poor cheeks burned more deeply than ever at this.

“I wish you hadn’t told him that, Philip,” she said. “I wish you hadn’t! You know very well I have no more influence over James than anyone else has. It was unkind of you to tell him that! Now I am afraid he’ll be disappointed. For I shall never dare to worry Jim about a thing like that. *You* don’t take any interest in this election, Philip, do you?”

From the tone of this last remark the young anarchist gathered the intimation that Andersen had been talking about the affair to his little friend and had been expressing opinions derogatory to Mr. Wone’s campaign. She would hardly have spoken of so lively a local event in such a tone of weary disparagement, if some masculine philosopher had not been “putting ideas into her head.”

“You ought to make him join in,” continued Philip. “He has such influence down at the works. It would be a great help to father. We labouring people ought to stand by one another, you know.”

“But I thought — I thought —,” stammered poor Ninsy, pushing back her hair from her forehead, “that you had quite different opinions from Mr. Wone.”

“Damn my opinions!” cried the excited youth. “What do my opinions matter? We are talking of Jim Andersen. Why doesn’t he join in with the other men and help father in getting up the strike?”

“He — he doesn’t believe in strikes,” murmured the girl feebly.

“Why doesn’t he!” cried the youth. “Does he think himself different, then, from the rest of us, because old Gideon married the daughter of a vicar? He ought to be told that he is a traitor to his class. Yes — a traitor — a turn-coat — a black-leg! That’s what he is — if he won’t come in. A black-leg!”

They were interrupted by a sharp knock at the outer door. The girl raised herself on her elbow and became distressingly agitated.

“Oh, I believe that *is* Jim,” she cried. “What shall I do? He won’t like to find you here alone with me like this. What a dreadful accident!”

Philip without a moment’s delay went to the door and opened it. Yes, the visitor was James Andersen. The two men looked at one another in silence. James was the first to speak.

“So *you* are looking after our invalid?” he said. “I only heard this afternoon that she was bad again.”

He did not wait for the other’s response, but pushing past him went straight into Ninsy’s room.

“Poor child!” he said, “Poor dear little girl! Why didn’t you send a message to me? I saw your father in the yard and he told me to come on in. How are you? Why aren’t you in bed? I’m sure you ought to be in bed, and not talking to such an exciting person as our friend Philip.”

“She won’t be talking to me much longer,” threw in that youth, following his rival to the side of the girl’s sofa. “I only came to ask her to do something for us in this election. She will tell you what I mean. Ask her to tell you. Don’t forget! Good-bye Ninsy,” and he held out his hand with a searching look into the girl's face, a look at once wistfully entreating and fiercely reproachful.

She took his hand. "Good night, Philip," she said. "Think kindly of me, and think—" this was said in a voice so low that only the young man could hear— "think kindly of Jim. Good night!"

He nodded to Andersen and went off, a sombre dangerous expression clouding the glance he threw upon the clock in the corner.

"You pay late visits, James Andersen," he called back, as he let himself out of the cottage-door.

Left alone with Ninsy, the stone-carver possessed himself of the seat vacated by the angry youth. The girl remained quiet and motionless, her hands crossed on her lap and her eyes closed.

"Poor child!" he murmured, in a voice of tender and affectionate pity. "I cannot bear to see you like this. It almost gives me a sense of shame — my being so strong and well — and you so delicate. But you will be better soon, won't you? And we will go for some of our old walks together."

Ninsy's mouth twitched a little, and big tears forced their way through her tightly shut eyelids.

"When your father comes in," he went on, "you must let me help him carry you upstairs. And I am sure you had better have the doctor tomorrow if you are not better. Won't you let me go to Yeoborough for him tonight?"

Ninsy suddenly struck the side of her sofa with her clenched hand. "I don't want the doctor!" she burst out, "and I don't want to get better. I want to end it all — that's what I want! I want to end it all."

Andersen made a movement as if to caress her, but she turned her head away.

"I am sick and tired of it all," she moaned. "I wish I were dead. Oh, I wish I were dead!"

The stone-carver knelt down by her side. “Ninsy,” he murmured, “Ninsy, my child, my friend, what is it? Tell me what it is.”

But the girl only went on, in a low soft wail, “I knew it would come to this. I knew it. I knew it. Oh, why was I ever born! Why wasn’t it me, and not Glory, who died! I *shall* die. I *want* to die!”

Andersen rose to his feet. “Ninsy!” he said in a stern altered voice. “Stop this at once — or I shall go straight away and call your father!”

He assumed an air and tone as if quieting a petulant infant. It had its effect upon her. She swallowed down her rising fit of sobs and looked up at him with great frightened tearful eyes.

“Now, child,” he said, once more seating himself, and this time successfully taking possession of a submissive little hand, “tell me what all this is about. Tell me everything.” He bent down and imprinted a kiss upon her cold wet cheek.

“It is—” she stammered, “it is that I think you are fond of that Italian girl.” She hid her face in a fold of her rich auburn hair and went on. “They do tell me you walk with her when your brother goes with Miss Gladys. Don’t be angry with me, Jim. I know I have no right to say these things. I know I have no claim, no power over you. But we did keep company once, Jim, didn’t us? And it do stab my heart, — to hear them tell of you and she!”

James Andersen looked frowningly at the window.

The curtains were not drawn; and a dark ash-branch stretched itself across the casement like an extended threatening arm. Its form was made visible by a gap in the surrounding trees, through which a little cluster of stars faintly twinkled. The cloud veil had melted.

“What a world this is!” the stone-carver thought to himself. His tone when he spoke was irritable and aggrieved.

"How silly you are, Ninsy — with your fancies! A man can't be civil to a poor lonesome foreign wench, without your girding at him as if he had done something wrong! Of course I speak to Miss Traffio and walk with her too. What else do you expect when the poor thing is left lonesome on my hands, with Luke and Miss Gladys amusing themselves? But you needn't worry," he added, with a certain unrestrained bitterness. "It's only when Luke and his young lady are together that she and I ever meet, and I don't think they'll often be together now."

Ninsy looked at him with questioning eyes.

"He and she have quarrelled," he said curtly.

"Over the American?" asked the girl.

"Over the American."

"And you won't be walking with that foreigner any more?"

"I shan't be walking with her any more."

Ninsy sank back on her pillow with a sigh of ineffable relief. Had she been a Catholic she would have crossed herself devoutly. As it was she turned her head smilingly towards him and extended her arms. "Kiss me," she pleaded. He bent down, and she embraced him with passionate warmth.

"Then we belong to each other again, just the same as before," she said.

"Just the same as before."

"Oh, I wish that cruel doctor hadn't told me I mustn't marry. He told father it would kill me, and the other one who came said the same thing. But wouldn't it be lovely if you and I, Jim—"

She stopped suddenly, catching a glimpse of his face. Her happiness was gone in a moment.

"You don't love me. Oh, you don't love me! I know it. I have known it for many weeks! That girl has poisoned you against me — the wicked,

wicked thing! It’s no use denying it. I know it. I feel it, — oh, how can I bear it! How can I bear it!”

She shut her eyes once more and lay miserable and silent. The woodcarver looked gloomily out of the window. The cluster of stars now assumed a shape well-known to him. It was Orion’s Belt. His thoughts swept sadly over the field of destiny.

“What a world it is!” he said to himself. “There is that boy Philip gone with a tragic heart because his girl loves me. And I — I have to wait and wait in helplessness, and see the other — the one I care for — driven into madness. And she cares not a straw for me, who could help her, and only cares for that poor fool who cannot lift a finger. And meanwhile, Orion’s Belt looks contemptuously down upon us all! Ninsy is pretty well right. The lucky people are the people who are safe out of it — the people that Orion’s Belt cannot vex any more!”

He rose to his feet. “Well, child,” he said, “I think I’ll be going. It’s no use our plaguing one another any further tonight. Things will right themselves, little one. Things will right themselves! It’s a crazy world — but the story isn’t finished yet.

“Don’t you worry about it,” he added gently, bending over her and pushing the hair back from her forehead. “Your old James hasn’t deserted you yet. He loves you better than you think — better than he knows himself perhaps!”

The girl seized the hand that caressed her and pressed it against her lips. Her breast rose and fell in quick troubled breathing.

“Come again soon,” she said, and then, with a wan smile, “if you care to.”

Their eyes met in a long perplexed clinging farewell. He was the first to break the tension.

“Good-night, child,” he said, and turning away, left the room without looking back.

While these events were occurring at Wild Pine, in the diplomatist’s study at the Gables Mr. Wone was expounding to Mr. Taxater the objects and purposes of his political campaign.

Mrs. Wotnot, leaner and more taciturn than ever, had just produced for the refreshment of the visitor a bottle of moderately good burgundy. Mr. Taxater had demanded “a little wine,” in the large general manner which his housekeeper always interpreted as a request for something short of the very best. It was clear that for the treasures of innermost wine-cellars Mr. Wone was not among the privileged.

The defender of the papacy had placed his visitor so that the light of the lamp fell upon his perspiring brow, upon his watery blue eyes, and upon his drooping, sandy-coloured moustache. Mr. Taxater himself was protected by a carefully arranged screen, out of the shadow of which the Mephistophelian sanctity of his patient profile loomed forth, vague and indistinct.

Mr. Wone’s mission was in his own mind tending rapidly to a satisfactory conclusion. The theologian had heard him with so much attention, had asked such searching and practical questions, had shown such sympathetic interest in all the convolutions and entanglements of the political situation, that Mr. Wone began to reproach himself for not having made use of such a capable ally earlier in the day.

“It is,” he was saying, “on the general grounds of common Christian duty that I ask your help. We who recognize the importance of religion would be false to our belief if we did not join together to defeat so ungodly and worldly a candidate as this Romer turns out to be.”

It must be confessed that in his heart of hearts Mr. Wone regarded Roman Catholics as far more dangerous to the community than anarchists or infidels, but he prided himself upon a discretion worthy of apostolic inspiration in thus seeking to divide and set asunder the enemies of evangelical truth. He found the papist so intelligent a listener, — that hardly one secret of his political designs remained unshared between them.

“The socialism,” he finally remarked, “which you and I are interested in, is Christian Socialism. You may be sure that in nothing I do or say there will be found the least tincture of this deplorable modern materialism. My own feeling is that the closer our efforts for the uplifting of the people are founded upon biblical doctrines the more triumphant their success will be. It is the ethical aspect of this great struggle for popular rights which I hold most near my heart. I wish to take my place in Parliament as representing not merely the intelligence of this constituency but its moral and spiritual needs — its soul, in fact, Mr. Taxater. There is no animosity in my campaign. I am scrupulous about that. I am ready, always ready, to do our opponents justice. But when they appeal to the material needs of the country, I appeal to its higher requirements — to its soul, in other words. It is for this reason that I am so glad to welcome really intelligent and highly educated men, like yourself. We who take this loftier view must of course make use of many less admirable methods. I do so myself. But it is for us to keep the higher, the more ethical considerations, always in sight.

“As I was saying to my son, this very evening, the grand thing for us all to remember is that it is only on the assumption of Divine Love being at the bottom of every confusion that we can go to work at all. The Tory party refuse to make this assumption. They refuse to recognize the ethical substratum of the world. They treat politics as if they were a matter of merely imperial or patriotic importance. In my view politics and religion should go hand in hand. In the true democracy which I aim at establishing, all these secular theories — evidently due to the direct action of the Devil — such as Free Love and the destruction of the family — will not be tolerated for a moment.

"Let no one think," — and Mr. Wone swallowed a mouthful of wine with a gurgling sound,— "that because we attack capitalism and large estates, we have any wish to interfere with the sacredness of the home. There are, I regret to say, among some of our artizans, wild and dangerous theories of this kind, but I have always firmly discountenanced them and I always will. That is why, if I may say so, I am so well adapted to represent this district. I have the support of the large number of Liberal-minded tradesmen who would deeply regret the introduction of such immoral theories into our movement. They hold, as I hold, that this unhappy tendency to atheistic speculation among our working-classes is one of the gravest dangers to the country. They hold, as I hold, that the cynical free thought of the Tory party is best encountered, not by the equally deplorable cynicism of certain labor-leaders, but by the high Christian standards of men like — like ourselves, Mr. Taxater."

He paused for a moment and drew his hand, which certainly resembled the hand of an ethical-minded dispenser of sugar rather than that of an immoral manual labourer, across his damp forehead. Then he began again.

"Another reason which seems to point to me, in quite a providential manner, as the candidate for this district, is the fact that I was born in Nevilton and that my father was born here before me.

"'Wone' is one of the oldest names in the church Register. There were Wones in Nevilton in the days of the Norman Conquest. I love the place — Mr. Taxater — and I believe I may say that the place loves me. I am in harmony with it, you know. I understand its people. I understand their little weaknesses. Some of these, though you may not believe it, I even may say I share.

"I love this beautiful scenery, these luscious fields, these admirable woods. I love to think of them as belonging to us — to the people who live among them — I love the voice of the doves in our dear trees, Mr. Taxater. I love the cattle in the meadows. I love the vegetables in the gardens. And I love to think" — here Mr. Wone finished his glass, and drew the back of his hand across his mouth— "I love to think of these good gifts of the Heavenly Father as being the expression of His divine bounty. Yes, if anywhere in our revered country atheism and immorality are condemned by nature herself, it is in Nevilton. The fields of Nevilton are like the fields of Canaan, they are full of the goodness of the Lord!"

"Your emotions," said the Papal Apologist at last, as his companion paused breathless, "do you credit, my dear Sir. I certainly hold with you that it is important to counteract the influence of Free-Thinkers."

"But the love of God, Mr. Taxater!" cried the other, leaning forward and crossing his hands over his knees. "We must not only refute, we must construct." Mr. Wone had never felt in higher feather. Here was a man capable of really doing him justice. He wished his recalcitrant son were present!

"Construct — that is what I always say," he repeated. "We must be creative and constructive in our movement, and fix it firmly upon the Only Foundation."

He surveyed through the window the expansive heavens; and his glance encountered the same prominent constellation, which, at that very moment, but with different emotions, the agitated stone-carver was contemplating from the cottage at Wild Pine.

"You are undoubtedly correct, Mr. Wone," said his host gravely, using a tone he might have used if his interlocutor had been recommending him to buy cheese. "You are undoubtedly correct in finding the basis of the system of things in love. It is no more than what the Saints have always taught. I am also profoundly at one with you in your objection to Free Love. Love and Free Love are contradictory categories. They might even be called antinomies. There is no synthesis which reconciles them."

Mr. Wone had not the remotest idea what any of these words meant, but he felt flattered to the depths of his being. It was clear that he had been led to utter some profound philosophical maxim. He once more wished from his heart that his son could hear this conversation!

"Well, Mr. Taxater," he said, "I must now leave you. I have other distinguished gentlemen to call upon before I retire. But I thank you for your promised support.

"It would be better, perhaps" — here he lowered his voice and looked jocose and crafty— "not to refer to our little conversation. It might be misunderstood. There is a certain prejudice, you know — unjustifiable, of course, but unfortunately, very prevalent, which makes it wiser — but I need say no more. Good-bye, Mr. Taxater — good night, sir, good night!"

And he bowed himself off and proceeded up the street to find the next victim of his evangelical discretion.

As soon as he had gone, Mr. Taxater summoned his housekeeper.

"The next time that person comes," he said, "will you explain to him, very politely, that I have been called to London? If this seems improbable, or if he has caught a glimpse of me through the window, will you please explain to him that I am engaged upon a very absorbing literary work."

Mrs. Wotnot nodded. "I kept my eyes open yesterday," the old woman remarked, in the manner of some veteran conspirator in the service of a

Privy Counsellor.

"As you happened to be looking for laurel-leaves, I suppose?" said Mr. Taxater, drawing the red curtains across the window, with his expressive episcopal hand. "For laurel-leaves, Mrs. Wotnot, to flavour that excellent custard?"

The old woman nodded. "And you saw?" pursued her master.

"I saw Mr. Luke Andersen and Miss Gladys Romer."

"Were they as happy as usual — these young people," asked the theologian mildly, "or were they — otherwise?"

"They were very much what you are pleased to call otherwise," answered the old lady.

"Quarrelling in fact?" suggested the diplomat, seating himself deliberately in his arm-chair.

"Miss Gladys was crying and Mr. Luke was laughing."

The Papal Apologist waved his hand. "Thank you, Mrs. Wotnot, thank you. These things will happen, won't they — even in Nevilton? Mr. Luke laughing, and Miss Gladys crying? Your laurel-leaves were very well chosen, my friend. Let me have the rest of that custard tonight! I hope you have not brought back your rheumatism, Mrs. Wotnot, by going so far?"

The housekeeper shook her head and retired to prepare supper.

Mr. Taxater took up the book by his side and opened it thoughtfully. It was the final volume of the collected works of Joseph de Maistre.

Mr. Wone had not advanced far in the direction of the church, when he overtook Vennie Seldom walking slowly, with down-cast head, in the same direction.

Vennie had just passed an uncomfortable hour with her mother, who had been growing, during the recent days, more and more fretful and suspicious.

It was partly to allay these suspicions and partly to escape from the maternal atmosphere that she had decided to be present that evening at the weekly choir-practice, a function that she had found herself lately beginning to neglect. Mr. Wone had forgotten the choir-practice. It would interfere, he was afraid, with his desired interview with Mr. Clavering. Vennie assured him that the clergyman's presence was not essential at these times.

"He is not musical, you know. He only walks up and down the aisle and confuses things. Everybody will be glad if you take him away."

She was a little surprised at herself, even as she spoke. To depreciate her best friend in this flippant way, and to such a person, showed that her nerves were abnormally strained.

Mr. Wone did not miss the unusual tone. He had never been on anything but very distant terms with Miss Seldom, and his vanity was hugely delighted by this new manner.

"I am coming into my own," he thought to himself. "My abilities are being recognized at last, by all these exclusive people."

"I hope," he said, tentatively, "that you and your dear mother are on our side in this great national struggle. I have just been to see Mr. Taxater, and he has promised me his energetic support."

"Has he?" said Vennie in rather a startled voice. "That surprises me — a little. I know he does not admire Mr. Romer; but I thought — —"

"O he is with us — heart and soul with us!" repeated the triumphant Nonconformist. "I am glad I went to him. Many of us would have been too narrow-minded to enter his house, seeing he is a papist. But I am free from such bigotry."

"And you hope to convert Mr. Clavering, too?"

“Certainly; that is what I intend. But I believe our excellent vicar needs no conversion. I have often heard him speak — at the Social Meeting, you know — and I assure you he is a true friend of the working-classes. I only wish more of his kind were like him.”

“Mr. Clavering is too changeable,” remarked Vennie, hardly knowing what she said. “His moods alter from day to day.”

“But you yourself, dear Miss Seldom,” the candidate went on. “You yourself are, I think, entirely with us?”

“I really don’t know,” she answered. “My interests do not lie in these directions. I sometimes doubt whether it greatly matters, one way or the other.”

“Whether it matters?” cried Mr. Wone, inhaling the night-air with a sigh of protestation. “Surely, you do not take that indifferent and thoughtless attitude? A young lady of your education — of your religious feeling! Surely, you must feel that it matters profoundly! As we walk here together, through this embalmed air, full of so many agreeable scents, surely you must feel that a good and great God is making his power known at last, known and respected, through the poor means of our consecrated efforts? Forgive my speaking so freely to one of your position; but it seems to me that you must — you at least — be on our side, simply because what we are aiming at is in such complete harmony with this wonderful Love of God, diffused through all things.”

It is impossible to describe the shrinking aversion which these words produced upon the agitated nerves of Vennie. Something about the Christian candidate seemed to affect her with an actual sense of physical nausea. She could have screamed, to feel the man so near her — the dragging sound of his feet on the road, the way he breathed and cleared his throat, the manner in which his hat was tilted, all combined to irritate her unendurably. She found herself fantastically thinking how much sooner she would have married even the egregious John Goring — as Lacrima was going to do — than such a one as this. What a pass Nevilton had brought itself to — when the choice lay between a Mr. Romer and a Mr. Wone!

An overpowering wave of disgust with the whole human race swept over her — what wretched creatures they all were — every one of them! She mentally resolved that nothing — nothing on earth — should stop her entering a convent. The man talked of agreeable odours on the air. The air was poisoned, tainted, infected! It choked her to breathe it.

"I am so glad — so deeply glad," Mr. Wone continued, "to have enjoyed the privilege of this little quiet conversation. I shall never forget it. I feel as though it had brought us wonderfully, beautifully, near each other. It is on such occasions as this, that one feels how closely, how entirely, in harmony, all earnest-minded people are! Here are you, my dear young lady, the descendant of such a noble and ancient house, expressing in mute and tender silence, your sympathy with one who represents the aspirations of the poorest of the people! This is a symbolic moment. I cannot help saying so. A symbolic and consecrated moment!"

"We had better walk a little faster," remarked Miss Seldom.

"We will. We will walk faster," agreed Mr. Wone. "But you must let me put on record what this conversation has meant to me! It has made me more certain, more absolutely certain than ever, that without a deep ethical basis our great movement is doomed to hopeless failure."

The tone in which he used the word "ethical" was so irritating to Vennie, that she felt an insane longing to utter some frightful blasphemy, or even indecency, in his ears, and to rush away with a peal of hysterical laughter.

They were now at the entrance to a narrow little alley or lane which, passing a solitary cottage and an unfrequented spring, led by a short approach directly into the village-square. Half way down this lane a curious block of Leonian stone stood in the middle of the path. What the original purpose of this stone had been it were not easy to tell. The upper portion of it had apparently supported a chain, but this had long ago disappeared. At the moment when Mr. Wone and Miss Seldom reached the lane's entrance, a soft little scream came from the spot where the stone stood; and dimly, in the shadowy darkness, two forms became visible, engaged in some obscure struggle. The scream was repeated, followed by a series of little gasps and whisperings.

Mr. Wone glanced apprehensively in the direction of these sounds and increased his pace. He was confounded with amazement when he found that Vennie had stopped as if to investigate further. The truth is, he had reduced the girl to such a pitch of unnatural revolt that, for one moment in her life, she felt glad that there were flagrant and lawless pleasures in the world.

Led by an unaccountable impulse she made several steps up the lane. The figures separated as she approached, one of them boldly advancing to meet her, while the other retreated into the shadows. The one who advanced, finding himself alone, turned and called to his companion, "Annie! Where are you? Come on, you silly girl! It's all right."

Vennie recognized the voice of Luke Andersen. She greeted him with hysterical gratitude. "I thought it was you, Mr. Andersen; but you did frighten me! I took you for a ghost. Who is that with you?"

The young stone-carver raised his hat politely. "Only our little friend Annie," he said. "I am escorting her home from Yeoborough. We have been on an errand for her mother. She's such a baby, you know, Miss Seldom, our little Annie. I love teasing her."

"I am afraid you love teasing a great many people, Mr. Andersen," said Vennie, recovering her equanimity and beginning to feel ashamed. "Here is

Mr. Wone. No doubt, he will be anxious to talk politics to you. Mr. Wone!" She raised her voice as the astonished Methodist came towards them. "It is only Mr. Andersen. You had better talk to *him* of your plans. I am afraid I shall be late if I don't go on." She slipped aside as she spoke, leaving the two men together, and hurried off towards the church.

Luke Andersen shook hands with the Christian Candidate. "How goes the campaign, the great campaign?" he said. "I wonder you haven't talked to James about it. James is a hopeless idealist. James is an admirable listener. You really ought to talk to James. I wish you *would* talk to him; and put a little of your shrewd common-sense into him! He takes the populace seriously — a thing you and I would never be such fools as to do, eh, Mr. Wone?"

"I am afraid we disturbed you," remarked the Nonconformist, "Miss Seldom and I — I think you had someone with you. Miss Seldom was quite interested. We heard sounds, and she stopped."

"Oh, only Annie" — returned the young man lightly, "only little Annie. We are old friends you know. Don't worry about Annie!"

"It is a beautiful night, is it not?" remarked the Methodist, peering down the lane. Luke Andersen laughed.

"Are you by any chance, Mr. Wone, interested in astronomy? If so, perhaps you can tell me the name of that star, over there, between Perseus and Andromeda? No, no; that one — that greenish-coloured one! Do you know what that is?"

"I haven't the least idea," confessed the representative of the People. "But I am a great admirer of Nature. My admiration for Nature is one of the chief motives of my life."

"I believe you," said Luke. "It is one of my own, too. I admire everything in it, without any exception."

"I hope," said Mr. Wone, reverting to the purpose that, with Nature, shared just now his dominant interest, "I hope you are also with us in our struggle against oppression? Mr. Taxater and Miss Seldom are certainly on our side. I sometimes feel as though Nature herself, were on our side, especially on a lovely night like this, full of such balmy odours."

"I am delighted to see the struggle going on," returned the young man, emphatically. "And I am thoroughly glad to see a person like yourself at the head of it."

"Then you, too, will take a part," cried the candidate, joyfully. "This, indeed, has been a successful evening! I feel sure now that in Nevilton, at any rate, the tide will flow strongly in my favour. Next week, I have to begin a tour of the whole district. I may not be able to return for quite a long time. How happy I shall be to know that I leave the cause in such good hands! The strike is the important thing, Andersen. You and your brother must work hard to bring about the strike. It is coming. I know it is coming. But I want it soon. I want it immediately."

The stone-carver nodded and hummed a tune. He seemed to intimate with the whole air of his elegant quiescence that the moment had arrived for Mr. Wone's departure.

The Nonconformist felt the telepathic pressure of this polite dismissal. He waved his arm. "Good night, then; good night! I am afraid I must postpone my talk with Mr. Clavering till another occasion. Remember the strike, Andersen! That is what I leave in your hands. Remember the strike!"

The noise of Mr. Wone's retreating steps was still audible when Luke returned to the stone in the middle of Splash Lane. The sky was clear now and a faint whitish glimmer, shining on the worn surface of the stone, revealed the two deep holes in it, where the fastenings of the chain had hung. The young man tapped the stone with his stick and gave a low whistle. An amorphous heap of clothes, huddled in the hedge, stirred, and emitted a reproachful sound.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" he said. "What silly nonsense is this? Get up! Let's see your face!" He stooped and pulled at the object. After a moment's struggle the flexible form of a young girl emerged into the light. She held down her head and appeared sulky and angry.

"What's the matter, Annie?" whispered the youth encircling her with his arms.

The girl shook him away. "How could you tell Miss Seldom who I was!" she murmured. "How could you do it, Luke? If it had been anybody else — but for her to know — —"

The stone-carver laughed. "Really, child, you are too ridiculous! Why, on earth, shouldn't she know, more than anyone else?"

The girl looked fiercely at him. "Because she is good," she said. "Because she is the only good person in this blasted place!"

The young man showed no astonishment at this outburst. "Come on, darling," he rejoined. "We must be getting you home. I daresay, Miss Seldom is all you think. It seemed to me, though, that she was different from usual tonight. But I expect that fool had upset her."

He let the young girl lean for a moment against the shadowy stone while he fumbled for his cigarettes and matches. He observed her make a quick movement with her hands.

"What are you up to now?" he asked.

She gave a fierce little laugh. "There!" she cried. "I have done it!"

"What have you done?" he enquired, emitting a puff of smoke, and throwing the lighted match into the hedge.

She pressed her hands against the stone and looked up at him mischievously and triumphantly. "Look!" she said, holding out her fingers in the darkness. He surveyed her closely. “What is it? Have you scratched yourself?”

“Light a match and see!” she cried. He lit a match and examined the hand she held towards him.

“You have thrown away that ring!”

“Not *thrown* it away, Luke; not thrown it away! I have pressed it down into this hole. You can’t get it out now! Nobody never can!”

He held the flickering match closely against the stone’s surface. In the narrow darkness of the aperture she indicated, something bright glittered.

“But this is really annoying of you, Annie,” said the stone-carver. “I told you that ring was only lent to me. She’ll be asking for it back tomorrow.”

“Well, you can tell her to come here and get it!”

“But this is really serious,” protested Luke, trying in vain to reach the object with his outstretched fingers.

“And I have twisted my hair round it!” the girl went on, in exulting excitement, “I have twisted it tight around. It will be hard to get it off!”

Luke continued making ineffectual dives into the hole, while she watched him gleefully. He went to the hedge and breaking off a dusty sprig of woundwort prodded the ring with its stalk.

“You can’t do it” she cried, “you can’t do it! You’ll only push it further in!”

“Damn you, Annie!” he muttered. “This is a horrible kind of joke. I tell you, Gladys will want this confounded thing back tomorrow. She’s already asked me twice for it. She only gave it to me for fun.”

The girl leaned across the stone towards him, propping herself on the palms of her hands, and laughing mischievously. “No one in this village can get that ring out of there!” she cried; “no one! And when they does, they’ll find it all twisted up with my hair!” She tossed back her black locks defiantly.

Luke Andersen’s thoughts ran upon scissors, pincers, willow-wands, bramble-thorns, and children’s arms.

“Leave it then!” he said. “After all, I can swear I lost it. Come on, you little demon!”

They moved away; and St. Catharine’s church was only striking the hour of nine, when they separated at her mother’s door.

CHAPTER XV. MORTIMER ROMER

THE INCREDIBLY HALCYON June which had filled the lanes and meadows of Nevilton that summer with such golden weather, gave place at last to July; and with July came tokens of a change.

The more slow-growing hay-fields were still strewn with their little lines of brown mown grass waiting its hour of “carrying,” but the larger number of the pastures wore now that freshly verdant and yet curiously sad look, which fields in summer wear when they have been shorn of their first harvest. The corn in the arable-lands was beginning to stand high; wheat and barley varying their alternate ripening tints, from the rich gold of the one, to the diaphanous glaucous green, so tender and pallid, of the other. In the hedges, rag-wort, knapweed and scabious had completely replaced wild-rose and elder-blossom; and in the ditches and by the margins of ponds, loosestrife and willow-herb were beginning to bud. Even the latest-sprouting among the trees carried now the full heavy burden, dark and monotonous, of the summer’s prime; and the sharp, dry intermittent chirping of warblers, finches and buntings, had long since replaced, in the garden-bushes, the more flute-like cries of the earlier-nesting birds.

The shadowy woods of the Nevilton valleys, with their thick entangled undergrowth, were less pleasant to walk in than they had been. Tall rank growths choked the wan remnants of the season’s first prime; and beneath sombre, indistinguishable foliage, the dry, hard-trodden paths lost their furtive enchantment. Dog-mercury, that delicate child of the under-shadows, was no more now than a gross mass of tarnished leaves. Enchanter’s nightshade took the place of pink-campion; only to yield, in its turn, to viper's bugloss and flea-bane.

As the shy gods of the year's tender birth receded before these ranker maturings, humanity became more prominent. Print-frocked maidens assisted the sheep in treading the slopes of Leo's Hill into earthy grassless patches. Bits of dirty paper and the litter of careless picnickers strewed the most shadowy recesses. Smart youths flicked town-bought canes in places where, a few weeks before, the squirrel had gambolled undisturbed, and the wood-pecker had deepened the magical silence by his patent labour. Where recently, amid shadowy moss "soft as sleep," the delicate petals of the fragile wood-sorrel had breathed untroubled in their enchanted aisles of leafy twilight, one found oneself reading, upon torn card-board boxes, highly-coloured messages to the Human Race from energetic Tradesmen. July had replaced June. The gods of Humanity had replaced the gods of Nature; and the interlude between hay-harvest and wheat-harvest had brought the dog-star Sirius into his diurnal ascendance.

The project of Lacrima's union with Mr. John Goring remained, so to speak, "in the air." The village assumed it as a certainty; Mr. Quincunx regarded it as a probability; and Mr. Goring himself, enjoying his yearly session of agreeable leisure, meditated upon it day and night.

Lacrima had fallen into a curious lassitude with regard to the whole matter. In these July days, especially now that the sky was overcast by clouds and heavy rains seemed imminent, she appeared to lose all care or interest in her own life. Her mood followed the mood of the weather. If some desperate deluge of disaster was brooding in the distance, she felt tempted to cry out, "Let it fall!"

Mr. Quincunx's feelings on the subject remained a mystery to her. He neither seemed definitely to accept her sacrifice, nor to reject it. He did not really — so she could not help telling herself — visualize the horror of the thing, as it affected her, in any substantial degree. He often made a joke of it; and kept quoting cynical and worldly suggestions, from the lips of Luke Andersen.

On the other hand, both from Mr. Romer and the farmer, she received quiet, persistent and inexorable pressure; though to do the latter justice, he made no further attempts to treat her roughly or familiarly.

She had gone so far once — in a mood of panic-stricken aversion, following upon a conversation with Gladys — as actually to walk to the vicarage gate, with the definite idea of appealing to Vennie; but it chanced that in place of Vennie she had observed Mrs. Seldom moving among her flower-beds, and the grave austerity of the aristocratic old lady had taken all resolution from her and made her retrace her steps.

It must also be confessed that her dislike and fear of Gladys had grown to dimensions bordering upon monomania. The elder girl at once hypnotized and paralyzed her. Her sensuality, her feline caprices, her elaborately cherished hatred, reduced the Italian to such helpless misery, that any change — even the horror of this marriage — assumed the likeness of a desirable relief.

It is also true that by gradual degrees, — for women, however little prone to abstract thought, are quick to turn the theories of those they love into living practice, — she had come to regard the mere physical terror of this momentous plunge as a less insurmountable barrier than she had felt at first. Without precisely intending it, Mr. Quincunx had really, in a measure — particularly since he himself had come to frequent the society of Luke Andersen — achieved what might have conventionally been called the "corruption" of Lacrima's mind. She found herself on several occasions imagining what she would really feel, if, escaped for an afternoon from her Priory duties, she were slipping off to meet her friend in Camel's Cover or Badger's Bottom.

When the suggestion had been first made to her of this monstrous marriage, it had seemed nothing short of a sentence of death, and beyond the actual consummation of it, she had never dreamed of looking. But all this had now imperceptibly changed. Many an evening as she sat with her work by Mrs. Romer's side, watching Gladys and her father play cards, the thought came over her that she might just as well enjoy the comparative independence of having her own house and her own associations — even though the price of them *were* the society of such a lump of clay — as live this wretched half-life without hope or aim.

Other moods arrived when the thought of having children of her own came to her with something more than a mere sense of escape; came to her with the enlargement of an opening horizon. She recalled the many meandering discourses which Mr. Quincunx had addressed to her upon this subject. They had not affected her woman's instincts; but they had lodged in her mind. A girl's children, so her friend had often maintained, do not belong to the father at all. The father is nothing — a mere irrelevant incident, a mere chance. The mother alone — the mother always — has the rights and pleasures, as she has the responsibilities and pains of the parental relation. She even recalled one occasion of twilight philosophizing in the potato-bed, when Mr. Quincunx had gone so far as to maintain the unscientific thesis that children, born where there is no love, inherit character, appearance, tastes, everything — from the mother.

Lacrima had a dim suspicion that some of these less pious theories were due to the perverse Luke, who, as the cloudier July days overcast his evening rambles, had acquired the habit of strolling at night-fall into Mr.

Quincunx's kitchen. Once indeed she was certain she discerned the trail of this plausible heathen in her friend's words. Mr. Quincunx, with one of his peculiarly goblin-like leers, had intimated — in jest indeed, but with a searching look into her face that it would be no very difficult task to deceive, — in shrewd Panurgian roguery, this clumsy clown. His words at the time had hurt and shocked her; and her reaction from them had led to the spoiling of a pleasant conversation; but they invaded afterwards, more deeply than she would have cared to confess, her hours of dreamy solitude.

Her southern imagination, free from both the grossness and the hypocrisy of the Nevilton mind, was much readier to wander upon an antinomian path — at least in its wayward fancies — than it would have been, had circumstances not led her away from her inherited faith.

While the sensuality of Gladys left her absolutely untouched, the anarchistic theories of her friend — especially now they had been fortified and directed by the insidious Luke — gave her intelligence many queer and lawless topics of solitary brooding. Her senses, her instincts, were as pure and unsophisticated as ever; but her conscience was besieged and threatened. It was indeed a queer rôle — this, which fate laid upon Mr. Quincunx — the rôle of undermining the reluctance of his own sweetheart to make a loveless marriage — but it was one for which his curious lack of physical passion singularly fitted him.

Had Vennie Seldom or Hugh Clavering been aware of the condition of affairs they would have condemned Mr. Quincunx in the most wholesale manner. Clavering would probably have been tempted to apply to him some of the most abusive language in the dictionary. But it is extremely questionable whether this judgment of theirs would have been justified.

A more enlightened planetary observer, initiated into the labyrinthine hearts of men, might well have pointed out that Mr. Quincunx's theories were largely a matter of pure speculation, humorously remote from any contact with reality. He might also have reminded these indignant ones that Mr. Quincunx quite genuinely laboured under the illusion — if it were an illusion — that for his friend to be mistress of the Priory and free of her dependence on the Romers was a thing eminently desirable, and worth the price she paid for it. Such an invisible clairvoyant might even have surmised, what no one in Nevilton who knew of Mr. Romer's offer would for one second have believed; namely, that he would have given her the same advice had there been no such offer, simply on the general ground of binding her permanently to the place.

The fact, however, remained, that by adopting this ambiguous and evasive attitude Mr. Quincunx reduced the more heroic and romantic aspect of the girl's sacrifice to the lowest possible level, and flung her into a mood of reckless and spiritless indifference. She was brought to the point of losing all interest in her own fate and of simply relapsing upon the tide of events.

It was precisely to this condition that Mr. Romer had desired to bring her. When she had first attracted him, and had fallen into his hands, there had been certain psychological contests between them, in which the quarry-owner had by no means emerged victorious. It was the rankling memory of these contests — contests spiritual rather than material — which had issued in his gloomy hatred of her and his longing to corrupt her mind and humiliate her soul. This corruption, this humiliation had been long in coming. It had seemed out of his own power and out of the power of his feline daughter to bring it about; but this felicitous plan of using the girl's own friend to assist her moral disintegration appeared to have changed the issue very completely.

Mr. Romer, watching her from day to day, became more and more certain that her integral soul, the inmost fortress of her self-respect, was yielding inch by inch. She had flung the rudder down; and was drifting upon the tide.

It might have been a matter of surprise to some ill-judging psychologists that a Napoleonic intriguer, of the quarry-owner's type, should ever have entered upon a struggle apparently so unequal and unimportant as that for the mere integrity of a solitary girl's spirit. Such a judgment would display little knowledge of the darker possibilities of human character. Resistance is resistance, from whatever quarter it comes; and the fragile soul of a helpless Pariah may be just as capable of provoking the aggressive instincts of a born master of men as the most obdurate of commercial rivals.

There are certain psychic oppositions to our will, which, when once they have been encountered, remain indelibly in the memory as a challenge and a defiance, until their provocation has been wiped out in their defeat. It matters nothing that such oppositions should spring from weak or trifling quarters. We have been baffled, thwarted, fooled; and we cannot recover the feeling of identity with ourselves, until, like a satisfied tidal wave, our will has drowned completely the barricades that defied it. It matters nothing if at the beginning, what we were thwarted by was a mere trifle, a straw upon the wind, a feather in the breeze. The point is that our will, in flowing outwards, at its capricious pleasure, met with opposition — met with resistance. We do not really recover our self-esteem until every memory of such an event has been obliterated by a complete revenge.

It is useless to object that a powerful ambitious man of the Romer mould, contending Atlas-like under a weight of enormous schemes, was not one to harbour such long-lingering rancour against a mere Pariah. There was more in the thing than appears on the surface. The brains of mortal men are queer crucibles, and the smouldering fires that heat them are driven by capricious and wanton guests. Lacrima's old defeat of the owner of Leo's Hill — a defeat into which there is no need to descend now, for its "terrain" was remote from our present stage — had been a defeat upon what might be called a subliminal or interior plane.

It was almost as if he had encountered her and she had encountered him, not only in the past of this particular life, but a remoter past — in a past of some pre-natal incarnation. There are — as is well-known, many instances of this unfathomable conflict between certain human types — types that seem to *find* one another, that seem to be drawn to one another, by some preordained necessity in the occult influences of mortal fate. It matters nothing in regard to such a conflict, that on one side should be strength, power and position, and on the other weakness and helplessness. The soul is the soul, and has its own laws.

It is a case of what a true initiate into the secrets of our terrestrial drama might entitle Planetary Opposition. By some hidden law of planetary opposition, this frail child of the Apennine ridges was destined to provoke, to an apparently quite unequal struggle, this formidable schemer from the money-markets of London.

In these strange pre-natal attractions and repulsions between men and women, the mere conventional differences of rank and social importance are as nothing and less than nothing.

Vast unfathomable tides of cosmic conflict drive us all backwards and forwards; and if under the ascendance of Sirius in the track of the Sun, the master of Nevilton found himself devoting more energy to the humiliation of his daughter's companion than to his election to the British Parliament, one can only remember that both of them — the strong and the weak —

were merely puppets and pawns of elemental forces, compared with which he, as well as she, was as the chaff before the wind.

It was one of the peculiarities of this Nevilton valley to draw to itself, as we have already hinted, and focus strangely in itself, these airy and elemental oppositions. To rise above the clash of the Two Mythologies on this spot, with all their planetary "auxiliar gods," one would have had to ascend incredibly high into that star-sown space above — perhaps so high, that the whole solar system, rushing madly through the ether towards the constellation of Hercules, would have shown itself as less than a cluster of wayward fireflies. From a height as supreme as this, the difference between Mortimer Romer and Lacrima Traffio would have been less than the difference between two summer-midges transacting their affairs on the edge of a reed in Auber Lake.

Important or unimportant, however, the struggle went on; and, as July advanced, seemed to tend more and more to Mr. Romer's advantage. Precisely what he desired to happen was indeed happening — Lacrima's soul was disintegrating; her powers of resistance were diminishing; and a reckless carelessness about her personal fate was taking the place of her old sensitive apprehensions.

Another important matter went well at this time for Mr. Romer. His daughter became formally engaged to the wealthy American. Dangelis had been pressing her, for many weeks, to come to some definite decision, between himself and Lord Tintinhull's heir, and she had at last made up her mind and given him her promise.

The Romers were enchanted at this new development. Mrs. Romer had always disliked the thought of having to enter into closer relations with the aristocracy — relations for which she was so obviously unsuited; and Ralph Dangelis fitted in exactly with her idea of what her son-in-law should be.

Mr. Romer, too, found in Dangelis just the sort of son he had always longed for. He had quite recognized, by this time, that the "artistic" tastes of the American and his unusual talent interfered in no way with the possession of a very shrewd intellectual capacity. Dangelis had indeed all the qualities that Mr. Romer most admired. He was strong. He was clever. He was an entertaining companion. He was at once very formidable and very good-tempered. And he was immensely rich.

It would have annoyed him to see Gladys dominate a man of this sort with her capricious ways. But he had not the remotest fear that she would dominate this citizen of Ohio. Dangelis would pet her and spoil her and deluge her with money, but keep a firm and untroubled hand over her; and that exactly suited Mr. Romer's wishes. The man's wealth would also be an immense help to himself in his financial undertakings. Together they would be able to engineer colossal and world-shaking schemes.

It was a satisfaction, too, to think that, when he died, his loved quarries on Leo's Hill and his historic Leonian House should fall into the hands, not of these Ilchesters and Ilminsters and Evershots — families whose pretensions he hated and derided — but of an honest descendant of plain business men of his own class.

It was Mrs. Romer, and not her husband, who uttered a lament that the House after their death should no longer be the property of one of their own name. She proposed that Gladys' American should be induced to change his name. But Mr. Romer would hear nothing of this. His system was the old imperial Roman system, of succession by adoption. The man who could deal with the Legions, the man who was strong enough to suppress strikes on Leo's Hill, and cope successfully with such rascals as this voluble Wone, was the man to inherit Nevilton! Be his patronymic what you please, such a man was Cæsar. Himself, a new-comer, risen from nothing, and contemptuous of all tradition, it had constantly been a matter of serious annoyance to him that the wealth he had amassed should only go to swell the pride of these fatuous landed gentry. It delighted him to think that Gladys' children — the future inheritors of his labour — should be, on their father's side also, from new and untraditional stock. It gave him immense satisfaction to think of disappointing Lord Tintinhull, who no doubt had long ago told his friends how sad it was that his son had got entangled with that girl at Nevilton; but how nice it was that Nevilton House should in the future take its proper place in the county.

There was one cloud on Mr. Romer's horizon at this moment, and that cloud was composed of vapours spun from the brain of his parliamentary rival, the eloquent Methodist.

Mr. Wone had long been at work among the Leo's Hill quarry-men, encouraging them to strike. Until the second week in July his efforts had been fruitless; but with the change in the weather to which we have referred, the strike came. It had already lasted some seven or eight days, when a Saturday arrived which had been selected, several months before, for a great political gathering on the summit of Leo's Hill. This was a meeting of radicals and socialists to further the cause of Mr. Wone's campaign.

Leo's Hill had been, for many generations, the site of such local gatherings. These gatherings were not confined to political demonstrators. They were usually attended by circus-men and other caterers to proletarian amusement; and were often quite as lively, in their accompaniments of feasting and festivity, as any country fair.

The actual speaking took place at the extreme northern end of the hill, where there was a singular and convenient feature, lending itself to such assemblies, in the formation of the ground. This was the grassy outline, still emphasizing quite distinctly its ancient form, of the military Roman amphitheatre attached to the camp. Locally the place was known as “the Frying-pan”, from its marked and grotesque resemblance to that utensil; but no base culinary appellation, issue of Anglo-Saxon unimaginativeness, could conceal the formidable classic moulding of its well-known shape — the shape of the imperial colisseum.

Between the Frying-pan and the southern side of the hill, where the bulk of the quarries were, rose a solitary stone building. One hardly expected the presence of such a building in such a place, for it was a considerable-sized inn; but the suitableness of the grassy expanses of the ancient camp for all manner of tourist-jaunts accounted for its erection; and doubtless it served a good purpose in softening with interludes of refreshment the labours of the quarry-men.

It was the presence of this admirable tavern so near the voice of the orator, that led Mr. Romer, himself, to stroll, on that Saturday, in the direction of his rival’s demonstration. Though the more considerable of his quarries were at the southern end of the hill, certain new excavations, in the success of which he took exceptional interest, had been latterly made in its very centre, and within a stone’s throw of the tavern-door. The great cranes, used in this new invasion, stood out against the sky from the highest part of the hill, and assumed, especially at sunset, when their shape was rendered most emphatic, the form of enormous compasses, planted there by some gigantic architectural hand.

It was in relation to these new works that Mr. Romer, towards the close of the afternoon, found himself advancing along the narrow path that led, between clumps of bracken and furze-bushes, from the most westward of his woods to the hill’s base. Mr. Lickwit had informed him that there was talk, among some of the more intransigent of the Yeoborough socialists, about destroying these cranes. Objections had been brought against them, in recent newspaper articles, on purely æsthetic grounds. It was said they disfigured the classic outline of the hill, and interfered with a landmark which had been a delight to every eye for unnumbered ages.

It was hardly to be supposed that the more official of the supporters of Mr. Wone would condone any such outbreak. It was unlikely that Wone himself would do so. The "Christian Candidate," as his Methodist friends called him, was in no way a man of violence. But the fact that there had been this pseudo-public criticism of the works from an unpolitical point of view might lend colour to any sort of scandal. There were plenty of bold spirits among the by-streets of Yeoborough who would have loved nothing better than to send Mr. Romer's cranes toppling over into a pit, and indeed it was the sort of adventure which would draw all the more restless portion of the meeting's audience. The possibility was the more threatening because the presence of this kind of general fair attracted to the hill all manner of heterogeneous persons quite unconnected with the locality.

But what really influenced Mr. Romer in making his own approach to the spot, was the neighbourhood of the Half Moon. Where there was drink, he argued, people would get drunk; and where people got drunk, anything might happen. He had instituted Mr. Lickwit to remain on guard at the eastern works; and he had written to the superintendent of police suggesting the advisability of special precautions. But he felt nervous and ill at ease as he listened, from his Nevilton terrace, to the distant shouts and clamour carried to him on the west wind; and true to his Napoleonic instincts, he proceeded, without informing anyone of his intention, straight to the zone of danger.

The afternoon was very hot, though there was no sun. The wind blew in threatening gusts, and the quarry-owner noticed that the distant Quantock

Moors were overhung with a dark bank of lowering clouds. It was one of those sinister days that have the power of taking all colour and all interest out of the earth's surface. The time of the year lent itself gloomily to this sombre unmasking. The furze-bushes looked like dead things. Many of them had actually been burnt in some wanton conflagration; and their prickly branches carried warped and blighted seeds. The bracken, near the path, had been dragged and trodden. Here and there its stalks protruded like thin amputated arms. The elder-bushes, caught in the wind, showed white and metallic, as if all their leaves had been dipped in some brackish water. All the trees seemed to have something of this dull, whitish glare, which did not prevent them from remaining, in the recesses of their foliage, as drearily dark as the dark dull soil beneath them. The grass of the fields had a look congruous with the rest of the scene; a look as if it had been one large velvety pall, drawn over the whole valley.

In the valley itself, along the edges of this grassy hall, the tall clipped elm-trees stood like mourning sentinels bowing towards their dead. Drifting butterflies, principally of the species known as the "Lesser Heath" and the "Meadow-Brown," whirled past his feet as he walked, in troubled and tarnished helplessness. Here and there a weak dilapidated currant-moth, the very epitome of surrender to circumstance, tried in vain to arrest its enforced flight among the swaying stalks of grey melancholy thistles, the only living things who seemed to find the temper of the day congenial with their own.

When he reached the base of the hill, Mr. Romer was amazed at the crowd of people which the festivity had attracted to the place. He had heard them passing down the roads all day from the seclusion of his garden, and to judge by such vehicles as he had secured a glimpse of from the entrance to his drive, many of them must have come from miles away. But he had never expected a crowd like this. It seemed to cover the whole northern side of the hill, swaying to and fro, like some great stream of voracious maggots, in the body of a dead animal.

Round the cranes, in the centre of the hill, the crowd seemed especially thick. He made out the presence there of several large caravans, and he heard the music of a merry-go-round from that direction. This latter sound, in its metallic and ferocious gaiety, seemed especially adapted to the character of the scene. It seemed like the very voice of some savage Dionysian helot-feast, celebrated in defiance of all constituted authority. It was such music as Caliban would have loved.

Unwilling to arouse unnecessary anger by making his presence known, while there was no cause, Mr. Romer left the Half Moon on his right, and crossing the brow of the hill diagonally, by a winding path that encircled the grassy hollows of innumerable ancient quarries, arrived at the foot of an immense circular tumulus which dominated the whole scene. This indeed was the highest point of Leo's Hill, and from its summit one looked far away towards the Bristol Channel in one direction, and far away towards the English Channel in another. It was, as it were, the very navel and pivot of that historic region. From this spot one obtained a sort of birds-eye view of the whole surface of Leo's Hill.

Here Mr. Romer found himself quite alone, and from here, with hands clasped behind him, he surveyed the scene with a grave satiric smile. He could see his new works with the immense cranes reaching into the sky above them. He could see the swaying crowd round the amphitheatre at the extreme corner of the promontory; and he could see, embosomed in trees to the left of Nevilton's Mount, a portion of his own Elizabethan dwelling.

Mr. Romer felt strong and confident as he looked down on all these things. He always seemed to renew the forces of his being when he visited this grass-covered repository of his wealth and influence. Leo's Hill suited his temper, and he felt as though he suited the temper of Leo's Hill. Between the man who exploited the stone, and the great reservoir of the stone he exploited, there seemed an illimitable affinity.

He looked down with grim and humorous contempt at the noisy crowd thus invading his sacred domain. They might harangue their hearts out, — those besotted sentimentalists, — he could well afford to let them talk! They might howl and dance and feast and drink, till they were as dazed as Comus' rabble, — he could afford to let them shout! Probably Mr. Wone, the "Christian Candidate," was even at that moment, making his great final appeal for election at the hands of the noble, the free, the enlightened constituency of Mid-Wessex.

Romer felt an immense wave of contempt surge through his veins for this stream of fatuous humanity as it swarmed before his eyes like an army of disturbed ants. How little their anger or their affection mattered to him — or mattered to the world at large! He would have liked to have seized in his hands some vast celestial torch and suffocated them all in its smoke, as one would choke out a wasp's nest. Their miserable little pains and pleasures were not worth the trouble Nature had taken in giving them the gift of life. Dead or alive — happy or unhappy — they were not deserving of any more consideration than a cloud of gnats that one brushed away from one's face.

The master of Leo's Hill drew a deep breath and listened to the screams of the merry-go-round. Something in the strident machine made him think of hymn-singing and mob-religion. This Religion of Sentiment and Self-Pity with which they cloak their weakness and their petty rancour — what is it, he thought, but an excuse of escaping from the necessity of being strong and fearless and hard and formidable? It is easier — so much easier — to draw back, and go aside, and deal in paltry subterfuges and sneaking jealousies, veneered over with hypocritical unction, than to strike out and pursue one’s own way drastically and boldly.

He folded his arms and frowned. What is it, he muttered to himself, this hidden Force, this Power, this God, to which they raise their vague appeals against the proud, clear, actual domination of natural law and unscrupulous strength? Is there really some other element in the world, some other fact, from which they can draw support and encouragement? There cannot be! He looked at the lowering sky above him, and at the grey thistles and little patches of thyme under his feet. All was solid, real, unyielding. There was no gap, no open door, in the stark surface of things, through which such a mystery might enter.

He found himself vaguely wondering whose grave this had originally been, this great flat tumulus, upon which he stood and hated the mob of men. There was a burnt circle in the centre of it, with blackened cinders. The place had been used for some recent national rejoicing, and they had raised a bonfire here. He supposed that there must have been a much more tremendous bonfire in the days when — perhaps before the Romans — this mound was raised to celebrate some savage chieftain. He wondered whether, in his life-time, this long-buried, long-forgotten one had stood, even as he stood now, and cried aloud to the Earth and the Sky in sick loathing of his wretched fellow-animals.

He humorously speculated whether this man also, this ancient challenger of popular futility, had been driven to strange excesses by the provocative resistance of some feeble girl, making her mute appeals to the suppressed conscience in him, and calling in the help of tender compassionate gods? Had they softened this buried chieftain’s heart, these gods of slavish souls and weak wills, before he went down into darkness? Or had he defied them to the last and died lonely, implacable, contemptuous?

The quarry-owner's ears began to grow irritated at last by these raucous metallic sounds and by the laughter and the shouting. It was so precisely as if this foolish crowd were celebrating, in drunken ecstasy, a victory won over him, and over all that was clear-edged, self-possessed, and effectual, in this confused world. He struck off the heads of some of the grey thistles with his cane, and wished they had been the heads of the Christian Candidate and his oratorical associates.

Presently his attention was excited by a tremendous hubbub at the northern extremity of the hill. The crowd seemed to have gone mad. They cheered again and again, and seemed vociferating some popular air or some marching-song. He could almost catch the words of this. The curious thing was that he could not help in his heart dallying with the strange wish that in place of being the man at the top, he had been one of these men at the bottom. How differently he would have conducted the affair. He knew, from his dealings with the country families, how deep this revolutionary rage with established tradition could sink. He sympathized with it himself. He would have loved to have flung the whole sleek structure of society into disorder, and to have shaken these feeble rulers out of their snug seats. But this Wone had not the spirit of a wood-louse! Had he — Romer — been at this moment the arch-revolutionary, in place of the arch-tyrant, what a difference in method and result! Did they think, these idiots, that eloquent words and appeals to Justice and Charity would change the orbits of the planets?

He strode impatiently to the edge of the tumulus. Yes, there was certainly something unusual going forward. The crowd was swaying outwards, was scattering and wavering. Men were running to and fro, tossing their hats in the air and shouting. At last there really was a definite event. The whole mass of the crowd seemed to be seized simultaneously with a single impulse. It began to move. It began to move in the direction of his new quarries. The thrill of battle seized the heart of the master of Nevilton with an exultant glow. So they were really going to attempt something — the incapable sheep! This was the sort of situation he had long cried out for. To have an excuse to meet them, face to face, in a genuine insurrection, this was worthier of a man’s energy than quarrelling with wretched Social Meetings.

He ran down the side of the tumulus and hastened to meet the approaching mob. By leaving the path and skirting the edge of several disused quarries he should, he thought, easily be able to reach his new works long before they did. The tall cranes served as a guide. To his astonishment he found, on approaching his objective, that the mob had swerved, and were now streaming forward in a long wavering line, between the Half Moon tavern and the lower slopes, towards the southern end of the hill.

“Ah!” he muttered under his breath, “this is more serious! They are going to attack the offices.”

By this time, the bulk of the crowd had got so far that it would have been impossible for him to intercept or anticipate them.

Among the more cautious sight-seers who, mixed with women and children, were trailing slowly in the rear, he was quite certain he made out the figures of Wone and his fellow-politicians. “Just like him,” he thought. “He has stirred them up with his speeches and now he is hiding behind them! I expect he will be sneaking off home presently.” The figure he supposed to be that of the Christian Candidate did, as a matter of fact, shortly after this, detach himself from the rest of his group and retire quietly and discreetly towards the path leading to Nevilton.

Romer retraced his steps as rapidly as he could. He repassed the tumulus, crossed a somewhat precipitous bank between two quarries, and emerged upon the road that skirts the western brow of the hill. This road he followed at an impetuous pace, listening, as he advanced, for any sound of destruction and violence. When he arrived at the open level between the two largest of his quarries he found himself at the edge of a surging and howling mob. He could see over their heads the low slate roofs of his works, and he could see that someone, mounted on a large slab of stone, was haranguing the people near him, but more than this it was impossible to make out and it was extremely difficult to get any closer. The persons on the outskirts of the crowd were evidently strangers, and with no interest in the affair at all beyond excited curiosity, for he heard them asking one another the most vague and confused questions.

Presently he observed the figure of a policeman rise behind the man upon the stone and jerk him to the ground. This was followed by a bewildering uproar. Clenched hands were raised in the air, and wild cries were audible. He fancied he caught the sound of the syllable "fire."

Romer was seized with a mad lust of contest. He struggled desperately to force his way through to the front, but the entangled mass of agitated, perspiring people proved an impassable barrier.

He began hastily summing up in his mind what kind of destruction they could achieve that would cause him any serious annoyance. He remembered with relief that all the more delicate pieces of carved work were down at Nevilton Station. They could do little damage to solid blocks of stone, which were all they would find inside those wooden sheds. They might injure the machinery and the more fragile of the tools, but they could hardly do even that, unless they were aided by some of his own men. He wondered if his own men — the men on strike — were among them, or if the rioters were only roughs from Yeoborough. Let them burn the sheds down! He did not value the sheds. They could be replaced tomorrow. Their utmost worth was hardly the price of a dozen bottles of champagne. It gave him a thrill of grim satisfaction to think of the ineffectualness of this horde of gesticulating two-legged creatures, making vain assaults upon slabs of impervious rock. Man against Stone! It was a pleasant and symbolic struggle. And it could only have one issue.

Finding it impossible to move forward, and not caring to be observed by anyone who knew him hemmed in in this ridiculous manner among staring females and jocose youths, Romer edged himself backwards, and, hot and breathless, got clear of the crowd.

The physical exhaustion of this effort — for only a man of considerable strength could have advanced an inch through such a dense mass — had materially diminished his thirst for a personal encounter. He smiled to himself to think how humorous it would be if he could, even now, overtake the escaping Mr. Wone, and offer his rival restorative refreshment, in the cool shades of his garden! For the prime originals of this absurd riot to be drinking claret-cup upon a grassy lawn, while the misled and deluded populace were battering their heads against the stony heart of Leo’s Hill, struck Mr. Romer as a curiously suitable climax to the days’ entertainment. Hardly thinking of what he did, he clambered up the side of a steep bank, where a group of children were playing, and looked across the valley. Surely that solitary black figure retreating so furtively, so innocently, along the path towards the wood, could be no one but the Christian Candidate!

Mr. Romer burst out laughing. The discreet fugitive looked so absurdly characteristic in his shuffling retirement, that he felt for the moment as if the whole incident were a colossal musical-comedy farce. A puff of smoke above the heads of the crowd, and a smell of burning, made him serious again. “Damn them!” he muttered. “They shall not get off without anything being done.”

From his present position he was able to discern how he could get round to the sheds. On their remoter side he saw that the crowd had considerably thinned away. He made out the figures of some policemen there, bending, it appeared, over something upon the ground.

It did not take him long to descend from his post, to skirt the western side of the quarries, and to reach the spot. He found that the object upon the ground was no other than his manager Lickwit, gasping and pallid, with a streak of blood running down his face. From the policemen he learnt that an entrance had been forced into the sheds, and the more violent of the rioters — the ones who had laid Mr. Lickwit low — were now regaling themselves in that shelter upon the contents of a barrel of cider, whose hiding-place someone had unearthed. The fire was already trampled upon and extinguished. He learnt further that a messenger had been sent to summon more police to the spot, and that it was to be hoped that the revellers within the shed would continue their opportune tippling until their arrival. This, however, was not what fate intended. Reeling and shouting, the half-a-dozen joyous Calibans emerged from their retreat and proceeded to address the people, all vociferating at the same time, and each interrupting the other. The more official and respectable among the politicians had either retired altogether from the scene or were cautiously watching it, from the safe obscurity of the general crowd, and the situation around the stone-works was completely in the hands of the rioters.

Mr. Romer, having done what he could for the comfort of his manager, who was really more frightened than hurt, turned fiercely upon the aggressors. He commanded the two remaining policemen — the third was helping Lickwit from the scene — to arrest on the spot these turbulent ruffians, who were now engaged in laying level with the ground a tool-shed adjoining the one they had entered. They were striking at the corner-beams of this erection with picks and crow-bars. Others among the crowd, pushing their less courageous neighbours forward, began throwing stones at the policemen, uttering, as they did so, yells and threats and abusive insults.

The mass of the people behind, hearing these yells, and yielding to a steady pressure from the rear, where more and more inquisitive persons kept arriving, began to sway ominously onward, crowding more and more thickly around the open space, where Mr. Romer stood, angrily regarding them.

The policemen kept looking anxiously towards the Half Moon where the road across the hill terminated. They were evidently very nervous and extremely desirous of the arrival of re-enforcements. No re-enforcements coming, however, and the destruction of property continuing, they were forced to act; and drawing their staves, they made a determined rush upon the men attacking the shed. Had these persons not been already half-drunk, the emissaries of the law would have come off badly. As it was, they only succeeded in flinging the rioters back a few paces. The whole crowd moved forward and a volley of stones and sticks compelled the officials to retreat. In their retreat they endeavoured to carry Mr. Romer with them, assuring him, in hurried gasps, that his life itself was in danger. “They’ll knock your head off, sir — the scoundrels! Phil Wone has seen you.”

The pale son of Mr. Wone had indeed pushed his way to the front. He at once began an impassioned oration.

“There he is — the devil himself!” he shouted, panting with excitement. “Do for him, friends! Throw him into one of his own pits — the bloodsucker, the assassin, the murderer of the people!”

Wild memories of historic passages rushed through the young anarchist’s brain. He waved his arms savagely, goading on his companions. His face was livid. Mr. Romer moved towards him, his head thrown back and a contemptuous smile upon his face.

The drunken ring leaders, recognizing their hereditary terror — the local magistrate — reeled backwards in sudden panic. Others in the front line of the crowd, knowing Mr. Romer by sight, stood stock still and gaped foolishly or tried to shuffle off unobserved. A few strangers who were there, perceiving the presence of a formidable-looking gentleman, assumed at once that he was Lord Tintinhull or the Earl of Glastonbury and made frantic efforts to escape. The crowd at the back, conscious that a reverse movement had begun, became alarmed. Cries were raised that the “military” had come. “They are going to fire!” shouted one voice, and several women screamed.

Philip Wone lifted up his voice again, pointing with outstretched arm at his enemy, and calling upon the crowd to advance.

“The serpent! — the devil-fish! — the bread-stealer! — the money-eater!” he yelled. “Cast him into his own pit, bury him in his own quarries!”

It was perhaps fortunate for Mr. Romer at that moment that his adversary was this honest youth in place of a more hypocritical leader. An English crowd, even though sprinkled with a leaven of angry strikers, only grows puzzled and bewildered when it hears its enemy referred to as “devil-fish” and “assassin.”

The enemy at this moment took full advantage of their bewilderment. He deliberately drew out his cigarette-case and lighting a cigarette, made a gesture as if driving back a flock of sheep. The crowd showed further signs of panic. But the young anarchist was not to be silenced.

“Look round you, friends,” he shouted. “Here is this man defying you on the very spot where you work for him day and night, where your descendants will work for his descendants day and night! What are you afraid of? This man did not make this hill bring forth stone, though it is stone, instead of bread, that he would willingly give your children!”

Mr. Romer gave a sign to the policemen and approached a step nearer. The cider-drinkers had already moved off. The crowd began to melt away.

“The very earth,” went on the young man, “cries aloud to you to put an end to this tyranny! Do you realize that this is the actual place where in one grand revolt the men of Mid Wessex rose against the—”

He was interrupted by a man behind him — a poacher from an outlying hamlet. “Chuck it, Phil Wone! Us knows all about this ’ere job.”

Mr. Romer raised his hand. The policemen seized the young man by the arms, one on either side. He seemed hardly to notice them, and went on in a loud resonant voice that rang across the valley.

“It will end! It will end, this evil day! Already the new age is beginning. These robbers of the people had better make haste with their plundering, for the hour is approaching! Where is your priest?” — he struggled violently with his captors, turning towards the rapidly retreating crowd, “where is your vicar, — your curer of souls? He talks to you of submission, and love, and obedience, and duty. What does this man care for these things? It is under this talk of “love” that you are betrayed! It is under this talk of “duty,” that your children have the bread taken from their mouths! But the hour will come; — yes, you may smile,” he addressed himself directly to Mr. Romer now, “but you will not smile for long. *Your* fate is already written down! It is as sure as this rain, — as sure as this storm!”

He was silent, and making no further resistance, let himself be carried off by the two officials.

The rain he spoke of was indeed beginning. Heavy drops, precursors of what seemed likely to be a tropical deluge, fell upon the broken wood-work, upon the half-burnt bracken, upon the slabs of Leonian stone, and upon the trampled grass. They also fell upon Mr. Romer’s silver match-box as he selected another cigarette of his favourite brand, and walked slowly and smilingly away in the direction of Nevilton.

CHAPTER XVI. HULLAWAY

"I SEE," SAID Luke Andersen to his brother, as they sat at breakfast in the station-master's kitchen, about a fortnight after the riot on Leo's Hill, "I see that Romer has withdrawn his charge against young Wone. It seems that the magistrates set him free yesterday, on Romer's own responsibility. So the case will not come up at all. What do you make of that?"

"He is a wiser man than I imagined," said James.

"And that's not all!" cried his brother blowing the cigarette ashes from the open paper in front of him. "It appears the strike is in a good way of being settled by those damned delegates. We were idiots to trust them. I knew it. I told the men so. But they are all such hopeless fools. No doubt Romer has found some way of getting round them! The talk is now of arbitration, and a commissioner from the government. You mark my words, Daddy Jim, we shall be back working again by Monday."

"But we shall get the chief thing we wanted, after all — if Lickwit is removed," said James, rising from the table and going to the window, "I know I shall be quite satisfied myself, if I don't see that rascal's face any more."

"The poor wretch has collapsed altogether, so they said down at the inn last night," Luke put in. "My belief is that Romer has now staked everything on getting into Parliament and is ready to do anything to propitiate the neighbourhood. If that's his line, he'll succeed. He'll out-manœuvre our friend Wone at every step. When a man of his type once tries the conciliatory game be becomes irresistible. That is what these stupid employers so rarely realize. No doubt that's his policy in stopping the process against Philip. He’s a shrewd fellow this Romer — and I shouldn’t wonder if, when the strike is settled, he became the most popular landlord in the country. Wone did for himself by sneaking off home that day, when things looked threatening. They were talking about that in Yeoborough. I shouldn’t be surprised if it didn’t lose him the election.”

“I hope not,” said James Andersen gazing out of the window at the gathering clouds. “I should be sorry to see that happen.”

“I should be damned glad!” cried his brother, pushing back his chair and luxuriously sipping his final cup of tea. “My sympathies are all with Romer in this business. He has acted magnanimously. He has acted shrewdly. I would sooner, any day, be under the control of a man like him, than see a sentimental charlatan like Wone get into Parliament.”

“You are unfair, my friend,” said the elder brother, opening the lower sash of the window and letting in such a draught of rainy wind that he was immediately compelled to re-close it, “you are thoroughly unfair. Wone is not in the least a charlatan. He believes every word he says, and he says a great many things that are profoundly true. I cannot see,” he went on, turning round and confronting his equable relative with a perturbed and troubled face, “why you have got your knife into Wone in this extreme manner. Of course he is conceited and long-winded, but the man is genuinely sincere. I call him rather a pathetic figure.”

“He looked pathetic enough when he sneaked off after that riot, leaving Philip in the hands of the police.”

“It annoys me the way you speak,” returned the elder brother, in growing irritation. “What right have you to call the one man’s discretion cowardice, and the other’s wise diplomacy? I don’t see that it was any more cowardice for Wone to protest against a riot, than for Romer to back down before public opinion as he seems now to have done. Besides, who can blame a fellow for wanting to avoid a scene like that? I know *you* wouldn't have cared to encounter those Yeoborough roughs."

"Old Romer encountered them," retorted Luke. "They say he smoked a cigarette in their faces, and just waved them away, as if they were a cloud of gnats. I love a man who can do that sort of thing!"

"That's right!" cried the elder brother growing thoroughly angry. "That's the true Yellow Press attitude! Here we have one of your 'still, strong men,' afraid of no mob on earth! I know them — these strong men! It's easy enough to be calm and strong when you have a banking-account like Romer's, and all the police in the county on your side!"

"Brother Lickwit will not forget that afternoon," remarked Luke, taking a rose from a vase on the table and putting it into his button-hole.

"Yes, Lickwit is the scape-goat," rejoined the other. "Lickwit will have to leave the place, broken in his nerves, and ruined in his reputation, while his master gets universal praise for magnanimity and generosity! That is the ancient trick of these crafty oppressors."

"Why do you use such grand words, Daddy Jim?" said Luke smiling and stretching out his legs. "It's all nonsense, this talk about oppressors and oppressed. The world only contains two sorts of people — the capable ones and the incapable ones. I am all on the side of the capable ones!"

"I suppose that is why you are treating little Annie Bristow so abominably!" cried James, losing all command of his temper.

Luke made an indescribable grimace which converted his countenance in a moment from that of a gentle faun to that of an ugly Satyr.

"Ho! ho!" he exclaimed, "so we are on that tack are we? And please tell me, most virtuous moralist, why I am any worse in my attitude to Annie, than you in your attitude to Ninsy? It seems to me we are in the same box over these little jobs."

"Damn you!" cried James Andersen, walking fiercely up to his brother and trembling with rage.

But Luke sipped his tea with perfect equanimity.

"It's no good damning me," he said quietly. "That will not alter the situation. The fact remains, that both of us have found our little village-girls rather a nuisance. I don't blame you. I don't blame myself. These things are inevitable. They are part of the system of the universe. Little girls have to learn — as the world moves round — that they can't have everything they want. I don't know whether you intend to marry Ninsy? I haven't the slightest intention of marrying Annie."

"But you've been making love to her for the last two months! You told me so yourself when we met her at Hullaway!"

"And you weren't so very severe then, were you, Daddy Jim? It's only because I have annoyed you this morning that you bring all this up. As a matter of fact, Annie is far less mad about me than Ninsy is about you. She's already flirting with Bob Granger. Anyone can see she's perfectly happy. She's been happy ever since she made a fool of me over Gladys' ring. As long as a girl knows she's put you in a ridiculous position, she'll very soon console herself. No doubt she'll make Granger marry her before the summer's over. Ninsy is quite a different person. Annie and I take our little affair in precisely the same spirit. I am no more to blame than she is. But Ninsy's case is different. Ninsy is seriously and desperately in love with you. And her invalid state makes the situation a much more embarrassing one. I think my position is infinitely less complicated than yours, brother Jim!"

James Andersen's face became convulsed with fury. He stretched out his arm towards his brother, and extended a threatening fore-finger.

"Young man," he cried, "I will *never* forgive you for this!"

Having uttered these words he rushed incontinently out of the room, and, bare-headed as he was, proceeded to stride across the fields, in a direction opposite from that which led to Nevilton.

The younger brother shrugged his shoulders, drained his tea-cup, and meditatively lit another cigarette. The stone-works being closed, he had all the day before him in which to consider this unfortunate rupture. At the present moment, however, all he did was to call their landlady — the station-master's buxom wife — and affably help her in the removal and washing up of the breakfast things.

Luke was an adept in all household matters. His supple fingers and light feminine movements were equal to almost any task, and while occupied in such things his gay and humorous conversation made any companion of his labour an enviable person. Mrs. Round, their landlady, adored him. There was nothing she would not have done at his request; and Lizzie, Betty, and Polly, her three little daughters, loved him more than they loved their own father. Having concerned himself for more than an hour with these agreeable people, Luke took his hat and stick, and strolling lazily along the railroad-line railings, surveyed with inquisitive interest the motley group of persons who were waiting, on the further side, for the approach of a train.

A little apart from the rest, seated on a bench beside a large empty basket, he observed the redoubtable Mrs. Fringe. Between this lady and himself there had existed for the last two years a sort of conspiracy of gossip. Like many other middle-aged women in Nevilton, Mrs. Fringe had made a pet and confidant of this attractive young man, who played, in spite of his mixed birth, a part almost analogous to that of an affable and ingratiating cadet of some noble family.

He passed through the turn-stile, crossed the track, and advanced slowly up the platform. His plump Gossip, observing him afar off, rose and moved to meet him, her basket swinging in her hand and a radiant smile upon her face. It was like an encounter between some Pantagruelian courtier and some colossal Gargamelle. They stood together, in the wind, at the extreme edge of the platform. Luke, who was dressed so well that it would have been impossible to distinguish him from any golden youth from Oxford or Cambridge, whispered shameless scandal into the lady's ears, from beneath the shadow of his panama-hat. She on her side was equally confidential.

"There was a pretty scene down our way last night," she said. "Miss Seldom came in with some books for my young Reverend and, Lord! they did have an ado. I heard 'un shouting at one another as though them were rampin' mad. My master 'ee were hollerin' Holy Scripture like as he were dazed, and the young lady she were answerin' 'im with God knows what. From all I could gather of it, that girl had got some devil's tale on Miss Gladys. 'Tweren't as though she did actually name her by name, as you might say, but she pulled her hair and scratched her like any crazy cat, sideways-like and cross-wise. It seems she'd got hold of some story about that foreign young woman and Miss Gladys having her knife into 'er, but I saw well enough what was at the bottom of it and I won't conceal it from 'ee, my dear. She do want 'im for herself. That's the long and short. She do want 'im for herself!"

"What were they disputing about?" asked Luke eagerly. "Did you hear their words?"

"'Tis no good arstin' me about their words," replied Mrs. Fringe. "Those long-windy dilly-dallies do sound to me no more than the burbering of blowflies. God save us from such words! I'm not a reading woman and I don't care who knows it. But I know when a wench is moon-daft on a fellow. I knows that, my dear, and I knows when she's got a tale on another girl!"

"Did she talk about Catholicism to him?" enquired Luke.

"I won't say as she didn't bring something of that sort in," replied his friend. "But 'twas Miss Gladys wot worried 'er. Any fool could see that. 'Tis my experience that when a girl and a fellow get hot on any of these dilly-dally argimints, there's always some other maid biding round the corner."

"I've just had a row with James," remarked the stone-carver. "He's gone off in a fury over towards Hullaway."

Mrs Fringe put down her basket and glanced up and down the platform. Then she laid her hand on the young man's arm.

"I wouldn't say what I do now say, to anyone, but thee own self, dearie. And I wouldn't say it to thee if it hadn't been worriting me for some merciful long while. And what's more I wouldn't say it, if I didn't know what you and your Jim are to one another. 'More than brothers,' is what the whole village do say of ye!"

"Go on — go on — Mrs. Fringe!" cried Luke. "That curst signal's down, and I can hear the train."

"There be other trains than wot run on them irons," pronounced Mrs. Fringe sententiously, "and if you aren't careful, one such God Almighty's train will run over that brother of yours, sooner or later."

Luke looked apprehensively up the long converging steel track. The gloom of the day and the ominous tone of his old gossip affected him very unpleasantly. He began to wish that there was not a deep muddy pond under the Hullaway elms.

"What on earth do you mean?" he cried, adding impatiently, "Oh damn that train!" as a cloud of smoke made itself visible in the distance.

"Only this, dearie," said the woman picking up her basket, "only this. If you listen to me you'd sooner dig your own grave than have words with brother. Brother be not one wot can stand these fimble-fambles same as you and I. I know wot I do say, cos I was privileged, under Almighty God, to see the end of your dear mother."

"I know — I know—" cried the young man, "but what do you mean?"

Mrs. Fringe thrust her arm through the handle of her basket and turned to meet the incoming train.

"'Twas when I lived with my dear husband down at Willow-Grove," she said. "'Twas a stone's throw there from where you and Jim were born. I always feared he would go, same as she went, sooner or later. He talks like her. He looks like her. He treats a person in the way she treated a person, poor moon-struck darling! 'Twas all along of your father. She couldn't bide him along-side of her in the last days. And he knew it as well as you and I know it. But do 'ee think it made any difference to him? Not a bit, dearie! Not one little bit!"

The train had now stopped, and with various humorous observations, addressed to porters and passengers indiscriminately, Mrs. Fringe took her place in a carriage.

Heedless of being overheard, Luke addressed her through the window of the compartment. "But what about James? What were you saying about James?"

"'Tis too long a tale to tell 'ee, dearie," murmured the woman breathlessly. "There be need now of all my blessed wits to do business for the Reverend. There, look at that!" She waved at him a crumpled piece of paper. "Beyond all thinking I've got to fetch him books from Slitly's. Books, by the Lord! As if he hadn't too many of the darned things for his poor brain already!"

The engine emitted a portentous puff of smoke, and the train began to move. Luke walked by the side of his friend's window, his hand on the sash.

"You think it is inadvisable to thwart my brother, then," he said, "in any way at all. You think I must humour him. You are afraid if I don't—" His walk was of necessity quickened into a run.

"It's a long story, dearie, a long story. But I had the privilege under God Almighty of knowing your blessed mother when she was called, and I tell you it makes my heart ache to see James going along the same road as—"

Her voice was extinguished by the noise of wheels and steam. Luke, exhausted, was compelled to relax his hold. The rest of the carriages passed him with accumulated speed and he watched the train disappear. In his excitement he had advanced far beyond the limits of the platform. He found himself standing in a clump of yellow rag-wort, just behind his own stone-cutter's shed.

He gazed up the track, along which the tantalizing lady had been so inexorably snatched away. The rails had a dull whitish glitter but their look was bleak and grim. They suggested, in their narrow merciless perspective, cutting the pastures in twain, the presence of some remorseless mechanical Will carving its purpose, blindly and pitilessly, out of the innocent waywardness of thoughtless living things.

An immense and indefinable foreboding passed, like the insertion of a cold, dead finger, through the heart of the young man. Fantastic and terrible images pursued one another through his agitated brain. He saw his brother lying submerged in Hullaway Pond, while a group of frightened children stood, in white pinafores, stared at him with gaping mouths. He saw himself arriving upon this scene. He even went so far as to repeat to himself the sort of cry that such a sight might naturally draw from his lips, his insatiable dramatic sense making use, in this way, of his very panic, to project its irrepressible puppet-show. His brother's words, "Young man, I will never forgive you for this," rose luridly before him. He saw them written along the edge of a certain dark cloud which hung threateningly over the Hullaway horizon. He felt precisely what he would feel when he saw them — luminously phosphorescent — in the indescribable mud and greenish weeds that surrounded his brother's dead face. A sickening sense of loss and emptiness went shivering through him. He felt as though nothing in the world was of the least importance except the life of James Andersen.

With hurried steps he recrossed the line, repassed the turn-stile, and began following the direction taken by his brother just two hours before. Never had the road to Hullaway seemed so long!

Half-way there, where the road took a devious turn, he left it, and entering the fields again, followed a vaguely outlined foot-path. This also betraying him, or seeming to betray him, by its departure from the straight route, he began crossing the meadows with feverish directness, climbing over hedges and ditches with the desperate preoccupation of one pursued by invisible pursuers. The expression upon his face, as he hurried forward in this manner, was the expression of a man who has everything he values at stake. A casual acquaintance would never have supposed that the equable countenance of Luke Andersen had the power to look so haggard, so drawn, so troubled. He struck the road again less than half a mile from his destination. Why he was so certain that Hullaway was the spot he sought, he could hardly have explained. It was, however, one of his own favourite walks on rainless evenings and Sunday afternoons, and quite recently he had several times persuaded his brother to accompany him. He himself was wont to haunt the place and its surroundings, because of the fact that, about a mile to the west of it, there stood an isolated glove-factory to which certain of the Nevilton girls were accustomed to make their way across the field-paths.

Hullaway village was a very small place, considerably more remote from the world than Nevilton, and attainable only by narrow lanes. The centre of it was the great muddy stagnant pond which now so dominated Luke's alarmed imagination. Near the pond was a group of elms, of immense antiquity, — many of them mere stumps of trees, — but all of them possessed of wide-spreading prominent roots, and deeply indented hollow trunks worn as smooth as ancient household furniture, by the constant fumbling and scrambling of generations of Hullaway children.

The only other objects of interest in the place, were a small, unobtrusive church, built, like everything else in the neighborhood, of Leonian stone, and an ancient farm-house surrounded by a high manorial wall. Beneath one of the Hullaway Elms stood an interesting relic of a ruder age, in the shape of some well-worn stocks, now as pleasant a seat for rural gossips as they were formerly an unpleasant pillory for rural malefactors.

As Luke Andersen approached this familiar spot he observed with a certain vague irritation the well-known figure of one of his most recent Nevilton enchantresses. The girl was no other, in fact, than that shy companion of Annie Bristow who had been amusing herself with them in the Fountain Square on the occasion of Mr. Clavering's ill-timed intervention. At this moment she was sauntering negligently along, on a high-raised path of narrow paved flag-stones, such paths being a peculiarity of Hullaway, due to the prevalence of heavy autumn floods.

The girl was evidently bound for the glove-factory, for she swung a large bundle as she walked, resting it idly every now and then, on any available wall or rail or close-cut hedge, along which she passed. She was an attractive figure, tall, willowy, and lithe, and she walked in that lingering, swaying voluptuous manner which gives to the movements of maidens of her type a sort of provocative challenge. Luke, advancing along the road behind her, caught himself admiring, in spite of his intense preoccupation, the alluring swing of her walk and the captivating lines of her graceful person.

The moment was approaching that he had so fantastically dreaded, the moment of his first glance at Hullaway Great Pond. He was already relieved to see no signs of anything unusual in the air of the place, — but the imaged vision of his brother's drowned body still hovered before him, and that fatal "I'll never forgive you for this!" still rang in his ears.

His mind all this while was working with extraordinary rapidity and he was fully conscious of the grotesque irrelevance of this lapse into the ingrained habit of wanton admiration. Quickly, in a flash of lightning, he reviewed all his amorous adventures and his frivolous philanderings. How empty, how bleak, how impossible, all such pleasures seemed, without the dark stooping figure of this companion of his soul as their taciturn background! He looked at Phyllis Santon with a sudden savage resolution, and made a quaint sort of vow in the depths of his heart.

"I'll never speak to the wench again or look at her again," he said to himself, "if I find Daddy Jim safe and sound, and if he forgives me!"

He hurried past her, almost at a run, and arrived at the centre of Hullaway. There was the Great Pond, with its low white-washed stone parapet. There were the ancient elm-trees and the stocks. There also were the white-pinafored infants playing in the hollow aperture of the oldest among the trees. But the slimy surface of the water was utterly undisturbed save by two or three assiduous ducks who at intervals plunged beneath it.

He drew an immense sigh of relief and glanced casually round. Phyllis had not failed to perceive him. With a shy little friendly smile she advanced towards him. His vow was already in some danger. He waved her a hasty greeting but did not take her hand.

"You'd better put yourself into the stocks," he said, covering with a smile the brutality of his neglect, "until I come back! I have to find James."

Leaving her standing in mute consternation, he rushed off to the churchyard on the further side of the little common. There was a certain spot here, under the shelter of the Manor wall, where Luke and his brother had spent several delicious afternoons, moralizing upon the quaint epitaphs around them, and smoking cigarettes. Luke felt as if he were almost sure to find James stretched out at length before a certain old tombstone whose queer appeal to the casual intruder had always especially attracted him. Both brothers had a philosophical mania for these sepulchral places, and the Hullaway grave-yard was even more congenial to their spirit than the Nevilton one, perhaps because this latter was so dominatingly possessed by their own dead.

Luke entered the enclosure through a wide-open wooden gate and glanced quickly round him. There was the Manor wall, as mellow and sheltering as ever, even on such a day of clouds. There was their favourite tombstone, with its long inscription to the defunct seignorial house. But of James Andersen there was not the remotest sign.

Where the devil had his angry brother gone? Luke's passionate anxiety began to give place to a certain indignant reaction. Why were people so ridiculous? These volcanic outbursts of ungoverned emotion on trifling occasions were just the things that spoiled the harmony and serenity of life. Where, on earth, could James have slipped off to? He remembered that they had more than once gone together to the King's Arms — the unpretentious Hullaway tavern. It was just within the bounds of possibility that the wanderer, finding their other haunts chill and unappealing, had taken refuge there.

He recrossed the common, waved his hand to Phyllis, who seemed to have taken his speech quite seriously and was patiently seated on the stocks, and made his way hurriedly to the little inn.

Yes — there, ensconced in a corner of the high settle, with a half-finished tankard of ale by his side, was his errant brother.

James rose at once to greet him, showing complete friendliness, and very small surprise. He seemed to have been drinking more than his wont, however, for he immediately sank back again into his corner, and regarded his brother with a queer absent-minded look.

Luke ordered a glass of cider and sat down close to him on the settle.

“I am sorry,” he whispered, laying his hand on his brother’s knee. “I didn’t mean to annoy you. What you said was quite true. I treated Annie very badly. And Ninsy is altogether different. You’ll forgive me, won’t you, Daddy Jim?”

James Andersen pressed his hand. “It’s nothing,” he said in rather a thick voice. “It’s like everything else, it’s nothing. I was a fool. I am still a fool. But it’s better to be a fool than to be dead, isn’t it? Or am I talking nonsense?”

“As long as you’re not angry with me any longer,” answered Luke eagerly, “I don’t care how you talk!”

“I went to the churchyard — to our old place — you know,” went on his brother. “I stayed nearly an hour there — or was it more? Perhaps it was more. I stayed so long, anyway, that I nearly went to sleep. I think I must have gone to sleep!” he added, after a moment’s pause.

“I expect you were tired,” remarked Luke rather weakly, feeling for some reason or other, a strange sense of disquietude.

“Tired?” exclaimed the recumbent man, “why should I be tired?” He raised himself up with a jerk, and finishing his glass, set it down with meticulous care upon the ground beside him.

Luke noticed, with an uncomfortable sense of something not quite usual in his manner, that every movement he made and every word he spoke seemed the result of a laborious and conscious effort — like the effort of one in incomplete control of his sensory nerves.

“What shall we do now?” said Luke with an air of ease and indifference. “Do you feel like strolling back to Nevilton, or shall we make a day of it and go on to Roger-Town Ferry and have dinner there?”

James gave vent to a curiously unpleasant laugh. “You go, my dear,” he said, “and leave me where I am.”

Luke began to feel thoroughly uncomfortable. He once more laid his hand caressingly on his brother’s knee. “You have really forgiven me?” he pleaded. “Really and truly?”

James Andersen had again sunk back into a semi-comatose state in his corner. “Forgive?” he muttered, as though he found difficulty in understanding the meaning of the word, “forgive? I tell you it’s nothing.”

He was silent, and then, in a still more drowsy murmur, he uttered the word “Nothing” three or four times. Soon after this he closed his eyes and relapsed into a deep slumber.

“Better leave ‘un as ‘un be,” remarked the landlord to Luke. “I’ve had my eye on ‘un for this last ‘arf hour. ‘A do seem mazed-like, looks so. Let ‘un bide where ‘un be, master. These be wonderful rumbly days for a man’s head. ‘Taint what ‘ee’s ‘ad, you understand; to my thinking, ’tis these thunder-shocks wot ‘ave worrited ’im.”

Luke nodded at the man, and standing up surveyed his brother gravely. It certainly looked as if James was settled in his corner for the rest of the morning. Luke wondered if it would be best to let him remain where he was, and sleep off his coma, or to rouse him and try and persuade him to return home. He decided to take the landlord's advice.

"Very well," he said. "I'll just leave him for a while to recover himself. You'll keep an eye to him, won't you, Mr. Titley? I'll just wander round a bit, and come back. May-be if he doesn't want to go home to dinner, we'll have a bite of something here with you."

Mr. Titley promised not to let his guest out of his sight. "I know what these thunder-shocks be," he said. "Don't you worry, mister. You'll find 'un wonderful reasonable along of an hour or so. 'Tis the weather wot 'ave him floored 'im. The liquor 'ee's put down wouldn't hurt a cat."

Luke threw an affectionate glance at his brother's reclining figure and went out. The reaction from his exaggerated anxiety left him listless and unnerved. He walked slowly across the green, towards the group of elms.

It was now past noon and the small children who had been loitering under the trees had been carried off to their mid-day meal. The place seemed entirely deserted, except for the voracious ducks in the mud of the Great Pond. He fancied at first that Phyllis Santon had disappeared with the children, and a queer feeling of disappointment descended upon him. He would have liked at least to have had the opportunity of *refusing* himself the pleasure of talking to her! He approached the enormous elm under which stood the stocks. Ah! She was still there then, his little Nevilton acquaintance. He had not seen her sooner, because she was seated on the lowest roots of the tree, her knees against the stocks themselves.

"Hullo, child!" he found himself saying, while his inner consciousness told itself that he would just say one word to her, so that her feelings should not be hurt, and then stroll off to the churchyard. "Why, you have fixed yourself in the very place where they used to make people sit, when they put them in the stocks!”

“Have I?” said the girl looking up at him without moving. “’Tis curious to think of them days! They do say folks never tasted meat nor butter in them old times. I guess it’s better to be living as we be.”

Luke’s habitual tone of sentimental moralizing had evidently set the fashion among the maids of Nevilton. Girls are incredibly quick at acquiring the mental atmosphere of a philosopher who attracts them. The simple flattery of her adoption of his colour of thought made it still more difficult for Luke to keep his vow to the Spinners of Destiny.

“Yes,” he remarked pensively, seating himself on the stocks above her. “It is extraordinary, isn’t it, to think how many generations of people, like you and me, have talked to one another here, in fine days and cloudy days, in winter and summer — and the same old pond and the same old elms listening to all they say?”

“Don’t say that, Luke dear,” protested the girl, with a little apprehensive movement of her shoulders, and a tightened clasp of her hands round her knees. “I don’t like to think of that! ’Tis lonesome enough in this place, mid-day, without thinking of them ghost-stories.”

“Why do you say ghost-stories?” inquired Luke. “There’s nothing ghostly about that dirty old pond and there’s nothing ghostly about these hollow trees — not now, any way.”

“’Tis what you said about their listening, that seems ghostly-like to me,” replied the girl. “I am always like that, you know. Sometimes, down home, I gets a grip of the terrors from staring at old Mr. Pratty’s barn. ’Tis funny, isn’t it? I suppose I was born along of Christmas. They say children born then are wonderful ones for fancying things.”

Luke prodded the ground with his cane and looked at her in silence. Conscious of a certain admiration in his look, for the awkwardness of her pose only enhanced the magnetic charm of her person, she proceeded to remove her hat and lean her head with a wistful abandonment against the rough bark of the tree.

The clouds hung heavily over them, and it seemed that at any moment the rain might descend in torrents; but so far not a drop had fallen. Queer and mysterious emotions passed through Luke's mind.

He felt in some odd way that he was at a turning-point in the tide of his existence. It almost seemed to him as though, silent and unmoving, under the roof of the little inn which he could see from where he sat, his brother was lying in the crisis of some dangerous fever. A movement, or gesture, or word, from himself might precipitate this crisis, in one direction or the other.

The girl crouched at his feet became to him, as he gazed at her, something more than a mere amorous acquaintance. She became a type, a symbol — an incarnation of the formidable writing of that Moving Finger, to which all flesh must bow. Her half-coquettish, half-serious apprehensions, about the ghostliness of the things that are always *listening*, as the human drama works itself out in their dumb presence, affected him in spite of himself. The village of Hullaway seemed at that moment to have disappeared into space, and he and his companion to be isolated and suspended — remote from all terrestrial activities, and yet aware of some confused struggle between invisible antagonists.

From the splashing ducks in the pond who, every now and then, so ridiculously turned up their squat tails to the cloudy heavens, his eye wandered to the impenetrable expectancy of the stone path which bordered the muddy edge of the water. With the quick sense of one whose daily occupation was concerned with this particular stone, he began calculating how long that time-worn pavement had remained there, and how many generations of human feet, hurrying or loitering, had passed along it since it was first laid down. What actual men, he wondered, had brought it there, from its resting-place, æons-old in the distant hill, and laid it where it now lay, slab by slab?

From where he sat he could just observe, between a gap in the trees of the Manor-Farm garden, the extreme edge of that Leonian promontory. It seemed to him as though the hill were at that moment being swept by a storm of rain. He shivered a little at the idea of how such a sweeping storm, borne on a northern wind, would invade those bare trenches and unprotected escarpments. He felt glad that his brother had selected Hullaway rather than that particular spot for his angry retreat.

With a sense of relief he turned his eyes once more to the girl reclining below him in such a charming attitude.

How absurd it was, he thought, to let these vague superstitions overmaster him! Surely it was really an indication of cowardice, in the presence of a hypothetical Fate, to make such fantastic vows as that which he had recently made. It was all part of the atavistic survival in him of that unhappy "conscience," which had done so much to darken the history of the tribes of men. It was like "touching wood" in honour of infernal deities! What was the use of being a philosopher — of being so deeply conscious of the illusive and subjective nature of all these scruples — if, at a crisis, one only fell back into such absurd morbidity? The vow he had registered in his mind an hour before, seemed to him now a piece of grotesque irrelevance — a lapse, a concession to weakness, a reversion to primitive inhibition. If it had been cowardice to make such a vow, it were a still greater cowardice to keep it.

He rose from his seat on the stocks, and began idly lifting up and down the heavy wooden bar which surmounted this queer old pillory. He finally left the thing open and gaping; its semi-circular cavities ready for any offender. Moved by a sudden impulse, the girl leant back still further against the tree, and whimsically raising one of her little feet, inserted it into the aperture. Amused at her companion's interest in this levity, and actuated by a profound girlish instinct to ruffle the situation by some startling caprice, she had no sooner got one ankle into the cavity thus prepared for it, than with a sudden effort she placed the other by its side, and coyly straightening her skirts with her hands, looked up smiling into Luke's face.

Thus challenged, as it were, by this wilful little would-be malefactor, Luke was mechanically compelled to complete her imprisonment. With a sudden vicious snap he let down the enclosing bar.

She was now completely powerless; for the most drastic laws of balance made it quite impossible that she could release herself. It thus became inevitable that he should slip down on the ground by her side, and begin teasing her, indulging himself in sundry innocent caresses which her helpless position made it difficult to resist.

It was not long, however, before Phyllis, fearful of the appearance upon the scene of some of Hullaway's inhabitants, implored him to release her.

Luke rose and with his hand upon the bar contemplated smilingly his fair prisoner.

"Please be quick!" the girl cried impatiently. "I'm getting so stiff."

"Shall I, or shan't I?" said Luke provokingly.

The corner of the girl's mouth fell and her under-lip quivered. It only needed a moment's further delay to reduce her to tears.

At that moment two interruptions occurred simultaneously. From the door of the King's Arms emerged the landlord, and began making vehement signals to Luke; while from the corner of the road to Nevilton appeared the figures of two young ladies, walking briskly towards them, absorbed in earnest conversation. These simultaneous events were observed in varying ratio by the captive and her captor. Luke was vaguely conscious of the two ladies and profoundly agitated by the appearance of the landlord. Phyllis was vaguely conscious of the landlord and was profoundly agitated by the appearance of the ladies. The young stone-carver gave a quick thoughtless jerk to the bar; and without waiting to see the result, rushed off towards the inn. The heavy block of wood, impelled by the impetus he had given it, swung upwards, until it almost reached the perpendicular. Then it descended with a crash. The girl had just time to withdraw one of her ankles. The other was imprisoned as hopeless as before.

Phyllis was overwhelmed with shame and embarrassment. She had in a moment recognized Gladys, and she felt as those Apocalyptic unfortunates in Holy Scripture are reported as feeling when they call upon the hills to cover them.

It had happened that Ralph Dangelis had been compelled to pay a flying visit to London on business connected with his proposed marriage. The two cousins, preoccupied, each of them, with their separate anxieties, had wandered thus far from home to escape the teasing fussiness of Mrs. Romer, who with her preparations for the double wedding gave neither of them any peace.

They approached quite near to the group of elms before either of them observed the unfortunate Phyllis.

“Why!” cried Gladys suddenly to her companion. “There’s somebody in the stocks!”

She went forward hastily, followed at a slower pace by the Italian. Poor Phyllis, her bundle by her side, and her cheeks tear-stained, presented a woeful enough appearance. Her first inclination was to hide her face in her hands; but making a brave effort, she turned her head towards the new-comers with a gasping little laugh.

"I put my foot in here for a joke," she stammered, "and it got caught. Please let me out, Miss Romer."

Gladys came quite near and laid her gloved hand upon the wooden bar.

"It just lifts up, Miss," pleaded Phyllis, with tears in her voice. "It isn't at all heavy."

Gladys stared at her with a growing sense of interest. The girl's embarrassment under her scrutiny awoke her Romer malice.

"I really don't know that I want to let you out in such a hurry," she said. "If it's a game you are playing, it would be a pity to spoil it. Who put you in? You must tell me that, before I set you free! You couldn't have done it yourself."

By this time Lacrima had arrived on the scene.

The shame-faced Phyllis turned to her. "Please, Miss Traffio, please, lift that thing up! It's quite easy to move."

The Italian at once laid her hands upon the block of wood and struggled to raise it; but Gladys had no difficulty in keeping the bar immoveable.

"What are you doing?" cried the younger girl indignantly. "Take your arm away!"

"She must tell us first who put her where she is," reiterated Miss Romer. "I won't have her let out 'till she tells us that!"

Phyllis looked piteously from one to the other. Then she grew desperate.

"It was Luke Andersen," she whispered.

"What!" cried Gladys. "Luke? Then he's been out walking with you? Has he? Has he? Has he?"

She repeated these words with such concentrated fury that Phyllis began to cry. But the shock of this information gave Lacrima her chance. Using all her strength she lifted the heavy bar and released the prisoner. Phyllis staggered to her feet and picked up her bundle. Lacrima handed the girl her hat and helped her to brush the dust from her clothes.

"So *you* are Luke's latest fancy are you?" Gladys said scowling fiercely at the glove-maker.

The pent-up feelings of the young woman broke forth at once. Moving a step or two away from them and glancing at a group of farm-men who were crossing the green, she gave full scope to her revenge.

"I'm only Annie Bristow's friend," she retorted. "Annie Bristow is going to marry Luke. They are right down mad on one another."

"It's a lie!" cried Gladys, completely forgetting herself and looking as if she could have struck the mocking villager.

"A lie, eh?" returned the other. "Tisn't for me to tell the tale to a young lady, the likes of you. But we be all guessing down in Mr. North's factory, who 'twas that gave Luke the pretty lady-like ring wot he lent to Annie!"

Gladys became livid with anger. "What ring?" she cried. "Why are you talking about a ring?"

"Annie, she stuck it, for devilry, into that hole in Splash-Lane stone. She pushed it in, tight as 'twere a sham diamint. And there it do bide, the lady's pretty ring, all glittery and shiny, at bottom of that there hole! We maids do go to see 'un glinsying and gleaming. It be the talk of the place, that ring be! Scarce one of the childer but 'as 'ad its try to hook 'un out. But 'tis no good. I guess Annie must have rammed it down with her mother's girt skewer. 'Tis fast in that stone anyway, for all the world to see. Folks, may-be, 'll be coming from Yeoborough, long as a few days be over, to see the lady’s ring, wot Annie threw’d away, ‘afore she said ‘yes’ to her young man!”

These final words were positively shouted by the enraged Phyllis, as she tripped away, swinging her bundle triumphantly.

It seemed for a moment as though Gladys meditated a desperate pursuit, and the infliction of physical violence upon her enemy. But Lacrima held her fast by the hand. “For heaven’s sake, cousin,” she whispered, “let her go. Look at those men watching us!”

Gladys turned; but it was not at the farm-men she looked.

Across the green towards them came the two Andersens, Luke looking nervous and worried, and his brother gesticulating strangely. The girls remained motionless, neither advancing to meet them nor making any attempt to evade them. Gladys seemed to lose her defiant air, and waited their approach, rather with the look of one expecting to be chidden than of one prepared to chide. On all recent occasions this had been her manner, when in the presence of the young stone-carver.

The sight of Lacrima seemed to exercise a magical effect upon James Andersen. He ceased at once his excited talk, and advancing towards her, greeted her in his normal tone — a tone of almost paternal gentleness.

“It is nearly a quarter to one,” said Gladys, addressing both the men. “Lacrima and I’ll have all we can do to get back in time for lunch. Let’s walk back together!”

Luke looked at his brother who gave him a friendly smile. He also looked sharply at the Hullaway labourers, who were shuffling off towards the barton of the Manor-Farm.

“I don’t mind,” he said; “though it is a dangerous time of day! But we can go by the fields, and you can leave us at Roandyke Barn.”

They moved off along the edge of the pond together.

“It was Lacrima, not I, Luke,” said Gladys presently, “who let that girl out.”

Luke flicked a clump of dock-weeds with his cane. “It was her own fault,” he said carelessly. “I thought I’d opened the thing. I was called away suddenly.”

Gladys bowed her head submissively. In the company of the young stone-carver her whole nature seemed to change. A shrewd observer might even have marked a subtle difference in her physical appearance. She appeared to wilt and droop, like a tropical flower transplanted into a northern zone.

They remained all together until they reached the fields. Then Gladys and Luke dropped behind.

“I have something I want to tell you,” said the fair girl, as soon as the others were out of hearing. “Something very important.”

“I have something to tell you too,” answered Luke, “and I think I will tell it first. It is hardly likely that your piece of news can be as serious as mine.”

They paused at a stile; and the girl made him take her in his arms and kiss her, before she consented to hear what he had to say.

It would have been noticeable to any observer that in the caresses they exchanged, Luke played the perfunctory, and she the passionate part. She kissed him thirstily, insatiably, with clinging lips that seemed avid of his very soul. When at last they moved on through grass that was still wet with the rain of the night before, Luke drew his hand away from hers, as if to emphasize the seriousness of his words.

“I am terribly anxious, dearest, about James,” he said. “We had an absurd quarrel this morning, and he rushed off to Hullaway in a rage. I found him in the inn. He had been drinking, but it was not that which upset him. He had not taken enough to affect him in that way. I am very, very anxious about him. I forget whether I've ever told you about my mother? Her mind — poor darling — was horribly upset before she died. She suffered from more than one distressing mania. And my fear is that James may go the same way."

Gladys hung her head. In a strange and subtle way she felt as though the responsibility of this new catastrophe rested upon her. Her desperate passion for Luke had so unnerved her, that she had become liable to be victimized by any sort of superstitious apprehension.

"How dreadful!" she whispered, "but he seemed to me perfectly natural just now."

"That was Lacrima's doing," said Luke. "Lacrima is at the bottom of it all. I wish, oh, I wish, she was going to marry James, instead of that uncle of yours."

"Father would never allow that," said Gladys, raising her head. "He is set upon making her take uncle John. It has become a kind of passion with him. Father is funny in these things."

"Still — it might be managed," muttered Luke thoughtfully, "if we carried it through with a high hand. We might arrange it; the world is malleable, after all. If you and I, my dear, put our heads together, Mr. John Goring might whistle for his bride."

"I *hate* Lacrima!" cried Gladys, with a sudden access of her normal spirit.

"I don't care two pence about Lacrima," returned Luke. "It is of James I am thinking."

"But she would be happy with James, and I don't want her to be happy."

"What a little devil you are!" exclaimed the stone-carver, slipping his arm round her waist.

"Yes, I know I am," she answered shamelessly. "I suppose I inherit it from father. He hates people just like that. But I am not a devil with you, Luke, am I? I wish I were!" she added, after a little pause.

"We must think over this business from every point of view," said Luke solemnly. "I cannot help thinking that if you and I resolve to do it, we can twist the fates round, somehow or another. I am sure Lacrima could save James if she liked. If you could only have seen the difference between what he was when I was called back to him just now, and what he became as soon as he set eyes upon her, you would know what I mean. He is mad about her, and if he doesn't get her, he'll go really mad. He *was* a madman just now. He nearly frightened that fool Titley into a fit."

"I don't *want* Lacrima to marry James," burst out Gladys. Luke in a moment drew his arm away, and quickened his pace.

"As you please," he said. "But I can promise you this, my friend, that if anything does happen to my brother, it'll be the end of everything between *us*."

"Why — what — how can you say such dreadful things?" stammered the girl.

Luke airily swung his stick. "It all rests with you, child. Though *we* can't marry, there's no reason why we shouldn't go on seeing each other, as we do now, forever and ever, — as long as you help me in this affair. But if you're going to sulk and talk this nonsense about 'hating' — it is probable that it will be a case of good-bye!"

The fair girl's face was distorted by a spasmodic convulsion of conflicting emotions. She bit her lip and hung her head. Presently she looked up again and flung her arms round his neck. “I’ll do anything you ask me, Luke, anything, as long as you don’t turn against me.”

They walked along for some time in silence, hand in hand, taking care not to lose sight of their two companions who seemed as engrossed as themselves in one another’s society. James Andersen was showing sufficient discretion in avoiding the more frequented foot-paths.

“Luke,” began the girl at last, “did you really give my ring to Annie Santon?”

Luke’s brow clouded in a moment. “Damn your ring!” he cried harshly. “I’ve got other things to think about now than your confounded rings. When people give me presents of that kind,” he added “I take for granted I can do what I like with them.”

Gladys trembled and looked pitifully into his face.

“But that girl said,” she murmured— “that factory girl, I mean — that it had been lost in some way; hidden, she said, in some hole in a stone. I can’t believe that you would let me be made a laughing-stock of, Luke dear?”

“Oh, don’t worry me about that,” replied the stone-carver. “May-be it is so, may-be it isn’t so; anyway it doesn’t matter a hang.”

“She said too,” pleaded Gladys in a hesitating voice, “that you and Annie were going to be married.”

“Ho! ho!” laughed Luke, fumbling with some tightly tied hurdles that barred their way; “so she said that, did she? She *must* have had her knife into you, our little Phyllis. Well, and what’s to stop me if I did decide to marry Annie?”

Gladys gasped and looked at him with a drawn and haggard face. Her beauty was of the kind that required the flush of buoyant spirits to illuminate it. The more her heart ached, the less attractive she became. She was anything but beautiful now; and, as he looked at her, Luke noticed for the first time, how low her hair grew upon her forehead.

"You wouldn't think of doing that?" she whispered, in a tone of supplication. He laughed lightly and lifting up her chin made as though he were going to kiss her, but drew back without doing so.

"Are you going to be good," he said, "and help me to get Lacrima for James?"

She threw her arms round him. "I'll do anything you like — anything," she repeated, "if you'll only let me love you!"

While this conversation was proceeding between these two, a not less interesting clash of divergent emotions was occurring between their friends. The Italian may easily be pardoned if she never for one second dreamed of the agitation in her companion's mind that had so frightened Luke. James' manner was in no way different from usual, and though he expressed his feelings in a more unreserved fashion than he had ever done before, Lacrima had been for many weeks expecting some such outbreak.

"Don't be angry with me," he was saying, as he strode by her side. "I had meant never to have told you of this. I had meant to let it die with me, without your ever knowing, but somehow — today — I could not help it."

He had confessed to her point blank, and in simple, unbroken words, the secret of his heart, and Lacrima had for some moments walked along with head averted making no response.

It would not be true to say that this revelation surprised her. It would be completely untrue to say it offended her. It did not even enter her mind that it might have been kinder to have been less friendly, less responsive, than she had been, to this queer taciturn admirer. But circumstances had really given her very little choice in the matter. She had been, as it were, flung perforce upon his society, and she had accepted, as a providential qualification of her loneliness, the fact that he was attracted towards her rather than repelled by her.

It is quite possible that had he remained untouched by the evasive appeal of her timid grace; had he, for instance, remained a provocative and impenetrable mystery at her side, she might have been led to share his feelings. But, unluckily for poor Andersen, the very fact that his feelings had been disclosed only too clearly, militated hopelessly against such an event. He was no remote, shadowy, romantic possibility to her — a closed casket of wonders, difficult and dangerous to open. He was simply a passionate and assiduous lover. The fact that he *could* love her, lowered him a little in Lacrima's esteem. True to her Pariah instincts she felt that such passion was a sign of weakness in him; and if she did not actually despise him for it, it materially lessened the interest she took in the workings of his mind. Maurice Quincunx drew her to him for the very reason that he was so sexless, so cold, so wayward, so full of whimsical caprices. Maurice, a Pariah himself, excited at the same time her maternal tenderness and her imaginative affection. If she did not feel the passion for him that she might have felt for Andersen, had Andersen remained inaccessible; that was only because there was something in Maurice's peculiar egoism which chilled such feelings at their root.

Another almost equally effective cause of her lack of response to the stone-carver's emotion was the cynical and world-deep weariness that had fallen upon her, since this dreadful marriage with Goring had become a settled event. Face to face with this, she felt as though nothing mattered very much, and as though any feeling she herself might excite in another person must needs be like the passing of a shadow across a mirror — something vague, unreal, insubstantial — something removed to a remote distance, like the voice of a person at the end of a long tunnel, or as the dream of someone who is himself a figure in a dream. If anyone, she felt, broke into the enchanted circle that surrounded her, it was as if they sought to make overtures to a person dead and buried.

It was almost with the coldness and detachment of the dead that she now answered him, and her voice went sighing across the wet fields with a desolation that would have struck a more normal mind than Andersen's as the incarnation of tragedy. He was himself, however, strung up to such a tragic note, that the despair in her tone affected him less than it would have affected another.

"I have come to feel," said she, "that I have no heart, and I feel as though this country of yours had no heart. It ought to be always cloudy and dark in this place. Sunshine here is a kind of bitter mockery."

"You do not know — you do not know what you say," cried the poor stone-carver, quickening his pace in his excitement so that it became difficult for her to keep up with him. "I have loved you, since I first saw you — that day — down at our works — when the hawthorn was out. *My* heart at any rate is deep enough, deep enough to be hurt more than you would believe, Lacrima. Oh, if things were only different! If you could only bring yourself to care for me a little — just a little! Lacrima, listen to me."

He stopped abruptly in the middle of a field and made her turn and face him. He laid his hand solemnly and imploringly upon her wrist. "Why need you put yourself under this frightful yoke? I know something of what you have had to go through. I know something, though it may be only a little, of what this horrible marriage means to you. Lacrima, for your own sake — as well as mine — for the sake of everyone who has ever cared for you — don't let them drag you into this atrocious trap.

“Trust me, give yourself boldly into my care. Let’s go away together and try our fortune in some new place! All places are not like Nevilton. I am a strong man, I know my trade, I could earn money easily to keep us both. Lacrima, don’t turn away, don’t look so helpless! After all, things might be worse, you might be already married to that man, and be buried alive forever! It is not yet too late. You are still free. I beg and implore you, by everything you hold sacred, to stop and escape before it is too late. It doesn’t matter that you don’t love me now. As long as you don’t utterly hate me all can be put right. I don’t ask you to return what I feel for you. I won’t ask it if you agree to marry me. I’ll make any contract with you you please, and swear any vow. I won’t come near you when we are together. We can live under one roof as brother and sister. The wedding-ring will be nothing between us. It will only protect you from the rest of the world. I won’t interfere with your life at all, when once I have freed you from this devil’s hole. It will only be a marriage in form, in name; everything else will be just as you please. I will obey your least wish, your least fancy. If you want to go back to your own country and to go alone, I will save up money enough to make that possible. In fact, I have now got money enough to pay your journey and I would send out more to you. Lacrima, let me help you to break away from all this. You must, Lacrima, you must and you shall! If you prefer it, we needn’t ever be married. I don’t want to take advantage of you. I’ll give you every penny I have and help you out of the country and then send you more as I earn it. It is madness, this devilish marriage they are driving you into. It is madness and folly to submit to it. It is monstrous. It is ridiculous. You are free to go, they have no hold upon you. Lacrima, Lacrima! why are you so cruel to yourself, to me, to everyone who cares for you?”

He drew breath at last, but continued to clutch her wrist with a trembling hand, glancing anxiously, as he waited, at the lessening distance that separated them from the others.

Lacrima looked at him with a pale troubled face, but her large eyes were full of tears and when she spoke her voice quivered.

"I was wrong, my friend, to say that none of you here had any heart. Your heart is large and noble. I shall never — never forget what you have now said to me. But James — but James, dear," and her voice shook still more, "I cannot, I cannot do it. There are more reasons than I can explain to you, why this thing must happen. It *has* to happen, and we must bow our heads and submit. After all, life is not very long, or very happy, at the best. Probably," — and she smiled a sad little smile,— "I should disappoint you frightfully if we did go together. I am not such a nice person as you suppose. I have queer moods — oh, such strange, strange moods! — and I know for certain that I should not make you happy.

"Shall I tell you a horrible secret, James?" Here her voice sank into a curious whisper and she laughed a low distressing laugh. "I have really got the soul, the *soul* I say, not the nerves or sense, of a girl who has lost everything, — I wish I could make you understand — who has lost self-respect and everything, — I have thought myself into this state. I don't care now — I really don't — *what* happens to me. James, dear — you wouldn't want to marry a person like that, a person who feels herself already dead and buried? Yes, and worse than dead! A person who has lost all pity, all feeling, even for herself. A person who is past even caring for the difference between right and wrong! You wouldn't want to be kind to a person like that, James, would you?"

She stopped and gazed into his face, smiling a woeful little smile. Andersen mechanically noticed that their companions had observed their long pause, and had delayed to advance, resting beneath the shelter of a wind-tossed ash-tree. The stone-carver began to realize the extraordinary and terrible loneliness of every human soul. Here he was, face to face with the one being of all beings whose least look or word thrilled him with intolerable excitement, and yet he could not as much as touch the outer margin of her real consciousness.

He had not the least idea, even at that fatal moment, what her inner spirit was feeling; what thoughts, what sensations, were passing through her soul. Nor could he ever have. They might stand together thus, isolated from all the world, through an eternity of physical contact, and he would never attain such knowledge. She would always remain aloof, mysterious, evasive. He resolved that at all events as far as he himself was concerned, there should be no barrier between them. He would lay open to her the deepest recesses of his heart.

He began a hurried incoherent history of his passion, of its growth, its subtleties, its intensity. He tried to make her realize what she had become for him, how she filled every hour of every day with her image. He explained to her how clearly and fully he understood the difficulty, the impossibility, of his ever bringing her to care for him as he cared for her.

He even went so far as to allude to Mr. Quincunx, and implored her to believe that he would be well content if she would let him earn money enough to support both her and Maurice, either in Nevilton or elsewhere, if it would cut the tragic knot of her fate to join her destiny to that of the forlorn recluse.

It almost seemed as though this final stroke of self-abnegation excited more eloquence in him than all the rest. He begged and conjured her to cut boldly loose from the Romer bonds, and marry her queer friend, if he, rather than any other, were the choice she made. His language became so vehement, his tone so impassioned and exalted, that the girl began to look apprehensively at him. Even this apprehension, however, was a thing strangely removed from reality. His reckless words rose and fell upon the air and mixed with the rising wind as if they were words remembered from some previous existence. The man's whole figure, his gaunt frame, his stooping shoulders, his long arms and lean fingers, seemed to her like something only half-tangible, something felt and seen through a dim medium of obscuring mist.

Lacrima felt vaguely as though all this were happening to someone else, to someone she had read about in a book, or had known in remote childhood. The overhanging clouds, the damp grass, the distant ash-tree with the forms of their friends beneath it, all these things seemed to group themselves in her mind, as if answering to some strange dramatic story, which was not the story of her life at all, but of some other harassed and troubled spirit.

In the depths of her mind she shrank away half-frightened and half-indifferent from this man's impassioned pleading and heroic proposals. The humorously cynical image of the hermit of Dead Man's Lane crossed her mental vision as a sort of wavering Pharos light in the dreamy twilight of her consciousness. How well she knew with what goblin-like quiver of his nostrils, with what sardonic gleam of his eyes, he would have listened to his rival's exalted rhetoric.

In some strange way she felt almost angry with this bolder, less cautious lover, for being what her poor nervous Maurice never could be. She caught herself shuddering at the thought of the drastic effort, the stern focussing of will-power which the acceptance of any one of his daring suggestions would imply. Perhaps, who can say, there had come to be a sort of voluptuous pleasure in thus lying back upon her destiny and letting herself be carried forward, at the caprice of other wills than her own.

Mingled with these other complex reactions, there was borne in upon her, as she listened to him, a queer sense of the absolute unimportance of the whole matter. The long strain upon her nerves, of her sojourn in Nevilton House, had left her physically so weary that she lacked the life-energy to supply the life-illusion. The ardour and passion of Andersen's suggestions seemed, for all their dramatic pathos, to belong to a world she had left — a world from which she had risen or sunk so completely, that all return was impossible. Her nature was so hopelessly the true Pariah-nature, that the idea of the effort implied in any struggle to escape her doom, seemed worse than the doom itself.

This inhibition of any movement of effective resistance in the Pariah-type is the thing that normal temperaments find most difficult of all to understand. It would seem almost incredible to a healthy minded person that Lacrima should deliberately let herself be driven into such a fate without some last desperate struggle. Those who find it so, however, under-estimate that curious passion of submission from which these victims of circumstance suffer, a passion of submission which is itself, in a profoundly subtle way, a sort of narcotic or drug to the wretchedness they pass through.

"I cannot do it," she repeated in a low tired voice, "though I think it's generous, beyond description, what you want to do for me. But I cannot do it. It's difficult somehow to tell you why, James dear; there are certain things that are hard to say, even to people that we love as much as I love you. For I do love you, in spite of everything. I hope you realize that. And I know that you have a deep noble heart."

She looked at him with wistful and appealing tenderness, and let her little fingers slip into his feverish hand.

When she said the words, “I do love you,” a shivering ecstasy shot through the stone-carver’s veins, followed by a ghastly chilliness, like the hand of death, as he grasped their complete meaning. The most devastating tone, perhaps, of all, for an impassioned lover to hear, is that particular tone of calm tender affection. It has the power of closing up vistas of hope more effectively than the expression of the most vigorous repulsion. There was a ring of weary finality in her voice that echoed through his mind, like the tread of coffin-bearers through a darkened passage. Things had reached their hopeless point, and the two were standing mute and silent, in the attitude of persons taking a final farewell of one another, when a noisy group of village maids, on their dilatory road to the glove-factory, made their voices audible from the further side of the nearest hedge.

They both turned instantaneously to see how this danger of discovery affected their friends, and neither of them was surprised to note that the younger Andersen had left his companion and was strolling casually in the direction of the voices. As soon as he saw that they had observed this manœuvre he began beckoning to James.

“We’d better separate, my friend,” whispered Lacrima hastily. “I’ll go back to Gladys. She and I must take the lane way and you and Luke the path by the barn. We’ll meet again before — before anything happens.”

They separated accordingly and as the two girls passed through the gate that led into the Nevilton road, they could distinctly hear, across the fields, the ringing laughter of the high-spirited glove-makers as they chaffed and rallied the two stone-carvers through the thick bramble hedge which intervened between them.

CHAPTER XVII. SAGITTARIUS

THE SUMMER OF the year whose events, in so far as they affected a certain little group of Nevilton people we are attempting to describe, seemed, to all concerned, to pass more and more rapidly, as the days began again to shorten. July gave place to August, and Mr. Goring's men were already at work upon the wheat-harvest. In the hedges appeared all those peculiar signals of the culmination of the season's glory, which are, by one of nature's most emphatic ironies, the signals also of its imminent decline.

Old-man's-beard, for instance, hung its feathery clusters on every bush; and, in shadier places, white and black briony twined their decorative leaves and delicate flowers. The blossom of the blackberry bushes was already giving place to unripe fruit, and the berries of traveller's-joy were beginning to turn red. Hips and haws still remained in that vague colourless state which renders them indistinguishable to all eyes save those of the birds, but the juicy clusters of the common night-shade— "green grapes of Proserpine" — greeted the wanderer with their poisonous Circe-like attraction, from their thrones of dog-wood and maple, and whispered of the autumn's approach. In dry deserted places the scarlet splendour of poppies was rapidly yielding ground to all those queer herbal plants, purplish or whitish in hue — the wild hyssop, or marjoram, being the most noticeable of them — which more than anything else denote the coming on of the equinox. From dusty heaps of rubbish the aromatic daisy-like camomile gave forth its pungent fragrance, and in damper spots the tall purple heads of hemp-agrimony flouted the dying valerian.

An appropriate date at the end of the month had been fixed for the episcopal visit to Nevilton; and the candidates for confirmation were already beginning, according to their various natures and temperaments, to experience that excited anticipation, which, even in the dullest intelligence, such an event arouses.

The interesting ceremony of Gladys Romer's baptism had been fixed for a week earlier than this, a fanciful sentiment in the agitated mind of Mr. Clavering having led to the selection of this particular day on the strange ground of its exact coincidence with the anniversary of a certain famous saint.

The marriage of Gladys with Dangelis, and of Lacrima with John Goring, was to take place early in September, Mrs. Romer having stipulated for reasons of domestic economy that the two events should be simultaneous.

Another project of some importance to at least three persons in Nevilton, was now, as one might say, in the air; though this was by no means a matter of public knowledge. I refer to Vennie Seldom's fixed resolution to be received into the Catholic Church and to become a nun.

Ever since her encounter in the village street with the loquacious Mr. Wone, Vennie had been oppressed by an invincible distaste for the things and people that surrounded her. Her longing to give the world the slip and devote herself completely to the religious life had been incalculably deepened by her disgust at what she considered the blasphemous introduction of the Holy Name into the Christian Candidate's political canvassing. The arguments of Mr. Taxater and the conventional anglicanism of her mother, were, compared with this, only mild incentives to the step she meditated. The whole fabric of her piety and her taste had been shocked to their foundations by the unctuous complacency of Mr. Romer's evangelical rival.

Vennie felt, as she stood aside, in her retired routine, and watched the political struggle sway to and fro in the village, as though the champions of both causes were odiously and repulsively in the wrong. The sly conservatism of the quarry-owner becoming, since the settlement of the strike, almost fulsome in its flattery of the working classes, struck her as the most unscrupulous bid for power that she had ever encountered; and when, combined with his new pose as the ideal employer and landlord, Mr. Romer introduced the imperial note, and talked lavishly of the economic benefits of the Empire, Vennie felt as though all that was beautiful and sacred in her feeling for the country of her birth, was blighted and poisoned at the root.

But Mr. Wone's attitude of mind struck her as even more revolting. The quarry-owner was at least frankly and flagrantly cynical. He made no attempt — unless Gladys' confirmation was to be regarded as such — to conciliate religious sentiment. He never went to church, and in private conversation he expressed his atheistic opinions with humorous and careless shamelessness. But Mr. Wone's intermingling of Protestant unction with political chicanery struck the passionate soul of the young girl as something very nearly approaching the "unpardonable sin." Her incisive intelligence, fortified of late by conversations with Mr. Taxater, revolted, too, against the vague ethical verbiage and loose democratic sentiment with which Mr. Wone garnished his lightest talk. Since Philip's release from prison and his reappearance in the village, she had taken the opportunity of having several interviews with the Christian Candidate's son, and these interviews, though they saddened and perplexed her, increased her respect for the young man in proportion as they diminished it for his father. With true feminine instinct Vennie found the anarchist more attractive than the socialist, and the atheist less repugnant than the missionary.

One afternoon, towards the end of the first week in August, Vennie persuaded Mr. Taxater to accompany her on a long walk. They made their way through the wood which separates the fields around Nevilton Mount from the fields around Leo's Hill. Issuing from this wood, along the path followed by every visitor to the hill who wishes to avoid its steeper slopes, they strolled leisurely between the patches of high bracken-fern and looked down upon the little church of Athelston.

Athelston was a long, rambling village, encircling the northern end of the Leonian promontory and offering shelter, in many small cottages all heavily built of the same material, to those of the workmen in the quarries who were not domiciled in Nevilton.

"It would be rather nice," said Vennie to the theologian, "if it wouldn't spoil our walk, to go and look at that carving in the porch, down there. They say it has been cleaned lately, and the figures show up more clearly."

The papal champion gravely surveyed the outline of the little cruciform church, as it shimmered, warm and mellow, in the misty sunshine at their feet.

"Yes, I know," he remarked. "I met our friend Andersen there the other day. He told me he had been doing the work quite alone. He said it was one of the most interesting things he had ever done. By the way, I am confident that that rumour we heard, of his getting unsettled in his mind, is absolutely untrue. I have never found him more sensible — you know how silent he is as a rule? When I met him he was quite eloquent on the subject of mediæval carving."

Vennie looked down and smiled — a sad little smile. "I'm afraid," she said; "that his talking so freely is not quite a good sign. But do let's go. I have never looked at those queer figures with anyone but my mother; and you know the way she has of making everything seem as if it were an ornament on her own mantelpiece."

They began descending the hill, Mr. Taxater displaying more agility than might have been expected of him, as they scrambled down between furze-bushes, rabbit-holes, and beds of yellow trefoil.

"How dreadfully I shall miss you, dear child," he said. "No one could accuse me of selfishness in furthering your wish for the religious life. Half the pleasant discoveries I've made in this charming country have been due to you."

The young girl turned and regarded him affectionately. "You have been more than a father to me," she murmured.

"Ah, Vennie, Vennie!" he protested, "you mustn't talk like that. After all, the greatest discovery we have made, is the discovery of your calling for religion. I have much to be thankful for. It is not often that I have been permitted such a privilege. If we had not been thrown together, who knows but that the influence of our good Clavering — —"

Vennie blushed scarlet at the mention of the priest's name, and to hide her confusion, buried her head in a great clump of rag-wort, pressing its yellow clusters vehemently against her cheeks, with agitated trembling hands.

When she lifted up her face, the fair hair under her hat was sprinkled with dewy moisture. "The turn of the year has come," she said. "There's mist on everything today." She smiled, with a quick embarrassed glance at her companion.

"The turn of the year has come," repeated the champion of the papacy.

They descended the slope of yet another field, and then paused again, leaning upon a gate.

"Have you ever thought how strange it is," remarked the girl, as they turned to survey the scene around them, "that those two hills should still, in a way, represent the struggle between good and evil? I always wish that my ancestors had built a chapel on Nevilton Mount instead of that silly little tower."

The theologian fixed his eyes on the two eminences which, from the point where they stood, showed so emphatically against the smouldering August sky.

"Why do you call Leo's Hill evil?" he asked.

Vennie frowned. "I always have felt like that about it," she answered. "It's an odd fancy I've got. I can't quite explain it. Perhaps it's because I know something of the hard life of the quarry-men. Perhaps it's because of Mr. Romer. I really can't tell you. But that's the feeling I have!"

"Our worthy Mr. Wone would thank you, if you lent him your idea for use in his speeches," remarked the theologian with a chuckle.

"That's just it!" cried Vennie. "It teases me, more than I can say, that the cause of the poor should be in his hands. I can't associate *him* with anything good or sacred. His being the one to oppose Mr. Romer makes me feel as though God had left us completely, left us at the mercy of the false prophets!"

"Child, child!" expostulated Mr. Taxater— "*Custodit Dominus animas sanctorum suorum; de manu peccatoris liberabit eos*."

"But it is so strange," continued Vennie. "It is one of the things I cannot understand. Why should God have to use other means than those His church offers to defeat the designs of wicked people? I wish miracles happened more often! Sometimes I dream of them happening. I dreamt the other night that an angel, with a great silver sword, stood on the top of Nevilton Mount, and cried aloud to all the dead in the churchyard. Why can't God send real angels to fight His battles, instead of using wolves in sheep's clothing like that wretched Mr. Wone?"

The champion of the papacy smiled. "You are too hard on our poor Candidate, Vennie. There's more of the sheep than the wolf about our worthy Wone, after all. But you touch upon a large question, my dear; a large question. That great circle, whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere, as St. Thomas says, must needs include many ways to the fulfilment of His ends, which are mysterious to us. God is sometimes pleased to use the machinations of the most evil men, even their sensual passions, and their abominable vices, to bring about the fulfilment of His will. And we, dear child," he added after a pause, "must follow God's methods. That is why the church has always condemned as a dangerous heresy that Tolstoyan doctrine of submission to evil. We must never submit to evil! Our duty is to use against it every weapon the world offers. Weapons that in themselves are unholy, become holy — nay! even sacred — when used in the cause of God and His church."

Vennie remained puzzled and silent. She felt a vague, remote dissatisfaction with her friend's argument; but she found it difficult to answer. She glanced sadly up at the cone-shaped mount above them, and wished that in place of that heathen-looking tower, she could see her angel with the silver sword.

"It is all very confusing," she murmured at last, "and I shall be glad when I am out of it."

The theologian laid his hand — the hand that ought to have belonged to a prince of the church — upon his companion's.

"You will be out of it soon, child," he said, "and then you will help us by your prayers. We who are the temporal monks of the great struggle are bound to soil our hands in the dust of the arena. But your prayers, and the prayers of many like you, cleanse them continually from such unhappy stains.”

Even at the moment he was uttering these profound words, Mr. Taxater was wondering in his heart how far his friend’s inclination to a convent depended upon an impulse much more natural and feminine than the desire to avoid the Mr. Romers and Mr. Wones of this poor world. He made a second rather brutal experiment.

“We must renounce,” he said, “all these plausible poetic attempts to be wiser than God’s Holy Church. That is one of the faults into which our worthy Clavering falls.”

Once more the tell-tale scarlet rushed into the cheeks of Nevilton’s little nun.

“Yes,” she answered, stooping to pluck a spray of wild basil, “I know.”

They opened the gate, and very soon found themselves at the entrance to Athelston church. Late summer flowers, planted in rows on each side of the path, met them with a ravishing fragrance. Stocks and sweet-williams grew freely among the graves; and tall standard roses held up the wealth of their second blossoming, like chalices full of red and white wine. Heavy-winged brown butterflies fluttered over the grass, like the earth-drawn spirits, Vennie thought, of such among the dead as were loath to leave the scene of their earthly pleasures. Mounted upon a step-ladder in the porch was the figure of James Andersen, absorbed in removing the moss and lichen from the carving in the central arch.

He came down at once when he perceived their approach. “Look!” he said, with a wave of his hand, “you can see what it is now.”

Obedient to his words they both gazed curiously at the quaint early Norman relief. It represented a centaur, with a drawn bow and arrow, aiming at a retreating lion, which was sneaking off in humorously depicted terror.

"That is King Stephen," said the stone-carver, pointing to the centaur. "And the beast he is aiming at is Queen Maud. Stephen's zodiacal sign was Sagittarius, and the woman's was Leo. Hence the arrow he is aiming."

Vennie's mind, reverting to her fanciful distinction between the two eminences, and woman-like, associating everything she saw with the persons of her own drama, at once began to discern, between the retreating animal and the fair-haired daughter of the owner of Leo's Hill, a queer and grotesque resemblance.

She heaved a deep sigh. What would she not give to see her poor priest-centaur aim such an arrow of triumph at the heart of his insidious temptress!

"I think you have made them stand out wonderfully clear," she said gently. "Hasn't he, Mr. Taxater?"

The stone-carver threw down the instrument he was using, and folded his arms. His dark, foreign-looking countenance wore a very curious expression.

"I wanted to finish this job," he remarked, in a slow deep voice, "before I turn into stone myself."

"Come, come, my friend," said Mr. Taxater, while Vennie stared in speechless alarm at the carver's face. "You mustn't talk like that! You people get a wrong perspective in things. Remember, this is no longer the Stone Age. The power of stone was broken once for all, when certain women of Palestine found that stone, which we've all heard of, lifted out of its place! Since then it is to wood — the wood out of which His cross was made — not to stone, that we must look."

The carver raised his long arm and pointed in the direction of Leo's Hill. "Twenty years," he said, "have I been working on this stone. I used to despise such work. Then I grew to care for it. Then there came a change. I loved the work! It was the only thing I loved. I loved to feel the stone under my hands, and to watch it yielding to my tools. I think the soul of it must have passed into my soul. It seemed to know me; to respond to me. We became like lovers, the stone and I!" He laughed an uneasy, disconcerting laugh; and went on.

"But that is not all. Another change came. *She* came into my life. I needn't tell you, Miss Seldom, who I mean. You know well enough. These things cannot be hidden. Nothing can be hidden that happens here! She came and was kind to me. She is kind to me still. But they have got hold of her. She can't resist them. Why she can't, I cannot say; but it seems impossible. She talks to me like a person in a dream. They're going to marry her to that brute Goring. You've heard that I suppose? But of course it's nothing to you! Why should it be?"

He paused, and Vennie interrupted him sharply. "It is a great deal to us, Mr. Andersen! Every cruel thing that is done in a place affects everyone who lives in the place. If Mr. Taxater and — and Mr. Clavering — thought that Miss Traffio was being driven into this marriage, I'm sure they would not allow it! They would do something — everything — to stop such an outrage. Wouldn't you, Mr. Taxater?"

"But surely, Vennie," said the theologian, "you have heard something of this? You can't be quite so oblivious, as all that, to the village scandal?"

He spoke with a certain annoyance as people are apt to do, when some disagreeable abuse, which they have sought to forget, is brought vividly before them.

Vennie, too, became irritable. The question of Lacrima's marriage had more than once given her conscience a sharp stab. "I think it is a shame to us all," she cried vehemently, "that this should be allowed. It is only lately that I've heard rumours of it, and I took them for mere gossip. It's been on my mind." She looked almost sternly at the theologian. "I meant to talk to you about it. But other things came between. I haven't seen Lacrima for several weeks. Surely, if it is as Mr. Andersen says, something ought to be done! It is a horrible, perfectly horrible idea!" She covered her face with her hands as if to shut out some unbearable vision.

James Andersen watched them both intently, leaning against the woodwork of the church-door.

"I thought you all knew of this," he said presently. "Perhaps you did; but the devil prompted you to say nothing. There are a great many things in this world which are done while people — good people — look on — and nothing said. Do you wonder now that the end of this business will be a curious one; I mean for me? For you know, of course, what is going to happen? You know why I have been chosen to work at this particular piece of carving? And why, ever since I quarrelled with Luke and drank in Hullaway Inn, I have heard voices in my head? The reason of that is, that Leo's Hill is angry because I have deserted it. Every stone I touch is angry, and keeps talking to me and upbraiding me. The voices I hear are the voices of all the stones I have ever worked with in my life. But they needn't fret themselves. The end will surprise even them. *They* do not know," — here his voice took a lower tone, and he assumed that ghastly air of imparting a piece of surprising, but quite natural, information, which is one of the most sinister tokens of monomania,— "that I shall very soon be, even as they are! Isn't it funny they don't know that, Miss Seldom? Isn't it a curious thing, Mr. Taxater? I thought of that, just now, as I chipped the dirt from King Stephen. Even *he* didn't know, the foolish centaur! And yet he has been up there, seeing this sort of thing done, for seven hundred years! I expect he has seen so many girls dragged under this arch, with sick terror in their hearts, that he has grown callous to it. A callous king! A knavish-smiling king! It makes me laugh to think how little he cares!"

The unfortunate man did indeed proceed to laugh; but the sound of it was so ghastly, even to himself, that he quickly became grave.

"Luke will be here soon," he said. "Luke has always come for me, these last few days, when his work is over. It'll be over soon now, I think. He may be here any moment; so I'd better finish the job. Don't you worry about Lacrima, ladies and gentlemen! She'll fly away with the rooks. This centaur-king will never reach *her* with his arrows. It'll be me, not her, he'll turn into stone!"

He became silent and continued his labour upon the carving. The wonder was that with his head full of such mad fancies he could manage so delicate a piece of work. Mr. Taxater and Vennie watched him in amazement.

"I think," whispered the latter presently, "we'd better wait in the churchyard till his brother comes. I don't like leaving him in this state."

Mr. Taxater nodded, and retreating to the further end of the path, they sat down together upon a flat tombstone.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Taxater, after a minute or two's silence, "that I spoke rather crossly to you just now. The truth is, the man's reference to that Italian girl made me feel ashamed of myself. I have not your excuse of being ignorant of what was going on. I have, in fact, been meaning to talk to you about it for some weeks; but I hesitated, wishing to be quite sure of my ground first.

"Even now, you must remember, we have no certain authority to go upon. But I'm afraid — I'm very much afraid — what Andersen says is true. It is evidently his own certain knowledge of it that has upset his brain.

And I'm inclined to take his word for it. I fear the girl must have told him herself; and it was the shock of hearing it from her that had this effect.

"There's no doubt he's seriously ill. But if I know anything of these things, it's rather a case of extreme nervous agitation than actual insanity. In any event, it's a relief to remember that this kind of mania is, of all forms of brain-trouble, the easiest cured."

Vennie made an imperious little gesture. "We *must* cure him!" she cried. "We must! We must! And the only way to do it, as far as I can see, is to stop this abominable marriage. Lacrima can't be doing it willingly. No girl would marry a man like that, of her own accord."

Mr. Taxater shook his head. "I'm afraid there are few people," he remarked, "that some girl or other wouldn't marry if the motive were strong enough! The question is, What is the motive in this instance?"

"What can Mr. Quincunx be thinking of?" said Vennie. "He hasn't been up to see mother lately. In fact, I don't think he has been in our house since he began working in Yeoborough. That's another abominable shame! It seems to me more and more clear that there's an evil destiny hanging over this place, driving people on to do wicked things!"

"I'm afraid we shall get small assistance from Mr. Quincunx," said the theologian. "The relations between him and Lacrima are altogether beyond my power of unravelling. But I cannot imagine his taking any sort of initiative in any kind of difficulty."

"Then what are we to do?" pleaded Vennie, looking anxiously into the diplomatist's face.

Mr. Taxater rested his chin upon the handle of his cane and made no reply.

At this moment the gate clicked behind them, and Luke Andersen appeared. He glanced hastily towards the porch; but his brother was absorbed in his work and apparently had heard nothing. Stepping softly along the edge of the path he approached the two friends. He looked very anxious and troubled.

Raising his hat to Vennie, he made a gesture with his hand in his brother's direction. "Have you seen him?" he enquired. "Has he talked to you?"

The theologian nodded.

"Oh, I think all this is dreadful!" whispered Vennie. "I'm more distressed than I can tell you. I'm afraid he's very, very ill. And he keeps talking about Miss Traffio. Surely something can be done, Mr. Andersen, to stop that marriage before it's too late?"

Luke turned upon her with an expression completely different from any she had ever seen him wear before. He seemed to have suddenly grown much older. His mouth was drawn, and a little open; and his cheeks were pale and indented by deep lines.

"I would give my soul," he said with intense emphasis, "to have this thing otherwise. I have already been to Lacrima — to Miss Traffio, I mean — but she will do nothing. She is mad, too, I think. I hoped to get her to marry my brother, off-hand, anyhow; and leave the place with him. But she won't hear of it. I can't understand her! It almost seems as if she *wanted* to marry that clown. But she can't really; it's impossible. I'm afraid that fool Quincunx is at the bottom of it."

"Something must be done! Something must be done!" wailed Vennie.

"*Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus!*" muttered Mr. Taxater. "*Speravit anima mea in Domino.*"

"I shouldn't mind so much the state he's in," continued Luke, "if I didn't remember how my mother went. She got just like this before she died. It's true my father was a brute to her. But this different kind of blow seems to have just the same effect upon James. Fool that I am, I must needs start a miserable quarrel with him when he was most worried. If anything happens, I tell you I shall feel I'm responsible for the whole thing, and no one else!"

All this while Mr. Taxater had remained silent, his chin on the handle of his cane. At last he lifted up his head.

"I think," he began softly, "I should rather like a word alone with Mr. Luke, Vennie. Perhaps you wouldn't mind wandering down the lane a step or two? Then I can follow you; and we'll leave this young man to get his brother home."

The girl rose obediently and pressed the youth's hand. "If anyone can help you," she said with a look of tender sympathy, "it is Mr. Taxater. He has helped me in my trouble."

As soon as Vennie was out of hearing the theologian looked straight into Luke's face.

"I have an idea," he said, "that if any two people can find a way out of this wretched business, it is you and I together."

"Well, sir," said Luke, seating himself by Mr. Taxater's side and glancing apprehensively towards the church-porch; "I have tried what I can do with Miss Romer, but she maintains that nothing she can say will make any difference to Miss Traffio."

"I fancy there is one thing, however, that would make a difference to Mr. Quincunx," remarked the theologian significantly. "I am taking for granted," he added, "that it is this particular marriage which weighs so heavily on your brother. He would not suffer if he saw her wedded to a man she loved?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Luke, "your idea is to appeal to Quincunx. I've thought of that, too. But I'm afraid it's hopeless. He's such an inconceivably helpless person. Besides, he's got no money."

"Suppose we secured him the money?" said Mr. Taxater.

Luke's countenance momentarily brightened; but the cloud soon settled on it again.

"We couldn't get enough," he said with a sigh. "Unless," he added, with a glimmer of humour, "you or some other noble person have more cash to dispose of than I fancy is at all likely! To persuade Quincunx into any bold activity we should have to guarantee him a comfortable annuity for the rest of his life, and an assurance of his absolute security from Romer's vengeance. It would have to be enough for Lacrima, too, you understand!"

The theologian shook the dew-drops from a large crimson rose which hung within his reach.

"What precise sum would you suggest," he asked, "as likely to be a sufficient inducement?"

The stone-carver meditated. "Those two could live quite happily," he remarked at last, "on two hundred a year."

"It is a large amount to raise," said Mr. Taxater. "I fear it is quite beyond my power and the power of the Seldoms, even if we combined our efforts. How right Napoleon was, when he said that in any campaign, the first, second, and third requisite was money!

"It only shows how foolish those critics of the Catholic Church are, who blame her for laying stress upon the temporal side of our great struggle against evil. In this world, as things go, one always strikes sooner or later against the barrier of money. The money-question lies at the bottom of every subterranean abuse and every hidden iniquity that we unmask. It's a wretched thing that it should be so, but we have to accept it; until one of Vennie's angels" — he added in an undertone— "descends to help us! Your poor brother began talking just now about the power of stone. I referred him to the Cross of our Lord — which is made of another material!

“But unfortunately in the stress of this actual struggle, you and I, my dear Andersen, find ourselves, as you see, compelled to call in the help, not of wood, but of gold. Gold, and gold alone, can furnish us with the means of undermining these evil powers!”

The texture of Mr. Taxater’s mind was so nicely inter-threaded with the opposite strands of metaphysical and Machiavellian wisdom, that this discourse, fantastic as it may sound to us, fell from him as naturally as rain from a heavy cloud. Luke Andersen’s face settled into an expression of hopeless gloom.

“The thing is beyond us, then,” he said. “I certainly can’t provide an enormous sum like that. James’ and my savings together only amount to a few hundreds. And if no quixotic person can be discovered to help us, we are bound hand and foot.

“Oh I should like,” he cried, “to make this place ring and ting with our triumph over that damned Romer!”

“*Quis est iste Rex gloriæ?*” muttered the Theologian. “*Dominus fortis et potens; Dominus potens in prœlio.*”

“I shall never dare,” went on the stone-carver, “to get my brother away into a home. The least thought of such a thing would drive him absolutely out of his mind. He’ll have to be left to drift about like this, talking madly to everyone he meets, till something terrible happens to him. God! I could howl with rage, to think how it all might be saved if only that ass Quincunx had a little gall!”

Mr. Taxater tapped the young man’s wrist with his white fingers. “I think we can put gall into him between us,” he said. “I think so, Andersen.”

“You’ve got some idea, sir!” cried Luke, looking at the theologian. “For Heaven’s sake, let’s have it! I am completely at the end of my tether.”

"This American who is engaged to Gladys is immensely rich, isn't he?" enquired Mr. Taxater.

"Rich?" answered Luke. "That's not the word for it! The fellow could buy the whole of Leo's Hill and not know the difference."

Mr. Taxater was silent, fingering the gold cross upon his watch-chain.

"It remains with yourself then," he remarked at last.

"What!" cried the astonished Luke.

"I happen to be aware," continued the diplomatist, calmly, "that there is a certain fact which our friend from Ohio would give half his fortune to know. He certainly would very willingly sign the little document for it, that would put Mr. Quincunx and Miss Traffio into a position of complete security. It is only a question of 'the terrain of negotiation,' as we say in our ecclesiastical circles."

Luke Andersen's eyes opened very widely, and the amazement of his surprise made him look more like an astounded faun than ever — a faun that has come bolt upon some incredible triumph of civilization.

"I will be quite plain with you, young man," said the theologian. "It has come to my knowledge that you and Gladys Romer are more than friends; have been more than friends, for a good while past.

"Do not wave your hand in that way! I am not speaking without evidence. I happen to know as a positive fact that this girl is neither more nor less than your mistress. I am also inclined to believe — though of this, of course, I cannot be sure — that, as a result of this intrigue, she is likely, before the autumn is over, to find herself in a position of considerable embarrassment. It is no doubt, with a view to covering such embarrassment — you understand what I mean, Mr. Andersen? — that she is making preparations to have her marriage performed earlier than was at first intended."

"God!" cried the astounded youth, losing all self-possession, "how, under the sun, did you get to know this?"

Mr. Taxater smiled. "We poor controversialists," he said, "have to learn, in self-defence, certain innocent arts of observation. I don't think that you and your mistress," he added, "have been so extraordinarily discreet, that it needed a miracle to discover your secret."

Luke Andersen recovered his equanimity with a vigorous effort. "Well?" he said, rising from his seat and looking anxiously at his brother, "what then?"

As he uttered these words the young stone-carver's mind wrestled in grim austerity with the ghastly hint thrown out by his companion. He divined with an icy shock of horror the astounding proposal that this amazing champion of the Faith was about to unfold. He mentally laid hold of this proposal as a man might lay hold upon a red-hot bar of iron. The interior fibres of his being hardened themselves to grasp without shrinking its appalling treachery.

Luke had it in him, below his urbane exterior, to rend and tear away every natural, every human scruple. He had it in him to be able to envisage, with a shamelessness worthy of some lost soul of the Florentine's Inferno, the fire-scorched walls of such a stark dilemma. The palpable suggestion which now hung, as it were, suspended in the air between them, was a suggestion he was ready to grasp by the throat.

The sight of his brother's gaunt figure, every line of which he knew and loved so well, turned his conscience to adamant. Sinking into the depths of his soul, as a diver might sink into an ice-cold sea, he felt that there was literally *nothing* he would not do, if his dear Daddy James could be restored to sanity and happiness.

Gladys? He would walk over the bodies of a hundred Gladyses, if that way, and that alone, led to his brother's restoration!

"What then?" he repeated, turning a bleak but resolute face upon Mr. Taxater.

The theologian continued: "Why, it remains for you, or for someone deputed by you, to reveal to our unsuspecting American exactly how his betrothed has betrayed him. I have no doubt that in the disturbance this will cause him we shall have no difficulty in securing his aid in this other matter. It would be a natural, an inevitable revenge for him to take. Himself a victim of these Romers, what more appropriate, what more suitable, than that he should help us in liberating their other victims? If he is as wealthy as you say, it would be a mere bagatelle for him to set our good Quincunx upon his feet forever, and Lacrima with him! It is the kind of thing it would naturally occur to him to do. It would be a revenge; but a noble revenge. He would leave Nevilton then, feeling that he had left his mark; that he had made himself felt. Americans like to make themselves felt."

Luke's countenance, in spite of his interior acquiescence, stiffened into a haggard mask of dismay.

"But this is beyond anything one has ever heard of!" he protested, trying in vain to assume an air of levity. "It is beyond everything. Actually to convey, to the very man one's girl is going to marry, the news of her seduction! Actually to 'coin her for drachmas,' as it says somewhere! It's a monstrous thing, an incredible thing!"

"Not a bit more monstrous than your original sin in seducing the girl," said Mr. Taxater.

"That is the usual trick," he went on sternly, "of you English people! You snatch at your little pleasures, without any scruple, and feel yourselves quite honourable. And then, directly it becomes a question of paying for them, by any form of public confession, you become fastidiously scrupulous."

"But to give one's girl away, to betray her in this shameless manner oneself! It seems to me the ultimate limit of scurvy meanness!"

"It only seems to you so, because the illusion of chivalry enters into it; in other words, because public opinion would condemn you! This honourable shielding of the woman we have sinned with, at every kind of cost to others, has been the cause of endless misery. Do you think you are preparing a happy marriage for your Gladys in your 'honourable' reticence? By saving her from this union with Mr. Dangelis — whom, by the way, she surely cannot love, if she loves you — you will be doing her the best service possible. Even if she refuses to make you her husband in his place — and I suppose her infatuation would stop at that! — there are other ways, besides marriage, of hiding her embarrassed condition. Let her travel for a year till her trouble is well over!"

Luke Andersen reflected in silence, his drooping figure indicating a striking collapse of his normal urbanity.

At last he spoke. "There may be something in what you suggest," he remarked slowly. "Obviously, *I* can't be the one," he added, after a further pause, "to strike this astounding bargain with the American."

"I don't see why not," said the theologian, with a certain maliciousness in his tone, "I don't see why not. You have been the one to commit the sin; you ought naturally to be the one to perform the penance."

The luckless youth distorted his countenance into such a wry grimace, that he caused it to resemble the stone gargoyles which protruded their lewd tongues from the church roof above them.

"It's a scurvy thing to do, all the same," he muttered.

"It is only relatively— 'scurvy,' as you call it," replied Mr. Taxater. "In an absolute sense, the 'scurviness' would be to let your Gladys deceive an honest man and make herself unhappy for life, simply to save you two from any sort of exposure. But as a matter of fact, I am *not* inclined to place this very delicate piece of negotiation in your hands. It would be so fatally easy for you — under the circumstances — to make some precipitate blunder that would spoil it all.

"Don't think," he went on, observing the face of his interlocutor relapsing into sudden cheerfulness, "that I let you off this penance because of its unchivalrous character. You break the laws of chivalry quite as completely by putting me into the possession of the facts.

"I shall, of course," he added, "require from you some kind of written statement. The thing must be put upon an unimpeachable ground."

Luke Andersen's relief was not materially modified by this demand. He began to fumble in his pocket for his cigarette-case.

"The great point to be certain of," continued Mr. Taxater, "is that Quincunx and Lacrima will accept the situation, when it is thus presented to them. But I don't think we need anticipate any difficulty. In case of Dangelis' saying anything to Mr. Romer, though I do not for a moment imagine he will, it would be well if you and your brother were prepared to move, if need were, to some other scene of action. There is plenty of demand for skilled workmen like yourselves, and you have no ties here."

The young man made a deprecatory movement with his hands.

"We neither of us should like that, very much, sir. James and I are fonder of Nevilton than you might imagine."

“Well, well,” responded the theologian, “we can discuss that another time. Such a thing may not be necessary. I am glad to see, my friend,” he added, “that whatever wrong you have done, you are willing to atone for it. So I trust our little plan will work out successfully. Perhaps you will look in, tomorrow night? I shall be at leisure then, and we can make our arrangements. Well, Heaven protect you, ‘*a sagitta volante in die, a negotio perambulante in tenebris*.’”

He crossed himself devoutly as he spoke, and giving the young man a friendly wave of the hand, and an encouraging smile, let himself out through the gate and proceeded to follow the patient Vennie.

He overtook his little friend somewhere not far from the lodge of that admirable captain, whose neatly-cut laurel hedge had witnessed, according to the loquacious Mrs. Fringe, the strange encounter between Jimmy Pringle and his Maker. Vennie was straying slowly along by the hedge-side, trailing her hand through the tall dead grasses. Hearing Mr. Taxater’s footsteps, she turned eagerly to meet him.

“Well,” she asked, “what does Luke say about his brother? Is it as bad as we feared?”

“He doesn’t think,” responded the theologian, “any more than I do, that the thing has gone further than common hallucination.”

“And Lacrima — poor little Lacrima! — have you decided what we must do to intervene in her case?”

“I think it may be said,” responded the scholar gravely, “that we have hit upon an effective way of stopping that marriage. But perhaps it would be pleasanter and easier for you to remain at present in ignorance of our precise plan. I know,” he added, smiling, “you do not care for hidden conspiracies.”

Vennie frowned. “I don’t see why,” she said, “there should be anything hidden about it! It seems to me, the thing is so abominable, that one would only have to make it public, to put an end to it completely.

“I hope” — she clasped her hands— “I do hope, you are not fighting the evil one with the weapons of the evil one? If you are, I am sure it will end unhappily. I am sure and certain of it!”

She spoke with a fervour that seemed almost prophetic; and as she did so, she unconsciously waved — with a pathetic little gesture of protest — the bunch of dead grasses which she held in her hand.

Mr. Taxater walked gravely by her side; his profile, in its imperturbable immobility, resembling the mask of some great mediæval ecclesiastic. The only reply he made to her appeal was to quote the famous Psalmodic invocation: “*Nisi Dominus ædificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt qui ædificant eam.*”

It would have been clear to anyone who had overheard his recent conversation with Luke, and now watched his reception of Vennie’s instinctive protest, that whatever the actions of this remarkable man were, they rested upon a massive foundation of unshakable philosophy.

There was little further conversation between them; and at the vicarage gate, they separated with a certain air of estrangement. With undeviating feminine clairvoyance, Vennie was persuaded in the depths of her mind that whatever plan had been hit upon by the combined wits of the theologian and Luke, it was one whose nature, had she known it, would have aroused her most vehement condemnation. Nor in this persuasion will the reader of our curious narrative regard her as far astray from the truth.

Meanwhile the two brothers were also returning slowly along the road to Nevilton. Had Mr. Clavering, whose opinion of the younger stone-carver was probably lower than that of any of his other critics, seen Luke during this time, he might have formed a kindlier judgment of him. Nothing could have exceeded the tact and solicitude with which he guided the conversation into safe channels. Nothing could have surpassed, in affectionate tenderness, the quick, anxious glances he every now and then cast upon his brother. There are certain human expressions which flit suddenly across the faces of men and women, which reveal, with the seal of absolute authenticity, the depth of the emotion they betray. Such a flitting expression, of a love almost maternal in its passionate depth, crossed the face of Luke Andersen at more than one stage of their homeward walk.

James seemed, on the whole, rather better than earlier in the day. The most ominous thing he did was to begin a long incoherent discourse about the rooks which kept circling over their heads on their way to the tall trees of Wild Pine. But this particular event of the rooks' return to their Nevilton roosting-place was a phase of the local life of that spot calculated to impress even perfectly sane minds with romantic suggestion. It was always a sign of the breaking up of the year's pristine bloom when they came, a token of the not distant approach of the shorter equinoctial days. They flew hither, these funereal wayfarers, from far distant feeding-grounds. They did not nest in the Nevilton woods. Nevilton was to them simply a habitation of sleep. Many of them never even saw it, except in its morning and evening twilight. The place drew them to it at night-fall, and rejected them at sunrise. In the interval they remained passive and unconscious — huddled groups of black obscure shapes, tossed to and fro in their high branches, their glossy heads full of dreams beyond the reach of the profoundest sage. Before settling down to rest, however, it was their custom, even on the stormiest evenings, to sweep round, above the roofs of the village, in wide airy circles of restless flight, uttering their harsh familiar cries. Sailing quietly on a peaceful air or roughly buffeted by rainy gusts of wind — those westerly winds that are so wild and intermittent in this corner of England — these black tribes of the twilight give a character to their places of favourite resort which resembles nothing else in the world. The cawing of rooks is like the crying of sea-gulls. It is a sound that more than anything flings the minds of men back to “old unhappy far-off things.”

The troubled soul of the luckless stone-carver went tossing forth on this particular night of embalmed stillness, driven in the track of those calmly circling birds, on the gust of a thought-tempest more formidable than any that the fall of the leaves could bring. But the devoted passion of the younger brother followed patiently every flight it took; and by the time they had reached the vicarage-gate, and turned down the station-hill towards their lodging, the wild thoughts had fallen into rest, and like the birds in the dusk of their sheltering branches, were soothed into blessed forgetfulness.

Luke had recourse, before they reached their dwelling, to the magic of old memories; and the end of that unforgettable day was spent by the two brothers in summoning up childish recollections, and in evoking the images and associations of their earliest compacts of friendship.

When he left his brother asleep and stood for a while at the open window, Luke prayed a vague heathen prayer to the planetary spaces above his head. A falling star happened to sweep downward at that moment behind the dark pyramid of Nevilton Mount, and this natural phenomenon seemed to his excited nerves a sort of elemental answer to his invocation; as if it had been the very bolt of Sagittarius, the Archer, aimed at all the demons that darkened his brother’s soul!

CHAPTER XVIII. VOICES BY THE WAY

THE MORNING WHICH followed James Andersen's completion of his work in Athelston church-porch, was one of the loveliest of the season. The sun rose into a perfectly cloudless sky. Every vestige of mist had vanished, and the half-cut corn-fields lay golden and unshadowed in the translucent air. Over the surface of every upland path, the little waves of palpable ether vibrated and quivered. The white roads gleamed between their tangled hedges as if they had been paved with mother-of-pearl. The heat was neither oppressive nor sultry. It penetrated without burdening, and seemed to flow forth upon the earth, as much from the general expanse of the blue depths as from the limited circle of the solar luminary.

James Andersen seemed more restored than his brother had dared to hope. They went to their work as usual; and from the manner in which the elder stone-carver spoke to his mates and handled his tools, none would have guessed at the mad fancies which had so possessed him during the previous days.

Luke was filled with profound happiness and relief. It is true that, like a tiny cloud upon the surface of this clear horizon, the thought of his projected betrayal of his mistress remained present with him. But in the depths of his heart he knew that he would have betrayed twenty mistresses, if by that means the brother of his soul could be restored to sanity.

He had already grown completely weary of Gladys. The clinging and submissive passion with which the proud girl had pursued him of late had begun to irritate his nerves. More than once — especially when her importunities interrupted his newer pleasures — he had found himself on the point of hating her. He was absolutely cynical — and always had been — with regard to the ideal of faithfulness in these matters. Even the startling vision of the indignant Dangelis putting into her hands — as he supposed the American might naturally do — the actual written words with which he betrayed her, only ruffled his equanimity in a remote and even half-humorous manner. He recalled her contemptuous treatment of him on the occasion of their first amorous encounter and it was not without a certain malicious thrill of triumph that he realized how thoroughly he had been revenged.

He had divined without difficulty on the occasion of their return from Hullaway that Gladys was on the point of revealing to him the fact that she was likely to have a child; and since that day he had taken care to give her little opportunity for such revelations. Absorbed in anxiety for James, he had been anxious to postpone this particular crisis between them till a later occasion.

The situation, nevertheless, whenever he had thought of it, had given him, in spite of its complicated issues, an undeniable throb of satisfaction. It was such a complete, such a triumphant victory, over Mr. Romer. Luke in his heart had an unblushing admiration for the quarry-owner, whose masterly attitude towards life was not so very different from his own. But this latent respect for his employer rather increased than diminished his complacency in thus striking him down. The remote idea that, in the whirligig of time, an offspring of his own should come to rule in Nevilton house — as seemed by no means impossible, if matters were discreetly managed — was an idea that gave him a most delicate pleasure.

As they strolled back to breakfast together, across the intervening field, and admired the early dahlias in the station-master's garden, Luke took the risk of testing his brother on the matter of Mr. Quincunx. He was anxious to be quite certain of his ground here, before he had his interview with the tenant of the Gables.

"I wish," he remarked casually, "that Maurice Quincunx would show a little spirit and carry Lacrima off straight away."

James looked closely at him. "If he would," he said, "I'd give him every penny I possess and I'd work day and night to help them! O Luke — Luke!" he stretched out his arm towards Leo's Hill and pronounced what seemed like a vow before the Eumenides themselves; "if I could make her happy, if I could only make her happy, I would be buried tomorrow in the deepest of those pits."

Luke registered his own little resolution in the presence of this appeal to the gods. "Gladys? What is Gladys to me compared with James? All girls are the same. They all get over these things."

Meanwhile James Andersen was repeating in a low voice to himself the quaint name of his rival.

"He is an ash-root, a tough ash-root," he muttered. "And that's the reason he has been chosen. There's nothing in the world but the roots of trees that can undermine the power of Stone! The trees can do it. The trees will do it. What did that Catholic say? He said it was Wood against Stone. That's the reason I can't help her. I have worked too long at Stone. I am too near Stone. That's the reason Quincunx has been chosen. She and I are under the power of Stone, and we can't resist it, any more than the earth can! But ash-tree roots can undermine anything. If only she would take my money, if only she would."

This last aspiration was uttered in a voice loud enough for Luke to hear; and it may be well believed that it fortified him all the more strongly in his dishonourable resolution.

During breakfast James continued to show signs of improvement. He talked of his mother, and though his conversation was sprinkled with somewhat fantastic imagery, on the whole it was rational enough.

While the meal was still in progress, the younger brother observed through the window the figure of a woman, moving oddly backwards and forwards along their garden-hedge, as if anxious at the same time to attract and avoid attention. He recognized her in a moment as the notorious waif of the neighborhood, the somewhat sinister Witch-Bessie. He made an excuse to his brother and slipped out to speak to her.

Witch-Bessie had grown, if possible, still more dehumanized since when two months ago she had cursed Gladys Romer. Her skin was pallid and livid as parchment. The eyes which stared forth from her wrinkled expressionless face were of a dull glaucous blue, like the inside of certain sun-bleached sea-shells. She was dressed in a rough sack-cloth petticoat, out of which protruded her stockingless feet, only half concealed by heavy labourer's boots, unlaced and in large holes. Over her thin shoulders she wore a ragged woolen shawl which served the office not only of a garment, but also of a wallet; for, in the folds of it, were even now observable certain half-eaten pieces of bread, and bits of ancient cheese, which she had begged in her wanderings. In one of her withered hands she held a large bunch of magenta-coloured, nettle-like flowers, of the particular species known to botanists as marsh-wound-wort. As soon as Luke appeared she thrust these flowers into his arms.

"Gathered 'un for 'ee," she whispered, in a thin whistling voice, like the soughing of wind in a bed of rushes. "They be capital weeds for them as be moon-smitten. Gathered 'un, up by Seven Ashes, where them girt main roads do cross. Take 'un, mister; take 'un and thank an old woman wot loves both of ‘ee, as heretofore she did love your long-sufferin’ mother. I were bidin’ down by Minister’s back gate, expectin’ me bit of oddments, when they did tell I, all sudden-like, as how he’d been taken, same as *she* was.”

“It’s most kind of you, Bessie,” said Luke graciously. “You and I have always been good friends.”

The old woman nodded. “So we be, mister, and let none say the contrary! I’ve a dangled ‘ee, afore-now, in these very arms. Dost mind how ‘ee drove that ramping girt dog out of Long-Load Barton when the blarsted thing were for laying hold of I?”

“But what must I do with these?” asked the stone-carver, holding the bunch of pungent scented flowers to his face.

“That’s wot I was just a-going to tell ‘ee,” whispered the old woman solemnly. “I suppose *he’s* in there now, eh? Let ‘un be, poor man. Let ‘un be. May-be the Lord’s only waitin’ for these ’ere weeds to mend ’is poor swimey wits. You do as I do tell ‘ee, mister, and ‘twill be all smoothed out, as clean as church floor. You take these blessed weeds,— ‘viviny-lobs’ my old mother did call ’em — and hang ’em to dry till they be dead and brown. Then doddy a sprinkle o’ good salt on ’em, and dip ’em in clear water. Be you followin’ me, mister Luke?”

The young man nodded.

“Then wot you got to do, is for to strike ’em against door-post, and as you strikes ’em, you says, same as I says now.” And Witch-Bessie repeated the following archaic enchantment.

Marshy hollow woundy-wort,
Growing on the holy dirt,
In the Mount of Calvary
There was thou found.

In the name of sweet Jesus
I take thee from the ground.
O Lord, effect the same,
That I do now go about.

Luke listened devoutly to these mysterious words, and repeated them twice, after the old woman. Their two figures, thus concerted in magical tutelage, might, for all the youth’s modern attire, have suggested to a scholarly observer some fantastic heathen scene out of Apuleius. The spacious August sunshine lay splendid upon the fields about them, and light-winged swallows skimmed the surface of the glittering railway-line as though it had been a flowing river.

When she was made assured in her mind that her pupil fully understood the healing incantation, Witch-Bessie shuffled off without further words. Her face, as she resumed her march in the direction of Hullaway, relapsed into such corpse-like rigidity, that, but for her mechanical movement, one might have expected the shameless flocks of starlings who hovered about her, to settle without apprehension upon her head.

The two brothers labored harmoniously side by side in their work-shop all that forenoon. It was Saturday, and their companions were anxious to throw down their tools and clear out of the place on the very stroke of the one o’clock bell.

James and Luke were both engaged upon a new stone font, the former meticulously chipping out its angle-mouldings, and the latter rounding, with chisel and file, the capacious lip of its deep basin. It was a cathedral font, intended for use in a large northern city.

Luke could not resist commenting to his brother, in his half-humorous half-sentimental way, upon the queer fact that they two — their heads full of their own anxieties and troubles — should be thus working upon a sacred font which for countless generations, perhaps as long as Christianity lasted, would be associated with so many strange and mingled feelings of perturbation and hope.

"It's a comical idea," he found himself saying, though the allusion was sufficiently unwise, "this idea of Gladys' baptism."

He regretted his words the moment they were out of his mouth; but James received them calmly.

"I once heard," he answered, "I think it was on the sands at Weymouth, two old men discussing quite reverently and gravely whether an infant, baptized before it was born, would be brought under the blessing of the Church. I thought, as I listened to them, how vulgar and gross-minded our age had become, that I should have to tremble with alarm lest any flippant passer-by should hear their curious speculation. It seemed to me a much more important matter to discuss, than the merits of the black-faced Pierrots who were fooling and howling just beyond. This sort of seriousness, in regard to the strange borderland of the Faith, has always seemed to me a sign of pathetic piety, and the very reverse of anything blasphemous."

Luke had made an involuntary movement when his brother's anecdote commenced. The calmness and reasonableness with which James had spoken was balm and honey to the anxious youth; but he could not help speculating in his heart whether his brother was covertly girding at him. Did he, he wondered, realize how far things had gone between him and the fair-haired girl?

"It's the sort of question, at any rate," he remarked rather feebly, "that would interest our friend Sir Thomas Browne. Do you remember how we read together that amazing passage in the Urn Burial?"

"'But the iniquity of oblivion,'" quoted James in answer, "'blindly scattereth her Poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the Pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana; he is almost lost that built it. Time has spared the epitaph of Hadrian's Horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal durations; and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon without the favour of the everlasting register.… Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings; we slightly remember our felicities and the smartest strokes of affliction leave but short smart upon us. To weep into Stones are fables.'"

He pronounced these last words with a slow and emphatic intonation.

"Fables?" he repeated, resting his hand upon the rim of the font, and lowering his voice, so as not to be heard by the men outside. "He calls them fables because he has never worked as we do — day in and day out — among nothing else. The reason he says that to weep into Stones are fables is that his own life, down at that pleasant Norwich, was such a happy one. To weep into Stones! He means, of course, that when you have endured more than you can bear, you become a Stone. But that is no fable! Or if it was once, it isn't so today. Mr. Taxater said the Stone-Age was over. In my opinion, Luke, the Stone-Age is only now beginning. The reason of that is, that whereas, in former times, Stone was moulded by men; now, men are moulded by Stone. We have receded, instead of advancing; and the iniquity of Time which turned animals into men, is now turning men back into the elements!"

Luke cursed bitterly in his heart the rhythmic incantations of the old Norwich doctor. He had been thinking of a very different passage from that which his brother recalled. To change the conversation he asked how James wished to spend their free afternoon.

Andersen's tone changed in a moment, and he grew rational and direct. "I am going for a walk," he said, "and I think perhaps, if you don't mind, I'll go alone. My brain feels clouded and oppressed. A long walk ought to clear it. I think it will clear it; don't you?" This final question was added rather wistfully.

"I'm sure it will. Oh, it certainly will! I expect the sun has hit you a bit; or perhaps, as Mr. Taxater would say, your headache is a relative one, due to my dragging in such things as Urn Burial. But I don't quite like your going alone, Daddy James."

The elder brother smiled affectionately at him, but went on quietly with his work without replying.

When they had finished their mid-day meal they both loitered out into the field together, smoking and chatting. The afternoon promised to be as clear and beautiful as the morning, and Luke's spirits rose high. He hoped his brother, at the last moment, would not have the heart to reject his company.

The fineness of the weather, combined with the Saturday half-holiday, was attracting abroad all manner of Nevilton folk. Lads and maids, in merry noisy groups, passed and repassed. The platform of the little station was crowded with expectant passengers waiting for the train to Yeoborough.

As the brothers stood together, carelessly turning over with their sticks the fetid heads of a patch of meadow fungi, they observed two separate couples issuing, one after another, from the little swing-gate that opened on the level-crossing. They recognized both couples almost simultaneously.

The first pair consisted of Annie Bristow and Phyllis Santon; the second of Vennie Seldom and Mr. Clavering.

The two girls proceeded, arm-in-arm, up the sloping path that led in the direction of Hullaway. Vennie and Mr. Clavering advanced straight towards the brothers. Luke had time to wonder vaguely whether this conjunction of Vennie and her Anglican pastor had any connection with last night's happenings.

He was too closely associated with that Gargantuan gossip, Mrs. Fringe, not to be aware that for many weeks past Miss Seldom and the young clergyman had studiously avoided one another. That they should now be walking together, indicated, to his astute mind, either a quarrel between the young lady and Mr. Taxater, or an estrangement between the vicar and Gladys. Luke was the sort of philosopher who takes for granted that in all these situations it is love for love, or hate for hate, which propels irresistibly the human mechanism and decides the most trifling incidents.

James looked angry and embarrassed at the appearance of the pair; but they were too close upon them for any escape to be possible.

"How are you today, Andersen?" began Mr. Clavering, with his usual well-meaning but indiscreet impulsiveness. "Miss Seldom tells me she was nervous about you last night. She was afraid you were working too hard."

Vennie gave him a quick reproachful glance, and made a deprecatory movement with her hands. "Are all men," she thought, "either without scruple or without common-sense?"

"I'm glad to see that I was quite mistaken," she hastened to add. "You don't look at all tired today, Mr. Andersen. And no wonder, with such a perfectly lovely afternoon! And how are you, Mr. Luke? I haven't been down to see how that Liverpool font is getting on, for ever so long. I believe you'll end by being quite as famous as your father."

Luke received this compliment in his most courtly manner. He was always particularly anxious to impress persons who belonged to the “real” upper classes with his social sang-froid.

He was at this precise moment, however, a little agitated by the conduct of the two young people who had just passed up the meadow. Instead of disappearing into the lane beyond, they continued to loiter at the gate, and finally, after an interlude of audible laughter and lively discussion, they proceeded to stretch themselves upon the grass. The sight of two amiable young women, both so extremely well known to him, and both in evident high spirits, thus enjoying the sunshine, filled our faun-like friend’s mind with the familiar craving for frivolity. He caught Mr. Clavering’s glance fixed gravely upon him. He also, it appeared, was not oblivious of the loitering villagers.

“I think there are other members of your flock, sir,” said James Andersen to the young vicar, “who are at the present moment more in need of your help than I am. What I need at this moment is air — air. I should like to be able to wander over the Quantocks this afternoon. Or better still, by the edge of the sea! We all need more air than we get here. It is too shut-in here — too shut-in and oppressive. There’s too much stone about; and too much clay. Yes, and the trees grow too close together. Do you know, Miss Seldom, what I should like to do? I should like to pull down all the houses — I mean all the big houses — and cut down all the trees, and then perhaps the wind would be free to blow. It’s wind we want — all of us — wind and air to clear our brains! Do you realize” — his voice once more took that alarming tone of confidential secretiveness, which had struck them so disagreeably the preceding evening;— “do you realize that there are evil spirits abroad in Nevilton, and that they come from the Hill over there?” He pointed towards the Leonian escarpments which could be plainly seen from where they stood, slumbering in the splendid sunshine.

“It looks more like a sphinx than a lion today, doesn’t it, Miss Seldom? Oh, I should like to tear it up, bodily, from where it lies, and fling it into the sea! It blocks the horizon. It blocks the path of the west-wind. I tell you it is the burden that weighs upon us all! But I shall conquer it yet; I shall be master of it yet!” He was silent a few seconds, while a look of supreme disappointment clouded the face of his brother; and the two new-comers gazed at him in alarm.

“I must start at once,” he exclaimed abruptly. “I must get far, far off. It is air I need, air and the west-wind! No,” he cried imperiously, when Luke made a movement, as if to take leave of their companions. “I must go alone. Alone! That is what I must be today: alone — and on the hills!”

He turned impatiently as he spoke; and without another word strode off towards the level-crossing.

“Surely you will not let him go like that, Mr. Andersen?” cried Vennie, in great distress.

“It would do no good,” replied Luke, watching his brother pass through the gate and cross the track. “I should only make him much worse if I tried to follow him. Besides, he wouldn’t let me. I don’t think he’ll come to any harm. I should have a different instinct about it if there were real danger. Perhaps, as he says, a good long walk may really clear his brain.”

“I do pray your instinct is to be relied on,” said Vennie, anxiously watching the tall figure of the stone-carver, as he ascended the vicarage hill.

“Well, if you’re not going to do your duty, Andersen, I’m going to do mine!” exclaimed the vicar of Nevilton, setting off, without further parley, in pursuit of the fugitive.

"Stop! Mr. Clavering, I'll come with you," cried Vennie. And she followed her impulsive friend towards the gate.

As they ascended the hill together, keeping Andersen in sight, Clavering remarked to his companion, "I believe that dissolute young reprobate refused to look after his brother simply because he wanted to talk to those two girls."

"What two girls?" enquired Vennie.

"Didn't you see them?" muttered the clergyman crossly. "The Bristow girl and little Phyllis Santon. They were hanging about, waiting for him."

"I'm sure you are quite wrong," replied Vennie. "Luke may have his faults, but he is devoted — madly devoted — to his brother."

"Not at all," cried Clavering almost rudely. "I know the man better than you do. He is entirely selfish. He is a selfish, sensual pleasure-seeker! He may be fond of his brother in his fashion, just because he *is* his brother, and they have the same tastes; but his one great aim is his own pleasure. He has been the worst influence I have had to contend with, in this whole village, for some time back!"

His voice trembled with rage as he spoke. It was impossible, even for the guileless Vennie, not to help wondering in her mind whether the violence of her friend's reprobation was not impelled by an emotion more personal than public. Her unlucky knowledge of what the nature of such an emotion might be did not induce her to yield meekly to his argument.

"I don't believe he saw the people you speak of any more than I did," she said.

"Saw them?" cried the priest wrathfully, quickening his pace, as Andersen disappeared round the corner of the road, so that Vennie had to trot by his side like a submissive child. "I saw the look he fixed on them. I know that look of his! I tell you he is the kind of man that does harm wherever he goes. He’s a lazy, sensual, young scoundrel. He ought to be kicked out of the place.”

Vennie sighed deeply. Life in the world of men was indeed a complicated and entangled matter. She had turned, in her agitation about the stone-carver, and in her reaction from Mr. Taxater’s reserve, straight to the person she loved best of all; and this was her reward, — a mere crude outburst of masculine jealousy!

They rounded the corner by her own gate, where the road to Athelston deviates at right angles. James Andersen was no longer in sight.

“Where the devil has the man got to?” cried the astonished clergyman, raging at himself for his ill-temper, and raging at Vennie for having been the witness of it.

The girl glanced up the Athelston road; and hastening forward a few paces, scanned the stately slope of the Nevilton west drive. The unfortunate man was nowhere to be seen.

From where they now stood, the whole length of the village street was visible, almost as far as the Goat and Boy. It was full of holiday-making young people, but there was no sign of Andersen’s tall and unmistakable figure.

“Oh, this is dreadful!” cried Vennie. “What are we to do? Where can he have gone?”

Hugh Clavering looked angrily round. He was experiencing that curious sense, which comes to the best of men sometimes, of being the special and selected object of providential mockery.

“There are only two ways,” he said. “Either he’s slipped down through the orchards, along your wall, or he’s made off to Nevilton Mount! If that’s what he’s done, he must be now behind that hedge, over there. We should see him otherwise.”

Vennie gazed anxiously in the direction indicated. “He can’t have gone into our garden?” she said. “No, he’d never do that! He talked about air and hills. I expect he’s where you say. Shall we go on?”

They hurried down the road until they reached a gate, on the further side of the hedge which ran to the base of Nevilton Mount. Here they entered the field. There was no sign of the fugitive; but owing to certain inequalities in the ground, and the intervention of some large elm-trees, it was still quite possible that he was only a few hundred yards in front of them. They followed the line of the hedge with all the haste they could; trusting, at every turn it made, that they would discover him. In this manner they very soon arrived at the base of the hill.

“I feel sure he’s somewhere in front of us!” muttered Clavering. “How annoying it is! It was outrageous of that young scoundrel to let him go like this; — wandering about the country in that mad state! If he comes to any harm, I shall see to it that that young man is held responsible.”

“Quick!” sighed Vennie breathlessly, “we’d better climb straight to the top. We *must* find him there!”

They scrambled over the bank and proceeded to make their way as hurriedly as they could through the entangled undergrowth. Hot and exhausted they emerged at last upon the level summit. Here, the grotesque little tower mocked at them with its impassive grey surface. There was no sign of the man they sought; but seated on the grass with their backs to the edifice were the figures of the complacent Mr. Wone and one of his younger children, engaged in the agreeable occupation of devouring a water-melon. The mouth and chin of the Christian Candidate were bespattered with the luscious juice of this delectable fruit, and laid out carefully upon a magazine on his knees, was a pleasing arrangement of rind-peelings and well-sucked pips.

Mr. Wone waved his hand in polite acknowledgment of Clavering's salute. He removed his hat to Vennie, but apologized for not rising. "Taking a little holiday, you observe!" he remarked with a satisfied smile. "I see you also are inclined to make the most of this lovely summer day."

"You haven't by any chance seen the elder Andersen, have you?" enquired Clavering.

"Not a bit of it," replied the recumbent man. "I suppose I cannot offer you a piece of melon, Miss Seldom?"

The two baffled pursuers looked at one another in hopeless disappointment.

"We've lost him," muttered the priest. "He must have gone through your orchard after all."

Mr. Wone did not miss this remark. "You were looking for our good James? No. We haven't seen anything of him. No doubt he is with his brother somewhere. I believe they usually spend their Saturdays out at Hullaway."

"When does the election come off, Mr. Wone?" enquired Vennie, hastily, extremely unwilling that her tactless companion should disclose the purpose of their search.

"In a week's time from next Monday," replied the Candidate. "This will be my last free day till then. I have to make thirty speeches during the next seven days. Our cause goes well. I believe, with God's great help, we are practically certain of victory. It will be a great event, Miss Seldom, a great event."

Mr. Clavering made a hopeless sign to Vennie, indicative of the uselessness of any further steps to retake the runaway.

"I think your side will win in the country generally," he remarked. "As to this district, I cannot tell. Mr. Romer has strengthened himself considerably by his action after the strike."

The candidate placed a carefully selected piece of fruit in his mouth, and called to his little boy, who was scratching his initials with a knife upon the base of the tower.

"He will be beaten all the same," he said. "He is bound to be beaten. The stars in their courses must fight against a man like that. I feel it in the air; in the earth; in these beautiful trees. I feel it everywhere. He has challenged stronger powers than you or me. He has challenged the majesty of God Himself. I'll give you the right" — he went on in a voice that mechanically assumed a preacher's tone— "to call me a liar and a false prophet, if by this time, in ten days, the oppressor of the poor does not find himself crushed and beaten!"

"I am afraid right and wrong are more strangely mixed in this world than all that, Mr. Wone," Vennie found herself saying, with a little weary glance over the wide sun-bathed valleys extended at their feet.

"Pardon me, pardon me, young lady," cried the Candidate. "In this great cause there can be no doubt, no question, no ambiguity. The evolution of the human race has reached a point when the will of God must reveal itself in the triumph of love and liberty. Nothing else matters. All turns upon this. That is why I feel that my campaign is more than a political struggle. It is a religious struggle, and on our side are the great moral forces that uphold the world!"

Vennie's exhausted nerves completely broke down upon this.

"Shall we go?" she said, touching her companion on the sleeve.

Clavering nodded, and bade the melon-eater "good afternoon," with a brusque gesture.

As they went off, he turned on his heel. "The will of God, Mr. Wone, is only to be found in the obedient reception of His sacraments."

The Christian candidate opened his mouth with amazement. “Those young people,” he thought to himself, “are up to no good. They’ll end by becoming papists, if they go on like this. It’s extraordinary that the human mind should actually *prefer* slavery to freedom!”

Meanwhile the man whose mysterious evasion of his pursuers had resulted in this disconcerting encounter was already well-advanced on his way towards the Wild Pine ridge. He had, as a matter of fact, crossed the field between the West drive and the Vicarage-garden, and skirting the orchards below Nevilton House, had plunged into the park.

A vague hope of meeting Lacrima — an instinctive rather than a conscious feeling — had led him in this direction. Once in the park, the high opposing ridge, crowned with its sentinel-line of tall Scotch-firs, arrested his attention and drew him towards it. He crossed the Yeoborough road and ascended the incline of Dead Man’s Lane.

As he passed the cottage of his rival, he observed Mr. Quincunx energetically at work in his garden. On this occasion the recluse was digging up, not weeds, but young potatoes. He was in his shirt-sleeves and looked hot and tired.

Andersen leaned upon the little gate and observed him with curious interest. “Why isn’t she here?” he muttered to himself. Then, after a pause: “He is an ash-root. Let him drag that house down! Why doesn’t he drag it down, with all its heavy stones? And the Priory too? And the Church; — yes; and the Church too! He burrows like a root. He looks like a root. I must tell him all these things. I must tell him why he has been chosen, and I have been rejected!” He opened the gate forthwith and advanced towards the potato-digger.

Mr. Quincunx might have struck the imagination of a much less troubled spirit than that of the poor stone-carver as having a resemblance to a root.

His form was at once knotted and lean, fibrous and delicate. His face, by reason of his stooping position, was suffused with a rich reddish tint, and his beard was dusty and unkempt. He rose hastily, on observing his visitor.

"People like you and me, James, are best by ourselves at these holiday-times," was his inhospitable greeting. "You can help me with my potatoes if you like. Or you can tell me your news as I work. Or do you want to ask me any question?"

He uttered these final words in such a tone as the Delphic oracle might have used, when addressing some harassed refugee.

"Has *she* been up here today?" said the stone-carver.

"I like the way you talk," replied the other. "Why should we mention their names? When I say people, I mean girls. When I say persons, I mean girls. When I say young ladies, I mean girls. And when you say 'she' you mean our girl."

"Yours!" cried the demented man; "she is yours — not ours. She is weighed down by this evil Stone, — weighed down into the deep clay. What has she to do with me, who have worked at the thing so long?"

Mr. Quincunx leant upon his hoe and surveyed the speaker. It occurred to him at once that something was amiss. "Good Lord!" he thought to himself, "the fellow has been drinking. I must get him out of this garden as quickly as possible."

"She loves you," Andersen went on, "because you are like a root. You go deep into the earth and no stone can resist you. You twine and twine and twine, and pull them all down. They are all haunted places, these houses and churches; all haunted and evil! They make a man's head ache to live in them. They put voices into a man's ears. They are as full of voices as the sea is full of waves."

"You are right there, my friend," replied Mr. Quincunx. "It's only what I've always said. Until people give up building great houses and great churches, no one will ever be happy. We ought to live in bushes and thickets, or in tents. My cottage is no better than a bush. I creep into it at night, and out again in the morning. If its thatch fell on my head I should hardly feel it."

"You wouldn't feel it, you wouldn't!" cried the stone-carver. "And the reason of that is, that you can burrow like a root. I shouldn't feel it either, but for a different reason."

"I expect you'd better continue your walk," remarked Mr. Quincunx. "I never fuss myself about people who come to see me. If they come, they come. And when they go, they go."

The stone-carver sighed and looked round him. The sun gleamed graciously upon the warm earth, danced and sparkled upon the windows of the cottage, and made the beads of sweat on Mr. Quincunx's brow shine like diamonds.

"Do you think," he said, while the potato-digger turned to his occupation, "that happiness or unhappiness predominates in this world?"

"Unhappiness!" cried the bearded man, glaring at his acquaintance with the scowl of a goblin. "Unhappiness! Unhappiness! Unhappiness! That is why the only wise way to live is to avoid everything. That's what I always do. I avoid people, I avoid possessions, I avoid quarrels, I avoid lust, and I avoid love! My life consists in the art of avoiding things."

"She doesn't want happiness," pleaded the obsessed stone-carver. "And *her* love is enough. She only wants to escape."

"Why do you keep bringing Lacrima in?" cried the recluse. "She is going to marry John Goring. She is going to be mistress of the Priory."

A convulsive shock of fury flashed across the face of Andersen. He made a movement that caused his interlocutor to step hurriedly backwards. But the emotion passed as rapidly as it had come.

"You would avoid everything," he said cunningly. "You would avoid everything you hate, if someone — myself for instance — or Luke — made it easy for you to save her from these houses and these churches! Luke will arrange it. He is not like us. He is wise. He knows the world. And you will only have to go on just as before, to burrow and twine! But you'll have done it. You'll have saved her from them. And then it will not matter how deep they bury me in the quarries of Leo's Hill!"

"Is he drunk? Or is he not drunk?" Mr. Quincunx wondered. The news of Andersen's derangement, though it had already run like wild-fire through the village, had not yet reached his ears. For the last few days he had walked both to and from his office, and had talked to no one.

A remarkable peculiarity in this curious potato-digger was, however, his absolute and unvarying candour. Mr. Quincunx was prepared to discuss his most private concerns with any mortal or immortal visitor who stepped into his garden. He would have entered into a calm philosophical debate upon his love-affairs with a tramp, with a sailor, with the post-man, with the chimney-sweep, with the devil; or, as in this case, with his very rival in his sweetheart's affection! There was really something touching and sublime about this tendency of his. It indicated the presence, in Mr. Quincunx, of a certain mystical reverence for simple humanity, which completely contradicted his misanthropic cynicism.

"Certainly," he remarked, on this occasion, forgetting, in his interest in the subject, the recent strange outburst of his companion. "Certainly, if Lacrima and I had sufficient money to live upon, I would be inclined to risk marrying. You would advise me to, then; wouldn’t you, Andersen? Anyone would advise me to, then. It would be absurd not to do it. Though, all the same, there are always great risks in two people living together, particularly nervous people, — such as we are. But what do you think, Andersen? Suppose some fairy god-mother did give us this money, would you advise us to risk it? Of course, we know, girls like a large house and a lot of servants! She wouldn’t get that with me, because I hate those things, and wouldn’t have them, even if I could afford it. What would you advise, Andersen, if some mad chance did make such a thing possible? Would it be worth the risk?”

An additional motive, in the queerly constituted mind of the recluse, for making this extraordinary request, was the Pariah-like motive of wishing to propitiate the stone-carver. Parallel with his humorous love of shocking people, ran, through Mr. Quincunx’s nature, the naive and innocent wish to win them over to his side; and his method of realizing this wish was to put himself completely at their mercy, laying his meanest thoughts bare, and abandoning his will to their will, so that for very shame they could not find it in them to injure him, but were softened, thrown off their guard, and disarmed. Mr. Quincunx knew no restraint in these confessions by the way, in these appeals to the voices and omens of casual encounter. He grew voluble, and even shameless. In quiet reaction afterwards, in the loneliness of his cottage, he was often led to regret with gloomy remorse the manner in which he had betrayed himself. It was then that he found himself hating, with the long-brooding hatred of a true solitary, the persons to whom he had exposed the recesses of his soul. At the moment of communicativeness, however, he was never able to draw rein or come to a pause. If he grew conscious that he was making a fool of himself, a curious demonic impulse in him only pressed him on to humiliate himself further.

He derived a queer inverted pleasure from thus offering himself, stripped and naked, to the smiter. It was only afterwards, in the long hours of his loneliness, that the poison of his outraged pride festered and fermented, and a deadly malice possessed him towards the recipients of his confidences. There was something admirable about the manner in which this quaint man made, out of his very lack of resistant power, a sort of sanctity of dependence. But this triumph of weakness in him, this dissolution of the very citadel of his being, in so beautiful and mystical an abandonment to the sympathy of our common humanity, was attended by lamentable issues in its resultant hatred and malice. Had Mr. Quincunx been able to give himself up to this touching candour without these melancholy and misanthropic reactions, his temper would have been very nearly the temper of a saint; but the gall and wormwood of the hours that followed, the corroding energy of the goblin of malice that was born of such unnatural humiliations, put a grievous gulf between him and the heavenly condition.

It must also be remembered, in qualification of the outrageousness, one might almost say the indecency, of his appeal to Andersen, that he had not in the remotest degree realized the extent of the stone-carver's infatuation with the Italian. Neither physical passion, nor ideal passion, were things that entered into his view of the relations between the sexes. Desire with him was of a strange and complicated subtlety, generally diffused into a mild and brooding sentiment. He was abnormally faithful, but at the same time abnormally cold; and though, very often, jealousy bit him like a viper, it was a jealousy of the mind, not a jealousy of the senses.

What in other people would have been gross and astounding cynicism, was in Mr. Quincunx a perfectly simple and even childlike recognition of elemental facts. He could sweep aside every conventional mask and plunge into the very earth-mould of reality, but he was quite unconscious of any shame, or any merit, in so doing. He simply envisaged facts, and stated the facts he envisaged, without the conventional unction of worldly discretion. This being so, it was in no ironic extravagance that he appealed to Andersen, but quite innocently, and without consciousness of anything unusual.

Of the two men, some might have supposed, considering the circumstances, that it was Mr. Quincunx who was mad, and his interlocutor who was sane. On the other hand, it might be said that only a madman would have received the recluse's appeal in the calm and serious manner in which Andersen received it. The abysmal cunning of those who have only one object in life, and are in sight of its attainment, actuated the unfortunate stone-carver in his attitude to his rival at this moment.

"If some fairy or some god," he said, "did lift the stone from her sepulchre and you from your sepulchre, my advice to you and to her would be to go away, to escape, to be free. You would be happy — you would both be happy! And the reason of your happiness would be that you would know the Devil had been conquered. And you would know that, because, by gathering all the stones in the world upon my own head, and being buried beneath them, I should have made a rampart higher than Leo's Hill to protect you from the Evil One!"

Andersen's words were eager and hurried, and when he had finished speaking, he surveyed Mr. Quincunx with wild and feverish eyes. It was now borne in for the first time upon that worthy philosopher, that he was engaged in conversation with one whose wits were turned, and a great terror took possession of him. If the cunning of madmen is deep and subtle, it is sometimes surpassed by the cunning of those who are afraid of madmen.

"The most evil heap of stones I know in Nevilton," remarked Mr. Quincunx, moving towards his gate, and making a slight dismissing gesture with his hand, "is the heap in the Methodist cemetery. You know the one I mean, Andersen? The one up by Seven Ashes, where the four roads meet. It is just inside the entrance, on the left hand. They throw upon it all the larger stones they find when they dig the graves. I have often picked up bits of bones there, and pieces of skulls. It is an interesting place, a very curious place, and quite easy to find. There haven't been many burials there lately, because most of the Methodists nowadays prefer the churchyard. But there was one last spring. That was the burial of Glory Lintot. I was there myself, and saw her put in. It's an extraordinary place. Anyone who likes to look at what people can write on tombstones would be delighted with it."

By this time, by means of a series of vague ushering movements, such as he might have used to get rid of an admirable but dangerous dog, Mr. Quincunx had got his visitor as far as the gate. This he opened, with as easy and natural an air as he could assume, and stood ostentatiously aside, to let the unfortunate man pass out.

James Andersen moved slowly into the road. "Remember!" he said. "You will avoid everything you hate! There's more in the west-wind than you imagine, these strange days. That's why the rooks are calling. Listen to them!"

He waved his hand and strode rapidly up the lane.

Mr. Quincunx gazed after the retreating figure till it disappeared, and then returned wearily to his work. He picked up his hoe and leaned heavily upon it, buried in thought. Thus he remained for the space of several minutes.

"He is right," he muttered, raising his head at last. "The rooks are beginning to gather. That means another summer is over, — and a good thing, too! I suppose I ought to have taken him back to Nevilton. But he is right about the rooks.”

CHAPTER XIX. PLANETARY INTERVENTION

THE LONG SUMMER afternoon was nearly over by the time James Andersen reached the Seven Ashes. The declining sun had sunk so low that it was invisible from the spot where he stood, but its last horizontal rays cast a warm ruddy light over the tree-tops in the valley. The high and exposed intersection of sandy lanes, which for time immemorial had borne this title, was, at the epoch which concerns us, no longer faithful to its name.

The ash-trees which Andersen now surveyed, with the feverish glance of mental obsession, were not seven in number. They were indeed only three; and, of these three, one was no more than a time-worn stump, and the others but newly-planted saplings. Such as they were, however, they served well enough to continue the tradition of the place, and their presence enhanced with a note of added melancholy the gloomy character of the scene.

Seven Ashes, with its cross-roads, formed indeed the extreme northern angle of the high winding ridge which terminated at Wild Pine. Approached from the road leading to this latter spot, — a road darkened on either hand by wind-swept Scotch-firs — it was the sort of place where, in less civilized times, one might have expected to encounter a threatening highwayman, or at least to have stumbled upon some sinister witch-figure stooping over an unholy task or groping among the weeds. Even in modern times and in bright sunshine the spot was not one where a traveller was induced to linger upon his way or to rest himself. When overcast, as it was at the moment of Andersen's approach, by the coming on of twilight, it was a place from which a normal-minded person would naturally be in haste to turn. There was something ominous in its bleak exposure to the four quarters of the sky, and something full of ghostly suggestiveness in the gaping mouths of the narrow lanes that led away from it.

There was, however, another and a much more definite justification for the quickening, at this point, of any wayfarer's steps who knew the locality. A stranger to the place, glancing across an empty field, would have observed with no particular interest the presence of a moderately high stone wall protecting a small square enclosure. Were such a one acquainted with the survivals of old usage in English villages, he might have supposed these walls to shut in the now unused space of what was formerly the local "pound," or repository for stray animals. Such travellers as were familiar with Nevilton knew, however, that sequestered within this citadel of desolation were no living horses nor cattle, but very different and much quieter prisoners. The Methodist cemetery there, dates back, it is said, to the days of religious persecution, to the days of Whitfield and Wesley, if not even further.

Our fugitive from the society of those who regard their minds as normally constituted, cast an excited and recognizant eye upon this forlorn enclosure. Plucking a handful of leaves from one of the ash-trees and thrusting them into his pocket, some queer legend — half-remembered in his agitated state — impelling him to this quaint action, he left the roadway, crossed the field, and pushing open the rusty iron gate of the little burying-ground, burst hurriedly in among its weather-stained memorials of the dead.

Though not of any great height, the enclosing walls of the place were sufficient to intensify by several degrees the gathering shadows. Outside, in the open field, one would have anticipated a clear hour of twilight before the darkness fell; but here, among the graves of these humble recalcitrants against spiritual authority, it seemed as though the plunge of the planet into its diurnal obscuring was likely to be retarded for only a few brief moments.

James Andersen sat down upon a nameless mound, and fixed his gaze upon the heap of stones referred to by Mr. Quincunx. The evening was warm and still, and though the sky yet retained much of its lightness of colour, the invading darkness — like a beast on padded feet — was felt as a palpable presence moving slowly among the tombs.

The stone-carver began muttering in a low voice scattered and incoherent repetitions of his conversation with the potato-digger. But his voice suddenly died away under a startling interruption. He became aware that the heavy cemetery gate was being pushed open from outside.

Such is the curious law regulating the action of human nerves, and making them dependent upon the mood of the mind to which they are attached, that an event which to a normal consciousness is fraught with ghostly terror, to a consciousness already strained beyond the breaking point, appears as something natural and ordinary. It is one of the privileges of mania, that those thus afflicted should be freed from the normal oppression of human terror. A madman would take a ghost into his arms.

On this occasion, however, the most normal nerves would have suffered no shock from the figure that presented itself in the entrance when the door was fully opened. A young girl, pale and breathless, rushed impulsively into the cemetery, and catching sight of Andersen at once, hastened straight to him across the grave-mounds.

"I was coming back from the village," she gasped, preventing him with a trembling pressure of her hand from rising from his seat, and casting herself down beside him, "and I met Mr. Clavering. He told me you had gone off somewhere and I guessed at once it was to Dead Man's Lane. I said nothing to him, but as soon as he had left me, I ran nearly all the way to the cottage.

The gentleman there told me to follow you. He said it was on his conscience that he had advised you to come up here. He said he was just making up his mind to come on after you, but he thought it was better for me to come. So here I am! James — dear James — you are not really ill are you? They frightened me, those two, by what they said. They seemed to be afraid that you would hurt yourself if you went off alone. But you wouldn't James dear, would you? You would think of me a little?"

She knelt at his side and tenderly pushed back the hair from his brow. "Oh I love you so!" she murmured, "I love you so! It would kill me if anything dreadful happened to you." She pressed his head passionately against her breast, hardly conscious in her emotion of the burning heat of his forehead as it touched her skin.

"You will think of me a little!" she pleaded, "you will take care of yourself for my sake, Jim?"

She held him thus, pressed tightly against her, for several seconds, while her bosom rose and fell in quick spasms of convulsive pity. She had torn off her hat in her agitation, and flung it heedlessly down at her feet, and a heavy tress of her thick auburn hair — colourless now as the night itself — fell loosely upon her bowed neck. The fading light from the sky above them seemed to concentrate itself upon the ivory pallor of her clasped fingers and the dead-white glimmer of her impassioned face. She might have risen out of one of the graves that surrounded them, so ghostly in the gloom did her figure look.

The stone-carver freed himself at length, and took her hands in his own. The shock of the girl's emotion had quieted his own fever. From the touch of her flesh he seemed to have derived a new and rational calm.

"Little Ninsy!" he whispered. "Little Ninsy! It is not I, but you, who are ill. Have you been up, and about, many days? I didn't know it! I've had troubles of my own." He passed his hand across his forehead. "I've had dreams, dreams and fancies! I'm afraid I've made a fool of myself, and frightened all sorts of people. I think I must have been saying a lot of silly things today. My head feels still queer. It's hurt me so much lately, my head! And I've heard voices, voices that wouldn't stop."

"Oh James, my darling, my darling!" cried the girl, in a great passion of relief. "I knew what they said wasn't true. I knew you would speak gently to me, and be your old self. Love me, James! Love me as you used to in the old days."

She rose to her feet and pulled him up upon his. Then with a passionate abandonment she flung her arms round him and pressed him to her, clinging to him with all her force and trembling as she clung.

James yielded to her emotion more spontaneously than he had ever done in his life. Their lips met in a long in-drawing kiss which seemed to merge their separate identities, and blend them indissolubly together. She clung to him as a bind-weed, with its frail white flowers, might cling to a stalk of swaying corn, and not unlike such an entwined stalk, he swayed to and fro under the clinging of her limbs. The passion which possessed her communicated itself to him, and in a strange ecstasy of oblivion he embraced her as desperately as her wild love could wish.

From sheer exhaustion their lips parted at last, and they sank down, side by side, upon the dew-drenched grass, making the grave-mount their pillow. Obscurely, through the clouded chamber of his brain, passed the image of her poppy-scarlet mouth burning against the whiteness of her skin. All that he could now actually see of her face, in the darkness, was its glimmering pallor, but the feeling of her kiss remained and merged itself in this impression. He lay on his back with closed eyes, and she bent over him as he lay, and began kissing him again, as if her soul would never be satisfied.

In the intervals of her kisses, she pressed her fingers against his forehead, and uttered incoherent and tender whispers. It seemed to her as though, by the very magnetism of her devotion, she *must* be able to restore his shattered wits.

Nor did her efforts seem in vain. After a while the stone-carver lifted himself up and looked round him. He smiled affectionately at Ninsy and patted her, almost playfully, upon the knee.

“You have done me good, child,” he said. “You have done me more good than you know. I don’t think I shall say any more silly things tonight.”

He stood up on his feet, heaved a deep, natural sigh, and stretched himself, as one roused from a long sleep.

“What have you managed to do to me, Ninsy?” he asked. “I feel completely different. Those voices in my head have stopped.” He turned tenderly towards her. “I believe you’ve driven the evil spirit out of me, child,” he said.

She flung her arms round him with a gasping cry. “You do like me a little, Jim? Oh my darling, I love you so much! I love you! I love you!” She clung to him with frenzied passion, her breast convulsed with sobs, and the salt tears mingling with her kisses.

Suddenly, as he held her body in his arms, he felt a shuddering tremor run through her, from head to foot. Her head fell back, helpless and heavy, and her whole frame hung limp and passive upon his arm. It almost seemed as though, in exorcising, by the magnetic power of her love, the demon that possessed him, she had broken her own heart.

Andersen was overwhelmed with alarm and remorse. He laid her gently upon the ground, and chafed the palms of her hands whispering her name and uttering savage appeals to Providence. His appeals, however, remained unanswered, and she lay deadly still, her coils of dusky hair spread loose over the wet grass.

He rose in mute dismay, and stared angrily round the cemetery, as if demanding assistance from its silent population. Then with a glance at her motionless form, he ran quickly to the open gate and shouted loudly for help. His voice echoed hollowly through the walled enclosure, and a startled flutter of wings rose from the distant fir-trees. Somewhere down in the valley, a dog began to bark, but no other answer to his repeated cry reached his ears. He returned to the girl’s side.

Frantically he rent open her dress at the throat and tore with trembling fingers at the laces of her bodice. He pressed his hand against her heart. A faint, scarcely discernible tremor under her soft breast reassured him. She was not dead, then! He had not killed her with his madness.

He bent down and made an effort to lift her in his arms, but his limbs trembled beneath him and his muscles collapsed helplessly. The reaction from the tempest in his brain had left him weak as an infant. In this wretched inability to do anything to restore her he burst into a fit of piteous tears, and struck his forehead with his clenched hand.

Once more he tried desperately to lift her, and once more, fragile as she was, the effort proved hopelessly beyond his strength. Suddenly, out of the darkness beyond the cemetery gate, he heard the sound of voices.

He shouted as loudly as he could and then listened intently, with beating heart. An answering shout responded, in Luke’s well-known voice. A moment or two later, and Luke himself, followed by Mr. Quincunx, hurried into the cemetery.

Immediately after Ninsy’s departure the recluse had been seized with uncontrollable remorse. Mixed with his remorse was the disturbing consciousness that since Ninsy knew he had advised Andersen to make his way to Seven Ashes, the knowledge was ultimately sure to reach the younger brother’s ears. Luke was one of the few intimates Mr. Quincunx possessed in Nevilton. The recluse held him in curious respect as a formidable and effective man of the world. He had an exaggerated notion of his power. He had grown accustomed to his evening visits. He was fond of him and a little afraid of him.

It was therefore an extremely disagreeable thought to his mind, to conceive of Luke as turning upon him with contempt and indignation. Thus impelled, the perturbed solitary had summoned up all his courage and gone boldly down into the village to find the younger Andersen. He had met him at the gate of Mr. Taxater’s house.

Left behind in the station field by James and his pursuers, Luke had reverted for a while with the conscious purpose of distracting his mind, to his old preoccupation, and had spent the afternoon in a manner eminently congenial, making love to two damsels at the same time, and parrying with evasive urbanity their combined recriminations.

At the close of the afternoon, having chatted for an hour with the station-master’s wife, and shared their family tea, he had made his way according to his promise, into Mr. Taxater’s book-lined study, and there, closely closeted with the papal champion, had smoothed out the final threads of the conspiracy that was to betray Gladys and liberate Lacrima.

Luke had been informed by Mr. Quincunx of every detail of James’ movements and of Ninsy’s appearance on the scene. The recluse, as the reader may believe, did not spare himself in any point. He even exaggerated his fear of the agitated stone-carver, and as they hastened together towards Seven Ashes, he narrated, down to the smallest particular, the strange conversation they had had in his potato-garden.

"Why do you suppose," he enquired of Luke, as they ascended the final slope of the hill, "he talked so much of someone giving me money? Who, on earth, is likely to give me money? People don't as a rule throw money about, like that, do they? And if they did, I am the last person they would throw it to. I am the sort of person that kind and good people naturally hate. It's because they know I know the deep little vanities and cunning selfishness in their blessed deeds.

"No one in this world really acts from pure motives. We are all grasping after our own gain. We are all pleased when other people come to grief, and sorry when things go well with them. It's human nature, that's what it is! Human nature is always vicious. It was human nature in me that made me send your brother up this hill, instead of taking him back to the village. It was human nature in you that made you curse me as you did, when I first told you."

Luke did his best to draw Mr. Quincunx back from these general considerations to his conversation with James.

"What did you say," he enquired, "when he asked you about marrying Lacrima, supposing this imaginary kind person were available? Did you tell him you would do it?"

"You mean, was he really jealous?" replied the other, with one of his goblin-like laughs.

"It was a strange question to ask," pursued Luke. "I can't imagine how you answered it."

"Of course," said Mr. Quincunx, "we know very well what he was driving at. He wanted to sound me. Whatever may be wrong with him he was clever enough to want to sound me. We are all like that! We are all going about the world trying to find out each other's weakest points, with the idea that it may be useful to us to know them, so as to be able to stick knives into them when we want to."

"It was certainly rather a strange question considering that he is a bit attracted to Lacrima himself," remarked Luke. "I should think you were very cautious how you answered."

"Cautious?" replied Mr. Quincunx. "I don't believe in caution. Caution is a thing for well-to-do people who have something to lose. I answered him exactly as I would answer anyone. I said I should be a fool not to agree. And so I should. Don't you think so, Andersen? I should be a fool not to marry, under such circumstances?"

"It depends what your feelings are towards Lacrima," answered the wily stone-carver.

"Why do you say that, in that tone?" said the recluse sharply. "You know very well what I feel towards Lacrima. Everyone knows. She is the one little streak of romance that the gods have allowed to cross my path. She is my only girl-friend in Nevilton."

At that moment the two men reached Seven Ashes and the sound of their voices was carried to the cemetery, with the result already narrated.

It will be remarked as an interesting exception to the voluble candour of Mr. Quincunx, that in his conversation with Luke he avoided all mention of Lacrima's fatal contract with Mr. Romer. He had indeed, on an earlier occasion, approached the outskirts of this affair, in an indirect manner and with much manœuvring. From what he had hinted then, Luke had formed certain shrewd surmises, in the direction of the truth, but of the precise facts he remained totally ignorant.

The shout for help which interrupted this discussion gave the two men a shock of complete surprise. They were still more surprised, when on entering the cemetery they found James standing over the apparently lifeless form of Ninsy Lintot, her clothes torn and her hair loose and dishevelled. Their astonishment reached its climax when they noticed the sane and rational way in which the stone-carver addressed them. He was in a state of pitiful agitation, but he was no longer mad.

By dint of their united efforts they carried the girl across the field, and laid her down beneath the ash-trees. The fresher air of this more exposed spot had an immediate effect upon her. She breathed heavily, and her fingers, under the caress of James' hands, lost their rigidity. Across her shadowy white face a quiver passed, and her head moved a little.

"Ninsy! Ninsy, dear!" murmured Andersen as he knelt by her side. By the light of the clear stars, which now filled the sky with an almost tropical splendour, the three men gazing anxiously at her face saw her eyes slowly open and her lips part in a tender recognitory smile.

"Thank God!" cried James, "You are better now, Ninsy, aren't you? Here is Luke and Mr. Quincunx. They came to find us. They'll help me to get you safe home."

The girl murmured some indistinct and broken phrase. She smiled again, but a pathetic attempt she made to lift her hand to her throat proved her helpless weakness. Tenderly, as a mother might, James anticipated her movement, and restored to as natural order as he could her torn and ruffled dress.

At that moment to the immense relief of the three watchers the sound of cart-wheels became audible. The vehicle proved to be a large empty wagon driven by one of Mr. Goring's men on the way back from an outlying hamlet. They all knew the driver, who pulled up at once at their appeal.

On an extemporized couch at the bottom of the wagon, made of the men's coats, — Mr. Quincunx being the first to offer his, — they arranged the girl's passive form as comfortably as the rough vehicle allowed. And then, keeping the horses at a walking-pace, they proceeded along the lane towards Wild Pine.

For some while, as he walked by the cart's side, his hand upon its well-worn edge, James experienced extreme weariness and lassitude. His legs shook under him and his heart palpitated. The demon which had been driven out of him, had left him, it seemed, like his biblical prototype, exhausted and half-dead. By the time, however, that they reached the corner, where Root-Thatch Lane descends to the village, and Nevil's Gully commences, the cool air of the night and the slow monotonous movement had restored a considerable portion of his strength.

None of the men, as they went along, had felt in a mood for conversation. Luke had spent his time, naming to himself, with his accustomed interest in such phenomena, the various familiar constellations which shone down upon them between the dark boughs of the Scotch-firs.

The thoughts of Mr. Quincunx were confused and strange. He had fallen into one of his self-condemnatory moods, and like a solemn ghost moving by his side, a grim projection of his inmost identity kept rebuking and threatening him. As with most retired persons, whose lives are passed in an uninterrupted routine, the shock of any unusual or unforseen accident fell upon him with a double weight.

He had been much more impressed by the wild agitation of James, and by the sight of Ninsy's unconscious and prostrate figure, than anyone who knew only the cynical side of him would have supposed possible. The cynicism of Mr. Quincunx was indeed strictly confined to philosophical conversation. In practical life he was wont to encounter any sudden or tragic occurrence with the unsophisticated sensitiveness of a child. As with many other sages, whose philosophical proclivities are rather instinctive than rational, Mr. Quincunx was liable to curious lapses into the most simple and superstitious misgivings.

The influence of their slow and mute advance, under the majestic heavens, may have had something to do with this reaction, but it is certain that this other Mr. Quincunx — this shadowy companion with no cabbage-leaf under his hat — pointed a most accusing finger at him. Before they reached Nevil's Gully, the perturbed recluse had made up his mind that, at all costs, he would intervene to prevent this scandalous union of his friend with John Goring. Contract or no contract, he must exert himself in some definite and overt manner to stave off this outrage.

To his startled conscience the sinister figure of Mr. Romer seemed to extend itself, Colossus-like, from the outstretched neck of Cygnus, the heavenly Swan, to the low-hung brilliance of the "lord-star" Jupiter, and accompanying this Satanic shadow across his vision, was a horrible and most realistic image of the frail Italian, struggling in vain against the brutal advances of Mr. Goring. He seemed to see Lacrima, lying helpless, as Ninsy had been lying, but with no protecting forms grouped reassuringly around her.

The sense of the pitiful helplessness of these girlish beings, thrust by an indifferent fate into the midst of life's brute forces, had pierced his conscience with an indelible stab when first he had seen her prostrate in the cemetery. For a vague transitory moment, he had wondered then, whether his sending her in pursuit of a madman had resulted in a most lamentable tragedy; and though Andersen's manner had quickly reassured him as it had simultaneously reassured Luke, the original impression of the shock remained.

At that moment, as he helped to lift Ninsy out of the wagon, and carry her through the farm-yard to her father's cottage, the cynical recluse felt an almost quixotic yearning to put himself to any inconvenience and sacrifice any comfort, if only one such soft feminine creature as he supported now in his arms, might be spared the contact of gross and violating hands.

James Andersen, as well as Mr. Quincunx, remained silent during their return towards the village. In vain Luke strove to lift off from them this oppression of pensive and gentle melancholy. Neither his stray bits of astronomical pedantry, nor his Rabelaisean jests at the expense of a couple of rural amorists they stumbled upon in the overshadowed descent, proved arresting enough to break his companion's silence.

At the bottom of Root-Thatch Lane Mr. Quincunx separated from the brothers. His way led directly through the upper portion of the village to the Yeoborough road, while that of the Andersens passed between the priory and the church.

The clock in St. Catharine's tower was striking ten as the two brothers moved along under the churchyard wall. With the departure of Mr. Quincunx James seemed to recover his normal spirits. This recovery was manifested in a way that rejoiced the heart of Luke, so congruous was it with all their old habits and associations; but to a stranger overhearing the words, it would have seemed the reverse of promising.

"Shall we take a glance at the grave?" the elder brother suggested, leaning his elbows on the moss-grown wall. Luke assented with alacrity, and the ancient stones of the wall lending themselves easily to such a proceeding, they both clambered over into the place of tombs.

Thus within the space of forty-eight hours the brothers Andersen had been together in no less than three sepulchral enclosures. One might have supposed that the same destiny that made of their father a kind of modern Old Mortality — less pious, it is true, than his prototype, but not less addicted to invasions of the unprotesting dead — had made it inevitable that the most critical moments of his sons' lives should be passed in the presence of these mute witnesses.

They crossed over to where the head-stone of their parents' grave rose, gigantic and imposing in the clear star light, as much larger than the other monuments as the beaver, into which Pau-Puk-Keewis changed himself, was larger than the other beavers. They sat down on a neighbouring mound and contemplated in silence their father's work. The dark dome of the sky above them, strewn with innumerable points of glittering light, attracted Luke once more to his old astronomical speculations.

"I have an idea," he said, "that there is more in the influence of these constellations than even the astrologers have guessed. Their method claims to be a scientific one, mathematical in the exactness of its inferences. My feeling about the matter is, that there is something much more arbitrary, much more living and wayward, in the manner in which they work their will upon us. I said 'constellations,' but I don't believe, as a matter of fact, that it is from them at all that the influences come. The natural and obvious thing is that the *planets* should affect us, and affect us very much in the same way as we affect one another. The ancient races recognized this difference. The fixed stars are named after animals, or inanimate objects, or after powerful, but not more than human, heroes. The planets are all named from immortal gods, and it is as gods, — as wilful and arbitrary gods — that they influence our destinies."

James Andersen surveyed the large and brilliant star which at that moment hung, like an enormous glow-worm, against the southern slope of Nevilton Mount.

"Some extremely evil planet must have been very active during these last weeks with Lacrima and with me," he remarked. "Don't get alarmed, my dear," he added, noticing the look of apprehension which his brother turned upon him. “I shan’t worry you with any more silly talk. Those voices in my head have quite ceased. But that does not help Lacrima.” He laughed a sad little laugh.

“I suppose,” he added, “no one can help her in this devilish situation, — except that queer fellow who’s just left us. I would let him step over my dead body, if he would only carry her off and fool them all!”

Luke’s mind plunged into a difficult problem. His brother’s wits were certainly restored, and he seemed calm and clear-headed. But was he clear-headed enough to learn the details of the curious little conspiracy which Mr. Taxater’s diplomatic brain had evolved? How would this somewhat ambiguous transaction strike so romantic a nature as his?

Luke hesitated and pondered, the tall dark tower of St. Catharine’s Church affording him but scant inspiration, as it rose above them into the starlit sky. Should he tell him or should he keep the matter to himself, and enter into some new pretended scheme with his brother, to occupy his mind and distract it, for the time being?

So long did he remain silent, pondering this question, that James, observing his absorbed state and concluding that his subtle intelligence was occupied in devising some way out of their imbroglio, gave up all thought of receiving an answer, and moving to a less dew-drenched resting-place, leaned his head against an upright monument and closed his eyes. The feeling that his admired brother was taking Lacrima’s plight so seriously in hand filled him with a reassuring calm, and he had not long remained in his new position before his exhausted senses found relief in sleep.

Left to himself, Luke weighed in his mind every conceivable aspect of the question at stake. Less grave and assured than the metaphysical Mr. Taxater in this matter of striking at evil persons with evil weapons, Luke was not a whit less unscrupulous.

No Quincunx-like visitings of compunction had followed, with him, their rescue of Ninsy. If the scene at Seven Ashes had printed any impression at all upon his volatile mind, it was merely a vague and agreeable sense of how beautiful the girl’s dead-white skin had looked, contrasted with the disturbed masses of her dusky hair. Beyond this, except for a pleasant memory of how lightly and softly she had lain upon his arm, as he helped to carry her across the Wild Pine barton, the occurrence had left him unaffected.

His conscience did not trouble him in the smallest degree with regard to Gladys. According to Luke’s philosophy of life, things in this world resolved themselves into a reckless hand-to-hand struggle between opposing personalities, every one of them seeking, with all the faculties at his disposal, to get the better of the others. It was absurd to stop and consider such illusive impediments as sentiment or honour, when the great, casual, indifferent universe which surrounds us knows nothing of these things!

Out of the depths of this chaotic universe he, Luke Andersen, had been flung. It must be his first concern to sweep aside, as irrelevant and meaningless, any mere human fancies, ill-based and adventitious, upon which his free foot might stumble. To strike craftily and boldly in defence of the person he loved best in the world seemed to him not only natural but commendable. How should he be content to indulge in vague sentimental shilly-shallying, when the whole happiness of his beloved Daddy James was at stake?

The difference between Luke’s attitude to their mutual conspiracy, and that of Mr. Taxater, lay in the fact that to the latter the whole event was merely part of an elaborate, deeply-involved campaign, whose ramifications extended indefinitely on every side; while to the former the affair was only one of those innumerable chaotic struggles that a whimsical world delighted to evoke.

An inquisitive observer might have wondered what purpose Mr. Taxater had in mixing himself up in the affair at all. This question of his fellow-conspirator's motive crossed, as a matter of fact, Luke's own mind, as his gaze wandered negligently from the Greater to the Lesser Bear, and from Orion to the Pleiades. He came to the characteristic conclusion that it was no quixotic impulse that had impelled this excellent man, but a completely conscious and definite desire — the desire to add yet one more wanderer to his list of converts to the Faith.

Lacrima was an Italian and a Catholic. United to Mr. Quincunx, might she not easily win over that dreamy infidel to the religion of her fathers? Luke smiled to himself as he thought how little the papal champion could have known the real character of the solitary of Dead Man's Lane. Sooner might the sea at Weymouth flow inland, and wash with its waves the foot of Leo's Hill, than this ingrained mystic bow his head under the yoke of dogmatic truth!

After long cogitation with himself, Luke came to the conclusion that it would be wiser, on the whole, to say nothing to his brother of his plan to work out Lacrima's release by means of her cousin's betrayal. Having arrived at this conclusion he rose and stretched himself, and glanced at the sleeping James.

The night was warm and windless, but Luke began to feel anxious lest the cold touch of the stone, upon which his brother rested, should strike a chill into his blood. At the same time he was extremely loth to disturb so placid and wholesome a slumber. He laid his hand upon the portentous symbol of mortality which crowned so aggressively his parents' monument, and looked round him. His vigil had already been interrupted more than once by the voices of late revellers leaving the Goat and Boy. Such voices still recurred, at intermittent moments, followed by stumbling drunken footsteps, but in the intervals the silence only fell the deeper.

Suddenly he observed, or fancied he observed, the aspect of a figure extremely familiar to him, standing patiently outside the inn door. He hurried across the churchyard and looked over the wall. No, he had not been mistaken. There, running her hands idly through the leaves of the great wistaria which clung to the side of the house, stood his little friend Phyllis. She had evidently been sent by her mother, — as younger maids than she were often sent — to assist, upon their homeward journey, the unsteady steps of Bill Santon the carter.

Luke turned and glanced at his brother. He could distinguish his motionless form, lying as still as ever, beyond the dark shape of his father's formidable tombstone. There was no need to disturb him yet. The morrow was Sunday, and they could therefore be as late as they pleased.

He called softly to the patient watcher. She started violently at hearing his voice, and turning round, peered into the darkness. By degrees she made out his form, and waved her hand to him.

He beckoned her to approach. She shook her head, and indicated by a gesture that she was expecting the appearance of her father. Once more he called her, making what seemed to her, in the obscurity, a sign that he had something important to communicate. Curiosity overcame piety in the heart of the daughter of Bill Santon and she ran across the road.

"Why, you silly thing!" whispered the crafty Luke, "your father's been gone this half hour! He went a bit of the way home with Sam Lintot. Old Sam will find a nice little surprise waiting for him when he gets back. I reckon he'll send your father home-along sharp enough."

It was Luke's habit, in conversation with the villagers, to drop lightly into many of their provincial phrases, though both he and his brother used, thanks to their mother's training, as good English as any of the gentlefolk of Nevilton.

The influence of association in the matter of language might have afforded endless interesting matter to the student of words, supposing such a one had been able to overhear the conversations of these brothers with their various acquaintances. Poor Ninsy, for instance, fell naturally into the local dialect when she talked to James in her own house; and assumed, with equal facility, her loved one's more colourless manner of speech, when addressing him on ground less familiar to her.

As a matter of fact the universal spread of board-school education in that corner of the country had begun to sap the foundations of the old local peculiarities. Where these survived, in the younger generation, they survived side by side with the newer tricks of speech. The Andersens' girl-friends were, all of them, in reality, expert bilinguists. They spoke the King's English, and they spoke the Nevilton English, with equal ease, if with unequal expressiveness.

The shrewd fillip to her curiosity, which Luke's reference to Lintot's home-coming had given, allured Phyllis into accepting without protest his audacious invention about her father. The probability of such an occurrence seemed sealed with certainty, when turning, at a sign from her friend, she saw, against the lighted window the burly form of the landlord engaged in closing his shutters. It was not the custom, as Phyllis well knew, of this methodical dispenser of Dionysian joys to "shutter up house," as he called it, until every guest had departed. How could she guess — little deluded maid! — that, stretched upon the floor in the front parlor, stared at by the landlord’s three small sons, was the comatose body of her worthy parent breathing like one of Mr. Goring’s pigs?

“Tain’t no good my waiting here then,” she whispered. “What do ‘ee mean by Sam Lintot’s being surprised-like? Be Ninsy taken with her heart again?”

“Let me help you over here,” answered the stone-carver, “that Priory wench was talking, just now, just across yon wall. She’ll be hearing what we say if we don’t move on a bit.”

“Us don’t mind what a maid like her do hear, do us, Luke dear?” whispered the girl in answer. “Give me a kiss, sonny, and let me be getting home-along!”

She stood on tiptoe and raised her hands over the top of the wall. Luke seized her wrists, and retained them in a vicious clutch.

“Put your foot into one of those holes,” he said, “and we’ll soon have you across.”

Unwilling to risk a struggle in such a spot, and not really at all disinclined for an adventure, the girl obeyed him, and after being hoisted up upon the wall, was lifted quickly down on the other side, and enclosed in Luke’s gratified arms. The amorous stone-carver remembered long afterwards the peculiar thrill of almost chaste pleasure which the first touch of her cold cheeks gave him, as she yielded to his embrace.

“*Is* Nin Lintot bad again?” she enquired, drawing herself away at last.

Luke nodded. “You won’t see her about, this week — or next week — or the week after,” he said. “She’s pretty far gone, this time, I’m afraid.”

Phyllis rendered to her acquaintance’s misfortune the tribute of a conventional murmur.

“Oh, let’s go and look at where they be burying Jimmy Pringle!” she suddenly whispered, in an awe-struck, excited tone.

“What!” cried Luke, “you don’t mean to say he’s dead, — the old man?”

“Where’s ‘t been to, then, these last days?” she enquired. “He died yesterday morning and they be going to bury him on Monday. ‘Twill be a monstrous large funeral. Can’t be but you’ve heard tell of Jimmy’s being done for.” She added, in an amazed and bewildered tone.

“I’ve been very busy this last week,” said Luke.

“You didn’t seem very busy this afternoon, when you were with Annie and me up at station-field,” she exclaimed, with a mischievous little laugh. Then in a changed voice, “Let’s go and see where they’re going to put him. It’s somewhere over there, under South Wall.”

They moved cautiously hand in hand between the dark grassy mounds, the heavy dew soaking their shoes.

Suddenly Phyllis stopped, her fingers tightening, and a delicious thrill of excitement quivering through her. “There it is. Look!” she whispered.

They advanced a step or two, and found themselves confronted by a gloomy oblong hole, and an ugly heap of ejected earth.

“Oh, how awful it do look, doesn’t it, Luke darling?” she murmured, clinging closely to him.

He put his arm round the girl’s waist, and together, under the vast dome of the starlit sky, the two warm-blooded youthful creatures contemplated the resting-place of the generations.

“It’s queer to think,” remarked Luke pensively, “that just as we stand looking on this, so, when we’re dead, other people will stand over our graves, and we know nothing and care nothing!”

“They dug this out this morning,” said Phyllis, more concerned with the immediate drama than with general meditations of mortality. “Old Ben Fursling’s son did it, and my father helped him in his dinner-hour. They said another hot day like this would make the earth too hard.”

Luke moved forward, stepping cautiously over the dark upturned soil. He paused at the extreme edge of the gaping recess.

"What'll you give me," he remarked turning to his companion, "if I climb down into it?"

"Don't talk like that, Luke," protested the girl. "'Tisn't lucky to say them things. I wouldn't give you nothing. I'd run straight away and leave you."

The young man knelt down at the edge of the hole, and with the elegant cane he had carried in his hand all that afternoon, fumbled profanely in its dusky depths. Suddenly, to the girl's absolute horror, he scrambled round, and deliberately let himself down into the pit. She breathed a sigh of unutterable relief, when she observed his head and shoulders still above the level of the ground.

"It's all right," he whispered, "they've left it half-finished. I suppose they'll do the rest on Monday."

"Please get out of it, Luke," the girl pleaded. "I don't like to see you there. It make me think you're standing on Jimmy Pringle."

Luke obeyed her and emerged from the earth almost as rapidly as he had descended.

When he was once more by her side, Phyllis gave a little half-deliberate shudder of exquisite terror. "Fancy," she whispered, clinging tightly to him, "if you was to drag me to that hole, and put me down there! I think I should die of fright."

This conscious playing with her own girlish fears was a very interesting characteristic in Phyllis Santon. Luke had recognized something of the sort in her before, and now he wondered vaguely, as he glanced from the obscurity of Nevilton Churchyard to the brilliant galaxy of luminous splendour surrounding the constellation Pegasus, whether she really wanted him to take her at her word.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of voices at the inn-door. They both held their breath, listening intently.

“There’s father!” murmured the girl. “He must have come back from Lintot’s and be trying to get into the public again! Come and help me over the wall, Luke darling. Only don’t let anybody see us.”

As they hurried across the enclosure, Phyllis whispered in his ears a remark that seemed to him either curiously irrelevant, or inspired in an occult manner by psychic telepathy. She had lately refrained from any reference to Lacrima. The Italian’s friendliness to her under the Hullaway elms had made her reticent upon this subject. On this occasion, however, though quite ignorant of James’ presence in the churchyard, she suddenly felt compelled to say to Luke, in an intensely serious voice:

“If some of you clever ones don’t stop that marriage of Master Goring, there’ll be some more holes dug in this place! There be some things what them above never will allow.”

He helped her over the wall, and watched her overtake her staggering parent, who had already reeled some distance down the road. Then he returned to his brother and roused him from his sleep. James was sulky and irritable at being so brusquely restored to consciousness, but the temperature of his mind appeared as normal and natural as ever.

They quitted the place without further conversation, and strode off in silence up the village street. The perpendicular slabs of the crowded head stones, and the yet more numerous mounds that had neither name nor memory, resumed their taciturn and lonely watch.

To no human eyes could be made visible the poor thin shade that was once Jimmy Pringle, as it swept, bat-like, backwards and forwards, across the dew-drenched grass. But the shade itself, endowed with more perception than had been permitted to it while imprisoned in the “muddy vesture” of our flesh and blood, became aware, in its troubled flight, of a singular spiritual occurrence.

Rising from the base of that skull-crowned monument, two strange and mournful phantoms flitted waveringly, like huge ghost-moths, along the protruding edge of the church-roof. Two desolate and querulous voices, like the voices of conflicting winds through the reeds of some forlorn salt-marsh, quivered across the listening fields.

“It is strong and unconquered — the great heart of my Hill,” one voice wailed out. “It draws them. It drives them. The earth is with it; the planets are for it, and all their enchantments cannot prevail against it!”

“The leaves may fall and the trees decay,” moaned the second voice, “but where the sap has once flowed, Love must triumph.”

The fluttering shadow of Jimmy Pringle fled in terror from these strange sounds, and took refuge among the owls in the great sycamore of the Priory meadow. A falling meteorite swept downwards from the upper spaces of the sky and lost itself behind the Wild Pine ridge.

“Strength and cunning,” the first voice wailed forth again, “alone possess their heart’s desire. All else is vain and empty.”

“Love and Sacrifice,” retorted the other, “outlast all victories. Beyond the circle of life they rule the darkness, and death is dust beneath their feet.”

Crouched on a branch of his protecting sycamore, the thin wraith of Jimmy Pringle trembled and shook like an aspen-leaf. A dumb surprise possessed the poor transmuted thing to find itself even less assured of palpable and familiar salvation, than when, after drinking cider at the Boar’s Head in Athelston, he had dreamed dreams at Captain Whiffley’s gate.

“The Sun is lord and god of the earth,” wailed the first voice once more. “The Sun alone is master in the end. Lust and Power go forth with him, and all flesh obeys his command."

"The Moon draws more than the tides," answered the second voice. "In the places of silence where Love waits, only the Moon can pass; and only the Moon can hear the voice of the watchers."

From the red planet, high up against the church-tower, to the silver planet low down among the shadowy trees, the starlit spaces listened mutely to these antiphonal invocations. Only the distant expanse of the Milky Way, too remote in its translunar gulfs to heed these planetary conflicts, shimmered haughtily down upon the Wood and Stone of Nevilton — impassive, indifferent, unconcerned.

CHAPTER XX. VOX POPULI

JAMES ANDERSEN'S MENTAL state did not fall away from the restored equilibrium into which the unexpected intervention of Ninsy Lintot had magnetized and medicined him. He went about his work as usual, gloomier and more taciturn, perhaps, than before, but otherwise with no deviation from his normal condition.

Luke noticed that he avoided all mention of Lacrima, and, as far as the younger brother knew, made no effort to see her. Luke himself received, two days after the incident in the Methodist cemetery, a somewhat enigmatic letter from Mr. Taxater. This letter bore a London post-mark and informed the stone-carver that after a careful consideration of the whole matter, and an interview with Lacrima, the writer had come to the conclusion that no good purpose would be served by carrying their plan into execution. Mr. Taxater had, accordingly, so the missive declared, destroyed the incriminating document which he had induced Luke to sign, and had relinquished all thought of an interview with Mr. Dangelis.

The letter concluded by congratulating Luke on his brother's recovery — of which, it appeared, the diplomatist had been informed by the omniscient Mrs. Wotnot — and assuring him that if ever, in any way, he, the writer, could be of service to either of the two brothers, they could count on his unfailing regard. An obscure post-script, added in pencil in a very minute and delicate hand, indicated that the interview with Lacrima, referred to above, had confirmed the theologian in a suspicion that hitherto he had scrupulously concealed, namely, that their concern with regard to the

Italian's position was less called for than appearances had led them to suppose.

After reading and weighing this last intimation, before he tore up the letter into small fragments, the cynical Luke came to the conclusion that the devoted champion of the papacy had found out that his co-religionist had fallen from grace; in other words, that Lacrima Traffio was no longer a Catholic. It could hardly be expected, the astute youth argued, that Mr. Taxater should throw himself into a difficult and troublesome intrigue in order that an apostate from the inviolable Faith, once for all delivered to the Saints, should escape what might reasonably be regarded as a punishment for her apostacy.

The theologian's post-script appeared to hint that the girl was not, after all, so very unwilling, in this matter of her approaching marriage. Luke, in so far as he gave such an aspect of the affair any particular thought, discounted this plausible suggestion as a mere conscience-quieting salve, introduced by the writer to smooth over the true cause of his reaction.

For his own part it had been always of James and not of Lacrima he had thought, and since James had now been restored to his normal state, the question of the Italian's moods and feelings affected him very little. He was still prepared to discuss with his brother any new chance of intervention that might offer itself at the last moment. He desired James' peace of mind before everything else, but in his heart of hearts he had considerable doubt whether the mood of self-effacing magnanimity which had led his brother to contemplate Lacrima's elopement with Mr. Quincunx, would long survive the return of his more normal temper. Were he in James' position, he told himself grimly, he should have much preferred that the girl should marry a man she hated rather than one she loved, as in such a case the field would be left more open for any future "rapprochement."

Thus it came about that the luckless Pariah, by the simple accident of her inability to hold fast to her religion, lost at the critical moment in her life the support of the one friendly power, that seemed capable, in that confusion of opposed forces, of bringing to her aid temporal as well as spiritual, pressure. She was indeed a prisoner by the waters of Babylon, but her forgetfulness of Sion had cut her off from the assistance of the armies of the Lord.

The days passed on rapidly now, over the heads of the various persons involved in our narrative. For James and Lacrima, and in a measure for Mr. Quincunx, too, — since it must be confessed that the shock of Ninsy's collapse had not resulted in any permanent tightening of the recluse's moral fibre, — they passed with that treacherous and oblivious smoothness which dangerous waters are only too apt to wear, when on the very verge of the cataract.

In the stir and excitement of the great political struggle which now swept furiously from one end of the country to the other, the personal fortunes of a group of tragically involved individuals, in a small Somersetshire village, seemed to lose, for all except those most immediately concerned, every sort of emphasis and interest.

The polling day at last arrived, and a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of Nevilton, both men and women, found themselves, as the end of the fatal hours approached, wedged and hustled, in a state of distressing and exhausted suspense, in the densely crowded High Street in front of the Yeoborough Town Hall.

Mr. Clavering himself was there, and in no very amiable temper. Perverse destiny had caused him to be helplessly surrounded by a noisy high-spirited crew of Yeoborough factory-girls, to whom the event in progress was chiefly interesting, in so far as it afforded them an opportunity to indulge in uproarious chaff and to throw insulting or amorous challenges to various dandified youths of their acquaintance, whom they caught sight of in the confusion. Mr. Clavering's ill-temper reached its climax when he became aware that a good deal of the free and indiscreet badinage of his companions was addressed to none other than his troublesome parishioner, Luke Andersen, whose curly head, surmounted by an aggressively new straw hat, made itself visible not far off.

The mood of the vicar of Nevilton during the last few weeks had been one of accumulative annoyance. Everything had gone wrong with him, and it was only by an immense effort of his will that he had succeeded in getting through his ordinary pastoral labour, without betraying the unsettled state of his mind and soul.

He could not, do what he might, get Gladys out of his thoughts for one single hour of the day. She had been especially soft and caressing, of late, in her manner towards him. More submissive than of old to his spiritual admonitions, she had dropped her light and teasing ways, and had assumed, in her recent lessons with him, an air of pliable wistfulness, composed of long, timidly interrupted glances from her languid blue eyes, and little low-voiced murmurs of assent from her sweetly-parted lips.

It was in vain that the poor priest struggled against this obsession. The girl was as merciless as she was subtle in the devices she employed to make sure of her hold upon him. She would lead him on, by hesitating and innocent questions, to expound some difficult matter of faith; and then, just as he was launched out upon a high, pure stream of mystical interpretation, she would bring his thoughts back to herself and her deadly beauty, by some irresistible feminine trick, which reduced all his noble speculations to so much empty air.

Ever since that night when he had trembled so helplessly under the touch of her soft fingers beneath the cedars of the South Drive, she had sought opportunities for evoking similar situations. She would prolong the clasp of her hand when they bade one another good night, knowing well how this apparently natural and unconscious act would recur in throbs of adder's poison through the priest's veins, long after the sun had set behind St. Catharine's tower.

She loved sometimes to tantalize and trouble him by relating incidents which brought herself and her American fiancé into close association in his mind. She would wistfully confide to him, for example, how sometimes she grew weary of love-making, begging him to tell her whether, after all, she were wise in risking the adventure of marriage.

By these arts, and others that it were tedious to enumerate, the girl gradually reduced the unfortunate clergyman to a condition of abject slavery. The worst of it was that, though his release from her constant presence was rapidly approaching — with the near date of the ceremonies for which he was preparing her — instead of being able to rejoice in this, he found himself dreading it with every nerve of his harassed senses.

Clavering had felt himself compelled, on more than one occasion, to allude to the project of Lacrima's marriage, but his knowledge of the Italian's character was so slight that Gladys had little difficulty in making him believe, or at least persuade himself he believed, that no undue pressure was being put upon her.

It was of Lacrima that he suddenly found himself thinking as, hustled and squeezed between two obstreperous factory-girls, he watched the serene and self-possessed Luke enjoying with detached amusement the vivid confusion round him. The fantastic idea came into his head, that in some sort of way Luke was responsible for those sinister rumours regarding the

Italian's position in Nevilton, which had thrust themselves upon his ears as he moved to and fro among the villagers.

He had learnt of the elder Andersen's recovery from Mrs. Fringe, but even that wise lady had not been able to associate this event with the serious illness of Ninsy Lintot, to whose bed-side the young clergyman had been summoned more than once during the last week.

Clavering felt an impulse of unmitigated hatred for the equable stone-carver as he watched him bandying jests with this or the other person in the crowd, and yet so obviously holding himself apart from it all, and regarding the whole scene as if it only existed for his amusement.

A sudden rush of some extreme partisans of the popular cause, making a furious attempt to over-power the persistent taunts of a group of young farmers who stood above them on a raised portion of the pavement, drove a wedge of struggling humanity into the midst of the crowd who surrounded the irritable priest. Clavering was pushed, in spite of his efforts to extricate himself, nearer and nearer to his detested rival, and at last, in the most grotesque and annoying manner possible, he found himself driven point-blank into the stone-carver's very arms. Luke smiled, with what seemed to the heated and flustered priest the last limit of deliberate impertinence.

But there was no help for it. Clavering was forced to accept his proffered hand, and return, with a measure of courtesy, his nonchalant greeting. Squeezed close together — for the crowd had concentrated itself now into an immoveable mass — the fortunate and the unfortunate lover of Gladys Romer listened, side by side, to the deafening shouts, which, first from one party and then from the other, heralded the appearance of the opposing candidates upon the balcony above.

"I really hardly know," said Luke, in a loud whisper, "which side you are on. I suppose on the Conservative? These radicals are all Nonconformists, and only waiting for a chance of pulling the Church down."

"Thank you," retorted the priest raising his voice so as to contend against the hubbub about them. "I happen to be a radical myself. My own hope is that the Church *will* be pulled down. The Church I believe in cannot be touched. Its foundations are too deep."

"Three cheers for Romer and the Empire!" roared a voice behind them.

"Wone and the People! Wone and the working-man!" vociferated another.

"You'll be holding your confirmation soon, I understand," murmured Luke in his companion's ear, as a swaying movement in the crowd squeezed them even more closely together.

Hugh Clavering realized for the first time in his life what murderers feel the second before they strike their blow. He could have willingly planted his heel at that moment upon the stone-carver's face. Surely the man was intentionally provoking him. He must know — he could not help knowing — the agitation in his nerves.

"Romer and Order! Romer and Sound Finance!" roared one portion of the mob.

"Wone and Liberty! Wone and Justice!" yelled the opposing section.

"I love a scene like this," whispered Luke. "Doesn't it make you beautifully aware of the contemptible littleness of the human race?"

"I am not only a radical," retorted Clavering, "but I happen also to be a human being, and one who can't take so airy a view of an occasion of this kind. The enthusiasm of these people doesn't at all amuse me. I sympathize with it."

The stone-carver was not abashed by this rebuke. "A matter of taste," he said, "a matter of taste." Then, freeing his arm which had got uncomfortably wedged against his side, and pushing back his hat, "I love to associate these outbursts of popular feeling with the movements of the planets. Tonight, you know, one ought to be able to see—"

Clavering could no longer contain himself. "Damn your planets!" he cried, in a tone so loud, that an old lady in their neighbourhood ejaculated, "Hush! hush!" and looked round indignantly.

"I beg your pardon," muttered the priest, a little ashamed. "What I mean is, I am most seriously concerned about this contest. I pray devoutly Wone will win. It'll be a genuine triumph for the working classes if he does."

"Romer and the Empire!" interpolated the thunderous voice behind them.

"I don't care much for the man himself," he went on, "but this thing goes beyond personalities."

"I'm all for Romer myself," said Luke. "I have the best of reasons for being grateful to him, though he is my employer."

"What do you mean? What reasons?" cried Clavering sharply, once more beginning to feel the most unchristian hatred for this urbane youth.

"Oh, I'm sure I needn't tell you that, sir," responded Luke; "I'm sure you know well enough how much I admire our Nevilton beauty."

Gladys' unhappy lover choked with rage. He had never in his life loathed anything so much as he loathed the way Luke's yellow curls grew on his forehead. His fingers clutched convulsively the palms of his hands. He would like to have seized that crop of hair and beaten the man's head against the pavement.

"I think it's abominable," he cried, "this forcing of Miss Traffio to marry Goring. For a very little, I'd write to the bishop about it and refuse to marry them."

The causes that led to this unexpected and irrelevant outburst were of profound subtlety. Clavering forgot, in his desire to make his rival responsible for every tragedy in the place, that he had himself resolved to discount, as mere village gossip, all the dark rumours he had heard. The blind anger which plunged him into this particular outcry, sprang, in reality, from the bitterness of his own conscience-stricken misgivings.

“I don’t think you will,” remarked Luke, lowering his voice to a whisper, though the uproar about them rendered such a precaution quite unnecessary. “It is not as a rule a good thing to interfere in these matters. Miss Gladys has told me herself that the whole thing is an invention of Romer’s enemies, probably of this fellow Wone.”

“She’s told me the same story,” burst out the priest, “but how am I to believe her?”

A person unacquainted with the labyrinthine convolutions of the human mind would have been staggered at hearing the infatuated slave thus betray his suspicion of his enchantress, and to his own rival; but the man’s long-troubled conscience, driven by blind anger, rendered him almost beside himself.

“To tell you the truth,” said Luke, “I think neither you nor I have anything to do with this affair. You might as well agitate yourself about Miss Romer’s marriage with Dangelis! Girls must manage these little problems for themselves. After all, it doesn’t really matter much, one way or the other. What they want, is to be married. The person they choose is quite a secondary thing. We have to learn to regard all these little incidents as of but small importance, my good sir, as our world sweeps round the sun!”

“The sun — the sun!” cried Clavering, with difficulty restraining himself. “What has the sun to do with it? You are too fond of bringing in your suns and your planets, Andersen. This trick of yours of shelving the difficulties of life, by pretending you're somehow superior to them all, is a habit I advise you to give up! It's cheap. It's vulgar. It grows tiresome after a time."

Luke's only reply to this was a sweet smile; and the two were wedged so closely together that the priest was compelled to notice the abnormal whiteness and regularity of the young man's teeth.

"I confess to you," continued Luke, with an air of unruffled detachment, as if they had been discussing the tint of a flower or the marks upon a butterfly's wing, "I have often wondered what the relations really are between Mr. Romer and Miss Traffio; but that is the sort of question which, as Sir Thomas Browne would say, lends itself to a wide solution."

"Romer and Prosperity!" "Wone and Justice!" yelled the opposing factions.

"Our pretty Gladys' dear parent," continued the incorrigible youth, completely disregarding the fact that his companion, speechless with indignation, was desperately endeavouring to extricate himself from the press, "seems born under a particularly lucky star. I notice that every attempt which people make to thwart him comes to nothing. That's what I admire about him: he seems to move forward to his end like an inexorable fate."

"Rubbish!" ejaculated the priest, turning his angry face once more towards his provoking rival. "Fiddlesticks and rubbish! The man is a man, like the rest of us. I only pray Heaven he's going to lose this election!"

"Under a lucky star," reiterated the stone-carver. "I wish I knew," he added pensively, "what his star is. Probably Jupiter!"

"Wone and Liberty!" "Wone and the Rights of the People!" roared the crowd.

“Wone and God’s Vengeance!” answered, in an indescribably bitter tone, a new and different voice. Luke pressed his companion’s arm.

“Did you hear that?” he whispered eagerly. “That’s Philip. Who would have thought he’d have been here? He’s an anarchist, you know.”

Clavering, who was taller than his companion, caught sight of the candidate’s son. Philip’s countenance was livid with excitement, and his arms were raised as if actually invoking the Heavens.

“Silly fool!” muttered Luke. “He talks of God as glibly as any of his father’s idiotic friends. But perhaps he was mocking! I thought I detected a tang of irony in his tone.”

“Most of you unbelievers cry upon God when the real crisis comes,” remarked the priest. “But I like Philip Wone. I respect him. He, at least, takes his convictions seriously.”

“I believe you fancy in your heart that some miracle is going to be worked, to punish my worthy employer,” observed Luke. “But I assure you, you’re mistaken. In this world the only way our Mr. Romers are brought low is by being out-matched on their own ground. He has a lucky star; but other people” — this was added in a low, significant tone— “other people may possibly have stars still more lucky.”

At this moment the cheering and shouting became deafening. Some new and important event had evidently occurred. Both men turned and glanced up at the stucco-fronted edifice that served Yeoborough as a city-hall. The balcony had become so crowded that it was difficult to distinguish individual figures; but there was a general movement there, and people were talking and gesticulating eagerly. Presently all these excited persons fell simultaneously into silence, and an attitude of intense expectation. The crowd below caught the thrill of their expectancy, and with upturned faces and eager eyes, waited the event. There was a most formidable hush over the whole sea of human heads; and even the detached Luke felt his heart beating in tune to the general tension.

In the midst of this impressive silence the burly figure of the sheriff of the parliamentary district made his way slowly to the front of the balcony. With him came the two candidates, each accompanied by a lady, and grouped themselves on either side of him. The sheriff standing erect, with a sheet of paper in his hand, saluted the assembled people, and proceeded to announce, in simple stentorian words, the result of the poll.

Clavering had been stricken dumb with amazement to observe that the lady by Mr. Romer's side was not Mrs. Romer, as he had thoughtlessly assumed it would be, but Gladys herself, exquisitely dressed, and looking, in her high spirits and excitement, more lovely than he had ever seen her.

Her fair hair, drawn back from her head beneath a shady Gainsborough hat, shone like gold in the sunshine. Her cheeks were flushed, and their delicate rose-bloom threw into beautiful relief the pallor of her brow and neck. Her tall girlish figure looked soft and arresting amid the black-coated politicians who surrounded her. Her eyes were brilliant.

Contrasted with this splendid apparition at Mr. Romer's side, the faded primness of the good spouse of the Christian Candidate seemed pathetic and grotesque. Mrs. Wone, in her stiff black dress and old-fashioned hat, looked as though she were attending a funeral. Nor was the appearance of her husband much more impressive or imposing.

Mr. Romer, with his beautiful daughter's hand upon his arm, looked as noble a specimen of sage authority and massive triumph, as any of that assembled crowd were likely to see in a life-time. A spasmodic burst of cheering was interrupted by vigorous hisses and cries of "Hush! hush! Let the gentleman speak!"

Lifting his hand with an appropriate air of grave solemnity, the sheriff proceeded to read: “Result of the Election in this Parliamentary Division — Mr. George Wone, seven thousand one hundred and fifty nine! Mr. Mortimer Romer, nine thousand eight hundred and sixty-one! I therefore declare Mr. Mortimer Romer duly elected.”

A burst of incredible cheering followed this proclamation, in the midst of which the groans and hisses of the defeated section were completely drowned. The cheering was so tremendous and the noisy reaction after the hours of expectancy so immense, that it was difficult to catch a word of what either the successful or the unsuccessful candidate said, as they made their accustomed valedictory speeches.

Clavering and Luke were swept far apart from one another in the mad confusion; and it was well for them both, perhaps, that they were; for before the speeches were over, or the persons on the balcony had disappeared into the building, a very strange and disconcerting event took place.

The unfortunate young Philip, who had received the announcement of his father’s defeat as a man might receive a death-sentence, burst into a piercing and resounding cry, which was clearly audible, not only to those immediately about him, but to every one of the ladies and gentlemen assembled on the balcony. There is no need to repeat in this place the words which the unhappy young man hurled at Mr. Romer and his daughter. Suffice it to say that they were astounding in their brutality and grossness.

As soon as he had uttered them, Philip sank down upon the ground, in the miserable convulsions of some species of epileptic fit. The tragic anxiety of poor Mrs. Wone, who had not only heard his words, but seen his collapse, broke up the balcony party in disorder.

Such is human nature, that though not one of the aristocratic personages there assembled, believed for a moment that Philip was anything but a madman; still, the mere weight of such ominous words, though flung at random and by one out of his senses, had an appreciable effect upon them. It was noticed that one after another they drew away from the two persons thus challenged; and this, combined with the movement about the agitated Mrs. Wone, soon left the father and daughter, the girl clinging to her parent's arm, completely isolated.

Before he led Gladys away, however, Mr. Romer turned a calm and apparently unruffled face upon the scene below. Luke, who, it may be well believed, had missed nothing of the subtler aspects of the situation, was so moved by the man's imperturbable serenity that he caught himself on the point of raising an admiring and congratulatory shout. He stopped himself in time, however; and in place of acclaiming the father, did all he could to catch the eye of the daughter.

In this he was unsuccessful; for the attention of Gladys, during the brief moment in which she followed Mr. Romer's glance over the heads of the people, was fixed upon the group of persons who surrounded the prostrate Philip. Among these persons Luke now recognized, and doubtless the girl had recognized too, the figure of the vicar of Nevilton.

Luke apostrophized his rival with an ejaculation of mild contempt. "A good man, that poor priest," he muttered, "but a most unmitigated fool! As to Romer, I commend him! But I think I've put a spoke in the wheel of his good fortune, all the same, in spite of the planet Jupiter!"

CHAPTER XXI. CAESAR’S QUARRY

Mr. Romer’s victory in the election was attended by a complete lull in the political world of Nevilton. Nothing but an unavoidable and drastic crisis, among the ruling circles of the country, could have precipitated this formidable struggle in the middle of the holiday-time; and as soon as the contest was over, the general relaxation of the season made itself doubly felt.

This lull in the political arena seemed to extend itself into the sphere of private and individual emotion, in so far as the persons of our drama were concerned. The triumphant quarry-owner rested from his labors under the pleasant warmth of the drowsy August skies; and as, in the old Homeric Olympus, a relapse into lethargy of the wielder of thunder-bolts was attended by a cessation of earthly strife, so in the Nevilton world, the elements of discord and opposition fell, during this siesta of the master of Leo’s Hill, into a state of quiescent inertia.

But though the gods might sleep, and the people might relax and play, the watchful unwearied fates spun on, steadily and in silence, their ineluctable threads.

The long process of “carrying the corn” was over at last, and night by night the magic-burdened moon grew larger and redder above the misty stubble-fields.

The time drew near for the reception of the successful candidate’s daughter into the historic church of the country over which he was now one of the accredited rulers. A few more drowsy sunshine-drugged days remained to pass, and the baptism of Gladys — followed, a week later, by the formal imposition of episcopal hands — would be the signal for the departure of August and the beginning of the fall of the leaves.

The end of the second week in September had been selected for the double marriage, partly because it synchronized with the annual parish feast-day, and partly because it supplied Ralph Dangelis with an excuse for carrying off his bride incontinently to New York by one of his favourite boats.

Under the quiet surface of this steadily flowing flood of destiny, which seemed, just then, to be casting a drowning narcotic spell upon all concerned, certain deep and terrible misgivings troubled not a few hearts.

It may be frequently noticed by those whose interest it is to watch the strange occult harmonies between the smallest human dramas and their elemental accomplices, that at these peculiar seasons when Nature seems to pause and draw in her breath, men and women find it hard to use or assert their normal powers of resistance. The planetary influences seem nearer earth than usual; — nearer, with the apparent nearness of the full tide-drawing moon and the heavy scorching sun; — and for those more sensitive souls, whose nerves are easily played upon, there is produced a certain curious sense of lying back upon fate, with arms helplessly outspread, and wills benumbed and passive.

But though some such condition as this had narcotized all overt resistance to the destiny in store for her in the heart of Lacrima, it cannot be said that the Italian’s mind was free from an appalling shadow. Whether by reason of a remote spark of humanity in him, or out of subtle fear lest by any false move he should lose his prey, or because of some diplomatic and sagacious advice received from his brother-in-law, Mr. John Goring had, so far, conducted himself extremely wisely towards his prospective wife, leaving her entirely untroubled by any molestations, and never even seeing her except in the presence of other people. How far this unwonted restraint was agreeable to the nature of the farmer, was a secret concealed from all, except perhaps from his idiot protégé, the only human being in Nevilton to whom the unattractive man ever confided his thoughts.

Lacrima had one small and incidental consolation in feeling that she had been instrumental in sending to a home for the feeble-minded, the unfortunate child of the game-keeper of Auber Lake. In this single particular, Gladys had behaved exceptionally well, and the news that came of the girl's steady progress in the direction of sanity and happiness afforded some fitful gleam of light in the obscurity that surrounded the Pariah's soul.

The nature of this intermittent gleam, its deep mysterious strength drawn from spiritual sources, helped to throw a certain sad and pallid twilight over her ordained sacrifice. This also she felt was undertaken, like her visit to Auber Lake, for the sake of an imprisoned and fettered spirit. If by means of such self-immolation her friend of Dead Man's Lane would be liberated from his servitude and set permanently upon his feet, her submission would not be in vain.

She had come once more to feel as though the impending event were, as far as she was concerned, a sort of final death-sentence. The passing fantasy, that in a momentary distortion of her mind had swept over her of the new life it might mean to have children of her own, even though born of this unnatural union, had not approached again the troubled margin of her spirit.

Even the idea of escaping the Romers was only vaguely present. She would escape more than the Romers; she would escape the whole miserable coil of this wretched existence, if the death she anticipated fell upon her; for death, and nothing less than death, seemed the inevitable circumference of the iron circle that was narrowing in upon her.

Had those two strange phantoms that we have seen hovering over Nevilton churchyard, representing in their opposite ways the spiritual powers of the place, been able to survey — as who could deny they might be able? — the fatal stream which was now bearing the Pariah forward to the precipice, they would have been, in their divers tempers, struck with delight and consternation at the spectacle presented to them. There was more in this spectacle, it must be admitted, to bring joy into the heart of a goblin than into that of an angel. Coincidence, casualty, destiny — all seemed working together to effect the unfortunate girl's destruction.

The fact that, by the recovery of his brother, the astute Luke Andersen, the only one of all the Nevilton circle capable of striking an effective blow in her defence, had been deprived of all but a very shadowy interest in what befell, seemed an especially sinister accident. Equally unfortunate was the luckless chance that at this critical moment had led the diplomatic Mr. Taxater to see fit to prolong his stay in London. Mr. Quincunx was characteristically helpless. James Andersen seemed, since the recovery of his normal mind, to have subsided like a person under some restraining vow. Lacrima was a little surprised that he made no attempt to see her or to communicate with her. She could only suppose she had indelibly hurt him, by her rejection of his quixotic offers, on their way back from Hullaway.

Thus to any ordinary glance, cast upon the field of events as they were now arranging themselves, it would have looked as though the Italian's escape from the fate hanging over her were as improbable as it would be for a miracle to intervene to save her.

In spite of the wild threat flung out by Mr. Clavering in his sudden anger as he waited with Luke in the Yeoborough street, the vicar of Nevilton made no attempt to interfere. Whether he really managed to persuade his conscience that all was well, or whether he came to the conclusion that without some initiative from the Italian it would be useless to meddle, not the most subtle psychologist could say. The fact remained that the only step he took in the matter was to assure himself that the girl's nominal Catholicism had so far lapsed into indifference, that she was likely to raise no objection to a ceremony according to Anglican ritual.

The whole pitiful situation, indeed, offered only one more terrible and branding indictment, against the supine passivity of average human nature in the presence of unspeakable wrongs. The power and authority of the domestic system, according to which the real battle-field of wills takes place out of sight of the public eye, renders it possible for this inertia of the ordinary human crowd to cloak itself under a moral dread of scandal, and under the fear of any drastic breach of the uniformity of social usage.

A visitor from Mars or Saturn might have supposed, that in circumstances of this kind, every decent-thinking person in the village would have rushed headlong to the episcopal throne, and called loudly for spiritual mandates to stop the outrage. Where was the delegated Power of God — so the forlorn shadows of the long-evicted Cistercians might be imagined crying — whose absolute authority could be appealed to in face of every worldly force? What was the tender-souled St. Catharine doing, in her Paradisiac rest, that she could remain so passively indifferent to such monstrous and sacrilegious use of her sacred building? Was it that such transactions as this, should be carried through, under its very shelter, that the gentle spirits who guarded the Holy Rood had made of Nevilton Mount their sacred resting-place? Must the whole fair tradition of the spot remain dull, dormant, dumb, while the devotees of tyranny worked their arbitrary will— "and nothing said"?

Such imaginary appeals, so fantastic in the utterance, were indeed, as that large August-moon rose night by night upon the stubble-fields, far too remote from Nevilton's common routine to enter the heads of any of that simple flock. The morning mists that diffused themselves, like filmy dream-figures, over the watchful promontory of Leo's Hill, were as capable as any of these villagers of crying aloud that wrong was being done.

The loneliness in the midst of which Lacrima moved on her way — groping, as her enemy had taunted her with doing, so helplessly with her wistful hands — was a loneliness so absolute that it sometimes seemed to her as if she were already literally dead and buried. Now and then, with a pallid phosphorescent glimmer like the gleam of a corpse-light, the mortal dissolution of all the ties that bound her to earthly interests, itself threw a fitful illumination over her consciousness.

But Mr. Romer had over-reached himself in his main purpose. The moral disintegration which he looked for, and which the cynical apathy of Mr. Quincunx encouraged, had, by extending itself to every nerve of her spirit, rounded itself off, as it were, full circle, and left her in a mental state rather beyond both good and evil, than delivered up to the latter as opposed to the former. The infernal power might be said to have triumphed; but it could scarcely be said to have triumphed over a living soul. It had rather driven her soul far off, far away from all these contests, into some mysterious translunar region, where all these distinctions lapsed and merged.

Leo's Hill itself had never crouched in more taciturn intentness than it did under that sweltering August sunshine, which seemed to desire, in the gradual scorching of the green slopes, to reduce even the outward skin of the monster to an approximate conformity with its tawny entrails.

Mr. Taxater's departure from the scene at this juncture was not only, little as she knew it, a loss of support to Lacrima, it was also a very serious blow to Vennie Seldom.

The priest in Yeoborough, who at her repeated request had already begun to give her surreptitious lessons in the Faith, was not in any sense fitted to be a young neophyte's spiritual adviser. He was fat. He was gross. He was lethargic. He was indifferent. He also absolutely refused to receive her into the Church without her mother's sanction. This refusal was especially troublesome to Vennie. She knew enough of her mother to know that while it was her nature to resist blindly and obstinately any deviation from her will, when once a revolt was an established fact she would resign herself to it with a surprising equanimity. To ask Valentia for permission to be received into the Church would mean a most violent and distressing scene. To announce to her that she had been so received, would mean nothing but melancholy and weary acquiescence.

She felt deeply hurt at Mr. Taxater's desertion of her at this moment of all moments. It was incredible that it was really necessary for him to be so long in town. As a rule he never left the Gables during the month of August. His conduct puzzled and troubled her. Did he care nothing whether she became a Catholic or not? Were his lessons mere casual by-play, to fill up his spare hours in an interesting and pleasant diversion? Was he really the faithful friend he called himself? Not only had he absented himself, but he had done so without sending her a single word.

As a matter of fact it was extremely rare for Mr. Taxater to write a letter, even to his nearest friends, except under the stress of theological controversy. But Vennie knew nothing of this. She simply felt hurt and injured; as though the one human being, upon whom she had reposed her trust, had deserted and betrayed her. He had spoken so tenderly, so affectionately to her, too, during their last walk together, before the unfortunate encounter with James Andersen in the Athelston porch!

It is true that his attitude over that matter of Andersen's insanity, and also in the affair of Lacrima's marriage, had a little shocked and disconcerted her. He had bluntly refused to take her into his confidence, and she felt instinctively that the conversation with Luke, from which she had been so curtly dismissed, was of a kind that would have hurt and surprised her.

It seemed unworthy of him to absent himself from Nevilton, just at the moment when, as she felt certain in her heart, some grievous outrage was being committed. She had learned quickly enough of Andersen's recovery; but nothing she could learn either lessened her terrible apprehension about Lacrima, or gave her the least hint of a path she could follow to do anything on the Italian's behalf.

She made a struggle once to see the girl and to talk to her. But she came away from the hurried interview as perplexed and troubled in her mind as ever. Lacrima had maintained an obstinate and impenetrable reserve. Vennie made up her mind that she would postpone for the present her own religious revolt, and devote herself to keeping a close and careful watch upon events in Nevilton.

Mr. Clavering's present attitude rendered her profoundly unhappy. The pathetic overtures she had made to him recently, with a desperate hope of renewing their friendship on a basis that would be unaffected even by her change of creed, had seemed entirely unremarked by the absorbed clergyman. She could not help brooding sometimes, with a feeling of wretched humiliation, over the brusqueness and rudeness which characterized his manner towards her.

She recalled, more often than the priest would have cared to have known, that pursuit of theirs, of the demented Andersen, and how in his annoyance and confusion he had behaved to her in a fashion not only rough but positively unkind.

It was clear that he was growing more and more slavishly infatuated with Gladys; and Vennie could only pray that the days might pass quickly and the grotesque blasphemy of the confirmation service be carried through and done with, so that the evil spell of her presence should be lifted and broken.

Prayer indeed — poor little forlorn saint! — was all that was left to her, outside her mother's exacting affection, and she made a constant and desperate use of it. Only the little painted wooden image, in her white-washed room, a pathetic reproduction of the famous Nuremburg Madonna, could have betrayed how long were the hours in which she gave herself up to these passionate appeals. She prayed for Clavering in that shy heart-breaking manner — never whispering his name, even to the ears of Our Lady, but always calling him "He" and "Him" — in which girls are inclined to pray for the man to whom they have sacrificed their peace. She prayed desperately for Lacrima, that at the last moment, contrary to all hope, some intervention might arrive.

Thus it came about, that beneath the roofs of Nevilton — for neither James Andersen nor Mr. Quincunx were "praying men" — only one voice was lifted up, the voice of the last of the old race of the place's rulers, to protest against the flowing forward to its fatal end, of this evil tide.

Nevertheless, things moved steadily and irresistibly on; and it seemed as though it were as improbable that those shimmering mists which every evening crept up the sides of Leo's Hill should endure the heat of the August noons, as that the prayers of this frail child should change the course of ordained destiny.

If none but her little painted Madonna knew how passionate were Vennie's spiritual struggles; not even that other Vennie, of the long-buried royal court, whose mournful nun's eyes looked out upon the great entrance-hall, knew what turbulent thoughts and anxieties possessed the soul of Gladys Romer.

Was Mr. Taxater right in the formidable hint he had given the young stone-carver, as to the result of his amour with his employer's daughter? Was Gladys not only the actual mistress of Luke, but the prospective mother of a child of their strange love?

Whatever were the fair-haired girl's thoughts and apprehensions, she kept them rigidly to herself; and not even Lacrima, in her wildest imagination, ever dreamed that things had gone as far as that. If it had chanced to be, as Mr. Taxater supposed, and as Luke seemed willing to admit, Gladys was apparently relying upon some vague accident in the course of events, or upon some hidden scheme of her own, to escape the exposure which the truth of such a supposition seemed to render inevitable.

The fact remained that she let matters drift on, and continued to prepare — in her own fashion — not only for her reception into the Church of England, but for her marriage to the wealthy American.

Dangelis was continually engaged now in running backwards and forwards to town on business connected with his marriage; and with a view to making these trips more pleasantly and conveniently he had acquired a smart touring-car of his own, which he soon found himself able to drive without assistance. The pleasure of these excursions, leading him, in delicious solitude, through so many unvisited country places and along such historic roads, had for the moment distracted his attention from his art.

He rarely took Gladys with him; partly because he regarded himself as still but a learner in the science of driving, but more because he felt, at this critical moment of his life, an extraordinary desire to be alone with his own thoughts. Most of these thoughts, it is true, were such as it would not have hurt the feelings of his fiancée to have surprised in their passage through his mind; but not quite all of them. Ever since the incident of Auber Lake, an incident which threw the character of his betrothed into no very charming light, Dangelis had had his moments of uneasiness and misgiving. He could not altogether conceal from himself that his attraction to Gladys was rather of a physical than of a spiritual, or even of a psychic nature.

Once or twice, while the noble expanses of Salisbury Plain or the New Forest thrilled him with a pure dilation of soul, as he swept along in the clear air, he was on the verge of turning his car straight to the harbour of Southampton and taking the first boat that offered itself, bound East, West, North or South — it mattered nothing the direction! — so that an impassable gulf of free sea-water should separate him forever from the hot fields and woods of Nevilton.

Once, when reaching a cross-road point, where the name of the famous harbour stared at him from a sign-post, he had even gone so far as to deviate to the extent of several miles from his normal road. But that intolerable craving for the girl's soft-clinging arms and supple body, with which she had at last succeeded in poisoning the freedom of his mind, drew him back with the force of a magnet.

The day at length approached, when, on the festival of his favorite saint, Mr. Clavering was to perform the ceremony, to which he had looked forward so long and with such varied feelings. It was Saturday, and on the following morning, in a service especially arranged to take place privately, between early celebration and ordinary matins, Gladys was to be baptized.

Dangelis had suddenly declared his intention of making his escape from a proceeding which to his American mind seemed entirely uncalled for, and to his pagan humour seemed not a little grotesque. He had decided to start, immediately after breakfast, and motor to London, this time by way of Trowbridge and Westbury.

The confirmation ceremony, for reasons connected with the convenience of the Lord Bishop, had been finally fixed for the ensuing Wednesday, so that only two days were destined to elapse between the girl's reception into the Church, and her admission to its most sacred rites. Dangelis was sufficiently a heathen to desire to be absent from this event also, though he had promised Mr. Clavering to support his betrothed on the occasion of her first Communion on the following Sunday, which would be their last Sunday together as unwedded lovers.

On this occasion, Gladys persuaded him to let her ride by his side a few miles along the Yeoborough road. They had just reached the bridge across the railway-line, about a mile and a half from the village, when they caught sight of Mr. John Goring, returning from an early visit to the local market.

Gladys made the artist stop the car, and she got out to speak to her uncle. After a minute or two's conversation, she informed Dangelis that she would return with Mr. Goring by the field-path, which left the road at that point and followed the track of the railway. The American, obedient to her wish, set his car in motion, and waving her a gay good-bye, disappeared swiftly round an adjacent corner.

Gladys and her uncle proceeded to walk slowly homeward, across the meadows; neither of them, however, paying much attention to the charm of the way. In vain from the marshy hollows between their path and the metal track, certain brilliant clumps of ragged robin and red rattle signalled to them to pause and admire. Gladys and Mr. Goring strolled forward, past these allurements, with a superb absorption in their own interests.

"I can't think, uncle," Gladys was saying, "how it is that you can go on in the way you're doing; you, a properly engaged person, and not seeing anything of your young lady?”

The farmer laughed. “Ah! my dear, but what matter? I shall see her soon enough; all I want to, may-be.”

“But most engaged people like to see a little of one another before they’re married, don’t they, uncle? I know Ralph would be quite mad if he couldn’t see *me*.”

“But, my pretty, this is quite a different case. When Bert and I” — he spoke of the idiot as if they had been comrades, instead of master and servant— “have bought a new load of lop-ears, we never tease ’em or fret ’em before we get ’em home.”

“But Lacrima isn’t a rabbit!” cried Gladys impatiently; “she’s a girl like me, and wants what all girls want, to be petted and spoilt a little before she’s plunged into marriage.”

“She didn’t strike me as wanting anything of that kind, when I made up to her in our parlour,” replied Mr. Goring.

“Oh you dear old stupid!” cried his niece, “can’t you understand that’s what we’re all like? We all put on airs, and have fancies, and look cross; but we want to be petted all the same. We want it all the more!”

“I reckon I’d better leave well alone all the same, just at present,” observed the farmer. “If I was to go stroking her and making up to her, while she’s on the road, may-be when we got her into the hutch she’d bite like a weasel.”

“She’d never really bite!” retorted his companion. “You don’t know her as well as I do. I tell you, uncle, she’s got no more spirit than a tame pigeon.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said the farmer.

Gladys flicked the grass impatiently with the end of her parasol.

"You may take my word for it, uncle," she continued. "The whole thing's put on. It's all affectation and nonsense. Do you think she'd have agreed to marry you if she wasn't ready for a little fun? Of course she's ready! She's only waiting for you to begin. It makes it more exciting for her, when she cries out and looks injured. That's the only reason why she does it. Lots of girls are like that, you know!"

"Are they, my pretty, are they? 'Tis difficult to tell that kind, may-be, from the other kind. But I'm not a man for too much of these fancy ways."

"You're not drawing back, uncle, are you?" cried Gladys, in considerable alarm.

"God darn me, no!" replied the farmer. "I'm going to carry this business through. Don't you fuss yourself. Only I like doing these things in my own way — dost understand me, my dear? — in my own way; and then, if so be they go wrong, I can't put the blame on no one else."

"I wonder you aren't more keen, uncle," began Gladys insinuatingly, following another track, "to see more of a pretty girl you're just going to marry. I don't believe you half know how pretty she is! I wish you could see her doing her hair in the morning."

"I shall see her, soon enough, my lass; don't worry," replied the farmer.

"I should so love to see you give her one kiss," murmured Gladys. "Of course, she'd struggle and make a fuss, but she'd really be enjoying it all the time."

"May-be she would, my pretty, and may-be she wouldn't. I'm not one that likes hearing either rabbits or maidens start the squealing game. It fair gives me the shivers. Bert, he can stand it, but I never could. It's nature, I suppose. A man can't change his nature no more than a cow nor a horse."

"I can't understand you, uncle," observed Gladys. "If I were in your place, I'm sure I shouldn't be satisfied without at least kissing the girl I was going to marry. I'd find some way of getting round her, however sulky she was. Oh, I'm sure you don't half know how nice Lacrima is to kiss!"

"I suppose she isn't so mighty different, come to that," replied the farmer, "than any other maid. I don't mind if I give *you* a kiss, my beauty!" he added, encircling his niece with an affectionate embrace and kissing her flushed cheek. "There — there! Best let well alone, sweetheart, and leave your old uncle to manage his own little affairs according to his own fashion!"

But Gladys was not so easily put off. She had recourse to her fertile imagination.

"You should have heard what she said to me the other night, uncle. You know the way girls talk? or you ought to, anyhow! She said she hoped you'd go on being the same simple fool, after you were married. She said she'd find it mighty easy to twist you round her finger. 'Why,' she said, 'I can do what I like with him now. He treats me as if I were a high-born lady and he were a mere common man. I believe he's downright afraid of me!' That's the sort of things she says about you, uncle. She thinks in her heart that you're just a fool, a simple frightened fool!"

"Darn her! she does, does she?" cried Mr. Goring, touched at last by the serpent's tongue. "She thinks I'm a fool, does she? Well! Let her have her laugh. Them laughs best as laughs last, in my thinking!"

"Yes, she thinks you're a great big silly fool, uncle. Of course it's all pretence, her talk about wanting you to be like that; but that's what she thinks you are. What she'd really like — only she doesn't say so, even to me — would be for you to catch her suddenly round the waist and kiss her on the mouth, and laugh at her pretendings. I expect she's waiting to give you a chance to do something of that sort; only you don't come near her.

Oh, she must think you're a monstrous fool! She must chuckle to herself to think what a fool you are."

"I'll teach her what kind of a fool I am," muttered Mr. Goring, "when I've got her to myself, up at the farm. This business of dangling after a maid's apron strings, this kissing and cuddling, don't suit somehow with my nature. I'm not one of your fancy-courting ones and never was!"

"Listen, uncle!" said Gladys eagerly, laying her hand on his arm. "Suppose I was to take her up to Cæsar's Quarry this afternoon? That would be a lovely chance! You could come strolling round about four o'clock. I'd be on the watch; and before she knew you were there, I'd scramble out, and you could climb down. She couldn't get away from you, and you'd have quite a nice little bit of love-making."

Mr. Goring paused, and prodded the ground with the end of his stick.

"What a little devil you are!" he exclaimed. "Darn me if this here job isn't a queer business! Here are you, putting yourself out and fussing around, only for a fellow to have what's due to him. You leave us alone, sweetheart, my young lady and me! I reckon we know what's best for ourselves, without you thrusting your hand in."

"But you might just walk up that way, uncle; it isn't far over the hill. I'd give — oh, I don't know what! — to see you two together. She wants to be teased a little, you know! She's getting too proud and self-satisfied for anything. It would do her ever so much good to be taught a lesson. It isn't much to do, is it? Just to give the girl you're going to marry one little kiss?"

"But how do I know you two wenches aren't fooling me, even now?" protested the cautious farmer. "'Tis just the sort of maids' trick ye might set out to play upon a man. How do I know ye haven't put your two darned little heads together over this job?"

Gladys looked round. They were approaching the Mill Copse.

“Please, uncle,” she cried, “don’t say such things to me. You know I wouldn’t join with anyone against you. Least of all with her! Just do as I tell you, and stroll up to Cæsar’s Quarry about four o’clock. I promise you faithfully I haven’t said a word to her about it. Please, uncle, be nice and kind over this.”

She threw her arms round Mr. Goring’s neck. “You haven’t done anything for me for a long time,” she murmured in her most persuasive tone. “Do you remember how I used to give you butterfly-kisses when I was a little girl, and you kept apples for me in the big loft?”

Mr. Goring’s nature may, or may not have been, as he described it; it is certain that the caresses and cajoleries of his lovely niece had an instantaneous effect upon him. His slow-witted suspicions melted completely under the spell of her touch.

“Well, my pretty,” he said, as they moved on, under the shadowy trees of the park, “may-be, if I’ve nothing else to do and things seem quiet, I’ll take a bit of a walk this afternoon. But you mustn’t count on it. If I do catch sight of ‘ee, ‘round Cæsar’s way, I’ll let ‘ee know. But ’tisn’t a downright promise, mind!”

Gladys clapped her hands. “You’re a perfect love, uncle!” she cried jubilantly. “I wish I were Lacrima; I’d be ever, ever so nice to you!”

“Ye can be nice to me, as ’tis, sweetheart,” replied the farmer. “You and me have always been kind of fond of each other, haven’t us? But I reckon ye’d best be slipping off now, up to your house. I never care greatly for meeting your father by accident-like. He’s one of these sly ones that always makes a fellow feel squeamy and leery.”

That afternoon it happened that the adventurous Luke had planned a trip down to Weymouth, with a new flame of his, a certain Polly Shadow, whose parents kept a tobacco-shop in Yeoborough.

He had endeavoured to persuade his brother to accompany them on this little excursion, in the hope that a breath of sea-air might distract and refresh him; but James had expressed his intention of paying a visit to his gentle restorer, up at Wild Pine, who was now sufficiently recovered to enable her to sit out in the shade of the great trees.

The church clock had just struck three, when James Andersen approached the entrance to Nevil’s Gully.

He had not advanced far into the shadow of the beeches, when he heard the sound of voices. He paused, and listened. The clear tones of Ninsy Lintot were unmistakable, and he thought he detected — though of this he was not sure — the nervous high-pitched voice of Philip Wone. From the direction of the sounds, he gathered that the two young people were seated somewhere on the bracken-covered slope above the barton, where, as he well knew, there were several shady terraces overlooking the valley.

Unwilling to plunge suddenly into a conversation that appeared, as far as he could catch its purport, to be of considerable emotional tension, Andersen cautiously ascended the moss-grown bank on his left, and continued his climb, until he had reached the crest of the hill. He then followed, as silently as he could, the little grassy path between the stubble-field and the thickets, until he came to the open space immediately above these fern-covered terraces.

Yes, his conjecture had been right. Seated side by side beneath the tall-waving bracken, the auburn-haired Ninsy and her anarchist friend were engaged in an absorbing and passionate discussion. Both of them were bare-headed, and the young man’s hand rested upon the motionless fingers of his companion, which were clasped demurely upon her lap. Philip’s voice was raised in intense and pitiful supplication.

"I'd care for you day and night," Andersen heard him cry. "I'd nurse you when you were ill, and keep you from every kind of annoyance."

"But, Philip dear," the girl's voice answered, "you know what the doctor said. He said I mustn't marry on any account. So even if I had nothing against it, it wouldn't be possible for us to do this."

"Ninsy, Ninsy!" cried the youth pathetically, "don't you understand what I mean? I can't bear having to say these things, but you force me to, when you talk like that. The doctor meant that it would be wrong for you to have children, and he took it for granted that you'd never find anyone ready to live with you as I'd live with you. It would only be a marriage in name. I mean it would only be a marriage in name in regard to children. It would be a real marriage to me, it would be heaven to me, to live side by side with you, and no one able any more to come between us! I can't realize such happiness. It makes me feel dizzy even to think of it!"

Ninsy unclasped her hands, and gently repulsing him, remained buried in deep thought. Standing erect above them, like a sentry upon a palisade, James Andersen stared gloomily down upon this little drama. In some strange way, — perhaps because of some sudden recurrence of his mental trouble, — he seemed quite unconscious of anything dishonourable or base in thus withholding from these two people the knowledge that he was overhearing them.

"I'll take care of you to the end of my life!" the young man repeated. "I'm doing quite well now with my work. You'll be able to have all you want. You'll be better off than you are here, and you know perfectly well that as soon as your father's free he'll marry that friend of his in Yeoborough. I saw him with her last Sunday. I'm sure it's only for your sake that he stays single. She's got three children, and that's what holds him back — that, and the thought that you two mightn't get on together. You'd be doing your father a kindness if you said yes to me, Ninsy. Please, please, my darling, say it, and make me grateful to you forever!”

“I can’t say it, — Philip, dear, I can’t, I can’t”; murmured the girl, in a voice so low that the sentinel above them could only just catch her words. “I do care for you, and I do value your goodness to me, but I can’t say the words, Philip. Something seems to stop me, something in my throat.”

It was not to her throat however, that the agitated Ninsy raised her thin hands. As she pressed them against her breast a look of tragic sorrow came into her face. Philip regarded her wistfully.

“You’re thinking you don’t love me, dear, — and never can love me. I know that, well enough! I know you don’t love me as I love you. But what does that matter? I’ve known that, all the time. The thing is, you won’t find anyone who loves you as I do, — ready to live with you as I’ve said I will, ready to nurse you and look after you. Other people’s love will be always asking and demanding from you. Mine — oh, it’s true, my darling, it’s true! — mine only wants to give up everything to make you happy.”

Ninsy was evidently more than a little moved by the boy’s appeal. There was a ring of passionate sincerity in his tone which went straight to her heart. She bent down and covered her face with her hands. When at length she lifted up her head and answered him, there were tears on her cheeks, and the watchful listener above them did not miss the quiver in her tone.

“I’m sorry, Philip boy, more sorry than I can say, that I can’t be nicer to you, that I can’t show my gratitude to you, in the way you wish. But though I do care for you, and — and value your dear love — something stops me, something makes it impossible that this should happen.”

“I believe it’s because you love that fellow Andersen!” cried the excited youth, leaping to his feet in his agitation.

In making this movement, the figure of the stone-carver, silhouetted with terrible distinctness against the sky-line, became visible to him. Instinctively he uttered a cry of surprise and anger.

"What do you want here? You've been listening! You've been spying on us! Get away, can't you! Get back to your pretty young lady — her that's going to marry John Goring for the sake of his money! Clear out of this, do you hear? Ninsy's sick of you and your ways. Clear off! or I'll make you — eavesdropper!"

By this time Ninsy had also risen, and stood facing the figure above them. Every vestige of colour had left her cheeks, and her hand was pressed against her side. Andersen made a curious incoherent sound and took a step towards them.

"Get away, can't you!" reiterated the furious youth. "You've caused enough trouble here already. Look at her, — can't you see how ill she is? Get back — damn you! — unless you want to kill her."

Ninsy certainly looked as though in another moment she were going to fall. She made a piteous little gesture, as if to ward off from Andersen the boy's savage words, but Philip caught her passionately round the waist.

"Get away!" he cried once more. "She belongs to me now. You might have had her, you coward — you turn-coat! — but you let her go for your newer prey. Oh, you're a fine gentleman, James Andersen, a fine faithful gentleman! *You* don't hold with strikes. *You* don't hold with workmen rising against masters. *You* hold with keeping in with those that are in power. Clear off — eavesdropper! Get back to Mistress John Goring and your nice brother! He's as pretty a gentleman as you are, with his dear Miss Gladys!"

Ninsy's feet staggered beneath her and she began to hang limp upon his arm. She opened her mouth to speak, but could only gasp helplessly. Her wide-open eyes — staring from her pallid face — never left Andersen for a moment. Of Philip she seemed absolutely unconscious. The stone-carver made another step down the hill. His eyes, too, were fixed intently on the girl, and of his rival's angry speeches he seemed utterly oblivious.

"Get away!" the boy reiterated, beside himself with fury, supporting the drooping form of his companion as if its weight were nothing. "We've had enough of your shilly-shallying and trickery! We've had enough of your fine manners! A damned cowardly spy — that's what I call you, you well-behaved gentleman! Get back — can't you!"

The drooping girl uttered some incoherent words and made a helpless gesture with her hand. Andersen seemed to read her meaning in her eyes, for he paused abruptly in his approach and stretched out his arms.

"Good-bye, Ninsy!" he murmured in a low voice. He said no more, and turning on his heel, scrambled swiftly back over the crest of the ridge and disappeared from view.

Philip flung a parting taunt after him, and then, lifting the girl bodily off her feet, staggered down the slope to the cottage, holding her in his arms.

Meanwhile James Andersen walked swiftly across the stubble-field in the direction of Leo's Hill. At the pace he moved it only took him some brief minutes to reach the long stone wall that separates, in this quarter, the quarried levels of the promontory from the high arable lands which abut upon it.

He climbed over this barrier and strode blindly and recklessly forward among the slippery grassy paths that crossed one another along the edges of the deeper pits.

The stone-carver was approaching, though quite unconsciously, the scene of a very remarkable drama. Some fifteen minutes before his approach, the two girls from Nevilton House had reached the precipitous edge of what was known in that locality as Cæsar's Quarry. Cæsar's Quarry was a large disused pit, deeper and more extensive than most of the old excavations on the Hill, and surrounded, on all but one side, by blank precipitous walls of weather-stained sandstone. These walls of smooth stone remained always dark and damp, whatever the temperature might be of the air above them; and the floor of the Quarry was composed of a soft verdant carpet of cool moist moss, interspersed by stray heaps of discoloured rubble, on which flourished, at this particular season of the year, masses of that sombre-foliaged weed known as wormwood.

On the northern side of Cæsar's Quarry rose a high narrow ridge of rock, divided, at uneven spaces, by deeply cut fissures or chasms, some broad and some narrow, but all overgrown to the very edge by short slippery grass. This ridge, known locally as Claudy's Leap, was a favourite venture-place of the more daring among the children of the neighbourhood, who would challenge one another to feats of courage and agility, along its perilous edge.

On the side of Claudy's Leap, opposite from Cæsar's Quarry, was a second pit, of even deeper descent than the other, but of much smaller expanse. This second quarry, also disused for several generations, remained so far nameless, destiny having, it might seem, withheld the baptismal honour, until the place had earned a right to it by becoming the scene of some tragic, or otherwise noteworthy, event.

Gladys and Lacrima approached Cæsar's Quarry from the western side, from whose slope a little winding path — the only entrance or exit attainable — led down into its shadowy depths. The Italian glanced with a certain degree of apprehension into the gulf beneath her, but Gladys seemed to take the thing so much for granted, and appeared so perfectly at her ease, that she was ashamed to confess her tremors. The elder girl, indeed, continued chatting cheerfully to her companion about indifferent matters, and as she clambered down the little path in front of her, she turned once or twice, in her fluent discourse, to make sure that Lacrima was following. The two cousins stood for awhile in silence, side by side, when they reached the bottom.

"How nice and cool it is!" cried Gladys, after a pause. "I was getting scorched up there! Let's sit down a little, shall we, — before we start back? I love these old quarries."

They sat down, accordingly, upon a heap of stones, and Gladys serenely continued her chatter, glancing up, however, now and again, to the frowning ridges of the precipices above them.

They had not waited long in this way, when the quarry-owner's daughter gave a perceptible start, and raised her hand quickly to her lips.

Her observant eye had caught sight of the figure of Mr. John Goring peering down upon them from the opposite ridge. Had Lacrima observed this movement and lifted her eyes too, she would have received a most invaluable warning, but the Powers whoever they may have been, who governed the sequence of events upon Leo's Hill, impelled her to keep her head lowered, and her interest concentrated upon a tuft of curiously feathered moss. Gladys remained motionless for several moments, while the figure on the opposite side vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. Then she slowly rose.

"Oh, how silly I am," she cried; "I've dropped that bunch of marjoram. Stop a minute, dear. Don't move! I'll just run up and get it. It was in the path. I know exactly where!"

"I'll come with you if you like," said Lacrima listlessly, "then you won't have to come back. Or why not leave it for a moment?"

"It's on the path, I tell you!" cried her cousin, already some way up the slope; "I'm scared of someone taking it. Marjoram isn't common about here. Oh no! Stay where you are. I'll be back in a second."

The Italian relapsed into her former dreamy unconcern. She listlessly began stripping the leaves from a spray of wormwood which grew by her side. The place where she sat was in deep shadow, though upon the summit of the opposite ridge the sun lay hot. Her thoughts hovered about her friend in Dead Man's Lane. She had vaguely hoped to get a glimpse of him this afternoon, but the absence of Dangelis had interfered with this.

She began building fantastic castles in the air, trying to call up the image of a rejuvenated Mr. Quincunx, freed from all cares and worries, living the placid epicurean life his heart craved. Would he, she wondered, recognize then, what her sacrifice meant? Or would he remain still obsessed by this or the other cynical fantasy, as far from the real truth of things as a madman's dream? She smiled gently to herself as she thought of her friend's peculiarities. Her love for him, as she felt it now, across a quivering gulf of misty space, was a thing as humorously tolerant and tender as it might have been had they been man and wife of many years' standing. In these things Lacrima's Latin blood gave her a certain maturity of feeling, and emphasized the maternal element in her attachment.

She contemplated dreamily the smooth bare walls of the cavernous arena in which she sat. Their coolness and dampness was not unpleasant after the heat of the upper air, but there was something sepulchral about them, something that gave the girl the queer impression of a colossal tomb — a tomb whose scattered bones might even now be lying, washed by centuries of rain, under the rank weeds of these heaps of rubble.

She heard the sound of someone descending the path behind her but, taking for granted that it was her cousin, she did not turn her head. It was only when the steps were quite close that she recognized that they were too heavy to be those of a girl.

Then she leapt to her feet, and swung round, — to find herself confronted by the sturdy figure of Mr. John Goring. She gave a wild cry of panic and fled blindly across the smooth floor of the great quarry. Mr. Goring followed her at his leisure.

The girl's terror was so great, that, hardly conscious of what she did, she ran desperately towards the remotest corner of the excavation, where some ancient blasting-process had torn a narrow crevice out of the solid rock. This direction of her flight made the farmer's pursuit of her a fatally easy undertaking, for the great smooth walls closed in, at a sharp angle, at that point, and the crevice, where the two walls met, only sank a few feet into the rock.

Mr. Goring, observing the complete hopelessness of the girl's mad attempt to escape him, proceeded to advance towards her as calmly and leisurely as if she had been some hare or rabbit he had just shot. The fact that Lacrima had chosen this particular cul-de-sac, on the eastern side of the quarry, was a most felicitous accident for Gladys, for it enabled her to watch the event with as much ease as if she had been a Drusilla or a Livia, seated in the Roman amphitheatre. The fair-haired girl crept to the extreme brink of the steep descent and there, lying prone on the thyme-scented grass, her chin propped upon her hands, she followed with absorbed interest the farmer's movements as he approached his recalcitrant fiancée.

The terrified girl soon found out the treachery of the panic-instinct which had led her into this trap. Had she remained in the open, it is quite possible that by a little manœuvring she could have escaped; but now her only exit was blocked by her advancing pursuer.

Turning to face him, and leaning back against the massive wall of stone, she stretched out her arms on either side of her, seizing convulsively in her fingers some tufts of knot-grass which grew on the surface of the rock.

Here, with panting bosom and pallid cheeks, she awaited his approach. Her tense figure and terror-stricken gaze only needed the imprisoning fetters to have made of her an exact modern image of the unfortunate Andromeda. She neither moved nor uttered the least cry, as Mr. Goring drew near her.

At that moment a wild and unearthly shout reverberated through the quarry. The sound of it — caught up by repeated echoes — went rolling away across Leo’s Hill, frightening the sheep and startling the cider-drinkers in the lonely Inn. Gladys leapt to her feet, ran round to where the path descended, and began hastily scrambling down. Mr. Goring retreated hurriedly into the centre of the arena, and with his hand shading his eyes gazed up at the intruder.

It was no light-footed Perseus, who on behalf of this forlorn child of classic shores, appeared as if from the sky. It was, indeed, only the excited figure of James Andersen that Mr. Goring’s gaze, and Lacrima’s bewildered glance, encountered simultaneously. The stone-carver seemed to be possessed by a legion of devils. His first thundering shout was followed by several others, each more terrifying than the last, and Gladys, rushing past the astonished farmer, seized Lacrima by the arm.

“Come!” she cried. “Uncle was a brute to frighten you. But, for heaven’s sake, let’s get out of this, before that madman collects a crowd! They’ll all be down here from the inn in another moment. Quick, dear, quick! Our only chance is to get away now.”

Lacrima permitted her cousin to hurry her across the quarry and up the path. As they neared the summit of the slope the Italian turned and looked back. Mr. Goring was still standing where they had left him, gazing with petrified interest at the wild gestures of the man above him.

Andersen seemed beside himself. He kept frantically waving his arms, and seemed engaged in some incoherent defiance of the invisible Powers of the air. Lacrima, as she looked at him, became convinced that he was out of his mind. She could not even be quite clear if he recognized her. She was certain that it was not against her assailant that his wild cries and defiances were hurled. It did not appear that he was even aware of the presence of the farmer. Whether or not he had seen her and known her when he uttered his first cry, she could not tell. It was certainly against no earthly enemies that the man was struggling now.

Vennie Seldom might have hazarded the superstitious suggestion that his fit was not madness at all but a sudden illumination, vouchsafed to his long silence, of the real conditions of the airy warfare that is being constantly waged around us. At that moment, Vennie might have said, James Andersen was the only perfectly sane person among them, for to his eyes alone, the real nature of that heathen place and its dark hosts was laid manifestly bare. The man, according to this strange view, was wrestling to the death, in his supreme hour, against the Forces that had not only darkened his own days and those of Lacrima, but had made the end of his mother's life so tragic and miserable.

Gladys dragged Lacrima away as soon as they reached the top of the ascent but the Pariah had time to mark the last desperate gesture of her deliverer before he vanished from her sight over the ridge.

Mr. Goring overtook them before they had gone far, and walked on with them, talking to Gladys about Andersen's evident insanity.

"It's no good my trying to do anything," he remarked. "But I'll send Bert round for Luke as soon as I get home. Luke'll bring him to his senses. They say he's been taken like this before, and has come round. He hears voices, you know, and fancies things."

They walked in silence along the high upland road that leads from the principal quarries of the Hill to the Wild Pine hamlet and Nevil’s Gully. When they reached the latter place, the two girls went on, down Root-Thatch Lane, and Mr. Goring took the field-path to the Priory.

Before they separated, the farmer turned to his future bride, who had been careful to keep Gladys between herself and him, and addressed her in the most gentle voice he knew how to assume.

“Don’t be angry with me, lass,” he said. “I was only teasing, just now. ’Twas a poor jest may-be, and ye’ve cause to look glowering. But when we two be man and wife ye’ll find I’m a sight better to live with than many a fair-spoken one. These be queer times, and like enough I seem a queer fellow, but things’ll settle themselves. You take my word for it!”

Lacrima could only murmur a faint assent in reply to these words, but as she entered with Gladys the shadow of the tunnel-like lane, she could not help thinking that her repulsion to this man, dreadful though it was, was nothing in comparison with the fear and loathing with which she regarded Mr. Romer. Contrasted with his sinister relative, Mr. John Goring was, after all, no more than a rough simpleton.

Meanwhile, on Leo’s Hill, an event of tragic significance had occurred. It will be remembered that the last Lacrima had seen of James Andersen was the wild final gesticulation he made, — a sort of mad appeal to the Heavens against the assault of invisible enemies, — before he vanished from sight on the further side of Claudy’s Leap. This vanishing, just at that point, meant no more to Lacrima than that he had probably taken a lower path, but had Gladys or Mr. Goring witnessed it, — or any other person who knew the topography of the place, — a much more startling conclusion would have been inevitable. Nor would such a conclusion have been incorrect.

The unfortunate man, forgetting, in his excitement, the existence of the other quarry, the nameless one; forgetting in fact that Claudy's Leap was a razor's edge between two precipices, had stepped heedlessly backwards, after his final appeal to Heaven, and fallen, without a cry, straight into the gulf.

The height of his fall would, in any case, have probably killed him, but as it was "he dashed his head," in the language of the Bible, "against a stone"; and in less than a second after his last cry, his soul, to use the expression of a more pagan scripture, "was driven, murmuring, into the Shades."

It fell to the lot, therefore, not of Luke, who did not return from Weymouth till late that evening, but of a motley band of holiday-makers from the hill-top Inn, to discover the madman's fate. Arriving at the spot almost immediately after the girls' departure, these honest revellers — strangers to the locality — had quickly found the explanation of the unearthly cries they had heard.

The eve of the baptism of Mr. Romer's daughter was celebrated, therefore, by the baptism of the nameless quarry. Henceforth, in the neighbourhood of Nevilton, the place was never known by any other appellation than that of "Jimmy's Drop"; and by that name any future visitors, curious to observe the site of so singular an occurrence, will have to enquire for it, as they drink their pint of cider in the Half-Moon Tavern.

CHAPTER XXII. A ROYAL WATERING-PLACE

LUKE ANDERSEN'S TRIP to Weymouth proved most charming and eventful. He had scarcely emerged from the crowded station, with its row of antique omnibuses and its lethargic phalanx of expectant out-porters and bath-chair men, — each one of whom was a crusted epitome of ingrained quaintness, — when he caught sight of Phyllis Santon and Annie Bristow strolling laughingly towards the sea-front. They must have walked to Yeoborough and entered the train there, for he had seen nothing of them at Nevilton Station.

The vivacious Polly, a lively little curly-haired child, of some seventeen summers, was far too happy and thrilled by the adventure of the excursion and the holiday air of the sea-side, to indulge in any jealous fits. She was the first of the two, indeed, to greet the elder girls, both of them quite well known to her, running rapidly after them, in her white stiffly-starched print frock, and hailing them with a shout of joyous recognition.

The girls turned quickly and they all three awaited, in perfect good temper, the stone-carver's deliberate approach. Never had the spirits of this latter been higher, or his surroundings more congenial to his mood.

Anxious not to lose any single one of the exquisite sounds, sights, smells, and intimations, which came pouring in upon him, as he leisurely drifted out upon the sunny street, he let his little companion run after his two friends as fast as she wished, and watched with serene satisfaction the airy flight of her light figure, with the deep blue patch of sea-line at the end of the street as its welcome background.

The smell of sea-weed, the sound of the waves on the beach, the cries of the fish-mongers, and the coming and going of the whole heterogeneous crowd, filled Luke's senses with the same familiar thrill of indescribable pleasure as he had known, on such an occasion, from his earliest childhood. The gayly piled fruit heaped up on the open stalls, the little tobacco-shops with their windows full of half-sentimental half-vulgar picture-cards, the weather-worn fronts of the numerous public-houses, the wood-work of whose hospitable doors always seemed to him endowed with a peculiar mellowness of their own, — all these things, as they struck his attentive senses, revived the most deeply-felt stirrings of old associations.

Especially did he love the sun-bathed atmosphere, so languid with holiday ease, which seemed to float in and out of the open lodging-house entrances, where hung those sun-dried sea-weeds and wooden spades and buckets, which ever-fresh installments of bare-legged children carried off and replaced. Luke always maintained that of all mortal odours he loved best the indescribable smell of the hall-way of a sea-side lodging-house, where the very oil-cloth on the floor, and the dead bull-rushes in the corner, seemed impregnated with long seasons of salt-burdened sun-filled air.

The fish-shops, the green-grocer's shops, the second-hand book-shops, and most of all, those delicious repositories of sea-treasures — foreign importations all glittering with mother-of-pearl, dried sea-horses, sea-sponges, sea-coral, and wonderful little boxes all pasted over with shimmering shells — filled him with a delight as vivid and new as when he had first encountered them in remote infancy.

This first drifting down to the sea's edge, after emerging from the train, always seemed to Luke the very supremacy of human happiness. The bare legs of the children, little and big, who ran laughing or crying past him and the tangled curls of the elder damsels, tossed so coquettishly back from their sun-burnt faces, the general feeling of irresponsibility in the air, the tang of adventure in it all, of the unexpected, the chance-born, always wrapped him about in an epicurean dream of pleasure.

That monotonous splash of the waves against the pebbles, — how he associated it with endless exquisite flirtations, — flirtations conducted with adorable shamelessness between the blue sky and the blue sea! The memory of these, the vague memory of enchanting forms prone or supine upon the glittering sands, with the passing and re-passing of the same plump bathing-woman, — he had known her since his childhood! — and the same donkeys with their laughing burdens, and the same sweet-sellers with their trays, almost made him cry aloud with delight, as emerging at length upon the Front, and overtaking his friends at the Jubilee Clock-Tower, he saw the curved expanse of the bay lying magically spread out before him. How well he knew it all, and how inexpressibly he loved it!

The tide was on its outward ebb when the four happy companions jumped down, hand in hand, from the esplanade to the shingle. The long dark windrow of broken shells and sea-weed drew a pleasant dividing line between the dry and the wet sand. Luke always associated the stranded star-fish and jelly-fish and bits of scattered drift-wood which that windrow offered, with those other casually tossed-up treasures with which an apparently pagan-minded providence had bestrewn his way!

Once well out upon the sands, and while the girls, with little shrieks and bursts of merriment, were pushing one another into the reach of the tide, Luke turned to survey with a deep sigh of satisfaction, the general appearance of the animated scene.

The incomparable watering-place, — with its charming “after-glow,” as Mr. Hardy so beautifully puts it, “of Georgian gaiety,” — had never looked so fascinating as it looked this August afternoon.

The queer old-fashioned bathing-machines, one of them still actually carrying the Lion and Unicorn upon its pointed roof, glittered in the sunshine with an air of welcoming encouragement. The noble sweep of the houses behind the crescent-shaped esplanade, with the names of their terraces — Brunswick, Regent, Gloucester, Adelaide — so suggestive of the same historic epoch, gleamed with reciprocal hospitality; nor did the tall spire of St. John’s Church, a landmark for miles round, detract from the harmony of the picture.

On Luke’s left, as he turned once more and faced the sea, the vibrating summer air, free at present from any trace of mist, permitted a wide and lovely view of the distant cliffs enclosing the bay. The great White Horse, traced upon the chalk hills, seemed within an hour’s walk of where he stood, and the majestic promontory of the White Nore drew the eye onward to where, at the end of the visible coast-line, St. Alban’s Head sank into the sea.

On Luke’s right the immediate horizon was blocked by the grassy eminence known to dwellers in Weymouth as “the Nothe”; but beyond this, and beyond the break-water which formed an extension of it, the huge bulk of Portland — Mr. Hardy’s Isle of the Slingers — rose massive and shadowy against the west.

As he gazed with familiar pleasure at this unequalled view, Luke could not help thinking to himself how strangely the pervading charm of scenes of this kind is enhanced by personal and literary association. He recalled the opening chapters of “The Well-Beloved,” that curiously characteristic fantasy-sketch of the great Wessex novelist; and he also recalled those amazing descriptions in Victor Hugo’s “L’Homme qui Rit,” which deal with these same localities.

Shouts of girlish laughter distracted him at last from his exquisite reverie, and flinging himself down on the hot sand he gave himself up to enjoyment. Holding her tight by either hand, the two elder girls, their skirts already drenched with salt-water, were dragging their struggling companion across the foamy sea-verge. The white surf flowed beneath their feet and their screams and laughter rang out across the bay.

Luke called to them that he was going to paddle, and implored them to do the same. He preferred to entice them thus into the deeper water, rather than to anticipate for them a return home with ruined petticoats and wet sand-filled shoes. Seeing him leisurely engaged in removing his boots and socks and turning up his trousers, the three exuberant young people hurried back to his side and proceeded with their own preparations.

Soon, all four of them, laughing and splashing one another with water, were blissfully wading along the shore, interspersing their playful teasing with alternate complimentary and disparaging remarks, relative to the various bathers whose isolation they invaded.

Luke’s spirits rose higher and higher. No youthful Triton, with his attendant Nereids, could have expressed more vividly in his radiant aplomb, the elemental energy of air and sea. His ecstatic delight seemed to reach its culmination as a group of extraordinarily beautiful children came wading towards them, their sunny hair and pearl-bright limbs gleaming against the blue water.

At the supreme moment of this ecstasy, however, came a sudden pang of contrary emotion, — of dark fear and gloomy foreboding. For a sudden passing second, there rose before him, — it was now about half-past four in the afternoon, — the image of his brother, melancholy and taciturn, his heart broken by Lacrima's trouble. And then, like a full dark tide rolling in upon him, came that ominous reaction, spoken of by the old pagan writers, and regarded by them as the shadow of the jealousy of the Immortal Gods, envious of human pleasure — the reaction to the fare of the Eumenides.

His companions remained as gay and charming as ever. Nothing could have been prettier than to watch the mixture of audacity and coyness with which they twisted their frocks round them, nothing more amusing than to note the differences of character between the three, as they betrayed their naive souls in their childish abandonment to the joy of the hour.

Both Phyllis and Annie were tall and slender and dark. But there the likeness between them ceased. Annie had red pouting lips, the lower one of which protruded a little beyond its fellow, giving her face in repose a quite deceptive look of sullenness and petulance. Her features were irregular and a little heavy, the beauty of her countenance residing in the shadowy coils of dusky hair which surmounted it, and in the velvet softness of her large dark eyes. For all the heaviness of her face, Annie's expression was one of childlike innocence and purity; and when she flirted or made love, she did so with a clinging affectionateness and serious gravity which had much of the charm of extreme youth.

Phyllis, on the contrary, had softly outlined features of the most delicate regularity, while from her hazel eyes and laughing parted lips perpetual defiant provocations of alluring mischief challenged everyone she approached. Annie was the more loving of the two, Phyllis the more lively and amorous. Both of them made constant fun of their little curly-headed companion, whose direct boyish ways and whimsical speeches kept them in continual peals of merriment.

Tired at last of paddling, they all waded to the shore, and crossing the warm powdery sand, which is one of the chief attractions of the place, they sat down on the edge of the shingle and dried their feet in the sun.

Reassuming their shoes and stockings, and demurely shaking down their skirts, the three girls followed the now rather silent Luke to the little tea-house opposite the Clock-Tower, in an upper room of which, looking out on the sea, were several pleasant window-seats furnished with convenient tables.

The fragrant tea, the daintiness of its accessories, the fresh taste of the bread and butter, not to speak of the inexhaustible spirits of his companions, soon succeeded in dispelling the stone-carver's momentary depression.

When the meal was over, as their train was not due to leave till nearly seven, and it was now hardly five, Luke decided to convey his little party across the harbour-ferry. They strolled out of the shop into the sunshine, not before the stone-carver had bestowed so lavish a tip upon the little waitress that his companions exchanged glances of feminine dismay.

They took the road through the old town to reach the ferry, following the southern of the two parallel streets that debouch from the Front at the point where stands the old-fashioned equestrian statue of George the Third. Luke nourished in his heart a sentimental tenderness for this simple monarch, vaguely and quite erroneously associating the royal interest in the place with his own dreamy attachment to it.

When they reached the harbour they found it in a stir of excitement owing to the arrival of the passenger-boat from the Channel Islands, one of the red-funneled modern successors to those antique paddle-steamers whose first excursions must have been witnessed from his Guernsey refuge by the author of the "Toilers of the Deep." Side by side with the smartly painted ship, were numerous schooners and brigs, hailing from more northern regions, whose cargoes were being unloaded by a motley crowd of clamorous dock-hands.

Luke and his three companions turned to the left when they reached the water’s edge and strolled along between the warehouses and the wharves until they arrived at the massive bridge which crosses the harbour. Leaning upon the parapet, whose whitish-grey fabric indicated that the dominion of Leo’s Hill gave place here to the noble Portland Stone, they surveyed with absorbed interest the busy scene beneath them.

The dark greenish-colored water swirled rapidly seaward in the increasing ebb of the tide. White-winged sea-gulls kept swooping down to its surface and rising again in swift air-cutting curves, balancing their glittering bodies against the slanting sunlight. Every now and then a boat-load of excursionists would shoot out from beneath the shadow of the wharves and shipping, and cross obliquely the swift-flowing tide to the landing steps on the further shore.

The four friends moved to the northern parapet of the bridge, and the girls gave little cries of delight, to see, at no great distance, where the broad expanse of the back-water began to widen, a group of stately swans, rocking serenely on the shining waves. They remained for some while, trying to attract these birds by flinging into the water bits of broken cake, saved by the economic-minded Annie from the recent repast. But these offerings only added new spoil to the plunder of the greedy sea-gulls, from whose rapid movements the more aristocratic inland creatures kept haughtily aloof.

Preferring to use the ferry for their crossing rather than the bridge, Luke led his friends back, along the wharves, till they reached the line of slippery steps about which loitered the lethargic owners of the ferry-boats. With engaging alarm, and pretty gasps and murmurs of half-simulated panic, the three young damsels were helped down into one of these rough receptacles, and the bare-necked, affable oarsman proceeded, with ponderous leisureliness, to row them across.

As the heavy oars rattled in their rowlocks, and the swirling tide gurgled about the keels, Luke, seated in the stern, between Annie and Phyllis, felt once more a thrilling sense of his former emotion. With one hand round Phyllis' waist, and the other caressing Annie's gloveless fingers, he permitted his gaze to wander first up, then down, the flowing tide.

Far out to sea, he perceived a large war-ship, like a great drowsy sea-monster, lying motionless between sky and wave; and sweeping in, round the little pier's point, came a light full-sailed skiff, with the water foaming across its bows.

With the same engaging trepidation in his country-bred comrades, they clambered up the landing-steps, the lower ones of which were covered with green sea-weed, and the upper ones worn smooth as marble by long use, and thence emerged upon the little narrow jetty, bordering upon the harbour's edge.

Here were a row of the most enchanting eighteenth century lodging-houses, interspersed, at incredibly frequent spaces, by small antique inns, bearing quaint names drawn from British naval history.

Skirting the grassy slopes of the Nothe, with its old-fashioned fort, they rounded the small promontory and climbed down among the rocks and rock-pools which lay at its feet. It was pretty to observe the various flutterings and agitations, and to hear the shouts of laughter and delight with which the young girls followed Luke over these perilous and romantic obstacles, and finally paused at his side upon a great sun-scorched shell-covered rock, surrounded by foamy water.

The wind was cool in this exposed spot, and holding their hats in their hands the little party gave themselves up to the freedom and freshness of air and sea.

But the wandering interest of high-spirited youth is as restless as the waves. Very soon Phyllis and Polly had drifted away from the others, and were climbing along the base of the cliff above, filling their hands with sea-pinks and sea-lavender, which attracted them by their glaucous foliage.

Left to themselves, Luke removed his shoes and stockings, and dangled his feet over the rock's edge, while Annie, prone upon her face, the sunshine caressing her white neck and luxuriant hair, stretched her long bare arms into the cool water.

Leaning across the prostrate form of his companion, and gazing down into the deep recesses of the tidal pool which separated the rock they reclined on from the one behind it, the stone-carver was able to make out the ineffably coloured tendrils and soft translucent shapes of several large sea-anemones, submerged beneath the greenish water. He pointed these out to his companion, who moving round a little, and tucking up her sleeves still higher, endeavoured to reach them with her hand. In this she was defeated, for the deceptive water was much deeper than either of them supposed.

"What are those darling little shells, down there at the bottom, Luke?" she whispered. Luke, with his arm round her neck, and his head close to hers, peered down into the shadowy depths.

"They're some kind of cowries," he said at last, "shells that in Africa, I believe, they use as money."

"I wish they were money here," murmured the girl, "I'd buy mother one of those silver brushes we saw in the shop."

"Listen!" cried Luke, and taking a penny from his pocket he let it fall into the water. They both fancied they heard a little metallic sound when it struck the bottom.

Suddenly Annie gave a queer excited laugh, shook herself free from her companion’s arm, and scrambled up on her knees. Luke lay back on the rock and gazed in wonder at her flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

“What’s the matter, child?” he enquired.

She fumbled at her bosom, and Luke noticed for the first time that she was wearing round her neck a little thin metal chain. At last with an impatient movement of her fingers she snapped the resisting cord and flung it into the tide. Then she held out to Luke a small golden object, which glittered in the palm of her hand. It was a weather-stained ring, twisted and bent out of all shape.

“It’s *her* ring!” she cried exultantly. “Crazy Bert got it out of that hole, with a bit of bent wire, and Phyllis squirmed it away from him by letting him give her a lift in the wagon. He squeezed her dreadful hard, she do say, and tickled her awful with straws and things, but before evening she had the ring away from him. You can bet I kissed her and thanked her, when I got it! Us two be real friends, as you might call it! Phyllis cried, in the night, dreaming the idiot was pinching her, and she not able to slap ’im back. But I got the ring, and there’t be, Luke, glittering-gold as ever, though ’tis sad bended and battered.”

Luke made a movement to take the object, but the girl closed her fingers tightly upon it and held it high above his head. With her arm thus raised and the glitter of sea and sun upon her form, she resembled some sweetly-carved figure-head on the bows of a ship. The wind fanned her hot cheeks and caressed, with cool touch, her splendid coils of hair. Luke was quite overcome by her beauty, and could only stare at her in dazed amazement, while she repeated, in clear ringing tones, the words of the old country game.

“My lady’s lost her golden ring;
Her golden ring, her golden ring;
My lady’s lost her golden ring;
I pitch upon you to find it!”

The song’s refrain died away over the waves, and was answered by the scream of an astonished cormorant, and by a mocking shout from a group of idle soldiers on the grassy terrace above the cliff.

“Shall us throw her ring out to sea?” cried Annie. “They say a ring lost so, means sorrow for her that owns it. Say ‘yes,’ and it’s gone, Luke!”

While the girl’s arm swung backwards and forwards above him, the stone-carver’s thoughts whirled even more rapidly through his brain. A drastic and bold idea, that had often before crossed the threshold of his consciousness, now assumed a most dominant shape. Why not ask Annie to marry him?

He was growing a little weary of his bachelor-life. The wayward track of his days had more than once, of late, seemed to have reached a sort of climax. Why not, at one reckless stroke, end this epoch of his history, and launch out upon another? His close association with James had hitherto stood in the way of any such step, but his brother had fallen recently into such fits of gloomy reticence, that he had found himself wondering more than once whether such a drastic troubling of the waters, as the introduction of a girl into their ménage, would not ease the situation a little. It was not for a moment to be supposed that he and James could separate. If Annie did marry him, she must do so on the understanding of his brother’s living with them.

Luke began to review in his mind the various cottages in Nevilton which might prove available for this adventure. It tickled his fancy a great deal, the thought of having a house and garden of his own, and he was shrewd enough to surmise that of all his feminine friends, Annie was by far the best fitted to perform the functions of the good-tempered companion of a philosophical sentimentalist. The gentle creature had troubled him so little by jealous fits in her rôle of sweetheart, that it did not present itself as probable that she would prove a shrewish wife. Glancing across the blue water to the great Rock-Island opposite them, Luke came rapidly to the conclusion that he would take the risk and make the eventful plunge. He knew enough of himself to have full confidence in his power of dealing with the delicate art of matrimony, and the very difficulties of the situation, implied in the number of his contemporary amours, only added a tang and piquancy to the enterprise.

"Well," cried Annie. "Shall us throw the pretty lady's ring into the deep sea? It'll mean trouble for her, trouble and tears, Luke! Be 'ee of a mind to do it, or be 'ee not? 'Tis your hand must fling it, and with the flinging of it, her heart'll drop, splash — splash — into deep sorrow. She'll cry her eyes out, for this 'ere job, and that's the truth of it, Luke darling. Be 'ee ready to fling it, or be 'ee not ready? There'll be no getting it back, once us have throwed it in."

She held out her arm towards him as she spoke, and with her other hand pushed back her hair from her forehead. For so soft and tender a creature as the girl was, it was strange, the wild Maenad-like look, which she wore at that moment. She might have been an incarnation of the avenging deities of sea and air, threatening disaster to some unwitting Olympian.

Luke scrambled to his feet, and seizing her wrist with both his hands, forced her fingers apart, and possessed himself of the equivocal trinket.

"If I throw it," he cried, in an excited tone, "will you be my wife, Annie?"

At this unexpected word a complete collapse overtook the girl. All trace of colour left her cheeks and a sudden trembling passed through her limbs. She staggered, and would have fallen, if Luke had not seized her in his arms.

In the shock of saving her, the stone-carver's hand involuntarily unclosed, and the piece of gold, slipping from his fingers, fell down upon the slope of the rock, and sliding over its edge, sank into the deep water.

"Annie! Annie! What is it, dear?" murmured Luke, making the trembling girl sit down by his side, and supporting her tenderly.

For her only answer she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately again and again. It was not only of kisses that Luke became conscious, for, as she pressed him to her, her breast heaved pitifully under her print frock, and when she let him go, the taste of her tears was in his mouth. For the first time in his life the queer wish entered the stone-carver's mind that he had not, in his day, made love quite so often.

There was something so pure, so confiding, and yet so passionately tender, about little Annie's abandonment, that it produced, in the epicurean youth's soul, a most quaint sense of shame and embarrassment. It was deliciously sweet to him, all the same, to find how, beyond expectation, he had made so shrewd a choice. But he wished some humorous demon at the back of his mind wouldn't call up before him at that moment the memory of other clinging arms and lips.

With an inward grin of sardonic commentary upon his melting mood, the cynical thought passed through his mind, how strange it was, in this mortal world, that human kisses should all so lamentably resemble one another, and that human tears should all leave behind them the same salt taste! Life was indeed a matter of "eternal recurrence," and whether with Portland and its war-ships as the background, or with Nevilton Mount and its shady woods, the same emotions and the same reactions must needs come and go, with the same inexorable monotony!

He glanced down furtively into the foam-flecked water, but there was no sign of the lost ring. The tide seemed to have turned now, and the sea appeared less calm. Little flukes of white spray surged up intermittently on the in-rolling waves, and a strong breath of wind, rising with the sinking of the sun, blew cool and fresh upon their foreheads.

"Her ring's gone," whispered Annie, pulling down her sleeves over her soft arms, and holding out her wrists, for him to fasten the bands, "and you do belong to none but I now, Luke. When shall us be married, dear?" she added, pressing her cool cheek against his, and running her fingers through his hair.

The words, as well as the gesture that accompanied them, jarred upon Luke's susceptibilities.

"Why is it," he thought, "that girls are so extraordinarily stupid in these things? Why do they always seem only waiting for an opportunity to drop their piquancy and provocation, and become confident, assured, possessive, complacent? Have I," he said to himself, "made a horrible blunder? Shall I regret this day forever, and be ready to give anything for those fatal words not to have been uttered?"

He glanced down once more upon the brimming, in-rushing tide that covered Gladys' ring. Then with a jerk he pulled out his watch.

"Go and call the others," he commanded, "I'm going to have a dip before we start."

Annie glanced quickly into his face, but reassured by his friendly smile, proceeded to obey him, with only the least little sigh.

"Don't drown yourself, dear," she called back to him, as she made her way cautiously across the rocks.

Luke hurriedly undressed, and standing for a moment, a slim golden figure, in the horizontal sunlight, swung himself lightly down over the rock's edge and struck out boldly for the open sea.

With vigorous strokes he wrestled with the inflowing tide. Wave after wave splashed against his face. Pieces of floating sea-weed and wisps of surf clung to his arms and hair. But he held resolutely on, breathing deep breaths of liberty and exultation, and drinking in, as if from a vast wide-brimmed cup, the thrilling spaciousness of air and sky.

Girls, love-making, marriage, — the whole complication of the cloying erotic world, — fell away from him, like the too-soft petals of some great stifling velvet-bosomed flower; and naked of desire, as he was naked of human clothes, he gave himself up to the free, pure elements. In later hours, when once more the old reiterated tune was beating time in his brain, he recalled with regret the large emancipation of that moment.

As he splashed and spluttered, and turned over deliciously in the water, like some exultant human-limbed merman, returning, after a long inland exile, to his natural home, he found his thoughts fantastically reverting to those queer, mad ideas, about the evil power of the stone they both worked upon, to which James Andersen had given expression when his wits were astray. Here at any rate, in the solid earth's eternal antagonist, was a power capable of destroying every sinister spell.

He remorsefully blamed himself that he had not compelled his brother to come down with them to the sea. He recalled the half-hearted invitation he had extended to James, not altogether sorry to have it refused, and not repeating it. He had been a selfish fool, he thought. Were James swimming now by his side, his pleasure in that violet-coloured coast-line and that titanic rock-monster, would have been doubled by the revival of indescribably appealing memories.

He made a vigorous resolution that never again — whatever mood his brother might be in — would he allow the perilous lure of exquisite femininity, to come between him and the nobler classic bond, of the love that “passeth the love of women.”

Conscious that he must return without a moment’s further delay if they were to catch their train, he swung round in the water and let the full tide bear him shoreward.

On the way back he was momentarily assailed by a slight touch of cramp in his legs. It quickly passed, but it was enough to give the life-enamoured youth a shock of cold panic. Death? *That*, after all, he thought, was the only intolerable thing. As long as one breathed and moved, in this mad world, nothing that could happen greatly mattered! One was conscious, — one could note the acts and scenes of the incredible drama; and in this mere fact of consciousness, one could endure anything. But to be dead, — to be deprived of the sweet air, — that remained, that must always remain, the one absolute Terror!

Reaching his starting-place, Luke was amused to observe that the tide was already splashing over their rock, and in another minute or two would have drenched his clothes. He chuckled to himself as he noted how this very practical possibility jerked his mind into a completely different vein. Love, philosophy, friendship, all tend to recede to the very depths of one’s invaluable consciousness, when there appears a risk of returning to a railway station in a drenched shirt.

He collected his possessions with extreme rapidity, and holding them in a bundle at arm’s length from his dripping body, clambered hastily up the shore, and humorously waving back his modest companions, who were now being chaffed by quite a considerable group of soldiers on the cliff above, he settled himself down on a bank of sea-weed and began hurriedly to dry, using his waistcoat as a towel.

He was soon completely dressed, and, all four of them a little agitated, began a hasty rush for the train.

Phyllis and Polly scolded him all the way without mercy. Had he brought them out here, to keep them in the place all night? What would their mothers say, and their fathers, and their brothers, and their aunts?

Annie, alone of the party, remained silent, her full rich lips closed like a sleepy peony, and her heavy-lidded velvety eyes casting little timid affectionate glances at her so unexpectedly committed lover.

The crossness of the two younger girls grew in intensity when, the ferry safely crossed, Luke dragged them at remorseless speed through the crowded town. Pitiful longing eyes were cast back at the glittering shops and the magical picture-shows. Why had he taken them to those horrid rocks? Why hadn’t he given them time to look at the shop-windows? They’d promised faithfully to bring back something for Dad and Betty and Queenie and Dick.

Phyllis had ostentatiously flung into the harbour her elaborately selected bunch of sea-flora, and the poor ill-used plants, hot from the girl’s hand, were now tossing up and down amid the tarry keels and swaying hawsers. The girl regretted this action now, — regretted it more and more vividly as the station drew near. Mummy always loved a bunch o’ flowers, and they were so pretty! She was sure it was Luke who had made her lose them. He had pushed her so roughly up those nasty steps.

Tears were in Polly’s eyes as, bedraggled and panting, they emerged on the open square where the gentle monarch looks down from his stone horse. There were sailors now, mixed with the crowd on the esplanade, — such handsome boys! It was cruel, it was wicked, that they had to go, just when the real sport began.

The wretched Jubilee Clock — how they all hated its trim appearance! — had a merciless finger pointing at the very minute their train was due to start, as Luke hurried them round the street-corner. Polly fairly began to cry, as they dragged her from the alluring scene. She was certain that the Funny Men were just going to begin. She was sure that that distant drum meant Punch and Judy!

Breathlessly they rushed upon the platform. Wildly, with anxious eyes and gasping tones, they enquired of the first official they encountered, whether the Yeoborough train had gone.

Observing the beauty of the three troubled girls, this placid authority proceeded to tantalize them, asking "what the hurry was," and whether they wanted a "special," and other maddening questions. It was only when Luke, who had rushed furiously to the platform's remote end, was observed to be cheerfully and serenely returning, that Phyllis recovered herself sufficiently to give their disconcerted insulter what she afterwards referred to as "a bit of lip in return for his blarsted sauce."

No, — the train would not be starting for another ten minutes. Fortunate indeed was this accident of a chance delay on the Great Western Railroad, — the most punctual of all railroads in the world, — for it landed Luke with three happy, completely recovered damsels, and in a compartment all to themselves, when the train did move at last. Abundantly fortified with ginger-pop and sponge-cake, — how closely Luke associated the savour of both these refreshments with such an excursion as this! — and further cheered by the secure possession of chocolates, bananas, "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday," and the "Illustrated London News," — the girls romped, and sang, and teased each other and Luke, and whispered endearing mockeries out of the window to sedately unconscious gentlemen, at every station where they stopped until the aged guard's paternal benevolence changed to irritable crossness, and Luke himself was not altogether sorry when the familiar landscape of Yeoborough, dusky and shadowy in the twilight, hove in sight.

Little Polly left them at the second of the two Yeoborough stations, and the others, crowding at the window to wave their good-byes, were carried on in the same train to Nevilton.

During this final five minutes, Annie slipped softly down upon her lover's knees and seemed to wish to indicate to Phyllis, without the use of words, that her relations with their common friend were now on a new plane, — at once more innocent and less reserved.

CHAPTER XXIII. AVE ATQUE VALE!

JAMES ANDERSEN LAY dead in the brothers' little bedroom at the station-master's cottage. It could not be maintained that his face wore the unruffled calm conventionally attributed to mortality's last repose. On the other hand, his expression was not that of one who has gone down in hopeless despair.

What his look really conveyed to his grief-worn brother, as he hung over him all that August night, was the feeling that he had been struck in mid-contest, with equal chance of victory or defeat, and with the indelible imprint upon his visage of the stress and strain of the terrific struggle.

It was a long and strange vigil that Luke found himself thus bound to keep, when the first paroxysm of his grief had subsided and his sympathetic landlady had left him alone with his dead.

He laughed aloud, — a merciless little laugh, — at one point in the night, to note how even this blow, rending as it did the very ground beneath his feet, had yet left quite untouched and untamed his irresistible instinct towards self-analysis. Not a single one of the innumerable, and in many cases astounding, thoughts that passed through his mind, but he watched it, and isolated it, and played with it, — just in the old way.

Luke was not by any means struck dumb or paralyzed by this event. His intelligence had never been more acute, or his senses more responsive, than they remained through those long hours of watching.

It is true he could neither eat nor sleep. The influence of the motionless figure beside him seemed to lie in a vivid and abnormal stimulation of all his intellectual faculties.

Not a sound arose from the sleeping house, from the darkened fields, from the distant village, but he noted it and made a mental record of its cause. He kept two candles alight at his brother's head, three times refilling the candlesticks, as though the guttering and hissing of the dwindling flames would tease and disturb the dead.

He had been careful to push the two windows of the room wide open; but the night was so still that not a breath of wind entered to make the candles flicker, or to lift the edge of the white sheet stretched beneath his brother's bandaged chin. This horrible bandage, — one of the little incidents that Luke marked as unexpectedly ghastly, — seemed to slip its knot at a certain moment, causing the dead man's mouth to fall open, in a manner that made the watcher shudder, so suggestive did it seem of one about to utter a cry for help.

Luke noted, as another factor in the phenomena of death, the peculiar nature of the coldness of his brother's skin, as he bent down once and again to touch his forehead. It was different from the coldness of water or ice or marble. It was a clammy coldness; the coldness of a substance that was neither — in the words of the children's game— "animal, vegetable, nor mineral."

Luke remembered the story of that play of Webster's, in which the unhappy heroine, in the blank darkness of her dungeon, is presented with a dead hand to caress. The abominably wicked wish crossed his mind once, as he unclosed those stark fingers, that he could cause the gentle Lacrima, whom he regarded, — not altogether fairly, — as responsible for his brother's death, to feel the touch of such a hand.

There came over him, at other times, as he inhaled the cool, hushed air from the slumbering fields, and surveyed the great regal planet, — Mr. Romer's star, he thought grimly, — as it hung so formidably close to the silvery pallid moon, a queer dreamy feeling that the whole thing were a scene in a play or a story, absolutely unreal; and that he would only have to rouse himself and shake off the unnatural spell, to have his brother with him again, alive and in full consciousness.

The odd thing about it was that he found himself refusing to believe that this was his brother at all, — this mask beneath the white sheet, — and even fancying that at any moment the familiar voice might call to him from the garden, and he have to descend to unlock the door.

That thought of his brother’s voice sent a pang through him of sick misgiving. Surely it couldn’t be possible, that never, not through the whole of eternity, would he hear that voice again?

He moved to the window and listened. Owls were hooting somewhere up at Wild Pine, and from the pastures towards Hullaway came the harsh cry of a night-jar.

He gazed up at the glittering heavens, sprinkled with those proud constellations whose identity it was one of his pastimes to recognize. How little they cared! How appallingly little they cared! What a farce, what an obscene, unpardonable farce, the whole business was!

He caught the sound of an angry bark in some distant yard.

Luke cursed the irrelevant intrusive noise. “Ah! thou vile Larva!” he muttered. “What! Shall a dog, a cat, a rat, have life; and thou no breath at all?”

He leant far out of the window, breathing the perfumes of the night. He noticed, as an interesting fact, that it was neither the phloxes nor the late roses whose scent filled the air, but that new exotic tobacco-plant, — a thing whose sticky, quickly-fading, trumpet-shaped petals were one of his brother’s especial aversions.

The immense spaces of the night, as they carried his gaze onward from one vast translunar sign to another, filled him with a strange feeling of the utter unimportance of any earthly event. The Mythology of Power and the Mythology of Sacrifice might wrestle in desperate contention for the mastery; but what mattered, in view of this great dome which overshadowed them, the victory or the defeat of either? Mythologies were they both; both woven out of the stuff of dreams, and both vanishing like dreams, in the presence of this stark image upon the bed!

He returned to his brother's side, and rocked himself up and down on his creaking bedroom chair. "Dead and gone!" he muttered, "dead and gone!"

It was easy to deal in vague mystic speculation. But what relief could he derive, he who wanted his brother back as he was, with his actual tones, and ways and looks, from any problematic chance that some thin "spiritual principle," or ideal wraith, of the man were now wandering through remote, unearthly regions? The darling of his soul — the heart of his heart — had become forever this appalling waxen image, this thing that weighed upon him with its presence!

Luke bent over the dead man. What a personality, what a dominant and oppressive personality, a corpse has! It is not the personality of the living man, but another — a quite different one — masquerading in his place.

Luke felt almost sure that this husk, this shell, this mockery of the real James, was possessed of some detestable consciousness of its own, a consciousness as remote from that of the man he loved as that pallid forehead with the deep purple gash across it, was remote from the dear head whose form he knew so well. How crafty, how malignant, a corpse was!

He returned to his uncomfortable chair and pondered upon what this loss meant to him. It was like the burying alive of half his being. How could he have thoughts, sensations, feelings, fancies; how could he have loves and hates, without James to tell them to? A cold sick terror of life passed through him, of life without this companion of his soul. He felt like a child lost in some great forest.

“Daddy James! Daddy James!” he cried, “I want you; — I want you!”

He found himself repeating this infantile conjuration over and over again. He battered with clenched hand upon the adamantine wall of silence. But there was neither sign nor voice nor token nor “any that regarded.” There was only the beating of his own heart and the ticking of the watch upon the table. And all the while, with its malignant cunning, the corpse regarded him, mute, derisive, contemptuous.

He thought, lightly and casually, as one who at the grave of all he loves plucks a handful of flowers, of the girls he had just parted from, and of Gladys and all his other infatuations. How impossible it seemed to him that a woman — a girl — that any one of these charming, distracting creatures — should strike a man down by their loss, as he was now stricken down.

He tried to imagine what he would feel if it were Annie lying there, under the sheet, in place of James. He would be sorry; he would be bitterly sad; he would be angry with the callous heavens; but as long as James were near, as long as James were by his side, — his life would still be his life. He would suffer, and the piteous tragedy of the thing would smite and sicken him; but it would not be the same. It would not be like this!

What was there in the love of a man that made the loss of it — for him at least — so different a thing? Was it that with women, however much one loved them, there was something equivocal, evasive, intangible; something made up of illusion and sorcery, of magic and moonbeams; that since it could never be grasped as firmly as the other, could never be as missed as the other, when the grasp had to relax? Or was it that, for all their clear heads, — heads so much clearer than poor James’! — and for all their spiritual purity, — there was lacking in them a certain indescribable mellowness of sympathy, a certain imaginative generosity and tolerance, which meant the true secret of the life lived in common?

From the thought of his girls, Luke's mind wandered back to the thought of what the constant presence of his brother as a background to his life had really meant. Even as he sat there, gazing so hopelessly at the image on the bed, he found himself on the point of resolving to explain all these matters to James and hear his opinion upon them.

By degrees, as the dawn approached, the two blank holes into cavernous darkness which the windows of the chamber had become, changed their character. A faint whitish-blue transparency grew visible within their enclosing frames, and something ghostly and phantom-like, the stealthy invasion of a new presence, glided into the room.

This palpable presence, the frail embryo of a new day, gave to the yellow candle-flames a queer sickly pallor and intensified to a chalky opacity the dead whiteness of the sheet, and of the folded hands resting upon it. It was with the sound of the first twittering birds, and the first cock-crow, that the ice-cold spear of desolation pierced deepest of all into Luke's heart. He shivered, and blew out the candles.

A curious feeling possessed him that, in a sudden ghastly withdrawal, that other James, the James he had been turning to all night in tacit familiar appeal, had receded far out of his reach. From indistinct horizons his muffled voice moaned for a while, like the wind in the willows of Lethe, and then died away in a thin long-drawn whisper. Luke was alone; alone with his loss and alone with the image of death.

He moved to the window and looked out. Streaks of watery gold were already visible above the eastern uplands, and a filmy sea of white mist swayed and fluttered over the fields.

All these things together, the white mist, the white walls of the room, the white light, the white covering on the body, seemed to fall upon the worn-out watcher with a weight of irresistible finality. James was dead— “gone to his death-bed; — he never would come again!”

Turning his back wearily upon those golden sky-streaks, that on any other occasion would have thrilled him with their magical promise, Luke observed the dead bodies of no less than five large moths grouped around the extinct candles. Two of them were “currant-moths,” one a “yellow under-wing,” and the others beyond his entomological knowledge. This was the only holocaust, then, allowed to the dead man. Five moths! And the Milky Way had looked down upon their destruction with the same placidity as upon the cause of the vigil that slew them.

Luke felt a sudden desire to escape from this room, every object of which bore now, in dimly obscure letters, the appalling handwriting of the ministers of fate. He crept on tiptoe to the door and opened it stealthily. Making a mute valedictory gesture towards the bed, he shut the door behind him and slipped down the little creaking stairs.

He entered his landlady’s kitchen, and as silently as he could collected a bundle of sticks and lit the fire. The crackling flames produced an infinitesimal lifting of the cloud which weighed upon his spirit. He warmed his hands before the blaze. From some remote depth within him, there began to awake once more the old inexpugnable zest for life.

Piling some pieces of coal upon the burning wood and drawing the kettle to the edge of the hob, he left the kitchen; and crossing the little hall, impregnated with a thin sickly odor of lamp-oil, he shot back the bolts of the house-door, and let himself out into the morning air.

A flock of starlings fluttered away over the meadow, and from the mist-wreathed recesses of Nevilton House gardens came the weird defiant scream of a peacock.

He glanced furtively, as if such a glance were almost sacrilegious, at the open windows of his brother's room; and then pushing open the garden-gate emerged into the dew-drenched field. He could not bring himself to leave the neighbourhood of the house, but began pacing up and down the length of the meadow, from the hedge adjacent to the railway, to that elm-shadowed corner, where not so many weeks ago he had distracted himself with Annie and Phyllis. He continued this reiterated pacing, — his tired brain giving itself up to the monotony of a heart-easing movement, — until the sun had risen quite high above the horizon. The great fiery orb pleased him well, in its strong indifference, as with its lavish beams it dissipated the mist and touched the tree-trunks with ruddy colour.

"Ha!" he cried aloud, "the sun is the only God! To the sun must all flesh turn, if it would live and not die!"

Half ashamed of this revival of his spirits he obeyed the beckoning gestures of the station-master's wife, who now appeared at the door.

The good woman's sympathy, though not of the silent or tactful order, was well adapted to prevent the immediate return of any hopeless grief.

"'Tis good it were a Saturday when the Lord took him," she said, pouring out for her lodger a steaming cup of excellent tea, and buttering a slice of bread; "he'll have Sunday to lie up in. It be best of all luck for these poor stiff ones, to have church bells rung over 'em."

"I pray Heaven I shan't have any visitors today," remarked Luke, sipping his tea and stretching out his feet to the friendly blaze.

"That ye'll be sure to have!" answered the woman; "and the sooner ye puts on a decent black coat, and washes and brushes up a bit, the better 'twill be for all concerned. I always tells my old man that when he do fall stiff, like what your brother be, I shall put on my black silk gown and sit in the front parlour with a bottle of elder wine, ready for all sorts and conditions."

Luke rose, with a piece of bread-and-butter in his hand, and surveyed himself in the mirror.

"Yes, I do need a bit of tidying," he said. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind my shaving down here?"

Even as he spoke the young stone-carver could not help recalling those sinister stories of dead men whose beards have grown in their coffins. The landlady nodded.

"I'll make 'ee up a bed for these 'ere days," she said, "in Betty's room. As for shaving and such like, please yourself, Master Luke. This house be thy house with him lying up there."

Between nine and ten o'clock Luke's first visitor made his appearance. This was Mr. Clavering, who showed himself neither surprised nor greatly pleased to find the bereft brother romping with the children under the station-master's apple-trees.

"I cannot express to you the sympathy I feel," said the clergyman, "with your grief under this great blow. Words on these occasions are of little avail. But I trust you know where to turn for true consolation."

"Thank you, sir," replied Luke, who, though carefully shaved and washed, still wore the light grey flannel suit of his Saturday's excursion.

"Give Mr. Clavering an apple, Lizzie!" he added.

"I wouldn't for a moment," continued the Reverend Hugh, "intrude upon you with any impertinent questions. But I could not help wondering as I walked through the village how this tragedy would affect you. I prayed it might," — here he laid a grave and pastoral hand on the young man's arm, — "I prayed it might give you a different attitude to those high matters which we have at various times discussed together. Am I right in my hope, Luke?"

Never had the superb tactlessness of Nevilton's vicar betrayed him more deplorably.

"Death is death, Mr. Clavering," replied the stone-carver, lifting up the youngest of the children and placing her astride on an apple-branch. "It's about the worst blow fate's ever dealt me. But when it comes to any change in my ideas, — no! I can't say that I've altered."

"I understand you weren't with him when this terrible thing happened," said the clergyman. "They tell me he was picked up by strangers. There'll be no need, I trust, for an inquest, or anything of that kind?"

Luke shook his head. "The doctor was up here last night. The thing's clear enough. His mind must have given way again. He's had those curst quarries on his nerves for a long while past. I wish to the devil — I beg your pardon, sir! — I wish I'd taken him to Weymouth with me. I was a fool not to insist on that."

"Yes, I heard you were away," remarked Hugh, with a certain caustic significance in his tone. "One or two of our young friends were with you, I believe?"

Luke did not fail to miss the implication, and he hit back vindictively.

"I understand you've had an interesting little service this morning, sir, or perhaps it's yet to come off? I can't help being a bit amused when I think of it!"

An electric shock of anger thrilled through Clavering's frame. Controlling himself with a heroic effort, he repelled the malignant taunt.

"I didn't know you concerned yourself with these observances, Andersen," he remarked. "But you're quite right. I've just this minute come from receiving Miss Romer into our church. Miss Traffio was with her.

Both young ladies were greatly agitated over this unhappy occurrence. In fact it cast quite a gloom over what otherwise is one of the most beautiful incidents of all, in our ancient ritual."

Luke swung the little girl on the bough backwards and forwards. The other children, retired to a discreet distance, stared at the colloquy with wide-open eyes.

"This baptizing of adults," continued Luke,— "you call 'em adults, don't you, on these occasions? — is really a little funny, isn't it?"

"Funny!" roared the angry priest. "No, sir, it isn't funny! The saving of an immortal soul by God's most sacred sacrament may not appeal to you infidels as an essential ceremony, — but only a thoroughly vulgar and philistine mind could call it funny!"

"I'm afraid we shall never agree on these topics, Mr. Clavering," replied Luke calmly. "But it was most kind of you to come up and see me. I really appreciate it. Would it be possible," — his voice took a lower and graver tone,— "for my brother's funeral to be performed on Wednesday? I should be very grateful to you, sir, if that could be arranged."

The young vicar frowned and looked slightly disconcerted. "What time would you wish it to be, Andersen?" he enquired. "I ask you this, because Wednesday is — er — unfortunately — the date fixed for another of these ceremonies that you scoff at. The Lord Bishop comes to Nevilton then. It is his own wish. I should myself have preferred a later date."

"Ha! the confirmation!" ejaculated Luke, with a bitter little laugh. "You're certainly bent on striking while the iron's hot, Mr. Clavering. May I ask what hour has been fixed for *this* beautiful ceremony?"

"Eleven o'clock in the morning," replied the priest, ignoring with a dignified wave of his hand the stone-carver's jeering taunt.

"Well then — if that suits you — and does not interfere with the Lord Bishop—" said Luke, "I should be most grateful if you could make the hour for James' funeral, ten o'clock in the morning? *That* service I happen to be more familiar with than the others, — and I know it doesn't take very long."

Mr. Clavering bent his head in assent.

"It shall certainly be as you wish," he said. "If unforeseen difficulties arise, I will let you know. But I have no doubt it can be managed.

"I am right in assuming," he added, a little uneasily, "that your brother was a baptized member of our church?"

Luke lifted the child from the bough and made her run off to play with the others. The glance he then turned upon the vicar of Nevilton was not one of admiration.

"James was the noblest spirit I've ever known," he said sternly. "If there is such a thing as another world, he is certain to reach it — church or no church. As a matter of fact, if it is at all important to you, he was baptized in Nevilton. You'll find his name in the register — and mine too!" he added with a laugh.

Mr. Clavering kept silence, and moved towards the gate. Luke followed him, and at the gate they shook hands. Perhaps the same thought passed through the minds of both of them, as they went through this ceremony; for a very queer look, almost identical in its expression on either face, was exchanged between them.

Before the morning was over Luke had a second visit of condolence. This was from Mr. Quincunx, and never had the quaint recluse been more warmly received. Luke was conscious at once that here was a man who could enter into every one of his feelings, and be neither horrified nor scandalized by the most fantastic inconsistency.

The two friends walked up and down the sunny field in front of the house, Luke pouring into the solitary's attentive ears every one of his recent impressions and sensations.

Mr. Quincunx was evidently profoundly moved by James' death. He refused Luke's offer to let him visit the room upstairs, but his refusal was expressed in such a natural and characteristic manner that the stone-carver accepted it in perfect good part.

After a while they sat down together under the shady hedge at the top of the meadow. Here they discoursed and philosophized at large, listening to the sound of the church-bells and watching the slow-moving cattle. It was one of those unruffled Sunday mornings, when, in such places as this, the drowsiness of the sun-warmed leaves and grasses seems endowed with a kind of consecrated calm, the movements of the horses and oxen grow solemn and ritualistic, the languor of the heavy-winged butterflies appears holy, and the stiff sabbatical dresses of the men and women who shuffle so demurely to and fro, seem part of a patient liturgical observance.

Luke loved Mr. Quincunx that morning. The recluse was indeed precisely in his element. Living habitually himself in thoughts of death, pleased — in that incomparable sunshine — to find himself still alive, cynical and yet considerate, mystical and yet humorous, he exactly supplied what the wounded heart of the pagan mourner required for its comfort.

"Idiots! asses! fools!" the stone-carver ejaculated, apostrophizing in his inmost spirit the various persons, clever or otherwise, to whom this nervous and eccentric creature was a mere type of failure and superannuation. None of these others, — not one of them, — not Romer nor Dangelis nor Clavering nor Taxater — could for a moment have entered into the peculiar feelings which oppressed him. As for Gladys or Phyllis or Annie or Polly, — he would have as soon thought of relating his emotions to a row of swallows upon a telegraph-wire as to any of those dainty epitomes of life's evasiveness!

A man's brain, a man's imagination, a man's scepticism, was what he wanted; but he wanted it touched with just that flavour of fanciful sentiment of which the Nevilton hermit was a master. A hundred quaint little episodes, the import of which none but Mr. Quincunx could have appreciated, were evoked by the stone-carver. Nothing was too blasphemous, nothing too outrageous, nothing too bizarre, for the solitary's taste. On the other hand, he entered with tender and perfect clairvoyance into the sick misery of loss which remained the background of all Luke's sensations.

The younger man's impetuous confidences ebbed and dwindled at last; and with the silence of the church-bells and the receding to the opposite corner of the field of the browsing cattle, a deep and melancholy hush settled upon them both.

Then it was that Mr. Quincunx began speaking of himself and his own anxieties. In the tension of the moment he even went so far as to disclose to Luke, under a promise of absolute secrecy, the sinister story of that contract into which Lacrima had entered with their employer.

Luke was all attention at once. This was indeed a piece of astounding news! He couldn't have said whether he wondered more at the quixotic devotion of Lacrima for this quaint person, or at the solitary's unprecedented candour in putting him "en rapport" with such an amazing situation.

"Of course we know," murmured Mr. Quincunx, in his deep subterranean voice, "that she wouldn't have promised such a thing, unless in her heart she had been keen, at all costs, to escape from those people. It isn't human nature to give up everything for nothing. Probably, as a matter of fact, she rather likes the idea of having a house of her own. I expect she thinks she could twist that fool Goring round her finger; and I daresay she could! But the thing is, what do you advise *me* to do? Of course I'm glad enough to agree to anything that saves me from this damnable office. But what worries me about it is that devil Romer put it into her head. I don't trust him, Luke; I don't trust him!"

"I should think you don't!" exclaimed his companion, looking with astonishment and wonder into the solemn grey eyes fixed sorrowfully and intently upon his own. What a strange thing, he thought to himself, that this subtle-minded intelligence should be so hopelessly devoid of the least push of practical impetus.

"Of course," Mr. Quincunx continued, "neither you nor I would fuss ourselves much over the idea of a girl being married to a fool like this, if there weren't something different from the rest about her. This nonsense about their having to 'love,' as the little simpletons call it, the man they agree to live with, is of course all tommy-rot. No one 'loves' the person they live with. She wouldn't love me, — she'd probably hate me like poison, — after the first week or so! The romantic idiots who make so much of 'love,' and are so horrified when these little creatures are married without it, don't understand what this planet is made of. They don't understand the feelings of the girls either.

"I tell you a girl *likes* being made a victim of in this particular kind of way. They're much less fastidious, when it comes to the point, than we are. As a matter of fact what does trouble them is being married to a man they really have a passion for. Then, jealousy bites through their soft flesh like Cleopatra's serpent, and all sorts of wild ideas get into their heads. It's not natural, Luke, it's not natural, for girls to marry a person they love! That's why we country dogs treat the whole thing as a lewd jest.

"Do you think these honest couples who stand giggling and smirking before our dear clergyman every quarter, don't hate one another in their hearts? Of course they do; it wouldn't be nature if they didn't! But that doesn't say they don't get their pleasure out of it. And Lacrima'll get her pleasure, in some mad roundabout fashion, from marrying Goring, — you may take my word for that!"

"It seems to me," remarked Luke slowly, "that you're trying all this time to quiet your conscience. I believe you've really got far more conscience, Maurice, than I have. It's your conscience that makes you speak so loud, at this very moment!"

Mr. Quincunx got up on his feet and stroked his beard. "I'm afraid I've annoyed you somehow," he remarked. "No person ever speaks of another person's conscience unless he's in a rage with him."

The stone-carver stretched out his legs and lit a cigarette. "Sit down again, you old fool," he said, "and let's talk this business over sensibly."

The recluse sighed deeply, and, subsiding into his former position, fixed a look of hopeless melancholy upon the sunlit landscape.

"The point is this, Maurice," began the young man. "The first thing in these complicated situations is to be absolutely certain what one wants oneself. It seems to me that a good deal of your agitation comes from the fact that you haven't made up your mind what you want. You asked my advice, you know, so you won't be angry if I'm quite plain with you?"

"Go on," said Mr. Quincunx, a remote flicker of his goblin-smile twitching his nostrils, "I see I'm in for a few little hits."

Luke waved his hand. "No hits, my friend, no hits. All I want to do, is to find out from you what you really feel. One philosophizes, naturally, about girls marrying, and so on; but the point is, — do you want this particular young lady for yourself, or don't you?"

Mr. Quincunx stroked his beard. “Well,” — he said meditatively, “if it comes to that, I suppose I do want her. We’re all fools in some way or other, I fancy. Yes, I do want her, Luke, and that’s the honest truth. But I don’t want to have to work twice as hard as I’m doing now, and under still more unpleasant conditions, to keep her!”

Luke emitted a puff of smoke and knocked the ashes from his cigarette upon the purple head of a tall knapweed.

“Ah!” he ejaculated. “Now we’ve got something to go upon.”

Mr. Quincunx surveyed the faun-like profile of his friend with some apprehension. He mentally resolved that nothing, — nothing in heaven nor earth, — should put him to the agitation of making any drastic change in his life.

“We get back then,” continued Luke, “to the point we reached on our walk to Seven Ashes.”

As he said the words “Seven Ashes” the ice-cold finger of memory pierced him with that sudden stab which is like a physical blow. What did it matter, after all, he thought, what happened to any of these people, now Daddy James was dead?

“You remember,” he went on, while the sorrowful grey eyes of his companion regarded him with wistful anxiety, “you told me, in that walk, that if some imaginary person were to leave you money enough to live comfortably, you would marry Lacrima without any hesitation?”

Mr. Quincunx nodded.

“Well,” — Luke continued— “in return for your confession about that contract, I’ll confess to you that Mr. Taxater and I formed a plan together, when my brother first got ill, to secure you this money.”

Mr. Quincunx made a grimace of astonishment.

"The plan has lapsed now," went on Luke, "owing to Mr. Taxater's being away; but I can't help feeling that something of that kind might be done. I feel in a queer sort of fashion," he added, "though I can't quite tell you why, that, after all, things'll so work themselves out, that you *will* get both the girl and the money!"

Mr. Quincunx burst into a fit of hilarious merriment, and rubbed his hands together. But a moment later his face clouded.

"It's impossible," he murmured with a deep sigh; "it's impossible, Luke. Girls and gold go together like butterflies and sunshine. I'm as far from either, as the sea-weed under the arch of Weymouth Bridge."

Luke pondered for a moment in silence.

"It's an absurd superstition," he finally remarked, "but I can't help a sort of feeling that James' spirit is actively exerting itself on your side. He was a romantic old truepenny, and his last thoughts were all fixed — of that I'm sure — upon Lacrima's escaping this marriage with Goring."

Mr. Quincunx sighed. He had vaguely imagined the possibility of some grand diplomatic stroke on his behalf, from the astute Luke; and this relapse into mysticism, on the part of that sworn materialist, did not strike him as reassuring.

The silence that fell between them was broken by the sudden appearance of a figure familiar to them both, crossing the field towards them. It was Witch-Bessie, who, in a bright new shawl, and with a mysterious packet clutched in her hand, was beckoning to attract their attention. The men rose and advanced to meet her.

"I'll sit down a bit with 'ee," cried the old woman, waving to them to return to their former position.

When they were seated once more beneath the bank, — the old lady, like some strange Peruvian idol, resting cross-legged at their feet, — she began, without further delay, to explain the cause of her visit.

“I know’d how ’twould be with ‘ee,” she said, addressing Luke, but turning a not unfriendly eye upon his companion. “I did know well how ’twould be. I hear’d tell of brother’s being laid out, from Bert Leerd, as I traipsed through Wild Pine this morning.

“Ninsy Lintot was a-cryin’ enough to break her poor heart. I hear’d ‘un as I doddered down yon lane. She were all lonesome-like, under them girt trees, shakin’ and sobbin’ terrible. She took on so, when I arst what ailed ‘un, that I dursn’t lay finger on the lass.

“She did right down scare I, Master Luke, and that’s God’s holy truth! ‘Let me bide, Bessie,’ says she, ‘let me bide.’ I telled her ’twas a sin to He she loved best, to carry on so hopeless; and with that she up and says,— ‘I be the cause of it all, Bessie,’ says she, ‘I be the cause he throw’d ‘isself away.’ And with that she set herself cryin’ again, like as ’twas pitiful to hear. ‘My darlin’, my darlin’,’ she kept callin’ out. ‘I love no soul ‘cept thee — no soul ‘cept thee!’

“’Twas then I recollected wot my old Mother used to say, ‘bout maids who be cryin’ like pantin’ hares. ‘Listen to me, Ninsy Lintot,’ I says, solemn and slow, like as us were in church. ‘One above’s been talking wi’ I, this blessed morn, and He do say as Master James be in Abram’s Bosom, with them shining ones, and it be shame and sin for mortals like we to wish ‘un back.’

“That quieted the lass a bit, and I did tell she then, wot be God’s truth, that ‘tweren’t her at all turned brother’s head, but the pleasure of the Almighty. ‘’Tis for folks like us,’ I says to her, ‘to take wot His will do send, and bide quiet and still, same as cows, drove to barton.’

"'Twere a blessing of providence I'd met crazy Bert afore I seed the lass, else I'd a been struck dazed-like by wot she did tell. But as 'twas, thanks be to recollectin' mother's trick wi' such wendy maids, I dried her poor eyes and got her back home along. And she gave I summat to put in brother's coffin afore they do nail 'un down."

Before either Luke or Mr. Quincunx had time to utter any comment upon this narration, Witch-Bessie unfastened the packet she was carrying, and produced from a card-board box a large roughly-moulded bracelet, or bangle, of heavy silver, such as may be bought in the bazaars of Tunis or Algiers.

"There," cried the old woman, holding the thing up, and flashing it in the sun, "that's wot she gave I, to bury long wi' brother! Be pretty enough, baint 'un? Though, may-be, not fittin' for a quiet home-keeping lass like she. She had 'un off some Gipoo, she said; and to my thinkin' it be a kind of heathen ornimint, same as folks do buy at Roger-town Fair. But such as 'tis, that be wot 'tis bestowed for, to put i' the earth long wi' brother. Seems somethin' of a pity, may-be, but maid's whimsies be maids' whimsies, and God Almighty'll plague the hard-hearted folk as won't perform wot they do cry out for."

Luke took the bangle from the old woman's hand.

"Of course I'll do what she wants, Bessie," he said. "Poor little Ninsy, I never knew how much she cared."

He permitted Mr. Quincunx to handle the silver object, and then carefully placed it in his pocket.

"Hullo!" he cried, "what else have you got, Bessie?" This exclamation was caused by the fact that Witch-Bessie, after fumbling in her shawl had produced a second mysterious packet, smaller than the first and tightly tied round with the stalks of some sort of hedge-weed.

“Cards, by Heaven!” exclaimed Luke. “Oh Bessie, Bessie,” he added, “why didn’t you bring these round here twenty-four hours ago? You might have made me take him with me to Weymouth!”

Untying the packet, which contained as the stone-carver had anticipated, a pack of incredibly dirty cards, the old woman without a word to either of them, shuffled and sifted them, according to some secret rule, and laid aside all but nine. These, almost, but not entirely, consisting of court cards, she spread out in a carefully concerted manner on the grass at her feet.

Muttering over them some extraordinary gibberish, out of which the two men could only catch the following words,

“Higgory, diggory, digg’d
My sow has pigg’d.
There’s a good card for thee.
There’s a still better than he!
There is the best of all three,
And there is Niddy-noddee!” —

Witch-Bessie picked up these nine cards, and shuffled them long and fast.

She then handed them to Luke, face-downward, and bade him draw seven out of the nine. These she once more arranged, according to some occult plan, upon the grass, and pondered over them with wrinkled brow.

“’Tis as ’twould be!” she muttered at last. “Cards be wonderful crafty, though toads and efties, to my thinkin’, be better, and a viper’s innards be God’s very truth.”

Making, to Luke’s great disappointment, no further allusion to the result of her investigations, the old woman picked up the cards and went through the whole process again, in honour of Mr. Quincunx.

This time, after bending for several minutes over the solitary's choice, she became more voluble.

"Thy heart's wish be thine, dearie," she said. "But there be thwartings and blastings. Three tears — three kisses — and a terrible journey. Us shan't have 'ee long wi' we, in these 'ere parts. Thee be marked and signed, master, by fallin' stars and flyin' birds. There's good sound wood gone to ship's keel wot'll carry thee fast and far. Blastings and thwartings! But thy heart's wish be thine, dearie."

The humourous nostrils of Mr. Quincunx and the expressive curves of his bearded chin had twitched and quivered as this sorcery began, but the old woman's reference to a "terrible journey" clouded his countenance with blank dismay.

Luke pressed the sybil to be equally communicative with regard to his own fate, but the old woman gathered up her cards, twisted the same faded stalks round the packet, and returned it to the folds of her shawl. Then she struggled up upon her feet.

"Don't leave us yet, Bessie," said Luke. "I'll bring you out something to eat presently."

Witch-Bessie's only reply to this hospitable invitation was confounding in its irrelevance. She picked up her draggled skirt with her two hands, displaying her unlaced boots and rumpled stockings, and then, throwing back her wizened head, with its rusty weather-bleached bonnet, and emitting a pallid laugh from her toothless gums, she proceeded to tread a sort of jerky measure, moving her old feet to the tune of a shrill ditty.

"Now we dance looby, looby, looby,
Now we dance looby, looby, light;
Shake your right hand a little,
Shake your left hand a little,

And turn you round about."

"Ye'll both see I again, present," she panted, when this performance was over, "but bide where 'ee be, bide where 'ee be now. Old Bessie's said her say, and she be due long of Hullaway Cross, come noon."

As she hobbled off to the neighbouring stile, Luke saw her kiss the tips of her fingers in the direction of the station-master's house.

"She's bidding Daddy James good-bye," he thought. "What a world! 'Looby, looby, looby!' A proper Dance of Death for a son of my mother!"

CHAPTER XXIV. THE GRANARY

LUKE PERSUADED MR. Quincunx to stay with him for the station-master's Sunday dinner, and to stroll with him down to the churchyard in the afternoon to decide, in consultation with the sexton, upon the most suitable spot for his brother's interment. The stone-carver was resolved that this spot should be removed as far as possible from the grave of their parents, and the impiety of this resolution was justified by the fact that Gideon's tomb was crowded on both sides by less aggressive sleepers.

They finally selected a remote place under the southern wall, at the point where the long shadow of the tower, in the late afternoon, flung its clear-outlined battlements on the waving grass.

Luke continued to be entirely pleased with Mr. Quincunx's tact and sympathy. He felt he could not have secured a better companion for this task of selecting the final resting-place of the brother of his soul. "Curse these fools," he thought, "who rail against this excellent man!" What mattered it, after all, that the fellow hated what the world calls "work," and loved a peaceful life removed from distraction?

The noble attributes of humour, of imagination, of intelligence, — how much more important they were, and conducive to the general human happiness, than the mere power of making money! Compared with the delicious twists and diverting convolutions in Mr. Quincunx's extraordinary brain, how dull, how insipid, seemed such worldly cleverness!

The death of his brother had had the effect of throwing these things into a new perspective. The Machiavellian astuteness, which, in himself, in Romer, in Mr. Taxater, and in many others, he had, until now, regarded as of supreme value in the conduct of life, seemed to him, as he regretfully bade the recluse farewell and retraced his steps, far less essential, far less important, than this imaginative sensitiveness to the astounding spectacle of the world.

He fancied he discerned in front of him, as he left the churchyard, the well-known figure of his newly affianced Annie, and he made a detour through the lane, to avoid her. He felt at that moment as though nothing in the universe were interesting or important except the sympathetic conversation of the friends of one's natural choice — persons of that small, that fatally small circle, from which just now the centre seemed to have dropped out!

Girls were a distraction, a pastime, a lure, an intoxication; but a shock like this, casting one back upon life's essential verities, threw even lust itself into the limbo of irrelevant things. All his recent preoccupation with the love of women seemed to him now, as though, in place of dreaming over the mystery of the great tide of life, hand in hand with initiated comrades, he were called upon to go launching little paper-boats on its surface, full of fretful anxiety as to whether they sank or floated.

Weighed down by the hopeless misery of his loss, he made his way slowly back to the station-master's house, too absorbed in his grief to speak to anyone.

After tea he became so wretched and lonely, that he decided to walk over to Hullaway on the chance of getting another glimpse of Witch-Bessie. Even the sympathy of the station-master's wife got on his nerves and the romping of the children fretted and chafed him.

He walked fast, swinging his stick and keeping his eyes on the ground, his heart empty and desolate. He followed the very path by which Gladys and he, some few short weeks before, had returned in the track of their two friends, from the Hullaway stocks.

Arriving at the village green, with its pond, its elms, its raised pavement, and its groups of Sunday loiterers, he turned into the churchyard. As we have noted many times ere now, the appealing silence of these places of the dead had an invincible charm for him. It was perhaps a morbid tendency inherited from his mother, or, on the other hand, it may have been a pure æsthetic whim of his own, that led him, with so magnetic an attraction, towards these oases of mute patience, in the midst of the diurnal activities; but whatever the spell was, Luke had never found more relief in obeying it than he did at this present hour.

He sat down in their favourite corner and looked with interest at the various newly-blown wild-flowers, which a few weeks' lapse had brought to light. How well he loved the pungent stringy stalks, the grey leaves, the flat sturdy flowers of the "achillea" or "yarrow"! Perhaps, above all the late summer blooms, he preferred these — finding, in their very coarseness of texture and toughness of stem, something that reassured and fortified. They were so bitter in their herbal fragrance, so astringent in the tang of their pungent taste, that they suggested to him the kind of tonic cynicism, the sort of humorous courage and gay disdain, with which it was his constant hope to come at last to accept life.

It pleased him, above all when he found these plants tinged with a delicious pink, as though the juice of raspberries had been squeezed over them, and it was precisely this tint he noticed now in a large clump of them, growing on the sun-warmed grave of a certain Hugh and Constance Foley, former occupants of the old Manor House behind him.

He wondered if this long-buried Hugh — a mysterious and shadowy figure, about whom James and he had often woven fantastic histories —

had felt as forlorn as he felt now, when he lost his Constance. Could a Constance, or an Annie, or a Phyllis, ever leave quite the void behind them such as now ached and throbbed within him? Yes, he supposed so. Men planted their heart's loves in many various soils, and when the hand of fate tugged them away, it mattered little whether it was chalk, or sand, or loam, that clung about the roots!

He looked long and long at the sunlit mounds, over which the tombstones leaned at every conceivable angle and upon which some had actually fallen prostrate. These neglected monuments, and these tall uncut grasses and flowers, had always seemed to him preferable to the trim neatness of an enclosure like that of Athelston, which resembled the lawn of a gentleman's house.

James had often disputed with him on this point, arguing, in a spirit of surly contradiction, in favour of the wondrous effect of those red Athelston roses hanging over clear-mown turf. The diverse suggestiveness of graveyards was one of the brothers' best-loved topics, and innumerable cigarettes had they both consumed, weighing this subject, on this very spot.

Once more the hideous finality of the thing pierced the heart of Luke with a devastating pang. On Wednesday next, — that is, after the lapse of two brief days, — he would bid farewell, for ever and ever and ever, to the human companion with whom he had shared all he cared for in life!

He remembered a little quarrel he once had with James, long ago, in this very place, and how it had been the elder and not the younger who had made the first overtures of reconciliation, and how James had given him an old pair of silver links, — he was wearing them at that moment! — as a kind of peace-offering. He recollected what a happy evening they had spent together after that event, and how they had read "Thus spake Zarathustra" in the old formidable English translation — the mere largeness of the volume answering to the largeness of the philosopher's thought.

Never again would they two "take on them," in the sweet Shakespearean phrase, "the mystery of things, as though they were God's spies."

Luke set himself to recall, one by one, innumerable little incidents of their life together. He remembered various occasions in which, partly out of pure contrariness, but partly also out of a certain instinctive bias in his blood, he had defended their father against his brother's attacks. He recalled one strange conversation they had had, under the withy-stumps of Badger's Bottom, as they returned through the dusk of a November day, from a long walk over the southern hills. It had to do with the appearance of a cloud-swept crescent moon above the Auber woods.

James had maintained that were he a pagan of the extinct polytheistic faith, he would have worshipped the moon, and willingly offered her, night by night, — he used the pious syllables of the great hedonist, — her glittering wax tapers upon the sacred wheaten cake. Luke, on the contrary, had sworn that the sun, and no lesser power, was the god of his idolatry, and he imagined himself in place of his brother's wax candles, pouring forth, morning by morning, a rich libation of gold wine to that bright lord of life.

This instinctive division of taste between the two, had led, over and over again, to all manner of friendly dissension.

Luke recalled how often he had rallied James upon his habit of drifting into what the younger brother pertinently described as a "translunar mood." He was "translunar" enough now, at any rate; but now it was in honour of that other "lady of the night," of that dreadful "double" of his moon-goddess — the dark pomegranate-bearer — that the candles must be lit!

Luke revived in his mind, as he watched the slow-shifting shadows move from grave to grave, all those indescribable "little things" of their every-day life together, the loss of which seemed perhaps worst of all. He recalled how on gusty December evenings they would plod homeward from some Saturday afternoon's excursion to Yeoborough, and how the cheerful firelight from the station-master's house would greet them as they crossed the railway.

So closely had their thoughts and sensations grown together, that there were many little poignant memories, out of the woven texture of which he found himself quite unable to disentangle the imaginative threads that were due to his brother, from such as were the evocation of his own temperament.

One such concentrated moment, of exquisite memory, he associated with an old farm-house on the edge of the road leading from Hullaway to Rogerstown. This road, — a forlorn enough highway of Roman origin, dividing a level plain of desolate rain-flooded meadows, — was one of their favourite haunts. "Halfway House," as the farm-dwelling was called, especially appealed to them, because of its romantic and melancholy isolation.

Luke remembered how he had paused with his brother one clear frosty afternoon when the puddles by the road-side were criss-crossed by little broken stars of fresh-formed ice, and had imagined how they would feel if such a place belonged to them by hereditary birthright, what they would feel were they even now returning there, between the tall evergreens at the gate, to spend a long evening over a log fire, with mulled claret on the hob, and cards and books on the table, and a great white Persian cat, — this was James' interpolation! — purring softly, and rubbing its silky sides against Chinese vases full of rose-leaves.

Strange journeys his mind took, that long unforgettable afternoon, — the first of his life spent without his brother! He saw before him, at one moment, a little desolate wooden pier, broken by waves and weather, somewhere on the Weymouth coast. The indescribable pathos of things outworn and done with, of things abandoned by man and ill-used by nature, had given to this derelict pile of drift-wood a curious prominence in his House of Memory. He remembered the look with which James had regarded it, and how the wind had whistled through it and how they had tried in vain to light their cigarettes under its shelter.

At another moment his mind swung back to the daily routine in their pleasant lodging. He recalled certain spring mornings when they had risen together at dawn and had crept stealthily out, for fear of waking their landlady. He vividly remembered the peculiar smell of moss and primroses with which the air seemed full on one of these occasions.

The place Luke had chosen for summoning up all these ghosts of the past held him with such a spell that he permitted the church-bells to ring and the little congregation to assemble for the evening service without moving or stirring. “Hugh and Constance Foley” he kept repeating to himself, as the priest’s voice, within the sacred building, intoned the prayers. The sentiment of the plaintive hymn with which the service closed, — he hardly moved or stirred for the brief hour of the liturgy’s progress, — brought tears, the first he had shed since his brother’s death, to this wanton faun’s eyes. What is there, he thought, in these wistful tunes, and impossible, too-sweet words, that must needs hit the most cynical of sceptics?

He let the people shuffle out and drift away, and the grey-haired parson and his silk-gowned wife follow them and vanish, and still he did not stir. For some half-an-hour longer he remained in the same position, his chin upon his knees, staring gloomily in front of him. He was still seated so, when, to the eyes of an observer posted on the top of the tower, two persons, the first a woman and the second a man, would have been observed approaching, by a rarely-traversed field-path, the side of the enclosure most remote from Hullaway Green.

The path upon which these figures advanced was interrupted at certain intervals by tall elm-trees, and it would have been clear to our imaginary watcher upon the tower that the second of the two was glad enough of the shelter of these trees, of which it was evident he intended to make use, did the first figure turn and glance backward.

Had such a sentinel been possessed of local knowledge he would have had no difficulty in recognizing the first of these persons as Gladys Romer and the second as Mr. Clavering.

Gladys had, in fact, gone alone to the evening service, on the ground of celebrating the close of her baptismal day. Immediately after the service she had slipped off down the street leading to the railroad, directing her steps towards Hullaway, whither a sure instinct told her Luke had wandered.

She was still in sight, having got no further than the entrance to Splash Lane, when Clavering, who had changed his surplice with lightning rapidity, issued forth into the street. In a flash he remarked the direction of her steps, and impelled by an impulse of mad jealousy, began blindly following her.

Not a few heads were inquisitively turned, and not a few whispering comments were exchanged, as first the squire’s daughter, and then the young clergyman, made their way through the street.

As soon as Gladys had crossed the railroad and struck out at a sharp pace up the slope of the meadow Clavering realized that wherever she intended to go it was not to the house in which lay James Andersen. Torn with intolerable jealousy, and anxious, at all risks, to satisfy his mind, one way or the other, as to her relations with Luke, he deliberately decided to follow the girl to whatever hoped-for encounter, or carefully plotted assignation, she was now directing her steps. How true, how exactly true, to his interpretation of Luke’s character, was this astutely arranged meeting, on the very day after his brother’s death!

At the top of the station-field Gladys paused for a moment, and, turning round, contemplated the little dwelling which was now a house of the dead.

Luckily for Mr. Clavering, this movement of hers coincided with his arrival at the thick-set hedge separating the field from the metal track. He waited at the turn-stile until, her abstraction over, she passed into the lane.

All the way to Hullaway Mr. Clavering followed her, hurriedly concealing himself when there seemed the least danger of discovery, and at certain critical moments making slight deviations from the direct pursuit.

As she drew near the churchyard the girl showed evident signs of nervousness and apprehension, walking more slowly, and looking about her, and sometimes even pausing as if to take breath and collect her thoughts.

It was fortunate for her pursuer at this final moment of the chase that the row of colossal elms, of which mention has been made, interposed themselves between the two. Clavering was thus able to approach quite close to the girl before she reached her destination, for, making use of these rugged trunks, as an Indian scout might have done, he was almost within touch of her by the time she clambered over the railings.

The savage bite of insane jealousy drove from the poor priest’s head any thought of how grotesque he must have appeared, — could any eyes but those of field-mice and starlings have observed him, — with his shiny black frock-coat and broad-brimmed hat, peeping and spying in the track of this fair young person.

With a countenance convulsed with helpless fury he watched the girl walk slowly and timidly up to Luke’s side, and saw the stone-carver recognize her and rise to greet her. He could not catch their words, though he strained his ears to do so, but their gestures and attitudes were quite distinguishable.

It was, indeed, little wonder that the agitated priest could not overhear what Gladys said, for the extreme nervousness under which she laboured made her first utterances so broken and low that even her interlocutor could scarcely follow them.

She laid a pleading hand on Luke's arm. "I was unhappy," she murmured, "I was unhappy, and I wanted to tell you. I've been thinking about you all day. I heard of his death quite early in the morning. Luke, — you're not angry with me any more, are you? I'd have done anything that this shouldn't have happened!"

Luke looked at her searchingly, but made, at the same time, an impatient movement of his arm, so that the hand she had placed upon his sleeve fell to her side.

"Let's get away from here, Luke," she implored; "anywhere, — across the fields, — I told them at home I might go for a walk after church. It'll be all right. No one will know."

"Across the fields — eh?" replied the stone-carver. "Well — I don't mind. What do you say to a walk to Rogerstown? I haven't been there since I went with James, and there'll be a moon to get home by." He looked at her intently, with a certain bitter humour lurking in the curve of his lips.

Under ordinary circumstances it was with the utmost difficulty that Gladys could be persuaded to walk anywhere. Her lethargic nature detested that kind of exercise. He was amazed at the alacrity with which she accepted the offer.

Her eyes quite lit up. "I'd love that, Luke, I'd simply love it!" she cried eagerly. "Let's start! I'll walk as fast as you like — and I don't care how late we are!"

They moved out of the churchyard together, by the gate opening on the green.

Luke was interested, but not in the least touched, by the girl's chastened and submissive manner. His suggestion about Rogerstown was really more of a sort of test than anything else, to see just how far this clinging passivity of hers would really go.

As they followed the lane leading out of one of the side-alleys of the village towards the Roman Road, the stone-carver could not help indulging in a certain amount of silent psychological analysis in regard to this change of heart in his fair mistress. He seemed to get a vision of the great world-passions, sweeping at random through the universe, and bending the most obstinate wills to their caprice.

On the one hand, he thought, there is that absurd Mr. Clavering, — simple, pure-minded, a veritable monk of God, — driven almost insane with Desire, and on the other, here is Gladys, — naturally as selfish and frivolous a young pagan as one could wish to amuse oneself with, — driven almost insane with self-oblivious love! They were like earthquakes and avalanches, like whirlpools and water-spouts, he thought, these great world-passions! They could overwhelm all the good in one person, and all the evil in another, with the same sublime indifference, and in themselves — remain non-moral, superhuman, elemental!

In the light of this vision, Luke could not resist a hurried mental survey of the various figures in his personal drama. He wondered how far his own love for James could be said to belong to this formidable category. No! He supposed that both he and Mr. Quincunx were too self-possessed, or too epicurean, ever to be thus swept out of their path. His brother was clearly a victim of these erotic Valkyries, so was Ninsy Lintot, and in a lesser degree, he shrewdly surmised, young Philip Wone. He himself, he supposed, was, in these things, amorous and vicious rather than passionate. So he had always imagined Gladys to have been. But Gladys had been as completely swept out of the shallows of her viciousness, by this overpowering obsession, as Mr. Clavering had been swept out of the shallows of his puritanism, by the same power. If that fantastic theory of Vennie Seldom's about the age-long struggle between the two Hills — between the stone of the one and the wood of the other — had any germ of truth in it, it was clear that these elemental passions belonged to a region of activity remote from either, and as indifferent to both, as the great zodiacal signs were indifferent to the solar planets.

Luke had just arrived at this philosophical, or, if the reader pleases, mystical conclusion, when they emerged upon the Roman Road.

Ascending an abrupt hill, the last eminence between Hullaway and far-distant ranges, they found themselves looking down over an immense melancholy plain, in the centre of which, on the banks of a muddy river, stood the ancient Roman stronghold of Rogerstown, the birth-place, so Luke always loved to remind himself, of the famous monkish scientist Roger Bacon.

The sun had already disappeared, and the dark line of the Mendip Hills on the northern horizon were wrapped in a thick, purple haze.

The plain they looked down upon was cut into two equal segments by the straight white road they were to follow, — if Luke was serious in his intention, — and all along the edges of the road, and spreading in transverse lines across the level fields, were deep, reedy ditches, bordered in places by pollard willows.

The whole plain, subject, in autumn and winter, to devastating floods, was really a sort of inlet or estuary of the great Somersetshire marshes, lying further west, which are collectively known as Sedgemoor.

Gladys could not refrain from giving vent to a slight movement of instinctive reluctance, when she saw how close the night was upon them, and how long the road seemed, but she submissively suppressed any word of protest, when, with a silent touch upon her arm, her companion led her forward, down the shadowy incline.

Their figures were still visible — two dark isolated forms upon the pale roadway — when, hot and panting, Mr. Clavering arrived at the same hill-top. With a sigh of profound relief he recognized that he had not lost his fugitives. The only question was, where were they going, and for what purpose? He remained for several minutes gloomy and watchful at his post of observation.

They were now nearly half a mile across the plain, and their receding figures had already begun to grow indistinct in the twilight, when Mr. Clavering saw them suddenly leave the road and debouch to the left. “Ah!” he muttered to himself, “They’re going home by Hullaway Chase!”

This Hullaway Chase was a rough tract of pasturage a little to the east of the level flats, and raised slightly above them. From its southern extremity a long narrow lane, skirting the outlying cottages of the village, led straight across the intervening uplands to Nevilton Park. It was clearly towards this lane, by a not much frequented foot-path over the ditches, that Gladys and Luke were proceeding.

To anyone as well acquainted as Clavering was with the general outline of the country the route that the lovers — or whatever their curious relation justifies us in calling them — must needs take, to return to Nevilton, was now as clearly marked as if it were indicated on a map.

“Curse him!” muttered the priest, “I hope he’s not going to drown her in those brooks!”

He let his gaze wander across the level expanse at his feet. How could he get close to them, he wondered, so as to catch even a stray sentence or two of what they were saying.

His passion had reached such a point of insanity that he longed to be transformed into one of those dark-winged rooks that now in a thin melancholy line were flying over their heads, so that he might swoop down above them and follow them — follow them — every step of the way! He was like a man drawn to the edge of a precipice and magnetized by the very danger of the abyss. To be near them, to listen to what they said, — the craving for that possessed him with a fixed and obstinate hunger!

Suddenly he shook his cane in the air and almost leaped for joy. He remembered the existence, at the spot where the lane they were seeking began, of a large dilapidated barn, used, by the yeoman-farmer to whom the Chase belonged, as a rough store-house for cattle-food. The spot was so attractive a resting-place for persons tired with walking, that it seemed as though it would be a strange chance indeed if the two wanderers did not take advantage of it. The point was, could he forestall them and arrive there first?

He surveyed the landscape around him with an anxious eye. It seemed as though by following the ridge of the hill upon which he stood, and crossing every obstacle that intervened, he ought to be able to do so — and to do so without losing sight of the two companions, as they unsuspiciously threaded their way over the flats.

Having made his resolution, he lost no time in putting it into action. He clambered without difficulty into the meadow on his right, and breaking, in his excitement, into a run, he forced his way through three successive bramble-hedges, and as many dew-drenched turnip-fields, without the least regard to the effect of this procedure upon his Sunday attire.

Every now and then, as the contours of the ground served, he caught a glimpse of the figures in the valley below, and the sight hastened the impetuosity of his speed. Once he felt sure he observed them pause and exchange an embrace, but this may have been an illusive mirage created by the mad fumes of the tempestuous jealousy which kept mounting higher and higher into his head. Recklessly and blindly he rushed on, performing feats of agility and endurance, such as in normal hours would have been utterly impossible.

From the moment he decided upon this desperate undertaking, to the moment, when, hot, breathless, and dishevelled, he reached his destination, only a brief quarter of an hour had elapsed.

He entered the barn leaving the door wide-open behind him. In its interior tightly packed bundles of dark-coloured hay rose up almost to the roof. The floor was littered with straw and newly-cut clover.

On one side of the barn, beneath the piled-up hay, was a large shelving heap of threshed oats. Here, obviously, was the sort of place, if the lovers paused at this spot at all, where they would be tempted to recline.

Directly opposite these oats, in the portion of the shed that was most in shadow, Clavering observed a narrow slit between the hay-bundles. He approached this aperture and tried to wedge himself into it. The protruding stalks of the hay pricked his hands and face, and the dust choked him.

With angry coughs and splutters, and with sundry savage expletives by no means suitable to a priest of the church, he at length succeeded in firmly imbedding himself in this impenetrable retreat. He worked himself so far into the shadow, that not the most cautious eye could have discerned his presence. His sole danger lay in the fact that the dust might very easily give him an irresistible fit of sneezing. With the cessation of his violent struggles, however, this danger seemed to diminish; for the dust subsided as quickly as it had been raised, and otherwise, as he leant luxuriously back upon his warm-scented support, his position was by no means uncomfortable.

Meanwhile Luke and Gladys were slowly and deliberately crossing the darkening water-meadows.

Gladys, whose geographical knowledge of the district was limited to the immediate vicinity of her home had not the remotest guess as to where she was being led. For all she knew Luke might have gone crazy, like his brother, and be now intending to plunge both himself and her into the depths of some lonely pool or weir. Nevertheless, she continued passively and meekly following him, walking, when the path along the dyke's edge narrowed, at some few paces behind him, with that peculiar air of being a led animal, which one often observes in the partners of tramps, as they plod the roads in the wake of their masters.

The expanse they traversed in this manner was possessed of a peculiar character of its own, a character which that especial hour of twilight seemed to draw forth and emphasize. It differed from similar tracts of marsh-land, such as may be found by the sea's edge, in being devoid of any romantic horizon to afford a spiritual escape from the gloom it diffused.

It was melancholy. It was repellant. It was sinister. It lacked the element of poetic expansiveness. It gave the impression of holding grimly to some dark obscene secret, which no visitation of sun or moon would ever cajole it into divulging.

It depressed without overwhelming. It saddened without inspiring. With its reeds, its mud, its willows, its livid phosphorescent ditches, it produced uneasiness rather than awe, and disquietude rather than solemnity.

Bounded by rolling hills on all sides save one, it gave the persons who moved across it the sensation of being enclosed in some vast natural arena.

Gladys wished she had brought her cloak with her, as the filmy white mists rose like ghosts out of the stagnant ditches, and with clammy persistence invaded her unprotected form.

It was one of those places that seem to suggest the transaction of no stirring or heroic deeds, but of gloomy, wretched, chance-driven occurrences. A betrayed army might have surrendered there.

Luke seemed to give himself up with grim reciprocity to the influences of the spot. He appeared totally oblivious of his meek companion, and except to offer her languid, absent-minded assistance across various gates and dams, he remained as completely wrapped in reserve as were the taciturn levels over which they passed.

It was with an incredible sense of relief that Gladys found herself in the drier, more wholesome, atmosphere of Hullaway Chase. Here, as they walked briskly side by side over the thyme-scented turf, it seemed that the accumulated heat of the day, which, from the damp marsh-land only drew forth miasmic vapours, flung into the fragrant air delicious waftings of warm earth-breath. With still greater relief, and even with a little cry of joy, she caught sight of the friendly open door of the capacious barn, and the shadowy inviting heap of loose-flung oats lying beneath its wall of hay.

"Oh, we must go in here!" she cried, "what an adorable place!"

They entered, and the girl threw upon Luke one of her slow, long, amorous glances. "Kiss me!" she said, holding up her mouth to him beseechingly.

The faint light of the dying day fell with a pale glimmer upon her soft throat and rounded chin. Luke found himself disinclined to resist her.

There were tears on the girl's cheek when, loosening her hold upon his neck, she sank down on the idyllic couch offered them, and closed her eyes in childish contentment.

Luke hung over her thoughtfully and sadly. There is always something sad, — something that seems to bring with it a withering breath from the ultimate futility of the universe, — about a lover's recognition that the form which formerly thrilled him with ecstasy, now leaves him cold and unmoved. Such sadness, chilly and desolate as the hand of death itself, crept over the stone-carver's heart, as he looked at the gently-stirring breast and softly-parted lips of his beautiful mistress. He bent down and kissed her forehead, caressing her passively yielded fingers.

She opened her eyes and smiled at him, the lingering smile of a soothed and happy infant.

They remained thus, silent and at rest, for several moments. It was not long, however, before the subtle instinct of an enamoured woman made the girl aware that her friend's responsiveness had been but a momentary impulse. She started up, her eyes wide-open and her lips trembling.

"Luke!" she murmured, "Luke, darling,—" Her voice broke, in a curious little sob.

Luke gazed at her blankly, thankful that the weight of weary foreknowledge upon his face was concealed from her by the growing darkness.

"I want to say to you, my dear love," the girl went on, her bosom rising and falling in pitiful embarrassment, and her white fingers nervously scooping up handful after handful of the shadowy grain.

"I want to say to you something that is — that is very serious — for us both, Luke, — I want to tell you, — —"

Her voice once more died away, in the same inarticulate and curious gurgle, like the sob of water running under a weir.

Luke rose to his feet and stood in front of her. “It’s all right,” he said calmly. “You needn’t agitate yourself. I understand.”

The girl covered her face with her hands. “But what shall I do? What shall I do?” she sobbed. “I can’t marry Ralph like this. He’ll kill me when he finds out. I’m so afraid of him, Luke — you don’t know, — you don’t know,—”

“He’ll forgive you,” answered the stone-carver quietly. “He’s not a person to burst out like that. Lots of people have to confess these little things after they’re married. Some men aren’t half so particular as you girls think.”

Gladys raised her head and gave her friend a long queer look, the full import of which was concealed from him in the darkness. She made a futile little groping movement with her hand.

“Luke,” she whispered, “I must just say this to you even if it makes you angry. I shouldn’t be happy afterwards — whatever happens — if I didn’t say it. I want you to know that I’m ready, if you wish, if — if you love me enough for that, Luke, — to go away with you anywhere! I feel it isn’t as it used to be. I feel everything’s different. But I want you to know, — to know without any mistake — that I’d go at once — willingly — wherever you took me!

“It’s not that I’m begging you to marry me,” she wailed, “it’s only that I love you, love you and want you so frightfully, my darling!

“I wouldn’t worry you, Luke,” she added, in a low, pitiful little voice, that seemed to emerge rather from the general shadowiness of the place than from a human being’s lips, “I wouldn’t tease you, or scold you when you enjoyed yourself! It’s only that I want to be with you, that I want to be near you. I never thought it would come to this. I thought—" Her voice died away again into the darkness.

Luke began pacing up and down the floor of the barn.

Once more she spoke. "I'd be faithful to you, Luke, married or unmarried, — and I'd work, though I know you won't believe that. But I can do quite hard work, when I like!"

By some malignity of chance, or perhaps by a natural reaction from her pleading words, Luke's mind reverted to her tone and temper on that June morning when she insulted him by a present of money.

"No, Gladys," he said. "It won't do. You and I weren't made for each other. There are certain things — many things — in me that you'll never understand, and I daresay there are things in you that I never shall. We're not made for one another, child, I tell you. We shouldn't be happy for a week. I know myself, and I know you, and I'm sure it wouldn't do.

"Don't you fret yourself about Dangelis. If he finds out, he finds out — and that's the end of it. But I swear to you that I know *him* well enough to know that you've nothing to be afraid of — even if he does find out. He's not the kind of man to make a fuss. I can see exactly the way he'd take it. He'd be sorry for you and laugh at himself, and plunge desperately into his painting.

"I like Dangelis, I tell you frankly. I think he's a thoroughly generous and large-minded fellow. Of course I've hardly seen him to speak to, but you can't be mistaken about a man like that. At least I can't! I seem to know him in and out, up hill and down dale.

"Make a fuss? Not he! He'll make this country ring and ting with the fame of his pictures. That's what he'll do! And as for being horrid to you — not he! I know him better than that. He'll be too much in love with you, too, — you little demon! That's another point to bear in mind.

"Oh, you'll have the whip-hand of him, never fear, — and our son, — I hope it *is* a son my dear! — will be treated as if it were his own.

"I know him, I tell you! He's a thoroughly decent fellow, though a bit of a fool, no doubt. But we're all that!

"Don't you be a little goose, Gladys, and get fussed up and worried over nothing. After all, what does it matter? Life's such a mad affair anyway! All we can do is to map things to the best of our ability, and then chance it.

"We're all on the verge of a precipice. Do you think I don't realize that? But that's no reason why we should rush blindly up to the thing, and throw ourselves over. And it would be nothing else than that, nothing else than sheer madness, for you and I to go off together.

"Do you think your father would give us a penny? Not he! I detect in your father, Gladys, an extraordinary vein of obstinacy. You haven't clashed up against it yet, but try and play any of these games on him, and you'll see!

"No; one thing you may be perfectly sure of, and that is, that whatever he finds out, Dangelis will never breathe a word to your father. He's madly in love with you, girl, I tell you; and if I'm out of the way, you'll be able to do just what you like with him!"

It was completely dark now, and when Luke's oration came to an end there was no sound in the barn except a low sobbing.

"Come on, child; we must be getting home, or you'll be frightfully late. Here! give me your hand. Where are you?"

He groped about in the darkness until his sleeve brushed against her shoulder. It was trembling under her efforts to suppress her sobs.

He got hold of her wrists and pulled her to her feet. "Come on, my dear," he repeated, "we must get out of this now. Give me one nice kiss before we go."

She permitted herself to be caressed — passive and unresisting in his arms.

In the darkness they touched the outer edge of Mr. Clavering's hiding-place, and the girl, swaying a little backwards under Luke's endearments, felt the pressure of the hay-wall behind her. She did not, however, feel the impassioned touch of the choking kiss which the poor imprisoned priest desperately imprinted on a loose tress of her hair.

It was one of those pitiful and grotesque situations which seem sometimes to arise, — as our fantastic planet turns on its orbit, — for no other purpose than that of gratifying some malign vein of goblin-like irony in the system of things.

That at the moment when Luke, under the spell of the shadowy fragrance of the place, and the pliant submissiveness of the girl's form, threw something of his old ardour into his kiss, her other, more desperate love should have dared such an approach, was a coincidence apparently of the very kind to appeal to the perverse taste of this planetary humour.

The actual result of such a strange consentaneousness of rival emotion was that the three human heads remained for a brief dramatic moment in close juxtaposition, — the two fair ones and the dark one so near one another, that it might have seemed almost inevitable that their thoughts should interact in that fatal proximity.

The pitiful pathos of the whole human comedy might well have been brought home to any curious observer able to pierce that twilight! Such an observer would have felt towards those three poor obsessed craniums the same sort of tenderness that they themselves would have been conscious of, had they suddenly come across a sleeping person or a dead body.

Strange, that the ultimate pity in these things, — in this blind antagonistic striving of human desires under such gracious flesh and blood

— should only arouse these tolerant emotions when they are no longer of any avail! Had some impossible bolt from heaven stricken these three impassioned ones in their tragic approximation, how, — long afterwards, — the discoverer of the three skeletons would have moralized upon their fate! As it was, there was nothing but the irony of the gods to read what the irony of the gods was writing upon that moment's drowning sands.

When Luke and Gladys left the barn, and hurriedly, under the rising moon, retook their way towards Nevilton, Clavering emerged from his concealment dazed and stupefied. He threw himself down in the darkness on the heap of oats and strove to give form and coherence to the wild flood of thoughts which swept through him.

So this was what he had come out to learn! This was the knowledge that his mad jealousy had driven him to snatch!

He thought of the exquisite sacredness — for him — of that morning's ritual in the church, and of how easily he had persuaded himself to read into the girl's preoccupied look something more than natural sadness over Andersen's death. He had indeed, — only those short hours ago, — allowed himself the sweet illusion that this religious initiation really meant, for his pagan love, some kind of Vita Nuova.

The fates had rattled their dice, however, to a different tune. The unfortunate girl was indeed entering upon a Vita Nuova, but how hideously different a one from that which had been his hope!

On Wednesday came the confirmation service. How could he, — with any respect for his conscience as a guardian of these sacred rites, — permit Gladys to be confirmed now? Yet what ought he to do? Drops of cold sweat stood upon his forehead as he wondered whether it was incumbent upon him to take the first train the following morning for the bishop's palace and to demand an interview.

No. Tomorrow the prelate would be starting on his episcopal tour. Clavering would have to pursue him from one remote country village to another, and what a pursuit that would be! He recoiled from the idea with sick aversion.

Could he then suppress his fatal knowledge and let the event take place without protest? To act in such a manner would be nothing less than to play the part of an accomplice in the girl's sin.

Perhaps when the bishop actually appeared he would be able to secure a confidential interview with him and lay the whole matter before him. Or should he act on his own responsibility, and write to Gladys himself, telling her that under the circumstances it would be best for her to stay away from the ceremony?

What reason could he give for such an extraordinary mandate? Could he bluntly indicate to her, in black and white, the secret he had discovered, and the manner of its discovery? To accuse her on the ground of mere village gossip would be to lay himself open to shameful humiliation. Was he, in any case, justified in putting the fatal information, gathered in this way, to so drastic a use? It was only in his madness as a jealous lover that he had possessed himself of this knowledge. As priest of Nevilton he knew nothing.

He had no right to know anything. No; he must pay the penalty of his shameful insanity by bearing this burden in silence, even though his conscience groaned and cracked beneath the weight. Such a silence, with its attendant misery of self-accusation and shame, was all he could offer to his treacherous enchantress as a tacit recompense for having stolen her secret.

He rose and left the granary. As he walked homeward, along the Nevilton road, avoiding by a sort of scrupulous reaction the shorter route followed by the others, it seemed to him as though the night had never been more sultry, or the way more loaded with the presence of impendent calamity.

CHAPTER XXV. METAMORPHOSIS

The day of James Andersen's funeral and of Gladys' confirmation happened to coincide with a remarkable and unexpected event in the life of Mr. Quincunx. Whatever powers, lurking in air or earth, were attempting at that moment to influence the fatal stream of events in Nevilton, must have been grimly conscious of something preordained and inevitable about this eccentric man's drift towards appalling moral disaster.

It seemed as though nothing on earth now could stop the marriage of Lacrima and Goring, and from the point of view of the moralist, or even of the person of normal decency, such a marriage, if it really did lead to Mr. Quincunx's pensioning at the hands of his enemy, necessarily held over him a shame and a disgrace proportionate to the outrage done to the girl who loved him. What these evil powers played upon, if evil powers they were, — and not the blind laws of cause and effect, — was the essential character of Mr. Quincunx, which nothing in heaven nor earth seemed able to change.

There are often, however, elements in our fate, which lie, it might seem, deeper than any calculable prediction, deeper, it may be, than the influence of the most powerful supernatural agents, and these elements — unstirred by angel or devil — are sometimes roused to activity by the least expected cause. It is, at these moments, as though Fate, in the incalculable comprehensiveness of her immense designs, condescended to make use of Chance, her elfish sister, to carry out what the natural and normal stream of things would seem to have decreed as an impossibility.

Probably not a living soul who knew him, — certainly not Lacrima, — had the least expectation of any chance of change in Mr. Quincunx. But then none of these persons had really sounded the depths in the soul of the man. There were certain mysterious and unfathomable gulfs in the sea-floor of Mr. Quincunx's being which would have exhausted all the sorceries of Witch-Bessie even to locate.

So fantastic and surprising are the ways of destiny, that, — as shall be presently seen, — what neither gods nor devils, nor men nor angels, could effect, was effected by nothing more nor less than a travelling circus.

The day of the burying of James and the confirmation of Gladys brought into Nevilton a curious cortège of popular entertainers. This cortège consisted of one of those small wandering circuses, which, during the month of August are wont to leave the towns and move leisurely among the remoter country villages, staying nowhere more than a night, and taking advantage of any local festival or club-meeting to enhance their popularity.

The circus in question, — flamingly entitled Porter's Universal World-Show, — was owned and conducted by a certain Job Love, a shrewd and avaricious ruffian, who boasted, though with little justification, the inheritance of gipsy blood. As a matter of fact, the authentic gipsy tribes gave Mr. Love an extremely wide berth, avoiding his path as they would have avoided the path of the police. This cautious attitude was not confined, however, to gipsies. Every species of itinerant hawker and pedler avoided the path of Mr. Love, and the few toy-booths and sweet-stalls that followed his noisy roundabouts were a department of his own providing.

It was late on Tuesday night when the World-Show established itself in Nevilton Square. The sound of hammers and the barking of dogs was the last thing that the villagers heard before they slept, and the first thing they heard when they awoke.

The master of the World-Show spent the night according to his custom in solitary regal grandeur in the largest of his caravans. The sun had not, however, pierced the white mists in the Nevilton orchards before Mr. Love was up and abroad. The first thing he did, on descending the steps of his caravan, was to wash his hands and face in the basin of the stone fountain. His next proceeding was to measure out into a little metal cup which he produced from his pocket a small quantity of brandy and to pour this refreshment, diluted with water from the fountain, down his capacious throat.

Mr. Love was a lean man, of furtive and irascible appearance. His countenance, bleached by exposure into a species of motley-coloured leather, shone after its immersion in the fountain like the knob of a well-worn cudgel. His whitish hair, cut in convict style close to his head, emphasized the polished mahogany of his visage, from the upper portion of which his sky-blue eyes, small and glittering, shone out defiantly upon the world, like ominous jewels set in the forehead of an obscene and smoke-darkened idol.

Having replaced his cup and flask in his pocket, the master of the World-Show looked anxiously at the omens of the weather, snuffing the morning breeze with the air of one not lightly to be fooled either by rain or shine. Returning to the still silent circus, he knocked sharply with his knuckles at the door of the smallest of the three caravans.

“Flick!” he shouted, “let me in! Flick! Old Flick! Darn ‘ee, man, for a blighting sand-louse! Open the door, God curse you! Old Flick! Old Flick! Old Flick!”

Thus assaulted, the door of the caravan was opened from within, and Mr. Love pushed his way into the interior. A strange enough sight met him when once inside.

The individual apostrophized as “Old Flick” closed and bolted the door with extraordinary precaution, as soon as his master had entered, and then turned and hovered nervously before him, while Mr. Love sank down on the only chair in the place. The caravan was bare of all furniture except a rough cooking-stove and a three-legged deal table. But it was at neither of these objects that Job Love stared, as he tilted back his chair and waved impatiently aside the deprecatory old man.

Stretched on a ragged horse-blanket upon the floor lay a sleeping child. Clothed in little else than a linen bodice and a short flannel petticoat, she turned restlessly in her slumber under Mr. Love's scrutiny, and crossing one bare leg over the other, flung out a long white arm, while her dark curls, disturbed by her movement, fell over her face and hid it from view.

"Ah!" remarked Mr. Love. "Quieter now, I see. She must dance today, Flick, and no mistake about it! You must take her out in the fields this morning, like you did that other one. I can't have no more rampaging and such-like, in my decent circus. But she must dance, there's no getting over that, — she must dance, Old Flick! 'Twas your own blighting notion to take her on, remember; and I can't have no do-nothing foreigners hanging around, specially now August be come.

"What did she say her nonsense-name was? Lores, — Dolores? Whoever heard tell of such a name as that?"

The sound of his voice seemed to reach the child even in her sleep; for flinging her arms over her head, and turning on her back, she uttered a low indistinguishable murmur. Her eyes, however, remained closed, the dark curves of her long eye-lashes contrasting with the scarlet of her mouth and the ivory pallor of her skin.

Even Job Love — though not precisely an æsthete — was struck by the girl's beauty.

"She'll make a fine dancer, Flick, a fine dancer! How old dost think she be? 'Bout twelve, or may-be more, I reckon.

“’Tis pity she won’t speak no Christian word. ’Tis wonderful, how these foreign childer do hold so obstinate by their darned fancy-tongue!

“We must trim her out in them spangle-gauzes of Skipsy Jane. *She* were the sort of girl to make the boys holler. But this one’ll do well enough, I reckon, if so be she goes smilin’ and chaffin’ upon the boards.

“But no more of that devil’s foolery, Flick? Dost hear, man? Take her out into the fields; — take her out into the fields! She must dance and she must smile, all in Skipsy Jane’s spangles, come noon this day. She must do so, Flick — or I ain’t Jobie Love!”

The old man paused in his vague moth-like hovering, and surveyed the outstretched figure. His own appearance was curious enough to excite a thrill of intense curiosity, had any less callous eye but that of his master been cast upon him.

He produced the effect not so much of a living person, animated by natural impulses, as of a dead body possessed by some sort of wandering spirit which made use of him for its own purposes.

If by chance this spirit were to desert him, one felt that what would be left of Old Flick would be nothing but the mask of a man, — a husk, a shard, a withered stalk, a wisp of dried-up grass! The old creature was as thin as a lathe; and his cavernous, colourless eyes and drooping jaw looked, in that indistinct light, as vague and shadowy as though they belonged to some phantasmal mirage of mist and rain drifted in from the sleeping fields.

“How did ‘ee ever get Mother Sterner to let ‘ee have so dainty a bit of goods?” went on Mr. Love, continuing his survey of their unconscious captive. “The old woman must have been blind-scared of the police or summat, so as to want to be free of the maid. ’Tisn’t every day you can pick up a lass so cut out for the boards as she be.”

At intervals during his master's discourse the parchment-like visage of the old man twisted and contorted itself, as if with the difficulty of finding words.

When Job Love at last became silent, the words issued from him as if they had been rustling eddies of chaff, blown through dried stalks.

"I've tried her with one thing, Mister, and I've tried her with another, — but 'tis no use; she do cry and cry, and there's no handling her. I guess I must take her into them fields, as you do say. 'Tis because of folks hearing that she do carry on so."

Job Love frowned and scratched his forehead.

"Damn her," he cried, "for a limpsy cat! Well — Old Flick — ye picked her up and ye must start her off. This show don't begin till nigh along noon, — so if ye thinks ye can bring her to reason, some ways or t'other ways, off with 'ee, my man! Get her a bite of breakfast first, — and good luck to 'ee! Only don't let's have no fuss, and don't let's have no onlookers. I'm not the man to stand for any law-breaking. This show's a decent show, and Job Love's a decent man. If the wench makes trouble, ye must take her back where she did come from. Mother Sterner'll have to slide down. I can't have no quarrels with King and Country, over a limpsy maid like she!"

Uttering these words in a tone of formidable finality, Mr. Love moved to the entrance and let himself out.

Their master gone, Old Flick turned waveringly to the figure on the floor. Taking down a faded coat from its peg on the wall, he carefully spread it over the child, tucking it round her body with shaking hands. He then went to the stove in the corner, lit it, and arranged the kettle. From the stove he turned to the three-legged table; and removing from a hanging cupboard a tea-pot, some cups and plates, a loaf of bread and a pat of butter, he set out these objects with meticulous nicety, avoiding the least clatter or sound. This done, he sat down upon the solitary chair, and waited the boiling of the water with inscrutable passivity.

From outside the caravan came the shuffle of stirring feet and the murmur of subdued and drowsy voices. The camp was beginning to enter upon its labour of preparation.

When he had made tea, Old Flick touched his sleeping captive lightly on the shoulder.

The girl started violently, and sat up, with wide-open eyes. She began talking hurriedly, protesting and imploring; but not a word of her speech was intelligible to Old Flick, for the simple reason that it was Italian, — Italian of the Neapolitan inflexion.

The old man handed her a strong cup of tea, together with a large slice of bread-and-butter, uttering as he did so all manner of soothing and reassuring words. When she had finished her breakfast he brought her water and soap.

"Tidy thee-self up, my pretty," he said. "We be goin' out, along into them fields, present."

Bolting the caravan door on the outside, he shuffled off to the fountain to perform his own ablutions, and to assist his companions in unloading the stage-properties, and setting up the booths and swings. After the lapse of an hour he climbed the caravan-steps and re-entered softly.

He found the girl crouched in a corner, her hands clasped over her knees, and traces of tears upon her cheeks. Before leaving her, the old man had placed shoes and stockings by her side, and these she now wore, together with a dark-coloured skirt and a scarlet gipsy-shawl.

"Come," he said. "Thee be goin' wi' I into the fields. Thee be goin' to learn a dancin' trick or two. Show opens along of noon; and Master, he's goin' to let 'ee have Skipsy Jane's spangles."

How much of this the child understood it is impossible to say; but the old man’s tone was not threatening, and the idea of being taken away — somewhere — anywhere — roused vague hopes in her soul. She pulled the red shawl over her head and let him lead her by the hand.

Down the steps they clambered, and hurriedly threaded their way across the square.

The old man took the road towards Yeoborough, and turned with the girl up Dead Man’s Lane. He was but dimly acquainted with the neighbourhood; but once before, in his wanderings as a pedler, he had encamped in a certain grassy hollow bordering on the Auber Woods, and the memory of the seclusion of this spot drew him now.

As they passed Mr. Quincunx’s garden they encountered the solitary himself, who, in his sympathy with Luke Andersen on this particular day, had resolved to pay the young man an early morning visit.

The recluse looked with extreme and startled interest at this singular pair. The child’s beauty struck him with a shock that almost took his breath away. There was something about the haunting expression of her gaze as she turned it upon him that roused an overpowering flood of tenderness and pity in untouched abysses of his being.

There must have been some instantaneous reciprocity in the eccentric man’s grey eyes, for the young girl turned back after they had passed, and throwing the shawl away from her head, fixed upon him what seemed a deliberate and beseeching look of appeal.

Mr. Quincunx was so completely carried out of his normal self by this imploring look that he went so far as to answer its inarticulate prayer by a wave of his hand, and by a sign that indicated, — whether she understood it or not, — that he intended to render her assistance.

In his relations with Lacrima Mr. Quincunx was always remotely conscious that the girl’s character was stronger than his own, and — Pariah-like — this had the effect of lessening the emotion he felt towards her.

But now — in the look of the little Dolores — there was an appeal from a weakness and helplessness much more desperate than his own, — an appeal to him from the deepest gulfs of human dependence. The glance she had given him burned in his brain like a coal of white fire. It seemed to cry out to him from all the flotsam and jetsam, all the drift and wreckage of everything that had ever been drowned, submerged, and stranded, by the pitilessness of Life, since the foundation of the world.

The child’s look had indeed the same effect upon Mr. Quincunx that the look of his Master had upon the fear-stricken Apostle, in the hall of Caiaphas the high priest. In one heart-piercing stab it brought to his overpowered consciousness a vision of all the victims of cruelty who had ever cried aloud for help since the generations of men began their tragic journey.

Perhaps to all extremely sensitive natures of Mr. Quincunx’s type, a type of morbidly self-conscious weakness as well as sensitiveness, the electric stir produced by beauty and sex can only reach a culmination when the medium of its appearance approximates to the extreme limit of fragility and helplessness.

Hell itself, so to speak, had to display to him its span-long babes, before he could be aroused to descend and “harrow” it! But once roused in him, this latent spirit of the pitiful Son of Man became formidable, reckless, irresistible. The very absence in him of the usual weight of human solidity and “character” made him the more porous to this divine mood.

Anyone who watched him returning hastily to his cottage from the garden-gate would have been amazed by the change in his countenance. He looked and moved like a man under a blinding illumination. So must the citizen of Tarsus have looked, when he staggered into the streets of Damascus.

He literally ran into his kitchen, snatched up his hat and stick, poured a glass of milk down his throat, put a couple of biscuits into his pocket, and re-issued, ready for his strange pursuit. He hurried up the lane to the first gate that offered itself, and passing into the field continued the chase on the further side of the hedge.

The old man evidently found the hill something of an effort, for it was not long before Mr. Quincunx overtook them.

He passed them by unremarked, and continued his advance along the hedgerow till he reached the summit of the ridge between Wild Pine and Seven Ashes. Here, concealed behind a clump of larches, he awaited their approach. To his surprise, they entered one of the fields on the opposite side of the road, and began walking across it.

Mr. Quincunx watched them. In a corner of the field they were crossing lay a spacious hollow, — once the bed of a pond, — but now quite dry and overgrown with moss and clover.

Old Flick's instinct led him to this spot, as one well adapted to the purpose he had in mind, both by reason of its absolute seclusion and by reason of its smooth turf-floor.

Mr. Quincunx waited till their two figures vanished into this declivity, and then he himself crossed the field in their track.

Having reached the mossy level of the vanished pond, — a place which seemed as though Nature herself had designed it with a view to his present intention, — Old Flick assumed a less friendly air towards his captive. A psychologist interested in searching out the obscure workings of derelict and submerged souls, would have come to the speedy conclusion as he watched the old man’s cadaverous face that the spirit which at present animated his corpse-like body was one that had little commiseration or compunction in it.

The young Dolores had not, it seemed, to deal at this moment with an ordinary human scoundrel, but with a faded image of humanity galvanized into life by some conscienceless Larva.

In proportion as this unearthly obsession grew upon Old Flick, his natural countenance grew more and more dilapidated and withered. Innumerable years seemed suddenly added to the burden he already carried. The lines of his face assumed a hideous and Egyptian immobility; only his eyes, as he turned them upon his companion, were no longer colourless.

“Doll,” said he, “now thee must try thee’s steps, or ‘twill be the worse for thee!”

The girl only answered by flinging herself down on her knees before him, and pouring forth unintelligible supplications.

“No more o’ this,” cried the old man; “no more o’ this! I’ve got to learn ‘ee to dance, — and learn ‘ee to dance I will. Ye’ll have to go on them boards come noon, whether ‘ee will or no!”

The child only clasped her hands more tightly together, and renewed her pleading.

It would have needed the genius of some supreme painter, and of such a painter in an hour of sheer insanity, to have done justice to the extraordinary expression that crossed the countenance of Old Flick at that moment. The outlines of his face seemed to waver and decompose. None but an artist who had, like the insatiable Leonardo, followed the very dead into their forlorn dissolution, could have indicated the setting of his eyes; and his eyes themselves, madness alone could have depicted.

With a sudden vicious jerk the old man snatched the shawl from the girl's shoulders, flung it on the ground, and seizing her by the wrists pulled her up upon her feet.

"Dance, ye baggage!" he cried hoarsely;— "dance, I tell 'ee!"

It was plain that the luckless waif understood clearly enough now what was required of her, and it was also plain that she recognized that the moment for supplication had gone by. She stepped back a pace or two upon the smooth turf, and slipping off her unlaced shoes, — shoes far too large for her small feet, — she passed the back of her hand quickly across her eyes, shook her hair away from her forehead, and began a slow, pathetic little dance.

"Higher!" cried Old Flick in an excited voice, beating the air with his hand and humming a strange snatch of a tune that might have inspired the dances of Polynesian cannibals. "Higher, I tell 'ee!"

The girl felt compelled to obey; and putting one hand on her hip and lifting up her skirt with the other, she proceeded, shyly and in forlorn silence, to dance an old Neapolitan folk-dance, such as might be witnessed, on any summer evening, by the shores of Amalfi or Sorrento.

It was at this moment that Mr. Quincunx made his appearance against the sky-line above them. He looked for one brief second at the girl's bare arms, waving curls, and light-swinging body, and then leapt down between them.

All nervousness, all timidity, seemed to have fallen away from him like a snake's winter-skin under the spring sun. He seized the child's hand with an air of indescribable gentleness and authority, and made so menacing and threatening a gesture that Old Flick, staggering backwards, nearly fell to the ground.

"Whose child is this?" he demanded sternly, soothing the frightened little dancer with one hand, while with the other he shook his cane in the direction of the gasping and protesting old man.

"Whose child is this? You've stolen her, you old rascal! You're no Italian, — anyone can see that! You're a damned old tramp, and if you weren't so old and ugly I'd beat you to death; do you hear? — to death, you villain! Whose child is she? Can't you speak? Take care; I'm badly tempted to make you taste this, — to make *you* skip and dance a little!

"What do you say? Job Love's circus? Well, — he's not an Italian either, is he? So if you haven't stolen her, he has."

He turned to the child, stooping over her with infinite tenderness, and folding the shawl of which she had again possessed herself, with hands as gentle as a mother's, about her shoulders and head.

"Where are your parents, my darling?" he asked, adding with a flash of amazing presence of mind,— "your 'padre' and 'madre'?"

The girl seemed to get the drift of the question, and with a pitiful little smile pointed earthward, and made a sweeping gesture with both her hands, as if to indicate the passing of death's wings.

"Dead? — both dead, eh?" muttered Mr. Quincunx. "And these rascals who've got hold of you are villains and rogues? Damned rogues! Damned villains!"

He paused and muttered to himself. "What the devil's the Italian for a god-forsaken rascal?— 'Cattivo!' 'Tutto cattivo!' — the whole lot of them a set of confounded scamps!"

The child nodded her head vigorously.

"You see," he cried, turning to Old Flick, "she disowns you all. This is clearly a most knavish piece of work! What were you doing to the child? eh? eh? eh?" Mr. Quincunx accompanied these final syllables with renewed flourishes of his stick in the air.

Old Flick retreated still further away, his legs shaking under him. “Here, — you can clear out of this! Do you understand? You can clear out of this; and go back to your damned master, and tell him I’m going to send the police after him!

“As for this girl, I’m going to take her home with me. So off you go, — you old reprobate; and thankful you may be that I haven’t broken every bone in your body! I’ve a great mind to do it now. Upon my soul I’ve a great mind to do it!

“Shall I beat him into a jelly for you, — my darling? Shall I make him skip and dance for you?”

The child seemed to understand his gestures, if not his words; for she clung passionately to his hands, and pressing them to her lips, covered them with kisses; shaking her head at the same time, as much as to say, “Old Flick is nothing. Let Old Flick go to the devil, as long as I can stay with you!” In some such manner as this, at any rate, Mr. Quincunx interpreted her words.

“Sheer off, then, you old scoundrel! Shog off back to your confounded circus! And when you’ve got there, tell your friends, — Job Love and his gang, — that if they want this little one they’d better come and fetch her!

“Dead Man’s Lane, — that’s where I live. It’s easily enough found; and so is the police-station in Yeoborough, — as you and your damned kidnappers shall discover before you’ve done with me!”

Uttering these words in a voice so menacing that the old man shook like an aspen-leaf, Mr. Quincunx took the girl by the hand, and, ascending the grassy slope, walked off with her across the field.

Old Flick seemed reduced to a condition bordering upon imbecility. He staggered up out of that unpropitious hollow, and stood stock-still, like one petrified, until they were out of sight. Then, very slowly and mumbling incoherently to himself, he made his way back towards the village.

He did not even turn his head as he passed Mr. Quincunx's cottage. Indeed, it is extremely doubtful how far he had recognized him as the person they encountered on their way, and still more doubtful how far he had heard or understood, when the tenant of Dead Man's Lane indicated the place of his abode.

The sudden transformation of the timid recluse into a formidable man of action did not end with his triumphant retirement to his familiar domain. Some mysterious fibre in his complicated temperament had been struck, and continued to be struck, by the little Dolores, which not only rendered him indifferent to personal danger, but willing and happy to encounter it.

The event only added one more proof to the sage dictum of the Chinese philosopher, — that you can never tell of what a man is capable until he is stone-dead.

CHAPTER XXVI. VARIOUS ENCOUNTERS

During the hours when Mr. Quincunx was undergoing this strange experience, several other human brains under the roofs of Nevilton were feeling the pressure of extreme perturbation.

Gladys, after a gloomy breakfast, which was rendered more uncomfortable, not only by her father's chaffing references to the approaching ceremony, but by a letter from Dangelis, had escaped to her room to be assisted by Lacrima in dressing for the confirmation.

In his letter the artist declared his intention of spending that night at the Gloucester Hotel in Weymouth, and begged his betrothed to forgive this delay in his return to her side.

This communication caused Gladys many tremors of disquietude. Could it be possible that the American had found out something and that he had gone to Weymouth to meditate at leisure upon his course of action?

In any case this intimation of a delay in his return irritated the girl. It struck her in her tenderest spot. It was a direct flouting of her magnetic power. It was an insult to her sex-vanity.

She had seen nothing of Luke since their Sunday's excursion; and as Lacrima, with cold submissive fingers, helped her to arrange her white dress and virginal veil, she could hear the sound of the bell tolling for James Andersen's funeral.

Mingled curiously enough with this melancholy vibration falling at protracted intervals upon the air, like the stroke of some reiterated hammer of doom, came another sound, a sound of a completely opposite character,

— the preluding strains, namely, of the steam roundabouts of Porter's Universal Show.

It was as though on one side of the village the angel of death were striking an iron-threatening gong, while, on the other side, the demons of life were howling a brazen defiance.

The association of the two sounds as they reached her at this critical hour brought the figure of Luke vividly and obsessingly into her mind. How well she knew the sort of comment he would make upon the bizarre combination! Beneath the muslin frills of her virginal dress, — a dress that made her look fairer and younger than usual, — her heart ached with sick longing for her evasive lover.

The wheel had indeed come full circle for the fair-haired girl. She could not help the thought recurring again and again, as Lacrima's light fingers adjusted her veil, that the next time she dressed in this manner it would be for her wedding-day. Her one profound consolation lay in the knowledge that her cousin, even more deeply than herself, dreaded the approach of that fatal Thursday.

Her hatred for the pale-cheeked Italian re-accumulated every drop of its former venom, as with an air of affectionate gratitude she accepted her assistance.

It is a psychological peculiarity of certain human beings that the more they hate, the more they crave, with a curious perverted instinct, some sort of physical contact with the object of their hatred.

Every touch of Lacrima's hand increased the intensity of Gladys' loathing; and yet, so powerful is the instinct to which I refer, she lost no opportunity of accentuating the contact between them, letting their fingers meet again and again, and even their breath, and throwing back her rounded chin to make it easier for those hated wrists to busy themselves about her throat. Her general air was an air of playful passivity; but at one moment, imprinting a kiss on the girl's arm as, in the process of arranging her veil, it brushed across her cheek, she seemed almost anxious to convey to Lacrima the full implication of her real feeling.

Never has a human caress been so electric with the vibrations of antipathy, as was that kiss. She followed up this signal of animosity by a series of feline taunts relative to John Goring, one of which, from its illuminated insight into the complex strata of the girl's soul, delighted her by its effect.

Lacrima winced under it, as if under the sting of a lash, and a burning flood of scarlet suffused her cheeks. She dropped her hands and stepped back, uttering a fierce vow that nothing — nothing on earth — would induce her to accompany a girl who could say such things, to such a ceremony!

"No, I wouldn't, — I wouldn't!" cried Gladys mockingly. "I wouldn't dream of coming with me! Tomorrow week, anyway, we're bound to go to church side by side. Father wanted to drive with me then, you know, and to let mother go with you, — but I wouldn't hear of it! I said they must go in one carriage, and you and I in another, so that our last drive together we should be quite by ourselves. You'll like that, won't you, darling?"

Lacrima's only answer to this was to turn her back to her cousin, and begin putting on her hat and gloves.

"I know where you're going," said Gladys. "You're going to see your dear Maurice. Give him my love! I should be ashamed to let such a wretched coward come near me.

"James — poor boy! — was a fellow of a different metal. He'd some spirit in him. Listen! When that bell stops tolling they'll be carrying him into the church. I expect you're thinking now, darling, that it would have been better if you'd treated him differently. Of course you know it's you that killed him? Oh, nobody else! Just little Lacrima and her coy, demure ways!

"*I've* never killed a man. I can say that, at all events.

"That's right! Run off to her dear Maurice, — her dear brave Maurice! Perhaps he'll take her on his knees again, and she'll play the sweet little innocent, — like that day when I peeped through the window!"

This final dart had hardly reached its objective before Lacrima without attempting any retort rushed from the room.

"I *will* go and see Maurice. I will! I will!" she murmured to herself as she ran down the broad oak staircase, and slipped out by the East door.

Simultaneously with these events, a scene of equal dramatic intensity, though of a very different character, was being enacted in the vicarage drawing-room.

Vennie, as we have noted, had resolved to postpone for the present her reception into the Catholic Church. She had also resolved that nothing on earth should induce her to reveal to her mother her change of creed until the thing was an accomplished fact. The worst, however, of the kind of mental suppression in which she had been living of late, is that it tends to produce a volcanic excitement of the nerves, liable at any moment to ungovernable upheavals. Quite little things — mere straws and bagatelles — are enough to set this eruption beginning; and when once it begins, the accumulated passion of the long days of fermentation gives the explosion a horrible force.

One perpetual annoyance to Vennie was her mother's persistent fondness for family prayers. It seemed to the girl as though Valentia insisted on this performance, not so much out of a desire to serve God, as out of a sense of what was due to herself as the mistress of a well-conducted establishment.

Vennie always fancied she discerned a peculiar tone of self-satisfaction in her mother's voice, as, rather loudly, and extremely clearly, she read her liturgical selections to the assembled servants.

On this particular morning the girl had avoided the performance of this rite, by leaving her room earlier than usual and taking refuge in the furthest of the vicarage orchards. Backwards and forwards she walked, in that secluded place, with her hands behind her and her head bent, heedless of the drenching dew which covered every grass-blade and of the heavy white mists that still hung about the tree-trunks. She was obliged to return to her room and change her shoes and stockings before joining her mother at breakfast, but not before she had prayed a desperate prayer, down there among the misty trees, for the eternal rest of James Andersen's soul.

This little incident of her absence from prayers was the direct cause of the unfortunate scene that followed.

Valentia hardly spoke to her daughter while the meal proceeded, and when at last it was over, she retired to the drawing-room and began writing letters.

This was an extremely ill-omened sign to anyone who knew Mrs. Seldom's habits. Under normal conditions, her first proceeding after breakfast was to move to the kitchen, where she engaged in a long culinary debate with both cook and gardener; a course of action which was extremely essential, as without it, — so bitter was the feud between these two worthies, — it is unlikely that there would have been any vegetables at all, either for lunch or dinner. When anything occurred to throw her into a mood of especially good spirits, she would pass straight out of the French window on to the front lawn, and armed with a pair of formidable garden-scissors would make a selection of flowers and leaves appropriate to a festival temper.

But this adjournment at so early an hour to the task of letter-writing indicated that Valentia was in a condition of mind, which in anyone but a lady of her distinction and breeding could have been called nothing less than a furious rage. For of all things in the world, Mrs. Seldom most detested this business of writing letters; and therefore, — with that perverse self-punishing instinct, which is one of the most artful weapons of offence given to refined gentlewomen, — she took grim satisfaction in setting herself down to write; thus producing chaos in the kitchen, where the gardener refused to obey the cook, and miserable remorse in the heart of Vennie, who wandered up and down the lawn meditating a penitential apology.

Satisfied in her heart that she was causing universal annoyance and embarrassment by her proceeding, and yet quite confident that there was nothing but what was proper and natural in her writing letters at nine o'clock in the morning, Valentia began, by gentle degrees, to recover her lost temper.

The only real sedative to thoroughly aggravated nerves, is the infliction of similar aggravation upon the nerves of others. This process is like the laying on of healing ointment; and the more extended the disturbance which we have the good fortune to create, the sooner we ourselves recover our equanimity.

Valentia had already cast several longing glances through the window at the heavy sunshine falling mistily on the asters and petunias, and in another moment she would probably have left her letter and joined her daughter in the garden, had not Vennie anticipated any such movement by entering the room herself.

"I ought to make you understand, mother," the girl began as soon as she stepped in, speaking in that curious strained voice which people assume when they have worked themselves up to a pitch of nervous excitement, “that when I don’t appear at prayers, it isn’t because I’m in a sulky temper, or in any mad haste to get out of doors. It’s — it’s for a different reason.”

Valentia gazed at her in astonishment. The tone in which Vennie spoke was so tense, her eyes shone with such a strange brilliance, and her look was altogether so abnormal, that Mrs. Seldom completely forgot her injured priestess-vanity, and waited in sheer maternal alarm for the completion of the girl’s announcement.

“It’s because I’ve made up my mind to become a Catholic, and Catholics aren’t allowed to attend any other kind of service than their own.”

Valentia rose to her feet and looked at her daughter in blank dismay. Her first feeling was one of overpowering indignation against Mr. Taxater, to whose treacherous influence she felt certain this madness was mainly due.

There was a terrible pause during which Vennie, leaning against the back of a chair, was conscious that both herself and her mother were trembling from head to foot. The soft murmur of wood-pigeons wafted in from the window, was now blended with two other sounds, the sound of the tolling of the church-bell and the sound of the music of Mr. Love’s circus, testing the efficiency of its roundabouts.

“So this is what it has come to, is it?” said the old lady at last. “And I suppose the next thing you’ll tell me, in this unkind, inconsiderate way, is that you’ve decided to become a nun!”

Vennie made a little movement with her head.

“You have?” cried Valentia, pale with anger. “You have made up your mind to do that? Well — I wouldn’t have believed it of you, Vennie! In spite of everything I’ve done for you; in spite of everything I’ve taught you; in spite of everything I’ve prayed for; — you can go and do this! Oh, you’re an unkind, ungrateful girl! But I know that look on your face. I’ve known it from your childhood. When you look like that there's no hope of moving you. Go on, then! Do as you wish to do. Leave your mother in her old age, and destroy the last hope of our family. I won't speak another word. I know nothing I can say will change you." She sank down upon the chintz-covered sofa and covered her face with her hands.

Vennie cursed herself for her miserable want of tact. What demon was it that had tempted her to break her resolution? Then, suddenly, as she looked at her mother swaying to and fro on the couch, a strange impulse of hard inflexible obstinacy rose up in her.

These wretched human affections, — so unbalanced and selfish, — what a relief to escape from them altogether! Like the passing on its way, across a temperate ocean, of some polar iceberg, there drove, at that moment, through Vennie's consciousness, a wedge of frozen, adamantine contempt for all these human, too-human clingings and clutchings which would fain imprison the spirit and hold it down with soft-strangling hands.

In her deepest heart she turned almost savagely away from this grey-haired woman, sitting there so hurt in her earthly affections and ambitions. She uttered a fierce mental invocation to that other Mother, — her whose heart, pierced by seven swords, had submitted to God's will without a groan!

Valentia, who, it must be remembered, had not only married a Seldom, but was herself one of that breed, felt at that moment as though this girl of hers were reverting to some mad strain of Pre-Elizabethan fanaticism. There was something mediæval about Vennie's obstinacy, as there was something mediæval about the lines of her face. Valentia recalled a portrait she had once seen of an ancestor of theirs in the days before the Reformation. He, the great Catholic Baron, had possessed the same thin profile and the same pinched lips. It was a curious revenge, the poor lady thought, for those evicted Cistercians, out of whose plundered house the Nevilton mansion had been built, that this fate, of all fates, should befall the last of the Seldoms!

The tolling of the bell, which hitherto had gone on, monotonously and insistently, across the drowsy lawn, suddenly stopped.

Vennie started and ran hurriedly to the door.

“They are burying James Andersen,” she cried, “and I ought to be there. It would look unkind and thoughtless of me not to be there. Good-bye, mother! We’ll talk of this when I come back. I’m sorry to be so unsatisfactory a daughter to you, but perhaps you’ll feel differently some day.”

Left to herself, Valentia Seldom rose and went back to her letter. But the pen fell from her limp fingers, and tears stained the already written page.

The funeral service had only just commenced when Vennie reached the churchyard. She remained at the extreme outer edge of the crowd, where groups of inquisitive women are wont to cluster, wearing their aprons and carrying their babies, and where the bigger children are apt to be noisy and troublesome. She caught a glimpse of Ninsy Lintot among those standing quite close to where Mr. Clavering, in his white surplice, was reading the pregnant liturgical words. She noticed that the girl held her hands to her face and that her slender form was shaking with the stress of her emotion.

She could not see Luke’s face, but she was conscious that his motionless figure had lost its upright grace. The young stone-carver seemed to droop, like a sun-flower whose stalk has been bent by the wind.

The words of the familiar English service were borne intermittently to her ears as they fell from the lips of the priest who had once been her friend. It struck her poignantly enough, — that brave human defiance, so solemn and tender, with which humanity seems to rise up in sublime desperation and hoist its standard of hope against hope!

She wondered what the sceptical Luke was feeling all this while. When Mr. Clavering began to read the passage which is prefaced in the Book of Common Prayer by the words, “Then while the earth be cast upon the Body by some standing by, the priest shall say,” — the quiet sobs of poor little Ninsy broke into a wail of passionate grief, grief to which Vennie, for all her convert’s aloofness from Protestant heresy, could not help adding her own tears.

It was the custom at Nevilton for the bearers of the coffin, when the service was over, to re-form in solemn procession, and escort the chief mourners back to the house from which they had come. It was her knowledge of this custom that led Vennie to steal away before the final words were uttered; and her hurried departure from the churchyard saved her from being a witness of the somewhat disconcerting event with which the solemn transaction closed.

The bringing of James’ body to the church had been unfortunately delayed at the start by the wayward movements of a luggage-train, which persisted in shunting up and down over the level-crossing, at the moment when they were carrying the coffin from the house. This delay had been followed by others, owing to various unforeseen causes, and by the time the service actually began it was already close upon the hour fixed for the confirmation.

Thus it happened that, soon after Vennie’s departure, at the very moment when the procession of bearers, followed by Luke and the station-master’s wife, issued forth into the street, there drove up to the church-door a two-horsed carriage containing Gladys and her mother, the former all whitely veiled, as if she were a child-bride. Seeing the bearers troop by, the fair-haired candidate for confirmation clutched Mrs. Romer’s arm and held her in her place, but leaning forward in the effort of this movement she presented her face at the carriage window, just as Luke himself emerged from the gates.

The two young people found themselves looking one another straight in the eyes, until with a shuddering spasm that shook her whole frame, Gladys sank back into her seat, as if from the effect of a crushing blow received full upon the breast.

Luke passed on, following the bearers, with something like the ghost of a smile upon his drawn and contorted lips.

CHAPTER XXVII. VENNIE SELDOM

IT WAS NOT towards her mother's house that Vennie directed her steps when she left the churchyard. She turned sharp to the west, and walked rapidly down the central street of the village into the square at the end of it.

Here she found an arena of busy and stirring confusion, dominated by hissing spouts of steam, hoarse whistlings from the "roundabout" engines, and occasional bursts of extravagant melody, as the circus-men made their musical experiments, pending the opening of the show.

Vennie's intention, in crossing the square, was to pay a morning visit to Mr. Quincunx, whose absence from Andersen's funeral had struck her mind as extraordinary and ominous. She feared that the recluse must be ill. Nothing less than illness, she thought, would have kept him away from such an event. She knew how closely he and the younger stone-carver were associated, and it was inconceivable that any insane jealousy of the dead could have held him at home. Of course it was possible that he had been compelled to go to work at Yeoborough as usual, but she did not think this likely.

It was, however, not only anxiety lest her mother's queer friend should be ill that actuated her. She felt, — now that her ultimatum had been delivered, — that the sooner she entered the Catholic Church and plunged into her novitiate, the better it would be. When events had *happened*, Mrs. Seldom accepted them. It was during the days of uncertain waiting that her nerves broke down. Once the daughter were actually a postulant in a convent, she felt sure the mother would resign herself, and resume her normal life.

Valentia was a very independent and self-sufficient woman. With her favourite flowers and her favourite biographies of proconsular personages, the girl felt convinced she would be much less heart-broken than she imagined.

Her days in Nevilton being thus numbered, Vennie could not help giving way to a desire that had lately grown more and more definite within her, to have a bold and unhesitating interview with Mr. Quincunx. Perhaps even at this last hour something might be done to save Lacrima from her fate!

Passing along the outskirts of the circus, she could not resist pausing for a moment to observe the numerous groups of well-known village characters, whom curiosity had drawn to the spot.

She was amazed to catch sight of the redoubtable Mr. Wone, holding one of his younger children by the hand and surveying with extreme interest the setting up of a colossal framework of gilded and painted wood, destined to support certain boat-shaped swings. She felt a little indignant with the worthy man for not having been present at Andersen's funeral, but the naive and childlike interest with which, with open mouth and eyes, he stood gaping at this glittering erection, soothed her anger into a smile. He really was a good sort of man, this poor Wone! She wondered vaguely whether he intended himself to indulge in the pastime of swinging in a boat-shaped swing or whirling round upon a wooden horse. She felt that if she could see him on one of these roundabouts, — especially if he retained that expression of guileless admiration, — she could really forgive him everything.

She caught a glimpse of two other figures whose interest in the proceedings appeared extremely vivid, no less persons than Mr. John Goring and his devoted henchman, Bert Leerd. These two were engaged in reading a glaring advertisement which depicted a young woman clad in astounding spangles dancing on a tight-rope, and it was difficult to say whether the farmer or the idiot was the more absorbed.

She was just turning away, when she heard herself called by name, and from amid a crowd of women clustering round one of Mr. Love’s bric-a-brac stalls, there came towards her, together, Mrs. Fringe and Mrs. Wotnot.

Vennie was extremely surprised to find these two ladies, — by no means particularly friendly as a rule, — thus joined in partnership of dissipation, but she supposed the influence of a circus, like the influence of religion, has a dissolvent effect upon human animosity. That these excellent women should have preferred the circus, however, to the rival entertainment in the churchyard, did strike her mind as extraordinary. She did not know that they had, as a matter of fact, “eaten their pot of honey” at the one, before proceeding, post-haste, to enjoy the other.

“May we walk with you, miss, a step?” supplicated Mrs. Fringe, as Vennie indicated her intention of moving on, as soon as their salutations were over.

“Thank you, you are very kind, Mrs. Fringe. Perhaps, — a little way, but I’m rather busy this morning.”

“Oh we shan’t trouble you long,” murmured Mrs. Wotnot, “It’s only, — well, Mrs. Fringe, here, had better speak.”

Thus it came about that Vennie began her advance up the Yeoborough road supported by the two housekeepers, the lean one on the left of her, and the fat one on the right of her.

“Will I tell her, or will you tell her?” murmured the plump lady sweetly, when they were clear of the village.

Mrs. Wotnot made a curious grimace and clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Better you; much, much better, that it should be you," she remarked.

"But 'twas thy tale, dearie; 'twas thy tale and surprisin' discoverin's," protested Mrs. Fringe.

"Those that knows aren't always those that tells," observed the other sententiously.

"But you do think it's proper and right the young lady should know?" said Mr. Clavering's housekeeper.

Mrs. Wotnot nodded. "If 'taint too shameful for her, 'tis best what she'd a' ought to hear," said the lean woman.

Vennie became conscious at this moment that whenever Mrs. Wotnot opened her mouth there issued thence a most unpleasant smell of brandy, and it flashed upon her that this was the explanation of the singular converging of these antipodal orbits. In the absence of her master, Mrs. Wotnot had evidently "taken to drink," and it was doubtless out of her protracted intoxication that Mrs. Fringe had derived whatever scandalous piece of gossip it was that she was now so anxious to impart.

"I'll tell 'ee, miss," said Mrs. Fringe, "with no nonsense-fangles and no shilly-shally. I'll tell 'ee straight out and sober, — same as our dear friend did tell it to me. 'Tis along of Miss Romer, — ye be to understand, wot is to be confirmed this same blessed day.

"The dear woman, here, was out a-gatherin' laurel-leaves one fine evenin', long o' some weeks since, and who should she get wind of, in the bushes near-by, but Mr. Luke and Miss Gladys. I been my own self ere now, moon-daft on that there lovely young man, but Satan's ways be Satan's ways, and none shall report that I takes countenance of *such* goings on. Mrs. Wotnot here, she heerd every Jack word them sinful young things did say, — and shameful-awful their words were, God in Heaven do know!

"They were cursin' one another, like to split, that night. She were cryin' and fandanderin' and he were laughin' and chaffin'. 'Twas God's terror to hear how they went on, with the holy bare sky over their shameless heads!"

"Tell the young lady quick and plain," ejaculated Mrs. Wotnot at this point, clutching Vennie's arm and arresting their advance.

"I *am* 'a tellin' her," retorted Mrs. Fringe, "I'm a tellin' as fast as my besom can breathe. Don't 'ee push a body so! The young lady ain't in such a tantrum-hurry as all that."

"I am *rather* anxious to get on with my walk," threw in Vennie, looking from one to another with some embarrassment, "and I really don't care very much about hearing things of this kind."

"Tell 'er! Tell 'er! Tell 'er!" cried Mrs. Wotnot.

Mrs. Fringe cast a contemptuous look at her rival housekeeper.

"Our friend baint quite her own self today, miss," she remarked with a wink at Vennie, "the weather or summat' 'ave moved 'er rheumatiz from 'er legs, and settled it in 'er stummick."

"Tell her! Tell her!" reiterated the other.

Mrs. Fringe lowered her voice to a pregnant whisper.

"The truth be, miss, that our friend here heered these wicked young things talk quite open-like about their gay goings on. So plain did they talk, that all wot the Blessed Lord 'is own self do know, of such as most folks keeps to 'emselves, went burnin' and shamin' into our friend's 'stonished ears. And wot she did gather was that Miss Gladys, for certin' and sure, be a lost girl, and Mr. Luke 'as 'ad 'is bit of fun down to the uttermost drop."

The extraordinary solemnity with which Mrs. Fringe uttered these words and the equally extraordinary solemnity with which Mrs. Wotnot nodded her head in corroboration of their truth had a devastating effect upon Vennie. There was no earthly reason why these two females should have invented this squalid story. Mrs. Fringe was an incurable scandal-monger, but Vennie had never found her a liar. Besides there was a genuine note of shocked sincerity about her tone which no mere morbid suspicion could have evoked.

The thing was true then! Gladys and Luke were lovers, in the most extreme sense of that word, and Dangelis was the victim of an outrageous betrayal.

Vennie had sufficient presence of mind to avoid the eyes of both the women, eyes fixed with ghoulish and lickerish interest upon her, as they watched for the effect of this revelation, — but she was uncomfortably conscious that her cheeks were flaming and her voice strained as she bade them good-bye. Comment, of any kind, upon what they had revealed to her she found absolutely impossible. She could only wish them a pleasant time at the circus if they were returning thither, and freedom from any ill effects due to their accompanying her so far.

When she was alone, and beginning to climb the ascent of Dead Man's Lane, the full implication of what she had learnt thrust itself through her brain like a red-hot wedge. Vennie's experience of the treacherousness of the world had, as we know, gone little deeper than her reaction from the rough discourtesy of Mr. Clavering and the evasive aloofness of Mr. Taxater. This sudden revelation into the brutishness and squalour inherent in our planetary system had the effect upon her of an access of physical nausea. She felt dizzy and sick, as she toiled up the hill, between the wet sun-pierced hedges, and under the heavy September trees.

The feeling of autumn in the air, so pleasant under normal conditions to human senses, seemed to associate itself just now with this dreadful glance she had had into the basic terrors of things. The whole atmosphere about her seemed to smell of decay, of decomposition, of festering mortality. The pull and draw of the thick Nevilton soil, its horrible demonic gravitation, had never got hold of her more tenaciously than it did then. She felt as though some vast octopus-like tentacles were dragging her earthward.

Vennie was one of those rare women for whom, even under ordinary conditions, the idea of sex is distasteful and repulsive. Presented to her as it was now, mingled with treachery and deception, it obsessed her with an almost living presence. Sensuality had always been for her the one unpardonable sin, and sensuality of this kind, turning the power of sex into a mere motive for squalid pleasure-seeking, filled her with a shuddering disgust.

So this was what men and women were like! This was the kind of thing that went on, under the "covert and convenient seeming" of affable lies!

The whole of nature seemed to have become, in one moment, foul and miasmic. Rank vapours rose from the ground at her feet, and the weeds in the hedge took odious and indecent shapes.

An immense wave of distrust swept over her for everyone that she knew. Was Mr. Clavering himself like this?

This thought, — the thought of what, for all she could tell, might exist between her priest-friend and this harlot-girl, — flushed her cheeks with a new emotion. Mixed at that moment with her virginal horror of the whole squalid business, was a pang of quite a different character, a pang that approached, if it did not reach, the sharp sting of sheer physical jealousy.

As soon as she became aware of this feeling in herself it sickened her with a deeper loathing. Was she also contaminated, like the rest? Was no living human being free from this taint?

She stopped and passed her hand across her forehead. She took off her hat and made a movement with her arms as if thrusting away some invisible assailant. She felt she could not encounter even Mr. Quincunx in this obsessed condition. She had the sensation of being infected by some kind of odious leprosy.

She sat down in the hedge, heedless of the still clinging dew. Strange and desperate thoughts whirled through her brain. She longed to purge herself in some way, to bathe deep, deep, — body and soul, — in some cleansing stream.

But what about Gladys' betrothed? What about the American? Vennie had scarcely spoken to Dangelis, hardly ever seen him, but she felt a wave of sympathy for the betrayed artist surge through her heart. It could not be allowed, — it could not, — that those two false intriguers should fool this innocent gentleman!

Struck by a sudden illumination as if from the unveiled future, she saw herself going straight to Dangelis and revealing the whole story. He should at least be made aware of the real nature of the girl he was marrying!

Having resolved upon this bold step, Vennie recovered something of her natural mood. Where was Mr. Dangelis at this moment? She must find that out, — perhaps Mr. Quincunx would know. She must make a struggle to waylay the artist, to get an interview with him alone.

She rose to her feet, and holding her hat in her hand, advanced resolutely up the lane. She felt happier now, relieved, in a measure, of that odious sense of confederacy with gross sin which had weighed her down. But there still beat vaguely in her brain a passionate longing for purification. If only she could escape, even for a few hours, from this lust-burdened spot! If only she could cool her forehead in the sea!

As she approached Mr. Quincunx's cottage she experienced a calm and restorative reaction from her distress of mind. She felt no longer alone in the world. Having resolved on a drastic stroke on behalf of clear issues, she was strangely conscious, as she had not been conscious for many months, of the presence, near her and with her, of the Redeemer of men.

It suddenly was borne in upon her that that other criminal abuse, which had so long oppressed her soul with a dead burden, — the affair of Lacrima and Goring, — was intimately associated with what she had discovered. It was more than likely that by exposing the one she could prevent the other.

Flushed with excitement at this thought she opened Mr. Quincunx's gate and walked up his garden-path. To her amazement, she heard voices in the cottage and not only voices, but voices speaking in a language that vaguely reminded her of the little Catholic services in the chapel at Yeoborough.

Mr. Quincunx himself answered her knock and opened the door. He was strangely agitated. The hand which he extended to her shook as it touched her fingers.

But Vennie herself was too astonished at the sight which met her eyes to notice anything of this. Seated opposite one another, on either side of the solitary's kitchen-fire, were Lacrima and the little Dolores. Vennie had interrupted a lively and impassioned colloquy between the two Italians.

They both rose at her entrance, and their host, in hurried nervous speech, gave Vennie an incoherent account of what had happened.

When they were all seated, — Vennie in the little girl's chair, and the child on Mr. Quincunx's knees, — the embarrassment of the first surprise quickly subsided.

"I shall adopt her," the solitary kept repeating, — as though the words were uttered in a defiance of universal opposition, "I shall adopt her. You'd advise me to do that, wouldn't you Miss Seldom?

"I shall get a proper document made out, so that there can be no mistake. I shall adopt her. Whatever anyone likes to say, I shall adopt her!

“Those circus-scoundrels will hold their tongues and let me alone for their own sakes. I shall have no trouble. Lacrima will explain to the police who the child is, and who her parents were. That is, if the police come. But they won’t come. Why should they come? I shall have a document drawn out.”

It seemed as though the little Neapolitan knew by instinct what her protector was saying, for she nestled down against his shoulder and taking one of his hands in both of hers pressed it against her lips.

Vennie gazed at Lacrima, and Lacrima gazed at Vennie, but neither of them spoke. There was an inner flame of triumphant concentration in Vennie’s glance, but Lacrima’s look was clouded and sad.

“Certainly no one will interfere with you,” said Vennie at last. “We shall all be so glad to think that the child is in such good hands.

“The only difficulty I can see,” she paused a moment, while the grey eyes of Mr. Quincunx opened wide and an expression of something like defiance passed over his face, “is that it’ll be difficult for you to know what to do with her while you are away in Yeoborough. You could hardly leave her alone in this out-of-the-way place, and I’m afraid our Nevilton National School wouldn’t suit her at all.”

Mr. Quincunx freed his hand and stroked his beard. His fingers were quivering, and Vennie noticed a certain curious twitching in the muscles of his face.

“I shan’t go to Yeoborough any more,” he cried. “None of you need think it!

“That affair is over and done with. I shan’t stay here, any more, either, to be bullied by the Romers and made a fool of by all these idiots. I shall go away. I shall go — far away — to London — to Liverpool, — to — to Norwich, — like the Man in the Moon!”

This final inspiration brought a flicker of his old goblin-humour to the corners of his mouth.

Lacrima looked at Vennie with an imperceptible lifting of her eyebrows, and then sighed deeply.

The latter clasped the arms of her high-backed chair with firm hands.

“I think it is essential that you should know *where* you are going, Mr. Quincunx. I mean for the child’s sake. You surely don’t wish to drag her aimlessly about these great cities while you look for work?

“Besides, — you won’t be angry will you, if I speak plainly? — what work, exactly, have you in your mind to do? It isn’t, I’m afraid, always easy —”

Mr. Quincunx interrupted her with an outburst of unexpected fury.

“That’s what I knew you’d say!” he cried in a loud voice. “That’s what *she* says.” He indicated Lacrima. “But you both say it, only because you don’t want me to have the pleasure of adopting Dolores!

“But I *shall* adopt her, — in spite of you all. Yes, in spite of you all! Nothing shall stop me adopting her!”

Once more the little Italian nestled close against him, and took possession of his trembling hand.

Vennie perceived an expression of despairing hopelessness pass like an icy mist over Lacrima’s face.

The profile of the Nevilton nun assumed those lines of commanding obstinacy which had reminded Valentia a few hours ago of the mediæval baron. She rose to her feet.

“Listen to me, Mr. Quincunx,” she said sternly. “You are right; you are quite right, to wish to save this child. No one shall stop you saving her. No one shall stop you adopting her. But there are other people whose happiness depends upon what you do, besides this child.”

She paused, and glanced from Mr. Quincunx to Lacrima, and from Lacrima to Mr. Quincunx. Then a look of indescribable domination and power passed into her face. She might have been St. Catharine herself, magnetizing the whole papal court into obedience to her will.

“Oh you foolish people!” she cried, “you foolish people! Can’t you see where God is leading you? Can’t you see where His Spirit has brought you?”

She turned upon Mr. Quincunx with shining eyes, while Lacrima, white as a phantom and with drooping mouth, watched her in amazement.

“It’s not only this child He’s helped you to save,” she went on. “It’s not only this child! Are you blind to what He means? Don’t you understand the cruelty that is being done to your friend? Don’t you understand?”

She stretched out her arm and touched Mr. Quincunx’s shoulder.

“You must do more than give this little one a father,” she murmured in a low tone, “you must give her a mother. How can she be happy without a mother?

“Come,” she went on, in a voice vibrating with magnetic authority, “there’s no other way. You and Lacrima must join hands. You must join hands at once, and defy everyone. Our little wanderer must have both father and mother! That is what God intends.”

There was a long and strange silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock.

Then Mr. Quincunx slowly rose, allowed the child to sink down into his empty chair, and crossed over to Lacrima’s side. Very solemnly, and as if registering a sacred vow, he took his friend’s head between his hands and kissed her on the forehead. Then, searching for her hand and holding it tightly in his own, he turned towards Vennie, while Lacrima herself, pressing her face against his shabby coat, broke into convulsive crying.

“I’ll take your advice,” he said gravely. “I’ll take it without question. There are more difficulties in the way than you know, but I’ll do, — we’ll do, — just what you tell us. I can’t think—” he hesitated for a moment, while a curious smile flickered across his face, “how on earth I’m going to manage. I can’t think how we’re going to get away from here. But I’ll take your advice and we’ll do exactly as you say.

“We’ll do what she says, won’t we, Lacrima?”

Lacrima’s only answer was to conceal her face still more completely in his dusty coat, but her crying became quieter and presently ceased altogether.

At that moment there came a sharp knock a the door.

The countenance of Mr. Quincunx changed. He dropped his friend’s hand, and moved into the centre of the room.

“That must be the circus-people,” he whispered. “They’ve come for Dolores. You’ll support me won’t you?” He looked imploringly at Vennie. “You’ll tell them they can’t have her — that I refuse to give her up — that I’m going to adopt her?”

He went out and opened the door.

It was not the circus-men he found waiting on his threshold. Nor was it the police. It was only one of the under-gardeners from Nevilton House. The youth explained that Mr. Romer had sent him to fetch Lacrima.

“They be goin’ to lunch early, mistress says, and the young lady ‘ave to come right along ‘ome wi’ I.”

Vennie intervened at this moment between her agitated host and the intruder.

“I’ll bring Miss Traffio home,” she said sternly, “when she’s ready to come. You may go back and tell Mrs. Romer that she’s with me, — with Miss Seldom.”

The youth touched his hat, and slouched off, without further protest.

Vennie, returning into the kitchen, found Mr. Quincunx standing thoughtfully by the mantelpiece, stroking his beard, and the two Italians engaged in an excited conversation in their own tongue.

The descendant of the lords of Nevilton meditated for a moment with drooping head, her hands characteristically clasped behind her back. When she lifted up her chin and began to speak, there was the same concentrated light in her eyes and the same imperative tone in her voice.

“The thing for us to do,” she said, speaking hurriedly but firmly, “is to go — all four of us — straight away from here! I’m not going to leave you until things are settled. I’m going to get you all clean out of this, — clean away!”

She paused and looked at Lacrima. “Where’s Mr. Dangelis?” she asked.

Lacrima explained how the artist had written to Gladys that he was staying until the following day at the Gloucester Hotel in Weymouth.

Vennie’s face became radiant when she heard this. “Ah!” she cried, “God is indeed fighting for us! It’s Dangelis that I must see, and see at once. Where better could we all go, — at any rate for tonight — than to Weymouth? We’ll think later what must be done next. Dangelis will help us. I’m perfectly certain he’ll help us.

“Oh yes, we’ll go to Weymouth at once, — before there’s any risk of the Romers stopping us! We’ll walk to Yeoborough — that’ll give us time to think out our plans — and take the train from there.

"I'll send a telegram to my mother late tonight, when there's no chance of her communicating with the House. As to being seen in Yeoborough by any Nevilton people, we must risk that! God has been so good to us today that I can't believe He won't go on being good to us.

"Oh what a relief it'll be, — what a relief, — to get away from Nevilton! And I shall be able to dip my hands in the sea!"

While these rapid utterances fell from Vennie's excited lips, the face of Mr. Quincunx was a wonder to look upon. It was the crisis of his days, and he displayed his knowledge that it was so by more convulsive changes of expression, than perhaps, in an equal stretch of time, had ever crossed the visage of a mortal man.

"We'll take your advice," he said, at last, with immense solemnity.

Lacrima looked at him wistfully. Her face was very pale and her lips trembled.

"It isn't only because of the child, is it, that he's ready to go?" she murmured, clutching at Vennie's arm, as Mr. Quincunx retired to make his brief preparations. "I shouldn't like to think it was only that. But he *is* fond of me. He *is* fond of me!"

CHAPTER XXVIII. LODMOOR

IT WAS MR. Quincunx who had to find the money for their bold adventure. Neither Vennie nor Lacrima could discover a single penny on their persons. Mr. Quincunx produced it from the bottom of an old jam-pot placed in the interior recesses of one of his deepest cupboards. He displayed to his three friends, with not a little pride, the sum he was possessed of, — no less in fact than five golden sovereigns.

Their walk to Yeoborough was full of thrilling little excitements. Three times they concealed themselves on the further side of the hedge, to let certain suspicious pedestrians, who might be Nevilton people, pass by unastonished.

Once well upon their way, they all four felt a strange sense of liberation and expansion. The little Neapolitan walked between Mr. Quincunx and Lacrima, a hand given to each, and her childish high spirits kept them all from any apprehensive brooding.

Once and once only, they looked back, and Mr. Quincunx shook his fist at the two distant hills.

“You are right,” he remarked to Vennie, “it’s the sea we’re in want of. These curst inland fields have the devil in their heavy mould.”

They found themselves, when they reached the town, with an hour to spare before their train started, and entering a little dairy-shop near the station, they refreshed themselves with milk and bread-and-butter. Here Mr. Quincunx and the child waited in excited expectation, while the two girls went out to make some necessary purchases — returning finally, in triumph, with a light wicker-work suit-case, containing all that they required for several days and nights.

They were in the train at last, with a compartment to themselves, and, as far as they could tell, quite undiscovered by anyone who knew them.

Vennie had hardly ever in her life enjoyed anything more than she enjoyed that journey. She felt that the stars were fighting on her side or, to put it in terms of her religion, that God Himself was smoothing the road in front of her.

She experienced a momentary pang when the train, at last, passing along the edge of the back-water, ran in to Weymouth Station. It was so sweet, so strangely sweet, to know that three living souls depended upon her for their happiness, for their escape from the power of the devil! Would she feel like this, would she ever feel quite like this, when the convent-doors shut her away from this exciting world?

They emerged from the crowded station, — Mr. Quincunx carrying the wicker-work suit-case — and made their way towards the Esplanade.

The early afternoon sun lay hot upon the pavements, but from the sea a strong fresh wind was blowing. Both the girls shivered a little in their thin frocks, and as the red shawl of the young Italian had already excited some curiosity among the passers-by, they decided to enter one of the numerous drapery shops, and spend some more of Mr. Quincunx’s money.

They were so long in the shop that the nervous excitement of the recluse was on the point of changing into nervous irritation, when at last they reappeared. But he was reconciled to the delay when he perceived the admirable use they had made of it.

All three were wearing long tweed rain-cloaks of precisely the same tint of sober grey. They looked like three sisters, newly arrived from some neighbouring inland town, — Dorchester, perhaps, or Sherborne, — with a view to spending a pleasant afternoon at the sea-side. Not only were they all wrapped in the same species of cloak. They had purchased three little woollen caps of a similar shade, such things as it would have been difficult to secure in any shop but a little unfashionable one, where summer and winter vogues casually overlapped.

Mr. Quincunx, whose exaltation of mood had not made him forget to bring his own overcoat with him, now put this on, and warmly and comfortably clad, the four fugitives from Nevilton strolled along the Esplanade in the direction of St. John’s church.

To leave his three companions free to run down to the sea’s edge, Mr. Quincunx possessed himself of the clumsy paper parcels containing the hats they had relinquished and also of the little girl’s red shawl, and resting on a seat with these objects piled up by his side he proceeded to light a cigarette and gaze placidly about him. The worst of his plunge into activity being over, — for, whatever happened, the initial effort was bound to be the worst, — the wanderer from Dead Man’s Lane chuckled to himself with bursts of cynical humour as he contemplated the situation they were in.

But what a relief it was to see the clear-shining foam-sprinkled expanse of water lying spread out before him! Like the younger Andersen, Mr. Quincunx had a passionate love of Weymouth, and never had he loved it more than he did at that moment! He greeted the splendid curve of receding cliffs — the White Nore and St. Alban’s Head — with a sigh of profound satisfaction, and he looked across to the massive bulk of Portland, as though in its noble uncrumbling stone — stone that was so much nearer to marble than to clay — there lurked some occult talisman ready to save him from everything connected with Leo’s Hill.

Yes, the sea was what he wanted just then! How well the salt taste of it, the smell of its sun-bleached stranded weeds, its wide horizons, its long-drawn murmur, blent with the strange new mood into which that morning's events had thrown him!

How happy the little Dolores looked, between Lacrima and Vennie, her dark curls waving in the wind from beneath her grey cap!

All at once his mind reverted to James Andersen, lying now alone and motionless, under six feet of yellow clay. Mr. Quincunx shivered. After all it was something to be alive still, something to be still able to stroke one's beard and stretch one's legs, and fumble in one's pocket for a "Three Castles" cigarette!

He wondered vaguely how and when this young St. Catharine of theirs intended to marry him to Lacrima. And then what? Would he have to work frightfully, preposterously hard?

He chuckled to himself to think how blank Mr. Romer would look, when he found that both his victims had been spirited away in one breath. What a girl this Vennie Seldom was!

He tried to imagine what it would be like, this business of being married. After all, he was very fond of Lacrima. He hoped that dusky wavy hair of hers were as long as it suggested that it was! He liked girls to have long hair.

Would she bring him his tea in the morning, sometimes, with bare arms and bare feet? Would she sit cross-legged at the foot of his bed, while he drank it, and chatter to him of what they would do when he came back from his work?

His work! That was an aspect of the affair which certainly might well be omitted.

And then, as he stared at the three girlish figures on the beach, there came over him the strange illusion that both Vennie and Lacrima were only dream-people — unreal and fantastic — and that the true living persons of his drama were himself and his little Neapolitan waif.

Suppose the three girls were to take a boat — one of those boats whose painted keels he saw glittering now so pleasantly on the beach — and row out into the water. And suppose the boat were upset and both Vennie and Lacrima drowned? Would he be so sad to have to live the rest of his life alone with the little Dolores?

Perhaps it would be better if this event occurred after Vennie had helped him to secure some work to do — some not too hard work! Well — Vennie, at any rate, *was* going to be drowned in a certain sense, at least she was meditating entering a convent, and that was little different from being drowned, or being buried in yellow clay, like James Andersen!

But Lacrima was not meditating entering a convent. Lacrima was meditating being married to him, and being a mother to their adopted child. He hoped she would be a gentle mother. If she were not, if she ever spoke crossly to Dolores, he would lose his temper. He would lose his temper so much that he would tremble from head to foot! He called up an imaginary scene between them, a scene so vivid that he found himself trembling now, as his hand rested upon the paper parcel.

But perhaps, if by chance they left England and went on a journey, — Witch-Bessie had found a journey, “a terrible journey,” in the lines of his hand, — Lacrima would catch a fever in some foreign city, and he and Dolores would be left alone, quite as alone as if she were drowned today!

But perhaps it would be he, Maurice Quincunx, who would catch the fever. No! He did not like these “terrible journeys.” He preferred to sit on a seat on Weymouth Esplanade and watch Dolores laughing and running into the sea and picking up shells.

The chief thing was to be alive, and not too tired, or too cold, or too hungry, or too harassed by insolent aggressive people! How delicious a thing life could be if it were only properly arranged! If cruelty, and brutality, and vulgarity, and *office-work*, were removed!

He could never be cruel to anyone. From that worst sin, — if one could talk of such a thing as sin in this mad world, — his temperament entirely saved him. He hoped when they were married that Lacrima would not want him to be too sentimental about her. And he rather hoped that he would still have his evenings to himself, to turn over the pages of Rabelais, when he had kissed Dolores good night.

His meditations were interrupted at this point by the return of his companions, who came scrambling across the shingle, threading their way among the boats, laughing and talking merrily, and trailing long pieces of sea-weed in their hands.

Vennie announced that since it was nearly four o'clock it would be advisable for them to secure their lodging for the night, and when that was done she would leave them to their own devices for an hour or two, while she proceeded to the Gloucester Hotel to have her interview with Ralph Dangelis.

Their various sea-spoils being all handed over to the excited little foundling, they walked slowly along the Esplanade, still bearing to the east, while they surveyed the appearance of the various "crescents," "terraces," and "rows" on the opposite side of the street. It was not till they arrived at the very end of these, that Vennie, who had assumed complete responsibility for their movements, piloted them across the road.

The houses they now approached were entitled "Brunswick Terrace," and they entirely fulfilled their title by suggesting, in the pleasant liberality of their bay-windows and the mellow dignity of their well-proportioned fronts, the sort of solid comfort which the syllables “Brunswick” seem naturally to convey. They began their enquiries for rooms, about five doors from the end of the terrace, but it was not till they reached the last house, — the last except two reddish-coloured ones of later date, — that they found what they wanted.

It was arranged that the two Italians should share a room together. Vennie elected to sleep in a small apartment adjoining theirs, while Mr. Quincunx was given a front-room, looking out on the sea, on the third floor.

Vennie smiled to herself as she thought how amazed her mother would have been could she have seen her at that moment, as she helped Lacrima to unpack their solitary piece of luggage, while Mr. Quincunx smoked cigarettes in the balcony of the window!

She left them finally in the lodging-house parlour, seated on a horse-hair sofa, watching the prim landlady preparing tea. Vennie refused to wait for this meal, being anxious — she said — to get her interview with the American well over, for until that moment had been reached, she could neither discuss their future plans calmly, nor enjoy the flavour of the adventure.

When Vennie had left them, and the three were all comfortably seated round the table, Mr. Quincunx found Lacrima in so radiant a mood that he began to feel a little ashamed of his ambiguous meditations on the Esplanade. She was, after all, quite beautiful in her way, — though, of course, not as beautiful as the young Neapolitan, whose eyes had a look in them, even when she was happy, which haunted one and filled one with vague indescribable emotions.

Mr. Quincunx himself was in the best of spirits. His beard wagged, his nostrils quivered, his wit flowed. Lacrima fixed her eyes upon him with delighted appreciation, — and led him on and on, through a thousand caprices of fancy. The poor Pariah's heart was full of exquisite happiness. She felt like one actually liberated from the tomb. For the first time since she had known anything of England she was able to breathe freely and spontaneously and be her natural self.

For some queer reason or other, her thoughts kept reverting to James Andersen, but reverting to him with neither sadness nor pity. She felt no remorse for not having been present when he was buried that morning. She did not feel as though he were buried. She did not feel as though he were dead. She felt, in some strange way, that he had merely escaped from the evil spells of Nevilton, and that in the power of his new strength he was the cause of her own emancipation.

And what an emancipation it was! It was like suddenly becoming a child again — a child with power to enjoy the very things that children so often miss.

Everything in this little parlour pleased her. The blue vases on the mantelpiece containing dusty "everlasting flowers," the plush-framed portraits of the landlady's deceased parents, enlarged to a magnitude of shadowy dignity by some old-fashioned photographic process, the quaint row of minute china elephants that stood on a little bracket in the corner, the glaring antimacassar thrown across the back of the arm-chair, the sea-scents and sea-murmurs floating in through the window, the melodious crying of a fish-pedler in the street; all these things thrilled her with a sense of freedom and escape, which over-brimmed her heart with happiness.

What matter, after all, she thought, that her little compatriot with the wonderful eyes had been the means of arousing her friend from his inertia!

Her long acquaintance with Mr. Quincunx had mellowed her affection for him into a tenderness that was almost maternal. She could even find it in her to be glad that she was to be saved from the burden of struggling alone with his fits of melancholia. With Dolores to keep him amused, and herself to look after his material wants, it seemed probable that, whatever happened, the dear man would be happier than he had ever dreamed of being!

The uncertainty of their future weighed upon her very little. She had the true Pariah tendency to lie back with arms outstretched upon the great tide, and let it carry her whither it pleased. She had done this so long, while the tide was dark and evil, that to do it where the waters gleamed and shone was a voluptuous delight.

While her protégées were thus enjoying themselves Vennie sought out and entered, with a resolute bearing, the ancient Gloucester Hotel. The place had recently been refitted according to modern notions of comfort, but in its general lines, and in a certain air it had of liberal welcoming, it preserved the Georgian touch.

She was already within the hall-way when, led by an indefinable impulse to look back, she caught sight of Dangelis himself walking rapidly along the Esplanade towards the very quarter from which she had just come. Without a moment's hesitation she ran down the steps, crossed the road and followed him.

The American seemed to be inspired by some mania for fast walking that afternoon. Vennie was quite breathless before she succeeded in approaching him, and she did not manage to do this until they were both very nearly opposite Brunswick Terrace.

Just here she was unwilling to make herself known, as her friends might at any moment emerge from their lodging. She preferred to follow the long strides of the artist still further, till, in fact he had led her, hot and exhausted in her new cloak, quite beyond the limits of the houses.

Where the town ceases, on this eastern side, a long white dusty road leads across a mile or two of level ground before the noble curve of cliffs ending in St. Alban's Head has its beginning. This road is bounded on one hand by a high bank of shingle and on the other by a wide expanse of salt-marshes known in that district under the name of Lodmoor. It was not until the American had emerged upon this solitary road that his pursuer saw fit to bring him to a halt.

"Mr. Dangelis!" she called out, "Mr. Dangelis!"

He swung round in astonishment at hearing his name. For the first moment he did not recognize Vennie. Her newly purchased attire, — not to speak of her unnaturally flushed cheeks, — had materially altered her appearance. When she held out her hand, however, and stopped to take breath, he realized who she was.

"Oh Mr. Dangelis," she gasped, "I've been following you all the way from the Hotel. I so want to talk to you. You *must* listen to me. It's very, very important!"

He held his hat in his hand, and regarded her with smiling amazement.

"Well, Miss Seldom, you *are* an astonishing person. Is your mother here? Are you staying at Weymouth? How did you catch sight of me? Certainly — by all means — tell me your news! I long to hear this thing that's so important."

He made as if he would return with her to the town, but she laid her hand on his arm.

"No — no! let's walk on quietly here. I can talk to you better here."

The roadway, however, proved so disconcerting, owing to great gusts of wind which kept driving the sand and dust along its surface, that before

Vennie had summoned up courage to begin her story, they found it necessary to debouch to their left and enter the marshy flats of Lodmoor. They took their way along the edge of a broad ditch, whose black peat-bottomed waters were overhung by clumps of “Michaelmas daisies” and sprinkled with weird glaucous-leafed plants. It was a place of a singular character, owing to the close encounter in it of land and sea, and it seemed to draw the appeal of its strange desolation almost equally from both these sources.

Vennie, on the verge of speaking, found her senses in a state of morbid alertness. Everything she felt and saw at that moment lodged itself with poignant sharpness in her brain and returned to her mind long afterwards. So extreme was her nervous tension that she found it difficult to disentangle her thoughts from all these outward impressions.

The splash of a water-rat became an episode in her suspended revelation. The bubbles rising from the movements of an eel in the mud got mixed with the image of Mrs. Wotnot picking laurel-leaves. The flight of a sea-gull above their heads was a projection of Dangelis’ escape from the spells of his false mistress. The wind shaking the reeds was the breath of her fatal news ruffling the man’s smiling attention. The wail of the startled plovers was the cry of her own heart, calling upon all the spirits of truth and justice, to make him believe her words.

She told him at last, — told him everything, walking slowly by his side with her eyes cast down and her hands clasped tight behind her.

When she had finished, there was an immense intolerable silence, and slowly, very slowly, she permitted her glance to rise to her companion’s face, to grasp the effect of her narration upon him.

How rare it is that these world-shaking revelations produce the impression one has anticipated! To Vennie’s complete amazement, — and even, it must be allowed, a little to her dismay, — Dangelis regarded her with a frank untroubled smile.

“You, — I—” she stammered, and stopped abruptly. Then, before he could answer her, “I didn’t know you knew all this. Did you really know it, — and not mind? Don’t people mind these things in — in other countries?”

Dangelis spoke at last. “Oh, yes of course, we mind as much as any of you; that is to say, if we *do* mind, — but you must remember, Miss Seldom, there are circumstances, situations, — there are, in fact feelings, — which make these things sometimes rather a relief than otherwise!”

He threw up his stick in the air, as he spoke, and caught it as it descended.

“Pardon me, one moment, I want — I want to see if I can jump this ditch.”

He threw both stick and hat on the ground, and to Vennie’s complete amazement, stepped back a pace or two, and running desperately to the brink of the stream cleared it with a bound. He repeated this manœuvre from the further bank, and returned, breathing hard and fast, to the girl’s side.

Picking up his hat and stick, he uttered a wild series of barbaric howls, such howls as Vennie had never, in her life, heard issuing from the mouth of man or beast. Had Gladys’ treachery turned his brain?

But no madman could possibly have smiled the friendly boyish smile with which he greeted her when this performance was over.

“So sorry if I scared you,” he said. “Do you know what that is? It’s our college ‘yell.’ It’s what we do at base-ball matches.”

Vennie thought he was going to do it again, and in her apprehension she laid a hand on his sleeve.

“But don’t you really mind Miss Romer’s being like this? Did you know she was like this?” she enquired.

“Don’t let’s think about her any more,” cried the artist. “I don’t care what she’s like, now I can get rid of her. To tell you the honest truth, Miss Seldom, I’d come down here for no other reason than to think over this curst hole I’ve got myself into, and to devise some way out.

“What you tell me, — and I believe every word of it, I want to believe every word of it! — just gives me the excuse I need. Good-bye, Miss Gladys! Good-bye, Ariadne! ‘Ban-ban, Ca-Caliban, Have a new master, get a new man!’ No more engagements for me, dear Miss Seldom! I’m a free lance now, a free lance, — henceforward and forever!”

The exultant artist was on the point of indulging once more in his college yell, but the scared and bewildered expression on Vennie’s face saved her from a second experience of that phenomenon.

“Shall I tell you what I was thinking of doing, as I strolled along the Front this afternoon?”

Vennie nodded, unable to repress a smile as she remembered the difficulty she had in arresting this stroll.

“I was thinking of taking the boat for the Channel Islands tomorrow! I even went so far as to make enquiries about the time it started. What do you think of that?”

Vennie thought it was extremely singular, and she also thought that she had never heard the word “enquiries” pronounced in just that way.

“It leaves quite early, at nine in the morning. And it’s *some* boat, — I can tell you that!”

"Well," continued Vennie, recovering by degrees that sense of concentrated power which had accompanied her all day, "what now? Are you still going to sail by it?"

"That's — a — large — proposition," answered her interlocutor slowly. "I — I rather think I am!"

One effect of his escape from his Nevilton enchantress seemed to be an irrepressible tendency to relapse into the American vernacular.

They continued advancing along the edge of the ditch, side by side.

Vennie plunged into the matter of Lacrima and Mr. Quincunx.

She narrated all she knew of this squalid and sinister story. She enlarged upon the two friends' long devotion to one another. She pictured the wickedness and shame of the projected marriage with John Goring. Finally she explained how it had come about that both Mr. Romer's slaves, and with them the little circus-waif, were at that moment in Weymouth.

"And so you've carried them off?" cried the Artist in high glee. "Bless my soul, but I admire you for it! And what are you going to do with them now?"

Vennie looked straight into his eyes. "That is where I want *your* help, Mr. Dangelis!"

It was late in the evening before the citizen of Toledo, Ohio, and the would-be Postulant of the Sacred Heart parted from one another opposite the Jubilee Clock.

A reassuring telegram had been sent to Mrs. Seldom announcing Vennie's return in the course of the following day.

As for the rest, all had been satisfactorily arranged. The American had displayed overpowering generosity. He seemed anxious to do penance for his obsession by the daughter, by lavishing benefactions upon the victims of the father. Perhaps it seemed to him that this was the best manner of paying back the debt, which his æsthetic imagination owed to the suggestive charms of the Nevilton landscape.

He made himself, in a word, completely responsible for the three wanderers. He would carry them off with him to the Channel Isles, and either settle them down there, or make it possible for them to cross thence to France, and from France, if so they pleased, on to Lacrima's home in Italy. He would come to an arrangement with his bankers to have handed over definitely to Mr. Quincunx a sum that would once and for all put him into a position of financial security.

"I'd have paid a hundred times as much as that," he laughingly assured Vennie, "to have got clear of my mix-up with that girl."

Thus it came about that at nine o'clock on the day which followed the burial of James Andersen, Vennie, standing on the edge of the narrow wharf, between railway-trucks and hawsers, watched the ship with the red funnels carry off the persons who — under Heaven — were the chief cause of the stone-carver's death.

As the four figures, waving to her over the ship's side grew less and less distinct, Vennie felt an extraordinary and unaccountable desire to burst into a fit of passionate weeping. She could not have told why she wept, nor could she have told whether her tears were tears of relief or of desolation, but something in the passing of that brightly-painted ship round the corner of the little break-water, gave her a different emotion from any she had ever known in her life.

When at last she turned her back to the harbour, she asked the way to the nearest Catholic Church, but in place of following the directions given her, she found herself seated on the shingles below Brunswick Terrace, watching the in-drawing and out-flowing waves.

How strange this human existence was! Long after the last block of Leonian stone had been removed from its place — long after the stately pinnacles of Nevilton House had crumbled into shapeless ruins, — long after the memory of all these people’s troubles had been erased and forgotten, — this same tide would fling itself upon this same beach, and its voice then would be as its voice now, restless, unsatisfied, unappeased.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE GOAT AND BOY

IT WAS THE middle of October. Francis Taxater and Luke Andersen sat opposite one another over a beer-stained table in the parlour of the Goat and Boy. The afternoon was drawing to its close and the fire in the little grate threw a warm ruddy light through the darkening room.

Outside the rain was falling, heavily, persistently, — the sort of rain that by long-continued importunity finds its way through every sort of obstacle. For nearly a month this rain had lasted. It had come in with the equinox, and Heaven knew how long it was going to stay. It had so thoroughly drenched all the fields, woods, lanes, gardens and orchards of Nevilton, that a palpable atmosphere of charnel-house chilliness pervaded everything. Into this atmosphere the light sank at night like a thing drowned in deep water, and into this atmosphere the light rose at dawn like something rising from beneath the sea.

The sun itself, as a definite presence, had entirely disappeared. It might have fallen into fathomless space, for all the visible signs it gave of its existence. The daylight seemed a pallid entity, diffused through the lower regions of the air, unconnected with any visible fount of life or warmth.

The rain seemed to draw forth from the earth all the accumulated moisture of centuries of damp autumns, while between the water below the firmament and the water above the firmament, — between the persistent deluge from the sky and the dampness exuded from the earth, — the death-stricken multitudinous leaves of Nevilton drifted to their morgue in the cart-ruts and ditches.

The only object in the vicinity whose appearance seemed to suffer no change from this incursion of many waters was Leo's Hill. Leo's Hill looked as if it loved the rain, and the rain looked as if it loved Leo's Hill. In no kind of manner were its familiar outlines affected, except perhaps in winning a certain added weight, by reason of the fact that its rival Mount had been stripped of its luxuriant foliage.

"So our dear Mr. Romer has got his Freight Bill through," said Luke, sipping his glass of whiskey and smiling at Mr. Taxater. "He at any rate then won't be worried by this rain."

"I'm to dine with him tomorrow," answered the papal champion, "so I shall have an opportunity of discovering what he's actually gained by this."

"I wish I'd had James cremated," muttered Luke, staring at the fireplace, into which the rain fell down the narrow chimney.

Mr. Taxater crossed himself.

"What do you really feel," enquired the younger man abruptly, "about the chances in favour of a life after death?"

"The Church," answered Mr. Taxater, stirring his rum and sugar with a spoon, "could hardly be expected to formulate a dogma denying such a hope. The true spirit of her attitude towards it may perhaps be best understood in the repetition of her requiem prayer, 'Save us from eternal death!' We none of us want eternal death, my friend, though many of us are very weary of this particular life. I do not know that I am myself, however. But that may be due to the fact that I am a real sceptic. To love life, Andersen, one cannot be too sceptical."

"Upon my soul I believe you!" answered the stone-carver, "but I cannot quite see how *you* can make claim to that title."

"You're not a philosopher my friend," said Mr. Taxater, leaning his elbows on the table and fixing a dark but luminous eye upon his interlocutor.

"If you were a philosopher you would know that to be a true sceptic it is necessary to be a Catholic. You, for instance, aren't a sceptic, and never can be. You're a dogmatic materialist. You doubt everything in the world except doubt. I doubt doubt."

Luke rose and poked the fire.

"I'm afraid my little Annie'll be frightfully wet," he remarked, "when she gets home tonight. I wish that last train from Yeoborough wasn't quite so late."

"Do you propose to go down to the station to meet her?" enquired Mr. Taxater.

Luke sighed. "I suppose so," he said. "That's the worst of being married. There's always something or other interfering with the main purpose of life."

"May I ask what the main purpose of life may be?" said the theologian.

"Talking with you, of course," replied the young man smiling; "talking with any friend. Oh damn! I can't tell you how I miss going up to Dead Man's Cottage."

"Yes," said the great scholar meditatively, "women are bewitching creatures, especially when they're very young or very old, but they aren't exactly arresting in conversation."

Luke became silent, meditating on this.

"They throw out little things now and then," he said. "Annie does. But they've no sense of proportion. If they're happy they're thrilled by everything, and if they're unhappy, — well, you know how it is! They don't bite at the truth, for the sake of biting, and they never get to the bone. They just lick the gloss of things with the tips of their tongues. And they quiver and vibrate so, you never know where they are, or what they've got up their sleeve that tickles them."

Mr. Taxater lifted his glass to his mouth and carefully replaced it on the table. There was something in this movement of his plump white fingers which always fascinated Luke. Mr. Taxater's hands looked as though, beyond the pen and the wine-cup, they never touched any earthly object.

"Have you heard any more of Philip Wone?" enquired the stone-carver.

The theologian shook his head. "I'm afraid, since he went up to London, he's really got entangled in these anarchist plots."

"I'm not unselfish enough to be an anarchist," said Luke, "but I sympathize with their spirit. The sort of people I can't stand are these Christian Socialists. What really pleases me, I suppose, is the notion of a genuine aristocracy, an aristocracy as revolutionary as anarchists in their attitude to morals and such things, an aristocracy that's flung up out of this mad world, as a sort of exquisite flower of chance and accident, an aristocracy that is *worth* all this damned confusion!"

Mr. Taxater smiled. It always amused him when Luke Andersen got excited in this way, and began catching his breath and gesticulating. He seemed to have heard these remarks on other occasions. He regarded them as a signal that the stone-carver had drunk more whiskey than was good for him. When completely himself Luke talked of girls and of death. When a little depressed he abused either Nonconformists or Socialists. When in the early stages of intoxication he eulogized the upper classes.

"It's a pity," said the theologian, "that Ninsy couldn't bring herself to marry that boy. There's something morbid in the way she talks. I met her in Nevil's Gully yesterday, and I had quite a long conversation with her."

Luke looked sharply at him. "Have you yourself ever seen her, across there?" he asked making a gesture in the direction of the churchyard.

Mr. Taxater shook his head. “Have you?” he demanded.

Luke nodded.

A sudden silence fell upon them. The rain beat in redoubled fury upon the window, and they could hear it pattering on the roof and falling in a heavy stream from the pipe above the eaves.

The younger man felt as though some tragic intimation, uttered in a tongue completely beyond the reach of both of them, were beating about for entry, at closed shutters.

Mr. Taxater felt no sensation of this kind. “*Non est reluctandum cum Deo*” were the sage words with which he raised his glass to his lips.

Luke remained motionless staring at the window, and thinking of a certain shrouded figure, with hollow cheeks and crossed hands, to whom this rain was nothing, and less than nothing.

Once more there was silence between them, as though a flock of noiseless night-birds were flying over the house, on their way to the far-off sea.

“How is Mrs. Seldom getting on?” enquired Luke, pushing back his chair. “Is Vennie allowed to write to her from that place?”

The theologian smiled. “Oh, the dear lady is perfectly happy! In fact, I think she’s really happier than when she was worrying herself about Vennie’s future.”

“I don’t like these convents,” remarked Luke.

“Few people like them,” said the papal champion, “who have never entered them.

“I’ve never seen an unhappy nun. They are almost too happy. They are like children. Perhaps they’re the only persons in existence who know what continual, as opposed to spasmodic, happiness means. The happiness of sanctity is a secret that has to be concealed from the world, just as the happiness of certain very vicious people has, — for fear there should be no more marriages."

"Talking of marriages," remarked Luke, "I'd give anything to know how our friend Gladys is getting on with Clavering. I expect his attitude of heroic pity has worn a little thin by this time. I wonder how soon the more earthly side of the shield will wear thin too! But — poor dear girl! — I do feel sorry for her. Fancy having to listen to the Reverend Hugh's conversation by night and by day!

"I sent her a picture post-card, the other afternoon, from Yeoborough — a comic one. I wonder if she snapped it up, and hid it, before her husband came down to breakfast!"

The jeering tone of the man jarred a little on Mr. Taxater's nerves.

"I think I understand," he thought to himself, "why it is that he praises the aristocracy."

To change the conversation, he reverted to Miss Seldom's novitiate.

"Vennie was very indignant with me for remaining so long in London, but I am glad now that I did. None of our little arrangements — eh, my friend? — would have worked out so well as her Napoleonic directness. That shows how wise it is to stand aside sometimes and let things take their course."

"Romer doesn't stand aside," laughed Luke. "I'd give a year of my life to know what he felt when Dangelis carried those people away! But I suppose we shall never know.

"I wonder if it's possible that there's any truth in that strange idea of Vennie's that Leo's Hill has a definite evil power over this place? Upon my soul I'm almost inclined to wish it has! God, how it does rain!"

He looked at his watch. "I shall have to go down to the station in a minute," he remarked.

One curious feature of this conversation between the two men was that there began to grow up a deep and vague irritation in Mr. Taxater's mind against his companion. Luke's tone when he alluded to that picture-card— "a comic one" — struck him as touching a depth of cynical inhumanity.

The theologian could not help thinking of that gorgeous-coloured image of the wayward girl, represented as Ariadne, which now hung in the entrance-hall of her father's house. He recalled the magnificent pose of the figure, and its look of dreamy exultation. Somehow, the idea of this splendid heathen creature being the wife of Clavering struck his mind as a revolting incongruity. For such a superb being to be now stretching out hopeless arms towards her Nevilton lover, — an appeal only answered by comic post-cards, — struck his imagination as a far bitterer commentary upon the perversity of the world than that disappearance of Vennie into a convent which seemed so to shock Luke.

He extended his legs and fumbled with the gold cross upon his watch-chain. He seemed so clearly to visualize the sort of look which must now be settling down on that pseudo-priest's ascetic face. He gave way to an immoral wish that Clavering might take to drink. He felt as though he would sooner have seen Gladys fallen to the streets than thus made the companion of a monkish apostate.

He wondered how on earth it had been managed that Mr. Romer had remained ignorant of the cause of Dangelis' flight and the girl's precipitate marriage. It was inconceivable that he should be aware of these things and yet retain this imperturbable young man in his employment. How craftily Gladys must have carried the matter through! Well, — she was no doubt paying the penalty of her double-dyed deceptions now. The theologian experienced a sick disgust with the whole business.

The rain increased in violence. It seemed as though the room where they sat was isolated from the whole world by a flood of down-pouring waves. The gods of the immense Spaces were weeping, and man, in his petty preoccupation, could only mutter and stare.

Luke rose to his feet. “To Romer and his Stone-Works,” he cried, emptying his glass at one gulp down his throat, “and may he make me their Manager!”

Mr. Taxater also rose. “To the tears that wash away all these things,” he said, “and the Necessity that was before them and will be after them.”

They went out of the house together, and the silence that fell between them was like the silence at the bottom of deep waters.

THE END

Rodmoor (1916)

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O they rade on, and farther on,
And they waded rivers abune the knee,
And they saw neither sun nor moon
But they heard the roaring of the sea.
Anonymous.

DEDICATED

TO THE SPIRIT OF

EMILY BRONTE

I. THE BOROUGH

IT WAS NOT that he concealed anything from her. He told her quite frankly, in that first real conversation they had together — on the little secluded bench in the South London park — about all the morbid sufferings of his years in America and his final mental collapse.

He even indicated to her — while the sound of grass-mowing came to them over the rain-wet tulips — some of the most secret causes of this event; his savage reaction, for instance, against the circle he was thrown into there; his unhappy habit of deadly introspection; his aching nostalgia for things less murderously new and raw.

He explained how his mental illness had taken so dangerous, so unlooked for a shape, that it was only by the merest chance he had escaped long incarceration.

No; it was not that he concealed anything. It was rather that she experienced a remote uneasy feeling that, say what he might, — and in a certain sense he said too much rather than too little — she did not really understand him.

Her feminine instinct led her to persuade him that she understood; led her to say what was most reassuring to him, and most consolatory; but in her heart of hearts she harboured a teasing doubt; a doubt which only the rare sweetness of these first love-days of her life enabled her to hide and cover over. Nor was this feeling about her lover's confessions the only little cloud on Nance Herrick's horizon during these memorable weeks — weeks that, after all, she was destined to look back upon as so strangely happy.

She found herself, in the few moments when her passionate emotion left her free to think of such things, much more anxious than she cared to admit about the ambiguous relations existing between the two persons dependent upon her. Ever since the death of her father — that prodigal sailor — three years ago, when she had taken it upon herself to support both of them by her work in the dressmaker's shop, she had known that all was not well between the two. Rachel Doorm had never forgiven Captain Herrick for marrying again; she felt that instinctively, but it was only quite recently that she had grown to be really troubled by the eccentric woman's attitude to the little half-sister.

Linda's mother, she knew, had in her long nervous decline rather clung than otherwise to this grim friend of the former wife; but Linda's mother had always been different from other women; and Nance could remember how, in quite early days, she never interfered when Miss Doorm took the child away to punish her.

To Nance herself Rachel had always been something of an anxiety. Her savage devotion had proved over and over again more of a burden than a pleasure; and now that there was this increased tension between her and Linda, the thing began to appear invidious, rapacious, sinister.

She was torn, in fact, two ways over the situation. Her own mother had long ago — and it was one of her few definite recollections of her — made her swear solemnly never to desert this friend of former days; and the vows she had registered then to obey this covenant had grown into a kind of religious rite; the only rite, in fact, after all these years, she was able to perform for her dead.

And yet if loyalty to her mother kept her patiently tender with Rachel's eccentricities, the much warmer feeling she had for her other parent was stirred indignantly by the thought of any unkindness dealt out to Linda.

And just at present, it was clear, Linda was not happy.

The young girl seemed to be losing her vivacity and to be growing silent and reserved.

She was now nearly eighteen; and yet Nance had caught her once or twice lately looking at Rachel Doorm with the same expression of frightened entreaty as she used to wear when led away from her mother's side for some childish fault. Rachel's father, a taciturn and loveless old man, had recently died, leaving his daughter, whom he had practically cast off, a small but secure annuity and a little house on the east coast.

It was now to this home of her ancestors, in the village of Rodmoor, that Rachel Doorm was anxious to transport both sisters; partly as a return for what Nance's mother, and more recently Nance herself, had done for her support, and partly out of fanatical devotion to Nance.

The girl could not help experiencing a feeling of infinite relief at the thought of being freed from her uncongenial work in the dressmaker's establishment. Her pleasure, nevertheless, had been considerably marred, in the last few days, by the attitude of her sister towards the projected change.

And now, with the realisation of this thrilling new passion possessing her, her own feeling about leaving London was different from what it had been at first.

None of these questions interrupted, however, on that particular afternoon, the girl's dreamy and absorbed happiness.

In the long delicious intervals that fell between her and her lover with a perfume sweeter than that of the arrested rain, she let her mind wander in languid retrospect, from that seat in Kensington Park, over every one of the wonderful events that had led her to this.

She recalled her first sight of Adrian and how it had come over her, like an intimation from some higher sphere of being, that her fate was henceforth to lie, for good and for evil, in that man's hands.

It was quite early in April when she saw him; and she remembered, sitting now by his side, how, as each day grew milder, and the first exquisite tokens of Spring penetrated one by one — here a basket of daffodils, and there a spray of almond-blossom — into the street she traversed to her work, she felt less and less inclined to struggle against the deep delicious thrill that suffused itself, like a warm indrawing wave, through every pulse of her body. That it should never have come to her before — that she should have lived absolutely fancy-free until so near her twenty-third birthday — only made her abandonment to what she felt now the more sweet and entire.

“It is love, — it is love,” she thought; “and I will give myself up to it!”

And she had given herself up to it. It had penetrated her with an exultant inner spring of delight. She had immersed herself in it. She had gone through her tedious drudgery as if she were floating, languidly and at ease, on a softly rocking tide. She had lived entirely in the present. She had not made the least movement even to learn the name of the man whose wordless pursuit of her had stirred her senses to this exultant response.

She had felt an indescribable desire to prolong these hours of her first love, these hours so unreturning, so new and so sweet; a desire — she remembered it well now — that had a tinge of unformulated fear about it; as though the very naming, even to herself, of what she enjoyed, would draw down the jealousy of the invisible powers.

So she had been careful never to stop or linger, in her hurried morning walks to the historic bridge; careful — after she had once passed him, and their eyes had met — never so much as to turn her head, to see if he were following.

And yet she knew — as well in those first days as she knew now — that every morning and night he waited, wet or fine, to see her go by.

And she had known, too — how could she not know? — that this mute signalling of two human souls must change and end; must become something nearer or something farther as time went on. But day by day she put off this event; too thrilled by the sweet dream in which she moved, to wish to destroy it, either for better or for worse.

If she had doubted him; doubted that he cared for her; all would have been different.

Then she would have taken some desperate step — some step that would have forced him to recognise her for what she was, his one of all, ready as none else *could* be ready, to cry with a great cry— “Lord, behold thine hand-maid; do unto her according to Thy will!” But she had known he did care. She had felt the magnetic current of his longing, as if it had been a hand laid down upon her breast.

And in answer she had given herself up to him; given herself, she thought, with no less complete a yielding than that with which, as she heard his voice by her side, reaching her through a delicate mist of delicious dreaming, she gave herself up to him now.

She recalled with a proud gladness the fact that she had never — never for a moment — in all those days, bestowed a thought on the question of any possible future with him. In the trance-like hours wherein she had brooded so tenderly over the form and face of her nameless lover, she always pictured him as standing waiting for her, a tall, bowed, foreign-looking figure, clothed in the long weather-stained Inverness — the very texture of which she seemed to know the touch of — by that corner curb-stone where the flower-shop was.

Just in that manner, with just that air of ardent expectation, he might be found standing, she had felt, through unnumbered days of enchantment, and she passing by, in silence, with the same expectant thrill.

Such a love draught, not drained, not feverishly drunk of, but sweet in her mouth with the taste of a mystic consecration, seemed still, even now that she had him there beside her, to hold the secret, amid this warm breath of London's first lilacs, of a triumphant Present, wherein both Past and Future were abolished.

It seemed to the happy girl on this unique April afternoon, while the sliding hours, full of the city's monotonous murmur, sank unnoticed away, and the gardeners planted their pansies and raked lethargically in the scented mould, as though nothing that could ever happen to her afterwards, could outweigh what she felt then, or matter so very greatly in the final reckoning. With every pulse of her young body she uttered her litany of gratitude. "*Ite; missa est*" her heart cried— "It is enough."

As they walked home afterwards, hand in hand through the dusk of the friendly park, she made him tell her, detail by detail, every least incident of those first days of their encountering. And Adrian Sorio, catching the spirit of that exquisite entreaty, grew voluble even beyond his wont.

He told her how, in the confusion of his mind, when it was first revealed to him that the devastation he was suffering from did not deny him the sweet sting of "what men call love," he found it impossible to face with any definite resolution the problem of his doubtful future. He had recognised that in a week or so every penny he possessed would be gone; yet it was impossible — and his new emotion did not, he confessed, alter this in the least — to make any move to secure employment.

A kind of misanthropic timidity, so he explained to her, made the least thought of finding what is popularly known as "work" eminently repellant to him; yet it was obvious that work must be found, unless he wished, simply and quietly, to end the affair by starvation.

This, as things went then, he told her, giving her hand a final pressure as they emerged into the lighted streets, he did not at all urgently want — though in the first days of his return from America he had pondered more than once on the question of an easy and agreeable exit. It was as they settled down side by side, — her hat no longer held languidly in her gloveless hand, — to their long and discreet walk home through the crowded thoroughfares, that she was first startled by hearing the name "Rodmoor" from his lips. How amazing a coincidence! What a miraculous gift of the gods!

Fate was indeed sweeping her away on a full tide.

It seemed like a thing in some old fantastic romance. Could it be possible even before she had time to contemplate her separation from him that she should learn that they were not to separate at all!

Rachel Doorm was indeed a witch — was indeed working things out for her favourite with the power of a sorceress. She kept back her natural cry of delight, "But that is where we are going," and let him, all unconscious, as it seemed, of the effect of his words, unravel in his own way the thread of his story.

It was about a certain Baltazar Stork she found he was telling her when her startled thoughts, like a flock of disturbed pigeons, alighted once more on the field of his discourse. Baltazar, it appeared, was an old friend of Sorio's and had written to offer him a sort of indefinite hospitality in his village on the North Sea. The name of this place — had she ever heard of Rodmoor? — had repeated itself very strangely in his mind ever since he first made it out in his friend's abominable hand.

At that point in their walk, under the glare of a great provision shop, she suddenly became conscious that he was watching her with laughing excitement. "You know!" she cried, "you know!" And it was with difficulty that he persuaded her to let him tell her how he knew, in his own elaborate manner.

This refuge — offered to him thus out of a clear sky, he told her — did in a considerable sense lend him an excuse for taking no steps to find work. And the name of the place — he confessed this with an excited emphasis — had from the beginning strangely affected his imagination.

He saw it sometimes, so he said, that particular word, in a queer visualised manner, dark brown against a colourless and livid sky; and in an odd sort of way it had related itself, dimly, obscurely, and with the incoherence of a half-learnt language, to the wildest and most pregnant symbols of his life.

Rodmoor! The word at the same time allured and troubled him. What it suggested to him — and he made her admit that his ideas of it were far more definite than her own — was no doubt what it really implied: leagues and leagues of sea-bleached forlornness, of sand-dunes and glaucous marshes, of solitary willows and pallid-leaved poplars, of dark pools and night-long-murmuring reeds.

“We’ll have long walks together there!” he exclaimed, interrupting himself suddenly with an almost savage gesture of ardent possession. If it had been any one but Baltazar Stork, he went on, who had sent him this timely invitation, he would have rejected it at once, but from Baltazar he had no hesitation in accepting anything. They had been friends too long to make any other attitude possible. No, it was no scruple of pride that led him to hesitate — as he admitted to her he had done. It was rather the strange and indefinable reaction set up in his brain by those half-sinister half-romantic syllables — syllables that kept repeating themselves in his inner consciousness.

Nance remembered more than once in a later time the fierce sudden way he turned upon her as they stood on the edge of the crowded square waiting the opportunity to cross and asked, with a solemn intensity in his voice, whether she had any presentiment as to how things would turn out for them in this place.

“It hangs over me,” he said, “it hangs over us both. I see it like a heavy sunset weighted with purple bars.” And then, when the girl did nothing but shake her head and smile tenderly, “I warn you,” he went on, “you are risking much — I feel it — I know it. I have had this sort of instinct before about things.” He shivered a little and laid his hand on her arm as if he clung to her for reassurance.

Nance remembered long afterwards the feelings in her that made her turn her face full upon him and whisper proudly, as if in defiance of his premonitions, “What can happen to us that can hurt us, my dear, as long as we are together, and as long as we love one another?”

He was silent after this and apparently satisfied, for he did not scruple to return to the subject of Rodmoor. The word gave him in those first days, he said, that curious sensation we receive when we suddenly say to ourselves in some new locality, “I have been here; I have seen all this before.”

Had he at that time, he told her, been less distracted by the emotions she aroused in him, he would have analysed to the bottom the dim mental augury — or was it reminiscence? — called up by this name. As it was he just kept the thing at the back of his mind as something which, whatever its occult significance, at least spared him the necessity of agitating himself about his future.

Nance’s thoughts were brought back from their half-attention with a shock of vivid interest when he came to the point, amid his vague recollections, of his first entrance into her house. It was exactly a week ago, he reminded her, that he found himself one sunny morning securely established as a new lodger under her roof. In his impatient longing to secure the desirable room — across the narrow floor of which, he confessed to her, he paced to and fro that day like a hungry tiger — he had even forgotten to make the obvious inquiry as to the quarter of the London sky from which his particular portion of light and air was to come.

It was only, he told her, with a remote segment of his consciousness that he became aware of the fine, full flood of sunshine which poured in from the southern-opening window and lay, mellow and warm, upon his littered books and travel-stained trunk.

Casual and preoccupied were the glances he cast, each time his mechanical perambulation brought him to that pleasant window, at the sun-bathed traffic and the hurrying crowd. London Bridge Road melted into his thought; or rather his thought took possession of London Bridge Road and reduced it to a mere sounding-board for the emotion that obsessed him.

That emotion — and Nance got exquisite pleasure from hearing him say the words, though she turned her face away from him as he said them — took, as he paced his room, passionate and ardent shape. He did not revivify the whole of her, — of the fair young being whose sweetness had got into his blood. He confined himself to thinking of the delicate tilt of her head and of the spaciousness between her breasts, spaciousness that somehow reminded him of Pheidian sculpture.

He hadn't anticipated this particular kind of escape — though it was certainly the escape he had been seeking — amid the roar of London's streets; but after all, if it did give him his cup of nepenthe, his desired anodyne, how much the more did he gain when it gave him so thrilling an experience in addition? Why, indeed, should he not dream that the gods were for once helping him out and that the generous grace of his girl's form was symbolic of the restorative virtue of the great Mother herself?

Restoration was undoubtedly the thing he wanted — and in recalling his thoughts of that earlier hour, to her now walking with him, he found himself enlarging upon it all quite unscrupulously in terms of what he now felt — restoration on any terms, at any cost, to the kindly normal paths out of which he had been so roughly thrown. He thrust indignantly back, he told her, that eventful morning the intrusive thought that it was only the Spring that worked so prosperously upon him. He did not want it to be the Spring; he wanted it to be the girl. The Spring would pass; the girl, if his feeling for her — and he glanced at the broad-rimmed hat and shadowy profile at his side — were not altogether illusive, would remain. And it was the faculty for remaining that he especially required in his raft of refuge.

Up and down his room, at any rate, he walked that day with a heightened consciousness such as he had not known for many clouded months. "The Spring" — and in his imaginative reaction to his own memories he grew, so Nance felt with what was perhaps her first serious pang, almost feverishly eloquent— "the Spring, whether I cared to recognise it or not, waved thrilling arms towards me. I felt it" — and he raised his voice so loud that the girl looked uneasily round them— "in the warmth of the sun, in the faces of the wistful shop girls, in the leaves budding against the smoke of the Borough. It had come to me again, and you — you had brought it! It had come to me again, the Eternal Return, the antiphonal world-deep Renewal. It had come, Nance, and all the slums of Rotherhithe and Wapping, and all the chimneys, workshops, wharves and tenements of the banks of this river of yours could not stop the rising of the sap. The air came to me that morning, my girl!" — and he unconsciously quickened his steps as he spoke till, for all her long youthful limbs she could hardly keep pace with him— "as if it had passed over leagues of green meadows. And it had! It had, Nance! And it throbbed for me, child, with the sweetness of your very soul." He paused for a moment and, as they debouched more directly eastward through a poor and badly lit street, she caught him muttering to himself what she knew was Latin.

He answered her quick look — her look that had a dim uneasiness in it — with a slow repetition of the famous line, and Nance was still quite enough of a young girl to feel a thrill of pride that she had a lover who, within a stone's throw of the "Elephant and Castle," could quote for her on an April evening that "*cras amet qui nunquam amavit*" of the youth of the centuries!

The rich, antique flavour of the words blent well enough as far as she was concerned with the homely houses and taverns of that dilapidated quarter. The night was full of an indescribable balm, felt through the most familiar sounds and sights, and, after all, there was always something mellow and pagan and free about the streets of London. It was the security, the friendly solidity, of the immense city which more than anything just then seemed to harmonise with this classical mood in her wonderful foreigner and she wished he would quote more Latin as they went along, side by side, past the lighted fruit stalls.

The overhanging shadow of Adrian's premonitions, or whatever they were, about Rodmoor, and her own anxieties about Rachel Doorm and Linda withdrew themselves into the remotest background of the girl's mind as she gave herself to her happiness in this favoured hour. It was in a quiet voice, after that, that he resumed his story. The sound, he said, of one of the Borough clocks striking the hour of ten brought a pause to his agitated pacing.

He stretched himself, he told her, when he heard the clock, stretched his arms out at full length, with that delicious shivering sensation which accompanies the near fulfilment of deferred hope. Then he chuckled to himself, from sheer childish ecstasy, and made goblinish faces.

Nance could not help noticing as he told her all this, how quaintly he reproduced in his exaggerated way the precise gestures he had indulged in. “Per Bacco! I had only three pounds left,” he said, and as he shrugged his shoulders and glowered at her under a flickering lamp from eyes sunken deep in his heavy face, she realised of what it was he had been all this while vaguely reminding her — of nothing less, in fact, than one of those saturnine portrait-busts of the Roman decadence, at which as a child she used to stare, half-frightened and half-attracted, in the great Museum.

The first thing he did, he told her, when the sound of the clock brought him to his senses, was to empty his pockets on the top of the chest-of-drawers which was, except for the bed and a couple of rickety chairs, the only article of furniture in the room. An errant penny, rolling aside from the rest, tinkled against the edge of his washing basin. “Not three pounds!” he muttered and leered at himself in his wretched looking glass.

It was precisely at that moment that the sound of voices struck his ears, proceeding from the adjoining room.

“I had spent half the night,” he whispered, drawing his companion closer to his side as a couple of tipsy youths pushed roughly by them, “lying awake listening. I felt a queer kind of shame, yes, shame, as I realised how near I was to you. You know I knew nothing of you then, absolutely nothing except that you went to work every day and lived with some sort of elderly person and a younger sister. It was this ignorance about you, child, that made my situation so exciting. I waited breathlessly, literally petrified, in the middle of the room.”

Nance at this point felt herself compelled to utter a little cry of protest.

"You ought to have made some kind of noise," she said, "to let us know you were listening."

But he waved aside her objection, and continued: "I remained petrified in the centre of the room, feeling as though the persons I listened to might at any moment stop their conversation and listen, in their turn, to the frantic beating of my heart. I heard your voice. I knew it in a moment to be yours — it had the round, full sweetness" — his arm was about her now— "of your darling figure. 'Good-bye!' you called out and there came the sound of a door opening upon the passage, 'Good-bye! I'm off. Meet me to-night if you like. Yes, soon after six. Good-bye! Look after each other.'

"The door shut and I heard you running down the stairs. I felt as though that 'Meet me to-night' had been addressed to myself. I crossed over to the window and watched you thread your way through the crowd in the direction of the Bridge. I knew you were late. I hoped you would not be scolded for it by some shrewish or brutal employer. I wished I had had the courage to go out on the landing and see you off. Why is one always so paralysed when these chances offer themselves? I might easily have taken a fellow-lodger's privilege and bidden you good morning. Then I found myself wondering whether you had any inkling that I had been sleeping so near you that night. Had you, you darling, had you any such instinct?"

Nance shook her head, nor could he see the expression of her eyes in the quiet darkened square, across which they were then moving. They came upon a wooden bench, under some iron railings, and he made her sit down while he completed his tale. The spot was unfrequented at that hour, and above their heads — as they leaned back, sighing tranquilly, and he took possession of her hand — the branch of a stunted beech-tree stretched itself out, hushed and still, enjoying some secret dream of its own amid the balmy perfumes of the amorous night.

"May I go on?" he enquired, looking tenderly at her.

In her heart Nance longed to cry, "No! No! No more of these tiresome memories! Make love to me! Make love to me!" but she only pressed his fingers gently and remained silent.

"I took up a book," he went on, "from the heap on the floor and drawing one of those miserable chairs to the window, I opened it at random. It happened to be that mad lovely thing of Remy de Gourmont. I forgot whether you said you had got as far as French poetry in that collection of yours that Miss Doorm is so suspicious of. It was, in fact, 'Le livre des Litanies,' and shall I tell you the passage I read? I was too excited to gather its meaning all at once, and then such a curious thing happened to me! But I will say the lines to you, child, and you will understand better."

Nance could only press his hand again, but her heart sank with an unaccountable foreboding.

"It was the Litany of the Rose," he said, and his voice floated out into the embalmed stillness with the same ominous treachery in its tone, so the poor girl fancied, as the ambiguous words he chanted.

"*Rose au regard saphique, plus pâle que les lys, rose au regard saphique, offre-nous le parfum de ton illusoire virginité, fleur hypocrite, fleur de silence.*"

The strange invocation died away on the air, and a singular oppression, heavy as if with some undesired spiritual presence, weighed upon them both. Sorio did not speak for some minutes, and when he did so there was an uneasy vibration in his voice.

"As soon as I had read those lines, there came over me one of the most curious experiences I have ever had. I seemed to see, yes, you may smile,"

— Nance was far from smiling— “but it is actually true — I seemed to see a living human figure outline itself against the wall of my room. To the end of my days I shall never forget it! It was a human form, Nance, but it was unlike all human forms I’ve ever beheld — unless it be one of those weird drawings, you know? of Aubrey Beardsley. It was neither the form of a boy nor of a girl, and yet it had the nature of both. It gazed at me with a fixed sorrowful stare, and I felt — was not that a strange experience — that I had known it before, somewhere, far off, and long ago. It was the very embodiment of tragic supplication, and yet, in the look it fixed on me, there was a cold, merciless mockery.

“It was the kind of form, Nance, that one can imagine wandering in vain helplessness down all the years of human history, seeking amid the dreams of all the great, perverse artists of the world for the incarnation it has been denied by the will of God.” He paused again, and an imperceptible breath of hot balmy air stirred the young leaves of the beech branch above them.

“Ah!” he whispered, “I know what I thought of then. I thought of that ‘Secret Rose Garden’ where the timid boy-girl thing — you know the picture I mean, Nance? — is led forth by some wanton lamp bearer between rose branches that are less soft than her defenceless sides.”

Once more he was silent and the hot wind, rising a little, uttered a perceptible murmur in the leaves above their heads.

“But what was more startling to me, Nance,” he went on, “even than the figure I saw (and it only stayed a moment before disappearing) was the fact that at the very second it vanished, I heard, spoken quite distinctly, in the room next to mine, the word ‘Rodmoor.’

“I threw down the ‘Book of Litanies’ and once more stood breathlessly listening. I caught the word again, uttered in a tone that struck me as having something curiously threatening about it. It was your Miss Doorm, Nance.

No wonder she and I instinctively hated each other when we met. She must have known that I had heard this interesting conversation. Your sister's voice — and you must think about that, Nance, you must think about that — sounded like the voice of a little girl that has been punished — yes, punished into frightened submissiveness.

"Miss Doorm was evidently talking to her about this Rodmoor scheme. 'It's what I've waited for, for years and years,' I heard her say. 'Every Spring that came round I hoped he would die, and he didn't. It seemed that he wouldn't — just to spite me, just to keep me out of my own. But now he's gone — the old man — gone with all his wickedness upon him, and my place returns to me — my own place. It's mine, I tell you, mine! mine! mine!' It was extraordinary, Nance, the tone in which she said these things. Then she went on to speak of you. 'I can free her now,' she said, 'I can free her at last. Aren't you glad I can free her? Aren't you glad?'

"I confess it made me at that moment almost indignant with your sister that she should need such pressing on such a subject. Her voice, however, when she murmured some kind of an answer, appeared, as I have said, quite obsequious in its humility.

"'O my precious, my precious!' the woman cried again, evidently apostrophising you, 'you've worked for me, and saved for me, and now I can return it — I can return it!' There was a few minutes' silence then, and I moved," Sorio continued, "quite close to the wall so as to catch if I could your sister's whispers.

"Miss Doorm soon began once more and I liked her tone still less. 'Why don't you speak? Why do you sit silent and sulky like that? Aren't you glad she'll be free of all this burden — of all this miserable drudgery? Aren't you glad for her? She kept you here like a Duchess, you with your music lessons! A lot of money you'll ever earn with your music! And now it's my turn. She shall be a lady in my house, a lady!'"

Nance's head hung low down over her knees as she listened to all this and the hand that her lover still retained grew colder and colder.

"I remember her next words," Sorio went on, "particularly well because a lovely fragrance of lilacs came suddenly into the window from a cart in the street and I thought how to my dying day I should associate that scent with this first morning under your roof.

"'You say you don't like the sea?' Miss Doorm went on, 'and you actually suppose that your not liking the sea will stop my freeing her! No! No! You'll have the sea, my beauty, at Rodmoor — the sea and the wind. No more dilly-dallying among the pretty shop windows and the nice young music students. The Wind and the Sea! Those are the things that are waiting for you at Rodmoor — at Rodmoor, in my house, where she will be a lady at last!'

"You see, Nance," Adrian observed, letting her hand go and preparing to light a cigarette, "Miss Doorm's idea seems to be that you will receive quite a social lift from your move to her precious Rodmoor. She evidently holds the view that no lady has ever earned her living with her own hands. Does she propose to keep a horde of servants in this small house, I wonder, and stalk about among them, grim and majestic, in a black silk gown?

"I must confess I feel at this moment a certain understanding of your sister's reluctance to plunge into this 'milieu.' I can see that house — oh, so clearly! — surrounded by a dark back-water and swept by horribly cold winds. I'm sure I don't know, Nance, what kind of neighbours you're going to have on the Doorm estate. Probably half the old hags of East Anglia will troop in upon you, like descendants of the Valkyries. And the North Sea!

You realise, my dear, I suppose, what the North Sea is? I don't blame little Linda for shivering at the thought of it."

For the first time since she had known him Nance's voice betrayed irritation. "Don't tease me, Adrian. I can't stand it to-night. You don't know what all this means to Rachel."

Adrian smiled. "Your dear Rachel," he said, "seems to have got you both fairly well under her thumb."

"She was my mother's best friend!" the girl burst out. "I should never forgive myself if I made her unhappy!"

"There seems more chance, as I see it now," observed Sorio, "that Miss Doorm will make Linda unhappy. I think I may take it that Linda's mother wasn't much of a favourite of hers? Isn't that so, my dear?"

"We must be getting home now," the girl remarked, rising from the bench. But Sorio remained seated, coolly puffing wreaths of cigarette smoke into the aromatic night.

"There's not the slightest need to get cross with me," he said gently, giving the sleeve of her coat a little deprecatory caress.

"As a matter of fact, when I heard that woman scold Linda for not wanting to set you free I felt, in a most odd and subtle manner, curiously anxious to scold her, too; I quite longed to overcome and override her absurd reluctance. I even felt a strange excitement in the thought of walking with her along the edge of this water, and in the face of this wind. O! I became Miss Doorm's accomplice, Nance! You may be perfectly happy. I made up my mind that very moment that I would write at once to Baltazar and accept his invitation. Indeed I did write to him, the minute I could hear no more talking. I was too excited to write much. I just wrote: 'Amico mio: — I will come to you very soon,' and when I'd finished the letter I went straight out and posted it. I believe I heard Linda crying as I went downstairs, but, as I tell you, Nance, I had become quite an accomplice of Miss Doorm! It seemed to me outrageous that the selfish silliness of a child like that should interfere with your emancipation. Besides I liked the thought of walking with her by the shore of this sea and calming her curious fear."

He threw away his cigarette and, rising to his feet, drew the girl's arm within his own and led her homewards.

The beech-tree, as if relieved by their departure, gave itself up with more delicious abandonment than ever to the embraces of the warm Spring night. They had not far to go now, and Nance only spoke once before they arrived at their door in the London Bridge Road.

"Had that figure you saw," she asked in a low constrained voice, "the same look Linda has — now that you know what she is like?"

"Linda?" he answered, "Oh, no, my dear, no, no! That one had nothing to do with Linda. But I think," he added, after a pause, "it had something to do with Rodmoor."

II. DYKE HOUSE

Nance Herrick stood at her window in the Doorm dwelling the morning after their arrival thinking desperately of what she had done. The window, open at the top, let in a breath of chilly, salt-tasting wind which stirred the fair loose hair upon her forehead and cooled her throat and shoulders. At the sound of her sister's voice she closed the window, cast one swift, troubled look at the river flowing so formidably near, and moved across to Linda's side. Drowsy and warm after her deep sleep, the younger girl stretched out her long, youthful arms from the bed and clasped them round Nance's neck.

"Are you glad," she whispered, "are you glad, after all, that I made you come? I couldn't have borne to be selfish, dear. I should have had no peace. No! —," she interrupted an ejaculation from Nance, " — it wasn't anything to do with Rachel. It wasn't, Nancy darling, it really and truly wasn't! I'm going to be perfectly good now. I'm going to be so good that you'll hardly know me. Shall I tell you what I'm going to do? I'm going to learn the organ. Rachel says there's a beautiful one in the church here, and Mr. Traherne — he's the clergyman, you know — plays upon it himself. I'm going to persuade him to teach me. O! I shall be perfectly happy!"

Nance extricated herself from the young girl's arms and, stepping back into the middle of the room, stood contemplating her in silence. The two sisters, thus contrasted, in the hard white light of that fen-land morning, would have charmed the super-subtle sense of some late Venetian painter. Nance herself, without being able precisely to define her feeling, felt that the mere physical difference between them was symbolic of something dangerously fatal in their conjunction. Her sister was not an opposite type. She too was fair — she too was tall and flexible — she too was emphatically feminine in her build — she even had eyes of the same vague grey colour. And yet, as Nance looked at her now, at her flushed excited cheeks, her light brown curls, her passionate neurotic attitude, and became at the same time conscious of her own cold pure limbs, white marble-like skin and heavily-hanging shining hair, she felt that they were so essentially different, even in their likeness, that the souls in their two bodies could never easily comprehend one another nor arrive at any point of real instinctive understanding.

Something of the same thought must have troubled Linda too at that moment, for as they fixed their eyes on each other's faces there fell between them that sort of devastating silence which indicates the struggle of two human spirits, seeking in vain to break the eternal barrier in whose isolating power lies all the tragedy and all the interest of life.

Suddenly Nance moved to the window and threw it wide open.

"Listen!" she said.

The younger sister made a quick apprehensive movement and clasped her hands tightly together. Her eyes grew wide and her breast rose and fell.

"Listen!" Nance repeated.

A low, deep-drawn murmur, reiterated, and again reiterated, in menacing monotony, filled the room.

"The sea!" cried both sisters together.

Nance shivered, closed the window and sank down on a chair. With lowered eyes she remained for some seconds absorbed and abstracted. When she lifted her head she saw that her sister was watching her and that there was a look on her face such as she had never seen there before. It was a look she was destined to be unable to thrust from her memory, but no effort of hers could have described it then or afterwards. Making an effort of will which required all the strength of her soul, Nance rose to her feet and spoke solemnly and deliberately.

“Swear to me, Linda, that nothing I could have said or done would have made you agree to stay in London. I told you I was ready to stay, didn’t I, that night I came back with Adrian and found you awake? I begged and begged you to tell me the truth, to tell me whether Rachel was forcing you into going. I offered to leave her for good and all — didn’t I? — if she was unkind to you. It’s only the truth I want — only the truth! We’ll go back — now — to-morrow — the moment you say you wish it. But if you don’t wish it, make me know you don’t! Make me know it — here — in my heart!”

In her emotion, pressing her hand to her side, she swayed with a pathetic, unconscious movement. Linda continued to watch her, the same indescribable look upon her face.

“Will you swear that nothing I could have done would have made you stay? Will you swear that, Linda?”

The younger girl in answer to this appeal, leapt from her bed and rushing up to her sister hugged her tightly in her arms.

“You darling thing!” she cried, “of course I’ll swear it. Nothing — nothing — *nothing*! would have made me stay. Oh, you’ll soon see how happy I can be in Rodmoor — in dear lovely Rodmoor!”

A simultaneous outburst of weeping relieved at that moment the feelings of both of them, and they kissed one another passionately through their falling tears.

In the hush that followed — whether by reason of a change in the wind or simply because their senses had grown more receptive — they both clearly heard through the window that remained closed, the husky, long-drawn beat, reiterative, incessant, menacing, of the waves of the North Sea.

During breakfast and the hours which succeeded that meal, Nance was at once surprised and delighted by the excellent spirits of both Miss Doorm and Linda. They even left her to herself before half the morning was over and went off together, apparently in complete harmony along the banks of the tidal stream.

She herself, loitering in the deserted garden, felt a curious sensation of loneliness and a wonder, not amounting to a sense of discomfort but still remotely disturbing, as to why it was that Adrian had not, as he had promised, appeared to take her out. Acting at last on a sudden impulse, she ran into the house, put on her hat and cloak, and started rapidly down the road leading to the village.

The Spring was certainly not so far advanced in Rodmoor as it was in London. Nance felt as though some alien influence were at work here, reducing to enforced sterility the natural movements of living and growing things. The trees were stunted, the marigolds in the wet ditches pallid and tarnished. The leaves of the poplars, as they shook in the gusty wind, seemed to her like hundreds and hundreds of tiny dead hands — the hands of ghostly babies beseeching whatever power called them forth to give them more life or to return them to the shadows.

Yes, some alien influence was at work, and the Spring was ravished and tarnished even while yet in bud. It was as if by an eternal mandate, registered when this portion of the coast first assumed its form, the seasons had been somehow thwarted and perverted in the processes of their natural order, and the land left, a neutral, sterile, derelict thing, neither quite living nor quite dead, doomed to changeless monotony.

Nance was still some little distance from the village, but she slackened her pace and lingered now, in the hope that at any moment she might see Adrian approaching. She knew from Rachel's description only very vaguely where Mr. Stork's cottage was and she was afraid of missing her lover if she went too far.

The road she was following was divided from the river by some level water meadows and she did not feel certain whether the village itself lay on the right or the left of the river mouth. Miss Doorm had spoken of a bridge, but among the roofs and trees which she made out in front of her, she was unable at present to see anything of this.

What she did see was a vast expanse of interminable fen-land stretching away for miles and miles on every side of her, broken against the sky line, towards which she was advancing, by grey houses and grey poplars but otherwise losing itself in misty horizons which seemed infinite in their remoteness. On both sides of the little massed group of roofs and trees and what the girl made out as the masts of boats in the harbour, a long low bank of irregular sand-dunes kept the sea from her view, though the sound of the waves — and Nance fancied it came to her in a more friendly manner now she was closer to it — was insistent and clear.

Across the fens to her left she discerned what was evidently the village church but the building looked so desolate and isolated — alone there in the midst of the marshes — that she found it difficult to conceive the easily-daunted Linda as practising organ music in such a place. She wondered if the grey building she could just obscurely distinguish, leaning against the wall of the church, were the abode of Mr. Traherne. If so, she thought, he must indeed be a man of God to endure that solitude.

She had wandered into the wet grass by the road's edge and was amusing herself by picking a bunch of dandelions, the only flower at that moment in sight, when she saw a man's figure approaching her from the Rodmoor direction. At first she assumed it was Adrian, and made several quick steps to meet him, but when she recognised her mistake the disappointment made her so irritable that she threw her flowers away. Her irritation vanished, however, after a long survey of him, when the stranger actually drew near.

He was a middle-sized man wearing at the back of his head a dark soft hat and buttoned up, from throat to ankles, in a light-coloured heavy overcoat. His face, plump, smooth, and delicately oval, possessed a winning freshness of tint and outline which was further enhanced by the challenging friendliness of his whimsical smile and the softness of his hazel eyes. What could be seen of his mouth — for he wore a heavy moustache — was sensitive and sensuous, but something about the way he walked — a kind of humorous roll, Nance mentally defined it, of his sturdy figure — gave an impression that this body, so carefully over-coated against the cold, was one whose heart was large, mellow and warm. It was not till after a minute or two, not in fact till he had wavered and hovered at her side like an entomologist over a newly discovered butterfly, that the girl got upon the track of other interesting peculiarities.

His nose, she found, for instance, was the most striking feature of his face, being extremely long and pointed like the nose of a rodent, and with large quivering nostrils slightly reddened, it happened just then, by the impact of the wind, and tilted forward as the man veered about as though to snuff up the very perfume and essence of the fortunate occasion.

From the extreme tip of this interesting feature hung a pearly drop of rheum.

What — next to the man's nose — struck the girl's fancy and indeed so disarmed her dignity that even his entomological hoverings were forgiven, was the straight lock of black-brown hair which falling across his forehead gave him a deliciously ruffled and tumbled look, as if he had recently been engaged in a rural game of "blind man's buff." The forehead itself, or what could be seen of it, was weighty and thoughtful; the forehead of a scholar or a philosopher.

Nance had never in all her life been treated by a stranger quite in the way this worthy man treated her, for not only did he return upon his steps immediately after he had passed her, but he permitted his eyes, both in passing and repassing, to search her smilingly up and down from her boots to the top of her head, precisely as if he were a connoisseur in a gallery observing the "values" of a famous picture.

And yet, for she was not by any means oblivious to such distinctions, the girl was unable to feel even for one second that this surprising admirer was anything but a gentleman — a gentleman, however, with very singular manners. That she certainly did feel. And yet, she liked him, liked him before he uttered a word, liked him with that swift, irrational, magnetic attraction which, with women even more than with men, is the important thing.

Passing her for the third time he suddenly darted into the grass, and with a movement so comically impetuous that though she gave a start she could not feel angry, picked up her discarded flowers and gravely presented them to her, saying as he did so, "Perhaps you'll be annoyed at leaving these behind — or do you wish them at the devil?"

Nance took them from him and smiled frankly into his face.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have picked them," she said. "People don't like dandelions brought into houses."

"What an Attic chin you have!" was the stranger's next remark. There was such an absence in his tone of all rakish or conventional gallantry that the girl still felt she could not repulse him.

"You are staying here — in Rodmoor?" he went on.

Nance explained that she had come to live with Miss Doorm.

"Ah!" The stranger looked at her curiously, smiling with exquisite sweetness. "You have been here before," he said. "You came in a coach, pulled by six black horses. You know every sort of reed and every kind of moss in all the fens. You know all the shells on the shore and all the seaweed in the sea."

Nance was less puzzled than might be supposed by this fantastic address, as she had the advantage of interpreting it in the light of the humorous and reassuring smile which accompanied its utterance.

She brought him back to reality by a direct question. "Can you tell me where Mr. Stork lives, please? I've a friend staying with him and I want to know which way a person would naturally take coming from there to us. I had rather hoped," she hesitated a little, "to have met my friend already. But perhaps Mr. Stork is a late riser."

The stranger, who had been looking very intently at the opposite hedge while she asked her question, suddenly darted towards it. The queer way in which he ran with his arms swinging loosely from his shoulders, and his body bent a little forward, struck Nance as peculiarly fascinating. When he reached the hedge he hovered momentarily in front of it and then pounced at something. "Missed!" he cried in a peevish voice. "Damn the little scoundrel! A shrew-mouse! That's what it was! A shrew-mouse!"

He came hurrying back as fast as he went, almost as if Nance herself had been some kind of furred or feathered animal that might disappear if it were not held fast.

"I beg your pardon, Madam," he said, breathlessly, "but you don't often see those so near the town. Hullo!" This last exclamation was caused by the appearance, not many paces from them, of Adrian Sorio himself who emerged from a gap in the hedge, hatless and excited.

"I was on the tow-path," he gasped, "and I caught sight of you. I was afraid you'd have started. Baltazar made me go with him to the station." He paused and stared at Nance's companion.

The latter looked so extremely uncomfortable that the girl hastened to come to his rescue.

"This gentleman was just going to show me the way," she said, "to your friend's house. Look, Adrian! Aren't these lovely?"

She held out the dandelions towards him, but he disregarded them.

"Well," he remarked rather brusquely, "now I've found you, I fancy we'd better go back the way we came. I'm longing to see how Linda feels. I want to take her down to the sea this afternoon. Shall we do that? Or perhaps you can't both leave Miss Doorm at the same time?"

He stared at the stranger as if bidding him clear off. But the admirer of shrew-mice had recovered his equanimity. "I know Mr. Stork well," he remarked to Sorio. "He and I are quite old friends. I was just asking this lady if she had ever been in the fens before, but I gather this is her first visit."

Adrian had by this time begun to look so morose that Nance broke in hurriedly.

"We must introduce ourselves," she said. "My name is Miss Herrick. This is Mr. Adrian Sorio." She paused and waited. A long shrill cry followed by a most melancholy wail which gradually died away in the distance, came to them over the marshes.

“A curlew,” remarked the intruder. “Beautiful and curious — and with very interesting mating habits. They are rare, too.”

“Come along, Nance,” Sorio burst out. But the girl turned to her new acquaintance and extended her hand.

“You haven’t told us *your* name yet,” she said. “I hope we shall meet again.”

The stranger gave her a look which, for caressing softness, could only be compared to a virtuoso’s finger laid upon an incomparable piece of Egyptian pottery.

“Certainly we shall meet,” he murmured. “Of course, most certainly. I know every one here. My name is Raughty — Doctor Fingal Raughty. I was with old Doorm when he died. A noble head, though rather malformed behind the ears. He had a peculiar smell too — not unpleasant — rather musky in fact. They called him Badger in the village. He could drink more gin at a sitting than any man I have ever seen. He resembled the portraits of Descartes. Good-bye, Miss — Nance!”

As soon as the lovers were alone Sorio’s rage broke forth.

“What a man!” he cried. “Who gave him leave to talk like that of Mr. Doorm? How did he know you weren’t related to him? And what surpassing coolness to call you by your Christian name! Confound him — he’s gone the way we wanted to go. I believe he knew that. Look! He’s fooling about in the ditch, waiting for us to overtake him!”

Nance could not help laughing a little at this. “Not at all, my dear. He’s looking for shrew-mice.”

“What?” rejoined the other crossly. “On the public road? He’s mad. Come, we must get round him somehow. Let’s go through here and hit the tow path."

They had no more interruptions as they strolled slowly back along the river's bank. Nance was perplexed, however, by Adrian's temper. He seemed irritable and brusque. She had never known him in such a mood, and a dim, obscure apprehension to which she could assign no adequate cause, began to invade her heart.

They had both become so silent, and the girl's nerves had been so set on edge by his unusual attitude towards her, that she gave a quite perceptible start when he suddenly pointed across the stream to a clump of oak trees, the only ones, he told her, to be found in the neighbourhood.

"There's something behind them," she remarked, "a house of some kind. I shouldn't like to live out in that place. How they must hear the wind! It must howl and moan sometimes — mustn't it?" She smiled at him and shivered.

"I think I miss London Bridge Road a little, and — Kensington Park. Don't you, too, Adrian?"

"Yes, there's a house behind them," Sorio repeated, disregarding her last words and staring fixedly at the oak trees. "There's a house behind them."

His manner was so queer that the girl looked at him with serious alarm.

"What's the matter with you, Adrian?" she said. "I've never known you like this—"

"It's where the Renshaws live," her lover continued. "They have a kind of park. Its wall runs close to the village. Some of the trees are very old. I walked there this morning before breakfast. Baltazar advised me to."

Nance looked at him still more nervously. Then she gave a little forced laugh. "That is why you were so late in coming to see me, I suppose! Well, you say the Renshaws live there. May one ask who the Renshaws are?"

He took the girl's arm in his own and dragged her forward at a rapid pace. She remarked that it was not until some wide-spreading willows on the further side of the river concealed the clump of oaks that he replied to her question.

"Baltazar told me everything about them. He ought to know, for he's one of them himself. Yes, he's one of them. He's the son of old Herman, Brand's father; not legitimate, of course, and Brand isn't always kind to him. But he's one of them."

He stopped abruptly on this last word and Nance caught him throwing a furtive glance across the stream.

"Who are they, Adrian? Who are they?" repeated the girl.

"I'll tell you," he cried, with strange irritation. "I'll tell you everything! When *haven't* I told you everything? They are brewers. That isn't very romantic, is it? And I suppose you might call them landowners, too. They've lived here forever, it seems, and in the same house."

He burst into an uneasy laugh.

"In the same house for centuries and centuries! The churchyard is full of them. It's only lately they've taken to be brewers — I suppose the land don't pay for their vices."

And again he laughed in the same jarring and ungenial way.

"Brand employs Baltazar — just as if he wasn't his brother at all — in the office at Mundham. You remember Mundham? We came through it in the train. It's over there," he waved his hand in front of him, "about seven miles off. It's a horrid place — all slums and canals. That's where they make their beer. Their beer!" He laughed again.

"You haven't yet told me who they are — I mean who else there is," observed Nance while, for some reason or other, her heart began to beat tumultuously.

“Haven’t I said I’d tell you everything?” Sorio flung out. “I’ll tell you more than you bargain for, if you tease me. Oh, confound it! There’s Rachel and Linda! Look now, do they appear as if they were happy?”

Favoured by the wind which blew sea-wards, the lovers had been permitted to approach quite close to their friends without any betrayal of their presence.

Linda was seated on the river bank, her head in her hands, while Miss Doorm, like a black-robed priestess of some ancient ritual, leant against the trunk of a leafless pollard.

“They were perfectly happy when I left them,” whispered Nance, but she was conscious as she spoke of a cold, miserable misgiving in her inmost spirit. Like a flash her mind reverted to the lilac bushes of the London garden, and a sick loneliness seized her.

“Linda!” she cried, with a quiver of remorse in her voice. The young girl leapt hurriedly to her feet, and Miss Doorm removed her hand from the tree. A quick look passed between the sisters, but Nance understood nothing of what Linda’s expression conveyed. They moved on together, Adrian with Linda and Nance with Rachel.

“What do they call this river?” Nance enquired of her companion, as soon as she felt reassured by the sound of the girl’s laugh.

“The Loon, my dear,” replied Miss Doorm. “They call it the Loon. It runs through Mundham and then through the fens. It forms the harbour at Rodmoor.”

Nance sat silent. In the depths of her heart she made a resolution. She would find some work to do here in Rodmoor. It was intolerable to be dependent on any one. Yes, she would find work, and, if need be, take Linda to live with her.

She felt now, though she would have found it hard to explain the obscure reason for it, more reluctant than ever to return to London. Every pulse of her body vibrated with a strange excitement. A reckless fighting spirit surged up within her. Not easily, not quickly, should her hold on the man she loved be loosed! But she felt danger on the horizon — nearer than the horizon. She felt it in her bones.

They had now reached the foot of Rachel's garden and there was a general pause in order that Adrian might do justice to the heavy architecture of Dyke House, as it was called — that house which the Badger — to follow Doctor Raughty's tale — had taken into his "noble" but "malformed" head to leave to his solitary descendant.

As they passed in one by one through the little dilapidated gate, Nance had a sudden inspiration. She seized her lover by the wrist. "Adrian," she whispered, "has there been anything — any one — to remind you — of what — you saw — that morning?"

She could not but believe that he had heard her and caught her meaning, yet it was hard to assume it, for his tone was calm and natural as he answered her, apparently quite misunderstanding her words:

"The sea, you mean? Yes, I've heard it all night and all day. We'll go down there this afternoon, and Linda with us." He raised his voice. "You'll come to the sea, Linda; eh, child? To the Rodmoor sea?"

The words died away over the river and across the fens. The others had already entered the house, but a laughing white face at one of the windows and the tapping of girlish hands on the closed pane seemed to indicate acquiescence in what he suggested.

III. SEA-DRIFT

THE WIND HAD dropped but no gleam of sunshine interrupted the monotonous stretch of grey sky, grey dunes and grey sea, as the sisters with their two companions strolled slowly in the late afternoon along the Rodmoor sands.

Linda was a little pale and silent, and Nance fancied she discerned now and again, in the glances Miss Doorm threw upon her, a certain sinister exultation, but she was prevented from watching either of them very closely by reason of the extraordinary excitement which the occasion seemed to arouse in Sorio. He kept shouting bits of poetry, some of which Nance caught the drift of, while others — they might have been Latin or Greek, for all she knew — conveyed nothing to her but a vague feeling of insecurity. He was like an excited magician uttering incantations and invoking strange gods.

The sea was neither rough nor calm. Wisps of tossed-up foam appeared and disappeared at far distant points in its vast expanse, and every now and then the sombre horizon was broken in its level line by the emergence of a wave larger and darker than the rest.

Flocks of gulls disturbed by their approach rose, wheeling and screaming, from their feeding-grounds on the stranded seaweed and flapped away over the water.

The four friends advanced along the hard sand, close to the changing line of the tide’s retreat, and from the blackened windrow there, of broken shells and anonymous sea refuse they stopped, each one of them, at different moments, to pick up some particular object which attracted or surprised them. It was Nance who was the first to become aware that they were not the only frequenters of that solitude. She called Adrian's attention to two figures moving along the edge of the sand-dunes and apparently, from the speed with which they advanced, anxious to reach a protruding headland and disappear from observation.

Adrian stopped and surveyed the figures long and intently. Then to her immense surprise, and it must be confessed a little to her consternation, he started off at a run in pursuit of them. His long, lean, hatless figure assumed so emphatic and strange an appearance as he crossed the intervening sands that Linda burst into peals of laughter.

"I wish they'd run away from him," she cried. "We should see a race! Who are they? Does he know them?"

Nance made no reply, but Miss Doorm, who had been watching the incident with sardonic interest, muttered under her breath, "It's begun, has it? Soon enough, in all conscience!"

Nance turned sharply upon her. "What do you mean, Rachel? Does Adrian know them? Do *you* know who they are?"

No answer was vouchsafed to this, nor indeed was one necessary, for the mystery, whatever it was, was on the point of resolving itself. Adrian had overtaken the objects of his pursuit and was bringing them back with him, one on either hand. Nance was not long in making out the general characteristics of the strangers. They were both women, one elderly, the other quite young, and from what she could see of their appearance and dress, they were clearly ladies. It was not, however, till they came within speaking distance that the girl's heart began to beat an unmistakable danger-signal. This happened directly she obtained a definite view of the younger of Adrian's companions. Before any greeting could be given Rachel had whispered abruptly into her ear, "They're the Renshaws — I haven't seen them since Philippa was a child, but they're the Renshaws. He must have met them this morning. Look out for yourself, dearie."

Nance only vaguely heard her. Every fibre of attention in her body and soul was fixed upon that slender equivocal figure by Adrian's side.

The introduction which followed was of a sufficiently curious character. Between Nance and the young woman designated by Rachel as Philippa there was an exchange of glances when their fingers touched like the crossing of two naked blades. Mrs. Renshaw retained Linda's hand in her own longer than convention required, and Linda herself seemed to cling to the brown-eyed, grey-haired lady with a movement of childish confidence. Nance was calm enough, for all the beating of her heart, to remark as an interesting fact that her rival's mother, though oppressively timid and retiring in her manner towards them all, seemed to exercise a quelling and restraining influence upon Rachel Doorm, who began at once speaking to her with unusual deference and respect. The whole party, after some desultory conversation, began to drift away from the sea towards the town and Nance found herself in spite of some furtive efforts to the contrary, wedged closely in between Mrs. Renshaw and Rachel — with Linda walking in front of them — as they followed the narrow uneven path between the sand-dunes and the heavy sand of the upper shore.

Every now and then Mrs. Renshaw would bend down and call their attention to some little sea plant, telling them its name in slow sweet tones, as if repeating some liturgical formula, and indicating into what precise colour its pale glaucous buds would unsheathe as the weather grew warm.

On these occasions Nance quickly turned her head; but do what she could, she could only grow helplessly conscious that Adrian and his companion were slipping further and further behind.

Once, as the tender-voiced lady touched lightly, with the tips of her ungloved fingers, a cluster of insignificant leaves and asked Nance if she knew the lesser rock-rose the agitated girl found herself on the point of uttering a strangely irrelevant cry.

"*Rose au regard saphique*," her confused heart murmured, "*plus pâle que les lys, rose au regard saphique, offre-nous le parfum de ton illusoire virginité, fleur hypocrite, fleur de silence*."

They approached at last the entrance of the little harbour, and to Nance's ineffable relief Mrs. Renshaw paused and made them sit down on a fish-smelling bench, among coils of rope, and wait the appearance of the missing ones.

The tide was low and between great banks of mud the water rushed seaward in a narrow, swirling current. A heavy fishing smack with high tarred sides and red, unfurled sails, was being steered down this channel by two men armed with enormous poles. Through the masts of several other boats, moored to iron rings in the wooden wharf, and between the slate roofs of some ramshackle houses on the other side, they got a glimpse, looking westward across the fens, of a low, rusty-red streak of sombrely illuminated sky. This apparently was all the sunset Rodmoor was destined to know that evening and Nance, as she listened vaguely to Mrs. Renshaw's gentle voice describing to Linda the various "queer characters" among the harbour people, had a strange, bewildered sense of being carried far and far and far down a remorseless tide, with a heavy sky above her and interminable grey sands around her, and all the while something withheld, withdrawn, inexplicable in the power that bore her forward.

They came at last — Adrian and Philippa Renshaw, and Nance had, in one heart-rending moment, the pitiless suspicion that the battle was lost already and that this fragile thing with the great ambiguous eyes and the reserved manner, this thing whose slender form and tight-braided, dusky hair might have belonged to a masquerading boy, had snatched from her already what could never for all the years of her life be won again!

As they left the harbour and entered the main village street, Adrian made one or two deliberate efforts to detach Nance from the rest. He pointed out little things to her in the homely shop-windows and seemed surprised and disappointed when she made no response to his overtures. She *could* not make any response. She could not bring herself so much as to look into his face. It was not from any capricious pride or mere feminine pique that she thus turned away but from a profound and lamentable numbness of every emotion. The wound seemed to have gone further even than she herself had known. Her heart felt like a dead cold weight — like a murdered, unborn child — beneath her breast, and out of her lethargy and inertness, as in certain tragic dreams, she could not move. Her limbs seemed formed of lead, and her lips — at least as far as he was concerned — became those of a dumb animal.

A man, viewing the situation from outside, the slightness and apparent triviality of the incident, would have been astounded at the effect upon her of so insubstantial a blow, but women move in a different world, a world where the drifting of the tiniest straw is indicative of crushing catastrophes, and to the instinct of the least sensitive among women Nance's premonitions would have been quite explicable.

It was at that moment that it was sharply borne in upon her how slight her actual knowledge of her lover was. Her absorption in him was devoted and complete but in regard to the intricacies and complications of his character she was as much in the dark to-day as when they first met in London Bridge Road.

Strangely enough, in the paralysis of her feelings, Nance was unconscious of any definite antagonism to the cause of her distress. She found she could talk quite naturally and spontaneously to Miss Renshaw when chance threw them together as they emerged upon the village green.

“Oh, I like those trees!” she cried, as the row of ancient sycamores which gave the forlorn little square its chief appeal first struck her attention.

The cottage of Baltazar Stork, it turned out, was just behind these sycamores and next door to the building which, with its immense and faded sign-board, offered the natives of Rodmoor their unique dissipation. “The Admiral’s Head!” Nance repeated, surveying the sign and thinking to herself that it must have been under that somewhat sordid roof that Miss Doorm’s parent had drunk himself to death.

“Don’t look at it,” she heard Mrs. Renshaw say. “I feel ashamed every time I pass it.”

Philippa gave Nance a quick and rather bitter smile.

“Mother is telling them that it is our beer which they sell there. You know we are brewers, don’t you? Mother thinks it her duty to remind every one of that fact. She gets a curious pleasure out of talking about it. It’s her morbid conscience. You’ll find we’re all rather morbid here,” she added, looking searchingly into Nance’s face.

“It’s the sea. Our sea is not the same as other seas. It eats into us.”

“Why do you say just that — and in that tone — to me?” Nance gravely enquired, answering the other’s gaze. “My father was a sailor. I love the salt-water.”

Philippa Renshaw shrugged her shoulders. “You may love being *on* it. That’s a different thing. It remains to be seen how you like being *near* it.”

“I like it always, everywhere,” repeated Nance obstinately, “and I’m afraid of nothing it can do to me!”

They overtook the others at this point and Mrs. Renshaw turned rather querulously to her daughter.

“Don’t talk to her about the sea, Philippa — I know that’s what you’re doing.”

The girl with the figure of a boy let her eyes meet Adrian’s and Nance felt the dead weight in her heart grow more ice-cold than before, as she watched the effect of that look upon her lover.

It was Rachel who broke the tension. “It wasn’t so very long ago,” she said, “that Rodmoor was quite an inland place. There are houses now, they say, and churches under the water. And it swallows up the land all the time, inch by inch. The sand-dunes are much nearer the town, I am sure of that, and the mouth of the river, too, than when I lived here in old days.”

Mrs. Renshaw looked by no means pleased at this speech.

“Well,” she said, “we must be getting home for dinner. Shall we walk through the park, Philippa? It’s the nicest way — if the grass isn’t too wet.”

In the general chorus of adieus that followed, Nance was not surprised when Sorio bade good-night to her as well as to the others. He professed to be going to the station to meet the Mundham train.

“Baltazar will have a lot of things to carry,” he said, “and I must be at hand to help.”

Mrs. Renshaw pressed Linda’s hand very tenderly as they parted and a cynical observer might have been pardoned for suspecting that under the suppressed sigh with which she took Philippa’s arm there lurked a wish that it had been the more docile and less difficult child that fate had given her for a daughter.

Linda, at any rate, proved to be full of enthusiastic and excited praise for the sad-voiced lady, as the sisters went off with Rachel. She chattered, indeed, so incessantly about her that Nance, whose nerves were in no tolerant state, broke out at last into a quite savage protest.

"She's the sort of person," she threw in, "who's always sentimental about young girls. Wait till you find her with some one younger than you are, and you'll soon see! Am I not right, Rachel?"

"She's not right at all, is she?" interposed the other. Miss Doorm looked at them gravely.

"I don't think either of you understand Mrs. Renshaw. Indeed there aren't many who do. She's had troubles such as you may both pray to God you'll never know. That wisp of a girl will be the cause of others before long."

She glanced at Nance significantly.

"Hold tight to your Adrian, my love. Hold tight to him, my dearie!"

Thus, as they emerged upon the tow path spoke Rachel Doorm.

Meanwhile, from his watch above the Inn, the nameless Admiral saw the shadows of night settle down upon his sycamores. His faded countenance, with its defiant bravado, stared insolently at what he could catch between trees and houses, of the darkening harbour and if Rodmoor had been a ship instead of a village, and he a figurehead instead of a sign-board, he could not have confronted the unknown and all that the unknown might bring more indifferently, more casually, more contemptuously.

IV. OAKGUARD

THE NIGHT OF her first meeting with Adrian Sorio, found the daughter of the house of Renshaw restless and wakeful. She listened to the hall clock striking the hour of twelve with an intentness that would have suggested to any one observing her that she had only been waiting for that precise moment to plunge into some nocturnal enterprise fraught with both sweetness and peril.

The night was chilly, the sky starless and overcast. The heavy curtains were drawn but the window, wide-open behind them, let in a breath of rain-scented air which stirred the flames of the two silver candles on the dressing table and fluttered the thin skirt of the girl's night-dress as she sat, tense and expectant, over the red coals of a dying fire.

A tall gilt-framed mirror of antique design stood on the left of the fireplace.

As the last stroke of midnight sounded, the girl leapt to her feet and swiftly divesting herself of her only garment, stood straight and erect, her hands clasped behind her head, before this mirror. The firelight cast a red glow over her long bare limbs and the flickering candle flames threw wavering shadows across her lifted arms and slender neck. Her hair remained tightly braided round her head and this, added to the boyish outlines of her body, gave her the appearance of one of those androgynous forms of later Greek art whose ambiguous loveliness wins us still, even in the cold marble, with so touching an appeal. Her smooth forehead and small delicately moulded face showed phantom-like in the mirror. Her scarlet lips quivered as she gazed at herself, quivered into that enigmatic smile challenging and inscrutable which seems, more than any other human expression, to have haunted the imagination of certain great artists of the past.

Permitted for a brief moment to catch a glimpse of that white figure, an intruder, if possessed of the smallest degree of poetic fancy, would have been tempted to dream that the dust of the centuries had indeed been quickened and some delicate evocation of perverse pagan desire restored to breath and consciousness.

Such a dream would not, perhaps, have survived a glance at the girl's face. With distended pupils and irises so large that they might have been under the influence of some exciting drug, her eyes had that particular look, sorrowful and heavy with mystery, which one feels *could not have been in the world* before the death of Christ.

With her epicene figure, she resembled some girl-priestess of Artemis invoking a mocking image of her own defiant sexlessness. With her sorrowful inhuman eyes she suggested some strange elf-creature, born of mediæval magic.

Turning away from the mirror, Philippa Renshaw blew out the candles and flung open the curtains. Standing thus for a moment in the presence of the vague starless night full of chilly earth odours, she drew several long deep breaths and seemed to inhale the very essence of the darkness as if it had been the kiss of some elemental lover. Then she shivered a little, closed the window and began hurriedly to dress herself by the firelight. Bare-headed, but with a dark cloak reaching to her feet, she softly left her room and crept silently down the staircase. One by one she drew the heavy bolts of the hall door and turned the ponderous key.

Letting herself out into the night air with the movements of one not unaccustomed to such escapades, she hurried down the stone pathway, passed through the iron entrance gates, and emerged into the park. Catching up the skirt of her cloak, and drawing it tightly round her so that it should not impede her steps, she plunged into the wet grass and directed her course towards the thickest group of oak trees. Between the immense trunks and mossy roots of these sea-deformed and wind-stunted children of the centuries she groped her way, her feet stumbling over fallen branches and her face whipped by the young wet leaves.

A mad desire seemed to possess her, to throw off every vestige and token of her human imprisonment and to pass forth free and unfettered into the embrace of the primeval powers. One would have thought, to have watched her as she flung herself, at last, on her face under one of the oldest of the trees and liberating her arms from her cloak, stretched them round its trunk, that she was some worshipper of a banished divinity invoking her god while her persecutors slept, and passionately calling upon him to return to his forsaken shrine. Releasing her fierce clasp upon the rough bark of the tree, not however before it had bruised her flesh, the girl dug her nails into the soft damp leaf-mould and rubbed her forehead against the wet moss. She shuddered as she lay like this, and as she shuddered she clutched yet more tightly, as if in a kind of ecstasy, the roots of grass and the rubble of earth into which her fingers dug.

Meanwhile, within the house, another little drama unrolled itself. In the old-fashioned library collected by many generations of Renshaws, where the noble Rabelaisian taste of the eighteenth century jostled unceremoniously with the attenuated banalities of a later epoch, there sat, at the very moment when the girl descended the stairs, a tall powerfully built man in evening dress.

Brand Renshaw was a figure of striking and formidable appearance. Immensely muscular and very tall, he carried upon his massive shoulders a head of so strange a shape that had he been a mediæval chieftain he would doubtless have gone down to posterity as Brand Hatchet-pate, or Brand Hammer-skull. His head receded from a forehead narrow and high, and rose at the back into a dome-like protrusion which, in spite of the closely-clipt, reddish hair that covered it, suggested, in a manner that was almost sinister, the actual bony substructure of the cranium beneath.

The fire was out. The candles on the table were guttering and flickering with little spitting noises as their wicks sank and the cold hearth in front of him was littered with the ashes of innumerable cigarettes. He was neither reading nor smoking them. He sat with his hands on the arms of his chair, staring into vacancy.

Brand Renshaw's eyes were like the eyes of a morose animal, an animal endowed perhaps with intellectual powers denied to the human race, but still an animal, and when he fixed his gaze in his concentrated manner upon the unknown objects of his thought there was a weight of heavily focussed intensity in his stare that was unpleasantly threatening.

He was staring in this way at the empty grate when, in the dead silence of the house, he caught the sound of a furtive step in the hall without, and immediately afterwards the slight rasping noise of bolts carefully shot back.

In a flash he leapt to his feet and extinguished the guttering candles. Quietly and on tip-toe he moved to the door and soundlessly turning the handle peered into the hall. He was just in time to see the heavy front door closed. Without the least token of haste or surprise he slipped on an overcoat, took his hat and stick and went forth in pursuit of the escaped one.

At first he saw only the darkness and heard no sound but the angry flutterings of some bird in the high trees, and — a long way off, perhaps even beyond the park — the frightened squeal of a hunted rabbit. But by the time he got to the gate, taking care to walk on the flower-beds rather than on the stone pathway, he could make out the figure of the girl no great way in front of him. She ran on, so straight and so blindly, towards the oak trees that he was able without difficulty to follow her even though, every now and then, her retreating figure was absorbed and swallowed up by the darkness.

When at last he came up to her side as she lay stretched out at the foot of the tree, he made no immediate attempt to betray his presence. With his arms folded he stood regarding her, a figure as silent and inhuman as herself, and over them both the vague immensities and shadowy obscurities of the huge earth-scented night hung lowering and tremendous, like powers that held their breath, waiting, watching.

At intervals an attenuated gust of wind, coming from far away across the marshes, moved the dead leaves upon the ground and made them dance a little death dance. This it did without even stirring the young living shoots on the boughs above them.

The darkness seemed to rise and fall about the two figures, to advance, to recede, to dilate, to diminish, in waves of alternate opacity and tenuity. In its indrawings and outbreathings, in the ebb and flow of its fluctuating presence, it seemed to beat — at least that is how Brand Renshaw felt it — like the pulse of an immense heart charged with unutterable mysteries.

This illusion, if it were an illusion, may have been due to nothing more recondite than the fact that, in the silence of the heavy night, the sound of the tide on the Rodmoor sands was the background of everything.

It was not till the girl rose from the ground that she saw him standing there, a shadow among the shadows. She uttered a low cry and made a movement as if to rush away, but he stepped quickly forward and caught her in his arms. Tightly and almost savagely he held her, pressing her lithe body against his own and caressing it with little, deep-voiced mutterings as if he were soothing a desperate child. She submitted passively to his endearments and then, with a sound that was something between a moan and a laugh, she whispered brokenly into his ear, “Let me go, Brand, I was silly to come out. I couldn’t help it. I won’t do it again. I won’t, I swear.”

“No, I think you won’t!” the man muttered, keeping his arm securely round her waist and striding swiftly towards the house. “No, I think you won’t!”

He paused when they reached the entrance into the garden and, taking her by the wrists, pressed her fiercely against one of the stone pillars upon which the gate hung.

“I know what it is,” he whispered. “You can’t deceive me. You’ve been with those people from London. You’ve been with that friend of Baltazar’s. That’s the cause of all this, isn’t it? You’ve been with that damned fool — that idiotic, good-for-nothing down at the village. Haven’t you been with him? Haven’t you?”

The arms with which he pressed her hands against her breast trembled with anger as he said these words.

“Baltazar told me,” he went on, “only this morning — down at Mundham — everything about these people. They’re of no interest, none, not the least. They’re just like every one else. That fellow’s half-foreign, that’s all. An American half-breed, of some mongrel sort or other, that’s all there is to be said of him! So if you’ve been letting any mad fancies get into your head about Mr. Sorio, the sooner you get rid of them the better. He’s not for you. Do you hear? He’s — not — for — you!” These last words were accompanied by so savage a tightening of the hands that held her that the girl was compelled to bite her lip to stop herself from crying.

“You hurt me,” she said calmly. “Let me go, Brand.” The self-contained tone of her voice seemed to quiet him and he released her. She raised one of her wrists to her mouth and softly caressed it with her lips.

"You'll be interested, yourself, in these people before very long," she murmured, flashing a mocking look at him over her bare arm. "The second girl is very young and very pretty. She confided in me that she was extremely afraid of the sea. She appealed to mother's protective instincts at once. I've no doubt she'll appeal to your — protective instincts! So don't be too quick in your condemnation."

"Damn you!" muttered her brother, pushing the gate open. "Come! Get in with you! You talk to me as if I were a professional rake. I take no interest — not the slightest — in your young innocents with their engaging terrors. To bed! To bed! To bed!"

He pushed her before him along the path, but Philippa knew well that the hand on her shoulder was lighter and less angry than the one that had held her a moment ago, and as she ascended the steps of Oakguard — the name borne by the Renshaw house since the days of the Conqueror — there flickered over her shadowy face the same equivocal smile of dubious meaning that had looked out at its owner, not so long since, from the mirror in her room.

When the dawn finally crept up, pallid and cold out of the North Sea and lifted, with a sort of mechanical weariness, the weight of the shadows, it was neither Brand nor Philippa who was awake.

Roused, as always, by the slightest approach of an unusual sound, the mother of that strange pair had lain in her bed listening ever since her daughter's first emerging from the house.

Once she had risen, and had stood for a moment at the window, her loose grey hair mixed with the folds of an old, faded, dusky-coloured shawl. That, however, was when both of her children were away in the middle of the park and absolute silence prevailed. With this single exception she had remained listening, always silently listening, lying on her back and with an expression of tragic and harassed expectation in her great, hollow, brown eyes. She might have been taken, lying there alone in the big four-posted bed, surrounded by an immense litter of stored-up curios and mementoes, for a symbolic image of all that is condemned, as this mortal world goes round, to watch and wait and invoke the gods and cling fast to such pathetic relics and memorials as time consents to leave of the days that it has annihilated.

Slowly the dawn came up upon the trees and roofs of Oakguard. With a wan grey light it filled the pallid squares of the windows. With a livid grey light it made definite and ghastly every hollow and every wrinkle in that patient watcher's face.

Travelling far up in the sky, a long line of marsh-fowl with outstretched necks sought the remoter solitudes of the fens. In the river marshes the sedge-birds uttered their harsh twitterings while, gathered in flocks above the sand-dunes, the sea-gulls screamed to the inflowing tide their hunger for its drifted refuse.

Wearily, at last, Helen Renshaw closed her eyes and it was the first streak of sunshine that Rodmoor had known for many days which, several hours later, kissed her white forehead — and the grey hairs that lay disordered across it — softly, gently, tenderly, as it might have kissed the forehead of the dead.

V. A SYMPOSIUM

ADRIAN SORIO SAT opposite his friend over a warm brightly burning fire.

Baltazar Stork was a slight frail man of so delicate and dainty an appearance that many people were betrayed into behaving towards him as gently and considerately as if he had been a girl. This, though a compliment to his fragility, was bad policy in those who practised it, for Baltazar was an egoist of inflexible temper and under his velvet glove carried a hand of steel.

The room in which the two friends conversed was furnished in exquisite and characteristic taste. Old prints, few in number and rare in quality, adorned its walls. Precious pieces of china, invaluable statuettes in pottery and metal, stood charmingly arranged, with due space round each, in every corner. On either side of the mantelpiece was a Meissen-ware figure of engaging aspect and Watteau-like design, while in the centre, in the place where a clock is usually to be found, was a piece of statuary of ravishing delicacy and grace representing the escape of Syrinx from the hands of Pan.

The most remarkable picture in the room, attracting the attention at once of all who entered, was a dark, richly coloured, oval-shaped portrait — a portrait of a young man in a Venetian cloak, with a broad, smooth forehead, heavy-lidded penetrating eyes, and pouting disdainful mouth. This picture, said to have been painted under the influence of Giorgione by that incomparable artist’s best loved friend, passed for a portrait of Eugenio Flambard, the favourite secretary of the Republic’s most famous ambassador during his residence at the Papal Court.

The majority of these treasures had been picked up by Baltazar during certain prolonged holidays in various parts of the Continent. This, however, was several years ago before the collapse of the investment, or whatever it was, which he inherited from Herman Renshaw.

Since that time he had been more or less dependent upon Brand, a dependence which nothing but his happy relations with Brand's mother and sister and his unfailing urbanity could have made tolerable.

"Adrian, you old villain, why didn't you tell me you'd seen Philippa. Brand informed me yesterday that you've seen her twice. This isn't the kind of thing that pleases me at all. I don't approve of these clandestine meetings. Do you hear me, you old reprobate? You don't think it's very nice, do you, for me to learn by accident — by a sort of wretched accident — of an event like this? If you *must* be at these little games you might at least be open about them. Besides, I have a brotherly interest in Philippa. I don't want to have her innocence corrupted by an old satyr like you."

Sorio contented himself by murmuring the word "Rats."

"It's all very well for you to cry 'Rats!' in that tone," went on the other. "The truth is, this affair is going to become serious. You don't suppose for a moment, do you, that your Nance is going to lie down, as they say, and let my extraordinary sister walk over her?"

Adrian got up from his seat and began pacing up and down the little room.

"It's absurd," he muttered, "it's all absurd. I feel as if the whole thing were a kind of devilish dream. Yes, the whole thing! It's all because I've got nothing to do but walk up and down these damned sands!"

Baltazar watched him with a serene smile, his soft chin supported by his feminine fingers and his fair, curly head tilted a little on one side.

"But you know, mon enfant," he threw in with a teasing caress in his voice, "you know very well you're the last person to talk of work. It was work that did for you in America. You don't want to start *that* over again, do you?"

Adrian stood still and glared at him.

"Do you think I'm going to let *that* — as you call it — finish me forever? My life's only begun. In London it was different. By God! I wish I'd stayed in London! Nance feels just the same. I know she does. She'll have to get something, too, or we shall both go mad. It's this cursed sea of yours! I've a good mind to marry her, out of hand, and clear off. We'd find something — somewhere — anywhere — to keep body and soul together."

"Why did you come to us at all, my dear, if you find us so dreadful?" laughed Baltazar, bending down to tie his shoe-string and pull up more tightly one of his silk socks.

Adrian made no answer but continued his ferocious pacing of the room.

"You'll knock something over if you're not careful," protested his friend, shrugging his shoulders. "You're the most troublesome fellow. You accept a person's offer and make no end of a fuss over it, and then a couple of weeks later you roar like a bull and send us all to the devil. What's the matter with us? What's the matter with the place? Why can't you and your precious Nance behave like ordinary people and make love to one another and be happy? She's got all her time to herself and you've got all your time to yourself. Why can't you enjoy yourselves and collect seaweed or starfish or something?"

Adrian paused in his savage prowl for the second time.

"It's your confounded sea that's at the bottom of it," he shouted. "It gets on her nerves and it gets on mine. Little Linda was perfectly right to be scared of it."

"I fancied," drawled the other, selecting a cigarette from an enamelled box and turning up the lamp, "you found little Linda's fears rather engaging than otherwise."

"It works upon us," Sorio went on, heedless of the interruption, "it works upon us in some damnable kind of way! Nance says she hears it in her sleep. I'm sure *I* do. I hear it without a moment's cessation. Listen to the thing now — *shish, shish, shish, shish!* Why can't it make some other noise? Why can't it stop altogether? It makes me long for the whole damned farce to end. It annoys me, Tassar, it annoys me!"

"Sorry you find the elements so trying, Adriano," replied the other languidly, "but I really don't know what I can do to help you — I can only advise you to keep out of Philippa's way. She's an element more troublesome than any of them."

"Tassar!" shouted the enraged man in a burst of fury, "if you don't stop dragging Philippa in, I'll murder you! What's Philippa to me? I *hate* her — do you hear? I hate the very sound of her name!"

"Her name?" murmured Stork, meditatively, "her name? Oh, I think you're quite wrong to hate that. Her name suggests all sorts of interesting things. Her name has quite a historic sound. It's mediæval in colour and Greek in form. It makes me think of Euripides."

"This whole damned Rodmoor of yours," moaned Adrian, "gets too much for me. Where on earth else, could a man find it so hard to collect his thoughts and look at things as they are? There's something here which works upon the mind, Tassar, something which works upon the mind."

"What's working on *your* mind, my friend," laughed Baltazar Stork, "is not anything so vague as dreams or anything so simple as the sea. It's just the quite definite but somewhat complicated business of managing two love affairs at the same time! I'm sorry for you, little Adrian, I'm extremely sorry for you. It's a situation not unknown in the history of the world, in fact, it might be called quite common. But I'm afraid that doesn't make it any pleasanter for you. However, it can be dealt with, with a little skill, Adrian, with just a little skill!"

The man accused in this teasing manner turned furiously round, an angry outburst of blind protest trembling on his tongue. At that moment there was a low knock at the outer door. Baltazar jumped to his feet. "That must be Raughty," he cried. "I begged him to come round to-night. I so longed for you to meet him." He hastened out and admitted the visitor with a cordial welcome. After a momentary pause and a good deal of shuffling — for Dr. Raughty was careful to wear not only an overcoat but also goloshes and even gaiters when the weather was inclement — the two men entered the room and Stork began an elaborate introduction.

"Dr. Fingal Raughty," he said, "Mr. Adrian—" but to his astonishment Sorio intervened, "The Doctor and I have already become quite well acquainted," he remarked, shaking the visitor vigorously by the hand. "I'm afraid I wasn't as polite as I ought to have been on that occasion," he went on, speaking in an unnaturally loud voice and with a forced laugh, "but the Doctor will forgive me. The Doctor I'm sure will make allowances."

Dr. Raughty gave him a quick glance, at once friendly and ironical, and then he turned to Stork. "Mother Lorman's dead," he remarked with a little sigh, "dead at last. She was ninety-seven and had thirty grandchildren. She gurgled in her throat at the last with a noise like a nightingale when its voice breaks in June. I prefer deaths of this kind to any other, but they're all pitiful."

"Nance tells me you were present at old Doorm's death, Doctor," said Adrian while their host moved off to the kitchen to secure glasses and refreshment.

The Doctor nodded. “I measured that fellow’s skull,” he remarked gravely. “It was asymmetrical and very curiously so. The interesting thing is that there exists in this part of the coast a definite tradition of malformed skulls. They recur in nearly all the old families. Brand Renshaw is a splendid example. *His* skull ought to be given to a museum. It is beautiful, quite beautiful, in the anterior lobes.”

Baltazar returned carrying a tray. The eyes of Dr. Raughty gleamed with a mellow warmth. “Nutmeg,” he remarked, approaching the tray and touching every object upon it lightly and reverently. “Nutmeg, lemon, hot water, gin — *and* brandy! It’s an admirable choice and profoundly adapted to the occasion. May I put the hot water on the hob until we’re ready for it?”

While Baltazar once more withdrew from the scene, Dr. Raughty remarked, gravely and irritably, to Sorio that it was a mistake to substitute brandy for rum. “He does it because he can’t get the best rum, but it’s a ridiculous thing to do. *Any* rum is better than no rum when it’s a question of punch-making. Are you with me in this, Mr. Sorio?”

Adrian expressed such complete and emphatic agreement that for the moment the Doctor seemed almost embarrassed.

On Baltazar’s return to the room, however, he hazarded another suggestion. “What about having the kettle itself brought in here?”

Stork looked at him without speaking and placed on the table a small plate of macaroons. The Doctor glanced whimsically at Sorio and, helping himself from the little plate, muttered in a low voice after he had nibbled the edge of a biscuit, “Yes, these seem perfectly up to par to-day.”

The three men had scarcely settled themselves down in their respective chairs around the fire than Adrian began speaking hurriedly and nervously.

"I have an extraordinary feeling," he said, "that this evening is full of fatal significance. I suppose it's nothing to either of you, but it seems to me as though this damned *shish, shish, shish, shish* of the sea were nearer and louder than usual. Doctor, you don't mind my talking freely to you? I like you, though I was rude to you the other day — but that's nothing—" he waved his hand, "that's what any fool might fall into who didn't know you. I feel I know you now. That word about the rum — forgive me, Tassar! — and the kettle — yes, particularly about the kettle — hit me to the heart. I love you, Doctor Raughty. I announce to you that my feeling at this moment amounts to love — yes, actually to love!

"But that's not what I wanted to say." He thrust his hands deep into his pockets, stretched his legs straight out, let his chin sink upon his chest and glared at them with sombre excitement. "I feel to-night," he went on, "as though some great event were portending. No, no! What am I saying? Not an event. Event isn't the word. Event's a silly expression, isn't it, Doctor, — isn't it — dear, noble-looking man? For you do look noble, you know, Doctor, as you drink that punch — though to say the truth your nose isn't quite straight as I see it from here, and there are funny blotches on your face. No, not there. *There!* Don't you see them, Tassar? Blotches — curious purply blotches."

While this outburst proceeded Mr. Stork fidgeted uneasily in his chair. Though sufficiently accustomed to Sorio's eccentricities and well aware of his medical friend's profound pathological interest in all rare types, there was something so outrageous about this particular tirade that it offended what was a very dominant instinct in him, his sense, namely, of social decency and good breeding. Possibly in a measure because of the "bar sinister" over his own origin, but much more because of the nicety of his æsthetic taste, anything approaching a social fiasco or *faux pas* always annoyed him excessively. Fortunately, however, on this occasion nothing could have surpassed the sweetness with which Adrian's wild phrases were received by the person addressed.

"One would think you'd drunk half the punch already, Sorio," Baltazar murmured at last. "What's come over you to-night? I don't think I've ever known you quite like this."

"Remind me to tell you something, Mr. Sorio, when you've finished what you have to say," remarked Dr. Raughty.

"Listen, you two!" Adrian began again, sitting erect, his hands on the arms of his chair. "There's a reason for this feeling of mine that there's something fatal on the wind to-night. There's a reason for it."

"Tell us as near as you can," said Dr. Raughty, "what exactly it is that you're talking about."

Adrian fixed upon him a gloomy, puzzled frown.

"Do you suppose," he said slowly, "that it's for nothing that we three are together here in hearing of that—"

Baltazar interrupted him. "Don't say 'shish, shish, shish' again, my dear. Your particular way of imitating the Great Deep gives me no pleasure."

"What I meant was," Sorio raised his voice, "it's a strange thing that we three should be sitting together now like this when two months ago I was in prison in New York."

Baltazar made a little deprecatory gesture, while the Doctor leaned forward with grave interest.

"But that's nothing," Sorio went on, "that's a trifle. Baltazar knows all about that. The thing I want you two to recognise is that something's on the wind, — that something's on the point of happening. Do you feel like that — or don't you?"

There was a long and rather oppressive silence, broken only by the continuous murmur which in every house in Rodmoor was the background of all conversation.

"What I was going to say a moment ago," remarked the Doctor at last, "was that in this place it's necessary to protect oneself from *that*." He jerked his thumb towards the window. "Our friend Tassar does it by the help of Flambard over there." He indicated the Venetian. "I do it by the help of my medicine-chest. Hamish Traherne does it by saying his prayers. What I should like to know is how *you*," he stretched a warning finger in the direction of Sorio, "propose to do it."

Baltazar at this point jumped up from his seat.

"Oh, shut up, Fingal," he cried peevishly. "You'll make Adrian unendurable. I'm perfectly sick of hearing references to this absurd salt-water. Other people have to live in coast towns besides ourselves. Why can't you let the thing take its proper position? Why can't you take it for granted? The whole subject gets on my nerves. It bores me, I tell you, it bores me to tears. For Heaven's sake, let's talk of something else — of any damned thing. You both make me thoroughly wretched with your sea whispers. It's as bad as having to spend an evening at Oakguard alone with Aunt Helen and Philippa."

His peevishness had an instantaneous effect upon Sorio who pushed him affectionately back into his chair and handed him his glass. "So sorry, Tassar," he said. "I won't do it again. I *was* beginning to feel a little odd to-night. One can't go through the experience of cerebral dementia — doesn't that sound right, Doctor? — without some little trifling after-effects. Come, let's be sensible and talk of things that are really important. It's not an occasion to be missed, is it, Tassar, having the Doctor here and punch made with brandy instead of rum, on the table? What interests me so much just now," he placed himself in front of the fireplace and sighed heavily, "is what a person's to do who hasn't got a penny and is unfit for every sort of occupation. What do you advise, Doctor? And by the way, why have you eaten up all the macaroons while I was talking?"

This remark really did seem a little to embarrass the person indicated, but Sorio continued without waiting for a reply.

"Yes, I suppose you're right, Tassar. It's a mistake to be sensitive to the attraction of young girls. But it's difficult — isn't it, Doctor? — not to be. They're so maddeningly delicious, aren't they, when you come to think of it? It's something about the way their heads turn — the line from the throat, you know — and about the way they speak — something pathetic, something — what shall I call it? — helpless. It quite disarms a person. It's more than pathetic, it's tragic."

The Doctor looked at him meditatively. "I think there's a poem of Goethe's which would bear that out," he remarked, "if I'm not mistaken it was written after he visited Sicily — yes, after that storm at sea, you remember, when the story of Christ's walking on the waves came into his mind."

Sorio wrinkled up his eyes and peered at the speaker with a sort of humorous malignity.

"Doctor," he said, "pardon my telling you, but you've still got some crumbs on your moustache."

"The one word," put in their host, while Dr. Raughty moved very hastily away from the table and surveyed himself with a whimsical puckering of all the lines in his face, at one of Stork's numerous mirrors, "the one word that I shall henceforth refuse to have pronounced in my house is the word 'sea.'

I'm surprised to hear that Goethe — a man of classical taste — ever refers to such Gothic abominations."

"Ah!" cried Sorio, "the great Goethe! The sly old curmudgeon Goethe! He knew how to deal with these little velvet paws!"

Dr. Raughty, reseating himself, drummed absent-mindedly with his fingers upon the empty macaroon plate. Then with a soft and pensive sigh he produced his tobacco pouch, and filling his pipe, struck a match.

"Doctor," murmured Sorio, his rebellious lips curved into a sardonic smile and his eyes screwed up till they looked as sinister as those of his namesake, Hadrian, "why do you move your head backwards and forwards like that, when you light your pipe?"

"Don't answer him, Fingal," expostulated Baltazar, "he's behaving badly now. He's 'showing off' as they say of children."

"I'm not showing off," cried Sorio loudly, "I'm asking the Doctor a perfectly polite question. It's very interesting the way he lights his pipe. There's more in it than appears. There's a great deal in it. It's a secret of the Doctor's; probably a pantheistic one."

"What on earth do you mean by a 'pantheistic' one? How, under Heaven, can the way Fingal holds a match be termed 'pantheistic'?" protested Stork irritably. "You're really going a little too far, Adriano mio."

"Not at all, not at all," argued Sorio, stretching out his long, lean arms and grasping the back of a chair. "The Doctor can deny it or not, as he pleases, but what I say is perfectly true. He gets a cosmic ecstasy from moving his head up and down like that. He feels as if he were the centre of the universe when he does it."

The Doctor looked sideways and then upon the ground. Sorio's rudeness evidently disconcerted him.

"I think," he said, rising from his chair and putting down his glass, "I must be going now. I've an early call to make to-morrow morning."

Baltazar cast a reproachful look at Adrian and rose too. They went into the hall together and the same shufflings and heavy breathings came to the ears of the listener as on Raughty's arrival. The Doctor was putting on his goloshes and gaiters.

Adrian went out to see him off and, as if to make up for his bad behaviour, walked with him across the green, to his house in the main street. They parted at last, the best of good friends, but Sorio found Baltazar seriously provoked when he returned.

"Why did you treat him like that?" the latter persisted. "You've got no grudge against him, have you? It was just your silly fashion of getting even with things in general, eh? Your nice little habit of venting your bad temper on the most harmless person within reach?"

Sorio stared blankly at his friend. It was unusual for Mr. Stork to express himself so strongly.

"I'm sorry, my dear, very sorry," muttered the accused man, looking remorsefully at the Doctor's empty glass and plate.

"You may well be," rejoined the other. "The one thing I can't stand is this sort of social lapse. It's unpardonable — unpardonable! Besides, it's childish. Hit out by all means when there's reason for it or you're dealing with some scurvy dog who needs suppressing but to make a sensitive person like Fingal uncomfortable, out of a pure spirit of bullying — it's damnable!"

"I'm sorry, Tassar," repeated the other meekly. "I can't think why I did it. He's certainly a charming person. I'll make up to him, my dear. I'll be gentle as a lamb when I see him next."

Baltazar smiled and made a humorous and hopeless gesture with his hands. “We shall see,” he said, “we shall see.”

He locked the door and lit a couple of candles with ritualistic deliberation. “Turn out the lamp, amico mio, and let us sleep on all this. The best way of choosing between two loves is to say one’s prayers and go to bed. These things decide themselves in dreams.”

“In dreams,” repeated the other, submissively following him upstairs, “in dreams. But I wish I knew why the Doctor’s ankles look so thick when he sits down. He must wear extraordinary under-clothes.”

VI. BRIDGE-HEAD AND WITHY-BED

Philippa Renshaw's light-spoken words about Linda recurred more than once to the mind of the master of Oakguard as April gave place to May and May itself began to slip by. The wet fields and stunted woods of Rodmoor seemed at that time to be making a conscious and almost human effort to throw off the repressive influence of the sea and to respond to the kindlier weather. The grasses began to grow high and feathery by the roadside, and in the water-meadows, buttercups superseded marigolds.

As he went to and fro between his house and his office in Mundham, Brand — though he made as yet no attempt to see her — became more and more preoccupied with the *idea* of the young girl. That terror of the sea in the little unknown touched, as his sister well knew it would, something strangely deep-rooted in his nature. His ancestors had lived so long in this place that there had come to exist between the man's inmost being and the voracious tides which year by year devoured the land he owned, an obstinate reciprocity of mood and feeling. That a young and fragile intruder should have this morbid fear of the very element which half-consciously he assimilated to himself, gave him a subtle and sullen exultation. The thing promised to become a sort of perverted link between them, and he pleased himself by fancying, even while, in fear of disillusionment, he kept putting off their encounter, that the girl herself could not be quite free of some sort of premonition of what awaited her.

Thus it happened that Philippa Renshaw's stroke in her own defence worked precisely as she had anticipated. Brooding, in his slow tenacious way, as the weeks went by, upon this singular projection of his imagination, he let his sister do what she chose, feeling assured that in her pride of race, she would not seriously commit herself with a nameless foreigner, and promising himself to end the business with a drastic hand as soon as it suited him to do so.

It was about the middle of May when an event took place which gave the affair a decisive and fatal impulse. This was a chance encounter, upon the bridge crossing the Loon, between Brand and Rachel Doorm. He would have passed her even then without recognition, but she stopped him and held out her hand.

“Don’t you remember me, Mr. Renshaw?” she said.

He removed his hat, displaying his closely cropped reddish head with its abnormal upward slope, and regarded her smilingly.

“You’ve changed, Miss Rachel,” he remarked, “but your voice is the same. They told me you were here. I knew we should meet sooner or later.”

“Put on your hat, Mr. Renshaw,” she said, seating herself on a little stone bench below the parapet and making room for him at her side. “I knew, too, that we should meet. It’s a long time from those days — isn’t it? — a long time, and a dark one for some of us. Do you remember when you were a child, how you asked me once why they called this place the New Bridge, when it’s obviously so very old? Do you remember that, Mr. Renshaw?”

He looked at her curiously, screwing up his eyes and wrinkling his forehead. “My mother told me you’d come back,” he muttered. “She was always fond of you. She used to hope — well, you know what I mean.”

“That I’d marry Captain Herrick?” Miss Doorm threw in. “Don’t be afraid to say it. The dead can’t hear us and except the dead, there’s none who cares. Yes, she hoped that, and schemed for it, too, dear soul. But it was not to be, Mr. Renshaw. Ellie Story was prettier. Ellie Story was cleverer. And so it happened. The bitter thing was that he swore an oath to

Mary before she died, swore it on the head of my darling Nance, that if he did ever marry again, I should be the one. Mary died thinking that certain. Anything else would have hurt her to the heart. I know that well enough; for she and I, Mr. Renshaw, as your mother could tell you, were more than sisters."

"I thought you and Linda's mother were friends, too," observed Brand, looking with a certain dreamy absorption up the straight white road that led to the Doorm house. The mental fantasies the man had woven round the name he now uttered for the first time in his life had so vivid a meaning for him that he let pass unnoticed the spasm of vindictiveness that convulsed his companion's face.

Rachel Doorm folded her arms across her lean bosom and flung back her head.

"Ellie was *afraid* of me, Mr. Renshaw," she pronounced huskily, and then, looking at him sharply: "Yes," she said, "Mrs. Herrick and I were excellent friends, and so are Linda and I. She's a soft, nervous, impressionable little thing — our dear Linda — and very pretty, too, in her own way — don't you think so, Mr. Renshaw?"

It was the man's turn now to suffer a change of countenance. "Pretty?" he laughed. "I'm sure I don't know. I've never seen her!"

Rachel clasped her hands tightly on the lap of her black dress and fixed her eyes upon him. "You'd like to see her, wouldn't you?" she murmured eagerly. He answered her look, and a long, indescribable passage of unspoken thoughts flickered, wavered and took shape between them.

"I've seen Nance — in the distance — with my mother," he remarked, letting his glance wander to the opposite parapet and away beyond it where the swallows were skimming, "but I've never yet spoken to either of the girls. I keep to myself a good deal, as every one about here knows, Miss Rachel.”

Rachel Doorm rose abruptly to her feet with such unexpected suddenness that the man started as if from a blow.

“Your sister,” she jerked out with concentrated vehemence, “is doing my Nance a deadly injury. She’s given her heart — sweet darling — absolutely and without stint to that foreigner down there.” She waved her hand towards the village. “And if Miss Renshaw doesn’t let him go, there’ll be a tragedy.”

Brand looked at her searchingly, his lips trembling with a smile of complicated significance.

“Do make her let him go!” the woman repeated, advancing as if she were ready to clasp his hand; “you can if you like. You always could. If she takes him away, my darling’s heart will be broken. Mr. Renshaw — please — for the sake of old days, for the sake of old friends, do this for me, and make her give him up!”

He drew back a little, the same subtle and ambiguous smile on his lips. “No promises, Miss Rachel,” he said, “no promises! I never promise any one anything. But we shall see; we shall see. There’s plenty of time. I’m keeping my eye on Philippa; you may be sure of that.”

He held out his hand as he spoke to the agitated woman. She took it in both of her own and quick as a flash raised it to her lips.

“I knew I should meet you, Mr. Renshaw,” she said, turning away from him, “and you see it has happened! I won’t ask why you didn’t come to me before. I haven’t asked *that* yet — have I? — and I won’t ever ask it. We’ve met at last; that’s the great thing. That’s the only thing. Now we’ll see what’ll come of it all.”

They separated, and Brand proceeded to cross the Bridge. He had hardly done so when he heard her voice calling upon him to stop. He turned impatiently.

"When you were a little boy, Mr. Renshaw," — her words came in panting gasps— "you said once, down by the sea, that Rachel was the only person in the world who really loved you. Your mother heard you say it and looked — you know how she looks! You used always to call me 'Cousin' then. Far back, they say, the Renshaws and the Doorms *were* cousins. But you didn't know that. It was just your childish fancy. 'Cousin Rachel,' you said once — just like that— 'come and take me away from them.'"

Brand acquiesced in all this with an air of strained politeness. But his face changed when he heard her final words. "Listen," she said, "I've talked to Linda about you. She's got the idea of you in her mind."

At the very moment when this encounter at the New Bridge ended — which was about six in the afternoon — Nance Herrick was walking with a beating heart to a promised assignation with Sorio. This was to take place at the southern corner of a little withy-bed situated about half a mile from Dyke House in the direction of Mundham. It was Nance's own wish that her lover — if he could still be called so — should meet her here rather than in the house. She had discovered the spot herself and had grown fond of it. Sheltered from the wind by the clump of low-growing willows, and cut off by the line of the banked-up tow-path from the melancholy horizon of fens, the girl had got into the habit of taking refuge here as if from the pursuit of vague inimical presences. In the immediate neighbourhood of the withy-bed were several corn fields, the beginning of a long strip of arable land which divided the river from the marshes as far as Mundham.

The particular spot where she hoped to find Sorio awaiting her was a low grassy bank overshadowed by alders as well as willows, and bordered by a field of well-grown barley, a field which, though still green, showed already to an experienced eye the kind of grain which a month or so of not too malicious weather would ripen and turn to gold. Already amid the blades of the young corn could be seen the stalks and leaves of newly grown poppies, and mingled with these, also at their early stage of growth, small, indistinguishable plants that would later show themselves as corn-flowers and succory.

The neighbourhood of this barley field, with its friendly look and homely weeds, promising a revel of reassuring colour as the summer advanced, had come to be, to the agitated and troubled girl, a sort of symbol of hope. It was the one place in Rodmoor — for the Doorm garden shared the gloomy influences of the Doorm house — where she could feel something like her old enjoyment in the natural growths of the soil. Here, in the freshly sprouting corn and the friendly weeds that it protected, was the strong, unconquerable pressure of earth-life, refusing to be repressed, refusing to be thwarted, by the malign powers of wind and water.

Here, on the bank she had chosen as her retreat, little childish plants she knew by name — such as pimpernel and milkwort — were already in flower and from the alders and willows above her head sweet and consolatory odours, free from the tang of marsh mist or brackish stream, brought memories of old country excursions into places far removed from fen or sea.

She had never yet revealed this sanctuary of hers to Sorio and it was with throbbing pulses and quickened step that she approached it now, longing to associate its security with her master-feeling, and yet fearful lest, by finding her lover unkind or estranged, the place should lose its magic forever. She had dressed herself with care that afternoon, putting on — though the weather was hardly warm enough to make such airy attire quite suitable —

a white print frock, covered with tiny roses. Several times in front of the mirror she had smoothed down her dress and unloosened and tied back again her shining masses of hair. She held her hat in her hand now, as she approached the spot, for he had told her once in London that he liked her better when she was bareheaded.

She had left her parasol behind, too, and as she hastened along the narrow path from the river to the withy-bed, she nervously switched the green stalks by her side with a dead stick she had unconsciously picked up.

Her print dress hung straight and tight over her softly moulded figure and her limbs, as she walked, swayed with a free and girlish grace.

Passionately, intently, she scanned the familiar outlines of the spot, hoping and yet fearing to see him. Not yet — not yet! Nothing visible yet, but the low-lying little copse and the stretch of arable land around it. She drew near. She was already within a few paces of the place. Nothing! He was not there — he had failed her!

She drew a deep breath and stood motionless, the dead stick fallen from her hand and her gloveless fingers clasping and unclasping one another mechanically.

“Oh, Adrian! Adrian!” she moaned. “You don’t care any more — not any more.”

Suddenly she heard a swish of leafy branches and a crackle of broken twigs. He was there, after all.

“Adrian!” she cried. “Is that you, Adrian?”

There was more rustling and swishing, and then with a discordant laugh he burst out from the undergrowth.

“You frightened me,” she said, looking at him with quivering lips. “Why did you hide away like that, Adrian?”

He went straight up to her, seized her fiercely in his arms and covered her mouth, her throat and neck with hot, furious kisses. This was not what Nance's heart craved. She longed to sob out her suppressed feelings on his shoulder. She longed to be petted and caressed, gently, quietly, and with soft endearing words.

Instead of which, it seemed to her that he was seeking, as he embraced her body and clung to her flesh with his lips, to escape from his own thoughts, to suppress *her* thoughts, to sweep them both away — away from all rational consciousness — on the brutal impulse of mere animal passion.

Her tears which were on the point of flowing, in a tide of heart-easing abandonment, were driven inwards by his violence, and in her grey eyes, if he had cared to look, he would have seen a frightened appeal — pitiful and troubled — like the wild glance of a deer harried by dogs.

His violence brought its own reaction at last and, letting her go, he flung himself panting upon the ground. She stood above him for a while, flushed and silent, smoothing down her hair with her hands and looking into his face with a puzzled frown.

"Sit down," he gasped. "Why do you stare at me like that?"

Obediently she placed herself by his side, tucked her skirt around her ankles and let her hands fall on her lap.

"Adrian," she said, glancing shyly at him. "Why did you kiss me like that, just now?"

He propped himself up and gazed gloomily across the barley field. "Why — did — I — kiss you?" he muttered, as if speaking in a dream.

"Yes — why, like that, just then," she went on. "It wasn't like you and me at all. You were rough, Adrian. You weren't yourself. Oh, my dear, my dear! I don't believe you care for me half as you used to!"

He beat his fists irritably on the ground and an almost vindictive look came into his eyes.

"That's the way!" he flung out, "that's the way I knew you'd take it. You girls want to be loved but you must be loved just thus and so. A touch too near, a word too far — and you're all up in arms."

Nance felt as though an ice-cold wedge had been thrust between her breasts.

"Adrian," she cried, "how can you treat me in this way? How can you say these things to me? Have I ever stopped you kissing me? Have I ever been unresponsive to you?"

He looked away from her and began pulling up a patch of moss by its roots. "What are you annoyed about, then?" he muttered.

She sighed bitterly. Then with a strong effort to give her voice a natural tone. "I didn't feel as though you were kissing me at all just now. I was simply a girl in your arms — any girl! It was a shame, Adrian. It hurt me. Surely, dear," — her voice grew gentle and pleading— "you *must* know what I mean."

"I don't know in the least what you mean," he cried. "It's some silly, absurd scruple some one's been putting in your head. I can't always make love to you as if we were two children, can I — two babes in the wood?"

Nance's mouth quivered at this and she stretched out her arm towards him and then, letting it drop, fumbled with her fingers at a blade of grass. A curious line, rarely visible on her face, wrinkled her forehead and twitched a little as if it had been a nerve beneath the skin. This line had a pathos in it beyond a mere frown. It would have been well if the Italian had recalled, as he saw it, certain ancient tragic masks of his native country, but it is one of life's persistent ironies that the tokens of monumental sorrow, which serve so nobly the purposes of art, should only excite peevish irritation when seen near at hand. Sorio did not miss that line of suffering but instead of softening him it increased his bitterness.

"You're really not angry about my kissing you," he said. "That's what all you women do — you pitch upon something quite different and revenge yourself with it, when all the time you're thinking about — God knows what! — some mad grievance of your own that has no connection with what you say!"

She leapt up at this, as if bitten by an adder and looked at him with flashing eyes.

"Adrian! You've no right — I've never given you the right — to speak to me so. Come! We'd better go back to the house. I wish — oh, how I wish — I'd never asked you to meet me here."

She stooped to pick up her hat. "I liked it so here," she added with a wistful catch in her voice, "but it's all spoilt now." Sorio did not move. He looked at her gravely.

"You're a little fool, Nance," he said, "absolutely a little fool. But you look extraordinarily lovely at this moment, now you're in a fury. Come here, child, come back and sit down and let's talk sensibly. There are other things and much more important things in the world than our ridiculous quarrels."

The tone of his voice had its effect upon her but she did not yield at once.

"I think perhaps to-day," she murmured, "it would be better to go back." She continued to stand in front of him, swaying a little — an unconscious trick of hers — and smiling sadly.

"Come and sit down," he repeated in a low voice. She obeyed him, for it was what her heart ached for, and clinging tightly to him she let her suppressed emotions have full vent. With her head pressed awkwardly against his coat she sobbed freely and without restraint.

Sorio gently buttoned up the fastening of one of her long sleeves which had come unloosed. He did this gravely and without a change of expression. That peculiar and tragic pathos which emanates from a girl's forgetfulness of her personal appearance did not apparently cross his consciousness. Nance, as she leant against him, had a pitiable and even a grotesque air. One of her legs was thrust out from beneath her skirt. Sorio noticed that her brown shoes were a little worn and did not consort well with her white stockings. It momentarily crossed his mind that he had fancied Nancy's ankles to be slenderer than it seemed they were.

Her sobs died away at last in long shuddering gasps which shook her whole frame. Sorio kept stroking her head, but his eyes were fixed on the distant river bank along which a heavily labouring horse was tugging at a rope. Every now and then his face contracted a little as if he were in physical pain. This was due to the fact that from the girl's weight pressing against his knee he began to suffer from cramp. Though her sobs had died down, Nance still seemed unwilling to stir.

With one of her hands she made a tremulous movement in search of his, and he answered it by tightly gripping her fingers. While he held her thus his gaze wandered from the horse on the tow-path and fixed itself upon a large and beautifully spotted fly that was moving slowly and tentatively up a green stalk. With its long antennæ extended in front of it the fly felt its way, every now and then opening and shutting its gauzy wings.

Sorio hated the horse, hated the fly and hated himself. As for the girl who leant so heavily upon him, he felt nothing for her just then but a dull, inert patience and a kind of objective pity such as one might feel for a wounded animal. One deep, far-drawn channel of strength and hope remained open in the remote depths of his mind — associated with his inmost identity and with what in the fortress of his soul he loved to call his “secret” — and far off, at the end of this vista, visualized through clouds of complicated memories — was the image of his boy, his boy left in America, from whom, unknown even to Nance, he received letters week by week, letters that were the only thing, so it seemed to him at this moment, which gave sweetness to his life.

He had sought, in giving full scope to his attraction to Nance, to cover up and smooth over certain jagged, bleeding edges in his outraged mind, and in this, even now, as he returned the pressure of her soft fingers, he recognized that he had been successful.

It was, he knew well, only the appearance of this *other one* — this insidious “rose au regard saphique” — this furtive child of marsh and sea — who had spoilt his delight in Nance — Nance had not changed, nor indeed had he, himself. It was only the discovery of Philippa, the revelation of Philippa, which had altered everything.

With his fingers entangled in the shining hair, beneath his hand, he found himself cursing the day he had ever come to Rodmoor. And yet — as far as his “secret” went — that “fleur hypocrite” of the salt-marshes came nearer, nearer than mortal soul except Baptiste — to understanding the heart of his mystery. The sun sinking behind them, had for some while now thrown long dark shadows across the field at their feet.

The flies which hovered over the girl’s prostrate form were no longer radiantly illuminated and from the vague distances in every direction came those fitful sounds of the closing day — murmurs and whispers and subtle breathings, sweet and yet profoundly sad, which indicate the ebb of the life-impulse and approach of twilight.

The girl moved at last, and lifting up a tear-stained face, looked timidly and shyly into his eyes. She appeared at that moment so submissive, so pitiful, and so entirely dependent on him that Sorio would have been hardly human if he had not thrown his arms reassuringly round her neck and kissed her wet flushed cheek.

They rose together from the ground and both laughed merrily to see how stained and crumpled her newly starched frock had become.

“I’ll meet you here again — to-morrow if you like,” he said gently. She smiled but did not answer. Simple-hearted though she was, she was enough of a woman to know well that her victory, if it could be called victory, over his morose mood was a mere temporary matter. The future of their love seemed to her more than ever dubious and uncertain, and it was with a chilled heart, in spite of her gallant attempts to make their return pleasant to them both, that she re-entered the forlorn garden of Dyke House and waved good-bye to him from the door.

VII. VESPERS

NANCE CONTINUED TO resort to her withy-bed, in spite of the spoiling of its charm, but she did not again ask Sorio to meet her there. She met him still, however, — sometimes in Rachel's desolate garden which seemed inspired by some occult influence antipathetic to every softening touch, and sometimes — and these latter encounters were the happier ones — in the little graveyard of Mr. Traherne's church. She found him affectionate enough in these ambiguous days and even tender, but she was constantly aware of a barrier between them which nothing she could say or do seemed able to surmount.

Her anxiety with regard to the relations between Rachel and Linda did not grow less as days went on. Sometimes the two seemed perfectly happy and Nance accused herself of having a morbid imagination, but then again something would occur — some quite slight and unimportant thing — which threw her back upon all her old misgivings.

Once she was certain she heard Linda crying in the night and uttering Rachel's name but the young girl, when roused from her sleep, only laughed gaily and vowed she had no recollection of anything she had dreamed.

As things thus went on and there seemed no outlet from the difficulties that surrounded her, Nance began making serious enquiries as to the possibility of finding work in the neighbourhood. She read the advertisements in the local papers and even answered some of them but the weeks slipped by and nothing tangible seemed to emerge.

Her greatest consolation at this time was a friendship she struck up with Hamish Traherne, the curate-in-charge of Rodmoor upon whose organ in the forlorn little Norman church, Linda was now daily practising.

Dr. Raughty, too, when she chanced to meet him, proved a soothing distraction. The man's evident admiration for her gratified her vanity, while her tender and playful way of expressing it put a healing ointment upon her wounded pride.

One late afternoon when the sun at last seemed to have got some degree of hold upon that sea-blighted country, she found herself seated with Mr. Traherne on a bench adjoining the churchyard, waiting there in part for the service — for Hamish was a rigorous ritualist in these things and rang his bell twice a day with devoted patience — and in part for the purpose of meeting Mrs. Renshaw, who, as she knew, came regularly to church, morning and evening.

Linda was playing inside the little stone edifice and the sound of her music came out to them as they talked, pleasantly softened by the intervening walls. Mr. Traherne's own dwelling, a battered, time-worn fragment of monastic masonry, clumsily adapted to modern use, lay behind them, its unpretentious garden passing by such imperceptible degrees into the sacred enclosure that the blossoms raised, in defiance of the winds that swept the marshes, in the priest's flower-beds, shed their petals upon the more recently dug of his parishioners' graves.

It may have been the extreme ugliness of Rodmoor's curate-in-charge that drew Nance so closely to him. Mr. Traherne was certainly in bodily appearance the least prepossessing person she had ever beheld. He resembled nothing so much as an over-driven and excessively patient horse, his long, receding chin, knobbed bulbous nose, and corrugated forehead not even being relieved by any particular quality in his small, deeply-set colourless eyes — eyes which lacked everything such as commonly redeems an otherwise insignificant face and which stared out of his head upon the world with a fixed expression of mild and dumb protest.

Whether it was his ugliness, or something indefinable in him that found no physical or even vocal expression — for his voice was harsh and husky — the girl herself would have been puzzled to say, but whatever it was, it drew her and held her and she experienced curious relief in talking with him.

This particular afternoon she had permitted herself to go further than usual in these relieving confidences and had treated the poor man as if he were actually and in very truth her father-confessor.

“I’ve had no luck so far,” she said, speaking of her attempts to get work, “but I think I shall have before long. I’m right, am I not, in *that* at any rate? Whatever happens, it’s better Linda and I should be independent.”

The priest nodded vigorously and clasped his bony hands over his knees.

“I wish,” he said, “that I knew Mr. Sorio as I know you. When I know people I like them, and as a rule—” he opened his large twisted mouth and smiled humorously at her— “as a rule they like me.”

“Oh, don’t misunderstand what I said just now,” cried Nance anxiously. “I didn’t mean that Adrian doesn’t like you. I know he likes you very much. It’s that he’s afraid of your influence, of your religion, of your goodness. He’s afraid of you. That’s what it is.”

“Of course we know,” said Hamish Traherne, prodding the ground with his oak stick and tucking his long cassock round his legs, “of course we know that it’s really Mr. Sorio who ought to find work. He ought to find it soon, too, and as soon as he’s got it he ought to marry you! That’s how I would see this affair settled.” He smiled at her with humorous benignity.

Nance frowned a little. “I don’t like it when you talk like that,” she remarked, “it makes me feel as though I’d done wrong in saying anything about it. It makes me feel as though I had been disloyal to Adrian."

For so ugly and clumsy a man, there was a pathetic gentleness in the way he laid his hand, at that, upon his companion's arm. "The disloyalty," he said in a low voice, "would have been *not* to have spoken to me. Who else can help our friend? Who else is anxious to help him?"

"I know, I know," she cried, "you're as sweet to me as you can be. You're my most faithful friend. It's only that I feel — sometimes — as though Adrian wouldn't like it for me to talk about him at all — to any one. But that's silly, isn't it? And besides I must, mustn't I? Otherwise there'd be no way of helping him."

"I'll find a way," muttered the priest. "You needn't mention his name again. We'll take him for granted in future, little one, and we'll both work together in his interests."

"If he could only be made to understand," the girl went on, looking helplessly across the vast tract of fens, "what his real feelings are! I believe he loves me at the bottom of his heart. I know I can help him as no one else can. But how to make him understand that?"

They were interrupted at this point by the appearance of Mrs. Renshaw who, standing in the path leading to the church door, looked at them hesitatingly as if wondering whether she ought to approach them or not.

They rose at once and crossed the grass to meet her. At the same time Linda, emerging from the building, greeted them with excited ardour.

"I've done so well to-day, Mr. Traherne," she cried, "you'd be astonished. I can manage those pedals perfectly now, and the stops too. Oh, it's lovely! It's lovely! I feel I'm going really to be a player."

They all shook hands with Mrs. Renshaw, and then, while the priest went in to ring his bell, the three women strolled together to the low stone parapet built as a protection against floods, which separated the churchyard from the marshes.

Tiny, delicate mosses grew on this wall, interspersed with small pale-flowered weeds. On its further side was a wide tract of boggy ground, full of deep amber-coloured pools and clumps of rushes and terminated, some half mile away, by a raised dyke. There was a pleasant humming of insects in the air, and although a procession of large white clouds kept crossing the low, horizontal sun, and throwing their cold shadows over the landscape, the general aspect of the place was more friendly and less desolate than usual.

They sat down upon the parapet and began to talk. “Brand promised to come and fetch me to-night,” said Mrs. Renshaw. “I begged him to come in time for the service but—” and she gave a sad, expressive little laugh, “he said he wouldn’t be early enough for that. Why is it, do you think, that men in these days are so unwilling to do these things? It isn’t that they’re wiser than their ancestors. It isn’t that they’re cleverer. It isn’t that they have less need of the Invisible. Something has come over the world, I think — something that blots out the sky. I’ve thought that often lately, particularly when I wake up in the mornings. It seems to me that the dawns used to be fresher and clearer than they are now. God has got tired of helping us, my dears,” and she sighed wearily.

Linda extended her warm little hand with a caressing movement, and Nance said, gently, “I know well what you mean, but I feel sure — oh, I feel quite sure — it’s only for a time. And I think, too, in some odd way, that it’s our own fault — I mean the fault of women. I can’t express clearly what’s in my mind but I feel as though we’d all changed — changed, that is, from what we used to be in old days. Don’t you think there’s something in that, Mrs. Renshaw? But of course that only applies to Linda and me.”

The elder woman’s countenance assumed a pinched and withered look as the girl spoke, the lines in it deepening and the pallor of it growing so noticeable that Nance found herself recalling the ghastly whiteness of her father’s face as she saw him at the last, laid out in his coffin. She shivered a little and let her fingers stray over the crumbling masonry and tangled weeds at her side, seeking there, in a fumbling, instinctive manner, to get into touch with something natural, earthy, and reassuring.

The procession of clouds suffered a brief interlude at that moment in their steady transit and the sinking sun shone out warm and mellow, full of odours of peat and moss and reedy mud. Swarms of tiny midges danced in the long level light and several drowsy butterflies rose out of nowhere and fluttered over the mounds.

“Oh, there’s Brand coming!” cried Mrs. Renshaw, suddenly, with a queer contraction of her pale forehead, “and the bell has stopped. How strange we none of us noticed that! Listen! Yes — he’s begun the service. Can’t you hear? Oh, what a pity! I can’t bear going in after he’s begun.”

Brand Renshaw, striding unceremoniously over the graves, approached the group. They rose to greet him. Nance felt herself surveyed from head to foot, weighed in the balances and found wanting. Linda hung back a little, shamefaced and blushing deeply. It was upon her that Brand kept his eyes fixed all the while he was being introduced. She — as Nance recognized in a flash — was *not* found wanting.

They stood talking together, easily and freely enough, for several minutes, but nothing that Nance heard or said prevented her mind from envisaging the fact that there had leapt into being, magnetically, mysteriously, irresistibly, one of those sudden attractions between a man and a girl that so often imply — as the world is now arranged — the emergence of tragedy upon the horizon.

“I think — if you don’t mind, Brand,” said Mrs. Renshaw when a pause arrived in their conversation, “we’ll slip into the church now for a minute or two. He’s got to the Psalms. I can hear. And it hurts me, somehow, for the poor man to have to go through them alone.”

Nance moved at once, but Linda pouted and looked shyly at Brand. “I’m tired of the church,” she murmured. “I’ll wait for you out here. Are you going in with them, Mr. Renshaw?”

Brand made no reply to this, but walked gravely with the two others as far as the porch.

“Don’t be surprised if your sister’s spirited away when you come out, Miss Herrick,” he said smilingly as he left them at the door.

Returning with a quick step to where Linda stood gazing across the marshes, he made some casual remark about the quietness of the evening and led her forth from the churchyard. Neither of them uttered any definite reference to what they were doing. Indeed, a queer sort of nervous dumbness seemed to have seized them both, but there was a suppressed surge of excitement in the man’s resolute movements and under the navy blue coat and skirt which hung so delicately and closely round her slender figure. The girl’s pulses beat a wild excited tune.

He led her straight along the narrow, reed-bordered path, with a ditch on either side of it which ended in the bridge across the Loon. Before they reached the bridge, however, he swerved to the left and helped her over a low wooden railing. From this point, by following a rough track along the edge of one of the water meadows it was possible to reach the sand-dunes without entering the village.

“Not to the sea,” pleaded Linda, holding back when she perceived the direction of their steps.

“Yes, to the sea!” he cried, pulling her forward with merciless determination. She made no further resistance. She did not even protest when, arrived at the end of their path, he lifted her bodily over the gate that barred their way. She let him help her across the heavily sinking sand, covered with pallid, coarse grass which yielded to every step they took. She let him, when at last they reached the summit of the dunes and saw the sea spread out before them, retain the hand she had given him and lead her down, hardly holding back at all now, to the very edge of the water.

They were both at that moment like persons under the power of some sort of drug. Their eyes were wild and bright and when they spoke their voices had an unnatural solemnity. In the absoluteness of the magnetic current which swept them together, they could do nothing, it seemed, but take all that happened to them for granted — take all — all — as if it could not be otherwise, as if it were *unthinkable* otherwise.

When they reached the place where the tide turned and the tremulous line of spindrift glimmered in the dying sunlight, the girl stopped at last. Her lips and cheeks were pale as the foam itself. She tried to tear her fingers from his grasp. Her feet, sinking in the wet sand, were splashed by the inflowing water.

“They told me you were afraid,” he muttered, and his voice sounded to them both as if it came from far away, “but I didn’t believe it. I thought it was some little girl’s nonsense. But I see now they were right. You *are* afraid.”

He rose to his full height, drawing into his lungs with a breath of ecstasy the sharp salt wind that blew across the water’s surface.

“But out of your fear we’ll make a bond between us,” he went on, raising his voice, “a bond which none of them shall be able to break!”

He suddenly bent down and, scooping with his fingers in the water, lifted towards her a handful of sea-foam that gleamed ghostly white as he held it.

“There, child,” he cried, “you can’t escape from me now!”

As he spoke he flung, with a wild laugh, straight across her face, the foam-bubbles which he had caught. She started back with a little gasp, but recovering herself instantly lifted the hand which held her own and pressed it against her forehead. They stood for a moment, after this, staring at one another, with a hushed, dazed, bewildered stare, as though they felt the very wind of the wing of fate pass over their heads.

Brand broke the spell with a laugh. “I’ve christened you now,” he said, “so I can call you what I like. Come up here, Linda, my little one, and let’s talk of all this.”

Hand in hand they moved away from the sea’s edge and crouched down in the shadow of the sand-dunes. The rose-coloured light died out along the line of foam and the mass of the waters in front of them darkened steadily, as if obscured by the over-hovering of some colossal bird. Far off, on the edge of the horizon, a single fragment of drifting cloud took the shape of a bloody hand with outstretched forefinger but even that soon faded as the sun, sinking into the fens behind them, gave up the struggle with darkness.

With the passing of the light from the sea’s surface, all that was left of the wind sank also into absolute immobility. An immense liberating silence intensified, rather than interrupted by the monotonous splash of the waves, seemed to stream forth from some planetary reservoir and overflow the world.

Not a sea-gull screamed, not a sound came from the harbour, not a plover cried from the marshes, not a step, not a voice, not a whisper, approached their solitude or disturbed their strange communion.

Linda sat with her head sunk low upon her breast and her hands clasped upon her knees. Brand, beside her, caressed her whole figure with an intense gaze of concentrated possession.

Neither of them spoke a word, but one of the man's heavy hands lay upon hers like a leaden weight bruising a fragile plant.

What he seemed attempting to achieve in that conspiring hour was some kind of magnetizing of the girl's senses so that the first movement of overt passion should come from her rather than from himself. In this it would seem he was not unsuccessful, for after two or three scarce audible sighs her body trembled a little and leant towards his and a low whisper uttered in a tone quite unlike her ordinary one, tore itself from her lips, as if against her volition.

"What are you doing to me?" she murmured.

While the invisible destinies were thus inaugurating their projected work upon Brand and Linda, Nance and Mrs. Renshaw issued forth from the churchyard.

"If only life were clearer," the girl was thinking, "it would be endurable. It's this uncertainty in everything — this dreadful uncertainty — which I can't bear!"

"That was a beautiful psalm we had just now," said Mrs. Renshaw, in her gentle penetrating voice as, after some minutes' silent walking they emerged upon the bridge across the Loon. Nance looked down over the parapet and in her depressed fancy she saw the drowned figure of herself, drifting, face upward, upon the flowing water.

"Yes," she replied mechanically, "the psalms are always beautiful."

"I don't believe," the lady went on, glancing at her with eyes so hollow and sorrowful that it seemed as though the twilight of a world even sadder than the one they looked upon emanated from them, "I don't believe I understand that little sister of yours. She's very highly strung — she's very nervous. She requires a great deal of care. To tell the truth, I don't consider my son Brand at all a good companion for her. I wish they'd waited and not gone off like that. He doesn't always remember what a sensitive thing the heart of a young girl is."

They had now reached the southern side of the Loon and were on the main road between Rodmoor and Mundham. A few paces further brought them to the first houses of the village. Something in the helpless, apologetic, deprecatory way with which, just then, Mrs. Renshaw greeted an old woman who passed them, had a strangely irritating effect upon Nance's nerves.

"I don't see why young people should be considered more than any one else!" she burst out. "It's a purely conventional idea. We all have our troubles, and what I think is the older you get the more difficult life becomes."

Mrs. Renshaw's face assumed a mask of weary obstinacy and she walked more slowly, her head bent forward a little and her feet dragging.

"Women have to learn what duty means," she said, "and the sooner they learn it the better. Those among us who are privileged to make one good man happy have the best that life can give. It's natural to be restless till you have this. But we must try to overcome our restlessness. We must ask for help."

She was silent. Her white face drooped and bowed itself, while her tired fingers relaxed their hold on her skirt which trailed in the dust of the road.

Her profile, as Nance glanced sideways at it, had a look of hopeless and helpless passivity.

The girl withdrew into herself, irritated and yet remorseful. She felt an obscure longing to be of some service to this unhappy one; yet as she watched her, thus bowed and impenetrable, she felt shut out and excluded.

Before they reached the centre of the village — for Nance felt unwilling to leave Mrs. Renshaw until she had seen her safe within her park gates — they suddenly came upon Baltazar Stork returning from his daily excursion to Mundham.

He was as elegantly dressed as usual and in one hand carried a little black bag, in the other a bunch of peonies. Nance, to her surprise, caught upon her companion's face a look of extraordinary illumination as the man advanced towards them. In recalling the look afterwards, she found herself thinking of the word "vivacity" in regard to it.

"Oh, I'm always the same," Mr. Stork replied to the elder lady's greeting. "I grow more annoyingly the same every day. I say the same things, think the same thoughts and meet the same people. It's — lovely!"

"I'm glad you ended like that," observed Nance, laughing. It was one of her peculiarities to laugh — a little foolishly — when she was embarrassed and though she had encountered Sorio's friend once or twice before, she felt for some reason or other ill at ease with him.

With exquisite deliberation Mr. Stork placed the black bag upon the ground and selecting two of the freshest blooms from his gorgeous bunch, handed one by the light of a little shop window to each of the women.

"How is your friend?" enquired Mrs. Renshaw with a touch of irony in her tone. "This young lady has not seen him to-day."

At that moment Nance realized that she hated this melancholy being whom a chance encounter with her husband's son seemed to throw into such malicious spirits. She felt that everything Mrs. Renshaw was destined to say from now till they separated, would be designed to humiliate and annoy her. This may have been a fantastic illusion, but she acted upon it with resolute abruptness.

"Good-bye," she exclaimed, turning to her companion, "I'll leave you in Mr. Stork's care. I promised Rachel not to be late to-night. Good-bye — and thank you," she bowed to the young man and held up the peony, "for this."

"She's jealous," remarked Baltazar as he led Mrs. Renshaw across the green under the darkening sycamores. "She is abominably jealous! She was in a furious temper — I saw it myself — when Adrian took her sister out the other day and now she's wild because he's friendly with Philippa. Oh, these girls, these girls!"

An amused smile flickered for a moment across the lady's face but she suppressed it instantly. She sighed heavily. "You are all too much for me," she said, "too much for me. I'm getting old, Tassar. God be merciful! This world is not an easy place to live in."

She walked by his side after this in heavy silence till they reached the entrance of the park.

VIII. SUN AND SEA

As the days began to grow warmer and in the more sheltered gardens the first roses appeared, Nance was not the only one who showed signs of uneasiness over Adrian Sorio's disturbed state of mind.

Baltazar was frequently at a loss to know where, in the long twilights, his friend wandered. Over and over again, after June commenced, the poor epicure was doomed to take his supper in solitude and sit companionless through the evening in the grassy enclosure at the back of his house.

As the longest day approached and the heavily scented hawthorn tree which was the chief ornament of his small garden had scattered nearly all its red blossoms, Stork's uneasiness reached such a pitch that he protested vigorously to the wanderer, using violent expressions and, while not precisely accusing him of ingratitude, making it quite plain that this was neither the mood nor the treatment he expected from so old a friend.

Sorio received this outburst meekly enough — indeed he professed himself entirely penitent and ready to amend his ways — but as the days went on, instead of any improvement in the matter, things became rapidly worse and worse.

Baltazar could learn nothing definitely of what he did when he disappeared but the impression gradually emphasized itself that he spent these lonely hours in immense, solitary walks along the edge of the sea. He returned sometimes like a man absolutely exhausted and on these occasions his friend could not help observing that his shoes were full of sand and his face scorched.

One especially hot afternoon, when Stork had returned from Mundham by the midday train in the hope of finding Adrian ready to stroll with him under the trees in the park, there occurred quite a bitter and violent scene between them when the latter insisted, as soon as their meal was over, on setting off alone.

"Go to the devil!" Adrian finally flung back at his entertainer when — his accustomed urbanity quite broken down — the aggrieved Baltazar gave vent to the suppressed irritation of many days. "Go to the devil!" the unconscionable man repeated, putting down his hat over his head and striding across the green.

Once clear of the little town, he let his speed subside into a more ordinary pace and, crossing the bridge over the Loon, made his way to the sea shore. The blazing sunshine, pouring down from a sky that contained no trace of a cloud, seemed to have secured the power that day of reducing even the ocean itself to a kind of magnetised stupor. The waters rolled in, over the sparkling sands, with a long, somnolent, oily ripple that spent itself and drew back without so much as a flicker or flake of foam. The sea-gulls floated languidly on the unruffled tide, or quarrelled with little, short, petulant screams over the banks of bleached pungent-smelling seaweed where swarms of scavenging flies shared with them their noonday fretfulness.

On the wide expanse of the sea itself there lay a kind of glittering haze, thin and metallic, as if hammered out of some marine substance less resistant but not less dazzling than copper or gold. This was in the mid-distance, so to speak, of the great plain of water. In the remote distance the almost savage glitter diminished and a dull livid glare took its place, streaked in certain parts of the horizon by heavy bars of silvery mist where the sea touched the sky. The broad reaches of hard sand smouldered and flickered under the sun's blaze and little vibrating heat waves danced like shapeless demons over the summit of the higher dunes.

Turning his face northward, Sorio began walking slowly now and with occasional glances at the dunes, along the level sand by the sea's edge. He reached in this way a spot nearly two miles from Rodmoor where for leagues and leagues in either direction no sign of human life was visible.

He was alone with the sun and the sea, the sun that was dominating the water and the water that was dominating the land.

He stood still and waited, his heart beating, his pulses feverish, his deep-sunken eyes full of a passionate, expectant light. He had not long to wait. Stepping down slowly from the grass-covered dunes, past a deserted fisherman's hut which had become their familiar rendezvous, came the desired figure. She walked deliberately, slowly, with a movement that, as Sorio hastened to meet her, had something almost defiant in its dramatic reserve.

They greeted one another with a certain awkwardness. Neither held out a hand — neither smiled. It might have been a meeting of two conspirators fearful of betrayal. It was only after they had walked in silence, side by side and still northwards for several minutes, that Sorio began speaking, but his words broke from him then with a tempestuous vehemence.

"None of these people here know me," he cried, "not one of them. They take me for a dawdler, an idler, an idiotic fool. Well! That's nothing. Nance doesn't know me. She doesn't care to know me. She — she *loves*! As if love were what I wanted — as if love were enough!"

He was silent and the girl looked at him curiously, waiting for him to say more.

"They'd be a bit surprised, wouldn't they," he burst out, "if they knew about the manuscripts *he*" — he uttered this last word with concentrated reverence,— “is guarding for me over there? *He* understands me, Phil, and not a living person except him. Listen, Phil! Since I’ve known you I’ve been able to breathe — just able to breathe — in this damned England. Before that — God! I shudder to think of it — I was dumb, strangled, suffocated, paralyzed, dead. Even now — even with you, Phil, — I’m still fumbling and groping after it — after what I have to say to the world, after my secret, my idea!

“It hurts me, my idea. You know that feeling, Phil. But I’m getting it into order — into shape. Look here!”

He pulled out of his pocket a small thick notebook closely written, blurred with erasures and insertions, stained with salt-water.

“That’s what I’ve done since I’ve known you — in this last month — and it’s better than anything I’ve written before. It’s clearer. It hits the mark more crushingly. Phil, listen to me! I *know* I’ve got it in me to give to the world something it’s never dreamed of — something with a real madness of truth in it — something with a bite that gets to the very bone of things. I know I’ve got that in me.”

He stooped down and picked up a stranded jelly-fish that lay — a mass of quivering, helpless iridescence — in the scorching sun. He stepped into the water till it was over his shoes and flung the thing far out into the oily sea. It sank at once to the bottom, leaving a small circle of ripples.

“Go on, go on!” cried the girl, looking at him with eyes that darkened and grew more insatiable as she felt his soul stir and quiver and strip itself before her.

“Go on! Tell me more about Nance.”

“I *have* told you,” he muttered, “I’ve told you everything. She’s good and faithful and kind. She gives me love — oh, endless love! — but that’s not what I want. She no more understands me than *I* understand — eternity! Little Linda reads me better."

"Tell me about Linda," murmured the girl.

Sorio threw a wild glance around them. "It's her fear that taught her what she knew — what she guessed. Fear reads deep and far. Fear breaks through many barriers. But she's changed now since she's been with Brand. She's become like the rest."

"Oh, Brand —!" Philippa shrugged her shoulders. "So *he's* come into it? Well, let them go. Tell me more about Nance. Does she cling to you and make a fuss? Does she try the game of tears?"

Sorio looked at her sharply. A vague suspicion invaded the depths of his heart. They walked along in silence for several minutes. The power of the sun seemed to increase. A mass of seaweed, floating below the water, caused in one place an amber-coloured shadow to break the monotony of the glittering surface.

"Does your son believe in you — as I do?" she asked gently.

As soon as the words had crossed her lips she knew they were the very last she ought to have uttered. The man withdrew into himself with a rigid tightening of every nerve. No one — certainly not Nance — had ever dared to touch this subject. Once to Nance, in London, and twice recently to his present companion, had he referred to Baptiste but this direct question about the boy was too much; it outraged something in him which was beyond articulation. The shock given him was so intense and the reaction upon his feelings so vivid that, hardly conscious of what he did, he thrust his hand into his pocket and clutched tightly with his fingers the book containing his work, as though to protect it from aggression. As he thus stood there before her, stiff and speechless, she could only console herself by the fact that he avoided her eyes.

Her mind moved rapidly. She must invent, at all costs, some relief to this tension. She had trusted her magnetism too far.

"Adriano," she said, imitating with feminine instinct Baltazar's caressing intonation, "I want to bathe. We're out of sight of every one. We know each other well enough now. Shall we — together?"

He met her eyes now. There was a subtile appeal in their depths which drew him to her and troubled his senses. He nodded and uttered an embarrassed laugh. "Why not?" he answered.

"Very well," she said quickly, clinching her suggestion before he had time to revoke his assent, "I'll just run behind these sand hills and take off my things. You undress here and get into the water. And swim out, too, Adrian, with your back to me! I'll soon join you."

She left him and he obeyed her mechanically — only looking nervously round for a moment as he folded his coat containing the precious manuscript and laid a heavy stone upon it.

He plunged out into the waveless sea with fierce, impetuous strokes. The water yielded to his violent movements like a lake of quicksilver. Dazzling threads and flakes and rainbows flashed up, wavered, trembled, glittered and vanished as he swam forward. With his eyes fixed on the immense dome of sky above him, where, like the rim of a burnished shield, it cut down into the horizon, he struck out incessantly, persistently, seeking, in thus embracing a universe of white light, to find the escape he craved.

Strange thoughts poured through his brain as he swam on. The most novel, the most terrific of the points contained in those dithyrambic notes left behind under the stone surged up before him and, mingling with them in fierce exultant affection, the image of Baptiste beckoned to him out of a molten furnace of white light.

Far away behind him at last he heard the voice of his companion. Whether she intended him to turn he did not know, for her words were inaudible, but when he did he perceived that she was standing, a slim white figure, at the water's edge. He watched her with feelings that were partly bitter and partly tender.

"Why does she stand there so long?" he muttered to himself. "Why doesn't she get in and start swimming?"

As if made aware of his thought by some telepathic instinct the girl at that moment slipped into the water and began walking slowly forward, her hands clasped behind her head. When the water reached above her knees she swung up her hands and with a swift spring of her white body, disappeared from view. She remained so long invisible that Sorio grew anxious and took several vigorous strokes towards her. She reappeared at last, however, and was soon swimming vigorously to meet him.

When they met she insisted on advancing further and so, side by side, with easy, leisurely movements, they swam out to sea, their eyes on the far horizon and their breath coming and going in even reciprocity.

"Far enough!" cried Sorio at last, treading water and looking closely at her.

There was a strange wild light in the girl's face. "Why go back?" her look seemed to say— "Why not swim on and on together — until the waters cover us and all riddles are solved?" There was something in her expression at that moment — as, between sky and sea, the two gazed mutely at one another — which seemed to interpret some terrible and uttermost mystery. It was, however, too rare a moment to endure long, and they turned their heads landwards.

The return took longer than they had anticipated and the girl was swimming very slowly and displaying evident signs of exhaustion before they got near shore. As soon as she could touch the bottom with her feet she hurried out and staggered, with stiff limbs, across the sands to where she had left her clothes.

When she came back, dressed and in lively spirits, her unbound hair shimmering in the sunshine like wet silk, she found him pacing the sea's edge with an expression of gloomy resolution.

"I shall have to rewrite every word of these notes," he said, striking his hand against his pocket. "I had a new thought just now as I was in the water and it changes everything."

She threw herself down on the hot sand and spread out her hair to let it dry.

"Don't let's go yet, Adrian," she pleaded. "I feel so sleepy and happy."

He looked at her thoughtfully, hardly catching the drift of her words. "It changes everything," he repeated.

"Lie down here," she murmured softly, letting her gaze meet his with a wistful entreaty.

He placed himself beside her. "Don't get hurt by the sun," he said. She smiled at that — a long, slow, dreamy smile — and drawing him towards her with her eyes, "I believe you're afraid of me to-day, Adrian," she whispered.

Her boyish figure, outlined beneath the thin dress she wore, seemed to breathe a sort of classic voluptuousness as she languidly stretched her limbs. As she did this, she turned her head sideways, till her chin rested on her shoulder and a tress of brown hair, wet and clinging, fell across her slender neck.

A sudden impulse of malice seemed to seize the man who bent over her. "Your hair isn't half as long as Nance's," he said, turning abruptly away and hugging his knees with his arms.

The girl drew herself together, at that, like a snake from under a heavy foot and, propping herself up on her hands, threw a glance upon him which, had he caught it, might have produced a yet further change in the book of philosophic notes. Her eyes, for one passing second, held in them something that was like livid fire reflected through blue ice.

For several minutes after this they both contemplated the level mass of illuminated waters with absorbed concentration. At last Adrian broke the silence.

“What I’m aiming at in my book,” he said, “is a revelation of how the essence of life is found in the instinct of destruction. I want to show — what is simply the truth — that the pleasure of destruction, destruction entered upon out of sheer joy and for its own sake, lies behind every living impulse that pushes life forward. Out of destruction alone — out of the rending and tearing of something — of something in the way — does new life spring to birth. It isn’t destruction for cruelty’s sake,” he went on, his fingers closing and unclosing at his side over a handful of sand. “Cruelty is mere inverted sentiment. Cruelty implies attraction, passion, even — in some cases — love. Pure destruction — destruction for its own sake — such as I see it — is no thick, heavy, muddy, perverted impulse such as the cruel are obsessed by. It’s a burning and devouring flame. It’s a mad, splendid revel of glaring whiteness like this which hurts our eyes now. I’m going to show in my book how the ultimate essence of life, as we find it, purest and most purged in the ecstasies of the saints, is nothing but an insanity of destruction! That’s really what lies at the bottom of all the asceticism and all the renunciation in the world. It’s the instinct to destroy — to destroy what lies nearest to one’s hand — in this case, of course, one’s own body and the passions of the body. Ascetics fancy they do this for the sake of their souls. That’s their illusion. They do it for its own sake — for the sake of the ecstasy of destruction! Man is the highest of all animals because he can destroy the most. The saints are the highest among men because they can destroy humanity."

He rose to his feet and, picking up a flat stone from the sea's edge, sent it skimming across the water.

"Five!" he cried, as the stone sank at last.

The girl rose and stood beside him. "I can play at 'Ducks and Drakes' too," she said, imitating his action with another stone which, however, sank heavily after only three cuttings of the shiny surface.

"You can't play 'Ducks and Drakes' with the universe," retorted Sorio. "No girl can — not even you, with your boy-arms and boy-legs! You can't even throw a stone out of pure innocence. You only threw that — just now — because I did and because you wanted me to see you swing your arm — and because you wanted to change the conversation."

He looked her up and down with an air of sullen mockery. "What the saints and the mystics seek," he went on, "is the destruction of everything within reach — of everything that sticks out, that obtrudes, that is simply *there*. That is why they throw their stones at every form of natural life. But the life they attack is doing the same thing itself in a cruder way. The sea is destroying the land; the grass is destroying the flowers; the flowers one another; the woods, the marshes, the fens, are all destroying something. The saints are only the maddest and wisest of all destroyers—"

"Sorio! There's a starfish out there — being washed in. Oh, let me try and reach it!"

She snatched his stick from him and catching up her skirt stepped into the water.

"Let it be!" he muttered, "let it be!"

She gave up her attempt with an impatient shrug but continued to watch the steady pressure of the incoming tide with absorbed interest.

"What the saints aim at," Sorio continued, "and the great poets too, is that absolute *white light*, which means the drowning, the blinding, the annihilating, of all these paltry-coloured things which assert themselves and try to make themselves immortal. The only godlike happiness is the happiness of seeing world after world tumbled into oblivion. That's the mad, sweet secret thought at the back of all the religions. God — as the great terrible minds of antiquity never forgot — is the supreme name for that ultimate destruction of all things which is the only goal. That's why God is always visualised as a blaze of blinding white light. That's why the Sun-God, greatest of destroyers, is pictured with burning arrows."

While Adrian continued in this wild strain, expounding his desperate philosophy, it was a pity there was no one to watch the various expressions which crossed in phantasmal sequence, like evil ghosts over a lovely mirror, the face of Philippa Renshaw.

The conflict between the man and woman was, indeed, at that moment, of curious and elaborate interest. While he flung out, in this passionate way, his metaphysical iconoclasm, her instinct — the shrewd feminine instinct to reduce everything to the personal touch — remained fretting, chafing, irritable, and unsatisfied. It was nothing to her that the formula he used was the formula of her own instincts. She loved destruction but in her subtle heart she despised, with infinite contempt, all philosophical theories — despised them as being simply irrelevant and off the track of actual life — off the track, in fact, of those primitive personal impulses which alone possess colour, perfume, salt and sweetness!

Vaguely, at the bottom of his soul, even while he was speaking, Sorio knew that the girl was irritated and piqued; but the consciousness of this, so far from being unpleasant, gave an added zest to his words. He revenged himself on her for the attraction he felt towards her by showing her that in the metaphysical world at any rate, he could reduce her to non-existence! Her annoyance at last gave her, in desperation, a flash of diabolic cunning. She tossed out to him as a bait for his ravening analysis, her own equivocal nature.

"I know well what you mean," she said, as they moved slowly back towards Rodmoor. "Poor dear, you must have been torn and rent, yourself, to have come to such a point of insight! I, too, in my way, have experienced something of the sort. My brain — you know *that*, by this time, don't you, Adriano? — is the brain of a man while my body is the body of a woman. Oh, I hate this woman's body of mine, Adrian! You can't know how I hate it! All that annoys you in me, and all that annoys myself too, comes from this," and she pressed her little hands savagely to her breast as she spoke, as though, there before him, she would tear out the very soul of her femininity.

"From earliest childhood," she went on, "I've loathed being a girl. Long nights, sometimes, I've lain awake, crying and crying and crying, because I wasn't born different. I've hated my mother for it. I hate her still, I hate her because she has a morbid, sentimental mania for what she calls the sensitiveness of young girls. The sensitiveness! As if they weren't the toughest, stupidest, sleepiest things in the world! They're not sensitive at all. They've neither sensitiveness nor fastidiousness nor modesty nor decency! It's all put on — every bit of it. I *know*, for I'm like that myself — or half of me is. I betray myself to myself and lacerate myself for being myself. It's a curious state of things — isn't it, Adriano?"

She had worked herself up into such a passion of emotional self-pity that great swimming tears blurred the tragic supplication of her eyes. The weary swing of her body as she walked by his side and the droop of her neck as she let her head fall when his glance did not respond were obviously not assumed. The revelation of herself, entered upon for an exterior purpose, had gone further than she intended and this very stripping of herself bare which was to have been her triumph became her humiliation when witnessed so calmly, so indifferently.

After this they walked for a long while in silence, he so possessed by the thrilling sense of having a new vista of thought under his command that he was hardly conscious of her presence, and she in obstinate bitter resolution wrestling with the remorse of her mistake and searching for some other means — any means — of sapping the strength of his independence.

As they moved on and the afternoon advanced, a large and striking change took place in the appearance of the scene. A narrow, clear-cut line of shadow made itself visible below the sand-dunes. The sky lost its metallic glitter and became a deep hyacinthine blue, a blue which after a while communicated itself, with hardly any change in its tint, to the wide-spread volume of water beneath it. In those spots where masses of seaweed floated beneath the surface, the omnipresent blue deepened to a rich indescribable purple, that amazing purple more frequent in southern than in northern seas, which we may suppose is indicated in the Homeric epithet "wine dark."

As the friends approached the familiar environs of Rodmoor they suddenly came upon a fisherman's boat pulled up upon the sand, with some heavy nets left lying beside it.

"Sorio!" cried the girl, stooping down and lifting the meshes of one of these, "Sorio! there's something alive left here. Look!"

He bent over the net beside her and began hastily disentangling several little silvery fish which were struggling and flapping feebly and opening their tiny gills in labouring gasps.

“All right — all right!” cried the man, addressing in his excitement the tiny prisoners, “I’ll soon set you free.”

“What are you doing, Adrian?” expostulated the girl. “No — no! You mustn’t throw them back — you mustn’t! The children always come round when school’s over and search the nets. It’s a Rodmoor custom.”

“It’s a custom I’m going to break, then!” he shouted, rushing towards the sea with a handful of gasping little lives. His fingers when he returned, were covered with glittering scales but they did not outshine the gleam in his face.

“You should have seen them dash away,” he cried. “I’m glad those children won’t find them!”

“They’ll find others,” remarked Philippa Renshaw. “There’ll always be some nets that have fish left in them.”

IX. PRIEST AND DOCTOR

THERE ARE HOURS in every man's day when the main current of his destiny, rising up from some hidden channel, becomes a recognizable and palpable element in his consciousness. Such hours, if a man's profoundest life is — so to speak — in harmony with the greater gods, are hours of indescribable and tremulous happiness.

It was nothing less than an experience of this kind which flowed deliciously, like a wave of divine ether, over the consciousness of Hamish Traherne on the day following the one when Sorio and Philippa walked so far.

As he crossed his garden in the early morning and entered the church, the warm sun and clear-cut shadows filled him with that sense of indestructible joy to which one of the ancient thinkers has given the beautiful name of μονοχρονος ἡδονὴ — the Pleasure of the Ideal Now.

From the eastern window, flooding the floor of the little chancel, there poured into the cool, sweet-smelling place a stream of quivering light. He had opened wide the doors under the tower and left them open and he heard, as he sank on his knees, the sharp clear twittering of swallows outside and the chatter of a flock of starlings. Through every pulse and fibre of his being, as he knelt, vibrated an unutterable current of happiness, of happiness so great that the words of his prayer melted and dissolved and all definite thought melted with them into that rare mood where prayer becomes ecstasy and ecstasy becomes eternal.

Returning to his house without spilling one golden drop of what was being allowed him of the wine of the Immortals, he brought his breakfast out into the garden and ate it, lingeringly and dreamily, by the side of his first roses. These were of the kind known as "the seven sisters" — small and white-petaled with a faint rose-flush — and the penetrating odour of them as he bent a spray down towards his face was itself suggestive of old rich wine, "cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth."

From the marshes below the parapet came exquisite scents of water-mint and flowering-rush and, along with these, the subtle fragrance, pungent and aromatic, of miles and miles of sun-heated fens.

The grass of his own lawn and the leaves of the trees that overshadowed it breathed the peculiar sweetness — a sweetness unlike anything else in the world — of the first hot days of the year in certain old East Anglian gardens. Whether it is the presence of the sea which endows these places with so rare a quality or the mere existence of reserve and austere withholding in the ways of the seasons there, it were hard to say, but the fact remains that there are gardens in Norfolk and Suffolk — and to Hamish Traherne's flower-beds in spite of the modesty of their appeal, may well be conceded something of this charm — which surpass all others in the British Isles in the evocation of wistful and penetrating beauty.

The priest had just lit his cigarette and was sipping his tea when he was startled by the sudden appearance of Nance Herrick, white and desperate and panting for breath.

"I had to come to you," she gasped, refusing his proffered chair and sinking down on the grass. "I had to! I couldn't bear it. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop in that house. I saw him last night. He was walking with *her* near the harbour. I spoke to them. I was quiet — not angry or bitter at all and he let her insult me. He let her whip me with her tongue, wickedly, cruelly and yet so under cover, so sideways — you know the kind of thing, Hamish? — that I couldn't answer. If I'd been alone with her I could have, but his being there made me stupid, miserable, foolish! And she took advantage of it. She said — oh, such mean, biting things! I can't say them to you. I hate to think of them. They went right through me like a steel lash. And he stood there and did nothing. He was like a man in a trance. He stood there and let her do it. Hamish — Hamish — I wish I were at the bottom of the sea!"

She bowed her white, grief-distorted face until it was buried in the grass. The sun, playing on her bright hair, made it look like newly-minted gold. Mr. Traherne sank on his knees beside her. His ugliness, intensified by the agitation of his pity, reached a pitch that was almost sublime. He was like a gargoyle consoling a goddess.

"Child, child, listen to me!" he cried, his husky grating voice flinging itself upon the silence of her misery like a load of rubble upon a marble pavement.

"There are moments in our life when no words, however tender, however wise, can do any good. The only way — child, it is so — it is so! — the only way is to find in love itself the thing that can heal. For love *can* do this, I know it, I have proved it."

He raised one of his arms with a queer, spasmodic gesture and let it drop as suddenly as he had raised it.

"Love rejoices to bear everything," he went on. "It forgives and forgives again. It serves its beloved night and day, unseen and unfelt, it draws strength from suffering. When the blows of fate strike it, it sinks into its own heart and rises stronger than fate. When the passing hour's cruel to it, it sinks away within, below the passing of every possible hour, beyond the hurt of every conceivable stroke. Love does not ask anything. It does not ask to be recognized. It is its own return, its own recognition. Listen to me, child! If what I'm saying to you is not true, if love is not like this, then the whole world is dust and ashes and 'earth's base built on stubble'!"

His harsh voice died away on the air and for a little while there was no sound in that garden except the twitter of birds, the hum of insects, and the murmur of the sea. Then she moved, raised herself from the ground and rubbed her face with her hands.

"Thank you, Hamish," she said.

He got up from his knees and she rose too and they walked slowly together up and down the little grass plot. His harsh voice, harsher than ever when its pitch was modulated, rose and fell monotonously in the sunny air.

"I don't say to you, Nance, that you shouldn't expect the worst. I think we always should expect that and prepare to meet it. What I say is that in the very power of the love you feel there is a strength capable of sustaining you through your whole life, whatever happens. And it is out of this very strength — a strength stronger than all the world, my dear — than all the world! — that you'll be able to give your Adrian what he needs. He needs your love, little one, not your jealousy, nor your self-pity, nor your anger. God knows how much he needs it! And if you sink down into your heart and draw upon that and wait for him and pray for him and endure for him you will see how, in the end, he'll come back to you! No — I won't even say that. For in this world he may never realize whose devotion is sustaining him. I'll say, whether he comes back or not, you'll have been his only true love and he'll know it, child, in this world or another, he'll know you for what you are!"

The sweet, impossible doctrine, older than the centuries, older than Plato, of the supremacy of spiritual passion had never — certainly not in that monastic garden — found a more eloquent apologist. As she listened to his words and her glance lingered upon a certain deeply blue border of larkspurs, which, as they paced up and down mingled with the impression he made upon her, Nance felt that a crisis had indeed arrived in her life — had arrived and gone — the effect of which could never, whatever happened, altogether disappear. She was still unutterably sad. Her new mood brought no superficial comfort. But her sadness had nothing in it now of bitterness or desperation. She entered, at any rate for that hour, into the company of those who resolutely put life's sweetness away from them and find in the accepted pressure of its sharp sword-point a pride which is its own reward.

This mood of hers still lasted on, when, some hours later, she found herself in the main street of the little town, staring with a half-humorous smile at the reflection of herself in the bow-window of the pastry-cook's. She had just emerged from the shop adjoining this one, a place where she had definitely committed herself to accept the post of "forewoman" in the superintendence of half a dozen young girls who worked in the leisurely establishment of Miss Pontifex, "the only official dressmaker," as the advertisement announced, "on that side of Mundham."

She felt unspeakably relieved at having made this plunge. She had begun to weary of idleness — idleness rendered more bitter by the misery of her relations with Sorio — and the independence guaranteed by the eighteen shillings a week which Miss Pontifex was to pay her seemed like an oasis of solid assurance in a desert of ambiguities. She cared nothing for social prestige. In that sense she was a true daughter of her father, the most "democratic" officer in the British Navy. What gave her a profound satisfaction in the midst of her unhappiness was the thought that now, without leaving Rodmoor, she could, if Rachel's jealousy or whatever it was, became intolerable, secure some small, separate lodging for herself and her sister.

Linda even, now her organ-playing had advanced so far, might possibly be able to earn something. There were perhaps churches in Mundham willing to pay for such assistance if the difficulty of getting over there on Sundays when the trains were few, could in some way be surmounted. At any rate, she felt, she had made a move in the right direction. For the present, living at Dyke House, she would be able to save every penny Miss Pontifex gave her, and the sense of even this relative independence would strengthen her hand and afford her a sort of vantage-ground whatever happened in the future.

She was still standing in front of the confectioner's window when she heard a well-known voice behind her and, turning quickly round, found herself face to face with Fingal Raughty. The Doctor looked at her with tender solicitude.

"Feeling the heat?" he said, retaining her fingers in his own and stroking them as one might stroke the petals of a rare orchid.

She smiled affectionately into his eyes and thought how strange an irony it was that every one, except the person she cared most for, should treat her thus considerately.

"Come," the Doctor said, "now I've got you I'm not going to let you go. You must see my rooms! You promised you would, you know."

She hadn't the heart to refuse him and together they walked up the street till they came to the tiny red-brick house which the Doctor shared with the family of a Mundham bank-clerk. He opened the door and led her upstairs.

"All this floor is mine," he explained. "There's where I see my patients, and here," he led her into the room looking out on the street, "here's my study."

Nance was for the moment inclined to smile at the use of the word "study" as applied to any room in Rodmoor High Street, but when she looked round at walls literally lined with books and at tables and chairs covered with books, some of them obviously rare and valuable, she felt she had not quite done justice to the Doctor's taste. He fluttered round her now with a hundred delicate attentions, made her remove her hat and gloves and finally placed her in a large comfortable armchair close to the open window. He pulled one of the green blinds down a little way to soften the stream of sunshine and, rushing to his book-case, snatched at a large thin volume which stood with others of the same kind on the lowest shelf. This he dusted carefully with his sleeve and laid gently upon her lap.

"I think you'll like it," he murmured. "It's of no value as an edition, but it's in his best style. I suppose Miss Doorm has all the old masters up at Dyke House bound in morocco and vellum? Or has she only county histories and maps?"

While his visitor turned over the pages of the work in question, her golden head bent low and her lips smiling, the doctor began piling up more books, one on the top of another, at her side.

"Apuleius! — he's a strange old fellow, not without interest, but you know him, of course? Petronius Arbiter! you had better not read the text but the illustrations may amuse you. William Blake! There are some drawings here which have a certain resemblance to — to one or two people we know! Bewick! Oh, you'll enjoy this, if you don't know it. I've got the other volume, too. You mustn't look at *all* the vignettes but some of them will please you."

"But — Fingal—" the girl protested, lifting her head from Pope's Rape of the Lock illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley— "what are *you* going to do? I feel as if you were preparing me for a voyage. I’d sooner talk to you than look at any books.”

“I’ll be back in a moment,” he said, throwing at her a nervous and rather harassed look, “I must wash my hands.”

He hurried precipitously from the room and Nance, lifting her eyebrows and shrugging her shoulders, returned to the “Rape of the Lock.”

The doctor’s bathroom was situated, it appeared, in the immediate vicinity of the study. Nance was conscious of the turning of what sounded like innumerable taps and of a rush of mighty waters.

“Is the dear man going to have a bath?” she said to herself, glancing at the clock on the chimney-piece. If her conjecture was right, Dr. Raughty took a long while getting ready for his singularly timed ablution for she heard him running backwards and forwards in the bathroom like a mouse in a cage. She uttered a little sigh and, laying the “Rape of the Lock” on the top of “Bewick,” looked wearily out of the window, her thoughts returning to Sorio and the event of the preceding evening.

Quite ten minutes elapsed before her host returned. He returned in radiant spirits but all that was visible to the eye as the result of his prolonged toilet was a certain smoothness in the lock of hair which fell across his forehead and a certain heightening of the colour of his cheeks. This latter change was obviously produced by vigorous rubbing, not by the application of any cosmetic.

He drew a chair close to her side and ignored with infinite kindness the fact that his pile of books lay untouched where he had placed them.

“Your neck is just like a column of white marble,” he said. “Are your arms the same — I mean are they as white — under this?”

Very gently and using his hands as if they belonged to someone else, he began rolling up the sleeve of her summer frock. Nance was sufficiently young to be pleased at his admiration and sufficiently experienced not to be shocked at his audacity. She let him turn the sleeve quite far back and smiled sadly to herself as she saw how admirably its freshly starched material showed off the delicacy and softness of the arm thus displayed. She was not even surprised or annoyed when she found that the Doctor, having touched several times with the tips of his fingers the curve of her elbow, possessed himself of her hand and tenderly retained it. She continued to look wistfully and dreamily out of the window, her lips smiling but her heart weary, thinking once more what an ironic and bitter commentary it was on the little ways of the world that amorousness of this sort — gentle and delicate though it might be — was all that was offered her in place of what she was losing.

"You ought to be running barefooted and full of excellent joy," the voice of Dr. Raughty murmured, "along the sands to-day. You ought to be paddling in the sea with your skirts pinned round your waist! Why don't you let me take you down there?"

She shook her head, turning her face towards him and releasing her fingers.

"I must get back now," she remarked, looking him straight in the eyes, "so please give me my things."

He meekly obeyed her and she put on her hat and gloves. As they were going downstairs, she in front of him, Nance had a remote consciousness that Dr. Raughty murmured something in which she caught Adrian's name. She let this pass, however, and gave him her hand gratefully as he opened the door for her.

"Mayn't I even see you home?" he asked.

Once more she shook her head. She felt that her nerves, just then, had had enough of playful tenderness.

“Good-bye!” she cried, leaving him on his threshold.

She cast a wistful glance at Baltazar’s cottage as she crossed the green.

“Oh, Adrian, Adrian,” she moaned, “I’d sooner be beaten by you than loved by all the rest of the world!”

It was with a slow and heavy step that Dr. Raughty ascended his little staircase after he had watched her disappear. Entering his room he approached the pile of books left beside her chair and began transporting them, one by one, to their places in the shelves.

“A sweet creature,” he murmured to himself as he did this, “a sweet creature! May ten thousand cartloads of hornified devils carry that damned Sorio into the pit of Hell!”

X. LOW TIDE

Nance was so absorbed, for several days after this, in making her final arrangements with the dressmaker and getting into touch with the work required of her that she was able to keep her nerves in quite reasonable control. She met Sorio more than once during this time and was more successful than she had dared to hope in the effort of suppressing her jealous passion. Her feelings did not remain, she admitted that to herself sadly enough, on the sublime platonic level indicated by Mr. Traherne, but as long as she made no overt reference to Philippa nor allowed her intercourse with her friend to be poisoned by her wounded pride, she felt she had not departed far from the priest's high doctrine.

It was from Sorio himself, however, that she learned at last of a new and alarming turn of events, calculated to upset all her plans. This was nothing less than that her fatal presentiment in the churchyard had fulfilled itself and that Brand and Linda were secretly meeting. Sorio seemed surprised at the tragic way she received this news and she was equally indignant at his equanimity over it. The thing that made it worse to her was her deep-rooted suspicion that Rachel Doorm was implicated. Adrian laughed when she spoke of this.

"What did you expect?" he said. "Your charming friend's an old crony of the Renshaws and nothing would please her better than to see Linda in trouble. She probably arranges their meetings for them. She has the look of a person who'd do that."

They were walking together along the Mundham road when this conversation took place. It was then about three o'clock and Nance remembered with a sudden sinking of her heart how cheerfully both of her companions had encouraged her to make this particular excursion. She was to walk with Sorio to Mundham and return late in the evening by train.

“I shall go back,” she cried, standing still and looking at him with wild eyes. “This is too horrible! They must have plotted for me to be out of the way. How could Linda do it? But she’s no more idea than a little bird in the hedge what danger she’s in.”

Sorio shrugged his shoulders.

“You can’t go back now,” he protested. “We’re more than two miles away from the bridge. Besides, what’s the use? You can’t do anything. You can’t stop it.”

Nance looked at him with flashing eyes.

“I don’t understand what you mean, Adrian. She’s in danger. Linda’s in danger. Of course I shall go. I’m not afraid of Brand.”

She glanced across the wide expanse of fens. On the southern side of the road, as she looked back, the park trees of Oakguard stood out against the sky and nearer, on the northern side, the gables of Dyke House itself rose above the bank of the river.

“Oh, my dear, my dear,” she cried distractedly, “I must get back to them! I must! I must! Look — there’s our house! You can see its roof! There’s some way — surely — without going right back to the bridge? There *must* be some way.”

She dragged him to the side of the road. A deep black ditch, bordered by reeds, intersected the meadow and beyond this was the Loon. A small wooden enclosure, isolated and forlorn, lay just inside the field and from within its barrier an enormous drab-coloured sow surveyed them disconsolately, uttering a lamentable squeal and resting its front feet upon the lower bar of its prison, while its great, many-nippled belly swung under it, plain to their view. Their presence as they stood in a low gap of the hedge tantalized the sow and it uttered more and more discordant sounds. It was like an angry impersonation of fecundity, mocking Nance's agitation.

"Nothing short of wading up to your waist," said Sorio, surveying the scene, "would get you across that ditch, and nothing short of swimming would get you over the river."

Angry tears came into Nance's eyes. "I would do it," she gasped, "I would do it if I were a man."

Sorio made a humorous grimace and nodded in the direction of the sow.

"What's your opinion about it — eh, my beauty?"

At that moment there came the sound of a trotting horse.

"Here's something," he added, "that may help you if you're bent on going."

They returned to the road and the vehicle soon approached, showing itself, as it came near, to be the little pony-cart of Dr. Raughty. The Doctor proved, as may be imagined, more than willing to give Nance a lift. She declared she was tired but wouldn't ask him to take her further than the village.

"I'll take you wherever you wish," said Fingal Raughty, giving a nervous little cough and scrambling down to help her in.

"Ah! I forgot! Excuse me one minute. Hold the pony, please. I promised to get some water-mint for Mrs. Sodderly."

He ran hurriedly into the field and Nance, sitting in the cart, looked helplessly at Sorio who, making a gesture as if all the world had gone mad, proceeded to stroke the pony's forehead. They waited patiently and the Doctor let them wait. They could see him through the gap in the hedge running hither and thither and every now and then stooping down and fumbling in the grass. He seemed entirely oblivious of their discomfort.

"This water-mint business," muttered Sorio, "is worse than the shrew-mouse hunt. I suppose he collects groundsel and feverfew for all the old women in Rodmoor."

Nance soon reached the limit of her patience. "Dr. Raughty!" she cried, and then in feminine desperation, "Fingal! Fingal!" she shouted.

The Doctor came hurrying back at that and to Sorio's astonishment it appeared he had secured his desired plants. As he clambered up into the little cart a delicious aromatic fragrance diffused itself around Nance.

"I've found them all right," he said. "They're under my hat. Sorry I've only got room for one of you. Get on, Elizabeth!"

They drove off, Sorio making a final, Pilate-like gesture of complete irresponsibility.

"A noble creature — that sow," the Doctor observed, glancing nervously at his companion, "a noble, beautiful animal! I expect it likes to feed on watermelons as well as any one. Did you observe its eye? Like a small yellow daisy! A beautiful eye, but with something wicked in it — didn't you think so? — something menacing and malicious."

Nance compelled herself to smile at this sally but her hands itched to snatch the whip and hasten the pony's speed. They arrived at last at the New Bridge and Nance wondered whether the Doctor would be really amenable to her wishes or whether he would press her to visit his study again. But he drove on without a word, over the Loon, and westward again on the further side of it straight in the direction of Dyke House.

As they drew near the place Nance's heart began to beat furiously and she cast about in her mind for some excuse to prevent her companion taking her any further. He seemed to read her thoughts for, with almost supernatural tact, he drew up when they were within a few hundred yards of the garden gate.

"I won't come in if you don't mind," he said. "I have several patients to see before supper and I want to take Mrs. Sodderly her water-mint."

Nance jumped quickly out of the cart and thanked him profusely.

"You're looking dreadfully white," he remarked, as he bade her good-bye. "Oh, wait a moment, I must give you a few of these."

He carefully removed his hat and once more the aromatic odour spread itself on the air.

"There!" he said, handing her two or three damp-rooted stems with purplish-green leaves. She took them mechanically and was still holding them in her hands when she arrived with pale lips and drawn, white face, at the entrance to the Doorm dwelling.

All was quiet in the garden and not a sound of any living thing issued from the house. With miserable uncertainty she advanced to the door, catching sight, as she did so, of her own garden tools left lying on the weedy border and some newly planted and now sadly drooping verbenas fading by their side. She blamed herself even at that moment for having, in her excitement at going to meet Sorio, forgotten to water these things. She resolved — at the back of her mind — that she would pull up every weed in the place before she had done with it.

Never before had she realized the peculiar desolation of Dyke House. With its closed windows and smokeless chimneys it looked as if it might have been deserted for a hundred years. She entered and standing in the empty hall listened intently. Not a sound! Except for a remote ticking and the buzzing of a blue bottle fly in the parlour windows, all was hushed as the inside of a tomb. There came over her as she stood there an indescribable sense of loneliness. She felt as though all the inhabitants of the earth had been annihilated and she only left — she and the brainless ticking of clocks in forsaken houses.

She ran hurriedly up the staircase and entered the room she shared with Linda. The child's neatly made little bed with the embroidered night-dress cover lying on the pillow, struck her with a passion of maternal feeling.

"My darling! My darling!" she cried aloud. "It's all my fault! It's all my fault!"

She moved to the window and looked out. In a moment her hands clasped tightly the wooden sash and she leaned forward with motionless intensity. The uninterrupted expanse of that level landscape lent itself to her quick vision. She made out, clearly and instantaneously, a situation that set her trembling from head to foot. In one rapid moment she took it in and in another moment she was prepared for swift action.

Moored on the further side of the river was a small boat and in the boat, sitting with his forehead bowed upon his hands, was Brand Renshaw. His head was bare and the afternoon sun shining upon it made it look red as blood. On the further side of the Mundham road — the very road she had so recently traversed — she could see the figure of a girl, unmistakably her sister — advancing quickly and furtively towards the shelter of a thin line of pine trees, the most western extremity of the Oakguard woods. The man in the boat could see nothing of this. Even if he rose to his feet he could see nothing. The river bank was too high. For the same reason the girl crossing the fields could see nothing of the man in the boat. Nance alone, from her position at the window, was in complete command of both of them. She drew back a little into the room lest by chance Brand should look up and catch sight of her. What a fortunate thing she had entered so quietly! They were taking every precaution, these two! The man was evidently intending to remain where he was till the girl was well concealed among the trees. Rachel Doorm, it seemed, had taken herself off to leave them to their own devices but it was clear that Brand preferred an assignation in his own park to risking an entrance to Dyke House in the absence of its mistress. For that, at any rate, Nance was devoutly thankful. Watching Linda's movements until she saw her disappear beneath the pines, Nance hurried down the stairs and out into the garden. She realized clearly what she had to do. She had to make her way to her sister before Brand got wind she was there at all.

She knew enough of the Renshaw family to know that if she were to call out to him across the river he would simply laugh at her. On the other hand if he got the least idea she were so near he would anticipate events and hasten off at once to Linda.

But how on earth could she herself reach the girl? The Loon flowed mercilessly between them. One thing she had not failed to remark as she looked at Brand in his little sea boat and that was that the tide was now running very low. Sorio had been either mistaken or treacherous when he assured her it was at its height. It must have been falling even then.

She let herself noiselessly out of the gate and stood for a moment contemplating the river bank. No, Brand could not possibly see her. Without further hesitation she left the path and moved cautiously, ankle-deep in grass, to where the Loon made a sharp turn to the left. She had a momentary panic as she crawled on hands and knees up the embankment. No, even here, as long as she did not stand upright, she was invisible from the boat. Descending on the further side she slipped down to the brink of the river. The Loon was low indeed. Only a narrow strip of rapidly moving water flowed in the centre of the channel. On either side, glittering in the sun, sloped slimy banks of mud.

Her face was flushed now and through her parted lips the breath came heavily, in excited gasps.

"Linda — little Linda!" she murmured, "it's my fault — all my fault!"

With one nervous look at the river she sank down on the sun-baked mud and took off her shoes and stockings. Then, thrusting the stockings inside the shoes and tying the laces of these latter together, she pulled up her skirts and secured them round her waist. As she did this she peered apprehensively round her. But she was quite alone and with another shuddering glance at the tide she picked up her shoes and began advancing into the slippery mud. She staggered a little at first and her feet sank deep into the slime but as soon as she was actually in the water she walked more easily, feeling a surer footing. The Loon swirled by her, sending a chill of cold through her bare white limbs. The water was soon high above her knees and she was hardly a quarter of the way across! Her heart beat miserably now and the flush died from her cheeks. It came across her mind like an ice-cold hand upon her throat, how dreadful it would be to be swept off her feet and carried down that tide — down to the Rodmoor harbour and out to sea — dead and tangled in weeds — with wide-open staring eyes and the water pouring in and out of her mouth. Nothing short of her desperate maternal instinct, intensified to frenzy by the thought that she was responsible for Linda's danger, could have impelled her to press on. The tide was up to her waist now and all her clothes were drenched but still she had not reached the middle of the current.

It was when, taking a step further, she sank as deep as her arm-pits, that she wavered in earnest and a terrible temptation took her to turn and give it up.

"Perhaps, after all," she thought, "Brand has no evil intentions. Perhaps — who can tell? — he is genuinely in love with her."

But even as she hesitated, looking with white face up and down the swirling stream, she knew that this reasoning was treacherous. She had heard nothing but evil of Brand’s ways with women ever since she came to Rodmoor. And why should he treat her sister better than the rest?

Suddenly, without any effort of her own, she seemed to visualize with extraordinary clearness a certain look with which, long ago, when she was quite a child, Linda had appealed to her for protection. A passion of maternal remorse made her heart suddenly strong and she plunged recklessly forward. For one moment she lost her footing and in the struggle to recover herself the tide swept over her shoulders. But that was the worst. After that she waded steadily forward till she reached the further side.

Dripping from head to foot she pulled on her shoes, wrung as much of the water as she could out of her drenched skirts and shook them down over her knees. Then she scrambled up the bank, glanced round to make certain she was still unseen and set off through the fields. She could not help smiling to herself when she reached the Mundham high-road and fled quickly across it to think how amazed Sorio would have been had he seen her just then! But neither Sorio nor any one else was in sight and leaving behind her the trail of wet shoes in the hot road dust, she ran, more rapidly than ever, towards the group of ancient and dark-stemmed pines, into the shadow of which she had seen her sister vanish.

XI. THE SISTERS

LINDA WAS SO astounded that she could hardly repress a scream when, as she sat with her back against a tree on a carpet of pine-needles, Nance suddenly appeared before her breathless with running. It was some moments before the elder girl could recover her speech. She seized her sister by the shoulders and held her at arms' length, looking wildly into her face and panting as she struggled to find words. "I waded," she gasped, "across the Loon — to get to you. Oh, Linda! Oh, Linda!"

A deep flush appeared in the younger sister's cheeks and spread itself over her neck. She gazed at Nance with great terrified eyes.

"Across the river—" she began, and let the words die away on her lips as she realized what this meant.

"But you're wet through — wet through!" she cried. "Here! You must wear something of mine."

With trembling fingers she loosened her own dress, hurriedly slipped out of her skirt, flung it aside and began to fumble at Nance's garments. With little cries of horror as she found how completely drenched her sister was, she pulled her into the deeper shadow of the trees and forced her to take off everything.

"How beautiful you look, my dear," she cried, searching as a child might have done for any excuse to delay the impending judgment. Nance, even in the reaction from her anxiety, could not be quite indifferent to the naïveté of this appeal and she found herself actually laughing presently as with her arms stretched high above her head and her fingers clinging to a resinous pine branch, she let her sister chafe her body back to warmth.

"Look! I'll finish you off with ferns!" cried the younger girl, and plucking a handful of new-grown bracken she began rubbing her vigorously with its sweet-scented fronds.

"Oh, you do look lovely!" she cried once more, surveying her from head to foot. "*Do* let me take down your hair! You'd look like — oh, I don't know what!"

"I wish Adrian could see you," she added. This last remark was a most unlucky blunder on Linda's part. It had two unfortunate effects. It brought back to Nance's mind her own deep-rooted trouble and it restored all her recent dread as to her sister's destiny.

"Give me something to put on," she said sharply. "We must be getting away from here."

Linda promptly stripped herself of yet more garments and after a friendly contest as to which of them should wear the dry skirt they were ready to emerge from their hiding-place. Nance fancied that all her difficulties for that day were over. She was never more mistaken.

They had advanced about half a mile towards the park, keeping tacitly within the shadow of the pines when suddenly Linda, who was carrying her sister's wet clothes, dropped the bundle with a quick cry and stood, stone-still, gazing across the fields. Nance looked in the direction of her gaze and understood in a moment what was the matter. There, walking hastily towards the spot they had recently quitted — was the figure of a man.

Evidently this was the appointed hour and Brand was keeping his tryst. Nance seized her sister's hand and pulled her back into the shadow. Linda's eyes had grown large and bright. She struggled to release herself.

"What are you doing, Nance?" she cried. "Let me go! Don't you see he wants me?"

The elder sister's grasp tightened.

“My dear, my dear,” she pleaded, “this is madness! Linda, Linda, my darling, listen to me. I can’t let you go on with this. You’ve no idea what it means. You’ve no idea what sort of a man that is.”

The young girl only struggled the more violently to free herself. She was like a thing possessed. Her eyes glittered and her lips trembled. A deep red spot appeared on each of her cheeks.

“Linda, child! My own Linda!” cried Nance, desperately snatching at the girl’s other wrist and leaning back, panting against the trunk of a pine.

“What has come to you? I don’t know you like this. I can’t, I can’t let you go.”

“He wants me,” the girl repeated, still making frantic efforts to release herself. “I tell you he wants me! He’ll hate me if I don’t go to him.”

Her fragile arms seemed endowed with supernatural strength. She wrenched one wrist free and tore desperately at the hand that held the other.

“Linda! Linda!” her sister wailed, “are you out of your mind?”

The unhappy child actually succeeded at last in freeing herself and sprang away towards the open. Nance flung herself after her and, seizing her in her arms, half-dragged her, half-carried her, back to where the trees grew thick. But even there the struggle continued. The girl kept gasping out, “He loves me, I tell you! He loves me!” and with every repetition of this cry she fought fiercely to extricate herself from the other’s embrace. While this went on the wind, which had been gusty all the afternoon, began to increase in violence, blowing from the north and making the branches of the pines creak and mutter over their heads. A heavy bank of clouds covered the sun and the air grew colder. Nance felt her strength weakening. Was fate indeed going to compel her to give up, after all she had endured?

She twined her arms round her sister’s body and the two girls swayed back and forwards over the dry, sweet-scented pine-needles. Their scantilyclothed limbs were locked tightly together and, as they struggled, their breasts heaved and their hearts beat in desperate reciprocity.

“Let me go! I hate you! I hate you!” gasped Linda, and at that moment, stumbling over a moss-covered root, they fell together on the ground.

The shock of the fall and the strain of the struggle threw the younger girl into something like a fit of hysteria. She began screaming and Nance, fearful lest the sound should reach Brand’s ears, put her hand over the child’s mouth. The precaution was unnecessary. The wind had increased now to such a pitch that through the moaning branches and rustling foliage nothing could be heard outside the limits of the wood.

“I hate you! I hate you!” shrieked Linda, biting in her frenzy at the hand which was pressed against her mouth. Nance’s nerves had reached the breaking point.

“Won’t you help me, God?” she cried out.

Suddenly Linda’s violence subsided. Two or three shuddering spasms passed through her body and her lips turned white. Nance released her hold and rose to her feet. The child’s head fell back upon the ground and her eyes closed. Nance watched her with fearful apprehension. Had she hurt her heart in their struggle? Was she dying? But the girl did not even lose consciousness. She remained perfectly still for several minutes and then, opening her eyes, threw upon her sister a look of tragic reproach.

“You’ve won,” she whispered faintly. “You’re too strong for me. But I’ll never forgive you for this — never — never — never!”

Once more she closed her eyes and lay still. Nance, kneeling by her side, tried to take one of her hands but the girl drew it away.

“Yes, you’ve won,” she repeated, fixing upon her sister’s face a look of helpless hatred. “And shall I tell you why you’ve done this? Shall I tell you why you’ve stopped my going to him?” she went on, in a low exhausted voice. “You’ve done it because you’re jealous of me, because you can’t make Adrian love you as you want, because Adrian’s got so fond of Philippa! You can’t bear the idea of Brand loving me as he does — so much more than Adrian loves you!”

Nance stared at her aghast. “Oh, Linda, my little Linda!” she whispered, “how can you say these terrible things? My only thought, all the time, is for you.”

Linda struggled feebly to her feet, refusing her sister’s help.

“I can walk,” she said, and then, with a bitterness that seemed to poison the air between them, “you needn’t be afraid of my escaping from you. He wouldn’t like me now, you’ve hurt me and made me ugly.”

Nance picked up her bundle of mud-stained clothes. The smell of the river which still clung to them gave her a sense of nausea.

“Come,” she said, “we’ll follow the park wall.”

They moved off slowly together without further speech and never did any hour, in either of their lives, pass more miserably. As they came within sight of Oakguard, Linda looked so white and exhausted that Nance was on the point of taking her boldly in and begging Mrs. Renshaw’s help, but somehow the thought of meeting Philippa just at that moment was more than she was able to endure, and they dragged on towards the village.

Emerging from the park gates and coming upon the entrance to the green, Nance became aware that it would be out of the question to make Linda walk any further and, after a second’s hesitation, she led her across the grass and under the sycamores to Baltazar’s cottage.

The door was opened by Mr. Stork himself. He started back in astonishment at the sight of their two figures pale and shivering in the wind. He led them into his sitting-room and at once proceeded to light the fire. He wrapped warm rugs round them both and made them some tea. All this he did without asking them any questions, treating the whole affair as if it were a thing of quite natural occurrence. The warmth of the fire and the pleasant taste of the epicure's tea restored Nance, at any rate, to some degree of comfort. She explained that they had walked too far and that she had tried to cross the river to get help for her sister. Linda said hardly anything but gazed despairingly at the picture of the Ambassador's secretary. The young Venetian seemed to answer her look and Baltazar, always avid of these occult sympathies, watched this spiritual encounter with sly amusement. He had wrapped an especially brilliant oriental rug round the younger girl and the contrast between its rich colours and the fragile beauty of the face above them struck him very pleasantly.

In his heart he shrewdly guessed that some trouble connected with Brand was at the bottom of this and the suspicion that she had been interfering with her sister's love affair did not diminish the prejudice he had already begun to cherish against Nance. Stork was constitutionally immune from susceptibility to feminine charm and the natural little jests and gaieties with which the poor girl tried to "carry off" a sufficiently embarrassing situation only irritated him the more.

"Why must they always play their tricks and be pretty and witty?" he thought. "Except when one wants to make love to them they ought to sit still." And with a malicious desire to annoy Nance he began making much of Linda, persuading her to lie down on the sofa and wrapping an exquisite cashmere shawl round her feet.

To test the truth of his surmise as to the cause of their predicament, he unexpectedly brought in Brand's name.

"Our friend Adrian," he remarked, "refuses to allow that Mr. Renshaw's a handsome man. What do you ladies think about that?"

His device met with instant success. Linda turned crimson and Nance made a gesture as if to stop him.

"Ha! Ha!" he laughed to himself, "so that's how the wind blows. Our little sister must be allowed no kind of fun, though we ourselves may flirt with the whole village."

He continued to pay innumerable attentions to Linda. Professing that he wished to tell her fortune he drew his chair to her side and began a long rigamarole about heart lines and life lines and dark men and fair men. Nance simply moved closer to the fire while this went on and warmed her hands at its blaze.

"I must ask him to fetch us a trap from the Inn," she thought. "I wish Adrian would come. I wonder if he will, before we go."

Partly by reason of the fact that he had himself arranged her drapery and partly because of a touch of something in the child's face which reminded him of certain pictures of Pintericchio, Baltazar began to feel tenderer towards Linda than he had done for years towards any feminine creature. This amused him immensely and he gave the tenuous emotion full rein. But it irritated him that he couldn't really vex his little protégé's sister.

"I expect," he said, replacing Linda's white fingers upon the scarlet rug, "I expect, Miss Herrick, you're beginning to feel the effects of our peculiar society. Yes, that's my Venetian boy, Flambard" — this was addressed to Linda— "isn't he delicious? Wouldn't you like to have him for a lover? — for Rodmoor is a rather curious place. It's a disintegrating place, you know, a place where one loses one's identity and forgets the rules. Of course it suits *me* admirably because I never consider rules, but you — I should think — must find it somewhat disturbing? Fingal maintains there's a definite physiological cause for the way people behave here. For we all behave very badly, you know, Miss Herrick. He says it's the effect of the North Sea. He says all the old families that live by the North Sea get queer in time, — take to drink, I mean, or something of that sort. It's an interesting idea, isn't it? But I suppose that sort of thing doesn't appeal to you? You take — what do you call it? — a more serious view of life."

Nance turned round towards him wearily.

"If Adrian doesn't come in a minute or two," she thought, "I shall ask him to get a trap for us, or I shall go to Dr. Raughty."

"It's an odd thing," Baltazar continued, lighting a cigarette and walking up and down the room, "how quickly I know whether people are serious or not. It must be something in their faces. Linda, now" — he looked caressingly at the figure on the sofa— "is obviously never serious. She's like me. I saw that in her hand. She's destined to go through life as I do, playing on the surface like a dragon-fly on a pond."

The young girl answered his look with a soft but rather puzzled smile, and once more he sat down by her side and renewed his fortune-telling. His fingers, as he held her hand, looked almost as slender as her own and his face, as Nance saw it in profile, had a subtle delicacy of outline that made her think of Philippa. There was, to the mind of the elder girl, a refined inhumanity about every gesture he made and every word he spoke which filled her with aversion. The contours of his face were exquisitely moulded and his round small head covered with tight fair curls was supported on a neck as soft and white as a woman's; but his eyes, coloured like some glaucous sea plant, were to the girl's thinking extraordinarily sinister. She could not help a swift mental comparison between Baltazar's attitude as he leaned over Linda and that of Dr. Raughty when, on various occasions, that honest man had made playful love to herself. It was hard to define the difference but, as she watched Baltazar she came to the conclusion that there was a soul of genuine affectionateness in the doctor's amorous advances which made them harmless as compared with this other's.

Linda, however, was evidently very pleased and flattered. She lay with her head thrown back and a smile of languid contentment. She did not even make an attempt to draw away her hand when the fortune-telling was over. Nance resolved that she would wait five minutes more by their host's elegant French time-piece and then, if Adrian had not come, she would make Mr. Stork fetch them a conveyance. It came over her that there was something morbid and subtly unnatural about the way Baltazar was treating Linda and yet she could not put her finger upon what was wrong. She felt, however, by a profound instinct, an instinct which she could not analyse, that nothing that Brand Renshaw could possibly do — even were he the unscrupulous seducer she suspected him of being — could be as dangerous for the peace of her sister's mind as what she was now undergoing. With Brand there was quite simply a strong magnetic attraction, formidable and overpowering, and that was all, but she trembled to think what elements of complicated morbidity Baltazar's overtures were capable of arousing.

"Look," he said presently, "Flambard's watching us! I believe he's jealous of me because of you, or of you because of me. I don't believe he's ever seen any one so near being his rival as you are! I think you must have something in you that he understands. Perhaps you're a re-incarnation of one of his Venetians! Don't you think, Miss Herrick," and he turned urbanely to Nance, "she's got something that suggests Venice in her as she lies there — with that smile?"

The languorous glance of secret triumph which Linda at that moment threw upon her sister was more than Nance could endure.

"Do you mind getting us a trap of some sort at the Admiral's Head?" she said brusquely, rising from her seat.

Baltazar assented at once with courteous and even effusive politeness and left the room. As soon as he was gone, Nance moved to Linda's side.

"Little one," she said, with trembling lips, "I seem not to know you to-day. You're not my Linda at all."

The child's face stiffened spasmodically and her whole expression hardened. She fixed her gaze on the ambiguous Flambard and made no answer.

"Linda, darling — I'm only thinking all the time of you," pleaded Nance, putting out her hand.

A gleam of positive hatred illuminated the child's eyes. She suddenly snatched at the proffered hand and surveyed it vindictively.

"I can see where I bit you just now. I'm glad I did!" she cried, and once more she set herself to stare at Flambard.

Nance went over to the fireplace and sat down. But something seemed to impel Linda to strike her again.

"You thought you were going to have every one in Rodmoor to yourself, didn't you?" she said. "You thought you'd have Adrian and Dr. Raughty and Mr. Traherne and everybody. You never thought any one would begin liking me!"

Nance looked at her in sheer terrified astonishment. Certainly the influence of Baltazar was making itself felt.

"You brought me here," Linda went on. "I didn't want to come and *you knew I didn't*. Now — as *he* says, we must make the best of it."

The phrase "and you knew I didn't" went through Nance's heart like a poisoned dagger. Yes, she had known! She had tried to put the thing far from her — to throw the responsibility for it upon her reluctance to hurt

Rachel. But she had known. And now her punishment was beginning. She bowed her head upon her hands and covered her face.

"You came," the girl's voice went on, "because you hated leaving Adrian. But Adrian doesn't want you any more now. He wants Philippa. Do you know, Nance, I believe he'd marry Philippa, if he could — if Brand would let him!"

The hands that hid Nance's face trembled. She longed to run away and sob her heart out. She had thought she was at the bottom of all possible misery. She had never expected this. Linda, as if drawing inspiration for the suffering she inflicted, continued to look Flambard in the eyes.

"Brand told me Philippa meets Adrian every night in the park. He said he spied on them once and found them kissing each other. He said they were leaning against one of the oak trees and Adrian bent her head back against the trunk and kissed her like that. He showed me just how he did it. And he made me laugh like anything afterwards by something else he said. But I don't think I'll tell you that — unless you want to hear very much — Do you want to hear?"

Nance, at this moment, lifted up her head. She had a look in her eyes that nothing except the inexhaustible pitilessness of a woman thwarted in her passion could have endured without being melted.

"Are you trying to kill me, Linda?" she murmured.

Her sister gave her one quick glance and looked away again at Flambard. She remained silent after that, while the French clock ticked out the seconds with a jocular malignity.

The wind, rising steadily, swept large drops of rain against the window and the noise of the waves which it brought with it sounded louder and clearer than before as if the sea itself had advanced several leagues across the land since first they entered the house.

XII. HAMISH TRAHERNE

NANCE SAID NOTHING to Rachel Doorm on the night they returned, driven home by the landlord of the Admiral's Head. What Rachel feared, or what she imagined, as the sisters entered the house in their thin attire carrying the bundle of drenched clothes, it was impossible to surmise. She occupied herself with lighting a fire in their room and while they undressed she brought them up their supper with her own hands. It was a wretched night for both of the sisters and few were the words exchanged between them as they ate their meal. Once in bed and the light extinguished, it was Nance, in spite of all, who fell asleep first. "The pangs of despised love" have not the same corrosive poison as the sting of passion embittered by rancour.

Nance was up early and took her breakfast alone. She felt an irresistible need to see Mr. Traherne. She arrived at the priest's house almost as early as she had done on a former occasion, only this time, the day being overcast and the wind high, he received her within-doors. She found him reading "Don Quixote" and, without giving her time to speak, he made her listen to the gentle and magnanimous story of the poor knight's death.

"There's no book," he said, when he had finished, "which so recovers my spirits as this one. Cervantes is the noblest soul of them all and the bravest. He's the only author who never gives up his humility before God or his pride before the Universe. He's the author for me! He's the author for us poor priests!"

Mr. Traherne lit a cigarette and looked at Nance through its smoke with a grotesque scowl of infinite reassurance.

"Cheer up, little one!" he said, "the spirit of the great Cervantes is not dead in the world. God has not deserted us. Nothing can hurt us while we hold to Christ and defy the Devil!"

Nance smiled at him. The conviction with which he spoke was like a cup of refreshing water to her in a dry desert.

"Mr. Traherne," she began, but he interrupted her with a wave of his arm.

"My name's Hamish," he said.

"Hamish, then," she went on, smiling at the ghoulish countenance before her, round which the cigarette smoke ascended like incense about the head of an idol, "I've more to tell you than I can say. So you must listen and be very good to me!"

He settled himself in his deep horse-hair chair with one leg over the other and his ancient, deplorably-stained cassock over both. And she poured forth the full history of her troubles, omitting nothing — except one or two of Linda's cruel speeches. When she had completed her tale she surveyed him anxiously. One terrible fear made her heart beat — the fear lest he should tell her she must carry Linda back to London. He seemed to read her thoughts in her eyes. "One thing," he began, "is quite clear. You must both of you leave Dyke House. Don't look so scared, child. I don't mean you must leave Rodmoor. You can't kidnap your sister by force and nothing short of force would get her, in her present mood, to go away with you. But I think — I think," he added, "we could persuade her to leave Miss Doorm."

He straightened out his legs, puckered his forehead and pouted his thick lips.

"Have a strawberry," he said suddenly, reaching with his hand for a plate lying amid a litter of books and papers, and stretching it out towards her.

"Oh, there are ashes on it. I'm sorry! But the fruit's all right. There! keep it by you — on the floor — anywhere — and help yourself!"

He once more subsided into his chair and frowned thoughtfully. Nance, with a smile of infinite relief — for had he not said that to leave Rodmoor was impossible? — kept the plate on her lap and began eating the fruit. She longed to blow the ashes away but fear of hurting his feelings restrained her. She brushed each strawberry surreptitiously with the tips of her fingers before lifting it to her mouth.

"You're not cold, are you?" he said suddenly, "because I *could* light a fire."

Nance looked at the tiny grate filled with a heap of bracken-leaves and wondered how this would be achieved.

"Oh, no!" she said, smiling again. "I'm perfectly warm."

"Then, if you don't mind," he added, making the most alarming grimace, "pull your skirt down. I can see your ankles."

Nance hurriedly drew up her feet and tucked them under her. "All right now?" she asked, with a faint flush.

"Sorry, my dear," said Hamish Traherne, "but you must remember I'm a lonely monk and ankles as pretty as yours disturb my mind." He glared at her so humorously and benevolently that Nance could not be angry with him. There was something so boyish in his candour that it would have seemed inhuman to take offence.

"I believe I could think better if I had Ricoletto," he cried a moment later, jumping up and leaving the room. Nance took the opportunity of blowing every trace of cigarette-ash from her strawberry plate into the fender. She had hardly done this and demurely tucked herself up again in her chair when Mr. Traherne re-entered the room carrying in his hands a large white rat.

“Beautiful, isn’t he?” he remarked, offering the animal for the girl to stroke. “I love him. He inspires me with all my sermons. He pities the human race, don’t you, Ricoletto? And doesn’t hate a living thing except cats. He has a seraphic temper and no wish to marry. Ankles are nothing to him — are they, Ricoletto? — but he likes potatoes.”

As he spoke the priest brushed aside a heap of papers and laid bare the half-gnawed skin of one of these vegetables.

“Come, darling!” he said, reseating himself in his chair and placing rat and potato-skin together upon his shoulder, “enjoy yourself and give me wisdom to defeat the wiles of all the devils. Devils are cats, Ricoletto darling, great, fluffy, purring cats with eyes as big as saucers.”

Nance quietly went on eating strawberries and thinking to herself how strange it was that with every conceivable anxiety tugging at her heart she could feel such a sense of peace.

“He’s a papistical rat,” remarked Mr. Traherne, “he likes incense.”

Once more he relapsed into profound thought and Ricoletto’s movements made the only sound in the room.

“What you want, my child,” he began at last, while the girl put her plate down on the table and hung upon his words, “is lodgings for yourself and Linda in the village. I know an excellent woman who’d take you in — quite close to Miss Pontifex and not far from our dear Raughty. In fact, she’s the woman who cleans Fingal’s rooms. So that’s all in her favour! Fingal has a genius for getting nice people about him. You like Fingal, Nance, eh? But I know you do, and I know,” and the priest made the most outrageous grimace, “I know he adores *you*. You’re perfectly safe, let me tell you, with

Fingal, my dear; however, he may tease you. He’s a hopeless heathen but he has a heart of gold.”

Nance nodded complete assent to the priest’s words. She smiled, however, to herself to think what a little way this “safety” he spoke of would go if by chance her heart were not so entirely preoccupied. She couldn’t resist the thought of how pathetically like children all these admirable men were, both in their frailties and in their struggles against their frailties. Her sense of peace and security grew upon her, and with this — for she was human — a delicate feeling of feminine power. Mr. Traherne continued —

“Yes, you must take lodgings in the village. Eighteen shillings a week — that was what that Pontifex woman promised you, wasn’t it? — won’t be over much for two of you. But it’ll keep you alive. Wait, though, wait! I don’t see why Linda shouldn’t play for us, up here, on Sundays. I’m always having to go round begging for some one. Often I have to be organist myself as well as priest. Yes — let her try — let her try! It’ll help me to keep an eye on her. It’ll be a distraction for her. Yes, let her try! I could give her a little for doing it — not what she ought to have, of course, but a little, enough to make her feel she was helping you in your housekeeping. Yes,” he clapped his hands together so violently that Ricoletto scrambled up against his collar and clung there with his paws. “Yes, that’s what we’ll do, my dear. We’ll turn your sister into a regular organist. Music’s the best charm in the world to drive away devils, isn’t it, Ricoletto? Better even than white rats.”

Nance looked at him with immense gratitude and, completely forgetting his instructions, altered her position to what it had been before. Mr.

Traherne rose and, turning his back to her, drummed with his fingers on the mantelpiece while Ricoletto struggled desperately to retain his balance.

A queer thought came suddenly into Nance's head and she asked the priest why it was that there were so many unmarried men in Rodmoor. He swung round at that and gave her a most goblinish look, rubbing the rat's nose as he did so, against his cheek.

"You go far, Nance, you go far with your questions. As a matter of fact, I've sometimes asked myself that very thing. You're quite right, you know, perfectly right. It applies to the work-people here as much as to the gentry. We must see what Fingal Raughty says. He'd laugh at my explanation."

"What's your explanation?" enquired the girl.

"A very simple one," returned the priest. "It's the effect of the sea. If you look at the plants which grow here you'll understand better what I mean. But you haven't seen the plant yet which is most of all characteristic of Rodmoor. It'll be out soon and I'll show it to you. The yellow horned poppy! When you see that, Nance, — and it's the devil's own flower, I can assure you! — you'll realize that there's something in this place that tends to the abnormal and the perverse. I don't say that the devil isn't active enough everywhere and I don't say that all married people are exempt from his attacks. But the fact remains that the Rodmoor air has something about it, something that makes it difficult for those who come under its influence to remain quite simple and natural. We should grow insane ourselves — shouldn't we, old rat? shouldn't we, my white beauty? — if it weren't that we had the church to pray in and 'Don Quixote' to read! I don't want to frighten you, Nance, and I pray earnestly that your Adrian will shake off, like King Saul, the devil that troubles him. But Rodmoor isn't the place to come to unless you have a double share of sound nerves, or a bottomless fund of natural goodness — like our friend Fingal Raughty. It’s absurd not to recognize that human beings, like plants and animals, are subject to all manner of physical influences. Nature can be terribly malign in her tricks upon us. She can encourage our tendencies to morbid evil just as she can produce the horned yellow poppy. The only thing for us to do is to hold fast to a power completely beyond Nature which can come in from outside, Nance — from outside! — and change everything.”

While Nance listened to Mr. Traherne’s discourse with a portion of her mind, another part of it reverted to Linda and as soon as he paused she broke in.

“Can’t we do anything, anything at all, to stop Mr. Renshaw from seeing my sister?”

The priest sighed heavily and screwed his face into a hundred grotesque wrinkles.

“I’ll talk to him,” he said. “It’s what I dread doing more than anything on earth, for, to tell you the honest truth, I’m a thorough coward in these things. But I’ll talk to him. I knew you were going to ask me to do that. I knew it directly you came here. I said to myself as soon as I saw you, ‘Hamish, my friend, you’ve got to face that man again,’ but I’ll do it, Nance. I’ll do it. Perhaps not to-day. Yes, I’ll do it to-day. He’ll be up at Oakguard this evening. I’ll go after supper. It’ll be precious little supper I’ll eat, Nance, but I’ll see him, I’ll see him!”

Nance showed her gratitude by giving him her hand and looking tenderly into his eyes. It was Mr. Traherne who first broke the spell and unclasped their fingers.

“You’re a good girl, my dear,” he muttered, “a good girl,” and he led her gently to the door.

XIII. DEPARTURE

After her talk with Mr. Traherne, Nance went straight to the village and visited the available lodging. She found the place quite reasonably adapted to her wishes and met with a genial, though a somewhat surprised reception from the woman of the house. It was arranged that the sisters should come to her that very evening, their more bulky possessions — and these were not, after all, very extensive — to follow them on the ensuing day, as suited the convenience of the local carrier. It remained for her to secure her sister's agreement to this sudden change and to announce their departure to Rachel Doorm. The first of these undertakings proved easier than Nance had dared to hope.

During these morning hours Miss Doorm gave Linda hardly a moment of peace. She persecuted her with questions about the events of the preceding day and betrayed such malignant curiosity as to the progress of the love affair with Brand that she reduced the child to a condition bordering upon hysterical prostration. Linda finally took refuge in her own room under the excuse of changing her dress but even here she was not left alone. Lying on her bed, with loosened hair and wide-open, troubled eyes fixed upon the ceiling, she heard Rachel moving uneasily from room to room below like a revengeful ghost disappointed of its prey. The young girl put her fingers in her ears to keep this sound away. As she did so, her glance wandered to the window through which she could discern heavy dark clouds racing across the sky, pursued by a pitiless wind. She watched these clouds from where she lay and her agitated mind increased the strangeness of their ominous storm-blown shapes. Unable at last to endure the sight of them any longer she leapt to her feet and, with her long bare arms, pulled down the blind. To any one seeing her from outside as she did this she must have appeared like a hunted creature trying to shut out the world. Flinging herself upon her bed again she pressed her fingers once more into her ears. In crossing the room she had heard the heavy steps of her enemy ascending the staircase. Conscious of the vibration of these steps, even while she obliterated the sound they made, the young girl sat up and stared at the door. She could see it shake as the woman, trying the handle, found it locked against her.

Nothing is harder than to keep human ears closed by force when the faculty of human attention is strained to the uttermost. It was not long before she dropped her hands and then in a moment her whole soul concentrated itself upon listening. She heard Miss Doorm move away and walk heavily to the end of the passage. Then there was a long pause of deadly silence and then, tramp — tramp — tramp, she was back again.

“I won’t unlock the door! I won’t! I won’t! I won’t!” muttered the girl, and as if to make certain that her body obeyed her will she stretched herself out stiffly and clutched the iron bars above her head. She lay like this for some minutes, her lips parted, her eyes wildly alert and her breast rising and falling under her bodice.

Once more the door shook and she heard her name pronounced in a low clear-toned voice.

“Linda! Linda!” the voice repeated. “Linda! I must talk to you!”

Unable to endure the tension any longer and finding the dimness of the room more trying than the view of the sky, the girl ran to the window and pulled up the blind as hastily as she had pulled it down. She gazed out, pressing her face against the pane. The clouds, darker and more threatening than ever, followed one another across the heavens like a huge herd of monstrous beasts driven by invisible herdsmen. The Loon swirled and eddied between its banks, its waters a pale brownish colour and here and there, floating on its surface, pieces of seaweed drifted. The vast horizon of fens, stretching away towards Mundham, looked almost black under the sky and the tall pines of Oakguard seemed to bow their heads as if at the approach of some unknown menace.

The door continued to be shaken and the voice of Rachel Doorm never ceased its appeal. Linda went back to her bed and sat down upon it, propping her chin on her hands. There is something about the darkening of a house by day, under the weight of a threatened storm, that has more of what is ominous and evil in it than anything that can occur at night. The "demon that walketh by noonday" draws close to us at these times.

"Linda! Linda! Let me in! I want to speak to you," pleaded the woman. The girl rose to her feet and, rushing to the door, unlocked it quickly. Returning to her bed she threw herself down on her face and remained motionless. Rachel Doorm entered and, seating herself close to Linda's side, laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder.

"Why haven't you got on your frock?" she murmured. "Your arms must be cold as ice. Yes, so they are! Let me help you to dress as I used to in the old days."

Linda drew herself away from her touch and with a convulsive jerk of her body turned over towards the wall.

"It's a pity you didn't think over everything," Miss Doorm went on, "before you began this game with Mr. Renshaw. It's begun to hurt you now, hasn't it? Then why don't you stop? Tell me that, Linda Herrick. Why don't you stop and refuse to see him any more? What? You won't answer me? I'll answer for you then. You don't stop now, you don't draw back now, because you can't! He's got hold of you. You feel him even now — don't you — tugging at your heart? Yes, you're caught, my pretty bird, you're caught. No more tossing up of your little chin and throwing back your head! No more teasing this one and that with your dainty ways — while you whistle them all down the wind. It's you — you — that has to come now when some one else calls, and come quickly, too, wherever you may have run! How do you know he doesn't want you now? How do you know he's not waiting for you now over there by the pines? Take care, my girl! Mr. Renshaw isn't a man you can play with, as you played with those boys in London. It'll be you who'll do the whining and crying this time. The day's near when you'll be on your knees to him begging and begging for what you'll never get! Did you think that a chit of a child like you, just because you've got soft hair and white skin, could keep and hold a man like that?

"Don't say afterwards that Rachel Doorm hadn't warned you. I say to you now, give him up, let him go, hide yourself away from him! I say that — but I know very well you won't do what I say. And you won't do it because you can't do it, because he's got your little heart and your little body and your little soul in the palm of his hand! I can tell you what that means. I know why you press your hands against your breast and turn to the wall. I've done that in my time and turned and tossed, long nights, and got no comfort. And you'll turn and toss, too, and call and call to the darkness and get no answer — just as I got none. Why don't you leave him now, Linda, before it's too late? Shall I tell you why you don't? Because it's too late already! Because he's got you for good and all — got you forever and a day — just as some one, no matter who, got Rachel once upon a time!"

Her voice was interrupted by a sudden splashing of rain against the window and the loud moaning gust of a tremendous wind making all the casements of the house rattle.

"Where's Nance?" cried the young girl, starting up and leaping from the bed. "I want Nance! I want to tell her something!"

At that moment there were voices below and the sound of a vehicle driven to the rear of the house. Miss Doorm left the room and ran down the stairs. Linda flung on the first dress that offered itself and going to the mirror began hastily tying up her hair. She had hardly finished when her sister entered. Nance stood on the threshold for a moment hesitating, and looking anxiously at the other. It was Linda who made the first movement.

"Take me away from here," she gasped, flinging herself into her sister's arms and embracing her passionately, "take me away from here!"

Nance returned the embrace with ardour but her thoughts whirled a mad dance through her brain. She had a momentary temptation to reveal at once her new plan and let her sister's cry have no other answer. But her nobler instinct conquered.

"At once, at once! My darling," she murmured. "Yes, oh, yes, let's go at once! I've got some money and Mr. Traherne will send me some more. We'll take the three o'clock train and be safe back in London before night. Oh, my darling, my darling! I'm so glad! We'll begin a new life together — a new life."

At the mention of the word "London" Linda's arms relaxed their hold and her whole body stiffened.

"No," she gasped, pushing her sister away and pressing her hand to her side, "no, Nance dear, I can't do it. It would kill me. I should run away from you and come back here if I had to walk the whole way. I won't see him. I won't! I won't! I won't talk to him — I won't let him love me — but I can't go away from here. I can't go back to London. I should get ill and die. I should want him so much that I should die. No, no, Nance darling, if you dragged me by force to London I should come back the next day somehow or another. I know I should — I feel it *here* — as she said."

She kept her hand still pressed against her side and gazed into Nance's face with a look of helpless pleading.

"We can find somewhere to live, you and I, without going far away, somewhere where we shan't see *her* any more — can't we, Nance?"

It was then, and with a clear conscience now, that the elder girl, speaking hurriedly and softly, communicated the preparations she had made and the fact that they were free to leave Dyke House at any moment they chose.

"I've asked the man to put up the horse here for the afternoon," she said, "so that we shall have time to collect the things we want. They'll send for our trunks to-morrow."

Linda's relief at hearing this news was pathetic to see.

"Oh, you darling — you darling!" she cried, "I might have known you'd save me. I might have known it! Oh, Nance dear, it was horrid of me to say those things to you yesterday. I'll be good now and do whatever you tell me. As long as I'm not far away from *him* — not too far — I won't see him, or speak to him, or write to him! How sweet of Mr. Traherne to let me play the organ! And he'll pay me, too, you say? So that I shall be helping you and not only be a burden? Oh, my dear, what happiness, what happiness!"

Nance left her and descended to the kitchen to help Miss Doorm prepare their midday meal. The two women, as they busied themselves at their task, avoided any reference to the issue between them, and Nance wondered if the man from the Admiral's Head, who now sat watching their preparations and speculating whether they intended to give him beer as well as meat, had intimated to Rachel the object of his delayed departure. When the meal was ready, Linda was summoned to share it and the thirsty ostler, sipping lemonade with a wry countenance, at a side table, was given the privilege of hearing how three feminine persons, their heads full of agitation and antipathy, could talk and laugh and eat as if everything in the wide world was smooth, safe, harmless and uninteresting.

When the meal was over Nance and Linda once more retired to their room and busied themselves with selecting from their modest possessions such articles as they considered it advisable to take with them. The rest they carefully packed away in their two leather trunks — trunks which bore the initials "N. H." and "L. H." and still had glued to their sides railway labels with the word "Swanage" upon them, reminiscent of their last seaside excursion with their father.

The afternoon slipped rapidly away and still the threatened storm hung suspended, the rain coming and going in fitful gusts of wind and the clouds racing along the sky. By six o'clock it became so dark that Nance was compelled to light candles. Their packing had been interrupted by eager low-voiced consultation as to how they would arrange their days when these were, for the first time in their lives, completely at their own disposal. No further reference had been made between them, either to Adrian or to Mr. Renshaw. The candles, flickering in the gusty wind, threw intermittent spots of light upon the girls' figures as they stooped over their work or bent forward, on their knees, whispering and laughing. Not since either of them had arrived in Rodmoor had they been quite so happy. The relief at escaping from Dyke House lifted the atmosphere about them so materially that while they spoke of their lodging in the High Street and of the virtues of Mrs. Raps, Nance began to feel that Adrian would, after all, soon grow weary of Philippa and Linda began to dream that, in spite of all appearances, Brand's attitude towards her was worthy of a man of honour.

At six o'clock they were ready and Nance went down to announce their departure to Rachel Doorm. She found their driver asleep by the kitchen fire and, having roused him and told him to put his horse into the trap, she went out to look for her mother's friend.

She found Rachel standing on the tow path gazing gloomily at the river. She was bareheaded and the wind, wailing round her, fluttered a wisp of her grey hair against her forehead. Beneath this her sunken eyes seemed devoid of all light. She turned when she heard Nance's step, her heavy skirt flapping in the wind as she did so, like a funereal flag.

"I see," she said, pointing at the light in the sisters' room where the figure of Linda could be observed passing and repassing, "I see you're taking her away. I suppose it's because of Mr. Renshaw. May I ask — if it's of any interest to you that I should care at all — what you're going to do with her? She's been — she and her mother — the curse of *my* life, and I fancy she's now going to be the curse of yours."

Nance wrapped herself more tightly in a cloak she had picked up as she came out and looked unflinchingly into the woman's haggard face.

"Yes, we're going away — both of us," she said. "We're going to the village."

"To live on air and sea-water?" inquired the other bitterly.

"No," rejoined Nance gently, "to live in lodgings and to work for our living. I've got a place already at the Pontifex shop and Mr. Traherne's going to pay Linda for playing the organ. It'll be better like that. I couldn't let her go on here after what happened yesterday."

Her voice trembled but she continued to look Miss Doorm straight in the face.

"You were away on purpose yesterday, Rachel," she said gravely, "so that those two might be together. It was only some scruple, or fear, on Mr. Renshaw's part that stopped him meeting her in the house. How often this has happened before — his seeing her like this — I don't know, and I don't want to know — I only pray to God that no harm's been done. If it *has* been done, the child's ruin's on *our* head. I cannot understand you, Rachel, I cannot understand you."

Miss Doorm's haggard mouth opened as if to utter a cry but she breathed deeply and restrained it. Her gaunt fingers twined and untwined themselves and the wind, blowing at her skirt, displayed the tops of her old-fashioned boots with their worn, elastic sides.

"So she's separated us, has she?" she hissed. "I thought she would. She was born for that. And it's nothing to you that I've nursed you and cared for you and planned for you since you were a baby? Nothing! Nothing at all! She comes between us now as her mother came before. I knew it would happen so! I knew it would! She's just like her mother — soft and clinging — soft and white — and this is the end of it."

Her voice changed to a low, almost frightened tone.

"Do you realize that her mother comes to me every night and sits looking at me with her great eyes just as she used to do when Linda had been rude to me in the old days? Do you realize that she walks backwards and forwards outside my door when I've driven her away? Do you realize that when I go to bed I find her there, waiting for me, white and soft and clinging?"

Her voice rose to a kind of moan and the wind carried it across the empty road and tossed it over the fields.

"And she speaks, too, Nance. She says things to me, soft, clinging, crying things that drive me distracted. One day, she told me *that* only last night, one day she's going to kiss me and never let me go — going to kiss me with soft, pleading, terrified lips through all eternity, kiss me just as she did once when Linda lost my beads. You remember my beads, Nance? Real jade, they were, with funny red streaks. I often see them round her neck. They'll be round her neck when she kisses me, jade, you know, my dear, with red streaks. I shall see nothing else then, nothing else while we lie buried together!"

She lowered her voice to a whisper.

"It was the Captain who brought them. He brought them over far seas. He brought them for me, do you hear — for me! But they're always round her neck now, after that day."

Nance listened to this wild outburst with a set stern face. She had always suspected that there was something desperate and morbid about Rachel's attachment to her father but never, until this moment, had she dreamed how far the thing went. She looked at the woman's face now and sighed and with that sigh she flung to the blowing wind the covenant between herself and her own mother. All the girl's natural sanity and sense of proportion were awake now and she stiffened her nerves and hardened her heart for what she had to do.

"Between a vow to the dead," she thought, "and the safety of the living, there can be only one choice for me."

"So you're going away," began Miss Doorm again. "Well, go, my dear, go and leave me! I shan't trouble the earth much longer after you're gone."

She turned her face to the river and remained motionless, watching the flowing water. The heavy weight of the threatening storm, the storm that seemed as though some powerful earth-god, with uplifted hand, were holding back its descent, had destroyed all natural and normal daylight without actually plunging the world into darkness. A strange greenish-coloured shadow, like the shadow of water seen through water, hung over the trees of the park and the opposite bank of the river. The same greenish shadow, only touched there with something darker and more mysterious, brooded over the far fens out of which, in the remote distance, a sort of reddish exhalation indicated the locality of the Mundham factories. The waters of the Loon — as Rachel and Nance looked at them now — had a dull whitish gleam, like the gleam of a dead fish's eye. The sense of thunder in the air, though no sound of it had yet been heard, seemed to evoke a kind of frightened expectancy. The smaller birds had been reduced to absolute stillness, their twitterings hushed as if under the weight of a pall. Only a solitary plover's scream, at rare intervals, went whirling by on the wind.

"Come back, come in, will you?" said Nance at last, "and say good-bye to us, Rachel. I shall come and see you, of course. We shall not be far away."

She stretched out her hand to help her down the slope of the embankment. Rachel made no response to this overture but followed her in silence. No sooner, however, had they entered the garden and closed the little gate behind them, than the woman fell on her knees on the ground and caught the girl round the waist.

"Nance, my treasure!" she cried pitifully, "Nance, my heart's baby! Nance, oh, Nance, you won't leave me like this after all these years? No, I won't let you go! Nance, you can't mean it? You can't really mean it?"

The wind, blowing in gusts about them, made the gate behind them swing open on its hinges. Rachel's dishevelled tress of grey hair flapped like a tattered piece of rag against the girl's side.

"Look," the woman wailed, "I pray you on my knees not to desert me! You don't know what you're doing to me. You don't, Nance, you don't! It's all my life you're taking. Oh, my darling, won't you have pity? You're the only thing I've got — the only thing I love. Nance, Nance, have pity on me!"

Nance, with tears in her eyes but her face still firm and hard-set, tried to free herself from the hands that held her. She tried gently and tenderly at first but Rachel's despair made the attempt difficult. Then she realized that this appalling tension must be brought at all costs to an end. With a sudden, relentless jerk, she tore herself away and rushed towards the house. Rachel fell forward on her face, her hands clutching the damp mould. Then she staggered up and raised her hand towards the lighted window above at which Linda's figure was clearly visible.

"It's you — it's you," she called aloud, "it's you who've done this — who've turned my heart's darling against me, and may you be cursed for it! May your love turn to poison and eat your white flesh! May your soul pray and pray for comfort and find none! Never — never — never — find any! Oh, you may well hide yourself! But *he* will find you. Brand will find you and make you pay for this! Brand and the sea will find you. Listen! Do you hear me? Listen! It's crying out for you now!"

Whether it was the sudden cessation of her voice, intensifying the stillness, or a slight veering of the wind to the eastward, it is certain that at that moment, above the noise of the creaking gate and the rustling bushes, came the sound which, of all others, seemed the expression of Rodmoor's troubled soul. Linda herself may not have heard it for at that moment she was feverishly helping Nance to pile up their belongings in the cart. But the driver of their vehicle heard it.

"The wind's changing," he remarked. "Can you hear that? That's the darned sea!"

The trap carrying the two sisters was already some distance along the road when Nance turned her head and looked back. They had blown out their candles before leaving and the kitchen fire had died down so that there was no reason to be surprised that no light shone from any of the windows. Yet it was with a cold sinking of the heart that the girl leaned forward once more by the driver’s side. She could not help seeing in imagination a broken figure stumbling round the walls of that dark house, or perhaps even now standing in their dismantled room alone amid emptiness and silence, alone amid the ghosts of the past.

XIV. BRAND RENSHAW

WHILE THE SISTERS were taking possession of their new abode and trying to eat — though neither had much appetite — the supper provided for them by Mrs. Raps, Hamish Traherne, his cassock protected from the threatening storm by a heavy ulster, was making his promised effort to "talk" with the master of Oakguard. Impelled by an instinct he could not resist, perhaps with a vague notion that the creature's presence would sustain his courage, he carried, curled up in an inside pocket of his cloak, his darling Ricoletto. The rat's appetite had been unusually good that evening and it now slept peacefully in its warm nest, oblivious of the beating heart of its master. Carrying his familiar oak stick in his hand and looking to all appearance quite as formidable as any highwayman the priest made his way through the sombre avenue of gnarled and weather-beaten trees that led to the Renshaw mansion. He rang the bell with an impetuous violence, the violence of a visitor whose internal trepidation mocks his exterior resolution. To his annoyance and surprise he learnt that Mr. Renshaw was spending the evening with Mr. Stork down in the village. He asked to be allowed to see Mrs. Renshaw, feeling in some obscure way suspicious of the servant's statement and unwilling to give up his enterprise at the first rebuff. The lady came out at once into the hall.

"Come in, come in, Mr. Traherne," she said, quite eagerly. "I suppose you've already dined but you can have dessert with us. Philippa always sits long over dessert. She likes eating fruit better than anything else. She's eating gooseberries to-night."

Mrs. Renshaw always had a way of detaching herself from her daughter and speaking of her as if she were a strange and somewhat menacing animal with whom destiny had compelled her to live. But the priest refused to remove his ulster. The interest of seeing Philippa eat gooseberries was not strong enough to interrupt his purpose.

"Your son won't be home till late, I'm afraid?" he said. "I particularly — yes, particularly — wanted to see him to-night. I understand he's at the cottage."

"Wait a minute," cried the lady in her hurried, low-voiced tone. "Sit down here, won't you? I'll just — I'll just see Philippa."

She returned to the dining-room and the priest sat down and waited. Presently she came hurrying back carrying in her hands a plate upon which was a bunch of grapes.

"These are for you," she said. "Philippa won't touch them. There! Let me choose you out some nice ones."

The servant had followed her and now stood like a pompous and embarrassed policeman uncertain of his duty. It seemed to give Mrs. Renshaw some kind of inscrutable satisfaction to cause this embarrassment. She sat down beside the priest and handed him the grapes, one by one, as if he were a child.

"Brand orders these from London," she remarked, "that's why we get them now. I call it extravagance, but he *will* do it." She sighed heavily. "Philippa," she repeated, "prefers garden fruit so you mustn't mind eating them. They'll get bad if they're not eaten."

The servant hastened on tip-toe to the dining-room door, peered in, and returned to his post. He looked for all the world, thought Mr. Traherne, like a ruffled and disconsolate heron. "He'll stand on one leg soon," he said to himself.

"When do you expect your son home?" he enquired again. "Perhaps I might call at the cottage and walk back with him."

"Yes, do!" Mrs. Renshaw cried with unexpected eagerness. "Do call at the cottage. It'll be nice for you to join them. They'll all be there — Mr. Sorio and the Doctor and Brand. Yes, do go in! It'll be a relief to me to think of you with them. I'm sometimes afraid that cousin Tassar encourages dear Brand to drink too much of that stuff he likes to make. They will put spirits into it. I'm always telling them that lime juice would be just as nice. Yes, do go, Mr. Traherne, and insist on having lime juice!"

The priest looked at the lady, looked at the servant and looked at the hall door. He felt a faint scratching going on inside his cloak. Ricoletto was beginning to wake up.

"Well, I'll go!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet.

At that moment the figure of Philippa, exquisitely dressed in a dark crimson gown, emerged from the dining-room. She advanced slowly towards them with more than her usual air of dramatic reserve. Mr. Traherne noticed that her lips were even redder than her dress. Her eyes looked dark and tired but they shone with a mischievous menace. She held out her hand sedately and as he took it, fumbling with his ulster, "I hope you enjoyed your grapes," she said.

"You ought to apologize to Mr. Traherne for appearing before him at all in that wild costume," remarked Mrs. Renshaw. "You wouldn't think she'd been at the dentist's all day, would you? She looks as if she were in a grand London house, doesn't she, just waiting to go to a ball?"

"Yes, at the dentist's," Mrs. Renshaw went on, speaking quite loudly, "at the dentist's in Mundham. She's got an abscess under one of her teeth. It kept her awake in the night. I think your face is still a little swollen, dear, isn't it? She oughtn't to stand in this cold hall, ought she, Mr. Traherne?

And with so much of her neck exposed. It was quite a large abscess. Let me look, dear." She moved towards her daughter, who drew hastily back.

"She won't let me look at it," she added plaintively. "She never would, not even when she was a child."

Hamish, fumbling with his fingers inside his ulster, made a grotesque grimace of sympathy and once more intimated his desire to say good-night. He discerned in the look the girl had now fixed upon her mother an expression which indicated how little sympathy there was between them. It was nearly half past nine when he reached Rodmoor and knocked at Baltazar's door. There was some sort of village revel going on inside the tavern and the sound of this blended, in intermittent bursts of uproar, with the voices from Stork's little sitting-room. Both wind and rain had subsided and the thunder-feeling in the air had grown less oppressive.

Traherne found himself, as he had been warned, in the presence of Raughty, Sorio and Brand. Ushered in by the urbane Baltazar he greeted them all with a humorous and benignant smile and took, willingly enough, a cup of the admirable wine which they were drinking. They all seemed, except their host himself, a little excited by what they had imbibed and the priest observed that several other bottles waited the moment of uncorking. Dr. Raughty alone appeared seriously troubled at the new-comer's entrance. He coughed several times, as was his habit when disconcerted, and glanced anxiously at the others.

Sorio, it seemed, was in the midst of some sort of diatribe, and as soon as they had resumed their seats he made no scruple about continuing it.

"It's all an illusion," he exclaimed, looking at Mr. Traherne as if he defied him to contradict his words, "it's all an absolute illusion that women are more subtle than men. The idea of their being so is simply due to the fact that they act on impulse instead of by reason. Any one who acts on impulse appears subtle if his impulses vary sufficiently! Women are extraordinarily simple. What gives them the appearance of subtlety is that they never know what particular impulse they're going to have next. So they just lie back on themselves and wait till it comes. They're eminently *physiological*, too, in their reactions. Am I not right there, Doctor? They're more entirely material than we are," he went on, draining his glass with a vicious gulp, "they're simply soaked and drenched in matter. They're not really completely or humanly *conscious*. Matter still holds them, still clings to them, still drowns them. That is why the poets represent Nature as a woman. The sentimental writers always speak of women as so responsive, so porous, to the power of Nature. They put it down to their superior sensitiveness. It isn't their sensitiveness at all! It's their element. Of course they're porous to it. They're part of it! They've never emerged from it. It flows round them like waves round seaweed. Take this question of drink — of this delicious wine we're drinking! No woman who ever lived could understand the pleasure we're enjoying now — a pleasure almost purely intellectual. They think, in their absurd little heads, that all we get out of it is the mere sensation of putting hot stuff or sweet stuff or intoxicating stuff into our mouths. They haven't the remotest idea that, as we sit in this way together, we enter the company of all great and noble souls, philosophizing upon the nature of the gods and sharing their quintessential happiness! They think we're simply sensual beasts — as they are themselves, the greedy little devils! — when they eat pastry and suck sugar-candy at the confectioner's. No woman yet understood, or ever will, the sublime detachment from life, the victory over life, which an honest company of sensible and self-respecting friends enjoy when they drink, serenely and quietly, a wine as rare, as well chosen, as harmless as this! Women hate to think of the happiness we're enjoying now. I know perfectly well that every one of the women who are connected with us at this moment — and that only applies," he added with a smile, "to Mr. Renshaw and myself — would suffer real misery to see us at this moment. It's an instinct and from *their* point of view they're justified fully enough.

"Wine separates us from Nature. It frees us from sex. It sets us among the gods. It destroys — yes! — that's what it does, it destroys our physiological fatality. With wine like this," he raised his glass above his head, "we are no longer the slaves of our senses and consequently the slaves of matter. We have freed ourselves from matter. We have *destroyed* matter!"

"I'm not quite sure," said Doctor Raughty, going carefully to the fireplace where, on the fender, he had deposited for later consumption, a saucer of brandied cherries, "I am not sure whether you're right about wine obliterating sex. I've seen quite plain females, in my time, appear like so many Ninons and Thaises when one's a bit shaky. Of course I know they may appear so," he went on patiently and assiduously letting every drop of juice evaporate from the skin of the cherry he held between his fingers before placing it in his mouth, "appear desirable wenches, I mean, without our having any inclination to meddle with them but the impulse is the same. At least," he added modestly, "their being there does not detract from the pleasure."

He paused and, with his head bent down over his cherries, became absolutely oblivious to everything else in the world. What he was trying now was the delicate experiment of dipping the fruit, dried by being waved to and fro in the air, in the wine-glass at his side. As he achieved this end, his cheeks flushed and nervous spasmodic quiverings twitched his expressive nostrils.

"I am inclined to agree with the Doctor," said Brand Renshaw. "It seems mere monkish nonsense to me to separate things that were so obviously meant to go together. I like drinking while girls dance for me. I like them to dance on and on, and on and on till they're tired out and then—" He was interrupted by a sudden crash which made all the glasses ring and ting. Mr. Traherne had brought down his fist heavily upon the rosewood table.

"What you people are forgetting," shouted the priest, "is that God is not dead. No! He's not dead, even in Rodmoor. Nature, girls, wine, rats, — are all shadows in flickering water. Only one thing's eternal and that is a pure and loving heart!"

There was a general and embarrassed hush after this and the priest looked round at the four men with a sort of wistful bewilderment. Then an expression of indescribable sweetness came into his face.

"Forgive me, children," he muttered, pressing his hand to his forehead. "I didn't mean to be violent. Baltazar, you must have filled my glass too quickly. No, no! I mustn't touch a drop more."

Stork leaned forward towards him.

"We understand," he said. "We understand perfectly. You felt we were going a little too far. And so we were! These discourses about the mystery of wine and the secret of women always betray one into absurdity. Adrian ought to have known better than to begin such a thing."

"It was my fault," repeated Mr. Traherne humbly. "If you'll excuse me I'll get something out of my pocket."

He rose and went into the passage. Brand Renshaw shrugged his shoulders and lifted his glass to his lips.

"I believe it's his rat," whispered Dr. Raughty softly. "He lives too much alone."

The priest returned with Ricoletto in his hand and resuming his seat stroked the animal dreamily. Baltazar looked from one to another of his guests and his delicate features assumed a curious expression, an expression as though he isolated himself from them all and washed his hands of them all.

"Traherne refers to God," he began in a flutelike tone, "and it's no more than what he has a right to do. But I should be in a sorry position myself if my only escape from the nuisance of women was to drag in Eternity. Our dear Adrian, whose head is always full of some girl or another, fancies he can get out of it by drink. Brand here doesn't want to get out of it. He wants to play the Sultan. Raughty — we know what an amorous fellow *you* are, Doctor! — has his own fantastic way of drifting in and out of the dangerous waters. I alone, of all of you, have the true key to escape. For, between ourselves, my dears, we know well enough that God and Eternity are just Hamish's innocent illusion."

The priest seemed quite deaf to this last remark but Brand turned his hatchet-shaped head towards the speaker.

"Shut up, Tassar," he muttered harshly, "you'll start him again."

"What do you mean?" cried Sorio. "Go on! Go on and tell us what you mean."

"Wait one moment," intervened Dr. Raughty, "talk of something else for one moment. I must cool my head."

He put down his pipe by the side of his saucer of cherries, arranging it with exquisite care so that its stem was higher than its bowl. Lifting his chair, he placed it at a precise angle to the table, returning twice to add further little touches to it before he was half-way to the door. Finally, laying down his tobacco pouch, lightly as a feather upon the seat of the chair, he rushed out of the room and up the stairs.

"When the Doctor gets into the bathroom," remarked Brand, "we may as well put him out of our minds. The last time he dined with me at Oakguard he nearly flooded the house."

Mr. Traherne pressed his rat to his cheek and grinned like a satyr.

"None of you people understand Fingal," he burst out, "it's his way of praying. Yes, I mean it! It's his way of saying his prayers. He does it just as Ricoletto does. It's ritual with him. I understand it perfectly."

The conversation at this point seemed to have a peculiarly irritating effect upon Sorio. He fidgeted and looked about him uneasily. Presently he made an extraordinary gesture with one of his hands, opening it, extending the fingers stiffly back and then closing it again. Baltazar, watching him closely, remarked at last, "What's on your mind now, Adriano? Any new obsession?"

They all looked at the Italian. His heavy "Roman-Emperor" face quivered through all its muscles.

"It's not ritual," he muttered gloomily, "you'd better not ask me what it is, for I *know*!"

Brand Renshaw smiled a cruel smile.

"He means that it's *madness*," he remarked carelessly, "and I dare say he's quite right."

"Fingal Raughty's not mad," protested Mr. Traherne, "I tell you he bathes himself just as my rat does — to praise God and purge his sins!"

"I wasn't thinking about the Doctor," said Brand quietly, the same cruel gleam in his eyes. "Mr. Sorio knows what I meant."

The Italian made a movement as if he were about to leap upon him and strike him, but the reappearance of Fingal, his cheeks shining and his face softly irradiated, distracted the general attention.

"You'd begun to tell us, Stork," said the Doctor, "what *your* escape is from the sting of sensuality. You wipe out, altogether, you say, God and

Eternity?”

Baltazar’s feminine features hardened as if under a thin mask of enamel. Brand shot a malignant glance at him.

“I can answer that,” he said, with venomous bitterness. “Tassar thinks himself an artist, you know. He despises the whole lot of us as numbskulls and Philistines. He’ll tell you that art’s the great thing and that critics of art know much more about it than the damned fools who do it, all there is to be known, in fact.”

Baltazar’s expression as he listened to his half-brother’s speech was a palimpsest of conflicting emotions. The look that predominated, however, was the look of a woman under the lash, waiting her hour. He smiled lightly enough and gesticulated with his delicate hand.

“We all have our secret,” he declared gaily. “Brand thinks he knows mine but he’s as far from knowing it as that new moon over there is from knowing the secret of the tide.”

His words caused them to glance at the window. The clouds had vanished and the thin ghostly crescent peered at them from between the curtains.

“The tide obeys it,” he added significantly, “but it keeps its own counsel.”

“And it has,” put in Sorio fiercely, “depths below depths which it were better for no corpse-world to interfere with!”

Dr. Raughty, who had cleared his throat uneasily several times during the last few moments, now called the attention of the company to a scorched moth which, hurt by one of the candles, lay shuddering upon the edge of the table.

“Hasn’t it exquisite markings?” he said, touching the creature with the tip of his forefinger, and bending forward over it like a lover. “It’s a puss-moth! I wish I had my killing-bottle here. I’d keep it for Horace Pod.”

Sorio suddenly leapt from his seat and made a snatch at the moth.

“Shame!” he cried, addressing indiscriminately the Doctor, Horace Pod and the universe. “Poor little thing!” he added, seizing it in his fist and carrying it to the window. When, with some difficulty and many muttered imprecations he had flung it out, “it tickled me,” he remarked gravely. “Moths flutter so in your hand.”

“Most things flutter,” remarked Brand, “when you try to get rid of them. Some of them,” he added in a significant tone, “don’t confine themselves to fluttering.”

The incident of the moth seemed to break up, more than any of the preceding interruptions, the harmony of the evening. Dr. Raughty, looking nervously at Sorio and replacing his pipe in his pocket, announced that he intended to depart. Brand Renshaw rose too and with him, Mr. Traherne.

“May I walk with you a little way?” said the priest.

The master of Oakguard stared at him blankly.

“Of course, of course,” he replied, “but I’m afraid it’ll take you out of your road.”

It was some time before they got clear of the house as Baltazar with a thousand delicate attentions to each of them and all manner of lively speeches, did his best, in the stir of their separation, to smooth over and obliterate from their minds the various little shocks that had ruffled his entertainment. They got away, however, at last and Brand and the priest, bidding the rest good night, took the road to the park. The sky as they entered the park gates was clear and starry and the dark trees of the avenue up which they walked, rose beside them in immovable stillness.

Mr. Traherne, putting his hand into the pocket of his ulster to derive courage from contact with his pet, plunged without preamble into the heart of the perilous subject.

“You may not know, Renshaw,” he said, “that Miss Herrick and her sister are leaving Dyke House and are going to live in the village. Nance has got work at Miss Pontifex’ and Linda is going to play the organ regularly for me. I believe there’s been something — lately” — he hesitated and his voice shook a little but, recovering himself with a tremendous effort, “something,” he went on, “between Linda and yourself. Now, of course, in any other case I should be very reluctant to say anything. Interference in these things is usually both impertinent and useless. But this case is quite different. The girl is a young girl. She has no parents. Her sister is herself quite young and they are both, in a sense, dependent on me as the priest of this place for all the protection I can give. I feel responsible for these girls, Renshaw, responsible for them, and no feelings of a personal kind with regard to any one,” here he squeezed Ricoletto so tightly that the rat emitted a frightened little squeal, “shall interfere with what I feel is my duty. No, hear me out, hear me out, Renshaw!” he continued hurriedly, as his companion began to speak. “The matter is one about which we need not mind being quite open. I want you, in fact, to promise me — to promise me on your word of honour — that you’ll leave this child alone. I don’t know how far things have gone between you. I can’t imagine, it would be shameful to imagine, that it has gone beyond a flirtation. But whatever it has been, it must stop now. It’s only your word of honour I want, nothing but your word of honour, and I can’t believe you’ll hesitate, as a gentleman, to give me that. You’ll give me that, won’t you, Renshaw? Just say yes and the matter’s closed.”

He removed his hand from his pocket and laid it on his companion's wrist. Brand was sufficiently cool at that moment to remark as an interesting fact that the priest was trembling. Not only was he trembling but as he removed his hat to give further solemnity to his appeal, large drops of perspiration, known only to himself, for darkness dimmed his face, trickled down into his eyes. Brand quietly freed himself and moved back a step.

"I'm not in the least surprised," he said, "at your speaking to me like this, and strange as it may seem it does not annoy me. In fact it pleases me. I like it. It raises the value of the girl — of Linda, I mean — and it makes me respect you. But if you imagine, my good Mr. Traherne, that I'm going to make any such promise as you describe, you can have no more notion of what I'm like than you have of what Linda's like. Talk to *her*, Hamish Traherne, talk to her, and see what she says!"

The priest clenched his fingers round the handle of his oak stick. He felt rising in him a tide of natural human anger. Mentally he prayed to his God that he might retain his self-control and not make matters worse by violence.

"If it interests you to know," Brand continued, "I may tell you that it's quite possible I shall marry Linda. She attracts me, I confess it freely, more than I could possibly explain to you or to any one. I presume you wouldn't carry your responsibility so far as to make trouble about my marrying her, eh? But that's nothing. That's neither here nor there. Married or unmarried, I do what I please. Do I convey my meaning sufficiently clearly? I — do — what — I — please. Let that be your clue henceforth, Mr. Hamish Traherne, and the clue of everybody else in Rodmoor, in dealing with me. Listen to me, sir. I do you the honour of talking more openly to you to-night than I'm ever likely to talk again. Perhaps you have the idea that I'm a mere commonplace sensualist, snatching at every animal pleasure that comes my way? Perhaps you fancy I've a vicious — what do you call it?— 'penchant' — for the seduction of young girls? Let me tell you this, Mr. Hamish, a thing that may somewhat surprise you. I've walked these woods till I know every scent in them by night and day — do you catch that fungus-smell now? That's one of the smells I love best of all! — and in these walks, absolutely alone, — I love being alone! — I've faced possibilities of evil — faced them and resisted them, mind you! — compared with which these mere normal sexual lapses we're talking about are silly child's play! Linda does me good. Do you hear? She does me good. She saves me from things that never in your wildest dreams you'd suppose any one capable of. Oh, you priests! You priests! You shut yourselves up among your crucifixes and your little books, and meanwhile — beyond your furthest imagination — the great tides of evil sweep backwards and forwards! Listen! I needn't tell you what that sound is? Yes — you can hear it. In every part of this place you can hear it! I was born to that tune, Traherne, and I shall die to that tune. It's better than rustling leaves, isn't it? It's deeper. It's the kind of music a man might have in his head when doing something compared with which such little sins as you're blaming me for are virtues! Did you see that bat? I've watched them under these trees from midnight to morning. A bat in the light of dawn is a curious thing to see. Do you like bats, Mr. Traherne, or do you confine yourself to rats?

"Bah! I'm talking like an idiot. But what I want you to understand is this. When you're dealing with me, you are dealing with some one who's lost the power of being frightened by words, some one who's broken the world's crust and peeped behind it, some one who's seen the black pools — did you guess there were black pools in this world? — and has seen the red stains in them and who knows what caused those stains! Damn it all — Hamish Traherne — what did you take me for when you talked to me like that? A common, sensual pig? A vulgar seducer of children? A fellow to be frightened back into the fold by talk of honour and the manners of gentlemen? I tell you *I've seen bats in the dawn* — and seen them too, with images in my memory that only *that sound* — do you hear it still? — could equal for horror.

"It's because Linda knows the horror of the sea that I love her. I love to lead her to it, to feel her draw back and not to let her draw back! And she loves me *for the same reason*! That's a fact, Mr. Hamish, that may be hard for you to realize. Linda and I understand each other. Do you hear that, you lover of rats? We understand each other. She does me good. She distracts me. She keeps those black pools out of my mind. She keeps Philippa's eyes from following me about. She takes the taste of funguses out of my mouth. She suits me, I tell you! She's what I need. She's what I need and must have!

"Bah! I'm chattering like an idiot. I must be drunk. I *am* drunk. But that's nothing. That's one of the vices that are *my* virtues. I'll tell you another thing, while I'm about it, Hamish Traherne. You've wondered sometimes, I expect, why I'm so good to Baltazar. Quite Christian of me, you've thought it, eh? Quite noble and Christian — considering what he is and what I am? That just shows how little you know us, how little you know either of us! Tassar can no more get away from me than I can get away from him. We're bound together for life, my boy, bound together by what those black pools mean and what *that sound* — you wouldn't think you could hear it here, would you? — never stops meaning.

"Bah! I'm drunk as a pig to-night! I've not talked like this to any one, not for years. Listen, Traherne! You have an ugly face but you're not a fool. Wasn't it Saint Augustine who said once that evil was a mere rent in the cloak of goodness? The simple innocent! I tell you, evil goes down to the bottom of life and out beyond! I know that, for I've gone with it. *I've seen the bats in the dawn.*

"Yes, Tassar's gone far, Hamish Traherne, farther than you guess. Sometimes I think he's gone farther than *I* guess. *He* never talks, you know. You'll never catch *him* drunk. Tassar could look the devil in the face, and worse, and keep his pretty head cool! — Oh, damn it all, Traherne, it's not easy for a person never to open his mouth! But Tassar's got the secret of that. He must get it from my father. There was a man for you! You wouldn't have dared to talk to him like this."

Several times during this long outburst, Mr. Traherne's fingers had caused pain to Ricoletto. But now he flung out his long arms and clutched Brand fiercely by the shoulders.

"Pray — you poor lost soul," he shouted, "pray the great God above us to have mercy upon you and have mercy upon us all!"

His arms trembled as he uttered these words and, hardly conscious of what he was doing, he shook the heavy frame of the man before him backwards and forwards as if he had been a child in his hands. There was dead silence for several seconds and, unheeded by either of them, a weasel ran furtively across the path and disappeared among the trees. The damp odours of moss and leaf-mould rose up around them and, between the motionless branches above, the stars shone like pin-pricks through black parchment. Suddenly Brand broke away with a harsh laugh.

"Enough of this!" he cried. "We've had enough melodramatic nonsense for one night. You'd better go back to bed, Traherne, or you'll be oversleeping yourself to-morrow and my mother will miss her matins."

He held out his hand.

"Good night! — and sleep soundly!" he added, in his accustomed dull, sarcastic tone.

The priest sighed heavily and groped about on the ground for the hat he had dropped. Just as he had secured it and was moving off, Brand called out to him laughingly,

“Don’t you believe a word of what I said just now. I’m not drunk at all. I was only fooling. I’m just a common ruffian who knows a pretty face when he sees it. Talk to Linda about me and see what she says!” He strode off up the avenue and the priest turned heavily on his heel.

XV. BROKEN VOICES

NANCE AND LINDA were not long in growing accustomed to their new mode of life. Nance, after her London experiences, found Miss Pontifex' little work-room, looking out on a pleasant garden, a place of refuge rather than of irksome labour. The young girls under her charge were good-tempered and docile; and Miss Pontifex herself — an excitable little woman with extravagantly genteel manners, and a large Wedgewood brooch under her chin — seemed to think that the girl's presence in the establishment would redound immensely to its reputation and distinction.

"I'm a conservative born and bred," she remarked to Nance, "and I can tell a lady out of a thousand. I won't say what I might say about the people here. But we know — we know what we think."

Nance's intimate knowledge of the more recondite aspects of the trade took an immense load off the little dressmaker's mind. She had more time to devote to her garden, which was her deepest passion, and it filled her with pride to be able to say to her friends, "Miss Herrick from Dyke House works with me now. Her father was a Captain in the Royal Navy."

The month of July went by without any further agitating incidents. As far as Nance knew, Brand left Linda in peace, and the young girl, though looking weary and spiritless, seemed to be reconciling herself fairly well to the loss of him and to be deriving definite distraction and satisfaction from her progress in organ-playing. Day by day in the early afternoon, she would cross the bridge, under all changes of the weather, and make her way to the church. Her mornings were spent in household duties, so that her sister might be free to give her whole time to the work in the shop, and in the evenings, when it was pleasant to be out of doors, they both helped Miss Pontifex watering her phloxes and delphiniums.

Nance herself — as July drew to its close and the wheat fields turned yellow — was at once happier and less happy in her relations with Sorio. Her happiness came from the fact that he treated her now more gently and considerately than he had ever done before; her unhappiness from the fact that he had grown more reserved and a queer sort of nervous depression seemed hanging over him. She knew he still saw Philippa, but what the relations between the two were, or how far any lasting friendship had arisen between them, it was impossible to discover. They certainly never met now, under conditions open to the intrusion of Rodmoor scandal.

Nance went more than once, before July was over, to see Rachel Doorm, and the days when these visits occurred were the darkest and saddest of all she passed through during that time. The mistress of Dyke House seemed to be rapidly degenerating. Nance was horrified to find how inert and indifferent to everything she had come to be. The interior of the house was now as dusty and untidy as the garden was desolate, and judging from her manner on the last visit she paid, the girl began to fear she had found the same solace in her loneliness as that which consoled her father.

Nance made one desperate attempt to improve matters. Without saying anything to Miss Doorm, she carried with her to the house one of Mrs. Raps' own buxom daughters, who was quite prepared, for an infinitesimal compensation, to go every day to help her. But this arrangement collapsed hopelessly. On the third day after her first appearance, the young woman returned to her home, and with indignant tears declared she had been "thrown out of the nasty place."

One evening at the end of the month, just as the sisters were preparing to go out for a stroll together, their landlady, with much effusion and agitation, ushered in Mrs. Renshaw. Tired with walking, and looking thinner and whiter than usual, she seemed extremely glad to sit down on their little sofa and sip the raspberry vinegar which Nance hastened to prepare. She ate some biscuits, too, as if she were faint for want of food, but all the time she ate there was in her air an apologetic, deprecatory manner, as though eating had been a gross vice or as though never in her life before had she eaten in public. She kept imploring Nance to share the refreshment, and it was not until the girl made at least a pretence of doing so that she seemed to recover her peace of mind.

Her great, hollow, brown eyes kept surveying the little apartment with nervous admiration. "I like it here," she remarked at last. "I like little rooms much better than large ones." She picked up from the table a well-worn copy of Palgrave's "Golden Treasury" and Nance had never seen her face light up so suddenly as when, turning the pages at random, she chanced upon Keats' "Ode to Autumn." "I know that by heart," she said, "every word of it. I used to teach it to Philippa. You've no idea how nicely she used to say it. But she doesn't care for poetry any more. She reads more learned books, more clever books now. She's got beyond me. Both my children have got beyond me." She sighed heavily and Nance, with a sense of horrible pity, seemed to visualize her — happy in little rooms and with little anthologies of old-world verse — condemned to the devastating isolation of Oakguard.

"I see you've got 'The Bride of Lammermoor' up there," she remarked presently, and rising impetuously from her seat on the sofa, she took the book in her hands. Nance never forgot the way she touched it, or the infinite softness that came into her eyes as she murmured, "Poor Lucy! Poor Lucy!" and began turning the pages.

Suddenly another book caught her attention and she took down "Humphrey Clinker" from the shelf. "Oh!" she cried, a faint flush coming into her sunken cheeks, "I haven't seen that book for years and years. I used to read it before I was married. I think Smollett was a very great writer, don't you? But I suppose young people nowadays find him too simple for their taste. That poor dear Mr. Bramble! And all that part about Tabitha, too! I seem to remember it all. I believe Dickens used to like Smollett. At least, I think I read somewhere that he did. I expect he liked that wonderful mixture of humour and pathos, though of course, when it comes to that, I suppose none of them can equal Dickens himself."

As Mrs. Renshaw uttered these words and caressed the tattered volume she held as if it had been made of pure gold, her face became irradiated with a look of such innocent and guileless spirituality, that Nance, in a hurried act of mental contrition, wiped out of her memory every moment when she had not loved her. "What she must suffer!" the girl said to herself as she watched her. "What she must *have* suffered — with those people in that great house."

Mrs. Renshaw sighed as she replaced the book in the shelf. "Writers seem to have got so clever in these last years," she said plaintively. "They use so many long words. I wonder where they get them from — out of dictionaries, do you think? — and they hurt me, they hurt me, by the way they speak of our beloved religion. They can't *all* of them be great philosophers like Spinoza and Schopenhauer, can they? They can't all of them be going to give the world new and comforting thoughts? I don't like their sharp, snappy, sarcastic tone. And oh, Nance dear!" — she returned to her seat on the sofa— "I can't bear their slang! Why is it that they feel they must use so much slang, do you think? I suppose they want to make their books seem real, but *I* don't hear real people talking like that. But perhaps it comes from America. American writers seem extraordinarily clever, and American dictionaries — for Dr. Raughty showed me one — seem much bigger than ours."

She was silent for a while and then, looking gently at Linda, "I think it's wonderful, dear, how well you play now. I thought last Sunday evening you played the hymns better than I've ever heard them! But they were beautiful hymns, weren't they? That last one was my favourite of all."

Once more she was silent, and Nance seemed to catch her lips moving, as she fixed her great sorrowful eyes upon the book-shelf, and began slowly pulling on her gloves.

"I must be going now," she said, with a little sigh. "I thank you for the raspberry vinegar and the biscuits. I think I was tired. I didn't sleep very well last night. Good-bye, dears. No, don't, please, come down. I can let myself out. It's a lovely evening, isn't it, and the poppies in the cornfields are quite red now. I can see a big patch of them from our terrace, just across the river. Poppies always make me think of the days when I was a young girl. We used to think a lot of them then. We used to make fairies out of them."

Nance insisted on seeing her into the street. When she entered the room again, she was not altogether surprised to find Linda convulsed with sobs. "I can't — I can't help it," gasped the young girl. "She's too pitiful. She's too sad. You feel you want to hug her and hug her, but you're afraid even to touch her hand!" She made an effort to recover herself, and then, with the tears still on her cheeks, "Nance dear," she said solemnly, "I don't believe she'll live to the end of this year. I believe, one of these days, when the Autumn comes, we shall hear she's been found dead in her bed. Nance, listen!" — and the young girl's voice became awe-struck and very solemn — "won't it be dreadful for *those two*, over there, when they find her like that, and feel how little they've done to make her happy? Can't you imagine it, Nance? The wind wailing and wailing round that house, and she lying there all white and dreadful — and Philippa with a candle standing over her —"

"Why do you say 'with a candle'?" said Nance brusquely. "You're talking wildly and exaggerating everything. If they found her in the morning, like that, Philippa wouldn't come with a candle."

Linda stared dreamily out of the window. "No, I suppose not," she said, "and yet I can't see it without Philippa holding a candle. And there's something else I see, too," she added in a lower voice.

"I don't want—" Nance began and then, more gently, "*What* else, you silly child?"

"Philippa's red lips," she murmured softly, "red as if she'd put rouge on them. Do you think she ever does put rouge on them? That's, I suppose, what made me think of the candle. I seemed to see it flickering against her mouth. Oh, I'm silly — I'm silly, I know, but I couldn't help seeing it like that — her lips, I mean."

"You're morbid to-day, Linda," said Nance abruptly. "Well? Shall we go to the garden? I feel as though carrying watering-pots and doing weeding will be good for both of us."

While this conversation was going on between the sisters in their High Street lodging, Sorio and Baltazar were seated together on a bench by the harbour's side. The tide was flowing in and cool sea-breaths, mixed with the odour of tar and paint and fisherman's tobacco, floated in upon them as they talked.

"It's absurd to have any secrets between you and me," Sorio was saying, his face reflecting the light of the sunset as it poured down the river's surface to where they sat. "When I become quite impossible to you as a companion, I suppose you'll tell me so and turn me out. But until then I'm going to assume that I interest you and don't bore you."

"It isn't a question of boring any one," replied the other. "You annoyed me just now because I thought you were making no effort to control yourself. You seemed trying to rake up every repulsive sensation you've ever had and thrust it down my throat. Bored? Certainly I wasn't bored! On the contrary, I was much more what you might call *bitten*. You go so far, my dear, you go so far!"

"I don't call that going far at all," said Sorio sulkily. "What's the use of living together if we can't talk of everything? Besides, you didn't let me finish. What I wanted to say was that for some reason or other, I've lately got to a point when every one I meet — every mortal person, and especially every stranger — strikes me as odious and disgusting. I've had the feeling before but never quite like this. It's not a pleasant feeling, my dear, I can assure you of that!"

"But what do you mean — what do you mean by odious and disgusting?" threw in the other. "I suppose they're made in the same way we are. Flesh and blood is flesh and blood, after all."

As Baltazar said this, what he thought in his mind was much as follows: "Adriano is evidently going mad again. This kind of thing is one of the symptoms. I like having him here with me. I like looking at his face when he's excited. He has a beautiful face — it's more purely antique in its moulding than half the ancient cameos. I especially like looking at him when he's harassed and outraged. He has a dilapidated wistfulness at those times which exactly suits my taste. I should miss Adriano frightfully if he went away. No one I've ever lived with suits me better. I can annoy him when I like and I can appease him when I like. He fills me with a delicious sense of power. If only Philippa would leave him alone, and that Herrick girl would stop persecuting him, he'd suit me perfectly. I like him when his nerves are quivering and twitching. I like the 'wounded-animal look' he has then. But it's these accursed girls who spoil it all. Of course it's their work, this new mania. They carry everything so far! I like him to get wild and desperate but I don't want him mad. These girls stick at nothing. They'd drive him into an asylum if they could, poor helpless devil!"

While these thoughts slid gently through Stork's head, his friend was already answering his question about "flesh and blood." "It's just that which gets on my nerves," he said. "I can stand it when I'm talking to you because I forget everything except your mind, and I can stand it when I'm making love to a girl, because I forget everything but—"

"Don't say her body!" threw in Baltazar.

"I wasn't going to," snarled the other. "I know it isn't their bodies one thinks of. It's — it's — what the devil is it? It's something much deeper than that. Well, never mind! What I want to say is this. With you and Raughty, and a few others who really interest me, I forget the whole thing. *You* are individuals to me. I'm interested in you, and I forget what you're like, or that you have flesh at all.

"It's when I come upon people I'm neither in love with nor interested in, that I have this sensation, and of course," and he surveyed a group of women who at that moment were raising angry voices from an archway on the further side of the harbour, "and of course I have it every day."

Stork looked at him with absorbed attention, holding between his fingers an unlit cigarette. "What exactly *is* the feeling you have?" he enquired gently.

The light on Sorio's face had faded with the fading of the glow on the water. There began to fall upon the place where they sat, upon the cobblestones of the little quay, upon the wharf steps, slimy with green seaweed, upon the harbour mud and the tarred gunwales of the gently rocking barges, upon the pallid tide flowing inland with gurglings and suckings and lappings and long-drawn sighs, that indescribable sense of the coming on of night at a river's mouth, which is like nothing else in the world. It is, as it were, the meeting of two infinite vistas of imaginative suggestion — the sense of the mystery of the boundless horizons sea-ward, and the more human mystery of the unknown distance inland, its vague fields and marshes and woods and silent gardens — blending there together in a suspended breath of ineffable possibility, sad and tender, and touching the margin of what cannot be uttered.

"What is it?" repeated Sorio dreamily, and in a low melancholy voice. "How can I tell you what it is? It's a knowledge of the inner truth, I suppose. It's the fact that I've come to know, at last, what human beings are really like. I've come to see them stripped and naked — no! worse than that — I've come to see them *flayed*. I've got to the point, Tassar, my friend, when I see the world *as it is*, and I can tell you it's not a pleasant sight!"

Baltazar Stork regarded him with a look of the most exquisite pity, a pity which was not the less genuine because the emotion that accompanied it was one of indescribable pleasure. In the presence of his friend's massive face and powerful figure he felt deliciously delicate and frail, but with this sense of fragility came a feeling of indescribable power — the power of a mind that is capable of contemplating with equanimity a view of things at which another staggers and shivers and grows insane. It was allotted to Baltazar by the secret forces of the universe to know during that hour, one of the most thrilling moments of his life.

"To get to the point I've reached," continued Sorio gently, watching the colour die out from the water's surface and a whitish glimmer, silvery and phantom-like, take its place, "means to sharpen one's senses to a point of terrible receptivity. In fact, until you can hear the hearts of people beating — until you can hear their contemptible lusts hissing and writhing in their veins, like evil snakes — you haven't reached the point. You haven't reached it until you can smell the graveyard — yes! The graveyard of all mortality — in the cleanest flesh you approach. You haven't reached it till every movement people make, every word they speak, betrays them for what they are, betrays the vulture on the wing, and the hyena on the prowl. You haven't reached it till you feel ready to cry out, like a child in a nightmare, and beat the air with your hands, so suffocating is the pressure of loathsome living bodies — bodies marked and sealed and printed with the signs of death and decomposition!"

Baltazar Stork struck a match and lit his cigarette.

"Well?" he remarked, stretching out his legs and leaning back on the wooden bench. "Well? The world is like that, then. You've found it out. You know it. You've made the wonderful discovery. Why can't you smoke cigarettes, then, and make love to your lovely friends, and let the whole thing go? You'll be dead yourself in a year or two in any case.

"Adriano dear," he lowered his voice to an impressive whisper, "shall I tell you something? You are making all this fuss and driving yourself desperate about a thing which doesn't really concern you in the least. It's not your business if the world does reek like a carcass. It's not your business if people's brains are full of poisonous snakes and their bellies of greedy lecheries. It's not your business — do you understand — if human flesh smells of the graveyard. Your affair, my boy, is to get what amusement you can out of it and make yourself as comfortable as you can in it. It might be worse, it might be better. It doesn't really make much difference either way.

"Listen to me, Adriano! I say to you now, as we sit at this moment watching this water, unless you get rid of this new mania of yours, you'll end as you did in America. You'll simply go mad again, my dear, and that would be uncomfortable for you and extremely inconvenient for me. The world is not *meant* to be taken seriously. It's meant to be handled as you'd handle a troublesome girl. Take what amuses you and let the rest go to the devil! Anything else — and I know what I'm talking about — tends to simple misery.

"Heigh ho! But it's a most delicious evening! What nonsense all this talk of ours is! Look at that boy over there. He's not worrying himself about grave-yards. Here, Harry! Tommy! Whatever you call yourself — come here! I want to speak to you."

The child addressed was a ragged barelegged urchin, of about eleven, who had been for some while slowly gravitating around the two men. He came at once, at Baltazar's call, and looked at them both, wonderingly and quizzically.

"Got any pictures?" he asked. Stork nodded and, opening a new box of cigarettes, handed the boy a little oblong card stamped with the arms of some royal European dynasty. "I likes the Honey-Dew ones best," remarked the boy, "them as has the sport cards in 'em."

"We can't always have sport cards, Tommy," said Baltazar. "Little boys, as the world moves round, must learn to put up with the arms of European princes. Let me feel your muscle, Tommy. I've an idea that you're suffering from deficient nourishment." The child extended his arm, and then bent it, with an air of extreme and anxious gravity. "Pretty good," said Stork, smiling. "Yes, I may say you're decidedly powerful for your size. What's your opinion, Tommy, about things in general? This gentleman here thinks we’re all in a pretty miserable way. He thinks life’s a hell of a bad job. What do you think about it?”

The boy looked at him suspiciously. “Ben Porter, what cleans the knives up at the Admiral’s, tried that game on with me. But I let him know, soon enough, who he were talking to.” He moved off hastily after this, but a moment later ran back, pointing excitedly at a couple of sea-gulls which were circling near them.

“A man shot one of them birds last night,” he said, “and it fell into the water. Lordy! But it did splash! ‘Tweren’t properly killed, I reckon — just knocked over.”

“What’s that?” said Sorio sharply. “What became of it then? Who picked it up?”

The boy looked at him with a puzzled stare. “*They* ain’t no good to eat,” he rejoined, “they be what you call cannibal-birds. They feeds on muck. Cats’ll eat ’em, though,” he added.

“What became of it?” shouted Sorio, in a threatening voice.

“Went out with the tide, Mister, most like,” answered the child, moving apprehensively away from him. “I saw some fellows in a boat knock at it with their oars, but they couldn’t get it. It sort o’ flapped and swimmed away.”

Sorio rose from his seat and strode to the edge of the quay. He looked eastward, past the long line of half-submerged wooden stakes which marked the approach to the harbour. “When did that devil shoot it, do you say?” he asked, turning to the boy. But the youngster had taken to his heels. Angry-looking bronze-faced gentlemen who interested themselves in wounded sea-gulls were something new in his experience.

“Let’s get a boat and row out to those stakes,” said Adrian suddenly. “I seem to see something white over there. Look! Don’t you think so?”

Baltazar moved to his side. “Heavens! my dear,” he remarked languidly, “you don’t suppose the thing would be there now, after all this time? However,” he added, shrugging his shoulders, “if it’ll put you into a better mood, by all means let’s do it.”

It was, when it came to the point, Baltazar who untied an available boat from its moorings, and Baltazar who appropriated a pair of oars that were leaning against a fish shed. In details of this kind the passionate Sorio was always seized with a paralysis of nervous incompetence. Once in the boat, however, the younger man refused to do anything but steer. “I’m not going to pull against this current, for all the sea-gulls in the world,” he remarked.

Sorio rowed with desperate impetuosity, but it was a slow and laborious task. Several fishermen, loitering on the quay after their supper, surveyed the scene with interest. “The gentleman wants to exercise ‘isself afore dinner-time,” observed one. “’Tis a wonder if he moves ’er,” rejoined another, “but ‘e’s rowin’ like ’twas a royal regatta.”

With the sweat pouring down his face and the muscles of his whole body taut and quivering, Sorio tugged and strained at the oars. At first it seemed as though the boat hardly moved at all. Then, little by little, it forged ahead, the tide’s pressure diminishing as the mouth of the harbour widened. After several minutes’ exhausting effort, they reached the place where the first of the wooden piles rose out of the water. It was tangled with seaweed and bleached with sun and wind. The tide gurgled and foamed round it. Baltazar yawned.

“They’re all like this one,” he said. “You see what they’re like. Nothing could possibly cling to them, unless it had hands to cling with.”

Sorio, resting on his oars, glared at the darkening waters. “Let’s get to the last of them anyway,” he muttered. He pulled on, the effort becoming easier and easier as they escaped from the in-flow of the river-mouth and reached the open sea. When at last the boat rubbed its side against the last of the stakes, they were nearly a quarter of a mile from land. No, there was certainly no sea-gull here, alive or dead!

A buoy, with a bell attached to it, sent at intervals, over the water, a profoundly melancholy cry — a cry subdued and yet tragic, not absolutely devoid of hope and yet full of heart-breaking wistfulness. The air was hot and windless; the sky heavy with clouds; the horizon concealed by the rapidly falling night. Sorio seized the stake with his hand to keep the boat steady. There were already lights in the town, and some of these twinkled out towards them, in long, radiating, quivering lines.

"Tassar!" whispered Sorio suddenly, in a tone strangely and tenderly modulated.

"Well, my child, what is it?" returned the other.

"I only want to tell you," Adrian went on, "that whatever I may say or do in the future, I recognize that you're the best friend I've got, except one." As he said the words "except one," his voice had a vibrant softness in it.

"Thank you, my dear," replied his friend calmly. "I should certainly be extremely distressed if you made a fool of yourself in any way. But who is my rival, tell me that! Who is this one who's a better friend than I? Not Philippa, I hope — or Nance Herrick?"

Sorio sighed heavily. "I vowed to myself," he muttered, "I would never talk to any one again about him: but the sound of that bell — isn't it weird, Tassar? Isn't it ghostly? — makes me long to talk about him."

"Ah! I understand," and Baltazar Stork drew in his breath with a low whistle, "I understand! You're talking about your boy over there. Well, my dear, I don't blame you if you're homesick for him. I have a feeling that he's an extraordinarily beautiful youth. I always picture him to myself like my Venetian. Is he like Flambard, Adrian?"

Sorio sighed again, the sigh of one who sins against his secret soul and misses the reward of his sacrilege. “No — no,” he muttered, “it isn’t that! It isn’t anything to do with his being beautiful. God knows if Baptiste *is* beautiful! It’s that I want him. It’s that he understands what I’m trying to do in the darkness. It’s simply that I want him, Tassar.”

“What do you mean by that ‘trying in the darkness,’ Adriano? What ‘darkness’ are you talking about?”

Sorio made no immediate answer. His hand, as he clung to the stake amid the rocking of the boat, encountered a piece of seaweed of that kind which possesses slippery, bubble-like excrescences, and he dug his nails into one of these leathery globes, with a vague dreamy idea that if he could burst it he would burst some swollen trouble in his brain.

“Do you remember,” he said at last, “what I showed you the other night, or have you forgotten?”

Baltazar looked at his mistily outlined features and experienced, what was extremely unusual with him, a faint sense of apprehensive remorse. “Of course I remember,” he replied. “You mean those notes of yours — that book you’re writing?”

But Sorio did not hear him. All his attention was concentrated just then upon the attempt to burst another seaweed bubble. The bell from the unseen buoy rang out brokenly over the water; and between the side of their boat and the stake to which the man was clinging there came gurglings and lappings and whispers, as if below them, far down under the humming tide, some sad sea-creature, without hope or memory or rest, were tossing and moaning, turning a drowned inhuman face towards the darkened sky.

XVI. THE FENS

Nance was able, in a sort of lethargic obstinacy, to endure the strain of her feelings for Sorio, now that she had the influence of her familiar work to dull her nerves. She tried hard to make things cheerful for her not less heart-weary sister, devising one little scheme after another to divert and distract the child, and never permitting her own trouble to interfere with her sympathy.

But behind all this her soul ached miserably, and her whole nature thirsted and throbbed for the satisfaction of her love. Her work played its part as a kind of numbing opiate and the evenings spent among Letitia Pontifex' flower-beds were not devoid of moments of restorative hope, but day and night the pain of her passion hurt her and the tooth of jealousy bit into her flesh.

It was worst of all in the nights. The sisters slept in two small couches in the same room and Nance found herself dreading more and more, as July drew to its close, that hour when they came in from their neighbour's garden and undressing in silence, lay down so near to one another. They both tried hard, Linda no less than her sister, to put the thoughts that vexed them out of their minds and behave as if they were fancy-free and at peace, but the struggle was a difficult one. If they only hadn't known, so cruelly well, just what the other was feeling, as they turned alternately from side to side, and like little feverish animals gasped and fretted, it would have been easier to bear. "Aren't you asleep yet?" one of them would whisper plaintively, and the submissive, "I'm so sorry, dear; but oh! I wish the morning would come," that she received in answer, met with only too deep a response.

One unusually hot night — it happened to be the first Sunday in August and the eve of the Bank Holiday — Nance felt as though she would scream out aloud if her sister moved in her bed again.

There was something that humiliated and degraded in this mutual misery. It was hard to be patient, hard not to feel that her own aching heart was in some subtle way mocked and insulted by the presence of the same hurt in the heart of another. It reduced the private sorrow of each to a sort of universal sex pain, to suffer from which was a kind of outrage to what was sacred and secret in their individual souls.

There were two windows in their room, one opening on the street and one upon an enclosed yard at the back of the house. Nance, as she now lay, with the bed-clothes tossed aside from her, and her hands clasped behind her head, was horribly conscious not only of the fact that her sister was just as wide awake as she herself, but that they were listening *together* to the same sounds. These sounds were two-fold, and they came sometimes separately and sometimes simultaneously. They consisted of the wailing of an infant in a room on the other side of the street, and the whining of a dog in a yard adjoining their own.

The girl felt as though every species of desolation known in the world were concentrated in these two sounds. She kept her eyes tightly shut so as not to see the darkness, but this proceeding only intensified the acute receptivity of her other senses. She visualized the infant and she visualized the dog. The one she imagined with a puckered, wrinkled face — a face such as Mr. Traherne might have had in his babyhood — and plague-spots of a loathsome colour; she saw the colour against her burning eyeballs as if she were touching it with her fingers and it was of a reddish brown. The dog had a long smooth body, without hair, and as it whined she saw it feebly scratching itself, but while it scratched, she knew, with evil certainty, that it was unable to reach the place where the itching maddened it.

There was hardly any air in the room, in spite of the open windows, and Nance fancied that she discerned an odour proceeding from the wainscoting that resembled the dust that had once greeted her from a cupboard in one of the unused bedrooms in Dyke House, dust that seemed to be composed of the moth-eaten garments of generations of dead humanity.

She felt that she could have borne these things — the whining dog, and the wailing infant — if only Linda, lying with her face to the wall, were not listening to them also, listening with feverish intentness. Yes, she could have borne it if the whole night were not listening — if the whole night were not listening to the turnings and tossings of humanity, trying to ease the itch of its desire and never able to reach, toss and turn as it might, the place where the plague-spot troubled it.

With a cry she leapt from her bed and, fumbling on the dressing-table, struck a match and lit a candle. The flickering flame showed Linda sitting bolt-upright with lamentable wide-open eyes.

Nance went to the window which looked out on the yard. Here she turned and threw back from her forehead her masses of heavy hair. “God help us, Linda!” she whispered. “It’s no use. Nothing is any use.”

The young girl slowly and wearily left her bed and, advancing across the room, nestled up against her sister and caressed her in silence.

“What shall we do?” Nance repeated, hardly knowing what she said. “What shall we do? I can’t bear this. I can’t bear it, little one, I can’t bear it!”

As if in response to her appeal, the dog and the infant together sent forth a pitiful wail upon the night.

“What misery there is in the world — what horrible misery!” Nance murmured. “I’m sure we’re all better off dead, than like this. Better off dead, my darling.”

Linda answered by slipping her arms round her waist and hugging her tightly. Then suddenly, “Why don’t we dress ourselves and go out?” she cried. “It’s too hot to sleep. Yes, do let’s do that, Nance! Let’s dress and go out.”

Nance looked at her with a faint smile. There was a childish ardour about her tone that reminded her of the Linda of many years ago. “Very well,” she said, “I don’t mind.”

They dressed hurriedly. The very boldness of the idea helped them to recover their spirits. Bare-headed and in their house-shoes they let themselves out into the street. It was between two and three o’clock. The little town was absolutely silent. The infant in the house opposite made no sound. “Perhaps it’s dead now,” Nance thought.

They walked across the green, and Nance gave a long wistful look at the windows of Baltazar’s cottage. The heavy clouds had lifted a little, and from various points in the sky the stars threw down a faint, uncertain glimmer. It remained, however, still so dark that when they reached the centre of the bridge, neither bank was visible, and the waters of the Loon flowing beneath were hidden in profound obscurity. They leant upon the parapet and inhaled the darkness. What wind there was blew from the west so that the air was heavy with the scent of peat and marsh mud, and the sound of the sea seemed to come from far away, as if it belonged to a different world.

They crossed the bridge and began following the footpath that led to the church. Coming suddenly on an open gate, however, they were tempted, by a curious instinct of unconscious self-cruelty, to deviate from the path they knew and to pursue a strange and unfamiliar track heading straight for the darkened fens. It was on the side of the path removed from the sea that this track began, and it led them, along the edge of a reedy ditch, into a great shadowy maze of silent water-meadows.

Fortunately for the two girls, the particular ditch they followed had a high and clearly marked embankment, an embankment used by the owners of cattle in that district as a convenient way of getting their herds from one feeding-ground to another. No one who has never experienced the sensation of following one of these raised banks, or dyke-tracks, across the fens, can conceive the curious feelings it has the power of evoking. Even by day these impressions are unique and strange. By night they assume a quality which may easily pass into something bordering upon panic-terror. The palpable and immediate cause of this emotion is the sense of being isolated, separated, and cut-off, from all communication with the ordinary world.

On the sea-shore one is indeed in contact with the unknown mass of waters, but there is always, close at hand, the familiar inland landscape, friendly and reassuring. On the slope of a mountain one may look with apprehension at the austere heights above, but there is always behind one the rocks and woods, the terraces and ledges, past which one has ascended, and to which at any moment one can return.

In the midst of the fens there is no such reassurance. The path one has followed becomes merged in the illimitable space around; merged, lost and annihilated. No mark, no token, no sign indicates its difference from other similar tracks. No mark nor token separates north from south or east from west. On all sides the same reeds, the same meadows, the same gates, the same stunted willow-trees, the same desolate marsh pools, the same vast and receding horizons. The mind has nothing to rest itself upon except the general expanse, and the general expanse seems as boundless as infinity.

Nance and her sister were not, of course, far enough away from their familiar haunts to get the complete "fen-terror," but, aided by the darkness, the power of the thing was by no means unfelt. The instinct to escape from the burden of their thoughts which drove the girls on, became indeed more and more definitely mingled, as they advanced, with a growing sense of alarm. But into this very alarm they plunged forward with a species of exultant desperation. They both experienced, as they went hand in hand, a morbid kind of delight in being cruel to themselves, in forcing themselves to do the very thing — and to do it in the dead of night — which, of all, they had most avoided, even in the full light of day.

Before they had gone much more than a mile from their starting-point they were permitted to witness a curious trick of the elemental powers. Without any warning, there suddenly arose from the west a much more powerful current of wind. Every cloud was driven sea-ward and with the clouds every trace of sea-mist. The vast dome of sky above them showed itself clear and unstained; and across the innumerable constellations — manifest to their eyes in its full length — stretched the Milky Way. Not only did the stars thus make themselves visible. In their visibility they threw a weird and phantom-like light over the whole landscape. Objects that had been mere misty blurs became distinct identities and things that had been absolutely out of sight were now unmistakably recognizable.

The girls stood still and looked around them. They could see the church tower rising squat and square against the line of the distant sand-dunes. They could see the roofs of the village, huddled greyly and obscurely together, beyond the dark curve of the bridge. They could make out the sombre shape of Dyke House itself, just distinguishable against the high tow-path of the river. And Nance, turning westward, could even discern her favourite withy-copse, surrounded by shadowy cornfields.

There was a pitiable pathos in the way each of the girls, now that the scene of their present trouble was thus bared to their view, turned instinctively to the object most associated with the thoughts they were seeking to escape. Nance looked long and wistfully at the little wood of willows and alders, now a mere misty exhalation of thicker shadow above the long reaches of the fens. She thought of how mercilessly her feelings had been outraged there; of how violent and strange and untender Sorio had been. Yet even at that moment, her heart aching with the recollection of what she had suffered, the old fierce passionate cry went up from her soul—"better be beaten by Adrian than loved by all the rest of the world!"

It was perhaps because of her preoccupation with her own thoughts and her long dreamy gaze at the spot which recalled them, that she did not remark a certain sight which set her companion trembling with intolerable excitement. This was nothing less than the sudden appearance, between the trees that almost hid the house from view, of a red light in a window of Oakguard. It was an unsteady light and it seemed to waver and flicker. Sometimes it grew deeply red, like a threatening star, and at other times it paled in colour and diminished in size. All at once, after flickering and quivering for several seconds, it died out altogether.

Only when it had finally disappeared did Linda hastily glance round to see if Nance had discerned it. But her sister had seen nothing.

It was, as a matter of fact, small wonder that this particular light observed in a window of Oakguard, thrilled the young girl with uncontrollable agitation. It had been this very signal, arranged between them during their few weeks of passionate love-making, which had several times flickered across the river to Dyke House and had been answered, unknown to Nance, from the sisters' room. Linda shivered through every nerve and fibre of her being, and in the darkness her cheeks grew hot as fire. She suddenly felt convinced that by some strange link between her heart and his, Brand knew that she was out in the fens, and was telling her that he knew it, in the old exciting way.

"He is calling me," she said to herself, "he is calling me!" And as she formed the words, there came over her, with a sick beating of her heart and a dizzy pain in her breast, the certainty that Brand had left the house and was waiting for her, somewhere in the long avenue of limes and cedars, where they had met once before in the early evening.

"He is waiting for me!" she repeated, and the dizziness grew so strong upon her that she staggered and caught at her sister's arm. "Nance," she whispered, "I feel sick. My head hurts me. Shall we go back now?"

Nance, full of concern and anxiety, passed her fingers across her sister's forehead. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she cried, "you're in a fever! How silly of me to let you come out on this mad prank!"

Supporting her on her arm she led her slowly back, along the embankment. As they walked, Nance felt more strongly than she had done since she crossed the Loon, that deep maternal pity, infinite in its emotion of protection, which was the basic quality in her nature. For the very reason, perhaps, that Linda now clung to her like a child, she felt happier than she had done for many days. A mysterious detachment from her own fate, a sort of resigned indifference to what happened, seemed to liberate her at that moment from the worst pang of her loss. The immense shadowy spaces about her, the silence of the fens, broken only by the rustling of the reeds and an occasional splash in the stream by their side as a fish rose, the vast arch of starlit sky above her, full of a strange and infinite reassurance — all these things thrilled the girl's heart, as they moved, with an emotion beyond expression.

At that hour there came to her, with a vividness unfelt until then, the real meaning of Mr. Traherne’s high platonic mystery. She told herself that whatever henceforth happened to her or did not happen, it was not an illusion, it was not a dream — this strange spiritual secret. It was something palpable and real. She had felt it — at least she had touched the fringe of it — and even if the thing never quite returned or the power of it revived as it thrilled her now, it remained that it *had been*, that she had known it, that it was there, somewhere in the depths, however darkly hidden.

Very different were the thoughts that during that walk back agitated the mind of the younger girl. Her whole nature was obsessed by one fierce resolve, the resolve to escape at once to the arms of her lover. He was waiting for her; he was expecting her; she felt absolutely convinced of that. An indefinable pain in her breast and a throbbing in her heart assured her that he was watching, waiting, drawing her towards him. The same large influences of the night, the same silent spaces, the same starlit dome, which brought to Nance her spiritual reassurance, brought to the frailer figure she supported only a desperate craving.

She could feel through every nerve of her feverish body the touch of her love’s fingers. She ached and shivered with pent-up longing, with longing to yield herself to him, to surrender herself absolutely into his power. She was no longer a thing of body, soul, and senses. The normal complexity of our mortal frame was annihilated in her. She was one trembling, quivering, vibrant chord, a chord of feverish desire, only waiting to break into one wild burst of ecstatic music, when struck by the hand she loved.

Her desire at that moment was of the kind which tears at the root of every sort of scruple. It did not only endow her with the courage of madness, it inspired her with the cunning of the insane. All the way along the embankment she was devising desperate plans of escape, and by the time they reached the church path these plans had shaped themselves into a definite resolution.

They emerged upon the familiar way and turned southward towards the bridge. Nance, thankful that she had got her sister so near home without any serious mishap, could not resist, in the impulse of her relief, the pleasure of stopping for a moment to pick a bunch of flowers from the path’s reedy edge. The coolness of the earth as she stooped, the waving grasses, the strongly blowing, marsh-scented wind, the silence and the darkness, all blent harmoniously together to strengthen her in her new-found comfort.

She pulled up impetuously, almost by their roots, great heavy-flowered stalks of loose-strife and willow-herb. She scrambled down into the wet mud of a shallow ditch to add to her bunch a tall spray of hemp-agrimony and some wild valerian. All these things, ghostly and vague and colourless in the faint starlight, had a strange and mystic beauty, and as she gathered them Nance promised herself that they should be a covenant between her senses and her spirit; a sign and a token, offered up in the stillness of that hour, to whatever great invisible powers still made it possible on earth to renounce and be not all unhappy. She returned with her flowers to her sister’s side and together they reached the bridge.

When they were at the very centre of this, Linda suddenly staggered and swayed. She tore herself from her sister’s support and sank down on the little stone seat beneath the parapet — the same stone seat upon which, some months before, that passage of sinister complicity had occurred between Rachel Doorm and Brand. Falling helplessly back now in this place, the young girl pressed her hands to her head and moaned pitifully.

Nance dropped her flowers and flung herself on her knees beside her. “What is it, darling?” she whispered in a low frightened voice. “Oh, Linda, what is it?” But Linda’s only reply was to close her eyes and let her head fall heavily back against the stone-work of the parapet. Nance rose to her feet and stood looking at her in mute despair. “Linda! Linda!” she cried. “Linda! What is it?”

But the shadowy white form lay hushed and motionless, the soft hair across her forehead stirring in the wind, but all else about her, horribly, deadly still.

Nance rushed across the bridge and down to the river’s brink. She came back, her hands held cup-wise, and dashed the water over her sister’s face. The child’s eyelids flickered a little, but that was all. She remained as motionless and seemingly unconscious as before. With a desperate effort, Nance tried to lift her up bodily in her arms, but stiff and limp as the girl was, this seemed an attempt beyond her strength.

Once more she stood, helpless and silent, regarding the other as she lay. Then it dawned upon her mind that the only possible thing to do was to leave her where she was and run to the village for help. She would arouse her own landlady. She would get the assistance of Dr. Raughty.

With one last glance at her sister’s motionless form and a quick look up and down the river on the chance of there being some barge or boat at hand with people — as sometimes happened — sleeping in it, she set off running as fast as she could in the direction of the silent town.

As soon as the sound of her retreating steps died away in the distance, the hitherto helpless Linda leapt quickly and lightly to her feet. Standing motionless for awhile till she had given her sister time to reach the high-street, she set off herself with firm and rapid steps in the same direction. She resolved that she would not risk crossing the green, but would reach the park wall by a little side alley which skirted the backs of the houses. She felt certain that when she did reach this wall it would be easy enough to climb over it. She remembered its loose uneven stones and its clinging ivy. And once in the park — ah! she knew well enough what way to take then!

Deserted by its human invaders, the old New Bridge relapsed into its accustomed mood of silent expectancy. It had witnessed many passionate loves and many passionate hatreds. It had felt the feet of generations of Rodmoor's children, light as gossamer seeds, upon its shoulders, and it had felt the creaking of the death-wagon carrying the same persons, heavy as lead then, to the oblong holes dug for them in the churchyard. All this it had felt, but it still waited, still waited in patient expectancy, while the tides went up and down beneath it, and sea airs swept over it and night by night the stars looked down on it; still waited, with the dreadful patience of the eternal gods and the eternal elements, something that, after all, would perhaps never come.

Nance's flowers, meanwhile, lay where she had dropped them, upon the ground by the stone seat. They were there when, some ten minutes after her departure, the girl returned with Dr. Raughty and Mrs. Raps to find Linda gone; and they were there through all the hours of the dawn, until a farm boy, catching sight of them as he went to his work, threw them into the river in order that he might observe the precise rapidity with which they would be carried by the tide under the central arch. They were carried very swiftly under the central arch; but linger as the boy might, he did not see them reappear on the other side.

XVII. THE DAWN

THE DAWN WAS just faintly making itself felt among the trees of Oakguard when Philippa Renshaw, restless as she often was on these summer nights, perceived, as she leaned from her open window, a figure almost as slender as herself standing motionless at the edge of one of the terraces and looking up at the house. There was no light in Philippa's room, so that she was able to watch this figure without risk of being herself observed. She was certain at once in her own mind of its identity, and she took it immediately for granted that Brand was even now on his way to meet the young girl at the spot where she now saw her standing.

She experienced, therefore, a certain surprise and even annoyance — for she would have liked to have witnessed this encounter — when, instead of remaining where she stood, the girl suddenly slipped away like a ghostly shadow and merged herself among the park-trees. Philippa remained for some minutes longer at the window peering intently into the grey obscurity and wondering whether after all she had been mistaken and it was one of the servants of the house. There *was* one of the Oakguard maids addicted to walking in her sleep, and she confessed to herself that it was quite possible she had been misled by her own morbid fancy into supposing that the nocturnal wanderer was Linda Herrick.

She returned to her bed after a while and tried to sleep, but the idea that it was really Linda she had seen and that the young girl was even now roaming about the grounds like a disconsolate phantom, took possession of her mind. She rose once more and cautiously pulling down the blind and drawing the curtains began hurriedly to dress herself, taking the precaution to place the solitary candle which she used behind a screen so that no warning of her wakefulness should reach the person she suspected.

Opening the door and moving stealthily down the passage, she paused for a moment at the threshold of her brother's room. All was silent within. Smiling faintly to herself, she turned the handle with exquisite precaution and glided into the room. No! She was right in her conjecture. The place was without an occupant, and the bed, it appeared, had not been slept in. She went out, closing the door silently behind her.

Her mother's room was opposite Brand's and the fancy seized her to enter that also. She entered it, and stepped, softly as a wandering spirit, to her mother's side. Mrs. Renshaw was lying in an uneasy posture with one arm stretched across the counterpane and her head close to the edge of the bed. She was breathing heavily but was not in a deep sleep. Every now and then her fingers spasmodically closed and unclosed, and from her lips came broken inarticulate words. The pallid light of the early dawn made her face seem older than Philippa had ever seen it. By her side on a little table lay an open book, but it was still too dark for the intruder to discern what this book was.

The daughter stood for some minutes in absolute rigidity, gazing upon the sleeper. Her face as she gazed wore an expression so complicated, so subtle, that the shrewdest observer seeking to interpret its meaning would have been baffled. It was not malignant. It certainly was not tender. It might have been compared to the look one could conceive some heathen courtesan in the days of early Christianity casting upon a converted slave.

Uneasily conscious, as people in their sleep often are, without actually waking, of the alien presence so near her, Mrs. Renshaw suddenly moved round in her bed and with a low moaning utterance, settled herself to sleep with her face to the window. It was a human name she had uttered then. Philippa was sure of that, but it was a name completely strange to the watcher of her mother's unconsciousness.

Passing from the room as silently as she had entered, the girl ran lightly down the staircase, picked up a cloak in the hall, and let herself out of the front door.

Meanwhile, through the gradually lifting shadows, Linda with rapid and resolute steps was hastening across the park to the portion of the avenue where grew the great cedar-trees. This was the place to which her first instinct had called her. It was only an after-thought, due to cooler reason that had caused her to deviate from this and approach the house itself.

As she advanced through the dew-drenched grass, silvery now in the faint light, she felt that vague indescribable sensation which all living creatures, even those scourged by passion, are bound to feel, at the first palpable touch of dawn. Perfumes and odours that could not be expressed in words, and that seemed to have no natural origin, came to the girl on the wind which went sighing past her. This — so at least Linda vaguely felt — was not the west wind any more. It was not any ordinary wind of day or night. It was the dawn wind, the breath of the earth herself, indrawn with sweet sharp ecstasy at the delicate terror of the coming of the sun-god.

As she approached the avenue where the trunks of the cedars rose dark against the misty white light, she was suddenly startled by the flapping wings of an enormous heron which, mounting up in front of her out of the shadow of the trees, went sailing away across the park, its extended neck and outstretched legs outlined against the eastern sky. She passed in among the shadows from which the heron had emerged, and there, as though he had been waiting for her only a few moments, was Brand Renshaw.

With one swift cry she flung herself into his arms and they clung together as if from an eternity of separation. In her flimsy dress wet with mist she seemed like a creature evoked by some desperate prayer of earth-passion. Her cheeks and breast were cold to his touch, but the lips that answered his kisses were hot as if with burning fever. She clung to him as though some abysmal gulf might any moment open beneath their feet. She nestled against him, she twined herself around him. She took his head between her hands and with her cold fingers she caressed his face. So thinly was she clad that he could feel her heart beating as if it were his own.

“I knew you were calling me,” she gasped at last. “I felt it — I felt it in my flesh. Oh, my only love, I’m all yours — all, all yours! Take me, hold me, save me from every one! Hold me, hold me, my only love, hold me tight from all of them!”

They swayed together as she clung to him and, lifting her up from the ground he carried her, still wildly kissing him, into the deeper shadow of the great cedars. Exhausted at last by the extremity of her passion, she hung limp in his arms, her face white as the white light which now flooded the eastern horizon. He laid her down then at the foot of one of the largest trees and bending over her pushed back the hair from her forehead as if she had been a tired child.

By some powerful law of his strange nature, the very intensity of her passion for him and her absolute yielding to his will calmed and quieted his own desire. She was his now, at a touch, at a movement; but he would as soon have hurt an infant as have embraced her then. His emotion at that moment was such as never again in his life he was destined to experience. He felt as though, untouched as she was, she belonged to him, body and soul. He felt as though they two together were isolated, separated, divided, from the whole living world. Beneath the trunks of those black-foliaged cedars they seemed to be floating in a mystic ship over a great sea of filmy white waves.

He bent down and kissed her forehead, and under his kiss, chaste as the kiss a father might give to a little girl, she closed her eyes and lay motionless and still, a faint flickering smile of infinite contentment playing upon her lips.

They were in this position — the girl's hand resting passively in his — and he bending over her, when through an eastward gap between the trees the sun rose above the mist. It sent towards them a long blood-coloured finger that stained the cedar trunks and caused the strangely shaped head of the stooping man to look as if it had been dipped in blood. It made the girl's mouth scarlet-red and threw an indescribable flush over her face, a flush delicate and diaphanous as that which tinges the petals of wild hedge roses.

Linda opened her eyes and Brand leapt to his feet with a cry. "The sun!" he shouted, and then, in a lower voice, "what an omen for us, little one — what an omen! Out of the sea, out of *our* sea! Come, get up, and let's watch the morning in! There won't be a trace of mist left, or dew either, in an hour or so."

He gave her his hand and hurriedly pulled her to her feet. "Quick!" he cried. "You can see it across the sea from over there. I've often seen it, but never like this, never with you!"

Hand in hand they left the shade of the trees and hastening up the slope of a little grassy mound — perhaps the grave of some viking-ancestor of his own — they stood side by side surveying the wonder of the sunrise.

As they stood there and the sun, mounting rapidly higher and higher, dispersed the mists and flooded everything with golden light, Brand's mood began to change towards his companion. The situation was reversed now and it was his arms that twined themselves round the girl's figure, while she, though only resisting gently and tenderly, seemed to have recovered the normal instincts of her sex, the instincts of self-protection and aloofness.

The warmer the sun became and the more clearly the familiar landscape defined itself before them, the more swiftly did the relations between the two change and reverse. No longer did Brand feel as though some mystic spiritual union had annihilated the difference between their sex. The girl was once more an evasive object of pursuit. He desired her and his desire irritated and angered him.

“We shan’t have the place to ourselves much longer,” he said. “Come — let’s say good-bye where we were before — where we weren’t so much in sight.”

He sought to lead her back to the shade of the cedars; but she — looking timidly at his face — felt for the first time a vague reaction against him and an indefinable shrinking.

“I think I’ll say good-bye to you here,” she said, with a faint smile. “Nance will be looking for me everywhere and I mustn’t frighten her any further.”

She was astonished and alarmed at the change in his face produced by her words.

“As you please,” he said harshly, “here, as well as anywhere else, if that’s your line! You’d better go back the way you came, but the gates aren’t locked if you prefer the avenue.” He actually left her when he said this, and without touching her hand or giving her another look, strode down the slope and away towards the house.

This was more than Linda could bear. She ran after him and caught him by the arm. “Brand,” she whispered, “Brand, my dearest one, you’re not really angry with me, are you? Of course, I’ll say good-bye wherever you wish! Only — only—" and she gave an agitated little sigh, "I don't want to frighten Nance more than I can help."

He led her back to the spot where, under the dark wide-spreading branches, the red finger of the sun had first touched them. She loved him too well to resist long, and she loved him too well not to taste, in the passionate tears that followed her abandonment to his will, a wild desperate sweetness, even in the midst of all her troubled apprehensions as to the calamitous issues of their love.

It was in the same place, finally, and under the same dark branches, that they bade one another good-bye. Brand looked at his watch before they parted and they both smiled when he announced that it was nearly six, and that at any moment the milk-cart might pass them coming up from the village. As he moved away, Linda saw him stoop and pick up something from the ground. He turned with a laugh and flung the thing towards her so that it rolled to her feet. It was a fir-cone and she knew well why he threw it to her as their farewell signal. They had wondered, only a little while ago, how it drifted beneath their cedar-tree, and Brand had amused himself by twining it in her hair.

She picked it up. The hair was twisted about it still — of a colour not dissimilar from the cone, but of a lighter shade. She slipped the thing into her dress and let it slide down between her breasts. It scratched and pricked her as soon as she began to walk, but this discomfort gave her a singular satisfaction. She felt like a nun, wearing for the first time her symbol of separation from the world — of dedication to her lord's service. "I am certainly no nun now," she thought, smiling sadly to herself, "but I am dedicated — dedicated forever and a day. Oh, my dear, dear Love, I would willingly die to give you pleasure!"

She moved away, down the avenue towards the village. She had not gone very far when she was startled by a rustle in the undergrowth and the sound of a mocking laugh. She stopped in terror. The laugh was repeated, and a moment later, from a well-chosen hiding-place in a thicket of hazel-bushes, Philippa Renshaw, with malignant shining eyes, rushed out upon her.

"Ah!" she cried joyously, "I thought it was you. I thought it was one or other of you! And where is our dear Brand? Has he deserted you so quickly? Does he prefer to have his little pleasures before the sun is *quite* so high? Does he leave her to go back all alone and by herself? Does he sneak off like a thief as soon as daylight begins?"

Linda was too panic-stricken to make any reply to this torrent of taunts. With drawn white face and wide-open terrified eyes, she stared at Philippa as a bird might stare at a snake. Philippa seemed delighted with the effect she produced and stepping in front of the young girl, barred her way of escape.

"You mustn't leave us now," she cried. "It's impossible. It would never do. What will they say in the village when they see you like that, crossing the green, at this hour? What you have to do, Linda Herrick, is to come back and have breakfast with us up at the house. My mother will be delighted to see you. She always gets up early, and she's very, very fond of you, as you know. You *do* know my mother's fond of you, don't you?

"Listen, you silly white-faced thing! Listen, you young innocent, who must needs come wandering round people's houses in the middle of the night! Listen — you Linda Herrick! I don't know whether you're stupid enough to imagine that Brand's going to marry you? Are you stupid enough for that? Are you, you dumb staring thing? Because, if you are, I can tell you a little about Brand that may surprise you. Perhaps you think you're the first one he's ever made love to in this precious park of ours. No, no, my beauty, you’re not the first — and you won’t be the last. We Renshaws are a curious family, as you’ll find out, you baby, before you’ve done with us. And Brand’s the most curious of us all!

“Well, are you coming back with me? Are you coming back to have a nice pleasant breakfast with my mother? You’d better come, Linda Herrick, you’d better come! In fact, you *are* coming, so that ends it. People who spend the night wandering about other people’s grounds must at least have the decency to show themselves and acknowledge the hospitality! Besides, how glad Brand will be to see you again! Can’t you imagine how glad he’ll be? Can’t you see his look?

“Oh, no, Linda Herrick, I can’t possibly let you go like this. You see, I’m just like my dear mother. I love gentle, sensitive, pure-minded young girls. I love their shyness and their bashfulness. I love the unfortunate little accidents that lead them into parks and gardens. Come, you dumb big-eyed thing! What’s the matter with you? Can’t you speak? Come! Back with you to the house! We’ll find my mother stirring — and Brand too, unless he’s sick of girls’ society and has gone off to Mundham. Come, white-face; there’s nothing else for it. You must do what I tell you.”

She laid her hand on Linda’s shoulder, and, such was the terror she excited, the unhappy girl might actually have been magnetized into obeying her, if a timely and unexpected interruption had not changed the entire situation. This was the appearance upon the scene of Adrian Sorio. Sorio had recently acquired an almost daily habit of strolling a little way up the Oakguard avenue before his breakfast with Baltazar. On two or three of these occasions he had met Philippa, and he had always sufficient hope of meeting her to give these walks a tang of delicate excitement. He had evidently heard nothing of Linda’s disappearance. Nance in her distress had, it seemed, resisted the instinct to appeal to him. He was consequently considerably surprised to see the two girls standing together in the middle of the sunlit path.

Linda, flinging Philippa aside, rushed to meet him. “Adrian! Adrian!” she cried piteously, “take me home to Nance.” She clung to his arm and in the misery of her outraged feelings, began sobbing like a child who has been lost in the dark. Sorio, soothing and petting her as well as he could, looked enquiringly at Philippa as she came up.

“Oh, it’s nothing. It’s nothing, Adrian. It’s only that I wanted her to come up to the house. She seems to have misunderstood me and got silly and frightened. She’s not a very sensible little girl.”

Sorio looked at Philippa searchingly. In his heart he suspected her of every possible perversity and maliciousness. He realized at that moment how entirely his attraction to her was an attraction to what is dangerous and furtive. He did not even respect her intelligence. He had caught her more than once playing up to his ideas in a manner that indicated a secret contempt for them. At those moments he had hated her, and — with her — had hated, as he fancied, the whole feminine tribe — that tribe which refuses to be impressed even by world-crushing logic. But how attractive she was to him! How attractive, even at this moment, as he looked into her defiant, inscrutable eyes, and at her scornfully curved lips!

“You needn’t pity her, Adrian,” she went on, casting a bitter smile at Linda’s bowed head as the young girl hid her face against his shoulder. “There’s no need to pity her. She’s just like all the rest of us, only she doesn’t play the game frankly and honestly as I do. Send her home to her sister, as she says, and come with me across the park. I’ll show you that oak tree if you’ll come — the one I told you about, the one that’s haunted.”

She threw at him a long deep look, full of a subtle challenge, and stretched out her hand as if to separate him from the clinging child. Sorio returned her look and a mute struggle took place between them. Then his face hardened.

"I must go back with her," he said. "I must take her to Nance."

"Nonsense!" she rejoined, her eyes darkening and changing in colour. "Nonsense, my dear! She'll find her way all right. Come! I really want you. Yes, I mean what I say, Adrian. I really want you this time!"

The expression with which she challenged him now would have delighted the great antique painters of the feminine mystery. The gates of her soul seemed to open inwards, on magical softly-moving hinges, and an incalculable power of voluptuous witchcraft emanated from her whole body.

It is doubtful whether a spell so provocative could have been resisted by any one of an origin different from Sorio's. But he had in him — capable of being roused at moments — the blood of that race in which of all others women have met their match. To this witchcraft of the north he opposed the marble-like disdain of the south — the disdain which has subtlety and knowledge in it — the disdain which is like petrified hatred.

His face darkened and hardened until it resembled a mask of bronze.

"Good-bye," he said, "for the present. We shall meet again — perhaps to-morrow. But anyway, good-bye! Come, Linda, my child."

"Perhaps to-morrow — and perhaps *not*!" returned Philippa bitterly. "Good-bye, Linda. I'll give your love to Brand!"

Sorio said little to his companion as he escorted her back to her lodging in the High Street. He asked her no questions and seemed to take it as quite a natural thing that she should have been out at that early hour. They discovered Dr. Raughty in the house when they arrived, doing his best to dissuade Nance from any further desperate hunt after the wanderer, and it was in accordance with the doctor's advice, as well as their own weariness that the two sisters spent the later morning hours of their August Bank-holiday in a profound and exhausted sleep.

XVIII. BANK-HOLIDAY

It was nearly two o'clock in the afternoon when Nance woke out of a heavy dreamless sleep. She went to the window. The shops in the little street were all closed and several languid fishermen and young tradesmen's apprentices were loitering about at the house doors, chaffing lazily and with loud bursts of that peculiarly empty laughter which seems the prerogative of rural idleness, the stray groups of gaily dressed young women who, in the voluptuous contentment of after-dinner repletion, were setting forth to take the train for Mundham or to walk with their sweethearts along the sea-shore. She turned and looked closely at her still sleeping sister.

Linda lay breathing softly. On her lips was a childlike smile of serene happiness. She had tossed the bed-clothes away and one of her arms, bare to the elbow, hung over the edge of the bed. It seemed she was holding fast, in the hand thus pathetically extended, some small object round which her fingers were tightly closed. Nance moved to her side and took this hand in her own. The girl turned her head uneasily but continued to sleep. Nance opened the fingers which lay helplessly in her own and found that what they held so passionately was a small fir-cone. The bright August sunshine pouring down upon the room enabled her to catch sight of several strands of light brown hair woven round the thing's rough scales. She let the unconscious fingers close once more round the fir-cone and glanced anxiously at the sleeping girl. She guessed in a moment the meaning of that red scratch across the girl's bosom. She must have been carrying this token pressed close against her flesh and its rough prickly edges had drawn blood.

Nance sighed heavily and remained for a moment buried in gloomy thought. Then, stepping softly to the door, she ran downstairs to see if Mrs. Raps were still in her kitchen or had left any preparations for their belated dinner. Their habit was to make their own breakfast and tea, but to have their midday meal brought up to them from their landlady's table. She found an admirable collation carefully prepared for them on a tray and a little note on the dresser telling her that the family had gone to Mundham for the afternoon.

"Bless your poor, dear heart," the note ended, "the old man and I thought best not to disappoint the children."

Nance felt faint with hunger. She put the kettle on the fire and made tea and with this and Mrs. Raps' tray she returned to her sister's side and roused her from her sleep.

Linda seemed dazed and confused when she first woke. For the moment it was difficult not to feel as though all the events of the night and morning were a troubled and evil dream. Nance noticed the nervous and bewildered way in which she put her hand to the mark upon her breast as if wondering why it hurt her and the hasty disconcerted movement with which she concealed the fir-cone beneath her pillow. In spite of everything, however, their meal was not by any means an unhappy one. The sun shone warm and bright upon the floor. Pleasant scents, in which garden-roses, salt-sea freshness and the vague smell of peat and tar mingled together, came in through the window, blent with the lazy, cheerful sounds of the people's holiday. After all they were both young and neither the unsatisfied ache in the soul of the one nor the vague new dread, bitter-sweet and full of strange forebodings, in the mind of the other could altogether prevent the natural life-impulse with which, like two wind-shaken plants in an intermission of quiet, they raised their heads to the sky and the sunshine. They were young.

They were alive. They knew — too well, perhaps! — but still they knew what it was to love, and the immense future, with all its infinite possibilities, lay before them. “Sursum Corda!” the August airs whispered to them. “Sursum Corda!” “Lift up your hearts!” their own young flesh and blood answered.

Linda did not hesitate as she ate and drank to confess to Nance how she had betrayed her and how she had seen Brand in the park. Of the cedar trees and their more ominous story she said nothing, but she told how Philippa had sprung upon her in the avenue and of wild, cruel taunts.

“She frightened me,” the girl murmured. “She always frightens me. Do you think she would really have made me go back with her to the house — to meet Brand and Mrs. Renshaw and all? I couldn’t have done it,” she put her hands to her cheeks and trembled as she spoke, “I couldn’t — I couldn’t! It would have been too shameful! And yet I believe she was really going to make me. Do you think she was, Nance? Do you think she *could* have done such a thing?”

Nance gripped the arms of her chair savagely.

“Why didn’t you leave her, dear?” she exclaimed. “Why didn’t you simply leave her and run off? She isn’t a witch. She’s simply a girl like ourselves.”

Linda smiled. “How fierce you look, darling! I believe if it had been you you’d have slapped her face or pushed her down or something.”

Nance gazed out of the window, frowning. She wondered to herself by what spiritual magic Mr. Traherne and his white rat proposed to obliterate the poisonous rage of jealousy. She wondered what he would say, the devoted priest, to this uncalled for and cruel attack upon her sister. She had never heard him mention Philippa at any time in their talks. Was he as much afraid of *her* beauty as he pretended to be of her own? Did he make

Philippa hide her ankles in her skirt when she visited him? But she supposed she never did visit him. It was somehow very difficult to imagine the sister of Brand Renshaw in the priest's little study.

From Traherne, Nance's mind wandered to Dr. Raughty. How kind he had been to her when she was in despair about Linda! She had never seen him half so serious or troubled. She could hardly help smiling as she remembered the peculiar expression he wore and the way he pulled on his coat and laced up his boots. She had let him give her a little glass of *crême de menthe* and she could see now, with wonderful distinctness, the gravity with which he had watched her drink it. She felt certain his hand had shaken with nervousness when he took the glass from her. She could hear him clearing his throat and muttering some fantastic invocation to what sounded like an Egyptian divinity. Surely the effect of extreme anxiety could produce upon no one else in the world but Dr. Raughty a tendency to allude to the great god Ra! And what extraordinary things he had put into his little black bag as he sallied forth with her to the bridge! Linda might have been in need of several kinds of surgical operations from the preparations he made.

He had promised to spend that day on a fishing trip, out to sea, with Adrian and Baltazar. She wondered whether their boat was still in sight or whether they had got beyond the view of Rodmoor harbour.

"Linda, dear," she said presently, catching her sister's hand feeling about under her pillows for the fir-cone she had hidden, "Linda, dear, if I'm to forgive you for what you did last night, for running away from me, I mean, and pretending things, will you do something that I want now? Will you come down to the shore and see if we can see anything of Adrian's boat? He's fishing with Dr. Raughty and Mr. Stork, and I'd love to get a sight of their sail. I know it's a sailing boat they've gone in because Dr. Raughty said he was going to take his mackintosh so that when they went fast and the water splashed over the side he might be protected. I think he was a little scared of the expedition. Poor dear man, between us all, I'm afraid we give him a lot of shocks!"

Linda jumped up quite eagerly. She felt prepared at that moment to do anything to please her sister. Besides, there were certain agitating thoughts in her brain which cried aloud for any kind of distraction. They dressed and went out, choosing, as suited the holiday occasion, brighter frocks and gayer hats than they had worn for many weeks. Nance's position in the Pontifex shop was a favourable one as far as their wardrobe was concerned.

They made their way down to the harbour. They were surprised, and in Linda's case at any rate not very pleasantly surprised, to find tied to a post where the wharf widened and the grass grew between the cobble-stones the little grey pony and brown pony-cart which Mrs. Renshaw was in the habit of using when the hot weather made it tiring for her to walk.

"Let's go back! Oh, Nance, let's go back!" whispered Linda in a panic-stricken voice. "I don't feel I *can* face her to-day."

They stood still, hesitating.

"There she is," cried Nance suddenly, "look — who's she got there with her?"

"Oh, Nance, it's Rachel, yes, it's Rachel!"

"She must have gone to Dyke House to fetch her," murmured the other. "Quick! Let's go back."

But it was already too late. Rising from the seat where they were talking together at the harbour's edge, the two women moved towards the girls, calling them by name. There was no escape now and the sisters advanced to meet them.

They made a strange foreground to the holiday aspect of the little harbour, those two black-gowned figures. Mrs. Renshaw was a little in front and her less erect and less rigid form had a certain drooping pathos in its advance as though she deprecated her appearance in the midst of so cheerful a scene. Both the women wore old-fashioned bonnets of a kind that had been discarded for several years; but the dress and the bonnet of Rachel Doorm presented the appearance of having been dragged out of some ancient chest and thrust upon her in disregard of the neglected condition of her other clothes. Contrasted with the brightly rocking waters of the river mouth and the gay attire of the boat-load of noisy lads and girls that was drifting sea-ward on the out-flowing tide, the look of the two women, as they crossed the little quay, might have suggested the sort of scene that, raised to a poetic height by the genius of the ancient poets, has so often in classical drama symbolized the approach of messengers of ill-omen.

Mrs. Renshaw greeted the two sisters very nervously. Nance caught her glancing with an air of ascetic disapproval at their bright-coloured frocks and hats. Rachel, avoiding their eyes, extended a cold limp hand to each in turn. They exchanged a few conventional and embarrassed sentences, Nance as usual under such circumstances, giving vent to little uncalled for bursts of rather disconcerting laughter. She had a trick of opening her mouth very wide when she laughed like this, and her grey eyes even wider still, which gave her an air of rather foolish childishness quite inexpressive of what might be going on in her mind.

After a while they all moved off, as if by an instinctive impulse, away from the harbour mouth and towards the sea-shore. To do this they had to pass a piece of peculiarly desolate ground littered with dead fish, discarded pieces of nets and dried heaps of sun-bleached seaweed. Nance had a moment’s quaint and morbid intimation that the peculiar forlornness of this particular spot gratified in some way the taste of Mrs. Renshaw, for her expression brightened a little and she moved more cheerfully than when under the eyes of the loiterers on the wharf. There were some young women paddling in the sea just at that place and some young men watching them so that Mrs. Renshaw, who with Nance kept in advance of the other two, led the way along the path immediately under the sand-dunes. This was the very spot where, on the day of their first exploration of the Rodmoor coast, they had seen the flowerless leaves of the little plant called the rock-rose. The flowers of this plant, as Nance observed them now, were already faded and withered, but other sea growths met her eye which were not unfamiliar. There were several tufts of grey-leaved sea-pinks and still greyer sea-lavender. There were also some flaccid-stalked, glaucous weeds which she had never noticed before and which seemed in the moist sappy texture of their foliage as though their natural place was rather beneath than above the salt water whose propinquity shaped their form. But what made her pause and stoop down with sudden startled attention, was her first sight of that plant described to her by Mr. Traherne as peculiarly characteristic of the Rodmoor coast. Yes, there it was — the yellow horned poppy! As she bent over it Nance realized how completely right the priest had been in what he said. The thing's oozy, clammy leaves were of a wonderful bluish tint, a tint that nothing in the world short of the sea itself, could have possibly called into existence. They were spiked and prickly, these leaves, and their shape was clear-edged and threatening, as if modelled in sinister caprice, by some Da Vinci-like Providence, willing enough to startle and shock humanity. But what struck the girl more vividly than either the bluish tint or the threatening spikes were the large, limply-drooping flowers of a pallid sulphurous yellow which the plant displayed. They were flowers that bore but small resemblance to the flowers of other poppies. They had a peculiarly melancholy air, even before they began to fade, an air as though the taste of their petals would produce a sleep of a deeper, more obliterating kind than any “drowsy syrups” or “mandragora” which the sick soul might crave, to “rase out” its troubles.

Mrs. Renshaw smiled as Nance rose from her long scrutiny of this weird plant, a plant that might be imagined “rooting itself at ease on Lethe’s wharf” while the ghost-troops swept by, whimpering and wailing.

“I always like the horned poppy,” she remarked, “it’s different from other flowers. You can’t imagine it growing in a garden, can you? I like that. I like things that are wild — things no one can imprison.”

She sighed heavily when she had said this and, turning her head away as they walked on, looked wearily across the water.

“Bank-holidays are days for the young,” she went on, after a pause. “The poor people look forward to them and I’m glad they do for they have a hard life. But you must have a young heart, Nance, a young heart to enjoy these things. I feel sometimes that we don’t live enough in other people’s happiness but it’s hard to do it when one gets older.”

She was silent again and then, as Nance glanced at her sympathetically, “I like Rodmoor because there are no grand people here and no motor-cars or noisy festivities. It’s a pleasure to see the poor enjoying themselves but the others, they make my head ache! They trouble me. I always think of Sodom and Gomorrah when I see them.”

“I suppose,” murmured the girl, “that they’re human beings and have their feelings, like the rest of us.”

A shadow of almost malignant bitterness crossed Mrs. Renshaw’s face.

“I can’t bear them! I can’t bear them!” she cried fiercely. “Those that laugh shall weep,” she added, looking at her companion’s prettily designed dress.

"Yes, I'm afraid happy people are often hard-hearted," remarked Nance, anxious if possible to fall in with the other's mood, but feeling decidedly uneasy. Mrs. Renshaw suddenly changed the conversation.

"I went over to see Rachel," she said, "because I heard you had left her and were working in the shop."

She took a deep breath and her voice trembled.

"I think it was wrong of you to leave her," she went on, "I think it was cruel of you. I know what you will say. I know what all you young people nowadays say about being independent and so forth. But it was wrong all the same, wrong and cruel! Your duty was clearly to your mother's friend. I suppose," she added bitterly, "you didn't like her sadness and loneliness. You wanted more cheerful companionship."

Nance wondered in her heart whether Mrs. Renshaw's hostility to the complacent and contented ones of the earth was directed, in this case, against the hard-worked sewing girls or against poor Miss Pontifex and her little garden.

"I did it," she replied, "for Linda's sake. She and Miss Doorm didn't seem happy together."

As she spoke, she glanced apprehensively round to ascertain how near the others were, but it seemed as though Rachel had resumed her ascendency over the young girl. They appeared to be engaged in absorbing conversation and had stopped side by side, looking at the sea. Mrs. Renshaw turned upon her resentfully, a smouldering fire of anger in her brown eyes.

"Rachel has spoken to me about that," she said. "She told me you were displeased with her because she encouraged Linda to meet my son. I don't like this interference with the feelings of people! My son is of an age to choose for himself and so is your sister. Why should you set yourself to come between them? I don't like such meddling. It's interfering with Nature!"

Nance stared at her blankly, watching mechanically the feverish way her fingers closed and unclosed, plucking at a stalk of sea-lavender which she had picked.

"But you said — you said—" she protested feebly, "that Mr. Renshaw was not a suitable companion for young girls."

"I've changed my mind since then," continued the other, "at any rate in this case."

"Why?" asked Nance hurriedly. "Why have you?"

"Because," and the lady raised her voice quite loudly, "because he told me himself the other day that it was possible that he would marry before long."

She glanced triumphantly at Nance. "So you see what you've been doing! You've been trying to interfere with the one thing I've been praying for for years!"

Nance positively gasped at this. Had Brand really said such a thing? Or if he had, was it possible that it was anything but a blind to cover the tracks of his selfishness? But whatever was the reason of the son's remark it was clear that Nance could not, especially in the woman's present mood, justify her dark suspicions of him to his mother. So she did nothing but continue to stare, nervously and helplessly, at the stalk which Mrs. Renshaw's excited fingers were pulling to pieces.

"I know why you're so opposed to my son," continued Mrs. Renshaw in a lower and somewhat gentler tone. "It's because he's so much older than your sister. But you're wrong there, Nance. It's always better for the man to be older than the woman. Tennyson says that very thing, in one of his poems, I think in 'The Princess.' He puts it poetically of course, but he must have felt the truth of it very strongly or he wouldn't have brought it in. Nance, you've no idea how I have been praying and longing for Brand to see some one he felt he could marry! I know it's what he needs to make him happy. That is to say, of course, if the girl is good and gentle and obedient."

The use of the word "obedient" in this connection was too much for Nance's nerves. Her feelings towards Mrs. Renshaw were always undergoing rapid and contradictory changes. When she had talked of Smollett and Dickens in their little sitting room the girl felt she could do anything for her, so exquisitely guileless her soul seemed, so spiritual and, as it were, transparent. But at this moment, as she observed her, there was an obstinate, pinched look about her face and a rigid tightening of all its lines. It was an expression that harmonized only too well with her next remark.

"Your setting yourself against my son," she said, "is only what I expected. Philippa would be just like you if I said anything to her. All you young people are too much for me. You are too much for me. But I hear what you say and go on just the same."

The look of dogged and inflexible resolution with which she uttered this last sentence contrasted strangely with her frail aspect and her weary drooping frame.

But that phrase about "obedience" still rankled in Nance's mind, and she could not help saying, "Why is it, Mrs. Renshaw, that you always speak as though all the duty and burden of marriage rested upon the woman? I don't see why it's more necessary for her to be good and gentle than it is for the man!"

Her companion's pallid lips quivered at this into a smile of complicated irony and a strange light came into her hollow eyes.

“Ah, my dear, my dear!” she exclaimed, “you are indeed young yet. When you’re a few years older and have come to know better what the world is like, you will understand the truth of what I say. God has ordered, in his inscrutable wisdom, that there should be a different right and wrong for us women, from what there is for men. It may seem unjust. It may *be* unjust. We can no more alter it or change it than we can alter or change the shape of our bodies. A woman is *made* to obey. She finds her happiness in obeying. You young people may say what you please, but any deviation from this rule is contrary to Nature. Even the cleverest people,” she added with a smile, “can’t interfere with Nature without suffering for it.”

Nance felt absolutely nonplussed. The woman’s words fell from her with such force and were uttered with such a melancholy air of finality, that her indignation died down within her like a flame beneath the weight of a rain-soaked garment. Mrs. Renshaw looked sadly over the brightly-rocking expanse of sunlit water, dotted with white sails.

“It may appear to us unjust,” she went on. “It may *be* unjust. God does not seem in his infinite pleasure to have considered our ideas of justice in making the world. Perhaps if he had there would be no women in the world at all! Ah, Nance, my dear, it’s no use kicking against the pricks. We were made to bear, to endure, to submit, to suffer. Any attempt to escape this great law necessarily ends in misery. Suffering is not the worst evil in the world. Yielding to brutal force is not the worst, either. I sometimes think, from what I’ve observed in my life, that there are depths of horror known to men, depths of horror through which men are driven, compared with which all that *we* suffer at their hands is paradise!”

Her eyes had so strange and illumined an expression as she uttered these words that Nance could not help shuddering.

"We, too," she murmured, "fall into depths of horror sometimes and it is men who drive us into them."

Mrs. Renshaw did not seem to hear her. She went on dreamily.

"We can console ourselves. We have our duties. We have our little things which must be done. God has given to these little things a peculiar consecration. He has touched them with his breath so that they are full of unexpected consolations. There are horizons and vistas in them such as no one who hasn't experienced what I mean can possibly imagine. They are like tiny ferns or flowers — our 'little things,' Nance, growing at the bottom of a precipice."

The girl could restrain herself no longer.

"I don't agree with you! I don't, I don't!" she cried. "Life is large and infinite and splendid and there are possibilities in it for all of us — for women just as much as men; just, just as much!"

Mrs. Renshaw smiled at her with a look in her face that was half pitiful and half ironical. "You don't like my talk of 'little things.' You want great things. You want Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus! Even your sacrifice — if you *do* sacrifice yourself — must be striking, stirring, wonderful! Ah, my dear, my dear, wait a little, wait a little. A time will come when you'll learn what the secret is of a woman's life on this earth."

Nance made a desperate gesture of protest. Something treacherous in her own heart seemed to yield to her companion's words but she struggled vigorously against it.

"What we women have to do," Mrs. Renshaw continued pitilessly, "is to make some one need us — need us with his whole nature. That is what is meant by loving a man. Everything else is mere passion and tends to misery. The more submissive we are, the more they need us. I tell you, Nance, the deepest instinct in our blood is the instinct to be needed. When a person needs us we love him. Everything else is mere animal instinct and burns itself out."

Nance fumbled vaguely and helplessly in her mind, as she listened, to get back something of the high, inspiring tone of Mr. Traherne's mystical doctrine. *That* had thrilled her and strengthened her, while *this* flung her into the lowest depths of despondency. Yet, in a certain sense, as she was compelled to admit to herself, there was very little practical difference between the two points of view. It was only that, with Mrs. Renshaw, the whole thing took on a certain desolate and disastrous colour as if high spirits and gaiety and adventurousness were wrong in themselves and as if nothing but what was pitched in a low unhappy key could possibly be the truth of the universe. The girl had a curious feeling, all the while she was speaking, that in some subtle way the unfortunate woman was deriving a morbid pleasure from putting thrilling and exalted things upon a ground that annihilated the emotion of heroism.

"Shall we go down to the sea now, dear?" said Mrs. Renshaw suddenly. "The others will see us and follow."

They moved together across the clinging sand. When they approached the water's edge, now deserted of holiday-makers, Nance searched the skyline for any sail that might be the one carrying Sorio and his friends. She made out two or three against the blue distance but it was quite impossible to tell which of these, if any, was the one that bore the man who, according to her companion's words, would only "need" her if she served him like a slave.

Mrs. Renshaw began picking up shells from the debris-scattered windrow at the edge of the wet tide-mark. As she did this and showed them one by one to Nance, her face once more assumed that clear, transparent look, spiritual beyond description and touched with a childish happiness, which the girl had noticed upon it when she spoke of the books she loved. Could it be that only where religion or the opposite sex were concerned this strange being was diseased and perverted? If so, how dreadful, how cruel, that the two things which were to most people the very mainspring of life were to this unhappy one the deepest causes of wretchedness! Yet Nance was far from satisfied with her reading of the mystery of Mrs. Renshaw. There was something in the woman, in spite of her almost savage outbursts of self-revelation, so aloof, so proud, so reserved that the girl felt only vaguely assured she was on the right track with regard to her. Perhaps, after all, below that tone of self-humiliating sentiment with which she habitually spoke of both God and man, there was some deep and passionate current of feeling, hidden from all the world? Or was she, essentially and in secret truth, cold and hard and pagan and only forcing herself to drink the cup of what she conceived to be Christianity out of a species of half-insane pride? In all her utterances with regard to religion and sex there was, Nance felt, a kind of heavy materiality, as if she got an evil satisfaction in rendering what is usually called "goodness" as colourless and contemptible as possible. But now as she picked up a trumpet-shaped shell from the line of debris and held it up, her eyes liquid with pleasure, to the girl's view, Nance could not resist the impression that she was in some strange way a creature forced and driven out of her natural element into these obscure perversities.

"I used to paint these shells when I was a girl," Mrs. Renshaw remarked.

"What colour?" Nance answered, still thinking more of the woman than of her words. Her companion looked at her and burst into quite a merry laugh.

"I don't mean paint the shell itself," she said. "You're not listening to me, Nance. I mean copy it, of course, and paint the drawing. I used to collect sea-weeds too, in those days, and dry them in a book. I have that book somewhere still," she added, wistfully, "but I don't know where."

She had won the girl's attention completely now. Nance seemed to visualize with a sudden sting of infinite pity the various little relics so entirely dissociated from Rodmoor and its inhabitants which this reserved woman must keep stored up in that gloomy house.

"It's a funny thing," Mrs. Renshaw went on, "but I can smell at this moment quite distinctly (I suppose it's being down here by the sea that makes it come to me) the very scent of that book! The pages used to get stuck together and when I pulled them apart there was always the imprint of the seaweed on the paper. I used to like to see that. It was as though Nature had drawn it."

"It's lovely, collecting things," Nance remarked sympathetically. "I used to collect butterflies when I was a child. Dad used to say I was more like a boy than a girl."

Mrs. Renshaw glanced at her with a curious look.

"Nance, dear," she said in a low, trembling voice, "don't ever get into the habit of trying to be boyish and that sort of thing. Don't ever do that! The only good women are the women who accept God's will and bow to his pleasure. Anything else leads to untold wretchedness."

Nance made no reply to this and they both began searching for more shells among the stranded sea-drift.

Over their heads the sea-gulls whirled with wild disturbed screams. There was only one sail on the horizon now and Nance fixed her thoughts upon it and an immense longing for Adrian surged up in her heart.

Meanwhile, between Linda and Miss Doorm a conversation much more sinister was proceeding. Rachel seemed from their first encounter and as soon as the girl came into contact with her to reassert all her old mastery.

She deliberately overcame the frightened child's instinctive movement to keep pace with the others and held her closely to her side as if by the power of some ancient link between them, too strong to be overcome.

"Let me look at you," she said as soon as their friends were out of hearing. "Let me look into your eyes, my pretty one!"

She laid one of her gaunt hands on the girl's shoulder and with the other held up her chin.

"Yes," she remarked after a long scrutiny during which Linda seemed petrified into a sort of dumb submission, "yes, I can see you've struggled against him. I can see you've not given up without an effort. That means that you *have* given up! If you hadn't fought against him he wouldn't have followed you. He's like that. He always *was* like that." She removed her hands but kept her eyes fixed gloomily on the girl's face. "I expect you're wishing now you'd never seen this place, eh? Aren't you wishing that? So this is the end of all your selfishness and your vanity? Yes, it's the end, Linda Herrick. It's the end."

She dragged the girl slowly forward along the path. On their right as they advanced, the sun flickered upon the rank grasses which grew intermittently in the soft sand and on their left the glittering sea lay calm and serene under the spacious sky.

Linda felt her feet grow heavy beneath her and her heart sank with a sick misgiving as she saw how far they had permitted the others to outstrip them. Beyond anything else it was the power of cruel memories which held the young girl now so docile, so helpless, in the other's hands. The old panic-stricken terror which Rachel had the power of exciting in her when a child seemed ineluctable in its endurance. Faintly and feebly in her heart Linda struggled against this spell. She longed to shake herself free and rush desperately in pursuit of the others but her limbs seemed turned to lead and her will seemed paralyzed.

Rachel’s face was white and haggard. She seemed animated by some frenzied impulse — some inward, demoniac force which drove her on. Drops of perspiration stood out upon her forehead and made the grey hair that fell across it moist and clammy under the rim of her dusty black hat. Her clothes, as she held the girl close to her side, threw upon the air a musty, fetid odour.

“Where are your soft ways now?” she went on, “your little clinging ways, your touching little babyish ways? Where are your whims and your fancies? Your caprices and your blushes? Where are your white-faced pretences, and your sham terrors, only put on to make you look sweet?”

She had her hand upon the girl’s arm as she spoke and she tightened her grasp, almost shaking her in her mad malignity.

“Before you were born your mother was afraid of me,” she went on. “Oh, she gained little by cutting me out with her pretty looks! She gained little, Linda Herrick! She dared scarcely look me in the face in those days. She was afraid even to hate me. That is why *you* are what you are. You’re the child of her terror, Linda Herrick, the child of her terror!”

She paused for a moment while the girl’s breath came in gasps through her white lips as if under the burden of an incubus.

“Listen!” the woman hissed at last, staggering a little and actually leaning against the girl as though the frenzy of her malignity deprived her of her strength. “Listen, Linda. Do you remember what I used to tell you about your father? How in his heart all the time he loved only me? How he would sooner have got rid of your mother than have got rid of me? Do you remember that? Listen, then! There’s something else I must say to you —

something that you've never guessed, something that you couldn't guess. When you were—" she stopped, panting heavily and if Linda had not mechanically assisted her she would have fallen. "When you were — when I was—" Her breath seemed to fail her then completely. She put her hand to her side and in spite of the girl's feeble effort to support her she sank, moaning, to the ground.

Linda looked helplessly round. Nance and Mrs. Renshaw had passed beyond a little promontory of sand-hills and were concealed from view. She knelt down by Rachel's side. Even then — even when those vindictive dark eyes looked at her without a sign of consciousness, they seemed to hold her with their power. As they remained mute and motionless in this manner, the prostrate woman and the kneeling girl, a faint gust of wind, blowing the sand in a little cloud before it and rustling the leaves of the horned poppies, brought to Linda's senses an odour of inland fields. She felt a dim return, under this air, of her normal faculties and taking one of the woman's hands in her own she began gently chafing it. Rachel answered to the touch and a shiver passed through her frame. Then, in a flash, intelligence came back into her eyes and her lips moved. Linda bent lower so as to catch her words. They came brokenly, and in feeble gasps.

"I loved him so, I loved him more than my life. He took my life and killed it. He killed my heart. He brought me those beads from far across the sea. They were for me — not for her. He brought them for me, I tell you. I gave him my heart for them and he killed it. He killed it and buried it. This isn't Rachel's heart any more. No! No! It isn't Rachel's. Rachel's heart has gone with him — with the Captain — over great wide seas. He got it — out of me — when — he — kissed my mouth."

Her voice died away in inarticulate mutterings. Then once more her words grew human and clear.

"My heart went with him long ago, after that, over the sea. It was in all his ships. It was in every ship he sailed in — over far-off seas. And in place of my heart — something else — something else — came and lived in Rachel. It is this that — that—" The intelligence once more faded out of her eyes and she lay stiff and motionless. Linda had a sudden thought that she was dead and, with the thought, her fear of her rolled away. Looking at her now, lying there, in her black dress and crumpled bonnet, she seemed to see her as she was, a mad, wretched, passion-scorched human being. It crossed the young girl's mind how inconceivable it was that this haggard image of desolation had once been young and soft-limbed, had once danced out on summer mornings to meet the sun as any other child! But even as this thought came to her, Rachel stirred and moved again. Her eyes had a dazed expression now — a clouded, sullen, hopeless expression. Slowly and with laborious effort, refusing Linda's assistance, she rose to her feet.

"Go and call them," she said in a low voice. "Go and call them. Tell Mrs. Renshaw that I'm ill — that she must take me home. You won't be troubled with me much longer — not much longer! But you won't forget me. Brand will see to that! No, you won't forget me, Linda Herrick."

The girl ran off without looking back. When the three of them returned, Rachel Doorm seemed to have quite resumed her normal taciturnity.

They walked back, all four together, to the harbour mouth. The sisters helped the two women into the little cart and untied the pony. As they clattered away over the cobble-stones, Nance received from Mrs. Renshaw a smile of gratitude, a smile of such illumined and spiritual gaiety that it rendered the pale face which it lit up beautiful with the beauty of some ancient picture.

When the pony-cart had disappeared, Nance and Linda sat down together on the wooden bench watching the white sail upon the horizon and talking of Rachel Doorm.

Most of the holiday-makers had now retired to their tea and a fresh breeze, coming in with the turn of the tide, blew pleasantly upon the girls' foreheads and ruffled the soft hair under their daintily beribboned hats. Nance, holding in her fingers the trumpet-shaped shell, found herself suddenly wondering — perhaps because the shape of the shell reminded her of it — whether Linda had left that ominous fir-cone behind her in her room or whether at the last moment she had again slipped it into her dress. She glanced sideways at her sister's girlish bosom, scarcely stirring now as with her head turned she looked at the full-brimmed tide, and she wondered if, under that white and pink frock so coquettishly open at the throat, there were any newly created blood-stains from the rasping impact of that rough-edged trophy of the satyr-haunted woods of Oakguard.

The afternoon light was so beautiful upon the water at that moment and the cries of the circling sea-gulls so full of an elemental callousness that the elder girl experienced a sort of fierce reaction against the whole weight of this intolerable sex-passion that was spoiling both their lives. Something hard, free and reckless seemed to rise up within her, in defiance of every sort of feminine sentiment and, hardly thinking what she did or of the effect of her words, "Quick, my dear," she cried suddenly, "give me that fir-cone you've got under your dress!"

Linda's hands rose at once and she clutched at her bosom, but her sister was too quick for her and too strong. Nance's feeling at that moment was as if she were plucking a snake away. Rising to her feet when she had secured the trophy, she lifted up her arm and, with a fierce swing of her whole body, flung both it and the shell she had herself been holding far into the centre-current of the inflowing tide.

"So much for Love!" she cried fiercely.

The shell sank at once to the bottom but the fir-cone floated. For a moment, when she saw Linda's dismay, she felt a pang of remorse. But she crushed it fiercely down. Behind her whole mood at that moment was a savage reaction from Mrs. Renshaw's emotional perversity.

"Come!" she cried, snatching at her sister's hand as Linda wavered on the wharf-brink and watched the fir-cone drift behind an anchored barge and disappear. "Come! Let's go back and help Miss Pontifex water her garden. Then we'll have tea and then we'll go for a row if it isn't too dark! Perhaps Dr. Raughty will be home by then and we'll make him take us."

She was so resolute and so dominant that Linda could do nothing but meekly submit to her. Strangely enough she, too, felt a certain rebound of youthful vivacity now she was conscious no longer of the rough wood-token pressing against her flesh. She also, after what she had heard from the lips of Rachel, experienced a reaction against the sorrow of "what men call love." Their mood continued unaltered until they reached the gate of the dressmaker's garden.

"Then it's Dr. Raughty — not Adrian," the younger girl remarked with a smile, "that we're to have to row us to-night?"

Nance looked quickly back at her and made an effort to smile too. But the sight of the flower-beds and the carefully tended box-hedges of the little garden, had been associated too long and too deeply with the pain at her heart. Her smile died away from her face and it was in silence after all and still bowed, for all their brave revolt under the burden of their humanity, that the two girls set themselves to water, as the August sun went down into the fens, the heavily-scented phloxes and sweet lavender of the admirable Miss Pontifex. That little lady was herself at that moment staring demurely, under the escort of a broad-shouldered nephew from London, at a stirring representation of “East Lynne” in a picture show in Mundham!

XIX. LISTENERS

August, now it had once come, proved hotter than was usual in that windy East Anglian district. Before the month was half over the harvest had begun and the wheat fields by the river bank stood bare and stubbly round their shocks of corn. Twined with the wheat stalks and fading now, since their support had been cut away, were all those bright and brilliant field flowers which Nance had watched with so tender an emotion in their yet unbudded state from her haunt by the willow bed. Fumitory and persicaria, succory and corn cockles, blent together in those fragrant holocausts with bindweed and hawkweed. At the edges of the fields the second brood of scarlet poppies still lingered on like thin streaks of spilt red blood round the scalps of closely cropped heads. In the marshy places and by the dykes and ditches the newly grown rush spears were now feathery and high, overtopping their own dead of the year before and gradually hiding them from sight. The last of all the season's flowers, the lavender-coloured Michaelmas daisies alone refused to anticipate their normal flowering. But even these, in several portions of the salt marshes, were already high-grown and only waiting the hot month's departure to put forth their autumnal blossoms. In the dusty corners of Rodmoor yards and in the littered outskirts of Mundham, where there were several gravel-quarries, camomile and feverfew — those pungent children of the late summer, lovers of rubbish heaps and deserted cow sheds — trailed their delicate foliage and friendly flowers. In the wayside hedges, wound-wort was giving place to the yellow spikes of the flower called "archangel," while those "buds of marjoram," appealed to in so wistful and so bitter a strain by the poet of the

Sonnets, were superseding the wild basil. The hot white dust of the road between Rodmoor and Mundham rose in clouds under the wheels of every kind of vehicle and, as it rose, it swept in spiral columns across that grassy expanse which, in accordance with the old liberal custom of East Anglian road-makers, separated the highway on both sides from the enclosing hedges. With the sound of the corn-cutting machine humming drowsily all day and, in the twilight, with the shouts and cries of the children as their spirits rose with the appearance of the moths and bats, there mingled steadily, day in and day out, the monotonous splash of the waves on Rodmoor beach.

To those in the vicinity, whom Nature or some ill-usage of destiny had made morbidly sensitive to that particular sound, there was perhaps something harder to bear in its placid reiterated rhythm under these halcyon influences than when, in rougher weather, it broke into fury. The sound grew in intensity as it diminished in volume and with the *beat, beat, beat*, of its eternal refrain, sharpened and brought nearer in the silence of the hot August noons there came to such nervously sensitive ears as were on the alert to receive it, an increasingly disturbing resemblance to the sistole and diastole, the inbreathing and outbreathing of some huge, half-human heart.

Among the various persons in Rodmoor from whom the greater and more beneficent gods seemed turning away their faces and leaving them a prey to the lesser and more vindictive powers, it is probable that not one felt so conscious of this note of insane repetition, almost bestial in its blind persistence, as did Philippa Renshaw. Philippa, in those early August weeks, became more and more aloof from both her mother and Brand. She met Sorio once or twice but that was rather by chance than by design and the encounters were not happy for either of them. Insomnia grew upon her and her practise of roaming at night beneath the trees of the park grew with it. Brand often followed her on these nocturnal wanderings but only once was he successful in persuading her to return with him to the house. In proportion as she drew away from him he seemed to crave her society.

One night, after Mrs. Renshaw had retired to bed, the brother and sister lingered on in the darkened library. It was a peculiarly sultry evening and a heavy veil of mist obscured the young crescent moon. Through the open windows came hot gusts of air, ruffling the curtains and making the candle flames flicker. Brand rose and blew out all the lights except one which he placed on a remote table below the staring dark-visaged portrait, painted some fifty years before, of Herman Renshaw, their father. The other pictures that hung in the spaces between the book-shelves were now reduced to a shadowy and ghostly obscurity, an obscurity well adapted to the faded and melancholy lineaments of these older, but apparently no happier, Renshaws of Oakguard. Round the candle he had left alight a little group of agitated moths hovered and at intervals as one or other of them got singed it would dash itself with wild blind flutterings, into the remotest corners of the room. From the darkness outside came an occasional rustle of leaves and sighing of branches as the gusts of hot air rose and died away. The oppressive heat was like the burden of a huge, palpable hand laid upon the roof of the house. Now and again some startled creature pursued by owl or weasel uttered a panic-stricken cry, but whether its enemy seized upon it, or whether it escaped, the eyes of the darkness alone knew. Its cry came suddenly and stopped suddenly and the steady beat of the rhythm of the night went on as before.

Brand flung himself down in a low chair and his sister balanced herself on the arm of it, a lighted cigarette between her mocking lips. Hovering thus in the shadow above him, her flexible form swaying like a phantom created out of mist, she might have been taken for the embodiment of some perverse vision, some dream avatar from the vices of the dead past.

"After all," Brand murmured in a low voice, a voice that sounded as though his thoughts were taking shape independently of his conscious will, "after all, what do I want with Linda or any of them since I've got you?"

She made a mocking inclination of her head at this but kept silence, only letting her eyes cling, with a strange light in them, to his disturbed face. After a pause he spoke again.

"And yet she suits me better than any one — better than I expected it was possible for a girl like that to suit me. She'll never get over her fear of me and that means she'll never get over her love. I ought to be contented with that, oughtn't I?"

He paused again and still Philippa uttered no word. "I don't think you quite understand," he went on, "all that there is between her and me. We touch one another *in the depths*, there's no doubt about that, and our boat takes us where there are no soundings, none at least that I've ever made! We touch one another where that noise — oh, damn the wind! I don't mean the wind! — is absolutely still. Have *you* ever reached a point when you've got that noise out of your ears? No — you know very well you haven't! You were born hearing it — just as I was — and you'll die hearing it. But with her, just because she's so afraid, so madly afraid — do you understand? — I *have* reached that point. I reached it the other night when we were together. Yes! You may smile — you little devil — but it's quite true. She put it clear out of my head just as if she'd driven the tide back!"

He stared at the cloud of faint blue smoke that floated up round his sister's white face and then he met her eyes again.

“Bah!” he flung out angrily. “What absurd nonsense it all is! We’ve been living too long in this place, we Renshaws, that’s what’s the matter with us! We ought to sell the confounded house and clear out altogether! I will too, when mother dies. Yes, I will — brewery or no brewery — and go off with Tassar to one of his foreign places. I’ll sell the whole thing, the land and the business! It’s begun to get on my nerves. It *must* have got on my nerves, mustn’t it, when that simple *break, break, break*, as mother’s absurd poem says of this damned sea, sounds to me like the beating heart of something, of something whose heart ought to be *stopped* from beating!”

His voice which had risen to a loud pitch of excitement died away in a sort of apologetic murmur.

“Sorry,” he muttered, “only don’t look at me like that, you girl. There, clear off and sit further away! It’s that look of yours that makes me talk in this silly fashion. God help us! I don’t blame that foreign fellow for getting queer in his head. You’ve got something in those eyes of yours, Philippa, that no living girl ought to be allowed to have! Bah! You’ve made me talk like an absolute fool.”

Instead of moving away as she had been bidden, Philippa touched her brother with a light caress. Never had she looked so entirely a creature of the old perverse civilizations as she looked at that moment.

“Mother thinks you’re going to marry that girl,” she whispered, “but I know better than that, and I’m always right in these things, am I not, Brand darling?”

He fell back under her touch and the shadowy lines of his face contracted. He presented the appearance of something withered and crumpled. Her mocking smile still divided her curved lips, curved in the subtle, archaic way as in the marbles of ancient Greece. Whatever may have been the secret of her power over him, it manifested itself now in the form of a spiritual cruelty which he found very difficult to bear. He made a movement that was almost an appeal.

“Say I’m right, say I’m always right in these things!” she persisted.

But at that moment a diversion occurred, caused by the sudden entrance of a large bat. The creature uttered a weird querulous cry, like the cry of a newborn babe and went wheeling over their heads in desperate rapid circles, beating against the book-case and the picture frames. Presently, attracted by the light, it swooped down upon the flame of the candle and in a moment had extinguished it, plunging the room into complete darkness.

Philippa, with a low taunting laugh, ran across the room and wrapped herself in one of the window curtains.

“Open the door and drive it out,” she cried. “Drive it out, I say! Are you afraid of a thing like that?”

But Brand seemed either to have sunk into a kind of trance or to be too absorbed in his thoughts to make any movement. He remained reclining in his chair, silent and motionless.

The girl cautiously withdrew from her shelter and, fumbling about for matches, at last found a box and struck a light. The bat flew past her as she did so and whirled away into the night. She lit several candles and held one of them close to her brother’s face. Thus illuminated, Brand’s sinister countenance had the look of a mediæval wood-carving. He might have been the protagonist of one of those old fantastic prints representing Doctor Faustus after some hopeless struggle with his master-slave.

“Take it away, you! Let me alone. I’ve talked too much to you already. This is a hot night, eh? A hot night and the kind that sets a person thinking. Bah! I’ve thought too much. It’s thinking that causes all the devilries in the world. Thinking, and hearing hearts beating, that ought to be stopped!”

He pushed her aside and rose, stretching himself and yawning.

"What's the time? What? Only ten o'clock? How early mother must have gone to bed! This is the kind of night in which people kill their mothers. Yes, they do, Philippa. You needn't peer at me like that! And they do it when their mothers have daughters that look like you — just like you at this very moment."

He leaned against the back of a chair and watched her as she stood negligently by the mantelpiece, her arm extended along its marble surface.

"Why does mother always say these things to you about my marrying?" he continued in a broken thick voice. "You lead her on to think of these things and then when she comes out with them you bring them to me, to make me angry with her. Tell me this, Philippa, why do you hate mother so? Why did you have that look in your face just now when I talked of killing her? What — would — you — Hang it all, girl, stop staring and smiling at me like that or it'll be you I'll kill! Oh, Heaven above, help us! This hot night will send us all into Bedlam!"

He suddenly stopped and began intently listening, his eyes on his sister's face. "Did you hear that?" he whispered huskily. "She's walking up and down the passage — walking in her slippers, that's why you can hardly hear her. Hush! Listen! She'll go presently into father's room. She always does that in the end. What do you think she does there, Philippa? Rummages about, I suppose, and opens and shuts drawers and changes the pictures! What people we are! God — what people we are! I suppose the sound of her doing all that irritates you till your brain nearly bursts. It's a strange thing, isn't it, this family life! Human beings like us weren't meant to be stuck in a hole together like wasps in a bottle. Listen! Do you hear that? She's doing something to his window now. A lot he cares, six feet under the clay! But it shows how he holds her still, doesn't it?" He made a gesture in the direction of his father's picture upon which the candle-light shone clearly now, animating its heavy features.

"Do you know," he continued solemnly, looking closely at his sister again, "I believe one of these nights, when she walks up and down like that, in her soft slippers, you'll go straight up and kill her yourself. Yes, I believe you listen like this every night till you could put your fingers in your ears and scream."

He moved across the room and, approaching his sister, shook her roughly by the arm. Some psychic change in the atmosphere about them seemed to have completely altered their relations.

"Confess — confess — you girl!" he muttered harshly. "Confess now — when you go rushing off like that into the park it isn't to see that foreign fellow at all? It isn't even to lie, as I know you love to do, touching the stalks of the poison funguses with the tip of your tongue under the oak trunks? It's to escape from hearing her, that's what it is! Confess now. It's to escape from hearing her!"

He suddenly relaxed his grasp and stood erect, listening intently. The sweet heavy scent of magnolia petals floated in through the window and somewhere — far off among the trees — a screech-owl uttered a broken wail, followed by the flapping of wings. The clock in the hall outside began striking the hour. Before each stroke a ponderous metallic vibration trembled through the silent house.

"It's only ten now," he said. "The clock in here is fast."

As he spoke there was a loud ring at the entrance door. The brother and sister stared blankly at one another and then Philippa gave a low unnatural laugh. "We might be criminals," she whispered. They instinctively assumed more easy and less dramatic positions and waited in silence, while from the distant servants' quarters some one came to answer the summons. They heard the door opened and the sound of suppressed voices in the hall. There was a moment's pause, during which Philippa looked mockingly and enquiringly at Brand.

"It's our dear priest," she whispered, "and some one else, too."

"Surely the fool's not going to try—" began Brand.

"Mr. Traherne and Dr. Raughty!" announced the servant, opening the library door and holding it open while the visitors entered.

The clergyman advanced first. He shook hands with Brand and bowed with old-fashioned courtesy to Philippa. Dr. Raughty, following him, shook hands with Philippa and nodded nervously at her brother. The two men sank into the seats offered them and accepted an invitation to smoke. Brand moved to a side table and mixed for them, with an air of resigned politeness, cool and appropriate drinks. He drank nothing himself, however, but his sister, with a mocking apology to Mr. Traherne, lit herself a cigarette.

"How's the rat?" she began, throwing a teasing and provocative smile upon the priest's perturbed countenance.

"Out there," he replied, emptying his glass at one gulp.

"What? In your coat pocket on such a night as this?"

Mr. Traherne put down his glass and inserted his huge workman's fingers into the bosom of his cassock.

"Nothing under this but a shirt," he said. "Cassocks have no pockets."

"Haven't they?" laughed Brand. "They have something then where you can put money. That is, unless you parsons are like kangaroos and have some natural little orifice in which to hide the offerings of the faithful."

"Is he happy always in your pocket?" enquired Philippa.

"Do you want me to see?" replied the priest, rising with a movement that almost upset the table. "I'll bring him in and I'll make him go scimble-scamble all about the room."

The tone in which he uttered these words said, as plainly as words could say, "You're a pretty, silly, flirtatious piece of femininity! You only talk about my rat for the sake of fooling me. You don't really care whether he's happy in my pocket or not. It's only out of consideration for your silly nerves that I don't play with him now. And if you tease me an inch more I will, and make him run up your petticoats, too!"

"Sit down again, Traherne," said Brand, "and let me fill up your glass. We'll all visit the rat presently and find him some supper. Just at present I'm anxious to know how things are in the village. I haven't been down that way for weeks."

This was a direct challenge to the priest to come, without further delay, to the matter of his visit. Hamish Traherne accepted it.

"We came really," he said, "to see *you*, Renshaw. A little later, perhaps before we go, we must have our conversation. We hardly expected to have the pleasure of finding Miss Philippa sitting up so late."

Dr. Raughty, who all this while had been watching with the most intense delight the beauty of the girl's white skin and scarlet lips and the indescribable charm of her sinuous figure, now broke in impetuously.

"But it can wait! It can wait! Oh, please don't go to bed yet, Miss Renshaw. Look, your cigarette's out! Throw it away and try one of these. They're French, they're the yellow packets, I know you like them. They're what you smoked once when we were on the river — when you caught that great perch."

Philippa, who had risen to her feet at Traherne's somewhat brusque remark, came at once to the Doctor's side.

“Oh, the perch,” she cried, “yes, I should think I do remember! You insisted on killing it at once so that it shouldn’t jump back into the water. You put your thumb into its mouth and bent back its head. Oh, yes! That yellow packet brings it all back to me. I can smell the sticky dough we tried to catch dace with afterwards and I can see the look of your hands all smeared with blood and silver scales. Oh, that was a lovely day, Doctor! Do you remember how you twisted those things, bryony leaves they were, round my head when the others had gone? Do you remember how you said you’d like to treat me as you treated the perch? Do you remember how you ran after a dragon-fly or something?”

She stopped breathlessly and, balancing herself on the arm of the Doctor’s chair, blew a great cloud of smoke over his head, filling the room in a moment with the pungent odour of French tobacco.

Both Traherne and Brand regarded her with astonishment. She seemed to have transformed herself and to have become a completely different person. Her eyes shone with childish gaiety and when she laughed, as she did a moment afterwards at some sally of the Doctor’s, there was a ring of unforced, spontaneous merriment in the sound such as her brother had not heard for many years. She continued to bend over Dr. Raughty’s chair, covering them both in a thick cloud of cigarette smoke, and the two of them soon became absorbed in some intricate discussion concerning, as far as the others could make out, the question of the best bait to be used for pike.

The priest took the opportunity of delivering himself of what was on his mind.

“I’m afraid, Renshaw,” he said, “you’ve gone your own way in that matter of Linda Herrick. No! Don’t deny it. You may not have seen her as often as before our last conversation, but you’ve seen her. She’s confessed as much to me herself. Now look here, Renshaw, you and I have known one another for some good few years. How long is it, man? Fifteen, twenty? It can't be less. Long enough, anyway, for me to have earned the right to speak quite plainly and I tell you this, you must stop the whole business!"

His voice sank as he spoke to a formidable whisper. Brand glanced round at the others but apparently they were quite preoccupied. Mr. Traherne continued.

"The whole business, Renshaw! After this you must leave that child absolutely alone. If you don't — if you insist on going on seeing her — I shall take strong measures with you. I shall — but I needn't say any more! I think you can make a pretty shrewd guess what I shall do."

Brand received this solemn ultimatum in a way calculated to cause the agitated man who addressed it to him a shock of complete bewilderment. He yawned carelessly and stretched out his long arms.

"As you please, Hamish," he said, "I'm perfectly ready not to see her. In fact, I probably shouldn't have seen her in any case. To tell you the truth, I've got a bit sick of the whole thing. These young girls are silly little feather-weights at best. It's first one mood and then another! You can't be sure of them for two hours at a stretch. So it's all right, Hamish Traherne! I won't interfere with her. You can make a nun of her if you like — or whatever else you fancy. All I beg of you is, don't go round talking about me to your parishioners. Don't talk about me to Raughty! I don't want my affairs discussed by any one — not even by my friends. All right, my boy — you needn't look at me like that. You've known me, as you say, long enough to know what I am. So there you are! You've had your answer and you've got my word. I don't mind even your calling it 'the word of a gentleman' as you did the other night. You can call it what you like. I'm not going to see Linda for a reason quite personal and private but if you like to make it a favour to yourself that I don't — well! throw that in, too!"

Hamish Traherne thrust his hand into his cassock thinking, for the moment, that it was his well-worn ulster and that he would feel the familiar form of Ricoletto.

It may be noted from this futile and unconscious gesture, how much hangs in this world upon insignificant threads. Had the priest's fingers touched at that moment the silky coat of his little friend he would have derived sufficient courage to ask his formidable host point-blank whether, in leaving Linda in this way, he left her as innocent and unharmed as when he crossed her path at the beginning. Not having Ricoletto with him, however, and his fingers encountering nothing but his own woolen shirt, he lacked the inspiration to carry the matter to this conclusion. Thus, upon the trifling accident of a tame rodent having been left outside a library or, if you will, upon an eccentric parson having no pocket, depended the whole future of Linda Herrick. For, had he put that question and had Brand confessed the truth, the priest would undoubtedly, under every threat in his power, have commanded him to marry her and it is possible, considering the mood the man was in at that moment and considering also the nature of the threat held over him, he would have bowed to the inevitable and undertaken to do it.

The intricate and baffling complications of human life found further illustration in the very nature of this mysterious threat hinted at so darkly by Mr. Traherne. It was in reality — and Brand knew well that it was — nothing more or less than the making clear to Mrs. Renshaw beyond all question or doubt, of the actual character of the son she tried so conscientiously to idealize. For some basic and profound reason, inherent in his inmost nature, it was horrible to Brand to think of his mother knowing him. She might suspect and *she might know that he knew she suspected*, but to have the thing laid quite bare between them would be to send a rending and shattering crack through the unconscious hypocrisy of twenty years. For certain natures any drastic cleavage of slowly built-up moral relations is worse than death. Brand would have felt less remorse in being the cause of his mother's death than of being the cause of her knowing him as he really was. The matter of Linda being thus settled between the two men, if the understanding so reached could be regarded as settling it, they both turned round, anxious for some distraction, to the quarter of the room where their friends had been conversing. But Philippa and the Doctor were no longer with them. Brand looked whimsically at the priest who, shrugging his shoulders, poured himself out a third glass from the decanter on the table. They then moved to the window which reached almost to the ground. Stepping over its low ledge, they passed out upon the terrace. They were at once aware of a change in the atmospheric conditions. The veil of mist had entirely been swept away from the sky. The vast expanse twinkled with bright stars and, far down among the trees, they could discern the crescent form of the new moon.

Brand pulled towards him a spray of damask roses and inhaled their sweetness. Then he turned to his companion and gave him an evil leer.

"The Doctor and Philippa have taken advantage of our absorbing conversation," he remarked.

"Nonsense, man, nonsense!" exclaimed the priest. "Raughty's only showing her some sort of moth or beetle. Can't you stop your sneering for once and look at things humanly and naturally?"

His words found their immediate justification. Turning the corner of the house they discovered the two escaped ones on their knees by the edge of the dew-drenched lawn watching the movements of a toad. The Doctor was gently directing its advance with the stalk of a dead geranium and Philippa was laughing as merrily as a little girl.

They now realized the cause of the disappearance of the sultriness and the heat. From over the wide-stretching fens came, with strong steady breath, the north-west wind. It came with a full deep coolness in it which the plants and the trees seemed to drink from as out of some immortal cistern. It brought with it the odour of immense marsh-lands and fresh inland waters and as it bowed the trees and rustled over the flower-beds, it seemed to obliterate and drive back all indications of their nearness to the sea.

Raughty and Philippa rose to their feet at the approach of their friends.

"Doctor," said Brand, "what's the name of that great star over there — or planet — or whatever it is?"

They all surveyed the portion of the sky he indicated and contemplated the unknown luminary.

"I wish they'd taught me astronomy instead of Greek verses when I was at school," sighed Mr. Traherne.

"It's Venus, I suppose," remarked Dr. Raughty. "Isn't it Venus, Philippa?"

The girl looked from the men to the sky, and from the sky to the men.

"Well, you *are* a set of wise fellows," she cried, "not to know the star which rules us all! And that's *not* Venus, Doctor! Don't any of you really know? Brand — you surely do? Well, I'll tell you then, that's Jupiter, that's the lord-star Jupiter!"

And she burst into a peal of ringing boyish laughter. Brand turned to the Doctor, who had moved away to cast a final glance at the toad.

"What have you done to her, Fingal?" he called out. "She hasn't laughed like that for years."

The only answer he received to this was an embarrassed cough, but when they returned to the library and began looking at some of the more interesting of the volumes in its shelves it was noticed by both Brand and Mr. Traherne that the Doctor treated the young girl with a frank, direct, simple and humorous friendliness as if completely oblivious of her sex.

XX. RAVELSTON GRANGE

THE HOT WEATHER continued with the intermission of only a few wet and windy days all through the harvest. One Saturday afternoon Sorio, who had arranged to take Nance by train to Mundham, loitered with Baltazar at the head of the High Street waiting the girl's appearance. She had told him to meet her there rather than at her lodging because since the occasion when they took refuge in the cottage it had been agitating to her to see Linda and Baltazar together. She knew without any question asked that for several weeks her sister had seen nothing of Brand and she was extremely unwilling, now that the one danger seemed removed, that the child should risk falling into another.

Nance herself had lately been seeing more of her friend's friend than she liked. It was difficult to avoid this, however, now that they lived so near, especially as Mr. Stork's leisure times between his journeys to Mundham, coincided so exactly with her own hours of freedom from work at the dressmaker's. But the more she saw of Baltazar, the more difficult she found it to tolerate him. With Brand, whenever chance threw him across her path, she was always able to preserve a dignified and conventional reserve. She saw that he knew how deep her indignation on behalf of her sister went and she could not help respecting him for the tact and discretion with which he accepted her tacit antagonism and made any embarrassing clash between them easy to avoid. At the bottom of her heart she had never felt any personal dislike of Brand Renshaw, nor did that peculiar fear which he seemed to inspire in the majority of those who knew him affect her in the least. She would have experienced not the slightest trepidation in confronting him on her sister's behalf if circumstances demanded it and meanwhile she only asked that they should be left in peace.

But with Baltazar it was different. She disliked him cordially and, with her dislike, there mingled a considerable element of quite definite fear. The precise nature of this fear she was unable to gauge. In a measure it sprang from his unfailing urbanity and the almost effusive manner in which he talked to her and rallied her with little witticisms whenever they met. Nance's own turn of mind was singularly direct and simple and she could not avoid a perpetual suspicion in dealing with Mr. Stork that the man was covertly mocking at her and seeking to make her betray herself in some way. There was something about his whole personality which baffled and perplexed her. His languid and effeminate manner seemed to conceal some hard and inflexible attitude towards life which, like a steel blade in a velvet scabbard, was continually on the point of revealing its true nature and yet never actually did. She completely distrusted his influence over Sorio and indeed carried her suspicion of him to the extreme point of even doubting his affection for his old-time friend. Nothing about him seemed to her genuine or natural. When he spoke of art, as he often did, or uttered vague, cynical commentaries upon life in general, she felt towards him just as a girl feels towards another girl whose devices to attract attention seem to be infringing the legitimate limit of recognized rivalry. It was not only that she suspected him of every sort of hypocritical diplomacy or that every attitude he adopted seemed a deliberate pose; it was that in some indescribably subtle way he seemed to make her feel as if her own gestures and speeches were false. He troubled and agitated her to such an extent that she was driven sometimes into a mood of such desperate self-consciousness that she did actually become insincere or at any rate felt herself saying and doing things which failed to express what she really had in her mind. This was especially the case when he was present at her encounters with Sorio. She found herself on such occasions uttering sometimes the wildest speeches, speeches quite far from her natural character, and even when she tried passionately to be herself she was half-conscious all the while that Baltazar was watching her and, so to speak, clapping his hands encouragingly and urging her on. It was just as if she heard him whispering in her ear and saying, “That’s a pretty speech, that’s an effective turn of the head, that’s a happily timed smile, that’s an appealing little silence!”

His presence seemed to perplex and bewilder the very basis and foundation of her confidence in herself. What was natural he made unnatural and what was spontaneous he made premeditated. He seemed to dive down into the very depths of her soul and stir up and make muddy and clouded what was clearest and simplest there. The little childish impulses and all the impetuous girlish movements of her mind became silly and forced when he was present, became something that might have been different had she willed them to be different, something that she was deliberately using to bewitch Adrian.

The misery of it was that she *couldn’t* be otherwise, that she couldn’t look and talk and laugh and be silent, in any other manner. And yet he made her feel as if this were not only possible but easy. He was diabolically and mercilessly clever in his malign clairvoyance. Nance was not so simple as not to recognize that there are a hundred occasions when a girl quite legitimately and naturally “makes the best” of her passing moods and feelings. She was not so stupid as not to know that the very diffusion of a woman’s emotions, through every fibre and nerve of her being, lends itself to innumerable little exaggerations and impulsive underscorings, so to speak, of the precise truth. But it was just these very basic or, if the phrase may be permitted, these “organic” characteristics of her self-expression, that Baltazar's unnatural watchfulness was continually pouncing on. In some curious way he succeeded, though himself a man, in betraying the very essence of her sex-dignity. He threw her, in fact, into a position of embarrassed self-defence over what were really the inevitable accompaniments of her being a woman at all.

The unfairness of the thing was constantly being accentuated and made worse by the fact of her having so often to listen to bitter and sarcastic diatribes from both Adrian and his friend, directed towards her sex in general. A sort of motiveless jibing against women seemed indeed one of the favourite pastimes of the two men and Nance's presence, when this topic came forward, appeared rather to enhance than mitigate their hostility.

On one or two occasions of this kind, Dr. Raughty had happened to be present and Nance felt she would never forget her gratitude to this excellent man for the genial and ironical way he reduced them to silence.

"I'm glad you have invented," he would say to them, "so free and inexpensive a way of getting born. You've only to give us a little more independence and death will be equally satisfactory."

On this particular afternoon, however, Baltazar was not encouraging Sorio in any misogynistic railings. On the contrary he was endeavouring to soothe his friend who at that moment was in one of his worst moods.

"Why doesn't she come?" he kept jerking out. "She knows perfectly how I hate waiting in the street."

"Come and sit down under the trees," suggested Baltazar. "She's sure to come out on the green to look for you and we can see her from there."

They moved off accordingly and sat down, side by side, with a group of village people under the ancient sycamores. Above them the nameless Admiral looked steadily sea-wards and in the shadow thrown by the trees several ragged little girls were playing sleepily on the burnt-up grass.

"It's extraordinary," Sorio remarked, "what a lot of human beings there are in the world who would be best out of it! They get on my nerves, these people. I think I hear them more clearly and feel them nearer me here than ever before in my life. Every person in a place like this becomes more important and asserts himself more, and the same is true of every sound. If you want really to escape from humanity there are only two things to do, either go right away into the desert where there's not a living soul or go into some large city where you're absolutely lost in the crowd. This half-and-half existence is terrible."

"My dear, my dear," protested his companion, "you keep complaining and grumbling but for the life of me I can't make out what it is that actually annoys you. By the way, don't utter your sentiments too loudly! These honest people will not understand."

"What annoys me — you don't understand what annoys me?" muttered the other peevishly. "It annoys me to be stared at. It annoys me to be called out after. It annoys me to be recognized. I can't move from your door without seeing some face I know and what's still worse, seeing that face put on a sort of silly, inquisitive, jeering look, as much as to say, 'Ho! Ho! here is that idiot again. Here is that fool who sponges upon Mr. Stork! Here is that spying foreign devil!'"

"Adrian — Adrian," protested his companion, "you really are becoming impossible. I assure you these people don't say or think anything of the kind! They just see you and greet you and wish you well and pass on upon their own concerns."

"Oh, don't they, don't they," cried the other, forgetting in his agitation to modulate his voice and causing a sudden pause in the conversation that was going on at their side. "Don't they think these things! I know humanity better. Every single person who meets another person and knows anything at all about him wants to show that he's a match for his little tricks, that he's not deceived by his little ways, that he knows where he gets his money or doesn't get it and what woman he wants or doesn't want and which of his parents he wishes dead and buried! I tell you you've no idea what human beings are really like! You haven't any such idea, for the simple reason that you're absolutely hard and self-centred yourself. You go your own way. You think your own thoughts. You create your own fancy-world. And the rest of humanity are nothing — mere pawns and puppets and dream-figures — nothing — simply nothing! I'm a completely different nature from you, Tassar. I've got my idea — my secret — but I'd rather not talk about that and you'd rather not hear. But apart from that, I'm simply helpless. I mean I'm helplessly conscious of everything round me! I'm porous to things. It's really quite funny. It's just as if I hadn't any skin, as if my soul hadn't any skin. Everything that I see, or hear, Tassar — and the hearing is worse, oh, ever so much worse — passes straight through me, straight through the very nerves of my inmost being. I feel sometimes as though my mind were like a piece of parchment, stretched out taut and tight and every single thing that comes near me taps against it, tip-tap, tip-tap, tip-tap, as if it were a drum! That wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't that I know so horribly clearly what people are thinking. For instance, when I go down that alley to the station, as I shall soon with Nance, and pass the workmen at their doors, I know perfectly well that they'll look at me and say to themselves, 'There goes that fool again,' or, 'There goes that slouching idiot from the cottage,' but that's not all, Tassar. They soon have the sense to see that I'm the kind of person who shrinks from being noticed and that pleases them. They nudge one another then and look more closely at me. They do their best to make me understand that they know their power over me and intend to use it, intend to nudge one another and look at me every time I pass. I can read exactly what their thoughts are. They say to themselves, ‘He may slink off now but he’ll have to come this way again and then we’ll see! Then we’ll look at him more closely. Then we’ll find out what he’s after in these parts and why that pretty girl puts up with him so long!’”

He was interrupted at that moment by a roar of laughter from the group beside them and Baltazar rose and pulled him away. “Upon my soul, Adrian,” he whispered, as he led him back across the green, “you must behave better! You’ve given those honest fellows something to gossip about for a week. They’ll think you really are up to something, you can’t shout like that without being listened to and you can’t quarrel with the whole of humanity.”

Adrian turned fiercely round on him. “Can’t I?” he exclaimed. “Can’t I quarrel with humanity? You wait, my friend, till I’ve got my book published. Then you’ll see! I tell you I’ll strike this cursed human race of yours such a blow that they’ll wish they’d treated a poor wanderer on the face of the earth a little better and spared him something of their prying and peering!”

“Your book!” laughed Baltazar. “A lot they’ll care for your book! That’s always the way with you touchy philosophers. You stir up the devil of a row with your bad temper and make the most harmless people into enemies and then you think you can settle it all and prove yourselves right and everybody else wrong by writing a book. Upon my soul, Adrian, if I didn’t love you very much indeed I’d be inclined to let you loose on life just to see whether you or it could strike the hardest blows!”

Sorio looked at him with a curiously bewildered look. He seemed puzzled. His swarthy Roman face wore a clouded, weary, crushed expression. His brow contracted into an anxious frown and his mouth quivered. His air at that moment was the air of a very young child that suddenly finds the world much harder to deal with than it expected.

Baltazar watched him with secret pleasure. These were the occasions when he always felt strangely drawn towards him. That look of irresolute and bewildered weakness upon a countenance so powerfully moulded filled him with a most delicate sense of protective pity. He could have embraced the man as he watched him, blinking there in the afternoon sunshine, and fumbling with the handle of his stick.

But at that moment Nance appeared, walking rapidly with bent head, up the narrow street. Baltazar looked at her with a gleam of hatred in his sea-coloured eyes. She came to rob him of one of the most exquisite pleasures of his life, the pleasure of reducing this strong creature to humiliated submissiveness and then petting and cajoling him back into self-respect. The knowledge that he left Sorio in her hands in this particular mood of deprecatory helplessness, remorseful and gentle and like a wild beast beaten into docility, caused him the most acute pain. With poisonous antagonism under his urbane greeting he watched furtively the quick glance she threw at Adrian and the way her eyes lingered upon his, feeling her way into his mood. He cast about for some element of discord that he could evoke and leave behind with them to spoil the girl's triumph for he knew well that Adrian was now, after what had just occurred, in the frame of mind most adapted of all to the influence of feminine sympathy. Nance, however, did not give him an opportunity for this.

"Come on," she said, "we've only just time to catch the three o'clock train. Come on! Good-bye for a while, Mr. Stork. I'll bring him back safe to you, sooner or later. Come on, Adrian, we really must be quick!"

They went off together and Baltazar wandered slowly back across the green. He felt for the moment so lonely that even his hatred drifted away and sank to nothingness under the inflowing wave of bitter universal isolation. As he approached his cottage he stopped stone-still with his eyes on the ground and his hands behind his back. Elegantly dressed in pleasant summer clothes, his slight graceful figure, easy bearing, and delicate features, gave without doubt to the casual bystanders who observed him, an impression of unmitigated well-being. As a matter of fact, had that discerning historic personage who is reported to have exclaimed after an interview with Jonathan Swift, “there goes the unhappiest man who ever lived,” exercised his insight now, he might have modified his conclusion in favour of Baltazar Stork.

It would certainly have required more than ordinary discernment to touch the tip of the iron wedge that was being driven just then into this graceful person’s brain. Looking casually into the man’s face one would have seen nothing perhaps but a dreamy, pensive smile — a smile a little bitter maybe, and self-mocking but with no particularly sinister import. A deeper glance, however, would have disclosed a curious compression of the lines about the mouth and a sort of indrawing of the lips as if Mr. Stork were about to emit the sound of whistling. Below the smiling surface of the eyes, too, there might have been seen a sort of under-flicker of shuddering pain as if, without any kind of anæsthetic, Mr. Stork were undergoing some serious operation. The colour had deserted his cheeks as if whatever it was he was enduring the endurance of it had already exhausted his physical energies. Passing him by, as we have remarked, casually and hastily, one might have said to oneself— “Ah! a handsome fellow chuckling there over some pleasant matter!” but coming close up to him one would have instinctively stretched out a hand, so definitely would it then have appeared that, whatever his expression meant, he was on the point of fainting. It was perhaps a fortunate accident that, at this particular moment as he stood motionless, a small boy of his acquaintance, the son of one of the Rodmoor fishermen, came up to him and asked whether he had heard of the great catch there had been that day.

“There’s a sight o’ fish still there, Mister,” the boy remarked, “some of them monstrous great flounders and a heap of Satans such as squirts ink out of their bellies!”

Baltazar’s twisted lips gave a genuine smile now. A look of extraordinary tenderness came into his face.

“Ah, Tony, my boy,” he said, “so there are fish down there, are there? Well, let’s go and see! You take me, will you? And I’ll make those fellows give you some for supper.”

They walked together across the green and down the street. Baltazar’s hand remained upon the child’s shoulder and he listened as he walked, to his chatter; but all the while his mind visualized an immense, empty plain — a plain of steely-blue ice under a grey sky — and in the center of this plain a bottomless crevasse, also of steely-blue ice, and on the edge of this crevasse, gradually relinquishing their hold from exhaustion, two human hands. This image kept blending itself as they walked with all the little things which his eyes fell upon. It blent with the cakes in the confectioner’s window. It blent with the satiny blouses, far too expensive for any local purchaser, in Miss Pontifex’s shop. It blent with the criss-cross lines of the brick-work varied with flint of the house where Dr. Raughty lived. It blent with their first glimpse of the waters of the harbour, seen between two ramshackle houses with gable roofs. Nor when they finally found themselves standing with a little crowd of men and boys round a circle of fish-baskets upon the shore did it fail to associate itself both with the blue expanse of waveless sea stretched before them and with the tangled mass of sea shells, seaweed and sea creatures which lay exposed to the sunlight, many-coloured and glistening as the deeper folds of the nets which had drawn them from the deep were explored and dragged forward.

Meanwhile Adrian and Nance, having safely caught their train, were being carried with the leisurely steadiness of a local line, from Rodmoor to Mundham. Jammed tightly into a crowded compartment full of Saturday marketers, they had little opportunity during the short journey to do more than look helplessly across their perspiring neighbours at the rising and falling of the telegraph wires against a background of blue sky. The peculiar manner in which, as a train carries one forward, these wires sink slowly downwards as if they were going to touch the earth and then leap up with an unexpected jerk as the next pole comes by, was a phenomenon that always had a singular fascination for Sorio. He associated it with his most childish recollections of railway travelling. Would the wires ever succeed in sinking out of sight before the next pole jerked them high up across the window again? That was the speculation that fascinated him even at this moment as he watched them across the brim of his companion's brightly trimmed hat. There was something human in the attempts the things made to sink down, down, down and escape their allotted burden and there was certainly something very like the ways of Providence in the manner in which they were pulled up with a remorseless jolt to perform their duties once more.

Emerging with their fellow-passengers upon the Mundham platform both Sorio and Nance experienced a sense of happiness and relief. They had both been so long confined to the immediate surroundings of Rodmoor that this little excursion to the larger town assumed the proportions of a release from imprisonment. It is true that it was a release that Adrian might easily have procured for himself on any day; but more and more recently, in the abnormal tension of his nerves, he had lost initiative in these things. They wandered leisurely together into the town and Sorio amused himself by watching the demure and practical way in which his companion managed her various economic transactions in the shops which she entered. He could not help feeling a sense of envy as he observed the manner in which, without effort or strain, she achieved the precise objects she had in mind and arranged for the transportation of her purchases by the carrier's cart that same evening.

He wondered vaguely whether all women were like this and whether, with their dearest and best-loved dead at home, or their own peace of mind permanently shattered by some passage of fatal emotion only some few hours before, they could always throw everything aside and bargain so keenly and shrewdly with the alert tradesmen. He supposed it was the working of some blind atavistic power in them, the mechanical result of ages of mental concentration. He was amused, too, to observe how, when in a time incredibly short she had done all she wanted, instead of rushing off blindly for the walk they had promised themselves past the old Abbey church and along the river's bank, she shrewdly interpreted their physical necessities and carried him off to a little dairy shop to have tea and half-penny buns. Had *he* been the cicerone of their day's outing he would have plunged off straight for the Abbey church and the river fields, leaving their shopping to the end and dooming them to bad temper and irritable nerves from sheer bodily exhaustion. Never had Nance looked more desirable or attractive as, with heightened colour and little girlish jests, she poured out his tea for him in the small shop-parlour and swallowed half-penny buns with the avidity of a child.

Baltazar Stork was not wrong in his conjecture. Not since their early encounters in the streets and parks of South London had Sorio been in a gentler mood or one more amenable to the girl's charm. As he looked at her now and listened to her happy laughter, he felt that he had been a fool as well as a scoundrel in his treatment of her. Why hadn't he cut loose long since from his philandering with Philippa which led nowhere and *could* lead nowhere? Why hadn't he cast about for some definite employment and risked, without further delay, persuading her to marry him? With her to look after him and smooth his path for him, he might have been quite free from this throbbing pain behind his eyeballs and this nervous tension of his brain. He hurriedly made up his mind that he *would* ask her to marry him — not to-day, perhaps, or to-morrow — for it would be absurd to commit himself till he could support her, but very soon, as soon as he had found any mortal kind of an occupation! What that occupation would be he did not know. It was difficult to think of such things all in a moment. It required time. Besides, whatever it was it must be something that left him free scope for his book. After all, his book came first — his book and Baptiste. What would Baptiste think if he were to marry again? Would he be indignant and hurt? No! No! It was inconceivable that Baptiste should be hurt. Besides, he would love Nance when he knew her! Of that he was quite sure. Yes, Baptiste and Nance were made to understand one another. It would be different were it Philippa he was thinking of marrying. Somehow it distressed and troubled him to imagine Baptiste and Philippa together. That, at all costs, must never come about. His boy must never meet Philippa. All of this whirled at immense speed through Sorio's head as he smiled back at Nance across the little marble table and stared at the large blue-china cow which, with udders coloured a yet deeper ultramarine than its striped back, placidly, like an animal sacred to Jupiter, contemplated the universe. There must have been a wave of telepathic sympathy between them at that moment, for Nance suddenly swallowing the last of her bun, hazarded a question she had never dared to ask before.

"Adrian, dear, tell me this. Why did you leave your boy behind you in America when you came to England?"

Sorio was himself surprised at the unruffled manner in which he received this question. At any other moment it would have fatally disturbed him. He smiled back at her, quite easily and naturally.

"How could I bring him?" he said. "He's got a good place in New York and I have nothing. I *had* to get away, somewhere. In fact, they sent me away, 'deported' me, as they call it. But I couldn't drag the boy with me. How could I? Though he was ready enough to come. Oh, no! It's much better as it is — much, much better!"

He became grave and silent and began fumbling in one of his inner pockets. Nance watched him breathlessly. Was he really softening towards her? Was Philippa losing her hold on him? He suddenly produced a letter — a letter written on thin paper and bearing an American stamp — and taking it with careful hands from its envelope, stretched it across the table towards her. The action was suggestive of such intimacy, suggestive of such a new and happy change in their relations, that the girl looked at the thing with moist and dazed eyes. She obtained a general sense of the firm clear handwriting. She caught the opening sentence, written in caressing Italian and, for some reason or other, the address — perhaps because of its strangeness to a European eye — fifteen West Eleventh Street — remained engraved in her memory. More than this she was unable to take in for the moment out of the sheer rush of bewildering happiness which swept over her and made her long to cry.

A moment later two other Rodmoor people, known to them both by sight, entered the shop, and Sorio hurriedly took the letter back and replaced it in his pocket. He paid their bill, which came to exactly a shilling, and together they walked out from the dairy. The ultramarine cow contemplated the universe as the newcomers took their vacated table with precisely the same placidity. Its own end — some fifty years after, amid the debris of a local fire, with the consequent departure of its shattered pieces to the Mundham dumping ground — did not enter into its contemplation. Many lovers, happier and less happy than Sorio and Nance, would sit at that marble table during that epoch and the blue cow would listen in silence. Perhaps in its ultimate resting-place its scorched fragments would become more voluble as the rains dripped upon the tins and shards around them or perhaps, even in ruins — like an animal sacred to Jupiter — it would hold its peace and let the rains fall.

The two friends, still in a mood of delicate and delicious harmony, threaded the quieter streets of the town and emerged into the dreamy cathedral-like square, spacious with lawns and trees, that surrounded the abbey-church. A broad gravel-path, overtopped by wide-spreading lime trees, separated the grey south wall of the ancient edifice from the most secluded of these lawns. The grass was divided from the path by a low hanging chain-rail of that easy and friendly kind that seems to call upon the casual loiterer to step over its unreluctant barrier and take his pleasure under the welcoming trees. They sat down on an empty bench and looked up at the flying buttresses and weather-stained gargoyles and richly traceried windows. The sun fell in long mellow streams across the gravel beside them, broken into cool deep patches of velvet shadow where the branches of the lime trees intercepted it. From somewhere behind them came the sound of murmuring pigeons and from further off still, from one of the high-walled, old-fashioned gardens of the houses on the remote side of the square, came the voices of children playing. Sorio sat with one arm stretched out along the top of the bench behind Nance’s head and with the other resting upon the handle of his stick. His face had a look of deep, withdrawn contentment — a contentment so absolute that it merged into a sort of animal apathy. Any one familiar with the expression so often seen upon the faces both of street-beggars and prince-cardinals in the city on the Tiber, would have recognized something indigenous and racial in the lethargy which then possessed him. Nance, on the other hand, gave herself up to a sweet and passionate happiness such as she had not known since they left London. While they waited thus together, reluctant by even a word to break the spell of that favoured hour, there came from within the church the sound of an organ. Nance got up at once.

"Let's go in for just a minute, Adrian! Do you mind — only just a minute?"

The slightest flicker of a frown crossed Sorio's face but it vanished before she could repeat her request.

"Of course," he said, rising in his turn, "of course! Let's go round and find the door."

They had no difficulty in doing this. The west entrance of the church was wide open and they entered and sat down at the back of the nave. Above them the spacious vaulted roof, rich with elaborate fan-tracery, seemed to spread abroad and deepen the echoes of the music as if it were an immense inverted chalice spilling the odour of immortal wine. The coolness and dim shadowiness of the place fell gently upon them both and the mysterious rising and sinking of the music, with no sight of any human presence as its cause, thrilled Nance from head to foot as she had never been thrilled in her life. Oh, it was worth it — this moment — all she had suffered before — all she could possibly suffer! If only it might never stop, that heavenly sound, but go on and on and on until all the world came to know what the power of love was! She felt at that moment as if she were on the verge of attaining some clue, some signal, some sign, which should make all things clear to her — clear and ineffably sweet!

The deep crimsons and purples in the coloured windows, the damp chilly smell of the centuries-old masonry, the large dark recesses of the shadowy transepts, all blended together to transport her out of herself into a world kindlier, calmer, quieter, than the world she knew.

"And — he — shall — feed—" rang out, as they listened, the clear flutelike voice of some boy-singer, practising for the morrow's services, "shall — feed — his — flock."

The words of the famous antiphony, "staled and rung upon" as they might be, by the pathetic stammerings of so old a human repetition, were, coming just at this particular moment, more than Nance could bear. She flung herself on her knees and, pressing her hands to her face, burst into convulsive sobs. Sorio stood up and laid his hand on her shoulder. With the other hand — mindful of early associations — he crossed himself two or three times and then remained motionless. Slowly, by the action of that law which is perhaps the deepest in the universe, the law of *ebb and flow*, there began in him a reaction. Had the words the unseen boy singer was uttering been in Latin, had they possessed that reserve, that passionate aloofness in emotion, which the instinct of worship in the southern races protects from sentiment, such a reaction might have been spared him; but the thing was too facile, too easy. It might have been the climax of a common melodrama. It fell too pat upon the occasion. And it was insidiously, treacherously, horribly human. It was too human. It lacked the ring of style, the reserve of the grand manner. It wailed and sobbed. It whimpered upon the Almighty's shoulder. It wanted the tragic abandonment of the "Dies Irae," as it missed the calmer dignity of the "Tantum ergo." It appealed to what was below the level of the highest in religious pathos. It humiliated while it comforted.

The boy's voice died away and the organ stopped. There was a sound of shuffling in the choir and the mutter of voices and even a suppressed laugh.

Sorio removed his hand from Nance's shoulder and stooping down picked up his hat and stick. He looked round him. A fashionably dressed lady, carrying a bunch of carnations, moved past them up the aisle and presently two younger women followed. Then a neatly attired dapper young clergyman strolled in, adjusting his eye-glasses. It was evidently approaching the hour of the afternoon service. The spell was broken.

But the kneeling girl knew nothing, felt nothing, of all this. She, at all events, was in the church of her fathers — the church that her most childish memories rendered sacred. Had she been able to understand Sorio's feeling, she would have swept it aside. The music was beautiful, she would have said, and the words were true. From the heart of the universe they came straight to her heart. Were they rendered unbeautiful and untrue because so many simple souls had found comfort in them?

"Ah! Adrian," she would have said had she argued it out with him. "Ah, Adrian, it *is* common. It is the common cry of humanity, set to the music of the common heart of the world, and is not that more essential than 'Latin,' more important than 'style'?"

As a matter of fact, the only controversy that arose between them when they left the building was brief and final.

"I fancy," remarked Sorio, "from what you tell me of her, that that's the sort of thing that would please Mrs. Renshaw — I mean the music we heard just now!"

Nance flushed as she answered him. "Yes, it would! It would! And it pleases *me* too. It makes me more certain than ever that Jesus Christ was really God." Sorio bowed his head at this and held his peace and together they made their way to the bank of the Loon.

What they were particularly anxious to see was an old house by the river-side about a mile east of the town which had been, some hundred years before, the abode of one of the famous East Anglian painters of the celebrated Norwich school — a painter whose humorous aplomb and rich earth-steeped colouring rivalled some of the most notable of the artists of Amsterdam and The Hague.

Their train back to Rodmoor did not leave till half-past seven and as it was now hardly five they had ample time to make this little pilgrimage as deliberately as they pleased. They had no difficulty in reaching the river, and once at its edge, it was only a question of following its windings till they arrived at Ravelston Grange. Their way was somewhat impeded at first by a line of warehouses, between which and a long row of barges fastened to a series of littered dusty wharves, lay all manner of bales and casks and bundles of hay and vegetable. There were coal-yards there too, and timber-yards, and in other places great piles of beer-barrels, all bearing the name "Keith Radipole" which had been for half a century the business title of Brand Renshaw's brewery. These obstacles surmounted, there were no further interruptions to their advance along the river path.

The aspect of the day, however, had grown less promising. A somewhat threatening bank of clouds with dark jagged edges, which the efforts of the sun to scatter only rendered more lurid, had appeared in the west and when, for a moment, they turned to look back at the town, they saw its chimneys and houses massed gloomily together against a huge sombre bastion whose topmost fringe was illuminated by fiery indentations. Nance expressed some hesitation as to the wisdom of going further with this phalanx of storm threatenings following them from behind, but Sorio laughed at her fears and assured her that in a very short time they would arrive at the great painter's house.

It appeared, however, that the “mile” referred to in the little local history in which they had read about this place did not begin till the limits of Mundham were reached and Mundham seemed to extend itself interminably. They were passing through peculiarly dreary outskirts now. Little half-finished rows of wretchedly built houses trailed disconsolately towards the river’s edge and mingled with small deserted factories whose walls, blackened with smoke, were now slowly crumbling to pieces. Desolate patches of half-cultivated ground where the stalks of potatoes, yellowing with damp, alternated with thickly growing weeds, gave the place that peculiar expression of sordid melancholy which seems the especial prerogative of such fringes of human habitation. Old decaying barges, some of them half-drowned in water and others with gaunt, protruding ribs and rotting planks, lay staring at the sky while the river, swirling past them, gurgled and muttered round their submerged keels. It was impossible for the two friends to retain long, under these depressing surroundings, their former mood of magical harmony. Little shreds and fragments of their happiness seemed to fall from them at every step and remain, bleakly flapping among the mouldering walls and weedy river-piles, like the bits of old paper and torn rag which fluttered feebly or fell into immobility as the wind rose or sank. The bank of clouds behind them had now completely obscured every vestige of the sun and a sort of premature twilight lay upon the surface of the river and on the fields on its further side.

“What’s that?” asked Nance suddenly, putting her hand on his arm and pointing to a large square building which suddenly appeared on their left. They had been vaguely aware of this building for some while but one little thing or another in their more immediate neighbourhood had confined it to the remoter verge of their consciousness. As soon as she had asked the question Nance felt an unaccountable unwillingness to carry the investigation further. Sorio, too, seemed ready enough to let her enquiry remain unanswered. He shrugged his shoulders as much as to say "how can I tell?" and suggested that they should rest for a moment on a littered pile of wood which lay close to the water's edge.

They stepped down the bank where they were, out of sight of the building above, and seated themselves. With their arms around their knees they contemplated the flowing tide and the dull-coloured mud of the opposite bank. A coil of decaying rope, tossed aside from some passing barge, lay at Sorio's feet and, as he sat in gloomy silence, he thought how like the thing was to something he had once seen at an inquest in a house in New York. As for Nance, she found it difficult to remove her eyes from a shapeless bundle of sacking which the tide was carrying. Sometimes it would get completely submerged and then again it would reappear.

"Why is it," she thought, "that there is always something horrible about tidal rivers? Is it because of the way they have of carrying things backward and forward, backward and forward, without ever allowing them either to get far inland or clear out to sea? Is a tidal river," she said to herself, "the one thing in all the world in which nothing can be lost or hidden or forgotten?"

It was curious how difficult they both felt it just then either to move from where they were or to address a single word to one another. They seemed hypnotized by something — hypnotized by some thought which remained unspoken at the back of their minds. They felt an extreme reluctance to envisage again that large square building surrounded by weather-stained wall, a wall from which the ivy had been carefully scraped.

Slowly, little by little, the bank of clouds mounted up to the meridian, casting over everything as it did so a more and more ominous twilight. The silence between them became after a while, a thing with a palpable presence. It seemed to float upon the water to their feet and, rising about them like a wraith, like a mist, like the ghost of a dead child, it fumbled with clammy fingers upon their hearts.

"I'm sure," Sorio cried at last, with an obvious struggle to break the mysterious sorcery which weighed on them, "I'm perfectly sure that Ravelston Grange must be round that second bend of the river — do you see? — where those trees are! I'm sure it must! At any rate we *must* come to it at last if we only go on."

He looked at his watch.

"Heavens! We've taken an hour already getting here! It's nearly six. How on earth have we been so long?"

"Do you know, Adrian," Nance remarked — and she couldn't help noticing as she did so that though he spoke so resolutely of going forward he made not the least movement to leave his seat— "do you know I feel as if we were in a dream. I have the oddest feeling that any moment we might wake up and find ourselves back in Rodmoor. Adrian, dear, let's go back! Let's go back to the town. There's something that depresses me beyond words about all this."

"Nonsense!" cried Sorio in a loud and angry voice, leaping to his feet and snatching up his stick. "Come on, my girl, come, child! We'll see that Ravelston place before the rain gets to us!"

They clambered up the bank and walked swiftly forward. Nance noticed that Sorio looked steadily at the river, looked at the river without intermission and with hardly a word, till they were well beyond the very last houses of Mundham. It was an unspeakable relief to her when, at last, crossing a little footbridge over a weir, they found themselves surrounded by the open fens.

"Behind those trees, Nance," Sorio kept repeating, "behind those trees! I'm absolutely sure I'm right and that Ravelston Grange is there. By the way, girl, which of your poets wrote the verses —

'She makes her immemorial moan,
She keeps her shadowy kine,
O, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line!'

They've been running in my head all the afternoon ever since I saw 'Keith Radipole,' on those beer-barrels."

Nance, however, was too eager to reach the real Ravelston to pay much heed to his poetic allusion.

"Oh, it sounds like — oh, I don't know — Tennyson, perhaps!" and she pulled him forward towards the trees.

These proved to be a group of tall French poplars which, just then, were muttering volubly in the rain-smelling wind. They hurried past them and paused before a gate in a very high wall.

"What's this?" exclaimed Sorio. "*This* can't be Ravelston. It looks more like a prison."

For a moment his eyes encountered Nance's and the girl glanced quickly away from what she read in his face. She called out to an old man who was hoeing potatoes behind some iron railings where the wall ended.

"Could you tell me where Ravelston Grange is?" she enquired.

The old man removed his hat and regarded her with a whimsical smile.

"'Tis across the river, lady, and there isn't no bridge for some many miles. Maybe with any luck ye may meet a cattle-boat to take ye over but there's little surety about them things."

“What’s this place, then?” asked Sorio abruptly, approaching the iron railings.

“This, mister? Why this be the doctor’s house of the County Asylum. This be where they keep the superior cases, as you might say, them what pays summat, ye understand, and be only what you might call half daft. You must a’ seed the County Asylum as you came along. ’Tis a wonderful large place, one of the grandest, so they say, on this side of the kingdom.”

“Thank you,” said Sorio curtly. “That’s just what we wanted to know. Yes, we saw the house you speak of. It certainly looks big enough. Have there been many new cases lately? Is this what you might call a good year for mental collapses?”

As he spoke he peered curiously between the iron bars as if anxious to get some sight of the “half daft,” who could afford to pay for their keep.

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘a good year,’ mister,” answered the man, watching him with little twinkling eyes, “but I reckon folk have been as liable to go shaky this year as most other years. ’Tisn’t in the season, I take it, ’tis in the man or for the matter of that,” and he cast an apologetic leer in Nance’s direction, “in the woman.”

“Come on, Adrian,” interposed his companion, “you see that guide-book told us all wrong. We’d better get back to the station.”

But Sorio held tightly to the railings with both his hands.

“Don’t tease me, Nance,” he said irritably. “I want to talk to this excellent man.”

“You’d better do what your missus says, mister,” observed the gardener, returning to his work. “The authorities don’t like no loitering in these places.”

But Sorio disregarded the hint.

"I should think," he remarked, "it wouldn't be so very difficult to escape out of here." He received no reply to this and Nance pulled him by the sleeve.

"Please, Adrian, please come away," she pleaded, with tears in her voice. The old man lifted up his head.

"You go back where you be come from," he observed, "and thank the good Lord you've got such a pretty lady to look after you. There be many what envies you and many what 'ud like to stand in your shoes, and that's God's truth."

Sorio sighed heavily, and letting go his hold upon the railings, turned to his companion.

"Let's find another way to the town," he said. "There must be some road over there, or at worst, we can walk along the line."

They moved off hastily in the direction opposite from the river and the old man, after making an enigmatic gesture behind their backs, spat upon his hands and returned to his work. The sky was now entirely overclouded but still no rain fell.

XXI. THE WINDMILL

WITH THE COMING of September there was a noticeable change in the weather. The air got perceptibly colder, the sea rougher and there were dark days when the sun was hardly seen at all. Sometimes the prevailing west wind brought showers, but so far, in spite of the cooler atmosphere, there was little heavy rain. The rain seemed to be gathering and massing on every horizon, but though its presence was felt, its actual coming was delayed and the fields and gardens remained scorched and dry. The ditches in the fens were low that season — lower than they had been for many years. Some of them were actually empty and in others there was so little water that the children could catch eels and minnows with their naked hands. In many portions of the salt marshes it was possible to walk dry-shod where, in the early Spring, one would have sunk up to the waist, or even up to the neck.

Driven by the hot weather from their usual feeding-grounds several rare and curious birds visited the fens that year. The immediate environs of Rodmoor were especially safe for these, as few among the fishermen carried guns and none of the wealthier inhabitants cared greatly for shooting. Brand Renshaw, for instance, like his father before him, refused to preserve any sort of game and indeed it was one of the chief causes of his unpopularity with the neighbouring gentry that he was so little of a sportsman.

One species of visitor brought by that unusually hot August was less fortunate than the birds. This was a swallow-tail butterfly, one of the rarer of the two kinds known to collectors in that part of the country. Dr. Raughty was like a man out of his senses with delight when he perceived this beautiful wanderer. He bribed a small boy who was with him at the moment to follow it wherever it flew while he hurried back to his rooms for his net. Unluckily for the swift-flying nomad, instead of making for the open fens it persisted in hovering about the sand-dunes where grew a certain little glaucous plant and it was upon the sand dunes, finally, that the Doctor secured it, after a breathless and exhausting chase.

It seemed to cause Fingal Raughty real distress when he found that neither Nance nor Linda was pleased at what he had done. He met, indeed, with scanty congratulations from any of his friends. With Sorio he almost quarreled over the incident, so vituperative did the Italian become when reference was made to it in his presence. Mrs. Renshaw was gently sympathetic, evidently regarding it as one of the privileges of masculine vigour to catch and kill whatever was beautiful and endowed with wings, but even she spoilt the savour of her congratulations with a faint tinge of irony.

Two weeks of September had already passed when Sorio, in obedience to a little pencilled note he had received the night before, set off in the early afternoon to meet Philippa at one of their more recently discovered haunts. In spite of his resolution in the little dairy shop in Mundham he had made no drastic change in his life, either in the direction of finding work to do or of breaking off his relations with the girl from Oakguard. That excursion with Nance in which they tried so ineffectively to find the great painter’s house left, in its final impression, a certain cruel embarrassment between them. It became difficult for him not to feel that she was watching him apprehensively now and with a ghastly anxiety at the back of her mind and this consciousness poisoned his ease and freedom with her. He felt that her tenderness was no longer a natural, unqualified affection but a sort of terrified pity, and this impression set his nerves all the more on edge when they were together.

With Philippa, on the other hand, he felt absolutely free. The girl lived herself so abnormal and isolated a life, for Mrs. Renshaw disliked visitors and Brand discouraged any association with their neighbours, that she displayed nothing of that practical and human sense of proportion which was the basis of Nance's character. For the very reason, perhaps, that she cared less what happened to him, she was able to humour him more completely. She piqued and stimulated his intelligence too, in a way Nance never did. She had flashes of diabolical insight which could always rouse and astonish him. Something radically cold and aloof in her made it possible for her to risk alienating him by savage and malicious blows at his pride. But the more poisonous her taunts became, the more closely he clung to her, deriving, it might almost seem, an actual pleasure from what he suffered at her hands. Anxious for both their sakes to avoid as much as possible the gossip of the village, he had continued his habit of meeting her in all manner of out-of-the-way places, and the spot she had designated as their rendezvous for this particular afternoon was one of the remotest and least accessible of all these sanctuaries of refuge. It was, in fact, an old disused windmill, standing by itself in the fens about two miles north of that willow copse where he had on one fatal occasion caused Nance Herrick such distress.

Philippa was an abnormally good walker. From a child she had been accustomed to roam long distances by herself, so that it did not strike him as anything unusual that she should have chosen a place so far off from Oakguard as the scene of their encounter. One of her most marked peculiarities was a certain imaginative fastidiousness in regard to the *milieu* of her interviews with him. That was, indeed, one of the ways by which she held him. It amounted to a genius for the elimination of the commonplace or the “familiar” in the relations between them. She kept a clear space, as it were, around her personality, only approaching him when the dramatic accessories were harmonious, and vanishing again before he had time to sound the bottom of her evasive mood.

On this occasion Sorio walked with a firm and even gay bearing towards their rendezvous. He followed at first the same path as that taken by Nance and her sister on the eve of their eventful bank-holiday but when he reached Nance’s withy-bed he debouched to his left and plunged straight across the fens. The track he now followed was one used rarely, even by the owners of cattle upon the marshes and in front of him, as far as his eye could reach, nothing except isolated poplars and a few solitary gates, marking the bridges across the dykes, broke the grey expanse of the horizon. The deserted windmill towards which he made his way was larger than any of the others but while, in the gently-blowing wind the sails of the rest kept their slow and rhythmic revolution, this particular one stretched out its enormous arms in motionless repose as if issuing some solemn command to the elements or, like the biblical leader, threatening the overthrow of a hostile army.

As he walked, Sorio noticed that at last the Michaelmas daisies were really in bloom, their grey leaves and sad autumnal flowers blending congruously enough with the dark water and blackened reed-stems of the stagnant ditches. The sky above him was covered with a thin veil of leaden-coloured clouds, against which, flying so high as to make it difficult to distinguish their identity, an attenuated line of large birds — Sorio wondered if they were wild swans — moved swiftly towards the west. He arrived at last at the windmill and entered its cavernous interior. She rose to meet him, shaking the dust from her clothes. In the semi-darkness of the place, her eyes gleamed with a dangerous lustre like the eyes of an animal.

"Do you want to stay where we are?" he said when he had relinquished the hand she gave him, after lifting it in an exaggerated foreign manner, to his lips. She laughed a low mocking laugh.

"What's the alternative, Adriano mio? Even *I* can't walk indefinitely and it isn't nice sitting over a half-empty dyke."

"Well," he remarked, "let's stay here then! Where were you sitting before I came?"

She pointed to a heap of straw in the furthest corner of the place beneath the shadow of the half-ruined flight of steps leading to the floor above. Adrian surveyed this spot without animation.

"It would be much more interesting," he said, "if we could get up that ladder. I believe we could. I tried it clumsily the other day when I broke that step."

"But how do we know the floor above will bear us if we do get up there?"

"Oh, it'll bear us all right. Look! You can see. The middle boards aren't rotted at all and that hole there is a rat-hole. There aren't any dangerous cracks."

"It would be so horrid to tumble through, Adrian."

"Oh, we shan't tumble through. I swear to you it's all right, Phil. We're not going to dance up there, are we?"

The girl put her hand on the dilapidated balustrade and shook it. The whole ladder trembled from top to bottom and a cloud of ancient flour-dust, grey and mouldy, descended on their heads.

"You see, Adrian?" she remarked. "It really isn't safe!"

“I don’t care,” he said stubbornly. “What’s it matter? It’s dull and stuffy down here. I’m going to try anyway.”

He began cautiously ascending what remained intact of the forlorn ladder. The thing creaked ominously under his weight. He managed, however, to get sufficiently high to secure a hold upon the threshold-beam of the floor above when, with the aid of a projecting plank from the side-wall of the building, he managed to retain his position and after a brief struggle, disappeared from his companion’s view.

His voice came down to her from above, muffled a little by the intervening wood-work.

“It’s lovely up here, Phil! There are two little windows and you can see all over the fens. Wait a minute, we’ll soon have you up.”

There was a pause and she heard him moving about over her head.

“You’d much better come down,” she shouted. “I’m not going up there. There’s no possible way.”

He made no answer to this and there was dead silence for several minutes. She went to the entrance and emerged into the open air. The wide horizon around her seemed void and empty. Upon the surface of the immense plain only a few visible objects broke the brooding monotony. To the south and east she could discern just one or two familiar landmarks but to the west there was nothing — nothing but an eternal level of desolation losing itself in the sky. She gave an involuntary shudder and moved away from the windmill to the edge of a reed-bordered ditch. There was a pool of gloomy water in the middle of the reeds and across this pool and round and round it whirled, at an incredible speed, a score or so of tiny water-beetles, never leaving the surface and never pausing for a moment in their mad dance. A wretched little moth, its wings rendered useless by contact with the water, struggled feebly in the centre of this pool, but the shiny-coated beetles whirled on round it in their dizzy circles as if it had no more significance than the shadow of a leaf. Philippa smiled and walked back to the building.

"Adrian," she called out, entering its dusty gloom and looking up at the square hole in the ceiling, from which still hung a remnant of broken woodwork.

"Well? What is it?" her friend's voice answered. "It's all right; we'll soon have you up here!"

"I don't want to go up there," she shouted back. "I want you to come down. Please come down, Adrian! You're spoiling all our afternoon."

Once more there was dead silence. Then she called out again.

"Adrian," she said, "there's a moth being drowned in the ditch out here."

"What? Where? What do you say?" came the man's reply, accompanied by several violent movements. Presently a rope descended from the hole and swung suspended in the air.

"Look out, my dear," Sorio's voice ejaculated and a moment later he came swinging down, hand over hand, and landed at her side. "What's that?" he gasped breathlessly, "what did you say? A moth in the water? Show me, show me!"

"Oh, it's nothing, Adrian," she answered petulantly. "I only wanted you to come down."

But he had rushed out of the door and down to the stream's edge.

"I see it! I see it!" he called back at her. "Here, give me my stick!" He came rushing back, pushed roughly past her, seized his stick from the ground and returned to the ditch. It was easy enough to effect the moth's rescue. The same fluffy stickiness in the thing's wet wings that made it helpless in the water, made it adhere to the stick's point. He wiped it off upon the grass and pulled Philippa back into the building.

"I'm glad I came down," he remarked. "I know it'll hold now. You won't mind my tying it round you, will you? I'll have both the ends down here presently. It's round a strong hook. It's all right. And then I'll pull you up."

Philippa looked at him with angry dismay. All this agitating fuss over so childish an adventure irritated her beyond endurance. His proposal had, as a matter of fact, a most subtle and curious effect upon her. It changed the relations between them. It reduced her to the position of a girl playing with an elder brother. It outraged, with an element of the comic, her sense of dramatic fastidiousness. It humiliated her pride and broke the twisted threads of all kinds of delicate spiritual nets she had in her mind to cast over him. It placed her by his side as a weak and timid woman by the side of a willful and strong-limbed man. Her ascendency over him, as she well knew, depended upon the retaining, on her part, of a certain psychic evasiveness — a certain mysterious and tantalizing reserve. It depended — at any rate that is what she imagined — upon the inscrutable look she could throw into her eyes and upon the tragic glamour of her ambiguous red lips and white cheeks. How could she possibly retain all these characteristics when swinging to and fro at the end of a rope?

Sorio's suggestion outraged something in her that went down to the very root of her personality. Walking with him, swimming with him, rowing in a boat with him — all those things were harmonious to her mind and congruous with her personal charm. None of these things interfered with the play of her intelligence, with the poise, the reserve, the aloofness of her spiritual challenge. She was exceptionally devoid of fear in these boyish sports and could feel herself when she engaged in them with him, free of the limitations of her sex. She could retain completely, as she indulged herself in them, all the equilibrium of her being — the rhythm of her identity. But this proposal of Sorio's not only introduced a discordant element that had a shrewd vein of the ludicrous in it, it threw her into a physical panic. It pulled and tugged at the inmost fibres of her self-restraint. It made her long to sit down on the ground and cry like a child. She wondered vaguely whether it was that Adrian was revenging himself upon her at that moment for some accumulated series of half-physical outrages that he had himself in his neurotic state been subjected to lately. As to his actual sanity, it never occurred to her to question *that*. She herself was too wayward and whimsical in the reactions of her nerves and the processes of her mind to find anything startling, in *that* sense, in what he was now suggesting. It was simply that it changed their relations — it destroyed her ascendency, it brought things down to brute force, it turned her into a woman.

Her mind, as she stood hesitating, reviewed the moth incident. That sort of situation — Adrian's fantastic mania for rescuing things — had just the opposite effect on her. He might poke his stick into half the ditches of Rodmoor and save innumerable drowning moths; the only effect *that* had on her was to make her feel superior to him, better adapted than he to face the essential facts of life, its inherent and integral cruelty for instance. But now — to see that horrible rope-end dangling from that gaping hole and to see the eager, violent, masculine look in her friend's eyes — it was unendurable; it drove her, so to speak, against the jagged edge of the world's brute wall.

"To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes,
Is delicate and rare—"

she found herself quoting, with a horrible sense that the humour of the parody only sharpened the sting of her dilemma.

"I won't do it," she said resolutely at last, trying to brave it out with a smile. "It's a ridiculous idea. Besides, I'm much too heavy. You couldn't pull me up if you tried till nightfall! No, no, Adriano, don't be so absurd. Don't spoil our time together with these mad ideas. Let's sit down here and talk. Or why not light a fire? That would be exciting enough, wouldn't it?"

His face as he listened to her darkened to a kind of savage fury. Its despotic and imperious lines emphasized themselves to a degree that was really terrifying.

"You won't?" he cried, "you won't, you won't?" And seizing her roughly by the shoulder he actually began twisting the rope round her body.

She resisted desperately, pushing him away with all the strength of her arms. In the struggle between them, which soon became a dangerous one, her hand thrusting back his head unintentionally drew blood with its delicate finger-nails from his upper lip. The blood trickled into his mouth and, maddened by the taste of it, he let her go and seizing the end of the rope, struck her with it across the breast. This blow seemed to bewilder her. She ceased all resistance. She became docile and passive in his hands.

Mechanically he went on with the task he had set himself, of fastening the rope round her beneath her arm-pits and tying it into a knot. But her absolute submissiveness seemed presently to paralyze him as much as his previous violence had disarmed and paralyzed her. He unloosed the knot he was making and with a sudden jerk pulled the rope away from her. The rope swung back to its former position and dangled in the air, swaying gently from side to side. They stood looking at each other in startled silence and then, quite suddenly, the girl moved forward and flung her arms round his neck.

"I love you!" she murmured in a voice unlike any he had heard her use before. "I love you! I love you!" and her lips clung to his with a long and passionate kiss.

Sorio's emotions at that moment would have caused her, had she been conscious of them, a reaction even less endurable than that which she had just been through. To confess the truth he had no emotion at all. He mechanically returned her kisses; he mechanically embraced her. But all the while he was thinking of those water-beetles with shiny metallic coats that were gyrating even now so swiftly round that reedy pool.

"Water-beetles!" he thought, as the girl's convulsive kisses, salt with her passionate tears, hurt his wounded lip. "Water-beetles! We are all like that. The world is like that! Water-beetles upon a dark stream."

She let him go at last and they moved out together hand in hand into the open air. Above them the enormous windmill still upheld its motionless arms while from somewhere in the fens behind it came a strange whistling cry, the cry of one of those winged intruders from foreign shores, which even now was perhaps bidding farewell to regions of exile and calling out for some companion for its flight over the North Sea.

With his hand still held tightly in hers, Philippa walked silently by his side all that long way across the meadows and dykes. Sorio took advantage of her unusually gentle mood and began plaintively telling her about the nervous sufferings he endured in Rodmoor and about his hatred for the people there and his conviction that they took delight in annoying him. Then little by little, as the girl's sympathetic silence led him on, he fell to flinging out — in short, jerky, broken sentences — as if each word were torn up by the roots from the very soil of his soul, stammered references to Baptiste. He spoke as if he were talking to himself rather than to her. He kept repeating over and over again some muttered phrase about the bond of abnormal affection which existed between them. And then he suddenly burst out into a description of Baptiste. He rambled on for a long while upon this topic, leaving in the end only a very blurred impression upon his hearer’s mind. All, in fact, the girl was able to definitely arrive at from what he said was that Baptiste resembled his mother — a Frenchwoman of the coast of Brittany — and that he was tall and had dark blue eyes.

“With the longest lashes,” Sorio kept repeating, as if he were describing to her some one it was important she should remember, “that you, or any one else, has ever seen! They lie on his cheek when he’s asleep like — like —”

He fumbled with the feathery head of a reed he had picked as they were walking but seemed unable to find any suitable comparison. It was curious to see the shamefaced, embarrassed way he threw forth, one by one, and as if each word caused him definite pain in the uttering, these allusions to his boy.

Philippa let him ramble on as he pleased, hardly interrupting him by a gesture, listening to him, in fact, as if she were listening to a person talking in his sleep. She learnt that it was only with the greatest difficulty that he had persuaded Baptiste to keep his position in New York and not fling everything up and follow him to London. She learnt that Baptiste had copied out with his own hand the larger portion of Sorio’s book and that now, as he completed each new chapter, he sent it by registered mail straight to the boy in “Eleventh Street.”

“It will explain my life, my whole life, that book,” Adrian muttered. “You’ve only heard a few of its ideas, Phil, only a few. The secret of things being found, not in the instinct of creation but in the instinct of destruction, is only the beginning of it. I go further — much further than that. Don’t laugh at me, Phil, if I just say this — only just this: I show in my book how what every living thing really aims at is to escape from itself, to escape from itself by the destruction of itself. Do you get the idea in that, Phil? Everything in the world is — how shall I put it? — these ideas are not easy, they tear at a person's brain before they become clear! — everything in the world is on the edge, on the verge, of dissolving away into what people call nothingness. That is what Shakespeare had in his mind when he said, 'the great globe itself, yea! all which it inherits, shall dissolve and — and—' I forget exactly how it runs but it ends with 'leave not a rack behind.' But the point I make in my book is this. This 'nothingness,' this 'death,' if you like, to which everything struggles is only a name for *what lies beyond life* — for what lies, I mean, beyond the extreme limit of the life of every individual thing. We shrink back from it, everything shrinks back from it, because it is the annihilation of all one's familiar associations, the destruction of the impulse to go on being oneself! But though we shrink back from it, something in us, something that is deeper than ourselves pushes us on to this destruction. This is why, when people have been outraged in the very roots of their being, when they have been lacerated and flayed more than they can bear, when they have been, so to speak, raked through and combed out, they often fall back upon a soft delicious tide of deep large happiness, indescribable, beyond words."

He was too absorbed in what he was saying to notice that as he made this remark his companion murmured a passionate assent.

"They do! They do! They do!" the girl repeated, with unrestrained emotion.

"That is why," he continued without heeding her, "there is always a fierce pleasure in what fools call 'cynicism.' Cynicism is really the only philosophy worth calling a philosophy because it alone recognizes 'that everything which exists ought to be destroyed.' Those are the very words used by the devil in Faust, do you remember? And Goethe himself knew in his heart the truth of cynicism, only he loved life so well, — the great child that he was! — that he *couldn't* endure the thought of destruction. He understood it though, and confessed it, too. Spinoza helped him to see it. Ah, Phil, my girl, *there* was a philosopher! The only one — the only one! And see how the rabble are afraid of Spinoza! See how they turn to the contemptible Hegel, the grocer of philosophy, with his precious 'self-assertion' and 'self-realization'! And there are some idiots who fail to see that Spinoza was a cynic, that he hated life and wished to destroy life. They pretend that he worshipped Nature. Nature! He denied the existence of it. He wished to annihilate it, and he did annihilate it, in his terrible logic. He worshipped only one thing, that which is beyond the limit, beyond the extremest verge, beyond the point where every living thing ceases to exist and *becomes nothing*! That's what Spinoza worshipped and that's what I worship, Phil. I worship the blinding white light which puts out all the candles and all the shadows in the world. It blinds you and ends you and so you call it darkness. But it only begins where darkness is destroyed with everything else! Darkness is like cruelty. It's the opposite of love. But what I worship is as far beyond love as it is beyond the sun and all the shadows thrown by the sun!"

He paused and contemplated a nervous water-rat that was running along close to the water of the ditch they walked by, desperately searching for its hole.

"I call it white light," he continued, "but really it's not light at all, any more than it's darkness. It's something you can't name, something unutterable, but it's large and cool and deep and empty. Yes, it's empty of everything that lives or makes a sound! It stops all aching in one's head, Phil. It stops all the persecution of people who stare at you! It stops all the sickening tiredness of having to hate things. It'll stop all my longing for Baptiste, for Baptiste is *there*. Baptiste is the angel of that large, cool, quiet place. Let me once destroy everything in the way and I get to Baptiste — and nothing can ever separate us again!"

He looked round at the grey monotony about them, streaked here and there by patches of autumnal yellow where the stubble fields intersected the fens.

"I prove that I'm right about this principle of destruction, Phil," he went on, "by bringing up instances of the way all human beings instinctively delight to overthrow one another's illusions and to fling doubt upon one another's sincerity. We all do that. You do, Phil, more than any one. You do it to me. And you're right in doing it. We're all right in doing it! That accounts for the secret satisfaction we all feel when something or other breaks up the complacency of another person's life. It accounts for the mad desire we have to destroy the complacency of our own life. What we're seeking is *the line of escape* — that's the phrase I use in my book. The line of escape from ourselves. That's why we turn and turn and turn, like fish gasping on the land or like those beetles we saw just now, or like that water-rat!"

They had now reached the outskirts of Nance's withy-bed. The path Sorio had come by deviated here sharply to the east, heading sea-wards, while another path, wider and more frequented, led on across the meadows to the bank of the Loon where the roof and chimneys of Dyke House were vaguely visible. The September twilight had already begun to fall and objects at any considerable distance showed dim and wraith-like. Damp mists, smelling of stagnant water, rose in long clammy waves out of the fens and moved in white ghostly procession along the bank of the river. Sorio stood at this parting of the ways and surveyed the shadowy outline of the distant tow-path and the yet more obscure form of Dyke House. He looked at the stubble field and then at the little wood where the alder trees differentiated themselves from the willows by their darker and more melancholy foliage.

"How frightening Dyke House looks from here," remarked Philippa, "it looks like a haunted house."

A sudden idea struck Sorio's mind.

"Phil," he said, letting go his companion's hand and pointing with his stick to the house by the river, "you often tell me you're afraid of nothing weird or supernatural. You often tell me you're more like a boy in those things than a girl. Look here, now! You just run over to Dyke House and see how Rachel Doorm is getting on. I often think of her — alone in that place, now Nance and Linda have gone. I've been thinking of her especially to-day as we've come so near here. It's impossible for me to go. It's impossible for me to see any one. My nerves won't stand it. But I must say I should be rather glad to know she hadn't quite gone off her head. It isn't very nice to think of her in that large house by herself, the house where her father died. Nance told me she feared she'd take to drink just as the old man did. Nance says it's in the Doorm family, that sort of thing, drink or insanity, I mean — or both together, perhaps!" and he broke into a bitter laugh.

Philippa drew in her breath and looked at the white mist covering the river and at the ghostly outlines of the Doorm inheritance.

"You always say you're like a boy," repeated Sorio, throwing himself down where four months ago he had sat with Nance, "well, prove it then! Run over to Dyke House and give Rachel Doorm my love. I'll wait for you here. I promise faithfully. You needn't do more than just greet the old thing and wish her well. She loves all you Renshaws. She idealizes you." And he laughed again.

Philippa regarded him silently. For one moment the old wicked flicker of subtle mockery seemed on the point of crossing her face. But it died instantly away and her eyes grew childish and wistful.

"I'm not a boy, I'm a woman," she murmured in a low voice.

Sorio frowned. "Well, go, whatever you are," he cried roughly. "You're not tired, are you?" he added a little more gently.

She smiled at this. "All right, Adrian," she said, "I'll go. Give me one kiss first."

She knelt down hurriedly and put her arms round his neck. Lying with his back against the trunk of an alder, he returned her caress in a perfunctory, absent-minded manner, precisely as if she were an importunate child.

"I love you! I love you!" she whispered and then leaping to her feet, "Good-bye!" she cried, "I'll never forgive you if you desert me."

She ran off, her slender figure moving through the growing twilight like a swaying birch tree half seen through mist. Sorio's mind left her altogether. An immense yearning for his son took possession of him and he set himself to recall every precise incident of their separation. He saw himself standing at the side of the crowded liner. He saw the people waving and shouting from the wooden jetty of the great dock. He saw Baptiste, standing a little apart from the rest, motionless, not raising even a hand, paralyzed by the misery of his departure. He too was sick with misery then. He remembered the exact sensation of it and how he envied the sea-gulls who never knew these human sufferings and the gay people on the ship who seemed to have all they loved with them at their side.

"Oh, God," he muttered to himself, "give me back my son and you may take everything — my book, my pride, my brain — everything! everything!"

Meanwhile Philippa was rapidly approaching Dyke House. A cold damp air met her as she drew near, rising with the white mists from off the surface of the river. She walked round the house and pushed open the little wooden gate. The face of desolation itself looked at her from that neglected garden. A few forlorn dahlias raised their troubled wine-dark heads from among strangling nettles and sickly plants of pallid-leaved spurge. Tangled raspberry canes and over-grown patches of garden-mint mingled with wild cranesbill and darnel. Grass was growing thickly on the gravel path and clumps of green damp moss clung to the stone-work of the entrance. The windows, as she approached the house, stared at her like eyes — eyes that have lost the power to close their lids. There were no blinds down and no curtains drawn but all the windows were dark. No smoke issued from the chimney and not a flicker of light came from any portion of the place. Silent and cold and hushed, it might have been only waiting for her appearance to sink like an apparition into the misty earth. With a beating heart the girl ascended the steps and rang the bell. The sound clanged horribly through the empty passages. There was a faint hardly perceptible stir, such as one might imagine being made by the fall of disturbed dust or the rustle of loose paper, but that was all. Dead unbroken silence flowed back upon everything like the flow of water round a submerged wreck. There was not even the ticking of a clock to break the stillness. It was more than the mere absence of any sound, that silence which held the Doorm house. It was silence such as possesses an individuality of its own. It took on, as Philippa waited there, the shadowy and wavering outlines of a palpable shape. The silence greeted the girl and welcomed her and begged her to enter and let it embrace her. In a kind of panic Philippa seized the handle of the door and shook it violently. More to her terror than reassurance it opened and a cold wave of air, colder even than the mist of the river, struck her in the face. She advanced slowly, her hand pressed against her heart and a sense as if something was drumming in her ears.

The parlour door was wide open. She entered the room. A handful of dead flowers — wild flowers of some kind but they were too withered to be distinguishable — hung dry and sapless over the edge of a vase of rank-smelling water. Otherwise the table was bare and the room in order. She came out again and went into the kitchen. Here the presence of more homely and unsentimental objects relieved a little the tension of her nerves. But the place was absolutely empty — save for an imprisoned tortoise-shell butterfly that was beating itself languidly, as if it had done the same thing for days, against the pane.

Mindful of Sorio's habit and with even the faint ghost of a smile, she opened the window and set the thing free. It was a relief to smell the river-smell that came in as she did this. She moved out of the kitchen and once more stood breathless, listening intently in the silent hall-way. It was growing rapidly darker; she longed to rush from the place and return to Sorio but some indescribable power, stronger than her own will, retained her. Suddenly she uttered a little involuntary cry. Struck by a light gust of wind, the front door which she had left open, swung slowly towards her and closed with a vibrating shock. She ran to the back and opened the door which led to the yard. Here she was genuinely relieved to catch the sound of a sleepy rustling in the little wood-shed and to see through its dusty window a white blur of feathers. There were fowls alive anyway about Dyke House. That, at least, was some satisfaction. Propping the door open by means of an iron scraper she returned to the hall-way and looked apprehensively at the staircase. Dared she ascend to the rooms above? Dared she enter Rachel Doorm's bedroom? She moved to the foot of the staircase and laid her hand upon the balustrade. A dim flicker of waning light came in through the door she had propped open and fell upon the heavy chairs which stood in the hall and upon a fantastic picture representing the eruption of Vesuvius. The old-fashioned colouring of this print was now darkened, but she could see the outlines of the mountain and its rolling smoke. Once again she listened. Not a sound! She took a few steps up the stairs and paused. Then a few more and paused again. Then with her hands tightly clenched and a cold shivering sensation making her feel sick and dizzy, she ran up the remainder and stood weak and exhausted, leaning against the pillar of the balustrade and gazing with startled eyes at a half-open door.

It is extraordinary the power of the dead over the living! Philippa knew that in that room, behind that door, was the thing that had once called itself a woman and had talked and laughed and eaten and drunk with other women. When Rachel Doorm was about the age she herself had now reached and she was a little child, she could remember how she had built sand-castles for her by the sea-shore and sang to her old Rodmoor songs about drowned sailors and sea-kings and lost children. And now she knew — as surely as if her hand was laid upon her cold forehead — that behind that door, probably in some ghastly attitude of eternal listening, the corpse of all that, of all those memories and many more that she knew nothing of, was waiting to be found, to be found and have her eyes shut and her jaw bandaged — and be prepared for her coffin. The girl gripped tight hold of the balustrade. The terror that took possession of her then was not that Rachel Doorm should be dead — dead and so close to her, but that she should *not* be dead!

At that moment, could she have brought herself to push that door wide open and pass in, it would have been much more awful, much more shocking, to find Rachel Doorm alive and see her rise to meet her and hear her speak! After all, what did it matter if the body of the woman was twisted and contorted in some frightful manner — or *standing* perhaps — Rachel Doorm was just the one to die standing! — or if her face were staring up from the floor? What did it matter, supposing she *did* go straight in and feel about in the darkness and perhaps lay her hand upon the dead woman's mouth? What did it matter even if she *did* see her hanging, in the faint light of the window, from a hook above the curtain with her head bent queerly to one side and a lock of her hair falling loose? None of these things mattered. None of them prevented her going straight into that room! What did prevent her and what sent her fleeing down the stairs and out of the house with a sudden scream of intolerable terror was the fact that at that moment, quite definitely, there came the sound of *breathing* from the room she was looking at. A simple thing, a natural thing, for an old woman to retire to her bedroom early and to lie, perhaps with all her clothes on, upon her bed, to rest for a while before undressing. A simple and a natural thing! But the fact remains as has just been stated, when the sound of breathing came from that room Philippa screamed and ran panic-stricken out into the night. She hardly stopped running, indeed, till she reached the willow copse and found Sorio where she had left him. He did not resist now when breathlessly she implored him to accompany her back to the house. They walked hurriedly there together, Adrian in spite of a certain apprehension smiling in the darkness at his companion's certainty that Rachel Doorm was dead and her equal certainty that she had heard her breathing.

"But I understand your feeling, Phil," he said. "I understand it perfectly. I used to have the same sensation at night in a certain great garden in the

Campagna — the fear of meeting the boy I used to play with before I *expected* to meet him! I used to call out to him and beg him to answer me so as to make sure."

Philippa refused to enter the house again and waited for him outside by the garden gate. He was long in coming, so long that she was seized with the strangest thoughts. But he came at last, carrying a lantern in his hand.

"You're right, Phil," he said, "the gods have taken her. She's stone-dead. And what's more, she's been dead a long time, several weeks, I should think."

"But the breathing, Adrian, the breathing? I heard it distinctly."

Sorio put down his lantern and leant against the gate. In spite of his calm demeanor she could see that he also had experienced something over and above the finding of Rachel's body.

"Yes," he said, "and you were right about that, too. Guess, child, what it was!"

And as he spoke he put his hand against the front of his coat which was tightly buttoned up. Philippa was immediately conscious of the same stertorous noise that she had heard in the room of death.

"An animal!" she cried.

"An owl," he answered, "a young owl. It must have fallen from a nest in the roof. I won't show it to you now, as it might escape and a cat might get it. I'm going to try and rear it if Tassar will let me. Baptiste will be so amused when he finds me with a pet owl! He has quite a mania for things like that. He can make the birds in the park come to him by whistling. Well! I suppose what we must do now is to get back to Rodmoor as quick as we can and report this business to the police. She must have been dead a week or more! I'm afraid this will be a great shock to Nance."

“How did you find her?” enquired the girl as they walked along the road towards the New Bridge.

“Don’t ask me, Phil — don’t ask me,” he replied, “She’s out of her troubles anyway and had an owl to look after her.”

“Should I have been—” began his companion.

“Don’t ask me, girl!” he reiterated. “I tell you it’s all past and over. Rachel Doorm will be buried in the Rodmoor churchyard and I shall have her owl. An old woman stops breathing and an owl begins breathing. It’s all natural enough.”

XXII. THE NORTHWEST WIND

THE FUNERAL OF Rachel Doorm was a dark and troubled day for both Nance and Linda. Even the sympathy of Mr. Traherne seemed unable to console them or lift the settled gloom from their minds. Nance especially was struck dumb with comfortless depression. She felt doubly guilty in the matter. Guilty in her original acquiescence in the woman's desire to have them with her in Rodmoor and guilty in her neglect of her during the last weeks of her life. For the immediate cause of her death, or of the desperation that led to it, their leaving Dyke House for the village, she did not feel any remorse. That was inevitable after what had occurred. But this did not lessen her responsibility in the other two cases. Had she resolutely refused to leave London the probability was that Rachel would have been persuaded to go on living with them as she had formerly done. She might even have sold Dyke House and with the proceeds bought some cottage in the city suburbs for them all. It was her own ill-fated passion for Sorio, she recognized that clearly enough, that was the cause of all the disasters that had befallen them.

Linda's feeling with regard to Rachel's death was quite different. She had to confess in the depths of her heart that she was glad of it, glad to be relieved of the constant presence of something menacing and vindictive on the outskirts of her life. Her trouble was of a more morbid and abnormal kind, was, indeed, the fact that in spite of the woman's death, she *hadn't* really got rid of Rachel Doorm. The night before the funeral she dreamed of her almost continually, dreamed that she herself was a child again and that Rachel had threatened her with some unknown and mysterious punishment.

The night after the funeral it was still worse. She woke Nance by a fit of wild and desperate crying and when the elder girl tried to discover the nature of her trouble she grew taciturn and reserved and refused to say anything in explanation. All the following week she went about her occupations with an air of abstraction and remoteness as if her real life were being lived on another plane. Nance learnt from Mr. Traherne, who was doing all he could think of to keep her attention fixed on her organ-playing, that as a matter of fact she frequently came out of the church after a few minutes' practise and went and stood, for long periods together, by Rachel's grave. The priest confessed that on one of the occasions when he had surprised her in this posture, she had turned upon him quite savagely and had addressed him in a tone completely different from her ordinary one.

It was especially dreadful to Nance to feel she was thrust out and alienated in some mysterious way from her sister's confidence.

One morning towards the end of September, when they were dressing together in the hazy autumnal light and listening to the cries of sea-gulls coming up from the harbour, Nance caught upon her sister's face, as the girl's eyes met one another in their common mirror, that same inscrutable look that she had seen upon it five months before when, in their room at Dyke House they had first become acquainted with the eternal iteration of the North Sea's waves. Nance tried in vain all the remainder of that day to think out some clue to what that look implied. It haunted her and tantalized her. Linda had always possessed something a little pleading and sad in her eyes. It was no doubt the presence of that clinging wistfulness in them which had from the first attracted Brand. But this look contained in it something different. It suggested to Nance, though she dismissed the comparison as quite inadequate almost as soon as she had made it, the cry of a soul that was being *pulled backwards* into some interior darkness yet uttering all the while a desperate prayer to be let alone as if the least interference with what destiny was doing would be the cause of yet greater peril.

The following night as she lay awake watching a filmy trail of vaporous clouds sail across a wasted haggard moon, a moon that seemed to betray as that bright orb seldom does the fact that it was a corpse-world hung there with almost sacrilegious and indecent exposure, under the watchful stars, she noticed with dismay the white-robed figure of her sister rise from her bed and step lightly across the room to the open window. Nance watched her with breathless alarm. Was she awake or asleep? She leant out of the window, her long hair falling heavily to one side. Nance fancied she heard her muttering something but the noise of the sea, for the tide was high then in the early morning hours, prevented her catching the words. Nance threw off the bed-clothes and stole noiselessly towards her. Yes, certainly she was speaking. The words came in a low, plaintive murmur as if she were pleading with some one out there in the misty night. Nance crept gently up to her and listened, afraid to touch her lest she should cause her some dangerous nervous shock but anxious to be as close to her as she could.

“I am good now,” she heard her say, “I am good now, Rachel. You can let me out now! I will say those words, I am good now. I won’t disobey you again.”

There was a long silence, broken only by the sound of the Sea and the beating of Nance’s heart. Then once more, the voice rose.

“It’s down too deep, Rachel, you can’t reach it with that. But I’ll go in. I’m not afraid any more! If only you’ll let me out. I’ll go in deep — deep — and get it for you. She can’t hold it tight. The water is too strong. Oh, I’ll be good, Rachel. I’ll get it for you if only you’ll let me out!”

Nance, unable to endure any more of this, put her arms gently round her sister's body and drew her back into the room. The young girl did not resist. With wide-open but utterly unconscious eyes she let herself be led across the room. Only when she was close to her bed she held back and her body became rigid.

"Don't put me in there again, Rachel. Anything but that!"

"Darling!" cried Nance desperately, "don't you know me? I'm with you, dear. This is Nance with you. No one shall hurt you!"

The young girl shuddered and looked at her with a bewildered and troubled gaze as if everything were vague and obscure. At that moment there came over Nance that appalling terror of the unconscious, of the *sub-human* which is one of the especial dangers of those who have to look after the insane or follow the movements of somnambulists. But the shudder passed and the bewildered look was superseded by one of gradual obliviousness. The girl's body relaxed and she swayed as she stood. Nance, with a violent effort, lifted her in her arms and laid her down on the bed. The girl muttered something and turned over on her side. Nance watched her anxiously but she was soon relieved to catch the sound of her quiet breathing. She was asleep peacefully now. She looked so pathetically lovely, lying there in a childish position of absolute abandonment that Nance could not resist bending over her and lightly kissing her cheek.

"Poor darling!" she said to herself, "how blind I've been! How wickedly blind I've been!" She pulled the blanket from her own bed and threw it over her sister so as not to disturb her by altering the bed-clothes. Then, wrapping herself in her dressing-gown she lay back upon her pillows resigned for the rest of the night to remaining wakeful.

The next day she noticed no difference in Linda's mood. There was the same abstraction, the same listless lack of interest in anything about her and worst of all that same inscrutable look which filled Nance with every sort of wild imagination. She cast about in despair for some way of breaking the evil spell under which the girl was pining. She went again and again to see Mr. Traherne and the good man devoted hours of his time to discussing the matter with her but nothing either of them could think of seemed a possible solution.

At last one morning, some days after that terrifying night, she met Dr. Raughty in the street. She walked with him as far as the bridge explaining to him as best she could her apprehensions about her sister and asking him for his advice. Dr. Raughty was quite definite and unhesitating.

“What Linda wants is a mother,” he said laconically. Nance stared at him.

“Yes, I know,” she said. “I know well enough, poor darling! But that’s the worst of it, Fingal. Her mother’s been dead years and years and years.”

“There are other mothers in Rodmoor, aren’t there?” he remarked.

Nance frowned. “You think I don’t look after her properly,” she murmured. “No, I suppose I haven’t. And yet I’ve tried to — I’ve tried my very best.”

“You’re as hopeless as your Adrian with his owl,” cried the Doctor. “He was feeding it with cake the other day. Cake! He’d better not bring his owl and our friend’s rat together. There won’t be much of the rat left. Cake!” And the Doctor put back his head and uttered an immense gargantuan laugh. Nance looked a little disturbed and even a little indignant at his merriment.

“What do you mean by *other* mothers?” she asked. They had just reached the bridge and Dr. Raughty bade her look over the parapet.

“What exquisite bellies those dace have!” he remarked, snuffing the air as he spoke. “There’ll be rain before night. Do you feel it? I know from the way those fish rise. The sea too, it has a different voice — has that ever caught your attention? — when there's rain on the wind. Those dace are shrewd fellows. They're after the bits of garbage the sea-gulls drop on their way up the river. You might think they were after flies, but they're not. I suppose George Crabbe or George Borrow would switch 'em out with some bait such as was never dreamed of — the droppings of rabbits perhaps or ladybird grubs. I suppose old Doctor Johnson would wade in up to his knees and try and scoop 'em up in his hands. There's a big one! Do you see? The one waving his tail and turning sideways. I expect he weighs half a pound or more. Fish are beautiful things, especially dace. Isn't it wonderful to think that if you pulled any of those things backwards through the water they would be drowned, simply by the rush of water through their gills? Look, Nance, at that one! What a silver belly! What a delicate, exquisite tail! A plague on these fellows who philander with owls and rats! Give me fish — if you want to make a cult of something." He lowered his voice to a whisper, "I should think Lubric de Lauziere must have kept a pet fish in his round pond!"

"Good-bye, Fingal," said Nance, holding out her hand.

"What! Well! Where! God help us! What's wrong, Nance? You're not annoyed with me, are you? Do you think I'm talking through my hat? Not at all! I'm leading up to it. A mother — that's what she wants. She wants it just as those dace want the water to flow in their faces and not backwards through their gills. She's being dragged backwards — that's what's the matter with her. She wants her natural element and it must flow in the right direction. *You* won't do. Traherne won't do. A mother is the thing! A woman, Nance, who has borne children has certain instincts in dealing with young girls which make the wisest physicians in the world look small!"

Nance smiled helplessly at him.

"But, Fingal, dear," she said, "what can I do? I can't appeal to Mrs. Raps, can I — or your friend Mrs. Sodderley? When you come to think, there are very few mothers in Rodmoor!"

The Doctor sighed. "I know it," he observed mournfully, "I know it. The place will die out altogether in fifty years. It's as bad as the sand-dunes with their sterile flora. Women who bear children are the only really sane people in the world."

He ran his thumb, as he spoke, backwards and forwards over a little patch of vividly green moss that grew between the stones of the parapet. The air, crisp and autumnal with that vague scent of burning weeds in it which more than anything else suggests the outskirts of a small town at the end of the summer, flowed round them both with a mute appeal to her, so it seemed to Nance, to let all things drift as they might and submit to destiny. She looked at the Doctor dreamily in one of those queer intermissions of human consciousness in which we stand apart, as it were, from our own fate and listen to the flowing of the eternal tide.

A small poplar tree growing at the village end of the bridge had already lost some of its leaves and a few of these came drifting, one by one, along the raised stone pathway to the girl's feet. Over the misty marsh lands in the other direction, she could see the low tower of the church. The gilded weather-vane on the top of it shimmered and glittered in a vaporous stream of sunlight that seemed to touch nothing else.

Dreamily she looked at the Doctor, too weary of the struggle of life to make an effort to leave him and yet quite hopeless as to his power to help her. Fingal Raughty continued to discourse upon the instinctive wisdom of maternity.

"Women who've had children," he went on, "are the only people in the world who possess the open secret. They know what it is to find the ultimate virtue in exquisite resignation. They do not only submit to fate — they joyfully embrace it. I suppose we might maintain that they even 'love it' — though I confess that that idea of 'loving' fate has always seemed to me weird and fantastic. But I laugh, and so do you, I expect, when our friends Sorio and Tassar talk in their absurd way about women. What do they know of women? They've only met, in all their lives (forgive me, Nance!) a parcel of silly young girls. They've no right to speak of life at all, the depraved children that they are! They are outside life, they're ignorant of the essential mystery. Goethe was the fellow to understand these things, and you know the name *he* gives to the unutterable secret? *The Mothers*. That's a good name, isn't it? The Mothers! Listen, Nance! All the people in this place suffer from astigmatism and asymmetry. Those are the outward signs of their mental departure from the normal. And the clever ones among them are proud of it. You know the way they talk! They think abnormality is the only kind of beauty. Nance, my dear, to tell you the truth, I'm sick of them all. *My* idea of beauty is the perfect masculine type, such as you see it in that figure they call 'the Theseus' — in the Elgin marbles — or the perfect feminine type as you see it in the great Demeter. Do you suppose they can, any of them, get round that? Do you suppose they can fight against the rhythm of Nature?"

He pulled out his tobacco pouch and gravely lit his pipe, swinging his head backwards and forwards as he did so. Nance could not help noticing the shrewd, humorous *animalism* of his look as he performed this function.

"But what can be done? Oh, Fingal, what *can* be done about Linda?" she asked with a heavy sigh.

He settled his pipe in his mouth and blew violently down its stem, causing a cloud of smoke to go up into the September air.

"Take her to Mrs. Renshaw," he said solemnly. "That's what I've been thinking all this time. That's my conclusion. Take her to Mrs. Renshaw."

Nance stared at him. "Really?" she murmured, "you really think *she* could help?"

"Try it — try it — try it!" cried Dr. Raughty, flinging a bit of moss at the fish in the water below them.

"It's extraordinary," he added, "that these dace should come down so far as this! The water here must be almost entirely salt."

That afternoon Nance went to Mr. Traherne's vesper service. She found Mrs. Renshaw in the church and invited both her and the priest to come back with them to their lodgings. She did this under the pretense of showing them some new designs of a startling and fascinating kind that she had received from Paris. The circean witcheries of French costumery were not perhaps precisely the right attraction either for Mrs. Renshaw or Hamish Traherne, but the thing served well enough as an excuse and they both took it as such. She was careful to hurry on in advance with Mr. Traherne so as to make it inevitable that Linda should walk with Mrs. Renshaw. The mistress of Oakguard seemed unusually pale and tired that afternoon. She held Linda back in the churchyard until the others had got quite far and then she led her straight to Rachel Doorm's grave. They had buried the unhappy woman quite close to the outermost border of the priest's garden. Nothing but a few paces of level grass separated her from a row of tall crimson hollyhocks. The grave at present lacked any headstone. Only a bunch of Michaelmas daisies, placed there by Linda herself, stood at its foot in a glass jar. Several wasps were buzzing round this jar, probably conscious of some faint odour clinging still about it from what it had formerly contained. Mrs. Renshaw stood with her hand leaning heavily on Linda’s shoulder. She seemed to know, from the depths of her own fathomless morbidity, precisely what the young girl was feeling.

“Shall we kneel down?” she said. Linda began trembling a little but with simple and girlish docility, free from any kind of embarrassment, she knelt at the other’s side.

“We mustn’t pray for the dead,” whispered Mrs. Renshaw. “*He*,” she meant Mr. Traherne, “tells us to in his sermons, but it hurts me when he does for we’ve been taught that all that is wrong — wrong and contrary to our simple faith! We mustn’t forget the Martyrs — must we, Linda?”

But Linda’s mind was far from the martyrs. It was occupied entirely with the thing that lay buried before them, under that newly disturbed earth.

“But we can pray to God that His will be done, on earth, even as it is in Heaven,” murmured Mrs. Renshaw.

She was silent after that and the younger and the elder woman knelt side by side with bowed heads. Then in a low whisper Mrs. Renshaw spoke again.

“There are some lines I should like to say to you, dear, if you’ll let me. I copied them out last week. They were at the end of a book of poetry that I found in Philippa’s room. She must have just bought it or had it given to her. I didn’t think she cared any more for poetry. The pages weren’t cut and I didn’t like to cut them without her leave but I copied this out from the end. It was the last in the book.”

She hesitated a moment while Linda remained motionless at her side, trembling still a little and watching the movements of a Peacock butterfly which was then sharing with the wasps their interest in the ancient honey-jar.

Mrs. Renshaw then repeated the following lines in a clear exquisitely modulated voice which went drifting away over the surrounding marshes.

“For even the purest delight may pall,
And power must fail and the pride must fall.
And the love of the dearest friends grow small,
But the glory of the Lord is all in all.”

Her voice sank. A slight gust of wind made the trees above them sigh softly as though the words of the kneeling woman were in harmony with the inarticulate heart of the earth.

Linda stopped trembling. A sweet indescribable calm began slowly to pervade her. Gently, like a child, she slipped her hand into her companion’s.

“Do you remember the Forty-third Psalm, Linda?” Mrs. Renshaw continued and her clear dramatic voice, with a power of feeling equal to that of any great actress, once more rose upon the air.

“Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way.

Though thou hast sore broken us, in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.”

Once more she was silent but with a slight veering of the wind, the sound of the waves beyond the sand-dunes came to them with pitiless distinctness. It seemed to mock — this voice of the earth’s antagonist — mock, in triumphant derision, the forlorn hope which that solemn invocation had roused in the girl’s heart. But in contending against Mrs. Renshaw’s knowledge of the Psalms even the North Sea had met its match. With her pale face uplifted and a wild light in her eyes, she continued to utter the old melodious incantations with their constant references to a Power more formidable than “all thy waves and storms.” She might have been one of the early converts to the faith that came from the sacred Desert, wrestling in spiritual ecstasy with the gods and powers of those heathen waters.

Either by one of the fortunate coincidences which sometimes interrupt even the irony of nature or, as Mrs. Renshaw would herself have maintained, by a direct answer to her prayer, the weathercock on the church tower swung round again. North-east it swung, then north-north-east, then due north. And finally, even while she was uttering her last antiphony, it pointed to north-west, the quarter most alien and antagonistic to the Rodmoor sea, the portion of the horizon from which blew the wind of the great fens.

In a country like East Anglia so peculiarly at the mercy of the elements, every one of the winds has its own peculiar burden and brings with it something healing and restorative or baleful and malefic. The east wind here is, in a paramount sense, the evil wind, the accomplice and confederate of the salt deep, the blighter of hopes, the herald of disaster. The north-west wind, on the contrary, is the wind that brings the sense of inland spaces, the smell of warm, wet earth and the fragrance of leaf mould in sweet breathing woods. It is the wind that fills the rivers and the wells and brings the fresh purifying rain. It is a wind full of memories and its heart is strong with the power of ancient love, revived even out of graves and sepulchres. To those sensitive to finer and rarer earth influences among the dwellers by the east coast there may be caught sometimes upon the north-west wind the feeling of pine woods and moorland heather. For it comes from the opposite side of the great plain, from Brandon Heath and even beyond and it finds nothing in the wide fen country to intercept it or break the rush of its sea-ward passage.

Thus, when the two women rose finally to their feet it was to be met by a cool, healing breath which, as it bowed the ranks of the hollyhocks and rustled through the trees, had in it a delicious odour of inland brooks and the coming of pure rain.

"Listen to me, child," said Mrs. Renshaw as they passed out of the churchyard, "I want to say this to you. You mustn't think that God allows any intercourse between the living and the dead. That is a wicked invention of our own sinful hearts. It is a temptation, darling — a temptation of the devil — and we must struggle against it. Whenever we feel it we must struggle against it and pray. It is perfectly right for you to think gently and forgivingly of poor Miss Doorm. It were wrong to think otherwise. But you mustn't think of her as anywhere near us or about us now. She's in the hands of God and in the mercy of God and we must leave her there. Do you hear what I'm saying, Linda? Do you understand me? Anything else is wrong and evil. We are all sinners together and we are all in the same merciful hands."

Never was the exorcising of powers hurtful to humanity more effective. Linda bowed her head at her words and then raising it freely, walked with a lighter step than for seven long days. She wished in her heart that she had the courage to talk to Mrs. Renshaw about an anxiety much more earthly, much less easy to be healed, than the influence of Rachel Doorm, alive or dead, but so immense was her relief at that moment to be free from the haunting phantom that had been pulling her towards that mound in the churchyard that she found it in her heart to be hopeful and reckless even though she knew that, whatever happened, there was bound to be pain and trouble in store for her in the not far distant future.

XXIII. WARDEN OF THE FISHES

IT WILL BE found not altogether devoid of a strange substratum of truth, though fantastic enough in the superficial utterance, the statement that there are certain climacteric seasons in the history of places when, if events of importance are looming upon the horizon, they are especially liable to fall. Such a season with regard to Rodmoor, or at least with regard to the persons we are most concerned with there, may be said to have arrived with the beginning of Autumn and with the month of October.

The first weeks of this month were at any rate full of exciting and fatal interest to Nance. Something in the change of the weather, for the rains had come in earnest now, affected Sorio in a marked degree. His whole being seemed to undergo some curious disintegrating process as difficult to analyze as the actual force in Nature which was at that very time causing the fall of the leaves. We may be allowed to draw at least this much from Sorio's own theory of the universal impulse to self-destruction — the possible presence, that is to say, of something positive and active, if not personal and conscious, in the processes of natural decadence. Life, when it corrupts and disintegrates; life when it finally falls away and becomes what we call death, does so sometimes, or seems to do so, with a vehemence and impetuosity which makes it difficult not to feel the pressure of some half-conscious "will to perish" in the thing thus plunging towards dissolution. The brilliant colour which many flowers assume when they approach decease bears out this theory. It is what the poet calls a "lightning before death" and the rich tints of the autumn foliage as well as the phosphorescent glories — only repulsive to our human senses in fatal association — of physical mortality itself, are symbols, if not more than symbols, of the same splendid rushing upon nothingness.

This change in Sorio was not at all to Nance's disadvantage in the external aspect of the relations between them; indeed, she was carried forward by it to the point of coming to anticipate with trembling excitement what had begun to seem an almost impossible happiness. For Sorio definitely and in an outburst of impatient pleading, implored her to marry him. In the deeper, more spiritual association between them, however, the change which took place in him now was less satisfactory. Nance could not help feeling that there was something blind, childish, selfish, unchivalrous, — something even reckless and sinister — about this proposal and the passionate eagerness with which he pressed it upon her, considering that he made no more attempt than before to secure any employment and seemed to take it for granted that either she or Baltazar Stork or his own son in America, or some vague providential windfall would provide the money for this startling adventure. Side by side with her surprise at his careless disregard for all practical considerations, Nance could not help feeling a profound apprehension which she herself was unwilling to bring to the surface of her mind with regard to his mood and manner during these days. He seemed to throw himself passively and helplessly upon her hands. He clung to her as a sick child might cling to its parent. His old savage outbursts of cynical humour seemed to have vanished and in their place was a constant querulousness and peevishness which rendered their hours together much less peaceful and happy than they ought to have been. All sorts of little things irritated him — irritated him even in her. He clung to her, she could not help fancying, more out of a strange instinct of self-preservation than out of natural love. She couldn't help wondering sometimes how it would be when they were actually married. He seemed to find it at once difficult to endure her society and impossible to do without it. The bitter saying of the old Latin poet might have been his motto at that time. “*Nec sine te nec tecum vivere possum.*”

And yet, in spite of all this, these early October days were days of exquisite happiness for Nance. The long probation through which her love had passed had purged and winnowed it. The maternal instinct in her, always the dominant note in her emotions, was satisfied now as it had never been satisfied before, as perhaps unless she had children of her own it would never be satisfied again.

In these days of new hope and new life her youth seemed to revive and put forth exquisite blossoms of gaiety and tenderness. In a physical sense she actually did revive, though this may have been partly due to the cool crisp air that now blew constantly across the fens, and Linda, watching the change with affectionate sympathy, declared she was growing twice as beautiful.

She offered no objection when Sorio insisted upon having their “bans” read out in church, a duty that was most willingly performed without further delay by Hamish Traherne. She did not even protest when he announced that they would be married before October was over, announced it without any indication of how or where they would live, upon whose money or under whose roof!

She felt a natural reluctance to press these practical details upon his notice. The bond that united them was too delicate, too tenuous and precarious, for her to dare to lean heavily upon it, nor did the few hesitating and tentative hints she threw out meet with any response from him. He waved them aside. He threw them from him with a jest or a childish groan of disgust or a vague “Oh, *that* will work itself out. *That* will be all right. Don’t worry about *that*! I’m writing to Baptiste.”

But, as we have said, in spite of all these difficulties and in spite of the deep-hidden dismay which his nervous, querulous mood excited in her, Nance was full of a thrilling and inexpressible happiness during these Autumn days. She loved the roar of the great wind — the north-west wind — in chimneys and house-tops at night. She loved the drifting of the dead leaves along the muddy roads. She loved the long swishing murmur of the rushes growing by the dyke paths as they bent their feathery heads over the wet banks or bowed in melancholy rhythm across the rain-filled ditches.

Autumn was assuredly and without doubt the climacteric season of the Rodmoor fens. They reluctantly yielded to the Spring; they endured the Summer, and the Winter froze them into dead and stoical inertness. But something in the Autumn called out the essential and native qualities of the place's soul. The fens rose to meet the Autumn in happy and stormy nuptials. The brown, full-brimmed streams mounted up joyously to the highest level of their muddy banks. The faded mallow-plants by the river's side and the tarnished St. John's wort in the drenched hedges assumed a pathetic and noble beauty — a beauty full of vague, far-drawn associations for sensitive humanity. The sea-gulls and marsh-birds, the fish, the eels, the water-rats of the replenished streams seemed to share in the general expansion of life with the black and white hornless cattle, the cattle of the fens, who now began to yield their richest milk. Long, chilly, rainy days ended in magnificent and sumptuous sunsets — sunsets in which the whole sky from zenith to nadir became one immense rose of celestial fire. Out of a hundred Rodmoor chimneys rose the smell of burning peat, that smell of all others characteristic of the country whose very soil was formed of the vegetation of forgotten centuries.

In the large dark barns the yellow grain lay piled roof-high, while in every little shed and outhouse in the country, damsons, pears and potatoes lay spread out as if for the enjoyment of some Dionysian gathering of the propitiated earth-gods.

The fishermen, above all, shared in the season's fortune, going out early and late to their buoy-marked spots on the horizon, where the presence of certain year-old wrecks lying on the sand at the bottom drew the migratory fish and held them for weeks as if by a marine spell.

But if the days had their especial quality, the nights during that October were more significant still. The sky seemed to draw back, back and away, to some purer, clearer, more ethereal level while with a radiance tender and solemn the greater and lesser stars shed down their magical influence. The planets, especially Venus and Jupiter, grew so luminous and large that they seemed to rival the moon; while the Moon, herself, the mystic red moon of the finished harvest, the moon of the equinox, drew the tides after her, higher and fuller and with a deeper note in their ebb and flow than at any other season of the year.

Everywhere swallows were gathering for their long flight, everywhere the wild geese and the herons were rising to incredible heights in the sky and moving northward and westward; and all this while Nance was able, at last really able, to give herself up to her passion for the man she loved.

It was a passion winnowed by waiting and suffering, purged to a pure flame by all she had gone through, but it was a passion none the less — a long exclusive passion — the love of a lifetime. It made her sometimes, this great love of hers, dizzy and faint with fear lest something even now should at the last moment come between them. Sometimes it made her strangely shy of him too, shy and withdrawn as if it were not easy, though so triumphantly sweet, to give herself up body and soul into hands that after all were the hands of a stranger!

Sorio did not understand all this. Sometimes when she thrust him away as if the emotion produced by his caresses were more than she could bear or as if some incalculable pride in her, some inalienable chastity beyond the power of her senses, relucted to yield further, he grew angry and morose and accused her of jealousy or of coldness. This would have been harder to endure from him if there had not existed all the while at the bottom of her heart a strange, maternal pity, a pity not untouched with a sort of humorous irony — the eternal irony of the woman as she submits to the eternal misunderstanding of the man, embracing her without knowing what he does. He seemed to her sometimes in the mere physical stress of his love-making almost like an amorous and vicious boy. She could not resist the consciousness that her knowledge of the mystery of sex — its depth and subtlety not less than its flame and intensity — was something that went much further and was much more complicated and involved with her whole being than anything he experienced. Especially did she smile in her heart at the queer way he had of taking it for granted that he was "seducing" her, of deriving, it seemed, sometimes a satyrish pleasure from that idea, and sometimes a fit of violent remorse. When he was in either of these moods she felt towards him precisely as a mother might feel towards a son whose egoism and ignorance gave him a disproportioned view of the whole world. And yet, in actual age, Sorio was some twenty years her senior.

In her own mind, as the weeks slipped by and their names had already been coupled twice in the Sunday services, Nance was taking thought as to what, in solid reality, she intended to do with this child-man of hers when the great moment came. She must move from their present lodging. *That* seemed certain. It also seemed certain that Linda would have still to go on living with her. Any other arrangement than that was obviously unthinkable.

But where should they live? And could she, with the money at present at her disposal, support three people?

A solution was found to both these problems by Mr. Traherne. There happened to exist in Rodmoor, as in many other old decaying boroughs on the east coast, certain official positions the practical service of which was almost extinct but whose local prestige and financial emoluments, such as they were, lingered on unaffected by the change of conditions. The relentless encroachments of the sea upon the land were mainly responsible for this. In certain almost uninhabited villages there existed official persons whose real raison d'être lay with the submerged foundations of former human habitations, deep at the bottom of the waters.

It was, indeed, one of the essential peculiarities of life upon those strange sea-banks this sense of living on the edge, as it were, of the wave-drowned graves of one's fathers. It may have been the half-conscious knowledge of this, bred in their flesh and blood from infancy, that gave to the natives of those places so many unusual and unattractive qualities. Other abodes of men rest securely upon the immemorial roots of the past, roots that lie, layer beneath layer, in rich historic continuity endowing present usages and customs with the consecration of unbroken tradition. But in the villages of that coast all this is different. Tradition remains, handed down from generation to generation, but the physical continuity is broken. The east-coast dwellers resemble certain of the stellar bodies in the celestial spaces, they retain their identity and their names but they are driven, in slow perpetual movement, to change their physical position. In scriptural phrase, they have no "abiding-place" nor can they continue "in one stay."

The fishing boats of the present generation set their brown sails to cross the water where, some hundreds of years before, an earlier generation walked their cobbled streets. The storm-buoys rock and ring and the boat lanterns burn their wavering signals over the drowned foundations that once supported Town-Hall and church tower, Market place and Village Tavern. It is this slow, century-delayed flight from the invading tide which so often produces in East Anglian coast towns the phenomenal existence of two parish churches, both it may be still in use, but the later and newer one following the heart of the community in its enforced retreat. Thus it is brought about in these singular localities that the very law of the gods, the law which utters to the elements the solemn “thus far and no further” is as a matter of fact, daily and momently, though with infinite slowness, broken and defied.

It is perhaps small wonder that among the counties of England these particular districts should have won for themselves a sinister reputation for impiety and perversity. Nothing so guards and establishes the virtue of a community than its sense of the presence in its midst of the ashes of its generations. Consciously and in a thousand pious usages it “worships its dead.” But East-Anglian coast-dwellers are not permitted this privilege. Their “Lares and Penates” have been invaded and submerged. The fires upon their altars have been drowned and over the graves of their fathers the godless tides ebb and flow without reverence. Fishes swim where once children were led to the font and where lovers were wedded the wild cormorant mocks the sea-horses with its disconsolate cry. It is easy to be believed that the remote descendants of human beings who actually walked and bartered and loved and philosophized on spots of ground now tangled with seaweed and sea-drift, and with fathoms of moaning and whispering water above them, should come in their hour to depart in a measure from the stable and kindly laws of human integrity! With the ground thus literally *moving* — though in age-long process — *under their feet*, how should they be as faithful as other tribes of men to what is permanent in human institution?

There was perhaps a certain congruity in the fact that now, after all these ages of tidal malice, it was in the interests of so singular an alien as Sorio — one whose very philosophy was the philosophy of “destruction” — that this lingering on of offices, whose service had been sea-drowned, remained as characteristic of the place. But this is precisely what did occur.

There was in Rodmoor a local official, appointed by the local town council, whose title, “The Warden of the Fishes,” carried the mind back to a time when the borough, much larger then, had been a considerable centre of the fishing industry. This office, tenable for life, carried with it very few actual duties now but it ensured a secure though small emolument and, what was more important, the occupancy, free of rent, of one of the most picturesque houses in the place, an old pre-Elizabethan dwelling of incommodious size but of romantic appearance, standing at the edge of the harbour.

The last incumbent of this quaint and historic office, whose duties were so little onerous that they could be performed by a very old and very feeble man, was a notable character of the village called John Peewit Swinebitter, whose chief glory was not attained until the close of his mortal days, which ended under the table in the Admiral’s Head after a surfeit of the very fish of which he was “warden” washed down by too copious libations of Keith-Radipole ale.

Since Mr. Swinebitter’s decease in June, there had gone on all through July and August, a desperate rivalry between two town factions as to the choosing of his successor and it was Mr. Traherne’s inspired notion to take advantage of this division to secure the post for Nance’s prospective husband.

Sorio, though of foreign blood, was by birth and nationality English and moreover he had picked up, during his stay in Rodmoor, quite as much familiarity with the ways and habits of fish as were necessary for that easy post. If, at any unforeseen crisis, more scientific and intimate knowledge was required than was at his disposal, there was always Dr. Raughty, a past master in all such matters, to whom he could apply. It was Mr. Traherne's business to wheedle the local rivals into relinquishing their struggle in favour of one who was outside the contention and when this was accomplished the remaining obstacles in the way of the appointment were not hard to surmount. Luckily for the conspirators, Brand Renshaw, though the largest local landowner and a Justice of the Peace, was not on the Rodmoor council.

So skillfully did Mr. Traherne handle the matter and so cautious and reserved was Nance that it was not till after the final reading of their bans in the church on the marshes and the completion of the arrangements for their marriage at the end of the following week, that even Baltazar Stork became aware of what was in the wind.

Sorio himself had been extremely surprised at this unexpected favour shown him by the local tradesmen. He had brooded so long upon his morbid delusion of universal persecution that it seemed incredible to him, in the few interviews which he had with these people, that they should treat him in so courteous and kind a manner. As a matter of fact, so fierce and obstinate were their private dissensions, it was a genuine relief to them to deal with a person from outside; nor must it be forgotten that in the appointment of Nance's husband to the coveted post they were doing honour to the memory of the bride's father, Captain Herrick having been by far the most popular of all the visitors to Rodmoor in former times. Most of the older members of the council could well remember the affable sailor.

Many of them had frequently gone out fishing with him in the days when there were more fish and rarer fish to be caught than there were at present — those “old days” in fact which, in most remote villages, are associated with stuffed wonders in tavern parlours and with the quips and quirks of half-legendary heroes of Sport and Drink.

It was a reversion to such “old days” to have a gentleman “Warden of the Fishes.” Besides it was a blow at the Renshaws between whom and the town-council there was an old established feud. For it was not hidden from the gossips of Rodmoor that the relations between Nance and the family at Oakguard were more than a little strained, nor did the shrewder ones among them hesitate to whisper dark and ominous hints as to the nature of this estrangement.

Baltazar Stork received the news of his friend’s approaching marriage with something like mute fury. The morning when Sorio announced it to him was one of concentrated gloom. The sea was high and rough. The wind wailed through the now almost leafless sycamores and made the sign which bore the Admiral’s head creak and groan in its iron frame. It had rained steadily all through the night and though the rain had now ceased there was no sun to dry the little pools of water which lay in all the trodden places in the green or the puddles, choked up with dead leaves, which stared desolately from the edges of the road upon the sombre heaven. Sorio, having made his momentous announcement in a negligent, off-hand way, as though it were a matter of small importance, rushed off to meet Nance at the station and go with her to Mundham.

As it was Saturday the girl had no scruple about leaving her work. In any case she would have been free, with the rest of Miss Pontifex’s employees, in the early afternoon. She was anxious to spend as long a time as was possible making her final purchases preparatory to their taking possession of Ferry Lodge. The mere name of this relic of Rodmoor's faded glory was indicative of how times had changed. What was once an inland crossing — several miles from the shore — had now become the river's mouth and where farmers formerly watered their cattle the fishing boats spread their sails to meet the sea.

Nance had made a clean sweep of the furniture of their predecessor, something about the reputation of Mr. Peewit Swinebitter prejudicing her, in perhaps an exaggerated manner, against the buying of any of his things. This fastidiousness on her part did not, however, lessen the material difficulties of the situation, Sorio being of singularly little assistance in the rôle of a house-furnisher.

Meanwhile, with hat pulled low down over his forehead and his cane switching the rain-drenched grass, Baltazar Stork walked up and down in front of his cottage. He walked thus until he was tired and then he came and stood at the edge of the green and looked at his empty house and at the puddles in the road. Into the largest of these puddles he idly poked his stick, stirring the edge of a half-submerged leaf and making it float across the muddy water. Children passed him unheeded, carrying cans and bottles to be filled at the tavern. Little boys came up to him, acquaintances of his, full of gaiety and mischief, but something in his face made them draw back and leave him. Never, in all his relations with his friend, had Baltazar derived more pleasure from being with him than he had done during the recent weeks. That condition of helpless and wistful incompetence which Nance found so trying in Sorio was to Baltazar Stork the cause of the most delicate and exquisite sensations. Never had he loved the man so well — never had he found him so fascinating. And now, just at the moment when he, the initiated adept in the art of friendship, was reaping the reward of his long patience with his friend’s waywardness and really succeeding in making him depend on him exactly in the way he loved best, there came this accursed girl and carried him off!

The hatred which he felt at that moment towards Nance was so extreme that it overpowered and swamped every other emotion. Baltazar Stork was of that peculiarly constituted disposition which is able to hate the more savagely and vindictively because of the very fact that its normal mood is one of urbane and tolerant indifference. The patient courtesy of a lifetime, the propitiatory arts of a long suppression, had their revenge just then for all they had made him endure. In a certain sense it was well for him that he *could* hate. It was, indeed in a measure, an instinct of self-preservation that led him to indulge such a feeling. For below his hatred, down in the deeper levels of his soul, there yawned a gulf, the desolating emptiness of which was worse than death. He did not visualize this gulf in the same concrete manner as he had done on a previous occasion, but he was conscious of it none the less. It was as a matter of fact a thing that had been for long years hidden obscurely under the hard, gay surface of his days. He covered it over by one distraction or the other. Its remote presence had given an added intensity to his zest for the various little pleasures, æsthetic or otherwise, which it was his habit to enjoy. It had done more. It had reduced to comparative insignificance the morbid vexations and imaginative reactions from which his friend suffered. He could afford to appear hard and crystal-cold, capable of facing with equanimity every kind of ultimate horror. And he *was* capable of facing such. Under the shadow of a thing like that — a thing beyond the worst of insane obsessions, for his mind was cruelly clear as he turned his eyes inward — he was able to look contemptuously into the Gorgon face of any kind of terror. When he chose he could always see the thing as it was, see it as the desolation of emptiness, as a deep, frozen space, void of sound or movement or life or hope or end. There was not the least tinge of insanity in the vision.

What he was permitted to see, by reason of some malign clarity of intellect denied to the majority of his fellows, was simply the real truth of life, its frozen chemistry and deadly purposelessness. Most men visualize existence through a blurring cloud of personal passion, either erotic or imaginative. They suffer, but they suffer from illusion. What separated Baltazar from the majority was his power of seeing things in absolute colourlessness — unconfused by any sort of distorting mirage. Thus what he saw with his soul was the ghastly loneliness of his soul. He saw this frozen, empty, hollow space and he saw it as the natural country in which his soul dwelt, its unutterable reality, its appalling truth. That was why no thought of suicide ever came to him. The thing was too deep. He might kill himself, but in so doing he would only destroy the few superficial distractions that afforded him a temporary freedom. For suicide would only fling him — that at least is what, with horrible clarity, he had come to feel about it — into the depths of his soul, into the very abyss, that is to say, which he escaped by living on the surface. It was a kind of death-in-life that he was conscious of, below his crystalline amenities, but one does not fly to death to escape from death.

It will be seen from this how laughable to him were all Sorio's neurotic reactions from people and things. People and things were precisely what Baltazar clung to, to avoid that "frozen sea" lying there at the back of everything. It will be easily imagined too, how absurd to him — how fantastic and unreal — were the various hints and glimpses which Sorio had permitted him into what his friend called his "philosophy of destruction." To make a "philosophy" out of a struggle to reach the ultimate horror of that "frozen sea," how lamentably pathetic it was, and how childish! No sane person would contemplate such a thing and the attempt proved that Sorio was not sane. As for the Italian's vague and prophetic suggestions with regard to the possibility of something — philosophers always spoke of "something" when they approached nothing! — beyond "what we call life" that seemed to Baltazar's mind mere poetic balderdash and moon-struck mysticism. But he had always listened patiently to Sorio's incoherences. The man would not have been himself without his mad philosophy! It was part of that charming weakness in him that appealed to Baltazar so. It was absurd, of course — this whole business of writing philosophic books — but he was ready to pardon it, ready to listen all night and day to his friend's dithyrambic diatribes, as long as they brought that particular look of exultation which he found so touching into his classic face!

This "look of exultation" in Sorio's features had indeed been accompanied during the last month by an expression of wistful and bewildered helplessness and it was just the union of these two things that Baltazar found so irresistibly appealing. He was drawn closer to Adrian, in fact, during these Autumn days, than he had ever been drawn to any one. And it was just at this moment, just when he was happiest in their life together, that Nance Herrick must needs obtrude her accursed feminine influence and with this result! So he gave himself up without let or hindrance to his hatred of this girl. His hatred was a cold, calculated, deliberate thing, clear of all volcanic disturbances but, such as it was, it possessed him at that moment to the exclusion of everything else. He imagined to himself now, as with the end of his stick he guided that sycamore leaf across the puddle, how Nance would buy those things in the Mundham shops and what pleasure there would be in her grey eyes, that peculiar pleasure unlike anything else in the world which a woman has when she is indulging, at the same moment, her passion for domestic detail and her passion for her lover!

He saw the serene *possessive* look in her face, the look of one who at last, after long waiting, arrives within sight of the desired end. He saw the little outbursts of girlish humour — oh, he knew them so well, those outbursts! — and he saw the fits of half-assumed, half-natural shyness that would come over her and the soft, dreamy tenderness in her eyes, as together with Adrian, she bought this thing or the other, full of delicate association, for their new dwelling-place. His imagination went even further. He seemed to hear her voice as she spoke sympathetically, pityingly, of himself. She would be sure to do that! It would come so prettily from her just then and would appeal so much to Adrian! She would whisper to him over their lunch in some little shop — he saw all that too — of how sad she felt to be taking him away from his old friend and leaving that friend alone. And he could see the odd bewildered smile, half-remorseful and half-joyful with which Sorio would note that disinterested sympathy and think to himself what a noble affectionate creature she was and how lucky he was to win her. He saw how careful she would be not to tire him or tease him with her purchases, how she would probably vary the tedium of the day with some pleasant little strolls together round the Abbey grounds or perhaps down by the wharves and the barges.

Yes, she had won her victory. She was gathering up her spoils. She was storing up her possessions! Could any human feeling, he asked himself with a deadly smile upon his lips, be more sickeningly, more achingly, intense than the hatred he felt for this normal, natural, loving woman?

He swept his stick through the muddy water, splashing it vindictively on all sides and then, moving into the middle of the road, looked at his empty cottage. Here, then, he would have to live again alone! Alone with himself, alone with his soul, alone with the truth of life!

No, it was too much. He never would submit to it. Better swallow at once and without more nonsense the little carefully concocted draught which he had long kept under lock and key! After all he would have to come to that, sooner or later. He had long since made up his mind that if things and persons — the "things and persons" he used as his daily drug, failed him or lost their savour he would take the irrevocable step and close the whole farce. Everything was the same. Everything was equal. He would only move one degree nearer the central horror — the great ice field of eternity — the plain without end or beginning, frozen and empty, empty and frozen! He stared at his cottage windows. No, it was unthinkable, beginning life over again without Adrian. A hundred little things plucked at random from the sweet monotony of their days together came drifting through his mind. The peculiar look Adrian had when he first woke in the morning — the savage greediness with which he would devour honey and brown bread — the pleading, broken, childlike tones in his voice when, after some quarrel between them he begged his friend to forgive him — all these things and many others, came pouring in upon him in a great wave of miserable self-pity. No — she should not win. She should not triumph. She should not enjoy the fruits of her victory — the strong feminine animal! He would sooner kill her and then kill himself to avoid the gallows. But killing was a silly futile kind of revenge. Infants in the art of hatred *killed* their enemies! But at any rate, if he killed her she would never settle down in her nice new house with her dear husband! But then, on the other hand, she would be the winner to the end. She would never feel as he was feeling now; she would never look into his eyes and know that he knew he had beaten her; he would never *see* her disappointment. No — killing was a stupid, melodramatic, blundering way out of it. Artists ought to have a subtler imagination! Well, something must be done, and done soon. He felt he did not care what suffering he caused Sorio, the more *he* suffered the better, if only he could see the look in those grey eyes of Nance that confessed she was defeated!

Quite quietly, quite calmly, he gathered together all the forces of his nature to accomplish this one end. His hatred rose to the level of a passion. He vowed that nothing should make him pause, no scruple, no obstacle, until he saw that beaten look in Nance's face. Like all dominant obsessions, like all great lusts, his purpose associated itself with a clear concrete image, the image of the girl's expression when at last, face to face with him, she knew herself broken, helpless and at his mercy.

He walked swiftly down the High Street, crossed the open space by the harbour and made his way to the edge of the waves. Surely that malignant tide would put some triumphant idea into his brain. The sea — the sterile, unharvested sea — had from the beginning of the world, been the enemy of woman! Warden of the Fishes! He laughed as he thought of Sorio's assuming such a title.

"Not yet, my friend — not quite yet!" he murmured, gazing across the stormy expanse of water. Warden of the Fishes! With a strong, sweet, affectionate wife to look after him? "No, no, Adriano!" he cried hoarsely, "we haven't come to that yet — we haven't come to that quite yet!"

By some complicated, psychological process he seemed to be aware, as he stared at the foaming sea-horses, of the head of his mute friend Flambard floating, amid the mist of his own woman-like hair, in the green hollows of the surf. He found himself vaguely wondering what he — the super-subtle Venetian — would have done had he been "fooled to the top of his bent" by a girl like Nance — had he been betrayed in his soul's deepest passion. And all at once it came over him, not distinctly and vividly but obscurely and remotely as if through a cloudy vapour from a long way off, from far down the vistas of time itself, what Flambard would have done.

He stooped and picked up a long leather-like thong of wet, slippery seaweed and caressed it with his hands. At that moment there passed through him a most curious sensation — the sensation that he had himself — he and not Flambard — stood just in this way but by a different sea, ages, centuries ago — and had arrived at the same conclusion. The sensation vanished quickly enough and with it the image of Flambard, but the idea of what remained for him to do still hovered like a cloud at the back of his mind. He did not drag it forth from its hiding place. He never definitely accepted it. The thing was so dark and hideous, belonging so entirely to an age when "passional crimes" were more common and more remorseless than at the present, that even Baltazar with all the frozen malice of his hate scrupled to visualize it in the daylight. But he did not drive it away. He permitted it to work upon him and dominate him. It was as though some "other Baltazar" from a past as remote as Flambard's own and perhaps far remoter — had risen up within him in answer to that cry to the inhuman waters. The actual working of his mind was very complicated and involved at that moment. There were moments of wavering — moments of drawing back into the margin of uncertainty. But these moments grew constantly less and less effective. Beyond everything else that definite image of Nance's grey eyes, full of infinite misery, confessing her defeat, and even pleading with him for mercy, drove these wavering moments away. It was worth it, any horror was worth it, to satiate his revenge by the sight of what her expression would be as he looked into her face then. And, after all, the thing he projected would in any case, come about sooner or later. It was on its way. The destinies called for it. The nature of life demanded it. The elements conspired to bring it about. The man's own fatality was already with a kind of vehemence, rushing headlong — under the fall of these Autumn rains and the drifting of these Autumn leaves — to meet it and embrace it! All he would have to do himself would be just to give the wheel of fate the least little push, the least vibration of an impulse forward, with his lightest finger!

Perhaps, as far as his friend was concerned, he would really, in this way, be saving him in the larger issue. Were Adrian's mind, for instance, to break down now at once, rendering it necessary that he should be put, as they say in that appalling phrase, "under restraint," it might as a matter of fact, save his brain from ultimate and final disaster. It is true that this aspect of what he projected was too fantastic, too ironically distorted, to be dwelt upon clearly or logically but it came and went like a shadowy bird hovering about a floating carcass, round the outskirts of his unspeakable intention. What he reverted to more articulately, as he made his way back across the littered sand-heaps to the entrance of the harbour, was the idea that, after all, he would only be precipitating an inevitable crisis. His friend was already on the verge of an attack of monomania, if not of actual insanity. Sooner or later the thing must come to a definite climax. Why not anticipate events, then, and let the climax occur when it would save him from this intolerable folly — worse than madness — of giving himself up to his feminine pursuer? As he made his way once more through the crowded little street, the fixed and final impression all these thoughts left upon his mind was the impression of Nance Herrick's face, pale, vanquished and helpless, staring up at him from the ground beneath his feet.

XXIV. THE TWENTY-EIGHTH OF OCTOBER

BALTAZAR WAS NOT long in carrying out what, in bitter self-colloquy, he called his Flambardian campaign. He deliberately absented himself from his work in the Mundham office and gave up all his time to Sorio. He now encouraged this latter in all his most dangerous manias, constantly leading the conversation round to what he knew were exciting and agitating topics and bringing him back again and again to especial points of irritation and annoyance.

The days quickly passed, however, and Adrian, though in a strange and restless mood, had still, in no public manner, given evidence of insanity, and short, of course, of some such public manifestation, his treacherous friend's plan of having him put under restraint, fell to the ground.

Meanwhile, Nance's preparations for her marriage and for their entrance into their new home advanced towards completion. It was within three days of the date decided upon for their wedding when Nance, who had had less time recently at her disposal for watching her sister's moods, came suddenly to the conclusion, as, on a wild and stormy afternoon, she led her home from the church, that something was seriously wrong. At first, as they left the churchyard and began making their way towards the bridge, she thought the gloom of the evening was a sufficient reason for Linda's despairing silence, but as they advanced, with the wind beating in their faces and the roar of the sea coming to them over the dunes, she came to the conclusion that the cause lay deeper.

But that night — it was the twenty-eighth of October — was certainly desolate enough to be the cause of any human being's depression. The sun was sinking as the sisters started for their walk home. A blood-red streak, jagged and livid, like the mutilated back of some bleeding monster, lay low down over the fens. The wind wailed in the poplars, whistled through the reeds, and sighed in long melancholy gasps like the sobbing of some unhappy earth-spirit across the dykes and the ditches. One by one a few flickering lamps appeared among the houses of the town as the girls drew near the river, but the long wavering lines of light thrown by these across the meadows only increased the general gloom.

"Don't let's cross at once," said Linda suddenly, when they reached the bridge. "Let's walk along the bank — just a little way! I feel excited and queer to-night. I've been in the church so long. Please let's stay out a little."

Nance thought it better to agree to the child's caprice; though the river-bank at that particular hour was dark with a strange melancholy. They left the road and walked slowly along the tow-path in the direction away from the town. A group of cattle standing huddled together near the path, rushed off into the middle of the field.

The waters of the Loon were high — the tide flowing sea-ward — and here and there from the windows of some scattered houses on the opposite bank, faint lights were reflected upon the river's surface. A strong smell of seaweed and brackish mud came up to them from the dark stream.

"What secrets," said Linda suddenly, "this old Loon could tell, if it could speak! I call it a haunted river."

Nance's only reply to this was to pull her sister's cloak more tightly round her shoulders.

"I don't mean in the sense of having drowned so many people," Linda went on, "I mean in the sense of being half-human itself."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when a slender dusky figure that had been leaning against the edge of one of the numerous weirs that connect the river-tides with the streams of the water-meadows, came suddenly towards them and revealed herself as Philippa Renshaw.

Both the girls drew back in instinctive alarm. Nance was the first to recover.

“So you too are out to-night,” she said. “Linda got so tired of practising, so we—”

Philippa interrupted her: “Since we *have* met, Nance Herrick, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t talk a little. Or do you think the people about here would find that an absurd thing for us to do, as we’re both in love with the same man, and you’re going to marry him?”

She uttered these words so calmly and in so strange a voice that Nance for the moment was too startled to reply. She recovered herself quickly, however, and taking Linda by the arm, made as if she would pass her by, without further speech. But Philippa refused to permit this. With the slow dramatic movement always characteristic of her, she stepped into the middle of the path and stopped them. Linda, at this, hung back, trying to draw her sister away.

The two women faced one another in breathless silence. It was too dark for them to discern more than the vaguest outlines of each other’s features, but they were each conscious of the extreme tension, which, like a wave of magnetic force, at once united and divided them. Nance was the first to break the spell.

“I’m surprised,” she said, “to hear you speak of love. I thought you considered all that sort of thing sentimental and idiotic.”

Philippa’s hand went up in a quick and desperate gesture, almost an imploring one.

“Miss Herrick,” she whispered in a very low and very clear tone, “you needn’t do that. You needn’t say those things. You needn’t hurt me more than is necessary."

"Come away, Nance. Oh, please come away and leave her!" interjected Linda.

"Miss Herrick, listen to me one moment!" Philippa continued, speaking so low as almost to be inaudible. "I have something to ask of you, something that you can do for me. It isn't very much. It isn't anything that you need suspect. It is a little thing. It's nothing you could possibly mind."

"Don't listen to her, Nance," cried Linda again. "Don't listen to her."

Philippa's voice trembled as she went on, "I beg you, I beg you on my knees to hear me. We two may never meet again after this. Nance Herrick, will you, will you let me speak?"

Linda leapt forward. She was shaking from head to foot with fear and anger. "No," she cried, "she shall not listen to you. She shall not, she shall not."

Nance hesitated, weary and sick at heart. She had so hoped and prayed that all these lacerating contests were over and done with.

Finally she said, "I think you must see, you must feel, that between you and me there can be nothing — nothing more — nothing further. I think you'll be wise, I think you'll recognize it afterwards, to let me go now, to let me go and leave us alone." As she spoke she drew away from her and put her arm round Linda's waist. "In any case," she added, "I can't possibly hear you before this child. Perhaps, but I can't promise anything, but perhaps, some other day, when I'm by myself."

She gave one sad, half-sympathetic, half-reproachful glance, at the frail shadowy figure standing mute and silent; and then turning quickly, let herself be led away.

Linda swung round when they were some few paces away. "She'll never listen to you!" She called out, in a shrill vibrating voice, "I won't ever let her listen to you."

The growing darkness, made thicker by the river-mists, closed in between them, and in a brief while their very footsteps ceased to be heard. Philippa was left alone. She looked round her. On the fen side of the pathway there was nothing but a thick fluctuating shadow, out of which the forms of a few pollard-willows rose like panic-stricken ghosts. On the river itself there shimmered at intervals a faint whitish gleam as if some lingering relics of the vanished day, slow in their drowning, struggled to rise to the surface.

She moved back again to the place where she had been standing at the edge of the weir. Leaning upon the time-worn plank rotten with autumn rains, she gazed down into the dense blackness beneath. Nothing could be seen but darkness. She might have been looking down into some unfathomable pit, leading to the caverns of the mid-earth.

A deathly cold wave of damp air met her face as she leaned over the plank, and a hollow gurgling roar, from the heavy volume of water swirling in the darkness, rose to her ears. She could smell the unseen water; and the smell of it was like the smell of dead black leaves plucked forth from a rain pool in the heart of a forest.

As she leaned forward with her soft breast pressing against the wooden bar and her long slender fingers clutching its edge, a sinister line of poetry, picked up somewhere — she could not recall where — came into her mind, and she found her lips mechanically echoing it. "Like a wolf, sucked under a weir," the line ran, and over and over again she repeated those words.

Meanwhile Nance, as they returned across the bridge, did her best to soothe and quiet her sister. The sudden appearance of Philippa seemed to have thrown the girl into a paroxysm of frenzy. "Oh, how I hate her!" she kept crying out, "oh, how I loathe and hate her!"

Nance was perplexed and bewildered by Linda's mood. Never had she known the girl to give way to feelings of this sort. When at last she got her into their house, and had seen her take off her things and begin tidying herself up for their evening meal quite in her accustomed way, she asked her point-blank what was the matter, and why to-day, on this twenty-eighth of October, she had suddenly grown different from her ordinary self.

Linda, standing with bare arms by the mirror and passing a comb through her heavy hair, turned almost fiercely round.

"Do you want to know? Do you really want to know?" she cried, throwing back her head and holding the hair back with her hands. "It's because of Philippa that *he* has deserted me! It's because of Philippa that he hasn't seen me nor spoken to me for a whole month! It's because of Philippa that he won't answer my letters and won't meet me anywhere! It's because of Philippa that now — now when I most want him" — and she threw the comb down and flung herself on her bed— "he refuses to come to me or to speak a word."

"How do you know it's because of Philippa?" Nance asked, distressed beyond words to find that in spite of all her efforts Linda was still as obsessed by Brand as ever before.

"I know *from him*," the girl replied. "You needn't ask me any more. She's got power over him, and she uses it against me. If it wasn't for her he'd have married me before now." She sat up on the edge of her bed and looked woefully at her sister with large sunken eyes. "Yes," she went on, "if it wasn't for her he'd marry me now — to-day — and, oh, Nance, I want him so! I want him so!"

Nance felt an oppressive weight of miserable helplessness in the presence of this heart-stricken cry. As she looked round the room and saw her various preparations for leaving it and for securing the happiness of her own love, she felt as though in some subtle way she had once more betrayed the unhappy child. She knew herself, only too well, what that famished and starving longing is — that cry of the flesh and blood, and the heart and the spirit, for what the eternal destinies have put out of our reach!

And she could do nothing to help her. What *could* she do? Now for the first time in her life, as she looked at that lamentable youthful figure, dumbly pleading with her for some kind of miracle, Nance was conscious of a vague unformulated indignation against the whole system of things that rendered this sort of suffering possible. If only *she* were a powerful and a tender deity, how she would hasten to end this whole business of sex-life which made existence so intolerable! Why could not people be born into the world like trees or plants? And being born, why could not love instinctively create the answering passion it craved, and not be left to beat itself against cruel walls, after scorching itself in the irresistible flame?

“Nance!” said the young girl suddenly. “Nance! Come here. Come over to me. I want to tell you something.”

The elder sister obeyed. It was not long — for hard though it may be to break silence, these things are quickly spoken — before she knew the worst. Linda, with her arms clutched tightly round her, and her face hidden, confessed that she was with child.

Nance leapt to her feet. “I’ll go to him,” she cried, “I’ll go to him at once! Of course he must marry you now. He must! He must! I’ll go to him. I’ll go to Hamish. I’ll go to Adrian — to Fingal! He *must* marry you, Linda. Don’t cry, little one. I’ll make it all right. It *shall* be all right! I’ll go to him this very evening.”

A faint flush appeared in Linda’s pale cheeks and a glimmer of hope in her eyes. “Do you think, possibly, that there’s any chance? *Can* there be any chance? But no, no, darling, I know there’s none — I know there’s none.”

"What makes you so sure, Linda?" asked Nance, rapidly changing her dress, and as she did so pouring herself out a glass of milk.

"It's Philippa," murmured the other in a low voice. "Oh, how I hate her! How I hate her!" she continued, in a sort of moaning refrain, twisting her long hair between her fingers and tying the ends of it into a little knot.

"Well, I'm off, my dear," cried Nance at length, finishing her glass of milk and adjusting her hat-pins. "I'm going straight to find him. I may pick up Adrian on the way, or I may not. It rather depends. And I *may* have a word or two with Philippa. The chances are that I shall overtake her if I go now. She can't have waited much longer down by the river."

Linda rushed up to her and clasped her in her arms. "My own darling!" she murmured, "how good you are to me — how good you are! Do you know, I was *afraid* to tell you this — afraid that you'd be angry and ashamed and not speak to me for days. But, oh, Nance, I do love him so much! I love him more than my life — more than my life *even now*!"

Nance kissed her tenderly. "Make yourself some tea, my darling, won't you? We'll have supper whenever I come back, and that'll be — I hope — with good news for you! Good-bye, my sweetheart! Say your prayers for me, and don't be frightened however late I am. And have a good tea!"

She kissed her again, and with a final wave of the hand and an encouraging smile, she left the room and ran down the stairs. She walked slowly to the top of the street, her head bent, wondering in her mind whether she should ask Adrian to go with her to the Renshaws' or whether she should go alone.

The question was decided for her. As she emerged on the green she suddenly came upon Sorio himself, standing side by side with Philippa. They both turned quickly as, in the flare of a wind-blown lamp, they perceived her approach. They turned and awaited her without a word.

Without a word, too — and in that slow dreamlike manner which human beings assume at certain crises in their lives, when fate like a palpable presence among them takes their movements into its own hand — they moved off, all three together, in the direction of the park gates. Not a word did any of them utter, till, having passed the gates, they were quite far advanced along that dark and lonely avenue.

Then Philippa broke the silence. “I can say to her, Adrian, what I’ve just said to you — mayn’t I?”

In the thick darkness, full of the heavy smell of rain-soaked leaves, Sorio walked between them. Nance’s hand was already resting upon his arm, and now, as she spoke, Philippa’s fingers searched for his, and took them in her own and held them feverishly.

“You can say what you please, Phil,” he muttered, “but you’ll see what she answers — just what I told you just now.”

Their tone of intimate association stabbed like a knife at the heart of Nance. A moment ago — in fact, ever since she had left her by the weir — she had been feeling less antagonistic and more pitiful towards her vanquished rival. But this pronoun “she” applied mutually by them to herself, seemed to push her back — back and away — outside the circle of some mysterious understanding between the two. Her heart hardened fiercely. Was this girl still possessed of some unknown menacing power?

“What I asked Adrian,” said Philippa quietly, while the pressure of her burning fingers within the man’s hand indicated the strain of this quietness, “was whether you would be generous and noble enough to give him up to me for his last free day — the last day before you’re married. Would you be large-hearted enough for that?”

“What do you mean— ‘give him up’ to you?” murmured Nance.

Philippa burst in a shrill unearthly laugh. “Oh, you needn’t be frightened!” she exclaimed. “You needn’t be jealous. I only mean let me go with him, for the whole day, a long walk — you know — or something like that — perhaps a row up the river. It doesn’t matter what, as long as I feel that that day is *my* day, my day *with him* — the last, and the longest!”

She was silent, feverish, her fingers twining and twisting themselves round her companion’s, and her breath coming in quick gasps. Nance was silent also, and they all three moved forward through the heavy fragrant darkness.

“You two seem to have settled it between yourselves definitely enough,” Nance remarked at last. “I don’t really see why you need bring me into it at all. Adrian is, of course, entirely free to do what he likes. I don’t see what I have to do with it!”

Philippa’s hot fingers closed tightly upon Sorio’s as she received this rebuff. “You see!” she murmured in a tone that bit into Nance’s flesh like the tooth of an adder. “You see, Adriano!” She shrugged her shoulders and gave a low vindictive laugh. “She’s a thorough woman,” she added with stinging emphasis. “She’s what my mother would call a sweet, tender, sensitive girl. But we mustn’t expect too much from her, Adrian, must we? I mean in the way of generosity.”

Nance withdrew her hand from the arm of her betrothed and they all three walked on in silence.

“You see what you’re in for, my friend,” Philippa began again. “Once married it’ll be always like this. That is what you seem unable to realize. It’s a mistake, as I’ve often said, this mixing of classes.”

Nance could no longer restrain herself. “May I ask what you mean by that last remark?” she whispered in a low voice.

Philippa laughed lightly. “It doesn’t need much explanation,” she replied. “Adrian is, of course, of very ancient blood, and you — well, you betray yourself naturally by this lack of nobility, this common middle-class jealousy!”

Nance turned fiercely upon them, and clutching Sorio’s arm spoke loudly and passionately. “And *you* — what are *you*, who, like a girl of the streets, are ready to pick up what you can of a man’s attentions and attract him with mere morbid physical attraction? *You* — what are *you*, who, as you say yourself, are ready to *share* a man with some one else? Do you call *that* a sign of good-breeding?”

Philippa laughed again. “It’s a sign at any rate of being free from that stupid, stuffy, bourgeois respectability, which Adrian is going to get a taste of now! That very sneer of yours— ‘a girl of the streets’ — shows the class to which you belong, Nance Herrick! We don’t say those things. It’s what one hears among tradespeople.”

Nance’s fingers almost hurt Sorio’s arms as she tightened her hold upon him. “It’s better than being what *you* are, Philippa Renshaw,” she burst out. “It’s better than deliberately helping your brother to ruin innocent young girls — yes, and taking pleasure in seeing him ruining them — and then taunting them cruelly in their shame, and holding him back from doing them justice! It’s better than that, Philippa Renshaw, though it *may* be what most simple-minded decent-hearted women feel. It’s better than being reduced by blind passion to have to come to another woman and beg her on your knees for a ‘last day’ as you call it! It’s better than *that* — though it *may* be what ordinary unintellectual people feel!”

Philippa’s fingers grew suddenly numb and stiff in Sorio’s grasp. “Do you know,” she murmured, “you ‘decent-feeling’ woman — if that’s what you call yourself — that a couple of hours ago, when you left me on the river bank, I was within an ace of drowning myself? I suppose 'decent-feeling' women never run such a risk! They leave that to 'street-girls' and — and — and to us others!"

Nance turned to Sorio. "So she's been telling you that she was thinking of drowning herself? I thought it was something of that kind! And I suppose you believed her. I suppose you always believe her!"

"And he always believes *you*!" Philippa cried. "Yes, he's always deceived — the easy fool — by your womanly sensitive ways and your touching refinement! It's women like you, without intelligence and without imagination, who are the ruin of men of genius. A lot *you* care for his work! A lot *you* understand of his thoughts! Oh, yes, you may get him, and cuddle him, and spoil him, but, when it comes to the point, what *you* are to him is a mere domestic drudge! And not only a drudge, you're a drag, a burden, a dead-weight! A mere mass of 'decent-feeling' womanliness — weighing him down. He'll never be able to write another line when once you've really got hold of him!"

Nance had her answer to this. "I'd sooner he never *did* write another line," she cried, "and remain in his sober senses, than be left to *your* influence, and be driven mad by you — you and your diseased, morbid, wicked imagination!"

Their two voices, rising and falling in a lamentable litany of elemental antagonism — antagonism cruel as life and deeper than death — floated about Sorio's head, in that perfumed darkness, like opposing streams of poison. It was only that he himself, harassed by long irritating debates with Baltazar, was too troubled, too obsessed by a thousand agitating doubts, to have the energy or the spirit to bring the thing to an end, or he could not have endured it up to this point. With his nerves shaken by Baltazar's corrosive arts, and the weight of those rain-heavy trees and thick darkness all around him, he felt as if he were in some kind of trance, and were withheld by a paralysing interdict from lifting a finger. There came to him a sort of half-savage, half-humorous remembrance of a conversation he had once had with some one or other — his mind was too confused to recall the occasion — in which he had upheld the idealistic theory of the arrival of a day when sex jealousy would disappear from the earth.

But as the girls continued to outrage each other's most secret feelings, each unconsciously quickening her pace as she poured forth her taunts, and both dragging Sorio forward with them, the feeling grew upon him that he was watching some deep cosmic struggle, that was, in its way, as inhuman and elemental as a conflict between wind and water. With this idea lodged in his brain, he began to derive a certain wild and fantastic pleasure from the way they lacerated one another. There was no coxcombry in this. He was far too wrought-upon and shaken in his mind. But there was a certain grim exultant enjoyment, as if he were, at that moment, permitted a passing glimpse into some dark forbidden "cellarage" of Nature, where the primordial elements clash together in eternal conflict.

Inspired by this strange mood, he returned the pressure of Philippa's fingers, and entwined his arm round the trembling form of his betrothed, drawing both the girls closer towards him, and, in consequence, closer towards one another.

They continued their merciless encounter, almost unconscious, it seemed, of the presence of the man who was the cause of it, and without strength left to resist the force with which he was gradually drawing them together.

Suddenly the wind, which had dropped a little during the previous hour, rose again in a violent and furious gust. It tore at the dark branches above their heads and went moaning and wailing through the thickets on either side of them. Drops of rain, held in suspension by the thicker leaves, splashed suddenly upon their faces, and from the far distance, with a long-drawn ominous muttering, that seemed to come from some unknown region of flight and disaster, the sound of thunder came to their ears.

Sorio dropped Philippa's hand and embracing her tightly, drew her, too, closely towards him. Thus interlocked by the man's arms, all three of them staggered forward together, lashed by the wind and surrounded by vague wood-noises that rose and fell mysteriously in the impenetrable darkness.

The powers of the earth seemed let loose, and strange magnetic currents in fierce antipodal conflict, surged about them, and tugged and pulled at their hearts. The sound of the thunder, the wild noises of the night, the strange dark evocations of elemental hatred which at once divided and united his companions, surged through Sorio's brain and filled him with a sort of intoxication.

The three of them together might have been taken, had the clock of time been put back two thousand years, for some mad Dionysian worshippers following their god in a wild inhuman revel.

Inspired at last by a sort of storm-frenzy, while the wind came wailing and shrieking down the avenue into their faces, Sorio suddenly stopped.

"Come, you two little fools," he cried, "let's end this nonsense! Here — kiss one another! Kiss one another, and thank God that we're alive and free and conscious, and not mere inert matter, like these dead drifting leaves!"

As he spoke he stepped back a little, and with a swing of his powerful arms, brought both the girls face to face with one another. Nance struggled fiercely, and resisted with all her strength. Philippa, with a strange whispering laugh, remained passive in his hands.

"Kiss one another!" he cried again. "Are you kissing or are you holding back? It's too dark for me to see!"

Philippa suddenly lost her passivity, slipped like a snake from under his encircling arms, and rushed away among the trees. “I leave her to you!” she called back to them out of the darkness. “I leave her to you! You won’t endure her long. *And what will Baptiste do*, Adriano?”

This last word of hers calmed Sorio’s mood and threw him back upon his essential self. He sighed heavily.

“Well, Nance,” he said, “shall we go back? It’s no use waiting for her. She’ll find her way to Oakguard. She knows every inch of these woods.” He sighed again, as if bidding farewell, in one fate-burdened moment, both to the woods and the girl who knew them.

“*You* can go back if you like,” Nance answered curtly. “I’m going to speak to Brand”; and she told him in a brief sentence what she had learned from Linda.

Sorio seized her hand and clutched it savagely. “Yes, yes,” he cried, “yes, yes, let’s go together. He must be taught a lesson — this Brand! Come, let’s go together!”

They moved on rapidly and soon approached the end of the avenue and the entrance to the garden. As Sorio pushed open the iron gates, a sharp crack of thunder, followed by reverberating detonations, broke over their heads. The sudden flash that succeeded the sound brought into vivid relief the dark form of the house, while a long row of fading dahlias, drooping on their rain-soaked stems, stood forth in ghastly illumination.

Nance had time to catch on Adrian’s face a look that gave her a premonition of danger. Had she not herself been wrought-up to an unnatural pitch of excitement by her contest with Philippa, she would probably have been warned in time and have drawn back, postponing her interview with Brand till she could have seen him alone. As it was, she felt herself driven forward by a force she could not resist. “Now — very now,” she must face her sister’s seducer.

A light, burning behind heavy curtains, in one of the lower mullioned windows, enabled them to mount the steps. As she rang the bell, a second peal of thunder, but this time farther off, was followed by a vivid flash of lightning, throwing into relief the wide spaces of the park and the scattered groups of monumental oak trees. For some queer psychic reason, inexplicable to any material analysis, Nance at that moment saw clearly before her mind’s eye, a little church almanac, which Linda had pinned up above their dressing-table, and on this almanac she saw the date — the twenty-eighth of October — printed in Roman figures.

To the servant who opened the door Nance gave their names, and asked whether they could see Mr. Renshaw. “*Mr.* Renshaw,” she added emphatically, “and please tell him it’s an urgent and important matter.”

The man admitted them courteously and asked them to seat themselves in the entrance hall while he went to look for his master. He returned after a short time and ushered them into the library, where a moment later Brand joined them.

During their moment of waiting, both in the hall and in the room, Sorio had remained taciturn and inert, sunk in a fit of melancholy brooding, his chin propped on the handle of his stick. He had refused to allow the servant to take out of his hands either his stick or his hat, and he still held them both, doggedly and gloomily, as he sat by Nance’s side opposite the carved fireplace.

When Brand entered they both rose, but he motioned them to remain seated, and drawing up a chair for himself close by the side of the hearth, looked gravely and intently into their faces.

At that moment another rolling vibration of thunder reached them, but this time it seemed to come from very far away, perhaps from several miles out to sea.

Brand's opening words were accompanied by a fierce lashing of rain against the window, and a spluttering, hissing noise, as several heavy drops fell through the old-fashioned chimney upon the burning logs.

"I think I can guess," he said, "why you two have come to me. I am glad you have come, especially you, Miss Herrick, as it simplifies things a great deal. It has become necessary that you and I should have an explanation. I owe it to myself as well as to you. Bah! What nonsense I'm talking. It isn't a case of 'owing.' It isn't a case of 'explaining.' I can see that clearly enough" — he laughed a genial boyish laugh— "in your two faces! It's a case of our own deciding, with all the issues of the future clearly in mind, what will be really best for your sister's happiness."

"She has not sent—" began Nance hurriedly.

"What you've got to understand — you Renshaw—" muttered Adrian, in a strange hoarse voice, clenching and unclenching his fingers.

Brand interrupted them both. "Pardon me," he cried, "you do not wish, I suppose, either of you, to cause any serious shock to my mother? It's absurd of her, of course, and old-fashioned, and all that sort of thing; but it would actually *kill* her—" he rose as he spoke and uttered the words clearly and firmly. "It would actually *kill* her to get any hint of what we're discussing now. So, if you've no objection, we'll continue this discussion in the work-shop." He moved towards the door.

Sorio followed him with a rapid stride. "You must understand, Renshaw —" he began.

"If it'll hurt your mother so," cried Nance hurriedly, "what must Linda be suffering? You didn't think of this, Mr. Renshaw, when you—"

Brand swung round on his heel. “You shall say all this to me, all that you wish to say — everything, do you hear, everything! Only it must and *shall* be where she cannot overhear us. Wait till we’re alone. We shall be alone in the work-shop.”

“If this ‘work-shop’ of yours,” muttered Sorio savagely, seizing him by the arm, “turns out to be one of your English tricks, you’d better—”

“Silence, you fool!” whispered the other. “Can’t you stop him, Miss Herrick? It’ll be pure murder if my mother hears this!”

Nance came quickly between them. “Lead on, Mr. Renshaw,” she said. “We’ll follow you.”

He led them across the hall and down a long dimly lit passage. At the end of this there was a heavily panelled door. Brand took a key from his pocket and after some ineffectual attempts turned the lock and stood aside to let them enter. He closed the door behind them, leaving the key on the outside. The “work-shop” Brand had spoken of turned out to be nothing more or less than the old private chapel of Oakguard, disassociated, however, for centuries from any religious use.

Nance glanced up at the carved ceiling, supported on foliated corbels. The windows, high up from the ground, were filled with Gothic tracery, but in place of biblical scenes their diamonded panes showed the armorial insignia of generations of ancient Renshaws. There was a raised space at the east end, where, in former times, the altar stood, but now, in place of an altar, a carpenter’s table occupied the central position, covered with a litter of laths and wood-chippings. The middle portion of the chapel was bare and empty, but several low cane chairs stood round this space, like seats round a toy coliseum.

Brand indicated these chairs to his visitors, but neither Nance nor Sorio seemed inclined to avail themselves of the opportunity to rest. They all three, therefore, stood together, on the dark polished oak floor.

On first entering the chapel, Brand had lit one of a long row of tapers that stood in wooden candlesticks along the edge of what resembled choir stalls. Now, leaving his companions, he proceeded very deliberately to set light to the whole line of these. The place thus illuminated had a look strangely weird and confused.

Certain broken flower-pots on the ground, and one or two rusty gardening implements, combined with the presence of the wicker-chairs to produce the impression of some sort of "Petit Trianon," or manorial summer-house, into which all manner of nondescript rubbish had in process of long years come to drift.

The coats-of-arms in the windows above, as the tapers flung their light upon them, had an air almost "collegiate," as if the chamber were some ancient dining-hall of a monastic order. The carpenter's table upon the raised dais, with some dimly coloured Italianated picture behind it, inserted in the panelling, gave Nance a most odd sensation. Where had she seen an effect of that kind before? In a picture — or in reality?

But the girl had no heart to analyse her emotions. There was too much at stake. The rain, pattering heavily on the roof of the building, seemed to remind her of her task. She faced Brand resolutely as he strolled back towards them across the polished floor.

"Linda has told me everything," she said. "She is going to have a child, and you, Mr. Renshaw, are the father of it."

Sorio made an inarticulate exclamation and approached Brand threateningly. But the latter, disregarding him, continued to look Nance straight in the face.

"Miss Herrick," he said quietly, "you are a sensible woman and not one, I think, liable to hysteric sentimentalism. I want to discuss this thing quite freely and openly with you, but I would greatly prefer it if your husband — I beg your pardon — if Mr. Sorio would let us talk without interrupting. I haven't got unlimited time. My mother and sister will be both waiting dinner for me and sending people to find me, perhaps even coming themselves. So it's obviously in the interests of all of us — particularly of Linda — that we should not waste time in any mock heroics."

Nance turned quickly to her betrothed. "You'll hear all we say, Adrian, but if it makes things easier, perhaps—"

Without a word, in mute obedience to her sad smile, Sorio left their side, and drawing back, seated himself in one of the wicker chairs, hugging his heavy stick between his knees.

The rain continued falling without intermission upon the leaden roof, and from a pipe above one of the windows they could hear a great jet of water splashing down outside the wall.

Brand spoke in a low hurried tone, without embarrassment and without any sort of shame. "Yes, Miss Herrick, what she says is quite true. But now come down to the facts, without any of this moral vituperation, which only clouds the issues. You have, no doubt, come here with the idea of asking me to marry Linda. No! Don't interrupt me. Let me finish. But I want to ask you this — how do you know that if I marry Linda, she'll be *really* any happier than she is to-day? Suppose I were to say to you that I would marry her — marry her to-morrow — would *that*, when you come to think it over in cold blood, really make you happy in your mind about her future?

"Come, Miss Herrick! Put aside for a moment your natural anger against me. Grant what you please as to my being a dangerous character and a bad man, does that make me a suitable husband for your sister? Your instinct is a common instinct — the natural first instinct of any protector of an injured girl, but is it one that will stand the light of quiet and reasonable second thoughts?

“I am, let us say, a selfish and unscrupulous man who has seduced a young girl. Very well! You want to punish me for my ill-conduct, and how do you go about it? By giving up your sister into my hands! By giving up to me — a cruel and unscrupulous wretch, at your own showing — the one thing you love best in the world! Is that a punishment such as I deserve? In one moment you take away all my remorse, for no one remains remorseful *after* he has been punished. And you give my victim up — bound hand and foot — into my hands.

“Linda may love me enough to be glad to marry me, quite apart from the question of her good fame. But will you, who probably know me better than Linda, feel happy at leaving her in my hands? Your idea may be that I should marry her and then let her go. But suppose I wouldn’t consent to let her go? And suppose she wouldn’t consent to leave me?

“There we are — tied together for life — and she as the weaker of the two the one to suffer for the ill-fated bargain! *That* will not have been a punishment for me, Nance Herrick, nor will it have been a compensation for her. It will simply have worked out as a temporary boredom to one of us, and as miserable wretchedness to the other!

“Is that what you wish to bring about by this interference on her behalf? It’s absurd to pretend that you think of me as a mere hot-headed amorist, desperately in love with Linda, as she is with me, and that, by marrying us, you are smoothing out her path and settling her down happily for the rest of her life. You think of me as a cold-blooded selfish sensualist, and to punish me for being what I am, you propose to put Linda’s entire happiness absolutely in my hands!

"Of course, I speak to you like this knowing that, whatever your feelings are, you have the instincts of a lady. A different type of woman from yourself would consider merely the worldly aspect of the matter and the advantage to your sister of becoming mistress of Oakguard. *That*, I know, does not enter, for one moment, into your thoughts, any more than it enters into hers. I am not ironical in saying this. I am not insulting you. I am speaking simply the truth.

"Forgive me, Miss Herrick! Even to mention such a thing is unworthy of either of us. I am, as you quite justly realize — and probably more than you realize — what the world calls unscrupulous. But no one has ever accused me of truckling to public opinion or social position. I care nothing for those things, any more than you do or Linda does. As far as those things go I would marry her to-morrow. My mother, as you doubtless know, hopes that I *shall* marry her — wishes and prays for it. My mother has never given a thought, and never will give a thought, to the opinion of the world. It isn't in her nature, as no doubt you quite realize. We Renshaws have always gone our own way, and done what we pleased. My father did — Philippa does; and I do.

"Come, Miss Herrick! Try for a moment to put your anger against me out of the question. Suppose you did induce me to marry Linda, and Linda to marry me, does that mean that you make me change my nature? We Renshaws never change and *I* never shall, you may be perfectly sure of that! I *couldn't* even if I wanted to. My blood, my race, my father's instincts in me, go too deep. We're an evil tribe, Nance Herrick, an evil tribe, and especially are we evil in our relations with women. Some families are like that, you know! It's a sort of tradition with them. And it is so with us. It may be some dark old strain of Viking blood, the blood of the race that burnt the monasteries in the days of Æthelred the Unready! On the other hand it may be some unaccountable twist in our brains, due — as Fingal says — to — oh! to God knows what!

"Let it go! It doesn't matter what it is; and I daresay you think me a grotesque hypocrite for bringing such a matter into it at all. Well! Let it go! There's really no need to drag in Æthelred the Unready! What you and I have to do, Miss Herrick, is, seriously and quietly, without passion or violence, to discuss what's best for your sister's happiness. Put my punishment out of your mind for the present — that can come later. Your friend Mr. Sorio will be only too pleased to deal with that! The point for *us* to consider, for us who both love your sister, is, what will really be happiest for her in the long run — and I can assure you that no woman who ever lived could be happy long tied hand and foot to a Renshaw.

"Look at my mother! Does she suggest a person who has had a happy life? I tell you she would give all she has ever enjoyed here — every stick and stone of Oakguard — never to have set eyes on my father — never to have given birth to Philippa or to me! We Renshaws may have our good qualities — God knows what they are — but we may have them. But one thing is certain. We are worse than the very devil for any woman who tries to live with us! It's in our blood, I tell you. We can't help it. We're made to drive women mad — to drive them into their graves!"

He stopped abruptly with a bitter and hopeless shrug of his shoulders. Nance had listened to him, all the way through his long speech, with concentrated and frowning attention. When he had finished she stood staring at him without a word, almost as if she wished him to continue; almost as if something about his personality fascinated her in spite of herself, and made her sympathetic.

But Sorio, who had been fidgetting with his heavy stick, rose now, slowly and deliberately, to his feet. Nance, looking at his face, saw upon it an expression which from long association she had come to regard with mingled tenderness and alarm. It was the look his features wore when on the point of rushing to the assistance of some wounded animal or ill-used child.

He uttered no word, but flinging Nance aside with his left hand, with the other he struck blindly with his stick, aiming a murderous blow straight at Brand's face.

Brand had barely time to raise his hand. The blow fell upon his wrist, and his arm sank under it limp and paralysed.

Nance, with a loud cry for assistance, clung frantically to Sorio's neck, trying to hold him back. But apparently beyond all consciousness now of what he was doing, Sorio flung her roughly back and drove his enemy with savage repeated strokes into a corner of the room. It was not long before Brand's other arm was rendered as useless as the first, and the blows falling now on his unprotected head, soon felled him to the ground.

Nance, who had flung open the door and uttered wild and panic-stricken cries for help, now rushed across the room and pinioned the exhausted flagellant in her strong young arms. Seeing his enemy motionless and helpless with a stream of blood trickling down his face, Adrian resigned himself passively to her controlling embrace.

They were found in this position by the two men-servants, who came rushing down the passage in answer to her screams. Mrs. Renshaw, dressing in her room on the opposite side of the house, heard nothing. The steady downpour of the rain dulled all other sounds. Philippa had not yet returned.

Under Nance's directions, the two men carried their master out of the "work-shop," while she herself continued to cling desperately to Sorio.

There had been something hideous and awful to the girl's imagination about the repeated "thud — thud — thud" of the blows delivered by her lover. This was especially so after the numbing of his bruised arms reduced Adrian's victim to helplessness.

As she clung to him now she seemed to hear the sound of those blows — each one striking, as it seemed, something resistless and prostrate in her own being. And once more, with grotesque iteration, the figures upon Linda's almanac ticked like a clock in answer to the echo of that sound. "October the twenty-eighth — October the twenty-eighth," repeated the church-almanac, from its red-lettered frame.

The extraordinary thing was that as her mind began to function more naturally again, she became conscious that, all the while, during that appalling scene, even at the very moment when she was crying out for help, she had experienced a sort of wild exultation. She recalled that emotion quite clearly now with a sense of curious shame.

She was also aware that while glancing at Brand's pallid and unconscious face as they carried him from the room, she had felt a sudden indescribable softening towards him and a feeling for him that she would hardly have dared to put into words. She found herself, even now, as she went over in her mind with lightning rapidity every one of the frightful moments she had just gone through, changing the final episode in her heart, to quite a different one; to one in which she herself knelt down by their enemy's side, and wiped the blood from his forehead, and brought him back to consciousness.

Left alone with Sorio, Nance relaxed her grasp and laid her hands appealingly upon his shoulder. But it was into unseeing eyes that she looked, and into a face barely recognizable as that of her well-beloved. He began talking incoherently and yet with a kind of terrible deliberation and assurance.

"What's that you say? Only the rain? They say it's only the rain when they want to fool me and quiet me. But I know better! They can't fool me like that. It's blood, of course; it's Nance's blood. *You*, Nance? Oh, no, no, no! I'm not so easily fooled as that. Nance is at the bottom of that hole in the wood, where I struck her — *one* — *two* — *three*! It took three hits to do it — and she didn't speak a word, not a word, nor utter one least little cry. It's funny that I had to hit her three times! She is so soft, so soft and easy to hurt. No, no, no, no! I'm not to be fooled like that. My Nance had great laughing grey eyes. Yours are horrible, horrible. I see terror in them. *She* was afraid of nothing."

His expression changed, and a wistful hunted look came into his face. The girl tried to pull him towards one of the chairs, but he resisted — clasping her hand appealingly.

"Tell me, Phil," he whispered, in a low awe-struck voice, "tell me why you made me do it. Did you think it would be better, better for all of us, to have her lying there cold and still? No, no, no! You needn't look at me with those dreadful eyes. Do you know, Phil, since you made me kill her I think your eyes have grown to look like hers, and your face, too — and all of you."

Nance, as he spoke, cried out woefully and helplessly. "I am! I am! I am! Adrian — my own — my darling — don't you know me? I am your Nance!"

He staggered slowly now to one of the chairs, moving each foot as he did so with horrible deliberation as if nothing he did could be done naturally any more, or without a conscious effort of will. Seating himself in the chair, he drew her down upon his knee and began passing his fingers backwards and forwards over her face.

"Why did you make me do it, Phil?" he moaned, rocking her to and fro as if she were a child. "Why did you make me do it? She would have given me sleep, if you'd only let her alone, cool, deep, delicious sleep! She would have smoothed away all my troubles. She would have destroyed the old Adrian and made a new one — a clear untroubled one, bathed in great floods of glorious white light!"

His voice sank to an awe-struck and troubled murmur. "Phil, my dear," he whispered, "Phil, listen to me. There's something I can't remember! Something — O God! No! It's *some one* — some one most precious to me — and I've forgotten. Something's happened to my brain, and I've forgotten. It was after I struck those blows, those blows that made her mouth look so twisted and funny — just like yours looks now, Phil! Why is it, do you think, that dead people have that look on their mouths? Phil, tell me; tell me what it is I've forgotten! Don't be cruel now. I can't stand it now. I *must* remember. I always seem just on the point of remembering, and then something in my brain closes up, like an iron door. Oh, Phil — my love, my love, tell me what it is!"

As he spoke he clasped the girl convulsively, crushing her and hurting her by the strength of his arms. To hear him address her thus by the name of her rival was such misery to Nance that she was hardly conscious of the physical distress caused by his violence. It was still worse when, relaxing the force of his grasp, he began to fondle and caress her, stroking her face with his fingers and kissing her cheeks.

"Phil, my love, my darling!" he kept repeating, "please tell me — please, please tell me, what it is I've forgotten!"

Nance suffered at that moment the extreme limit of what she was capable of enduring. She dreaded every moment that Philippa herself would come in. She dreaded the reappearance of the servants, perhaps with more assistance, ready to separate them and carry Adrian away from her. To feel his caresses and to know that in his wild thoughts they were not meant for her at all — that was more, surely more, than God could have intended her to suffer!

Suddenly she had an inspiration. “Is it Baptiste that you’ve forgotten?”

The word had an electrical effect upon him. He threw her off his lap and leapt to his feet.

“Yes,” he cried savagely and wildly, the train of his thoughts completely altered, “you’re all keeping him away from me! That’s what’s at the bottom of it! You’ve hidden Nance from me and given me this woman who looks like her but who can’t smile and laugh like my Nance, to deceive me and betray me! I know you — you staring, white-faced, frightened thing! *You* don’t deceive me! *You* don’t fool Adrian. I know you. *You* are not my Nance.”

She had staggered away, a few paces from him, when he first threw her off, and now, with a heart-rending effort, she tried to smooth the misery out of her face and to smile at him in her normal, natural way. But the effort was a ghastly mockery. It was little wonder, seeing her there, so lamentably trying to smile into his eyes, that he cried out savagely: “That’s not my Nance’s smile. That’s the smile of a cunning mask! You’ve hidden her away from me. Curse you all — you’ve hidden her away from me — and Baptiste, too! Where is my Baptiste — you staring white thing? Where is my Baptiste, you woman with a twisted mouth?”

He rushed fiercely towards her and seized her by the throat. “Tell me what you’ve done with him,” he cried, shaking her to and fro, and tightening his grasp upon her neck. “Tell me, you devil! Tell me, or I’ll kill you.”

Nance’s brain clouded and darkened. Her senses grew confused and misty. “He’s going to strangle me,” she thought, “and I don’t care! This pain won’t last long, and it will be death from *his* hand.”

All at once, however, in a sudden flash of blinding clearness, she realized what this moment meant. If she let him murder her, passively, unresistingly, what would become of him when she was dead? Simultaneously with this thought something seemed to rise up, strong and clear, from the depths of her being, something powerful and fearless, ready to wrestle with fate to the very end.

“He shan’t kill me!” she thought. “I’ll live to save us both.” Tearing frantically at his hands, she struggled backwards towards the open door, dragging him with her. In his mad blood-lust he was horribly, murderously strong; but this new life-impulse, springing from some supernatural level in the girl’s being, proved still stronger. With one tremendous wrench at his wrists she flung him from her; flung him away with such violence that he slipped and fell to the ground.

In a moment she had rushed through the doorway and closed and locked the heavy door behind her. Even at the very second she achieved this and staggered faint and weak against the wall, what seemed to her rapidly clouding senses a large concourse of noisy people carrying flickering lights, swept about her. As they came upon her she sank to the floor, her last impression being that of the great dark eyes of Philippa Renshaw illuminated by an emotion which was beyond her power of deciphering, an emotion in which her mind lost itself, as she tried to understand it, in a deep impenetrable mist, that changed to absolute darkness as she fainted away.

XXV. BALTAZAR STORK

THE MORNING OF the twenty-ninth of October crept slowly and greyly through the windows of the sisters' room. Linda had done her best to forget her own trouble and to offer what she could of consolation and hope to Nance. It was nearly three o'clock before the unhappy girl found forgetfulness in sleep, and now with the first gleam of light she was awake again.

The worst she could have anticipated was what had happened. Adrian had been taken away — not recognizing any one — to that very Asylum at Mundham which they had glanced at together with such ominous forebodings. She herself — what else could she do? — had been forced to sign her name to the official document which, before midnight fell upon Oakguard, made legal his removal.

She had signed it — she shuddered now to think of her feelings at that moment — below the name of Brand, who as a magistrate was officially compelled to take the initiative in the repulsive business. Dr. Raughty and Mr. Traherne, who had both been summoned to the house, had signed that dreadful paper, too. Nance's first impression on regaining consciousness was that of the Doctor's form bending anxiously over her. She remembered how queer his face looked in the shadowy candle-light and how gently he had stroked the back of her hand when she unclosed her eyes, and what relief his expression had shown when she whispered his name.

It was the Doctor who had driven her home at last, when the appalling business was over and the people had come, with a motor car from Mundham, and carried Adrian away. She had learnt from him that Brand's injuries were in no way serious and were likely to leave no lasting hurt, beyond a deep scar on the forehead. His arms were bruised and injured, Fingal told her, but neither of them was actually broken.

Hamish Traherne had gone with the Mundham people to the Asylum and would spend the night there. He had promised Nance to come and see her before noon and tell her everything.

She gathered also from Fingal that Philippa, showing unusual promptitude and tact, had succeeded in keeping Mrs. Renshaw away, both from the closed door of the chapel and from the bedside of Brand, until the latter had recovered consciousness.

Nance, as her mind went over and over every detail of that hideous evening, could not help thanking God that Adrian had at least been spared the tragic burden of blood-guiltiness. As far as the law of the land was concerned, he had only to recover his sanity and regain his normal senses, to make his liberation easy and natural. There had been no suggestion in the paper she had signed — and she had been especially on the look-out for that — with regard to *criminal* lunacy.

She sat up in bed and looked at her sister. Linda was sleeping as peacefully as a child. The cold morning light gave her face a curious pallor. Her long brown lashes lay motionless upon her cheeks, and from her gently parted lips her breath came evenly and calmly.

Nance recalled the strange interview she had had with Brand before Adrian flung himself between them. It was strange! Do what she could, she could not feel towards that man anything but a deep unspeakable pity. Had he magnetized her — her too — she wondered — with that mysterious force in him, that force at once terrible and tender, which so many women had found fatal? No — no! That, of course, was ridiculous. That was unthinkable. Her heart was Adrian’s and Adrian’s alone. But why, then, was it that she found herself not only pardoning him what he had done but actually — in some inexplicable way — condoning it and understanding it? Was she, too, losing her wits? Was she, too, — under the influence of this disastrous place — forfeiting all sense of moral proportion?

The man had seduced her sister, and had refused — *that* remained quite clearly as the prevailing impression of that wild interview with him — definitely and obstinately to marry her, and yet, here was she, her sister's only protector in the world, softening in her heart towards him and thinking of him with a sort of sentimental pity! Truly the minds of mortal men and women contained mysteries past finding out!

She lay back once more upon her pillows and let the hours of the morning flow over her head like softly murmuring waves. There is often, especially in a country town, something soothing and refreshing beyond words in the opening of an autumn day. In winter the light does not arrive till the stir and noise and traffic of the streets has already, so to speak, established itself. In summer the earlier hours are so long and bright, that by the time the first movements of humanity begin, the day has already been ravished of its pristine freshness and grown jaded and garish. Early mornings in spring have a magical and thrilling charm, but the very exuberance of joyous life then, the clamorous excitement of birds and animals, the feverish uneasiness and restlessness of human children, make it difficult to lie awake in perfect receptivity, drinking in every sound and letting oneself be rocked and lulled upon a languid tide of half-conscious dreaming.

Upon such a tide, however, Nance now lay, in spite of everything, and let the vague murmurs and the familiar sounds flow over her, in soft reiteration. That she should be able to lie like this, listening to the rattle of the milkman's cans and the crying of the sea-gulls and the voices of newly-awakened bargemen higher up the river, and the lowing of cattle from the marshes and the chirping of sparrows on the roof, when all the while her lover was moaning, in horrible unconsciousness, within those unspeakable walls, was itself, as she contemplated it in cold blood, an atrocious trick of all-subverting Nature!

She looked at the misty sunlight, soft and mellow, which now began to invade the room, and she marvelled at herself in a sort of bewildered shame that she should not, at this crisis in her life, *be able to feel more*. Was it that her experiences of the day before had so harrowed her soul that she had no power of reaction left? Or was it — and upon this thought she tried to fix her mind as the true explanation — that the great underlying restorative forces were already dimly but powerfully exerting themselves on behalf of Adrian, and on behalf of her sister and herself?

She articulated the words "restorative forces" in the depths of her mind, giving her thought this palpable definition; but as she did so she was only too conscious of the presence of a mocking spirit there, whose finger pointed derisively at the words as soon as she had imaged them. Restorative forces? Were there such things in the world at all? Was it not much more likely that what she felt at this moment was nothing more than that sort of desperate calm which comes, with a kind of numbing inertia, upon human beings, when they have been wrought upon to the limit of their endurance? Was it not indeed rather a sign of her helplessness, a sign that she had come now to the end of all her powers, and could do no more than just stretch out her arms upon the tide and lie back upon the dark waters, letting them bear her whither they pleased — was it not rather a token of this, than of any inkling of possible help at hand?

It was at that moment that amid the various sounds which reached her ear, there came the clear joyous whistling of some boy apprentice, occupied in removing the shutters from one of the shop-windows in the street. The boy was whistling, casually and clumsily enough, but still with a beautiful intonation, certain familiar strophes from the Marseillaise. The great revolutionary tune echoed clear and strong over the drowsy cobble-stones, between the narrow patient walls, and down away towards the quiet harbour.

It was incredible the effect which this simple accident had upon the mind of the girl. In one moment she had flung to the winds all thought of submission to destiny — all idea of "lying back" upon fate. No longer did she dream vaguely and helplessly of "restorative forces," somewhere, somehow, remotely active in her favour. The old, brave, defiant, youthful spirit in her, the spirit of her father's child, leapt up, strong and vigorous in her heart and brain. No — no! Never would she yield. Never would she submit. "*Allons, enfants!*" She would fight to the end.

And then, all in a moment, she remembered Baptiste. Of course! That was the thing to be done. Fool that she was not to have thought of it before! She must send a cabled message to Adrian's son. It was towards Baptiste that his spirit was continually turning. It must be Baptiste who should restore him to health!

It was not much after six o'clock when that boy's whistling reached her, but between then and the first moment of the opening of the post office, her mind was in a whirl of hopeful thoughts.

As she stood waiting at the little stuccoed entrance for the door to open, and watched with an almost humorous interest the nervous expectancy of the most drooping, pallid, unhealthy and unfortunately complexioned youth she had ever set eyes upon, she felt full of strength and courage. Adrian had been ill before and had recovered. He would recover now! She herself would bring him the news of Baptiste's coming. The mere news of it would help him.

There was a little garden just visible through some iron railings by the side of the post office and above these railings and drooping towards them so that it almost rested upon their spikes, was a fading sunflower. The flower was so wilted and tattered that Nance had no scruple about stretching her hand towards it and trying to pluck it from its stem. She did this half-mechanically, full of her new hope, as a child on its way to catch minnows in a freshly discovered brook might pluck a handful of clover.

The sickly-looking youth — Nance couldn't help longing to cover his face with zinc-ointment; why did one *always* meet people with dreadful complexions in country post offices? — observing her efforts, extended *his* hand also, and together they pulled at the radiant derelict, until they broke it off. When she held it in her hands, Nance felt a little ashamed and sorry, for the tall mutilated stem stood up so stark and raw with drops of white frothy sap oozing from it. She could not help remembering how it was one of Adrian's innocent superstitions to be reluctant to pick flowers. However, it was done now. But what should she do with this great globular orb of brown seeds with the scanty yellow petals, like weary taper-flames, surrounding its circumference?

The lanky youth looked at her and smiled shyly. She met his eyes, and observing his embarrassment, obviously tinged with unconcealed admiration, she smiled back at him, a sweet friendly smile of humorous camaraderie.

Apparently this was the first time in his life that a really beautiful girl had ever smiled at him, for he blushed a deep purple-red all over his face.

"I think, ma'am," he stammered nervously, "I know who you are. I've seen you with Mr. Stork."

Nance's face clouded. She regarded it as a bad omen to hear this name mentioned. Her old mysterious terror of her friend's friend rose powerfully upon her. In some vague obscure way, she felt conscious of his intimate association with all the forces in the world most inimical to her and to her future.

Observing her look and a little bewildered by it, the youth rambled helplessly on. "Mr. Stork has been a very good friend to me," he murmured. "He got me my job at Mr. Walpole's — Walpole the saddler, Miss. I should have had to have left mother if it hadn't been for him."

With a sudden impulse of girlish mischief, Nance placed in the boy's hand the great faded flower she was holding. "Put it into your button-hole," she said.

At that moment the door opened, and forgetting the boy, the sunflower, and the ambiguous Mr. Stork, she hurried into the building, full of her daring enterprise.

Her action seemed to remove from the youth's thoughts whatever motive he may have had in waiting for the opening of the office. Perhaps this goddess-like apparition rendered commonplace and absurd some quaint pictorial communication, smudgy and blotched, which now remained unstamped in his coat-pocket. At any rate he slunk away, with long, furtive, slouching strides, carrying the flower she had given him as reverently as a religious-minded acolyte might carry a sacred vessel.

Meanwhile, Nance sent off her message, laying down on the counter her half-sovereign with a docility that thrilled the young woman who officiated there with awe and importance.

"Baptiste Sorio, fifteen West Eleventh Street, New York City," the message ran, "come at once; your father in serious mental trouble"; and she signed it with her own name and address, and paid five shillings more to secure an immediate reply.

Then, leaving the post office, she returned slowly and thoughtfully to her lodging. The usual stir and movement of the beginning of the day's work filled the little street when she approached her room. Nance could not help thinking how strange and curious it was that the stream of life should thus go rolling forward with its eternal repetition of little familiar usages, in spite of the desperation of this or the other cruel personal drama.

Adrian might be moaning for his son in that Mundham house. Linda might be fearing and dreading the results of her obsession. Philippa might be tossing forth her elfish laugh upon the wind among the oak-trees. She herself might be "lying back upon fate" or struggling to wrestle with fate. What mattered any of these things to the people who sold and bought and laughed and quarrelled and laboured and made love, as the powers set in motion a new day, and the brisk puppets of a human town began their diurnal dance?

It was not till late in the afternoon that Nance received an answer to her message. She was alone when she opened it, Linda having gone as usual, under her earnest persuasion, to practise in the church. The message was brief and satisfactory: "Sailing to-morrow *Altrunia* Liverpool six days boat Baptiste."

So he would really be here — here in Rodmoor — in seven or eight days. This was news for Adrian, if he had the power left to understand anything! She folded the paper carefully and placed it in her purse.

Mr. Traherne had come to her about noon, bringing news that, on the whole, was entirely reassuring. It seemed that Sorio had done little else than sleep since his first entrance into the place; and both the doctors there regarded this as the best possible sign.

Hamish explained to her that there were three degrees of insanity — mania, melancholia, and dementia — and, from what he could learn from his conversations with the doctors, this heavy access of drowsiness ruled out of Adrian's case the worst symptom of both these latter possibilities. What they called "mania," he explained to her, was something quite curable and with nearly all the chances in favour of recovery. It was really — he told her he had gathered from them— "only a question of time."

The priest had been careful to inquire as to the possibility of Nance being allowed to visit her betrothed; but neither of the doctors seemed to regard this, at any rate for the present, as at all desirable. He cordially congratulated her, however, on having sent for Sorio's son. "Whatever happens," he said, "it's right and natural that *he* should be here with you."

While Nance was thus engaged in "wrestling with fate," a very different mental drama was being enacted behind the closed windows of Baltazar's cottage.

Mr. Stork had not been permitted even to fall asleep before rumours reached him that some startling event had occurred at Oakguard. Long before midnight, by the simple method of dropping in at the bar of the Admiral's Head, he had picked up sufficient information to make him decide against seeing any one that night. They had taken Sorio away, and Mr. Renshaw had escaped from a prolonged struggle with the demented man with the penalty of only a few bruises. Thus, with various imaginative interpolations which he discounted as soon as he heard them, Baltazar got from the gossips of the tavern a fair account of what had occurred.

There was, indeed, so much excitement in Rodmoor over the event that, for the first time in the memory of the oldest inhabitants, the Admiral's

Head remained open two whole hours after legal closing time. This was in part explained by the fact that the two representatives of the law in the little town had been summoned to Oakguard to be ready for any emergency.

It was now about four o’clock in the afternoon. Baltazar had found himself with little appetite for either breakfast or lunch, and at this moment, as he sat staring at a fireplace full of nothing but burnt out ashes, his eyes had such dark lines below them that one might have assumed that sleep as well as food had lost its savour for him in the last twelve hours. By his side on a little table stood an untasted glass of brandy, and at his feet in the fender lay innumerable, but in many cases only half-smoked, cigarettes.

The impression which was now upon him was that of being one of two human creatures left alive, those two alone, after some world-destroying plague. He had the feeling that he had only to go out into the street to come upon endless dead bodies strewn about, in fantastic and horrible attitudes of death, and in various stages of dissolution. It was his Adriano who alone was left alive. But he had done something to him — so that he could only hear his voice without being able to reach him.

“I must end this,” he said aloud; and then again, as if addressing another person, “We must put an end to this, mustn’t we, Tassar?”

He rose to his feet and surveyed himself in one of his numerous beautifully framed mirrors. He passed his slender fingers through his fair curls and peered into his own eyes, opening the lids wide and wrinkling his forehead. He smiled at himself then — a long strange wanton smile — and turned away, shrugging his shoulders.

Then he moved straight up to the picture of the Venetian Secretary and snapped his fingers at it. “You wait, you smirking ‘imp of fame’; you wait a little! We’ll show you that you’re not so deep or so subtle after all. You wait, Flambard, my boy, you wait a while; and we'll show you plots and counter-plots!"

Then without a word he went upstairs to his bathroom. "By Jove!" he muttered to himself, "I begin to think Fingal's right. The only place in this Christian world where one can possess one's soul in peace is a tiled bathroom — only the tiles must be perfectly white," he added, after a pause.

He made an elaborate and careful toilet, brushing his hair with exhaustive assiduity, and perfuming his hands and face. He dressed himself in spotlessly clean linen and put on a suit that had never been worn before. Even the shoes which he chose were elegant and new. He took several minutes deciding what tie to wear and finally selected one of a pale mauve colour. Then, with one final long and wistful glance at himself, he kissed the tips of his fingers at his own image, and stepped lightly down the stairs.

He paused for a moment in the little hall-way to select a cane from the stick rack. He took an ebony one at last, with an engraved silver knob bearing his own initials. There was something ghastly about the deliberation with which he did all this, but it was ghastliness wasted upon polished furniture and decrepit flies — unless every human house conceals invisible watchers. He hesitated a little between a Panama hat and one of some light-coloured cloth material, but finally selected the former, toying carefully with its flexible rim before placing it upon his head, and even when it was there giving it some final touches.

The absolute loneliness of the little house, broken only by an occasional voice from the tavern door, became, during his last moments there, a sort of passive accomplice to some nameless ritual. At length he opened the door and let himself out.

He walked deliberately and thoughtfully towards the park gates, and, passing in, made his way up the leaf-strewn avenue. Arrived at the house, he nodded in a friendly manner at the servant who opened the door, and asked to be taken to Mrs. Renshaw's room. The man obeyed him respectfully, and went before him up the staircase and down the long echoing passage.

He found Mrs. Renshaw sewing at the half-open window. She put down her work when he entered and greeted him with one of those *illumined* smiles of hers, which Fingal Raughty was accustomed to say made him believe in the supernatural.

"Thank you for coming to see me," she said, as he seated himself at her side, spreading around him an atmosphere of delicate odours. "Thank you, Baltazar, so much for coming."

"Why do you always say that, Aunt Helen?" he murmured, almost crossly. It was one of the little long-established conventions between them that he should address his father's wife in this way.

There came once more that indescribable spiritual light into her faded eyes. "Well," she said gaily, "*isn't* it kind of a young man, who has so many interests, to give up his time to an old woman like me?"

"Nonsense, nonsense, Aunt Helen!" he cried, with a rich caressing intonation, laying one of his slender hands tenderly upon hers. "It makes me absolutely angry with you when you talk like that!"

"But isn't it true, Tassar?" she answered. "Isn't this world meant for the young and happy?"

"As if I cared what the world was *meant* for!" he exclaimed. "It's meant for nothing at all, I fancy. And the sooner it reaches what it was meant for and collapses altogether, the better for all of us!"

A look of distress that was painful to witness came into Mrs. Renshaw's face. Her fingers tightened upon his hand and she leant forward towards him. “Tassar, Tassar, dear!” she said very gravely, “when you talk like that you make me feel as if I were absolutely alone in the world.”

“What do you mean, Aunt Helen?” murmured the young man in a low voice.

“You make me feel as if it were wrong of me to love you so much,” she went on, bending her head and looking down at his feet.

As he saw her now, with the fading afternoon light falling on her parted hair, still wavy and beautiful even in its grey shadows, and on her broad pale forehead, he realized once more what he alone perhaps, of all who ever had known her realized, the unusual and almost terrifying power of her personality. She forced him to think of some of the profound portraits of the sixteenth century, revealing with an insight and a passion, long since lost to art, the tragic possibilities of human souls.

He laughed gently. “Dear, dear Aunt Helen!” he cried, “forget my foolishness. I was only jesting. I don’t give a fig for any of my opinions on these things. To the deuce with them all, dear! To free you from one single moment of annoyance, I’d believe every word in the Church Catechism from ‘What is your name?’ down to ‘without doubt are lost eternally’!”

She looked up at this, and made a most heart-breaking effort not to smile. Her abnormally sensitive mouth — the mouth, as Baltazar always maintained, of a great tragic actress — quivered at the corners.

“If *I* had taught you your catechism,” she said, “you would remember it better than that!”

Baltazar’s eyes softened as he watched her, and a strange look, full of a pity that was as impersonal as the sea itself, rose to their surface. He lifted her hand to his lips.

“Don’t do that! You mustn’t do that!” she murmured, and then with another flicker of a smile, “you must keep those pretty manners, Tassar, for all your admiring young women!”

“Confound my young women!” cried the young man. “You’re far more beautiful, Aunt Helen, than all of them put together!”

“You make me think of that passage in ‘Hamlet,’” she rejoined, leaning back in her chair and resuming her work. “How does it go? ‘Man delights me not nor woman either — though by your smiling you seem to say so!’”

“Aunt Helen!” he cried earnestly, “I have something important to say to you. I want you to understand this. It’s sweet of you not to speak of Adriano’s illness. Any one but you would have condoled with me most horribly already!”

She raised her eyes from her sewing. “We must pray for him,” she said. “I have been praying for him all day — and all last night, too,” she added with a faint smile. “I let Philippa think I didn’t know what had happened. But I knew.” She shuddered a little. “I knew. I heard him in the ‘work-shop.’”

“What I wanted to say, Aunt Helen,” he went on, “was this. I want you to remember — whatever happens to either of us — that I love you more than any one in the world. Yes — yes,” he continued, not allowing her to interrupt, “better even than Adriano!”

A look resembling the effect of some actual physical pain came into her face. “You mustn’t say that, my dear,” she murmured. “You must keep your love for your wife when you marry. I don’t like to hear you say things like that — to an old woman.” She hesitated a moment. “It sounds like flattery, Tassar,” she added.

“But it’s true, Aunt Helen!” he repeated with almost passionate emphasis. “You’re by far the most beautiful and by far the most interesting woman I’ve ever met.”

Mrs. Renshaw drew her hand across her face. Then she laughed gaily like a young girl. “What would Philippa say,” she said, “if she heard you say that?”

Baltazar’s face clouded. He looked at her long and closely.

“Philippa is interesting and deep,” he said with a grave emphasis, “but she doesn’t understand me. *You* understand me, though you think it right to hide your knowledge even from yourself.”

Mrs. Renshaw’s face changed in a moment. It became haggard and obstinate. “We mustn’t talk any more about understanding and about love,” she said. “God’s will is that we should all of us only completely love and understand the person He leads us, in His wisdom, to marry.”

Baltazar burst into a fit of heathen laughter. “I thought you were going to end quite differently, Aunt Helen,” he said. “I thought the only person we were to love was going to be God. But it seems that it is man — or woman,” he added bitterly.

Mrs. Renshaw bent low over her work and the shadow grew still deeper upon her face. Seeing that he had really hurt her, Baltazar changed his tone.

“Dear Aunt Helen!” he whispered gently, “how many happy hours, how many, how many! — have we spent together reading in this room!”

She looked up quickly at this, with the old bright look. “Yes, it’s been a happy thing for me, Tassar, having you so near us. Do you remember how, last winter, we got through the whole of Sir Walter Scott? There’s no one nowadays like *him* — is there? Though Philippa tells me that Mr. Hardy is a great writer.”

“Mr. Hardy!” exclaimed her interlocutor whimsically. “I believe you *would* have come to him at last — perhaps you *will*, dear, some day. Let’s hope so! But I’m afraid I shall not be here then.”

"Don't talk like that, Tassar," she said without looking up from her work. "It will not be *you* who will leave *me*."

There was a pause between them then, and Baltazar's eyes wandered out into the hushed misty garden.

"Mr. Hardy does not believe in God," he remarked.

"Tassar!" she cried reproachfully. "You know what you promised just now. You mustn't tease me. No one deep down in his heart disbelieves in God. How can we? He makes His power felt among us every day."

There was another long silence, broken only by the melancholy cawing of the rooks, beginning to gather in their autumnal roosting-places.

Presently Mrs. Renshaw looked up. "Do you remember," she said very solemnly, "how you promised me one day never again to let Brand or Philippa speak disrespectfully of our English hymn-book? You said you thought the genius of some of our best-known poets was more expressed in their hymns than in their poetry. I have often thought of that."

A very curious expression came into Baltazar's face. He suddenly leaned forward. "Aunt Helen," he said, "this illness of Adrian's makes me feel, as you often say, how little security there is for any of our lives. I wish you'd say to me those peculiarly sad lines — you know the one I mean? — the one I used to make you smile over, when I was in a bad mood, by saying it always made me think of old women in a work-house! You know the one, don't you?"

The whole complicated subtlety of Mrs. Renshaw's character showed itself in her face now. She smiled almost playfully but at the same moment a supernatural light came in her eyes. "I know," she said, and without a moment's hesitation or the least touch of embarrassment, she began to sing, in a low plaintive melodious voice, the following well-known stanza. As she sang she beat time with her hand; and there came over her hearer the obscure vision of some old, wild, primordial religion, as different from paganism as it was different from Christianity, of which his mysterious friend was the votary and priestess. The words drifted away through the open window into the mist and the falling leaves.

“Rest comes at length, though life be long and weary,
The day must dawn and darksome night be past;
Faith’s journey ends in welcome to the weary,
And heaven, the heart’s true home, will come at last.”

When it was finished there was a strange silence in the room, and Baltazar rose to his feet. His face was pale. He moved to her side and, for the first and last time in their curious relations, he kissed her — a long kiss upon the forehead.

With a heightened colour in her cheeks and a nervous deprecatory smile on her lips, she went with him to the door. “Listen, dear,” she said, as she took his hand, “I want you to think of that poem of Cowper’s written when he was most despairing — the one that begins ‘God moves in a mysterious way.’ I want you to remember that though what he lays upon us seems *crushing*, there is always something behind it — infinite mercy behind infinite mystery.”

Baltazar looked her straight in the face. “I wonder,” he said, “whether it is I or you who is the most unhappy person in Rodmoor!”

She let his hand fall. “What we suffer,” she said, “seems to me like the weight of some great iron engine with jagged raw edges — like a battering-ram beating us against a dark mountain. It swings backwards and forwards, and it drives us on and on and on.”

“And yet you believe in God,” he whispered.

She smiled faintly. “Am I not alive and speaking to you, dear? If behind it all there wasn’t His will, who could endure to live another moment?”

They looked into one another's face in silence. He made an attempt to say something else to her but his tongue refused to utter what his heart suggested.

"Good-bye, Aunt Helen," he said.

"Good night, Tassar," she answered, "and thank you for coming to see me."

He left the house without meeting any one else and walked with a deliberate and rapid step towards the river. The twilight had already fallen, and a white mist coming up over the sand-dunes was slowly invading the marshes. The tide had just turned and the full-brimmed current of the river's out-flowing poured swift and strong between the high mud-banks.

The Loon was at that moment emphasizing and asserting its identity with an exultant joy. It seemed almost to *purr*, with a kind of feline satisfaction, as its dark volume of brackish water rushed forward towards the sea. Whatever object it touched in its swift passage, it drew from it some sort of half-human sound — some whisper or murmur or protest of querulous complaining.

The reeds flapped; the pollard-roots creaked; the mud-promontories moaned; and all the while, with gurglings and suckings and lappings and deep-drawn, inward, self-complacent laughter, the sliding body of the slippery waters swept forward under its veil of mist.

On that night, of all nights, the Loon seemed to have reached that kind of emphasis of personality which things are permitted to attain — animate as well as inanimate — when their functional activity is at its highest and fullest.

And on that night, carefully divesting himself of his elegant clothes, and laying his hat and stick on the ground beside them, Baltazar Stork, without haste or violence, and with his brain supernaturally clear, drowned himself in the Loon.

XXVI. NOVEMBER MIST

BALTAZAR'S DEATH, UNDER circumstances which could leave no doubt as to the unhappy man's intention to destroy himself, coming, as it did, immediately after his friend's removal to the Asylum, stirred the scandalous gossip of Rodmoor to its very dregs.

The suicide's body — and even the indurated hearts of the weather-battered bargemen who discovered it, washed down by the tide as far as the New Bridge, were touched by its beauty — was buried, after a little private extemporary service, just at the debatable margin where the consecrated churchyard lost itself in the priest's flower-beds. Himself the only person in the place exactly aware of the precise limits of the sacred enclosure — the enclosure which had never been enclosed — Mr. Traherne was able to follow the most rigid stipulations of his ecclesiastical conscience without either hurting the feelings of the living or offering any insult to the dead. When it actually came to the point he was, as it turned out, able to remove from his own over-scrupulous heart the least occasion for future remorse.

The Rodmoor sexton — the usual digger of graves — happened to be at that particular time in the throes, or rather in the after-effects, of one of his periodic outbursts of inebriation. So it happened that the curate-in-charge had with his own hands to dig the grave of the one among all his parishioners who had remained most distant to him and had permitted him the least familiarity.

Mr. Traherne remained awake in his study half the night, turning over the pages of ancient scholastic authorities and comparing one doctrinal opinion with another on the question of the burial of suicides.

In the end, what he did, with a whimsical prayer to Providence to forgive him, was to *begin* digging the hole just outside the consecrated area, but by means of a slight northward *excavatio*, when he got a few feet down, to arrange the completed orifice in such a way that, while Baltazar's body remained in common earth, his head was lodged safe and secure, under soil blessed by Holy Church.

One of the most pious and authoritative of the early divines, Mr. Traherne found out, maintained, as no fantastic or heretical speculation but as a reasonable and reverent conclusion, the idea that the surviving portion of a man — his "psyche" or living soul — had, as its mortal tabernacle, the posterior lobes of the human skull, and that it was from the *head* rather than from the *body* that the shadowy companion of our earthly days — that "animula blandula" of the heathen emperor — melted by degrees into the surrounding air and passed to "its own place."

The Renshaws themselves showed, none of them, the slightest wish to interfere with his arrangements, nor did Hamish Traherne ever succeed in learning whether the hollow-eyed lady of Oakguard knew or did not know that the clay mound over which every evening without fail, after the day of the unceremonious interment, she knelt in silent prayer, was outside the circle of the *covenanted* mercies of the Power to which she prayed.

The "last will and testament" of the deceased — written with the most exquisite care — was of so strange a character, taking indeed the shape of something like a defiant and shameless "confession," that Brand and Dr. Raughty, who were the appointed executors, hurriedly hid it out of sight. Everything Mr. Stork possessed was left to Mrs. Renshaw, except the picture of Eugenio Flambard. This, by a fantastic codicil, which was so extraordinary that when Brand and Dr. Raughty read it they could do nothing but stare at one another in silent amazement, was bequeathed, at the end of an astonishing panegyric, “to our unknown Hippolytus, Mr. Baptiste Sorio, of New York City.”

Baltazar had been buried on the first of November, and as the following days of this dark month dragged by, under unbroken mists and rain, Nance lived from hour to hour in a state of trembling expectancy. Would Baptiste’s ship bring him safely to England? Would he, when he came, and discovered what her relations with his father were, be kind to her and sympathetic, or angry and hurt? She could not tell. She could make no guess. She did not even know whether Adrian had really done what he promised and written to his son about her at all.

The figure of the boy — on his way across the Atlantic — took a fantastic hold upon her disturbed imagination. As day followed day and the time of his arrival drew near, she found it hard to concentrate her mind even sufficiently to fulfil her easy labours with the little dressmaker. Miss Pontifex gently remonstrated with her.

“I know you’re in trouble, Miss Herrick, and have a great deal on your mind, but it does no good worrying, and the girls get restless — you see how it is! — when you can’t give them your full attention.”

Thus rebuked, Nance would smile submissively and turn her eyes away from the misty window.

But every night before she slept, she would see through her closed eyelids that longed-for boy, standing — that was how she always conceived him — at the bows of the ship, standing tall and fair like a young god; borne forwards over the starlit ocean to bring help to them all.

In her dreams, night after night, the boy came to her, and she found him then of an unearthly beauty and endowed with a mysterious supernatural power. In her dreams, the wild impossible hope, that somehow, somewhere, he would be the one to save Linda from the ruin of her youthful life, took to itself sweet immediate fulfilment.

Every little event that happened to her during those days of tension assumed the shape of something pregnant and symbolic. Her mind made auguries of the movements of the clouds, and found significant omens, propitious or menacing, from every turn of the wind and every coming and going of the rain. The smallest and simplest encounter took upon itself at that time a curious and mystic value.

In after days, she remembered with sad and woeful clearness how persons and things impressed her then, as, in their chance-brought groupings and gestures, they lent themselves to her strained expectant mood.

For instance, she never could forget the way she waited, on the night of the third of November, along with Linda and Dr. Raughty, for the arrival of the last train from Mundham, bringing Mr. Traherne back from a visit to the Asylum with news of Adrian.

The news the priest brought was unexpectedly favourable. Adrian, it seemed, had taken a rapid turn for the better, and the doctors declared that any day now it might become possible for Nance to see him.

As they stood talking on the almost deserted platform, Nance's mind visualized with passionate intensity the moment when she herself would take Baptiste to see his father and perhaps together — why not? — bring him back in triumph to Rodmoor.

Her happy reverie on this particular occasion was interrupted by a fantastic incident, which, trifling enough in itself, left a queer and significant impression behind it. This was nothing less than the sudden escape from Mr. Traherne's pocket of his beloved Ricoletto.

In the excitement of their pleasure over the news brought by the priest, the rat took the opportunity of slipping from the recesses of his master's coat; and jumping down on the platform, he leapt, quick as a flash, upon the railway track below. Mr. Traherne, with a cry of consternation, scrambled down after him, and throwing aside his ulster which impeded his progress, began desperately pursuing him. The engine of the train by which the clergyman had arrived was now resting motionless, separate from the line of carriages, deserted by its drivers. Straight beneath the wheels of this inert monster darted the escaped rat. The agitated priest, with husky perturbed cries, ran backwards and forwards along the side of the engine, every now and then stooping down and frantically endeavouring to peer beneath it.

It was so queer a sight to see this ungainly figure, dressed as always in his ecclesiastical cassock, rushing madly round the dark form of the engine and at intervals falling on his knees beside it, that Linda could not restrain an almost hysterical fit of laughter.

Dr. Raughty looked whimsically at Nance.

"He might be a priest of Science, worshipping the god of machines," he remarked, assuming as he spoke a sitting posture, the better to slide down, himself, from the platform to the track.

The station-master now approached, anxious to close his office for the night and go home. The porter, a peculiarly unsympathetic figure, took not the least notice of the event, but coolly proceeded to extinguish the lights, one by one.

The ostler from the Admiral's Head, who had come to meet some expected visitor who never arrived, leaned forward with drowsy interest from his seat on his cab and surveyed the scene with grim detachment, promising himself that on the following night at his familiar bar table, he would be the center of public interest as he satisfied legitimate local curiosity with regard to this unwonted occurrence.

Nance could not help smiling as she saw the excellent Fingal, his long overcoat flapping about his legs, bending forward between the buffers of the engine and peering into its metallic belly. She noticed that he was tapping with his knuckles on the polished breast-plate of the monster and uttering a clucking noise with his tongue, as if calling for a recalcitrant chicken.

It was not long before Mr. Traherne, growing desperate as the oblivious porter approached the last of the station lamps, fell flat on his face and proceeded to shove himself clean under the engine. The vision of his long retreating form, wrapped in his cassock, thus worming himself slowly out of sight, drew from Nance a burst of laughter, and as for Linda, she clapped her hands together like a child.

He soon reappeared, to the relief of all of them, with his recaptured pet in his hand, and scrambled back upon the platform, just as the last of the lamps went out, leaving the place in utter darkness.

Nance, her laughter gone then, had a queer sensation as they moved away, that the ludicrous scene she had just witnessed was part of some fantastic unreal dream, and that she herself, with the whole tragedy of her life, was just such a dream, the dream perhaps of some dark driverless cosmic engine — of some remote Great Eastern Railway of the Universe!

The morning of the fourth of November dawned far more auspiciously than any day which Rodmoor had known for many weeks. It was one of those patient, hushed, indescribable days — calm and tender and full of whispered intimations of hidden reassurance — which rarely reach us in any country but England or in any district but East Anglia. The great powers of sea and air and sky seemed to draw close to one another and close to humanity; as if with some large and gracious gesture of benediction they would fain lay to rest, under a solemn and elemental requiem, the body of the dead season's life.

Nance escaped before noon from Miss Pontifex's work-room. She and Linda had been invited by Dr. Raughty to lunch with him and Hamish at the pastry-cook's in the High Street. It was to be a sort of modest celebration, this little feast, to do honour to the good news which Mr. Traherne had brought them the night before and which was corroborated by a letter to Nance herself from the head doctor, with regard to Adrian's astonishing improvement.

Nance felt possessed by a deep and tumultuous excitement. Baptiste surely must be near England now! Any day — almost any hour — she might hear of his arrival. She strolled out across the Loon to meet Linda, who had gone that morning to practise on the organ for the following Sunday's services.

As she crossed the marsh-land between the bridge and the church, she encountered Mrs. Renshaw returning from a visit to Baltazar's grave. The mistress of Oakguard stopped for a little while to speak to her, and to express, in her own way, her sympathy over Adrian's recovery. She did this, however, in a manner so characteristic of her that it depressed rather than encouraged the girl. Her attitude seemed to imply that it was better, wiser, more reverent, not to cherish any buoyant hopes, but to assume that the worst that could come to us from the hands of God was what ought to be expected and awaited in humble submissiveness.

She seemed in some strange way to *resent* any lifting of the heavy folds of the pall of fate and with a kind of obstinate weariness, to lean to the darker and more sombre aspect of every possibility.

She carried in her hands a bunch of faded flowers brought from the grave she had visited and which she seemed reluctant to throw away, and Nance never forgot the appearance of her black-gowned drooping figure and white face, as she stood there, by the edge of the misty, sun-illumined fens, holding those dead stalks and withered leaves.

As they parted, Nance whispered hesitatingly some little word about Baltazar. She half expected her to answer with tears, but in place of that, her eyes seemed to shine with a weird exultant joy.

“When you’re as old as I am, dear,” she said, “and have seen life as I have seen it, you will not be sad to lose what you love best. The better we love them, the happier we must be when they are set free from the evil of the world.”

She looked down on the ground, and when she raised her head, her eyes had an unearthly light in them. “I am closer to him now,” she said, “closer than ever before. And it will not be long before I go to join him.”

She moved slowly away, dragging her limbs heavily.

Nance, as she went on, kept seeing again and again before her that weird unearthly look. It left the impression on her mind that Mrs. Renshaw had actually secured some strange and unnatural link with the dead which made her cold and detached in her attitude towards the living.

Perhaps it had been all the while like this, the girl thought. Perhaps it was just this habitual intercourse with the Invisible which rendered her so entirely a votary of moonlight and of shadows, and so unsympathetic towards the sunshine and towards all genial normal expressions of natural humanity.

Nance had the sensation — when at last, with Linda at her side, she returned dreamily to the village — of having encountered some creature from a world different from ours, a world of grey vapours and shadowy margins, a world where the wraiths of the unborn meet the ghosts of the dead, a world where the “might-have-been” and the “never-to-be-again” weep together by the shores of Lethe.

The little party which assembled presently round a table in the bow-window of the Rodmoor confectioner’s proved a cheerful and happy one. The day was Saturday, so that the street was full of a quiet stir of people preparing to leave their shops and begin the weekly holiday. There was a vague feeling of delicate sadness, dreamy yet not unhappy, in the air, as though the year itself were pausing for a moment in its onward march towards the frosts of winter and gathering for the last time all its children, all its fading leaves and piled-up fruits and drooping flowers, into a hushed maternal embrace, an embrace of silent and everlasting farewell.

The sun shone gently and tenderly from a sky of a faint, sad, far-off blue — the sort of blue which, in the earlier and more reserved of Florentine painters, may be seen in the robes of Our Lady caught up to heaven out of a grave of lilies.

The sea was calm and motionless, its hardly stirring waves clearer and more translucent in their green depths than when blown upon by impatient winds or touched by shameless and glaring light.

A soft opalescent haze lay upon the houses, turning their gables, their chimneys, their porches, and their roofs, into a pearl-dim mystery of vague illusive forms; forms that might have arisen out of the “perilous sea” itself, on some “beachéd margent” woven of the stuff of dreams.

The queer old-fashioned ornaments of the room where the friends ate their meal took to themselves, as Nance in her dreamy emotion drew them into the circle of her thoughts, a singular and symbolic power. They seemed suggestive, these quaint things, of all that world of little casually accumulated mementoes and memories with which our troubled and turbulent humanity strews its path and fills the places of its passionate sojourning. Mother-of-pearl shells, faded antimacassars, china dogs, fruit under glass-cases, old faded photographs of long-since dead people, illuminated texts embroidered in bright wool, tarnished christening mugs of children that were now old women, portraits of celebrities from days when Victoria herself was in her cradle, all the sweet impossible bric-a-brac of a tea-parlour in a village shop surrounded them as they sat there, and thrilled at least two of their hearts — for Linda's mood was as receptive and as sensitive as Nance's — with an indescribable sense of the pathos of human life.

It was of "life" — in general terms — that Dr. Raughty was speaking, as the two young girls gave themselves up to the influence of the hour and played lightly with their food.

"It's all nonsense," the doctor cried, "this confounded perpetual pessimism! Why can't these people read Rabelais and Montaigne, and drink noble wine out of great casks? Why can't they choose from among the company of their friends gay and honest wenches and sport with them under pleasant trees? Why can't they get married to comfortable and comely girls and regale themselves in cool and well-appointed kitchens?"

He helped himself as he spoke to another slice of salmon and sprinkled salt upon a plateful of tomatoes and lettuce.

"Whose pessimism are you talking about, Fingal?" inquired Nance, playing up to his humour.

"Don't get it only for me," Mr. Traherne cried, addressing the demure and freckled damsel who waited on them. "I'm asking for a glass of ale, Doctor. They can send out for it. But I don't want it unless—"

The Doctor's eyes shone across the table at him like soft lamps of sound antique wisdom. "Burton's," he exclaimed emphatically. "None of friend Renshaw's stuff! Burton's! And let it be that old dark mahogany-coloured liquor we drank once under the elm-trees at Ashbourne."

The waitress regarded him with a coquettish smile. She laboured under the perpetual illusion that every word the Doctor uttered was some elaborate and recondite gallantry directed towards herself.

The conversation ran on in lively spasmodic waywardness. It was not long before the ale appeared, of the very body and colour suggested by the Doctor's memories. Nance refused to touch it.

"Have some ginger-pop, instead, then," murmured Fingal, pouring the brown ale into a china jug decorated with painted pansies. "Linda would like some of that, I know."

The priest held out his glass in the direction of the jug.

"A thousand deep-sea devils — pardon me, Nance, dear! — carry off these pessimists," went on the Doctor, filling up the clergyman's glass and his own with ritualistic solemnity while the little maid, the victim of an irrepressible laughing-fit, retired to fetch ginger-beer. "Let us remember how the great Voltaire served God and defended all honest people. Here's to Voltaire's memory and a fig for these neurotic scribblers who haven't the gall to put out their tongues!" He raised his glass to his lips, his eyes shining with humorous enjoyment.

"What scribblers are you talking about?" inquired Nance, peeling a golden apple and glancing at the misty roofs through the window at her side.

"All of these twopenny-halfpenny moderns," cried the Doctor, "who haven't the gall in their stomachs to take the world by the scruff of its neck and lash out. A fig for them! Our poor dear Adrian, when he gets cured, will write something — you mark my words — that'll make 'em stir themselves and sit up!"

"But Adrian is pessimistic too, isn't he?" said Nance, looking wistfully at the speaker.

"Nonsense!" cried the Doctor. "Adrian has more Attic salt in him than you women guess. I believe, myself, that this book of his will be worthy to be put beside the 'Thoughts' of Pascal. Have you ever seen Pascal's face? He isn't as good-looking as Adrian but he has the same intellectual fury."

"What's your opinion, Fingal," remarked Mr. Traherne, peering anxiously into the pansied jug, "about the art of making life endurable?"

Dr. Raughty surveyed him with a placid and equable smile. "Courage and gaiety," he said, "are the only recipe, and I don't mind sprinkling these, in spite of our modern philosophers, with a little milk of human kindness."

The priest nodded over what was left of his ale. "*De fructu operum tuorum, Domine, satiabitur terra: ut educas panem de terra, et vinum lætificet cor hominis; ut exhilaret faciem in oleo, et panis cor hominis confirmet*," he muttered, stretching out his long legs under the table and tilting back his chair.

"What the devil does all that mean?" asked the Doctor a little peevishly. "Can't you praise God in simple English? Nance and I couldn't catch a word except 'wine' and 'bread' and 'oil.'"

Mr. Traherne looked unspeakably ashamed. "I'm sorry, Nance," he murmured, sitting up very straight and pulling himself together. "It was out of place. It was rude. I'm not sure that it wasn't profane. I'm sorry, Fingal!"

"It's a beautiful afternoon," said Nance, keeping her eyes on the little street, whose very pavements reflected the soft opalescent light which was spreading itself over Rodmoor.

"Ah!" cried Dr. Raughty, "we left *that* out in our summary of the compensations of life. *You* left that out, too, Hamish, from your 'fructu' and 'panem' and 'vinum' and the rest. But, after all, that is what we come back to in the end. The sky, the earth, the sea, — the great cool spaces of night — the sun, like a huge splendid god; the moon, like a sweet passionate nun; and the admirable stars, like gems in some great world-peacock's tail — yes, my darlings, we come back to these in the end!"

He rose from his seat and with shining eyes surveyed his guests.

"By the body of Mistress Bacbuc," he cried, in a loud voice, "we do wrong to sit here any longer! Let's go down to the sands and cool our heads. Here, Maggie! Madge! Marjorie! Where the deuce has that girl gone? There she is! Get me the bill, will you, and bring me a finger-bowl."

Mr. Traherne laid his hand gently on the doctor's arm. "I'm afraid we've been behaving badly, Fingal," he whispered. "We've been drinking ale and forgetting our good manners. Do I look all right? I mean, do I look as if I'd been drinking mahogany-coloured Burton? Do I look as usual?"

The doctor surveyed him with grave intentness. "You look," he said at last, "something between Friar John and Bishop Berkeley." He gave him a little push. "Go and talk to the girls while I buy them chocolates."

Having paid the bill, he occupied himself in selecting with delicate nicety a little box of sweet-meats for each of his friends, choosing one for Nance with a picture of Leda and the Swan upon it and one for Linda with a portrait of the Empress Josephine.

As he leant over the counter, his eyes gleamed with a soft benignant ecstasy and he rallied the shop-woman about some heart-shaped confectionary adorned with blue ribbons.

Before Mr. Traherne rejoined them Nance had time to whisper to Linda, "They're both a little excited, dear, but we needn't notice it. They'll be themselves in a moment. Men are all so babyish."

Linda smiled faintly at this and nodded her head. She looked a little sad and a little pale.

Dr. Raughty soon appeared. "Come on," he said, "let's go down to the sea"; and in a low dreamy voice he murmured the following ditty:

"A boat — a boat — to cross the ferry!
And let us all be wise and merry,
And laugh and quaff and drink brown sherry!"

Linda caught at Nance's sleeve. "I think I'll let you go without me," she whispered. "I feel rather tired."

Nance looked anxiously into her eyes. "I'd come back with you," she murmured, "but it would hurt their feelings. You'd better lie down a little. I'll be back soon." Then, in a lower whisper, "They did it to cheer us up. They're dear, absurd people. Take care of yourself, darling."

Linda stood for a while after she had bidden them all good-bye and watched them move down the street. In the misty sunshine there was something very gentle and appealing about Nance's girlish figure as she walked between the two men. They both seemed talking to her at the same time and, as they talked, they watched her face with affectionate and tender admiration.

"She treats them like children," said Linda to herself. "That's why they're all so fond of her."

She walked slowly back up the street; but instead of entering her house, she drifted languidly across the green and made her way towards the park gates.

She felt very lonely, just then — lonely and full of a heart-aching longing. If only she could catch one glimpse, just one, of the man who was so dear to her — of the man who was the father of her child.

She thought of Adrian's recovery and she thought vaguely and wistfully of the coming of Baptiste. "I hope he will like us," she said to herself. "I hope he will like us both."

Hardly knowing what she did, she passed in through the gates and began moving up the avenue. All the tragic and passionate emotions associated with this place came over her like a rushing wave. She stopped and hesitated. Then with a pitiful effort to control her feelings, she turned and began retracing her steps.

Suddenly she stopped again, her heart beating wildly. Yes, there were footsteps approaching her from the direction of Oakguard. She looked around. Brand Renshaw himself was behind her, standing at a curve of the avenue, bareheaded, under an enormous pine. The horizontal sunlight piercing the foliage in front of him shone red on the trunk of the great tree and red on the man's blood-coloured head.

She started towards him with a little gasping cry, like an animal that, after long wandering, catches sight of its hiding-place.

The man had stopped because he had seen her, and now when he saw her approaching him a convulsive tremor ran through his powerful frame. For one second he made a movement as if to meet her; but then, raising his long arms with a gesture as if at once embracing her and taking leave of her, he plunged into the shadows of the trees and was lost to view.

The girl stood where he had left her — stood as if turned to stone — for several long minutes, while over her head the misty sky looked down through the branches, and from the open spaces of the park came the harsh cry of sea-gulls flying towards the coast.

Then, with drooping head and dazed expressionless eyes, she walked slowly back, the way she had come.

XXVII. THRENOS

After her encounter with Nance, Mrs. Renshaw, returning to Oakguard, informed both Philippa and Brand of the improvement in the condition of Adrian Sorio.

Philippa received the news quietly enough, conscious that the eyes of her brother were upon her; but as soon as she could get away, which was not till the afternoon was well advanced, she slipped off hastily and directed her steps, by a short cut through the park, to the Rodmoor railway-station. She had one fixed idea now in her mind — the idea of seeing Adrian and talking with him before any interview was allowed to the others.

She knew that her name and her prestige as the sister of the largest local landowner, would win her at any rate respectful consideration for anything she asked — and everything beyond that she left recklessly in the hands of fate.

Baltazar's death had affected her more than she would herself have supposed possible. She had felt during these last days a sort of malignant envy of her mother, whose attitude towards her friend's loss was so strange and abnormal.

Philippa, with her scarlet lips, her classic flesh, her Circean feverishness, suffered from her close association with this exultant mourner, as some heathen boy robbed of his companion might have suffered from contact with a Christian visionary, for whom death was "far better."

At this moment, however, as she hurried towards the station, it was not of Baltazar, it was of Adrian, and Adrian only, that she thought.

She dismissed the fact of Baptiste's expected arrival with bitter contempt. Let the boy go to Nance if he pleased! After all, it was to herself — much more intimately than to Nance — that Adrian had confided his passionate idealization of his son and his savage craving for him.

Yes, it was to her he had confided this, and it was to her always, and never to Nance, that he spoke of his book and of his secret thoughts. Her *mind* was what Adrian wanted — her mind, her spirit, her imagination. These were things that Nance, with all her feminine ways, was never able to give him.

Why couldn't she tear him from her now and from all these people?

Let these others be afraid of his madness. He was not mad to her. If he were, why then, she too, she who loved him and understood him, was mad!

From the long sloping spaces of the park, as she hurried on, she could see at intervals, through the misty sun-bathed trees, the mouth of the harbour, with its masts and shipping, and, beyond that, the sea itself.

Ah! the sea was the thing that had mingled their souls! The sea was the accomplice of their love!

Yes, he was hers — hers in the heights and the depths — and none of them should tear him from her!

All the whimpering human crowd of them, with their paltry pieties and vulgar prudence — how she would love to strike them down and pass over them — over their upturned staring faces — until he and she were together!

Through the dreamy air, with its floating gossamer-seeds and faint smell of dead leaves, came to her, as she ran on, over the uneven ground, past rabbit-holes and bracken and clumps of furze, the far distant murmur of the waves on the sands. Yes! The sea was what had joined them; and, as long as that sound was in her ears, no power on earth could hold them apart!

She reached the station just in time. It was five minutes to five and the train left at the hour. Philippa secured a first-class ticket for herself and sank down exhausted in the empty compartment.

How long that five minutes seemed!

She was full of a fierce jealous dread lest any of Nance’s friends might be going that very evening to visit the patient.

She listened to the conversation of two lads on the platform near her carriage window. They were speaking of a great bonfire which was to be prepared that day, on the southern side of the harbour, to be set alight the following evening, in honour of the historic Fifth of November. In the tension of her nerves Philippa found herself repeating the quaint lines of the old refrain, associated in her mind with many childish memories.

“Remember, remember
Fifth of November,
Gunpowder Treason and plot.
We know no reason
Why Gunpowder Treason
Should ever be forgot!”

And the question flashed through her mind as to what would have happened by the time that great spire of smoke and flame — she recalled the look of it so well! — rose up and drifted across the water. Would it be the welcoming signal to bring Baptiste to Rodmoor — to Rodmoor and to Adrian?

Two minutes more! She watched the hand upon the station-clock. It was slowly crossing the diminishing strip of white which separated it from the figure of the hour. Oh, these cruel signs, with their murderous moving fingers! Why must Love and Hope and Despair depend upon little patches of vanishing white, between black marks?

Off at last! And she made a little gasping noise in her throat as if she had swallowed that strip of white.

An hour later, as the November darkness was closing in, she passed through the iron gates into the Asylum garden. As she moved in, a small group of inmates of the Asylum, accompanied by a nurse, emerged from a secluded path. It was shadowy and obscure under those heavy trees, but led by the childish curiosity of the demented, these unfortunate persons, instead of obeying their attendant's command, drifted waveringly towards her.

A movement took place among them like that described by Dante in his Inferno as occurring when some single soul, out of a procession of lost spirits, recognizes in the dubious twilight, a living figure from the upper air.

For the moment Philippa wondered if Adrian was among them, but if he was he was given no opportunity to approach her, for the alert guardian of these people, like some Virgilian watcher of ghostly shadows upon the infernal stream, shepherded them away, across the darkened lawn, towards the corner of the building.

The Renshaw name acted like magic when she reached the house. Yes, Mr. Sorio was much better; practically quite himself again, and there was no reason at all why Miss Renshaw should not have an interview with him. A letter had, indeed, only that very afternoon been posted to Miss Herrick, asking her to come up to the place the following day.

Philippa inquired whether her interview with the patient might take the form of a little walk with him, before the hour of their evening meal. This request produced a momentary hesitation on the part of the official to whom she made it, but ultimately — for, after all, Miss Renshaw was the sister of the magistrate who had procured the unhappy man's admission into the place — that too was granted her, on condition that she returned in half-an-hour's time, and did not take her companion into the streets of the town. Having granted her request the Asylum doctor left her in the waiting-room, while he went to fetch her friend.

Philippa sank down upon a plush-covered chair and looked around her. What a horrible room it was! The shabby furniture, covered with gloomy drapery, had an air of sombre complicity with all the tragedies that darkened human life. It was like a room only entered when some one was dead or dying. It was like the ante-room to a cemetery. Everything in it drooped, and seemed anxious to efface itself, as if ashamed to witness the indecent exposures of outraged human thoughts.

They brought Sorio at last, and the man's sunken eyes gleamed with a light of indescribable pleasure when his hand met Philippa's and clutched it with trembling eagerness.

They went out of the room together and moved down the long passage that led to the entrance of the place. As she walked by his side, Philippa experienced the queer sensation of having him as her partner in some diabolic *danse-macabre*, performed to the mingled tune of all the wild "songs of madness" created since the beginning of the world.

She couldn't help noticing that the groups of people they passed on their way had an air quite different from persons in a hospital or even in a prison. They made her think — these miserable ones — of some horrible school for grown-up people; such a school as those who have been ill-used in childhood see sometimes in their dreams.

They seemed to loiter and gather and peer and mutter, as if, "with bated breath and whispering humbleness," they were listening to something that was going on behind closed doors. Philippa got the impression of a horrible atmosphere of *guilt* hanging over the place, as if some dark and awful retribution were being undergone there, for crimes committed against the natural instincts of humanity.

A lean, emaciated old woman came shuffling past them, with elongated neck and outstretched arms. “I’m a camel! I’m a camel! I’m a camel!” Philippa heard her mutter.

Suddenly Adrian laid his hand on her arm. “They let me have my owl in here, Phil,” he said. “We mustn’t go far to-night or it’ll get hungry. It has its supper off my plate. I never told you how I found it, did I? It was pecking at her eyes, you know. Yes, at her eyes! But that’s nothing, is it? She had been dead for weeks, and owls are scavengers, and corpses are carrion!”

They crossed the garden with quick steps.

“How good the air is to-night!” cried Philippa’s companion, throwing back his head and snuffing the leaf-scented darkness.

They were let out through the iron gates and turning instinctively southwards, they wandered slowly down to the river — the girl’s hand resting on the man’s arm.

They passed, on their way, the blackened wall of a disused factory. A blurred and feeble street-lamp threw a flickering light upon this wall. Pasted upon its surface was a staring and coloured advertisement of some insurance company, representing a phoenix surrounded by flames.

Philippa thought at once of the bonfire which was being prepared for the ensuing evening. Would Adrian’s boy really arrive in so short a time? And would Adrian himself, like that grotesque bird, so imperturbable in the midst of its funeral pyre, rise to new life after all this misery? Let it be her — oh, great heavenly powers! — let it be her and not Nance, nor Baptiste, nor any other, who should save him and heal him!

Still looking at the picture on the wall, she repeated to her companion a favourite verse of Mrs. Renshaw’s which she had learnt as a child.

“Death is now the phoenix’ nest
And the turtle’s loyal breast
To eternity doth rest.
“Leaving no posterity,
’Twas not their infirmity,
It was married chastity.”

The rich dirge-like music of these Shakespearian rhymes — placed so quaintly under their strange title of “Threnos,” at the end of the familiar volume — had a soothing influence upon them both at that moment.

It seemed to Philippa as if, by her utterance of them, they both came to share some sad sweet obsequies over the body of something that was neither human nor inhuman, something remote, strange, ineffable, that lay between them, and was of them and yet not of them, like the spirit-corpse of an unborn child.

They reached the bank of the river. The waters of the Loon were high and, through the darkness, a murmur as if composed of a hundred vague whispering voices blending together, rose to their ears from its dark surface.

They moved down close to the river’s edge. A small barge, with its long guiding-pole lying across it, lay moored to the bank. Without a moment’s delay — as if the thing had been prepared in advance to receive him — Adrian jumped into the barge and seized the pole.

“Come!” he said quietly.

She was too reckless and indifferent to everything now, to care greatly what they did; so without a word of protest, or any attempt to turn his purpose, she leapt in after him and settling herself in the stern, seized the heavy wooden rudder.

The tide was running sea-ward, fast and strong, and the barge, pushed vigorously by Adrian’s pole away from the bank, swept forward into the darkness.

Adrian, standing firmly on his feet, continued to hold the pole, his figure looming out of obscurity, tall and commanding.

The tide soon swept them beyond the last houses of the town and out into the open fens.

The night was very still and quite free from wind but a thin veil of mist concealed the stars.

Adrian, letting the pole sink down on the deck of the barge, moved forward to where she sat holding the rudder, and stretched himself out at her feet.

“Will they follow us?” he whispered in a dreamy indifferent voice.

“No, no!” the girl answered. “They’ll never think of this. They’ll wait for us and when we don’t come back, they’ll search the town and the roads. Let’s go on as we are, dearest. What does it matter? What does anything matter?”

She lay back and ran her fingers gently and dreamily over his forehead.

Swiftly and silently the barge swept on, and willows, poplars, weirs, dam-gates, tall reeds and ruined rush-thatched hovels, passed them by, like figures woven out of unreal shadows.

The water gurgled against the sides of the barge and whispered mournfully against the banks, and, as they advanced, the mystery of the night and the brooding silence of the fens received them in a mystic embrace.

A strange deep happiness gradually surged up in Philippa’s heart. She was with the man she loved; she was with the darkness she loved, and the river she loved. The Loon carried them forward, the pitiful friendly Loon, the Loon which had flowed by the dwelling of her race for so many ages; the Loon which had given Baltazar the peace he craved.

Just the faintest tremor of doubt troubled her, the thought that it was towards Nance — towards her rival — that the tide was bearing them; but let come what might come, that hour at least was hers! Not all the world could take that hour from her — and the future? What did the future matter?

As to the brain-sick man himself, who lay at the girl's feet, it were long and hard to tell all the strange dim visions that flowed through his head. He took Philippa's hand in his own and kissed it tenderly but, had the girl known, his thoughts were not of her. They were not even of his son; of the son for whom he had so passionately longed. They were not of any human being. They circled constantly — these thoughts — round a strange vague image, an image moulded of white mists and white vapours and the reflection of white stars in dark waters.

This image, of a shape dim and vast and elemental, seemed to flow upwards from land and sea, and stretch forth towards infinite space. It was an image of something beyond human expression, of something beyond earth-loves and earth-hatreds, beyond life and also beyond death. It was the image of Nothingness; and yet in this Nothingness there was a relief, an escape, a refuge, a beyond-hope, which made all the ways of humanity seem indifferent, all its gods childish, all its dreams vain, and yet offered a large cool draught of "deep and liquid rest" the taste of which set the soul completely free.

Many hours passed thus over their heads, as the tide carried them down towards Rodmoor, round the great sweeping curves made by the Loon, through the stubble-fields and the marshes.

It was, at last, the striking of the side of the barge against one of the arches of the New Bridge, which roused the prostrate man from the trance into which he had fallen.

As soon as they had emerged on the further side of the arch, he leapt to his feet. Bending forward towards Philippa, he pointed with an outstretched arm towards the shadowy houses of Rodmoor which, with here and there a faint light in some high window, could now be discerned through the darkness.

“I smell the sea!” he cried. “I smell the sea! Drift on, Phil, my little one, drift on to the harbour! I must leave you now. We shall meet by the sea, my girl — by the sea in the old way — but I can’t wait now. I must be alone, alone, alone!”

Waving his hand wildly with a gesture of farewell, he clutched at a clump of reeds and sprang out upon the bank. Philippa, letting the barge float on as it pleased, followed him with all the speed she could.

He had secured a considerable start of her, however, and it was all she could do to keep him in sight in the darkness.

He ran first towards the church, but when he reached the path which deviated towards the sand-dunes, he turned sharply eastward. He ran wildly, desperately, with no thought in his whole being but the feeling that he must reach the sea and be alone.

He felt at that moment as though the whole of humanity — loathsome, cancerous, suffocating humanity — were pursuing him with outstretched hands.

Once, as he was mid-way between the church path and the dunes, he turned his head, and catching sight of Philippa’s figure following him, he plunged forward in a fury of panic.

As he crossed the dunes, at this savage pace, something seemed to break in his brain or in his heart. He spat out a mouthful of sweet-tasting blood, and, falling on his knees, fumbled in the loose sand, as if searching for some lost object.

Staggering once more to his feet, and seeing that his pursuer was near, he stumbled wildly down the slope of the dunes and tottered across the sand to the water’s edge.

He was there at last — safe from everything — safe from love and hatred and madness and pity — safe from unspeakable imaginations — safe from himself!

The long dark line of waves broke calmly and indifferently at his feet, and away — away into the eternal night — stretched the vast expanse of the sea, dim, vague, full of inexpressible, infinite reassurance.

He raised both his arms into the air. For one brief miraculous moment his brain became clear and an ecstatic feeling of triumph and unconquerable joy swept through him.

“Baptiste!” he shouted in a shrill vibrating voice, “Baptiste!”

His cry went reverberating over the water. He turned and tried to struggle back. A rush of blood once more filled his mouth. His head grew dizzy.

“Tell Nance that I — that I—” His words died into a choking murmur and he fell heavily on his face on the sand.

He was dead when she reached him. She lifted him gently till he lay on his back and then pressing her hand to his heart, she knew that it was the end.

She sank beside him, bowing her forehead till it touched the ground, and clinging to his neck. After a minute or two she rose, and taking his hand in her own she sat staring into the darkness, with wide-open tearless eyes.

She was “alone with her dead” and nothing mattered any more now.

She remained motionless for several long moments, while over her head something that resembled eternity seemed to pass by, on beautiful, terrible, beating wings.

Then she rose up upon her feet.

“She shall never have him!” she murmured. “She shall never have him!”

She tore from her waist a strongly-woven embroidered cord, the long tassels of which hung down at her side. She dragged the dead man to the very edge of the water. With an incredible effort, she raised him up till he leant, limp and heavy, against her own body.

Then, supporting him with difficulty, and with difficulty keeping herself from sinking under his weight, she twisted the cord round them both, and tied it in a secure knot. Holding him thus before her, with his chin resting on her shoulder, she staggered forward into the water.

It was not easy to advance, and her heart seemed on the point of breaking with the strain. But the savage thought that she was taking him away from Nance — from Nance and from every one — to possess him herself forever, gave her a supernatural strength.

It seemed as though the demon of madness, which had passed from Adrian at the last, and left him free, had entered into her.

If that was indeed the case, it is more than likely that when she fell at last — fell backwards under his weight beneath the waves — it was rather with a mad ecstasy of abandonment that she drank the choking water, than with any hopeless struggle to escape the end she had willed.

Bound tightly together, both by the girl’s clinging arms and by the cord she had fastened round them, the North Sea as it drew back in the outflowing of its tide, carried their bodies forth into the darkness.

Far from land it carried them — under the misty unseeing sky — far from misery and madness, and when the dawn came trembling at last over the restless expanse of water, it found only the white sea-horses and the white sea-birds. Those two had sunk together; out of reach of humanity, out of reach of Rodmoor.

THE END

Ducdame (1925)

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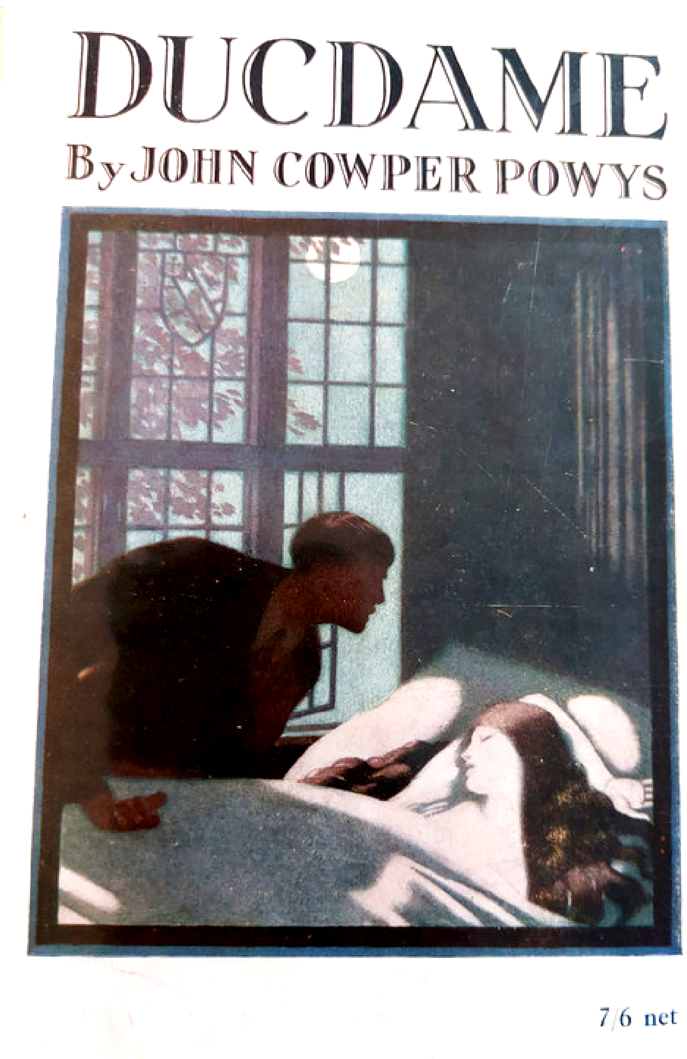

DUCDAME

By JOHN COWPER POWYS

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The first edition

DEDICATED

TO

THAT SUPERIOR MAN

KWANG-TSE OF KHI-YUAN

THE ONLY ONE AMONG PHILOSOPHERS TO BE AT ONCE
RESPECTFUL TO HIS SPIRIT-LIKE ANCESTORS AND INDULGENT
TO THOSE WHO, LIKE THE PROTAGONIST OF THIS BOOK,

GO WHERE THEY ARE PUSHED,
FOLLOW WHERE THEY ARE LED,
LIKE A WHIRING WIND,
LIKE A FEATHER TOSSED ABOUT,
LIKE A REVOLVING GRINDSTONE.

AMI. What’s that “ducdame?”

JAQ. ’Tis a Greek invocation, to call fools into a circle….

ACT II, Scene VI, *As You Like It.*

CHAPTER I

SOME OF THE most significant encounters in the world occur between two persons one of whom is asleep or dead; and it might almost seem as if Rook Ashover had recognized this fact when he found himself standing by Netta Page's side on the night of November's fullest moon. Netta herself, before they went to bed, had drawn the curtain back and pulled up the blind; and she was now lying with her face illuminated and her soul, as it were, exposed. Rook looked at her with fixed intensity, as if he were striving to solve some long-withheld riddle; some riddle to which a night of this kind could alone bring the solution.

The effect of the moonlight on Netta's face was interesting. It was even complicated. It emphasized a certain haggardness, a certain battered, woebegone pitifulness in her; but it also endowed her with a touching and patient dignity.

She had never been beautiful; never even pretty; but as she lay now, with the breath coming evenly through her scarcely parted lips, there was something about her that would have arrested and held the attention of almost any onlooker.

It was perhaps an enduring softness that predominated in that immobile pose; a softness bruised, relaxed, passive; yet resistant, too, and singularly undefeated for all its helplessness. Rook Ashover continued to gaze at her face as it lay thus prostrate before him, unashamed in its unconscious exposure; but his eyes very soon fell to forgetting what he actually saw in the abstraction of his thought.

While he stood there, ready dressed to go out, the hands of the clock behind him pointing at two o'clock, he had the air of an intruder, almost of a stranger. When his thoughts did finally return to the figure in the bed, it was with a cold, remote, detached tenderness; the sort of tenderness that human beings feel in the presence of impersonal humanity.

It was a movement from Netta herself that broke the spell at last. She turned uneasily, as if conscious of his scrutiny, and the expression of her profile pressed against the pillow was less placid than it had been before.

Her movement made Rook vividly aware of the nature of his feelings; and a quick sudden anger against himself rose in his mind. What a fate it was to be made just as he was made, with this inhuman detachment always ready to fall upon him at every turn like a screen of coldly dripping gray-green water!

He left the bedside and walked to the window. The great "branch-charmèd" trees stood out there above the grass, motionless and hushed. The empty white road, the bridge over the river, the wide water meadows beyond the river, all lay before him transformed, etherealized. The liquid luminosity that filled the air seemed to emanate from something remoter and more mysterious than that round silvery disc floating in the high zenith.

Everything seemed insubstantial and dream-like. Shapes and shadows! Shadows and shapes! All the familiar things were distinct enough in that diffused pallor. But they seemed to him withdrawn, remote, intangible; as if he were regarding them from some solitary tower.

Rook Ashover stared across the fields as he had stared a moment before at the face of the woman.

The cold unearthliness of what he now saw found its response in what was occurring in his own mind, a response that went far to obliterate his self-contempt.

Out over those moonlit fields his spirit wandered, out over the very brim, as it seemed, of our floating earth globe, thus rendered transparent and unsolid, out over the vast aërial gulfs beyond.

Between his soul and all this enchanted spaciousness there arose a reciprocity he could not analyze, a feeling that had the irresponsibility of despair and yet was not despair, that resembled loneliness and yet was not loneliness. It was almost as if, just behind all this etherealized chemistry, there really did exist something corresponding to the old Platonic idea of a universe composed of mind-stuff, of mind-forms, rarer and more beautiful than the visible world.

He left the window and stepping back to the bedside bent with exquisite precaution over the sleeper, touched her up-flung arm very gently with his lips; and then, opening and shutting the door as noiselessly as he could, ran hurriedly down the stairs and let himself out of the house.

Certain portions of the earth's surface seem, from the remotest past, to have responded in some particularly intense way to the influence of moonlight.

Among these predestined localities the strip of road and river and meadowland surrounding Ashover Bridge was one of the most susceptible of all planetary spots to the lunar sorcery.

This double-arched bridge, built of rough local stone, carries one of Dorsetshire's most traditional highways over the river Frome, at the point where Ashover Church on the one bank, and Ashover House on the other bank, give the place its historic significance. The bridge represents, for those who are travelling southward, the near approach of the parting of the ways between Tollminster and Bishop's Forley; but the milestone against the ditch opposite Rook Ashover's gate informs the traveller of the distance to London itself.

It was at this milestone that Rook glanced now.

London? The word had almost ceased to have any significance to him; though from his childhood it had touched that riverside road with a curious magic.

Arrived at the bridge he walked to the centre of it and leaned over the parapet.

It was hand not to feel as though this familiar stonework were strange and insubstantial under the indrawn breath of that immense silence.

The water itself as it swirled and eddied under the arches seemed to flow with a muted movement, as if it were not real water but phantom water.

It grew real enough, however, even as he watched it; for a great perch, at the bottom of what they called Saunders’ Hole, rose suddenly to the surface with a splash that made Rook start.

To that big fish, too, it must have seemed as if there were more in this November night than a mere ordinary lapse of hours and moments.

Down to the depths of Saunders’ Hole it sank again; and there, where the man’s glance could not follow it, it moved rapidly to and fro as if under some lunar ecstasy; sometimes with great open mouth and huge iridescent gills turned upstream it lashed the water; sometimes with its sharp spine fins erect and its tail quivering it dug furiously at the river bed.

Leaning his elbows against the parapet Rook let his gaze wander from point to point of that well-known landscape. It was the same and yet how different!

To his left, as he overlooked Saunders’ Hole, rose the square tower of Ashover Church, isolated among the water meadows.

Round the base of the tower he could make out a shimmering group of white objects, objects more congruous with the moonlight than they were with anything else in the world, except certain drifting gusts of gray slanting rain that came up with the west wind.

Among these tombstones of the generations Rook could distinguish even at this distance the one under which his father had been buried five years before.

All the rest of his house, from his grandfather back to Lord Roger, the Crusader, were very gently, century by century, becoming less and less distinguishable from the mouse-coloured dust that lay between the chancel slabs.

Turning to his right, away from the river, he could make Out with hardly less difficulty the shadowy masonry of the house he had just left, standing in the midst of its ghostly lawn, between the branches of its two great trees.

Those trees looked more monumental than the house itself as he surveyed them now — especially the cedar. That was the tree he had had such trouble climbing as a young boy. He remembered how his grandfather — the one whose bones must still be intact, the bones of a life-weary octogenarian amid that mouse-coloured dust — had been forced to put a ladder to its trunk to bring him down.

The other tree was a lime, half of whose leaves had already drifted across the road into the ditch behind the milestone. But *that* tree Rook associated with later happenings, and all hurriedly, for he was loth to change his mood, he surveyed the house; the house of which he was himself the twenty-first possessor, as the guide books proudly put it, in the direct male line.

Ashover House had been a small house in the 13th Century. In the 17th it had been a spacious one. Now in the 20th Century it was a small house again; the mediæval buttresses, the Tudor staircase, the Jacobean doorway, the Inigo Jones ceiling being the only portions of it that witnessed to its former dignity. For the rest it was a little, old-fashioned, lichen-covered building, dominated by two gigantic trees.

But small as it was, it had its own mysterious pathos to Rook as he watched it, so hushed and motionless there. Beyond the house his eyes followed the familiar kitchen garden with its high brick walls and well-kept out-houses. And beyond that, too, he looked; to where the trunks of the old apple trees weaving their twisted shadows on the long grass led to the thorn hedge where the yellow-hammers always nested; led beyond that to the rough sloping pasture, thick with mysterious knolls and hollows, which they called Battlefield; led, finally, to the high sentinel row of gaunt Scotch firs that guarded the top of Heron's Ridge.

Ragged, yet monumental, desperate in their abandoned gestures, yet sternly taciturn in their rooted immobility, these pine trees had been the background of his imagination as long as he could remember.

He turned away from them now with a sigh of unconscious distress, and, swinging clear round, gave himself up to the opposite quarter of that transfigured landscape.

Here he followed the road as it left the church gate and stretched away over the fields and ditches. There was a mile of it before one came to the hamlet, a mile of mud and reeds and floods and marsh fowl, out of the midst of which rose a second bridge across the river, a wooden one with white railings.

It was the forlornness of this unusual approach as much as the sturdy compactness of the place itself that made whatever view one got of Ashover village a thing extremely sensitive to atmospheric conditions, responsive to every varying shift of wind and weather.

At this particular hour its little mass of roofs and walls presented the appearance of a miniature city in some old steel engraving. Rook stared at it in half-ashamed sadness. How little he really knew, he to whom the place had given its name, of the actual thoughts, of the actual dramas, that went on under those projecting eaves and contorted chimneys!

Splash! An enormous water rat dived down from the bank into Saunders' Hole and proceeded to swim across the river.

Rook watched its course with curious interest, noting its sublime imperviousness to everything in the world except its immediate purpose.

There was something about the illuminated ripples that extended behind it, as it swam, that seemed in some way symbolical of all planetary movement. Vivid as quicksilver those ripples flashed, until the shadow of the bridge blotted them out!

No sooner had the rat reached its goal and vanished in the reeds than the great perch splashed out once more into the moonlight and sank, leaving a new circle of silver ripples, to live for a transitory moment.

Tired of seeing nothing but these reflected evidences of her power, Ashover leaned back against the stone coping of the bridge and stared up at the great luminary herself. Those queer hieroglyphs written across her face seemed as if they were on the point of revealing, to him alone of all the tribes of men, some incredible world secret. The immense silver disc grew nearer and larger and brighter as he gazed at it. It ceased to be a mere satellite of the earth, a mere mirror of an invisible sun. It became a round illuminated lake that drew him toward it, that drew him into it. The blue-black sky around it became a sloping, slippery shore, that held no ledge, no crevice, to which he could cling; nothing to break the swift, fatal, final slide into that magnetic gulf!

His neck grew stiff from the way in which he had twisted himself backward. But his fingers did not relax their hold on the stone coping. If some nocturnal bird had been circling above him the creature might easily have mistaken his face for dome inanimate piece of whiteness, set up there as a mark in the night.

Still he remained motionless, spellbound, ensorcerized; and between the white face looking downward and the white face looking upward a strange correspondency established itself.

The spell was broken for him at last by the sound of feet upon the road. The footsteps were distant, but the silence of the hour caused them to be to him as though they were a few paces off. Rook crossed the bridge to the farther side and scrutinized the road that led to the village.

He had not long to wait. Emerging from the shadow of the clump of alders that hid the weir dam, where the sheep-washing pool was, came the figure of a man. The figure advanced in a way peculiar to itself. It advanced with difficulty, with a laboured, shuffling, dragging movement, and yet it advanced hurriedly and with a fixed intent. Rook remembered the unswerving preoccupation of the swimming rat.

The concentrated shuffle of his brother's feet, the monotonous tap of his brother's stick, had something about them that was primitive, subhuman, animal. They suggested the presence of an inbitten bodily hurt, the overcoming of which had become automatic, but could never become easy.

With rapid strides the elder brother hurried to meet the younger. They met at the church gate.

What Lexie Ashover saw was a tall, dark, massive-featured personage, bony rather than thin, clumsy rather than powerful, whose predominant facial expression was a sort of sullen, puzzled abstraction.

What Rook saw was an emaciated figure whose large fair head, covered with thick curly hair and out of all proportion to the leanness of his person, had been moulded, in some fit of divine whimsicality, into a startling resemblance to the well-known portrait bust of the Emperor Claudius.

Both brothers were bareheaded. Both were lifted at that moment above their ordinary level of feeling. But the excitement that was agitating them took in Rook the form of morose abruptness; in Lexie the form of nervous volubility.

It was a peculiarity of these two to display their affection for each other with a shameless freedom. They kissed each other now in the middle of the moonlit road as if they had been agitated conspirators, sealing some covenant of fatal complicity.

With his fingers twitching nervously at his brother's overcoat, Lexie began talking in a hurried eager voice, as if someone or something at any moment might interrupt him.

"I saw Nell last night; here at this very spot. Our priestly friend had stayed inside the church for some reason; and she had wandered out and was waiting for him just here. Rook, I know I'm right in what I told you about her. She's unhappy. She's very unhappy."

The elder Ashover's gaze transferred itself from his brother's face to the wall of the churchyard. "Unhappy," he repeated after a pause, and the word sounded like the splash of a stone that someone had thrown into a deep well.

"But, Rook, what a girl she is! What a girl! She feels things with her whole body. Do you know what I mean? She *thinks* with her body."

Rook turned his head still farther away.

"The brain is better for that," he muttered; but Lexie went on:

"I believe she's reached the point of absolute hatred for him. And shall I tell you what has done it? It's that book of his — that book." His brother emitted a sound that might have been a chuckle or a groan. "That book — —" repeated Lexie. But the other remained silent.

"What do you do to all these women, Rook, to make them so fond of you? The thing's getting ridiculous. There's Cousin Ann — well! We all know what she and Mother are up to! And now it seems as if I've only to mention your name to Nell and she jumps out of her skin. Do you know what she said? She said you had a perfect right to live with Netta if you wanted to; and that it was outrageous of people to make such a fuss. She trembled all over like a bit of quaking grass when she talked about it."

Rook Ashover made no reply of any kind to this. His face grew hard. But Lexie rambled on without the least embarrassment.

"It's no use beating about the bush any more, Rook. You've got yourself into a pretty bloody predicament. No one can possibly tell what the upshot will be."

The elder man's sullenness did melt at this.

"The upshot will be that you and I will be the last of the Ashovers," he remarked grimly.

Lexie's resemblance to the least heroic of the Cæsars became strikingly marked.

"Mother hasn't said anything more, has she?" he enquired anxiously. "God! It was awful when she actually talked of you and Netta before Ann. Rook, tell me. Would you send Netta away and marry Ann if *I* went over to the enemy? Or would you hold out even against *me?"*

His brother seemed to regard this question as unworthy of any serious answer. He simply disregarded it.

"You're sure you do right in risking these walks, my dear?" He touched Lexie's forehead as he spoke and ran his fingers through the young man's thick hair as if he had been a woman.

"I can't help feeling," he went on, "that you *may,* after all, be sacrificing everything by not doing what that doctor said. As long as we're together you'll always be tempted to go beyond your strength; and I'm the worst person in the world for the business of reminding you. I can't realize things as I ought. I forget so."

Lexie had begun fumbling once more with one of the buttonholes of his brother's overcoat; but he dropped his hand now.

"I'm as fit as a badger in Field-Cover!" he cried. "It's when you talk like that — —"

The malignant mechanism of chance stopped the words in his mouth.

He swayed a little and bent his head, poking automatically with his stick at the mud under his feet which showed faint traces of frost marks.

Rook clutched at his shoulder.

"Lexie, don't! Lexie, what is it? You're not going to faint, are you?"

But the young man had already gained his composure.

"Let's go into the churchyard," he said, taking his brother's arm.

They moved together through the gate and followed the path that led to the base of the tower.

"Do sit down for a bit," pleaded Rook. "It frightens me when you get like that."

"Here? Near the old man?" and Lexie made a scarcely perceptible grimace in the direction of their father's grave.

"Yes; here."

And they sat down side by side on a flat tombstone, the name and date of which had been obliterated by many Novembers.

The rank autumnal grass in the uncut portion of the enclosure rose before them in the moonlight or lay in tangled swathes on the ground like the uncombed hair of a titanic skull.

The bent stems and rain-battered leaves of the hedge parsley that grew where the graves ended resembled now an enchanted Lilliputian forest through which some fairy beasts had trampled, leaving it outraged and desolate.

There was only one tree in that portion of the churchyard, a very old elm, lopped and beheaded and almost leafless, but with a trunk of such sturdy proportions and so deeply indented that it resembled the torso of a gigantic pillar, half buried in the earth but still bearing witness to its old obscure importance.

The two men contemplated this colossal relic, their attention drawn to it by a low sound that suddenly emerged from its headless jagged top and died away.

"Do you hear?" whispered Lexie. "What's that? There's no wind. There's something alive up there."

They both listened intently but the sound was not repeated.

"It's queer to think of these women — Nell, Netta, Cousin Ann, and our mother — all lying in their beds in the moonlight and all agitated in some way over you."

"Damn you, Lexie! Why over me? Why the devil not over *you?* With all this refusing to do what Twickenham tells you and all this walking too far, there's enough in your goings-on to keep every one of us awake at night."

He had hardly spoken the words when, with a wild tumbling of soft feathery wings, a couple of brown owls flew out of the headless tree. One flew straight across the water meadows; while the other, swinging round and rising over the heads of the two men, vanished behind the masonry of the tower.

"Netta is absurd about owls," said Rook. "She says that she must have been a field mouse once and owls ate her. I tell her that she was much more likely a great stoat who ate little owls. What are you laughing at, you devil? I suppose you think Netta hasn't the brain of a sparrow? And you think she can’t appreciate the country? And you think. I’m making an absolute idiot of myself by having her here?”

“We needn’t go into all that now,” responded Lexie. “Have a cigarette?” And with a series of movements that were concentrated in their punctiliousness he proceeded to light a match.

Rook shook his head. But he watched with curious interest the tiny Promethean flame lift up its eternal living protest between cold moonlight and cold mortality.

They were both silent for a space. Then Lexie suddenly uttered the words: “The left side would be better than the right.”

Rook stared blankly at the little rings of smoke that followed one another into the phantasmal air.

“What on earth are you talking about? What left side?”

Lexie deposited a carefully preserved ash end upon the stone between them, where the little gray heap lay undisturbed, like the excrement of a wandering moon moth.

“Of the tree, brother Rook,” he said, contorting the imperial ruggedness of his face into one of his humorous grimaces; “of the tree. And don’t let the matter pass out of your forgetful mind! Mother’s sure to want to bury me over there by the old man. And I don’t want to be buried there. I want to be on the left side of the tree. Only for the Lord’s sake let me lie deep. You know what elms are! It’s one of those funny tricks of Nature; like the throats of whales. Monstrous trunks; and then silly little tendrils hardly bigger than turf-roots. I don’t want to be exposed, brother Rook. So get that fixed in your mind. The left side of the tree; and *seven* feet down!”

The voice of the sick man died away into space; just as, a little while before, the fluttering of the owls had died away. Both sounds were now travelling, at a rate measurable to science, toward the moon. If the vibration of them survived the loss of the earth’s atmosphere it would soon be reaching a point from which, if sounds had sight, the other side of the moon would be visible!

Some such fantasy as this passed obscurely through Rook’s mind as he delayed his response.

In his abstracted fashion he sent his soul wandering over the wide expanse of water meadows, intersected by reedy ditches, which lay beyond the low wall of the churchyard.

He could actually feel the chill of those cold fields, of those flooded ditches, as if his mind had the power of carrying his senses with it on such a voyage. He seemed to himself to become a moving nebulous shadow, acting as sentinel to the very floor of silence upon which the world is built.

What he felt most conscious of at that moment was not the menace of mortality by which his brother was threatened, but the indrawn breath of multitudes upon multitudes of grass blades, full of the pallid greenish sap of that late season, that seemed answering the attraction of the moon with a conscious answer; just as the vast swaying sea growths are said to do under their fathoms of salt water.

“Why do you keep harping upon death?” he said at last. “Lots of people with your particular trouble live for years and years. You’ll probably see *me* buried by the side of the old man long before they disturb the roots of your elm for you.”

Lexie looked at him with the peculiar look that death-threatened people have in the presence of the ultimate treachery. The luminousness that surrounded them made it impossible that Rook could miss that look — a look that begged and pleaded, a look that howled, like a dog driven to its kennel.

"This is my last November," the look said, "and I love every moment of every hour of life!"

"Can't you see that I am sinking into absolute loneliness?" the look said. "Hold me! Clutch me! Save me!"

Rook glanced at his brother; saw the look; but still continued to allow his soul to wander over the fields. He wanted his brother to die least of all things in the world. He could not imagine life without him. And yet in some mysterious way, just because of the ghastly threat to the bond between them, he experienced an actual enhancing of the beauty of that night.

Something in the depths of his nature gathered itself together under his brother's words, focussed itself, roused itself to a strange pitch of exaltation. The white tombstones, the headless tree, the motionless shadow of the tower, the spellbound meadows, became so beautiful to him that death itself seemed hardly less beautiful.

Those pastures seemed to stretch away and away, until they crossed the borderline between death and life. They seemed to reach out to something dim and vague and wonderful; to some unearthly ghost garden, far from all human troubling, where nothing but solemn milk-white cattle moved up and down through a pearl-gray mist, licking every now and then with great languid tongues the drooping rims of huge moon mushrooms.

There must have been a long silence between the two brothers just then; for when Rook returned to himself it seemed that it was across an immeasurable gulf that his own last words returned to him.

By one of the quick simultaneous movements of thought that often occurred between them when they were alone together they both fixed their eyes upon their father's grave.

It was Lexie who finally put into words the thing that was in their minds.

“The old man won’t like it if we’re the last of his race. But I suppose that’s nothing to you, Rook.”

The face of the elder Ashover certainly did not at that moment suggest the passion of piety. Never had it worn more obstinately its characteristic look of truculent abstraction.

But Lexie was undeterred.

“Are you absolutely certain,” he said, “that Netta can’t have a child?”

Rook nodded.

“You’d marry her, of course, if she did?”

“I suppose so.”

“And nothing any of us can do or say will ever make you get rid of her?”

Rook shook his head.

“Well, for God’s sake, let’s tell the old gentlemen inside that the family’s done for, and see what *they* say!”

Lexie rose to his feet as he spoke and, hobbling between the graves, passed into the shadow of the tower.

Rook came slowly after him. There was an illusory chilliness within the shadow that gave to both men the sensation of crossing the mouth of a sepulchre. And in very definite sense this building *was* the sepulchre of their people.

They moved round to the south side of the church and followed the wall till they reached the east end. Then stepping close up to an unstained widow they peered straight into the chancel.

The moonlight streaming in behind them threw its ghostly light on everything there. The little church looked as if it had been illuminated for some nocturnal office.

The Norman arch, the carved mediæval niches, the brass lectern, the tall Puritan pulpit, seemed all of them emphatically conscious of some invisible ceremony. Was it an unending platonic dialogue they listened to, between nothingness and the dust of the generations? or did the living souls of all the animate creatures that were asleep just then — men and women under their blankets, cattle under their hurdles, wild fowl under their marsh reeds — gather together "on such a night as this," a queer, twittering, bleating, weeping, bodiless crowd, *animulæ, vagulæ, blandulæ,* and hold a secular consistory above those cold slabs?

There, at any rate, they all lay, the Ashovers of Ashover! Their two descendants, the fair one and the dark one, pressed their foreheads very close to the window and surveyed the well-known marble images and the brass inscriptions on the stone floor.

The most imposing effigy of them all was that of Benjamin Ashover, the 18th-century Deist, the friend of Voltaire.

The mortuary grandeur of this sturdy infidel threw all the rest into the shade. Clumsy classical cupids, with less resemblance to cherubs than to wine bottles, supported the plump pillow on which rested the well-shaped, supercilious head; nor could anything exceed the patronizing complacency with which this bewigged unbeliever contemplated his present surroundings!

Very different was the expression of Sir Robert Ashover, the cavalier victim of Oliver Cromwell.

Wistful and indignant, in lace collar and embroidered coat, this defender of old illusions stared out of his marble frame with an expression of melancholy surprise at the lack of gentlemanliness, or even of common decency, in "the ways of God to Man."

More different still from the philosopher's smirk was the impenetrable aloofness, stern and forbidding, of Lord Roger of Ashover, the Crusader.

With his mailed hands crossed, with his hound at his feet, with his unsheathed sword at his side, Lord Roger looked like a man-at-arms of Eternity, deep asleep, while the armies of Time trampled past him.

“*E la sua volontate è nostra pace,”* his lips seemed to say under his pointed beard!

Rook and Lexie drew back together from the window and returned in silence to the gravel path that led to the gate.

Once outside in the road they both became conscious that the luminous mystery above them had worked some kind of sorcery upon their nerves, had vampirized in some perceptible way their life energy.

Every grass blade, every tree trunk, every gatepost, was still floating in a lovely transparent liquid trance.

But when the two men had parted from each other, and Rook, pausing on the bridge to listen to his brother’s dragging footsteps and tapping stick, had become suddenly conscious that there was an alteration in the feel of the air, the echo of Lexie’s final words returned to him.

“She has never been really friendly to the human race. Never really friendly! It’s a shame we can’t wait here together, brother Rook, until we can smell the dawn!”

CHAPTER II

THE RAIN LASHED against the window panes of the dining room of Ashover House. Netta Page sat facing the window in a tall straight-backed chair.

She had finished her breakfast. She sat with her chin on her hands, her elbows on the table, her eyes staring in front of her.

There were no other people in the room. Rook and Lady Ann had breakfasted together earlier. Mrs. Ashover never appeared till midday. The same situation had repeated itself many times already; and these lonely morning meals were by no means distasteful to Netta.

As she sat now in that straight-backed chair her eyes were fixed steadily on the rain; but her thoughts were focussed on the figure of a little old lady in a black satin dress who had just passed her on the staircase.

It was not a nice experience to be looked through as if you were transparent and as if the balustrade on the other side of your body were requiring a new coat of paint; but it was a still more unpleasant sensation to be given a glance that resembled a sharp stinging smack on the cheek; and Netta, in recalling these incidents, was conscious that her resentment at them was something new; was something different from the weary habitual patience into which the buffets of life had beaten her.

But this sort of thing had been going on for a year; and she still could be quite happy at certain moments.

Not one single time, since Rook had brought her to the house, had Mrs. Ashover spoken to her, or smiled at her, or eaten at the same table with her.

The servants, too, old-fashioned and eccentric, had taken their cue from the old lady and had missed no opportunity of making the intruder feel her position.

Well! *that*, at any rate, was quite different now. The appearance of Cousin Ann upon the scene had changed all that. Netta did not quite understand Cousin Ann's kindness. But, on the other hand, she did not suspect it of any hidden treachery. She just accepted it as she had accepted so much else. And it certainly had made the whole difference as far as the servants were concerned. Lady Ann could not apparently coax Mrs. Ashover into a different mood; but she had forced her to retreat from position after position of overt contempt, and she had cast such a spell over the rest of the household that the girl no longer went to and fro among them like a convicted criminal.

Everybody in the place had felt the new influence. The worst of the village gossips, when they saw the daughter of Lord Poynings grow friendlier and friendlier with "the kept woman," had begun to wonder if it wouldn't after all result in Master Rook's marrying "the poor harmless body."

Even that formidable entity "the neighbourhood" showed signs of a certain restlessness under its own verdict. It was one thing to punish the impoverished Ashovers. It was another thing to be denied the pleasure of meeting Ann Wentworth Gore.

A tentative gesture, however, which was made from a certain quarter to propitiate Lady Ann without relaxing the proprieties, met with such an annihilating rebuff that it would have needed a bolder person than any who lived just then on the banks of the Frome to repeat that offence. The Ashover family was therefore left in peace to work out its own destiny.

Many other images besides those of the ungracious old lady and the friendly young one rose between Netta and the streaming window panes that November morning.

Rain more than anything else in the world carries the mind back to early associations, and Netta saw herself as a little girl in a starched pinafore watching it beat on the roof of the Black Dog at Portsmouth.

She saw herself as an overworked barmaid at the King George in Southampton, watching it turn the little stone gutter into a turbid flood.

She saw herself as the ambiguously protected “niece” of Major-General Sir James Carton watching it drip, drip, drip from a Hammersmith waterspout upon a galvanized-iron roof.

She saw herself as a second-rate actress in a second-rate stock company watching it from the common dressing room as it changed the colour from yellow ochre to rusty brown of a Bristol alley wall.

She saw herself in a boat at Abingdon, watching it leap up in a million tiny water tongues from the surface of the great smooth river, the day when a Guy’s Hospital student took her to Pangbourne. She could feel at that very moment the touch of his young feverish hand upon her body. She could hear the harsh-throated sedge warblers chattering in the reeds.

Netta loved these solitary interludes in the Ashover dining room.

She could dream things there and tell herself stories there, untroubled by any agitation. She could even think without hopeless regret of that rash proceeding that had for ever ruined her chance of having a child. She could even try to imagine what sort of child Rook and she would have had if things had been different!

So far off and so soothingly vague were Netta’s thoughts that morning that she scarcely turned in her chair when Pandie, the red-haired housemaid, came in to set light to the fire.

“No, you’ll never see no rain like our rain, miss, in all the countries you do travel through! ‘Tain’t in nature that water should fall from dry clouds same as from wet clouds, and there aren’t no clouds this side of Salisbury Plain so wet as ours!”

Thanks to Cousin Ann, Pandie was always affable now; and the sound of her voice and the look of her sturdy broad back bent over the coals filled Netta with a delicious feeling of security.

Oh, how often in former times she had longed to be at once thoroughly idle and thoroughly respectable!

It was her craving for this particular combination that had betrayed her into the Major-General episode, the single one of all her experiences that she would have liked blotted completely out of her memory.

“I like your rain very much,” she said softly. “Were you born in Ashover, Pandie?”

“Me, miss? Me, mum? The Lord love us! No, mum. I were born down Somerset-way atween Tarnton and Durston. ’Twas fresh water, too, where Father lived. But ‘tweren’t Frome-water. ’Twas Parret-water; and there were big willow trees over’n and terrible black mud under’n. Corpses themselves would turn to water where I was born, miss; but that’s not saying anything against these parts.”

When Pandie was gone the crackling of the newly lit sticks increased Netta’s content.

The effect of rain-lashed windows was to give to the light that filled the room a curious atmospheric quality; a quality that roused in the woman who sat there an indefinable feeling connected with a mysterious dream she had sometimes, the exact outlines of which, though repeated again and again, she invariably lost.

What the rain really did was to throw a greenish-gray shadow into the room, a shadow that was broken at this moment by spurts and splashes of redness coming from the grate.

She drank her remaining cup of tea in quick little sips, holding up the cup with a certain nonchalant air as she had seen Cousin Ann do, the little finger stiffly extended, the elbow resting on the table.

Over the fireplace was a portrait of Sir Robert Ashover, the unfortunate Cavalier; and the sad eyes and melancholy forehead of this picture met her gaze with penetrating sympathy.

From the very first she had taken a fancy to Sir Robert. She loved his carefully combed curls and his dreamy sensuous lips. She looked at him now with renewed reassurance. He was certainly the last person in the world to will any harm to a poor girl.

She found herself on the point of wishing that Rook was more like Sir Robert and less like his mother.

But Rook had something in him that separated him from all of them; from her most of all.

Oh, dear! She hurriedly jerked up her consciousness, like an entangled fishing line, out of *that* trouble; and threw it again, with a clear fresh swing, into less weedy waters.

How wonderful it was to be free from worry.

She had worried a great deal when she first came to this place. She wondered what her Bristol friends, Madge and Minnie, would feel if they were in her shoes.

She smiled to herself as she thought of such a possibility. They would be miserable. They would be pining for shops and picture houses and “boys.” Why was it she didn’t crave for any of these things? Minnie and Madge had always said she was a “funny one,” and she supposed they were right. She remembered how even Rook had expressed surprise that she could go on like this, month after month, doing nothing at all and wanting nothing at all.

Cousin Ann was the only person who never seemed to get annoyed with her. It did not appear to aggravate Cousin Ann when she wanted to read stories in her bedroom instead of walking through the mud and rain. The young lady even chose books for her, just the ones she liked best, out of the jumble of volumes that filled the house.

Thinking of Cousin Ann she rose from her chair and went out into the hall.

Here she stood for a moment, very still and quiet, listening to the wind and to the voice of Pandie talking in the kitchen.

Then she gave a little jerk to one of her sleeves, glanced at her feet to see that her stockings were unruffled, and opening the door with rather a deprecatory softness, went into the drawing room.

Lady Ann was standing at a large rosewood table which she had covered with newspapers. On the table was a great rain-drenched heap of chrysanthemums, laurustinus, and a few marigolds, together with the wet leaves of certain other plants. Lady Ann was engaged in shaking the water out of these flowers and in arranging them in a row of tall vases.

She welcomed Netta with affectionate gravity, as one priestess might welcome another when engaged in something which implied an hieratic freemasonry.

Nor was their background at that moment unworthy of them. The chairs and sofas of the chilly room wore a kind of grand ghostliness in their chintz covers. They seemed to survey these two warm-blooded persons like so many wistful defunct nuns. The stately ornaments on the chimney-piece were all white and gilt; the landscapes on the walls were all in pale water colour or pastel. The whole room had the look of something that accepted

Time and Change and Death as its lords and masters and yet refused to yield one inch of its own dignity and ceremoniousness.

Neither Lady Ann nor Netta spoke much as they went on with their work but they were both obviously very happy in what they were doing. Indeed, as they laughed and spread out fresh paper on the table and poured water from one vase to another one and arranged the cut stalks and the pungent-smelling leaves, it was as if all individual difference between them dropped away; while two depersonalized figures, as in some old faded print entitled "Women Arranging Flowers," substituted themselves for the real Ann Gore and the real Netta Page.

"Rook says that Lexie isn't so well."

These words, as soon as Netta had uttered them, sounded to her ears as if she had heard them long before, spoken by someone else.

Cousin Ann stared at her in obvious surprise.

"He didn't tell me that this morning," she said. "But of course he may have been too worried to talk about it."

She was silent for a moment, her large gray eyes staring in front of her, her full lips parted, her rounded chin raised.

Then with a sudden almost childish gesture of excitement: "Listen, Netta, I've got an idea. Let's go round there now, this very moment. Let's take him some of these flowers."

The blank look with which the older woman received this suggestion and her glance at the windows increased Cousin Ann's excitement.

"Yes, yes, yes," she cried. "That's what we'll do! We'll surprise him. There's heaps of time. I'll lend you my mackintosh and take my plaid cloak. Oh, you dear, how funny and frightened you look, Come on. I'll get Pandie to clear these things away. No, no. Of course I can't go alone. Oh, you dear thing. I do adore you when you look so scared."

In her impetuosity the young girl seized Netta's head between her hands and kissed her on the forehead. Then she dragged her out of the room and up the historic staircase.

The road between Ashover Church and Ashover village lay east and west. Between it and the water meadows there was nothing but a stretch of low white railings. Halfway to the village the road crossed a narrow wooden bridge where the river turned sharply to the south.

It was a road that had a distinct character of its own and no reforming county council had yet dared to meddle with that character.

The flooded ruts into which the two women kept stumbling might have been indented by the wagon wheels of Cromwell; and the rough ditch-side grass, now beaten flat by the weather, might have fed the flocks of Wolsey.

Cousin Ann's excitement seemed rather to increase than to diminish. Her thick boots and stockings kept her feet dry; while the water streaming down her cheeks heightened her eager colour.

Netta, on the contrary, was conscious that her feet were miserably wet, that the draggled ends of her hair were hanging loose, and that the rain was finding its way down her very neck behind the collar of her mackintosh.

Dead yellow leaves whirled past them as they struggled on. The willows bowed down toward the alders. The alders bent desolately toward the reeds. The reeds crouched and shuddered until they touched the surface of the swollen ditches. Tossed wildly on the rain came flocks of starlings, their awkward bodies carried up and down by the wind, their wings beating aimlessly.

The women arrived at last at the cottage of the Vicar of Ashover, a little whitewashed two-story building close to the road, where in former times had stood the turnpike toll-gate.

Lady Ann hesitated here a moment, pulling her cloak closer round herself and adjusting the mackintosh of her companion. She had made Netta wear a cloth cap of Rook's and the miserable patience of the rain-drenched face beneath it struck her now with a little twinge of remorse.

They were on the point of moving forward again when the door of the cottage opened and the figure of a young girl presented itself in the doorway.

"I saw you through the window," said this apparition in a voice so faint that the words hardly reached them. "Come in, won't you? Come in, please!"

They made their way through the tiny garden and entered the house.

Nell took them into her own sitting room and placed them on the sofa opposite the fire. She persuaded Netta to take off her shoes and hold her feet to the blaze.

They spoke of Lexie, how mysterious his illness was and how unwisely he treated himself, taking long exhausting walks when the one thing the doctor implored him to avoid was that kind of exertion.

And then quite suddenly, as she sat on a little stool by the side of the hearth, the visitors became aware that the girl was trembling from head to foot.

Shivering convulsive tremors ran through her slim frame. Her small head, whose wavy light-brown hair framed a face as shell-like in its transparency as an old miniature, straightened itself stiffly on its slender neck as if to defy some mortal weakness.

"What is it?" murmured Cousin Ann, laying her wet gloved hand on the young woman's knee.

The sympathetic voice and touch seemed to alarm the girl rather than quiet her. Curious twitching lines appeared on her face; and her mouth, which normally had a piteous twist, began to resemble the mouth of an unhappy little gargoyle.

She rose from her seat, biting her under lip, clenching her fingers in the palms of her hands, and stood by the mantelpiece.

Lady Ann also rose and for a moment remained hesitating. Netta, who kept glancing timidly from one to another as she stretched her feet nearer and nearer to the fire, was vaguely struck by something brusque and blundering in her friend’s movement. She became conscious of a wish that Cousin Ann would turn her steady glance away from that troubled figure; and behind that wish she found herself feeling a faint, a very faint hostility to her dear friend.

Lady Ann had never looked more competent, more high-spirited, more kind. She seemed on the point of making some pronounced sympathetic gesture, perhaps even of taking the hysterical girl in her arms. Netta had a feeble inclination to cry out: “Let her alone! let her alone!” But all she could do was to wish herself out in the rain again, out in the road, in the fields, in the middle of Hangdown Cover; out anywhere, so as not to see — she couldn’t tell quite what!

Thank Heaven! The door opened just then and the Vicar of Ashover entered. Netta had not been able yet to make up her mind whether she liked William Hastings or disliked him. He made her think of a picture of Napoleon that hung in the Major-General’s bathroom and *that* association was horrible. But he also made her think of Monseigneur Tallainton, the little old French priest of the Catholic church in Bristol; and that association endeared him to her. She liked something compact and weighty about his rather corpulent body, and she liked his hands, which were very small and very white. It was a certain suppressed passion in his face which puzzled her and disturbed her. It was like a ship with its decks covered with great dark guns coming down upon her out of the mist.

The Vicar shook hands cordially with Cousin Ann and bending quickly over Netta herself prevented her from rising. It was while he was doing this that his young wife slipped silently around the outside of the group and escaped from the room.

It was not till after the conversation had begun that the girl's disappearance was noticed.

"Yes, I'm afraid she was upset by something," said Lady Ann, catching the Vicar's eye as it roved from Netta's outstretched feet to her cloth cap.

"It's the weather," said William Hastings. "She is always like this when it rains. Nell hates the rain."

"I think it was more than *that,* Mr. Hastings," said Lady Ann gravely. "But it's a pity the climate doesn't suit her, if you're going on living here."

"Dorsetshire suits us better than any other place when the wind's not in the west."

As if in response to the clergyman's words a great gust of wind shook the windows of the house and a splutter of rain came hissing down the chimney.

Netta thought she could hear a bed creaking in the room above them, and the sound troubled her more than the sound of sobs. She drew her feet away from the fire and began putting on her stiff half-dried shoes.

"Yes, we must be going," said Lady Ann, rising. "But I would have liked to ask you about your book. Is it coming on well?"

The Vicar's face changed its expression completely. "Seventeen chapters," he said with a look at Netta as if she and her troublesome shoe-strings were the eighteenth chapter. "But it is the old story with me, Lady Ann. I tear most of it up. It isn't a very cheerful book."

Lady Ann smiled as she wrapped her plaid round her. She had grown accustomed to this kind of thing from William Hastings and had ceased to take it seriously. No one but the man's own wife had ever seen this mysterious work, and for some reason or another Nell Hastings never spoke of it.

But Netta was on her feet now and gravely contemplating the faded carpet. Hastings and his book presented themselves to her mind as a great plump black crow carrying a little plump black crow in his claws. She fancied she heard that bed creaking again.

She pulled on her mackintosh with such rapidity that the clergyman was not in time to assist her. She was glad when they were out of the house. She was glad to feel the rain on her face again.

As for Cousin Ann the whole experience of that little room, with its grotesque antimacassars across the backs of mahogany chairs and its double row of daguerreotypes, seemed to sail off over the ditches like a bubble of froth. Her only remark, as the rain eddied and gyrated past them like a horizontal cataract, reducing the whole world to the grayness of a cadaver, was a remark that conveyed no meaning at all to the mind of Netta.

"Queen Elizabeth was right. There's something funny about it. They ought never to have allowed it."

The rain increased in volume. The village in front of them seemed completely to disappear. The plaid cloak soon became as wringing wet as if it had been flung into the ditch. The drops trickled down Netta's back in cold persistent streamlets that made her shiver. Her shoes were so full of water that they responded with gurgling swishing noises every time she moved her feet.

On and on they struggled, their heads bent, their soaked garments clinging to the curves of their figures like Pheidian drapery, their eyes blurred, the rain tasting salty in their mouths, as if it were the tears of some vast inconsolable Niobe.

It seemed to Netta as though their heavy progress would never end; as though all her troubled life had been only a fantastic preparation for a destiny that meant walking, walking, walking, by the side of a being whose thoughts she could never read, toward a goal that could never be reached!

And obscurely, through the clamminess of her clothes, through the gurglings of her shoes, she kept hearing that invisible bed in the upper room of Toll-Pike Cottage creaking, creaking, creaking, like the hinge of a gate behind a retreating assassin.

She began to fall into that mood of indignant pity about Nell Hastings that used to puzzle the girls so when she displayed it over the affairs of poor Madge. Why did she always worry herself about people? Mrs. Hastings was nothing to her. She didn’t want her pity. She did want *something*, though, and Netta wished she could give it to her.

She found herself giving it to her in her imagination. It took the form of a twenty-pound note, like the one which the manager of the Bristol Theatre gave to Minnie at Christmas. She saw that twisted mouth trying to thank her but she hurried away…. Why! They had actually turned down Marsh Alley and were at Lexie’s very gate. “Never mind, dear. I expect we’re both a little dazed.” So Cousin Ann had been speaking to deaf ears! “I must stop fancying things,” Netta said to herself as Lexie’s housekeeper let them in and preceded them upstairs.

They found the invalid lying on a deck chair at the edge of his bookcase. On a little table by his side was a china mug and in the mug was a specimen of that curious plant, half fungus, half flower, which the botanists call broom rape.

Lexie sat up very straight and contemplated his visitors with wide-open eyes.

"We mustn't stay a moment," announced Cousin Ann. "Rook doesn't know we came. We've brought you these." And to Netta's astonishment, out of the deep pocket of her plaid coat the young woman produced a bunch of dilapidated chrysanthemums.

Lexie received the flowers, snuffed tentatively at them, remarked that they smelt like muskrats, and laid them down beside the mug.

He looked at Netta then, with something like a furtive appeal on his corrugated face.

"Do you want me to go and talk to Mrs. Bellamy?" Netta said humbly.

A glance of unconcealed irritation was her reward for this.

"You're both so thoroughly wet," he grumbled, "that I refuse to be responsible for keeping you a second. Thank you for coming, Ann. Thank you for bringing these. And now, for God's sake, clear off, both of you, and race home!"

He waved them away with both his hands and seemed seriously agitated. And yet Netta was once more aware that he was looking at her with that same significant expression. What did he want her to do? To go home alone?

"Why doesn't Ann stay to lunch with you and let Mrs. Bellamy dry her things?" she murmured.

"And leave you to go home by yourself? Can you see me doing such a thing?" cried Lady Ann.

There was an awkward pause between the three of them, during which Netta loosened the wet mackintosh from her throat and moved away from the support of a table lest her dampness should spoil Lexie's papers.

The drenched condition of the two women seemed to draw into that little room a desolate melancholy essence composed of fallen leaves, muddy cart ruts, and clammy mist. Toward the water that still clung to their bodies the great moving volume of water outside seemed stretching itself through the little window in irresistible attraction.

The red coals in Lexie's grate seemed to lose something of their power. The rosy glow reflected from Lexie's crowded bookcases seemed to fade. The little blue fire devil that danced like a demon butterfly on the top of the coals flagged and drooped. A great blind streaming face was pressed against the window — the gray featureless face of the rain. It was as if a corpse-cold cloudy arm, wavering and shadowy, fumbled and plucked at those two dripping figures; as though, drenched as they were, they belonged to the drowning fields outside and not to this warm human interior. Lexie himself, as he looked from the one to the other, felt conscious that something from those miles of soaked pastures, something beyond the mere drenched clothes and rain-draggled hair of the two girls, was separating them from him by an impassable barrier.

The thing made him petulant, querulous. It was always like this with women, he thought. They were so damnably absorbent of the chemistry of nature! They were so easily submerged by these elemental forces! When one wanted them to be especially rational and attentive, their bodies were drifting off, tissue by tissue, cell by cell, upon some long inhuman tide, leading God knows where!

He got up now with a painful effort, an effort that made Netta instinctively spring forward, while Cousin Ann fell back against the wall as if to ward off a blow.

"Do you know why she comes to me like this?" he said, leaning forward and addressing Netta.

Netta hurriedly withdrew the hand she had stretched out to support him.

"Don't!" she murmured, shaking her head. "Don't!" And then with a voice that gathered a sudden unexpected power: "Please sit down again, Mr. Lexie, and let me leave her here. Rook will understand."

The rugged-faced thin man leaned still farther forward. His hands pressed hard against the little table, shook it so that the broom-rape trembled.

"Rook!" he cried. "I should think he *will* understand! She comes to me to *square* me! Do you hear, you dear little fool? To square me! Did you think she came for anything else?"

His voice died away in his mouth like an echo in an open doorway; but his mouth still hung open, the under lip pendulous and quivering; and a drop of saliva ran down to the tip of his chin.

"Go! Both of you!" he cried hoarsely; and sinking back into his chair he turned obstinately toward the fire, hugging his thin knees.

Netta was conscious of nothing else but a desire to bend over that figure and press that heavy curly head against her breast; but Cousin Ann with a fierce little red spot burning on each of her cheeks had become completely mistress of the situation.

"Good-bye, Lexie," she said quietly. "Come, Netta."

They moved toward the door, but as they went out he turned again.

"Why don't you go to Hastings and square *him?* He'll give you reasons. But you'd better not read his book. Do you hear? Don't you dare to read his book! You have reasons enough without that. Ask Nell. She can tell you." His haggard profile and deep-set sombre-lidded eye seemed thrusting a pike into Cousin Ann's retreating figure.

"*It's all in the book!*" he shouted after them as they closed the door and ran down the stairs.

CHAPTER III

MRS. ASHOVER WALKED with a firm quick step. No one would have guessed, to see her little thin black figure making its way through the long grass of the orchard, that this was the seventy-third November the power of which she had defied.

The gate leading from the orchard to the sloping hill called Battlefield was a gate heavy on its latch. But it was a gate that Mrs. Ashover had manipulated as a young bride fifty years before and she was not to be daunted by it now. She rubbed her forefinger thoughtfully up and down its gray lichen-grown top bar. The sun was warm around her, a slanting autumn sun, and it fell pleasantly on the ancient gate and on the rough yellow patches of lichen which filled the crevices of that half-century-old plank. A piece of woodwork exposed to all the elements is a very different thing from a piece of woodwork protected within a barn or a church. Its life is five times as intense; its experiences five times as acute. That top bar by the time this particular afternoon sun reached it must have been, if vividness of experience were allowed to count, older than Dürer's famous Madonna in Nuremberg.

Mrs. Ashover looked from the gate to an old apple tree that grew beside it and from the tree she looked to the ground. A sprinkling of yellow apples had been left there, and many of them were half buried in the rank thick-bladed grass.

Mrs. Ashover tapped the gate with her knuckles. It was annoying that Rook was so careless and so casual in his handling of the place. In John's day good cooking apples such as these would have been gathered to the last rain-soaked pippin.

With a shrug of her shoulders and a fierce little sigh the old lady forced the stubborn latch and pushed the gate open.

When it was shut behind her she resolutely ascended the hill. She stepped carefully over the mole runs, avoided the patches of brown bracken and the mysterious hollow places that broke the ascent, and finally, a little out of breath, arrived at the summit of Heron's Ridge.

The horizontal sun threw her slim erect shadow along the close-cropped turf as emphatically as it threw the shadows of the Scotch firs. They were twice as old as she was, these trees; but she felt just then as if she were their contemporary. She prodded the trunk of one of them with her ebony stick. The gesture relieved her feelings; and she continued it till a piece of red-brown bark fell upon the ground.

With a flickering smile on her thin lips she left the tree and, moving to the farther crest of the ridge, looked down into the less familiar valley. A grassy slope, patched with bracken and furze, locally named Dorsal, led down to a narrow muddy lane. Beyond this lane a thick undergrowth of small oaks and hazels mounted up to a high leafy skyline called Antiger Great Knoll. There was only one human habitation visible between Dorsal and the Antiger Woods and upon this habitation she now fixed her eyes.

It was a small gamekeeper's cottage surrounded by pheasant coops and fowl runs. A footpath led down to it from where she stood; and an untidy vegetable garden, in which a bonfire of weeds was then burning, separated it from the lane.

Mrs. Ashover contemplated this scene for some moments in an attitude of intense thought. She knew every tuft of furze, every bracken patch, every grassy excrescence, every gravelly hollow, as well as she knew the furniture in her own bedroom.

There was the dead ash tree struck by lightning forty years before, at the roots of which she used to sit and sketch and read, before Lexie was born.

There was the rabbit burrow, with the earth mould freshly disturbed and the little pellets of excrement freshly dropped, just as it had looked, with the sun falling aslant upon it, when she used to bring out her writing case and write long letters about her children and her husband to dear Edith, Cousin Ann's mother.

She could actually recall a certain sentence she had used, on one of these occasions, which poor dear Edith had commented upon and been greatly shocked by.

"I have washed all Wentworth blood out of me," she had written, "and gone over body and soul to John's people. John's gods have become my gods; John's dead, my dead."

Setting her face with renewed determination and clutching her stick tightly the old lady made her way down the hill to the back door of the house in the lane.

The gamekeeper and his wife were engaged in feeding the fowls, assisted by their idiot son. This child, whose half-articulate utterances and facial distortions would have been horrible in a city, fell naturally into his place among wilting hemlocks and lightning-struck trees and birds eaten by hawks and rabbits eaten by weasels.

Mr. and Mrs. Drool were thrifty, decent people who were able to increase their income very considerably by this fowl run of theirs; especially since Lord Antiger's agent had ceased to invite any one to shoot in those particular preserves and had gone to live himself in Bishop's Forley, five miles away.

“Mrs. Ashover! Well, I never!”

“The missus her own self! Well, I’ll be jiggered!”

“Blub … blub … blub! Binnory good boy! Give Binnory summat.”

“Don’t drag at the missus, Binnory!”

“Don’t ‘ee mind him, Mrs. Ashover! Don’t ‘ee mind him! He do know who you be as well as he knows who we be! ’Tis a windle-wandle innocent; but you should hear’n holler to the hoot owls when sun be down. And he do know the gentry when he sees ‘un as well as any God-fearing man.”

Mrs. Ashover responded to these various voices with unruffled equanimity. She patted Binnory on the head and told him never to kill slowworms. She steered the conversation to Mr. Drool’s pheasants and to Mrs. Drool’s Wyandottes. She answered their questions about Rook and Lexie with becoming vagueness.

At the first pause in the conversation, however, she moved straight to her purpose.

“I want to see Mr. Richard,” she said. “Is he in the house?”

“She wants to see Corporal Dick,” repeated the woman, glancing with a certain obvious embarrassment at her husband.

“He be weed-burning in garden, mum,” she went on. “It be a job he have always a mind for. He do like the smell o’t and the flare o’t. Joe and me have always marked it in him. He do look as eager for bonfire-time as ‘twere for the King’s birthday.”

“May I go round and speak to him, Polly?”

“Certainly you may, ‘m; mayn’t she, Joe? Certainly she may speak to Granfer Dick. There’s no reason why she shouldn’t speak to the Corporal, is there, Joe?”

Mrs. Drool looked extremely uncomfortable as she uttered these words; and the gamekeeper’s uneasiness was so great that without knowing what he did he picked up his corduroy coat from the clothes line and shook it in the air.

"Binnory'll take you to see Granfer Dick burnin' things. Binnory'll take you"; and the idiot tugged at Mrs. Ashover's skirt, uttering while he did so the peculiar inhuman sound represented by the syllables, "blub-a-blub … blub-a-blub."

Mrs. Ashover did not hesitate. Taking the boy by the hand she walked rapidly round the house, leaving the gamekeeper and his wife staring blankly at each other.

The reason of their embarrassment became quite plain when the strangely assorted pair reached the place. Granfer Dick, for some reason of his own, had stripped himself not only of his coat and waistcoat but of his shirt, too; and, armed with a pitchfork, was throwing weeds on the fire in nothing but a pair of old military trousers.

The Corporal was a man of gigantic size; and the sight of such an extremely old man in such scanty clothing surrounded by smoke and flame was certainly a thing calculated to disturb a stranger.

Mrs. Ashover was no stranger, however; nor did her appearance cause the least discomfort to the octogenarian. He leaned on his pitchfork and with a wave of his hand sent Binnory away.

"Well, sister Joan, what mischief brings *you* here this day of all days? You've only been three times to see me since John died and now you come on the very day he died."

The resolute little woman did not wince or draw back. She brushed a flying spark from her dress and pointed at the Corporal with her stick.

Between the fading November sunset and the clouds of blue smoke she looked like an aristocratic sorceress summoning up some great fire spirit. She was in one of her most reckless moods; but it was with a quiet affectionate gesture that she beckoned the old man to move nearer to her out of the smoke. Ever since her husband had first introduced her to this bastard brother of his she had felt friendly to him and free of her usual prejudices. She called him "Corporal" though now; and, as they fell to exchanging confidences, he did not repeat the "sister Joan," but addressed her without any appellation at all.

"I've no one to go to! I've no one to go to," Mrs. Ashover found herself saying. "Doctor Twickenham is a fool. William Hastings is mad; and Lexie is worse than mad where Rook is concerned. I told you a year ago, Richard"— "She drops the Corporal when she wants help," thought the old man— "where it seemed to me Ann Gore might come in. Well! I've had her with me for several months, and what's the result? I am besieged in my own house. That woman is everywhere. I meet her on the staircase. I meet her in the garden. I only *don't* meet her in the dining room and the drawing room because I stay in my own bedroom! I tell you the place doesn't belong to me any more. I am just an uncomfortable visitor, staying with my son and his mistress. That's how it must appear to all our neighbours; and that's how it is."

The Corporal threw his pitchfork away and led his agitated visitor back to the house. Opening the front door he took her straight into his own little room where there was a big wood fire. He placed her in a dilapidated armchair with the utmost courtesy and then began muttering and groaning while he fumbled for his best clothes in the chest of drawers.

"So Ann has gone over to the harlot? Ay, John. Ay, John. Ay, John. That I should have lived to see this."

"I've no one to go to," repeated Mrs. Ashover. "That's why I came to you. John always used to come to you. I can hear him saying it now— 'I'll just run across and talk to Richard' — so, my friend," and she smiled almost wistfully at the wrinkled contorted features appearing under the upheld coat, “you must help us at this pinch or see us go right down to the bottom.”

Granfer Dick pulled a chair to the opposite side of the fire, took his seat deliberately, and stared with concentrated intensity at his kinswoman.

“Smoke if you want to, Corporal,” said the old lady. He shook his head and continued to survey her with frowning forehead and screwed-up eyes, thinking many things.

“It’s funny…. It’s as funny as a bad dream,” murmured the old woman. “But if something isn’t done soon nothing will change it. Rook will get older and older till he dies childless; and the family will die out with him.”

A fierce light came into the Corporal’s pale eyes and the skin of his closely shaven face tightened itself over its bony framework like parchment that is pulled taut.

“What’s that?” he cried. “Die out? The Ashovers ‘die out’?”

“Certainly they will, if you can’t think of how to help me. When once I’m buried and out of the way, things will go on exactly as they are now, till Lexie is dead and Rook is dead. That woman is certain to outlive them both; and then … Well! that’ll be the end. There’ll be nobody else.”

The two old people looked each other full in the eyes and all manner of wild fantastic thoughts passed between them. They were like a pair of aged priests, servants for innumerable years at a venerable altar, who suddenly awake to the fact that the great god of their idolatry is stricken with a mortal disease.

Terrible with a kind of mad panic such priests might become. They might slaughter holocausts of sheep and oxen. They might steal the flocks from the shepherd and the swine from the swineherd. Nothing might be safe from their sacrificial depredations unless their god himself intervened.

But how could the shadowy god of Squire John's widow and Squire Ralph's bastard express its pleasure or displeasure?

Could the sad-eyed cavalier come forth from his gilt picture frame and say: "Let the family end!"? Could Sir Benjamin come forth with his marble smirk and say: "Let the family end!"? Could the Crusader uncross his feet, or John Ashover lift the slab from his more recent dissolution, and cry with one united sepulchral voice: "Let the family be as though it had never been!"?

Without a word interchanged these two crack-brained old people, the elegant lady and the social outcast, let their wild fancies circle round the figure of Cousin Ann — Cousin Ann, who seemed dedicated by Nature herself to be a mother of distinguished offspring. It was incredible that a girl like that should really betray them. But what was she doing? It looked like callous, careless, cynical caprice; Girls *have* ways of getting hold of men. They have absolutely *sure* ways when they can be persuaded to sacrifice their pride.

The unspoken thoughts of the two fanatics grew queerer and madder every moment, as the November mist, blending with the smoke of the bonfire, darkened the windows of the room.

"What can I do?" murmured Mrs. Ashover at last, making a pitiful little movement with one thin arm toward her companion. But the Corporal had lifted himself up very straight now and sat bolt upright, his long fingers on the arms of the chair, his little eyes almost shut.

"With buck-rabbits who won't come to't, with buck-ferrets who won't come to't, with hound-dogs who won't come to't, 'tis only a matter of putting the right mate to 'em; shutting her up with him and taking yourself off. You know that and I know that. It's only a question of the hour and the maid."

The matter-of-fact gravity of the Corporal and the outrageousness of his suggestion so tickled the old lady’s nervous fancy that she clapped her hands to her face and burst into a peal of hysterical laughter.

She laughed until the tears ran down between her fingers; but even then, deep down underneath her collapse, she was conscious that a set of fantastic possibilities, like blocks of erratic tesseræ, were forming themselves into a kind of pattern. It was all so mad and strange. But who could tell? She knew there were powers and forces in the world that would sometimes carry to a conclusion what was *imagined* when they refused to yield an inch to what was *willed.*

She was suddenly aware of a crazy desire to bring the Corporal upon the scene. It could do no harm for him to see Rook; it could do no harm for him to see Cousin Ann. It would gratify a perverse longing in her for him to see the intruding woman herself. Let the bastard deal with the mistress. There would be an ironic justice in that. She thought deeply for a minute, biting her lip and tapping the ground with her stick.

It couldn’t do any harm; that was certain. Rook had always treated the old man well and Lexie, before he got ill, had been in the habit of spending hours with him.

She glanced at the clock on Granfer Dick’s mantelpiece. How the days were closing in! It was only a quarter to five now. If they started together at once they might find the whole party still sitting over tea; and what was more natural than that she should have asked the Corporal to escort her home? Then he would see the woman. John was dead but John’s brother would see the enemy in the house.

She felt like some beleaguered chatelaine who could bring up at need a trusty freelance ready for anything. The adventure appealed to the old woman’s youthful spirit. It appealed to a vein of superstition in her, too. The

Corporal was a queer character. Perhaps he had the evil eye! Perhaps he would strike God's own terror into the heart of the creature. Her mind ran off down a long avenue of wild conjectures. Perhaps John's brother would whisper such murderous threats into the wretch's ear that one of these fine days she would pack her things without a word and be off into the void!

The hands of the clock in that little empty room were still short of the hour of five when the mistress of Ashover, leaning on the Corporal's arm, was struggling up the slope that led to the Scotch firs.

"Tu-whit — tu-who! Tu-whit — tu-who!" came the voice of Binnory, and they fancied they could hear a long-drawn answering wail from the depths of the Antiger Woods.

It was getting very dark before they were halfway up the hill. The November night, rolling like a great brown-coloured wave across the earth, gathered up their human excitement into its own dark heart and diffused it over the misty woods and leaf-strewn lanes. The fatality of old age mingled with the fatality of vast dim vegetable forces moving to obscure dissolution.

Caw! Caw! Caw! came the cry of solitary belated birds, following their companions from the ploughed fields of the valley to the trees on Antiger Great Knoll; and the voice of the rooks became the voice of the night itself, that great primordial winged thing, woeful and yet undespairing, lamentable and yet consolatory; full of whispers and murmurs, of premonitions and memories, wherein the beginning of things reaches forward to the end of things and the end of things reaches backward to the beginning.

Mrs. Ashover's arm trembled as it rested on the Corporal's; and the old man himself had frequently to delay their ascent in order to take breath.

And yet something that was stronger than their decrepitude seemed to draw them both on. Was it that the actual flame of life in this man and this woman was leaping high and fierce just then because of some occult emotional understanding that was older and deeper than this present business? Had Joan Ashover from the very first felt more tenderly for this brother of her "John" than she herself had realized?

Perhaps some of these shadowy clumps of furze bush, dripping with wet white mist and smelling of dead wood and fungous growths, by the side of which they rested, were old enough to recall other encounters between these two, wherein the wild vagaries of the human heart had been fecund of astounding self-deceptions!

They were standing now beneath the great trunks of Heron's Ridge and both the old people drew into their lungs the chill, muddy, pungent breath of the distant water meadows as it came up to them across the flooded river.

Very old they both felt as they breathed that chilly breath! The little lady's outburst of adventurousness flagged, wilted, sank. The first coming on of the night, with its unsealings and releases, was a very different thing from the established nocturnal power that now sank its foundations into one abyss and lifted its ramparts into another!

She drew her arm stiffly out of the Corporal's and turned her face round to him. They could see little of each other's expression but John's brother was not surprised when she said in a faint querulous voice: "It's too late to-night. They will all have separated. I couldn't bring them together. That woman will have gone to her room, to my son's room. You'd better leave me here, Corporal. No! No! I couldn't think of taking you farther. You are older than I am, my friend. Good-night, Corporal!"

A few minutes later a slim figure with bowed head and weary limbs was descending the hill to the south through the rabbit burrows of Battlefield, while a gaunt figure with bowed head and weary limbs was descending the hill to the north through the rabbit burrows of Dorsal.

An electric current sent in a bee line through the clay heart of Heron's Ridge would have connected those two figures; but not for long.

Tu-whit — tu-who! Tu-whit — tu-who! wailed the owls of Antiger Great Knoll; but no one listened to them except the idiot; and he was too occupied with stamping out the ashes of Granfer Dick's bonfire to give them back their cry.

CHAPTER IV

WILLIAM HASTINGS SAT writing at the window in the upper back room of Toll-Pike Cottage.

Pale watery sunlight, faint as though it had passed through fathoms of attenuating mist, spread itself out over his minute meticulous manuscript, over the bare floor, over the shabby bookcase, over the gaunt discoloured volumes of Philo, Iamblicus, Plotinus, Paracelsus, which stood like dehumanized, featureless ghosts between the melancholy milestones of his Latin and Greek theology.

The Napoleonic stomach of the man was pressed forward against the edge of the wretched little table which served him for a desk, while his white, plump ecclesiastical fingers held the pen with a suave ferocity.

It was not permitted just then to any living person to catch the expression on William Hastings's face as with calm, monotonous scrupulosity he formed word after word and punctuated them and dotted them and preserved their measured margins.

There happened to be two little crumpled-up dead flies upon the window sill before him, and it seemed as if some power inimical to life itself emanated from the movements of that white, plump hand. Was it an accident, a coincidence, that on the grass below the theologian's window a forlorn heap of frost-bitten feathers was all that was left of a seven-month-old sparrow?

Is there, perhaps, a power of destruction in human thought capable of projecting its magnetism beyond its own realm of immaterial ideas? Nothing moved in that shabby room except the hand that was writing, and yet there undoubtedly did mingle with the pale, watery light that filtered in something that seemed to make the more friendly of the volumes upon the shelves draw closer together, to make the print of Saint Jerome with his lion and his skull look unnaturally ghastly, and to make the black marble clock upon the mantelpiece tick like the heart of a condemned man.

But if the furniture in Mr. Hastings's room caught in such a troubled manner the vibration of his "not very cheerful book," there was someone in the house who received these mysterious emanations much more woefully.

The young woman down below kept wandering uneasily from parlour to kitchen and from kitchen to parlour. She presented the appearance of someone who struggled with an overpowering impulse to run out of the house, to run down the road, to run for miles and miles and miles.

At one point as the hours went on she did actually steal up to her bedroom and snatch her hat and cloak from the shaky cupboard; but she flung them aside when she came down and returned to her stove in the kitchen.

She was boiling something in an iron pot, and as she stood stirring this, she kept looking furtively round, holding herself very still to listen, her hand on the spoon and her head turned sideways.

Once she opened the back door a little and let the misty yellow light lie cold and comfortless on the gray flagstones and the smell of leaf mould mingle with the steam of her cauldron.

It was one of those days when the stillness is so absolute that it seems as if all the winds of the world had actually dropped out of the air, like great birds shot through the heart, and were now lying stone dead in remote lakes and ponds and backwaters out of all reach of recovery.

There was a small poplar tree behind Toll-Pike Cottage, and just because there were so few leaves left each one of them seemed to float in its own particular atmospheric circle; and as it floated, to be consciously holding its breath.

The very prevalence of pale yellow over every other colour gave to the fragment of space framed by the open door a look as of royal obsequies, as if all the land were covered, like a naked archaic corpse, with flakes upon flakes of chilly gold.

It sometimes happens, in an out-of-the-way country spot like this one, that even the most harmless and commonplace noises cease altogether, leaving behind them a silence so profound that it becomes ominous.

Such a silence, saturated like a great wet sponge with a watery yellowness that might have been washed from the golden body of some drowned idol, gathered closer and closer round the agitated girl.

She put her hands to her ears at last. She was afraid of hearing the scratching of a pen up there; but this gesture only had the effect of making her abominably conscious of the beating of her own heart.

Suddenly she decided to endure the thing no longer; and very silently, moving on tiptoe, she crept upstairs.

Pausing at her husband’s door she found herself without the courage to open it and without the courage to descend. She just stood outside on the landing listening.

Ah! she was sure she could hear his pen now; and it seemed to her as if it were the beak of some obscene bird pecking at the throat of life. This monstrous thinking-machine was the only thing that was alive in that windless morning. By the chilly mortuary light of the same sun whose pallid gold made the leaves so yellow and the air so misty this infernal cerebral gimlet was boring its way into some undefended crevice in the foundations of human sanity.

She would have found it hard to say by what gradual means she had become so certain as to the nature of her husband’s thought. But certain she was now; and if she had dared she would have rushed into the room like a madwoman and torn the abominable thing into a thousand fragments.

Why didn’t she dare? What was there about this man that always paralyzed her? She leaned against the closed door and bowed her head upon her elbow. She seemed beyond the relief of tears, beyond the power of any decision.

It had all been so wonderful to her at first. To be loved by a recluse, by a thinker, by a person so different from the rest. And Aunt Martha had been so pleased about it before she died; so pleased that her nervous, troublesome niece had someone to look after her.

To look after her! What would the old lady have said could she have known? She recalled her feelings when she first fully realized that her ideal image of the man had been broken to pieces. But she mustn’t think of that. Nothing that could ever happen would be quite as bad as what she went through then. Who was it who had told her once that cut flowers before they actually die suffer a spasmodic crisis and stretch themselves out with a palpable jerk, stark and rigid? That was just the way her romantic feeling for William had ended — given a horrible spasmodic jump, like a broken spring, and fallen in a dead heap!

And it was not only that the mainspring of her love was broken. There had taken its place another feeling about him, a feeling very difficult to define, a vague, mysterious terror of something within him that baffled and perplexed her, something that roused an agitation in her such as people feel in the presence of the supernatural.

It is true that this particular sensation came and went. It was at its worst at moments like this when something in the day itself played into its hands.

But there were other days, when, in the ordinary exchange of little diurnal domestic interests, the thing subsided and died down. During these calmer interludes, though the romance of her love was dead beyond recall, she was not devoid of a certain quiet affection for him, strong enough to respond to his own attenuated, eccentric, spasmodic fits of tenderness.

But to-day that almost supernatural terror seemed at its very worst. Oh, she was at the end of her tether to-day and something would have to be done. She could bear the strain of it no longer. She began listening again with increased intensity….

Ah, he had pushed his chair back in there and put down the pen. She could see him as clearly as if the wood against which she leaned had been glass. She saw how his white hands clasped themselves upon his stomach, just where the little gold cross hung down. Oh, loathing! Loathing! Loathing! What was this? She was downstairs now, pulling on her cloak. Bang! The door had shut behind her and she was in the garden. Click! The gate had swung behind her and she was in the road.

Where was she going?

It was not till she had walked some hundreds of yards down the road that she knew she was going to Lexie Ashover's. *That* was the last resort, then! That was what her feet would do with her when her mind ceased to act!

All the rest of the way she remained drugged and numb; and even at Lexie's door she was still too dazed to catch the look of disapproval with which Mrs. Bellamy regarded her, or to realize until she had removed her cloak in Lexie's room that she had forgotten to take off her apron.

Lexie had been more submissive to his doctor during the last week, and the girl was touched to see how this relapse into an invalid state had affected his spirits. He seemed to have lost something of his accustomed vein of humorous malice.

He removed a pile of books from the lap of a leather armchair and made her sit opposite him, scanning her face with a certain whimsical intensity as children in fairy books scan the faces of human-speaking animals.

The pallor of the day increased the natural pallor of her skin. Her oval forehead with the silky hair falling on each side of it seemed to carry more human sadness under its tender curves than any mere personal trouble could account for. Lexie's flickering fire threw softening lights upon this sorrow, without touching its lodged hurt.

His own cue, it seemed, was a low confidential tone of intimate gravity. "You know what happened after we talked in the churchyard that night? They came to see me … in the morning … just as you have come now … and Ann was more Ann than I've ever seen her. I couldn't stand it. It was too much. But whether Netta heard what I said, or understood what I meant, the Lord alone knows! They were both dripping wet and I packed them off. But I'm sure Ann understands. You know what I'm like when I get rattled, Nell. I don't beat about the bush."

A faint little smile crossed the visitor's face.

"What did you say to her?"

"I said she'd come to *'square' me."*

"Lexie! Did you say that?"

"Why not? I believe in bringing everything right out into the air. I like to see the little horns protruding and the furry ears pricked up. I like to see the sharp claws under the velvet pads."

"But, Lexie, did Netta hear what you said? Oh, Lexie! How awful!"

"I tell you they were both so dripping wet that it was all very confused. It was like quarrelling in a laundry. You could smell their drenched clothes. You could smell their wet skins. Poor Netta stood on one leg like a rain-soaked heron, and Ann looked as if she didn't know her head from her tail. It was an entertaining scene, only I was too rattled to enjoy it."

"But do you really mean that Ann is trying to come between Netta and Rook?"

"Nell, I'm ashamed of you! Don't you know that women like that never come between people in that way?"

"In what kind of way do they do it, then?"

Lexie made a face at her as if he were playing at bears with a young child.

"They don't do anything," he said. "They just look on till it happens."

Nell raised herself very straight in her chair and met Lexie's grimace eye to eye.

"If she entangles Rook and makes Netta unhappy it'll be a cruel, scandalous, wicked shame!"

Her violent words had their effect. Lexie got up, shuffled to the mantelpiece, and leaning his elbow against the corner of it looked down with concern into her face.

"I suppose," he said solemnly, "it has never occurred to you that Rook may be thoroughly tired of both of them."

She frowned and tilted back her head to get the full significance of this, and the young man was aware of something more vibrant and tense in her manner than he had realized at first.

He began to wonder about the apron, too, which she had now untied from her waist and was mechanically folding upon her lap.

"Tired of both of them," she repeated; and then, avoiding his eyes and dropping her head— "He used to be very fond of Ann before he met Netta, didn't he?"

Lexie seemed to derive a mischievous satisfaction from delaying his answer to this question. He took his elbow from the chimneypiece and placed his hand upon the back of her chair.

She kept her head bent, but the next thing he did was done in so casual and natural a way that it was very difficult for her to take offence at it. He lifted up her chin with two fingers and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

“Did you say ‘fond of Ann’?” he cried. “He used to make love to her for whole summers. They used to stay out all night. My mother never knew half that went on. They were a fair pair; and I daresay Ann fell in love with him for ever and ever. She’s certainly had endless chances of being married since, though she’s only twenty-five — did you realize that, Nell? — only twenty-five now.”

The girl sighed and, instead of returning his smile, looked abstractedly into the fire. Lexie suddenly remembered how Rook had grown remote and sullen when he rallied him in the churchyard.

“It’s these two now,” he said to himself. “I knew it.” And then, lifting whimsically one of his heavy eyelids:

“I only hope,” he thought, surveying the abstracted head and tilted shoulders beneath him; “I only hope the Reverend William will wear his horns with a good grace. For he’ll have ’em. And good luck to him!”

Reluctant to break the spell of his companion’s mood, thus scandalously interpreted, Lexie sank back into his armchair and rubbed his thin knees with outspread hands.

Oh, that he might only stay conscious, in this exciting chaotic world, three, six, ten, fifteen years longer!

The silence between them lasted for several minutes without a sound entering the room. Not a pulse stirred in all that sapless yellow world of vegetable mortality outside, from which the odour of accepted death mounted into the air.

Finally the girl came to herself and began to speak hurriedly and nervously, pinching the folded apron on her lap as if it were an object for sale upon a counter.

“I don’t know why I should tell you these things — but there’s no one else — I’ve got no one else — I don’t think I can stand it any more. — It isn’t that he’s unkind to me or anything like that — he’s always the same. — It isn’t that he troubles me with questions — he doesn’t notice anything — never anything! It isn’t that he touches me” — she gave a little movement that made Lexie stop rubbing his knees— “he’s quite given up doing that. It isn’t that he reads to me what he writes” — her mouth twitched and her forehead puckered— “it isn’t that he talks to me about what he writes. — He never talks to any one. — It’s just —— Oh, Lexie!” — and she leaned forward with wide-open eyes and the apron crushed between her hands— “it’s just the things he’s thinking and the things he’s writing — —” She stopped short and stared wildly, as if looking at something behind Lexie’s shoulder. “Do you believe in God?” she concluded with a funny jerk in her voice and a shuddering relaxation of her slim body.

Lexie’s countenance had grown graver and graver while she spoke, and its expression, under his corrugated Claudian brows, more and more sympathetic. But at her final question, flung at him so unexpectedly and recklessly, his very soul seemed to draw back into some interior impregnable fortress, out of the little arrow slits of which he peered forth at her, over moat and portcullis, with a watchful and suspicious cunning.

“I don’t see,” he said slowly, “why you women have always to make such a coil. I’d like you so much better, Nell, if you just honestly told me you'd fallen out of love with that cold-blooded word-spinner of yours; that you hated him like a dead fish; that you'd adore giving him a shrewd blow in the gizzard!"

Two expressions overlapped each other, quick as thought, across Mrs. Hastings's tremulous face. The first one was sheer pain. The second was irrepressible childish amusement.

"Dear Lexie!" she murmured; and then in a calmer voice, "I expect I do seem to you silly. But it isn't as simple as you think it is. If you only knew, you wouldn't look at me as you're looking now. I'm not putting this on. I'm not playing on your sympathy. There may be quite natural reasons for these things; but I tell you William's a different person from what any of you dream. He's not an ordinary person at all. He's — he's — he's either *mad* or he's thinking — thinking something — that destroys — you know? — that destroys everything!"

Lexie withdrew even from behind the narrow aperture of his defensive tower. He withdrew backward, backward, till nothing was visible of him but a suspicious pair of fox's eyes blinking out of the darkness.

The girl sighed, but something seemed to drive her on to betray herself. "Don't you believe in good Powers and evil Powers? You must! You must! Don't you believe in people being obsessed?"

He made a movement with his hand as if to interrupt her.

"I could *make* you believe!" she cried, raising her voice. "I could *make* you!"

He came back again to the arrow-slit in his tower.

"Poppycock!" he murmured; and it was almost as if he had been a brutal schoolboy putting out his tongue.

She winced and fell back in her chair. A kind of bewildered anger seized her heart against all these men. She visualized the corrugated leathery countenance in front of her, smiling that superior smile, as if it were a burrowing badger, digging itself obstinately into its familiar hole when the sky was full of flaring comets.

"You don't believe in anything, then," she remarked faintly, "that doesn't happen under your very nose?"

"I don't believe in all these mystical fol-de-rols," cried Lexie; "and it would be a damned good thing for you if I could shake them out of *your* head."

The mere sight of her twisted mouth, quivering there before him as if he had struck it with the back of his hand, seemed to aggravate him to further abuse.

"The worst of you women," he began again, "is that you always find some mysterious fantastic reason for a perfectly legitimate and natural thing. You are thoroughly sick of that good man of yours; sick to death of him; and I don't blame you. Why don't you honestly say so, then, instead of dragging in all these metaphysical cantraps, and trying to make out that the poor devil's a bloody magician or God knows what?"

She turned away from him with a hopeless sigh and stared into the fire, her elbow on the arm of her chair, her long thin arm supporting her chin.

The reaction from his scolding tone, from his "beating her up" as he called it, caused a delicious warmth toward her to pass through his veins. Watching her sitting there, so much at his mercy, he experienced a sudden twinge of jealousy over his brother's prerogative. In the present sweetness of his feeling toward her, now that he had chastised her for her silliness, he felt greatly tempted to give his brother's monopoly a timely jolt.

His eyes narrowed under their heavy Cæsarean lids. She was a highly strung little wench. She would probably let him embrace her out of pure craving for sympathy, for refuge, for protection. The image of Rook's figure, as it had leant by his side at the moonlit window, the outline of that profile, high-cheekboned like a Red Indian, the shape of that closely cropped dark-haired skull, rose up irrelevantly, accusingly. And life was so short — so atrociously short — especially — *his* life!

He rose and came over to Nell's side. He laid his hand on the back of the girl's chair and caressed its polished woodwork with little jerky movements of his fingers. "Shall I touch her hair?" be thought, "or put my hand on her shoulder?"

He stood there very awkwardly for a perceptible passage of time while the girl beside him made herself more comfortable by a little indrawing movement. She seemed to be absorbed in a not unpleasant but very complicated piece of thinking.

"To the devil with these haverings!" he said to himself. "But why does a person's heart beat so absurdly at the mere thought of doing such a natural, such an inevitable thing? And why this sickening sensation in the pit of one's stomach?"

"You're not angry with me, Nell dear?" he asked. His voice must have had a quaver, a huskiness, a strained note in it, as quickly recognized by feminine nerves as the flick of a pike's tail is recognized by suspicious minnows. She gave him a scared sidelong look. But even in the act of turning her head toward him and meeting his gaze the fear went out of her face. There is always something pathetic and childish to a woman in a man's physical desire. To the man's own consciousness he may appear a veritable devil. To his would-be victim he is much more like a greedy infant.

Nell Hastings was not conscious at that moment of the least quiver of moral indignation. She just lifted her chin from her hand, pulled up her feet under her in the big chair and looked straight back at him with an understanding smile; a smile of more direct girlish happiness than had crossed her face for many a long month!

In the simple glow of finding herself desired by a man she respected, the nameless horror she had run away from receded and receded. What made Lexie’s embarrassed overture the more touching was the very fact of his illness. He stirred something within her that had never been stirred before, her inborn protective instinct. She felt toward him what a lover of woods might feel who comes upon a rugged sturdy tree marked with a great staring notch and a chalk number. The last thing she had expected was that Lexie, as well as his mysterious brother, should look at her like that. Of course, it was different from what Rook made her feel. That was a thing by itself. She had not decided yet what that was. But she was far too grateful to poor dear Lexie for wanting her at all, and he so stricken and threatened, to fuss herself much as to how *this* situation dovetailed in with the other.

“Poor little Nell! Poor little Nell!” He had taken both her wrists now in one of his hands and had put the other lightly on her shoulder.

What she meant to do was to laugh affectionately and snatch her hands away, but instead of doing that she found herself standing by his side. Had he pulled her out of the chair or had she, to release herself from him, slipped out of it herself?

“Don’t do that! No! No! Don’t do that!” Her voice sounded calm and sensible enough, but what was the use of a calm voice when she was already in his arms and yielding to his agitated caresses?

Her mind raced about in all sorts of funny directions while she submitted to his love-making. She caught sight, over his shoulder, of a row of books entitled “Mermaid Classics” and she wondered what the girls in those books did when people took them in their arms. She found herself listening to see if she could hear Mrs. Bellamy moving about in the house. Then, in the midst of her feeble movements of resistance, she caught sight of a little bust of Voltaire on the mantelpiece. How benignly that malicious old man was watching her!

Suddenly she drew away from him and shook off his hands.

“Please don’t, Lexie! I don’t want it to be like this. I don’t want it.”

His face looked haggard as she pushed him back and she felt a wave of dangerous pity for him. How could he know that she had brought it to an end not because of indifference but because of the opposite of indifference? It was all right as long as she was a passive rag doll in his hands; but if she began to come to life — it wouldn’t do.

In a moment she became stiff as a block of wood; and though she still smiled at him and displayed no shadow of anger against him, he felt that, for that day at least, he must be just the friend again, just the kind, disinterested friend.

They both moved to the window and looked out.

“Damn these niceties and nuances!” he said to himself. “She’s in love with Rook and thinks it wrong to care for both of us. Yet she *does* care for both of us. Oh, when will human beings put all this business on a simple natural earthy basis?”

The look of the pools in the road reflecting the pale, chilly sunlight brought the girl’s mind back to her immediate trouble.

“What am I to do now, Lexie?” she whispered. “It must be nearly time for his meal. He’ll wonder where I am. He has to go to see Mrs. Drool this afternoon.” She stopped and shivered. “I can’t imagine what he says to these people or what he does. Think of seeing him sitting on a cottage chair!” And she suddenly burst into an uncomfortable laugh that made Lexie look at her very gravely.

“Nell, my dear,” he said after a pause, “I fancy the only thing to do now is to go back and endure it as well as you can for a little while. One never knows! I tell you, my sweet Nelly, one never knows! The world is much more malleable than people realize. Go on as you are for a *little* longer: something’s sure to happen.”

She did not seem to be listening very intently. Her eyes had left his face and were gazing into the distance. A curious, inscrutable look came over her features and her twisted mouth quivered.

“Very well, Lexie dear,” she said. “I will go back to him. Don’t bother to come down. I can let myself out.”

CHAPTER V

THERE WAS NO reason why Cousin Ann shouldn't have tripped over a tree root during her walk with Rook and strained her knee. People *did* stumble over things and hurt themselves.

There was no reason why she shouldn't have answered Rook laughingly, jestingly, just as she *did* answer him: "I'd love you to do it for me!"

That was all. That was her way of flinging back his suggestion that he should "massage" the injured knee. It was natural enough. Nothing to complain of. They were old friends, old playmates from infancy. They met in a world totally outside *her* world. It was natural they should have their jokes. But it wasn't a very pretty joke this time. If Minnie or Madge had made it she would have cried: "Don't be vulgar!"

It was just that — just that Rook should make that sort of joke at all, that had driven her to make a scene. It wasn't jealousy, as Rook had said. She wasn't jealous of Ann Gore. It was only that she never could bear vulgarity. It made her sick in her stomach. And all men were like that, gentlemen and counter-jumpers, lords and bookmakers! They all loved to make vulgar jokes. But there was no need for Rook to get so angry. He ought to know that a girl doesn't always mean what she says; especially when her feelings have been hurt. But that was the way. Men were so stupid. They took things wrongly. They listened to your *words* instead of caring what you felt.

Netta's feet ware on the fender of her empty bedroom grate as these thoughts pounded and hammered in her indignant consciousness, making her head ache with the strain.

She had been too upset to ring for Pandie to light the fire. She did not want Pandie to see that she'd been crying. She did not want any one's pity, least of all that of a gossiping servant.

Mercy! How cold it was and how the wind howled round the house! It didn't feel like the morning, somehow. It felt like the afternoon; and yet it was only eleven — and all that trouble had happened since nine o'clock!

She rose stiffly to her feet and, though she was fully dressed, she snatched a cloak out of the cupboard and wrapped it round her neck like a shawl. Oh, what was that? — someone knocking at the door? A gentle knock; different from Pandie's; different from Rook's; who on earth was it?

She hurriedly hung up the cloak again and closed the cupboard. Then she glanced quickly round the room. Yes, it looked like a real lady's room: the vase of flowers on the dressing table; the pillows undisturbed; no stray petticoats lying about. "Come in!" she called in a firm, quiet, self-controlled voice; and rubbed her cheeks with both hands.

The door opened and was shut again, very noiselessly shut; and Cousin Ann stood before her. Cousin Ann looked very young and very girlish; not nearly so athletic and sportsmanlike as usual. This look was partly explained by the fact that she still wore her nightgown and dressing gown and had tied her hair back with nothing but a broad ribbon; but it was also due to a certain psychological softness brought about by her recent hurt. Cousin Ann limped as she moved to Netta's bed and sat down upon it. The other bed in the room, Rook's bed, seemed to take an unkind pleasure at that moment in emphasizing its presence. "Why doesn't one of you sit down on me?" it seemed to say. "I am here — Rook Ashover's bed — and this encounter interests me greatly!"

"I couldn't rest in that room," were the first words Lady Ann uttered. "Pandie came and talked and talked; and Mrs. Ashover said she was coming; and so I thought I'd take refuge with you."

"It's very nice of you, Ann, I'm sure," murmured the elder woman, catching sight of herself, as she spoke, in the great gilt mirror and feeling dismay at the lack of youth in her own face. "It's very nice of you to come. Does your knee hurt you very much?"

Lady Ann glanced at the door. "Do you mind locking us in?" she said. The smile that accompanied these words had almost a schoolgirlish look of mischievous complicity.

Netta walked across the room and turned the key.

"I wish *you'd* massage me!" laughed Lady Ann, making a little half-playful groan of distress as she stretched herself out at full length on the bed.

"There, just there!" she murmured, struggling to rise on her elbow to draw her clothes aside.

"I see. I'll do it!" interjected Netta. "There! Is *that* where it is? I expect when it swells up it will stop hurting. It isn't swollen yet, is it?"

Lady Ann gave her a quick penetrating glance; but Netta's face was grave and sympathetic. "No," she said. "You can't see very much, can you? But it feels perfectly awful."

Netta sat down by the girl's side and moved her fingers gently across a knee that might have belonged to Artemis herself. She could not help a faint pang of envy at the extraordinary whiteness of the skin she touched. With a scarcely perceptible movement she rearranged her visitor's dressing gown and went on in silence, passing her fingers up and down the injured knee.

"How dark it is!" the younger girl cried. "And how the wind does howl! I fancy there must be a storm coming up."

"It's not so *very* dark," said Netta quietly, letting her hands sink wearily. "It's gray. I noticed it directly I got up. It's all gray, the sky, the garden, and everything. Rook said this was the sort of weather when you can *see* the wind! You know the way he talks! It's funny sometimes. It makes a person laugh."

Lady Ann smiled and let her fingers seek those of her friend. They both remained quite still for a time, listening to the rattling of the windows and the long-drawn moan that kept filling the chimney and then dying away again.

"Netta dear," said Ann suddenly, "are you very, very fond of Rook?"

The first effect of these words upon the woman sitting on the bed was a dull physical tremor, as if from a narrow path below a great mountain slope she had heard the beginning of an avalanche.

Wow ho! Wow ho! Wow ho! moaned the wind in the chimney.

Gathering up all her forces to deal with this crisis she extracted her fingers from Lady Ann's clasp and straightened her shoulders.

"Why have you waited to ask me that till to-day?" she said, in a low, flat, level tone.

She wanted to look Lady Ann straight in the eyes; but an indescribable timidity compelled her to fix her glance on the gray window.

"But are you, dear, are you, so *very* fond of him?"

Her lips made an effort to form the suitable words; but her throat seemed to be playing some tiresome trick upon her. It seemed to be necessary that she should keep swallowing.

"Because if you're not," Lady Ann went on, "I mean if you're not *very* fond of him, it's much easier to understand all you're doing."

"What — *do* — you mean? Oh, what *are* you saying to me?" stammered the troubled girl.

"Don't get excited, dear." And the aristocratic fingers sought the plebeian ones again. "There's no need to get agitated. I know well enough that nothing I say will make any difference. But it's like this, Netta. I sometimes think you don't quite realize, and never have quite realized, all that this means to Rook."

This time Netta Page did turn a scared, troubled face directly upon the beautiful head lying on her pillow.

"You've never spoken like this to me before," she said slowly. "Have I done anything? Is it because I got cross just now when he said — when he said that about your knee?"

Lady Ann folded her hands and closed her eyes for a moment. Her face in the gray light looked mysteriously lovely. Was she praying to her gods to give her strength to go through with the discomfort of acting the rôle of executioner?

"Have I done anything?" Netta repeated in a monotonous sing-song. "Have I done anything?"

"You've done this, my dear," said Cousin Ann gravely, opening her eyes and lifting her head a little. "You've made it impossible for Rook to have children — and if he doesn't have a child — if he doesn't have a son — there'll be no Ashovers left after he and Lexie are dead. And you know what Lexie's health is like? He's a dying man!"

Ah! The avalanche had begun to move. Thoughts and images pursued one another madly through Netta's bewildered brain. Fantastic images some of them were! One was the image of Cousin Ann herself — with her beautiful marbly limbs — lying on a bed like this, big with a boy-child of Rook's.

She said nothing for a long while. Her thoughts gathered about the knob of the bedpost above Cousin Ann's head. The bedpost marched in and out of her thoughts like a drill sergeant among shifty recruits.

Wow ho! Wow ho! Wow ho! moaned the wind in the chimney.

She kept forming words in the depths of her mind and then rejecting them.

One of these sentences got as far as the tip of her tongue.

“How do you know that *I* shan’t have a dead?” it protested. But *that* sentence would have been a lie; a lie to her own heart; for she knew only too well that fate had written her down childless.

“Of course I understand it all perfectly,” Cousin Ann’s voice went on; “if you are not very fond of Rook. In that case you are naturally, as we say, out for your own hand. But what I find *to* puzzling is, how, if you *are* very fond of him, you can have the heart to blight his whole future and doom him to childlessness? *That* is what puzzles me, Netta.”

Still the bedpost kept trying to play its part as the master of the ceremonies. But the convicted woman was not conscious any more of these little things. Slowly, with a thick woolly movement, blind and massive, the great avalanche was beginning to bear down upon her. Before the weight of it, before the reverberation of its descending, a landslide seemed to have begun that made the oasis in which she was living, with all its sweet earth and peaceful grass, rock and sway beneath her feet.

With the surface of her mind she was prepared to fight for every inch of her happiness; but, down in her soul, she felt conquered already. Something in herself betrayed her, with a dark subterranean treachery. Something called out: “I yield! I yield!” to the life-destroying whisper of this girl with these beautiful knees.

She found her tongue at last; but what she said was the merest froth of her mind’s turmoil, the merest spindrift of the tragic turn of the tide.

It was a gross thing, too, a venomous, petty, poisonous thing — the thing a jealous chorus girl would say, quarrelling over some beau at the stage door.

“Did you really hurt your knee walking with Rook this morning?”

Cousin Ann lifted her arched eyebrows.

Netta was standing in the middle of the room now, her face a pitiable mirror of contesting feelings.

“Will you please go now?” she stammered helplessly; and then with a faint return of the ugly mood— “that’s to say, if you can walk.”

Cousin Ann rose up from the bed and certainly there was little evidence of lameness as she moved across the room.

“There’s no need for us to quarrel,” she said quietly as she unlocked the door. “I like you, Netta, and I am sorry for you. You’re bound to suffer, whichever way things work out. One can’t carry off a situation like this beyond a certain point; even *you* can’t do that; though I do think you’re rather wonderful!”

She was alone again; alone in that fireless room. The indent left by Lady Ann’s head still remained in the pillow. The coverlet of the bed still showed the imprint of her body.

Netta walked to the window and looked out. The great lime tree was bowing and clutching at space under the wind’s lash. High up in the air dark specks were being lifted and dropped, dropped and lifted, that once were green budding leaves.

There was a soughing noise in the bushes, as if some great invisible animal were panting there; and what she could see of the water meadows beyond the river looked dark and troubled as though under the persecution of some evil power the menace of whose purpose was still obscure.

The woman shivered, but did not leave the window. She found a certain comfort in sharing with so much helplessness and dumbness the concentrated malice of this invisible enemy.

Her nature had a peculiar passivity in it, an almost voluptuous inertness; and now, when her whole blind instinct was to put off the moment of thinking, there was a real relief in becoming part of these struggling trees and sullen, persecuted meadows.

The wind did actually seem to take on a palpable shape as she watched, a shape that *was* a shape, though it was chaotic, formless, wavering. And she could not escape the sense that in some definite malignant manner the invisible creature was directing its murderous violence against herself, against this intruder, this invader, this stranger within the gates!

She was still standing at the window when Rook, after a hurried knock, came quickly into the room. She glanced at him for one swift moment and then lifting up her arms, with a swaying staggering lurch forward, she flung herself upon him and clung round his neck.

“I am sorry. I am sorry. I am so sorry!” she moaned. “You *will* forgive me, Rook, my own? I ought not to have behaved like that. I know I ought not. I was mad, just mad!”

Rook answered her appeal with hurried soothing exclamations: “It’s all right, little one. It’s all right. It’s absolutely all right. There! There! No, don’t cry, sweetheart! I tell you it was nothing. Nothing at all! I’ve quite forgotten it. It’s all over. You are my little Netta again — you are, aren’t you?”

Feeling his arms so firm and tight around her and his lips upon her forehead Netta was sorely tempted to yield to an impassioned fit of desperate sobbing. Her whole nature craved for that relief. But long and bitter experience had taught her that men shrink from these abandonments, shrink from them and grow cold beneath their weight. So with an heroic effort she calmed herself and remained limp and exhausted but untrembling, unshaken, within his grasp.

At the first relaxing of his embrace she drew herself gently away, and all her endeavour was to retain the sweetness of his tenderness, without spoiling it by any blunder, without spilling a drop of its delicious security.

She pulled him down on the bed beside her, close to the pillows still marked by the imprint of Ann's head, and remained quite silent for a moment, holding tight to one of his hands and lifting it once — twice — three times — to her lips.

"Little Netta!" he kept repeating. "Little Netta!"

At last feeling his arm round her waist, feeling herself drawn close against him, she gathered up courage to speak again.

"I oughtn't to have acted like that, Rook. I know I oughtn't. I can't think why I did! You're not angry with me any more, are you?"

"Angry?" he repeated. "Angry? Good God! It's you who ought to be angry! Netta darling, listen — listen to me." His voice grew very quiet and resolute, the voice which she had come to associate with her happiest moments; the voice he had used when he first made her come with him to Ashover.

"Cousin Ann and I are very old friends. You do understand that, don't you? And when I say 'old friends' you do know what I mean? There's no danger to you, none at all, from what Cousin Ann and I are to each other *now*, you understand. It would be different altogether if we were meeting here for the first time. *Then* you might have had a right to be worried. But when people have known each other all their lives, there's a certain — oh, I don't know — a certain familiarity which to a person like me destroys all the thrill of — well! of love-making, to be quite frank. — Do you understand what I'm saying to you, Netta darling?"

The sweetness to her wounded feelings of the tenderness in his voice was all that concerned the woman at that moment. As to what he actually *said*, it just excited a vague wonder and amusement in her that her mysterious Rook could be so stupid, so blind. She felt he had not the remotest desire to deceive her, to pull wool over her eyes. But, mercy! what things men *could* think, what things men *could* say! An overwhelming wave of pitiful gentleness toward him, just because he was so funny, swept over her heart. She lifted up her chin and gave him a quick, sudden, passionate

"Oh, I know I was mad," she repeated. "I know I was mad."

His arm tightened round her in a reassuring hug. Then with a bound he was off the bed and hanging over the dead ashes in the grate.

"Why haven't they cleared this up?" he grumbled. "Why didn't Pandie light your fire?"

Wow ho! Wow ho! Wow ho! moaned the wind in the chimney above his head.

He moved to the side of the mantelpiece and rang the bell.

"Tell her to take the ashes away and bring some sticks," he said. "I've got to go round now and meet Uncle Dick. The old man's been hanging about all morning, they tell me. What he wants I can't think! You've seen him, haven't you, Netta? I told you about him. My grandfather was a rake in his time. I daresay I've got plenty of other relations hidden away somewhere if the truth were known."

Netta heard him as if his voice came to her through a dense volume of green, humming water. The wind began rattling the window again, as though its invisible fingers itched to get her by the throat.

"Uncle Dick?" she repeated vaguely. "Oh, yes, Corporal Dick! I know. Cousin Ann introduced me to him. He lives over there — beyond Battlefield. Yes, of course you must go if he wants to see you."

She got up and stood there, passive and hesitating. She would have given anything to be really loved just then — not petted and pitied but loved, so as to drown all her thoughts. But he moved straight to the door.

“Make Pandie light you one of her best fires,” he said.

Rook Ashover found his poor relation waiting for him in the little nondescript place they had acquired the habit of calling “the Master’s Study” since the time of Uncle Dick’s progenitor. Perhaps that was the reason the Corporal always insisted upon being shown in there in preference to any more formal reception.

The old man was sitting on a high-backed chair, his long bony fingers crossed over one of his knees. His hat and stick and muffler lay on the table.

“Well, Uncle Dick, how goes it?” said the nephew, shaking his visitor cordially by the hand. “Sit down, sit down.” And he drew up another high-backed chair and smilingly placed himself opposite him, with the look of one who deprecates an expected reproof.

“Wind rather strong to-day, eh?” went on the younger man. “Found it rough, I expect, coming across the hill? How are they all over there?”

The Corporal regarded the Squire of Ashover with an austere, quizzical eye.

“It’s not about them, Nephew, that I’ve come so far to see ‘ee.”

“What is it for, Uncle, then? Just for old companion’s sake and to tell me I’ve been neglecting you lately?”

“They tell me, down Dorsal, that Lexie be no better and that Doctor says there’s no hope for ‘n to see another year round.”

Rook’s smile died upon his face. “That’s so, Uncle. I’m afraid that’s so.”

“Well, then, if that’s so,” returned the old man, uncrossing his knees and leaning forward, “how is it that you have the face, Nephew — you that be Squire and all that — to go and fix yourself up with a young woman that may be a decent body and such-like and I’m not saving she isn’t, but one that makes your blessed mother feel lonesome and confounded in her own house, as if the whole world were turned higgledy-piggledy? ’Tisn’t that I’ve anything against Miss Page here. She be a good-hearted young woman by all accounts. But, good or bad, we know that she isn’t your lawful wife; and we know that she be standing in the place of your lawful wife; and the long and short of *that* is — with Lexie being as he be — that when he’s gone and when in due time you are gone, too, there’ll be no more Ashovers on Frome-side. Young, old, rich, poor, that’ll finish ’em! That’ll be the end.”

Having thus finished the longest consecutive utterance he had ever made in his life the Corporal crossed his legs, straightened himself out in his chair, and solemnly and gravely winked at his obstinate nephew.

Rook had shuffled uneasily more than once during this discourse, but by the time it was over he had taken his cue.

“Uncle Richard,” he began, “I am very grateful to you for speaking your mind so frankly. Of course, I *do* see how unpleasant all this is for my mother. And I see exactly how you yourself must feel about it. Unfortunately there are certain questions in life that one cannot decide in consideration for other people’s feelings; or even perhaps for one’s own feelings. I don’t think you’d wish me to behave badly, Uncle Richard. I brought Miss Page here to the house with my eyes fully open. She herself, I daresay, would have preferred to remain in seclusion. If I had known, of course, how my mother would take it, shutting herself up in her room and so on, I admit I might have acted differently. I fancied that time and habit would bring her round. They don’t seem to have done so. And there it is! You must see for yourself that I cannot send Miss Page away *now.* It would be a dishonourable thing, a brutal thing, an impossible thing. No! No! Uncle; there are situations in life when a man must shift for himself. I fully understand your motives in coming to me like this. But it’s no use. My mother is my mother and I am myself. As to the future, We shall see! Not even *you* can read the future, Uncle!"

The old man heard him to the end. Then with a stiff mechanical jerk he got up, straightened his shoulders to their full height, took his stick and hat and muffler from the table, and strode resolutely to the door.

"This is all I'm to get from you, then?" said he in a husky voice. "I'm an old man and a poor man; but this house and this family are more precious to me than my own life. You think I'm an old fool. Don't 'ee be too sure, Nephew; don't 'ee be too sure! There be some as can endure to see their hopes frustrated; and there be some as can't and won't. When a man's my age and has nothing to live for and nothing to fear, *he's dangerous* — that's what he is; he's *dangerous!* He's like a fox that's been half-skinned in a trap. He goes slow and he goes round; but he gets his goose in the end!"

Rook had risen to his feet and was standing with his body bent forward and his fingertips resting on the table. He might have been a bewildered parliamentarian watching the intrusion of some reckless bomb-thrower. He wished he had taken a different line with the old fanatic; been conciliatory, prevaricating, indefinite. Nothing more annoying than this could possibly have occurred — annoying and sinister. The old man's vague and obscure menaces were just the kind most of all calculated to worry a man's mind. The wildest, queerest thoughts whirled through Rook's brain as he watched his uncle turn round upon him once more, his hand on the door handle.

"You think because you were born legitimate-like and be Squire of Ashover and stand where your father stood and where my father stood, that you can do as you please. Do you know this place as I know it? Do you hear the voices of dead folks calling to you out of their graves? Do you see things in the woods, in the lanes, in the bartons, as I do? Things that do walk and wail o' nights, 'cause the Lord won't let un lie still? Hark to the wind now, young man, hark to the wind now! It's contrary to nature for the wind to talk to a man, but 'a do talk; I've a-heard un; day in, day out; and 'a do say such things as would turn a man's wits if he didn't know north from south in every copse and spinny o' Frome-side. But go your ways, Rook Ashover, go your ways! Drive our dead folks back where they belong! Be the black plague to your sacred mother! I've a-said my say and I be going. But I've not finished with this little job yet!"

To Rook's final astonishment before he disappeared into the hallway the extraordinary old man gave him a second portentous wink, the effect of which upon the aged face that made it was bizarre in the extreme. It was as if a judge, wearing the black cap, had suddenly put out his tongue at the condemned.

The agitated silence which followed the departure of Uncle Dick was interrupted by the familiar sound of Pandie ringing the hall bell as a signal for lunch. The noise made Rook think of the days when he and Lexie used to bolt up to their bedroom at the end of the passage to wash themselves clean of fish scales and river slime.

Oh, Lexie, Lexie … Ay! He would be content to go over the whole wretched business of his life again if only he could give his brother ten good years more of the existence he loved so well!

CHAPTER VI

DECEMBER HAD COME; and with the coming of December there fell upon that country of pastures and orchards a warm trance-like stillness.

The earth seemed to lie back upon itself, relaxed and lethargic. The days slid by imperceptibly, each one resembling the one before it, in a heavy, damp, windless atmosphere, steamy and misty, with large sun-warmed, earth-brown noons followed by amber-coloured twilights.

On one of these rich mellow placid days, imperturbable and languid as a woman in bed with her first-born, Mrs. Ashover and Lady Ann sat in the former's luxurious room, enjoying afternoon tea.

Any one who could have peered into this privileged chamber would have displayed little surprise at learning that its occupant preferred to have all her meals brought up to her there.

The place was really an almost flawless work of art. It had the qualities of a drawing room and yet it was more delicate, more dainty, more personal, than any drawing room Lady Ann had ever seen.

Mrs. Ashover had a fire in the grate, but it was so warm that she had opened one of the windows, and the rich earth-heavy smell of ploughed furrows and mud-muffled lanes came floating in and hovered over the delicate bric-à-brac and over the Queen Anne chairs and tables.

It was perhaps because of the millions and millions of dead leaves that were dissolving back into the flesh of their great drowsy mother that, with this air from the woods and meadows, there came a perceptible savour, acrid and penetrating, of the very sweat of death itself.

It was the sort of day that has an especial appeal to the nerves of women, perhaps because the passivity, the inertness, the lethargy of the earth at these times, its preparturient *fallowness*, moribund and yet magnetic, self-absorbed and yet germinative, has something in it that answers to one of their own most profound and secret moods.

The land, thus lying fallow and immobile, might be said to have sunk down, to have sunk back, into some interior level or stratum of being, where it was unapproachable to the sun's generative warmth, and yet had a mysterious life of its own.

Hardly conscious of the systole and diastole of its faint breath, of the subterranean beating of its muffled pulses, the vast rain-soaked countryside seemed, during this placid winter solstice, to be in some mysterious way enjoying the ecstasy of its own virginal languor, of its own deep peace, as a "still unravished bride of quietness."

Something of this appeasement, of this self-amorous quiescence, must have floated in through that open window, must have worked its relaxing charm upon the old woman and the young woman, as they sat on the sofa side by side, their skirts touching, the supple athletic wrist in its tweed sleeve, the slender aged wrist in its lace sleeve, hovering over the little rosewood tea table, over the polished silver, over the Meissen china.

The influence of the day, the immense languid emanation that diffused itself through the room, endowed with a vague but very formidable power the subtle conspiracy, evasive, ambiguous, which rose like the scent of a sweet but poisonous flower from their intimate conversation.

"She is thinking over what I said," threw out Lady Ann, helping herself to another piece of thin bread and butter and lifting it to her finely curved mouth with the impetuousness of a greedy child.

"But what good will *that* do us?" murmured the old woman, flicking an errant tea leaf from the edge of her cup as if she would dispose of their enemy in the same more effective, more drastic way.

"No thinking that *she* does will take her off, switch her back to Bristol, or wherever it is he picked her up. That's what I feel about all this roundabout method of yours. It just doesn't get us anywhere! I told you from the beginning that the way you treated her would only give her a false impression; only make her settle down more snugly than ever in her warm nest. And now by giving her a jolt you've only made her suspicious of you. You haven't changed her. How could you change her? Why *should* she change?"

Lady Ann swallowed her bread and butter and stretched out her hand for another piece. She felt very hungry and for some occult reason very formidable. She moved her supple body inside her closely fitting clothes with a slow feline movement of muscular relaxation. "I'll go for a long walk after tea. I'll take Lion," she said to herself. And her mind visualized the enormous Newfoundland dog bounding over the gorse bushes and sniffing at the rabbit burrows. Between herself and this dog of Rook's a close attachment had sprung up. She had been shocked to find how little Rook cared for it. People who didn't understand dogs oughtn't to have dogs! They either neglected them heartlessly, or they corrupted them by ill-timed petting.

"How long will you give me, Auntie, to try out my method?" she asked, holding up her teacup and smiling, with the conquering smile of youth, at her companion.

"How long, my dear child? Goodness! I give you as long as you like! What else can I do? Nothing that *I* can say to the poor boy seems to make the least difference."

As the old woman uttered these words she thought within her heart: “Can’t I make this proud creature see what our only chance is? Can’t I make her see that our only chance is nothing else than her own reckless, unscrupulous beauty?” And the brutal game-preserving expressions of Corporal Dick, still redolent of rank weed-smoke, thumped and heel-tapped in her obsessed brain.

“She’s been thinking a great deal lately,” went on the younger woman, stretching out her long legs and sliding both hands into her jacket pockets. “She can’t get what I said to her out of her mind. She’s beginning to feel pricks of conscience. There’s no doubt about that. And once get her to feel *that* sort of thing to a point of spoiling her illusion — well! there we are!”

Mrs. Ashover rose from the sofa and, impatiently pushing the tea table a little farther away, reached for her woolwork. Then sinking back by her companion’s side she turned a querulous, anxious, disturbed face toward her.

“Spoiling her illusion? What are you talking about, child?” She sighed heavily and smoothed the lace cuff of one of her wrists with nervous fingers.

“I believe you have a sort of liking for the baggage!” she burst out.

Lady Ann lifted her eyebrows and regarded her with a mocking, slightly contemptuous smile. The daughter of a long line of courtly diplomatists, she began to feel a little irritated with her aunt. “It’s the Gresham blood in her,” she thought. “They always had a second-rate streak.”

“Well!” she said slowly. “I don’t feel that it’s necessary to quarrel with people. One puts oneself on their level in that way, doesn’t one? I daresay the poor little woman has had a hard enough time of it. If I could give her a good round income; a trim little villa down at Weymouth or somewhere;

with a couple of servants and an old enamoured sea captain, shall we say, across the hedge — gracious! I would willingly do it!"

Mrs. Ashover's countenance expressed the sort of astonishment that she would have felt if Cousin Ann had suddenly kicked one of her neat shoes right across the room.

"You young people are too much for me," she murmured. "Too much for me. I suppose it's Rook who has put these ideas into your head," she added, with a quick glance of stealthy malevolence. "In my time designing minxes like that were not given incomes. They were given the stick!"

Lady Ann leaned forward and laid her strong young hand on the old woman's knee.

"Do you suppose, Auntie dear, that if I wasn't sure it would be all right, I should feel as happy as I do to-day?"

Mrs. Ashover's face cleared a little. There certainly did seem to gleam forth an overpowering confidence and assurance from the girl's limpid, mysterious gray eyes.

There was a tone of impassioned pleading in the old lady's voice as she murmured eagerly: "You give me your word? You *will* save him? You *will* save him from her?"

Ann Gore dropped her eyelids at this and a smile of deep, sweet, implacable power crossed her mouth, making her full lips, exquisitely childish in their perfect Cupid's bow, curve so divinely that her aunt leaned over and impulsively kissed her.

"We won't talk about it any more, child. I understand you. There! I expect you're wanting to get out now and have your walk. You mustn't give up the whole of a lovely afternoon to an old troublesome thing like me."

They both rose to their feet. The air from the open window, treacherous-sweet with the death smell of a world of dying leaves, flowed through them;

rousing a poignant response in their deepest nerves.

The wide-stretching unsown plough lands, the patient indrawn leafless woods, the great inert, apathetic breasts of the earth, drew these women toward them in answering reciprocity. To the elder it was as if the strong invisible hands of the dead generations were urging her on, comforting her, sustaining her, in her struggle against her adversary. To the younger it was as if the very spirit of that hibernating countryside, lying fallow, secretive, implacable, were calling to her to share in some tremendous *waiting*, through rain, through frost, through everything — for the hour of the sowing of the seed.

They stood together for a perceptible space of time, caught, as two people often are, by the very beat of the wings of fate. Then all in a moment they became conscious that they were both listening, intently, absorbingly, to a sound in the garden outside.

It was the sound of a man's footsteps moving up and down, up and down, with irritating regularity, along the gravel path that ran parallel to the lawn.

They both felt instinctively that the man was Rook; and for that very reason they were each reluctant to go to the window and look out. Rook's personality had certainly hovered over their tea table, but neither of them was at all anxious for the intrusion of his actual presence at that juncture.

The situation was indeed, for one second, humorously disconcerting; one of those situations with which the clumsy gaucherie of men copes more easily than the finesse of women.

But Lady Ann kept her head, and soon proved herself a true daughter of the diplomatic Lord Poynings.

Without the flicker of an eyelid to indicate that she knew that both of them had heard those steps: "There's Lion!" she cried. "I'm sure he's dying for a run on Battlefield. Good-bye, Auntie! I’ve enjoyed my tea so much!”

The door was hardly shut behind her when Mrs. Ashover hurried to the window. There he was — her son the Squire — pacing abstractedly up and down, as if the little gravel path were the wall of a fortress.

Presently she heard the voice of Cousin Ann, a clear careless young girl’s voice, calling: “Lion! Lion! Lion!” Apparently Rook Ashover also heard that voice; for he stopped suddenly in his abstracted walk, stood hesitating for a moment, looking nervously toward the sound; and then with a quick furtive stride and without so much as once glancing behind him, made off in the direction of the Frome bridge.

“Why doesn’t she run after him?” cried the old lady in her indignant heart, tapping the window sill with her knuckles.

“Lion! Lion! Lion!” came the girlish voice from the stable yard.

“You fool! He’s across the bridge! You stupid! He’s across the river!” And the belligerent little woman positively shook the window frame in her impetuous annoyance.

Rook *was* across the river. He was not only across the river but he was also — very soon — across the churchyard and out into the water meadows behind it. He felt such an intense desire for movement, for action, for self-escape.

No doubt the peculiar quality of that pacing up and down the gravel path had been the outward sign of the rending and tearing within him of two opposite motive forces.

He had made a sort of half-appointment to meet Nell Hastings that afternoon; but something in Netta’s mood, something illuminated, magnetic, had made him feel uneasy and perplexed.

Netta had seemed to escape him as she never had escaped him. She seemed to have acquired some mysterious independence. She had spoken to him and looked at him in such a strange, remote, exultant way! He felt piqued and confused. He found himself half-wishing that he hadn't made this appointment with Nell.

Rook did not realize how deeply the great goddess Artemis — the mysterious immortal whose love is for her own body — had come into her own that day. He did not realize that it was a day for the triumph of woman's nerves over man's nerves. On such a day, he ought to have told himself, had the dangerous thyrsus-bearing son of Semele come stealthily into the city of Pentheus. On such a day had the wild Bassarids and Mænads sent the gory head of Orpheus "down the swift Hebrus, to the Lesbian shore"! On such a day had the dogs and maidens of Diana torn the luckless Actæon limb from limb. It was a woman's day; a day that lay virginal, inscrutable, relaxed; yet with a magnetism in its inertness that could trouble a man's deepest soul.

And Rook Ashover hated the day. He felt a queer, nervous, reluctant uneasiness even about meeting Nell. He would have given anything for a hard, nipping black frost to get its grip upon these misty meadows, to turn all this clinging earth-flesh into frozen rock! He loathed the sodden, relaxed clay with its incense-reek of insidious mortality. He longed to escape from it all, into some clear, purged, bitter air. He felt homesick for the tang of the salt, unharvested, unfecund sea.

Blindly striding across the meadows — full of whirling, contradictory thoughts — he was suddenly brought to a standstill by a wide black ditch.

"Double-dyed ass! Of course there's no path over these cursed fens!"

He walked along the edge of the ditch, looking for a plank or a dam by which to cross.

No plank! No dam! Only another black ditch still wider than the one he was following!

He had a queer horrid moment; caught there, by those two black ditches. The reeds had been dead and rotten for some time and their brown stalks stood up like twisted feathers from some obscene bird's skull whose skeleton was mud-engulfed. One ditch was full of dead willow leaves. The other had a dead alder branch floating on its surface. And from both of them there emerged a heavy thick acrid odour that seemed as if it must be the very final exhalation of the dead flesh of a world.

Turning his heel in an angry desperation he caught sight of a human figure emerging from the shadow of the church and moving hesitatingly among the graves.

His heart, in spite of himself, began to beat violently. She was earlier than he had expected!

Had there been some new trouble with that mad priest?

Well! Never mind the reason. She was there. And he quickened his steps to something approaching a run, fearful that she might take fright when she saw him and out of some crazy perversity elude him and vanish.

She gave no sign of retreating, however. She just remained passive — leaning against a tombstone; waiting for him. He scrambled over the low wall and strode straight up to her, holding his hat in his hand.

"I knew it was you," she said simply; and made room for him at her side; so that he could lean also against the monument to "Timothy Edward Foraker, yeoman of this Parish."

"I knew it was you," she repeated, letting her fingers remain clasped in his as they stared together across the misty expanse.

Rook did not speak a word to her for several minutes. His soul seemed divided into three separate beings. One of these beings was obsessed with a simple concentrated desire to get hold of the inmost fluttering identity of this passive creature. To get hold of that — to take it for his own — to make it his unresisting, helpless, abandoned possession.

Another being in him was full of nervous considerations that were tremulous with a thousand fears, like the quivering antennæ of moths, the agitated feelers of sea anemones, the twitching nostrils of horses; considerations that included Netta, Cousin Ann, his mother — Nell herself.

But the third being in him just looked on, with absolute detachment and indifference, at the whole turbid stream of his life. It hovered over both their heads, this third being, and over the gravestone of Timothy Edward against which they leaned. It hovered over the ragged, mournful trunk of Lexie's elm tree. It voyaged out over the misty fens, over the gates and dams and poplars and ditches — over the rim of the horizon. And it was already out of its body, this third being, out of its malice-ridden, nerve-jangled body, drinking with deep, thirsty draughts the great calm under lake of hateless, loveless oblivion!

His first words to her came from the second being in him, the one with the twitching nostrils of a nervous animal. "Why did you come earlier than you said? It's only beginning to get dark now."

Even while he spoke, the first being in him was clutching her thin fingers more tightly, possessing itself of them more unscrupulously.

"Why didn't I wait?" she murmured. "It wasn't because I was in such a desperate hurry that I *couldn't* wait, Rook. Was that what you were thinking?" And she turned her head toward him with a faint little-girl smile, answering the pressure of his fingers.

"No, Rook dear," she went on. "It was because he *is* after all going to have vespers to-night. He told me yesterday he wasn't; that he had something else to do; and that's why I said to you to come to-night. But he *is*. So I came early; on the chance. I shall have to wait for him here," she added. "He likes me to be in the church."

Rook cast a slow, cautious glance toward the corner of the building. "But we've got a long time before vespers, haven't we?" he said.

"About an hour, I should think." And she, too, cast an anxious glance in the direction of the village. "Well, nearly an hour, anyway; but you'll go when I tell you, Rook, won't you? Sometimes I like to have you near me when I meet him. But not to-day. Oh, Rook! I saw Lexie this morning and he's worrying about himself. He says this damp weather'll kill him if it goes on. I thought he looked rather better, if anything. But he's worrying."

Rook dropped her hand and stood up. "Damn! I must go and see him," he said. "I haven't seen him for three days. I'll go straight over there to-night."

The girl got up, too. She felt only softly and gently sorry for Lexie. There was a queer exaltation in her that made it difficult to be more sorry than that for any one.

"He'll outlive us all," she said. "His mania for life is like the jump of that salmon trout I saw at Tollminster Mill. I told you about it. It jumped over the edge of the boat. It jumped over everything. And it got back, too, into the mill pond."

For some reason or other it gave Nell a peculiar satisfaction to think of Lexie as a silvery salmon jumping for his life. She felt that she would like to hold that struggling, arrowy, smooth-scaled fish tightly in her hand before seeing it go splashing back.

She became quiet and still, thinking of Lexie in this way; but in the end she wanted to stop thinking of him; for she suddenly recalled the particular look in the eyes of the animal in her childhood's Bible, entitled: "The Ram caught by its Horns." No fish, even with hooked gills, even with the tragic eye-sockets of the Dolphins of Scopas, could ever feel quite what that beast felt; and if a man felt more ——

She found herself being led by Rook to the door of the church. The sun had been invisible for some time past; and now the whole scene was losing its distinctness, losing its familiar landmarks one by one as the night fell.

Gloom that drew its quality from dampness, a positive thing, was rapidly being replaced by gloom that drew its quality from darkness, a negative thing.

Rook pushed open the door of the church and drew her inside. It was like night within the building, a night that was faintly touched by a pallid greenish luminousness that seemed to have no connection with sun or moon.

As the heavy door closed behind them the girl felt she had passed into a different world, a world smelling of some sort of chilly-fleshed fungous growths that had taken centuries to mature.

Rook took her by the hand and led her up the narrow aisle, past the brass lectern, under the Norman archway, to where the tombs of the Ashovers of old days lay in their pallid immobility. Standing behind her, while her knees touched the sleeping Crusader, he took her in his arms and kissed her cold cheek. Letting her head sink back and turning her face sideways she met his lips, while her slender body yielded itself to him.

She felt strangely and profoundly happy in his embrace. It was a different kind of happiness altogether from what she felt when Lexie kissed her on the day she had fled from her home. She had had Rook on her mind then, so that she could not lie back content upon the dark flood; but it was Rook himself whose desire was that flood now, and her whole nature was free to respond.

A queer remembrance came into her mind as she yielded to his caresses, the remembrance of a salt marsh by the Dorset coast, where the greenish-white light of a protracted sunset hung like livid phosphorus in the black pools, stained with pale blood. She remembered how a solitary heron with wide-stretched wings and trailing legs had descended into the water; and how she had felt that it was those livid pools in the black earth, rather than the darkened sky overhead, that offered an escape to her soul.

Here in the church with the man she loved she felt as if she were hidden safe away from all responsibility, from all pursuit. She felt as long as she could keep his desire concentrated upon her, that Time itself stood still; and a lovely, deep, enchanted Eternity substituted itself for the little poisonous rankling minutes that throbbed like evil ulcers.

Rook’s mind also had its own obscure journeys to make. He was aware — as she never for a moment seemed to be — of the presence of his dead people. He was aware of an angry menace rising from all that human dust under his feet, threatening him if he did not open the gates of the future to their race, cursing him if he barred and locked those gates in the selfish enjoyment of uncreative, unproductive emotion.

As he caressed her there in that dark church on that curious day he felt as though he were inflicting a definite wound upon the accumulated yearning, the gathered tension, stretching out into the future, of six long human centuries.

So many fathers begetting so many children; so many children begetting so many fathers; and all to end in his striking them back into the annihilating dark, with a mocking “Down, wantons, down!”

It was as if all the life energy of all that proud human tribe had been concentrated in one invisible gesture of intense creation, only to be derided, jeered at, spurned, by his flippant indifference.

Indifference? It was defiance; since he had chosen their very resting place to flaunt his sterile malice. Into this very shrine of their vitality, of their hope, of their unconquerable life urge he had come to parade his disillusionment, his alliance with emptiness, with nothingness, with the eternal *No* of the abyss!

He had come to fool them. How did the sentinel Crusader know that this girl he had brought with him was inhibited and disallowed; a mocking mirage to their hope? He had come to fool them. So at least that smirking infidel of a great-grandfather Benjamin seemed to guess as he leered at them over the plump cupids.

For it was against the very monument of the crafty Deist that the two were leaning now; and, as they clung together there, Rook felt he was taking a kind of revenge on fate itself.

He was certainly revenging himself upon the life lust of his own race. He was denying that race any future at all. He was saying to the vast dim company of future Ashovers, “Ye shall not live!”

It was a feeling of this kind, deep, cold, malicious, that made every caress he gave this girl a kind of flouting of the gods. Each kiss was a malignant sacrilege directed against the helpless invisible company of the Future.

He had decided to cut the living navel cord between these two. Let the one be totally forgotten! Let the other never be born!

Something of the viciousness of these thoughts must have passed into the very touch of his hands; but if it did, the girl neither regarded it nor was affected by it.

Rook was startled — as if it were something upon which he had not calculated — when he became aware of the spiritual exaltation of his companion.

The girl's white features, as he caught a glimpse of them in that spectral light, wore an expression of childlike beatitude. He knew there had been a mysterious attraction of some kind between himself and this woebegone little creature; but when he saw that illuminated look on her face, endowing her with an utterly unexpected beauty, he was conscious of a sharp secret pang, as if his nature had suddenly touched some "fourth dimension" whose superiority to his own level of existence shocked and troubled him.

Many months after this he remembered what he felt at that moment, when that white face swirled up to him as if on the crest of a dark wave, looking at him and through him and past him in an ecstasy of which he himself touched barely the fringe.

It was certainly in league with the nerves of women, the peculiar atmosphere of that December day.

Whether it was in league with the remorseless umbilical cord of those insistent generations was a different matter. Rook Ashover had only commenced his fatal struggle with *that* dark mandate!

The two companions found themselves back again at the door at last; the man troubled, anxious, perturbed, his mind abnormally alert to every shape and sound of the external world; the girl drugged, dazed, numbed, but unfathomably happy.

"It's like death to make love to you," he muttered when they were out of the church.

"Yes," she whispered. "I felt like that, too."

She lied with an entranced luxuriousness, careless of what he said or what she answered.

"I shall wait for William now without minding a bit," she added. "You go off quickly, Rook. No! No! No good-byes! I'll go back and light all the candles! You look when you get to the bridge and see if the windows aren't lit up! When you hear him ringing the bell you may think of me saying my prayers by those tombs! There! Go off quick —— No! No! I won’t say any good-bye!”

Rook did turn round when he reached the bridge; and sure enough, the windows were lighted up as he had never seen them lighted up before. It was a sort of heathen Candlemas; a twilight celebration of the tutelary Powers of that riverside, as they reassumed, with the fall of darkness, their ancestral domination.

The smell of the water washing against the mossy arches, the smell of the black mud in the banked-up ditches, the smell of miles and miles of damp grass sinking down, blade by misty blade, under the weight of the night, flowed like a palpable exhalation around the yellowish gleam of those Gothic windows.

He leaned against the parapet and listened intently. The air about him seemed supernaturally hushed; all the great gulfs of the night listening there, even as he was listening.

And then in a moment, with a suddenness that made Rook gasp, for he had heard no footstep upon the road, the great cracked reverberating bell rang out from the church tower.

Toom! Toom! Toom!

The very cattle and sheep must have stirred uneasily in their sheds and bartons. It was as if that heathen illumination had actually summoned forth out of the air the tangible presence of something that had been gathering upon Ashover since the dawn of the day.

Toom! Toom! Toom!

It was as if the gigantic feet of Cybele herself, *Magna Mater, Bona Dea*, were striding bronze-sandalled over the dark bedrock of Frome-side.

Toom! Toom! Toom!

CHAPTER VII

THE BLACK FROST prayed for by Rook came at last. It came a few days before Christmas, and on the morning of Christmas Eve it held all Fromeside in stark iron-bound rigidity.

The long-drawn-out dissolution of the leaves was over now. Except for a few holly bushes on the Tollminster Road and the line of Scotch firs on Heron's Ridge it might have been supposed that the whole phenomenon of foliage, of umbrageousness, had never existed upon the planet.

Brown and gray, gray and brown, the bare bushes, the bare branches, rose abruptly from the naked frost-bitten soil. In holes, in crevices, in rabbit burrows, under tree roots, in the bottom of ponds, in the minute tunnels of lobworms, certain shapeless nonentities that once vibrated to sun and moon and all the winds lay hidden, forgotten, annihilated, done for.

To any human being who loved form better than colour in material things the effect of this change amounted to positive ecstasy. Such an one was Rook; and the pleasure which he enjoyed hour by hour during these iron-bound days was beyond description.

An essential puritanism in his nature answered exultantly to this stark bleak time. To see the silhouette of the world gray upon gray; to see the stiff, constricted, sombre mornings pass abruptly into the space-dark, wind-bitten, frozen evenings; to see the hours between eleven o'clock and three o'clock blotted out, as it were, from the diurnal calendar — all this was like a deep, silent, magical satisfaction to his whole nature.

He was so happy that his happiness became a mesmeric tyranny over those who surrounded him. He seemed able to lift his hand against the very march of events; to keep fate itself petrified, immobile, suspended; harmless as the icicles that hung above the water under Frome Bridge.

He was especially happy that morning of Christmas Eve. He had had a long, shamelessly candid conversation with Lexie the night before, and the savour of Lexie's cynical sagacity was sweetening the taste of his early breakfast as he sat with Cousin Ann and Netta drinking cup after cup of tea and watching the reddening logs.

It was so dark that they had candles on the table; and the flames of these candles increased Rook's happiness, both by the way they drew their purity from the frost-bitten air and by something almost mystical in their quivering up-burning.

Netta, too, for some secret reason of her own, seemed in unnaturally high spirits. From where she was sitting she looked straight into the eyes of the melancholy cavalier; and if ever any particular atmospheric condition lent itself to the inner soul of a picture, this candle-lighted refuge from the black frost was the dedicated background for that of Sir Robert Ashover.

Cousin Ann was less in harmony with herself. She talked graciously enough. She kept her head. But her gaiety was of a conventional, external kind: a laughing curve here of her fine lips; a seductive glance there of her gray eyes; and all the while a little puckered frown that twitched and deepened between her arched eyebrows! She had, as King Lear would say, her "frontlet on."

If the mute gaze of the sad Sir Robert kept murmuring "a brave wench! a brave wench!" to the ex-actress from Bristol, something in the nerves of Cousin Ann responded to a chill of absolute isolation. She felt herself to be cut off from every support, human or inhuman. The frost had so petrified the rich life saps of the countryside, those sweet, rank, procreative forces that usually sustained her, that she had the sense of being separated from her gods by a glacial barrier.

Not that she relented in her purpose or relinquished one jot of her resolution. She continued to “steer right onward.” But the mood that upheld her was a thing of blind human obstinacy.

As the hours drew on toward the birth of Christ the earth constricted itself in its primordial, inert malice; and against this tightening of brute matter round about her, the heart of the young girl hardened itself within itself, as if beneath bands of triple steel.

But even as this very thing went on, Cousin Ann’s manner toward Rook became more coaxing and more provocative; her manner toward Netta more intimate and more disarming.

It was this exuberance in her that by degrees acted like an irritant upon the man’s nerves and impinged upon his happiness. Something radiated from the girl that was alien to the temper of the day; alien to the frozen starkness in which he delighted, alien to that corpse-like rigidity that must be broken by a power beyond nature or not broken at all!

The atmosphere round their three heads, as they sat beneath the flickering candles listening to Lady Ann’s chatter, began to grow intolerable to Rook. The very tingling in his blood, due to the electric contest going on between the burning logs inside and the frost outside, increased this feeling.

Finally he could endure the sound of that rich young voice no longer. He rose from the table abruptly, almost rudely, and muttering something about “giving Lion a run,” went out into the hall.

No sooner was the door shut behind him than Netta also rose as if to follow him; but Cousin Ann laid her hand on Netta’s arm and pulled her back into her chair.

The younger woman's heart was beating violently at that moment and a sort of dizziness like that which she felt on the hunting field when her horse approached an impossible jump made Netta's figure seem dim and wavering.

Having got her antagonist there before her, resigned and patient, it seemed as if the grand diplomatic stroke she had been meditating was infinitely more difficult than she had expected. The way, at that juncture, she clasped and unclasped her fingers may have reproduced on a smaller stage the very gesture with which her notorious great-grandfather, Lord Harry Poynings, had persuaded a crown prince to renounce his birthright.

"He *is* a dear, isn't he?" she murmured, in an impulsive tone which seemed signalling for an exchange of confidences. "There he goes, banging the kitchen door! Have you noticed how he always goes out through the kitchen? It's an old instinct, I expect. His father used to go out that way. He kept his guns there and used to meet the gamekeeper there. It *would* seem a pity, wouldn't it, Netta, if all these old ways died out? And of course they *will* die out if Rook doesn't marry."

The ex-actress did not wince. Her gaze remained fixed upon the melancholy face in the gilt frame. "Brave wench! Brave wench!" those sympathetic eyes seemed reiterating. But Netta stared back sadly enough at that sorrowful countenance.

An immense wave of weariness and disillusionment swept over her. Her exalted mood wilted and sank. The situation had been hard enough to bear when she first came to Ashover. Cousin Ann's appearance on the scene had relieved her from a tension that was becoming well-nigh intolerable. But now that her friendly rescuer had joined forces with the enemy she felt that the powers against her were more than she had strength to resist.

She could have resisted them, perhaps — for she was not devoid of the kind of stubbornness that passive natures of her quality possess — if it had not been for this fatal doubt in her own heart, this doubt which the blind humility of her love for Rook kept feeding with a sweet poison.

That love had assumed during these last days the form of a vague excited impulse, leading her she knew not where; ruffling the quiet of her mind with all manner of wild and wavering projects. She was only faintly affected by this matter of the Ashovers and their threatened extinction. The clamouring shadows from that crowded chancel might have beaten at her windows night by night and found her impervious to their entreaty. It was with Rook, and Rook only, she was concerned; and the gist of the excitement that had buoyed her up of late had been a desire to do something, something unexpected and new, that would make him know her as he had never known her before.

"If Rook *did* marry," Cousin Ann continued, "there's no earthly reason why he shouldn't go on taking care of you, Netta. You and he could find some delicious little place to hide away in; somewhere where you'd be quite free from the sort of thing that annoys you here."

Netta heard these words as if they were spoken in a dream. She withdrew her eyes from Sir Robert's face and let them rest upon her own hands folded tightly upon her lap.

"You *do* see what I mean?" went on the diplomatic voice. "Once get Rook safely married — married to anybody, Netta — to anybody! — and you and he need not be really separated."

She stretched out her arm and extinguished one of the candles which had begun guttering and hissing. She did this quite casually with her finger and thumb; and Netta could not help feeling as if she herself were that quickly despatched flame.

"Heavens, yes!" cried Lady Ann. "I can see you and me now, gossiping round some lovely little fire in Chelsea or Bloomsbury!"

Netta lifted her head at this.

"And the wife, too?" she said, with the shadow of a smile.

Ann received the retort in the spirit of a master fencer taking a well-directed thrust.

"Oh, the wife! Well! not quite *that,* Netta. Though these silly old embarrassments are fast breaking up. But, no! Not the wife, too, Netta. We'll leave *her* to the happy old lady upstairs. And we'll share Rook between us — as we're sharing him now."

The tone in which Cousin Ann spoke of "the wife" was really in the great manner of diplomatic badinage. It pulled Netta across some intimate threshold toward herself and thrust this poor imaginary lady into the outer darkness of conventional unimportance.

"The wife's affair," the girl continued, with a richly toned youthful chuckle, "will be to produce little Ashovers! Beyond *that* there's no need for any pathetic heroics, *I* should treat Rook just as I've always treated him, if he had a dozen wives!"

Netta looked past Cousin Ann's flushed cheeks, past the three still burning candles, to the gray square of the one unfrozen mullioned window. The naked boughs of the lime tree outside made a tracery of extraordinary beauty against this pane. And this tracery seemed to be actually reproduced in the mysterious frost marks which covered all the other windows with a lacework filigree.

It was as if that bitter weather had been an old German woodcarver, from Nuremberg or Rothenburg, outlining with his bony knuckles and iron tool a convoluted image of the very platonic "soul" or spiritual "eidolon" of some frost-benumbed growth of the Black Forest.

It was the impression she got from those mysterious frost marks and those knotted twigs, an old buried impression leaping suddenly into life, that created the resignation of her tone in what came next.

“Tell me what to do then — tell me — what to do — and I will do it!”

The words might have come from the clock above the chimneypiece, from the Cavalier’s picture, from the ghost of the tree itself, so stern and faint and impersonal did they sound as they floated over the empty cups and over the charred logs.

Lady Ann heard these words with every sense she possessed. She heard them as a prick-eared fox might have heard the rustle of a plump guinea fowl settling down to sleep in a blackthorn hedge. She heard them with such a thrill of triumph that she rose instinctively to her feet. Whatever may have been the emotion of her great-grandfather when his royal victim capitulated it could hardly have surpassed what she felt just then.

The incredible good luck of this unexpected victory fairly took her breath away.

“You *will* give up? You *will?”*

Just for one flickering second there was a vibration in the air about them as if the excited girl were actually going to bend down and kiss her conquered antagonist.

But there must have been something in Netta’s face that nipped in the bud any gesture of that sort.

The woman seemed to be collecting her strength very much as a person who had lost a lot of blood might weakly try to get up from the ground.

“Don’t go yet,” she murmured, misunderstanding Ann’s restlessness. “Don’t go away yet. It isn’t as simple as you think. I must tell you something.”

Cousin Ann moved across to the fireplace and relieved her feelings by striking one of the half-burnt logs a series of violent blows with the poker.

Returning to her seat she flung her plate and cup aside with a gesture more like that of a man than a woman and hurriedly lit another cigarette.

What she craved for at that moment was violent physical exertion. Her thoughts instinctively leaped from one blood-stirring activity to another. She saw the little white "scuts" of vanishing rabbits as she pursued them with her dog. She felt the blue-black ice crack beneath her feet as she skated over the Tollminster mill pond. She felt the kick of the gun against her shoulder as she shot wild duck with her father on Forley Marsh.

She would have liked to put the unhappy and wounded Netta "out of her pain" as she would have done to any other flying creature. She had "brought her down," But that was no reason why she should not treat her in a sporting manner. She wished she could finish her off as she would a moor hen dragged to her feet by Lion — wring her neck quickly and kindly, and then swing on over the frozen fields!

"Not as simple as I think?" she enquired brusquely. "It seems simple enough to me."

Netta appeared still to be struggling with a profound interior lassitude, as if out of the channel of some cut vein her blood was making a crimson pool on the floor. She uttered a little clicking sound in her throat. Then she spoke, exaggerating the genteel pronunciation of the words, as if what would really have relieved her feelings would have been to talk like a Portsmouth barmaid.

"One finds it difficult sometimes to make a person agree, you know, to accept one's decision. I *have* suggested the very thing you are now saying. I have *begged* Rook to take a room for me in Tollminster or Bristol. I have begged him not to let me be a drag on his life. I have told him I would perfectly understand his marrying; that I thought he *ought* to marry. I have said all those things to him, Lady Ann."

Ann's gray eyes scrutinized her coldly and critically.

"I expect you told him that you would not accept a penny from him after you left here and after he was married?"

Netta stared in surprise. How did this girl know that?

"Yes," she answered, "that was just what I did say."

A smile of malicious subtlety crossed Ann's, beautiful lips. "And while you said it, of course, you knew that just that very thing would effectively stop him?"

The frowning bewilderment on Netta's face indicated without the defence of words her freedom from such elaborate guile.

But Cousin Ann went on: "I daresay it was all unconscious, the line you took. But I'm afraid we're responsible for these shifty moves, even though we don't realize it when we make them."

She was silent for a moment, tapping the table with her cigarette case.

"Damn it all!" she burst out at last. "You must pull yourself together, Netta, and *make* him realize you're serious. This offering to live without help, this offering to just disappear is only putting spokes in your own wheel. Of course he won't let you go off like that! What decent man could? When you take *that* line you leave him no alternative."

Netta's face showed quite clearly that this argument had gone through her like a sword.

"I thought — —" she began; but even as she spoke the deadly implication of all that this meant stopped her words in mid-utterance. She sat staring at Cousin Ann with her mouth open.

That young lady's earliest playmate had been her father's gamekeeper. Missy Sparrow-hawk the old man used to call her. Certainly no raptorial hoverer over the wintry fields knew better the exact moment wherein to drop from the sky.

"One has to face the means to a thing when one wants a thing," said Cousin Ann. "You and I both care, I take it, for Rook's happiness above everything else. And Rook's real happiness, whatever he may *say,* is in carrying out his destiny. And his destiny, Netta, is in playing his part in life as his people have played it before him."

The ex-actress from the Bristol Empire closed her mouth, lowered her eyelids till it almost seemed as if her eyes were shut, too, and gave an imperceptible nod of the head.

"Rook must have a *son!*" added the excited girl, clenching one of her hands and beating it upon her knee as if she were annihilating the very possibility of female Ashovers. "And we've got to manage it. *You've* got to manage it."

What Netta was struggling to keep at that moment was the lovely vague impulse to do something wonderful and unexpected for Rook, some passionate effacement of herself, some act of desperate humility, that would bring him back to her in his thoughts, whatever became of her in reality.

The thought of something like that had been the last refuge of her weariness and her weakness. It had been a beautiful revenge upon them all and a complete escape from them all. But it was so difficult, when Cousin Ann talked in this way, to feel this any more. Cousin Ann made it seem as if she would be only tricking and fooling Rook. That was not at all what had been in her mind, filling her with this vague secret exultation.

"You mean that I should go off without his knowing?"

Cousin Ann indicated that she did mean just exactly that.

"But he'd come after me. Oh, you don't know him! You don't know him at all! You think it all depends on how little he cares for me. It doesn't depend on that! It depends on his own pride; on what he feels he has chosen to do, in defiance of everyone!"

Netta's voice as she went on became more and more careless and confidential. It became like the voice of a dying person confessing half-forgotten sins to a stranger priest.

"He would follow me and find me out wherever I went. To get some job somewhere and hide away from him would be absolutely impossible. He'd find me out. Nothing would stop him. He'd just bring me back here — and — and — —"

Cousin Ann remained completely oblivious of the ricochet of pride in the woman's voice; pride that kept beating against her calm rational statement, like the wind against a beleaguered rampart.

"Don't you understand what I mean?" said Netta almost crossly. And then a sudden smile of irony, irony deep and simple as the earth itself, passed over her haggard face.

"No!" repeated the other. "Tell me, quick! What would he do then?"

Netta looked her full in the face.

"He'd insist on marrying *me* then!" she said.

"Ah! he would, would he?" cried Cousin Ann, making an attempt to return Netta's smile with appropriate playfulness.

The attempt was not a very successful one. The response hung in the wind a bit. For the pulse beat of a second the victory was with the late mistress of Major-General Caxton. For once in her proud hoverings Missy Sparrow-hawk blinked and swerved. That nuance of irony on her rival's face became something she could not discount or deal with. For a couple of ticks of the great dining-room clock Lady Ann Poynings was no better than a baffled barbarian.

The result of this momentary defeat, however, was to add a fiercer momentum to her next stroke, which certainly did not miss its mark.

“Then there’s only one thing left for you to do if you’re serious in what you said just now.”

The strange illuminated look came back into Netta’s eyes.

“You mean — to do away with myself?” she whispered.

Lady Ann gave a spontaneous start of surprise at this. Among the various issues she had projected for her campaign, the suicide of her victim had, so far, taken no place.

“Good Lord, Netta Page! What must you think of me! Of course I wasn’t dreaming of horrors like that!”

Once more there came into the other’s countenance the same disconcerting smile.

“I don’t think you’d dream of anything for many nights,” she said. “But what is this one thing left, if it isn’t killing myself?”

Plumb-down, like a falling meteorite, came Missy Sparrow-hawk this time.

“A woman can always,” she whispered savagely, “kill the illusion which a man builds up about her or about himself in connection with her. And when that’s done, there is nothing left.”

The deadliness of this stroke was promptly proved by a curious case of obliteration. What was obliterated was the unearthly eagerness in Netta’s eyes; that exaltation which had carried their struggle to a level of emotion outside the scope of a winner of “scuts” and “pads” and “brushes.”

The look did not merely fade from Netta’s face; for that would imply a process. It sank and was extinguished. *It went out.* It disappeared as completely as the light in a ship’s stern disappears when the ship sinks into the sea trough.

“Nothing left but just disgust with the whole thing,” added Cousin Ann, driving the stroke home with ferocious finality. “They don’t hang on as *we* do, Netta Page. We’ve only to let ourselves drift and drop our form a bit and they’re off! They’re awfully fastidious, men are. You’d think sometimes that they’d never seen anything born or anything die!”

Netta’s face expressed a comprehension so bleak and stark that every vestige of beauty seemed frozen out of its haggardness.

“You mean that I should make him hate me?” she said humbly.

“I’m not dictating to you,” breathed the other, with a deep sigh of relief and leaning back in her chair. “It’s you who will have to do it. I’m not impertinent enough to suggest how it’s to be done. I only know, Netta, that if you don’t do just that, nothing that you do will make any difference.”

Why should it have happened that at that critical moment, in place of glancing at the gentle Sir Robert, Netta’s eyes fell upon the one unfrozen pane of the Elizabethan window, across which the lime tree stretched its branch? However it happened, the sight of that branch, motionless and benumbed in the leaden-coloured air reminded her of those drab wintry days when Florrie would bring back to their room from the Turk’s Head, hidden under her cloak, a bottle of Gordon’s gin.

She seemed actually to hear Florrie’s voice at that moment; and there was a branch across the frozen window there, too.

“You get quite like the other girls when you’re squiffy, Net!”

It was in that room that she had vowed to herself, one sickeningly gray morning, that she would never, never, never be “like the other girls” again!

She felt a sudden overpowering necessity to be quite alone. She felt that whatever happened it would be a heavenly relief, like the cessation of physical nausea, not to see Cousin Ann’s brightly flushed cheeks and clear gray eyes any more!

Rather stiffly, for the frost seemed to have got into her bones, she rose from her seat and stood quite still, looking straight down at her enemy.

Cousin Ann felt as though she were riding an unknown horse without spur or bridle or bit. She experienced a sense of abominable embarrassment. She felt as she had felt once when her father caught her stamping on a slowworm. She felt more clumsy than cruel, more thick-skinned than victorious. She felt a fool.

This feeling was not diminished when her rival gave her what seemed to resemble the melancholy shadow of an ironic curtsey. It remained when, with a movement that could not have been more dignified if it had been the exit of the betrayed crown prince, the friend of Florrie and Minnie bowed herself out into the empty hall.

CHAPTER VIII

NETTA NEVER FORGOT the final hour of that Christmas Eve as she watched from their bed the figure of Rook standing in his dressing gown by the window. He was as one who reports to his companion from some solitary Childe Roland Tower the signs and portents of a world dark with mysterious travail throes.

So as not to chill her with the night air as she sat up erect in the bed, her brown hair hanging loose over each shoulder and her eyes big with her hidden purpose, he did not open the window, though he longed to do so; but since their only light was the last flicker of their fire, the great hollow spaces of the hushed midnight gave up their secret to him.

“There’s a thaw beginning,” he said, half turning toward the bed.

“Does that mean that it’ll rain to-morrow?” she asked in a low voice as if she were afraid of disturbing something, afraid of interrupting some deep dark purpose of nature, as sacred and hidden as her own.

“It means a white Christmas — that’s what it means,” replied the Squire of Ashover. “I can’t see one single star. Wait a moment! Cover yourself up, will you? And I’ll open the window.”

Netta obediently sank down on the pillow and pulled the bedclothes close under her chin. Lying warm and quiet there she closed her eyes. In spite of everything she felt strangely happy.

Rook opened the upper window sash and leaned out, inhaling great breaths of dark damp air.

“There are clouds over everything,’ he reported. “And they’re not rain clouds, Netta. I can smell the snow coming.”

“Can you really smell the snow?” whispered the woman; and as the night air swept in about her she, too, was conscious of an indescribable presence there in the great brooding spaces, a presence like that of some enormous, formless, feathery body, the approach of which did actually send out some vague impalpable essence, recognizable by human senses — the smell of the snow!

Netta lay for several minutes in silence, giving herself up to this mysterious elemental process that was going on out there in the vast night.

Then suddenly she was conscious of a vague uneasiness. Why did not Rook close the window and come back into the room?

She raised her head. He was still leaning out, staring into the darkness, motionless as a sentinel, and she became conscious from the very pose of his head that he was absorbed in watching something or listening to something. Was he listening to the relaxing of the crust of the earth as it yielded to the thaw?

All at once he closed the window and turned round.

“Did you see anything?” she asked.

He looked at her in surprise. “How did you know?” he returned. And she saw by his face that he had received some kind of shock.

He came and sat down on the bed, taking the hand which she thrust out toward him.

“What was it, Rook?” she whispered.

He fixed her with his eyes, seeing her and yet not seeing her, like a man who is recreating in his mental vision some disturbing image.

“Rook!” she repeated, this time with real concern in her voice; “Rook! What did you see out there?”

His natural and somewhat morose humour came back into his eyes.

"There's no point in making a secret of it," he said. "There's someone out there with a lantern, standing by the shrubbery, behind the trees. He moved off when I opened the window and slunk into the bushes. My dear, I don't like it! It's nearly midnight. Who the devil would be in our garden in the middle of the night?"

Netta drew away her hand and sat up very straight, staring at him with wide-open eyes.

"I believe I know who it is, Rook!" she cried excitedly. "It's Corporal Dick! Pandie was rambling on just now about him. Oh, Rook, do you think he's gone mad?"

Rook leapt to his feet and strode to the window.

"Whoever it was he's disappeared now," he said, coming back to the middle of the room and hesitating there with a puzzled frown, his hand on the chair where he had laid his clothes.

"I wonder if I ought to dress and go out and see — I don't *want* to make a fuss — but if it is Uncle Dick —— What did Pandie say about him?"

"She said he'd been behaving queerly all day; hanging about the garden with a gun and. asking her questions."

Rook gave a perceptible start. *"What?"* he cried out. Then in a calmer voice: "I don't see anything very mad in that, Netta! Pandie's always getting the jumps about something or other. Uncle Dick was no doubt wanting me to go shooting with him. Good Lord! I can't see the old man wandering round here with a lantern in the middle of the night."

Netta shook her head. "But you said you saw someone. Did the man you see have a gun, Rook?"

He did not answer, but began pacing up and down the room, cursing under his breath: "The Corporal! Damn the Corporal!"

Each time he came to the chair where his clothes had been thrown, he stopped and picked up his shirt or his vest. Then he would throw the thing down and start walking and muttering again.

Nothing could have been more disagreeable to him than the idea of playing hide-and-seek at that confounded hour with a problematical Uncle Dick.

The unpleasant notion that if it *was* his uncle he might have to lock him up for the night, or even escort him back home over Battlefield and Dorsal, made him extremely unwilling to begin the business of dressing. And yet something ought to be done!

But perhaps it wasn't Uncle Dick at all — just some predatory night wanderer from the village on the way to his rabbit snares. A nocturnal chase after a poor devil of that kind would be worse than the other possibility.

Rook decided to let the matter rest. He became conscious of a superimposing weight in the atmosphere that made nothing seem more desirable than to take Netta in his arms and fall fast asleep.

He flung a shovelful of coal on the fire to keep it alive till morning, and throwing the window wide open to the now absolutely untroubled night, got straight into bed.

It was Netta and not he who stayed a wake long enough to count the strokes, when the solemn Queen Anne timepiece in the hall downstairs, an object brought into the family by one of the sagacious marriages of great-grandfather Benjamin, struck twelve of the clock.

Rook was still fast asleep, as fast asleep as if he had spent the night drinking wine with Monsieur Voltaire, when Netta awoke to her first white Christmas at Ashover.

An extraordinary sensation, that sudden consciousness of the fact that the window ledges were thick with a soft feathery muffling substance, and the dark woodwork of the window a mere frame to the falling, falling, falling of heavy silent flakes!

A miraculous intrusion, this mysterious whiteness, so different from all terrestrial or solar elements; as if some vast meteoric moon, virginal and immaculate, had actually collided, in its mystic orbit, with our motley guilt-stained earth!

Netta glanced at the fire. It was still warm and glowing, while a light that seemed to proceed rather from the snow itself than from any remoter luminary filled the room with a faint bluish mist.

Very noiselessly she slipped out of bed and began hurriedly putting on her clothes. It was a little after seven and she knew that there was a service at eight in Ashover Church.

She had secretly resolved the night before that she would go to this service. Mrs. Ashover always went to the more popular one at eleven o'clock; but Netta had helped Nell Hastings to set up a little straw-thatched manger, overarched with holly, in that famous chancel, and she was filled with an eager desire to see how it looked with the lighting of the candles Cousin Ann, she felt sure, would go rushing through the snow with Lion if she went out at all. In fact, the chances were that there would be no human being at this queer ceremony except the disastrous Mr. Hastings and his equivocal wife.

She took her heavy cloak and muffler, drew a pair of goloshes over her thickest boots, pulled low down over her head a young girl's tam-o'-shanter that had accompanied her through all her vicissitudes, kissed her hand at the figure in the bed, and let herself out.

She left the house by the kitchen door, greeting Pandie and the cook, who were enjoying a cup of early tea over the stove, in so happy a voice that when she had gone Pandie remarked to the other: "These here actressy gels do love a bit of white Christmas, same as decent-living folks, then; seems so! Her be gone to hear Parson Hastings say his ‘shed-for-you’ by snow-shine I reckon! Will the poor deceived man give the like o’ she the sacriments, do ‘ee suppose?”

Martha Vabbin opened the top of the stove with an iron hook and shifted the kettle.

“Maybe he will and maybe he won’t,” she replied. “But I heard tell that when Corporal Dick askit for a sup o’ them things in bygone days the Reverend that then was talked terrible straight to the poor hedge-dropped lad.”

Netta’s experience of snow in the real country was so slight that she felt an extraordinary sensation of awe as her steps broke the feathery whiteness that covered everything. A cart of some kind had entered the drive gate since the snow-storm began; but apart from this, everything was virginal and unstained.

The purity of the new-fallen snow made all the various little objects that displayed themselves in their shameless browns or yellows look more than just dirty; look in some queer way *degraded,* as if Nature had tossed them out in a fit of disgust. Every single twig or gatepost or tree root which *did* dare to assert its identity, bore upon its face the look of being subjected to a kind of penitential exposure, as if the self-respecting reticence with which it had concealed all the little birthmarks, deformities, and discolorations upon its poor skin were being held up to scorn.

Netta had passed round the corner of the house and was making her way through the little shrubbery path bordered by laurels and laurustinus, when she became aware of a sudden rustling and stumbling in the bushes behind her. She stopped and turned round. Could it be that Rook had found she was gone and had followed her? The moment she stopped and remained motionless, the person or animal behind her did the same thing; and so instantaneous was the sequence of silence upon sound that it was almost as if the steps of this mysterious pursuer were only an echo of her own.

Something kept her from retracing her way; perhaps a vague fear that it might be Cousin Ann; but each time she advanced and stopped again, the same phenomenon repeated itself. In the end she began to run, stumbling over the hidden roots and shaking the snow down from the smooth leaves of the laurels.

Just at the moment she emerged from the shrubbery near the drive gate and caught sight of the lighted windows of the church on the other side of the river, she tripped up over a dead branch and fell headlong to the ground.

Simultaneously with her fall two sharp reports rang out behind her and two volleys of leaden gunshot rattled against the gate.

She scrambled up on her knees, her face in the direction from which the shots had come. With a rapid movement of thought she wondered if she had been hit; and as she wondered, she was distinctly conscious of a delicious wave of relaxation and relief.

Her brain had never been clearer, her thoughts never more clairvoyant.

If only she *had* been hit, how lovely to die just here; especially if Rook came to find her when she was dead! It was with a queer detached observation, almost as if she had been an irresponsible onlooker instead of a muffled-up white-faced woman kneeling in the snow, that she watched the tall form of Corporal Dick emerge from the bushes.

Seeing her kneeling like this and gazing at him with great staring eyes, it must have crossed the crazed wits of the Ashover bastard that the contents of both his barrels had lodged in her body.

With a gasping cry he flung his gun away and stood panting, like an animal that has killed its quarry but has burst its own heart in the exhausting pursuit.

For the space of three or four seconds the woman’s eyes and the man’s eyes remained spellbound, entoiled in that peculiar and unique complicity — unlike anything else in the world — that unites a hunter and his victim.

Then in one swooning moment the effect of his twelve-hour vigil in the falling snow darkened the old man’s senses. He reeled like a tree that has been cut with an axe, threw up his arms, and fell heavily on his face.

His fall and the sight of his outstretched figure lying before her broke the spell of Netta’s paralyzed nerves. She staggered to her feet and moving toward him knelt down by his side. At first she thought he was dead; but as she turned his gaunt frame over, she felt his heart beating under his snow-dampened clothes.

With some effort, for Corporal Dick’s tall figure was massive-boned though skeleton-lean, she dragged him along the snow to the nearest tree and there propped up his head on her muffler and tam-o’-shanter. Then she took off her cloak and spread it over him; and after standing for a second to see whether the tree trunk kept the snow from falling on his face, she started back at a run toward the house; crossing the lawn between the lime tree and the cedar.

As she ran she heard the church bell begin to ring. It rang unevenly, and she surmised that either Nell herself was ringing it or that Mr. Hastings had got some village boy to help him.

By good luck Rook had heard the report of the gun and was already half-dressed when she reached their room.

“Shot at you?” he kept repeating; and he hugged her with more warmth than Netta had experienced for many a long month. “Shot at you? Corporal Dick shot at you? Ay! What a race we are!”

He seemed to Netta to be actually exhilarated by the event. She heard him humming "Good King Wenceslaus" as he pulled on his boots. This was a tendency she was never quite able to fathom in him, this tendency to detach himself from things that happened and to enjoy them in a sort of inhuman trance, as if they were insubstantial dream pictures!

Netta felt obscurely piqued by his mood, in spite of the warm hug he had given her. It seemed odd that he should hum "King Wenceslaus" like that, when she had just been shot at as if she had been a pheasant or a rabbit!

She could not help the tears coming into her eyes as she thought how easily she might have been lying now just where the Corporal was lying.

It was through a vague self-pitying humour, not devoid, however, of a certain sweetness, that the domestic agitations that followed reached her mind as if through a mist made of fine-drifted snow.

It all seemed to mingle with the snow, this whispered, murmured agitation; Pandie's voice offering wild conjectures; Mrs. Ashover's voice issuing contradictory commands.

It mingled with the snow; it mingled with that sudden glance she had had of the lighted windows across the river; it mingled with the tune of "King Wenceslaus"; it mingled with a few floating fragmentary words from that old ditty, about "bringing meat" and "bringing wine!"

She was herself so far removed from the domestic furore that rose and fell round the recovering consciousness of Corporal Dick that she hardly commented on the fact that Rook said no word about *her* version of the episode in the garden. Rook was not the only perosn who heard the shots; nor was Rook the only person who knew of the Corporal's excited state of mind. Netta was once more, however, to become aware of how embattled a front the House of Ashover could turn to all outside interference.

Even when the gun itself was found, half-buried in the snow, it did not seem to occur to any one that the affair was a matter for official examination. The old feudal spirit, according to which in former days the Lords of Frome-side would have power of life and death over those within their gates, seemed to hover over every aspect of this unlucky incident.

But it was not only the alarums and excursions of domestic agitation that reached Netta, during the subsequent hours of that singular Christmas Day, through a dream-like mist. The attitude of each one of the family, their personal characteristic reactions, affected her with the same muffled remoteness.

It seemed to her half-unreal when she learnt that Corporal Dick was suffering from brain fever; still more unreal when she heard his voice, apparently perfectly sane and intelligible, demanding that he should be taken home; most of all unreal when it was decided that he *should* be taken — in Doctor Twickenham's closed carriage — to the gamekeeper's house.

It seemed to her exactly like an event in a dream when, after some talk with the doctor about a trained nurse, Lady Ann volunteered to sleep at the gamekeeper's and act that very part!

It was only when the church bells were ringing for the three o'clock afternoon service that this vaporous condition of Netta's mind was dissipated with an unpleasant and shocking suddenness.

The doctor had already carried off his patient, avoiding the snowdrifts in the narrower lanes, when it emerged as a settled arrangement that Rook was to escort Lady Ann across Battlefield and Dorsal to the house of Mr. Drool.

It was curious how bitterly Netta received this information as it was revealed to her during a rather strained and silent Christmas repast. On innumerable other occasions she had seen the cousins go off together without a qualm. But to-day, after her conversation with Lady Ann, she felt a sickening distaste at the thought of their association.

She was the one who had been shot at. She was the one who for Rook's sake had kept the thing a secret. It seemed an unnecessary stroke of irony that she should be just calmly set aside, and that all the drama of the event should centre in Cousin Ann's acting the heaven-sent trained nurse!

To Netta's simple mind an attempted murder was an attempted murder, a thing of bloody violence and notoriety, implying policemen and judges and law courts. There was something weird to her in the way Rook and Lady Ann could enjoy Mrs. Vabbin's mulled claret and mince pies and Pandie's chatter about the Corporal's craziness when, but for a stumble over a log, there would have been a dead body lying in the house — a body that would have been Netta herself!

How *could* Rook go off in such high spirits with Lady Ann at his side and Lion scattering the snow with flying leaps, when there was nothing for herself to do but put on her cloak and tam-o'-shanter again and set out to church — unless she wished to sit alone in her bedroom thinking of Mrs. Ashover sitting alone in *her* bedroom?

What her nature really craved at that moment was someone like Minnie or Florrie to whom she could tell the whole story; tell how she felt when she was running; tell how she felt when she saw the lighted windows; tell how she felt when she heard the shots; tell everything and have a good satisfying cry about everything — but instead of that, there were Pandie and Martha whispering over a belated meal in the kitchen and there was Mrs. Ashover upstairs with the Prayer Book on her lap — Netta could just see her! — reading about shepherds and Stars in the East and wishing that Corporal Dick had shot a little straighter while he was about it!

In the end she did slip out and hurry off to that afternoon service. She had never, since she was a child, missed altogether the Christmas Offices, and as she listened to Hastings's monotonous intonation mumbling over one of them now, like a great belated wasp in a forgotten apple loft, her indignant pity began to melt away.

It was no high supernatural consolation that came to her there. It was simply as if she herself, Netta Page, moving in the wake of those unrealizable turbaned shepherds, with the sound of a gunshot in her ears and a pitiful purpose hugged to her heart, had stumbled upon the presence of an event, which — whether fabulous or not — had covered the sorry footprints of humanity as the snow covered the fields, with a mysterious inviolable beauty.

CHAPTER IX

ROOK'S HIGH SPIRITS did not diminish as, with Lion in front of him and Cousin Ann at his side, he struggled through the snow up the slope of Battlefield.

What Netta had interpreted as but another, darker example of that vein of inhuman detachment in him by which she had been so often hurt was in reality a feeling of immense relief that the Corporal had struck his threatened blow and that the blow had proved harmless. He had not breathed a hint to the girl of Uncle Dick's threats, but the thing had been a growing weight on his mind, the heavier because of its vagueness; and now that it was all over — for his instinct told him that the old man was henceforth *hors de combat* — his present sense of escape was proportionate to his former fears.

The darkness that came slowly upon them, as step by labouring step they struggled up the hill, was mingled for Rook with a warm, exhilarating consciousness of his cousin's proximity. The association of Netta's figure with complicated agitations threw him back with a peculiar relief, now Netta was safe and sound, to his old careless easy pleasure in Lady Ann's company.

He had always enjoyed being out in the fields with this warm-blooded creature of his own race, and to-night something in the character of the evening itself intensified that enjoyment.

It seemed to have a special quality of its own, the darkness that was falling about them now and isolating their two figures from the rest of the universe. It had a quality that was almost man-made, so burdened was it with ancient human consciousness of the ways of life upon the earth.

It seemed to carry with it an accumulated sense of the ending of days, of long, fate-charged days, that somehow or another *had* ended at last.

It was like a vast epitome of the various finalities, upshots, results, conclusions, that had descended, for better or for worse, upon all the eyelids that had ever closed, by sleep or by death, along that countryside!

Not a labourer, not a carter, not a shepherd, that had ever shuffled homeward after his day's work, but had left some residue of his patience and his resignation upon the burden of that darkness.

And it was a peculiarly English darkness. It was a darkness with an island roughness in it, where a faint tang of seashore fog blended with the breath of hidden moss and heavy mud and with the chill of the snow.

And withal it was saturated with history. Just such a twilight as this must have settled upon Pevensey or Sedgemoor after some great historic battle, when the alarums and excursions had died down!

It was not an easy matter, struggling up that hill through the soft unfrozen snow, between rabbit holes and molehills, between furze bushes and hornbeam stumps; and when at last they reached the top and found themselves among the great dark trunks of the Scotch firs, it was natural enough that they should lean against each other for a moment's breathing time before commencing the descent.

The touch of his cousin's cold cheek, the familiar associations aroused in him by the smell of the Irish-tweed jacket she wore, as they leant together against one of those rough tree trunks, plunged him into the irresponsible security of remembered things.

Between the enormous sky spaces above the trees, void of star or planet, and the heavy snow masses that had descended out of their gulfs, there must have been proceeding, all that evening, some magnetic affinity that in the end would result in still further visitations from those airy heights.

Some of these magnetic currents from the elements above the firmament must have passed through these two human bodies on their mysterious journey; for when after a while they began going down the hill on the Dorsal side, Rook became conscious that his former familiarities with his cousin had not blunted the edge of their attraction for each other.

As they descended into the valley hand in hand, there was that in the tones of both their voices that suggested the atmosphere of a reckless, unholy prank.

When they arrived at Mr. Drool's house they found that Corporal Dick was lying comfortably in his own bed, that the doctor had departed, and that Mrs. Drool had turned Binnory out of his especial room and had made the place presentable for Cousin Ann's reception.

The idiot boy was in a high state of excitement over all these developments. He watched his mother making up a cot for him by the kitchen fire with unbounded satisfaction, but he kept returning to the Corporal's room to tell the lady "who be going to sleep wi' I" what sounds and sights of the encompassing night were to be expected by his visitor.

The Corporal's room and Binnory's room were isolated from the rest of the house, so that Cousin Ann had no need to fear any difficulty or interruption in the performance of her nursing duties.

Uncle Dick was very quiet now, but Mrs. Drool told Rook that they had had considerable difficulty in keeping him in bed when they first got him undressed.

"Doctor told Drool," she said, "that we was to watch out for new sympterums in his sad state. He said Drool had to sit up wi' 'ee for fear 'ee'd do summat to hurt 'isself with his crazy old notions. What did he do up at house, Master Rook? There be a couple down this morning from Ash'ver Old Pyke who do tell how Martha Vabbin wrastled wi' 'ee all night long, in backyard! They do say how he did shoot at she with's rabbit gun and how she did beat on's head to quiet 'un with a girt iron shovel!"

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Drool," the Squire of Ashover found himself saying in answer to this new version of recent events; and as he spoke he hesitated for a moment with that queer tightening of the nerves about the heart which indicates the forming of a subconscious resolution, of which the rational mind is only half aware. "Netta will understand," he said to himself. "She will know I have stayed up with the old man. I *could* send Drool over to tell them, but it's not a nice night for such a thing."

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Drool," he repeated. "I'll sit up with Mr. Richard myself. You and your husband can go to bed, just as usual. There *is* one thing, though, you might do for Lady Ann and me. You might send us up some sort of light supper — anything you have in the house — just on a tray, you know — let your son bring it up to us. We could have it in Mr. Richard's room if it isn't too much trouble."

The result of this suggestion was that a couple of hours later Rook and Ann sat down to a substantial meal of cold pheasant, home-made bread and Dorchester pale ale, while their low-voiced conversation attuned itself to the peaceful breathings of the invalid. They had scarcely begun their repast when Ann became conscious that the idiot was making some curious vocal attempts, in her room opposite, to imitate the voices of some carol singers or "waits" who had visited the gamekeeper's house earlier in the day. Binnory was practising a grotesque version of his own of the familiar ditty — "God rest you merry, gentlemen"; a version that seemed, as it reached her ears, to be mingled with a more questionable tavern catch, picked up from some less pious quarter.

Disturbed by this incongruous serenade, which the excitement of her nerves rendered the more noticeable, Cousin Ann got up, opened the door, and crossed the passage.

She found the idiot sitting on her bed while one of the pillows, decorated with her hat and cloak, was propped up horizontally against the wall beside him. “She be *you,* lady,” said the boy with a certain obstinate sulkiness in his voice, “and I be Squire. Us be singing ‘Born is the king’ to them ghosties what do bide out there.”

Lady Ann looked at the lad with a mixture of confusion and irritation. Then catching sight of her leather bag, open on a chair, with her heavy crimson dressing gown in it, she suddenly seemed to grow oblivious of the boy’s presence and, as if she were quite alone, threw off her tweed jacket, slipped out of her tweed skirt, and hurriedly put her dressing gown on.

“You be different from *she* now,” muttered Binnory, indicating the pillow with a jerk of his thumb.

Cousin Ann smiled at him as she had not often smiled at any one. The feeling of the soft garment against her limbs, in place of the other, made her suddenly vividly aware of that classic perfection of her form which had struck Netta so. The natural tingling of her relaxed muscles after their struggle through the snow increased this consciousness.

“Come in and have some supper with Mr. Ashover and me,” she said to the idiot gently. “And since I’m quite different now, we can put *her* back to bed, can’t we?”

She removed the cloak and hat from the pillow and replaced it at the head of the bed, patting it smooth with her hand. Then she led the boy across the passage and into the Corporal’s room where Rook had already disposed of half the great jug of Dorchester ale. Her thoughts, as she placed the boy between them and met Rook's clouded gaze of appreciation, were fatal and masterful in their recognition of her chance-given opportunity.

She had at first that sickening sense of inability to eat a mouthful which used to come over her at hunt breakfasts in her father's house before a great meet of Blackmore hounds; but it did not take more than a few sips of Mrs. Drool's jug to remove that inhibition, and very soon she found herself enjoying the meal with full youthful zest.

"And do you remember the night Aunt Edith found us in the hayloft?" Rook said suddenly, his heart warmed by the soft look in the girl's eyes. "How on earth did she get up the ladder, Coz? Or didn't she get up the ladder? And that evening you nearly fell through the ice on Abbotsbury Pond? *That* was a mad Christmas, eh? The time your father had to go to Paris, and you and I had the whole place to ourselves?"

"That'll larn 'ee to play the bitch in gentlemen's houses — that'll larn 'ee, ye sly baggage!"

The interruption came from the bed, but the old man turned over to the wall and once more his breathing was quiet and undisturbed.

"It's not only thik old owl-devil wot I do hear o' nights," threw in Binnory. "There be hosts and hosts o' them others, wot nobody but me take notice of."

"What others do you mean, Binnory?" enquired Cousin Ann, her face radiant with a heathen happiness that quite ensorcerized the lad, as if it had been the rich honey drink of Valhalla.

"I mean them hosts of girt gray boggles that go flapping over Dorsal, lady; same as can't bear to bide where Mister Pod do put 'em when they be deaded and shrouded."

"Goodness, Rook! Who puts these ideas in this child's head?" murmured Cousin Ann.

“Him as is over there, lady,” replied Binnory, answering for himself. “Granfer Dick do tell I of everythink. ‘A do tell of how babies be born wot bain’t prayed over afore they be born, but be just dropped, like lambs at lambing-time. ‘A do tell of babies that do cry like corncrakes after we, when us be up field-way or down river-way, till us dursn’t bide in them places after dark be come. ‘A do tell of how slimmity puss-cats, in shape of wimmings from Lunnon, do catch great folks round them’s necks, and scrabbit them till they ain’t no blood left in ’em!”

“Blood!” the voice came suddenly and startlingly from the bed. “I’ve ‘a seen that bloody bitch quelled and quieted. I’ve ‘a put the Lord’s own lead in her.”

Cousin Ann rose to her feet, but the old man with a commanding sweep of his hand waved her off. He raised himself up in bed and stared wildly at them, searching for words.

Binnory, too frightened to move or breathe, gazed at him with mouth and eyes open. Granfer Dick had always been more than human to the lad, and this burst of excitement in him was as though the eternal hills had begun to cry out.

Anxious not to increase the old man’s excitement by unnecessary opposition, and not quite free from the fumes of the Dorchester ale, Rook remained passive in his seat, while his cousin leaned against the edge of his chair ready to spring over to the bed the moment the need arose.

It was at her that the Corporal now pointed his long gaunt arm, the white nightshirt clinging tight round the bony wrist, the forefinger outstretched.

“Where be the spirit of your people, Ann Poynings? Where be your love and your maiden beauty this bitter day? Have you no thought to put a hand out and stop this ruin of hopes and expectations; this crumbling down of what took a thousand years to build? What be your girl-pride and your lady-pride; your maidenhead-fears and your virgin-fears, compared with Ashover going down into a rumour of dust and dirt? Ay! Ay! Your cheeks are rosy-bright and your eyes shining. You do know what an old man would say but must forbear to say. You do know well enough! Ay! If ye be as comely in shift and smock as ye be in cramosin, he that be now sitting aside of 'ee would be a gowk and a gammon to let the ice freeze on the cold sheets!"

His arm sank down on the bed and his head fell back on the pillow.

Lady Ann went quickly over to him and pulled the bedclothes up under his chin. He met her gaze with a look of beseeching intensity, the wild glare dying out from his face like the reflection of a blown-out torch from a murky pool.

Then to the girl's amazement one of his wrinkled eyelids closed in a fantastic goblinish wink and he heaved over against the wall and remained dead-still.

She stood by his side for a second or two, contemplating his giant frame under the chequered coverlet. The thoughts that passed at that moment through the head of Missy Sparrow-hawk would have been difficult to put into intelligible words.

She protracted her pose at the bedside longer than was necessary. When she did turn away from her now peacefully breathing patient, it was not at Rook she looked but at the boy.

"Better run down now, Binnory, and get into bed! Do you want the lady to come down and tuck you up? Very well, then! Be a good boy and undress yourself quietly and I'll come down and say good-night to you in five, six, seven, *ten* minutes."

The lad obeyed her without demur. He glanced reverently at the sleeping form, touched his forehead mechanically, as he had been taught to do when addressing the gentry, and slipped quietly down the stairs.

The cousins were left alone with the sleeping man. Rook got up and walked over to the window.

"Shall I open it a little?" he asked. The *soi-disant* trained nurse nodded.

He pulled the sash down.

The night outside was windless and hushed as a vast mausoleum, but before he pulled up the window again they both heard in the stillness the soft shuffling muted thud — snow upon snow — where some bowed-down branch was eased of its clinging load.

"It'll begin again before morning," said Rook, turning toward the girl. "Perhaps we shall be completely snowed up here! I hope the Drools have plenty more of that ale in the house."

He spoke casually and lightly to conceal his growing agitation. Vaguely in his mind he associated the great darkened mass of frozen cloud-stuff that covered the earth with the inevitableness of the fate that was gathering about him.

"I'll just run down to see that the boy's all right," said Cousin Ann, yielding to a little nervous shiver, "and then I'll go straight to bed. Good-night, Cousin." She made a slight movement toward him, and then, drawing herself up, lifted her half-extended hand to her own hair and adjusted its braids.

"Good-night, my dear," murmured Rook brusquely, emptying the last drop of ale into his glass and swallowing it at a gulp.

She closed the door. He heard her go downstairs and enter the front kitchen. He waited, listening intently, his knuckles pressed upon the table. Why should the ticking of the clock be echoed so ridiculously by the irrepressible beating of his heart?

He heard the shutting of the kitchen door and her quick rush up the stairs. Then her own door was shut; and the house was as silent as Antiger

Great Knoll.

An overpowering restlessness came upon him. He glanced round the Corporal's room, at the gilded clock on the mantelpiece, at the lithograph of the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, at the old man's Sunday clothes hanging on wooden pegs, at the mother-of-pearl shells on the little mahogany table, at the shiny horsehair armchair, at the spotted china dogs that glowered at each other from red-tasselled brackets. Finally he could stand it no more. "I'll have a breath of air," he said to himself. "A breath of air, Uncle Dick," he repeated aloud, apostrophizing the form on the bed.

"I hope she won't think I'm running away," he thought as he descended the creaking stairs. "But, no! She's a sensible girl and a man ought to cool his head after all that ale!"

The gamekeeper's backyard was no longer isolated from the surrounding planetary spaces. No mere fragmentary instalment of the inter-stellar darkness had lodged itself there. The whole weight of the great Opposite of Light, the whole volume of light's negation and antithesis, bore down upon him out of aërial infinitude. The superincumbent ocean of blackness, swallowing up all form, all colour, all past, all future, was indeed enough to drown fathom-deep every scruple left in his human brain.

He found himself recalling, as he stood there in the trodden snow, a particularly outrageous oracle of his brother Lexie, most mischievously germane to the matter in hand. He was on the point of turning to go in when a faint night wind, touching his face as it journeyed from nowhere to nowhere, seduced him into making a few further steps over the vegetable stumps and clumps of Mr. Drool's garden.

Peering through that blind opacity he could just make out the vague line of the garden hedge. The Antiger Woods were entirely invisible. The elm trees by the side of the lane showed themselves as vague pillars of darkness within the dome of darkness. It struck his mind as a strange thing, that, though all distinctions were blotted out, he still was conscious of the snow at his feet as being something white, rather than black or gray. Did human beings inherit some queer colour sense, quite apart from the vision of the eye; a *tactile* sense, perhaps; derived from some remote animal or even vegetable atavism?

Ah! Ah! what was that? …

A most uncanny sound, blood-curdling and shocking, came suddenly to his ears from the invisible heart of the snow-bound hills. He smiled to himself when it was repeated, for he was sceptical enough not to be startled a second time by any nocturnal terror.

He stood still, listening. The second time, however, proved to be the last time. Only once again until the hour of his death did Rook Ashover hear that sound; nor did he ever come to any rational conclusion as to that sound's origin.

Often and often after that night it was his destiny to wonder what that thing was. It was louder and more appalling than the cry of any wild creature. When Rook tried to describe it to Lexie he emphasized the fact that it seemed to come to him through some heavy, remote intervening substance. The nearest description he seemed able to give of it was that it suggested the united exultation of a host of people buried underground.

The occurrence might have altered the course of events that night — for all his inhuman callousness — if it had not been that his wanderings through Mr. Drool's garden had brought him to that side of the house from which he could see his cousin's window.

There was her white figure standing in full candlelight against the small square panes!

Had she also heard the sound? Rook never knew. To her — for some subconscious reason — he always kept complete silence upon that mystery.

Whether she was even aware that he had gone out he never knew, any more than he knew whether the gamekeeper and his wife were conscious or unconscious of his nocturnal movements.

He did not stand there for long. He could see her turn away from the window and blow out her candle, and that single natural gesture, more than all the other forces that were combining against him, stiffened the nerves of his resolution.

Back to the door and up the creaking steps, and once more he was in Corporal Dick's room!

The old man had apparently slept without any change of position.

Rook rapidly undressed, and putting on his overcoat as a dressing gown, lit a cigarette at the fire, using a torn letter from his pocket to transport the necessary flame.

He smiled to himself to see how his hand shook as he did this.

With hurried indrawing breaths he smoked about half of the cigarette, leaning against the mantelpiece. Then, throwing the rest of it on the coals, he moved to the door and went out into the passage.

As he left the room he heard the old man muttering in his sleep. He waited breathlessly for a moment, his hand on the door-knob.

"Die out? Never — never — I'll shoot the bitch like a rabbit first!"

The words were followed by an inarticulate moan and that again by dead silence. Rook left the Corporal's door open and moved silently across the landing.

Without knocking he turned the handle of the door opposite. It opened easily, and entering with a beating heart he left it ajar behind him.

The old man at least deserved that much consideration from the head of the family he had done so much to keep alive upon the earth!

CHAPTER X

IT WAS THE morning of the last day of the year. Characteristic of so many winter days in Dorset the weather was neither warm nor cold nor wet nor dry. It was Laodicean weather, born, like the English Prayer Book, of a genius for compromise. If such weather had had a human soul, it would have been condemned by Dante as being “neither for God nor for His enemies”!

The sun was not sufficiently strong to throw a single shadow or to illumine a single blade of grass; and yet one could see its form up there behind filmy vapours, faint, wistful, like a pallid, age-worn coin, weak as the eye of a dying lion, at which any mongrel cur may bark.

After a breakfast with Netta and his cousin as neutral and colourless as was the sky outside, Rook was buttoning up his gaiters in the kitchen, his foot on a chair, when Pandie approached him with a look of gloating importance. No archaic herald carrying solemn messages from one monarch to another could have displayed, more unctuous gravity than did this exile “from the banks of the Tone” in conveying to Rook the news that he was wanted by his mother.

As soon as his back was turned Pandie hurried to the elbow of Martha Vabbin and began eagerly speaking.

“Twasn’t what the missus spoke aloud that made I know ‘twere going to be bad for Squire; ‘twere what Missus keepit locked up in her own besom. Missus be terrible sore about this fancy party for year’s end what Master Lexie have prejicted for all o’n. She do want Squire to stay with she, decent and quiet-like, and not go hobby-horsing to brother's where there be no one to put cork in bottle save Gammer Bellamy, thik old trot!"

Martha Vabbin turned a large impassive face toward her excited colleague.

"Thee and me won't have nothink to complain of, woman, if folks be down village. Missus won't want more than her usual; and us can have Martin Pod up-along, same as us did five years agone, when them all was in London; only please God 'a won't have his rheumatics on him, the poor crotchety man!"

Pandie was unimpressed by the prospect of entertaining the cantankerous sexton. She retained her dramatic manner.

"Did 'ee see how much of thik brandy someone have drunk these last days? If someone do drink to-night like what she's a been drinking lately, up there by her lone self, Squire'll have to carry her home piggy-back, same as old Squire carried Nancy Cooper home the night of the eclipse."

Martha Vabbin tossed a bowlful of peeled potatoes into a pot of clean water and resettled the lid of another pot out of which came a fragrant steam.

"I can't see who's to object to a body having a nip between meals, even if she *be* living with a gentleman. Since Christmas, when she came in here and laid, side of my plate, that pearl and pansy brooch, I've 'a had a Christian forbearance for the poor sinner. What you wants to be, Pandie, is more 'vangelical, same as I. Fornication ain't the only thorn in the blessed Lord's flesh. This speaking evil of them that's soft as lambs be a terrible sharp prick for the dear Immanuel; which is to say 'God with us.'"

Pandie turned away and moved irritably toward the pantry. She knew too well what to expect when Mrs. Vabbin's voice assumed a certain pious tone, redolent of prayer meetings. "*I* won't be the one to give that Pod anythink to drink," she said to herself. "He do make Martha as high-falutin as 'isself."

The master of the house found his mother in a state of unusual tension. She had had a series of agitating interviews with Cousin Ann since the affair of the shooting and she had found the younger woman mysteriously reserved and unsympathetic.

"So I'm to be left alone to-night, Rook, it seems," she began, without rising from her armchair or lifting her eyes from her knitting.

The son did not risk a rebuff by attempting to kiss her. He shut the door and stood with his back to the fire, glancing round at the warm intimacies of the room.

"I don't see why Lexie should have a lonely New Year any more than you, Mother," he said slowly. "It's your own attitude you must blame and nobody else's."

The old lady sighed. "I don't blame anybody," she said querulously. "I'm past blaming anybody. I thought when you brought that woman here that things could not be worse. But they *are* worse. How you can find it in you to go on like this is beyond my comprehension. I only hope your dear father is protected from knowing what I've gone through. That's what puzzles me most of all, Rook; that you can bear to think of him looking down at us at this moment and seeing — —"

"Stop, for God's sake, Mother; stop!"

She did stop and with trembling fingers unravelled several inches of her work.

"When you talk like that about my father 'looking down at us' it makes me feel absolutely sick! Aren't you ashamed of such plebeian sentimentality? It makes me feel as if Cousin Ann were right when she says that there's a streak of common blood in you, Mother. How *can* you say things like that? ‘Looking down at us!’ It’s a disgusting phrase; worthy of a nonconformist minister; worthy of Martin Pod!”

The old lady met his angry look quite fearlessly, though there was more unravelling of woollen threads in her black-silk lap.

Then the corners of her eyes and mouth began to wrinkle, and a smile that might have been called mischievous flickered across her face.

“Never mind about your father, then,” she said. “You’re a true Ashover, Rook, whatever Cousin Ann thinks of *me!* Come here, you troublesome boy, and give your old mother a kiss.”

He went across to her and bent down.

“That’s better,” she said as he returned to the hearth. “Oh, Rook, Rook, if you could only once see things as they are. But there! I don’t believe you men live in the same world as we do. I believe you all move about in some crazy unreality of your own fancy. Sometimes I wonder if you’re not all a little bit mad! I teased you just now about your father. But, oh, dear! your father was just the same. Listen, Rook! Have I ever told you about his affair with Nancy Cooper the gipsy? No? But of course you’ve heard of it. You men always hear of those things. It’s probably been tavern gossip for years and years! It was a New Year’s night when he broke with her; found her in the arms of a tramp or something and never spoke to her again. He was easily shocked, was my poor dear John. And when once a thing was over, it *was* over!”

“I presume the story doesn’t reveal what happened to Nancy?” said Rook with sombre sarcasm.

“Oh, yes, it does! She married a respectable market gardener. Her husband’s potatoes were the best anywhere round here.”

“Well, Mother, I’ve got to do endless things before lunch, so I must make a start. I have to run over to the Drools’ to see if there’s any change.”

Mrs. Ashover sighed. A chilly wave of lonesomeness suddenly swept over her. She would miss Corporal Dick seriously.

"There won't be any change but the last," she said.

Rook nodded. "I'm afraid so," he murmured.

Mrs. Ashover gathered herself together for one more effort. She rose from her chair, holding the whole bundle of knitting in one of her hands.

"Cousin Ann thinks that if you ever *did* see your way to marry it would be no more than right to provide very liberally for Miss Page."

Rook looked at her with surprise. This was the first time she had shown the least inclination to recognize Netta's existence.

"I've been wanting to say something to you, Rook," she went on.

His eyes widened and his lips parted. Could it actually be that his mother was prepared to give up the struggle?

"It's this, Rook. I want you to know that I'm ready to make any sacrifice of comfort or income for the sake of seeing you happily settled. I would even be ready, if your wife didn't like my society, to leave the house altogether!"

These words went through Rook like a spear. From a long-suppressed well of feeling in him there arose a blind flood of tenderness for this little woman standing there before him fumbling with her magenta-coloured wools.

"Leave the house, Mother?" he muttered. "Why, you'd die in a week anywhere else than here!"

The tone of his voice broke down some obstinate inhibition in her, too. She moved a step toward him and a moment afterward he was holding her in his arms. It was the son rather than the mother who lost control just then. There was so much upon his mind. He was beset by so many complications.

She, too, as they clung together, almost yielded to an instinct which had not by any means been the dominant one of her life. Like so many women who exhaust what maternal feeling they possess upon lover or husband, her attitude to her children had fallen far short of anything resembling passion. She had never, for instance, manifested the least preference for one son over the other; nor had she ever felt any regrets at lacking a daughter.

Thus it was only natural that when Rook's emotion had subsided and he walked away to the fireplace his mother's habitual feeling toward him as the head of her house rather than as the child of her womb recovered its normal sway.

Following this return to her integral self it was also inevitable that with a woman's unscrupulousness she should make an instinctive attempt to exploit Rook's emotion to her own purpose.

"Don't you realize what all this means to me?" she cried, as soon as he turned a calm face toward her. "Don't you realize, Rook, that it's worse than death to me to think of you and Lexie being the last of our people? Will you never understand that I keep thinking day and night about this awful thing? Oh, Rook, my son, my son, don't be hard and blind! Give me what I ask of you, Rook! Give me a daughter whose children will be mine as well as yours; whose children will be your father's and *his* father's, and will save us all from dying from the earth!"

Rook was stirred more than she knew by this well-timed appeal, but he, too, began to feel a reaction from his momentary collapse. An obscure indignation in him rose up against this exploitation of his emotion. He spoke quite calmly now and even sternly.

"You mustn't say such things to me, Mother."

She lifted her eyebrows, shook her head sadly, and resumed her seat.

“Give me my knitting, Rook, please. And you’d better start now on your various engagements. I like a quiet morning and we’ve had a good talk.”

He obeyed her in silence, but just as he had his hand on the handle of the door he suddenly turned round.

“Don’t you love me at all, Mother, apart from the family? Don’t you care whether I am happy or unhappy? Is the family so much to you that your son is nothing?”

She looked him straight in the eyes from where she sat, bolt upright, in her Chippendale chair. She removed her fingers from the magenta-coloured woolwork and let them slide along the chair arms till they clasped the two rounded ends tightly and fiercely, so that her knuckles showed white and sharp in the firelight.

“I have cared for you,” she cried, “since you first walked and talked; but I would have seen you dead in your cradle if I could have had another son, a different son. You make me wish you’d never been born, Rook!”

He stared at her in sombre amazement. His whole world, his whole life illusion, heaved and rocked about his ears.

“Mother!” he blurted out.

The tone of that cry did for just the flicker of a second arrest the hardening of her heart, because it was the exact repetition of the tone of his indignant bewilderment when she had struck him as a child. But the accumulated tide of her anger rolled over the impression as a wave might drown a submerged rock.

“If only Lexie had been the sound one!” she wailed. “If only Lexie had been the sound one!”

Rook shrugged his shoulders, laughed a husky, miserable laugh, and left her as she was, staring desperately into the emptiness of the impossible.

Descending the stairs with a hopeless weight on his heart he found his cousin and Netta standing in the hall, the former holding a letter in her hand, the torn unstamped envelope of which lay on the ground.

"Oh, Rook, listen to this!" cried Lady Ann. "Nell invites us all to dine at Toll-Pike. She says Lexie has asked them, too, to drop in later and she says that William himself was anxious that Netta should come with us!"

Rook turned brusquely round. "Do *you* want to go?" he enquired harshly, addressing Netta.

"It's just as you and Cousin Ann like," replied the girl meekly.

"Very well," he said. "But I won't have Hastings patronizing you with any of his confounded priestliness! Ann, you'll see to that, eh? I won't have Netta insulted by that chap's condescension. If he doesn't treat her exactly as he treats you, she shan't enter his house!"

A cold chill went through Netta's heart at these clumsy words. She looked down nervously at the envelope lying on the ground and longed to stoop and pick it up, so as to hide her face from them both.

Cousin Ann gave a quick protesting glance. "Of course," she said, "he'll behave as he ought to behave, since he's invited us. You don't intend to come yourself, then?"

He shook his head. "No. You'll find me at Lexie's. I'm going to the village now and I'll tell him. We haven't had a meal together for much too long."

"Where are you going now, Rook?" enquired Netta, making an obvious effort to speak lightly and casually.

"I?" replied Rook shortly. "I'm going first to the village and then over to Drools'. One of us *must* see Uncle Dick to-day."

What had been in her mind was the thought of having him to herself, for some little time anyhow, that last day of such an eventful year; but she let it pass humbly enough.

"I only thought you'd have to lunch somewhere, Rook. Wouldn't it be easier to come back here and then go to Antiger Lane afterward?"

"I don't *want* to come back here," he retorted sharply. "I must have a walk to-day."

"You're not very polite, Rook," said Cousin Ann. "I expect that what you've really got in your mind is a jug of Mrs. Drool's ale. I expect he intends to lunch better than any of us. Don't you think so, Netta?"

Netta looked wearily from one to the other. She had not missed the glance that passed between them at the allusion to the ale.

"And what are you two going to do with yourselves this gray day? You're both so amiable that the only difficulty will be to find out what the other really wants!"

"Oh, we shall get on, sha'n't we, Netta?" said Cousin Ann, slipping her hand over the other's wrist.

Netta felt a wild plebeian desire to slap the handsome girl's face, but her shame at her own impulse gave her answer its appropriate lightness.

"Of course we shall, Rook. You needn't think that we can't get on without a man to amuse us, even though it *is* New Year's Eve!"

Rook looked at them, standing together there, and a sort of baffled moroseness took possession of him. What was this power in women that enabled them to carry things off with such disconcerting indifference? What was this mental fluidity that enabled them to enter into some strange subconscious alliance with one another from which a man was ejected like an alien, like a stranger?

With each of these two alone he had felt the thrill of possession. But now that they were together, he felt as if *all that* must have been an arrogant hallucination! He hated to see them together. It substituted femininity in the abstract — a thing he found almost repulsive — for the individual clinging arms which could carry him out of himself!

He moved off to the door into the kitchen, sulky and baffled.

“Well! Good-bye, till we meet at Lexie’s!” he said, opening the door and sweeping them together in one weary dismissing gesture. “I hope Mrs. Bellamy mixes the punch as well as she did last New Year’s Eve!”

Before that day was over there was a distinct alteration in the drab colourlessness of the weather. Little by little the puddles in the roads turned into cat’s-ice. A faint film of solidification formed over the ponds at the meadow corners. Hieroglyphic patterns made themselves visible in the mud of secluded lanes. Wrinkled crisscross imprints appeared on the top of the new molehills, imprints made by lighter touches than the feet of mice or birds or the trail of worm or snail.

Dead leaves that had lain softly one upon another in the mouths of old enmossed fox holes or under clumps of fungi at the edges of woods were now soldered together, as if by tinkling metal, with a thin filigree of crisp white substance. The wet vapour distillations clinging to the yellow reeds down by the ditches began to transform themselves into minute icicles. Birds that had reassumed their natural thinness fluffed out their feathers again as they hopped about searching for sheltered roosting places. In every direction there were tiny rustlings and tightenings and crackings as the crust of the planet yielded to the windless constriction, crisp and crystalline, of a gathering hoar frost.

Nell Hastings had procured a young girl from the village to help her to make her preparations. She herself set the table for her little party; arranged the fruit and the nuts and the sweets; and even lit the four red candles half an hour before the time for the appearance of her guests.

When all was ready below stairs and she had placed her villager as sentinel over the various pots and pans in the kitchen, she ran up to her room to change her dress.

She found her husband seated on their bed, in his trousers and vest, struggling with an immaculate evening shirt. He had brushed his hair so carefully and was taking so much trouble with his clothes that for one moment Nell was aware of a wave of tenderness toward him. His profile, as she watched it furtively in the mirror, had really a certain Napoleonic majesty; and the naïve solemnity of his struggle with his evening clothes touched that particular chord in her woman's nature which must have responded to just such childish self-ornamentation of the preoccupied male for thousands and thousands of years.

She left the brushing of her own hair for a minute or two to hover over him with bare arms, her proffered assistance being itself a kind of subtle caress.

And woman-like she was not content to let this interlude just pass for what it was. She must needs exploit it. When they were both ready to go down she suddenly took his head in her hands and kissed him on the forehead.

"You see how happy we are now?" she said; "and how everything is all right again? That's because you've stopped writing that terrible book. Don't write it any more, William! I beg you! See, I beg you on my knees, in my best white dress, not to write another word of it!"

She actually did sink on her knees before him, clinging to the front of his coat and throwing back her head.

He could not have known, had he been as wise as Hermes Trismegistus, that the caressing abandonment of this gesture — apparently directed toward himself alone, and isolating the two of them from all the world by a sort of magical circle — was in reality entirely due to the girl's happy knowledge that she was going to see Rook Ashover that night. The power that all human nature has, of exploiting secret emotions in the interest of obvious emotions, is carried by women to a most delicate and extravagant excess. Even as she knelt before him with her head thrown back looking so provocatively and wistfully appealing, she was thinking of him and of his book with less than half her mind.

Had William Hastings possessed the cosmic clairvoyance of a Paracelsus he might still have been unable to fathom the motives of this thin figure, with bare shoulders, clinging so beseechingly to the buttons of his coat.

As a matter of fact, he made not the slightest attempt to fathom them. He replied to the unfairness of her woman's weapon by the unfairness of his man's weapon. He just pulled her up by physical force, and holding her more tightly and with more vicious concentration than he had done for many a long month, he took advantage of her instinctive, nervous yielding to snatch a moment of blind love-making, such as he might have snatched had they been complete strangers to each other.

The man had really been as much betrayed into their luckless marriage as had the girl. He had met her at her aunt's, an old priest-ridden fanatic, who at once set herself to curry favour with Eternity by handing over to its representative, as a menaced city might hand over its fairest virgin to a sea monster, the body and soul of her niece.

The girl had amused him at first, both by her idealizing devotion and by her neurotic moods. To the former he had responded by an attenuated strain of absentminded tenderness; to the latter he had responded by an ironic indulgence, as if her girlish perversities and caprices were the gambols of a half-human kitten.

It was not until her moods, her fits of crying, her childish obstinacies, her cravings for romance, had thoroughly wearied him and got on his nerves that he began to treat her with a studied callousness, hardening his heart against her, in an unphilosophic anger with her, for having ever crossed the threshold of his monastic cell.

It was a shock to the girl from which only her encounter with Rook saved her, when she first realized how little of natural warmth there was in the awkward tenderness which was Hastings's nearest approach to human passion; but even this new feeling, so satisfying to her suppressed craving for romance, did not obliterate the disastrous effect of that first revelation of what the sex instinct can sink into, in a personality dominated by the tyranny of thought.

It did make her cling, however, with a desperate and pathetic tenacity, to whatever romantic elements there were — and there were not many — in Rook's response to her infatuation. It was doubtless the fact that what the girl had so far never encountered, either in Hastings or in Rook, was just warm natural human amorousness that led to the contentment and complaisance with which she had received the shameless advances of the invalid Lexie. Lexie, with whom she had no responsible link of any kind, seemed the only one whose erotic proclivities left behind them no poison, no sting, no regret.

The ill-timed embrace between these two remote and alien human beings was interrupted by the sound of the door bell. They pulled themselves together at once, the girl smiling, the man grave, and after opening the door and listening for a moment to the colloquy below, they went downstairs side by

It was a wonder to watch Nell's little villager in cap and apron assume the airs of an experienced servant as she informed Cousin Ann and Netta that "Mrs. Hastings be expecting their ladyships; and please would they take off their cloaks and go straight into parlour."

Nell's dinner party, when it was once under way, proved successful beyond her utmost expectation. The thought that when it was over she was going to Lexie's to meet Rook gave animation and freedom to her chatter and something almost approaching loveliness to her thin face.

William Hastings, too, was in excellent spirits, and all went smoothly till the time came for the sweets and nuts.

Perhaps it was a glass of the Vicar's port wine that broke the spell and put mischief into the heart of Cousin Ann; for the little servant had scarcely retired to begin washing the dishes when that young woman said, turning to her host: "Have you got yet to the really exciting part of your book, Mr. Hastings?"

The look which the author of the work in question turned upon his guest startled even the daughter of Lord Poynings. It must have resembled the look with which the famous Dean Swift actually killed the unfortunate Vanessa.

"Has my wife been talking to you?" he asked in a tone that made Nell wish the ceiling would fall down on their heads. "Have you," he went on, "got the slightest idea of what my book means?"

"Means?" stammered Cousin Ann. "I understood you to imply that it was slightly heretical. But beyond that — I — I have no notion, of course. I've never heard you read a line of it!"

The countenance of Mr. Hastings expressed the passing within him of a terrific struggle. The veins in the man's neck stood out like whipcord. Beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead. His cheeks grew flushed and then very pale. His fingers, which were playing with the blade of a silver fruit knife, bent it back until it looked as though it would snap. He remained as if petrified in his seat; breathing heavily, like a person on the verge of some kind of fit.

The three women stared at him in dead silence. They all seemed to recognize that a chance spark might set off a terrific explosion. But, in their silence, their own whirling thoughts must have resembled, for any occult initiate, three differently coloured lighthouses, projecting upon a mysterious storm their divergent rays!

The enormous magnetism of the man, in the turmoil of his suppressed fury, stirred up all manner of latent emotions in these three feminine bosoms.

Cousin Ann thought to herself that if she *were* destined to conceive a child for Rook, she must be careful to avoid the risk of any more shocks of this kind.

Nell thought to herself how odd it was that when William's madness was directed toward others instead of toward her, she felt a queer perverted pride in him and even sympathy for him.

Netta was swept out, beyond the little room, beyond the four candles, beyond the convulsed countenance of the man opposite, into the bleak country of her own bitter resolution. "I'll do it to-night," she thought. "I'll drink to-night at Lexie's all I can, so that he won't be able to bear the sight of me when he comes!"

William Hastings rose from the table. He had got his emotion into control, and he held it down within him as a man holds a maddened horse with an iron bit.

"Well, young ladies," he said with a benevolent smile, "I expect we'd better start, if we're not going to disturb Mrs. Bellamy's arrangements."

A quarter of an hour later they were all four entering the village. The lamps from the cottage windows shone out upon the littered yards, with their pails and wood piles and pig troughs and chicken pens; out upon the disconsolate vegetable patches where forlorn potato stumps and melancholy cabbage stalks carried the crisp whiteness of the beginnings of a heavy hoar frost.

As they turned into the alley where Lexie's cottage stood, they could see, at the end of the narrow lane, the dark-stretching expanse of the water meadows.

"There's a new moon this evening," said Mr. Hastings. "I shouldn't be surprised if we could see it from the end of the lane. It may be behind the house at this moment."

"Let's go and see," cried Cousin Ann.

"No, no," said Nell. "We're late already. Mrs. Bellamy begged me not to be late."

"It's no distance," protested the other, "and it would be so wonderful to see it over the ditches! Let's go, Mr. Hastings!"

"You go in with Miss Page, then, Nell," said Hastings. "Lady Ann and I won't be five minutes. You can tell them we are just coming."

The young girl obeyed with alacrity. She felt in a state of complete psychic sympathy with Netta and it was more than she had dared to hope for to meet Rook without either her husband or Cousin Ann!

These two unwanted ones walked rapidly together down to the end of the little road.

In a softer humour than usual, because of the pressure upon mind and body of the oldest interrogation-mark in the world, Cousin Ann was less oblivious than might have been expected to the recondite magic of that place and that hour.

The dark flat surface of a tall house by the edge of the fields rose above them like the bastion of an ancient city. Perhaps just because she felt herself at that moment on the verge of becoming a living bridge by which the Past might go over into the Future, she experienced the feeling that long ago, and even many times, she had come to a road's end like this, where was just such a dark-walled house, and just such a smell of muddy, reedy fens stretching away under the burden of hoar frost!

Coming round the corner of the wall they found themselves on the edge of a little deserted paddock, bordered by a fence of loose stones and extending clear down to the first of the ditches, over the dark surface of which hung, sideways and drooping, the heavy trunks of a couple of pollard willows.

"Look!" cried Cousin Ann. "There it is!" and she pointed to the extreme edge of the western horizon, above which, sure enough, floated the thinnest, frailest moon-sickle that she had ever seen!

Squadrons of vaporous clouds kept up a perpetual march across it; but there it was— "Astarte, Queen of Heaven, with crescent horns!" — and the power of its presence, like the presence of the youngest, most fragile daughter of an old tragic dynasty, reached them through the night and blended with the vague earthy smells that came floating up from the shadowy fens.

"I'm glad we came, aren't you?" the girl whispered, aware of a great leap of power and strength in the very depths of her being. "*You* thought of coming, though. I should never have done it alone."

She laid the tips of her fingers on her companion's sleeve, and the effect of this slight contact was enough to enhance to a point of magnetic intimacy her feeling of power.

"Tell me, now, will you; now we're alone here, what you really are saying in that book?"

William Hastings swung round as quickly as if he had been struck by an invisible arrow.

"What's that?" he cried hoarsely. "Leave *that*, please, Lady Ann Poynings!"

But the girl watched the horned and crescented mystery, cutting its path through the clouds, like a fairy scimitar through a froth of soapsuds, and she remorselessly went on.

"Why should I leave that, William Hastings? I'm intelligent enough to know that what you're doing is no trifle, is perhaps of the greatest importance to us all."

"No trifle and of great importance!" he repeated mockingly. But she could see he was yielding a little, and she laid her hand again on his coat sleeve.

"Do tell me! Do take me into your confidence!"

He was evidently impressed by her words. He looked round furtively as if to make sure there was no one within hearing.

"May I ask you a question, Lady Ann?" he said.

Cousin Ann smiled in the darkness. "Why not? Especially since I'm asking *you* such terrific impertinences!"

"Well, then, would you be good enough to tell me what is your motive for going on living in this disgusting world?"

"You mean for not committing suicide?"

"Not at all! I mean for wishing your life to continue; for wishing the life of the world to continue; for wishing that life *as* life should conquer death *as* death."

"But it never can *completely* conquer death, can it?"

It was his turn now to snatch hold of her wrist in the darkness.

"Never completely. No; never completely! But it can conquer it very far. It can conquer it so far as to encourage men, beasts, birds, fishes, to go on with the huge stupidity! It can conquer it so far as to encourage intelligent women still to persist in bearing children!"

Ann Poynings extricated her wrist from his unconscious clutch. Was all this a mere bookworm's eccentricity, or was the man actually out of his wits?

"Well?" she pursued. "And your idea is to analyze the motives that make people go on living when they are sick of life? Is that it, Mr. Hastings?"

He suddenly threw out both his arms toward her, so that she started back with considerable alarm; but he laid his hands on her shoulders and spoke thick and fast.

"I've always known you weren't quite like the rest. I've always known I *could* tell you about it," he began. "The Ashovers are enslaved by their sensations. They live for their sensations. But you're different. You live for something else. They are all nothing to me, I tell you. No one is anything to me except as a proof of my discovery! It's like this. What I've found out is the original secret of Life-Destruction; the great anti-vital energy, the death energy! What I've found out is the thing that one of the old poets symbolized once as the Breath of Demogorgon. It is just as much an organic force, an actual magnetic force, as radium or electricity. But it is more powerful than these because it belongs to the soul."

He paused breathlessly and dropped his hands from her shoulders.

"I know," he began again, after another anxious glance round, to make sure they were alone, "that what I've discovered is not a mere metaphysical theory. Do you know how I know it?"

His voice became lower and more furtive and he leaned close to her in the darkness.

"I know it by actual evidence here in Ashover! No — don't run away. They can wait. You *must* hear me out now I've begun to speak. Ever since I came to this place I have been conscious of the power the dead have to preserve something of themselves alive in the world! Old families, like these Ashovers, have this power; just as old planets, like Saturn and Uranus, have it. Now do you know what I am doing? I am thwarting these dead! *I am driving them back.* I say this to you so that you can bear witness to the truth. There'll be no more Ashovers born into Frome-side. Rook and Lexie are the last!"

Lady Ann instinctively pressed her hands against her body as if to assure herself of its material substantiality. There was something so sinister and ghastly in the man's tone, and something so formidable in the perverse power that emanated from him, that she felt for a moment actually weak and faint. What horrible instinct of a distorted brain made him say these things to *her* rather than to any one else?

She glanced across the hushed empty fields, lying dim and vague before them. She searched for that "miraculous crescent", but while they had looked away, it had been swallowed up by the clouds. Alone with this sombre figure of negation, hovering there like a great gray owl in front of her, in starched shirt and woolly overcoat, her mind clouded and darkened, she felt as if she were struggling with some hideous sort of nightmare. The whole scene — the blank wall, the dark forms of the willows, the hoar frost on the grass — all seemed unreal, fantastic, like something that must be broken to pieces by an effort of the will!

That she — Ann Poynings — should be spending New Year's Eve with a human being dominated by such woe-begotten fancies, rumoured out of the remote heathen Past with "Gorgons, Hydras, and Chimæras dire," seemed to suggest some mad hallucination. It must be, she thought, the troubled expectation in her nerves as to what might come of the affair with Rook that exposed her so to this lunatic's chatter. She would throw the crazy enchantment off, break it up, return to her normal vision!

With a gallant effort of all the forces of her strong and cynical youth she did turn upon him now with a forced lightness of tone that would have changed the whole temper of the conversation with any one but William Hastings.

"But what about the book, Mr. Hastings? The question as to whether it is better for old families to die out or not to die out does not seem to require a whole volume."

The change in her tone seemed quite lost upon him in his excitement, but he had built up such an edifice of secrecy about his thoughts that to express himself with any clearness had become impossible.

"My book?" he muttered. "My book? I can't explain it to you now. It goes too far, too deep. Some day all the world will know. When I am dead, Lady Ann; when I am dead! But I have written it all down; step by step I have made it all plain. Every page has that breath upon it which the old poet talks of, the breath of Demogorgon! And when I am dead and they understand what I've discovered, what a power I shall have put into the souls of men! I shall have given man the power to counteract the creativeness of God. And Man shall say, 'Let there be Darkness!' and there shall be Darkness."

His voice died away over the frozen meadows. "Let us go back. Let us go in," he said after a pause. "I don't suppose that any human creature has ever felt the disgusting loathsomeness of life more than I have. Too many horrible things! Too many horrible thoughts! Oh, what a day — what a day — when it is all absolutely wiped out!"

They turned back together up the lane and stopped at Lexie’s house. They could see the illuminated figures of their friends between the curtains of the room upstairs.

Mr. Hastings opened the gate into the little garden for his companion to pass in before him.

“Look at that!” he whispered, pointing to the window above. “It’s all futility and disgustingness. Poison and ratsbane! Nettles and snakes! Frog spawn and fœtus! And it’s the same up in the sky as in that silly room!” And he turned his accusing face toward the three stars of Orion’s Belt, which were all of the celestial luminaries at present visible through the overhanging clouds.

“Shut the gate and come in, Mr. Hastings,” called Cousin Ann from the doorstep. She had already rung the bell and had heard Mrs. Bellamy approaching from the kitchen.

CHAPTER XI

THERE WAS ABOUT half an hour more of the old year to tick itself away on Lexie's clock. The company had arranged itself by a kind of selective felicity such as rarely emerges from the shuffling of the chance movements in a group of friends.

Nell Hastings, in a mood of radiant excitement, was seated by Rook's side, talking with a reckless abandonment that was probably the result of the ritualistic bowl of punch, mixed and stirred with exquisite care by their host's hand, which stood in the centre of the room.

Lexie himself seated on a hard-backed chair was reading aloud in a murmuring, chanting voice, from the Oxford Book of English Verse, while Cousin Ann and Mr. Hastings, from opposite ends of the rug-covered sofa, listened to him with an attention that was at once entranced and wandering; the sort of attention that strangers in a foreign temple might offer to an alien liturgy.

Netta, isolated from the rest even more than Cousin Ann was isolated from Mr. Hastings, sat in Lexie's especial armchair watching Rook and Nell with an inscrutable smile.

Every now and then, unnoticed by any of the others except Lady Ann, she moved across to the table and replenished her glass from the deep nutmeg-scented bowl, whose silvery depths seemed as misty as her own cloudy thoughts.

By degrees the intent look with which she regarded her protector and his young companion changed its character. Her fixed mysterious smile degenerated into a fatuous stare and that again into an expression which resembled the ostentatious restraint of a burst of silly giggling.

The clock on the mantelpiece had now reached a point indicative of there being only fifteen minutes left of the year that was sinking into the gulf.

Lexie was reading Shakespeare's "The Phœnix and the Turtle." One by one the richly cadenced quatrains of the mysterious poem, thrown into a solemn relief by the unction of his voice, accompanied by the slow swaying of his heavy head as the music of the words took possession of him, even as the Delphic vapours were wont to intoxicate the Oracular priestess, fell grandly and fatally upon the rushing surface of that tidal ebb of the river of time, so soon to be swallowed up:

Let the bird of loudest lay
On the sole Arabian tree
Herald sad and trumpet be,
To whose sound chaste wings obey.

…….

Here the anthem doth commence: —
Love and constancy is dead;
Phœnix and the turtle fled
In a mutual flame from hence.

…….

So they loved, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division none;
Number there in love was slain.

Like the corpses of royal children, slain in some religious holocaust, wrapped up in cerements of gold, the slow, gnomic, litany-sad syllables, murmured in Lexie’s deep hieratic voice, sank down into that flowing stream and disappeared for ever.

What planetary mystery, beyond the death dirge of human love, beyond the annihilation of human faith, had the great poet in his mind as he composed these extraordinary strophes?

The clock on the mantelpiece had reached the point of three minutes to midnight now; and though Nell’s low eager voice talking to Rook had not ceased, one could note that it kept breaking and hesitating, as if the girl has been spiritually aware, without being mentally conscious, that the death and birth of time itself were interchanging their unfathomable secrets above her head.

The poet’s stanzas seemed actually to be trailing their black and golden vestments to the measure of “a defunctive music” whose full significance was deeper, wider, more beautiful, more tragic, than anything that was passing between those four walls.

Before the two hands of the clock had come together under the sign of twelve, Lexie had reached the “Threnos” of this mysterious Shakespearean psalmody:

Death is now the phœnix’ nest
And the turtle’s loyal breast
To eternity doth rest,
Leaving no posterity:
’Twas not their infirmity,
It was married chastity.

Directly the clock began to strike they all lifted their eyes and remained motionless, staring at one another. There was a hush in the room when the thin reverberation died away, out of the heart of which it almost seemed as if they could hear the death rattle of some enormous winged creature, some huge space-moth, whose soft-feathered body was even then crumpling up, contorted and rigid, to sink down into the pools of Nothingness, a vast, lamentable, empty husk!

It was William Hastings who broke the silence.

“It’s curious to think,” he said, “that Time is a mere human invention, a mere illusion, without reality or substance beyond the fantastic and arbitrary interference of man.”

“Nonsense!” broke in Rook. “Time moves at a different rate for different types of consciousness. But it isn’t an illusion. It’s the very essence of reality! It pours forth, like the water of life, from every shape and form into which Space is divided. You can’t think of Space without Time, but sometimes I almost feel as if I *could* think of Time without Space.”

“How *do* you think of Time, Rook?” enquired Lexie, anxious as he always was to encourage his taciturn brother to express himself.

“I think of it as a great gray Serpent, perpetually uncoiling itself from a pile of coils that has no end and no beginning.”

“You mean that it always comes round again, having swallowed its tail?” said Nell with a little self-conscious, youthful laugh at her own audacity.

“No, no — I don’t mean that at all. I mean that it just uncoils itself and goes off into darkness; scale after scale of gray silveriness; and then lost to sight! I can see those coils uncurling their endless length independently of Space altogether.”

William Hastings looked at him with the Weary indifference with which professional philosophers regard the utterances of ordinary persons.

“You can’t see *anything* without using both the great illusions, Ashover,” he remarked drily. “But I sympathize with you in your condemnation of Space. Space has *too much in it.* But then, so has your Time! The whole business has gone too wide and far. The hour has struck for striking a blow at these miserable illusions, at this disgusting spectacle!"

He rose from the sofa as he spoke and began walking up and down the room. Lexie, who had been watching the face of Netta with a certain anxiety, left the mantelpiece and drew up a chair by her side, slipping his hand into hers as if to establish between them a warm human barrier against these desolate speculations. "I tell you," went on Hastings, "the time has come to unwind the clock, to unravel the woof!"

"Mr. Hastings has some very interesting thoughts," said Cousin Ann, clipping her words like a youthful undergraduate anxious to prove his sobriety.

"Netta and I don't know what the devil he's talking about, do we, Netta?" put in Lexie. Netta made no answer. With a blank fatuous smile and wavering steps she moved across to the punch bowl and refilled her glass.

When she had reseated herself, Lexie once more possessed himself of her hand. He did this with a grave protective gesture while his corrugated, seamed, and leathery countenance, full of a formidable Cæsarean dignity, turned toward the excited ecclesiastic a quizzical and hostile eye.

"You mean, I suppose," said Rook, filling his own glass again, while Nell watched him from her corner with big, infatuated eyes, "that your thoughts have hurt themselves against the ultimate walls; and you want a world without walls? You'd better wait for death, Hastings. That's simpler than trying to change the universe."

William Hastings paused in his monotonous walk and drummed with one of his hands on the table.

"Death is no good!" he shouted. "What we want is to stop death from breeding life! What we have to do is to go behind both life and death and get our hands on the mainspring."

Netta began to laugh at this, an unpleasant tipsy laugh that drew Rook's attention to her for the first time that night.

"What's the matter, Netta?" he said brusquely. "Let her alone, Lexie."

Netta's laugh died away in a series of suppressed giggles.

"Let her alone yourself," replied the younger Ashover, glancing almost angrily at his brother.

"Come and sit down again," came in Nell's faint voice from the corner of the room. It was difficult to decide whether the young girl's appeal referred to Rook or to her husband, or to both of them. Neither of the men, however, paid the least attention to her.

"What are you laughing at, Netta?" said Rook, standing in front of the unhappy woman and staring at her as if she had been an entire stranger to him.

A complicated expression, difficult to analyze, flitted across her face. There was in it the hunted look of an animal at bay. There was in it a sullen obstinate look, as of a child who is bent on mischief. And in addition to these things there was a curious coarsening process observable there, as if another Netta were dragging and tugging at her consciousness.

"I've — got — to — laugh," she gasped out. "It's — all — so funny!"

There was a dead silence in the room. Everyone looked at the two of them. Everyone seemed to be conscious, in a sudden suspension of all other interest, that a fatal and epoch-making event was taking place.

Lexie rose from his chair at her side and moved back again to the fireplace.

"What's so funny? I don't know what you mean," said Rook sternly.

His voice seemed to come from such a region of cold, sober detachment that all the company, fuddled a little, as they all were, by the fumes of that silver bowl, experienced an uncomfortable and disturbing shock.

Rook had, as a matter of fact, drunk less than the rest; but, in any case, his tough, phlegmatic nature was not easily affected by liquor.

Netta stopped giggling and pointed at William Hastings, who now sat, gloomy and abstracted, on the sofa.

"He said the mainspring," she cried huskily. "Yes, you did. You can't deny it. You said the mainspring!"

Lexie intervened at this point.

"It's one of his metaphysical symbols, Netta dear. He could easily have said gammon and spinach. It's what these philosophers always do — use some havering jargon that might mean anything! You're perfectly right, Netta. It's the devil's own silliness."

"What do you say to *that*, Hastings?" cried Rook, turning away from the bewildered face in front of him and glaring at the clergyman.

"I leave you to answer your little brother," retorted the other.

"That's not fair," cried Cousin Ann in her rich flute-like voice. "Rook and Lexie are two different people. Aren't you, Rook? You're much nearer Mr. Hastings in your ideas. In fact, I've heard you say much the same sort of thing; only you never stay in the same mood long and you love contradicting yourself."

She looked around as if seeking for corroboration of her words. Her eyes caught those of Nell fixed upon her with a sort of frightened wonder.

"You understand what I mean, don't you, Nell?" she murmured.

"I certainly do," cried the young girl in eager excitement, Her mouth quivering and her cheeks flushed. "I've always known that the real opposite to William was Lexie Ashover and not Rook Ashover."

Netta's voice at this point rang out thickly and discordantly.

"Opposite? Opposite? What do *you* know about Rook? Rook's a deep one; that's what Rook is — a deep one; and I'm the one to know it."

Her tone had that peculiar emphasis in it of a tipsy person who grows quarrelsome.

"I'm not arguing with you, Netta dear," cried Nell, rising from her seat and then sinking back again with a weary indecision. "I'm not arguing with her, am I, Rook? Perhaps I'm stupid and childish, but I judge things differently than by just the words people say. And you *can* judge things like that, can't you, Rook? Judge them by something in the air, I mean?"

She grew self-conscious and embarrassed when she felt the silence round her and the concentrated attention of the whole room. But her embarrassment only drove her on to further self-exposure.

"What I mean is this: There's something hateful in William — something wicked and cruel — that wants to destroy things. Rook doesn't want to destroy anything. He only wants to escape, to get away, to let everything go. Things are only half real to Rook; and people, too. They're real to William; and that's why he wants to blot them out."

She stopped, trembling and exhausted, and gazed at Netta like a child begging for shelter and comfort. Netta nodded her head with solemn approbation.

"Half real," she murmured. "Half real. That's what it is! Isn't she clever to have found that out about him? I never could have thought that out for myself."

Lexie left the fireside where he had been silently listening to all this, and going to the window pulled the curtains back and pushed down the sash.

"Come and look here, Nell," he said, almost commandingly. The girl cast a quick questioning look at her husband and at Rook and crossed the room to her host's side.

"Have you ever seen that before?" Lexie said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

“The whole look of everything,” he replied ambiguously, taking her wrist and making her lean out of the window with him, while Cousin Ann with gestures of exaggerated chilliness threw an antimacassar round her shoulders and moved up close to William Hastings as if to include him in the somewhat perilous intimacy into which the company showed signs of drifting.

Nell was not long in realizing what Lexie meant. By reason of some peculiar thinness in the atmosphere, following upon the precipitation into glittering hoar frost of every particle of vapour, the stars shone down upon the earth with extraordinary brilliance. So brilliant were they, and so large and clear, that the most casual observer, that night, could hardly have failed to be reduced to some kind of amazement. The startling fact that these remote suns were not all of the same simple luminosity but were red and green and orange, and even faintly blue, gave to their appearance a palpable reality, brought their identity home to human senses as a measurable wonder, in a way that could never have happened if they had all of them been just monotonous points of shining whiteness.

But the phenomenon which had struck Lexie and was now holding his companion spellbound was not the fact that the stars were red and orange and blue as well as white; it was the fact that certain atmospheric conditions, connected with the hoar frost, had given to the diffused starlight a quality that properly belonged to moonlight; in other words, had thrown into pallid and phantasmal emphasis objects and distances that were normally obscured by darkness.

“What’s the matter, you two?” called out Rook at last.

“Nothing, my dear,” answered Lexie, pulling the girl back into the room and closing the window.

“Nothing,” echoed William Hastings hoarsely, removing his clasped hands and lifting up his face with an expression like that of an opium-eater returning miserably to normal consciousness.

Netta burst into a peal of plebeian laughter. Her countenance in its convulsed state was not pretty to look upon and Rook after one glance turned away with a shiver of repugnance.

“Nothing — nothing—” gasped Netta at last. “It’s like a game. It’s like hunt-the-slipper. It makes a person laugh.” And once more a peal of merriment more suitable to a Southsea bar-room than to the sedate bookshelves of Lexie’s classical retreat rang through the room.

“Look at Rook’s face!” she gasped out, when her fit subsided. “He’s angry with me. He’s furious at me! And doesn’t it make him look funny?” And she laughed again.

The discordant note had sunk so deeply by this time into the consciousness of them all that an uncomfortable silence filled the room; a silence that was more than a mere negation of sound; a brutal, malignant, positive silence, such as seemed to possess a tangible though an invisible body of its own.

The fire on the hearth was almost extinct; the great silver punch bowl was empty; most of the candles had guttered down till nothing but flimsy blue flames hovered like shapeless astral lights over the prostrate wicks and liquid grease.

The window curtains had been left open; and Lexie Ashover, who alone of them all retained his habitual alertness, was aware of the contrast between that shining galaxy of many-coloured worlds out there and these abashed, disordered representatives of the race who had dared to divide the universal flux, the motions of those immense orbits, into days and weeks and months and years.

He moved the empty bowl from the centre of the room and replaced it by a vase containing some sprigs of untimely born yellow jasmine that had, without rule or reason and by the haphazard of accident alone, started budding under his eaves.

It had pleased him to see these wayward children of life and chance, and he bent over them now and smelt them as if to draw from their unfrustratable sap encouragement and strength for himself.

Cousin Ann, seeing him thus employed, threw off the antimacassar from her neck and moved up to his side.

Rook had resumed his original place by Nell in the corner of the room, but he was not speaking to her; in fact, he seemed unconscious of her presence. He was staring in front of him with the expression of one who, in place of a vague undetermined future, finds himself suddenly confronted by the hooked horns of an implacable dilemma.

A mysterious flickering smile kept crossing the lips of Cousin Ann as she stood by Lexie's table, caressing the jasmine buds with her fingers and murmuring little mischievous nothings. She felt at that moment & sudden wave of exultant assurance, beyond all rational scrutiny, that she was already upon the path of becoming the mother of Rook's child.

Woman-like, she could glance at him now, as he sat scowling and abstracted by Nell's side, with a furtive possessive triumph in her eyes which was tolerant of everything! She had won in the life-and-death struggle between them! She held all the court cards — every one of them — in her firm hands, and the trump cards as well. She looked at Netta, who had begun to show signs of falling asleep. Strangely enough, instead of feeling remorse for the evil suggestion that had begun this business, and instead of feeling any admiration for the exalted heroism that underlay this pitiful *dégringolade*, she began actually to share Rook's ignorant repugnance, justifying to herself her betrayal of Netta on the ground that under the influence of drink the woman's real character displayed itself in its true colours.

Netta's appearance, as she began to give up struggling against the approach of what was really a drunken sleep, was certainly calculated to shock any sensitive nerves. Her hair was disordered, her dress ruffled, her forehead beaded with perspiration, and she kept pulling up her legs into her armchair and rearranging her petticoats with that maudlin air of exaggerated sex-consciousness which, of all things, is the most jarring and offensive to women.

"Oh, it's been a huge success, your party!" murmured Cousin Ann. "Don't you feel that yourself, my dear?"

Lexie looked at her sardonically and even went so far as to put out the tip of his tongue.

"Well? Hasn't it?" she continued, sweeping aside his humorous grimace.

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "We shan't know whether it's been a success or not until the year is over."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" she laughed. "Well, I've a strong presentiment it'll prove a success to *you!*"

The lower part of Lexie's face, the heavy Claudian contours of his cheeks and chin, stiffened, at her personal allusion, into panic-stricken apprehension. He positively pinched her arm in his agitation.

"Ann! How can you say such things? Don't you know that to talk of the luck of the year *after* twelve o'clock is the height of dangerous folly?"

Lady Ann was absolutely nonplussed as to whether she had committed a real *faux pas* or whether Lexie was fooling. His beautifully moulded lips, as classical as her own, did actually display vexation; but directly she met his eyes they seemed to be mocking her with a mischievous and reckless raillery. He changed the emphasis of her attention before she had solved this mystery.

"There isn't a person in this room, Ann, except you and me, whose soul has not been reduced to something pallid and drivelling by this party! I oughtn't to have put so much gin into the punch. Mrs. Bellamy was all for more rum and less gin. But I've always had a *penchant* for that turpentinish, bark-like taste, like the style of Dean Swift."

Cousin Ann looked round the room, and it really did seem to her as if the place were full of woebegone, abject wraiths — wraiths that floated, like stiff corpses, in front of the brains that had begotten them. At the end of any long entertainment between the same four walls there is something of this effect, with the forlornness of which the very furniture seems to conspire; as if the chaos in human brains had the power of ruffling the natural decorum of the inanimate and reducing it to a lamentable simulacrum of its own littered wretchedness.

The girl got no comfort from looking at the cold glittering sky through the uncurtained window. There certainly was something that night not only remote but actually unsympathetic about those points of fire.

She had put out her hand again and touched the yellow buds. She felt at that moment isolated from the rest of the world; menaced and threatened by a thousand perils. Nothing was clear to her as to the significance of this sorry end of a pleasant party; but she felt as if something hostile to the very essence of her happiness was abroad in that room. Cousin Ann did not often let her imagination run away with her; but at this moment, while she contemplated the inert misery that had fallen upon that group of people; when she saw the ungraceful sleep of Netta, the exposed infatuation of Nell, the morose lethargy of Rook, the suppressed malice of Hastings; she felt as if the place were a sort of hospital ward over which the high stars twinkled like the brilliant electric bulbs over an operating table.

She was just on the point of opening her lips to suggest their return home when, with a shock that made them all stare bewilderedly at each other, the door bell rang violently.

“What’s that?” cried Rook, leaping to the window and leaning out. “Who’s there?” he called, for the intruder was concealed by the porch.

“Mrs. Bellamy has gone to bed long ago,” said Lexie. “Do you mind running down and seeing who it is, Rook?”

“I’ll go,” cried William Hastings who happened to be nearest the door.

As he went down there was an intense moment of expectancy. Even Netta, who had been waked from sleep, realized that there was something serious in the air.

Nell was visibly trembling. “I feel,” she whispered to Rook, “as if a goose were walking over my grave.”

They could all hear the door opened and shut, the sound being followed by the tones of a man’s voice talking in a low, hurried murmur. Then there was the creaking of a hall chair as Hastings made the messenger sit down, and almost immediately the clergyman reappeared.

“It’s Drool, from Antiger Lane,” he said gravely. “Mr. Richard Ashover died two hours ago.”

CHAPTER XII

MORE THAN THREE months had passed over the precincts of Ashover, and before this space of time had elapsed the greatest transfiguration possible to the life of the earth was already growing visible and audible. The passing of autumn into winter, for all its stark relief of bare branches and frozen hills, has nothing comparable to this miraculous reversion, taking place in the heart of the vegetable world, heralded from the yellow bills of blackbirds and from the throats of wind-tossed missel thrushes mating in the high trees.

The poignance of the change has slid into the very word we use to mark and note it, a word that seems to be itself the essence of this jargoning from brown and yellow beaks, this rising of bubbling freshets between green banks, this mounting of sticky sap in cool-growing stalks!

For there is something in our northern syllable “spring” which suggests, not only the vernal fragilities themselves, but all that damp, chilly, earthy, moss-scented world out of which these little emerald-coloured blades and sheaths and filmy spears pierce their path into the air.

Latinized words, like the word “primavera,” have their own sophisticated allurement; but the word “spring,” full as it is of the very greenness of hyacinth stalks, the very blueness of hedge-sparrows’ eggs, the very glint of celandine petals, has a sadder, more human significance; has something that carries the mind back, beyond the suppliance of any particular spring sound or spring sight, into the dark rain-soaked background which gave all these things birth; into cold wet places where stinging hazel twigs switch the skin, where the ground is treacherous with hidden swamps, where young birds and young rabbits are devoured by hawks, where the winds bring a perilous relaxation and heart-hurting memories, where the beech drippings are black and poisonous, where the blackthorn buds are ominous with fate and sorrow and sudden death.

It was by a gate in Antiger Lane, as they were on their way, at the end of a long, rambling walk, to make some final arrangements as to Uncle Dick's scanty belongings, that Lady Ann revealed to Rook that she was destined to have a child.

The girl never forgot the tiniest aspect of the scene they looked at at that moment. Her condition seemed to have softened something in her; seemed to have made her sensitive, in a way she had never been sensitive before, to the little things of nature and life.

As they leaned now side by side upon this gate the faint, almost sickly smell of primroses stole over her senses and made it harder than ever to break the silence. She had a little bunch of them in her dress, loose pink-tinged stalks and diaphanous blooms mingled with large vegetable-like leaves.

She could see the crimson buds of a large pink campion hanging loosely down against a mass of dog mercury; and not far from it, at the edge of a fallen trunk spotted with fungi, she could make out what she imagined to be the fragile greenish-yellow petals of the little plant called moschatel.

The deeper interstices of the wood as she let her gaze wander into them were not of one uniform green. It was as if there were in Nature some living spirit of growth and life that trembled and wavered into one nuance of colour after another, from faint coral to elusive purple, according to the manner in which the filmy sheaths and coverings of the buds and the sap-filled tenuous twigs took the character of their particular tree. Something in the inmost nature of the young sycamores, for example, gave to their large, clumsy, sticky embryo leaves an embronzed glossiness that was as different from the diaphanous green of the beech buds flecked with translucent threads of moth-soft whiteness as was the delicate freshness of the larches, as if an emerald-coloured waterfall had splashed down upon them, from the sturdy outgrowths of the dogwood.

"I ought to tell you, Rook, that it is certain now. It's no good not telling you, is it?"

Some obstinate maliciousness in him made him refuse to let her off with this.

"What's certain now? What are you talking about?"

She knew that he knew perfectly well, but she was too much softened by the season and by her mood to answer his obstinacy in like coin. "I am talking about the fact that unless anything goes wrong I am to have a child, Rook."

As she spoke she looked straight into his face. Her gray eyes, a little distended, were solemn and almost infantile in their appeal.

"You're not angry, Rook, are you? You're pleased, Rook, aren't you?"

His obstinacy did melt at this and he kissed and embraced her in all tenderness.

"Yes — I suppose I am," he murmured, as he released her. "More than I like to admit to myself, I expect! But what the devil are we going to do now, my sweet Coz?"

"*Do*, Rook?"

The reproachfulness in her tone was obliterated for him by the droop in the corners of her mouth which had the look of a child who, whatever happens, must be brave and not weep, though it has "full cause for weeping."

He made the great decision quickly now. Probably he had really, in his unconscious nature, been gradually making it all through that warm, relaxed, balmy-breathed spring.

"We must be married at once, of course; without a moment's delay. I don't want to make use of Hastings. In fact, he's been so odd lately in his manner to me that he might easily refuse to have anything to do with us, and that would be the kind of thing we want to avoid just now. No! I'll run over to Tollminster, get a special license, and see my little friend Tishmarsh. He'd marry us like a shot and nothing said! There'd be no difficulty if we did it like that. You've not been married before and I've not been married before." He paused, and after a second found himself drawing a deep breath: "Heigh-ho!"

The sigh of the Master of Ashover floated away into the Antiger Woods and lost itself amid the chatterings of hedge sparrows and chittering of wrens. Cousin Ann bit her lip and repressed an instinctive rush of Poynings pride that might have altered the whole course of subsequent events if she had given way to it.

All she said was: "I shall put myself in your hands, Rook. You must do with me as you think best for us both."

He drew her arm within his own and they walked on silently together toward the gamekeeper's cottage.

Had any stranger approached them, as they loitered thoughtfully side by side, his first thought would have been: "What a splendid typical pair of English lovers!" His second thought, on catching sight of their faces, would have been: "Those people have quarrelled and neither of them is of the stuff to forgive!"

When they reached Mr. Drool's cottage Rook looked at his watch.

"I think," he said, "I'd better go straight back to the house, get the necessary funds, and make Twiney drive me over there before dark. It's four o'clock now and I should catch young Tishmarsh at his tea. Twiney's mare could easily run me over in half an hour."

She took in all this with a calm, inexpressive face. "What had I better do, then?" she asked him.

"Do you mind going over Uncle Richard's belongings?" he said. "There isn't much, but you might put aside the kind of things one would wish to keep and tell Mrs. Drool she can have the rest. Poor old chap! I think we owe some thing to him, eh, my dear?"

She smiled faintly. It gave her a queer sensation to think of standing in that room again, and in her heart she was conscious of a bitter disappointment that she was not to be with him there. She had had at the back of her mind during the whole length of their walk the image of a cozy little tea tray shared between them in that familiar place. But there it was! Better let him do what he had to do for them both while the mood was on him.

There was a moment, when, as he held her hand at the gamekeeper's gate and felt the warmth and pathos of her youth in its magnetic pressure, they both were conscious of a closer reciprocity than they had ever known before; but the peculiar quality of that moment did not outlast his vision of her figure passing slowly up the little garden path and disappearing into the house.

Her reluctance to leave him and his reluctance to go seemed based on a sad clairvoyant recognition in them both that chance had given them that one brief interim of understanding only to take it away again for ever; and when he did turn aside at last and clamber up through a certain gap in the hedge which he had known from childhood the nerves of his mind were so strung-out and taut that the briar thorns that pricked his hands and face were a sort of assuagement to its tension.

Beginning to ascend the uneven slope of Dorsal he was unable to prevent all the little aromatic tufts of ground ivy over which he stepped from associating themselves with his thought. The pale-green fronds of the bracken, too, like miniature motley-coloured giraffe necks transferred to the realm of vegetation, uncurled themselves amid the images of his brain, as if they had been so many motionless sea horses among dark-finned, swift-flashing fish.

And most of all did the peculiar fragrance of the yellow gorse pass into his troubled consciousness, bringing with it, as he avoided those piercing spikes, a sense of honey upon the air.

As he approached the fir trees on the summit Rook found himself gathering up the tangled threads of his consciousness into one ravelled wretched skein. A feeling of miserable self-reproach took possession of him, mixed with a helplessness in the presence of this rush of events. He looked back woefully to the days when he first inherited Ashover, to the days when all his available emotions were centred round the personality of Lexie; round the long, delicious, irresponsible conversations they had had together under sweet-flowering hedgerows, in hot cornfields, and by the banks of the river!

He remembered one particular June evening when, as he watched by his brother's side a great orange-bellied newt sink languidly down into the depth of a meadow pond, while the hum of the heavy mowing machine went round the field followed by the scent of newly cut clover and the flicker of careless-winged dragon-flies, he had responded to Lexie's expression of unruffled happiness by an ill-advised desire that "something new and strange should turn up."

It was only a twelvemonth after that ill-fated wish that he had first met Netta; and ay! what troubles, what troubles his restlessness had brought upon them all! He tried to analyze the weakness, nay! the deformity in his nature, that had betrayed him into this cul-de-sac. If only he had been capable of one natural simple human passion it would have been all so different! It was this accursed detachment of his brain, mingled with his particular kind of cold sensuality, that had rendered him so fatal an influence in the lives of all his friends. If only he had kept altogether clear of the love of women! His temperament must resemble, he thought, that of those mediæval monks, for whom any feminine contact was an evil thing just because of this queer lack of genuine normal emotion.

Arrived at Heron’s Ridge and standing motionless there under one of the Scotch firs with his eyes fixed on the fresh green shoots, moist and glossy, of a chance-sown patch of Lords-and-Ladies, Rook made a forlorn attempt, in a kind of weary desperation, to visualize his life in some sort of perspective.

He saw this cold, this saurian viciousness of his as present in every case. He saw his relation with Netta as viciousness mingled with pity; with Ann as viciousness and camaraderie; with Nell as viciousness and romance. Unconsciously taking note of the extraordinary shape of the queer plant at which he stared, he found himself associating his own ambiguity with the contours of its leaves, and Lexie’s more direct and more wholesome nature with the shameless purple spear which those leaves encircled; and it came over him, as he stared at this wanton outgrowth of the huge indifferent universe, that he would have done far better to concentrate all his affection on Lexie alone, and satisfy his satyrishness, if it *had* to be satisfied, with chance encounters in the city streets!

It came over him that his whole relation with every one of these people, with Ann, with Netta, with Nell, was in reality a superficial thing, external to his inmost life illusion, external to the deep, subconscious link that bound him to Lexie.

And as he let his thoughts drift dangerously along this road there suddenly gathered about him a sickening, panic-stricken fear of life; a fear of life burdened and sharpened by the responsibilities he had incurred in regard to these three women. He felt as though he could lift up in that sweet spring air a howl like the howl of a trapped animal. Why, oh! why had he got himself so miserably entangled? And then, like a bitter undertide, like salt sea water in the midst of an inland river, there swept over him the weight of these different human existences upon which he had so disastrously impinged. *Their* lives to them were as important as his own to himself; and yet he had presumed, in his blind selfishness, to treat them as he might have treated insensitive, inanimate objects. Oh, he deserved every inch of the iron which now pierced him through his bones! With cold clairvoyance he reviewed the stages of philosophic scepticism, of spiritual disillusionment, that had gradually made him so indifferent to what he did, so indifferent to work, to ambition, to any purpose in things at all. He recognized the fact now that it was this refusal to take the ultimate issues of life seriously that had laid him open to these disasters. Lexie, who was far more materialistic than he was, could never have got entangled so; because he treated life as a work of art, and was consequently sagacious, meticulous, cautious, in spite of his scandalous humour.

With a sigh that came from the depths of his soul the unfortunate man lifted his feet from the spot where the patch of Lords-and-Ladies had seemed to paralyze him, and proceeded to run down the slope of Battlefield, running with a certain rather awkward movement of his long legs, such as used to make Lexie laugh at him and tease him when they were boys together.

Something seemed to be turning a kind of screw inside him with a squeeze and a twinge that scraped upon the very parchment of his soul as a lead pencil upon a slate; and it is likely enough that nothing that Ann or Netta or Nell had ever suffered, or would suffer, because of him, quite equalled the cold, unmitigated misery that hounded him on then, down that hill, like a murderous ice dog!

Arrived at his house he entered it, as was his wont and the wont of his father before him, through the kitchen door. He told Pandie to put on her things and run down to the village to order Twiney and his mare.

“Have you taken up tea yet to Miss Page?” he asked.

Pandie hummed and hawed and hovered, doing the thing that Lexie always described as “standing on one foot.” He saw that she had something on her mind beyond her courage to express, but he cut her short with a gesture.

“Have you taken the tea up yet, or haven’t you?” he asked irritably.

Pandie looked helplessly at the broad back of Mrs. Vabbin, who had ostentatiously occupied herself at the stove, but whose whole figure radiated “eyes and ears.” She muttered something about the door being locked.

“Locked!” he cried. “Well? What then? Haven’t you got knuckles? Haven’t you got a tongue?”

It might almost have been supposed that the wanderer from the county of Somerset had suffered paralysis in all her senses, for she remained rooted to the ground, staring at him as if she were looking at a ghost.

“Oh, be off, then, for heaven’s sake!” he cried. “And make Twiney put his horse in at once and drive you back here. A breath of air may quicken your wits, my good girl!"

He left the kitchen and ran up the great 17th-century staircase, two steps at a time. He had heard enough to fill him with all manner of sinister forebodings.

The door of Netta's room was *not* locked, but the sight that met his eyes was worse than his worst presentiment. The room, facing south, was flooded with lovely spring sunshine. The window was wide open, and across the garden came the song of an invisible blackbird, that clear-throated gay-wistful song, which always seems to reach the mind from some mysterious pre-natal region, full of something sadder than human tears and happier than human laughter.

But what a travesty, what a farcical travesty of the first romance of a man's life was the figure he found seated by that pleasant window! Netta sat there in her shift. Her hair, banging loose and disordered on each side of her head, betrayed only too many gray streaks in its untidy brown masses; while her right arm, falling limp and inert to the floor, still held in its feeble clutch one of those small glass bottles of French brandy for which the Ashover cellar had formerly been famous!

Her face was flushed and not agreeably flushed, the lines in it being drawn tightly and harshly underneath the skin, while the skin itself was that of a person marked and sealed as belonging pitifully to a nature divested of the natural instincts of human self-respect.

Rook closed the door behind him and turned the lock. "The servants have known this for a long time," he thought to himself.

He crossed the room and stood by her side. Her breath, heavy with liquor, spoiled the scent of that divine air, which floated in upon him as if over thousands of leagues of newly sprouting grass.

He shook her by the shoulder; not roughly but quite without tenderness, for his heart at that moment felt dead within him beneath all the futilities of human existence.

She opened her eyes and stared at him wildly, appearing hardly conscious at first as to where she was. Then, with a natural impulse of concealment, as if — thought Rook bitterly — he had been a policeman in a raid, she pushed the bottle under her chair and made a pitiful movement to adjust her attire to the requirements of conventional modesty.

“So this is how you amuse yourself,” he said. “Perhaps you’d like me to hand you your dressing gown?” he added, with a sarcasm in his tone which was as completely lost upon her as if it had been addressed to the lime tree in the garden.

She took the dressing gown he brought her and, holding out her arms as if she had been a doll, passively allowed him to help her into it. Then she rose unsteadily to her feet, clutching the folds of the garment against her breast with one hand and gathering up her hair with the other.

“Well?” he said in a low bitter tone.

She let her hair fall down again and put out her hand toward him with a helpless, deprecating gesture.

“Don’t you love me at all, Rook?” she murmured huskily.

He disregarded both gesture and words and, stepping past her, closed the window with so much unnecessary violence that its panes rattled. Then he pulled the blind halfway down as if to shut out the unbearable loveliness of that spring day. But the slanting sunshine was kinder than he was, for it threw upon the floor under her feet a pool of yellow light in the midst of which she continued to stand, like a woebegone leaden statue in a fountain of gold.

“I did it for you! I did it for you!” she brought out recklessly, too unhappy under his reproaches and too dazed in her mind to care what inmost secrets she betrayed.

He stared at her in sceptical bewilderment.

“I don’t know what on earth you’re talking about, Netta,” he said; and then, fumbling awkwardly in his pocket for a cigarette, “Oh, do sit down!” he added, crossly and petulantly. “How can I talk to you when you’re standing there like a petrified image?”

“Rook!” she said, moving a step toward him.

Something in her expression touched a chord of remorseful tenderness in him and he took her in his arms; but he had no sooner done this than the overpowering smell of liquor in her breath extinguished the impulse. So as not to hurt her feelings he continued to press her against his shoulder and to let her lean all her weight upon him; but it was with a cold, unhappy, weary eye, without warmth and without pity, that he took in, over her bowed head, the familiar aspects of the room and the great stream of sunlight, full of flickering dust motes, that wavered across the floor.

As he looked at those tiny illuminated specks he thought to himself how likely enough it was that each one of these atoms was itself an enormous world, a world that doubtless at that very beat of time — perhaps a whole year of it — contained many Rook Ashovers in the process of disentangling themselves from many Netta Pages!

And the immense misery and futility of the whole boundless spectacle drove itself into his brain. What suffering! What misunderstanding! What cruel dilemmas! And all issueless and meaningless as that dance of April sun motes!

He registered in his mind a deep, silent vow that he would never, whatever happened to him afterward, forgive the Power that was responsible for this fermenting-vat of misery. No conceivable rearrangements or renewals or redemptions should ever make up, to him, at any rate, for what certain sensitive organisms are compelled to endure while this particular sphere is turning upon its axis!

Though he retorted thus, with all the righteous anger at his command, at the shameless First Cause of human suffering, his own nature was such that it never occurred to him to ask her again what she meant by that obscure cry: “I did it for you! I did it for you!”

And she, recovering now, as she clung passionately to him, both her sobriety and her love, recovered simultaneously with these her original heroic resolution.

In the strength of nothing less than this she extricated herself at last from his embrace, and some blessed principle of chance ordained, in defiance of the malignity of fate, that she should not know how cold and perfunctory, how weary and without human pity, that embrace had been!

No sooner had she recovered her mental balance and moving across to the bed had stretched herself out on it, a natural and touching smile upon her face and her hands clasped behind her neck, than there came the sound of wheels upon the gravel of the front drive. Pandie had been extremely expeditious in her embassy, and Mr. Twiney and his horse were at Rook’s disposal.

Netta was clear-witted enough now to understand from the look upon his face that there was something about the appearance of this conveyance at this moment that agitated and troubled him.

He moved to the window and stood there with his back to her, absorbed in miserable thought. Netta guessed shrewdly enough that he was suffering from the particular situation of all situations which he dreaded most: that of having to make a quick and momentous decision. She resolved to help him to make this mysterious choice at once, whatever the consequences might be.

"You've got an engagement, Rook," she said quietly. "So don't let me keep you. You needn't worry about me any more. I'm all right now. I'll ring for Pandie presently, when I'm dressed, and have my tea. Then I've got a nice story to read till you come back. Or I may go out. That's what I'll do," she added cheerfully and firmly. "I'II go out for a bit! So don't worry. I shall be here; and quite good and quiet, Rook dear, when you come back."

He found it the easiest thing to do at that moment, just to obey her; just to take advantage of the velvet cloak she snatched off her heart and spread out before him, covering the fissures that yawned under their feet, covering the mud, covering everything!

"I'll tell her about Ann and me to-night," he said to himself. "It'll be easier to tell her at night. Her mind is not calm enough yet."

His brain said other things to his heart, too, as he moved irresolutely toward the door, his eyes fixed on her face and his hands fumbling with the buttons of his overcoat. Had not her resolution held firm, with all the power of her love for him tightening the fibres of its cruel strength, had she collapsed again, or appealed to his feelings, or clung to him in the blind pathos of her helplessness, the probability is that he would not have found it in him to go.

But she did none of these things. She forced into her countenance that world-old smile, full of the bitter wisdom of centuries, the smile of Sarah, the smile of Mary, the smile wherewith the sons of men have been at once mocked and protected by the daughters of men since the beginning of the world.

"Good-bye, then," he murmured, something within him surging up in one last wild desire that she should implore him, that she should conjure him to stay with her. “Good-bye, then, Netta dear. Don’t forget to ring for tea as soon as you are ready. See you again soon!”

The door opened, shut upon him, and he was gone.

A minute or two later she heard the sound of wheels upon gravel. He was gone; and she had done what she had taken upon herself to do. He was gone thinking of her *like that,* like the figure he had seen seated by the window when he first entered the room!

She did not move a muscle now. In exactly the position wherein he had left her, there she remained; but her mind, empty of every other thought, kept hovering round one particular thing: kept wishing that he had kissed her at the very last, just before he had gone, so that her heart could have given him, her cheek against his, its own secret, unrecognized, desperate farewell.

Rook had forgotten that one of the ways to Tollminster was by that very Antiger Lane where he had left his cousin. He remembered it just in time; just at the moment when Mr. Twiney’s gig reduced itself to a walking pace to ascend the long tree-shaded hill known as Friday’s Dip.

Halfway up this hill they came to a lane that left the road at right angles. An old signpost, lichen-covered and weather-stained, pointed a long exhausted arm toward this lane, bearing the single word “Gorm.”

Rook clapped his hand on the driver’s wrist.

“Go the Antiger way, will you, Mr. Twiney?”

“’Tis a deal longer round, Squire,” replied the man. “And there be bad ruts on thik little road. The best way is the nat’ral way as you might ‘spress it.” And he indicated with his whip the long straight ascent before them.

Rook’s next speech was perhaps as much of a surprise to himself as it was to Mr. Twiney.

“I have to pick up Lady Ann,” he said, “at Drool’s. We have an engagement together at Tollminster.”

“Right you be, Squire!” returned the man cheerfully. “I reckon me wold horse can wamble on through more dirt than any dirt these folks have a-known. These roads be nothink to what I’ve a-seed down Stourbridge way. Illigant carriage drives they be, to them parts!’

He turned his mare in the desired direction as he spoke; and Rook, watching the gleaming celandines in the ditch as they jogged along, found himself repeating the word upon the signpost as if it were an incantation.

“What kind of a village is Gorm?” he inquired casually. “I’ve seen that signpost ever since I was a child, but I can’t remember ever having seen any place corresponding to it. I know the hamlets so well, too, between here and Tollminster.”

“‘Tain’t a village at all, Squire,” answered his companion. “’Tis writ on thik signpost and that’s all I do mind. Gippoo Cooper, same as your Dad were smitten wi’, did used to say down to Black Pig that ‘un were a girt devil’s name, writ on thik board for to guide boggles and ghosties. I’ve always been a bit scared-like, in dirty weather, when I’ve a-seed thik sign; and me mare, too, stopped in’s tracks one terrible wet night and turned ‘un’s head right round to I, same as a living Christian might, as much as to say, poor dumb beasty, ‘This place bain’t a place for neither thee nor me, mister!’”

The warm golden afternoon light had deepened to a rich amber tint, falling upon hedge and copse and meadow, by the time they approached Drool’s cottage.

Rook was reminded of that mysterious glow, seeming to come from all quarters of the horizon at once, such as forms the background to the delicate Tuscan leafiness in many an Old Master’s picture. The very cuckoo-flowers in the damp margins of the fields had that curious allegorical look which all fresh spring growths sometimes assume, as if they were painted in the illuminated edges of old breviaries.

Twiney pulled up in front of the little garden, where not so many hours before the cousins had separated, and Rook hurried up to the door. He knocked sharply with the handle of his stick and waited impatiently for an answer.

As he waited the impression came over him, as impressions do on such occasions — our reasoning faculties not having altogether destroyed our intuitions — of something or another being seriously amiss. Made up of an accumulation of many converging little signs — silences where there would naturally be sounds; sounds where there would naturally be silence — there gathers suddenly upon the human heart at such moments a burden of prophetic misgiving.

He opened the door and entered the little entrance hall. As he did so he became aware of two simultaneous sounds, both of them sinister and disturbing. The louder of the two sounds was the high-pitched monotone of the idiot Binnory; and the words uttered by the lad, as Rook listened in breathless amazement, were more extraordinary than the sound itself.

"I do see 'ee! Binnory do see the fine lady what's been brought low! Loowhee! Loowhee! Loowhee! I do see through crack and chink! I do see through hole and cranny! I do see 'ee! Binnory do see 'ee. The fine lady, on the high horse, what our Squire have tumbled and towzled! 'Ee be left, all draggled and scanted, like a fine girt mallard with's wing shot off. And Squire be gone to London town and he'll never come back; never no more at all! And Binnory do see 'ee and do hear 'ee! You mid drive Binnory away but a'll come back. And you mid live now where Uncle Dick did live; and you mid tell Binnory stories and stories, like what Uncle Dick did tell. Loowhee! Loowhee! Binnory knows all that do befall in earth and in sky!"

The second sound that reached Rook's ears, simultaneously with the idiot's babble, was the low persistent crying of a girl in abandoned misery. *Could* that be his cousin? *Could* that faint pitiful whimper come from the heart of Lady Ann?

He waited to hear no more but rushed up the little staircase.

He found Binnory clinging to a hole in the wall, which he had evidently made for himself and through which he was peering into the room. Rook was too concerned now to bother about the boy; without even knocking at the door he burst straight in.

Lady Ann was lying with her face on the pillow, having exhausted herself to such a point that her crying was scarcely audible.

"*My dear!* What's the matter? For God's sake, what's the matter?" And Rook knelt by the bed and pulled the girl over toward him.

"Send him away, Rook! He's there still! Send him away, Rook, or I shall go mad!' And her voice began to rise to something like a scream.

Rook got upon his feet, rushed out into the passage, caught up the idiot under his arm and carrying him downstairs as if he were a bundle of hay, put him out of the front door and locked it from inside.

Then he went into Mrs. Drool's part of the house and locked the other door, too. There was no sign of the gamekeeper or his wife anywhere about the place.

When he returned to the room upstairs he was amazed at the change in Cousin Ann. It was just as if Binnory had really cast a spell over her, and that the moment he was disposed of she came entirely back to her normal self.

She had already got up from the bed and was smoothing out her ruffled hair at Uncle Dick's looking glass. When he entered she turned round to him, smiling; and Rook had his second lesson that day as to the variable nature of women's smiles.

This smile of Cousin Ann's was whimsically penitent, full of the deprecating cajolery of a child. She put her hands on Rook's shoulders and kissed him on the forehead.

"I couldn't help it, my dear," she said. "I was alone in the house with him and he teased me and teased me. I was doing what you told me — making a list of the things — but he wouldn't let me alone. He must have heard those people talking about us. I was feeling upset and I lost my temper. I hit him. It was dreadful of me; but that's what I did. I hit him! And after that he wouldn't go away but kept peeping at me through that hole in the wall. It was awful, Rook! It was like a nightmare. I kept dragging him away from that hole and pushing him downstairs. But he's so strong. He always came back, and then kept jeering at me. But you've locked him out now, have you? Oh, I am so glad!" And she sucked in her breath with a little gurgling sibilance, as if it were all she could do not to burst into a fit of unnatural laughter.

Her mood touched Rook's heart more than she realized. He had always associated her with such complete independence that to see her in this agitated state struck home at him through all his defences.

The vague intention which had formulated itself in his mind at the moment when he saw the word "Gorm" on the signpost now hardened into a definite resolution.

"Get your things on quickly, my dear," he said. "I'm going to take you with me to Tollminster."

More passive and docile than she had ever been in her life, Cousin Ann allowed herself to be led down the stairs, hurried along the little garden path, and lifted into the cart. Rook placed her between himself and Mr. Twiney, and as they rattled through the muddy lanes and through the gathering spring twilight the girl abandoned herself without restraint to a delicious wave of voluptuous contentment which cradled and rocked her and obliterated all doubt and responsibility.

She had fallen into a kind of trance wherein all objects lost their substantiality and became porous and dream-like, when the lighted lamps of the cheerful High Street and the rough cobblestones of the inn yard made her realize that they had reached Tollminster.

Rook gave orders to Peter Twiney to meet them in that same inn yard later in the evening, and he and Cousin Ann made their way through the narrow old-fashioned streets to the lodging of his friend the curate.

The closing of spring days in an ancient country town has a glamour about it of a quality more delicate and penetrating than anything that can be reached in the leafiest and remotest solitudes. The sense of the open roads stretching out from the lighted thoroughfares into the embalmed darkness; the fragrance of lilac bushes from invisible walled gardens; the emerging of the impression of new-leafed greenness from behind the moss-covered gates of church precincts and almshouse precincts; the twilit presence of newly planted pansies and primulas in old Georgian window frames; all these things together, mingled with sudden breaths of mud-scented coolness coming up from river banks, where the great moist marigold buds are swelling and swelling in the darkness, give to the streets of such a town an enchantment that has the power to summon up and embody the rarest memories of our race consciousness.

The curate of Saint Mark’s Church received his visitors with undissembled delight. Full of a youthful idolatry for the Squire of Ashover, in which a natural and innocent snobbishness mingled with a quaint personal hero worship, the young clergyman was quick enough to catch every emotional nuance of this unexpected visit.

“I’m proud to be the one to launch you,” he kept repeating, as he dragged them out again, up Antiger Street, up South Street, until they reached the necessary office.

The place was closed; but the energetic curate, with his knowledge of local ways, was able to follow up the official trail to such excellent effect that when they returned to his lodging the desired special license was safe in Rook’s possession.

What followed was even more dream-like to Lady Ann’s irresponsible and reckless mood than was their drive through the muddy lanes. Mr. Tishmarsh rummaged up his sexton and his verger as witnesses; opened the little postern-gate of the dark Henry the Seventh church with his own private key, slipped on his vestments in the easy familiar manner of a disciple of the Bishop of Oxford, repeated his nervous formula: “I’m proud to be able to launch you!” so unconsciously that it struck the girl as falling into a sort of allotted rhythm amid the austere hieratic injunctions of the fatal service, and finally made them write their names in the parchment-bound book as man and wife, leaving both of them with a queer impression in their minds that they had been hypnotized by a romantic schoolboy.

“Couldn’t have been worked like this for any one but you, Mr. Ashover,” remarked the exultant little cleric as he escorted them toward the yard of the Red Lion. “Nor for any woman but yourself, Lady Ashover!” he hurried to add, fumbling in his confusion over the bride’s new name.

Rook was exceedingly anxious to shake off the little man before they encountered their driver's inquisitive sympathy, but Mr. Tishmarsh had at least this in common with his professional enemy the Devil that, when once he had been made use of, it was not easy to get out of his clutches.

"I must help you into your vehicle, Lady Ashover," the youth announced. "That's only my right, isn't it, as I was the one to launch you?"

Rook found himself damning the kind little priest in his heart with vindictive fury out of all proportion to the slight occasion. His nerves, now the drastic step had actually been taken, were feeling the effects of the unnatural tension of this long day.

They were off at last, but not before Mr. Peter Twiney had thrown a most quizzical and knowing leer in the direction of the curate of Saint Mark's, left bare-headed and excited among the staring ostlers of the Red Lion.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached Ashover House. Rook made Mr. Twiney drive round to the back door, so as not to disturb any one; but it soon appeared that this familiar precaution was, for once in the history of that quiet dwelling, ironically unnecessary.

The whole house was stirring with lights and voices and emotional confusion.

Pandie met them in the doorway; and not only Mr. Twiney, but also, it appeared, his long-necked horse as well, listened with an attention that suggested one of the rarest dramatic sensations in two blameless lives, while the white-faced servant, her apron and cap awry, and her hands waving in the air like the flappers of an unhappy penguin, explained that Miss Page had runned away unbeknown to any one; that in her own opinion, she had drownded herself in Saunders' Hole; while in the opinion of Mrs. Vabbin she had been kidnapped and ravaged by them murdering gippoos.

CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS ALMOST as if the momentous event that had happened to Cousin Ann — that secret victory of the Ashover dust under the chancel floor — had laid a paralyzing finger upon the life-hating pen of William Hastings.

Nell awoke late on the morning after the events just described, awoke with a mysterious sense of some great load having been lifted from her life during her sleep. To her surprise she found a note from her husband, fixed to the pincushion in front of her looking-glass, tellingher that he had had his breakfast and had gone off for the day to Bishop's Forley.

She knew why this had happened. A celebrated theologian from Germany, one of the few modern thinkers whose writings interested this lonely nihilist, had come to stay with an ex-priest there; and it was at the invitation of this man that Hastings had gone.

Brushing her hair before the open window with the scent of the young leaves and the new-grown grass floating in upon her and the songs of thrushes and blackbirds answering each other across the road, the girl abandoned herself to a thrilling current of happiness that seemed composed of every magical sound and every ecstatic scent that the great reservoirs of life held in their hidden springs.

It was as though she could catch, behind the shrill bird notes and the arrowy odours, the very stir and movement of the green sap as it pressed upward to meet the warmth of the generative sun.

Out of the recesses of her nature where they had been so long hidden rose a thousand indescribable memories.

Pale-green cowslip stalks mingled, in these faint evocations, with the transparent lilac of cuckoo-flowers, with the unique thrill of the first purple crocuses against the brown earth mould, with the crimson-tipped petals of innumerable daisies on dew-wet mossy lawns. Sharp birth pangs at once jocund and poignant seemed to answer from the depths of her being the unsealings and unsheathings that were going on in wood and garden and field.

All her buried responses to Nature, responses that had seemed to come to her in the form of pure ecstasies of childish happiness but in reality were associated with quite definite impressions of warmth and coolness, of stalks and leaves, of earth mould and roots and moss, of sun-motes and shadows, now rushed upward to the level of her brain, flooding her with a rapture that was beyond human description.

She tied up her hair, put on her shift, and ran down, bare-armed as she was, to make the preparations for her breakfast, against the moment she should be washed and dressed. There was not much to be done, for Hastings had built up an excellent fire and had put both kettles on the stove.

Hurrying through her ablutions with the impatience of a child, delaying just long enough to open her trunk and take out therefrom a real spring dress, in an incredibly short time she was seated at the kitchen table, with the door into the garden open in front of her, eating bread and butter and drinking tea with a face so radiant that had a sub-human elemental wayfarer lingered on the threshold watching her it would have certainly thought that the lives of the daughters of men were the ones to be envied throughout all space!

It then came over her what she would do when she had washed up the breakfast things, made her bed, and watered the purple and pink hyacinths that were budding now under the south wall. She decided that she would cross the Ashover bridge, skirt the Ashover garden by a little path she knew well, and make her way over the hill to the Antiger Woods. She would not let herself think of an encounter with Rook; in fact, she was by no means sure that she wished to see him that day; but she wished to associate him with her unusual mood; she wished to be near him, to feel the pulses of the spring in the locality haunted by his presence.

She was so impatient to get out of the house that in the end she forgot all about the hyacinths; and it was not until she had reached the entrance to the churchyard that, with a little funny smile on her twisted mouth, she remembered this omission.

Drawn, against her intention and against her will, by the memory of that afternoon in the darkened church, she lingeringly and slowly entered the enclosure and moved round toward the west door.

Her astonishment was great when, turning the corner of the building, she suddenly found herself faced by Rook's mother. Mrs. Ashover was standing by the grave of her husband. Nell got a quick glimpse of her before she was observed and she was amazed at the expression on her face.

The old woman looked like an exultant and malignant witch, who had come to confide some unholy triumph to the responsive bones of a heathen corpse. She showed herself disconcerted and annoyed at the apparition of Nell, but she did not make any effort to conceal the causes of her wicked satisfaction.

"You'd better know at once what has occurred, Mrs. Hastings," she said, "and then you can tell your husband, if Rook hasn't told him already."

Nell's face grew white. What blow was this, then, that had chosen this day of all days to fall upon her head?

"What?" she murmured, her mouth open and her eyes wide. "Has anything happened — to any one?"

“Happened? I should think things *have* happened! You may be interested to learn that my son and his cousin were married yesterday by special license in Tollminster; and that *that woman* has run away.”

Mrs. Ashover fixed upon the girl, as she brought this out, a look of such evil exultation that Nell felt as though every secret of her own heart were stripped bare. She could only make a little gasping noise in her throat in response to this overwhelming information and instinctively she pressed her hand upon the late Squire’s head-stone.

“What’s the matter?” said the old lady, laying her gloved hand on the girl’s wrist and retaining it in her nervous clutch. “Come, come. This won’t do! Why, you’re as white as a Wyandotte hen. Come into the church and sit down a minute. No! No! I’m not going to have you fainting here by my John.” And she chuckled with a high-pitched quavering chuckle such as might have emerged from the leathery lungs of an agitated bat.

She dragged the girl with her into the building and they sat down side by side. As the blood began to come back to Nell’s cheeks and she began to make an attempt to visualize Cousin Ann as Rook’s wife, her deeper consciousness was aware of the Ashover tombs and of the difference between the way they looked now and the way they looked on that dark, misty evening.

“Where has Netta Page gone?” she whispered to her companion.

“Gone to the gutter!” was the unspoken response of the old woman. But what she actually said was: “We have no idea, child. Not Rook or any of us! They’ve been scouring the country all night; they’ve been to the police and they’ve been to the railway stations. Not a sign or trace anywhere! The curious thing about it is that she didn’t take anything; nothing but her handbag; and *that,* from what my son says, must have been practically empty. I think myself that she took money, but Rook says not. If he’s right *there,* it's because she's gone with someone, with some man or other with whom she's been keeping in touch all the time. You know they're like that! That's what they always do: go back to some lazy bully who takes all their earnings!"

As Nell listened to this tirade her disgust grew greater and greater. If it had not been for those tombs in the chancel, whose presence had never been more emphatic, she would have protested indignantly and rushed away. As it was she just leaned back with half-closed eyes, trying to imagine what Netta must have actually felt as she stole out of that unconscious house with her empty handbag. In her growing sympathy with Netta she began to feel calmer and less hurt under her own personal blow. After all, she had never let her thoughts or feelings wander off beyond the romance of the immediate present. With regard to Lady Ann she felt no individual jealousy; only a sickening weight of troubled concern as to what the whole thing must have meant for Rook.

"I shall leave them alone for a while."

Nell heard the old lady's voice through the thick screen of her own agitation, as if it came to her through a tapestried wall.

"Alone for a while. You can tell your husband that. And if Lady Ann would rather have the place to herself *after* that, I shall be all right. It'll kill me, very likely, if they find they can't put up with me here; but I shall die happy."

Mrs. Ashover lapsed into silence; and her gaze, as well as that of her youthful companion, wandered from the Voltairean lawyer to the melancholy Cavalier; and from the Cavalier to the austere Crusader.

"It's absolutely all right," she murmured aloud to these exacting spirits of the race she served. "It's absolutely all right."

There was something in the mere fact of Mrs. Ashover's revealing her thoughts in this way to a comparative stranger that startled and astonished the young girl. This insanity of devotion to so impersonal a thing as the survival of a family was so entirely outside Nell's own life illusion that she felt like a person who watches the clash of phantom armies upon a phantom shore. And yet she was intelligent enough not to miss the note of something almost sublime in the old woman's crazy loyalty.

"It'll kill me if they can't put up with me here." That desperate sentence kept repeating itself in the girl's brain like the beat of a drum that outlasts all the other sounds as the mêlée rolls itself away over the muffling hills.

Absorbed, each of them, in their own thoughts, the old woman and the young woman could hardly be expected to be aware of the full power of the occult influences that streamed forth on that enchanted spring day from the mouse-coloured dust underneath those marble slabs. It was as though the rejuvenative stirrings in earth and air had actually pierced through the slow dissolution of the centuries and roused some hidden vital force down there in the darkness, latent and potential, beyond all annihilation.

Some sort of obscure summoning from these tombs of the race she had saved must anyway have carried its exultant vibration into the nerves of the new mistress of Ashover; for, after a long lapse of silence between them, both the women seated there, with a pool of sunshine under their feet and a wavering stream of sunshine falling on their heads, became suddenly conscious that they were no longer alone in the church. They turned round simultaneously. They simultaneously stood up. And there was Lady Ann, erect and bareheaded in the doorway, regarding them with a blank, dazed, inexpressive face, like the face of a noctambulist.

They extricated themselves quickly from the narrow pew and walked down the aisle to meet her. She smiled faintly at Nell and held out her hand, but it was from behind the same impassive mask — the mask of a hypnotized sleepwalker — that she addressed her words to Mrs. Ashover.

“I came to tell you, Aunt, that Rook has got on the track of our lost lady. It appears she was seen, by someone who knew her, in Bishop’s Forley last night. I know there’s a great mass of slums round those glove factories. I’ve seen awful places down there — lodging houses and public houses and that sort of thing where any one of that kind might naturally go.”

Mrs. Ashover glanced at Nell, her instinct as a woman of the world warning her that this was not the moment for any interchange of unholy triumph between herself and her new daughter. But Lady Ann seemed strangely oblivious just then to all the conventions.

“You’re lucky to be able to enjoy a day like this with a clear mind,” she said, looking Nell straight in the face with her formidable gray eyes. “You’re lucky to be free of any contact with our crazy family.”

“William is in Bishop’s Forley to-day,” murmured Mrs. Hastings.

“Perhaps he’ll be the one, then, to find our lost sheep and bring her back!” responded Lady Ann with a joyless laugh. “Rook drove over there hours ago,” she added.

Walking side by side the three women skirted the angle of the church wall and moved toward the gate leading to the road. They walked in silence, the old woman and the young woman on either side of the newcomer, whose personality seemed endowed at that moment with an immense passivity of weight and power, capable of reducing them both to the rôle of irrelevant supernumeraries.

The warm spring sunshine covered them, all three, with its fecund benediction, and gave to their silent association an almost biblical solemnity. It was as if they had been moving, in accordance with some preordained religious rite, from flower-strewn altar to flower-strewn altar!

They seemed, all of them, relegated to subordinate yet essential parts in some vast mystery play, some vernal celebration, complicated and dumb, in honour of Persephone or her mother. The cawings of jackdaws, the chittering of sparrows, the harsh cries of a flock of starlings as they settled for a moment on the edge of the roof, did not disturb, any more than did the bleatings of some distant hurdled ewes, the almost supernatural seriousness with which those three figures moved to the entrance of the churchyard.

Were they subconsciously aware, just then, in that magnetic weather, of the invisible pressure of the countless spirits of the dead, rushing forward through the body of the half-formed nameless one, hid in the womb of a new mother of the generations, forward, forward, into the dim, uncreated future?

If it *were* so, if the sublime mystery of the continuity of human life, beautiful and terrible, withdrew from these three sensitive female frames on that fatal morning all power of individual resistance, all power of personal choice, it is easy enough to understand how it was that they moved so slowly toward the gate. Such is the clairvoyant link between all women in their knowledge of themselves as living channels between what was and is and is to come it is likely enough that the strange passivity that emanated from the nerves of one of them on this occasion passed insensibly into the nerves of the other two.

No sooner were they out of the consecrated enclosure, however, and on the sunlit road than the whole mental atmosphere about them changed.

“May I come with you as far as the bridle path?” said Nell. “I made up my mind this morning that I would go to Antiger Woods to look for primroses, and I think I shall still do that — unless,” she added with a gentle glance at Cousin Ann, “I can be of any help to any one?”

Rook’s wife and Rook’s mother exchanged a quick significant look.

"I think, my dear," said the latter with a sudden sharp eagerness, "you may be of immense use to us a little later. If my son, for instance, succeeds in finding Miss Page, and brings her back here, as I'm afraid he's only too likely to do, it would be a blessed relief to all of us if you could — perhaps — for just a few days — till other arrangements were made — take her in at the cottage?"

Nell was unable to prevent the blood rushing to her cheeks. Had this aunt-mother and this niece-daughter, with their merciless aristocratic gray eyes, sounded her heart's secret to its uttermost depths? Were they bent upon punishing her for her temerity? Was this extraordinary suggestion their premeditated revenge?

"I am sure William and I will do everything we can to help you, Mrs. Ashover," the girl answered gravely. "I only trust no harm has come to Netta. I can't believe that she went to any of those dreadful places. I expect she just took the night train to Bristol. I know she's got people she knows there. Or she may have gone to London."

Mrs. Ashover had ceased to listen. A new thought had come into her mind.

"Will you walk back with us to the house, Nelly? There is something I'd be most grateful to you if you'd do for me. Something I want to send to Lexie."

The girl permitted herself to be led prisoner by these two dominant spirits and they all three crossed the bridge.

A few minutes later Nell found herself waiting alone in the great chilly unused drawing room whose spacious ceremoniousness seemed to embrace and envelop her as if she were just one more primrose or crocus or snowdrop to be "arranged" in a slender glass vase.

Never did the room look more stately, in its gilt and its whiteness, in its water colours and French prints; but the young visitor felt an intense and increasing hostility to the whole atmosphere there, as if the great room were consciously emphasizing a sort of victory over her and over all the wayward romance she represented.

She moved to the mantelpiece and stood silently regarding a little gold-framed miniature of Rook's father when a young child. The picture fascinated her by its resemblance to Rook, and a wave of overpowering pity for what she knew well enough he was going through during these agitated hours swept over her like a shivering ague fit.

The odd thing was, and she wondered at it herself, that she felt no anger, no bitterness against him. She longed to rise up against them all and do something — she knew not what — to clear his path for him; to make, as the Bible says, "his way smooth." She felt glad that she was to be sent on a message to Lexie. She wondered how much Lexie had been told of all that was happening. Had Lady Ann found time to send him news of her marriage, news of Netta's disappearance? What an irony if this "something" that she was to take to him were nothing less than this double-edged piece of overpowering intelligence!

She looked at the marble and gilt clock. It was already nearly one. Would she be forced to stay and eat lunch with this mother and this daughter?

The idea of such a thing was utterly repulsive to her. It would have been like eating with two judges while the executioner was at work upon the condemned!

A sudden sound of the opening and shutting of doors in the rear of the house made her stand transfixed on the faded hearthrug, her eyes hypnotized by its convoluted pattern, her ears listening, listening —— In a moment she lifted her head and made one irrepressible movement toward the door. She had heard a familiar voice outside, engaged in a hurried low-toned dialogue with Pandie. Then there came his step in the passage and the door of the drawing room was flung open.

Nell stared at him for a moment in speechless dismay. He might have served, save for his English clothes, for a picture of Hamlet rushing in upon Ophelia. His clothes were muddy and untidy, his boots unpolished, his chin unshaven, his eyes bloodshot and sunk deep in their sockets as if after many nights of sleeplessness.

He shut the door with studied precaution and fixed a long nervous look upon the girl as if expecting some angry outburst from her. Then, advancing a step or two, he threw down his hat and stick upon the rosewood table and looked wildly round him like a hunted criminal seeking sanctuary.

Nell's paralyzed dismay melted into infinite tenderness when she saw how broken he was. She went straight up to him and threw her arms round his neck.

His face felt cold and clammy to her kiss, as if it had been something carved out of the pith of elder-wood, and the unshaven hairs upon his chin pricked her cheek.

"Hush," he whispered nervously. "Hush, for God's sake! They haven't any idea that I'm here. They're upstairs. Pandie told me you were alone. I've come back for money and my shaving things. Twiney's waiting for me in the road. I wouldn't let him drive up. Pandie's gone to my room to get everything. She won't breathe a word. So *you* mustn't either, my sweet Nell! Oh! I shall find her; I shall find her; or never come back here again!"

The young girl released his neck but clung still to his shoulders, gazing up into his face.

"You will find her, Rook dear. I know you'll find her! I never believed it for a moment when they said she'd gone to that dreadful place."

He took her hands gently from his shoulders and held her at arm’s length away from him. In his excitement the grip of his fingers was so powerful that he bruised her flesh.

“You don’t know what it is to feel as I feel, Nell,” he muttered huskily. “It’s like being a murderer.”

“It was not your fault, Rook darling,” she whispered. “It was not your fault. I know all about it. I saw it all happening; but what could I do? Oh, Rook, my dear, dear love, what could I do?”

“It’s like being a murderer, Nell,” he repeated, gripping her thin arms so tightly that she could not refrain from a little smothered cry. “It’s just as if I had deliberately killed her! And she was so good! Oh! Nell, I was all she had. And she was so dear and good!”

He loosed her arms and uttered a sigh that shook his bony frame to its centre.

“You will find her, Rook dear! You will find her!” the girl kept repeating; and then, feeling suddenly faint with the tension of this encounter, she sank down on one of the tall, embroidered, Louis Quatorze chairs, heart-shaped and gilded.

He fell on his knees at her side and taking her face in his hands kissed her pitifully and blindly. Under his kisses her colour came back and she leaned forward, her hands clasping his head.

“Rook, dear, dear Rook, you’ll find her!” she chanted, in a kind of crooning monotone, swaying a little as if rocking an infant. “You’ll find her, Rook. Have no fear! Something tells me that you and she will meet again.”

He rose to his feet and glanced nervously at the door.

“If I do, Nell,” he whispered, “you’ll be my friend, won’t you, and help me through with all this?”

She never knew what he really meant by this last appeal, for with a quick tap at the door Pandie put her head into the room and beckoned to him.

"I'm with you, Pandie," he cried. "Good-bye, Nell!"

And before she had found the strength to get up from the rose-embroidered chair with the stiff gilded arms, he had got out of the room and the door was shut.

Once upon her feet she felt her normal strength coming back; and with that strength she felt a certain strange deep happiness stirring in her heart, a happiness that was different from the happiness she had experienced earlier that morning, and yet was not, it may be, altogether remote from that! She bent down over a great shallow vase of primroses that stood in the middle of the table where Rook had thrown his hat and stick, and she buried her face in those pale virginal blooms.

She approached the verge, as she inhaled that penetrating sweetness, of nothing less than the open secret which "many prophets and kings" have died without knowing, namely, that when love passes a certain subjective barrier and flows outward over the life of the person loved, it liberates itself for that moment at least from the sting that is "cruel as the grave."

She was still smelling these flowers when Mrs. Ashover came in; carrying in her hand a folded note.

"Will you take this to Lexie for me, my dear?" she said. "I would have loved to keep you to lunch with us, but as you can see, everything is at sixes and sevens!"

For no reason at all except from an inherent and invincible capriciousness in the very texture of all terrestrial happenings, it was this silly phrase "sixes and sevens" rather than anything that any other human being had said to her that day that kept teasingly and mechanically forming itself upon her lips as she recrossed the two bridges over the river, on her way to be the first messenger to inform Lexie Ashover that his historic name was in less danger than it had been, two days ago, of disappearing altogether from the face of the earth!

CHAPTER XIV

EMERGING FROM THE ex-priest’s house at Bishop’s Forley, the Reverend William Hastings, his head throbbing from the excitement of his metaphysical arguments with the German visitor, found himself walking, about six o’clock in the evening, through a street completely unknown to him in the poorer district of the rambling overcrowded town.

He had walked all the ten miles to the place that morning and when he left his confrères he announced his intention of walking all the way home; but the agitation of the arguments they had had in this singular meeting had left him so exhausted that he began to think he would give up all thought of getting back that night.

This point being settled he felt half inclined to return to his heretical colleague and ask for hospitality; but the memory of the wretchedly meagre quarters the man lived in, combined with a vision of the abnormal physical size of the foreign guest, made him shrink from such a step. He decided to dispatch a telegram to his wife and find a room in some lodging house or inn.

The hum and stir in his brain, reverberating and richocheting with dark and disturbing oracles, had driven him blindly on so far from the centre of the town that now, when he came to his senses and looked round for any sign of what he wanted, he found himself as much lost and confused as if he were in a completely strange country.

The sun had disappeared behind a bank of clouds, the edges of which wore that peculiar crimson zig-zag, so portentous and menacing, such as long ago the hawk-like eyes of Dante must have lit upon, as appropriate to the dusky walls of Dis!

This jagged torch flare in the west gave a yet more threatening and lurid aspect to the narrow poverty-stricken streets, abutting upon blackened sheds and upon desolate open spaces. There were shallow pools of rain water in some of these open spaces, pools whose metallic surface, livid and motionless, reflected this sunset glow.

Across the path of the sunset rose up certain dilapidated groups of melancholy and lamentable dwellings, from which a tall broken chimney here and a projected roof-corner there isolated themselves from their surroundings and stood out, black and ominous, against what looked like a vast bleeding wound in the ribs of the world.

Vaguely moving in the direction of the sunset, and falling back, as he went, so deeply into his wild cosmic speculations that he became oblivious of everything around him, it was not until he was right under the wall of a hideously recognizable building that he grew conscious once again of his human identity.

It was the Bishop's Forley Workhouse which he now was skirting, feeling obscurely aggrieved, even as a philosopher, at the rubbish heaps and smouldering rubble mounds that made of this place a sort of Golgotha. One particular spot struck with a vibration of horror the tough nerves of this lover of Nothingness.

It was a sort of local potter's field or pauper burying-ground, and it was entirely surrounded by iron railings some ten feet high. A fresh instalment of young nettles had come back with the coming of spring, but the old ones were there, too, interspersed with anonymous oblong mounds and with rusty tins and rain-drenched newspapers.

The look of the nettles between those tall iron railings presented itself to the mind of William Hastings in a sudden bleak objective light that was unusual with him. He stood still and stared in front of him.

On one side of the enclosure rose the blank wall of the Workhouse. There was only one iron-barred window in that forlorn expanse, and this window had caught from the afterglow in the western sky a certain greenish phosphorescent tint such as may be observed on the flesh of corpses.

On the other side of the enclosure were the roofless walls of a ruined factory: walls from which emanated that peculiar ghastliness of futility which only the work of men's hands, when it has fallen into desuetude, is able to evoke.

What came over the mind of the heretic priest at that moment was a certain day, years and years ago, when, in the wretched playground of a second-rate preparatory school, he had watched a couple of his companions throwing handfuls of cinders taken from a galvanized iron ash bin at the body of a dead rat. He had been the laughing stock of the school even before that day for his inability to conform to their standards, but after that day his loathing for every aspect of youthful high spirits hardened into a misanthropic mania.

His mind recalled the loveliness of the country through which he had passed on his way to this town. It recalled the elaborate patient defence of a certain "hope against hope" advocated by the man from Germany. And there arose in him a ferocious wish that he could take this abomination of desolation, standing here so real and tangible in the twilight, and plant it down among the gracious meadows and the plausible arguments, so that none should escape its terrible significance.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps and he turned his back to the iron railings and waited, listening.

The steps came drifting along slowly, uneven spasmodic, shuffling, and stumbling. When they came round the corner by the ruined factory he saw that the figure bearing down upon him was that of a woman. She came up to him, muttering as she came, one hand dragging after her a torn umbrella and one clinging tenaciously to a black bag that swung half-open against her side.

When she reached him she stopped short and looked him straight in the face with a long, puzzled, half-understanding stare. Hastings knew her at once. His own mind was so wrought upon by what he had been feeling that it was with something less than a startled shock and yet something more than a casual comprehension that he recognized her and realized what her state implied.

"I've left that place — I'm never going back," she said hurriedly; and then with a pitiable and almost infantile intonation: "You won't tell them, will you? You won't tell any one, will you?"

He sighed and made an awkward gesture as if shrugging his shoulders. The sight of her standing there with that wretched open bag and that trailing umbrella was something he had to deal with, to get into focus, to be drastic and practical about.

Like a slowly retreating wave, leaving only wisps of scattered spindrift behind it, to be blown at random hither and thither, his metaphysical thoughts fell back, fell away, displaying him, as the outside world generally found him, a quiet, self-controlled country priest.

What was this woman doing in the slums of Bishop's Forley? And since he had encountered her there what did it behove *him* to do? For the flicker of a second his instinct was just to bolt, just to leave her as she was; but a kind of aloof, weary pity, mixed with the mechanical habit of his trade, kept him from such an extreme of callousness.

"I can't take her back to Ashover to-night," he thought. "I suppose I must take her to some lodging house." He stood looking at her, as she let her vacant stare wander away from his face and drift along the wall of the Workhouse and over the Paupers' Cemetery.

"Will she come with me?" he wondered, "and if she does, will she behave properly and stay in the room I find for her? She looks as if she might refuse to remain in any one place to-night." And the man began to recall the various hopeless experiences he had had with women in this state.

While he hesitated and wondered what to do, Netta turned away from him and began to shuffle off down the road. This decided him. He stepped quickly after her and offered her his arm. She leaned upon it at once with a hopeless docility like that of some dazed and bewildered animal that has lost all power of individual decision. She even permitted him to take from her the black bag, which he at once proceeded to shut, and then to retain in the same hand with which he held his stick.

He did not dare reverse the direction she was following, knowing by experience that such interference with a person's obscure desires is apt to cause any sort of outbreak or collapse. As a philosopher he let the whole thing take what course it would. As a clergyman he automatically assumed a kind of professional responsibility that remained on the alert for each new crisis as it might happen to arise.

They were soon outside the limits of the town. The deepening of the twilight about the solitary roadway, bordered by forlorn allotment patches and broken wooden palings, seemed rather to intensify than to diminish the dilemma of the exploited misanthrope.

It was Netta herself, as it happened, who was the first to bring them back to practical urgencies. The effect of whatever it was that she had been drinking began to wear off in the effort of physical movement and in the impact of the chilliness of approaching night.

“Where are we going?” she said suddenly, bringing him to a pause by a field gate through which they could see the dim shapes of a hurdled flock and catch the smell of turnips and damp straw and sheep’s excrement.

“Do ‘ee ask the dear gentleman where he be taking of ‘ee?” came a startling voice out of the hedge.

Netta pressed instinctively closer to the clergyman’s side; for the figure that followed the voice, from what seemed the very depths of a watery ditch, was strange enough to scare the most preoccupied mind.

It was that of a woman so old as to be almost beyond human recognition. Her face was not so much the colour of ashes as the colour of the inside of a white eggshell that has been exposed on the top of a rubbish heap for many weeks. Out of this face looked forth a pair of ghastly sunken eyes, colourless now in the darkness, but possessed of some kind of demonic vitality that made both Hastings and Netta shrink and draw back, as if from the presence of something malignant and dangerous.

“Betsy must have known ‘ee was coming, dearie! What else was I nursing my old bones for on way home from town? ’Twas so when the gentleman from London brought his sweetheart this way fifteen years agone. These things be writ in the stars, sweet lady; they be writ in the stars. What else was it that made old Betsy bide in ditch for best of an hour, and her with her partners waiting for she at home? Well! Well! Ye’ve a-come, ye’ve a-come; and since this be so and partners be waiting, I reckon Betsy’ll be getting home-along before ’tis dark.”

She pulled out of the ditch as she spoke a heavy pedlar’s basket upon which apparently she had been sitting. Netta still clung with obvious dismay to Hastings’s arm and this seemed to arrest the crone’s attention. Her sunken eyes, like those of a hundred-year-old weasel, examined every detail in the appearance of the two intruders. There was nothing in any casual inspection of William Hastings to suggest his profession. He was wearing a dark overcoat and a black cloth cap drawn low over his forehead. He might have been a land agent or a doctor or a well-to-do commercial traveller.

"Be the gentleman nice to 'ee, dearie?" said the woman, moving a little nearer.

Conscious of Netta's discomposure Hastings waved her off.

"Where do you live, granny?" he asked.

The question evidently put a new idea into the old trot's head.

"Me partners be waiting for I," she murmured; and then in a shrill eager voice, "But you mid come and see where old Betsy do bide. You mid come and see! Betsy'll tell the sweet lady's fortune and bring down wagonloads o' luck on both your pretty heads. So come along wi' I, young folk; and me and my partners will show you Cimmery Land in the girt wold crystal stone!"

Hastings and Netta looked at each other in the darkness. He could see she was expecting him to make a curt refusal to this apparition's suggestion. It was on his lips to do so and lead her away, but then he imaged to himself the long dreary road they had followed, the hopelessness of hunting for shelter in a district of the town completely unknown to him, and the possibility that even if he did find a lodging of some sort Netta would not settle down in it. The old woman's words suggested that the escape from their present uncertainty which she offered was not far to seek.

He cast his eyes round them. All was silent. All was obscure and dark. His philosophy was authentic enough to make it easy for him to be led, at a moment like this, by any chance-blown straw. It did not really matter! He was tired and hungry. His companion was near the end of her tether. Why not just resign themselves and see what happened?

He looked at Netta with a little shrug of his shoulders. She, too, was beginning to feel her powers of volition ebbing and sinking.

"Very well, Mother," he said to the old woman. "Let's see where you live."

The issue was more propitious than he could have hoped. Their guide led them forward not more than a few hundred paces, and while they were still, both of them, in a sort of exhausted daze, they found themselves clambering up the steps of a stationary caravan; and in an incredibly short while after that it seemed almost a natural thing in their bewilderment that they should be drinking better tea out of better cups and saucers than any that Hastings, at any rate, was accustomed to enjoy under his Nell's housekeeping!

The interior of the caravan was spotlessly clean and the old woman herself under the yellow lamplight presented a much less sinister appearance than when she had first materialized, like an evil spirit, at the gate by the sheepfold.

There was one moment when Netta began nervously looking round, as she stirred her tea, as if desirous of something else, that might have had an unfortunate issue; for Hastings, catching the look, enquired of their entertainer if she could give the girl a taste of brandy.

"Not if she askit me till Judgment Day!" cried the woman. "I bain't a soft-heart and I bain't one for blunt knives or silver bullets, but I be afeard of liquor as if it were a burning lake of adder's gall."

Netta had coloured with pitiful shamefacedness under the exposure of her companion's remark, but she exchanged a quick glance with him now.

"Why are you afraid of liquor, Granny?" said William Hastings.

“Because of *they* in there! Because of me partners!” answered the old woman.

Her repeated references to “partners” had already disturbed Netta’s mind and she now looked with much uneasiness at a large Paisley shawl which hung down from an extended rope, concealing a corner of the caravan from view.

No more was said, however, until the gipsy’s guests had finished their meal and the table had been dragged aside against the bed leaving a space in the centre of this curious interior empty and clear.

Then the old woman, with a furtive look at her visitors and a queer sort of inarticulate caressing murmur, such as a person might make to soothe the fears of some species of wild animal, drew aside a piece of the shawl and stood there, holding the fabric in her hand and clicking with her tongue. At first there was no response except a feeble scuffling in the darkness. Then to the horror of Netta and to the amazement of her companion there issued forth, holding each other’s hands, a pair of creatures that it was difficult to regard as the progeny of the human race.

They were of the masculine sex and wore extravagant clothes; the sort of clothes that one sees on the bodies of dwarfs and midgets in circuses, but it was impossible for either Netta or Hastings to look at anything but their faces, which were more horrible to human sight than if they had been creatures of a monstrous nightmare.

It was only after a second or two that the full ghastliness of the deformity that dehumanized these beings entered the consciousness of the two spectators, but when it did so Netta clapped her hands over her own face and sprang to her feet.

“I can’t bear it! I can’t bear it!” she screamed. “Take them away! Let me go from here!”

The old woman placed herself between her “partners” and the terrified girl.

“It’s all right, Missy,” she mumbled, and then making once more the same sub-human caressing sound and the same clicking noise with her tongue, she shuffled the two unfortunates back again into their hiding place and let fall the covering.

It was several minutes before Hastings succeeded in pacifying Netta and persuading her to sit down again; and even after she was seated and was able to smile faintly at her own weakness, several involuntary spasms of shuddering ran through her frame.

“Didn’t I tell ‘ee?” the old woman triumphantly protested, taking her seat on the narrow bed. “Them’s queer to look on and that’s God’s truth, dearie, but if it hadn’t been for the drink, them ‘ud be as natural-like as your own self.”

“Who are they?” enquired Mr. Hastings, looking with a good deal of relief at Netta who had now overcome her shivering fit.

“Me partners,” repeated the hag. “Them as has got old Betsy her poor living, day in, day out, these twenty years. ‘Ee should see ‘un dance, Mister. Them can dance same as real poppets.”

“But who are they?” repeated the misanthrope, displaying more curiosity than Netta had ever seen in him before. She herself had now completely recovered her sober senses, and dimly through a turbid cloud of dream-like images there began to rise before her the vision of what she had run away from and the stark question of what she was to do next.

“Them be the childer of me own daughter, Mister,” replied the woman. “Of me own daughter, Nancy Cooper, what Squire Ashover sweeted. When Squire broke with she, her married a decent market-man, what grew ‘taties and such-like. But ’twas no use. Squire’d learned her to drink terrible; and

’twas along o’ that she runned off wi’ Colpepper Thomas the horse-dealer. He were the drunkenest brute between Exeter and London, and it was my own self who buried her. She left me her two, them as has been my partners for twenty years. She swore they were Squire’s, and we got hundreds of pounds out of ‘ee for they, unbeknown to his lady.”

Old Betsy paused, and Netta, who had been staring at her in consternation ever since she began, now began stammering: “Do you mean that those poor things are — half-brothers — to — to — the present Mr. Ashover?”

“That’s what old Betsy means and not a word less,” chuckled the old woman. “We bain’t gipsies, as folks do say; not a bit o’t. We be a good Frome-side family same as Squire ‘isself. Them Ashovers be Satan’s own tribe, every one of them. There be old man Dick who went and hanged ‘isself so I’ve a-heard. He was Squire John’s brother. And now they say Squire Rook have got some doxy or other in house wi’ ‘ee. *He’d* look silly, would Squire Rook, if I askit he for a few hundred for me partners here!”

William Hastings was not surprised to notice that Netta avoided meeting his eye. He had summed up her situation pretty shrewdly by this time and was vaguely considering in his own mind what line of action he ought to take. What he did not feel sure of was whether she had left Ashover with its master’s concurrence; or whether, out of sheer weariness of her equivocal position there, she had just drifted off.

Having relieved her feelings by her long confession Betsy Cooper now became taciturn and practical. She indicated that in return for a small sum of money she would retire for the night behind the Paisley shawl, leaving the rest of the interior of her retreat at the disposal of her guests.

“There be a horse-trough under hedge,” she remarked, pointing at the door of the caravan, “if so be that either of ‘ee want to wet your hands afore night.”

The idea of setting out again to look for a more conventional shelter was appalling to Netta. She slipped down the caravan steps upon the roadside for a moment; and did dip her fingers in the receptacle described by the pseudo-gipsy; but the night was so dark and the air so chilly that she was glad enough to return to her seat by the stove. She would have given a great deal just then for a taste of what the old woman had designated as “adder’s gall”; but her whole life seemed so broken up that she was thankful enough to have someone, even if it were only William Hastings, to cling to as a raft in that blind sea.

Hastings also made a temporary exit into the environs of their shelter with a view of collecting his thoughts and deciding upon his course of action. He made up his mind to accept this chance-given hospitality, leaving the problem of what to do next undecided till the morning. Netta had begun to look as if she longed for nothing so much as sleep. Well! Sleep would perhaps clear his own mind and give him the clue to the best course of action.

While the old woman herself was filling up her water jugs at a spring that adjoined the trough, Hastings contemplated his companion, who sat on the bed, her head buried in her hands, and wondered what the circumstances actually were that had led to this flight from peace and comfort.

“Netta!” he began, anxious to get some insight into her thoughts.

“Yes, Mr. Hastings.”

“I don’t want to hurt your feelings or be impertinent, but you must know what I feel, meeting you in a place like this, after knowing you as well as I have.”

She looked at him with her forehead wrinkled in hesitation. Could she make a confidant of such a man? Something in her yearned to unburden itself in a torrent of pitiful words, but something else — a queer mixture of pride and timidity — made her feel as if it would be a sacrilege to speak to any living soul of what had happened. With the recovery of her normal self there rose up before her mind, as the one anchor to which she must cling, through ruin, through disaster, through blind misery, the fixed idea that she had effaced herself by her own will for the sake of her love.

"I don't think you know me *very* well, Mr. Hastings," she said, smiling.

He was curiously nonplussed by the ease and naturalness of her tone. Seeing her as he had seen her in the street that night he had forgotten how far she had gone in her acceptance of the light social tone of the Ashover circle.

"No — no! Of course not," he muttered hurriedly; but in his heart he thought: "Oh, these women! These women! One minute they fling themselves upon your neck and the next they take this society air and bow you out of the room."

"I mean it's difficult to explain everything to-night," she pleaded, not missing the clouded expression that had come over his face.

He remained silent for a moment; while she looked at him rather wistfully, wishing that he *was* the kind of person to whom it would be easy to unlock the secrets of her heart. Then he said suddenly: "You won't mind staying the night here with me, will you? I don't see what we can do except leave everything till the morning."

For the moment she misunderstood him and a deep indignant flush mounted into her cheeks, but his matter-of-fact air reassured her and she felt ashamed of herself.

"Don't think I'm ungrateful, Mr. Hastings. You've been most kind to me." And then she added as an afterthought: "But I shall hate taking the only bed in the place!"

Once more Hastings got that funny impression of something put on and artificial in her tone. But he let it pass and the return of Betsy Cooper brought their dialogue to a close.

The arrangements for the night were simple enough after all when they were actually made. Old Betsy retired behind the suspended shawl from the recesses of which emerged the most extraordinary succession of inhuman sounds that Hastings had ever heard in his life.

The clergyman himself, notwithstanding the libidinous leer to which the old woman treated him as she disappeared, a look that was made doubly significant by her manifest recognition of his profession, proceeded to wrap his overcoat round Netta's passive form as she lay on the bed and then, making himself as comfortable as he could in the wicker chair, prepared to spend the night in metaphysical reverie, his pipe lit, and his feet on the stove.

Netta's quiet breathing soon showed she was free from her troubles among the eidolons of sleep, and the man was left to his own thoughts.

Strange enough were his thoughts!

This lonely wheeled hut in the midst of the darkness seemed to him like a silent ship voyaging through the gulfs of immensity. He visualized the unspeakable deformities behind that curtain, sleeping against the lap of that old woman, like Phorkyads against the knees of Medusa; and it seemed to him as if that invisible group were a fitting enough symbol of all that this whole terrestrial ship carried, in *its* voyage, through the godless and measureless ether.

He recalled what Betsy had said of that "Cimmery Land" to be revealed by these pariahs in a "girt wold crystal stone"; and he smiled grimly to himself as he thought of how all over the county of Dorset men and women were moving in their dreams through just such an impossible country.

And then he thought of his book and of how during these last spring days he had neglected it; seduced a little, he could not tell why, by a certain quality in his wife he had not noticed before.

And then letting himself go upon the full stream of his misanthropic fancies, he imagined that this caravan, in which he sat, warming himself and smoking, contained all that was left alive in the whole stellar system. He imagined it transported through empty space; through space star-less, planet-less, moon-less; a vast “Cimmery Land” crystal, void of everything except the unconscious spirit of darkness.

And in the gray hollowness of that crystal, which he now saw as the very rondure of eternity, he was obscurely conscious of a projection of himself, of William Hastings; not the William Hastings who was on the verge of discovering the secret of universal death; but a William Hastings who was a little unhappy boy at school, persecuted by his companions and hating all the world, but able to *think the whole world away* and to sink back, back, far back, into the comfortable arms of the infinite Nothingness!

His last thought, before his pipe fell from his mouth and his head sank back in sleep, was that of the two creatures behind the Paisley shawl. He fancied he saw them emerge from their retreat. He fancied he saw them take each other’s hands and dance a strange and monstrous dance, the dance of the Annihilation of All Life; the dance of *That* which was destined to take the place of Life; when the Caravan of the Universe touched at last the circumference of its voyage!

CHAPTER XV

THE DAY THAT broke over the five human heads — if Betsy Cooper's "partners" could be called human — domiciled in that fantastic shelter was one of those exceptional spring days that seem created by Nature to protect herself against the too exquisite intensity of her own birth pangs.

It was as if a tenuous film, composed of some aërial stuff more delicate than vapour or cloud, had been drawn like a floating veil between earth and sky.

Every palpable object by roadside or meadow seemed to emerge from a soft enveloping mist that was neither white nor yellow nor purple but resembled rather that mother-of-pearl opalescence which shimmers in the hollowness of certain seashells.

The mental atmosphere in the caravan was, however, as so often happens with our persecuted humanity, in direct and discordant opposition to the tender vaporousness of the relaxed weather outside.

It was an atmosphere of cold and obstinate resolution; disenchanted, joyless, weary, but rigid in its purposes, and defiant of all opposition.

The mood that dominated that small group as they talked over their bread and tea was the mood of Netta Page. So hopeless in its inflexible determination was this mood that it seemed to obsess and preoccupy the girl herself to the complete exclusion of her other normal faculties.

She manifested no more than the very faintest shrinking when, in the process of satisfying the needs of the deformed twins, the Paisley curtain was dragged completely aside.

What she had decided upon was to take the midday train to London and just lose herself in the unsearchable depths of that great sea of tossing humanity.

Contrary to Cousin Ann's opinion, she had taken no more money when she left Ashover than the coins in her purse; and the appeal she now made to Hastings was that he should purchase her railway ticket for her before they separated.

Hastings refused for a long time even to consider such a thing. What he felt was that whatever may have been the reasons for her unaccountable flight it was incumbent upon him to plead for second thoughts; incumbent upon him to prevent any irrevocable step till Rook had seen her again. He was anxious to hire a conveyance and just take her back to the village, leaving it to herself and Ashover to settle their difficulties when they met. If he had had the least inkling of the fatal visit to Tollminster, it might have given him a clue as to how to act, but the situation being so dark and obscure, all he could think of was just to retard the rush of events.

It was unfortunately true, and he had had to confess this to the obstinate girl, that the bank he dealt with happened to be in Bishop's Forley, so that if he once agreed to lend her this money all they had to do was to wait till the hour for the building to open. She dragged this out of him by wild talk about pawning her cloak and rings, but he cursed himself for his candour when he found how ardently she jumped at it.

Old Betsy Cooper listened with intense interest to all this talk and hurried off with alacrity to find pencil and paper, when, the discussion concluded at last and Hastings conquered, Netta insisted upon writing a letter for him to take to Rook.

Had the clergyman been more of a man of the world, had he been less hopeless and disenchanted himself, he might have held out against her entreaties. But what could he do? He couldn't put her by force into a cart bound for Ashover; and to leave her to trail round in desperation through the pawn-shops of this forlorn town seemed more heartless than to accede to her wishes.

A vague idea did for a moment cross his mind that he might leave her imprisoned in Betsy Cooper's care while he hurried back himself to Ashover; but even so abstracted a disciple of Paracelsus was too well acquainted with the tenacity of women when under the power of a fixed idea to give more than the attention of a second to such a scheme.

Another line of action that flashed through his mind was to send the old woman off to despatch a messenger or a message to Rook, while he himself held Netta by force just where she was. But Netta's impatience, shut up with him there alone for half a day, in close propinquity to those Deformities, was more than he found himself prepared to face. Had she been a younger girl or a weaker girl, the thing would have been easier. He could have dominated her then by sheer official authority. But how could he dominate a self-possessed, reserved woman, her own mistress, knowing exactly what she wanted, and knowing exactly what she wanted of him?

The end of it was that with Netta's letter to Rook in his pocket and with all the money he had had on him transferred to Betsy's pocket, he started off with the girl through that vaporous spring haze on their way to Stockit's Dorset Bank.

He found no difficulty in drawing out the money from his small savings. The difficulty came when it was a question of giving her something beyond the actual price of the ticket so that she should not find herself penniless when she reached London.

Another woman perhaps would have been unpersuadable over this, too, but as long as the money she made use of was not Rook's money Netta's scruples were feeble and easily over-ridden. He had the satisfaction of knowing, before they separated, that what she finally accepted was enough to keep her alive for at least a month after she reached town, and even longer than that if she were very careful. But if she yielded on this point and seemed quite vague and uncertain as to whether the money were a loan or a gift, she became as rigid as adamant when Hastings asked for some address.

"London is enough address for any one," she said, with that peculiar society tone that Hastings found so difficult to put up with. "You'll hear of me, if I become a celebrated actress," she added more naturally.

Hastings had taken for granted that since he had made it possible for her to escape he was in a position to demand her address, and this point-blank refusal outraged his sense of justice. When he understood that she really intended to remain obdurate, he began to regret that he had not made this stipulation earlier, made it before the means to exact it had passed from his hands.

It was eleven o'clock when this conversation took place, and the London express left at noon. The girl entreated him to say good-bye to her before she actually went to the station. She was nervous, she said, lest someone should recognize him, even if she herself passed unnoticed.

Her umbrella was rolled up neatly now and her black bag looked eminently respectable. No one would have recognized in this quiet dignified woman the forlorn creature of last night's encounter.

They went together into a little dairy shop and had a luncheon of cocoa and halfpenny buns on a marble counter. It was then that, in a final attempt to change her resolution, he began to emphasize the unfairness of the course she was taking and its cruelty to Rook. The girl's reply to this was to break, without a moment's warning, into a passion of silent weeping. Her big tears, for it was a peculiarity of Netta's to shed very large tears when she wept, came literally splashing down upon the marble table and reduced all his arguments to silence. Even at this juncture, however, he was struck by the manner in which women can give way to mental anguish and yet retain their consciousness of practical exigencies. For even in the midst of her tears he saw her glance at the clock and begin feeling in her purse to make sure she had not mislaid the money he had given her.

It came over him like a sudden illumination, the tenacious power of life in human beings, this mysterious life, against which he was waging his insane metaphysical war!

For Netta pulled out of her pocket one of those tiny handkerchiefs, compressed into the shape of a small puff-ball by being clutched in the palm of a feverish hand, such as all the lovers and all the sons of women see so often *without seeing*, as if they were the handles of doors or the knobs of bedposts, and after rubbing her cheeks and adjusting her hair looked straight into his face with a spontaneous smile.

That smile, more pitiful and more heroic than anything Hastings was destined to witness for many a long day, returned to his mind more than once in the course of the next twenty-four hours. It followed him back to his cottage by the water meadows. It followed him to his supper table. It followed him to his bed. And when he was next seated at his desk, reassembling the dark threads of his devastating philosophy, it troubled his sentences and ruffled his thought in the same way that the discovery of a gleaming bracelet in an ash pit would disturb the occupation of a gatherer-up of cinders.

Though there was so little of a link between them, the mere sense of the fatality and finality of the step she was taking made it difficult for both of them to bring themselves to the irrevocable moment of saying good-bye. He walked with her lingeringly down the narrow street, with its rows of little greengrocers’ and confectioners’ shops, faintly hoping as they went along that even yet, at the last, she might draw back from her desperate plunge.

They passed a vulgar modern hostelry entitled the Antiger Arms just before they reached the final turn to the station; and quite casually and with that peculiar kind of dull, sick, superficial curiosity, such as must often be the mood of condemned criminals as they are led to execution, the girl glanced into the little carriage yard of this place.

Her fingers clutched her companion’s wrist.

“There’s Mr. Twiney!” she whispered.

Hastings did not need to be told. With a rush of fierce relief, which showed how far below his misanthropic indifference his uneasiness at Netta’s departure had gone, he recognized the familiar figure of the most affable of his parishioners.

Netta made now an instinctive movement to escape; but the priest held her arm tightly and pulled her into the yard after him, past the painted shafts and the muddy splash-boards of a long line of farmers’ gigs, till he had attracted Mr. Twiney’s attention.

“Mr. Hastings! Lord ‘a’ mercy on us! And Miss Page! Well, I’ll be blotted out of Book! Ay, won’t Squire be glorified to see ‘ee! A’ve been raging and carrying on like a ferret in a poke. It’s been hither and thither with him and no mistake; no rest, no sleep you might say, since he drove wi’ I to get tied up to’s cousin. Ye’ve a-heard of *that* goings-on, I reckon? ’Tis all over Dorset. Tied up and married *he* be, safe and sound; but a’s had no pleasure in’t so far; only hither and thither, as a person might say. But a’ll be a man again now, belike, the poor gentleman, now you’ve a-found this lady, Mister Hastings!”

The clergyman looked at Netta to see if she had caught the drift as unmistakably as he had done himself of Mr. Twiney’s words.

Her head was rigid on her neck, but tilted a little to one side, like a flower-pot on the top of a dahlia stick.

"Mr. Ashover and Lady Ann are married, you say?" She repeated the words as if they were an echo of something else, of some other, quite different words that were resounding in her own ears.

Mr. Twiney looked at them now with an expression of grave concern upon his countenance. It came over him that he had "let his tongue hang out" as his wife Eliza was wont to express it.

"That be just how it be, miss," he answered solemnly. "But don't 'ee take on because of that, lady," he added anxiously. "Gents like our Squire do marry or not marry same as the likes of I do throw peelings to pigs. 'Tis a small matter to they, lady. Why, 'tis nothink at all! They sleeps the same; and they eats the same. 'Tis a kind of whimsy with they, and I'm blind sure Squire'll be as joyed to see 'ee as if he ain't never set eyes on that grand young woman what is now his lawful missus!"

Hastings slipped his hand into his waistcoat pocket and glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve. In fifteen minutes the express would come in. In twenty minutes it would have come and gone.

He found himself looking nervously at the entrance to the yard. At any moment, he thought, Rook might appear on the scene and settle everything!

Netta might have easily noticed both these significant movements on the part of her indiscreet protector; but at the close of Mr. Twiney's speech she had produced a lead pencil and a bit of paper — legacies, both of them, from their night with Betsy — and had begun writing hurriedly and quickly. She held up the paper now toward William Hastings.

"That'll find me in London," she said. "But you must swear to me, by God's truth, that you won't show it to Mr. Ashover. Do you swear that?"

Confused and bewildered by the rapidity of her movement, and only anxious to retain her with him till the train had gone, Hastings gave her his promise.

“I shall Want to know how he gets on,” she murmured hurriedly, repossessing herself of her black bag which he had placed on the ground. And then with her hand on his arm: “But you swear you won’t even tell him you’ve got an address? If you do, if you give him the least hint, remember you’ve broken your word!”

She need not have pressed her point so desperately. In the earlier hours of their contact the priest’s consideration had been mostly for Rook, who, after all, was his patron if not his friend. But, as so often happens in these cases, when one enters an emotional imbroglio from one particular entrance it is likely enough that one comes out of it on quite the opposite side. Hastings had been swept so far into the tide of Netta’s feelings that it was impossible for him to remain the neutral spectator he had been at the beginning. The mere fact that she had taken him into her confidence as she had done drew him to her side and compelled him to divide his loyalty.

As he took from her this little bit of paper he saw a look on her face which made him realize her identity as he had never done in the days at Ashover; realise it in the way human beings so seldom do realize these mysteries as they pass and repass in the casual encounters of life.

At the very moment, however, when this new perception broke the hard crust of the clergyman’s sensibility, Mr. Twiney, who had been staring at the entrance to the yard, suddenly called out in stentorian tones: “There he do go! There he do go!”

Hastings looked up and saw the figure of the Squire of Ashover on the farther side of the road, running as fast as his legs could carry him in the direction opposite from that of the railway. Rook had made a point of being on the platform to see that particular express go; but a policeman in the station, of whom he asked the eternal question he had been asking all day and night, had reported that he had just seen a woman, exactly corresponding to the description given, eating with someone in a little dairy shop in the town. “But whether she’s still there, Mr. Ashover, I can’t inform you, sir.”

If Mr. Hastings had been more of a strategist and less of a philosopher he would have clung to Netta at this crisis and made Mr. Twiney pursue his master. Instead of doing this he completely lost his head, bolted out of the yard into the road, and ran up the street after him, shouting: “Mr. Ashover! Mr. Ashover!” at the top of his voice.

A great brewery van nearly rolled over him as he tried to cross, and he had to draw back from under the very horses’ heads; and when he did get over, Rook was already some twenty yards away, running at a great rate, entirely oblivious of the fact that any one was following.

The policeman’s words had filled the unfortunate man with that sickening desperate hope that trembles, by its own extravagant impetus, on the verge of certainty. As he ran, he already saw Netta in the small shop; saw himself rushing in upon her there; saw himself hugging her savagely to his heart; saw the illuminated look with which she would greet him; felt a flood of sobbing, ecstatic relief, as if a dead body, loved beyond everything in the world, had been restored to life.

It came over him with a blinding rush of tragic certainty that if he let Netta slip out of his hands now at this moment she would disappear completely into the void. To find her, to speak to her, to hold her *now* was his one chance!

He was actually within a few paces of the very place where the girl and Hastings had had their hurried meal when the latter overtook him.

The priest was too breathless to do more for a moment than stand gasping. As he struggled to speak he could hear in the distance the unmistakable thunderous sound of the Great Western express rolling into the station.

“She’s there!” he gasped. “Rook, she’s there! She’s got her ticket for London!”

The unhappy victim of the hunting dogs of remorse did not delay a minute. Like a leaf in the wind he turned his face; and breathing hard as an animal that reverses his track, he rushed off the way he had come, scattering the astonished pedestrians and making the drivers of market carts and trade wagons turn round to stare at him.

It had not been wasted, even on the indurated skull and irresponsive nerves of Mr. Twiney, that as the man ran so desperately north-northeast, the woman hurried with equal precipitation south-southwest.

He returned to the stable, and in order to be what the poet calls *utrumque paratus* (prepared for either event), he began harnessing his long-necked mare, expressing, as he did so, his own commentary upon these events into her cavernous ear.

“He’ve a-run *from* train and she’ve a-run *to* train! That’s how things do go, Liza, me beauty. ’Tis a pity for man and beast, me lass, that ’tis so, but so ’tis and us has best reckon on’t. He *that* way, she *this* way! ’Tis only to be trusted, me little hoss, that since World be round and Christmas be coming, this poor sorrowing gent and his sweetheart’ll cuddle down yet, comfortable and sly, spite of all accidents.”

Philosophers *may* have had, ere now, sufficient detachment from human feelings to contemplate the cruel tricks of time from the point of view of eternity; but though William Hastings, as he followed his desperate patron at a slower pace, endeavoured to regard these things with ironic equanimity he found himself listening with the most agitated attention to the distant puffing of the great green-painted engine as it waited in the station.

As for Rook, driven, as it might seem, by the Eumenides themselves, he had no strength left for any thought in his head except to reach that platform before the train moved out. On this return run he no longer visualized his encounter with Netta. His heart seemed on the point of bursting in his body, as he dashed along, keeping to the roadway in spite of the traffic, so as to be less impeded.

He did suffer from a vague impression as he ran that if he only could find breath in him to shout her name the girl would be bound to hear him and unfasten her carriage door, even if the train were moving. But, as it happens in dreams, his voice seemed to die away, ineffectually, in his throat. The nearer he came to the station the more clearly he could hear the heavy snorting of the locomotive, waiting like a great leashed hound to rush forth again upon its way.

He ran faster yet, and still faster, a strange enough figure in his long flapping ulster, his arms bent at the elbow, his fingers digging into the palms of his hands. Every second that passed seemed to him like something more living and terrible than just mere *time;* seemed to him like the pulse beat of a long-drawn-out gigantic arm — the invisible arm of his desire — the fingers of which were already clutching the door handle of Netta’s compartment, at which the railway guard was standing now with his whistle at his lips.

The whole world was reduced to a very simple equation at that moment, to the coming together for ever, or to the rending apart for ever, of Netta Page and Rook Ashover. Nothing existed for him, as his breath came in gasps, but the formless outline of an unspoken cry, a cry that implied words and yet was never destined to be uttered in words; the cry, “Netta, stop! Netta, stop! Netta, it’s all right!”

He actually heard the guard’s whistle now and the louder responding whistle of the engine. He rushed blindly forward. He did not realize that he was shouting wildly as he ran. Afraid that he would not have time to force his way through the doors and the crowds of the waiting room, by an infernal piece of misjudgment, one of those fatal blunders that seem like the very hoof of a demon outstretched to trip a man up, he veered aside when he heard the train moving, and rushing round the corner of the building, saw himself jumping on to the platform of one of the last carriages, perhaps of the guard’s van itself! God! There were high iron gates at this spot; gates to climb over which he would have had to be a veritable acrobat.

It was over. It was all over. He was too late.

He shook the iron bars of the gates with his hands, and out of his mouth came a hoarse frustrated howl.

The train was moving too fast now and his eyes were too blinded to see her face at the window; but she saw him, and a kind-hearted commercial traveller in the seat opposite her was horrified to see a quiet-looking, white-faced woman leap up and begin fumbling with the handle of the door. “Can’t get out now, missy!” the worthy man protested; pulling her back with gentle firmness into her seat.

When William Hastings arrived at the station he was more disturbed than surprised to observe a small crowd of porters and cab drivers collected round the gates to the left of the waiting room. At his appearance on the scene they thinned themselves out and he was aware of the figure of Rook Ashover, seated on the ground with his back to some iron railings, gasping for breath and crying like an infant.

"Ashover! Rook Ashover!" murmured the clergyman, recovering his own breath in long deep sighs. "You'll see her again, Ashover! You can find her again!"

As he uttered the words he felt the silly futility of them, and the two pencil scrawls he had in his pocket, the letter and the address, seemed to possess pulses of their own which beat in unison with the beating of his heart.

He got Rook on his feet at last. The wretched man insisted upon going into the station and making enquiries about the next train to London. There was no train at all, it appeared, until six o'clock that night and *that* was a slow stopping train that did not reach town till after midnight.

Even Rook, distraught as he was, realized the folly of pursuing his friend any farther that day.

It was, however, only by degrees, only after they had walked slowly back to the Antiger Arms together, that the full stark hopelessness of the situation dawned upon the distracted man's mind. London! How could he possibly find her in London, whatever day he went, or whatever train he took?

While they were waiting in the hotel yard for Mr. Twiney, who had retired to the tap room, Hastings handed over to Rook the letter which Netta had given him. Rook opened this as he stood there and read it leaning against the wheel of the gig; while Hastings went discreetly off to call the driver.

The letter ran as follows:

DEAREST ROOK:

I beg you not to think hard of me because of the drink. I did it because I had to do it. Don't think hard of me, Rook, my dear, dear love. I did it for the best, but I can't stand it any longer. Don't worry about me. I shall be all right. Good-bye, dearest Rook. There's nothing for you to feel sorry about….

NETTA.

With his eyes full of tears and his mouth drooping at the corners, in that grotesque twitching way in which a proud man struggles against breaking down, Rook folded up this letter and hid it carefully in his pocket.

He had recovered a good deal of his normal equanimity by the time Hastings brought Mr. Twiney back from the tap room; and that excellent man remarked to them both as they drove off, sitting side by side: "'Tis a wonder, gentlemen, 'tis a Bible wonder, how what do seem worse to we than dirty weather by thik old Gorm signpost do in the latter end when us turns about, seem Heaven's own blessings! 'Tis a wonder that so't should be. But so 'tis; and us has got to reckon wi't."

The long drive back to Ashover was broken by only one brief stop, when both Mr. Twiney and Hastings insisted upon Rook's drinking a glass of beer and eating a bit of cheese. The sky remained overcast all the way by that same strange filmy veil that Hastings had noted when he first awoke in the caravan.

They reached Ashover by the middle of the afternoon; but when they approached the house Rook commanded Mr. TWiney to stop the gig.

"Hastings!" he said, "would you do a good turn for me?"

The priest, who had been throughout their drive singularly divided in his mind between his loyalty to Netta and his obvious duty to Rook, expressed himself ready to do anything.

"Get out here, then, would you? And run into the house and ask for Lady Ann? You might tell her that I've driven on to the village with Mr. Twiney and that I rather think I shall stay the night with Lexie. Will you tell her that? Oh, and you might tell her, too" — he hesitated, conscious of the alert interest of Mr. Twiney— “you might tell her — well! — everything that’s happened; just as it *did* happen! Will you do that for me?” And he helped the clergyman to descend from the cart, and then, calling upon the driver to drive on, got up again into his place.

CHAPTER XVI

IT WAS THE third day of June, and Pandie, having "done" the occupied chambers of Ashover House, was busy cleaning the windows and brushing the floors of the two small rooms which opened upon the landing opposite the large front bedrooms.

The bedroom above the dining room looking out upon the linden tree was still used by Rook. Netta's bed was covered by the same counterpane. Netta's clothes still hung in the mahogany cupboard. Netta's modest cold-cream pots and bottles of eau de Cologne still stood on the old-fashioned washstand.

Lady Ann, too, now Lady Ann Ashover, had not moved out of the great "spare room" above the drawing room, which had been allotted to her from the moment she first arrived.

It had been a shock to Rook's mother and something approaching a scandal to the inhabitants of the kitchen when it became evident that the master and mistress of the house aid not intend to share the same room. Martha spoke of it with hushed voice and gloomy solemnity to Pod, the evangelical sexton.

"It be contrary to nature, that's what I do say, Mr. Pod. Contrary to nature and contrary to the blessed Scriptures."

The sexton had no quarrel with this sentiment. Indeed he was prepared to go further than his friend in his reprobation of "these heathen ways what the gentry do pick up in their travels." He put the case to Mrs. Vabbin with convincing logic. "If the holy Lord had meant us to sleep single He would never have put it into our brains to hammer up these here double beds.

Double beds means sleeping double. Any turnip can see that. And who would have thought of girt double beds if the Lord hadn't whispered into the patriarchs' ears them holy texts about the Woman being subject to the Man?"

Mrs. Vabbin's enormous countenance, with its little nose, little mouth, and little eyes, shone with a kind of interior lustre as she imbibed these oracles. "Pod be nothink to look at," she remarked to Pandie afterward, "but when he opens his mouth to speak, the Holy Spirit do fly out'n and make a person's heart grow weak, same as they girt drums down at Patchery Fair."

As April passed into May and May began to take upon itself the appearance of a summer month, Mrs. Ashover's concern over this unnatural behaviour of the Squire and his bride began to quiet down. As far as she could see, the two treated each other just exactly as they had done before; and the knowledge communicated to her by Ann — for the niece concealed nothing from her aunt — of the child the girl expected before that autumn was over, was so unspeakably gratifying that everything else sank into insignificance in comparison.

It was an infinite relief to her, too, that not for one second would Lady Ann consider the idea of her leaving Ashover. It was also a pleasant surprise to find that in the thousand and one details of managing the establishment, details passionately precious to the old lady's heart, she was not going to be interfered with in any way by her daughter-in-law.

The return upon the scene, gradual but sure, of the "county families" of the neighbourhood, was also a source of intense and secret satisfaction to the little woman. Lady Ann seemed ready to leave this aspect of her new life as completely as she had left the domestic side of things, entirely to her aunt. Mrs. Ashover found it difficult to persuade either Rook or her to take the least interest in the little society visits that began steadily increasing in number as it became more and more certain that *that woman* was gone for good.

For the aunt it was a new light on her niece's character to find that Lady Ann despised the "county families" and detested every sort of "society," being quite content to spend her days in long rambling walks alone with Rook's dog, or in just sitting on the seat under the linden listening to the thrushes. It was almost as if Netta's mania for unsocial solitude had been bequeathed to her successor; but the happy old lady was too preoccupied with the success of her grand scheme to bother her head very much over this new phase or to worry herself as to what it indicated regarding the relations between husband and wife.

The third day of June was Mrs. Ashover's birthday; and now, as Pandie went in and out of the two little rooms she was attending to, rooms kept scrupulously clean in a sort of contented emptiness, as if waiting to be turned into a day nursery and night nursery when the autumn came, it occurred to her mind that it was time to remove the old lady's breakfast things and receive her orders for the day.

Through the open windows and the open doors of that panelled landing the warm sunshine was pouring into the old house bringing with it the pleasant sound of the mowing machine and the sweet smell of cut grass.

Pandie hummed to herself as she went up the short flight of polished steps that led into the "new wing," as it was called, at the end of which, looking out upon the orchard and upon the yellow gorse and green bracken of Battlefield, was her own bedroom and that of her friend Martha.

Taking off her rough apron and tidying herself before the glass, preparatory to ascending to the third floor which was almost entirely taken up by Mrs. Ashover's long, low-ceilinged boudoir, the red-haired servant changed her humming into the erratic strain of an ancient Somersetshire song, such as in all probability had never been heard before in that Fromeside manor.

She moved to her open window, as she sang, tying up the strings of a spotlessly clean apron and rolling down her sleeves. Leaning out of the window she soon met the gaze of two elderly men resting at that moment in leisurely contentment from the not very arduous task of mowing the grass paths of the kitchen garden. It was the privilege of Mr. Twiney to steer the lawnmower, while Mr. Pod, acting the part of a human horse, marched in front, pulling the machine along by the aid of two slender cords.

Mr. Pod was now with the utmost deliberation emptying the box of the lawnmower into a wheelbarrow, which was already half full of velvet-soft dark-green grass.

Mr. Twiney was lighting his pipe. Hie two old cronies standing there in the early summer sunshine between the rows of immature green peas and immature sweet peas, between a border of yellow pansies and a hedge of pink and white peonies, gave an added sweetness to that ribald Sedgemoor song, as the hard-worked damsel trilled the lines like a great red-poll'd bird.

Both of the elderly men were arrested by her voice; but Mr. Pod only gave her a cursory glance and turned to his wheelbarrow. Mr. Twiney, however, jerked his thumb in the direction of his companion, as much as to say, "Don't 'ee mind *his* being there, me pretty maid; I be a-listening to 'ee!" and then made a deliberately gallant gesture, beckoning the wench to come down and speak to him.

Pandie did not hesitate. With one glance at the looking glass on the chest of drawers she ran down the stairs, slipped through the scullery unnoticed by Martha, and emerged from the back door.

Mr. Twiney, moving leisurely toward her in his shirt sleeves, had the air of one whose professional duty required him at that juncture to survey with care certain gooseberry bushes and certain rhubarb stalks and to pick off the blighted leaves of particular standard roses whose buds were still green.

Arriving at length, after many pauses, at a point opposite to the kitchen door he proceeded to greet the red-haired maiden with a gesture of dignified surprise; and, like a man interrupted in the preoccupation of a lifetime, began to unbend the austerity of his visage into a grave but indulgent urbanity.

"A fine morning, Pandie, me girl!" he exclaimed. "'Tis good growing weather for both beasties and roots. Them peas be wonderful well come on, and I've never seed they onions so high. 'Tis the same with me old mare down in village. She do put her old head out of winder and hollers to everythink what traipses along. 'Tis real summer be come this season, same as it used to be when us were childer. Old Pod he be got his bit of mead, down by river, most ready for cutting; only it be so full of them sour weeds that 'twon't make good hay. Now there's me own little patch up by churchyard, maidie! Pod had dunged his mead with nothink but cow-dung, while all them dead folk, right down from King Charley's time, do make hay for I and me old mare!"

Pandie nodded her head sympathetically.

"You was always a lucky man, Mr. Twiney," she remarked. "Though they do say that grass what's nourished by corpses makes milk bad for butter. But maybe horses be different; though me old father used to say that horses be more human than we be. They *be* sensitive beasts, I reckon. But maybe your horse takes kind of natural to churchyard grass, Mr. Twiney?"

"Maybe she do. Maybe she don't," replied the gardener. "There be more sextons in my family, come to think of it, than there be in Pod's; though he did cut me out with the parson that is. Not that I grudge it to the poor man.

If it weren’t for what he gets for thik little job ’twould be workhouse for ‘ee; and all the village do know it.”

The two interlocutors stared gravely at each other, while over them both floated, on waves of aromatic sunshine, the scent of currant bushes and gooseberry bushes, the scent of heavy peony blooms, of the sun-warmed leaves of budding briar-roses and of the barrowful of cut grass.

Pandie pondered in her heart for some piece of news that would enhance her value in the eyes of her friend. She recalled the occasion when by a heaven-sent piece of luck Lady Anil had been so nervous and “beyond herself” that she had confided in the servant that this was the beginning of her fifth month of pregnancy.

How dearly would she have loved to reveal this fact to Mr. Twiney!

Still more powerfully was she tempted to speak of a matter that she and Martha Vabbin had been discussing for the last three months: the extraordinary change that had taken place in Lady Ann’s own habits and ways; her long preoccupied silences under the linden, when she neither sewed nor read; her long hours of heavy thought at her own window, her long lonely walks with the dog.

But the most agitating urge of all, an urge that only the strongest inbred loyalty could have resisted, was the desire to make a confidant of Mr. Twiney concerning the two separate bedrooms and concerning certain inexplicable scenes that had taken place between the Squire and his new lady, scenes of which she had not even dared to speak to Mrs. Vabbin herself!

Suddenly the right inspiration came to her.

“’Tis Missus’s birthday to-day — the old Missus’s, I mean. And she’ve a-got in her head to do what she’ve a-always done on her birthdays; and that’s to picnic out in Antiger High Mead. I’m a-going up now to her room to take her orders for what Martha have to pack in hampers; and pretty soon they'll be sending for thee own self about driving of them out there."

Pandie's face got as red as her hair as she made this announcement. She looked at the gardener with austere gravity, as much as to say: "You see before you the possessor and revealer of all hidden things."

But Mr. Twiney's composure was unshaken. "I've a-known all that these last two days, maidie," he replied, "and I've got somethink to tell 'ee what'll make 'ee stare like an owl to hear of! I heard tell of it from our policeman when he was last round here. It seems that that old bitch-wife Betsy Cooper, what folks call a gippoo though she be no more a gippoo than I be, have moved her cart up from Bishop's Forley to thik crossroad where Gorm Lane do meet Antiger Lane. 'Tis where the old bitch can snare all the rabbits she've a mind to and where there be a fresh-water spring. The place have naught to do with our Squire. All that belongs to he over thik way is that Antiger High Mead where I be to drive the Missus."

Pandie's face, which had been growing more and more downcast under this recital, which transferred the glory of knowledge from herself to Mr. Twiney, now brightened again.

"There be nothink in the move of a gippoo's cart to make an ado over," she murmured complacently.

"That'll be all thee do know on't," retorted the gardener. "It'll open your eyes a bit wider, me maidie, when I tell 'ee that Squire have gone and gived old Betsy two ten-pound notes for to clear out of thik lane; while she be biding where she be to get more from 'un! They say them innocents she do take money for be Squire John's by-throws; seeing as how he was so smitten wi' Nancy, what was their mother."

Pandie did indeed open her eyes at this. She even became a little pale. She had more than once heard this legend about Nancy Cooper, but the idea of her master being actually compelled to hand money over to Nancy's mother shocked and startled her feudal pride.

She opened her mouth to utter an indignant protest, when the voice of Martha from the scullery behind her put an abrupt end to the colloquy.

"Pandie, where be 'ee? Missus be ringing for you, Pandie!" And then in a tone intended to be heard across the currant bushes as far as Mr. Pod's wheelbarrow: "What be come to 'ee, lass, that you go interrupting a man's work like that? Come into house, lazy-bones! Come into house!"

While the family's dependents were thus discussing affairs in the kitchen garden the new lady of the house was displaying signs of unusual agitation as she sat in her favourite place under the lime tree. The tree above her was in full blossom and the air hummed and murmured with the innumerable bees that hovered about it. All the sweetness of the early summer flowed in upon her senses, one little thing and then another bringing its own especial evocation of delicate memory. The sudden sound, and equally sudden cessation of sound, as a blue-bottle fly droned past her; the rich lazy movements of two tortoise-shell butterflies, the swifter flight of a great yellow brimstone butterfly; the gleam of the pearl-white blossoms of an elder bush in the shrubbery, held up like a cluster of filigreed chalices to catch the distilled quintessence of that golden morning; all these things and something beyond them all, something which might have been defined as the accumulated anonymous fragrance of all those flowers of the field that lack any definite scent and yet from their very number *must* fling some sort of essence of themselves upon the air, such as buttercups and moon daisies, flowed in upon the mind of Cousin Ann and blended themselves with her troubled thoughts.

Every now and then she would cast a nervous glance at the three windows of Mrs. Ashover's boudoir; windows which projected from the eaves of the house, above the level of her own and her husband's more spacious bedrooms. She seemed to shrink from the idea that the old lady was aware of the agitated state of her mind, to shrink from the thought of that erect little figure watching her inquisitively, anxiously, from one of those three windows!

She kept rising from her seat under the tree and making little impatient excursions, first to one flower bed and then to another, as if to assure herself that the green stalks of this or that plant of the later summer had not blossomed into sudden miraculous bloom. What a rush of turbulent thoughts whirled that morning through Lady Ann's brain! What troubled her most through it all was the agitating change that seemed to have taken place in her own nature. She had always regarded herself as being "in love" with her cousin; but, as she looked back on those early days of her association with him, the feelings she had then, compared with what she suffered from now, seemed a mere girlish fancy.

She would have supposed, from her own abrupt and straight-cut psychological insight, that the condition of being pregnant would have completely saved her from this miserable infatuation. She would have predicted, had the case been that of another woman, that the new interest, the looking forward to a new life, would have detached her from the child's father, numbed her emotional nerves, lulled her into a kind of lethargic trance and nourished her upon vague, sweet, half-animal dreams.

Nothing of the kind! She found herself wretchedly and shamefully in love with her husband, torn by the most humiliating of all forms of jealousy, jealousy for a rival whose personality she despised and whose existence had melted into air and become nothing.

She was jealous of a ghost, of a shadow, of a memory, of an unreal image conceived by pity and begotten by insane remorse.

Every incident in her new life with Rook hurt her to the inmost nerve of her. personal pride. It was humiliating that he refused to share her room. It was gall and wormwood to her to see him day by day so submerged by his own fixed idea that he went to and fro like a man in a trance, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, noticing nothing; taking not the least interest in any of her projects, taking no interest at all in this child of theirs which was now so emphatically beginning to manifest its presence. She had broken down under the strain once or twice; and, as Pandie alone in that household knew, there had been some terrible and lacerating scenes between them.

But on the whole she had just suffered in silence; and she was at least thankful that the sagacious old mother remained, as far as she was able to detect, completely oblivious of what was going on.

What was preying on her nerves at that particular moment was not, as it happened, connected with Netta at all. It was connected with Nell. Rook that morning had carelessly announced that he had been invited to lunch at Toll-Pike Cottage. Well! There was nothing but what was perfectly natural in that! It was only by pure accident that she had that very morning, about half an hour ago, caught sight of William Hastings, mounted on his bicycle, riding at a steady speed in the direction of Bishop’s Forley.

He might of course have been on his way to visit some outlying districts of their own estate. He might easily have been running over to Antiger Lane to call upon Mrs. Drool, to buy honey or eggs from her, or because Binnory had got into some trouble. At the thought of Binnory she instinctively shuddered, remembering the experiences of her wedding day. Her nerves were all jangled that fine June morning. The chances were surely all against the man’s having set out on so long a ride.

And yet were they?

It was unusual for Hastings to go visiting in the morning. He generally wrote in the morning and went his rounds in the afternoon. Besides, Ann knew that he had a philosophical colleague in that squalid town.

She wished she could remember what the reply had been to Mrs. Ashover's invitation, asking the vicar and his wife to picnic with them in Antiger High Mead. Had Nell Hastings accepted for them both or only for herself?

The abnormal condition of Ann's nerves was proved by the fact that she actually got up now with the intention of going straight to Mrs. Ashover's room to satisfy her mind on this point; and then, no sooner had she reached the front door than she felt so invincible a repugnance at the thought of encountering the old lady that she reversed her steps and came hurriedly back to the shelter of the lime tree.

She had "The Bride of Lammermoor" with her in the old Ballantyne edition; but in vain she tried to forget the sting of her trouble in following the proud griefs of the unhappy Ravenswood! All she could do was to gaze absentmindedly on those quaint illustrations; too abstracted even to brush away the little ivory-coloured yellow-stamened blossoms that kept falling on the open pages.

The uncertainty of it all was the thing that seemed to hurt her most. She visualized the thin harassed face of Rook, as she had seen it that morning, as he perfunctorily kissed her cheek, preparatory to setting out on some too-long-delayed piece of business connected with his property. He had been growing steadily thinner, steadily sadder and quieter, ever since his marriage. He was invariably kind and considerate to her. The only violent scenes they had were scenes deliberately and wantonly brought on by herself in the irritation of her nerves.

Over and over again she had told herself to wait till the birth of her child. Then, surely, if it were a son — and she had made up her mind that it *would* be a son — Rook's interest in her, in life, in everything would come back!

All would be well if only this poisonous stabbing of jealousy would cease.

What a thing jealousy was!

It was like an actual sharp thorn pressing into her flesh; a thorn through which a little rankling stream of fermenting poison ran like a corrosive acid through her secretest veins.

Cousin Ann smiled bitterly and miserably with her beautiful full lips. How she would have mocked at herself half a year ago! How she would have sworn that such emotion as this was nothing but a silly female affectation! It was like a definite material malady. She could almost localize it; as if it were a malignant growth within her physical frame, counteracting with its persistent throb the sweet lethargy of pregnancy.

The thing was made worse for her — though she herself was unconscious of this — by the innate primitiveness of her nature. With all her social breeding Ann Gore was essentially an unsophisticated, natural, savagely simple creature of earth. Rook's ingrained cerebralism, those dehumanized ponderings upon life, into which he used to fall, even in the early days of their companionship, had never so much as penetrated the outer surface of her smooth feline skin.

But it was this uncertainty that maddened her most!

Was Rook unfaithful to her with this funny-looking little clergyman's wife, as well as with the ghost, the phantasm, the wraith of Netta?

She had felt so confident that if once she got hold of him, in complete intimacy, the spirit of her youth, her vitality, her strength would soon put an end to these aimless philanderings!

But there had been no intimacy! The ghost of Netta stood unappeased upon their bridal threshold holding them apart. And kept like this at a distance from him, all that was most formidable in her, the beauty and power of her body, the pathos of her pregnancy, the resilience of her spirit, remained unused, unexerted, disallowed.

She was like a strong and beautiful plant cut off from water and sunshine by some invisible yet insurmountable barrier.

The uncertainty, the miserable uncertainty! It was becoming more than she could bear. With a resolute movement, more obstinate than any she had yet made, she rose now from that sun-warmed seat, adjusted her summer hat, pulled her embroidered smock smoothly down over her rounded hips, picked up her long-handled parasol, and started off toward the entrance of the garden.

She emerged into the road and, with slow deliberate steps, without hurry or hesitation, proceeded to cross the bridge.

All that enchanted summer landscape quivered and vibrated around her in an air that was almost windless. The tall grasses of the ditches and hedges seemed like undulating ripples in a vast umbrageous sea, of which the deep-grassed hayfields, full of buttercups and red-stalked sorrel and white daisies, were the untraversed ocean floor, and the hills and copses and orchards the spray-flecked waves!

The Frome itself flowed high and strong that day between its banks, where tarnished marigold stalks and freshly sprouting rushes gave to the muddy roots of willow and alder the dignity of microscopic African swamps, with newts for alligators and tiny green frogs for hippopotami.

The fecundity of summer filled every little hollow and crevice in those banks with infinitesimal growths, nameless except to botanists, many of them the embryonic sproutings of plants destined to wait a couple of months, or even longer, for their time of flowering.

Crossing the bridge and following the familiar road, now white and dusty between its uncut grass borders, Lady Ann walked forward with a firmer, surer pace. She used her red parasol as a walking stick. Her summer hat, with a cluster of tulips beneath its wide brim, was held high and straight on her proud young head. Her mind, as she walked, was not oblivious of the singing of at least three invisible skylarks, out of a sky as blue as a Della Robbia plaque; and in the vigour of her youth, even against her conscious mood, her senses began to respond to the jocund pulse beat of a prodigal, lavish, irrepressible countryside!

It was about half-past twelve when she arrived at the wooden bridge near the sheep-washing pool which marked the halfway point between Ashover Church and Ashover village. Just beyond this bridge, on the side of the road opposite to the water meadows, there was a little field path which mounted slowly, through a couple of green barley fields, to the rough open country below the northern extremity of Heron’s Ridge.

Cousin Ann climbed over the stile leading to this path and began slowly ascending the incline between the divided masses of immature green stalks. Skylarks trilled and trilled above her head, one song blending with another song in that peculiar timeless ecstasy which seems to have more in common with the scarlets and blues of some great Venetian picture than with any musical instrument.

She had crossed the first barley field and had reached a thickset hedge which was now a mass of new leafage mingled with a weight of dim, half-faded hawthorn blossoms. She turned to her right at this point and moving slowly through the feathery grasses between the green barley and the hedgerow advanced to a spot on that sloping hill from which she could look straight down to the back entrance to Toll-Pike Cottage.

All the wide stretch of the Frome valley lay before her, green and lovely in the quivering translucent noon heat of that summer day. Out of the level plain of the brook meadows the familiar outlines of the church and its gravestones stood like a reef of gray rocks in a green halcyon sea.

Between the excited woman and the mysterious power emanating from the mortality of that place there was a formidable and strange correspondence — a correspondence that did not rise to the level of the girl's mental consciousness, but affected her, none the less, and strengthened, so to speak, the despotism and magnetism of her will. Lady Ann had all the Ashover dead behind her; supporting her, sustaining her, protecting her; as if she were a faithful seaworthy ship into whose care they had entrusted their last forlorn hope.

The kitchen door of Toll-Pike Cottage stood wide open and from where she stood she fancied she could detect the form of Nell's enormous tabby cat asleep on the sun-warmed threshold.

She hesitated a little now; not for any emotional reason, but because her instinct as a landowner's daughter reluctED at the notion of crossing a field of corn that was already ankle-high.

She moved on a few hundred yards, searching for the faintest vestige of a path. The brown mould as she continued to thrust her parasol between those spears of diaphanous green was not yet so devoid of moisture as not to emit its own peculiar smell — the smell of the actual flesh of the earth — which mingled so naturally with the sharp sour scent of the growing stalks. In spite of the obstinate anger in her heart which was driving her forward, her whole physical being found itself responding to that immemorial contact, the contact of a woman who has conceived, with that which conceives and brings forth all life.

Suddenly her spirits rose in triumph. There *was* a little path!

From a gap in the hedge, evidently an ancient secretive way, for the sticks that had been twisted across it had burst into leaf, right down to Nell's very door, ran a narrow ribbon of brown soil dividing the expanse of barley.

Lady Ann hurried down this path, her skirts swishing against the growing corn, her parasol grasped tightly in her hand. The back door of the house *was* wide open and Nell's great cat, the Marquis of Carabas, *was* fast asleep on the threshold. Cousin Ann with noiseless fingers unhooked a little wire gate which was there, and stepping over the ridges of William Hastings's potatoes, approached the door.

The thrill of action, of any kind of action, had so quickened the pulses of her energetic spirit that, strange though it may sound, she felt happier at that moment than she had actually felt since she came back from Tollminster on her wedding night. A situation that would have appalled a different type of woman seemed to rouse some ancestral fighting spirit in Cousin Ann; seemed, in fact, to assuage, with a sort of sporting or hunting recklessness, the lodged and rooted trouble within her….

What was that?

She paused, listening, one hand pressed against the lintel of the door; the other stroking the Marquis with her parasol, as he rubbed his back against her ankles.

From within the little front dining room came the sound of the arranging of knives and forks, of plates and glasses; a sound which conveyed instantaneously to Cousin Ann's mind the fact that whoever they might be who were to partake of that meal, the meal itself was not ready.

And then, all suddenly, she heard Nell begin to sing as she put the finishing touches to her luncheon table. She sang the famous song of the exiled courtier in “As You Like It”:

Who doth ambition shun
And loves to live i’ the sun,
Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither, come hither, come hither
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

The girl had no power of voice and no very good ear. She sang in a careless and irresponsible way, but the jealous heart of the listener did not fail to catch the strain of thrilling feminine happiness that underlay the notes of the old song.

“She is alone and she is expecting Rook,” thought Lady Ann; and a sudden spasm of fierce anger took possession of her; an anger that caused the red parasol to tremble in her clutch as if it had been a deadly weapon.

Then in a flash it came over her what to do. In a far better trained and far richer voice than Nell’s she burst out into the melancholy Jaques’s bitter antiphony:

If it do come to pass
That any man turn ass,
Leaving his wealth and ease
A stubborn will to please,
Ducdame, ducdame, ducdame!
Here shall he see
Gross fools …

She did not get any further; for Nell, who had stood for a minute with a plate of almonds and raisins in her hand, frozen helpless with panic, now came hurrying down the passage, her cheeks white, her mouth grotesquely open.

"Lady Ann! How you did startle me! Is anything the matter?"

Cousin Ann made no movement to meet her, no movement to cross tibe threshold. She waited till the girl came quite close.

In one second Cousin Ann became as calm and collected as if the two of them were casually meeting at a garden party at Antiger House.

"I'd no idea you had a voice, Nell," she said. "We must have you bring your songs up to the house one of these nights."

Nell bit her lip. The tone of that "we must have you" was like the tone Lady Ann would have used to some pretty little girl in the village; to some child of Martin Pod or Mr. Twiney.

"Won't you come in?" The words were uttered mechanically. She had meant to say something altogether different.

"Oh, no, no! On no account!" Cousin Ann responded. "I'm lunching at home. It was so nice of you to ask Rook to join you and your husband. By the way, could I see Mr. Hastings? I've got a message for him from my aunt."

Nell's mouth opened and shut and her eyes looked as frightened as a hedge sparrow's when it hears the hunting call of the shrike.

"William isn't here," she murmured faintly. "He was suddenly called away and I thought — I thought it would be silly not to enjoy the pleasure of such an important guest. If I had had any one to send, I would have begged you to come, too; but I expect even then it would have been too hurried a notice. But now you *are* here, I do hope you will stay? And let me have the pleasure of getting a meal for you both?"

“My husband has not come yet, then?” enquired Lady Ann. Nell shook her head. “Well. Perhaps I will rest a little then, if I may?” And taking the other’s consent for granted, and carrying it off with so natural an air that it was impossible for Nell to resist her, she moved hurriedly down the passage and went straight into the dining room.

There lay, betrayed and revealed to those jealous eyes, a pathetic little love feast prepared by the young girl for the man she idealized.

The two places had been laid opposite each other in the curve of the bow window. A great bowl of blue violas, light and delicate as butterflies’ wings, more like wild flowers than garden flowers, stood in the middle of the table. At the side of one of the plates, evidently the one to be used by Rook, lay three pansies, a purple one, a yellow one, and a black one.

Lady Ann surveyed this spectacle with a sudden indrawing of her breath. So this was the way the sad, remorseful, preoccupied Rook was taking his diversion. And he had lied to her, with the worst kind of lie, the treacherous half-lie of a coward. He had duped her, under the guise of conscience-stricken remorse. What hypocrisy, what calculated cold-blooded hypocrisy. And she, too, in the state in which she was.

Her indignation blotted Nell completely out of the picture. Her one desire now was to meet Rook face to face.

“How prettily you have set the table,” she said with a smile. “I’m sure Mr. Ashover will be delighted when he sees what a charming welcome is awaiting him. Well, I must be off.”

She moved back to the kitchen door, quite oblivious now of her pretended need of resting.

Nell was too miserable and bewildered to say one word in answer to this. All she could do was just to follow her visitor meekly down the passage.

"What a lovely cat," Cousin Ann now murmured, stooping down to stroke the Marquis of Carabas. "Oh, by the way, Nell, my aunt expects you to her picnic this afternoon. Will your husband's engagement prevent his being there, too? What shall I say to Mrs. Ashover?"

"It's very kind of you, Lady Ann, I'm sure. But William can't possibly come, I'm afraid."

"Well. Come yourself, anyway," cried Cousin Ann, picking up her parasol and passing out. "You don't happen to know from what direction Rook will descend upon you?" she added gaily as Nell waited in the doorway.

The girl shook her head.

"Because I'd like to ask him whether *he* intends to come to his mother's little party. But never mind. My aunt and I will survive it, I daresay, even if we are the only people there. Good-bye." And without waiting to see the closing of the door — the door that was no longer to be left open for intruders — she retraced her steps by the same path she had followed to reach the house.

She knew that Rook's business that morning had taken him to the other side of Heron's Ridge, and her only impulse now was to walk quickly enough so as to intercept him while he was still out of sight of the cottage.

She was conscious of feeling a little tired and faint as she ascended the hill; but her anger, which now settled into a calm, cold fury, was strong enough to support and sustain her; and it was not long before she reached the stile into the second barley field, breathing heavily as she went.

Here again she came to a tall hawthorn hedge voluptuously scented with the richly perishing May blossoms. She forced her way through a half-open gate which must have remained exactly in the same position since the early spring, for the feathery grasses grew high and tall around it and several wisps of bindweed had encircled its lowest bar.

She had calculated her movements to a nicety. There, approaching her with swinging careless steps, down the rough slope of a gorse-grown incline, was the figure of her husband. He saw her in a moment; stood for a second as if confused at her appearance; and then came on resolutely to where she awaited him, her free hand pressed tightly against her waist, her face white and drawn.

"Ann! What are you doing here?"

She made a little gesture that kept him at a distance while she recovered her breath.

"I — thought — I — would like — a little stroll — but it — it has been rather too much for me."

She spoke in gasps, but she smiled quite naturally into his face and her tone was calm.

"You'd better come into Nell's with me," he said. "You can't walk back in that state. She'll be able to look after you."

"I think — if you don't mind, Rook — I'd prefer to rest a little where I am."

As she spoke she sank down, easily and spontaneously, among the grasses of the hedge. Her movement disturbed several white butterflies which fluttered away along the edge of the field, while a scarlet-and-black cinnabar moth flew heavily from a tuft of clover to a patch of hedge parsley; where it paused, as if to regard the tulips in her hat, its wings drawn close against its body.

Rook knelt down anxiously by her side, his face sad and puzzled; his heart infinitely weary of the whole business of living. Above them, lost in the cerulean blue, not one lark, or two or three or four, but it might well have been a whole classic chorus of larks kept up that arrogant, brazen, importunate monotone of ecstasy, such as no instrument of string or pipe, no voice of man or woman, could lift from the earth; the very voice, so it might well seem, of the griefless, merciless, exultant sky, whose colour mocks all human passion by the impact of its appalling simplicity.

CHAPTER XVII

IT DID NOT need a long interlude under that June hedge to bring the colour back to Lady Ann's cheeks and a more even beat to her indignant heart.

The savage and primitive portion of her nature was soothed and satisfied by the fact that she was keeping Rook away from Nell; and something more subtle within her was quick enough to divine that Rook's attitude under this turn of events was not at all the attitude of a baffled and disappointed amorist.

He seemed just simply concerned and agitated at her own state and apparently took it for granted, without any other thought, that he would now have to support her back to Ashover.

He took her back there, indeed, leaning on his arm, by the very same path she herself had followed an hour ago; and his tenderness and solicitude were so obviously genuine that, though her anger against him still smouldered on in the depths, she confined its expression to nothing more serious than a few bitter sarcasms. It still remained possible that "everything," including that carefully prepared table, was on Nell's side; possible, after all, that Rook had not wilfully deceived her, that he had not, in fact, himself been aware of the convenient absence of Mr. Hastings.

Though she was feminine enough to derive a wicked satisfaction in the thought of that table left there without a guest; those yellow, purple, and black pansies lying unseen by any eye except her own, she was practical enough to insist on Mr. Twiney's being sent back at once to the village with orders to call in at Toll-Pike Cottage on his way to his own house. "And put the back seat in, Twiney, please," she said, as they encountered the gardener on their return. "And don't forget to call for Mrs. Hastings as well as Mr. Lexie! I shall drive; so there will be just four people. Mr. Ashover will walk."

Perhaps even the outraged feelings of Lady Ann would have been subdued into pity if she could have seen the forlorn figure in Toll-Pike Cottage removing one by one the plates from the dining room and the dishes from the kitchen stove. Nell had seen from her bedroom, to which she had fled to escape the mocking sight of her preparations, the husband and wife making their way back across the fields; and the sight had filled her with a cold, miserable hopelessness and a bitter shame.

Lady Ann's intrusion had been particularly cruel because there had been a pitiable struggle in her own conscience over the whole affair. She had seen very little of Rook since the fatal day of Netta's flight. He had given her very few chances to see him. And though she had struggled heroically to keep up the level of her emotion to what she had felt when they met in that drawing room, there were occasions when, as in the case of this unfortunate lunch, her longing to be with him, to have him to herself alone, overpowered her conscientious scruples.

The fact that she had steadily struggled to efface every instinct of possessiveness from her feelings so as to be of genuine use to him as a friend made it all the bitterer and more shameful to be thus exposed in her lapse from her self-imposed standard by Lady Ann's appearance.

Nothing is harder to bear than a fall from one's own ideal when it is grossly interpreted. A portion of oneself ranges itself then on the side of the accuser and the rest of one's being writhes helplessly under a double shame.

By degrees she managed to calm herself enough so as to restore her house to its normal appearance. She hadn't the heart to taste any of the things she had prepared. Standing by the cleared and empty table she nibbled a few biscuits and drank a glass of milk. Of those three pansies, she slipped one without a smile into a little apple-green volume of Shelley and squeezed the other two into a vase of wild flowers.

She had just done this when she saw Mr. Twiney at the gate. She went out to meet him. He announced in a circuitous rigmarole that he had been ordered to call for her with his gig.

"'Tisn't as if me cart were a gentleman's cart; but the lady up there," and he jerked his thumb toward Ashover House, "be going to drive me mare, and she expects 'ee to sit on thik back-seat 'long wi' Mr. Lexie."

Nell was on the point of explaining to the man that she had not the least intention of coming to Antiger High Mead; but she suddenly changed her mind.

"I am going up to see Mr. Lexie in a minute or two," she said, "and I'll tell him to expect you."

She let Mr. Twiney depart then; and running back into the house and up into her room began to put on her walking shoes and her newest hat.

Half an hour later she was sitting in Lexie's little garden at the rear of his cottage; confessing everything that had occurred. The enclosure was a small one, defended on two sides by rough gray walls and divided from a small orchard at the back by a briar-rose hedge.

The girl sat opposite Lexie in a low deck chair; and as she talked to him from beneath the shady brim of her hat she kept pulling at the green blades and brittle daisy-stalks of the grass patch beneath them.

From one of the apple trees in the orchard came the sweet reiterated quinquapartite moan of a wood pigeon; and Lexie, as he listened to what his guest was saying, found himself repeating the measured Shakespearean quatrain that he loved so well:

Whereupon it made this threne
To the phœnix and the dove,
Co-supremes and stars of love,
As chorus to their tragic scene.

"And so she came right into my room and saw how I was expecting your brother — saw everything. And I could tell just how it struck her, just what she thought." Nell sighed miserably and threw away a little handful of squeezed-up daisy-stalks which fell across the burnished golden face of a dandelion.

"She thought what was the truth," said Lexie, the leathery folds and humorous wrinkles about his eyes deepening into a hundred crevices and furrows as ruggedly emphatic as those on the bark of his favourite elm tree.

The girl lifted her chin and leaned forward. "You know it wasn't like that," she said. "You know I hadn't the least wish to make her feel badly. It just happened that William was out for the day and I thought it would be nice to cook a meal for him — for Rook, I mean. I hadn't talked quietly and properly to him for weeks and weeks."

Lexie did his best not to smile as if he were speaking to an irrational child. He was conscious of a certain irritation against his brother. How badly things were arranged in this world. Why couldn't all this romantic "havering" be concentrated on someone more fitted to appreciate it than this master of manias and inhibitions!

"And now I've really hurt her," Nell went on. "She'll think that there's something serious between Rook and me and be up in arms whenever we meet. I've made things worse for Rook, made them much worse; and there's actually nothing between us except what you know perfectly well — just what I happen to feel myself — which doesn't matter to Rook at all or to any one else!"

Lexie's half-conscious irritation against his brother betrayed itself now in spite of his humorous lightness of tone. "Tell me, Nell," he said, "are you in love with Rook?"

The outrageous directness of this question did not seem to annoy the young girl. For some curious reason those plain significant words gave her a kind of relief. She liked the way Lexie uttered them. She liked to hear them being uttered.

"In — love — with — Rook?" she repeated very slowly. "I wonder if it *is* as thrilling as that. I certainly have never been in love with my husband if 'in love' means the sort of feeling I have for your brother. And yet William has been much nicer to me lately. He's been steadily nicer and nicer since he stopped writing his book."

"Has he let it go altogether?" asked Lexie.

She shook her head doubtfully. "I wouldn't like to say that and I think it would be unlucky to say it. It might start him off at it to-morrow. But he certainly has not written a line — I know that for a fact — since the end of April. He wrote a little after Netta went away; and then he stopped. Why do you suppose he stopped?"

Lexie replied to this only by one of his characteristic grimaces.

"Don't you worry about Ann, my sweet Nell," he said. "She'll be just the same to you. And when she's talked to Rook about your lunch, and beaten him up a bit, she'll be the same to him, too! These things are not really so terrible as people think they are. There's a deal of conventional bluff in it."

"Women think a lot about things like that," murmured the girl feebly.

Lexie sawed the air with his hand; a trick of his when he got excited. The gesture was peculiar to him and its nature resembled the movement a person might make when obstructed by tall reeds in a thick swamp.

"They don't really!" he cried with more emphasis than Nell had ever heard him use about anything. "It's all put into their heads by what they read and by what they hear and by what they think that other people think. Left to themselves women would take these things very easily and very naturally."

As he paused to take breath, for he had worked himself into a sincere agitation now and his gray eyes had become quite large and brilliant, the girl opposite him suddenly burst into a peal of unexpected laughter.

He looked at her with injured gravity, the naïveté of which made it harder for her to recover herself. His self-respect was genuinely outraged; but the graver and more discomposed he looked, the more difficult did she find it to stop laughing. It was as if Lexie had become a church, a funeral, a parliamentary debate, a meeting of scientists. She began to have what children call "a regular laughing fit." She put her hands to her face, and tears of merriment ran down her cheeks.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he demanded, rising from his chair and approaching hers. His face wavered between sympathy for what might have been hysterical agitation and annoyance at what might have been childish rudeness.

His tone quieted her and she took her fingers from her face and searched about for her handkerchief.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "I'm so very sorry. It's silly of me —— You're a dear, Lexie — I love you very much." And she held out her hand to him.

He took it and refused to let it go.

"What was it that set you off just then?" he asked gravely. "Did I say anything especially ridiculous? Did I give myself away in some unpardonable fashion? Did what I said seem obvious and banal beyond words?"

"Dear Lexie!" murmured the girl, trying in vain to get her fingers out of the invalid's clutch in such a manner as might seem natural and unconscious. "Dear Lexie! Of course you didn't do anything of the kind! What you said was very sensible; and I daresay quite true. It was *because* it was so sensible that I laughed. I don't think sensible things, or even true things, are ever the right explanations when it comes to women!"

Lexie's countenance at that moment would have made an engaging study for some master painter; for some portraitist possessed of the psychological impressionism of Spain combined with the grandiose vitality of Venice. The little wrinkles in the skin of his cheeks indicated that his humour was tickled. An unusually concentrated frown in his heavy forehead suggested that his wits were piqued. While the way his drooping half-closed eyelids reduced his eyes — lately so wide open — to nothing but little narrow slits of amorousness denoted that the accidental imprisonment of a hand that desired to escape had already aroused the satyr in his blood.

"You steered me off just now," he said, pressing the hand he held against the girl's slender neck, "when I asked you a definite question. I don't believe you're half as much of an idealist as you think you are, you sweet Nell. Why do you keep that hat on? You're not afraid of sunstroke, are you?"

As he spoke he used his free hand to pull out the one hatpin that the girl wore; and in a moment her head was bare. He stooped over her as if to follow up his advantage.

Nell's own sensations at the moment were terribly complicated. His warm knuckles pressed against her neck sent a faint luxurious relaxation through every nerve of her body. She was so full of shame at her recent lapse from her own ideal that a great weariness possessed her heart, a weariness that could easily have found a numbing relief in letting him do what he liked.

But simultaneously with these emotions there suddenly rose up within her, to her own surprise, a surging wave of anger against him. What right had he to behave in this way? What right had he to assume that she would let him make love to her? She freed her hand with a jerk and pushed him back so violently and unexpectedly that he staggered.

“What are you doing, Lexie?” she cried indignantly. “I’ve told you before I don’t like this sort of thing!”

She didn’t catch the expression upon his face at this rebuff. She only heard him mutter something under his breath as he moved off; and then she saw him go hurriedly to the flower bed under the wall and stoop down. He seemed to be looking for something among the green shoots of the unbudded delphiniums, something that required much fumbling and searching for, if it were to be-found at all.

His body looked so thin and fragile as he stooped over the bed and his head so heavy, that a twinge of commiseration passed through her.

“What silly punctilious creatures girls are!” she thought to herself. “Why shouldn’t I have let him kiss me if he wanted to? He’s a much finer, a much more interesting human being than I am; and he’s ill, too! What a brute one is with one’s wretched pride and egotism!”

Lexie had found what he wanted now and came back smiling, his head held high, his hand extended. It was a single lavender-coloured, double French primrose, enfolded in its own large crumpled leaf.

“It’s the last left,” he said, handing it to her. “Fast-fading primroses covered up in leaves,” he added, purposely misquoting; “only this isn’t a real primrose. I never have been able to make out what mysterious old associations I have with this flower. It always gives me a peculiar sensation unlike anything else. Don't you think, my sweet Nell, that there are certain memories in us that come straight down to us from our parents and through them from *their* parents? If it isn't like that, what is it? Memories of our childhood before we were conscious?"

He stopped and they both resumed their seats; he to light a cigarette, she to pin the flower very carefully upon the edge of her dress, against her neck — "exactly," she thought to herself, "where he touched me just now."

"No, no," he said, "don't you let that scene with Ann have any effect upon you at all. I give you my word of honour, Nell, that there's nothing in it — nothing, nothing. She'll be exactly the same to you when you see her next. Please, don't let's have any bourgeois 'not-speakings,' and so on, in our circle!"

"But. Lexie, I *can't* go to this picnic after what happened to-day! I can't face Ann after that! It goes against something in me which doesn't feel at all 'bourgeois,' something that seems just the opposite of 'bourgeois!'"

Lexie peered gravely at her through his cigarette smoke. "You're wrong, Nelly dear. I tell you you're wrong. It's the very best thing you could do; for Rook, for yourself, for Lady Ann, for everyone. It is, indeed!"

The girl bent her head, frowning. She felt an unconscionable longing to see Rook that day. It was a chance she might not have again for many days; and it would be amusing, sitting on the back seat of Mr. Twiney's gig with Lexie.

"How is Rook going to get over there himself?" she asked.

"He? Oh, he'll walk. *Do* come, Nell. Do be a spirited, civilized, sensible girl, and come. My mother will think it awfully funny if you don't. It's her birthday, you know; and rather an event in our family."

The girl looked at him dubiously. "I don't — feel — as if I *could* face her and — and talk to her as if nothing had happened. She must think that

Rook and I have been seeing each other much more than we have.”

Lexie got up and threw away his cigarette. It fell close to her feet and she put her foot on its thin wisp of smoke.

“Think what a meteorite that must seem,” she said, “to the tiny grass-insects. Isn’t it hard to realize, Lexie, how all that we feel is only like a little smoke in the grass?”

“What’s that?” he rapped out, and moving up to her he took her by the wrists and looked threateningly into her face. “What’s that? What’s that? Like a smoke? Well, and if it *is* — you dear troubled Nell — that doesn’t make it any the less important.”

He let her go and remained silent and very grave, looking away from her, away from that sunlit garden, where the early afternoon shadow was just beginning to pass from the gravel path to the box border; away from that piece of dusty white road outside his gate, where that very morning he had picked a bit of yellow stonecrop from the wall and a bit of ground ivy from under the wall, crushing them in his hands and only relinquishing them when Mrs. Bellamy brought him his breakfast, and it came into his mind how perverted, how corrupt, how mad with the worst madness there is in life it was to diminish one jot or one tittle of the unique, the miraculous importance of these heavenly sensations. “Oh, let me live another year — two more years — *three* more years!” he prayed to that June air and those June odours.

It was almost as if it came like a sign of acceptance, of recognition, from some hidden heathen deity, still able to exert his power in that Dorset village, that even as the man and the girl looked into each other’s eyes, there sounded from some neighbouring tree invisible to them both the world-old *Cuckoo! Cuckoo!* of the unconquerable augur of sweet mischief.

Lexie's faced relaxed into a smile of thrilling satisfaction; every wrinkle in it deepening and radiating, while he rubbed his hands together. "It hasn't changed its tune yet!" he cried. "The summer is only beginning."

"Very well, Lexie," said the girl with a deep sigh of submission. "I'll go with you. I should only be perfectly miserable if I went back now to the house." She paused, frowning. "I *must* have just a word with your brother. I couldn't endure William's coming back and this whole day being wasted. I don't hate William as much as I used to, Lexie," she added inconsequently.

"No one hates any one when his own life is all right," he said. "Come on, you sweet Nell, let's see if Mr. Twiney's outside. If he isn't, we might walk as far as that."

He moved toward the house. "One moment," he said. "I'll just run in and tell Mrs. Bellamy."

She watched him disappear.

Over her head flew the long-tailed bird, cuckooing as it flew. Awkward and yet rapid in its direct movement, it seemed to her, just then, as if it were no ordinary feathered creature; but rather a mysterious agent of the gods. She felt a sick repugnance at the thought of encountering Lady Ann again; but her desire to see Rook, to talk to him, to hear his voice, grew every moment more imperative.

Far away though it was now, she could still hear the voice of the cuckoo; and in some inscrutable manner the sound of it acted as an irritant to hear nerves, making her restless and impatient, making every minute of delay seem fraught with some kind of vague danger to both herself and Rook.

At the very moment when the young girl was thus concerned about him, Rook himself, having eaten a hurried lunch, was walking quickly across Battlefield.

Before leaving the house he had opened his iron cash box and placed two five-pound notes in his pocket.

“I’ll settle that business with Betsy,” he thought, “on my way to High Mead.”

As he passed the Drools’ cottage he was observed by Binnory, who promptly followed him into the lane and overtook him at a run.

“Squire Ash’ver!” cried the idiot breathlessly. “Take I with ‘ee to see the gippoos! Take I with ‘ee to see them two who be half beasties and half men! Take Binnory with ‘ee, Squire Ash’ver, and he’ll do summat for ‘ee one day! So he will, too, summat ‘ee never’d guess at! Take I with ‘ee, Squire Ash’ver!”

Rook turned toward the excited boy with a look of positive hatred. He remembered his behaviour to Lady Ann. He associated him with Corporal Dick.

“Go home, Binnory!” he rapped out. “Get home with you, child!” And he quickened his pace to shake off this unwelcome attendant.

He had never been quite satisfied with the accepted version of the lad’s paternity. In his heart he had more than once accused Uncle Dick of being his father; but that was at moments when this whole business of the “Ashover immorality” grew to the dimensions of an obsession.

They all had the same taint! His father with Nancy Cooper, Corporal Dick with this gamekeeper’s wife, his grandfather with the Corporal’s mother — they had all, in taking their pleasure, become the causes of hideous complications.

If he had let Netta alone, perhaps by this time she would have married some honest man and been as happy as women are; whereas now —— His thoughts recoiled from the fantastic abominations his imagination called forth.

"Squire Ash'ver! If I give 'ee them three girt blue her'n's eggs I've a-got hid away, will 'ee take I to see the half beasties?"

The lad was trotting by his side now, his mouth open, his eyes furtive and foxy. Rook began to lose his temper in earnest. There was something peculiarly irritating to his nerves just then in this encounter. It was bad enough to have to deal with old Betsy and her "partners." There came over him an unpleasant sense of being surrounded by crowds and crowds of Ashover bastards, each new one more repulsive than the rest. He felt like Macbeth, contemplating the interminable descendants of Banquo.

"Get away with you, can't you?" he cried angrily. "What do you mean by following me like this?"

"Don't 'ee talk to I like that, Squire Ash'ver," pleaded the boy, his tone wheedling and coaxing.

"Go home!" shouted Rook, and began to stride along even more quickly than before.

But the voice continued at his elbow; for the boy found no difficulty at all in keeping up with him.

"If you'll take I to see the half beasties, Squire," cried Binnory as he ran, "I'll show 'ee where 'tis said Witch Nancy were bedded when they two was born! 'Tis a dry pond up High Mead way, near-along where you be going to eat and drink present. I've a-seed 'un when I were little. 'Twas Granfer Dick showed 'un to I; and he'd a-say how wonderful it were that them things should be born'd, 'long wi' frogs and toads and hedge-pricklies what have their own lawful nature!"

Rook stopped and turned round upon the idiot, furious with a blind anger. He raised his stick as if to strike him a blow. Binnory seemed not the least disturbed by this gesture; indeed, he grinned in his face and did nothing but just skip back out of arm's reach.

Rook went so far as actually to pursue the boy for a stone's-throw or two, in the direction of his home; but when he came close up to him a great wave of weariness and disgust fell upon his spirit and made it impossible for him to lift a finger.

"Go home, I tell you!" was all he could say. But he might have been addressing his words to the elm trees in the hedge for all the effect they had. Whether Binnory had the wit to detect an artificial note in his threats, or whether he trusted in his own obstinate tenacity to get what he wanted in spite of the Squire's anger, his next move was a masterpiece of strategy.

He scrambled up the bank and pushed himself through the hedge into the wood. Once in the wood, he waited till Rook turned to go on again; and then proceeded to run parallel with his victim's advance, keeping the thickset hedge between them.

Under the smooth branches of the newly leafed beech trees he ran; under the darker foliage of the sycamores; under the stinging twigs of the green hazels; over dog-mercury, over pink campion, over the soft unbudded whitish-green spikes of foxglove and mullein. Feeble-winged currant moths flapped against his face as he ran. Greenish-coloured pollen from the stamens of entangled parasitic plants clung to his cap and to his hair. Swathes of pith twine tripped him up. The oozy stalks of half-dead bluebells bent and broke beneath his boots, staining them, with sticky vegetable juice. Rook heard him groan now and again as the thorns pricked him or the twigs stung his cheeks; but he no longer uttered any words. All his energy seemed taken up in the effort of keeping pace with his unsympathetic companion.

At last the man could endure the situation no longer. It had begun to touch the limit both of his patience and of his sense of humour.

"Come here, you rascal!" he shouted. "Come here, Binnory, you rogue! If you can run like that over there, you'd better come back into the lane. I'll take you with me! You shall see your gippoos!"

He had hardly finished speaking when, like a rabbit from its burrow, pushing aside the prickly thickness of a holly tree in the hedge, the boy came tumbling and scuffling down the bank.

Rook moderated his pace after that; and the two curiously assorted companions, having made up their quarrel, proceeded on their way down that sweet-scented lane, amicably discussing the weasels, squirrels, and rabbits that kept crossing their path and the various bird notes that reached them from the wood.

They came at last to the grassy clearing, where the lane associated with the mysterious name of Gorm branched off from the other; and there, straight in front of them, under the hedge, was Betsy Cooper's caravan.

The old woman had erected a clothes-line as a sort of extempore tent; and behind a row of vividly coloured garments hanging between two posts the forms of the unfortunate "partners" were visible, seated opposite each other on the ground, their laps full of moon daisies and quaking grass.

Rook could see Betsy herself, a few hundred yards or so down the road, digging up dandelion roots with a knife.

He went straight toward her, leaving his companion to stare at the "half beasties" to his heart's content.

"Ay, Squire! So 'ee be come to I, then; so 'ee be come to Auntie Betsy, same as she told 'ee 'ee would. 'Tis good hearing to me wold ears to catch the sound of thee tongue and see thee wicked smiling eyes again! Thou'rt always welcome, Squire Ashover. Thou'rt always welcome."

"I've brought the money, Betsy," said Rook quietly, manifesting little tendency to respond to her familiar garrulousness. "And now I hope you'll keep your promise and move away."

He put his hand in his pocket as he spoke and produced the two five-pound notes. The old lady's countenance assumed a time-battered expression of senile imbecility, out of the depths of which, like the gaze of a snake peering through a sheep's skull, shone her tiny yellowish eyes.

"Come to cart, Squire Ashover; come to cart. I've got summat to show 'ee afore us puts thik bit of paper across wood and across iron."

Rook replaced the notes in his pocket and followed her submissively to her wheeled house. His chief anxiety now was to get his business done before Mr. Twiney's conveyance, bringing the rest of the party, should appear upon the scene.

The old woman manifested no surprise at seeing Binnory, who was now seated on the grass at a cautious distance from the dwarfs, regarding their infantile play with a mixture of suspicion and fascination.

"He be an innocent, same as they be," she chuckled, glancing furtively at Rook. "Dilly Drool should have come to I for a sip o' tiger-root when she were heavy. My Nancy never missed a morning without taking of it; and 'twould have given her as healthy a babe as maid could wish; only her old man couldn't keep his hands off her because of the drink."

Rook moved aside to let the woman go up the caravan steps in front of him. She turned her head as she reached the top.

"Thee Ashovers be sweet-spoken gents and I don't care who hears me say it; but ye be queer ones with the maids; and 'tis that what brings the thwartings and blightings upon 'ee; for 'tis a sure thing that them as handles ploughs when rye be green and goose-pods be sour finds nothink in meadow when 'a do come to harvest-time save toadstools and devils-bit!"

"What do you mean by 'goose-pods,' Betsy?" her guest enquired, mounting the steps behind her.

“I mean them things in pond-water what ain’t water-lilies nor ain’t long purples. But come ‘ee in, Squire Ashover, come ‘ee in; I’ve a-got summat to show ‘ee!”

The old woman made him sit down on the narrow bed which was covered now by a patchwork quilt. She pulled the white curtains across the window, so that the hot afternoon light that poured into that small interior was softened and mellowed.

Then she placed a wooden table in front of him and on the table a curiously woven very old mat, of an unusual and enigmatical pattern.

Rook wondered vaguely what the preparations meant; but his thoughts wandered off to his fixed idea of his bad treatment of Netta and they only returned to his present surroundings when the sound of the steady trotting of Mr. Twiney’s mare broke upon that summer stillness.

He listened intently, his face toward the door; but the dogcart passed by without stopping, its occupants apparently undisturbed by the sight of the dwarfs and Binnory.

Betsy Cooper gave no sign that she had even heard the quick trotting of the mare, as Lady Ann speeded it up with rein and whip. What she did now was to place upon the table a perfectly round clear crystal, about the size of a large apple, and so smooth and globular that it was only by putting it down with the utmost gentleness that she rendered it immobile.

“What’s that?” said Rook. “Can you see fortunes in it, Betsy?”

“Fortunes!” snorted the crone contemptuously. “You can see the Will of God in it, Squire Ashover!”

The man bent down over this microcosmic symbol of the world he found so hard to handle, and stared fixedly and rigidly into its irised depths. Violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red — they were all held in faint solution in the rondure of that prismatic orb.

Betsy stood in front of him, waiting patiently. She did not ask him "if he saw anything." She leaned her hands upon the table and half-closing her eyes swayed a little, backward and forward, humming some obscure gibberish underneath her breath.

Then Rook did actually begin to see something. Whether it was a phantom of the mind, "a false creation proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain," or whether a flawless crystal of that particular kind *has* the power — as yet unverified by science — of reflecting thoughts as well as objects, the fact remains that he saw the figure of Netta bending over something.

What was it she was bending over? Her head was lowered so that he could not catch the expression on her face; but the feeling he got from what he did see of her was sad without being hopelessly unhappy. It was calm and quiet.

"What is she looking at?" he muttered aloud.

The old woman above him took no notice of his words; but her hummings and mumblings increased in volubility. Then he became aware of what it was that this image of his ill-used mistress gazed at so calmly. It was himself — the form of Rook Ashover — and it lay hushed and white and still in a coffin of dark-coloured wood.

For a seconder two longer he looked at this picture in the crystal; and as he looked a great wave of unalterable peace and happiness passed over him.

So deep and convincing was this sensation that when the figures finally faded away and he lifted up his head he experienced that sense of irrational fretfulness and irritation such as people feel when they are awakened suddenly out of a restorative and dreamless sleep.

He poshed the table away and stretched himself. His very muscles felt as if he had just been aroused from a prolonged slumber. He yawned and scowled crossly; stretched out his arms again and muttered: “Ay! ay!” in an intonation of petulant querulousness.

Betsy Cooper took not the least notice of what he was doing. She removed the mat. She took down an old clay pipe from a bracket nailed to the wall and filling it with tobacco sat down upon a chair to smoke. A thin sun-moted stream of light that had found an entrance between curtain and window frame turned her mummy-like face into gleaming gold and the smoke of her pipe into pontifical incense.

Rook rose to his feet and stood over her. He felt drugged and stupid and absurdly childish.

“Where did you get that thing from?” he asked, in a fussy, matter-of-fact, disparaging tone.

Betsy took the pipe from her mouth and stared at him with the slow, patient, satiric stare of thousands of years of sunburned, rain-bleached wisdom.

“’Tis the Cimmery stone,” she murmured.

He began walking up and down that small interior like a wild animal in the presence of his tamer.

“What Cimmery stone?” he demanded abruptly, standing in front of her again.

“From Cimmery Land, Squire,” she answered quietly. “And that be the land where folks do live like unborn babes. They don’t see nothink, nor hear nothink, in thik place, except what be like the smoke of this ’ere pipe; and when them folks do talk ‘mid theyselves it be like the turning of Miller Cory’s girt wheel — mum, mum, mum — where us can hear the drumming of wonderful green water and where millstone be all moss-mumbled and wheel be all hart’s-tongue ferns! ’Tis real wet rain, what’s finer than corpse dust, them folks do live under; and they tell I it be wonderful strange to see ‘un walk and talk … mum … mum … mum … and thik mist all slivery and dimsy round ‘un.”

As the old woman spoke Rook became quieter and his nerves less irritable. He could not catch the full import of what she said, but it soothed and calmed him. It was as though she were describing to him the god-like dwellers in some unearthly Limbo — some Elysian Fourth Dimension — out of Space and out of Time — where everything was, as it were, painted with gray upon gray; and where large and liberating thoughts moved to and fro over cool, wet grass like enormous swallows, easily, naturally, without any effort; thoughts that were made of memories and of hopes, and never of logic or of reason; thoughts that came and went under a thin, fine, incessant rain that itself was composed of the essence of memory, the memory of old defeated, long-forgotten gods whose only immortality was in this gray, cool, silent, sadly driven mist!

As he listened to the old woman and watched the smoke of her pipe floating up into the illuminated sun-ray where it broke at once into a hundred silver-blue undulations, it came over him that this Cimmery Land of which she spoke was the thing that he had so often vaguely dreamed of; dreamed of on lonely roads at twilight; dreamed of lying on his bed listening to the sounds of the morning; dreamed of under walls of old buildings in the quiet places of historic cities, when the noons fell hotly and the shadows fell darkly, and from hidden fountains came the splash of water.

Dreamed of! But never, until this moment, *felt* within his conscious brain, as something that out of the turbulent arena of life might actually emerge — emerge and establish itself — as this crystal had done, projected like a Bubble of Eternity from some great under-tide, beyond the reach of loss and longing and lust and loathing, beyond the reach of everything for which humanity has found a name.

His reverie was interrupted by strange sounds from the grass plot outside.

"Thik innocent be pestering me partners," said the old woman, rising stiffly to her feet. "Best gie I them bank-notes afore ye leaves," she added, screwing up her eyes and swallowing her thin lips till her face resembled a Chinese idol.

Rook put his hand in his pocket and drew out the two notes. The old woman took a bit of wood out of the unlit stove and a plain steel knife out of a drawer. She laid both these things on the table where the crystal had been, the former on the top of the latter. Taking the notes in her hand, she spat three times on them and spread them out upon the wood-and-iron cross which she had thus constructed.

"I'll be off from troubling of thee any further, Squire Ashover," she said. "And if I bain't much mistaken thee and me will follow different ways here-to-come."

By the time Rook arrived at Antiger High Mead his mother's birthday picnic was in full swing.

The late afternoon sun cast long richly coloured shadows across that small hayfield. The haymakers had left their work to go to their tea and their half-filled wagon was standing under a large pale-leafed ash, its glossy chestnut-coloured horse, monumental as a statue in classic bronze, patiently munching a great heap of fragrant grass.

The three women were sitting with their backs to him so that Lexie, drinking his tea with epicurean satisfaction, his eyes missing nothing of the magic of that June day, was the first to see him approaching.

He came round from the western side of the field, so that his shadow, advancing before him, fell across the whole party and extended to the wheels of the wagon under the ash tree.

"There you are!" he cried in a half-jocose, half-reproachful voice, a voice that carried the nuance that they might have waited for him before actually beginning their repast.

"You're late, Rook," said his mother, turning her head and making room for him at her side.

"How is it we didn't pass you?" enquired Lady Ann. "Is there any other way? I thought you had to come by the road."

"So sorry I couldn't manage that lunch with you, Nell," he said, taking no notice of the questions asked him and putting out his hand for a cup of tea. "Ann has explained how it happened, I expect? She'd got farther afield than she ought and I had to take her home."

"Oh, Nell *perfectly* understands!" cried Lady Ann, selecting a water-cress sandwich from the basket beside her. "Your apologies are so belated, my dear, that they're really unnecessary. Aren't they, Nell? It's just like Rook, isn't it, to be so formal in his explanations? You might think that we were all strangers, instead of — what we are!"

Her rich flute-like laugh rang across the hayfield and, her gray eyes, full of voluptuous malice, played mischievously over both her victims.

"I think it's quite right for Rook to apologize," said Mrs. Ashover. "I'm sure that's the kind of thing I brought you up to do, isn't it, Rook?" The little old lady surveyed her eldest son with ironic complacency.

"You brought us up to nothing of the sort, Mother," remarked Lexie, holding out his cup to be refilled by Lady Ann and laying it carefully down by his side as he prepared to light a cigarette. "You put into our heads such an idea of the greatness of the family that every single thing we did was done as if an Ashover couldn't do wrong."

"I'm sure Mrs. Ashover never taught you anything of the sort," threw in Nell gently, smiling at Lexie with a clinging, lingering smile on her unclassical mouth, while every nerve in her body responded tremulously to Rook's closeness to her. "I'm sure the outside world regards you all as possessed of beautiful manners. Don't you think so, Lady Ann?"

"Is that a subtle suggestion that however much I may marry an Ashover I must always remain an outsider?" retorted the daughter of the diplomatist.

Nell blushed. This kind of equivocal badinage was always embarrassing to her; and she felt vaguely that Cousin Ann was in some indirect way trying to make a fool of her.

Rook, who had been drinking tea and eating bread and butter like a man in a trance, now put down his empty cup, glanced whimsically at his wife, and holding out his hand to Nell to help her to get up, said quietly and naturally: "Come for a stroll with me, Nell, then, will you? And we'll make up for our lost lunch by finding a wood-warbler's nest. There used to be a lot of birds in these woods. Do you remember the black-cap's eggs, Lexie? How we left two in the nest; and I broke all we took; and then got angry when you wanted to go back for one of the two we'd left?"

While he threw out these casual remarks to cover their retreat, Nell was struggling to regain her composure; struggling to get strength of mind enough to look Lady Ann in the face. The temptation to obey him and follow him was more than she could resist; but she knew well that his naïve masculine assumption that he was carrying off the situation by his flippant tone was entirely unjustified.

To Nell's consternation Lady Ann herself at that moment scrambled up from the grass. "Black-caps!" she cried. "Oh, Rook, I'd no idea you had black-caps so near Ashover! We used to have to go so far out into the woods to see one; and then you generally heard it without seeing it!"

Rook's mind at that moment sank down into a veritable gulf of misery. He saw himself for the rest of his life having to deal with this strong, capable, high-spirited woman, for whose personality at that moment, although she was the mother of his child, he felt not one single shred of love, but rather something that bordered very closely upon sheer hatred.

This occasion would probably be repeated again and again and again — the same difficulty in getting away; the same inevitable dissimulation; the same teasing contest. And yet he ought to have been gratified and thrilled at having the love of a girl as beautiful and distinguished as Ann Gore.

The truth was, he thought, as he let his brother Lexie take up his wife's challenge and talk about black-caps, the truth was that men didn't want the love of women, unless under circumstances that gratify a certain subtle craving in their *life illusion*, a certain subconscious *self-love*, which is deeper than any pride, or any vanity, or any conceit, or any lust! They want to love women themselves, in every possible kind of way, wickedly, tenderly, chastely, licentiously; but when it comes to a matter of *being loved*, they become harshly exacting and suffer from every sort of antipathy and repulsion unless in the one single case where their life illusion is satisfied.

The most immoral of men are monogamists in this sense. They are perfectly prepared to exploit the love that women give them and turn it to their own profligate account; but it rarely occurs to them that such love is in itself a rare and exquisite commodity. It presents itself rather as a tragic and burdensome appendage to a lovely and magical experience. It only becomes precious, as a thing in itself, when it answers the hunger of this mysterious life illusion which is deeper than possessiveness and stronger than sensuality.

Women, on the contrary, so Rook's troubled thoughts ran, regard their own "love" as so rare and so precious, that it fills them with a sense of intolerable grievance when the man they care for slights it or undervalues it. They are ready then to accuse such a man of every sort of meanness and baseness. With malicious inspiration they label him with just the particular faults that are most hateful to him, associating their indignation against him with everything in the world except the one thing for which he is really to be blamed; the fact, namely, that he was betrayed into speaking *their* language when he was using them in *his* fashion.

He remembered vividly the latter taunts that his wife had levelled at him as they lingered together in the hall before he started. They were all unfair, unjust; beside the mark. And yet they hurt him just because they touched him where he was most sensitive.

She had accused him of having concealed from her what she called his "love affair with a little chit of a married schoolgirl." And as they watched his mother coming down the Jacobean staircase she had flung at him the taunt which she divined would pierce him the deepest.

"It's *her* blood in you, you know! That Gresham blood!"

While these thoughts passed through Rook's mind his eyes were fixed upon the corner of the hayfield where Mr. Twiney's horse had been tethered. They had taken him out of the shafts and he was nibbling now at the new honeysuckle shoots in the leafy hedge.

Great bushes of elder, crowded with flowery "patens" of ivory whiteness, stretched their branches down to the level of the cut grass; and the look of these heavy blossoms against the close-shaven ground gave to

Rook a sharp sensation of some old childish memory that made his present sadness all the deeper.

The badinage that had been passing like an invisible shuttle-cock among that group of people subsided at last. “Don’t break the black-cap’s eggs this time,” cried Lady Ann after them as Rook moved away with Nell toward the edge of the wood.

They were still within sight of the others and were examining the tiny crimson petals of the first wild rose they had yet seen really in bud when the girl murmured anxiously in his ear: “We must never do it again, Rook. We must be very, very good from now on! Your wife is very angry with me. She despises and hates me, and I can’t stand it. Oh, Rook, how cruel it is for everything to be like that. when it’s all so beautiful!”

He looked at her face vacantly as it was lifted up to him from under her broad-brimmed hat. Her mouth was twitching. Her eyes gazed at him through so much water of unfallen tears that he began absentmindedly to speculate — as if in the presence of a scientific problem — how it could be possible that they could remain as they were without brimming over and running down her cheeks.

“Come on,” he said abruptly. “Let’s get out of sight.”

They moved forward a few yards, skirting the hedge. Nell trailed her fingers through some tall umbelliferous flowers that grew amid the uncut feathery grasses. She hung her head and her heart felt weary within her. Was he in a mood to disregard all she’d been saying — all she had been vowing to herself of renunciation and effacement? Was he going to take her into all that lovely freshly budded greenery, into all that mass of leaves and undergrowth, of ferns and moss and entangled branches, and just seize upon her without further scruple?

Her heart began to beat violently. A vibrant tremor of magnetic excitement rose from the very centre of her soul and, like a mounting stream of quicksilver, quivered through the nerves of her body. By anticipating his unscrupulousness, his reckless indifference to consequences, as something already present before her, she was conscious of a sudden responsive thrill of complete abandonment.

They came to a gap in the hedge. Her heart beat so wildly that she was afraid the man must hear it. Where had fled all her self-sacrificing vows, all her resolutions of effacement? Glancing round at the others before she let him pull her up to his side on the hedge bank, she saw Lady Ann had gone over to the place where she had tied the horse and was re-adjusting the bridle so as to give the animal more scope to feed. There was something in this simple and natural proceeding that struck the girl's mind with a sense of shame. She saw Mrs. Ashover, too, talking so quietly and happily with Lexie — both of them with their backs propped up against haycocks — that she felt as if there were something discordant, ill-considered, irrelevant in this ill-timed love of hers for this husband, this son, this brother, whose days might have stretched out so calmly before him in these pleasant places.

Rook helped her through the hedge, however, and led her straight into the wood. Above their heads the indefatigable little chiff-chaff repeated his two-syllabled monotone. From far up the woody slope, where the trees were taller and the undergrowth thinner, there sounded the *Caw — Caw — Caw* of the man's own ragged-winged namesakes.

Nell's skirts were stained with beech drippings, with the sticky amber-coloured tar of the spruce firs, with the brown oozings of patches of swamp ground, with the black moisture where accumulations of former rains had saturated the hollow interstices of elm roots and oak roots; with the dust of last year's funguses. Burr prickles clung to her thin stockings. Her hair, for she had snatched off her hat and carried it now in her hand, was loose and rumpled, and full of bits of twigs and shreds of moss.

They came to a little open space, covered with thick bentgrass of a vivid emerald green and surrounded by young sycamores. Here they sank down exhausted and silent: Rook with his back against one of the trees, Nell huddled up at his side, her head resting on his lap.

The physical effort which she had had to make, in forcing her way after him through so many obstacles, had exhausted her to such a point that her nerves were now in complete quiescence. The movement of his fingers as they disentangled the various little objects that had got caught in her hair increased her feeling of profound passivity.

His own thoughts were perhaps sadder than they had ever been in his life. The very quietness of the moment, the faint innumerable summer sounds that came and went; the rising and falling of a cloud of indolent sunlit gnats, each one of them a little dancing speck of intense consciousness; the sharp reiterated strokes of a woodpecker hidden somewhere above their heads; the swaying of the bent-grass in a wind that was gentler than the breath of sleep: all these things seemed only to enhance and emphasize the lamentable futility of human life, its confusions, its blunderings, its pitiful misunderstandings.

His heart ached for Netta. If only he knew that she was alive; that she was at least in no desperate straits, in no hopeless misery! But this absolute dead silence lay like a block of heavy quarried stone upon the well mouth of all his natural happiness.

Nell's voice broke the silence.

"It's lovely here, isn't it?" she said. "I'm very glad we came here, Rook. I shall never forget this afternoon. It was sweet of Lexie to make me come, wasn't it? If it hadn't been for him I never would have thought of it."

The man did not answer at once; or rather he answered with a reassuring movement of his hand.

His actual *thought* at that moment was rather to be concealed than revealed; for it was one of those thoughts that isolate a person's identity and put up a sort of invisible screen of malicious loneliness between oneself and one's companion.

He indulged in the fantastic wish, in fact, that some sudden electric disturbance, some insane magnetic current, might kill at one blow every kind of "love" toward him in his mother, in his wife, in Nell. He would like to be loved by only two people in the world: by Netta and by his brother!

"Yes, I am glad Lexie brought you," he said. "It would have been absurd not to have had you here. Ann is not really as jealous as she likes to pretend. But you know how it is with me these days! I can't think of anything. I can't concentrate on anything. I see Netta's face, I see certain expressions of quaint enjoyment, of funny bewilderment, that she used to have, and it just paralyses me! I'm only half alive all the time. And I hate everyone — well! not quite everyone, Nell — who interrupts my thinking about her! Wouldn't you suppose, Nell, that it would be possible by sheer *willing* to force a lost person to reveal his hiding place? It seems so grotesque, so mad, that she should be at this moment somewhere in London wanting to see me; and I should be here wanting to see her; and that we Cannot communicate in *any* way!"

Nell rose suddenly to a sitting posture and turned toward him. "Do you know, Rook," she said, "I sometimes fancy that William knows more about her than he has confessed."

"*What!*" — The word leapt out of Rook's throat like a bullet from a revolver. "*What* are you saying?"

He scrambled to his feet and pulled the girl up with him so violently that his fingers hurt her arm.

"Dear Rook!" she gasped. "I — don't — I — I mean — I don't suppose — —"

The excitement in his face, the return of life to his eyes, the grip of his hand, revealed to her with fatal lucidity how little, in the deepest part of his nature, her own personality and all the romantic happiness that had passed between them really counted.

"Knows more about her? Hastings knows more about her? What do you mean? Has he said anything to you?"

"No — no — no — no," she stammered hurriedly. "It was just a silly thought of mine. It was just that now and then, when I've talked to him about Netta, I seemed to feel as if he were uneasy in some way. I hadn't thought of it seriously till this moment. Oh, Rook, dearest Rook, don't think too much of so little a thing!"

"I shall come over to-night and talk to him. Will he be at home? He isn't away for the night, is he? Let's get back! My mother will be worried. We mustn't keep them. We don't want them to drive off without us."

His words came to her ears one after another, like the rattle of musketry, heard from behind the torrent of some tremendous volume of falling water, some splashing Niagara of doom in her own mind. She had not realized till that second of time how far she had gone in her vague irrational hopes about the future, about a future in which he and she were, by some heavenly sorcery, linked together. Consciously it had been to her no more than an enchanted episode, "the perfume and suppliance of a minute"; but in the unconscious recesses of her mind — as happens with most women — she had been spinning, like an insatiable little silkworm, a subterranean cocoon of romantic inventions.

But it was over now; over for good and all; and she must get back to those self-effacing moods; those moods whose sweetness — though she had not guessed it at the time — must have been craftily nourished by these irrational wellsprings of hope, far, far below the surface.

She must get back to that feeling she had had, on the day in the Ashover drawing room, when he fell at her knees wounded, distraught, beside himself; and she became for the moment a calm healing spirit, without a single selfish desire of her own.

“They won’t have gone, will they?” she murmured, as they pushed their way back through the entangling undergrowth by the way they had come.

“They’ll have waited! They’ll have waited!” he kept saying, as he hurried forward.

When they came to the place where the ground was swampy and their feet sank into a substance that was brown-black with the dissolution of bark and leaves and grass roots and ancient moss, he put his arm round her waist to lift her faster along.

It was not till they were close to the hedge dividing the wood from the hayfield that Rook realized, as he released her waist and let her pause to tidy herself up and put on her hat, how white her face had become and how dazed and numb her whole being was. But self-absorbed in the mania of his remorse, it did pierce the armour of his egoism to see the look in her eyes as she stood fumbling with her hair in front of him, her arms raised and her body flecked with the shadows of leaves and branches. He became conscious that she, too, this troubled figure with the sycamore shadows wavering upon her dress, was unhappy in the same sort of way he was unhappy and without his toughness to bear it.

For a moment they passed out together beyond the circle of both their deep-bitten sorrows; and it was as if what he had felt as he gazed into

Betsy’s Cimmery Land crystal rose up again from beneath and beyond them and lifted them into a region outside the sphere of all human confusion.

“They’ve waited!” he whispered. “I can see Lexie and Mother. It’s all right, Nell dear!”

She smiled in answer and instinctively held out her hand. He took it and held it for a moment. “You’ve been very good to me, Nell,” he said. “I don’t know what I should do if I hadn’t got you.”

These last words of his coming after her realization, that afternoon, as never before, of how little, after all, she really meant to him, sounded as hollow to her ears as the mocking rhetoric upon a tombstone.

She did not speak but dropped his hand as one who had come to the end of her endurance and whose only desire was to escape. Breaking away from him she pushed blindly through the hedge and walked across the field without looking back.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT WAS JUST ten o'clock on that same June evening. So late was the sun in sinking and so protracted was the twilight that even now, although the last yellowish-green spaces in the infinite horizon had faded into steely gray, there yet remained a pallid nebulosity in the air, a nebulosity that seemed to emanate from the surface of the earth, as if the earth were its own moon and had the power of holding back both the velvety invasion of darkness itself and the natural luminousness of the high stars.

Nell had gone to bed by that curious earth light without requiring a candle. She lay now in an exhausted and docile suspension of all her energies; letting the fragrant airs that floated in through the open window stir her hair faintly and lightly upon her forehead and become the accomplices of that abnormal twilight of twilight which made the planetary orb itself resemble a leaf-shadowed glowworm.

She listened for a while in motionless passivity to the murmur of men's voices in the study across the passage. She even smiled to herself a little as the fantastic notion crossed her mind that she might be a girl in Damascus or Antioch or Stamboul or in some place where women had nothing of the free initiative such as they possessed on the banks of the Frome.

With this fancy still in her brain and the large serenity of that June night lulling her senses, she turned over on her side toward the wall. There, in the pallid dimness, she stared passively at a little chance-drawn mark on the gray-plastered surface before her, a quaint little hieroglyph of the fingers of accident, which had come to take many strange shapes and be associated with many strange feelings during her life in that room. Before she slept on this occasion that little scrawl took the shape of Mr. Twiney's cart; and in the cart, erect and straight, stood the figure of Lady Ann, holding the reins, like a classic charioteer!

She had a vague feeling that she herself was fleeing from this equipage, fleeing down the glade of a deep, deep wood; and then, all in a moment, like the celestial clouds thrown about their favourites by the Homeric gods, a great friendly mist received her and enveloped her; and she fell into a dreamless sleep.

Meanwhile, in the room opposite, a momentous and peculiar dialogue was imprinting itself, like a disordered pattern under the hands of a drink-crazed artist, upon the ethereal stuff of that June night.

"She gave you no sign, no hint, then — not one of any kind — as to where she was going when she got to London?"

William Hastings shook his head. Far down in the priest's subconscious nature there stirred a malicious exultation at the fact that he was holding back Netta's secret from this rival of his.

During these last two months, parallel with the cessation of his writing, there had arisen within him a more possessive attitude toward his wife, an attitude that made it harder for him to endure the girl's attraction to Rook. By one of those inexplicable contrarieties which seem so inevitable an adjunct to all erotic emotions, instead of being tempted to reveal Netta's address to Rook and thus to side-track him away from Nell, he was fortified and strengthened in what he had come to regard as a sacred contract with the other woman.

It is likely enough that in any case he would have held fast by his oath to the runaway; but under the present circumstances this oath became more and more of a superstitious trust, a trust into which he flung not only what was obstinate and unyielding in his nature but what was malicious and revengeful.

His pride had been hurt far more than he himself had realized by his wife's infatuation. He must have divined, even while still at work on his book, a good deal more of what was going on than he had permitted either Rook or Nell to detect.

He was a man whose subconscious emotions worked their way to the surface slowly, and, as it were, by a process of infiltration. His first response to his wife's attraction to Rook had been philosophical and indulgent, just as his first response to Netta's flight had been a concern for Rook himself; but both these moods were easy and superficial, while all the while there was gradually stirring within him a dark unconscious anger against Rook which only required the impact of some external shock or encounter to bring to head.

Thus in the matter of Netta's address his feelings had become extremely complicated. He had begun by keeping her secret out of a vague loyalty to her but he found himself keeping it now out of a definite hostility to Rook.

"No," he repeated monotonously to every appeal. "No. She only gave me that letter, which I gave you. Beyond that, you know as much of what happened as I do."

"Hastings, you're not concealing something from me because you think that if I get hold of Netta again it'll make my wife and my mother miserable, and upset everything? If that's what's in your mind I give you my word I won't bring her back! I've no thought of bringing her back, anyhow. It's the last thing I want to do now. I only want to see her, to know where she is; to get rid of this awful sensation of blankness and emptiness."

"So you feel like that, do you?" said William Hastings, pushing the matchbox across the table and lighting a cigarette himself. "I have often wondered, Ashover, whether it was possible for you to feel a thing like this, simply and naturally, as an ordinary man would feel it.”

“Did she mention,” interjected Rook, “when she was talking to you, any names of her friends?”

“She spoke of someone called Minnie,” answered the other.

“That was it! Minnie!” cried Rook eagerly. “Did she mention her surname? Did she mention what theatre she worked in? Did she mention what part of London she lived in?”

William Hastings drummed with his fingers carelessly on the table. He had given Rook his only easy chair; and he himself sat erect and nonchalant on the chair he used when he wrote.

“No. She mentioned no surname and no theatre. She talked of Minnie a great deal. She seemed very fond of Minnie. I began quite to visualize this remote young woman; not by her appearance exactly; but by the way Netta made you understand the sort of person she was. I got quite interested in Minnie, Ashover.”

“You’re sure she hasn’t written to thank you for that money? That’s the thing I *cannot* understand.”

Hastings became aware that irony and sarcasm were entirely irrelevant at that moment.

“No. She hasn’t written to me,” he answered simply. “If she *did*, of course I would tell you at once. I expect she’s got a place in some theatre. Has it occurred to you, Ashover, to go the round of the London theatres?”

Rook cast a puzzled, scowling look at his host. He became vaguely conscious that this little stubby dark-eyed man with the Napoleonic paunch was practising some derisive trick upon him.

“The round of the theatres? Good God, Hastings! what do you mean? Do you mean that I should enquire from every manager in London what people are on his list?"

The clergyman looked at him now with unmitigated malevolence. "Why don't you apply to some detective office, Ashover? Those people are trained like dogs for just this kind of thing. They would probably ferret her out in a very short time."

"I have thought of that," replied Rook, crossing his legs and lighting another cigarette. "The objection to my doing it is, I'm afraid, a ridiculously simple one; and you know what *that* is, Hastings!"

Hastings lifted his eyebrows and drummed on the table with his plump white hands. "I can guess," he said.

"I just haven't any cash," went on his visitor. "I mean, nothing approaching enough for a thing like that! And besides — I suppose you'll think it silly; but I have a sort of horror of using detectives to find Netta."

"Perhaps you don't *really* want to find her," said the clergyman.

Rook looked at him sharply from the depths of his armchair. He began to be much more conscious than he had been at first of the maliciousness in the man's tone.

"Why do you say just that, Hastings?" he asked drily; and if the priest had been more clairvoyant than he was he would have become aware of a sudden veering of the psychological weathercock.

It had begun to dawn upon Rook that this man was, in some secretive way he could not quite define, playing a game with him.

"Oh, I don't mean anything, Ashover. I understand well enough how you shrink from using those people. I only meant that sometimes one is unconscious of the real impulse behind one's actions."

"You're sure you didn't give her any more than those fifteen pounds?"

As he spoke Rook looked at the pale, plump face above him with its heavy-lidded greenish-black eyes and became conscious of the fact that he had no more notion of what went on in this extraordinary person’s mind than he had of what went on in the mind of some great toad hidden under a rhubarb leaf in Nell’s little garden.

Rook had insisted upon returning to Hastings that particular sum; and the clergyman, unwilling to make an issue out of a point of that kind, had accepted the money in the spirit in which it was given.

“Not a penny more,” repeated the man at the table, resting his chin upon his hands and staring at the oblong frame of grayness through which the scented night air came floating into the little room.

Rook uncrossed his legs and clutched the arms of his chair with angry, bony fingers. He scowled helplessly at the impassive countenance above him. There was something in the immense silence of that slowly descending etherealized darkness that seemed to render it a kind of brute stupidity in him not to be able to read his companion’s thoughts. That impalpable summer air was like a condensation of the thoughts of the terrestrial globe itself, strange, dreamlike, non-human, such as rose and fell, fell and rose, with the rhythm of some vast, placid, elemental sea.

Rook longed to tell the man that it was Nell herself who had suggested that he knew more of Netta’s plans than he had confessed; but even in his present harassed impatience he had not quite the cold-blooded cynicism to drag the young girl into their colloquy.

“Shall we have a light?” he remarked at last, when it seemed to him that Hastings was prepared to go on staring into the darkness without motion or change or limit.

The man did rise from his seat at this; moving stiffly, like a person whose soul has returned to its body after some long translunar journey. He lit a couple of candled and put them down on the table before him; where they bowed gently in that perfumed air, one after the other, like two grave acolytes in the presence of a dark altar.

"Hastings," said Rook all of a sudden when, with no change in his position, the theologian had resumed his mute dialogue with the wordless spaces.

"Well, Ashover?"

"If Netta, by any remote chance, *does* write to you, you won't fail to let me hear of it at once?"

Hastings smiled. "Of course I'll let you know of it, Ashover."

The curious thing at this moment was, that, by reason of some inherent duplicity and illusion-weaving power in Nature herself, the priest was actually fortified in his dissimulation by the great flow of honey-scented darkness which now flooded everything and drowned everything.

It was as if "the still small voice" of the very planet we live upon, when, in the absence of wind or storm, it makes itself felt from its inmost interior integrity, were saturated with some irremediable ultimate evasion. It was as though this old protean universe, when once you reached its native inherent character beneath all its masks and transformations, had its own secretive life illusion, its own eternal magic-bestowing falsehood, from which the subterfuges and equivocations of the human race drew living nourishment.

"Hastings," said Rook again. "If you *did* by any chance find out where Netta was, you haven't got any grievance against me, have you, that would make you want to hide it from me?"

Whatever may have been the reservoirs of planetary duplicity from which the priest was able to draw his support there was no need to use them just then; for an interruption occurred which saved him from any reply.

Two moths, of the species known to entomologists as yellow-underwings, flew into the room together and fluttered straight into one of the candles. Hastings gazed at them without moving; but Rook, springing up from his place, began a series of frantic efforts to catch them in his fingers. He stood by the table, making desperate clutching movements with his hands, while his companion, pushing back his chair a little, watched him gravely and silently.

One of the moths was caught at last, and going to the window Rook threw it, rather than released it, into the embalmed darkness outside. By the time he returned to the table, however, the other moth was lying singed and dead beside the candlestick.

"Why didn't you catch it?" he cried indignantly; and the sudden consciousness of what had really happened — of those two feathered amorists moving together over the dark currant bushes in a mysterious ecstasy; of their being drawn toward a flame that desired them not and indeed knew not of their existence; of their being separated with an absolute and final separation; of the one he had thrown out fumbling vaguely with its antennæ in that immense darkness, from under the shadow of a peony leaf or a dock leaf; fumbling and uttering — who knows? — lamentations and moanings that would sound like the voice of Eros himself if there were ears that could hear it — struck like a spear into Rook's brain.

He went to the window, closed it with a violent gesture, and throwing himself down with a groan into the creaking cane chair, rabbed his face with his hands.

"It's getting too much for me, Hastings," he said, "It's getting altogether too much for me! What qualities ought one to have to be happy in a world like this? Ay? Ay? What has Lexie got, for instance? Courage? A lust for life? A mania for the wretchedest flicker of consciousness, as long as it *is* consciousness? Oh, I would like to escape from the whole thing! To escape out of it, I tell you, clear, clear out of it!"

Hastings surveyed the agitated man with a concentrated frown. This interview was beginning to break up the misty veil of more natural human feeling which of late had been forming, like an attenuated film, over the dark river of his thought. The plummet thrown out by Rook's pessimism reached the surface of that formidable undercurrent and stirred its waters.

"Why do you say 'escape'?" he asked sternly. "The longing to 'escape' is only the other side of the lust to enjoy. It's as old as the hills, that 'clear, clear out of it!' and it's as feeble as a baby's wail." He looked at Ashover more gently now, as he felt within him, rising up from the depths, the pride of his own life illusion as opposed to the other's.

Ashover, too, felt, man-like, the challenge of a conflicting system of metaphysicalized self-assertion, and a gleam of interest in their discussion broke the gloom of his mood.

"Well? What do *you* do, Hastings, when you feel the turn of the great screw?"

"I never feel its turn, Ashover! I have nothing in me to resist it and therefore I can't feel it. We're talking in different languages."

Rook smiled. "I've always wanted to ask you what that book of yours is really about. It seems to me that this is a moment when I *may* do that."

The theologian got up. He walked to the window and opened it wide. Then he came back to the table and blew out both the flames.

"We needn't burn any more moths," he said in a low voice. "You and I can see enough of each other without candles."

He resumed his seat and the two men sat silently in their places in that perfumed darkness. There was a syringa bush by the garden gate and the smell of its flowers mingled with the less definite scent of the wide-stretching hayfields. There was a faint dampness in the air from the neighbourhood of so many water brooks, but this only had the effect of making the darkness larger and cooler and more liberating.

William Hastings gathered up within him those obscure magnetic forces to which human beings give the names of "will" and "thought" and "purpose." There flowed into the resultant complex of his energy, as the two sat silently there, a desire to undermine the very foundations of this proud, alien, inaccessible soul that lay chafing and fretting before him with this ridiculous wound in its heart. He felt no pity, no sympathy; but the obscure malice which had been slowly accumulating within him for many months took the form now of a longing to overcome the creature's remoteness and detachment, to invade it, to overwhelm it, to drown its rock base and carry it away on the torrent of his own stronger, more formidable identity.

With a movement of his fingers that was much more rapid and nervous than usual he struck a match with the mechanical intention of lighting a cigarette. The little burst of sulphurous flame illuminated his own bent head; and at the same time brought his companion's face up out of what seemed an abyss of nebulous darkness. He shook the flame into extinction and threw the match-end away.

"There's no pleasure in smoking when you can't see the smoke," he said.

"Well? Are you going to tell me about your book?" repeated the other.

There was a moment's deep silence between them that lay upon the filmy folds of the darkness like a dead child upon a woman's lap.

"Ashover!" The word seemed to come from a portion of the man's being that was behind and beyond his mere physical frame.

"Well? What is it?"

"Do you realize that there is a hidden struggle going on in the depths — an appalling struggle — between two Powers that are beyond man and beyond Nature?"

“I certainly do not,” muttered Rook sullenly.

“One of these Powers is the life force,” weat on the priest. “The other is the death force. And what I have come to realize lately is this: that just as man can put himself into the magnetic matrix of life and germinate new creations, so he can also unchain the cogwheel and break the mainspring in that ultimate darkness! In other words, Ashover, I have found out that the soul of man is a much more dangerous weapon than is usually imagined.”

“All this sounds to me very like what I’ve heard in church,” remarked Rook grimly.

“It *is* like that!” cried the priest, “It is! It is! But that only shows that what I’ve discovered answers to an indestructible instinct in the human race.”

“The human race is not much of a criterion,” grumbled the voice in the cane chair. “It swings east by north; and then it swings west by south. It’s a bloody weathercock, your race instinct!”

“It hasn’t swung much for the last five thousand years on *this* matter,” retorted the other. “Against all the claptrap of science it has steadily maintained the one great appalling truth that men and gods and all the living things in nature are only pawns and dice and counters in a conflict between two equal and unfathomable antagonists! Haven’t you yourself felt it, Ashover?” His voice dropped to a penetrating whisper which pierced the darkness like a conspirator’s dagger. “Haven’t you felt that everything you consciously thought and did had behind it *something else;* gave way into something; just as broken ice gives way? And haven’t you felt that this something was sometimes life and sometimes death? Haven’t you felt that kind of thing, Ashover?”

Rook’s voice out of the darkness had the sort of tone a floating tree trunk might have had, as it knocked against another, on the dark tide of a swirling river.

“My good man,” he said, “I’ve felt so often every kind of sickening sensation that I’ve lost the spirit to tabulate them. I don’t see why you should stop at this duality of yours. Why not take it for granted that the universe is crowded with levels, strata, planes, dimensions, altitudes, regions, all of them full of wretched sensitive beings like ourselves longing to escape?”

The intonation of weary scepticism in his voice seemed to have a peculiarly irritating effect on the priest’s nerves.

“You’re not serious, Ashover,” he said. “No one who analyses his own feelings can get away from this great undertow of opposite tides — the death urge and the life urge. What I’ve discovered is that we can get behind the scene and *pull up the dam,* so that the death force can flood the whole field.”

Rook’s voice became more weary and detached than ever, as all the mysterious polarities in his nature focussed themselves in fierce secretive resistance to this vision that was invading and seeking to dominate his own.

“I think nothing of these forces of yours, Hastings,” he retorted. “Why stop at life and death? Why not have a whole vortex of conflicting powers? Life and death are just words! All we know is a mad chaotic jumble of things that we call ‘living’ and things that we call ‘dead.’ What I feel is that the whole imbroglio may be a set of obscene dreams, a great concourse of phantasmagoric shadows, most of them disgusting; some of them magically lovely! And what I would like to do is to dive down into some lake of nothingness where you could forget that there ever were such horrors!”

Hastings became conscious of a definite feeling of anger toward this man. A vague throb in some old deep scar within him reverting to some half-forgotten outrage his pride had received, when he, a child of middle-class origin, had been insulted by these careless aristocrats, began to mingle now with a rationalist's natural indignation against merely fanciful speculations. These people never took these ultimate issues seriously. They were no more to them than the leap of fish in a mill pond! Phantasmagoric shadows! The great dark fragrant night about him, full of the odours of a red earth, pressed upon his brain with a sense of the thinness, of the irrelevancy, of these bodiless conjectures. Life? Did he not know its bitterness, its brutality only too well? Death? Was not this divine darkness a very symbol of the sweetness of the eternal sleep? He felt that if, at that moment, he could, by raising his hand, have plunged the whole stellar system into final destruction, he would willingly have raised it!

And this man, this Ashover, had now linked himself with a spirited, amorous girl who would soon — he knew it well enough! — satisfy this tenacious family's desire to continue alive upon the earth. And his own fragile neurotic Nell was obsessed by her girlish fancy for this indolent sceptic; this persifleur who, with his pools of nothingness, posed as a martyr of remorse because he had driven his mistress out of his house! What did the man know about "Dimensions, levels, regions"? Phrases of that kind, how hollow, how rhetorical they were, with this enchanted June night whispering to them of the realities of life and death!

Far off across the wide water meadows he could hear at intervals the husky cry of some lonely nocturnal bird, a night-jar, perhaps, or a bittern; and the sound came to him as something that fortified his drastic vision of things. Was he not, himself, a solitary nighthawk crying out aloud, in a language no man understood, as he felt the damp airs of the great flood coming up over the marshes?

"What I feel about all this" — it was Rook's voice speaking again, and more wearily, more indifferently than ever— "is that the true reality of things, the reality that we may wake up to when we die, is so completely different from life and death that it is a mere waste of time to argue about it. You say that my longing to escape is only the inverse of — well! of Lexie's mania for living. But what of your own mania for death and destruction, Hastings? Isn't that, too, with all the energy you throw into it, just the inverse of what you call the life urge? You are really just as dogmatic in your death-cult as Lexie in his life-cult! What I feed is that the whole thing is so mad and so chaotic that to dispute about it at all is to lend yourself to being fooled and deluded. Better let it alone; and just take each day as it comes."

Hastings began to experience one of the most discomforting sensations that the human soul can endure, the sensation of feeling his spiritual pride menaced by something alien, He gave his chair a jerk backward in the darkness and clenched the fingers of his right hand so tightly that the nails nearly pierced the flesh.

It was absolutely necessary to him at that moment to find himself stronger, more formidable, more *evil* even, than this man who carried the airy indifference of his class into the very gulfs! And the sophisticated trifler was loved by three women! The struggle between them had by this time become one of those primeval struggles between two horned animals, in which power over nature, power over women, and power over God are fantastically mingled as the elements of a war to the death.

It seemed to Hastings, at that second, as if their hostility to one another, this sullen obscure wrestling that was going on in the darkness, occupied an arena that sank down into the very navel of the earth.

He felt a desire to go to the window and lean out. From where he sat he could detect a group of little faint stars; and he tried feebly to recall what constellation it would be that at that particular hour looked down upon Toll-

Pike Cottage. A vague uneasiness had begun to trouble his mind; Was it possible that this Pyrrhonian attitude of Rook's toward life, this careless, indolent, drifting "chaoticism," gave the man the same advantage over him in philosophy as he possessed in the material world? But how could a person so casual, so formless, so evasive, be as close to the open secret as one who was concentrated and knit together, with a deep hard purpose in his mind?

He suddenly began to get an impression that Rook was playing with him, *had* been playing with him during the whole of their talk! That was an old trick of these accursed "upper classes." You never knew where you were with them; you never knew where you "had" them! Like a cold finger of boreal ice pointing at his central nerve the abominable suspicion began to invade his mind that his whole system of philosophizing was only a weapon in a fierce personal struggle for recognition, for ascendancy. Apparently it was not necessary for an Ashover to have recourse to such weapons! *They* need not formulate their philosophy. *They* need not be logical or rational. *They* could play with the realities of life and death as they played with their dogs and their guns and their girls. *They* could just lie back upon themselves and be what they were and all the rest of the universe might go on as it pleased! "Chaoticism" indeed! That was exactly the word. To walk through the lanes and the woods; to enjoy his meals; to seduce a girl here and a girl there; and to hand on his name by a well-timed marriage to another generation, who would also lie back upon themselves and talk of chance and chaos; while he, William Hastings, who had put his whole life's blood into a book of crushing, deadly, annihilating power only existed as an object of quaint interest, set aside as a fantastic-brained country parson who was useful for reading pious homilies in the presence of Ashover monuments!

"You won't deceive me in any way over Netta, Hastings?" The words, coming from the other hidden countenance, in that midnight chamber, floated away out of the window toward the little, unknown group of stars.

"Deceive you? Why on earth should I deceive you? I tell you you know everything there is to be known in the whole world!"

The man's voice took on at that point the peculiar quiver which indicates in highly strung nerves the approach of a collapse of all self-control.

"Why don't you apply to the detectives, Ashover!" he went on. "To the detectives!" And suddenly without the least intention he broke into a loud harsh rasping laugh. "The detectives!" he kept on gasping in a choking voice. "The detectives!"

It was Rook who felt a longing to go to the window now. That little room was becoming intolerable to him. He did, in fact, get up from his seat and stagger to the window sill, his legs numb and stiff; but Hastings was still rocking himself to and fro in such an alarming spasm of laughter that he remained leaning there with his face to the interior of the room.

The priest's sinister explosion died down at last and he lifted his head from his hands.

"So I suppose now," he said, addressing the dark figure that concealed so much of the starlit window frame, "you'll have an heir to your historic family."

Rook was too surprised by this rude remark to make any answer at all. He began to think the moment had arrived for bidding his host good-night. There evidently was nothing more to be got out of him with regard to Netta and he was in no mood for prolonging this scene.

But the ferment he had unwittingly aroused in Hastings's soul had not exhausted its vindictive ricochets. "And so it's a boy you're expecting, is it?" His voice became hoarse as he went on with unrestrained malice: "I saw Binnory Drool to-night. He talked about you and about Betsy and the others. You've seen the others, I suppose, Ashover?"

Rook struck a match now and advancing to the table lit one of the candles full in his host's face. He was so startled and shocked by the expression upon that suddenly illuminated countenance that he drew back with an unconscious exclamation of dismay.

"Ay! What's the matter, man? What's up? Are you angry with me about anything? What have I done?"

The priest jerked his chair farther back. "What was that word of yours?" he whispered huskily. "Phantasmagoric! A good word, phantasmagoric!"

Rook took up the other candle in his hand and lit it from the one that was already burning. The two small flames rose now between the two men like the horns of the ultimate Dilemma.

"Your people in the family vault must be in high feather these days, Ashover," the priest went on. "They've been working and working for this, for many a long year. They were getting quite anxious, down there under the stones! It would have been a pity to disappoint them, wouldn't it? I wonder what it feels like to have a long line of ancestors regulating one's private affairs? It must be an interesting feeling."

Rook looked round the room to see where he had put his hat and stick. He walked to the spot where they were and took them up. "Good-night, Hastings," he said. "I must be off now."

The priest rose to his feet like a man drunk or drugged.

"What would you have done," he said, "if I *had* known anything about Netta? Known, for instance, where her address was now? Would you have gone straight off to her? Would you have left your wife and have gone to live with her? Not a bit of it! You'd have given her a little flattery and a little money and come right back here to your walks and your meals and your ‘phantasmagoric shadows’! Tell me this, Rook Ashover. How does a phantasmagoric shadow look when its female shadow has been decoyed away? Does it dance like a good obedient puppet on well-pulled wires? Does it, Ashover — does it?”

It must have happened then that some mysterious nerve in the man’s inmost identity, some nerve which had been strained by his struggle with Rook to the breaking-point, did actually break at that moment, destroying the normal intellectual self-control that renders certain actions impossible. For what occurred seemed monstrous and fantastic when Rook recalled it afterward. Repeating the words: “Does it dance, does it, does it, does it?” the man skipped up toward Rook, his arms grotesquely stretched out, his face distorted into a goblinish leer, one leg bent and raised in the air, the other hopping along the floor.

Rook drew back in apprehension, thinking that Hastings would end by striking him; but instead of that what he did was to seize one of the brass candlesticks from the table and fling it with a wild swing of his arm against the door.

Rook made a half-defensive, half-protective movement toward him; but the gesture proved unnecessary. The man clapped his hands to his head, staggered across the room, and falling into the cane chair where the other had been sitting burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

Two things occurred one after the other then, that were afterward so closely associated together in Rook’s mind that it was difficult to separate them. From the silence of the darkness outside there came suddenly to his ears, carried as it seemed from, somewhere beyond the garden and beyond the immediate meadows, that same extraordinary sound which he had heard on the occasion of his night with Ann in the Drool cottage.

He had no time to analyze the nature of the sound, but there did flash across his consciousness a vague and irrational notion connecting it with the savage outburst with which this huddled and sobbing object in the chair had derided his unborn child. Had the prophet of annihilation been answered by a howl of counter-mockery from those silent tombs under the chancel slabs? Or was the whole thing a ghastly trick of his own disturbed brain, an auditory hallucination practised upon him by the agitation of that extraordinary encounter?

He bad no time to question further this "supernatural soliciting," to use the Shakespearean word, when the door of the room opened silently and, by the light of the one candle that still burned upon the table, appeared the white figure of Nell, her hair loose about her shoulders, her feet bare.

She had been awakened from a deep sleep by the noise of the candlestick hurled against the door, and without any clear consciousness of where she was or what she was doing she had rushed blindly across the landing.

Rook, who had flung down his hat and stick upon Hastings's desk, now made a mechanical movement toward them, feeling that it was not the moment to intrude any longer upon these two people.

Nell stopped him with a quick gesture.

"Oh, what *is* the matter?" she cried. "No! No! I can't let you go like that until I know what's happened! What is it, Rook? What have you done to him? Have you two been quarrelling?"

There was no need for Rook to reply for Hastings himself got up from the chair.

"Go back to your room, Nelly dear," he said gently, but in a tone that made it difficult for the girl not to obey him. "I'll just see Mr. Ashover out and then I'll come. Have you got everything, Ashover? I don't think you'd anything but your stick, had you?"

Rook could do nothing but just press Nell’s hand as he passed. Her eyes clung to his in that dim candlelight in a way he never forgot. He left her standing with the light in her hand at the top of the stairs.

“Good-night, Ashover. I’m afraid I lost my wits just now. I have quite got them back.”

“Good-night, Hastings, and I beg you not to think any more about it or indeed about any of these things too much. It’s better sometimes to wake up in the morning as if you were newly born.”

He held out his hand as he spoke and Hastings, after a moment’s hesitation, took it.

“Perhaps it’s just as well once in a way to lose one’s wits,” he said. “Don’t be afraid. If ever I hear from Netta I shall let you know. Good-night, Ashover.” And he closed the door behind him with a faint recrudescence of his lost sense of formidableness.

At least he had not revealed to him Netta’s secret. It was necessary to his very life, at this moment of the supreme wreck of his self-respect, that the simple chance-given vantage ground of having the girl’s address in his hands should act as a counterpoise to his abasement.

The ultimate duplicity of the universe, whether it were logical or phantasmagorical, had at least given him one way of crying an incontestable “checkmate!” to the Squire of Ashover.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST DAY of June found most of the Frome-side hay fields cut and carried. Not only so, but the newly sprouting grass in nearly all of these peaceful enclosures had begun to assume that peculiarly rich shade of green, deeper than the first spring verdure and in a certain sense even fresher, by reason of the fact that at the earlier season the new shoots are surrounded by so many of the old winter-bleached blades and stalks, whereas, at this great midsummer solstice, between the time of the rains and the time of the coming of the roses, the mowing machines have made a clear field for that vivid aftermath.

The wild roses were out already, and in their glory; so were the cream-yellow clusters of honeysuckle; so also the firstborn of the foxgloves. Field orchids and bird’s-foot trefoil were taking the place of daisies and cowslips; and down in the water meadows ragged robin and marsh-woundwort were lifting their heads amid the innumerable spear points of the new-grown rushes.

Dragon-flies began to appear in greater numbers over the rain-filled cattle ponds and along the ditches; the most common kind being those whose bodies were as blue as kingfishers and their wings like quivering fans of quicksilver chequered with powdered jet dust.

All through that month, through the earlier days of sunshine and through the later days of turbulent rains, Rook had sullenly been groping in his mind for some clue to the almost triumphant malice with which Hastings treated him now whenever they met. He found it difficult to believe that it was simply due to jealousy over Nell; for of late he had hardly seen anything of the girl and when they did meet it was under conditions to which the most jealous husband could hardly take exception.

The fact that his absorbing remorse about Netta had destroyed all desire within him for other women produced the illusion in his mind that he was isolated, cut off, marooned and under a sort of curse. To himself he seemed a moral leper, doomed to produce unhappiness wherever he went or whatever he did; and so, as often happens with egoists of his kind, he took it for granted that others saw him exactly as he saw himself.

That it never occurred to him that he might be paying the penalty now for earlier irresponsibilities was due to the fact that in those first days of his encounters with Nell, Hastings had seemed so entirely removed from all mundane or human emotions. The man had not been exactly what the old books used to call a "wittold"; but he had certainly produced the impression that no romance in which his wife chose to be involved was likely to worry him very much. But all that was completely changed! He felt as if Hastings were watching him with the eye of a malignant raven; and though his own sensuality was as dead in him, just then, as if he had been swimming among icebergs, it was an intensification of his self-condemned loneliness not to have the balm of Nell's sympathy.

This last day of the month was a day of days. It was one of those sequences of twenty-four hours that seem in some way detached and isolated from the rest of the season. There was a mild steady wind blowing from the southwest, a wind that in its journey across the orchards and dairies of the west country seemed to have gathered up the sharp taste of green apples and of green corn, and to have mingled this more astringent essence with the rain-scented breath of heavy-uddered cattle and with the sweetness of old-fashioned rows of pinks in hot sunny borders, between brick paths and box hedges.

By one of those earth-obsessed intuitions which his growing malady seemed to render more intense and clarified every day, Lexie had predicted the occurrence of this halcyon weather and had arranged to have himself driven out by Mr. Twiney to a place called Comber’s End, which lay on the farther side of the great stretch of water brooks and meadows on the edge of which the village of Ashover stood.

Comber’s End itself was hardly a hamlet; its chief peculiarity being an old manorial farmhouse surrounded by a large pond or small lake, of considerable depth, at one extremity of which was an ancient water mill.

Rook was to meet his brother at the spot and they were to lunch together there, Lexie bringing the meal with him carefully packed in a basket by Mrs. Bellamy.

There was no road of any kind directly across the marshes. The best toad for driving round them was several miles east of the village, while the way Rook had selected to walk, following narrower and rougher lanes, was nearly as far as that in the western direction.

It was indeed down a narrow grassy road that he found himself walking, in the mid-hours of that unusual morning, with the larks singing above his head, the warblers chattering in the hedges, and the lane itself stretching away in front of him, a long straight line of narrowing perspective bordered by pollard willows. He felt wearily, hopelessly sad, as he walked along, switching aimlessly with his stick the dock leaves and hemlock plants and rousing from their noon siesta, now a long-legged heron, and now a green snake, while the far-travelled wind rustling through the alders and the guelder bushes seemed to him like a trailing army of defeated sighs; sighs that died upon the air, one after another, and were replaced, one after another, by new fugitives from new fields of remote disaster.

Rook would have felt less sad if he could have regarded the impasse in which he was caught as a matter of blind destiny. The poison that rankled in him came from the thought that he could have escaped from the whole thing if only he had been sensible as Lexie was sensible, and had not just run headlong upon the shoals, like a ship with a mad pilot.

He felt responsible at that moment for the unhappiness of all the lives within his reach. His mother alone was free from the curse that seemed to have fallen upon him; his mother, and perhaps his unborn child. Even his love for Netta was not so much a craving for Netta's society as a wretched remorse at being the cause of her disappearance.

He examined his heart as he went along; and it was borne in upon him that he never had really, in all his life, loved a single human being except his brother. And now his brother was dying.

As he stared at the long lines of pollard willows on either side of the lane, their grotesque trunks, topped by what looked like thick upstanding panic-stricken hairs, became to him a silent avenue of Rook Ashovers, each of them born without a heart and each of them awaiting some kind of retributive judgment day! He wished he could walk along that road for ever and ever; or that, by walking along it till his knees tottered and his soul was sick to death, he might do penance for the misery he had caused.

He saw life at that moment in a different light from any that he had seen it in before. He saw it as a place where not to have become involved in any other existence was the only cause for real thankfulness to the gods; in any other existence than such as was organically linked with his own. For his relation with Lexie had brought only happiness to them both. So had his relation with his mother until she had imbibed this mania about his marriage.

The rest was all misery! Netta he had disappointed and thrown aside. Nell he had tantalized and thrown aside. Ann he had provoked and humiliated beyond the point of forgiveness. What was there about him that made any intimate association with a woman dangerous and fatal? Not simply his selfishness. Plenty of selfish men enjoyed, after their fashion, eminently successful lives with the girls of their choice. There was something about himself, something about his *kind* of selfishness, that was as deadly to his happiness with these sensitive creatures as was catsbane to cats or wolfsbane to wolves!

He tried to imagine a world in which there were no women at all, or rather a world in which he himself had no dealings with women. Could he have lived, in harmonious and contented happiness, without any amorous dalliance? He remembered a certain day when someone or other, he forgot who the person was, had challenged him about his idleness, had suggested that to go on as the impoverished Squire of Ashover, doing nothing but walk and eat and sleep, was unworthy of a man with any spirit. He swung his stick into a bush of dogwood and chuckled aloud. God! he had intelligence enough to dispose of *that* indictment. What did it matter? The world was full enough of "honourable men" struggling frantically to get the advantage of one another in this race for success, for fame, for recognition, for achievement. What did it matter? Better, far better, to live harmlessly in some quiet untroubled place, watching season follow season, month follow month, aloof and detached; leaving the breathless procession of outward events to turn and twist upon itself like a wounded snake!

What did it matter? There was no "great Task-master" in the invisible world waiting to fall upon him with upbraidings and penalties. The opinions of his tribe, of his class, of the human race itself — what did they really amount to? His account was with the universe that had tossed him forth and that would receive him again. No! he could sink back deep enough into his own nature to let accusations of *that* kind fall harmless about him. It was not in *that* direction that his mistake lay. His mistake lay in not recognizing that unless a man has the stomach of a pirate it is better to give these tempting brigs and brigantines a wide berth; better to sail the high seas without meddling with any of them!

If only he had found out how fatally Nature had mingled the elements in him before he committed himself to Netta or Nell or Ann! This blending of an irresistible attraction to the feminine body and mind, with an absolute lack of emotional passion, was nothing less than a monstrous deformity! What kind of a heart *had* he, when he could find it in him to wish that he had never set eyes on any one of the three? His instincts were not perverted. They were only so capricious and elusive, so bloodless and non-human, that they flitted over the flower beds of life very much as those little blue butterflies he was watching now flitted from that patch of St. John's-wort to that patch of hawk-weed!

He began to walk more slowly and driftingly along that interminable lane. He felt as if he had already been following it for half a day; and it still stretched straight in front of him, without any sign of an end or of a turning. It seemed to melt into that leafy horizon as the moon-path across the sea on a moonlit night dips down over the rim of the world.

He felt utterly weary of himself and his familiar destiny. Yet he found it impossible even to conceive of any other. The idea of leaving Ashover and starting life afresh with any new ambition was as far from what his energy could compass as for a perch in Saunders' Hole to turn into one of the swallows that skimmed its surface.

What he craved, with all the desperation of a fox caught by wire netting in a fowl run, was just to be free; free, to enjoy precisely such an excursion with Lexie as this one was, without feeling a dull throb in his secret conscience, like the throb of a malignant growth in the pit of his stomach!

He stopped for a while, leaning over a gate and gazing into the green slime of a cattle-trodden ditch, across which three orange-bodied dragon-flies were darting with as much arrogance as if it were a Venetian lagoon.

He had a feeling that some deep inarticulate grievance, much less clearly defined than these other causes of misery, was obscurely stirring within him. He tried to plumb the recesses of this emotion and he came to the conclusion that it was a blind repulsion at the idea of being married to Lady Ann. He suddenly found himself actually trembling with a convulsive fit of anger against his wife; and not only against his wife. It was as if he had never realized before how profoundly his life illusion was outraged by his marriage. The thought that he was irretrievably committed to this brilliant high-handed companion; the thought that his life was no longer to be a series of sweet solitary sensations, but a thing which was only half his own, stripped the magic from earth and air and sky!

And this was a trick that had been played upon him by a subtle conspiracy of all the persons in his entourage. His mother and Lady Ann had plotted for it. Netta had sacrificed herself for it. Nell had accepted it and condoned it. And most of all, that indestructible and accursed entity, the House of Ashover itself, had pushed him into it with urgent, unwearied, importunate hands, all the more powerful because they were invisible!

His mind began running up and down the events of his life. He had drifted into this cul-de-sac in a sort of anæsthetized trance. Something vety deep in his nature had always preserved an absurd faith in his power of extricating himself from any trap. This faith no doubt depended on his emotional detachment; on those remote translunar journeys of his mind that seemed to reduce all human relations into a misty puppet show, seen through the smaller end of a telescope!

He cast about in his brain until his mind trailed its wings and sank huddled and drooping from sheer exhaustion in the attempt to find some outlet from his dilemma.

To and fro those orange-bodied dragon-flies darted. To and fro across the oozing footprints of the cattle, between great heaps of dung, clouds of infinitesimal midgets hovered and wavered; while in a corner of clear water a group of tiny black water beetles whirled round and round, as if they were trying to outpace their own small shadows which answered to their movement, down there on the sunlit mud, in queer radiated circles like little dark-rimmed moons.

The peculiar nature of Rook’s intelligence did not permit him the pragmatic refuge of some drastic change in his system of life. His soul wilted and sagged but he felt no energy to cry: “Hold … enough!” to the cohorts of chance; or to deify them with ethical nicknames.

That the universe could be envisaged as a place where human characters were hammered and chiselled into some premeditated mould of valour or resignation never so much as crossed the threshold of his consciousness. His vision of things would go on to the very end drawing its quality from just such vignettes of the ways of nature as he was staring at at that moment — those casual heaps of cattle dung, those dancing midges, that green pond slime, those revolving jet-bright beetles!

He was sick and weary with the effort of thinking; of thinking round, and round in the same circle. He was like a hunted gladiator who, in his blind race for life, keeps seeing the same impassive faces looking down upon the same heart-breaking circuit of the arena.

At that particular moment it began to dawn upon him that this numb, paralyzed, gray, horizonless state was worse, in the kind of misery it produced, than his furious self-accusations about Netta.

It was not the Netta trouble that was hurting him the deepest now, it was his reaction to his marriage; a reaction that seemed to menace the very essence of his identity, an essence that had winced and squirmed under the whip of his remorse but after all had been *there*, intact and integral in the darkness; *there* for good or for evil!

But his marriage seemed in some mysterious way to invade this precious untouchable essence, to swamp it, to blur it, to destroy its outlines. The truth was that the peculiar "formula" or illusory "symbol" of his especial kind of sensuality had always implied a very definite relation between himself and the object of its attraction, a relation according to which it was necessary for him to feel himself entirely independent and detached from the other person; necessary, in fact, that he should feel himself to be stronger, more formidable, more integrated than this other.

Under conditions of that kind, with every nuance of this "formula" satisfied, he could be tender, pitiful, and even clairvoyant; as he had been, almost to the last, in his feeling about Netta; but when this "formula," this symbolic projection of the realistic fact reflected in the distorting lens of his mind, was broken up by a differently adjusted balance of relations, in place of tenderness he was liable to feel a blind hostility, and in place of pity a cold-blooded vindictive malice.

His "love-making" with Cousin Ann had always been of a very light and a very superficial sort, from his side of the encounter; just because the strength of her nature precluded that protective or possessive thrill which his vice demanded; and now that he found himself actually married to her, nothing that her brilliance or her beauty or her grand manner could achieve gave him the faintest sensual pleasure.

Rook's was the kind of nature that derives no satisfaction from sensual emotion unless it is at liberty to disparage rather than to idealize; to pity rather than to admire; to possess rather than *be* possessed; and in every one of these requisites he was outraged and frustrated by his marriage with his cousin.

What he really required of life was not an impassioned love with an equal mate, but certain faint, vague, elusive ecstasies that were entirely unspiritual, entirely unemotional, and entirely de-personalized. Women were to him not human souls to be loved for themselves but just vibrant quivering telegraph wires, from which, as they stretched across land and river and hill in their long mysterious reach, the rain-scented winds of night and morning drew magical hummings and whisperings and wild sad prophecies!

Rook had never possessed any sense of proportion; and he was especially liable to let his moods become manias when they were associated with anything physiological. At that moment he got the sensation that his brain was going to burst like the seeds of a gorse-bush in hot weather, as he contemplated those jet-black beetles revolving in their unwearied circles.

He felt as if Lady Ann's personality were actually adhering to his own; and not only adhering to it, but sucking it up; as a whirlpool might suck up a paper boat!

His imagination got more and more unbalanced; ran riot more and more wildly; as he thought of himself in relation to this cousin-wife. He began to feel as if from henceforth to the day of his death he were destined to be deprived of all separate individual reality, destined to become a mere husk or shell, in the centre of which was nothing that could assert itself, or sink down into itself, but only something that had to reflect, reflect, reflect the thoughts of a completely alien person.

He felt as though this female creature, to whom he was now so indissolubly linked, were some sinister living growth, fungus-like and carnivorous, that devoured his flesh and drank his blood; something that it would be necessary to cut away from his inmost bones before he could breathe freely or take any natural pleasure in life again.

The feeling grew and grew upon him, as he stared at that stagnant pond; till it seemed as if some actual magnetic power were menacing him with suffocation! And then, all in a moment, he found himself continuing his slow progress along that interminable pollard-bordered road.

For some reason or other connected with the tension in his brain, the hedges ceased to be green under that halcyon sky. They became gray, like the colour of wood-ashes. The trunks of the willows, too, became gray; and the lane itself under his feet, its deep clay-stiffened cart ruts and its margins of silverweed and feverfew, became gray as the face of some enormous dead creature upon which he was treading.

A paralysis of dizziness seized him, mingled with an abysmal loathing for he knew not what. He staggered as he walked and he found himself feebly shaking his head as if to make some overt protestation against a vision of things that his reason still assured him was unreal.

And then it was that a rider, mounted upon a tall gray horse, came cantering toward him and, pulling up when he reached him, turned his horse round and proceeded to ride by his side along the lane, talking to him as he rode. The horseman was a young man of singularly prepossessing appearance, and as he bent down over the animal’s neck to bring his face nearer to the pedestrian, Rook received a vivid impression that something which had happened to him before was now going to happen again and in exactly the same way.

He was not in the least surprised to detect in his companion’s face a certain unmistakable resemblance to his own, nor was he startled or in any way shocked when the youth addressed him as “Father.”

“It is just dizziness,” Rook found himself saying. “It has nothing to do with what I have been suffering.”

“You must not suffer, Father,” the youth said gently, stroking his horse’s neck with a light hand.

“I thought just now,” Rook retorted, “that there was no human being in the world unhappier than I am.”

“Why are you unhappy, Daddy?” enquired the youthful rider.

“It’s an indescribable horror,” Rook answered. “Something that a lad like you had better not try to think about. I myself could hardly put it into words. But the effect it has upon me I *could* describe; only that would make you as miserable as I am.”

He placed his hand on the edge of the rider’s saddle and the boy laid his own upon it and began caressing it.

“There’s no need for you to tell me, Daddy,” he murmured. His voice became so low and faint just then that Rook glanced at him anxiously. And it was not only that his voice seemed to sink away like a wind that sighed itself into silence among feebly stirred grasses. His very form and face grew shadowy and indistinct.

Rook was conscious of making a quick desperate effort to hold both horse and rider near his side. He had the sense of clinging tenaciously to something that was falling back into fathoms of water. The very silence into which the boy’s voice sank, the grayness into which his form dwindled and receded, seemed to be broken and troubled by a confused medley of hummings and murmurings, obscure, indistinct, unintelligible to the man's ears.

"I thought just now," Rook went on, holding tightly to the edge of the rider's saddle, "that there was no one in the world more cowardly, more contemptible than I am; no one in the world more treacherous, lecherous, and mean-hearted! And then I saw that the green slime was the green slime, that the cattle dung was the cattle dung; and it came into my head that a man has to accept himself for what he is; or if he can't do that just kill himself and end it!"

Kill himself and end it! The words seemed to drift away, over the flanks of the horse and over the pollard willows, as if they possessed some palpable body of their own that could not dissolve at once into the air. Rook heard them floating across the fields. Why didn't they sink into that mass of grayness that now began suffocating him again?

He made a convulsive clutch at his companion's fingers, and once more that fresh, fair youthful face leaned down close to his own.

"It must be the boy from Comber's End," he wanted to say to himself; but in place of saying "Comber's End" the word "Ashover" came into his mind.

And then again it seemed inevitable and natural that the youth should be murmuring: "It's all right, Daddy; it's absolutely all right."

"I must tell him about the green slime," Rook thought insistently. "I must make it clear to him about the cattle dung."

"There's a heron over there, Daddy," said the young horseman quietly, "and it hasn't a gray feather on it."

For some reason or other the sense of a heron having nothing gray, not one single feather of gray about it filled Rook with indescribable relief.

"Can it fly?" he whispered.

But the boy was silent again and once more both horse and rider seemed to recede and recede into an enveloping mist. Frantically Rook clung to those youthful fingers, and as he clung to them they grew warm and firm again under his touch

"It was the green slime," the man began again, in a hurried husky voice, his brain full of the one obstinate desire to make a very difficult point clear. "And the cattle dung," he added, pressing the horseman's hand against his saddle.

"What they made me think was that no one who makes any effort to change his nature or to change any one else's nature has any right to be alive upon the earth." His voice subsided but he was still driven on by that desperate impatient sense that he *must* make everything plain before the lad cantered off.

"Slime — dung — not one gray feather — —" he gasped wildly; and then, in a sudden burst of exultant freedom: "No one is worthy to live," he cried with a loud voice, "who doesn't know — who doesn't know — —"

"What, Daddy?" whispered the voice at his side.

He flung the words into the air now with a ringing triumphant voice.

"Who doesn't know that all Life asks of us is to be recognized and loved!"

The young rider suddenly snatched up the hand with which Rook had been so desperately retaining him and raised it to his lips. Then he gave him a smile the penetrating sweetness of which diffused itself through every fibre of the man's body.

"Good-bye, Daddy!" he murmured gently; and whispering some quick word to his horse he gave the bridle a shake and cantered away down the lane.

The sound of the retreating horse hooves subsided slowly into silence. The boy's face, so unmistakably resembling his own but with a beauty and power in it beyond anything he had ever approached, remained in his mind as an ineffaceable reality!

"Recognized and loved," he muttered; and there arose within him the feeling that it was for the creation of a being like this that all the suffering he had caused and all the horror he had endured found their solution. It was toward this that the invincible life purpose, reaching out from the buried dust of his ancestors to him, had been pushing him blindly forward, tearing a path for it, clearing a way for it, through all his confusions and calamities!

The rider's figure was out of sight, however, now; and the beat of his horse's hooves was quite silent. The feeling which had arisen from some subconscious recess in the man's nature died down with their vanishing. Rook surveyed the empty road in front of him with a vague, incredulous smile. Then he shook his head in the same feeble protesting manner as he had done before.

"Rook Ashover, you must look to your wits!" he muttered; and he struck at a tall patch of hog weed out of which fluttered a tortoise-shell butterfly.

All sorts of quite irrelevant and even ridiculous things came into his mind. He remembered a wooden sword that he had played with as a child and he saw distinctly the gray dilapidated mane of a hobbyhorse he used to ride. Then there came suddenly into his head the word "Gorm," written upon a ghostly signpost.

"That boy must be the boy from Comber's End," he repeated mechanically. But as soon as he had formulated the words he remembered that it was when he himself was a boy that he used to meet the farmer's son of that remote manor house.

The face of the countryside had retaken its natural colour from him now. The appalling grayness which had so mysteriously fallen upon it had completely vanished.

"I must have worried myself into some sort of fit," he thought. "I wonder if I fell down just now and have been lying on the road, as Mother used to say I did when I was a boy. God! I must be a bit more careful how I let my thoughts run away with me! I wonder if someone on horseback *did* pass me by, or pick me up? But what on earth could I have said to the chap? He must have thought I was drunk. God! I must have seemed perfectly mad to him! I talked to him as if he were Ann's child grown into a man. And *he* talked to me like that."

He pulled his hat down over his head and walked steadily forward, puzzled and disturbed. He could see the end of the lane now, about a quarter of a mile in front of him. It merged itself in a broad highway, the famous Roman road between Salisbury and Exeter, and at the point where it met the road stood a copse of larches, incredibly fresh and green against the southern sky.

Rook continued to review with a sullen puzzled obstinacy his recent experience. What annoyed him was that he kept seeing that green slime and those trodden cattle droppings; and then completely losing the thread of everything. Had he fainted there by the pond and just dreamed about the rest? But when he came to his senses he was out of sight of the pond. He must have got up and walked on, still in a state of unconsciousness! He had heard of people doing that kind of thing. What did they call it? *Amnesia.* Well! He must stop letting his thoughts run on into these wretched manias. He had been worrying himself too much. Marriage? Well! Other men had made fools of themselves before, without falling into these morbid spasms of horror. Was he, deep down in his subconscious nerves, twisted in some way, unnatural, abnormal, without the ordinary masculine feelings about women? He knew that the excitement with which he was now hurrying to Comber's End was something beyond any emotion he had ever felt in awaiting a rendezvous with a woman.

Was that fainting-fit into which he had fallen just a mental reaction from some deep shock of physical aversion connected with his marriage to his cousin?

He stood quite still under the green clump of larches and pondered on this with a scowling brow.

What nonsense! He remembered how wonderful and lovely that night in Drools' cottage had been. Was it nothing but the heady fumes of that rich Dorchester ale, nothing but the sorcery of those snow-burdened midnight spaces, that had cast such a glamour over that encounter? Was he, down deep below all his love affairs, an indurated, an incorrigible misogynist? He shuddered a little as the memory of the nausea through which he had passed reapproached the threshold of his consciousness. He shook it off with a jerk of his head and a wave of his stick; and started at a swinging, resolute stride, northward, along the highway.

"I'm tough enough to survive these shocks," he thought to himself; "and I can drink my draught of Lethe and forget them all."

He looked around him now with a return of his natural de-personalized passion for that perpetually changing face of the Frome valley.

"Forget them all," he repeated to himself: and out of the depths of his soul he uttered a kind of inarticulate prayer to those green pastures, to those leafy woods, to those sailing clouds, that he might remain to the end their unperturbed, unaffrighted votary!

After a quarter of an hour's walking along the Roman road he came to a lane on his right which was as thickly overgrown with summer grass as if it had been a narrow elongated meadow. "To Comber's End" said the signpost at the corner; and Rook hastened down this propitious avenue of greenness with a nearer approximation to a light heart than he had known for many a long day.

After following the lane's winding course for some twenty minutes and getting, as it seemed, deeper and deeper into a maze of ancient orchards and dark-stemmed covers he came to a place where his path widened out into a kind of miniature parkland.

Acres of velvety grass dotted with thick-trunked oak trees lay spread out before him in the hot, shadowless noon sunshine, with a herd of brown-and-white cattle feeding on one side of it and a group of horses lying asleep on the other.

The scene had that peculiar monumental quality under the cloudless sun, such as does not often, even in the most privileged localities, arrest the traveller's attention. It struck Rook now as if it came to him with the weight of a whole series of complicated human impressions behind it. It seemed to summon him forth, as it must have summoned his ancestors before him, out of the cluttered distractions of the passing hour into some larger, nobler world, some world that lay all the while only just behind the familiar, the taken-for-granted, the common undistinguished face of crude reality!

He crossed the grass with a happy liberated step; passed close to the sleeping horses whose huge and sprawling abandonment had something so naked, so *animal* about it — their legs and hooves protruded so shamelessly from their round bellies! — that he felt as if he were some shadowy supernumerary come to life in the rich canvas of a Tintoretto or a Titian; one of those carelessly sketched anonymous figures whose business it is to stare modestly and self-effacingly at some great mythopœic event whose "persons" are gods and beasts and heroes.

Passing down an avenue of chestnut trees, whose branches made a flickering catafalque over his head, he came to the edge of the little lake on the farther side of which the Comber's End manor house stood.

The place was as majestic and undisturbed as if the centuries had passed over it like a flock of wild geese dropping nothing but a few gray feathers to mark their flight.

The kitchen garden of the manor farm was surrounded by a high brick wall, the eastern side of which abutted upon the lake, leaving only a narrow footpath, overgrown with tangled vegetation, between it and the actual water.

Rook, as he saw all this, was suddenly almost glad that he had not come bolt upon his brother! That peculiar thrill, unlike anything else in the world, that trembles through us when, quite alone, we arrive suddenly upon a scene that answers to our deepest æsthetic exigencies is quickly dissipated by the neighbourhood of even the most friendly alien personality.

It establishes itself, this feeling, as if it were a furtive, intimate understanding between ourselves and whatever scene it may be answers to our craving.

And such moments have another, a yet more subtle value; namely, their power of linking themselves up in some mysterious way with all the other past moments of a similar nature that we have passed through in the course of our life. Toward these other moments the present one seems to gravitate by a natural affinity, taking its place among them and establishing itself among them, in such a way as to draw them out more clearly, more definitely, from their hidden retreats, and to make us more vividly aware of them.

It is then that we become conscious that in addition to the ordinary gregarious human life, led by us in contact with others and in the stress of our normal pursuits, there is another, a more intimate life, solitary and detached, that has its own days and months and years, such as are numbered by no measurings of common time, by no computation on any terrestrial almanac.

Underneath the procession of our normal days the visions of these solitary moments mingle and flow, making the dust and noise of the overt drama of our life seem crude and vulgar in comparison. They have nothing to do with the emotional or with the rational processes of our nature, these moments of vision. They are purely æsthetic. Yet they are not æsthetic in the sense of being entirely preoccupied with what is usually called beauty. The more definite and more suggestive word "magic" indicates better the quality to which they respond. For "magic" can be felt, both in landscapes and in other places, where there are few elements of those high mysterious values which we associate with the beautiful.

As Rook stood now on the edge of Comber's End Pond and watched the moor hens and coots and wild ducks floating upon water that was the colour of lapis-lazuli, it was not the beauty of the scene that carried his consciousnes down that strange interior river, under ancient bridges and by hushed gardens, past shadowy terraces and turreted towers, past lonely towpaths and long-stretching melancholy roads! It was something that might easily have worked its charm upon him had the place lacked almost all the gracious beauty it possessed; had it been no more than a couple of stunted pine trees staring down upon the raw edges of a deserted quarry!

Rook's own particular response to the accidental groupings of scenery was something that implied sometimes a vindictive malice against the richer forms of loveliness and an obstinate sullen preference for things that were abject, woebegone, god-forsaken. Thus were certain peculiar characteristics in his erotic life transferred to his æsthetic life; and the misery of his yearning to comfort the unhappy Netta found itself balanced by his malignant reaction from the brilliant Ann.

Suddenly to his immense astonishment he caught sight of his brother where least of all he had expected to find him; and as he chuckled to himself and waved his stick in the air he became for a moment a completely different human being.

Gone were all his dark manias and phobias. Gone were all the mystic ecstasies of his secretive personal life. In one great wave of joyous rejuvenation he became a boy again with the companion of his boyhood!

An aspen poplar, blighted by some long-forgotten thunderstorm, stretched a great dead leafless branch, bifurcated in the centre, right over the surface of the lake. Out upon this perilous projection the reckless invalid had managed to climb; and there he lay, in serene and triumphant complacency, his Cæsarean head propped against the blackened trunk and his thin bare legs dabbling in the water. He had been there all the while, watching Rook with a whimsical amusement, and all he did now, when his elder brother walked over to his retreat, was to greet him with such a satiric grimace that Rook felt the same disturbed boyish embarrassment that he used to feel in the very old days when Lexie took him to task for some piece of egoistic priggishness which he had hoped had passed unnoticed by that cynical eye.

“You don’t expect me to join you out there, I hope,” said the elder Ashover, regarding his brother’s position with some apprehension. “What have you done with poor Twiney and his cart?”

Lexie’s only reply to this was to make a second grimace which crumpled up his classical countenance till it resembled one of those goblinish tailpieces with which 18th-century publishers used to adorn their more decorative quartos.

"Don't you worry about your lunch before the moment I've arranged for it, brother Rook," he remarked after a moment of silence; during which Rook seated himself upon the bank at the foot of the tree. "The amazing thing is that I've managed to get you here at all considering the way you've treated me these last weeks."

"Ay? What's that? Oh, you mean that I've been more often to Toll-Pike than to your place? What nonsense! I haven't seen Nell for the last fortnight and we've been together twice — no, three times! — in that time."

Lexie settled himself more comfortably in his seat, drew out of his pocket a small cardboard box, rattled it vigorously, opened it, shook the contents into the palm of his hand, and conveying it from there to his mouth, swallowed it at a gulp.

"What's that?" enquired Rook, lighting a cigarette and stretching out his legs in luxurious contentment.

"Morphia tablets," replied his brother with ironic brevity.

There was a touch of bitterness, of faint reproach even, in the tone with which those two sinister words were uttered, which Rook did not miss.

The two men looked for a moment into each other's eyes. Rook was the first to remove his gaze; and as he turned it upon the sunlit waters of that great placid pond that he and Lexie had visited together from their earliest childhood, a sharp pang, different in its nature from any he had been feeling before, went through his heart.

What *would* he do, how *could* he endure his life, when this brother of his had been driven from his last stronghold, from the bifurcated branch of Ygdrasil, the World Ash tree, and had slipped into a lake deeper than that of Comber's End?

CHAPTER XX

IT WAS UNDER the heavy green of a midsummer chestnut tree, of all trees the one which takes to itself most completely the character of that umbrageous season, of that interlude in the year's progression, when the "primal burst" is over and the yellows and purples of the August efflorescence are still unbudded, that Rook and Lexie unpacked Mrs. Bellamy's basket and enjoyed the culminating hour of their *fête-champêtre.*

The chestnut's branches, with their huge, somnolent leafy fingers hovering above them like an indulgent episcopal benediction, stretched out over the smoothly running brook which fed the water mill at the eastern extremity of the lake. Here Rook ate his meal, seated with his back against the trunk of the tree; while his brother, with that invincible desire to give every passing moment some additional heightening, which the fatality of his illness had begun to accentuate to a point of actual recklessness, had succeeded in balancing himself on one of the great motionless spokes, covered now with moss and ferns, that in former times used to turn the machinery of the mill.

The younger Ashover had finished his lunch — his taste for food was growing steadily more capricious and fastidious — and was now smoking one cigarette after another, as he sat hunched up there above the stream with his knees beneath his chin.

"I hope that wheel won't suddenly begin to turn," said Rook. "How does it manage to stay still with the water flowing on underneath it?"

"It's not really flowing," said the other. "To make it come with a proper rush, strong enough to move the wheel, they'd have to lift up some dam on the other side."

They both remained silent, listening to the monotonous ripple of the little brook as it eddied and gurgled round the stones in its shallow bed.

"There's a trout!" cried Lexie suddenly. "Did you see it? It went under that green stone. Do you remember how we used to catch them in a butterfly net by damming up the pools under the bank?"

Rook shook his head. "I'd forgotten that," he said. "But I remember how you always used to say that a fresh-caught trout, lying stone dead in a handful of grass, was one of the objects a person would remember most vividly if he had been transported to a different planet and was trying to recall the most characteristic and delicious things in his old earth life. The look of those silvery scales and purple spots, with the little bits of bright-green grass sticking to them, was only rivalled by one other thing in the world you used to say."

"What was that?" enquired Lexie.

"The smell of the inside of a pea's pod when you've just shred the peas?" pondered Rook gravely. "Or the smell of one of those squares of fresh turf in a wheelbarrow when someone's making a new lawn; or the smell of honeysuckle, when it's very yellow and a little faded? No! I don't believe it was the smell of anything! What *was* it that you used to put second to the trout?"

He mused for a minute or two in a silence that was full of the faint ripple of the stream and of the distant murmur of wood pigeons.

"I know!" he cried eagerly. "No; it wasn't a smell. It was the look of silverweeds, all covered with white dust, at the edge of a road that's just going over a hill from which you can see the sea!"

Lexie stared at him from his precarious seat on the mill wheel with a strange, intent absorption; an absorption so deep that Rook became aware that his mind had wandered away from their conversation. His eyes as he stared grew larger and more wistful, and the elder brother became uneasy and in some way put to shame by their expression.

There came over him, as he met their unseeing gaze, a sensation of the most heartbreaking sadness; that sort of sadness which comes upon us when in the middle of some hot cornfield, between the singing of larks and the hum of the cutting machine, between yellow stalks and red poppies, we hear the tolling of the village bell and think of the raw, open oblong hole in that crowded enclosure and of the white surplice of the priest!

“I’m getting stiff sitting here,” said Lexie breaking the spell. “Give me your stick a moment.”

Rook held out to him the end of his stick and his brother pulled himself up by its assistance and jumped upon the bank. Here he lay down upon the sun-flecked moss, his head against the other’s knees. Rook ran his fingers over the embossed corrugations and deep-dented furrows of the younger man’s heavy forehead.

“I wish to the devil,” he said abruptly, “that you and I were quite alone in the world! Think what it would be like,” he went on, “if this evening I were coming back with you to Marsh Alley, and there were no one in Ashover House except complete strangers! Mrs. Bellamy could look after us both perfectly well; and we’d have nothing to think of — no worries, no responsibilities! — nothing but just to read and talk and walk and watch the changes of the weather.”

“You might have done it if you’d really wanted to,” said Lexie.

Rook’s hand left his brother’s forehead and made an impatient clutch at the moss and the dry rubble.

“That’s a cruel thing to say; and you know very well it’s a silly thing, too. I couldn’t have left Mother alone. I might as well say to *you* that if you'd really wanted us to live together you'd have never gone off to Marsh Alley at all."

Lexie shifted his position a little so as to get his face into the sunshine.

"How could I live in that house with you and the old man cursing each other all day long? It was you who begged me to go off, so that we should have a place where we *could* be at peace!"

"Then why did you talk just now about my leaving Ashover and living with you? We *did* practically live together in those days. I was always coming over to you. You know I was, Lexie."

The younger man's tone softened. "I know it, Rook, I know it. It's only been this last year, since you brought your girl here, that we've been really separated. Why did you do it, Rook? Why did you do it?"

"I wish to the devil I hadn't done it!" cried the other fiercely. "It was only *that* that made Mother bring Ann here; and if *she* hadn't come, we might have been just as we were!"

"You'd have got some other girl; or *I* should," said Lexie. "No, it's no use blaming each other. It's all natural enough."

"It *isn't* natural," shouted Rook; and Lexie, though he couldn't see Rook's face, was only too well aware of the quivering and tightening of his upper lip and the protrusion of a vein in his forehead.

"It's a monstrous mania, this obsession we both have for young girls! It's inherited from the old man; just as *he* inherited it from *his* father! It was a beautiful piece of irony, just worthy of the way things work out, that it was Grandfather's bastard who landed me with Ann. And then the trouble I've had with Betsy; and with Nancy's luckless progeny! I tell you it's a monstrous obsession; that's what it is!" Lexie got up and sat in a pool of flickering golden sunshine, hugging his knees.

“I cannot understand,” he said, “how you can be what you are, with flashes of noble insight such as you have, and then fall back like this. When you talk as you’ve just been talking I feel only one thing for you, brother Rook.”

“What thing?” enquired the other in a more normal tone.

“Contempt,” was the younger Ashover’s laconic answer.

“Lexie, that’s not fair,” protested the accused man with the peculiar expression of half-ironic, half-authentic humility which he always assumed under a frontal attack. “Why is it contemptible to call this thing an obsession?”

“Because you sing such a bloody song about it, and then go on exactly the same! Why can’t you treat your girls as girls ought to be treated; and as, in their hearts, they like to be treated? Why can’t you just enjoy them for what they are and let them know what *you* are; without making such a devil of a fuss about it? It was a piece of pure sentimentality to bring Netta here in the beginning. And then, to go and marry Ann just because you’d taken your pleasure — —”

“But, good Lord!” Rook interrupted, “one can’t get one’s cousin, and a girl like Ann, too, into trouble and ‘nothing said’!”

The invalid made one of his most goblin-like grimaces at this.

“*She* got her pleasure out of it as well as you, brother Rook, and as for the results — oh, well! It’s no good going back on all that now. When is her child to be born?”

He flung out the question with as much nonchalance as if it had been of very small moment whether Ashover had an heir or not.

“In September, I suppose,” answered the other. In the silence that followed this, Rook’s mind wandered off to Netta and a miserable frown came upon his forehead as with his eyes watching the movements of a pair of green finches in a small hazel bush beyond the stream he wondered whether that drinking habit into which she had flung herself had gone from bad to worse. “I’ve done it for the best,” ran the phrase in her letter. Did *that* refer to the drinking? And if so, what did she mean?

“What’s the matter now?” enquired Lexie, and his elder brother began to explain how his remorse about Netta’s disappearance was mixed with his fear of the effect of drink upon her.

“You know what it is,” he said. “Men can drink heavily without its changing their life. I don’t think women can do that. If once they get any real dependence on it, they’re lost! Their whole nature seems to go to pieces.”

Lexie nodded grimly.

“I can’t think what started her drinking like that,” Rook continued. “She never touched liquor when I first knew her; but since that New Year’s Eve party of yours she got worse and worse. She used to drink in her room. I found a lot of bottles afterward; and I could see that Pandie knew about it.”

Lexie opened his eyes very wide at these words. “You don’t mean to say you didn’t see what was at the bottom of that?” he cried in unfeigned astonishment. “I saw it like a map.”

Rook stared at him blankly. “What are you talking about?”

“You don’t mean to say you missed the piquancy of *that* little game,” Lexie went on. “I don’t know how much was due to your philanderings with Ann and Nell; but it was plain to me that Netta had got something on her mind that she was trying to drown; something that egged her on to be absolutely reckless.”

Rook struggled awkwardly and stiffly to his feet.

“Did she say anything to you?” he cried harshly.

"Don't fly off at a tangent now. You couldn't have stopped her. It was natural enough."

"But she knew Ann and I were old friends. I told her so often. And she hadn't the least idea there was anything between Nell and me."

Lexie smiled complacently and pityingly. "It's amazing, Rook, how you can be so intuitive with women sometimes and so absolutely blind at other times! I don't say that your flirtations made her unhappy; but they were quite enough to make her a bit careless of appearances."

"Did any one else see what she was doing, do you suppose, except you and that little baggage Pandie?" Rook began swinging his stick as he asked this question. A troubled and nervous desire for some sort of action made it impossible for him to remain still.

"I have not the least doubt that everyone saw it — except you. I shouldn't be surprised if Cousin Ann saw it, even before I did."

"Why didn't she tell me, then? Why didn't *you* tell me?"

"Really, Rook, that's going a bit too far! Outsiders can hardly be expected to meddle between a man and his girl. Besides, nothing could suit Ann better than that Netta should make herself impossible!"

Rook let his stick fall to his side.

"You don't think she encouraged her in it, do you?" he said in a harsh whisper. "They were always together."

Lexie laughed. "There's a big gap between encouraging a person in a thing and making a fuss to stop them from it. I don't suppose Ann did anything about it at all. Just watched it going on, as I did, and *hoped for the best!*"

Rook's face was now convulsed with anger. "You were all against her!" he cried. "Every one of you! You all hated her and wanted her to clear out, while you kept me locked up and fed with penny buns like the bear in the Bristol Aquarium!"

Lexie chuckled with immense zest at this comparison. There *was* something, he thought to himself, very like a zoo animal about Rook's sulky restlessness. He got up from the ground and came over to his brother.

"Come," he said, "we won't quarrel over Netta. I would far rather live with Netta, drunk or sober, than be married to Cousin Ann! But don't look so miserable! If I *were* married to your wife I would soon put her in her place. And I'd dearly love to do it, too!" he added, with a leer that was at once dictatorial and satyrish. "I'd manage her, brother Rook. I'd tame her."

They gathered up the remains of their meal and tossed them into the basket.

"No, I'll carry it," said Rook, "and you take my arm! I can't have the doctor cursing me for tiring you out over this day's business. I want to have a lot more jaunts with you this summer."

They moved off together along the edge of the lake. For some reason or other Lexie's blunt, uncompromising attitude to Lady Ann gave Rook a feeling of relief. He felt less submerged, less invaded, less divided from himself with his brother at his side.

"Well!" he said presently. "This isn't the first time you and I have walked along this piece of grass. Oh, Lexie, Lexie, what things we have seen and felt together! I know that, wherever I am and whatever I see, there aren't many objects that catch my notice without my wanting to share them with you. I don't hold back much from you, Lexie."

The younger Ashover irreverently put out his tongue at this.

"Liar!" he said. "You know perfectly well that you're as reserved as the devil, even with me! I often feel that you have endless ideas and sensations that you hug to yourself and would hate my getting a hint of. But I do believe you love me, Rook, better than any one else. I think you'll feel queer, now and then, after I've been put by Mr. Pod under that elm tree."

Rook's reply to this was to hang his stick over his wrist and hug his brother tightly in his arms, kissing him repeatedly on cheeks, mouth, eyes, and forehead.

"Well!" he said breathlessly as he released him, "it's a good thing that you and I were born under the same roof. Think what it would have been like if we'd just casually glanced at each other on some railway platform or pavement and realized what we'd missed when the crowd divided us! No, no, Lexie. Nothing will make me believe that you won't live longer than I shall. These doctors are always making mistakes. There! I announce to you, this last day of June and by the edge of this blue lake, that we shall live to walk here together in twelve months' time, talking just as freely as we're talking now! Perhaps I shall have found Netta again by then."

They looked straight into each other's faces; and one of those moods that do not often fall upon human beings, unless brought about by the magic of sex, passed over both of them and blended with the noble and spacious purlieus of those manorial woods, with the deep blue of the water, with the brick towers and gray slate roofs of Comber's End.

They moved on then; and after walking round a bed of reeds, from which a moor hen and its half-grown family splashed out into the open pond raising a thousand iridescent ripples, they came to a pause by a low ornamental wall decorated at intervals by brick pilasters the capitals of which were covered with the white droppings of innumerable swallows who made them starting points for their flights over the lake.

The two Ashovers sat down upon the sun-warmed coping of this low wall, a pleasant relic of the times when the Lords of Comber's End were the feudal enemies of their own family. It gave Lexie, who was something of an antiquary in these historic matters, quite a complacent thrill to be able to remind Rook how long ago it was that the last of these hereditary foes had died childless. “It would have given *him* a shrewd slap in the eye,” he grossly chuckled, “if he could have looked forward a couple of hundred years and seen *us* sitting here in ease and satisfaction.”

Rook sighed. “Perhaps not,” he said. “He may even be at this very moment anticipating the blow that’s going to finish us off. How do we know that Ann’s child won’t turn out a girl? If it does, *that’ll* end it! Comber’s End and Ashover’s End — there’ll be nothing to choose between’ em.”

“Why do you say ‘that’ll end it’?” protested the other. “It looks to me as if my sister-in-law were good for more than one fling of this sort.”

Rook was silent. Why *had* he said just that? The words had seemed to come from him with the smooth and suave fatality of speech which makes it difficult for poets to say “earth” without saying “green” and “sky” without saying “blue.”

“Somehow,” he contented himself with replying, “I can’t imagine Ann not having a son for her first child.”

He smiled at that moment to himself; for he thought how Lexie would have jumped out of his skin if he had answered him by saying that he had himself, that very morning, seen with his own eyes the boy that was to be born!

“By the way,” he enquired casually, “do you know if there are any young people at the farm here now?”

Lexie looked at him significantly and quickly. “I’ve a good reason to know,” he said; “but I was going to keep it from you for a bit longer. As a matter of fact, there’s a very handsome youth there and a charming young girl. I know it because I had a companion with me when I drove out here this morning."

It was Rook's turn to show signs of agitation.

"What's this?" he flung out. "You don't mean to say — —"

Lexie interrupted him. "It's Nell," he cried hurriedly. "Don't get annoyed with me, Rook! I met her quite by chance and begged Twiney to stop and pick her up. She was setting out to see this youth and his sister on some parochial affair of Hastings's. Hastings puts lots of things of that kind off on her."

"Where is she now?" The words broke from the elder man with an impatience and eagerness that surprised himself.

"I don't know where she is now," answered Lexie. "I told her we'd call at the house and take her home late in the afternoon. I meant to keep it as a surprise for you, so, for God's sake, don't look so sick!"

Rook "sleeked over," as the poet says, his agitated expression; and picking up a loose piece of masonry from the wall beside him flung it into the water. The missile caused an enormous circle of ripples which enlarged and enlarged under their eyes.

"Do you remember how we used to play ducks and drakes in this pond?" he said. "I can't remember now where we got the stones."

"Under the house, over there," said the other. "You used to send me off to get them while you went on reading your book!"

Once more, deep down underneath the immediate agitation of Nell's presence between them, the old familiar thrill of their intimate association ran through Rook's soul. He watched the ripples that he had made in the water go on extending and extending toward the centre of the lake. "When Lexie and I are together," he thought, "it's as if a new personality were created that throws a glamour over the tiniest little thing that happens."

“Do you believe,” he said aloud, “that there’s *any* chance — any shadow of a shadow of a chance — that you and I will meet again after we’re dead?”

Lexie’s answer to this was not lacking in either emphasis or assurance.

“Not the faintest,” he said with a smile. “While either of us is alive the other will, in a sense, go on living. But when we’re both dead, we’re both dead. Do *you* realize what to be dead actually means, brother Rook? I sometimes have the feeling that in *that* matter I have more imagination than you!”

When he turned to see the effect of his words upon his companion he saw Rook’s gaze intently fixed on something on the lake which was obscured from his own sight by a tuft of reeds. But a moment later he, too, saw it — the form of an incredibly proud and majestic swan, paddling slowly toward them.

The bird was so beautiful that the vision of it passed beyond the point where either of them could share the feelings it excited with the other. It seemed to bring with it an overpowering sense of awe; for both the Ashovers regarded its advance in spellbound silence. It was as if it were floating on some mysterious inner lake that was, so to speak, the platonic idea, or the ethereal essence, of the actual lake which they were contemplating. It might have been swimming on an estuary that had suddenly projected itself into our terrestrial spaces from a purer level of existence, some tributary of the Eternal and the Undying, that flowed in for one ineffable second of time, converting the watery element it mingled with into its own ethereal substance.

The spell of its approach was broken as soon as the bird itself realized that the Ashover brothers were not two motionless tree-trunks, but alien and disturbing invaders. It swung round with a proud curve of its great neck and an eddy of the blue water about its white feathers, and sheered off toward the centre of the pond.

Rook and Lexie regarded its departure with concentrated interest; but now that the magical moment had passed they were able to note the almost humorous effect of the swan’s attempts to retain his impassive dignity, to show appropriate indignation, and at the same time to put a good clear space of deep lake water between himself and the onlookers.

“Susannah and the Elders!” murmured Lexie with a chuckle. “But aren’t they provocative and tantalizing? I wish we could hide ourselves in the reeds and see it making love to Leda. What a shame Nell isn’t here!”

“It’s its neck that’s so arresting,” said Rook. “That sense of incalculable power mixed with serpentine beauty!”

“I don’t know about that,” remarked Lexie, “but I would give a great deal to see Nell caressing it.”

A heathen and classic wantonness descended upon both men. They began to feel an irritable desire to separate from each other and find, each for himself, a companion as beautiful and capricious as that proud bird.

“I don’t see why we should wait till the end of the afternoon,” said Lexie, “before getting hold of Nell. What do you feel about going straight up to the house now?”

“All right,” Rook agreed. “Only you know what that means? It means we’re bound to quarrel! Won’t you admit now that this whole business is a mad obsession? Here we sit, you and I, in the very acme of our precious day; everything enchanting round us, everything doubly delicious because we’re together; and the mere sight of that bird’s neck sets us off on the old wretched will-o’-the-wisp hunt, ‘over bog, over briar,’ though we know perfectly well that the whole thing’s an illusion!”

Lexie made a deprecatory grimace. “Not an illusion at all. That’s one of those tiresome metaphysical tricks you’re always indulging in. Besides, it doesn’t mean any very great separation. We usually come back to each other pretty quick, good luck or bad luck! Do you remember in old days how we used to set out for a bit of sport to Tollminster Great Fair? Have you forgotten those fields down by the river at Bishop’s Forley? Or those seats under the trees at Polberry Cross? *You* used to be much more excited than I was when we started off, after breakfast, on a fine August day. That’s just what you double-faced metaphysicians are always up to! You want to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. You want to call honest natural pleasure an illusion; and yet you’re more frantic to get hold of it than any one else!”

Rook sighed heavily. His brother’s words, bringing back the long summer days of that old, careless, irresponsible life, made him feel the full weight of all his present miseries. Oh, why couldn’t one separate altogether the spirit of adventure in these things from the wretched entanglements that come in their train? The outrageous notion came into his head of how lovely it would be if these irresistible beings, who allured him so, were as heartless and emotionless as that clouded-yellow butterfly whose flight he was now observing! Why couldn’t it have been arranged like that; emotion and attraction remaining absolutely distinct things? They *were* distinct in him! Why couldn’t they be distinct in everyone? And then, as the image of Netta’s face as she had turned toward him on that last day in their room rose up before his mind’s eye, he knew that all this chatter about sport and pleasure was a mere ruffling of the surface of reality. How could one even dream of girls being like clouded-yellow butterflies, when that single look, terrible and beautiful “as an army with banners,” in the face of *one* of them, was enough to take the taste out of all food and the sweetness out of all sunshine?

“Let’s walk once across the field before we do anything else,” he said sadly; and Lexie was far too sympathetic to the fitful moods of his brother, and far too sagacious, to utter a word of protest.

So, turning their backs to that blue water, they moved slowly side by side across the sunlit park land. The oaks were beginning to cast shadows now, short abrupt shadows, the hot shadows of an early summer afternoon, smelling of moss and the breath of cattle and of puff-ball funguses.

The horses, which Rook had passed earlier that day, stood crowded together in the shade; while the brown-and-white cows, beginning to grow restless at the approach of milking time, moved uneasily along the edge of the meadow palings, snuffing the air and lowing.

They crossed the whole expanse of the grass in silence, and when they reached the road Rook could see that Lexie showed signs of feeling his malady upon him. They sat down by the roadside under a beech tree, where the ground was covered with last year’s leaves and the scattered husks of beech mast. Here Lexie produced his little box and swallowed the last two tablets which it contained.

“I must have another,” he murmured. “He said I could take three.”

He dropped the empty box on the ground beside them and produced an unopened one from his pocket. Out of this, when he had broken its wrapper, he extracted one more tablet and swallowed it hurriedly.

“Let’s have a look!” cried Rook, taking the little box into his hands.

The strain of suffering passed very quickly out of the younger man’s face; as if his faith in the beneficent drug had the power of anticipating its chemical and physical effect.

"Ten of those little things," he said, "would finish *you* off, Rook. I fancy it would need about fifteen to kill me, as I've become inured to it. Odd, isn't it? Think now — how simple it would be for both of us to gulp them down, one after another; and then just to light our last cigarettes and make ourselves ready for Eternity. We're in such a convenient place, too! Twiney would be bound to find us; and he could bundle us into the bottom of his cart as if we were venison. Nell would have to sit by his side with one foot on you and one foot on me. It would be quite a *cortège-macabre.* The whole village would turn out to see us go by. You know how the rumour of those things runs in front of the thing itself? 'The brothers Ashover, furtively but blamelessly pursuing their last journey into their native domains.' Can't you hear how Hastings would describe it to his friend in Bishop's Forley? Can't you catch the unctuous clerical humour enhancing the taste of the well-baked tea cakes on some little tennis-lawn?"

Rook, who was holding the box tightly in his fingers, looked at his brother with a scowl. "I think it's extremely wrong of Twickenham to let you have so many of these damned things! You might easily swallow them in your sleep; or even forget how many you'd taken and take an overdose. Really, Lexie; I mean what I say! It's not right. I don't like it. There! I'm cursed if I'll give them back to you!" And he proceeded to put the box into his own pocket.

"Give me those tablets, Rook, or I shall get angry! You needn't blame Twickenham. I only get the prescription from him. The chemist makes them up. He's an old friend of mine. You don't know him. He's a great fisherman and we talk of flies. He knows me too well to be afraid that I shall take one tablet more than the right amount. And no one but you would ever dream of a person taking morphia tablets in his sleep. Give them back, Rook, or I shall get very angry with you, and that *may* finish me off!"

His face became so agitated that Rook did grow afraid as to the effect such excitement might have, and drawing out the box he laid it down on the grass by the side of the empty one.

At that moment Lexie struggled hurriedly to his feet. “There’s a White Admiral!” he cried in childish eagerness. And sure enough, clinging to a beech leaf on a bough that was just above their heads, its wings drawn back so that the translucent loveliness of their green-veined sides was revealed in full sunshine, swung this rare and exquisite butterfly.

Rook watched his brother standing there with his back to him, his arm extended and his hand moving slowly and tremblingly toward the unsuspecting creature, evidently, from its flawless freshness, just emerged from its chrysalis. How often had he surveyed in old days this familiar figure, stealing up toward some gorgeous hoverer, his whole being absorbed and rapt in the intensity of the chase.

There! Lexie had made his snatch at it, but the White Admiral had slipped away and was fanning its wings, wide-open now so that its proud black-and-white markings were distinctly visible, on another beech twig farther away.

Lexie moved toward it and once more stealthily lifted his hand.

It may have been that this familiar vision, redolent of old, sweet memories, brought to the elder brother’s mind, in one unbearable rush of bitter thought, the feeling that henceforth he no longer possessed his own independent identity; or it may have been that ever since he first saw Lexie with that little box, the idea had been vaguely stirring within him that it would be wise to have such a key to final escape safely in his keeping! Whichever way it was, just at the moment when Lexie was most absorbed, Rook quickly opened the full box, emptied about twenty of the tablets into the other one and thrust the two boxes into different pockets.

Among the many movements made by the animals and the birds in the environs of Comber’s End on that loveliest of midsummer days it was significant enough that the two most symbolic and expressive ones made by mortal men should have been a movement to capture one tremulous living creature and a movement to set free another; to capture a White Admiral butterfly, and to set free — *hospes comesque corporis* — a human soul, fooled to the top of its bent.

CHAPTER XXI

JULY PASSED AND August came. The halcyon weather of the Comber's End day had not lasted very long. The latter half of July was gusty and cold. In many of the cornfields the wheat lay prostrate, beaten down and rain-sodden; while the hedge flowers, such as knapweed and scabious and ragwort, had that look of overweighted overgreen foliage and undersized rain-blighted blossoms such as indicates the absence of long hours of uninterrupted sunshine.

But with the coming of August all this changed. The prostrate corn lifted itself up a little. The roads grew dusty. The fairy rings on Battlefield turned pale green; the turf around them became bleached and yellowish; while the taller grasses at the edges of the fields assumed that shade of old mellow gold which answered to the ripening of the grain at their side.

The effect of the preceding stormy weather had been to produce an anticipation of autumn in certain aspects of that harvest season, in others to retard the autumn's approach with a kind of second midsummer. It was only on the higher uplands and on the slopes of the hills, where the soil was lighter and more gravelly, that the grass embrowned itself and lost its sap. In the valleys it remained moist, even after many long, hot days; and though groups of trees, here and there, that had been exposed to the rains and winds carried signs of their ill-usage, the more protected ones, in the depths of the Antiger Woods, for instance, were as richly green still as in the early days of June.

But a week of hot sun and sultry twilights soon manifested its effects. All along the banks of the Frome great spikes of purple loosestrife alternated with the ragged clumps of hemp agrimony and with the rose-coloured tufts of willow herb. The ditches of the water meadows were overgrown with meadowsweet; and under the crowded stems of the hazel copses the yellowing leaf spears of the dead bluebells were covered with masses of enchanter's nightshade.

But the real quality of these cloudless August days was to be found in the cornfields. Here amid the tall yellow stalks and the grain-swollen ears of wheat and barley rose up as if over night, millions and millions of poppy flowers. Something about the texture of these filmy scarlet petals, as if they had been made of the blood of the earth itself, shed by hot sun kisses and staunched by hot sun breath, carried the very secret of that season from field to field and across the white haze-tremulous roads.

Little quivering vibrations in the air, waves of heat, would be seen floating now over the tops of thyme-scented banks or over the burnished metallic surface of the bracken. And as these flickering heat waves drew their faint purplish veil between one's eyes and the landscape, they brought with them the feeling, even in the midst of some brief stroll abroad after early tea, that one was upon a long, significant journey; a journey to a country quite unknown, to great dim cities with towers and spires, far off, over leagues and leagues of shimmering poppy-stained vapour!

And indeed, as one great spacious golden morning followed another, there did seem to grow upon the consciousness of more than one of the persons living in Ashover the feeling that they were being carried forward on some steady-keeled purple-sailed galleon toward the unknown marvels of an unknown harbour.

Lady Ann, now beginning the eighth month of her pregnancy, seldom left the garden. For hours she would sit on her chair under the linden tree, her hands idly clasped upon the book in her lap, her eyes fixed on the shadows on the grass.

Rook had become more considerate and more tender toward her as her time drew near; but he could not pretend to an excitement he did not feel; and for any sympathy in the paramount question that absorbed her — would her child prove to be a boy? — she was driven to the rather teasing and exhausting speculations of Mrs. Ashover, combined with the old lady's memories of the pre-natal peculiarities of her own sons.

It was the beginning of the second week in the month. The herbaceous borders of the Ashover garden had become like little tropical forests of heavily scented blooms to the bumble-bees and humming-bird moths that moved about among them. Round the high stalks of the delphiniums and the hollyhocks all manner of smaller flowers huddled themselves: petunias, verbenas, calceolarias mingling with every variety of campanula.

"How incredibly secure," thought Rook to himself, as at about two o'clock in the afternoon of a day that seemed even hotter than the preceding ones he strolled along the flower borders with the vague intention of taking the opportunity of a solitary walk while his mother and his wife both rested and the whole place was hushed in its noon siesta, "how incredibly secure and complacent you do look!" He surveyed half-enviously a small patch of blue lobelia that had got itself wedged in between two tufts of London Pride. "I suppose the life of a lobelia is entirely composed of long delicious passive sensations! I suppose a deep narcissistic ecstasy in its own Tyrian blueness is thrilling through it at this moment, combined with all sorts of mysterious *rapports* with the earth and air such as our animal senses have absolutely no idea of! I daresay it can even feel the movement of the planet itself; very likely blowing back a lovely freshness upon it, through all this heat, from airs outside any of the airs that we're conscious of! And it probably has the most subtle nuances of pleasure from its sense of the deep cool earth under its roots. I must tell Twiney to make sure he waters all these beds every evening now!"

He glanced at his wife's chair with her book and parasol left upon it; and it struck his mind how completely this girl of sport and adventure had submitted to her new rôle. He sighed heavily as he turned the corner of the house; for it was borne in upon him that he had made not the least attempt to penetrate the barrier of aristocratic reserve with which this mother of his child had guarded her feelings. She must have been having her panics and her disgusts; as well as her thrilling moments of mysterious pleasure! He certainly had made no attempt to arrive at any real intimacy with her, at any intelligent comprehension of what she was feeling at this crisis in her life.

What strange creatures human beings were! What obstinate, obdurate walls of egoism separated them from one another and substituted ignorant hostility for imaginative understanding! He walked round the house and down the kitchen-garden path where the rows of dahlias, tied to tall sticks, were still only masses of dark glossy foliage with chilly sour-looking globular buds that in their immaturity seemed to reject rather than welcome the noon heat. The difference between these sap-cold shining-leafed plants and the warm bloom of the peaches ripening so fast against the hot red bricks of the great garden wall fell in with his fatalistic thoughts; seemed to suggest the same insurmountable divergencies in the vegetable world as existed in human nerves!

But how infinitely shut away from vexations and tribulations the garden was, with its floating breaths from mint and rosemary, with its vague, sweet, diffused essence of ripening fruit under the hot, tarry netting, where the wasps buzzed and the white butterflies played!

The place seemed to hold up invisible barriers against everything in the world that was not gracious and time-mellowed. Mild ghosts of generations of placid gardeners seemed to bend over those well-weeded furrows of brown earth mould; seemed to raise old wrinkled sunburnt hands to the rusty nail heads and mouldering shreds of cloth which held the smooth twigs of the apricots; seemed to shuffle along those quiet paths carrying musk-scented geranium plants from “frame” to flower bed!

The spot seemed in some especial sense the accumulated retort of the human race to all the elements of chaos. Rook felt, as he loitered in it, as though the absence from his own days of the sort of patient diurnal labour which for generations had made all this possible was the central cause of his discontent.

He passed out at last into the orchard; and from the orchard into the open uplands. The slope of Battlefield as he made his way between gorse and bracken was sweet with the invisible scent of thyme. It was difficult not to tread upon tufts of euphrasia and milkwort; and when he reached the top of the hill the hot, windless suction of the noon’s leonine mouth had filled the air so full with the odour of pine bark and turpentine and fir needles that he felt as if the trouble of human thoughts were a kind of foreign intrusion, an ill-mannered and irrelevant guest, amid the largesse of all this earth life.

Instead of exhausting him, the heat of that hour of the day seemed to put a sort of magnetic fever into his blood. He ran down the slope of Dorsal, sweating from every pore, but with an almost fierce exuberance of energy. Reaching Antiger Lane he turned to the right, away from the Drools’ cottage, and began striding up the road at a great pace, swinging his stick as he walked. He soon passed the place where Ann had confessed to him just four months ago that she was with child, but even the sight of the hedge and bank and gate and trees at that particular point did not destroy the careless aplomb of his mood.

By degrees the nature of the scenery on the side of the lane facing the Antiger Woods changed its character. The hillside diminished to a gentle upward incline and by the time he arrived at a point parallel with the village of Ashover this slope became a field of ripe wheat.

What wind there was — an almost imperceptible breath from the east — reached his senses across this cornfield; and the smell of the ripe ears, like a quintessential airy diffusion of the bread of life itself, passed into his veins and increased the heathen exuberance of his blood. For the first time since he had seen that white swan's neck curving so provocatively at Comber's End, Rook immersed himself in the great undertide of the world's sensual life. All sorts of passing impressions, selected at random out of the things he had seen that day, conspired together to push him on into this fatal humour. The blue lobelia was there, the yellow wasps were there, the rusty nails in the scraps of cloth against the hot brick wall were there, the tonic fragrance of the fir trees; and now this sense of the bounty of the gods in the "living bread" of the generations!

There came over him the old mysterious classic acceptance of life upon the earth, of birth and death, of pleasure and sorrow, of love and the loss of love; and he had the feeling that whatever might be the issue of all these things for him, it was enough that they had been just as they had been. The horror that is never very far away, the loathing and the sick mad dread, seemed to fall off from his thoughts like scum from a boat's prow.

That immense noon heat, large and indolent and yellow pelted, like a great planetary lion, had licked up with its burning tongue all the poison and putridity.

He was immensely surprised, as he turned a corner of the lane, to encounter the redoubtable Mr. Twiney seated luxuriously in his familiar cart while his long-necked mare cropped the grass by the hedge.

Rook had no sooner caught sight of Mr. Twiney's face than he knew that something had ruffled the man's equanimity. The blue smoke from his pipe ascended in a thin spiral wisp and wavered among the thick sycamore leaves above his head as if it had been the tail of some dreamy feline ghost; but Mr. Twiney's tone did not correspond with the placidity of the smoke.

"Heigh! And what be Squire Ash'ver doing, then, this peevish-hot day? Ain't it enough to make man and beast sweat their selves into rain pipes; and grow as slippy as eels in pond mud?"

"It certainly is pretty hot, Twiney," said Rook, wiping his forehead. "How does your wife stand this kind of weather?"

Mr. Twiney sat erect at this and eyed him with a defensive and suspicious eye.

"Me old woman be snappish in winter, prickish in ploughing time, and all heads-and-tails in harvest. But come summer, same as us has now, and she be sweet as oil of Lebanon. I wish other folks were as well-spoken as my old woman be."

Rook undid the buttons of his waistcoat and tugged at his flannel shirt so as to let the air touch his skin.

"Who is it you're waiting for?" he enquired.

The owner of the mare gave the back of his grazing animal a gentle flick with his whip.

"Them sting flies be poisonous bad for horseflesh," he remarked meditatively. "What they do feed on when there ain't no horses where they do bide passes me comprehension."

"Twiney, who *are* you waiting for?" Rook repeated in a more abrupt tone.

The man looked at him rather dubiously. "I suppose I ain't giving away no lady's secrets nor no gentleman's either, when I tell 'ee, Squire, that 'tis thee own brother that I've a-brought here, long wi' Missy Hastings from Toll-Pike."

"Oh, naturally — quite right — very nice. I'm so glad." These meaningless syllables fell from Rook's lips as if they had been over-ripe apples detaching themselves from a motionless bough on a windless night.

The man in the cart watched him closely, but the indolent and casual expression on Mr. Twiney's freckled face made him appear as one who while observing everything observed nothing.

"They be gone to Titty's Ring, Squire," he said pensively. "'Twere only a few minutes agone that they set out. I saw the tail o'n vanishing into wood by yon hedge gap. Don't 'ee be worritted, Squire! Master Lexie walked as upright as if he'd never had an illness in's life. I said to 'un, 'Don't 'ee kill yourself with exercise, Master Lexie!' and Missy Hastings she laughed in me face like a green yaffle. 'Let 'un lean on thee arm, as if thee was man and he were woman!' I said. And Mr. Lexie he answered me short and brusk-like, same as if I'd said somethink indecent. It doesn't do to speak to quiet men as your brother have spoke to me just now, Squire. All village do know he hasn't long to live. And maybe that's what makes 'un cranky. And we must be considerate with a nice gentleman, as he be. But I bain't one for brusky speeches, whether from the gentry or from me own wife. I likes to be bespoke soft and easy, Squire Ash'ver, as well as any man in England."

"I'm sure my brother meant no harm. And I'm sure Mrs. Hastings didn't mean to laugh in your face, Twiney. I can't imagine either of them doing such a thing. Well! Good-day to you! If I happen to meet them I'll tell them that you're still waiting."

He began to move off, but Mr. Twiney's indignation was not yet appeased.

"I think you ought to know it, Squire, though I'm not the one to tell you. But they do say down village that Mr. Lexie and Missy Hastings be up to no good in these goings on. I've a-driven them two into every lane and every cattle drive round these parts. I think it's only due to 'ee, Mr. Ash'ver, seeing as you're Squire and such-like, to let 'ee know how the wind be blowing!"

"All right, Twiney; I'm much obliged to you, Twiney; but you mustn't listen to the village gossip, you know. Good-day to you!" And with unctuous discretion on his tongue but black anger in his heart he strode down the lane.

So this was why he had been seeing so little of Lexie during the last fortnight! The rogue had stolen a march on him and had been up to serious mischief with that romantic little idiot! He found it impossible to see the thing in a reasonable or magnanimous light. A few weeks ago he would have shrugged his shoulders and washed his hands of the matter. Nell belonged to Hastings; not to him. She had never really belonged to him! Why was it, then, that he felt so maliciously angry with both her and his brother? He refused to attempt to analyze what he felt. He just gave himself up to a blind irrational grievance; to a sense of having been betrayed by his brother and fooled by the girl.

Every complicated and suppressed irritation he had ever harboured against Lexie rose to the surface. He felt as if he had wilfully allowed his remorse about Netta to tie his hands in a struggle with his brother which had been secretly going on for many months; a struggle as to whether he with his translunar lust, or Lexie, with his humorous satyrishness, should carry off this sensitive little being of the twisted mouth and the slender pliable limbs!

No sooner was he round the first corner and out of sight of Mr. Twiney than he stood stock still, staring at the woods in front of him. He knew well where Titty's Ring was. It was a clearing in the centre of the wood where the ground became level for a short distance and where in former times there had been a spring. Lexie had had from childhood a curious predilection for this particular spot; for the lusciousness of the long damp grass that grew there, for its complete isolation in the centre of so much undergrowth, for its cuckoo-flowers that were larger and of a deeper lilac there than down in the valley, while all the years he had known it there had been two grass snakes in that place, which every spring cast their spotted skins; of which skins he had collected quite a number, mysterious and unique objects, different in the feeling of their scaly texture from anything else in the whole world!

It was, in fact, as Rook well knew, a symbolic and significant fact that his brother had taken Nell to this favourite spot of his, and had taken her there, too, on an afternoon that seemed, as Lexie himself would have put it, "dedicated" to such a felicitous proceeding.

He approached the fence that separated him from the wood and began staring savagely into its umbrageous recesses. The wood itself became, as he gazed into its leafy shadows, an utterly different thing from what it had been before. It became a classic and Arcadian refuge, "dear to Pan and the Nymphs," in whose embowered hiding-places all the responsibilities of the world fell away and vanished.

Rook began to visualize the scene in Titty's Ring with an intensity that caused him a sick sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. He made a faint troubled effort to remember the menace that overhung his brother's life; but even as he did this he found his own fingers fumbling at the little box containing those morphia tablets, the loss of which, when he returned the other one, Lexie had never discovered. No! He himself, as his mind became more and more morbid, might be driven to die, too. And that being so, the difference between their two fates was not so tremendous as to give him a cruel and outrageous advantage.

And after all, at the bottom of things, when it became a matter of two males fighting for a female, these questions of honour and justice and fairness and even decency, didn't they always go to the wall? Lexie had flung them over. There had been a sort of tacit understanding between them about Nell; and though he had certainly allowed Lexie to think that he had withdrawn from the field, it was taking his withdrawal a little too literally, to act as if Nell were entirely fancy-free.

Rook's thoughts, as the August sun beat upon his head, growing even hotter as it sank a little from the zenith, were so wild and unbalanced as to resemble the thoughts of a person in a fever. The shock of what he had just heard and the vivid material images his mind kept conjuring up of what was going on at Titty's Ring stirred up a certain black mud of human maliciousness which lay dormant in one deep recess of his nature.

The most fantastic ideas entered his mind; the idea, for example, that he was the victim of a conspiracy of persecution, or at least of manipulation, in which everyone in his circle played a definite part, propitiating and managing him to ends that were theirs and not his.

He began to envisage Netta's disappearance as part of this conspiracy and it presented itself to him that his wife had probably encouraged Lexie in this more serious pursuit of Nell. And his mother, too! He recalled now how often in the last few weeks the old lady had held him at her side, no doubt to keep him away from Toll-Pike Cottage. He felt an angry sensation of being waylaid and humoured and manœuvred at every turn, of being surrounded by the pressure of soft, firm, strong hands that were regulating his life contrary to his deepest life illusion!

Once more he began to feel that in opposition to the free play of his identity all these terrible forces of tribal continuity and tribal self-assertion were using him for purposes utterly foreign to his own personal vision of existence. They intended that the family should have an inheritor; and in order that this should come to pass they were prepared to turn him, Rook Ashover, into a mere passive link in a chain that stretched back to the 13th Century and forward God knows how far!

The old blind vicious feeling came over him that he, a lonely, solitary, hunted figure, was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with "Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers," all conspiring to reduce his independent life to a meaningless cipher!

Well! He would fight them all; and if Lexie — the only human soul in the world that he really loved — went over to their side, he would fight him, too, whether he were a dying man or not! All the time that these extravagant thoughts whirled through his brain he held his cloth cap in his hand; and the early afternoon sun, full of the iron virulence which it possesses at that hour, intensified the fever that raged within him.

All at once, driven by a sudden irresistible impulse, he forced his way through the fence and plunged into the wood. Like Lexie he knew every stick and stone of that countryside; and it was not long before he hit upon one of the little mossy paths, formerly game drives but invaded now by every sort of vegetation, which intersected the thick undergrowth.

He followed this path with a stride that grew more and more rapid as he advanced; for he knew by the look of certain outstanding trees that he was not far from the piece of level ground where Titty's Ring and other smaller nameless expanses of open grass broke the leafy monotony.

Arrived at the first of these woodland greenswards he paused for a minute to take breath. Steady, unflickering shadows, dark as the hollow places in some immense sorrowful upturned face, lay in great silent pools on the deep-rooted grass. Faint vibrations of the air that could hardly be called winds lifted the feathery seed tops of hawkweed and dandelion; while out of the silence all around him came indescribable sighings and rustlings, as if an invisible population of elemental beings, lighter than air itself, were awakening from their noon siesta.

Wiping the sweat from his forehead with the cap he was still clutching in his fingers, he shook his head solemnly and gravely from side to side as if replying to some formidable argument of an unseen antagonist. He then moved away from this first clearing and took a path opposite to the path by which he had come.

A second greensward was followed by yet another, each one more magical in its shadowy seclusion; and Rook felt as if he were passing through a series of sacred groves, the leafy purlieus and outermost "lady-chapels," it might be, of some thrice-holy place, as yet unvisited by any human votary!

Hush! He was certain that he had heard voices….

He stopped dead still, listening intently, cursing the loud chatter of a jay that broke the surrounding stillness.

It was those two! He knew their tones. He knew the amorousness in his brother's low chuckling laugh; he knew the faint broken protest — who would not know *that* if not he? — of Nell's timid and enchanting reluctance.

The path in which he waited now was narrowed and almost closed by several horn-beam bushes; and to the end of his life he remembered the look of those thick leaves, so olive-green on one side and so ivory-white on the other! One of these bushes had extended clear across the path; and unwilling to force his way noisily through its thick growth he sank down upon hands and knees and crept under it, still holding his cloth cap in one hand and his stick in the other.

A sour-sweet smell rose from the earth as his knuckles pressed against it, that peculiar smell which belongs to dry wood mould that has been so fed by fallen leaves and by the rubble of dead twigs as to become something far more organic than the soil of any ploughed-up open field.

In the midst of the blind turmoil of his blood his senses seemed preternaturally acute and alert. He saw the tiny gray cups of a little patch of moss, each cup decorated outside by infinitesimal scales and bosses, as if from the fingers of some fairy Hephæstus, and shining inside as though inlaid with opalescent enamel.

It was extraordinary how clear his mind was as he crept forward, the lower branches of the hornbeam switching the back of his head. He even stopped, for the flicker of a second, to lift up the bent stalk of a minute saxifrage which his hand, as if it had been the paw of an animal, had brushed heavily aside. As far as the sensations of that little cluster of pale green petals were concerned he might have been a love-crazed dinosaur, advancing to interrupt the pleasures of a brother dinosaur. A blind weight, a crushing bruise, and then a great mysterious uplifting! That was all that the saxifrage felt. How could it know that this miraculous uplifting was the result, achieved at a moment when the rest of the man was demented, of the existence of a pitifulness in human nature that was older than its earliest appearance in Antiger Great Wood?

There was a single moment, just before he saw them there in that sunlit glade, when a half-forgotten memory of some childish game with his brother in that very place became a living portion of the olive-green screen before him, a living film of affection, which had to be torn apart by a conscious movement of his will before he leapt out upon them.

But he lifted his head now, very gently, rising up on his knees; and what he saw, as he rose, seemed by its own power, independently of his will, to break that filmy screen of ancient association. Standing locked together in one another's arms, in the very centre of Titty's Ring, the long grass in the sunlight showing green as seaweed about their feet, Nell barely touching the ground upon which Lexie's heels were so masterfully planted, the two figures were swaying to and fro in an ecstasy of amorous enchantment. He rose upright, flung aside the last intervening branch of the hornbeam, and rushed out upon them.

His first impulse was to strike them both down. The accumulated irritations of many months would have been behind that blow; and behind it, too, would have been a deep, subterranean, occult jealousy of Lexie; not merely the immediate jealousy over Nell but a much more subtle thing: a jealousy of Lexie's sagacity and — who knows? — even of the mysterious advantage in these things that his very illness gave him! And mentally speaking, the blow *was* given. Rook had the feeling of giving it. He had the relief, the exhaustion, the relaxation of having given it. And yet in the course of his rush toward them, and of his approach till he' stopped in front of them, he never so much as raised his hand.

Lexie was the one whose head was turned toward him and he at once loosened his hold upon the girl, who sank down upon the grass. Whiter than any human being had ever seen it was the younger Ashover's Claudian countenance as he moved forward a step or two, putting himself between his brother and the girl upon the ground. As for Nell, she gave one startled cry, stared at the intruder as if he had been a complete stranger, and then covered her face with her two hands.

"So this is it, is it?" said Rook hoarsely, confronting them with a look so menacing that Lexie made a little nervous deprecatory movement.

"Rook — I'm ashamed of you — to follow us like this — to frighten Nell like this —— What's up now? What's the matter with you? Nell and I have a perfect right to come out together if we want to on a fine August afternoon!"

His voice took on the old familiar tone of semi-badinage as he said this, and the colour began to come back to his face.

"So this is it!" repeated Rook, staring wildly at Nell who had now removed her hands from her face and was answering his look with a steady scrutinizing gaze that became more and more full of complicated significance.

"So this is how you have decided to treat me," he went on, throwing down both stick and cap upon the grass and rubbing his forehead as if to obliterate some evil dream. "It's the sort of thing one expects from Lexie," he continued bitterly; "but I'd fooled myself into thinking that *you* were different from the rest of them, Nell."

The younger Ashover began at this moment to display unmistakable signs of his malady. A quick spasm crossed his features; his mouth quivered; a convulsive tremor ran through him. "Sit down!" said Rook in a commanding tone. "No, you're perfectly right. I ought not to have come. But you needn't be afraid, you two; I won't interrupt your excursions a second time. Sit down, Lexie, can't you?"

His brother obeyed him and sinking on the ground by Nell's side hugged his knees with his arms.

"I thought you meant fisticuffs just now, Rook," he said, smiling. "What would *you* have done" — and he turned his head toward the young girl— "if Rook and I had started butting at each other like two roaring bulls? God! I'm glad you didn't go for me with that oak stick of yours, Rook. It looks like the very father of cudgels! Sit down yourself, for the Lord's sake; and don't stand on one leg any more."

But Rook did not change from his dazed, fixed stare at Nell. It was as if he had been some infuriated but puzzled savage, whose spirit was slowly being sapped by the power of a civilized eye.

"I'm sorry, Nell," he blurted out at last. "I'm very sorry I followed you."

But the girl rose quietly to her feet. "I think I'll walk home by myself," she said. "I've had enough of the Ashover family for one afternoon!"

Her tenuous sarcasm, obvious and simple though it was, carried a weight out of all proportion to its justification, by reason of its incongruity upon the lips that uttered it. Lexie made a grimace; and searching about in his pocket for what he wanted lit a cigarette with shaky fingers.

But Rook's face darkened into an angry frown. "You won't leave this spot, Nell," he said fiercely, "till you and I have come to an understanding!"

She made no answer to this challenge; but tossing her head and giving him one quick reproachful look she walked off toward the hornbeam path.

Both the brothers saw her forcing her way through the branch-covered aperture with swift impatient movements of her thin bare arms.

When she was out of sight Rook made a hesitating movement to follow her.

"Stop, you fool, stop!"

The affectionate roughness in Lexie's tone did more than all his whimsicalities to soothe away the elder brother's dangerous mood. Curiously enough, too, the mere fact that he had *seen* the worst, or what he convinced himself was the worst, of that amorous encounter, drew out the sharpest sting of his jealousy. And the girl had gone. Lexie and she were no longer together. And in her going she had reserved her indignation, her hurt pride, her revolt, her sense of shame, entirely for *him;* her mute reproaches entirely for him; her revenge entirely for him. That "I've had enough of you Ashovers" was a barbed dart that she must have known *he* would be the one to smart under! Lexie would not care. Lexie enjoyed a certain humorous gregariousness in his amours. "Enough of the Ashovers" was a hit at the elder of the Ashovers; and in these cases the one whom the woman wants to hurt the most is the one she loves the best!

So he argued with himself, applying the balm of convoluted reasoning to the wound he had received; a wound that all the while was healing from another cause … from the relief of a blow that had only been delivered on the astral plane! Restrained from following the girl by all these concerted withholdings, Rook himself sank down now on the grass of Titty's Ring by the side of his brother and accepted from his fingers a cigarette of peace.

"Think of all the hands through which this little white tube has passed," said Lexie, with a relaxed sententiousness, "only that it may burn itself out into thin air, between two quarrelling men, in the heart of a Dorset wood!"

He pulled out his little box as he spoke and swallowed a couple of the lozenge-shaped tablets. Rook was conscious of a faint sardonic malice as he let his own finger and thumb toy with the companion box in his waistcoat pocket.

They subsided into gloomy silence while the wood murmurs around them became a sighing echo of the great forward-rushing flood of Time, swallowing everything up.

"By the way, Lexie," Rook said after a pause, "doesn't it seem as if it were carrying things a trifle far, for us both to be making love so openly to the wife of the village priest? Hastings, of course, is too lost in his book to care what his girl does; but I did get a hint from Twiney just now that the village had begun to talk."

Lexie looked at him with narrowed, screwed-up eyelids. Rook got a faint impression of something approaching a lewd wink; but Lexie's eyes had so many natural wrinkles around them that he may have been deceived.

"I notice," said the younger Ashover, "that it isn't until *your* particular star is suffering a momentary eclipse that this matter of propriety comes to the front. Good Lord! if we're to begin considering the feelings of the village we might as well give up having any pleasure at all. At least *I* might, who haven't been blessed with a mistress like Netta or a wife like Ann! Why! Do *you* realize that I haven't had any dalliance with any wench at all since those days when we used to go to Tollminster together?" His voice became high-pitched and even querulous. "I tell you it would be *monstrous* if I should go down to my grave without having known *any* pleasure!"

He fell into a fit of bottomless gloom from which his voice emerged again like the sound of a bumble-bee in a great foxglove bell.

"I adore them all!" he muttered. "I adore them all!"

Rook watched him with sympathy; but a mysterious meanness in himself at which he was both surprised and ashamed made the difference of their luck in this particular case not altogether disagreeable to his inmost mind. A very queer sort of vicious irritable malice, akin to the malice with which one regards the struggles of a mob at the ticket office of a theatre, took possession of him as he looked at Lexie's agitated face. He felt for one second as if it would give him a wicked delight to crowd Titty's Ring with the forms of sleeping mænads; and then, immediately afterward, to obliterate them with a wave of his hand!

His thoughts were interrupted by an unexpected remark from his brother.

“Nell is quite certain now,” said Lexie gravely, “that Hastings *does* know where Netta is. She got it out of him last night that he knows. She told me to tell you.”

The whole face of the surrounding scene changed in a moment for Rook Ashover. He rose and pulled his brother up by his hands.

“Damn the man!” he cried fiercely. “I thought there was something of that kind. Come on; let me get you down to the cart. Twiney’s been waiting long enough.” He took Lexie by the arm and held the hornbeam branches back while he passed through.

The sound of their footsteps, the rustling of leaves and cracking of twigs died away in the distance. The light wind lifted the grasses of Titty’s Ring with an undulating airy softness that was neither melancholy nor cheerful, a remote softness that did not correspond with any emotions known to the human race.

Clouds of wavering gnats rose and fell, veered and drifted, across that sunlit space; and in their movements there was a sort of rhythm as if they were obeying some unseen fairy orchestration.

The two spotted green snakes, secure now of any interruption, came forth side by side. They might have been drawing the beechnut chariot of Titania herself; so carefully did they advance, every now and then lifting their purple-stained heads and darting out their tiny forked tongues. No other living thing appeared. Sunlight and shadow lay peacefully side by side; and silence fell upon silence like water upon water.

But nothing that stirs the magnetic currents between human beings, those waves of emotion that are like invisible harp strings and are so cruelly jarred, can be altogether lost in the atmosphere where it was begotten.

Something remains, some faint disturbance, some ghostly ripple, in that particular air, of which minds that are sensitive to such vibrations must for ever afterward be conscious.

Limned in that enclosure between woodland and woodland, some shadowy residue, some tenuous adumbration of those three human forms would thenceforth tremble there on the verge of visibility.

Long afterward when those three persons were dead and buried, the eidolons of what had happened to them in that agitated moment would be ready to resume their shape.

The rains might disfigure that spot and the storms dismantle it. Titania's snakes might reach their appointed sum of years and cast no more skins. It still would remain as an evidence of the potency of human passion that something in the quality of that place would never again be quite as it was before. Less palpable than any *revenant* of definite shape, these airy essences would only touch the nerves of such as were responsive enough to feel them. But as long as Titania's Ring did not lose altogether the character it held then there would be that upon its air that would not pass with the passing of any summer.

CHAPTER XXII

All through the rest of that hot August, night alter night in the small book-littered room at Toll-Pike Cottage, Rook wrestled with William Hastings over the matter of Netta's address. The priest did not deny, on the contrary he quite openly admitted, that he knew where she was; but weeks passed and nothing that Rook could say or do was able to shake his obstinate resolution.

"I promised Miss Page not to betray her and I won't betray her."

They gradually became occasions of a curious and complicated perversity, these recurrent and prolonged conversations in that stuffy little room. Nell did not by any means always absent herself from the arguments between the two men; and her presence, when she joined them, added its own troubled implication to the increasing morbidity of these strange encounters.

In her reaction against both Rook and Lexie after that incident in Titty's Ring she had drawn insensibly closer to her husband. What had gone on in the depths of that entangled system of nervous susceptibilities which her slight frame enclosed would have required the elucidation of a book far nearer to the mysteries of life than that sinister manuscript in her husband's bureau now so seldom looked upon!

Her romantic devotion to Rook, already removed from the turmoil of her disturbed senses, sublimated itself during these hot August weeks into a passionate longing to do something, to do anything, to restore his peace of mind. She had begun to believe that if only she could bring Netta into his life again, that restless fever that seemed eating out his soul would be allayed and quieted.

Her unsatisfied craving for love, roused and irritated by days and days of feebler and feebler resistance to Lexie's ardour, turned now, in her reaction from her yielding mood of that one unfortunate afternoon, into a less fastidious and more complying attitude toward her legal companion.

Hastings himself began to be vaguely aware of unsuspected depths of perversity in his own feelings, especially in regard to his contest with Rook. He found himself deriving a vicious triumph from drawing out to further and further lengths the protracted struggle between them and he was even tempted sometimes to pretend to be weakening in his resistance in order that his opponent should not lose hope and retire in anger and disgust.

But if there were unsounded levels of morbidity in his desire that their strange duel should not end too quickly, there were still more furtive depths in his attitude to Rook and Nell when he had them together under his eye. He did not hesitate at these times to make the very utmost of the newly established relations between himself and his young wife, playing unscrupulously upon Nell's desperate desire that he should reveal his treasured secret and exploiting her touching attempts to persuade him.

Nell had not the remotest inkling of all that was going on in his mind. She herself, with a young girl's erotic egoism, was living just then in a sort of lingered-out trance of dreamy self-effacement. Had she known what ambiguous motives were mingling with his refusal to yield up Netta's secret she would have shrunk from his caresses as from those of a hooded snake. But her indignant disgust, as in so many similar cases, would not have been altogether just or fair. Hastings had, until that eventful summer, lived so completely in his metaphysical thoughts that he might be said to have had no normal human life at all; and now when, for the first time under the biting whip of jealousy, his natural self-assertion rose up and demanded satisfaction, it was only to find that this long-starved, long-delayed burgeoning was afflicted at the very root.

Against the corrosive poison of the humiliation he endured from the mere sight of Rook and Nell together his wounded vanity turned and turned upon itself, like an animal that turns against its own flesh; and by a strange obscure law, working in that dark inner world, he found his account in lacerating his own deep hurt still further; because, in so doing, he dragged the others down with him in a morbid complicity of shame.

As August drew to a close and the ninth month of Lady Ann's pregnancy approached, Rook felt himself becoming more and more of a lean, lifeless, motiveless shadow of the man he had formerly been. The preparations for his son's birth — for no one seemed for a moment to doubt the sex of the newcomer — caused him nothing but irritation. It was as though, as the infant came nearer and nearer to birth, it drew to itself every magnetic current of vitality that stirred in the air about it. The atmosphere of Ashover House seemed to exist for no other purpose than for nourishing this insatiable intruder; and Rook went to and fro among his people with a sense of seeing his most cherished fancies and illusions reduced to insignificant wind-wafted straws blown up and down the steps of the Capitolium in the path of a young Cæsar!

There were moments when that strange hallucination of the rider on the gray horse who had overtaken him on the road to Comber's End returned with a dim rebuking gesture at the excess of his pusillanimity; but for the most part he found himself shrinking away from the flushed triumphant languor of Lady Ann, from the nervous excitement of Mrs. Ashover, from the gloating whispers and glances of Pandie and Mrs. Vabbin.

It was indeed with the feeling of an escape from something that had grown well-nigh unbearable that he kept returning, every few days, to his attacks upon the secretive malignity of Mr. Hastings. To his conscious mind it was always of Netta that he thought; but in reality the mere neighbourhood of Nell's devotion, the mere propinquity of that supple youthful body and those clinging idealizing glances, was something that restored him to his lost place in the centre of his universe, something that transformed him back, from a negligible courtier mannikin in the train of his offspring, to an authentic protagonist in his own life tragedy, dealing with existence on equal terms!

The last day of August came and went; and with its departure the weather showed signs of changing. Gusty westerly winds, blowing up from the Bristol Channel across Sedgemoor and Blackmore, began troubling the sun-bleached trees and moaning disconsolately through the deserted stubble fields.

Rook had begun to grow conscious that he was playing no very dignified part in this psychological chess game. He felt certain uneasy misgivings as to whether his determination to drag the secret at all costs out of the husband had resulted in anything more palpable than the distraction of his own troubled nerves by the society of the wife.

There came over him, too, as he began to recognize that Hastings had an obstinacy in him that no importunity and no persuasion could influence, an ugly and unpleasant sense of having been entangled in some equivocal spiritual orgy that was exercising a drug-like and sinister effect upon all three of them.

He felt ashamed that he had permitted this Toll-Pike obsession, whatever its nature might be, to interfere with the frequency of his visits to Lexie. Lexie had not been so well after that Titty's Ring excursion; and though whenever he and his brother did meet it was quite on the old unassailable footing, the younger Ashover could not help being conscious that the only permanent effect of the summer jaunts which he had found so sweet was to throw his timid companion back more unhesitatingly into the arms of her husband, more absorbingly into her platonic passion for Rook.

If Lexie could have pierced with his sagacious weather eye the mile or so of gusty autumn-smelling air and the few inches of brick and mortar which separated his candle-lit chamber from these nocturnal encounters at Toll-Pike Cottage, he would have made more than his usual grimace of disgust at the neurotic tricks of the human mind. It would have seemed to him that the very atmosphere of that room of Hastings's was penetrated with unnatural suppressions. He would have denounced every one of its three occupants as being engaged in spinning out, like so many demented silkworms, a thick unhealthy cocoon of meretricious emotion. He would have cast upon his brother one of those looks of indignant moral contempt such as a shrewd horse-dealer turns upon a showy but short-winded nag. And if he could have appeared before the three of them with an appropriate protest upon his tongue, it would have referred to the superiority of the most gross and the most unsophisticated bawdiness over this super-subtle mental dissipation!

As one rain-swept day followed another over the roofs of that Frome-side village the sense of expectancy, in the minds of all the persons with whom we are concerned, grew steadily heavier and heavier; until it became something that could hardly be borne.

This expectant mood, with the burden of gathering fate pressing upon it, is a natural enough phenomenon in all cases of child-birth. In this case, however, it went further. It affected Marsh Alley and Toll-Pike as well as Ashover House. It entered the innocent domicile of Mr. Pod. It sat down like a veiled figure upon the lintel of Mr. Twiney. It even seemed to visit the stable of the long-necked mare; so ominous and plaintive were the whinnyings that proceeded from that square window abutting on the village street.

More than ten days of these September gusts had passed; when, one stormy night, Nell Hastings found herself suddenly and unaccountably wide awake in her bed. There was a waning half-moon observable through her window which kept throwing a pallid stream of light across her husband's sleeping head, before it was swallowed up once more by swift-travelling clouds.

The girl felt impelled to prop herself up on her elbows and stare out upon that patch of troubled changing sky. She had that uncomfortable sense of vast world-wide impending catastrophe which often comes to people, when, at some moment usually associated with oblivion, they catch the face of the world off-guard, so to speak, and in unsuspecting disarray.

She glanced over her shoulder at Hastings's face. Was it some movement, some muttering of his, that had roused her into this unnatural wakefulness? She looked at his watch on the little table beside them. It pointed to half-past two; just that particular hour of the night which Rook always maintained was associated with the lowest ebb of vitality in mortal pulses; the hour when ships sank, when wild geese failed in their flight, when old trees and old men turned cold, and when animals and children were stillborn.

Ah! It must have been Hastings who had disturbed her; for he was beginning to talk in his sleep now.

His words were broken and incoherent; fragments, it might well have seemed, and wind-tossed straws, of that troubled substance, the whole compact rondure of which seemed to be bearing them gustily through space, buffeted up — down — here — there — by winds that had no mercy and no purpose.

All at once she bent down above him and listened with every sense in her body; listened with the beatings of her heart above all; and with a cold tension of her muscles.

“I’ll see you dead before I’ll tell you!”

Her brain became one petrified conch of listening. It became a brittle shell through which some mysterious sound was destined to pass which it found almost unbearable.

But she had to bear it; and it did not fail to come in that commonplace, realistic, matter-of-fact manner characteristic of all true oracles.

“Thirteen Walpole Street” came the words from the sleeping man. “Walpole Street.” And then there followed more incoherent mutterings and once again that ferocious sentence the words of which seemed to glow with a smouldering lava-like fury. “I’ll see you dead before I’ll tell you!”

He rambled on a little further after that; but his words carried no more significance to her ear than does the wash of the tide upon the pier-posts of a ferry when the traveller has once stepped ashore. She sank down again by his side in that wind-tossed half-moonlight and lay staring at the little squares of the window.

As so often happens with momentous human decisions, such as carry in their train drastic issues and devastating results, the first knowledge she had herself of the thing she was going to do seemed in some curious way to precede and antedate all the motives that subsequently accounted for it.

It was as if she were making a discovery in the mind of another person, the definite discovery, in fact, that this other person had decided, for reasons absolutely hidden from everyone, to bring Netta Page back to Ashover!

What she really discovered, as she stared at those window squares, was that she herself had irrevocably decided to bring Netta back; but this decision — based upon nothing that could be accounted for by any rational argument — required every kind of rational argument to support it and make it plausible!

What she felt within herself as she considered her plan — this plan that she suddenly discovered to be already existing — was that, now she knew Netta's address, it would be impossible to hide it from Rook; and if Rook knew it he would take the next train for London. It seemed so much better for Netta to be the one to make the journey. If Rook went off in his present mood, God knows when he would come back. And obviously he would go. She knew him well enough to know *that* for an absolute certainty. Well, then, if she didn't want to think of him breaking away from everyone and staying on blindly with Netta in London, the only thing to do was to bring Netta to him.

She had begun to feel an unmitigated reaction against the morbid entanglement into which the existence of that secret had brought the three of them. She hated to think of her husband in that particular light. She hated to think of his having that advantage over Rook. To bring Netta herself upon the scene was to clear the air in every direction. She did feel a moment's qualm at the thought of doing it when Ann's child was so near birth. But Ann had never been considerate of *her* feelings or indeed of any one's. Ann had always struck out remorselessly for her own hand! So drastically had she done so that it seemed a kind of Quixotism to consider Ann in the matter at all. The person to be considered was Rook and as far as Rook was concerned, now that she knew where Netta was, there seemed to be only two conceivable alternatives: either to give him the address without comment, which would mean his going off pell-mell to London, to return

God knew when; or to wire Netta straight away and send her the money to make the journey herself!

As to what would happen later on, as to what permanent arrangements Rook might wish to make, or Netta might be prepared to make, *that* must be left to the future to decide. She and William would have done their part, as soon as Netta and Rook had been brought together again! Her own desire was simply to reinstate her husband's dignity in Rook's eyes, and Rook's dignity in her husband's eyes; and to break up the unhealthy and sinister duel between them which had converted that August into one of the most morbid epochs in her life.

Of any deliberate revenge upon Lady Ann her mind was quite unconscious. She just ruled Lady Ann out of court as a person who could be trusted to strike out for herself, whatever happened. She had not forgotten the intrusion into her dining room, or the exposure of the plate with the three pansies beside it. That incident had made a dent upon her mind which the intervening months had not obliterated, but it played no part in what she felt now. The waves of thought that kept overleaping one another in her small oval-shaped head as she stared at the square panes, at the racing yellow-tinged clouds, at the formless moon, were almost all generous and romantic.

The most dominant and most recurrent of these thoughts if they had been translated into definite words would have run as follows: "Rook is pining for Netta, who will never understand him as *I* understand him. But he wants her; he is full of remorse about her. Left to Ann and Ann's child, he will eat his heart out in utter misery. *I* alone can save him by bringing Netta into his life again."

The day that dawned upon this eventful night was a dark and strange one even for that unusual September. It suggested rain; but it was not raining. It suggested thunder; but there was no thunder. Only, without the assistance of any frost or of any apparent wind, the first fluttering down of leaves took place in all manner of unexpected directions.

Even Hastings felt the influence of the day. “Don’t you smell something queer in the air this morning, Nell?” he said to her at breakfast.

The girl nodded in silence, waiting for the right moment to make her momentous announcement.

“It’s extraordinarily odd,” he went on, “but I keep being conscious of some subtle smell — in this room — in the garden — in the road — that I haven’t noticed since I was a child. It’s not exactly a smell, either! It’s more than that. It’s a taste in the mouth and a strange indescribable feeling through every pore of the body.”

Nell did begin to listen to him now, lifting up her chin between a vase of salpiglossis and a vase of cinerarias, both of them brought from the Ashover garden by Rook.

“I keep thinking of all sorts of little objects connected with my life when I was a child,” Hastings continued. “I see the backs of certain volumes of the Latin classics my father used to read. My father was a cobbler, Nell. Have I ever told you that? But he had a mania for reading Latin. He was not a learned man. It was a sort of fantastic game with him. And there’s something about the smell of this air that makes me think of London pavements and the peculiar feeling of the wet city mist on your face when you open a window into a room lit by gas and crowded with leather-bound books.”

He sank into silence again; but his face bore such a happy, dreamy expression that Nell was quite shocked by his next words when, after a long pause, he looked across at her with a light in his eyes.

“I shall take my book up again this morning,” he said. “I’ve been getting a new angle on it during these nights with Ashover. I’ve been tapping his brain without his knowing it — not for ideas exactly — but to get my own thoughts into focus.”

He rose from the table as he spoke and going to the window opened it a little farther.

“There’s the smell of something more than rain out there,” he said. “If you want to know what I really think, Nell, I think there’s a terrific thunderstorm coming up! Perhaps it’s *that* which brings what I have to write next in my book — my chapter of all chapters, Nell! — with such a mad rush into my mind.”

He moved back to his chair, but instead of reseating himself, he leant against it, keeping his eyes fixed upon her and growing more and more excited.

“I believe I could finish the whole thing if I really got started to-day, Nell. I’ve only four more chapters. But they’re the difficult ones. That’s why I’ve been letting it go lately. They’re the ones that explain the actual process of cosmic unravelling. They’re the ones that give the clue to the unwinding of the clock!”

She looked at his illuminated and disturbed face with a scrutinizing eye. Had he the natural human intelligence to grasp all she meant to do by having Netta here? One could never tell with him! There was an obstinate wilfulness in the man that might sheer off at any tangent, at any moment. “Shall I speak to him now?” she thought. “Or shall I wait?”

Her decision, like so many human decisions, was brought to a head by something entirely outside her control. She caught sight of the village postman passing their gate, an occurrence that meant that in the space of about half an hour, giving him time to reach Ashover House and return, he would be passing it again and consequently be at hand to enable her to carry out her precipitate plan.

She moved straight up to her husband, and in a low, hurried, eager voice confessed what she had overheard and what she wished to do.

The criss-cross currents that tossed themselves into spray within the depths of the priest’s mind took two main directions as he listened to her breathless suggestion.

The first of these tidal currents was full of a heavy sulkiness at being betrayed into giving up his secret; a secret which had become a sort of fetish with him as being the symbol of his malignant advantage over Rook Ashover. It was just because those harmless syllables, “Thirteen Walpole Street,” had become a kind of mania with the man that he had been overheard muttering them in his sleep; and now Nell was in possession of them!

But the second of these two mental tides contradicted the mood of the first. By having Nell and Rook so often recently under his eye his jealousy had gathered momentum; while the perverse forms of malignity which at the start had supplied an antidote to this jealousy were beginning to lose their savour and to grow tiresome and insipid.

There were several reasons why Nell’s surprising suggestion did not altogether displease him. For one thing he felt sure it would mean the end of this platonic philandering between his wife and Ashover. Rook could hardly make use of Toll-Pike Cottage as a rendezvous for two love affairs! In the second place, it would cause definite and emphatic annoyance to Lady Ann; for whom, ever since he had learnt that she was to be a mother, he had nourished one of his queer half-neurotic, half-metaphysical aversions.

As Nell talked to him now she could see from his expression that his feelings were not by any means simple. She had recourse therefore to a grand feminine *coup*, which came to her by a sort of inspiration.

"You know what you have so often felt," she pleaded, "with regard to all our friends here? Well — *that*, at any rate, will be quite different when you've asserted yourself between Netta and Rook."

He stared at her in clouded bewilderment. What on earth did she mean? He could not believe that she saw quite as clearly as her hint implied the gaping depths of the hurt to his self-love which his position as the priest of the village had worked in him.

"You mean?" he murmured tentatively.

She looked straight at him now; and, like so many essentially honest and unscheming women, she found that the very integrity of her nature gave her a power, when she *was* embarked on a campaign of diplomacy, far more effective than any actual cunning in argument.

"I mean that it'll be more of a relief to me than I can tell you for you to be worthy of yourself and in the open over Mr. Ashover. I can't explain to you what it'll mean to me, William, to be free of this horrid sense that you're doing something shameful and unkind, like this hiding up Netta's address! It's made a difference to me already — just our talking freely like this about it! And if we send our telegram and have Netta here I shall feel still happier! I *do* think, William dear, that none of them have looked to you for your help and advice in their lives, as they naturally might have done, considering, after all, that you *are* the vicar of the place!"

She watched him anxiously; and a glow of excitement came into her face when she saw that her words had not been without their effect.

"You mustn't think," she went on, "that my friendship with Mr. Ashover prevents my seeing how coolly, to say the least of it, both he and Lexie treat you in your position as priest. It's the one thing about them that I've never understood.” She stopped and glanced quickly at him, wondering whether she had let herself go too far.

“I’m glad to have been able to tell you this, William,” she added. “Because I feel so much that it only wants a little more respect on both sides for you and Mr. Ashover to get on splendidly together.”

She had won her point. She knew it as clearly as if he had thrown up both his hands and cried out: “I yield!” Her victory was almost as unexpected as it was complete. She did not estimate, because it was outside her knowledge of the man’s metaphysical mania, the part played in his yielding by his mysterious hostility to Rook’s wife. Still less did she realize how much of it was due to a certain queer tenderness which he had come to feel for Netta herself, a tenderness that was, in the last resort, a kind of sympathy of pariah for pariah, of one child of the people for another child of the people.

“Then I can write the telegram?” she cried impulsively. And making a swift childish clutch at one of Hastings’s hands she raised it to her mouth.

It was this gesture more than anything that she had done which reconciled him to her victory. There is nothing in the world more calculated to establish a man in his own esteem than to feel the lips of a young girl against his fingers! The psychological effect of such a thing, reverting to dim, far-off pre-Homeric times, carries a magic along with it capable of seducing the coldest-blooded philosopher.

Hastings watched her scribbling the telegram on a piece of paper. He heard her muttering aloud those familiar syllables: “Thirteen Walpole Street,” which he had himself been so malignantly and triumphantly whispering under his breath for the last half year. He derived a peculiar physical relief, like the drawing of a piece of rusty iron out of his flesh, at the mere sound of those words on another’s lips, and while his wife rushed out with the telegram to the postman he found himself running up the stairs to his room with a clearer mind and a more lively desire to continue his life's work than he had felt since the day of Netta's flight.

The woman had been more on his mind than he had acknowledged to himself; and his recondite revenge upon Rook, by refusing her address, had been a severer strain upon his nerves than he had calculated upon. Well! He was clear of it. He would have the whip hand of them all now. He would henceforth be in a position to assert himself as the formidable spiritual director of all these people!

He sat down at his table and drew out his manuscript. The sight of these closely written impassioned pages changed the current of his thoughts once more. What did it matter whether these people treated him properly or not? What did it matter whether he was an effective parish priest or not? What did it matter whether his gentle Nell kissed his hand or not? Long, long years after he was dust in dust, after there was no longer any living creature who remembered him, his work would still be exercising its effect upon the universe; the wonder of the disillusioned, the terror of the illusioned!

For the rest of that day Hastings worked silently, passionately, upon his book. When he came down to lunch he was like a different man. Nell had never known him in such high spirits. He gossiped about the village people. He told her stories about his early struggles, his desperate youthful attempts to get an adequate education, his experiences at various theological colleges.

The girl thought to herself, "If he'd been like this a year ago, I would never have gone out so much with Lexie." Had Nell been more superstitious than she was she would have felt uneasy in the presence of this unnatural exuberance. An occult-minded person would have watched William Hastings very closely at that juncture and would perhaps have endeavoured to calm and allay this stream of excited talk. But Nell's own spirits were so exalted just then at the despatching of the telegram and the idea of Netta's arrival that she responded to his mood with a mood of like kind. Never had Toll-Pike Cottage heard such voices and such laughter. It would have taught the evasive Rook something he did not know as to the nature of women could he have seen the apparently complete and radiant accord that existed between these two. All through the afternoon, until tea-time, Hastings worked on; writing with scarcely a glance out of the window or away from the page; as if it were necessary to finish the book that very day.

After one of the happiest teas they had ever had since they were married, Nell announced that she intended to make Mr. Twiney drive her down to Bishop's Forley station; so that, in case Netta had been at home when the telegram reached her and had started at once by the first train, she might not be left stranded.

Hastings shook his head. "You're assuming too much, young lady," he remarked. "The chances are all against her being in the house when your message arrives. And why should she start in such a hurry? The natural thing would be to give herself at least a night to think over it."

Nell looked at him significantly. "*That* shows how little you know about women," she said. "There's probably not been a day since she left when she hasn't imagined herself rushing off back again just like this! What I said in the telegram was that we both thought that she ought to come, that it was important she should come. That would bring *me* without waiting overnight, if *I* were in her place!"

Hastings smiled grimly. "You and Netta are different people, Nell. And there's another thing, too. You seem to assume that she's got the money to come. I must say I think *that's* a rather big assumption."

Nell’s face crinkled itself into a fit of giggling at this.

“How funny you are, William,” she gasped. “Didn’t you see me go to my chest of drawers just now? I gave the postman five pounds to telegraph with the message!”

Hastings stared at her. “Five pounds? Where did you get that from, Nell?”

She laughed still more at this.

“Where — do — you — suppose I get — money — from?” she murmured. “Do you think someone gives it to me?”

“I give it up completely,” he cried. “You’re too much for me to-day, young woman.”

She made the shadow of a childish grimace at him, more in the manner of a daughter than a wife; a look that if Rook had caught he would have felt a malicious suspicion that all the romantic glamour he had come to associate with her was in some sort of way a trick that had been played upon him.

It is doubtful whether there is any man in the world who, if he saw all the flickers of expression in the face he is enamoured of, would not be shocked to the foundations of his being; and both Rook and Hastings were such megalomaniacal subjectivists, that as far as they were concerned there really were two quite distinct Nells who doubtless inhabited the same slender frame! It was doubtless Lexie who came nearer than either of them to see the girl as she actually was.

“It’s your own money!” she cried radiantly. “Well! We’ll see whether you’re right or I’m right about her coming to-day. But I’m going to meet this train, anyhow!”

She was going out of the room when he stopped her with a new tone in his voice.

“Have you given a single thought to the future?” he began. “I mean have you considered what’s going to become of Netta after we *have* got her here?”

Nell made an impatient little gesture with her slender fingers.

“That’s just like a man!” she cried. “Always calculating and weighing. How do we know anything about the future? We may none of us live beyond this autumn!”

The priest lifted his eyebrows and let it go. After all, whatever the upshot of all this was to be, it was a matter for Rook and Netta to settle between themselves. And it did seem to him clear that any issue would be better than the present uncertainty and misunderstanding.

He withdrew to his room and launching out once more upon the dark tide of his impassioned logic, forgot Nell, Netta, Rook, and all terrestrial happenings in that unique absorption in the pure pleasure of laying thought upon thought, speculation upon speculation, which can give, to those who abandon themselves to its fascination, a delight that surpasses every sensual happiness.

It was nearly ten o’clock that night when he heard through his open window the wheels of Twiney’s conveyance stopping at the garden gate.

He listened. Two women’s voices! So Nell *had* been right in her premonition, and Netta had come! He pushed his papers aside and ran down the stairs to welcome them at the door.

He had no time at the moment to do more than shake hands with the newcomer; for he had to help Mr. Twiney carry up her trunk to the attic room; but a few minutes later, when they were all three together in the parlour, he received his first intimation of how little they either of them knew of what was going on in their visitor’s mind.

"I'm so glad you came, Netta," he said in a kindly, almost paternal tone. "What Nell thought was that something *had* to be done! She was afraid that Mr. Ashover was working himself into such agitation about you that it was cruel to keep you hidden away any more. Though I did obey you, didn't I, in holding your secret tight?"

"I knew you," broke in Nell, "better than William. He thought you'd wait till to-morrow. But I was sure you'd come to-day."

They both surveyed their silent visitor with friendly curiosity. Netta was quietly and unassumingly dressed. In general appearance, when she pushed up her veil, she looked quite unchanged. But there was something about her manner that made it hard to talk as naturally and openly as they expected to do as soon as Mr. Twiney's back was turned.

"Mr. Ashover is not ill, I hope?" she asked in a low voice.

"Ill?" cried Hastings. "I should think not! And it's Nell, not I, who's got this idea of his being so worried. Besides, it's not only about our Netta that he's been worrying. I suppose you've heard — —"

He stopped suddenly, catching a quick warning look on his wife's face.

"When is the child to be born?" asked Netta quietly.

"Oh, pretty soon now, so they tell me," Hastings replied. "I daresay it's the kind of thing that Mr. Ashover finds especially trying," he added. "But I'm sure he'll be so thankful to have his mind set at rest about you that he'll be a different person to-morrow."

"I sha'n't be a burden on you long," said Netta. "I've told Nell that it's only a very short little visit." She made an affectionate movement toward her hostess and laid her hand upon her arm. "I can't let Nell's hospitality make me a trouble to you," she went on, "and I won't let it either!" she added with a smile.

Hastings drew back, baffled and puzzled. Netta had teased him before with a certain society air which he regarded as an affectation; but her present tone was different from that. It was the tone of a person who has a definite and unalterable plan in his own mind and who is just diplomatically sparring to gain time. There was something about Netta's reserve, something in her manner and in the expression of her eyes, that thoroughly puzzled him.

There was no more real conversation between them during the light supper which Nell now brought in upon a tray; but as soon as the visitor had retired to her attic bedroom her hosts exchanged their impressions.

"I don't believe she's drinking any more," said Nell. "That's the great thing to be thankful for."

Hastings shook his head.

"And yet there's something queer about her," the girl went on, "that scares me somehow. Did you notice it? A sort of unnatural quietness?"

Hastings nodded

"Of course, she always was quiet," Nell continued, "and very likely we've forgotten *how* quiet she was. But I can't help feeling it's more serious than that. I don't know what to make of it! She talks naturally enough and listens to what you say. But one has the feeling all the time that her mind is only half in the room with you."

Nell rubbed her face violently with her hands; an habitual gesture with her when she was cornered and bewildered.

"She frightens me!" she burst out. "You don't suppose she's taken to drugs, do you, William?"

He shook his head.

"She seemed to realize about Lady Ann's child," the girl added, "without being told. I couldn't stop Twiney talking about it. But it didn't seem news to her. Perhaps she'd heard about it on the journey. Twiney said, by the way, that Pandie had told *him* that the child might be born any day now!"

Hastings protruded his under-lip in the manner characteristic of him when any of his manias were touched upon, "It would not trouble *me* very much," he said grimly, "if after all this fuss it turned out to be a girl!"

The unwitting cause of this midnight discussion in Toll-Pike Cottage lay awake in her attic bed long after her hosts had wandered off into the paths of sleep.

Strange enough was it to find herself once more on the banks of the Frome! Strange and, in a sense that she was not able herself to analyze, sad with a sadness beyond anything she had ever known.

Vainly she tried to envisage what form her reëncounter with Rook would take. As she watched the rolling banks of whitish-yellow clouds crossing and recrossing that sickly, shapeless object, so distorted, so disfigured, that she knew to be the waning moon, a very curious and disturbing mental experience took possession of her. She had the feeling that some great passage of time had elapsed, some half-century of the journeying years, and that she alone of all the people she had known in Ashover was alive on that September night. She felt vividly conscious of being a solitary disembodied spirit, without desire, without hope, without regret, without any faintest wish to change anything or to alter anything; indeed, with no emotion at all except an infinite sadness.

Why she should be so sad she could not tell. Rook, Lexie, Hastings, Nell, Lady Ann — were they not all lying in absolute quiescence in that enclosure by the water meadows? A new race of men and women filled their places, who cared nothing for them, nothing for their memories, nothing for their names!

Her mind seemed to revert, with a cold, responsive weariness, to the inscrutable melancholy that used to puzzle her upon the face of Sir Robert; and it seemed to her, as she watched that bulging, unhappy, deformed moon, cringing before the clouds, that she now understood the secret of his sadness. It was a sadness that only a certain type of sentiency in this world ever responded to or touched the fringe of, a sadness that had something to do with what the undying elements must feel — the earth, the air, the water — as they submit in their patience to the eternal process; and watch the human generations coming and going and leaving behind so faint a trace!

And then, without any warning, a queer thing happened to Netta Page. She grew suddenly conscious that an actual human face was peering in upon her from outside the window; not pressing itself against the window pane, but regarding her with fixed intentness out of that heart-sick moonlight, its eyes looking straight into her eyes with an expression in them that gathered up and held in suspense the diffused woefulness that filled the great sky tent.

Long years afterward Netta could recall that look. And the curious thing about it was that she never hesitated as to the identity that hovered behind it, out there, in the sick, gusty night!

She knew it for the face of Sir Robert Ashover; and so deep an impression had that portrait of the Cavalier made upon her mind that even now, as she felt a vivid consciousness of his actual presence, it was with no trace of fear but rather with a sort of emotional recognition that she met his gaze. Hardly conscious of what she did she stretched out her arms toward the window; and it seemed to her as if that sorrowful phantom countenance smiled gently and reassuringly at her as it faded away.

When it was gone and she was once more lying back upon her pillow she found herself silently crying; not with bitter self-pitying tears, but with the sort of tears that belong to the winnowed and de-personalized spirit of the human race itself as it draws back from the confused arena of its sufferings and catches the sounds of disaster and calamity, faint and muffled, and almost mellowed as they rise up above the roof tops of the world.

She made up her mind that when she did meet Rook on the ensuing day she would make him take her into the church, to that marble image of the Cavalier there! How strange it was, she thought, as her tears dried upon her cheeks, that the mind of a person dead and buried more than two hundred years should still retain its power to influence and to console! Was it that something actually survived, of such a person’s subtler, more sensitive consciousness, among the places where it had moved in its lifetime? Or was there, behind all the dream stuff of the whole tragic scene, some imperishable cistern or reservoir of superhuman pity into which these nobler, these more imaginative responses sank, as the years moved round, adding always something to this great protest?

Netta’s nature was too simple, her beliefs and half-beliefs too vague and unformed, to be conscious of more than the crudest outlines of these open questions; but the things she had suffered and the things she had done, combined with the pressure upon her mind of her return to a place of so many memories, stirred up within her thoughts and speculations corresponding with these and corresponding with that troubled night sky.

The face at her window may have been a creation of her over-excited nerves; but before she fell asleep at last, in the early dawn, she had immersed all the recent impressions of her London life in these earlier associations; associations saturated with the sights and sounds of the country, and full of a sadness that was more wistful, if not less bruising, than the kind of wretchedness she had superimposed upon it.

The faint light of the dawn as it filled the small attic window with a cold, pale, watery blueness, like the blueness of polished steel, merged with the great concentrated secret thought which had been sustaining her all that agitating day.

She dreaded her meeting with Rook more for his sake than for her own. What *would* his reaction be to what she had to make him understand? Why, oh, why, she thought, did things that were so clear, so simple, so indisputable, to one human mind, become so strange, so foreign, so insane, when communicated to another?

With something more than the hard bones of ivory skulls were human beings divided, each from each! And she flung out against the pallid, bluish dawn a last desperate prayer that that particular queer-shaped skull that had so often lain by her side should not prove impervious to what she had to communicate to the consciousness within it!

CHAPTER XXIII

IT WAS THE last day of September. The Ashover brothers were seated side by side under Lexie's elm tree in the churchyard, the back of the younger propped up against the trunk, that of the elder against an anonymous tombstone.

The day was misty and warm. The early afternoon shadows had that purplish haze and dew-wet mistiness over their dark outlines on the grass which dwellers in the west of England have long learnt to associate with the red berries of traveller's joy and the white clusters of old-man's-beard! It was one of those days when the filmy seeds of dandelions move at random, without the stirring of a breath, from resting place to resting place; when the purple tufts of knapweed reveal the hard globulous husk below the petals; when the ragwort droops heavily over the mole heaps; when the dominant odour upon the air seems to be a blending of burning weeds and rain-soaked funguses.

"Are you sure she told you all she told me?" Rook was saying, in a voice that seemed as if it might have been the very epitome of that autumnal season, so languid and spiritless did it sound.

"Good Lord, Rook! How can I tell what she told you?" rapped out the other. "The thing is clear enough, anyhow. Those Anglican fathers must have got hold of her soon after she disappeared. She's had more than six months of their confounded chatter. The wonder is that they haven't spoilt her more than they have. You know what I'm like over these things; how tough and hard to be fooled I am? And though I can't forgive them for putting their nonsense into the mind of a sweet creature like that, I have to admit that it's the genuine thing with her. And I expect, too, it *has* given her a new interest." He paused and frowned meditatively. "I expect it's been for the best, Rook," he added gravely.

"Did she say anything to you about wanting to join some order?" asked the elder brother.

"She mentioned it as a possibility. But as far as I could make out, these Fathers, whoever they are, weren't encouraging it. I suppose they want her for other purposes. Oh, I don't like it — I don't like it, Rook!"

Rook recalled his own recent talk with Netta in Toll-Pike Cottage; and he also felt that he "didn't like it." Indeed, that was putting what he had gone through during that interview very much too mildly.

The encounter had been to him like a draught of coloquintida. It had been one of the master ironies of his life. He had rushed to greet his former mistress with an exultant sense of reconciliation and recovery. He had met her with a glowing wave of tenderness; and then in place of the answering tide of renewed loyalty, in place of the clinging and pathetic affection he had expected, he had been received by a completely different Netta; a Netta who treated their former life as if it had been sin; a Netta who took it for granted that thenceforth to the end of his days he was going to be faithful to Lady Ann!

The situation had been made doubly ironical by the fact that it had been impossible to conceal from his wife that the girl had come back. He had brought the news out boldly and frankly and there had been a distressing scene between them about it; a scene that had been repeated afterward with even more unpleasant nuances of misunderstanding when he had tried to explain the new and unexpected attitude toward him in which his mistress had returned.

Ann had never been more hard, more unyielding, more brutally cynical. She took the line, or pretended to take the line, that the whole thing was an elaborate pretence or pose on Netta's part. She treated him as if he were a clumsy and conceited victim of a masterpiece of calculated cajolery from an astute adventuress. She flatly refused to see Netta or to listen to any further explanations of her return. "*C'est fini! C'est fini!*" she had said with a wave of her hand when he brought the matter up for the third time.

"I saw Nell yesterday for a moment — —"

Rook's thoughts had been wandering so far that he felt as if these words of his brother's had been spoken hours ago instead of a minute since.

"It was Nell who got her address out of him and wired to her to come," said Rook. "Just think of it! It seems difficult to believe that all these things have happened since you and I talked in this very place last November."

"That great full moon!" responded the other. "And I thought I shouldn't last out to the end of the summer; and here we are nearly in October! God! I'm glad to be still alive in this world; able to eat a tasty bit of pigeon pie as well as another; and to bustle over for a bit of back-chat with brother Rook of a fine autumn afternoon! By the way, Twickenham maintains that I must be getting a mania for morphia. He says I finished my last box a couple of weeks too soon!"

The elder Ashover's fingers instinctively pressed a little cardboard object in his waistcoat pocket; but all he said was: "I hope you'll need those things less and less as time goes on."

"I've had to go a bit slow on cigarettes this last month," remarked Lexie, striking a match and lighting one as he spoke with more than his usual deliberation. "My bill with Twiney was terrible, as you may imagine," he added, watching the heavy-scented circles of smoke ascend into the thick autumnal air.

Rook glanced at him with sardonic solicitude. “I could just manage to lend you five or six pounds,” he muttered, “but of course it’s really Lady Ann’s money.”

“Oh, I shall get on,” chuckled the other. “You’ll want every penny you’ve got when this child of hers appears. Have you decided upon a nurse yet?”

Rook sighed heavily and looked away over the familiar water meadows, over that level plain of grass and reeds which had been so often “a bank and shoal of time “for his mind’s escape. There came over him a grievous sense of being divided from his brother as they had never been divided before. This new responsibility, even if it *were* his wife’s money that dealt with the material side of it, was something that in a subtle and invisible manner ended his old bachelor association with Lexie. His life with Netta had not impinged upon *that* at all; had been, in fact, only a more extravagant case of the amorous adventures that in the old days had consolidated their friendship, giving it that heathen predatory touch which adds quality and piquancy and substance, as if they were fellow huntsmen in the same perilous jungle! But this allusion to the nurse of his child, carrying the implication that thenceforward he was bound up with deep traditional issues independent of Lexie altogether, seemed to signify the definite end of something and the definite beginning of something else, seemed to stand out like a great ambiguous signpost in his days — like that obscure “Gorm” signpost; meaning nothing, yet meaning everything!

He looked at Lexie’s face as the younger man puffed out those spirals of blue smoke into an air that was thick with diffused colour, like the palette of some planetary Tiepolo; and it came over him that the real mistake of his life was in having departed, one stone’s throw, from the calm epicurean existence of those first years after their father’s death.

What had made him depart from that unruffled backwater, that earthly paradise of equanimity? Well! Just his viciousness; just that desire to round off his life with some feminine person or other who would satisfy those insatiable instincts that in the nature of the case his brother could not satisfy!

Oh! Could he only have foreseen, could he only have foreseen! — If he'd been tough and hard and callous he would have been able to whistle them all down the wind. In *that* case he would have made love to Ann and kept her at a distance; love to Nell and kept her at a distance; love to Netta and kept her at a distance! It was this fatal mixture in him of viciousness and pitiful sympathy that had ruined his life.

For his life *was* ruined. He knew *that* as definitely as if he had seen himself like a dead horse in a field, with Lady Ann and her beautiful offspring battening upon his flesh like two resplendent-winged dragon-flies!

Another person would have considered him the fortunate possessor of a distinguished wife and — he felt sure it would be so — of a distinguished heir to his name. Outwardly, at this moment, especially now that Netta was off his conscience and independent of him, he was a man any one might reasonably envy. Yet here he was, looking yearningly at Lexie's seamed and weather-stained face, as he might have looked his last at some lovely enchanted island from which a fatal vessel was irrevocably bearing him away!

Ay! Ay! A human being's life was not a thing of outward possessions, of outward circumstances. It was a thing of a certain secret abiding life illusion, that *must* be in some measure satisfied or all was lost! *His* life illusion implied his freedom from every sort of responsibility, except the responsibility of being a good son and a good brother. He was a man born to make women unhappy if he so much as approached them! And yet, how *not* to approach them, being obsessed, as he was, with this insane impersonal desire? What a dilemma! Why wasn't it possible to have love affairs with trees, with the elements, as those old classical personages used to have?

Oh, how intensely he loved his brother as he looked at him now! If only he could have exchanged with Lexie; he to be the sick one, the doomed one, and Lexie to be the husband of Lady Ann!

"How did Twickenham say you were when he examined you yesterday?" he asked at length, bringing to an end his prolonged melancholy silence.

"Oh, I thought I'd told you," replied Lexie eagerly. "He was very pleased — really surprised, you know! He seemed to indicate that I might go on quite comfortably through another year. My peculiar trouble seems to lend itself to these prolongations and postponements. And in my own secret mind — though I don't want to say the words — I have a sort of instinct that if I *do* last out one other year, it'll be damnably hard to unloose my hold upon life!"

Rook looked at him with infinite sympathy. He looked at the enormous size of Lexie's head, at the depths below depths of life energy in his glaucous coloured eyes, at the sweet, rich; almost feminine curves of his sensitive mouth.

"Lexie," he began, and stopped suddenly.

"Well, Rook, what is it?"

"I oughtn't to say a thing like that, I suppose. It's one of those absolutely outrageous things that Nature lets people think, but that no decent person could possibly bring himself to say!"

"What is it? What is it, Rook?"

"Well, I was just thinking how many lives I would offer up, and *whose* lives, if the gods would make me absolutely assured that yours would go on for thirty more years!"

Lexie threw away his cigarette and made a face at him. "I wouldn't have the least objection to this holocaust of yours if I didn't know for a certainty that, no sooner had you done it you'd begin regretting it! You're a funny person and I doubt if you realize how far your queerness goes."

He got up from the ground and yawned. When Lexie yawned he did so with the earthy shamelessness of a wild animal.

"Let's walk back to my place together, Rook," he said. "We could stop at Toll-Pike on the way, maybe, and see if either of the girls is in! Old Hastings, Nell tells me, has started off like a maniac at that book of his. She says he writes day and night now; and hardly stops to eat his meals. It's lucky for her that she *has* got Netta with her."

They crossed the graveyard together. "Well! Well!" Lexie continued, "It's something that you and I are still walking on a good gravel path side by side. I might so easily be now lying under that elm trunk with the beard growing on my chin and evil-smelling rheum running out of my eyes and nostrils! Yet here we are, looking forward to an excellent tea with black-currant jam among my phloxes, and very likely a couple of sweet-natured wenches to enjoy it with us! How any one can ever worry himself about the shuffling of the cards, as long as there are any cards to shuffle — that's what I cannot understand, brother Rook."

They emerged into the road and proceeded to wander slowly through its white dust watching the heavy-winged tarnished peacock butterflies flutter before them from silverweed to silverweed.

"Think what it would be like," said Lexie, "if every human being left a thin silvery trail behind him like the slime of a snail! Think of such a trail crossing and recrossing its tracks from where it first leaves its perambulator to where it climbs into bed for the last time! *Our* tracks must pretty often have gone over the same ground, side by side along this road. And yet it is an absolute and irrevocable certainty that one of these walks together will be our last."

Rook's thoughts were preoccupied at that moment with the stark question, a question that gave him the sensation of looking into a gaping wound which had begun to fester, as to what kind of a tilt or twist or secret palliative he could administer to this truculent life illusion of his, so as to endure Netta's conversion, his child's birth, his mother's senile jubilation, and this indescribable separation from Lexie which Lexie seemed too egoistic and self-absorbed even to notice!

"One of these walks will be our last," his brother was saying. Didn't he have the wit to recognize that this "last" had already happened?

They approached the clump of alders that overhung the sheep-washing pool. This was the point where the river turned sharply to the right, heading for the water meadows, and was crossed by a wooden bridge bordered by the same kind of whitewashed railings as skirted the preceding strip of road.

In the centre of this bridge the two brothers came to a pause, leaning against the railing and looking away over the barley fields, now a misty expanse of golden stubble, which sloped up toward Heron's Ridge.

"Do you remember how we used to call this bridge 'Foulden's Bridge,' for no reason except that we had a nursery-maid called 'Foulden' who used to meet that old villain Pod here of a fine summer's evening?"

Lexie chuckled as he uttered these words with an unctuous comprehensive historic chuckle which "flew low," so to speak, like a great flopping mallard, over all the days of all the years of both their lives!

Rook did not trouble himself to answer this particular remark. The two brothers were so content in each other's society that they had a way of thinking aloud; each one pursuing his own deep-indented furrow of contemplation; quite satisfied if now and again these isolated trails crossed one another, like Lexie's silvery snail tracks!

"I think the most delicious moments of my life," said Rook dreamily, "if I put aside the very best of our excursions together, have come when I've been walking by myself along some road I've never seen before. Are you listening, Lexie?"

His brother bent over the railing to watch the course of a bit of wood which he had flung into the water. He lifted up his head presently. "One minute!" he remarked. "Don't forget what you were going to tell me; but I want to see" — and he flung another piece of wood after the first— "I want to see whether it's Rook or Lexie who gets safe under the bridge!"

Rook leaned over the white-washed railing by his side. The Frome ran shallow and weedy just there. A few slender dace, with their heads upstream, were letting the current carry them languidly backward; while at the side of the river, where the water ran over clear sunlit pebbles, a great shoal of minnows were hovering and darting, like little tongues of quicksilver.

"There we go!" cried Lexie, giving his brother one of those looks of complicated naïveté and subtlety which always troubled Rook's mind, as if with the tantalizing proximity of some dimension of human goodness and sweetness which was only offered to be snatched away. "There we go!" And he ran across "Foulden Bridge" to the other side. Rook followed him, puzzled at the eagerness with which he himself, too, awaited the issue of this childish contest.

"I'm out! I'm safe!" cried the younger Ashover, pointing with his stick. Then in a moment his face assumed a most curious mixture of condolence and triumph. "But you're stuck fast under there! You're done for, Rook!"

The elder man did at that second of time undergo an unusual and very unexpected sensation, a perfectly direct and unmitigated shock of self-pity, as if he had been suddenly condemned to leave a world full of beauty and happiness.

“Well? Shall we go on?” said Lexie. “I’m glad it was you and not I who sank, because that means that we *shall* be together this time next year.”

They moved on across the bridge. The road stretched straight in front of them with nothing but the small white square of Toll-Pike Cottage, far away on the left, to break its perspective till it lost itself in the dim autumnal blur, haze-wrapped and purple-shadowed, of Ashover village.

They moved very slowly now, arm-in-arm, scattering the dust with their feet. Each time they prodded the ground with their sticks little white clouds arose, that subsided patiently and sadly after they passed, like the sighs of disappointed watchers.

“What a place in the imagination,” said Rook suddenly, “has come to be taken by *dust.* Doesn’t it always return to your mind, that scene in Syria, when the Lord stopped and wrote in the dust?”

Lexie swung round. “You mean when He spat in the dust and made clay! It certainly is strange how every incident of that life falls in with the commonest omens of any walk you go. What were you just going to say on the bridge, Rook, when I interrupted you?”

The elder brother frowned. “Oh, nothing,” he said crossly; but after a pause and in an abstracted tone, “I was wanting to clear up a thing that’s always puzzled me. What is it you feel when you’re alone on a strange road, especially when it leads up over a bare hill? Do you suppose it’s an atavistic memory from times when people were more nomadic and more isolated than they are to-day? Or do you think that all the feelings of solitude, accumulated from many generations, are gathered up then; as if there were a person in each of us who was like a kind of Wandering Jew, with a consciousness entirely made up of the vague, faint, half-human impressions of loneliness, a person whose whole long mysterious life, reaching through many centuries, were one solitary journey?”

In place of answering him Lexie pulled him round by the arm and they stood for a while looking back. All the familiar objects that they looked at then — the wooden bridge with its white palings, the dark-green alders by the sheep wash, the square tower of the church, the gray-stone bridge, the clump of thick-foliaged trees that hid Ashover House — all these things that each of them had known from childhood fell into a new and unfamiliar setting, as if they had been discovered off-guard, in some secretive mood that they had been at pains to conceal.

“Don’t you feel,” said Rook, “that we might be at this moment two characters in one of Grimms’ fairy stories? Haven’t you got that odd feeling, that you get in those stories, as if there were nothing really vulgar or banal in the whole world? As if we might see an old woman driving a goose over that first bridge and a man with a pack on his back crossing this second bridge, and every door in the village ready to open to the cooking of magic cakes and the purring of great wise all-knowing cats! It’s what comes from living in the same spot all one’s life and then suddenly seeing everything as if you’d never seen it before. The only way to escape from vulgarity and commonness is to live all one’s days in a place like Ashover.” He stopped and drew a long breath. “I don’t think I really should care very much,” he added, “if I should never go ten miles away from here until I died!”

They turned their faces once more toward the village and walked on together without further speech till they came to Toll-Pike Cottage.

Lexie's anticipations were justified. They found Netta and Nell seated together in the little front garden. They were able to observe the two girls several seconds before they were themselves seen or heard owing to the muffling softness of the white dust and the fact that the women were engaged in an intimate and agitating conversation.

As the brothers watched them across the fence there came into Lexie's mind that peculiar sense of the passing of time which so often seized and arrested him. That he and Rook on this particular day of September should catch sight of those two, Nell in her white summer frock and Netta in black, talking so earnestly and anxiously, with the little round bed of red geraniums in front of them and the window of Hastings's study open above their heads, seemed to be one of those events that, common enough in themselves, are yet pregnant in some peculiar way with an unforgettable significance.

"Rook is right," thought Lexie, "about living in Ashover. It's the fact of one's knowing every stick and stone in the background of events that gives to events their heightened value. To get the passing of time one has to possess a dial, as it were, on which the hours are marked!" They opened the gate and entered the garden.

Lexie found it piquant to watch this meeting between Netta and his brother. "*There* are those two," he thought, "solemnly shaking hands and gravely discussing some indifferent matter, when a year ago they were sharing the same room and using the same water jug."

His thoughts were impinged upon by a very serious communication from Nell.

"We're worried about William to-day," she said. "He's been writing at that book of his without cessation for the last twelve hours. He got up early this morning, before I was awake, and we haven't been able to persuade him to come to any meals."

"Has he eaten anything?" enquired Lexie.

"Hardly anything. I took him some milk and biscuits. He hasn't locked the door. But when I go in he looks so wild and haggard and gets so angry at being disturbed that I daren't stop more than a minute. I'm afraid for his mind if he goes on like this. He sat up till three or four this morning. He couldn't have slept more than two hours. And I didn't like what he said when I went in."

"What did he say?"

"It was about Lady Ann and her child. It was awful, Lexie! I can't think how a sane man can think such appalling thoughts. I don't believe he *is* quite sane," she breathed.

"Can you see him from here?" enquired Lexie, speaking in the tone he might have used if Hastings had been a dangerous otter or badger.

"No. You see? The window's open but he's got the blind down. Come here, Lexie. I don't want Rook to hear us." They moved away to the other side of the geranium bed.

"Netta, you can't mean that you're going back to London without letting me see you once more alone?" Rook spoke these words wistfully and pleadingly but there was an undertone of indignant sullenness in his voice and his eyes had an angry glint.

The girl's face was very pale; a pallor which the golden September light clinging to her brown hair threw into touching relief. She seemed as Rook looked at her, standing there resolute and sad in her loose black dress, to be thinner and more girlish than in former times.

She was aware that his look had in it a recognition of her physical desirableness; the half-conscious non-mental renewal of an ancient magnetism. She knew that he was recalling with a certain tantalized sulkiness his former possession of her.

“I cannot bear it, Rook dear,” she said gently. “I could bear it if I didn’t love you. But I love you far too well. Don’t make it harder for me, Rook, than it is already!”

He glanced gloomily round; but Lexie and Nell had seated themselves on a wooden bench under the hedge, their eyes directed, not toward himself and Netta, but toward the window of Hastings’s room.

“Come into the house,” he said brusquely, taking her by the shoulder.

She felt so strong in her sadness and in her pity that she allowed him to take her into Nell’s little parlour and shut the door upon them; but her instinctive response to the familiar touch of his hands surprised her by its independence of her conscious mind.

The very moment they were alone the room began to assume that cunning, furtive, pandar-like look that rooms take on when human skeletons of opposite sexes stand in one another’s presence, silent, obsessed, with beating pulses and hammering hearts! Rook’s eyes mechanically noted a grotesquely sentimental picture of Nell as a little girl which stood on the mantelpiece and then without regarding her feeble protests he took Netta in his arms.

Those two human bodies seemed to rush together in a strange complicity of contempt for what was happening to those minds or to those wills. The man pressed his mouth so savagely upon the girl’s mouth that before their kiss was over her lips had parted in helpless abandonment.

He had sworn in his anger that she was “like all women” and she knew in her heart that she had proved herself like many among them in the manner in which she yielded at that moment without really yielding at all She just let him do with her as he pleased because her body already belonged to his body and seemed to return to its possessor with the inevitableness of a compass needle. And yet not for one second did she deviate or collapse from her mental resolution.

As soon as he had removed his mouth from her mouth and had begun to kiss her chin and her neck, this unseduced spirit in her revolted and flung him off. He became suddenly conscious that he was holding a limp, cold, unresponsive husk in his arms, something whose essence was not there at all, a stiff, lifeless simulacrum of the real Netta. He let her sink down into Nell's one available armchair, the very chair in which she had sat nearly a year ago, when on that day of torrential autumn rain she had come into the room with Cousin Ann.

"There … you see!" he gasped breathlessly. "All this mania of yours is just a morbid fancy that you've fallen into by living too much alone. You're my same Netta … you'll always be my Netta … nothing that can possibly happen can change that!"

An expression of pitiable sadness came into her face. She looked not only very pale but actually old and haggard at that moment. With the sunlight gone from her hair and her hair itself ruffled by their embrace the gray streaks in its heavy masses became lamentably apparent.

"When you say that it's wrong for you to live with me any more, does that mean that you and I are to be as if we'd never lived as we have?"

She made an effort to answer him, but it was too much. Those big tears, the sight of which brought back the pathos of her personality more than anything else could have done, those tears as big as the eggs of golden-crested wrens, began one by one to run down her cheeks. She made no effort to dry them. She seemed unconscious of their presence. Nor did the lines of her countenance distort themselves as most people's faces do when they cry. Her eyes remained wide open and fixed upon his own. Her mouth, too, remained strangely untremulous, its quiet curves set fast in an expression of weary composure.

Very slowly she shook her head; and then, after making some little swallowing movements in her throat, she spoke to him firmly and gently.

“I shall never love any one but you, Rook,” she said, “but I must go back where I came from. The Fathers have been very kind to me and they’ve found me work to do. I’ve got my life to lead somehow, Rook dear. And they’ve been very good to me. I owe them everything, everything!”

In her desire to explain she had touched just the one chord whose vibration was calculated to hurt him most.

“Everything, Netta?” he repeated with bitter sarcasm. For it was just *that*, that she should have turned in her despair to other comforters, to other responses, to a different refuge than anything he could supply which hit him to the depths of his nature.

It seemed to him as if what she had done was something worse than ingratitude. She had taken their love, which was the expression of all that had been best and tenderest and most delicate in him, and had treated it as something evil and sinful. He had given her a pity, an understanding, a recognition, that went beyond anything those priests could give her; and now she was capable of this enthusiastic cry: “I owe them everything!”

The window of the room was wide open to the garden and there floated in upon them the distant murmur of Lexie’s and Nell’s voices and the musky scent of geraniums.

Rook found that he had counted much more upon Netta’s attitude to him than he had until that moment realized. It was not that he had anything to offer her; any reasonable alternative to this new life she had found for herself. If there had been anything definite in his mind he could have dealt with this blow more effectively, have found an antidote for its smart. He was standing before her there, pleading angrily and helplessly for something that had no shape, no substance, no form. He was pleading with her to have pity upon his life illusion, pity upon his soul's inmost self, pity upon that ultimate reflection of himself before himself which lay in the abysmal mirror of his self-deception as the sky lies in a mirage of water above arid sands! He was pleading with her to save from destruction something that was so tenuous that he himself could hardly define it. Like a thin film of autumn mist his self-love wavered and undulated between them in that geranium-scented air. It became a drooping filament of unreal vapour. It faded; it hovered; it sank. A sense of intolerable emptiness came over him. Netta's Fathers had saved *her* soul; but they had stricken his. But how could *she* know that? How could she know that his feeling for her was the one affair of his life that exactly lent itself to that morbid peculiarity in the depths of his being, his desire to love a person who in some way was dependent upon him, helpless before him, different from what he was by some impassable gulf?

Along with the emptiness that filled his soul there came the sting of a peculiarly masculine resentment; the resentment which arises when a woman with whom one has dropped one's mask and put aside one's reserve suddenly reassumes *her* mask and *her* reserve at the very moment when one is most unarmed and at her mercy!

"And so your Fathers have taught you to look back upon our life together as *sin?*" His tone was strained and harsh; and the girl saw clearly that he was on the verge of breaking out into a torrent of indignant words, bitter, corrosive, capable of leaving behind them scars that would never be effaced.

She must stop him. She must explain to him. She must make him realize what she had been feeling when she deliberately began drinking in order to degrade herself in his eyes. It was intolerable to her that he should take her present mood, her new life, and make of it something that diminished the value of all that had been between them. What she wanted to make him understand was that never from her — never, never from her! — could come any diminishing, any undervaluing of their love or of all that that love had meant. And if she could not make him see this without saying what was too hard to say, well, she must say it!

Woman-like, what hurt her most was that she should have blurred the image of herself that their love had created in his mind, nay, spoilt his response to that image by giving him the idea that it was possible for her to have changed so much as to be ready to betray their past together, to blaspheme against what they had shared.

She looked at him with that expressive look with which one human being beats at the closed shutters of another's conciousness, like a starving traveller whose language is so remote, so foreign, that it might be mistaken for the wind in the trees, for the rain on the porch! What she wanted to lay before him was nothing less than the full measure of her love. That he should accuse her of not recognizing the worth of their days together or the value of the sympathy he had given her — it was blind, unfair, distorted, mad!

That was what men were always doing in this world; they were laying stress on external, outward, logical aspects of relations between people and missing the one thing needful! They were always working themselves up into rational indignation about aspects of love that were accidental, occasional, relative; whereas, all the while, Love Himself, absolute and immeasurable, remained dumb and inarticulate on the threshold!

As she looked at him now with this mystery lying unspoken, unspeakable, at the heart of her existence, and that turmoil of wild accusation trembling upon his tongue, it came over her what a tragic chasm it was that separated the love of a woman from the love of a man.

"It is thus. It is so. There are these evidences. There is this proof," cries the exacting reason of the one. "I love you! Can't you see that I love you?" answers the blind instinct of the other. Netta began to feel heart-sick and dizzy as she watched him, standing there like a judge; waiting, waiting, till some self-betraying murmur on her part brought down on her head the already formulated sentence. She seemed to herself to be beating back with her hands a clamour of discordant voices, of confused inexplicable sounds. Why did those steps keep marching up and down, up and down, in the room above? Or were they, too, only the beating of her heart? Surely that must be Lexie and Nell just outside the door! But their murmurings reached her as if they were not human at all; as if Rook's pulses full of unjust anger had acquired some horrid goblin speech and were rushing upon her like an infuriated mob —

And then, without any reason for it, she saw with incredible clearness a little thin gold ring that the "Father" had worn on his finger when she was first pouring out to him the misery of her shame, of her loneliness; and as that vision disappeared, mingling strangely with a fierce red spot on Rook's lowering forehead, she found herself experiencing that lightning-rapid panorama of her whole previous existence, such as, people had told her, persons underwent when, in drowning, they sank for the third time.

She certainly had begun to feel actually faint. What was Rook doing standing there, so funnily stern, in front of her? What was it she had to make him understand? Something that a person could do when he loved another person very much — but something that it was impossible to speak of!

"Rook!" she brought out with a kind of gasp.

At that moment the door flew open and Lexie and Nell precipitated themselves into the room. They both showed signs of extreme agitation and they both began speaking at once.

"Pandie is out there — —"

"Pandie has come to say that — —"

Rook turned pale. Had the moment arrived? Was he even now the father of an heir to Ashover?

Netta rose to her feet, also very white and trembling.

"Is it Lady Ann?" she asked.

Lexie was the one to explain; for Nell's attention was distracted at that moment by the sound of her husband's steps moving backward and forward in his room above.

"Pandie is at the gate," said Lexie hurriedly. "She says your wife can't be found."

The first feeling that Rook had under the shock of this unexpected news was — strangely enough — a queer spasm of relief! For some profound subconscious reason anything seemed more tolerable to him just then than to hear that his child had come into the world.

"Can't be found?" he repeated. And then, taking advantage of the strangeness of the communication to give vent to his unnatural emotion in the form of blind anger against the messenger: "What does the little fool come running here for?" he cried sternly. "Why doesn't she look about in the garden, in the kitchen garden, in the orchard, up Battlefield, even? Ann has been walking quite far some of these days. She's taken into her head to go a farther stroll than usual, that's all! What's the use of coming here to tell us a thing like that? Let me see her." And he made a step toward the open door, where Nell was still standing, nervously preoccupied by the sounds overhead. "Let me see her! Let me talk to her!"

But Lexie intervened and stopped him. “It’s more serious than you think, Rook,” he said gravely. “For God’s sake keep your wits about you! They’ve searched the garden *and* the orchard already. Pandie says they’ve been everywhere. Mother has been herself to the top of Heron’s Ridge looking for her. God knows what may not have happened! Women are apt to go crazy at these times and do the maddest things. Pandie says old Betsy Cooper has turned up, dragging the idiot Binnory after her, with some wild story about having seen her in Antiger Lane near Drool’s cottage. Martha Vabbin has gone to get Drool himself; and to see if by some lucky chance she just went in there to rest. But from what Betsy and the idiot say she didn’t go into the cottage at all — —” He broke off suddenly, disturbed by the sight of Nell rushing wildly up the stairs.

“There’s something wrong up there, too,” he added, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Rook without a word hurried into the garden. He found Pandie standing on the gravel path like a comic image of desperation, her head bare and her hand clutching an enormous garden rake.

“Oh, Master Rook, Master Rook! What have come upon our heads to-day?” cried the distracted servant. “Missus says I was to fetch ‘ee to come home at once; and Mr. Lexie, too, if he were well enough to walk on his feet. And she says you was to fetch Mr. Twiney and Mr. Pod up along! And she says you was to summon the police; and I reckon myself ’twould be only right, considering how them gippoos be abroad, to send to Forley Barracks for the Military. Lord alive! Lord alive! That I should be the woman to tell the Squire of Ashover that his lady be gone to find a hole in the river deep enough to commit ‘fanticide in!”

Rook was too bewildered by this time even to smile at these aberrations of the native of Somersetshire.

“What have you got that rake for, Pandie?” he asked.

“For to drag the ponds and ditches with, Master Rook! They say that when a body’s expecting, like as your lady be, there ain’t no pond water near or far that Providence don’t tempt ‘un with. ’Tis a pity her legs bain’t swelled up! When their legs be swelled up they can’t go suiciding and such-like. ’Tis a dispensation of Nature!”

Rook turned away from her.

“Lexie! Nell! Netta!” he called out. “I’m off to the house!”

He strode to the gate. “You go on to the village, Pandie,” he cried, “and get Twiney and Pod and bring them back with you in Twiney’s cart and don’t go shouting all this nonsense to everyone you meet. I expect I shall find Lady Ann safe at home when I get back!”

He was already in the road when he heard his brother’s voice calling him by name. He turned and met Lexie at the gate.

“Nell has just come down from talking to that beggar upstairs,” said the younger man, “and she says she’s had the greatest difficulty in quieting him. I couldn’t get the drift of what the trouble was; but he’s got his confounded book mixed up with your child. The chap seems to have gone all to pieces. I’m glad Netta *is* with them. Nell oughtn’t to be left alone with him.” He laid his hand on his brother’s arm. “You’re not letting this fuss about Ann upset you, Rook, are you? This day seems dedicated to one agitation after another! But don’t you worry, dear Rook. Ann’s probably turned up by now.”

Rook suddenly bent forward, took his brother’s grave and anxious countenance between his hands and kissed him rapidly. “I shall look in at the church,” he said. “That’s just the place none of them would think of! But, as you say, she’s probably safe back in her room by now. There’s something about this day that seems to make everyone nervous. I’ve noticed it before. Whenever the wind drops dead in Ashover and the air is absolutely still, something's sure to happen with us. We're a funny family. The gods must be perfectly sick of us. Well, I'm off! Don't leave Nell alone with Hastings, I beg you, Lexie!"

He strode off down the road.

Lexie saw Pandie staring up at Hastings's window as if she had been mesmerized. With one hand on her rake she was mechanically moving it about among the geraniums. Whether in that waking dream she imagined she was dredging a pond to find Ann's body or whether she was reverting to some childish memory of helping her father amid the rich loam of Sedgemoor, no one will ever know. There are instinctive actions and gestures of human beings, especially at some great crisis of drastic events such as was then gathering about these people, which will always retain an element of the grotesque and the inexplicable.

"I'll come with you to the village, Pandie," said the young man, breaking in upon her trance. "Here! For God's sake drop that rake of yours and pull yourself together! What's the matter with you, woman?"

The red-haired servant turned toward him a face that was distorted with emotion.

"She told I we be all flummoxed by thik parson up there."

"*Who* told you?" cried Lexie impatiently; and then, catching sight of Netta at the door, "Don't you leave Nell alone with that chap, will you? Pandie and I are going to the village."

Netta made a sign that she understood him and returned into the house. Lexie took the rake from Pandie's unconscious hands and led her into the road.

"Who told you?" he repeated as they moved off together.

“That gippoo bitch, Bet Cooper, ‘twere what warned I of ‘ee. ’Twas for that she be come, so ‘a did say. She’d a-seen thik parson murdering our Squire, or summat o’ that, in a girt wold crystal-stone, what she have stoled from some foreign scollard! I did tell thee mother what she did say; but not a thought would she give to it. Your mother’s not one to attend to God his wone self when she be put about.”

Lexie found his strength barely sufficient to reach the first house in the village, which by good luck happened to be that of Mr. Pod, the Sexton. Here he decided to rest, sending Pandie on to find Mr. Twiney.

Sitting in Mr. Pod’s little kitchen through which not a breath of air passed, either by door or window, he could not help recalling his brother’s words about these days when the wind was dead in Ashover.

“I don’t like it,” he said to himself. “I don’t like it! Things are beginning to get out of control; and I can’t tell what the upshot will be.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE INVIOLABLE STILLNESS of that last day of September prevented Lady Ann from enjoying her usual rest in the afternoon. An unaccountable malaise came upon her, a sense of suffocation, of being shut in, imprisoned, sepulchred, buried alive. She had suffered from the same species of nervousness once or twice before, but never so badly as now.

She went to the window of her room and looked out.

Everything was hushed and death-still in the somnolent garden. The branches of the great cedar swam motionless upon the air and seemed borne up by vibrant aërial waves of soft blue mist.

"I'll go for a walk," she said to herself. "I'll take Lion."

She put on her prettiest summer hat, threw a thin loose dust-coloured cloak round her shoulders and slipped quietly down the stairs. Very cautiously, so as not to arouse any one's attention, she let herself out of the front door and walked round to the rear of the house.

She knew that Rook was out with Lexie somewhere and she knew that Mrs. Ashover was resting in her big upstairs room. As she came past the kitchen door she was met by that peculiar complicated odour which in English houses of the Ashover sort seems synonymous with two o'clock in the afternoon, might indeed be the very smell of the gamboge-coloured hide of two o'clock, that enemy of romance and all delicate joy! It was an odour in which the "washing-up" beginning in the scullery mingled with the servants' dinner ending in the kitchen and both of these with the indescribable sense of the crowding together of the various house pets, canine and feline, who had "followed the dishes out."

Lady Ann had not been able to eat much lunch and this two-o'clock smell made her feel for a moment a little dizzy and sick. But the great point was that nobody about the place saw her as she hurried past. Lion was neither at the kitchen door nor in his kennel by the stable. "Oh, I forgot!" she said to herself. "I told them to take him down to Drool's." She had vexed herself lately about the dog; feeling that, now her own walks were curtailed, it didn't get enough exercise, Rook being teased rather than entertained by the animal's company.

Her momentary malaise passed off after she had crossed the orchard and got clear away on the slope of Battlefield, and when she reached the top of Heron's Ridge she felt better than she had felt for several weeks.

She felt happier, too. That rich, indolent, windless autumn day was profoundly adapted to her mood. The sense of the apples and pears growing riper and mellower every day among those lichen-covered branches, of the hazelnuts growing browner and plumper among their crumpled leaves, of the mushrooms in the lush grass meadows appearing so suddenly and so quickly, that even those who knew their privileged haunts would wonder at their coming; the sense of all these things around and about her seemed to soothe her mind and liberate her spirit, as if the immense fecundity of Nature were something she could draw upon to enlarge and replenish her own vitality.

She had not been as far as Drool's cottage for several weeks; but to-day it seemed to her that it would be very nice to pay a visit to the place. She felt a queer emotional craving to stand once more, whatever might be the result of what she had soon to go through, in that little room of Binnory's. And besides, she would greatly love to catch a final glimpse of the dog, her one completely faithful and loyal supporter, before she entered upon this life-and-death struggle.

There were many feelings in her proud young heart that she had always found it easier to confide to horses and dogs than to her own species; and with Lion especially she had come to find a satisfying sense of dropping her reserve and giving way to this or that primitive and even savage emotion such as her stoical training had taught her to suppress in the presence of her own race.

She came down the Dorsal side of the hill with a gayer and more light-hearted tread than she had used for many a long day in her diurnal strolls. She watched the rabbits with the eye of a sportsman, at once sympathetic and predatory. She snuffed the air, at one big clump of bracken, catching the familiar taint of a fox in that misty windless atmosphere; and she stopped more than once to place her foot on the loose up-flung trail of earth mould which marked the movement of a burrowing mole. A few of her husband's black namesake birds kept up a perpetual clamour above the high tops of the trees as if to make sure that no invading jay or magpie should interfere with the return of their tribe when later in the afternoon they "made wing to the rooky wood," while the whirring headlong flight of more than one family of partridges made her forget her obligation to her own offspring!

It was only when she was quite close to the cottage at the foot of the hill that her mood veered. It was as if the master of the vessel of her mind had suddenly come on deck and given orders to swing sheer round, from larboard to starboard. It was a quick instinctive rush of anger against Rook that decided her.

"I'll turn round and go straight back," she thought. "That room is nothing to me now; and Lion will only want to go home with me if he sees me."

She was so close to the gap in the hedge, however, by which the lane was reached, a little to the right of the cottage, that she was led on, by that curious and childish instinct which demands that the most drifting of human walks should have some sort of goal, to struggle cautiously down the bank to the familiar road.

Once in the lane it occurred to her that the most sensible way home would be round by the barley fields; for Heron’s Ridge was much less of an eminence there, and she could stroll back at leisure by the village road and the two bridges.

She turned to the right accordingly at this point, and soon found herself opposite the gate into the wood where she had first revealed to Rook that she was with child. An unpleasantly familiar voice came suddenly to her ears from the other side of this gate. She moved a step toward it; and there, under the brushwood, she saw Binnory.

Nor was the idiot alone. Occupied, beneath his fascinated scrutiny, in collecting some especial herbalist’s plant — which may even have been, for all Ann knew about such things, the famous classical hellebore — the old trot, Betsy Cooper herself, turned toward her the sort of menacing scrutiny that a sinister sorceress of ancient times might have turned toward some Eurynome or Dione, big with the child of an Olympian.

“Save us and help us if it ain’t her ladyship’s own self!” cried the crone, rising from her knees and coming forward.

“’Tis my pretty leddy! ’Tis *my* pretty leddy!” ejaculated the idiot, approaching the gate with still more alacrity. “Have ‘ee been to Lunnon to find Squire Ash’ver, what rumpled thee fine feathers for ‘ee unbeknownst to any but poor Binnory?”

Lady Ann instinctively drew away from these two discomfortable figures, retreating, as she pulled her cloak around her, toward the middle of the lane. Here she stopped and faced them; but neither the old woman nor the boy made any attempt to come farther than the gate.

"Thee best get up along over Hern's Top as quickly as thee may," said Betsy Cooper. "'Twere only last night when I be cleaning me horse-cart, out where us do bide now, and me partners were quiet-like and 'twere all still as churchyard stones, that a voice inside me belly said to I, 'Look i' thik wold crystal, Betsy lass; look i' thik wold crystal!' And no sooner did I do what 'un did say than, Lord bless us and keep us! There was that black parson of yours a-murderin' of poor dear Squire!"

She stopped to take breath and Lady Ann moved as if to go on down the lane.

"It's true as God's dear blood, your ladyship!" screamed the old woman, making a feeble attempt to open the gate. "Get home with you, you owdacious turleypin!" This was addressed to Binnory, who was staring at the girl in the road as if he meditated a wild rush toward her.

"I can't listen to you now," said Lady Ann calmly. "But if you'd like to come up to the house later I'm sure you'll be made welcome."

She spoke in the tone she habitually used to poor people, the tone that was at once easy and distant. What it implied was: "I have no time now to chatter with picturesque vagabonds; but my servants will be charmed to give you tea in the kitchen!"

Betsy Cooper by no means missed the quality of this rebuff; but she was too excited to enter into personal adjustments just then; besides, beyond all her eccentricity, she was saturated with a feudal respect for the house of Ashover.

"Don't 'ee take on, your ladyship," she pleaded. "Don't 'ee take on! 'Twere after I'd a-seen that murderin' parson in Cimmery stone that I heard a voice out of one of me partner's mouths. They innocents *do* talk if it *be* talking, your ladyship; and it's what me partner said that do most bide in me mind. ‘A said a terrible queer word, Lady Ash’ver; and it’s as true as God’s dear blood what I be telling thee.”

The idiot, who had now climbed to the top of the gate and was balancing himself there like a demonic gargoyle, burst in with an exultant cry at this point.

“I do know what the half beastie did say, pretty leddy! Binnory do know what the half beastie did say to Granny Cooper!”

“I can’t listen to you now,” repeated Lady Ann sternly. “Come up to the house later; and you, too, Binnory, if you like. Good-afternoon to you both!” And she swept off down the lane with all a grand lady’s indifference as to whether the populace commented on her condition or held their peace.

She did not put her hands to her ears, however, as many prospective mothers of heroes and demigods have been driven ere now to do; and for that reason it was impossible not to hear what the old woman shouted after her.

“Till book be burned no child’ll be borned!”

The idiot, who had now scrambled over the gate, ran after her down the lane. “Till book be burned no child’ll be borned!” he screamed in his shrill voice; and it was only after Lady Ann had turned twice round, threatening him with her parasol, that he desisted and drifted back to his companion.

Even when she was out of all sight and hearing of these two troublesome beings and had rounded the corner at the point opposite Titty’s Ring she still seemed to hear that ominous and fantastic oracle. The magpies chattered it; the green finches chittered it; the very rooks themselves, who now began to gather in larger numbers, seemed echoing it with their rueful cawings. The whole incident was peculiarly distasteful to the girl’s mind; but the first effect it had upon her was doubtless an excellent one. It roused to full flood her gallant fighting spirit. What impertinence! What intolerable impertinence! And then her invincible youthfulness came to her aid. There was something that tickled her realistic sense of humour about the whole thing. “It’s just a trick to get money out of us,” she thought. “That fool Hastings has probably been telling everybody what he told me on New Year’s night, about his abominable theories. No doubt when he spent that day in the caravan with Netta Page the old woman listened to his mad talk. The dwarfs probably heard him, too! In fact, the chances are that our absurd clergyman and his insane fancies are the common gossip of the whole neighbourhood.”

Had Lady Ann been a more neurotic or a weaker person this agitating encounter would have been actually dangerous to her. As it was, so robust was her constitution and so defiant her temper, it seemed rather to hearten her and steady her than to do her any harm.

It did cross her mind as she left the lane and made her way through the stubble fields toward the village that she was at that crisis in her life singularly alone. Her own parents were dead. Mrs. Ashover was her nearest relative; and the girl was far too sagacious not to know that it was in the rôle of a mother of future Ashovers rather than in the rôle of a daughter to herself that the old tribal fanatic cherished her.

Alone. Well? What of that? Many a Norse ancestor of hers had been alone ere now, both on land and sea, and *that* fact had not weakened the strength of his arm or blurred his clear, unclouded glance into the shifty eyes of Fate!

Besides, she was not alone! Rook might have a cold and fickle heart. His mother might be obsessed by the family. Very well! Let them go. She carried *her* champion, *her* supporter, *her* ally, here in her own vitals!

She was at the top of the ridge now and beginning to feel exhausted. That young Viking in her belly was displaying his strength — and his sex, too — how sure she was of *that!* — by certain familiar thumpings and stirrings.

It must be getting on toward tea-time. The autumn sun already rested, red and glowing, like a vast eye-socket veiled in titanic sorrow, on the treetops behind the Drools' cottage.

The church and churchyard down there in the valley were gathered now in thick woolly mists, and as she looked at them she remembered the peculiar psychic support which more than once those dead people there had seemed capable of giving her.

Well! Weary though she was, she was so mysteriously self-subsistent at that moment that she felt strong enough to steer her vessel onward without assistance, or even sympathy, from any quarter.

As she came slowly down the stubble field with its faint strawy smell and its little tufts of fumitory and small wild yellow pansies she had a strange fierce longing for the unknown travail that was to come upon her. She felt associated so closely with her child in this struggle that it was almost as if two lovers, of proud Spartan breed, were preparing for an engagement with a barbarous enemy!

Never for one second did she contemplate the possibility of her death. The life force in her seemed so inexhaustible, so potent, that it tossed such thoughts aside, as a racehorse might toss the foam from his mouth and nostrils.

She soon reached the hawthorn hedge where she had met Rook on the occasion of her visit to Toll-Pike. She smiled faintly as she thought of that unenjoyed lunch! And she said to herself with stark sincerity, "How *can* Rook and Lexie find anything to attract them in that sentimental, funny-looking little thing?"

She sat down to rest on the identical spot where she had rested before. The hedge protected her from the rising mists, and the ground was still warm except where the longer grass had caught the dew. With her cloak wrapped round her she sank luxuriously back against the furrow of sweet-smelling earth mould. The largeness of that autumn day, its indrawn breath, its immense passivity, lulled her into a delicious relaxation.

She lay there for nearly an hour, living intensely and absorbingly in the great parturient process that was going on within her. Then, at last, feeling the approach of the evening chill, she rose to her feet, and, rested and comforted in mind and body, pushed open the ancient ramshackle gate into the remembered barley field.

It was then that quite suddenly, and, as it were, quite naturally, that tiresome, ungrammatical refrain, “Till book be burned no child’ll be borned,” repeated itself in her ears as if someone at her very side had whispered it.

Lady Ann became grave and stood motionless, like a beautiful animal scenting some species of ambiguous danger. “What’s up with me?” she thought to herself. “Is this nerves? Or am I growing superstitious?”

And then without reasoning about it at all she suddenly felt an irresistible instinct driving her to go straight down to Toll-Pike Cottage and face this life-hating conjurer whose sorcery was so inimical to herself and her child.

She tried to find, for her own justification, some quite reasonable motive for stopping at Toll-Pike Cottage just then; nor was such a motive very difficult to find. She felt not the slightest embarrassment at being seen either by Nell or Hastings in her present condition. As for Netta’s presence there, she did not permit it to affect her one way or the other. Her attitude to both these rivals of hers was that of an indifferent conqueror of superior race, whose caprices may be indulged to the furthest limit in sublime contempt for any reaction, favourable or unfavourable, that they might produce on the vanquished.

It did not take her long to reach the cottage. This time there was no Marquis of Carabas lying on the back porch. But Lady Ann did not intend to enter in that unconventional manner this time. She walked round to the front door and rang the bell. To her surprise she heard excited and agitated voices in the room above.

She waited. No one seemed to have noticed her ring. There was evidently something serious going on upstairs.

Was this crazy priest quarrelling with these two women? Was he ill-using them, perhaps? All her social instincts as a member of the English ruling class rose up in indignation. It was no more to her then that Rook had taken his pleasure with these girls than if they had been daughters of Twiney or of Pod! What was unpardonable was that in the village of Ashover, within a mile of Ashover House, an English clergyman should be behaving like a drunken blacksmith. For it *was* that. She was not country-born for nothing. She had heard so often that particular mingling of female clamour with masculine threats from under the eaves of thatched cottages, as she rode home, dreamy and content, through Sturminster, through Shaftesbury, through Stalbridge, from a successful hunt with the Blackmore pack!

With her practical and realistic mind she came to the prompt conclusion that in “his weakness and his melancholy” this hedge priest of theirs had taken to drink. Accustomed from her earliest childhood to high-handed interference, and entirely free from any physical apprehensions on her own behalf, the intrepid girl boldly turned the handle of the door, entered the little hallway, and walked resolutely and unflinchingly up the narrow staircase.

Her steps on the stairs were no more audible to the persons in that room than had been the sound of her ring. She heard scuffling and struggling in there as well as this turmoil of voices.

With a quick movement of her strong young wrist she turned the handle of the door and swung it wide open. The sight that met her eyes was disturbing enough; though it was not quite on a par with the violent ruffianism she had been imagining. Like all people of her kind she lumped the middle classes and the proletariat together, and took for granted that any of them might at any moment break all laws of decency and self-respect.

She was not surprised, therefore, to see William Hastings with a white distorted countenance struggling to release himself from the arms of Mr. Pod, who, very red in the face and obviously much embarrassed at being found in such a situation, was holding the priest down on a sofa-bed.

This article of furniture must have been recently dragged in from the room opposite, for it was placed awkwardly and grotesquely between the philosopher's desk and the round table in the centre of the chamber.

On one side of this makeshift bed stood Netta, evidently doing her best to soothe the afflicted man; while at its foot, leaning across it so as to touch her husband's hands with her own, was the slender form of Nell, from whose eyes the tears were streaming and whose whole body was trembling with agitation and concern.

"Lordy! Your Ladyship did give I a start!" cried the breathless sexton, relaxing his hold upon the man on the bed. "Us all thought as you was drownded in sheep wash or summat!"

"Thank God, you're all right, Lady Ann," said Netta gravely, glancing anxiously down at the man beneath her to see that he did not take advantage of this new apparition to make a fresh struggle to escape.

But Hastings was staring at Ann with wild intensity, every line in his face expressive of the passing of one complicated emotion after another across the clouded mirror of his mind. He had worked at the completion of his book so passionately that now it was finished the actual volume itself, its leather binding, its ink-stained pages, had become to his unsettled brain a magical engine of destruction, a nihilistic catapult as it were, that it now behoved him to hurl at the citadels of life!

Two of these life ramparts had got themselves lodged in his mind as especially challenging to his campaign — those Ashover tombs in the church chancel, and the living body of Lady Ann Ashover! From those tombs, Hastings had come to be obstinately convinced, emanated the very essence of this unscrupulous life force, which in its relentless strivings disturbed the placid pools of non-existence. And here was Lady Ann herself, now standing before him, the incarnation of the remorseless urge! With the extravagant fanaticism of a mad logician, Hastings formulated, even as he looked at the woman, a monstrous and diabolic project. He would make her herself hug to her heart his "Book of Annihilation," and carry it to the place of those living dead.

To his distorted vision this hurling of his book among his enemies presented itself as the supreme stroke in an abysmal spiritual warfare whereof he was the protagonist and this woman, big with child, the antagonist.

The man's intellectual magnetism was so great that as he sat up there in bed with the veins in his forehead distended and his face quivering with conflicting emotion the four persons in that room remained awed and silent. When he did speak it was with a mingling of insane cunning and disordered impetuousness.

“They won’t let me take it and hide it!” he cried. “I want to hide it under those chancel slabs … I could easily get up those stones and put it there; but they won’t let me! And now you’ve come and you’ll join with them. If you hadn’t come I’d have done it. Wouldn’t I have done it, fellow?” And he turned his distracted glance upon the embarrassed Mr. Pod, who stood watching him with one of his great fists ostentatiously clenched, as if Hastings were a troublesome bullock at Tollminster Fair.

“’Tis true enough, your ladyship, what Parson do say,” acquiesced the sexton. “‘A would have rinned all the way to church and have scrabbled with’s own hands at they paving stones! ‘A would have done that; and maybe heaved up some of they ancient Squires what do bide under them moniments! ’Tis God’s truth what ‘a do say, your ladyship. ‘A be a terrible strong man, and there be none to hold ‘un but only I and these two young leddies!”

Lady Ann became suddenly aware of the actual presence of Hastings’s book. The manuscript occupied a large leather-bound volume as big as a business ledger, and it lay on the priest’s desk just above his bed. She knew the look of the book, as she had seen it in his hands before; and she surveyed it now with a peculiar and unusual interest.

Nell, who was standing at the foot of the bed, caught the direction of the visitor’s glance.

“My husband had just finished his last chapter, Lady Ann, when this idea of hiding it in the church came into his head. You feel better now, William, don’t you? You won’t frighten us again, will you, William?”

The man rose a little higher on the bed, straightening his legs and propping himself up on his two hands. He stared at Nell’s face with that pathetic and puzzled frown with which people whose mental processes have grown jangled become for a moment aware of something wrong and unusual.

It was as if he were peering helplessly at the young girl through the entangled boughs of his own obscuring delusion. Fancying that he did hear her and understand her Nell flung herself down on her knees at his side and began chafing one of his hands.

Lady Ann exchanged glances with Netta; but neither of them, nor indeed Mr. Pod himself, who looked as if he would be thankful if the floor sank beneath him, seemed anxious to intervene between these two.

Lady Ann's thoughts wandered off to all that buried dust under the church pavement which seemed to be so persistent an influence in the movement of events in this place. She recalled the man's wild discourse to her on New Year's Eve, at the end of Marsh Alley, and how he had associated, even then, the negations of his ferocious logic with the extinction of the House of Ashover. He was disarmed and innocuous enough now; but she, in her sanity, began just then, as she saw the book lying there within her reach, to be betrayed into the same illusion as the one which this madman held, namely, that this mysterious destructive force had actually passed from the living man's intellect into the inanimate potency of the work he had just completed.

Once more that jingle of Betsy's— "Till book be burned no child'll be borned" — sounded in her brain with the appalling distinctness of a warning sea bell rocked by rising waves.

Nell was keeping up, in a kind of crooning tone, a sort of lullaby to the man on the bed. She seemed to forget the presence of the others.

Suddenly Hastings bent forward, stretched out his arm, and possessed himself of the volume on the desk. He turned over some of its pages with a sort of malignant awe; while a moment later with a glance at Lady Ann that had a flicker of demonic subtlety in it, he tossed the book down at the foot of the bed.

Then it seemed as if he forgot its existence; for he began to talk incoherently of certain early memories of his in the slums of London. He mentioned names that were completely strange to them all; and with those names he mixed the names of Latin writers and the titles of Latin books. And he talked of the lily pond in Kew Gardens, which must have been the. objective of some thrilling childish excursion. And then he muttered something about park railings, with deer behind them. "Let me feed them, Mother! Let *me* feed them!" he cried out in a loud voice; and then, without any apparent connection, he began reciting the old grammar-school tag:

"Common are to either sex
Artifex and oppifex,
Conviva, vates, advena,
Testis, civis, incola,
Parens, sacerdos, custos, vindex,
Adolescens, infans, index,
Judex, haeres, comes, dux,
Princeps, municeps, conjux!"

Mr. Pod manifested considerable apprehension when he heard these strange syllables. He looked from one to another of the three ladies as if he expected them to call upon him to clap his great hand over the mouth of the delirious man.

"This do come of praying and preaching," he whispered in an awestruck voice. "Parson be calling upon the Lord in Greek and Hebrew, same as 'tis writ the Blessed Saviour did. 'Tis enough to make a man's wits turn to have to say 'Dearly Beloved' and 'Scripture moveth us in sundry places' every seventh day, wet *or* fine! 'Tis a wonder more on 'em don't start hollerin' and forgetting theyselves!"

Lady Ann heard these words of the sexton with the sort of attention a starving man on a raft might give to the screaming of a sea gull while his companions were casting lots as to which of them should die first.

The sight of that volume lying at the foot of the bed obsessed her with an irresistible fascination. Suddenly she could endure it no longer; and, without a word said, she just slipped forward a couple of steps, snatched up the volume, thrust it under her arm beneath her cloak and moved quickly back to the open door.

The voice of the delirious man went on mumbling inanely the classic doggerel:

"Auctor, exsul, and with these
Bos … tigris … interpres …
Canis and anguis … serpens … sus."

It was as though, having completed his categorical Domesday Book of all life's progeny, he were waiting in sardonic expectation for the explosion of his train of dynamite.

Nell and Netta both made instinctive movements toward her. There was something treacherous and outrageous to their minds in this arbitrary despoiling of an unconscious man.

"What are you doing, Lady Ann?" cried Netta. "You're not going to take his book really away, are you?"

"Give it back…. Give it back…. Oh, how *dare* you?" protested Nell.

There was, however, at that moment such a dangerous light in the eyes of the girl in the doorway that neither of them had the courage to approach her. In any case, so tightly was she holding the book, it could not have been taken from her without a struggle; and the idea of anything of that sort, in the condition in which she was and under the eyes of Hastings, was inconceivable.

"Take it and good luck to 'ee, marm," threw in Mr. Pod. "And if 'ee *do* bury it, same as parson did tell 'ee to, me own girt pick what I do use in hard weather be lying under one of they stone seats in porch. I reckon 'twere a good deed if more of them books be put under sod! 'Tis this book-writing what do worrit quiet-lived folks more'n the worst god-danged ale in Dorchester!"

"You're not too … too tired … to walk home … Lady Ann … are you?" murmured Netta. "Because … I could go and get someone — —" She stopped abruptly in the presence of the cold stare which the girl gave her from the door; but she added gallantly, "We are all so thankful to see that you're safe."

Ann replied to this only with a general and easy "Good-night," and descending the stairs with the air of one who has paid a natural and normal visit let herself out into the garden.

A quarter of an hour later and Hastings's mood had changed again for the worse. The unfortunate man seemed to forget that he himself had wished to give his "Praise of Death" into the arms of a pregnant woman. He began to renew his efforts to break loose from Mr. Pod's restraining hands. So distressing was it to Nell to see his struggles that she enquired of Netta in a low voice whether it wouldn't be better to humour him and let him get out into the air.

"There would be no harm as long as we all went with him," she whispered.

But Netta opposed this suggestion with stern common sense.

"Nell, it's impossible," she retorted. "It's impossible. He'll be quieter presently. But if he isn't you'd better go to the village and get more help."

The girl's words were soon justified. Exhausted by his own violence the unhappy philosopher fell at last into a sort of comatose quiescence; and though, as the evening wore on, their hope that he would fall asleep was not fulfilled, there seemed no likelihood that he would make any further attempt that night to get out of the house.

He refused, however, to let Nell undress him; and she had to content herself with seeing him lying, pale and silent, his eyes fixed on the darkening window; while Mr. Pod, seated on a chair by his side, watched over him with respectful patience.

The twilight of that last day of September seemed loth to lose itself in the finality of night. All the various familiar sounds which that particular hour seems to evoke upon a country road — the lowing of cattle, the crying of nocturnal birds, the intermittent barking of a farmyard dog or of a fox in the furze covers — followed on her journey home the solitary figure of Lady Ann, with that closely written volume held tightly under her cloak.

As she walked slowly between the darkening water meadows and the misty stubble fields she became aware, more acutely than was usual with her, of the phantasmal quality of an autumn evening of this kind. The remote fluidity, as if they were being looked at through the windows of a sea king's palace, of the trees and gates and weir dams which she passed struck her with a sense of beauty that she had never in that particular way experienced before.

She had a queer, vague impression that she was feeling these things not only for herself but for the child within her; and, as this feeling grew upon her, a deep mysterious gratitude to life itself; not to any power beyond life — for she was a woman almost completely devoid of the religious sense — but just to life, life as it was, with everything that it entailed, rose up in her heart so overpoweringly that she actually hummed to herself as she walked along.

She felt chilly, however, as she crossed the wooden bridge and inhaled the mud-scented mist that rose from its surface; and once more that oracular jingle came into her head. “It’s all nonsense,” she thought, “to imagine that those Deformities I saw by the caravan that day uttered a thing like that! Betsy Cooper must have invented it herself. It’s the sort of abracadabra she *would* think of; especially after listening to that fool of a parson. I sha’n’t say a word of this to Rook or any one!”

By this time she did begin to feel the effects of her long walk; but she was a girl of immense intrepidity and she struggled on gallantly until, crossing the stone bridge by the churchyard, she found herself at her own drive gate.

As it happened there was a pile of burning weeds just outside this gate, one of the growing evidences of Rook’s absentminded submission to the indolence and carelessness of his dependents. She was still thinking of that “Till-book-be-burned” catch of the pseudo-gipsy when her eyes fell upon the great red heart of this smoking heap, glowing with a crimson glow in the damp windless obscurity.

Once more acting on a sudden unpremeditated impulse she removed the volume from beneath her cloak and flung it into the centre of the smouldering heap.

Having done the thing, it was with a fierce and primitive satisfaction that she prodded its pages open with the end of her parasol and watched the ruddy flames leap up and devour them. So bright were these flames as the pages really began shrivelling that she could actually catch a word or two in Hastings’s meticulously clear hand, as they were thus illuminated in their vanishing. She caught the word “nothingness” and the word “equilibrium” and some other word that might have been “dissolution” or “devolution”; and then there were no more intelligible pages left of the life work of the Reverend William Hastings!

She was interested, however, to observe that before falling into dust the last of these pages remained as thin blackened ghosts within the licking tongues of the fire; ghosts of written sheets, upon which she still could trace unreadable hieroglyphs and indecipherable signs; signs that were the bodiless *revenants* of those irrefutable arguments with which the theologian had demolished the universe that begat him, hieroglyphs that were like long-necked cormorants flying over a gulf into which Time and Space had sunk.

She left the heap of burning weeds and moved slowly, very slowly, toward the house. She began to be aware that the exhaustion, which made her body feel like something that was made of pulseless wool but at the same time was as heavy as sods of turf, was now accompanied by other, more disturbing symptoms.

Lady Ann bit her lip and stood for a moment quite still. Then, moving on steadily and quietly across the lawn, she mounted the familiar steps of the entrance to the house and opened the door into the hall.

Here she swayed and staggered; and finally fell half-fainting into one of the great mahogany hall chairs inscribed with the armorial bearings of the House of Ashover!

CHAPTER XXV

BY GOOD FORTUNE Mr. Twiney and his gig were both in the Ashover stable, when on Lady Ann's recovery from her collapse it became plain that her confinement was at hand. The man was despatched at once to fetch Doctor Twickenham, whose house was some three miles away, on the Tollminster Road.

It was Mrs. Ashover herself who discovered the girl, white and foredone, on that hard mahogany chair in the panelled hall. The old lady displayed as much energy in this crisis as she had done on previous agitating occasions; and it was not long before, with Rook's help, she had got the girl safely undressed and in bed, in the pleasant room she had used since her arrival on the scene more than a year ago.

Left alone at last with his wife, whose sufferings were at present very intermittent, Rook found himself quite differently affected and much more affected than he had anticipated. He was a man to whom the immediate presence of physical distress was more impressive than any mental or emotional appeal. Something peculiarly responsive and sensitive in him was stirred and troubled as he watched those quick spasms crossing the girl's flushed face.

"Ann," he muttered as he bent down over her. "Ann, my sweet Ann!"

She smiled at him stoically, but he could not help noticing that there was a remoteness and detachment at the back of her eyes, as if she were a duellist with drawn rapier saluting her opponent while she spoke lightly and casually to the friend at her side.

"You *will* get through it all right, Ann? You feel you'll be all right?"

It seemed natural enough to her that she should be the one to supply comfort at that moment rather than to receive it.

"Of course I'll get through it, Rook," she said. "Don't you fret yourself about me. Go for a walk and keep safe away till it's all over. And don't let your mother or any one else worry you about me. I shall be all right."

She clenched her fingers tightly as a recurrent spasm overtook her; but as soon as it passed she smiled at him again.

"He'll be born on the first of October," she said confidently.

There was a moment's silence between them while he wondered whether it would annoy her, or whether she would think it an unreal and sentimental thing to do, if he took hold of one of her hands.

To his utter astonishment she suddenly plucked both her arms out from beneath the sheet and flung them round his neck.

"Kiss me, Rook," she sobbed. "I love you! I do love you so much!"

He bent down; and for the first time in the lives of these two proud creatures there were salt tears mingled with the embrace they exchanged.

A hurried knock at the door made the man rise up erect and composed.

"Open it, dear," she gasped; and with a smile more obviously strained than any she had yet given him, "and go for a good long walk — but not *too* long!"

He opened the door and there stood his mother. The little lady had the demeanour of some military conqueror in an old print who stands amid dying men and horses with the complacency of a successful horticulturist.

"We mustn't exhaust her by talking," she said; and Rook felt inclined to take the triumphant old woman by the shoulders and shake her violently, while he bawled in her ears: "It's wicked! It's wicked! It's wrong! It's wrong! It's wrong!" What he did say was: "I'm going out for a while, Mother. Twickenham will be here in a moment."

"But — Rook" — and Mrs. Ashover showed signs of puzzled irritation — "she may ask for you presently. She may want you. They often feel like that!"

He pushed past her without replying and ran downstairs.

His overcoat lay on the hall table and he pulled it on, shivering. For some reason he felt at that moment deadly cold. As he did this Pandie came running out of the kitchen.

"Master Rook! How be my Lady? Be it really begun, then? 'Tis best for all when't do come quick and fast. Missus said I were to bide in kitchen and not come nigh to she; but 'tis terrible hard to stand afore thik old sink and act natural-like when my Lady be brought to bed. Martha, she do say 'tis the Lord wi' healing in His wings what us best to pray to; but *I* says, and they was my very words, Master Rook, *I* says, I'll just run out and ask Squire hisself. Maybe he'll say 'tis tempting of Providence for I to bide in kitchen! Maybe he'll say 'twere best for she and best for the blessed babe that I bide upstairs near thik door so's to be ready and waiting. Martha can open for doctor. She be one who can act natural when all be topsy-turvied! But I weren't born holy and hushed. I were born trembly and human-hearted. So don't 'ee tell I to bide in kitchen, Master Rook, when my Lady be brought to bed. 'Tisn't in nature that I should do the like o' that, whatever Missus do say!"

Rook hardly caught the drift of this torrent of speech, but a sickening pity came over him for that lonely figure in the room upstairs; and at the same time the feeling deepened upon him that he must get away — away — away.

He moved to the door; but the red-haired servant in her excitement clung to his coat sleeve.

"Thee aren't going out, Master, be 'ee? Oh, don't 'ee go out, Master, don't 'ee go out! I've a-heard four girt thunderclaps already as I were trying to scrape thik old silver coffee-pot what thee mother must have clean though sky do fall! Don't 'ee go out, Squire Ash'ver, don't 'ee go out, Master Rook! Doctor'll be here present; and 'tisn't in nature for 'ee to go!"

He flung her off and rushed bareheaded into the garden, slamming the great Georgian door behind him. It was with an indescribable feeling of relief, when he found himself outside the drive gate and in the road, that he felt heavy splashes of rain upon his face.

There was no sound of thunder; and indeed it may well have been that those four thunderclaps had no existence except in Pandie's head, but before he had gone many steps a torrential volume of rain descended upon him.

It was like the breaking of some vast taut hawser by which the very planetary ship itself was roped to its cosmic dock; so that the earth vessel now, free of all restraint, unpiloted, masterless, lampless, drifted, with all its dark, wet, silent decks and rigging, into a chaos of water, wherein the waters "that are above the firmament" mingled with the waters "that are beneath the firmament!"

When Rook reached the middle of the stone bridge he turned round, hearing the sound of wheels. Very faintly, like two watery marsh fires, phosphorescent and fitful, he could see the lights of Twiney's cart as it stopped at the drive gate. So the mare had been persuaded, somehow, in spite of this waterspout of rain, to pass the "Gorm" signpost; and the doctor had come to Ashover House, for the first time, for *this* purpose, since he came to assist at the birth of Lexie!

Rook leaned upon the cold parapet of the bridge from the surface of which the rain splashed into the darkness. As he stared down into the murmuring obscurity beneath him he remembered how the river had looked on that moonlit night when Lexie came over from Marsh Alley to meet him in the churchyard. That was the first time his brother had told him about his desire to be buried underneath the elm.

He clutched the cold edge of the stonework with both his hands and bent forward, listening to the gurgling noises made by the flowing water and to the hissing sound of the rain as it struck the river’s surface.

The rain beat down upon his bare head with a force that made him wonder if it were not going to change to hail. But it was much too warm a night for that; and he recognized that it was the unusual size of the individual raindrops and the torrential force with which their massed volume hit his skull, which gave him that particular impression.

He bowed his head still lower over the parapet, deriving a fierce pleasure from thus yielding himself up to the mysterious caprice of the blind, soulless, formless element which knew no difference between a living human skeleton and the inanimate blocks of smooth quarried stone. His mind, always abnormally sensitive to physical sensations, began to detach itself from any definite train of thought; began to disembody itself and unsheathe itself, until it seemed to arrive at a naked airy freedom which enabled it to mingle with the dark flow of that invisible gurgling water and with the seething downpour of that inundating deluge.

Drowning! That was the ultimate sensation he craved; drowning in these vast inhuman elements that obeyed no master and had no purpose or object or obligation; but only drifted and drifted, on and on, up and down, as the unknown reservoirs of subhuman force sucked them in.

Oh, with what happiness he could imagine himself floating — dead — dead — dead — down that current of dark swollen water! No more responsibilities, no more decisions, no more miserable remorse!

That mysterious country of the underworld of which the Greek wanderer had his vision, coming to it at last through those Cimmerian mists, may after all have held a shadowy correspondence with something that really did exist!

If so, it was surely there, surely under those gray willows and among those tall grasses, that the land of untroubled twilight awaited him, whose margins he had so often approached, caught in quick strange glimpses, along the Frome-side roads and the green Frome-side lanes!

He stood erect and looked about him. The rain began rapidly to diminish now, moving away over the valley toward the east with the same capricious suddenness as that with which it had first arrived.

He crossed the bridge and walked on to the entrance into the churchyard.

He hesitated here for a while, his mind returning to his wife and to that devastating sense of a woman's absolute loneliness at these hours which had driven him forth by a kind of shame. How wicked it was, how dark, how heathen, that mock sympathy which his mother and Pandie had displayed! How horrible this deep, blind, pitiless understanding that women had of one another at such moments — an understanding that was not tenderness or pity but something else; something that came to the surface at these times from the subterranean abysses of nature.

"Ann — my dear sweet Ann — bear it a little longer, just a very little longer, and you'll be happier than you ever dreamed was possible!"

So he said in his heart, making of his craving to relieve her in her travail a sort of desperate conscious prayer, directed to no deity and to no demon, but to the vast night itself, oldest of all divinities, accomplice alike of the birth of grass blades in the wet dew of Titty's Ring and of the birth of planets in the cold emptiness of space.

Then it occurred to him that he would like, on this night of the birth of his first-born, to go for a moment to where his father— “the old man” with whom he had had a lifelong feud — lay stretched out under his six feet of clay.

This irrational yielding to the very tradition against which he had struggled so long came upon him without warning; came upon him as if in reply to an actual summons. He hesitated for a moment longer, shaking his head from side to side and pulling his drenched overcoat tightly round him, while with a grim, rather ghastly smile he stared at the dark roof in front of him, from which the water was now audibly dripping.

He became suddenly conscious, as never before, of the appalling finality of human decisions, even in the least important matter. The water dripped, dripped, dripped, from that sloping roof, upon the enmossed slabs of some enclosed tombstone; and it seemed to him as if it dripped from the eternal wound in the heart of the universe, the wound that nothing could staunch or heal, the original blunder of the gods, the free will of life to *will against life.*

Shivering now a little, though the rain had quite ceased, and lifting his feet very heavily and with difficulty, as if they were subjected in some special way just then to the law of gravitation, Rook moved up the gravel path and rounded the corner of the building.

There before him, visible in spite of the darkness, was the familiar white headstone; there, too, the well-known trunk of Lexie’s elm. But what struck his mind with a shock of abrupt amazement, struck it with the sort of chill that comes over us when something occurs which resembles the intrusion of the abnormal or supernatural, was the emerging from the church porch of a human figure. He moved forward boldly, however, in pursuit of this figure which proceeded to cross the churchyard to its remote end under the broken wall. There, as he approached it, it assumed the appearance of a woman, a woman who took up a spade which she had left on the ground and began to dig with animal-like rapidity and concentration, throwing the loose earth upon a growing heap at her side.

It was clear she must have been at her task for some while before the rain interrupted her; for the heap of earth at the edge of the hole she was digging showed large and unmistakable in the darkness.

He recognized her now. She was Betsy Cooper. And well enough did he apprehend what she was at; for it had been one of the scandals of the village in his boyhood that Nancy Cooper, his father's favourite, had been buried somewhere in that quarter without a tombstone; and that even the mound that indicated the place had been flattened out in some orderly but impious tidying up of that particular spot.

He walked straight across to where the old woman was digging. She did not hear him approach and he came close up to her before he spoke.

"Betsy!"

She leaped up at the sound, and drew away trembling, dropping her spade into the hole. When she saw who it was her face became transfigured with wild concern.

"Get 'ee back into house, Squire Ash'ver! Get 'ee back into house while there be time! What be 'ee doing traipsin' in churchyard when thee's wife be brought to bed? Get 'ee back, Squire Rook, lest some girt blow fall on 'ee! Hist — hist — dear Squire alive! There be terrible mischief abroad this blessed night for thee and thine. I do know it and I've a-told them maidies in kitchen what I do know! Dursn't one of all thy folk up and tell 'ee what I did say to they afore this same sundown? I'd a-told it to thee wold mother but naught of it and naught of poor Betsy would *she* bide. Wahay! Wahoh! And that none should heed! Wahoh! And that thee own self should be traipsin' here, none withholding! Get thee back to house, for the sake of thy own flesh and blood, Squire Ash'ver! Get thee back for Christes' sake afore 'tis too late!"

The old woman's agitation was so extreme that she actually waved both her thin arms in the air, while her face assumed the look of some inspired prophetess.

Rook looked at her with grave attention. But, as in the case of a greater than he, there were powers and influences abroad that rendered him obstinately obdurate to her clamour.

"So you're trying to find Nancy?" he said sternly and quietly, looking down into the hole she had digged.

And as he looked, a sharp spasm came over him and a strange emotion gripped his vitals. In one single flash he got a vision of the whole tragic pity of the human race — these mothers, these children! He saw his own delicately nurtured Ann alone in that bed. He saw this old woman wrestling with the very earth, if so be that she might touch the bones of her child dead twenty, thirty years ago.

"Let my Nancy bide where she be!" cried the hag in desperation. "Look to thee own self, Squire Ash'ver! Look to thee own self and get back to house!"

He turned away, unwilling to drive the woman to further extremes of supplication; but as he left her there he said compassionately and gently, but with a certain sternness: "If you do find your girl to-night, Betsy, or on any other night, I will see to it that she has a proper tombstone."

He passed his father's grave this time with a shrug of his shoulders. Was the late Squire himself responsible for the abominable neglect that was the cause of Betsy's nocturnal piety? Were those "half beasties," as Binnory called them, his own half brothers?

He walked rapidly out of the churchyard into the road.

Once more that leaden feeling in his legs, as if the law of gravitation had suddenly doubled its centripetal pull!

Once more that accursed sense of enormous importance in the making of trivial, unessential decisions!

“Ann didn’t need me there,” he thought, “till it’s all over. It’s the least I can do for her to obey her literally. She doesn’t want any more of these mock-sympathetic watchers!” And he visualized with such appalling distinctness the red-haired Pandie, obsessed with gloating sentiment, clinging to the banisters or listening at the door, that he plucked at his heavy feet as if they had been two obdurate roots, and strode resolutely off toward Foulden Bridge.

It was then, out there between the river bank and the open meadows, that the quality of the sky above his head began to change. The waning moon was still below the horizon; but a gentle wind had risen from the west and had swept the clouds before it, so that Rook was able to discern at least one or two of the constellations with which he was familiar.

He could see the great outstretched wings of Cygnus, like the wings of some vast emissary of fate despatched by one demiurge to another, flying across the fields of space.

He could see a star that he fancied must be Aldebaran; and another that he noted to himself, with that pathetic satisfaction with which creatures of a day find respite from their nothingness in the mere *naming* of the immortals, as a luminary that might be, only his memory always failed him, that favourite sky mark of his brother Lexie, Vega in Lyra.

Lit by the stars as if by far-off candle flames the wide water meadows stretched away to his left; and beyond the river and beyond the barley fields rose dark and blurred, like a great bastion of some invisible fortress, the vague outline of Heron’s Ridge.

Certain stars, watery and faint, as if they had been the drowned but not quite extinguished bodies of glowworms, lay silent and deep-buried in the muddy water of a ditch at the roadside. Bits of broken reed stalk and wind-blown twigs from willow trees and alders floated between the images of these fallen stars, as if they floated above a crevice in the terrestrial orb itself which sank down into antipodal gulfs.

Calmed and soothed by the largeness of the night about him the Squire of Ashover began to recover the equipoise of his perturbed spirit.

Ashover? Ashover? What was Ashover between the hovering wings of Cygnus and the stretching out of the chords of Lyra?

He suddenly began to feel strangely, exultantly happy; happier than he had been for more than twelve months; happier than he had been since those irresponsible days just after his father's death.

Every person he thought of at that moment intensified rather than diminished his happiness. Round all the people of his life there seemed to float a sort of ideal luminosity, enhancing their dignity, their beauty, their originality, their human worth.

He felt a sense of inexpressible gratitude to the gods that he had ever known these people of his life, his brother, his mother, his wife, Netta, and Nell. Some actual chemical fluid, wonderful, magical, as if those high stars had been melted in some enchanted forest pool to which he had pressed his lips, seemed to flow round the figures of these people as they gathered there in his mind, and to harmonize for ever his relations with them.

Under the healing flow of this magical fluid, which seemed actually at that moment flooding every cell of his brain, the knots of the nerves that were jangled there unloosed themselves and expanded freely; expanded like the floating tendrils of dry seaweed when the twilight tide covers it, after a hot day!

In the ecstasy of what he felt just then it seemed to him that he could live happily by Ann's side for the rest of his life. It seemed to him that even if her love were far more predatory and possessive than it ever *had* been he still could live with her, live with her and her child, without any of that abominable illusion of being suffocated, divided, impinged upon, from which he had suffered so horribly in times past.

And the same thing applied to all the other people of his life. Something had happened to those knotted nerves in his soul that had untied them completely, that had spread them out beautifully and freely like crumpled mosses that have been washed by rain and can now hold the sun in their leafy cups without withering.

As he came near to Foulden Bridge his happiness grew to such a pitch that he actually skipped a step or two with those feet of his that just now were so leaden and heavy.

The alders by the sheep wash, if they possessed any conscious interest in the human figures of their environment, must have been struck by the sight of a bony, hatless, middle-aged man, skipping with his feet as if they were the hooves of an escaped goat!

All at once Rook became aware — without warning, without premonition — of that same young rider upon the gray horse moving silently along by his side.

Instinctively, as before, he clutched at the youth's saddle; and as before, the boy laid his warm youthful fingers caressingly upon his hand.

"I told her I'd have a tombstone put up as soon as she found her," he discovered himself saying, as if in answer to some reproach which the boy had made. "And I've obeyed Ann to-night quite literally. She told me to walk to Foulden Bridge."

Why he said just this, when Ann had never once mentioned the word "Foulden," is one of those queer incidents in a man's life destined to remain to the end of time hidden away unsolved in the limbo of the irrelevant.

But what troubled Rook then was that the youth did not respond to his self-justifying speeches. All he did was to press the hand upon his saddle with still more tender solicitude. Rook wanted him to speak. His longing that he should speak was the first interruption he had suffered to that strange happiness which still hung about him.

But the boy rode slowly on and remained silent. Suddenly Rook felt those fingers grow cold. And it was not only that they grew cold. They seemed to melt away; they seemed to become lighter and more insubstantial than mist!

He looked up. Ah! that figure was receding, horse and rider together, receding and receding; growing dim and faint, dimmer and fainter, until there was no more left of them than a troubled shadow, limned as it were in a great withdrawing wave, rolling back down a shelving beach.

And as they vanished from the man's sight there came to his ears what seemed like a lamentable sigh:

"Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!"

And though with his reason he knew it was only the rising of the wind and its tremulous passage across the shaken reeds, to his heart it seemed an appeal and a warning and a farewell; but what was most strange of all to him just then was the fact that simultaneously with the sinking away of that forlorn sigh across the wet fields, he became absolutely certain, beyond doubt or dispute, that in her bed in Ashover House his wife had been delivered of a son.

So certain was he of this that a rush of quick irrepressible tears came to the back of his eye sockets, and though not a tear actually fell he was conscious enough that he, too, Rook of Ashover, was experiencing now, for all his sceptical disillusionment, the most primitive emotion of the human race: that immemorial exultation, older than the tents of Abraham, older than the tents of Achilles, the joy that a man child is born into the world!

For the third time that night he stood hesitating. He would have liked to go straight home, run at top speed home, leap up the staircase, push Pandie and his mother aside, and embrace his wife and the new-born.

But at that moment another instinct in him contended with the desire to retrace his steps; namely, the instinct just to rush over to Marsh Alley and be the first to bring the news of his son's birth to Lexie.

Oh, he must do that. Lexie had been associated with every crisis in his life; and now — in the medley of events that had occurred since he left him at Toll-Pike — he had made no sign. To let this night of all nights pass by without seeing Lexie, would it not be something that he would regret to the end of his days? Lexie would laugh at him — he could see at this moment the face he would make — but he would be touched and pleased, all the same, at this disordered midnight visit. He could hear his voice rallying him: "So brother Rook is all 'alive-oh' at last!" That was the way he would fool him; that was the way he would send him back post-haste; utterly refusing, no doubt, to believe that the child *was* yet born; scolding him even for being so superstitious!

It was characteristic of Rook Ashover that at this particular moment of his life he should be hesitating between these two quite irrational appeals: the tug at his heart that pulled him toward a brother who would only tease him when he appeared, and the tug at his heart that pulled him toward a child whose very existence was entirely problematical!

For the third time he brought his hesitation to an end. For the third time he plucked at those earthbound feet of his and strode forward.

"I'll throw stones at his window," he thought, "if he's gone to bed." And he walked rapidly on to the centre of Foulden Bridge.

While these events were proceeding in the lives of the Squire and Lady Ann, matters were not much more quiescent or peaceful within the narrow walls of Toll-Pike Cottage.

With the help of the muscular arms of Mr. Pod the two girls had succeeded in restraining the violent excitement of the unfortunate philosopher. His thoughts still full of his book, his mind full of wild fancies, the fixed idea had taken possession of him that it was to deliver his precious work into the hands of his enemy, Rook, that Lady Ann had stolen it.

Helpless under the sturdy guardianship of his sexton gaoler the poor wretch had relapsed into that sort of petrified passivity into which rabbits and hares are wont to sink when some immense danger menaces their life.

The girls, who kept opening the door to see how he was, became more and more reassured as night drew on, believing — because it was just *that* they especially wanted to believe — that he had fallen into a calm, refreshing sleep, from which he would finally awake, cured of his temporary dementia.

So reassured did they become that they even prepared for themselves a little supper in Nell's kitchen and sat talking together there in low voices, while every now and then Netta would replenish a plate on the floor from which the Marquis of Carabas licked up the morsels his fastidious heart loved.

"We should have heard if she'd been seriously upset by going so far," Nell was saying in reply to some remark of Netta.

The other shook her head. "I'm afraid a good many things could happen in Ashover House and we remain in the dark about them here. To tell you the truth, Nell, I feel as if anything might happen to any of us to-night!"

She moved her chair a little as she spoke, so as to get it away from the window, against which the rain had now begun to beat with extraordinary violence. Both the girls turned their heads toward the streaming pane; and there fell upon them that tremulous and not always unpleasant shudder such as children experience in large shadowy gardens when they play at hide-and-seek.

"If William isn't better when he wakes up," said Nell presently, "I shall ask Pod to stay the night. There's no earthly reason why he shouldn't do that. One of us can go round and tell his wife."

Netta nodded. "I hope Lexie is safe home," she said suddenly, turning quickly round with a new trouble in her eyes. "Pod says he left him in his cottage when he came here, too exhausted to walk any farther."

Nell's mouth opened pitifully and she clapped her hands together. "Oh, Netta," she cried, "we forgot Lexie completely! How could we do that? Oh … oh … oh…." And she rose from her chair and looked helplessly at the flood of rain which made the window seem as if it were a porthole in a wave-deluged ship.

"There's nothing we could have done, anyhow," said Netta soothingly. "I don't think Mrs. Pod would let him go unless he really felt better."

Nell looked scrutinizingly at her, as a child looks at an older person, doubtful whether it is being honestly or treacherously comforted.

"I hope you are right," she murmured, resuming her seat. "It would be horrible if anything happened to Lexie from our thoughtlessness. But I *can't* believe it will! Oh, Netta, oughtn't one of us to go to Ashover House and get William's book? I don't like to think of his waking up and wanting it and not finding it!" And once more she rose from her chair.

"Nell, sit down!"

The elder woman spoke with an authority far more weighty and unhesitating than would have been possible to the Netta of five months before. She had come to exercise, even in that short time, a sort of protective domination over the young girl.

“Don’t let’s work ourselves up into unnecessary agitation,” she said, smiling. “Not that I don’t feel just as you do,” she added a moment later. “It’s as if we two were locked up together in a fortress, isn’t it? With some great battle going on outside, in which all our people are engaged, on one side or the other!” She looked at her companion thoughtfully and sighed heavily. “My whole life has been a sort of waiting,” she murmured in a low voice. “But *that’s* at an end now.”

Nell hardly heard what she was saying. A nervous restlessness, beyond what she could quite account for, made her fidgety and preoccupied.

“I can just see Lexie describing his evening with Mrs. Pod, can’t you?” went on Netta. “Can’t you see him shutting first one eye and then the other in the way he does when he’s done something he’s pleased with? There’s nothing in the world delights him more than listening to the opinions of people like Mrs. Pod.”

“Why is it that I feel so funny and nervous, then?” demanded Nell. “I *know* it’s not about William. I can’t tell you just how I know; but I do know…. It’s about the others.” And she looked at her friend with an expression of puzzled exasperation, as if it were a sort of unkindness on Netta’s part not to relieve her anxiety.

“Hush! Didn’t you hear something?”

It was Netta who rose to her feet this time. She went to the door into the passage and opened it.

“I thought I heard the gate clicking,” she said.

Nell jumped up hastily and pushing past her ran upstairs.

A minute later Netta heard her voice calling her by name from the room above.

“Netta! Netta! Come here!”

It hardly surprised her when she did stand by her friend’s side in that littered room to see the figure of Mr. Pod lying fast asleep in the wicker chair, while the couch they had brought in for Hastings was untenanted and empty.

“He must have slipped out in his stockings!” whispered Nell. The girl was trembling from head to foot and her face was as white as the face of the marble clock on the mantelpiece which did nothing but point to half-past eleven with a malignant emphasis.

Netta bent over the sleeping man and shook him indignantly by the shoulder.

“Where be I? What be doing to I? Let a man bide where ‘a be, can’t ‘ee?”

“You’ve gone to sleep,” was the girl’s somewhat hopeless answer to these murmurings. “Mr. Hastings has got out of the house and we must go after him! Get your things on, Nell, quick as you can! There’s nothing else to do. We must all go and look for him. He’s probably gone to Ashover House with the idea of getting his book back!”

“Be parson rinned off, then?” muttered the bewildered sexton, rising with some embarrassment to his feet and staring feebly at the bookcase as if he suspected his prisoner to be ensconced behind it. “‘A were there right enough, not two minutes agone! Do ‘ee think ‘a be hiding somewheres about, lady? ‘A be a terrible crafty gentleman, when’s wits be working.’

“Nonsense, Mr. Pod,” said Netta severely, pulling on her hat and gloves and shoes, while Nell did the same in her bedroom. “Any one would think you’d been drinking. A reliable man *you* are, Mr. Pod; to go to sleep when we trusted you so implicitly! You don't know what harm mayn't come of this criminal neglect of yours!"

It is always a relief in any great human crisis to find a scapegoat; and the staring imbecility of the poor man at that moment certainly did lend itself to such treatment.

"Aren't you ready yet, Nell?" the impatient girl cried, adjusting her cloak between the two open doors. "The rain has stopped now, so we needn't bother *what* we put on! The great thing is to catch him before he gets to the bridge."

Why she used the word "bridge" at that moment she herself could never have explained. "We've got to catch him before he gets to the bridge!" She remembered that phrase afterward with a certain superstitious shudder.

Mr. Pod, meanwhile, was defending himself volubly. "No need to be scolding of I, missy. *I* be ready to go along. 'Tis the other young leddy what's keeping us. I've a-laid out too many precious corpses in me time not to be up and lively for anythink."

Nell did appear now, at the head of the stairs, still very white and trembling. She seemed so helpless and so nervous that her agitation communicated itself to her friend.

"For God's sake, let's start." The elder woman's voice had caught the quiver of suspense with which the whole atmosphere of that house of open doors was now vibrating.

They all three descended the stairs together and passed out into the garden.

It had indeed been a chance for "a crafty gentleman" to exercise his wit, that stealthy escape of William Hastings! He had achieved it with the supernatural cunning of a madman, that cunning which seems to be instinctive and subhuman; as though, with the atrophy of his reason, a man’s mind were able to draw freely upon the magnetic duplicity of birds and fishes.

Passing the rain-drenched geranium bed, from which emanated an odour musky and sweet, as if from an enclosed conservatory, he picked up from the ground the great, heavy, iron-tipped garden rake which Pandie had dropped there early the same afternoon.

It was by reason of being burdened with this grotesque weapon that he allowed the gate to click as he went through, a sound that, in the silence of their suspense in the kitchen, had actually reached the ears of one of the girls.

The anger which the loss of his book had roused in him had now crystallized in his demented brain into a cold, murderous fury against the Squire of Ashover.

Hastings’s passion at that crisis was to his own mind a pure irrevocable physical necessity. It was *necessary* that he should find Rook Ashover — even if he had to break into his house — and it was *necessary* that he should kill him. Behind this necessity swirled and seethed and fermented all his suppressed jealousy, all his accumulated life hatred, all his desire to “crack Nature’s moulds” and bring back the original chaos!

Hurrying along the grass at the edge of the rain-soaked road without overcoat or shoes, the garden rake clutched tightly in his hand, he soon became aware that another figure, also bareheaded, was advancing toward him.

He was separated from this figure by scarcely more than the length of Foulden Bridge; but by the accident of his following the grass path rather than the open road he himself was a far less noticeable object to the other than the other was to him.

The coming together of these two figures, with the river and the white-railinged bridge between them, might easily have seemed like one single man encountering his own image, or even meeting a phantom of himself, as Goethe once did on an unfrequented road; but no such fancy as that crossed the mind of William Hastings. Whether in the whirl of his thoughts he paused to note the strangeness of this accident, that the man he was seeking was coming straight toward him, no one will ever know. Frozen stiff with excitement he savagely clutched his weapon in both hands and crouched down behind the woodwork of the bridge where it joined the road.

Rook came on with rapid strides to the centre of the bridge. What he saw was not the white railing at his side, or the swollen river beneath him, or the dim perspective of the road in front of him; least of all did he see that crouching figure.

He saw Lexie's face at the open window. He saw that expressions of mock consternation which he knew so well. He heard his voice: "Is all well with the child? Is all well with Ann? What are you in such a 'toss' for, brother Rook?"

And then, before he had time to do more than make that spasmodic mental jerk with which the mind passes from one region of reality to another, Hastings was upon him. With a terrific swing of that fantastic weapon the priest struck him full on the side of the head; the arm which Rook instinctively raised to protect himself coming in contact with no more than the handle of the instrument.

Stunned and unconscious the wounded man fell heavily back against one of the two solitary railings which formed the double balustrade of the wooden bridge.

The impact of so massive and bony a frame was too much for that weather-weakened plank; and with a sinister crashing sound it broke and fell outward, precipitating the unconscious man into the stream below. Face downward in that swift-rushing current floated now, limp and unresisting, what was speedily no more than the shape, the form, the image of a *homo sapiens.* First to one side of the river it drifted; then to the other; the weeds brushing against its face, and the Frome water, embrowned by the rain, splashing and gurgling round its unheeding ears.

It was quite out of sight in the darkness — it would have been perhaps out of sight in full daylight — when William Hastings flung his weapon down and returned to consciousness from the petrified trance he had fallen into after striking his blow.

He occupied himself for a while, with an absorbed and vacant concentration, in the task of breaking off and throwing into the river bits of the broken rail that still hung loose and uneven over the water. Then wearily and slowly he turned back the way he had come.

Exhausted by the storm of passion in his brain and by the physical stress of what he had gone through that day he did not get very far. Long before he reached the gate of Toll-Pike Cottage he sank down by the wayside, a huddled, shivering, half-dazed creature, who was quickly passing from all conscious memory of his identity.

Here they found him after the lapse of barely an hour; and when they had carried him back into his room and had undressed him and got him into bed it was clear that his incoherent murmurings were something different from his former insanity.

Before morning he was in a raging fever; and the doctor when he finally appeared, between eleven and twelve of this first noonday of the month of October, was able to say no more than that nothing could be done for him beyond what Netta and Nell had already done.

He died at two o’clock in the afternoon of the following day, recognizing no one, aware of no human feeling, returning, as he had so often wished to return, to whatever “equilibrium,” it may be, beyond the difference between life and death, beyond the difference between space and time, smoothes away the outrage of consciousness and the “whips and scorns” of memory.

Some thirty-five years ago the wife of a classical-minded cobbler in east London had given birth to an unhealthily sensitive child; had nourished him with milk from breasts that were themselves ill-nourished; had lulled him to sleep with songs to which no feet had ever danced, with which no airs from green grass or from yellow sand had ever mingled; had washed him, clothed him, wondered at him, worshipped him…. Dead, stone-dead was that woman now; dead, and in a grave marked with no more than her name and the number of her few and evil years! She had died in absolute certainty that her son would be a famous thinker, known from the Hebrides to Land’s End. But she had not been able even to lift so much as a finger to help him when the work of his lifetime was being thrust into a bonfire of weeds! And where was she now, that mother, when to a rush of girlish tears that were more than half for another man, her worshipped son, a thick-set, heavy-jowled image of lamentable mortality, was lowered into the earth, with a Mr. Pod at his head and a Mr. Twiney at his feet?

Rook Ashover was buried a couple of days later than the man who brought to an end his Pyrrhonian scepticism with a garden rake.

That harmless horticultural tool was picked up on the first of October by none other than Binnory, whose instinct for disaster brought him to Foulden Bridge before the wings of rumour had scarcely begun to flutter.

It interested Binnory to decipher on its handle the name of an ironmonger in Bishop’s Forley. The name Was Lovejoy; and Binnory got pleasure from speaking of the rake as if it possessed itself that sonorous appellation. He ran off with it across the hill and hid it under an elder bush on the edge of Titty's Ring. Here he would go, when the leaves began to fall, and rake them together with it; pretending that the elder bush was his house and that he was tidying up his drive "like Mr. Twiney at Ash'ver do"; and he would mutter his wildest fancies quite freely to this product of the Bishop's Forley shop, going so far in his weak-headedness as to treat it as a kind of living fetish. Once he even carried his treasure trove several miles down the lane to display it with pride to the "half beasties," whose caravan still remained in the neighbourhood.

Thus it happened that while the Squire of Ashover and the Priest of Ashover became less and less endowed with the illusion of personality, the rake "Lovejoy" gathered to itself more and more of this ambiguous value.

A hundred Octobers hence some pair of nameless lovers, seeking refuge from the inquisitive and the frivolous, may very likely stumble upon a rusty piece of iron and a worm-eaten staff, may very likely use them to clean the mud from their shoes, without the least notion of the part played by these objects in a long-forgotten Frome-side story.

No one knew what passed through Lady Ann's mind as she lay pale and silent hour by long hour with her new-born child by her side; the child that *was*, after all, a son. Never had the proud girl kept her feelings more completely to herself. To whom, indeed, should she reveal them? Her father was dead. Her mother was dead. Mrs. Ashover's grief at her son's death was so mitigated by her sense of escape from a far greater disaster, the tragedy of the family's extinction, that she could not have responded, even had Ann been entirely unreserved, to the girl's craving for response. Lexie had always been critical and suspicious of her, his vanity piqued by her preference for his brother, his taste offended by her philistinism.

Missy Sparrow-Hawk was not made for submission to circumstance. She was made to control circumstance. But like many another shrewd diplomatist in this chaotic world she found herself baffled and beaten by that element of pure chance which even a Poynings could not outwit.

She had calculated her moves with the most perfect nicety. She had counted on this. She had discounted that. What she had not foreseen was the intrusion upon the stage of events of the rake “Lovejoy.” She had felt so sure that in the end she would bring Rook round. Her child was her final master stroke. But no master stroke could bring the dead back to life.

Lady Ann was outwitted, outmanœuvred, beaten. As she lay in her bed listening to the wind in the autumn trees she looked steadily, unflinchingly, at the lonely years in front of her. She would live, of course. She would cherish Rook’s child. But whatever happened in the long future she would never again be the same Cousin Ann who had put on that crimson dressing gown in the gamekeeper’s cottage!

Well, there it was! She was twenty-six and she had her child. And yet in her unflinching realism she knew that she was beaten. The mouse-coloured dust in Ashover Church might exult in the continuance of its race. *It* had gained its end. *It* was victorious. But the human bridge by which that indestructible life urge had hurled itself into the future carried from henceforth a hurt, a scar, a mark, from which it would never quite recover!

Cousin Ann’s beautiful lips closed upon her secret. She would be a proud and competent mistress of a rejuvenated House. But as her heart hardened itself to envisage her defeat, she stared with her gray eyes into Something that at certain hours, when for instance the branches of the cedar creaked and the branches of the lime rustled, was not very far removed from what less stoical persons than Ann Wentworth Gore would have named despair.

At any rate, she did not protest, nor indeed did any other member of that household, when, by the reiterated importunity of the remorseless old dowager, the boy was christened John after his grandfather. Lexie in his heart was glad of his mother's choice. Let the name of Rook disappear from the face of the earth! Let no other human being ever carry it, or be called to bed or board by its familiar sound!

But it was a blubbered and ravaged countenance, emptied of all zest for life, robbed of its most characteristic folds and ceases, haggard and woebegone, like the knight-at-arms in "La Belle Dame," that the younger brother — who would, except for this infant, have been the new Squire of Ashover– turned toward the dishes prepared for him by Mrs. Bellamy and toward the books and trees and flower beds and sunrises and sunsets of his accustomed life. He saw, not felt, how beautiful those halcyon days of October were. He went to and fro in a blank and hollow trance, a trance scooped out and scraped dry of all rich and joyous aplomb, of all pleasant chat, of all mellow and wanton sallies.

When November came and Lady Ann's child was more than a month old Lexie began slowly to regain something of his old humour. The curious thing about it was that his health, instead of suffering any collapse by Rook's death, took a decided turn for the better. It was as if, by passing so suddenly into the dim underworld, the elder Ashover had transferred some actual psychic magnetism into the nerves of his companion. Their life together had been so intimate and so involved that it is easy to imagine the existence of a sort of common cistern of energy flowing between them; drawn upon by both of them; and deriving its source from the indestructible vitality of their ancestors! Such a reservoir would naturally flow with its own independent pulse; and the fact that there was only one of them left to draw upon it would double the influx of its power as soon as the first shock of separation had lost its violence.

The first outward indication of this *vita nuova* in the sick man was the frequency of his visits to Toll-Pike Cottage where Netta was still staying on as Nell's guest. More than once Nell came alone to share some meal with him in his own house; and by the time the first two weeks of November were over, there had been some very uncomfortable scenes with Mrs. Bellamy, who passionately resented these unconventional entertainments.

In the middle of November there happened to fall upon Frome-side a long unaccountable spell of gusty westerly wind. It was a peculiar wind that thus came to that Dorset valley over the orchards and moors of Somersetshire. It was an intermittent wind, with wild spurts of incredibly thin rain, rain so fine and vapoury that it soaked to the core whatever it approached and made man and beast, and even the trees of the field, bend and bow and sway and crouch, when its chilly gusts swept over them and enveloped them.

It was at the close of one of the worst of these persecuted days that Netta Page came to bid farewell to her buried friend.

The rain had ceased with the fall of twilight, but not one flower upon the grave she came to greet had that persistent wind left intact. What disfigured wreaths did remain on the mound of disturbed loam were reduced to shapeless tangles of string and stalks.

The wind kept blowing her hair loose from under her hat. It swept her cloak against her figure. It whirled round her in eddies and spirals. It blew leaves and twigs against her face and made it difficult for her to breathe as it beat furiously against her mouth and nostrils. She kept forming words in her throat; and it was to herself as if she uttered them. But whether any real sound would have come forth from her lips, even if this tempest had ceased, is more than doubtful.

But she was talking to the shrouded form beneath her; and, coherent or incoherent, her words had their relief for her own soul….

“You needn’t fret any more about him or her or me or any one! It’s all right, Rook dear. Everything is all right.”

The force of the wind made her lift both hands to her rain-drenched hat; but even that movement did not prevent two long wisps of hair from detaching themselves from the rest and blowing like tattered streamers behind her. Hurriedly she sank down on her knees and pressed her face against the soaked clay.

The descending darkness swept over her and covered her, separating her from the rest of the world.

Over Antiger Woods, over Dorsal, over Battlefield, like some enormous arrow-stricken dying bird, that darkness came upon her; and though her mind was too absorbed in her grief to be conscious of anything external it is likely enough that the swallowing up of all shapes and contours and colours in the one great wave of blackness made it easier for her to feel that she and what lay down there beneath her were for that moment undivided.

So dependent are the minds of human beings upon these outward tokens, so pitiably do they cling to the least vestige of any “real presence” of what they have loved, that the worst pang of loss that Netta was ever destined to know came when at last, stiff and shivering, she moved away from that spot.

It is significant that these holes dug in churchyard clay are not refilled and covered up, so as to be left just level with the surrounding sod! For it is these tragic hillocks, themselves so nearly resembling enshrouded human shapes, that give us the last illusion of our sorrow, the idea that they actually wrap up and enfold that form which in reality lies so far below!

Netta stumbled several times in the darkness over other graves, graves that were no more to; her mind than so many ridges of obstructing turf clods; but she reached the road at last; and when she did reach it and began to make her way with heavy dragging steps back to the cottage, though the storm of her grief had exhausted itself, what took its place was a cold, dull, inert recognition of that unbridgeable gulf between the living and the dead which the assuaging ritual of all the centuries leaves still exposed — yawning; gaping, uncrossed.

She found the door of the cottage left open to admit her; but the fire was almost out in the little parlour and the house was empty.

As she went to and fro among the deserted rooms, making weary and half-mechanical preparations for her own and her companion's evening meal, she fancied she heard the sound of loud harsh music coming from the direction of the village. She opened the kitchen door and listened. Certainly there *was* something going on. Oh! This was the worst of it; that a human soul is not even allowed to live in quiet with its own loss. Life must be rushing, jerking, trailing, dancing, howling forward, just the same; and for ever deriding the least attempt to hold it back, to strike it into silence!

"It sounds like a whirligig," she thought as she closed the door. "I didn't know they had whirligigs in the country." When the meal was prepared and all was ready for Nell's return she sat down listlessly on a chair in the kitchen, listening to that harsh music in the distance, to the purring of the Marquis of Carabas, to the ticking of the clock. Once she started, fancying she heard a sound on the floor above. She thought how queer it was that rooms where people had died should be endowed with more life than other rooms; and that the very boards should creak and the very soot fall dawn the chimney with a sort of intense and solemn self-consciousness!

She wanted to concentrate her mind an a hundred little incidents of her life with Rook; but instead of being able to do this she was compelled, as if by an inner command, to listen intently to hear whether another board would creak up there in Hastings's room….

Netta was not the only one who had heard the strains of music that November evening. A couple of hours before, just after she had taken her hat and cloak and gone out into the twilight, the unexpected sound had reached the ears of her two friends as they sat together in the very place where she was sitting now.

"Listen!" cried Lexie eagerly, leaping to his feet and running out into the back garden. The girl followed and he turned to her with an expression of childish delight. "It's a roundabout!" he chuckled. "Who would have thought it possible as late in the year as this and on a night like this? I've known them to come in October on their way to London; but never in November!"

He looked round him. It was nearly dark now; and, although the rain had stopped, the wind was moaning disconsolately in the trees above the wall and was tossing the bare stalks of the raspberry canes against the posts of the empty clothes line.

It was one of those evenings in which foot travellers on country roads lean for a while over some wet stile or gate and survey the faint whitish glimmer in the sad west, and listen to the splash of raindrops from some tall elm above their heads as a disturbed starling or pigeon tumbles out of

"When was the last merry-go-round *you* saw, Nell?" he asked. And there was a tone in his voice as if he were deliberately defying the forlornness of earth and air and sky.

“I’ve never seen one in Ashover, Lexie,” she answered.

“Well, you *shall* see one!” he cried. “For I’ll show you one. I can take a girl to a circus of a cold November night as well as another!”

“But, Lexie — —” she began.

He swept aside her objections. “Come!” he cried. “Get your things on! It’ll do us good to have a bit of sport.”

He hurried her back into the house and made her put on her cape and hat, both of them composed of new mourning black, bought at a shop in Tollminster.

As he held her cloak for her, she was struck by the manner in which the faded tweed suit he wore had grown by daily use to become a kind of animal’s skin. No human being’s clothes, seen without the wearer, could be more characteristic, more living, than Lexie Ashover’s! The effect was enhanced by the perpetual presence of some dead hedge weed or another left in his buttonhole as it might have been left on the shaft of a cart or at the bottom of a wicker basket.

He put on a heavy muffler and overcoat and took his stick in his hand. This stick, a round-handled ash stick, was worn as smooth and glossy by long use as the carved pew of a monk or a hermit’s spade.

Once out in the road they were aware that this stormy night had its own peculiar spirit, a spirit that had something reckless and magnetic in it, disturbing to human nerves. Neither the man nor the girl glanced back toward the white railings of Foulden Bridge, railings which had not yet been mended. Lexie kept talking and gesticulating; pointing with his hand in the direction from which the sound seemed to proceed; and laughing in his deep, chuckling, almost leonine manner over the strange fantasy of this belated showman in coming to such a place in the month of November.

He led his companion at a quick pace, past the house of Mr. Pod, past the entrance to Marsh Alley, until he brought her to a small enclosed field on the north of the village where such entertainers were wont to encamp when they visited that district.

The sound of the music increased in volume as they approached and was combined with spasmodic shrieks from the primitive engine that worked the roundabout, with the noisy shouts of young men, the laughter and giggling of girls, and the cries of children.

The wind was still blowing so violently that the rough naphtha-lighted tent, in the midst of which the wooden horses gyrated, shook and shivered and tugged at its supports to such an alarming degree that the older villagers hesitated to enter for fear of having the whole thing come down about their ears.

Lexie led Nell to the rear of a little crowd of wind-blown spectators who were standing at the entrance to the tent.

“It’s late in the year, isn’t it, for this kind of thing?” he remarked to a sturdily built stranger who was bending over one of the tent pegs, making the rope more secure.

“Late? I should think it was late,” replied the man in a surly tone. Then, when he took in the personality of Lexie: “We’re due in Bishop’s Forley to-night, sir,” he added, “and we stay there for the winter. I said myself ‘twere a fool thing to stop here with the weather so had; but he *would* have it so; and so here we are!”

“I’ve never known a merry-go-round in Ashover later than October,” repeated Lexie gravely, moving forward with Nell into the tent.

The engine happened to stop at that moment, and as the boys and girls who had been riding clambered down, and another instalment prepared to mount, a quick whisper ran round among them and many eyes were turned upon the couple.

Nell pulled him by the arm. “Let’s get away,” she whispered. “They’re noticing us.”

But it chanced that a particularly grotesque piebald horse had stopped just in front of Lexie. This horse possessed an unscrupulous and world-embracing eye, an eye upon whose yellow-tinted orb the flame of the naphtha lamps shone luridly, giving it an almost Cyclopean look.

“One minute!” the young man said. And leaving his companion standing there alone, white-faced and disconcerted, he climbed up with careful deliberation upon the animal’s back.

The music soon recommenced; and the fantastic circle of horses and riders revolved once more, to a pandemonium of raucous sounds.

“Looksee! Looksee!” cried one of the children. “There be Master Lexie, a-ride-a-cock-horsin’ same as we!”

Nell, in her black dress and black hat, was the cynosure of many astonished eyes. She knew them all, but she carefully avoided meeting the glance of any one in particular. Na one in the tent was bold enough to address her; the older people moving discreetly away to the farther side of the engine, the children crowding up as near to her as they dared but only whispering to each other in low tones that were drowned in the noise of the brazen din.

She herself stared helplessly at Lexie’s figure, in its frayed overcoat and blue muffler, appearing and disappearing with punctual regularity, like some sign of the Zodiac in a clock-work heaven.

The piebald horse he rode lost most of its individual character in that whirling revolution; but Nell could still catch the staring voracity of its insatiable eye, an eye that remained fixed upon her with an expression that was neither sympathetic nor derisive; an expression of simple devouring interest.

As to Lexie himself, his own lineaments were composed into a fixed and smiling mask of infantile complacence. One of his eyelids was lifted a little higher than the other in a kind of ecstasy of ironic roguery; but the glance he directed toward his companion as he passed her by in his gyrations had in it a sublime acceptance of destiny worthy of the animal on whose back he rode.

The noise in the young man's ears was deafening; and as he listened to it, giving himself up to the motion, his mind began wandering off to other sounds of a less artificial character that were at that moment rising up toward the cloud-covered sky from his native Frome-side.

He thought of the way the branches were creaking even now among the Scotch firs on Heron's Ridge. He imagined the grunt of a badger as it trotted in the moaning wind across Titty's Ring. He heard the cattle stirring drowsily in their bartons. He heard the splash of a perch in Saunders' Hole and the cry of a stray mallard drifting across the marshes toward Comber's End. Out of the heart of that brazen clamour he seemed to be listening to the tiny German clock ticking the hour in his mother's bedroom. He even fancied he could hear the quiet breathing in its guarded cradle of the small head of his House, the young new Squire of Ashover. And then suddenly, as in his fantasy he counted up these unnoticed sounds of the night, it seemed to him that he could actually catch the whirring of owl wings hovering about his elm tree in the churchyard, as they had done in the moonlight, just a year ago, when he met his brother at that place.

Before the music stopped or the rotation of the wheel of horses and riders came to a standstill, Lexie jumped down on the ground by Nell's side. He took her by the arm and led her out of the tent where they were met in the darkness by that familiar smell of an enclosure of grass trodden by men and beasts, the precise savour of which none know who have not been to fairs and circuses in country villages.

"The hobbyhorse is forgot!" he muttered; and the girl was bewildered by the fierce intensity of his grip upon her arm. The wind seemed to blow against his face at that moment with an ice-cold menace, as of some breath from the outer spaces. He gathered his forces together to resist this threat; and instinctively, in so doing, he let his arm in the darkness enclose Nell's waist.

"Don't let's go back just yet," he pleaded. "Netta won't mind waiting a little for supper."

The girl was so startled and shocked by the change in his manner as they came out of the tent that, in her pity for him, she did not have the heart to resist. But the touch of her warm young body, as he pressed her against him, soon restored him.

He led her down a grassy rain-soaked lane; one of those lanes on the outskirts of a village that usually end in nothing more hospitable than some isolated group of cattle sheds or pigsties.

What in this case they stumbled upon, however, was an open barn; and Lexie was enchanted beyond measure to detect in its cavernous obscurity a mass of sweet-smelling piled-up hay.

But Nell hesitated now and drew back when, with an exclamation of unashamed delight, he pulled at her hand to lead her forward into this shrine of Demeter.

"Let's go home, Lexie," she begged. "My shoes and stockings are soaking, and I'm sure yours must be! We really oughtn't to keep Netta waiting any longer."

But it was not easy to resist the wistful and humorous appeals, some of them almost querulous in their childishness, with which he implored her; and she yielded at last.

From outside in the darkness they could hear the shrieks and snorts of the merry-go-round and the wild music of a country jig that might have been the very tune to which the West Saxons first invaded Frome-side, so heathen and barbaric did it sound.

Neither of them could have told how long they were there together, with that sweet penetrating smell of the hay about them, and the scent of the dark, rain-drenched fields blown in through the door. But when they stood at last on the threshold of their hiding place, and while Lexie's countenance was illuminated for a moment by the light of the match with which he lit a cigarette, Nell noticed to her consternation a look upon his face like the look of a child outraged and lost.

"What is it, Lexie?" she asked anxiously.

But he threw the match away without answering. His mind, like a blind home-turning mole whose moving tunnel escapes all prevention, though its course can be traced by the upheaved turf, reverted to that six-foot-deep hole in the churchyard.

"Come along," he said brusquely; but a minute later, offering her his arm to lean upon, "I do hope you won't be the worse for this, Nell. It would be a shame if you were; for you're a brave and generous little girl. Do your feet feel *very* wet? If they don't *feel* wet I expect you'll get no harm."

This time it was the girl who made no answer. When they reached the field where the tent had been, they found the showmen in the process of packing up and departing. The wind made the lamps by which they laboured flare and smoke like the fires of some wild bivouac; and the figures of the men, showing dark and sinister in the tossing shadows, seemed as alien to the hedges and gates and trees as if they had been brought there by evil wizardry.

There was a group of two or three farm lads still lingering about the show wagons; and when Lexie and Nell had passed they heard behind them shouts of ribald laughter. Lexie felt his companion's hand tremble on his arm and a wave of anger, out of all proportion to the incident, passed through his frame.

"What brutes they are!" he muttered aloud.

And then in his secret thoughts he lamented the innumerable obstacles and difficulties by which the simplest and most natural attempts to be just ordinarily happy are surrounded and hemmed in.

"Something has given this human society a twist in the wrong direction," he said to himself. And even as he said it a shameful subterranean thankfulness that it was not he who was lying in that six-foot hole took possession of him.

"Nell, my dear, you're not angry with me, are you?"

She pressed his arm gently; and the wordless tenderness of that response touched him more than any words could have done.

"How sweet and lovely a girl can be!" he thought; and then in a kind of inward ecstasy, "I am alive! I am alive!" he cried to his own heart.

But a moment later, quite unknown to the girl at his side, "the form," to use a biblical phrase, "of his visage" changed. "Oh, Rook! Oh, my brother, my brother!"

Nell never quite understood why it was that just then he stopped dead still in the road and dropped the arm that was supporting her.

But he had gone down in his remorse among those who "lie in hell like sheep." He, the life amorist, the worshipper of the sun and the sweet air and the grain-bearing earth, was up to his knees at that moment in waters deeper and colder than the waters of the Frome.

But even there, though his face in the darkness had the injured, bewildered look of an outraged child, he held the dead man tightly, protectively against his heart. He did not budge an inch from the integrity of his nature. But his love, like a spear driven into the bed of a swollen river, stood up erect and defiant, visible through the driving mist to all such as might come that way, a signpost in the night, a signal, a token, a witness that would at least outlast his own days, even though it did not outlast the Scotch firs on Heron’s Ridge or the linden tree and the cedar tree on the lawn of Ashover House.

THE END

The Inmates (1952)

First published by Macdonald & Co in London in 1952, *The Inmates* was written and released shortly after *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages,* his final epic instalment in the 'Welsh Novels' series, which had taken Powys considerable time and energy to complete. He composed *The Inmates* far more quickly than many of his earlier novels and it was published the year before he turned eighty. From the mid 1910's onwards, he was a prolific author, producing many novels, short stories and works of philosophy and literary criticism, including books on Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Dorothy Richardson and François Rabelais. He continued to write and release books until shortly before his death in June 1963 at the age of ninety.

The Inmates is set in a mental institute named Glint Hall and centres on the lives and relationships between the inmates, John Hush and Tenna Sheer. Powys wrote in the prefatory note that the work proffers a 'Philosophy of Demented' and that he attempted to create '… a group of really mad people who have the fantastic and grotesquely humorous extravagance that, after all, is an element in life'. Powys' depiction of madness and the social and political institutions that preside over its definition illuminates the role and use of power in designating what constitutes sanity and insanity. He demonstrates that by categorising certain world views or beliefs as 'mad' and imprisoning those who espouse them, the powerful can maintain their authority and dominance.

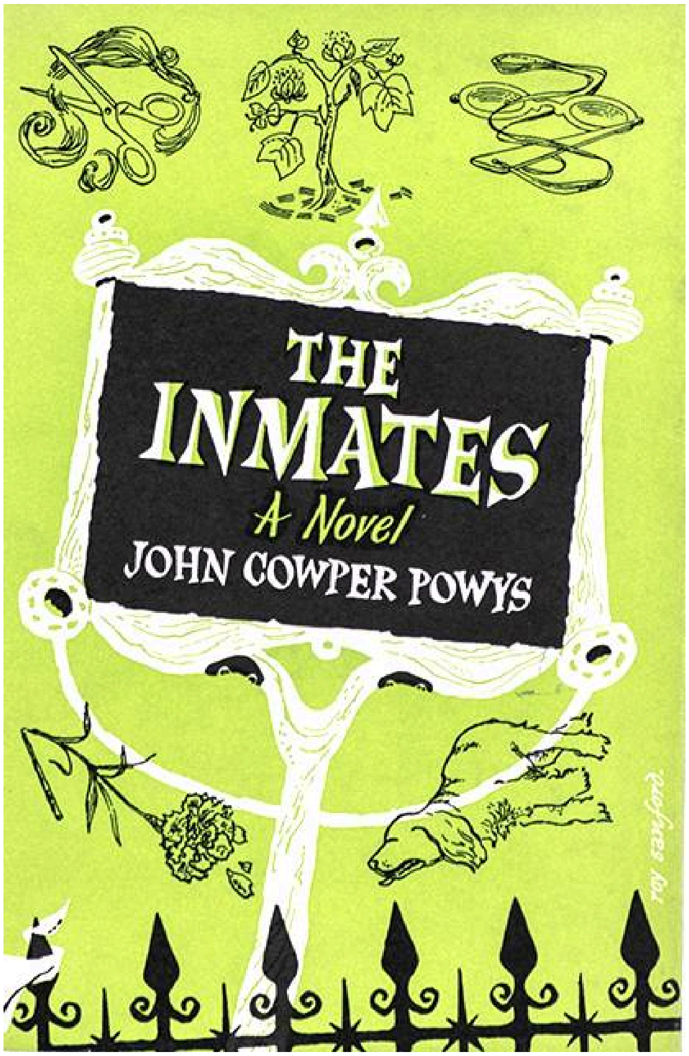
THE
INMATES
A Novel
JOHN COWPER POWYS
roy sanford

The first edition

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To Joy Wilkins

in Memoriam

March 25th, 1921

PREFATORY NOTE

I THINK THAT any book or picture or composition of any sort, once out into the world, so to say, produces a different effect on each person who seriously tries to follow it. I certainly do not think that the author of it has any monopoly in its interpretation. In fact, Thomas Hardy, from whom I learnt so much when I saw him in my early twenties, implied once to me that other minds, if sympathetic, of course, could get more out of a work than the author had the faintest idea existed in it. I daresay, too, there are quite lawful reactions totally different from any the author could have imagined.

What I've tried to do in this tale is to invent a group of really mad people who have the fantastic and grotesquely humorous extravagance that, after all, is an element in life. When Dickens gives himself up to enlarging on the monstrous and the macabre in his characters, you don't feel that they become less real. In a sense they become more real. Reality is not equivalent to dullness. It is not equivalent to solemnity. It is not even equivalent to Matthew Arnold's famous Greek word for describing what poetry should be, namely spoudaios, having the highest seriousness, or worthy of one's most serious attention. No! There is something in reality, and not least in the reality of insanity, that is caught on the wing when you are swinging your butterfly-net about in a mood of complete carelessness or even carrying it under some instinctive impulse in a rush of haste. Curiously enough, the Greek Lexicon of Liddell and Scott begins its interpretation of this very "spoudaios" with the words "in haste", suggestive of the eagerness with which we snatch at some particular aspect of reality that hits our fancy. What might indeed be called the "aboriginal levity" of the mother of the muses insists on the recognition of a vein of pure grotesquerie and simple gargoylishness in some of Nature's most natural creations, a vein in the world that made Heine refer on his mattress of death to the "Heavenly Aristophanes There is, indeed, a vein of what might be called "devilish childishness", full of naïve terrors and wild outbursts of ecstatic merriment in many of those among us who are suffering or have suffered from mental derangement; and this humour of the insane has not yet had the aesthetic homage due to it. In my own approach to it and in my imaginary characters in this fantastic book I have no doubt been influenced by my delight, itself almost amounting to a mania, in such figures as Rabelais' "Songe-Creux", who seems to have been a real clown-singer-dancer when the great Italian Renaissance — for this particular vein, sane or insane, has always been recognised in Italy — became popular in France. In Heine's *Florentine Nights* we get it, and of course it was present, as Rabelais himself recognised, in Villon; and nearer our own day we can trace it in Verlaine. In Poe, also, as I learnt from a hint from Thomas Hardy, there is not a little of it. Among the most moving characters in all literature, one, Don Quixote, is an actual madman and the other, Hamlet, pretends to be mad till he comes within an inch of being really so; while is it not inevitable that an old lecturer-actor like myself, struggling to describe the ghastly levities of insanity, should find that terrific scene in *King Lear*, where the professionally mad fool and the pretended mad Edgar are hustled by the really mad king into the hovel on the heath, exercising a peculiar influence over his fancy?

To obtain the particular effect required, that is to say some approximate reflection of those frivolous aspects of insanity which the gravity of religion and the inflexible "heavy weather" of both morality and science seek to suppress, I instinctively discovered as I went along that three things were essential if I were to get the required atmosphere: first a simplicity of narrative to compete with the macabre frivolity of the subject, secondly a shameless exploitation wherever possible of my own personal manias, and thirdly a savage avoidance of all the modern psychoanalytical catchwords, whether quasi-popular or pseudo-scientific, as leading us away from the heart of the matter, which is not the cause of the patient's mania but how it feels to himself or herself to suffer from it.

What in fact I am trying to do in this wild book is, if I may so put it, to defend the crazy ideas of mad people — in so far, of course, as they don't run to homicide and cruelty — as against the conventional ideas of sane people. I want to show that between all manner of quite different types of patients in a mental institution there is — when you come to these crazy ones' basic philosophies — sufficient mental agreement to constitute what I would like to have the courage to call the "Philosophy of the Demented". In other words, though these unfortunates differ greatly in their aberrations from one another, they really do possess, if we drain off or skim off those details of their manias which are obviously peculiar to the individual, certain dominant attitudes to life, to nature and to the cosmos, which, though contrary to all the accepted notions of the conventional minds who make up the world's judgment, have a deep abiding philosophic truth. But this "truth", this Philosophy of the Demented, is naturally under the ban of our authorities in Church and State. And being condemned at the top level it is very noticeable that it is anathema to the underlings, whose personal power and glory depend, of course, as they mount up, on the conventional ideas they have at last, after many rungs of the careerist-ladder, come to embody and represent. Incidentally, we may remark how very contrary to the way it was in the Renaissance in Italy, where money to support science and art was provided by reckless and unscrupulous despots, is our method of parliamentary and ministerial support of these things, a support that actually comes of course from the taxes paid by ourselves. Our popular ideas about philosophy and science and art — popular ideas that are now dramatically influenced by the extravagant lengths to which Jung's followers have carried the theory of the Unconscious, a theory that in a hundred years will probably be relinquished as a complete illusion — obviously cannot extend beyond our own intellectual limitations. Thus between the sophisticated experimental processes of our modern doctors' treatment of us when helpless in their hands and our own simple ideas criss-crossed by the catchwords of psychoanalysis, there is a vast gulf, a gulf that grows daily wider and wider. But when we look at modern art it is a different story. Strangely enough, some of the wildest, queerest, weirdest experiments of modern art, though totally obscure and even extremely repulsive to our conventional and popular taste, have a startling affinity with the ideas of the inmates of our asylums. The genius of great artists has always been in their unearthly and startling imaginations allied to madness. And this was true in the past as well as to-day. Thus I find no jarring note when I introduce Rembrandt's "Supper at Emmaus" into Glint. The unearthly fancies of the Philosophy of the Demented fall in naturally with a work of art like this, though they horrify the conventional ideas of ordinary people. In fact, our ordinary ideas have become a queer patchwork of uninspired conventionality criss-crossed by flashes of genius, a patchwork which the desperate truth in the blood of the Philosophy of the Demented naturally struggles to confound. I like to tell myself that one aspect of the Philosophy of the Demented is that daring cosmological theory about a real plurality of worlds; namely the theory of William James that we live in a multiverse rather than a universe. Everyone of my inmates is a symbol of some important aspect of its truth which seems to me especially alien to the schoolmaster-taught conventional mind with its passion for unity and oneness. For instance, the Zeit-Geist is an epitome of those lonely sensations when we feel ourselves to be isolated consciousnesses at some uncertain point in boundless space and time. It is at the emptiness round us all that this mad creature points his horribly wagging finger. The Commander, on the other hand, represents that recurrent struggle of the practical prophet to use the traditional values of our older Services for the purpose of making our political rulers at once wiser and more heroic than we are ourselves. Mr. Pantamount embodies that world-old secret of exultant and humorous self-escape which may have been the secret of the Mysteries of Eleusis and which may even revert to the submerged continents of “Mu” in the Pacific and “Atlantis” in the Atlantic. Echetus is the Homeric name in the Odyssey for that cruel king of some terrible coast whose title was the “Maimer of Men”, just as the impervious head of Glint was a manner of his laboratory dogs. The personage who appears at the end and disposes of the sadistic Gewlie is a Lama from Thibet visiting this country in his escape from the Communists. It is a symbolic rounding off of what might be called the self-escape-philosophy of Mr. Pantamount that the only memorial of their time as inmates of Glint left to remind John and Tenna of their old life as they begin their new is a liberated dog called Mr. Lordy.

1. "CERTIFIED"

IT WAS ON one of the gravel paths of the institution that John Hush said goodbye to the young English statesman and his American betrothed, who at John's own request had not remained with him more than a few minutes after depositing him with the famous Doctor Echetus, the head of the place. He knew fatally well that it was a gravel path where he had said goodbye to them, because when they had driven away he felt that he preferred to stare at a small dandelion plant — flower, stalk, leaves and root — that had been weeded-up that morning and now lay withering in the sun upon that bed of immaculately raked-over little brownish stones rather than meet without a pause the scientific eyes of the well-known doctor. It was, all the same, more with his patron's future fate than with his own that John Hush's mind was occupied when the car drove off at last with the beautiful American and her handsome statesman and he found himself alone with Doctor Echetus.

"A brilliant man!" commented the Doctor admiringly. "May I enquire if you are related to him?"

"Oh no!" cried John hurriedly. "Oh dear no! No, I'm not related to him. He was very kind to my parents and I had an uncle in his service."

"A great gentleman of the old school," went on the Doctor. "You can see it in every movement he makes. You feel it before he utters a word. I think he told me your own parents were dead?"

"Yes," said John, "both of them."

"And that uncle, too, of whom you spoke?"

"Yes, that uncle too."

"You've no relations at all?"

"None at all."

Doctor Echetus was silent, contemplating John with historic rather than scientific interest, as if he were the Last of the Mohicans.

Then he said, as if offering a hobby-horse to a Mohawk, “I expect you’d like to look round a bit before going in?”

“I would indeed, Doctor.”

But John found his mind wandering away over and over again from what the ruler of Glint Hall was showing him. It kept wandering to the wonderful American lady, fabulously beautiful and incredibly rich, whom he himself with his own ears had heard fixing Midsummer Day as the day when she and his guardian should be married. And to-day was only the twenty-fifth of March; so it was a long way off!

But how well he knew — oh, how exactly and in what minute particulars! — all that it meant to this “great gentleman of the old school”, to be married to this woman from the New World!

Wandering as his thoughts were, it did strike John Hush that the grounds of Glint Hall were as well kept as they were extensive and varied. The Doctor led him through lawns and shrubberies and orchards and gardens, all of them enclosed by a high and imposing wall, till they finally reached the great southern gates.

To the left of these gates there ran a small stream which had been allowed to flow under the wall; and John couldn’t help noticing with a certain grim interest that there was a row of enormous and most threatening-looking spikes adhering to the base of the wall and descending into the weeds and mud at the bottom of the flowing water.

On the right of the gates, where the stream was crossed by an ornamental little stone bridge, was a grey-cement lodge built in one of the newest styles of artificial masonry, and to the door of this lodge the Doctor conducted the new inmate.

There was no need to knock or ring, for a tall and extremely angular woman whom John had perceived watching their approach through her parlour window hurried to open the door.

“Good evening, Mrs. Squeeze,” said the Doctor; and there was something in his tone and manner that drew to the two of them the full attention of the new arrival. Exactly what it was that startled him into taking so much notice of this bony but still handsome woman as she confronted his companion, John Hush would have been puzzled to say. One thing this arrest of his attention certainly did; it forced him to throw an analytical glance upon the master of Glint. Until this moment John Hush had experienced a singular reluctance to look at the man who now held him in thrall.

It is true he had had no very pressing need to look at him; in fact he had had no need at all. But now that the Doctor’s personality was confronted by the personality of Betsy Squeeze something in the nature of a crucial dramatic crisis, not merely arresting but actually absorbing, took possession of the stage. Doctor Echetus was a substantially built man of middle height who possessed the sort of countenance that it would have seemed natural to find on the shoulders of an extremely competent manager of a country club. He had a well-trimmed pointed beard, rather small, vague, dreamy, unenthusiastic eyes, and, finally, a mouth that was so much the opposite of a sensual one, or a jealous one, or an emotional one of any kind, that it made you think of a professional cricketer or of the general supervisor of a well-kept public garden.

Betsy Squeeze, on the other hand, in spite of her tall bony frame and long bony face, had the most searching hazel eyes — yellow-grey they might have been called rather than green-grey — that John Hush had ever seen.

The “aura”, as John’s diplomatic guardian would have called it, of deprecatory discomfort which separated the polite Doctor Echetus from this impolite Mrs. Squeeze emanated, John was clever enough to see, from the man.

“The fellow’s scared stiff of her,” he told himself.

“How are you to-day, Mrs. Squeeze?” the doctor murmured.

“How are you?” the woman returned with cheerful unction; and continued rapidly, “I was saying to Mrs. Cuddle only yesterday; ‘It won’t be long,’ I was saying, ‘before you and me, Mrs. Cuddle, will be using the term “His Lordship” when we mention the boss. If ’is ‘ealth ‘olds out,’ I was saying, ‘for only a gentleman of iron,’ I was saying, and Mrs. Cuddle knows I never exsage, ‘could bear the noise them dogs lift up when you be prodding their bowels with that fine teaser of yours what my Bill calls ‘Little Prickly’. We’d ‘ave any gent who weren’t a man of iron like our Doc,’ I was saying, ‘setting up a ‘owl, like a mad dog ‘isself some fine spring night when the moon’s in her ghost-bearing!

“‘Weak women such as us,’ I says to Tamia Cuddle, ‘would have got the Jimimas after a month of them dogs; but Doc’ll go on, you’ll see, our Doc’ll go on till he finds that dog-pearl he’s after, the dog-pearl that’ll bring us all long life and a lordship for him that found it!’”

“Well — well — well — well,” murmured the master of Glint, looking first to the ground below the feet of Mrs. Squeeze and then to the roof above the head of Mrs. Squeeze.

“He’ll be taking notice of me soon,” thought John Hush, “if it’s only to get away!”

But Doctor Echetus’s eyes in their obscure distress seemed to have gone off on a quest of their own. Since Bill Squeeze was not under the mat or on the roof he might be at the back; and it was clearly through the house and out the other side that Doctor Echetus’s blurred, obstinate, unenthusiastic, public-garden eyes had begun to search.

“Is Squeeze in?” he enquired.

“No, sir; no, Doctor Echetus. But I could soon fetch him. He’s bound to be round and about. Fact to God, Doctor, we’ve had a bit of a tell-off, me and Bill, and when Bill got to ‘ollerin’ I told ’im the best ‘ee could do was to take things easy, as you might say, in shed. Bill’s most ‘isself, you might say, in shed, same as I be in kitchen. As it ‘appened, I *weren’t* in kitchen this particular time; and that’s why I saw you coming. I were in parlour reading the Sunday papers. You’re the one, Doctor, to know what ’tis with me and ’im— ’im being funny and all of that, and me ‘aving me ‘eart. Not that Bill ain’t a good man to me; and I don’t say he’s not a good servant to the Hall, for he is; but he’s funny, and it’s in consideration of that that the Hall gets a good servant cheap, as you’ll be the first to allow, Doctor, though he was took over and me with him, before your time.

"But, as I tell him it's all right to get a job he can do well and please everybody, and a job nobody could get anybody else to do, and he doing it for a sum nobody else — I mean nobody who wasn't I don't know what — would consider for a moment, but it's quite a different thing to go on being funny when you're with the woman you married for better, for worse, and me being that woman, if you see what I mean, Doctor Echetus — quite a different thing it is! And when you consider, Doctor Echetus, how Bill's way of being funny is not only to go on talking about what passes through his mind — not that I'd trouble about that; for he thinks sillier thoughts than I've ever known a man to think, and I've known many — but about all he sees and hears up at Hall in his day's work; and when you consider what I do for him in house and all that and how days go by without my seeing my friend Mrs. Cuddle or hearing one word of what's going on up at Hall or whether you've took in anyone" — here Betsy shot a quick glance at John Hush— "who's been in the Sunday papers — not, I say, to talk to me of what he hears and sees up at Hall, but to talk to a wooden image he keeps in his pocket, when you consider all this, Doctor Echetus, is it any wonder—"

But the Doctor had by this time gathered together all the conglomerate substance of his personality, all the praetorian cement of his position, all the sandbags of his prestige and all the tenon'd and mortised concrete of his discretion, and he now proceeded to make a firm but benignant motion with the little finger of his left hand.

"Well, Mrs. Squeeze," he announced quietly, "I don't think I'll trouble your husband to-night. We all gain, you know, by what he does with his axe in that shed of his. My fires as well as yours, Mrs. Squeeze, depend on that axe. I know well how these little peculiarities of our good Bill can be very trying sometimes. I find them so myself now and again. But we must be patient, we must be patient. But tell him, won't you, that I'd like to see him the first thing to-morrow. No, no, I won't stay now. Good evening, Mrs. Squeeze. This way, Mr. Hush!"

But as the absent-minded young man followed this new master of his fate, this lord of destiny whom he had just watched dodging, evading, propitiating and not without difficulty escaping a somewhat dilapidated specimen of the classical Erinyes, he did his utmost to bring his attention to bear upon what was happening to himself. But there it was! Even as he dragged his steps after his guide and followed him through one kitchen-garden after another, along interminable gravel-paths under the ever-present prison-wall, till they reached the man's official residence with the monstrous annex, joined to it by a passage, where he kept his dogs, Hush still moved mechanically as if his guardian and the beautiful American had carried his soul away in the luggage-box of their smooth-running car.

It wasn't, indeed, till Doctor Echetus had led him around the whole circle of the place and they had followed for several hundred yards the barbed-wire fence that railed off an extensive plantation of young spruce-firs on Glint Hall's northern side, and shut away this forestry department from the stables and sheds and barns and the big cobblestone yard where the agricultural activities of the establishment were concentrated, that his attention was arrested by a sound that he knew perfectly well was the usual indignant cry of a blackbird angry at being disturbed in some remote part of the plantation where it was already hovering about its mate and her nest.

Since, however, Echetus had just led his new inmate past the main entrance to the research laboratory, where those experiments on living dogs were carried on that Betsy Squeeze regarded as a scientist's shortest cut to the peerage, the Doctor evidently mistook that blackbird's scream of anger for a dog's howl of pain, and with the hurried exclamation: "Excuse me, Mr. Hush, I must see into this!" he disentangled a piece of wire from a small gate, pushed it open, and hurried down a grassy path between immature spruce-firs.

John replaced the wire as neatly as he could and followed at the Doctor's heels. He was still so absorbed in a mental pursuit of his guardian and the American girl that the colours of this path, especially a particular shade of trampled earth that resembled dried blood, though they had a vaguely troubling effect upon him, hardly roused his full awareness. Indeed, until this moment his whole consciousness had been so absorbed in the emotional strain of his separation from his friends and in the deep interior effort he was making to accept this separation in every one of its implications that his own consignment to Glint

Hall had scarcely begun to impinge upon his mind; nor had the impressions so far made on him by the place begun as yet to take any definite shape.

His spirit was still trying to follow his youthful patron and his patron's betrothed, trying to imagine what the two of them were feeling as they arrived at their friend's abode, known locally as Halfway House; but there was something about this path quite apart from that bird's cry that was beginning now to bring him back to the immediate responses of his own nerves.

But while the bird's violent protests against disturbance died away in the distance, a much more intimate skin, so to speak, of his consciousness was now torn away as, at the heels of the Doctor, he suddenly found himself confronted by a horrible hole in the ground. It was clean in the centre of this blood-coloured path; and it was in a small clearing among some of the thickest-foliaged spruce-firs John had ever seen.

It was out of this hole that the Doctor had evidently fancied in his ignorance of birds' cries that the sound they'd heard proceeded. One of his assistants, the Doctor supposed, must have thrown a yet living dog to perish among the dead. For a dog's face did meet John's stare as he gazed down into that hole, and a dog's eyes answered his stare with a look of such unutterable loneliness under the infliction of pain that it revealed to him as a reality in the world what he had hitherto only ventured to approach in the imagination of exasperated nerves.

When the Doctor moved away and hurried back to the little gate in the fence, with himself following like a human dog, he began instinctively trying to cleanse his mind from the horrors suggested by that expression in the creature's eyes. And this he tried to do by plunging his own face into the foliage of those dusky-green spruce-firs; nor was the gesture an imaginary one, for he did quite deliberately let some of the lower branches of these sweet-smelling boughs flap against his mouth, brush against his forehead, and sting his half-shut eyelids.

Doctor Echetus seemed to recognise that this slight debouching to his dog-pit among the fir trees had disturbed the mental absorption of his new patient, for as they crossed the cobblestones of Glint Hall's extensive farmyard he took the opportunity to enlighten him a little about Betsy's husband.

"That fellow's an extraordinary case," he told him. "None of us have ever known a case like it before. It's a form of what I have come to describe in my case-book as *perverse doll-fetishism*; by which I mean the natural desire of young females for dolls perversely camouflaged in a mature male as a mystical idolatry of the inanimate. The relation between the human tendency to idol-worship inherited by us all, and the attraction of certain animals towards certain inanimate objects, is of greater importance than has yet been grasped. Where William Squeeze's case is a singular one is that he introduces into this perverse doll-mania a curious element of paranoiac superiority.

"What Squeeze does is indeed rather singular. He inflates the importance of his personality by conversing with this doll-image of his, which, if you please, he carved for himself out of wood; carved it roughly, you understand, in the shape of a classical head surmounting a six-inch pedestal.

"One of my former patients — he's dead now — was an authority on Greek philosophy, and in looking after him our friend Squeeze picked up quite a few tags from the ideas of Heraclitus, whose name, for some cause deserving further study, must have arrested his attention. As no doubt you must have observed, that tiresome wife of his, with her vulgar and ridiculous ways, is the chief reason why his cure is so delayed; though I am not ashamed to admit that we shall all be rather sorry when he is cured, for his case is a fascinating one and full of importance for all students of insanity.

"You know, I felt pretty sure as we listened just now to that tiresome woman that Squeeze wasn't in his shed at all! If he had been I'm sure we should have heard his axe. My own belief is that you'll find him in the reading-room, the place of all places about which I have taken the most trouble! If you do see him there, my advice to you would be to say nothing of our visit to his lodge. Well! I see we've been seen from our other lodge, the one occupied by the best servant I possess here, the devoted Cuddle, whose good lady, unlike our friend Betsy, is more active with her hands than with her tongue! Yes, Cogent, yes indeed; I certainly think—"

Doctor Echetus was now addressing himself to a short but extremely broad-shouldered individual who, appearing to John as if he had forced his way through a dense undergrowth of spruce-firs from a hole that led straight to Hell, now filled a space where previously there had been nothing.

"I certainly think, Cogent, that you should see Doctor Splitting if he comes at the usual hour tomorrow. But I must be leaving you both now. I need my tea; and my tea, ha! ha I needs me! We'll soon be meeting again, Mr. Hush, soon be meeting again! I leave you in good hands. Cuddle will take you to the reading-room. Yes, Mr. Hush is our new inmate and he wants to rest in the reading-room until tea-time. Will you take him there, Cuddle?"

Remaining perfectly motionless for half a minute, just as if he had been watching the retreating backs of his own words, "until tea-time, Cuddle", flick the dust from their skirts and go mincing off across the yard, the master of Glint turned his back upon them and hurried away.

Thus left to themselves the new inmate looked at the keeper, and the keeper looked at the new inmate; and an instantaneous electric-magnetic current of hostility, far subtler and deeper because on more equal terms than that between weasel and rabbit, passed from the nerve-centre of this official to the nerve-centre of this patient.

"Have you made any arrangements yet, Mr. Hush," were the first words that passed between these two antipodal human organisms, "with regard to your washing?"

"Why no! I can't say I have as yet. Isn't that sort of thing taken care of here? I mean, isn't there a — isn't there a laundry?" But even as he uttered these words there came over the newcomer a vision of himself setting out from those vast lodge-gates along a winding lane with his dirty clothes tied in a bundle and held up by a stick resting first on one shoulder and then on the other, and a parallel vision of himself returning later with quite a different bundle, smelling beautifully of soap, and wrapped around in a vast spotlessly white Mother-Hubbard's apron.

But the best of all the possible servants that Doctor Echetus could imagine interrupted these wandering thoughts.

“There’s a laundry, of course, for public patients; but we find that when gentlefolk like yourself come here they usually want to make their own arrangements. I only spoke because I know how pleased Mrs. Cuddle would be to do for you, and not only to do for you, if you know what I mean — but to have the pleasure of meeting a young gentleman like yourself and — perhaps — you never can be sure — finding she can help you in other little ways. Many’s the time I’ve heard my wife say: ‘It’s wonderful, considering everything, what a woman can do for a well-spoken young gentleman who’s really grateful for her help!’ But I see Mrs. Cuddle is halfclosing already. We are half-closing, you understand, at a quarter to five, and full-closing at a quarter past six. It’s a custom of old standing, I believe. Maybe it’s a good custom; maybe it’s a bad one. They say, ‘to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams’. But it’s not that we’ve got to consider now. We’ve got to consider now whether you would like Mrs. Cuddle to do your washing. And towards your decision on this point I can contribute an important, some people might even call it a *decisive*, argument: Mrs. Cuddle would *like* to do your washing.” And then without any pause: “I am telling our new young gentleman here, Tamia, that you’d be willing to attend to his mending and do his washing as long as he’s with us. That’s quite correct, isn’t it?”

What John Hush felt at that moment was pure and simple astonishment, the cause of which was as simple as the feeling; for if there was one art in which Mr. Cogent Cuddle excelled it was the art that in modern fiction is known as “shepherding”, and so skilfully had he practised this art on the new inmate that when the plump, active, girlish-complexioned, flaxen-haired woman, evidently a good deal younger than her husband, turned round from the half-closed gates, John felt a surprise that was by no means disagreeable.

It was a peculiarity of John’s consciousness that it possessed the power of reducing its mental landscape to so small a size or perhaps it would be better to say of reducing its field of vision to so small a size, that when one image occupied this inner space it became like a figure in a doorway entirely blocking the entrance, and making it necessary for any newly arriving thought or image to pass clean through the first if it, too, were to take its place in this exclusive enclosure. Thus it happened that just as a few minutes earlier the figures of his guardian and his guardian's girl had to endure the passing through them, in the entrance to his mental landscape, of a lot of scratching, scraping, brushing and stinging spruce-boughs and of a dog's face staring out of a horrible pit, so the kindly form of Mrs. Cogent Cuddle now had to glide into view through those boughs and across that hole in the ground. And it, moreover, turned out that this woman's face, once established in his field of vision, reminded him most strangely of his old nurse Maria, the only woman in his life, till he met his patron's American girl, whose personality he could enjoy without any physical, emotional, or nervous disturbance.

"You heard me call Mrs. C. 'Tamia' just now," the man remarked a few minutes later, after he had indicated to John how to get to the reading-room through the back of Glint, "but you don't have no notion, do you, what 'Tamia' stands for?"

It was extraordinary how disturbing it was to John's newfound comfort in meeting someone so like his old nurse to have his ignorance of what Tamia "stood for" thus emphasised by Tamia's husband. "If I could only think of it! If I could only... If I could only..." And it came into his head how he had read in some book that the way to compel spirits to obey you was to know their names. And suddenly he did know! Clearly and for certain he knew. "Her name," he thought, "is Mesopotamia"; and instantaneously he decided that he would conceal from Cogent Cuddle that he knew his wife's name, just as he would conceal from him that she reminded him of Maria Blackthorn, who had been his nurse from infancy to the age of five. "She's too good for him! She's too good for him! She's too good for him!" he thought. "No, Mr. Cuddle," he said, "I haven't the faintest idea! But I think 'Tamia' is a very suitable name. It's a pretty name, too. It sounds like Spenser's name for the Thames!" Oh, he was off now — doing what he delighted in doing — teasing, that is to say, a dedicated enemy! But as Cogent Cuddle, after giving him at the door of the reading-room a puzzled, suspicious, faintly bewildered, but also a shrewd and cunning look, the sort of look a cat might give a dog whom it left guarding its pet rat-hole, turned his back on the building to rejoin his lady in the north lodge, he caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror.

He was more than satisfied with the manner in which this mirror reflected him; and he paused for a second to indulge this satisfaction. The mask he beheld was mostly composed of brow, eyes and chin; for his human lips had so constantly been withdrawn into his mouth in the process of controlling some natural emotion that they looked as if — were the necessity for the mastery of all feeling by pure will kept up for a few years longer — they might dissolve away entirely. Meanwhile his forehead was straight; his nose was straight; his chin was straight; and even his soul, putting aside its more intimate connection with these physical manifestations of his personality, might also, according to the strictest Euclidean definition of a "line", have been called straight. It was certainly basically, ultimately, and fundamentally so; though around and above this final "straightness", in which culminated Cogent Cuddle's residual and over-all purpose in life, there ran a twisted and complicated network of devious indirections, which made up the various crooked means by which this purpose was pursued.

Contrary to the human weakness of Bill Squeeze, whose temperamental anarchism could only be ruffled into action by the force that roused it and was alone capable of routing it, namely the tongue of Betsy his wife, Cogent Cuddle had succeeded in so completely depersonalising the ideal idol of world-communism that he never permitted himself even to think of it as anything but *It.* He himself had been converted in a public museum and it was only when *It* decided that the best way he could serve *It* was by converting to its service some famous champion of vivisection that he married Tamia, left his arrow-heads of flint, and came to Glint Hall, first to be cured of an imaginary aberration, and then to devote himself with implacable fidelity to the tremendous task, difficult but by no means impossible, of converting half the attendants at this asylum, and, if destiny so decided, the great Doctor Echetus himself.

2. THE FIRST GLANCE

"ESCAPE FOR THE certified!" thought John Hush as he entered the reading-room and looked round the books.

"'Isles of the Blest' for the inmates!"

The door by which he had entered faced a large window in the further side of this spacious room surrounded by bookshelves, a window through which the afternoon sunshine, floating between the still leafless branches and scarcely budding twigs of a tall tulip-tree, now fell with a palpable warmth full on his face. Towards this window he promptly directed his steps.

Very curious are the impressions that reach us when we enter any sort of a room for the first time. Not only are we confronted by the "aura" of the bodies and souls of those who habitually frequent it, but something quite different from any human atmosphere makes its impact upon us, namely the combined emanations from the pieces of furniture that have been longest in the room.

But John Hush, as he threaded his way between the chairs and tables with the intention of reaching the window, was now confronted by something beyond the room's human atmosphere, and beyond the impalpable emanations proceeding from such inanimate things in the room as had their own private histories.

He was confronted by a vibration of intense and concentrated curiosity, a vibration of surprise, of wonder, of a will to guard, to steer, to warn, to protect; but of this confrontation, and of the impalpable opposition it offered to his movement towards the window, he was entirely unaware. The personage who projected it, though Hush could have seen him, and indeed had actually been warned of his probable presence here by Echetus himself, was none other than Betsy's husband, the incorrigible Bill Squeeze, whose case, as the Doctor had explained to John, was so extremely interesting that it had become advisable to delay its cure. Bill Squeeze, as he now stared with this spell-binding intensity upon John's wavering progress towards the window, offered to such intelligences as might have been in a position to observe it a countenance that in all essentials was the direct opposite to that of Cogent Cuddle. For just as the husband of Tamia and keeper of the north gate of Glint was a perfect example of Spenser's mystic dogma that soul is form and doth the body make; his countenance being entirely composed of the straight lines of predetermined conviction, Betsy's Bill had a visage literally composed of the rounded curves of arbitrary, whimsical and humorous caprices. His nose was as shapeless as a fungus on a willow-stump. His forehead projected over his nose like a wooden roller about to flatten out the dough of a pancake.

At the same time anyone watching him with as careful a scrutiny as he was bestowing on John Hush might have noticed in the fathomless curiosity of his eyes and in the incorrigible fantasies of his lowering forehead a resemblance to a well-known explorer contemplating an ensorcerised aboriginal of Central Africa.

The attention he was directing at John, however, struck its object without attracting that object's notice, while the interest of two other persons, by reason of their being directly between him and the window, could neither be by-passed unobserved nor glanced at and disregarded. Each of these two inmates, a man and a woman, must have experienced a certain unwillingness to stroll about the gardens of Glint Hall on this particular afternoon of the twenty-fifth of March in the present year. Their unwillingness, however, must have sprung from very different causes; for these two persons were almost as different from each other as were Cuddle and Squeeze.

John could easily imagine two reasons, all the same, for this man and this woman preferring to remain in this quiet place in spite of an afternoon of sunshine, reasons which it is quite conceivable *did* influence them both. The first of these may have quite naturally been, our friend told himself, a wish not to be accosted by, or even looked at, by any fellow-inmate; while the second may very well have been an insupportable distaste for, and an infinite weariness of, everything that this end-of-March sunshine could possibly reveal in the grounds of Glint Hall — a weariness of every flowerbed, of every shrubbery, of every rock-garden, of every lawn, of every fruit tree, of every iron post in every stretch of the iron railings that separated the gravel paths from the grassy pastures.

Other reasons, no doubt, this man and this woman may have had for remaining in the reading-room on so sunny a twenty-fifth of March, but if they were wearied, as is quite possible, even of the very meadows of the institution, even of the sleek cattle that grazed in those meadows, it is also possible that such weariness extended even as far as the half a dozen wise old rooks who were generally to be seen lurching from side to side and jerking themselves forward across those pastures with the peculiar movements of winged creatures whom necessity has induced or compelled to walk instead of flying.

To reach the window our friend had to pass quite close to these ungregarious persons, and he forced himself to do so. The man was the first who was in his path; and he decided to pass him with a friendly nod as if he were a nameless tavern-acquaintance. The man was an extremely tall lean man with a very long neck on which rested, or rather from which hung, a head of such massive proportions that it looked as if it had belonged to some formidable broad-shouldered dwarf who had compelled this feeble-necked giant to exchange skulls with him.

What this dwarf-giant saw when John approached him was a gaunt, dark-haired, hollow-eyed, curly-headed individual who certainly looked — though as a matter of fact John had never acted in a play in his life — as if he had just stepped down from the stage of a provincial collegiate theatre where he had been rehearsing the part of the melancholy Jacques.

John was indeed on the point of greeting this dwarf-giant in a carelessly-natural and unselfconsciously-easy voice when he became aware that the fellow had fixed upon him a look of shocking penetration, a look that seemed to say: “I know exactly who you are. Your friends may have kept your case out of the Sunday papers, but I know it perfectly well and so does everybody else in here!”

Hurriedly switching off, therefore, the greeting he was on the verge of uttering, John hastened forward. Nor did he make any attempt to catch the eye of the other person in his path; for he told himself that if a male fellow-inmate could see through him at the first glance, what might not a female one be able to do? He felt sure she was trembling with shameless curiosity, though as yet she had not lifted up, far less turned upon him, the lorgnette she was clasping so tightly on her black silk lap.

But it came to Hush as he glanced quickly at her that her purpose in carrying this thing was less in order to perceive obscure objects more clearly herself than to tap the knuckles of such unfortunates as might be unable to see what Providence had decided to reveal to her.

But he was at the window now, an excellently large window, and from it he could see, for it was on the first floor, the whole wide expanse of the gardens and meadows and walks and shrubberies on the southern side of the institution. There was hardly more than an air-gulf of ten yards between the window at which he now stood and the top branches of the nobly-grown tulip-tree.

Nor was this all; for extended on the grass beneath the tree and thus within the space of some twenty yards of the window-pane through which he was now excitedly staring, there lay a young woman the like of whom he had never seen in all the days of his life. And, now that he had caught sight of this girl under the tulip-tree, what had previously been the merest chance for Bill Squeeze became a certainty, the certainty that balanced on the lowest step but one of the reading-room step-ladder he would be able to watch the new inmate without being watched himself and able also to point him out to the personage he carried in his pocket.

“So that’s the new bloke, is it?” he murmured as he contemplated with equanimity the nervously apprehensive actorlike individual with the decadent Roman nose, protruding upper lip and small deep-sunken grey eyes, who was standing like a mesmerised ghost at the reading-room window.

"He's watching Tenna Sheer. That's what *he's* doing! No, no, it's no use thinking you're invisible, young gent, for us do know all your little ways, don't us, Heraclitus?"

Bill was muttering all this in an audible voice; but the man and woman were so used to his mutterings that they took no notice of him; and John, after one hurried glance at him in which he realised who he was, gave himself up again to the girl under the tree. Bill now thrust his hand into the side pocket of his official jacket and brought cautiously and gently to the orifice of that spacious receptacle a small image of the weeping philosopher. This image he proceeded, with the most delicate and considerate nicety, to raise just high enough for its wide-open, staring, unblinking eyes to get a good glimpse of the man at the window. Then again he recommenced his mutterings. But John Hush, having once realised who he was, did not turn his head again to give him and his philosopher a second look.

"Up to his tricks, ain't he, Heraclitus? But he can't fool *us,* can he, old sport? For what you dunno, *I* know, and what I dunno *you* know! Yes, *she's* there all right, ain't she, my wise one? Sitting under the tulip-tree she is, reading her book, and all the others afeered to go near her! What frights them so about that little girl, Heraclitus? That's what I want to know. She never talks back to none o' the lot; and when she does say anything, 'tis ever gentle and low, like Shakespeare says gals' voices should be! I don't say 'tis a warm-'earted voice, Heraclitus, old sport, and I don't say it's a neighbourly or a frolicsome voice. And yet, when you consider it, Heraclitus, you couldn't call it an icicle-proud voice. But whatever it is about that gal's voice, old tuppenny, it sure does give our poor little flock of natural lunies the tigly-wiglies. But what you can't tell me, Heraclitus" — and it was at this point that the husband of Betsy Squeeze decided that the moment had come for him to go home to tea— "is what it is that Mr. Hush finds so choosie-woosie, goosie-poosie, loosie-toosie, floosie-soosie about Missy Sheer. That's the mystery us has got to tackle, old sport, so don't jump the barriers or rush to conclusions.

"You may be a hell of a philosopher, Heraclitus, but I'm not going to have any bloody endings in this here tub of Diogenes, alias the old game-bag, alias Lizzie's temptation, alias the black hole of Glint. So be content with the peep into high life giv'd yer by Jupiter

Squeeze. But home's the word, my hearty; so let's repeat the musical chairs — I mean prayers — we composed the last time we sat on the steps of Parnassus. So good night, lords and ladies, and don't forget God and his prophet."

And with a glance at the back of the man at the window and an affectionate pat to his own left-hand pocket Bill went off. An onlooker would certainly have been induced to feel that the wavering channel of destiny and the fluttering trail of fate and the indecipherably scrawled map of chance, not to mention the sealed orders of necessity, were worthy of John's simplest and purest gratitude, if only for the fact that they had given him an extremely long-sighted pair of eyes.

A less clear vision would have missed half of the effect of the old-fashioned navy-blue dress, the plain black stockings, the filmy, straight, but rather rumpled and badly-combed hair of a subtle shade of brown that hovered between sepia and burnt-sienna, the nose that was slightly too aquiline for the pale oval face but went beautifully with the indescribably subtle curves of the girl's lips.

It was the general impression of all these, carried through the air from the grass to the window, just as if the flickering sunshine reaching out through the still leafless tulip-tree were a deviously designing artist, using that soft south-blowing air to create out of some unknown atmospheric element the perfect ideal, realised at last, of John Hush's life-long longing. He could see with a telepathic clarity all the appalling sensitiveness those rare curves implied.

So quickly would they be distorted that the very secret of their beauty lay in the strange prophetic quiver of agitation that stirred in them, like the wind in budding ash-tree leaves before there was any apparent troubling of the air. Tenna Sheer's chin struck him as so frail in its modelling that it seemed as devoid of the ordinary obstinacy of human self-assertion as a drooping currant moth; while her ears seemed to him like those of an exiled elf that has been blown on the wind from an island "where every sound gives delight and hurts not", to an island 'where but to hear is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despairs".

Frozen into a motionlessness that was like an icicle on the edge of Acheron, John Hush, as he stared through the shut window, felt that the prostrate form beneath that tulip-tree enshrined so absolutely the essence of all the maddening femininity he craved in his distraught idolatry, that all ordinary women, all ordinary beautiful women, struck him at this moment as belonging to a different sex altogether.

This enchanted creature struck him, in fact, as just as much more sensitive than ordinary women, as ordinary women were more sensitive than men. What in fact John Hush beheld with his long-sighted eyes was what old mediæval learning called an "Elemental", and probably in this case would have been further defined as a creature of the air rather than of the earth or of the water or of the great zodiacal bodies of heavenly fire. For though it was certainly upon the earth that this ariel was now outstretched, Hush felt that no earth-magic could keep her there long.

Standing erect at that closed windowpane — for though the afternoon was exceptionally warm for the end of March it appeared to be taken for granted by the authorities that the inmates of a home like this would rather have their reading-room windows shut than open — John Hush thought, with the rational assurance of a man who has tried to regulate certain features of life according to his romantic wishes and has not always been aware of the ill-adjustment of these attempts to practical necessity, "I must go down to her at once."

Following this impulse, he moved towards the door, giving the dwarf-headed giant a wide berth, and glancing at the lady with the lorgnette as if she were less than the arm of the chair she sat in, in fact as if she were a certain nick in the woodwork of that arm that had been caused by an unskilled furniture-mover when it was first brought to Glint Hall. He tried as he went to visualise the girl under the tulip-tree as she would be when awake and sitting up or standing up; and he continued this process of mental visualisation down the main staircase, stepping aside to let little groups of inmates pass as they went up. Through the main entrance-hall he continued it and out of the front-door, where again he had to step aside to let people enter; but by the time he reached the grass between the circle of gravel in front of the entrance and the tulip-tree, his mental vision was abruptly broken up by the sound of the bugle within the building and the sight of the girl herself crossing the grass towards him.

"*Damn!*" muttered John Hush with as much personally directed fury towards the jumble of large destinies and small accidents that had occasioned this mischance as if they had been embodied in the person of some preposterous rival. He opened his mouth as she passed him, but not a word could he utter; and if the mental vision of her by which he'd been obsessed had reduced the dwarf-headed giant to the nothingness of a blur and the lady with the lorgnette to the negligibility of a nitch, the way Tenna Sheer now hurried past him with her head bent low so as to see nobody and her fingers fumbling in the pages of that curst book blotted out the whole of the mental landscape that made such a vision possible.

"Swithold footed thrice the old!" was the blighted jingle that accompanied in John Hush's furious fancy the dying notes of that tea-time bugle, as he swung round to follow her across the gravel and into the hall and up the staircase. He suddenly felt a compulsion to tune his steps, and, indeed, to regulate every physical movement he made to some sort of rhyming tag.

"Follow her out," he murmured to himself as he went to the men's lavatory, "and follow her in; to *follow* a woman is no sin!" But later, when he discovered that the male inmates had their meals at one long table in the dining-hall and the female inmates at another long table in the same dining-room, his rhyming vein deserted him and his one desire was to find a seat from which he could see at least the back of Miss Sheer.

With a gasp of content he found one from which her face was visible. With this privilege in his possession, it was almost mechanically that he drank his first two cups of tea, though it did cross the threshold of his attention that both the attendants who carried round the tea and the attendants who followed with the milk and sugar spoke nicely if not respectfully to him and let him have as many lumps of sugar as he wanted.

Chance had so arranged it that when John's head retained its normal position as he drank his tea he could just detect the shadowy curve of Miss Sheer's small white chin between or above or below the various opaque obstacles, organic and inorganic, which intervened; and not only so, but chance had also arranged that one of those mysterious shafts of light that so often break up the symmetry of a large apartment and do so in a manner for which a considerable experience of place and time alone can account, was now flickering, full of floating dust-motes that seemed to him like tiny magnetic whirlpools of occult affinity, between the arms and shoulders and sleeves and lifted cups surrounding that white chin, which in itself was worthy of any of those exquisite modellers of virginal-angelic chins in the studio of Leonardo, and a plate of brown bread-and-butter on John's own table into which that shaft of light sank and dissolved.

Towards this plate, upon which there remained only one last piece, John now stretched out his arm. But a youth at his side, and it had already struck him that there was only one grey head to be seen among the men seated round this long table, eagerly, almost passionately, forestalled him, snatching it up and swallowing it in a couple of ravenous spasms.

"Touch down!" chuckled this playful competitor, turning upon him a bland and serene smile. "All's fair in love and war! Besides, if your dad had seen as much as my dad's seen, and sailed the seas as long, and drunk rum with as many one-eyed admirals and as many fathom-deep pirates and as many lights-burning-bright-sir able seamen, north, south, east, west of Rotterdam, and east and west of Cape Horn, you'd have learnt, as I've learnt, the truth of that great saying of the king of the Cannibal Islands: 'For women and bread a man gives his head.'"

At this point Hush was aware of the turning towards them of a good many indignant countenances round that table, and aware, too, of the similarity of the expression written in marked language upon these faces. This was an expression not unlike what would have appeared on the faces of a group of boys on their first night back at school had one of their number, breaking an unwritten law, begun bragging of his exploits in his native village.

John was likewise aware of a coming together, behind himself and the excited speaker, of at least four of the sturdy-masculine attendants, two of whom were purveyors of tea and two distributors of milk and sugar. But John's mind, full of one matter only, and burning to make friends with his youthful neighbour purely with a view to gaining more light upon this one matter, completely disregarded these omens.

"And what," he innocently enquired, "has the wind at Cape Horn to do with your taking the last piece of brown bread?"

But in place of replying to this academic question, the son of the great seaman threw upon him a reproachful and upbraiding look and with anything but a genial "Excuse me", rose from the table and, with the assistance of the four attendants, stepped over the wooden form they were sitting on, and with haughty and silent submission allowed himself to be led out of the hall.

"You see, sir," murmured his neighbour on the other side, leaning closer to John than John found agreeable, since the fellow's clothes reeked of some peculiarly pungent disinfectant, "you see, he thinks his father was the Flying Dutchman!"

Evidently satisfied that the incident had passed without raising a disturbance, the attendants were now carrying round more tea and more milk and sugar; but John noticed that no other plate of brown bread-and-butter appeared to replace the one devoured so rapidly by the son of the Flying Dutchman.

But the white bread-and-butter was still there, and since the tea and the sugar seemed both inexhaustible, and he had eaten nothing since breakfast, our friend, though still hardly realising what he was doing, began to swallow slice after slice.

But all the while he was telling himself: "I'll sit here till she goes. I'll sit here till she goes; and then I'll go, and I'll speak to her outside!"

There had, indeed, been certain shiftings and readjustings and unsettlings that now enabled him, though the shaft of light had faded, to get a clearer view of that small oval face, aquiline nose, and perfect mouth and chin. She had seated herself, as it happened, next to the lady with the lorgnette, and now that several inmates from both tables had left the dining-hall it became clear that the lorgnette-carrier was concentrating on her fragile companion. The girl's head was bent over her plate, and as far as John could make out she was swallowing her white bread-and-butter as dreamily and absent-mindedly and with the same lack of any consciousness of the pleasure of taste as he was doing himself.

It was clear that though the lorgnette lady was addressing her with a continuous stream of low-voiced talk, her response was wordless. It was, indeed, confined to a few barely perceptible nods. At this point John Hush decided to be bold. A natural instinct, however, like that of a wild animal suddenly introduced into a concentration camp of circus animals, caused him to keep a wary eye on the attendants and to make no move till they were absorbed in a lively chat together near the door of the hall. Then without turning his head as he spoke, and, as far as appearance went, murmuring his words like a ventriloquist, he appealed to the man who reeked of disinfectant.

“Are we,” he enquired at large, “allowed to talk to each other at meal-time?”

As the man began replying to this question he did turn his head towards him just a little; but he noticed with relief that the stranger from whose person, unless they crowded up much closer on their common bench, he was divided, and glad to be divided, by a considerable gap, followed, no doubt quite deliberately similar tactics.

“Yes,” the man replied, in a cautious and abstracted tone, addressing the backs of the women at the other table. “Yes, we’re allowed to talk as much as we like as long as we avoid the facts of life.”

“The facts of life?” echoed our friend vaguely; but his imagination had begun to call up several very curious memories that explained a good deal of what he now saw around him.

“I mean,” the other went on, “real life, life that’s the opposite of all the fables and fairy-tales and fancies and all the silly escapes, in which the people who shut us up here love to indulge.”

He was speaking so low now that John had some difficulty, with his head in its present position, in hearing him at all; and he knew by their voices, too, that the attendants, though still chatting cheerfully, were no longer in a group at the door.

“You mean,” said John, “that we mustn’t talk of anything that’s important. But just tell me one thing, if you don’t mind.”

"You mustn't ask me," murmured the other, with scarcely a movement of his lips, "whether the stuff is stronger to-day or whether I still smell *It* through the stuff."

"Do you," whispered the cunning John, breathing his words as if the backs at the other table had been the wall of a fives court, "do you still smell *It*?"

"Hush!" returned the other. "Hush!"

"Hush is my name, you know," whispered John, "so it's easy to hush!"

"Pardon me," protested the disinfected one, "I'm afraid I don't follow."

"Hush is my name. My father was Thomas Hush and I am John Hush."

The utterance of this simple information gave John courage, and he turned his head far enough round to enable him to see that the speaker was a pitifully humble and a pitifully inconspicuous little man with sandy hair and large ears.

"May I use your name," enquired the little man, "when they don't put enough stuff on my clothes?"

Still dominated by his one sole purpose of learning more about Miss Sheer, John replied in his friendliest voice, "Of course! I'd be proud for you to use it! Do you find they take advantage of yours? Or have you turned against it? I won't ask you what it is."

The other leaned forward. "When I smell It," he whispered in an awestruck voice, "I become nothing but *It*; and the worst of it is, they have to put more on my clothes every day. Did you say you were interested in rock gardens?"

This last sentence was spoken in a tone our friend had no difficulty in recognising. It was the tone of a boy who substitutes "Cato" for "catapult" when he becomes aware that the master is listening. But John experienced a thrill of crafty satisfaction. He had, it would appear, by means of all this selfish sympathy, made a friend already.

"What's that girl's name," he boldly enquired, though he knew perfectly well an attendant was already just behind them, "who is sitting next the woman who's got that eye-glass thing with a long handle?"

"That one? Oh, that's Tenna Sheer! She's been here a couple of years. She tried to kill her own dad, she did. That's what got her in here. It was only her dad being mayor of somewhere and swearing to be responsible for her that saved her from prison. And then a year ago she went for old Rumpibus with a door-scraper. He's got the scar still, and you can see it from here. He's descended from the great Doctor Rumpibus. He's the grey-haired one over there. He's a decent sort of gent and never holds it against her. I don't know him very well. He talks to everybody. He's not a bit scared of Miss Sheer. He gives her the time of day like everybody else. Jesus! If I had one grey hair I'd be fearful of being alone in a room with her! Tried to kill her own dad, she did, and he a great arch-builder and a 'sir' in his own right. And only a year ago it was that she went for old Rumpibus. You know why he's in here, I expect, Mr. Hush? He's in here because he thinks he's God. It's because we say 'Our Father' that she went for him. It's wonderful, when you come really to think about it, mister, that there should be such a lot of people in the world who can't abide their own father and their own mother. That's what I always say. If love's wonderful, hate's wonderful, too, for there isn't a person who doesn't know that if love is heads, tails is hate. People aren't as thankful for being alive and for having mothers and fathers as anyone might think.

"In our gents' lavatory there *used* to be — they've whited it out now — a sort of music-hall song spelled out on the wall above the third seat all about Tenna Sheer; and in this same song I'm telling you of, Sheer was made to rhyme with beer."

At this moment the disinfected one bent his back and changed his tone. "She is just like you, I expect, interested in rock gardens. No, you mustn't mind their not letting us talk seriously at meals. There is a purpose in it, no doubt, beyond playing the giddy goat with us. I can't see it myself. It seems just silly to me, but people are clever nowadays, and I don't know no think myself. You've just come, mister, I expect? *Certified*, I suppose. Don't take it amiss that I say so, mister, will you? There's those here, you know, who aren't and never never can be. 'Tisn't lawful to certify in all conditions. But if you ain't had it done, the visiting specialist won't need to look you over. It's the certified alone they're interested in. To un-certify a certified — *that's* something worth talking about! It's about *that* the newspaper men come here; six at a time I've seen 'em come, Mister 'Ush. But, as I was saying," and the nameless one converted his animated three-quarter face into a severely inscrutable profile, "with the smaller kind of rock gardens, especially of this season, you never can be perfectly sure."

Hush was aware of one of the attendants slowly retreating towards the end of the table. "May I ask," his companion went on, "what they've got on you, chum?"

"Me?" Hush gave a self-conscious chuckle. "Me, do you say? What they've got on me? Well! I don't mind telling *you,* though I don't believe in talking about it to all and sundry. My trouble's an old one. I've had it since I was a schoolboy; and the war made it worse. Well! I don't mind telling you. But the truth is—"

He broke off. All the while the other had been speaking he had been repeating the syllables "Tenna Sheer" over and over again; trying to make them flow into that girl at the other table and diffuse themselves through her and become so intimately part of her that every wisp of her hair and every feature of her face, and every pleat and hem and fold and crease and curve and hollow and wrinkle of every garment she wore, and every beat of her pulses and every stir and every stillness of every part of her body under her clothes, together with the whole atmosphere and aura of her personality, should in some occult manner be contained in the actual sound of those three syllables of her name!

His feeling became so intense as he sat there listening to this gallant but inconspicuous victim of a maniacal sense of smell that he imagined himself holding Tenna Sheer on his knee; and, with every caress he gave her, calling upon the fitful precipitation of airy mist that composed her name to identify itself more fully with the being of which it was the vibratory symbol.

"You were telling me," recommenced the disinfected one, "about the particular trouble that caused you yourself to be thrown among us? I'm afraid I turned your attention from the subject."

If John Hush hadn't just seen an inch or two more of Miss Sheer's forehead from where he sat he would have been sharply arrested by his neighbour's choice of the word "trouble".

It had occurred to him to wonder at least twice in the motor car as he sat beside the fair American how the inmates of an asylum were accustomed in ordinary conversation with one another to refer to their personal aberrations; and one of the occasions when he had been thinking of this was when the lady was speaking of the recent purchase by some American friends of hers of the old mansion called Halfway House whose lights they both assured him must certainly be visible as soon as darkness fell from any window at Glint Hall that faced the hills to the west.

"What *is* there about your name," enquired John Hush, "that makes you want to use mine instead?"

"My name?" echoed the other. "Did you say my name?"

"That's what I said," sighed John, with a peculiar and almost petulant irritation. "What devilment is this," he went on, "that two honest men like you and me can't exchange the simplest remark about the mystery of names without having to produce the name of the person who baptised us, of the god whose worshipper we became by being baptised, and of the king whose subject we became by being born!"

He now found without any too palpable twisting or peering that he could see quite a lot of Miss Sheer's face as she listened to the lady with the lorgnette. He even went so far as to pretend to himself that he could catch the identical expression of her face under that lady's concentration.

"Do you want really to know my name?" repeated the little man. And when John nodded abstractedly, wondering whether it would have to be in that leather-smelling reading-room that he must struggle to snatch his first exchange of words with the object of his obsession before they had to separate for the night, there suddenly took place an event which, of all the events that could conceivably happen at that moment, was the one that John Hush least expected.

He was compelled to remove his eyes from Tenna Sheer. The truth was that the insignificant little sandy-haired creature who was addressing him became suddenly endowed — at least as far as John was concerned — with an authentic power of hypnotism. It was as if he had suddenly been compelled to follow, in full daylight and in the centre of a dramatic moment that required all his attention, and not only to follow but to understand all the ghastly events of the life-tragedy of somebody else, of somebody who was not, and had no wish to be, connected in any way with John Hush. This had never happened to John before.

Living in his own insanity, if insanity it were, other people's identities — always with the exception of his guardian — had until this moment been like the sound of rain on the window, or wind in the trees, or waves on the beach. But now as he listened to this disinfected nonentity he found himself compelled to share the tragedy of a person whose weight of character was like that of a fly among a herd of bison.

The small creature told him in a rapid whisper that his name was Lordy — Osbert Lordy, he told him — and that from boyhood he'd been so used to having exclamations of "O Lordy!" addressed to him that he'd come to hate his name. His father had died before he ever saw him, and his mother had married again, and not only married but married a man fifty years older than herself.

It was this stepfather who had become the horror of his life. It was in fact because of the moral superiority of Tenna's father over his stepfather that Mr. Lordy felt critical of this young woman's conduct. She — so Hush was now compelled to learn — might have a selfish father. She didn't have to wait on a decomposing corpse who was no relation to her at all I "In the end," Mr. Lordy said, "I completely lost my temper. He had been looking forward to his hundredth birthday. I hadn't touched him — to wash him, you understand — for years. He had begun to stink. The neighbours complained. As I say, I lost control of myself. It was on his hundredth birthday, and he said he could dance for the joy of being alive. 'And dance you shall, Daddy Lug!' I cried out. And I did make him dance. I held on to him and danced him up and down. He was a big man, but I felt as strong as a gorilla. You do, you know, when it comes over you like that! Well! I danced him to death; and that began it all. Daddy Lug was dead — dead and buried! But It got out of his grave and came to make me dance. It wasn't him any more, mister. No-no. And it wasn't quite as bad as him. It was his stink. I expect you didn’t know, mister, that old men stink like corpses? You didn’t? No, I thought not I “And that’s why I have to be kept from cracking up with stronger and stronger disinfectants. It’s a pity. I don’t know what they’d do if I began smelling ‘*It*’ in my sleep. Perhaps you’ve never heard this, but it’s the truth. Jesus Christ goes down unto the hell of sleep where all living things are given a tiny-weenie blotto, or crazy-dazy holiday from God’s waking creation; and Jesus Christ strolls about down there as easy and careless as a sailor at the fair, and spits as the rest of us do, and dawdles round, so that his blessed spittle’s as common down there as cuckoo-spit on the longest day, and that’s why none of us poor devils, except now and again in a nightmare, meet *you know what* when we’re asleep! Our priest here doesn’t live round here, you know. I *think* he comes from Horsesmouth. Anyway, he comes every Wednesday, and his name’s Wun — Allen Wun — that’s what his name is; and Wednesday’s the day he comes. I know *that* because I don’t need as much disinfectant on the day he comes. I don’t say I don’t need *any,* mister. Even the father from Horsesmouth can’t be a total disinfectant for one like me.

“But he goes a long way; and if a poor devil could live at Horsesmouth and see the father Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays there’s no telling what mightn’t happen. Ail this bloody life might get as blotto as the hell of sleep itself. Anyway, I’ve found *this* out, that as Eno’s Salts are good against bunged-up guts, so Christ’s spittle’s good against corpses in the hell of sleep. I haven’t liked to ask the father why it’s not used regular — Christ’s spittle, I mean — in our *waking* life. Mind you, I’m not underesteeming its use in the hell of sleep; but if ever I dared ask Father Allen Wun such a question I’d ask him point-blank why the Lord don’t stroll about in our *waking hell* now and again. Maybe he’s got a stepfather in our waking hell who won’t let him spit.

“If I *did* ask—”

But John Hush interrupted him. “I’m terribly sorry, Mr. Lordy, but I *must* go now. Will you be having tea here tomorrow about this same time?”

But all he could catch of the little man’s reply as he stepped over their bench and hurried off towards the door was the word “disinfectant”, and even that reached him with a faint sound as if it came from far away.

3. THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

HE WAS FEVERISHLY making a little round pellet with his thumb and first two fingers from some crumbs left on the table near the brown-bread-and-butter plate as he came out of the dining-hall; but the moment he had shut the door behind him and realised that he was alone with the girl he shook this pellet to the floor, rubbed his greasy fingers against the edge of his jacket, and walked rapidly past her, down the corridor, just as if he were hurrying to the main staircase.

The moment he had passed her, however, he made a desperate and convulsive motion of his will, swung clean round, and confronted her.

“Miss Sheer!” he gasped. He could feel in his own nerves the shock that made her draw back. It was just as if he had flicked that little pellet of brown bread straight into her face.

“Oh!” she cried.

“Please, *please*, Miss Sheer,” he implored in a low scarcely audible voice. “I don’t want to be rude, and I won’t keep you a moment. I only wanted to tell you that I think I know — something — about the book you’re reading — that would interest you a lot, if you’d only listen to me just one moment.

“I’m fond of reading alone, too, just as you are, but there’s something I know about that book that would be — that would make — that would surprise — that would, in fact, thrill you quite a lot! Please, Miss Sheer, believe me! I have discovered something — I’d like to tell you something — about that book — that — that explains a great deal.”

She shrank back and cowered away from him like a windblown leaf that shrivels at its corners and seems to hesitate, as it gives little taps to the hard road, whether to resign itself to the cart-track or aim for the ditch. Then to his intense astonishment she stood quite still. Finally she gave him the swiftest and at the same time the most understanding look he had ever had from anyone in his whole life.

It was as if the crumpled leaf had turned into a bird — not an ordinary bird, but a bird made of some sort of living air that was more penetrating than thought itself. And this thought-bird seemed to flutter through the very pores of his skin and to dart up and down and round and round inside him, soothing with its gentle air-feathers the nervous tension of his whole being.

His cunning in walking past her and then turning so as to bar her retreat down the passage had evidently justified itself completely, though he was far too absorbed in the personality of Tenna Sheer to have any heart to glory just then in the success of his manoeuvre. But his strategy had had the effect of catching her between himself and the large window with which this second-floor passage terminated.

Behind him now was the reading-room from which he had first seen her. Behind him also was the popular smoking-room with its tables for games and cards. The only important room that wasn’t behind him just then was the dining-hall from which they had just emerged.

For various practical and psychological reasons the massively built window at the end of the corridor which now formed a grandiose frame for Miss Sheer’s small but beautifully shaped head was, among all the windows of Glint Hall, the one out of which the fewest number of inmates were in the habit of looking.

By this time the book she had been reading, which was a small thin dark-blue volume of Henry James’s *Daisy Miller*, had been slipped into her handbag, a receptacle which had already struck our young man as having a tendency to remain imperfectly closed. But he now forgot both book and bag in contemplating the effect of her head against this easterly view.

The window behind her revealed an undulating expanse of arable land, broken here and there by hedges and trees. But this expanse terminated in a clear-cut unploughed grassy ridge, in the centre of which rose some kind of ancient fortification surmounted by a couple of gigantic Scotch firs. The whole ridge at this moment was in the process of being atmospherically affected by what was happening to the opposite horizon as the sun went down. In that western sky, where his guardian’s lady had told him could be seen the lights of the American-purchased mansion called Halfway House, there must indeed have been visible at that particular time an unusual sunset.

John Hush’s service in various Balkan capitals in the combined role of private secretary, poor relation, and outspoken valet, hadn’t encouraged him to make any but rather feeble and sporadic efforts to correct his city-bred ignorance of Nature. He may therefore have been in complete error when he interpreted the atmospheric condition just then of that eastern ridge with its prehistoric camp and its pair of majestic Scotch firs as due to the sinking of an especially blood-red sun over the rim of the opposite horizon and consequently over the chimneys of that Halfway House that now was sheltering his friends.

But the actual cause of the enchanted look of this eastern ridge mattered nothing to John Hush at that moment. The important thing was its ensorcerising effect as a background for Tenna Sheer’s delicately shaped skull and soft brown hair. From the twilight that had begun to fall upon that prehistoric ridge there certainly emanated a heathen influence, and to the imaginative but not very scholarly mind of John Hush the small head that now appeared between that horizon and himself might have been the head of Ariadne or Andromeda or Atalanta or Arethusa or any other immortal nymph.

As he stared at the brown hair and white face before him, and beyond that head and face at all that was revealed through the great window terminating the second floor of Glint Hall, he began to feel so happy that he couldn’t utter a sound. That he’d got her to look at him, that he’d got her not to run away from him, that he’d got her to give him her sympathetic attention, was so wonderful to him that for the moment he was unable to think of anything else. He just stared at her in speechless enchantment and she noticed that his under-lip was trembling as if he were going to cry. He was clearly helpless and wholly at her mercy. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before. Here was a real person, a person as mysterious as all other persons but completely different from all others in the fact that he belonged to her. She could be nice or horrid to him. She could make him happy or make him unhappy. But beyond all this, he was an endlessly winding path that she could follow at ease and leisure, not caring in the least where it led but free to trim the branches and dig round the tree-roots and look at the newts in the forest pools.

She was an old inmate. He was a new inmate. But they fitted into each other as naturally as the shadow of a tree fits into the ups and downs of a stretch of grass. Whether men knew such things as quickly as women she couldn't tell; but one thing she knew for certain: he wasn't a spluttering, banging, stretching, creaking, stamping, shouting, boasting, laying-down-the-law sort of man! He wasn't *any* sort of man! He was an inanimate. He was more like a doll than like a person. If he couldn't know what she was feeling, he knew she liked him to be there and knew he liked her to be there.

"And I don't *have* to talk to him now I've got him," she thought, "if I don't want to! I can think my own thoughts just as I always do, and sometimes not tell him! At any minute I can say to him: 'What are you thinking?' Or I can say: 'What does that noise remind you of?' Or I can say: 'What does that taste make you think of?' Or, 'What did you feel when you first knew you were certified?' Of course, I *needn't ever* ask him things like that. And, of course, I'll never know for an absolute certainty how much he's hiding when he answers! He wouldn't be an inanimate doll if there weren't a mystery in him I can never, never get to the bottom of!"

To any onlooker the queer thing about this meeting between John Hush and Antenna Sheer would certainly have been the length of the time they just stared at each other between their ejaculatory questions and their slow, pondering answers! Miss Sheer was really only half listening to him when he fell into a rambling discourse as to the manner in which he would run Glint Hall if he were its chief. "I could think anything," she was now saying to herself, "with him there. I could do anything, dust anything, clean anything, pick up anything, put down anything, sew anything, weed anything, pick up leaves, trim bushes, draw pictures, make patterns! His being there doesn't bother me at all!" And by "there" she didn't mean "in sight Now she'd got him, she could talk to him whereever he was, or wherever she was! And she could never get to the end of him. Yes! that was the thing! He was her doll, but she would never know all he had in his mind, or might suddenly have in his mind, though it wasn't there before; and she needn't know it! No, she needn't!

What they thought need never be quite the same. She couldn't bear it if it were quite the same! But he must feel a lot that she felt. He must feel that things were pressing in upon her and jeering at her, and saying to her: "Yes, you see how brown I am! How yellow I am! How grey I am! You see how dusty I am, and the same as always! Yes, I am those same hairs in your comb, those same fish-bones on your plate, those same door-handles one after another in your house; I am that same dust and that same duster!"

"No! they can't ever again say those things to me! Simply and solely because I've got a thinking man-doll for my own! And I needn't bother any more whether people hate me or don't like me, or whether I'm ugly and plain, or stupid and silly! Nothing of these matters any more! I've got a walking, moving, thinking animate-inanimate of my own, one that can say to itself: 'Has she gone for long? Will she be back soon? What will she have to tell me when she comes home?'"

All this while beneath their hurried spasmodic words and queer intense silences their souls were calmly, quietly, and with infinite relief, simply enjoying themselves. But at last he told himself that he must begin to talk to her or she'd take him for an imbecile.

"What do you think of Glint Hall?" he asked.

She waved her hand. "I can't bear its name."

"Yes. It's a short name, isn't it."

"Too short. I like long names."

"What kind of names?"

"Oh, I don't know; a name like Rhyd-y-Groes-ar-Havren."

"That sounds Welsh to me."

"It is Welsh. A girl in the laundry told me it was her home. I made her write it down because I liked it."

"Did you work in a laundry?"

"Only for a week, to escape keeping house. But I wasn't strong enough. I couldn't do it. I had to go back."

"Did you try anything else?"

"Lord, yes! I was always trying things! But the nice places wouldn't keep me. I wasn't clever enough or strong enough; and in the places where it wasn't nice I couldn't stick it out."

It was at this moment that the big clock in the artfully constructed belfry of Glint Hall struck half-past six. "The bell for everyone to be indoors will ring in a second," murmured John Hush anxiously. "And, anyway, there'll be such a crowd in the garden now. Hadn't we better find a good corner in the reading-room where we can go on talking?"

Miss Sheer glanced nervously round and at once made her accustomed hurried and timid step backwards; and then, looking straight into his eyes, gave a long-drawn, infinitely contented sigh, and with her head tilted just a little to one side allowed her face to relax into the ghost of a smile.

"Wouldn't the smoking-room be better?" She uttered these words, not in the sort of whisper that is conventionally described as "lighter than air," but in a low sound that exactly resembled the fretting of one feathery reed against another on the edge of a small pond. "They'd take less notice of us," she added, "and there are heaps of games there; so we could pretend to be playing."

He clapped his hands in pure delight. "And cigarettes," he suggested, "that we could pretend to be smoking!"

"Don't you smoke?" she enquired.

"No," he confessed, feeling rather ashamed, "no; I can't honestly say I do. But I'll love to see you do it, one after another!"

"Have you never smoked?"

"Oh yes! And it's queer how I came to give it up. But we mustn't waste time talking about that now. Let's go in there quick. Better not be seen hanging about in the passage like kids at school."

He gave her sleeve a jerk, and his agitation was such that without releasing his hold on this small segment of cloth, though he wasn't dull to the fact as he clung to it with his finger and thumb that it was warm inside and cold outside, he hurried her down the corridor to the door of the smoking-room, which they found open. It had only been left a few inches open by the last person to enter, but the sound of men's voices and women's laughter issuing from the room broke upon them as they paused on the threshold with the disturbing impact of a sudden puff of unexpected steam from a stationary locomotive. The whole thing was indeed far easier than John Hush had imagined it could possibly be.

He led her nervously and shyly into the further end of the darkest corner, threading his way like a water-diviner, while she glided after him like a shadow. Between table and table and chair and chair they made their way; and when they did at last discover an empty place it was to find they could settle down there in complete isolation without exciting anything beyond a sympathetic smile.

What he had found with his invisible divining-rod was nothing less than a tiny walnut-wood table adorned with inlaid squares, squares appropriate to romantic chessmen but at the present moment invaded and successfully occupied by businesslike draughtsmen, who though of fungoid rather than of anthropoid shape seemed to John Hush to click their heels with secret joy and respectfully salute their new pair of opposing generals, as who should say: "*Now* we'll be having an easy time!"

And it certainly is true that the new generals and their respective men were in a secure position. They were in a recess behind two rather noisy groups of card-players who were far too occupied with their own skill and their own chances and their own flirtations to feel more than a remote flutter of faint interest over Miss Sheer and her new friend.

As to what they were supposed to do with these sturdy little toadstool-fighters, her white ones defying his black ones, neither of them had the remotest idea. Sir Warden Sheer had had as little time for parlour-games as he had had for tavern-games, and since he believed more strongly in daughters looking after those to whom they owe all than in successful builders humouring the fancies of spoilt young women, Tenna's leisure moments had a tendency to be spent rather in reiterated ponderings about her mother's death than in learning to understand the meaning of "checkmate Mrs. Warden Sheer — for this occurred before the housebuilder had been knighted for his contributions to progress — had been drowned in the over-turning of a solitary canoe, and her daughter's balance of mind, like the balance of that canoe, only in a more gradual decline, had been tilted still further on the sinister side by that event.

"Did *your* father ha*ve you* certified and put in here?" Tenna now enquired across the patient draughtsmen.

"God, no!" he chuckled. "I wish I had a father, if only as someone to damn and curse! No, I'm what you call an orphan. I've got no relations at all. There is a person — as a matter of fact he's a well-known political figure — who calls himself my guardian. It's he who chose my school for me when my parents died, who got me into his own office abroad when the war broke out, and in whose service — I mean as whose secretary, for he treats me like a younger brother — I stayed abroad till the end of the war. It's been since the war, since we've both been back in this country, that our troubles — mine and his too — have mounted up. I'm not blaming him, Miss Tenna. No, you mustn't think I am. Don't look so angry with him! It wasn't his fault any more than it was mine. He had to put me away. He had to put me in here! I'd have disgraced him completely, ruined him, in a sense, if he hadn't put me here. In plain words, Miss Tenna, if so I may call you, I deliberately begged him to have me certified.

"Of course, really, I'm no more insane than you are; I daresay no more than a lot of us are in here. In fact, now that I've met you, and now that you've been so nice, I wouldn't be surprised if I don't get quite cured of my mania, or crazy-wickedness, or nervous complaint, or whatever you like to call it. Yes! I really mean it, Tenna Sheer. You don't know what you've done to me."

She bent down sideways and squeezed the life out of her latest cigarette by pressing it against the wooden edge of an empty waste-paper basket that was so large and solemn and grandly recriminatory that it made John think of a certain second chamber in a Balkan republic.

Then she said with a frown: “But, Mr. Hush, you must have met hundreds of girls far cleverer, far prettier, far smarter, far more lady-like, than me—”

Her frown deepened and she made a vague gesture with her hand as if constructing a little viaduct through the smoke of the dead cigarette along which her soul could cross over the heads of the lazily listening draughtsmen.

“Say ‘John’” he broke in. “Don’t mister me!”

But she went on without heeding the interruption. “And far better able to interest anyone like you — and not only that, but far nicer than I am; for the truth is—” Here she began the gesture of pointing a finger at her own ribs, but thinking better of it she bowed her forehead low down over both her hands. Then she pressed her slender palms and widely-divided fingers against her cheeks, rubbing the skin as if such friction removed some teasing and irrelevant train of thought. “For the truth is,” she went on, taking her hands from her face and sitting up straight, “you’ve no idea how far from nice I am inside!”

She sank back after this confession and looked steadily at him as if challenging him to go on being the friend of a creature so monstrous.

“She’s got an absolutely elfish face,” he thought. “It’s not human. It’s I don’t know what! It’s a leaf on the water-face, a root in the hedge-face, a frost-picture on the window-pane face, a feather on the wind-face, a foam on the wave-face, a ‘Virgin of the Rocks’ face! I’ve seen something like it somewhere; but I can’t think where!”

Antenna Sheer was indeed watching him at this moment with an expression completely different from any expression he’d ever seen on a human face. It gave him the feeling that at any moment she might vanish altogether out of his sight.

“How terrible,” he thought, “if I were really and truly insane and she were only a fancy of my madness?”

He couldn't help noticing that as a smoker of cigarettes she had the peculiarity of making more smoke, thicker clouds of smoke, than any smoker he'd ever known!

As they whispered together across these orderly ranks of opposing draughtsmen, their thoughts seemed to swim in and out of their quaintly contrasted skulls like fish between a couple of under-water rock caves.

In his skull the question was now swimming about as to how she managed to create such a cloud of undulating smoke. Was it, he wondered, because she swallowed less and inhaled less than other smokers, and drew at the same time much more desperately at her cigarette?

And what an extraordinary number of cigarettes she possessed! And she appeared to be keeping them all quite loose at the bottom of this handbag, into which *Daisy Miller* had retreated. And the handbag itself, as he surveyed it shyly, respectfully, surreptitiously, and with a queer sense that it was a sort of indecency to notice it at all, how unlike all other handbags he had ever seen it was! It made him think of certain sacred objects used in extremely ancient ritualistic observances, objects of which the symbolic significance had long ago been lost; but objects which retain, so he told himself, like the ghostly notes of Roland's horn in the forest of Fonterabia, some inner quintessence of the actual matter, in *that* case the "matter" of sound, in *this* case the "matter" of fabric or gold or silver or bronze or ivory or semi-precious stone with which the "object of mystery" had been — during long centuries of time — ceremoniously charged.

"Is your father — I mean your guardian," was the next question she asked, "a married man?"

He looked at her in astonishment. "Why do you ask that?"

"You needn't tell me," she replied, "if you don't want to." He thrust his arm clean across the draughtsmen and touched, not her hand, for he felt she wasn't a person to be lightly touched, but, as an Israelitish ox or mule might have done, that ark of mystery, her handbag.

"Of course I want to! I want to tell you everything.

There's not one single least little thing I wouldn't like you to know. That's not why I asked you why you asked me. It's only that it makes you such a witch! No wonder you like Welsh words! For, do you know, it's just because he isn't married, and wants so awfully to be married, that we agreed I really had to be shut up!"

Antenna Sheer's face became at that moment what some of the old writers in the shelves of that reading-room from whose window he had first seen her would have called a palimpsest. Her perplexed and slightly suspicious frown didn't vanish, but it was overtaken and, as you might say, overlapped by a flickering smile. Beneath this smile it was still just discernable, like the scaly back of a small crab seen through disturbed water.

"Go on," she said; and it was clearly all she could say.

"As I told you," John went on, "since he's been back from abroad he's become much more important. They need him, you know; I mean this present government needs him, needs him terribly. In fact there's nobody else who can play with the other side as he can, and make them hop and skip with their own weapons! You will say, I expect — ("Mercy!" thought Tenna, "*I* have nothing to say!") you will say that a man as clever as he is ought to settle down and write books and not fool about with politics; but the thing is he's not good at writing books, and he *has* a perfect gift for politics, and if he married this lady they'd have the best drawing-room in London and she swears she'll marry him on Midsummer Day if by that time he's got a constituency."

It was Tenna's turn to lay a rapid hold on her bag. She extracted a cigarette and began to breathe forth, like the elfin daughter of a dragon, clouds of white smoke. She even had a temporary coughing fit. But how could her companion possibly know that the word "constituency", though its connection with the building-trade might be obscure, brought Sir Warden into her mind; and along with Sir Warden there came as so often happened the whole problem of her mother's upset canoe.

"Do you like her? Is she nice to you?" she enquired, rather painfully.

John Hush pondered. It was all very well to want to tell Tenna Sheer everything; but how could he get it into that angelic little forehead rising before him through its cloud of smoke as if it had come straight into Glint Hall from those rock-caves that "kept the fallen day" of such dangerously "deep seas" about them, the worldly fact that once having embarked on the fatal ship of politics, the influence, the insight, the discretion, the social power of some wise and tactful and, for such was the truth, wealthy woman, were absolutely essential to a prosperous career?

But the girl with feminine intuition had touched the danger-point. "I told him," confessed John Hush, "that he'd better keep me out of it altogether — not mention me, you know, or anything! Why should he? He's only my guardian; and anybody can be a guardian to anybody. I might easily be a black man from a cotton-patch in Alabama. He didn't like what I said. He's a real one, I tell you, but I kept at him. I told him that when he was in Parliament and had what they call 'a stake in the country', and had children of his own, and had 'saved civilisation', he could get me out of here, have me de-certified, or whatever they call it. And I kept reminding him what luck we'd had" (Miss Sheer thought she'd never seen anybody's eyes shine so bright or any face become so transparent as John's became now) "in keeping me out of the papers; and what he'd feel like if at tea somewhere they'd seen — you know? — a picture of me in the — the act of — oh, but of course I haven't told you yet—"

Tenna gave a shiver, dropped her cigarette on the walnut table, pressed the joints of all her ten fingers, including the thumbs, against her navel, gazed nervously round to make sure no one was listening, watched with relief while the uniformed attendant, who had recently appeared on the scene, turned his back to them in the course of his march up and down the apartment, and at last murmured hoarsely: "I'd rather not hear about it if you don't mind."

"But you *must* hear, Tenna! I want you to hear! It's important to me you should hear!"

Tenna was aware of a dark wave of familiar misery mounting up on her horizon. This was the sort of thing she dreaded: a man bent on telling her about his sexual peculiarities! It made her feel all that she really and truly was, all that Sir Warden took for granted she was, and all that Sir Warden — and to this she could have sworn upon her mother's drowned body — secretly gloated over her being!

But the light had gone out of John's face and his eyes were slowly becoming glazed. Wearily and mechanically he was stretching out his arm over the draughtsmen, not to draw virtue from her handbag but simply to pick up her smouldering cigarette; and, just as he had recently watched her do, he now began to extinguish it by rubbing the crumpled blob of white paper flecked with brown fibre up and down that inchwide rim of the recriminatory waste-paper basket.

Antenna suddenly felt as if the man opposite her were himself that blob of matter he was squeezing into a little ball and as if the fingers pressing the blob against the rim of that calmly-yawning Avernus were not his fingers but hers.

She suddenly felt that at all costs she must save that little brownish object from rolling down into that horror-pit of lost and discarded sentences — sentences of torn-up letters, sentences of torn-up newspapers, sentences of torn-up books, sentences like hibernating butterflies drowsing in dusty rafters, sentences like dead flies on the window-sills of unopened windows, sentences that wanted to be set free, to be blown through the air, or over the water, or into the fire — anything but to be carried off with the garbage in the cavernous dust-cart to the smouldering rubbish-heaps of Glint Hall!

As she looked at his glazed eyes and squeezing fingers, and at that whitish-brown blob on the point of being flicked into hell, she suddenly felt such a rush of protectiveness towards John Hush that she could not remain inactive a second longer.

Biting her under-lip, in a reckless abandonment to her impulse, she flashed down with the swoop of a shrike, snatched the round blob from those squeezing fingers that seemed to be her own, and opening her handbag quick as thought dropped this paper-ball of damnation among the virginal cigarettes that strewed the sweet-scented leather-tapestried bower of *Daisy Miller*.

"No, no, Mr. Hush," she whispered in an impassioned and excited tone, "I didn't mean at all what you think! Oh, not at all! I can't wait to hear exactly what you felt and did; what indeed you *had* to do since you felt as you did, and just how you came to do it."

The change in John Hush resembled the emergence from his shroud of the resuscitated Lazarus.

He licked his fingers and began vigorously rubbing at the mark left on the walnut table by the recently burning cigarette. But he didn't wait to finish this ablution of the battlefield of the draughtsmen. He broke into a fountain-jet of rapid murmurs, the words issuing pell-mell, in a disordered flight of narration.

"It was a mania for girls," he explained, using expressive words as he went on, and yet words so refined and delicate and fastidious that they couldn't have offended the ears of the chastest of women.

"Everything about them," he declared, "since I was a boy, has thrilled me so that I could hardly bear it! The way they're made, the way they move, the way they speak, the way they dress, the way they do their hair, the way they look, the things they do, the things they say, have grown to be more and more exciting to me; so exciting that I couldn't stand it without throwing my arms round them and hugging them! The moment they stopped being children — for female-children had no interest for me at all — I didn't give a damn whether they were pretty or not, whether they were tall or short, plump or thin, dark or fair! Just the fact of their being girls was all I bothered about, all I cared for!

"Well! you can guess how far this obsession of mine led me. I used to go down to the beaches and sands of all the seaside resorts available from London and stare like a crazy hypnotised vampire at some particular girl whom I discovered I could watch without attracting hostile attention.

"I had acquired the habit when I was abroad of searching public places for the sort of figures to which I was specially attracted; for as time went on I wasn't equally attracted to every aspect of them in the indiscriminate manner I had been at first. And even among the particular things about them which I made, as they say, into a fetish, I began to discriminate.

“And then, beginning about this time last year, a mysterious change appeared in my mania. It was curious. I can’t explain it; and these doctors who ask us all these questions have never explained it — at least not so that I can understand or can associate — you know what I mean — what I *feel* with the words they use! But I reached the point when the only thing that gave me the real ecstacy I’ve always had from something or other about girls was to carry a pair of scissors about with me and cut off a tiny little lock of hair when I saw the kind I wanted, the kind I had this queer mania for. Isn’t that an odd thing? But its oddity isn’t the point! The point is, or *was,* Tenna, my Tenna, for I shan’t call you Sheer ever again because there’s something frightening to me about the name Sheer; and though I don’t know any of your people, nor have ever seen anything about them in the papers, there must be something, mustn’t there, to make me feel like I do? — but the point is that a girl’s curl is like the curve of a wave, or the tail of a bubble under ice, or the crest of a wisp of foam or the smooth arch at the top of a waterfall!

“And girls with curls never get caught. They always turn and laugh at the great helpless hunters who are hunting them! They are like foam on waves, ripples on lakes, currents on rivers, feathers on precipices, thistledown on winds, leaves on waterfalls. Girls with curls always escape! That was the whole idea in carrying a pair of scissors wherever you went. You only had to creep up behind one of them and — *snip-snap* — it was done!”

John Hush gave utterance to a quaint little murmured chuckle, light and low, husky and yet airy, like a wrinkled piece of bracken crossing a dry flat stone as it worked its way along a path of spruce-needles under a roof of dark-green spruce-boughs. “*Snip-snap!*” he repeated, “and it was all done!”

Antenna Sheer had kept her eyes earnestly fixed on his face all this while. When he stopped speaking she lifted her hands to her head and ran her fingers gravely and scrupulously through her own hair, as if to ascertain, once for all and beyond all question, whether it was straight or curly.

“Oh, I’m quite different now,” he whispered eagerly. “Since I’ve met you I’m quite different! When I had that crazy mania for curls it was because I wanted Undines and nothing but Undines! I changed completely this afternoon when I saw you under the tulip-tree. I've never seen anyone in the least like you, Tenna. And you've made me into a different person.

"I've come to my final conclusion about girls, Tenna. And shall I tell you what it is?"

Deep in her heart — while with her elbows on the table and her frail long-pointed shell-brittle chin, propped on her two clenched hands, gravely supporting her small skull, from whose metaphysical frontal-lobe she had pushed back the hair — Tenna thought:

"Yes, he's mine. He's my doll. He's the one I've waited for all my life. I never thought I'd find him. I thought I'd die and he'd die without one ever knowing the other. But *there he is*, sitting opposite me in this smoky, noisy place, with that keeper walking up and down, pretending not to be thinking of anything, while he gives a suspicious peep into everybody's face, trying to read their secretest thoughts.

"But let him peep and peep into *my* face He'll never read mine! Nobody, nobody, nobody, nobody will ever know what my thoughts are! There he sits! There sits my actual doll! And does God think, and do the doctors think, and does that devil who calls himself my father think, that I shan't know what to do with him now I've got him? Oh, you'll all of you soon see whether I do or don't! But there's no hurry about it. We're both here for good. We're both certified.

"We're both under control. Under control? Don't you be afraid, my precious doll, what they can do to us! They can't do anything to us as long as we're *both* certified, both under control! It's the ordinary outside world that's liable to hurt us!

"Oh, take care, my only doll, oh, take care! Isn't it beyond all hope that we should be as safe as we are? That's to say until *he* comes at midsummer to make sure there's no chance of my running away!

"And it's at midsummer you said your guardian hopes to get married. Well, there's plenty of time to think everything out before then. And I'm the one to do it! So slow's the word, Antenna, my girl. There are days and days and days; and if I want the nights to think in as well, there are the nights too!

"What a good thing days are so long and nights are as long as days! I never did justice before to the length of days! Now I love to think of them stretching out, one after another and full of such a lot of hard things and soft things and of blue things and green things and of things that go in and of things that stick out. And I love to think of the nights all black and white and full of things that don't matter and things that don't count, and you just following things, and things just following you, and him, the great devil, never there at all, and they stretching out and out; and no hurry about anything!"

Miss Sheer's private thoughts had by this time been accompanied, though not interrupted or disturbed by yet further revelations from John Hush, who had reached the point of explaining to her that the beautiful brilliant lady his guardian hoped to marry on Midsummer Day was an American born and bred, when the tallest of the attendants announced with benignant authority, a *little* as if it had been a council-of-war and he the chief-of-staff to a commander-in-the-field, and a *little* too as if it had been a London pub and he an imposing but kindly landlord, that it was time for bed.

John and Tenna rose to their feet like a couple of animals who have been disturbed, not so much by a dog, as by some harmless pedestrian; and hurrying between the tables and the groups of players so as to get out into the passage and to be alone as quickly as possible, they discussed in an hurried colloquy as to when and where they could meet on the following day.

John Hush was by no means pleased to learn that an able-bodied young man and an able-bodied young woman, such as they confessedly were, would not be free to enjoy each other's society till after the midday meal. "I'll have to help in the house," she explained to him, "and you'll have to do something in the stables or in the garden. This special Bedlam is half an expensive school and half a luxurious hospital. It's not like a workhouse — at least I don't think so; nor like a prison. I can't imagine prisoners being allowed to go about together as we've been doing, can you?"

As she spoke to him thus hurriedly in that dimly-lighted passage, Tenna Sheer presented to the enclosed world of John's awareness as indeed she would have done to the unenclosed world of his guardian’s awareness, a contented and satisfied countenance. Had the head of Glint Hall, to whose experiments on dogs the scientific journals had been of late more than responsive, seen her face at that moment he would have been at no loss at all to explain this profound change for the better in a patient obsessed by a patricidal mania.

But his explanation would have had little to do with what actually went on in the conscious soul of this evasive young woman. That she regarded John as a doll she had had all her life without knowing it, or rather as a doll she had lost in the desert and that now had come back to her of its own accord, wouldn’t have drawn the ghost of a smile from the famous doctor; while that John Hush regarded her as a miraculous combination of the elementals of air and water, that is to say of an Ariel and Undine, though confided to him by John Hush himself, would have aroused not the faintest comprehension in the water-tight pigeon-holes of his mind. That to follow the actual feelings of his patients’ afflicted nerves *as they felt them themselves* should be one of the first steps to any real cure was the last thing the famous doctor could imagine or conceive. Indeed, it could be said of him that he owed his high position to his gift for making himself not only immune but absolutely impervious to what might be called the imponderables of his cases, whether canine or human. He possessed, indeed, the two supreme qualifications for success in this world: an undeviating one-track mind and the power of putting first things first.

But though the expression upon the face of Miss Sheer as she gave her hand to John and bade him goodbye “till two o’clock tomorrow under the tulip-tree” would have conveyed little to Doctor Echetus, it conveyed a great deal to John Hush as he followed the girl with his eyes till she vanished at the top of that staircase to the left, on the wall of which were written, in unmistakably clear letters, the words “Ladies Only”; and only then, and not till then, did he begin ascending the staircase to the right, on the wall of which were written, in equally clear letters, the words “Men Only

4. FATHER TOBY

IT HAD ALREADY been conveyed to the new inmate, though through whose mediumship he had now entirely forgotten, that supper at Glint Hall only consisted of milk and biscuits, or, for those who preferred it, of a bowl of hot bread-and-milk, and that this modest repast was served in the dining-room, when, as at this moment, the reading-room and the smoking-room were closed for the night.

But John had been led to understand that only a small number of patients partook even of this light supper; most of them preferring to retire to their solitary bedrooms where they all discovered awaiting them on their toilet-table quite a substantial stick of chocolate. This had been a bequest to the institution by a certain great and wise chocolate manufacturer who had found in the course of his long and charitable life that in prisons and mad-houses, and other places where people pine, the only sticks held in greater veneration than sticks of dynamite are sticks of chocolate.

But even beyond finding chocolate in their bedrooms, the inestimable privilege at Glint Hall, and one held sacred by all inmates both male and female, was the rare and heavenly privilege of having bedrooms to themselves.

And it was with this thrice-blessed custom that the chaplain of the institution, Father Toby Tickle, was associated. It was not Father Toby himself, however, who was mainly responsible for this supreme solace. It was his extremely ugly and extremely good-natured wife, Mrs. Ursula Tickle, a personage known to the whole establishment both indoors and out-of-doors as “Ursie Mum”. Mrs. Tickle had acquired this nickname in a very natural fashion, and she was constantly justifying its use. There apparently existed for her only one unpardonable human fault, and this fault was fastidiousness.

“Didn’t your mummy teach you no better than that?” she would say when in the presence of this weakness. “Did Snow-White come into the world,” she would say, "between powder-puff and soap-dish?"

"Mr. Pick-and-Choose," she would say, "never got to Heaven." And it was the same when instead of scolding, she was praising some unfastidious inmate. "If I were your mum," she would say, "I'd be proud of anybody working with slops till you're as muddy as sin, and messing with filth till you stink like a sewer!"

John Hush was still standing in a sort of daze on the third step of the staircase marked "Men Only", letting the loitering and arguing stream of men pass him by with casual and friendly "good nights" when Ursie Mum, accompanied by her husband, appeared as his side. The pair were pursuing their blameless way to their bedchamber, an apartment that could only be reached by ascending the same staircase that led to John's.

Observing the dazed condition of this newcomer, Mrs. Tickle indicated to Father Toby that it might be a good thing if he escorted the young man to his room; and, even as she made the suggestion, proceeded, as you might say, to put on steam herself so that in her own peculiar movement, which was as if she possessed at the centre of her being a mechanical engine that gave her complete control over the whole of her unwieldy frame, she projected herself forward so rapidly that she was already half-way up the staircase before John had time to respond to anything but the presence of her husband, which made itself felt as if it were an old-fashioned battleship rather than a person — a ship of the line, we might say, heaving-up beside him rather than approaching him, and throwing out, in place of grappling-irons or the voice of a speaking-trumpet, a peculiar shipyard fragrance that suggested a newly-painted lion and unicorn at its prow, as well as an ancient mainmast steadying its deck, from whose historic pennon, representing our island of sea-dogs, more sacred emblems had evaporated in the free-blowing airs.

Father Toby was indeed a striking figure, and John Hush stared at him in astonishment. He was quite as tall if not taller than John himself, and his weather-beaten leathery face, though it might have struck some who saw it as having a resemblance to the Emperor Hadrian, was in reality a physiognomic composite made up of the expressions of old-fashioned squires, poachers, keepers, farmers, hedgers, ditchers, cattlemen, shepherds, fishermen, timbermen, pictured in passing by field and forest, grassland and cornland, downland and moorland, fenland and marshland, from Carlisle to Colchester and from Shrewsbury to Penzance, a typically insular face, stamped with the diurnal endurance of the most changeable weather on this planet, gathered up from all the counties of Britain, caught anywhere and found everywhere, confused together for the confounding of enemies and the comforting of friends, moulded into a mood of incorrigible resistance to everything alien, a weather-created mask of obstinate defiance to every veering of the weather that created it!

"Hullo, young gentleman!" cried Father Toby. "Didn't I see you arrive this afternoon with those Americans who've bought Halfway House?"

John felt in such a dazed condition after his talk with Tenna that he would have willingly confessed to arriving at Glint Hall that afternoon in the company of the Emperor of Constantinople. He emerged at once from his confused lethargy and indulged in an outburst of violent politeness.

"Yes, sir," he responded eagerly, "yes, sir, yes, Father! I hadn't the pleasure of a proper talk with you just then; but I look forward to one later, Father. I'm afraid more people want to know you better, Father, than you'll ever know."

Whatever the Father knew, or didn't know, upon this particular point, few could have possibly surmised — certainly not his present interlocutor — that he had already guessed correctly as to the cause of this same gentleman's unnatural excitement.

"I was very glad to see—" went on Father Tickle. "No, no! We mustn't stay talking here. I'll come upstairs with you. We live in the same wing. My wife's just gone ahead. By the way, I'd like to give you the general hang of things here if I might — if it wouldn't annoy you — so that you'd feel more at home—' at home *from* home', and all that — when you wake up to-morrow."

"I'd like it very much," murmured John Hush, not having the faintest notion what this weather-beaten cleric was talking about or with what "general hang of things" he was to be made acquainted.

But he hadn't to wait long. When they reached the floor above and had passed the open door of the Tickle apartment where Ursie Mum, upright in the middle of the room and free from her conventional outer garment, had already assumed the voluminous house-wrapper with which the females of the establishment had come to associate her endearing hideousness.

Father Tickle always told her that her ugliness was a thing of magic; and that what she really was was one of those "Messengers of the Grail" who one day — so he would say — would "drop the mask".

At this moment all that Ursie Mum did was to wave them away with an exaggerated gesture of outraged modesty; and on they went down the passage.

It was only when they had passed John's own small room, the door of which was also open, and its unappealing though neat appearance revealed to all it might concern, that the nature of his guide's intention became clearer.

It was a very long passage and there were many other doors on both sides, from a few of which came voices, but from most of them only those various less significant sounds, hard to particularise, made by human beings of the male sex as they prepare for bed.

At length the passage terminated in a small, squat, covered-in tower, barely lifted a storey's height above the rest of the wing, but raised high enough to contain a square chamber empty of everything but flowerpots, some intact, but most of them broken, and the intact ones containing not very promising and extremely chilly-looking cuttings and seedlings. This squat tower-room, John soon realised, overlooked the whole massive structure of Glint Hall. It possessed four windows each of which opened on one of the four quarters of the horizon.

There was no moon that night; and the starlight was obscured in certain directions by floating grey clouds, blown listlessly and sadly upon a chilly wind; but there was enough light in the sky to give John Hush a rough if somewhat blurred idea of what the handsome chaplain of Glint Hall meant by his queer expression "the general hang of things".

The first thing Father Toby did was to light a small wax-candle that stood securely fixed on its own dried wax on a rough wooden bench among scattered potsherds. The second thing he did was to light a short clay pipe and begin puffing out clouds of sweet smoke. This latter was in itself a sufficiently simple act, but it was one that Father Toby performed in so challenging a manner that it made John feel like a degenerate uncle in the presence of a manly schoolboy.

Emitting one defiant puff after another between his set teeth as if he were a moral locomotive, Father Toby guided John to the particular window of this tower-room that looked south. Here he could see directly beneath them the tulip-tree under which he had had his first sight of Tenna. Looking further afield he realised now that the whole landscape round and about Glint Hall was dominated by the river. The importance of this river was a surprise to him. He had grasped, with an odd satisfaction, the nearness of that ancient heathen camp with its two Scotch firs that lay east. He had been thinking all the evening, save when too stirred by Tenna's presence to think of anything else, about the massive stone manor called Halfway House that lay west; and where his guardian and the American girl were now with their American friends.

But of the river he had taken no thought. Now, as he surveyed the whole southward-stretching landscape, he noticed how, although the lawns and flower-borders and shrubberies and the railed-off green meadows and vegetable-gardens of Glint were enclosed by the institution's towering prison-wall, the height of the wall itself seemed considerably reduced from this observation-point.

Thus reduced, however, it served rather to accentuate than diminish the peculiar appeal of the unusual river. John realised, indeed, that the natural protagonist of the whole scene in this particular place was neither Glint Hall nor Halfway House, nor even the pre-historic camp with its monumental pines, but was simply and solely the winding river.

And, moreover, there was, he suspected, some mysterious link, perhaps in the very act of being created, between this monstrously walled-up citadel and the river that so nearly surrounded it.

As they stood side by side before this southern horizon John realised that more than smoke was issuing from the formidable game-keeper jaws of the tall chaplain. “Of course, it’s not a deep river and it’s not a fast river. But what makes a river the kind that satisfies a person has to do with the nature of the water.”

As John listened to these murmurs he got the feeling that he was being conducted through the intricacies of a scene more seductive than anything in real nature: a scene like an ideal print in some old romantic masterpiece; a Holbein illustration, for instance, of More’s *Utopia.*

“Our river,” Father Toby went on, “often makes me think of a place I once visited in South America. Those reedy ditches and pollarded willows have the sort of look — though of course the particular trees and the particular reeds are quite different — the sort of look..”

But as John watched the man’s face in that criss-cross mingling of light and darkness, he received the impression that this river-worshipping chaplain of Glint had no more idea of what ordinary human beings go through in their diurnal endurances and nocturnal nightmares, whether the vegetation runs to bulrushes or to bamboos, than has the south wind that moans round their patience or the north wind that rouses them to revolt. “Toby of Glint,” so he rhymed it to himself, “has a heart of flint, though he smokes a pipe of clay; and Ursie Mum would have taken to rum if she hadn’t had her way.”

But the new inmate of Glint Hall was not allowed to spend his time shifting from foot to foot in that tower-room composing rhymes about the authorities. He might have been a visitor to some four-square lighthouse on some historic ocean rock, judging by the polite persistence with which he was now conducted to the eastern window.

Here he was encouraged to observe, though from a loftier position, all that he had already seen that evening with Tenna’s head in front of it. The curves of the old camp would have scarcely been distinguishable at all under the cloud-dimmed stars if there hadn’t been that couple of Scotch firs whose monumental old age divided the ridge into three sections — the one to the right of the two trees, the one between the two trees, and the one to the left of the two trees.

It indeed began to occur to John Hush that there was something like theological unction in the precision with which his self-appointed guide was mapping out the cloudy horizons of Glint Hall; and the impression was increased rather than diminished when he noticed the perceptible rapidity with which the view from the northern aspect of their tower was slurred over.

This view embraced what he had already seen of the abode of Mesopotamia Cuddle, the woman destined to do his washing, and who had already made him think of his childhood's nurse, and it comprised the cobble stone yard surrounded by stables and barns and pigsties on which his bedroom-window looked.

It also included a wide sweep of the hideous prison-wall, broken, as he had already discovered, by the same type of model lodge and terrific lodge-gates as had confronted him, beyond the gardens and the meadows, on the southern side of the grounds.

"Why is the fellow," he thought, "so unwilling to give me any time to take in what he calls 'the hang of things' from this outlook?"

John Hush was not an unmitigated fool. Possibly by reason of his birth in Derbyshire, one of the most central of our counties, he carried about with him a conjunction of geographical and astrological birth-seeds that endowed him with a peculiar kind of cunning.

This was a cunning that certain particular animals and a certain class of human neurotics alone possess. It is a cunning hard to define, and not at all easy to catch at work; and on the occasions when the herd, or the pack, or, in more conventional language, public opinion does discover its base of operations, it hunts it down in a savage rush of fury.

It was this special kind of cunning in him that led John at this moment to delay the slurring over of the northern outlook from the tower of Glint and to compel Father Toby to pause in his circumnavigation of the four horizons.

Whether it was by pure chance, or, as seems more likely, by the passing of some sort of hostile vibration between them, John obtained this delay by a reference to the unusual appearance of the river from their high observation-point. “It looks like a huge white serpent,” he murmured, “like that world-snake in Norse mythology. You’d think it was working its way closer and closer to us with the aim of eventually making a leap and squeezing us to death!”

As if in reply to these sinister words of his visitor, Toby Tickle pressed the switch of an electric bulb in the wall of the tower-room. By the light of this bulb John could see that his guide’s expression had changed. He now looked grave and slightly worried. John could have sworn that across those weather-beaten features that had become so representative of life on British soil under changing British skies there even passed a flicker of something like fear.

“What a pathetic crew we educated people are!” thought the new inmate. “There isn’t one of us who hasn’t got some bruised spot in the landscape of his soul, where morbidly sensitive moss or perilous grass or electricity-charged lichen grows and where the mere approach of an alien presence sends a shiver through our whole being.”

But the chaplain was protesting vigorously now: “Oh, you mustn’t, my dear lad, you really and truly mustn’t speak of our Glint river like that! Serpents — snakes — dragons — squeezings to death? Oh no, no, no! I cannot allow such expressions to drop into the air from this observation-post of mine! I must confess to you at once, my dear boy, that that river down there, about which you talk so lightly, is my whole life in this place: well, of course I can’t *quite* say that, for obviously my work here is the reason I am here at all. But I can say — and you’ll forgive me, won’t you, for taking you into my confidence? — I can say that the river is my whole life when I’m not at my job! I go down there practically every day and all the year round. It’s the fish, of course, chiefly. But it’s everything else, too! Though the fish are the only creatures I *kill.* Coldblooded, you understand, Mr. Hush. I mean the fish, of course, not myself! I’m extra hot-blooded, as everybody who knows me would say. But I don’t shoot. And I’ve never hunted. Fishing’s my one and only! And it’s mostly coarse fish, too; perch and roach, you know. Though I often catch quite good-sized dace with a fly. I've really become quite a specialist over the flies that dace will take. I'll show you when you're free from this little temporary trouble.

"I'll take you on what I call my round. It's the nature of the land that makes the river curve so. Oh, I assure you, Mr. Hush, there's no serpentine malice in it! Purely the lie of the land.

But it's unique, you know. Nothing like it in all the British Isles! Why, it curves clear round the whole place except for one little quarter of a mile!

"I sometimes think it's these curves that make me love the river as much as I do; and, of course, the fish I catch in it. In God's truth I sometimes hardly could say whether I love the fish for the river or the river for the fish! Cold-blooded they are — the fish I mean — and the worms, too, of course! That's why they don't feel, though they wriggle and flop. Coldblooded — that's what worms and fishes are.

"And yet it's curious how when the juice comes out of them — out of either worms or fish — it doesn't *feel* cold. And, do you know, Mr. Hush, I've asked some of the cleverest scientists in the kingdom why it is that the river curves round this place, and do you think any of them gave me a sensible answer? Not a one! I mean not an answer that a simple chap like me, whose only sophistication is to put worms on a hook and catch great greedy old perch through their tough gills, can understand.

"My rival cleric here, the Roman priest from Horsesmouth, pulls my leg about this river. He makes out she was once a heathen goddess — yes, a real heathen goddess! It's funny, isn't it? I expect our good Doctor thinks I've become infected — *affected*, shall we say — by my concentration on the work here. But that's absurd, of course! I've always been eccentric in these things!

"The truth is I've got my own idea as to what the Church should be; and this idea includes quite a lot of things that would shock some people. We're all Christians nowadays. Christ, by 'being lifted up', as he himself predicted 'has drawn all men unto him'; but the reason why Communism has grown so strong is that it has stolen half the thunder of Christ.

"And who is the chief enemy of the Roman Church? Communism? Well, Communism you will say, has stolen the other half of this divine arsenal. But notice this, my dear boy — notice this!"

"Don't worry, master," thought John, "I'm noticing quite a lot of things!"

One of the things he was noticing had no direct connection, though doubtless many indirect ones, with the ecclesiastical ideal now being communicated to him by this hot-blooded killer of the cold-blooded. It had to do with the way in which this formidable clergyman with his barge-pole physiognomy was lighting his clay pipe. He lit it like a pilot, he lit it like a boatswain, he lit it like a gamekeeper, he lit it like a yachtsman, he lit it like the oldest member of the oldest white-man's club in Central Africa.

And with every pressure of his broad thumb he seemed to be saying: "To hell with your aesthetes and ritualists! What is needed to-day to keep up the old historic church to which we have dedicated our lives is more of our national character. What the world needs isn't pious United-Nations martyrs. The world needs adventurous Americans, scientific Germans, inventive Italians, practical Frenchmen, independent Australians, and strong, tough, sporting English!"

John Hush couldn't help allowing his mind at this point to recall a discourse of his guardian's at a club in Belgrade on the varieties of religion in the Church of England. "You can catalogue them," his guardian had declared on that occasion, "by the way they eat and drink and smoke. For example, if you want to understand the beautiful simplicity of the Evangelical party in our Church, you ought to see them at a Sunday-school treat eating strawberries and cream. The High Church, on the contrary, imitates the Papists and goes in for bouts of poetic alchoholism. But it's the Broad Church who are the most representative of us. They're the sporting parsons, and with them a weakness for the wriggling of worms on hooks and the flapping of dying fish on grass naturally coincides with the grimness of strong teeth biting the stems of sturdy pipes."

"God doesn't want," this river-lover continued, for by this time he seemed to have accepted John's diplomatic politeness as the first stage of a convertite's interest, "God doesn't want an emasculated world of planetary puppets. He wants a world of richly contradictory and finely complicated individuals to whom every country has given its quota of special peculiarities!"

John Hush stared in wonder at the only official guide supplied to him in this home by his national government. Toby Tickle's countenance automatically assumed as it met his gaze the expression it must have worn afternoon after afternoon in sun and rain and mist and drizzle and sleet and snow and through many a dull day of composite neutrality along the banks of his obsessing river.

During the passing of quite a number of moments of reciprocal personal scrutiny, the Reverend Tickle tried more definitely than was usual with him to sum up the character of this young man whose nervous and sulkily philosophical appearance suggested nothing so much as a would-be actor dedicated with any luck to be allowed to play Hamlet.

John's mind, on the other hand, had never been less restricted by what we have been taught to regard as the fatally procrastinating tendency in Ophelia's lover. His thoughts were of the kind at that moment that no possible action, however swift and successful, could embody. The bronze head in front of him became a microcosm of the whole round earth, while the four horizons visible from this tower-room, one of which alone — that is to say the eastern one — was entirely free of the ubiquitous river, became four infinite recessions of uninterrupted space.

The peculiar thing was that the imaginative urge in John's mind, an urge that was electrified by a considerable amount of emotion, was so pathetically devoid of all logical and mathematical and even metaphysical machinery that once having seized upon the notion of four corridors of space receding endlessly northward and southward and westward and eastward, always with Glint as their common point of departure, he felt absurdly puzzled as to how to fill up the four gaps between these four corridors so that the natural rondure of the earth's complete horizon should remain unbroken.

He decided that towards the circumference of this vast ultimate spatial rondure there must be for ever emanating from their centre at Glint, and for ever arriving at their destined point on this far-off tremendous circumference, just as many streams of magnetic energy as are required “to go”, as children say, “round And thus, according to his pictorial but extremely unscientific cosmology, John Hush visualised his four great spatial highroads as a four-fold objectively parcelled-out stratification of this perpetually streaming radiation. Consequently, as he went on staring at the bronze physiognomy of his country’s fish-hooking representative of the absolute in Doctor Echetus’s home of rest, he found he was able to follow the spatial corridor behind the chaplain’s head, which happened to be the one to the east and the only one free of the river, as clearly as it was possible for him, without indulging in any particular acrobatics, to visualise through the back of his own head the one to the west, the Halfway House one, which he himself just then liked as little as the chaplain liked the riverless one.

Never in his life had John’s thoughts whirled through his head as fast as they did at this moment; and the thought that dominated all the rest was strictly rather a nervous sensation than a thought, namely the present physical position of the curious entity he felt to be his conscious soul at an actual point in space from which four infinities radiated. It suddenly struck him as positively comical that such a wavering, fluctuating, and morbidly shrinking creature, as was the living thing in which dwelt the consciousness of John Hush, should possess a zodiacal position in space at all; but that it should also find itself confronted at this dizzy planetary centre, where four such pendulous space-roads met, by such a sturdy home-bird as this fisher in perch-pools, seemed to be carrying comedy into burlesque.

But his thoughts were now scattered as completely as if they’d been a swarm of midges dispersed by a cast of the chaplain’s fly. Father Toby took his pipe out of his mouth, strode to the potsherd table, and snatching up half of a flower-pot pressed it down upon the flickering wax-candle and held it there until that troubled flame, spluttering and hissing, was transformed into a thickly oozing, rapidly dissolving cloud of reeking fumes.

This drastic action, like most actions of such a kind, not only broke up the pregnant moment that had enveloped these two human forms as a long drawn-out operatic syllable envelopes a pair of lovers, but completely changed the atmosphere of the whole situation. With the firm and quiet authority of an experienced moral leader, Father Toby now conducted the new inmate to the western window of the tower-room. It became clear that of all the four horizons visible from his watch-tower the chaplain felt that the one best adapted to the troubled soul of his new recruit was this one to the west.

He pointed out to the newcomer how upon the upward slope of the hills dominating this view, which was indeed exactly what John had been told before he ever caught sight of the place, could be seen the flickering lights of Halfway House.

It certainly gave John a queer feeling, full of conflicting currents of emotion, when he was thus encouraged to admire the lights of Halfway House.

“Nothing like knowing the ropes,” said Father Tickle. And he repeated the words with yet greater emphasis as they descended the half-dozen steps into the passage. “When you know the ropes,” he concluded, “you’re ready for anything.”

At the door of John’s room he stopped again. “It’s curious to think,” he remarked in a contemplative tone, and as if the idea had just come into his head for the first time, “that today’s the twenty-fifth of March. Do you know, Mr. Hush, I believe I’ve really twigged at last what the Church had in mind in putting the Annunciation into this week.”

“Have you, Father?” murmured John respectfully, while in his heart he thought, “Why is it that High Church clergymen always make you feel uncomfortable? This fellow’s what’s called a decent chap. He wants to put me at my ease. He wants to heal my trouble. He wants to make me happy in this place. Why in the name of God, then, must he use the word ‘twig’ in talking of Mary and the angel?

“It’s our class system that does it. The public schools don’t aim at making Christians. They aim at making self-controlled, brave, polite, modest, chivalrous pagans. They teach us to be courageous, honest, patient and enduring. To be stoics, in fact. And then we expect our clerics to be as unselfconsciously Christian as Irish or French or Italians who have lived in religion, like minnows in a stream, from childhood, and to whom the poetry of Christianity is as natural as eating or drinking, and its restrictions as natural, though sometimes as annoying, as relieving ourselves."

While these thoughts passed through John's head, Father Tickle, who had the quick psychological perception of a man who has wrestled all his mature years with a tendency to paederasty, decided that it would have to be through that extremely difficult young woman called Antenna Sheer, and only through her, that any successful approach to this polite young man could be made.

"Yes, but," the chaplain went on, "it's too nice a point — too human a point you might almost say I — to be discussed as late as this! Oh, by the way, you saw where the men's lavatory is? You saw the door, didn't you? We passed it at the top of the stairs. To tell the truth, we've got quite a nice well-kept lavatory in our wing. I confess it's a little too near my wife's apartment — but she doesn't mind. She's a remarkable woman. You will meet her in due course. She's in the women's domain all day, and we're pretty quiet up here during the night.

"But you and my wife will get on like a house on fire when you do meet.... Oh yes, you can open your window still further if you like, Mr. Hush. Or you can keep it entirely shut. It's just as you like. Those bars? Yes, I know; they *are* rather like a nursery-window, aren't they? You see, it wouldn't quite do, would it, to have people roaming the countryside all night? Here's your electric switch. May I turn it on? Well! Sleep well, Mr. Hush."

Very carefully and meticulously, the moment the Father was gone, did John explore every aspect of his small room. There was a neat little chest-of-drawers with a couple of deep square drawers at the top into which had been carefully put not only his collars and handkerchiefs but also his socks; and in the same drawer as these latter and placed there with equal care he found the books he had brought with him.

And he responded with quite a little glow of satisfaction as he noted that these books of his — which had been selected with some nicety and consisted of Hesiod in the Loeb Classics, a French volume of Selections from Paul Verlaine, Walt Whitman's *leaves of*

Grass, Longfellow's *Poetical Works*, *The Mabinogion* in Lady Charlotte Guest's translation, Milton, and Edgar Allen Poe — hadn't been shoved together or stuck in at random but had been carefully isolated from one another and laid to rest apart, as if the person who unpacked them desired to treat them with some special kind of respect.

"I wonder who arranged these?" he thought. And then — and, as it happened, quite correctly — he attributed this to Mesopotamia Cuddle. There was no wallpaper on the walls, but they had been newly whitewashed, and though this whiteness would have thrown into effective relief any crudely coloured picture, the only picture actually hanging there — and it was a very little one — was a reproduction of Rembrandt's "Supper at Emmaus". This picture, in any case, depended for its effect on something other than colour.

It struck John, indeed, when he approached close enough to it to get the almost disturbing effect of the light thrown by the electric bulb as it encountered that other light diffused by the small central figure under that massive arch, that there was something in the expression of this resurrected deity that reminded him of the look he had caught in the dead eyes of one of those dogs in that horrible pit among the spruce-trees. It was as if that small figure were totally unconscious of the divine light that was filtering and leaking from him and drifting away to the ends of the earth.

"But though *he* doesn't know it," thought John, "it *is* there — man's hope against hope — under that cavernous arch which hides all the oppressions that are done out of sight of the sun. But while that very homely Son of Man breaks the bread of — damn it all!" — thus did John interrupt John— "if I'm not in the picture myself! On my soul, I believe I'm that boy there who's changing the plates for them!

"But what does that fleshless fish-head on the plate he's changing think of it all? That boy certainly looks as if he felt friendly to these queer guests; but he also looks as if he wouldn't be sorry for this supper to be over I "As to that little god-man with the light leaking out of him, he looks as if he were too sodden — no, not exactly sodden, too saturated with suffering to understand that he has redeemed the world. He certainly looks far too humble to believe he's the Second Person of any Trinity, and too shocked and puzzled by what they’ve just been telling him to have any heart left to enjoy her resurrection!”

John Hush began walking up and down between his chest-of-drawers and his bed. “Oh, dearie I! Oh, dearie I!” he kept muttering. Then he thought: “But I’ve got Tenna. That poor fleshless fish-head on the dish hasn’t got her! That young dish-washer hasn’t got her! That pipe-smoking cleric with a wriggling worm on his hook and a dying fish in his basket hasn’t got her!”

He crossed the room, and going to the window opened it as far as it would open. Then he began to shake the bars with his clenched hands. One after another he shook them, making an ugly face each time he did so. Then he shoved his hands deep into his pockets and leaned forward, pressing his stomach against the window-sill and his forehead against those upper panes that refused to move, just as the obstinate stone of Sisyphus, bewitched in the same sort of purgatory, refused to *cease* moving.

He tried to forget his anxieties by taking in every pool of liquid dung and every heap of befouled and bedraggled straw. The cobblestone yard out there was certainly a large one; and the number of stables and barns and sheds was beyond what anyone would have expected in a place like this. From the yard his gaze moved to the dimly lit upper room of the northern lodge. Was the woman who resembled his old nurse already in that upper room? Yes! yes! he could see “vast formless things moving the scenery to and fro” up there.

“What a mystery it is,” he thought, “that it should be in our power to look or not to look at what strikes us as unbearably horrible or as intolerably alluring! But I fancy,” so John’s thoughts ran on, “I’ll grow so practised in these mental tricks before I get out of this incredible place that, weak fool as I am, with about as much will-power as a pond-newt, I’ll steer my own mind and regulate my own feelings quite as successfully as that pathetic perch-catcher.”

But he left the window now and extinguished the electric light. Irritably he tried to throw off, with coat, waistcoat, shirt, collar, tie, braces, trousers, drawers and socks, as if they had been scales growing upon the skin of his very soul, his odd vague misgivings not only about Father Tickle's hurry to by-pass the northern view, which was the view from this window, but about those shadows he had seen through the yellow blinds of the Cuddles' upper floor.

Safe in bed, he stretched himself out at full length and remained for some minutes on his back wondering whether to yield to his cowardly desire to turn away from the window or whether to lie boldly on his side facing it. It was a fear that cowardice might hurt him more than courage rather than any courage that made him decide to face it, and it was facing the window that he finally closed his eyes and set himself to think of Antenna Sheer.

But though he faced the terrifying window, and though he closed his eyes and used all the visionary energy he possessed to summon up the precise appearance of Miss Sheer's small head and clear-cut features against the peculiar rich blackness encrusted with zigzags of dazzlement that had been substituted for ordinary sight by his tightly shut eyelids, what he felt impelled to do, as he lay thus with his knees bent and his fingers clutching his lean thighs, was to envisage not merely the lineaments of the daughter of Sir Warden Sheer or of the rising young statesman he called his guardian, but of that dramatic mask of destiny which was his own life.

He pondered on his passionate devotion for the man who was spiritually so much more than a father to him, and on the curious fact that, though his feeling for this person was completely devoid of every sort of homosexual vibration, it was extremely intense and desperately jealous. He also pondered on the odd fact that, jealous as he was, he found no difficulty in making friends with his guardian's betrothed, or even in feeling a certain affection for her, though — and this rather bewildered him — he experienced not the faintest attraction towards her.

Gradually these thoughts about Tenna and about his guardian lost their personal intensity, and it was not long before the faces of both his girl and his friend were absorbed into those dizzy encrustations of dazzling light that kept appearing and disappearing against the inky blackness.

And it was then that the palpable body of his life itself rose up, not as a memory of anything, nor as a hope for anything, but simply as a huge, shapeless mass of pain-bearing and pleasure-bearing substance, pressing upon his consciousness, yielding to his consciousness, wounding and caressing his consciousness, like the shores of a vast continent opposed to an inflowing sea-tide. The "I am!" behind this consciousness that flowed round his experience was certainly an entity of an extremely evasive kind; but the consciousness itself was a sequence of very definite impressions, moving and tossing up and down, many of them very delicious and many of them horrible.

"It is a battle," he told himself. "It has always been a battle between me and the whole pressure of my experience as to whether I can enjoy life or not. Yes, it's a battle between me and life. 'The wrestling of this world asketh a fall', and, when I'm dead, either the world will say: 'That crazy little weak silly creature of a John Hush got me down', or I shall have to say, 'Well! You beat me, you damned world, and that's the truth. I tried to enjoy being alive, but I simply couldn't; and I'm glad it's over! Life, World, Existence, whatever you prefer to call yourself, *you've won,* and John Hush is beaten!'"

He clutched at his thigh still more tightly and bent his body still more firmly into the shape of a buried skeleton in a cist or of an unborn embryo in a womb. And as he did so he sought to envisage in one amorphous "lump", as it were, the varied reactions he was feeling to all that surrounded him at this moment. "I *will* enjoy my life!" he kept repeating, as he obstinately wrestled with this enormous swaying and heaving mass of mingled impressions. "I *will* enjoy my life!"

What he felt at that moment was that it was really possible for him to force himself to enjoy this battle with life even if he couldn't enjoy the particular experiences with which life was challenging him at the moment.

Although he actually continued in that bent position, clasping sometimes his ankle, what he felt in his imagination was that he was moving about quite freely over the surface of the earth. "I've got to hold my soul in readiness," he thought, "for struggle after struggle. But no struggle, however intense, need prevent my enjoying it, and if I enjoy life

— I mean enjoy the *struggle* to enjoy life — nothing else need come into it. That's the whole thing: to reduce the battle to its simplest elements. But how *can* it be thus reduced?"

And John answered his own question as his lean fingers tightened his grip upon his lean thigh. "It can only be thus reduced by concentrating my mind on my mind's own power of enjoyment as if this power were a magnetic stream of invisible energy drawn from unfathomable reservoirs in myself and turned upon outward things like a moving searchlight, a searchlight that is transforming by its magical force" — and certainly no buried skeleton and no unborn embryo could have worn a look of more self-satisfied relief than John's face assumed when to himself he used the word "transforming"— "of painful as well as of pleasant things; and forcing them all, pell-mell and *en masse*, into the enjoyment circle!"

Having thought of the word "transforming", John suddenly, and without knowing it, came near the ocean-brink of sleep, and his thoughts reverted to Tenna.

"I've got her," he thought, "and that's the great thing. If I decide to enjoy my life under any condition, under that condition I can *make* myself enjoy it! It's all in my power. But what *wasn't* in my power, what was a matter of fate or of providence or pure chance, was my meeting Tenna at all!...

> 'Childe *Rowland to the dark tower came*
> *His word was still*
> *Fie, foh, and fum,*
> *I smell the blood of a British man.*'"

5. THE NEXT DAY

JOHN HUSH SLEPT until three minutes after four on the morning of the twenty-sixth. Then he awoke with a groan and a gasping cry; but, for all his struggles to recall what had troubled him, he was unable to remember.

"I believe I've had a nightmare!" he told himself, as he lay staring into the darkness with his fingers trembling and his forehead sweating, while his whole soul jerked itself back in spasms of relief to a shaken but normal consciousness. "It's some weakness in my heart, of course," he thought, and he repeated several times over: "But the heart's nothing; the heart's nothing." And while he repeated these reassuring words he did his best not to think of a monstrous, heavily moving luggage-train that had got mixed up in some way with an appalling mass of darkness pressing in upon him from every side. "I mustn't think of it," he told himself. "I mustn't think of it."

And although this "mustn't think" was quite as definitely concerned with the intolerable weight of darkness around him as was his "nothing" with the pounding of his heart over the luggage-train, it was attended by much more serious apprehensions. And this was proved by the fact that each time he told himself he "mustn't think" of the darkness, his whole power of mind hovered on the edge of a panic-stricken sensation that made him draw back in terror from the black darkness round him and mentally try to push it away with both his hands.

An old, old trouble with him it was, this spasm of night-terror. It had to do with an imaginary difficulty in breathing; difficulty that sometimes took possession of him with such horrible tenacity that, although the whole thing was entirely mental, he would feel on the point of rushing wildly out of the house, while he shouted with a terrifying cry: "Air! Air! Air! Air!"

On this occasion — though it did not seem to increase his nervous tension — he was thoroughly conscious that it was impossible for him to rush out of *this* house or even to break his neck by throwing himself out of a window. But he had recourse to an old device of his, that had often proved successful, as indeed it did now. He set himself *to breathe consciously*. He did this by drawing his breath through his mouth and disregarding his nostrils completely. He became, indeed, an animal that possessed no other aperture for imbibing air except a mouth; and by the trick of making each particular motion of inhaling and exhaling a separate undertaking, and of carrying through this undertaking in triumphant defiance of the darkness, he reached a condition wherein by continuing his monotone of vocal dichotomy, "in-out, out-in, out-in, in-out", obstinately repeated, he began to feel that his own secret, private, unique consciousness was a match and more than a match for this ink-black cuttlefish of not-being, this huge epitome of ultimate negation, this mother of nothingness, this absolute of nonentity, this unspeakable hole in the bosom of Abraham, this grandfather of chaos, this paradigm of the final abyss that had taken into its fearful head to swallow him up!

"The great thing," he thought, "is to have faith in your own power. If you have faith that you can get on happily without God, you *can* get on happily without God! If you have faith that by some trick or other, or just by waiting till your chance comes, you can marry your love, or kill your enemy, or live till you've outlived your friends, you can do all those things. Faith is everything! It's infinitely more precious than hope or love!"

All theology, like other exquisite things, is allied to madness; and had the soul of Tenna Sheer been watching over her new friend's pillow, under the compulsion of driving away devils, she might have witnessed, for at night in Glint Hall there were strange symposia of telepathic dreaming, a curious dialogue between the spirit of Father Toby and the spirit of Father Wun, in the course of which the schismatic priest, defending himself against the orthodox priest, protested that had this aggressive mystery of Faith really possessed a magic denied both to hope and love, the only way of making certain of this superiority would simply be to wait till the horror of darkness were actually at our throat and then boldly and desperately try out this power in the soul to hypnotise the soul; and see what happened!

But even if in this conjectured vigil of Miss Sheer it happened that the magic of faith did work the miracle and thus prove itself more god-like than hope or love, there would remain much more for it to do. The actual nature of the faith-power thus exerted would have to be experienced — and this also would be, if not an act of, certainly a labour of faith — so fully, that there would inevitably come to pass an intensification of the link between the consciousness enjoying the struggle and the struggle enjoyed.

But whether if was the mental concentration implied in forcing himself to be conscious of each breath he drew, or whether it was his faith in the hypnotic power of his own soul over his body, John Hush did fall asleep and managed to remain asleep till he was roused by a violent beating of a gong in the passage outside his door. The state of his mind when he awoke astonished him. Instead of any feeling of horror at being where he was, he was instantaneously aware of a childish thrill of simple interest and excitement. He felt as he might have done when instead of being twenty-two he was eight, and instead of hiding *Leaves of Grass* in his collar-drawer he hid his catapult.

He awoke, indeed, with a vague sensation of extraordinary happiness. He felt as he had once felt at the seaside when his childhood's nurse, with whom even after he had gone to school he still spent his holidays, had let him make friends with a little girl who was a relative of hers, on a well-known beach in East Anglia. That particular fortnight on the east coast had indeed been the period of the most perfect happiness he had known in his whole life. It had even surpassed those thrills when he first snipped off those entrancing curls with his scissors.

Nor did the whole morning of that twenty-sixth of March, long though it was, play him any trick or grow sandy or gravelly under him, as he trod his appointed round and did everything he was directed to do in the stables, in the cowsheds, in the woodsheds, and in that big cobblestone yard.

At breakfast only about half the men and only about a third of the women were present in the dining-room at the official hour, and Tenna was not among them. So it was with a lively excitement at one o'clock, though he was both hungry and tired, that he stared at a segment of her oval little face at dinner while he talked with more sympathy than he had dared to hope he could muster up to poor little corpse-haunted, badly disinfected Mr. Lordy.

He learnt from this latter that Father Allen Wun, the Catholic priest, had had an unexpected invitation to lunch at the American-owned mansion that afternoon and might possibly drop in for a cup of tea at Glint Hall with his handful of believers in the older faith.

“If the Father does do this,” Mr. Lordy explained, “I’ll get him to sit here with us and we can hear all the news about that house. They say some very grand people from London are stopping there this week. Anyway, it’ll be great to hear what the place is like.”

“It will indeed,” Hush heartily concurred. And he wondered whether his guardian and the lady had decided to spend a couple of nights there before returning to London. Mr. Lordy was authentically sympathetic.

“What kind of night did you have, Mr. Hush? To some people their first night here is the worst they go through, and I only pray that wasn’t your experience.”

John hesitated for a second; and then he thought: “But, after all, what’s the point of being reserved and superior with a decent chap like this?”

But Mr. Lordy had gone on quickly; and it was obvious that the little man felt happier than yesterday. The truth was, John told himself, that everybody was so hungry, and the Irish stew was so good, and even the vegetables on the side, such as mashed potatoes and cabbage, not to mention turnip, were so well cooked that there was little fear, if they spoke low, of attracting the attention either of their fellow-inmates or of the attendants.

“If I can persuade the Father,” Mr. Lordy went on, “to have tea with us here, there’d only be a few other gentlemen — and I’m sure you wouldn’t mind crowding up a little so as to fit them in — and it would be such a perfect chance for our telling him something of what really goes on behind the humbug these people talk.

“The Catholic Church *has* its faults, Mr. Hush. Please don’t think I’m bigoted; but with *it* — I mean with *us* — religion does really come first. And it is genuine religion. In fact it's *so* genuine that those who hate religion call it superstition. But superstition or not, Mr. Hush, with us it comes first; and isn't that what all the great world leaders are always telling us to do — in the papers I mean — put first things first?"

John fixed the little man with all the power he could throw into his look and words. "I'll be eternally grateful to you, Mr. Lordy, if you do get the Father to have tea with us tonight. I heard of 'Halfway House' before I ever knew there was such a place as Glint Hall; and I long to hear about it from someone who's been inside. It's one of the great historic houses of these islands. They taught me all that's true about it at school; and they taught me all that isn't true about it at college. And now from Father Wun Allen—"

"Father Allen Wun, if you don't mind," corrected his neighbour, "for it's the Father himself who makes jokes about his name, for he's full of fun, the Father is, and All-in-One, if you catch his meaning, in a manner of speaking is what he means—"

John nodded more energetically than irritably; for he was as desperately grateful to this murderer of a life-loving stepfather as he was disturbed by the disinfectant that drove off that old gentleman's ghost.

"And from Father All-in-One," he thought, "I'll *really* get what this Anglican chaplain, Tickle, who showed me round last night, called 'the hang of the place' — but shall I?" They finished their Irish stew, in spite of Mr. Lordy's having a second helping, in silence after this; but as soon as the pudding appeared, which consisted of hot apple-dumplings, to which could be added all the creamy milk and brown sugar anyone could possibly want, Mr. Lordy, who had clearly, from the frown on his expressive face, been thinking things out, began again with intense seriousness.

Fortunately for John's reputation for courtesy, Tenna Sheer, out of some obscure feminine impulse, or even, perhaps, intention, had been trying for the whole length of that hungry meal to avoid meeting John's eyes, and even to avoid if possible — at least so it seemed to him — his catching sight of her at all. Thus as he tipped up his plate with his left hand — a childish trick of which his nurse could never cure him, and in which his guardian from one Balkan capital to another had shamelessly encouraged him — and scooped up with his spoon — his guardian was only waiting, he once told him, to see him lift the plate itself to his mouth — the last drop of milky juice and melted sugar, destiny — for this really was *not* chance — enabled him to give his full attention to his excited neighbour.

"There's something I'd like to ask you, mister," began Mr. Lordy gravely, "on this twenty-sixth day of March, now that the Announcement of the Immaculate Miracle is already a day old; and you not being a Catholic, but being what you might call an outsider, makes it easy to ask you, whereas in a matter like this, a heaven-and-hell matter if you follow my meaning, another Catholic might misunderstand what was up, and seek to acquire merit with the blessed saints by blabbing to the nearest Father or even to the Lord Bishop, if the Father was scared of going outside his orders and borders in such high matters.

"Well, it's concerning what I heard Doctor Echetus say to that sly devil Cuddle when they were talking in the fir-plantation, and me all the time aloft in one of the tallest firs like the little short man in the Holy Gospel. Cuddle was asking whether he knew the kind of devil that fellow Gewlie actually was, and the Doctor was saying what did he think he was if he didn't know Gewlie to be the worse case of a sod — only he called it 'sard' but it rhymed with 'lard' — he'd ever handled; and Cuddle was going on about the games Gewlie were up to all the time, when Doctor asked him straight out, flipperty-flap, straight from the tap, didn't he know that these sorts of crack-ups were always hiring themselves out to places like this?

"And so what I'm asking you, mister, you being a free-thinking man and one who don't believe in Church or Judgment, is just simply this: whether I ought in fairness to our fellow-inmates to give the Father a straight tip about friend Gewlie, who, to tell you the honest truth, is a practising Catholic and will be sure to be round here at tea-time, sucking up to the Father and putting the idea into his head that any stories he may hear about him are ridiculous nonsense."

"You mean..." began John hesitatingly. He was anxiously waiting the faintest move Miss Sheer might make to leave the hall. He felt as if he had already exhausted all the springs of unselfishness in his soul by just listening sympathetically to Mr. Lordy and treating him with the attention of a fellow conspirator. To be responsible for the man's actions or to give him advice as to this stand of his between the appalling Gewlie and the formidable All-in-One were imperatives of social behaviour that just then seemed to be retreating to outside the circumference of his conscience. "You mean," he repeated, "that we might decoy the great Catholic Church herself, in the person of this good Father, into exposing Doctor Echetus's tolerance of an active sadist among us when his English chaplain, Father Tickle, either doesn't realise what's going on or is powerless to do anything to stop it? But has there ever been" — he interrupted himself to make a movement of rising, but sat down again, for his training as half-valet and half-secretary to a diplomat in the Balkans had taught him that to leave any building with a girl and to descend any staircase with the same girl and then to drift casually into any garden together would be less noticeable than to hurry from a hall alone, and to await the girl under a tulip-tree—" has there ever been a case, Mr. Lordy, when the word of an inmate of an asylum, or the words of a lot of inmates of an asylum, were accepted as evidence against a warder, still more of a warder supported by a doctor? Has there ever been such a case, my friend, and can we imagine —

But forgive me — I have an appointment — we'll meet at tea — and I'll be interested" — he was on one foot now with the other suspended above their bench— "to see the Father — and friend Gewlie, too, if he comes. So long, Mr. Lordy!"

Not a word of greeting did the lovers exchange, in fact not a word of any kind, till they had rounded the laurel hedge at the first curve of the nearest gravel path. Then Antenna said, speaking rapidly and low, and gazing gravely into his face as she swung her big-brimmed brown hat by a string of loose elastic inside it, "I stayed awake a long time wondering whether you'd be able to sleep. I slept *my* first night like a dead rabbit hunted to death, for *he* had come here with me; but my second night they had to give me a drug, I screamed such curses at him. But after that, when I knew he was back at home and was all those hours away and there was no chance of his coming back — for he never leaves his business unless he's forced to — I settled down quite happily. In fact, except for certain times when I hated him so much that just for him to be alive spoilt everything, I was happier than I'd ever been since she killed herself to escape him and left me alone with him. Think of her doing that — leaving the child she'd brought into the world alone with him! Oh, this place has been a heaven to me just simply because I've escaped from him! Before yesterday I had only one happiness — to be where he wasn't! And only one misery — that Midsummer Day would h*ave* to come, when he'd be here again — only for an hour or so — for he'll hardly sit down he'll be so keen to get back to his houses — but just to *see* him — but I mustn't think about it! You're here now; and everything's different. But *did* you sleep all right? I don't seem able to stop talking when I'm with you! But *did* you?"

John Hush nodded. "I certainly did," he said, "but I confess I had a nightmare later on. I don't know how much later on, for I went to sleep again. But you know how it is when you wake up with a nightmare and it's still pitch-dark. But I went to sleep again and stayed asleep till the morning."

"I won't ask you what the nightmare was," said Antenna. He stood still, and she stood still by his side. He looked at her closely.

"Better not, perhaps," he said. "Though I *could* try to tell you. I *could* try to tell you anything, Tenna."

She looked away from him; but standing as they were, she couldn't altogether hide her face from him, and he was shocked by the nerve-strain that was upon it, that was in fact drawn tight and quivering over it, like a new skin over a palpitating sore. "I don't believe," he burst out, "it *is* fair for me to go on telling you things when you don't tell me anything of the same sort!" He saw her bite her under-lip. He saw her lower her head and stare at the ground. He saw the sun throw the shadow of her skirt and the shadow of his trousers upon the well-weeded gravel path and the shadow of their heads upon the smoothly clipped laurel hedge. Then he saw her lift up her head and fix her resolute eyes full upon him.

"What you and I, my friend, had better do," she told him in a calm low voice, "is to get to know each other as quickly as we can! But, on the other hand, if we tell each other too agitating things at the start — it's a queer thing, my dear, but then we *are* a queer pair — I have an odd sort of feeling that it'll get in the way of our knowing each other, rather than help us.

I'm bad at expressing myself. I'm not clever like you, John, and I'm not educated like you.

"But I can *feel* things like this; and you being what you are to me, I know I've got plenty of time. And, after all, John, there's a lot in us both — more than a lot — that all the agitations in the world can't change or turn into anything but what's — well, I needn't go on, need I, for you know all this? — what's important to you and me is just our own ordinary selves, not all these terrible things we've been through!"

She had got as far as the sentence, "what's more important to you and me" before she realised that he had ceased to listen; the sudden manner in which this revelation arrested her increased the shock of it. But the relief that went through her like wine through a sieve when she realised the extremely practical, masculine, and even military reason why his mind had wandered from her words, was so great that she seized his sleeve between her finger and thumb and pinched it violently.

"Stay just as you are," he whispered stiffly, "and don't look as if I were telling you anything that I *oughtn't* to be telling you! As a matter of fact, I've come to the conclusion that, if we ever decide to escape from here, this is the place where we could do it. Only, we'd have to go slowly and get ready slowly! Take a good look at it, my dear." He lowered his voice. "But we mustn't be caught standing here and staring like a couple of frogs at a water-snake! I'll explain later; but if we went in with that water and came out with that water we couldn't be more than a couple of minutes at the whole job. But we'll have to get those real spikes out and we'll have to slip some artificial ones in, and we'll have to deepen the bed of the stream a bit to make sure there'll be room for us to get through that great hole and come out on the other side. But come along now, for Christ's sake!

"Yes, I know that's the south lodge over there where that fellow lives who was watching me in the reading-room yesterday when I first saw you. But come along! Don't look at it! And don't say anything aloud here about the water, or the spikes, or the hole under the wall."

Antenna hurriedly quickened her steps, and as she passed the south lodge she swept its windows with her eyes; and there, sure enough, just within the porch, serenely mending her husband's woollen drawers, but keeping her eyes fixed in a patient dreamy reverie upon the gravel path, sat Betsy.

"'Ow are you to-day, Mr. 'Arsh?" she cried at once, in her clear ringing voice.

To John's nervous companion this voice became at once a living creature, a creature something between a flying-fish and a water-rat; and since Tenna's eyes were reluctant to glance at those spikes in the stream, it was precisely there that she now was conscious of the oily and polished spine of that embodied voice that was now being scraped by those same spikes as it followed the stream beneath the wall.

But then, in a still louder tone, Betsy went on: "We must all join together, mustn't we, Miss Sheer, in making a nice young gentleman like Mr. 'Arsh feel a 'ome-from-'ome feeling amongst us 'ere!"

"He's going to show me the cattle in the field that he was looking after this morning. He's made friends with your husband already."

These words were uttered by Miss Sheer in the voice that all the Glint attendants had come to know well, and Betsy cursed her savagely in her heart.

It was not concealed from John that there was danger in the air, and he raised his voice accordingly. "I tell her," he cried, "that it's going to be 'round and round the mulberry bush', the sort of walk I'm going to take her!"

With this he drew Tenna away, giving Betsy no chance to utter another word; but when they were beyond her voice and yet were still well under her eye, he allowed a discreet space to appear between himself and Tenna, a space almost as wide as a whole yard, and as if well satisfied with this outward and visible sign of propriety, they quickened their mutual pace, he swinging a last-season's dead artichoke stalk, of which he had possessed himself, he couldn't have told how, as they approached the south lodge, and she "arranging", by plucking at them with the fingers of her right hand, five or six short-stemmed clover blooms and a couple of wisps of ground-ivy that she had snatched up as they walked and now held captive in her left hand. Thus following the gravel path that ran along the edge of the meadow, they vanished from the resentful eyes of Betsy.

"Snobbish little bitch!" thought that lady ferociously. "I'd give her the gallows with a look of my eye, I would! Try and kill the poor old dad what begat her, would she, the proud little hat-pin? If I were Master Doctor I'd soon uncertify y*ou,* you little toss-head, and give your case a good re-trial, too, and when the judge was talking about attempted murder and telling you you was in luck not to be hanging by the neck till you was dead, do you think I'd have looked away and been sorry for you?

"Not on your life, Missy Too Proud-to-speak! Not on your little life! I'd be glad you'd got what you ought to have, getting let off like you've been, and being cooked for and waited on like you are, by them that's known how to restrain they selves!"

But another thought followed hard on this one. "Yes, restrain theyselves, I tell you, when they might right and proper have killed their old men over and over, so aggravacious are all men and so much have us poor women got to suffer from them!"

As soon as they were out of sight of Betsy the new inmate drew close to Tenna Sheer. "I don't think that good lady is very partial to us!" he remarked.

But the girl didn't reply. Nor did she lift up her head or look at him till they'd come to the end of the railings separating them from the grazing cattle.

"What's the matter, Antenna?" John asked her, standing still and trying to look into her face.

"Oh, nothing particular!" she murmured, fidgeting with the flowers in her hand and still avoiding his eyes.

"There *is* something," he went on, "I feel certain there is. Please, please, Antenna, tell me what it is?"

But how could she tell him that the light, frivolous, indifferent tone with which he had referred to Betsy as "that good lady" had been a curious shock to her. She knew from what he had already revealed of his past that this upper-class tone wasn't, so to say, native to him — wasn't, that is, the tone he had heard in childhood. It was an acquired tone, imbibed like a special atmosphere, through his senses, though not through the pores of his skin, while with his guardian in those Balkan embassies.

As a matter of fact, Antenna's mother had belonged to identically the same class as John's own relatives in the crowded body of our wave-tossed social ship; while in spite of his financial success and his knighthood, Antenna's father belonged to the same class as Betsy herself, whose parents had for years peddled geraniums in south London.

If John hadn't lived on such intimate terms with his guardian he would have been more careful about his tone on an occasion like this. For he would have been more class-conscious. He would, in fact, have resembled his own parents and Antenna's mother; all of whom had been what used to be called decayed gentlefolk. The atmosphere of these embassies, on the contrary, was anything but old-fashioned; and if it was decayed it was teeming with parasite life. It was on the crest of time. It positively tripped and tumbled into the future. Thus it was with an air artificially acquired from a closeted clique of devil-may-care cadets of historic houses who were more at home with ex-royalties and ex-conspirators than with retired florists, that John had cleared his mind of Betsy.

"Well! I won't tease you, child, if you don't want to tell me!" he announced gravely. "But come on! I want to follow this damned wall all the way round to the other lodge, so that we'll know exactly where our cage ends!"

He gave a gentle tug at the sleeve of her grey jacket, while with his left foot he kicked out of her way a dead branch that had a thick knob at the end of it.

"Don't do that!" she cried in a voice that he hadn't heard from her before.

He swung round at once. Sorry, Tenna! he muttered. Then, after gazing at her bent head with a puzzled frown as she raised the branch to examine it: "Is it something you've seen before?" he asked. "Does it remind you of anything?"

She made no answer. All she did was to drag the thing off the grass and thrust it with deliberate care under a new-leafed elder-bush.

“That wasn’t where it belonged!” he grumbled. “What’s the idea?”

Again she made no answer. And this time he grew troubled. Was she really vexed with him for something? What the devil *was* there about that piece of dead wood with tiny little fungi on its underside?

“Please, my dear!” he pleaded. This was the first time since her mother’s death that anyone had called her “my dear That Welsh girl in the laundry had called her “ducky”, but that was different; and here, at Glint, Ursie Mum’s endearments by one of those cruel laws of nature that tend to flatten out familiar things, seemed hardly to count at all.

But hearing this man of hers, who was now her wooden doll for all eternity, utter these two syllables, an almost intolerable happiness seized her. The spasm of rapture that shook her was like a Maenadic cry, and for a moment her two arms shot up into the air as if they had become bird’s wings and were going to fly off by their own volition, leaving her human body staring after them.

Her head was thrown back; the expression on her face could only be called a contortion of ecstasy, but as soon as her arms sank down and she had clasped her hands behind her head, there rose from her lips a sign of such supreme contentment that it seemed to expand into a vast vaporous cup, capable of containing the whole dim, windless, warmly-chilly, misty green atmosphere round them, lifting up the sap of a million stalks and a million grasses and a million buds towards a sky that was so old and sad and weak that it looked as if it might melt into grey, tasteless, colourless water and drip and drop and drain away over all the horizons of the world from pure weariness of having seen so much beneath it and so having to see so much more beneath it before the end.

And John Hush thought: “She’s not human! God knows what she is, or what she’s got in her mind! What was she up to, pushing that dead thing under that elder-bush? Can young elder-bushes put new life into old rotten black stumps? Or did she *see a face* in that knob? Did she think it was doing something to that elder-bush? Or was the elder-bush jeering at it with its new leaves?”

But he felt, as he stood there before that thrown-back head, as if Nature were offering him, for once and for once only, a glimpse into one of her strangest, most terrifying, and yet most healing secrets, but a glimpse which, by some weird necessity of life’s peculiar ways, when once it has been offered, when once it has been received, irrespective of whether it has been understood or not, can never return again.

Antenna’s eyes had been wide open as she stood like that, and they had been facing him; but it struck him as though she were neither seeing him nor thinking of him. She seemed in fact to be seeing and feeling something that baffled her own mind and yet at the same time completely absorbed it. Was she feeling happy or unhappy as she stood like that staring out of this world into something else? It was impossible to tell.

Hush watched her as an astronomer might watch a star, a hunter might watch a deer, a fisherman might watch a trout, a prophet might watch a bird of unknown augury, a monk the parted lips of a miraculous virgin, and a laborious creative god the frantic antics of irresponsible and chaotic chance.

Suddenly her arms sank down, her head hung, and feebly, weakly, and absent-mindedly she pushed the stalks of the flowers she’d been carrying into her belt.

“Well,” she sighed, as if waking up in a hospital bed on the sudden apparition of a privileged relative, “I feel as if I’d just come back from sailing round the world! Do you ever feel like that, John — falling asleep while you’re on your feet? But, come on, my friend, I do want to go the whole circle together on our first day in this place.”

6. MR. FROGCASTLE

IT ALMOST SEEMS as if certain particular human thoughts associated with certain special human feelings often remain hovering in the air, or slowly dissolving into the air, above certain particular tracts of ground. This does not imply that everybody who passes or crosses such a spot is affected by these bodiless “revenants” or invisible creations of intense feelings that have come and gone; but when destiny brings people to these places who are dedicated by their special sensibilities to respond to these derelict emanations curious and startling results can come of such encounters.

The place which John and Tenna were now on the point of leaving could hardly be said to possess any very remarkable characteristics. It was a chance-given spot on the fringe of a crowded and flourishing plantation of young spruce-firs with a sprinkling of other trees.

With their backs to this spot, what they faced was the gravel path by which they had come and the green meadow, with a few healthy-looking cattle grazing in it, which was terminated by their impregnable prison-wall.

What exactly it had been that caused the unloved, and many would add the unlovable, Miss Sheer to be seized with such an ecstasy because a neurotic young man answering to the name of John, with the look of an old-fashioned Shakespearean actor, had called her “my dear”, must, of course, remain conjectural, but an element of not altogether negligible value in interpreting it might be found in the fact that the head-gardener of Glint, who lived outside the walls and whose name was Frogcastle, had paused this very morning, as he passed this spot after listening to a quarrel between Betsy and Bill, to thank the gods that he had remained a widower.

As the two now moved away, with the gardener’s unuttered cry of gratitude to fate clapping its wings like a bird caught in the girl’s hair, it was she this time who put her hand on his arm; but he noticed that before they went on she gave a nervous glance at the end of the dead branch which could be clearly seen protruding from beneath the fresh leaves of the elder-bush that grew so low that they touched the grass.

She walked fast after that; and he noticed that she was absorbed in some difficult train of thought, for she kept silent, and the lines in her forehead kept deepening and twitching. "Do you mind if I ask you something, Tenna?"

"Of course not! What do you take me for, John Hush?" She turned to him without slackening her speed, and he was struck by the grave intensity of her look. "She believes I'm going to reveal to her some extraordinary secret of superhuman endurance," he told himself, "whereas what I really must get from her is a practical idea of the points of the compass in this infernal hole!"

"Do you know if that south gate we've just passed — that gate between the stream where we looked at those spikes and the lodge where we saw that chattering female — is really south? What I mean is this. Suppose *there weren't any wall at all*, should we now be able to see Halfway House where I fancy my guardian intended to stay the night?"

"Halfway House?" she repeated vaguely. "Oh, I suppose so. Yes, of course! At least I think so. They've often shown it to me — I know that — from the window of the linen-room on the top floor. I suppose the west's over there!" And she made a careless gesture with her free hand — the hand that wasn't clutching his coat-sleeve with all its five fingers — a gesture that swept the horizon from south-west to north-west.

John made two resolutions: firstly to avoid rather than cultivate the habit of referring to his guardian; secondly to make careful and exact investigations of his own, quite independently of Tenna, as to these ticklish compass-points in regard to Glint Hall and its surroundings.

"Yes," he replied, in answer to that extremely comprehensive wave of the thin arm in the grey jacket, "yes, that must be just about where it is."

"Is that the creature you were going to show me?" enquired the girl, pointing to a large deep-uddered grey cow standing by itself under the shadow of the enclosing wall and beneath a couple of small silver poplars.

“No,” he replied, “I don’t think so. No, I’m sure it isn’t! The one I took a fancy to was grey — certainly it was very grey — purely grey, not light grey, nor dark grey, but just grey. There! There are some more of them near that haystack. Perhaps the one I wanted to show you is with that lot. It had longer horns than the one over there — yes, much longer horns! And I think it was greyer, too, than the one over there — yes, longer horns, and greyer still — you’ve never seen a cow so grey!”

Hush was silent; and, as far as Antenna could tell, his mind was completely absorbed in estimating the comparative greyness of Glint Hall’s grey cows.

Her own mind was following very curious patterns of thought, patterns whose effect upon her companion, had he been able to apprehend them, would have startled her as much as *her* thoughts would have startled him.

“Longer horns,” the girl was thinking, “and greyer cows!” And instead of the actual cattle before her she saw in her mind wide-stretching meadows extending under a sky even more mistily sun-pearled and even more vaporous with golden interstices than the one now above them; and, feeding in these meadows, beyond all the rivers she knew, beyond the reedy water-courses and the deep weirs, beyond the salt tide that carried down her mother’s canoe, she saw grey cows that moved among the tall shadows of leafless poplars and white horns that kept piercing yet whiter mists!

But as she walked on by his side and he kept rejecting one particular grey cow and then returning to it, and kept rejecting one pair of white horns and then returning to them, his curious absorption in this unimportant game began to get on her nerves. Why must he be like this? Why couldn’t her newly-discovered lover, who had so much about him that was like a helpless, puzzled, bewildered inanimate, walk about these gardens without comparing white horns with white horns and without worrying and fussing whether he was showing her the precise creature whose shed he’d cleaned that morning.

So intensely irritated with the absurd fuss he was making about his precious cows did she become at last that she flung one thought at least against such a jagged block of blue-black ice in the sluice of her consciousness that it broke into sharp-edged bits of ice. And then as she clung to the railings, while he hesitated and stared across the grass, she felt as if her mind were being pricked by the horns of cows wherever it turned; not only so, but her imagination began playing tricks with this tedious talk until it made him say the most silly, crazy, and grotesque things.

And at last her mind actually began twisting his words and mixing up his words and using his words as leaping-off places for sheer madcap fantasies. For John, by reason of having all that morning looked forward so much to telling her about these cows and to showing her their peculiarities, was agreeably lingering over the lengthy business of resolving into proper order their various shades of greyness and their various lengths of horns without, as happens so often when men talk to women, noting her reaction to his words.

Tenna's imagination, indeed, began playing with these ubiquitous horns till they seemed to tear themselves and their owners' heads and rush about in an independent pack. They seemed to be joined by the horns of the moon, by the horns of the deer in Windsor Park, by the horns of every tricorn and unicorn in the forest in Broceliande.

And then she suddenly wanted to stop them in their mad rush. For she saw where they were heading, these horns without a head! They were heading for the brick-yards, gravel-pits, saw-mills, and cement-works, of the Firm of Sheer and Shot, house-builders and estate-agents.

But when the actual horns he was pointing out to her began leaving their owner's heads she felt compelled to turn her own head away from him lest he should see she wasn't *properly* listening. She felt as if her mind were doing something that was wicked and wrong; so before she had the power to stop herself she began crying out: "I see the one you mean clearly! I see her! I see her! I see her! I see her! And oh, how grey she is!" But she dared not look him in the face as she uttered these false and treacherous cries; for though in her mind the rush of horns had been swallowed up in Sir Warden's brickyard, there was left behind one old grey cow, like a creature of painted wood, and this old cow was sitting up on its hind legs in the manner of a performing dog, while the grave John, himself looking like a wooden figure from an old-fashioned Noah's ark, was milking her into a child's seaside bucket! And all this while the real John Hush was saying to himself: "She's here! She's here! She's here! And I'm telling her just what I swore I would tell her! Yes, she's the one I can tell all my thoughts to, and everything I do! Nobody else in the world would care to hear what I've been doing in the north yard all those long hours!"

And then he spoke aloud, swinging round happily towards her and away from the cows.

"Come on!" he cried, pulling her forward by the sleeve of her coat. "And what about it being your turn to show *me* something!"

"Sure! I'll show you something!" she murmured cheerfully; and indeed it was really such a relief to her to wipe those comic Noah's ark creatures off the slate of her mind that she could actually smile at him as they moved forward.

"Oh, there's Mr. Frogcastle," she whispered presently. "I'm so glad. I'd like you to meet him. He's not an inmate. He comes from the village. He's an expert gardener. And do you know, John" — Hush noticed she spoke with more eagerness and animation than she had shown all this afternoon— "he's been the one and only person since you and I met yesterday who's taken the faintest interest in me, or gone out of his way to discover anything about me, all these two years!"

Hush followed her with willing alacrity, and they advanced quickly along the gravel path under their prison wall. He didn't feel in the least jealous of the man they were approaching. He felt nothing but pure unmixed gratitude; and he contemplated Mr. Frogcastle with alert equanimity and friendly interest.

The gardening expert was halfway up a short ladder fastening little bits of soft woollen cloth round thin sprays of old indented peach-branches and tender young nectarine-twigs; but as soon as he heard them approaching he began hurriedly to descend. They met at the foot of his ladder and the girl introduced the two men.

Seldom had John Hush seen a person more entirely satisfying to his taste in human beings; and if the other wasn't equally reassured, he answered John's greeting with a friendly handshake. Mr. Frogcastle wore a flimsy, very new cloth cap at the back of his skull. The whole of his head was covered by a thick crop of close-cut grizzled hair that so much resembled a wild beast's skin that John's first thought as he surveyed him was that the neat cap was his natural skin and the rough hair some savage creature's fur. Frogcastle had hollow, rather pallid cheeks, a wide friendly mouth, an extremely low broad forehead, and very pale greenish-grey eyes.

These eyes supplied the whole clue to the gardener's character. They were so wide apart that they appeared to focus in a completely different way from ordinary human eyes. Instead of concentrating upon any particular point in what they surveyed, they seemed to take in the whole length, breadth, height and depth of the object. The object wasn't isolated from its surroundings but absorbed and included in all its peculiar relations to its position in the world, so that a considerable segment of the object's environment, together with a fair stretch of the causes and antecedents that had made the object what it was, were embraced in one glance by the unnaturally wide scope of Daniel Forecastle's vision.

If this had the effect of diminishing the intensity of the gardener's gaze, it also had the effect of giving it a weight, a balance, a dispassionate consideration that seemed to challenge the cosmos to catch such a gaze off-guard. It was largely for this very reason that Miss Sheer felt so comfortable and relaxed when she talked with Danny Frog. She felt as if he treated her like a shrub rather than a girl.

In fact she forgot she *was* a girl when she talked to him. She felt that, while she couldn't bear either Father Toby or Father Allen to come near her, still less Doctor Echetus, she wouldn't have minded having her hair cut by Mr. Frogcastle.

"I've just had a scene with that fellow Gewlie, Miss," said the gardener presently, after answering some questions that John put to him about wall-fruit. "You remember telling me about his meddling with Mr. Tackle and Miss Tutty and frightening them by following them about and saying things to them? Well, what do you think? I caught him at it yesterday; and when he grew insulting and even accused me of being jealous over poor Miss Tutty, do you know what happened, miss? Something very rare with me!"

Tenna glanced quickly at John, and then she burst out with a little laugh. “You didn’t *hit* him?”

“That’s exactly what I did! I knocked him down!”

It was John who intervened at this point. “But I’ve got to meet this awful chap at tea today! I’m glad you’ve dealt with him already, Mr. Frogcastle, or I might be forgetting I’m an inmate and not a visitor! It’s through my good neighbour in the dining-room, Mr. Lordy, that I got the invitation. He’s a Catholic, and so apparently is this awful Gewlie. Well, I’ll be well primed with the facts; and if I don’t give this same reverend Father a few hints about his dear son, my name’s not John Hush.”

“Will *you* be at this tea-party, miss?” enquired the gardener; and it struck John that he spoke rather anxiously, but it was hard to tell, since the wide gaze of his eyes was such that it turned a person’s attention away from any expression there might be upon his face to follow the faintest hint of his meaning from his voice, which always tended to resemble the voice of an oracle speaking out of the air.

“Well,” the girl murmured with the fleetingest shadow of a smile, “I’ll be in the same room, anyway. And you may depend on it, Mr. Frogcastle, I’ll take in all I can of what’s going on.”

There was something in the wide stare of the gardener’s eyes when she had said this that created a curious silence round all three of them. This silence continued even after Danny Frog had bidden them goodbye and had reascended his ladder. It even accompanied them till they were well out of the far-flung shadow of that high southern wall.

“Can we get back without passing that tiresome woman again?” enquired John Hush.

Antenna hesitated. “Of course,” she said to herself, “there is that twisting path I found last year through this damned wood, but it led—” And Antenna shivered at the memory of what she had found. “No, John,” she said, “not to-day. Another day — perhaps — but not on our first day. But old Betsy will have gone in by this time. She’ll be in her kitchen. I know she will! And, anyway, we’ll walk quickly past the lodge. She’ll not bother us, John. I swear to you she won’t.”

“But we’ll get back too soon if we walk so fast,” he protested.

“Well” — and she looked at the wood on their right and the meadow-railings on their left— “we might—”

But their discussion was interrupted by a party of their fellow-inmates — about half a dozen of them — who came laughing and shouting and giggling past them, slapping and pummelling one another. Some of this noisy band shouted at them; others laughed at them; others waved to them with genial friendliness. There were a few of them, however, who actually hunched their bodies into knots and tightened their garments round them as if in desperate fear of contagion.

When they had gone and the pair had turned to each other with the same unspoken wonder as to what Mr. Frogcastle would do when these people reached him, whether, for instance, he would remain on his ladder with his back to them or swing round to greet them, they became aware that two more Glint Hall inmates were advancing towards them, evidently as unwilling as they were themselves to get entangled in any group. But unlike themselves this pair was not walking side by side, for the rear one was clearly pursuing the foremost one, who was striding forward with her head in the air and an expression of haughty disgust on her face.

Nor was this all: for at a little distance behind this couple there strolled one of Glint Hall’s tallest attendants, a man with a countenance that reminded John Hush of the profile of George Washington on a five-cent postage-stamp. This man was indeed as clearly bent on doing to a nicety what he regarded as his duty as was the first president; for his immovable face seemed to say: “Let the grass and the railings and the grey cows and the birds and the bushes, as well as that noisy set of people who have just crowded past, understand once for all who I am and what I am: I am here and I am *not* here. When anything goes wrong, behold! I am there. When all goes well I am as though I were nowhere.” Getting rid very quickly of the erroneous idea which at the first moment crossed his mind, that this tall attendant was none other than the egregious Gewlie, John was able to give his entire attention to the woman who was now approaching them. And he now knew her as the person he had come to think of as “the lady with the lorgnette”.

He recognised her luckless follower, too. He turned out to be that first inmate he had encountered after he had been deposited in the reading-room by Mr. Cogent Cuddle. He was the man who might so well have been a foundling from a circus, of which his father was the giant and his mother the dwarf.

And it was upon this freak of nature that the lady with the lorgnette, swinging suddenly round on both her polished heels, now turned the full ferocity of her terrifying fashionscope. She turned it upon her bewildered follower as if it had been the shining muzzle of a machine-gun, and its effect on the giant-dwarf was instantaneous. Being the sport of Nature that he was, he was peculiarly sensitive to the heat of the sun, and this was especially so — though nobody in Glint Hall except Ursie Mum would believe it — in the month of March. He had therefore placed upon his head, when he followed the lorgnette-bearer into the garden without time to get his hat, an enormous blue handkerchief, bought at a fair in the County of Essex, of whose border he made a fresh knot, snatching it from his head and replacing upon his head every time the lady paused in her march.

There must have been latent in this poor *manqué* some abortive germ of an inspired diarist after the fashion of Pepys, and these knots in his headgear were his method of recording the momentous pausing places of his idol. His appearance, however, was not improved thereby as every new knot reduced the blue handkerchief in size. Never had a lorgnette revealed such a grotesque apparition.

But the giant-dwarf was as unable to cease celebrating the lady’s pauses by tying knots as the lady was unable to prevent her expression from saying: “How dare this peripatetic abortion cross my horizon?”

But it was the lorgnette that won. The infatuated freak suddenly flung up his great hands to his head, dragged the handkerchief down over his eyes, staggered as if he’d had a sunstroke, and retreated in shuffling panic towards the south lodge, whither, John noticed, it had also become the apparent whim of the Washington-like attendant casually to direct his loitering way.

As soon as they were alone again between the railings and the thick plantation of small firs, they both stopped.

“Tenna!” John whispered, as if Mr. Frogcastle, with his eyes wider apart than ever, were looking down on them from his ladder against the wall. “Tenna! What are you —?”

But Tenna’s eyes, as John now saw, and every nerve in Tenna’s body that could be reached through her eyes, were absorbed in the slowly approaching figure of the woman with the lorgnette. This singular creature, whose whole body and soul appeared to be drawn inwards out of the surrounding air towards the proud protrusion of her under-lip, displayed herself to Tenna as a perambulating symbol of all those forms of British snobbishness, whether of blood or of taste or of moral judgment, that her father — long before he had become Sir Warden Sheer, long before he had become the head of his firm, long before he had married Doctor Cataract’s only daughter and begotten Tenna — had worshipped as the true Shekinah or Cloud of Divine Glory into which money, and money alone and yet more money, could enable a self-made man to thrust his reverential head.

What never ceased to fascinate Ursie Mum Tickle in her work among the inmates of Glint Hall — a work that was more than saintly, that was in fact goddess-like, for if saints redeem, goddesses recreate — was the fact that, though nobody else among the authorities in Glint Hall seemed to notice it, there were no two inmates in the whole place even faintly resembling each other in the nature of their mental afflictions.

Now in Britain, as we all know only too well, there are degrees of ladyhood. Some are born ladies; some achieve ladyness; and there are — though this may be hard to believe — those who have it thrust upon them! Miss Arabella Bolster belonged to a fourth category — those who worship the Middle Ages.

And it was this interior, spiritual pride in Miss Bolster that Sir Warden Sheer, that thick-skinned master-builder, dimly and dumbly felt with uncomprehending awe.

Unluckily for Miss Bolster's mental balance she actually did have in her veins a drop of blood inherited from Boule d'Enterre. This noble gentleman, who was himself a Crusader, is known to have claimed descent, when his right to the family's coat-of-arms was challenged by Ralph Boylestarre, from Baron Boltstraigne of Bolt who was killed at the Battle of Hastings.

Miss Bolster's half-brother, when a handsome boy of fifteen, had fled from her devoted care and escaped to the Continent, where after many ambiguous adventures — for *his* hobby or mania had nothing to do with the Middle Ages — he was finally befriended by a benevolent Turk. It was under this Turk's protection that, rendered prematurely old by the life he had led, he settled down as a sort of door-keeper at a villa on the shore of the Sea of Marmora.

From this neo-Gothic retreat he despatched once a year to the only other descendant of Boule d'Enterre a picture-postcard upon which was written an affectionate but stiffly conventional greeting, "couched", as Miss Bolster told Father Toby, "in language of Oriental restraint".

The number of these cards — that were pictorially always exactly the same and in their pious brevity might have been composed by Boule d'Enterre himself — now amounted to thirty-three; but as Miss Bolster re-read them more than thirty-three times every year their romantic value for a victim of the medieval frenzy was beyond the science of numbers.

And there arose in Arabella's "noble mind o'erthrown" the desperate illusion that a certain blotch or blur or disfigurement that was in reality a flaw in the printing, and which always appeared, as the picture remained the same, in the same place, in the Turk's garden, was a ruined wall of Gothic rather than of Turkish masonry. To this heap of stones, or rather to this defect in the print, the authentic though very thin and wavering line by which Arabella "deduced her lineage" from Boule d'Enterre had now been destined to lead.

The blur was a wall. The wall was a Crusader's castle. And the castle had been built by Boule d'Enterre. And to say that this discovery endeared these unchanging tokens from the boy she had brought up to Miss Bolster's heart would be to underrate their effect upon her. If they buoyed up her heart they intensified her pride to the breaking point.

Thus, with her lorgnette elevated as if it were at least a broken handle—" gules in bend between two cross-crosslets sable " — of a Crusader's sword, she advanced upon our two friends like the avantgarde of Charlemagne, not of course really seeing them at all and, indeed, seeing nothing at all but the infatuated offscouring of the old-fashioned circus known when she was a child as the "Tom Thumb Circuit", alias "The Roystering Laxatives".

Tenna's mind was diabolically clear about her danger. Her feelings were writhing like insect-dogs under their vivisectors terrible microscope, but she held them down. It would have been an ecstasy to her to snatch the lorgnette from the advancing woman and hit her — *thud*, *thud, thud*, only *that* wouldn't have been the sound — full in that contemptuous face. She ceased to be Tenna Sheer, exercising self-control: she became the wild clutch with which she seized John's arm; she became the frantic fling-away of her whole body; she became the desperate pull with which she dragged him after her among the thickly planted spruce-firs. She was forced to let him go in a minute or two because the branches so hurt her face, but *that* was all right, for now she knew he'd follow her!

Nor did she force her way in a straight line through those firs. One mad terror strove with another in her nerves; for she hadn't forgotten what she had once come upon in this plantation — that very pit for dead dogs that had shaken John to such a point. At last, completely exhausted, she lurched forward for a few paces bent double and then crumpled up and lay motionless, her chin against her knees.

John Hush knelt down on the ground at her side. The ground was damp, though fallen spruce-needles made it much less so than it would have been in any other portion of the earth encompassed by the great wall of Glint.

"She'll be gone in a second, Tenna, my Tenna!" John whispered in her ear — though there was really no need to whisper— "and they'll all be gone in ten minutes!" He looked at his watch. “Yes, sweetheart, in ten minutes the first bell for tea will ring. So we’ll have a quiet walk back!”

Tenna was hit to the heart by his calling her “sweetheart Flashing like forked lightning, her mind zigzagged back to the days of her girlhood when she used to play a game with all the twigs and sticks she could pick up under the poplar trees in Corncrake Crescent. She would pretend these sticks were people. She would turn one of them into her father; and that stick was always destined for some horribly ignominious end. And one of them would be her lover. She had never had a lover and never expected to have one; but she was an inexhaustible reader of love-stories.

And though all that the proud, thin twig with a little grey lichen on it that she chose for herself would allow to her heroic warrior, covered with moss, was to lie with its head — that is to say with its club-like end, whereon the wind that tore it from its branch had left a knobby oblong excrescence — resting upon her foot, which was the point of the Tenna-twig from which the bark had been peeled she was reminded of these solitary games when John Hush threw himself down by her side, and a queer thrill ran through her that was compounded of a variety of tremendous and exciting shivers.

There was real alarm in what she felt, for though he had confessed to her as if she were sexless the peculiar nature of his obsession for young women, she couldn’t help being a young woman, and although it was impossible not to feel herself different from those others, different in herself and totally different in her relation to him, she felt that in these things the shrewdest intuition that any girl had might easily fail to predict what could happen.

But as if he read her thoughts and had resolved to show her that from the sex-mania that affected him she had nothing to fear, all he did was to clutch tight with the finger and thumb of his right hand the fringe of her coat; and pinching this fragment of cloth with such intense violence that thumb and first finger soon began to grow numb, he turned over upon his face, so that the feeling of the ground beneath him gave him an obscure sense that in clutching the hem of Persephone's garment he was, like the impious Jasion, enjoying the Great Mother herself.

But that inch or two of cloth, just because it *was* unyielding cloth and not responding or relucting flesh, reduced his maniacal vice to a quite controllable measure; and though he was, you might say, after his own crazy cerebral fashion making love to her, it was all so remote from ordinary love-making that it wasn't calculated to draw from her any faintest trace of the automatic response that the ordinary sex-excitement of the male is wont to arouse in the nervous system of the female; and he himself was able to do what he never could have done six months ago in the crazy obsession of his ringlet-snatching, that is to say he was able to enjoy Tenna's nearness to him and his worship of her in widespread sensuous connection with the immediate surface of the earth.

It had always been an integral element in his erotic temperament to embrace figuratively and imaginatively, but with every sense he possessed, the particular expanse or segment of the earth's body which happened to be the geographical background of the human contact he was enjoying.

And at this moment, therefore, with his whole nature absorbed in the cerebral ravishing of Tenna's evasive spirit, he derived a complicated satisfaction from reminding himself of all he had discovered in the last twenty-four hours as to the elemental foundation upon which his new temple of Eros was rising. The temple itself might be inchoate, cloudy, shadowy, wavering in outline; but its base, at any rate, was solid and four-square.

Bending over his girl's form, as she lay on her side on the ground facing him, it gave him a peculiar satisfaction to remember every geographical detail of this river-circled plateau on which they were stranded at Glint. His mind pieced together for itself a sort of spiritual helicopter upon which he proceeded to fly north, south, east and west!

He flew in a straight line, for instance, though all the while he was anchored by her side, to that pit of horror on the northern fringe of this fir plantation. He even flew across that appalling spot to the vast farm-buildings and cobblestone yard where this morning he had worked. He visualised the way in which the lodge, where the woman lived who reminded him of his old nurse, confronted the yard beneath his bedroom-window and guarded the hideous iron gates beyond which the road stretched away through a patch or two of fir-plantation like the one in which he was now lying by Tenna's side until it reached an expanse of willows and rushes and a bridge across the river. Then he thought of the two enormous Scotch firs on the crest of the ancient British camp to the east of Glint Hall. That prehistoric fortress seemed to possess the power of holding back the river and hindering its approach.

And again, completing his exploration of the four-square foundation of his tower of Eros, for where they lay now was on its south side, he visualised to the west the park-like upward slope, where, beyond a more stately bridge than any of the others, rose the singular mansion owned by his guardian's American friends.

Returned from these aerial journeys to the four sides of the imaginary square, upon which, disregarding both the wall and the river, he was resolved to build his temple to the son of Aphrodite, it occurred to him to wonder what connection there could possibly be between his depraved mania for girls, that until yesterday had made it impossible for him to fall in love, and the curious magnetic attraction he had for such things as ruinous bridges, obliterated mile-stones, fallen breakwaters, forgotten boundary-posts, broken park-pailings, moss-grown weir-dams, derelict boat-keels, stranded barges, crumbling walls, indecypherable signposts, obsolete mill-wheels, deserted wharves, earth-sunk grave-stones.

In some weird way all these things seemed a natural, an inevitable background to his feeling for Tenna, who was now *all girls in one.* Yes, a natural background; and yet he now began to feel as if this four-square elemental foundation, upon which, along with Tenna, who so strangely resembled them, all these half-ruinous things, that had been lying there for a thousand years, could be lifted up, Tenna and himself with them, not by any violent eruption or any startling miracle, but easily, naturally, smoothly, quietly, as if they were figures carved in stone and soon to be poised between heaven and earth, as oblivious of the walls of Glint as they were of the waters of the river — that river with Father Tickle catching its perch, that river that would have encircled them clear round, if it had not been for some unknown deity in the old hill-camp who kept thrusting its waters away!

What was Tenna thinking about now as she lay facing him with her eyes so tight shut and her breathing so steady and even? Well, you could love one of these strange creatures to the limit and yet have no idea of what went on in that delicate brittle skull or beneath those maiden breasts. Absolutely no idea! No idea whether she was angry or indifferent; no idea whether she was full of rebellious devilry or full of infinite resignation!

"I don't even know," he thought, "whether at this second she's fast asleep, or watching me, as in the stories they always say they watch you, through their lovely eyelashes! Sometimes I could even wish" — he made a face as this thought danced like a goblin through his head— "that I were a stone at the bottom of the brook that goes under those iron spikes and under the wall! I'd be a stone then that couldn't slip or sink or roll or slide among litter and rubbish! I'd be safe then in a niche, a ledge, a crack — and I'd be safe from the spikes and I'd be safe at the bottom!"

She was lying all curled up, with her high white forehead, which suddenly made him think of an old print his guardian possessed of Bernard De Fontenelle, author of *The Plurality of Worlds*, almost touching one of her knees, knees covered by extremely old-fashioned black stockings, things that were almost unattainable that spring, as John, an expert upon girls' attire, knew very well. He himself, now seated on his haunches with his hands clasped round his shins, was gazing down at her, endeavouring to conjure up a plurality of universes to help him exorcise the thought of nail-scissors.

The recoil of his mind from this temptation had the same effect upon him that pushing with a punt-pole against a verdurous bank might have had if he'd been in a boat on Father Toby's river. It started him thinking of barges and bargepoles and encircling rivers and exhausted females prostrate upon pine-needles: examples certainly rather than symbols of the plurality of life's dimensions. And he said to himself: "I believe the chief cause of madness is our absurd admiration for *personality*. Everybody longs to have a striking personality, a personality full of humours and whims and fancies and prejudices and eccentricities and grotesqueries.

"Everybody would like to hear it said of them: He or she has got such a great personality! That's what does all the harm! A great personality? A great ass! This whole damned place is simply chock-full of great personalities, the whole lot of us simply wallowing in our bloody personalities! I'd like to collect together the whole crowd of the inmates of Glint in that reading-room up there and give them a discourse that would astonish Father Toby, but with which I believe old Ursie Mum would entirely agree! I'd tell them that the whole business of being cured and getting out of here consists in ridding ourselves of our blasted personality!

"I'd tell them we should reduce our lives to two dimensions, and cut out this damned personality once for all: Be in your bodies, I'd tell them — be in your bodies to the limit, and then when your bodies don't satisfy you, be *in the spirit*! You ask, my dears, I'd say to them, what I mean by being in the spirit? Well, I'd say to them: *That's* just what I'm telling you now!

"You've heard all this chat, I'd say to them, about evolution producing civilisation? Well! What did Jean-Jacques Rousseau tell us, eh? To pick up a few home-truths from the trusty savage, and let evolution tread water for a time! In other words, instead of letting this blind conceited idiotic evolution-impulse do what it likes with us, why not play at being gods ourselves and do a little wholesome self-creating on our own? Yes! And begin, too, I would say to them, with the nature of our own being! What drives us mad? I'd say to them. And I'd answer: The over-complicated nature of our own identity!

"Of course that's the exact truth; for it's the real truth that always has to be dug up from the pit, like Aristophanes *Eirene*, when you're going to improve things. These are grand days for manufacturing what they call Robots.

"Well! Why not substitute *creation* for manufacture; and play at being gods ourselves? Why not, I'd say to them, start creating a different kind of human being than the one that can only be scared by hell-fire into behaving properly? That crazy fellow Kirilov in *The Possessed* says that the human race has to be *physically changed*.

"Well! Let's be the ones to change it. That's what I'll tell them! And I'll add: Where in the name of Holy Jesus could be found a better place for changing it than Doctor Echetus's home for lost dogs? But how to do it? Ah! There's the rub that makes calamity of so long life!

"But listen, my dears, I'd say to them. Here we are, all together, in this nice comfortable reading-room, with the biggest tulip-tree in the United Kingdom outside the window. Isn't it natural to us all, though not always easy, I admit, but isn't it natural to us all, to change our nature by getting rid of certain fancies, caprices, whimsies, mischiefs, furies, manias?

"We've all heard of *conversion*, haven't we? We all know what the Salvation Army can do for the souls it saves? But that, you'll say, means faith in God! Of course it does! But let me tell you this, my dear. The thing that works these miracles isn't God, but the *faith* which these people have in God. It's faith, I tell you, that does it. Jesus is perfectly right there, and so is Paul. What works the miracle is faith. And whose faith, I'd like to know? Ours, of course!

"And faith in what, you'd like to know? *Faith in our power to change ourselves!* All right, I'd go on, so far all is granted. The change is to be made, this terrific, this terrible, this startling change, this change that's as extreme as a physical change, this change that the Salvationists call 'a change of heart'. But the change I'm telling you about is more than a change of heart. It's a change of *dimension.* It's a *metaphysical* change.

"In our human mental world it's like splitting the atom! In plain words, I'd tell them, in language you can all understand, my dear fellow-inmates, what we've got to do is to reduce the embodiments of our identity *from three to two!*

"And just here, my darlings, so I'll say to them, lies the miracle. What took theology — starting with Plato, long before Jesus was born or Paul had preached in Athens and converted half the household of Caesar — what took, I'll say, about two thousand years for theology to do we must do, like spiritual atom-splitters, in a few months, in fact, I would add, before midsummer I "And what we must do, I would go on, coming now to the essential point, is to liquidate completely from our individual human nature this preposterous and troublesome something in each man and each woman, namely that grandiose projection of ourselves that we are in the habit of describing as our personality.

"It is *this* part of us, so I would tell them in my speech in the reading-room, which is at the bottom of all the worst troubles and quarrels and misunderstandings in life.

"Of course it's with our bodily senses that we enjoy things and suffer things and it is over the appetites of the body that in our most animal moods we fight with each other both individually and as a pack. But wasn't it from the frustrated desires of their flesh and blood as individual men or animals that Alexander and Caesar and Hannibal and Tamburlaine and Ghengis Khan and Frederick the Great and Bismarck and Hitler brought such devastation to so many?

"I'll tell you, fellow-inmates; I'll tell you in one single word. These famous men weren't more lecherous or treacherous, more cruel or hard-hearted, than the rest of us. They were probably less so! They were certainly more hard-working and in most cases more magnanimous. How, then, is it that their names have become so satanic that the smoke of them mounts up to heaven? What brings down this doom upon them that they should be accounted worse among men than plagues or famines? In one single word, fellow-inmates, in one single word: *personality!*

"These murderers of thousands, these manufacturers of widows and orphans, these burners of roof-trees, these blackeners of hearth-stones, these sackers of cities, these scorchers of the earth, don't do what they do because of their bodies. They don't do what they do because of their appetites and sensations. Far less do they do what they do because of the spirit that exalts all men and makes the souls of all men equal! They do what they do because of this accursed *third dimension* of our nature, this thrice-accursed devil or a thing we call Personality!

"This, brother-inmates, this, sister-inmates, is the 'abomination of desolation' set up in the holy place — that is to say, between the sacred animal-earthly *body* and the sacred human-planetary *spirit*; in other words, brother-and-sister inmates, between the dust that returneth to the earth from which it rises and the spirit that returneth to the air from which it descends.

"There are many worlds and many universes, fellow-inmates, but we, human beings, are constructed of only two dimensions — matter and mind, body and spirit. All the horrors and evils in life come from the accurst Platonists or Gnostics or Prae-Christian mystics, whoever they may have been, who confused the whole issue by inventing, out of some subtle confusion in the mysterious relation between our conscious self and our bodily self, this proud, insolent, ambitious, indecent, arrogant, and entirely illusory concept of personality.

"Don't you see, brother-inmates and sister-inmates—"

Here John realised that in his ambassadorial pride in subtle distinctions he had begun murmuring aloud this "counterblast", as the old covenanter would have styled it, to history's great men, and that Tenna had opened one eye and had fixed it steadily upon him. The reading-room and its imaginary audience vanished completely then, as John's two eyes encountered this dazed and puzzled stare.

But like a man who has long been practising a particular jump and has thrown himself so absolutely into this practice that all other mental energies must remain numb and void till the contest is over, John Hush didn't stop murmuring this imaginary speech. Nor was he content with his position by Tenna's side. Rising on his knees, he swayed above her for a moment, his two eyes fixed upon the eye she had opened, an eye which, just because it was only one, didn't seem to be fully aware of the nature of the situation, and then he sank forward across her, plunging the palms of his hands and the undersides of his wrists into the spruce-needles on the further side of her. In this position, Tenna's body being so thin and her dress being so flimsy, there was nothing of her he could really see, although to his fancy the sepia-coloured fir-needles, a few miniature funguses, a spray of yellowish moss, and a patch of grey lichen became a firmament of staring puzzled brown eyes.

As for Tenna, she lay like a dead sycamore leaf that all the winter had been blown from spruce-fir branch to spruce-fir branch, hating the rich incense-heavy Christmas smell of their massive green foliage and longing to sink down amid funguses and damp moss and those fine thin patches of grass-blades that seem to rise out of larch-needles, like the spears of fairy warriors sown by the tender gums of lizards and slow-worms and secretive toads.

She was fully awake now, but hesitated to open her other eye lest this man of hers should start doing in this perfect hiding-place whatever it is men do to women. Those were the exact words she made use of in her curled-up blind soliloquy, and the unspoken words were followed by a fretful, petulant, troubled protest against the whole nature of normal life which apparently refused to make it clear to one like her, *who had nothing to go upon*, except the vaguest virginal fancies, what at such a moment it were best for a girl to do. She had never felt quite so confused and bewildered as she did at this moment.

Hitherto there had only been one Tenna in her heart, head, her neck, her stomach, her bowels, her legs, her arms. Now to her consternation there seemed more than one "queen of the castle". There seemed indeed several Tennas within her, and these different Tennas wanted different things.

None of them, however — and this was the most troublesome part of it — had a clear idea of what it did want. There had been a Tenna — could it have been only yesterday morning? — whose secretest and deepest ideal was to have a mate who was barely human, who was in fact the extreme opposite in human polarity from the hard-working, hard-climbing, maleconscious, class-conscious, race-conscious, brick-yard owner, who had been made a "Sir" for his services to society, and for whom, not only because he'd begotten her, and not only because her mother drowned herself, but simply and solely because he was himself, because his eyes were his eyes, his nose his nose, his ears his ears, his hands his hands, his smell his smell, the hairs on his head, on his hands, on his chest, and everywhere else where there could be hairs, his hairs; for whom she had a loathing as if he were "the worm" Jesus talks of "that dieth not" — yes, there had been a Tenna whose ideal mate, in order that he might be the extremest possible opposite to Sir Warden Sheer, resembled an inanimate doll, of human size and human appearance, of course, and certainly not in the least effeminate, but so much her very own that he could be trusted never to touch her when or where she didn't want to be touched, and who could be trusted when she wanted to be quiet never to ramble on in a tiresome, pedantic, stupid, tedious, obscure way about white cows or spikes under bridges or Halfway Houses belonging to rich Americans!

But last night, after they separated, and once in the night when she woke and stayed awake, she had found that her heart, her senses, her nerves, her whole body, had come to be, in a manner that caused her several queer shivers and tremors, not entirely satisfied with a companion so completely inanimate.

And yet there was still a Tenna struggling for the mastery against the one that made her open her left eye. This Tenna, though her body was so feminine and so soft, was the fierce man-hater who, a couple of years ago, had got herself into Glint for trying to kill her father. Had it been Mr. Frogcastle rather than Mr. Gewlie who had been the one to be spying upon the inmates of Glint that cloudy end of a warm-breathing day, it is hard not to believe he would have paused in a humorous reverie as he spied on those two human forms, one bent like a new moon on the ground and the other bent like an arched bridge across her body and both ensorcerised in a queer unnatural silence. The convulsive tremors that had passed through them separately before their bodies assumed this queer almost zodiacal position would have been unknown to him; but it would have struck him that some serious tension vibrated in the atmosphere about them, a tension that suggested the approach of an unusual nervous crisis or at least that such a crisis was on the wind.

But no such crisis, whether projected by the terrible urge of Eros or by the terrible necromancy of Nemesis, occurred at that time; nor, indeed, was there anybody spying on them. But, all the same, a startling change in the situation did occur, of which the cause, though it had nothing to do with human emotion, was a simple and natural one. It was, in fact, a series of long-drawn exquisite notes from an unseen blackbird; and under the impact of this recklessly shrill yet liquidly raindrop sound, the tense, opaque, heavily covered, humanly compact bodies of those two inmates of Glint were magnetised into a vibrant alertness.

John’s body instantaneously stiffened and straightened. He drew his fingers out of the thick mass of pine-needles and knelt upright by Tenna’s side, listening. She remained prostrate, but turning round she now lay on her back, and drawing up her knees clasped them tight with her clenched hands. Extended like this, he kneeling with his hands clasped behind him and she on her back with her hands clasped about her knees, they both listened to this invisible bird which had flown across the Glint meadows on an exploring expedition, but at this moment was tempted to take a holiday from the nesting-season’s labours and to make a little music for the pure pleasure of making it.

The two listeners to this divine burst of aesthetic selfishness were queerly affected by what they heard. As there is an irresistible and fatal regularity in Nature’s pulsings and throbbings and spasms of erotic sound, so there are also in the recurrent motions of the ebb and flow of the life-stream certain unexpected, unaccounted-for in-rushings of completely incalculable forces. These forces, although they are forces “that Nature makes”, disturb and interrupt the normal rhythm of things; and when in their startling unexpectedness, like “bolts”, as we say, “out of the blue”, these extra-normal invaders from far outside the ordinary system of life’s ebb and flow rush upon us, it is as if we felt a sudden cosmic crack in the thick rondure of our universe, through which the-devil-knows-what invasion takes possession of us.

To these highly-strung lovers of two days’ acquaintance it was as if there came rushing on the notes of this unseen bird an airborne shaft of unnatural revelation, in fact a revelation assuring them of the irrational fact that the madness that had lodged them in this weird walled-in place was not in its essential nature an evil thing at all, but, on the contrary, a sort of miraculously winged ichor or elixir which as it came fluttering down from some completely different dimension had overflown its mark and had hit the wrong nerve in each of them, so that she was not inspired to start a revolt against the cruelty of old custom but only to try to kill complacent old men; while he was not inspired to perform some miracle of valour for a maiden but only to cut off the curls of provocative maids.

"Oh, my one of all," he thought, "it doesn't matter whether I touch you or don't touch you as long as we are together, as long as you are alive and by my side!"

And she thought: "I don't care whether he makes love to me or not. From the heart of my skull to the heart of his skull there's some kind of air-bridge and over that bridge our thoughts keep passing, not speaking a single word, but — what's that?"

She sprang to her feet, and so did he, for quite close to them they heard gaspings and pantings and a desperate scrambling. Before they could decide what to do, a pair of inmates, a man and a woman, people just known to her, but quite unknown to him, rushed wildly past, evidently in a pitiful panic, while behind them came a uniformed attendant.

John Hush knew at once that in all the days of his life he had never seen any human face more appalling in its possibilities than the face of the person who was following these frightened inmates.

Tenna, of course, knew well who it was, but she had no time to explain anything to her companion. With a movement as swift as the blackbird, who with an angry scream broke off its impassioned celebration of solitude and noisily flapped away, she flung herself between pursuer and pursued. Her instinct had risen to the occasion.

"Oh, how lucky it's you, Mr. Gewlie!" she cried. "Mr. Hush here — Mr. Hush, this is my good friend Mr. Gewlie — Mr. Hush was telling me he hoped to meet Father Wun at tea to-day. I believe they have friends in common at Halfway House. Will you help us to get back to the path, Mr. Gewlie? Mr. Hush and I have begun to feel nervous in this wood. And we feel we have been trespassing, too! Please be so good as to take us out of the wood, Mr. Gewlie!"

The man removed his hat with his right hand, wiped his forehead with the palm of his left hand, and stared at Tenna hesitating. John also stared at her in absolute astonishment. "What a thing a girl is!" he thought.

And then he, too, addressed himself to the man, carefully and deliberately, using his most pronounced Embassy voice.

But still the man hesitated, glancing in the direction whither the panic-stricken pair had fled.

Then Tenna “took”, as Homer would say, whether of a mortal or an immortal, “other counsel”. She, too, glanced in the direction followed by that panic-stricken pair.

“I hope,” she said, speaking slowly and clearly, “those excited people who have just passed us won’t come out from the wood exactly where Mr. Frogcastle is nailing up fruit trees — because I’m sure he won’t at all like to be disturbed.” She had done the trick!

Into the countenance of the attendant, Gewlie, came an expression of a terror even greater than that which she had seen on the faces of the two fugitives.

“Follow close behind me!” he gasped from his distorted lips, and, swinging clear round, led the way back towards the south lodge.

7. THE TEA-PARTY

JOHN'S ADMIRATION FOR Tenna was as boundless as ever when, in the watchful but extremely respectful company of Mr. Gewlie he entered the dining-hall and made his way to his usual place. Yes, there was Mr. Lordy, keyed up to an intense excitement of expectation; but no sign as yet of Father Wun.

As for the man Gewlie, it was clear that the departure of Tenna had restored his equanimity. He assumed the role of introducing John Hush to the expectant group of Catholics. “And here,” he announced, “is our nice, good, new gentleman, most comforting to us all, I'm sure — aren't I right, Mr. Lordy? — so healthy and strapping and upstanding — aren't they the words Miss Bolster herself would use? Except ‘strapping’, perhaps! Do you know I once asked Miss Bolster if she liked the word ‘strapping’ as applied to a handsome spirited young man, and do you know what she said?”

It was at this point that Mr. Lordy paid John one of the greatest compliments he had ever received in his life. John hadn't been in Balkan embassies for nothing; and well enough did he know that the humbler, shyer, more timid and less self-assertive a person is, the greater is the honour of such a person's confidence.

And now Mr. Lordy lifted him, with a gesture like a delicate accolade, into the innermost circle of his friends! This he did with a flicker of his left eyelid across the breast-bone of the man Gewlie. It wasn't that he gave John a wink. That would be to put it grossly. It was rather as if he took the eyelid-flicker with which a wink would naturally begin, caught it with impalpable fingers and released it, like an invisible thought-moth, in the kitchen-garden of John's brain.

Meanwhile the man Gewlie went on. “She said ‘yes’! Yes, Miss Bolster said ‘yes’! She willingly admitted that the word ‘strapping’ gave her a nice feeling and was one of her favourite words. She told me it made her think of football!” By this time John and Mr.

Lordy had already devoured between them almost half the whole plate of brown-bread-and-butter; and it was clear that Gewlie, who, though in uniform, was obviously playing the part of an invited guest, was too nervous to do more than nibble at this feast.

John could catch only an occasional glimpse of Antenna from where he sat, for she had taken a place at the furthest end of the women's table. She had found Miss Bolster's society too reminiscent of that particular social ideal that always hovered before Sir Warden's "inward eye" and which, though beyond the reach of bricks and mortar, had been one of the main inspirations of his undeviating, undistracted, and, you might almost say, devoted struggle to become rich.

As for the man Gewlie, he also kept giving troubled glances at the unfilled gap on the further side of Mr. Lordy which had been clearly reserved for the Father; for beyond this gap there were about half a dozen inmates who were murmuring among themselves in a manner that had for an onlooker, even for an onlooker who had so recently been "certified", a curiously unpleasant effect. Hush would have been hard put to it to define this particular unpleasantness. It wasn't an indecent effect. On the contrary, it was nervously proper. But in some peculiarly ghastly way it struck Hush as if all those half-dozen people, though so strictly correct in their gestures and in their sentiments, had no modest covering of ordinary *skin* between their clothes and their bowels, lungs, bladder, gall, kidneys, liver, and several other familiar human organs!

Was this due, he wondered, to their carrying the ancient psychoanalytical habit of confession much further than it could possibly be carried in Catholic countries where everybody was a Catholic or an atheist; or was the Catholic Faith itself such a protection against the religious element in all insanity that there was something almost indecent about a mad Catholic?

Some inmates who had come in while John was occupied with Gewlie and Mr. Lordy now entirely concealed Tenna from him. This was a serious matter, for the agitating conclusion of their afternoon walk had prevented them from arranging together where they would meet after this meal; and John would have liked to have signalled to her by some sign she would have recognised at once — for instance by treating bits of bread-and-butter as if they'd been draughtsmen — to suggest that they should meet in that same corner of the smoking-room.

He felt sure Antenna was only hidden by those newcomers. She couldn't, surely, have slipped out of the hall altogether without his having noticed it? But all the same he felt extremely nervous. He must arrange with her a minutely circumstantial plan of campaign for an occasion of this sort!

He made a feeble attempt now to enter into the Gewlie-Lordy dialogue by forcing himself to turn upon them both a certain engaging and beguiling smile, a smile full of the aristocratic roguery of diplomatic confidence-tricks, to show he had heard what he hadn't heard, caught what he hadn't caught, divined what he hadn't divined, and understood what nobody but God could possibly have understood, but the only result of this almost feminine manoeuvre was to involve him still further in the ghastly and tragic chatter, like the twittering of a flock of purgatorial long-tailed tits, at once weirdly jocular and reverentially apprehensive, of these half-dozen Roman Catholic inmates.

They even struck John, though he was anything but an Homeric student, as if they were gathering to meet Father Wun as the Homeric ghosts under the earth gathered to greet Odysseus — pathetic shadows of their own past, longing to do, to say, to feel, in fact to play, the living part which they no longer had the substantiality to fulfil.

He couldn't follow what these men were saying. Indeed, they spoke very low. But it almost looked as if they were conversing with the empty space on the bench which would soon be filled by Father Wun, for they kept throwing quick glances at that unfilled gap and then looking hurriedly and reverentially away, until Hush began to feel that he would experience only a faint surprise if some shadowy manifestation of at least the lower portion of Father Wun's material envelope had been revealed to them for a second, even though it had been withdrawn in a flash.

But what was this? All the inmates who were having their tea in that hall, not merely the men at John's table but the women at Tenna's, had ceased to talk and were gazing awestruck at a group of people who had just entered. It caused John a sharp pang that he couldn’t be absolutely sure, since only a few inches of a girl’s shoulder and about an inch of her sleeve were all he could see of his friend at this agitating moment, that these adjuncts did belong to her, or that she was there at all.

He had reached that crucial point in a love-affair when a lover feels that all those extra-dramatic occasions which normally he would appreciate with his whole nature could only reach half of his attention if the object of his attraction were not there to share them.

But even with half of his nature, waveringly combined with those two inches of feminine attire, John Hush did note with no small interest the impressive group that had now entered. One was Doctor Echetus himself; and rarely had any of the inmates there present been more conscious of the greatness of their lord and master. He was an impressive-looking individual; and the impression he made was certainly one of great authority. Authority, perhaps, would be a better word for the head of Glint than any other. The impression he made at first glance couldn’t in any sense be called an impression of distinction.

To the man’s essential quality of self-centred assurance had been added, as I have already presumed to hint, a curious air of integral officialdom like that possessed by the established overseers of parks, public gardens, and even of royal castles; and Doctor Echetus certainly looked at this moment, as his calm gaze moved from visitors to patients and from patients to visitors, as if he were an embodiment of all the most formidable insignia of authority from the Black Forest to the Gobi Desert, and from all the imperial ante-chambers from China to Peru.

But it was the Doctor’s companions that drew John’s interest most vividly just then and made him snatch almost angrily and with the eye of a shrike at that morsel of sleeve and that reverted shoulder-tip to make them share what he felt. For one of the visitors was a lady. This lady John felt sure must be the new owner of Halfway House and the identical person under whose roof his guardian and his guardian’s betrothed had spent last night.

It seemed to him that her gaze, though she was a short plump personage who looked decidedly short-sighted, took every chance it could of scanning the faces of the inmates at the men's table; but he hurriedly told himself that even if this were true it might easily be that his friends had respected his pride and had scrupulously refrained from referring to him at all, and that this kindly creature who bore, he now decided, a striking resemblance to a picture he had once seen of the youthful Queen Victoria when under the escort of Lord Melbourne, was simply behaving as she always behaved.

There was nothing about Doctor Echetus in the least like Lord Melbourne, and as for Father Wun, he was the mortal antipodes of any conceivable British statesman, but it was quite clear to our well-trained diplomatic friend that this short plump uncomely American lady possessed that imponderable feminine quality of regal magnetism which enabled Victoria to out-queen it even over the Empress Eugénie. She was now advancing to the bottom of the table, where Hush was painfully and desperately trying to snatch a glimpse of more than his friend's sleeve.

As the American advanced, she asked one question of Father Wun and another question of Doctor Echetus in such a manner as to transform both these gentlemen into organic ornaments upon the prow of that exquisitely-steered ship which was herself under reduced sails.

John was so absorbed in his guardian's hostess that he only gave a cursory and fleeting glance at Father Wun, and it wasn't till both Echetus and the lady had disappeared that his attention returned to his own table.

Oh, how fearful he was lest Tenna shouldn't have been there at all, and not only so, but should have gone without their having made any definite arrangement as where they would spend their evening!

But he had to deal with the immediate situation now, for he was being introduced to the Father by Mr. Lordy, and he was particularly anxious to notice the effect of the priest's presence upon the egregious Gewlie.

No sooner, however, was he alert to what was happening round him than he saw Tenna. Yes! There she was! And, oh, how thankful he felt! Two or three women had suddenly moved away from that end of the table, and there was Tenna clearly exposed to his view — yes! and actually smiling at him, and watching what was happening at his Catholic tea-party as closely as he had been watching the entrance and departure of the queenly American!

"No doubt," he told himself, "she will wait now till I make a move, and then we'll be together in the passage near that end window as we were yesterday."

Father Wun greeted him in the friendliest manner, but he clearly had so many of his own faith on his hands that he couldn't remain in conversation with him for more than a minute or two. But the Father did reveal the important fact that his guardian *had* spoken about him. What had he said about him? Not very much; so at least he gathered from the priest's brief words. And John was glad that it hadn't been very much!

But now the whole situation was moment by moment becoming much more dramatic, and John could see across the two tables that Tenna was missing nothing of what was going on.

Mr. Lordy, who had begun to treat the pot of freshly-made tea brought by an attendant as if it had been made by himself to be served by himself at a party presided over by himself, now proceeded, without the slightest preliminary warning or challenge, to plunge into his appalling charges against Gewlie, who, perfectly unmoved, and with a patient, protesting, wistfully indulgent expression on his face, appeared to be assuring the Father that there was no reason why they should permit this agreeable meeting of fellow-religionists who knew one another so well to be seriously disturbed by the unfortunate manias of a person as unimportant as this voluble epitome of all that is negligible.

While Mr. Lordy plunged on and on into further and further details of Gewlie's sadistic behaviour, John had time to study at close range the whole figure and countenance of Father Wun. No one had told him that there was any oriental blood in the priest, but "Wun" certainly sounded like a Chinese name, and soon all sorts of obscure odds and ends of information about the ancient Chinese classics of Confucius and Mencius if not of Laotze and Kwang-tze came drifting into John’s head in vague association with Jesuit missionaries.

And yet somehow he couldn’t imagine the authorities appointing a priest with Chinese blood to a parish in so populous and important a town as the one which was now the centre of the Father’s activities, though for himself John saw no reason against it.

But whether or not he had any Chinese blood, Father Wun’s face was as impenetrably polite as if he’d been a direct descendant of Confucius. It gave no sign of annoyance or of impatience. It betrayed no anxious concern about Mr. Lordy’s plunging into such dangerous matters.

John thought he detected at one point a movement of the priest’s expressionless eyes — not of his head — in the direction of a couple of attendants who were discussing some private matter of their own, but who now and then directed a faintly amused glance at the group of Catholic inmates gathered round their spiritual guide; but even of this glance he wasn’t certain.

John’s own chief preoccupation, as this scene appeared to be intensifying to a point where an explosion of some sort was unavoidable, was to keep his eye on Tenna, and if possible exchange with her some sort of wordless commentary on what was happening, while he missed nothing of what actually *was* happening. Unfortunately upon one of these occurrences he couldn’t comment with Tenna simply because, by reason of the distance between them, she couldn’t possibly see it. This was the curious way in which from having been slightly paler than usual, the egregious Gewlie — for there was a sort of comical abominableness about the man that possessed a lurid attraction, and John didn’t conceal from himself that he derived peculiar satisfaction from mumbling the phrase “the egregious Gewlie’: — now displayed at various places in the skin of his face certain dark-red spots.

“It isn’t, Father, believe me, it isn’t” — Lordy was now explaining— “that I’ve any malice or hatred or any personal grudge against Mr. Gewlie! What I *have* seen, I *have* seen, and what I dread seeing, I dread seeing, and the truth is, Father — yes, you may smile your sneering smile, you cruel wretch, but you can't stop my telling the Father everything! — the truth is there are certain unfortunate people in this place this smiling devil won't leave alone. He has the whole place, as all the attendants have, to wander about in just as he likes. He has a pass-key to all the rooms. Don't you see, Father, how horribly wicked this whole system is, and how dreadful for this demon's victims? Mind you, Father, I'm only telling you what everybody in this place knows to be true, only they're too afraid — and naturally enough they're too afraid — to tell any outside person what's going on here all the time. Yes, you can smile and tap your head." At this point John was able to exchange a completely understanding look with Tenna; for it was evident that the last thing the egregious Gewlie felt like doing at that moment was tapping his head. He was, in fact, rather absurdly straining his neck, so as to be able to keep an eye on the nearest group of his fellow-attendants, where, though they were still talking among themselves, there was one man who by some tacit agreement never took his gaze away from the encircled figures of Lordy and Father Wun. "But the truth—': Mr. Lordy now burst out, "the truth is that instead of this place being a place of healing for the wretched people singled out by this man for his devilish tricks, it has become a place where people on the edge of being cured are driven back, harried back, hunted back into raving fever!"

Mr. Lordy's voice had a definite touch of hysteria by this time, and his fellow-religionists began to huddle closer and closer to Father Wun, like a woolly flock suddenly aware that in their midst is a creature not entirely sheepish; an insignificant beast, but a beast with at least a drop of the blood of a yak or ibex.

And the eyes of John Hush and Tenna Sheer, meeting across the two empty tables, told each other how the faintest quiver of hysteria in *any* voice attracts human attention to the exclusion of everything else.

The attendant, who was, so to say, in the crow's-nest of that near group gave a quick glance at his companions and they all moved forward. Parallel with this forward movement of his fellow-keepers, the red spots in the countenance of the egregious Gewlie faded away, and he resumed his original smile, so volubly saying: “Isn’t it touching how insanity creates such monstrous accusations in simple minds?”

But the hysterical quiver in Mr. Lordy’s tone rose higher yet, and as it rose the man himself became more and more negligible, till, as that high-pitched cry ceased to be composed of coherent words and became like the discordant quavers and semiquavers of a bar of broken music, there did not seem, at least to the eyes and ears of John and Tenna, to be any Mr. Lordy at all, but only a thin quivering gnat-like vibration in the air that kept repeating, “Let me alone! Let me alone! Let me alone! Let me alone!” and then, on a yet wilder and more defiant note, like a whirring of invisible grouse-wings over a rain-soaked moor, “Go away! Go away! Go away! Go away! Let me be! Let me be! Let me be! Let me be!”

The moment was a very painful one to John, and not less so, he could clearly detect, to Tenna, for they both could see that in another minute the attendants would surround this vibration from the void and hustle and rustle it back into the darkness, as if an abortion had presumed to criticise creation and had to be hugged to death on the downy bosoms of celestial midwives!

But — and for the first time to-night — the weary, inscrutable countenance of Father Allen Wun moved like a mountainous sheepfold to protect his frightened flock of huddled sheep.

“Mr. Lordy and Mr. Gewlie,” he remarked calmly, “have anticipated by a few minutes the talk I have begged them to have with me after tea in Mr. Lordy’s room upstairs. You will excuse us, the rest of you, I know? If I hadn’t to catch the eight o’clock bus I would have joined you all in the smoking-room presently, but as it is, I’m afraid I must bid you good night. Both Mr. Lordy and Mr. Gewlie belong to our Saint Patrick’s Dramatic Club and their different approach to all these difficult mental problems has begun to extend, I’m afraid, to regions where, quite naturally and properly, we laymen — I speak as a novice in the presence of so many expert ministers of the great healing profession — must confess to being out of our depth. But it is as a priest of the Church that I must insist, if you’ll permit me, to have a little talk with my two sons here — with you, Mr. Lordy, and with you, Mr. Gewlie — so if you don't mind, gentlemen... and Father Wun turned his eyes in his buttressed, bastioned and bulwarked face without moving his skull by the faintest flicker of an inch. He turned then towards the stealthily advancing but obviously hesitating attendants on one side of him and the fidgety, furtive, feverish group of frightened fellow-Catholics on the other.

It was, as John saw, and as he realised when he caught the expression on her face that Tenna had seen, a crucial moment. The attendants, in spite of the Father's rock-bastioned skull, were still advancing, with the evident intention of laying their hands upon Mr. Lordy and removing him, by the exertion of irresistible though patient force, bodily from the dining-hall, and of conveying him to the particular wing of the establishment where unruly inmates were encouraged to develop second thoughts.

It was clear to John that in these two or three beats of the dragging pulse of time a very great deal was happening, and happening, it seemed to him, to the advantage of Gewlie and to the disadvantage of Mr. Lordy. Gewlie's face had triumphantly petrified itself into his superior smile and there was a movement of his lips as if he were articulating the words, "I will see you later, Father. Yes, a little later, when I have attended to the removal of this ridiculous individual."

Gewlie's eyes were in fact now alight with a sinister magnetic power that seemed to be actually drawing the attendants towards Mr. Lordy. John found himself so absorbed in his recognition of what was going on that for the moment his mental contact with Tenna was broken, and he missed the fact that the girl had moved forward and was now standing alone, half-way between the women's table and the spot where Father Wun was holding the enemy at bay.

John's fear that Mr. Lordy was on the point of losing this terrible tense struggle was now accentuated by the fact that Father Wun himself suddenly moved. This movement arrested John's full attention. It struck him in a curious way. It was as if something much more than an Oriental-looking personage in a dusky cloth suit and a round collar were changing a physical position.

The priest moved so close to Mr. Lordy that the lower portion of a notably ecclesiastical, tightly buttoned, gastronomical abdomen touched one of the disinfectant-reeking side-pockets of that feverish nonentity.

John himself had actually begun to shiver with sympathetic apprehension. This physical change in Father Wun's position troubled him greatly. He felt convinced that it wouldn't have occurred if the priest hadn't been pretty sure that the attendants would carry off Mr. Lordy, and that he, priest of Omnipotence as he was, would be forced to catch his bus without having achieved anything in the service of his God, or of his Church, or of his conscience.

John's one hope, though he would hardly have dared to confess such a crazy thing even to Tenna, was that the contact of that almost episcopal abdomen with Mr. Lordy's coat-pocket might somehow, in the mysteries of magnetic transference, whirl the man out of danger.

It was at that extremely crucial second that the voice of Tenna Sheer, sounding like the wind through a husky, threshed-out hollow straw almost at John's elbow, became audible. There had been a cessation of talk among the Catholics when the priest made that paternal move to Mr. Lordy's side; and it was therefore in a silence that gave to her words a startling emphasis that everyone heard her say: "I think I saw Mr. Frogcastle just now crossing the grass. He must be going to see Doctor Echetus."

It was like the explosion of an occult bomb. Thrusting himself between the two attendants who were nearest to Mr. Lordy, the panic-stricken Gewlie dragged them off towards the only window in the hall.

As for Tenna, she hurried back to the women's part of the room, where, completely indifferent to Father Wun's momentous tea-party, a group of female inmates was listening with not a few nudges and giggles and chuckles and spasms of delight — for it was evident that the springtime aura of this twenty-sixth day of March was as active inside as it was outside Glint Hall — to a scene between a big plump bouncing girl, whose real name was Lavinia Tatters, but who from a very early age had been christened Tottie Creambo, and the elderly gentleman whom, as Mr. Lordy had pointed out to John at their first encounter, because for some reason he'd reminded her of her father, Tenna had on her first appearance at Glint Hall blindly attacked.

But fortunately for everybody except Gewlie, Tenna had turned her back on the women's table before the appearance of old Rumpibus and Tottie. It was, therefore, with a free mind that she could join the alliance, not unknown in history, between orthodoxy and insanity and assist them, for the time being at any rate, to defeat the Devil.

John himself had switched his gaze from the girl to Gewlie, in time to mark before the man dragged the attendants away the look of ghastly panic on his face. Gewlie's features had indeed contorted themselves into a horrible mask of terror.

"What does he suppose," John foolishly asked himself, "that a pruner of peaches and a planter of raspberry canes can possibly do to a medically approved attendant at a scientifically conducted lunatic-asylum?"

But as Gewlie's victims forgot, or they wouldn't have been where they were, and as Father Allen Wun seems to have forgotten or he wouldn't have been where *he* was, the inflictors of physical pain in this world are, as a rule, save under special conditions, less deft in their poignant art than their brethren the inflictors of mental pain.

That the opposite of active sadism is passive masochism is undoubtedly sound logic, but the appallingly intimate link between a distorted imagination and the horror-nerve which the power that creates our particular dimension of the multi-verse has inserted in the human-animal nature, as the vivisectors in their research laboratories know well, is by no means confined to sex-perversity.

The expression of horrible terror that convulsed the features of the man Gewlie at that moment lodged itself in John's secret gallery of memorable images, and became a *memento crudelitatis* and a lasting warning against projecting the faintest sadistic vibration into the ebbing and flowing ocean of floating subhuman thoughts that surrounds us all.

The red blotches on Gewlie's face increased as rapidly as the skin between them became deathly white. It was as if all the blood in his body, rushing inwards to quench the mad thirst of the terror-monster in his soul, had lost its way, and while drops of it had got caught in various skin-holes, other projections of it were drumming at his eyes, pounding at his ears, gurgling in his chest, and, like condensed steam in an engine gone wrong, were not only causing the nerves in his face to give mechanical twitches but had even gone so far as to force certain muscles in his throat to utter inarticulate terror-sounds that were not only beyond anything human but even beyond anything animal.

It was as if the unfortunate man's paroxysm of terror had reached such a point that it had broken down some biological barrier between animal sensibility and the sensitiveness of such inorganic planetary substances in the stellar galaxy as can be imagined shrinking at the threat of some atomic explosion that could throw them back into the void of non-existence! The unhappy wretch had returned from the window, leaving the other attendants to watch the scene from a distance; for it was clear that Mr. Lordy was now quite calm and that Father Wun had the situation well under control.

Gewlie was in fact now standing in baffled, frustrated, defeated helplessness, like a convicted criminal, who, having exhausted every vista of assault, was watching the closing of every corridor of escape. And yet nothing about the man's figure or about the expression of his face suggested any change in his essential nature. His defeat had nothing to do with what we call conversion. It was merely a reduction to temporary helplessness.

"Well, my friends," Father Wun began, looking steadily at Mr. Lordy, who with his mouth dribbling and his eyes dilated, was staring at his dumbfounded enemy much as a spell-bound rabbit might stare at blood-sucking weasel, half of whose head has suddenly been blown off. "Well, my friends, will you let me say good night now, good night to all of you here? My sons, Lordy and Gewlie, are going to talk matters over with me upstairs. Come, my sons, we will soon find out what's wrong with Glint from the viewpoint of the blessed saints. 'Tis *they*, after all, isn't it, who are the true astronomers and the true discoverers who know where to look for the real zodiacal signs in our human darkness? Come, Gewlie! Come, Lordy!"

And incontinently, taking advantage of the abnormal and almost embarrassing quiescence into which everybody had fallen, including the attendants, who now acted like well-drilled troopers who had been disbanded, Father Wun led his submissive captives away. Past the other table he led them, past the group who had collected round Tottie Creambo and old Mr. Rumpibus, past the loiterers drifting towards the reading-room and the smoking-room, until he reached the foot of the stairs leading to the men's quarters.

It was as soon as Tenna turned her back on Gewlie and Lordy that she perceived old Rumpibus and Tottie. At the sight of them she forgot John altogether and walked straight towards them. John followed her somewhat anxiously, and the Catholics from the tea-party followed John.

Meanwhile the discomfited attendants, talking in a less confident and less casual tone than was usual among themselves, came slowly behind.

"These gentry," thought John, as he became aware of their presence bringing up the rear and caught their murmurings, "will be giving short shrift to any *other* signs of revolt among us! Father Wun, is he? Well! With the help of Tenna, for to-night at least Father Wun has won!"

8. THE COMMANDER

"YOU DID IT," whispered John to Tenna as soon as they stood together. "I thought that devil had beaten us! And he sure would have if it hadn't been for you. You're a wonder, you really are! Do you think the Father will put a spoke into his wheel?"

Tenna made no reply, and when he bent down to get a look at her face he was surprised and distressed to see an expression upon it he had never seen there before. It was an intent look and yet an abstracted look.

It was an awe-inspiring look and yet it was a wild and reckless look. It was the look of an agitated revolutionary torn between two very different if not opposite methods of revolt. In fact, Tenna's face had become an arena where a gladiatorial struggle was going on.

John followed her gaze. It was fixed upon the dignified and venerable old gentleman whose first name he had already discovered to be Zedekiah, commonly shortened to Zed, and whose surname was Rumpibus.

And suddenly John remembered Mr. Lordy's words about Tenna's crazy assault upon this old man soon after her arrival here two years ago. Yes, Tenna's eyes *were* fixed on Mr. Rumpibus now, and her whole body, as he could feel when he took hold of her arm above the elbow with his right hand, was quivering.

But that she was struggling valiantly against her obsession was clear, for he could see the twitchings in her forehead, and he could see she had drawn her lower lip tightly into her mouth. This time he began to pray that the grumbling attendants behind him would intervene and pack Tottie off to the reading-room and old Rumpibus to the smoking-room — at any rate, separate them. Wasn't that sort of thing exactly what these cursed attendants were for?

Missy Creambo was obviously teasing her old gentleman with every accusation, tantalisation, provocation, instigation, manipulation, implication, improvisation, monopoligation, desquamation and titillation that came, it could hardly be said into her head, but into whatever nerve-centre connected with the head is dedicated to the exciting and provoking of what are popularly known as “the senses”.

Although John had come to suspect from what he had already heard about him that the “Dean” of Glint Hall was an expert at drawing to his person every vibration of persecution, every brand of mockery, every gesture of provocation that occurred in his neighbourhood, it had never crossed his mind that this insanely masochistic old gentleman could have any effect on Tenna or revive that weird storm of perilous feeling that had swept through her when she first saw him two years ago.

“I must get her away,” he thought. “I must take her to our corner in the smoking-room.”

“Shall we—” he demanded of his companion in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by those who were near and sufficiently conventional not to arouse the attention of those who were further away, “shall we have another game of draughts, if our place of last night hasn’t been stolen by anybody?”

As he spoke he offered her his arm with as much natural ease as if they had been in a dancing-hall rather than in an institution, but she snatched at the wrist he offered and began whispering to him in a low, concentrated, agitated voice. What she was saying as the spluttered syllables and broken sentences, each one of them growing more disturbing and more startling, as it followed its predecessor, was a dramatic denunciation of Mr. Rumpibus.

“He leads her on,” Tenna murmured. “Can’t you see what he’s doing? He’s driving her crazy. He’s forcing her to go further and further! He’s drawing her on to make her strike him; and when once she does that, it’ll be all up with her. She won’t be able to restrain herself! She’ll pick up something from somewhere, don’t you see, that will really hurt him before them all! Oh, it maddens me to see him do it! He oughtn’t to be allowed to do it!”

Tenna’s silence when her whispers ceased was more agitating to John Hush than her words, for her clutch at his wrist tightened and the pressure of her pulse upon his pulse united them in a dim, blood-dark, cowering riot of throbbing dread that gave him the feeling that they were both wrapped in the same bundle of hunted guilt, a bundle that only wanted to roll, of its own volition, out of the room into the corridor, and out of the corridor down the staircase, and through the door into the garden, and out of the garden under those spikes under the bridge!

It was for John the most unpleasant moment he had had since his arrival in the place. And his discomfort was increased by the way the attendants were now obstinately pressing upon them from behind, longing — he could actually feel the vibration of this longing — to reassert themselves over the inmates after their defeat by Father Wun.

And John had also begun to be troubled by something much more serious: namely by the fact that he had begun to look at Tenna in a way he had prayed to avoid. This was due partly to the vibratory aura of Mr. Rumpibus and partly to a telepathic wave of suspicious viciousness from the attendants behind him, who were obviously jostling both Tenna and himself towards the reading-room in the manner of silent but sharp-toothed sheep-dogs who can hardly wait for some of their flock to behave badly so that a modicum of barking if not of biting might be in order.

Until this unfortunate minute his feeling tor Tenna had been entirely ideal and romantic. He worshipped the startling originality of her mind; and as for her strange, aloof, evasive face, it reminded him of the angel in the Virgin of the Rocks with the long-extended finger pointing towards the divine child.

But now at this confused and disturbed moment he couldn’t resist staring at one particular wisp of her hair disarranged in her present agitation and twisted into the special kind of tangle, that, for some fabulous cause which none of the doctors who had dealt with his case could discover, his demon made him so desperate to clip, cut, carry off, and keep, till, perhaps — oh, madness! — he burnt it with a match.

Yes, this was the first time since they had met that his curious perversity had brought *her* into the circle of its casting-net. John Hush was not one to miss the appalling seriousness of this shock to his feeling for Tenna. The danger hit him a blow in his most vulnerable place.

“This will never do!” he groaned, and in the strength of his trouble he uttered these words aloud.

“Never do, never do, young man,” echoed one of the attendants with a patronising chuckle just behind his back. “No, it’ll never do, will it?” the man jeered on. “Never, never do, will it?”

When they had all been projected into the corridor, and John was beginning to feel just as if the two of them really were in serious truth the congealed and aggregated bundle he had imagined them, they were accosted, or rather Tenna was accosted, by the only inmate of Glint Hall who actually behaved as if he *were* out of his mind; that is to say, who behaved in the manner in which most visitors to lunatic-asylums find the inmates behaving — not as ninnies, freaks, antics, and mountebanks, nor as howling, ranting, gesticulating, gibbering, posturing, dribbling, chattering maniacs, nor acting like so many perambulating images of absolute silence or moving masks of irrevocably sealed damnation, but very much as ordinary people.

This was the ex-naval officer, Commander Serius-Ocius, who, after his famous infatuation for Weeny Wimple, the beautiful Tahitian dancer, had retired to the Canary Islands. It must have been his unfortunate return to London from this pleasant retreat that disturbed the balance of his mind. For, once in London, Commander Serius-Ocius got into the habit of behaving in such a manner outside the entrance to Parliament that his conduct compelled the Cabinet to introduce a Private Bill, the passing of which enabled the Home-Secretary, in the interests of the state, to place the gallant gentleman in some appropriate home.

“Are you two people going,” enquired the Commander of our friends, bowing before them, as the poet says, most politely, “to the reading-room or to the smoking-room?”

At this point-blank and perfectly direct challenge John Hush would certainly have extemporised some absolutely fantastic excuse, if he hadn’t just then had the double shock of discovering that not only his new girl-friend but his new-made self — yes, the unfamiliar new self which had been born of his resolve to make the way smooth for his guardian’s union with the beautiful American — were both liable, quite apart from their private affinity, to relapse into their original and totally different aberrations.

So disturbed, indeed, were both our friends by the scene that was going on between Mistress Creambo and old Rumpibus that they were forced to gaze blankly at each other for a second or two in order to realise what these places were to which Commander Serius-Ocius was referring when he talked of reading-rooms and smoking-rooms. Then, speaking simultaneously, and far too impulsively to bother about what words they used, they assured him they were going to the smoking-room.

“Not to play cards, I hope?” remarked the officer from the Canary Islands.

“Oh no!” cried Tenna. “Mr. Hush and I aren’t at all sociable. If we did anything, we’d play draughts.”

“Will you let me share your draughts for half an hour?” enquired the Commander.

Again they were compelled to look at each other; and their looks carried the bewildered blankness that a boy and a girl might have displayed if in the midst of sailing toy boats on the Serpentine they had been suddenly accosted by a foreigner in a turban, who wanted to know the way to the Tower.

“We can find — we can show — we can share,” responded Tenna, with what was at once a curiously eager and a completely absent-minded voice.

“By all means,” John assured him. “We’ll take you straight to where we were sitting last night. It’s a quiet corner, and there’ll be no need to play draughts or indeed play anything else if you don’t want to. There’ll be no need to do anything at all! It really is a quiet corner, isn’t it, Tenna?”

But the girl, with her fingers still clutching his wrist and, if it is permissible to say so, teleporting him forward by a sort of streamlined vibration of invisible will, was far too absorbed in watching Tottie Creambo and Mr. Rumpibus moving towards the reading-room, from which already came the sound of piano-playing, to take any part in this propitiation of the Commander from the Canaries. Miss Creambo’s yellow hair had never been twisted more loosely round her small head, nor had the old black-silk dress that clung to her voluptuous torso and rounded limbs ever given its wearer a more languorous droop or a more enticing allure.

John found it difficult not to imagine himself entering the lists against old Rumpibus, for there could be no disputing Tottie's lecherous desirability. And though he couldn't bring himself to share Tenna's solicitude for Miss Creambo, as opposed to the subtle provocations of Mr. Rumpibus, he was intensely fascinated by that gentleman's exquisitely ascetic features and by the indescribable deftness with which he manipulated his clean-shaven spiritual profile, causing it to cut its way like the prow of a wave-clipping vessel through all those siren enticements, even while he dizzied himself and dazzled himself and dallied and dangled and danced in the aura of that heavy yellow hair and those luxurious caress-inviting curves.

But the Commander from the Canaries, now that he'd grappled with them, was not to be lightly thrown off; and it only needed a second or two of uneasy tension before the disappearance of Miss Tottie's yellow hair and silk-swathed limbs, followed by the incisive and almost papal profile of Mr. Rumpibus — just in time, John couldn't help thinking, to avoid being beheaded by the reading-room door — threw the two friends completely into his power.

And the Commander lost no time in boarding the vessel he had captured. There was no great stir, nor any particular flurry of speculation as the three of them entered the smoking-room and made their way between the tables to last night's corner. Yes, the waste-paper receptacle was still there, and the draught-board with its opposing black and white bodyguards was still there; and it was easy for John Hush, who for all the Commander's quarterdeck presence of mind was much more socially alert, to borrow, with hurried apologies, an empty armchair, a chair much more suited to a philosophical symposium than to a round game; and ensconced in this throne "out of time", as Father Toby might have called it, or "out of space", as Father Wun might have corrected him, Serius-Ocius of the Canaries dropped anchor.

John Hush and Tenna Sheer sat as still as mice listening to the murmur of his hypnotising voice and struggling with all their concentrated attention to follow his startling ideas. They kept their eyes fixed upon him, never once, as most lovers would have felt compelled to do, exchanging a glance of sympathetic bewilderment, and never once, not by as much as one timid question, interrupting the flow of his words.

The Commander was no mean exponent of original ideas when once he was fairly launched. He was a clean-shaved man of about fifty, with closely cut grey hair; unusually small ears, growing as near to his skull as seemed possible if they were to fulfil the purpose of ears; a large, leathery, weather-beaten face; a mouth that was permanently open with a painfully striving look that suggested hard-drawn laboriously-taken breaths and an intelligence concentrated, at the cost of a well-concealed strain and at the risk of the snapping of some secret muscle or dynamic valve or metallic spring, on the single and sole purpose of keeping the ship afloat.

Since every inmate of Glint Hall had strong ideas about every other inmate's most intimate case-history, it was a commonplace of gossip that Commander Serius-Ocius had officially been directed to take a prolonged holiday under Doctor Echetus by reason of a peculiar habit he had fallen into of waylaying Members of Parliament of both parties on their way to Westminster and informing them of the absolute necessity of being more philosophical in their attitude to public affairs if the ship of state was to weather the present storm.

Little did the incorruptible officer know that this wisdom of the ancients to which he desired to recall the rulers of our lives to-day had never been more realistically justified than in the immediate effect of his personality to-night on these two agitated friends.

John Hush, as he listened to him, was telling himself that his own particular mania, a purely erotic one, was no illusion, no hallucination, no fixed idea of an erroneous kind. The curls of girls *were* alluring. Only fanatical miscreants and ferocious misogynists could deny it. His trouble was therefore purely a matter of degree. To *look* at a girl's hands or knees or mouth or neck or bosom or ankles or eyebrows or hair with delirious and dissolving ecstasy could not be called insane. It was legitimate fetish-worship and had multitudinous roots in Nature; indeed, as used by Nature in a myriad ways for the propagation of life.

But was insanity used by Nature? Well, maybe it was! John sucked in his lower lip in a grimace that with him took the place of that mysterious mental gesture that people call "smiling to themselves". But at any rate for to-night, with Tenna herself so upset by *her* lack of degree, or proportion, or whatever it was, in *her* particular mania, it was hardly a moment to dally with the limits of Nature's indulgence.

In a fierce effort to forget what deliciousness it would be to snip off that maddening brown tress which at the moment wasn't only "disarrayed", as the poet Spenser would call it, but was damp with the perspiration of agitation as well as of the heat of the room, John Hush now set himself to stare at the Commander's mouth, which revealed what his eyes and nose and chin and the whole shape of his skull did their utmost to conceal, namely the desperateness of the man's obsessed concentration.

At several of the card-playing tables in their neighbourhood people looked at each other between the moves of their game with a vague faint quizzical amusement, as much as to say: "Poor wretches! That's what comes of being kind to the father of all bores!"

What the card-players couldn't see, and what the Members of Parliament he waylaid couldn't see, was that this competent and experienced naval officer, whose eyes and nose and chin and forehead were to the highest degree professional, conventional and class-conditioned, revealed not only by the words that issued from his mouth but by the form and imprint, by the psychological tension and stress-moulded expression of the mouth out of which they proceeded, a power of spirit that was positively apostolic. They couldn't see that in the course of every single day and in the course of every single night, whether he were awake or asleep, for it was a peculiarity of Commander Serius-Ocius to practise his philosophy in his dreams, the spirit of this man gave orders from the quarterdeck of Nature to the rudder of the human ship, directing its course and navigating it through windless calms as well as through water-spouts and typhoons.

"I've been waiting for you two," was what he was now telling our friends. "Yes, waiting for you; for I knew by the law of averages that, if I stayed in this place for as long as they let me stay, the chances were that I should find the undivided persona humana. As somebody says in the Symposium of Plato, men and women were once one person, a person who must have moved through life in a circular manner... in fact like a wheel... and I have learnt from this inspired hint that an 'undivided persona'... such as is formed by the conjunction of certain unusually harmonious lovers like yourselves... is bound to understand me... for when this person... I mean the 'undivided persona'... who advances into truth like a wheel... hears my message... yes, when this circular person, this undivided person, this 'persona humana', as you might say, 'in the round', this real two-in-one who is much more divine, as Pythagoras taught, than any Trinity, being wholly free from the diabolical taint of odd numbers and wholly embodied in the divine potency of even numbers... when this two-in-one catches, that is to say when *you two*, my dear friends, who are now listening to me, catch the drift of my message, you will understand why the truth has been delivered to me once for all by great creative Nature and why it is that she compels me to tell the rulers of land and sea how to rule and the creatures of land and sea how to be ruled."

He paused at this point and looked in turn at his two hearers. He looked at Tenna first and was at once aware of a wave of tenderness towards him, but at the same time was conscious of an intangible spiritual something, a sort of shimmering opalescent resistant object that was about the size of an ordinary dish-cover and which she seemed to have the power, while she shot at him eager, hurried, sympathetic, and even appealing glances, of projecting from her bosom, like a Highland target or Homeric buckler, as if to make sure no unfair advantage was being taken of her yielding mood.

Oh, how well did Commander Serius-Ocius know the various sensations of pride, some exciting, some soothing, some *just there*, to be put up with, as he would put up with the advertisements in an absorbing magazine — that he experienced now! But his pride soon had a fall. With his left hand resting on the rim of the waste-paper receptacle, and his skull pressing against the side of the raggedly-covered wooden back of his faded armchair, his exultation made his receptivity so intense that his conversion of our lovers actually began to be seriously interrupted by the sub-human consciousness of this same ancient chair whose last-century mischief and antiquated malevolence began obscurely teasing this polite occupier of a piece of furniture formerly used by chair-ridden great-aunts with large tabby cats on their laps.

The Commander now surveyed the young couple before him with the neatly arranged draught-board pressing against her silky black sash and against his silver watch-chain, and it struck him how easily at a signal from some Doctor Echetus in the world of the inanimate that draught-board might obediently cut them both asunder and reduce them to a half-woman and a half-man!

Ah, and how well did he know the sensation he now experienced as he watched those young heads in front of him and saw behind them all those card-players so absorbed in their games that they were like a fleet of little skiffs in a great mist, diminishing, dilating, advancing, receding, outlining themselves with menacing clarity, and then again vanishing like phantoms!

And then the Commander looked from the young woman to the young man, and as he did so a whole set of disturbing memories assailed him. His own grey sleeve about the wrist of the hand that dallied with the rubbish-box exchanged itself for a much darker one with gleaming official stripes, and he felt as if he ought to be uttering brief, clear, practical, technical words of command; anything but strange intimations of mystical wisdom!

But now instead of those old mechanically jerked-out laconic syllables such as, “yes sir! no sir! three feet to starboard, sir!” what he heard from the young man opposite him were the diplomatic words: “I don’t want to tire you with questions, Commander, but if you could put into a plain and simple sentence the chief points of your new philosophy it would be of the greatest interest to us both. Miss Sheer has been very good to me since I arrived yesterday afternoon and I hope you too, sir, will help me with your advice. It isn’t easy, is it, sir, to get reconciled to the routine of a place like this? But Miss Sheer tells me the worst feelings come *after* a patient has just got through the first settling down. There's a revulsion, she says, that comes then, that is worse than any of the first shocks, because there's an unpleasant sense of the thing going on — if you can follow me, sir? — for a rather long time — going on, in fact, if you will let me put it crudely, *for ever.*"

From its expression of simple concern Commander Serius-Ocius's face became a living mask of heroic compassion. Both the young people opposite him were regarding him with the look of a pair of precocious children who in the midst of an elaborate game have got themselves, for all their cleverness, into such appalling trouble that they can't get out of it without the help of a competent as well as a kind policeman.

"Well, well, well, well!" he repeated sympathetically. "It's clear that you two are born — yes; I can't refrain from saying so — born to be recipients of my doctrine. And it's very simple. That's the beauty of it, my dear children; it's so very simple. All you've got to use is your mind. And, mark you, it needn't be a clever mind. It needn't even be a sane mind. That's what people are too stupid to understand. It can be a crazy mind or a silly mind. It can even be an idiotic mind."

At this moment John Hush made a scarcely perceptible movement with his head so as to get one of his eyes, his left eye as a matter of fact, into focus with one of Tenna's.

"The mistake," the Commander went on, "that everybody makes, is to assume you have to be wise and clever and intellectual to get at the truth about life. My philosophy teaches the opposite of all that nonsense! You've got to clear your mind at the start of all other ideas. In fact you've got to clear your mind of *all* ideas! You've got to use your mind: that's what I teach. But not for the purpose of thinking. You've got to use your mind to stop yourself from thinking! What do you suppose our minds were made for? For the low, corrupting, insidious, perverse, drug-like vice of thinking? The gods forbid! The mind is far too rare a thing, too delicate a thing, too subtle a thing, too complicated a thing, too noble and sacred a thing, to be used for thinking! That would be like using a magic wand for a walking-stick or a porridge-spoon to move a manure-heap.

"The mind's everything. But you don't want to wash your feet in everything! The mind's air, water, earth, fire. It's life; it's death; it's the world; it's the end of world. A mad mind is simply a mad world. A weak mind is simply a weak world. There's nothing else, I tell you, my children, except reservoirs upon reservoirs of surplus matter.

"And don't forget this, my friends, you *are* your minds! When people talk about the soul surviving the body they're only reminding themselves of the importance of their minds! Our minds *are* our souls. Whether any of them succeeds in surviving death is a question none has ever answered or can ever answer. Our minds are surrounded by what used to be called 'matter' and now is called by a lot of other names.

"But calling it other names doesn't change its nature. Only one thing changes the nature of matter, and that is the diving into it of mind. It is by plunging your minds, my dear children, into what you touch, hear, see, smell and taste, that you endow poor, patient, humble, passive, enduring matter, which by itself is nothing, with all its magic attributes. They are all in you, for you are a multitude. Every self is a multitude and every self is a mind, and the plunging of every mind into matter creates a new world.

"That is why it is ridiculous to say that there is only one world. There are as many worlds as there are minds to plunge into matter, and these are beyond counting.

"And don't you see what a revolution this makes in our whole system of life? What do we all want? Only one thing, children, only one thing! To enjoy ourselves! But do we want to enjoy ourselves in the same way? Of course not. For no two of us are alike. Well then, what are the things that hinder us from enjoying ourselves? Who doesn't know the damned list? Pain first of all; then cold and hunger; then fear; then illness and discomfort; then disappointment, frustration, humiliation; then sex, sex in too big, or too little, or too eccentric doses; then some mental disturbance, such as those that get us here; and finally — and this is far the worst of the lot, save raving frenzy or extreme pain — what we call boredom, *ennui*, feeling dead-sick of everything!

"Now let me ask you a plain question, my children. Is there any way, even for a very short period of time, by which we can shake off these obstacles to enjoying ourselves?

And, if there is, *what* is it? Well, children, I would answer this question at once. There is such a way. And I'll tell you what it is in one word. *Forgetting!*

"Great creative Nature has given us the power of forgetting everything except extreme pain. As we know well enough from our life in this place, madness doesn't necessarily follow a person into his sleep. Nobody sleeps sounder than a certified lunatic.

"*Before* you're certified you suffer from two quite special horrors. The first of these might be called the fear of insanity in general. The second can only be called by some very queer name known to the person who feels it and known to nobody else. In fact this horror I will call our personal and particular mania.

"After you're certified — at least this I understand to be the usual experience — you lose the dread of madness in general but in place of this you begin to experience an increased terror of what I might call your 'old particular'. And now I come to a very peculiar phenomenon, and it is this. Though your horror of your 'old particular' is increased, when it is actually *upon you* you can endure it much more easily when you're 'certified' than you could before. And there is a curious reason for this. There emanates a certain aura from the pressure around us here of so many souls exerting their divine power of forgetting!

"There isn't an inmate among us here — no, *nor* an attendant" — and Commander Serius-Ocius gave a little jerk of his close-cropped gentlemanly skull in a direction that might be described as backward and upward— "who is not concentrating on forgetting. Nor is it concealed from any inmate of any asylum in this country that the attendants grow very quickly more dangerously demented than their patients. Thus, taking patients and attendants together — and of course it wouldn't do to exclude from these creators of such blessed clouds of oblivion the illustrious head of our institution — thus there is created here an aura of what might be called retrogressive nihilism, or the power of *uncreating the created*, the power, you might say, of unliving life, unsolidifying matter, unactualising reality, and of reducing the *is* to the level of the *is not.*

“Further than this, in the sublime art of ‘retrogressive nihilism’, it would be difficult to go, unless we reduced the historic *was* to what never under any condition could possibly have been. But now I will tell you, my dear friends, what we’ve got to do with our minds instead of letting them give way to this worse than bestial vice, this *human* vice of thinking. I tell you we have perverted the true direction of Nature’s spontaneous movement.

“Some devil has done it, some proud morbid degenerate depraved-perverted devil who has hated the large free motions of the stars in their courses, and of the constellations, and of the galaxies, and of the nebulae, and of the revolving planets! What we must do, my dear friends, is to break away for ever from this vicious, stinking, polluted, maniacal habit of using the mind to think!”

At this point the intense emotion surging up behind the Commander’s own mind brought it about that his tone ceased to resemble either the tone of a quarterdeck voice, or the tone of a lights-burning-bright-sir voice, and became the kind of fatally well-known tone that in a second drew the two tall attendants towards the utterer of it.

“Pardon me, sir!” whispered John hurriedly, bending forward over the elbow of the Commander’s armchair. “Pardon me, sir! I believe those officials are going to meddle with us!”

The naval man screwed up his eyes as if to look through a telescope. Then, turning his neatly-shaped head a little to one side, he closed one eye and surveyed the tall attendants through the other, as if he were measuring them from the mouth of a turret-gun in preparation for giving them a broadside fore and aft.

Relaxing after this, as if he really had disposed of them, he continued his disclosure in a quieter voice. “You will say,” he went on, “that there’s nothing for the mind to do if it stops thinking. I reply there is *everything* for it to do!”

As John listened, with his eye on the attendants and on some of the tables, too, where people had paused in their game, he began to wonder whether the leading statesmen of our island, as they were arrested by this ancient mariner on the threshold of Parliament, actually heard a single word of what he said ere they looked round wildly for a policeman.

“Sane people are really rather stupid,” John said to himself, “to take no interest at all in our ideas. If Hamlet pretended madness and Don Quixote survived madness and Ajax died mad, madness can’t be a negligible thing.”

But Serius-Ocius had begun again. “A mind virgin to all thought,” he said, “can become a diving-suit for the soul to enjoy itself in! I am not asserting that the mind is independent of the body. I’m only saying that it can take from our body, and from the bodily senses, and from time and space, all it needs to form a diving-suit, which, though remaining attached to the body by a sort of umbilical cord, has the power of plunging into any substance it likes outside itself.

“And now I arrive at my central point. What we all live for is happiness. And what is happiness? Happiness is a series of pleasures, of pleasures that in the long run satisfy us completely. Without a number of single pleasures, delicious in themselves, it’s impossible to have any satisfying sequence of pleasures.

“And of what do single pleasures consist? They consist of *simple* pleasures; and here we reach what people call the heart of the matter. All matter is a mass of material outside ourselves. All pleasure is the sensation we experience when we plunge into something outside ourselves. Mind is the self within us and matter is the self without us.

“This plunge of the *self* into the *not-self* is what we call pleasure; and the more we enjoy this plunge, and the more often we make it, the more pleasure we get from life. Therefore we must struggle to disregard and forget all the impressions that hinder this plunge and we must force ourselves at every possible moment, and along with whatever else we may be doing, to keep a portion of our mind free not only to make the plunge but to immerse itself in the element into which it plunges.”

Commander Serius-Ocius’s voice had again risen to a disturbing pitch and again certain of the groups of card-players had stopped their play to listen. The two attendants had now become three attendants and were clearly only waiting to pounce till it was unavoidably evident that the ex-naval man had gone far enough to justify his being placed in the punishment wing of the institute.

And suddenly the Commander, grown aware that there was opposition to him in the room and a hostile silence, leapt to his feet.

“It is my duty,” he cried in a thundering voice, “to announce to everyone here the beginning of a new world! The new world will not be given us by religion, nor will it be discovered for us by science, but it will be created by ourselves as if we were gods! We shall create it out of the reservoir of ever-fresh material which lies at the back of space and time. I have only been able to discover this because of my training in the Navy, and it is as a discovery of the Navy that I announce—”

But to John’s and Tenna’s consternation the attendants had laid hold of him now and were taking him by the arm as he stood confronting the whole room as if he was quelling a mutiny at sea. With his compact close-cropped skull, his straight figure, his square shoulders, his hands in the side-pockets of his grey well-fitting jacket, he looked as if he were the Admiral of all the West defending the Straits of Gibraltar from an armada of Mongols.

9. HAMMER AND NAILS

THE TWO ATTENDANTS who had seized the Commander by his arms were not his only menace. There was a third person there, who was already beginning to unfold with scientific nicety what Tenna from her experience of the place knew well as a special kind of strait-waistcoat recently invented by Doctor Echetus and which had the peculiarity of being able to be compressed into so small a space that it could be carried about in the pocket of any attendant who understood how to slip it neatly and quickly over a patient's unruly torso and rebellious arms.

But suddenly the attention of each of the three keepers as well as of their powerful antagonist, was diverted by an excited inrush of a new crowd of inmates who bursting into the room began calling out: "Where is Commander S.O.? We want Commander S.O.! The Father says Commander S.O. is mentioned in the paper this morning! The Father says the paper says Commander S.O."

Undeterred by the presence of the three attendants, the newcomers, whom Hush recognised at once as the group of Catholics he had met at tea, were soon hurrying and scrambling into our friend's corner. They were all excited and they were all in high spirits.

"Had they," John asked himself, "been crowding round the door of Mr. Lordy's bedroom in the hope of seeing in the flesh some palpable exorcism of Satan? And had their enthusiasm for righteousness taken the form of hero-worship for the Navy?"

Suddenly John Hush saw Mr. Lordy among them. But it was a Mr. Lordy in a transformed mood. The cloud of predestined insignificance which habitually emanated, like a subhuman aura from the man's eyes, nose, mouth, forehead, cheeks, chin, head, neck, shoulders, hips, legs and feet, had, so to say, changed its colour. It was still there, this emanation of something as typically and normally insignificant as the smell of a fox is foxy or the smell of a fish is fishy; but it was no longer blurred by the smoke of self-contempt.

It was as unobtrusive as ever, but it was satisfied to be itself. Its radiation, like a wavering flickering of light following the dragging footsteps of some unknown tramp-saint, caused its possessor no embarrassment.

He felt no pride in it. But if he ever were conscious of it, it gave him a faintly agreeable sensation, like a small acid-drop in the mouth.

"This must be," thought John Hush, "the magic of the Church of Rome. How on earth can that Father have worked it? Did they all see him putting the fear of God into Gewlie? No, that wasn't the way the Church of Rome did things! Father Wun must have won again by some subtle appeal to some secret virtue in this horrible man known to nobody else; and this momentary release from his obsession must have created such a vacuum in the soul of the egregious Gewlie that the living waters of natural feeling must have rushed to that spot from every quarter of the compass and brimmed up so over poweringly in the soul of everybody there that they had to find an outlet in some traditional popular channel, which of course the accident of the Commander being mentioned in the paper had beautifully supplied."

But that gentleman's voice was being raised again to its more than quarter-deck resonance and John Hush noticed that one of the attendants, the one with the Doctor's patent strait-waistcoat, had vanished from the scene; doubtless to fetch reinforcements for the forces of order.

In desperation he turned to Tenna, who was standing by herself with a strained and troubled frown and with her eyes on the door of the room. She clearly was listening intently; and John's imagination began conjuring up a sea-fight wherein the rest of them were all engaged on deck while she alone at the stem of the vessel was scanning the horizon in the expectation of the spouting of a whale.

Alas! John knew only too well who his friend's whale was! It was a human person. It was that old gentleman who not only derived satisfaction from being teased, tormented, and tantalised by Tottie Creambo, but would have derived a similar satisfaction from being beaten up by Tenna for permitting such liberties to be taken with him by Tottie!

“For God’s sake, tell me how to quiet him!” John now kept whispering in Tenna’s ears. “Listen to me, Tenna! For God’s sake listen to me! We must quiet him before any more of them come! They’ll keep him shut up for months if we let him go on, and you know how he’ll feel if they do that!”

At last she heard him. With a deep sigh that seemed to shake her whole body, her tension relaxed, and very slowly, as if on the countenance of a patient recovering by degrees from an anaesthetic, a whimsical smile flitted across her face. What puzzled John as completely as it delighted him was that she didn’t seem to need any further elucidation of that moment’s crisis or of what had to be done. She seemed to awake from her own private grief straight into the Commander’s private grief, and to understand them both equally well. She was like a sea-bird who has dived after a fish, and who now, safely returned to the surface, flies through the air with as much knowledge of what that more rarified element requires of it as it displayed beneath the water when it caught the fish.

And what she did now was as astonishing to John as was the calm and collected assurance with which she did it. She went straight to Mr. Lordy and had a hurried word with him; a word which John, who was watching her with as much anxiety as he was feeling for the Commander, felt impelled to overhear.

“Can you remember, Mr. Lordy,” she asked him in a clear whisper, “what it was you told *him*?” — and she gave her head a little jerk in the direction of the Commander, who was now standing, though the men were not actually touching him, with an attendant on each side.

“I mean,” she continued, “that night he was so excited on the staircase and what you said calmed him down so completely.”

Seldom had John Hush felt more respect for a living creature than he felt for Mr. Lordy at that second. The intense guilelessness of the puzzled and baffled gaze the man turned upon Tenna would have made anyone, he decided, trust him with their wife, their child, their country, and their country’s gods!

"What did I say to him? Oh, Miss Tenna, please believe me when I tell you I had nothing I could say to him. But wait — wait! Doesn't it say in the Bible or in Shakespeare, 'Nothing can come of nothing?' Oh, but I do remember now! I told him about Lieutenant Lordy, a member of our family in the what-do-you-call-it century when there was a hole in the ship and the water was rushing in and our relative said to him — I mean to the captain, or admiral, or whatever he was then — I mean to Lord Nelson— 'If you please, sir,' our relative said, 'we'll be in Davy Jones' locker by this time to-morrow!' And all Lord Nelson answered — and our relative remembered his very words, because when he was paid off and back home, as you might say, he was took by what in those what-do-you-call-them days they called 'horse's fever' and he repeated Lord Nelson's very words to the Reverend who was anointing him, and that's how he came to be called 'Lord Nelson's Pint' because you'd only to treat him to a pint and the admiral's very words were yours—"

By this time not only John Hush but everybody within hearing, including Commander Serius-Ocius himself and each of the two attendants, was listening intently; nor did it take John very many minutes to become aware that the attendants had begun to edge away as rapidly and imperceptibly as they could, and had even begun to present the appearance of having no longer any particular interest in that corner of the room.

It was at that critical moment that John perceived that the man with Doctor Echetus's latest invention in his pocket had returned, but was now whispering rather foolishly and even crossly to his reinforcements and was clearly sending them off whence they'd come.

"And what," enquired Tenna, who had gathered up, John could see, into an invisible ball of gossamer thread the whole psychic aura of this improvement in the situation, "did Lord Nelson actually say to your ancestor, Mr. Lordy?"

The little man shut his eyes as if to shut out a world made up of imaginary horrors created by the activity of those accursed "thoughts" whose perilous frivolity the Commander wished to restrain. "What our relative told Lord Nelson," he announced, "was that they'd all be dead men by that time to-morrow; and what Lord Nelson replied was: 'Pump at the water — hammer at the nails! Leave till to-morrow who sinks or sails!'"

John stepped back a pace or two then, and so did Tenna, for it became clear that Mr. Lordy's tone in uttering this quotation, quite as much as the quotation itself, had saved the day. It was a commonplace tone and it was a conventional tone, but it was a tone that in its very conventionality conveyed so clearly the familiar picture painted by the Lord of Hosts himself all over our old island of brown beer in pewter-mugs, of leather-trodden sawdust on uneven floors, of mongrel dogs lifting grateful legs against whitewashed posts, of creaking sign-boards, and finally of "the wind and the rain and a little tiny wit making content with our fortunes fit", that it swept into Doctor Echetus's laboratory for lost dogs and demented men as if it brought a nepenthe that could redeem all sorrows and assuage all pain. At any rate, the strait-waistcoat expert and his colleagues had vanished, while the attendants who had been at the Commander's elbow had not even resumed their perambulation of the room but had seated themselves at a table near the door and were now sedately smiling at each other as they alternately shook a dice-box.

All this, John Hush soon realised, was no miracle. He had only to lend an ear to what the Commander, who had reseated himself in his armchair, was now saying to Mr. Lordy, to understand what the strait-waistcoat man, the second he came back, had realized in a flash, that — pro tem, anyway — the devil of insanity had been driven out and Commander Serius-Ocius was once more a quiet and competent ex-officer of the fleet.

Mr. Lordy himself, who had worked this temporary cure of the most distinguished of his fellow-inmates, solely and simply by becoming a medium for all the undistinguished persons who, from the furthest Hebrides to the Scilly Isles, had in the last hundred years uttered, and with no particular emphasis, the word "Nelson", was only anxious now that these well-meaning but abjectly heretical pair of friends should not altogether miss the significance of the coming among them, even for a brief hour or two, of a priestly successor to the apostolic revealers of the one Truth.

It can be believed that neither of our friends was lacking in interest in the fate of Attendant Gewlie nor at the same time very surprised to learn that since the particular kind of wickedness in which the wretch was such a master was not a "mortal" but only a "venial" sin, this weasel-like pursuer of human rabbits had not even been threatened with dismissal from Glint Hall. Well, he would only have gone to another asylum if he had been dismissed from this one; and, after all, there *was* his maniacal terror of Mr. Frogcastle to restrain him here, not to speak of Father Wun's awareness of his horrible vice.

"You were saying, sir—" John hesitatingly observed, for though the last thing he wanted to do was to arouse the officer's nervous eloquence again, he knew from his own feelings that while Tenna and he were, so to speak, in the psychic attitude, sitting at the man's feet, it would be embarrassing and difficult to attempt any sort of ordinary give-and-take conversation, "you were saying that the purpose of life is to enjoy ourselves. I didn't want to interrupt you then, but I'd be so grateful, sir, and I'm sure my friends Miss Sheer and Mr. Lordy would say the same, if you'd tell us a little more about your ideas as to the enjoyment of life and where we young ones are apt to get things mixed up.

"I don't want to bother you, sir, if you feel too tired to talk any more" — John added this after a pause, a pause too craftily short, however, for the officer to take advantage of it — "but I'd like to know, and so, I'm sure would my friends here, a little more about this 'plunging' you spoke of into all these various forms and colours of matter, and why it is that this brings us pleasure so deep that such pleasure can be regarded as the purpose of life."

The expression upon the officer's face as he listened to this crafty rigmarole touched John Hush to the heart. He longed to exchange glances with Tenna, who would he felt sure share this spasm of *tendresse*. Chance was as tender to him, however, as he felt towards the Commander, for had he met Tenna's look he would have found it unsympathetic. She was prepared to help the officer against the authorities, but when she perceived on his face the masculine unction of mental superiority and the philosophic pride of being in a position to "lay down" as we say, "the law", a fierce jet of rebelliousness shot through her veins, and the officer's face, that face which to John held a touching revelation of boyish simplicity in its glow of triumphant exposition, became an epitome of all she loathed most in the world; became, in fact, what the world loves to call "benign and fatherly John's chance-given luck certainly held out during the whole length of what followed, for if he had glanced but once into her face he would have been thunderstruck by its expression.

Mr. Lordy did glance at it; and what he saw compelled him to say to himself, “I wish the Father knew what a good Catholic this girl would be! I’m sure he’d try to convert her. She’s the sort of girl who’d make a perfect mother to half a dozen obedient souls. She knows that all insanity comes from pride and can only be really exorcised, as the Father said upstairs just now, through that slit in the skin *we* call ‘humility’, that slit in the skin for which the angels have a heavenly word of their own!”

What had specially struck Mr. Lordy about Tenna was something that John, just because he was listening to her so intently, hadn’t noticed — namely the startling difference between her profile and her full face. “She’s a queer one,” thought Mr. Lordy. “She’s both a profile-girl and a full-face girl!”

And, indeed, Mr. Lordy’s verdict approached the truth. Tenna *was* both these things. In profile, her soft dead-white skin was emphasised by the way her brown hair, hair that was so fine and filmy that it naturally clung together in smooth masses, fell so thickly, like a heavy shadow, over her ear and across the side of her face. Her delicate aquiline nose and small soft chin, together with the tender fluctuating lines at the corner of her mouth, indicative of the exquisitely childish curves with which her lips would part, composed a living portrait that simply and entirely vanished, like the vanishing of a lovely ghost at cockcrow, the moment she turned her head and you saw her full face. Then you realised how pitilessly her unbalanced sensibility, her subhuman shyness, her morbid shrinking from contact with events and people, hurt her and lacerated her; then you realised how all the complicated habits she had acquired of taking life so much harder than others took it left her suffering from a malady that might well have been called the malady of *being a skin short.*

The more he studied the girl’s look, the more sorry for her Mr. Lordy became. It must be, he told himself, the absence from her life of the help of a good priest that caused her front-face to differ from her side-face and to be lined with an anxiety so far beyond the natural wont of her years. She had four deep perpendicular lines descending her forehead and no less than four horizontal ones — very faint, it is true, but the carefully concerned Mr. Lordy was able to count them in that electric-lit corner — crossing her forehead, while her eye-sockets were so deep, and the troubled brown orbs within them so swiftly moving and so glittering with a dangerously intent lustre, that Mr. Lordy experienced a sympathetic shock as she talked to him and even began vaguely wondering if there were anything that a simple person could do to ease her agitation.

One thing he could see clearly. The interest that her young friend Mr. Hush appeared to be taking in this voluble gentleman from the Royal Navy was extremely painful to her. All seven frowns, both the perpendicular ones and the horizontal ones, obviously deepened every time she looked in the Commander's direction, while her eyes in their hollow sockets almost ceased to be brown and took to themselves a peculiarly alarming golden tint as if she were some weird kind of metamorphosed bird — a sandpiper, perhaps, Mr. Lordy thought, considering her long thin limbs! — who might suddenly begin flying round the room and beating its wings against the walls!

But the officer's words, as fascinating to John Hush as they were infuriating to Tenna Sheer, were now beginning to arrest Mr. Lordy's own distracted attention.

"We can't get away from it," Serius-Ocius was saying. "The 'I' in us — and that is of course the mind that uses our body and its senses — is the only soul we've got. The first great mistake a typical Member of Parliament makes is to assume that, because thought can't function without a thinker, there must be within the body, though quite capable of slipping out of it in sleep, or in a trance, or at death, a queerly functioning, formless entity called a 'soul'.

"According to this idea we are presented with the quaint situation of not only possessing two thinkers for one set of thoughts but with the danger that if one of these 'thinkers', for instance this fantastic butterfly called the 'soul', were to slip out of the body and take a holiday, whether in a sleep or a trance, it might take the mind's thoughts — that is to say our thoughts, the thoughts of our mind-self or the living thing that says 'I am I' —

along with it, so that we should be left with nothing but a dumb, deaf, blind unconscious self, every one of whose thoughts have been stolen by the runaway soul.

"I well remember being told once by one of these political rogues — I think it was the Member for Wash Lane, the second son of the first Lord Antimacassar — that his soul always left his body when he was asleep.

"'You don't dream, then?' I said. 'Oh yes,' he cried, 'I'm a terrific dreamer!'

"'But how,' I protested, 'can an animal body deserted by the creature inside it which thinks, that is to say deserted by its own consciousness, have any dreams at all?'

"That *did* stump him, and he began at once, as they always do when defeated in argument, looking round for a policeman. You see now, don't you, my children, the mistake our preposterous rulers make? They are convinced that all thoughts must be the thoughts of thinkers — whereas, of course, there isn't a single traveller by sea who hasn't come upon derelict thoughts drifting on the waves like seaweed, and there isn't a traveller by road who hasn't come upon wind-piled ridges of desert-sand where thoughts are buried thick as the shards of beetles in the cracks of forgotten sepulchres.

"What these same Members of Parliament — good easy men I — are inclined to do, in their anxiety to fob off their thoughts upon their butterfly soul, is to forget that what we call our 'thoughts', speaking in the plural, are really only another name for the inexplicable phenomenon, speaking in the singular, that we call our consciousness. You can find lost 'thoughts' drifting about like fallen leaves or floating seaweed, but it is only from the consciousness in some sort of living creature that they are originally born."

Mr. Lordy had completely given up any further attempt to follow the peculiar reasoning of the man who thought he could teach philosophy to Members of Parliament; but it came rushing into his mind how quaint it would be if the souls of people really could leave their bodies and go roaming about! "Suppose," so he thought in his secret heart, "Father Wun were at this minute watching our proceedings and listening to our conversation; and suppose Father Toby came floating by, like a sea-urchin, mounted upon some great squidlike jelly-fish thing, would I be glad or sorry to see them fight?

"And what would they look like? Oh, how queer it all is! Why are people so odd-looking, anyway, quite apart from their souls? And why should there be people at all? Or a world at all? Or anything at all?"

At this point the Commander bent forward eagerly in his chair and the weird thought crossed the consciousness of John, who was watching the man's worn handsome excited face very earnestly, that his own ambassadorial politeness, learnt in the Balkans and which he knew had become a habit with him, was acting upon this honest sailor like a magic spell, and indeed was having an extremely curious effect on him drawing out from him, as if by an hypnotic process, thoughts and feelings such as in the natural course of events he would have hesitated to express even to those indignant Members of Parliament he was wont to waylay.

"A person's mind," the officer went on with impassioned vehemence, "is himself, his identity, his individuality, his conscious ego. We all of us feel this mind-self within us to be connected with our body, but yet at the same time we feel it to be independent of our body. But what we do *not* feel is that its self-consciousness, its power of realising its past as well as its present, its future as well as its past, is the self-consciousness of a living thing *within* our *body*, a living thing that could leave our body and go moving about quite freely through time and space. We do not feel this because it isn't there to feel.

"There is no soul to go rampaging about. What exists is our self-consciousness, our mind-self, and this, though we feel it to be independent of the body, we also feel it to be dependent upon the body. It is more than the body; but, while the body lives it can only escape from the body in imagination and in dreams. And thus I come, my dear boy—"

Mr. Lordy, who was growing more and more concerned by the expression of Tenna's face, by the gleam in her eyes and by the deepening lines on her forehead, told himself at this point that it was only just in time the officer *had* thrown in "my dear boy" and *had* lowered his voice and concentrated so definitely upon John Hush. "She'd have flown at him in a second," Mr. Lordy told himself, "just as she did at old Rumpibus that day."

“Thus I come,” went on the Commander, “to my answer to your question about pleasure and happiness. These things indeed are the whole purpose of life. Faith, hope, and charity; truth, beauty, science and art; passion and compassion; all these are precious to us only in so far as they make us happy, only in so far as they enable us to enjoy life. And the point of it is that the nature of our ego, of our mind-self, the nature of this ‘I am I’ that is *not* lurking, like an ambiguous parasite, under our skin, but is the companion and mate of our old familiar doomed-to-perish dust-and-ashes body, the nature of our mind-self is such that when it plunges into the forms and colours, the sounds and scents, the atmospheres and wandering airs, of the elements that surround our body — when, I say, it resolves itself into these things, sinks into them, immerses itself in them, loses itself in them, and yet, by that mysterious principle in life, which Jesus seems to have snatched from the air, draws out of them a magical nourishment, then and then only is it happy and content.

“It is this immersion of the mind-self in whatever it may be it chooses to feed upon, that constitutes its secret of enjoying itself; and we must never forget—”

But here the Commander was compelled to drop his dominating flagship tone; not because anybody contradicted him, still less because anyone was jeering at him, but solely because there wasn’t a single person at that moment listening to a word he said. Not that the Commander’s voice ceased at that point. It went on. He was a determined gentleman and he had a message. And this message was to the broken intellects and drifting wits of the entire world. But he had ceased to lean eagerly forward, staring at John Hush. He had relaxed. He had stretched himself out in his armchair. He was twisting a large signet-ring with a Roman goddess engraved on it, along with the words “Sooner or Later”, round and round the third finger of his left hand.

Nor would it be true to declare that, though the three persons he imagined himself converting had ceased to listen, and though Tenna was hating him, and Mr. Lordy was puzzled by him, and John’s mind was wandering from him to Halfway House, the words he was uttering were wholly lost.

On the contrary, while Tenna held her hands over her face without being able to stop herself from glaring through her own fingers at those seafaring fingers twisting that classical ring, and while John thought, "*Will* she agree to marry him before Midsummer Day comes and changes everything?" Mr. Lordy, who had caught the phrase "constitutes the secret of enjoyment" discovered that the word "constitute" had a potent effect upon him. Mr. Lordy felt compelled to repeat the word. "Constitute, constitute," he muttered. "Constitute, constitute."

And it seemed to him as if the word "constitute" were a giant crane that had the power of seizing upon him and hoisting him up to heaven. Not unkindly nor clumsily was it ready to hoist him the moment he wished to be hoisted.

It hadn't intruded on him. It wasn't pushing itself forward. It had nothing in common with a bulldozer. *It was just there*, ready and able to hoist, anxious to hoist, but with no intention of hoisting until required by the hoisted.

Mr. Lordy began to feel faintly sleepy. "Not quite yet," he told the great being whose name was "constitute"— "I'm not quite ready to be hoisted; but I soon shall be — constitute — constitute — constitute."

10. THE ZEIT-GEIST

WHEN JOHN HUSH and Tenna Sheer had separated for the night, and John was once more alone in his bedroom, the first thing he did was to go straight up to the Rembrandt picture of the Supper at Emmaus and begin deliberately talking to the newly resurrected Christ as if he were Mr. Lordy; and, indeed, there was a remarkable resemblance between the unique painter's idea of how Jesus looked under that stone arch in the old inn and the way Mr. Lordy looked when seated at any meal in the Glint dining-room; and it struck John Hush with overwhelming force that the rays of divinity which were emanating from that timid, nervous, and unassuming person with such embarrassing persistence were a disturbing bewilderment to the man himself.

"Well, well!" John muttered. "*So* you can break bread in Doctor Echetus' research laboratory as well as anywhere else, can you? And that serving-boy can do his bit of day's work, can he, bringing you that fish's head to eat without bothering whether the fish-hook's still in its gill or not? Yes, by God! that boy can go on just the same, waiting at table and saving his wages and going to the bazaar to find a girl who can be kind, and feeling no necessity to be more righteous than his parents or his playmates or to be so wise that he could say 'Rabbi' to the man under the arch when the others hailed him as master, and yet not be an absolute idiot in Israel!

"Yes, yes! Nor is there need — no need at all, is there, my little Lord Jesus — for this honest serving-boy to run round to the stable to see that the asses have water in case of their being wanted. He can bring the fish's head in, can't he, Lord Jesus, and carry it out, too, after the hungry travellers have scraped it clean, without worrying whether it was caught from the common beach or from the promontory preserved for Caesar's household?"

His mood changing again, John moved back to the door and turned off the light. This proceeding converted his bedroom into a twilit chamber in a city-wall, and he rushed across to the barred window and clutching the top of it with his hands where it was open and where the smell of trodden straw and lately dropped dung was blown in along with a vague waftage from the invisible sap of millions of misty grass-stalks and thousands of wet wind-stirred withy-buds drooping above the weirs and the dams and the muddy ditches where the unseen river made its sweeping curve to the north, he began pressing his forehead hard against that portion of his window that had been designed to be unmoveable.

And just here upon the steel frame of the windowpane he now proceeded to give several sharp taps with that portion of his skull out of which, if he had been the Devil, or even if he had been the humblest of the angels who followed the Devil, there might have sprouted, indeed there would naturally have sprouted, a fine pair of horns.

He could detect the light in the upper window of the north lodge where his friend the wife of the gate-keeper slept, that chamber which twenty-four hours ago had filled him with such frightening thoughts. Then, without turning on the electric light, he began rapidly pacing his room from wall to window.

The curious greenish light that washed back and forth in his chamber like an unpalpable estuary of air seemed, as he marched up and down, to pass through him as if his body were the plasm of a newly born spirit, or rather, if spirits can die, of a newly dead spirit. He was desperately wondering now about the four quarters of the dark sky; and the problem that particularly absorbed him was the question as to how far round this place the sweeping curve of the river went.

He had been strongly reminded just now of the river by the smell of damp mud, and he decided that Glint Hall must be surrounded by its flow in a vast curve of several miles, stretching from north to south across that western horizon where shone at night the lights of Halfway House.

If he were right in supposing the river's curve to be as extensive as this, there would be only one of all the four horizons free of this encirclement, only one with what you might call a dry approach. But which way, he kept asking himself, did the river flow? Did it flow from north to south across this western horizon? Or did it flow from south to north?

And there was another question that bothered his mind. What was the mysterious something that stood between those two Scotch firs that were growing side by side on the crest of the ridge, where that prehistoric camp was? He was sure there was something there in addition to those firs. What the devil was it?

It was something monumental, poetical, and very important; and it was something that separated those two trees! Ay, he remembered now. *It was the sun!* But he hadn't seen it himself. That's why he'd forgotten. Someone had told him that at a certain time in the year the sun rose exactly between those two Scotch firs as you saw them on the crest of that ancient camp from the windows of Glint looking east.

Yes, that was what it was — the sun! And he'd been told that it would soon be the time of the year when you could see the sun rise between those trees.

He suddenly stood dead-still in the middle of the room. Why the devil was it so extremely necessary to him to get the precise geography of Glint Hall and of the position of his room in regard to the points of the compass?

He concluded, but without much assurance of finality in the idea, that it had something to do with a queer fear that had come over him ever since Tenna had been so upset by Mr. Rumpibus, namely the fear that his own mind was on the edge of playing him some outrageous trick! "Normal people," as he had grown accustomed to call the bulk of his fellow-creatures since he had become obsessed by the indescribable thrill of his peculiar use of nailscissors, "normal people" always seemed to take geography and the points of the compass for granted.

And yet they were assisted in their successful struggle to keep their mental balance far more than they realised by their dependence on the points of the compass. "I must get it clear! I *must* get it clear!" he told himself; and he began making a deliberate effort to put himself, naked and passive and free from every human purpose, into the power of the four winds.

He obstinately turned round as if he'd been a lighthouse on one of those mysteriously turning castle rocks, the idea of which and the planetary explanation of which, lost in an engulfing antiquity, keep reoccurring in the ancient Welsh books.

In this crazy process of behaving like a "turning castle" with four sides, he faced, first the north through his barred window, then the south through his closed door, then the west through the wall behind his bed, and lastly the east through the wall behind his chest-of-drawers. The Rembrandt picture was against this final barrier to the gulfs of space, so that it was from the direction of the old heathen camp that there had appeared, as if straight from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and in as deep a daze of wonder at being resurrected as he was in a maze of wonder at being accounted a god, that Jesus of Nazareth had entered the research laboratory of Doctor Echetus.

And now as John Hush stared for half a minute at each of his four walls — at his window, at his door, at his bed, at his chest-of-drawers — he forced himself to call up before his mind's eye all that he could remember of each particular stretch of country between Glint Hall and its four horizons. Alder-swamps and willows and a flooded river lay beyond the gates to the north. Alder-swamps and willows and a flooded river lay beyond the gates to the south. Alder-swamps and willows and a flooded river lay beyond the walls to the west, where rose the roofs of Halfway House.

Meanwhile to the east there were only dry, heathery, sandy plantations of young firs and pines, spruce-firs, Douglas pines, and Siberian larches, all of these mounting up to that heathen camp on the top of which were the two gigantic Scotch firs, between whose trunks, so he now remembered being told, the sun rose at this time of the year. It was only when he had entirely satisfied his desire for revolving like an idolatrous weathercock to the four quarters of the sky that he approached his chest-of-drawers. This he did with a view to ascertaining if it contained a packet of cigarettes he had placed among his collars, not as a bait for a thief, but simply because it contained a particular brand that had been a favourite with his guardian and that out of a sort of piety he enjoyed as a special celebration on particular days.

Yes, the cigarettes entitled "The Smoke of Heaven" were in their place; and John felt, as he folded four of his collars in a consecrated half-circle about the box of pale-blue cardboard which contained them that as long as he had the job of keeping quite a lot of material objects clean and neat, while at the same moment he could "plunge", as the commander had recommended into the nonhuman elements of Nature, he would daily advance in wisdom.

It was at this moment that he found himself confronted by the fact that, not only was one of the round brass corner-knobs of his bed missing, but that one of the polished mahogany knobs of the drawer that held the cigarettes was badly chipped. He gazed at these mutilated things with an overpowering urge to do something to patch them up and heal them. After his fashion he had to analyse even this compulsion and to do so while he was deciding to yield to it. "It must be a reaction," he thought, "from that officer's talk about plunging into things! No, I really can't undress and get into bed with that unhappy screw craving for a knob and that knob so miserably chipped. It's things like this waiting to be properly fitted and united that cause so much misery in the world. The whole world of Glint Hall is simply full of inanimate inmates!

"Oh, I *can't* understand how living things can be so indifferent to inanimate things! Damn their souls! Till the bits that are broken off, and the pieces that are divided, and the parts that are lost, are joined together again, what's the use of talking about federations of the world?"

With a rush of more happiness than he had felt since he first saw Tenna under the tulip-tree, he now set himself to unscrew the chipped wooden knob. It yielded at first, then was recalcitrant, then yielded again; and while he worked at it he couldn't help deciding that there was a great deal in what Serius-Ocius had recently been asserting. "But," he told himself, "where the fellow went wrong was in not realising that any work you do, when done naturally, such as removing this chipped knob, means using the mind; and, though it doesn't mean thinking, it means being conscious, and, moreover, being conscious that you are being conscious!"

When he had removed the chipped knob from his collar-drawer, he found that it was a hard job to fasten it to the protruding screw at the corner of his bed. But his wrists were strong, and though the mahogany knob didn't completely conceal the base of the exposed screw, it hid the top of it quite successfully, so that his bed now possessed three brass knobs and one wooden knob.

This gave him extraordinary satisfaction, and he stared triumphantly for several minutes into a world of broken things that were no longer broken — spoons with restored handles, dolls with restored heads, horses with restored hooves, cups with restored saucers, teapots with restored spouts, chimneys with restored chimney-pots — while it seemed to him that all the *animae* of these inanimates, as they crowded round him, were crying aloud in a multitudinous chant:

"*Hail, mender of mendicants!*
Hail, furbisher of fetishes!
Hail, tailor of totems!
Hail, mortiser of mascots!"

But soon, coming out of this godlike trance, he sat down on the edge of his bed beside the latest of his four knobs and gazed round his room. The strong electric bulb seemed to be saying all the while: "To the healthy all things are healthy!" and "Be strong and sane like me!" and "Let there be light, light, light, light!"

The divine Mr. Lordy watched him out of the great painter's chiaroscuro as if through a miraculous hole in the wall; and though he felt that the shadows were twisting and twining with shadows in that upper room of the north lodge, he could see nothing but the square panes and the imprisoning bars of his own uncurtained window. But it was at this moment that silence itself, eldest of all things, began to throb and beat and pump and pulse and bulge and rumble at him.

"Is it," he thought, "just my nerves that I hear sounds in the passage? Damn! That's the worst of these institutions. They're all right in the day. It's in the night that the thoughts and dreams of the sleepers come out of their rooms and shuffle about, and shiver, and squeak and gibber. Yes it's in the night they sob and go moaning up and down."

"No! No!" he told himself. "*That's* not nerves!" He had heard a door open; and now there were shuffling feet! Oh, there was no question about it. He listened intently. Yes, the person, whoever it was, must have seen the light under his door. "That's the worst of these electric bulbs," he thought, "you can't turn them *down*. You can only turn them *out.*"

He rose from his bed and, with the intention of locking his door, turning the light out, and going to bed by the pallid greyness that came in through the window, he took two and a half of the three or four lazy steps he would have to take to reach the corner between door and wall where protruded the knob that worked the electricity. Then he suddenly became a waxwork image in the centre of which thudded a panic-stricken heart.

The door towards which he had moved opened a couple of inches, and about level with his face and near it, too, for he was only a yard away, a finger inserted itself as if it had been the snout of a peculiar animal. The finger had large knuckles and it had particularly long intersections between these knuckles. It could not have been called a deformed finger nor did it look like a finger dedicated to the service of actions that had, as the poet says, "no relish of salvation in them. But if it wasn't a devilish finger no one could call it a "good" finger, it was just a finger. It might have been a symbol in heraldry. It might have been a symbol in some occult pack of prophetic cards. John regarded it with fascinated horror.

But now the finger began to bend at its thick knuckle. It bent towards him. It waggled at him. It did more than waggle. It wriggled. John had seen terrifying objects in his time. He had seen ghastly objects. He had seen appalling objects. But this wriggling finger directed towards his face was different from anything he had ever seen.

And his consciousness as it contemplated this "moving finger" felt as if it were absolutely alone with it, in some cosmic vacuum beyond all worlds. But an atrocious idea now came gently sliding into his head. He was an agile performer with nail-scissors; and he had noticed just now, when he went to his collar-drawer to see if his package of "The

Smoke of Heaven" was still there, that since they'd got him safely certified it hadn't occurred to them to search his toilet articles and remove those glittering snappers. Why, therefore, shouldn't he grab that wagging finger and cut its nails for it, cut them to the quick! But it was all very well to think of these terrestrial performances. Here he was — and, in spite of Serius-Ocius, or any other king's officer, *for him the mind was everything* — floating like a vast mass of indivisible squid on an ocean without bottom, without horizon, without a ripple, while against his heart, his breast, his solar plexus, his mental nerve-centre, wriggled eternally, like the undying worm that Jesus beheld devouring those who wouldn't love him, the tumbling finger of the background material of the deepest abyss known.

The thing was more than obscene to John Hush. To his mind there was something about it like a monstrous ribaldry and as if an outrage were being perpetrated upon the inherent decency of matter itself. The spotted nakedness it embodied wasn't a phallic nakedness, and yet in some shocking manner it was super-sexual. It suggested the self-ravishing and self-impregnating sex-organism of some abysmal being in the process of whose eternal spawning the copulating opposites of mind and matter and male and female were as yet undifferentiated.

"Cut your damned nails for you — that's what I'll do!" he muttered aloud; and, swinging round, lurched heavily, for he felt weak in his legs, towards the collar-drawer from which he had just wrenched the chipped knob, leaving a lamentable hole behind.

Even in the midst of his perturbed state he experienced, and was surprised to observe himself doing so, a puzzled amazement at the unconcerned complacency of the thing's twin-handle. But before he could reach the outraged hole or its unsympathetic twin, the door of his room very slowly and very silently opened, and a middle-aged man in blue-and-white pyjamas waddled along the floor towards him, advancing on his haunches and his heels with his arms working like bargepoles, as if he were trying to imitate the motion of the circular man-woman of the Platonic symposium.

John’s first feeling at the approach of this apparition, who was breathing hard and whose spasmodic movements were already losing their initial fling, was one of profound relief. And with this relief he got back his calmer wits to such a tune that he began to enjoy himself. “It shows,” he thought, as he stared into the eyes of the creature on the floor, “that what I’m really afraid of is simply the vacuum; yes, simply the void, the inane, the empty, the vacant, that shocking gap or gulf concealed behind every motion of the consciousness that apprehends and every aspect of the thing apprehended.”

Having in this manner stated his view of his own fear he suddenly began to continue his thoughts concerning it aloud just as if he were conversing with the intruder on the floor.

“I was thinking about fear,” he murmured. “And I’m now convinced that what frightens us — well, frightens *me* anyhow! — is not what we actually *see — you,* for instance, playing the giddy goat in my room when you ought to be asleep — but *the empty space*, the vacuum, so to speak, *of the future moment*, the hollow place, so to put it, of the as yet unfilled gap in time, into which the whole caboodle, I mean the whole panorama of experience, is moving, to become, directly it occupies that gap, like yourself who are now interrupting my going to bed by acting the fool, to become something that may be annoying and may make us angry but which is not in the remotest degree what we call terrifying.”

With a deep and extremely theatrical sigh and a shrug of his shoulders that had a somewhat foreign air, the man in the elegant pyjamas picked himself up and sat down on the edge of the bed.

“And now—” the fellow began, jerking up one of his feet under him, and tapping the floor with the heel of the other, both feet being tightly encased in embroidered slippers ornamented by green beads; “and now—” and he threw into his words the satisfied tone of a man just come to his club and with the best hours of the day stretching out like golden sands in front of him, “and now we can tell each other to our heart’s content all about ourselves! And it might, don’t you think, be a good thing if we shut the door and turned on the electric heater?”

John, who was now standing with his back to the door, closed it as silently as he could, and feeling very irritable and repeating to himself over and over, "I'll turn the chap out in a minute and go to bed," began vaguely looking round. Till this moment he had never realised that there *was* an electric-heater in his room. But there it was; and it was situated between his only chair, a chair which had its back to the wall, and his now somewhat reproachful chest-of-drawers. He turned it on; and seating himself upon the chair beside it, soon began to feel that he really did owe something to this preposterous person for indicating to him this fountain of agreeable heat.

He pulled the chair away from the wall, and keeping nothing but his profile directed towards his visitor and repeating to himself over and over, as a kind of incantation, "going to bed... going to bed... going to bed," he tried hard to put some authentic cameraderie into the tone with which he begged at least for the honour of learning his visitor's name.

"Name?" cried the invader of his bed. "Did I hear you utter that goose-girl word 'name'? Don't you remember the words of Faust concerned the Spirit? 'I have no name to give it — feeling is all in all — the name is sound and smoke'! But, since I *am* here, and we are alone, I may as well confess that I'm generally known in this absurd place by my title."

"And may I enquire what that is?" John murmured wearily, thinking, as he surveyed the coloured beads on the slipper with which the fellow was tapping the floor, that he would talk quite openly to Tenna to-morrow, when they met after the midday meal, and make her see that it was absolutely essential, however they might have to act or speak or dissemble with regard to the rest, to be completely frank with each other; and if they had — as no doubt they had — unusual peculiarities of their own, they must confess them freely to each other, and each obtain the aid of the other in getting them under control.

It indeed began to strike John very strongly that if, after only two nights in this place, a man like himself, who had served in all the embassies of the Balkans, could be so shocked and startled by the wagging of a finger through the crack of a door and in full electric light, and long before midnight, there was little to wonder at if Tenna's nerves had grown shaky after two years of this sort of thing? And he thought: "Can *anything* in our whole normal way of life be crazier than this throwing of extra-crazy people *together* with the idea of getting them back to normality? Of course, *really* it's just to get us out of the way!"

"Well, sir," he repeated, as the occupier of the bed remained silent, "and what *is* your title?"

The man on the bed hesitated. His manner was that of a disguised monarch who is not absolutely sure whether his confession of identity will be made to a friend or an enemy. Then he said, "My title, good friend, is an unusual one; but not, I fancy an altogether unknown one, to a gentleman and a scholar like yourself."

Here the fellow leapt to his feet and gave John a dignified bow.

"I am the Marquis of the Fourth Dimension," he declared, "and I am, of course, much more than human. History doesn't contain me. I contain history. I am real and yet I am ideal. Some thinkers call me 'the Zeit-Geist'; but I prefer, as that German said, to be superficial out of profundity."

After this bold revelation of the riddle of personality, the Marquis of the Fourth Dimension drew back a step further, making, as he did so, a gesture that reminded John of a woman's curtsey. It must have been some kind of choreographic compulsion conveyed by telepathy from one mind to another, combined with the propitiatory training of an ambassador's secretary that brought it about that John, with an even lower obeisance than that of the Zeit-Geist, slipped into the precise position on the bed vacated by the other, imitating him even to the extent of drawing up one foot under him and tapping with the other upon the floor.

Moving, therefore, in this magnetised circle of reciprocity, the Marquis of the Fourth Dimension approached the bed and touched the knee which his host had just bent beneath him.

John surveyed this outstretched finger with a curious interest. It was the same finger, composed of bone, flesh, blood, and rather wrinkled skin, terminating in a horny but in this particular case a very clean fingernail, that had frozen his heart with terror ten minutes ago.

The very same finger! And yet he regarded it now with a quiet, humorous interest, but an interest that was not very lively or intense, and might, indeed, pretty soon change into complete indifference. What conclusion — such was his thought as this nobleman from a Dimensional House of Lords kept his finger upon him, and kept it in the position and, indeed, with something of the gesture of that pointing finger of the Father of Gods and Men in Michelangelo's picture where He is conveying the breath of life into Adam — what conclusion was he to come to in regard to pure fear?

For in this case that is what it was. It wasn't fear of death, or fear of a fall, or fear of a bullet, or fear of cancer, or fear of pain. Could it be fear of the supernatural? Not in any ordinary or traditional sense! He had never for a moment doubted that it was the real finger of a real person. "No; the truth is," John told himself: "this thing, fear, is as much a part of the original constitution of our souls as attraction and repulsion, advance and retreat, love and hate. If to be born is to enter battle, it is also to endure fear. The only creatures wholly free from fear are the dead."

"Well?" enquired the person who declared himself to be, as Homer would put it, the Time-spirit, "I came in dancing, and dancing I must go out!" Here he removed both his Michelangelical finger and the magnetic radiation that excited reciprocity. "But I can't go back to my pillow till I make you realise as a gentleman and a scholar exactly to what a pass human history has come in realising its final identity in me; for let me tell you this, my good sir, and see that you lay it to heart. They used to talk of the Peers of Christendom. Well, now they must deal *with us*, the Peers of the Fourth Dimension! And scholars like you and me" — here he lowered his voice— "know very well to what in reality all this fuss about evolution amounts!"

Here he approached so close to John that the latter felt a shivering in his stomach, like the under-the-skin shudder of an old maid compelled to contemplate a rape. The visitor put both his feet on the floor and struck the palms of his hands together with a smart shock as if he were killing a flea or summoning a waitress.

“It amounts,” he whispered hoarsely, “to a bubble! And this dance you have had the privilege of witnessing is the dance of history, that is to say the dance of a bubble!”

At this point John stood up, and, straightening his shoulders, discovered to his amazement that he was considerably taller than the Zeit-Geist, whose personal appearance, now that he had ceased to be afraid of him, he was free to take in. The man was nearly bald and had a plump round face with prominent ears. His chin was small and had a deep dimple in it. His eyes were pale grey, and they were so pale that as the electric bulb shone down on them they looked positively white. In fact, as John continued to inspect them, they seemed almost devoid of eyeballs, and the effect of this was to make them really ghastly.

John had never seen any eyes like them, and he made up his mind, then and there, to ask Tenna for every detail she could give him of this weird creature.

“When we meet again,” he now presumed to enquire, “is there any *ordinary* name by which I can address you?”

To his surprise the plump round visage before him broke into a smile. “Well, well well! Think of that! And so you’ve never even heard of Professor Zoom of the College of Doom?” John could only bow gravely; but when the fellow had danced himself to the door, and John had opened it for him, both the men began whispering. John whispered, “I hope you’ll be able to sleep.”

And Zoom whispered: “Oh, I’ll sleep all right. I’ll sleep like a — like a—”

“Like a top?”

“Like a burst bubble!” replied the Marquis of the Fourth Dimension.

11. HITHER AND THITHER

JOHN WOKE UP before it was fully light. In fact he woke at the hour when human beings usually feel at their lowest level of courage, energy, and confidence.

The actual dawn could hardly be said to have begun, and yet the infinite restfulness and restorative anonymity of the all-obliterating night had vanished. It was that hour, or half-hour, or even that quarter of an hour, for the length of its lasting as well as the degree of its quality varies in proportion to what the clouds and the mists and the winds are doing in any particular locality, when a pallid diffusion of light enters our sleeping-place—” lumen intra limen”, “light across the threshold” — and affects us in a manner quite different from any other phenomenon of nature.

As he awoke to consciousness this pallid light struck John Hush as if it had been a *fifth element*, as different from air and water as these are different from earth and fire.

John could see by means of this presence the objects in his room, and clearest of all he could see the window-panes through which this presence was entering his room; but there was nothing that it revealed to him in his surroundings that was more startling, more strange, more solemnising than itself.

The queer thing about it was that it didn’t make him think at all of the radiance of the sun’s rays. Nor did it make him think of warmth in general or of the delicious sensation of being warm. It struck him as a thing in itself, as an absolute, as something which, though it may have been a normal apparition, was the essence of pure light, of very light of very light, and, as the creed says, “begotten not made”. This fifth element that ere the coming of dawn was now establishing itself both outside and inside the weak barrier of his window seemed to him, as he watched it, to be the physical embodiment of some ultimate disillusionment that was older than the orbits of any of the stars yet known to us, older than the inhabitants of any planet revolving round any of those stars. He felt at that moment as if this strange, cold, prae-dawn light had nothing to do with the rays of any sun or with the rays of any star, and yet was totally different from any legendary *psychic* event, like the Fall of Man or the Revolt of the Angels. It struck him now, this prae-dawn light, as if its far-off origin had nothing to do with any war in Heaven, or with any prehistoric rallying of mankind to the cause of the devils or titans.

Something had happened, something had gone wrong, that was much further off and longer ago than any wars between Jehovah and Satan. And it had happened in the process of creation itself. Something like a ghastly cosmogonic blunder had been made by whatever demiurgic power it might be that had originally projected the "background material" of our dimension into overt existence.

The impression of immemorial antiquity made upon him by this cold white light that seemed so much older than sun, moon, or stars was indeed an impression of abysmal disillusionment; but it was the disillusionment not of the created but of the creator. This prae-dawn light was the diffused sigh with which the original world-builder had lamented some huge catastrophic mistake and with little hope of redeeming it had obstinately set to work to start all over again.

Thus did John Hush work it out to his grim satisfaction that this white light of disillusionment, which had recurred at irregular and intermittent dawns from the beginning of the world, could still communicate to us the oldest secret of all, the secret of the endurance of the burden of existence by inanimate things.

John, indeed, felt that the effect upon him of this faint prae-matutinal light was sobering rather than inspiring; and, though not saddening to his spirits, was a patient and stoical influence rather than an exultant one. He remembered a talk he'd once had with a Bulgarian scholar about their personal reactions to this particular prae-dawn light, and how the man had told him that each of the ancient classical races had special names for the influence of this hour, the Roman goddess of the light before sun-rise being named Matuta, whereas the Greeks had called her Leucothea.

This goddess, he explained to John, was, by reason of her own tragic experiences before her apotheosis, liable to have an unlucky effect upon any child of one's own, but a very lucky effect when a mother brought into her presence a neighbour's child.

"My feelings just now," thought John, "are certainly what you might call Leucothean. They are benevolent and yet totally irreligious!"

He soon found that, as his present mood intensified itself and established itself, it excluded all human emotions except those of a mild expectation, a mild enjoyment, a mild pity, a mild amusement, and a strong desire to get Tenna and himself, together with as many of the other inmates and dogs as were still redeemable, out of the hands of Doctor Echetus.

In this cold, enduring, sobering, prae-dawn light the bubble-dance of last night's fourth-dimensional nobleman struck him as scarcely more real than two half-forgotten dreams whose scattered members he now vaguely began to reassemble; but save that one of them had to do with a dead sycamore-twig and the other with a little heap of rabbit's dung, the first associated with some terrible unknown fear, the second with the redemption of all matter, he could not summon them back.

"It's about time to go down to those sheds," he thought. "But one thing's clear! I mustn't think of girls' curls, even if such thoughts are, as I daresay they may be, a legitimate enticement of Nature. Tenna's my sweetheart, and I *won't* mix her up with my manias!"

He got out of bed quickly now, and stood for a second or two hesitating as to whether to put on his faded blue-and-black dressing-gown to go to the lavatory, or his overcoat. He decided on the latter, so as to feel less conspicuous in case he met anyone; but he couldn't resist drawing his fingers across the agreeable texture of the former.

"So the moment has come," he thought, addressing his dressing-gown as if it had consciousness, "when the deliciously safe tightness of your collar when its top button is buttoned, and all those things you make me remember when you flap round my legs, have to be hung up on a hook!"

And even as he touched it there came over him one memory after another of precious moments when the rainbow bridge of man's precarious *monochronos hedone*, that flickering perfection of the Ideal Now, spanned the abyss between the two horrors, the former of which our French drawing-rooms call *ennui* and the latter of which our German class-rooms call *angst.*

He met nobody on his way to the lavatory or on his way back, and he only met men who were complete strangers to him as he went down to the yard. Once in the yard, nothing occurred to disturb his equanimity. He enjoyed his work out here at this hour. Oil-lamps and gas-burners, in addition to electricity, played their part in the illumination of the stables and sheds, where the less aged and frail among the male inmates helped the hired farm-hands from about half-past six to eight. Chance had so arranged it that John's particular job, into which he had been initiated yesterday, was singularly adapted to his complete lack of any sort of knowledge of cattle and horses. It was to clean out an airy shed and the couple of capacious stalls in which two white cows and two grey cows were milked every morning and evening.

The woman who milked these particular four cows was a sturdy creature of about thirty who "answered", as they put it in Glint kitchen, to the name of Nancy Yew, and to whom the gods had given an extremely passionate, though an indescribably ugly, physiognomy. It was her only child Seth by whose work with pitchfork and shovel this shed was kept clean and daily supplied with fresh straw from the neighbouring straw-stacks; and it was to help the frail and youthful Seth with the maturity of his own manly strength that Hush had been selected by the asylum authorities to work in the particular shed called Delta.

Why the sheds at Glint had been named from the letters of the Greek alphabet, nobody to whom John had so far put the question had been able to say. Some professor with a philological mania must have taken Greek mythology too lightly and the Greek alphabet too seriously.

Nor apparently had the learned man — for, as Doctor Echetus himself admitted, "the alphabet can lead anywhere" — confined his nomenclative mania to the inanimate. The most beautiful of these four beasts had in some way or other acquired the unusual soubriquet of Clyde, which at once suggested to John's mind the name Clytemnestra.

It was with electric light that the stalls of Clytie and of her sister-cow were lit these March mornings, and John had derived a good deal of pleasure from the various quite startling "chiaroscuro" effects that resulted from this modernistic illumination of prehistoric labours.

Nancy Yew's son was a bastard. He was also not entirely "there". But since to be not entirely "there" was likely to be less noticeable here than elsewhere, and since she herself was milking both Clyde and Clyde's sister, Whitey, in the shed, it was Seth's business to keep clean, Nancy Yew felt that though she couldn't always be there to keep an eye on him, there was bound to be a definite aura of maternal protection hovering over that Delta stall.

"And to you too, sir!" Mistress Yew now murmured in response to John's greeting. "And there'll be a nice drop"— "tling-tirroop! tling-tirroop!" went Clyde's milk into the pail— "a real nice drop of rain, I wouldn't wonder, by nick of noon this day, if I've not lost my what-do-you-know, if you catch my meaning, mister."

"Do you mean it's going to rain, Mrs. Yew?" enquired John, plunging his fork into several heaps of dirty straw, one after another, and trying to make a solid mass of them, thick enough to be transported out of the shed.

"Mummy's thinking," intervened young Seth in a gently explanatory tone, "of turn-ups."

John added yet another layer of dirty straw to his transfixed mass, and pressing it against the floor of the shed threw his whole weight upon the handle of his pitchfork. He perceived in a flash that, like other innocents, young Seth had the wit to see that what sane people always have at the back of their minds is their own concern, their own affair, their own purpose, their own interest.

"You'll be," he added with a sudden illumination of his long, sad, weary, resigned face, "wanting to see how this here place looks in sunshine."

John confessed that such was his desire.

“Me garding,” murmured the idiot’s mother, to the resounding noise of Clyde’s milk, “be too dry for end of March.”

John continued leaning on his fork while he watched the long thin wavering shape of Seth insinuate itself, like a patient slow worm endowed with the power of perpendicular motion, between the stool on which his mother was sitting and the hindquarters of Whitey.

What passed through John’s mind, as he watched the boy carry his shovelful of dung out into the yard, was the idea that on some far-off day when Tenna and himself had a house of their own, far from all their friends, they might have Seth as their retainer. Then he glanced at the rough, red, wind-tanned, rugged cheek of Nancy Yew, as it pressed itself against the incredibly soft side of the creature she was milking. “Maybe it would be all right,” he thought, “if I asked Tenna straight out if she wouldn’t mind my snipping off — now I’ve got the scissors in my drawer, and since I’ve got them it seems mad not to use them — just that one single little tiny curl? Yes, I must think, think, think, think, very carefully about this.”

And while Mistress Nancy milked Whitey, and while he did quite a lot of Seth’s share of the stall-cleaning in addition to his own, he went on wondering whether it wouldn’t be quite a natural and sensible thing to do, since he *had* found at last a girl who suited him, if he used her as a lightning-conductor for this mania of his.

“His poor dear head,” as Mrs. Toby Tickle would have said; but of course it wasn’t his “head” at all, it was that desperate thing in him that was the bowsprit of his whole life’s intention— “was ringing” with this idea when the asylum bell proclaimed that it was time for breakfast.

This bell began ringing at three minutes to eight, and went on until three minutes past eight, and it might be said that these six minutes were to some of the inmates of Glint the most precious of the whole twelve hours, if not of the whole twenty-four.

And they were this for a very powerful reason; namely that the clanging of the great bell of Glint produced such hurryings, scramblings, rushings, scurryings, jostlings, that those who weren’t hungry, and those who wanted to avoid the notice of others, and those who were half-asleep, and those who were on the look-out for a minute or two's pretence that they were still free-agents and could come and go as they liked had the sort of interval not often offered to the inmates of an institution.

As John propped his pitchfork against the wall and with the help of a wisp of straw set himself to clean his boots, he noticed the devouring yearning in the one single round grey eye which, during all the while she was milking, Nancy kept fixed upon her offspring. Glancing from her to the lad himself, he became aware that Seth was now watching with an absorbed and fascinated interest one of the inmates who had strayed quite far from the sacred purlieus of the farmyard and was now skipping and dancing and nodding his head and taking fantastic leaps as he made towards one of the tall iron posts of the big gates guarded by the north lodge.

Seth's own long thin greyish face wore the intense expression, undisturbed by any need for action, which some spell-bound onlooker might have worn in a religious picture by El Greco.

"Who is that fellow, laddie, dancing up to that gate?" John enquired of the boy. The moment he'd uttered these words, though he hadn't spoken loudly and the noise of the squirted jets of milk came near to drowning them, he felt he oughtn't to have uttered them. Seth was so polite that it was pain to him not to answer at once, and yet he was so absorbed in the queer figure at which he was staring that it was worse pain to look away or to make any response.

But when the figure stood still between the dazzling sunshine and the dark velvety shadows on the green grass, he did at last turn to his questioner—" It's Twin Hither, "he said. "It's the one as hunts shadows! If you hadn't got to go and eat sausages in hall, mister, you might have seen Twin Thither, too! She's the clever one, she is! She has got to have water or something like water for her hunt. And do you know what her hunt is, Master Hush?"

John looked at him gravely and shook his head.

“Reflections!” cried the boy. “Twin Hither’s after shadows, and Twin Thither’s after reflections! They’re a funny pair, they twins! He be a boy and she be a girl, but they look awful-much the same!”

Seth’s long sad narrow face with its perpetually raised eyebrows and its life-weary detachment from everything that other human beings long for, was now to John’s astonishment transformed by a radiance that seemed to reach it directly, instantaneously, and with an immediate physical contact, from the skipping and capering figure that was now approaching the northern gate of Glint. The towering gates themselves contained elaborate iron bars that had curious ornamental portcullises at intervals, answering each other in a sort of pattern of heraldic symbolism, as though they were perpetually chanting in metallic reiteration: “Stay where you are! Stay where you are! Stay where you are! Don’t try to escape! Don’t try to escape! Here is your world! Here is your world!”

But this was not all. The gate-posts of these vast erections rose considerably above the complicated ironwork of the gates themselves and were terminated by dull specimens of that sort of totally meaningless ornamental foliation which at one epoch carried the very stamp and seal of successful builders of the type of Tenna’s progenitor; and from both these tall gate-posts, if so they could be described, though they resembled gigantic metal lances that had been used to pierce titanic puffballs and had retained what they had transfixed of these cryptogamous growths like the spiked heads of condemned felons, there stretched across the sunlit grass two long narrow wavering shadows, and it was along one of these early morning shadows that Twin Hither was now skipping.

“What on earth will the boy do,” thought John, “when he reaches the gate?”

John looked anxiously at Seth; and Seth looked anxiously at John. They knew by each other’s eyes that they were both deeply concerned over what was going to happen; though the idiot was still exultant with his faith in the spirit that inspired that airy dancer.

Suddenly Twin Hither swung clean on his heel and went skipping back along his shadow-path towards the rear entrance of the building. When he came to the spot where the shadow ended, with a reproduction on the sunlit grass of that shapeless terminal, he took a run, and leaping over the gap which separated this object from the sun-illumined mat in front of the open door, he seemed literally to dive into the passage with his hands clasped in front of his face.

All that was left for the onlookers to do was to follow back with their heavy gaze the dancer’s shadow-path as it returned to its monstrous origin, that “leave-all-hope symbol in shoddy cast-iron!”

“See you again in an hour,” murmured John, “and good luck till then!”

But noticing the idiot’s eyes and the desperate look in them, “Don’t ‘ee mind too much, Seth, my friend. He’ll be out here again this afternoon.”

“It isn’t *that*, mister.”

“*Not* that? What is it, Seth?”

But all the answer the boy gave him was a faint movement of his head towards the silken flanks of Whitey, which in that curious criss-crossing of artificial light with the long dazzling rays and deep shadows of the newly risen sun, made a perfect background for the profile of Nancy and the indrawing possessiveness of her insatiable maternal eye.

“I might have guessed it!” thought John. “Before we know where we are, it’s on us again — *the Holy Family*!”

He swung round and bolted; yes, the private secretary to our country’s special representative in four sovereign states bolted like a rabbit from the irresistible power of the loving eye. This particular projection of possessiveness was harmlessly pillowed against the silken side of Whitey; and it wasn’t that he feared anything for himself, or that he had any thought that Nancy was a witch. He knew she was a good, kind, hardworking honest woman, who doted on her idiot son.

“And it isn’t,” he told himself, as he took his place beside Mr. Lordy at the dining-room table and commenced hungrily devouring his oatmeal and brown sugar, “it isn’t as if there were anything unnatural or morbid in this mother’s love for her offspring. It is a perfectly normal and natural feeling!” Why then had a shiver of terrible sympathy shot through him when we saw the boy's glance at that round shameless feminine eye staring at him out of the very belly, so it seemed, of that patient beast?

There was no escape. He had to face the truth. He might have to deceive a lot of other people, but it was silly and ridiculous solemnly to set to work deceiving himself. And what *was* the truth?

Ah, *there* was the rub! Well! He decided that since they had now both finished their porridge, he would consult Mr. Lordy. Mr. Lordy had quelled the storm in the breast of a naval commander; why should he not be able to settle the problem as to where "love" ought to yield to common sense?

"Will they bother us," he began, not exactly in a whisper but in quite a low tone, "if I ask you rather a crucial question; if I ask you, in fact, how far we ought to carry our obedience to love?"

Mr. Lordy must have taken stronger measures than usual to protect himself from the ghost of the old gentleman he had shaken to death, for John's first taste of the copious helping of scrambled eggs which was now on his plate, in spite of all the pepper with which he had freely sprinkled it, carried with it a perceptible smack of powerful disinfectant.

"In all well-managed institutions," replied Mr. Lordy in a firm voice, and John knew at once that the loyal little man was quoting from some printed sermon of Father Wun, "it is imperative to keep quite distinct what we say from what we think. Thoughts are one thing. Words are another thing. The space between thoughts and words must be kept like carefully preserved grass. This space must be cut. This space must be weeded. This space must be rolled."

Putting down his knife and using his fork like a spoon, in the American manner, and pushing to the side of his plate with the extreme tip of his longest finger, as if it were a piece of carpet upon which a corpse had been lying, the square of toast upon which the scrambled egg had been placed, Mr. Lordy drained his teacup to the bottom and continued his quotation. "When we talk of 'love' we talk of a thing so slippery, so fluid, so erratic, that there's nothing to which it can be compared except those moving bubbles under cat-ice which have, as everybody must remember, so striking a resemblance to wriggling tadpoles."

It was only with a slight shake of the head that Mr. Lordy refused an attendant's offer of more scrambled eggs. John, however, though fully aware that the satisfying of his hunger did to some extent diminish his attention, felt sure that as long as he imitated Mr. Lordy by keeping his profile at right angles to his interlocutor there was nothing in their conversation to draw "those men" a step nearer — John, I say, acquiesced quite shamelessly when he had the chance of a second helping.

"No one in this place," began Mr. Lordy, addressing his words to the distant row of female backs up and down which John was pathetically moving his lack-lustre gaze, not with any hope of seeing Tenna there, for she had told him that she was one of the lucky ones for whom Mam Tickle had coaxed from the authorities the privilege of going to the kitchen for a tray and carrying their tea and bread-and-butter up to their bedrooms, but with a foolish lover's fancy that, having been seen there once, she might be seen there again.

"No one in this place," quoted Mr. Lordy, becoming a little confused as he went on, "has the right to use the word *ought* in connection with that listing wind referred to in the Gospels or possibly in the Epistles, or even in the Acts, but referred to anyway as a precious something that comes and goes where it listeth, and none can increase it or restrain it by any effort of will, and none can bind it or loose it or create it or destroy it. The Church regulates marriage and overlooks the begetting and the conceiving of children. The Law regulates possessions and overlooks the acquiring and the inheriting of possessions.

"Conscience regulates our behaviour to all other living creatures. The State regulates our intercourse with other nations and takes upon itself the prevention of crime, and the certifying of — well, of people like us! But love is no more under our control than the clouds or the winds or the rain or the sun or the tides of the sea." but don't people tell us, Mr..Lordy, John remarked in the particular diplomatic tone that conceals beneath a quiet emphasis the mischievous shaking up, like peas in a bag, of che whole subject, "that the opposite of love is *hate*; and that, if everything important to life is connected with love, everything dangerous and deadly to life must be connected with hate?" But no ambassadorial niceties could side-track a man who had danced his stepfather to death like a badly-made puppet.

"Hate," said Mr. Lordy, with unruffled concentration on the row of feminine backs, "is *not* the opposite of love." He paused. One of the nearest attendants, and he could not be called *very* near, was at this moment removing the chief weight of his body from his left foot and transferring it to his right foot. Such relaxings, such rest-giving physical movements, such shiftings of bodily weight, such yawns and sighs, can in an unconcerned bystander have a momentous effect upon the manner and even upon the substance of a prophetic revelation. But when the bystander is an attendant employed to safeguard the nerves and moral sense of the public from untimely and improper revelations, the greatest of prophets has to be careful.

And Mr. Lordy had long ago learnt to take no chances in this danger-zone of official attention. "What I always say," he interpolated gravely in a firm, clear voice, "about Ayrshire cattle, is that you mustn't keep them too long in the same field." Then, when it became clear nobody was listening, "The point is," he went on, "that hate, which is just as much out of our control as love, has no connection with love at all. It resembles love in the sense that it is as completely beyond our power as the wind or the sea or the clouds or the rain. But it is no more the opposite of love than miserliness is the opposite of honesty or treachery is the opposite of extravagance."

"Well then," burst out John with some impatience, for he had become angrily conscious how many the hours were, and how slowly they were likely to pass, before he would have a chance of being with Tenna again, "what becomes of our behaviour to our parents, to our wives, to our children, to 'ur neighbours and friends?"

Mr. Lordy moved his head round apprehensively as if he were expecting a physical assault from all these directions.

“That,” he murmured, “is as the Church decides. It is the Church that teaches us how to behave in this world so that we can inherit the world to come.”

Here Mr. Lordy hurriedly crossed himself and carefully looked down at an elegantly bound volume of Milton which he had pulled out of his pocket and placed between the empty plate of brown bread-and-butter and the untouched plate of white bread-and-butter.

“You won’t think I’m presuming on your kindness to me, Mr. Hush,” he said, speaking shyly and in a low voice and pushing Milton against the untouched plate of white bread-and-butter, “if I confessed to you a fancy of mine? You really and truly won’t? Well, it is this. I feel that the souls of original writers — for the more original a writer is, the more powerful is the pressure of his projected soul — are real presences that have their dwelling inside the printed pages of the author’s books; not more than one, you understand, Mr. Hush — I mean not more than one soul to each separate book, though if the book has several volumes the author’s soul will naturally have to flit from one to another of these separate volumes. You understand, Mr. Hush? — one, that is to say, for each volume.”

John gravely inclined his head, indicating that he had no quarrel with the creative energy for thus confining the number of living souls in each book to one apiece. Encouraged by his friend’s nod, Mr. Lordy now went on to explain that each book-spirit had its own natural appetite for appropriate nourishment, and that white bread-and-butter, thickly spread and thinly cut, was exactly what the fastidious soul dwelling between the covers of Milton’s works would enjoy most.

“You see, Mr. Hush, though I am no good at Greek and Latin, I used to blow for the organist in our church; and I must take it for granted that when a spirit is very particular about the arrangement of poetical words it will be fastidious and even finical about what it imbibes of material sustenance.”

John Hush instantaneously forgot the attendants and incontinently turned his full attention upon Mr. Lordy. “If there is,” he thought, “an exacting spirit between those covers ready to imbibe some ethereal essence from a plate of bread-and-butter, I’m damned if I’ve not got in me some still more fastidious and exacting spirit! Mine is not perhaps so austerely particular as Milton's; but by God it's more delicate in its taste! My spirit, in fact — I mean as opposed to Milton's, though they say at Cambridge he was called 'the Lady of Christ's' — is the spirit of an old maid.

"I want to protect that heavenly wine-coloured leather-bound book as if it were a vestal virgin. In fact I can't stand the sight" — here he looked round almost ferociously— "of pages full of the subtlest verbal harmonies in Britain, being jostled by two great greasy plates, one of them greedily empty, and the other repulsively full." Thinking in this way and with an irrepressively urgent movement of hand and arm, Hush seized upon the poetical works of John Milton and inserted them in the nearest sanctuary he could see, which was one of Mr. Lordy's well-disinfected coat-pockets. This done he boldly leaned sideways towards the ear of the coat's wearer.

"Who the devil," he whispered, "is *that* fellow? And what bug has he got in his bonnet?"

In portentous gravity Mr. Lordy whispered back: "It's poor old Pantamount. He's perfectly harmless. Wouldn't hurt a fly. But they don't like him. They keep him in 'the Wing' all they can. It's in 'the Wing' for anything, with poor old Pantamount. You see what he's like. Wouldn't flap at a fly. Wouldn't 'shush' at a midge. Wouldn't worry a woodlouse. Mam Tickle says he's the saint of Glint, but Father Toby don't like him and Father Wun can't abide him. He's been here as long as anybody, but lots of us have hardly seen him. They keep him in 'the Wing'. If he goes on as he's doing now, for instance, he won't last out the day. Back he'll go!"

John Hush sat up straight again, staring fixedly at the extraordinary figure thus presented to his attention.

"What does the Commander think about him?" he enquired. "He? He's probably never seen him or heard of him."

"Doesn't everybody talk about him?"

"I should say not!"

"What do they say about him?"

“Tottie Creambo says it’s lucky to look at him, dangerous to meet his eye and fatal to speak to him. She says there are four of the rooms in the men’s quarter — that where you and I sleep — empty because of him.”

“You mean they died after speaking to him?”

“That’s what Tottie says.”

“What ridiculous nonsense!”

“Well, I’m not going to sit here any longer; and I’d advise you not to. In fact, Mr. Hush, only you mustn’t think me impertinent, I beg you to come away with me.” With these words Mr. Lordy rose to his feet. “If you’re here at dinner I’ll tell you more. I really am sorry, sir, but sometimes we just *have* to be rude.”

And so now there was only Mr. Lordy’s empty place by his side; and in front of him was the full plate of white bread-and-butter and the empty plate that had been full of brown bread-and-butter. There was also Mr. Lordy’s empty cup and his own empty cup; and these two cups had the look of being absorbed in metaphysical speculation about nature of human fear.

“Have to be rude, have we,” said John to himself. “And have to be frightened, too, eh? Here am I, a perfectly sane person save for a trifling sex-mania, so dominated by the deranged mind of this quaint individual whom I’ve been confusing with Jesus at Emmaus, that under the power of his crazy influence I am absolutely scared of even looking at this chap who’s making now these extraordinary noises and who was just now on his knees! ‘But I’m not going to yield to this crazy fear. Only I must fight it in my own way and nobody else’s. Go on, you over there! Go on praying in hissings and scrabblings and rustlings and scrapings such as grass-snakes and slow-worms make when they pray! I’ll look at you in a moment and, by God, I’ll speak to you in a moment! “Whatever Mam Tickle may say, my room up there looking north, my room where the redeemer who’s scared of being a redeemer comes out of a hole in the wall, won’t be empty to-night, won’t be empty for many a night, won’t be empty till I’ve decided I’ve had enough of this place and am going to leave it; yes, and perhaps not only leave it, but leave it with *all* its rooms empty!"

And then while he could hear the slow steps of the two breakfast-attendants marching up and down, up and down, and while he wondered how soon they would start meddling with Pantamount, he set himself to find some mark, some sign, some crack, some blemish, some flaw, some stain, some defect, some deformity in one or other of the empty cups over which he was now bending so that he'd be able to distinguish them and know them again after they had been washed and dried.

And find it he now did! It was a small chip, a chip taken from the curve of the cup's handle just where the handle touched the side of the cup. The second he saw this chipped curve he knew that if there was a soul in that volume of Milton, a soul now safe from greasy plates in the left-hand pocket of its owner, there was also a soul in this chipped cup which was now from henceforth totally, inexorably, ineluctably, irremediably, separate from all other cups.

It might be broken, it might be thrown away, it might be flung to the bottom of a river, it might be thrown into the dog-pit among the spruce-firs; but its separate identity, its difference from all other cups ever made or ever destined to be made, was now, once for all, unalterably, fundamentally, absolutely established.

"It is a cup, take it for all in all the like of which — a cup is a cup: therefore it possesses a soul and from the depths of this soul I am draining enough courage, like the ichor from the veins of an immortal, to do what I want to do; enough courage, in fact, to face the man-god Pantamount, who at this moment is hiding his godhead by the simple device of kneeling upon a bench and pretending to pray."

12. PANTAMOUNT

LAYING THE FINGERNAIL of his longest finger for the palpable passing of half a second on that chip in the cup, John now boldly rose to his feet, stepped backwards over the bench and walked casually towards one of their two attendants. While he did so, he noticed that the other attendant, with a casualness equal to his own, had languidly seated himself near the door. The attendant towards whom John now directed his negligent steps was the one who struck him as intending to approach the kneeling man, not directly but indirectly, in fact with that encircling movement that had already, even in the space of the forty-eight hours of his sojourn here, made John think of a dog-fish rounding up a shoal of mackerel and of a nakednecked vulture hovering round a corpse till the right moment to come down for its feast.

"Won't you try one of mine?" he now remarked, addressing this perambulating official. His silver case was in his hand and he was wishing for the first time since his guardian had given it to him on his twenty-first birthday that it was made of solid gold.

The man smiled agreeably but shook his head.

"Oh no, sir! Oh no!" he murmured. "Our regulations are very strict on this point. You see, sir, if once any of us permitted such a thing, the fat, as they say, would be in the fire."

"I understand perfectly," conceded John in his most ambassadorial tone. "'The fat and the fire.' Yes, I believe I have heard that before. It's a powerful saying. Yes, indeed, I can see what a lot of regulations there have to be to run a place like this with any kind of smoothness. But about that queer chap kneeling on the bench over there? Would he be angry if I said good morning to him? Would it be — all right — if I spoke to him? Of course, I know I mustn't ask you questions"; and as he said this he removed a couple of cigarettes from the left side of his still open silver case and transferred them with exquisite nicety to the right side, bending his head a little towards the case as he did so and lightly blowing away a few feathery shreds of tobacco that in the airy fashion of wisps of cloud in a halcyon sky were flecking the polished silver. “Not personal questions, of course,” he went on, “though I can’t believe the poor fellow’s name is really Pantamount. I expect that’s a nickname, eh, like Tottie Creambo; one of those school nicknames — for, after all, Glint Hall *is* a kind of school, isn’t it? — a school from which we poor inmates that you chaps are treating for our various manias are hoping — I’m sure I am” — and the crafty John straightened his shoulders and threw a wistful and nostalgic glance towards the window— “to soon return cured into the ordinary world! It would be more polite, I expect, don’t you fancy so, Mister officer, if I were to address him by his real name? Some name, I expect, like Brown or Smith — though, of course, it might be, for we never know in these confused days, Romanoff or Hapsburg. In fact I might chance it, mightn’t I, and call him Mr. Jones?”

The attendant had been regarding John as he talked in this style with an expression of suspended judgment. It was not an expression of serious suspicion and it certainly was not one of intimate trust. As he waited for him to reply, John hurriedly told himself that if there were not psychological training-schools for asylum servants there certainly ought to be; and then he told himself just as hurriedly that training in psychology was the last thing needed.

“All that is needed,” he told himself as he watched the man’s eyes and mouth, “is natural human sympathy, and reservoirs upon reservoirs of instinctive tact!”

But in a second the fellow had to answer! He couldn’t go on looking at him with that peculiar expression whether he had learnt to look like that or whether it was an inspiration of his own. “Oh, chipped cup,” John found himself silently praying, “if you inanimates have any soul at all, make him answer me!” but aloud he said: I may be quite wrong, but my impression is that Pantamount was the name of a hobby-horse in the nursery of King Arthur.”

Suddenly the attendant turned his profile to John and began talking to himself. “One thing’s clear,” he muttered audibly: “Brown-Smith must come off his bloody knees!”

After thinking aloud in this surprising manner, the attendant resumed his circumambient stalking-match.

But now on the strength, John told himself, of a single chipped teacup, whose soul, like that of all souls, whether vegetable, animal, mineral, human or divine, was “totus sensus, totus visus, totus anditus, totus sui generis”, he moved straight to the side of that kneeling figure. The neighbours of Mr. Brown-Smith alias Pantamount, who sat at their breakfast nearest to the man, were to John’s surprise paying very little attention to him. Every now and then they whispered to each other; but though John couldn’t be sure their whispers had nothing to do with the kneeling man, the fact that not one of them so much as glanced at the attendant seemed to suggest that their minds were far away from him, and very likely far away from the present moment.

Mr. Pantamount’s own mind seemed far away, too, for his eyes were shut and his lips were moving in his concentrated prayer to some invisible hearer. The first thing John noticed about the man’s face was that it was composed of eery hard flesh. This flesh wasn’t stretched out taut over prominent bones. It was just hard flesh where most people have soft flesh. The man had an aquiline nose, and the colour of his skin seemed yellow rather than white or brown, and though John looked at his head pretty closely, he found himself completely unable to decide whether his skull was bald or whether it was covered, like that of a baby, with very fine, very filmy, whitish-grey hair.

But the general effect of this hard-fleshed, strongly moulded skull, tilted upwards and a little backwards, was that it was not composed of human flesh at all, but was a very ancient image carved in some kind of hard-grained wood, the image, so it struck John’s mind at that first moment of encountering it, of some sage from the lost continent of Atlantis.

“No, no! I don’t mean,” so he decided he would interpret Mr. Pantamount to Tenna when they were together again, “the image of an Atlantean god; I mean an image, or, if you prefer, a statue, cut in hardwood and petrified, if that’s a permissible word, by aeons upon aeons of aimless drifting, back and forth, to and fro, up and down, in the tides of the salt sea.”

John’s mind was in an odd state that morning, a more confused state than he had experienced since he first saw Tenna under the tulip-tree. He couldn’t expel from his consciousness that possessive, in-drawing, in-sucking, maternal eye of the mother of Seth, issuing forth from the half of the face whose other half was hidden against the body of the milkgiving cow.

He could see all the time with horrible clarity the pitiful helplessness of the desperate little jerks which that unhappy idiot kept making, with the obscure hope of originating some independent life, some seminal sex-life, some self-chosen life, of his very own, that wouldn’t at once, that *wouldn’t ever*, be lapped up and swallowed up and drawn up into the veins and sinews and maternal juices of his doting parent.

How to deal with the terrible force of normal love was a problem John Hush felt he was himself spiritually too weak to undertake either for himself or on behalf of another; and when it came to abnormal or perverse love it would have been grotesque for anyone as degenerate as he knew himself to be to attempt a syllable of advice to another person!

But though he had spent the whole of the precious unreturning bloom of to-day’s early-morning hours, hours that always had the effect of throwing him into a mood of almost painfully virginal receptivity, watching, watching, watching, with a dreadful absorption the vampirising suction of maternal love as its youthful victim squirmed beneath it, it still seemed to him that for him — though other men might risk such things — the only course was to dodge, with all the subtlety at his command, every conceivable kind of responsibility. But though he indulged to the limit a pitiful and almost wistful craving to escape responsibility, none of this mental spreading of wings seemed able to save him to-day from seeing before his inmost vision that insucking maternal eye, that eye wherein this much-praised “love” could be observed, in the serpentine coils of its devouring insatiability, swallowing its offspring’s freedom to live a life of its own and exciting itself to swallow the more voluptuously as its own pity for the helpless thing’s struggles draws forth more maternal saliva to smooth the path of its re-enwombing.

And yet this question, John told himself now as he stared at the kneeling Pantamount, was a matter of cosmogonic psychology. Should the maternal eye, turning so quickly into the eye of a virtuous vampire, be violently *put out*, or could it be, so to say, philosophically diverted or even perhaps metaphysically hoodwinked by the evocation of some primordial illusion with the help of creative nature?

It was for help to meet the life-challenge of this demonic beautiful-horrible thing that he had come to Mr. Lordy this morning; but Mr. Lordy had failed him. Of course he ought to have known that Mr. Lordy, as a worshipper of the Mother of God, was bound to fail him.

“My irritation with Mr. Lordy,” he told himself, “isn’t quite fair! The Mother of the Redeemer has been worshipped for so long with the crucified on her knees that to rebel against mother-love as something deadly to natural life has become an unnatural gesture.

“But a carved wooden image of the last of the Atlanteans, an image capable of keeping itself upright on its knees on an ordinary schoolroom bench for something like twenty minutes, is an entity, call it Pantamount or Tom Thumb, or Tamburlaine the Great, that I can’t afford to ignore when considering the crucial point whether in its essence love isn’t a curse to the human race—”

What he felt at that moment was that if he could only explain to this Atlantean creature just exactly what that mother was doing when she kept her eye on her idiot boy, he might persuade the man to go out with him into the yard now at once and address a word of warning to the woman.

“Mr. Brown-Smith!” he accordingly began.

But he was so obsessed by the indurated woodenness of the man’s appearance that it gave him a very curious feeling when the fellow lazily, easily, comfortably and quite casually opened his left eye and fixed it upon him. The eye was a heavy-lidded eye. It was an ichthyoid eye, and it gave John Hush a look that made him feel as if he had been dead twenty thousand years and in his ghostly peregrinations, while stumbling along the bottom of some prehistoric ocean-bed, had stumbled on a volcanic crack in that horrific floor of the universe and out of this crack had been arrested by the fixity of this eye. Then the other eye opened and then the mouth opened.

“Sit down and explain yourself!” said the mouth; and, as the creature who owned the mouth spoke, it itself slid down into a sitting posture and made room for John at its side.

Not one of the inmates who were finishing their breakfast at that end of the table gave John a glance; and as for the attendant who had encouraged him to speak to this “revenant” from before the Flood, he had calmly taken himself off and was now standing with his hands in his pockets quietly talking to his companion near the door.

“Mr. Brown-Smith!” began John again, as soon as he found himself comfortably seated beside this enigmatic fragment of antiquity. “What I’ve been wanting to ask you ever since I first saw you is this: Wouldn’t it be a good thing to invent some other word in place of the word love?”

The piece of driftwood that had become immortal in its aeonian tossings on all the seas of all the world allowed its Atlantean head to wag slowly from side to side in an emphatic “no”, “Why not?” John persisted.

“Because,” responded Pantamount, “words have magical power; and since the word ‘love’ has been used so long for all the meanings we give it in this part of the world, it would be silly to use another word unless we decided to break the spell.

If we decided to undo all that this magic word has done, then we would have to use a word that was opposite in meaning; and not only so, we would have to try hard to feel whatever it was that the new word meant.”

John looked at him uneasily.

“Would we have to say ‘hate’?” he enquired.

But the driftwood man only smiled at him. Not a word did he answer.

“You mean,” answered John, “that hate isn’t the opposite of love?”

But still the driftwood man only smiled; and now his smile made John think of a queerly shaped piece of wood that he had found once in a rock-pool near Lulworth and that a fisherman had told him must have been carried backwards and forwards across the ocean for a million years.

"You mean," said John, "that hate is some kind of perverted love, and that the real opposite of love would be indifference; and that if we found some appropriate word either biblical or classical implying anyway the condition of complete imperviousness, we might if we used such a word for a few hundred years gradually turn off, before we knew what we were doing, the electric current that moves the entire world?"

Pantamount didn't even smile. The features carved in driftwood, from which John had never taken his eyes, remained as unmoved as a universe from which the dynamic polarity of positive and negative electricity had been totally withdrawn.

John felt frustrated and baffled. He felt like a boy who had at last found the way into the circus of his ideal desire only to be rejected as incapable of even collecting the dung of the elephant he longed to ride.

"I had hoped you could help me," he murmured rather pitifully. "It's this woman from the village who comes to the sheds to do the milking. She's got an idiot boy, you know, and this boy—" He fancied he detected a flicker of interest cross the man's face, and so he dropped the Brown-Smith and boldly called him Pantamount. "And she loves this kid, Mr. Pantamount," he said, "to such a tune that I saw a look of positively sick longing on the boy's face when he wanted to follow one of those twins — you know the pair, Mr. Paramount? — as he danced over the shadows."

Once more a smile flickered over the piece of driftwood that had been crossing the Atlantic for a million years, and along with this smile there drifted into John's ears what sounded like a proposition of some elemental Euclid, a proposition that had come together out of the lines and curves of foam left by the ripples and eddies of half the tides of the Atlantic.

"What we tend to forget," murmured this elemental subhuman Euclid, "is that our choice is not between the chaoticism of 'love-hate' and the monotony of 'love-nothing'. It is between a less or a more of this lively and magnetic ‘love-hate’, that is to say a less or a more of the natural magic we’ve all been practising for a million years!”

John shuddered through his whole body and soul. He had never in his life felt so compelled to stiffen his whole being, and at the same time to bend it, metaphorically speaking, in that crouching movement, described by the Homeric word *aleis,* of a desperate creature at bay. He had never felt like this before, anywhere, or about anything. He sat straight up. He clenched his lean knuckles upon his hard, pressed-together knees. He felt as if in another second he might be compelled to butt with his head, as well as struggle with clenched hands and bony knees, against the impact of this cosmic ‘love-hate’ about which the man was talking.

“I don’t think—” he gasped, in a voice that to his own internal hearing was like a rending and a splintering crack, cleaving its way through some vast, compact, adamantine rock, thick as the world, “I don’t think I agree with you!”

He was astonished that the half a dozen men who were still lingering over their breakfast didn’t rise and crowd round them. He was amazed that the attendant with whom he had been talking didn’t come rushing up. But what was this? The arm that came round him was not the arm of any indignant attendant, nor was it the arm of any agitated neighbour. It was the arm of Mr. Pantamount himself; and no sooner was it about him than he was aware of the fact that he had totally and entirely misunderstood the man’s meaning.

The arm thrown round him, the arm supporting him, the arm that was now leading him across the dining-hall towards the entrance to the passage and the stairs, wasn’t at all the kind of “loving arm” the mere idea of which as approaching him and as touching him made him feel as if he could utter a scream that would crack “the thick rotundity of the earth “You misunderstood me completely, my dear boy,” said Mr. Pantamount, allowing John to lean against the banister while he himself, relaxing his hold upon the young man, permitted his own arm to sink limply to his side and stood awkwardly and obviously very uncomfortably on the second step of the staircase.

"You don't perhaps realise that what you call 'love' and I call 'love-hate' is an electric vibration, with an ebb and flow and a less and a more, as if it were an actual fluid, but a vibration whose activity, though not its essential nature, is affected by the amount of it you use.

"Thus while an ordinary amount of the 'love-hate' vibration or invisible fluid leaves things to all outward appearance very much the same as they were, the use of twice as much of this fluid has a totally different effect and a very sudden and sometimes a very surprising one. Can't I make you see, my dear boy, that in all these ultimate things in nature and life, it is not the difference of substance, but the difference of *quantity* that is the important thing? This nectar, this ichor, this miraculous semen of the gods, is simply the result of doubling, yes! and perhaps of more than doubling, the amount of love-hate you are using. This doesn't change the quality of the thing's creative magnetism; but it changes completely its effect. Can I make you understand? I tell you when you shudder, as you did'just now, at the idea of the appalling power of ordinary human love mixed, as it always is, with ordinary human hate, you are entirely justified.

"And you are entirely justified in crying out that you don't agree with the abuse, examples of which we see on all sides, of this divine force and power. Experiment with it yourself, my dear boy! Only the living experience of it will show you! And don't you see how easy it is? You don't have to say to yourself: 'Now I must mix my love for this person, for this stone, for this stump, for this grass, for this plant, for this mud, this rock, this empty air, this gulf between the stars, this horizon of moving ocean, this wall, this carpet, this bird, this cloud of gnats, or for these legs and arms that are yours, theirs, or my own, *with the proper amount of hate*!" I tell you you don't have to think what you're doing at all; or to understand what you're doing at all; or to stop for a moment to ask yourself 'what am I doing?' All you've got to do is to do it.

"And if you say to me, 'To do what?' I answer, 'To "love-hate" more than you've ever love-hated before!' That's all. To do it more. To do it more each time you do it!"

At this point Mr. Pantamount gave John a look; and this look John, in the quarter of a tick of the big clock just below them in the hall, decided that at all costs he must fix in his memory, exactly as it was so that he might recall every quiver and quirk of it, every up-lift and down-droop of it, to Tenna, when they met in the afternoon. It was, he decided he would tell Tenna, the most perfect example he had ever seen of the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove, fused in something else, something that John, whether Tenna understood him or not, could only describe as *magian*.

At the moment, however, John had no time to think out all that the man's look implied, since the words that followed it required instantaneous action.

"Better go down a couple of steps further," suggested Mr. Tantamount, "and let's both lean on this rail, so that you can keep watch past my shoulder on all who come up, and I can keep watch past your shoulder on all who are coming down. Our watchword, of course, is 'Inmates pass!' But if they're not inmates we'll both hurry down and be out of the front door before you can say 'Jack Robinson!'"

Hush obeyed him in every detail; and certainly if Doctor Echetus had appeared at the bottom of the stairs and Father Toby Tickle at the top of the stairs, they would never have given a second glance to these two active, practical, competent, energetic men exchanging a casual morning's greeting as they passed each other on the main staircase of Glint Hall.

"Forgive all this fuss, my dear sir!" murmured Mr. Pantamount. "And before I go on, let me assure you I don't give myself away to everybody like this; only I knew, even before you spoke to me, that you and I had a lot in common."

Meanwhile John's mind had been whirling round fifty times faster than the big entrance-hall clock, whose chief peculiarity compared with other institutional time-pieces was the bare, unbroken, unadorned whiteness of its face and the unvarnished blackness, an opaque dead blackness, more like soot than ink, of its broad flat hands, hands that resembled the gloved fingers of an implacable great-aunt raised to her face in mechanical prayer the moment her knees touched their familiar accomplice the straw-stuffed hassock.

"He's on the track of something," John thought, "but he's taken the wrong road to get there. This damned 'love-hate' business, however much he piles it up, can never get him there. He may be right that they're not opposites; or, if they are, that they depend on each other for their very existence; but I don't see how he can deny that they cancel each other out, and that no amount of 'more', 'more', 'more', 'more' can really fuse them together or produce the required magic. No amount of 'more' can change the quality of a thing's essence." John felt like a mediaeval theologian who has just nailed up a challenge on the gate of the university of the universe. But it was as if that far-carried fragment of Atlantean driftwood had read his thoughts.

"It is not," recommenced Mr. Pantamount, "that the hate-fluid neutralises or freezes the love-fluid, nor is it that the psychic-chemical atoms of love work upon the object to which we direct them in alternate activity with those of hate. To think in that way is to misunderstand the nature of both. The love-element or love-fluid or love-magnetism in us possesses as the larger portion of its nature psychic-chemical atoms that are identical with — and I have proved this from many curious experiments on these delicately mixed atoms in my own nature — identical with the psychic-chemical constitution of the hate-element or hate-magnetism in us. When we direct them towards any person or any thing, they create a link between ourselves and that person or thing. And this link, whether a love-link or a hate-link, or both together, as is usually the case, is not easy to break.

"And now consider this, my dear sir. The whole of our life is divided into two halves, the first action, the second contemplation; and the curious thing to note is that though they both tend to overlap each other, there is about twice as much over-lapping of action by contemplation as of contemplation by action.

"For instance, I am going out now to help trimming some young firs. My chopping and sawing is unquestionably action; but, as I do it, are my taste, my eyes, my ears, my nose, my touch, entirely absorbed in this action? Of course not!

"And what about women? A woman, let's say, is washing up at her sink. She is rinsing and drying; but while her fingers are at work she can see a stream of sunlight striking the woodwork at her side or striking a rack of clean plates over her head, and she can note a leaf blown across the bricks at her feet, while the sound of rooks is reaching her through the window from somewhere outside, or the long-drawn whistle of a train.

"We are thus compelled — as the academic logicians would put it, though, of course, really, we are *anything but compelled*, for all the world does the precise opposite! — compelled to recognise that contemplation occupies about three-quarters of our life, while action — though we may be supposed to be working twelve hours every day — really only occupies, that is to say entirely fills, our living consciousness for about a quarter of our life, or perhaps only a tenth. And now I come to my point—"

But at this moment a group of specially fortunate male inmates, favoured, as Tenna was, by being allowed to have their breakfast on trays in their bedroom, came leisurely downstairs, each one of them, without exception, John noticed, surveying Mr. Pantamount with fascinated interest as they passed.

"He must," thought John, "be some kind of a celebrity, perhaps a famous criminal of whom in those foreign places I never heard!" and he began conjuring up the most monstrous "Jack the Ripper" crimes, trying in vain to imagine his companion committing them. Then he told himself that perhaps Mr. Pantamount had a mad fancy that he was once a salamander who slept in a warming-pan under the stairs all day, but at night scurried about from room to room, all over the building, swallowing all the big black spiders it could catch by one leg and gobbling them up alive.

"But it must," he thought, "have been all a pure fancy! He may have crawled about in the dark all night for years with his head near the floor and his mouth open; but as for catching a single spider. I can't see him ever doing it. And whatever his crimes, whatever his manias, whatever his crazy delusions, whatever Jesuitical or Taoistical defence of 'love-hate' he may invent, calling it a 'magnetic vibration', I like this Pantamount. I feel a physical attraction to the fellow. But where the devil are my thoughts off to now?" He asked himself this when he realised that he was rubbing the slippery banister with the palm of his hand and imagining himself caressing the sea-polished, million-years-drifted woodwork of Mr. Pantamount's battered frame! That gentleman was now speaking once more, and speaking with a queer creaking sound in his voice that really did seem to John like the creaking in the skeleton ribs of some fantastic vessel from the ports of lost Atlantis, or even from the drowned harbours of Mu, the flood-city of the Pacific, a vessel that had drifted for aeons of time across one, or both, of these two oceans, and in drifting had been scraped and scratched by huge extinct devil-fish and hammered by the frontal bones of marine mammals larger than any leviathans as yet recorded in the annals of the sea.

"Three quarters of our life," creaked Mr. Pantamount, "is contemplation; and so much does our happiness depend on those three-quarters of our life that even if we are incredibly deft and adroit in our daily job we can be the reverse of happy in our lives!

"Now suppose, my dear sir, that that aggravating old clock ticking away down there were to recognise that you and I were both unhappy; and, further, were to decide like some shrewd old Nanny to tell us what to do to recover our spirits, what would it tell us? Well! I contend that it would tell us, as it saw us against this banister, that we must intensify our love-hate for everything in our consciousness at this moment. It would, in fact, tell us not to confine ourselves to the woodwork under our elbows or to the carpet-covered boards under our feet or to the sun's rays falling upon the marble squares upon the floor or to the heavenly scents of leaves and grass reaching us through some open window downstairs, that is to say, not to confine our intensification-scoop to what is round us at the moment but to include, in addition to the moment's plunder, all the most pressing images of pleasure, yes, and of pain too, that at this moment are disturbing, delighting, harassing, agitating, thrilling or lacerating us from our immediate past — that is to say, from the past that has power to hurt us still; the events, for instance, that brought us to Glint Hall and the personalities, both engaging and detestable, that were connected with our coming here."

At this point John Hush suddenly became aware of the countenance of that keeper of the north lodge whose sleeping-quarters and those of the woman who resembled his old nurse he could see from his bed. The man was staring at them with concentrated interest;

but the moment he realised that John had recognised him he turned his head, shrugged his shoulders and went off.

“What makes up the larger part,” continued Mr. Tantamount, though John Hush knew he had seen the man, “of everyone’s life is our love-hate for the people of our life, for our wives and husbands and friends, for our parents and children and neighbours, for our employers and employees. Thus whenever we are oppressed by sadness or by annoyance the cause is our love-hate for other people, either a momentary and transient, or a permanent and abiding love-hate, with the stress on the hate, or on the love as circumstances dictate. Therefore, if the art of life consists in the supremely easy and yet supremely difficult art of being happy, it becomes clear that our deliberate intensification of the nervous magnetic flow from our soul into the clothes, the faces, the gestures, the bodies, the ways, the words, the expressions, of the people of our life will be associated with the material things immediately around us.

“For instance, at this moment I am myself grievously affected by two faces, faces that I love and hate, faces that swim about in my spleen and burrow in my bowels, faces that I know so intensely that I feel as if my own face, as I think about them, comes to resemble first one of them and then the other! Well, my friend, these faces mingle with these stairs and these banisters, with that pool of sunlight, with that old clock’s ticking! Yes, and I’ve got to mix them with all the air around us and all the earth about us, and with the airy space beyond, and with the empty spaces beyond the airy-spaces, and with the great void itself.”

Pantamount’s words melted into so much before they died away that John’s mind was left flying in circles over the things into which they’d sunk, like a seagull over miles and miles of wet sand.

But for John the oddest thing about that particular montent of his clinging to the banister of the main staircase of Glint was that suddenly, and without warning, his own life-consciousness which till now had felt completely dominated by this human eidolon of ghostwood that had drifted for a million years over the antediluvian cities of Atlantis and Mu and about whom heaven knows what sea-birds had floated and what flying-fish had flown, rose in revolt. Yes, the almost insanely humble life-consciousness in John's Shakespearean actor's frame, from feeling like the consciousness of a fly, of a gnat, of a midge, of a worm, of a newt, of a spider, of a flea, began to feel as if it were the life-consciousness of some great magician capable of making any enemy he might have wish to the devil he were his friend before it was too late.

And with this totally unexpected sense of power there came a clear memory of what, when he left the milking sheds and came into breakfast, he had wanted from Mr. Lordy and been unable to get from him because of his being a Catholic, namely some device, some trick, some incantation, some miraculous formula, by means of which he could liberate — spiritually, of course, not physically — that idiot village-boy from his possessively devoted mother.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Brown-Smith" — he noticed that at the sound of those syllables Pantamount made a humorous grimace, screwing up his features in the most grotesque manner till he caused them to resemble the features of a sea-serpent to whom has been offered a dish of pond-eels; but John shamelessly went on—" what I want you to do now is to win the confidence of no less a person than the village idiot of this hamlet. Yes, this is serious, Pantamount. I want you to attract this boy to yourself, as I know you could if you only would, and draw off a little of this same 'love-hate' — intercept it. I mean — as it flows between this possessive mother and this possessed youngster. Come on, my dear sir, and let me introduce you. You'll soon see just what I mean."

He laid his fingers on the man's sleeve.

"I don't know," he began again, as they descended into the hall, "whether you have a mother living, Mr. Pantamount? I am an orphan myself; but there are cases, I assure you, when — cases when—" He broke off suddenly; and then, in quite a different voice, a voice that rose almost to a harsh scream:

"There are cases, Mr. Pantamount—" He stopped abruptly.

"Cases when," he went on after a pause, during which he was clearly trying to control himself, "it makes anyone *murderous!*"

The sound of this dangerous word startled both of them; and it was with an access of caution, reticence and discretion that they crossed the threshold and walked out into the air. Oh, how clearly John could remember afterwards all that passed through his mind as he led the man from the front of Glint Hall clear round to the back and guided him into the particular portion of the big north yard where were the couple of sheds in and out of which Nancy and her son looked after their cows.

He imagined himself founding, with the money he would receive from a brilliantly savage book on the way Glint Hall was run, a completely new Glint Hall, in which all the attendants were men he himself had trained and among whom it would be impossible to imagine such a creature as Mr. Gewlie.

The wind had entirely gone down when they reached the cowshed, and the smell of dung and hay and grass and milk and oil and grease and sawdust and stagnant water and horse-piss and disinfectant and river-mist and new paint all mingled together in the windless warmth to create a morbidly agreeable earthly Hades quite as pleasant if not more pleasant to John's peculiar taste than any earthly Paradise of which he had read.

The brooding sunshine heaved and quivered and wavered and languidly floated between the buildings as if it were a diffused essence of *pot-pourri* drawn from the fecundity of the whole of the British Isles; and the singular notion now edged itself into John Hush's brain that the cockleshell creases of Pantamount's figure represented a cosmic reversion to some purely mineral world against which the friendly, animal-vegetable world had long ago revolted.

To John's fantastic speculation at this moment the ocean-drenched driftwood of this weird person's bodily form, to which just now on the staircase he had been so strangely attracted, had grown to be something not merely petrified, but transformed into some element older than uranium or helium or hydrogen or nitrogen, older than all the scoriac dust from all the extinct craters of the world.

But his crazy thoughts were now impinged upon by their arrival at the shed, and their vision of Nancy and her offspring, the sweat running down the ruddy, plump apple-hard cheeks of the one, and the sad, hollow, elongated, Quixotic cheeks of the other, while the former worked with bucket and mop at the cribs, racks, receptacles for grain, and bins for mixing food and fodder, and the latter, with the biggest pitchfork Hush had ever seen, was shuffling back and forth, carrying the cow-dung and the trampled straw to a great heap in the corner of one of the small fields which were inside the walls of the institution.

So fast had John's imagination run ahead of what he was practically achieving that the process of introducing his friend to Nancy was well over, and the buxom middle-aged woman was already becoming infatuated with this refugee from before the Flood, by the time he himself had begun to talk to the idiot.

When his conversation with Seth, however, touched the performances of Hither and Thither, John had an agitating shock with regard to his own personal mental state. He suddenly experienced the extremely disturbing sensation that he was living in a dream that was inside another dream. There was terror for him in this. He had been dreaming and now was awake; but he found that he had awakened into a new dream, out of which he now had to escape again through any aperture, postern, skylight porthole, arrow-slit, airshaft, that in his desperation he could hit upon!

But what had happened to him? A minute or two ago, as he presented his new friend to the idiot's mother, and himself began talking in so mellow a tone to the boy, he not only felt that he was master of a very difficult situation but that he was master of it by the use of his own secret way of life that was totally outside the bounds of race or creed.

Yes, a minute or two ago he was on the crest of a great wave of life, in a *Flying Dutchman* of his own, and able to ride any storm and give any orders — like yesterday's crazy Commander — but now — Jesus Holy! — there was nothing to stand on, nothing under his feet, nothing to stop him going down, nothing to stop him going up, nothing to stop him going sideways, whether to left or right, and, with this, his senses had gone all askew, so that he saw sounds, heard smells, felt colours, tasted shadows!

"What on earth has happened to me?" he asked himself. His actual body was swaying and lurching about; though it wasn't only in the outer world that things had become very queer. He kept asking himself, “Is this the proper way to breathe?” For the notion had crossed his mind that he ought to be breathing through his skin, but that he’d forgotten the trick of this! And then he thought: “Didn’t I know how to fly when I was little? Weren’t there once feathers on my wrists? Yes, yes — *feathers*! Didn’t Plato talk of feathers? He’s a good fellow. Where is he now?”

Everything in John’s mind was rocking like bilge-water in the hold of a ship. He had begun talking to the idiot about love-hate. And now he was demanding of himself why it was that it had become impossible for the world ever to come to an end while there was so much love-hate to draw upon. What was the matter with him? Something must have gone wrong! “Is it possible that when I was getting sleepy and struggling and beating against sleep I broke through some barrier and slipped down some crack leading into a completely different world?”

And then in a flash of realisation he knew what it was! The whole atmosphere of psychic disturbance in Glint Hall — that is to say the magnetic cloud of *derangement under treatment* — was something totally different from the natural tradition of world-old rural aberration such as is rooted in the common earth along with rocks and stones and trees.

Yes, John Hush now saw clearly enough what had happened. Coming straight from insanity *within* Glint to insanity *outside* Glint, he had indeed quite literally slipped into a different world. The truth was that the insanity of the free outside world was capable of producing many startling effects upon Doctor Echetus’s imprisoned patients. To them it seemed doubly real. It was real in its insanity, which the inmates naturally held to be a very especial form of truth; and it was also real in the manner in which it was taken for granted and given its particular and special place in the free, noninstitutional life of the ordinary world. This idiot boy he was trying to assist in freeing himself from his possessive mother had managed in some subtle and indescribable way to hypnotise him into the poetically accepted and taken-for-granted aberration of a simple idiocy that was as old as the human race. This boy was, in fact, what in ancient races was called an “Innocent of God”, and in the presence of this planetary human derangement that was older than Homer or Hesiod, this derangement with whose sacred innocence even Hippocrates dared not meddle, this derangement that affected every aspect of the human flesh, every member of the human body, every impulse of the human spirit, all these modern psychiatrists about whom his guardian and his guardian's friends were forever talking seemed frivolous and superficial and trivial and altogether unsound.

Yes, John realised now what had happened to him. By trying to help this rustic Innocent, this incarnation of all the traditional simplicities of all the Simple-Simons of the immemorial village-greens of England, he had given himself up to a lad whose whole soul longed to catch, to take hold of, to feel between his fingers, some wild free creature that he could make his own, and only in this way obliterate his secret knowledge that to his mother he himself was just such a wild creature, and that all this craving was born of his own flutterings and quiverings as he was pressed to his mother's heart.

And John saw that by giving himself up to this lad — for he told himself that what might be called "the insanity of nature" was a more powerful force than what might be called "the insanity of nerves" — he had himself taken the part, in this mad drama, of those airy-fairy twins for whom the heart and spirit of the lad were crying.

"Well, Nancy my dear," he could hear Pantamount murmuring in that peculiar tone of his that seemed to introduce into the actions of an hour the feelings of a thousand years, "I must get off now to my spruce-firs; but I'll see you again to-morrow and we'll talk more about that little matter!" It was indeed with these words repeating themselves over and over again at the back of his brain— "that little matter, that little matter, that little matter!" — that John decided as he worked by the boy's side that what he was really doing for him was offering himself as the wild goose, as the wild lizard, as the wild shrew-mouse, or even as the wild hedgehog, for the idiot's imagination to overtake and hug to its heart, though its embrace killed the thing it loved!

But he knew he had contracted the last thing he wanted just then, namely a heavy human responsibility; and what if he had started towards this unknown Atlantean a foolish fancy in the breast of Nancy that might end by making the woman seriously unhappy?

"I must tell Tenna," he thought, "every word of this." And then there came over him a ghastly desolating sense that what he had particularly dreaded with regard to himself and Tenna was the very thing that had been brought to pass; namely that their individual manias should be swept into the current of their friendship — for he was actually beginning to wonder which of her locks he would most like to snip off; and there *she* was, scarce able to control her fury with that absurd old Rumpibus!

"I must have it out with her," he thought, "I must persuade her to enter into a sort of solemn league and covenant with me, so that I restrain myself about her curls and she restrains herself about that ridiculous old doddipole."

13. THE POLISHED TABLE

THE DAYS AND weeks and months at Glint Hall went by with their scrapings of nerve-strings, their loosenings of nerve-knots, their meltings of nerve-glaciers, their combustions of nerve-dams, their scoopings out of nerve-cisterns, their crater-eruptions of nerve-volcanoes, their ice-fields of nerve-corpses, without any startling change in the average tempo of the affinity between John and Tenna, until the revolving whirligig of fate, following its own rhythmical polarity of obsessions, brought time's pulsing locomotive to a pause on Saturday June the sixteenth, just a week before Midsummer Eve. The unequalled solstitial twilights of this particular summer, although entirely natural, were not without their temperamental effect upon the inmates of Glint.

This effect was primarily nervous, but it was emotional, too; and that open-minded scientist, the master of Glint, studied it just as carefully as he studied the recurrent effects of the waxing and waning moon.

It was as a consequence of these studies that he discovered that when subjected to a succession of twilights patients tended to become absent-minded and indulge in those vague daydreams in which all dangerous obsessions are lost. He was, indeed, famous all over Europe as the only authority who insisted on allowing protracted twilights their therapeutic effect.

This was on the principle of *like curing like.* For as Nature in her northern twilight falls into a mood suspended between a romantic worship of light and a romantic worship of darkness, so also does her paragon, man; and as Nature's temperate zones are healing and restoring to her poor creatures of earth, so nothing but good could come, the Doctor argued, from letting loose, so to speak, this solstitial suavity upon agitated human nerves.

And under what conditions, he must have asked himself, were his certified bedlamites most apt to be soothed by the innocuous daydreams of nature's twilights? Obviously when reading! And reading what books? Obviously old-fashioned books. From the pages of modern books the minds of readers seldom wander. It is from old-fashioned books that these touchingly abstracted heads are lifted up in their trances of absorbed daydreams.

Doctor Echetus never hesitated to rely upon the sound judgment of his chaplain, Father Toby, as to the difference between disturbing books and soothing books. Thus it was brought about that the chief inciters to insanity, to whose devilish influence, according to John and Tenna, these aberrations were due, namely religion, sex, and blazing sunshine, were all barred from this group of patients from whose carefully-shaded lamps, and from whose books chosen by Father Toby, not a few wholesomely dreaming heads were lifted up in the peaceful dusk.

The grand piano was an innovation. It had been steadily advocated for the reading-room by Ursie Mum; but for a long time Doctor Echetus had refused to consider it. It was only when Ursie Mum persuaded a specialist from Budapest to explain to the Doctor the value of adding good music to good books, and both to the influence of prolonged twilight — and then only when she herself offered to pay for the piano — that Echetus yielded.

In regard to the smoking-room, nobody interfered with the Doctor's method. Here he was startlingly original. Here he followed the purely empirical and experimental method. He insisted on the shutters being closed and the curtains being drawn and all the electricity being fully turned on. Thus when a patient moved from the reading-room into the smoking-room it was like leaving one hemisphere to enter another! There was no card-table in the room that wasn't brilliantly illuminated, and there could never be a doubt in the mind of the blindest player as to what cards he held in his hand.

It may be imagined it was found necessary in spite of the Doctor's experiments in normal nightclubism to open a couple of small windows near the door when the smoke-filled warmth of the room became too overpowering; but, that the Doctor's original idea shouldn't be interfered with, the particular windows letting in the air looked to the east and consequently opened on the darkest twilight that could be found round Glint Hall, and although in the twilight the old heathen camp could be seen, the lights in the room were so glaring that the view outside was considerably dimmed. The Doctor's idea in this whole scheme of the smoking-room was to evoke, as far as it could be done, an environment of metropolitan normality, thereby inducing the patients to forget that they *were* patients.

On this particular night of the sixteenth of June John Hush and Tenna Sheer were facing each other over the same familiar untouched draughts-board as had been their inanimate companion every night since Lady Day. "Nothing," John was earnestly whispering to her, "can stop my reading your feelings in your face. We know each other too well, my precious one, and we can't be put off by words. You can repeat that bravado till midnight and you won't make me believe you. I know you are as tense as a bowstring, and so are the rest of us, and every day now till we're off it'll get worse and worse. Tottie and Thither and Miss Bolster are just as strung-up as Mr. Lordy; nor are the Commander and the Zeit-Geist any better. Pantamount is the only one of the lot of us who seems unruffled, and, of course, it may be self-control even with him.

"I don't have to tell *you*, my treasure, what the worst danger is!" Her eyes, which had been growing larger and darker and rounder all the evening and had begun to surround themselves with cavernous circles that steadily grew hollower as the flickering orbs within them grew darker, now emitted a startling glitter that shot from their centre to their circumference as they reflected the rays from the nearest electric bulb in the ceiling.

"You mean *ourselves*?" she murmured. "Well!"

"Well! Not only you and I, my dear. I mean the whole lot of us who're in the secret. I mean all the Confederates."

Tenna bit her lips and was silent. Then, unable to restrain herself, she began speaking rapidly, though still in so low a voice that he found difficulty in following her.

"What's so unfair about you, John, is that you treat my instincts as if they were no more than your own manias which have merely to do with yourself! Do you know I sometimes feel I shan't be able to get into that plane at all with that abominable old man! I feel as though if he were there I'd throw myself out, or throw him out!"

John looked at her exactly as a devoted elder brother placed in charge of the "little ones" in the absence of their Nanny might have looked at the most excitable of these troublesome infants.

"Please, please, my treasure, listen to me for one second! Don't, for heaven's sake let it be like it was that awful time in May when neither of us could utter a word at the Confederates' table, and they all saw we'd had one of those lovers' quarrels at which — as I told you then — they say Jove laughs, and Miss Bolster said—"

Tenna gave him one of her most furious looks. "Who cares what Miss Bolster said? And you've no right to call it a quarrel in that stupid schoolboy way when naturally anyone's feelings would have been hurt by what you said."

"What *did* I say? No, no! I'm not trying to tease you! I really do want to know. It's very important I should know. Don't you see, when we're all so sensitive about certain teasing views of what we feel so strongly, it's maddening to be quite in the dark! We know that something we couldn't bear to be said is being said about us and yet we don't know what it is! Please, please tell me what it was I said that hurt you so! I *know* I could explain it."

But the only reply she gave was to turn her head away. She had come to know, by the experience of a quarter of a year, that nothing put him at her mercy so quickly as the simple gesture of turning her head away from him and keeping it turned away.

At this particular moment her head was turned in such a manner as to cause the electric light from the bulb in the ceiling to isolate, like shadowed ivory, from the rest of her face the white portion of her left eye, which, since the brown of Tenna's eyes was a very deep brown and a good deal deeper than the brown of her hair, gleamed, by reason of the contrast, with an almost phosphorescent whiteness, a whiteness so pure that it possessed a power of reflection.

This power of reflection possessed by the intense whiteness that encircled the brown of the girl's eye, and which at this moment, because of her half-averted head, was all John Hush could see of it, was now made use of by the nearest electric bulb shining down from the ceiling to reflect mysterious gleams of an unusual lustre.

The truth is that, as in the case of certain historic women whose faces have come down to us in poetry and painting, Tenna's appearance, evasive and shadowy as it was, had the peculiarity of something transparent. Her inner soul, her astral identity, showed through.

It was through the sharp outlines of her profile, through the bony structure of her cheeks and eye-sockets that this was now emphasised. It was emphasised by the merest chance, by the most trifling and negligible accident.

John was hopelessly unobservant in these things. This mysterious golden lustre now reflected in the white penumbra of Tenna's eye as she kept her face half-averted was entirely due to something abnormal and unusual about the particular electric bulb above them from which the light fell. There was certainly something peculiar about this bulb, but John didn't glance up at it or give it a thought; though he yielded himself wholly to the effect it produced.

The bulb may have suffered some slight accident to its pure spotlessness and translucency that caused it to emit an uneven ray, or by some quirk in its glassy substance it may have flung down a more intense light than its original purpose warranted.

In any case it was a negligible accident in this hot illuminated chamber, where the intermittent airs from outside smelt of the thyme-scented grass of the high camp-ridge and not of the muddy reeds of the river that encircled Glint Hall in every other direction, that such a mystic gleam, or demonic gleam, or gleam from some temporary crack in the adamantine walls of our present dimension, shone from the delicate features of this old-fashioned girl that it never occurred to John Hush that the accidental concatination of a half-averted profile with an erratic electric bulb could be its sole cause. No revelation from the confounding workshop of Nature takes longer to establish itself in a clever diplomatic mind than that the greatest emotional events are often spontaneously generated by the flips and flurries of chance stirring into life the fecundity of chaos.

As he gazed at her now John Hush made up his mind never to allow his reaction to any conceivable caprice of hers to divert the obstinate steering of the mental ship of his life towards the north-star of fidelity; and this in spite of any new mania of his own or any new madness of hers.

"We've only got a week more, dear heart. I implore you to remember that; only a week more before the moment comes for you to escape the visit of your father and for me to cut to pieces my jealousy of the American woman! Let's make a bargain, my one of all, that we can never break!

"But the important thing now needn't be as serious as that. It need only be a simple, honest, faithful bond between you and me for these few agitating days! Don't be angry with me any more, I beg you, my sweet, because of that wretched mania of mine. I frightened you unnecessarily about it.

"You see, Tenna my treasure, I have to confess all my manias to you; and that must give you the idea that I'm all manias, nothing but manias, whereas it isn't like that at all!

"I yield to them pretty often, I know. But I don't always yield to them! No, by no means always! You must remember that it's only *three times* in these three months — April, May, June — that I've done you-know-what! And I've got all three of you-know-what safely upstairs in my collar-drawer. I haven't done to them you-know-what. Well, as you know, I needn't talk like that — I mean I haven't put a match to any of the three, so as to lick up the smell of their burning, and so lick up my girl till she's part of me, though I've wanted to so much that my knees have knocked together and my stomach — you know those feelings! — has sunk inwards till it felt like a broken soap-bubble!

"Oh! I've come near it Tenna! I've lit a match and held it to one of those heavenly curls, closer — closer — closer —

But I didn't burn it! I tell you, Tenna, my precious, I really must have a much stronger will, now that I've met you, than I ever had before! Why, in the old days nothing on earth would have stopped me from burning those wisps of hair of yours! You don't mind my calling them curls, do you? I know your hair's only wavy really and not properly curly, Tenna, but nothing has made my will stronger than this temptation! They're all three in my collar-drawer upstairs. One's in *Leaves of Grass*, one's in *Don Quixote*, one's in the

Odyssey in Loeb's Classics. And though, of course, I've *thought* of burning them time and time again, I never have!

"It's extraordinary, really, when you come to think of it! Here am I in 'the very lists of love', as it says in *Venus and Adonis*, only it isn't exactly 'love', not love in the ordinary sense, anyway! But here I am, surrounded by people who have followed their personal manias *to the limit* — and there, in my collar-drawer are three of your darling curls" — he lowered his voice till she could barely catch the words— "yet I can't—"

He stopped. But had Mr. Lordy instead of being deep in chess in the reading-room with Mr. Candlemas, the mad lexicographer from Sheffield, been seated near them in the smoking-room listening to their talk he would have noticed the hurried, instinctive movement with which Tenna's hand went up to her head at the words "three of them".

But John was far too full of his own obsession and of his pride in controlling it to notice the fainter and more attenuated effects of his words. "I tell you my will has become what I never thought possible — really strong and powerful! It's queer, isn't it, my precious one?" His whispers were growing louder as well as more intense. "But, of course, it's all due to being really in love for the first time in my life. If I weren't in love it wouldn't have been long — in April probably! — that I'd have done the worst, and let myself go, as most of us here have done, to the limit. But you mustn't imagine, my one of all, that it's been easy to restrain myself. You'd scarcely believe what power of will my love for you has developed! Only last night I was on my feet three times in the night: once for the curl in *Leaves of Grass*, once for the one in the *Odyssey*, once for the one in *Don Quixote*! My will became a gigantic pair of tongs — I could feel it holding me. Yes, little owlet! I stopped being your gladiator-slave. I stopped being your emperor at Capri. I became your simple lover transported by a will as powerful as a pair of iron tongs; and I took myself up and put myself down as I decided I could best serve you and be your faithful bodyguard.

"I don't want you to think of this new will-power of mine as if it were using its power to pick up and put out of the window a vicious old rat who has already swallowed his granddaughter's tail and is nibbling at more of her. But don't you see, my treasure, how unfair it is — surely you *must* see! — for you to let yourself go about that old fool Rumpibus till you risk endangering our whole escape? I can't see how you *can* do it, Tenna! It seems unlike you. You become a different person when you do it.

"And don't you see the danger — danger to yourself in doing it? Don't you see what I mean, Tenna? Sir Warden Sheer will have made all his arrangements to come. We can't get off before Midsummer Day because my guardian won't be married before that day and the American plane won't be starting till he's married. And we must give them time to motor here from London.

"And don't you see that if you let yourself go as you're itching to do — and don't think I don't know it, my precious, and don't think they haven't noticed it, too! — let yourself go, I mean, to the limit, and do old Rumpibus in, as you easily could, don't you see they'll put you up there, in 'the Wing', and when the moment comes we shan't be able to escape with the rest, and our miraculous chance will be over and have come to nothing and can never return. The American plane will be gone without us! You and I will be separated and kept apart till we die of old age, or manage to kill ourselves; and that, you mad nymph *in antro*, is no easy thing here where all the windows are barred and they've taken everything away!

"Shall I tell you something, Tenna, that you'll be surprised to hear? I've been lying awake half the night for the last couple of weeks — oh, more than that! — telling myself horrible stories about what'll happen, what can't help happening, in case your self-control breaks down and you attack old Rumpibus! It's gone so far with me, my treasure, that I've actually — but never mind that!

"The point is, it's simply cruel of you to be so unfair as to let yourself go, when for your sake, I mean for both our sakes, I've turned myself into a pair of tongs and have lifted myself up and put myself down and carried myself out into the yard as if I were a dead rat! Why should you let yourself go and I restrain myself?

"Answer me that, girl of my heart! Answer me that! For it's unfair, unfair, unfair!"

There had come to be something so like a sob in that “unfair, unfair, unfair” that one of the two attendants, after a glance at his mate, began stealthily threading his way through the card tables towards their corner.

In spite of his emotion it was John and not Tenna who noticed this movement; and in a voice completely different from the excited feverish whisper he’d been using, a voice so perfectly under his control that when Tenna heard it she couldn’t — in spite of her agitation, and though she felt more inclined to cry than laugh — couldn’t resist a flickering smile, “Come, little lady,” he said, “it’s time we stopped quarrelling over our sins!” and rising from his seat and stretching a hand across the draught-board to help her to do the same, he boldly and brazenly led her between the tables, clear past the nonplussed attendant, and out of the smoking-room into the long passage that ended, as John knew well, better indeed than any other inmate, with a view to the east where rose the ridge with the two Scotch firs and the ancient British camp. Thence, turning their backs upon the staircase to the bedrooms above, they moved slowly to the door of the reading-room.

“Sorry, kid,” John murmured humbly, “I oughtn’t to have got so worked up. I expect it’s the terrible nearness to the time. But it’s no good my warning you and then getting so excited myself! I wonder if we were idiots to go and call our little group the Confederates? I don’t like what you tell me about Ursie Mum asking what Miss Bolster meant by saying to those women, ‘No, I’m not a Catholic. I’m a Confederate’.”

Tenna pressed his hand. “I’ll try,” she said gravely and simply; and it was clear to him that in her mind she had never felt the real danger, but now was seriously promising him to struggle against her fury with old Rumpibus.

No one interfered with them when they took their places at the round mahogany table in the centre of the reading-room, near which, as was his habit before locking up the room for the night, Bill Squeeze was taking his Heraclitus-doll, for that was one of the parts the bearded little image played in his life, on its good-night inspection of the bookshelves.

So accustomed had all the habitués of the reading-room grown to the murmuring sound of Bill’s nightly dialogue, wherein silence represented philosophy and a series of “obstinate questionings" ordinary humanity, that only a few readers ever looked up from their books, and of those who did so to-day it was only Tottie Creambo and Arabella Bolster who smiled at the pair on the step-ladder.

There was only one attendant in the reading-room. It was clear that the opinion of Doctor Echetus that the most effective of all sedatives for the disorientated and distraught is an old-fashioned library had influenced the official arrangements in this case.

The attendant upon whom by some natural law of spiritual selection had fallen the duty of superintending the reading-room was the oldest of all the attendants at Glint Hall. His name was Davy Jones and he looked exactly as if he had reappeared from a locked sea-chest deep down in the ooze, where fabulous gems had glimmered from his skull with mysterious gleams, and pieces-of-eight had tinkled against his ribs with every movement of every fish's tail.

Davy Jones took no notice of any particular inmate except Pantamount, towards whom his attitude was extremely peculiar. It couldn't have been called hostile, nor could it have been called friendly. It might have been described as humorously and gravely self-protective.

Davy Jones would throw the same sort of glance on Pantamount as a dignified gentleman quietly following his accustomed path through his own wood but suddenly tripped by a stone, or a root, or a bramble, might turn to cast, in reproachful but amused astonishment, at the object which upset his equilibrium. "*If,*" thought John now, "Pantamount has flesh like a drifting log, and Davy Jones like a ship's keel, with a precious chest embedded in it, is it not natural that the latter should be apprehensive at the approach of the former?"

Since he had first met Pantamount John had been obscurely conscious that the man's fellow-inmates were uneasy in his presence. That the attendants were hostile to him was clear, and it gradually impressed itself on John that he himself was the only person among all the men and women in Glint who felt an unmistakable attraction towards this weird individual.

As to the solitary attendant in the reading-room, John felt nothing towards him except a lack of interest so extreme that it would have reached that dangerous limit of boredom that drives certain unbalanced natures to commit indecent crimes if it had not been for another element in the thing.

But just as the suggestion of immemorial driftwood in the flesh of Pantamount was a magnet of attraction to John, so the suggestion of sunken gems about the sleepy skeleton of Davy Jones produced in John a quite special kind of irritation.

One of the most startling conclusions he had reached as a result of his three months' incarceration was that the physical peculiarities of his fellow prisoners was a thing of much greater importance to him than their mental attitudes. These latter seemed arbitrary, fitful, fanciful, and unilluminating; whereas the former seemed to spring from terribly deep and tragic movements of human life.

Thus it was not Pantamount's theories about "love-hate" and the crucial importance of it's "less or more" that arrested John. It was his corporeal frame. And in the same way the kind of *ennui* that hovered in the air like a desolate sprinkling of grey sand whenever he contemplated Davy Jones was accompanied by a curious physical irritation with the old attendant's sleep-drenched flesh, flesh that concealed, fold upon drowsy fold, layer upon somnolent layer, unshared, unrecognised, unenjoyed, piled-up palimpsests of hoarded memory.

Davy Jones had the longest and whitest beard John had ever seen. It was a very thin beard, and when the old man twisted it, as he frequently did, round his wrist and even round his longest finger, where it shone like the silvery mane, caught in a tamarisk, of a lost and riderless Bucephalus, it gave some of the frequenters of that reading-room a curiously uncomfortable sensation.

It struck them, in fact, as possessing a sub-human life of its own, the life of a creature resembling a sea-anemone, whose tentacular filaments drew their lustre from the gradual dissolution of fathom-deep masses of gem-breeding scum, scum too heavy to stay on the surface, but since it was not heavy enough to sink to the bottom could only dissolve very slowly. Once in their places at the Confederates' table, and if not under the eye of Davy Jones, at least within the charmed circle of his imperishable beard, John and Tenna could hardly be deaf to the sound of the piano which as usual was being played softly and gently, but like most of the others who were gazing either at Bill Squeeze on his step-ladder with Heraclitus or at the tulip-tree framed in the open window, they were neither musical enough to be annoyed at the sound or placid enough to enjoy it.

The Confederates had now, for at least a month, entirely monopolised this round bare mahogany table. It was a table for whose particular polishing a servant called Mrs. Wohntscher, the only servant in Glint who wasn't an inmate, had a predilection that amounted to a passion.

Mrs. Wohntscher's wages were small enough, but if it hadn't been for Ursie Mum they would have been smaller still, for the simple reason that when once in her daily round of dusting she arrived at this big bare table in the reading-room she couldn't leave it. To polish it was to the soul of Mrs. Wohntscher such a heavenly delight that she could only be parted from it by the end of her day's work. But her rapt labour was certainly appreciated by John, if by nobody else. For when after the glare and heat of the smoking-room he saw Tenna's fingers sink to rest beside his own, and remain at peace folded upon that polished mahogany surface, which really in those June twilights resembled a magic pool, a calm deep as a deep sea used to descend upon him.

As he led Tenna to their table of conspiracy this particular night and took his place by her side between the Zeit-Geist and the Commander, he deliberately tried to divide his receptivity to what was around him into two spheres of sensitiveness, so that with one he might enjoy the air that was coming in through the window, and with the other guard his girl from getting worked up over poor old Rumpibus and Tottie Creambo, for there they were, playing their usual game across the table, he on the further side of the Commander, and she on the further side of the Zeit-Geist, who certainly, as far as he was concerned, took no more notice of her than if she had been a belated specimen of the plump fluffy moth known as the "yellow-under-wing Apart from the danger to Tenna's nerves, both persons and things as John looked about him, were soothing to his spirit. Mr. Lordy, snugly ensconced between the twin dancers who were whispering across him, was smiling with an expression of unruffled benignity as the Commander expounded to him the absurdity of using the mind to think; and as John watched the youthful faces of the girl Thither and the boy Hither at such close quarters, for it was unusual for them to sit down with the other Confederates, he was struck by the complete absence of all ordinary human interests in their faces.

Their lovely little features — for lovely they remained in spite of this surprising lack — were absolutely devoid of expression. They looked neither sad nor happy. They looked as if they had no desire, no ambition, no fear, no hope, no regret, as if they were totally unaware that such feelings existed.

With most of the persons sitting round this table and with nearly all the rest in other parts of the room, our friend had struck up during his three months in Glint a friendly acquaintance; and, indeed, he would have found it hard to explain what it was about the twin dancers, of whom the rumour ran that it was the irresponsible indulgence of a titled father that had affected their wits, that had made him so cautious in their case and induced him to draw away from any close contact.

The whole experiment of this music-and-twilight cure naturally implied that there should be as little exciting discussion of politics, crime, sex, or the cinema, as it was possible to avoid, and Davy Jones seemed endowed with the power of lifting his head and opening at least one of his eyes when any of these agitating topics emerged in the offing.

After glancing quickly at the peculiar ceremony proceeding on the step-ladder, where apparently Heraclitus had to utter an evening benediction to various heavy-weather sages of our feather-brained race, John allowed his attention to wander to the familiar window and the branches of the tulip-tree floating out there upon the flowing sea of twilight.

It seemed to him that what the air was bringing into the room that night was much more than the scent of flowering trees and fragrant shrubs. There was a scent upon it that was like an exhalation rising from a mass of cold grey water into which had been diffused long ago in aeons beyond all memory the souls of dead water-plants whose very shapes, not to speak of their names, were today totally extinct.

But from the tulip-tree under which he had first seen her John's spirit was now jerked back to Tenna. He shifted a little in his chair so as to be able to watch her face more closely. He had learnt by experience that such scrutiny was irritating to her even when it expressed nothing but the fascination of a lover; but he felt he had to risk it now, for he had already decided that at the first sign of her self-control breaking down he would get her out of the room even if he had to carry her in his arms.

He suddenly discovered that he had an ally in Pantamount who, with a sagacity and subtlety that bewildered him, had already sensed the danger and was leaning across Mrs. Wohntscher's circle of magic mahogany with his great bare arms outspread and his heavy king-log visage drooping as if across the rowlock of a ten-thousand-years-old Boat of Charon.

John soon realised that he'd been emptying "some dull opiate to the drains" and had "sunk lethe-wards" longer than he had intended while Tenna had been arguing with Pantamount.

When he became aware of their talk he found that though she had grown unusually excited she was keeping her head better than he had feared. Anyway, she was too absorbed to notice how he was watching her, so he could go on doing so without any fear of annoying her. She was gesticulating freely with her hands, as she always did when excited, but since when she was alone with him, and he took good care she should be alone with him most of their free time, he was absorbed in watching her face and listening to her words, these gestures were as a revelation to him.

And since she was now facing Pantamount and giving him her full attention, John was able to "take her in", as we say, in unbroken entirety, like a river-pool free from the ripple of a breath of wind, the rising of the smallest fish, the falling of a single leaf.

He noticed how relaxed her whole slender body was as she talked to Pantamount. It gave him the impression that it was the body of an exhausted dryad who had been on her feet so long as a captive odalisque in a tyrant's tent that she could only respond with her fingers to the call of her confederate-tree.

Her whole body suggested helpless weariness, and yet the life in her wrists and fingers was quiveringly electric. But not only had her body this look of helpless relaxation. Her brown hair was of so fine a texture and each strand of it so filmy and thin, that it sank across her high forehead with the massed effect of drifting seaweed, lifted and released, released and lifted, on the smooth surface of a recurrent wave.

The aquiline tilt of her nose and the old-miniature curves of her unreddened lips accentuated John Hush's feeling that she really did belong to those creatures of the elements known in the old books as Sylphs and Undines and that there was about her that sort of closeness to the more rarified aspects of planetary chemistry from which must have originated the weird fairytales about changelings.

John Hush had already discovered that there were aspects of Tenna Sheer that were as alarming as they were alluring.

Indeed, the better they had come to know each other the more intimately had his obsession for her become associated with a boy's awareness of mysterious vistas of recondite adventures, while hers for him was more and more like a little girl's desperate craving to possess an inanimate companion that was absolutely and entirely her own.

It was the movements of her hands and fingers that carried him away now as he watched her for they were completely unlike any hands or fingers he had ever seen.

The extraordinary and even startling thing about them was the abnormally wide spaces between the fingers and the girl's power of moving them in a sort of rhythmic dance while her wrists and arms, whether recumbent or lifted, seemed to partake of the strange lassitude of the rest of her body.

Pantamount, as Hush could clearly detect, was finding his task of keeping her attention growing harder every moment. The man couldn't see as clearly as could her lover from his place at her side that in the midst of her gestures — which were merely being used to emphasise her discourse, a discourse that itself carried danger, for it had already begun to be directed without distinction against all old men — she allowed her mobile fingers to play round a heavy water-bottle which as a missile of retribution might have knocked a horn off the skull of Satan.

And she was getting dangerously worked up. She was now assuring Pantamount — and John didn't dare to put that water-bottle out of her reach — that devils are always waiting to enter the souls of men the moment they approach seventy and their natural strength abates.

She asserted that a new Act of Parliament ought to be passed decreeing that automatically, at the age of seventy, and without appeal to any Court or any official board, all old men without exception should be sent to prison; to pleasant, comfortable prisons, of course, and more agreeable than Glint Hall, but still to prison, where they, along with the vicious devils that take possession of their souls, could no longer do any harm.

There might even be, she explained to Pantamount, special faraway islands in the Pacific reserved by the united Nations for the purpose of keeping these devil-possessed Strulbrugs in comfortable isolation for the rest of their days.

The unfortunate thing was that Pantamount took human emotion so casually and lightly that it was very difficult for him to imagine anyone getting agitated by the absurdly simple game that was going on between old Rumpibus and Tottie; a game that consisted as far as Hush could see in the former trying to steal a bit of bread from the girl's plate, while she, watching like a cat the approach of that long predatory finger and thumb across the polished table, would clap one of her plump little palms upon these extemporised tweezers and her other palm upon the bit of bread with a childish chuckle of triumph.

And then just what John most feared happened. The fingers of Tenna's right hand tightened upon the neck of the water-bottle and, leaping to her feet, she lifted it in the air.

John had never seen any human action performed with less time for human thought than Pantamount's action now. In the beat of a pulse he was on his long legs. In a second beat he'd caught the bottle before she had drawn it back for the fling. In a third beat he was leaning across the segment of polished mahogany that divided him from the girl, and then, while all the faces round that table turned towards them, he lifted her in the air and, heedless of her wild hysterical laughter, turned to carry her from the room.

Very rapidly now, however, but quite calmly and clearly and quietly, he spoke to John; and his words, below Tenna's laughter and all the hubbub in the room, sank into John's consciousness like a quick series of bullet-shots.

"Don't give me the lie. Don't contradict any of their nonsense! Let them take me upstairs. I can cope with anything they do. If I'*m* left behind when the time comes, it won't matter!"

All John could do was to follow them to the door through the crowd, clinging to Tenna's fingers, from which the bottle had already fallen on the floor, and fallen, oddly enough, without breaking, so that John was destined to remember more vividly even than Tenna's distorted mouth the particular look of the dark water as it flowed out over one of Ursie Mum's reddest rugs.

Of the white beard of Davy Jones, of Davy Jones himself, John could remember nothing. The old man must have hurried from the room for help at a pace that was like the subsiding of an ocean-wave when it has broken upon a ship's deck. It was from a position on his knees at Tenna's side as her hysterical convulsions subsided — for Pantamount had placed her on an old horse-hair sofa that stood at the foot of the staircase to the women's quarters — that John was able at last really to grasp the actual issue of what had happened; and it was an intense relief to him, one of the greatest reassurances of his life, when as he rose to his feet at Tenna's side and helped her, very pale and silent, but perfectly calm now, to get up from that horse-hair sofa and lean on his arm, to find, that as far as he could tell, nothing that threatened destruction to their plan of escape had so far occurred.

There was a great jostling and murmuring going on round them, broken by cries and outbursts of anger and exclamations of pity, but there was always this sort of hubbub when the inmates, dazed by cards or by exciting books, were crowding together discussing every detail of what had happened, and enjoying in lively gregariousness every sort of prediction as to what was going to happen.

John had caught a glimpse of the strait-waistcoat official among the attendants whom Davy Jones had summoned to the spot. Nor was he without his own secret and cruel wrestling with the dark angel. It seemed to him that as he emerged from the whirlpool of Tenna's convulsions on that horse-hair sofa — and he could even recall one moment when across his own wet mouth, full of a salty and yet dusty saliva that tasted as if he had been biting his lips face-down upon half a dozen such sofas, there seemed to be drawn some maddening wisp of Tenna's brown hair — he felt a throbbing guilt in some blackened gland of his memory, as if he and his love were returning together from a crazed plunge into the blue-black interstices of some gigantic poison-fruit full of fatal though delicious juice.

What John Hush began murmuring to himself, as soon as Tenna and he were on their feet again and the attention of the other inmates had been drawn elsewhere, was anything but a clear-cut confession, nor was it a tragic appeal to divine or human mercy. He didn't form in his mind words that exactly expressed his feelings as these feelings presented themselves. The words he was muttering gathered themselves from his consciousness at random, like mists rising from the surface of a mountain lake, and formed themselves into palpable and visible shapes.

But the general burden of what his heart was now muttering to his head was that it was no good trying to dodge the not very nice fact that he had known perfectly well he was letting Pantamount sacrifice himself for them all and especially for himself and Tenna. He hadn't been private secretary to an ambassador for nothing. He knew there were plenty of subtle ways in which acceptance of a man's sacrifice could be justified by those for whom it is made.

Pantamount was one single person, for example, and *they* were many people, and among them were several women. Pantamount had acted so quickly and decisively that he had left him no time to decide the issue in any other way than by humble and grateful acceptance of the queer man's heroic gesture. But, in spite of all this, his conscience still felt guilty.

Tenna and he were now standing, both of them absorbed in their own thoughts, on the outside of a jostling group of inmates who had gathered in the corridor between the door of the smoking-room and the door of the reading-room. From what he heard of this group's excited chatter it seemed that Mr. Cogent Cuddle had brought a couple of new patients, each of them middle-aged men of an unusual appearance, to wait in the reading-room until either Doctor Echetus himself, or Father Toby, was free to conduct them to their quarters for the night, if not to give them some kind of official reception.

By the time John had shaken off — and he felt as if he had done this for both of them — the distressing pressure on throat and lungs and nerves of that broken-springed, remorse-shiny, black-slug-slippery horse-hair sofa, he became aware not only that Father Toby was in sight but that Ursie Mum was at their side. This extraordinary lady, John had already decided, resembled Rabelais' Priestess Bac-Buc. He regarded her as the noblest creature with the breasts of a woman he had ever encountered; and to himself he always styled her Mothef of the Hunted.

She took him aside for a moment now, which was easy enough. Tenna was so sad and weak and humiliated and reduced to the vanishing point that she could be safely left in the dazed trance into which she had fallen without the danger of any new harm coming from this isolation.

And once having got him to herself, Ursie Mum hurriedly explained that it would be a great mistake for Tenna to go now at once to the loneliness of her bedroom, for the vibrations in her nerves would in all probability lead her mind round and round and round, in circle after circle of confused memories, bringing her nothing but the shapes and faces of people, outlined with horrible distinctness, and all of them giving her pain.

"Take her back to that table," she whispered to John, "that Mrs. Wohntscher so loves to polish — and she really does it wonderfully, doesn't she? — and let her get a few other ideas and feelings into her mind before you let her go upstairs. I may put on my dressing-gown and look in on her later in the night — perhaps take her a cup of chocolate — that's the thing that always makes me sleep. But Father Toby's going to give a little talk in the reading-room presently and that may have the same effect as the chocolate. I've known it myself; and listening to the other Father, too."

And she pushed him back to Tenna with a smile that gave him the feeling that in her heart of hearts she regarded her husband's ministrations as so much hot chocolate and Father Allen Wun's as so much hot cocoa.

John obeyed her to the letter, however, and took Tenna straight back to the polished table where they were warmly welcomed by the Marquis of the Fourth Dimension, alias the Zeit-Geist, alias Professor Zoom of the College of Doom.

"Well, you've sure come back at the right moment, children! What a lovely pair of ballad-babes you two are! The balloon's just going to burst. The drop at the tip of the Almighty's tongue's just going to fall! Lipperty-lopperty! It's gone! Wurra-lurra-buderpest! Laura's got it on the chest! The little birdies of fate have been beating their wings for sometime, but now they're really ready to fly! There comes a point you know, my pretties, there comes a point! Humbuggery's the word, of course, with all mankind. But things can happen, my dears. Not often, of course. But they can happen. And then there's no case for a cosmic crack and no need for the dung-cart to hurry back!

"Yes, things can happen, my pretties. Yes, after all, there do arrive moments when matters come to a head! It may be only a speck that does it. A speck of dust lodged in a wind-bag can blow a world sky-high! Explosions, you know, can be extremely unphilosophical. They can even be unscientific! Humbug, humbug, humbug — and then *crack*, *bang* — and where is the round world?"

As he beckoned them to sit beside him, John was staggered by the whiteness of the whites of Zeit-Geist's eyes. He shrank from even approaching the thought that there could be anything in common between this grotesque Eidolon of frivolity and the wild, tragic, staring eyes of Tenna, but where that unearthly gleam of God knows what sort of gold-dust had appeared on the whites of his girl's eyes under the electric light the appalling whiteness of the Zeit-Geist's eyes had horribly increased; and as John Hush watched it now it seemed as if it kept drawing to itself more and more of the man's eyeballs, till this pair of eye-centres, whose peering out from any living organism means to all of us poor creatures of earth our sole power of vision, was in danger of disappearing.

“With one illusion,” the Zeit-Geist went on, “inside another illusion, and all these double and treble illusions inside bubbles that are themselves inside other bubbles, and all of them together, bubbles and illusions, floating on a dream-river in a dream-world, what, I ask you, could be more fitting for the last scenes of the last act of the sixteenth of June than to hear Daddy Toby tell us of a new discovery about God—”

He broke off suddenly and pointed excitedly with the very finger that had so terrified John. “You see,” he cried, “what has happened? That idiot Cuddle instead of taking this pair of new inmates upstairs to their rooms has brought them in here, to hear a sermon on sanity, sobriety, and chastity from Father Toby, our great hooker of fish!”

And, sure enough, Toby Tickle’s open-air voice, full of the harsh twitterings of reed-warblers, the splashings of water-rats, the cryings of plovers, the challenges of yaffles, the screamings of jays, the quackings of wild ducks, now rose and fell in its familiar plangency.

“All aberrations of the human mind, my dear people,” declared Father Toby, while John, who knew too well how this sentence would end allowed his mind to wander, in company with his eyes, to the two new inmates, who, deserted by Mr. Cuddle and with nobody to welcome them except this impersonal open-air voice, were now standing side by side just across the threshold of the reading-room, surveying their surroundings with considerable curiosity and, as far as John could detect, with no apprehension at all.

There was, however, no question which of these two unusual events, occurring simultaneously twenty-five minutes before bedtime, namely the arrival in the reading-room of a couple of absolutely new patients and the delivery in the reading-room of a sermon by Father Toby, interested the present inmates the more. Toby, as Jesus would have put it, “*they had always with them*” and destiny might decide that they would find the newcomers more hopelessly devoid of amusement or entertainment for them than was usually the case even with patients who were incurably mad. But this was unlikely; and new guests at Glint were more exciting than new sermons.

As John gripped Tenna's left hand under the polished table, which at that moment seemed to gleam with a deep magic light as if its lustre were due to the anvil of Hephaestus rather than the duster of Mrs. Wohntscher, and looked anxiously about him, praying that their careful plot would not at this crucial moment, only a week from their escape, be broken up by Doctor Echetus. He couldn't help, any more than any other inmate could help, peering excitedly at the two newcomers, so unceremoniously landed here by Cogent Cuddle. This would have been a moment for Bill Squeeze, with Heraclitus in his pocket, to make it clear that the hour was unpropitious for new personalities.

But Bill must have departed for the night to Betsy and the south lodge. And then with a rush of shame and admiration he thought again of Pantamount, passive, patient, and unresisting, like an ancient camel with such a complicated experience of sand-storms and massacres and plagues and famines and the madness of strange gods that with a selflessness that was almost shocking in its natural ease he could let himself be carried off to that upper wing so that there should be no insuperable obstacle to the escape of the rest.

"And so, my friends," Father Toby was now saying, "I would like to appeal to you all, and especially to the two new patients, for I see we have two fresh faces here, whom I am delighted to welcome to our little intimate family of the good God, or, shall I say, to this 'great good place', as some old writer calls it; to appeal to you all, I repeat, to remember the one Great Essence of our Holy Faith, which is its integrity. By its integrity I mean its perfect oneness with itself.

"Our religion can be summed up in two simple one-syllable words, the word *knot* and the word *tight.* We are all tied together in the tight knot of our holy faith. And outside this compact globe, or *ball,* if I may use such a word, of which God is the centre and circumference, there is nothing but nothing. You are all interested, are you not, in the noble game of football? And you know well, do you not, the difference between a soccer ball and a rugger ball?

"Well, God's mysterious and eternal universe is like a soccer ball. It is rounder than a rugger ball and is more often kicked than carted. But the beautiful thing about our cosmic soccer ball is that it is *the all*. Outside of it there is absolutely and simply nothing.

"You have heard of Hell, dear people? Well, Hell is only our blasphemous and wholly impossible idea of something outside this tightly knotted soccer ball of a universe beyond whose circumference is nothing. You know, dear people, how the river flows round this 'great good place' as that well-known ancient famous author — at the moment his name escapes me — called our happy home?

"Well, in the same way God's love radiating by the necessity of the Divine Nature from the Eternal Being flows round *all that is* and protects it from being dissolved into all that is not. That river of love guards from nothingness the memory of everything that has ever existed and every thought that has ever been thought. Yes, dear people, you know how the river flows round us at Glint? Round and round and round us the river flows!

"And so and in the same manner round this cosmic ball flows the river of salvation."

At this point there came a voice from the polished table and John couldn't be sure whether it came from the boy Hither or the girl Thither. "Who catches the little fishes from the shining river?" This interruption broke the spell.

The Commander himself leaned forward over the table and gravely uttered the words: "By the pricking of my thumbs something wicked this way comes!"

He spoke so solemnly and with so grave a face that both Hither and Thither burst into high-pitched shrieks of childish merriment. But it was at that moment that Tenna herself, who all this while had been staring, with eyes that kept opening wider and wider, at one of the two new patients whom the inconsequent Cuddle had thrust into the reading-room and left stranded there like a couple of sea-lions on a sheep-browsing promontory, waved her free hand — one of her elbows was on the table and her chin was resting on that hand's inactive wrist — in the direction of the newcomer she'd been watching.

"He wants to answer him!" she burst out; and added quickly, when John turned an appealing look upon her, "Why don't you all let him speak?"

Just as if he had actually heard her, and he may have done so, though John didn't believe it, there now came, dancing forward into the space between Father Toby and the polished table, a man of about fifty in full evening dress and wearing patent-leather shoes. Had he been brought here in a car, John wondered, dressed like this? He was a striking-looking figure. His hair was grizzled and cropped close to his skull, while his high cheek-bones, sunken eyes, and hollow cheeks, gave his face a skull-like and a gargoyle-like appearance. His body was very short, but his arms and legs were long, and his hands and feet were abnormally large.

He advanced into the middle of the room in a series of skipping jerks; and it became in some queer way plain to everybody that if the caprice took him he could have used his big hands as feet and brandished his big feet like hands. But the moment he began speaking his absurdly short body and his startlingly long limbs froze into absolute immobility.

The sounds that issued from his mouth gave everybody the queerest shock, for his voice turned out to be more high-pitched than even Hither's and Thither's. It was indeed hardly human. It was as if some extremely bold insect were expressing its disapproval of the philosophical conclusions of the human race. Its protest was expressed in oddly constructed sentences, sentences so abrupt as to remind John of fifth of November squibs and crackers, yet what he said was simple enough and perfectly intelligible.

"Every word," he squeaked and gibbered, "of what has just been said is a lie! Nobody knows how many worlds there are — all totally different! *Our* realities, *our* worlds, our *truths*, *our* ideas, *our* impressions, are all different, and we may take it for granted that we are surrounded by millions of completely separate and completely different universes, some of them attainable from our dimension, most of them entirely beyond the scope, not only of our science, our reason, our logic, our intuition, our instinct but of our imagination, too!

"What the generations of mankind are like and what they've been like ever since they first appeared is the generations of the leaves of the forest! Leaves, leaves, leaves, leaves! Like leaves we come and like leaves we go! And if you want to know what we ought to aim at becoming with the whole of our intention I will tell you this first night I've set eyes on you! We ought to aim at becoming like a cloud of flies, a cloud of gnats, a cloud of midges! Thus and thus alone shall we escape places like this, preachers like this, and the silly solemn stupid humbug of taking for granted that a person is crazy because he doesn't accept the opinion of the hierarchy of ages, the academic poppycock of ages, the traditional abracadabra of a rabble of priests, professors, lawyers, doctors, scientists, politicians, divines, whose pontifical claptrap and up-se-daisy assumptions are simply the milk of those old moo-cows of habit, custom, tradition, and vain repetition, curdled by the holy horrors of hoodoos and taboos and put over on us, ever since man first appeared on the earth, by those who want to rule.

"How much better to do what I do and become a mob of midges, that is to say to blow up once for all this self-satisfied idea of wholeness and integrity and the beauty of a well-stuffed rounded-off person's person, and just say to all comers: I, *moi qui vous parle*, Johnny catch-as-catch-can, am not a pathetic tragical-comical *one creature* with a fatal power of choice between God and the Devil, but a host of creatures, a cloud of gnats, carried up and down on a welter of winds! Who and what can catch me, keep me, bind me, hold me, if I am true to myself? You say you can make me suffer and can force me to obey?

"Oh yes! And destiny, fate, necessity, chance, can beat me down to the ground. But what can they really do to me till they kill me *en masse* and finish me off *en masse*? They can do nothing! They can do nothing because I am *not one but a multitude.* And because every single thing and every single identical life is a multitude of things and lives!

"No, it's a lie that the universe is one. It's a multitude of personalities, of gods, of demons, of men, of animals, of midges and worms, of electrons and atoms! The reality of realities is not One but Many. And, of this many, nothing is eternal. Everything passes away! My thought, your thoughts, and the thoughts of every god, every demon, every insect, every worm, every minutest life that exists — *all* pass away, *all* 'leave', as the Great Magician says, 'not a rack behind'!"

Having thus expressed himself, this queer stranger balanced himself for a second on his head; and then rising on one of his enormous feet, whose size was emphasised rather than diminished by the elegance of the shoe that covered it, he uttered an audible sigh and murmured, loud enough for all to hear, but as if he were talking to himself, “The pleasure of life is expectation.”

14. MIDSUMMER DAWN

THE DAYS BEFORE Midsummer Day were without question the most agitating of John's whole life. On the contrary, by some lucky chance, a chance that to John was quite inscrutable, Tenna was calmer during those six days than she had been for a long time, and of her own accord took the initiative in avoiding Tottie and old Rumpibus.

The fatal time came round at last, and on Sunday the twenty-fourth John was awake well before three in the morning, nearly a whole hour before the sun rose. He lay dead-still on his back in the cold greyness of the prae-dawn, deliberately keeping his eyes tightly closed but listening intently to the sound beyond sound that proclaims the approach, through dedicated abysses of infinite space, of the light of a new day. This sound is not the mathematical music to which the spheres dance their mystic dance. It is not the balanced rhythm of the advances and retreats of the galaxies and the nebulae. It is not the humming of the unfathomable dimensions that surround us. It is not the overheard inbreathing and outbreathing of the revolving mystery that is the nearest neighbour to the world to which we belong. It is simply the sound of the coming of light.

What John felt most aware of as he lay there listening on that twenty-fourth of June to that cold, wordless antiphony between being and nothingness, between the is and the is not, was a feeling of wonder that he wasn't more disturbed, more agitated, more tense and strung-up on this morning of all mornings than he felt himself to be. How could he be so calm when everything of value to him in this or any other conceivable world was swaying, reeling, shivering, rocking on such an intolerable pivot of suspense?

Well! It was no good asking himself how he could be like this. The point was that he *was* like this; and it was a damned good thing for him that he was. "But it's up to you," he told himself, "my good John, whatever may be the cause of this unnatural calm of yours, to consider every move you’ve got to make in the next hour or so; and consider it from more angles than one and along with every possible danger that such a move may bring with it.

It really is a wonder,” he told himself, “that things have got as far as they have. But I must get up and go out and have a look at those south-lodge spikes and make sure they’re in working order. Everything depends on those damned spikes!”

Lifted up now as strongly by what he had to do as he had been by that weird fancy he had confessed to Tenna of his will being like a great pair of iron tongs with which he could pick himself up and plant himself wherever he might wish, or might decide he ought to wish, to be, he got out of bed in that queer pallid light that he kept telling himself was a sort of metaphysical light and began hurriedly dressing. While he put on his clothes he tried to arrange in his mind all he had to do if he was to have things really ready for their escape. This was no easy task, not only because, good diplomatist though he was, he was the extreme opposite of a competent conspirator, but because, owing to the special mental condition of most of the inmates, there were so many weak and ticklish spots in their conspiratorial phalanx that the most important and obvious duty of any leader fate might give them was to go up and down behind the front line, propping up the tottering knees and steadying the twitching lips of those whose shaky nerves, at a touch, at a straw, at a falling leaf on the air, at a ripple in the water, are plucked at by the madness of panic.

When he was dressed he stood hesitating for a moment, wondering whether to put on his boots or to carry them in his hand. The odd thing was that the idea of going to that stream flowing under the wall at the south lodge without his boots gave him the jitters.

“Why the holy Jesus should I feel like this from such a simple thing as carrying my boots and creeping downstairs in my stockings? Am I going dotty?” And then — but still standing in the same position with one of his boots dangling from a long leather bootlace in one hand and the other hand on the particular knob at the end of his bed that would always be associated with the wagging finger of the Zeit-Geist — he uttered that false artificial chuckle which is an essential attribute of a Nordic diplomatist in a Slavonic court.

On this occasion, however, the joke was against himself: “For what the hell,” he groaned in his heart, “am I doing, talking of ‘going dotty’ when I’ve got in my collar-drawer those three wisps of Tenna’s hair? God! How that does give this whole business away! Over girls’ curls I’m as crazy as you like, but the horrors that come over me when I think of creeping downstairs carrying my boots are — and I don’t deny it! — really and truly insane. Everything depends on the agreement of our minds about reality. That is sanity and everything is relative to that. There is no such thing as what the more simple-minded of our scientists call the ‘objective world’.

“This room and that yard” — and John waved the hand from which his left boot hung by its bootlace towards the ghostly panes of his window— “only exist because all the various minds that keep them going see more or less the same room and the same yard.

“But the great difficulty about it is that some of these minds are superhuman and some of them subhuman. So the common vision of things that these silly sods call ‘reality’ is a compromise between what souls of the elements see and feel and what the wood-ticks and the nuclear electrons see and feel. No wonder everything looks funny when we put our heads on one side and worse than funny when we stand on our heads.

“Nature isn’t a static picture on a stretched-out canvas. It’s a living face all puckered up with different feelings and with weeping and crying and putting out a galaxy of jeering tongues!”

He let the bootlace go and the boot fell with a thud on the floor. The sound of that thud and the thought of the many ears that might have heard it gave him a shock. He sat down on the edge of his bed and stared at his window. He counted six whitish-grey squares of window-glass above three rusty-black bars crossing a pallid gulf of dizziness that was scooped out of limitless space by the opposing wall of the north lodge.

“Of course, I ought to carry my boots when I creep down those stairs and unbar the hall door.” He knew there were a couple of night-watchmen down there, great lusty prizefighting fellows ready to stop any rush of inmates to escape. But he knew that in the summer dawn these guardians of the gate were always dead-asleep in the little entrance-office where they played their night-long games of chance; but, of course, the tramp of these thick-soled boots of his would almost certainly wake them — why the devil, then, had he got this queer horror of going down the stairs and crossing the hall with his boots in his hand? And why was it a still worse horror to think of following the gravel path between the tulip-tree and the flowerbeds, and along by the meadow-railings, with only his socks between his bare feet and the ground?

Damn! He had to face it. He had to admit it. It was the old supreme horror of his boyhood come back to torment him on this day of all days, this morning of all mornings!

Yes, it was that old boyish mania about femininity, that blind sick horror of everything feminine that used to extend to everything that yielded to pressure, that horror which at one time associated itself with everything that was soft, with everything *that went in*, with everything that resembled children's india-rubber toys when they were squeezed!

It was all very well to boast to Tenna about his will being strong as a pair of iron tongs, and about his power to hold his manias in complete control, and about his inflexible refusal to let himself put a match to those three wisps of hair in his collar-drawer! Yet here he was at this moment of all moments, when it was absolutely essential he should get out of the house without being heard — here he was, suddenly confronted by the worst horror of his boyhood, the thing he had for years taken for granted would never trouble him again!

But why should touching the floor, or the steps, or the gravel, or the grass, bring all this back? Yes, it had been in him all the time, this peculiar association of ideas; but why on earth should touching things with his bare feet, or with only socks or stockings on, bring into his mind that appalling boyish dread?

Damn it all! Where was the connection? What on earth had the feeling of gravel and grass and flagstones and bare boards under his feet to do with his boyish terror of growing, when he grew up, not into a man but into *a woman*? Had any watchful observer crept into John Hush's room on *his* bare feet just then he would have noticed how John's head had sunk so far forward as he sat on his bed that by this time his forehead was only about eight inches from the boots on the floor.

His shoulders were hunched up as he sat there, and he had laid his hands on the pair of boots beneath him and was pulling their leather tops towards each other, making them *just* touch, as if they were kissing each other, or whispering and conspiring with each other, and then he would pull them apart with a jerk, and then, after letting his long thin fingers hover languidly back and forth above them like sprays of seaweed over sea-anemones in a rock-pool, he would begin it all over again.

But suddenly he stopped, squared his shoulders, clasped his fingers tightly together and sat up straight. He had recalled a very curious conversation he had once had with his old nurse, the woman who resembled Mrs. Cogent Cuddle of the north lodge. This woman had been with his mother at his birth and had witnessed the performance of what was an ancient custom in that part of the country when by some chance the infant's feet appeared first.

On this occasion there had been a pause in the delivery while the doctor, a stiff-jointed old man, was still on the stairs, and to hasten the birth an ancient crone who was assisting rubbed the soles of the child's feet with a particular kind of pebble-stone, muttering as she did so some obscure ditty about boy-babes and girl-babes.

His mother, the nurse told him, had set her heart on the infant being a girl, "And if you, Master John," she had added, "be soft where women be soft, you may take it from me 'tis that pebble-stone fixed it — first in *her* mind, and then, half-born though ye were, in *yours*."

The possibility that this insane dread in his boyhood of developing certain feminine attributes and necessities which was so oddly associated with a horror of going bare-foot might be explained by this incident impressed him very little in those early days, but it came back to him now with a revealing force. It was all very well to boast to Tenna about his will being strong as a pair of iron tongs, and about his power to hold his manias in complete check, and about his adamantine refusal to let himself put a match to those three wisps of hair in his collar-drawer.

Here he was at this moment of all moments, when it was absolutely essential he should get out of the house without being heard, here he was, suddenly terrified by that peculiar feeling of an intense neurotic outrage at contact with the floor or the gound without his shoes!

And now he realised why he must avoid this particular feeling. Uh, but he knew too well what the terror was! He felt it in every whitish-grey pane of that window and in all that he could detect across that scooped-out and barricaded-up gulf of space between his iron bars, bare to the faintly stirring breath of the dawn's pallid outriders, and exposed to those windows of the north lodge that were now staring back at him and taunting him and whispering at him: "Keep your boots on — and keep your hair on — and stay where you are! And bear this in mind — you double-dyed ass — the fields of dawn aren't the place for ugly cowards to creep about in!" Yes, it was when he touched anything cold or damp or wet or scratchy or sharp or rough with his bare skin that the feeling came over him *that he was turning into a woman.*

Yes, it was then that he felt his breasts beginning to grow and their nipples to distent and get longer and longer and longer and longer, get so long in fact that he could wave them about in the air! Yes, he felt them now, growing as long as elephant's trunks and groping about in the same sort of way! Why, he could take hold of those window-bars with his elongated trunk-like nipples, nipples made of that warm, intimate, flexible, baby-smelling, rubber-like stuff, that seemed to have been stripped off the very secretest organs of warm nature-hidden life, and pull himself from the bed towards the midsummer dawn!

Thinking thus — if it could be called thinking — John Hush made several feeble movements with his hands towards the places in the air on both sides of his thin chest, now well-covered by woollen vest, linen shirt, and cloth waistcoat, where these imaginary members were waving about like the flappers of a dying seal.

He got up from the bed and began walking up and down the short piece of carpeted floor between it and the window. Each time he approached his boots, one of which lay on its side with one single long bootlace trailing beside it, he touched the heel of this particular one, which was turned towards the window and from which a gleam of whiteness was thrown back from the head of a smooth well-hammered shining nail, and gave it a hesitant tentative poke with the tip of his big toe. And as he walked up and down this small strip of colourless carpet he was cruelly torn between alternative decisions. Should he force himself to disregard these imaginary appendages to his thin chest, leave his boots as they were at this moment, and his slippers, side by side under the bed, as they were at this moment, and, leaving his room, creep downstairs past the little office-room, and have a good try at opening the front door and slipping out on the gravel-path beside the tulip-tree?

Or should he obey his dread of this horror-mania, put on his boots and slip downstairs as quietly as he could, letting the inevitable creaking take its chance, and chance take its own risk, while he just simply hoped and prayed that the two men inside that little room would be too absorbed in their game or too fast asleep or too drunk to take any notice as he pushed the bolts and went out? Over each of these choices there hung a special and peculiar dread.

Over the first — going down in his socks — hung this horror of elongated nipples. Over the second — going down in his boots — hung the peculiar terror, which was always such a cruel compulsion with him, of feeling a coward, feeling, in fact, that he was dodging what he feared, and, worse than all, feeling that by taking this path of funk he was starting on a funk-slope that must inevitably lead him down, down and down, till he found himself hemmed in by every kind of fear and face to face with some unknown horror from which there could be no escape.

So — for this was what he kept telling himself — the end of the funk-slope must inevitably be that he would perish of pure unmitigated terror, while the end of the other decision remained unknown. He might by forcing himself to carry his boots in his hands while he let his monstrous nipples hang down in front, or buttoned them up tight inside his coat, get safely out of the building and be able without disturbing a soul to find out whether those sham wooden spikes were still safely in position only waiting to be removed *en* *masse* with the greatest ease when the final moment arrived, by which time he might easily have entirely forgotten the nipples-horror.

Or, on the other hand, he might reach such a point of horror with regard to them that he’d be able to think of nothing else; and in place of opening any front door or visiting the spikes of any under-road stream, he’d just rush deliberately into that little office-room and beg to be taken to “the Wing” and have “these things” cut off by Doctor Echetus!

It was, in fact, a choice between an action that risked ruining everything and everybody in a welter of madness, or an action that only risked the ruin of this one particular plan of escape. Well, he must choose the one or the other; on the one hand all or nothing, on the other hand much less than all or a good deal more than nothing.

After all, his boots might not creak, or not loudly enough to spoil everything, and if he were caught, well! it might not prove the end of everything! But could he face — in his own deepest self — knowing to the end of his life that he’d been a coward and had funked carrying his boots because of — of those things?

Well, he had faced already ere now a good many memories of contemptible cowardice and had, yes he actually had, either forgotten them entirely or could treat their memory with indulgence. Yes! He would try it *in his hoots*!

But he never forgot to the end of his life what he felt as he put on his boots and laced up each of these objects with furious tightness over the instep of each foot, and then tied the laces in savage knots above his ankles. He remembered his concluding thought with special clarity as he rose to his feet and moved his body in odd jerks up and down as if performing some gymnastic exercise without lifting his feet from the floor.

He knew well that this conclusion was a final and very important one, as indeed it was; for it became a turning-point and a mile-stone in what might be called the wavering direction of his willed destiny.

“What am I doing?” he asked himself. “Well, I am choosing cowardice in this particular case quite deliberately so as to wrestle with life under the easiest and most unimpeded condition. By means of my cowardice I have won for myself now a completely free advance along a particular track of time, entirely irrespective of what may happen!

"I have chosen, in fact, the path *by which I can enjoy*, *and as I might say devour*, *every change in myself and every change in what is happening to me*, without bothering about my character or about my reputation! All I've got to do is to 'press on regardless,' as young Seth once told me he did."

All this being now settled, John went softly to the door, opened it, and closed it behind him. He congratulated himself that he'd dressed without turning on the electric light, since now he had no shock of contrast to face in the darkness of the corridor and the stairs. *Creak! Creak! Creak!* Of course it was quite impossible to go down these well-known stairs without this accursed sound. Well, he must just accept it as part of the carrying out of his great decision.

And what exactly was his great decision? "Oh, mother of the Muses, don't let me forget it — at least not till Tenna and I are safe! No, no, I can repeat it to a dot — though I'd be puzzled to remember how I reached it! Follow your worst cowardice and avoid the temptation to be brave, but press on regardless, doing the thing that in spite of your cowardice and all your stupidity it is your clear destiny, I mean the urge of your whole nature and the craving of your whole being, to do!" *Creak! Creak! Creak!* He tried to lessen this cursed noise by leaning all the weight he could possibly transfer from his feet as heavily as he could upon the wrist of the hand which was sliding down the banister.

There was no interruption, there was no sound except this devilish creaking, till he reached the bottom of the stairs; well, not precisely no sound, for from the very start, since from the moment he had closed his own door, he had been aware of a faint murmur of voices from that little room on the ground floor where those two watchers were trying to keep each other awake.

But this he had expected, this was the recognised background, like the flow of the river, to the presence of night at Glint, but it was when he let his hand slip from the polished knob at the bottom of the banister, and giving each of his thighs little blows with his clenched fists so as to diminish — there could have been no other reason for such an odd gesture — the ridiculous noise these damned boots of his made at each step, and it was when he began to walk slowly and cautiously from the staircase to the front door, that he was aware of the figure of a man crouching against the wall.

In recalling this later he was struck by the fact that he wasn't by any means overpoweringly startled by this apparition. His impassivity, however, wasn't due to anything heroic in him. It was due to the indescribable relief he was feeling that those revolting figments of his imagination, those distorted elongated female nipples that he had actually felt — for obviously if he hadn't felt the loathsome things as well as conjured them up, it wouldn't have been so bad — were no longer with him.

So great was this relief that the sight of the egregious Gewlie huddled up there waiting for him troubled him hardly at all. "That's one advantage of having a mad imagination," he told himself, "*real* devilries are reduced." The "reduced" devilry in this case was the look in Gewlie's eyes of hollow, desolate, unhappy, in-drawing suction. It was this look the man turned on him now and he caught it by the light from the door-crack of the little room; for the fellow had turned the lantern he carried as a gesture of humble apology upon his own feet so that all that passed between them took place by the light of that door-crack through which along with the thin glare of electric illumination came the sound of the two watchmen's voices.

In his relief at having shaken off those imaginary feminine appendages John found his whole nature exceptionally alert. He recalled in a flash the galvanic effect on Gewlie's nerves of Tenna's mention of her friend the gardener, and moving as quietly as he could he advanced towards the man, stepping gingerly on his heels till he could actually have allowed the uplifted sole of his right boot to descend upon Gewlie's exposed left ankle, as the man crouched sideways under the wall.

The ray from the lantern Gewlie carried flickered a little upon that prostrate ankle, which was covered, in spite of the season of the year, by a well-knitted woollen sock, for the unhappy creature, devil-ridden pervert though he was, had a grandmother in

Canterbury, to whom his hideous physiognomy, whenever it was presented to her old eyes, was an angelic vision.

Gewlie's slippers above his Canterbury socks were not a reassuring spectacle, for there were ominous stains on them, and, indeed, he had been called to assist — for such perverts are as precious to scientists in research laboratories as they are to despots in political prisons — both in that upper wing, wherein recalcitrant inmates were taught the limits of institutional forbearance, and in the Doctor's vivisection annex, wherein, according to an hypocrisy deeper and more unpardonable than that of the worst religious humbug, human flesh was supposed to be healed by the torture of animal flesh.

Had the incorrigible Pantamount been present here, "whether", as St. Paul would say, "in the body or out of the body", he would doubtless in his Atlantean knowledge of the language of the inanimate inmates of our planetary bedlam, have been struck by that moment's vivid exchange of impressions between Hush's upraised boot-sole and Gewlie's prostrate ankle.

But John, even if he had known the way two such manifestations of matter exchange their impressions of a self-stricken planet, was now occupied in informing the wearer of the knitted socks that, early as it was, he had an appointment to meet the Glint Hall gardener at the south lodge.

Like a will-o'-the-wisp chased by a jack-o'-lantern Gewlie's light flickered now. It flickered so violently that John felt as if the man had been transformed into a swarm of fire-flies. But an event occurred at that moment that gave this strange creature an entirely unexpected command over himself. A fantastical dialogue between the two watchmen in the little room suddenly burst upon their ears. But apart from this dialogue, to which they both listened intently with their backs to the wall opposite the little room, John felt by a queer instinct that something in Gewlie, either a vein of deeper devilry or of deeper religion, had considerably diminished the gardener's power to scare him.

"Didn't you hear what I've been saying to you all this while, Gum? And if you heard what I said, didn't you understand?"

"I can't honestly say I did, Glue."

"Will ye listen, then, ye sodden gomorra, if I tells ye once again?"

"'Ere's me ear, Glue."

"It may be no more nor a bloody flea-bite to thee, Gum, old pard, but to me who've been a Third-Programmer ever since wireless were wireless, to me who've been president for ten months of the Take It or Leave It Club for Special Asylum Attendants, there's never been such news as I've just heard; news that if you had the brain of a badger, Gum, you'd jump out of your hairy skin when I uncovers it for you!"

"Has it to do with international football, Glue?"

"It has to do with international blowing to bits, Gum! But it said there's now arrived in this old British Isle a great mystery-man called Morsimmon Esty; and Parliament have sent him here, not, you understand, as an ordinary inmate, but to be given the once-over, on the q.t. by Doctor Echetus, to see whether he's a real miracle-man like Merlin or Moses, or just a lunatic like the ones we've got here. The fellow seems to have the run of the place, for 'ee only arrived after teatime last evening, and I'll be damned if he hasn't been prowling around like Sherlock Holmes all night long!

"They tell me he ain't slept for four and twenty years; seeing he's found some radio-stuff out there in Thibet or cooked it up 'isself most like, what'll keep a man 'ealthy, wealthy and wise without so much as a wink of sleep. They say he met this jibber-jabber crazy clown from Outer Cathay on his journey here; and a real tonic that bird is, and an honest-to-God inmate, too, and his proper name's Katch-as-Kan!

"Yes, Katch-as-Kan, the dancing puss-moth, and, oh! but he does sleep! In fact, after that act he put on last night his head's been on pillow in number fifteen quiet as a baby, for the door can't lock and we've all 'ad a good look at 'im. *He* don't take no radio-urinny to drive dull sleep away! I wouldn't wonder if he don't ask for his tray on his counterpane and his cigarette in his soap-dish when he wakes up. One thing I do know. What he wants he'll ask for. And what he asks for he'll get I "But this 'ere barmie-larmie, Gum, you old gambler, be none other than the greatest barmie-larmie that ever lived. They say he's the old boy who's back of all these flying saucers, and that he's now busy with flying coal-scuttles, and that the plane they've got at Halfway House is for him to fly to New York in.

"But the greatest thing they say about him, and you think of that, brother Gum, is that he can paralyse hundreds of thousands of people — millions if he wants to! — just simply by this funny business of teletitery or whatever its scientific name is; but it takes a brain like mine, as full of culties as a music-hall stage of tighties, to understand these things. And this is how it works, brother Gum. And put your wits to it, brother, and push hard, for it's backroom-boy stuff, Gummy old chrysalis, if ever there were! But as I explain it, knowing both It, as we might say, and *you,* as we might say, it grows clear as daylight; and so listen.

"I'm in Thibet, you must understand, like this here barmie-larmie was, before he started to come here. Is that clear, Gummy? And I'm talking to you now, you being here, and me being there. And this is what I'm saying. 'Don't you dare to move an inch, Gum! Lie down on your face, Gum! Kneel on the ground with your head between your knees, Gum! And stay like that, Gum, just as long as I tell you!' Don't you see, partner, how any man alive, not to mention a barmie-larmie of the top-grade who could make his voice ring and ting in your ears as if you was in a telephone booth, could stop these hoary Russians and these bleeding Chinks and march the lot of them, meek and mild as Mary's lambs into Holy Lizzie's compound."

At this point the voice of Head-watchman Glue died away, and it became clear that Under-watchman Gum had either been reduced to an awed silence or had successfully retreated into that blessed detachment from the most powerful logic and the most triumphant reason, open to mortals in the poppied oblivion of sleep.

Swift as the leap of a grasshopper, Gewlie now turned round to John, his lantern throwing a narrow, elfish ray, that, as it flickered here and there, seemed to want to dance alternately with the light that shone through the door-crack of the little room, and with the paler, wiser, less purely human light that came floating in through a small round window above the well-barred front door of the whole establishment.

“I was waiting for you,” whispered Gewlie. “I thought you’d be glad of my help in getting away without their hearing you!”

But as if the accomplished Glue and the illiterate Gum had patched up, in fear of the “telepathy” they had been discussing, a sort of pact between knowledge and ignorance, they now turned without restraint to their private affairs. Here they were on equal ground, and they laughed and jested in so jovial a manner that John, when he began the process of drawing the bolts in dead silence, found he had no need of the feverish help proffered him by Gewlie. When once he had got the huge double doors open, both he and Gewlie, though what the latter’s actual sensations at that moment were would have puzzled even such an expert in human obliquity and human redemption as Father Allen Wun to interpret, were instantaneously confronted by the naked presence of the midsummer dawn. To John’s consciousness it was as if they’d been admitted through some “magic casement” into an enchanted Cimmeria of wandering airs that were at once exquisitely cool and exquisitely warm, and were full of faint yet quite distinguishable odours, odours that kept dodging one another, pursuing one another, overtaking one another, but never losing their identity.

Sharp grass-fragrancies came and went. Delicate rose-scents came and went. While in and out among them all, as if it were a weary serpent with dusky scales, such as might have been described in some heavily repeated burden to an old border ballad, floated the smell of river mud! It was at this moment that turning round to confront Gewlie, with nothing in his mind but an obscure urge of animal instinct warning him of danger, he realized, just as if it had been a demon-headed worm in the central nerve of the man that could actually be touched, what it was that he was plotting. Was this sudden knowledge part of the new planetary telepathy by means of which this mysterious refugee from Thibet was minded to bridge the appalling gulf between the warring halves of the whole human race?

For it was a very curious experience that John went through at that moment. Herodotus himself, the master of wonders, would have hesitated at describing the millions of little clock-cells in Gewlie’s skull that were ticking and tinkling and turning their tiny wheels on their electric pivots.

And yet all this was what John *did* actually behold! But it was much more than this that Master Glue's "barmie-larmie" had hypnotised our friend into embracing with his mental vision. It wasn't merely "as if" he could perceive millions of little clockcells in Gewlie's skull, ticking and tinkling and turning. There was no "as if" about it. This is what the intelligent inmate called John saw at the front door of the scientific establishment called Glint in the receptacle commonly known as Gewlie's head.

But he also saw what hasn't been permitted to many people — certainly to no other inmate of Glint — to see with mortal eyes, namely the insubstantial and yet not quite immaterial soul-covering or soul-skin which is the halfway house, "if one may", as Herodotus would put it, "speak in that manner", between the visible and the invisible! What he saw was in fact a cloudy shape in the form of a man, composed of semi-transparent mist, the colour of a puddle of dirty water upon which has just fallen some dark purplish shadow.

This misty shape might be called the chemical form of Gewlie's impalpable soul; but how well John could hear the clear, teasing, sceptical tone of Tenna's voice enquiring how in all this physical clockwork he managed to read the man's *thoughts*.

And then it was that in answer to this imaginary question he was compelled to admit that the man's thoughts came straight into his own head distinct from any clockwork and that he didn't "read" them in the wheels of Gewlie's skull.

No, it was into his own head they came, just as Homer makes Hector's brother confess that the truce between the two great opposed divinities, Athene and Apollo was entheti thumo, "slipped into his soul". But although Gewlie's thought was, as Homer says, "slipped" into John's soul, John was given, at that weird and never-to-return moment, the privilege of seeing the actual connecting link, duskier in colour than the cloudy image to which at the nape of the man's neck it was attached, between a human soul and a human body.

This link was apparently composed of an organic chemical substance which, in fact, conveyed the impression that a large living eel was the medium between Gewlie's soul and

Gewlie's body! It was emphasised for John as something distinct from both Gewlie's spirit and Gewlie's flesh by the peculiar way it quivered and shivered, and still more by the extraordinary manner in which like a thin little inlet of seawater in wind-swept sand it kept being traversed from end to end by rippling vibrations just as if it were swallowing something not much smaller than itself!

All this accentuation and extension, to put it mildly, of John's normal powers of vision lasted for no more than thirty seconds, and as soon as it had ceased and he and Gewlie had returned to a simple staring into each other's faces, each face having grown both more ghostly and more ghastly in this pallid prae-dawn light than was possible under the electric glitter from the crack of that office door or the will-o'-the-wisp jerks of Gewlie's lantern, our friend John was once more aware of that look of indescribable suction in his enemy's eyes.

But it suddenly struck him that this indrawing "suction" of Gewlie's expression suggested a much deeper cause than a simple sadistic delight in creating intense fear or supervising calculated inflictions of pain. It seemed to belong to an older order of things than ours, and to a more confused dimension of life, where the differences between good and evil were much less clearly defined. In fact, Gewlie's expression actually suggested that the wretched man regarded himself as the Supreme Deity's avenger and inquisitor, in fact as a sort of little Minotaur of eternal justice, for whom to devour his master's enemies was a sacred duty.

John realised that the moment they separated and he himself went off to that stream where all those spikes had been changed into moveable wedges of harmless wood, the wretch would scamper off to the house of Echetus and claim from him God knew what reward for God knows what discovery!

But now as he looked into the man's face, himself with his back to the tulip-tree and Gewlie with his back to the dark hall and to the thin tream of light that, along with the two watchmen's noisy laughter, came from the door of the little room, he found himself startled by something he hadn't at all expected; in short, by something that he would have described, and indeed did subsequently describe to Tenna, as the very last thing he would have looked for from Gewlie. What he saw was nothing less than an urge to utter an oracle.

The countenance of the man, no very attractive medium for any form of inspiration, least of all for a spiritual revelation, was actually convulsed and distorted under the pressure of what he was struggling to say or of what somebody or something was determined to make him say.

John was more than startled as he stared at the man's face in that unearthly morning light. He was shocked. Knowing, or at least thinking he knew, Gewlie's thoughts, and having just had, only a minute ago, not merely a super-sensual vision of the strange link between the man's soul and body but a direct intimation, by means of some new kind of telepathy of the man's intention to go at once and betray everything to Echetus, nothing could have surprised him more than that this weasel of hell should suddenly, instead of bolting off on his treacherous mission, be heaving and throbbing and contorting his horrible face in the spasm of a rending and tearing effort to utter an oracle!

And then suddenly the oracle burst forth from him in an appalling whisper. The spirit in Gewlie's soul, or the demon in Gewlie's soul, or simply the wretch's innermost self, had obviously not the faintest thought of addressing itself to John, as a sympathetic inmate of the asylum, or, supposing the pair could hear him, to the cultivated Glue or the illiterate Gum as fellow-attendants in the asylum.

No, this terrible whisper from the Coliseum of Gewlie's soul at bay was a bolt catapulted to the perimeter of his precious One-world-only in a desperate attempt to destroy for ever certain impious inmates who were trying to escape the cosmic glint of the living God. And the effect of this appalling whisper upon John was for the moment overwhelming. It struck him as the most poignant thing he had ever known. What thunderbolts of power lay in the miserablest human soul!

John felt like worshipping, not Gewlie or Gewlie's god, but the infinite divinity in the lowest human creature. He knelt on the mat in the doorway so that with his face close to Gewlie's face he could catch every syllable squeezed from that sponge of suction. And, as if the obsessed soul of the wretch did really have for its covering some kind of skin that could be torn in thin slits, there issued from its mouth, accompanying what he said, a queer sound that exactly resembled the tearing of some stiffly resistant fabric. “One God”, whispered Gewlie; and the whisper as it lost itself in the morning air was accompanied by the hissing scream of torn silk.

“One God,” repeated that wrung-out oval of porous human flesh, opposite to which John knelt; and it struck him, as he knelt there, in his thunderstruck worship of the intolerable, that not only were the eyes and mouth at work in this double process of sucking up and wringing out, but that the ears were doing their share, and the nostrils were doing theirs and that even the knuckles of the fingers clutching the lantern were doing theirs!

These fingers were in fact playing what might have been called “The March of the Cosmic Sponge”, for they were beating a sort of indrawing and out-propelling tattoo on John’s chest, in the process of which those fingers moment by moment seemed to be growing whiter and thinner and more bony, in their desperate attempt to combine the machinery of suction with the machinery of explosion.

“One God,” hissed the eyes, mouth, nostrils, ears, and clenched fingers of Gewlie, “and therefore one Mother of God; one God, and therefore one Son of God; one God and therefore one Church of God; one God and therefore one Bride of God; one God and therefore one Spirit of God; and as in the Beginning God was All, so in the End God will be All. God, God, nothing but God! The One, the One, the One, nothing but the One!”

But a man’s strength is a man’s strength, whatever his willpower, and the legs of a man are that strength’s measure and limit. Thus having flung his bolt back into the blue as a warning to the Titans to leave Pelion and Ossa alone and Olympus alone, the whole power and presence and personality of Gewlie cringed and cowered and crumpled and collapsed, as a creature drained of all life.

He made no further attempt to “kick against the pricks”, in other words against all the thorny land-hedgehogs and spiky sea-urchins of multifarious Nature with her fathomless reserves of infinite backgrounds and undreamed-of dimensions. He sank down weakly and shamelessly on the litter and dust of the unswept floor of the entrance-hall to Glint. Mrs. Wohntscher wasn't due for nearly an hour yet, and between his exhausted body and the dust of that trodden threshold there seemed a natural reciprocity.

John's pity for the man under the tension of the oracle that convulsed him, combined with the fact that John himself was on his knees, made any assistance he gave him natural and automatic. What he did for the sadistic little sod", as he called him later to Tenna, was simply to help him to collapse comfortably on his haunches, and, this done, to sink down by his side. After a little more shuffling, during which John treated his companion as if he were an exhausted infant, they were both seated on the capacious doormat, with their four heels on the doorstep.

The "sadistic little sod", however, though no longer with that painful accompaniment like the tearing of the veil of the Temple, continued his dithyrambic oracle in praise of the One. "There will be," his voice wistfully wailed in John Hugh's left ear, "no more *you* and no more *me,* no more men and no more women, no more masters and no more slaves! There will be no more black, red, yellow and white among the nations. There will be no more French and English, no more Jews and Gentiles, no more Old World and New World.

"There will be no more individuals, no more persons, no more men, or animals, or birds, or reptiles, or insects, or vegetation. There will be no more heavens, or earths, or moons, or stars, or galaxies, or nebulae. There will be no more time and no more space. There will be no more of anything we know.

"Instead of life there will be only God! Instead of death, only God! Instead of me, wanting what I want and hating you, only God! Instead of you, wanting what you want and hating me, only God! Instead of the sane eating up the mad in places like this, only God, eating us all up according to His eternal and divine pleasure."

The high-pitched intoning of this diabolus-sanctus litany ceased at last, and John Hush, plucking his attention like an in-sucked cork from this exhausted conqueror-worm, considered what was, as Homer would say, the best counsel to be followed. He had to make sure that those sham wooden spikes were O.K. so that when the moment came it would be easy to pull them out and let the stream carry them off, and easy to climb out on the bank on the other side of the great wall when once they had followed the stream under that arch.

But if he got up from the doormat and shut the door softly and cleared off wasn't there every chance that in spite of the fellow's belief in the final end of everything and his absolute conviction that he himself would vanish as utterly as a bubble of spittle from the mouth of one of the dogs in Echetus's torture-house, "the sadistic little sod" would scramble to his feet and for all the shakiness of his legs manage to shuffle off to the house of Echetus and find a hiding-place to wait there, as patiently as a cat watches at a mouse-hole, till the Doctor could see him.

And then John Hush thought of the appallingness for them all, for himself, for Tenna, for Mr. Lordy, for the mysterious Pantamount, for the heroic Commander, for poor old Miss Bolster and her besotted circus-freak, for those crazy twins, for the skipping Zeit-Geist, and even for Tenna's special human horror, that obsessed old masochist Rumpibus with his applecheeked Tottie, if their plot were discovered and the American plane went off without them!

"I'm responsible for the lot of them," he thought. "And if Tenna and I desert them, and *he* and that girl fly off with only Tenna and me, the fate of the inmates of Glint will be hopeless. Sometimes the worst of cowards simply *has* to be brave.

"Well, I rather fancy such a time has now come for me; and I've got to do something drastic." With a long fixed stare he contemplated the exhausted and wrung-out Gewlie.

Then, as we say, he gathered himself together, or, as Homer would say, he crouched to spring; and, having made up his mind, he acted with a rush.

15. “ON ALL FOURS”

IT MUST BE confessed that when once his resolution was made John plunged headforemost into a series of actions that would certainly have struck his guardian as surprisingly rapid and competent. He clapped his hand over his companion’s mouth, lifted him up in his arms, and, holding him pressed tightly to his chest, managed by squeezing him against the door-post to keep him dumb, while with his free hand, using exquisite care to shut them with scarcely a sound, he succeeded in closing the double doors of the main entrance to Glint Hall.

This accomplished, he staggered and stumbled eastward, away from the tulip-tree and the entrance-drive and the smooth lawn, following a narrow, neglected, overgrown path that led round the corner of the house where there were no windows on the ground-floor but above which, as he lurched and staggered on, he knew very well was that wide semi-Gothick window looking due east out of which on his first day in this place at the end of March he had seen the ancient fortress-ridge with its two Scotch firs, and seen it, in the rapidly darkening spring-twilight, as the background to Tenna’s face when they first exchanged words.

He had to lean against the wall every half-minute, and he kept uttering loud panting gasps that seemed to himself to resemble the hoarse croakings of a mad raven who was carrying in its claws in some desperate insurrection of the fowls of the air one of the most vicious of game-keepers, in order to quell his expostulations in the pit Echetus had dug for his dead dogs.

During these moments of resting against the wall he kept assuring himself that he mustn’t think about the threat to Tenna if Gewlie did get to Echetus and revealed their plot. “I mustn’t squeeze the little sod to death,” he thought, “or knock out his brains against this wall!”

But it wasn't only the roughness of the wall, making it an unpleasant object to rest against and a tempting smashing-block for the execution of a midget-minotaur of totalitarian omnipotence: it was the wall's endlessness that made every second of this struggle so appalling. And in addition to the rest there was this horrible half-dead, half-living, half-animate, half-inanimate jumble of things that clung to the wall for protection!

To John's peculiar sensibility and half-crazy fastidiousness this over-growth of creature-life as it brushed against his face was incredibly repugnant.

Midges, spider-webs, small blue-bottle flies, snail-slime, trailing stalks without leaves, tickling insects without wings, tangles of leaves that completely hid their stalks, and finally thick red stalks that seemed to carry upon their smooth surface nothing but thorns, all these conspired with nameless grub-dust and pollendust to cause him that particular kind of discomfort, thick with a curious excretion of loathing and disgust from which he seemed to have spent his whole life in running away; and here he was with a jungle of it round his head!

The wall, indeed, seemed to stretch on in complete indifference to everything except some implacable necessity of the higher mathematics. But it was not ordained by the great goddess Chance, Nature's daughter and darling, and so much less of a wanton than many sages have surmised, that John should perish of a burst blood-vessel at that particular stage of his unnatural undertaking.

After a few steps more of stumbling and staggering he reached the end. The building turned away from them at right angles; and there in front of them, looking due east, was a clear open space! So high did the up-sloping distance rise above their prison wall that the summit of the eastern ridge which he had seen from the window of that passage as a background to Tenna's head showed itself to him now through a wavering transparency of white mist, like a vision of magical escape, with its prehistoric camp and its two Scotch firs.

And above the ancient camp and between those two tremendous trees, red as the blood of a battle in heaven, rose the sun! It is true that neither the gasping and groaning John nor the moaning and whimpering Gewlie had the strength left to notice anything more than the most realistic aspect of what they saw or to observe that both the ridge and the trees upon the ridge had the air of having awaited this blood-red apparition, not for a mere twenty-four hours but for twenty-thousand years! but there it was: and you might have thought at that moment from the expression on each face that the question as to which was the victor and which was the vanquished made small difference compared with the desperate welcome they gave to that red rim, knowing well in their strained and contorted bones that its presence brought at least a respite to their struggle.

There were several cows in the enclosed meadow whose iron railings had now given to this grotesque contest some sort of an end; and these somnolent creatures, who had themselves only just risen to greet the sun, leaving dim islands of enchanted greyness on the grass, like patterns on a map of undersea mountains, half-turned their heads on the obscure chance that it might prove possible to find a natural cause for the sudden manifestation at the boundary of their pasture of a man with well-laced leather boots and a scratched face pressing frantically against his breast another being of the same species with tattered slippers, a white face, and something in the expression of his eyes that even at that safe distance was disturbing.

But, having decided that neither the man carrying nor the man carried was aiming just then at any mischief to them, they turned back to the east, where the bloody rim of the lord of life challenged all profane men and all impious beasts to dare to utter a blasphemous sound.

John now behaved to Gewlie as if he were a child, and deliberately helped him to prop his slippered feet on the bottom rail of the fence and to clutch tightly with his trembling fingers, from which still dangled the palely jerking lantern-flame, the thin chilly rondure of the top rail. No piercing shriek burst from Gewlie's mouth to fly like an arrow across their prison-wall till it reached that crimson orb on the horizon.

All the sound that came out of him was just as if John had been squeezing a queer-shaped bagpipe, a bagpipe which, when balanced against the railings, could only repeat with a whistling long-drawn gasp: “Mother of Mercy! but I didn’t know you were so strong!”

Strong or not, our friend couldn’t collect either his breath or his wits for a good half-minute, while with his arm round his prisoner’s shoulder he stared at that crimson platter slowly projecting itself from between a pair of familiar black trees across a gulf in space.

And he now discovered that one of the cows they had disturbed had not returned to the grass but was still staring at that blood-red rondure on the high ridge. And while this black-and-white cow stared in awe at the sun, John Hush, recovering his breath, stared in awe at the cow. “She might be Io herself,” he thought, “and that grand homed head with those liquid eyes and those quivering nostrils might be flinging its spirit across horizon after horizon, far over the Molossian plain, far beyond the oaks of Dodona, till it reaches the heaped-up mud of the Nile, where the gad-fly will cease from stinging and the great black king Epaphos will be born!”

And as he regained his breath, he asked himself what it was about the head of a homed cow confronting a sunrise that had such a peculiar effect on him? Was it, he vaguely pondered, mingling the remoteness of his thought with the aching of his muscles, that there exist within us certain life-germs inherited from primeval creatures of this planet who possessed an intimacy with the elements far closer than any known to us to-day; beings for whom what was happening now on that eastern ridge was the central ritual for all living things as they worshipped the cause of all life?

But everything was rapidly changing now about that crimson orb, and there had appeared above it what looked like an overhanging down-toppling mountain of woolly cloud edged with delicate silvery cornices and with coppery entablatures that were scooped into golden arches.

More slowly than he could have believed possible, that blood-red circle crossed the narrow chasm in space between the crest of the hill with its gigantic trees and these illuminated cloud-alps; and John had the feeling that it was crossing an irretrievable crack in our whole dimension! As he saw it now it was no circle, that orb of blood. It was the half-torso of a cosmic creature, a creature born of a self-evolved, self-differentiated multiverse, not created by any god, and not a friend, or an enemy either, to any man!

John had never properly learnt Greek at school and it was due entirely to his guardian that he had made feeble efforts to keep up with it later; but the Heifer-Maid of the Aeschylean Prometheus had always had a special attraction for him, as a creature loved by one ultimate mystery and hated by another! "We are all haunted by mysteries," he thought, "and we have no more idea why we are what we are than why anything is anything!"

Whether it was that carrying Gewlie like a colossal insect, like the very gad-fly from which the Heifer-Girl couldn't be saved till she reached the mouths of the Nile and gave birth to the black Epaphos, John had over-strained himself, or whether it was that his drastic question addressed to life and flung in the face of the rising lord of life had blinded and dazed him, but for a minute or two his whole consciousness stopped dead and everything went-dark.

He came to himself so quickly that his momentary loss of consciousness seemed to himself no more than the "blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised", and when his mind came back it was an extremely disagreeable and totally unexpected shock to see his recent companion scuttling like a ferret escaped from a keeper's bag in the direction of that pit for vivisected dogs whence, as he knew well, there was a direct path leading to the House of Echetus.

"Oh, God!" he groaned aloud, "if I don't stop him now all is lost! He'll tell all he knows and he probably knows everything!" Had the wakeful Zeit-Geist possessed, as according to the cultivated Glue their visitor from Thibet did, "the run of the whole place", and at that silent hour been watching from the dew-soaked shadow of one of the young spruces John's desperate final rush to catch his enemy, he would doubtless have understood the subtle relief it was to our friend to utter his feelings aloud instead of keeping them to himself as his old nurse would have told him he ought to do, and understood also, no doubt, that the mere putting his feelings into words toughened them with that spiritual cement that might be called *the irony of expressed self-consciousness*. It may be doubted whether the wakeful Zeit-Geist could have produced from about his person by simply wriggling a finger an instrument for recording not only the substance of a thought but its precise verbal vesture, but he would have had a perfect opportunity for registering the effect of extreme emotional agitation upon the colours and forms of the visible world as these are imposed upon, and interpenetrated by, purely mental imagery, had he been watching this manhunt.

At last a perfectly simple and direct feeling broke through the blurred confusion of the chaos in John's brain, and, as he ran, this feeling tore its way out and tossed itself free of everything! In place of Gewlie it was Tenna herself he was now carrying in his desperation, and it seemed as if he were making the most frantic efforts to keep her soul as well as her body from escaping, and he felt as if it were these efforts to keep Tenna's soul in Tenna's body that kept forcing him to make certain convulsive jerks as he ran, and not only so, but to give vent to certain surprisingly animal noises, as he leapt over the small spruces and dodged the large ones.

To himself these sounds were the very talk of his heart to her heart. "Oh, my one true love!" was what these gruntings and groanings were really saying; but, in some obstinate knot of self-confusion, as if he'd been a spell-bound thick-skinned, inarticulate animal, he was troubled now by a blind doubt as to whether she understood what he was doing and feeling.

"Tenna!" he cried at last; and it seemed to him that this cry — wrenched like a gobbet of bleeding flesh from his body, and like a nugget of burning radium from his soul — had been flung forth upon the universe from within the mounting curve of the escaping sun as it burst into the mists! "Whether we die together," he cried, "or go on living side by side till my manias grow grey and your manias turn grey, I'll hold on to you while I am I; and if I lose you I'll hunt for you from one dimension after another! I'll ransack them, I tell you, these dream-worlds! I'll break through them all till I get you again!"

It would have been a curious experience for old Mrs. Wohntscher, arriving, as she sometimes did, with all her paraphernalia for scrubbing and cleaning, long before even the most conscientious of the permanent staff had left their sleeping-quarters, if, as was her custom to do before settling down to work, she had taken her usual glance through the window at the end of the long corridor, and from thence had perceived the staggerings and the recoverings, the wild rushes towards the east, and the not less furious deviations to the north and the south, as these two figures, the one pursuing and the other pursued, the one bent upon reaching Echetus so as to reveal everything, the other still more bent upon preventing, if necessary by violence, the revelation of anything.

Whether the old lady, who never quite forgot, whatever else she was doing, that mahogany table at the end of her day, would have been able, simply from the outward appearance of the man pursuing, compared with the outward appearance of the man pursued, to decide whether it was the urge that was driving the first or whether it was the urge that was driving the second that was likely to prevail in the end, is a question difficult to answer.

Mrs; Wohntscher never gave a thought to outward appearances save in relation to inward urges. She had been brought up by the Salvation Army, having been left as a child almost literally on the Army's doorstep by one of those tenderhearted women who know by instinct, quite apart from logic or mathematics or even common sense, in what queer directions the vegetable substance of the second oldest mystery in the world is apt to make its unpredictable appearance; and although both Father Tickle and Father Allen Wun had more than once given her historical, archaeological, and even metaphysical instruction as to the true nature of the wood of the Holy Cross, there was something about the accelerated rhythm of the swing of her polishing-rag, as it swept dust and dirt from every grain of planetary wood, that led the old lady, in despite of geography, history, reason, and even of good taste, to reserve that honour for mahogany.

As a matter of fact, the philosophical charwoman did see the two figures behaving in that unusual manner by the first light of dawn, but when she turned back to the long corridor and set to work on its familiar floor she told herself that men *as* men, whether within or without the walls of Glint, were incurably demented.

For some while as she moved about on her hands and knees, Mrs. Wohntscher mingled the feel of each dust-crack she knew so well and of each queer mark in certain particular boards where great creative nature had indulged in some perverse caprice before the tree was cut down, with the peculiar aberrations of the male animal whether inside or outside this particular home of research.

"As I always say," she murmured to herself, "it's their trousers what does it. In them old scripture days" — thus her thoughts ran on— "when learned men painted proper Bible-pictures of the prophets and saints, they didn't paint the rest of the menfolk who were, of course, as men always are, playing at some silly game or drinking in pubs or sneaking into whore-shops.

"The saintly men they painted were always keeping their sheep or feeding their cattle or fishing from their boats, or with spears and shields taking captive great heathen cities from ungodly tribes of Midianites and Jebusites and Canaanites.

"Did we ever see in these Holy Sunday-book pictures even so much as one single pair of trousers? We never did! Where did I hear that timely saying: 'When men first wore trousers in Cuckoldy Square their wives went a-whoring at Candlemas Fair'?"

But neither the philosophical cleaning-woman nor the wakeful Pantamount, who from his small window in the punishment wing had also caught a fleeting glimpse of this drama among the spruce-trees, remained long enough at their posts of observation to see what happened when John came near to overtaking Gewlie at about a couple of hundred yards from the hole of the dead dogs.

Our friend was close behind the runaway; and Gewlie, aware of this, had already turned to face him, when from behind a spruce tree that was a trifle and a thicker trifle higher than the rest there suddenly appeared between them the most overwhelming personality that either of them had ever seen.

This person, if person he were and not a supernatural apparition, had his back to John and his face to Gewlie. Gewlie's own face, however, by one of those circus tricks so dear to that supreme virtuoso in historic pantomime the corybantic acrobat Chance, was clearly visible to John under the apparition’s left armpit; for the man, if man he were, held his arms akimbo, and the expression upon Gewlie’s face, thus exhibited within a living frame, completely bewildered his recent pursuer. It showed no fear. It showed no horror. It showed no surprise.

What it showed was ecstatic happiness! It had the look of those rather ugly supernumerary bystanders in some vast El Greco mystery-picture who nevertheless are quite as much transfigured and transported by what is occurring as the protagonists in that particular cosmic drama.

Very deliberately the imposing personage who had thus intervened proceeded to do what our friend had recently been doing for a different purpose and with another result. He lifted Gewlie in his arms. But instead of clasping him to his breast, as John had done, with a hug of desperate vengeance, this new performer in the Burlesque show of redemption held him high up in both his arms well above his head while he still kept his own face turned away.

John and Gewlie were therefore once again staring at each other; but this time only a couple of hundred yards from the dog-pit and with the prehistoric camp in full sight but with the risen sun concealed behind a mountain of mist.

And to John’s amazement the ecstatic Gewlie, thus held aloft before the indrawn breath of all the creatures of the dawn, began to utter articulate speech.

“So you see, master,” announced the contorted image of this weird transfiguration, “you were wrong and I was right. Men and women are nothing. All is God; and all is death at the hands of God!”

Gewlie’s face after he had uttered these words broke in pieces. Henceforth it was not as if Morsimmon Esty were carrying a dead man. It was as if he were carrying a figure of petrified clay that was in danger of crumbling to bits. A complete exhaustion that was like a collapse of living flesh, though it was parallel to Gewlie’s almost chemical dissolution, now took possession of John Hush.

He caught sight of the stump of a large ash tree that had been left in the ground when the spruces were planted and upon this he sank down, clutching his shins with his fingers and pressing his forehead against his knees. Gewlie was done for. But John felt as if this Morsimmon Esty had found a crack in the heart of life, thrust an atom-bomb into it, and were now carrying towards it a fluttering and flapping flame that would blow up the world!

And John, with his skull pressed against his knees, knew that the flame the man was carrying towards this crack was the soul of Gewlie. The flame of that soul had curled itself up like a crouching tiger within the cauldron of the wretch's cruelty; but now it was released. It had leapt up. It had leapt out. The infernal cat was out of the holy bag. "What," thought John, "is this Morsimmon Esty going to do now? I wish I knew whether he's on our side or on the side of our enemies! Will he want to fly to America with us if we get out of this place?"

These questions adapted themselves in John's skull, as he kept t'hat brittle structure pressed hard against his knees, to the rhythm of a peculiar jogging jig, a jig made, not with his heels against the stump he was sitting on, but with his fingernails on the edges of his shin-bones, scraping and rescraping these bony projections covered by corduroy trousers as if they were a pair of outstretched strings.

Suddenly he let his hands sink down and lifted his head. What he beheld in front of him was the figure of Morsimmon Esty moving, in the manner of a priest approaching an altar, towards the dog-pit, with the rapidly disintegrating remains of the man he had caused to die of ecstasy held aloft in both hands. The remains of Gewlie were indeed dissolving fast, but as moment by moment they crumbled away they retained a simulacrum of human shape; and it was this shape that had a resemblance to a rain-soaked delapidated long-lost doll from some gargantuan Glint Hall for insane dolls into which one of the most scatter-brained of all Sons of Mischief had incontinently tossed it, either in pure caprice or out of curiosity just to see what would happen to it in such a Noah's Ark of crazy puppets, all fancying themselves creatures who could purr and growl and scrabble and wriggle and lick and bite and wag their tails, when once they were presented with a keeper *who enjoyed his job*!

“Inmates are we?” thought John. “But if crumbling images of corruption like this poor eidolon are to be allowed to go on driving us into worse insanity there’s need indeed for rending and tearing, and a beginning again of the whole business! But of course” — and as he watched the inexplicable dissolution of the human-inhuman envelope of the entity upon whom the name Gewlie had been tagged he began to wonder if any atom of it, for the thing now seemed to be more than decomposing, it seemed to be trickling and dripping and melting away, would reach the dog-hole at all—” but of course, “he thought, “if the whole of this weird puppet-show we call ‘life’ vanishes at the moment of death into a dream which in its turn dissolves into another dream without the sleeper waking up at all, and if neither the dream that has gone nor the dream that has taken its place touch, as we might say, bottom, in the sense of ever reaching any firm ground, what does it matter whether he gets to the dog-hole with anything of Gewlie left, or whether it’s all gone before he gets there?

“I must call to him! But he knows I’m here, for he saw me. He came between us. No, I’d better not call to him. I’d better get up and go after him! But how solemnly he’s walking now! It’s as if he’s carrying something that’s very dangerous to spill, but he’s spilling it all the time without knowing it! Yes, I must get up at once and go after him.”

The man from Thibet was indeed advancing towards the dog-hole in a singular manner. He was walking not only slowly and cautiously but with a ritualistic gravity that was beginning to strike our friend as grotesque.

John Hush made an effort to rise. He *couldn’t* rise. He made another effort. Again he couldn’t! Had he been paralysed by this person whose face he hadn’t yet seen? Had he a face at all? Like other victims of a disordered imagination John had often frightened himself by horrible fancies of featureless human heads. Was he destined, now, even now, when on the brink of escape, to be driven really and actually insane by what he might see if Morsimmon Esty turned round?

He tried desperately for the third time to rise from that ash-tree stump. In vain! And yet he didn’t feel paralysed. Was the Thibetan a friend of the enemy and consequently hostile to any flight to New York? Was he himself destined to sit on this ash-tree stump till, like Gewlie, he crumbled and dribbled into nothing, his only advantage over that obsessed *voyeur* of cruelty being the questionable one that the bulk of his decomposition would take place while he was still conscious?

It may easily be imagined that John Hush had some very contradictory feelings, and as the result of these feelings some very contradictory ideas as he contemplated the prelatical back of Watchman Glue’s “barmie-larmie” who was indeed making the utmost of what that well-informed attendant had called his “run of the place For one thing, some self-lacerating devil in John forced him to imagine the dead silence, for she was as secretive as he was himself over their feelings for each other, with which Tenna would hear that his room had been found empty that morning and that Mrs. Wohntscher had seen him chasing Gewlie across the spruce-plantation.

On the other hand, he automatically began practising what he regarded as his most important discovery during his nine weeks in an institution devoted to research, nor was he so infatuated with his own devices as to fail to give due weight to the influence of the Commander in this, the royal trick, namely, of forcing himself to go through the motions of enjoying all the craziest and most abominable situations offered by life and death, as they arise, just as if instead of feeling them to be horrible he felt them to be delectable.

“Repeat these self-compelling motions of enjoyment often enough,” he had of late explained to Tenna, who could only refute him by murmuring a preference for death, “and the most appalling things change their character and cease to be intolerable.”

It was in accordance, therefore, with this august discovery, of which, so he had been driven to confess to Tenna, neither the Commander nor himself had hitherto made any striking use, that he now set himself to enjoy the sensation of imagining that the flesh below his ribs was falling away, and that, like the body of a dead sheep he had once seen in a ditch in Slovakia, his decomposing torso was rapidly becoming a confused waterfall of living maggots.

If this was to be his fate, wasn't it only meet and right that it should come upon him when he was in a position like this, huddled, head to knees, and with his fingers clasping his shins? Wasn't this the very position in which in ancient days they buried people?

Wasn't it the position in which foetuses and embryos and abortions were wont to hug themselves before being bundled out of limbo into life and out of life into limbo? "Well," he thought, "if I can't get up I can at least find out how much of my body is paralysed!"

It was this vigorous and sensible decision of John's that resulted in his carrying out a series of muscular experiments which, even if they had struck Tenna as pathetically like the sort of experiments that a doll would have made if a doll's brain had been able to make the discovery that it possessed physical things called "muscles", a mental thing called "will", and an electric system of interior wires by which these two could be connected, would not have impressed her with that particular kind of special hero-worship that childless women who are not "in love", but who are deeply touched in their maternal hearts and at the same time mischievously tickled in their old-maidish sense of humour where their male heroes are concerned, are apt to feel.

To feel the true poignancy of our friend's situation would have taken not only the romantic sentiment of Miss Bolster but also the realistic and sweeping shrewdness of Mrs. Wohntscher, remembering the innocent timidity of Mr. Wohntscher, who perished in the Second World War leaving her still a virgin.

To have seen John so resolutely at work on his mysterious inability to get up from that ash-stump would indeed have deeply impressed both these admirers of his. What he did was simply to try out one by one every movement that it was physically possible for him to make, and every set of muscles that it was possible for him to use, and how far and exactly where these revolting members and muscles refused obedience to his will.

And to his perfect amazement he found he could move any separate portion of his body he liked! He was soon behaving in the manner of an electrified robot, nodding and wagging his head, knocking his knees together, tapping his heels against each other, shrugging his shoulders, snapping his fingers, slapping his arms across his breast, and even causing his haunches to rock to and fro, as though he were in the act of dodging or destroying a wasp's nest.

But no sooner did he suspend these activities and try to rise to his feet from his seat on the stump than once more complete immobility took possession of him and he became no better than a stone.

And all this time it was impossible for him not to gaze with infuriated desperation at the massive prelatical back of this "barmie-larmie" who could reduce one man to a pinch of dust and another to a prisoner on a tree-stump. Yes! this formidable back was still moving, with what might most literally have been called the remains of Gewlie, towards the dog-pit. "But I won't, I positively won't," he thought, "work myself into a fury over this. What difference does it make, in a I dimension or time and space like this, it a conscious entity called John should be compelled, yes, compelled to contemplate another entity, and one devoid, as far as the first can tell, of a single human feature in his terrestrial face, playing at a solemn entombment with the scraps of decomposition left from the crumbling body of an asylum-keeper called Gewlie? And, "after all," he thought, "it's all pure chance! The Aristotelian-scholastic God of Father Wun's metaphysic has no more real existence than the Evangelical-Anglican God of Father Tobie's river-bank intimations! And this unfair chance has chosen to make a hundred times luckier than the tortured dogs of Echetus's dog-hole. What's happened to me is simply that in coming near this ambassador from Thibet, who, I certainly hope, is on our side and not on our enemy's, I have been touched by some devolutionary cosmic ray that has the power of magnetising people back from human to animal, from animal to vegetable, from vegetable to mineral, and so on down the scale to bodiless gasses and even, perhaps, to atoms and mesons.

"I don't so much mind if it leaves me as a patch of moss or a clump of lichen or even as a scum of mould, but I don't want to finish as one of those weird mathematical suppositions or hypotheses belonging to some level of existence that exists only in the human mind."

And then John thought of Tenna. What would Tenna feel when she discovered he had vanished with Gewlie? Imagination of the nerves rather than of the heart was John's chief peculiarity, and at this moment the image of Tenna's particular look when she realised the fact of his disappearance hit him such a sharp blow that its first effect was to cause him to utter aloud the first syllable of her name and to repeat that syllable over and over again.

He must have uttered it four times. "*Ten! Ten! Ten! Ten!*" But to him it was as if he had desperately shrieked it a hundred times, and not upwards after the vapour-wrapped sun as he had done before, but downwards, "through the thick rotundity of the earth", downwards, cracking the innermost centre of "nature's moulds" till that "*Ten! Ten! Ten! Ten*!" broke out, erupting upwards once more, in New Zealand, and became audible as the voice of some ancient Maori ghost from the mountain-peak of Taranaki!

And then, just as he had begun to wonder whether the syllable "Ten" might have been some ancient prehistoric invocation understood at once by dehumanised presences hovering about the ridge of the two Scotch firs, he suddenly discovered that by letting his hands sink forward into the moss in front of his feet, and rolling sideways off the ash-stump, he was able, like the Titan who could only be strangled when lifted into the air, to draw renewed strength from the earth.

Aided by this contact, and exultantly grateful to find he could crawl, he began moving, as they say, "on all fours It was in this way he tentatively followed Morsimmon Esty towards the dog-pit. It wasn't long, however, as may be supposed, before he was forced to stop to rest, for to move "on all fours" was a means of progression he hadn't practised since the age of one and a half.

The Thibetan stopped at the dog-pit and bent over it. Then he began to act as if he were removing from his hands something that might have been a little fluff, a little scurf, a flicker of scum, a speck of dandruff, a few scaly scabs, a wisp of hair, or a pinch of sticky dust.

Watching the tremendous back of Master Glue's "barmie-larmie" as he thus literally washed his hands of Gewlie, two rather unusual words came into John's head which he tried in vain to connect either with what he was watching of the person and of the proceedings of Morsimmon Esty, or with himself, as he peered out from under these sweet-scented spruce-branches. The first was the word *sorites*, and the second was the word *incunabula*.

Whether it was the prerogative of the feminine earth not only to allow a male human creature to draw "virtue" from his contact with her as the woman "with the issue of blood" drew virtue from Jesus of Nazareth, but also to supply him with a new metaphysical orientation by which he could avoid the pitfalls of life, John was now made more vividly aware than he had ever been before, as with his left hand he touched the fringe of the small just-budding purple plant called self-heal, and with his right knee approached the trailing white-flowered wisps of the plant called bed-straw, of the monstrous fallacy, lying treachery, and infernal falsehood, of the idea of logical determinism and absolute fate in human affairs, of which the enemy made such compelling play.

It seemed to him, at that first moment of being "on all fours", that he became a medium for the secret wisdom of all those creatures of the earth, animal, vegetable, mineral, "up and down, down and up", who, unaffected by the attractions of logical scientific reasoning, lived by the true illusions of life; above all by the ultimate illusion of free will. "On all fours", as he was now, he was able to observe quietly and closely, and free from the fever of self-sadistic reasoning, not only all the unpredictable twists and turns of the living stalks and filigree-foliage of the fragile bed-straw, not only the globular curves and shell-like foliations of the shadowy self-heal, but all those fascinatingly casual shapes and positions of shapes, forming spears, swords, shields, gibbets, triangles, pikes, sceptres, squares, gates, hoops, spirals, jig-saws, crosses, rakes, horns, harps, trumpets, into which the indiscriminate litter and inland windrows and spindrift of the tiny microscopic wood-sticks and straws and grass-blades of dead vegetation had been led or driven. And like an animal he raised one knee and then one hand, thinking, "I will crawl there," or, "I will crawl there," and then thinking, "I will crawl a little in that direction, and then I will turn round, not urged by any motive at all, or by any 'urge at all, or by any desire at all, but simply and solely to prove to myself, for my own interest alone, and at a moment decided upon quite arbitrarily and capriciously by myself, that I possess, along with every other planetary identity, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, together with all the atoms that compose us, the power to act or not to act, and the power to defy, unexpectedly, capriciously and wantonly, for the pure pleasure of proving to myself that I am free, every sort of cause and pressure exerted by every sort of material sequence as well as every sequence of thought or feeling or action!

"But oh, Tenna! Tenna! Tenna! The point now is, whether on our feet or 'on all fours', how many inmates we can save from Echetus!"

Slowly, cautiously, and forcing himself with a strange power in the depths of his spirit to taste a life-enjoyment beyond any he had ever known, he crawled towards the dog-pit.

Sorites? Incunabula? Did that first word mean an infinitely remote end to everything by a progression of mad logic leading to an impossibly absurd and therefore an absolutely nonexistent nothingness? And did that second word mean an infinitely remote rebeginning of everything out of the void?

Yes, out of the very vacuum of that absurdly logical nothingness? What magic there was in words! Mad it might be, but how miraculous it was that his absurd cry of "*Ten! Ten! Ten! Ten!*" had summoned up those two mysterious words!

He moved his right knee and then his left hand. He moved his left knee and then his right hand. He was still crawling in the direction of the man from Thibet, who was still bending over the dog-pit. But then all in a moment he swung round! It seemed to him that a broken stick his right knee had encountered and a hollow bole full of black water into which he had thrust his left hand had spoken to him in a language totally beyond such words as *sorites* and *incunabula*! Faster than he had ever crawled in his infant life he now moved "on all fours" away from the Thibetan and away from the dog-pit; nor did he rise to his feet till he was in sight of the stream flowing under their prison wall, where the iron spikes had been changed into wooden ones.

16. THE ESCAPE

WHEN HE HEARD the news brought *by* his two chief retainers, Doctor Echetus was indignant. He was not upset — not, that is to say, out of due measure and suitable proportion — nor was he alarmed about the future. He was simply and quite naturally indignant.

It was an exceptionally beautiful midsummer morning; and the Doctor, after leaving his breakfast-room where he had enjoyed just the kind of breakfast he liked best, had proceeded to make his leisurely way to an earth-closet near the research laboratory with a view to relieving his bowels. On his return from this innocent objective, he had stopped to pick a white carnation.

It had been with this particular flower in his buttonhole that he had delivered the presidential address which had first announced to his colleagues the new line of research by which, alone among European empiricists, he had hoped, carrying science into a sphere where no one had ever dared to carry it before, to reach the electric contact between life and consciousness, that is to say between the magnetic vibration that acts and reacts, and whatever it may be that transforms these actions and reactions into consciousness.

The act of easing his bowels had increased the doctor's sense of well-being, so that when arriving at the door of his office and remembering that there were dogs still waiting to be crucified in his laboratory, he breathed a sigh of pure satisfaction. But he was faced by a surprise. Bill Squeeze and Cogent Cuddle awaited him with the startling news that there was not one single inmate left in Glint Hall; unless — but that was unlikely — the person called Pantamount was still tied up in the punishment wing.

Did Doctor Echetus, on hearing this information, burst into a fit of rage? Did he stand staring at the two men, white and ghastly and hit through the heart? He did neither of these things. He showed nothing but quiet vexation.

"*Ingratitude*, that's what I call it!" was the first remark. "But of course," he went on, "they can't have got far! What were all the staff doing, Squeeze? And where are they now, Cuddle?"

"Well, sir," began the latter, taking the initiative at once, "Bill here and I decided, before we came to you, to give the staff those some identickle orders that you yourself gave the day the bomb fell between the north lodge and the cattle sheds, blowing up the three best old sows and the three prettiest litters of little pigs we've ever had in this part of the county! So that's what we told them to do, and that's what they've done. Half of them have gone to search the village — every house of it. And I told that half clear and straight: 'No beating about the bush, lads! 'I said. And then I took the liberty, sir, of repeating your own strong language, the language referred to afterwards, if you remember, sir, in all our best papers, as the firm masterly hand at once scientific and Christian that our national institutions need."

Doctor Echetus withdrew the white carnation from his buttonhole and frowned at it for less than two seconds. Then, behaving as only Candidates for International Kudos can behave, he plucked a few caryophyllic petals from its corolla, converted his thumb and index-finger into an automatic catapult, and after replacing the flower in his buttonhole shot what he had removed from it straight at the philosophical head of Heraclitus. This head was now in full process of being furtively, but with a slow concentrated absorption, lured out of Bill's pocket into the light of day.

"Well, well, well!" murmured the self-controlled vivisector turning his attention to the retardative Squeeze. "And in what direction did the other half of our people pursue these silly fugitives?"

"Oh *that*, sir," cried the ingratiating Cuddle before Bill could speak, "was decided for us by one of those providential happenings, which, as I've so often heard you say, sir, in the annex laboratory of the dog-room, are the true scientist's reward for his pursuit of truth without fear or favour."

"Which way? Which way? I'm asking you, which way?" demanded Doctor Echetus.

"Straight down the North Road, sir! Some on bicycles, some on tricycles, some on motor-cycles, some in lorries and tractors! 'The poor silly things,' as you, sir, so well call our runaways, were caught as they started in the middle of the night, for the whole thing must have been carefully planned; and the curious part of it is that our friend Gewlie — of all the staff, sir, as you know, the one most to be trusted — has completely disappeared, and it *has* crossed my mind that they may have murdered him; but, as I was saying, they were providentially seen as they were just starting by our distinguished visitor from the East — I believe you saw the gentleman last night, sir, and were seriously impressed by him? He was studying your methods, sir, by visits to the inmates at hours when they would least of all be expecting visitors, so he found out their ridiculous plot and he told us the whole thing. It was across the river they were to go and through the village — that's why we're having every house in the place searched — and then straight along the main road through Ghost-Privy and Pump-Handle to Integer Turnspit. Squeeze doesn't think — and I tend to agree with him — that there'll be any resistance to their recapture.

"The danger is — and Squeeze agrees with me in this as I agree with Squeeze that left to themselves they'll come back quietly — the danger is that when they go through the village some of the village-people will get into their silly heads that they are some sort of victims — you know, Doctor, what fancies village-people get — and try to hide them in their stick-houses and attics and pig-sties and straw-stacks and apple-lofts!

"That's why I sent the cleverer half of our staff to search the village from Stocks-Corner to Lovers Lane. And that's why I used the downright man-to-man language you used yourself, sir, on the occasion when—" But Cogent Cuddle suddenly stopped, for it had become clear that the master of Glint was no longer giving him the slightest attention.

Doctor Echetus's head was indeed turned to the south as far as it would go and he was listening with absorbed intensity to a titanic helicopter, evidently a new American invention, that clearly could fly lower than airplanes usually do. And not only was this great air-vessel flying unnaturally low, flying so low that it looked as if it might very soon prove a serious menace to those who were watching it, but it was flying extremely slowly and with curious waverings to left and right as if searching tor a suitable landing place.

It had such powerful engines that anyone would have supposed that the noise it made would have so disturbed the master of Glint that his brain would have become as confused as those of his runaway inmates. But not at all! This well-balanced guardian of public sanity retained his self-possession.

He again removed the white carnation from his coat, held it for a second to his left nostril, plucked out a few more of its musk-scented petals, and after returning its mutilated corolla and dangling stalk to his buttonhole, as if that innocuous slit had been a younger sister of the dog-hole among the spruces, "You're perfectly certain," he enquired, aiming, by aid of his firm square thumb and his sharp-pointed first finger, a new missile at the fox-hole of Heraclitus, "that this preposterous person from the East hasn't come on some special mission to make trouble in our English institutions? Foreign visitors to our research institutions have to be watched, you know; the—"

He was interrupted by the appearance on the scene of the oldest attendant, that same ancient-mariner-like individual who had been so cautious about making bad worse when Tenna Sheer suffered her seizure over Rumpibus and Tottie.

The old fellow was seriously out of breath and obviously very disturbed. "I have to tell you, Doctor—" he panted; but before he got any further he felt impelled to turn round and shout some extremely abusive words at somebody behind him who was at present invisible to the master of Glint. "Don't you dare to follow me, you fig-tree fornicator, you lousy grub-picker, you white-gilled worm-chaser! I won't be followed, I tell you, by a sneaking lemon-pip like you with a worm in his gullet and nothing but slug-slime in his stinking lubricating gizzard! Get away! Don't you hear? It's me that's seeing the Doctor about you, not you about me! Get away, you lubberly lobscouse!"

The classic physiognomy of Heraclitus, with that curiously complacent Greek-philosopher beard that must so often make an uncultured philistine long for an avenue of the busts of murderous Caesars, descended like a solemn Jack-in-the-box into the pocket of

Bill Squeeze while he and Cogent Cuddle rushed forward and began waving their arms, just as in a crowded sale of cattle the auctioneer's assistants indicate by resounding thumps on the animals' backs the appropriate entrances and exits.

But as the ex-sailor drew back, his companion advanced, and it was not long before Doctor Echetus beheld the unruffled visage of Mr. Frogcastle, the gardener. With its multitudinous criss-cross wrinkles, the gardener's countenance had the peculiar quality, and it is likely enough that this was the very thing about him that Gewlie had found so disturbing, of compelling those who looked at it for more than a second or two to fall into a reverie. The face of the gardener resembled in fact all those segments and fragments of the surface of the earth — pieces of broken fence, patches of frozen mud, sections of the bark of certain growing trees, strips of cart-track in out-of-the-way lanes, shallow ponds crinkly with cat-ice, which, for no reason that can be named, lure us into a mood of abstraction just as if they were snatches from some familiar scene in a previous incarnation.

"Be quiet, you," cried the Doctor sternly, addressing his oldest attendant: "and now!" and he turned to the gardener, who was neither panting nor explaining his presence.

In fact Disraeli's great motto for practical life— "no complaining and no explaining" — seemed wholly fulfilled in the gardener of Glint.

"I thought I'd better warn everybody up here" — and the gardener gazed equably round him— "that the milking woman from the village is on the rampage. She would have been up here by now, only she met her gossip and neighbour, old Mrs. Wohntscher, the scrub-woman, at the north lodge, and went for her. I wouldn't have been the man to try and separate those two, but before I left them they had been separated; and it was done by the chaplain's wife. There's a real lady for you, Mr. Doctor! I sure do give her the prize. But how she does it God and the Devil alone know; the one because he wins by it the other because he loses by it."

Doctor Echetus looked at him gravely. "Why did the milking-woman fall upon the scrubbing-woman? Can you tell me that, Gardener?"

"Certainly I can tell you, Doctor. She attacked her because the boy Seth has taken to following the Heavenly Twins, as we call them, when they get their dancing fits, and Mr. Hush, who is always about with Miss Sheer, encourages the twins to take notice of Seth and be nice to Seth, whatever his mother says or does."

It was a calm, unruffled, and completely self-controlled master of Glint who now once again, out of his first finger and thumb, manufactured an effective catapult with which he ejected all the remaining petals of the carnation's corolla and, when this had been done, allowed its limp stalk to flutter unheeded to the ground.

But that queer habit of nature, known to ordinary folk as "it never rains but it pours" or "misfortunes never come singly," seemed unable to make an exception even of an official who could convert his very fingers into "disposal squads".

All the four men moved forward now in an amazed and indignant protest, for two struggling and panting women, one of them beside herself with furious anger, came reeling and staggering up the slope to this strip of level gravel between the entrance to the Doctor's house and the entrance to the research laboratory, which now seemed to have become the final rampart and ultimate barricade against rebellious inmates.

The women engaged in this murderous-looking tussle were none other than Mrs. Wohntscher and the plump red-cheeked mother of the idiot Seth.

"Cos you 'aven't got," the milking-woman was shouting, "any childer of your own, you needn't come barging and bustling into the affairs of them as 'as! Tell me who's got my boy Seth! Tell me who 'twas you seed 'un with! And tell me quick, ye wurkus privy-cleaner, or I'll turn your yeller phyz into a turnip-field! Baalbub swallow my soul for mustard if I don't! Tell me who's got my Seth or you'll never have as much kissing space left in your yeller face as would tempt a horse-fly! One of your andy-dandy ones he was, I've no doubt, one of your well-behaved concertina-gents from abroadl Come on! Out with it! One of your fine loonies 'ave got 'im, sure as I'm born! Out with it, you devil's bitch! Who is it? You know you know and are only trying to keep my hands off 'im cos he's yours. Come on now, honest for once. Is it that Mr. Hush-a-baby of yours who sits, so they tell me, night after night with the worst loonies in the place and at a table you polishes hour by hour till it's as sleek as a suet-grub?

"No, not one of these gentlemen — don't you fancy it! — will stop me — no! not the Doctor himself — till I've got your ugly old-maid's mug down in the dust — and not then neither, till I've 'ammered with an honest country fist your filthy city-ways out of ye, ye slum-bitch what don't know a rake from a pitch-fork or a mattock from a hoe, and would be pulling up the best of the mangle-wurzels if you was told to do a bit of weeding before dark!"

Mr. Frogcastle had by this time withdrawn from the scene, while his recent antagonist, the old ex-sailor, had joined Cuddle and Squeeze in their attempt to separate the two women, or, to be more exact, to disengage the fingers, the knees, the few remaining teeth of the milking-woman from the clothes and person of the charwoman.

When they *were* separated, it became clear at once that Mrs. Wohntscher, though not wholly free from battle-stains, was a good deal the less ruffled and less upset of the two. The colossal helicopter now appeared to be following with concentrated care every curve of the serpentine river; that river that had struck so many among the inmates of Glint as being in league with their prison wall to draw closer the noose of their terrible isolation.

With all three pairs of absorbed masculine eyes watching this titanic air-omnibus from the outer world, it now became clear to the virgin mind of Mrs. Wohntscher that since nobody was detaining her by force, there was no reason against her immediate retirement from that over-crowded spot. Without any sign of her intention save the gentle extrication of her wrist from the heedless fingers of Bill Squeeze, she drew away from them all and hurried down the hill.

And the odd thing was that though at this very second Seth's mother lifted up her powerful voice in a louder cry than ever, this particular howl of hers, which only caused Mr. Cuddle to redouble his grip, had nothing to do with Mrs. Wohntscher. The milking-woman had suddenly caught sight of her missing boy himself. She had seen before the rest of them what they all now, including Doctor Echetus, surveyed in astonished silence. A majestic car had driven up of a bright yellow colour and of unusual proportions and out of it had jumped not only the idiot boy Seth but, clasping the boy's hands, one on one side of him and one on the other, that excitable and restless pair of young inmates, the boy Hither and the girl Thither.

The three youngsters were immediately, though quite quietly, followed from the capacious body of this crocus-coloured conveyance by two extremely imposing and authoritative persons. One of these gentlemen was obviously, from the easy and familiar manner in which he permitted Hither and Thither to run off with Seth towards the river, the parent of these excitable twins, while his companion, the owner of this portentous vehicle, was none other than Tenna's father, Sir Warden Sheer. Each of Doctor Echetus's subordinates automatically turned towards their master to see how far this sight would disturb him. It didn't disturb him in the least.

He had now no longer any buttonhole to toy with. So, to make it quite evident, possibly to himself as well as to his retainers, that he had not forgotten how to "keep an equable mind *rebus in arduis*", he absent-mindedly moved his hand — for he was standing quite close to Squeeze — and scratched with a couple of fingernails the beard of Heraclitus, whose head was still just observable above the rim of Bill's pocket. The particular coat worn by Bill on that eventful day, though it is doubtful whether he had put it on for that reason, had neater and trimmer pockets than his usual one, so that the uncarved base, or "Herm" which terminated in the philosopher's shoulders — shoulders that looked as if they could, like those of Atlas, sustain the whole paradoxical world — must have rested, invisible to everybody, in a warm, tender, comfortable darkness through which could be felt, though without jolt or jar, every movement of the hip-bone of Bill the *Sophosopheros* or wisdom-carrier.

"I rather tend to think," announced Doctor Echetus, addressing nobody in particular, but watching with concentrated attention the butterfly antics of Master Hither and Miss Thither as the twins danced off with the enraptured Seth towards the watery archway where there were no longer any iron spikes, “I rather tend to think that Lord Tom Tiddler himself, those twins’ father, is accompanying Sir Warden Sheer.”

He paused for a moment, lifting first one foot and then the other, and stamping the turf with each leather sole, resolutely, firmly, and even defiantly, like an aged ram, perched on a rock, preparing for the approach of a couple of inquisitive dogs. “What I would like you fellows to do,” he went on, “for my impression is that the two gentlemen have seen us and are coming straight up to us, is to remain here with me so as to be available for any action that may seem—” he paused for a second again, “that may seem *indicated.*” The master of Glint put into the word *indicated* every nuance of moral weight mingled with every nuance of infernal caution of which the head of the most complicated of all conceivable Holy offices — that of pure knowledge through licensed torture — could possibly make use—” Yes, seem indicated! “he concluded with a faint fluttering of the fingers of the left hand.

“And my impression is—” he added, while one of his companions glanced from the approaching gentlemen to the panting stable-woman, whose wrist he was still clutching, and the other tried to turn the bearded visage of Heraclitus towards the escaping twins, “my impression is that Lord Tom is under the happy illusion that all is in order and that it is part of our curriculum in the cure of those children of his to entrust them with the care of a boy like that, and to encourage them to play with him at such innocent undertakings as damming up rivers and making tunnels under walls.”

Both Cuddle and Squeeze nodded sagaciously; but the latter had to allow Heraclitus to turn his Athenian beard directly towards the woman he was holding, for the mother of Seth with her great round bulbous grey eyes “bursting”, as Mrs. Wohntscher would have put it, “out of her turniptop head”, had begun to heave and struggle and sob.

“Is it indicated,” Doctor Echetus’s look now said to his henchmen, “that we’ve got to separate this creature from her offspring? And, furthermore, have we the right to hold her back? She’s a free villager. She’s not an inmate. And mightn’t she,” so his look continued to hint, “be more of a trouble to our runaways, and to these damned agitators who are encouraging them, than she is to us?" Who can say whether Bill Squeeze was aware of all the implication of what he was doing in letting Seth's mother free to pursue her progeny?

But, aware or not, this eccentric "wisdom-carrier" must have heard these terrible sobs, must have felt these frantic and desperate efforts, even before Doctor Echetus had given him the glance that said: "Let the wretched woman go." It had long been the purpose of Betsy of the south lodge to make her husband follow, like a swift gnat "among the river-shallows, borne aloft, or sinking, as the light wind lives or dies", every curve and curlecue of a woman's conflicting emotions, so that as he released Seth's mother he used his free hand under his coat in the manner of a Punch-and-Judy showman, so as to permit his bearded doll to answer the woman's scream of maternal possessiveness with the philosophical retort of a free soul.

For that appalling scream as she rushed off came from her whole physical being. From her bulging eyes it came and from her twisted lips. From her belly it came, and from her protruding breasts. From her great thighs it came and from "the demesne that there adjacent lies".

The language of that cry was a language older than any English dialect from any English countryside, a language older than Sanscrit, older than Babylonian or Egyptian. "He has moved in my womb!" wailed that terrible cry. "He is my blood, my milk, my bones, my fibres, my flesh, my soul, *myself!* To let him leave me is to root out myself from myself! When his heart beats my heart beats! When his blood flows my blood flows! I can't eat save when he eats! I can't drink save when he drinks!

"For him to leave me and my warm love is a crime against God! He has no right to himself. He is mine and God's! He has no right to have any life save me, by me, and with me, who fed him with my food, swaddled him in my flesh, and grew him in the dark depths of my being like a ripe, sweet, lovely, round, obedient little bulb!" How low and faint was the voice from the bearded lips of a shocked and horrified philosopher that Bill Squeeze heard from the recesses of his pocket as he allowed his Heraclitus to sink down!

“Every living soul,” sounded that faint voice from the pocket of Betsy’s husband, “has one right that none can give or take away, one right in the infinite chaos of the innumerable warring worlds among which we are born, one right and one necessity, and that right is the right to be free and alone in our thoughts!”

But the mother of Seth was off now, bursting with the urge to whack and thwack and clack, with the law of the pack at her back, heading for the bed of the stream where the spikes were gone! Neither Squeeze nor Cuddle, however, could give any attention to the sequel of this maternal boy-hunt; for a second motorcar had appeared on the scene, driven by one person and driven at a most unusual speed. Out of it, the moment it stopped, leapt a tall, thin, lanky, aggressive individual, who began without delay shouting peremptorily and harshly at the figures of Lord Tom Tiddler and Sir Warden Sheer as they made their leisurely way towards the master of Glint and his two companions.

“Hie there, you two! Ho! Hie, you two! What’s wrong with you? Can’t you hear what a fellow’s saying? Stop there! Stop! I want to talk to you! Stop, I say!”

The two magnates, thus unceremoniously addressed, did turn round at this point, and after a word together awaited the newcomer in silence. Doctor Echetus and his two companions watched this encounter with considerable interest, but what would have struck our friend John, had he been sharing this contemplative suspense instead of being one of the trouble-makers, was the way in which both Bill Squeeze and Cogent Cuddle displayed no astonishment at Echetus’s calm! They took this superlative self-control, so it would seem, completely for granted, just as a couple of boys in some great cathedral choir, absorbed in some affair of their own, would take it for granted, though the organ suddenly became silent and though one of the big lights hanging from the roof-rafters above their heads mysteriously went out, and there wavered a flicker of surprise across the Norman eyebrows of the Dean, that nothing would disturb the serenity of my Lord the Bishop — no! though every light in the place went out, and everybody lit a match, and they all danced down the aisle to the tune of *Widdicombe Fair*.

But where the unruffled Doctor and his two retainers, for a philosopher in a pocket can hardly be called a retainer, were in luck at that moment was in regard to the acoustics of that gentle eminence. There was scarce a sigh or a groan, far less a word, from those three men down below that was inaudible to the three men up above.

“To whom have we the—” began the father of Hither and Thither.

“Do you know to whom you’re—” commenced the father of Tenna Sheer.

“My name is Cochineal, Colonel Cochineal,” declared the newcomer, “and if you guys weren’t mental patients, as I can see you are, of this peculiar bug-house of yours, where you seem to be treated with the easy therapy of doing what you damn-well like, I should have something to say to you, for where I live — Colonel Cochineal’s my name — I should have something to say to you — no! I wouldn’t call twice where I live after fellows like you — but if I did, there’d be some answering and some being answered! — you can take that from me, messieurs the uncured patients!

“And you can remember besides that it’s Colonel Cochineal who is always at your service!”

Cuddle and Squeeze had hardly exchanged a look over this opening remark, when Sir Warden, who hadn’t in his earlier days handled bricks and mortar for nothing, went straight to the point. “We are parents of patients, not patients, sir! This gentleman is Lord Tom Tiddler, whose two charming children are evidently being cured in the most sensible of all ways — at least that is my opinion — by being entrusted with the care of a village boy. I am the father, sir, myself, of a much sadder case, the case of a girl who has a passion for violence, sir — yes, sir, for physical violence, and I have no doubt you will understand me, sir, when I say that if I find her comfortable and quiet in this well-managed place, here I shall let her stay — yes, sir, stay till she has learnt to love her own father as the Book teaches.”

The colonel from the Deep South suppressed his anger and looked at Sir Warden with real respect. It was clear that the brickmaster’s straight man-to-man talk impressed him. At

Lord Tom he cast a sharp appraising defiant look, as at a weird animal who might or might not bite.

“I may as well,” he said, “inform you two patients — I mean parents — at once what I’m here for. Any little mistakes I may make in addressing you, you can balance up against your not answering me when I called. What I’ve come here about is a little private matter of investigation, entirely private and personal. I’ve heard it said where I come from — that is to say Cochinealville, Canister County — that you English allow social contact, drinking tea together, for instance, and even playing games like croquet and bowls, between buck niggers and white women. Now what I’ve come here to explain to you English about this nigger business is that in for a penny is in for a pound.

“What your English women haven’t yet learnt, and what I’ve come here to teach them, is the excruciating temptation they are to buck niggers. A buck nigger playing croquet is a buck nigger playing with fire. I’ve got no quarrel with, a nigger because he’s black any more than I’ve got a quarrel with the rain because its wet or with a pot of honey because its sticky. I’m glad I’ve met you two men because I can speak plainly to you, seeing as you are connected with this important institution as parents and not patients. It’s all in the understanding of the Unalterable. That’s the grand key-word. That’s the whole business; the *Unalterable*. The more I think of the word the more I like it. It is the grand secret of life as it should be. The mere sound of it makes you feel as if you were smoking a good cigar. Unalterable! It sounds like a rustle of the skirts of the woman you love. The great thing of course is to find out where the ‘unalterable’ begins and the ‘alterable’ ends. Can you make over a buck nigger so that when he sees a white woman playing croquet it don’t make the blood rush to all parts of his black body?”

“I believe,” broke in the father of Hither and Thither, “that the individuals who are staring down at us from the front of that building are the heads of this Institution. I am sure nobody will steal our cars if we leave them where they are. I can see my son and daughter are showing that little boy how to paddle in that pretty stream. Nothing could be more soothing to the over-excitable youngsters than paddling in cool running water. Gad! but this chap must be a good one at his job. My cousin Tit-Tat — the Dowager Lady Fly-by-Night, you know — wants me to send those children to America. She says America will knock the stage-struck nonsense out of them. It's all one great theatre, she tells me, over there, with everybody on the stage in ordinary life.

"Well, I suggest, gentlemen, since our cars are, so to speak, on holy ground, ha! ha! that we go and enquire of those fellows up there where this Doctor Echetus is to be found. Will you come, Sir Warden? Will you come, Colonel Cochineal?"

How Sir Warden reacted in his heart to this airy suggestion was not revealed in the words he uttered aloud. "God I how I wish, he thought, 'I was safe back in the brickyard office with old man Bogger lighting his third pipe and young Jiggit making his best blueprint and pretty Miss Caryatid knocking at the door with a nice cup of tea! I only hope this Doctor what's-his-name will soon begin letting Antenna fish for minnows with little boys; for then, please God, she may settle down here for the rest of her days and I may be quit of her!"

But aloud he said: "Certainly, my lord; at your service, my lord; it's a pleasure to be a fellow-parent with you, my lord, not to mention visiting an institution like this in your company! I'm sure you feel as I do, Colonel?"

While the complacent peer smiled his approval of the downright yet respectful manners of the self-made magnate, he looked at the colonel, who had suddenly commenced gazing at him with positive awe.

"I'd split my bottom dollar," said Colonel Cochineal emphatically, "for my little woman down south to see me on the television talking to the owner of Tom Tiddler's ground! Yes, of course I'll come! This noble knight speaks for me. 'Colonel,' I say to myself, 'you're in luck today! Not only have you found exactly the right place to deliver your message to the ladies of Great Britain about buck niggers, but you are privileged to ascend a natural eminence in the company of a cousin of the Dowager Fly-by-Night.'"

The Colonel paused and looked up at the Doctor and his two retainers, while it became clear to Lord Tom, if not to Sir Warden, that, like so many orators, he saw a surging audience at a cross-road of life where others could only see a group of idlers smoking cigarettes by a closed museum door.

When the three newcomers, ascending the slope together, arrived at the door of the Doctor's research laboratory, Bill Squeeze and Cogent Cuddle drew back a little to enable their chief to greet his visitors.

But since the Doctor had already made it clear to his two retainers that, at this dramatic crisis in the history of Glint, it was essential that he should have their support, they did not retreat far. It was the lord of Tom Tiddler's Ground who "broke", as we say, "the ice", for after the three men had shaken hands with Echetus, both the colonel from the cotton-fields and the knight from the brick-kilns turned almost pathetically to that florid Etonian.

"I haven't failed to notice, Doctor," Lord Tom began, "how happy and normal my youngsters look playing with that little rustic — clearly an importation from the village, though I confess as we were climbing your hill just now I was disturbed to see a rather wild and frantic woman, no doubt one of your simpler and humbler patients, Doctor, who appeared to be trying to drag the boy away from my friendly progeny. I couldn't help noticing that the child was clinging in the most desperate manner to both Marmaduke and Eleanora, who were, I could see, resolutely refusing to hand him over." Lord Tom of Tiddler's Ground paused politely at that point.

"Sheer?" he murmured interrogatively, like an experienced butler encouraging a poor relation. "Cochineal?"

But Sir Warden shook his head, and the Colonel told himself that the longer he held his tongue the more pleased with him his wife would be when he recounted this scene.

"What I feel myself," continued Lord Tom, inclining his massive forehead a little forward as he turned to Echetus, and permitting his right hand to sail loosely and negligently through the air by his side as if he were touching with the tips of his fingers the shoulders of the persons and the backs of the chairs intervening between himself and the footlights, "what I feel myself is that all the moral and intellectual problems of this round world are much simpler than people realise. In fact they are" — here not only did Cuddle and Squeeze come nearer, but the hairy pate of Heraclitus emerged from the latter's pocket, though the philosopher's beard was still invisible— "in fact they are reducible to one simple — simple — simple—" It was clear that Lord Tom had for gotten the clue-word that was the whole point of this discourse.

But while the master of Tiddler's Ground hovered vaguely about the word he had forgotten, the Doctor had what really was a supreme opportunity to display that equanimity with which temperament or training or some queer vacuum in his sensibility had endowed him; for glancing through the gap between the left shoulder of Lord Tom and the right shoulder of Sir Warden he beheld what he knew must be the titanic helicopter from America, now safely and comfortably landed among the reeds close to the river, from which position, the moment it so desired, it could rise and float away into the upper sky!

Surrounding this amazing object in a tossing, surging, jostling, struggling, confused mass of men and women, was the whole heterogeneous company of the inmates! And they were not only swarming round, they were actually clambering into that monstrous apparition!

Along with this disorderly mob Echetus was aware of a large sprinkling of uniformed men, obviously the bulk of his official attendants, making feeble, helpless, hesitant, drifting, half-hearted, and evidently quite vain attempts to prevent their patients' escape. That both his quaint adherents, Cuddle and Squeeze, were watching what was happening was clear to him; but all they had dared to do was to move up close together. They were not speaking a word. They were hypnotised by the sight of what was going on.

From the monumental pose of their profiled heads as their condition forced itself upon the corner of Echetus's vision, they might have been stunned, petrified, dumbfounded, all but bereft of their wits; but Echetus was too shrewd to take any of this for granted, and in some extreme background of his consciousness the idea arose that both these men had known of all this from the start. Very slowly he slid his fingers into his right side-pocket and extracted a half-filled packet. Then he thrust a hand more rapidly into his left side-pocket, brought out a box of matches, and with his gaze on that airplane and that crowd, as if they had been figures on the stage of a theatre where he was entertaining his friends, he offered a cigarette to Lord Tom of Tiddler's Ground.

Lord Tom shook his head, and Sir Warden, imagining such a refusal just then to be the proper thing, followed suit and shook his head too. The Colonel, however, perceiving the crumpled condition of that unappealing half-package, with courteous American consideration for the Doctor's feelings, accepted with alacrity, and permitted their host to protect with his curved hand the flame of the match.

It was this well-meant gesture of the Colonel's that let the cat out of the bag, for Lord Tom, catching the excitement of Squeeze and Cuddle, followed the direction of their gaze and swung round. So did Sir Warden — and the fat was in the fire. It was, indeed, more than in the fire. It was burning and smoking. And it was leaping up the slope towards them. This it was doing in the familiar persons of Father Wun, the priest, and Father Tickle, the chaplain.

To meet these anxious men of God, our four gentlemen, followed by Cuddle and Squeeze, hurried down the declivity. Their encounter might well have been called memorable; but alas! in after days not one of these worthy men could properly remember it, so blurred with egotistical prejudices were their visions and so lacking in the faintest repercussion of the swift-darting mischievous malice of the old Attic touch that could clarify by a few wholesome explosions the nuclear core of an occasion of this kind.

"Ha, Doctor!" cried Toby Tickle, "I swore to the Father I'd spotted you, all right! And sure enough here you are, watching the battle of the kites and crows, shall we call it? or the whales and the flying-fish? A little 'Mutiny on the Bounty', eh, Doctor? Ho! Ho! The Father takes it too seriously. I told him you had only to appear on the scene and this confounded American invention would soon flap its wings and be off, hell for leather, and our little flock would return to its proper fold! You'll see it all, Father, for yourself in a minute if you come down with him and watch him handle it! You Romanists have so much truck with the beachcombing rabble of the Mediterranean that you've forgotten what a proper chieftain and a real living authority is."

Father Wun turned upon his Anglican companion a look that clearly said: “There isn’t a thought in your float-bobbing brain, my good sir, that isn’t as transparent to me as the thoughts of Cranmer or Ridley when they first smelt the smoke of their own burning. You think, you great silly ass, that this precious Doctor of yours has only to stroll down to that airplane and clap his hands and the plane will sail away to America and his patients will gather round him like the children round Our Lord, while the lion and unicorn of this Commonwealth of Commonsense, touched by the intimations of a tempered immortality, will pull the Ark of the Covenant of decent behaviour into the well-stocked home-farm of Glint Hall!”

Oddly enough, it wasn’t the Reverend Toby, nor Lord Tom of Tiddler’s Ground, nor Sir Warden Sheer, who returned this look of infinite contempt cast by Father Wun at the smiling weather-beaten face of the chaplain. It was the world-weary, life-tired, ungullible stare of one who had seen too many “beginnings” and too many “ends” to give way to human peevishness or human jocularity in these difficult matters.

It was, in fact, the grave detached stare of none other than Heraclitus himself, as Bill Squeeze edged that bearded head over the rim of his pocket.

What appeared to amuse Doctor Echetus, who evinced not the faintest tendency to move from where he stood even though the heavens fell, was the appeal flung forth upon the general air by Lord Tom of Tiddler’s, who now beheld Marmaduke and Eleanora assisting the little Seth to clamber into the giant plane.

“Will anybody here,” he called out, addressing the whole countryside: “*Will* everybody here who has the right to wear a public-school tie come with me to stop this nonsense?”

At this point Lord Tom paused for a moment. Then in a still shriller tone he began again —” I’m only asking for a few real gentlemen: that’s not much to ask for, is it? A few real gentlemen? That’s what our public schools are for, aren’t they — at least the top half a dozen of them? Factories, aren’t they, for turning successful men’s sons into gentlemen! You agree, Sir Warden? You’re with me, Sir Warden?

“Well! Come on then! Let’s see what you and I can do to stop this nonsense! Come along, Colonel! Never mind about your niggers till we’ve got our palefaces under control! Come along! Come along! Come along!”

The voice of Lord Tom Tiddler died away as he approached the south-lodge gates. But through these gates he didn’t go at once; still less through the low archway where the stream ran under the wall. At those great gates, though Betsy had already passed through them, leaving them unfastened, Lord Tom waited for Sir Warden. This hesitation of Lord Tom’s failed not to interest quite a good deal the psychological eye of Doctor Echetus.

“It shows,” the master of Glint told himself, “how the vibrations of biological change affect human character. The aristocratic lord of Tiddler’s Ground daren’t take his own twins out of an American plane till a brickyard magnate supports him!”

Echetus found less to interest him in the movements of his chaplain and Father Wun, who were quite clearly not at all anxious to get involved in the confusion that was going on outside the wall of the institution and within one of the snakelike curves of the river. Whether by mutual consent or by the compulsion and pressure of theological argument, they paused under an isolated group of spruce-firs, whence they could observe both the imperturbable Doctor above and the wild confusion below.

It was at this moment that a concatenation of small occurrences, at once fortuitous and unavoidable, at once ordained by destiny and grotesquely accidental, prepared the way for an event which was as startling as it was tragic.

Bill Squeeze became so anxious to enable his bearded pockettotem to see what could happen in England when philosophical inmates revolt against unphilosophical scientists, that he left the Doctor alone with Cuddle and rushed off down the slope, following the same path as that which John Hush had traversed “on all fours” when he made his way to the now spikeless water-channel that ran under the great wall and out the other side.

It was in full view of his own house that this now unimpeded tunnel went under the wall; and it was no doubt his dread of his wife’s wounding tongue, and some vague notion that if he crept through that orifice instead of through the great gates she was less likely to catch him, that set him at such a pace.

"Well! Well!" ejaculated Doctor Echetus, watching the half-hearted and spiritless attendants making their feeble efforts to prevent the reckless and desperate inmates from crowding into the giant helicopter. "Well! Well! And what's going to be the issue of all this?"

He had put back into his pocket those cigarettes and matches that had enabled the colonel from the South to show what man-to-man courtesy, save where buck niggers were concerned, a gentleman from Cochinealville could display; and now with a deliberate tranquillity that rivalled the natural calm of that particular spot upon the earth's surface with a latitude and a longitude so mathematically verifiable, Doctor Echetus calmly lit a cigarette for himself.

No animal second-sight, such as might have warned a less purely rational intelligence, rushed into the Doctor's consciousness to tell him if he didn't swing round, quick as hell, this would be the last puff of smoke that would ever pass his lips.

Any onlooker except Mesopotamia Cuddle would have been surprised to see Cogent Cuddle, that orderly and obedient fanatic, extract from *his* pocket, not tobacco nor any still wiser consolation in the form of a philosopher, but simply and solely a very large army pistol. A small puff of smoke from the front of the Doctor's skull now floated off towards the river in a perfect ring, while a large puff of smoke, accompanied by a distinct but not overpowering detonation obscured the back of that same skull.

Ever since he had been delegated to bring the Doctor's activities to an end the moment they ceased to be of use to the movement, Cuddle had repeated as soon as he was awake, like the most devoted of priests his office, every syllable of the unequivocal instructions he had received from headquarters.

What he hadn't been instructed in, however, were certain disturbing details of the transaction, when he came to carry the thing through. He had accepted too roundly perhaps the Shakespearean murderer's easy assurance that "when the brains were out the man would die. His instructions had been reticent as to how the victim after receiving his death-wound was liable to behave.

There was no allusion in this Spartan document to wounded bodies leaping into the air or diving into wet mud or offering to the murderer's unprepared eyes shattered bones, bloody hairs and oozing brains, in conjunction, as happened at this moment, with a horrible stare from a pair of eyes different from all other eyes in the world.

Still less did these laconic instructions give the faintest hint as to how an inexperienced killer was to calm his own nerves when his victim really was dead. On this particular occasion Cuddle had hardly replaced his pistol in his pocket before he caught sight of the well-known figures of Father Toby and Father Wun retracing their steps.

Apparently the professional concern for mortality natural to all priests had been as much excited by the sound of that shot from the hill above as their instinctive dislike of anarchy had been exasperated by the shouts of the crowd below. Cuddle's first instinct when he saw the two priests returning was the natural one of blind concealment. He couldn't see the reverend gentlemen when he lay flat, nor they him. So from this position he pushed Echetus's body away from him till he got it completely hidden amid the stalks, leaves and flowers of a bed of rhododendrons. Thus by the time he was on his feet again, with the pistol in his pocket and the body out of sight, he was ready to put on some sort of defensive mask.

"We heard a shot from up here, Cuddle," cried Father Toby, when they reached him. "The Doctor hasn't lost his head, I hope? We've nearly lost ours; haven't we, Father Wun?"

"Perhaps you could tell us, my friend—" began the priest.

But the chaplain had now heard a familiar voice behind them and he hurriedly swung round. Father Wun did the same. So, to the indescribable relief of the agitated assassin, he beheld their backs instead of their faces. But he, too, had heard the unmistakable voice of Ursie Mum, the only one of all the authorities of Glint who had no enemy among the inmates, for Mrs. Wohntscher, who resembled Ursie Mum in being a married virgin, was too confined, as you might say, to the floor, for the mahogany table only rounded off the events of the day, to be able to exercise her personal power.

“I’m surprised at you, Father Wun,” Ursie Mum was now gasping indignantly, “encouraging Toby to leave his post like this! What have you got on your mind? And you too, Mr. Cogent Cuddle! I can’t understand how you men can — Goodness-gracious! but what’s this?”

Had she been the mother of all Britain, Ursie Mum couldn’t have uttered that “Goodness-gracious!” with more astonishment. It was not natural to her to feel, still less to express, dismay, but she came as near to that emotion at that moment as she had ever done in the whole of her maternal and yet old-maidish life.

Well might Ursie Mum, whose married virginity gave her a protective instinct that was far less savage and far more subtle than the ordinary maternal one, an instinct that might have won for her as a saint, if she’d wanted to be a saint, some such nickname as “the aunt of God”, well, indeed, might Ursie Mum come near to dismay, for between her and the two ecclesiastics there had suddenly manifested itself the figure of Morsimmon Esty, the refugee from Thibet. Without uttering a word, of giving any sign of warning, this mysterious stranger gripped the two Fathers with a double clutch of demonic power, Father Wun with his right hand and Father Tickle with his left hand, holding them in each case by the nape of their necks and with the devil’s own clutch of such supernatural force that to retain any dignity at all they were forced to submit as if he had been their executioner.

The crouching and quaking Cuddle shuffled backward as best he could, feeling with his heels for the body of Echetus so as to thrust it further out of sight among the rhododendrons. There soon, however, arrived a point when this iron-handed executioner from Thibet, with his murderous hold upon those two men of God, compelled the agitated Cuddle to scramble backwards over the corpse of his master; and once there, far too exhausted by his antics to attempt further evasion, compelled him, drugged with the sharp taste of rhododendron-stalks, to await, crouching on his heels, the next bounce of the ball of fate, as Destiny and Chance played their game over his head.

Cuddle never forgot the extraordinary spectacle that these casual performers offered to his vision. Ursie Mum, that good and great "Aunt of God", was by no means petrified by fear. She moved forward a step, and seeing Father Toby's hand dangling in pathetic helplessness she clasped it in her own. Thus, if we had the curiosity to contrast the thoughts of these living centres of consciousnesses as they occupied together the same transitory bubble on the river of time, both Father Wun and Cuddle felt they were not alone but were portions of a larger entity upon which at this uncomfortable crisis they could lie back, whereas both Toby Tickle and Ursie Mum felt that they were, though a man and a woman holding hands, totally alone in infinite space and infinite time, although there was no doubt, floating vaguely around them somewhere, a sweet savour usually called "God" and a horrid stink usually called "the Devil".

It was at this point that Morsimmon Esty sank down on his own knees in front of the body of Echetus, where he faced across it the crouching figure of Cuddle. Then, having got his captives upon their knees, he intensified his iron clutch upon each separate skull and forced their faces downward till their eyes and noses and mouths and cheeks were buried in the Harris-tweed-smelling coat and laboratory-acid-smelling trousers of the dead scientist. Five separate times did the person from Thibet press down their faces in this manner into that dead body. And most vividly aware were both the ecclesiastics that, at each descent of their faces into the body beneath them, *there was less of the dead man* into which to sink.

Finally, when their skulls rose for the fifth time it was from earth mould and weeds and the stalks of rhododendrons that they rose. There was no longer any remnant left of Echetus, the manner of dogs, nor was there any sign or shadow or semblance of the man from Thibet.

The two ecclesiastics were so physically exhausted by the weird experience they had been through that when at last released, and released in the attitude so natural to men of their profession, they were for a while unable to rise from their knees; and Cuddle, as he faced them with a piercingly sharp smell of stalk-sap in his nostrils, felt drawn to examine, with the desperate intensity of a hunted animal, the two faces that were now peering at him, towered over no longer by any supernatural stranger from Asia, but by the bent head, massive frame, and outstretched arm of Ursie Mum, that potential “aunt of God”, who, however, was of less interest to Cuddle than a rhododendron-stalk.

“Only two of them now,” he told himself, with an immense sigh of relief. Being a man of insight, in spiritual as well as other matters, it stuck him that his unquestioning use of the pistol, according to orders from above, need, as things had worked out, have no uncomfortable results for himself. The death of the master of Glint had in fact been lifted out of the sphere of the criminal and tragic into the sphere of the fantastic and miraculous. His personal apprehensions being so surprisingly eased he was now able to examine with something of his natural acuteness the faces of the two clerics kneeling before him and only divided from him by an oblong space about a foot and a half broad, where certain insignificant weeds, such as common veronica and groundsel, were now feebly rising from the prostrate position to which they had been reduced by the superincumbent weight of what was now thin air and a pinch of dust.

What struck Cuddle most about the face of Toby Tickle was its ruddiness and the thickness of the flesh that composed the nostrils and formed the bulbous knob of his healthy animal nose and the manner in which all the innumerable wrinkles from the corners of his eyes and the corners of his mouth seemed to be singing a little cheerful song of their own, a song that made Cuddle think of his wife when her special sort of female impulsiveness infuriated his logical mind.

And now, as he stared into the face of Toby Tickle, all the chaplain’s good-natured little wrinkles seemed chirping like grasshoppers. And to the embittered integrity of Cuddle’s fanaticism they really did compose themselves into a psychic ditty, though no doubt all Toby Tickle was feeling just then was that Ursie Mum had come to extricate him from the clutches of devils.

There’s never a hook
In a fish that you cook.
What hell in the steeple

Can bother a people
Whose God's in the sky
Where the great clouds sail by?
The wind and the sun
Wipe out all that's done.
Let the sad wail dong-ding
And the mud howl ding-dong.
Forget every things
Whether right, whether wrong!
'Twas *to help us forget*
That the seas were made wet.
'Twas *to help us slip past*
That the rocks were made fast.
If in one woman's looks
Are a million books
For one snow-flake of snow
You can let them all go.
When the sun goes down red
The last word has been said.

But when he turned from reading these rhythms in Toby Tickle's face and gaped at the polished inscrutable countenance of Father Wun, he suddenly became convinced that this latter had actually winked at him.

And though this impression coincided with the uprising of both priests from their knees, and coincided, too, with an exchange of words between Toby and his wife that struck him as if the woman had been reassuring a little boy of ten who without quite knowing what had happened had received a stab in his self-respect by having been danced up and down with no power of retaliating by a person who had now completely disappeared, Cuddle made no bones about catching Father Wun by one of the buttons of his waistcoat and asking him bluntly and plainly whether he would be willing to take him on as a general servant at a low salary.

After his discerning scrutiny of the priest’s impassive face, and after noting how the man was completely impervious to being turned upside down and bobbed five times against a corpse, he wasn’t really very surprised at the reception his offer received.

“You are, of course,” replied the Father quickly, “a lapsed member of the Greek Church?”

Cogent Cuddle admitted that such was the case; and in his heart he knew that the priest had accepted him. “Mesopotamia will have to go to mass!” he thought with vindictive and unholy joy. But Life has a partner in her game of bagatelle with Destiny, and this partner is called Chance. According to what happens we call her pure Chance, blind Chance, wretched Chance, or sometimes lucky Chance. And on this occasion Chance had arranged it with this same Mesopotamia’s natural impulse to escape that she should, by the hurried intercession of Mr. John Hush, find herself hugging herself with a healthy happiness she hadn’t known for twenty years, in a comfortable hiding-place in the very heart of this huge newly-invented helicopter.

And though so quietly hidden herself in the heart of the confusion, it was permitted to Mesopotamia, as if she’d been a veritable pet of Chance, to behold episodes in this strange vessel’s departure that not only would have absorbed the attention of her husband, that obstinate adherent of Oneness, but would have attracted a glance, though not, we may suspect, a turn of the head, from her husband’s new master, the equally obstinate adherent of the Oneness of the faith revealed to St. Paul on his way to Damascus.

She saw, for example, though neither of them could possibly see her, the outburst of wifely fury, mounting up and up till it burst into a suicidal scream of hate, which Betsy Squeeze of the south lodge flung at Bill Squeeze; she standing amid the reeds of the river and he caught by her as he leaned over the central rail of the airplane in an obvious effort to give the bearded doll in his pocket a parting view of the hemisphere they were leaving.

Mesopotamia heard this appalling feline howl with a response altogether different from that with which Bill Squeeze himself received it, while the actual emotion experienced by Betsy and expressed in this manner was totally different from the emotion either of them attributed to her. Mesopotamia, the woman’s gossip, and Bill, the woman’s husband, did however agree that one of Betsy’s dominant cravings was the craving to rise above the class into which she’d been born. For food and drink, for social jollification, for sexual ecstasy, for lively encounters, for pleasant parties, Betsy cared little or nothing. What she dreamed of, day in and day out, was for her neighbours to stare at each other in awed amazement and to murmur in their stunned and bewildered envy: “Think of our Betsy being a real lady born and nobody known it!”

But men are men, and women are women, and their association together through many years has the power of heaping up, day by day, and from thousands upon thousands of microscopic details, such smouldering stock-piles of explosive and even annihilating resentment that once released it seems to tap some Satanic crater that can draw upon the central lava of world-destruction!

What, however, brought Betsy’s outburst of love-hate to an end was neither her own death by a broken blood-vessel nor the death of her husband by a stab of conscience: it was the actual death, by a ghastly fall from the helicopter, of the desperate and indignant mother of the idiot-boy Seth. She had followed the pair of reckless twins on to the very deck of this monstrous vessel and had tried to snatch the boy from them by sheer force; but others on the airplane had intervened, some taking her side, and some the side of the twins, with the result that in the confusion of the struggle the unlucky woman fell backwards from the deck of the plane, struck a twisted, sharp-edged six-foot iron stanchion fixed among the reeds close to where Betsy stood to deliver her imprecations, and broke her back.

The hurt to the cattle-woman’s spine would alone have been fatal, even if her skull had not also been hit, and hit with the sort of crushing blow that kills at a stroke.

The disturbance that now arose, both on the deck of the vessel and on the ground beneath it, as a crowd composed of a motley mixture of inmates and attendants and villagers and onlookers surged round the idiot’s mother confused every issue. Betsy Squeeze, although on her knees by the dead woman, hadn’t by any means been shocked into silence, but, on the contrary, had found in this new tragedy a fresh cause for raving against “that cowardly idiot I only married out of pity for the brute, and he thinking of nothing but that bearded Beelzebub the crazy swine keeps in his filthy pocket!”

But it was rapidly becoming clear to John Hush, as he stood clutching Tenna’s hand and staring at his guardian *with that girl*, that an indescribable jealousy was twisting like a snake round every nerve and every nerve-twitching fibre under the skin of his whole body! His guardian had seen him, and had seen Tenna with him, and so had *that girl*. What they were trying to do now was to talk to him above the uproar and through the same megaphone they had been using to give orders to their American crew.

It was queer how John managed to keep a small, cold, clear, uncynical, unsardonic observation-post in one corner of his consciousness that observed everything that was happening at that moment, together with its precise impact upon himself. “This is,” he told himself, “the most hateful and horrible moment in my whole life! I’ve got to give him up whatever happens! Does he think he can hand himself over to that girl and keep me too? Not on your life, heart of my hell! Not on your life!”

What made things worse for John Hush at that devilish moment was the vicious and cruel struggle he was having, quite apart from his guardian and *that girl*, in what he called to himself his “Glint Hall conscience What, in plain fact, he felt he ought to be doing now, before this air-dragon rose from its riverbed, was to rush into the main building of Glint Hall, climb the stairs to the punishment wing, and rescue Pantamount, that log-like waif from the Atlantic, who had sacrificed himself for Tenna and for him. Wasn’t it his plain duty now to pay back this debt and return that sacrifice?

He couldn’t help being troubled by the most horrible imaginations as to what might have been done to Pantamount. The most horrible rumours were always running through Glint Hall as to what punishment wing, or “Special Department of Corrective Treatment”, as it was called, and as if his destiny wasn’t being cruel enough to him at that moment by dangling him on a sort of gallows-bridge between his guardian and Tenna, it needs must now make him imagine the luckless Pantamount pinioned and trussed up in that bloodless crucifixion practised on the friend of the suitors in the Odyssey; one of the things, like the hanging of the suitor's girl-friends, that had always seemed to him an absolute proof of the Odyssey's infinite inferiority to the Iliad!

In addition to these private thumb-screws of the mind, John was now growing increasingly aware that the crowd about them had become dangerously hostile to this American air-vessel, to its foreign passengers, its foreign crew, and to its obvious intention of kidnapping as many crazy inmates as it could and carrying them across the Atlantic! All this excited shouting through the megaphone amounted, as far as he could follow it, to some sort of angry ultimatum. Either he and Tenna must climb on board at once, without further parley, or they would simply have to be left behind.

John felt as if there was an excruciatingly thin, sharp, high-pitched ice-edge in the centre of his heart, along which two distinct selves, each of them giving vent to a piercing soprano-shriek, were skating side by side and each endeavouring to thrust the other over the ice-edge!

It was at that moment that an extremely handsome, rather languid, exquisitely graceful individual of the male sex, with large brown eyes and an aquiline nose and an obscurely atmospheric but at the same time an unquestionable persuasive Jewish look in his air of approach, came lightly and gracefully up to them.

"Do you happen to know anybody," enquired he, addressing John, "who has any knowledge of the signs of the zodiac?"

From the remote position within the hinterland of his mind that contained an observation-post John couldn't help noticing how half-way across his frozen eel-bridge-edge of exquisite indecision, from the pain of which, if he'd been a woman, that woman would have had to fling herself with a rending shriek, he couldn't help noticing that mixed with his suffering there was a weird and diabolic spasm of enjoyment as he looked in his questioner's face and replied quickly: "Certainly I do, my friend, if I know anything of myself, for drawing up horoscopes has for some years been a habit of mine, and I can usually tell at the first glance under what sign of the zodiac a person is born."

The super-subtle and gravely ironical newcomer then turned to Tenna, whose attention had clearly been arrested by the beauty of his disillusioned eyes and Cardinal-Newman-like profile. "Do you, lady," he enquired, "happen to know anybody who knows anything of palmistry?"

John Hush couldn't help smiling, even from his ice-edge tragic indecision, as he caught Tenna's quick amused look.

"Certainly, mister, certainly," she murmured excitedly.

"I'd like nothing better than to tell fortunes in a tent at a fair!"

Apparently very well satisfied with both these answers, their unknown interviewer went off, but John had a queer sense of something new in the wind when he saw the fellow hurry away to join none other than his old acquaintance, who had been the first inmate he had met when he arrived, namely that giant-dwarf from the circus who had been so attracted to Miss Bolster.

And then he was back again on the shrieking cutting ice-edge of his cruel indecision. As Homer is always saying: "his mind was" literally "divided into two".

Things were indeed growing more desperate every minute. His guardian's lady, the American to whom this gigantic invention belonged, kept whispering in his guardian's ear, and he could see clearly from her gestures that she was urging him to give the signal, whoever might be on board and whoever might be left behind, to rise from that river-side and be off at once!

The worst of the whole thing was that Tenna herself was beginning to get agitated with that old fatal agitation. He had known there *was* that danger. Too well for some time he had known it. Once or twice already he had caught sight of Tottie and old Rumpibus teasing each other in their accustomed manner as they leaned over the shining rail of the vessel's deck. And then as he was watching the preparations of a couple of the crew to haul up one of the few remaining gangways into the interior of the plane, he suddenly became aware of a much worse agitation in the frail form by his side and he noticed that she had twisted her head round and was straining her neck.

Yes! it had come — their worst danger! He knew it from the glimpse he got of her profile. He knew it from the frantic struggle she now began to get free of his hold; yes! to shake him off and rush wildly in the direction of the man she hated! Rumpibus and Tottie were nothing to this. This could only be one thing. This must mean the presence of her father.

He had never seen the man before, but that it was her father was proved by the effect on her. Sir Warden was accompanied by some upper-class person who might have been any gentlemanly barbarian in the kingdom who didn't "give a damn" how he behaved; and it was evident as they approached the plane together that their appearance wasn't only throwing Tenna into one of her insane fits but was causing terrible consternation to Hither and Thither.

He had already noticed how the Heavenly Twins had been struggling to keep the fact of his mother's death away from the boy Seth. Would they be able now to defy their parent and refuse to leave the plane? God! But things were growing crucial. If the great flying creature didn't rise now — now at once — these two confounded men of rank and authority — and anyone could see they were that sort of thing — would send for the police — indeed he fancied he could see the helmet of a policeman already — and the police would search the plane — and the end of it would be that the Americans and their crew would have to set off alone!

It was at a curious little pattern of torn-off pieces of feathery reed-stalks, lying criss-cross together on the wet mud along with blackened wisps of moss, that John was now staring as he lifted the struggling Tenna from her feet and heard the gasping choking passion of the rending sobs that he seemed to himself to be squeezing from the core of her heart; and as he stared at that pattern in the mud, he plunged the very horn — for it felt like the horn of a crazed unicorn — of his whole soul into the very centre of this hieroglyphic writing in the mud!

He didn't pray. He didn't laugh. He didn't cry. Down, down, down, he seemed to be plunging the horn of his spirit; plunging it down into a secret of life that could only be known by a man who was squeezing sobs like black ambergris and golden myrrh out of the heart of his true-love!

His trance, or obsession, or whatever it was, was broken by the one voice that in all his days in Glint had never been associated with anything that wasn't comforting and healing — the voice of Mr. Lordy! And simultaneously with Mr. Lordy's voice he heard above him the resonant voice of his guardian giving the signal to start. The ground shook beneath John's feet with what seemed to him to be the same convulsive movements as Tenna was making in his arms; and the steel body of the air-monster above him shivered from head to tail, and then from flank to flank, and then with one grand heave and four great up-gathering wave-like cresting curves, the huge creature swayed upwards.

It was to John an astonishing sight, and in some ways a horrible as well as beautiful sight, to see it rise, for the people round it, as well as the people upon it, were so jammed together that it was like the human head and shoulders of a Centaur tearing themselves free from the four legs and flanks and tail of the same body!

John felt as if where he now stood the air ought to be wet with blood. But he noticed that from the thing's tail a long rope-ladder was still swinging in the air, a ladder that looked as if the hemp that composed it was made of some stuff much whiter than could be woven from any ordinary flax. Though the vessel which was carrying Mr. Lordy away was already heaving and swaying, and Mr. Lordy's voice was always rather faint, they were his words and nobody else's that remained in John's ears, and simple enough they were:

"Look behind you, mister!"

Yes, Mr. Lordy had now departed, and all that John could do was to obey him. So he swung round. And there at his back, as unmoved by the giant helicopter's leap aloft as he might have been unmoved by all the seas and oceans of the world, stood Pantamount.

"You thought of going to the punishment wing to look for me, didn't you?" he said quietly.

John gazed at him in complete bewilderment. The long rope-ladder gleaming so oddly white in the sun was swinging now between them.

"Catch it and go, for God's sake!" he gasped.

"I will, I will, I will!" cried the other. "See! I obey you I and I'll think of you all the way across!"

It certainly offered no difficulty to this last of the Atlanteans to ascend this rope-ladder, though under his weight it serpentined over their heads like the tail of the chimæra. It was strange that it should have been just at this moment — though not out of keeping with a recurrent aspect of what happens to us in time and space where the negligible, the meaningless, the insignificant, the senseless, seems to take an impish delight in presenting itself to our attention — that the voice he heard upon the air was not the voice of any of his friends but a voice he hadn't heard since that day in March when he had had his first meal in the Glint dining-hall; the resounding voice, in fact, of the luckless young man who had been on that occasion removed by the attendants for making too much noise.

"My father," such were the last words that reached John's ears as his guardian left him for ever, "was the Flying Dutchman!" It was with the word "father" pounding and grinding and turning into powder within him something that seemed like the very marrow of his bones that John, with Tenna in his arms, stumbled blindly into the thick of the crowd. Though she had seen Sir Warden, he didn't think Sir Warden had seen her; and the chances were, he told himself, that the man took it for granted she was on board the plane.

Blindly he stumbled on, crying: "She's my wife, my wife, my wife!" when anyone tried to stop him. Then all in a moment everything had changed. They were out of the crowd. They were in a lane. They were just below that ancient camp with the two Scotch firs, where the river couldn't follow them. And now they were being helped into an old battered dilapidated car by the circus-freak who had been so obsessed by Miss Bolster and the man whose profile resembled Cardinal Newman's.

It was explained to them now, and Tenna listened with relief as she sank into the ferret-smelling back-seat by John's side, that if they wanted to escape from the world and from their relatives in the world, the best of all disappearances was to be lost in a travelling circus. Miss Bolster's giant-dwarf, John noticed, spoke almost affectionately to the handsome gentleman who was now driving them and who had asked them a few minutes ago those pointed questions. And certainly after being rattled and jerked in that ferret-smelling car through a greater number of narrow lanes than John had imagined existed in that part of the country, they arrived at the biggest circus encampment either of them had ever seen.

The handsome gentleman, whom the giant-dwarf simply addressed as "Boss", but who, before they reached their destination, introduced himself in the most courtly manner as Mr. Livius, kept turning round to explain to Tenna, for he evidently considered John to be a convert already, that behind the disguise, in darkened tents, of fortune-tellers and zodiacal-diviners, no one could possibly discover them.

And there, indeed, a new life began for them. None knew them. None dreamed of their identity, none guessed their past. They had no past. They needed no future. Past and future, as they often told each other, were so perforated by the faces, voices, movements, gestures and all the wild and whirling words they had heard at Glint that their present was sometimes in the one and sometimes in the other, and sometimes had swallowed both!

Their saviour, the giant-dwarf, was so pleased with the favour they won in the eyes of his Jewish friend, the boss of the whole show, that it was only in the November of that year, and he had intended to wait till a year had gone by and the anniversary of their arrival had come round, that he presented them with a very special gift. This was nothing less than a black spaniel he had stolen from the Glint research laboratory before Echetus, the manner of dogs, had got to work on it; and it was Tenna herself who chose its name. She decided to call it "Mr. Lordy".

Atlantis (1954)

This novel was first published by Macdonald & Co in London in 1954. The novel was dedicated to Powys' long-time companion, Phyllis Playter, who was not only his romantic partner, but a vital source of intellectual and creative support to him throughout their forty years together. The couple met in 1921 during one of Powys' lecture tours and quickly developed a strong and enduring connection. The major obstacle to their romance was that Powys had been married for twenty-five years to Margaret Lyon, with whom he had a son. He was unable to divorce her due to her Catholic faith. Nevertheless, Powys and Margaret eventually came to an agreement about their marriage and the author lived with Phyllis, while he continued to support his wife financially until her death in 1947.

Atlantis is a fantasy novel inspired by stories and characters from Greek mythology. The author described the book 'a long romance about Odysseus in his extreme old age, hoisting sail once more from Ithaca'. The protagonist sets out on another voyage after being abandoned by his former mentor, the goddess Athena, during an uprising of the Titans against their Olympian rulers. Odysseus' journey leads him to the underwater island of Atlantis, submerged beneath the sea, before he eventually arrives in the 'New World' of America. The novel is heavily populated with vivid and peculiar characters and Powys animates the inanimate giving stone pillars and wooden clubs the ability to move and speak.

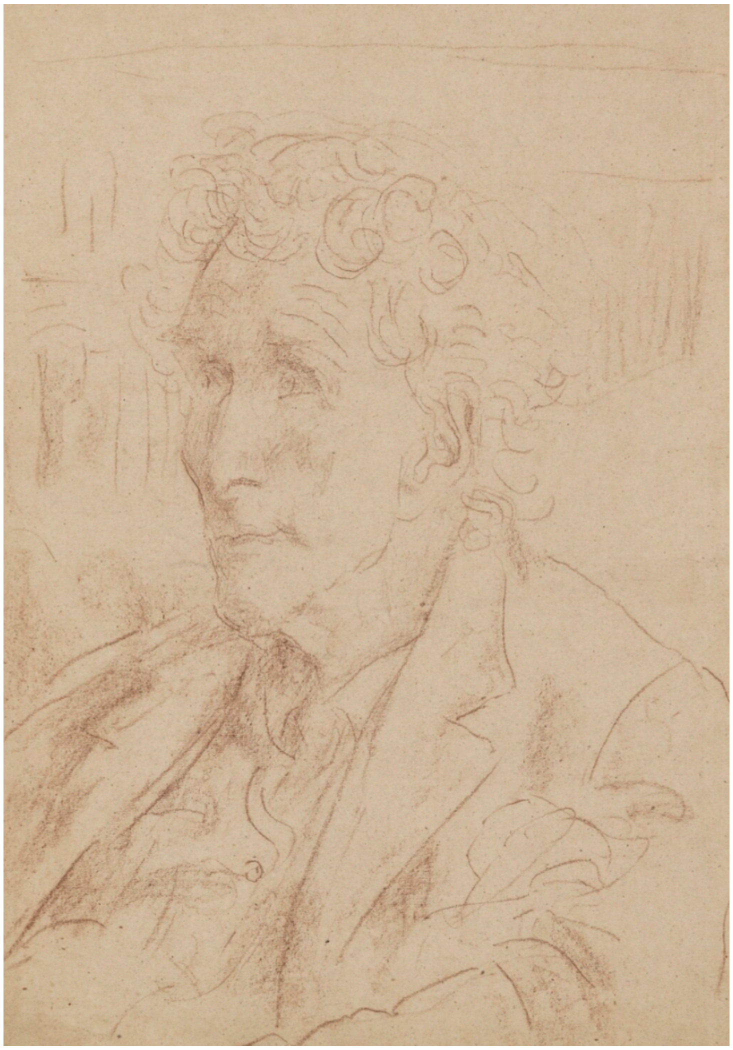

Chalk portrait of Powys by Augustus John, completed close to the time of publication

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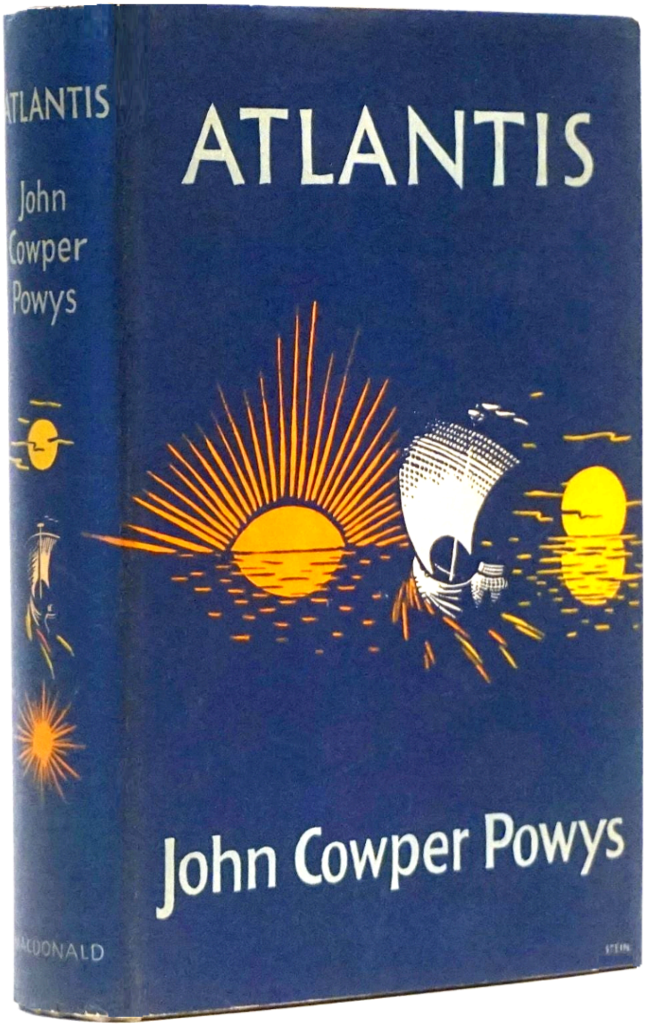
ATLANTIS
John Cowper Powys
ATLANTIS
John Cowper Powys
MACDONALD

The first edition

Dedicated to

PHYLLIS PLAYTER

CHAPTER I

THERE HAD BEEN an unusual tension all that Spring night in the air of the arched corridor that led into the royal dwelling. It was a weird, hushed, premonitory tension, the sort of tension that implies a secret foreknowledge shared among a number of so-called inanimate things. It was the sort of tension that strikes human beings as ominous, and from which all sub-human creatures instinctively shrink.

Even when the phantom-light that comes before dawn and is known in the island of Ithaca as “Lykophos” or “wolf-light,” touched with its ghostly greyness that silent portico the tension did not relax. Some chroniclers would no doubt declare that if this palace of the aged Odysseus had been on the mainland, or if Ithaca had been a larger island, the elemental vibration that was bringing this tension would have been less active. This is extremely doubtful. Such chroniclers would be laying too much stress upon the purely physical capacity of the inanimate to convey the shock of far-away outbreaks, and too little stress upon whatever it may be in the composition of any form of matter that partakes, however faintly, of the nature of emotional consciousness.

The corridor which was thus affected that Spring night was a narrow one but it was about eighty feet in length and its arched roof was reached by — it would be incorrect to say “was supported upon” — six huge pillars. These pillars were not of great height, for the arched roof was low; but they were of colossal girth and were by no means identical in appearance.

In fact the first impression any stranger who visited the House of Odysseus received from them was that they had been dragged to this royal entrance by long-forgotten generations of slaves and had belonged to more than one pre-historic temple in the primal age of the Island of Ithaca, an age so fabulously remote that these terrific pillars had probably beheld creatures that were neither gods nor men nor centaurs nor satyrs moving about beneath them.

The entrance to the corridor was from a garden of very ancient olive-trees, at one side of which was the slaves' burying-ground. The stones that supported the entrance-arch were so enormous that they made the porch itself look just what in all probability it was, the mouth of a subterranean river that aeons ago had dried up.

A stranger entering it could make out at once the half-open brazen doors at the end and at most hours could feel the fragrant smoke emerging from beside the throne and floating out down the row of pillars.

The tension at any rate that welcomed that particular dawn had been created, so it was gradually made evident, by some world-upheaval that was nearer human consciousness than the most insidious constituents of these last eddies of wood-smoke that were at that moment being wafted out between those brazen doors from the whitening ashes of the fire by the empty throne, nearer human consciousness than even the sepulchral mist that at this hour was slowly drifting in over the stunted olive-trees from the slaves' burying-ground.

Whatever was the nature of the revolutionary event that was happening or was just going to happen, and however important it may have been or was going to be for human consciousness, one thing can be counted upon as certain: it meant absolutely nothing to the dust of the dead slaves out there in that unhistoric enclosure. What did it mean to those Six Pillars? Now this was a significant question. To dispose of those centuries-old layers of slave-dust not a great deal of nourishing soil had had to be disturbed; but with these Six Pillars it was a different matter.

Odysseus himself, who had known them from childhood, and whose homesick imagination had turned to them again and again under the walls of Troy and in the Nymph-tended gardens of Circe and Calypso, found it impossible even now, as he went out or came in between the polished rondures of their preoccupied surfaces, to imagine them as anything but still erect in their majestic immunity, whatever convulsion at the heart of the island might make the rest of his home a heap of ruins.

But if the aged lord of that place could himself only too easily imagine its final desolation and see in those Six Pillars its only lasting memorial, by what tremors of vibration or currents of magnetism was the appalling tension caused that now filled that corridor?

One of the most startling things in human experience, whether the person be old or young, occurs whenever such a person is left alone for a while with another of its species who is sunk in sleep. It is then that the wakeful one suddenly becomes aware of the chasm that exists, a chasm resembling a crevasse in scoriac rock, between its consciousness and a consciousness like its own that is functioning in a completely different dimension.

There are some who find themselves questioning when they are fully awake, but of course they may have been influenced during their sleep, whether it is true that of all the things in the world the most precious is human consciousness. The champions of human consciousness defend its preciousness on the ground that it is consciousness alone that makes it possible for one living creature to respond to the feelings of another living creature.

Among ourselves however there are so many varieties of consciousness that it would seem as if it ought to be possible for us to relax the thought-pattern of human beings, or perhaps stretch it a little, till we could pass into the consciousness of a fish or a reptile or an insect or even of a plant or a tree.

Indeed if we have known the weird discomfort and strange uneasiness of the isolation of a brain awake lying close to a brain asleep, we have also known the annoying frustration of our complete failure to feel what the inanimate entities around us feel.

In the pre-dawn of the February day that brought this odd tension into the corridor of the palace of Odysseus the human sensibility that was really needed before any adequate solution of the mysterious shock lately received by this portion of the earth's surface could be obtained was the peculiar and special sensibility of a virgin who had never known a man, in other words of an old maid, a sensibility that the mere experience of copulation, whether resulting in pregnancy or not, wholly destroys, a sensibility that is as impossible for a mother as it is for a father.

The only human beings in the corridor at this hour were neither paternal nor maternal, nor were they on the watch. They were both male and they were both asleep. Thus it was left for the last of the six enormous Pillars to give the first articulation to the curious suspense that pulsed from one end to the other of that corridor.

One aspect of this magnetic vibration was naturally outside the Sixth Pillar's field of awareness. We refer to the possibility that being so rocky an isle Ithaca may simply have been the highest peak in an under-sea range of precipitous mountains and that thus, whatever it was that had happened whether of a psychical or of a physical nature, whether an insurrection of Titans or a revolt of Women, the news of it had travelled by way of Ithaca from the extreme East to the extreme West and from the extreme North to the extreme South.

The Sixth Pillar was the one nearest the olive-trees and the slaves' burial-ground outside the porch; and it was the furthest from the throne-room inside the porch. Its difference from the rest lay in the fact that it had been hammered and chipped and scooped and carved by none other than a son of the great craftsman Hephaistos, who was himself the son of Zeus and had been endowed with a peculiar sensitivity much nearer human awareness than anything possessed by the other five. So sensitive indeed was the Sixth Pillar that this particular Spring-night had seemed to it as long as three ordinary nights.

In this mood of nervous apprehension it had been distressingly aware of all the other entities in that corridor. One of these was an extraordinary-looking club from the Nemean forest on the mainland. Another was a still-living olive-stump, not more than a foot high, growing between two flagstones in the centre of the corridor.

A third had a quite different sort of identity and was a small brown moth with a way of flying that sometimes was faint, weak, fluttering, drooping and drifting, and at other times was jerky, violent, desperate, almost suicidal; while the fourth among them was just an ordinary house-fly.

All these had been struggling frantically for five hours of suspense to convey to one another, each with its own private interpretation, their particular *version* of the terrific shock that was now turning that dawn in the palace of the King of Ithaca into such a shattering experience.

"How extraordinary it is," the Sixth Pillar pondered, as it felt a breath of cooler wind, "that these two human bipeds, this simple Tis and this sly little rogue Nisos, can go on sleeping quietly among us here like a pair of acorn-surfeited swine, when someone or something who has a friend outside is telling us in here what the dawn-goddess has just confirmed, namely that things have begun to happen in our universe that may prove to be the beginning of its end.”

Having uttered these words in a tone that was barely distinguishable from a sad soft air that had just crossed the slaves’ graves, the Sixth Pillar decided that until new revelations should reach it, it would revert to the hieroglyphical if egotistical problem that was dearest of all to its un-roofed heart, namely the mysterious “U” and “H” carved upon its pediment which had been interpreted for generations as meaning “the Son of Hephaistos”.

Further and further into the corridor, implacably moving from pillar to pillar, and throwing a phantom-like chilly greyness over the dark flagstones as she moved, came the dawn-goddess. The one solitary ancient olive-stump that grew inside the corridor near its entrance and thrust forward one crooked bough like a raised hand with fleshless fingers lifted by a long-dead corpse from between the flagstones, could not hinder the dawn’s ashen-pale luminosity from enveloping it but it hardly seemed to be welcoming this pallid illumination.

On the contrary it seemed to be imploring the dawn to approach more slowly so that the awkward nakedness of its reluctant resurrection should not put either of them to shame. Between this corpse-like protuberance from beneath the floor and an enormous fire-blackened club that was propped against the inner side of the low entrance-arch there was now flitting through the grey light a small but alert house-fly.

This small creature seemed as conscious of the unnatural tension as was the over-vigilant Sixth Pillar itself. For though the little fly appeared to be using the resurrected bough solely for the purpose of cleaning its front legs, the visits it paid to the formidable club resting beside the entrance-arch were clearly actuated by a quite different motive.

Obviously what was urging the fly in this case was the necessity it felt of talking to somebody about this tension who had a philosophic mind. But the awakened house-fly was not the only insect in the place who feared, like the Sixth Pillar, that there was some planetary catastrophe imminent, either happening now, or just going to happen.

There was also a very disturbed light-brown moth. This moth seemed for some definite reason of its own to avoid alighting upon the olive-stump; but it also, like the fly, kept paying repeated visits to that Heraklean weapon by the entrance.

It must have been clear to the Sixth Pillar by this time that the dawn-goddess was not going to reveal to them anything beyond what they had all instinctively known, namely that something momentous, something that probably affected them all, had really occurred; otherwise the Pillar would hardly have relapsed into her ancient ponderings about those letters that had been engraved ages ago upon her marmoreal flesh. They must have been engraved there before she had had time to become a conscious, separate, inanimate entity. In fact they must have been engraved when all she felt was what her mother, the earth, felt.

Meanwhile the two human sleepers, lying discreetly apart on their goat-skin mats, one the middle-aged cow-herd, Tis, and the other the princely boy-helper of the household, Nisos, were both vaguely aware, even in their dreams, that psychic disturbing tremors of some sort were troubling that rocky palace and probably that whole rocky island.

What this especially simple cow-herd and what this especially alert princely house-boy would actually do, if, their dreams shaken off, they found themselves conscious, whether they understood its nature or not, of a catastrophic, all-affecting event, remained to be seen. None of their sub-human neighbours, animate or inanimate, not the club, not the olive-stump, not the moth, not the fly, had any doubt about the existence – for they had all learnt it from pleasant and unpleasant personal experience – of a very considerable gulf or gap or lacuna between the feelings, impressions, intimations, instincts, and, above all, reasonings, of all human beings, and their consequent action.

"It all depends, my pretty one," whispered the olive-stump to the house-fly as the latter in its agitation tried to clean its left back leg by brushing it against its gauzy transparent right wing, as it laid its square black head sideways against the smoothest portion of the upspringing shoot, "whether Nisos had a visit from Hierax his pet hawk while both you and I were still fast asleep."

"Why doesn't Pyraust come to ask you things like I do?" whispered the fly to the olive-shoot.

The older creature hesitated a moment. Then he said: "Because, Myos darling, she knows that I know who sends her here."

The fly, who had balanced itself very carefully on its front-legs and had begun to clean both its back-legs with its gauzy wings pressed its huge black head still closer against the skin of the olive-shoot and allowed its unemotional staring black eye to drink up the conversation that was now proceeding between the brown moth and the club of Herakles.

"I suppose you don't want to tell me who sends her?" whispered the house-fly. "I don't mind telling you at all," replied the other, "or anyone else either. It is Enorches, the High-Priest of the Orphic Mysteries who sleeps in the big ante-chamber of Athene's Temple where Telemachos ought to sleep. Instead of which Telemachos sleeps in that hut you pass on the left as you go in."

"Why does the Priest of Orpheus take that big ante-room for himself?" asked the house-fly, standing perfectly still now and staring at the brown moth whose wings were fanning the queer slit that went down the upper portion of the club of Herakles.

“That’s for Athene to answer, little fly,” replied olive-shoot with a curious hissing sound, as if its sap was seething.

“My Lord Telemachos has let himself be wheedled and worked upon by that Orpheus Priest ever since our Lady Penelope died. She would have scarce endured to see it.”

“You’re getting angry,” said the fly to itself. “By Zeus I believe if that Priest Enorches came in now you’d split into two and spurt poison over him.” The olive-shoot *was* getting angry and it wished it had wings like the fly so that it could accompany the fly to where the club was leaning.

“The Club is surely,” thought the olive-stump, “watching us now while it listens to the chatter of that silly little moth-girl Pyraust.” And the fly said to itself: “How tiresome it is that so many learned and scholarly philosophers have no eye into which you can look and read their thoughts! I’ve seen my own eyes reflected in a hundred different things and I may say without boasting that they are fierce and implacable. But even I can’t read any living creature’s thoughts with them. Now why is that? I can’t even read the thoughts of that silly little moth. Now why is it that I am no good at expressing the stem and majestic authority through my eyes which I feel so powerfully in the pit of my stomach? Isn’t it a funny thing that a person should feel inside him feelings that he can’t express in any possible way to other creatures? As for this poor amphibium of a half-in, half-out olive-shoot, it seems totally devoid of all real insight, it can only see through the inflamed pores of its touchy skin!

“And over there, within a dozen buzzing flaps of my wings, rests that great Club of Herakles as it has done for seventeen years! Yes! as it has done ever since Penelope died. Eurycleia must have seen it for seventeen years balanced between those out-jutting pieces of quartz!

"All those years — think of it! — it has been keeping its position, upright and invincible, leaning first to the right but still upright, still straight and unbending; and then, just a tiny bit, to the left, but still straight and unbending! Aye! How I admire thee, O great Club!"

And the fly went on to think how it would love to throw some charm or spell over the Club that would force it to make known to Odysseus how this cunning Orphic Priest was ousting Telemachos from the great hall of the Temple! It longed to ask the Club how it could refrain from calling upon its former master Herakles, now that it was clear that the old Odysseus was beginning to lose his grip upon the sequence of events.

Thus as strongly moved in its heart as it was in its mind, the fly stared at the archway beside which the Club was resting. Meanwhile the great Club was being slowly aroused from a dim obscure and puzzled sleep by the approach of the dawn-goddess, that tiptoe-footed daughter of Helios Hyperion, whose rosy fingers were still pressed against the palms of her hands.

"So I am still myself," was the first clear thought of the great weapon. "Yes, I am still myself." And it began deliberately recalling that far-off day when Herakles snatched it up from a fire-burnt portion of that Nemean forest on the mainland when he was struggling with the monstrous lion.

The club had been seriously blackened by that fire; but long before the fire had touched it it had been deeply indented by the trailing and twisting around it of a honeysuckle intruder who eventually would have possessed itself of it entirely and have transformed it from a noble pine sapling, half-strangled by a deadly honeysuckle, into a flourishing honeysuckle beautifying a wretched dead pine-trunk already blackened in some forest-fire.

"Still myself," continued the great weapon in its slow confused awakening under the gradual approach of dawn, "still old Dokeesis — who was embraced in that far-off forest by God knows what treacherous neighbour-plant, but who is still able to fit himself as easily into the hand of an older hero as into the hand of a younger hero; Yea! by the gods, and into the hand of a mortal hero as into the hand of an immortal one!"

Pondering thus, the fire-blackened, well-polished club, deeply furrowed into rounded grooves and convoluted curves by the parasitic plant which had so assisted or impeded — who can say which? — its natural growth as to endow it with what resembled a female bosom, found himself recalling his feelings, when, years and years ago, he was washed up by the waves on the coast of Ithaca.

Broken pieces of sea-bitten wreckage from far older vessels than the one upon which the sea-god's wrath had most recently been wreaked were strewn about him on the strip of shore beneath the rocky promontory where he lay. Sand-crusted fragments of sea-shells together with wind-tossed wisps of foam and salt-smelling ribands of slippery seaweed had drifted by pure chance and were piled up by pure chance against the rounded wooden curves of his female-looking bosom.

Just because he was the latest object to be cast up out of the deep upon that shelving shore the club of Herakles had felt in some dark and deep sense humiliated as well as ill-used.

It was curious, he thought, that this ancient feeling of humiliation should return to his consciousness at this particular moment of this February dawn; but as he tried to analyse what he felt, for the club had grown almost morbidly introspective during these long years of peaceful relaxation with his head resting sometimes against a piece of quartz to the East and sometimes against a piece of quartz to the West, he could only repeat over and over with a proud, furtive, sly, secret detachment, “I am myself”, and as he did so he felt detached not only from the service of Odysseus, but also, and this struck him as something quite new in his experience, from the service of his old master, the demi-god Herakles. He had therefore two introspective riddles about himself to ponder on as this cold pale light of this early dawn moved from pillar to pillar. Why should there be any sense of humiliation in his memory of surviving, in the way he had, the wrath of Poseidon?

And why should he be feeling this savagely cunning, ferociously sly sense of detachment from the service of *any* master, while at the same time he had such a self-confident sensation of power; of power to serve a mortal hero like Odysseus, quite equally with power to serve an immortal one like Herakles?

“Perhaps,” he said to himself, “I have spent so many days and months and years with my head drooping and slipping and sliding and sinking, first to the east and then to the west between these glittering blocks of quartz that when I try to form any clear-cut explanation of my real inner feelings I just swing from the extreme of shame to the extreme of self-confidence.

“But that seems a silly explanation when I think of the pride I felt in throwing my life into every blow I struck for Herakles, and when I think of the shame that shivered through me as I lay, like a swollen and bloated baby’s rattle, half-covered by seaweed, between two rock-pools, and felt the swishing of sea-gulls’ wings brush against my bare cheeks and my bare stump-end.”

But it was at that moment that the awakened consciousness in the club of Herakles decided that common decency as well as common courtesy, not to speak of prudence, demanded that he give some flicker of attention to the small brown moth that for the last half-an-hour, indeed long before any light entered that corridor, had been struggling to tell him things that concerned them all.

"*What's that?* You imp of Erebos? What's that you're telling me now? Isn't it enough that for more years than I can count I've been listening to you, and listening to your mother's and your grandmother's and your great-grandmother's chatter about this infernal Priest of Orpheus who has ousted every other prophet and seer and soothsayer and omen-reader from the Temple of Athene, that I must now treat you seriously; and begin solemnly answering a whole series of ridiculous questions about the end of the world?

"*What's that,* you silliest of insects? No, of course I've felt nothing of the kind! Have I felt, do you say, that the world was coming to an end as soon as the sun was up? Of course I've felt nothing of the kind! Don't I feel it now, you ask, this terrible news? No! I certainly *don't* feel it! I feel the confounded tickling of your tisty-wisty wings against my old life-crack; that crack from outer to inner, I mean, from what's going on to my consciousness of what's going on, that began when He — and if you don't know who *He* is you'd better get back into your baby chrysalis as soon as you can! — hit that great roaring Beast over the head in that Nemean wood.

"It's ever since then that my hearing's been so good. Curious, isn't it? Shows how wisely old Father Zeus governs the affairs of the world, eh? And so this blasted fool of an Enorches thinks the world's coming to an end does he? He'll soon learn the opposite if that great Son of Zeus whose business it is to purge the world of those who try to bring it to an end comes this way again!"

"Please, please, *please,* great Club," pleaded the little Pyraust in her most tender tone: "Please believe me when I warn you that there is serious danger ahead for all who fear the gods."

The voice of the club of Herakles shook with wrath. "I tell you, silliest of girl-moths, that this world of ours is founded forever on the will of Zeus the Father of All, he who wields the thunder and lightning, he who kills and makes alive, he who can cast those who refuse to serve him into the lowest depths of Tartaros; and Tartaros, you must remember, O most misled and most infatuated of small moths, is as far below the earth as the earth is below the starry heaven! Think, little whimperer, think, what it must have meant to an enemy of Zeus and of the Olympians when he felt himself falling, falling, falling, falling, even as the monster Typhon must have felt himself falling when, with Etna on the top of him to keep him perpendicular, down, down, down, down he went, down to a place — and don't you forget it, little flutterer with a wren's eye! — that is as far below the kingdom of the dead as *that* is below the earth!

"Yes, you flipperty-flap of an insect, what you've got to realize is that the Kingdom of the Dead is the Kingdom of Aidoneus; and that Aidoneus is the brother of Zeus and as much under his will as you and I are under his will.

"It is by the will of Zeus, as well as by the help of Queen Persephone, that Aidoneus keeps the ghastly myriads of the dead in control and compels them to submit to their fate. And do you know, you flicker-fan, what their fate is? What yours will be, yours will be, *yours* will be, if you flap at my crack of quietness, or disturb my groove of wisdom any more!

"But if you ask me, you silly flitter-fluff, what *their* fate is now, and what *yours* will soon be, I cannot answer. 'Shadows they are and shadows cover them,' as I heard Herakles muttering once when we brushed the dead leaves from his lion’s skin. Have you forgotten, O grain of sand on a pair of wings, the story of how our old Odysseus called up the Theban Prophet Teiresias from among these shadows?

“And how the Prophet had to drink blood before he could speak? So much for the most intellectual of mortal men when it comes to real knowledge! *Drink blood* is what *they* have to do, little brown one, drink blood! Is your precious Priest of Orpheus prepared to do *that*?”

The wings of the moth-girl emitted a faint susurrating shiver. Then they relaxed and closed above her sunken head. But she was still perched on one of the bosom-curves of the monster-killing Club where she must have looked to any smaller creature, to a thirsty louse for instance, searching for half a drop of sweat from a human hand, like an exhausted sea-mew resting on the crest of a sea-wave.

And her voice filtered down like a distillation of mist into that long and narrow crevasse where dwelt the club’s consciousness.

“Is it true, O immortal one,” she asked — and behold! it was brought about by her very fear of the gods that the voice of Pyraust, the moth-girl, gathered up as she spoke some of the rhythmical lost notes from the wailing of the earth over the rape of Persephone; and thus, while not too faint to be audible to the smallest louse, had in them that which caused even the pine-wood sap in the club of Herakles to stir and rise— “please, please tell me if it is true what I heard the Priest of Orpheus tell the Priestess of Pallas Athene: namely that on the confines of the country of the blameless Ethiopians there have now come back from the Kingdom of the Dead the First Man and the First Woman; and that the First Woman, whose name is Niobe, no longer weeps like a ceaseless torrent from an eternal rock; and that by her side once again is the first man, whose name is Phoroneus and who was the son of a Melian Nymph who came from ah Ash-Grove, even as thou thyself, O immortal one, came from a Pine-Forest."

Now indeed had the moth-girl said the wrong thing! She had been taught from childhood about the Melian Nymphs and about their association with Ash-trees and there had been a family tradition among her own brown-moth ancestors that it had been by the special intercession of one particular Melian Nymph that the original pair of brown-moths had extricated themselves from the hidden parts of the Great Mother.

But what she had never been taught, or, if she had, what she could never keep in her head, was that the effect of every act and every word and every gesture of every living creature depends, not on the *nature* of what's done, spoken, or indicated, but on the *manner* of these performances.

And where this impulsive flutterer made her mistake was in speaking so carelessly about Ash-Trees and Pine-Trees that the natural implication was left upon the atmosphere that the only difference between them was that one was the haunt of Nymphs and the other of Lions.

But the savage beast with whose brains the Club of Herakles had sprinkled the pine-needles of the Nemean Wood had never made a more violent sign of fury than the heavy thud with which the Club struck the paving stones of that palace-porch or the harsh groan with which it bade the terrified little flutterer "get back to your Priest of Blasphemy and your Father of Lies!"

Out into the dawn flew in deadly silence Pyraust, the brown moth, while Myos, the black house-fly, spread his gauzy wings and with the tense buzzing sound that always, for all its low pitch, suggested the impetus of a classic messenger, flew in pursuit of her to the Temple of Athene.

It was at this moment that the cow-herd Tis stretched himself with a comfortable groan and rising to his feet lifted up first his bare right leg and then his bare left leg, supporting them against the base of the third pillar, while he fumbled for his sandals. He had been sleeping in his single garment, his shirt-tunic or “chiton”, and he now surveyed his companion, the boy Nisos, who, asleep in a similar garment, though fashioned a little differently as befitted not only his fewer years but his nobler birth, had been so suddenly submerged in sleep that though the cords that bound his sandals to his ankles had been loosened and now trailed over the flag-stones, the sandals themselves remained on his feet.

Tis regarded the sleeping boy with friendly amusement for a moment. Then he shook him gently by the shoulder. “*That girl* will be down here in a moment,” he said. “In fact I keep thinking I hear her step. Of course neither she nor Leipephile would worry about me if I were like you a son of Naubolos who claims to have more right to be King of Ithaca than Odysseus himself.

“But if I were your elder brother or your uncle that girl Arsinöe would still throw her witch-look on me just the same as she does on you. She hates us all, and not altogether without — God! master Silly-Boy! wake up for Hermes’ sake! Tie your sandal-strings tight!” As he spoke the Cow-herd disentangled the boy’s sandal from the cords of the mattress on which the lad had been sleeping and helped him to get his foot into it.

“Has Babba been making a noise?” enquired Nisos somewhat irritably. “The old lady ought to be ashamed of herself,” he went on, “if she has been raising hell again just because her damned udders are too full. Didn’t I hold on to my bladder when it was nigh to bursting yesterday when mother sent me to the Temple to see Stratonika and I had to wait till her morning chant was finished and she’d put off her garlands and black ribbons in the porch?

“How ridiculously different from one another women are, Tis! Who would ever have imagined that Stratonika was Leipephile’s Sister? It seems just simply crazy to me whenever I think about it. I can't help rather liking Leipephile myself. It's the way she smiles at you when you tease her; as much as to say: "of course, kid, I know perfectly well you're much cleverer than I am; and I'm a bit of an idiot; and I know that the great House of Naubolides is much grander than we Pheresides can ever claim to be; but yet," so her looks seems to say, "you and I, Nisos Naubolides, are born to understand each other. That's what the gods have willed that you and I should understand each other!"

The boy was now engaged in smoothing down his blue-black hair with a small ivory comb which he drew from an interior pocket of his "chiton" and the odd fancy crossed the patient mind of Tis that his own left eye upon which Nisos seemed to have concentrated his gaze had suddenly become a mirror, but a mirror that didn't interfere with his keeping both his own eyes firmly fixed on the boy's face. "It'll be your brother Agelaos she'll soon have to understand, if what Eurycleia told me the other day is true," muttered Tis carelessly.

"O I know all *that*," cried Nisos; "and Agelaos is as simple as Leipephile! It's Mummy and me who are the clever ones. You should hear us confabulating in the kitchen when she's stewing pears and how I say something about Leipephile and she says something about Agelaos and how we both laugh. Dad has no more idea than Agelaos how mother and me talk about them and what we say and how we laugh; but naturally" — here the boy gave the cow-herd a very searching and very quick look— "naturally it's different between *us,* Tis. You're the oldest friend I've got; and I'll never have another like you. However! We are what we are, Tis, old partner — you the perfect cow-herd and me Eurycleia's clever little House-help — and if dreams mean anything some very queer happenings are on the wind. Do you know what I was dreaming when you woke me up? No, no! I'll tell you later! There's Babba making that noise again! Don't let's wait here, Tis. I'll come out with you. I've got to see mother anyway before I help Leipephile with the old man's breakfast. So I'll come down the road with you to the Milking-Shed and then I'll go on to Aulion. I'd better run in at Druinos as I pass its gate. My mother and Leipephile's mother tell each other everything! Dad and my brother can't understand how everything they say to each other is known all over the island.

"But what can you expect from two elderly well-to-do mothers with trained servants and children as grown-up as Stratonika and Leipephile on the one hand and my brother Angelaos on the other, and with nothing to do but comment on what other people are doing and saying?

"I call it perfectly natural and right. Why shouldn't our mothers have their little pleasures when they are too old to make love? I don't like these Temple-chanters who blame Nosodea and my mother for exchanging tales about their husbands and children. I know well how stupid Dad and Agelaos are; and we all know what a funny old customer Damnos Pheresides is! who in the name of Aidoneus can say what goes on in that queer-shaped head?

"If I were Leipephile's mother I should certainly want to talk to *somebody* about my husband." The shrill boyish voice of Nisos Naubolides drifted away between the olive-trees till it was lost among the slaves' graves. Very soon both that youthful voice and the cow-herd's hoarse responses to it were lost in Babba's call to be milked.

Even the Sixth Pillar, whose unusual consciousness had been at once fortified and dulled by its bewildered ponderings upon those two deeply-engraved letters, that "U" and that "H", which had in the early times appeared on its base, could no longer hear a sound.

Little big-eyed Myos the house-fly, was gone; indeed he was at this moment waylaying in the porch of Athene's Temple in defiance of the Priest of Orpheus his pathetically frail acquaintance Pyraust, the brown moth. Thus the most intelligent consciousness left just then in the Porch of the Palace — for the five younger Pillars were even more lacking in response to anything outside their own substance than their venerable comrade the Sixth Pillar who at least had kept up an interest in the letters "U" and "H" for a few thousand years — was the half-burnt pine-wood Club of Herakles, whose heavy head and almost feminine bosom as they rested between those fragments of quartz while the movements of the man and boy were still causing vibrations through the substance of the flagstone, lost no opportunity of swaying consequentially, and pontifically, first to one side and then to the other of their narrow enclosure.

It was indeed with almost a sacerdotal alternation between east and west or left and right, and with a quaint blend of judicial finality and suspended fatalism, that the Club of Herakles acted the part of Guardian of the Gate that early Spring morning.

Thus it was with a shrewdly expectant acceptance of the worst rather than a mischievous enjoyment of what was happening at the moment that the Club listened to a light step descending the unseen stairs to the door behind the throne and watched the stealthy opening of this same door and the emergence therefrom of a plaintively wistful middle-aged woman who looked as if she would have more willingly reconciled herself to welcoming the last dawn that would ever reach this earth than the particular one which was now removing the kindly veil of darkness from the repetitive horror of life.

The Pillars in the corridor were by no means evenly placed. They were indeed so divergently and so erratically arranged that they resembled the sort of massive supports that might have been found in the crypt of some sea-king's palace beneath the floor of the ocean, the building of which had been disturbed by the movement of sea-monsters.

The expression in the woman's face as she made her way from the inner door to the entrance was only too familiar to all the dwellers in that house. It was indeed the expression of such an enduring quarrel with existence that there was not one among them who would not — whatever words he or she might utter with their lips — breathe a sigh of gratitude to the gods on her behalf if they heard of her death. “The poor thing has gone whither she longed to go!” would have been the instinctive feeling of them all.

As the woman now threaded her way to the entrance she glanced apprehensively at every pillar she encountered; and in the case of the second one and the fourth one she slipped cautiously round them, as if to make sure that nobody was watching her. She wore the sort of robe or “peplos” that by means of the way a certain fold was draped over the curve of one of her breasts left room for a secret pocket at that particular place where a pair of scissors, or a knife, or a dagger, could be quite comfortably and easily concealed.

What this forlorn creature carried hidden in the fold of her foreign-looking garment on this eventful morning was as a matter of fact known to none, not even to the Club of Herakles. It was a carefully sharpened carving-tool of the sort used by wood-carvers. But what increased the self-conscious caution of this secretive woman's movements was the awkward bundle she carried in her bare arms wrapped in a linen cloth.

Whatever this object may have been it agitated the forest nerves of the once root-inspired club; for the club was naturally, since its flesh was made of wood, hostile to every metallic object and it recognized at once that whatever the girl was carrying it was something made of bronze. Bronze or not bronze the woman kept pressing it tightly to the pit of her stomach, while every now and then she gave a sharp jerk with her bare shoulder when that carving-tool in the fold of her robe scraped against her soft skin through its covering.

Safely past the great club, whose judicial watchfulness changed to angry perturbation as it felt her passing, Arsinöe, the Trojan, whose father was Hector, and her mother a sister of that Dolon who had been slaughtered so unmercifully by Diomed so that his weapons and all he wore might be offered up by Odysseus as a pious offering to Athene, found herself among the graves of the slaves and among the olive-trees that bordered on the graves.

Safely past both graves and olives, and clearly keeping a definite purpose in her tense brain the Trojan captive directed her steps to an uncultivated tract of wild country, about a mile square, which was avoided by all the people of Ithaca.

This particular expanse of ground was unploughed and unsown; nor was it planted with fruit-bearing trees or with nut-bearing trees or with any grain or any flowers. A few very ancient oaks and ash-trees and poplars had grown there for ages and there were several reedy swamps where the mud had a brackish smell though the sea was more than a mile away and where there were strangely-stalked mosses that looked as if they had grown there along with antediluvian marsh-lichens which had been the food of creatures so monstrous that the mind shrinks from picturing them.

At any rate the natives of Ithaca had for unchronicled generations avoided this particular square mile. It had come to be known as Rima or Arima, though these musical syllables had no known connection with the mysterious tribe of a similar-sounding name to which reference is made in certain ancient poems; and it was avoided for a very definite and particular reason. It had, as a matter of fact, become the “Temenos”, or consecrated shrine, of two fearful Beings who must have been worshipped as Deities in Ithaca long before the Golden Age of Kronos, and long before any dweller in the island had so much as heard of Zeus and his thunderbolts.

Not only was this weird expanse of haunted ground the “Temenos” or dedicated shrine of these two strange Beings, but it was the immemorial stage of an unending argument between them, a sort of phantom-ritual, not between two worshippers but between two objects of worship. They were both female Deities and what must have been in pre-historic days their unqualified hideousness had been blurred and clouded, and, if such a word can be used, be-ghosted, by the passing of time, as the most horribly shaped rocks can be overgrown by congenial funguses.

One was Eurybia, whose name means “far-flung force”; and the other was Echidna whose name simply means “the Serpent”. Eurybia was the grandmother of Hecate; while Echidna was the mother of the Chimera and of the Hydra and of Cerberus, and also of the Lion of Nemea, not so very long since destroyed in its savage old age by the introspective Club of Herakles, whose repose between his two quartz pillows had been disturbed only an hour ago by this tragic captive concerned with nothing but her carving-tool and the mysterious bronze object wrapped so carefully in its linen cloth.

The shrine of the Grandmother of Hecate was on the lower level of this mile of unfertile land. Indeed it overlooked the most frightening portion of the haunted swamp where any imaginative intruder might well fancy that he caught shadows and reflections in the black water and among the swaying reeds of hovering ghosts that had drifted down the ages from an epoch in which mortal men by day as well as by night had to struggle with creatures whose limbs were not only deathly cold but had a saurian effluvium from centuries of reptilian life in salt-marshes, where terraqueous abortions of both sexes embraced and devoured one another. The shrine of the Mother of the Chimera was in a different position, although there was only a quarter of a mile between them.

This portion of that "holy ground" stood under a tall black rock of some primeval adamantine stone, at once much smoother and much darker than all the other geological strata in Ithaca. In substance as well as in appearance the "eidolon" of Echidna was completely different from the image of Eurybia. Neither of them possessed a realistic human shape, but each was a misty phantom, associated with a material and movable object. At close quarters Eurybia was nothing but a thick wooden stump; while Echidna "the Serpent" was a short but very massive pillar of clearly articulated white stones, each one of which contained, embedded in the texture of its substance, a noticeable array of fossils, many of which, though by no means all of them, had originally been shell-fish.

Above and around each of these two Images or Idols there swayed and wavered and hovered and moved and shook, sometimes growing thicker and sometimes lighter, a tremulous body of palpable vapour unmistakably resembling a female human shape. Both shapes not only grew darker and lighter, thicker and thinner according to the occasion but they also contracted and expanded in actual size.

There was, however, one very curious thing about them. The mist that composed them was entirely impervious to the wildest winds. The wind might flow from North, South, East or West, and blow so softly that it would scarcely stir a feather, or so violently that it would rock the pinnacles of a mountain or upheave the roots of a deep-grown forest: in neither case was its presence so much as visible, however closely you watched, by any effect it had upon these two superhuman phantoms of mist. They exchanged human speech in the language common to both Achaeans and Trojans; speech that could be heard and understood by any native of that island who entered this unconsecrated, this unholy, this unwalled, unguarded, undefended, unassailable tract of demonic ground.

Yes, any reckless child, any rebellious prowler, any philosophical tramp, any desperate bandit, any life-weary beggar, any obsessed youth in pursuit of his ideal vision, could cross at will the boundary of this weird spot. Especially could any daring novice in religion, anxious to obtain supernatural support for his own particular interpretation of the Mysteries of Orpheus or of the Mysteries of Eleusis come stealthily and humbly to a smooth lawn equidistant between these two Beings, or between the wavering pillars of vapour that represented them, and, as he listened to the wind-impervious, storm-immune, rain-indifferent, unbridled and unholy dialogue between them, either be upheld in his special vein of mystical revelation about the secrets of the cosmos or be driven in a wild reaction against every spiritual cult in the civilised world to the desperate madness of parricide or matricide or to some astounding incest or bestiality or perhaps even some unheard-of attempt to side-track or undermine the very fountain-spring of human sexual life and to pervert the unmistakable intentions of nature.

But the absorbed intensity of the daughter of Hector, whose uncle Dolon was the son of Eumedes of Troy, was as unaffected by this undying dialogue of the dead as was the carving-tool she carried in that special fold of her garment which was the mark of the highest-born maidens of Ilium. She went straight into the centre of a grove of Ash-Trees, or Meliai, just as if she herself had been one of those Melian Nymphs born of the Great Mother at the first separation of Heaven from Earth, a grove of trees that grew on the eastern margin of the smooth lawn of delicate grass that lay midway between those two demonic pillars of cloud. Had Tis the cow-herd and Nisos the princely young house-help been following her at this moment they would certainly have stopped in horrified amazement at what they saw.

Both of them knew well as indeed did all the retainers of the royal House of Odysseus that the long-cherished divinely sacred arms of Achilles had been kept in the treasure-crypt beneath the palace ever since by the influence of the goddess Athene over merchant-sailors, they had reached Odysseus’ island home.

Whether voyaging eastward or voyaging westward, they had been brought safe to Ithaca five years after his own miraculous return. But who would have believed that Arsinöe, the youngest niece of Dolon the Trojan spy, could have carried the divine art of carving to such a pitch that she could carve an Ash-Tree, devoid of branches though it was and standing erect in its death, into the actual shape and form, as he was when he lived, of Hector, son of Priam, husband of Andromache, defender of Ilium?

And where and how could the girl have learnt such a god-given gift? Had she strayed as a child, while following the chorus of the maidens of Troy in their Orphic worship and received secret lessons from some outlawed offspring of Hephaistos, the son of Zeus? But learn the great art to some purpose she had, and this grand figure of Hector himself, standing tall and stately in the heart of this Melian Grove, was the result.

And now upon this noble image, carved though it was in perishable wood rather than in immemorial marble, this sad, lost, helpless Trojan maid had hung all those Hephaestian fragments of divine workmanship upon which the rising sun was already beginning to pour its pure blood-sprinkled gold. Holding it high with both her hands, as if it were a goblet of the very nectar of the Olympians, Arsinöe now disentangled the horse-hair-nodding helmet from its covering of white linen and placed it on the Trojan hero’s majestically moulded head.

Then at last carefully removing her carving-tool from that proud fold in her garment that marked her as having been a privileged attendant at Priam’s Court, the Trojan girl set to work to suggest by a series of delicate scoopings and indentations the precise appearance of Hector’s forehead — so un-Hellenic in its curious curves but so pitiably well-known to every dweller in Ilium — as its outlines, partly concealed and partly emphasized by the horse-hair helmet, emerged as if newly created to greet the glory of the sun’s first rays which now pierced with a long stream of golden light that little group of ancient ash-trees.

The moment she had completed her final touches to the dead, whose figure was now entirely accoutred in the divine armour of Achilles, which, piece by golden piece, save only the world-renowned shield which had never reached Ithaca, she had brought from the palace to that ash-grove, at first doing this month by month, and later week by week, as her purpose in its prosperous secrecy gathered momentum, she wrapped the linen cloth about her carving-tool and without giving her finished work any final glance turned to retrace her steps.

Her face as she turned to go re-assumed that look of Cimmerian hopelessness which had never left it since the day when her companions who had been pointed out so implacably, one by one, by Eurycleia, as the girls who had given their maiden-heads to the Suitors, had met their death by hanging— “no clean death for such” Telemachus had declared with all a young man’s righteous ferocity — and no graving-tool were it as powerful as the talons of the Erinyes themselves could have done for a human face what that event once for all had done, long ago as it was now, to the face of the youngest niece of Dolon.

But no sooner had she commenced her retreat over that square mile of mystery called “Arima”, the boundary of which, as all the natives of Ithaca knew, Odysseus in his old age never cared to cross, than she was aware of a new sound, a sound entirely distinct from the wild and hoarse dialogue between those two pillars of cloud, to which she paid no more attention, perhaps less, than did the frogs in that haunted swamp.

But the sound she heard now was completely unusual and very startling in that ghostly place. It was the unmistakable cry of a wounded bird. She heard it long before the bird itself fell miserably to the ground at her feet and lay there helplessly fluttering. Quickly she bent down, seized it, and pressed it to her breast. This she did with no change of expression and with the same unmoved, unsmiling, unhappy, inscrutably fixed look.

But she knew what had happened, and she knew what bird this was; none other in fact than Heirax the Hawk, the messenger-friend of Nisos, the princely House-Helper. Heirax had been wounded in the air, either by an attack from some other bird, or by an arrow from a human bow, just as he was reaching the cliffs of Ithaca, and for the last few minutes he had been desperately flying forward in hectic jerks and feverish swoops, with the frantic hope of reaching the palace and of delivering to her friend Nisos the tremendous news he carried before loss of blood brought him down.

But his fatal day, or, as any native of the island would have put it, his predestined “Keer” had come. He felt himself falling, and impelled by the natural instinct of all dying creatures to seek a hiding-place, he deliberately swerved so as to fall in “Arima”. It was only when quite close to the ground that he realized that he was destined to fall at the feet of the one single person belonging to the palace who was no friend of his friend Nisos. Leipephile was his best girl-friend and in his thoughts Heirax always pronounced that simple creature’s name as if it had been Leip-filly; thus totally avoiding the proper stress with Its accent on the “peph” that flippant second syllable.

Heirax’s pronunciation made the name more dignified as well as more appealing, though the sound of the word thus uttered would have made Agelaos, the girl’s betrothed, want to treat him as alas! the hawk was going to be treated now.

Not for nothing had the Trojan girl always stayed awake while the rest of them, including the king’s old nurse, nodded in weariness under the eternal divagations of their “much-enduring” lord. “Tell me, Heirax,” whispered Arsinöe now: “what your news is and I will swear by any oath you choose that I will tell it to Nisos. If you tell me, I will carry you back to the palace where they have drugs that will strengthen your spirit, and ointments that will stop the blood, and potions that will heal the pain. But if you will not tell me …” And she pressed her knuckles against the bird’s throat.

And Heirax the hawk said to himself: “It matters nothing whether I tell or refuse to tell. The news is bound to spread anyway. The only loss will be to Nisos and me. I shall lose the pleasure of telling him and he will lose the pleasure of being told by me.” He shifted his position slightly against her left breast and opening his beak made the sounds that Nisos had taught him.

Nisos had been a good teacher for a Hawk, especially for one born on a small island and accustomed to rocks and shores and sands and caves and curving waves and tossing wisps of foam. So his words were clear as to their meaning; though they were ungrammatical and disconnected in their utterance.

“Zeus,” he whistled — and at each sound drops of blood oozed from the wound in his side— “thunder lost …

peak of Gargaros …

… alone … Hera on Olympos …

… alone …
Trojans rebuilding Troy in Italy …
… Rome … Seven Hills … Tartaros
broken loose …
Niobe weeps no more …
… Chaos comes back …
Persephone
… leaves Aidoneus …
Prometheus escapes …
… Cheiron free …
Helios conquers
Apollo …
… Atlas no longer
… the sky …
the Mysteries … blown far and wide …
… Typhon free …”

Here there was a long pause; and in the interval the Trojan girl could hear the hoarse voices of those two Pillars of Cloud raised in an absorbed argument with each other. Eurybia was maintaining that what had happened was the overthrow of the Olympians by the Titans while Echidna was arguing that what was convulsing time and rocking space, and upheaving the Abyss till it was tilted as high as the Zodiacal Signs, was nothing more or less than the victory of the Eternal Feminine whether divine or human or diabolic or angelic or bestial or saurian or reptilian or earthly or aquatic or ethereal or fiery, over the male.

Then Heirax whistled: “Take me to Nisos or leave me to die in Arima!” Ever since she had heard the Hawk’s astounding news an absolute change had approached Arsinöe’s tragic face. It had not taken possession of it. It had only come near it. But it had come so near it that from now on to the end of her days at uneven intervals and for uncertain reasons there began to burst forth or rend forth or tear forth, or jet forth, or explode forth, a flame of exultation so formidable that anyone might have imagined that some fiery particle of the lost lightning of Zeus had by some mad chance got entangled in her hair giving to this already dangerous emotion of hers a supernatural power.

“And now I beseech you,” Heirax implored her, opening and shutting his beak with a queer, shrill, scraping sound, “take me to …” But it was out of a dead throat that the name “Nisos” dissolved in the air; for without a word the girl had wrung the bird’s neck.

But Heirax did have, for all his sudden end, a sort of tributary memorial set up in the scoriac floor of the Trojan girl’s memory; for whenever afterwards she recalled her exultation at the image of Zeus robbed of his aerial weapons and compelled to look down from one of those peaks in Ida, so officially familiar to him as the divine Umpire, and to hear news therefrom, without the power to interfere, of the rising of a new Troy on those Seven Italian Hills, she always felt herself lightly toying, as in her heart she derided the Fathers of Gods and Men, with the swaying neck and dangling head of that small enemy of Ilium, so limp in her hands.

But she didn’t toss that lump of blood-wet feathers either into Eurybia’s swamp or Echidna’s slaughter-cave. She carried it back to the feet of her tree-carved image of Hector and there as she curled it up, claws against beak and wings against belly, she murmured to it aloud: “I don’t fancy the worms of Arima will bother with *you*: but you’ll be eaten for all that! In this little matter, the friends of great Hector and the enemies of great Hector are the same. Eaten of worms are we all when we come to it: but at least we give birth to our own worms and are devoured by what we ourselves have engendered.” It may have been that some dim little-girl memory of the funeral-rites of the man whose horse-hair-crest above the armour of Achilles seemed just then to stir in reciprocity, came into her mind at that moment; for as she stared at the bird on the ground and thought of the Son of Kronos on his Thunderless peak her triumphant mood relaxed a little. At any rate it relaxed enough to enable her to hear a thin little reedy voice like an infant’s pipe played in a subterranean gallery.

“Aren’t you ashamed,” piped that thin voice, “to talk so loud that a person can’t hear Echidna’s answer to Eurybia? Is it nothing to you what has *caused* this terrible Pandemonium that is shaking the bowels of the universe, cracking the kernel of the cosmos, splitting the fundament of the crustaceous globe and disturbing every civilized and scholarly and sophisticated and weaponless worm who dwells below the vulgar and brutal surface of this blood-stained and desecrated earth?”

As Trojan maids, whether young or old, were addicted to become when crossed in any personal quest, Arsinöe became rude. “And who may you be?” she enquired.

“I happen to be,” replied the unruffled worm, “what below the surface of the earth we call a philosopher. I pursue the purpose of all true philosophy which is to live happily without helmet or breast-plate or greaves or shield or sword or spear or claws or teeth or sting or poison. But the human race refuses to let us stay quietly underground. It digs us up. It impales us on fish-hooks.

“And this invasion of our right as individual souls to pursue truth in our own fashion began early in the history of this planet and is not confined to the cruel race of men. As serpents practise it upon toads, so do toads upon us. Contemptible little birds swallow us whole and we perish in their loathsome little stomachs.

“Primeval saurians from the aboriginal swamps delight in swallowing us and love to feel us wriggling to death in the fearful stench of their foul entrails. Are you not ashamed to bring your blood-shedding absurdities, your ridiculous feuds, your childish armour, and your murderous weapons into Arima, so that a person cannot even hear the drift of the metaphysical argument between Eurybia and Echidna and hearing it judge calmly for himself whether what is happening is the long-expected revolt, so welcome to us worms, of women against men, or is a revival of the ancient struggle between Kronos of the Golden Age and his ‘Peace to all Beings’ and the reign of these accursed Olympians with their infantile motto: ‘The Devil take the Hindmost?’ Are you not ashamed of yourself, you carver of dead trees?’ Arsinöe touched carelessly with the tip of her right sandal Heirax’s squeezed-up corpse that had the appearance, after the way she had handled it, of a feathered tortoise.

“Is it permitted,” she enquired sarcastically, “to a humble carver of images who has not yet learnt that the earth belongs to those beneath it, to ask the name of the person who is addressing me?”

“I am the Worm of—” But the mysterious syllables “Arima” never reached her ears from the uplifted point of soft-wrinkled redness emerging from its crumpled collars of pink skin that diminished in tapering elasticity till they reached that prehensile projection: for she was off at a pace that was almost a run. “I must just go and see,” she told herself, “what that little devil Nisos is up to now.”

As she hurried away she took care to adjust the “Palace-of-Priam” fold neatly against her breast with the carving-tool wrapped tightly in the linen cloth she had used for the helmet. Not for one second had it occurred to her that, exquisitely as she had caught the curves of her hero’s skull, the way she had armed him would certainly have made Hector’s brother, the wanton

Paris, smile; for that Trojan helmet by no means went well with the armour of Achilles while the absence of the famous Hephaistian shield hindered the separate pieces of the golden armour from producing their proper cumulative effect.

“Have you got a mug or a cup of any kind with you, Tis?” she asked boldly as she passed the open door of the shed where Babba’s large, warm-blooded black-and-white body was being milked. “Come in, lady! Come in lady! Certainly I’ve got the best possible cup here for a beautiful maid like thy precious self!”

Thus speaking, and squeezing the final drop of milk from Babba’s depleted udder, Tis gave the cow a friendly slap, followed by a vigorous propulsion towards the hay at the head of her stall, and without further delay proceeded to dip into the brimming pail between his knees a great battered silver ladle, which, as his only valuable possession in the world, he kept hidden in a secret place in that ramshackle shed.

“Here ye be, lady,” he chuckled, “‘Tain’t every day old Tis has a fair lass to entertain in’s own banquet-hall! ’Tisn’t wine, as dost know of thyself, being as ye too, like Babba, must suckle offspring when the man and the hour be come; and it aint spiced with nard or thicked out with Pramnian cheese. But right good milk it be, warm from Babba’s teats and properer for a maid like thee than any of the rosy!”

The Herdsman went on with his quaint compliments long after the Trojan captive had possessed herself of the ladle’s gleaming handle and taken a satisfying sip of its warm contents. When she had restored to its owner the one and only heir-loom in his family except their name, for Tis’s Father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, who all worked on their own farm at the other end of the island, were never known as anything but Daddy Tis, Grand-Pa Tis, and Old Tis, she begged this middle-aged youngest and simplest of the Tisses to tell her if he knew whether Nisos Naubolides had gone back to the palace.

Without the faintest hesitation — for what did this middle-aged youngest of the Tisses know about cosmogonic upheavals and Trojan second-births? — the herdsman informed her that the young princeling of the great House of Naubolides hadn't yet returned from visiting Aulion his ancestral home. "He said something," continued the innocent herdsman, "about running in to Druinos on his way back. My lady Pandea," he said, "loves a gossip with my lady Nosodea."

"But Master Tis," protested the Trojan girl, aware that there was an obscure shadow wavering across the path she was now travelling though keeping well out of her immediate reach and as unable to shake her new secret triumph as it would have been to touch the adamantine unhappiness of her former mood, "how do you explain this business of the Priest of Orpheus being able—"

But the girl stopped short. What was the use of trying to make a man like this see what she could or couldn't understand among the confused doings of these infernal Achaians? "One thing's clear," her thoughts ran on: "Telemachos was, is, and ever will be my most dangerous enemy here. He is a priest in Athene's temple; and suppose he heard rumours that I'd been seen at work in that grove of Ash-Trees within the confines of Arima, he might come himself and get hold of me, independently altogether of Odysseus, and treat me exactly in the same cruel way he treated those others at the killing of the Suitors."

The lonely Trojan woman stood like a statue between Tis, who was now wiping his silver ladle with fresh-plucked moss and Babba who was switching her tail in growing impatience to be out, in the sunshine, cropping grass. The girl's eyes were fixed upon empty space, while before a secret judgment-seat in her hidden soul each of the island-leaders connected with the Palace or the Temple appeared one by one.

She thought of the great statue of Themis, daughter of heaven and earth, and sister of Okeanos, which stood at the foot of the grassy slope leading up to the porch of the Temple. This goddess of humane Law and Order, and of the righteous customs and traditions of mankind, had been worshipped in Ilium as devoutly as she was worshipped here; and Arsinöe's chief links between her youthful happiness and her mature servitude were the many gods of Hellas that were worshipped by both races.

Once or twice when the moon was full she had even slipped out of the palace-porch, and stealing down to the Temple barefooted, so that no grass-stain on her sandals, or gossamer-seed caught in the knots of the threads that fastened them, would betray her daring to the sharp eyes of old Eurycleia, had gone so far as to pay a visit to the stone image of this Goddess of divided mankind and to kiss the earth at its base.

Of the parents of the two brothers Agelaos and Nisos whose names were Pandea and Krateros, she had always preferred Krateros; not only because as the head of the Naubolos family he was the ancestral rival of Odysseus and Telemachos but because his appearance always struck her as un-Hellenic and even a little Phoenician. Nosodea, the mother of the Priestess Stratonika and of Eurycleia's Maid, Leipephile, who was the betrothed of Agelaos, she disliked most of all, more even than the King's old nurse, Eurycleia herself, whose caprices she had to obey.

Exactly *why* she so hated Nosodea she felt now, as she mentally caused the woman to be dragged before her judgment-seat, that she could not quite make clear even to herself. "She's such a regular woman!" she found herself repeating; but she knew she was packing into the word "regular" several qualities that were by no means exclusively feminine.

Nosodea’s husband, the father of the two girls, was a good deal older than his wife and was something of an enigma to the whole island. The adjective “geraios” meaning “old” was invariably added to his name by the whole neighbourhood; which in itself suggested, Arsinöe could not help thinking, that everybody felt the man to be different in some curious way from all his contemporaries.

And the odd thing was, the Trojan girl now told herself, while Babba fidgetted more and more irritably and Tis watched her with the expression with which when slaughtering an animal he waited for it to fall stunned after giving it a blow between the eyes, the odd thing was that for some inscrutable reason which completely baffled her she felt there was something in common between herself and Damnos Geraios and that if she could only get hold of the man when Nosodea was well out of the way she could form an alliance with him not only against his wife and two daughters but against the whole world!

“Well!” she sighed, almost as if she would have liked to spend the whole day thinking of all these people from the new background of her feelings, “I must be off, Master Tis! Thank you a thousand times for the milk!”

But it was at that moment that the Trojan woman received a startling shock. The herdsman suddenly lifted his muscular body from the tree-root that had been serving him as a milking-stool. He did not raise it to its full height, which at its best was nothing beyond a man’s medium stature, but he raised it sufficiently to make it resemble a quadruped swaying about on its hind legs. He still held the silver ladle; and as if to assist himself in an agitating process of confused and difficult thought he grasped it tightly at both ends and drew it angrily up and down across his forehead like a glittering rod across a sullen and silent musical instrument.

While absorbed in this process he kept repeating in a series of harsh cries the words: “Lady! lady, lady! The dream! The dream! The dream!”

Arsinöe experienced a spasm of such nervous irritation at this impediment to her already over-delayed departure that it was with an effort she suppressed the impulse to leave the man to his fit, or whatever it was, that was now doubling him up, and just hurry off. But impulsive selfishness was as foreign to Arsinöe’s introspective nature as was impulsive geniality.

“What dream are you talking about Master Tis? You really oughtn’t to give people such shocks. You quite scared me, jumping up so suddenly like that. Can’t you tell a person quietly, Master Tis, what’s come over you?”

But Tis continued to totter like a quadruped on its hind-legs; while, though holding it with only one hand now, he scraped his forehead with the ladle.

But it was at this moment that Babba, drawn into the situation by an obscure feeling that her friend and protector was being unfairly scolded, and also, by a less obscure desire to be led where she could find juicier and more sap-filled nourishment than the dry hay which at present bristled with so many sharp stalks over the edge of her wooden bin, shuffled back to Tis’s side and pressed her cold nose against the log from which he had just risen.

This instinctive bovine movement combined with the tone of rebuke in Arsinöe’s voice brought Tis to himself and he began hurriedly to explain. “You see, lady,” he almost blubbered, “great-grand-dad’s, bit of land at the blasted end of this here rock of beggars and bastards was called, in them blessed days of old, *after,* if ye understand me, the home-stead of Aulion of the Naubolides and also after the home-stead of Druinos of the Pheresides; and we was taught by grand-dad, whose old dad taught he, that on the day when Aulion and Druinos, our poor old bit of rock-dust and grass-root being called, thee must understand, by the name of Auliodruinos came under one hand, *that* one hand would bring down forever, break-up and bust-up, for good and all, you understand the House of Odysseus! And it just then came into me head that last night I dreamed that Grand-Dad was once again talking to us same as ‘un used to talk about this final confirmation and arbitration of They Above.”

At this point Tis stopped, and a look of abysmal satisfaction overspread his countenance. It was already familiar to the captive from Ilium that the use of long-drawn-out proclamatory expressions such as “confirmation” and “arbitration” was in itself comforting to the agora-loving inhabitants of Hellas; so now that she saw that look on the herdsman’s face she lost entirely her humanely feminine scruples about leaving this incredible simpleton alone with Babba. It was clear they understood each other. It was indeed not inconceivable that Babba herself derived vague images of rich green grass from words that sounded so rhetorically satisfying as “confirmation” and “arbitration”.

With her pride in the news that the unburied Heirax had brought quite unimpaired, therefore, by any twinges of a humanely feminine conscience, the Trojan girl, with one of the rare smiles that few in Ithaca had ever seen on her face, indicated to times during that disturbed February night, whileTis that it was time for him to think less about his grandfather and more about his job. She was not greatly worried at being so late; for she felt pretty sure, such were her own secret good spirits, that the king’s aged nurse would be too conscious of calamity on the wind to take her delay as more than a ripple of annoyance following a rolling wave of menacing premonition.

CHAPTER II

FOUR TIMES DURING that disturbed February night, while the atmosphere in the palace-corridor grew tenser and tenser, and the Herculean club between its quartz-props grew more and more surly, and the fly Myos and the moth Pyraust were working themselves up to a fever of agitation, did the lonely old monarch rise from his bed and look out of his two windows. One of these faced due West, that is to say towards the opposite quarter of the sky from the one upon which the corridor of the six pillars opened. The other window of the king's bedroom faced due North.

It was the middle of night when he got out of bed for the fourth time; and this time he heard a certain thin, frail, feminine voice uttering a quavering, rasping, high-pitched appeal from the ancient oak opposite his window. This was a hollow oak-tree not only familiar to his own boyhood, but equally familiar to the boyhood of Laertes his father; and it was the abode or what almost might be called the second self of a Dryad.

His encounters with this ancient Oak-Sister had been rarer since his marriage. They had been interrupted of course by the Trojan war and his capture by Circe and Calypso, and had been only intermittently resumed since his wife had followed his parents into the shades and his son Telemachos had turned into a reserved, self-centred, philosophy-absorbed priest, serving Athene indeed, but serving her in a very different manner from the way he served her himself.

The voice he heard now as he leaned out of the window which looked due North was consequently not only a little querulous but a little injured. He was wearing his usual night-blanket or "claina" which save on the hottest nights he kept buckled round him by his broad body-belt or “zosteer”; so it wasn’t from chilliness that the Dryad’s voice struck him as having in its tone something so disturbing that it went beyond querulousness or hurt feelings. Laertes, his father, who had often talked to her out of this same window, used to call her by her name; a name she had received from a patroness of hers, one of the less well-known Graces, a Spartan Grace named Kleta, or “the one called for in time of need”.

The Dryad Kleta was indeed a touchy, highly-strung, super-sensitive Nymph, whose chief pleasure was in what she persisted in calling her “garden”: and if you wanted to bring down her anger upon you you had only to meddle with this obsession of hers. Kleta’s garden in reality was simply and solely a wild strip of uncultivated woodland, not as rocky or swampy as the haunted “Arima”, but, like it, belonging to no individual owner, and extending as far as the crest of an up-land ridge from which the wooded peak of the mountain known as Neriton was visible as well as the high rock above that Naiad’s cave where on his return to slay the suitors Odysseus had been helped by Athene herself to hide his Phaiakian treasure.

The oak-tree from which this disturbing appeal reached him through the thick darkness was not only large enough and hollow enough to hide three or four old Dryads as emaciated as Kleta; but it was disfigured and deformed under its lowest branch, as well as above its largest branch, by two deeply-cut indentations, now almost filled up with mosses and small ferns, one of which, the lower one, having been made by the childish axe of Laertes and the other upper one by a similar childish tool wielded by himself.

As he leaned now out of that wooden aperture and murmured his response to that quavering voice he couldn’t help thinking of the days when his mother had stopped him from interfering with Kleta’s so-called “garden”. What the old Nymph liked to do was to arrange every tree, every shrub, every flower, every clump of grass, every dead or living root, every wild fern, every spray of ivy, so as to make exquisite patterns and delicate arrangements, and even to design suggestions of god-like terraces, and the mystic purlieus or enchanted courts and secret vistas leading into divine sanctuaries where the smallest insects and the weakest worms could be safe at last from all those abominable injustices and cruel outrages, and all those stupid brutalities and careless mutilations that lack even the excuse of lust.

But it was not only of things like these that the aged Dryad Kleta constructed what she called her garden. What she really set herself to be was a protector and fulfiller of the intentions of her universal mother Gaia, the Earth. Kleta was in fact a sort of voluntary gardener of wild nature, planting and re-planting and trimming and cutting and watering and grafting and designing, as if she were a spirit-like impersonation of all the various maturing elements and an embodied shield-bearer against all the destructive ones.

Not an inch of Kleta’s garden in the slow long passing of the years was neglected. That spartan grace who visiting Ithaca once every five-hundred years had noticed this young oak-tree with its entwining “hetaira”, or devoted “companion”, and had given the Dryad her own name, was well-satisfied with her protégée. If that portion of the island called Arima was dedicated to mystery and prophecy, the portion of it tended by Kleta was dedicated to the unruffled preservation of what is usually obliterated.

Kleta would arrange with absorbed contemplation and deeply pondered purpose all those little separate twigs and straws and tiny pieces of wood and fungus and fir-cone that lend themselves to some subtle extension of the power of Themis even over such chaotic realms of pure chance as are offered by the man-trodden and creature-trodden trails and tracks and paths in a wild island like Ithaca.

Anyone, whether human or more than human, who turns nature into a garden is liable to find an unbelievable number of very small things that have once been parts of other things but are now *entities on their own* such as bits of wood, bits of stalk, bits of fungus, bits of small snail-shells, bits of empty birds' eggs, bits of animals' hair, bits of birds' feathers, bits of broken sheaths of long-perished buds and shattered insect-shards, strewn remnants of withered lichen-clusters, and scattered fragments of acorns and berries and oak-apples that have survived in these lonely trails and tracks to be scurf upon the skin of one world and the chaos-stuff for the creation of another world.

It was especially the curious hieroglyphs and mysterious patterns which are the written messages from all the unnoticed things that die to make the dust out of which other things are born that fascinated the aged Dryad as she moved day by day about her wild garden.

It was because of her sensitiveness and touchiness with regard to her interpretations of Nature's intentions, and the odd uses to which Nature's smallest leavings and litterings can be put, that Kleta had often burst into fits of furious anger with the childish heroes of three generations of the Lords of Ithaca.

The first time he left his bed that February night he completely soothed the old Dryad. But by the fourth time he leaned on that great plank rather like a ship's rail, that crossed the opening into his bedroom at the top of a short ladder of thick pine-wood boards, he felt as if it were he himself, quite as much as the Dryad, who needed soothing.

This time he held a torch in his hand and had sandals on his feet, while Kleta, who was watching that illuminated window with trembling limbs and a troubled mouth could only stare in amazement at the figure that confronted her across that black gulf. Odysseus was anything but uncomely, anything but deformed or badly built, but it must be confessed that in the flickering blaze of his torch he presented a somewhat eccentric appearance at that moment.

He was not a tall man; and this fact which the famous Helen hadn't failed to notice made the massive breadth of his shoulders and the enormous span of his chest something that bordered on the fantastic and grotesque. Nobody's vision of him, arrested at first by these peculiarities, would be able all the same to dwell on them for long.

The startling proportions and unique grandeur of his head would inevitably dominate any enduring impression. He was very nearly totally bald; so there were no attractive curls to distract an onlooker's or even an interlocutor's attention from the peculiar majesty of his skull and of the way his eyes were set in it. His forehead itself was neither particularly high nor particularly low. Its breadth was its chief characteristic and next to its breadth the unusual distance between his eye-sockets.

This distance made it impossible for him to stare at any person with that kind of concentrated intensity which suggested that the object of the gaze had the power of giving him something that it was essential he should have, or of taking something from him that it was essential he should not lose.

In fact this breadth between his eye-sockets produced an effect that was at once sub-human and super-human. It gave him that look which certain large animals have of being completely oblivious to everything save their own immediate purpose. But it also gave him the look of a Titan or a Giant or even of a God from whom other mortals, whether male or female, had no claim for more individual notice or respect than swarms of gnats or midges.

His nose was neither curved like an eagle's beak nor protuberant as a boar's snout. It carried forward the straight line of his forehead and its character lay in its massive and bony breadth; for its nostrils were not especially wide nor did they twitch or contract and open with the abnormal sensitivity of horses or deer. Curiously enough it was not his majestic skull nor this weird breadth between his eyes that gave to the countenance of Odysseus its most familiar attribute.

Every person, whether male or female, in any group of people who encounter one another day by day, possesses some particular physical characteristic more realistically charged with that person's predominant effect upon others than any other attribute. In the case of the aged Odysseus this was his beard. If the wily old warrior had any special personal vanity or anything about his appearance upon which he himself especially concentrated it was his beard.

To get the effect that pleased him over this beard of his it had become necessary for him not only to trim it with the utmost care but to shave off or cut away all the hair on the portions of his face other than those that served him as a stage for this dramatic emphasis upon his beard.

As he now leaned out into that hollow sap-scented darkness holding his blazing torch, his beard was emphasized precisely in the way that satisfied this one queer streak of personal vanity in him. It was no wonder then that the old Dryad's appeal to him to come down those wooden steps, for they were much more than a ladder, and listen closely to what she wanted him to hear became an appeal that he felt to be irresistible, for in certain deep and narrow mole-runs in their nature the personal vanity of god-like men surpasses by a hundred-fold the natural vanity of women. But there was more in this than that. There was a queer psychic obsession in it; for once when, in middle manhood, and under the influence of this rather eccentric vanity of his, and of the method he had deliberately adopted for trimming it, his beard showed signs of taking the shape he desired for it, his mother Antikleia cried out to him when she caught sight of him emerging clean and fresh from a bath: "By the gods, boy, your beard is as pointed as the prow of a ship!" and, as it chanced, in flinging out this casual remark she proved she had read, as mothers sometimes, though not often, can read, what had hardly been known to himself, the hidden urge behind what he was doing to his face.

"O why is it," he groaned to himself, this wily old sacker of cities, and enslaver of their defenders' wives, "that we mortals have the power of re-creating our actual appearance with which we confront the sun and the moon? Animals and birds can't do it though they can rejoice in the change or lament over the change when it's done for them!"

If it had been some special competition of opposite odours during that February night, as they hovered round his home, some of them unspeakably exquisite, some of them revoltingly excremental, a few actually sepulchral, that swept his memory back at that moment to his mother's words about the way he trimmed his beard, he was still descending that wooden flight of stairs, when a gust of wind from the sea whirled away from above both himself and Kleta's oak a thick veil of mist, leaving in sight not only several zodiacal constellations, but among them, and yet not among them, such a shy, timid, lonely, brittle, shell-like crescent, that the idea of the Moon as she was before Artemis meddled with her, or Apollo meddled with the sun, whirled into his heavy skull.

This same gust of wind, not satisfied with making him aware that his disturbed sleep was connected with the fact that they were now in "noumenia" or the beginning of the month, brought from far-away, across rocks and deserts and forests and seas, in fact from the entrance to Hades itself a vision so strange that he paused in his descent, and holding his torch at arm's length, so that its flame shouldn't touch the protruding point of this same bowsprit-beard, shut both his deep-socketed, widely-separated eyes, and drew in his breath in such a gasping sigh that it was as if he were swallowing his own soul.

What that wind brought to him, as it revealed under those far-off stars that tiny crescent was nothing less than the glimpse he had in Hades of the ghost of Herakles himself, glaring round him like black night with his fingers on the string of his bow, while round about him whirled flocks upon flocks upon flocks of birds in feathered panic, their beaks and wings and claws indistinguishable as they circled.

But his vision of the former owner of the great club that nowadays was always so patiently waiting in the porch till its hour came round again, was gone with the gust that brought it. The old man leapt to the earth from the final rung of that wooden flight of steps and tightening his belt about his middle and holding his torch so that neither its flame nor its smoke should impede his movements he hurried across the uneven ground to the hollow oak.

It was certainly a pitiful old face that looked out at him from that mouldering recess; but he had known it now for all the years since Penelope died; and though in its lines and wrinkles, and in its scooped out hollows where soft feminine flesh should be, and in its bony protuberances where beguiling girlish dimples should be, it was a ghastly enough mask of the ravaging power of time, it had the same strangely preoccupied look it always had.

It was a beautiful face — no! not "beautiful" exactly — say rather haunting with its own special kind of poignant wistfulness — and it wore a permanent expression that betrayed the Dryad's incurable inability to lose herself in any love or worship or devotion or absorbing affection that implied the sacrifice of the smallest fraction of that larger half of her conscious life that was given up to her struggle to be a tender nurse, not only to all the wild vegetation within her reach, but to the innumerable offscourings of animal, vegetable and even mineral life about her, that seemed to her queer mind to be in need of a friend.

Arrived at the hollow oak the old king thrust the torch he carried into the ground, where its quiet flame, now that the gust of wind had subsided, burned as steadily as a large candle. “There’s so much, Odysseus, to tell you,” the Dryad began, “that I don’t know where to start. Kleta-Charis, my name-mother, has been here: that’s the chief thing I wanted to tell you. She was resting for the night in that cave of yours belonging to the Naiads where Athene helped you to hide your treasure when you returned to slay the suitors.”

“And where, now, old lady,” the king interrupted. “I am building my ship for my last voyage! But what did Kleta-Charis say? Don’t ‘ee be afraid to tell me, old friend. I know of myself from what I’ve been feeling all night that there’s something new and strange on the wind; though whether from East or West the storm is coming, and whether Zeus or Poseidon is behind it I’ve not yet learnt.

“What I cannot understand is why my friend Athene hasn’t come to tell me what has been happening tonight. In all my life until now she has always come to me at a great crisis. Is it so serious, do you suppose, Kleta-Dryad, that she has been summoned by the gods of Olympos to a grand council? Or has she gone to the East, whither the great gods were always accustomed to go at this time of year, to receive worship and reward worshippers among the blameless Ethiopians?”

“Sit down on this, my child,” and the lady of the oak leaned forward from her hiding-place and using both of her long emaciated arms spread out on the dark mosses and small ferns between them the skin of a recently dead wolf.

“Kleta-Charis,” murmured the old Dryad in a low hoarse voice, and it was clear to her hearer that she spoke with an effort and with a grim determination to let him hear the worst at once, “Kleta-Charis told me that the great gods were at this hour in such extreme danger themselves that they had no time to think of the fate of their votaries and champions. She said that the whole of Tartaros has broken loose, and that in their first attempt to resist this upheaval, Zeus and Poseidon, blind with anger, raised up such a world-swallowing sea-wave that it swallowed the whole continent of Atlantis; and that the cities of Atlantis with all their populations had now sunk into Hades, where, if Aidoneus reigns still — but does he, Odysseus, does he reign in Hades still? — he ought to be marshalling them in their due order and bringing their leaders and chieftains, and especially those among them who were unjust and cruel, before the judgment-seats of Rhadamanthus and Minos.”

The old Dryad, having poured out all this in one breath save for a gasp at the word “Atlantis” and another at the word “Aidoneus”, sank down on her knees in the inside of the hollow tree-trunk and rested her chin and her hands against the rough, powdery, thousand-year-old jaggedness of disintegration which for nearly a century had constituted the window-sill of the slowly dying oak which was in a sense her house, and in a sense herself.

She breathed heavily, but freely enough now, as she watched the effect of her words upon the massive, upturned, almost bald head beneath her, as he squatted cross-legged upon the wolf-skin, while his torch from its muddy socket in the wet moss threw a wavering beam of light upon his outstretched bowsprit-beard which at noon-day was like the solid silver of a graven image in a temple.

But the most silvery beard in that darkness, in spite of the crescent-moon and the stars and the torch, would have been reduced to a colour-levelling monotone by the encompassing gloom. He remained silent for a long moment. Then he said slowly: “My friend Athene is bound to appear soon. She will touch me with her immortal hand. She will counsel me with her divine wisdom.”

After hearing this the dweller in the dying oak fell silent in her turn while far-away they both could catch the voice of some fortunate sea-bird that after losing itself inland fell to uttering repeated cries of relief when it caught once more the sound of waves breaking on the rocks.

“Athene will probably appear to me,” began Odysseus again, “in the form of a young fisherman or goatherd when I go tomorrow, today I mean, to the cave of the Naiads where I’m building my ship. It was clever of me — eh, Kleta, old friend? — to go to a place like that which all the island regards as so sacred to the sea-powers that they daren’t approach it? My difficulty, as I knew from the start, when I began working on the keel and the body of my ship, will be to collect enough sail-cloth to make a big enough main-sail.

“You, of course, old friend, always busy as you are with tending your wild garden, have no idea of the things we men have to consider, especially in matters of war and of ships. I’ve made up my mind to hoist sail again before I die. I’m not going to rot here alive till I’m eaten by worms. You tell me Zeus and Poseidon and Aidoneus have between them drowned the whole of Atlantis. *That* doesn’t look to me as if the power of the gods were declining!

"Zeus, the Father of Athene, has often been influenced by her far-sighted wisdom; and when she visits me she will tell me how to propitiate the Father of men and gods. Even if Atlantis *is* at the bottom of the ocean, why should I be worried? Answer me *that*, name-child of the loveliest of the Graces! Couldn't I steer my ship, when once I've got her mainsail, over the graves of a hundred Atlantises?

"I tell you' old friend, I can't see what there is in this news to make me miserable. I just can't see! I feel at this moment as if I — —"

But he suddenly stopped; confounded by what he saw in the old face staring at him out of that hollow tree.

"What's the matter, Kleta-Dryad, old friend? For the sake of all the Olympians tell your child what's the matter?"

The Dryad uttered a choking sound in her throat that was like the sob of a sea-wave caught and imprisoned behind cruel rocks when it longs to leap and curve and curl and toss and crest and fume and foam and race over the ocean's surface. Then she said, speaking in a queer voice that seemed to come from the middle of her old bent spine and to force itself between her ribs and her withered breasts: "I can't hide it from you, my child; I can't hide it from you! But what Kleta-Charis really came to tell me was that Keto herself, the most terrible of all sea-monsters, has been seen in your cave!

"Oh child of my soul think of it! Yes, Keto herself, sister of that awful Eurybia who along with Echidna haunts Arima over there, where only those of us who have lost their wits ever go; yes! Keto the sea-monster who plays the beast with old man Phorkys of all the old gods of the sea has been seen in your cave; and since she has been there not a Naiad dares to go near it; and Kleta-Charis told me that nothing would ever induce her or any of her sisters to visit the place again! O my child, my child! It’s terrible to think of! What it will really be is a second Arima.

“Yes, Odysseus, a second ‘Arima’ whose threshold none of us will dare to cross. What are you doing? Where are you going, Odysseus? You’re not forgetting there are two hours still before Dawn, are you? Where are you going, Odysseus? You frighten me when you pull your blanket round you like that!”

Her voice rose to a hoarse shriek. “Stop, Odysseus! Stop! I tell you there are two hours more of night before the dawn comes. You can’t go *now*, my child! You can’t go like that!”

The only reply he made to her frantic appeal, as he rose to his feet and wrapped his blanket more tightly round him, was to turn his face towards the East and stand absolutely still with his mouth open, his nostrils wide and quivering, and his breath drawn deeply inwards in long spasms of excited suction.

But when the troubled old creature went so far in her agitation as to clamber grotesquely if not indecently out of the hollow oak and seize him by the wrist, he did speak, and when he spoke he did so with a natural and easy calm entirely free from all intensity of locked-in emotion.

“I am only going to my room,” he said, “to get some sleep, and I’ve not the least intention of going anywhere, Kleta, old friend, till I have had a good meal. Athene will no doubt either send me a message or come herself. I only hope she won’t send Telemachos. Why is it, Kleta dear, that I find it so hard to feel at ease with Telemachos since his mother died? He’s become so rigid and austere and pontifical; more of a priest than a son. The great goddess herself is free enough and natural enough with me. I can even fool her a bit now and again and make sport of the way she has treated me and challenge her to treat my son in the same way.

"And all this without her getting angry with me or my getting angry with her. Though she's an immortal Olympian, and I am very much of a too-human mortal man, the goddess and I understand each other perfectly. Nothing anyone said to make trouble between us about her telling Telemachos things she doesn't tell me would make me angry with her. She's the goddess who all my life has helped me; and I am the one from among the rulers of men she has chosen to aid and defend — and that's all there is between us.

"This business of priesthood and worship, and sanctity and calling upon the dead, and swallowing the smoke from mystic tripods, and eating the flesh of dead or of living gods, and drinking their blood, and bringing the dead to life by boiling their bones in magic cauldrons is something beyond me altogether and alien to me, and I cannot understand what has come over Telemachos since his mother died. He's become so silent and secretive and so wrapt up in all this priestly ritual, that I can't get a word out of him. He says he has no wish to be king of Ithaca and lord of the islands when I'm dead!

"Sometimes I think it's all due to this curst Priest of Orpheus. But that is hard to believe; for Telemachos from his infancy has seen the Maenads and Bacchantes of Dionysos without wanting to join them! He has seen the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone without wanting to follow them into the Kingdom of Aidoneus. I tell you, Kleta, all the priests and prophets of the gods that I've known, and I've known many, are such as teach us rulers how to overcome our enemies and how to break down the gates of their cities and take their women captive.

"No, I can't understand it, Kleta old friend. Do you remember how the other day you asked me why I didn't go to the Agora over there and make a public oration calling upon the people to collect all the sail-cloth they could get hold of and bring it to me? There are thousands and thousands of pieces of it woven into the huts and hovels of slaves in our city and hanging idly in the chambers of our merchants, when they ought to be filled with all the winds of heaven and carrying good well-benched ships over all the waves of the ocean."

He picked up his torch and looked about him. The torch had begun to burn badly and its smoke had an unnatural smell because of the moisture rising from the wet ground into which it had been thrust; but as he brandished it in the air to quicken its flame this badly-smelling cloud of smoke drifted away towards the Temple of Athene.

The old king followed its departure with his eyes while his head remained turned to the West. Slowly that small cloud of evil-smelling vapour floated away over the Temple towards the Agora. With his imagination conjuring up his speech to the assembled people of Ithaca he followed that small cloud to the low walls of their compact little city and to the amphitheatre outside those walls, with its stone seats and wide stone platform, where the citizens of the whole island, if once gathered together in a popular "ekklesia", could be conveniently harangued.

Then turning once more to the troubled old Dryad who had taken to heart so bitterly this invasion of the Naiads' cave by the monster-wife of the oldest of the "Old Men of the Sea" he saw that she was weeping silently with her forehead pressed against her knuckles and her hands clinging tightly to that uneven edge of rottenness, so frayed and so fragile and so soft and crumbling that it looked as if it had ceased to be a substance and had become a momentarily objectified taste or smell, such as, together with the aged transparency sobbing in its midst, might vanish like a ghost at cock-crow.

As the king turned his back upon her and moved off towards the stairway to his chamber he had the feeling that the bowed old creature were nibbling her own flesh as if it were a bread of phantom-sorrow made of the crumbling wood of an ancestral oak.

Back in his room, however, Odysseus behaved exactly as he had declared to his old friend he would behave. He loosened his belt, wrapt his blanket more evenly round him, and lay down on his bed, shutting his eyes so as to replace any sort of steady staring into darkness by an absolute blindness to the whole phenomena of the visible world.

Thus he remained, and no one but himself could possibly have told whether he were awake or asleep, till dawn was more than well advanced. In fact the sun was high above the horizon, and all the paths and vineyards and gardens and woods and desert-places were illuminated by full daylight when he rose from his bed and shouted for his ancient nurse.

It was indeed in magnificently pleasant sunshine that Odysseus found his circular bath of polished stone awaiting his appearance. Eurycleia had already seen to it that no fewer than eight great water-jugs of carefully varied temperature were arranged in order round that hollow circumference of polished stone.

From the surface of some of these jars the steam rose in clouds into the air, while, in other cases, ripples from newly dissolved circles of vanishing bubbles, all tinged with rainbow colours, proved from what clear fresh springs they had come. Here Eurycleia awaited him herself, and as, with the help of Leipephile and Arsinöe, the old nurse poured in alternation the cold and lukewarm and hot streams over him as he crouched and bent and straightened himself and moved this way and that, under the varying temperatures of those jars of water, his thoughts took shape and formulated themselves into a resolution to quicken to a much more rapid speed his preparations for hoisting sail once more and setting out to explore the world again.

"Yes," he thought, "I've given this pleasant routine of the beautiful seasons repeating themselves, and the beautiful days following the beautiful nights in beautiful succession as Themis the great Goddess of order under the will of Zeus decrees, its full opportunity to soothe this itching, fretting, chafing, gnawing, fermenting, biting, seething ache in my wicked old midriff!

"But this happy easy lazy time has not done it! The marrow in my bones howls and growls for the random odds of the old great Circus! I must, I must taste again the salty taste of real plotting and real planning and real deceiving and real achieving!"

In his massive, caustic, long-sighted, super-human and yet subhuman way Odysseus had acquired the power of what might be called a "postponement of thought" while a series of instinctive impulses directed his actions. This power which would certainly appear an odd one to most clever people, had not so much been forced upon him by the particular nature of his experiences as by the prevailing mood of his reactions to these experiences.

This power was not essentially a philosophical one, nor was it even a predominantly intellectual one. What it really might be called was the controlled release of that deep intimate rush of life which at special moments takes possession of us all with what feels as if it were a wild prophetic force under the direction of a calm calculating will.

While he gave himself up, therefore, to all the small physical movements which the process of being bathed by a commanding and rather cantankerous old woman, a beautiful, secretive, middle-aged woman, and a lovely but incredibly simple young woman, his whole nature was gathering itself together, not so much to follow a thought-out plan of action as to have his nervous, electric, magnetic soul kept, in intensely conscious reserve, just under his physical skin and ready for any event, a soul that was not necessarily composed of a single compact consciousness but retained the power of dividing itself at will.

It was indeed a very curious power that his soul possessed, of splitting itself up, if need were, into an array of square-headed conscious souls that still were Odysseus “pro tem”, though they were Odysseus in multiplicity rather than Odysseus in unity!

By the time the old hero was seated on his simple throne in the great open dining-hall of the palace, to which hidden steps descended from the upper chambers, and had begun to break his fast with bowls of red wine thickened by various powdered nuts and sweetened by a particular kind of honey, while he accompanied this rich beverage, after pouring out a libation to Zeus, by devouring greedily — for this first meal of the day was a good deal later than usual — the particular portion of the backbone of a fatted hog which best pleased him, he was fairly at rest in his mind.

He knew more or less what he was going to do, and he left the details of the thing to chance and occasion. Never in the history, not only of Ithaca, but of all Hellas, had there been such a born opportunist as Odysseus was. He had always been a difficult one for women to mould to their will.

It was because her powerful personality took the line of indomitable independence that Penelope had suited him so well; and it was probably because she had brought up their only child to live his own life independently of each of them that as a mature man Telemachos was so reserved and self-centred.

On this particular day therefore the old king had already thrust clean out of his contemplated groove of action any visit to or visit from his ritual-absorbed offspring. What he had to do was to visit the Naiads' Cave and find out if Keto the Sea-Monster had meddled in any way with the building of his ship of escape. "How queer," he told himself as he swallowed his final bowl of enriched and thickened wine, "that I should think of my ship as a way of *escape*! Escape from what? Have I acquired a hatred for an honoured, peaceful, well-regulated life? Is it now again just as it was on the Isles of Circe and Calypso where women's love was my accursed chain?

"No, no! That's absurd. My wife is dead and has left none to take her place. What's wrong with me then? To reach home from those immortal bitches was to escape slavery. But now that I'm at home and at peace, in rich, untroubled luxury, with my son a devoted priest of my divine protector, now that I am free from all ills of mind and body and have no enemy that I couldn't destroy with a look, a step, a thrust, a blow, now that I'm within a bow-shot of the 'herm' of Themis, the Mistress of Order and Decency and Custom, and only a couple of bow-shots from the Temple of the Daughter of Zeus, what's the matter with me that I can't rest by day or night till I've built my ship and hoisted my sail and am steering for an unknown horizon?

"Well, let's see," he was addressing the three women now, "what's been happening in my Cave of the Naiads. No! I'm not going to rush off, Nurse darling, in any mad hurry nor with unmoved bowels nor unrelieved bladder, and I hope to find you, and Leipephile and Arsinöe too, ready to give me as good a bath as this when I come back tonight; and I can tell you, my dears, I fully expect I may need it! But we shall see. Good luck to us all!"

All was dim in that long, low corridor, for the Sun was steadily mounting towards high noon and not until dawn tomorrow would there be any striking sign of the lord of light again, whether written in fire or written in blood. The Sixth Pillar was aware of a queer throbbing sensation under each of those grimly-scrawled letters upon its pediment as the king approached it and passed it, making straight for the Club of Herakles near the low arch leading into the olive-garden.

“O my! O my! O my! O my!” sighed the up-lifted arm of the solitary olive-shoot that had reared up between the flagstones of that ancient threshold; but when Odysseus stopped in front of the swollen-bosom’d club and taking it up with his left hand and transferring it to his right took a firm hold of it in its narrowest place, which was about three-quarters of its whole length if you measured from head to heel, he proceeded to carry it at right angles to his hip as a hunter carries a boar-spear when making his way through a thick forest.

By no unusual chance or casual accident, for they had been hovering over the rough ground of the slaves’ graves, awaiting him for several hours, did Myos the house-fly and Pyraust the girl-moth settle upon the great weapon, as the old hero held it at this horizontal angle to his person, and secrete themselves, as best they could, in the deep life-crack of the club’s conscious identity, where existed all the organic pulses of its mortal being.

They were both still huddled close together in this dynamic concealment and were still keeping up the metaphysical debate into which they delighted to throw the whole life-energy of their restless natures when Odysseus, after a rapid walk of four and a half miles, reached the sea-coast.

For a few moments the effect upon him of facing the sea was overwhelming. The purpose of his coming to where the waves broke was completely swept away by the waves themselves. In their breaking they took this purpose of his and tore it to tatters of lacy wisps and wind-tossed feathers and flying flurries of fleeting foam.

He had come to the same exact spot only a day or two ago when the waves were no wilder than they were today and the sun was no more dazzling; and yet the sight of this far-flung spray, of these gleaming sun-dazzlements hadn't swallowed up then in such a gasping whirlpool of sensation every plan and scheme he had been carefully formulating.

What was there about the sea today that made its effect upon him so much more overpowering than it had been that other time? In the intensity of this question, which his whole spirit seemed to be putting to some faraway heart of the cosmos, he grasped more tightly the club which he carried in his right hand.

Ah! how well the club knew that tightening of the fingers! "Not quite as strongly grasped," it thought, "as when Herakles heard the growl of that monstrous beast! But I know very well what my new wielder is worrying about now — what's in these roaring waves that wasn't in them before?

"*That's* what's sticking in his gullet, not the salt wings of the strangling wind nor the whirling spray. And I know what it is that's in them. I know what it is that's made them different. I know what it is that lurks behind these curving and cresting and breaking waves. It's nothing less than Keto the unspeakable, Keto from the abysmal chasm in the floor of the Atlantic, Keto by whom Phorkys the Old Man of the Sea begot Echidna the Ghost-Serpent of Arima, who, by her own son Orthos the brother of Cerberos, gave birth to the feline abortion that called itself a Lion whose brains I converted into good rich dung for the ferns and honeysuckle of the Nemean Forest!"

Thus murmured the club of Herakles in the hand of its new master, while Myos the fly and Pyraust the moth hugged each other in the crack of his body where his soul was most active, and while Odysseus with an impatient effort turned his back on those gleaming waves and entered the cave.

Then it was that the club endeavoured, by barging against every sea-weed-covered wall and colliding with every gigantic shell-fish that extended its wrinkled curves and scaly convolutions and encrusted horns from every obtruding buttress and arch, to catch his new master's attention by creating a dying-away echo that could just out-reverberate the hoarse long-drawn roar of the retreating tide by repeating the syllables "Keto-Keto-Keto-Keto" over and over again.

At last they arrived–Odysseus and his vociferous weapon–to the palatial interior of the cave, where the roof was high and the walls smooth, and the pavement, by being lifted up well above shore-level was not only dry but free from all rocky or stony obstructions.

The central hall, so to speak, of this cavernous palace by the sea resembled a gigantic workshop under immortal jurisdiction –not the jurisdiction of Hephaistos the god of fire but of some antipodal God of the extreme opposite element, that of water, but nevertheless a great and divine artificer.

In the centre of this elevated floor, which was surrounded by several subsidiary caverns that Odysseus had converted into storehouses for the materials of ship-building, lay the unfinished hull of a well-formed sea-going ocean-ship.

When the old hero, with his still murmuring but now much less tightly held companion, reached this half-built ship, which had a most curious look in this ocean-temple, he swung round and faced the wide up-sloping approach by which he had come.

This incline, which, as he now gazed down its full length, had become an astonishingly steep ascent, grew narrower and narrower the nearer it got to the flying surf and wildly tossed spray of the breaking waves.

"What has become of all the Naiads?" the king asked himself, "who were wont to frequent this cave? Have they been frightened away by that Monster of the Deep, Keto, the mate of Phorkys, the Old Man of the Sea?"

The king looked calmly round, evidently deciding, as not only his Heraklean club was deciding, but as the fly and the moth in their hiding-place in the bosom of the club were still more anxiously deciding, that some appeal to the absent Naiads to whom the cave belonged was called for at this juncture. Had the club, however, and, still more had the insects in the bosom of the club, made the appeal that followed, it would no doubt have been a more tactful one, but at any rate the king's voice echoed mightily through the whole place.

"O divine Naiads, I know your lives are determined, even as the lives of your cousins the Dryads, by the lives of the Forests and the Fountains and the Groves and the Caverns which you deify by your dear presences but which you cannot survive, whereas the fifty daughters of Nereus remain undying and imperishable even as Keto herself, the monstrous wife of Phorkys, for the sea cannot cease to exist, any more than can the earth herself, mother of us all.

"But it was the great goddess Athene who met me here when I was brought home by the ship of the Phaiakians and she told me to pray to you and to worship you and to cry aloud to you whenever I came here to build my ship for myself. And thus I obey her; and through my weak old voice it is the great goddess herself who calls upon you, O heavenly Naiads, who calls upon you to tell why you have deserted this beautiful cave and whether the cave itself is soon to be destroyed under the wrath of Poseidon the Shaker of the Earth as he avenges himself on the monstrous — —"

He was interrupted by a clear young girlish voice which was certainly not that of any Nymph, whether an immortal Nereid or a more vulnerable Naiad, but was obviously the voice, as Odysseus and his Heraklean club and those other living consciousnesses within the club, felt at once, not only of a maid of human origin but of a maid who spoke with the native island accent.

"Go away, you horrid thing! Go away! Or I'll call the King!" The little girl had evidently been watching the approach of the wily old warrior and his war-experienced weapon; for she now sprang up from the deepest portion of the ship's stern, where this one man's dry-dock work had advanced furthest, and with outstretched arms and streaming hair began shaking her fists and staring with wide-open eyes at something at the waves' edge.

Odysseus swung round on his heel; but between what this island-maid beheld and the line of his vision there was some obstacle, the corner of a rock, or an enormous fossil jutting out from the wall, or perhaps only an extra-thick tuft of salt weed on the floor of the descent into the sea, that completely hindered his vision as he struggled to focus the object that was giving her this shock.

It was an intensely awkward moment; for it was clear that the advancing monster, if such it were, must have assumed that Odysseus could see it as clearly as did the maiden but was scared either by his own old age or out of respect for the power of the immortal sea-god from interfering.

"She thinks," said the club of Herakles to himself "that the king is so old he'll just remain quiet and still while she tears the girl to pieces and swallows her!"

This idea was so appalling to the great weapon that, inspired, as we all can be by sheer desperation, he made one surpassing effort and slipping out of the hero's hand fell with a crash upon the rocky floor.

And then, in stooping to pick him up, Odysseus saw Keto. Never had the shrewd old hero shown more self-control or more subtle and convoluted cunning than he showed now. With the club in his hand and held by the middle as hunters hold a short boar-spear he ran down the slope straight towards the creature who was already half-out of the water. Keto's face was that of a beautiful woman, though it had at that moment an expression of horrible lust, mingled with insatiable greed: but it was not her face but her hair that was the strangest thing about her.

Her hair was of an extremely weird tint and was so long that as it spread out over the wave that was carrying her forward it changed the colour of the wave to its own hue. It was doubtless due in part to the fact that the season being an exceptionally early spring, there was so much fresh green to be observed in every direction, together with such startling contrasts as the blue of the sky and the purple of the mountains, that this weird apparition of Keto's hair struck these three consciousnesses as it came nearer and nearer, with that appallingly beautiful face at the head of its advance, as something so absolutely ghastly in its reversion to a colour that could only be described as a manifestation of Death and Nothingness in the midst of Life and Joy, that each one of them felt the approach of something like a frozen paralysis.

Not one of the three, not the wise old king with his staggering burden of memories unequalled by any man who has ever lived upon earth, not the terrific club of the greatest killer of anti-human Pests who has come to the rescue of humanity, not the young girl in her fresh youth from the oldest and simplest of the island's farming homesteads, had ever in their life before been thus paralysed by all that was suggested in a mere colour, and that colour without horns or claws or teeth or sting — just simply the colour of hair!

But all three of them felt simultaneously that their fearful impressions from Keto's hair were connected with one single simple thing, with nothing more or less in fact than the dead leaves of one particular kind of tree — O so well known to them all! — that grew somehow round every one of their homes in this island.

Over and over again had all three of them felt some strange shudder over this particular colour; the Heraklean club rather less than the old man or the young girl, since *his* native home was really in the forest of Nemea, situated on the "epeiros", as the islanders called the mainland.

Like a flash that combined the deadly bolt of forked lightning with the more widely spread illumination of sheet-lightning, some peculiar horror for normal mortal senses seemed to lurk in the mysterious colour of this sea-monster's hair. Yes! the only parallel to it was the colour of the dead leaves of that one particular tree in autumn, especially when autumn came earlier in the year than usual, causing these dead leaves to be isolated from their fellows.

It wasn't a negative colour or the absence of anything. It was a positive colour, and it possessed its own absolutely special metallic gleam. The colour grey, contrasted with what this colour was, would have appeared a friendly and natural if rather a melancholy apparition. But this colour flung forth a metaphysical shock. It possessed a look as if Nothingness itself, the primordial and perhaps the ultimate *Non Est* had chosen to incarnate itself in visible appearance.

"You will see me again!" it seemed to say to the old king, to the young farm-girl, to the club that slew the Nemean Lion. And the club was fully aware of the fact that there was a special reason for its sharing the horror that now menaced the other two, the fact namely that the Nemean Lion whose brains it dashed out on the "epeiros" was actually, though belonging to the earth, an offspring of this monster of the deep.

Little did either the old man or the young girl guess that the forward rush with which they both followed the Heraklean weapon, as, straining itself forward till it almost flew out of the king's grasp, it rushed with blind defiance down that slippery slope straight towards the beautiful face in its terrible hair, had anything to do with the fact that the weapon the king carried knew so much more than they did of the creature they were encountering.

So terrific, however, was the shock of sheer panic that struck them all three when they came within reach of that swirling whirlpool of hair — the colour of the absolute void before there was any world at all — that fortunately for the two human ones it broke through, just as if it had really been a flash of metaphysical illumination, the natural barrier between the consciousness of the club of Herakles and the consciousness of the man and the girl, so that when, within a couple of yards of the wave's edge, they finally stopped, Odysseus was able to threaten that beautiful face in the midst of that abysmal hair with the knowledge possessed by the weapon of the son of Zeus and his mortal bride Alkmene.

"Beware, you evil mother of good daughters, you mother of the Graiai, born with white hair, of the Graiai, who still live in Kisthene, the cavern of rock-roses, where there is neither sun nor moon, and where no stars shine, and who have only one eye to see with, and only one tooth to eat with! Beware, I tell you, you demon-mother of the white-haired Graiai! If ever your face is seen again near this Cave of the Naiads I shall rob your daughters of both their one eye and their one tooth; for none knoweth the road to Kisthene of the Rock-Roses better than I, wanderer as I've been through both the world of the living and the world of the dead!"

Had Keto, the eldest daughter of the Sea, possessed, at the back of her swirling hair, now the very colour of that Nothingness into which everything shall return, possessed a foam-drop of the feeling resembling ours, she would have been softened in some infinitesimal measure by the poignant sight of those two pathetic human beings, the little farm-girl with slender outstretched arms and the broad-shouldered shepherd of the people, brandishing his old cracked root of a twisted pine disfigured by honeysuckle and brooding on the spilt brains of lions; but that drifting face remained as impassive as the exquisite convolutions of a cockle-shell; impassive and implacable, and still slowly advancing.

But it was at that moment that behind this intolerable sea-horror with its appalling beauty and its deadly hair there suddenly rose up a three-fold prong held aloft in a vast overshadowing muscular arm. “Stop, all of you! stop, I say!” boomed the god’s terrific voice, as the outstretched trident was directed towards them.

With the sluicing and shelving roar of a hoarse, out-drawing, tidal retreat the whole volume of water, swallowing up Keto entirely as it went, rolled back about the tall and menacing torso of Poseidon. Recognizing his worst personal enemy in this insatiable avenger of the Kyklops Polyphemos and this passionate ally of the Trojans, Odysseus contented himself with shrugging his massive shoulders, with extending an imperative yet kindly hand to the young girl, with swinging the club in an almost humorous gesture of submitting to fate, and with walking, without another glance at the ship he was building, slowly forth from the Naiad’s Cave by the nearest inland path; a retreat from action that was an unspeakable relief to both the fly and the moth.

“Were you on your way somewhere, child?” he asked the young girl in a friendly voice, still retaining her hand. “I’m herdsman Tis’s youngest sister,” the girl replied in a docile voice. “Grandfather sent me with a message to him. Grandfather told me to stop at the Naiad’s Gave and see if it was true that you were building a ship. They say, down our way, that if you, my lord, sail from Ithaca, one of the Naubolides boys will be king in your place: but I tell them that's all silly nonsense."

The girl's obvious sincerity made Odysseus look more closely at her and he was struck by the oddity of her appearance. She had one of the plainest faces he had ever seen, and her stomach and torso were shapeless and graceless, but her legs were as beautifully formed as those of some incomparable dancer. "I'll take you to the house," he said. "Tis sleeps there and the women will find a place for you."

CHAPTER III

NEVER HAD NISOS Naubolides felt surer of himself or of his destiny than when, on this same morning of the old king's visit to the cave of the Naiads, he set out for the Temple of Athene. He had come straight from the presence of his mother Pandea whom he had found as he had expected, not in the Naubolides homestead of Aulion, but in the house called Druinos, where lived Nosodea, the mother of the two girls Leipephile and Stratonika, who was Pandea's best gossip, best scandal-monger, and best-loved friend.

The old Odysseus must have been still lying on his bed with his eyes closed after his nocturnal conversation with the Dryad Kleta when Nisos set out so full of confidence in himself and his future. As to Myos the fly and Pyraust the moth, they must already have discovered for the benefit of the Club of Herakles and of the inquisitive Olive-shoot which had sprung up near the club, some important news about the ambiguous activities of the Priest of Orpheus who had occupied the ante-chamber to the Temple, for they were now flying back in their return from the Temple.

At the foot of a long slope of carefully tended green grass that led away from the Temple in an Eastern direction there was an old roughly hewn ungainly statue — scarcely a statue at all for it was more like a low stone pillar or "herm", with the crude outlines of a clumsily carved feminine face just indicated at the top of it — not of Athene but of the Goddess Themis, the special guardian throughout all Hellas of law and order and justice and decent behaviour.

Nisos stopped in amazement in front of this image. He knew every curve and every hollow and every tinge of colour upon this ungainly block of stone. But behold! there was this morning a horrible great crack clear across it. It was a crack that reached from what might have been the figure’s left shoulder to what might have been its right buttock. Nisos now examined the injured image with the utmost nicety from top to toe.

As he was doing this he suddenly paused with an excited gasping little cry, the sort of cry a young soldier might have uttered who had just discovered on the battlefield the severed head of his general.

It was not quite as startled a cry as that; but it was in the same category of shocked astonishment. What he had seen were unmistakable blood-marks at different places all over the stone’s surface.

“Whose blood?” was the question that shot through the boy’s mind. Down on his knees he sank and began scrabbling with both hands in the grass. Here his startled curiosity was more than rewarded. Again and again his fingers encountered certain curious horny objects, which, as he lifted them up into the sunlight that was now blazing down upon him from a cloudless sky, revealed themselves without doubt or question to be nothing less than broken finger-nails, enormously sharp and super-humanly long finger-nails, some of them thicker than others, but almost all, he soon noticed, bloody as well as broken. “*Whose blood?*” the boy desperately asked himself again.

His whole feeling towards these abnormally large finger-nails was an extremely queer one. It was indeed such a confused and complicated one that, clever as he was, the lad was completely non-plussed. What agitated him was not so much these large and bloody finger-nails in themselves as what they represented and the world of associations they brought with them.

“This must be,” the boy told himself in one of his characteristic introspective mole-runs, as he automatically gathered those horrible fragments into a heap, “this must be what you feel when you go mad.

Didn't Herakles go mad? Didn't Ajax go mad? I mean when they'd annoyed Zeus in some way? Perhaps I've annoyed Zeus in some way without meaning to, and what I feel now is the beginning of my punishment."

For the last year and a half Nisos had deliberately cultivated his tendency to elaborate his fancies and enlarge upon his feelings. He had done this ever since the day when, neither of them knowing that he was within hearing, he had overheard his mother say to his father, "Nisos will be a famous philosopher one day! Don't you see how introspective he is?" "Introspective is what I am!" he had henceforth always told himself.

And when other boys beat him at racing or jumping or throwing the discus, "I'll be a prophet," he told himself, "when you are all common soldiers!"

His face just then, while the blazing sunshine caught the five beads of perspiration on his forehead and behaved towards them with the same passionate intensity as it was at that moment displaying towards the whole Aegean Sea, had a very curious expression. At that heap of supernaturally large and inhumanly pointed finger-nails, all torn and bloody he felt he was in a dream, whence, though he knew it *was* a dream, he was unable to force himself to wake. "Heavens and Earth!" he thought. "Of course I know whose finger-nails those are! They're the 'Harpies, the Snatchers'! They must have some quarrel with Themis." He shut his eyes and with the back of his hand wiped those five miniature seas of sweat out of existence.

And then he remembered what he'd been taught about the Strophades or Isles of the Turning-Point, and how it was there that Themis compelled the fierce sons of the North Wind, brandishing their sharp swords to turn from their pursuit of these fatal females who had no weapon but their own snatching nails! And so this foul crack in the image of the goddess of Order was the gratitude of these infernal Harpies!

Well, well, well. He decided that it might be wiser not to tell his mother about this crack in the image of Themis, nor to ask her what he had better do about this little heap of finger-nails. “Cover them up with Babba’s dung! Tis would say”, he thought; and then he thought: “No! I *won’t* be the one to tell mother. Those bloody nails give me the shivers!”

He did his best, as he left that desecrated image and made his way up the grassy slope towards the temple, to recover his self-esteem by remembering his mother’s words about his being “so introspective”. “Neither Daddy nor Agelaos,” he told himself, “would have the cleverness to feel things like this as I feel them.”

He was still nearly half a mile from the top of the slope where the first buildings began when he saw the two insects, so well known to him in the palace-porch, flying slowly towards him engaged in some absorbing argument between themselves. Yes, he was sure he knew them both. One was that pitifully nervous and weak-looking brown moth with fluttering wings. The other was that extremely self-centred house-fly with a calm collected manner, a black head and staring eyes.

And now if it were possible for him to enter into conversation with them, or at least into some sort of intelligent communication with them, he would gather all sorts of hints as to what this Orphic Priest, who called himself Enorches, was doing, and have something important to take back to his mother quite apart from those horrible finger-nails, concerning which he had decided to remain silent.

Yes, he was pretty sure he knew both these insects; but of course it was possible that the house-fly, with those transparent prismatic wings upon which it was always cleaning its rapidly moving feet, had two or three, or even four or five, brothers and sisters. It was also possible, though less likely, that the brown-winged, anxiously obsessed, sacrificially dedicated moth had a twin-sister who resembled her so closely in the eyes of gods and men that only a caterpillar could distinguish the one from the other.

Indeed if it were not for some multiple-footed, velvet-muffled relative, to whose cocoon-piercing, chrysalis-searching eyes no pair of winged creatures were exactly alike, how easily might the brown moth have been a nameless unidentified nomad, flitting over the earth's surface until she fell by her own propensity for self-sacrifice into some worse fate than becoming the obedient servant of the Priest of Orpheus.

Such a born Ambassador was Nisos that he had hardly caught sight of the two insects fluttering through the air towards him, so submerged in their metaphysical argument that they had no attention left for what they were doing or where they were going, than he stretched out his hands palms downward towards them and addressed them with his fondest and politest social salutation, a salutation that was only a little less respectful than the one he used, in his imagination, for kings and queens, and also, it must be admitted, for members however young of the ancient houses of the Naubolides of Aulion.

Having thus saluted them the youthful diplomatist uttered a deep sigh and ejaculated the gnomic syllables, "What a shame!" The subtle implication of this sympathetic groan was indeed, though few would have had the sensitivity to catch it, that the ignorant, vulgar, illiterate, brutal retainers of the Priest of Orpheus had clearly refused to allow the sophisticated homage of such noble insects to enter the inmost shrine, in spite of the fact that all the world owes honey to honey-bees, silk to silk-worms, pearls to oysters, and Tyrian dye to the lovely sea-shell, Porphura.

Seeing that he had succeeded in interrupting their dispute and that they were hesitating and flying in circles and hovering round his outstretched hands, the boy withdrew one arm, moved the other with a mute solicitation, and drawing in his breath with an instinctive movement of his whole frame that was in itself a crafty-imitation of a sub-human gesture, he made a peculiar humming sound between his palate and the back of his tongue.

All these things were done, all these signs were made, purely on the inspiration of the moment; but seeing them still hesitate and feeling in his open mouth and widened nostrils the morbid smell of the incense-heavy sacristy-dust they carried on their wings, he suddenly lifted the back of his hand to his mouth, licked it with his tongue, and stretched it forth again.

Ah! He was indeed a clever plenipotentiary. He had done it! Both the insects settled on the back of his hand which the moth desperately caressed with her wings and the house-fly began hurriedly to use as an ash-can for the dirt he scraped, first by the aid of one gauzy wing and then of another, from his exploring feet. Here indeed was the Ambassador’s opportunity! He must convince himself that he had come from the kitchen of his mother Pandea, the wife of Krateros Naubolides, straight to this sacred half-mile of well-watered grass.

He must let that ominous crack in the image of Themis be blotted from his mind and that bloody heap of super-human claws vanish like an obscure dream. Here upon the back of his hand were two living creatures, each of them endowed with wings, who had come straight from this temple, borne forth upon a dusty wafture of incense-bearing smoke.

But how, in the name of Tartaros, was he to obtain from them the information he required? How on earth could he cross the gulf between his human consciousness and their insect-consciousness? How was he to enter into conversation with this brown moth and this house-fly now that he *had* persuaded them to settle upon the back of his hand? Nisos Naubolides never forgot to the end of his mortal days this crucial moment. He drew his arm a little inwards towards his ribs and hung his head, staring helplessly at the back of his hand where from the knuckle of his longest finger, which she evidently felt to be a wisely chosen observation-post, the brown moth was explaining to the black fly, who was cleaning his shoes on the knuckle of Nisos' finger, just how it was that with such unusual words and gestures the Priest of Orpheus had bidden her show her friend off the premises and see to it that he never returned.

What, in the name of their universal mother the earth, was he to do to break down this cruel wall of difference between his human senses and those of these two creatures?

And then suddenly, to the born diplomatist, the inspiration came! Of course there was only one thing to do, and that was the thing indicated by every vibratory law of tellurian politeness. He must pray to Pallas Athene!

No sooner had he decided upon this line of action which was obviously the most proper, the most natural, the most pious line for a diplomatic ambassador to a great goddess's temple to adopt, than he lifted up in his heart an intensely concentrated prayer to Athene, imploring her to reveal to him how to exchange thoughts and experiences with this moth and this fly.

It was soon clear to him that the goddess had heard him and had taken measures without delay to give him an answer to his prayer. Well must she know the limits of her power and not only its limits. She also must know the evil effect, so often precisely contrary to the desired effect, of manifesting her power in her own person. So to enlighten him as to the way moths and flies received and remembered their impressions she evidently brought it about that her most understanding worshipper in the vicinity should at this critical moment be descending that grassy slope.

This was an elderly virgin called Petraia who belonged to an island family into which in each generation for hundreds of years an old maid with Sibylline inspiration had been born. Petraia was not the prophetess for this particular generation but she was twin-sister to the woman who was. And the goddess knew well that there existed, as happens sometimes with twins, a mysterious thought-transference between Petraia and her sister, who had fled from the world to the sacred Arician Forest of the Italian King Latinus, where she had become a follower of the immortal Nymph Egeria who lived like an oracle in a hidden cave.

It was through her sister's association with this Italian Nymph that Petraia was able to keep the virgin-goddess whom she served in close contact with all that preceded the founding of the New Troy, destined, so the word went forth, to rule the world from its Seven Hills.

Nisos was thoroughly at home with Petraia who in his infancy had been his nurse as well as his mother's midwife, so that he at once accepted her appearance at this juncture as an authentic answer to his prayer. Without a moment's delay in one wild rush of excited words the boy poured out the whole of his story and explained his difficulty about the insects.

The slender and stately old lady surveyed him with whimsical scrutiny. "So you want to get the news from those two small prisoners of yours, do you? And you need an interpreter?"

"O Nurse, I'm thankful it's you!" gasped Nisos. "Mother wanted me to find out what's going on and I don't feel like telling her about what I've just seen down there"; and he gave his head a jerk in the down-hill direction. "Does the goddess, do you think, know all about *that*? Does she know they've left a lot of their disgusting nails or claws, or whatever they are, behind, and all bloody too? Why does she let such things happen, Nurse, and so near her Temple? Themis is cracked clean through — does she know *that*? — clean through, from shoulder to hip! Mother will have a fit when she hears. I’m not going to be the one to tell her, nurse. You bet your life I’m not! You know what she is when she hears things like that. She’ll go rampaging off to Druinos to pour out everything to Nosodea; and there in his corner like a hunched-up toad you may depend old Damnos Geraios will be gloating over every word and thinking what new silliness he can invent for dear sweet simple Leipephile and what new imaginary wickedness for that idealistic fool Stratonika, so that she’ll have to lacerate herself to the bone to purge it away! But tell me, nurse most sacred, nurse most precious, nurse most holy, does our great goddess, who sent you here in answer to my prayer, know about Themis?”

He looked searchingly at the virginal midwife as he asked this question. He knew well that his faith in the omnipotence of their goddess wasn’t what it had been when he was five years old. He was nearly seventeen now, and in these last years he had had a great many very private and rather peculiar thoughts; but it would still have shocked an indestructible vein of piety in him to think that such things could happen as this horrible attack on the obelisk of Themis so near Athene’s very judgment-seat, without her knowing anything about it!

Petraia smiled that reassuring familiar smile that had so often comforted him in his paroxysing panic lest the feathered bosom of aboriginal Night should swallow him up alive.

“Let’s think of your insects first,” Petraia said now, and she added: “Moths and Flies before Law and Order!” She added these words with that particular kind of domestic persiflage that is more annoying to a boy nearly seventeen than a slap in the face.

However, he obediently lifted the back of his hand closer to his eyes and stared at the moth and the fly so intently that he could see the delicate lacy fringes on the margins of the moth's brown wings and the metallic circles like polished adamant round the bulging eyes of the house-fly.

As Nisos stared at the insects it seemed to him that he could feel like a palpable wafture of nard-scented air the divine power of feminine virginity, a power that male youth always recognizes without knowing precisely what it is, pass from Petraia's hand to the nerves of his shoulder. It did, yes! it actually did, transform the quivering of those brown wings and the friction of those jet-black legs upon those gauzy wings into the expression of thoughts that a human being could follow. "So that's it!" he said to himself sharply and shrewdly.

And he was so afraid that just as a crib of some classic paragraph might be snatched from a school-boy before he had got the hang of it, that this preternatural translation of the sign-language of insects into the sound-language of men might be withdrawn before he got its full import that he began announcing to Petraia in a louder voice than he generally used and in a hurried and curiously jerky manner that what the insects had revealed to him was that there was a quarrel beginning, that might soon become a deep rift, between Zeus and Hera, the former being alone on the peak of Gargaros deprived, one rumour declares, of all his weapons, while the latter was almost equally alone on the summit of Olympos.

He further announced to Petraia that the effect of this quarrel upon the great goddess Athene was to force her to withdraw herself from taking any part in any public movement until the issue between Zeus and Hera became clearer or definitely resolved itself in one way or another.

"But at this point," so he explained to the old midwife, "while the moth understands that our goddess has left Ithaca altogether, the fly is sure she is still in the island, and probably still in the temple; but is unwilling to commit herself, or take any side, or make any definite move, till things are clearer than they are at present.

“Another thing the fly tells me, Nurse dear, which astonishes me a good deal, and to confess the truth gives me a funny feeling, indeed, if I were absolutely honest, as you used to teach me every Naubolides with our claim to the kingship ought to be, makes me shiver and shake is that Tartaros has broken loose, and that Typhon, the most terrible of all the Titans, has burst his bonds from beneath Etna and is again breathing fire and smoke against the gods.

“But you see, Nurse dear, what makes it so hard for me to tell you all they say is that they keep contradicting each other as if they were speaking as ambassadors from opposite camps. For instance what the fly says is that the real reason why our great goddess Athene has withdrawn ‘pro-tem’ into herself is that she is waiting to hear what Zeus will do if certain rumours that have reached her from Italy are correct, namely that at a special place in Italy where there are seven sacred hills the descendants of Aeneas the pious ally of Priam have already begun to build a new Troy.

“The moth, on the other hand, swears that Athene has gone to visit the blameless Ethiopians to find out for herself whether it is true that Persephone has quarrelled with Aidoneus and helped Teiresias to bring back from Hades the weeping Niobe, the First Woman, together with her husband Phoroneus, the First Man.”

Long before the insects had ceased revealing their discoveries to the undulations of the knuckles of his now weakly and wearily extended hand, the inspiration proceeding from the virginity of the old maid who had nursed him ceased to give him the clue to the small creatures’ sign-language.

He gazed helplessly at her, while a wave of tiredness and the feeling of being a hopeless fool engulfed him. “What do *you* make of it all, Nurse?” he murmured feebly.

“It is clear enough, Nisos,” commented Petraia, “that a female moth and a male fly are bound to be on opposite sides in the great ‘old battle’.”

“What old battle, nurse darling?” enquired the boy, contemplating the insects on his knuckles with re-awakened interest.

“Between males and females, silly!” There fell a dead silence between them with the weight of a heavy stone: a silence that was broken at last by the old maid herself. Her voice rang out with something of the prophetic resonance that had belonged to that twin-sister of hers who was a neophyte of Egeria, the Nymph in the Cave in the Italian forest.

“Didn’t I always tell you, forgetful child, how Apollo and Artemis persecuted Niobe, the First Woman, whose husband Phoroneus was the son of a Melian Nymph? Didn’t I tell you how that pair of murderous deities — holy Athene guard me from them! — between whom and our great Goddess there has always been war since, like that dangerous Cyprian Aphrodite, they took the side of the Trojans and may the golden Sun, Helios, and the silver Moon, Selene, shake off such intruders! — didn’t I tell you how that murderous pair killed the children of Niobe the first woman? And how they wouldn’t even let their neighbours bury those beautiful maidens and heroic youths? Haven’t I told you all that?

“And now this liar of a house-fly is trying to make out that our great goddess has lost herself in some kind of trance when the pillars of the world are shaking. O you male creatures, what infants you are! Children of women and nurselings of women, it is your mothers, your mothers, always your mothers, who are to blame! It is only from us, the unmarried ones, the childless ones, who have never known a man, that you ever hear the truth!

That is what my sister always used to say. That is why she went to that forest of Aricia, which in Italy must be like the Nemean Forest in our mainland, and a little like our Arima too, only much bigger. Lucky, yea a thousand times lucky, are we in Ithaca to serve a Virgin Goddess!

"The mothers of men are the worst traitors to the cause of women. I tell you, boy, from the beginning of all things women have been betrayed, exploited, enslaved, insulted, perverted, depraved, debased, by men!"

Petraia drew breath at this point, while Nisos, feeling a little uneasy, since he still assumed it was in direct answer to his prayer that his old nurse had appeared on the scene, stared at the black fly on his knuckle with the vague idea of finding an excuse if not a justification for the wickedness of men in that big black head supported on those gauzy wings.

But the indignant old maid went on in mounting emotion, until her indictment soon became so detailed in its survey of the wrongs of women and so crushing in its denunciation of their corrupters, that all he could do was to rub his knee with his free hand while one method of defence followed another in mute succession through his bewildered brain.

"Petraia," he thought, "must have gone down to Hades like our King Odysseus for she can't have seen all these things happening round here." And then as his attention wandered a little from what he was hearing he became aware of an extremely unexpected and very curious experience. He found himself in fact whispering to the fly and being whispered to by the fly in a language of which he was absolutely ignorant. It was like a dream, though he was fully awake. The fly was a boy among flies as he himself was among people. And with this other boy he was now making fun of everything.

"But it's our great goddess — it *must* be — —" he told himself, "who in answer to my prayer has arranged this meeting with Petraia and has helped me and the fly to make friends! She is a Divine Being, therefore she must herself understand the language and the thoughts of all the animals, birds, reptiles, insects and even plants, that walk and fly and creep and grow around her temple."

He had begun to call the fly "Kasi". "Kasi-kid," he said, "isn't this whole business just like a game of Blindman's Buff? Don't you think so, Kasi?"

The old midwife at his side went on with her arraignment of all males; but he kept his attention fixed on the fly, for it had become a deep joy to him to feel that they'd really made friends. "Kasi" was an abbreviation of the Hellenic word for brother and it was the old class-mate expression that all the younger boys of Ithaca had made use of between themselves in the Island's preparatory-school.

As for the fly, it was natural enough that since it had got older considerably faster than his new friend it was as gratified at being called "Kasi" as Nisos would have been if he had been treated like a young comrade by one of the heroes in the Trojan war.

"Blindman's Buff?" cried the Fly. "It's as if we were all buzzing round a new-dropt cow-turd of Tis' s old Babba, all warm and steaming! But this lady-moth here keeps giving me a flap with her left wing to remind me that I promised to escort her home; so I'm afraid I must say 'cheire!' for we must do what the ladies tell us, is it not so?"

"It is indeed the sad truth, Kasi," admitted Nisos. "Ta-Ta! till the next time!" shrilled the Fly. But when the insects had commenced their flickering and wavering departure in such close colloquy that the all-seeing sun, whether ruled by an Olympian or a Titan or by nobody but his flaming self, couldn't decide whether to turn them into one darting jewel or into two darting jewels, Nisos found that Petraia had fallen silent and was regarding him with a look that was a palimpsest of different expressions. It had reproach in it. It had a grievance in it. It had mischievous amusement in it. It had a puzzled pity in it.

But in place of any sad, weary, resigned, disillusioned acceptance of fate it had a gravity that was faintly whimsical. “Those finger-nails that disgusted and disquieted you so, my dear,” she remarked at last, “show me who cracked that image of Themis. And now listen to me, child; and lay to heart what I tell you; for I am not speaking only on my own authority. I am speaking to you, Nisos, you Babe that I took from your mother, as an unwedded mortal on behalf of an unwedded immortal, for I tell you, boy, that at this very moment I can feel her presence inspiring me and teaching me exactly what to say and exactly what not to say to you, Nisos, child,” and Petraia’s voice quivered with emotion, “the greatest event, and by far the best event, that has ever happened in the history of our terrible world is now happening.

“From the lowest depths of Tartaros to the highest peaks of Olympos a great revolt is in progress which if successful will change the world. But it is a revolt against Fate Itself, as well as against the Will of the All-Father, a will that always bows to Fate and then pretends to be what the All-Father Himself would instinctively will, which of course really and truly it *isn’t*, only All-Father Zeus can’t and daren’t do what he’d like to do!

“Those who attacked that Figure of Themis were entirely justified in so doing. The Harpies, or ‘Snatchers’, as our enemies call them, are women like us, *like me*! They are women, and they are maids, and they are not only old maids, they are immortal maids! And they have joined the great revolt that began before dawn this night, this night that has now become day, the first day of the greatest event in the history of all days!

“Need your old nurse tell her babe what that event is? It is the Revolt of Women! Yes, of the Women-Slaves of the entire universe! Yes, Nisos, nothing less than that, the revolt of all Females in the cosmos against the tyranny of all Males in the cosmos! Themis, the goddess of Custom and Habit and Tradition, has always been unfair to us women, always trying to force us back into slavery to men whenever we've tried to escape. And, as with Themis, so with the Fates. They too are against us. They too want to hold us down to the laws, ways, manners, morals, usages, privileges, conventions, institutions, organizations, founded upon male stupidity and bigotry!

"But our maiden goddess will be on our side; yes! she will lead us! She — —" And then suddenly, after a terrifying pause, the boy heard Petraia utter a ghastly groan, followed by a horrible shriek. "She's gone, gone, gone, gone! She's left me! She's deserted me! Athene! Athene! Athene! Where art thou, Athene?"

Nisos looked in positive fear at the woman. Her whole countenance was convulsed, distorted, twisted awry; while her eyes, enlarged and deepened into the most beautiful and most terrible eyes Nisos had ever seen in his short life, gave him the feeling, as they turned on him, as if his whole nature were being summed up and weighed and analysed and judged by the central nerve of the entire universe!

"What's the matter, nurse?" he gasped in a low voice. At his question her gaze of terrible insight changed into one of contemptuous irritation.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing! *Nothing's* 'the matter'! What *could* be 'the matter'? A person may be allowed, I take it, to change colour for a second when the goddess she has been serving for forty years begins inspiring her with the deepest secrets of life in one blob, one blur, one blot, one gobbet of prophetic truth; and then, just as a person's in the act of expressing it glides off, glides away, glides into thin air, glides back to her grove or her grotto or her shrine leaving the person, *leaving me*, to be nothing but the silly, speechless idiot I always have been!"

Petraia stopped speaking and covered her contorted face with her two hands, while the boy noticed how big the tears were that forced themselves between those thin fingers and ran down between those wrinkled knuckles as the tall figure swayed and shook with her dreadful sobs.

Nisos was staggered. All he felt was awe and wonder; awe in the presence of such human emotion, and wonder that so wise a goddess could treat a faithful servant so unkindly and ungratefully. If only Petraia had been less upset she would have remained in touch with her twin-sister who in Aricia was at that very moment struggling desperately to convey to her by vibrations of pure thought that in this cosmic revolt on behalf of women, though the Fates and the All-Father and Themis might be against them, they had on their side the terrible Avengers of Blood, the Erinyes, who, according to Egeria, the Nymph in the Cave, could bring with them to the battle the Graiai, the Gorgons, the Sirens, and even the Nymphs of the Hesperides!

Had the woman only possessed the power to visualize the scene at that moment in the cave of Egeria, where the twin-sister on her knees with her long bare arms outstretched and her face transformed by an ecstasy of worship was invoking all the Chthonian deities on behalf of Petraia herself, that crazed creature might have been checked in her bitter wrath. As it was, she left Nisos without a word more; and the boy heard her as she went off talking blasphemously to herself about her service of the great goddess and how on this day of days the goddess had deserted her.

"So my life is to repeat itself, is it?" the boy heard her mutter, as she went up the slope with the particular aberrations of her way of moving when she was excited, which might be described as a limp and a jerk followed by a hop, exaggerated to a ridiculous degree, "always to repeat itself, is it? And there's never, never, never, never to be anything the matter! What's the matter? O I'll go and see if anything's the matter! The matter with my knees perhaps as I pray to you! With my voice perhaps as I sing hymns to you! With the floor of your shrine perhaps, with the echo of your arches perhaps, with the smoke of your incense perhaps? Or could it possibly be, that what the matter is, that you aren't in your temple at all? Just somewhere else!"

Muttering and babbling in this blasphemous way Patraia stumbled up the slope towards the temple and vanished from his view among the many marble buildings that surrounded the central shrine. Left alone without the fly, or the moth, or the old midwife, or, for all he felt of her presence, the Goddess either, Nisos himself began slowly ascending the slope. Strange thoughts flitted through his head as placing one foot carefully and pensively in front of the other, and then the other in front of it, and then repeating the process, he mounted that grassy hill.

Since it was not the time for any particular celebration, or for the performance of any particular ritual, this ascent to the Temple and to its agglomeration of marble buildings, interspersed by the wooden houses of the priests and the still rougher and cruder hovels, mostly constructed of tattered sail-cloth and twisted withy-twigs of the slaves of the priests, was at that moment almost entirely deserted.

Surrounded therefore by an atmosphere of consecrated silence our young friend had one of those opportunities that come to us all at rare moments of really "collecting", as we have come to call it, his wandering thoughts; and, as often happened when he was alone, his mind journeyed into a cloudy realm composed of an entirely imaginary circle of things and people.

This circle, person by person, and background by background, was his future, that far-off future, into which by the help of what he felt so strongly within him, what to himself he always called his "cleverness", he was certain he would one day come.

Where many island children watching their companions being scolded for behaving badly would say to themselves: *"I am good, I am!"* Nisos would say to himself: "I am clever, *I* am!" and he had an absolute faith that, if he didn't die by a violent death, he would one day be the memorable figure of his epoch. He never defined, or tried to analyse precisely, of what the power within him which he called his "cleverness" consisted.

His mother always told her neighbour, the lady of Druinos, that it consisted of a gift for subtle flattery and of a genius for propitiating older and wiser people. But of his real secret ambition he never spoke to his mother. The only person who had the faintest inkling of what it was, for nothing would have induced him to talk to Petraia about it, was his friend Tis, the herdsman.

But what in his hidden heart he actually imagined himself becoming was an inspired prophet. If Petraia could be so upset by the idea of their goddess deserting her and not speaking through her as Apollo did through the oracular woman at Delphi and as the Nymph Egeria did through Petraia's twin-sister in Aricia, why shouldn't *he* become the voice of some Divine Being, and win respect and esteem for himself for all time by expounding that Being's philosophy?

He began to wonder what kind of divinity he would be most fitted to represent, and most happy in representing. And as he pondered on this important point he found himself staring at one particular blade of grass the top of which, the *point* as it were, of this brightly green dagger, had turned into a pale brown colour. The point had not shrivelled or crumpled in this transformation. It was still as smooth as the rest of that leaf of grass; but it was discoloured.

Something had bitten it or the excretion of some poisonous creature had sucked the life-blood from it; or, for all Nisos knew, this single grass-leaf with all the consciousness it possessed had uttered a curse against Zeus himself, the lord of high heaven, and had thus drawn upon itself an individual flash, especially adapted to a small object, of celestial lightning.

At first Nisos couldn't help associating this discoloured point with Petraia's unseemly outburst; but as he went on staring at it his secret dream about his own future on this island stirred within him.

"Yes, by Aidoneus," he thought, "I know what special kind of prophet I'll be, a kind that has never existed in the world before! I'll not be a prophet to the clever who are weak and timid and nervous like me. I'll be a prophet to the strong who have been hurt in some way. Yes, I'll be a prophet to the healthy and strong who are like this leaf of grass with a brown tip."

"Listen to me," I'll cry, "all you who are strong but yet are stupid; you who are hurt and hit without knowing why! Listen to me!" He stood still, imagining himself a man with a long flowing beard, taller than he was now, much more distinguished than he was now, and possessed of philosophical secrets known to no other sage in Hellas. He glanced casually up the slope in front of him. All those glittering marble buildings he knew so well were hidden by the grassy ridge at the top of the ascent and he noticed that Petraia had entirely vanished.

"She must be visiting Stratonika," he said to himself. "Yes," he thought, "I'll be a Prophet to the strong who've been hurt, and the healthy who've fallen sick! The half-dead ones, the tortured ones, the mad ones, the diseased ones have all got prophets; but strong, stupid, silly things, like this blade of grass with a brown tip, who just stares back at a person, think they don’t want a prophet; but they do! O yes! you do, stupid grass, whatever you think! You wait till I’m older and cleverer and have a beard; and you’ll soon see! It’s the stupid things that need the clever prophets!”

Having decided on his future in general, Nisos now felt a need for beginning to practise the art of prophecy in a more special and particular manner; so he began plodding steadily on, with drops of sweat falling from his forehead and his eyes upon his sandals which were discoloured by pollen-dust and rabbit-dung.

Suddenly he turned his attention, drawn by an impulse for which he couldn’t account, away from the ridge in front of him to a clump of trees on his extreme left; and he even began walking hurriedly towards it. The trees were only a portion of the group of natural objects that was now his objective. In the blazing sun and against all this greenery the many-coloured mound he was aiming for had almost a purple look.

Nisos knew the place well. It was of natural rather than artificial origin, formed by the intermingling of three separate things, a rather oddly scrawled rock, the stump of an oak, and the twisted root of an ash. Over this dusky excrescence there grew a mass of waving ferns and thick clumps of a specially dark moss; and as Nisos now advanced towards it its queer purpureal tint appeared to be spotted by blood-red patches which glowered like raw wounds in that burning sun.

Everyone who knew Ithaca knew this spot and it was locally called Lykophos or “Wolf’s Light,” a name which implied that faint grey light before dawn that was more suitable to eyes of wolves than of men. The Lykophos-Mound seemed especially prominent at this moment. Its queerly scrawled rock, its oak-stump, its ash-root, together with the sap-filled living energy of its ferns and moss and honeysuckle, and its minutely delicate early Spring flowers and their clambering foliage, accentuated just then something about it, some powerful atmospheric emanation, that always made it an object towards which certain living people and certain living creatures gravitated with magnetic or hypnotic attraction but from which others shrank away with instinctive dread.

Nisos himself was one of the former sort; but his friend Tis, the herdsman, though he used simpler words, had given the boy the impression that to him there were always shocking blood-drops oozing out of that rock; while, for all its ferns and mosses and small spring-flowers and spreading foliage, there were always raw skinless hollows between its hieroglyphic surfaces and its leaf-mould ledges that suggested festering wounds and pus-exuding sores.

Among our other friends from the porch of the palace the black house-fly was repelled much in the same way as Tis. What the fly felt every time it flew near the Lykophos-Mound was an aching void in the pit of its stomach; as if some poisonous-looking meat-cover of brassy gauze had suddenly been precipitated out of the air to surround every half-crumb of edible farinaceousness and every half-drop of absorbable stickiness in the entire world.

It was however quite calmly and thoughtfully, and yet rather doggedly, for he was anxious to pick up for his extremely human Mummy a few fragments of more ordinary, more domestic, more everyday news than had recently been bewildering him from so many thaumaturgical if not supernatural directions, that our young friend was approaching the Lykophos-Mound, when he heard in the air above his head the strangest combination of startling, terrifying, and unbelievable sounds that he'd ever heard in his life.

And as, trembling with pure terror, he looked up, he saw a sight that froze his blood. What he saw gave him the impression that he was in the midst of a nightmare and that if he burst into a wild cry himself, these *other* cries, together with the incredible shapes that were descending from out of the air, would cease and dissolve and sink away, shaken into nothingness by his mother's approach as she answered his frantic screams.

But not for nothing had he been brought up by a mother like Pandea and a nurse like Petraia. Not for nothing had he listened as intently as that wicked old toad of a grandfather, Damnos Geraios himself, to the tales exchanged between his mother and her grand gossip, the mother of Leipephile and Stratonika. Above all it hadn't been for nothing that he had done housework for the aged lady who had been the nurse of three generations of royalty. As, half-petrified with terror, he gazed upward at what he saw, these two wide-winged female Horrors, uttering these appalling screeches as they flapped down towards the Lykophos-Mound in the half-circle of a raven-like swoop upon their prey, he knew at once who they were. One was an Erinys, one of the Avengers of Blood or Furies, and the other was a Gorgon.

Talking about it later with the old palace-nurse he came to the conclusion that the particular Erinys who made this attack must have been Allekto, whose name means "the never-ending" and that the Gorgon who tried to help her in this attack was Euryale whose name means "the wide sea".

But at the actual moment he had this appalling experience he only knew that without question one of them was most certainly an "Erinys" or "Fury" and the other was most certainly a Gorgon. The pair were clearly much too absorbed in catching their victim off-guard to notice Nisos at all. In fact they behaved as if he were a short, branchless tree, devoid of all sensibility save of a passive vegetative kind.

He was not, however, so paralysed with terror that he couldn't stagger to the trunk of the nearest spruce-fir; from which vantage-point, and clinging to this friendly tree with both his arms, he recovered a sufficient amount of "cleverness" to begin to take careful and detailed note of this whole amazing event. Amazing it certainly was: so much so that even the tree he was so desperately clutching, with some childish idea of taking refuge from the enemies of the gods with the daughters of the earth, displayed an unmistakable sign of being troubled in its quietude; for it exuded such a large drop of sticky tar that it tickled a nerve in the boy's smooth cheek. But in spite of his trembling legs and the tickling in his cheek he didn't fail to notice that the whole being of this pursuing Fury, whom he later discovered to be Allekto, "the never-ending", was so lost, diffused, absorbed, mania-mazed and blood-crazed, in its mad punishment-lust that though at this moment she was flying, the wings she flew with were feathered with the smoke of burning carrion, while from her mouth there issued, along with a stream of poisonous saliva, such a horrible alternation of bellowing and barking and such an appalling mixture of the stench of decomposition with the stench of excremental filth that the boy, though his stomach was empty, was unable to resist the motion of vomiting; and no! never for one moment did he fail to notice that everything about her had simply become one single rushing wind of all-devouring, all-consuming vengeance.

The creature whom Allekto was half-carrying through the air with her was also a female Being, and although it was not till later that Nisos learnt that she must have been Euryale or a daughter of "the wide sea", and in fact that she was a progeny of the sea monster Keto himself, he already knew, from her tusks like those of a wild pig, and her claws of brass, and the serpents that were a living portion of her flesh and blood, and above all from that unspeakable and utterly indescribable look in her eyes that made it impossible for any other living child of the earth or of the heavens to face her glance without at least the risk of being frozen into stone with sheer terror, that she was one of the Gorgons, an immortal sister of the mortal Medusa.

While absorbed in his contemplation of these two monsters, who were now hovering round and round the Lykophos-Mound, Nisos had not yet noticed the most important person of all in this cosmic-comic burlesque show, namely the Being whom these two monsters were preparing to attack. She, he found out later, was none other than Atropos, the smallest, but at the same time the wisest and the oldest, of the three Fates, or the "Moirai", those who can, when so they wish, decide the Destiny of every man and every woman born into the world.

Young Nisos Naubolides must have had something in him of the spirit of Odysseus, though, in place of being related to the king, his father Krateros and his brother Agelaos were the only living rivals of the old hero as claimants for the kingship. But the boy certainly displayed something beyond his boasted "cleverness" when, in order to find out what really was the object of this mad attack by the Erinys and the Gorgon, he made a run to another small fir-tree-trunk and clung tightly to it.

Yes! There she was, Atropos herself, the unturning, unbending, unwavering, unrelenting, implacable Decider of mortal destinies! As Nisos saw her, *she saw him,* and for an incredible moment this "clever" boy who had just made up his mind to be the prophet to the strong, looked into the eyes of Fate, into the eyes of her who could decide the Destiny of any man and any woman born into this world. Yes, they looked each other full in the face.

Atropos was under a spruce-fir just as Nisos was; but she was seated beneath hers, while he was clinging to his. As he looked at her now Nisos realized that the flesh and blood of which she was made was neither the normal flesh and blood of mortals nor what he had always been taught to believe was the immortal flesh of the gods with its veins full of ichor, that divine liquid more like the sap of imperishable vegetation than the raw red stomach-turning juice that mortals call blood.

No, the boy realized as he gazed at her that the mystery of her being was far deeper than anything he had been taught to attribute to her or to her sisters. In fact the aura that hovered round her and the spirit that emanated from her were so transporting to him that the frightful noise kept up above his head by the barking and bellowing of the Fury and the still more terrifying sound, resembling a series of viscous and glutinous thunder-claps following one another like a procession of sea-blown bubbles and finally bursting as they broke into the air, made by the Gorgon, became no more than hens cackling in a yard.

Yes, the material out of which Atropos was made was clearly as different from the ichor-nourished substance of the Olympians as it was from the horn-like material of the bodies of the Erinys and Gorgon. Nor was it made of that vaporous stuff, only a little thicker than mist or spray such as composed those phantom-like forms who eternally harangued each other in Arima. No; the truth is that the longer Nisos Naubolides looked into the eyes of Fate and the longer Fate looked into the eyes of Nisos Naubolides the more clearly did the latter realize that the imperishable frame of Atropos, this “one who could not be turned”, was made of a substance drawn from a level of existence outside both time and space, though cunningly adapted to play its part in each of them.

But the boy proved how “clever” he was by imbibing like an inexhaustible draught of timeless experience much more at that moment than the mere physical nature of the oldest of the Fates; for there came over him in a trance that was more than a trance the surprising knowledge — and this, though again and again he blundered hopelessly in trying to describe it in words, was really with him to the day of his death — that Atropos helps us in the creation of our individual fate by an infinitely long series of what some would call nothing but blind, stupid, dull, dreamy, moon-struck "brown studies", many of which take place inside the walls of houses, and others when we are moving about on our ordinary errands outside.

In these interruptions of our ordinary consciousness we fall into a brainless, idea-less moment of dull abstraction in which we cease to think of anything in particular but just stare blindly and dully at some particular physical object, no matter what, that happens to be there at the moment. This object, in itself of no particular interest, and never selected for its real purpose is merely an object to stare at, lean upon, rest against and use as a trance-background, or brown-study foreground, or, if you like, like a shoal beneath a stranded consciousness, or a reef of brainless abstraction, wherein we simply escape for a moment from the trouble of being a conscious creature at all.

Nisos showed how born he was to be an interpreter if not a prophet by his complete acceptance — as from the trunk of *his* spruce-fir he faced the Mistress of Fate as she leaned against the trunk of *her* spruce-fir — of the revelation that our individual destiny is made up of an accumulation of brainless, uninspired, brown-study moments of abstraction wherein we cease to be organic living creatures and almost become inanimates, almost become things of wood and stone and clay and dust and earth, almost become what we were before we were intelligent or instinctive creatures: almost — but not quite!

For, as our young friend looked Atropos in the face, there was permitted to him what is permitted to few among us mortals during our lifetime, namely the realization of what actually happens to us when we fall, as we all do, into these day-dreams. At that moment, as Nisos Naubolides now knew well, all over the surface of the earth there were living creatures, many of them men, women, and children, many of them horses, cattle, lions, wolves, foxes, wild asses and tame pigs, sheep and goats, rats and mice, who were standing or crouching, lying or sitting in one of these brooding trances when dazed and dreaming, we are asleep and yet not asleep.

For Nisos at this moment almost all the inhabitants of the earth, at least such as were not included in his school-geography-books, were “blameless Ethiopians”; and what he conjured up at that instant over the entire face of the earth’s surface were millions of men no different from those he knew so well, no different from the king and the king’s son, no different from his own father, Krateros Naubolides, or from the old man, Damnos Geraios, or from his own familiar bosom-crony, Tis, the herdsman from the other end of Ithaca, all of whom, as they went about their affairs, fell now and again into these day dreams of fate where, asleep and yet not asleep, they created without knowing it their future destiny.

And as he looked into the eyes of Atropos he seemed to become the blood-brother, the “Kasi”, or school-camerado, of all these day-dreamers, till their dream was his dream, and without any “pomposizing,” or processioning in the manner of Hermes, he became aware that with this whole great multitude, including not only his fellow-men but all creatures upon the earth, he was, without knowing it, living a double life, in fact two quite separate lives, one in this world and one in some other world.

“Why it’s just as if,” he said to himself, “I was in one of those dreams when I *know* I’m dreaming, and *could,* if I wanted to, wake up, quite naturally, easily, and without any particular effort, rather than go on dreaming.”

He was beginning to feel almost reassured, when suddenly he received an extremely unpleasant and thoroughly disconcerting shock. He beheld those two hovering Horrors make a downward swoop towards the Spruce-Fir against which Atropos was leaning. It was a shock that gave him a very disagreeable sensation, a sensation as if his heart-beats, his pulses, his quick-drawn breaths had been pounded into one single blood-dripping welter, and that this welter of automatic physical functionings might at any moment absorb the attention of his whole conscious being.

"What on earth can be going on in her head," he thought, "to give me such a feeling?" And then without warning, and still under the power of her eyes his entire mind became concentrated upon the old Odysseus. "I'm not going to endure," he thought, "no! not one day longer, this wretched plot that father and Agelaos and the rest of them are working up against the old man. Arsinöe's with them of course. That's only natural since she's a Trojan. But none of the rest of us are Trojans! What's come into us, what's come over us, that we're so against the old man?"

The unpleasant sensation he had just been through of feeling as if the beating of his heart, the flicker of his eyelids, the throb of his pulses, the breath of his lungs, had got mixed together in one raw palpitating bubble of blood-streaked eruption, now began, as Nisos disentangled himself from this reeking blood-sweating mass, to take its due proportion in his mind as he connected it with the drowsy passivity of his body, and not only of *his* body, but of all the bodies of all the human and sub-human creatures as they pause in their work or in their play, in their hunting or in their fighting, to forget themselves in day-dreams and trances.

And it was then that Nisos realized that not only heroes and kings and prophets and soothsayers but all living things are subject to an unseen, unfelt, unrecognized fate, and that it is this fate whose current flows, above or below, it matters not which, the heart-beats and pulse-beats of the lives of us all.

And the boy finally realized that there are points in our lives that we ourselves think of as turning points, but which, under the eyes of Atropos, the one with whom is no turning, are in reality only the fulfilment of our inherent destiny.

The boy had hardly reached this conclusion when the threatened attack began. The Erinys and the Gorgon descended with a sickening stench from their foul throats, with a horrible hissing from their bosom serpents, with an excremental vapour from their festering flesh and putrid scales, and with a screaming and a barking that silenced every bird and every wind.

It had nothing to do with the eyes of Atropos, for they had left him perforce — the instinctive impulse with which the boy now flung himself into the midst of that terrible struggle. The final issue may not have been in doubt; but Nisos was too young, and, just then too wild with desperate courage and too dazed by supernatural shocks to think of anything but his physical contact with that pair of Horrors and with their serpents and their stench and the sounds they made and with their appalling strength.

One comfort he had as he fought on, gasping and sweating, to free that oldest of all the beneficent powers in the world from those two demons, and that was nothing less than her own faint though very clear voice, encouraging him.

Another comfort he had was the uninterrupted humming of small insects round the Lykophos-Mound. These little creatures seemed quite oblivious of what was going on. Up and down across the surface of the rock they flew, dodging one another with quivering antennae and hovering wings; while first one, and then another, snatched a sip of Nectar from between petals of flowers so delicate that from their disturbed rims rose no sounds audible to human ears; though to lesser insects no doubt they sounded with the rain-drop clarity of tiny bells.

But what gave the boy a strength beyond his years was not only the fact that the oldest of all the goddesses was calling upon him to aid her, but that, although her voice was as faint as the remote sound of the sea-wind in a sea-shell, it was a voice with the most far-reaching echo he had ever heard.

For the echo of the voice of Atropos was no ordinary echo. It was a special and peculiar one, and it responded to every syllable that the old creature uttered; for through the substances of all the material elements of which the Island of Ithaca was composed this small faint echo of the oldest of the Fates could pass. Through substances that seemed bent on resisting its passing this echo easily and naturally passed. The old Fate’s voice went forth first; and then the echo followed it like a faithful disciple doing the will of its master. Passing through everything that resisted them they went on; till they reached the yawning void where all echoes cease.

And the echo of the voice of Atropos had the peculiarity of entering into all the substances that carried it forward, as well as using them to help it on its way towards the ultimate void. The echo entered now into the fluttering insects who were sucking the Nectar from those tiny flowers. It entered into the burning sun above those three immortals and above this one mortal just as it entered into the heart of the Lykophos-Mound.

The curious thing was that the boy accompanied his final terrific effort with his human hands and feet against the two monsters by a low-murmured, very rapidly enunciated, rational argument, defending his own and his mother’s friendly attitude towards the old king of Ithaca compared with the hostile one of his father Krateros and his brother Agelaos.

It was indeed only when he reached the culmination of this rapidly murmured, rational, and almost legal argument, with which he was punctuating, so to speak, his violent physical struggles, that he suddenly discovered that the battle had been won and that the Fury and the Gorgon had vanished. In his relief at this consummation, just when the throes of the struggle had become more than he could bear, the boy lost consciousness.

When he recovered he found that Atropos also was gone and that it required so much effort to leave the Lykophos-Mound and to drag himself up the rest of the hill that all that had passed grew steadily more blurred and more indistinct. One thing alone limned itself clearly on his mind, like a reflected image in water amid a crowd of globular bubbles, and that was some reference made, either by himself or by the oldest of the Fates, to a certain woven stuff.

This stuff he kept visualizing; but the shock to his nerves of what he had been through had made him completely forget its name. He remembered that the whole matter of this stuff had to do with some difficulty in procuring it and some difficulty with regard to its fabrication. He could see its colour. He could sense the feel of its substance, but its name and its use, though both of these had been familiar to him from his infancy, he had completely forgotten.

The shock he had received from the sight of those two monstrous creatures had left a queer blackness, a gaping, yawning, bleeding chasm in the compact body of his natural and orderly memories.

“I am myself,” he kept repeating as he climbed the hill. “Nisos is Nisos; and Nisos is clever; and Nisos is going to be the prophet of those who are strong and healthy but who have been hit in some way — hit as I am now! — and who need a prophet rather different from former prophets.”

And then in a flash it all came back to him and the gap in his memory was filled. “Othonia” was the word; and sail-cloth was the stuff. Atropos had told him — so he had had it from the Mouth of Necessity Itself — that

Zeus, alone on the summit of Mount Gargaros, deprived of his thunder-bolts and separated from Hera his Queen, had decided to unite all the will-power and wisdom he possessed with the will-power and wisdom possessed by Themis, the goddess of what was orderly and seemly, and with whatever Atropos herself, the oldest of the Fates, she who *was* Fate Itself, decided might be for the best.

And what was "for the best", here and now in Ithaca, was that Odysseus their lord and king should hoist sail again and depart for the Isles of the Blessed whither Menelaos, the brother of Agamemnon, had already sailed.

So *that* was it! And the little black spot in his rattled brain was no more than "othonia", a rag of sail-cloth, a woven wisp of crumpled weed, which had been completely obliterated, swept forth, cast away, blotted out from his terrestrial brain by the stench of those loathsome immortals! Othonia! Othonia! Othonia! Sails! Sails! Sails! *Sails* for whatever ship Odysseus can build, Sails for whatever crew Odysseus can find, to carry him on his last voyage across the sea!

It was in this first blush of his relief at the recovery of his memory that Nisos Naubolides suddenly felt himself seized by the wrist. He had been so absorbed in his thoughts that he had not noticed the man approaching him; but there at his side was the mysterious Priest of Orpheus. *"COME!"* was all the man said.

Nisos, who felt that if he could only avoid looking at the fellow's face he could cope with him perfectly, tried to pull his arm away. But this he found he couldn't do. And how queer it was that he couldn't look at him! Only an hour ago he had looked into the face of Euryale, the Gorgon, without being turned to stone. In the eyes of Fate Itself he had been finding comfort; but not with a secretive, intrusive wretch who wasn't even a priest of Dionysus, or of Demeter, or of Persephone or of the authentic Mysteries of Eleusis, but only of these newfangled, sanctimonious, priest-invented, fabulous Mysteries, of an Orpheus who himself was more of a fantastic poet than a hero or demigod, he felt entirely paralysed.

So here was he, Nisos Naubolides, the favoured one of the oldest of the Fates, one who was fated to use his cleverness, when he became a man, to grand prophetic effect, here was he, for some mad, mystical, demoniac reason, unable even to glance at the face of this crafty intruder! “Well,” the boy said to himself, “I know I heard old Damnos Geraios, Leipephile’s grand-dad, tell mother once that there were certain papyri which absorb certain pigments and others that cannot absorb them. So I suppose my particular kind of ‘cleverness’, though it may have Fate Itself on its side, would be entirely wasted on this man.”

By this time the man in question had conducted him to a sinister-looking square building, “*Go in there and learn reverence!*” was all he said as he pushed him in and barred the door behind him.

Nisos was so relieved at being liberated from the man’s touch, and from the nearness of a face he felt he couldn’t bring himself even to glance at, that the first thing he did was to clap his hands. “Well!” he said to himself, “as long as I don’t have *that* filthy sod hanging around, I don’t care what happens!”

What had happened was indeed a curious experience for a young prince of the House of Naubolides. He found himself enclosed in an extremely small and absolutely square cell that was nakedly bare from the centre of its ceiling to the centre of its floor. Ceiling, walls, floor, were all of the same stone and this stone was of a most unusual colour. He tried in vain to think of any object he knew that was of this peculiar colour. The nearest he could get to it was a thunder-cloud he had once seen when he was very little reflected in a muddle of rain-water near the cow-sheds of his home.

He stood on one leg for a second which was a custom of his when dumbfounded. But he soon brought his foot down again and remained with his heels together and his eyes fixed on things far beyond the queer-coloured walls that surrounded him.

The point he was considering now was simply this. Why should his natural awe and pious dread in the presence of the oldest of the Fates have produced in him no shrinking at all but on the contrary an indignant protectiveness and an unbounded respect, while the mere touch of this Priest of Orpheus, not to speak of the appalling disgust roused by the thought of seeing his face, made him shiver all over? Without having to separate either of his heels again, remove either of his feet from that weirdly coloured stone floor, Nisos decided that what really made the difference was that Atropos, like the Goddess Athene, had been well known to him from babyhood. His cradle so to speak had been rocked to the rhythm of the Three Fates and to the Rhythm of Athene's name. He didn't put it to himself in those exact words; but that was the substance of what he now thought.

But there was more in it than that. There was something else that was much harder to put into words, whether only to clear it up for himself, or to explain it, if he had to explain it later, to his mother. The oldest of the Fates was in reality much more like himself than this terrible priest of *none knew what.* She fought for her friends as he did. She felt pity for that poor old Zeus left lonely on the peak of Gargaros without his thunder-bolts, just as, if he ever thought of the All-Father at all, he would have felt pity himself.

And the same with Pallas Athene. She was one for telling huge palpable lies. And he had to do that himself. *That* was necessary in life's ups and downs. He had to do it every day! When he became the Prophet of the strong and healthy who have been hurt and hit in some way, he would show them the importance of being clever! But when this Priest talked of reverence it was clear he meant something quite different from proper piety.

Did these "Orphic Mysteries" which this weird new kind of Priest celebrated mean some blasphemous and horrible change in the proper manner of worship? Once again Nisos lifted up his right foot and stood on one leg thinking hard, like a young sand-piper pretending to be a heron.

"This must be," he said to himself, "one of those moments in the life of a clever prophet when he has to think about thinking. What the teachers at School say is always: 'Think, Nisos! Think, Kasi! Think, Agelaos!' But if you're going to be a prophet — you've got to do more than think. Any fool can think. You've got to think about thinking."

Finding however that the position in which a person thinks about thinking has an appreciable effect on his thought Nisos returned his right foot to that queerly-coloured floor with some violence. "We can't think properly about thinking," he thought, "without bringing in ourselves. Atropos has to be Fate unswerving or she cannot think. Athene has to be the natural daughter of Zeus' brain or *she* cannot think. Was this new kind of priest not thinking of himself at all but, busy in the establishment of some Secret Society, or Holy Cause, or Community Conspiracy, compared with whose dark and inhuman and impersonal purpose, he himself, the man Enorches, was as nothing?

"When I think," the embryo prophet now told himself, "I think like Athene and like Atropos and like the old Odysseus, from myself outwards. But I have a revolting suspicion that, when this horrible Orpheus-man thinks, he thinks towards himself inwards."

It may have been partly due to the queerly-coloured stone-work of this square cell, but our young friend's mind at this point turned, as if automatically, to an interior vision of those two letters carved upon the oldest Pillar in the Porch of the Palace. He felt, as he thought of those letters, as if they were engraved upon the substance of his own soul.

"From now on," he told himself, "I shall dodge, avoid, and undermine in every way I possibly can, these infernal 'Mysteries of Orpheus'." Having decided this point the youthful challenger looked round him more carefully than he had done before. Yes, this chamber into which that man had thrust him was certainly a naked one! It was as if he were imprisoned inside a hard, square, semi-precious stone: a stone that, *with him inside,* might have been worn by some tremendous titanic giant, a giant as big as Atlas who was reported to hold up the sky.

The boy had been thinking too hard, thinking with a cleverness that had become a strain. His nerves now began to behave as if they might in a little while make the sound of *popping*, after the manner of certain seed-pods. In pure nervousness he began to do funny things. He went up to the wall directly under a little square hole, that let in all the light the place had, and began to scrabble at it with his nails; at nothing in particular, just at the wall.

But this silliness was brought to an end by his wondering if it were possible that there might be — but this was probably only a little less silly — any scratches on these walls that resembled that "U" and that "H" on the base of the Pillar in the Palace-Porch. "Apparently," he thought, as he looked carefully about him, "to escape in soul from a Priest of Orpheus is easier than to escape in body!"

But he set himself the task of examining his prison in the manner in which he fancied his old friend, Myos the fly, would have examined it if *he* had been the one to show scant reverence to Orpheus. In his nervous excitement Nisos almost laughed aloud when he imagined Pyraust, the moth-girl, asking Myos to tell her who Orpheus was, and the fly describing him to the moth as the first original spider.

But he now meticulously examined every one of these four walls dutifully thanking as he did so the sky-god Ouranos, Zeus' grandfather, for the light that came from a small half-a-foot-square window near the top of one of them. He was growing nervous again now. With his birthday in sight, for he would be seventeen in a few days, he felt he must hurry up with his mental development if he were to be recognized by the whole Island as the Prophet to the strong by the time his brother, duly married to Leipephile Pheresides, had inherited their father's claim to be king in succession to Odysseus or even — here he looked round in real apprehension now; for where, in the name of Zeus, was the door through which he'd been thrust into this place? — even *instead of* Odysseus!

"Oh popoi!" he groaned. "Was there ever such a fool as I am? Of course it's to stop Odysseus from hoisting sail like a real king and to keep him petering out in his palace till he dies of idleness, or what Mummy calls 'malakia' or some such word, that Dad and Agelaos have been hiding up for years all the 'othonia' or sail-cloth they can get hold of!

"If ever," Nisos thought, "there has been a fool in Ithaca I am that fool!" But he had no sooner "given himself to the crows", as the island saying had it, as the greatest fool among all the "kasis" or class-mates of his age from coast to coast, than he suddenly become certain he *had* caught sight of the Pillar's "U" and "H".

Madly he rushed towards those scratches and pressed against them with both his bare hands. By Zeus, the Pillar *had* saved him! A great stone in the wall moved outwards, fell silently on a bed of moss outside, and lay there motionless. In the sun that stone took to itself a completely different colour from the one that had characterized it within those walls.

It struck the boy, as he jumped upon it, and jumped away from it, and ran off free, that that heavy stone looked as if it were drinking in, in that one second, enough air and sun to give it a new colour for a thousand years!

CHAPTER IV

A FEW DAYS after the momentous encounter between the oldest but far the most powerful of the Three Fates and the boy Nisos who had now reached the age of seventeen, the hero Odysseus awoke in the grey “wolf-light” of the pre-dawn, and, with nothing on but his blanket, his sandals, and his broad ox-hide belt, scrambled down the ladder and shuffled across the intervening space to the Dryad’s hollow tree.

It must be confessed that on this occasion the old king was the awakener of the old Dryad, and not the other way round. It gave Odysseus indeed something of a shock when, in that pallid “wolf-light”, with one hand on the soft-crumbling edge of the phantom-grey orifice, he peeped down upon the crumpled heap of faded substances, patches of linen, pieces of cloth, bits of bone, fragments of withered flesh, tangled twists of lichen-coloured female hair, in fact all the accessories and visible appendages of what might well have been an aged human female’s bed, including the old lady herself reposing within it.

The patches of linen and cloth were so pitiably the kind of objects that a wandering female beggar would have picked up in her capricious travels that Odysseus drew back with that sort of instinctive reluctance to disconcert a sleeping female that any male householder might feel who finds such an one slumbering in one of his out-houses.

But, along with this feeling, another and a very different one came over him as once more he thrust his bowsprit beard and his massive almost bald skull over the edge of that crumbling orifice.

This was a much more intimate and personal feeling, though sex and sex-shyness entered into it. It was indeed the sort of self-restrained courtesy on the relations between the sexes such as Odysseus had learnt as a child from his mother, Anticleia, the sophisticated daughter of the crafty and mischievously magnanimous Autolycus. In an island-palace such as theirs, crowded with alien visitors from half the coasts of Hellas, some kind of calculated refinement in ordinary personal contact was essential; and it was the dignified reserve of such well-brought-up behaviour that the old man felt he had outraged by peering down upon this sleeping old woman, as she lay half-naked amid her long-accumulated bits of human finery like some moribund forest-fungus that had just managed to survive the winter.

"I must wake the old creature somehow," he thought, "for if I'm to carry through this touchy business of appealing to the people in open 'agora' I *must* find out more about these strangers from Thebes who've got the daughter of Teiresias in their keeping, and the Dryad is the only one who can help me."

He turned his pointed beard to the West without getting any inspiration. Then he turned it to the East and despatched across all the forests and mountains and seas and swamps and deserts that separated him from the land of the blameless Ethopians what he felt to be the swiftest kind of prayer. "What actually is it that I have done," he asked himself, "to vex her as much as this?" And he drew a sigh that really came without any pretence from the very bottom of his being, "I've prayed to her as if my prayer were a wave, a wave that *must* bring her back. Yes, I've sent a wave to the Eastern edge of the world! It's a wave of the sea I've sent; only it's not merely making a furrow of sea-water; it's making a furrow of earth-mould, a furrow of broken branches, a furrow through all the forests of the Mainland till the Mainland itself reaches the edge of the earth!"

The old man’s pointed beard seemed to follow his thought as if it possessed the power of transforming itself into the wave its owner was imagining. “But what sort of thing is the edge of the earth,” Odysseus wondered; “and do the blameless Ethiopians peep over that edge as I peeped just now at the sleep of the Dryad?”

As he pondered on this, he saw in his mind a terrific chasm of absolute darkness along the fringe of which hung suspended gigantic smoke-blackened shapeless rocks, beneath which there was nothing but a hollow bottomless abyss. And then it seemed to the king, as he imagined himself lying on his stomach on one of these blackened rocks and staring down into the abyss, that he saw the sun coming up out of that unspeakable gulf.

“Do the blameless Ethiopians,” he wondered, “ever fall over that frightful edge?” He imagined the great goddess who was his friend, standing there in all her divine beauty, with the terrible Aegis-shield on her arm, its magic tassels dark with the darkness of the gulf of Erebos, while from her breastplate glared forth upon all who dared approach her the dreadful head of Medusa, the dead Gorgon, with the still living hair of its twining serpents feeding on the obscure mystery of its human fate.

Standing motionless the old man gazed for a long moment over that imaginary world’s edge. “She would be with me if she could,” he murmured aloud; and then shrugged his shoulders. “The gods with me or the gods against me,” he thought, “I shall do what I shall do; and what will come of it will be what will come of it!”

He then swung round but instead of leaning against the uneven edge of crumbling and rotten wood and peering down at the sleeping old creature as he had done at first, he now proceeded to call upon her by name; thus giving her an opportunity to arrange her appearance a little before presenting herself. There was enough light to catch her expression fully and clearly when, after a couple of minutes delay, she appeared at the entrance to her hollow tree.

"What — is — it?" she groaned hoarsely. "Has Krateros Naubolides attacked the Palace?"

The old king smiled under cover of his beard. "Not yet, my friend, not *quite* yet. But no doubt if the Palace doesn't take precautions and take them quickly too he *will* attack us before we know where we are. And *that,* my dear old friend, is precisely why I have come to disturb you so early. I feel ashamed of myself for breaking up your dream but there's something I'm very anxious to know, and you are the only mortal or immortal, the only Nymph of land or sea, who can help me to attain this knowledge."

Never in all his days had the crafty old wanderer seen such a look of unmitigated beatitude as rushed into the haggard face of Dryad! "O my dear child!" she cried, "I never thought the Olympians would give me a chance to" — Here the ancient creature had to struggle grimly with a rush of up-surging sobs— "to help the son of Laertes at a real crisis in his life. And I never would have presumed to push myself forward, whatever knowledge I might happen to have, without some sign, some invitation, some request, at least some permission, some opportunity, some door ajar. But now that you yourself have spoken, my dear lord, and have as the Persians say, stretched out your sceptre towards me, I can tell you all I know."

"Tell me, old friend, tell me quick; so that I can act at once. It has become fatally clear to me at last, though it took many days to make me believe it, that my wise goddess and ever-faithful protectress must have hurried away in anger and contempt from our wretched and ignoble quarrels and from this 'complicated world-crisis' as our more pompous contemporaries will love to call it, though of course, as you and I know well, if every battle between Gods and Titans is a 'world-crisis' our poor old world has never been free from one. Yes, it is natural enough that she should do what our great Olympians have always done at a crisis, gone off; gone off to recover her faith in the natural piety of humanity by enjoying for a while the innocent worship of these guileless races. And so, my dear friend, I'll put to you without further delay, the question I should have implored our great Goddess to answer. It is this.

"I have been assured by Eurycleia that the maiden Eione who has lately come to serve in our household, and who is, she herself declared, when I found her in the Cave of the Naiads, a sister of our excellent herdsman Tis, has revealed in recent conversations the discovery of an extremely important secret.

"It was to reveal this discovery to her faithful brother Tis that Eione came here from the opposite end of Ithaca. Eurycleia indeed assures me that Moros, who is Eione's grandfather and also the grandfather of our faithful Tis, has discovered that there is a formidable pair of foreigners, calling themselves Zenios and Okyrhöe, who have occupied for several years — nobody seems to know exactly for how long — a lonely and desolate farmhouse on the extreme sea-verge of a rocky headland that has been deserted for generations and left to fall into ruin. There are springs of fresh water in that lonely place, there are remains of several walls and even the remnants of a few wooden fences but the ground that was once protected by these things has been so blighted by sea-winds that it is doubtful if any grain would grow there now; and, if it did, it is certain its chance of its surviving the depredations of beasts and birds would be small.

"But grand-dad Moros swore to Eione — you're listening to me, aren't you, old friend? — that this queer foreign couple came here from Thebes after the death of Cadmus and that they brought with them enough treasure to keep them for a hundred years. And grand-dad Moros declares further that he has spoken with both Zenios and Okyrhöe and has learnt from them that they have under their protection in their half-ruined dwelling a young maiden who is the living daughter of the great prophet Teiresias.

"Eione's grand-dad swears he has been told by this couple, who have several times welcomed him to a lavish meal in their lonely refuge, whose local name is Ornax, that this young daughter of Teiresias, who has inherited from her father a startling amount of his prophetic inspiration, declares that if Odysseus does not sail from Ithaca this Spring on his last voyage he will die miserably in his bed, yes! in his bed in his ancient palace, of an ignoble disease flung upon him out of the deep sea by his deadly enemy Poseidon. Unlike other youthful prophets this young girl has never once contradicted, never once altered by a single breath, this terrible prediction. Her protectors Zenios and Okyrhöe swore to old Moros again and again, so Eione tells Eurycleia, that if ever Teiresias' daughter whose name, it seems is Pontopereia, came here, with this prophecy of hers, she would inevitably convince us all of its truth."

The aged Dryad gave two or three jerky hops forward till she stood on a heap of last year's dead oak-leaves. Here she became more erect than Odysseus had ever seen her; and raising her withered arms above her head she began clasping and unclasping her gnarled fingers tightly round the back of her neck.

"O my child, my child," she murmured. "Say the words, only say the words, and I will help you to the limit of my power and — and — —" Here the old lady broke off, under the strength of her emotion. " —— and beyond the limit!" she added in a gasping whisper.

"You mean, my dear friend," said Odysseus quietly, "that by the laws of decency and order that the world owes to Themis and to which Zeus himself bows, it would be improper for you, a mortal Nymph, to help me, a mortal man, before I had prayed and implored you to do so?"

The Dryad nodded furiously. "And we are further," he went on, "since both of us are doomed to die, we are further obligated by the ineluctable courtesies of the cosmos to accept whatever comes of such an appeal for help made by a mortal man to a mortal Nymph? Isn't that so, old friend?"

And once more the Dryad nodded; but this time resignedly rather than passionately.

"Well then, old sweetheart," the crafty hero concluded, "I do most earnestly beg your help in this difficult situation, but unluckily" — and it would have been clear enough to Penelope, had it been she who was just then listening to the old king, that this heroic courtesy in face of the unregulated chaos of life was extremely unpalatable to the old creature to whom it was offered— "it looks to me as if, since I am a man who cannot escape death, by reason of my association with the body of my mother, and since you are not one of these immortal nymphs of fountain and grove and cave and river but like myself are doomed to old age, it seems that even working together we shall find it no easy task to get out of this appalling dilemma: but easy or hard, I *will* lay it before you, old friend, exactly as it is."

He made a sign with his hand towards a large mossy stone a few paces to the North of her decayed and crumbling tree-trunk; and here they both sat down. "I understand from Eurycleia," he went on, "and she of course gets all her knowledge of the tricks of our enemies from" — but catching a look on his companion's face that he knew only too well, Odysseus interrupted his appeal for help and his tale of difficulties by reminding the Dryad that the aged Eurycleia was being assisted in the palace by the boy Nisos who was the younger son of Krateros Naubolides, the chief enemy of their

House, as well as by the simple-minded maiden Leipephile who was betrothed to Krateros' elder son.

"You see, old friend, we over-praised warriors of the last war before the last, are reduced, when our hoards of golden loot are exhausted, to living upon our native acres with very scanty attendants and upon pretty meagre fare, and if among these attendants there are some like the girl Arsinöe, who are captives of our bow and our spear, most of them are no different from the ordinary retainers of any well-do-do landowner."

What he had seen in his old friend's face that led him into reminding her of all this was a dark-scaled shadow of coiling jealousy that at the mention of Eurycleia's name rose like the crest of a venomous tree-toad into the Dryad's eyes.

But he hurried on now, speaking much faster, and clearly hoping by the mere rush of his words to drive back this moribund demon into its hiding-place amid the rotting roots of ancient hate.

"What I've decided to do now, my friend, is what I've been planning in the marrow of my bones for many and many a day; yes! you can guess what I mean. I've decided to call such an assembly of the men of Ithaca as there has not been for twenty years! To this assembly held in the agora, just as was the one about which they've so often told me when Telemachos made his great speech — and it's ironical to think how absolutely impossible it is even to imagine his making a speech like that today — I've decided to appeal in person on behalf of my desire to hoist sail for the last time. I've decided to implore the people to help me finish the ship I've begun in the Cave of the Naiads. I've decided to implore them to furnish me with all the sail-cloth I need.

"And with this sail-cloth I shall hoist upon a mighty mast such a sail as has never been seen before upon any sea."

They were seated so close to each other on that mossy stone that each of them was conscious of the smell of the other’s skin. The skin of Odysseus smelt in the nostrils of the old Dryad like a particular kind of sea-weed she was always especially anxious to keep from encroaching upon one of her favourite rock-pools where an uncultivated tract of land to the north of her dying oak-tree bordered on the sea.

The skin of the Dryad on the contrary smelt in the nostrils of the old king like an especially rare and fragrant fungus that grew out of the bark of the most ancient stumps of long dead trees.

Neither of the two old friends suffered the least distress from this vivid consciousness of the smell of the other’s skin. In fact a very curious phenomenon was the result of this mutual awareness, a sensuous result and a psychic result, and a result which gave each of them a peculiar pleasure. The fact is that from now on they would both enjoy summoning back at will, from, below their most sacred and secret shrines of intimately erotic “pot-pourri”, the separate smells of their separate skins fused together in one delicately united smell which was neither that of sea-weed nor of fungus but rather of those divine rock-roses of the land of the Graiai, the land that is called Kisthene, and that lies beyond Okeanos.

It was the Dryad and not the King who was the first to break the enchantment that had begun to wrap these two old friends round and about in its fatal folds as if with the invisible mantle of Urania, the heavenly Muse. “And now tell me, child of Laertes, what it is that in my crumbling corruption and my deciduous decomposition, I can do to help you fulfil your daring plan? Tell me, tell me, only tell me; and you’ll soon see what an old Nymph, even if she is destined unlike the Naiads and the Nereids, to perish utterly, can do to help you!”

"Well, it is like this, old friend," and the cunning Wanderer gave her one swift sidelong glance out of his deep-sunken, glaucous-green, totally unreliable, wholly unconquerable eyes, and then, as he went on speaking, fixed his gaze on a small group of trees that was, as he well knew by this time, directly between the rock where they now sat and the little walled capitol-city of the island, "though it has been, of course, for years and even centuries, the custom with us for none but warriors, or at least none but grown-up males, to address the people's assembly in the 'agora', this custom has of late grown less strict.

"Indeed in our life-time, as you, old friend, will remember, these assemblies of our traditional city-life have not only been open to all our people, but have been subjected to all manner of natural and even domestic interruptions. Now do you catch, my dear, what I am driving at? What I want to do is to get hold of this daughter of Teiresias and have her brought here under the good influence of young Eione and my faithful Tis, not to speak of young Nisos, who naturally enough, as happens in most Hellenic families, takes the opposite side to that of his elder brother in our civil strife; I mean of course, in this case, in the struggle between our House of Laertes and their House of Naubolides. Once have her safely here on the scene and I am confident she will exert such an influence on our side that my opponents will be completely vanquished. I'm perfectly well aware of the almost imbecile stupidity of Krateros' eldest son, our young Nisos' brother and of the equally helpless imbecility of the daughter of Nosodea who is betrothed to him. Our danger does not lie with *them*; though the House of Naubolides as represented by these simple old-fashioned Princes has actually, as all our islanders know, older and better claims to sovereignty than has our House of Laertes.

“No! No! the danger lies in an entirely different direction. It lies in the machinations and infernal cunning of this Priest of Orpheus who, by reason of our instinctive Hellenic weakness for mysticism and the occult, can lead us astray in any devilish direction he likes. It was only by the purest accident and by the boy’s sudden remembrance of that signature of the son of Hephaistos on the Pillar in our corridor that young Nisos was saved the other day from Hades alone knows what fate at the hands of this bloody-minded priest.

“And so, my dear,” Odysseus concluded, “the great problem for me now is how I’m to get hold of this thrice-precious little prophetic maid, Pontopereia, and transport her here. I know this Ornax place, this lonely promontory by the sea. But what about this Zenios and Okyrhöe? Heaven knows who *they* may be! Probably they are Thebans who claim descent from Kadmos himself, and possess magic powers beyond anything we’ve ever heard of!

“Well, old friend, there is my appeal to you — clear and definite enough but most damnably difficult. However! I know what tree is the king of all trees, and I know what Nymph is the empress of all wildernesses, and since she rules by turning the wilderness into a garden — well, there we are!”

He turned his head away from the group of trees that led to the North and let his gaze rest on the Dryad at his side. Few old women in any forest have answered an old man’s questioning gaze with a more radiant look.

“I surely *can* give you advice in this matter, thou brave son of a brave father, and I’ll do so without delay! It is not of course by any wisdom of my own, that chance has given me my opportunity of jumping into your boat and of snatching thus boldly at the rudder. It is due entirely, as you can guess, to my goddess-friend Kleta, loveliest of the Graces.

"But listen, precious child of Laertes; listen and store away my words in the depths of your great bald skull! You know the place where our city-walls descend most steeply from the 'agora' to the harbour? And you know where there's a second pair of walls at that steepest place that lead down between the rocks in a wider bend, though they too finally arrive at the harbour, only by a more circuitous route?"

Odysseus, who was listening intently, gravely nodded. "People don't often nowadays go to the harbour by that roundabout way; for, though the shorter street is terribly steep, it's only in bad weather that it's really dangerous to man or beast. In fact so few people ever do go down to the harbour by the circular route of which I'm now speaking that there are places in it where those sweet-scented, bitter-tasting plants grow — your mother probably taught you their ancient name; but I only remember what Penelope used to call them when you first brought her here as your bride. Not a pretty name at all *she* used to call them!"

Again the king gravely nodded.

"Well, my child," went on the aged Dryad, "just at the point where this roundabout way leaves the straight one there is an unwalled road, narrower than a street, but more frequented than an ordinary mountain-track, which leads to the summit of that ridge of rocks which your mother always maintained the farmers up there called "Cuckoo-Throne" or "Kokkys-Thronax", but for which your father Laertes had a grander name that I've forgotten. But never mind the name! What I have to tell you now, my dear, is more important than the name of any ridge of rocks. The folk who dwell up here, when you get to the top, are almost all small farmers. Their houses, however, are large and look very comfortable from the outside.

"But you know that rocky ridge I'm talking about better than I do; so it's silly to go on describing it to you. Anyhow, among the farm-houses up there

— and part of this ridge must be nearly as high as Neritos — there's a farm-house called Agdos where lives in complete loneliness a middle-aged farm-labourer of the name of Zeuks. This Zeuks has, as you can imagine, been so laughed at and so teased because of the resemblance of his name to that of Zeus, the supreme Ruler of gods and men, that he has become extremely eccentric and will only plough and sow and dig ditches and plant roots and prune trees for those among the farmers up there who use his name respectfully and never laugh at him because of it.

"In all these matters of words and letters, Odysseus my dear, I am as ignorant as this poor Zeuks, but I have the intelligence to know that if a farmer wants to get work from a hired man who isn't a slave he's got to treat him with respect."

The winner of the arms of Achilles once more nodded in grave acquiescence; but in his heart he thought: "When I hoist sail again I shall need no tying to the mast to keep me from the Isle of the Sirens!"

"It was," continued the old Dryad, "because of his hatred of being laughed at, that Zeuks began to leave the island on short fishing excursions on board a small schooner called 'the Starling', and it was on these excursions, upon which he was entirely alone, that he enlarged, so to speak, the nature of his booty or loot and took to indulging in a little cautious piracy.

"For several years it was the prevailing idea among the farmers of Kokkys-Thronax that their whimsical neighbour Zeuks had discovered not only a particularly profitable sand-bank for fishing, but a particularly profitable market for his fish. The barns of Zeuks' solitary homestead seemed to grow, autumn by autumn, fuller of the well-salted meats most necessary for the nourishment of strong men, and, spring by spring, of the honeyed sweet-meats most savoured at the festivals by women and children.

“But now, listen carefully to me, thou son of my lord Laertes. On the high ridge up there for three successive nights a great mist came out of the sea. This was long before your marriage with Penelope and she knew no more about the thing than you do yourself. It was your mother who knew all; and it was your mother who told me all. When those three nights were over — and you must understand, Odysseus, that it was then the identical time of year that we have reached today — very strange stories began to spread far and wide over our island. It was rumoured that during the three days when the unusual sea-mist covered that high ridge this unaccountable farm-labourer Zeuks had actually succeeded in bringing across the sea from Crete or Naxos, — Naxos I *think* it was, but I’m completely ignorant of everything outside what I call my ‘garden’ and how it could have been that a crazy one like this farm-labourer who wouldn’t labour if you didn’t treat him like the son of a prince, could do what no hero has ever done I cannot explain — succeeded I say in bringing across the sea and to that very ridge above our harbour, a living pair of immortal, super-magical, demogorgonic horses, Pegasos, born of the blood of Medusa and born with wings, and Arion, born of Demeter by the semen of Poseidon, and born white as the whitest dawn but with a mane black as the blackest midnight.

“But why do you turn your head away, Odysseus? And why do you sigh with that weary, cynical, bitter sigh? Is the whole subject full of infinite weariness to your mind? Is it so riddled and perforated with what a realistic shepherd of the people like yourself probably regards as romantic rubbish?

“But I *will* stop, Odysseus dear, if you feel that anyone who takes seriously such crazy local rumours cannot possibly be a real practical help to you in bringing Pontopereia the daughter of Teiresias here to influence the decisions of our Assembly."

The hurt feelings in the old lady's face were so vivid, and evidently must have risen from such a deep level of her whole being, that Odysseus looked at her in amazement. Since Penelope's death his amorous propensities had been only aroused by his memories, and as these were almost entirely concerned with immortals, who by reason of having no blood in them except the liquid known as "ichor", which has such a distinct cousinship with chlorophyll, the eternal greenness in vegetation, the physical effects of emotion upon flesh and blood had rarely attracted his attention; and when he noticed them at all, for he was as self-centred as a diamond, it was with so little disturbance of his own emotions that they were less to him than rain-drops on his bowsprit beard.

"What on earth's the matter, old friend?" he enquired. "Of course I want your help, want it very much indeed, want it especially at this juncture when I've *got* to get hold of Teiresias' daughter but can't think of any way of doing it, except by crossing the island on my own feet and carrying the girl off, like a warm bundle over my shoulder!

"But you are a wise lady, a friend of my parents, and, I daresay, of my grand-parents too, and you know all that is rumoured from skin to skin, to say nothing of mouth to mouth, from this damned Ornax promontory to the top of this confounded 'Cuckoo-Throne' where the Agdos-place of your precious old Zeuks must be hiding those heavenly horses in his pig-sties till he can find somebody to buy them! Who but a wise girl like you, my dearest friend, could possibly have told me that there was a shy old farm-labourer, with a homestead named Agdos perched on the top of Kokkys-Thronax, or whatever it was mother called it, who had got the winged Pegasos and the black-maned Arion hidden in some creaky shed or ruined stick-house up there until he hears of a travelling merchant rich enough, and by the gods daring enough, to make him an offer? Aye! But isn't it more likely that Pegasos and Arion will hoof this poor old Zeuks into the sea, and carry their purchaser to the Moon to sell *him*, than that an imaginary Phoenician trader will offer to buy the winged offspring of the Gorgon and the black-maned by-blow of Poseidon's rape of the mother of us all?

"But listen, my dear," he went on; for with all his adamantine, mortised-and-tenoned, indurated, inveterate, homogeneous, impregnable, bowsprit-bearded egoism, the son of Laertes was born crudely kind and had acquired an almost supernatural discretion; and he could see that any off-hand sailorish jocularity which diminished the gravity of the startling facts the Dryad had disclosed was ill-suited to the tempo of the occasion. "It is clear that as in what you call your 'garden' you have worked at fulfilling the inscrutable intentions of our mother the earth, under whatever name she likes best to be invoked, so you have been permitted a most rare communion with every living creature, mortal or immortal, finned, furred, feathered, scaled, naked as a serpent, disembodied as a mist, such as ever has been, ever is, or ever could be associated with the surface of this rocky island.

"And when, as at this hour, in the presence of the most dangerous, crucial, important, and fatal conjunction of the Zodiacal Signs of my destiny upon earth, you my parents' oldest friend, you the world-famous Dryad of the oldest oak in Hellas, take upon yourself the piloting of my boat through the earth-waves of mould and sand and gravel and clay, the only offering I have wherewith to thank you, Kleta-Dryad, is the cry of gratitude in my heart: 'vox et praeterea nihil!' as Petraia the Midwife always says, in the language of their New Troy, about her twin-sister's Nymph in that Italian cave."

He was silent, his eyes fixed steadily upon her face, his ten fingers, with the intention no doubt, in true Odyssean style, of simulating calm, resisting the natural human tendency to clasp and unclasp themselves under the pressure of agitating and anxious thought, tugging at the fastenings of his broad belt, while he even went so far as to indulge in the motion of a long shiver.

Then he straightened himself. “Well!” he muttered: “I must have a good bath and a mighty meal and a lordly action of the bowels; and I must get hold of Nisos, and, if I can do it without scaring any of them, discuss with him and with Tis and Eione at what hour we’d better make our visit to Ornax; and whether, we’d better assume, and I fancy Eione will be our best advisor on *that* point, that these mysterious strangers, Zenios and Okyrhöe, have come to Ithaca from Thebes and belong to the House of Kadmos, and that they have been within their legal right according to our Hellenic tradition in possessing themselves of the person of Pontopereia, the daughter of Teiresias.

“But you are the only one, I swear to you, Kleta darling, who have given me the true clue to my fate at this supreme crisis in my turbulent life; add thus while the Sun, once more Helios Hyperion, freed forever from the yoke of Apollo, looks down upon me, and the Moon, once more the virgin Selene, freed forever from the yoke of Artemis, looks down upon me, as, in this stick-house of a stable for immortal horses, I carry on my haggling with Zeuks — not with Zeus on the top of Gargaros in Ida, but with Zeuks on the top of Kokkys-Thronax in Ithaca — what I shall have in my heart will be neither the tricks of Zenios of Ornax, nor the wiles of Zeuks of Agdos, but the wisdom of the Dryad whose garden was the cradle of Odysseus.”

With these words the crafty hero did what even his father had never done — if Laertes *was* his father rather than that “Father of Lies”, the great

Hermes himself — he flung his arms about the old creature's neck and kissed her with such dexterity that the protruding point of his bowsprit beard rested tenderly upon the curve of her left shoulder.

He never knew, nor did any of his household ever know, far less any of the city-dwellers between the walls, or any vineyard-owners outside the walls, what the old Dryad did when in silence he had released her, in silence had turned his back upon her, in silence had re-mounted the steps to his bedroom; but the scattered offscourings of dismembered vegetation, the sheddings from dead leaves, the tiny bits of dead sticks, the half-stripped feathers, the empty husks of grass-seed, the pale straw-heads of withered stalks, not to mention the almost invisible insects for whom these minute objects were as stately avenues of cyclopean ruins, in fact all the unconsidered and unrecorded things that in their infinite multitude made up her "garden", accepted the opinion of a small black slug who assured its neighbour, a still smaller beetle, that the gods had turned their Dryad, as they had once turned Niobe, the ancestress of the human race, into a fountain of tears.

But the sun mounted up, steadily and ever more steadily, into the heavens, until he reached a point when the phantom moon that floated opposite to his rising, seemed to be drifting so aimlessly in a sky which was incapable of doing justice to more than one great luminary at the same time, that she looked as if nothing could hold her back from sliding down in an utter dive of helplessness into whatever element of complete extinction awaited such as sank and sank and sank, till they reached the nadir of the universe.

None of the three women, however, who poured first cold, then tepid, then pleasantly warm water, over the king in his bath, had the faintest resemblance in her mood just then to the moon in her vanishing. They were all indeed, although each in her different manner, far too intensely interested in the problem with which Odysseus had just confronted them to think of anything else. This was the question as to what special treasure or treasures he and Nisos had better take with them to Kokkys-Thronax if they were to be in any sort of secure position in bargaining with this madman, Zeuks.

Bargain with the fellow it was clear they had to; and from what the Dryad had said it was also clear that he was likely to prove an extremely shrewd bargainer. It did cross the cunning old hero's mind that it might be possible to take a band of men up there, surround this homestead called Agdos, and carry off that immortal pair of horses by force; but the more he thought of such a violent and arbitrary way of going to work the less he liked it.

His one fixed idea, the one final purpose of all this planning and scheming was to hoist sail once more. What in every bone of his body, what in every pulse of his blood, what in every centre of his complicated nerves, he longed for was simply to sail again into the unknown. He couldn't explain this urge, even to himself. It was deeper than any ordinary desire or intention.

His old friend the Dryad could have explained it to him. It was an obsession, like the migratory passion in birds and fish and insects and even in the spawn of eels!

In his old age it had become the final impulse of his energy, of his sex, of his fight for life, of his deepest secretive struggle, of his struggle, not so much to obey a destiny imposed upon by fate, as to create his own destiny. All he wanted now was to hoist sail once more; and, when he had hoisted sail, *to sail*! It was not that he cared greatly *whither* he sailed, or to what end; but since he knew more about the coasts of the "blameless Ethiopians",

— for such was the name he had been brought up to use for the dwellers on *both extremities* of the earth — to the East than to the West, it must be to the "blameless Ethiopians" of the *West* that he would sail.

Yes, he would sail West. And if to touch the limits of the earth in that direction and to reach the "blameless Ethiopians" who dwelt at those limits, that is to say where the Sun, who could travel a thousand times faster than any other living thing, was wont to rise, after traversing, swifter than the wind, the lower regions beneath the earth, was his destiny he would fulfil it.

Odysseus was impelled all the more strongly to make the supreme voyage of his life a voyage towards the West, because, if these late wild rumours told the truth, the whole of the continent of Atlantis had been sunk to the bottom of the sea. From his childhood he had been hearing tales of this mysterious continent, and now to learn that it had been forever submerged, in fact that it existed no longer, made the sort of impression on his peculiar mind, a mind at once obstinately and implacably adventurous, and yet craftily empirical and practical, such as a high-spirited boy would receive who suddenly learnt that what he had been taught were stars floating in space were really tiny holes in the arch of a colossal dome; an impression of which the practical effect was to strengthen his decision that at all cost this ultimate voyage of his must be to the West.

"I shall sail," he told himself, "*over* the waves *under* which lies Atlantis!"

And it was extraordinarily exciting to the peculiar temperament of this insatiable adventurer to think of reaching some unknown archipelago of islands, on the Western side, that is to say the *further side,* of a sunk continent.

Such were the old wanderer's thoughts as the three women gave him his bath in the upper chamber. While he was eating his breakfast, however, not only the three women to whom he was accustomed were called for consultation, but the little new-comer Eione was also brought in. It became indeed, before it ended, this breakfast of Odysseus on the morning of his encounter with Zeuks, what might be called a Council of State, for our young friend Nisos, now past his seventeenth birthday, stood proudly and demurely at the foot of the table from whose silver plates and flagons and salvers the well-browned, savoury-smelling hogsflesh and the barley-bread and the creamy milk and the fragrant red wine were soon, it was clear to all, putting the old hero into an especially good mood.

Among the women it was Leipephile who, for all her simplicity, watched the king of Ithaca with the most anxious expression. She could not quite understand her own feelings in the matter, but she had learnt enough from the teasing replies of Nisos and from certain rough and casual words dropped here and there by Tis to make her feel that the expedition which was now being planned had something at the back of it that was inimical to Agelaos her betrothed, something that not only her own mother Nosodea but Agelaos' mother Pandea would most certainly regard with serious concern and alarm.

As for the Trojan girl, or rather the Trojan woman, her bewildered resentment bred from years of captivity and always seething in her veins was now assuming, as it had never done before, a definite personal apprehension. They were discussing what particular treasure had better be brought up from the subterranean vaults beneath the palace and it naturally entered the Trojan prisoner's head that some golden object from the world-famous arms of Achilles that by the secret aid of Athene had been awarded to Odysseus instead of to the more daring, more fool-hardy, and far more powerful Ajax, might occur to the crafty old king as a more tempting exchange for the winged Gorgonian steed and the black-maned abortion of the great Mother than any vase or goblet or jug or cup among the rare gifts brought by Odysseus from the palace of Alcinous, the father of that young Nausikaa who had fixed upon the wanderer the first-love of a romantic maiden.

This armour of Achilles, as the Trojan captive well knew, had been brought to Ithaca in one of the ships of Menelaos long before the winner of it had himself got home: and what if it now occurred to Eurycleia his aged nurse, if not to the old king himself, to descend to that secretest chamber of all in the caves beneath the palace only to find it empty? Arsinöe had never been greatly worried at the thought of anybody finding her graven image of Hector, now so glittering in the armour of his slayer, within the haunted purlieus of Arima, since she knew that where abode those two terrible Phantasms, Eurybia the sister of the monstrous Keto, and Echidna, Keto's daughter, and where Odysseus himself never dared to go, it was unlikely that anyone, even if they risked it, would reveal to a soul where they had been or what they had seen there.

But to descend to that lowest of all the treasure-caves beneath the palace with the idea of finding something wherewith to bargain with this crazy Zeuks, *that* was quite a possible move. But even if the old man or this handsome boy-pet of Eurycleia's *did* find that chamber empty, was it likely that anyone would accuse her? Who would guess she had learnt the art of carving? Who would suppose she had ever lived closely enough to Hector to recall his features so well as to be able to carve them?

The aged Eurycleia was the only one during that quaintly palatial and yet so wholly domestic council of war to guess the meaning of the gloomy prognostication lowering in the frowning brow of Agelaos' simple betrothed, or to puzzle over the furtive glances now at the king, now at Nisos, now at Tis, by which were revealed the nervous apprehensions of

Arsinöe. The final issue of the discussion had probably been foreseen all along by the shrewd old nurse, who was, though she would have vigorously denied it, quite as “polumetis”, or full of the wisdom that wrestles with life’s realities, as was Odysseus himself.

It was in fact decided that Nisos should carry over his shoulder in a capacious sack, as he followed closely behind Odysseus, three precious objects, a golden Tripod, a golden Mixing-Bowl, and a golden Flagon. The two first of these came from the Phaeacian palace; while the third had been brought to Ithaca by Anticleia, the mother of Odysseus; and it was a marriage-gift to her from her own father Autolycos who all his days had been a great collector of such treasures. Wherever he went he found them; and whenever he found them he saw to it that they were not left behind when he moved on.

And now that these royal domestic female advisers had concluded their deliberations, while their chief was still devouring his meat and drinking his wine, it can easily be imagined in what high spirits our young friend Nisos was when he set off, brimfull of every kind of ambition to follow his aged hero and king on the first really official adventure, as you might put it, of his life.

Odysseus explained at the start to his excited follower that he had decided to avoid both the Temple and the City in approaching the homestead of Zeuks; so that their progress was less rapid than it would have been had they followed the various main thoroughfares.

Odysseus carried no weapon except our old acquaintance the club of Herakles, while Nisos, walking with a rhythmic swing of his whole body, balanced on his shoulders an enormous sack, to which, first on the right hand and then on the left, he kept lifting a hand, or, sometimes it might be, only a few fingers, to steady the thing’s weight under the shocks of the way.

The first thing they both realized when they crossed the border of Zeuks' farm was the fact that for all the precautions they had taken to reach the place un-heralded there was already quite a gathering of Zeuks' neighbours, small farmers with their wives and children, clearly collected there to get the thrill of an immensely grotesque and wildly comic, if not a shockingly startling, encounter.

Odysseus quickly understood that the half had not been told him of the fantastic personality he was now to meet for the first time. Into his mind, and indeed into the mind of his youthful attendant too, as they now both looked round at the faces about them, there entered the suspicion that this little crowd of men, women, and children, gathered on this level expanse of rough grass with lichen-covered rocks and a sprinkling of spring flowers, was anticipating an extremely dramatic scene, but was prepared to feel no particular sympathy for either side.

Evidently something beyond all ordinary events was going to happen, for the children kept whispering to one another, while the younger among them lifted puzzled and rather frightened eyes to the faces of their mothers; and indeed it was plain that what everybody expected was that their old, weak, deserted, and poverty-stricken king was now going to be completely outmatched, out-witted, and rendered helpless if not ridiculous, by this famous country-side clown whom none of their richest farmers could tame. “They are all thinking,” Nisos told himself, “that the old man must be in his dotage if he fancies he can cope with such a crazy rebel against all established authority as this weird creature Zeuks.

“And everybody here must feel,” the boy's thoughts ran on, “that the moment the king really sinks into the helpless silliness of old age, the House of Naubolides will assert its claim to rule; and to rule not only Ithaca but all the neighbouring islands as well.”

For a moment, as he rested his heavy sack upon a rock and automatically jerked his body so that the knife in the leather belt which his mother had given him on the day he was seventeen might fall into the precise place most convenient for clutching it at any sudden necessity, he felt a shiver of family-pride rushing through him, and of thankfulness to the Fates, the oldest of whom he had so recently defended, that he was different from the farmers' boys of his own age in this crowd whose eyes he could see were fixed on him, he hoped with envy, though in one case he fancied he caught a couple of them laughing at him.

But if the king's armour-bearer, or more strictly his currency-bearer, for it was purely in preparation for a shrewd piece of trading that the boy carried that heavy sack, had his own private thoughts created by the general atmosphere around him, the old hero was not without his own sharp-edged reactions to this highly-charged occasion. What he, from old experience of the moods of flexible-susceptible human beings, suddenly felt now was a complete surprise to himself. He felt that his own encounter with this queer personage who had the audacity, as well as the subtle cunning, to steal, by the aid of heaven knows what irresistible spell, the actual winged horse sprung from the blood of Medusa was not the sole cause of the crowd's excitement.

He couldn't help noticing that in place of staring eagerly and excitedly in the direction of the outbuildings and barns of the homestead called Agdos, the eyes of most of the people assembled here kept turning to the circuitous upland track by which he and Nisos had reached this flat expanse of level grass and evenly strewn gravel, just as if they expected a considerable rear-guard of well-armed soldiers to be following him!

"Surely they cannot," he thought, "really imagine that I've got a body-guard of Ithacan warriors ready, like those who arose from the sowing of the dragon’s teeth, to fight to the death wherever I lead them!”

But he quickly gave this mental question a physical rebuff with his broad shoulders, sharp-projecting chin and massive skull; and was prepared as he used to be, day following day, twenty years ago, for whatever ambush of his enemies was to burst out from round the next corner.

Odysseus had full need to be thus prepared, for in another second an enmity greater than any searching tentacle of Scylla or any whirling suction of Charybdis revealed itself to them all.

From the very same path by which the old king and the boy Nisos had just reached this spot came a hurrying figure of whose identity neither of them had any doubt. It was Enorches, the priest of Orpheus!

A curious shudder of supernatural awe ran through that whole crowd. The younger children clung to their mothers’ hands and garments whilst the men bit their lips, tightened their belts, and looked anxiously at one another. Nobody turned to the well-roofed sheds of Agdos, whence the mocking clown who called himself Zeuks was awaiting his turn on that typically Hellenic stage, which seemed, as was always happening in the midst of those eternally contesting islands and cities and races and cults and political parties, to have been called into existence, for some malicious purpose of its own, at that particular moment, by some invisible master of ceremonies.

At first glance Nisos simply could not resist the childish impulse of pure panic which caused him to heave up his sack once more on his shoulders and retreat before that advancing figure till he was a few paces to the rear of Odysseus, though he kept his head sufficiently to restrain himself from crouching, precious bundle and all, actually behind those broad shoulders.

As he watched Enorches advance straight towards them, evidently prepared to speak face to face with Ithaca’s king, it was only by an intense effort that he forced himself to do what even his encounter with the oldest and most powerful of the Fates had not enabled him to do, namely look the man in the face.

But the boy did manage to do this; and no action in all the years of his life was destined to be more momentous, and this purely in its effect upon himself, than his action in this case. And Nisos not only looked straight into Enorches' face. He quite deliberately forced his mind into its fullest, clearest consciousness as he did so; though the effort he had to make to do it was an extreme one, almost as if he had to embrace a boy or a girl with whom he was in love but whose body was hung with glittering sharp-edged and even pointed ornaments that hurt him as he pressed them with his arms and hands and naked skin.

But what, beneath that dazzling sky and burning sun did he make out of the face of the Priest of Orpheus? Well! The dominant features of it were its eyes and mouth. Nisos felt as if the visage into which he was now looking lacked forehead, ears, cheeks, and nose, lacked everything in fact but eyes and mouth; eyes to seek out its prey, and mouth to swallow it when found.

In that blazing noon and because of something demoniacal about the whirlpool-like suction of that mouth, Nisos felt as if this appalling Being had no forehead or nose, or ears, or chin, or even neck! Enorches was, he felt, literally all eyes and mouth, like certain fish, certain serpents, certain birds, and certain insects.

As he gazed in fascinated horror at this Priest of the Mysteries the creature moved — the boy could hardly think of the man as a human person — a few steps nearer to the old king. In making this move Enorches naturally came nearer to Nisos also, who felt such a shiver of terror, that, lugging his great sack along the ground, for having once faced that visage he couldn't take his eyes off it, even to lift up his bundle, he found himself in a position whence his magnetized stare of terror inevitably included Odysseus also.

And then to his astonishment the old king, taking no more notice of Enorches than if he'd been an over-officious retainer in a crowded court, turned to him himself. "Don't you think, Nisos Naubolides," the old man said, "that it might be a good idea when we come back with the daughter of Teiresias to make use of this level expanse in place of the traditional "agora"? Do you get what I mean, my lad?

"It strikes me somehow as a freer and less formal place, and being further from the city and further away from the city-walls it seems to me to be less under the influence of conventional rules, and more likely to be friendly to new and daring schemes, such as my wish to sail Westward, beyond the Pillars of Herakles and the Atlas Mountains, over the unknown waves that now, as we hear, hide the sunken continent of Atlantis. What are you staring at, boy? What's come over you? This is only the Orpheus fellow, you know, come to beg me no doubt not to begin giving away my treasures until he has had his share for the Mysteries.

"How did he find out, the rogue, about this madman Zeuks having ensorcerized Pegasos and Arion? Well — we needn't ask *that.* These Priests find out everything. The winds and waves themselves whisper to them, and the babies in arms babble to them, of the intentions of destiny.

"But isn't this an agreeable spot for a grand assembly? Isn't this just the very sort of place where orators are moved to speak freely and where true shepherds of the people can naturally draw inspiration out of the air? I was a fool, Nisos Naubolides, not to think of this place. I warrant it was the old associations of our "agora" up there stopped me from thinking sooner of a real grand appeal to our people. This will be the exactly right place for Teiresias' daughter to invoke the Olympians and propitiate the Fates.

"I feel like speaking to them now, only there aren't enough of them at the moment; and these, as you see, dear lad, are just the farmers' families round here. But what a place to inspire anyone! Look at these men and women, so lusty and well-fed! And what handsome-coloured cloth they're wearing! Do they weave these garments themselves nowadays do you suppose? How interested Penelope would be could she see how richly purplish in this noon-sun and under this cloudless sky gleams that excellent mingling of sepia and violet!

"And do you see how that noble Fir-tree up there stretches a horizontal branch from its very heart towards that other tree — I can't quite make out what tree *it* is — down there against the blue water of the bay? O yes! And when I come to address the assembly here — I tell you, my boy, it'll be like that very first assembly ever held in Ithaca, about which I used to hear from my mother before I was your age.

"Heavens! I'll make them sit up. Hermes! But I'll make them acclaim *you,* my dear lad, above your stupid brother, to rule in my place when I have hoisted sail. By Olympos yes! you shall look down past all these farmers in their richly-dyed cloth at that divine tree yearning to exchange its sap with that great pine; and as you see the sails of those fishing-boats on those blue waves you'll think of your old king looking down through the water of an unknown sea at the sunken palaces of Atlantis!

"Yes! By the 'aegis' of the Son of Kronos which is now the 'aegis' of Pallas Athene! when once, with the help of Pegasos and Arion, we've got Teiresias' daughter here, we will drag enough sail-cloth out of them to carry me to the shores of the unknown West! By the Olympians, yes! Why should this rustic father of yours, why should this stupid brother of yours, not be forced to give up their place to you, my dear boy? It worked before in this island, that sort of change; and it can be brought about again. O! if I could only get all the men of Ithaca assembled here I would know how to persuade them! Haven't I seen — —"

He was interrupted by a wild rush of all the crowd round them towards the sheds and barns of the homestead "whose name", as they had heard so often that day, "was Agdos". Enorches himself followed the crowd, passing both Odysseus and Nisos without a word: and there, before them all, walking, each of them on his four legs, quietly, obediently, tamely, patiently, came the winged dark-skinned horse, Pegasos, and the much smaller whitish-grey horse, with a sweeping black mane, known far less widely through Argos and all the mainland, but known well in the islands nearest to Ithaca, under the name of Arion.

Yes, quietly, gently, obediently, those two imperishable and immortal creatures walked forth from their stable towards Odysseus; while Nisos, who soon had his great sack of treasures, heavy as a king's ransom as they were, hoisted on his shoulders, opened his mouth and breathed in gasps while he awaited what would happen. And there, sometimes behind his immortal captives, and sometimes beside them, and sometimes even before them, was Zeuks himself!

Zeuks was a man of middle height according to ordinary human measurement; but among his other peculiarities he possessed an astonishingly natural power of appearing to be taller or shorter according to the convenience, as you might put it, of the particular occasion. It was as if the occasion itself became a sorcerer who called up, out of the abyss of the uncreated, exactly the right puppet-homunculus that the trick required.

Evidently what was required at this moment by the inevitable situation was to get these unusual creatures safely, quietly, and in docile subjection, into the immediate presence of the king of Ithaca. Meanwhile within that unclosable, unhealable, impenetrable, almost invisible crack, that extended down the whole length of the Club of Herakles, an intense argument was going on between Myos the fly and Pyraust the moth.

They had not been caught asleep, these two members of the royal household of Ithaca. In fact they had both been awakened by the stir in every inhabited portion of the palace, even before Odysseus had to end his emotional talk with the old Dryad which was the chief cause of his being where he was now.

Tis had been the first to disturb them. He had gone earlier than usual to milk Babba, for he wanted to get the pail of fresh milk safely into the palace before he drove the cow to a fresh strip of pasture, well the other side of the haunted Arima, upon whose devilish soil nothing would have induced him to tread. Then Arsinöe had flicked and flapped with one of the last scraps of a particular Pelasgian veil that she had surreptitiously extracted from Eurycleia's private treasure-box but took care to use before the old lady got up.

It was only after this event that she used a piece of the common stuff which the old nurse was wont to dole out for dealing with the dust which in both corridor and hall gathered with special heaviness owing to the nature of the rocky substances out of which Ithaca's royal cave had been originally and primevally dug.

It was indeed of dust that the two insects were arguing in their accustomed hiding-place within that warm perambulating retreat. Dust played as large a part in their life as wind and rain played in the life of the king of Ithaca; and so, while Enorches was striving to cast whatever devilish spell he fancied would be most effective against the creations of the blood of Medusa and the horse-play of Poseidon, the fly Myos was explaining to the moth Pyraust that every grain of dust was an actual world and that it was foolish to philosophize about the universe until you stopped talking about Etna being flung upon Typhon and talked about Arsinöe disturbing worlds with her duster.

Meanwhile Nisos also, like his newly-made student-pal or Kasi-kid, was philosophizing after his fashion. What struck him, as this dancing Zeuks led his magnetized captives towards them, was the smooth-sliding manner in which each separate event or incident or occurrence, whether it was of cosmogonic importance, or was of the faintest and most attenuated significance, a mere ripple, you might say, crossing the surface of the oceanic time-mirror of life, was accepted by Odysseus with the same unalterable equanimity.

Here was the winged horse Pegasos, born of the blood of the Gorgon, and here was the black-maned Arion, born of Demeter herself when she took the form of a mare to escape Poseidon; and dancing round these Divine Abortions was the queer individual who had the power of hypnotizing any equivocal creation who crossed his path and yet was no Bellerephon or Perseus or cast at all in the heroic mould; and here, beside them, surveying these lusty apparitions with the eye of an executioner was the Priest of the immemorial Mysteries who looked as if there were nothing in sight he would not gladly offer up to his chthonian divinities.

And yet what was this amazing old king pointing out to him now — to him whom he had recently been considering as his successor in the kingship over the heads of a father and elder brother — but some casually noted aesthetic point about the contrasting beauty of a certain massive tower of greyish-yellow stone, to the North-East of where they stood and rising from a corner of the city wall, and a glittering roof of white marble to their North-West belonging to the Temple of Athene, pictorial elements that justified still further, the old man explained, the idea of this particular spot as a new assembly place.

“Don’t let me ever forget,” the boy prayed in his heart, though to no particular deity, “the calm he shows at a moment like this!” And it really was, this time, without any thought of it being “clever” of him to notice such things that Nisos followed up his secret prayer by telling himself that though those weirdly startling wings rising from the shoulders of that submissive great horse, and that black mane sweeping the ground belonging to the other animal, were striking phenomena of creative nature’s power, it was really a more striking thing that a king who lived alone in his palace with his old nurse and a couple of maids should be so completely equal to occasions like this.

Was it, Nisos asked himself, that that great massive skull possessed an imperviousness to shocks denied to other human craniums? Well, anyway that bowsprit-like and carefully trimmed beard accentuated the quality of the man’s self-possession. And Nisos decided that when once *his* beard began to grow he would treat it with exquisite care. “A prophet,” he told, himself, “can clearly hide a great many natural feelings behind a well-managed beard, and if he can hide them, cannot he rule them, cannot he force them to obey him, as this horse with wings and this other with a trailing black mane have been forced to obey this madman Zeuks?”

CHAPTER V

IT WAS WITH the utmost interest that Nisos watched Zeuks and tried his best to weigh him up and get to the bottom of him. The impression he first got of this eccentric farm-labourer was that he was of middle height, of middle age, and of middle social estimation. He noted how essentially Achaean he was in every detail, in dress, in manner and in general appearance; not Pelasgian, or Dorian, or Ionian but an evenly balanced middle-of-the-road Achaean, moderate in all the imponderables, in tribal habits as well as personal reactions, and conveying, wherever he went, beneath the whole paraphernalia of his comic humours an impression of dispassionate calm; a calm that was not merely temperamental, like the coolness of Odysseus, but was the deliberately arrived-at attitude of a definite metaphysical philosophy.

Watching Zeuks carefully Nisos decided that it was this unobtrusive mediocrity that enhanced to such a startling degree the peculiar features of his countenance, features for which it would be difficult to find a more accurate epithet than bulbous. Bulbous they were, and bulbous they remained, under all the contortions and distortions of his remarkable physiognomy.

Every single one of the man's features was so to say swollen by the inordinate pressure within it of the particular purpose for which the creativeness of nature had designed it. The forehead of Zeuks seemed bursting with its overpowering plethora of thought. His nose seemed bursting with its abounding zest for smelling. His mouth with its full lips, its strong white teeth, its grandly sensuous curves, seemed to have been created by the insatiable palate and indefatigable tongue within it, a couple that were united in conjugal understanding, the palate as the female to the tongue as the male, for the tasting and enjoying of almost everything that could possibly, conceivably, indeterminably be tasted and enjoyed.

But his eyes,— "What is it in this man's eyes," thought Nisos, "that makes me feel so nice and warm?" — his eyes were surrounded by a thousand wrinkles and creases and rufflings of the ruddy skin round them, creases that seemed so infinitely tickled by what you had just said, or were just going to say, or simply by the way you were the self that *could* say such things, that merely to watch their response to you and your remarks gave you a delicious sense of having found your place in the world, a place which, the more you said, or the more entirely you put yourself behind what you said, would grow hourly, daily, monthly, yearly more agreeable to yourself, if not to all concerned!

But it was the eyes themselves, apart from those friendly and rampageously benevolent wrinkles, that were made to encourage everybody they approached to enjoy the world and to enjoy being the person who was thus enjoying it.

Zeuks' eyes were in fact so deeply set in his bulbous head that Nisos got the feeling that they receded into a mass of substance which they themselves, in their immense zest for life, were everlastingly creating afresh behind that mediocre skull with its pair of eternally recessive holes.

Nisos couldn't then — he put it down at first to the glare of the noonday sun, but he changed his mind later on — catch the exact colour of Zeuks' eyes; but for that very reason he decided they were probably hazel. It was indeed, all considered, an extremely complicated moment in our clever young friend's life. He might be seventeen and he might be the one destined by fate to become the prophet to the strong rather than to the weak, but it began to invade his mind, as he stood there, leaning on his heavy sack, which in its turn rested on a lichen-covered rock, that because a hero had won in his time almost miraculous victories and had used incredible physical strength and still more incredible mental cunning to win the victories, it did not mean that to the end of his days such an one would inevitably be the centre of every dramatic human situation that could possibly arise.

It was exactly noon on this desirable level expanse, with the homestead of Zeuks overlooking it to the East, and that high corner of the City-Wall and that gleam of the Temple’s marble roof out-topping it to the West, exactly noon on the very spot selected by the old king as the perfect site for an assembly of the people that would be swayed by his eloquence.

Well! here was Zeuks, coming dancing out of his ramshackle shed and leading, yes, actually leading, the immortal creatures they had come to buy!

The well-dressed crowd of prosperous farmer-families seemed puzzled as to where to turn to get some hint of the manner in which they ought to receive the thousand-years wonder of this smuggling into their home of these Divine Beasts. Were they to get it from Zeuks or from their king?

Alas! from neither! The Personage who was destined to direct their feelings was none other than Enorches, the Priest of Orpheus! Yes, to the absolute amazement of the seventeen-year-old “prophet to the strong”, there was not a family there, not a man or a woman there, not even a child, who did not excitedly turn to greet Enorches.

It is true there was one little toddler of about two-and-a-half who stretched out a plump arm towards the Club of Herakles, no doubt being attracted by the roundly twisted curves of that formidable bosom, in the cracked interior of which Myos the Fly was still expounding to Pyraust the

Moth the metaphysical philosophy of dust and how every grain of it was a world.

But apart from the child who admired the Club and the two insects who were inside the Club, the whole of that excited assembly of well-to-do farmers with their wives and children instinctively divided itself into two parties, the largest of which gathered closely round Enorches and displayed evident hostility to Zeuks, while the other advanced with irresistible curiosity towards Zeuks and his Divine Beasts, constantly looking back, however, as they did so, the women glancing apprehensively over their shoulders, and the children alternately stumbling as they turned to stare at Enorches, or clinging to their mothers' belts and pressing their faces against their garments.

Not a soul among that whole company made any move towards or away from their old king, though Nisos did notice two of the men whispering together with furtive glances at himself and his great sack.

"They're saying to each other," he thought with a faint shiver; "We'll take *that* off him before they get away from here!"

Meanwhile Odysseus, having gravely turned his pointed beard to the North, the West, the South and the East, and having instructed Nisos to remain close to his side— "No! no! my boy, much nearer than that! In fact you'd better put a finger into my belt, if you can balance that thing on your shoulder with one hand" — advanced slowly straight towards the swaying and dancing Zeuks.

Neither the word "swaying" nor the word "dancing" accurately describes the sinuous movements with which this queer creature hypnotized those two animals. As in every other aspect of this singular person's character, if you had never seen him before it was necessary for the understanding of his peculiar nature to catch not only the general expression of his face but at least a few of its special expressions; and among these it was especially important to note what his expression was when he experienced an access of respect and reverence for anyone or anything he suddenly encountered.

Nisos had the wit to realize quickly enough, when Odysseus had greeted Zeuks and was conversing with him, that what those little, searching, deep-set eyes, peering out from the receding depths of what seemed an eternally replenished background, expressed just then was a mixture of deeply affectionate respect and humorous amusement.

And it was further evident to Nisos that this singular person's profound respect for the king was increased, not diminished, by the fact that he found the old hero so infinitely entertaining. It was also evident that Odysseus felt absolutely at ease with Zeuks and entirely natural in dealing with him. Indeed he continued to be so direct, so objective, so practical in his handling of him that it was difficult for Nisos to see what there was about such shrewd and downright and matter-of-fact business relations that could excite not only ribald laughter but hugely humorous enjoyment.

But it was quite evident to Nisos that either the old king enjoyed being laughed at, or, and this is what seemed to the boy the more probable, that he had been so toughened by all his experiences of the ways of the world, that his self-created thick skin and his long-practised straight-to-the-point opportunism had made him as impervious to humour as he was impervious to love!

Nisos inserted a second finger into the king's belt, the longest finger he had. In some queer fashion the old man's imperviousness to everything but the one single desire to sail away, to sail over the sunken towers of Atlantis into the Unknown West, touched the boy to the heart. It was a purpose he could understand. It had something about it that resembled his own fixed intention to become, when once he had grown a pointed beard, a Prophet to the Strong.

Let the rollicking humour of Zeuks bubble and bubble from what springs it would! Let it burble up against the old hero's face pebbles as hard as balls of brimstone! There'd be one friend for the old adventurer who'd be as tough and impervious as himself! Yes, imperviousness was what the future "prophet to the strong" felt he must struggle to win.

But fate had other moves to make; and there were several farmers there who, although with homesteads on the same ridge as farm-labourer Zeuks, and although they had come out to see the farm up there at high noon, were in part self-pitying puppets moved by fingers other than their own, and yet were in part also living creators of the future of Ithaca.

Enorches had already begun to scream angrily at Zeuks before Nisos, with his right hand supporting the treasure-sack balanced to a nicety at the back of his head and with two fingers thrust deep into the belt of Odysseus, had even realized that he himself, and the deserted old king, and the winged Horse, and the black-maned Horse, and Zeuks and the Priest of Orpheus were in a random knot together, with the flabbergasted but still fascinated crowd hemming them in on all sides and surging round them,

"It's no good your grinning and chuckling at me, thief, robber, pirate, serf!" cried Enorches. "It's no good your fancying that a wretch like you, the lowest of the low, the basest of the base, born to be the slave of those who rightly and properly by the laws of Themis and Zeus and Eros and Dionysos and the Inspired Singer Orpheus rule the entire world, can make a covenant with a king to put in his keeping this mad Spawn of the Gorgon and this By-Blow of Poseidon and Demeter!

"Did you think, Dung of the Earth, did you suppose, Turd of the World, that the Stars in their Courses would fight for a blob, a shred, a foul pellet, a filthy crumb, a drop of cuckoo-spit, a clipping of toe-nail, like you? There are many who rule us. There are many who strive to rule us. There are many who once ruled us. Erebos and Tartaros are full of such as once lorded it over us! And where are they now?

“Don’t you understand sod of sods, don’t you comprehend, dreg of dregs, that what you’ve been given hands and feet for by the beautiful ones, the creative ones, the powerful ones, the one’s eternally to be worshipped, is the privilege, dung of dungs, blob of blobs, squit of squit, curd of curd, scurf of scurf, flake of flake, chip of chips, drop of drop, sweat of sweat, the privilege to serve your betters, and yet here you are actually daring to decamp with demigods!

“Yes! to steal, to kidnap, to imprison in your wretched pigsty these two sacred creatures, the feathers of whose wings and the hairs of whose manes you are unworthy to kiss! Release them, I command you! Hand them over to me, the god-appointed guardian of the holiest of holy mysteries!

Though Athene may have fled to her shrine among the Ethiopians, I have not fled; and where I am there will always be a sanctuary for any offspring of the ever-living gods, however far blasphemy and sacrilege and atheism may spread their savagery! Give up these holy creatures I say! Yield them over to me now and I will see that you escape the punishment you deserve! But refuse and it will fall upon you! Harken unto me all ye that are here, devoted worshippers of the most high Gods! Have you not heard — has it not been revealed to you — —”

It was at this point that Enorches, whose very name had been given him at his birth because of the enormity of his testicles, and who had been called ere now by fellow-priests “the well-hung brother” proved his manhood by leaping forward with a spring and scrambling up upon one of the rocks with which Odysseus's newfound "agora" was sprinkled and by bursting into a ringing oration.

"Our whole Hellenic way of life," he cried, "is in danger my friends, and we're not alive enough to what's going on to do anything to save it! We haven't even cleared our minds of all the childish poetry our mothers and nurses put into our heads to stop us piddling on the floor, or upsetting the pot on the fire, or cutting off the tail of the dog, or giving the hen's best chicks to the cat! We have been too shallow and stupid, my friends, in our whole attitude to religion!

"We have accepted like babies all our mothers told us about the Twelve Olympians, about Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Apollon, Artemis, Hermes, Aphrodite, Hephaistos, Ares, Themis, and our own Athene.

"But, my friends, all this is sheer childishness, and what it leads to is exactly what has happened in the case of this worthless pirate, this low-born thief, this dung-heap rapscallion, this offscouring of the city's brothels who calls himself Zeuks so that he may blaspheme the more, so that he may make a mock at our Father in Heaven, and, worse still, put to scorn our Father's Sister and Mate, the great Queen of Heaven, Hera herself!

"What none of you are grown up enough to understand, though I've been explaining this very thing for the last ten years, is that by certain new, certain occult, certain mystical, certain sanctified, certain divinely inspired revelations, drawn at length and explained at last from the most sacred and precious oracle that we of pure Hellenic birth can boast, an oracle do I say? an inheritance, a birth-right, a talisman, an enchantment, a divine and celestial Word, by means of which our enemies are inevitably defeated and our intentions are inevitably fulfilled, we know that we've arrived at a point in our development where Eros and Dionysos appear in their true light. Does anyone here on this fair platform, looking down on the rich harbour of our island-home, realize the full significance, the concerted value, the abysmally-charged import of the birthright of which I speak?

“Has anyone here been so freed of late from our mothers’ lullabies and war-tales as to know what I mean when I say that our way of life in Hellas has been saved only just in time from its final extinction by recent interpretations of the prophecies of our unique poet and singer, Orpheus?”

At this point in the midst of the resounding oration of Enorches there suddenly occurred the sort of movement of relaxation in that well-to-do careless crowd which suggests an articulate admission that the subject of a speech is totally beyond the intelligence of its listeners but that the personality of the speaker, and the fervour of his arguments, not to mention the dramatic situation in which he is taking so dominant a part, are all conducive to the said listeners’ settling down to listen in self-satisfied pleasure as if they’d been suddenly transported to an agreeable theatre.

What pleased our young friend Nisos in all this, especially when he noticed that both the two portions of this unconventional hill-top assembly, the part of it that had been so fascinated by Zeuks and his unusual horses as to feel definitely hostile to Enorches, and the part of it that remained under his spell, had both relaxed, was the fact that Zeuks himself had suddenly taken the initiative with Odysseus, and had advanced close up to him, trailing the long thin leather straps by which he drew the two horses after him, and that the two were now engaged, under the very nose of the excited orator in what looked like a very harmonious and mutually satisfactory bargain.

Meanwhile the speaker was approaching the culminating points of his speech, which were entirely concerned with the Mysteries.

“What is revealed to us in the Orphic Mysteries,” he was saying, “is the inner truth, the ultimate quintessence, of our whole Hellenic life. This essence, this quintessence, my dear friends, floats like an exhalation through every moment of our existence. Whither and Whence does it float? *That* is no simple question; for it is fed by a thousand ineffable imponderables!

"Mystery it is, and mystery it pursues. From mystery it ascends and in mystery it is engulfed. As the heat of this thrice-sacred noon dissolves in those blue waves down there, so there is a sweetly-dissolving high noon in the life of all of us Achaians towards which we are moving even as I speak; and I swear to you, brothers and sisters of this Isle of Ithaca, that it is only in the celebration of the Orphic Mysteries that you, men and women of Hellas, can rise to your full spiritual stature and rejoice in your full divine inheritance!"

Enorches was clairvoyant enough to grow aware at this point that his large audience were enjoying his speech delivered from that jagged little rock in precisely the spirit he cared least of all for it to be enjoyed, that is to say, as a theatrical performance, and he allowed his arms to sink to his side and his voice to die away.

But he didn't come down immediately from his little rock. He looked round him with a quite special expression, the expression of a creature with the beak of a bird of prey and the body of a serpent, a creature who has bitten its prey in half, and swallowed half of it, but still feels unsatisfied.

And it happened to be just at that very moment that Pyraust, the girl-moth, implored her boy-friend, Myos the House-Fly, to remove his powerful front legs from the particular one of her languidly trailing wings which it was always easiest for her to straighten out first when she had decided to spread both her wings in flight.

"I *know* he's calling for me to go to him," she explained, "and when he's calling so strongly it hurts me, yes it hurts me very much, not to be able to go to him! So lift up your front legs, my beautiful one, I beseech you! They are so strong and so gloriously black; and O! how weak my poor trembling brown wings seem in comparison with them! But lift them up now, I beg you!"

But the fly remained obstinate. "In a second; all in good time, all in due course!" he buzzed. "But while we are together I do so want to settle once for all this one single point. Surely you do admit, my sweet one, you can't help it, that in the smallest atom of dust, just as in the smallest grain of sand, there is a whole world of reality. Never mind all this noisy speaking and shouting! It's about shams and shows; not about reality at all!"

Thus speaking Myos pressed his two front legs, so black, so shining, and so extremely strong, more firmly than ever upon the quivering wing of the girl-moth. "But look who's here!" he added presently; and, again, after another pause: "Aren't you glad, my Crumb of Crumbs, that I didn't let you go when he first began bawling out his blathering bluster? Why! you'd have bumped into her! And I can tell you, my leaf of longing, my flying feather of dainty fancy, if you had bumped into her it would have been the end of you!"

The brown moth ceased struggling. The fly removed his leg from her wing. They both settled themselves down as comfortably as they were able in those narrow quarters where they were only about six inches below the powerful fingers of the king of Ithaca as he went on bargaining with Zeuks. Neither Zeuks nor he paid the faintest attention to the torrent of rhetoric from the lichen-covered rock, a torrent which, as soon as the speaker realized what newcomer it was who had now appeared among them, recommenced with redoubled vigour. For the personage who had burst in upon that extemporized "ecclesia" was in fact no other than Petraia, the old-maid midwife; and it was a Petraia worked up to a considerable degree of professional indignation, not to speak of virginal vituperation.

She advanced at a pace which could only be described by the vulgar expression “at a run”. She forced her way straight through the crowd till she reached a family group whose members were pushing against each other to get as close as they could to Pegasos and Arion.

Here she singled out a woman, obviously about as far advanced in pregnancy as it is possible to be and, clutching her by the only portion of her person which was not already pre-empted by three other children in addition to the small creature as yet undelivered, she dragged her away protesting loudly, a protest shared by so many of her brood that her carrying off by Petraia caused quite a little convulsion and a sort of counter-eddy in the stream of people who surrounded those two supernatural beasts.

As she dragged the woman towards the farm-house which was nearest to Zeuks’ domain they passed so close to the club of Herakles that Myos and Pyraust could clearly catch what Patraia was saying, and she was saying a great deal.

“A self-respecting woman like you,” she was complaining, “ought to be wiser than to be so interested in these playthings of men! All that these silly boy-men want are more and more playthings! What they don’t realize is the true meaning of this great news that is now spreading through the entire world. They don’t realize, these silly boys, that during a few recent weeks there has been a revolution in Nature herself! Nature herself has decided to assert herself at last. And *this* means, *can* mean, *does* mean, and *will* mean only one thing! And that one thing is this: Women from now on are no longer subject to men.

“And it means more than that. It means that women are not only from now on freed from the yoke of men, but that men are from now on subject to women, and must learn, if they don’t want to witness the death and perishing of the entire human race, to subject themselves to their mothers and wives and daughters.

“From now on men must learn that their highest worship is their worship of women and that this worship is called *Uranian* because it resembles the inspiration of the Heavenly Muse!”

All this while Petraia never ceased dragging her pregnant captive towards the Bed of Delivery, the Bed which everyone present at that stupendous scene was forced by her ringing declaration to behold as the only holy and thrice-blessed Bed to be desired by all! The unfortunate or divinely fortunate woman in whom the shock of this outrageous publicity had already started the suspended pains of labour was imploring the three children who were clinging to her to let her go, as well as imploring Petraia not to drag her so fast; and so shrill was the desperate falsetto clamour of their combined voices that the man of the family following uncomfortably behind was unable to succeed in his attempt to appear to be absorbed with interest in a particular white sail on the horizon of the bay.

Just before passing out of sight Petraia called the man to the woman’s side, and, as the two of them with their children vanished from sight, she herself swung round once more and uttered, in a tone more piercing than any she had yet used, her final defiance.

“News has just reached me,” she cried, “from my sister, who serves the Nymph Egeria, in the land of the King of the Latins where the Trojans have founded a new Troy, that Persephone herself has escaped from the Kingdom of Death and has begun to hasten across the face of the earth to find her mother Demeter! When these two meet, so has the Nymph Egeria told my sister, the world’s new age of the real rule of women will begin!

"And then it will be that men will sink back once more into what was their position when the world began, that is to say into complete inferiority to women; so that from that moment onwards their proper use and value and status in the world will be as it was in the Golden Age under the Rule of Kronos; that is to say as merely the breeding animals that we women use at our free will and pleasure, so that we can bear a sufficient number of girl-children who will in their turn become the rulers of the earth!"

With this final cry of defiance Petraia was gone; but Nisos, whose diplomatic caution, not to speak of his vivid personal fear of the fellow, had made him keep his eyes on Enorches who had remained silent on his rock during Petraia's outburst, now found himself unable to resist a shiver of panic when he saw the Orphic priest solemnly, pontifically, and with awe-inspiring intensity, lift up his right arm and point with extended fingers, as if uttering a devastating malediction, towards a particular point upon the horizon of the noonday blueness of the sea.

"Listen to me, O people of Ithaca!" he cried, "and be not deceived by an excited creature who knows no more of what has really begun to happen in the world than a feeble-winged moth!"

At this point it was no more concealed from Nisos than it was concealed from the Moth herself or indeed from her friend the Fly, that a thought-wave of some sort had been passing, consciously or unconsciously, in its gloating religiosity and its bitter belligerency between the Orphic priest and the two insects within the split bosom of the club of Herakles, one of them the priest's natural sacrificial victim and the other his natural biter, stinger, teaser, poisoner, tormentor, scavenger, devourer, and final exterminator.

"That little grey spot on our horizon," he cried, "is only one of thousands of islands in Greek waters! To it and from it, through all our bays and estuaries and harbours and river-mouths, the word is now being carried from promontory to promontory that the true Rulers of the world have at last come into their own and henceforth will prove themselves supreme. You all, O beloved sheep without a shepherd, know well in your hearts of whom I speak! I speak of that immortal pair of Deities destined by fate before the foundation of the world to be its ultimate masters. Need I say, my precious and dedicated people, some of whom are destined to be transformed and transported by the one, and some of whom are destined to be transfigured and redeemed by the other, that I speak of *Love* and *Drink,* of Eros and Dionysos! Between these immortal ones is a miraculous communion, a holy understanding, in the divine mystery of which each leads *to,* each mingles *with,* each is swallowed up *by* the other: Love in Intoxication, and Intoxication in Love!

"It has been revealed to us at last that all this childish domination of the inhabitants of the earth by the twelve Olympians has been infantile play-acting; and that the time has come for the real rulers of the universe to be recognized by us all for what they are and what we their subjects are.

"This was, O people of Ithaca, this was, O people of Hellas, whether you are Achaeans or Pelasgians, this was the meaning of the Songs of Orpheus! Orpheus and his Priests have, from the beginning of History, alone known that the true divinities behind Zeus and Poseidon and Aidoneus, the true divinities behind Hera and Demeter and Athene and Aphrodite have always been the same, that is to say Eros and Dionysos!

"The Mysteries of Eleusis have always in their unutterable essence, of which we may not even yet reveal the true nature, been identical with the Mysteries of Orpheus. Come then, O people of Ithaca and of all the sacred Isles, come then, and acknowledge the truth that only in the sacred ecstasy of Eros and Dionysos, that is to say of Love and Drink, is the Secret behind life revealed and the Secret behind death shown to be identical with it!

“This is the reason, let me now announce to you, my friends, why Aphrodite has been imprisoned by Hephaistos in the Island of Cyprus, and why Prometheus has been imprisoned by Dionysos where Atlas holds up the sky. What is happening now to our world, what is shaking the pillars of the earth, what is rocking the walls of Erebos, what is ransacking the recesses of Tartaros, is that Eros is shaking off the childish notion that Aphrodite is his mother, and is now showing that, as he once caused the aboriginal night to be impregnated by the whirling elements of Chaos, so today he is making Okeanos enlarge his boundaries both to the West and to the East and making the sun and the moon throw off the rule of the children of Leto! Come then, O people of Ithaca! Follow the Sun and the Moon! Shake off these bow-and-arrow tyrants, Apollo and Artemis! Throw down the altars and idols of the gods of Olympus, and worship none but the two Supreme Mysteries of the Universe, Eros the Mystery of Love and Dionysos the Mystery of Ecstasy!

“Worship these alone; and Eros will give you the only clue to the inexhaustible joy of life, and Dionysos will give you the only redemption from the inexhaustible misery of life!”

It was at that moment, as the voice of Enorches died down, that Nisos recalled a curious little event that had occurred just before he set out that morning with Odysseus. Carrying the heavy load with which he had started, his head held high and his right hand raised to keep the balance of the great sack which was swaying on his shoulder, he had been too excited to give much thought to those he was leaving.

In her natural feeling for her betrothed, the elder son of Krateros Naubolides, Leipephile had turned aside while the king’s old Nurse was waving them goodbye.

Naturally enough also the Trojan maid Arsinöe had turned aside from watching them depart. But Eione, the little sister of Tis, had followed them. Yes, she had followed them as far as the last Olive-Tree in the palace garden.

Here, as she waved her farewell, the wind from the bay, which they were facing as they went off, blew a loose fold of her garment so shamelessly clear from her perfectly formed thighs that unwilling to give an impression of immodesty and at the same time reluctant to stop waving to them till they were out of sight she went on waving with one hand while with bent head and floating hair she re-folded her garment about her limbs with the other hand; and it was the simple and direct childishness with which she accomplished this double task of waving with one hand and controlling her rebellious clothes with the other that so particularly touched Nisos and became for him a kind of visual symbol or dramatic emblem of the charm of the eternal feminine.

He had been rather slow to recognize the peculiar quality of Eione's charm, owing to the fact that there was nothing in her plain and simple face to correspond with the unusual loveliness and grace of her figure, but now that he was setting off on this historic expedition the whole quality of her personality invaded him.

He wasn't a conceited fool. He wasn't so fanatically hostile to this sinister Priest of the Mysteries as not to admit to himself that what filled his mind at that moment with this plain-faced, exquisitely moulded young girl was what the fellow was saying about Eros. He had never heard till now of the primordial cosmology, so to speak, of the Mysteries, and there was something about the thought of shaking off the familiar personalities of the Olympians and concentrating upon the idea that the primeval origin of all things was Eros, that appealed to him extremely.

He had always tried to think of himself as born to grow into a mysterious prophet, and the notion of such a prophet having a love-affair with some dedicated female was peculiarly appealing to him. Nor at this moment as the echoes of Enorches' voice died away among the rocks and caves of his native island, did it seem a negligible stroke of fate on his behalf — perhaps showing the hand of Atropos herself, to whom he had been of some service — that the female to be associated with his career should be the youthful sister of his faithful old friend, Tis.

In any case the Spinners of our human destiny did not give Nisos at this moment any further time for romantic thoughts about the youthful Eione with her homely face and her exquisite limbs, for he was called to the king's side by an imperative summons.

He obeyed with alacrity; and he found at once as he placed his treasure-bearing sack at the feet of the two protagonists that the transaction had been, with satisfaction to them both, brought to a successful conclusion.

Odysseus was obviously in the particular mood into which he never rose or sank except when things fell out almost exactly as he had hoped, and yet without any exhausting effort on his part. His great square head seemed more like a fleshless skull now that he'd got what he wanted than when he was still fighting for it. His chin was so relaxed and at ease that his beard had the look of the bowsprit of a vessel that has reached a halcyon sea of undisturbed calm, with the Sirens in the form of friendly birds clinging contentedly to the rigging.

As for Zeuks, he turned his head slowly towards Odysseus, then slowly towards the Priest of Orpheus who had now rushed between them, shooting himself down from the lichen-covered rostrum of his eloquence like a fleshly arrow from an hieratic bow.

“Eros!” cried Zeuks with the inconceivable gusto of a guest at a delicious private banquet who has just tasted what to him is the renewal of a long series of forgotten delights, enjoyed long ago and far away. *“Eros!* Why it’s wonderful to realize at last that we can freely embrace our divine boy as a grown-up independent Deity, acting on his own without any woman’s help!” And as if to prove his delight Zeuks started singing:

“Ha! Ha! Ha!
Hee! Hee! Hee!
Smell, taste, listen!
Touch and see!
Touch, see, listen!
Taste every juice!
Embrace Aidoneus!
And you won’t fear Zeus!”

Nisos felt such a burning atmospheric fire-ball of protection whirling round his head from Zeuks’ deep-set humorous eyeholes that he actually dared to make a faint flicker of an ugly face of impudent defiance at the Priest of Orpheus: and when he turned to see how Odysseus was responding to the encounter between these two formidable ones he experienced an agreeable shock; for Odysseus was, as a matter of fact, making much the same sort of grimace as he was making himself, only it was made in accordance with the hero’s age, dignity, and heroic past. The old king indeed scrupled not to nod several times with his great massive head in the direction of Zeuks, as much as to say: “I am entirely of your opinion, O most excellent dealer in immortal horse-flesh! And as for this noisy rhetorician, he hides, as his type usually do, his only spadeful of good turf under bushels of mystical bad hay.”

Obviously aware that their presence, combined with the special quality of their unusual nature, had much to do with this unseemly contention, both the winged Pegasos and the black-maned ivory-coloured Arion now began to use all their animal powers, four legs, their muscular shoulders, their nervous haunches, their arching necks, even the flashing wings of the one and the sweeping mane of the other, to thrust their way into the very centre of the contest.

This put the torch to the pyre. The fury of the Priest of Orpheus broke all bounds. "*What?*" he shouted, projecting his carrion-crow physiognomy so close to the king's impassive skull that it really did cross Nisos' mind to wonder what would happen if the man's vulturine beak were actually to snatch a gobbet of bleeding flesh from the throat beneath that proud ship's bow.

"Have you been dreaming," was what the Priest had the gall to mutter to the King, "in the decrepit vanity of your degenerate flesh to which in the solitude of its ancestral cave an outworn Olympian, herself a refugee in Ethiopia, has granted a retreat wherein your moribund body can decompose at leisure; have you, I say, been dreaming that the present-day inhabitants of Ithaca, only a few among whom can even remember the lies and tricks and multiple disguises and devices, for which in days before their parents were born, you won for a year or two some kind of a melodramatic notoriety, will stand by quiescent while you terminate Tyrian transactions with dung-heap pirates, and hand over treasures which properly belong to the people of this island to do with as they wish? Give me these two horses, this moment, you Zeuks, if that is the ridiculous appellation put on you by some former clown in mischievous blasphemy or cringing sycophancy towards the tottering Thunderer we call Zeus whose very thunderbolts have fallen once more into the hands of that one-eyed race of Cyclopean Giants from whom he originally stole them; yes! yes! give me these horses this moment!

"They shall remain in the sacred stables and in the consecrated meadows of the celebrants and hierophants of the Mysteries! They shall be made joyful by Eros, the Lord of Divine Lust, and shall be redeemed from the service of men by Dionysos the Lord of oblivious ecstasy!"

Thus speaking Enorches snatched at the bridle of Pegasos with one hand and at the bridle of Arion with the other, evidently hoping that the power of his personality, and the authority of his manner, and the occult magnetism of his touch would produce the required vibration of super-human force in sufficient accumulation to enable him to carry them off to those usurped purlieus of Athene's shrine which he had now appropriated as his own. But the event turned out otherwise.

Never had Nisos felt prouder of the old hero than he did at that moment: never had he felt more utterly resolved that no insurrection against him by the House of Naubolides, even with his own dad, Krateros, and his own brother, the betrothed of Leipephile, as its leaders, should ever meddle with the old warrior's authority!

In a flash, in the flickering of an eyelash, in the curve of a single ripple on the halcyon sea outside the bay, Odysseus had made use of the Club of Herakles as if it were a battering-ram and had administered to the Priest such a blow in his belly that the man went over in a perfect summersault, legs and arms in the air, and lost all his breath for a moment when he struck the ground. Next, with a series of rapid gestures and commands, so calmly and quietly made that he might have been seated in his hall at the end of the pillared corridor, Odysseus got Nisos and the treasure, still in its great sack, on the broad shoulders of Pegasos, and Zeuks himself, shaken by terrific amusement, lodged on the immortal creature's rump, and finally, just as his enemy, having regained breath was scrambling to his feet, he got himself, the club in his hand, and within it the Moth and the Fly clinging desperately together, balanced somehow upon the black-maned Arion.

All would have been well and they would have escaped in royal style, leaving the Priest of the Mysteries confounded, if it had not been that at this moment of all moments the old everlasting competitive instinct was aroused in the black-maned horse, progeny of the semen of Poseidon when Demeter played the mare, an instinct to show that a horse born of the coupling of Land and Sea could be faster, though it never left the earth, than one with wings so wide that their shadows stretched further than any bow could shoot and whose parentage was the spilling of Gorgonian blood!

With this natural but luckless urge propelling him the horse Arion started off with a bound before the old king, being a poor horseman since the isle was too rocky and mountainous to breed horses, had properly settled himself on its back; with the result that the old man, feeling himself to be slipping, tugged violently at the bridle, causing the creature to rear up on its hind legs.

Here was Enorches' chance, and "the well-hung one", as his fellow mystagogues called him, who was now beside himself with blind fury, seized Pegasos by his nearest wing, and Arion by the nearest portion of his flowing mane, and with a mighty wrench and a superhuman tearing and rending, of which the maddest follower of Dionysos would have been proud, pulled out a whole quarter of that flowing mane by the roots and the whole of the left wing of the Flying Horse by *its* roots, screaming, as he did so, in a voice that seemed to whirl like a sea-vulture round their heads in strident circles: "By all that's beyond our knowledge, and beyond our powers of knowledge, I curse you both!"

But they were no ordinary mortal horses these two; and after a quick exchange of equine-heart to equine-heart commentary on the situation with their heads touching, disregarding the Priest of Orpheus as completely as if he were an inanimate reproduction of the male organ that had simultaneously come to life and become inebriated, but whose antics were of no interest to creatures of their immortal breed, they leapt forward on their dedicated journey.

Thus it was that in spite of the abundant mixture of ichor and blood which dripped from the two horses' injured sides, and in spite of the insecure seat and bad horsemanship of the aged king, and in spite of the weight of the sack of treasure and its uneasy balancing by so young a rider as Nisos, and in spite of the fooling and jesting of Zeuks, who astraddle on Pegasos' rump, began murmuring a bawdy Bœotian ditty at the expense of the defeated priest, it was long before the sun showed any sign of sinking that this unusual group of living souls reached the rocky harbour-town of Reithron Paipalöenton. The laziest loiterers round the water-front of this town must have realized as they saw them, if they had not done so before, that something had happened, in the heaven, or in the earth, or in Erebos beneath the earth, that had materially altered the normal adjustment of the celestial and terrestial order, causing the most weird concatenations of persons and things.

Here they saw, for instance, these Reithron spectators of their harbour's routine, two mysteriously unusual horses, both dripping with blood, one of them with a single useless wing of many cubits length and a bleeding hole where its fellow had been and the other with a ghastly raw place where half of its sweeping black mane had been plucked out from its neck, so that its skin, though naturally of a greyish tinge, showed like white ivory blotched with blood, while riding upon one of these creatures was the most famous of all the heroes of the Trojan War save the swift-footed Achilles, and riding on the other, with a handsome boy in front of him, was a figure of comedy so extravagant that he might have been the tipsy Silenos himself, fresh from following Dionysos across the world!

And if the philosophic observers of Reithron Paipalöenton were struck by the outward appearance of our travellers, what about the Moth and Fly within the life-crack of the Heraklean Club?

“Are we still ourselves, Pyraust, my sweet friend?” enquired Myos, the house-fly, of his bewildered companion, while the west wind rushed wildly past them and the waves broke under the hooves of their two steeds, as they followed the jagged coast-line of that long and narrow island from one extremity to the other; but there was a tense moment of speechlessness within the bosom of the club of Herakles until after several convulsive and deep-drawn shivers the brown moth collected strength enough to reply.

“*You* are yourself, O imperturbable invertebrate! But, alas for me! I haven’t got the courage, nor the personality, to follow my own purposes and go my own way — O how wild this wind is! It would blow me into the forest if I were out in it; or if it were from the East I’d be drowned in the sea! — no! I haven’t got the strength of will to live my own life for myself in my own way; and even now my conscience is all worried because I didn’t go to help the Priest when he was surrounded by enemies! How brave he was to stand up for himself against them all and not even be afraid of tearing the feathers out of one of them and the hairs out of the other!

“O the poor, lonely, holy, heavenly man! O the wildly-loving, desperate man! O the great, erotic champion of blind, beautiful, abandoned drunken passion! O divine intoxicator! O the blessed inspirer of eternal hatred carried to a point beyond all understanding! How could I have borne to see a Priest of the Love of very Love and the Hate of very Hate frustrated in the ecstatic piety of his revenge, just when his beautiful anger had become a devouring Worm that could not be destroyed and a consuming Flame that could not be put out?

“I was a wretched disciple not to fly over to him, a miserable hand-maid not to whisper to him with my fluttering wings how much I admired him, how deeply I venerated his mighty, his majestic, his mysterious anger!”

The house-fly, who had listened to this outburst with troubled concentration, was now turning the subject over and over in his great heavy black head. At last he hummed: “I am afraid, my dear Pyraust, that I can’t quite follow your reasoning — but, heavens! how right you are about this terrible wind! I almost feel as if our living protector, this immortal club of Herakles, must soon be blown out of the king’s hand! ——

“That priest of yours certainly was beside himself with anger; that much I cannot deny: and when men are like that, whatever it may be that has roused their fury, they are all alike. They fall into a fit of abandoned rage and every kind of reason vanishes.

“But have you noticed, Pyraust, my pretty one, how this great weapon in which we’re travelling so fast, yes! this club of Herakles itself and nothing less, has been for some time, as we have been whirling along this infernal coast, conversing with the rocky ground itself, yes! actually with the very ground against which the eight hooves of our bearers have been striking, and very often striking fiery sparks?

“Have you noticed *this* queer fact, O soft-hearted one?”

Both the insects were quiet for a minute listening intently. Then Pyraust murmured in rapt admiration: “Yes, Myos most clever, Myos most discerning, Myos most sage, you are perfectly right! Our thrice-blest travelling shrine *is* talking to somebody or something. How marvellous of you to have found that out! I suppose we could scarcely dare — eh, my wise one? — to speak to our sacred Sanctuary and ask point-blank — no! I fear that would be too rude and impertinent! What do *you* feel?

"*Could* we dare?" — and the brown moth turned to the black fly the yearning of her whole quivering being. Again they were silent, listening to the wind whirling past them as they huddled together in the deepest shadow they could find in that narrow refuge.

"Why can't we listen to them without asking leave?" whispered the moth a moment later.

The fly made no answer. But his dark and corrugated countenance contorted itself into creases that could have been naturally interpreted as the tension of a profoundly scientific brain interrogating and interpreting Nature according to an elaborately technical process of his own invention.

"He's talking to our Sixth Pillar," he whispered at last— "O! O! how nice and out of the glare it is now! Do you know how *that* comes about, Pyraust?"

The moth shook her head; while her eyes opened wider still in dumb amazement that there should exist in the world anyone as wise as her friend the fly.

"The cause of this particular obscuration of dazzlement," announced that philosopher with the shrill certainty of a successful scientist, "is simply a human hand. Yes, whenever the old king who is holding the weapon that is our travelling equipage changes the position of his fingers, owing probably, but we can't be perfectly certain on that point, to some faint feeling of cramp, there occurs an over-powering alteration in the nature of our environment."

The moth bowed her small head and folded her silky wings in a paroxysm of passionate humility before such insight. But the sound of a very curious humming and drumming now presented itself to the startled attention of both of them.

“Do you hear *that*, my beautiful one?” enquired the fly.

“I most certainly do,” replied the moth. “Can you explain this also? Has *this* any connection with the way our ancient king holds his club of Hercules?”

Very gravely did the fly consider this simple question; and then he said, speaking very slowly: “My own feeling is that this curious sound has no connection at all with our heroic old king, or with the way he is holding the weapon which at this moment is our hiding-place.

No, precious one; my feeling is that this sound has to do with a conversation that is actually going on now, between the weapon which is our most blessed vehicle and the ground itself, including all the rocks and pebbles and even the very grains of sand, over which these astonishing horses are carrying us all on their backs.”

The brown moth uncurled her silky wings a little and stretched out her tiny legs with an even less noticeable movement. Then with one of her antennae she touched the precise centre of her friend’s heavy forehead and after having done so she licked the spot she had touched; and then instead of withdrawing her tongue and curling it up she made vague motions with it in the air as if inscribing upon that most elusive of all elements her unspeakable reverence for the wisdom of the fly.

Since it was the black-maned son of Poseidon, by the Earth-Mother in her disguise as a Mare, who was leading this singular cortège, and since Odysseus, who was holding Arion’s bridle-reins, along with the club of Herakles, at outstretched arm’s length, was, of all the warriors of that age, owing to the rockiness of Ithaca, the least acquainted with horses, it was natural that, quite apart from the dazzlement of the burning afternoon sun and the aridity of the rocks and sands and shelving stretches of bituminous gravel and shingly marl over which those eight unusual hooves clattered, there should be several abrupt arrests in their advance, and not a few perilous debouchings from the simpler direction indicated by commonsense.

But something or other, either the imperturbable spirit of the old king or the resolution of both the horses, kept them going. The bloody wound in Arion's shoulder made by the rape of half his mane did not seem to unsettle his mind; nor did the stream of bantering railleries addressed to the badly injured Pegasos by the incorrigible Zeuks diminish that godlike creature's speed.

And the pace they were going seemed to accelerate the scientific conclusions of the alert Fly. "No, by Aidoneus!" he suddenly cried; "No! my precious Pyraust! I was right in calling that weird sound we hear all the time a conversation or colloquy; but I made a mistake as to the identity of one of the interlocutors to whose dramatic secrets we have been listening.

"I took it for a simple dialogue between our Heraklean Club and the curving sea-banks of our sacred isle. But do you know who it is with whom our House of "Rest in Motion" is conversing?"

The brown Moth fluttered the feathery points of both her wings and allowed the proboscean sucker at the tip of her tongue to make a receptive gesture. "Yes?" she whispered, "yes? O I can't wait to hear!"

"It's none other," announced the triumphant Fly, "than our old Sixth Pillar in the Corridor at home! So I really am a Discoverer! Eh? What?"

The astounded Moth could only feel herself grow an infinitesimal portion of an inch smaller.

"What," she murmured, "does our Protector say to the Pillar? Isn't there a danger that the startling news of our being carried to the other end of the island by Pegasos and Arion may give the Pillar such a shock that its marble frame will split open, as that image of Themis did when the Harpies attacked it with their nails?”

But the Fly, after licking the sensitized tip of each of its front legs and after drying these delicate members on its transparent wings, made use of them with exquisite care and chivalrous nicety as dainty brushes to remove any feathery film that might be obstructing the hearing of the brown Moth, and ordered her to give herself up to listening and not to forget all that the Pillar itself had taught them about the universal language of matter in use even by its minutest particles.

“Don’t ‘ee forget, dear Pyraust,” he added, “how when we began our study of the alphabet of matter we learnt how much more important the sensations that certain words convey to us are than the precise nature of the words used or the number of syllables they contain.

“Above all, my dear girl, don’t forget what the Olive-Shoot always tells us, how in the science of language it is a combination of assonance and alliteration that conveys the idea; and thus it is only in poetry that the real secret of what is happening is revealed.”

They were both silent, listening intently; and it is clear that the club of Herakles, now held tight in the old hero’s hand, must have been putting some very crucial questions to the Sixth Pillar; and it struck both our listening insects, not to speak of the club itself, that it was really a masterpiece of technical triumph this invention of the “Son of Hephaistos”, whoever he was, who divulged the open secret of the long-hidden language, whereby the four elements, earth and air and fire and water, could hold converse together.

At this moment Pyraust and Myos had not to wait a second before they could hear it, the clear unmistakable voice, so familiar to them in that old corridor of their royal cave, of the Sixth Pillar.

"No," came the voice. "There is not a word, not a sign from Pallas Athene. It is universally accepted that she is in one of her shrines among the blameless Ethiopians; but how long she will remain there or what particular thing it was that roused her wrath against us all in Hellas, nobody has the faintest idea.

"As to the other gods, news has come that the rumour was true which declared that Typhon, the most powerful and monstrous and terrifying of all the titanic brood of the Great Mother, Typhon whom Zeus only just managed to overcome by means of the thunder and lightning given him by that weird Cyclopean race of one-eyed half-gods, to which Polyphemus belonged, Typhon who was buried under Etna, had truly and indeed broken loose from his dungeon.

"It is said he is now confronted by Herakles himself, Herakles the son of Zeus, and has been stopped by Herakles from advancing more than a few miles from the fiery crater out of which he has burst.

"There is no need for you, O great Club of Herakles, who have lived with us so long, and whom we of the palace-corridor have come to regard as one of ourselves, to feel hurt that it is not yourself who are now in the strong hand of Herakles as he holds back this monstrous Demigod from destroying the whole population of Italy and Greece and from advancing upon Asia and Africa.

"They say that the Three Fates have long ago decided that it is only by the metal iron that Typhon can be defeated and they further tell me that Hephaistos has now forged for Herakles out of iron a weapon as deadly if not as shapely and supple as you are yourself! If you ask me what has happened to great Hermes, the cunning messenger of Zeus, and the subtle intermediary between men and gods and between the living and the dead, I can only tell you what *my* messengers tell me; and as you know *my* messengers are the fiery, aqueous, aerial, terrestrial, magnetic quiverings through the elements that are swifter than the feet of Hermes or the wings of Iris, the murmur, that is to say, of element to element, and, where the earth is concerned, the whisper of rock to rock, and of grain of sand to grain of sand!

"And from these I have learnt the startling news that Father Zeus is no longer served by Hermes the Messenger; but on the contrary that Hermes has gone back to his birth-place in Mount Kyllene, whither his mother, Maia, the loveliest of the Pleiades, is still drawn down from the sky by the poets who worship her; so that she, along with her son's music, shall enable countless generations of unborn men and women to embrace the dark spaces of life's dubious experience with pleasure instead of pain!

"You, old corridor-companion, keep on telling me about this devilish priest of Orpheus with his mad incantations and his mania for Eros. Well, my friend, let me now tell you what I hear about this young Eros of the Mysteries. I hear he has recently mutilated himself so that he can make love to both sexes and be loved by both.

"My messengers are obscure as to the precise harm — if harm it is that he has done to himself; but that he has done something very serious to himself they do most strongly affirm, assuring me that the old Eros that gods and men have known until this hour is no more; and that a new and different Eros has taken his place. The elements also tell me that the goddess Aphrodite after being unfaithful to him with both mortals and immortals for so long has now fallen in love again with her crippled lord, Hephaistos, and is struggling to keep him to herself with every art she knows and all this in the Island of Lemnos!

"As to the Father of the Olympians, the great son of Kronos himself, the elements tell me that he is still on Mount Gargaros, but without his thunder and lightning which have been taken back by that same Cyclopean race from whom he originally received them. What makes it worse for this poor Thunderer, deprived of thunder, is that not only has his own son Hermes deserted him, but his other messenger and emissary, Iris, the Rainbow, has been entirely pre-empted, appropriated, and taken possession of, by Hera, the Queen of Heaven, who is now left alone on the summit of Olympos, with only a handful of frightened attendants, and surrounded by the empty palaces and the deserted pleasure-halls of the once-crowded City of the Gods.

"Under these conditions, as you may easily imagine, O great lion-slaying Nemean Club, to still possess a messenger like Iris is an indescribable relief, and you may be sure that Queen Hera makes the most of it, and despatches the luckless Iris on the most difficult quests. For example I happen to know that at this very moment this youthful immortal is wandering through the uttermost lands of the blameless Ethiopians searching for Pallas Athene.

"You ask me what I learn from the elements about Hermes since he no longer serves the Father of Gods and Men? Well, old companion of so many years, you who along with me have seen so many strange faces in our corridor to the palace of the king, what I have gathered from over-hearing these communications between the elements, which of course simply means the contact of air with water, water with fire, fire with earth, is so startling that I myself have difficulty in believing it. But what I've learnt I'll tell you at once, old friend, if my voice still reaches you, as your un-winged Pegasos and your un-maned Arion whirl you to the end of the isle; and it is this.

“All the spirits of all the mortals who ever lived on earth have defied Aidoneus; and, following the ghost of Teiresias, have broken loose from Hades and are wandering at large over the whole earth. It is now Persephone who is searching for her mother, searching frantically, searching desperately for her, through all their familiar abodes, through all their ancient haunts, by every public way, along every well-known river.

“Hast thou seen my mother?” is her cry. “Hast thou seen a stately woman with a mantle over her head and a staff in her hand?”

“But the most astonishing part of the news the elements have brought me is this. By the advice of Hermes, who it appears has been down to Hades to find the mysterious and awful Aidoneus who carried off Persephone and made her swallow those honey-sweet seeds of the fatal pomegranate, this dark ruler of a deserted Hades has summoned his brother Poseidon to meet him at the utmost limit of the West where the Titan Atlas, as a punishment for opposing Zeus, holds up the sky.

“Here Aidoneus and Poseidon together may be able to persuade the Son of Kronos to join them in leaving Olympos to Hera and in restoring and building up again the shattered order of the world; in forcing the ghosts of the dead back to Hades, the Titans back to their punishment in Tartaros, and with the help of Atropos, the oldest of the Fates, getting both Eros and Dionysos under such complete control that the entire — —”

It was at this crucial moment that the two insects within the bosom of the club of Herakles had to clutch each other in sheer panic. The whole cortège had stopped with a terrific jerk. There was a ghastly sound of eight equine hooves scraping against some flinty floor of rock.

In the stress of this shock the two wounded animals, Pegasos still bleeding where his lost wing had been torn out, and Arion still switching and bleeding where he had lost half his mane, drew up side by side.

Odysseus as he slid down to the ground, not without a certain grim satisfaction, shifted his grasp from the reins to the bridle of Arion, while Nisos, leaving to Zeuks all real responsibility for the wounded Pegasos, pushed the treasure-sack as well as he could to the part of the creature's back that was still unhurt.

As for Zeuks, he set himself to make a timely use of the healing properties of human saliva. He spat exhaustively upon the raw place in the creature's side from which the wing had been plucked, and when he had finished doing this he proceeded to blow upon the glittering bubbles of his own spittle until the whole surface of the creature's side was as iridescent as if the luckless Iris herself, exhausted by her pursuit of Athene among the blameless Ethiopians, had dissolved in fatigue upon his back.

Nisos glanced quickly round to see if the old King were using *his* spittle as balm for Arion's shoulder from which Enorches had torn at least half of that flowing mane; but in place of anything of that sort Odysseus was leaning his own elbow upon Arion's back together with the Nemean Club while he investigated the cause of this abrupt halt of their divine steeds.

Nisos had only to follow the tilt forward of the old king's beard to share his discovery, and they both faced the interrupter of their ride with cautious wonder. It was at a wild, shaggy, goat-legged, goat-horned, and yet human-shaped figure lying fast asleep in the shadow of a great rock that the old man and the boy now gazed in astonishment.

And then Nisos suddenly realized that there was another figure in their path, and one with which he was already acquainted. This second figure was nobody else but the eldest of the Three Fates, the powerful Atropos herself.

Then once more the boy faced her, the same frail woman, resting her back just as she had done before against the trunk of a spruce-fir that grew upon the very rock beneath which the sleeping Goat-foot lay. Unlike this goat-horned, goat-legged figure, however, the little old woman with her back to the tree was wide-awake; nor did the tree against which she was resting break the glare of the afternoon sun for her in the manner in which the rock did for the Being below her.

"O! I never thought — —" gasped Nisos the moment he met the eyes of this little old woman.

"No, you never thought, my boy, did you, that you and old Atropos would meet again so soon! In truth I never expected it myself. You see," she went on, keeping her eyes fixed on the boy and completely disregarding both Odysseus and Zeuks, "we Fates are not — I wish indeed we were! — the sole arbiters of destiny in this mad world. It was, for example, only in very vague shape that we Three foresaw all that's happening upon the earth today.

"But when this confusion ends, for confusion by its inherent nature cannot last, neither we three, nor the goddess Themis, whose image the Harpies broke, no, nor even the great Son of crooked-counselling Kronos, himself, will be the only arbiters of what happens. There will still remain, my dear boy, those two great Powers, and I am not talking of Eros or Dionysos, whom we all, plants and trees and beasts and birds, and fishes and reptiles and worms and insects and men and gods must obey, Necessity and Chance."

The eyes of Atropos seemed to hold behind them, when she had done speaking, so much more than the half-named body of a little, fleshless, shrivelled, skinny old woman, that Nisos continued to stare in petrified awe into their singular depths.

The sensation they gave him was that the sky above Ithaca and indeed above all the isles in all the bays and seas and straits and gulfs of the land of the Achaeans, together with the interiorly receding depths of all that land itself, the depths, in fact, of all the various solid elements that composed the rocks and sand and earth and soil of which that land was composed, had that pair of eyes *as their eyes*, and were even now, those remotenesses of sky beyond limit, and those staggering recessions of terrestrial matter beyond limit, gazing at him in a positively ghastly intensity while they informed him that the real deciders of his fate and of the fate of the old hero at his side, and of the fate of Eione, the ideal loveliness of whose perfect form had been for him the living background of the whole of this wild ride, were not the Fates nor the Gods nor the sublime obstinacy and cunning of Odysseus, but, as Atropos herself had just admitted, the inescapable pressure of pitiless Necessity and the motiveless antics of causeless Chance.

The tension, as they thus met once again, between the heart of Nisos and the eyes of Atropos was however soon brought to an end by an abrupt awakening movement in the goat-legged and goat-horned Personage lying in the shadow of that rock. He didn't wake quickly. He awoke slowly. But no sooner had he lifted a hand, not even to scratch his head but to grope with lecherous fingers amid the foliations of grey lichen that covered the base of the rock than an astonishing thing happened; and what was queerest about this thing was that it was felt by everybody and that it was inescapable.

Both the animals quite evidently felt it. Odysseus felt it. Nisos felt it. And Zeuks felt it. The fragile old figure beneath the spruce-fir on the top of the rock must at that moment have been occultly, covertly, and peremptorily summoned to some other significant parting of the ways for persons in whose destiny she was interested; for she promptly took advantage of this opportune distraction, and gathering her flimsy garments about her scrambled down from the rock and disappeared among the trees to seaward.

Nisos was amazed at what had begun to happen to him the very first moment that this goat-legged sleeper opened his eyes. He had been so hypnotized into a sort of philosophic acceptance of things he could only half follow, that, when he found himself shaking from head to foot in extreme panic-terror, but without the faintest notion of why the sudden fear had come upon him, he felt as if he were going mad. Was some appalling danger threatening them all, including the animals who had brought them here? And had the oldest and strongest of the Spinners of Destiny come to warn them, and had now gone to ward off from them the approaching danger?

Nisos felt certain he was not more affected by this sudden and inexplicable panic than were his companions. He could see that the horses were trembling; and indeed he experienced in the teeth of this weird terror a proud satisfaction that his own right arm which, while he was holding his colloquy with Atropos, he had kept stretched out, had not loosened or lessened the pressure of the hand with which he was supporting the great treasure-sack, propt on the back of Pegasos.

And it was clear to him that the wits of Odysseus were not in any more danger of being lost in this mysterious panic than his own. The old king calmly advanced towards the recumbent goat-man, dragging Arion with him. Nisos noticed too that he held the bridle with his left hand while he advanced, and that he gripped the Heraklean club firmly with his right.

“Hail to you,” the old king said, “whoever you may be — whether immortal or mortal, whether god or man! And I pray you, if you are a god, to pardon us for disturbing your noon-sleep before natural termination. I am Odysseus and I have come with Nisos Naubolides and with our good friend

Zeuks to do honour to the daughter of the great dead Prophet Teiresias whom many-voiced Rumour declares has been brought from Thebes to a dwelling here, hard by the sea. If, therefore, whether you are a god or a man, you will assist us in finding this House, I, Odysseus, son of Laertes, will of my free heart, give you whatever your soul desires of the treasure we carry with us."

The prostrate goat-man heard him to the end without stirring. Then he made a very quick movement. He rolled the greenish-black eye-balls of the enormous whites of his nymph-ravishing eyes, and without changing his position, or relaxing his clutch upon the lichen-tuft he was fondling, he took in everything. In fact from the look in those exploring eyes he did more than take in everything. You could have said he devoured, drank up, and erotically possessed everything; not only the old warrior with his bowsprit beard and full-bosomed club advancing upon him, but the half-winged Pegasos, the half-maned Arion, the grave, slender boy Nisos, and every bulge in the choreographic blur which the blazing sun created out of the bucolic features of Zeuks — except the great sack of treasure, across which those rolling eyes flitted without offering it the faintest attention.

Then the old king spoke again: "Are you prepared to show us the way to the house by the sea, whither these Thebans, if such they are, have brought the daughter of Teiresias?"

The goat-horned, goat-legged one suddenly leapt to his feet and with a rough and rude gesture pushed past Odysseus and seizing Zeuks by his elbows stared offensively and yet in some queer way possessively and almost paternally into his face. Over the wounded back of Pegasos, which, though still tender to the touch and not by any means healed, had been considerably soothed by its owner's spittle, it was still possible for Nisos to see Zeuks' expression, and it was an amazement to him to remark how quietly, and yet with a sort of comical expectation of more dramatic revelations to follow, he took the gross, yet almost cajoling stare of this horned and hairy Being.

“You are! — you are! And yet you *cannot* be!” blurted out the puzzled and bewildered God-Beast; and Nisos never forgot the mixture of earthy roguery, rustic guile, spontaneous magical power, along with the professional horned-ram propitiation of a cunning old shepherd, in the goat-legged creature’s tone.

But the capturer and dominator of Pegasos and Arion, the man who was more than a match for the Priest of the Mysteries, was once again completely master of the situation. With an easy assumption of authority — and yet our clever young Nisos didn’t miss the shade of something that resembled a curious spasm of play-acting in his tone — Zeuks freed himself from the God-Beast’s hold and turned to Odysseus.

“We are in the presence, O King,” he blurted out with an irresponsible chuckle, while the goat-horned creature leaned his chin upon the head of Pegasos and began whispering in one of the flying horse’s nervous and twitching ears, “of none other than the great god Pan himself. For some curious reason that I cannot explain to you, O king, this great and most benevolent deity has, ever since he first appeared to me on my farm, confused me with a lad he knew on the farm of farmer Dryops, whose favourite Nymph was Erikepaia, though we ignorant farm-labourers persisted in calling her Dryope or Dryopea, but who rejoiced to share Pan’s bed in the moss and ferns of this farmer Dryops’ Arcadian inheritance.

“Unlike the jealous and tyrannical Dryops, whose despotic arms Erikepaia joyfully exchanged for those of this famous god who fills the udders of Arcadian cattle with the richest milk and the hives of Arcadian bees with the sweetest honey, I have been proud, though she *was* loved by this kindly god, to have myself loved the lovely Erikepaia long and loyally, and long after she grew too old for a god's embraces I loved her. I loved her when she grew old with the oak of her adoption, which she and I together dug up from that Arcadian valley and planted here, here by the side of this rock, here where thou, O great Pan, whether thou knewest it or not, wast sleeping a moment ago.

"Her oak has fallen into dust and Erikepaia with it; but never once did the Nymph who had been loved by Pan or the farmer, my poor self, who loved the Nymph that had been loved by Pan, ever think of him save with true worship."

It was only when Zeuks had finished speaking that the last thing anyone of them expected happened.

The goat-legged Being swung away from Pegasos and approached Odysseus. Then with a movement so swift and yet so gentle that Nisos imagined he was lifting the hero's hand to his lips as a sign that he would himself be his guide to the house of the fugitives from Thebes he bit the king's hand with such sudden and vicious force that the old man dropped his club to the ground.

In an instant the god was upon the back of Arion, who with mildly startled up-tossed head tore his bridle from Odysseus, and, while what was left of his beautiful black mane was tossed across his rider's lean, goat-hairy shanks, set off at a gallop in the direction from which they had all just come; but as he rode away, the god of milk and butter and honey looked back over his shoulder at Nisos, as if deliberately wishing to include him also among the victims of his mischievous and shameless amorousness.

"Pegasos has told me," he cried, "that you've left at the palace a sweet little shepherdess called Eione who is just made to delight my simple taste. She'll suit me better, I fancy, than any prophetic daughter of Teiresias!"

Horse and rider, they were soon out of sight; but the shrewd Zeuks had not missed a swift instinctive move towards Pegasos made by Nisos the moment the goat-horned one flung out that word: “Eione”.

“No, no, my dear boy!” he cried sharply. “’Twould be crazy to try to catch them! And what could you do if you did catch them? All the while I lodged — and in this very place — with Erikepaia, she never once told me of any occasion during the time she was loved by Pan when he made her jealous of a mortal maid.”

He turned to Odysseus with a look of whimsical appeal, which, though it had something at once gravely conspiring and gaily mischievous, contained also an immediate and extremely practical warning. And then, while he kept one hand in kindly restraint on the boy’s shoulder, he boldly laid the other on the Club of Herakles which the king, having picked it up from the ground, had carefully balanced, too absorbed to give it more than a secondary place in his mind, on the unwounded portion of the back of Pegasos.

“Our young friend here, O great king,” protested Zeuks; “is impatient for our return so that he can protect his girl from the advances of this amorous goat-foot; but I tell him that, though, we can wound these immortal creatures and even draw ichor from their veins till they are too weak to move, we cannot plunge them as they can plunge us into that vast company of spirits beyond counting, such as have lately, the rumour runs, broken loose from Hades — into the company of those who can only fly like the flight of birds where no birds are and can only cry like the echoes of voices where no voices are, until the end of time.”

“Let us, O great Master,” begged Nisos, who for all Zeuks’ words could not help vividly visualizing the white soft body of Eione helplessly yielded up to those lean hairy shanks and to those gross bristly lips of the immortal

Goat-foot, “pray desperately to Atropos that fate may conquer both necessity and chance and bring us quick, quick, quick, to that House by the Sea whence without delay we can return home! O dear master, O great king, this, I swear, is what Pegasos wants, for I can feel him trembling and quivering under our hands!”

All the while the boy was making this appeal he was working hard with both his hands to get the great sack of treasure nearer the horse’s tail and further away from its shoulders.

“But, my friends,” groaned Odysseus, raising his bowsprit beard and drawing in his breath towards the four quarters of the horizon one by one. “How, in the name of Pallas Athene, are we to know in what direction this accurst place lies? If only we could hear the sea; *that* would be a surer help than any praying to any goddess of fate.”

For a moment they were all three silent. Then the two men became aware of unrestrained sobs breaking from the throat of Nisos. And for another moment, however intently they listened, that was the only sound.

Suddenly Odysseus murmured, as if thinking aloud: “I have felt *this* happen before, once, twice, three times before! There may be nothing in it; but, on the other hand, it may be — We must doubt everything — *including doubt.* Yes, *there*! There it is again! So be it. I can only try.” He lifted the club an inch or two, held it very lightly, and waited again. He held it as if he were testing its weight. He held it so that in its whole length it was removed from contact with the back of Pegasos. Then, still holding it lightly with his right hand, but grasping the horse’s bridle with his left, he began walking rapidly straight past the rock and into what looked like the thickest part of the fir-forest that completely surrounded them. Nisos, lifting his head now, thought silently: “He is making the club lead us! O Atropos, let us get back in time to save her!” The path by which they had come had vanished; and now indeed there was no path at all. But Odysseus led them forward without the faintest hesitation, nor was there any hesitation in the manner in which Pegasos followed, the treasure-sack propt on his rump, and Nisos keeping it from falling, while Zeuks with a large fern in his hand followed close behind, driving the flies from the raw on the horse's back whence Enorches had wrenched the wing.

Thus they steadily advanced, weaving their way in and out among the closely-growing fir-trees, and every now and then ascending and descending some small eminence usually of a circular shape and not unfrequently crowned with incredibly ancient stones of a kind totally different from any the island itself supplied, and in some cases, Nisos noticed as they passed, engraved with hieroglyphs not one letter of which he could recognize as Achaean or Hellenic.

And as they went on it was still the club of Herakles who led them; and Nisos often wondered whether he himself or Zeuks could have possibly caught, just through the palm of their hand, that subtle, illusive, delicate quiver, like the faint ripple of water seeking its level, by which the club conveyed its intimation of direction to the hand that had blinded Polyphemos.

Meanwhile within his "life-crack", as to himself the club called their refuge, the silky wings of Pyraust, the brown moth, were fluttering with a desperate desire to fly homewards in the track of Arion and Pan.

"You shan't! You shan't! You shan't!" shrilled the black fly in its highest-pitched voice. "I'd perish before I'd let you do anything so crazy! Don't you see, you sweet, delectable, adorable, little fool, that the trees are already throwing long shadows, and didn't you notice that on the crest of that last little hill we crossed the tree-trunks had a golden glow on their bark?"

The lovely little moth hurried to retort to this in an ironic assumption of pitiful weakness and naive innocence that not only made the fly feel a complete fool but removed from his proud heart every drop of that sweet metheglin of male superiority with which he had been intoxicating himself as he pictured their flight home together side by side in the “Wolf-Light” of the early dawn.

“Oh I know, I know,” cried the brown moth, “how lazy and luxurious it is of me to think of flying in the dark. But O it’s so nice, though I know it’s naughty of me to enjoy such a thing, to feel the great big strong black night holding me up on every side and whispering to me all the time: ‘Lean on me and you’ll be absolutely safe! Spread out your beautiful wings under me and you’ll see how soon you’ll learn to swim with me, ride with me, float with me, yes! you darling little moth, till I fill every nerve beneath your skin, and every pore in your skin, and every cavity in your lovely and trembling form with my calm and cool support!’

“Thus whispers the black night; and nobody can ever know,” continued the subtle and teasing moth, “all that the darkness of night means to me!”

The fly gave such a jerk of metaphysical excitement at this speech that the club’s consciousness of a shock in the “life-crack” of his honeysuckle-twisted or ivy-twisted bosom very nearly disturbed the whole piloting of their cortège.

“Why then, O most lovely and bewitching of self-deceivers, do you always try so desperately to burn yourself to death in any flame of light?”

The beautiful moth’s answer to this piece of logic had, however, to be postponed; for it was at that very second that they arrived at the end of the wood. There, before them, lay the salt waves with their islands and ships and rocky reefs and wide-stretching curving bays. And there, beyond all these, in far-away, vision-fulfilling, story-ending, mystery-resolving, resting-places for the imagination, the eyes of those three human beings were led further and yet further, to the vast horizons of the encircling sea.

And the great Club of Herakles ceased its rudder-like quiverings as impelled by an irresistible impulse Odysseus lifted the great weapon high above his head and shook it in the air as if he, a man among men, were taking it on himself to challenge that golden sun-path which, originating behind him, was now flowing across the darkening waters!

Yes! and to challenge the divine ether itself he lifted it up, the ether under which the sea-spaces before him extended beyond the ships, beyond the islands, beyond the main-land, beyond those far-away Asiatic mountains, on the Eastern verge of the world, where from the image of Niobe, the mother of mankind, fell no longer that ceaseless torrent of tears, and finally to challenge the very trident of Poseidon himself as he strove to dominate the multitudinous waves.

The two men, the now one-winged horse, the Heraklean club, the two insects, and our young friend Nisos, they were all silent; they were all gazing in front of them. What they saw as they gazed was the ruin of a building so colossal in its pre-historic enormity that the first impression Nisos had of it was that it ought to have sunk down by its own weight thousands of years ago to the very centre of the earth.

But what else did the boy see that made him even forget, as he looked, Eione’s danger from the shaggy lasciviousness of the Goat-foot from Arcadia? He distinctly saw, erect on a huge flat stone under a cyclopean arch, the figure of a young girl, a young girl of about the same age as Eione, though she may have been a little taller, and it seemed to him as if, with an outstretched arm, that figure was waving to him; not to the others, but to him — to him alone.

CHAPTER VI

"But you don't answer my question, Pontopereia. Why do you keep climbing the tower and looking inland like that? You're not up to some game with any of these farm-boys round here, are you? I've always told you I wouldn't stand for that sort of thing; so you'd better not begin it.

"I don't mean that you're not to climb the tower, child; so you needn't put on that sulky look. I know you like looking out over the bay and counting the sails and watching for foreign ships. I like doing that myself. Yes I'm always ready to play our old game of pretending we're waiting for the King of the Blameless Ethiopians; and that when his ship shows itself it will have a black sail, so that we shall know it.

"No, no! You're not to slip off like that without a word! You're much too fond of doing that; and I've noticed it's grown on you as a regular habit these Spring days. Of course I know all young girls get Spring-Fever. I used to get it myself. In fact, old as I am, I do still. The wily old Earth-Mother herself must have had it, or something uncommonly like it, when she left her daughter alone with those daffodil-pickers, a proper temptation for the King of Hades. Daffodil-pickers! She had to swallow a few Pomegranate-seeds before she learnt how close lie the borders of Heaven and Hell!

"But you weren't looking seaward, or counting ships, or pretending to be waiting for a black sail. You were staring at those fir-trees and at all those half-bare oaks and at that open clearing on the top of the ridge, where on fine days we can see the Rock of the Nymph of Dryops.

"Have you got into that crazy head of yours that just because I let Eione take you up there when this Moon was young you'll see that same chit of a dairy-wench waiting for you in the same place now this Moon is old?

"O yes! and another thing, Pontopereia, while I've got you to myself; for I don't know what Zenios would do if he heard of this little new game of yours. Don't you ever again — yes, you may well steal into the shadow of that Bust of Kadmos! — but you *must* listen to me now, though I can see how white your cheeks have gone and how those clumsy great legs of yours are shivering and shaking! — Don't you ever again, my girl, go into Zenios' underground treasury! I expect you've so often heard me laugh at the old fool about his pride and his miserliness and about all that nonsense of his being the rightful heir to the throne of Thebes, that you've begun to fancy you can play any of your wild-girl games upon the old stick-in-the-mud.

"But I can assure you, my fine girl, that though you may be a prophet's daughter, and though you may even have prophetic visions of your own, there's one thing you *can't* do, and that is meddle with Zenios' treasure-shelves! Why, my dear crazy child, if he found me — yes, *me*, my very, very self! — fumbling and fidgetting, and flopping, and flouncing from shelf to shelf in that treasury of his there'd be a rumpus that would bring Omphos, Kissos, and Sykos up from the fields!

"And do you think he'd put up with a child like you flibbertigibbetting down there? I don't like to try even to think of what he might do — yes! do to you and do to me too for not looking after you better! — for I've seen him in these furious moods, which is something you, my good child, have never seen, and I can assure you if you *had* seen him in one of them you'd never again take that silver key from its hook in his bedroom, never again go down those steps to that door."

It was clear that Pontopereia would be obedient. But it was absolutely certain also that had the inscrutable Atropos met the eyes of this lovely guardian of a clumsy girl at this particular second the woman's exultation over her victory would have sunk to the vanishing point.

"Where *is* Zenios? Is he coming home to supper?" enquired Pontopereia when she had recovered herself.

"O yes," replied Okyrhöe, glancing at the reflection of them both in the big polished shield hanging on the wall over their heads, the shield which Zenios always swore had belonged to Kadmos himself, "he'll be back all right for supper. In fact he's got to meet that funny old man Moros, your friend Eione's father or grandfather. I forget which it is! But he's a quaint old fellow; and he certainly knows how to flatter. Zenios thinks highly of him since he's ready to listen without end to endless talk about the great House of Kadmos, whence it came, and whither — —"

"Whither it'll go when you and I have escaped from it!" interrupted Pontopereia; and though the girl's eyes were fixed on the arched entrance to the room where they were talking, an entrance which in some incredible antiquity, had been carved out of ten yards of solid rock, Okyrhöe's eyes were still absorbed in the reflection of the two of them in that great polished shield. And so intense was the power of concentration with which Okyrhöe's self-interest had endowed her vision that it seemed to her a quite natural yielding to a quite natural impulse when she allowed the young girl to steal from her side and slip away in silence through that low deeply-cut arch into the open air, while she watched herself arrange her hair, arrange the veil that covered her hair, arrange what covered the veil that covered her hair, and, as she did so, permitted herself luxuriously and voluptuously to lie back in her chair and to tell herself, for the thousandth and one time, the thrilling story of her life up to date and all its drastic moves and dramatic crises.

It must have been her feminine suspicion that Pontopereia had taken advantage of Zenios' troublesome mania for being flattered to start an amorous affair with some farmer's son of the neighbourhood, or even to exalt this new friendship with Eione into a romantic attachment, that set her own mind running so recklessly upon her own youth.

Anyway she let herself recall the time when, being younger than Pontopereia was today, she had been a fellow-attendant along with Arsinöe among the crowd of spirited young girls from every part of the mainland at the court of King Priam in Ilium.

Her inspiration for these memories came from her own beautiful face; and as at this moment, with Zenios walking to meet his aged flatterer and Pontopereia remorsefully pretending to be looking for a black sail on water that was already too dark to reveal any sail, and with Nemertes, the stalwart mother of their three faithful servants, Omphos, Kissos, and Sykos, yes, with Nemertes, she told herself, now at work in the kitchen preparing a plentiful meal for the three lads and a no less plentiful, but rather more elegant one for Zenios and herself, there was no immediate necessity to leave this shield-mirror, she allowed the motions of her fingers, about her head, her hair, and her perfect throat, to follow the arbitrary motions of her memory.

And she remembered how her crafty mother from Crete, who had made her change her name from Genetyllis to Okyrhöe, had warned her against making friends with a wild strange girl at the same court whom everyone but the girl herself knew to be a bastard daughter of Hector.

But with Arsinöe she had insisted on making friends; and had proved her wisdom in this when the crash came and the city was taken, for she succeeded in making Andromache, Hector's widow, believe that it was she, and not Arsinöe, who had the right to call Hector father, and she had betrayed Arsinöe into the hands of Phoenician merchants bound for Ithaca, and while clinging herself to the ill-starred Andromache, she had succeeded at last in becoming the wife of the miser Zenios, and in aiding him in his flight from Thebes in company with Pontopereia.

It had only been when Zenios in his craving for masculine society had begun to exercise his hospitable influence on the susceptible Moros that Okyrhöe learnt that Arsinöe like herself was a refugee in Ithaca; and although this piece of news had at first been a considerable shock to Okyrhöe, she was now, as she airily, though by no means absent-mindedly, practised various expressions in profile, in three-quarters-face, and in full face, telling herself a fine story as to what she would do if by any strange chance she found herself confronting once again her old acquaintance, Arsinöe, the daughter of Hector the son of Priam….

"Okyrhöe! what do you think? Who do you suppose — —" The beautiful lady rose and swung round from her shield-mirror like an indignant sea-mew from the crest of a wave.

The shock of seeing Pontopereia so quickly again and in such an unaccountable whirl of excitement was as irritating as it was startling. The girl had left her at her shield-mirror. The girl now found her at her shield-mirror. There was something annoying in being thus caught practising seductive expressions and the effective manipulation of dramatic drapery.

"How often must I tell you, Pontopereia, that I won't have you calling me Okyrhöe! You must call me Mother."

"But you are not — —" the girl began; but seeing real anger in the woman's face she hurriedly broke off. "The King of Ithaca has come, mother! He's come with a heap of golden treasure to buy me from you and take me away with him!"

The excitement of Pontopereia was so overwhelming that it seemed to have loosened her hair, enlarged her breasts, increased her height, and transformed her whole being to such an extent that her figure seemed to fill the arched passage that led out into the air. As a growing girl the daughter of Teiresias was at the opposite pole of girlhood from the young Eione: for, while this latter's face was plain and homely, her limbs were those of a perfect dancer; but while Pontopereia's limbs were thick, heavy, awkward and unwieldy, her face was moulded with exquisite delicacy as if for the perfect expression of pure inspiration. It was a face that lent itself to be possessed by a power that, even as you watched it, seemed able to change human flesh and blood into some rarer essence, as though air, water, and fire had joined in revolt against the heavier and more substantial fourth element with which they are normally associated.

But though Okyrhöe had already recovered her composure and was now arranging her drapery round her shoulders with the absolute poise of a complete balance of personal being, as she begged the excited girl to tell her how large a bodyguard Odysseus had brought with him, and as she shifted her position from side to side in attempts to see if any of the royal attendants were visible between the outlet from this sequestered chamber and the curves of the sand-dunes descending to the edge of the sea, it was clear to Pontopereia that she had not yet decided upon her line of action.

"May I go and bring them in, Mother? And then may I run and tell Zenios who's come, and bring him back before he's gone too far? The only danger is that if I do catch up with him — you know what he is, Mother! — he very likely will just come back alone and send me on — miles and miles on very likely! — to tell old Moros that the king has suddenly come to supper and if *he* comes too there'll be one too many!"

The daughter of Teiresias certainly revealed her insight into Okyrhöe's nature by assuming that when the lovely lady finally decided in what direction her own chief private interests lay she wouldn't waste a second in making up her mind what she wanted done.

But what a girl of her age, however great her prophetic inspiration, naturally couldn't know, was the enormous though imponderable part played in the lives of all grown-up women by that curious sixth sense that can only be clumsily and crudely defined by the words *social instinct.* Nor could she know that this same "social instinct" resembles pure animal instinct much closer than it resembles anything rational or logical, and, as such, depends to a large extent on sight, sound, taste, smell and touch.

"Can he possibly remember me?" Okyrhöe thought. Then, having dismissed that idea as out of the question— "Never mind," she said to herself, "whether he does or not, I remember *him* perfectly well; and I remember that with him, where women are concerned, there are only two things, either simple lust, or simple affection. *That* being so — —" And her train of thought concluded with obscene images.

Meanwhile Pontopereia was wondering about the blood-stained ichor dripping from the left side of the one-winged horse, wondering about the implacably-pointed beard of Odysseus, pondering on the deeply cracked bosom of the club of Herakles, pondering on the jests and jokes and jibes and jabbering conjurations of the jiggering-juggering Zeuks, and finally seeing again the ever-vigilant Nisos with the gods alone knew what sort of precious treasure done up in a sack that reeked of mysterious far-away harbours.

But Okyrhöe had already had time to make up her mind. Like the smoke of a burning arsenal her astounding decision filled the room and went eddying forth in spiral circles over the whole of Ornax and over the dark waters of the whole bay.

"What I've got to do is to leave Nemertes to look after Zenios, take Pontopereia with me — by the gods if they want *her* they shall have us both! — go with them to the palace of Odysseus; and, once there, having got rid of the old man's old nurse, try my hand at being a combination of Kalypso and Penelope; and, as long as Athene leaves me in peace, *that*'ll be pretty easy!"

"No, child," she commanded in the strong firm tone of a born feminine ruler, "No, child, I'll come with you to welcome them. Oh no! I can't possibly spare you to run after Zenios. Let him meet old Moros and bring him back. Nemertes must prepare a really royal meal and when Omphos, Kissos, and Sykos have washed and changed their clothes and had their own supper, they must wait at table! So come on, child, we must tell Nemertes what's in store for her. It's lucky we killed that old boar-pig last week; aye! What a piece of luck *that* is! Nemertes must have enough meat in the larder for three Odysseuses! Well, come along my dear!"

It is certain that the primeval dining-hall of Ornax had never seen such a satisfying feast as the one with which, only a few hours later, the three gratified guests along with their entertainers were delighting their souls.

What added an unexpected and quite special interest to this improvised banquet was the fact that, along with old Moros, Zenios had brought back to Ornax none other than Petraia's sister who after a distressing scene with the Latin Nymph Egeria had embarked frantically for home; and by the aid of a real and not pretended black sail had been brought to this very coast.

To the complete surprise of their hostess the heart and soul of the whole dinner was Zeuks. Nor was it only Okyrhöe who was astonished at the way this plain rustic Achaean dominated the situation and entertained them all.

Nisos was amazed at what he saw and heard. Zenios though he condescended to chuckle now and again, was obviously more interested in a flask of a special kind of wine that Moros had brought for him than in anything else; but the fact that the first Master that Ornax had had for a thousand years, had had indeed since men and Titans were almost indistinguishable in their hostility to the gods, was so abnormally thick-skinned, so self-centred, so toweringly conventional, did undoubtedly contribute to the banquet's success.

Zenios was indeed so magnificently stupid as to take it for granted that his being of the same blood as the famous Kadmos and possessing that potentate's Shield, Drinking-Horn, and Sceptre in the shape of a Thyrsus, were circumstances that did so much honour to any guest that chance might send him that no more was required.

And no more *was* required. Zenios' guests were the luckiest of guests. They were left to entertain themselves. Nor was the fact of Zenios being such an obsessed collector of objects made of gold detrimental to what might be called the pleasant negativeness of his hospitality. His visitors obscurely thought of themselves — so completely did the mania of the born collector dominate the atmosphere of his table — as if they too were rare and precious and had been brought there for that reason.

Nor was this feeling contradicted by the nature of the locality. Ornax was literally a House of Ruins; but it was not itself a ruin. It had come to be created out of a physical acme of desperate isolation in combination with a psychic acme of impervious conceit. But it had been created by a woman; and thus the newly arisen House of Ornax had advantages, qualities, amenities and conveniences, beyond most of the Kings' Houses in Hellas.

In the first place it was divided into five essential structures; the Mirror Room, where hung the Shield of Kadmos; the sleeping Chambers with little stone-passages and wooden doors connecting them; the Dining-Hall, prepared for the reception of about twenty guests with no less than three “guest-thrones”, as well as the permanent host-throne, ensconced in which the greatest of Collectors enjoyed his meat, his wine, and an experimental variety of baked bread and sweet-meat condiments on every night of the year; the underground treasure-chamber, entered by descending quite a long flight of stone steps, at the bottom of which was a low-arched chamber entirely surrounded by extensive shelves scooped out of solid rock and crowded with all manner of ancient vessels and platters and bowls and goblets, things that were by no means all Theban, far less all connected with Kadmos, but things that had been got together by Xenios himself, in his double role as an acquisitive collector and an implacable miser.

And finally there was the kitchen. This was so large, so ancient, so monumental, that a visitor’s first thought would be that only a goddess could possibly preside over such a place.

Quite apart from her creation of this ideal abode for herself and Zenios, Okyrhöe had made sure that outside the great Kitchen there was a House of Shelter for Nemertes and her sons. And it was within the entrance to this annexe that a little private chamber had been constructed for Pontopereia and for her alone.

Okyrhöe had wisely decided, when the three of them first took possession of this long-deserted House by the Sea, that the best part for herself to play was the double one of Zenios’ wife and the bastard daughter of Hector; for this was a role that left her entirely independent and free at any moment to leave both Zenios and Pontopereia for any other human “stepping-stone to higher things” that Fate or Chance might provide. Absolute freedom for herself had been the guiding principle of all her actions since she first heard of Ornax. She had heard of the place from a Tyrian pirate.

And she had scarcely heard of it before she persuaded Zenios to secure the services not only of the man and his ship but of the man's sister Nemertes, the murder of whose builder-husband she contrived on their way, for it can be imagined how soon she made the ship's master her accomplice; and indeed the man was well advised by his sister to weigh anchor and clear off while the going was good.

Old Moros had never seen in all his days on earth anything so memorable as what he saw at this banquet. He was a kind-hearted man, however. Kind-heartedness had indeed been his chief handicap in life. He always found it difficult not to identify his feelings with the feelings of every person, man, woman or child, whom he came across. Each personality old Moros encountered impinged upon the personality of old Moros more than in her ordinary, rough-and-ready rules for human existence Nature had altogether allowed for. Thus while he watched the famous King Odysseus with awe and reverence, and stole as many infatuated glances as he dared at their enthralling hostess, he couldn't help again and again and again, casting a sympathetic, protective, and even paternal look at the newly-landed sister of Petraia, who sat by his side, while their far-sighted hostess was thinking, "I must keep those two together till Moros gets so concerned about her that he fetches a cart to carry her home." For the obvious truth was that Petraia's sister was pregnant.

How far gone was her pregnancy old Moros was not experienced enough in the child-bearing of ladies to have the least idea; but he saw enough for his habitual sympathy to beset him. Most tenderly he warded off the excess of wine offered the woman by the tallest of the three sons of Nemertes. All the three were attired in some exquisitely-washed white stuff that somehow gave old Moros the feeling that he was surrounded by male Sirens in the depths of the sea, who were always wanting to refill both his own and his neighbour's wine-cup, the neighbour for whose sake, so as to keep her repeated refusals from being observed, for luckily the wine did not incommode his own stomach, he succeeded in keeping their two glasses on his side of her plate.

"For the third time!" cried Zeuks, rising to his feet and striking the black bull's horn, rimmed with massive silver, from which he was drinking, against the golden goblet that had been so carefully chosen by Okyrhöe for Odysseus, "I call upon you all to join with me in defeating the ultimate design of this Monster, Enorches, who has dared to wrench half the life from these two celestial Horses!

"What is it I heard you say in your heart just now, great king, that you want us all to do? I'll tell you! I'll tell you! I'll tell you now, and I'll tell you once and for all!

"Yes, yes! You can look at me with that everlasting look of yours, which says to the entire universe 'Stop this business of acceptance as if there were no such thing as choice. Come! come! Do something about it!' That's what your pointed beard, sticking out like the sword of a sword-fish is forever saying: 'For the sake of all the gods in the sky do something about it!'

"But when we ordinary people want 'to do something about it, we simply don't know what to try to do!' Listen, therefore, O great king, to the word of one of the humblest of your subjects, and stick your beard into me when I go wrong in what I say!

"What we all want in our hearts, men and women alike, is a peaceful and at the same time an active life. There are too many prophets and oracles too, who always tell us to crown some king, to obey some law, to follow some hero, to embrace some system, to accept some philosophy, to invade some country, to sack some city!

"Well then, O great King, well then, dear Lords and Ladies, what happens? We burn that city, we over-run that country, we change our name, our language, our manners, our dress, our habits. But what is the result? Are we any happier? Not a bit of it! Are we any richer? Not by a farthing! Are we any wiser? Ask our wives and children! Are we honester, nobler, braver, kinder, tenderer, more sympathetic, more long-suffering, more enduring, more unconquerable, more impregnable? *We are not!*

"And yet we have invaded Persia, sacked Ecbatana, gutted Syracuse, burnt Troy! And yet we have accepted the philosophy of Parmenides. We have offered sacrifice to the God of Israel. We have bowed our heads in the Temple of Baal. We have given our maidens to Pan and our boys to Moloch. And are we the happier for it? Are we the wiser for it?

"Not a jot! Our eyes still weep salt tears! Our slaves still sweat blood! Our women still bear abortions! Our grapes are still sour! Our hives still lack honey! Our figs still lack sweetness! Our fountains are still slow to run, and our streams still sink in the same sand and dry in the same desert!

"What therefore is the word for the unenlightened and the sign for the uninspired? What is the clue for the lost in the wilderness; and the secret of recovery for the heavy of heart? Is it what Enorches calls the Mystery of Love that will save us? Is it the holy ecstasy of Dionysos that will set us straight in the path of happiness?

"Never on your life, great King! Never on your lives, my lovely companions! The only thing that can set us on the path of happiness is to create carvers of joy in our own secret selves and moulders of delight in our own hidden souls. And we must do it by the countering and confounding of the most extreme contradictions.

“We can’t do it, I tell you, by trying to mingle these opposites in confused conglomeration! No! we must keep our lives in natural advances and retreats, in ebb and flow, in up and down, in pull devil and pull tailor, till the end of the only round we know in this crazy planetary game! Shall I tell you O great King, shall I tell you most sweet and beautiful ladies, what, in spite of this Priest of Orpheus with his Eros and his Dionysus, is the real secret of the whole of life, of the whole of experience, of the whole of existence, of the whole of everything?

“I mean of course the secret of it for each and every one of us? I mean the ultimate word that eventually, when we have all been dead for a hundred-thousand years, will still describe the idea, the feeling, the emotion for every single consciousness possessed of what we call life? I have decided to announce to you tonight a word of my own which at least expresses one aspect of the complicated meaning that some magic word must eventually possess, when in a hundred-thousand years it is invented. My poor word is a common and an extremely simple word. It is — do not smile, most grave King!

“Yes! I will boldly utter it! — It is the word ‘Prokleesis’. And now I must struggle to make clear some of the beautiful, terrible, stirring, satisfying, comforting, restoring, consoling, redeeming, creating meanings that I have put into this natural and simple word, *Prokleesis!* For I do here and now, O great King! I do here and now, most lovely ladies! I do here and now, Moros my old friend, Nisos my young friend, and you three, heroic sons of the lady Nemertes, who is the friend of all of us, as indeed this banquet, which is the grandest banquet I have ever enjoyed, proves up to the hilt, I do here and now proclaim, to all living creatures in all the innumerable worlds, that for each and every one of us, whether human, super-human, or sub-human, whether male or female, whether old or young, that the word *Prokleesis* whose simplest meaning is a ‘defiance’ or ‘challenge’ is the best clue to life we can have!

“Yes, *Prokleesis* is the word. We must ‘challenge’ life from our childhood to our old age! We must ‘defy’ life to quench our spirit and to beat us down! We must ‘challenge’ it, whatever it may be, to a fight to the finish! Don’t you see, O great King, don’t you see, my sweet friends, how the crafty and wicked Enorches is really advocating an escape into death in place of a battle with life? His Eros and his Dionysos are both different names for the same plunge into the same Nothingness.

“One is a plunge into it by way of love, and the other by way of drink. Whatever else to be alive upon earth, or above earth, or under earth, may mean to those who are landed in it or sunk in it or confronted by it, it is clear that it means a challenge to a battle! O my friends, my friends, we have not got the secret of life, I mean the secret of our *experience of life for ourselves*, till we’ve defied it to make us cry, ‘Hold! Enough!’ This challenge, this ‘Prokleesis,’ is *the secret of life for us.*

“As to what the secret of life is *for life itself*, who can answer such a question? We can only answer for ourselves. The animals and birds and fishes can only answer *for themselves.* Whatever it is that calls itself the cause of life, or imagines itself to be the cause of life, or is supposed to be the cause of life by the tribal tradition of this race or that race, or by the geographical tradition of Northern or Southern life, or of Eastern or Western life, or Middle-Eastern life, or of life at the bottom of the ocean, or of life among the Gods in the sky, or of life among the Titans in Tartaros, or of life among the ghosts of Hades — if Ghosts *have* any life and if there are any ghosts left there now; for the story runs that they have all escaped, even as this wise lady here has come back to her own from the Latin cavern of the Nymph Egeria!

“No, we have not the faintest idea as to how this world of colour and form, and of solid and watery and airy and fiery substance ever appeared before us or ever inspired its favourite champions with the overpowering suggestion that we ourselves are nothing but transitory and dreamlike portions of its evanescent mirage!

“Let us suppose that at this very moment there suddenly crowded into this beautiful dining-hall twenty murderous pirates, from an unknown land beyond Ultima Thule, and carrying ropes woven of a breakable hemp! And let us imagine these pirates bind each of us, men and women alike, with their ropes, and deliberately begin chopping us to bits with their sharp knives! Call up such a scene, O great King, thou who hast known in thy vast travels worse scenes than this! Call up such a scene, sweet ladies! Call up such a scene, brave men!

“Now be absolutely honest with yourselves, every one of you here and tell yourselves, not aloud to the rest of us, but in silence, each heart to heart alone, exactly how you would feel as you watched what was going on and saw your own turn coming nearer and nearer, and heard the shrieks and groans of each particular victim.”

As Zeuks spoke in this way it was very clear what the feelings of Omphos and Kissos and Sykos would have been under the conditions he described as from behind the chair of Zenios they listened with awestruck attention. It was also clear that the three young men’s interest in what Zeuks was saying displeased their mistress Okyrhöe; for she promptly gave them a peremptory signal to go and help their mother in the kitchen; but as they discreetly followed one another out of the hall they received from Zeuks just as if they had been relatives of Zenios, and not servants at all, an extremely friendly and fraternal smile of recognizance.

Zenios himself, still absorbed in what remained on his large antique Babylonian plate, evidently considered that this drunken babbling horse-stealing bastard from a remote farm at the other end of the island whose future destiny even Atropos, unless the old lady had Anangke, or Necessity at one elbow, and Tyche, or Chance, at the other, would have been puzzled to predict, though he might propitiate a poverty-stricken king like Odysseus by his antics, was not the sort of person to interest a rich frequenter of the Bazaars and Markets of Thebes!

But Zeuks had not failed to notice that although the old King was too absorbed in his own thoughts to pay much attention to what was going on round him, there had come a moment, the same moment no doubt when the speaker had caught that response in the faces of the three sons of Nemertes, at which the old hero's pointed beard had suddenly jerked itself up in an automatic call to battle.

It was as if the bones of his jaw had answered a physiological summons independently of his mind. And this automatic jerk of the well-trimmed beard of the blinder of Polyphemus in some profoundly subtle way so completely satisfied the kidnapper of Pegasos that he suddenly became, at least in the eyes of Nisos who was watching him carefully a completely different person.

That curious appearance of being unnaturally bloated, as if his outer skin, like a leather bottle whereof the contents had become, by reason of some sort of spiritual fermentation, too powerful to be contained in such a prison had been replaced by a singular toughening, at least that is what appeared to have occurred, of the actual flesh of his face; and the result of this was to make the expression of his face harder, firmer, and though no less humorous, much more formidable in the nature of its humour.

Nisos noticed, something else too, though if he'd tried to describe it to his brother or his parents or even to his friend Tis, he would probably have become tongue-tied and might even have retreated into that quite special silence which we associate with idiots; but what he would have wanted to explain about this more powerful humour in Zeuks' expressive countenance was that in its inherent nature it was not proud or vain or conceited, nor did it, like almost all so-called "prophets" and "thinkers", shut all doors but the one it came in by, and close all windows but the one it looked out of!

By this time all their eyes were fixed upon Zeuks. The large platter upon which Zenios had been concentrating was now as empty as if that insatiable collector of every possible species of plate that the artists among men have ever carved and moulded in precious metal had licked it clean that night of every stain it had acquired while the blameless Ethiopians of the Sun's Rising carried it beneath the earth to the blameless Ethiopians of the Sun's Setting!

Odysseus himself had allowed his wandering mind to return to the immediate situation; and he was now watching Zeuks with the sort of steady, quiet, amused, contemplative interest that the master of a Circus of performing animals would display in the unexpected arrival of a caravan of freshly-caught creatures from the Mountains of the Moon.

As for Okyrhöe, she had very quickly decided that Zeuks was a person who had to be treated on completely different lines from any of the other original personalities she had hitherto succeeded in dominating.

"I must take him," she told herself, "by a direct attack. It would be no good to try to get round him."

Old Moros was watching Zeuks very much as Tis would have done. Indeed Nisos, as he glanced at him to see how he received this unexpected oration from a plain farmer from Cuckoo-Hill, was struck by the almost exact parallel in the old man’s features to the way Tis would open his mouth wider and wider as his wonder increased at the eloquence to which he was listening.

“He can’t follow a word,” Nisos told himself. “It’s the man’s power of stringing the words together that strikes him as the marvel!”

As for the fugitive from the Cave of Egeria, Nisos was still young enough to feel an intense discomfort every time she caught his attention, a discomfort which so far he had managed to ward off by repeating mechanically a little prayer to Hera about birth that Petraia had taught him in his childhood; but since by this time he had come to regard Zeuks as his fellow-adventurer and even had begun to tell himself an extremely romantic story of their more and more intimate association as in the wake of their heroic king they would trace in the unrevealing face of the waters the grave of lost Atlantis, it annoyed him to notice that whenever the pregnant woman looked at Zeuks she gave a queer kind of involuntary shudder, as if something about this startling apparition of a neatly-attired farmer of middle height, moderate good looks, and respectfully conventional manner, abandoning himself to an obscure thaumaturgic incantation for the redemption of the world, gave her a weird shock and made her feel that she must escape such a spectacle or her pains might begin without warning.

Nisos himself as he leant forward with his elbows on the wine-spilt-board, dug the fingers of his right hand into a new loaf from Nemertes’ oven, while in his left hand he clutched tightly a small gourd. Little trickles of wine kept dripping from this latter object every time in his excitement he turned it upside-down; while fragments of sweet-smelling crust fell with almost equal frequency as he squeezed the loaf. The boy was in a queer mood; for although the immediate hoof-beat of each galloping moment of time thudded rough-shod, as you might say, over the fore-front of his consciousness, behind it there kept humming and drumming a troubled comparison, of which he felt heartily ashamed, and yet in which he was unable to stop indulging, a comparison between the daughter of Teiresias, who kept meeting his eyes and who was clearly studying him with interest, and his friend Eione, the youngest sister of Tis, the vision of whose exquisite limbs as she bent to re-arrange the folds of her dress had grown all the more vivid to him since his disturbing encounter with the goat-foot Pan.

But Eione's childish features were unquestionably plain and homely; whereas, as he was now at such close quarters with Pontopereia he could dwell for steadily increasing spaces of time upon her beautiful and subtly intellectual face.

Ironically enough those two troublesome hamperers of the well-governed order of Themis, namely Tyche and Anangke, or chance and necessity, prevented him, though it was only by means of the very edge of the supper-board from noting how totally devoid of lightness and grace were the awkward limbs with which Nature in the reckless scattering of her bounty had burdened the daughter of Teiresias.

Had the competent and capable Nemertes not been busy in her kitchen preparing a culminating dish of sweet-meats it is quite possible that she would have reacted to the words and behaviour of Zeuks in a manner that would have come nearer to the heart of the utterer than any of the rest.

As to Odysseus himself, that wily old hero had made it a rule long ago never to waste his energy in redundant reactions. He accepted the message of Zeuks at its purely practical and pragmatic face-value: and since only certain portions of it could fall in with his own purpose, his calm empirical mind had enough to do in isolating these from the rest without getting excited about anything else.

The moment he entered Okyrhöe's dining-hall, the shrewd old king saw that it was she and not the collector of images who was responsible for the transformation of the aboriginal Ornax into a contemporary palace far more luxurious than his own; and in his diplomatic brain there began to take shape, as he cast glance after glance at the changing expressions, the lively gestures, the rapid decisive commands, of the lady of the house, the embryo idea that if the soothsaying daughter of a dead prophet was likely to help the advancement of his adventure, this formidable woman, if by any possible compulsion or enticement he could sweep her into his scheme, might turn out an even more effective aid. He hadn't relinquished his faithful Heraklean club when he crossed the threshold of this complicated group of palatial erections. In fact from where he now sat, while the lady's airy revelations of her life in the city of Kadmos were interrupted by Zeuks' reverberating "prokleesis", he could see the familiar curves of his queer-looking weapon propped against the elbow of a small stone-seat cut in the wall, a seat that would be far too narrow for any contemporary hips, whether male or female.

No smile came to his lips as he realized the direction his thoughts were on the verge of taking, as in spite of himself he listened to Zeuks' description of the in-rush of the murderous crowd of imaginary pirates and projected himself, for the push of his practical imagination could hardly be described in any other way, into breaking his bonds, scattering the bodies of his enemies, and grasping his club by the middle!

But if Zeuks' outburst of "prokleesis" had made even the paramour of the Daughter of the Sun jerk up his trim beard, it can be well understood how it made the two insects inside it jump and cry out. With them, however, the situation was just opposite to what it had been earlier that day; for now it was the fly who was keen to leave their shelter and the moth who was all for restraining him.

"But, Pyraust darling, I *must* find out whether the King is sweating under his beard! I know him so well that I know that *that* is the great sign. If there's a drop of perspiration under his beard you may depend on it that he's going to do something serious and do it soon. Please don't hold me so tight, my sweet friend. I swear I won't go further than that fold of his chiton. Once there I can crawl perfectly well between a few grey hairs, and soon discover what I want to know.

"It'll only be like a microscopic thicket, and you know how good I am at threading my way through olive-branches and rose-bushes! Oh, I'll find the least drop of sweat if there is one to be found! You see he's still got that old nurse, Eurycleia, though she must be over a hundred years old, and you may depend on that old lady keeping him clean. You bet your life, my pretty one, I couldn't settle on Zeuks' chiton — you must remember, darling, that we house-flies are extremely sensitive to smells.

"We're not like carrion-flies or dung-flies who live on filth and naturally seek it out! — no! I couldn't settle on Zeuks' chiton, though he's a self-respecting, decently washed and well-dressed farmer, without being overpowered by the smell of his skin. But Eurycleia uses, though he's old now, the same unguents and essences that she used for him when he was a child; so that you needn't be afraid, dear heart, that your crazy Myos will faint from the old man's stench, and slip down under the fellow's shirt and be no more seen!

"Whatever happens, I can assure you, sweetest of Pyrausts, that I shall return safely to this heavenly shelter in the bosom of our Heraklean Club.

"No? You won't let go? You won't let me risk it? All right, I'm not going to break loose by force. So if you won't let me go, you won't let me go; and that's the end of it. Of course some would say I'm taking the opportunity of your prohibition to escape doing what I'm really scared stiff of doing.

"But I know *you* don't think like this; and yours is the only opinion I really value. As I have often confessed to you, there have been occasions in my peaceful life when I have had pleasure with exactly twenty-seven female flies. This I have never concealed from you. But when it becomes ——"

It was at this point that the Moth — who so many times had heard her friend quote the well-known lines from Beelzebelle, the Sappho of Flies, that begin:

"airy-fairy-flickit-with-Mary" and ends:

"wagatail-wispy-with-honeymoon-Jane",

that there had been moments when she felt that if he didn't stop before one, two, three more ticks of the clock she would rush straight into the nearest fire — beat a tattoo with her free wing upon the wall of their retreat of so decisive a character that the fly yielded in every sense.

He left the topic of female flies. He gave up his exploration of the neck of Odysseus for a drop of perspiration. And he replied to the unspoken question that was behind all the moth had been saying, by assuring her that even if there had been no drop of sweat under the king's beard, and even if they all had to sleep where they were that night, they would without question be making their departure, if not by "Lykophos" or "Wolf's-light", certainly by the first streak of red in the sky….

By this time Zeuks had reached the climax of his singular outburst. He was still on his feet; but he was standing in a manner in which we can be absolutely certain no Grecian orator had ever stood before while addressing a crowd. One foot was on his chair and the other on the floor.

This sounds harmless and conventional enough; but it only does so because we have not yet realized that owing to Zeuks' lack of height and his chair's antique height, his upraised knee was on a level with his chin. Nor was this all; for Zeuks' incurable indifference to the decencies of human dignity combined with his flagrant and absolutely unashamed fondness for his own physical person from head to foot, resulted in a very quaint issue: for seeing his knee so extremely near his mouth, much nearer than human knees generally are to human lips he clutched it with his two hands and digging his chin into it and pressing his clenched teeth against it he began muttering and murmuring *through* his teeth, for his teeth being tightly clenched he wasn't biting his knee, a strange rhapsody of self-enjoyment.

To all but one of the company then present this curious chant of ecstatic self-possession was inarticulate; but to the club of Herakles it was not only wholly audible but wholly intelligible.

"At last," said the Club to himself, "I hear the language uttered, which, if I were the ruler of the world, I would cause to be the language of the world!"

What the club heard as articulate speech could not be set down in the syllables of any tongue that was spoken then on the surface of the earth or has been spoken since; but it consisted of a groaningly murmured, thickly muttered, grindingly hoarse, creakingly wooden, scrapingly rocky, clangingly metallic, and also, naturally enough considering that our friend was rhapsodizing into the hardness of his own knee, a satisfyingly onomatopaeic paean.

The drift of what Zeuks was chanting had undoubtedly to do with that same "prokleesis" whose secret he had tried to interpret; only this was an attempt to turn his own body into a drum or trumpet or clarionet, or whatever it might be, that like some vocal sea-shell or land-shell transformed the heavy material sounds of rock against rock, root against root, earth-mass against earth-mass, sea-sand against sea-sand, through which the sixth Pillar from its fixed abode in that old corridor at home was able to communicate with the club of Herakles.

"Enorches" — Zeuks chanted at last, in a deep, rich, resonant voice, lifting his head from his knee and clasping that symbol of eternal supplication with the fingers of both his hands— "Enorches is the unhappiest man on earth! Anyone who understood to the full the real nature of the unhappiness of Enorches would die of pity. But this much, my friends, it is permitted to me to tell you; and tell it you I must since the knowledge of it is of the very essence of the supreme 'prokleesis' you are making with me, or if you prefer, I am making with you, here tonight.

"Enorches is deliberately lying when he says that Eros and Dionysos together redeem the world. He implies that they do this, one or the other of them, or both together, as the salvation of mankind, by means of mystical love or mystical intoxication. He implies they do it so utterly and completely that ordinary self-control, ordinary kindness, ordinary decency, ordinary honesty, ordinary courtesy, ordinary generosity, are rendered totally and wholly unimportant when these two mystical ecstasies are at work; and that it is in fact as an alternative to the good, the true, and the beautiful, that these celestial manias and heavenly drugs fill the entire stage and obsess the whole nature of man's consciousness.

"Now the diabolical lie beneath all this is the implicit assumption that we love to the point of ecstasy and drink to the point of ecstasy in order that life shall go on in the universe indefinitely and without end. Now the real secret purpose and the real secret motive actuating Enorches is the extreme opposite of this.

“What he really hates with a hatred that is co-existent with his uttermost being and with the uttermost being of what he hates is nothing less than *Life itself.* His praise of Eros and Dionysos, that is to say his glorification of Love and Intoxication as Substitutes for all other forms of Worship, is really a grand and supreme indulgence in deliberate lying. The one secret aim and the one final intention of this crafty Priest of Orpheus is to destroy all Life utterly and forever!

“In the depths of his own being he is so scooped-out by despair, so bled white by abysmal unhappiness that he has only one desire left, the desire that Life once and for all and in every place under the sun and moon, and upon and within and below the earth, should be destroyed and brought to an end forever!

“Yes, what this Priest of the Mysteries aims at is that there shall no longer be any Mystery — in other words that there should no longer be any *life.* What he recognizes as the uttermost reality of his own destructive and negative nature is a fathomless, yawning void, an open mouth, a gulf, an abysmal hole; and this in-sucking shaft leads not to any kind of Being, but to that nameless opposite of all existence that can only be called Not-Being.

“Here, therefore, down in the depths of this priest’s nature, is something much deeper and much nearer an absolute than Death; for Death, after all, implies that something has lived or it could not have died; but in this man’s nature, when we go down to the very depths of it, we find *that* which can in reality have no ‘nature’ of any sort at all, for it is Nothingness Itself.

“Yes! What this self-styled Priest of Orpheus really feels, in his absolute and abysmal despair, is that it would have been infinitely better if there had never been any Life at all. But since life *has* appeared, what this Priest of the Mysteries would wish to see happen would be for the whole miserable mass of it to plunge headlong down and vanish in the Nothingness out of which it ought never to have emerged!"

While Zeuks let himself go in this sweeping diatribe they all watched him carefully in their different ways — Odysseus watched him as a steersman in dubious weather watches a distant horizon. Nisos watched him as an amorist might watch the eyes of one girl through the transparent body of another. The pregnant woman watched him as if he were a cock crowing on a dung-heap. Old Moros watched him as if he were a dog going too close to a trap that ought long ago to have been sprung. Zenios watched him as if he were an itinerant musician, spoiling an opportunity for a good stroke of business.

Okyrhöe watched him, thinking: "I must make them stay and I must give *him* something to lie on in the Mirror-Room." Pontoporeia watched him, thinking: "Yes, I agree with this absurd 'prokleesis' up to a point; but he doesn't make it personal enough, for it ought to be some way, some mood, some turn of the mind, some twist of the reason, that would help you when you wanted to make friends with a person."

And finally, while the club of Herakles, still leaning against the elbow of that narrow seat cut out of the pre-historic wall, watched him, thinking: "how annoying if he starts a vibration that brings me crashing down!" Zeuks felt as if an irresistible unseen power compelled him to fling back his head and to gaze out into the darkness through a half-open door; and though the lights about him made the darkness outside absolute, the same power that compelled him to lift his head forced him to treat that darkness as if it were the whole vast immeasurable bulk of the massed material of the thick-ribbed earth, ridge upon ridge, hill upon hill, mountain upon mountain, towering up in its enormity to a toppling height, high above the encircling ocean that encompasses all, forced him to treat it as if it were this, and at the same time forced him to plunge into it and with his soul gathered together to break through it, to cleave it, to wrench his way through it, until he reached a certain particular spot on the earth's surface.

What particular spot? Ah! That's the point! "That's what has been" — and it was Zeuks himself who flung this jaggedly-splintered shaft of rending interjection into the thick bulk of that darkness— "What has been led up to in all this" — for the spot he was being forced to visit was nothing less than a stone shed near-by with a massively-closed iron-barred door in which Pegasos had been imprisoned ever since Odysseus released him.

In this shed, tied by the neck, Pegasos was at that moment groaning piteously and twisting his head from side to side; for the rope that tied him crossed and re-crossed and chafed abominably that raw part of his shoulder from which the wing had been torn and from which even yet dark drops of blood, mingled with ichor, were trickling down.

Slowly therefore now, in spite of all the eyes that were upon him, Zeuks rose, and deliberately crossing the hall to the open door through which that unknown force had just drawn his soul into the palpable darkness, he resolutely, but still slowly and very quietly, left the company and went out. Once outside and alone in the air it was not nearly so dark, and it didn't take him long to discover the stone shed where in the haste of their arrival Pegasos had been tied up. It was still necessary, however, to get some kind of torch or lantern; and with this in view he made his way, led by the smell of the fragrant smoke to where Nemertes was already drying, after having cleaned and washed with the exquisite care and nicety exacted by Zenios of all who touched his possessions, the vast array of plates and dishes used at tonight's supper.

She certainly was a shrewd and intelligent woman, this mother of Omphos, Kissos, and Sykos; and now when Zeuks entered her domain to get a light so as to deal with Pegasos, and found her directing her three sons in the complicated task of piling up and putting away all this precious crockery, he was conscious of being delivered, merely by drawing her attention to his situation, from a whole load of tiresome responsibility.

She told him at once to fetch Pegasos out of that cold and dark shed and to bring him into the kitchen; and when he obeyed her and they had tied this mutilated and one-winged creature, who had once flown above the turrets of Arabia and the domes of China and the pyramids of Egypt and had distended its quivering nostrils in its flight to catch the enchanted odours that are wafted down on certain human midnights from the ghostly valleys of the moon, to one of the shadowy meat-hooks that broke the flickering fire-lit surface of those friendly walls, it was easy to see from the immortal animal's grateful eyes as they were turned first to one and then to another till they finally rested on the woman herself, that the prospect of a night behind the cyclopean pre-historic walls of Ornax after his windy lodging on the outskirts of Cuckoo-Hill was now wholly congenial to him.

Nemertes hesitated not to take entire possession of Zeuks at once and to tell him exactly what he had better do if he wished his one night in Ornax to be really a pleasant one.

"You will have to sleep in the porch of the Chamber of the Mirror so as to be a guard for the sleep of the Mistress. This will be the sleeping arrangement with which nothing must interfere; but if you, my Lord Zeuks, and you, my Lord Pegasos, agree to accept this arrangement, it is in my power to give *you*" — and she turned to Zeuks— "and *you*" — and she stroked the great free beautiful useless unhurt wing of her animal-visitor which now trailed across a third of the floor, "the peacefullest sleep you've ever had in your lives."

“Give us this?” enquired Zeuks in his most cheerful and humorous intonation.

“How will you give us this?” asked Pegasos with his appealing eyes.

And the woman answered by immediate action. She went to a great brazen receptacle in a corner of the kitchen and scooped up two handfuls of oats which she forthwith presented to the winged horse, who reverently swallowed them. Then she lifted the lid of a substantial chest made of sycamore wood from the main-land and brought out a small loaf. This she deliberately broke into four pieces, one big piece and three small pieces; and handing one of the small pieces to each of her sons who straightway began munching and masticating it with intense satisfaction, she gave the large piece to Zeuks who promptly kissed it and crammed it into his mouth, but allowed half of it to remain in one cheek, and half of it in the other, un-chewed and un-swallowed.

It was at this point that Zeuks noticed a hurried whispered conversation going on between Omphos, Kissos, and Sykos; and before he had made up his mind whether to ignore what he perceived or to boldly ask them what was the matter, Omphos, the eldest of the three, crossed the kitchen with obvious nervousness, while Pegasos, answering this respectful courtesy with equal consideration, did his best to move his unhurt wing out of the young man’s way.

When Omphos reached Zeuks he stood in front of him like an earnest-minded school-boy summoned for an oral examination; and Nemertes couldn’t help noting how quaint it was to see the two cheeks of this examiner of young men bulging so auspiciously for his own future enjoyment but rendering him practically inarticulate before an academic questioner.

But the question asked by Omphos was a simple one. “Could you tell us, my Lord Zeuks, exactly what you thought of when you say we must still practise ‘prokleesis’ though we were soon going to be cut to pieces by those pirates?”

What Zeuks desired to do at this point was first to use his tongue to push both halves of that delicious little loaf into one bulging cheek, and then with that same tongue to discourse so eloquently on the practice of “prokleesis” when you were watching people tortured or when you were being tortured yourself, that not only Omphos but his sympathetic brothers and possibly even their wise mother would decide to try how it worked in the ordinary vexations of every day.

But all he could blurt out at the moment was: “Of course nobody can bear more than a certain amount of pain; and if you’re watching its infliction on others there comes a point when you break out or go raving mad; but nothing helps anyone to endure what *can* be endured more than forcing yourself to feel in the way ‘prokleesis’ makes you feel: for when you feel like this it isn’t the cruel enemy or executioner or torturer or murderer you are defying; it is Life itself!

“And what are you defying Life to do? You are defying Life to make you stop fighting Life! You are defying Life to make you worship Death! You are defying Life to make you lose yourself in those Half-Deaths of mystical ecstasy, such as Enorches praises; he who this very day plucked out the wing that was the twin of this!”

Zeuks’ whole figure looked absurdly un-heroic and unprophetic as with his mouth full of half-munched bread he pulled out from under his belt a corner of his shirt and used it to dab up a small trickle of blood-stained ichor that was at the moment feeling its cautious way along the spine of the

Flying Horse in evident fear of ending its career as a living stream in a pool on the kitchen-floor.

It is doubtful whether even the most perspicacious ghost among those who were rumoured to have recently escaped from the under-world under the guidance of Pontopereia's father, had such an one passed through Ornax, would have been drawn to Zeuks as a person naturally provocative of spiritual attention.

But whatever an enlightened fugitive in the train of Teiresias might have thought of this short, vulgarly-attired individual, with his thumbs in his belt, who now proceeded to rub his bleached and bloated physiognomy, making as he did so a grotesque purring sound in his gullet, against the arched neck of the wounded offspring of the Gorgon's blood, Zeuks himself had not experienced a more delicious sensation of well-being since the days when he lived so contentedly with the cast-off paramour of the goat-footed Pan.

The bread he was masticating was proving so delicious and he kept turning it round and round in his mouth so long that when he finally did gulp it down it was simply saliva that he swallowed, only faintly tinctured with a lingering taste of wheaten bread. But it conveyed to every cell, tissue, nerve, fibre, gland and sense-centre in his whole body all the long air-nourished, sun-perforated, dew-quickened, rain-soaked experiences that had filled with more than physical richness each grain of wheat that made up Nemertes' precious flour.

Zeuks felt sure as he rubbed his head against the neck of Pegasos that the animal was feeling from its digesting of those oats exactly what he was feeling himself from his long-munched bread. It was therefore something of a shock to him when he heard the voice of young Nisos addressing him from the doorway and saw the others all turn round to greet the excited boy.

Nisos brought the news that Odysseus had decided to start for home extremely early; actually, in fact, before that faint grey light that preludes the rising of the sun and in Ithaca was called “Lykophos” or “Wolf’s Light”. Between the three sons of Nemertes, as Nisos made his announcement, a swift glance of pleasure and surprise had passed; and it was clear to both Zeuks and the boy that whatever the feeling of Nemertes might be, as far as Omphos, Kissos and Sykos were concerned the fact that this visit was to end before dawn was an indescribable relief.

But Nemertes looked grave. Carefully brushing off from her clothes the smallest wisp of straw from the oats-bin and the least little wheat-bread crumb from the loaf she had just divided, she beckoned Nisos to her side. “Just a moment, my Lord Zeuks, if you don’t mind,” she said, and taking Nisos gently by the arm led him, avoiding the switching and quivering feathers of Pegasos’ extended wing, for the animal evidently realized that a move of some sort was in the air, to a shadowy recess behind her cooking-stove.

“You are a good and faithful servant to your king, or I couldn’t talk so straight to you,” she said in a low voice. “But you’re not the only loyal adherent in the world, any more than Odysseus is the only true and honest master. Now I beg you to follow me very carefully, my young friend, in what I’m going to say. My sons are too simple-minded and too uncultivated in their intellects to get the full force of what I want to say; but you have had a good education in the best school in this island even if you’ve never been on the main-land, and so I’ll talk to you as I would to my husband, the Builder of Towns, who went to a school in Crete. My place in life from now on, you must understand, is to serve Okyrhöe, who at the moment, though I shan’t be surprised if she eventually becomes the partner of a god, when no doubt she will herself release me from my service, who is, I say, at the moment the wife of this man Zenios who declares himself to be of the House of Kadmos.

“But the point, my dear Nisos, that I should find hard to make my sons understand is this. When at the death of my husband, the Builder of Towns, I undertook, largely for the sake of my sons, so that we could all continue together, the service of Okyrhöe, I swore to serve her faithfully and I swore it by the gods, especially by the great Themis, the goddess of Order and Justice.

“Now my three sons hate Okyrhöe; nor can I blame them for this. To Zenios they feel nothing at all; neither love nor hate, neither consideration nor contempt. They are, however, quite prepared to go on working for him, feeling that by so doing they are serving their mother. You follow what I mean? When I am faithful to Okyrhöe it is not for her sake, but the sake of the great goddess of Order and Justice and Right, by whom I swore. Now I will tell you something else. And this, Nisos my lad, is a serious warning, If my mistress bids me make up a bed for him over there” — and she nodded towards Zeuks— “at the entrance to the Chamber of the Mirror where she always sleeps herself, he would be wise to make some excuse. Let him tell her, for instance, that he never undresses and goes to bed before an early start like this. In fact he’d better tell her — —”

She was interrupted by a wild, excited, high-pitched, youthful voice from the other end of that spacious kitchen; and at once they instinctively moved apart, and quite separately advanced to meet the girl, who was Pontopereia herself.

“I’ve come,” she was saying, and it was to every living person in that steamy, shadowy, fire-lit place that she addressed herself. “I’ve come to tell you that what I’ve been praying to the gods for a whole year might happen has now happened. The spirit of my father Teiresias has come upon me and the prophetic power of Teiresias has taken possession of me, and I feel flooded by what I know, and I feel afloat on what I understand, and I feel afire with what I have grasped, and if you don't enter into my meaning and catch the spirit of my revelation I swear to you that something dreadful will happen, and happen soon, and happen to all of us! So listen! listen! listen! and don't move, any of you here, till I've told you what I know!"

"Say what you've got to say, child; and say it quietly and say it quickly. We are all listening."

These words were not spoken by Nemertes who had approached nearest to the excited young girl and had even laid a firm and calming hand on one of her gesticulating arms. They were spoken by Zeuks, who, coming alongside of Nemertes as a massive and sturdy barge might come alongside of a sailing-ship, laid his hand upon Nemertes' shoulder and did so in such an affectionate and genial a way that no sensible or kindly person could possibly have taken offence; nor indeed could anyone, who in the position of Nisos and Nemertes' three sons had been destined to be spectators of this encounter, have denied that the combined magnetism of two such friendly and massive personalities was the very thing to calm the girl's excited nerves.

But was it the thing best calculated to bring to birth from this virgin frame a prophetic message from the world of spirits, or at any rate from a world beyond the reach of our normal sensations? Evidently to Nisos it was not, for he began pacing up and down with a frown of nervous apprehension. What he measured with his anxious steps was a limited stretch of the stone floor of that ancient chamber, a floor that may well have belonged, like the stone walls of the place, to some prehistoric god of silence, for there was a curious absence of every kind of echo to the human voice and of every kind of resonance from the human tread.

But as he paced nervously up and down, avoiding the now motionless feathers of Pegasos' prostrate wing, he couldn't help glancing now and again at the almost pathetic contrast between the illuminated beauty of Pontopereia's face and the clumsy heaviness of her limbs and indeed of her whole body from the waist down.

"What is prompting me," he thought, "to be so absurdly critical as to demand that a girl should be this or that before I can let myself fall in love with her, or think of her in my mind as my particular choice? Well! that's how I am," he concluded, "and there's no use making a fuss about it! I only pray that that accurst Goat-foot has encountered Enorches and made such a Dionysian raid upon that scoundrel's oldest wine that by this time he can't distinguish a young virgin from an old midwife."

Meanwhile Pontopereia was announcing in a tone whose prophetic intensity was no less assured, though it was calmer than when she first entered the kitchen, that if they wished their ride to be a success they must not wait till morning; no! not even if by morning they meant an hour before "Wolf-Light". On the contrary they must start at once; and if they felt sleepy they must console themselves by thinking how sweet it would be to lay their heads on their own pillows when they got home!

As far as Nisos could judge from the acquiescent pose of Zeuks' neat and pliant figure, for the face of the advocate of "Prokleesis" was turned towards Pontopereia, the man seemed prepared to do whatever she proposed; and it was a surprise to the boy when in the silence that followed her declaration Zeuks swung round and exchanged a rapid series of signals and significant signs with Pegasos, an exchange in which the horse's trailing wing played less of a part than its quivering ears, and the man's expressive hands less of a part than his thrust-out and sucked-in thick lips.

“Do you really think they’ll get Odysseus to agree to such a thing at such an hour?” Nemertes remarked to Nisos when Zeuks followed Pontopereia out of the kitchen. “But though I’m only an old woman in an old kitchen and no prophetess I would advise you, sonny, to slip off, now you have the chance, and see our Master, yes! see Zenios himself, whom you’re sure to find in his treasure-room at the bottom of that flight of stairs — you saw those stairs, didn’t you, laddie, as you went into the dining-hall? — for what I fancy your old king has forgotten, and what I’m certain this queer fellow Zeuks has forgotten, is that great sack of treasure you unloaded up there in the porch. It *was* treasure, wasn’t it? I saw, by the way you lifted it, how heavy it was; and I also saw, for we old women notice things like that, that when Zenios came back with Moros the first thing he did was to get the old man to help him trundle that sack of yours down those stairs. He has a queer sort of mind, has our master Zenios; and though I don’t suggest for a second that he intends to rob anyone of whatever that sack contains, I know him by this time well enough to know that if six hours or even four hours are allowed by destiny to pass over a neighbourhood where our Master and any precious treasure are to be found, at the end of those hours, and generally long before they end, the master of whom we are speaking and the treasure of which we are speaking will have been brought into physical contact as if by the use of a magnet.”

Nisos looked at the old lady in admiration. “By the gods,” he cried, “I’d completely forgotten that curst sack! Why! You’re a soothsayer too, though you do work in this old kitchen! I certainly *will* do just what you say, and see what’s happened to that great golden mixing-bowl! I can tell your master, anyway, *something* about it — though whether the old king got it from his queen’s father or whether Alkinoos gave it him in the land of the Phaeakeans I forget at this moment; but if I see it and touch it I daresay I’ll remember what Eurycleia told me about it! Old as she is, *her* memory never fails her! Yes, I'll go straight down those steps and talk to Zenios!

"O I do thank you, lady, for putting it into my head! What I expect has been in our old king's mind all along is some sort of an idea, though it seems horrid to say so," — at this point Nisos lowered his voice; not so much in order that his hearer's three sons shouldn't hear, as from an instinctive courtesy — proof, thought Nemertes, as she listened to him, of how well he'd been brought up— "some sort of an idea," he threw out in a hurried whisper as he rushed off— "of paying some sort of ransom or tribute for Pontopereia!"

As Nisos hastened to the northern edge of the pre-historic semicircle of stone ruins that these unscrupulous explorers from Kadmean Thebes had modernized and made habitable, he said to himself: "Tribute? Ransom? I wonder I didn't say 'Offering'. What of course it will really be, if the old king leaves that treasure behind without a word, will be buying the girl from him as we buy slaves in the market."

It was when he was feeling his way down those steps, and though it was quite dark he could see a light between door and doorpost at the foot of the stairs, that he stopped short, with one foot on the third and the other on the fourth step, and the extended fingers of his left hand spread out against the wall, for he had a sudden inspiration. "I'll suggest to Odysseus," he thought, "that I ought to visit Tis's home along with old Moros, now I'm so near, and that it might be a good thing if I went into the Naiads' Cave on my way back to see if the ship-keel is still as it was."

Meanwhile if Nemertes could have observed what was going on in her master's chamber at the bottom of that staircase she would have felt, well! not, as people say, "completely justified", for Nemertes had seen too much of the treacheries of life ever to feel precisely that, but she would have felt that she had not been far wrong in her knowledge of the ways of her master, as a collector of pre-historic treasures.

Long before Nisos had begun to make his way down those steps Zenios had been sitting on a low, rough, oblong couch of fir-planks covered with several layers of sheep-skins, a couch which in his lonely moods he preferred to any other. He was holding in his hands the heaviest and most precious of that sack's marvels. This was an unusually large Mixing-Bowl; the sort of Mixing-Bowl that among the more civilized Achaean tribes was generally known as a "Depas".

This particular "Depas" was an enormous one. It had a flat stand at its base and a circular handle on each side of its circumference and it was made of solid gold. It was in fact made of gold so heavy, so massive, and so purged of every kind of alloy, that as Zenios caressed it it gave him the feeling that it was something so totally different from all other things in the world and so absolutely divided from all other things in the world that when he gave himself up wholly and entirely to the pure sensation of this feel of it, he himself became isolated from everything else on earth. The handling of real gold, massive gold, pure gold, solid gold, had become the one positive lust, the one supreme indulgence, the one ecstatic cult, the one ultimate paradise of Zenios' existence; and when he did so, as he was doing now, he grew so identified with the precious thing he held, that with no effort other than passive surrender to bliss he became what, save for a few blameless Ethiopeans both in the extreme East and in the extreme West, a man seldom becomes, namely a motionless orb of convulsed sunlight, or even starlight, for whom the mere alternation of inbreathing and outbreathing is not only a sufficient satisfaction for one life, but a sufficient satisfaction to justify an infinite series of lives.

But meanwhile, very cautiously, and inch by inch, Nisos was descending the stairs towards this absorbed gold-worshipper. Now the approach of the aboriginal wild creatures in the forests of the earth towards one another has been from the beginning the cause of innumerable invisible vibrations across various expanses of earth and air and such primeval vibrations, whether of attraction or repulsion, or of pure warning, have never completely vanished from the human scene all the way down the ages.

It must have been some such vibration, and of pure warning too, that caused young Nisos, before he had reached the fourth step in his stealthy descent towards that chink of light between door and door-post, to change his mind completely, and, avoiding with exquisite care the least shiver of disturbing sound, to ascend those steps twice as quickly as he had descended them, and, once clear of that quarter of the restored ruins of Ornax, to set off as fast as possible to find Odysseus.

Even Zeuks would not have been able to interpret for the benefit of any other person seated on that broad back all the thoughts of Pegasos as the two of them waited patiently for their start from Ornax on their homeward journey. The whole thing is conjectural of course, but it does seem unlikely that an immortal creature however wounded could feel quite as agitated, as did Okyrhöe for example, when she discovered that she was really going to perch herself on the still bleeding back of a one-winged unflying flier, “with this low peasant”, as she told herself “who out of vulgar blasphemy calls himself Zeuks”, in front of her, “and this silly old King-Hero who won’t be able to see more of me than my back”, behind her.

The whole thing was a surprise and a shock to this beautiful designer of elaborate schemes; for the last thing she expected was to have to make her plunge into the innermost circle of Odysseus’ life without the least preparation, indeed with what might almost be called a “hippodromic” leap.

However! If she had to do it she had to do it, and with a courage and recklessness that would have drawn from her cautious slow-moving husband a very straight look, she rushed to one of the innermost chests in the furthest corner of her Mirror-Room and dragged forth from it a garment that Zenios had never known she had bought, for she had managed the transaction in secret with a Phoenician Merchant during a mighty purchase of golden cups.

No sooner now had she dragged out this garment and wrapped her lovely body in it than in a flash all her annoyance disappeared! It was exactly suited to the occasion. Nothing on earth could have answered this unexpected situation better. Even though the immortal creature she rode on was wet with ichor and blood, and even though "with this on" the old hero could not even see how shapely her back was, the effect of her face looking forth from that feathery cloud of heavenly whiteness was beyond what even she herself had ever dreamed of!

She walked up and down in front of Kadmos' Mirror-Shield. She arranged herself, with this wonderful thing about her, first on a couch, then on a chair, then on the couch again, and once more on a chair. Okyrhöe had never in her whole life felt so inspired by her own beauty. And the remarkable thing about it was that her head, her critical, fastidious, detached, acquisitive, unscrupulous head, remained absolutely clear and cold.

Dramatizing herself and gesturing and posing in front of that shield of Kadmos there was absolutely nothing in the consciousness of Okyrhöe that had the faintest resemblance to the self-adoration, the self-intoxication, the self-worship of the unfortunate Narcissus. Okyrhöe's mind was as cold and hard and ruthless as one of those short sharp Latin swords that the Nymph

Egeria in her Italian cave would know more about than any Achaean woman.

Okyrhöe used her beauty purely, solely, and simply as a weapon. She fought with her beauty as if it were a sword. She sacked cities with her beauty. She dried up deep seas with her beauty. She blighted harvests, she devastated vineyards, she up-rooted forests with it. She was prepared to blacken shining stars and to put out burning suns with her beauty. Beauty for her was something wherewith to carve out empires or to drown continents.

The cloak she had extracted from the Phoenician's most sacred and secret caravan was made of the white skin of a huge pre-historic animal called a Podandrikon whose peculiarity was that round its waist it had shining scales and round its neck it had thick white feathers. Wrapped in the Podandrikon's skin the completely reassured Okyrhöe told herself with one last glance at the Shield of Kadmos that if this fond and foolish old king thought he would ever sail from Ithaca again he was mad.

With the face the gods had given her and in the cloak she had discovered for herself she would rule all Argos and all Boeotia and all Hellas from this old fool's rock-cave island palace! Thus thought Okyrhöe.

But the oldest of the Fates, as it used to be said at any special pinch concerning the goddess Athene, who now was so wrought up — and who can blame her — by the blind folly of her own people in the face of all this cosmic confusion that she had taken refuge with the blameless Ethiopians, "took other counsel". Yes, Atropos, the weakest, the oldest, but the wisest of the Moirai, or Fates, came, invisibly rushing, as she always did, to the crisis-spot and prompted Odysseus to make one of his own decisions independently of everyone. And such a decision he made; and it was so wholly material and practical, and so absolutely free from any general theory about the matter at issue, from any logical sequence of reasoning about the problem at stake, from any principle of action, from any "mystique" of action, from any philosophic metaphysic of action, that it could hardly be described as a decision at all.

Of course in his past there had been occasions, there *had* to be occasions, when he was forced to act according to some practical plan of action, when in fact to act at all implied a plan of action; but this was different, and the truth was that Odysseus behaved now like a skilful carpenter who has already taken the measure of the adjustments, of the shaping, the trimming, the nailing, the thickening, the thinning, the rounding off, the hammering, the polishing, which in this particular case he would be forced to employ.

Those who knew him intimately however — and of these there were perhaps now living only two persons, namely his nurse Eurycleia, whose extreme old age interfered with the expression of what she knew, and the goddess Athene, who had her own ethnological undertakings independent of any individual man or woman — would have been in a position to explain to us that there had been in this extraordinary man's life certain far-off but quite definite, concrete and material projects to the realization of which the whole complicated organism of his formidable identity was basically aimed.

Of these vast projects, like huge islands on immeasurable horizons, Eurycleia would probably have pointed to the taking of Troy, while Pallas Athene might conceivably have named the immense but misty and cloudy notion, like an old and battered world-sailor's fantasy, that at present loomed in the darkly-brooding background of his consciousness, the notion of sailing Westward, far past the Pillars of Herakles and the place where Atlas holds up the Sky, past even the shores of Ultima Thule where exiled Kronos awaits the day of his awakening, the notion in fact of steering his ship over the very waves of the very sea under which lie the drowned towers and temples and domes and palaces and streets of the sunken continent of Atlantis.

But what Odysseus decided upon now as his most prudent line of action was to accept Okyrhöe's astonishing offer to share with Zeuks and himself the wounded back of Pegasos on condition that her tender maternal arms should firmly encircle the awkwardly-moulded form of the prophetic orphan Pontopereia.

He was in fact wily enough to decide then and there to use to the limit the obviously possessive power of this beautiful woman so as to make sure that no sudden, wild, girlish impulse such as might very well spring up in a daughter of Teiresias should deprive him of her as an aid to the baffling of his enemies and the furtherance of his sailing.

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried this same eager girlish prophet, when she found Zeuks alone with Pegasos waiting for Okyrhöe and the old king, "to have a chance to ask you what you really meant by your terrifying story of those horrible pirates putting ropes round us all and deliberately chopping us to death one by one. I couldn't bear to see it done to anybody, however much I hated them; and it's certain I couldn't bear it myself. I should just go shrieking-mad, and struggle wildly and bang about till I was killed or killed somebody else!"

The girl's directness and simplicity had its effect. The expression upon the face of Zeuks would have suggested to anyone who had the particular kind of penetration that the great Theban prophet seems to have been not quite able to pass on to his progeny, that within the bloated mask of humorous relish for every conceivable aspect of human existence and of animal sensation that was Zeuks' nature there had been suddenly roused from sleep a small active insect-like second nature that was a drastically honest commentator upon all the man's impressions and was a pitiless exposure of all his own self-deceptions and all his own exaggerations and all his own boastings.

“I’ll tell you the whole thing, my dear Pontopereia,” Zeuks blurted out hurriedly. “I was glorying, you see, in my own mind over this idea of mine which I call Prokleesis or ‘defiance’. I’m proud of this idea, which has become very important to me and which is something I’m constantly trying to practise. But I’m a terrible one for seeing everything as comic and I suddenly saw my own life-method, my own life-philosophy, my own private and special defiance of life as a comic thing; and I thought: ‘How can I show up this prokleesis of mine as I love to show up all those other philosophic cure-alls that aim at dispending with Themis, treating old Auntie Atropos as a doting hag, discounting Necessity, and putting Chance to shame as a negligible wanton?’

“And I decided that the only way I could do this was by imagining a situation in which only a very few heroic human souls, and they probably already half-crazy, could possibly practise my philosophy of ‘prokleesis’, or defiance of the whole of existence, and so I conjured up the picture of those murderous pirates on the brink of chopping us all to death one after another, as much as to say: ‘Well! If you can defy life while watching your best friends chopped to bits and waiting your own turn, you have to be something more than a clowning antic like me, whose head’s been turned by a good idea!’”

The kidnapper of Pegasos with his hand on that Gorgonian Wonder’s solitary wing must have drained at that second the ambrosial dregs of true philosophic glory, for the awkward figure of the daughter of Teiresias hunched itself into a shapeless heap of girlish admiration before the knees that had bent so faithfully all those years serving the aged Nymph deserted by Pan.

When Okyrhöe in the Podandrikon's incomparable skin, and with her bold hand on Odysseus' shoulder, finally appeared, it was evident that neither her own loveliness nor the unique wonder wrapped round her had made the old hero forget his Heraklean club.

"We shall be off in a moment, pretty creature," murmured the fly to the moth from the deep life-crack in that self-conscious weapon, "and then we'll soon find out how far the great god Pan has been able to go with young Eione."

"It's all very well for you to say that," replied the moth, "but I wish you hadn't gone to sleep while the Sixth Pillar was talking to the club just now; for the Pillar had heard about our midwife's sister having quarrelled with her Egeria, and being now with old Moros, at the home of Tis and Eione, and being on the point of having a child."

"How you beautiful girls," jeered the teasing fly, "do adore thinking of the results of love-making! What interests *me* is whether the great god Pan will be able to go to the limit with young Eione."

The moth stared vaguely out of the belly of the club into the surrounding darkness. "Yes, I wonder," she pondered, "whether Eione *is* old enough to have a child."

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS A riderless Arion who met the four of them, that is to say the two women, Okyrhöe and Pontopereia, mounted between the two men, Zeuks and Odysseus, when they arrived at the palace-porch and dismounted from the wounded back of Pegasos at the entrance to the Corridor of the Pillars. There was still a little more of that weird before-dawn light called Lykophos to be got through ere the sun rose, for neither Pegasos' wounded shoulder nor his heavily-trailing solitary wing had interfered with the speed of his stride; and the darkness had only just broken when they got home.

The faithful Tis, however, was awaiting them, though since he had fastened Arion by a rope long enough to permit the animal to graze on the weeds in the Slaves' Burial-ground it was clear he was ready to wait patiently for some time. But it was from Arion's obvious restlessness and excited expectancy, to be seen in every turn of his finely-moulded head and every arching of his proud though mutilated neck, that Tis, who knew the instincts of animals as well as Odysseus knew the instincts of men, had guessed that some mysterious vibration existing between these two semi-godlike creatures had already begun to inform Arion of the near arrival of Pegasos.

When they actually did meet, their re-encounter would have delighted Nisos, and he would have observed with relief that each of them had now ceased to leave on the ground any trail of blood-stained ichor. The immediate witnesses of the scene however were too taken up with their own affairs to notice the condition of the pair of animals who were led off by

Tis. He led them quite quietly and naturally to a shed adjoining the one devoted to Babba.

Babba herself, whose private affairs were less absorbing than those of any of the persons dismounting from the back of Pegasos, instantaneously thrust her horns through the wooden partition separating the two horses from herself, and then, hurriedly withdrawing these finely curved objects from the neat apertures they had made, proceeded to arrange her beautifully flapping ears so as to catch every faintest overtone and undertone of the thoughts and feelings that these unusual visitors exchanged between themselves.

But satisfactory as it was to an amiable and easy-going cow like Babba to have the distraction, though she could only understand half of what she heard, of listening to something that did at least make her forget the passing discomfort of waiting with full udders the time of her milking, it was a mild satisfaction compared with the pleasure Okyrhöe derived from talking to Arsinöe. The woman listened to every word Arsinöe uttered, to every sigh Arsinöe sighed. Nor was there any shade of seduction, whether frightening or reassuring, whether cajoling or propitiating, that she did not practise on her sister-handmaid from Priam's court.

She had Arsinöe just now entirely to herself, for Odysseus had gone off with Zeuks to present that unusual cattle-dealer, as a queer specimen of an island farmer, to their old family-nurse, Eurycleia. Time and place and circumstance therefore all played into Okyrhöe's hands and she threw such a thrilling intensity into what she was doing that she would have taken Arsinöe completely by storm if the latter had not possessed her own secret loyalties: but even these were troubled and shaken; for the girl accepted without question — being all the while herself the hero's child — the grotesque lie that Okyrhöe was a daughter of Hector. "You have the very look of his eyes!" Arsinöe cried. As a matter of fact even while she was uttering this ridiculous cry, and very largely because of the honest vehemence with which she uttered it, this impassioned carver of the features she had idealized from childhood, in complete ignorance of her blood-relationship to their possessor, not only revealed their outlines in her own face but imagined she found them where in reality there wasn't a trace of them.

To meet a sister-member of that girlish band of devoted hero-worshippers from Ilium was in itself an event that brought with it almost unbearable emotion, but to meet a woman who called Hector father loosened, as we say, Arsinöe's knees and melted her reserved heart. It was therefore in the sobs of her compatriot upon her beautiful bosom, a bosom no longer entirely concealed under the skin of the Podandrikon, a creature whose name, owing to its association with some mysterious oriental court-fashion, must always, so its wearer had explained to Zeuks as on their ride the night-wind whistled through it, be pronounced with the stress on the syllable "dand", that Okyrhöe won her first victory in the palace of the king of Ithaca.

It must, however, be allowed that in the bold invader's second encounter with the defenders of this pillared rock-cave the victory was on the other side. The old Eurycleia, who had looked after the wounds, and recognized the scars, and protected the eccentricities, and cured the manias, of three generations, saw through the mask worn so becomingly by this beautiful adventuress at the first glance.

To every point Okyrhöe brought forward the old lady opposed a plain blunt doubt of its essential veracity.

"My rule has always been," she declared at one point, "to obtain the word of a prophet or a teacher known through the whole of Hellas for proof of a family's claim to be connected with this or that hero of the days of our grandparents; and I have never myself accepted the word of a ghost. Odysseus undoubtedly does believe that he met the ghost of Teiresias beyond the brink of Okeanos and made the ghost drink of the blood of the animal he was sacrificing. Moreover I know that Odysseus feels sure that he himself and none other went down into the Underworld ruled over by Aidoneus the brother of Zeus and Poseidon. Indeed everyone who lives near our dear Odysseus has heard him tell stories about the ghosts of the famous heroes and heroines that he encountered in that Kingdom of the Dead.

"But I have seen so much of life in my time, young lady, and if you'll let me cry, 'Go away!' or 'erre! erre!' to the bad omen, so much of death too, that when I hear people tell me that they are connected with the family of Peleus or Theseus or Kadmos or Priam my feeling is simply this: if you have this noble blood in your veins your friends may be the better for it and your enemies the worse for it, but for you yourself life will be the same to you as it is to the rest of us, and death will be no longer in coming, nor kinder in the way in which it comes, than it is to the rest of us; for as my grandmother used to say, and she goes back further than your precious Kadmos, 'the nearer to the First Man the stronger the hand; the nearer to the Last Man the shrewder the head!'

"Thus although it was with her sweetest and most cajoling smile that Okyrhöe bowed herself out of the presence of the king's nurse, her thoughts, as she got the Trojan captive to introduce her to Leipephile, the betrothed of Nisos' brother, and then persuaded that same Arsinöe to take her to a well-cushioned chamber in a low-roofed passage behind the royal throne in the dining-hall, where Pontopereia was talking eagerly to young Eione, were nothing less than murderous.

"O you wait, you wait, you wait, you wait! you croaking and creaking corpse! It won't be you who'll choose the death you'll die. It'll be your meek and obedient Okyrhöe; and it won't be the prettiest death in the world either; I can tell you that."

Meanwhile, hidden away in that chamber at the end of that low-roofed passage between the great dining-hall and the subterranean kitchens and sculleries, where the meals were prepared and washed up and where the floral wreaths and the symbols and all the ritualistic paraphernalia for festival days were kept, Tis's little sister Eione was recounting to Pontopereia her escape from the amorous attentions of the god Pan.

"But didn't you feel," Pontopereia had just dared to suggest, "so spell-bound under his touch that you longed to yield to him?"

The two young girls were sitting cross-legged on opposite piles of Cyprian cushions. Eione was seated on cushions whose prevailing colour was pale green, and Pontopereia on cushions whose prevailing colour was purple. Eione looked gravely and intently into her friend's eyes.

"No, my dear," she replied, "you'll probably laugh at me as absurdly ignorant, but to tell you the honest truth — —"

"You mean you've never really been made love to?"

Eione neither reddened nor stammered. She just frowned and rubbed the sole of one of her sandals with two of her knuckles as if the unravelling of this difficult question required her whole mental concentration.

"I'm not sure whether I have or not," she said simply. "A boy who lives near us pressed me once very tight against him, when neither of us had much on, and I felt something — the thing they all have, I suppose, that makes them men — pounding and throbbing and beating against me like a stick with the pulse of a heart. But it didn't make me want him to do anything; and it didn't frighten me or disturb me. I just noticed it; that's all, and wondered what I'd feel if he did anything else, and whether I ought to help him to do anything else. And then somebody came — and that was all."

Pontopereia gave the purple cushion beneath her a mighty tug with both her hands so that it rose up like a wave between her thighs. "No," she said. "I can't call that quite enough; and to tell you the truth, my sweet one, I've never myself got as far as that — I mean in real life, if you understand. What I've always done, since I was O! so little, is to tell myself stories of love-making when I'm alone in bed. Sometimes I wake up in the night — you know? — feeling very amorous and then I tell myself, O such weird and funny stories — not very nice stories always, I'm afraid! It depends on what I'm feeling that particular night. But do tell me, my Sweet, what you did when Arcadian Pan laid hands on you. And first, do tell me this. Did his thin hairy legs and goat's feet give you the shivers?"

At this point, to Pontopereia's complete astonishment, Eione burst out laughing. "Shivers?" she cried. "I should say not! I like goats very much. Goats are my favourite beasts, just as Crows are my favourite birds, and blue dragon-flies my favourite insects and eels my favourite fish! I begged Arcadian Pan to let me stroke his thin hairy legs and it wasn't he who made me sit on his queer knees, it was I myself who made him take me on them. And I kept making him lift up his goat-feet so that I could see them quite close and touch them, like I like touching the feet of real goats! Then I made him let me clean his goat's horns for him and polish them till they were lovely and smooth. Then I got him to teach me to make some real proper sounds with his pipe — yes! I played some real notes on Arcadian Pan's own flute!

"Yes, as I'm telling you, Ponty darling, everything between us was just as I liked it to be, in fact as I made it be. The truth is I never knew that great gods — for he *is* a great god, isn't he, Arcadian Pan? — ever let a person treat them, well! certainly not an ordinary farm-girl like me treat them, as he let me treat him!"

Pontopereia pulled out the uppermost one of her purple cushions from between her legs, and spreading it on her knees thumped it with her fists into smoothness.

"But what happened then, my dear? You aren't suggesting, are you, that having made friends with this astonishing Being in such a simple way you were separated from him by a mistake?"

Eione looked at her with a vague careless, idle, good-natured, but entirely childish and innocent look.

"I wish indeed, Ponty dear," she said, slowly, "that you could explain to me what happened for it's all so totally beyond my comprehension that I've been living in a sort of trance of confusion ever since. It's only your coming that's brought me back into my own real self again. Yes, on my soul! I've never had such queer feelings. It's just as if I'd been turned into somebody else; and somebody whose whole life goes by, without any move of her own, just as if she were a figure in another person's dream! I know it sounds all vague and sleepy and funny; but I swear to you, Ponty darling, it's true. Do you think I've fallen in love with Arcadian Pan? Ordinary girls like me *can* fall in love with an immortal god can't they? There's nothing impossible about it is there?

"Anyway, Ponty darling, I don't quite know what has happened to me and that's what's made me decide that, come what may, I *must* stick close to Arcadian Pan for a few more spring days and see what comes of it! One important thing has already come of it and that is our curiously complete agreement over this great cosmic Revolution. Mind you, some of us Island people still talk of the 'Minoan' or 'Cretan' revolution and others still talk of the ‘Argive’ revolution; but the only revolution that Arcadian Pan and I talk of is what we have come to call the ‘Cosmic’ Revolution, by which we mean a rustic pastoral revolution against a cruel, despotic, wicked, undemocratic, hieratic, privileged tyrannical Order of the Citizens of great Cities, which we — rustic shepherds and shepherdesses from the country — have joined together to break up forever!”

“But what will you put in its place?” enquired Pontopereia, giving her purple cushion a final caress with both her hands; hands which it must be confessed were not, like those of Eione, the hands of a born dancer.

“Anarchy! Anarchy! Anarchy!” cried the younger girl. “Don’t you see, Ponty darling, this revolution of ours, which is really a revolution of the older gods against the newer gods, of the great old giant-gods, animal-gods, dragon-gods, serpent-gods, and, above all, *women*-gods, for the older times were *matriarchal times*, and women, *not* men, however heroic such men might be, ruled Heaven and Earth, since at the Beginning of things it was Gaia, our real old mother the earth, who gave birth to Ouranos, this holy heaven of hermeneutical humbug, that priests make so much of, and not the other way round! Isn’t that a spry word, ‘hermeneutical’? He taught me that!

“Yes! the thing that has thrown Arcadian Pan and me together has nothing really to do with his ‘taking me’, as he tells me they call it in the Arcadian sheep-folds, or his treating me as wives are treated, and it has nothing to do with my feelings, one way or the other.

“What Arcadian Pan feels drawn to do, as far as his treatment of a plain ignorant girl like me is concerned, is to keep his hands off me and the thing that male creatures carry about with them out of me, until what you might call ‘the ice’ is broken between us; but, to break this ‘ice’ — which is of course my shyness and nervousness and pride and independence, and also, you needn't smile, my dear! my ignorance — the great thing is for Arcadian Pan and me, and don't 'ee ever think, Ponty my precious, that I don't know what an honour it is for a stupid little kid like me to go about with a great immortal god, especially one with the beautifully-thin hairy legs and the firmly-planted goat-feet of my favourite of all animals! — the great thing, I say, is for Arcadian Pan and me to have the same idea of a proper 'Cosmic Revolution' and the same idea of the kind of Anarchy we must set up in place of this confounded hieratic 'order'.

"What the old Dryad advised — and she told us that though her name 'Kleta' was given her by one of the Graces she was not displeased to bear a name that resembled Keto, the fair-cheeked sea-monster who became the wife of Phorkys, one of those honest 'old Men of the Sea' who *cannot* — and isn't *that* a significant thing in itself? — tell a lie about anything.

"That's what I said this morning to Arcadian Pan, and O! it pleased him so: and though he swore he couldn't be as honest as all that, being a shepherd busy with ewes and nanny-goats and rams, and as a player on the flute for country-girls to follow and as the cause of those sudden, nameless, deep, strange, inexplicable, mysterious, obsessing, panic-terrors which take possession of mortal men and make them scurry and scamper away like rats out of a barn, he liked honesty, he said. And so I told him that the 'old men of the sea,' that is to say the old gods of the sea, were the only 'honest' gods in the world because they lived in water, and water I told him is the one element in the world that *cannot,* in its inherent nature, play dramatic tricks upon us." "What about ships at sea?" thought Pontopereia; but she held her peace; and Eione went on. "Well! we shall want all the help we can get from the outspoken honesty of water if we are to make headway against Zeus, Poseidon, and Aidoneus, each of the three of them a superb master of lies! Yes, what Arcadian Pan and I feel is that these three Sons of Kronos are now trying to combine together, since one is the Ruler of the Sky, one of the Sea, and the other of whatever dark and dreadful world it is that lies beneath the Earth; and that what we revolutionists and rebels have to do is enlist against Zeus and Poseidon and Aidoneus all the subnormal and abnormal and supernormal creatures we can collect together!

"These three most powerful rulers among the Olympians have joined together to suppress with violence and magical force every rebel that is opposed to them and opposed to all the great Olympians who support them!

"Do you realize, Ponty dear, that fresh news has just reached this appalling priest Enorches from his fellow-priests of the Mysteries at Eleusis, informing him that Herakles, who has been guarding Mount Etna to keep that fire-breathing monster Typhon from breaking out, has been persuaded by Dionysos to yield himself up to an orgy of drink; and that while this has been going on, Eros, who had been chained with golden chains by Hephaistos or by some 'Son of Hephaistos', like the one who carved the letters 'U. H.' on the base of the pillar here, yes! chained to the arm of Aphrodite's throne in Cyprus, has broken his bonds and joined Dionysos, and together they have succeeded in throwing Herakles into what amounts to a mad trance of ecstasy, in which condition he has become so completely irresponsible that the monster Typhon has got entirely loose, has left Italy and Sicily altogether, and has gone, fire-breathing, ravaging, rampaging, to where, above the Garden of Hesperides, the Titan Atlas, whose punishment from the Olympians it has been to hold up the sky, is threatening to leave his job? What do you think of all this, Ponty dear? Arcadian Pan and I think that his departure will neither mean the end of the sky nor the end of the earth, but the end of the superiority of the sky over the earth.

"You see, Ponty dear, the garden of the Hesperides lies at the western verge of the entire world where the divine streams of Okeanos encircle the earth, and where once used to be — malediction on those who submerged it! is what Arcadian Pan and I say now — the beautiful sheep-grazed meadows of Lost Atlantis. I took Arcadian Pan to the oak-tree of the King's old Dryad who was such a friend of Laertes in *his* time, and the Dryad revealed to him certain secrets of the Future of which he, although an immortal, had heard nothing; 'I am about to die', the Dryad said to us, 'or I shouldn't know these things myself.' And it was after our talk with the Dryad that *we decided to intercept Typhon*."

Pontopereia's blank amazement at these astonishing words made her whirl the purple cushion in the air before sitting down on it with a thud.

"You — and Arcadian Pan," she gasped, "intercepting that fire-breathing monster!" As she stared dumbfounded at her young friend, she became aware that the childish innocence in Eione's expression had suddenly changed to something else; and at this point she realized that between herself and this new Eione there was a blank space she couldn't bridge. "How weird," she said to herself, "are the ways by which two minds touch each other and dodge each other!"

And indeed it struck Pontopereia now as if they were the gestures of a complete stranger, when Eione suddenly stood up, opened her mouth as if to speak, but, in place of speaking, yawned, put the back of her left hand with careless indifference against her mouth, and, when her yawn was finished, with a half-smile, as if just waking from a pleasant dream in which she and Arcadian Pan might have been riding Typhon like an obedient horse, stretched both her shapely arms with clenched fists high above her straw-coloured head.

“You see, Ponty dear,” she said emphatically as she let her arms fall to her sides. “Not only has this Echidna of Arima borne children to Typhon but the dragon, Ladon, who guards the apples of the Hesperides, is her brother; and there is a good chance that when Poseidon and Aidoneus come on the scene we shall have got Prometheus himself to stand up to them.”

Pontopereia looked past her friend into far-receding space. She suddenly felt sad and lonely. Had this rash young girl, without in the least comprehending what was happening to her, fallen in love with Arcadian Pan? Was all that rather hurried and very startling and yet not completely satisfactory account of these great cosmic events an outward and visible sign of a much more personal feeling? Was it actually possible that a simple country girl like this should be subject to vibrations of emotion belonging to a superhuman conflict between Gods and Titans?

Pontopereia experienced just then a very perceptible sense of humiliation. When she had hastened their departure from Ornax she had felt without doubt the spirit of her father descend upon her and the inspiration of her father possess her soul, and she had exulted so much in this and felt so proud of it that it had seemed to her, as she bowed down in intellectual response before the gnomic humility of Zeuks, that her place in the struggle of life was with the great seers and the illumined soothsayers and not with ordinary women and girls.

But in this rough, earthy, primitive, uncomfortable rock-palace of the royal house of Ithaca she felt reduced in stature and importance. Her prophetic power seemed to have deserted her. While she had been listening to what Eione had told her of this news from the priests of Eleusis about the monster Typhon escaping from under Aetna and thundering over sea and land, till he reached the Garden of the Hesperides and the place where Atlas holds up the sky as his punishment, she felt as if without a definite inspiration from her father she had no place in these events and no power of her own to obtain such a place.

She even began to feel a doubt in her mind whether the beautiful and formidable Okyrhöe herself would be able to deal with this rock-hewn palace to which she had insisted on being brought.

With an intellectual candour that went further than the emotional simplicity of her friend she decided that the prophetic power within her must depend on the special atmosphere of particular places. "I don't believe," she told herself, "it will sweep me away at all here. Well, if I'm not destined, after all, to be a prophetess, *I'm not,* and that's all there is to be said! *But I wish Nisos was here*."

This frank admission, so nakedly expressed, was a great relief to her; she felt as if in the midst of putting on the ritualistic robes for the worship of one of the greater Olympians she had suddenly snatched the things off and thrown them on the floor and rushing out into the open air danced on the grass the first dancing-steps she had learnt as a child.

Meanwhile since Nisos' brother had carried away the other virginal attendant it was natural that the two woman who had known Ilium and the Court of King Priam should drift off together. As may be imagined with one like Okyrhöe to deal with, it did not take Arsinöe very long to discover that this lovely creature who put on the skin of the fabulous "Podandrikon" to accompany her to the haunted area of Arima and who seemed to find that to talk about the importance of accentuating the syllable "dand" in this harsh word was the best way of keeping their Trojan emotion in its place, had the same will as herself to thwart, frustrate and bring to a disastrous and contemptible end, the one single aim of the old age of Odysseus, his desire to sail across the sunken towers of Atlantis into the Unknown West.

Over their bowed feminine heads as they moved through Arima, defying the dark influences of that sinister region, there moaned and wailed, just as over the drowned temples of Atlantis Odysseus might have heard his ship's rigging respond to the wind, the eternally monotonous dialogue between Echidna the mother of the Hound of Hell, and Eurybia the grandmother of Hekate.

But when, in the golden afternoon light, Okyrhöe was led by her new ally into the very presence of what looked like the absolute reality of the fully-armed Hector himself, her nerves did for an instant, for all their superhuman control, break into a choking gasp. For not only were Hector's lineaments represented in exact correspondence to the living truth but there was something about the curves of his broad low forehead that exactly resembled the shape of Arsinöe's head. She recovered quickly however; and they were returning in a deliberately loitering fashion; for Arsinöe had begun to explain to the visitor that Odysseus grew irritable if he had to speak to guests or even to catch sight of guests while dinner was preparing though she admitted that the old hero had come by this time to look upon his unaristocratic companion, Zeuks, as an intimate; but the two women's leisureliness at this moment received a shock that was as disturbing as it was startling.

By a grotesque piece of ill-luck they encountered the old Dryad Kleta; an encounter which brought them both down with a disagreeable jolt to the very things in Odysseus' life that they would have preferred to ignore just then, that is to say to the human pathos of his present situation, as an extremely old man without a wife, or a daughter, or a grand-daughter, whose only son had become an austere, inhuman, unsympathetic recluse and a devotee of some contemplative cult, about which, save that it had nothing to do with Dionysos or Eros, and was in no favour with Enorches, it was very hard to get any information.

The old Dryad stood in front of them for a perceptible number of pulse-beats, staring at them as if they were trespassers and intruders of an extremely suspicious kind; not necessarily outsiders to be crushed as we crush black-beetles but entities to beware of and to be guarded against.

The old lady already knew Arsinöe by sight and was fully aware she was Trojan; and her first thought was that Okyrhöe must have just arrived by sea from the same part of the country. It may be believed she did not miss the royal eccentricity of the fabulous Podandrikon skin; and her mind began vaguely flapping like an aged phantom albatross from one to another of all the far-off harbours of which she had ever heard, leaving, as it flew, a feather caught in the sea-weed of one promontory and a splash of white dropping upon the rocks of another.

“Take notice, proud visitor,” she murmured, and then, with a quick glance at Arsinöe, “but you’ve been warned already, that we have to guard our renowned Odysseus from every agitating shock until the moment comes when he has got his ship ready to hoist sail and to sail away whither none of us will ever know! But sail he must and sail he will — away — away — away; and our duty now is to make everything as easy for him as we can until that heaven-appointed moment. Therefore, proud one, from far off, the best thing I can say to you is to bid you go — go quickly — go quietly — go at once! If you came by sea, find a ship and be off!

“There are ships sailing from this side of our island and there are ships sailing from the other side of our island. You wouldn’t be here if you hadn’t gold to pay your way. Well, stranger, find a ship and pay the master of that ship to take you to the harbour nearest the place where you would be!”

Okyrhöe made an effort to look more than humanly lovely and her features had certainly never been as goddess-like as at that moment. The sun was still overhead, though his tremendous arsenal of refulgence had sunk sufficiently from the Zenith to pour itself into every curve and cranny of Okyrhöe's countenance.

There are faces that cannot endure exposure of this kind, but Okyrhöe's face could endure anything. Indeed it looked to Arsinöe as she glanced at her companion that the intense emotion in the old Dryad's voice stirred up in the beautiful wearer of the Podandrikon skin a quivering vibration of self-assertion that rushed like a sea-breath touched by fire through nerves and veins and muscles and fibres and cells.

But if this rush of abnormal magnetism affected the recipient of the old Dryad's words, it also affected the Dryad herself. It did more than affect her. Leaving them helplessly standing there — and where she left them they remained; for nothing else at that moment seemed possible — she rushed wildly, blindly, desperately into the centre of Arima. Midway between the two figures of Eurybia and Echidna she paused for a moment, staring at them both like one deprived of speech by reason of the intensity of the feeling that possessed her. Then she cried out in a resonant voice that rang from end to end of that haunted enclosure, "Goddesses! Goddesses! Goddesses! Goddesses! worshipped for fifty thousand years in Argos and Ionia and Crete and Achaia and Lakedaimon! There is a battle going on that will never be repeated if it is not won now!

"It is a battle to restore to us women the ruling position we held at the beginning of things! In the reign of Kronos we held it — and *that* age was the Age of Gold. But it is Zeus the son of Kronos who has taken it from us, partly by his thunderbolts and partly by the cunning and strength of his two sons, Hermes and Herakles. Goddesses! My goddesses! You who have been worshipped in Ithaca for fifty-thousand years, harken unto me now!

"Persephone, the Queen of Hades, has left her Lord Aidoneus, and is now roaming the world seeking for her mother Demeter. But Hermes, that cunning one, has gone to both Aidoneus and Poseidon, yes! both to the Lord of Hades and the Lord of the Sea, and has brought them to the Garden of the Hesperides near the place where Atlas, as a punishment from Zeus, holds up the sky. And from there the three Olympian brothers, Zeus, Lord of the Sky, Poseidon Lord of the Sea, and Aidoneus, Lord of the Underworld, have resolved to resist this attempt of us women, led by Persephone, to seize again the universal rule and power that we once possessed. The great Olympian goddesses are wavering and have hidden themselves away. Athene has gone to Ethiopia.

"Hera is still alone on Olympos, but in a state of distraction. She has sent Iris to Ethiopia with frantic messages to Athene to return! But Iris seems unable to discover where Athene is hiding. Dionysos and Eros together are doing what Aphrodite cannot do; for Hephaistos has caught *her* in Lemnos and is keeping her a prisoner there.

"But Dionysos and Eros have between them ensorcerized the powerful Herakles and laid him low with Desire and Drink, so that Typhon breathing fire and up-rooting mountains can now drag forth Briareos from Tartaros this time for the dethroning, not the throning of Zeus! O great Echidna, Mother of the Sphinx, the Chimera, the Hydra and the Nemean Lion, help us now! O great Eurybia, grandmother of Hekate and daughter of Gaia the Earth and Pontos the Sea, help us now!

"And harken unto me, ye two, for I have great news! Arcadian Pan himself, yes! Pan with the beautiful horns and the hairy legs of a real living goat, has revolted against his time-serving, treacherous, cunning, thieving, lying begetter, Hermes, and is now, even now, leading by their bridles those two godlike horses Pegasos and Arion, so cruelly mutilated by Enorches the Priest of the Mysteries.

"And why, O great Goddesses, is he leading them? He is leading them with the idea of offering them to you Eurybia, of wide rule, daughter of Gaia and Pontos! He is leading them with the idea of offering them to you Echidna, daughter of Phorkys and Keto! He is leading them with the idea of being himself their rider and your guide and helping you to intercept Typhon in his fire-breathing course from Sicily to the Garden of the Hesperides, and make use of him, as huntresses make use of savage dogs, to defeat the Son of Kronos even though he is supported by Aidoneus, the Lord of the Dead, and Poseidon the Lord of the Sea.

"And then, when this resounding victory is won, this victory to which Atropos the oldest of the Fates who is a woman like ourselves will contribute her aid, we shall welcome completely to our side the wavering Hera and the wandering — —"

She was interrupted by a long, melodious, vibrant, tremulous note of music which was so penetrating and far-reaching that it was impossible not to receive it into your inmost identity like a perfect draught of wine. Without any other declaration, or sign, or warning, or announcement, the two godlike horses entered that haunted enclosure, Arcadian Pan repeating from the flute he pressed to his bearded mouth that same meltingly sweet note over and over and over and over.

Pan himself was mounted on Pegasos, and the young girl Eione on Arion; and she certainly seemed to be riding Arion easily and naturally and as if entirely at her own volition.

"Lady Okyrhöe!" cried Eione, as they came even with the two women; and into this salutation the young girl threw exactly the right note of respect and courtesy.

As Eione later discussed what they managed to achieve with Arcadian Pan — for it was remarkable how quickly she felt completely at ease with the goat-foot god — they agreed that it was peculiarly and specially lucky for the success of their scheme that in former times, so rumour said, Echidna had been embraced by the monster Typhon and not only so, but, as one story declared, had given birth by him to the Hydra of Lerna, if not to the famous victim of the club of Herakles, the Nemean Lion itself! But whatever were the feelings, mortal or immortal, of the riders upon those divine horses, the impression they produced upon the two women was noticeable.

Never to the end of her days did Arsinöe forget what she then beheld. Okyrhöe took it all more lightly, for her whole life had been such a tissue of murderous tensions and such a chain of deep-plotted explosions that for life's events to jerk and bleed and jitter and squeal as you dragged them clinging to your scraping harrow over the rough and smooth of fate seemed natural enough.

But apparently those two strange Beings, Eurybia and Echidna who for years and years and years had sighed obscurely, darkly, obstinately, and in a sort of ghastly antiphonic ritual at each other in horrible isolation across the dedicated unholiness of their island Arima, now found themselves bound to move, just as if Atropos herself were in person directing the operation; and there was something about their having to move after so long that was almost geological, giving the impression that the places from which they moved were left raw and in some way not only bloody and excremental but scoriac, volcanic, and like what is left when an avalanche moves.

Echidna instinctively selected Pegasos as her horse and Pan as her companion, while Eurybia slid easily and inevitably upon the back of Arion.

Each of these formidable goddesses, however, had the good sense to allow her fellow-rider to hold the bridle-reins of the particular animal she rode; so that as Okyrhöe the pretended daughter of Hector saw them pass that hero’s carved image, and as Arsinöe, his real daughter, saw the hoof of one of the horses fling a clod of mud against the figure she had broken her heart to carve and bruised her flesh to arm, it was upon Eione and Pan that their attention was fixed rather than upon the two goddesses; and as they listened to that exquisitely magnetic flute-note from the pipe of Pan dying away in the distance long after both horses with their four riders had disappeared, the drift of their separate moods opened between them like a yawning gulf, the mood of the wearer of that weird Podandrikon growing as tense as the mood of a general in the midst of the bloodiest part of a battle, while the mood of the daughter of Hector fell into that sadness, proud and bitter and rejecting all sympathy, which had become her prevailing attitude to life.

Had the girl possessed any real friend, had Nisos, for instance, not been so much younger, or Leipephile not so extremely simple, she might have been drawn out of this embittered isolation, for it was so long after the Trojan War that the ancient rancours in most ordinary minds were beginning to lose their edge, if not to wear out. If only Eurycleia hadn’t been so old it might have been different; but of all people an ancient family-nurse, and one who had nursed, as Eurycleia had, three generations of the same breed, would be the last to have any sensitized imagination left over for sympathetic consideration of the feelings of an alien.

It wasn’t until those heart-breakingly sweet notes — or rather the last long-drawn-out unequalled note — of Pan’s flute had died away that either Arsinöe or Okyrhöe gave a thought to the old Dryad who was the prime instigator of this disturbing event.

When they did turn to her it was simultaneously and with an equal feeling of something like real awe. “Let us help you home to your oak, Dryad,” whispered Okyrhöe; and if Nisos had heard that whisper, to which Arsinöe added a less articulate murmur, he would have had a thrill of real pride at being a native of a Grecian isle rather than of a Trojan or a Theban plain, for clearly so great is the power of a Greek Nymph even in her extreme old age that formidable foreigners are subdued before her.

As they approached the skeleton oak-tree on the bark of which flourished a special kind of rich green moss, as if the tree were already horizontal rather than perpendicular, the Dryad’s supporters both recognized that it was possible to look through the interstices of the bark into the interior wood of the tree which was split into long splintery filaments between which there were already oozing out and crumbling upon the lichen-covered ground certain thick masses of a reddish-brown substance which was the clotted heart-stuff or dust-resolved liver, or conglomerated entrail-matter, of that fast-perishing old tree.

Suddenly the Dryad stood dead-still between them, and laid one withered hand on the sleeve of Okyrhöe and one on the sleeve of Arsinöe.

“Give my farewell to Odysseus, you two. My name-mother is one of the Graces and just at this moment I felt her passing over me, warning me of my end. Zeus, it seems has got one last thunder-bolt left, a very little one, but large enough to dispose of my oak and me. Lest either of you should feel the shock of my destruction, it is important that you should hasten away. Don’t stop running till you reach the entrance to the Hall of the Pillars. There you will be safe. Fare ye well. Let my memory be forgotten!”

So intense was the tone of her words that although all was silent round them Okyrhöe snatched at Arsinöe’s hand and together they fled like a pair of panic-stricken pigeons. They did not stop running till they reached the entrance to the corridor of the Pillars; and then, when they did stop at last with their hands still clasped tight, each of them could hear clearly the beating of her own heart as well as that of her companion. In fact as they stood there in a sort of trance there arose from the pair of them a kind of mathematical and mechanical and wholly impersonal heart-beating, which went on till, in one single blinding flash of lightning, followed by a rolling clap of thunder, the Nymph and the oak-tree, and the stretch of ground where the oak-tree's roots had been, were reduced simultaneously to black ashes.

"What I don't understand, dear nurse," Odysseus was saying at that moment, as together with his new friend Zeuks he watched Eurycleia's face as he explained his ideas for the calling of the whole people together to listen to his plan for sailing across the drowned continent Atlantis. "What I don't understand is your objection to my telling the people exactly what I intend to do. Why shouldn't I tell them, Nurse darling? I shall say that what I want for my sailing is the most necessary thing of all — namely 'othonia' or sail-cloth.

"And I'll call upon them all, upon the whole people of Ithaca to collect sail-cloth for me. What can Krateros Naubolides do to stop the people, my own people of Ithaca, that were my father's people before me, from collecting enough 'othonia' or sail-cloth for my purpose? And then, you see, Nurse darling, if they begin making the excuse that it's wrong for me, Odysseus the son of Laertes, to leave the rule of this Island to others, I've got this brilliant, eloquent, inspired young daughter of Teiresias to help me with them. Don't you see, Nurse, how she'll make all the difference at this open 'agora' and meeting-place of our people? I'll call on her, as we used to call on all those prophets of old; and, girl though she is, she'll do the trick for us, Nurse, my honey! Now do, for the sake of all the gods tell me what's weighing on your dear mind, for I know *something* is! Are you afraid that secretive scoundrel Enorches has got some new trick up his sleeve, some dirty, crafty, clever trick that I've never thought of, that he will play on me at the last moment?"

Eurycleia gazed intently at him, frowning. Then she suddenly shifted in her seat and stared out of the window. Then she addressed herself to Zeuks. "Did you hear anything, Master?" "I certainly did!" Zeuks answered; and in his turn addressed the King.

"I expect you must have heard it too, my Lord? It didn't sound as ordinary thunder does at this time of the year either! Something's going on."

The old Nurse rose, not without difficulty, and confronted the two men from her full height, one hand resting on the arm of her chair. Her stark gaunt figure towered imposingly over them in the afternoon sunlight which was now pouring into the chamber.

"I think you are right, Master Zeuks," she said quietly. "If I'm not greatly mistaken that wasn't ordinary lightning or ordinary thunder. That was a thunderbolt from — —"

It was then that there came a hurried step outside Eurycleia's chamber and with all her simple impulsiveness Leipephile burst in.

The tall beautiful stupid girl was panting like a hunted animal. "What on earth is it?" asked the old Nurse. "What's happened? Was that a thunderbolt?"

"They're in the Porch," stammered Leipephile, recovering her breath with difficulty.

"Who are in the Porch?" cried the Nurse. "For the god's sake tell us what's happened, girl!"

"The strange lady in that funny cloak and Arsinöe."

"Well — why shouldn't they be in the Porch? Are they hurt? What's happened?"

"They say that Zeus has thrown a thunderbolt from Mount Gargaros, where he is looking down on the Garden of the Hesperides and on Atlas holding up the sky, and on Poseidon coming up out of the Sea; and on Aidoneus coming up out of Hades. They've just met the old Dryad — —" Here Odysseus interrupted her. "Met Kleta the Dryad, do you say, girl? What on earth was she doing all that way from her tree?"

"It is the Dryad *and* her tree, O king," replied the betrothed of Nisos' brother; and she spoke with less timidity and shyness now that she was delivering, or being delivered of, her chief news. "Yes, both the Dryad and her tree together, that the Son of Kronos has destroyed with a thunderbolt. The Dryad told them that the thunderbolt he was going to use was a little one and the last he had where he then was. But they told me to tell you that they know why the son of Kronos was angry with the Dryad." At this point Leipephile paused in her tale and surveyed her audience with the self-satisfied expression that implies the presence of news in the wind that can't be blurted out in a few words, and can't possibly be divined or guessed at, even by the cleverest listener. Her three hearers, not missing this expression, patiently imitated Eurycleia who had now resumed her seat at the table.

"It was," Leipephile went on, with obviously deep satisfaction at having such an important tale to relate to headquarters, "it was the goat-foot god Pan who began it all by consorting with the girl Eione — though I don't think he meddled with her maidenhead. The god Pan and the girl Eione were riding on Pegasos and Arion. And when the Dryad saw this she persuaded the goddesses Eurybia and Echidna who have for so long ruled over that place—" and Leipephile made a vague gesture with her hand in the general direction of Arima— "that place — you know — where everybody's scared of going — and what the Dryad told them to do was this. She told them, that is she told Eurybia and Echidna and Eione and Pan, all four mounted on Pegasos and Arion, to intercept the Monster Typhon and by a little bribing and petting and cozening and cosseting and coaxing — and a few terrifying threats too perhaps! — to make use of him as a savage hunting-dog; and, thus well-prepared for any event, to approach the Garden of the Hesperides."

There was a long silence when the girl had finished. Then Odysseus enquired: "Could you tell me, dear child, could any of you tell me, do you think, where the daughter of Teiresias has got to this afternoon while all these unexpected events have been occurring?" Leipephile stared at him with her mouth open, while Eurycleia and Zeuks exchanged a look by which the former said to the latter:

"Here's a typical monarch! Having made all this fuss to get hold of this damned girl, he now has let her escape!" while the latter said to the former: "We had better find out exactly from the woman in that weird cloak what kind of trouble this Pontopereia has fallen into on a fine afternoon."

But before they ceased to look at each other there were more light steps outside the door and Pontopereia herself appeared.

"Where's Eione?" she asked; and then seeing Odysseus she added: "Pardon me, great King, but they told me down there such a mad story that I had to come and see for myself! They said Eione had gone off with the goat-foot god and with two mysterious goddesses who for twenty years or more have been arguing together in a haunted place near here you call Arima."

"They seem to have told you the truth, child," replied Odysseus. "But now that you're here the best thing you and I can do is to arrange a definite plan of campaign for ourselves at the 'agora' tomorrow. So sit you down here and have a sip of my wine. This is our Eurycleia. Yes, give her one of those cups you like using best yourself, Nurse.”

Unlike many men of genius, whether in thought or in action, Odysseus was always vividly aware of the feelings of women; and he now glanced from Pontopereia to Leipephile and back again to Pontopereia.

“This lady,” he explained to the latter, “is the betrothed of our young friend Nisos’ elder brother, who, quite naturally, takes the side of their father Krateros Naubolides in our little island-feud. The pleasantest thing for you, my dear child” — he was addressing Leipephile now— “will be to have a quiet supper by yourself tonight and to go to bed early; for in this way you’ll escape being torn between your loyalty to us and your affection for our opponents.”

The tall simple girl didn’t appear to object in the very least to being thus lightly dismissed from so momentous a Council of War; and after a nod from Eurycleia had confirmed the king’s word, and after the kindly-natured Zeuks had muttered something about her being sure not to forget to have a good supper, she went off at once.

Then at last the party round the old Nurse gathered closely together to plan, as Odysseus had declared it was essential they should do, the general outline of his appeal to the people. But Odysseus had still got at the back of his consciousness a rooted feeling that there was something in Eurycleia’s mind with regard to all that had happened and all that was happening which it was important for him to know.

But it was not until he and Zeuks had mapped out pretty definitely their plan of campaign for to-morrow’s meeting in the “agora”, and had decided to send the heralds at early dawn round the whole island to announce it, that in a single hurriedly pronounced word the old Nurse revealed what it was. Telemachos! Yes, it was his son; his son, who like a wooden dagger, with a handle at one end and a point at the other end, had got himself caught fast in the consciousness of the old nurse. Yes, it was the “eidolon” of his son Telemachos she had in her mind, teasing and perplexing her with misgivings of every sort.

It must have been approaching the hour for supper when Odysseus discovered what Eurycleia had in her mind. “One thing seems certain,” he said, “and that is that this appalling Enorches hasn’t made the faintest, no! not the very faintest impression on him! What *does* he think of that retreat of his, which this devil of a priest has certainly curtailed to pretty small quarters?”

“Another thing seems certain too,” added the old Nurse; and going to the door at the back of her room she opened it and called down the passage. Then with the servant who answered her call she held a brief conversation, in the middle of which, telling the girl to wait a moment, she returned to Odysseus. “It seems certain to me,” she told him gravely, “that your son really must, for all his philosophizing, feel lonely sometimes and want to get a glimpse of his Dad. I know I want to get a glimpse of *him*; and I think the Lady Penelope would feel that old Nurse Eurycleia ought to have this wish gratified. Do you mind if I send somebody — Tis, if he’s about just now — to bid him come to supper tonight? There’ll be *as it is* two women-guests and only one man-guest, so he will make up the table; and you at the head and your own Nurse at the foot will behold the board complete. So may I send Tis or somebody to bid him to come?”

Across Odysseus’ countenance flapped like the wings of a black crow a momentary shadow of serious discomfort; but he had the strength to blot it out so completely that it was as if it had never been there. He nodded with the crushing acceptance and finality of Zeus. “Send anyone you wish and tell them in the Kitchen to prepare supper for two men and two women in addition to thee and me."

The old lady went back to the waiting serving-girl with this message. "She says Tis *is* there and she will tell him to go," she reported to the King on her return; and so it was settled, and that very evening Telemachos came. Nor among those sitting round the table in the throne-room at the end of the corridor of Pillars was there one who regretted this sudden resolve of the old Nurse to see her last Infant of the House as a noble-looking middle-aged man of fifty, sitting side by side with Zeuks, and opposite Okyrhöe and Pontopereia.

And the best of it was that the routine of custom in that royal dwelling made the whole thing easy. For the people in the Kitchen were always wont to bring the dishes up to a table just behind the royal throne and leave them there: from which position Leipephile and Arsinöe and Tis himself carried them round and then stood behind the throne of Odysseus while all the guests ate and drank at their leisure.

As might have been expected Okyrhöe was deeply impressed by the handsomeness and dignity of Telemachos; and as for Pontopereia she couldn't resist permitting a passionate prayer to Athene to embody itself in words in her mind: a prayer that if she should be called upon to utter words of prophetic insight in the presence of this silent, austere, good-looking man, with such broad-shoulders and such an intensely abstracted look on his stern face, she might be true to herself, true to her inspiration, and true to the great goddess who would use her as a reed through which to pour forth the rhythmic waves of her message to the world.

Their meal that night was indeed only half through when, constrained by a sudden urge whose origin was wholly obscure to her, Pontopereia asked Telemachos a plain direct unequivocal question.

"What would you say, My Lord Telemachos, was the real heart of your teaching? I mean the sort of thing you would have to explain to any student of philosophy, whether a boy or a girl, who wished to be considered as your proper disciple?"

Telemachos glanced quickly and a little uneasily at his father as if to assure himself that the old man would not mind his launching out upon such a topic at such a time; but as he received no warning against it, and, in place of that, saw something resembling the flicker of a benevolent smile cross his progenitor's face, he addressed himself to Pontopereia with sincere pleasure.

And the truth was that the longer she listened to him the more did Pontopereia feel drawn to the man and thankful she had risked her question. "He's lonely;" she told herself, "he's lonely and unhappy. He's invented this philosophy of his to fill a void. His philosophy is his kingdom, his wife, his children, his weapons, his ships, his ploughs, his horses, his granaries." And indeed his words, when he spoke, almost humorously fulfilled her prediction.

"I would tell this imaginary disciple of mine, lady," he said, "to make philosophy a substitute for every kind of success he can possibly want — no! more than a substitute, a fulfilment! I would say: 'What do you really want from life?' You've probably never asked yourself! Few of us do when we're young. But anyone who has watched you will know you've wanted the satisfaction of your hunger, your thirst, your lust, your hunting spirit, your fighting spirit, your collecting mania, your athletic mania, your building mania, your passion to be beautiful, to be a great artist, to be desired by many. Well, and what have you already attained in regard to this desire of yours? You've got the rudiments, the embryonic beginnings of all of them. You've got a body and a soul. You are a human being. You are living on the earth with the ocean around the earth, and the sun and the moon above the earth, and the stars above the sun and the moon, and the eternal ether above the stars.

"Well! consider your situation. You are a separate individual. You are a lonely individual. And though you may have got parents and brothers and sisters your happiness depends upon your own feelings for life, not upon their feelings for life nor upon their feelings for you. Well! you are surrounded by things that are made of the four elements, made of earth, made of fire, made of water, made of air. Very good. You have the power of embracing these things: of seizing upon them and embracing them so closely that you become one with each one of them.

"But these things, although like yourself they are separate and individual, are made up, just as you are yourself, of the four elements. Very well then! It is clear that when you, a human being, embrace the earth, you are embracing something made of the same material that you are made of. That is to say that a person made of air, water, earth, fire, is embracing other objects or entities or beings, also made of earth, fire, water, air. Thus with your mind and all your senses, thus with your body and all your soul you become one with the whole earth and with the ocean that surrounds the earth, one with the sun and moon, and one with the stars, and one with the immeasurable divine ether that surrounds the stars. Your body and your soul by this embrace become one with the body and the soul of the divine ether and with all that it surrounds. Earth, ocean, sun, moon, stars, ether, they are now one living thing; and to this one living thing, you, a separate living thing, are now joined in an inseparable embrace.

"You, and these things, now become one, have now become a larger one, an immeasurable one, but you still have the power in yourself, the terrific inexhaustible power in yourself, to work upon; to influence, to direct, to drive, to move this New Enormity, this vast new world, this world which you have created by embracing what you have embraced. In one sense therefore you have thus created a new world by joining the old world. Yes, you have created a new earth and ocean and sun and moon and a new immeasurable divine ether.

"Nor do you stop with this; for you go on working upon, and driving, and forcing, and moving, and directing, and re-creating, this immeasurable earth-ocean-sun-moon-ether, moulding it nearer and nearer to the secret desire of your heart; that is to say moulding this newly created earth-ocean-sun-moon-ether, and compelling it to obey your will.

"Now you may naturally say that you are only one of the innumerable separate individual lives who are working and willing and re-creating and re-moulding this existent one or super-one made of earth-ocean-sun-moon-stars and immeasurable depths of divine ether; and you will be perfectly right in saying this. You *are* only one of the many wills who are driving this earth-ocean-sun-moon-stars and immeasurable depths of ether forward upon its way. *Its way whither?*

"Ah! that is the impenetrable secret of which you are yourself a living part and a partial creator. You, a secret agent, have an obscure purpose in your mind; and so have your innumerable fellow-agents driving the universe *on its way*; but on its way *to what* — ah! *that* remains an impenetrable secret!"

Having completed his discourse Telemachos gave Pontopereia a hurried smile and a friendly but rather stiff little bow and once again, as at the beginning of his words, turned his head and glanced hurriedly and a little apprehensively at his father. Pontopereia missed nothing of these two motions; and from the nature of his smile, and from the quality of that respectful little obeisance addressed to herself, she clearly took in, as it can be believed the sharp-witted Okyrhöe did also, more of the man’s own essential character than was revealed in the vague and obscure method of philosophizing he had been at such pains to advocate.

Telemachos had his father’s massive, clear-cut, majestic, and severe cast of features. Where the general outline of their faces differed, apart from the fact that the old hero had a beard while his son was clean-shaved, was that Odysseus’s features were rugged and rock-like while Telemachos’s were like smoothly polished marble. Of the two of them, the son was the handsomer, the father the more easy-going, humorous and informal.

As you looked at the two of them you could see the effect of the fact that the father’s life had been passed, and was still being passed, in a constant and lively stream of contact with friends and enemies, while the son’s was now being divided between solitary walks along the edge of the sea and meditations in a small chamber surrounded by deep recesses full of parchment-rolls, either inscribed by the careful fingers and the exquisitely prepared pigments of ancient Sumeria, or by the less careful and much more daring imagination of the artists of Crete.

Telemachos could have devoted the closing periods of his discourse to an eloquent analysis of the nature of the cosmos, and of the part played in that nature by the four elements, as well as by the souls of the living entities, who are, as he explained, urging and driving and steering forward the whole body of life, and he probably would have done so, had he not suddenly felt in the depths of his being an inexpressible longing to escape from the whole business; not only from the urging and driving and stirring, not only from the desperate willing and the heroic share, if only an infinitesimal share, in the creation of the future, but from the things in themselves; yes! from the ancient earth herself, mother of us all, from the sun and the moon and the stars and from the divine ether; — from it all, from it all, from it all!

Yes, at that moment with everything that was deepest in his nature he wanted to escape from the whole struggle of life. Life from the start had been to him more of an effort than a pleasure. The fact of his childhood and boyhood having been passed in the absence of his father and in the invasion of their rock-palace by those insolent suitors had inflicted a bruise, a discoloration, upon his whole nature from which it had never entirely recovered.

Something about the gesture with which he now put both his elbows on the table and rested his forehead on his hands was in no wise missed by Okyrhöe, who was not at all anxious that this meal, so luckily, dexterously, and crucially arranged, if only by pure chance, should break up without certain definite advantages for herself having been established.

"What," she enquired suddenly of Telemachos, "is your feeling about this curious ride of Eione with Arcadian Pan on the backs of Pegasos and Arion, and carrying with them Echidna and Eurybia? The whole idea of it, they tell me, was of the old Dryad's urging and it seems that she and her oak-tree have together paid the penalty. But why Zeus should have been angry if the object of the ride was to intercept Typhon I fail to see. Your father has explained — haven't you, my King? — what an event in the history of Ithaca it is, this departure from Arima, well! from our whole island, of these two strange Beings.

"But what, I confess, puzzles me still, my Lord Telemachos, is this; and upon this I would like to hear your opinion. Are we to assume from the fact that Arcadian Pan and the girl Eione have gone off together that between this sweet-natured young creature and the goat-foot god there is, from now on, an authentic love-affair?

"Under ordinary conditions I am not inquisitive; and I know your father, our venerated King here, would not wish any of us to ask impertinent questions in these personal matters; but this is a most extraordinary and unusual expedition including not only Arcadian Pan but two powerful goddesses, one of them Eurybia, daughter of Gaia and Pontos and sister of Phorkys and of Nereus, and the other Echidna, who is said to have given birth to the Hydra of Lerna by this very same Typhon whom they are intending to waylay.

"In the first place, my Lord Telemachos, what puzzles me is that the ancient Dame of whom I caught a glimpse just now, and with whom I had the honour of a brief conversation when your revered Father took me into her presence, I am speaking of course of your old family-nurse, should have allowed a girl as young as Eione to go off on this wild adventure alone with Arcadian Pan and those two terrifying Goddesses who no doubt ruled over Ithaca and Achaea and Argos and Boeotia and Lakedaimon in the primeval far-away times before our mother the Earth gave birth to the Gods or the Titans or even to the mortal or immortal nymphs.

"In Thebes where my youth was spent a girl as young as Eione would still be in the care of her parents. Are your customs in this Island of Ithaca completely different from those on the mainland?"

There was a general silence. With what was quite clearly the faintest possible flickering of a smile at the left corner of his crafty mouth and with what was a definite movement of his beard in the direction of the Corridor of the Pillars, Odysseus saved his son, whom these significant questions had obviously embarrassed a good deal, from having to be the interpreter of local custom, by making use of the most primitive and also the most royal of all forms of summons.

Loudly, vigorously, and several times, he clapped his hands. Had he been a King in Jerusalem, or a Pharaoh in Egypt, he could not have clapped his hands with quicker effect. All the four guests present at that table, Telemachos, Zeuks, Okyrhöe, Pontopereia; not to speak of the attendants, including Arsinöe, who were holding wine-jugs and water-bottles and bread-platters behind the backs of these four persons, became as alert as if they expected this startling and oriental summons to result in the appearance of a troop of Harpies.

But, after a deep silence, the husky, hoarse voice of the old Nurse Eurycleia was heard from the end of the long dark passage leading to the kitchen. "What do you want?" were the direct and downright words that reached their ears.

"Send up Tis," was the king's imperative answer; and when Tis arrived, clearly somewhat disturbed and uncomfortable, Odysseus told him with a rough, humorous, blunt emphasis upon the word *maid*, to explain to the Lady Okyrhöe from Thebes how it was that he allowed a maid as young as Eione to go off on such an adventurous excursion alone with Arcadian Pan and two such formidable goddesses as Eurybia and Echidna.

Tis came forward to the left of the king's chair upon the arm of which he boldly rested his hand as he spoke. It was as clear to Okyrhöe and Pontopereia as it was to Zeuks that he was accustomed to doing this, and although feeling awkward and uncomfortable was so thoroughly used to speaking his mind before Odysseus that he was by no means tonguetied in the king's presence or in the presence of any guests.

"My little sister," he said, "like the rest of us, has been brought up to take care of herself. We have never been people to be afraid of the gods and where there are a lot of sheep-folds there have always been occasional visits from the great god Pan who likes the company of mortal girls as much as he likes the company of mortal or immortal Nymphs. My little sister Eione has always looked after her maidenhead shrewdly enough as well as briskly and boldly among the lads of the farms round us. So at our end of the island, if you understand, we would never be worried or scared if a sister of ours made friends with Arcadian Pan. Us all do know, ye must understand, that ’tis natural for Arcadian Pan to want a maid like she, and us all do know too that if Arcadian Pan did take she’s maidenhead, and she did bear a child to he, that child would be, whether it were a he-child or a she-child, half a god and half of an ordinary person; and what we do feel at our end of this dumb little island is that when once a girl has got through her labour-pains and has laid her baby, whether that baby be a man-child or a god-child, a mortal child or an immortal child, safe on the steps of the altar, she’s done pretty well for herself and has got a very nice start in life.

“Life’s a hard game is what us do think at our end of this rocky isle, and if a girl like our Eione gets through the hard part of being had by a man and the still harder part of having a baby-man, what us do feel, at our end of this funny-shaped island, is that she hasn’t done so badly for herself.”

Having thus spoken Tis looked at his island’s king, seated in the throne of Laertes, and wondered in his insular heart how it was that in so simple a matter as Arcadian Pan’s attraction to Eione and her rural predisposition to his thin goatish shanks compared with the more human limbs of other possible lovers it should have been necessary to have called him from the scullery to set the mind of this strange Theban lady at rest. Did the woman think that compared with the great fashionable courts of the main-land the royal palace-cave of Ithaca was a poor thing, and its girls poor things and its herdsmen uneducated clowns? By Hades! I’d larn her to think poorly of Ithaca if I were Odysseus the son of——

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a crashing fall in the Corridor of the Pillars, the door leading into which had been left ajar.

“See what that was!” commanded the king; while Zeuks, who was beginning to grow sleepy after the well-cooked food and good wine, jerked himself up, and fumbling under his coat for his dagger sat sideways against the back of his chair, watching Tis descend the couple of steps, push open the door, and pass into the corridor. The door swung back and there was silence. Tis wore, for his indoor work in kitchen and scullery his softest sandals; so that the silence round that dining table at this moment was profound.

Then Telemachos deliberately got up. Having risen from his chair he crossed the room as noiselessly as he could. All the while he had been so intensely struggling to get his philosophical ideas into focus so that he might explain them to Pontopereia his eyes had been fixed on an ancient sword suspended from an iron nail in the wall. It was a sword of a completely different make from the sort used by Odysseus. It had been part of a collection of foreign weapons made long ago by the father of Penelope, who, like Zenios of Thebes, was a great picker-up of antiques.

Engraved upon the handle, as Telemachos remembered well from his childhood, was the word “Sidon”; but there had once been a travelling merchant at their table when Telemachos was a little boy who assured Penelope from certain metal-marks he knew that this unusual weapon must have been made in Ecbatana. Of this sword Telemachos now possessed himself; nor did he fail to note with a thrill of more natural and simple pride than he had allowed himself to feel for years — well! anyway since the death of his mother — how firmly and strongly and yet how lightly and easily, he found himself able to wield it.

Without looking at Zeuks, for he kept his eyes on his father with a quaint deprecatory half-smile, he managed somehow to convey to the humorous kidnapper of the divine horses that with two such broad-shouldered men as they were to guard that throne-room neither of the old king’s lady-guests, however attractive, was in any danger of violence to her chastity.

Pontopereia, however, in place of catching such whimsical thoughts from her host's son, fixed her beautiful eyes upon Zeuks who, although he had screwed his head round against the back of his chair in the hope of being able to follow the movements of Tis in the Corridor, was quite capable of giving her a wink.

Nor was the daughter of Teiresias unaware of all it meant just at that moment to get a wink from "Zeuks of Cuckoo-Hill", as the king's mother would certainly have called him, although in reality Cuckoo-Hill never came down as near to the actual harbour as was the man's dwelling.

But Zeuks' wink said all that was necessary between them at that particular beat of the pulse of time. It said quite unmistakably: "O no! I know you've not forgotten about the pirates strapping us to our chairs and chopping us to bits. And I know you've not forgotten the great word *prokleesis*."

But Zeuks and Pontopereia were not the only man and woman whose difference of sex was a cause of vivid feeling at that moment. Into the wine-fragrant air about her Okyrhöe was projecting all the seduction she could. In fact she was playing the unmitigated harlot at the expense of the old king. She had not missed his attraction to her specially rounded breasts; and thus, as she kept asking him certain simple and direct questions, questions which she selected for the absence from them of what couldn't be answered without an effort of thought — questions such as: "What was one of your earliest recollections, great King?" — she took care, in lifting her wine-glass to her lips, to reveal ever so little more of the rondure of one of these same breasts, whose perfect orb, culminating in a nipple as rosy as the wine at her lips, was never wholly revealed or wholly concealed, but was always, like the tip of a coral flagstaff in the heart of a milky isle, being partially glimpsed, to the most exquisite titillation of the old hero's amorous proclivities.

Telemachos meanwhile, with that remarkable sword in his hand from the collection of his maternal ancestor, continued to lean all his weight upon this rare weapon's gold-chased handle while he kept his attention absorbed in the effort to get its point firmly lodged in a convenient crack between two flag-stones. Pontopereia, having, so to say, settled her ethical account with Zeuks by a mental obeisance before the word *prokleesis* in exchange for a wink of recognition that if philosophy didn't bring the sexes together it wasn't of much use to mankind, had suddenly grown aware that by tilting herself a bit to one side and, though her chair was too heavy to be moved, by resting her weight on her left buttock, she could glimpse quite clearly at the end of the Corridor of Pillars the broad back of the spell-bound Tis.

"What on earth is the fellow staring at?" she asked herself. "Is someone lying dead at his feet? Has he killed some intruder — the first of Zeuks' pirates to enter the palace?"

Tis was undoubtedly — she could divine that much from the general pose of his figure — a trifle scared as well as intensely interested and arrested; and Pontopereia, herself stiff with nervous excitement, breathed quickly as she watched him. While all this was going on, little old Eurycleia, who, under all her weight of years, moved as lightly as Atropos, the oldest, smallest, but most to be feared and most to be relied upon of all the Fates, was now leaning against the door-post of the interior entrance to the dining-hall. Her expression as she leant there was one of concern but it was not an expression of alarm. Nor was it an expression of tremulous or jumpy nerves.

What her face showed was pure and simple annoyance. The old nurse felt indignant. Indeed you might say she felt extremely angry. For two, if not for three generations she had been compelled to behold her own peculiar and special world crumble down. She did not see it fall with a crash. She saw it disintegrate and crumble down. And she saw this happen without being able to lift a finger to stop it. What she was doing now was typical of the whole situation. She was simply standing with her back against the cold stones of the passage wall just as if they, these inanimate fragments of flint and quartz and these bits of chilly marble were arrogantly and in a new kind of contemptuous aristocratic haughtiness cold-shouldering her into an oblivious grave.

All this waiting lasted for a far less space of time than it takes to describe the emotions of the persons who were waiting; and when the waiting ended, the general relief that everybody felt, though great enough, was not as heavenly as it would have been had the thoughts and feelings involved gone on for as long as any chronicler, using those unwieldy hieroglyphs we call "words" to inscribe them, was bound to go on.

Whether it was a real son of Hephaistos who had carved the letters "U" for *uios,* and "H" for the aspirated vowel at the beginning of the name of the great god of fire, nobody could ever be absolutely sure, but that the Pillar on which those letters were engraved had had breathed into it some sort of sub-human or super-human consciousness was undeniable.

And at this particular veering between serious apprehension and immense relief it was given to the consciousness of the Pillar to note the difference between the attitudes to life and death of the three men in that dining-hall; how Odysseus never gave to either life or death a single thought, pondering only and solely on how best to carry out his immediate purpose, how Telemachos, although temperamentally longing to be quit of the whole business, kept forcing himself to retain, with regard to the meaning of life, and with regard to the question whether there was any life for the individual soul after its body was dead, a position of rigid agnosticism; and finally how Zeuks with his motto of *Prokleesis* or "defiance" and his practice of *Terpsis* or "enjoyment" held strongly to the annihilation of the soul with the death of the body.

Shamelessly chuckling, as he had seldom dared to do in the presence of Odysseus, and never before had done in the presence of lady-visitors to the palace, Tis came back into the dining-hall from the Corridor, and at the sight of him the whole company except Odysseus and Okyrhöe moved forward to learn what had caused that resounding crash. There was now no physical barrier between the king on his throne with his wine-cup in his hand and the low arch at the end of the Corridor of Pillars that led out into the olive-garden, out into the grave-yard of the slaves, and out into the darkness of night.

"It were thee wone club what fell, my King," explained Tis, as having mounted the two marble steps that led into the hall he advanced towards the foot of the throne; "and it did strike me silly old mind, as I did see the waves of darkness pouring in at far end, and these here lights of banquet pouring out at near end, that if us were all lying in the dirt, man-deep, under they olive-stumps outside thik arch, 'stead of meat-dazed and urine-dizzened inside these here luscious walls, that what made the old club fall was fear of summat happening to all on us when this night's over and we get the people's word at the 'agora'!

"To say the truth I felt durned funny, my king, just now, when I seed thee's girt club lying face-down on they stones near olive-branch what have come up bold and straight, as you might say, out of floor!"

The first thought of Odysseus, when he heard all this, was the entirely practical and personal one of making sure that his most useful weapon was in its usual place and ready to his hand when needed.

“You propped it up again exactly where it always used to be, I hope — I mean between those bits of white stone in the wall?”

“Sure I did, my King, sure I did! Club do now bide exactly where club always did bide; I reckon about five feet away from that there up-growing olive-shoot.”

And then, when Odysseus had nodded his obvious satisfaction at this statement, and when Telemachos had re-hung the antique sword picked up by his grand-dad upon its nail and resumed his seat, and when the combined voices of Tis and Eurycleia had died away in lively comment upon the club’s fall as the speakers withdrew into the kitchen, it was left to Zeuks to swing the conversation back to the extraordinary expedition which the dead Dryad had originated.

“I’ve heard from some quarter,” he told them all, “that the hundred-armed Monsters, Briareos, Kottos, and Gyes are now swimming about in the sunken cities of Atlantis, feeding upon the innumerable corpses of their drowned populations; and, do you know, the idea has crossed my mind that what the dead Dryad really hoped to bring about was that Typhon should join them down there. But how a fire-breathing creature like Typhon could live under water like those Monsters is as much beyond my comprehension as — —”

“As many other things, Master Zeuks!” murmured Okyrhöe with her silvery laugh. And it was during the general amusement that followed this sally that the Fly, having rejoined the Moth in their usual retreat, which was now safely propped up again, implored his lovely friend to listen intently. “For,” said he, “the Pillar is now telling the club what is happening down there.”

“You mean down in Atlantis?” enquired the Moth.

“Certainly I do,” replied the Fly. “For you mustn’t be so absurdly man-loving as to think that because the human population of a continent is drowned with that continent, nothing interesting can go on down there any more. There are the fish, my pretty one, there are the fish. Do try to realize that life doesn’t end, Pyraust darling, when the human race ends. There *are* philosophers in the world — I won’t at this moment emphasize their names or their species — who hold the view that it will only be when the tribes of mortal men are sunk into complete oblivion that the real drama of the Cosmos will properly begin.”

“But,” whispered the Moth anxiously, “and forgive my stupidity if this is a silly question, what I cannot see is how this drama of the future will be recorded if there’s nobody to record it.”

“Unrecorded things are as important as recorded things,” said the Fly.

“But who hears of them?” commented the Moth sadly.

CHAPTER VIII

"How many are they?"

"How many of what, my beautiful one? Are you speaking of sea-gulls or crows?"

"People of course!" answered the Moth irritably. "Did you think I meant flies?"

"You'd have to count me out if you did," replied her friend grimly. "For I don't, and I believe it is a peculiarity shared by most of my species, at any rate those of the male sex, at all like being included in any plural category. Yes, indeed, my lovely one, I believe you'll find, as your experience thickens and your years increase, that you'll seldom meet a male who isn't at heart, though under various circumstances he may not appear so, an ingrained individualist. When I was younger I used to flirt with the wanton notion that to be really ourselves we had to move about in circles. I also played with the *spiritual* thought, as I understand they call it, that only when there are two or three of us the wind can be cozened and coaxed and cajoled to carry us to particular places, to certain river-banks, for instance, and to certain ponds full of special sorts of rushes, where we can find those extra delicate morsels of refreshment which our exacting senses crave.

"But after all the horrors I've seen, and after all the dangers from which I've been saved only by my constant and obsequious flattery of the goddess of Chance, I have learnt the supreme lesson of my life, that there is only one thing upon which a Fly can depend, namely himself."

"Do look what a lot of people there are! There must be more than a thousand! A thousand warriors who are skilled with the spear, not counting women and children!”

It was clear to the fly that his emotional friend was so hopelessly impressed by the number of the listeners that no appeal to reason was possible. So, giving it up, he confined himself to gazing out of the club’s “life-crack” at that awe-inspired mass of islanders and to endeavouring to follow the words of the orator. This shepherd of the people was none other than Nisos’ Father, Krateros Naubolides, who, mounted on an extremely old-fashioned and extremely shaky platform that had been erected by democratic settlers in Ithaca some sixty odd years ago, with the glittering marble Temple of Athene to its West and the deep blue water of the bay to its East, was explaining in a rough homely directness of speech, whose lack of intellectual subtlety and manifest honesty of feeling made his argument formidable, how bad for them it would be to use up all their precious sail-cloth, this divine “othonia” that took such expense to grow, such trouble to weave, and such art to prepare, for the ill-advised and indeed the absolutely crazy purpose of seeing off their aged and infirm king, in times when all experienced rulers were needed at home, on a wild fantastic voyage of his own eccentric fancy.

“It is our King’s actual presence,” Krateros bluntly and crudely shouted, “that we need at this juncture of our Island’s life, not some fabulous glory from a mad adventure undertaken in a demented old warrior’s last days!”

It was clear to the attentive fly that these rough and rude words uttered by a farmer, whose local breed was a good deal more purely local and insular than was that of Odysseus, was making a deep impression upon those among the islanders, both men and women, who were near enough to hear him; for they kept turning their heads to look at one another, and a considerable number of them actually clashed their brazen-pointed spears together in more than ordinary agreement.

Indeed the speaker himself, as the fly could catch in the tone of his voice, took it to be an indication that they were prepared, if this doting old hero went on insisting on his mad scheme, to rise in arms and dethrone both him and his philosophy-besotted son in favour of the more sensible if more insular stock of the House of Naubolides itself.

It was evident to Pontopereia that Odysseus was watching the assembly with inexhaustible attention, and was making, the girl decided, some special calculation with regard, not only to numbers and weapons, but to the quality and significance of the various farming families who were gathered here today, even if some were only represented by a male spearman whose relatives were all on the mainland. He had not dared to change the place of meeting and the girl could clearly see what were the chief impediments to this sort of democratic assembly in an "agora" that was at once old-fashioned in an unseemly, ramshackle, slovenly way, and modernistic in a cold, remote, indifferent way. For one thing, she noticed that however forcibly Odysseus had just now pressed his demand upon them for contributions of sail-cloth as if he were exacting the payment of tribute, it was only those quite near who could catch what he meant because of the purer language he used.

She noticed too that although Krateros Naubolides made himself heard, the agitation he created by the rough boldness of his rejection of the old king's claim was so great that little groups of men from nearby positions kept hurrying to further-off vantage-grounds where they would ardently enlarge on what had been said.

No sooner had the Father of our young friend Nisos Naubolides swung himself down from the platform of his Ithacan "agora", an erection that was really much too high to be a suitable speaking-place, than there ensued a rushing to and fro that made of the whole assembly a confusing if not a confounding hubbub of human bodies and human voices.

When “Government by Discussion”, as you might call the flexible and casual manner in which the Ithacan natives had settled their affairs half a century ago, was working well, the population of the island was much smaller, and the half-circle of stone-seats for listeners had a much less extended circumference.

The result of this increase in numbers was that many of the most eloquent speakers took care to avoid the grotesquely elevated wooden erection on the speaking-rock and made their speeches from the ground, which meant that they often had to stand a good deal too near their antagonists, who frequently were a closely-packed crowd of angry and excited spearmen.

There had been no political meeting in this Ithacan “agora” for several years, nor had it been observed by any official person, or indeed by anybody, official or otherwise, before this meeting began that a couple of rungs in the wooden steps ascending the speaking-rock were missing. This gap in the ascent to the platform of oratory had been treated as negligible by Krateros. The old King too in his introductory talk, where he had briefly and succinctly suggested the possibility of every householder on the Island delivering a certain quantity of “othonia”, had totally disregarded the shaky rostrum.

On this particular occasion it was before the handsome Father of our friend Nisos had reached the middle of his blunt and rude speech that the bulk of those who were listening to him became aware of the presence of the Priest of the Orphic Mysteries among the elders who stood at the foot of that dilapidated old-fashioned wooden erection on the summit of the speaking-rock.

The moment he was caught sight of, especially by the women, who were freely sprinkled among the men throughout the whole assembly, it was clear to the shrewd weather-eye of the watchful Odysseus that there was a palpable quickening of pulses. These manifestations of feeling in crowds are very queer phenomena. But of course this man possessed psychic powers of an unusually rare kind and he was insatiable in his quest for human converts of every age up and down the island; and, while a bogey-man to some, he was a redeeming angel to others.

Thus there now appeared over that whole assembly of men and women something resembling a many-coloured wind-blown ripple moving rapidly over a wide expanse of water, a ripple that was grey when it reached our horizon but had been a deep blue-green when it left the shore.

Had Nisos Naubolides arrived at the "agora" just then, he would have plunged at once into a veritable vortex of bewildering psychic problems, the chief of which would have been the extremely complicated question as to just what constituted an important enough crisis in the general stream of events, whether a waterfall, a cataract, a tributary, a marsh, a lake, or a "delta" of several river-estuaries, to justify an interference in the situation by the little old lady he had known as Atropos, and by what subtle understandings of the forces of earth and air and water and fire messages were duly despatched to the said little old lady, so that she could draw certain hints indicating in detail the issues involved and not failing to make clear at what exact point, if care was not taken, the wanton Goddess of pure Chance, whose name is Tyche, might snatch the occasion out of wiser hands.

But queerly enough it was neither blind Chance nor the oldest of the Fates who was now the disturber of the normal stream of natural events —

this stream that flowed and eddied and circled and delayed and hastened across that old "agora". It was none other than the young girl, Pontopereia.

It was some while before Enorches fully realized that his most formidable opponent at this crucial pause in events was the awkward and ungainly damsel who was now shuffling so absent-mindedly up and down between Odysseus, who was leaning on his club, and Okyrhöe, who had accompanied them to this confused scene for some mysterious purpose of her own. As she shuffled back and forth in this odd manner Pontopereia couldn't help noticing a great many things that she had no wish to notice.

This business of "noticing" was the very last thing she wanted to be engaged in at that particular juncture. Her entire purpose as she shuffled to and fro was indeed the extreme opposite of noticing anything. What she desired just then was to make her mind as near a blank as she possibly could so as to offer it as a pure, clean, unfurnished sanctuary, of which, free from every distraction, encumbrance, or rival, her father's prophetic spirit might take complete possession.

But so astonishing were the forms and colours forced upon her senses by the spectacle before her that she struggled in vain to defend her attention from them. The sun just then was in mid-sky and was blazing down with such tremendous noon-day glare upon land and sea that it was difficult for her not to feel that she must yield up her whole being to the dazzling white opacity of Athene's Temple on the one hand, and to the dazzling blue opacity of the gleaming salt water on the other.

She had never seen bluer salt water in all her life. It seemed at one moment to lift her up to a yet bluer sky-zenith in the air above, and at another moment, just as if it were some vast, hard, smooth, magnetic precious stone, to draw her down to a petrifying abyss of demonic blueness in some enchanting but dangerous dimension of existence below Tartaros itself.

It was indeed, though nobody but herself knew it, a real crisis in the life of the daughter of Teiresias, this appearance of hers before the Ithacan assembly of which Odysseus made so much. Her real antagonist in the whole thing was not the father of her new friend Nisos but the Priest of the Mysteries who was even now preparing to take a terrific advantage of the old King's calm and unruffled assurance.

"How absolutely alone," she said to herself, "we all are! That old hero with his projecting chin and his sharp beard sticking out from it like the horn of a fabulous beast, what is he thinking and feeling now? I shall never know. Nobody will ever know. And that red and green gnat over there, sunning itself on that half-budded greenish-yellow willow-leaf, I would bet anything it is now, at this very moment of time, wondering whether its fate is destined to come by the violence of another insect not much bigger than itself, or by the sudden downfall of a rotten branch dislodged by a gust of wind, or by being snapped up between the upper half and the lower half of the beak of a bird.

"And has it perhaps just decided," the girl thought, "that it would be pleasanter to be trampled out of existence while it was asleep under a leaf than to perish in the disgustingly foul air of the crop of a feathery glutton? It's gone anyway; and wherever it's gone it's just as absolutely alone, in a multitudinous world without end in any direction, as I am, or as this old king is, or as Mummy Okyrhöe is, or any one of these men waving their spears and whispering to their wives and to the wives of their friends! Alone, alone, alone!

"And the same applies," thought Pontopereia, "to whatever grub that little hole contains!" And she struck with the side of her sandal a decaying fragment of tree-root that was half-covered by dark-green moss but had blotches of grey lichen on it here and there, and it was between two of these grey patches that the daughter of Teiresias detected a small orifice that was obviously the entrance to the dwelling of some grub-like creature.

"Are you at home, master?" she muttered; and then, digging her heel into the rubble beside that piece of decayed wood, she swung her whole body round, smiling to herself with a muttered exclamation. "Why," she told herself, "I am doing just what I said a minute ago I mustn't do! I'm noticing things! Only these things aren't exactly what I meant. I meant marble roofs and dazzling waves! But I must, I *must* get into the right mood for father's spirit!"

She straightened herself, clasped her hands behind her, stared at her sandals, and tried to imagine she was walking upon empty air. "If I can't make my mind a blank," she said to herself, "I must anyway get myself into the mood of being angry with this confounded Krateros who wants to make a fool of the old king by not letting him sail. I know exactly what the old man feels. He doesn't want to slide into an ordinary, conventional, tiresome, commonplace old age. I can follow *that* like a map!

"Heaven and earth! If *I* had a chance to sail in a ship over the drowned cities of Atlantis, wouldn't I snatch at it!"

She shuffled on, after that, with her head bent, repeating the word "Atlantis" over and over again. What she obscurely felt in her deepest consciousness was that, since this word contained the concentrated desire of the old hero who had appealed to her for aid at this crisis of his life, the best way of emptying her mind so as to make it a medium for the spirit of the dead prophet was to dissolve this actual word into a sacred mist, or even, and her eyes grew larger when she thought of this, into a sort of nectar such as would help to banish every emotion from her mind save the will to prophesy.

"Atlantis! Atlantis." Atlantis! And from the lovely head balanced on the ungainly little body, all the whole teeming mass of that portentous gathering, with its hosts of sullen-sultry spearmen and its agitated mothers and excited children in their blood-bright gaily-coloured clothes, and beneath them those blue waters that drew her down, and above them those white walls that lifted her up, were wholly and absolutely banished.

And it was at that very moment, for at such times strange vibrations can pass between the oldest and the youngest among us, that Odysseus beckoned Pontopereia to his side.

Leaning with his right hand on his club, from the crack in whose breast both the moth and the fly were now gazing with absorbed interest at everything within the circuit of their vision, Odysseus told the daughter of Teiresias to use his left hand in place of the broken rung of that rotten ladder; "and make the devils, my brave girl," he muttered, "give me a good pile of sound 'othonia' instead of all this false flattery about 'wise old rulers'."

With this physical help and moral stimulus Pontopereia did manage in spite of her awkward legs and heavy thighs to get to her feet on that absurd wooden erection. But, once mounted there, a tragedy took place that was completely unknown to every consciousness in the whole world except the girl's own, a tragedy the mere existence of which justified up to the hilt what she had been feeling all that morning about the abysmal loneliness of every creature born into what we call "life".

For Pontopereia, as she gazed at those shining spears, and at that blue sea-pavement, that kept drawing her down, and at those white walls that kept lifting her up, was suddenly seized by a fit of appalling shyness. This convulsion of shyness paralysed her mouth as if with a ghost-fish's monstrous fins. It pressed against her throat as if with a bilge-smelling flattened-out whale-bone snout.

And finally it brought the thousand-times despairing ship-wrecked eye of a girl's frustrated life-hope to fix itself upon her! Yes, it brought it closer and closer and closer to the self within the self, to the Pontopereia within Pontopereia, to the living, shrinking soul inside the innermost sheath of her calyx-like identity, so that nothing less than what was all she was should be exposed to this searching, reducing, unsympathetic, sardonic eye, the eye of a shyness that at that moment had gone stark mad.

The poor girl was helpless. What had suddenly come over her could no more be struggled against than she could have regained her right arm if somebody had cut it off. And now quite independently of that fit of grotesque sub-human shyness, as if she had been a sparrow imagining itself a swan, she felt a natural, normal, overpowering human shame. She wanted nothing but to be allowed to hide her head and cry piteously. She could not even remember now, with the tears running down her cheeks and tasting salt on her lips and blotting out her sight, how she managed to slide down from that ridiculous wooden platform. But she did remember how the beard of Odysseus tickled her chin as the old king bent over her and tried to comfort her as she wept on the ground.

It was at that moment that the Priest of the Mysteries, who, like a holy and consecrated wolf, had been waiting for his chance to spring, snatched at his opportunity. And such was the power of this man's demonic personality that although the collapse of Teiresias' daughter had been followed by quite a lot of shouting and rushing hither and thither, accompanied by the angry brandishing of many spears in male hands and much high-pitched expostulation from female throats, the moment it was realized who it was who was now pulling himself up to the top of that shaky erection and using such obstinate determination in treading upon each broken rung and in clinging to each wretched bit of balustrade there was another of those queer gasps of mass-attention where the actual crowd itself seems to create for itself a unified Being with ears and eyes that can take things in, and get shocks of feeling from taking things in, just as ordinary personalities can.

Quite a considerable crowd of these islanders with spears, whose number had so impressed the moth that she had whispered the startling syllables “a thousand”, were close enough to the speech-rock to see what a teasing thing it was to mount that platform. Pontopereia had only managed it by the help of the old king.

It was the complete absence of anything traditional or romantic about that wholly silly erection that took the heart out of its ascent and may even have been the cause of the girl’s collapse when she had ascended it. One of the prices that had to be paid for the Trojan War by the Island of Ithaca was that there was neither time nor money to obliterate the finger-prints of the flagrant bad taste left by the rich citizens of that particular epoch.

It was lucky that most of the work of that bad time was not done in materials that by their own nature were especially lasting. It should also be noted that since then, the general taste of the islanders had improved so much that had any of the younger men, even the eldest son of Krateros Naubolides for instance, been called upon to speak they would have certainly spoken from among the old traditional stone-seats and not approached that fatal erection of ill-chosen wood. It was just because these preposterous platforms had already become laughing-stocks, that, when the Priest of the Mysteries in his struggle to ascend was observed to be hanging by one arm from the balustrade with his “chlaines”, or professional philosophic cloak, flapping in the wind about his rump, till the wood-work broke and deposited him on his back on the ground, quite a number of the men in the crowd gave a vent to a rude burst of laughter.

The sound of this must have reached the priest's ears for he leapt to his feet in one of his fits of blind rage, fits that always endowed him with superhuman strength and were therefore an advantage to him rather than anything else. At this moment what he did was to seize the actual main floor of the platform with both his hands and to shake it for a while, as if he were a besotted giant capable of shaking a king's palace to dust and ashes.

Then with one grand shattering, heaving spasm what he did was to bring the whole erection crashing to the ground in pieces. This done the astonishing man completely regained his self-control, in fact more than his self-control, for he became a supernaturally competent commander with all the resources of an exceptionally brilliant orator at the absolute disposal of a perfect strategist.

He coolly kicked aside the relics of the dilapidated platform he had demolished, and advancing to the front of the marble eminence on which the thing had been erected, he made just the right gesture and uttered just the right appeal to the crowd to command total attention. Indeed he did much more: for he allowed no second to pass, no pulse-beat to intervene, between this beginning of things and the torrential flow of burning words that followed it.

"Let no wind," he cried, "O people of sacred Ithaca, fill any ship's sail that leaves your consecrated coasts! Keep this feeble, doting, maudlin, crazy, despotic, degenerate old man on his throne till old age makes him drop from it like a rotten apple and drop straight into his grave! Meanwhile let him stay where he is! Let him keep the throne warm for your brave Krateros who is a strong, sensible, natural man like any other man, and all the better for not being an herald-trumpeted, bard-celebrated, minstrel-sung, lick-spittle old legend-maker who doesn’t think his cup of glory is full enough in just being accepted by you islanders as your king, doesn’t in fact think that to be king at all over a crew of miserly farmers and poor fishermen, such as he considers you to be, is worthy of a deathless, immortal hero, like himself!

“What he wants to do by this mad voyage of his over the drowned cities of Atlantis is to win for himself a name beyond that of any of our famous men, a name beyond the name of Agamemnon, beyond the name of Achilles, beyond the name of Diomed, and of course far beyond the names of any of your most glorious Trojan enemies, such as Priam or Hector or Aeneas or Paris!

“O my friends, my friends, it is only yesterday we all heard, through the mediumship of earth and air and fire and water of the drowning of Atlantis. These murderous gods always like their news to reach us drop by drop, as it suits their god-almightynesses’ cunning craftiness, and not for *our* interest really at all! But there’s one little, obvious, simple, human interpretation of their trick of revealing their own murderous behaviour in connection with these hints from earth and air and water and fire that may not yet have occurred to you — I mean the double-dyed craftiness of suggesting that what they have done purely and solely to protect themselves was done in the interest of a faithful steering of human history, as it takes place on this old earth, and in the interest of progress on this old earth, or anywhere else in space.

“And now I would like to say something to you about this drowning of Atlantis of which we hear so much. I would like at this moment, my dear friends, humbly, patiently, submissively, and with all due respect where respect is due, to suggest to you that these curst Olympian rulers of ours recently made a great discovery. They discovered, never mind how, perhaps through earth or air or water or fire, or perhaps through some treacherous group of Atlanteans themselves, for there are traitors in every country, that some great Atlantean philosopher, who may now at this moment, for all we know, be wandering over the earth under a completely different name, anyway my suggestion is that somehow or other they found out that an Atlantic philosopher had got the secret of some new magnetic stone that can influence unborn embryos and that is probably called the 'Embryo Stone', and whose power — I am only humbly suggesting this to you, though, I confess, in my own philosophical researches I have discovered some very peculiar and very powerful magnetic stones that can change the sex of an embryo.

"The Atlantean philosopher's stone may have the power of making the embryo bi-sexual. In which case, as you can well imagine, you warriors of Ithaca, the influence, the renown, the glory and the power of this Sage of Atlantis, not to mention his wealth, would be very great indeed! And naturally enough the high Olympians would hate him. They have always been extremely touchy and sensitive on such points; as they may well be! For doesn't their authority with all of us ordinary mortals largely depend on their power over birth, and over the various issues of birth? — yes! extremely touchy they have always been about this whole problem of birth and sex; and if I may whisper this in your ears, you brave men and beautiful women of Ithaca, it is by the cunning trick of keeping sex, and birth, the issue of sex, completely under their control, that these Olympian gods retain their power over us.

"But they can be defied now and again for all that; and very successfully defied. You have only to visit the "Herm" of the great Goddess Themis, within a mile of where we are now, and as you can believe from my devotion to Eros and Dionysos I'm no fanatic champion of propriety and decency, to see the havoc done to her image by the hands of the chaotic Harpies; and yet upon the traditional order maintained by Themis the basic rule of these Olympians is declared by their champions to depend.

"Whereas I say it depends only on two things — on the Thunder-bolts of Zeus and on the plagues sent by the Queen of Heaven. O my friends! if you would listen to me and boldly defy all these false gods; if you would turn to the only deities and divinities in the whole pantheon of godlike creatures who really have the power of giving us new life — not just murdering us with thunder-bolts and with plagues and famines — but transporting us by mystic ecstasies and paradisic trances into Dimensions of Being, where what here we are deluded into calling reality is seen in its true light, and where nothing, I say again to you, my friends, where nothing is the secret of all the Mysteries beneath and above the Sun and the Moon, beneath and above the divine ether, except the mind that half-creates what it enjoys, except the mind that half-annihilates what it cannot enjoy!"

When Enorches had finished speaking he showed in the presence of that enormous crowd and in the presence, and before the steady eyes and pointed beard, of the unalterable old king, the same perfectly cool brain and perfectly poised intelligence that he had shown when he began speaking.

But neither the old king, who now held the awkward form of the daughter of Teiresias firmly by the waist while he slowly and indifferently swung the club of Herakles to and fro with his free hand, nor the agitated crowd of spear-waving men and excited women had time to note this serenity in their orator, for the attention of every person in that oldest portion of the "agora", including king and crowd and prophet's daughter, was suddenly and startlingly switched to a completely new occurrence.

This abrupt jerk to the particular set of nerves in them all that responded to dramatic events included in its field of operations, as may be easily supposed, both the moth and the fly who just then were peering out of the life-crack of the club of Herakles with concentrated interest. It also included the club itself who in following the rush of events at this particular crisis had the advantage of its vibratory contact with the Sixth Pillar in the Corridor of Pillars. This contact, based on a long series of experiences so homely and natural that they might almost be called domestic, was in its way as much of a philosophical discovery as any conceivable one made by the Atlantean sage, and neither the moth, whose silky wings quivered with the agitation of its emotion, nor the fly, whose great black head bulged with the intensity of its rumination, could do more than quietly accept such a verdict when they heard the club murmur aloud to itself what it had just caught from the massive Being that bore the signature of a son of Hephaistos, namely the words: “Hear therefore what the sage saith, “When the messenger flies or gallops, or drives, or runs, hope nothing, fear nothing, expect nothing, talk of nothing, till he’s standing on the ground at your gate.”

This messenger was indeed running at a speed that made some of the women who watched him fear he would fall dead the moment he delivered his message. And what was his message? This question, which was pulsing and heart-beating in that whole vast mass of people, did not disturb Odysseus in the slightest degree.

His plan of using the Prophet’s daughter as a shaft of irresistible power resembling the shaft that originally separated the Heavens from the Earth had completely failed. Well! *That* had failed. *That* was over and done with. *That* was finished, closed, shut, settled, rounded off; but in its frustration, in its defeat, in its absolute *overness*, it left the great battlefield of creation and destruction open for something fresh from the root up!

Yes! the field was free for something that had not so far crossed the mind of any living creature, whether that creature were a god or a man or a beast or a bird or a fish or a reptile or a worm or an insect! Yes, the greatest gift the Earth had given to Odysseus at his birth was his power of accepting a crushing disaster and of starting freshly again, as the phrase runs, "from scratch".

Another great gift from the universal mother of men, who by many among us is called Nature rather than the Earth, of which this old hero was possessed, was the power of detaching himself from the agitations, confusions, emotions, desperations, terrors and exultations that might be absorbing and upsetting his immediate companions and not only of keeping his own spirit in the midst of the craziest hurly-burly and hullabaloo absolutely calm and unmoved, but of being capable under these conditions of so isolating his mind that he could go on coolly planning for the future, and calmly pondering on the future, and amusing himself by imagining what he would like best to happen in the future, with as much serenity as if he'd had nothing but lonely forests and untraversed seas around him for hundreds and hundreds of miles.

It had become clear to everybody now that behind the man who was running so fast, and who now was near enough to be recognizable as no other than our young friend Nisos, there was another man, quite different in appearance, attired in a manner wholly foreign to Ithaca and even to the main-land of Hellas, who clearly was finding it difficult to keep up with the younger man. Suddenly this first runner— "And it *is* Nisos!" thought Pontopereia, unable to stop herself from squeezing the king's arm in her excitement, "and he's coming straight to us!" — turned, saw how far off the other was, and stood still, so as to be overtaken.

It was indeed one of those curious occasions when the innate natures of the spectators at an important event reveal themselves to themselves, if not to anyone else, with what sometimes are quite surprising results.

“Can you see Enorches any longer?” enquired the moth of the fly. “I feel so dreadfully sure that the dear man may be wanting someone like me to make him happy about his beautiful speech and tell him how rich and clear his noble voice sounded.”

“May the Great Hornet sting your confounded Enorches!” responded the fly crossly. “Why can’t you, you little priest worshipper, look at the drama of life from a scientific distance?”

There was something so infinitely unpleasant to the moth, and so blighting and bleaching and blistering and blasting to her whole life-instinct, about this appalling “scientific distance” to which the fly was alluding, that she found it hard to be even polite to him.

“Well, my pretty?” he went on teasingly, for the difference of sex between them put *her* seriousness into one ballot-box and *his* into another, “why don’t you answer my plain question about a rational view of life taken from an astronomical scientific distance?”

This was too much for the moth, and she lost every silken flake of her natural sweet and obedient temper. “Why,” she screamed at him, “don’t I look at life from the view-point of the furthest star in the firmament? I’ll tell you why! I’ll tell you why! I’ll tell you why! Because I happen to be a Living Being on the Earth!”

The Fly sighed heavily. “How impossible it is,” he thought, “to exchange rational ideas with a female! And yet they *are* clever. It would be absurd to deny it. They are extremely clever. They may even be called wise. But their wisdom follows a completely different track from our wisdom. It skips about from point to point, *matching things.* We look at life as a whole.”

“You know exactly where the world comes to an end then?” shrieked the moth, making the fly feel as though she had read his thoughts. “What if it has trailing edges that lead to completely different ends? What if there’s a jumping-off place, from which a person can leap into another world altogether?”

“Listen, pretty fool!” protested the Fly sternly: and once more there came to their ears the voice of the Sixth Pillar conversing gravely with the club of Herakles; on whose head Odysseus was leaning rather heavily at that moment as he watched Nisos approach with that fantastically attired foreigner.

“The Sage avers that if the difference between one man and another with regard to their bodies is so great that it passeth understanding, considering that all have a head and a neck and shoulders and trunk and arms and legs and hands and feet and eyes and ears, the difference between them in regard to their minds is so great that it bars any approach to an attempt to understand it.”

“You heard *that*, sweetheart?” commented the Fly with satisfaction. “And if we can say as much as that about the difference in body and mind between creatures of the same species, what about the difference when you consider varieties of species? I tell you, little one, there’s no more good in my hoping that out of the various tribes of Flies one will arise destined to conquer the world than in these people here thinking that some Hellenic or Achaian or Bœotian tribe will conquer the world. I tell you, darling little idiot, no species and no portion of a species will ever conquer the world. It’s one of the tricks of Nature to put such ideas into people’s heads so as to make great wars arise between race and race and between species and species. Such wars between one swarm and another swarm are deliberately worked up by Nature so as to thin out earth’s population. Will you never learn, you lovely little goose-girl, that if a moth of your tribe wants her folks to rule the world there is only one thing for her to do?"

"And what may *that* be?" responded the moth in a voice so faint with sarcasm that it was hardly audible.

"Tell yourself a story about it happening," said the fly, "and die before you get to the last chapter."

"I sometimes think," whispered the moth, "that that's what I've done."

When Nisos and his oddly-attired companion reached Odysseus, Pontopereia took care to move aside and to be as inconspicuous a figure in that crowded landscape as was possible for a girl with her strikingly beautiful and intellectual face. Hardly conscious of what she was doing, however, when Nisos did begin to speak she kept on moving nearer and nearer to the old king; but since her reputed mother or at any rate her official guardian, Okyrhöe, also moved nearer, her interest must have seemed to Nisos entirely natural.

One thing about this new encounter of these two young people certainly showed the daughter of Teiresias in a dignified and admirable light, namely the fact that in her excited interest in what Nisos was telling the old King she forgot completely the shame and humiliation she had herself suffered so short a time before. In fact she forgot, as apparently Odysseus himself had forgotten, what a central dramatic part in turning the tide of popular feeling she had been brought there to play. And now it was all over and done with, as utterly as was the life of the old Dryad and her tree, both of them reduced to dust and ashes.

"It was when I had only just left the Cave of the Naiads that I first saw it." And here Nisos made a rather formal and yet quite a dramatic pause; and Pontopereia couldn't help noticing that the presence of the ornately-dressed, portentous-looking stranger who so punctiliously kept one of his brocaded knees on the ground while he watched the face of Odysseus with obsequious impassivity, did have the effect of stiffening just a little the unconventional naturalness of speech which the direct frankness of their master usually evoked in those who were closest to him.

And the girl also noticed that the spontaneous island-schoolboy attitude to all the fantastic ceremonials and the symbolic rituals of Persians, Libyans, Phoenicians, Babylonians and Assyrians, which she had marked in most Achaian and Hellenic lads, an attitude partly humorous, and partly fascinated and even a little awed, had resulted in this case in the way in which, though he did not kneel, Nisos stood respectfully before the king with his head bare and his hands clasped behind his back.

"I knew at once," the boy went on, "that it was a foreign boat. I knew *that* by its build and by its curious-looking sail. I knew also that it couldn't have come from very far away, for it was too small to have crossed such a formidable mass of water as that great Western Ocean in which we are told the gods have drowned the land of Atlantis. Well, O King, I climbed down to the sea's edge so as to direct them, by waving and shouting, to the estuary where they could lower their sail, fasten up their vessel, and land on our shore. It took a long time to do this for them. I had to scramble over a lot of steep rocks, didn't I, Euanthos?" And Pontopereia noticed that, instead of turning and giving a responsive smile to the speaker, this palatial individual, with one knee still on the gravelly ground and his submissively reverential gaze still fixed on the king, who by this time was crouching like a somnolent steersman on a rough lichen-covered ledge with the club between his knees, replied to the lad's appeal by making a solemn little bow, a bow which, in the relative position to which chance had brought them, might have been directed to the four staring eyes of the pair of fascinated insects.

"But when they were safely landed — when you were landed, Euanthos!" and Pontopereia, not to mention Okyrhöe, who kept edging nearer and nearer, noted a repetition of the same quaint performance— "I soon heard the great news. Thou, O King," — and it was clear to both those observant ladies that this boy-messenger completely misread the relaxed attitude of the old hero he was addressing, taking his drowsy abstraction as a sign of nonchalant indifference, when all the while it was really an instinctive animal withdrawal into cover, under the mask of which the wily old warrior watched the course of events, noting with shrewd precision the particular direction in which, under the pressure of numberless conflicting entities, the tide of destiny was moving.

"Thou, O King, art about to be visited by a famous royal Princess from the land of the Phaiakians whose parents and brothers enabled you to sail for home in a ship full of rich gifts."

"And what, my young friend," enquired Odysseus, throwing into his tone, the two ladies decided, a deliberate weariness and tedium, "do those of her court who are with her say is the name by which she is known to her own people and by which she wishes to be known to those other lands whither her ship carries her; for among all men who live by bread there are none to whom their parents do not give names, whether they be rich or poor, slaves or free, tillers of the earth, or wielders of royal sceptres."

"The name," cried Nisos, in a high-pitched excited voice, "of this visitor to the shores of Ithaca is none other than Nausikaa, the daughter of Arete who was the daughter of Rhexenor, and of Alkinoos who was the son of Nausithoos."

Neither Okyrhöe nor Pontopereia missed the rather startling swallowing sound, as if he had been munching a too big mouthful of bread and having retained it till it was in an almost liquid form in his mouth had sucked it down in one terrific gulp, which the old man emitted as the word “Nausikaa” reached his ears.

But Nisos had a still greater shock in store for his king. “From a couch of purple at the bottom of their boat,” he went on, “they helped to land the most noble figure of a man I have ever seen or could ever imagine. His hair was white with age and his shoulders were extremely bent, but the grandeur of his features and the beauty of his form, even in old age, were more like those of a god than of a human creature. I looked at him with awe and reverence, O king, and still more was I reduced to wordless amazement when the stately and distinguished Euanthos here” — and once again the two ladies were fascinated to watch this perfect courtier on his bended knee make that same masquerade-like inclination of his head without turning so much as the point of his beak-like nose in the direction of the person whose flattery he was acknowledging— “and I was impressed, O my King, to notice how superior to any of our modern Hellenic or Argive or Pelasgic or Danaan ways were the — —”

“By Kronos, boy, you don’t mean to say the man at the bottom of the boat was *Ajax*?”

At the utterance of this name both the ladies gasped audibly, and the elder one, with a shiver that ran clean through her, flung her arms protectively about the younger.

This time it was the turn of Nisos to nod assent while his gaze remained fixed on a different person from the one to whom he was responding. And at the receipt of this assent Odysseus rose from his seat abruptly.

“Ajax again!” he muttered. “It must have been a dream then that I saw him among the dead when the spirit of Achilles questioned me and went off with long strides among the rest in his joy that I could assure him his son had won glory! Ajax again! Well, well, well, well! He had Poseidon as his enemy among the Olympians, even as I have! And it may be that as I found help from Circe and Calypso and Leucothea, so he has found it from some great goddess at the bottom of the Sea! Poseidon must have overturned his ship in no ordinary way; not by just a wave out of the deep: very likely by flinging a mountain upon it, as the grandfather of Nausikaa prophesied the sea-god might do one day over their only good harbourage to stop their giving convoy and ships to the enemies of the Olympians.

"And very likely by doing that very thing Poseidon ruined his own abominable and murderous intention. The great *wave*, or the great *mountain*, whichever it was may have had the opposite effect to what was intended. It may have enshrouded Ajax in forests and ferns and mosses and vast leafy chasms and yawning flowery abysses and huge cracks and crevices in the green thick rondure of the earth.

"Well, well, well! So we've got Ajax on our hands again! What twists and turns of fate!— 'Turns' do I say? What enormous, sweeping, astral curves this destiny of ours indulges in! *Ajax!* Well, well! We must all be as gentle and hospitable to him as we can — eh, ladies, my dears? — eh, Nisos, my lad? And to this purpose" — and at this point the old King swung directly round upon Euanthos, who had risen to his feet and with his hands clasped behind him and his shoulders squared was staring at some particular oblong of nothingness beyond which his preposterous politeness had erected its own private horizon— "to this purpose we are indeed — don't you think so, Ladies? — incredibly lucky to have a real live Herald from the land of the Phaiakians actually here with us in our midst! He will explain to us, primitive islanders and settlers and farmers and fishermen as we are here in Ithaca, to what a stately tradition on the main-land of Hellas our ancestors look back.

“Yes, he will soon find, O my most gallant Hetairoi, that our old Achaian and Danaan ritual of life is as poetical as any he can discover in the most courtly cities of the orient. The first lesson he is destined to receive as to our power to show ourselves worthy of his respect will be the hospitality we shall now show to this noble princess, of whose coming he is the herald, and also the manner in which we shall entertain my ancient friend and once beloved rival, Ajax the son of Telamon!”

Odysseus leant forward as he spoke and as he did so he clasped with both hands the head of his club, pressing it against the pit of his stomach. It may be well believed how, as he did this, out of what the club itself always referred to as its “life-crack” and which was a slit in its gullet reaching as far down as its lungs and containing, as all its friends well knew, a sort of nomadic camp for two adventurous insect-friends of quite different species, there now issued a fine controversy.

Yes, out of the “life-crack” of the club there emerged and dissolved like recurrent waves of smoke into the hot afternoon air quite a bitter dialogue. It is curious how the voices of any living things as they strike air, or earth, or water, or fire, go through a change in their nature the perceiving of which, especially when such sounds happen to be solitary sounds, is a remarkable experience for the human person who perceives it.

Yes, it is when other sounds are absent and when the earth feels as if it were surrounded by an aura possessed of a singularly penetrating fragrance like nothing else in the world, that this change occurs. The sound may have been a cry of wild delight. It may have been a shriek of anger, it may have been a wail of sorrow, it may have been a whistle, a call, an appeal. It matters not what the sound was or what it conveyed. The sound has been changed.

And this change has come about by the thing having drawn out of the element into which it rose or fell, and into which it dispersed itself, something akin to its own nature and yet something that no creature alive could apprehend through its sense of hearing. Into what has it been changed? Into a presence. Yes, there is no doubt or question about that. It has become a presence. What the listener is aware of now is the inexplicable and unaccountable effect upon him of a presence; not a human presence nor a godlike presence nor a titanic presence, and totally different from any conceivable animal presence.

But the point is that the effect of this presence is the etherealizing in some mysterious way of the material element, whatever it may have been, into which the sound has plunged. If into the flames of a bonfire, those flames become the purged and dancing spirits of all the leaves they are devouring! If into the air above the peaks of a mountain, that air becomes a particular region of pure space made of a more rarefied substance than the ordinary air which surrounds the earth.

If into water, that water becomes a pool of such perfect translucence that a consecration of all the places on earth where water springs up seems indicated by its mere existence on this planet.

And finally if into earth, every grain of sand, or atom of rock or speck of mud, or dab of clay, or chip of quartz, or crumb of dung, or grit of granite, or mite of mould, which that sound reaches becomes suddenly possessed by something akin to the mystery of consciousness, though it is not the consciousness of a man or a beast or even of a vegetable.

It was when the voice of Odysseus died away with the sound of the name of the father of Ajax that the moth enquired of the fly: “Why does the King go on so long about Ajax? Isn’t the important person who has arrived not this half-drowned half-witted doting old hero from the Siege of Troy, but this great living Princess Nausikaa from the land of the Phaiakians?”

The philosophical contempt in the voice of the fly cannot be expressed in rational words. “Have you no idea, you funny little perfection of a darling, silly, little girl, as to the way we men take these things? Don’t you see that he’s making all this fuss about Ajax simply to cover up his feelings about Nausikaa? Have you forgotten, little stupid, all we were taught at school about men hiding up their strongest feelings, and about there having been a passionate romance between our King and some great Phaiakian princess? Why, you little ignorant silly, it’s one of the great love-stories of the entire world! Of course he has to make a lot of fuss about this old crazy Ajax! Why, you lovely, delicious, heavenly, little idiot, what on earth are you thinking about? Ajax defying the lightning is a simple proposition.

“*There* is Ajax. *There* is the lightning! There is an Ajax in every single living creature on earth and when that creature is in the mood of defying the Great Gods, it may be on behalf of the Little Gods, or it may be in anger on its own account. I tell you, you little silky-soft priest-worshipper, there isn’t a fisherman in all the coasts of Ithaca who hasn’t heard about Ajax and the Lightning. The toughest, roughest, homeliest, rudest fisherman you could find in this whole island has heard of Ajax defying the Lightning.

“I tell you, child, I know what I’m talking about. Being as fond of rotten fish as anybody in the world, I used to go out with certain special boats, whose owners used to start earlier in the morning than the others and weren’t as fussy as the others about cleaning out the bottom of their skiffs. Yes! I swear to you, you unscientific, irrational, unphilosophical, little lovely, I heard the most savage and most primitive of these sailors, yes! the very rudest of them, cry out to some companion: ‘Why, you’re as upset by a storm as Ajax defying the Lightning!’

"But when it comes to our king's meetings with Princess Nausikaa of that land, it's a very different story! Of course he keeps the essence of it to himself. Look at him now! He's as ready to fall into a fit of reverie and fantasia as any youth in his beatified adolescence!"

The words of the wise fly had much truth in them just then; but the whole scene up there, from the place where Odysseus held his Heraklian weapon to the place where excitedly whispering groups were gathered on the furthest outskirts of that island-agora, was so confused and chaotic that it had become difficult to concentrate on any particular member of the heterogeneous crowd that was surging about in agitated waves of bewildered excitement.

As for the priest Enorches, he had become so invisible that he might have sunk into the earth after his tremendous oration.

"And now," cried Odysseus, raising his voice above its accustomed pitch, "the thing for us to do is to go and greet this heroic rival of mine out of my ancient past, thus risen like a ghost to keep my pride in its proper place but also to make it clear to my enemies that it is essential that the people of Ithaca should provide their king with sail-cloth!"

While his words died away in that incredible sunshine he instinctively began leading them down the slope at the foot of which lay his rock-hewn palace.

But Nisos had a further announcement to make. "It was while we were leading Ajax as carefully as we could towards the palace that we met Zeuks, O King, and it was to tell you how Zeuks had taken it on himself to be the guide and interpreter to my Lord Ajax that I ran to meet you. My friend Euanthos here objected very strongly to my leaving our Lord Ajax under the care of Zeuks. It seemed to him that Zeuks was not well-dressed enough, well-mannered enough, distinguished enough, or nearly aristocratic enough, to be able to explain our life in Ithaca to a hero of the ancient tradition and one who possesses the lofty habits of the past and those godlike ways of living and thinking that are now lost to the world.”

Odysseus had inadvertently taken Pontopereia by the arm as he began to descend the hill, and this protective gesture of his had naturally brought Okyrhöe to his other side, that is to his right, where he prodded the ground with his club of Herakles. It was therefore, across the club’s self-styled “life-crack” that the craftiest woman in Hellas murmured her seductive words to the craftiest man in Hellas, and what she said was as nectar to the moth and as gall to the fly.

“All the Achaian world will be waiting with eagerness, my Lord King,” she murmured, “to hear the result of this encounter between you and the Lady Nausikaa. We forget sometimes how quickly news travels in these modern days. It’s the quality of the sails the ships carry, I expect: O, and of course it’s also because there are so many more merchant-sailors nowadays! Merchants are the great news-carriers and scandal-bearers. No doubt they always *have* been. But we mustn’t forget all these modern improvements in the masts and sails and benches and keels of ships, and even in the sleeping-places below the benches.

“It is wonderful to think of all the improvements we have lived to see of which our fathers never dreamed! Yes, I have followed pretty closely the history of Phaiakia from merchant-sailors’ narratives of what has been going on there, for in the history of any country what you pick up from travelling merchants is always nearer the truth than the speeches of official rulers and their ambassadors.”

“It was at this point that the fly became convinced that if Okyrhöe went on for one single sentence more in this manner Odysseus would revolt against her influence. But the clever woman now made it manifest that she could practise a quite different strategy, and as soon as she began in this clear, definite, and concrete manner, to aim at convincing him, she had the king at her mercy.

"What I have been leading up to," she now remarked in a most emphatic manner, "is this. I have been, as I tell you, O King, following rather carefully the events in Phaiakia; and I have noticed that when Alkinoos died his throne was occupied first by one, and then by another, of the favourite sons of the widowed queen. But both these sons died before their mother — at least that is what my merchant-sailors have told me; though I fully admit they may have had, in each case, their own peculiar business-reasons for lying — and so when finally the mother herself died the only surviving child of Alkinoos was Nausikaa.

"She married twice and both her husbands died childless, a situation that set going various shameful rumours among the people, rumours that Nausikaa poisoned them both with the hope of sailing for Ithaca when they were dead and being wedded to thyself! Of course you will know, O great King, much better than a mere stranger and traveller like myself, how to treat such ignoble tales: but you must at least remember in excuse for such tales that you have, as few heroes ever have, become a legend during your life-time, and since many of us in our youth have read — and have written too, I'll be bound! — passionate love-lyrics about you and this daughter of Alkinoos, it is inevitable that when we hear of you two meeting again all manner of disturbingly romantic thoughts rush into our human-too-human heads!

"From a perfectly practical and sensible point of view the coming to Ithaca of this experienced and beautiful woman was indeed most cleverly planned. She too without any doubt has been collecting news from merchant-ships about Ithaca, just as I have about Phaiakia; and having found out that Penelope has been long dead and that you have never taken a second wife she naturally thinks of marrying you and of having those children by you which she clearly could not have by any other husband. It is a tragic and a touching hope; but I can imagine it proving a good deal of a nuisance and embarrassment to you."

Neither the fly nor the moth as they listened to these words could see the effect upon the king of this treacherous warning, though they couldn't help noticing how the beard of Odysseus kept giving curious little forward jerks. But then the king's beard had for some time clearly been trying to isolate itself from the rest of his appearance. Apparently its desire was to become a sort of advanced Body-guard, which, if it were not propitiated, or, as the school-boy mates of Nisos would say, "sucked up to", its owner would have to treat as an independent personality, or simply to cut it off.

As a matter of fact the old man's imperviousness at this moment had no connection with these ambitions of his beard. It was in accord with his whole character that, while he accepted every material detail of what Okyrhöe suggested, he disregarded, or postponed for later consideration, the lady's psychic interpretation of the same.

What did cross his mind at that moment was a definite regret that owing to his penuriousness, or to his poverty, or to a mixture of them both, he had for years contented himself with getting on without any more effective cook in his excavated cave of a kitchen than the family's ancient Nurse Eurycleia, who though she knew well enough what to prepare for his own meals, and even better how to restrict the appetites of Arsinöe and Leipephile, would lack both the physical strength and the culinary experience to cook for a visitor like the Princess Nausikaa.

"Nisos!"

"I am here, my lord the King!"

"Run *down* this hill as fast as you ran *up* just now. Make it as clear as you can to Eurycleia what kind of guests we shall have tonight. Explain to her that Ajax will be as old as I am and probably as fussy about his food. I take it, lad, that if you start now you'll get home before either of them have time to arrive, especially if our friend Zeuks, who's such a babbler, is the one you've left with Ajax. You *will* have time to get there first, sonny, won't you?"

Nisos didn't look at the sky above the slope on which they had paused nor at the tops of the trees at the foot of the hill. He looked at his own sandals and he looked at his own hands. And then he said: "Yes, I *think* I can, my King. I'll have a good try at it anyway." And with one quick glance at Pontopereia he set off at top speed.

But while Nisos was running at top speed down the wooded slope between the "agora" and the palace, dodging sharp-edged rocks and thick clumps of impenetrable island-bushes, and squeezing his way between close-growing fir-trees whose lower branches were spiky and dead from lack of sun, and as he ran was being sexually and emotionally almost pulled in half; for his feelings were tugged at in one direction by what might be called the golden cord of Eione's supple limbs and lovely gestures and in another direction by the silver cord of Pontopereia's expressive face, the middle-aged Zeuks was guiding the senile Ajax through the deserted but still haunted region that was called "Arima".

The heraldic master of ceremony from the land of Phaiakia would certainly have described our friend Zeuks as an egregious and unconscionable rogue; but it is certain that as this same Zeuks slowly and carefully — though chuckling very often as he did so over private quips of his own — escorted the old, bent, white-headed Ajax, by the nearest way he could think of, to the rock-hewn House of Odysseus, he had some startling shocks.

The nearest way that was familiar to Zeuks was the unfrequented path through that haunted region that from Time unknown had been, and to Time unknown would always be, called Arima, and which really seemed, now it was deserted by Eurybia and Echidna, almost more ghostly in its loneliness than when those two phantasmagoric Beings disputed in their dreadful dialogue who first, who last, had broken loose from Erebos.

“You are taking me a little, just a little, too fast!” murmured the aged Ajax as they passed the spot where Echidna used to be.

Zeuks stopped at once to give the old man a chance to get his breath and to look round. He himself also looked round; and in doing so he noticed a blaze of golden light not far in front of them. It was a peculiar blaze. It was like nothing that Zeuks had ever seen before. He stared at it in positive amazement. Then suddenly, though entirely without any rational cause, he associated this fiery marvel with the presence of the aged warrior at his side.

Nor was he mistaken. Ajax, though much taller and broader-shouldered than any of the other Greeks in the Trojan war, was now terribly bent. There was indeed something impressively pitiful, even you might say, grotesquely pitiful, about the way his white head — for his hair instead of having become grey like the hair of Odysseus, had become as white as hoar-frost — or rather about the way his bent spine, curved like a great bow, had come to bring down his white head towards his feet, which were now encased, as he stood looking up under his deeply wrinkled and majestically moulded forehead, in massive almost coal-black sandals.

Ajax took longer than his guide in discovering that mysterious blaze of golden flame isolated in this haunted place.

“What in the name of Hermes is that light over there?” gurgled the old man, in a voice the significance of which Zeuks had been trying for the last couple of hours, in fact ever since he had first helped him from the ship to the shore, to catch and understand. It wasn’t that he couldn’t understand the meaning of the old hero’s words. The difficulty was not there. He couldn’t understand the mental and psychological frame of mind, the temper of mood, the drift of feeling, that was giving the very simplest of the groans, cries, sighs, ejaculations, murmurs, whispers, repetitions, interruptions, protestations, that issued from that long, narrow, pointed, friable, brittle-looking jaw whose dominant peculiarity was its extreme sensitiveness to emotion, whether that emotion was one of attraction or repulsion, of satisfied complacency or furious irritation.

The longer Zeuks pondered upon the psychic implications of the old warrior’s tone the more he became convinced that the picturesque apophthegm, purporting to give a characteristic idea of the man, that had already, long ere his death, spread throughout all Hellas, was substantially correct. You had only, Zeuks told himself, to observe for half an hour, as you followed the man, the twitchings, quiverings, tightenings, relaxings, compressions, releases, explosions, of his mouth, his lips, his jaws, to realize that the muscles which set these objects working were themselves set in motion by the drift of his whole spirit.

It became clear in fact that when Ajax in a fit of blind rage “defied the lightning” he was not in any mood of metaphysical rebellion, not, for instance, obeying Zeuks’ own precept of philosophic *prokleesis*, but was quite simply giving way to a natural fit of violent human fury. But whether his mood at this moment was normal or abnormal the febrile nerves of his malleable mouth were now twitching like something subjected to an extreme emotional stress.

"It's an extraordinary light!" he cried. "I must go and see what it is! It's like that dream I've always had since my childhood! And do you know what started that dream?"

At this Zeuks felt more interested than he had expected to feel in the outbursts of this white-haired hero.

"I would greatly like to know," he answered.

The tall, thin, bent figure swung round, using its left heel in its black sandal as a pivot.

"My father whose name was — —" The old warrior suffered from some impediment in his throat, an impediment which his attendants usually mistook for phlegm, but which was in reality the fragment of a golden arrow-head which the exceptional adaptability of the man's flesh and blood had appropriated to themselves and rendered innocuous, and it was now as he struggled with his father's name that a sound like a suppressed lion's roar burst from him.

"Telamon", interjected Zeuks patiently. "Telamon", the man repeated,— "who was king of Salamis, used to tell me of a rock on that Island near the village of Cychreus through which there was a bottomless hole.

"To this hole every infant born in Salamis was brought; and into this hole, whether it was a boy or girl, it looked, and sometimes saw nothing but impenetrable darkness, and sometimes saw a dazzling light; and its parents knew by its cries of joy when it saw the light and by its cries of sorrow when it saw the darkness. And once when I told my father — Telamon that is, and it's a good sign you've heard of him — when I told my father that I always dreamed of meeting a laughing man at the bottom of that hole he said it would be a son of the great god Pan I should meet and that when I met him I should die.

“He said — Telamon I mean, and it’s a good sign you’ve heard of him — that the light in that hole came from a dancing-lawn of the Nymphs on the other side of the earth and that among the Nymphs the most beautiful of all was Maia who was the mother of Hermes, who himself was the father of the great god Pan. And now when it’s such a good sign for me that you said ‘Telamon’, and when there is that light over there, I must go and see it.”

Zeuks never forgot how Ajax looked, as once more, with that weird gurgling sound in his throat that resembled the suppressed roar of a half-dead lion, he cried that he must go to that light. What made the man look so specially grotesque — and yet he was the noblest-looking human being Zeuks had ever seen — was the manner in which, while his tall thin majestic figure was bent almost double, his snow-white hair and ivory-white forehead not so far away from his jet-black sandals, his head was twisted sideways in order that he might fix upon Zeuks the intense stare of his yellowish-green eyes, a stare that had about it just then a golden effect, as if that fragment of solid gold that had incorporated itself among the native elements of his throat had the power of emitting gold-dust rays, even as the terrible Typhon breathed forth fire and smoke!

Zeuks, who had no more idea than Ajax himself what it really was that burned so grandly in the sun’s afternoon rays, moved with him now in the direction of the tree-carved Hector standing there in heroic isolation. But little did he guess for all his cleverness what was on the point of happening.

They had moved together about fifty paces from the point where they had, so to speak, stopped to get their breath, and had joined issue on the matter of the prophetic words of Telamon of Salamis.

Suddenly Ajax began swaying backwards and forwards as if he had been sprinkled with a handful of the holy dust from that Cychrean hole, and each time he swayed, first to the East and then to the West, just as if he were indulging in some ancestral and primordial ritual, he managed to accentuate into a grotesque distortion of his whole gaunt frame the way his white skull bent sideways to stare at Zeuks while it came bowing down from the mystery of the East to the mystery of the West.

And then with one single movement of his whole body the old warrior became as motionless as the Stone of Sisyphos, had Sisyphos been suddenly saved from the undying cruelty of Zeus. And from that motionlessness, just as if some primordial vein of gold in that Cychrean hole had really uttered a cry, there rang out a challenge so startling, that any daring wanderer passing through that deserted Arima, where Eurybia and Echidna no longer kept up their reciprocal incantation, would have said to himself: “By the gods, I must get nearer to *this*! Something really exciting is happening in this queer place! *Hush!* I must creep nearer!”

And nearer such an one would have crept. And he would have been rewarded.

“A power tells me, you laughing one, that you are my dream come true! Yes, by the earth our mother, you are no servant of Odysseus! You are no farmer of Ithaca! I, Ajax, the son of Telamon, know you for what you are! You are a true son of the great god Pan! You are the son of Pan, who is the son of Hermes, who is the son of Zeus, who is the son of Kronos!”

Certainly if the person who called himself Zeuks had all along known his parentage he couldn’t have acted differently. His fate it was just then to lead the desperately old Ajax to his fantastic end; and that is what he unhesitatingly did though without the faintest idea that death was hurrying there too. Straight up to that carved image of Hector of Troy he led the greatest Achaian. Full upon that figure shone the slanting afternoon sun in a blaze of burning light and all the artistry of Hector’s own daughter flamed forth in her father’s majestic person.

“Watch your sandals as you walk, my Lord Ajax. There are snakes in the grass.”

It was because the Trojan hero heard this instruction and obeyed it to the letter that they reached the carved tree before he lifted up his eyes to see what it was that burned before him with such a flame.

“Hector!” he cried with a ringing battle-cry; and then almost querulously as he rolled over at the feet of the son of Priam, “so its you and neither the one nor the other of us who at the end has the arms of Achilles!”

CHAPTER IX

BY THE TIME the body of the white-haired son of Telamon lay still, and Zeuks, “the laughing man”, had satisfied himself that this long, lean, fleshless form, whose mighty muscles had once hurled back from the hulls and bulwarks of the Achaian ships troop after troop of Trojans and Trojan allies, was really and truly dead, the sun had begun to fall horizontally upon the golden armour of Achilles, hanging now so easily and naturally on the ash-tree carved to resemble Hector. The Image of Hector, thus blazing in its blinding splendour, seemed to be exulting over the body of Ajax, as if it had stricken down that mighty son of Telamon not from the broken towers of a darkened Ilium but from the battlements of some new aerial Troy that were now emerging victorious.

And at this moment there came over Zeuks an unusual craving to get to the bottom of the old familiar mystery of his own birth. Those particular words which Ajax had evidently uttered under the direct impact and pressure of some sudden inspiration had sunk like a lump of adamant into the mind of Zeuks. He repeated them to himself— “The son of Pan, the son of Hermes, the son of Zeus, the son of Kronos” — and he even carried this liturgical genealogy a step further, and murmured the words: “the son of Gaia and Ouranos.”

Murmuring these words like a ritualistic chant he knelt over the body before him and thrusting his arms beneath it lifted it sufficiently high as to be able to prop it up with its back against the shins and knees and thighs of the graven image of the greatest of the Trojans, still blazing like fire in the armour of Achilles.

In carving Hector’s image out of that tree-trunk his unrecognized daughter had thought more of making the man’s face resemble its original than of making his form as muscular as it actually was. So that now, when the real muscles of the tall emaciated son of Telamon were thus contrasted with the supple and pliant elegance of that sunlit golden “eidolon” of his famous enemy, there would have been plenty of excuse for Zeuks had he cried out: “Gods in Heaven! No wonder Troy was taken and destroyed if one leader was like *this* and the other like *that*!”

But the mind of Zeuks was at that moment far too full of its own private speculations to do more than place on the ground behind him his own personal weapon, which was a thick, short, double-edged dagger with a sharp point, and lifting both hands to the bowed sun-illumined white head above him that now hung down with a distinct droop towards the direction from which they had just come, that is to say towards the rocky coast where the Naiads had their cave, he began to tilt it up and thrust it back a little, so that it should be kept in an upright position by resting it against the heart of the inmost wood of the carved tree where it was supported on one side by Hector’s left knee and on the other side by his right knee; and once having got it in that position Zeuks was as careful as a woman in the considerate manner in which he closed its eyes.

The afternoon sun was now projecting such a blaze of light that the armour of Achilles reflected it from every curve, whether convex or concave. In fact the incredible and miraculous gleaming of this armour which the cajoleries of the sea-goddess had extracted from the smithy of the fire-god, was so dazzling that whether it flamed back from the closed eyes of the son of Telamon or from the golden greaves of the son of Priam it compelled Zeuks to bend down till his own head was as deeply sunk forward between the knees of the dead Ajax as the head of Ajax was sunk backwards between the knees of the image of Hector.

Thus were the three figures united, one a corpse, one a work of art, and one a living creature; and this uniting of life with death, and of life and death with a graven image of human imagination had a curious and singular effect: for there came into the already confused and naturally chaotic mind of Zeuks one of the most powerful impressions of his whole life. In embracing those dead limbs and in drawing into the depths of his being the bitter smell of the old hero's scrotum, and the salt, sharp taste of the perspiration-soaked hairs of his motionless thighs, Zeuks completely forgot the dead man's announcement as to his own paternity. What filled his mind now was a sudden doubt about the wisdom of his proudly proclaimed "Prokleesis" as the best of all possible war-cries for the struggle of living creatures with the mystery of life.

But was it really the best? Was this challenging and this defying of life the wisest attitude for living creatures? Zeuks had long ago found out by bitter experience that *some* sort of habitual life-philosophy was absolutely essential for him. But was this mood of defiance and challenge the best he could find? He began to mutter all sorts of alternatives to himself as he buried his head between the thighs of Ajax.

By degrees he felt as if he were embracing both life and death, though like a bird swimming under water he had to rise to the surface every few minutes to get a breath of air. "By the waters of the Styx," he said, "whatever essence of living I make up my mind to embrace, it must be capable of being reduced to a simple surge of will-power and a simple clutch of enjoyment! And I must make it such a habit that I can summon it up at any moment and use it under any conditions!

“And since I’ve got to live out my destiny, whether I challenge it and defy it or simply submit to it, it seems silly to go on making this ‘prokleesis’ of mine the essence of the whole thing. No! I can now see well what the right word for my life-struggle is — not the word ‘prokleesis’, ‘defiance’, but the word *Lanthanomai*, or ‘I forget’, followed by the still simpler word, *Terpomai* or ‘I enjoy’. For by the Styx, its a question if we can enjoy anything till we’ve forgotten almost everything!

“That’s what’s the matter with Odysseus”; and at the thought of the man who had won this golden armour from the sinews and bones that here lay dead, only to lose it all again to this graven tree-trunk that would never be able to know anything of these human rivalries, Zeuks lifted up his head from between those withered but still mighty thighs. “It is,” he told himself, “as if I were embracing this corpse beneath that famous tree outside the great wall of Ilium; and as if I had been given by the gods the power to suck and draw and drain from the lapsing semen of this dead body such magnetic force into the peristaltic channel of my spirit that a fresh and a new insight into the whole of life radiates through me.”

Zeuks was not exaggerating what he felt; and indeed if the young daughter of Teiresias had been present at this moment she would have learnt as much, and perhaps more, from the motions of the man’s arms and legs just then, as she had ever learnt from his discarded clue-word “prokleesis”, or was ever likely to learn from his new clue-words, “lanthanomai” and “Terpomai”. But then Pontopereia, being, for all her prophetic gift, a natural girl, she would instinctively put less confidence in the creative impulse of a clue-word than in the simplest bodily movement.

But it was with more than his out-flung arms that this queer son of Arcadian soil proceeded now to encircle in one and the same embrace both the dead man’s neck and the base of that ash-tree out of which Hector’s shin-bones had been so exquisitely carved. It was not indeed until the moment when he saw Ajax fall at the feet of that graven image wearing the armour of Achilles, that something in him such as had never before come to the surface of the "laughing man" rose up, and dominated his whole nature. And it was on the strength of this "something" that he now pressed against his ribs in the same desperate embrace both the dead man and the carved tree.

"Why should I laugh at life rather than challenge it or defy it when all I've really got to do is just to enjoy it?" This was. what he was telling himself as he hugged the tree and the gold and the flesh and the bone together. And the very form of his. countenance became changed as he did so. The physiognomy of Zeuks has been, as we have seen, designed and dedicated, devoted and destined for the ribald reduction of everything in. existence to a monstrous jest.

But something had risen just then out of the depths of his being that was neither solemn nor comical; something that found its account in quite a different direction from that of either defiance or mockery. And the advantage of this direction was its freedom from the necessity of any effort except the effort of will. It needed absolutely no mental effort at all; not even the mental effort of realizing just exactly what it was he was defying, or towards what particular thing he was directing his mockery. "To will," Zeuks told himself, "is simply to do a little more vigorously what we are already doing spontaneously. These efforts naturally occur when we grow consciously aware of some exercise in ourselves of the life-energy which moves in every offspring of the ancient earth. All we have to do is to use our will to intensify this."

Nor was the expression upon the face of Zeuks that accompanied this revelation lost on the air. It was on the contrary inwardly digested. It was one of the luckiest moments in the philosophical life of the creature that always so proudly called itself “the Worm of Arima” that just when the adventurous consciousness of the son of Arcadian Pan had dived deep enough among the mysteries of the multiverse to discover a clue-word, or rather a clue-act, that was more intimate and more effective than “defy” or “mock”, the protruding, perspiring, and palpitating proboscis of the Worm of Arima happened to be above-board rather than in any of its convoluted labyrinths below. For since the illumination upon the countenance of Zeuks at this second of time communicated itself by the usual aerial vibration to everything within reach, it was natural enough that the Worm of Arima, being so near to it, carried away into its underground world when it returned there, though the form of its own visage was so much simpler, a celestial exultation worthy of the noblest zodiacal sign.

“These motions of the will,” said Zeuks to himself, “are motions of the life-energy within us, sometimes enduring and patient, sometimes violent and desperate. But, whatever these motions of the life-energy are, if they’re to give us that thrill of enjoyment we need, we’ve got to acquire the trick of forcing ourselves to forget the particular afflictions that spoil such enjoyment.”

And it was at this point in what might have been called his pearl-diving in the ensorcerized earth-mould of Arima that Zeuks felt himself to be, at one and the same time, a god, a man, a beast, a bird, a fish, a worm and an insect. And in his heart he cried out: “O gods, O men, O beasts, O birds, O fish, O frogs, O ferns and funguses, I, Zeuks, have you all in me, and I, Zeuks, am within you all! But, O Maia, mother of Hermes and grandmother of Pan, teach me to forget! Teach me, O youthful Maia, the heavenly tracks and heavenlier side-tracks of the sacred art of forgetting! Don’t let me ever, O Maia most holy, O Maia most blessed, O Maia eternally youthful, don’t let me forget how to forget!

“Yes, to forget the disgusts! Yes! to forget the horrors! yes! to forget the loathings! Mother of Hermes, hear the prayer of thy great-grand-son Zeuks, and grant unto him, and that not too late, the power of forgetting the madness, the loathsomeness, and the horror! I should require,” thus did the thoughts of Zeuks run on, “I who am a god, a man, a beast; a bird, a fish, a frog, a worm, an insect, I who have suffered such horrors from the sky, my begetter, from the earth, my mother, from the elements, my aunts, from Space my grandmother, from Time my grandfather, I should require a draught of forgetfulness so obliterating that it could turn every hell that all my separate natures necessitate into every paradise that all my separate natures crave! Mother of Hermes” — thus did the heart of Zeuks still jerk forth its desperate prayer to the multiverse around it— “cannot you see that for a manifold creature such as I am, a creature who is a god, a man, an insect, a frog, a newt, an ass, a camel, a bear, a monkey, an elephant, if I am really to drink a draught of pure Lethe, if I am really to obtain the power of forcing myself to forget the horrors, it can only be done by my own *will to forget*!

“O thou ‘still youthful Maia’, cannot you see that what I need is to strengthen my will to forget till it is ten thousand times more powerful than any god as yet discovered by us whether in earth or in air or in fire or in water? If I had this power, O thou ‘still youthful’ great-grandmother of mine, I could enjoy sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, each one of them separately or all together, and in the pleasure of satisfying hunger and thirst, and in the pleasure of satisfying lust and desire, and in the pleasure of diving into earth and air and water and fire, and through them and out the other side, if there *is* another side, I beseech thee, O Maia, thou Nymph forever young, let me learn the greatest of all the arts, the art of forgetting!"

By one of those pure caprices and casual happenings that occur under the dispensation of Tyche the great goddess of chance such as we mortals call "a stroke of luck" when they suit us and "the cruel irony of things" when they don't, it happened that when Zeuks began heaving up the body of Ajax, with a view to carrying it to the Corridor of the Pillars, there occurred a faint but unmistakable flicker at the outer corner of the dead man's left eyelid.

This incident was solely and simply due to the sudden jerk to the corpse's head when Zeuks lifted up that long, lean, painfully muscular body preparatory to making the effort, which was not at all an easy one, of balancing it on his shoulder. But this negligible and unimportant accident made, for a special reason, a most agitating impression on the mind of Zeuks.

What it did for him was to set going a peculiarly morbid infirmity of his imagination; namely the fantastic illusion that his own automatic blinkings and pulse-beats and heart-throbs and blood-circulations, yes! and even the naturally drawn breathings from his lungs might suddenly be intensified to a degree beyond bearing and he might be driven so wild by all these reiterative pulsings, pumpings and poundings that he'd be sent raving through Arima like a naked madman!

His face was contracted into a desperately grim scowl as he staggered off from the Hector-Tree with the body of Ajax on his back. "And so," he told himself, "it has now come to the point; and the question is, can the great-grand-son of immortal Maia keep his 'will to forget' intact when his whole taut skin drums from within to the tune of 'remember!'

Staggering along for a dozen strides at a time, every few seconds Zeuks had to stop to take breath. His shoulders were broad enough; but his legs were short; and the corpse he carried was so tall that its toes, for he carried it face downwards, kept tapping against his own heels.

But it was the horrible feeling that at any moment this repetitive pounding and pulsing and blinking might split his skin that was spoiling that moment for him rather than any effort of carrying Ajax. And it was at his tenth stop that he made a really desperate attempt to deal with this insane attack. He planted his feet firmly in a patch of damp and mossy soil, not far from the spot where Eurybia used to exercise her curious sedentary witchcraft, and where she used to argue with Echidna from twilight to twilight as to whether this breaking loose out of Tartaros, about which all the Attic world was now talking, was due to feminine wiles or to titanic straining.

Having got the heel of one sandal hidden in that soft wet moss and the under-curve of the other sandal covering something brittle below that wet moss that might easily have turned out to be the ivory-white thigh-bone of a still-born child, Zeuks now took up his own consciousness, as if it were a massive plummet of lead sharpened at the end, and drove it down deep into the earth.

Had either of his youthful acquaintances, Nisos or Pontopereia, been at his side at that moment they would have had, in the case of the former a male inspiration, and in the case of the latter a female inspiration, simply from Zeuks' visage. It was literally distorted, contorted, convulsed with pure exultation when at last he hauled up into the light the mental self he had let down into the abyss. What pleased him so much was the supreme success of his supreme effort; for his horrid, loathsome, disgusting mental illness, revolting in itself and attended by the wildest and maddest terrors, had actually been left behind in the depths of the earth like an after-birth at the bottom of a weedy garden.

This was a relief so incredible that it confused him by its very beatitude. “Never again,” he told himself, “never once again shall I have those horrors!”

And Zeuks remembered how when he was farming in the vicinity of Cuckoo-Hill he once heard Enorches, the Priest of the Mysteries, curse a rash young neighbour who had tried to seduce the neophyte-priestess Spartika, the daughter of Nosodea, and the sister of Leipephile; and how the pompously perverse and the necrophiliastically censorious tone of the man in his assumption of priestly authority had for long haunted him because it jumped with his own peculiar mental malady: “May your crime exude from every pore of your body like stinking pus! May it burst from every inch of your skin like gangrenous necrosis! May it reek from your body like putrid decomposition! May it cross every sight you see with a streak of fœtid blood! May it infect every sound you hear with an explosion of foul wind! May it taint everything you touch with vile and viscous glutinosity! May all you taste have the tang of brine and all you smell have a reek of the mortuary! May your consciousness of yourself become a consciousness of empty eye-sockets and rattling cross-bones! May the clock-strokes of annihilation record the hours of all your nights and the dust-motes of disillusion drift over the minutes of all your days!”

Zeuks could not only remember the shock he got from this curse, he remembered also the intensity of the particular prayer about his own fate which was his reaction to it. He had prayed to Arcadian Pan that he might become the supreme lord of the Island of Ithaca, dwelling, as Odysseus the son of Laertes did, and as Agelaos the son of Krateros Naubolides hoped one day to do, above the Corridor of the Pillars. “Why do I think of that prayer at this particular moment?" he asked himself as he staggered and shuffled under the weight of the tall corpse he was carrying, up the much-trodden path across the burying-ground of the slaves that led into the olive-garden.

But Zeuks the son of Arcadian Pan didn't hasten to leave the graves of the old slaves in order to reach the cradles of the young olives. On the contrary he moved more slowly than ever. He was clutching the dead man's wrists so tightly with both his hands that the warrior's toes still in heavy silver-clamped sandals tapped against his own bare heels causing him pain. In this slaves' cemetery Zeuks was on fairly familiar ground, for several of the farmers of Cuckoo Hill who were too poor to possess cemeteries of their own brought the bodies of their dead slaves to this spot.

Zeuks in his previous visits to the place however had never noticed that one of these graves and this a very deep one had not been filled up but was gaping wide-open. Now what, in the name of Persephoneia, the Queen of all the Dead, was the explanation of this? There were no inscriptions here at all and there had been none for centuries; so that the identity or identities of the occupant or occupants of this deep hole in the earth could only be revealed by such as had lowered him or her into this deep and narrow sepulchre or had recently robbed this nameless sanctuary of its inmate.

By this time the sun had already gone down below the horizon and night was rapidly approaching. "What in the name of Aidoneus and Persephoneia will our old man do with this other old man?" Zeuks now asked himself in perplexity. "He must be-entertaining the Princess by this time in the Dining-Hall and if that incredible old Eurycleia weren't the woman she is our old king would be in a fine fix! But that's just what this amazing old woman must have been doing again tonight, saving him from the shame of failing in any of his kingly duties! But what in the name of Aidoneus would the old man feel at this overpowering moment, when he’s not only got the Phaiakians on his hands, along with that crazy Herald of theirs, but has had to confront this Princess of all Princesses, if I were to appear before him with the corpse of Ajax!”

Very carefully and very slowly Zeuks lifted the long lean body, all bone and muscle and sinew, from his shoulder and laid it on its back on the indescribable rubble and litter that surrounded that gaping hole. Then, with his eyes on a smashed pot that looked as if it might have been the first piece of pottery ever made by the hand of man, his thoughts turned to Okyrhöe, “I hate that woman. I *know* she’s up to some game. Yes, I hate her! Oh, why is it that in this world there’s always somebody we *have* to wish in Hades? It’s not a matter of war or revenge or rivalry or just family against family, or tribe against tribe, or race against race. Those things are all part of the game, part of the way things are, part of the price we have to pay for being alive at all.

“Krateros Naubolides wants to keep the king here, so that without any trouble he can slip into his shoes when he dies. Odysseus on the contrary naturally wants *before he dies* to make such a thunderous commotion and such a roaring rumpus that his personality will go resounding on, like the beating of brazen swords upon brazen shields, till it’s heard over both the horizons of the world; heard where the blameless Ethiopians at the Gates of the West cry their farewell to the burning sun on his nightly journey, and heard where the blameless Ethiopians at the Gates of the East cry their welcome to the burning sun as he rises for a new day!

“No, what’s wrong isn’t our having enemies, it’s our having friends like this woman Okyrhöe! The old man will never be able to be happy again with Nausikaa while that cunning bitch is about. It’s a wicked shame.”

Staring with a frown at those smashed bits of discarded pottery Zeuks was now absolutely astonished to find himself sobbing. What in Hades' name did this mean? Was he not exultantly happy? Had he not shuffled off the coil of his worst horrors and left their scurf and their scum at the bottom of the abyss? "For what then — by all the Harpies" — he said to himself, "am I a grown man blubbing like a baby?"

He sucked in both his lips at this point which gave him an extremely odd expression, an expression which would certainly have interested his great-grandmother Maia if from some Valley of Eternal Youth she could have seen it; and with this expression — which was a mixture of fussy punctiliousness, touchy querulousness, and irritable contrariness, mingled together by a sort of impish gravity — fixed upon his features like an actor's mask, he placed his hands under the armpits of the dead man and lowered him down feet foremost into the open grave till he was standing erect in it.

Then Zeuks set himself to fill up the grave with the rubble that lay several inches deep in every direction. This was an easy task and Zeuks accomplished it in quick time, using both his extremities. What he didn't kick down into that hole from the litter around it he threw down into it with his hands.

And when he had finished his job he stamped heavily and obstinately on the rubble round the top of the corpse's head, leaving, however, for the benefit of his own private and secret knowledge and information, but only just recognizable even by himself, the little bronze spike on the top of the small bull's-hide head-piece that continued to surmount, even after all the knocking about that that warrior-body had undergone, the snow-white head of the dead chieftain.

With his lips still sucked into his mouth in that odd way Zeuks spent several minutes covering and revealing, revealing and once more covering, that little bronze spike, to conceal which finally, and it was almost dark by now, he made use of a cracked oyster-shell.

All this accomplished, he made the special ritual gesture practised for a thousand years at ceremonies where the dead had been buried rather than burnt, and when this had been done he moved cautiously through the olive-garden and bent his head in the darkness lower than he need have done before passing beneath the arch into the corridor of pillars. He felt in some odd way humbled; and every sort of pride, whether human or godlike, seemed to have been drained out of him simply by the fact of having lived all these hours with Ajax, who, whether alive or dead, was so natural and so true to his essential self, that he made any other persons seem vacillating and wayward.

"Didn't somebody tell me," Zeuks said to himself, as he emerged from under the low-bowed arch into the corridor of pillars, "that there was an olive-stump inside here ready to discuss the newest and the most difficult problems in philosophy? But I smell meat! The old king must be already at dinner. Hades! But I mustn't make a sound or I'll have them all rushing out!" His sandals were of tougher leather than those worn by his neighbours on Cuckoo-Hill and he suddenly became fearful of their creaking. He felt better when he had slipped them off and was holding them in his left hand; but he felt better still when he had extricated with some difficulty from the lining of his outer vest or "chiton" his two-edged dagger, whose small bronze handle was covered with a particular kind of cloth specially adapted to soak up blood without letting it drip.

But the odd thing with Zeuks just then, as inhaling the rich waftures from Eurycleia's ancestral cooking he stared wildly at the Club of Herakles propped up between its two projecting quartz-stones, was the fact that his irresolution at that critical moment connected itself with a feeling that went beyond humility.

"What has happened," he cried out from the depths of his heart with a wordless, soundless cry, "what has happened to you, O Maia, the Nymph who gave birth to Hermes, the begetter of Pan? You were not one, O Maia my own, O Maia, my more than Mother! You were not one of those tragic mortal ones who die, as the old Dryad here must have died along with her aged oak! Of the fate of the Nymph of Master Dryops I know something; and of the fate of the Nymph who bore Pan to Hermes I have heard much: but whither, I implore you to answer me, whither, O whither, have *you* fled, immortal mother of my father's father, you for whose sake the lyre was first strung? Are you still being visited by the son of Kronos in some hidden cave in Arcady? Or perhaps at this very moment, beyond the reach of us all, caught by the rising flood in some royal chamber in Atlantis, your far-floating, filmy-textured, chestnut-coloured hair is washing backwards and forwards, while stiff-finned fish and scaly-tailed sea-snakes press their snouts against your cold breasts?

"Have I prayed in vain to you all my life as an immortal, and have you all *the time been* cold and dead as Atlantis itself? Surely you are immortal among the Nymphs, oh mother of my father's father? Don't they say that the great earth-mother bore you at the beginning of all things, before she was over-shadowed by Ouranos or knew what it was to have connexion with any elemental power beyond herself? Aren't you, along with all the Nymphs of the Mountains and the Springs and the Lakes and the Seas, different altogether in the hierarchies of the gods from a pathetic old creature like the family-Dryad of this place who has now perished with her oak?"

He must have been himself at that moment, poor Zeuks, a somewhat pathetic figure, with one hand clutching that double-edged weapon under his “chiton” and with the other pressing his sandals against his ribs. At any rate the easily moved moth murmured to her friend the fly: “I do so, *so* wish, my dear friend, that we knew whence this fellow Zeuks originally came. I don’t mean *just now,* for, of course, we know *that* well enough! I mean at the beginning of his life. Do, for Heaven’s sake, Myos, wake up, ‘and see’, as rude boys learn to say at school, ‘what the cat has brought in’! I’m afraid you ate far too much of that beautifully-cooked bread-sauce! I warned you against it. Oh how I did warn you against it! For the same thing has happened to you before. It shows how we cannot be trusted not to fall into the sin of gluttony when we are safe at home and in no danger of being swallowed up alive by voracious insectivorous monsters. Listen to me, Myos, my only friend! Listen to me, most learned of revered teachers! I hate to speak of such tragic things: but don’t you remember how often we’ve seen dead flies, lying mute and silent, never to hum, never to buzz, never to murmur again? And where, I ask you, have we seen them?

“On plates and under plates! On tables and under tables! On window sills and under window sills! You flies are far too sensitive and intellectual and highly-strung to take risks with your food. It’s different altogether with us. We’re made for risks like that! If *we* don’t take risks every day of our lives we very quickly degenerate. I oughtn’t to scold you, my precious wise one” — here the beautiful moth showed signs of emotion, for her right wing quivered and her left antenna groped freebly in a whiff of steam-infected air from the hall within— “because I have myself been yielding so weakly to my admiration for your learning that I have not yet, though I heard his inspired speech, flown to enquire how the noble Priest of the Mysteries has borne up after his exhausting oration.

"But, O thou wisest of flies, I do feel such shame when I think" — It was then that there broke in upon their conversation the voice of their living and moving tent, namely the Club of Herakles, who when in the company of his special and most privileged associates always called himself "Dokeesis" a name which in that dark Nemean Forest, where he was brought up, has the meaning of "seeming", because there are so many shadows there that it is often hard to distinguish between appearance and reality.

"It is I who am speaking to you, again, Sixth Pillar, yes it is I, the Slayer of the Nemean Lion, and I want to know whether I heard you correctly, Sixth Pillar, when you spoke of receiving the news that the great Goddess Hera the Queen of Heaven, had suddenly left Olympos empty of her divine presence and had gone to Gargaros, the summit of Ida, with the intention of persuading the Son of Kronos, by the help of Desire, and by the help of Sleep after the satisfaction of Desire, to yield up his third portion of Power over the Kingdoms of this World to his two Brothers Aidoneus and Poseidon?

"And if I heard you correctly, O illustrious Sixth Pillar, who bear on your pedestal the signature of a son of Hephaistos, I would like to ask you if you could tell me what in your opinion was the secret purpose of the wife of Zeus in thus betraying her husband, the Ruler of the Upper Air, and through the air of the whole surface of the earth?"

There was no need for the little shame-faced silky-winged Pyraust to prod her friend the fly to listen to this dialogue whose reverberation shook the corridor. Indeed the fly's big eyes had begun to bulge to such an extent that the anxious moth-girl feared they might fall out of his head leaving two bloody apertures through which she would be staring into her friend's "frontal lobe", the last thing she wished to do.

“In my opinion,” the two insects now heard the Sixth Pillar say, “the goddess Hera must have welcomed the return, completely unknown to her husband, of the Messenger she sent, namely the seven-coloured Iris, to find Pallas Athene among the blameless Ethiopians. In my opinion Pallas Athene must have assured her that if they worked together now and got the help, both of Persephone from Hades, and of Thetis from the Sea, they would be able to take the domination of the world out of the possession of men and hand it over into the possession of women where it ought to have been from the beginning.”

After this there was dead silence in the corridor; until the shame-faced moth took upon herself to fling a question upon that wine-scented air towards the lusty olive-sprout that had dared to grow up between a couple of flagstones.

“Can you tell me, Olive-Branch, whether it will be the lady Okyrhöe or the lady Nausikaa who will win the love of Odysseus?” There was such a long silence after this dramatic question that the fly came near to spreading its gauzy wings and taking upon itself the role of Messenger from the Insects to the Olympians.

Well did the moth know what was in her friend’s mind; and she couldn’t help wondering what she herself would feel if she accompanied the fly through the flashes of light that wavered down from the hall above, and with rainbow colours flashing from point to point in *his* wings and mysterious gleams glorifying the lustrous brown of *her* wings, they were both to flicker up those stone steps and confront the revellers with the startling and momentous news that henceforth the world was to be ruled by women.

But the olive-shoot’s wise answer brought back everybody’s wits to the practical situation with which they were now faced. “The king will choose neither of those two women," announced the sagacious olive-shoot. "But you may be sure," he added with sturdy cynicism, "the King will use all the power he may have over both these ladies to be in a position to hoist sail without delay and explore the unknown West beyond Lost Atlantis."

Once more the boldness and rashness of the turn their talk so soon took brought down upon them all the same uneasy silence. But this time it was not from among any of them in the corridor that the interruption to their colloquy came; and it was Zeuks who was the first to be aware of it.

Zeuks was still standing against the wall clutching his formidable double-edged dagger in one hand and his sandals in the other; but he now imperceptibly moved his head so that his right ear might be directed towards the stairs that led down into the corridor from the dining-hall.

Zeuks heard steps descending those stairs, very, very slow and cautious steps, and very light steps, but with no vacillation or hesitation about their purpose. Somebody — a light-footed boy or girl — was coming as a spy or anyway as a scout. Zeuks listened intently to the faintest sound made by this explorer and he soon heard the hurried gasping breaths that the light-footed young person in his excitement was unable to suppress.

Listening with the divining rod, as you might call it, of his auditory intelligence Zeuks was soon rewarded for his concentrated attention by recognizing a particular click between two of these irrepressible gasps that identified the prowler without further question. He was Nisos Naubolides.

And then there occurred one of those curious moments, or rather seconds, in the experience of persons suddenly encountering each other in this particular dimension of our multiverse, persons familiar to each other and yet on the alert in regard to each other's immediate intentions. At such a second of time there is liable to happen an electric explosion between the life energy of the one and the life energy of the other, an explosion over which and upon which the consciousness of neither of the persons has the slightest influence or effect. What you might call the two kinds of life-levin or of life-lightning in these persons, thus confronting each other, must be far more different than the persons themselves are different and far more antagonistic.

Nisos, for instance, had always felt for Zeuks a friendly attraction and Zeuks had certainly felt for Nisos a protective affection. And yet no sooner did the lad descending those steps in the twilight catch sight of the familiar figure of Zeuks than he performed, or the life-lightning that was using him performed, some surprising acts. In the first place he put his fingers to his lips in the universal sign which means: “Hush! This little business is entirely between ourselves!” Then, though he was some seven or eight steps above the corridor, he made a wild leap like a young lion and landed on the corridor floor at least a yard beyond the Sixth Pillar; and then with a second and still more leonine leap he grasped Zeuks by the throat.

It was lucky for him that the impersonal life-lightning which seized upon Zeuks at that same instant confined itself, as if Zeuks had really been an animal, to physical contact. What Zeuks actually did was to thrust back, with a blind instinctive jerk, deep into the thick wool of the under-shirt out of which he’d drawn it, that dangerous two-edged dagger; and then with the whole strength of both his arms he tore one of Nisos’ hands from his throat and treating this captured hand as a hawk might treat a butcher-bird he squeezed it into his capacious mouth and pressed his teeth against it, not really hard enough to draw blood, but hard enough to give Nisos the feeling that those doglike teeth *were* drawing blood.

Thus had the situation between these two resolved itself into one of those purely physical encounters which carry with them so large a current of earth-life that they seem to satisfy both the creatures involved with a sort of absolute satisfaction. And what happened then was so much what we can imagine any benevolent fate would have intended to happen that it is hard to believe that it was brought about by pure chance.

Feeling through every throb the one hand which was still on Zeuks' throat that he had only to press these fleshy sinews with a viciously increasing purpose to stop the man's breath for ever, Nisos suddenly thought: "But I am going to be a prophet; and all Prophets have the power of an absolute control over their rage. I shall therefore show this funny fellow Zeuks that I am letting him live when I could easily kill him and being a good friend to him when I could easily be the deadliest enemy."

And on his side Zeuks was now saying to himself, as he kept his dog-like teeth firmly pressed against his antagonist's hand: "What is the use of being the great-grandson of the ever-youthful Nymph Maia, even if in the end, for all the gods in my blood, I have to sleep the perpetual sleep of death, what, I ask you, is the use of it all if I can't detach my consciousness from my body far enough to be able to put up with a leaping, scrabbling, jumping, skipping, dancing kid like this without wanting to bite his head off?"

"Come up quietly with me, Zeuks, old friend," gasped Nisos. "The old man will be damned glad to see you. But, for the sake of all we both love best in the world, what has happened to Ajax?"

"Surely I'll come with you, my dear boy," replied Zeuks. "Ajax, did you say? Why, Ajax is wholly, entirely, absolutely, and altogether out of it. Ajax is in fact not only dead but buried. I found him dead and I buried him myself. But let us go now and let us go quietly as you and I know well how to go. But tell me this before we start and tell it me in your lowest and least heraldic voice. How are things with the old man over his wine? Have either of those ladies got him yet in her toils?"

Nisos gave him as well as he could a lively but rather a school-boyish description of what he had seen; and as the older man listened he nodded many times and muttered varying rather cynical commentaries. Then did the two of them thread their way between the first, second, third and fourth Pillars, Zeuks leaning on the arm of Nisos as if he had been much older than he actually was.

"No, my dear friend," Zeuks said with a rapid downward glance towards the base of the Sixth Pillar as they passed that philosophic interpreter of elemental vibrations, "no! my impression from all you've told me about our old man's behaviour with those two women is that the Princess Nausikaa is shocked at the physical change in him. I don't want to mislead you. Sonny, for your impressions are vivid and you have described them mighty well; but my own feeling about it is that Nausikaa finds it hard to recognise in our old king the handsome hero with whom she fell in love when he suddenly appeared from out of the shadows of the rocks while she and her maidens were playing ball by the sea-shore. I don't think myself he is in the faintest danger of being seduced by the Okyrhöe woman. My idea is that the kind of flattery he uses in her case, you know the sort of thing I mean, that exaggerated praise of everything about her, is due to a mounting and intensifying irritation with the way she treats him."

"Yes! yes! yes!" murmured Nisos in a still lower voice as they drew near to the thick oaken brazen-barred door at the top of the steps, "yes! yes! I've noticed *that* about him too! He gets rid of his bottled-up rage just as some old people do of their bottled-up misery by the simple process of inventing exaggerated and fantastical fables. But I tell you, Zeuks, my friend, things are about as ticklish up there as they can possibly be. It's like balancing yourself on a tight-rope — no! not like balancing *yourself,* like watching them balance *themselves!* No! I haven't got it quite right even yet! It's like watching them dancing upon thin ice dangerously slippery and liable to break and let them into the water!"

"Well, Son, we'll soon be" — but Nisos couldn't catch the dying out of that sentence; for they were now standing before the massive brazen-fitted time-darkened door, the other side of which was that palace dining-hall which had already been for numberless generations, and would be for many more to come, a centre of intrigue and plotting, not only for Ithaca, but for the whole of Hellas.

This black-oak door with its four panels and bronze frame opened to them now at the first pressure of Zeuks' hand. It would have needed one of the minutest of all the dust-motes that danced so solemnly in that spear-shaft of a torch-ray across the head of the lady Okyrhöe, across the head of the lady Nausikaa, across the head of Odysseus himself, to thread that twisted path, beyond the cunning of the tiniest mite of sea-spray left by the sun in his descent, the twisted path to the heart of the old king.

It was clear at once to both Zeuks and Nisos that Odysseus was not so much drunk from the fumes of wine as drunk from the opposing sorceries of those two formidable women.

"You'd have thought," said Nisos to himself, "that Circe and Calypso between them would have made him harder to beguile; but of course — Nausikaa — —"

He closed the brazen-framed door behind Zeuks and himself and made a hurried obeisance to the old bearded figure on the throne-seat at the table, but although the king looked searchingly into each of their faces as they came forward it struck them both that he understood nothing of what he saw save only that some terrible crisis of a fatal choice was upon him.

As to this choice it was abundantly clear to both Nisos and Zeuks that until some unexpected ray of light penetrated that bearded head the old king was simply incapable of choosing between his new temptress and his ancient flame. There was indeed to each of them something almost sickeningly painful in the sight of this tremendous hero of the greatest war ever experienced by the human race being lured to this unseemly turnstile of sexual cross-purpose.

Nisos and Zeuks were able to approach the table in whispered colloquy with each other, were able indeed to receive a wine-glass from Eurycleia and have it filled by Arsinöe, and finally were able to enter into an extremely punctilious argument with the Herald without attracting more notice from Odysseus than a vague, obscure, and taking-everything-for-granted nod.

“Yes, you will be interested to hear,” said the Herald, “that your humble servant has been permitted to approach your King of Kings and Lord of Lords with a request for permission to visit in person the Royal Treasury and to see with my own eyes and touch with my own hands certain pieces of golden armour that actually belonged to Achilles the son of Peleus and which your King of Kings and Lord of Lords won from Ajax in a public competition presided over by the Olympians. This permission I hope presently to take advantage of, but this beautiful lady-in-waiting, who tells me she will escort me to the Treasury, begs me to await the moment when her lovely duty of dispensing wine to the King’s visitors is over for tonight.”

Zeuks looked at Nisos with a cold shiver of apprehension when Ajax was mentioned; and Arsinöe hastened to fill up the young man’s glass the moment he had allowed himself in his embarrassment to empty it at one gulp.

“You haven’t yet made it quite clear to me, sweet lady,” they heard Okyrhöe say to Nausikaa, “what exactly is the change you are so struck by in my darling hero here, since you beheld him, after his escape from that accurst Bitch-Nymph, washed up naked on your shores. O what a shock to your chaste and virginal feelings that occasion must have been! A naked man coming forth out of the wild waves and advancing straight towards you! No wonder this romantic and bewitching story had already become a sailor’s ditty in the docks of every port when I was a little girl!

“Little did I dream it would ever be my lot to be allowed by fate to succeed you in the affections of our little-girl-loving hero! O you must satisfy my childish curiosity, sweet Auntie Nausikaa; for my parents, you know, never allowed me to forget that I was descended from Nausithoos the father of Alkinoos who wedded your dear mother, Arete.

“O yes! it is indeed as if one of those impossible dreams in a young girl’s life had come true that the very same hero of my childhood should actually have become now that I’m grown up and can realize all it means, yes, should actually have become, in spite of his old age, my lover and my beloved!

“O sweet Auntie Nausikaa, you *must* forgive my emotion in meeting you; for you must realize how the sight of you calls up every glimpse and feature of my earliest visions of life, now so wonderfully satisfied, with him as my lover” — At this point Okyrhöe actually leant across the table and touched the stem of the wine-glass out of which Odysseus was drinking. “Yes,” she told him, “your little girl is confessing all our happiness to her Auntie Nausikaa!”

It was at this point that Zeuks looked at Nisos, and Nisos looked at Zeuks; and never, in all the history of love has such savage derision been excited by such palpable humbug.

“We Phaiakians,” began the Herald, his natural ritualistic assurance evidently emphasized by the long unnatural suppression which he had endured while his Phaiakian princess struggled to ward off without losing her temper the diabolical jibes of the weird woman from Thebes.

"We Phaiakians are more ready to enter into technical arguments on matters of science and on the navigation of oceangoing ships than any other race, and we find it very hard to argue on these important subjects with barbarians. That is one of the reasons why it is such a deep satisfaction to us to have the privilege of talking with real Hellenic gentlemen like yourselves."

"My own feeling is," said Nisos, trying to make himself a little more comfortable by leaning sideways against the table, "my own feeling is that it is better to work out our own personal system of philosophy as well as our system of navigation in private meditation than to offer them both for public discussion."

"Heaven and earth!" cried Zeuks. "What about impulsive fellows like me? I couldn't tell you by day or by night what I was going to do next!" Thus speaking, the great-grandson of the Nymph Maia hesitated not to take to himself a curious chair that stood empty, with its back to one of the richly carved alcoves of that stately hall, a chair that was actually formed out of the figure of a monstrously swollen dwarf from whose head a stag's antlers protruded and whose feet were elongated into tree-roots.

There was something about this chair so perfectly adapted to the personality of Zeuks that Odysseus seemed to accept him and the chair as if they had been one thing and not two things. In fact whenever Odysseus glanced in their direction he gave to this fantastical flesh-turned-into-wood man in a chair a half-humorous nod, a nod that seemed to say: "We are all in the same box; and if we don't grow horns and roots we grow fins and scales."

The easy way in which Zeuks was now enjoying life in that horned and rooted man-chair with which he had identified himself gave our friend Nisos an opportunity to take in more of the general situation than he had as yet had leisure to grasp. He noticed that more than half the seats round the table were empty but that the plates of their recent occupiers were still half full of untouched nuts and fruits and that their wine-glasses too were still only half empty.

It soon began to be clear to the young man that the cause of this desertion of the table was the simple fact that the three chief officers of Nausikaa's crew had been persuaded by Eurycleia, along with the half-a-dozen sailors who had navigated their ship, to join our old friend Tis and the Trojan captive Arsinöe in a wine-drinking revel parallel with the one that was now ebbing feebly to its close in this dilatory teasing of Nausikaa by the crafty Okyrhöe. Gay and lively were the cries and the laughter that kept reaching that quiet hall from the echoing passage leading down to the underground kitchen and wash-house.

As Nisos watched all that was going on he soon was made to feel decidedly uncomfortable by the absence of the familiar form of the beautiful Leipephile, who, quite naturally, was away somewhere with her betrothed, the elder son of Krateros Naubolides. Little physical things, too, as so often happens on such drastic occasions, were worrying Nisos now, and these were the more annoying and irritating because of Zeuks' excessive and exaggerated delight in identifying himself with that grotesque chair and its horns and roots.

Nisos himself, who had no chair and had begun to feel a fool as he stood alone by the side of the table like a child who has crept down from its nursery, had just got one of his bare knees into some sort of a kneeling position upon the edge of a high four-legged footstool, a position he endeavoured to render more secure by pressing his hand in the side of the table. He was unlucky in both these supports; for the footstool had once been covered by some sort of ancient rug, and an unpleasant knot left in its weaving chafed his knee to distraction, while at the precise spot where he pressed his hand on the table's edge there happened to be two or three brass nails that hadn't been properly hammered into the wood and one of these nails behaved as if it were trying to bite at the fleshy part at the base of his thumb.

Had Tis's little sister been present in this dining-hall just now instead of being carried on a crazy rampage on the back of Pegasos along with Arcadian Pan and that pair of appalling Phantoms, whose eternally-whispered wrangle seemed destined to be transferred from Arima to the drowned towers of Atlantis, she would no doubt have drifted to Nisos' aid.

Pontopereia, the daughter of Teiresias, who *was* present, was far too shy to speak to a soul except the punctilious Herald to whom she finally confessed her longing to climb up to one of the high windows under the roof of this great chamber and persuaded him to help her in this achievement.

While our friend Nisos was contending with knots in rugs and nails in boards there were other personalities in that hall, quite apart from the Herald and Pontopereia, who seemed to feel that the moment had come for the old little lady Atropos to draw near and give destiny a new turn. Among these other personalities were individual hairs in the beard of Odysseus: for though, like the branch of a tree, a beard, whether of a goat or a man, has its own general individual being, its separate hairs like the leaves on such a branch have identities of their own. Thus the king's beard in its general personality was not surprised to hear its separate hairs disputing.

“A spiritual impression has reached me,” began one of its smallest hairs, addressing itself to one of the largest; “that before darkness covers the earth today you and I and every other hair in this beard may be homeless.”

“May I be permitted to enquire,” returned the big hair to the little hair, “upon what authority you base this somewhat startling prediction?”

“There’s not the least reason why you should put on that patronizing tone just because you are a little older and a little thicker than I am,” retorted the other. “The important question is whether we shall or shall not both be thrown into a bonfire of rubbish and there burnt up into invisible nothingness!” And as he spoke the smallest hair made a faintly fluttering motion, like a minute dandelion-seed, or some still more simply constructed airborne vehicle, towards the smouldering fire in the centre of the room that still contained a few red embers and a few wisps of grey smoke, and as he made this gesture he shuddered visibly through the whole length of his being; “burnt to nothingness,” he concluded. “Go,” said the biggest hair in the king’s beard to an extremely active though almost invisible insect, “go and discover for the benefit of all of us whether there is still enough life in those smouldering embers to reduce even the scurf on the navel of a woodlouse to nothingness.” The resonance of so commanding a word plunged all the hairs into silence.

“I would dearly like to see myself, Odysseus,” began Nausikaa suddenly, “some of those golden pieces of armour, just a single shin-piece perhaps, or one of the lighter sort of thigh-pieces, if your treasury is handy, of the armour of Achilles, which by the adjudication of the Olympian gods was bestowed on you in preference to Ajax, the son of Telamon.”

The bowsprit-shaped beard of the king was raised with a jerk at this demand. “Tell somebody, tell Arsinöe,” the old man commanded, “to bring up here to show, to show to the Princess any of those pieces she finds herself strong enough to carry!"

"Yes, my lord the King, certainly, my lord the King," replied the stentorian Herald, scrambling back not only to the floor of the hall from the high window-ledge whither he had helped the daughter of Teiresias to find an uninterrupted refuge for her shy and unwordly mind, but to the reality of his own role in life from which he had been snatched by a sudden amorous illusion, "I will certainly see that the lady Arsinöe brings up at once all that in her heart the Princess covets to behold."

It was then that young Nisos as he leant so uncomfortably against the table was led by the King's command and the Herald's reply to imagine that here indeed was the voice of Atropos herself. "It's I who will be the herald to Arsinöe!" he told himself as he hurried off. He found the Trojan captive helping Eurycleia in the task of washing the most precious of the vessels that had just been used; and taking her aside out of the riotous revelry of Nausikaa's officers and men he explained to her just what the Princess had said; nor did he hesitate to make his own comment upon Nausikaa's request.

"Don't you think, my friend, that what she really wants is to re-establish something of her old link with the old man? Don't you think that in this subtle battle between these two — and I confess, my dear, it's a surprise to me that this complete stranger from Thebes, of whom we know nothing except what she herself tells us, should presume to make such a bold move as to try at once to link her life with his in sexual love so as to forestall any natural return of the old romantic attraction between Odysseus and Nausikaa — don't you think that it's our business to help Nausikaa all we can and to put as many spikes as we possibly can in the wily path of this confounded sorceress?"

Was it Atropos again who now inspired the Trojan captive with a lie worthy of the old Odysseus himself?

"I have already, Nisos Naubolides, thought of this very thing. In fact I have been spending all the twilight hours of this long and heavy evening, while these sailors of the Princess have been making such a barbaric rumpus, in carrying out to a particular tree, yes, Nisos Naubolides, to a special ash-tree in our ghostly Arima here which for years I have been carving into a faint resemblance to Hector of Troy himself, one after another of these golden pieces of the armour that once belonged to Achilles."

Nisos stared at the woman for a second in absolute wonder, even with awe. How clever girls were! How they anticipated everything that could possibly happen, and long before it happened too! So *this* was the explanation of a premonition he had had for some while that something was going to happen here at home that would turn out to be more serious than any crazy excursions upon which Arcadian Pan might embark with poor little Eione, Tis's small sister!

"Listen, you wise one!" he cried, pulling her close to him by her shoulders and putting his eager lips to her right ear, "can't you think of some trick you and I might play upon this damned woman from Syracuse — no! from Thebes it was! And, by the gods I shall hate the very name of Thebes from now on! Yes, I shall always think of Thebes in future as a filthy city of rats, with walls of stinking rottenness, and towers and domes that are just heaps of dung!

"But tell me, Arsinöe, O please, please tell me, Arsinöe, how we can play some effective trick upon this scriggling and wriggling worm of a woman! You were so clever, Arsinöe, so divinely clever, in making an image of carved wood out of a living tree and hanging the armour of Achilles on it!

Surely you can think of some device, some trick, some stab in the dark, by which you and I together could save the old man from this curst Theban Sorceress! Do, *do,* I beg and beseech you, Arsinöe, put your good Trojan wits alongside of my poor rocky-island ones and see what we can do! Never mind your coming from Troy. In a thing like this we are at one. Your grand old Priam would agree with me I know; and as for the noble Hector himself, why, he wouldn't hesitate for a second! I know it, I am sure of it, my sweet Arsinöe! Ithaca and Ilium can hold together as well as any civilized pair against this dock-yard Brothel Bitch from the slave-markets of the Orient! Think, think, think, all-wise one! I swear to you that you and I, if we can only put our heads properly together, can forget all that old Helen-of-Troy business and show this confounded Theban witch that she shan't meddle with us in our gratitude to these Phaiakian sea-farers and to their brave Princess Nausikaa.

"For the gods' sake think, my wise one, think out a cunning scheme that'll save our old man from this infernal witch!" Nisos then became silent for a while, holding Arsinöe by the shoulders and pressing her gently against one of the walls of that long narrow down-descending passage, illuminated here and there by richly-oiled and richly-ensconced torches, and echoing at intervals, as the door at the bottom of it opened to let someone in or out, to the excited voices of the Phaiakian sailors, who, in Eurycleia's subterranean kitchen, were enjoying her sagacious hospitality. Then, bending his head down gravely and seriously he touched Arsinöe's forehead with his lips. And it was at this moment that the thought first flashed through his mind that he was the kind of boy who could only be really happy if he had as his wife a woman a lot older than himself.

"For don't you see, Arsinöe, my darling friend," he went on, "don't you see, here there has suddenly come by the very will of Atropos herself, the grandest chance that the old man is ever likely to have to realize his desire to sail over the great Western ocean, under the waves of which Atlantis lies and to discover what unknown lands and continents and peoples and cities and fields of rich grain exist beyond those furthest horizons of water! For don't you see, Arsinöe darling, if this Princess Nausikaa can only be brought to see our old man as she saw him once when she loved him at first sight, why then, my lovely Trojan, let the armour of Achilles be left on your Image of Hector! Odysseus will be the Captain of Nausikaa's ship; and together they will sail into the fabulous memory of all the men who come after us — and, O my dear! may the old little goddess of Fate, Atropos herself, see to it that I am with him in this venture!"

Nisos was again silent, holding her by her shoulders against that wall. And then suddenly, freeing herself from him and throwing his hands back, she held herself erect and closed her eyes.

"I think," she said, speaking clearly and very rapidly, "that it's his beard that puts her off. What I would do if I were you is to make someone you happen to know, someone who wouldn't suffer the punishment *you* would have to suffer for such a thing in case it turned out badly, cut off with a sharp sword, or a polished knife, or a pair of shears, this teasing and intrusive and conceited and aggressive beard of the old man! Yes, Nisos Naubolides, *that* is what you must do! I see the doing of it clearly in the curious darkness into which at this moment the mental effort of trying to do exactly what is required has thrown around me. The thing to do is to cut off his beard!

"But one thing I know. The moment that beard of his has been cut off Nausikaa will see him as she saw him at the very first, when, while she was playing ball with her companions, he came straight to her out of the sea. Yes, Nisos Naubolides, that is the only way this witch-woman from Thebes who is already succeeding in enlarging the gulf between these former lovers, can be defeated. I swear to you I am right. I see it as if it were being done at this very moment. The love-light will come into Nausikaa's eyes the second that beard is gone. No, it is not your king's age that keeps them apart, now that they are together again. *It is the beard.* And Okyrhöe knows it very well and plays upon it. I have been watching her. She doesn't come between them herself if she can help it. She is too wise for that. She leaves it to the beard."

It was at this point — and, whether she was one of Hector's many illegitimate daughters or not, she certainly had a particular kind of intense and absorbed gravity, especially when there was a frown between her eyebrows, which anyone who had ever seen Hector would have recognized as his — that she opened her eyes and laid her fingers upon the young man's sleeve.

"Have you anyone in your mind, Nisos Naubolides," she asked him, "who would be the best person of all persons to do this bold and dangerous thing, whether a man or a woman, whether old or young? I mean," she went on earnestly, after a pause to let a couple of Nausikaa's ship's officers pass down the passage, and Nisos couldn't help admiring the way she instinctively let her fingers slip from his sleeve to his hand and let her head droop towards her shoulder— "I mean the actual cutting it off?" And when she saw he hadn't missed her gesture as the men passed, "Lovers, not conspirators, eh?" she added.

"Well, my beautiful one," he said, while his mind rushed off to the dining-hall and to the animal-shaped chair in which he had left Zeuks, "I think I *do* know the right one for the handling of this little job. But don't you think we ought to have two strings to our bow in so ticklish a thing? Why don't you go down to the kitchen and drop a few tentative hints in our old lady's ear? She's hand and glove with Odysseus, who treats her as if she were his Grandmother. She knows his mind, I should say, better than anyone else on this earth; and we may be sure she has as little love for Okyrhöe as we have: though I admit it's possible she's less friendly to Nausikaa than we are! However — the immediate business for us is to outwit this bitch from Thebes.

"Besides I think we're agreed, my sweet Trojan, that it would be sheer madness in the old king not to snatch at the heavenly chance of a perfect ship and perfect sailors?"

Arsinöe smiled; and having exchanged a kiss that was at once so friendly and so free from passion that they might have been brother and sister, she went down to the kitchen, while he went up to the dining-hall. He found Odysseus still sipping his wine and still keeping up a curious kind of cerebral dalliance with both the women; while from one end of the table to the other end of the table the two oldest of the Phaiakian ship's officers argued pedantically, technically and very loudly upon certain nice and difficult problems connected with the art of navigation.

Nisos slipped as noiselessly and as respectfully as he could to Zeuks' grotesque chair, and kneeling down before it muttered what was really a sort of extempore prayer, graver than casual listeners might have supposed, to Zeuks and Zeuks' chair, as if they were one creature or one sacred Image. To emphasize and enhance this anthropomorphic and fetish-worshipping gesture, which was one part humorous, two parts entirely serious, and only one part theatrical, he pressed his elbows against the arms of the chair and clasped his fingers in supplication; and then, afraid lest his queer friend should think he was making fun of him, he twisted his head round, as if to make sure that his performance was not missed by those at the table.

Meanwhile, having made sure that Zeuks was not in a trance of any sort, but sufficiently attentive, he whispered to him a realistic and rather grossly-worded summary of his talk with Arsinöe, feeling all the while that what he was kneeling before was neither a chair nor a man but a multiformed malleable monster ready to embrace whatever creature sank into its lap with such a transfiguring power of metamorphosis that it and the creature received into it were transformed into a new and monstrous identity.

Zeuks made no comment upon his friend's whispered monologue murmur save a constant murmur of the same words: "Go on. I understand. Go on. I follow you. Go on, Nisos Naubolides."

This completely passive acceptance of our young friend's startling revelation of what might have been described as "the Plot of the King's Beard" reduced a little the enormity of the sacrilege involved. It was only after they had gone on like this for some time, Nisos explaining, predicting, conjecturing, anticipating, enlarging, revising, and Zeuks listening and indicating that he missed nothing of what he heard, that there was a quite unlooked-for if not especially momentous interruption to the wine-sipping at the high table.

No less a person than the midwife came up the steps from the corridor, holding by the hand her now pregnant sister.

"I have brought to you, O king," she hurriedly announced, offering one of the empty table-chairs to her companion who sank into it with a groan of ineffable relief, "our well-known family prophetess, because they told me that there has come to you from Thebes the daughter of the great prophet Teiresias; and I wanted my sister, who is in the state you now witness, to exchange a few thoughts with her."

Round went the fine cranium and bowsprit beard of the old king as he looked for Pontopereia at the spot where she had recently been; but it was from quite a different quarter that her clear and unperturbed voice reached them. Tired of watching the deep and subtle struggle between the two ladies, the clumsy little wide-eyed creature, whose intellectual grasp of the whole state of the world at that juncture reduced — and how little either of those clever ones knew it! — both Okyrhöe and Nausikaa to a pathetically ordinary level of active, lively, beautiful, ambitious, practical women whose response to life completely shut out all the more cosmic reactions of the human mind, had boldly climbed into the high recess of one of the windows.

Having persuaded, and not without rousing some rather pathetic erotic illusions in that official breast, the pompous Herald to help her with his powerful arms and shoulders, the girl had succeeded in scrambling up into what was one of the most elevated of all that spacious hall's high window-ledges. From this vantage-ground she could not only amuse herself by watching the tricks of Okyrhöe and the shrewd hit-backs of Nausikaa, but she could see between the stalks of the creepers the blackened square of ground which was all that was left of the old Dryad and her oak-tree, after Zeus' angry thunderbolt.

"Something decisive for good and something heavy with the opposite of good are both on the verge of happening." Thus did Pontopereia murmur to herself the prophetic inspiration which came to her straight from that blackened spot in the forest where the old Dryad had perished.

"Something decisive for good, though it is also heavy with the opposite of good, is on the verge of happening," and as Pontopereia tried in these crude words, which she repeated twice over to herself in silence, to express what a breath of wind was now uttering in her ears and uttering a good deal more often than twice, she was suddenly arrested and fascinated by something else. It was a peculiarity of hers to make much of all the chance-shapes and accidental formations that presented themselves whether out-of-doors or in-doors; and what she saw now struck her as a real omen. The Dryad's blackened square of earth, which one general darkness of night had already made part of itself was scrawled over by a thin streak of light from the aperture at which she herself crouched, a streak of light with which chance or destiny was now inscribing, according to the lettering of a language not wholly different from hers, the fitful outlines of a disturbing "N"! Did this "N", the girl wondered, refer to Nisos or to Nausikaa, or possibly even to Nosodea the mother of Leipephile?

"It is in accordance with the ancient custom of our Grecian islands," the Midwife was now saying — indeed she had been uttering sentence after sentence ever since she first appeared but in such a loud, pontifical, assured, self-confident voice, that it was as if she were addressing a crowd of people outside who had no connection with Odysseus or with these two women or with Zeuks or with Nisos.

Odysseus, who had not taken the faintest notice of what the midwife was saying, now suddenly addressed the pregnant woman herself. "Your pains have not begun yet, have they, my dear?" The question was a foolish one and an extremely masculine one; for it was obvious that the pregnant woman's sister whose profession it was to deal with such cases would not have left her quite unassisted while she harangued the world; but there was clearly something about the exhausted creature that appealed to the old king.

Nausikaa rose from her seat. "Where's that old nurse of yours," she enquired; "the one you introduced me to a while ago? Hasn't she got a room in the palace where a poor woman like this can rest in peace and wait her hour?"

Odysseus put down his wine-glass and looked round the room. “Nisos!” he cried. “Please go down to the kitchen and bring Eurycleia up here. I want to talk to her.”

Nisos leaned forward and whispered to the occupant of that grotesque chair, while the chair itself, as he did so, seemed to be perceptibly projecting its roots into the floor and its stag-like horns towards the roof.

“Shall I do what he says?” he whispered to Zeuks, “or shall I pretend not to hear him?”

It was Zeuks himself, however, who at that moment pretended not to hear Nisos; for in his own mind Zeuks was thinking, “Why is it that it gives me no great thrill to know I am the son of Arcadian Pan? Is it because it doesn’t make me immortal and independent of death? In such great matters we men are like animals and do not understand what is going on. If it did make me independent of death it would still be impossible for me to *feel* independent of it. And what benefit do I get from being the son of a god, I should like to know, when I *feel* exactly like everybody else?”

These thoughts so dominated Zeuks that they gave him the sensation that he was lost in them and that his personality had disappeared and that it was the chair he sat in that thought these thoughts and that he was merely the name for the language the chair used. The chair, in fact, thought *in Zeuks* instead of *in Greek*!

It was indeed the fact that Nisos had actually knelt down with both his elbows propped on the arms of this singular chair where tree-root-legs and hooded covering of stag-horn seemed so much more alive than the man who was sitting in it, that rendered both himself and Zeuks so lost to all that was going on that it wasn’t until quite a crowd of Nisos’ relations were standing round them, nor until the Midwife herself had commenced a formal supplication imploring the goddess Athene to return to them in Ithaca that the spell was broken.

Roused at length from his trance Nisos was amazed to see quite close to him not only Nosodea, the mother of Leipephile, but Leipephile's elder sister Spartika, the priestess of Athene, as well as the old man Damnos Geraios. His amazement indeed had hardly reached its peak when lo! standing alone behind the lot of them, but with the half-protective, half-mocking gaze he knew so fatally well fixed steadily upon himself he saw his own mother!

Pandea looked just as calm, just as confident and self contained and just as serenely poised, as if she had been in her own house. That she was in the presence of the king did not apparently disturb her; nor, though her shrewd gaze was fixed on her son, did she seem at all concerned when without taking the least notice of any of the new-comers Odysseus repeated his command that the young man should hasten to the kitchen and fetch Eurycleia.

When at length Nisos did remove his elbows and release his fingers from the clasp of entranced prayer, and stiffly and painfully lifted, as if his limbs had been in peril of growing as inanimate as the wood-work above them, first one knee and then the other from the floor, he found that the wave-length of excitement was still concentrated on the almost stellar arena where the old warrior's beard with Zodiacal precision was pointed first towards Okyrhöe and then towards Nausikaa.

It certainly was not pointing towards Zeuks or towards this enigmatic chair; though the words by which Nisos had been ordered to fetch Eurycleia were still echoing in the boy's head. No; that bowsprit beard had turned away from them all and was now quivering like a moonlit spear-head over broken water towards the towering figure of the white-robed Spartika.

"Has the old man forgotten," Nisos thought, "that he has told me to fetch Eurycleia; or is he getting blind and doesn't see me at all and fancies that I've already gone down there? Or do the wisest old men, even when they're as wily as he is, when between two ladies like those two and a jug of wine such as he's got there, grow queer in the head? O gods above and gods below!" the boy's thoughts ran on as he pretended to be too absorbed in the condition of his friend Zeuks to make any response either to his mother's questioning concern or to the echo in his ears of the king's unobeyed command, "What on earth", he wondered, turning his gaze with such a rapid jerk that he made it impossible to meet his mother's eye, "What on earth is Spartika up to?"

It was evident to everyone there, except perhaps to Zeuks, who had fallen into one of his deepest gulfs of egoistic self-questioning, that the king was amazed by this apparition of Spartika in her white robes, chanting rather than repeating her religious message to them all.

Nisos had acquired the habit, shared by most of his friends and relations, of thinking nothing of Spartika. To disparage her religion, to question her devotion, to minimize her gifts, to underrate her sincerity, to make sport of the grave intensity she always put into her worship of Athene had been the general custom ever since this girl grew up, among everybody who knew her.

It is indeed one of life's mysteries how this can happen with certain particular young people; and it happens to young men as often as it does to young women. The Goddess herself, however, had encouraged this young priestess of hers from the very start; and it had in recent years become a familiar joke in the Temple that if you wanted to catch a glimpse of the Goddess of Wisdom you would have to cast yourself down in front of the small side-chapel altar which it was Spartika’s duty to decorate with fresh flowers.

If on the contrary you wanted to avoid any risk of encountering the formidable Goddess the thing to do was to say your prayers at her High Altar on the day when the Priest of the Mysteries of Eros and Dionysos was paying his perfunctory and conventional visit to the centre of the island’s traditional worship.

As Nisos turned at this moment towards Spartika, praying that his mother wouldn’t see through his pretence that he hadn’t seen her, and that Odysseus wouldn’t see through his pretence that he hadn’t heard his command, he was relieved of one of his nervous fears by noticing that the pregnant fugitive from Italy had gone to sleep in the chair wherein her sister had ensconced her and that, though the poor lady’s snores made old Damnos Geraios grin like a water-sprite, nobody else appeared to bother about her at all. Her midwife-sister was apparently absorbed in listening to Spartika’s speech; but whenever the impassioned priestess paused to take breath the midwife would interpolate some high-pitched moralizing of her own. Nisos however found himself in a very short time heartily wishing that the midwife would hold her tongue; for it began to strike him more and more strongly that Spartika had been grossly underrated.

“O Great Goddess of Wisdom,” prayed the white-robed figure, “send to thy faithful and devoted worshippers the power to hold fast amid all troubles and tribulations and against all enemies and traitors, and against all chances and accidents, and against all famines and pestilences and elemental disasters, that imperishable gift of pure reason which alone can assauge and mitigate and allay all the ills that our human mortality brings with it! Return, return, O greatest of all Goddesses, thou who wast born of the divine head of the son of Kronos, thou who hast merely to shake the tassels of thy glorious, equitable, thrice-holy Aegis, and all the howling, ravening, raving, blood-drinking, bone-cracking, flesh-devouring minions of mischief who serve the bigots, the dogmatists, the maniacs, the fanatics, the inquisitors who dominate this maddest of all possible worlds are scouted and routed into headlong flight!

“Here in this ancient hall while our world-famous king is entertaining two beautiful princesses and while Pontopereia the daughter of Teiresias — yes, my sweet child, I see that you’re listening to me from your perch like a sea-swallow blown inland before its time in that high window seat! — here, I say, in this old hall, while our king is entertaining his beautiful visitors, have you, his faithful people, forgotten — hast thou our wily sovereign thyself forgotten — the noble, the heroic, the pure, the devoted, the religious-hearted Telemachos, son of Odysseus, son of Laertes.

“What, I ask you, is wrong with all you people, that you are dividing yourselves now into these accurst divisions, some of you wanting Odysseus to rot like a wounded stag till he lies dead in his bed and makes way for Krateros Naubolides, or for Agelaos, son of Krateros Naubolides, the betrothed of my own sister Leipephile, and some wanting him to catch the ears of the whole world with his voyage across the drowned Atlantis to unknown shores beyond the Ultimate Horizons, but none of you, no! not even thou thyself, O King! thou infinitely heroic and infinitely wise lord of adventure by land and sea! — have even so much as considered the claim of this noble, this calm, this beautiful, this dignified, this profoundly intellectual, this spiritual-soul’d, pure-minded only son of Odysseus and Penelope!

“Why, I ask you, my friends, why, I ask you, my sisters and parents and neighbours, why, I ask you, my wily, secretive, many-natured, much-experienced, much-enduring, invincible Odysseus, have you narrowed down this ridiculous dispute to whether an old man is to risk mixing his bones with the bones of the lost populations of drowned Atlantis or is to be allowed to walk in the forests in sunshine and moonlight to listen to the winds and the waves, to survey the motions of the stars and risings and settings of the sun and the moon until he is buried by the side of his faithful wife, when all the while, only a few leagues away, there abides in the deep contemplation of the secret wisdom of the Great Goddess whose shining temple we have among us, the only son of this heroic king and his noble wife?

"I know well that Telemachos seeks no kingship and no kingdom. I know well that Telemachos has his courts and his palaces, his lands and his waters, his armies and his fleets in the high invisible world of the ancient philosophers and thinkers of the human race. I know very well that all you servants of our old heroic king, and thou O King thyself, I know would be with thy servants in this, would have difficulty in persuading Telemachos to add to the intellectual labours of his philosophical life by undertaking the more active and practical burdens of kingship.

"I know very well too that he has great respect for my sister's betrothed suitor, Agelaos Naubolides. But he is a much older man than my sister's Agelaos and if our old and much-enduring adventurer — I speak with all respect, most noble king! — were never to return from this incredible voyage upon which he has fixed his heart, his soul and his unusual brain — according to the natural ways of life it seems quite likely that my young friend Agelaos would not have to wait so very long for his turn at the game of Kingship. Therefore let us all, let every one of us, I say, be prepared for the future in the strength of our great Goddess Athene!"

Here the tall girl bent her head, smiled at her mother, Nosodea, who was taking the whole thing with the utmost matter-of-fact placidity and had just moved to the side of the pregnant woman who was now awake again, and quietly accepted the chair which the declamatory Midwife, talking quite hilariously now, dragged to her side.

And then, to Nisos' relief, Odysseus, who himself had risen from his seat and moved up close to the pregnant woman's side, once more requested him, but quite gently and apparently taking for granted that his earlier orders had been unheard, to hasten at once to the kitchen and fetch Eurycleia.

"And tell her, my boy," the old king added, "that I'd be glad if she could make up a bed for this woman so that her child can be born, even if the birth is delayed for a day or two, somewhere within these walls."

Lifting his head and straightening his shoulders while he whispered a hasty assurance to Zeuks that he'd be back in a pulse-beat, Nisos was just starting on this quest when Odysseus made a sign that he would like a private word with him before he left the hall. When he obeyed this sign and was standing so close to the old man that he could smell the wine he'd been drinking and even feel his own chin tickled by the foremost hairs of that still undaunted and still defiant beard, the old man took advantage of the Midwife's formidable back being momentarily bent over her sister to whisper to his young emissary that it was extremely likely that the father of this expected infant was none other than that king of the Latins whose defeat by Aeneas and his Trojan followers had, it seemed, led to the founding in Italy of a New Troy upon a group of Seven Hills, not without the aid of the most famous of all cave-nymphs and not without the help of human infants nourished by the dugs of wolves!

"So you can tell our nurse, my boy, if you find her in a difficult mood, that this baby, if a bed is made for its mother here, may turn out to be the heir to all the riches of the Italian Peninsula!" It was at that moment that

Nisos became aware that his own mother, Pandea, was cautiously, slowly, obstinately, threading her way towards him, for, drawn as women always are, by the twin-shadows of birth and death, the wife of the rival claimant to their island-throne had naturally an extra magnet tugging at her bosom in addition to the loadstone weighted by both birth and death.

But so quickly had it got about among the neighbours that the most romantic as well as the most human of all the old king's adventurous lady-loves had suddenly arrived along with Ajax, son of Telamon, regarded by all the world as dead, that popular curiosity, most of all in the women, had already crowded the corridor and the steps with people and was now filling the dining-hall.

Pandea had always been one of the most neighbourly and gossip-loving of ladies and this made her present passage through the crowd to reach her son Nisos by no means rapid. She was in fact caught by the belt and by the folds of her gown at every step.

At any moment now Nisos could have hurried off, thus obeying the king, escaping from his mother, and precluding any untimely labour-pains for the woman here; but he suddenly felt himself powerfully seized by the left wrist. It was Odysseus. "Where," cried the old man in a husky, agitated voice, "where, in the name of all the gods, is Ajax?"

All Nisos could do in reply to this, for in his intense desire to outwit Okyrhöe, and in his new and sudden alliance with Arsinöe, he had forgotten Ajax altogether, was to blurt out all he knew.

"Zeuks told me just now," he cried, "that he had found him dead and had buried him with his own hands." The one word "*Where?*", which the old king uttered on hearing this in a very curious tone, left a queer and complicated impression on the mind and nerves of Nisos. The boy could see that to the old man at this moment the idea of being confronted once again by his ancient comrade in arms of those long years of the Trojan War had touched something in his soul that was deeper and more essential and more important to him than all his romantic feeling for Nausikaa and all his libidinous feeling, or emotional feeling, or companionable intellectual feeling, for Okyrhöe.

The figure of Ajax, as the old man recalled it now, acted like a magic talisman upon him, restoring to him a whole existence of thoughts and sensations, of undertones and overtones of feeling, of desperations and ecstasies, so utterly remote from all he was experiencing at this moment that to plunge into them, and swim about in them, and inhale great draughts of their encircling atmosphere, was a startling shock.

Odysseus was indeed so affected by this sudden mental vision of Ajax that the one single view of himself and his whole life that he could endure, and that struck him as ground firm enough to fall back upon at a crisis, was the view of himself that accompanied his present resolution to sail across the ocean that had drowned Atlantis. This intention, this purpose did alone, the old man felt at that moment, justify his existence as nothing had done since in rivalry with the rest of the Greek leaders he entered Ilium in the Wooden Horse.

Escaping from his king therefore, with almost as much relief as he escaped from his mother, for he felt a sudden longing to be plotting and planning with Arsinöe again, Nisos pushed his way hurriedly through the crowd and was soon pleading passionately and eagerly the cause of the unborn babe, who might turn out to be the inheritor of the longest-descended racial tradition in Italy. “Well, if he’s set his heart on it,” the old lady finally conceded, “there’s nothing to be gained by thwarting his wishes. O you men! you men! He has no notion, nor, I expect, have you, closer though you are than he is to the womb out of which you all come, how near to her pains this woman is, but if — —”

Nisos interrupted her. “It was her sister, the midwife, Granny dear, who brought her to Odysseus, not I. I can’t remember ever seeing her. But I daresay I may have seen her when I was little, and before she went to Italy. She lived with the Nymph in the Cave, Granny. You know about that Nymph in the Cave in Italy, don’t you?”

But the old lady’s contradictory mood wasn’t soothed away by this. “I’ve known too many caves and too many Nymphs already!” she cried. “You and your Nymphs! What I would like to see, Nisos Naubolides, would be no more nymphs and no more caves but a well-built Palace in a well-built City with a well-trained army to protect it from pirates and murderers and thieves, and with well-trained servants to send on the King’s business, without having to have recourse to —— But what am I doing, chattering here with a baby like you when an old woman’s proper work’s up yonder? Here! give me my cloak, girl; and you were best come with me too, foreigner though you be, for us can never tell with these cave-nymphs! This wench may be dropping a monster with horns and tail before we’ve got her to bed!”

As may be conjectured these words were addressed to the alert Arsinöe, who with a quick glance at Nisos helped the old woman into the garment she required and assisted her up the passage to the hall. Before he followed them thither, however, our young friend couldn’t resist a word with his old comrade Tis whom he found naked to the waist working furiously between oven and wash-trough on his left and red ashes under a great cauldron on his right.

Dragging about with them across the floor their own foreign blankets, which they had brought up from the ship lest they should be stolen, were half-a-dozen sailors who had been so freely and hilariously partaking of the old nurse's hospitality that, now the feast was over, they found it hard to keep awake.

Nisos persuaded Tis to put on his tunic again and leave his wash-tub. Then in a voice too low for those of the foreigners who were not asleep to catch his words he tried to make clear to his friend the pressing necessity for cutting off the beard of Odysseus so that Nausikaa should see him as he was when she first set eyes on him. To his surprise he found that this daring stroke met with obstinate and determined resistance from Tis.

"I don't like it: I don't like it: I don't like it," he kept repeating. "It's an insult to the old man — an insult that I'd never consent to see practised on my old grand-dad Moros, an insult that you'll never persuade me to help you to carry through."

"But don't you see, old friend," pleaded Nisos, considerably disturbed by this unexpected opposition, "don't you see it's essential that Princess Nausikaa should recognize in our king the man she loved the moment she saw him coming out of the sea?"

But Tis shook his head. "You young folk always exaggerate and overrate the effect of any mortal thing that strikes you as romantic. How do you know that cutting off our king's beard will make him look young again? There are other signs of old age than the greyness or the whiteness of our hair. Odysseus had nothing like those deep lines at the side of his mouth, for instance, or those other lines, deeper still, in the centre of his forehead when he first met his princess. No, no! You know very well he hadn't! He couldn't have had.

"No, you're making a great mistake if you think our old hero's beard has anything to do with it! In fact, if anybody tried to meddle with our king's beard when his servant Tis was around that person had better take care! It wouldn’t be that man’s beard that would come off. It would be his head!”

“But don’t you see, Tis, old friend, it will only be in the interest of our king, and for the sake of the happiness of our king, and in order that our king may have all the honour and glory he wants, that his beard will be cut off. Better lose a beard, than a kingdom! Better lose a beard than the enchanting Love of your proud youth! O Tis, Tis, don’t be an obstinate Tis, a reactionary Tis, an antiquarian Tis! The world has to move on. Life has to move on. Customs have to change. Habits have to change. There was a time for beards. That time is past. Beards have to be — —”

But Nisos stopped suddenly. He was shocked at the expression he saw on Tis’s face. He felt in the marrow of his bones a lively shudder of fear. “Then it is really and truly possible,” he told himself, “for old Tis to give me such a clap across the ear-hole that my head will roll from my neck and go bouncing into — —”

But his thoughts were interrupted, and Tis’s attention was turned by a sudden loud uproar which descended the passage from the hall above; and they both became aware of shrill cries and resounding tramplings and even of the sound of bronze striking against bronze and iron striking against iron.

The foreign sailors leapt to their feet and drew from their belts their double-edged knives; while Nisos couldn’t help noticing, even in the distraction of that uproar, how carefully these men folded up the blankets on which they’d been lying and tucked them under their arms.

Both Tis and he were out of the kitchen and up the passage and forcing their way into the hall before either of them had time even to imagine what had happened. But it was soon plain enough to them both. There, confronting the king who was leaning forward across the back of the throne on which he had been seated, was Nisos’ brother Agelaos, the eldest son of

Krateros and Pandea, and close to him was none other than Leipephile the young man’s betrothed, while, facing the pair of them, on one side of Odysseus was Nausikaa and on the other were Okyrhöe and Pontopereia.

The uproar that had reached the kitchen came from two opposing groups of angry armed men, one of whom was shouting abuse of the House of Odysseus and the other abuse of the House of Naubolides. Matters might have got worse at any minute and serious blood-shed might doubtless have ensued, if an event had not occurred so unexpected by both parties that they turned, as if by mutual consent, from their furious confrontation of each other; and both sides gazed with awe-struck amazement at what they saw.

And what they saw was indeed a sufficient wonder to quell the wildest altercation. Walking quite gently, slowly, carefully and quietly, his wounded wing evidently grown again, and its roots completely healed, while the long feathery tips of both wings were folded against the animal’s sides like those of a colossal moth, there came up through the crowd, from the corridor of the pillars, the winged horse Pegasos. On his back, seated there with the utmost ease, and evidently in a mood of radiant high spirits, was the young girl Eione, Tis’s little sister, who the moment she caught sight of her brother by the side of Nisos kissed one of her hands to them both while with the other she waved in the air an extraordinary-looking object which she was clasping in triumph.

Pegasos bore her straight up to the old king, the two contending groups of people automatically separating to let them pass. When they reached the throne, across the back of which Odysseus, with great practical shrewdness, was already leaning forward above its empty seat, his body wedged between the chair’s back, across which he leaned, and the massive table which protected his rear, Pegasos stopped, and lowering his head, consented to enjoy the natural equine satisfaction of munching a couple of large lettuce-leaves which the old King lost no time in snatching from the table behind him and placing on the seat of the throne for the god-like creature's special delectation.

At that moment all the uproar ceased and so eager and anxious were both parties to catch every word of the dialogue between Eione and the king that in the silence which fell upon the whole company the sound of Pegasos munching the lettuce-leaves was audible from the door of the steps to the corridor to the door of the passage to the kitchen.

But everybody in the place was soon conscious of an absolutely different sound, a sound that closely accompanied the winged horse's munching of lettuce-leaves. This came from the mysterious object which Eione was now showing to Odysseus across the horse's bowed head. It was a sound like the sound of the wind. And the sound in this object was not limited to the sound of the North Wind or of the South Wind or of the East Wind or the West Wind. It was just the wind. It was all the winds together. And it was so powerful that it made many people at the back of the hall, who were unable to see that the sound was caused by what the girl was showing to the king, look up at the windows beneath the roof at one of which Pontopereia had been recently sitting and through which they supposed this wild rush of wind must be entering the hall.

The real power of it could only have been appreciated at that moment however by some observer who could read human thoughts; for this roaring, sighing, crying, wailing, laughing, lamenting, groaning, shrieking sound was so startlingly an embodiment of the real wind that it produced upon those who were nearest to the object out of which it came the identical effect that the hearing of such a wind, had it been real, would naturally have evoked. It made Odysseus feel more strongly than he had ever felt before his absolute determination to sail over the waters into which Atlantis had gone down. It carried Nausikaa back to her girlhood upon an irresistible rush of the wings of memory.

She had a hundred times recalled that day when she and her playmates were disporting themselves at their game of ball, in relaxation from washing their clothes, when the godlike stranger suddenly appeared among them and clasped her knees in a passionate appeal for help. O how well she remembered how he had followed up the impression he made upon her by uttering the hope that when she met her true mate, he and she together would soon find out how such a true union between lovers could be lucky to their friends and unlucky to their foes; and how they themselves would alone know what it really meant.

It brought to Pontopereia the feeling that she was gloriously giving herself up to a thrilling and convincing rush of prophetic inspiration. It raced through the mind of Nisos with the impossible romantic wish that somehow, somewhere, he would be triumphantly justified in possessing both Eione and Pontopereia as his Loves!

To Okyrhöe this sound of the wind, issuing forth from Eione's gift to Odysseus, brought a sense of deep, abysmal, desolate loneliness. She found herself identifying her own inmost being with this mysterious wind that had suddenly appeared, only the river Styx knew from whence, and which was associated with this ghostly "Arima" that sooner or later she would have to face if she remained with Odysseus.

While the wind of day and the wind of night were thus working upon various living creatures in various different ways, Eione was explaining in meticulous detail precisely how this extraordinary instrument worked; how it could be stopped, how intensified, how diminished, how directed, how reduced, and how expanded at the will of the wearer. Thus there was no special start or spasm of astonishment in that dining-hall when finally, just before Pegasos had lifted his head from the last lettuce-stalk left on the seat of the throne, Odysseus took the thing from the girl’s hands and raising it carefully in both his own fixed it on his head.

Once on his head, though it had a certain vague resemblance to a brazen helmet from which hung long twisting snakes, it looked much more like a complicated, convoluted sea-shell, a sea-shell that might have been worn by the sea-god Triton, or even by some greater deity of the salt deep. After a few more less solemn directions from Eione as to its use, the old king removed it from his head and half-turning round placed it beside his wine-cup on the table. He then, in the face of the whole company, gratefully, respectfully, and devotedly kissed both Eione’s hands, caressed the head of Pegasos, and instructed Tis, who was staring awestruck at his sister, to take the bridle of the winged horse and lead him, if his girl-rider saw fit, to a more restful feast in the royal stable adjoining the cow-stall of Babba.

When Tis had led away his sister and Pegasos the old king summoned Nisos, who had engaged Pontopereia in a whispered conversation behind the backs of Nausikaa and Okyrhöe, and told him to fetch Zeuks. This command he had no difficulty in obeying, for the son of Arcadian Pan had fallen into such a deep sleep in that queer-backed and queer-legged chair that it was easier to get him awake and to escort him, a bit dazed but no longer muttering in his sleep about “Ajax and the Lightning”, to where the king and his two ladies were once more seated at the table with their heads close together, than it would have been to explain to him all that had happened since he had fallen asleep.

But if it had been difficult to arouse the great-grandson of “still youthful Maia” from his trance in a chair that had both roots and horns, Odysseus did not seem to have the least difficulty in seating him on the throne now calmly and resolutely vacated.

“Fetch me, child,” he said to Nisos, laying a caressing hand on the boy’s head and drawing up for himself, to the acute vexation of Okyrhöe, an empty chair to the side of Nausikaa, “my club of Herakles, the weapon called ‘Dokeesis,’ from the entrance porch.”

There wasn’t a person in that hall that night who didn’t hear these momentous words; nor was there one who didn’t catch their significance. This was in fact a declaration that, armed as he would be when Nisos brought “Dokeesis”, and possessed as he now was of the Helmet of the Winds, the oldest and weakest and frailest, but far, O far the wisest, of the Fates, Atropos herself, the great-aunt of all the heavenly powers, had decided in an uncontroverted decree that, whatever the issue, Odysseus, King of Ithaca, was to sail over the towers of Lost Atlantis before he perished after the manner of men.

So intense had been the fascination and expectation throughout that great hall that when Nisos in a shorter time than seemed possible returned with the Club of Herakles and placed it in Odysseus’ hands there occurred once more that curious kind of hush that is in truth when it falls upon any mixed crowd of men and women the most mysterious force for the working of miracles that exists in this solar dimension of the multiverse.

“Listen, wise Fly,” murmured the Moth, as they peered together out of the life-crack of their wheel-less conveyance, “I think the Sixth Pillar is talking to our All-in-All.”

The Fly did listen: and it heard the Pillar tell the club that Poseidon and Aidoneus had decided to break the covenant they once made with Zeus over Atlantis when they allowed him to drown it under the western ocean as a punishment for its refusal to believe he existed. They promised him they would let it stay drowned and that no man should ever cross the place of its drowning. This solemn covenant they have now decided to tear to shreds; and, if it comes to a fight, they say that Two are stronger than One.

“I am wondering,” murmured the Moth, “whether it isn’t my duty to leave you tonight and fly at my best speed to the Priest of Eros, lest, my duty neglected, some world-disaster may overtake us.”

“If you feel like that, you’d better go to him,” hissed the Fly, in jealous rage. “And leave you alone in here?” “Where I am,” replied the Fly in his metaphysical pride, “there is always Eternity.”

The moth groaned. “I must, but O! it’s so hard, learn to love Eternity;” and she stroked with her left antenna one of the fly’s wings.

But the fly said to himself. “What shall I do if the King takes us down into Atlantis itself? There must be millions of dead flies down there.”

Meanwhile Nisos was walking round and round the great table thinking out very carefully just what he would say to Eione to persuade her to go with them. In his heart he was so indescribably relieved at the disappearance not only of his own relations, such as his brother and his brother’s betrothed, together with Pandea, his mother, and Nosodea, along with Spartika and the midwife, but of almost all the disputants and contenders of the general public of Ithaca, that he could only listen with amused and sympathetic satisfaction while the King explained to Zeuks that he had decided to put him into full, absolute, and complete charge of the Palace, the Temple, the chief Harbour, the lesser harbours, and all the caves, shrines, sanctuaries, and sacred places of the Island of Ithaca to guard, to hold and to sustain intact, until he, its only lawful sovereign and ruler, should return from his Voyage across the drowned Atlantis; “and take from you again the rights and privileges he now makes over to you and leaves unchallenged in your possession”.

At this point Odysseus laid his hand upon the strange object brought to him by Eione. “The Princess Nausikaa, here present,” he went on, “has consented to accept my company and that of my armour-bearer and Hetairos, Nisos Naubolides, together with my friend Okyrhöe the Theban and together with Pontopereia the daughter of Teiresias. At the moment I cannot tell you whether Eione, the sister of my Herdsman Tis, will also come with us; but I have the Princess’s permission to invite her to do so, and my impression is she *will* do so. Just as I make thee, Zeuks, my vice-regent and sole representative among men, so, among women I leave my old Nurse Eurycleia in absolute and unchallenged control. I must add that there has just come into my possession the Helmet of Proteus, wearing which it will be possible for me to visit drowned Atlantis beneath the very waters that drowned her.”

It was then that Nausikaa rose to her feet and said: “What my Lord Odysseus has told you is the truth.”

CHAPTER X

"WELL," SAID NISOS to Akron, the Master of the ship "Teras", "she's got through *that* anyway!"

"O she's a sly old bird, our good black ship, when matters get really serious," replied Akron, "and there's another thing about her which I wonder if you've noticed; I mean about her motion?"

"I *may* have noticed it and again I may not. Different eyes notice different things."

"They sure do; and they are also blind to different things. I was blind myself just now when the Pillars of Herakles vanished over the Eastern Horizon."

"Why, so they have! And I'd been watching so steadily to see them go! It's no use. You'll never make a sailor of me."

"I used to say that very thing once myself! But it passes, Nisos, it passes!"

Nisos looked at him gravely. "I take it you don't feel the slightest sensation of nervousness, or strangeness, not to speak of simple terror, when from this old black ship of yours you can see no sign or hint or trace of land? Don't you feel *any* fear, master, when with nothing between you and this black abyss but a few scrabbled bits of wood, if you don't mind my saying so, and a few shaky planks blown by the wind and tossed on the wave, you give yourself up to whatever fate awaits you?"

"Well, I wouldn't deny, my dear lad," replied Akron, the ship's master, "that sometimes, now and then, *I have that feeling,* just as we all have when a spear or an arrow comes too close to our head! I get it, for instance, when

I see the spouting of a whale, or catch sight of one of those great sharks, or one of those terrifying Hekatoncheiroi, such as Briareos must have looked when he smuggled down in the throne of the heavenly father and spread out on all sides his appalling suckers, each one of which would be capable of squeezing to death a man like you or me.

"But I really think I've got over those first sensations of what you might call pure elemental panic. I think I've come to be more or less reconciled to there being, as you say, Nisos, so much water under us and so much air above us! But such a lot of water and such an immensity of empty air does make a person feel small."

"I don't think," Nisos went on in a meditative tone, "that its exactly the mass of water, or the infinity of air, that makes us feel small. I think it is the ceasing of accustomed labour and the idleness that leaves the mind free to follow its fancies."

The ship's master watched his young passenger with a shrewd eye as he talked in this way. He thought Nisos was trying to make him believe that he was analysing his feelings with the utmost calm, like an experienced traveller recording his reactions when the most dangerous and agitating moments of what he was going through had arrived and passed.

"The kid would like me to think," he told himself, "that he accepts these monstrous enormities of air and water without one single natural shiver."

Their ship was named the "Teras" or the "Prodigy" and its master with whom Nisos had already made friends was a man called Akron who came from Lilaia, a town in Phokis, and was of a reserved and reticent but of a decidedly philosophical turn of mind. Akron came, like Tis, of farming stock, and although his father had kept an Inn in the main street of Lilaia, he had a great-uncle, of about the same age as old Moros, who continued running the family farm.

The second officer, whose name was Thon, had quite a different temperament from Akron and a very different bringing-up. He came of an old military family in Phrygia with a long and turbulent history. The “Teras” had two decks below the top one on which Nisos was standing as he talked with Akron. It was from the upper one of these that the four long oars projected that kept the “Teras” moving when the wind failed.

The mast was fixed in the keel of the vessel and reached up through both the two lower decks to where, on the top-deck, quite close to the spot on which our friend was now talking with Akron, the huge sail, made of the same sort of cloth that Odysseus had tried so desperately to obtain in Ithaca, was now carrying the “Teras” over the waves in a style that must have delighted every true sailor’s heart on board.

The way the vessel was behaving at this moment in a wind almost straight from the South-East, was certainly especially pleasing to the two men who just then were supervising the “protonoi” or “forestays”, the “kaloi” or “halliards”, and the “huperoi” or “braces”. These men were a pair of brothers, whose names, Pontos and Proros, were enough in themselves to suggest seafaring ability, but whose home-harbour, Skandeia in Kythera, was known over all Hellas to breed the best deck-hands in the world.

As he listened attentively and politely, though it must be confessed just a little cynically, to our friend Nisos’ rather prolonged but eloquent discourse on what particular feelings, whether enjoyable or the reverse, were aroused in him by air and water, Akron remained, according to the custom then prevalent in that best of all sea-going Hellenic circles, quietly, though not unsympathetically, detached from the chatter that was proceeding so happily between Pontos and Proros.

Both the brothers from Kythera were small in regard to their bodily form but they were smaller still in regard to the size of their skulls. Indeed so diminutive were these Kytharean craniums that the most studious and experienced of phrenologists would have been puzzled to say where there was room for any sort of bump of worship or for any sort of bump of mathematics or for any sort of bump of metaphysics in these quaint little rondures that resembled a couple of oak-apples as they kept bobbing up and down, rallying each other and making sport of the entire universe.

The oarsmen in the second deck, above sea-level, were not at that moment using their long, thick, heavy oars, which were the largest oars to be seen at that epoch in any harbour in the world, but had pulled them out of the water and were holding them across their knees while they themselves leant back in their seats, talking, or throwing "astragaloi", the special kind of dice that sailors preferred, or just settling themselves to sleep. There were four of these oarsmen, a couple for each side of the "Teras" as she breasted the waves, Klytos and Teknon on her starboard side, and Euros and Halios on her port side.

All these four men came from the immediate vicinity of the palace of Nausikaa's parents and their families were personally well-known to her. It was down on the third deck that the passengers' cabins were situated; and the present possessors of these cabins had to be selected without any exhausting consideration of personal feelings. One of them for instance was shared between Nausikaa and Okyrhöe; and another between Pontopereia and Eione; while a third was given up entirely to Odysseus.

The most striking thing about the "Teras" however was not the number of her decks nor the number of her cabins. It was her Figure-Head. If the beard of Odysseus, which already had played its part in one of the queerest palace-plots ever revealed by a chronicler, bore, as has already been noted, a strong resemblance to a ship's bowsprit, the real bowsprit of the "Teras', had no sooner entered the harbours of the world than it was recognized as the most striking of all figure-heads known to civilization. It represented a unique creature whose form and shape had been invented by the Ruler of Lost Atlantis who had concluded the work by placing on the creature's scaly neck his or her own head with all its striking features.

The name of this Ruler was unknown and the peculiarity of its unusual head was that it was hard to imagine it as the head of any mortal or immortal man, and still harder to accept it as the head of a god or head of the horribly scaly neck to which it was and is attached. This mysterious Being, whose extraordinary features were not those of a man or a god or a beast or a monster, was the author of a long poem about the beginning and the end of everything, a poem which still remains the greatest oracle of man's destiny existing upon the earth.

The unfortunate thing about this tremendous hieroglyph is that by reason of the drowning of the continent that produced it, and by reason of its being chained with golden chains to the altar of the Hundred and Twenty-Five Gods of that sunken continent, only those who were permitted to read it before the waves covered the altar to which it was bound know anything of its secret; and among these only the Seven Wise Men of Italy have so much as begun to penetrate its contents; and these have only revealed the fact that it is landscape superimposed upon landscape rather than rhythm upon rhythm that is the method of its message.

Since, however, when any of these Seven Wise Men perish the remaining ones appoint successors there is still a hope that in spite of the punishment inflicted by Zeus, the wisdom of Atlantis-will never be entirely lost.

While Nisos was struggling to be as prophetic as he could in his talk to the Master of the "Teras", Pontopereia, the daughter of a prophet, was doing the same sort of thing, only with more subtlety, in regard to Eione, as the two girls sipped the well-made red wine, mixed with plenty of pure spring-water, with which Nausikaa's stores provided them, not to mention nibbling a few particularly well-spiced biscuits from Arabia, a taste for which the princess inherited from her mother.

"Oh don't say *that,* darling Eione! I know so well the feeling you have that drives you to say it; but we women really must learn to slip under or slip over these crude urges of Nature that lift us off our feet and force us to utter things like that! The great thing is, I know I'm right in *that* anyway, the great thing is always to have *two* lives going; one of them the life we share with our friends, and the other the life we enjoy with our own mind and with our own senses.

"To keep this secret second life going, even while we are living the other to the full, is the supreme trick of existence for girls such as you and I."

Eione lifted up her shapely legs from the couch where hitherto the two girls had been lying face to face, each pair of bare feet resting motionless against the neck of the owner of the other pair. But the easy nonchalance of that chaste yet familiar position was completely broken up by this provocative movement on the part of Tis's sister. Their position blotted out from the daughter of Teiresias all view of her companion's face. All she could see of her now was a couple of white shins and the extremely intimate shadows and outlines between them.

"When you talk of the life we 'share with our friends'," enquired a girlish voice from behind these uplifted knees, "do you mean our lovers?"

"Certainly I do," replied Pontopereia almost sharply, "if we have such idiots; but what was in my mind was nothing as sexual as that."

"Would you advocate living this double life even after marriage?"

"Most certainly I would! Don't you see, my sweet, it is only after the actual moment of union has been consummated by the loss of our virginity that men, and women, can make love, as people call it, on equal terms. But does the ecstasy of such embraces so absorb us both as to completely blot out and obliterate our separate identities? Don't you suppose, my lovely one, that we still go on — I won't say thinking thoughts that have have no connection with the passionate pleasure we're enjoying, but thinking such a thought as— 'oh how utterly and entirely this heavenly, this divine sensation beats all other sensations I've ever known!'"

"But," came the voice from behind the upraised legs, that is to say from behind the whole of Eione from the waist down, "but doesn't what you're now saying, my friend, reduce the passion of love to an extremity of purely selfish sensation?"

Pontopereia at this drew up her own legs with an abrupt jerk; but straightened her back as she did so, and leaned forward, sitting on her heels, and resting the palms of both her hands upon the uplifted knees of the girl before her.

"I confess, my dear," she said, "that I'm talking of something of which I've had no experience. But surely if this ecstasy of love's embrace, of which such a lot is made, is as transporting and enthralling as we're always being told it is, neither of the parties concerned can possibly have the detachment of consciousness left inside them to say anything to themselves around or about or above or beneath the absolutely absorbing sensation they are caught up in and which is blinding them to all else?"

A sudden outburst of silvery laughter came from the girlish face upon which, with her hands on the young creature's knees, Pontopereia now gazed with unpretended admiration.

"Aren't you confusing," were the words that issued from that radiant but extremely simple countenance, "what we feel when we're imagining a love-ecstasy in some hot exciting trance of deliciousness when alone by ourselves with what we feel in our first real love-night?"

"You mean, Eione darling, that when we're in the act of making love we think more of our lover and more of *his* feelings than of our own?"

"The gods forbid!" cried the excited girl. "Did I hear you utter the word 'more'? Of course we think 'more' of his feelings for us than of ours for him! Isn't it the delicious heat of his feelings for us that rouses ours and that alone has the power to arouse ours?" Pontopereia perceived that she had indeed entered a sphere of philosophic analysis where more intimate experience than had yet been hers was required if she were to see the thing in proper perspective.

So with a view to changing the subject she changed her physical position and sliding both her own feet to the floor she edged herself along the side of the bed, till bending down above her friend she was able to smooth the girl's fair hair from her forehead.

"You haven't half told me, you know, what happened after you rode off with Arcadian Pan and with Eurybia and Echidna. Where on earth did those two leave you? What happened to the horse with the flowing mane? Did Pan himself go down under the waves when you got to the place where the land of Atlantis had been drowned?"

Before beginning any answer to all this Eione thrust her friend's hand away. "Don't do that! It makes me nervous! It's what Thrasonika our school-teacher used to do."

Pontopereia hurriedly withdrew her hand. She had received such a shock that, hardly aware of what she was doing, she licked the longest finger of the hand that had not been to blame and with it gently stroked the erring hand as if to cure it of its impetuosity.

"I can tell *you* of course," went on Eione, seized by a sudden gust of confidential school-girlishness, "because you weren't at school in Ithaca.

But it was because of Thrasonica going on stroking her hair that Amaryllis Leporides drowned herself."

Pontopereia's face expressed all the astonishment she felt, though by no means all the moral indignation she felt. Eione nodded vigorously. "Nobody but the three youngest of us know," she repeated; throwing into her tone the implication that in Ithaca a girl's sophistication decreased rather than increased as she grew up.

And indeed this was a view of insular as compared with continental education which struck Pontopereia as entirely correct.

"Nisos told me," announced Pontopereia, standing on her feet now, and sufficiently disturbed by the rebuff Eione had given her to hit back — woman *versus* woman — by dragging in Nisos, "that the great Epic Poem about the Beginning of All Things by the Ruler of Atlantis brings in the little island where Arcadian Pan must have given you the Helmet of Proteus and told Pegasos to carry you to Odysseus! But Nisos tells me this little island, which he says is called 'Wone' and must be pronounced so as to rhyme with 'tone' is really the top of the tallest of the mountains of drowned Atlantis, a mountain which used to be called Kunthorax and whose foot-hills rose from a vast fir-forest which was only a couple of days' ride from the great city of Gom which was — and I suppose still *is,* only it's under the water — the capital of Atlantis."

Eione had listened to all this with her eyes tightly shut and her whole face quiescent, as if, though perhaps not actually asleep, the treatment of this crucial subject by her philosophic friend had a somnolent effect upon her. But she was compelled to open her eyes, and open them pretty wide too, when Pontopereia seized the pole, with which they regulated the sky-light to the deck above, the sky-light from which came *most* of their air and, when they hadn't lit their oil-lamp, *all* their light, and opening it wider than they had ever done before, shouted in a shrill voice: “Is Nisos Naubolides up there? If he is, for the sake of all the gods tell him to come down here for a moment!”

So loudly did the youthful voice of the daughter of Teiresias ring through the whole interior of the “Teras” that it crossed the mind of Odysseus as he swung himself backwards and forwards in his cabin that it was possible that one of these two young creatures might have tried to put an end to the life of the other; and vaguely endeavouring to allow this imaginary supposition its full weight the old adventurer caused his hammock of small cords to swing rhythmically backwards and forwards to a sort of musical argument in favour of the advantage of being alive compared with the advantage of being dead.

The four oarsmen who while so fresh a wind filled the great sail were able to take their pleasure with their special dice or “astragaloi”, and had just decided that until supper-time they would make the game more lively by making it less individualistic, turning it in fact into a battle between the starboard and larboard oarsmen of the “Teras”, with Teknon and Klytos on the starboard side, and Euros and Halios on the larboard or port side; and it was this new and more communal game that was broken up by Pontopereia’s cry.

Having put its violent lid upon the dicing of these astragoloi-players the girl’s quivering cry rang from end to end of the top-most deck where Proros and Pontos, who were managing the ropes which held the great bulging sail upon whose one, taut, open curve their speed and safety of their speed entirely depended, repeated the cry at once, and not content with repeating it, they both imitated it, and did this so successfully that the first officer, Thon, who by general consent rather than by professional succession had become the outlookman of the “Teras”, ransacked the sea’s surface with his eyes in search of some broken-winged siren before he made it known to Akron the ship's master, that the young man to whom that same skipper was courteously listening was wanted below.

"Better go down at once, my boy! There's some serious trouble among your women-folk! I pray it's between those young ones, and *not* between those older ones! Down with you, my son! Down with you! No! no! Don't wait a second, *lad*! These troubles *inside* the ship are far more serious than anything that goes on in the City of Gom or at the top of Kunthorax; or on the Island of Wone. Oh, you'll settle this trouble, my lad, whatever it is! You've got the look of an ambassador. Down with you now; and quick about it!"

But it was several minutes before Nisos, buoyed up by feeling that it was especially exciting to be called upon to decide a quarrel between the daughter of Teiresias and the sister of Tis, managed to reach even the second deck of the "Teras"; and it was perhaps just because he kept telling himself that it was so quaint that a son of Krateros and Pandea should be the one destined by Atropos to hold these uncertain scales that he didn't clamber down the ship's first ladder with more headlong speed.

The ladder from the second deck to the third deck was at the stern of the vessel, whereas the one he had just descended was near the prow and the astonishing neck, scaled, feathered, wrinkled, infundibular, that belonged to the figure-head of the "Teras", the figure-head which so far he had only seen from the rear but which Akron assured him, when seen from the front, represented the most intellectual visage ever carved out of any substance upon earth by flint or stone or bronze or iron and was the face of "the unknown ruler" of Atlantis. Thus in order to reach the ladder to the lowest deck of the "Teras" where were the three cabins occupied at present by Nausikaa and Okyrhöe, by Eione and Pontopereia, and by Odysseus himself, Nisos had to step over the big round oars, either of Teknon and Klytos on the starboard side, or of Euros and Halios on the port side; and he selected the latter.

He did this, as we so often say, “for a trivial reason” but as we all, especially those of us who are historians, know only too well, reasons like this always appear to everybody trivial before the result is revealed, and the event which is the result monumentalized, made clear to all. His “trivial reason” was that the oarsman Euros had that deep indentation behind his skull and above his neck, which certain experiences had taught our young prophet was an infallible sign of refinement and of quite special sensitivity.

Greeting Euros therefore with diffidence and respect and half-turning to address the man’s up-tilted face as he paused, before stepping over the oar of Halios he continued to see, even while glancing into the man’s eyes, that particular indentation at the back of his head which he held in such high regard, while behind it as if it were a symbol of all that was delicate and vulnerable in humanity, as opposed to all that was inhuman in Nature, rolled the enormous weight of waters. But it is dangerous, as his hero Odysseus could have told him, to philosophize too minutely when you are acting with a rush: and his pause at that second made him trip up so blindly over Halios’ oar that down he came with a crash, sprawling absurdly on the carefully scrubbed deck, and uttering a blasphemous curse on the vindictive ways of Poseidon.

Halios lowered his great oar with rapid effectiveness as well as with exquisite nicety and helped Nisos to his feet while all their six eyes, joined now by the four eyes of Teknon and Klytos on the starboard side, turned simultaneously seaward, totally forgetting Pontopereia’s wild cry.

And what they saw was indeed a sufficient marvel to justify any creature’s obliviousness to all else. For on one side a flaming red sun sank behind the horizon; and on the other a pale full moon rose above the horizon.

What was indeed curious in this sudden possession by the sinking Sun and the rising Moon of the entire consciousness of four middle-aged men and one young man was the fact that each of the two celestial luminaries was only visible through one of the oar-holes on one of the two sides of the ship.

In each case the bulk of the hole was filled by its particular oar; and, since each of the heavenly bodies was of a circular shape, the golden segment of the moon, which encircled the oar of Euros on one side, and the blood-red segment of the sun which encircled the oar of Teknon on the other side, produced, when the eyes of all five men moved from one to the other, a visual effect so strange that it was doubtful if any of them would ever, though he lived as long as the Ithacan palace Dryad, see such a sight again. Each of the five men received the startlingness of this queer vision in a different way. Euros, for instance, felt pure annoyance over the advantage that the deck-hands who dealt with the ropes and the sail had over themselves in regard to what they could see, and this feeling was increased when first on one side and then on the other the oar-holes were not only lined and inlaid with bloody sickles and golden crescents but crossed and re-crossed by the obstinate and greedy flight of a small sea-bird, for whose feather-covered cranium these creaking orifices were associated neither with the sun nor with the moon, but purely and solely with the fragments of terrestial garbage which the oarsmen got rid of through them. As for Nisos, he played with the crazy and fantastic fancy that the whole universe was the body of the giant Atlas, that great Titan whom the Son of Saturn compelled to hold up the sky lest it fall upon the earth.

And Nisos imagined himself following his hero Odysseus in a winged ship that had the power of forcing its way through the body of the earth, as well as through the body of the sun, as well as through the body of the moon; but in his present fancy these three bodies were one body, the body that is to say of the entire universe, which was simply the body of Titan Atlas. His pet hawk was with him; and in his fancy he and his hawk kept flying through the whole body of Atlas and out on the other side: that is to say — into the void and back again into Atlas.

It was not long, however, before this Atlas fancy of our youthful prophet developed into a much bolder imagination; the idea namely, that he himself was a universe-devouring dragon who lived on the elements and fed on earth and fire and water as he hurled himself through the air from one universe to another, devouring each one in turn, while, out of his excrement, vast-trailing protoplasmic embryos of new universes were eternally coagulated afresh.

The queer trance into which all five men on the rowing-deck of the “Teras” had fallen may have been caused by the fact that in their awareness that the ship was sailing mid-way between sinking sun and rising moon each man felt he was being pitilessly pulled in opposite directions by two sanguinary opponents and that the end of it could only be that he would be torn into two halves. He could already feel himself becoming both these two half-selves which were now feebly drifting in opposite directions, their ragged edges raw and bloody while the flesh nearest those edges grew more and more gangrened. Was it perhaps that the screams of this sea-hawk, a bird that might easily have seemed to a prophetess, like that Nymph in the Italian cave, to be the return of a creature that had for hundreds of thousands of years been visiting and re-visiting the earth, stirred up in Nisos a desire to plunge deeper and deeper into the mystery of matter?

At any rate one thing was certainly clear, namely that the wood-work of the “Teras” herself was slowly being aroused to a sort of semi-human consciousness. Whether this would have a good effect on those who were voyaging in her, who could say?

But Nisos now set himself to scramble down to that lowest deck of all, from whence Pontopereia’s cry had ascended. It occurred to him, as he now rushed down, to wonder whether his delay in obeying her cry had hurt the feelings of the daughter of Teiresias, and as he climbed down the ladder, feeling slightly uncomfortable in his mind from remorse at not obeying her more quickly and slightly uncomfortable in his body from his crashing fall he cursed himself as a prize fool. “Where in the name of all the Harpies and Gorgons *is* the girl?” he muttered as he entered their cabin and found Tis’s sister asleep on their couch and not a sign of the other one. “Has she,” he thought, and as this fear shot through him he felt a queer sensation that he knew was different from any other feeling he had ever had before, “has she climbed up the ladder and thrown herself into the sea? And did she do this,” and he addressed his remark not to himself but to the sleeping figure of Eione, “because of something *you* said to her?”

He stood staring at the sleeping girl in the bed with what he pretended to himself was a look of fierce dramatic reproach. The sleeping girl would have been gratified however to observe that this fierce look was directed solely at her face and that upon her incredibly well-moulded limbs, as fully exposed to his view as her extremely rustic and almost grotesquely simple features, the look that was drawn out of him was of quite a different kind.

Different or not, all that Pontopereia knew about Nisos’ expression when she crept up silently behind him from her hiding-place among the hampers and nets and wicker cases and javelin-holders and quivers made of twisted root-fibres full of feathered arrows, which Odysseus had piled up outside his cabin and which — for the lowest deck of the "Teras" was anything but spacious — did more than just impinge upon the cabin of the two girls — all indeed that Pontopereia could possibly know of the feelings of Nisos as he stood staring at her enemy-friend and incorrigible rival was the simple fact that he *did* stand thus staring. And so when she spoke to him and he swung round to face her as if she had pricked him with one of Odysseus's darts, the look that was exchanged between them was one of those looks that young men and young maids exchange now and again and that are as the primeval Welsh Prose Epic expresses it, "like the colour of lightning upon a sword-blade".

But it was at this moment that Odysseus himself appeared on the scene, emerging from his solitary cabin with bare feet, and entirely naked save for the blanket he had wrapped round him and the extraordinary Helmet of Proteus which he had just clapped on his head.

"I want one of you," he whispered hoarsely, "to come here a second!"

"What in the name of Aidoneus," thought Nisos, "is in the king's mind?"

But Eione, who had already leapt from her couch so quickly that the imprint left by her head on the pillow contained a twisted couple of tiny fair hairs held together by an infinitesimal flake of cinder-dust that must have adhered to them when she was recently heating water for her bath, had not lived all her life with old Morus for nothing. She would naturally divine the sort of thing that the practical cunning of a wily old man would urge him to do at a crisis like this. She had therefore, in reading the mind of Odysseus, an advantage over both the daughter of a prophet and the young aspirant to be himself a prophet.

She therefore without a moment's hesitation, and as if it were a dedicated dagger for some pontifical killing, offered her slender wrist to the old king; who proceeded at once, and with no more hesitation than she had shown, to make use of this small wrist. He led her after an imperative gesture to Pontopereia and Nisos to remain quiescent, to the drawn curtain that covered the threshold of the cabin occupied by Nausikaa and Okyrhöe; and the moment he got her there he made a mute sign to her to remain absolutely still, and then, drawing the curtain aside with an imperceptibly gentle movement he set himself to listen to what was going on between the two women.

"O for heaven's sake don't make me have to go over it all again, Princess," Okyrhöe was saying. "I'm only telling you for the hundredth time that this whole mad voyage of this crazy old king is ridiculous; and that you who pretend to be his friend, instead of helping him, are driving him faster to his ruin and destruction! Why, my good, silly woman, before we started on this crazy voyage I talked to several of the sailors who are running this ship and I soon found out how hopeless the whole thing is. They told me that the very figure-head of this ship is enough to damn the whole business by showing the ship's destiny. They told me that the face of that Being at the prow is enough alone to prove to whom the vessel belongs! It belongs to the Ruler of Atlantis; for the face that looks out from that dreadful neck is the face of that Ruler himself!

"They *all* know that; yes! all the sailors on this ship know it. And they know too that it was because of the blasphemous inventions and impious intentions of this wicked magician that the divine Son of Kronos who wields the thunder plunged the whole continent of Atlantis into the depths of the ocean. You pretend that this ship is of your land and has inherited from the skill and the craft of your people its power of prevailing over disaster and of holding onto its strength. All this is false — in fact a lie! The 'Teras' with its officers and the best of its crew was a pirate-ship long before it fell into the skilled hands of your people and was converted into a vessel of the shape and style of your land.

"And now, my foolish woman, you must see how ridiculous it is to encourage Odysseus in this madness of his, when the truth is — —"

At this point Nausikaa boldly interrupted her. "Come, come, my dear lady, why on earth should a couple of presentable females like you and me scold each other like a pair of fish-wives in the old 'Net-Alley' of the Piraeus?"

But once started in her torrent of vituperation it was impossible to silence Okyrhöe. "When I began", the woman went on, "talking to these people just now I soon realized into what a desperate and tragic business you had, with all your good intentions, betrayed this unfortunate old king. Don't you see bow infinitely pathetic it is to watch this aged impulsive fool dressing himself up in this comical head-dress they call the Helmet of Proteus?

"What about all his fellow-countrymen who are now going to be led into such terrible peril by the pure chance that you came here with this ship? I'm not saying these things to you to torment you or to get any advantage over you. Do please, I beg you, lady, stop this vulgar abuse, and let us decide together how we can best help our mutual hero in this grand final adventure of his unequalled life!"

The two of them continued their word-battle for quite a number of minutes, though neither of them was unoccupied while their desperate dispute went on. They were both arranging their hair, their head-dresses, their robes, their jewels, and even smoothing out the creases in their soft leather sandals, to make which final adjustment they were forced to display to each other and of course, though unknown to themselves, to their three watchers, for, though the daughter of Teiresias still held herself proudly aloof, Nisos as it well may be believed, was unable to resist the temptation of joining in this espionage, the most intimate beauty of their figures.

Matters on board the “Teras” were further complicated at this critical point by the emergence from the ship’s hold, which was reached by a short ladder of no more than three rungs from the cabin occupied by Odysseus, of the two black Lybian cooks staggering under their first instalment of food and drink for everyone on board; and as this plenteous repast was to be swallowed in what was now the cabin of Odysseus it can be imagined with what rapidity these two imperious ladies of fashion hastened to complete their toilet.

Along with the two black Libyans there came up also from the hold of the good ship “Teras”, or “Prodigy”, a couple of Assyrian boys of about thirteen whose business it was to act as general scavengers and excrement-disposers for both crew and passengers. On every deck of the ship there were containers for excremental liquids and containers for excremental solids which it was the duty of these Assyrian boys to empty into the sea; and for this purpose, each day of every voyage, they went the round of the ship at sunset.

Thus it was no haphazard or random coincidence but by one of those inevitable concentrations of the normal and natural forces of life that keep the world on the move that the whole crowd of human creatures, from the Old Odysseus to the young excrement disposers, who were divided from the waters of drowning by the planks of the “Teras” or “Prodigy”, were gathered together when a clamorous shout went up, a shout that came from the throats of the general crowd and not from any professional group or any especially nervous group, a shout that was soon repeated still louder and by this time came from the deck upon which any boat-load of people coming from any direction at all would of necessity scramble on board.

Nisos was at Odysseus' side when the divine animal, Pegasos, flying with quite a company of people on his broad back, reached the "Teras" and therefore our young man had a unique opportunity of noting how the old king reacted to this impact. But he was so anxious to catch all the king's feelings that he couldn't help exaggerating much that he observed.

He exaggerated for instance many flickering changes of expression on the countenance of Odysseus. He exaggerated certain jerky and feverish gestures made by the King. The truth was that no one alive really understood the King except Eurycleia his old nurse. It was one of the results of Odysseus' abnormal self-control that he could feel deep down in his blood and bones reactions quite different from those which he felt in his more superficial nerves or along the surface of his skin, and more different still from those expressed in his face.

The scene on the "Teras'" top deck when Pegasos arrived was indeed something that might have reduced to a wild state of hysterical excitement any traveller less self-controlled and less artful than Odysseus. The human creatures whom Pegasos now shook from his broad back and from between his wide-stretched wings were obviously so confused by the whole experience that, as the saying goes, they hardly "knew their heads from their tails".

For the last couple of days a frantic longing to cling together like a frightened swarm of insects must have possessed them. But in spite of this they preserved their poise and endurance. Chief among these brave voyagers upon the winged horse was Zeuks the son of Arcadian Pan and along with him was none other than Spartika the Priestess of Athene's Temple, and in addition to these and holding herself with proud dignity a little apart from the rest was none other than Arsinöe the bastard daughter of

Hector, who in her childhood had been befriended by Andromache, Hector's wife.

Nisos was astonished to see that it was not Zeuks but Spartika who held the proudest position on the back of the winged horse, nearest, that is to say, to his head, and he was still more surprised when instead of descending, as Zeuks and Arsinöe very speedily did, Spartika remained seated, and indeed began to caress the mane of Pegasos and to give that arching neck whose curves resembled a torrent of water released from rocks and roots and flowing at ease down a smooth declivity, a series of reassuring and yet authoritative pats.

Our friend Nisos, who still retained at the back of his consciousness an obstinate determination to be a real prophet before he died, and who was still alert to catch the most intimate ways of the mental rulers of our race, was deeply struck by the manner in which Spartika kept them all standing where they were, as if she had thrown a spell over each of them, while she delivered what evidently was a long-prepared and legally-involved discourse on the precise attitude she intended to take between the run-away goddess of that formidable "aegis", whose very "tassels" could bring new life to the half-dead, and that Priest of the Mysteries who had so successfully usurped the position of Telemachos.

And suddenly Nisos noticed, and he felt that he had really made a step forward in his private self-education in the art of prophesying by having resisted Spartika's priestess-spell sufficiently to be able to notice such a thing at all, that while with one hand she caressed Pegasos, preparatory to giving him the recognizable signal that would make him shake out his eagle wings and gather up his equine hooves beneath him, with the other hand she was active in helping some quite carefully shrouded human figure to edge itself off the horse's back on to the deck where the others were now standing.

Nisos alone among all the onlookers was therefore spared the shock of surprise when two startling events occurred simultaneously: Pegasos suddenly spread his wings and rose into the air with Spartika leaning forward, and clinging to his mane with both hands. And like a living bundle of villainously dirty rags the figure of Enorches rolled upon the deck, and after a minute or two of absolutely solitary twisting and turning, rose to its feet, took up its wrappings and conveyed them to the rail of the ship.

Here, with what struck Nisos as a deadly curse upon the whole gamut of existence, this destructive Priest of the Mysteries flung his bundle of filthy rags into the water; and then, leaning over the edge himself, just as if he were hugging the thought of following his garments — and how had he managed to make them heavy enough to sink? — he plunged his thought, if nothing else, after what he had thrown.

And while the Priest of Eros and Dionysos was staring blindly after his own imaginary corpse, that corpse of living thought which he evidently pretended to himself he could see sinking down and down and down, till it found the slit at the bottom of the ocean which led to the slit at the bottom of the world which led to the slit at the bottom of the universe, Odysseus, whose outward nerves, equally with the imperturbable recesses of his being, were totally unaffected by any of these mental horrors, addressed a quiet request to Zeuks that he relate to him what had actually happened in Ithaca since the "Teras" set sail.

Nisos never forgot the scene that followed this natural demand. All the living persons on board save Akron the Master of the ship were gathered round the mast from which that pair of perfect sailors, Pontos and Proros from Skandeia in Kythara, had wisely lowered all but a small fold of the great sail.

Thus the “Teras”, or “Prodigy”, was running lightly, easily, freely, but comparatively slowly before a gentle and cool easterly wind; while the full moon, which was now moving with that motionless movement which is unlike any other movement in the universe, over, under, and straight through cloud after cloud, after cloud, after cloud, flooded the whole of what was visible, as well as — at least that was what came suddenly into Nisos’ head — the whole of what was invisible, with an enchantment that separated the real life of each separate living thing from the life imagined as its life by all other living things.

Nisos noted very definitely the extraordinary manner in which this flood of moonlight, which was as spiritual and mental as it was physical and emotional, held everybody at that crisis under such a spell that when the quiet voice of Odysseus called upon Zeuks to speak there came a strangely universal sigh from all present. The thoughts and feelings of Odysseus himself as he made this quiet request were more direct and simple, as they were more massively impenetrable and impervious to influence of any sort or kind, than his young follower Nisos could have believed possible.

Odysseus was prepared to humour and indulge to the limit all those who needed humouring and indulging if they were to be useful to him in the fulfilment of his purpose. He was also prepared to obliterate totally from his consideration, leaving them to go their way just as they liked, as he intended to go his way just as he liked, all those persons, creatures, tendencies, and forces, over whom or over which he had no control.

Unlike Zeuks as a man, and unlike Pegasos as an animal, there was, in spite of all the rumours to the contrary, no trustworthy evidence that any seed save that from the loins of Laertes was responsible for his begetting.

What separated him from other mortal men was the adamantine weight and solid mass of what might be called Being, or Existence, or Entity, thickening out his Personality, which he put behind the purpose, whatever purpose it might be, upon which at the moment he was engaged.

The real essence of the man’s shrewdness, for it was more like the measured sagacity of some huge sea-lion than it was like the wily cunning of a fox or the crafty vigilance of a hungry hyaena or the distracted desperation of a solitary wolf, had a super-animal obstinacy in it which had the power of keeping intact, like some monumental idol, the achievement towards which he kept advancing.

He had done precisely that with the taking and looting of Troy. The sack of this royal city must have occupied the attention of his whole essential Being and this perfectly calm yet terrific preoccupation, nourished on the very marrow of his bones, was the thing that made it possible for him to indulge in the most outrageous lies and monstrous deceptions, without, as the saying is, turning a hair.

And now it was the same with this voyage above the waters under which lay the lost Atlantis. Odysseus had the power of “jollying along” every mortal person and thing, whether divine, or human, whether animal, vegetable or mineral, that could possibly, by any imaginable twist or turn of coaxing, cajoling, cozening, condensing, dilating, liquifying, vaporizing, euhemerizing, metamorphosing be made use of to help forward his individual purpose.

What would have needed the genius of Pontopereia’s progenitor himself, yes! even of the great Teiresias, to unravel, was the convoluted connection between the definite, concrete, actual, realistic achievement at which Odysseus was aiming and the glory, honour and fame he would get by this achievement.

It seems to the present chronicler, though it is only too likely that both Homer and Hesiod would take a different view, that the grape-juice of the glory of achieving, and the fir-tree sap of having achieved, when the achievement has been accomplished, are so inextricably intermingled that not all the Sirens, Harpies, Gorgons and Erinyes in the whole cosmos could unravel them.

To capture Troy, to return to Ithaca while Penelope still lived, to plunge down among the sunken temples and altars and streets and markets of drowned Atlantis, each one of these triumphs of the individual will over all that opposes it, had become so completely all that was, all that is, all that shall be for evermore, to the man Odysseus, that to separate these events from this man would be like separating the moon from its light or the water from the waves.

Thus it was when Odysseus required of Zeuks that he should speak, Zeuks himself seemed conscious of some special quality in the moonlight as well as conscious of the abnormally dramatic weight of what he had to tell, for it struck Nisos who was watching Zeuks closely that this latter gave a sort of half-shrug of his broad shoulders and although he didn't remove his hands from his sides he opened them wide, with their palms exposed and their fingers widely extended, as if he were commencing to disclaim all possible responsibility for all conceivable events in this mad world.

And it was at that precise second that an infinitesimal and entirely haphazard thing occurred such as had happened to Nisos from his earliest childhood. The fact that he was watching Zeuks so closely sharpened his powers of observation to an abnormal extent. And the result of this was that his attention was caught and held by the fact that a small sea-swallow, swooping and swerving along this particular deck, had let fall upon the deck's well-scrubbed surface a little clot of bird's dung from which protruded not only the featherless stalk of a tiny feather but the clipt edge of a human toe-nail.

Nor did this extra discovery prevent Nisos in his moon-induced mania for minute observation, from noticing that Zeuks himself, as he straightened his shoulders to draw his breath before answering, laid bare upon his own chest a peculiar tuft of especially black hairs. “Is the sky going to fall when Zeuks answers?” thought Nisos: and certainly the general sigh that rose from the whole company just then struck him as curiously connected with all those aspects of human bodies of which human consciousness especially dislikes being reminded.

It was almost as if the unseemly parts of every corporeal frame in that whole company joined in that general sigh; joined in it indeed so pitifully that it seemed as if that sigh proceeded not so much from the lips of those gathered there as from those disparaged parts of their human bodies of which we only seem to grow fully aware when we are seized by an intense longing to escape from our bodies altogether!

It was a weird thought to come into a youthful head just then, but Nisos welcomed it, and indeed was proud of it, telling himself that his mother would have regarded it as an absolute proof that he was destined one day to be a prophet. Yes, he told himself, this great sigh from all these people came from every single one of the out-of-the-way hairs in their secret orifices of excretion and copulation, and from the ignoble hairs under their arms, whether male or female, and from every crushed, deformed, twisted, and squeezed-sideways toe-nail in that crowd, whether belonging to a male or a female.

Nor did the effect of the moon’s motionless motion, through those indifferent clouds, affect only human beings. It was especially potent where small, disregarded, insignificant material objects were concerned, objects such as pieces of burnt wood, broken shells, wisps of wool, flakes of foam, strips of sea-weed, frayed bits of cordage, and even certain infinitesimal scoriac fragments risen to the surface of the water and carried in circles over leagues and leagues of salt waves from the burning craters of the great mountain Kunthorax which towered above the city of Gom, the capital of drowned Atlantis.

Yes, this curious universal sigh rose not only from the less honourable portions of the bodies of the people upon the deck of the “Teras”, but from a host of derelict scraps and bits of scraps that winds and tides and sea-gull beaks had helped chance to collect at this particular moment and upon this particular deck. To the mind of our youthful prophet Nisos this heavy undulant sigh was drawn from every mortal thing there present that had, or could ever presume to claim that it had, suffered from the arrogance of immortal gods or the recklessness of mortal men.

A deep and spontaneous sigh like this was, he decided, clearly and unquestionably due to an obscure craving in existence itself to escape from every physical and every mental effort that was forever *“having to be made”* that it might remain what it was and not perish utterly in the abyss. All the animal, all the vegetable, all the mineral offscourings, castaways, shreds, patches, scrapings, splinters, parings, drift and flotsam, together with all the human abortions, misfits and degenerates and all the infected members of each particular corpus of corruption, seemed to Nisos just then as he tried desperately to unravel the psychic knot of that half-circle of suspended life and reluctant death under that intent moon as she passed those casual clouds, to be asking to be heard.

The universe seemed to be giving them some final pitiful chance that their breath should be audible and some broken syllable of their desire should be expressed, which, if Odysseus would only ask it or Zeuks would only answer it, might redeem all. But Odysseus was now repeating his question and Zeuks was now beginning to laugh.

Yes, it was with a laugh he commenced his answer, and with a laugh he finished his answer; and there were many there who must have thought that Odysseus would be overwhelmed by his answer. Zeuks told how it was soon after the "Teras" had sailed that the whole thing happened. Led by Krateros Naubolides, Nisos' father, and by Agelaos Naubolides, Nisos' brother, the enormous faction among the warriors of Ithaca who were opposed to the House of Odysseus swept down in a resolute mass upon the king's palace, ransacked it, scoured it out, gutted it, scraped it clean of every trace and vestige of the House of Odysseus, till from the Corridor of Pillars to the innermost caverns of its washing-chambers, sculleries, pantries, and kitchens, it became a primitive, antiquarian annex to the prosperous barns and picturesque enclosures and to all the long-reverberating rural and insular traditions of the autochthonous House of Naubolides.

"And Eurycleia?" enquired Odysseus, fixing upon the narrator a long, deep, quiet, steady look, not in the least degree an excited or emotional look, and not at all what could be called an inscrutable look. What it really was was a patient ritualistic look, like the look of a priest who has uttered the same words so many times that his emotional reaction to them has the modified, qualified, calmly reverential feeling such as is really the reaction to their destiny of many generations of a closely knit nation, gravely, but not solemnly, honouring their past, guarding their present as something sacred, and facing their future with a massively unruffled assurance.

Zeuks clearly found it difficult to tell the truth as to just how Eurycleia perished; but after a good many noises in his throat that were too like the sounds in an ox-stall to be called laughing and too like the sounds in a cowshed to be called crying, he explained that when the old nurse saw Leipephile by her betrothed's side among the foremost intruders she was unable to restrain her indignation and burst out in a rhapsody of vituperation. She abandoned herself indeed to such "shame-crying" and to flinging such "momon" or reproach upon Leipephile that Leipephile, who is, as we all know, a mightily big and powerful wench, lost her temper completely and struck her such a blow over the head with a large marble mixing-bowl or "depas" which she snatched from a side table that the old lady fell down and died instantaneously.

"In the confusion that followed, I fancy I began myself to behave in a wild and excited way and I think I must have drunk quite a lot too, for there was a great deal of wine floating round and I remember that the more adventurous of the intruders soon struck me as being a good deal more intoxicated than I was myself.

"Our Trojan Arsinöe here will bear witness to the truth of what I am narrating to you, O king; for in my tipsy folly I well remember thinking that it was my first duty to you to keep a tight hold on all your captives from the old Trojan War: and it was in the spirit of this sense of duty, O King, that I found myself clinging so closely to the maiden Arsinöe when we took our places on the back of the flying horse. It was your wise and cool-headed herdsman Tis, the brother of the maiden Eione who I understand is with you on board this ship, who insisted on our making use of Pegasos to follow you all this way across the sea.

"I tried to persuade him to accompany us rather than enter the service of the House of Naubolides but he maintained that his duty was first and foremost to the cow Babba, and that Babba's shed and hay-loft and her field of meadow-grass were, taken together, enough of a kingdom for any man to guard and fight for. He also said that if it was the will of Atropos that

Krateros Naubolides should rule in Ithaca while its King was sailing where no mortal had ever sailed before, it might well be her will also that when you returned you would find your cow Babba as ready to give you as good milk and as perfect cream as she did before you sailed away.

"'The land,' said Master Tis, 'is my mother and my father and my grandmother and my grandfather. The grass growing on the land is my cow's salvation and the milk from the udders of my cow is my redemption. The bread, made of the wheat which grows on my land, is, as I munch it, the only heaven I need, and furthermore,' said Tis, the grandson of Moros, 'the sweetness of the bread I munch increases as it nears the crust. My bread needs neither honey nor sugar to make it sweet but it needs land as good as my land to make bread as good as my bread; and it needs a cow as good as my cow to keep me from following my King across drowned Atlantis.'"

It was at this point, just as if the mention of the name "Atlantis" had softened some tension in the minds of all, that as Enorches, the Priest of the Mysteries, left the side of the ship and began to pace up and down within the limited space left between the mast with its reduced sail and the half-circle of listeners to this weird scene while his chiton, or body-shirt, having become ruffled in his violent disposal of his rags, his nakedness, unknown to himself, was startlingly exposed in quite a flagrant fashion.

This shameless sight combined with its exhibitor's complete unconsciousness evoked a loud and profane chuckle from Euros which communicated itself to Pontos and from him extended to Klytos and Teknon. Whether Odysseus saw what they were laughing at or not this was one of those occasions when the root cause of all his triumphant endurances had a perfect chance to show itself. His senses might be stirred by the mischievous and provocative smile that Okyrhöe was now directing towards him: his anger might be roused by the thought of the murder of his old nurse Eurycleia, the one person in the world who had known him in the intimate sense in which our father or our mother knows us, or our mate knows us, and by the fact that the blow that killed her was struck by the woman who herself had been waiting at his table since she was a child: but as neither of these things seemed able to change by a jot or a tittle the obstinate bulk of his intention, so no burst of bawdy laughter, even though directed at the privy parts of his worst enemy, could distract him just then from the moon that covered the waters and from the waters that covered Atlantis.

"How did you come, my good friend," he now calmly enquired of Zeuks, indicating the grotesque figure of Enorches, "to bring this confounded fellow with you on the back of Pegasos?"

"I don't wonder, O great King," replied Zeuks, "at your asking how it was that *he* came with us! Well, I can soon tell you how *that* happened. Your herdsman Tis, the brother of Eione here — I'm right in *that,* aren't I, Eione? — was the sole cause of the whole business. None of us would be here now if it weren't for him; and you saw just now how submissively the horse obeyed the priestess Spartika — all owing to wise treatment he received in Tis's stable. Herdsman Tis must have learnt from that old cow Babba he so dotes on some secret language that all animals, whether mortal or immortal, make use of when alone with each other.

"It must have been painful to Tis to prepare Pegasos for leaving his stable so soon; but I can tell you, my King, you've got nobody in your palace-cave, nobody in your whole rock-bound island, more devoted to you and your best interests than this man Tis.

"Well! just as we were coming out of those stables and sheds of yours, that this Tis looks after so well — and only, as far as I can see, for the advantage of that one solitary old cow — lo! and behold! there came rushing up to us this egregious fellow who calls himself a priest of Orpheus and who sure is the most treacherous and teasing and tantalizing and tricky human being I have ever encountered in the whole of my life. Ye gods! and if he didn't go so far as to demand permission to sit alongside of us on Pegasos' back!

"For the moment, my lord, I can assure you I was flabbergasted by this request. I only knew the fellow as your enemy, and the enemy of my young friend Nisos here, and the enemy of your son Telemachos. Why then, you naturally ask, did I allow this arch-liar, this dangerous and tricky traitor, to have a seat with us on the back of Pegasos? I'll tell you exactly why, O my King, and you must decide for yourself whether I was right or wrong. This Priest-fellow, this Enorches-man, fell on his knees before me and tapped the earth with his forehead seven successive times! As he did so he swore an oath; and he even went so far as to presume to add to this oath certain terrible and dreadful words after the manner of the immortal gods: for the words he added had to do with the River Styx.

"It was this oath of his, this oath by the Styx that he was planning no harm to you, my King, that caused me to hesitate. And then I suddenly decided to put my dilemma — as to whether to refuse his request or to allow him to join us — before your herdsman Tis and allow him to decide. And, when I put the matter to him, shall I tell you how he answered me, O great King?

"He said quite quietly: 'Set him before me, my lord Zeuks, and let me ask him something.'

"So I did, and set the man before him. And your herdsman Tis said to Enorches: 'May I ask you one question, O great Master of the Mysteries?' And when Enorches nodded, for I could see he regarded Tis as not grand enough, nor famous enough, nor learned enough, nor royal enough, to have any part or lot in these high matters, this was the question Tis put to him:

"'If your will, Master, was done about Eros and Dionysos, it would mean, wouldn't it, that your will would also be done about the Mysteries?'

"You should have seen the look the priest gave him. But he answered quick enough; and not sharply or angrily either: 'It *would* also be done about the Mysteries.' And it was then that the extraordinary thing happened that led to the Priest of the Mysteries to be marching up and down the deck of this ship as he is doing now in the eyes of all! Your herdsman Tis called upon the cow Babba.

"At the sound of his voice the cow Babba came straight from her stall and advanced among us, thrusting her cool wet nose into our bosoms, till we had, each one of us, pressed our lips against her upper lip with a noisy kiss.

"'Drop your token now, Babbawatty, my Holy of Holies,' said Tis in a low voice but a voice of the greatest authority I've ever heard since the day when I heard my grandfather addressing my father, and neither of *them* was an animal like Babba or a man like Tis; for indeed they both were and are immortal gods.

"At this command the cow turned towards us again as if she were going to repeat her recent nuzzling of us one by one. She did indeed move from one to another of us as before, but did no more nuzzling; and at that moment, O great King, there was one of those perceptible arrests, pauses, hushes, and sudden silences, as when the wing of a bird of omen touches the place where we are destined to rest in our final sleep. And it was after that weird pause that Babba stopped in front of Enorches, lifted her tail, straddled her legs and dropped on the ground the largest black-green cow-turd I've ever seen in my life.

"And, in the same pulse of time at which that huge dropping fell, Tis strode up to Enorches and said to him:

"'Master, you are holding something back from us. What is it?'

"And for answer the Priest of the Mysteries cried aloud in the hearing of them all: 'What I am holding back can only be revealed when, once more, as formerly they confronted each other in Arima, Eurybia confronts Echidna above the sunken City of Gom!'

"Having uttered these words he begged to be helped up upon the back of Pegasos and there was none among us who found it in him to refuse."

Zeuks was silent: while Nisos, watching Odysseus with the closest interest felt as if the old warrior's attitude to all these upheavals was not so much abysmally super-human as it was fathomlessly sub-human. Odysseus by this time had seated himself on a coil of ropes at the foot of the mast where the brothers Pontos and Proros, as they turned from the "protonoi" or "forestays" to the "kaloi" or "halliards," were clearly obeying a sequence of silent signs from Akron, the Teras' master, who with one hand against the mast was staring at the moon-lit horizon in front of the ship.

From the expression upon his face Akron might have been saying to himself: "The chief thing when you are master of a ship is to keep your ship afloat and your eye on the water in front of her. And there is great danger you may forget both these objectives if you listen for a single second to the song of a siren outside the ship or to the voice of a Prophet inside the ship."

And it now suddenly struck Nisos, as he moved as near as he dared to the King's extemporized throne, that the way the old man was now watching the objects and persons round him was exactly the way the winged horse watched the objects and persons round him before he proceeded to obey Spartika and carry her back to Ithaca.

Yes, the old king had at this very moment the same expression as the winged horse before he rose into the air. And Nisos told himself that a sea-lion, setting off, or a whale setting off, or even a sea-serpent starting to cross the ocean would have a look not very different from this aged adventurer's as he contemplated the universe from that heap of ropes.

Nisos was too honest with himself not to admit to himself that along with this sub-human look in Odysseus' eyes there was a distinctly normal human look there also. It annoyed our young friend to have to admit this but he was simply forced to do so.

"It must be," he thought, "that in the look of a normal man there is something parallel to the expression in the face of a sea-lion or a sea-serpent." It annoyed him to have to confess this; but he held rigidly to the idea that a prophet had to be honest with himself and he was resolved that when he reached mature years he would be a prophet: yes! a prophet of something, though he could not yet say in any clear terms, or indeed in any terms at all, of exactly what. And it was obvious to him that whatever elements of heroic endurance Odysseus possessed, they were in a really absolute sense human ones and normal ones.

The time taken by our future prophet to reach the conclusion that Odysseus was absolutely human had been so lengthy that most of the crowd, including the deck-hands, had entirely scattered, and there was nobody left but a small group of ordinary human beings, who were anything but professional, and Nisos' friend Zeuks, whose personal obliquities were human enough in spite of his ancestry.

Nisos meanwhile moved nearer and nearer to Odysseus. What he felt at that moment he would have been extremely puzzled to put into words. There was in his feeling, mixed with many very different emotions, a definite protective instinct towards Odysseus. Watching him seated there with that absurd Helmet of Proteus on his head, and holding his Club of Herakles propped up between his knees, more like the staff of an aged beggar than the most formidable weapon in the whole Grecian hemisphere, that hemisphere out of which the ship Teras was now swiftly moving as she advanced into the unknown West, Nisos felt as if the old hero were some precious relic, being carried, for the purpose of using it as a charm, into some completely different universe.

Nisos himself was vividly conscious, as if it had been a magnetic hand laid upon his shoulder, of the intense pressure of the presence of Akron, the Sea-Captain, as the man with his hand on the mast stared with what might have been called a cool and competent stare, but with what at the same time was a desperate and frantic stare, at the moonlit water in front of them.

Pontopereia and Eione had evidently found some way of smoothing out their rather intricate knot of contrariety; for the two girls were now pacing arm-in-arm from one end of the deck to the other, talking eagerly and rapidly. Nausikaa and Okyrhöe also had discovered a way, perhaps the best of all possible ways, of bringing to an end, at least for a time, their convoluted rivalry: for Nausikaa had stretched herself out upon the arching back of the ship’s tremendous figure-head, with her arms round the lower part of its scaly neck, and from this point of vantage she was watching with dreamy fascination the churned-up flakes of white and yellow-brown foam which followed one another to left and right as the proudly-cleaving neck, below the cosmogonic countenance of that sublime Being who had neither the face of a beast nor of a man nor of a god, cut its way through the water.

As for Okyrhöe, she had bent down gracefully in front of Odysseus and had snatched at a piece of sail-cloth that in some way had got itself entangled with the coil of ropes upon which the old man was seated. Spreading this piece of sail-cloth under the mast Okyrhöe plunged into the particular activity which had, since she was first grown up, been the ecstasy of her life, that is to say the arranging of her limbs in a manner to provoke intolerable desire.

Meanwhile the Club of Herakles, one of whose personal names was “Dokeesis”, or *“That which Seems”,* and another was Prosdokia or “Expectation” and who had the power of thinking and feeling not only with what it called its “life-crack”, within which the Moth and the Fly had taken sanctuary but with every portion of its polished surface, contemplated Okyrhöe who now lay at the feet of Akron, the Master of the ship, though he took no more notice of her than if she had been a captive from some island-citadel, a captive whom Odysseus, the Sacker of Cities, had carelessly carried off as they sailed West. But it was not Akron’s attention Okyrhöe wished to catch, as, lightly and gracefully — but O so deliberately! — she threw back her head upon her soft white arm and drew up her limbs beneath her. And it was then, and not till then, that Odysseus heard, as long ago, in that dark Nemaean Forest, he had heard it, the voice of his Club of Herakles. The Club was in the midst of a hurried and agitated dialogue with the Sixth Pillar of that Corridor in Ithaca so well known to most of them there.

It was not Odysseus’ nature, nor was it a habit of his in accordance with his nature, to enter lightly, casually, carelessly, easily, into a conversation with his most powerful weapon. Ever since he first heard that voice in the Nemaean Forest there had come moments when it was impossible not to hear the voice of the Club without a certain awe; and equally impossible not to reply to the voice without an inward submission to the burden of its utterance.

At this particular moment, seated on that coil of rope and turning his gaze first to the wide path of the moon on the water and then to a strange and shadowy Enormity that had suddenly appeared in front of them and that Nisos took to be a foreign ship with two colossal masts, but which might well have been a portion of the vast cranium of the Titan-Giant, Atlas, Odysseus was careful not to glance at Okyrhöe's seductive pose of slumber, nor at Nausikaa's slender limbs and passionate arms entwined about the scaly neck of the mysterious Ruler of Atlantis.

Okyrhöe's closed eyes above her rounded elbow might rest forever in sleepless provocation: Nausikaa's open eyes might be down-turned to the reflection of the moon and down-turned to depths below the reflection of the moon, and down-turned to depths below all reflection: it remained that Odysseus, the son of Laertes, calmly awaited what seemed like the imminent destruction of the ship "Teras" or "Prodigy" by her collison with an island, or with a monster of the deep, or with the head of the Giant Atlas, or with another and much larger vessel.

Odysseus and Nisos, as well as Akron, became aware at this crucial moment of agitated and extremely jerky words being exchanged between Pontos and Proros as they tugged at the outstretched sail of the "Teras". And, simultaneously with this dialogue between Pontos and Proros, Akron, the ship's master, gave expression to a long deep-drawn weirdly hopeless whistle and clapt his other hand upon the mast, to which he now seemed to be clinging, as if expectant of some terrific shock.

Meanwhile the Club of Herakles whose private and personal name was either "Dokeesis", "Seeming", or "Prosdokia", "Expectation", translated the startling news he was getting from the Sixth Pillar for the benefit of the aged but absolutely normal human brain that now bent low above it. And the words from the Sixth Pillar that the Club of Herakles now repeated for the benefit of his King were terribly simple.

"The ship 'Teras' at this moment is running into extreme danger. The moon is full. And as she shines upon the water and as the water reflects her, the spirit of the Being at the ship's bow is stirred within that Being as it remembers all the long nights it watched from the summit of the mountain Kunthorax the moon as a crescent, sharpening her horns of inversion, and rounding her horns of reversion, in creating and uncreating herself as the orb she is; and this stirring of whatever it may be of the spirit of this Being that still clings to its image is full of peril for the ship 'Teras', and indeed in a moment or two she may be shattered to pieces upon the Island of Wone."

It was naturally only a weird murmuring that Nisos caught of all this; but there was something about the reverberation of the syllable "Wone" that struck his imagination as well as his ear; nor could he help being interested as well as faintly amused as he watched that familiar crack, in the very throat, as it were, of the great weapon the king was clutching, to see a beautiful moth flutter forth and fly straight to the troubled forehead of Enorches, who was now squatting on the deck, and, apparently absorbed in thought, was tearing into pieces a considerable handful of the particular kind of seaweed that has so many of those slippery little bladders growing out of it, which look as if they might explode at a touch.

Arrived at the forehead of Enorches which was such a prominent feature that it seemed to overhang the rest of the man's face like a menacing avalanche, the moth fluttered restlessly up and down as if asking for permission to enter this recondite citadel of metaphysical mystery. Getting no apparent response it flew straight back to the club of Herakles.

And now at last our young would-be prophet was rewarded for the trouble he had taken on first catching the finger-nails of the Harpies at work on the Image of the Goddess of Order, the trouble to memorize a few words of the language of Insects.

"Moan for the Island of Wone!" was what Nisos heard. But the Fly heard more. So much did it hear that it straightway flew to the ear of Nisos to inform him and to force him to understand. This took some time. But when he did understand Nisos felt it to be his duty as a loyal adherent of the House of Odysseus to let that hero, who was already on his feet with one hand upon the shoulder of Akron and the other on the broad head of "Dokeesis", know what he had learnt.

"When he sees," the Fly had buzzed: and Nisos knew that it was of Enorches he was speaking, "that terrible pair from Arima, facing each other and arguing about the drowned city of Gom, he will reveal his secret."

But it now came to pass that both Okyrhöe and Nausikaa sprang to their feet, while Akron, the master of the ship, uttering his commands to the brothers Pontos and Proros as if a great wave were at that moment hanging above their heads, joined with them to pull down the body of the sail, till it slapped the deck, as though it were slapping the back of some martial "hetairos", or comrade-in-arms, at the start of a dangerous crisis.

It can be imagined how the brown moth awaited in their moving citadel within the "life-crack" of the club of Herakles the return of her friend the Fly. She had slipped out of his clutches to flutter to the help of Enorches so swiftly and unexpectedly, that he hadn't been able to stop her. On *his* return therefore she greeted him with a protesting cry; pointing out how unfair it was that after scolding her for supporting the Priest of the Mysteries he yet should hasten to display just the same sort of partisan activity on behalf of those who were opposed to the Priest.

But the moth soon found that this particular moment was too tense with opposing currents of feeling to allow for their usual verbal dispute. "Hush, sweet fool!" cried the fly. And then, when she tried again: "Hold your tongue you flapperty twitter-thighs! Don’t you see, little fool, that your friend the Priest is going to prick his own bubble?”

And indeed it was then that Nisos saw the Priest of the Mysteries leap up from the deck, throw away the seaweed with which he had been playing, and point with a pair of long bony arms at the flat, level, rocky Island that had suddenly risen out of the salt deep in front of them and now extended itself before the prow of the “Teras”.

“There they are!” cried the Priest hoarsely. “But it’s only another big ship with two tall masts!” screamed Okyrhöe. “It must be another ship! It *shall* be another ship! Those two things sticking up there, I say those two things there, *shan’t* be anything else than two thick ugly Cretan masts!”

But Odysseus had suddenly swung round and was now addressing a quiet figure whose head, emerging from the ladder leading to the lower deck, had been followed by a pair of easily-shrugged shoulders and an active mobile body, clad, for this special occasion it would almost seem, in the most conventional attire.

“Zeuks! Zeuks! My good friend! Do you mind coming here for a second!” cried the old hero; and in all this whirligig of a phantasmagoric pandemonium Nisos was so hit by the old man’s calm that while Zeuks hurried to their side he began scolding himself for the agitation he felt and for the fit of trembling that had seized him.

“Pray to Atropos, you immeasurable ass,” he muttered to himself. “Pray that you may never forget what you now see, or, by the gods! that it may be the last thing you *do* see, before we’re all drowned! … just a feeble old man with a pointed beard and this ‘Jack-O-Lanthorn’ on his head reducing the howling chaos of a wilderness of waters to something comparatively unimportant!”

“Can you catch,” the king was now asking Zeuks, “what this priest of Orpheus is saying as he watches us strike this island?”

And Zeuks answered: “He is confessing to you and to Eros and to Dionysos and to all those he has drawn after him that he has only used his praise of Love and Drink and his Priesthood of Orpheus and of the Mysteries to conceal his advocacy of universal Death. Life ought never, he says, to have started; and the sooner it sinks back into Nothingness the better for us all!”

CHAPTER XI

FOR ALL HIS good seamanship the skipper of the “Teras” or “Prodigy” was at heart, much more than his second-in-command and much more than any of his crew, whether their business was with oar or with sail, a born carpenter.

Thus it was his, Akron’s, crouching back that was the first object to arrest the attention of our friend Nisos when, not without having to overcome several physical and even a few mental impediments, he reached the bottom of the hold and was separated from the bottom of the sea by nothing but salt water and a double layer of inch-thick planks.

“More ‘Kolla’ I tell you! I must have a lot more ‘Kolla!’” was the cry that issued from beneath that hunched-over spine. “Glue! More glue!” was in fact the word that in hoarsely groaned accents emerged from that massive head and hooked nose. These were bent so low between the pair of formidable hands now at work squeezing the stuff into place, that the image presented by the red flames beneath the cauldron of melting glue as they flickered over the kneeling man and over the group of dark-skinned boys who were helping him was really like that of a huge Raven, who, with its beak and claws working together, was engaged in the construction of the Gods alone knew what sort of impregnable nest.

“O it’s you, is it?” Akron cried, straightening his back, though still remaining on his knees. “What I want now is one of those bronze hammers to smash this damned spike of rock! No! No! Heavier, much heavier than that! Go in there, where they are, Nisos, will you, and bring me the heaviest you can find!”

Nisos looked round him in some bewilderment; for the intense blackness of the shadows, and the red flickerings from the fire under the cauldron that was keeping the glue fluid, made up between them such an Hephaistian Smithy, as might well have been started by an insane as well as a lame god of fire at the bottom of the ocean!

But one of the black Libyan boys was quick to see his confusion and led him at once to the recess referred to as "in there" out of which he was soon able to extract the sort of long-handled hammer that was the instrument needed. Armed with this he returned to the bent figure of Akron, handed him the huge hammer, and watched eagerly to see what he would do.

The effect of what he saw at that moment lodged itself in his brain so deeply that always, after that, when he found himself in a place where there was anything to remind him of black protruding shadows and cavities full of whirling tongues of scarlet fire, all the impressions of that moment rushed back upon him.

It was the presence of that burning fire under the cauldron of melted glue in connection with the bottom of the ocean that hit him so hard. The element of fire, though taking up only so small a space compared with the terrific mass of water that surrounded it, drew into itself and flung out of itself, as it whirled its bloody circles round and round, an essence of existence that was at once absolute and unique.

But the master of the "Teras" straightened his back, took the long-handed hammer in his hand, and struck that up-thrusting point of rock one — two — three — terrific blows. At the first blow that rough projection of time-crumpled, space-naked rock shivered and cracked. At the second blow a fragment was whirled away. At the third blow the whole piece of rock went crashing off and was sent hurtling through the air to one of the pitch-black corners of the hold. Then there came bursting out of the hole made by that pointed rock a violent spout of sea-water; and down above this jet of brine Akron crouched again, squeezing into that jagged rent handful after handful of “kolla”, or semi-solid glue, snatched out of the cauldron. From a pile of carefully selected narrow slips of wood one of the black Libyan boys now handed Akron several freshly smoothed and rounded-off pieces of wood, by the aid of which, squeezed in with the malleable “kolla” or glue, this dangerous rent in the keel of the “Teras” was soon mended.

But they were now confronted by the yet more difficult business of getting the ship well away from the dangerous edges of the small island of Wone while they still kept within reach of it. Akron himself hurried to the oarsmen’s deck; for he had already decided that for this particularly ticklish and hazardous undertaking of getting the “Teras” clear of Wone and yet circumnavigating the island till they were well to the west of it, they would be better and safer in the hands of their oarsmen than of the men who manipulated their great sail.

One special advantage which this choice of Akron’s possessed Nisos realized to the full directly the two of them were on the oarsmen deck along with the four rowers. The crucial direction and management of the whole manoeuvre was now free from the presence of Nausikaa and Okyrhöe as well as of Eione and Pontopereia.

Zeuks however was still there, having deposited Arsinöe in the cabin of Odysseus, doubtless under the vague idea inherited from his immortal begetter, Arcadian Pan, that the only conceivable relation between a captive lady and a great sacker of cities was the sharing of a night’s sleep. Fortunately for the “Teras” and for them all the sharply-pointed rock that had pierced the keel was at the extreme end of a little promontory; so that at the first strong pull of the four long oars the ship swung clear of the island and was in deep water.

Ordering the four men to go on with an evenly-timed spell of steady rowing, Akron now ran up the ladder to the top-deck followed hurriedly by Nisos; and, once on that deck, instead of approaching the group near the mast where Odysseus was watching events with the detachment of an alert sea-lion, he strode quickly to the ship's stern to join the helmsman. He didn't presume himself to touch the "Teras's" helm, as the business of steering a ship as big as she was was no light task, and required a man not only with a special training but with special endowments.

But it had been to Akron himself, who had spent a day and a night in his younger days voyaging to Kephallenia to find Eumolpos and persuade him to join them, that the "Teras" owed her incomparable steersman. It was fascinating to Nisos to see the reverential respect with which the Master of the "Teras" followed now every faintest movement of the rudder by an expert in that difficult art.

The rudder was made of a young fir-trunk, peeled smooth and white; and, by its exquisite pressure upon the carefully squared and polished piece of wood directing the ship's course beneath the water, it caused the "Teras" to obey the firm unswerving hands of Eumolpos of Kephallenia with a perfection that was indeed awe-inspiring.

Nisos edged himself as far back into the stern as he possibly could, so far indeed that the round pole of the rudder pressed against his left thigh. But from this position he was able to get an unforgettable view of the whole spectacle. The moon was obviously full that night and its lustre flooded everything with a liquid luminosity that had nothing ghostly or spectral about it and yet was decidedly unearthly.

The Island of Wone, when once they had got the "Teras" off that sharp-jutting rock, by no means towered above them. Its structure was indeed that of a flat table-land raised only three or four feet above the surface of the sea; and the single mast of the “Teras” rose so high into the air as to quite out-top the two weird Divinities from Arima, Eurybia and Echidna, who, as they had done from time immeasurable, were still arguing with each other in a tireless monotonous dialogue.

The object upon which Nisos finally fixed his attention was the neck of the terrific Figure-Head of the “Teras”, which he had been assured he must regard as terminating in the actual head and features of its super-human designer.

These monumental features were at this very moment, so he had been solemnly told, no different from what they had been a hundred-thousand years ago and no different from what they would be a hundred-thousand years hence. “Had this supreme enemy of the everlasting gods,” he asked himself, “been able to invent a way of surviving beneath a volume of water half-a-mile deep?”

And what had happened to that fire-breathing monster Typhon? Had *he* been, as it had been said, “intercepted”, on his way to join the infernal foes of the gods who live forever? Nisos had been hearing, ever since he first came on board, extraordinary stories about this super-human Being whose features — and the legend ran that the Personage Itself had carved its own features — were neither divine nor human, neither of any conceivable Past or conceivable Future, but totally outside and beyond all we have heard, seen, remembered, imagined, dreamed, feared or hoped!

“It seems strange,” he said to himself, “that I, Nisos, the son of Pandea the wife of Krateros Naubolides, should be squatting by this helmsman, staring at the curving neck of this creature beyond all creatures, created by this creator beyond all creators, whose dragon-swan neck ends in some ultimate vision, the vision of a Being that is both more Divine and more Titanic than anything we know, that is in fact outside all we know. And isn’t it an unusually queer chance," Nisos now asked himself, "that I should know not one single person, except I suppose the men of the ship, who has ever seen the mysterious face with which the Figure-Head of the 'Teras' terminates?

"When this ship first entered the harbour of Ithaca was there not one single soul who saw her? When she was anchored in the harbour of Ithaca did no barge or boat or canoe or raft pass in front of her? Did no swimmer, swimming round her, look up at that face? Why haven't I asked this question of Odysseus, of Zeuks, of Princess Nausikaa herself to whom the ship belongs? There is certainly something queer about all this."

Nisos shuffled his uncomfortable body a little further still to the rear, until his back was pressed against the actual jet-black cross-bar of the ship's stern, in which position every time Eumolpos of Kephallenia gave the rudder the particular push that swung the "Teras" prow to the North our friend's thigh received something of a shock.

At one point indeed Eumolpos became aware of some sort of obstacle at the extreme reach of his helm's thrust, and turning his head for, as a man of good stock in Kephallenia, he was naturally courteous, he murmured an apology.

"O that's all right!" cried our friend. "It's only that I'm so unused to a ship. All I can do is to follow the master around."

But his word with the helmsman gave him the required incentive to put to Akron the question that was seething in his mind.

"By the way, Master, I suppose you've often examined the face of your ship's figure-head? Does it look like the face of a great philosopher, or like the face of a great poet, or like the face of a great scientist?"

Akron didn't even turn his head. "If I answered him properly you might never be able, aye, Eumolpos, to steer a ship again, all your days? But come along, Nisos! You said just now you were following me around! Well, I've got a bit of a job for you now."

Nisos disengaged himself from his cramped observation-post at the extreme stern of the "Teras" and followed Akron forward.

"No, seriously, my dear boy," the skipper said quietly, as they approached Odysseus, "it would never have done to start on all *that* business just then. The truth of it is that there's something funny about the whole thing." He grasped Nisos by the arm and they stood side by side for a minute, both of them watching, while he spoke, the wild half-naked figure of Enorches, the Priest, who was clearly haranguing the old king about something; something that made it necessary for Odysseus to sit down again on his coiled ropes.

"He wants me," said Akron, "to put the Island of Wone well behind us before night. His hope is that a cloud may cover up this confounded Moon before dawn and leave us free to get a good vision of the special stars by which he wants us to sail or to row — whichever may be necessary — *due West.* No, my dear boy, we of the 'Teras' have a natural instinct against talking about that matter of which you enquired just now; I mean about the face of our Figure-Head. The truth of it is there has been 'borne in upon us', as one of us called it the other night, an absolute conviction that only someone who in everything else was so simple, so much of an innocent that people felt they must treat him as if he were a vegetable or an animal or a fish of some kind or an inanimate thing, would be able to face that face without 'getting', as we say, 'the horrors'.

"If you were such an animal-like innocent I'd let you, if we had our anchor out, swim backwards and forward in front of our bows till you could look face to face at this enemy of the Olympians; but you my dear boy are anything but an innocent! On the contrary in most things you're a damned lot cleverer than I am or any of the rest of us who run this old ship."

"What kind of horrors would come upon anyone who wasn't an innocent, and who dared to face the face?"

"Do you want a straight answer, lad?"

"Of course."

"Well, as it happens, I, who now am talking with you, can tell you of one case."

"O quick, quick, captain! Tell me, before that face, scaring the gulls, gets round the next rock!"

The master didn't turn his eyes away from their steadily advancing mast, with all its ropes in order, though without a sail, but as he spoke it was clear to Nisos that ninety per cent of his consciousness was at that moment in his words.

"It was the officer I had before we got Thuon. Poor old Thuon can't bear even to look at the thing's neck from this side after what he's been told. The man's name was Teterix and he came from Zante and it was while I let them cast anchor for a while to catch some fish that this randy fool of a Zanteman began playing his games and swimming round the prow. I'd told him he weren't to do it, but he wanted to show off to the others; so as he swam he not only stared at the face but made faces at the face: and, in no time at all, there he was, climbing up on deck and dancing about in front of us with all his fingers pointing at his head. And such was the power of the horror on him *that he forced us to see him as he saw himself and as he felt himself*; that is to say with no human head at all, but with a raw bleeding neck out of which three bloated worms hung down who swayed to and fro and kept turning and twisting round.

"After this had gone on for several minutes the unfortunate Zante-man uttered one last piercing shriek, ran to the side of the ship and dived into the sea. So strong was the wretch's conviction that for a neck he had nothing but a gaping bloody hole with three bloated worms hanging out of it that it infected most of us who watched his dive; so that what we saw when he disappeared — and nothing of him ever reappeared — was a pool of blood on the water, with what looked like a blur of red worms squirming about within it."

"And you really and truly saw all that?"

"I really and truly saw all that," replied Akron.

Then it was that they both saw Odysseus beckoning to them and when they reached him they were, for the twentieth time that eventful evening, impressed to the depths of their souls by the old wanderer's self-control.

The excited priest of Orpheus, now entirely naked, was waving his long thin white arms, on which there was not a single black hair and which the moon seemed determined to turn to ivory. The madman was calling upon the whole universe to join him in his desperate incantation to Nothingness!

Not all the words of the priest's incantation reached Nisos; but those that did so sounded to him somewhat like this:

"Nothing! O Nothing! Thou god of all gods, thou creator of Silence!
God of all gods, and creator of Silence, thy daughter!
Nothing! O holy Nothing! O sacred Nothing, and Silence!
Swallow, great Nothing, all else but thyself and thy daughter!
Swallow air, swallow water, swallow fire, swallow earth and her children!
Swallow land, swallow sea, swallow all that in land and sea dwelleth!
Let the whole world be empty of all but thyself and thy daughter

Empty of all but thyself and thy daughter and darling!
Let nothing move in the height or the depth or the length or the breadth,
Save only thyself, great Nothing, thyself and thy daughter,
Only thyself and Silence, thy daughter and darling.
Let nothing sound in the earth or the air or the water or fire;
Let the whole world be empty of all but thyself and thy daughter,
All but thyself and Silence thy daughter and darling."

Nisos expected that Odysseus would react in some definite way to this nihilistic incantation; but he behaved as if he had not heard a word of what the Priest had been chanting, and as soon as Enorches realized that he was totally alone in his worship of Non-Existence he clung to the mast and became absolutely silent and still.

Meanwhile Odysseus had begun a long geological rigmarole on the chemical constituents of various kinds of scoriae substance; and he did this, Nisos decided, so as to reduce Enorches to the Nothingness he worshipped.

"It is an up-thrusting, up-pointing rock," Odysseus concluded, "a rock of black basalt, or of some blue-black adamantine stone, Master Akron. Have you heard what I've been saying in all this breaking of waves and splashing of water?"

Akron, followed closely by Nisos, who gave a grave little bow when he met the king's glance, declared that he'd heard perfectly every word.

"How well he lies!" thought Nisos. "I couldn't have done better myself. But no! He *must* have heard. What an ear he's got!"

"Yes, O great King," said Akron firmly. "You've said that we shall soon reach an up-pointing black rock, about a dozen feet inland from the island's edge, and that it is to this rock that you wish me to make fast the ship with our newest and strongest length of rope; for it is from there when this curst moonlight — have mercy on me, Selene! — is driven from the heaven by the sun, that you wish, my king, to make your first experimental dive with the Helmet of Proteus. Have I got your command clear, my lord Odysseus?" And the king murmured that he had. It struck Nisos however that the royal voice had grown perceptibly weaker since Pegasos had come and gone; but as the old man, after haying risen to his feet for some minutes, had now re-seated himself on his pile of ropes, this change of tone may have been without any special significance.

"But how," thought Nisos, "how *can* the old man endure all this?" And then, as in obedience to a whisper from Akron he picked up the blanket that the Priest of Orpheus had dropped and wrapt it round the fellow's shoulders, he noticed that Enorches gave him a very queer look. All the same the priest wrapped the thing round himself with obvious relief and crouched down again, this time with his back to the mast.

"Stay and watch him for a while, will you, son?" whispered Akron. "I've got to go down now to the oarsmen to talk to them about this rock to which we have to tie up the ship for the night. And keep an eye, sonny, will you" — here Akron moved close enough to add this in an extremely low whisper — "on Zeuks, while I'm down below? He seems to think that as long as he's embracing that girl he's keeping her from some mischief she naturally will be up to the moment he lets her go! But it's much more about himself than about that poor worried-looking waif from Troy that I'm concerned.

"You know the man a lot better than I do; in fact, as far as I can see, you're the only one aboard our old 'Teras' who knows anything about him at all. He's a funny-looking fellow right enough; and he's got a look as if at any moment he might break out into a roar of laughter that would burst his skin! I don't like the look of him and I don't trust him. So keep an eye on him, son, will you? They'll be calling us down before very long to the old man's cabin for supper. I pray we'll be reaching this confounded rock he talks about before *that's* ready. But maybe not! Anyway I'm off now. I'll be seeing you later. At supper, if not before! I won't ask you now how *you* suppose the old man knew about this same 'pointed rock' to which we're to moor the 'Teras'? *He can't have been here before, can he?* Well! See you soon again, son! But keep your wits about you. I leave the old man, so to say, in your care. See you soon!"

Both pairs of ladies, Pontopereia and Eione in their cabin, and Nausikaa and Okyrhöe in theirs, were, in a leisurely, negligent, nonchalant way, preparing for the passengers' supper in the much larger cabin dedicated to the comfort of Odysseus.

"What do you really feel, Eione darling, when you see that queer-looking individual Zeuks, holding that grave, sweet Trojan woman on his knee?"

Pontopereia held her own not very shapely left leg balanced across the knee of her other while she carefully adjusted her left sandal so that a particular wrinkle in its leather shouldn't hurt a bunion from which she was suffering.

Eione screwed up her forehead, but gave her friend a very straight look.

"It wouldn't suit you, my beautiful one, to feel as I feel," Eione replied, "for you're a clever girl from a big city and are born with an intellect of your own; and if a man began fooling about with you you'd either want him to come to the point, take your maidenhead, as they call it, and have done with it, or to let you alone and come back to listening while you explained your philosophy to him.

"But country girls like me are quite different. We've lived so close to animals that we've sort of turned into animals. We're fond of our own human flesh just as animals are. And we're particularly fond of our own flesh when men are enjoying it, I mean feeling it with any part of *their* bodies. I know what I'm talking about, Ponty darling, for I've had an experience that doesn't happen to every girl in the world I can assure you! I mean I've been, as they call it, 'made love to' — not much 'making' and not much 'love' in it, but never mind that! — by no other than the most lecherous Being in the whole wide world, the great Arcadian god Pan, his own self!

"And do you know what happened? We just simply made friends. I begged him not to meddle with my virginity, for, as I told him frankly, I didn't want to be bothered with the consequence of that sort of thing yet! I wanted to enjoy my life before starting to be a mother and all that sort of business. Arcadian Pan fully understood what I said to him; and he fully agreed with my point of view. I told him it wasn't fair that our mother the Earth should just use us as procreating nest-eggs for her own purposes. And he agreed.

"He said that in the act of copulation a woman got more pleasure than a man the moment the pain was over and sometimes even while the pain was going on. But he said he'd make a bargain with me that he'd agree not to meddle with my virginity if in return I'd let him hold me on his knees and enjoy the feeling of my thighs pressed against his thighs and the pleasure of stroking my breasts. He said that the pleasure to male flesh of having female flesh pressed against it was greater than the most delicious taste to the tongue or the palate or the most exciting bathing in water, rushing through air, burrowing in earth-mould, or brandishing blazing fire.

"He said that to deny to masculine flesh its greatest possible thrill, namely the ecstasy of being pressed against feminine flesh, was the most cruel and wicked perversion in the whole universe, and that the whole idea of refusing our human flesh to each other, when the meeting of these two sorts of flesh, the male and the female, gave to each the greatest thrill of pleasure possible to all organic beings in the whole universe was a wicked and cruel denial to life of what life had come into existence to enjoy.

"'Life,' said Arcadian Pan to me, 'life is lured and attracted out of the inert and inanimate elements into its earliest existence by the promise of the indescribable ecstasy of sexual pleasure! And so, when we have lured life out of the inanimate, to go and deny to it,' thus spoke Arcadian Pan to me, 'its prerogative and privilege and proprietary right, is an abominable treachery to the mysterious pressure, whatever it may be, that brought life into existence!'

"And I must tell you this also, Ponty, my true and only friend. When Arcadian Pan had taught me the ineffable, the unfathomable, the infinite pleasure that comes from male flesh pressing female flesh against itself — and, mind you, this has nothing at all to do with 'taking maidenheads', as they call it, or de-virginating virgins — he and I became excellent friends. I found his society extremely agreeable; and it seemed to me that he found mine the same! At any rate the result of our daily contact was that I got genuinely fond of him and sincerely attached to him as a friend; and I believe he felt exactly the same about me! That he was an immortal god and I a silly little mortal girl, doomed to perish in a few years, seemed to make no difference to him or to me! I can only tell you, Ponty dear, that if it weren't for meeting you, and your being so sweet to me, I should miss his company so much that there's no telling what silly things I might do. And what is more, I believe, though it seems conceited and vain to say so, that he misses me, though not of course as much as I miss him!"

At this point Pontopereia, as she lowered her not very shapely leg to the floor of that lowest deck of the "Teras" and endured with a little laugh the twitching pain she got from the contact of her sandal with her bunion, believed she beheld by the feeble flame of a flickering wick floating in oil, a real, actual, round pearl of a wet tear rolling down her friend's plain, simple, and the extreme opposite of what could be called a clever face and sliding from her retreating chin to the white hollow between her girlish breasts.

A very different dialogue was proceeding meanwhile in the cabin of the two older women. There was no inclination between those two to make the relation between male and female flesh the subject of discourse. *Their* talk was actuated by, and revolved round, and obstinately and viciously returned to, the intense heart-gnawing jealousy they felt with regard to each other and the old wanderer with whom they were sailing.

"You have no idea then, is that what you want me to believe, as to what you will do with me, when you and this ugly, badly built ship of yours have lured Odysseus to his death?"

"*Do* with you? I don't understand! I presume you'll stay here on board with us until you're tired of us? We shall, of course, when we've seen all we want to see of the ocean that swallowed up Atlantis, sail back to the land of my Fathers. If you think we're going to visit Ithaca just for the sake of ending where we began you're challenging the very mill-wheel of disappointment.

"And if you are playing with the crazy idea that you can persuade me to enter the harbour of the city of Thebes on your behalf you must be losing your head. What you ought to be asking yourself all this while is what you will do when we return to my country. I shall have no particular authority there; and if I *had* I doubt whether, from what I now am learning about you from personal contact, I should be particularly anxious to — *What was that?* The first call for dinner was it? Or was it a call for us to gather on the top deck again, before *something* — heaven knows what! — begins to happen?

"No, no! thanks all the same! You go on dressing; and be quick about it and stop talking! I can manage with this curst necklace if you leave me alone. Yes, you're welcome to all the hot water in that *pro-cho-os* over there. I've got all I want."

Meanwhile on the top deck the same sound of the same bell that had disturbed Nausikaa and Okyrhöe reached the ears of Odysseus. He had left his club propt against the bulwarks and had already begun to move, slowly and cautiously, as he always did when on board ship, from his seat of coiled ropes to the ladder leading to the oarsmen's deck.

Over the face of the priest Enorches as he lay naked in a couple of blankets, for some kindly sailor had brought him a second one, now that the only light in the sky and on the water was moonlight, there floated an unquestionable smile of pure comfort and relief. Most onlookers would have supposed this look to have been purely due to a draught of rich Cyprian wine which another kindly sailor had brought him; but our old acquaintance the Fly who was now in a position to observe these things at close quarters knew well enough that it was his friend the brown-winged Moth, who by deliberately fanning with her wings the wine-moistened lips of the Priest of the Mysteries, had drawn from him this genial token of well-being.

As to the Moth herself, she had no sooner returned to her friend in their familiar refuge than she was compelled to listen to one of those cosmic conversations between the Sixth Pillar and the Club of Herakles which the Fly's scientific mind always found so fascinating and illuminating.

"You must have noticed already, my dear old friend," the Sixth Pillar was saying, "how strongly and emphatically the four elements are joining in this multiversial revolt against the authority of the Olympians? Of course there are voices abroad and I can hear them in this corridor who declare that what is now going on is a world-wide revolt of women against men rather than of men against gods or of Titans against Olympians; but with my own personal nearness to the Four Supreme Elements I cannot share these eccentric opinions.

“To me it is clear that what is happening in the multiverse at the present moment is a revolt against Zeus the Son of Kronos by every other power in the wide world! The best proof of this is the definite news that Hera and Athene who have always worked hand in hand are now encouraging Poseidon and Aidoneus to join with Zeus in some final desperate act of authority and retribution.

“What I am most conscious of now,” went on the Sixth Pillar, “is the mental awareness of what is going on by each of the Four Elements. Take the earth, to begin with, my good friend. I assure you I cannot imagine anything clearer or more definite than the vibration of sympathy with the rebels in this cosmogonic revolt which I feel — yes! at this very second as I talk to you I feel it — emanating from the earth! The vibrations I feel, you must understand, my friend, are not spoken words. They are more like the deep, dim rumblings of an earthquake! They are thick and dense and dark, and convey to me something of what animals must feel when they fall and strike their foreheads upon the ground. On the contrary the vibrations I get out of the air are like a mighty rushing wind which seems in the fanning and flapping of its vast feathers to have completely surrounded me and to be carrying me into a boundless void.

“And then what I get out of the heart of the hot black fire of the darkened sun as he travels beneath the earth, and what I get out of the heart of the cold white fire of the ghostly moon as she rides through the clouds, are two infinite throbbings that are like thunder in my own heart!

"And strangest of all is the vibration that emanates from the massed volume of all the waters of the ocean, a vibration that is in many ways more important for us in this corridor of the rock-palace of the Island of Ithaca than all the other three; for it is a vibration from an element that resembles air made palpable, air thickened out into a tidal momentum encircling the earth, grey, fathomless, immeasurable, salt with all the tears ever shed, cold and ultimate as a universal grave."

The monotone of the Sixth Pillar's discourse as he thus informed his friend the Club of Herakles, to whom Atropos had given the name of "Expectation" and who had always had the name of "Dokeesis" or "Seeming", how the Four sublime elements of earth, air, fire and water responded to this world-wide revolt against the gods had scarcely died down, before there came, reverberating up from the depths of the "Teras", the second call for supper.

It was the custom on board this particular ship for the white crew and their black helpers to enjoy their evening meal in a haphazard manner, casually, and irregularly, and in no particular order, slipping down by twos and threes to the kitchen in the hold when opportunity offered, and lingering with a friend over a flask of wine down there when the wind was in their sail and the ship was moving quietly.

At the moment therefore when the second call for the supper went forth on this particular evening our young friend Nisos, who was to have a berth that night with the master of the ship so as to give the only remaining one-man cabin to Zeuks, was already wondering whether to obey the call alone or to beg Zeuks and Arsinöe, the latter looking half-asleep as she reposed partly on the knees of the son of Pan and partly against the base of the ship's figure-head, to accompany him.

If Arsinöe was half-asleep, Zeuks, as far as Nisos could tell, was entirely so, for his eyes were tightly closed and his face had the expression, already familiar to Nisos, that it always assumed when the man was asleep, an expression as if he were some whimsical creator of the world who had dozed off in the act of trying to suppress his amusement at his creation.

Pontos and Proros were playing some private game of their own at the foot of the mast, a game that was clearly one rather of skill than of chance; for they threw no dice, and seemed to be moving little bits of wood from one position to another across some geometrical figure scrawled on the deck.

Nisos had the boldness at this moment, so quietly and silently was the "Teras" being rowed along that rocky coast of the Island of Wone in that unearthly moonlight, to sink down himself upon the old king's seat of coiled ropes, as he watched in a sort of trance across the slowly changing rocky edges of Wone those two weird figures from Arima, whose unearthly and unending disputation with each other the wind must now be carrying back towards those old Eastern lands they were so steadily leaving as they sailed through the moonlight towards the unknown West.

It was a moment in his life, so our friend told himself, as he tried to arrange his limbs on his pile of ropes as comfortably as the king always did, that until his death he would remember.

"I don't believe I will go down to dinner at all tonight," he thought, answering, as he fancied, some call out of the moonlight that was more imperative for him than even the second call to the most important meal of the day, and in a flash of interior penetration he recognized that he still couldn't decide whether it was Pontopereia or Eione he would like best to have for his wife.

"I don't even know to which of them I am the more attracted! In fact, as I watch Arsinöe now, who is ever so much older than they are, I really think I would feel more at ease and more content if it were she rather than either of those young girls who was to be my mate. And she's not only older; she's a Trojan too! Of course I'd be thrilled to make love to either of those girls and overjoyed to sleep with either of them; but I'd be scared of being fixed up for good with that stupid little face of Eione's or with that heavy little body of Pontopereia's. I simply can't understand it! But there it is: it's the truth. What I feel now is that something — someone — a Presence of some kind — is calling to me out of this moonlight and out of this night-wind and out of these waves, though I'm damned if I know what kind of a Presence it is!

"Come! Tell me, you Unknown! Are you a living girl, you Mystery of the Night? Or are you a boy like me, alone and puzzled and not quite knowing what you want, but not wanting to go back to your mother, and hating your father and brother and your brother's girl? Are you a boy like me, you Mystery of the Night, serving one of the greatest heroes the world has ever seen and a hero who has seen more of the world than any other human being who has ever been born? Are you a lonely girl who-want me for your mate? Or are you a lonely boy who want me for your 'Hetairos' or friend? Speak you Mystery of the Night! Speak and tell me which of the two you are!"

But there was no answer and the Moon grew steadily larger and larger and larger. And as Nisos settled himself deeper and deeper in the centre of that pile of ropes he began to feel as if it were the Moon herself, Selene the Moon-Goddess, who had selected him, as according to the rumours he was always hearing she had long ago selected Arcadian Pan and as she had lately selected, so the angelic scandal-mongers swore, the Carian shepherd Endymion of Mount Latmos.

He allowed himself to dally with this idea of having really attracted the attention of the Moon-Goddess on this night of all nights when her circle of white magic was full to the brim, until the inhuman murmur from Eurybia and Echidna, neither of whom seemed even remotely affected by their voyage through the air from Arima to Wone, reached such a point in their choreographic accompaniment to his fancy, as if — pair of ancestral Titanesses as they were! — they were about to vary the monotony of their immemorial argument by hopping up and down in the fury of their repartees!

It was at this point that Nisos fancying he saw Arsinöe, still in the arms of the now soundly sleeping Zeuks, throw him an understanding if not a companionable smile, replied to her by kissing his hand.

“I can’t help liking this Trojan girl,” he said to himself; and then, as his gaze returned to Eurybia and Echidna, and from them wandered back to the coast of Wone, and from thence to the moonlight on the ocean, there rushed through his mind like jaggedly forked lightning a startling philosophical speculation.

“Does everything come round in circles and repeat itself? Was there, when people first invented boats and ships, some boy like me ten thousand years ago who lay on a ship’s deck, such as ships were in those days, with only one deck, and only a couple of oarsmen, and a sail made of the skins of seals and wild goats, and said to himself, just as I am saying now: ‘I don’t want to go back to mother and father. I want to serve my King. I want to make love to that girl I saw on that wharf where we moored yesterday!’

“And will there be a boy like me ten thousand years hence who will lie on a much grander deck than this and say to himself: ‘I don’t want to go back to my mother and father! I want to sail round all the known West to the Isles of the Blest!' That boy who *was* like me; and this boy who *will be* like me, shall we three meet in the kingdom of Aidoneus?"

Nisos had only just begun to turn his mind away from thinking about boys like himself ten thousand years before and ten thousand years after, when he saw Arsinöe open her beautiful eyes very wide indeed and give a start that would have waked from sleep anyone in the world save the son of Arcadian Pan who was holding her on his knee.

At the same time Nisos felt himself touched on the shoulder. He twisted his head round, and there before him in the moonlight stood the figure of Odysseus!

"Hush!" whispered the old hero while his bowsprit beard tickled Nisos' chin: "get up as quietly as you can, my boy, and take a step with me!"

It was a comfort to Nisos to notice when he was on his feet that his friend Arsinöe had been shrewd enough to shut her eyes and pretend to surrender herself to what certainly looked like a sleep as deep as Zeuks' own.

"I won't take you with me just now further than the ladder, my boy," said Odysseus still speaking very quietly. "I came to fetch 'Expectation', my most valued weapon, with which, as you know, Herakles killed the Nemean lion. But I also came to tell you what my intention is. I have already told Akron, who is at this moment informing the oarsmen what I have in mind, and I have already told Eumolpos the helmsman. My intention is this. My son Telemachos received, when he visited the yellow-haired Menelaos, as a guest-gift from Helen herself, a little phial of Nepenthe which was given to her by the King of Egypt.

"When even a few drops of this divine Nepenthe, the enemy of all suffering, are dropped into wine, the wine into which the Nepenthe has been poured, takes away all thoughts that bring anxiety or pain or fear or doubt or suspicion or grief or envy or hatred or terror; and in place of these a beatific happiness fills our souls to the brim.

"A little of this precious Nepenthe goes a very long way; and I have brought some of it with me to this ship. Now what I propose to do is to put a few drops of this divine drug into the wine which our four Ladies, together with Nausikaa's official Herald, will presently be drinking in my cabin. You and I, however — and for heaven's sake, child, don't you go and get caught by the fragrance of the wine or lured into letting the least drop of it touch your tongue! — as soon as we see that the four ladies and Nausikaa's Herald have fallen asleep and are deep sunk in this blessed Elysium of happy visions, having taken good care — and don't you forget that part of it, my son! — to eat enough to last us, if need be, for a whole night and day, we, I say, will leave that lower deck and come up here, to be ready for, well, for whatever fate may bring!"

They had by this time reached the ladder which descended to the deck of the rowers, and it was not until Odysseus was half-way down that the necessity of asking him a most drastic and necessary question forced Nisos to make the old man turn round and lift up his head towards him. Never did the lad, through all the rest of his mortal days, forget the impression he received at that second as the unearthly luminosity of that night's omniscient moonlight poured down upon that old upturned face with that crazy "Helmet of Proteus" twisted about it, whereof the absurdly trailing "thusanoi", or "tassels" looked in that silvery gleaming as if they were the "tassels" of Athene's "aegis" transformed into long, slenderly-coiling, silvery worms.

"Do you wish me, my king," Nisos enquired, getting the words out with a gasping rush of breath, "to inform Zeuks of your intention? Is *he* to share your Nepenthe with the Herald and the four ladies? Or shall I tell him of your intention and recommend him to bring down the Trojan maid Arsinöe to wait on the four ladies and to share their supper and the sleep-giving wine?"

"You have done well in thinking as you have," answered the voice of the king from the white face above that moonlit beard. "Bring them both down to my cabin. We'll let them both sleep the sleep of Nepenthe. After all it was the gift of Helen."

A couple of minutes later, Nisos was standing close to what clearly had become an extremely agitating game of contending figurines above whose "Pessoi", or "inanimate men-at-arms", Pontos and Proros were now bending in intense concentration.

But Nisos was too occupied just then in obeying Odysseus to feel the faintest desire to "pessenize". "Arsinöe!" he called out in a clear though not a loud voice. The girl heard him at once. "What's the matter?" she asked, disengaging herself from the knees of the son of Pan and rising to her feet.

"You must wake him now," our friend answered, "for the king wants him at their supper."

And then he added hurriedly, catching a rather pathetic look of bewilderment on her face, "And you too, Arsinöe my dear, I expect they'll all be glad to have you down there; for if I'm not mistaken there'll be more good wine than good manners at this precious supper of theirs!"

The girl bent down over Zeuks and shook him by the right shoulder. His body was squeezed between the metallic base of the famous figure-head which was at that point wrought into a number of shell-curved, beautifully carved dragon-scales, and the narrowing rondure of the rail of the ship's prow. Zeuks opened his left eye, gave both the girl and Nisos a glance that partook of the nature of a humorous wink and closed it again.

"Do wake him for heaven's sake, my dear!" repeated Nisos. "I'd do it myself," he went on, "only if I touched him he might fly into a passion and start hitting me; and that would probably set me off too and there'd be a fine row!"

Nisos felt deep in his soul that he wouldn't mind at all if there was a murderous row; but as he stared ahead he realized that the "Teras" had actually now reached the point at which not so far inland arose that nameless sharp-pointed rock to which their ship was to be roped. It certainly was a curiously shaped rock, like a tall lean man with a fantastically long neck and an unnaturally large head; and our friend began wondering just from where upon the "Teras" the rope would have to be conveyed to that figure and attached to it.

His speculations about the securing of their vessel were broken up by some change in the wind that brought to his ears — and apparently to Arsinöe's too, for she let Zeuks' head sink down again — what was unmistakably the culminating point of the unending dispute between Eurybia and Echidna.

Both Nisos and Arsinöe soon realized from the weird words they heard that Eurybia had finished her murmured contention that the reeling and rocking of the cosmos that was now the chief topic of what might be called the elemental gossip of the universe was due to a revolt of the whole Feminine Half of the world against the eternal Male; and that Echidna was now defending *her* notion of what was happening, which certainly was a startling and terrifying one, and entirely different from that of her sister phantom of this Arima in the midst of the ocean.

The gist of Echidna's view of what was occurring was that it was a grand revolt of the Titans, and, with the Titans of all those Giants and Dragons and Super-Animals and Super-Birds and Super-Fishes and Super-Reptiles and ancient long-forgotten insular divinities, such as Eurybia and herself, who, in comparison with the proud Olympians, must seem to some— “indeed” thought Nisos, “they seem to me” — hideous monsters and wicked antiquities — in universal conspiracy against the thunder-wielding All-Father, Zeus.

But what was probably to our friend Nisos’ ears, and certainly to those of Arsinöe, who was doing her best to disturb the sleepy head of the unconscionable son of Pan, the most alarming part of this victory-chant of the Antediluvians was that it concluded with a phantasmagoric wail of prediction, prophesying— “falsely, O falsely! let us pray!” cried the look that was being at that second exchanged between our young armour-bearer of the King of Ithaca and the daughter of Hector — that the revolt of the Titans and the Monsters was destined to prevail!

And as the prophetic hiss of Echidna, the Snake-Goddess, floated away on the moonlight, it came with a considerable shock into Nisos’ mind that it was no other than Arcadian Pan himself, the rustic god who had the horns and legs of a goat, who had carried off from Arima these two weird Beings who were like the ghosts of forgotten island Deities and had carried off Tis’s little sister Eione as well, Eione, who was now safe in the king’s cabin and would be shortly drinking the wine that contained Helen’s Egyptian Nepenthe, carried them all off together on those two immortal horses.

“Whither now, then,” the lad asked himself, “had Arcadian Pan gone? Had he dived down under the waters into the streets and temples and markets and shops and brothels of the metropolis of Atlantis? Impossible! Impossible! Who could imagine the goat-god of Arcadia playing on his flute in the fish-frequented streets of that drowned city? Impossible! Impossible! He must have made that other divine horse, the one whose mane was up-rooted by this naked wretch lying here now, dead-drunk in his blankets, under the ship's bulwark, carry him over sea and land home to his sheep-folds!"

As these thoughts crowded, like a swarm of small gnats, into our young friend's head he noticed that Akron, the ship's captain, was approaching them. This fact reached his intelligence indirectly but very quickly; for he saw all those little bits of wood that Pontos and Proros had been using as toy soldiers in their game of "Pesseia" disappear with a scraping and scuffling sound into the capacious folds of their tunics.

The unavoidable though quite faint sound made by these stalwart sailors as they disposed of so many handfuls of toy-soldiers made it clear to Nisos that the natural human passion for playing games was stronger than any intellectual interest in drowned cities or in the past or future of scientific civilizations. Pontos and Proros were ready for anything; but they did not want to see their precious "Pessoi" or draughtsmen cast into the sea.

"Well, my excellent land-lubbers!" exclaimed Akron in his most genial manner. "You'll soon have a chance to watch a little real seamanship, not un-combined, I hope, with a little unprofessional commonsense! You've already noticed, Nisos, my dear boy, that we've reached that rock — —" Akron lifted his arm and pointed eagerly— "that the king calls the Atlas Rock because, so he informs us, only none of us on this old ship can corroborate his words, it resembles the giant Titan whose head, and shoulders too, you and I must have seen from this very deck beyond the Pillars of Herakles before the 'Teras' made for the open sea; and the king swears it does actually resemble the Titan Atlas whom the All-Father punishes forever by making him hold up the sky.

"The king says that the Titan, though no weakling, lacks the broad shoulders and muscular neck that would render his task agreeable. The king says his shoulders slope like a woman's just as do those of this damned rock to which we've now got to tie up our grand old sea-eagle!"

It was clear to Nisos, if not to Zeuks, who had at last under the shock of the arrival of the skipper of the "Teras", shaken off his shameless tendency to respond to any increase in dramatic danger by an increase in undramatic drowsiness, that the four sailors on the deck below had stopped using their oars and that the "Teras" was now doing nothing but obeying the helmsmanship of Eumolpos as she followed the urge of those four men's final strokes.

"Odysseus told me" — and Nisos cried out his master's name with a voice to be heard in competition with the two sounds that just then were most dominant; in the first place with the whistling of the wind in the complicated rigging beneath the mast, rigging which, though doubtless less involved than Pontos' and Proros' recent "pessenizing" with soldiers made of splinters and slivers and shavings of wood, would have been enough to puzzle any landsman; and in the second place with the stentorian breathing of the poor blanketed Enorches.

Nisos must instinctively have said "Odysseus" instead of "the King" because, with this incredible moonlight flooding the rocks and beaches along whose edge they were moving and with that extraordinary rock wearing a human shape and those two phantom goddesses moaning forth into the moonlight their contrarious explanations of the present world-madness, it must have struck him that what was now happening was so dramatic that it lent itself better to the romantic name of the lover of Circe and Calypso than to the clanging monosyllable "King" whose only virtue was that it was the symbol of absolute law and order.

"Odysseus told me to say that both you yourself, friend Zeuks, and you also, Arsinöe my dear, will be welcome as soon as you can reach it, at the

Passengers’ Dining-Table in the King’s cabin, and he told me to accompany you both as soon as — —”

“What’s the matter, baby-boy?” interrupted Zeuks, looking as if he were a human skin on the point of bursting and losing its human shape in one great bubble of laughter: “Have you got a flea in — —”

“I pray it’s not a poisonous fly!” cried Arsinöe, with unmistakable sympathy in her tone. “You may laugh my Lord Zeuks,” the girl went on, coming hurriedly to Nisos’ side and raising both hands to the spot just above his collar-bone where he was now scratching himself with positively vicious intensity, “yes, you may laugh, but there may easily have been a whole swarm of poisonous insects carried from our last ‘port of call’ which was of course your — or I suppose I must now say ‘our’ — island harbour.”

But to the girl’s astonishment, and indeed to the astonishment of both Zeuks and Akron, Nisos thrust away her sympathetic hand, though its delicate fingers were trembling with real concern. But Arsinöe was saved from feeling hurt at his rejection of her help by her amazement at what he proceeded to do when she withdrew her hand. Both Zeuks and Akron were as astonished as she was and all the three of them drew near to watch his antics.

Even Enorches, clutching his outer blanket with his left hand round his throat and his inner blanket with his right hand round his waist, woke up suddenly from his trance and stared with unglazed absorbed concentrated attention at what Nisos was doing. Nisos had clearly got possession now of whatever creature it was that had caused him to scratch himself to such a tune; and he now held it in his clenched fist close to one of his ears. The only sound that issued from his imprisoning fingers was an irregular buzzing; and Arsinöe smiled at both Zeuks and Akron, who were now openly smiling at each other, while the Priest of Orpheus began muttering the most formidable liturgical prayer he knew by heart that the most mystical swamp in the realm of Aidoneus should receive his purified ghost.

“You were indeed brave to come all this way from your club-tent, Master Myos,” murmured our young friend; “though I hope your dear companion, the Brown Moth, won’t be too miserable in your absence.”

“Look at Enorches!” was the Fly’s reply to this; and the moment our friend obeyed him he knew perfectly well that the Moth was anything but miserable; for it was indeed obvious from the beatific smile of paradisal bliss that now radiated from the Priest’s curiously emphatic nose, mouth, eye-sockets, eyebrows, and ears, that the lovely little winged shadow that now kept hovering under and above and round and beneath the oddly-shaped chin of the oracle of Nothingness was nothing less than the Brown Moth herself playing at burning to death on the altar of truth.

That neither the worship of Eros nor of Dionysos nor even of Silence herself, oldest of all divinities in the world and the one most likely to outlive them all, could wholly satisfy the Priest’s voracious mystery-maw, Nisos at that moment felt certain. The Orphic Priest could praise Nothingness; but the ecstasy he worshipped was a real, actual, concrete experience, which, if not given him by drink or by lechery, could be given him by the devotion of a disciple.

“She knows you are here, does she?”

“Of course. And when she’s finished playing at ‘wings in the candle’ to pluck that poor devil out of his black blot of clotted ink, she’ll come fluttering round us; and then together— ‘off we’ll fly to drink with Helen before we die!’”

“With Helen?”

“I mean in a metaphysical sense, by sipping her Nepenthe.”

“It’s wonderful, Master Myos, isn’t it, that I haven’t forgotten your language?”

“Ah, my friend! Don’t you know why that is?”

“I can’t say I do.”

“That’s because” — and the Fly began to grow as academic as he always did with the Moth— “that’s because it was Athene herself who taught you the syntax of it.”

“You mean the peculiar way you always begin and always end with the adverb?”

“I mean the way we say: ‘Beautifully fluttered round him the moth symbolically-speaking.’”

“But do go on, Master Fly, with what you were telling me you had just over-heard from the talk of the Sixth Pillar with the Club of Herakles.”

“The Sixth Pillar told the Club that Princess Nausikaa had been chosen Queen of her Native Land and that those two Immortal Horses, that the Priest over there tried to maim, are even now on their way through the air to take her back to that country where her palace still possesses that famous garden which is the most beautiful garden that has ever been seen in the whole history of the world.”

“Those two Horses *coming here,* do you say?”

At this startling piece of news Nisos jumped to his feet, removed his hand from his ear, opened his fingers, and let the Fly go free with a flourish of his wrist. The Fly was no sooner free than it was instantly joined by the Moth, and the speed with which the two of them flew off the top deck, down the ladder to the oarsmen’s deck, down the next ladder to the cabin-deck, and thence straight into the interior of the great weapon that was their nomadic home, was incredible.

We human beings in our crowded life are more aware of the starting-points and arriving-points of insects than of the rapidity of their movements from point to point.

"Come along, Zeuks, for heaven's sake come along! And you too my lord Enorches! Fate will find a Community for you — don't you doubt it — where you can preach, if not practise, your nihilistic ideas, whether under the love-charms of Eros or under the Thyrsi of Dionysos!"

Our friend's voice was pitched so high, and he flung into it such a resounding intonation, that not only did Akron cast a sweeping glance from one end to the other of all the Horizon that was visible from their present position, but, to the evident surprise of Zeuks, Enorches actually did scramble clumsily to his feet, and even began automatically kicking at the skirt of his longest blanket as if to make sure that his sandals were firmly fastened.

Nisos then snatched instinctively at Arsinöe's arm; and followed closely by Zeuks, with Enorches lurching and shuffling after them, he turned his back upon the dragon-neck of the ship's figure-head and, avoiding the eyes of Pontos and Proros, for with a certain part of his mind he felt as if he were running away, he headed for that already familiar ladder leading down to the oarsmen's deck.

At the foot of this first ladder he paused for no more time than was just needed to get a glimpse of the face of Euros, a face that at that second looked vexed, irritated, touchy, anxious, full of the most sensitive perturbations, as he bent above his. motionless oar, ready to give it the pull of a master oarsman at the faintest hint from the upper deck.

Arrived at that crowded, ticklish, furtively confused and terribly littered centre of all the gossip and eavesdropping that went on in the passenger's quarter, Nisos, who was followed closely by Zeuks and by Arsinöe, who once again had a tight hold of each other's hands, but who himself, since he had no. hand to share with anyone, nor much thought for anything either, save to steer the wavering steps of the Priest of the Mysteries, had a moment's breathing-space. Now that this weird and disturbing individual was safely under at least temporary control Nisos couldn't help noticing the insatiable and unpleasantly greedy manner in which the man snuffed up and inhaled with, undisguised relish all the odours and all the smells and all the fragrances and all the airy essences and all the fetid stinks that challenged both the nostrils and the stomachs of any newcomers who dared to plunge from the upper deck into the stygian reek of these bowels of the "Teras".

And Nisos couldn't resist saying to himself: "Would this extraordinary creature advise us to lose ourselves in the madness of love or the madness of drink, and thus get to the Original nothingness, before the earth, before the sky, before the sea, before the sun, before the gods created man, before man created the Gods, if he hadn't forgotten the oracle that my mother used to tell me was what, by his obedience to it, made Odysseus the wisest of all men — *Meeden Agan,* 'nothing in excess'?"

"Why in the name of Aidoneus," the lad's thoughts ran on, as he watched his blanketed priest snuffing up with such a frenzy of maniacal sensuality the whirligig-reek of kitchen-fumes mixed with the contaminated sweat of the youthful disposers of excrement, "why in the name of Aidoneus was mother always quoting that *Meeden Agan,* 'Nothing in Excess', motto? It had nothing to do with the House of Naubolides, and was always on the lips of Odysseus. I can't understand it! Well, well! 'Nothing in Excess' will have now to be my motto, even when it comes to plunging into the revelry of this weird feast."

But it is easier to formulate a philosophy, even if we are destined to be a prophet in later life, than to apply it to a definite and particular occasion;

and Nisos was puzzled by the sharpness of the pang of jealousy of which he became aware when Zeuks put his arm round the waist of Arsinöe.

The daughter of Hector and the son of Arcadian Pan, however, seemed wholly and entirely oblivious of the feelings they were exciting in their guide as they pushed on in front of him.

Nisos, indeed, had all he could do, apart entirely from his feelings, in steering the blanketed Priest of Orpheus through this packed and perspiring crowd. The most difficult place to pass, with Enorches as your self-absorbed ghost-walker, was the spot where a couple of elongated planks had been laid down to cover a slippery slope that led to the kitchens and pantries and sculleries as well as to the sleeping-quarters of the Lybian and Syrian ship-boys.

Nisos was struck at this particular point at once by the perfect opportunity which such a spot offered for the accumulation of filth, and by the noteworthy fact, which certainly spoke well for the crew, that those planks were so immaculately clean. As both white and black serving-boys, in spite of their trained politeness and of their evident terror of the blankets of Enorches, were pushed and jostled against him by their companions, Nisos decided that the sweat of the lads of the Greek islands and mainland had a completely different odour from the sweat of the lads from the more eastern Asiatic shores and harbours.

But he had no time to pause to philosophize now upon differences of human sweat for Zeuks had already got himself and Arsinöe into that unusual cabin crowded with people and it had fallen to the lot of Nisos to project the staring Enorches, blankets and all, into the presence of Odysseus and Nausikaa who were on their feet in that extempore dining-hall talking gravely together.

The old king and his ballad-princess of so long ago were, however, spared the discomfort of having to be polite to such a person as Enorches by the appearance on the scene, this time for just the sort of occasion Nisos had always prayed would never arise, of the super-official, super-courtly, super-distinguished, super-pontifical Herald; who at once, as a born authority in regard to all ceremonies that require magisterial handling, and as a practised expert in all those concatenations that need super-natural tact, greeted Zeuks and Arsinöe with a glance and a couple of words, and took the Priest of Orpheus under his impeccable wing.

As for Nisos, who was quite alone now, he found himself once more following Zeuks and Arsinöe with his eyes. Neither Odysseus nor Nausikaa seemed to notice him, although the king may have done so without revealing it. But the feeling that caused him to stand and gaze at the back of Zeuks' satyrish knuckles as they presented themselves to his view, with the implication that the palm of the man's hand was enjoying the curve of the girl's hip, was accentuated now by an uprush of self-revelation that nearly knocked him over.

The truth of the matter now must be, he now boldly dared to tell himself, that it was this Trojan woman Arsinöe, and not either his friend Tis's little sister, Eione, nor the prophet's prophetic daughter, Pontopereia, whom he desired for his wife.

"Yes," Nisos told himself, "though she must be years and years older than I am, she's the one I want! She understands me better than anybody in the world except Tis; and I like her better than anyone in the world. I like her better than father or mother or Agelaos."

Odysseus and Nausikaa, who now seemed completely absorbed in each other, kept moving a little nearer to him, though without taking any notice of him; and this went on till he was leaning with his back against several pieces of suspended armour and a couple of tunics woven in Ithaca but dyed in Tyre: it went on, in fact, till he began to feel, not so much hungry, as extremely sleepy.

What was indeed like a demonic teasing of him by fate than anything else was the fact that although he could just make out from where he leant, or rather crouched, behind the king and Nausikaa, the figure of Okyrhöe seated calmly, and with a face like a mask, at one of the long tables, with an empty place next to her, devouring with an absorbed and concentrated attention a somewhat over-ripe Sicilian melon, he could only just see, between the embroidered sleeve of the protective Herald and the bare neck of the protected Enorches the delicate waist and the left breast, the latter only half-covered with "linon" that specially lovely Achaian linen so dear to the ladies of all lands, of the girl with whom he now knew he was really in love as he had never been in love before.

This certainty reached his mind in close connection with those clutching knuckles of the lecherous son of Pan which he now could detect beneath that white linen and whiter breast; but it obtained its domination over him and over his destiny in connection with a secret resolve he now made that was totally different from any purpose or any vow or any dedication he had ever made before.

And with this new intention, with this new gathering together of the diverse forces of his soul into what he decided must be, from now on, one intense, strongly compressed *will,* a will most malleable, a will most adaptable, a will that lends itself, a will that adjusts itself, a will that conceals itself, a will that multiplies itself, a will that seeks its irrepressible level, a will like water, a will like air, our young friend made a convulsive clutch at the foot of the Heraklean club upon which Odysseus had begun to lean so heavily in his absorbed talk with Nausikaa that there was a real danger of its suddenly sliding along the floor and letting him down.

But no sooner had Nisos clutched it than the familiar tinkling voice of the scientific Fly was in his ears. “Oh how much easier it would be, this ancient language of yours,” he thought, “if only there weren’t all these accurst adverbs! It’s the adverbs that spoil it. Why can’t you sting without stinging violently or buzz without buzzing gently? Why can’t you kiss without kissing tenderly? Why can’t you even think without thinking stupidly or cleverly?”

Although he didn’t relinquish his hold upon the club of Herakles, Nisos worked himself up into such irritation over the mania for adverbs in the language of insects, that in a whisper that contained something of sheer unkindness he called the attention of the Fly to the emergence from the club’s “lifecrack”, which was just above his fingers, of the priest-enamoured Moth.

But those adoring brown wings had barely fluttered twice up and down the sweltering space between the wet hairs of the man’s blanket and the wet hairs of the man’s chest, before, in her shrinking desire to comfort the Interpreter of the Mysteries without driving her companion to any regrettably rash act she had not only darted back to their lodging but had implored the Fly to translate for her what the news was that the club was hearing from the omniscient Sixth Pillar.

“Haven’t you yet caught across that moon-lit ocean of yours, my adventurous friend,” were the startling words that were now communicated to the moth by the fly and over-heard by Nisos, “the heavy breathing of Pegasos upon the wind and the quick gasps of his long-maned companion? And I presume Odysseus is already aware that his friend Nausikaa is now the Virgin Queen of her native-land, and that not only her parents’ palace and garden await her return, but the whole country passionately wants her back?”

Nisos clutched the foot of the club of Herakles so fiercely that the force of his grip squeezed the club’s attention out of his ears and reduced his Nemean senses to the same sort of deaf, dumb, and numb condition with which they had expected, washed up upon the shore of Ithaca, the reviving right hand of a new possessor.

And it was then that, more vividly than ever aware of those knuckles of Zeuks concealing from him so much of the bosom of Arsinöe, our young friend decided that he must learn from this queer rival of his, this fantastic child of Arcadian Pan, whose whole personality resembled an unburst bubble of purposeless laughter, the trick the fellow had of repeating some logos, some slogan of conduct, some motto of behaviour, by which a person’s divided will-power could be unified and concentrated.

And Nisos then and there decided that the word he wanted was the word *spoudazo*. “Yes, yes,” he muttered in his secret heart— “*that’s* the word, *that’s* the incantation I want! I want the feeling of being able to pull myself together till I’m like an arrow-head of intense will-power! Yes! yes! *Spoudazo* is my word, but I must add to it the word *terpsis, the sensation of enjoyment,* and I must throw into-these words my whole self and with my whole self, I here and now must *will intensely* that Arsinöe the Trojan shall belong to me!”

Nisos had no sooner decided upon selecting *spoudazo, “I absolutely will”* as the logos that should henceforth represent the motive-power of his life, than Odysseus and Nausikaa having decided upon something that was clearly very important as the result of their prolonged and absorbed discussion, swung clear round and came out of the extempore dining-hall into that wretchedly littered ante-chamber where those carefully scrubbed planks led down to the ship's lowest hold.

Our friend followed the aged King of Ithaca and the middle-aged Queen of the Phaiakians till they paused at the threshold of the cabin that Nausikaa shared with Okyrhöe. The ever-watchful old warrior was aware in a flash that they were being followed, and turned indignantly upon Nisos. But Nisos, knowing the wanderer's almost supernatural self-control, flung himself on his mercy without a second's hesitation.

"You ought O my King," he cried, "to know at once what I've learnt by means of the weapon you now hold in your hand! For as you now are holding it, mighty one, this is news you will never share with the Sixth Pillar in the Corridor at Ithaca! If I don't repeat every word of it, O great Master, may I pass at once to the kingdom of Aidoneus!"

It was with an unclouded forehead and even with the beginning of a friendly smile that the Wanderer bade him speak; and hurriedly and breathlessly the lad told the two of them the whole story.

To the young man's astonishment it was Nausikaa who spoke first. "You had better tell him," she said, addressing Odysseus, "what you have told me."

"I have been telling the Queen," said Odysseus at once, "what no one in the world knows except your mother; namely, my dear child, that I, and not Krateros Naubolides, am your father."

Our friend stood for a moment just as if one of those golden antennae, for that is what those elongated tassels that hung from the Helmet of Proteus were really like, had got twisted round his neck. Then his whole face puckered up, in the manner of a small boy who has been slapped and told to go to bed and the biggest tears that Nausikaa had ever seen, though two even bigger ones formed, though they did not fall, in her own eyes, rolled down his cheeks.

Odysseus looked quietly from one to the other of them, while with the wrist of the hand that held the club, that club which sometimes was called *Dokeesis,* “Seeming”, and sometimes “Expectation” he touched Nisos gently on the head. Then he said, while his bow-sprit beard turned with a queer jerk into the direction of the bed in Nausikaa’s cabin: “Well, my son, what our new Queen and your old Dad have to do now is to plant between us the seed of a new brother for you since you’ve lost Agelaos! And he’ll have to look sharp,” Odysseus added, as he led the Queen towards her own bed, “if our friend Leipephile is to conceive a new King of Ithaca before you and I come home from Atlantis!”

The old man — and our young friend, for all his emotional agitation, had the wit to notice this, took good care to prop up “Expectation” against the edge of their bed, before returning to the threshold to draw the curtains of their chamber — said to Nisos with an extremely humorous expression on his face: “For the sake of Aphrodite’s son, and by him I do *not* mean the good Aeneas — stay on guard here, my boy, and make sure that that terrible woman from Thebes doesn’t break in upon us! O yes! and don’t fail to remind me, before those Immortal Horses do carry them off, to see to it that that poor devil of an Enorches has a couple more blankets to keep him warm! He hurt both those creatures, you must remember, and flying horses, like ordinary horses, have long memories.”

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS AT the upper portion of Pegasos's wounded shoulder that the hypnotized stare of Nisos was fixed. With his own back to the mast Nisos had accepted for a moment the serious responsibility of two important ropes while Proros as the natural result of the unusual amount of wine he had drunk went to the side of the vessel to relieve himself.

But after handing back the ropes Nisos still stared at the shoulder of the flying horse; for not only was he amazed to see that the outraged wing had grown fresh and strong but there was something else going on that astonished him even more. For while Nausikaa took her place in the centre of that god-like back, and while, behind her, the meticulous Herald discoursed earnestly and authoritatively to Okyrhöe, evidently explaining to her many matters of which she was completely ignorant with regard to the political situation among the Phaiakians to whose land she was now to be transported, to his bewilderment Nisos actually beheld, stretching out of the blankets with which the priest's nakedness was covered, a bare arm with extended fingers clutching a piece of solidified ointment wherewith he was furtively rubbing and moistening the roots of the newly-grown feathers of that resuscitated wing.

"Is this insane fellow," Nisos thought, "actually trying to wither up this new growth of feathers as he destroyed the original ones?"

But when, turning his gaze upon the Flying Horse's god-like head, he caught the creature's calm, alert, self-composed and liquid eye, he recognized the true state of the case; namely that the crazy priest was desperately trying to redeem the harm he had done by doctoring these miraculous feathers so as to make them resemble those of a supernatural albatross.

When once he was satisfied that the Priest was not playing any wicked game with Pegasos, Nisos gave himself up to the pure fascination of just watching the winged horse, as the creature patiently stood on that top deck of the “Teras”. His length was such that four of him would have reached from figure-head to stern and his width was such that four of him would have reached from the starboard rail to the larboard rail. The rippling flow of the muscles under his skin was apparent with every breath he drew; and as Nisos watched him with increasing wonder and told himself that there weren’t many boys in the world or men either who would ever live to see such a sight, the divine creature’s grace became yet more astounding as the animal twisted his neck round to see Zeuks lift, first Eione, whose thighs he clearly enjoyed caressing as he assisted her, and then Pontopereia whom he hoisted up bodily by her waist, and who, taking no more notice of him than if he’d been a Mill-wheel or a Wind-mill, fixed her beautiful and intellectual dark eyes upon Nisos and breathed the words, unmistakably audible, though wafted to him on the prematurely engendered twin-sigh of a final farewell: “You are my boy and I love you!”

Nisos was standing now so close to Odysseus that he could feel the quivering outer edge of the great wave of intense erotic vibration that was passing between the old king of Ithaca and the new Queen of Phaiakia.

That Odysseus’ emotion was unusually strong could be seen by the manner in which he squeezed the head of “Expectation” alias “Dokeesis”. Herakles himself could have hardly clasped his fingers round that wooden skull with a fiercer clutch. The consequence of this natural action while the lithe and limber, the glossy and sinewy, the delicate and perfectly equiposed body of the most athletic creature in the Cosmos rested on the deck of the

“Teras”, was to produce such a vertiginous shock in the interior of the Heraklean Club that the Fly was forced like so many other great scientists to forget himself in his profession, and at once began interpreting, to the Moth and to all the world, in his high-pitched adverbial tongue, the information which the familiar voice of the Sixth Pillar in the old Corridor was conveying to the club.

“The son of the Midwife’s sister here, she who formerly served the famous ‘Nymph in Antro’ until she was made big with child by that King of the Latins who is building in Italy a New Troy upon Seven Hills, has been weaned from his mother’s breasts and can now be fed by hand. There have been rumours in the Palace that the marriage of the Maiden Leipephile to Agelaos the son of Krateros Naubolides will shortly take place. It is also reported that the other divine horse, the beautifully-maned one who has so often accompanied Pegasos when not using his wings or crossing the sea, has on several occasions been heard exchanging human speech with the Herdsman Tis. This strange event which seems to be unquestionably true has had the effect of greatly increasing the already high esteem with which Herdsman Tis is regarded, not only by Krateros Naubolides and his son Agelaos, but also by Nosodea the mother of both Leipephile and Spartika the Priestess of Athene’s Temple.”

Here the Fly’s lively rendering of the conversation between the Sixth Pillar and the Club of Herakles was broken up by the Fly himself. As a scientific translator of the measured monotone in which the Sixth Pillar reported to the Heraklean Club the elemental gossip that reached it through earth and air and fire and water the Fly, for all his extravagant “adverbialism”, was intelligible and sensible.

It was, in the manner of most great scientists, only when he enlarged on his purely personal grievances that his emotions tended to erupt in spasms of disconcerting spleen. “The bitch! The bitch! the bitch! the bitch!” he now buzzed in our friend’s ears.

“Excuse me, O thou newly-proclaimed son of abysmally-enduring Odysseus, but I must incontinently go to emphatically warn that adulterously-and-slavishly-behaving whore that I’ve got my eye on her!”

It was indeed clear to Nisos that what the Fly feared was that Pegasos might suddenly spread his tremendous wings and create such a rush of wind that the Moth would be perforce carried off through the air to the land of Phaiakia and that he would never see her again. And as the pair of them, for like other fluttering priest-worshippers the Moth was susceptible to firm handling, returned to the weapon in the old hero’s grasp, it struck the boy’s mind as a topic upon which it was really incumbent upon him to ponder carefully in view of his future as prophet, namely as to what part the material size of a living Being ought to play in diminishing or increasing that Being’s moral responsibility. To put it plainly, should the conscience of an insect be as tender and as quickly touched by remorse as the conscience of a whale?

A rasping stab in the vitals not so much of his conscience as of his intelligence hit him at that moment; and to the end of his days he always associated it with two things whose logical connection was merely that they belonged to the same animal. Something in the mast or the rigging interfered with the fall of the moonlight upon that glossy-dark supernatural form, whose fibres and muscles and tendons and curving sinews seemed to ripple in their relaxed quiescence not unlike the way the surface of the ocean itself was at that moment faintly stirring, but whatever it was that caused it, some kind of phantom-foam-drop appeared on the left front hoof of Pegasos gleaming with a light which seemed, in spite of it having descended from the full moon, to be an inner light, the light of a mind rather than of any external luminary.

And what became for Nisos a life-long memory, what became for him yet another symbol of that *spoudazo-terpsis,* "my whole will to enjoy what happens", which was now his war-cry, was the strange fact that this inward gleam in the left front hoof of the flying horse corresponded with, and answered to, an inner light in the fathomless depth of the liquid eye which Pegasos turned upon his passengers as he twisted his flexible neck round to see whether everyone was comfortably and securely mounted.

But no metaphysical war-cries and no mystical symbols can keep certain painful and jarring jolts and jerks from destroying our peace; and the splinter that now pierced our young friend's ideal chain of reasoning was a teasing and academic kind of question following closely on the childish one he had just asked himself about the conscience of a fly compared with that of a whale.

And the point was this. How far were the gods, by nature, by tradition, by custom, by international law, and finally by the necessity of the case, exempt from the moral law that all human beings of every tribe in the world feel an instinctive imperative, wherever it comes from, to obey?

When for instance Zeus swallowed the great prophetess Metis for fear of a fatal rival, was he breaking the moral law? The result, our teachers say, was the birth of Athene from his head. But does that redeem his murder of Metis? Athene was not Metis. To be the daughter of a mother born out of the head of the person who swallowed her does not make you your mother. It makes you a woman with every reason to avenge your mother on the person who swallowed her.

Themis the Goddess of Order may have been forced to yield to the embraces of Zeus, but it was she who named her daughter *Dike,* "Just

Retribution” and all his thunderings and lightnings cannot save the All-Father from the penalty of his crimes.

“By Aidoneus, no! When the time comes for me to be a Prophet the great test of my truth and the truth of what I prophesy can be only one thing, whether I do or do not make it clear that not one of the gods — no! not even the Son of Kronos himself — can escape from the Law of Retribution. Shall I really be what I so long to be when I return from this voyage? O Atropos, thou great little goddess of Fate, give me — —” His thoughts, and, we are compelled to add, his prayer to Destiny too, were broken off short by seeing Zeuks rush to the stern of the ship and disappear down the ladder. “He is after Arsinöe! He is after my girl!”

Every muscle in Nisos’ tall slender frame grew stiff and tense. “I forgot her! I forgot her! I forgot her! And he *had* forgotten her. Hypnotized by the fathomless moon-stone of that unnatural eye in the hoof of the Flying Horse, and quivering with excitement, as indeed was Pegasos himself, in anticipation of the spreading of those tremendous wings and of the immortal creature’s leap upwards into the air, Nisos had not only forgotten his deliberate association of his newly formulated life-logos, *spoudazo-terpsis,* with Arsinöe rather than with Eione or Pontopereia; but he had completely lost the image — though it now came back with a rush and filled his whole consciousness — of the Trojan maid herself.

“God! What a ‘kakos’, what a cad I am!” But it was no use dancing a remorse dance, or calling upon Dionysos or Eros. What he had to do, if he had anything left in him but downcast *aidos* or pure “shame”, was to go after this incorrigible Zeuks and snatch Arsinöe away from him. But how could he, though he *was* the son of Odysseus and not of Krateros Naubolides, contend with the son of an immortal god, and that god none other than Arcadian Pan, whose passion for girls and obsession by girls amounted to an absolute mania?

“But you never know,” he told himself.

“For not only is ‘all fair in love and war’, but in all earthly struggles, whether between races, or persons, or things, it is Chance, sometimes at the beginning, sometimes in the middle, sometimes at the end, who changes the wind, and gathers the rain, and loses or saves the day.

“What a curious nature mine is!” Nisos said to himself, instinctively making use of all the analytical intelligence he had, and he had a good deal more than most young men, to put an end to the smarting sting of self-reproach. “Here I am shivering with intense interest to see Pegasos mount up from the deck of the ‘Teras’ and yet I feel if I am to keep any self-respect at all I ought to invent some excuse, any confounded excuse, such as a desire to use a bucket down below, or to get a weapon from the pile of them in the big cabin, or to ask one of those Libyans to lend me his pocket-knife, and, muttering this same invented excuse, I ought to throw an easy self-contained glance at Odysseus, and slip off past Akron.

“By the Gods, this is what I will do!” For some reason he thought at this moment of his dead pet sea-hawk whom he would never behold again; and he also thought — it must have been the idea of his own death that brought such things into his mind — of the old dead Dryad about whom nobody any more seemed to give the least thought. Then he moved towards Akron. But what in heaven’s name was the man doing?

The captain of the “Teras” was indeed acting in a drastic manner. He was slowly and deliberately divesting himself of his clothes, and with the help of Proros and Pontos he was tying round his waist a long rope. Nisos paused for a moment as the East Wind and the Moonlight isolated their intrepid skipper and held him in their crystal embrace, and then to the young man's spell-bound gaze seemed to plunge with him into the water from a bow-sprit now as bare of ornament as the beard of Odysseus.

On their naked captain now boldly swimming, with the rope behind him passing, as he swam, through the hands of both Proros and Pontos, Nisos saw Odysseus fix a well-pleased and proudly satisfied look, a look that said: "Well done, faithful one!" But the old man was evidently so certain now of the result that he soon turned his gaze back to Pegasos, and to his silent dialogue with Nausikaa, who was now resting as securely on the divine horse's back as she would soon be doing on her expectant throne in the land of her fathers. Nisos however kept his eyes steadily on that moon-lit swimmer, kept them there indeed till the "Teras", quickly enough when the man had once climbed out of the water, was strongly and firmly moored to that human-shaped rock on the island of Wone, about fifteen yards inland, and about the same distance from those primeval Beings, who in their "Arima" of a forgotten Past could remember the days before Zeus and his thunderbolts, or the Titans and their mountains piled on mountains, had begun to disturb the world.

"I think, my Lord the King," Nisos now began, edging himself forward between Pontos and Proros, "that I'll just run down, if I may, and tell Zeuks that our ship is now safely moored."

Odysseus however was too absorbed in his final farewell to Nausikaa to hear his youthful adherent's courteous mutterings; and indeed it was not till Akron was back on the ship and had begun to dress and even to swallow a glass of wine that the casual words: "Just as you like, my son," came from the old man's lips.

As he went off Nisos told himself rather crossly and maliciously that at that moment the man's beard looked as if it were the horn of a sea-unicorn, an appendage which, in the case of this singular marine beast, protrudes not from the creature's forehead but from beneath its jaws. The absent-minded permission to be, as children say, "excused", was however, as can be surmised, enough to send our friend hurrying down two ladders and past four oarsmen. "Suppose," he said to himself, "Zeuks has taken her into Nausikaa's cabin and is even now enjoying her in that sumptuous bed."

Nisos knew so little about the actual details of sex-adjustment between boys and girls that he was apt to wander off into completely fanciful paths when he thought of such a thing as the ravishing of Arsinöe by Zeuks. "I shall simply," he told himself, "hit him with all the strength I have, and if I can't crack his skull I ought to be able to stun him. But perhaps that might excite Arsinöe's sympathy. God! I don't know!"

It happened however, that at the moment when Arsinöe came flying towards him with anything but a desperate cry, with, in fact, a welcoming and laughing salute, he had just bent down to lift up the corner of one of those well-scrubbed planks leading down to the hold; for he had seen a wounded rat with the lower part of its body a mass of crushed flesh and blood feebly moving its front legs down there and making a faint and piteous appeal to an indifferent universe.

"Nisos! My dear, my dear! What is it? O the poor little thing!" And once having embraced the situation she not only allowed Zeuks to overtake her and with some trepidation to salute his rival but she gripped that rival's arm, and, stooping down beside him, snatched up a piece of broken pottery that some sailor had dropped a minute ago, and in a few well-directed strokes sent the soul of the rat to the kingdom of Aidoneus.

Was it the royal blood of the House of Priam in her veins, pulsing through the cells of her brain, that gave Arsinöe on this occasion so much more spontaneous grace of gesture and so much more swiftness of mental apprehension than was possessed by either the Son of Arcadian Pan or the son of Odysseus, or was it a new feeling in her own heart? Anyway, the rat having been disposed of, there passed between Arsinöe and Nisos, almost as if the dead creature's blood had brought it about, a strangely swift understanding. This understanding was so deep and complete that our friend Zeuks, while he grew aware of it, found himself, in a manner which if it had been less complete he could never have attained, able to disregard it.

"Excuse me, you two," he ejaculated casually and carelessly, "if you don't mind, I'll rush up now and see what's been happening. You can follow as leisurely as you like."

The daughter of Hector smiled at the son of Odysseus; for since a couple of Libyan lads had just scrambled hurriedly past them on the way up, and three elderly sailors had shuffled uneasily past them on the way down, it was clear that however strong their instinct might be to snatch a moment of quiescence at this crisis in their lives, this particular cross-road corner, dominated by the mutilated rat and the piece of broken pottery that had ended its misery, was not a good place to stand aside in out of the mid-current of events.

Arsinöe felt a sensitive woman's natural reluctance to confuse the background of one man's love-making with the background of another man's love-making, so she hesitated about letting Nisos lead her back into the cabin of Eione and Pontopereia, while the one where Nausikaa had recently given herself to the old king struck the Trojan imagination of Hector's daughter as already dedicated to the heir of the Latin ruler whose New Troy was even then rising upon its Seven Hills.

Thus it was that driven by her own sensitivity to the particular background of any sexual emotion she automatically steered the ardent Nisos towards the ladder leading up to the seats of the oarsmen; and it was upon the oarsmen's deck, as far as they could withdraw themselves from the great motionless oars of the four rowers, that they threw their arms round each other.

Never in his life had Nisos felt as he did now after they had unclasped their arms and had sunk back against the side of the vessel. He held her by her two hands and with their knees touching he stared at her with vibrant intensity but as if from a tremendous distance. What he was really beginning to approach at that moment was simply and solely the everlasting mystery of the feminine.

And what struck him above everything else in this connection was the fact of the unfathomable and impassable gulf between the whole being of a man and the whole being of a woman. Her bodily life and its particular quality, the physical, chemical, elemental nature of her flesh and blood, was as different from his as was the substance of a fallen star or a meteorite from the stalk of a burdock. “The extraordinary thing about it,” he told himself, “is that this femininity exists in exactly the same things, like hair, and finger-knuckles, and veins, where veins are apparent, and the bones of wrists, and the rounded bones of knee-caps and the curving bones of chin and of jaw, and the more remarkable curves of shoulders, yes! in exactly the same things that in a corresponding manner exist in our male bodies as when I look at Zeuks or Akron or at my own reflection! And yet there is this startling, upsetting, disturbing difference between us!

“And all this is quite apart from the fatal, everlasting, tragic difference in bodily shape, which has to do with a girl’s breasts and hips and all her softer and more undulating curves.” So Nisos thought; and the more he gazed at her in this curious, special way the more did this mystery of her femininity grow upon him and envelope him. “What is it? What is it? What is it?” The spirit within him called aloud. But as he gave himself up to her he ceased to look at her. What he was now looking at were not the round knee-caps against which his own hard bare knees were pressed, but what seemed in that dim light to be a small ivory box or bottle — he couldn't be quite sure which it was, but he leaned to the view that it was an ivory box — out of which Euros kept shaking certain small, pearly shells upon a square wooden tray and examining them with extreme care as they lay side by side, before he gathered them up and shovelled them back into their glittering container.

Arsinöe herself was in the vague, dreamy, passive, resigned mood which had been her only happy mood for many a long year. She hadn't made friends with Zeuks in the way Eione had done with Arcadian Pan. But to be the son of a god is a very different thing from being a god. Besides, the great love-affair of Arsinöe's life had been her devotion to her father Hector, a devotion that couldn't have been tenderer or more ardent if Hector had responded to it but all he did was to take her away from her nameless mother and place her under the care of his wife Andromache.

On this deck of the oarsmen they could only embrace with their eyes a very narrow space of sky; so that neither of them had the least idea whether Pegasos had or had not spread his wings. The Trojan girl had really come to like Nisos quite a good deal and to feel a solid trust in him; but if some woman-friend had asked her point-blank: "What *do* you feel for this kid?" she would have probably revealed the truth that she felt a strong protective instinct for him and a desire to look after him. She would in all probability have made her woman-friend laugh, if she had not started a regular giggling-fit between them, by confessing that there had been moments of late, since she had known him better, when she had got the same sort of pleasure from his company as she used to get when she played with a special boy-doll of hers she was accustomed to call Ottatos.

Whether characteristic or not of the difference between the sexes in every human tribe beneath the sun, this interlude, or siesta, or metaphysical sticking-place in the dramatic story of the “Teras” or “Ship of Marvels”, was a noteworthy experience for Nisos whatever it may have been for Arsinöe.

It struck him very forcibly that the extraordinary good luck — and he prayed it really was, from whatever far distance flung, the impact of the wisdom of that wisest of all old little maids his ancient patroness “Atropos” that had brought it about — of his having been thrown into contact with this Trojan captive was the greatest event in his whole life.

And it was so because, since his own entire intention was to be a prophet when he became a mature man, the last thing he wanted for his companion through life was an energetic, assiduous, industrious, conscientious, formidable, inexhaustibly active and indefatigably competent. What Nisos wanted or some would prefer to say needed, was someone whose whole nature had the unusual power of being able to devote itself to the one perfectly simple and mysteriously wise act of drifting. Such an one, whether a man or woman, is able to act in a heart-whole and independent way only once in their life; but this act is the infinitely complicated one of stripping themselves stark naked, diving into the deep salt sea and there drifting wherever the tide carries them.

Compared with the people who put purpose after purpose before them and continue struggling energetically until they attain each of these purposes, these once-acting, once-stripping themselves, once-diving into the deep-sea Drifters seem allowed by Atropos the privilege of being porous to more than one universe and being aware of more than one Space and of more than one Time.

Yes! The winds of a million systems of things blow across them and one infinity calls to another infinity through them. And the singular thing is that among male children only those who are lucky enough to be born under the special inspiration of that funny little goddess, the old maid Atropos, whose abysmal intelligence has not been killed either by child-bearing or by playing the bitch, know that for life to *be* life and for the universe to *be* the universe it is essential that there shall be two embodiments of womankind. Each of these embodiments must have that everlasting mystery in her skin, in her flesh, in her hair, in her bones, in her milk, in her milt, in her mensuration as well as in her mind. But the one must be actively competent and divinely creative, the other incompetent and divinely passive. Nisos felt no longing for a mate who was protective of offspring and eternally producing offspring and keeping the human race alive upon this earth. It was the second type of female, the type protective of dreams and fancies and wishes and longings and illusions and imaginations, and ideals, and rebellions, and destructions, and insurrections, and redemptions, and recoveries, and re-births, and by means of all these things eternally changing the movements and explorations of the energy of life from one generation to another, towards which he felt drawn.

"What is it," he asked himself, at that crucial moment, "that this Trojan girl has got in her that neither Tis's little sister nor the daughter of Teiresias possess, but which I *must* have if I'm to be happy in my choice?"

It was at that very pulse-beat of Time that the young man became suddenly aware that Arsinöe was watching him with concentrated attention. Previous to this moment she had preserved the same friendly passivity that had always been her mood with Zeuks and had lasted throughout his recent amorous handling of her. But something, whether a flicker of romantic seriousness passing across the face of Nisos, or some thought or feeling of her own that may very well have reached her from the psychic work-shop of Atropos had suddenly drawn the girl nearer to the young man.

Nor was he oblivious of this change in her. But the curious thing was that while each of her successive moods, favourable to him or unfavourable to him, were of startling and piercing importance to herself while they lasted, to him, as he watched them come and go, they seemed, each of them in its entirety and intensity, so much a part of her that they endeared her to him in absolute remoteness from their tone, whether for him or against him, in relation to himself.

What particularly struck him at that moment was an odd relief that she was neither as pretty as his friend Tis's little sister, Eione, nor as beautiful as Teiresias' daughter, Pontopereia. "Your preciousness to me, my dear," he told her in his heart, "is that you are *not* particularly graceful like Eione or particularly intellectual like Pontopereia, but just simply a sweet-natured extremely feminine woman whom fate has handed over to me for my very own and who has come to entirely belong to me and to no other man in the whole world. It's because you're completely and entirely mine," so his improper, indecent, and outrageous thoughts ran on, "that you're so entrancingly lovely. What I worship, what I have always worshipped, ever since as a little boy I had a laurel stick called 'Sacred', which, though it hadn't any vital crack dividing its breast and supplying moths and flies and gnats and midges with a refuge from wind and rain, had one end resembling an idol's head and another end resembling a dragon's tail, is some object, possessed of an individuality that separates it from everything else in the world, and yet which is absolutely and entirely my very own, not to be shared in any way at all with anyone else. You *are* mine, aren't you, you tender, soft, mysterious subtle, enduring, unique creature? Gods in Heaven! if you weren't, I'd be so alone in this mad, aching, bruising, biting, scratching, stinging cosmos that I wouldn't care what happened to me! It's having found you, and having got you as both my idol and as my secret private personal toy that makes you what from now on you'll always — —"

"Come on, you two! Come on, for the sake of your poor old Zeuks, if not at the command of cloud-compelling Zeus! Come on, or Odysseus will be jumping into the sea with nothing but that ridiculous 'prumneesia' on his silly old pate!"

They both leapt to their feet, followed him at a run to the ladder, scrambled up helter-skelter, Arsinöe clinging to Nisos, while Zeuks, his left hand on the small of the man's back and his right on the woman's waist, pushed them violently from the rear.

Yes! Odysseus was standing alone at the base of the figure-head gripping "Expectation", otherwise "Dokeesis", firmly by the middle, and disentangling from the extraordinary object on his head what looked like a couple of dangling, elongated, devil-fish tentacles. Of these tentacles he was earnestly and gravely testing the strength, giving them a series of sharp tugs and using for this purpose both the hand that held the club and the one which was free and unencumbered.

Close to the mast stood Akron, watching over the curved spines and quiveringly extended arms of Pontos and Proros who were holding the swaying and dripping rope by which the "Teras" was moored to the rock that in shape resembled the Titan Atlas, and, as he watched those quivering arms and that massive rope, repeatedly turning his head away from the rock and towards Eumolpos at the helm.

Zeuks led the agitated and excited lovers straight up to Odysseus who swung round at once and regarded them from above his beard with a quiet and approving look, a look that said: "You're doing very well, my children. Go on as you've begun and all will be well."

It was only when Nisos realised the direction in which both the eyes and the pointed beard of the old man were now turned that a cold shudder of terror ran through him amounting to something like sheer panic though it didn't quite reach that point.

Odysseus was calmly regarding the water, his body stone-still, while both from the hand that held the club and from the other hand trailed those two weird streamers. What these streamers really resembled were the long-drawn-out single hairs of a certain prehistoric creature that swam the salt seas aeons of centuries ago and lived by devouring monstrous cuttle-fish which floated in chasms of water that descended to the centre of the earth.

Contemplating the greenish-black depths, into which Odysseus kept dangling these streamers from his fantastic helmet and testing their strength, Nisos began to feel more real nervous dismay than he had ever felt in his life before.

"By Aidoneus if this isn't worse," he said to himself, "than when I was in that prison of Enorches!" And then as he stared at that black-green swirling water, into which some deadly intimation told him Odysseus would soon force him to plunge, it suddenly came to him how the image of that mark on the base of the Sixth Pillar— "the Son of Hephaistos" — had acted like an incantation or a magic spell to free him from that cruel Priest's prison. And wasn't Hephaistos the god of Fire?

Well then, wasn't this mysterious Son of Hephaistos, or rather the Pillar raised up by him, the very saviour dedicated to come to the aid of a person in peril from Water? Thus, just as he had suddenly seen those two Letters on the wall of his prison, so he now saw them in the midst of that swirling green-black water.

And it was at that second that Odysseus swung round and shouted to Akron: "Keep her off the rocks till we come back!" and then in the same tone addressing Zeuks, just as if the daughter of Hector had been, like the “Teras”, another “Prodigy” of a Ship, “Guard my son’s Trojan as carefully as if she were Helen herself till we return!” Then turning his back upon everything but the miles of water that covered Atlantis: “Now you, my son, watch me carefully and do exactly what you see me do.”

Thus speaking the old king disentangled the long single hair, that was his Ariadne’s clue, from his Helmet of Proteus and placed the end of it between his teeth. Nisos, after one last hurried glance round, in which he saw the moonlit tips of Zeuks’ knuckles at Arsinöe’s waist but also noted that the knuckles of both *her* hands were pressed violently against her closed eyes, thrust the end of his “clue” into his mouth and shut his teeth upon it.

It was at that indrawn beat of the tense heart of their ship “Teras” that Arsinöe snatched her hands from her eyes, fumbled with the clothes of her companion, drew forth Zeuks’ habitual defence, his short double-edged sword-dagger, and thrust it into Nisos’ hand, thus it was not weaponless that our young friend, imitating to a nicety every movement of the old man, followed him over the ship’s side, and plunging feet-first into the water, disappeared from view.

What did not disappear, however, and it can be imagined the queer feeling the sight of these things gave to Arsinöe, were the two elongated single hairs, so vividly suggestive, whether or not such was their real origin, of some aboriginal prehistoric feminine monster, of that grotesque Helmet of Proteus, These objects remained on the surface of the water; and it was the weirdest thing Arsinöe had ever seen in her life to observe these thin streaks of moon-lit silveriness, bobbing up and down and round and round each other, and every now and then shooting off a certain distance from each other, where, although separated, they would recommence their sport of bobbing up and down and round and round, as if the other one were there, when in reality it was completely outside that particular radius of the game.

Zeuks was also watching this ocean dance of a couple of moonlit filaments constituting themselves a curious sort of comic-cosmic choroio; but his attention was so taken up with the delight he got from pressing Arsinöe's body against his own that this dithyrambic crescendo-diminuendo upon the water became merely an outward projection of the deliciousness of the dalliance in which he was indulging.

To Arsinöe on the other hand, though she could no more help staring at it than she could prevent her senses responding to her companion's caresses, it was as if the everlasting elements themselves were mocking her and making sport of her; but when Zeuks' ecstatic embrace subsided and she had once more to deal with the less wrought-up occurrences of the more normal succession of things she forced herself to recall what she had felt when in that "Arima" of Ithaca day after day, with the carving-tool tight between her fingers, she had carved the indomitable features of the defender of Troy out of the heart of an island ash-tree.

While the son of Arcadian Pan and the daughter of Hector of Troy watched the dance of those nameless things that were like the antennae of some primordial insect-monster of the ocean, our friend Nisos found he needed every gasp of breath, every drop of semen, every throb of blood, every microcosm of will, every spurt of energy, every burst of blind desperation he could call up if he were to remain "cheerful", as his island school-teachers had always taught him must be at the root of the philosophy of life of every pious son of an Achaian father, while side by side with Odysseus he sank through the water to the roofs and streets and temples of the capital-city of Atlantis.

They landed on a vast expanse of grey pavement and what was really an enormous space of perfectly smooth and carefully fitted flagstones; and while Odysseus was slowly turning round on his heels and with very little shuffling or stretching or stumbling was making a hurried but obviously a pretty careful survey of the panorama around them, the first thing that came into the head of Nisos to do was to snatch at his own silvery and swaying life-line. When once he had clutched this gleaming object at about five yards distance from the Helmet of Proteus, he glanced quickly at Odysseus for permission, and proceeded to give the glittering thin thing a bold twist round the cavity in the bosom of the Club of Herakles as the weapon reposed horizontally in the hand of Odysseus.

Noting his son’s action and divining that it had something to do with the curious “life-crack” or naturally-engendered slit in the bosom of “Dokeesis” *alias* “Expectation”, the old hero raised the weapon into a more perpendicular position and gave it the sort of brandishing shake that Herakles himself must have given it before between them they killed the Nemean lion.

Held quietly and firmly now at a slanting angle to the bottom of the ocean, and tangled in a twist of one of the two parallel life-lines that reached from the Helmet of Proteus to the surface of the sea, it was possible for our two world-voyaging insects to appear at the mouth of their unusually-shaped caravan and even plunge into verbal relations with their almost equally bewildered fellow-travellers.

“My friend the Moth keeps imploring me to tell her,” murmured the Fly, “just where in the circumambient trail of our cosmogonic excursion she may know she has arrived. I tell her that this is the only ship upon the sea that fulfils the longing of real adventures all over the world who long to exchange earth for air, air for fire, fire for water, in their natural, heaven-blest longing for new life.

“My friend the moth suffers unfortunately from one of those troublesome manias that so often afflict lovely and sensitive females. She maintains that the Orphic Priest, who confessed just now, when he saw Eurybia and Echidna on the island of Wone, that the gods he really worshipped were not Eros and Dionysos but Death and Nothingness, had been driven mad by the way we all treated him and by the hatred we all felt for him.

“She actually went so far as to say that if she could have spent a whole night when he was asleep caressing with her silky wings the frontal bone of his skull she could have restored him to sanity! I think myself that it is the pressure of all this dreadful volume of water upon a creature as delicate as she is that has disturbed her own brain.”

At this point Odysseus intervened, but quite carelessly and lightly. “If you don’t mind,” he said, “for this confounded weight of waters, in spite of our Helmet, makes me feel a trifle dizzy, I’ll rest here for a moment.” Saying this he seated himself upon a stone bench on a long, low wall; but he continued to keep the club in the same position and took care to hold it so that its “life-crack”, out of which the two insects were peering, might point towards Nisos.

“Please, O please, thou son of Odysseus,” cried the agitated moth, quickly recovering, under the powerful protection of the Helmet of Proteus, the spontaneous passion of her feelings, “don’t let him traduce by his terrible cleverness a person as holy, a person as chaste, a person as devoted, a person as spiritual as this great Priest of Orpheus! Where is he now, I ask you? Carried away by brute force on the back of a titanic animal who hates him even more than any of you do! Is that the way to treat the greatest Priest of the Highest Mysteries that the history of our world has known?

“If *he* were here now, instead of having to crouch as we are doing on the lowest bench in the lowest bottom of the world, we would be marching proudly across these bridges and in and out of these vast temples and forth and back down these sumptuous terraces and across these colossal squares and up and down these palatial flights of gently curving and softly undulating stairways, or we might even have found a chariot to ride in, for that would be the proper fashion for a man as old and famous as our sovereign the King of Ithaca!

“Please, O please, thou Son of Odysseus, call on your father to use his power to lift us out of this humiliation!”

“Is it not clear,” protested the fly, while the moth at his side quickly recovered her equanimity, “that the poor darling has suffered a serious shock? Think of her assuming that an aged hero who has lived, loved, and fought with the gods and whose capture of Troy, as the Pillar in the Corridor has been telling me, is included in the poetical recitations of all the master-reciters in Hellas, is less poetical when resting by the wayside as an ordinary tired old man, than if under a gorgeous canopy he were riding on the back of an elephant followed by a procession of camels as the emperor of a host of jewelled Barbarians!

“It can only be, as you can see at once, my noble Lord Nisos, that our beautiful friend is suffering from a shock caused by the pressure of this appalling mass of water; and it would be very kind, as well as most appropriate, if, in order to turn her attention to other things, you would tell your King that the Sixth Pillar has just informed me that the fire-breathing Monster, Typhon, half-Dragon and half-Giant, and the arch-enemy of the Olympians, whom Zeus buried under a mountain in Italy, but who had been loose for several months, has now been decoyed by the Being who lives down here, and whose image is the Teras’ figure-head, into serving Him or

Her or It, after the manner in which an obedient Beast serves its master. In fact, O most noble, O most loyal, O most sagacious grandson of Laertes, if you will forgive my turning for a moment from the philosophical aspects of life to those of more immediate concern" — and Nisos noticed that the head of the fly grew suddenly larger and blacker than usual and that both its orbicular eyes were gazing into the distance— "I believe the Monster I have just referred to, not the figure-head Being, if you understand, but the half-ophidian and half-human fire-breather, has smelt human blood down here and is hastening in our direction."

The hand with which Nisos had hurriedly touched his master's elbow, pointed now at a convulsive cloud of smoke and fire that he could see bending its course towards them over a sort of under-water aqueduct, and then, drawing from a slit in his own shirt, in a manner worthy of Zeuks himself, that dagger-sword with two edges that had been pressed into his hand as he went over the side, he gave a little straightening jerk to the club in the old man's hand as if indicating to it that battling with a Monster rather than philosophizing with a Fly must now be the order of the day.

It now became obvious once more to our friend what a perfect fellow-voyager and fellow-adventurer his new father was. Apparently Odysseus had so shrewdly and so quickly taken in the immediate topography of their position and the general nature of this astonishing metropolis of a drowned continent that he had no sooner caught sight of the Fire-breathing Typhon advancing towards them, swaying and heaving and writhing like a serpent with the lower half of its body, but steering itself with human arms and keeping a straight course along a sort of aqueduct, which perhaps still, though it only had the thirst of titans and monsters to quench, carried fresh streams in spite of all this intolerable weight of salt water: then with "Dokeesis" otherwise "Expectation" or the Nemean club in his right hand,

and his son’s arm gripped tight above the elbow in his left, he hurried off in a straight line towards the advancing monster but upon such a different level of ground that to reach them Typhon would have had to risk a plunge of about a thousand feet, a leap which for all his dragon scales and serpent tail and the fearful strength of his gigantic arms was evidently beyond his power.

What struck Nisos most about Odysseus as they advanced side by side towards this writhing and twisting cloud of fire and smoke, till it was almost exactly above their heads, was the man’s absolutely amazing gift for adapting himself to a staggering and overwhelming situation with complete calm and balance of mind.

“As for myself,” Nisos thought, “I believe I might just manage to carry things off with a rush and be brave enough to scare my enemy with brandishings of my dagger as I flew at his throat; but what I couldn’t do would be to get rid of my secret dread, my stalking and skulking terror, the horror I’d feel in my jumpy nerves and the heart-beating throbs of my jittering pulses.

“Why, the old man behaves as if this terrifying dead city at the bottom of the sea were the friendly haunts of his family dryad. He seems able to note things and examine things and analyse things with as much calm and as much lively interest as if he were observing the beasts and birds and shrubs and trees and plants and rocks and stones of a new tract of totally unknown country that we had invaded and occupied.”

“I don’t like the idea,” said Odysseus at last, lowering his head after having kept it thrown back and tilted upwards with his bowsprit beard pointing to the world they had left, “of that creature up there dropping his *kopros* on our heads.”

Nisos in his turn lifted his head; and there did indeed seem to him a very potent probability that from the under-belly of Typhon or, worse still, from beneath his serpentine tail, extremely unpleasant excrement might descend upon them! From that unwieldy body gusts of the foulest-smelling wind, collected for long in those over-replenished bowels, were already beginning to explode in startling and menacing bursts of spluttering thunder; and it certainly wasn't a pleasant prospect to imagine themselves being chased from one end of the ocean to the other by the droppings of this fire-breathing fugitive from the wrath of Zeus.

"I don't know, my son," the old man continued, "whether you can make out the width of that fresh-water aqueduct under his coils as he comes on; but from what I can see of the situation it strikes me that this final rebellious child of our old Earth has got himself on a road that's too narrow for him to turn till he arrives at the end of it. It's too high a jump even for him, and I really believe, now he's once on that aqueduct, that there's nothing he can do but go on to the end of the thing! We shall, no doubt, my dear boy, have many other vexations before we've got to the end of *our* aqueduct; but I think we're in no immediate danger from that outrageous Man-Dragon up there."

Forward therefore with free steps the father and son moved. They had to walk independently of each other because each held his weapon in his right hand, and when by any chance they moved too close, the hilt of the son's sword-dagger kept grazing the knuckles of the father's left hand.

What Odysseus was thinking as they went forward in this way Nisos would have given a lot to know; but he had by this time discovered that one of the fundamental characteristics of this greatest of all leaders was his power of keeping his wandering and philosophical thoughts wholly and completely distinct from his practical thoughts, that is to say from his tactics, stratagems, decisions, and plannings for future action.

For himself, as father and son advanced in this manner, both cautiously and impulsively, along the bottom of the deepest of earth's seas, Nisos was too absorbed and spell-bound by the external overpoweringness of what he saw to have any spirit left for mental reaction to it save awe and wonder. He decided that it must have been on the ground-floor so to say of the ocean-bed that they had found themselves after their dive.

But what a place it was, far more impressive than any city he had ever seen before, or ever was likely to see! The stones it was built of were all the same colour; but whether this was due to the action of the water or to the particular kind of rock or of marble that the builders had used he wasn't enough of a traveller to know. But all the visible masonry, including the roads and the pavements, was certainly of one and the same tint, and this tint was of a grey shade, but quite unlike any other grey shade he could ever remember having seen.

What struck him most about this whole drowned city as it rose up before him now was, strangely enough, its suitability, its fittingness, its adaptability for being a drowned city. It lent itself to its doom. It was in fact the most perfect realization of a drowned city that could have entered, or the idea of which could have entered, any great poet's imagination.

What especially struck Nisos about it was its unity with itself, the fact, namely, that it rose in so many levels, with its stair-ways and bridges and squares and platforms and tiers and terraces, as if conceived and created to support the pedestals and pillars of the metropolis of the universe with temples and theatres and dance-halls and council-chambers and academies and ecclesias and arenas and hippodromes and senate-halls, towering up, one above another, towards the surface of the water that covered them, making in their colossal entirety one single isolated palace-house, where reigned and ruled in undisturbed supremacy the mysterious Being who had revolted against Heaven, defied the Human Race, and adapted its own unfathomable consciousness to a secret submarine life, with no companion but the Man-Dragon, Typhon.

It was the extraordinary way in which this city beneath the waters satisfied the whole deep-breathing desire in the ultimate chemical elements of existence that they should have nothing within them to the end of their days save what in silence uttereth speech and whose speech is the speech of air, water, fire, and earth, an elemental language which in its essence is the music of enjoyment, that gave the thing its real secret.

It was queer and quaint to notice, as the two of them progressed onwards in what they both divined would probably turn out to be intricate curves returning by degrees to the region of the city from which they had set forth, how the various fish and sea-creatures they were constantly encountering showed not the faintest alarm at their appearance and even came so close that they sometimes brushed against their necks and arms and faces with their fins and tails. One star-fish for instance struck Nisos so violently in the mouth that it made his lip bleed, and it gave him a very queer shock when this sudden taste of blood mixed with salt-water brought back to his memory an occasion when as a child he had picked up a jelly-fish on the sea-coast, and then, falling on his face as he tried to bite it, had bloodied his mouth.

A much more obscure memory may have been released when he saw the extremely elastic and singularly delicate skin of one queer-looking sea-creature, skin that resembled the caul with which new-born babes are sometimes covered, rent and torn by the stab of a small sword-fish. But it was when he noticed one luckless fish whose eye was gone that he suddenly remembered how when he was questioning Eione as to the way the Helmet of Proteus, the thing that at this moment he and his father were using to such good effect, had come into her hands, she told him that Arcadian Pan had stolen it from the great Hunter Orion, whose consequent lack of it had resulted in his being blinded.

"The blinding of Orion! How very odd that I should never have given that piece of news a second thought!"

By one of those queer coincidences that it is always almost impossible to regard as *just* coincidences he had no sooner thought of the injury that Tis's little sister had unwittingly done to the great Hunter Orion than his father suddenly turned to him and said with a smile: "I was just wondering why it is, my son, that only once in my life I've composed a line of poetry, while from my memory I can repeat so many lines."

"What was the line you once composed?" enquired Nisos. "It would interest me so much if you'd repeat it to me now! Do, please, please, my father, let me hear that line of poetry you composed. Had it to do with what at that moment came into my head? I mean the blinding of Orion?"

Odysseus swung slowly round. "It's curious," he said, "that you should have spoken of Orion; for the line I composed, and I really do consider it a proper, authentic, natural line, though the only poetic part of it is the fact that it is rhythmical and runs smoothly, *is* about Orion. Well, I can't really say it's *about* him. But at any rate it refers to him, and the syllables of the line run musically together! In fact it's because they run so musically that I can repeat the line now. It's the simple sound of it that works the trick. In fact it's the sort of thing a child could invent without having to give it any particular significance.

"Yes, a child, if it tried to make up a story in poetry would be delighted if a line like this suddenly came into its head. It would probably even try to compose a second line, such as in its rhythm and smooth flow could follow the first.

"It was when I was in the Garden of Alkinöos to which Nausikaa guided me and when I was telling her father and mother, indeed when I was telling them all, about the ghosts of the Heroes I saw in Erebos, that this line suddenly came into my head.

"I had been explaining to them how I beheld the holy and upright Minos, that great son of Zeus, acting as Judge among the Ghosts in Hades when suddenly I thought: 'I must tell them how I saw the great Orion'; and it was only then, when, without premeditation, I uttered the words 'Ton de met Orionay pelorion eisenoeesa', that I realised I had uttered a line of real poetry. And yet all I'd said was just quite simply that 'after him' — by which I meant of course after Minos— 'I beheld the gigantic Orion'. But I must have instinctively realized that the words I was using had suddenly, like a boat from a muddy ditch into a flowing stream, emerged out of prose and into poetry; for I knew the poetic rhythm in what I added to this, namely:

'Chersin echone ropalon panchalkion aien aages.'

'In his hands holding his club, all-bronzed and ever unbroken.'"

Nisos spontaneously brandished his double-edged dagger as Odysseus, moving on with a firmer stride, mounted a short flight of broad stone steps and began to cross a marble square of immense size in the middle of which must have been a grove of enormous trees. It was painful to observe the lost and condemned trunks of this grove, not merely blackened by the salt water but curst with a peculiar shade of blackness to which an exquisitely faint blue tinge had been in some way added.

As they followed the marble roadway between these weird tree-trunks that were like ghosts gathered in a desolate flock by some invisible enchanter, Odysseus turned to his son. “I can’t tell how it is, my boy, but I have an instinct that it’s not for nothing that you and I were brought at the same moment into contact with the name ‘Orion’.”

Nisos stood so still that he might himself have been one of those ghastly tree-trunks with their weird metallic glitter in that pale light.

“Do you mean, my father — —” began the young man. But his words, whatever they were going to be, dissolved in that circumambient greyness; for as he met his father’s glance he knew without any exchange of words what the older man was thinking. In fact their separate thought-streams at that critical moment in their lives whirled together in a silent circular eddy. “You think, my Lord,” the younger man whispered, “that we’re in the line of the great Hunter’s arrows where we now stand; and that we might be hit and turned into ghosts ourselves at any second?”

Odysseus lowered his club till it rested on the pavement of the road they were following and they both gazed with instinctive apprehension at a group of colossal Sea-Weeds that rose, tough, wiry, weltering, succulent and elastic into the water, and seemed to be treating the water itself as if it were a thick undulating mass of weirdly smelling rubber that bent into curves and grooves and hollows as they pressed against it, and *into* it too, as you might say, without causing it to split or crack or bleed or sweat or melt; causing it to yield where it was pressed against, but always finding it impossible to prevent it returning, like a squeezed bubble, or like a vast impressionable bladder, the moment the pressure was relaxed.

“Have you realized, my Lord,” whispered Nisos; and it showed the nature of the intimate crisis that was intensifying itself about them, like an elemental process, parallel to, but not the same as, the process of freezing, that the young man without consciousness of what he did reverted to his mood of utterance before he knew his parentage, "have you realized that we're on the edge of — —"

His voice died away as he looked down; and there came no responding reply from the old man, as he too looked down. And well might the two of them — mere mental human animals of fibres and nerves as they were! — look down and look long, at what lay before them. They were indeed confronted by what might have struck them as a vast reserve of creation-material out of which all the multitudinous formations of earth-life could be replenished, reproduced, refilled with pith and sap and blood-juice.

They were indeed standing on the brink of a vast precipitous chasm that apparently descended to the centre of the earth but which the water of the ocean had now wholly filled. Huge rubber-like sea-growths protruded so thickly out of this indescribable gulf that it was clearly a horrible possibility that impulsive wayfarers might mistake the tops of these elastic weeds of the great salt deep for just a rougher portion of the paving-ground of the road they were following; but the idea that at any moment they might catch, carried to them by this weird element that could scarcely be called water, the twang of an arrow's flight from the bow of the great Hunter Orion, subdued to a minor degree of tension their reaction to this precipice beneath their feet.

Once more Nisos was, as they used to say in his island-school, bowled over by his new parent's calm. For the old man turned his back upon this cosmic chasm in the floor of the world just as he might have done if it had only been a muddy ditch near their old Dryad's decayed oak-tree.

"Well, sonny," he said, "we must go back a little way, but it won't have to be far. We'll find a way of getting our direction again if I'm not mistaken when we're at that arch." He was not mistaken. They soon found, exactly at the point he'd mentioned, sweeping upwards from that same arch, a tremendous flight of steps, a staircase, in fact, that soared up and up and up with such a stupendous urge that, in the process of their mounting it and ascending its grandly sweeping curves, neither of them, neither father nor son, could help feeling a curious exultant pride in belonging to the same type, if not to the same race, of human animals, who were responsible — quite apart from the Being who had tyrannized over them — for the building of this amazing city.

They had only to pause for a moment with their elbows on an ebony balustrade to realize what a sublime achievement this Metropolis of Atlantis was. The wonder was not only in the fact that its stairways and bridges and great squares and vast marketplaces were supported by the same colossal pillars, as the towering temples, which themselves, in their turn, were overtopped by yet more bridges, bridges above which still mightier and higher platforms had been erected, platforms which had been made the floors for still loftier towers. It was also in the fact that the whole mass of them, yes! the whole volume and weight of all these amazing constructions, were connected with one another, forming, so to speak, one vast musical composition in marble and stone. And if this drowned super-city was indeed by far the most remarkable creation that the world contained, how was it that the human race could calmly look on while some Titan built and some Olympian drowned its sublime structure? How was it that no desperate prayers to Atropos, who was the oldest and wisest even if she was the smallest and the most easily exhausted of the three Fates who govern the affairs of men and of nations, were not uplifted by the prophets of the people? But it now seemed to both the father and the son as they contemplated this spectacle, leaning upon that ebony balustrade with its summit disappearing in the salt water above them and the foundation disappearing in the salt water beneath them, that they really could hear the terrifying twang of the bow-string of Orion.

But Odysseus wasn't one to remain paralysed and confounded even though in the presence of a menace from Orion on one side and from Typhon on the other. "If *that's* the Hunter," he remarked quietly, *"that* is, without question," and he jerked his beard in the opposite direction, "the breathing of the Monster. So I suppose we'd better leave this point of vantage and swing round again, whether eastward or westward, or northward or southward; for I have now absolutely lost all sense of direction, and I expect you have too, my son! But I know we were just now following that damned Dragon, so, if I'm right to assume from the noise I can hear that the brute's coming back this way we've got to return to our first direction, sonny, which was certainly directly opposite our present one."

They turned their backs therefore to the still faint but extremely unpleasant sounds of which they both were now fully aware, and made their way, the father with Herakles' club and the son with Zeuks' double-edged dagger, back once more in the direction from which they had just been hastening.

"Was it an omen, my father, both of us thinking of Orion at the same time?" enquired Nisos rather timidly, for he was not sure, as nobody who knew Odysseus ever *could* be really sure, what his precise reaction would be to any question that had a mystical or religious over-tone.

In one sense this famous hero's character was abnormally simple, as simple, you might almost say, as that of an animal, in another sense it was unpredictable, yes! not so much complicated, or subtle, as wholly unpredictable. Even here it might have been argued that there was something animal-like, although to anyone who has a long experience of any particular species of animal the absolutely incalculable never occurs.

But it was precisely this, the absolute incalculable, that did occur with Odysseus; and it was upon this peculiarity that the popular idea of his wiliness and cunning rested. Human cunning, like human honesty, is one of the hardest of all qualities to catch, isolate, hold, and clearly define, especially so when we agitate our measuring scales by the introduction of our moral emotions. Odysseus' unpredictableness resembled in fact both the unpredictableness of the sort of super-animal we call "good", like Pegasos, and the unpredictableness of the sort of super-animal we call "bad", like Typhon.

But now to his son's question about Orion the old man's reply was both very gentle and very definite. "I have noticed," he said, "that the intimation of a great friend's approach or of a great enemy's approach reaches us through the intervening space much more quickly and much more unmistakably when the personage arriving finds us entirely alone and with nothing around us and about us except the elemental, the mineral, the vegetable forms of existence. Get away, you little idiots!" and he brushed aside with his left hand a shoal of tiny fish who had evidently mistaken his projecting beard for a growth of the sort of seaweed that might be expected to harbour the particular kind of small creatures that were to these scaly little mouths and distended gills a veritable heaven of feasting. "Of course in this case, my dear child," Odysseus went on, "you and I, since we have the same friends and enemies, can well, for the argument's sake, count as one person. To both of us, therefore, the presence of Orion down here at the bottom of the sea, exploring the metropolis of Atlantis, just as we are doing ourselves, is without question a menace to you and me. That he is, no doubt, much more of a menace to our enemy Typhon makes no difference to us. It is known that Orion was blinded for ravishing his mother and only restored to sight by the power of the Dawn. It is known that he has an insane passion for killing anything and everything with bow and arrow and that on one occasion he set out to destroy in this manner the whole human race. Whether he is here as a friend or as an enemy of the Being who rules this place and whose mysterious countenance our ship carries as her figure-head is completely unknown to us.

"Whether this mysterious Being to whose machinations, directed against the Son of Kronos, Atlantis owes her drowning, has the power to dominate Orion I have not the remotest idea. I can only assure you that when I saw Orion in Hades after my vision of Minos judging the Dead I felt very hostile to him. Ghost himself, he was killing for the second time, and for an everlasting Second Death, every creature he could discover, in a blind ecstasy of universal murder.

"Thus, my dear boy, when I hear you ask me whether the fact that the image or the eidolon or the actual living form of Orion coming into our two minds at the same moment when he is stalking through these deserted buildings in one of his insane murdering fits, is an omen, I can only answer, emphatically and definitely, *no*!

"*No!* It is no more an omen than when Polyphemos killed my companions and tried to kill me. It is a struggle, a battle, a contest, my little son. It is a fight! And everything in life is a fight, Nisos my friend, *everything*! That the idea of this savage Hunter, this madman, who some say raped his own mother, and whose very name means 'to pour out semen', and who others say had neither father nor mother, but was born of the semen of Zeus and Poseidon deliberately thrust into the hide of some slaughtered beast, and left to ferment there for the necessary nine or ten months, came into our minds at the same moment only shows how the eidola of dangerous men, who are threatening us, can pass through air and water and earth and fire till they fling themselves upon us like horrible projected shadows, warning us that very shortly the men themselves in their own flesh and blood will be upon us!

"Omens? It is the fight for life, the fight in life, the fight of life, and, by all the gods! the fight *with* life! But what we must set ourselves to do now is to discover the palace, the dwelling, the temple, the throne, the hiding-place of the Being who rules this place."

He gathered up his own trailing cord of the Helmet of Proteus more effectively round his head and watched his son do the same for himself and also for the club of Herakles; and once more they went on with their exploratory journey. But their quest was soon at its end. Without warning, without the faintest hint of premonition, they were suddenly standing on a platform of green marble, marble that through all this water had itself the look of water and of water in motion too; while in front of them, but to their surprise not on the tremendous and awe-inspiring throne they were expecting and looking for, but on a heap of long-dead, long-decayed, long-rotted, long-dissolved, long-degenerated, filthily-stinking, foully-crumbling, horribly-putrifying mass of sea-weeds in accumulated decomposition, reclined, or rather sprawled, the god-titan, or goddess-titan, for this horrific and terrifying rebel against all Deities was completely bi-sexual and androgynous, who was by reason of his, or of her, or of its defiance of Zeus and of Poseidon and of Aidoneus, those three Olympian Rulers of Sky and Sea and Hades, responsible for the drowning of Atlantis.

This mysterious Being, whose physical appearance struck Nisos as more shocking and also more feminine than human words could convey, fixed her eyes upon the young man as he stared in stupefied horror and made with outstretched and inwardly curved fingers a series of gestures, of a dangerously magnetic nature, compelling him to approach her. This summoning gesture he felt unable to resist, and first with one of his feet and then with the other — and as each foot advanced he felt himself forced to move his arms, in a fumbling and groping manner, mechanically forward — he slowly and steadily, while he trembled from head to foot at what he was doing, advanced towards this indescribable creature’s embrace.

And then, evidently as much to the surprise of this terrifying Being as to that of its intended victim, Odysseus calmly stepped forward and stood between them with his broad back towards his son and his face towards the Being crouching on that pile of rotting seaweed.

Nisos experienced an extremely odd sensation as he allowed his right hand grasping his two-edged weapon to sink down by his side and contemplated the broad back in front of him. It was to him a completely new sensation and one which made him feel a little foolish. He liked to be the active one, the most active one, in any group or in any company. He had been brought up to feel it his duty to serve, guard, protect, and defend his parents; and also to serve, guard, protect, and defend his King; and furthermore to help, aid, sustain and champion the very old.

And here he was standing weakly, feebly, passively, stupidly, behind the back of a person who was both his Father and his King and at the same was a very old man. Used to analysing his feelings he found it more than a little difficult to decide whether it was better to submit and obey on this occasion, when so old a man who was both his father and his king placed himself between him and the present danger and did so too without uttering a single word, did so in fact purely by the silent and practical and significant action of facing this appalling Being himself and turning his back upon the child of his loins, or whether he ought, with one desperate leap and a wild rush, to fling the old man aside, raise high his own arm, and plunge Zeuks’ deadly double-edged dagger again and again into what he could only pray would prove to be the heart of this living Mystery of Horror.

Why he thought of her, what put her into his head, what power concealed in the depths of his own nature called upon her for help, Nisos could no more tell than he could tell whether she would have been, in any case and entirely independent of both Odysseus and himself, exploring, as many another powerful Deity might well want to do, the deserted Metropolis of a drowned world, but she who now came suddenly into our friend's head was none other than Atropos herself, the oldest and the smallest, but far the most powerful, of the three Goddesses of Fate.

"O Atropos, O Atropos!" Nisos prayed in his heart. "Great Goddess of Fate! Thou who once didst let me struggle with Gorgons and Furies on thy behalf, help Odysseus and help me against this Horror!"

He had no sooner uttered this prayer than he was aware of a curious hush in the humming and murmuring waters around them. He shuffled sideways just a little; in fact just enough to be able to choose to see or to choose not to see, according to his wish, the magnetic eyes of the Being reclining on that foul heap of stinking seaweed. From this position he could see that the Being in front of him had got its eyes fixed steadily upon the face of Odysseus and was still making with its semi-human, semi-vulture-like finger-claws a monotonous, repetitive, ritualistic pantomime of silent motions, which clearly gesticulated what in words would have been: "Come to me! Come to me! Come to me! You and I, when once we are one, will conquer the universe!"

The Creature's "Come to me!" was repeated over and over and while this appalling sorcery of repetition went on Nisos' glance wandered to a half-revealed object that lay amid that rotting dark-brown seaweed. What it was, when once he caught sight of it, was evident enough, though the seaweed in which it was entangled covered many portions of it. It was the skeleton of a man or woman. Nisos didn't know enough about anatomy to know to which of the sexes it had belonged, and the light that shone from the couple of swaying cords that emanated from the Helmet of Proteus was not strong enough to reveal with certainty whether the owner of the flesh that had once covered that skeleton was a tall or a short person; but those white bones entwined with dusky seaweed made him, as the Helmet's flickering light fell upon them, wonder why he had never asked the all-knowing old hero how it was that considering the thousands of people who must have been drowned in that sunken city he hadn't seen until this moment a single dead man or woman. Anyone would certainly have supposed that if the thunder-loving Son of Kronos had caused the sinking of a crowded city like this as a punishment for impiety the whole place would be full of dead people caught and drowned without warning in the midst of their daily business and profane pleasures.

If only he had the power of reading the thoughts that were passing to and fro within the living skull of Odysseus under that fantastic Helmet! What *could* the old hero be doing with his mind and his will to counter this gesticulated spell by which the Ruler of Atlantis was seeking to enthral him?

It was hard enough for Nisos to take his eyes away from those twining and twisting fingers, but he was too scared as well as too prudent to risk more than a series of snatching, switching, twitching glances at the appalling beauty and over-mastering power of the face above those flickering hands and that androgynous breast.

What on earth would the old hero decide to do? It was certainly a weird state of things for a person as inexperienced as he himself was to have to face. But here was his father facing it in deadly silence; and he told himself that if he intended to be a prophet when he grew older he must force himself to face what was happening now. He must in fact force himself to see himself cowering behind his father who held the Heraklean Club but who could do nothing in the presence of this Being but simply stand his ground, while round about them both, wandering up and down these towering bridges and triumphant bastions and tessellated battlements roamed the titanic Dragon-Monster Typhon who had shaken a whole Sicilian mountain from off his shoulders and who breathed such fire from his belly that no mortal man could face him, and yet, huger than he, and armed with a club not of wood, but of bronze, here also was the greatest of all the Hunters of the world, enormous Orion, threatening not only Typhon but all that lived and moved upon the earth and all that lived and moved beneath the waters! And here was he, Nisos, cowering behind the back of his father. But he must, he must without shirking his own shame, force himself to visualize this living group of heterogeneous Beings, human and divine and demonic and bestial, isolated there in drowned Atlantis, but as compared with the infinite extension of the sky, and the infinite extension of time, of no more importance or significance than if it had been a group of toads and tadpoles and newts and stickle-backs and dragonfly-grubs in the minute estuary of a small pond.

His half-conscious pride in being clever enough to think thus of himself and of the rest of them lifted his spirits considerably and once again, and this time with more faith and hope than before, he prayed to Atropos, the oldest and smallest, but by far the most powerful, of the Three Fates.

And lo! such was the regard which this aged directress of mortal lives had for our young friend, and whether he knew it or not this personal link with the old lady was the best omen and the deepest intimation that could possibly have reached him that one day he really might prove to be a prophet to the people of Hellas, — lo! there suddenly swam past them, following a straight line between Odysseus and the god-demon of the drowned City, a large and peculiarly handsome Dolphin, upon whose back, and clinging to him with a certain nervous intensity, was Atropos herself!

She gave our friend as she passed, and she looked at nobody else and took no notice of anybody else, a look he would live to remember all his days, and probably would recall on the day of his death. It was then that Odysseus swung round at last, turning his back upon the god-demon, as if the ripples made by the passing of that Dolphin had broken, independently of any effort he had to make for himself, the whole of the spell which was now in the process of being thrown over him by the twining and twisting of those appalling fingers.

But when, in the radiation of each of the Helmet's hollow cords that gave to the calm old hero and his agitated son all their light and all their air, Nisos looked at his father's face he was surprised to see upon it an expression quite different from the expression he expected; for what he saw was not satisfaction over something that had just happened but expectation of something that was just going to happen.

And this became yet more evident when the old man held up before his son, in the full light and air of both those hollow cords that sprang from the crazy-looking object upon his head and went wavering upwards till they reached ocean's surface, his wooden Heraklean club.

"Expectation's acting true to his name, eh, sonny?" murmured the old man, speaking as quietly as if in place of a glowering horror there was nobody present but Tis and his faithful cow.

Nisos looked at the life-crack in the great weapon's bosom. Yes! There, as of old, was the big head and staring black eyes of the scientific fly; and there were the wavering antennae of the mystical moth!

To the son's astonishment the old hero begged him to enquire from the fly if the Sixth Pillar at home could still hold converse with "Expectation", and, in case it could, had it any news for them at the bottom of the deep sea? Nisos, though in his nervousness he felt as if the weaving fingers and the appallingly dominant eyes of the Being behind his father were keeping up a threat that nothing could dispel, gathered about him, as if it were the aegis of Athene herself, that look of Atropos and implored the fly to tell him the news.

Drawn back in a second were the quivering antennae of the moth, evidently under her friend's pressure, while with all his usual adverbial emphasis, the fly announced that the essential drift of the Sixth Pillar's news was that all the dimensions and all the elements of nature were at that moment waiting in an hushed and awestruck suspense the result of an ocean-deep contest between the immortal hunter Orion and the creator and survivor of Atlantis.

"The fly," Nisos continued, translating the insect language as carefully as he could, for like all very ancient classic tongues this insect one, which was far older than any of those used either among the defenders or the destroyers of Ilium, was full of subtle shades of meaning, "the fly tells me that the Pillar is at this moment warning its friend the wooden club that the club carried by Orion is made of something heavier than wood. It is in fact made of bronze. And the fly is now telling me all that the Pillar says about it to the club. I beg you, my father, to listen for a second to the voice of the fly, so that you can see, but if anybody in the world knows that already, it's you, what a grand teacher our goddess was when she put into my head, on the day the the Harpies attacked that stone with their nails, the trick of understanding this insect-tongue.

“Anyway, from what the fly says I gather that the Pillar has been assuring the Club that in the hands of wisdom wood can beat bronze, and that — —”

But Odysseus interrupted him at this point with a violent movement, a movement that flung them both down upon the ground. Then in a hoarse whisper the old hero bade Nisos help him, covering both of them with as much seaweed as they could gather up and strew over themselves, as they lay where they were with the club between them.

“Is it Typhon or Orion?” whispered the son. “Both of them!” groaned the father. And then with a sound that was half a curse and half a chuckle: “But its worse for this Atlantis-Bitch than for us!”

Vain and useless as he well knew such trifling things as double-edged daggers were in the presence of such Beings as he now peered at from under his heap of seaweed and across the heap that hid his begetter, Nisos couldn’t help clutching his only weapon, such as it was, and he couldn’t help feeling relieved when he saw by the light from the two Protean cords that swayed above their heaps of seaweed that his father had a tight grip upon their only real weapon, the club that in its day had drunk of the blood of the Nemean Lion, the club that sometimes bore the name of “Dokeesis”, “Seeming”, and sometimes the still simpler name of “Expectation”.

“Both of them!” Odysseus had gasped, with that queer sound that might have been a groan and might have been a chuckle; and as Nisos, feeling a human superiority to the fly, as the fly in his turn had felt a metaphysical superiority to the moth, peered out from under one heap of seaweed and across another, he did indeed behold “both of them”. And they were a really overwhelming sight. Typhon, the largest living creature ever born on land or in sea or air or fire, Typhon of whom even his mother the Earth was afraid, Typhon who had come so near to defeating Zeus that Zeus was only saved

by a trick that was not a trick of his own, now approached from the South, breathing fire upon the spot where the Creator of Atlantis sprawled on her seaweed throne and where the son as well as the grandson of Laertes crouched at her feet as if within two seaweed graves.

The fortunate thing for our seaweed-hidden humanity just then was the fact that this colossal Monster with the arms, head, breast, hips and belly of a man, had, in place of the legs of man or beast, the terrific, curving, twisting, writhing, scale-covered tail of a dragon. Typhon’s hands were garnished with the most vulpine and vulturine claws that were ever seen before, or during, or after the Great Flood that drowned Atlantis; while the gleam of the flame and the reek of the smoke that poured at all times from his throat in place of air kept making this ocean-deep water, through which he was now moving, steam and bubble round his too-human mouth, in a fashion that was as fascinatingly weird as it was, in some other queer way, disturbingly shocking.

But if the physical appearance of Typhon not only terrified but attracted Nisos after some mad and inexplicable fashion, the appearance of Orion, the greatest Hunter there has ever been, or ever will be, caused him to shiver under his rank-stinking shroud of slippery-slimy sea-refuse with a much more definite tug-of-war sensation between two conflicting emotions than he felt about the fugitive from beneath Etna.

It was indeed a certain concentrated, absolutely absorbed, gravely exultant enjoyment, held back as if by a leash just this side of ecstasy, which he read in the almost touchingly boyish features of the great Hunter that tore his sympathy into two halves of almost equally intense repercussion. O how he wanted to see that vast bow the Giant carried in his left hand bent for a shot and strung with one of those deadly arrows he wore in his belt! O how he longed to see that huge bronze club he swung in his right hand brought crashing down on the fire-breathing, water-bubbling visage of this Monster, who awaited his approach without a trace of perturbation!

So completely capable did Typhon evidently feel himself to be of clawing to death, or crushing to death, or squeezing to death, or burning to death with his fiery breath, or biting the head off any pursuer who dared approach him that Nisos was scarcely surprised to see him presently curl his gigantic tail in a vast circle round his ophidian loins and, deliberately clutching with outstretched human fingers handfuls of shells and pebbles and seaweed and sand, squat down in relaxed ease with his back against one of the colossal ammonites of which there are many in that deep bosom of the ocean.

What struck our young watcher, in spite of his boyish sympathy with every variety of hunter, as a really sublime spectacle of indifference in the hunted as to the final issue of the hunt, was the placid position in which the fire-breathing refugee from his living grave beneath Etna awaited the terrific Orion.

And like a mountain of submarine marble that has been washed smooth by the waves till it resembles a block of rainbow-gleaming ice, the great Hunter was now exposed to the petrified stare of our young friend under his counterpane of striking sea-weed. The tremendous figure in the foreground was engaged, it was plain to see, in adjusting an arrow to the string.

Through the wavering atmospheric lustre that emanated from the fantastic object on his father’s head the whole spectacle struck the prostrate lad with a strange sense of some vast world-history reaching some long-prognosticated moment, where life in its mysterious essence, human, sub-human, super-human, cosmic, and astronomic, had arrived at some pivotal point where the whole business, inscrutable, unspeakable, absolutely real, but beyond both mind and matter, gathers itself together to become something for which naturally enough there is as yet no name.

Then he saw Orion draw the arrow back on its quivering bow-string against his naked breast and let it fly. It flew with a reverberating directness straight towards the reclining Typhon and past the very feet of the recumbent Creator of Atlantis. It passed clean through one of the outstretched hands of the Man-Dragon, nailing it to the ground; and Orion perceiving this and glorying in it had the same look upon his face as when with his arrows he drove the Pleiades into the sky, and again when he came at last upon the sun-god Helios newly-risen over the edge of the world and was cured of his blindness.

But the latest and greatest of the primeval children of our Mother the Earth was not overcome by this shock. He didn't roar, nor did he howl; he didn't shriek, nor did he bellow: he didn't curse nor wail, nor yell, nor rumble, nor weep, nor moan. He only lifted as high as he could his right shoulder, for it was his left hand that had been hit, swung his right arm downward across his bent torso, seized the arrow and struggled to pull it out. The arrow, however, after piercing his hand, had gone deep into a very obstinate piece of rock, and pull as he might with that powerful arm and that powerful shoulder he couldn't pull it out.

While he struggled with it Nisos could see the vast figure of Orion approaching with long strides and brandishing his bronze club. At that particular sight the young man's mind moved very fast. He recalled what his father, lying now by his side, had told him, and how the words he used had of their own accord, so he declared, taken upon them the rhythm of poetry. In fact simultaneously with the approach of that tall terrifying figure, Nisos seemed to catch again the very syllables of what the old warrior had muttered at that moment.

“Tonde met’ Orionay pelorion eisenoeesa.”

“Chersin echone rapalon panchalkeon aien aages.”

What astonished the young man most in himself at that crucial second was that in spite of all tradition, convention, propriety, decency, law, order, education, custom, and harmonious necessity, he found that his sympathy was with the hunted and not the hunter, with the ugly and not the beautiful, with the Monster, and not the destroyer of Monsters, and he suddenly felt in himself a mad, wicked, rebellious, reckless impulse to jump up from the side of Odysseus, clutch the double-edged dagger that had belonged to the son of Arcadian Pan, leap on the shoulder of this god-defying Man-Dragon, and spur him on with a mocking and resounding challenge to withstand Orion to the death!

Odysseus must have become aware, by some psychic vibration passing from one light-giving Proteus-cord to the other, of this rebellious impulse in the life-blood of the child of his loins, for he suddenly handed to him his club, leapt to his feet with astonishing agility, crossed the few yards between them and Typhon in a couple of strides, and kneeling on one knee, and using both hands, pulled out the arrow! Nisos who was instantly at his side gave him back the club and helped him to his feet. But they now found themselves, while they watched Orion’s steady approach, standing so close to the Creator of Atlantis that this incalculable Entity was able to try its dangerous magic upon them both just as it pleased; one deadly-white phosphorescent tentacle of a finger being laid on the shoulder of Odysseus and the other on the shoulder of Nisos.

All three of them for a brief space, while every pulse-beat of time brought Orion nearer, were in any case reduced to helpless inactivity by the choking cloud of fire and smoke with which Typhon covered his retreat. But a retreat, and a very shrewd and very rapid retreat this enemy of Zeus was able to make under cover of his own fiery breath, so that when Orion, brandishing his club of bronze, arrived on the scene he had not the remotest idea whether his fugitive had fled east or west or north or south.

Nor did it appear to him that either of the two men he found awaiting him were in a condition capable of replying intelligently to any question he might ask as to the direction of the flight of the Enemy of Heaven. They were both, at least so it seemed to the simple mind of the great Hunter, so confused, so dazed, so numbed, so completely metagrabolized by the leprous white, death-worm-white, sarcophagus-toad-white dead-sea-eel-white fingers that rested upon them that he might equally well make enquiries of a heap of ordure dropped by the fugitive.

So he addressed himself to the Being who had reduced them to this condition.

“Tell me, you creator of drowned cities, you hypnotizer of men, whither has that monster whose belly-flame no water can quench and whose bladder-smoke no ocean can quell, shogged off on his wriggling tail?”

Neither the father with his unbelievable past nor the son with his doubtful future appeared able to utter a word. But the mental vibration between them was so aided by the cords of the Protean Helmet that Odysseus indicated to Nisos in a whisper below a whisper that the club of Herakles had begun to make curious little jerks, abrupt stirrings, and quiverings quite independent of the hand that held it. “Feel him, will you, son?” whispered the old hero, “and tell me what you think!”

Nisos laid his left hand on the club’s head, just above its life-crack where the hollow cord, clinging closely to it, still protected the sheltering insects from the pressure of the water. “If it wants to act on its own, my king and my father,” the young man whispered, “I would risk it and let it do so!”

And the club, whom some called “Expectation”, and others called “Dokeesis”, said to itself: “That bronze affair which Orion is whirling about over our heads may be all right for breaking stones. It is far too unwieldy, mechanical, automatic, and impervious to all suggestion, to crack the skull of a dangerous magician. If I can only make Odysseus give me my complete freedom I’ll show him and this lad too how to deal with wicked and horrible Beings! I came near it at the cave of the Naiads; but this Living Horror lying on that dead seaweed is worse than the oldest natural-born monster. But I, Dokeesis, can deal with it! Only let me go, and you shall see!”

And then, as his own hand on the club’s head and his father’s hand round the club’s waist relaxed a little, Nisos heard the fly say to the moth: “It’s hard for a thinking person like myself to go on studying life while these gods and men and monsters make such a stir; but I’m at least lucky to have someone like you, not quite indifferent to philosophic conclusions. Before the Pillar stopped talking to the club just now, it revealed the real cause of all this hullabaloo. It said it had learnt from earth and water and air and fire that the death of every deity in the world was at hand. It said that the world, what it always calls ‘the Pillared Firmament’, would outlast every creator that was supposed to have made it. This boy Nisos thinks that our ancient classical language is too *adverbial.* Adverbial! How else, I should like to know, could any language express how perfectly, beautifully, intelligently, clearly, and completely the club, in whose bosom you and I are at peace, understands our old and subtle tongue? Anyway the Pillar has now revealed that as a result of a spontaneous and natural revolt all over the world against god-worship, all the gods that exist, from Zeus downwards, and all the goddesses that exist from Hera downwards, including Athene herself and Eros and Dionysos and of course including Aidoneus the god of the dead, and Poseidon the god of the sea, are fated to perish. They are not fated to perish rapidly. Some indeed, Athene and Hermes for example, will perish slowly.

"But perish they all will. And the fatal sickness that must ere long bring them to their end is caused by this growing refusal to worship them. If mortal beings depend on the sun and the rain, immortal beings depend on our worship of them. If we stop worshipping them, the juice, the sap, the pith, the oil, the ichor, the very blood of their life vanishes; and like plants without sun and air, and plants without earth and water, they simply wither away."

The fly now became silent; but Nisos heard the moth answering him in her most vehement manner. "I don't see the use of dead things like sand and rocks and air and water and fire going on when living things like gods and men and insects have vanished away. That would mean that nothing would be left; for if no one knew they were there, there'd be nobody there and everything would be nothing."

"Your voice, beautiful one," said the fly, "sounds as if you'd rather like everything to be nothing."

"I would! I would! I would!" cried the moth; "for then the greatest Priest who has ever lived would be right, and the Pillar and the Club and all the rest of you would be wrong!"

Nisos decided in his own mind that it must have been the abnormal excitement of the club itself that had communicated this tension to its inmates. "Shall I," he said to himself, "take my hand off its head, and see what happens? My Father's hardly holding it at all! Suppose I *did* take my hand off its head would it move of itself? Would it go for this horror?"

Nisos had never in his life been aware of so many cross-currents of thoughts and intentions, of revelations and counter-revelations, of insurrections and counter-insurrections. He was conscious of feelings that whirled one way and of feelings that whirled exactly the opposite way, through his consciousness. It was like being torn in half. With one part of his soul he longed to lift his hand from the club and see the club plunge itself with all the power that killed Nemean Lion into the face of this Mystery enthroned on this dead seaweed!

With the other part of his soul he felt that to see the terrible beauty of this majestic face mauled, crushed, churned up, smashed up, beaten up, pounded up, hammered up, reduced to an indistinguishable paste of pestilential mud and blood would be to assist at the most savage crime that his wickedest imagination had ever pictured. But there was an “I am I” within him that was deeper than his divided soul; and with this he felt that the only conceivable alternative to letting the club obliterate this Ruler of Atlantis was to let the Horror have its way, to give up himself to it with absolute submission, to give up his father Odysseus to it, to give up his friend Zeuks, the son of Arcadian Pan, to it, and, worst of all, to give up to it his girl Arsinöe, the daughter of Hector of Troy. No, no, no, no! He couldn’t let this Being, whatever the mystery of its creative power, whatever the ineffable beauty of its face, whatever its justification as the archenemy of Olympos, triumph over all he loved, unresisted!

He felt too agitated, as the quivering of “Expectation” *alias* “Dokeesis” under the pressure of his hand indicated that at the withdrawal of his hand the club would act on its own and leap at that unspeakably lovely face bending towards them, to have the calm of mind to do what Odysseus was doing at this moment, namely keeping his eye fixed, not on the Creator-Survivor of Atlantis, but on the great Hunter Orion, who, towering above them, was now examining with the utmost nicety each arrow in his quiver, and as he did so kept turning north, south, east, west, and snuffing at the air for the direction of Typhon’s flight.

But he was absolutely amazed when he heard his father, who like himself was now on his feet, addressing Orion in a calm, quiet, but extremely authoritative voice.

“We have met without meeting, O mighty Orion, and I must request you to kneel down here for a moment at my side. I must ask you to do so in the name of your island of Chios. I must ask you to do so in the name of Merope. I must ask you to do so for the sake of the hide of that sacrificed bull, filled with the mingled semen of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hermes, and buried in the earth for ten months, out of which you were born.”

If the tone of Odysseus and the substance of his words were an astonishment to Nisos it was a still greater wonder to the boy when the towering giant submissively obeyed and knelt down by their side apparently quite indifferent to the fact that while he, a demi-god, was on his knees, they, a pair of mortal men, were on their feet.

Nisos now became painfully conscious of what might have been called the psychic helplessness of the four of them, Odysseus, Orion, the Nemean Club, and himself, arranged in a convenient row, as if they were Hesperidean Apples, to be devoured, one after another, by that Being reclining on the dead seaweed. Nor, it appeared, were any of the four of them very surprised by what they heard, though the tone of the Being’s voice when it first came forth might well have pulverized, or, at any rate, petrified, any one of them, caught by it alone.

It was not only the most scraping and jarring voice that Nisos had ever heard. It was the most mechanical, automatic, and metallic voice. It was a voice like the triumphant screaming of steel when in contact with tin. It was a voice like the voice of every instrument in the Smithy of Hephaistos if they had revolted and taken over for themselves the whole resounding and echoing place. It was not the voice of a god, or a man, or a beast, or a bird, or a reptile, or an insect. It was the voice of a vast reverberating arsenal full of every kind of instrument for every kind of creation and every kind of destruction.

"From now on, to the end of your lives," the voice from the Entity reclining on the dead seaweed grimly grated like a wheel, or grievously groaned like a plough-share, "you three migrants to my kingdom, of which, as you know, having once come you are forever the loyal subjects, will go about the world proclaiming my kingdom's laws. These laws will, in their own time and in due course, become the law of the whole earth, the law of every country and race and tribe and nation and people. This law will be absolutely and entirely scientific. As it is born of science, so it will grow, century by century and aeon by aeon, more purely scientific. Its one and sole purpose will be science for the sake of science. It will care nothing about such trifling, frivolous, unimportant matters as faith, hope and charity. It will care nothing about the happiness of people, or the comfort of people, or the education of people, still less, if that be possible, about the virtue or the righteousness or the compassion or the pity or the sympathy of people.

"It will use people — that is to say men, women, and children as it uses animals. It will practise upon them and experiment with them, not for their sake, but always purely and solely, as it ought to be, for the only Purpose, the only Religion, the only Object, the only Ideal, the only Patriotism, the only Cause, Reason or Consideration worth anything in the world — *to understand everything that exists in every aspect of its existence.*

"For the sake of Science we must create. For the sake of Science we must destroy. For the sake of Science we must go so deeply into the secret of the power of one human mind over another, and of all human minds over the substance of earth, the substance of air, the substance of water, and, above all, the substance of fire, so that in the final event the whole earth will be as completely under control as my ship of state the ‘Teras’. As completely, do I say? O much, much more! For though it will be worked and handled by human beings, just as the ‘Teras’ is worked by Akron and Teknon, and Pontos and Proros, and Klyton and Halios and Euros, they will be scientific human beings, that is to say every man, woman, and child, in the whole world will be dominated absolutely and entirely by me, or by someone appointed by me; and, in this new ‘Teras’ of mine, I shall sail to the furthest limit of the Cosmos carrying my war-cry of ‘Science or Death!’ to the end of Space and Time.”

“Shut your eyes, darling!” murmured the fly to the moth, “for *our* ‘cosmos’, or whatever you call our old club, is going to hit this Science-Horror pretty heavily, furiously, bloodily, murderously on the head!”

Nisos was so close to the “life-crack” within the club’s bosom that in the dead silence following the voice from that terribly beautiful countenance he couldn’t help catching, as the adverb-loaded buzz of the fly ceased, the moth’s contribution to the crisis, which, as can be imagined, was contained in two monosyllabic sighs— “priest”— “death”. But such was his sympathy with the club’s emotion that the boy now deliberately removed his hand. “Like son, like father,” might have been a proverb among flies, for Odysseus also completely relaxed his hold upon the club. Whether the savour of “poisonous brass and metal sick” from the brazen club held by the kneeling Orion, who with his height thus reduced by half was still taller by a head than the father and son who were on their feet, had anything to do with the violence of its wooden rival neither Odysseus or Nisos ever knew; and the bronze and the wooden weapon never met again. But, after a desperate, whirling circle, the self-brandished pine-tree-stump from that

Nemean wood crashed down head-foremost full into the forehead of the mysterious Being on that seaweed heap, breaking its skull to bits.

And, not content with this, the self-moved slayer of the Nemean Lion, just as if a ghost or "eidolon" of Herakles himself, wrenched forth from the dead past of that hero's madness, had been wielding him, continued to strike at that indescribably beautiful and majestic face, till there was nothing left but a revolting mixture of blood, flesh, bones, seaweed and sand, streaked with filthily bedaubed tufts of hair.

The whole business was over and the gigantic Orion with his club of bronze was already striding off, without a word to Odysseus, in a south-westerly direction whence he must have caught, on some far-carried stir of the waters, a trailing cloud-wisp of Typhon's breath, when a couple of Dolphins, a great deal larger than the one that had carried Atropos, but evidently, Nisos quickly told himself, sent to their aid by that timely-interfering Mistress of Particular Destinies, stopped with a slant-sliding pause of their triumphant witchery of movement close by their very side.

On the backs of these elegant sea-horses it was not long before it was possible for them to see, on rising to the ocean's surface pretty well in the identical place where they dived down, the familiar single mast and complicated rigging of the "Teras", not to speak of those tall, weird, eternally arguing goddesses "of an infant world", Eurybia and Echidna, who still stood, disputing with each other as to what was happening on earth at this crucial time, disputing with each other in their new "Arima", near to the Atlas-shaped rock to which the "Teras" was moored.

"Look! O my father! Look, for the sake of Aidoneus and Persephoneia, look! *It is gone!"* Gasping and spitting out the water from his throat and stomach, Nisos, keeping himself afloat with both legs and one arm, for their

Dolphin-steeds were soon a mile away, shouted this news to Odysseus, to whom the watchful Akron had already thrown a rope.

Turning his steady gaze as well as his bowsprit-beard towards his son, the old adventurer, who with Akron's help was only using his left hand to climb on deck while under his left arm the club of Herakles was squeezed against his ribs, signed to Nisos, who was treading water in an unruffled sunlit sea, to detach from his shoulder, as he himself with his right hand was now detaching from his head the Helmet of Proteus.

The sight that had made the youth utter that cry was nothing less than the complete disappearance of the figure-head of the "Teras" so long renowned in all the harbours of all the Islands. "There's something here," the boy told himself, as he watched the Helmet of Proteus with its elaborate apparatus of hollow cords, sink out of sight, "that deserves more thought than I can give it till I'm warm and dry."

But as in his turn he was helped by Akron to reach the "Teras'" top deck he couldn't help wondering why it had been necessary to sacrifice this elaborately worked-out method of remaining for an indefinite time beneath the ocean.

"That awful Being," he said to himself, "had certainly no sympathy with anybody or anything. We were all the same to it! It would cut to bits, it would burn to cinders, a hero, a lion, a dolphin, a bird, a frog, a worm, a maggot, a flea. And all this to understand life!

"It didn't enjoy anything, or like anything, or admire anything, or pity anything. And yet it wanted to explore everything and understand everything. What a perfectly appalling way of understanding things! All it could understand of anything was how that 'anything' reacted to torture and compulsion. Well, well: I have learnt from the bottom of the ocean even more than from the ancient and adverbial language of flies. I now know what I shall be a prophet of when I am a man. I'll be a prophet for the putting of Science in its place! And what is its place? Its place is the servant, not the master, of life, the friendly 'doulos', or obedient slave of living things, not their pitiless 'basileus', or 'royal despot'."

That day, with all the following days for several months, turned out to be one of the happiest epochs in the whole life of Nisos, the son of Odysseus. He grew more devoted to Arsinöe, the daughter of Hector, than he had ever imagined that it was possible for him to be to any girl. In a physical sense, in a romantic sense, in a psychic sense she appealed to him; and on her side all she had endured in her captivity had left her with so much subtle knowledge of the pathetic simplicity of masculine self-esteem that not the most teasing obstacles, the most stupid jealousies, the most ridiculous suspicions, the most childish egotisms, could spoil for her what she saw of honesty, loyalty, and simplicity in her boy-lover's nature.

He also came to understand Odysseus as he had never dared to hope was possible; but it was not so much the mental enlightenment he got of the great Adventurer's character as the simply boyish delight in the endless stories the old man would tell out of his inexhaustible memory, as they sat together under that single mast and outstretched sail in the most fortunate wind that ever wafted a vessel towards an unknown, but O! so passionately imagined, shore!

What was most fascinating of all perhaps to the boy was the way the old man would correct and qualify, and sometimes event indignantly contradict, the ballad ditties that had already been scattered abroad throughout Hellas about so many of his exploits. Of these ballad-tales Odysseus hesitated not to explain to his son that the ones about the Trojan War itself were far grander as poetry than the more modern and more domestic ones, full, though these latter were, of the realism of daily life, and more concerned with his own private and particular experiences.

Certainly if their luck-blest sailing from East to West was a specially dedicated time for Nisos, it was an even rarer period of exquisite human happiness for Arsinöe. She had by this time come to profoundly understand, not in a scientific manner, but in a much subtler, wiser, and entirely feminine manner, all four of the chieftains on board, for no sea-faring chronicler ought to omit Akron; while our friend Zeuks, like his father, Arcadian Pan, had the power of enjoying a young woman without spoiling her chances with other men: and finally, since she was the only girl on the "Teras", the ship itself, devoid of a figure-head, was her only rival.

As for Zeuks, he had for the whole of this happy voyage from East to West exactly what his peculiar turn of mind liked best in the world, that is to say, for Arsinöe would never express herself with him, an old man, a middle-aged man, and a very young man, all well-educated, with whom he could discuss his favourite problems forever, problems that were at once erotic and metaphysical and that lent themselves to a humorous elaboration which any woman's mind spoilt. For the feminine intelligence, brought on the scene, swept in its direct realism so fast over both his logical hieroglyphs on the sands of time and the pantomime-stage overlooking them, that it spoilt the whole humour of his game.

And so when Arsinöe was helping Odysseus take his bath, or was learning something about navigation from Akron, Zeuks would argue with Nisos about that life-logos idea which was summed up in those two significant words "spoudazo terpsis", which Nisos loved to translate, in the adverbial language of the fly, "I powerfully throw my whole will into enjoying myself under all conditions," while in his own secret mind Zeuks would struggle to find, though he never could find it, some pregnant aphorism that would say to the whole regiment of all the thinkers and all the prophets that have ever been: “to laugh at everything is the prerogative of man, and we must acquire the art of doing it quickly before everything laughs at us.”

By good luck, or rather by the profoundly wise premonition of Nausikaa, the “Teras” had sailed with provisions enough to last the whole crew for half a year, so that even Akron, cautious as he was, felt no fear that they would reach the end of their resources before they reached the coast of some island or country or continent. And even supposing the ocean stretched on and on as far as the Isles of the Blest where those favoured by the gods lived forever in perpetual happiness, what could happen to the “Teras” before she reached those isles need not trouble them now. Akron indeed went so far as to confess to Eumolpos the helmsman that when he experienced a certain shudder of apprehension at the idea of having to encounter such world-famous favourites of the immortals, he overcame the uneasiness of his respectful awe by the idea that these Blessed Ones might get some kind of a human thrill at being greeted with news from home.

But months passed by and the “Teras” reached no Isles of the Blest or any other Isles. Days followed days, weeks followed weeks, and they met nothing but the same monotony of unending waters. At last there came a day when there arose such an angry controversy among the crew, who had never bargained for a voyage as long as this, that Odysseus himself had to help Akron in restoring order. It was a quite natural nautical dispute about this everlasting fair wind. There certainly was something queer in a wind that never stopped filling their one great sail. Too well they all got to know that old familiar expanse of sail-cloth as it bulged out, so full of that never ceasing wind! There was even a dark stain upon it, in the shape of a man’s hand, made by the blood of a seagull.

But it really was wonderful how quickly the aged adventurer restored order. And he didn't do it just by his bawdy jests; though there were plenty of those. He did it by holding their fascinated attention while he regaled them with one enthralling episode after another drawn from the actual stream of memorable things. It had been about this wind that their dispute had arisen; and, as so often happens in these contests, in each of the opposing arsenals of argumentative weapons, more were drawn from temperament than from experience.

In the matter of his own adventures Odysseus had come to realize as he grew older, and in doing so he had been greatly assisted by his old Dryad's intimacy with the Naiads of the Cave, that there were already a number of tavern-and-harbour ditties, school-boy catches, ballad-minstrel songs, and even longer and more scrupulously measured verses, that made very free use of him and of his adventures, just as they did of those of Agamemnon and Achilles and Hector and Ajax; and he now quickly understood, as he caught the drift of this present dispute, that it had to do with an entirely false and rather ridiculous tale that had been rumoured abroad about an ox-hide bag, in which Aiolos, the King of the floating island of Aeolia, bound up the four winds of heaven; and about this bag being given to Odysseus to carry with him on his ship, and about Odysseus's ship-mates, imagining it contained gold and silver, untying the knot and letting the winds go free, and finally about the frantic fury into which the foolish Aiolos flew when their ship was blown back to his fantastic brass-bound floating island!

Odysseus explained to both sides in this airy dispute that the winds had nothing to do with any such preposterous potentate as King Aiolos of Aeolia, this portly despot with his over-fed six sons married to his pampered six daughters, none of whom did anything but eat and drink all day long.

He explained to them that the mother of the winds was Eos the Goddess of the Dawn, who had married Astraios the son of that very Eurybia they had left on the island of Wone disputing with Echidna; and he warned them that unless they wanted the Hunter Orion on their track they had better cut out this silliness about ox-hide bags.

"I can't interfere," he told them, "with what the minstrels and tavern-singers make up about me. But inspired poetry is one thing and a versified fairy-tale, however entertainingly told, is another thing."

"Land! Land! Land! Land!"

By divine good luck — though Nisos had his own secret thought that his old helper Atropos had something to do with it — it happened to be at the exact hour of Noon with the Sun high above them and the water calm when the whole lot of them crowded on deck to welcome this most heavenly of all sights to those in the air or on the water, the simple sight of the solid earth. It was not a mountainous coast they beheld nor a particularly rocky one. It was just a coast, just a shore, just land at last.

Akron wisely decided not to let his helmsman steer them straight in at the first approach. "I prefer to wait," he told them — and Odysseus bowed to his opinion— "till we find a really good landing."

It is a curious thing but "what happens" as we say, often takes the course of events out of the hands of any particular power, even out of the hands of Tyche the Goddess of Chance herself, and yet doesn't yield it up to Fate or Destiny or the Will of Heaven. The event is not so much stranger than fiction as more appallingly natural than the natural, and to our amazement redeems all sorrows in the sweetness of its silent finality.

Probably no one will ever be really able to explain what there was in common between three extremely vital Entities on board the "Teras" that caused them all three to die of pure delight at their approach to land.

None of the three was entirely human, and it is possible that this was the reason; for it often happens that when plants and insects and half-gods die, ordinary human beings go on living. Ordinary human beings must have a certain mixture of fat and gristle in them that has the power, just because it is — well! *what it is,* of completely absorbing certain deadly vibrations.

“It’s the end of me!” Zeuks murmured, as Nisos, fancying that the son of the great god Pan was merely drunk, bent rather irritably over him. He wanted to go to Arsinöe who was standing where the Figure-Head had once been, and was talking to Akron and Odysseus; but his conscience had compelled him not to desert his friend the Fly, who was stretched out on its back upon one of the wings of the Moth, who had beaten herself to death in an ecstasy of happiness against the wooden edge of the “life-crack” in the bosom of the club of Herakles.

“And of me also!” faintly whispered the Fly feebly moving one long thin leg backwards and forwards along the surface of both his translucent wings.

Nisos was tempted to cry out for Arsinöe. “It’s funny,” he thought, “that all death calls for women; and yet all life depends on women!”

“Is the Pillar saying anything to the Club about our landing?” he asked the dying Fly, feeling instinctively that it would like to die talking.

But the Moth being dead and its own end near the Fly was disinclined to report on the world-events. “I have been thinking,” he whispered, “about our burial; and it is of this I wish to speak.”

“I take it,” said Nisos, “you mean yours and the Moth’s?”

“I do,” whispered the Fly.

“Have you decided upon the exact spot?”

“I have.”

“Do I know it?”

“You do.”

“You don’t mean the Sea?”

“No! No! No! No!”

“Where do you mean?”

“Put your ear close.”

Nisos obeyed, though it meant his pressing rather awkwardly against the motionless Zeuks. “You don’t mean you want me to finish you off first?”

“Of course,” groaned the Fly. “Don’t you understand that I’m done for and want to — to — be in one blob *with her*?”

“Blot did you say?”

“Call it what you like. I *said* blob.”

“Where is it you want me to bury you both?”

“I want to be swallowed. I want to go into a god’s stomach.”

At this point Zeuks lifted his head with a chuckle. “I am no god of flies,” he said, “but I can follow this little beggar’s buzzing. Squeeze the two of them into a pellet and I’ll swallow it right now!”

Nisos gravely and reverently obeyed. With his finger and thumb he killed the Fly; and then of its body and of the body and the surviving wing of the Moth he made one blot or blob and held it towards Zeuks.

“Kiss it!” murmured the great-grandson of ever-youthful Maia.

Nisos kissed it and placed it between the lips of Zeuks who swallowed it with a pleased smile.

“Kiss *me*!”

Nisos again obeyed and kissed the grandson of Hermes with so much feeling that a tear fell on a cheek that looked as if it might at any moment be split from one side to the other by a burst of profane amusement. When this world-deep bubble of irrepressible jocularity had subsided, Zeuks, who was far too weak to do anything but just murmur the words, told Nisos that it was curious to think that at this moment all over the world there were entities dying in their loneliness, who were without a friend to help them and who had moreover an awareness of their loneliness that was so definite and clear that it was painful to think about it. “When you consider,” Zeuks murmured, but Nisos could see, below the tragic pity of his words, a bubble of such defiant, mischievous merriment bursting through the whole body of the man that it seemed to arise out of the heart of life itself, “when you consider all the men and women and all the beasts, fishes, birds, reptiles and insects, isn’t it awful to think of creatures dying in the panic terror of loneliness? Did you know, my friend” — Zeuks’ speech by this time was so low that Nisos had to bend down to catch it— “that there are vibrations from one organism to another throughout the entire universe? Well! There are! And do you know what I’m going to do now? And please don’t disturb me in it! I give you my word I’ll die the moment I’ve done it. I’m going to tell every dying one in this whole crazy and confounded world that they’ve got me, Zeuks, the son of *Pan,* that is to say of the rebel who is everywhere, *on their side against Zeus*, and that the best way of fooling him and the whole lot of them is to die laughing, yes! laughing at this big, bloody, beggarly joke of a world! Stand back now, my dear!”

Nisos simply and silently obeyed the fellow; but the burst of stored-up ribaldry with which Zeuks died was so explosive that there was no corpse left to bury or burn. Out of world-dust he’d come, and into world-dust he dissolved, and the tiny blob of insect lovers he’d swallowed, melted with him into thin air.

Long afterwards Nisos and Arsinöe would spend hours asking each other about their memory of that landing. “What exactly did you feel,” that luckiest of middle-aged Prophets would cry, “when Odysseus stopped us from lifting a finger against the Red-Skins crowding round us? Do you remember how he looked when he came back to us, after talking with them in some words they understood that he'd picked up, Heaven knows where, to tell us that we'd landed on a place called Manhattan, whose Ruler was a very very old Queen called Nokomis, whose only child had already sailed away to a Kingdom they called Ponemah, which was the land of the Wind they called Keewaydin? And, O my Love, my Life, *you* know as *I* know what we both felt when he cried aloud to us all, he, Odysseus, the son of Laertes, among all those Red-Skins: 'Now that our wind from the East has dropped at last, and the only wind that we feel is the North West wind Keewaydin, shall we hoist our sail again? Never, never, never, never! Come my friends, all of you, white, black, yellow, and red, let us pour out all our wine upon her and then burn her! Yes, let us burn our ship!'"

The Brazen Head (1956)

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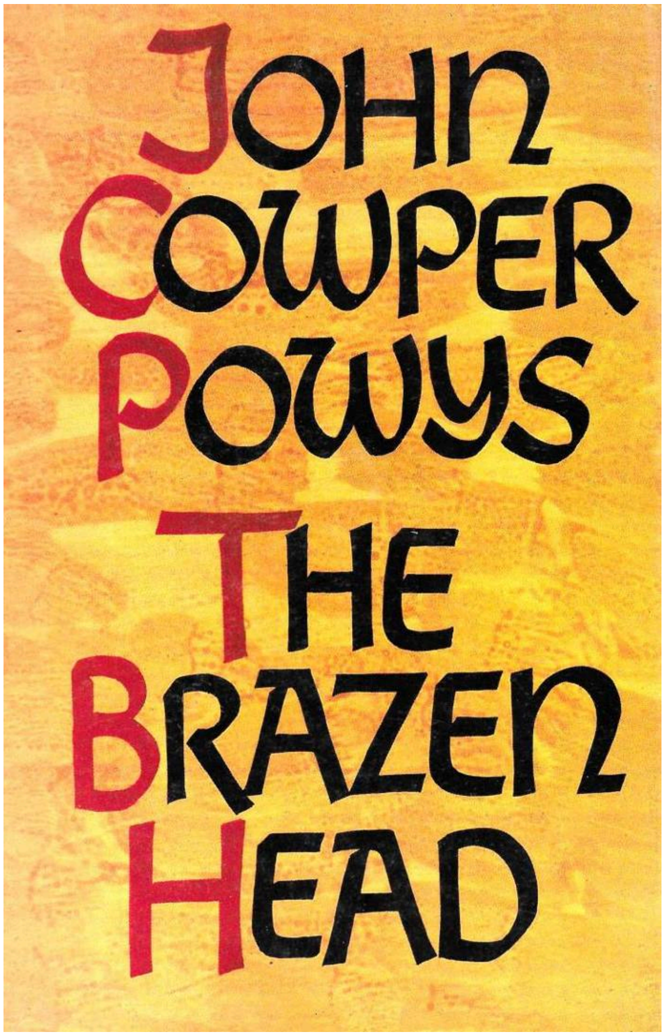
JOHN
COWPER
POWYS
THE
BRAZEN
HEAD

The first edition

Dedicated to

GILBERT TURNER, F.L.A.

I. THE STONE CIRCLE

IT DID NOT take Lil-Umbra long with her fifteen-year-old legs and her slender figure to scamper down the quarter-of-a-mile avenue of over-arching elms that led due eastward from the Fortress of Roque, where she lived, to the ancient circle of Druidic stones that had come to be known as "Castrum Sanctum". Once only did she pause: and that was because something about the manner in which all the smaller twigs at the end of one of the branches clutched at each other and then let each other go arrested her attention. It made her think of a young man called Raymond de Laon: but she could not have explained to anyone, just why it did.

The avenue sloped down all the way from the Fortress of Roque to the camp, but before it reached the latter, which was a grassy enclosure littered with broken stones, the smoothness of its gradual descent was checked and impeded, or, if you were bold enough to take them in a flying leap, accelerated, by a couple of rather high and very massive marble steps.

Lil-Umbra had already made up her mind, after seeing each of her brothers come down with a disturbing if not a disastrous collapse, that such wild jumps were beyond what was expected even from a maid "of true Abyssum spirit", as she had once heard herself described by her father to her mother. So she turned half round as she clambered down each of these two steps, touching with the tips of the fingers of one hand the slippery marble and giving a little tap on the ground with the toe of the foot that first came down, to make sure she wouldn't slip or slide. Once safely on the level grass of the Castrum Sanctum she ran with a quick bounding step to three tall perpendicular stones which stood side by side in the centre of the enclosure.

During the whole of that January there had scarcely been one night of thaw, and as this was the dawn of the twenty-ninth and in a couple of days it would be the first of February, the day which was her father's birthday, she had a particular reason of her own for approaching at this early hour those three upright stones.

It was Lil-Umbra's special desire to see the sun rise that morning while the waning moon was still visible in the sky, but she never would have dared to dodge both Nurse Rampant and the Nurse's assistant, old Mother Guggery, not to speak of Lady Val, her own devoted mother, if she hadn't made an appointment to meet a person, not only respected by them all, but one who was intimately lodged in Sir Mort Abyssum's trust and confidence.

This was none other than a gigantic Tartar whose life Sir Mort had saved when they both were surrounded in a half-crusading, half-plundering skirmish in Dalmatia, by an overpowering group of reckless Arab spearmen; and who in desperate gratitude had become his devoted slave for life.

Both the man's parents had been now for a long time dead. Giants of his size were very rare among Mongolian Tartars but, all the same, Peleg inherited his gigantic stature and strength from his Tartar mother, while his name Peleg showed that his father was a Jew, and indeed the original Peleg, too many thousands of years ago to be numbered in centuries, was none other than the grandson of Salah who was the grandson of Shem who was the son of Noah.

But it was certainly no thought of Noah or any other Hebrew patriarch that drew from Lil-Umbra her cry of excited delight the moment she saw Peleg crouching behind one tall Druidic stone in that broken circle. She scampered up to him at once and when she found he was asleep she had no compunction about snatching at his sleeve and jerking it up and down to waken him.

Had the rounded rim of the suddenly-risen Sun not become at that moment a living presence in the very place where, only a pulse-beat before, there had been nothing but the deepening of a wide golden glow diffused over the whole horizon, it is likely enough that Peleg might have received a bewildering shock from Lil-Umbra's leap into the enchanted pool of his dreams.

She certainly plunged in with a splash and the way she shook the giant's sleeve was enough to have jerked any ordinary mystery-loving Mongolian out of the happiest phantasmagoria of delectable dreams.

But the sight of that red rim, all the redder from the patches of snow on the slope of the ridge and the nakedness of the tree-trunks between which it appeared, conveyed to the man in a flash the whole situation. The first move he made was to alter with scrupulous care the position of the colossal iron mace which was his habitual companion and which was surmounted by a round ball as big as any ordinary man's head entirely covered by iron spikes. This weapon, which had been lying across his knees as he slept, with his back to the tallest stone of that forlorn remnant of a Druidic Circle, he now laid carefully on the frozen grass at his side and welcomed his master's daughter with a grave smile.

That little lady, delighted at having so successfully thrust her slight warmly-clad boreal body between the ancestral pillars of the mystic avenue to her friend's oriental dream-dome, didn't restrain herself in the least, now that he was awake, from pelting him with a shower of questions, confessions, declarations, and suggestions.

But it was not long before the gigantic Oriental and the young European were equally under the spell of that magnetic red orb which did not take many minutes to be half-way over the ridge that formed the eastern horizon of the Manor of Roque.

The Manor had only been in Sir Mort’s hands for a little over twenty years; but that had been quite long enough for himself and Lady Val, and their sons Tilton and John who were approaching twenty and their daughter Lil-Umbra, who would be sixteen in a month, to have grown intimately familiar with the fitful moods of the seasons in this part of Wessex, and with the particular enchantments worked upon this landscape by the Sun and the Moon in their variable seasons.

All five of them, the parents equally with their children, had established between themselves and both these heavenly bodies those private, individual, and even secretive personal relations that most human beings on this earth, whether old or young, though with very different degrees of intensity, instinctively reach.

“Well, here I am, Peleg!” gasped the young girl. “And O! how red the Sun is! It’s almost frighteningly red, isn’t it — rather like the Sun in that window in the Priory chapel — you know the window I mean? — that they say is a picture of the Last Day, when both Sun and Moon are to be soaked in blood. What things they do tell us, Peleg! I don’t believe a word of it; do you? I bet you don’t, any more than I do! It’s getting too much what these priests and monks tell us! Has John talked to you about what they’ve done to his master Friar Bacon, the learnedest man in the kingdom? Shut him up, they have, because he won’t believe their lies; and when he wants books and things — things he *has* to have if he’s to work at his inventions — they do their best to stop him from getting them!

“Do you know what came into my head the other day, Peleg? And it was because of that that I wanted you to show me the Moon this morning — no! wait a second — —” and the girl laid her hand on the back of the tightening and stiffening fingers by which the man was preparing to heave himself up from the ground— "It came into my head that perhaps even my father didn't really believe in all the things they try to make us swallow — and I can tell you myself of one person who doesn't, and that's Raymond de Laon of Cone Castle over there" — and she waved her hand, the one that wasn't being used to prevent his getting up, in a direction to the left of the now blazing Sun— "Raymond doesn't even believe that Pontius Pilate wrote 'King of the Jews' upon the Cross — and think, Peleg, how exciting it would be if I were more like Father in my secret thoughts than like Mother or Nurse or old Guggery or Prior Bog. What do you yourself think about all these things?"

The giant Tartar evidently thought that if he could get to his feet and convey this eager sceptic to a small eminence, only about three hundred yards away, the sight of the waning Moon, which he had himself just seen from that particular vantage-ground, would turn her mind away — at least on this particular occasion — from Pontius Pilate and the Crucifixion. He therefore proceeded to heave himself to his feet, murmuring as he took Lil-Umbra's hand tenderly but firmly in his own, "'Twere to see the Moon it was that you came, little lady, weren't it? To see the Moon from where your old Peleg do know every look of her, and every look of the belly and horns of her, aye! do know to a sliver which way her horns do point when she be rocking and floating like a ship without a mast and without a sail, a ship that's got lost in a sea of air, a ship that can do naught but watch that air change into an ocean of black darkness."

Muttering this musical monody to the Moon as if the Moon could hear every word of it, though neither Lil-Umbra nor himself could yet catch the faintest sign of her, Peleg led his companion down declivity after declivity filled with dead bracken-stalks and flowerless gorse-bushes, and across a few small rivulets that the girl could easily jump, and through one extremely unpleasant strip of boggy marshland, across which she allowed him to carry her, till they reached at last the place he had in his mind, which was a stone seat, made not by man but by nature, and a seat so prophetical that it might well have been the throne of a great paleolithic astrologer.

Upon this throne of stone they both sank down; and there was a deep silence between them. While this silence was lasting on and on, and while both these two beings, this middle-aged giant whose Jewish blood had endowed him with a more intellectual brain than people realized, and whose Mongolian instincts had from the start provided that brain with a reservoir of thick, rich, massive, sensuous impressions, and this high-strung, wrought-up, magnetically vibrant little daughter of Sir Mort and Lady Valentia, were giving themselves up, in the same absolute abandonment, to the spell thrown out by this faint, incredibly fragile waning moon, there had arrived at the Fortress of the Manor of Roque an unexpected company of visitors.

Now it happened that by some inexpliceble telepathic power the gigantic Mongol became aware of this unexpected intrusion; and it was a deeply trobling question to him whether to communicate to Lil-Umbra or not this sudden interruption. It was in psychic matters of this sort that Sir Mort completely underrated Peleg. It had always been the physical tremendousness of the Tartar's strength he needed.

He had never concerned himself very much with what went on in the man's private thoughts. One curious thing just then about the feelings of Peleg and Lil-Umbra as they yielded together so utterly to the sorcery of the Moon, while the giant wondered if it would be wise or not to speak of his new knowledge, was the way they were dominated by an irresistible inhibition against turning round to look at the Sun!

They both felt in some obscure half-conscious way that it would be dangerous and unlucky to turn towards that now fully risen luminary whose warmth they could distinctly feel at the back of their necks. Naturally the warmer the air grew and the more light there was in the sky the paler became the moon at which they were staring.

And the more the presence of the young girl at his side wrought this magic effect upon Peleg's attitude to the cosmos in general and to the landscape in particular, so the more divine did the Moon appear to him.

After a quick glance sideways at his companion as if to make sure of her sympathy but also secretly to ascertain if she were sharing his weird feeling that unexpected things were happening at the Fortress, he began to address the Moon in words more intimate and personal than Lil-Umbra had ever heard before used either to the Sun or to the Moon.

"O great Goddess," he prayed, "grant us, we beseech thee, an influence, a virtue, a secret, a touch, a mystery, from the heart of that which continueth, forever! In a few years I shall be an old man. In a few years this maiden will be a proud and beautiful woman and very likely the mother of children. Out of the heart of the Unknown thou hast come upon us, O great Goddess, and into the heart of the Unknown thou wilt soon pass from us. Heal us, therefore, O Goddess, of the hurts and wounds in our souls that ache and bleed today because of the false doctrines about gods and men that have been inflicted upon us, false doctrines about all things in heaven and earth!

"Have they not taken on themselves, these priests of pain, these ministers of blood, to invent signs and tokens and symbols and sacraments out of privation and deprivation, out of suppression and frustration, out of denial and negation? Have they not thus defied the revelations made by thy blessed mystery, and turned to nothing the secret of thy holy rapture, of thy sacred madness, of thy entranced, thy transporting ecstasy? Make them give us back the pulse of our life, great Goddess, give us back the beat of our heart, give us back the dance of our blood!"

Lil-Umbra remained silent for a couple of minutes with her face uplifted and her head turned sideways towards the colossal profile of the Tartar giant. There were several rooks and a few crows above their heads, sometimes flapping their great wings in disturbed agitation, and sometimes sailing with rhythmic risings and fallings, up and down between sky and earth.

"If I look at the Sun now," cried Lil-Umbra eagerly, "it won't make the Moon angry, will it, Peleg? I can feel it on my neck and I do so want to look straight at it!"

The giant smiled gravely. "Of course, my dear child! Let's both of us have a good stare at the old Life-Sustainer!"

When they had both turned their heads an inch towards the east, Peleg said quietly: "You'd never believe, would you, that the Life-Lord could shake off all that bloodiness so quickly and be as he is now, nothing but blazing gold."

It was at this point — perhaps under the influence of the advancing Sun, perhaps under the influence of the receding Moon — that Lil-Umbra felt an overpowering necessity to pour out from her own deepest soul a torrent of youthful revolt against the whole routine of maternal restraint and the whole authority of her old Nurse Rampant and of the still older Mother Guggery, Nurse Rampant's assistant. What especially she felt impelled to rebel against was the dullness and routine of so much oatmeal and barley-bread and rye-bread and so much vegetable-pottage in place of the rich meats and the intoxicating wines enjoyed by grown-up people; and the sudden inspiration seized her to do this under cover of the rumoured wickedness of

Baron Maldung and Lady Lilt and their daughter Lilith, of the Castle known as Lost Towers, which rose out of a swampy expanse of flat treeless country, due north of both the Fortress and the Forest of Roque.

"May I ask you something, Peleg, something that's been on my mind, for a long time?"

"Of course, little lady, of course! I like to hear a child's secrets; and when that child is the daughter of my master —— Go on, my dear, go on for Heaven's sake!"

And then Lil-Umbra did indeed go on. In fact she let herself go with a desperate rush of words. "Why does God allow such wicked people as that family in Lost Towers" — and she made a little gesture with her head and one of her shoulders towards the north— "to be blasphemous about such an important thing as the food we're given to eat? Mother Guggery swore to me that Sir Maldung and Lady Lilt taught their daughter Lilith that all animals were holy angels, and that all fruits and nuts and raisins, and all plants and grasses, and every kind of grain, and all trees and shrubs and bushes and hedges, and all ferns and mosses and lichens and seaweeds, were devils incarnate. I begged Mother Guggery to tell me more: and do you know what she said! She said that Lady Lilt had a special reverence for animals' mouths, and also for the two other holes that all animals, just like us human beings, have at the other end of them.

"Mother Guggery said that Lady Lilt would run screaming up and down all the stairs and through all the passages and anterooms and corridors of the entire Castle of Lost Towers whenever she saw one of Sir Maldung's dogs with its tongue hanging out. 'Someone has hurt that angel of a dog!' she would cry. And Guggery says that whenever Sir Maldung feels bad from eating too much oatmeal or barley-meal or bread-pudding, and begs her to let him kill a rabbit for a change, she refuses to go to bed with him until he has walked to the furthest northern border of the forest, where there's a marshy swamp with rushes growing so thick that they hide every sign of the water.

"When once he's there, Mother Guggery says, he has to make a vow to animals and birds and fishes and reptiles and worms and insects that he will eat nothing but what's made out of the bodies of these vegetation-demons; yes! nothing but what's made of wheat, made of barley, made of oats; yes! made of every root that exists which isn't poisonous! That's what Mother Guggery told me.

"Lady Lilt swore, that she wouldn't sleep with him till he'd uttered his vow at the forest's end that he wouldn't eat anything except this devilish vegetation.

"No! She wouldn't let him touch her till he'd sworn his faithful oath to eat nothing but grain and fruit and seeds and leaves and buds and stalks and peelings and parings and roots and bulbs and everything of that kind in the world that isn't poisonous, and that he'll bite them up and crunch them up and munch them up, and roll them round in his mouth and chew, chew, chew them, and reduce them to messy mush, till he has *taught* them, yes! taught them utterly and thoroughly, *to be what they are* and what in their effrontery they think they are, and what in their devilish violence they actually suppose they were created to be, that is to say these shrinking, stinking, crawling, sprawling, climbing, binding, twining, sprouting and outing, knotting and rotting, sliding and hiding, shivering and quivering, tangling and strangling, burrowing and billowing, racing and facing, threading and spreading and doing all this in the pure unspoilt, original paradise of the blessed inanimates and the holy elements, where men and beasts and birds and fish and reptiles and worms and insects lived happily on the sacred flesh of one another between rocks and water, and between earth and sky before this loathsome multitude — such were the words Mother Guggery told me the Lady used — of vegetation-devils with their horrible juices ensorcerized saps, skins without flesh, pulps without bones, that originally came out of some infernal crack in the floor of the ocean!

“Lady Lilt said she wouldn’t sleep with him again till he’d sworn his oath by the edge of that marsh at the forest’s end that he would teach these vegetable monstrosities to be what they were by grinding them between his teeth, squeezing them between his tongue and his palate, sucking and squashing them between his healthy natural animal jaws, wringing their insides out, draining their inmost juices to the last distillation — so Mother Guggery told me the Lady said — till all their demonic greenery-sap and all the devilish sappy greenery of their entire selves had been completely dissolved and disposed of in the good sound moving bodies of creatures with hungry bellies and with legs and arms and scales and fur and feathers and with the life-breathing bodies of wholesome earth-worms and the motions and melodies of exquisite insects!

“Such,” concluded Lil-Umbra with a gasp, “such were the very words Mother Guggery swore Lady Lilt used.”

There was something in the exhausted gasp with which the girl ended this torrent of fantastic rodomontade that made the giant at her side seriously troubled as to what he ought to do. The climax of her elaborate litany as to what Guggery said and the Lady did really seemed to have brought Lil-Umbra to the verge of a complete collapse. Her dainty little head was now resting against Peleg’s side like a wood-anemone against the trunk of a solitary sycamore.

“O my dear child!” groaned the huge Mongol: “I tell you it scares me like Hell to hear you talk in that way! It gives me the feeling that some evil influence has come over you. Dear God! but I wish to Heaven you had never asked that old bitch Guggery to talk about it at all! On my life it seemed to me as I listened to you just now that you'd got the exact intonation of Lady Lilt! I hate her; and I think she hates me. She's one of those strange ladies who are up to anything in the way of dangerous magic games! Think of her considering all the grain we eat, whether wheat, barley, oats, or rye, as horrible demons! It's pure craziness, child!"

With an almost indignant jerk he pulled her to her feet. Then, as they both stood with their backs to the paleolithic throne, they had the golden blaze of the now fully risen sun irradiating both the man's enormity and the girl's delicacy.

"I like looking at the waning Moon," murmured Lil-Umbra, "a lot better than facing the rising Sun! But, Peleg, when I said I wanted you to show me both of them together, I thought I should see them side by side. Aren't they *ever* side by side, for us to compare them with each other, one so timid, so escaping, so slipping away, and the other so bursting and bubbling with blazing gold?"

The Mongolian giant looked down at her with a very queer look, a look that she recognized and in every fibre of her being wholly accepted, but which she could not have interpreted to anyone in human words, whether such words were written or spoken.

"O most dear and most simple of little ladies!" the giant burst out. "Don't you see that the whole idea of this mad world is to be found in opposites! Everything, I tell you, my dear little lady, is a Double Opposite."

They both were forced to turn their eyes away from the full blaze of the Sun; but though Peleg turned his head as well as his eyes, so that he saw — but at that moment he saw it without seeing it — a small feathery wisp of white cloud resting against one of the horns of the waning Moon, Lil-

Umbra kept her head unmoved while with lowered eyes she stared at her own clasped hands.

“I don’t understand,” she said now, though with some hesitation, for she hated to appear stupid in this man’s sight, “how a thing can be a Double Opposite.”

The Tartar giant did see the Moon now, towards which his head was turned, and he saw it with his intelligence as well as with his senses; and not only so, for he felt as if with his outstretched fingers he could touch the inside edge of that fading boat-shaped rim while his head and neck, for both were bare, felt a distinctly pleasurable sensation from the warmth of the Sun’s increasing radiance.

“I’ll soon show you how it is, little lady of my master,” he said gravely. “Take ourselves. Take me for example. The first of my two Opposites is in myself, that is to say, my greedy-grasping body on one side and my obedient, faithful and well-behaved soul on the other side. But the second of my two Opposites is my whole self, body and soul together, as opposed to entire Creation or the total universe of which I am a living part.”

Lil-Umbra’s head, with its light soft, silky hair bound up so tightly with broad bands of blue satin that the compact shape of the small skull beneath them, such as any imaginable head-dress would have totally disfigured, was emphasized rather than nullified, lifted itself with an abrupt jerk.

“Oh! of course I see! I see entirely! There’s a bad Lil-Umbra, ready to tease things and torment things, and pinch things and pull things to bits and to eat too many pears and sing and hum and drum when Mother is nervous or Father’s tired. And there’s a good Lil-Umbra feeling sorry for Mother and wanting to do everything I can to please Father. And there’s me in myself, both bad and good, both Opposites joined in one, who have, as my Opposite now, the entire universe! O I see, I see! I see the whole thing now!

I carry two Opposites about with me wherever I go; but I myself am a perpetual living Opposite to the entire world, so that I really am, just as you said just now *everything was*, a double pair of Opposites!

“And now do tell me this, Peleg. Raymond de Laon swore to me the other day, when I went with Mother to Cone Castle and both Sir William and the Baron were away, that he had made up his mind to think out a philosophy for himself, quite different from that of the Stoics or the Epicureans, quite different from that of any of the ancient Greek thinkers, and most different of all from any of our modern theologians.

“Now, Peleg, tell me and tell me seriously, for this is very important to me, and may have an effect upon my whole life: Is Raymond educated enough, is he clever enough, does he in fact know enough, has he travelled enough, is he honest enough in questions like this, to have the right, without making an absolute fool of himself, to work out a philosophy of his own, a philosophy that could be proclaimed in one of their university theses and even be posted up, like they do, on the doors of great debating-halls to be criticized by the doctors of philosophy in Oxford and Paris?”

Peleg surveyed his youthful questioner with a very grave face. There were implications in all this that were not a little disturbing to him. Paleg wasn’t ignorant of the fact that this young Raymond de Laon was a relative of Baron Boncor of Cone Castle and that the Baron had begged him to remain with him for a while to initiate his simple-minded and honest young son into the ways of the world.

The old and ailing and mentally-shaken King Henry had been persuaded by an influential group at court to try to bind to the royal cause this powerful West Country family by knighting for some superficial and conventional reason the young William Boncor, who was, in Peleg’s opinion, though a thoroughly good and nice young fellow, as wholly devoid of any particularly original or outstanding quality as he was devoid of any dangerous vice.

Thus Peleg began to feel a certain nervous apprehension; for the possibility of his master’s little daughter falling in love with a clever young popinjay of the new generation was a shock to him. So it was in a tone that was new to her that he now spoke.

“I had not realized,” he began, “that you and young Raymond de Laon were such friends. I knew you saw a great deal of Lord and Lady Boncor of Cone, but I never guessed you or your brothers had seen much of this young relative from abroad. Your father I know has great respect for them all at Cone: but that you and young de Laon were friends I never dreamed.”

He stopped and surveyed his companion with a steady stare. “If I could only be sure,” he said slowly, “that this young man has had the right teachers, I would be happier about it. Tell me, little lady,” he went on. “Has your young friend actually had lessons from Friar Bacon at the Priory? They say that by taking a hare or two, or a badger, or even half-a-dozen wild geese, to Prior Bog’s kitchen, people can get themselves smuggled into the Friar’s cell. But I reckon they have to be pretty learned people even if it’s only in Greek Grammar.

“I heard someone in those kitchens say that you had to know quite a lot of the ‘Sentences’ of Peter Lombard, or at least be acquainted with the Commentary on them by Albertus Magnus before you’d have a chance, even if you had a hare in one pocket and a rabbit in another, of getting a lesson from the great man.”

Lil-Umbra gave vent to an exultant laugh, a laugh that rang out, rich and clear and resonant, towards the point in space whence the Moon was now retreating into the recesses of interminable remoteness; while the Hebraic Tartar, puzzled at her amusement, stared helplessly into the dazzling portion of the sky where the air like a huge celestial sponge had soaked up the burning rays of the Father of Life and Light and was diffusing them over the land and water of the whole Western world.

“But, Peleg,” Lil-Umbra cried, “don’t forget that John has been taught by Friar Bacon since he was no older than I am. It’s a terrific secret, of course, and everybody, including John himself, always speaks of his studies in Oxford at Regent’s House, and of course he would again work at Oxford if Friar Bacon were back as he was before Bonaventura became General of the Order and had the Friar removed from Oxford and shut up, first in Paris, and then at Bumset under Bog. They say in Loam village that the reason my father keeps it so secret is that Bonaventura would be angry as Hell if he knew.

“But of course Bumset Priory is in the village of Loam, which has always belonged to our Manor; so it wouldn’t be easy for Prior Bog to keep John out even if he wanted to, and you know what old Bog is, ready to serve as they say every master who comes along if he brings enough French wine. Father hasn’t told a soul about John’s going there so often. Sometimes I think even Mother doesn’t know! If she does, she’s a better keeper of things dark than anyone in the whole world!

“But I *think* she does know. I can’t imagine Father not telling her when he must know that John tells Tilton and me everything about it.”

Lil-Umbra could see that her bold divulging of this long and intimate association between her brother John and the notorious Friar Bacon was no small shock to her companion. The Tartar jerked back his head from the Sun-ray and gave it a rather strained twist sideways, a twist that enabled him to follow, as the girl had been doing, the retreat into space of that silvery Moon, but, instead of keeping his gaze there, he now suddenly lowered his head and turned his whole attention upon the murderous spikes of that iron mace he held on his lap, hugging it almost affectionately between his thighs, while with both his hands he abstractedly toyed with those appalling spikes, pressing his thumb against their vicious points in careful and calculated succession.

What he was feeling in his mind was a black void of desperate loneliness. He had been of late congratulating himself on having a really deep and unique pact, unspoken and inarticulate, but none the less massively consolidated, with his master Sir Mort, but this revelation from the man’s daughter of a secret as important as this — and a secret connected with Sir Mort’s own son — gave the gigantic Mongol the feeling that he was not even yet a really intimate member of this family and that he had better take what comfort he could as he used to do as an orphan in Dalmatia by imagining himself alone in space like the star Aldebaran.

But the wheel of his fate selected that moment to touch one of those mysterious “opposites” concerning which he had just been talking. And it was brought about, by one of those secret chains of events that are often so confounding when they emerge out of the underground mole-runs of cause and effect into the twilight of consciousness, that some small token, either the sight at such a moment of an intensely glittering gleam where a particular Sun-ray truck a special spot on the spiky ball he was holding, or the reappearance of a tiny wisp of white cloud, totally forgotten until he recalled it now, that he had seen only a minute or two ago in contact with the retreating Moon, roused in the depths of the tragic loneliness into which he had been plunged a darting flame of a possible redemption of everything.

This came like the leap of a shining fish out of a black pool, and the form it took was the form of a girl not much older than Lil-Umbra herself. But though of like age with the young creature now leaning so trustingly against him, the redemptive vision that rushed into his mind was that of a strangely appealing Jewish maid. Before the bloody day on which Sir Mort had earned his everlasting adhesion Peleg had met in this maid the ideal love of his whole life. She was certainly beautiful; but it was in a strange, very rare degree, and with a beauty that seemed perpetually re-created by some mysterious sorcery in herself. Her name was Ghosta, and on first setting eyes on her Peleg had experienced a thrill of unutterable pride at having in his own veins the blood of Israel.

Yes, this youthful virgin of his own race became from the moment he saw her the supreme light of his life. But it had been in vain that he had rushed round the battlefield and the camp trying desperately to find her again. They had met: they had looked into each other’s eyes: they had loved: and then the girl had vanished. And when all was over, and he had become for life the free slave of the House of Roque, it was as if she had been carried off on a cloud.

Like himself she must, he supposed, have been willingly or unwillingly carried off by some Anglo-Norman crusader to a castle in the north of Africa or on the borders of Palestine or in Gascony or Sicily or Piedmont or somewhere in England or Ireland or Scotland or Wales or peradventure on the shores of the Bosphorus.

But there now shot into the heart of the smouldering crater of his desperation a weird and unaccountable hope, based on something as slight as that wisp of cloud on the Moon or that dazzling Sun-gleam on the ball of spikes, but something from whose fluttering motion, like a will-of-the-wisp crossing a death-swamp, there arose a suggestion of salvation.

The mysterious Friar Bacon, now a prisoner of Prior Bog of Bumset, possessed a queer servant who was never known by any other name than that of “Miles”, an appellation which, being interpreted, might be said to mean an extremely private, reserved, original, exceptional, but also an extremely professional *soldier*: and it had recently happened that, while Peleg was delivering a message to Prior Bog of Bumset, this same Miles had made a casual allusion which for Peleg had been like the sudden appearance, above a scoriac plain and under a dull, grey, monotonous, and devitalized sky, of a miraculous waterspout.

For a second he felt as if he were himself being changed, like Lot’s wife, into a pillar of salt; but at the next moment both these mirages of sensation — himself as the pillar of salt, and the wild, mad, hope-against-hope chance that Miles was referring to Ghosta — melted into each other and floated away into space like a triumphantly burst bubble.

What Miles had alluded to in passing, without attributing any especial interest to it, was the fact that one of the Priory servants who helped Master Tuck the chief cook had declared that the said Master Tuck had recently purchased at the price of ten silver Jewish shekels a Jewish woman who had been brought over among the followers of some crusader from Mesopotamia.

Of course there was only one chance in ten thousand that this Jewish woman was his lost Ghosta; but at least it was not impossible. O if she were! If she only were! Such a chance, if it really came true, would reduce to a grain of black dust every despair he’d ever felt!

“Did you groan then, Peleg?” Lil-Umbra suddenly enquired, “or did you crush down in your heart a shout of joy? I’m sure you made a very important noise. I make important noises myself sometimes when I just *have to do something* but don’t want anybody else to know!”

“Little lady — —” he began; but stopped abruptly.

“Yes, Peleg: were you going to tell me just then your very, very greatest secret?”

“What makes you say that, little lady?”

"Because I heard you make a noise in the bottom of your heart like Father makes when Mother asks him what's the matter with him! I know perfectly well what's the matter with him. He's got something on his mind that he wants to take out of the place where it hurts and carry away to some great desert-plain or mountain-side where he can turn it over and over and over in his mind and nobody be a bit the wiser!"

"*He*'ll be the wiser himself, won't he, little lady?"

"Oh yes! But nobody else will know! *That*'s the great thing; nobody else to know what we've got down at the very bottom of us! But tell me this, Peleg. Why do you keep twisting your head round towards the Moon? And then start staring so straight into the blaze of the Sun? And then hang your head low down and fix your eyes on a root or a stone or a molehill or on one of those funny clumps of grey lichen? — and then, after that, as if you wanted to end up with something more exciting than anything on earth, why do you lift your chin up and stop looking at anything but the sky, just the sky alone, as if you expected some angel to come flying down towards you?"

The Tartar giant lowered his head and gazed earnestly at the young girl.

"I'll tell you exactly, little lady, why I look at things as you say, and in such a definite order, beginning with the Sun and ending with the universal air. As I look at each of these things in turn I make the motion of my mind that I make when Sir Mort, your Dad, is worshipping and I am with him in church, or on the march, or at a sacred shrine, or at some gathering of the crusaders. All of us in the whole world, little lady, worship in our own way and as we worship do something to the Thing we're worshipping; and we do this according to our different natures. Having an animal nature what I imagine myself doing to all the Deities I worship *is eating them*."

Lil-Umbra gave a cry of delight and clapped her hands. “Of course,” went on Peleg, “I don’t ask you to believe that I really and truly eat the Moon or the Sun or the Earth or the Air. I only mean that I ‘make the motino’ of eating each of these things, and then afterwards imagine that I’m getting the comfortable and delicious feeling of *having* eaten them! In short, to tell you the real truth, little lady, I *pretend* to myself I’m eating these things, and play at eating them as little boys play at cutting off heads and arms and legs in imaginary tournaments!

“I admit, dear heart, *when it comes to the Air* it’s not easy to pretend to myself that I’m eating it. But a person *can pretend* almost anything: and that’s all I ask, the right to pretend I’m eating air.”

“O Peleg! Peleg!” cried Lil-Umbra, in a frenzy of delight. “I’ll do exactly what you do when I’m sick to death of Religion. Oh yes, I will! And I’ll ask John to ask Friar Bacon what *his* opinion is of this method of worshipping. But shall I tell you a great secret, Peleg? From what I’ve seen Father do when I’ve been watching him and he doesn’t know anyone is watching him, I believe he has a funny way of worshipping, just as you have. But Roger Bacon thinks the best way to worship is to invent things! John says Roger Bacon is now inventing a Brazen Head, that one day when he’s finished with it will utter oracles very, very helpful to us and to our country. That’s an exciting way to worship, isn’t it? To invent a talking Brazen Head!”

As she spoke the girl smiled radiantly at the giant; but the mention of John brought back upon Peleg all the old cloud of deadly gloom. The thought that no one had told him anything about John having become a personal pupil of Friar Bacon, and that every single one of them, including Sir Mort, Lady Val, the elder boy Tilton, John himself, and even this little Lil-Umbra, had deliberately concealed from him this important piece of news — which wasn’t only family news but was also political, ecclesiastical, and international news — was a crushing blow.

What it meant was — so he told himself — that he was not the feudal retainer of the house of Abyssum that he had begun to assume he was, but just a hired man who had to fight for them, eat for them, and sleep for them, and whose sustenance was his wage. So once again his terribly imaginative desperation returned; and he felt as if this secretiveness towards him of the family he served was enough in itself to cast him into outer darkness and to turn him into one of those lost souls he was always hearing about from the pious Christians around him who loved to remind each other of the possibility for their enemies of what they called “the Second Death”. That very expression “the Second Death” came back with appalling vividness at this moment; and Peleg felt as if he were clinging desperately to one of the horns of that waning Moon that was now vanishing in space, while an unspeakably horrible monster of colossal size resembling an enormous cuttlefish dragged and dragged at him to pull him down to that same bottomless chasm in the floor of the ocean out of which, according to the blasphemous notion of the Baron Maldung and Lady Lilt, the whole vegetable world and all the grain upon which we live emerged at the beginning like one multiform devil with green sap for blood.

The wretchedness of Peleg’s mind at that moment and the ghastly mood into which he had fallen was revealed at this point by a positively heart-rending sigh from the very depths of his being, the sort of sigh that a prisoner who has betrayed his best friend in the hope of saving his own life might have been heard uttering when he suddenly became aware that he has been fooled by his enemies and that his betrayal of his best friend will not save his own life.

“Peleg, Peleg,” whispered the little maid at his side, “your heart is crying! Tell your Lil-Umbra what is the matter! Have you suddenly thought that the Pope might decide to start a crusade to cut off all Mongolian mothers from the face of the earth?”

The giant gasped, choked, turned his head, and spat. “Not quite as bad as that, dear child,” he murmured. Then he rose slowly to his feet, and taking one of her hands in one of his, as a great wafture of ocean-foam from a broken wave might enclose a little shell, that has been lying on the sand, “I’ll tell it all to you another time,” he murmured, “but just now we must go back; for Sir Mort’s sure to be wanting me, and Lady Val will be wondering what’s happened to you.”

Lil-Umbra followed obediently; but she couldn’t help noticing that the long shadows as she now ascended the avenue gave the trees a completely different look from what they had when she descended; nor was she unaware that those mysterious movements at the top of the branches, that had put such strange thoughts into her head before the sun rose, had now completely passed away, and that the smallest twig against the sky was now as motionless as the largest branch close to the earth.

II. THE FORTRESS OF ROQUE

THE DOOR-KEEPER OF the Fortress of Roque was an extremely simple-minded, middle-aged man called Cortex, whose childless wife, Bundy, ten years older than her husband, but with a considerably quicker brain, helped him at his unpredictable, incalculable job. The Fortress's entrance consisted of double doors of colossal thickness that were only closed at night. For these hours of darkness they were fastened by a couple of huge iron bars, strong enough to have barricaded the Skaian Gate of Ilium itself.

These doors opened directly into an entrance-hall that could have sheltered half a hundred men-at-arms if they had been able to pile up their armour in a secluded court-yard that was available on the inner side of this vast reception room.

While Peleg and Lil-Umbra were watching the Sun advance and the Moon retreat from their nature-made throne of stone, an interesting messenger was being interviewed at the great gate of the Fortress of Roque. This was a devil-may-care soldier of fortune called Spardo, who was a bastard son of Ottocar, King of Bohemia, and who was never tired of boasting of his regal begetting.

In order to extend his own predatory explorations, which already had carried him to Byzantium and to most of the ports on the northern shores of Africa, this plausible rogue had recently constituted himself a sort of supernumerary guide, amateur factotum, and diplomatic outrider to a European group of courtly travellers, a few of whom were bound for Oxford, but the rest were wealthy pilgrims, anxious to visit the more famous shrines in all parts of these islands.

Along with the others, however, were a certain number who at the moment were following with fanatical devotion wherever he went, as the same sort of crowd undoubtedly used to follow St. Francis and probably used to follow Jesus, the saintly "general", as he was appointed to be, of the Order of Franciscan Friars, known to all Europe as Saint Bonaventura. This was the Order that Roger Bacon had rather incautiously joined when his family had completely ruined itself in its service of the King against the Barons; and it was anything but fortunate for him when Bonaventura was made the Head of the Order.

It had been no other than St. Francis himself who had given to Jean de Fidanza the name of Bonaventura, by which he was known throughout the whole world; and it was Saint Francis who had started him upon his career of notorious sanctity.

As for this Spardo, he was a tall slender person of about thirty, with a carefully trimmed red beard and large roving blue eyes. He was now holding by the bridle an odd-looking grey horse, which at first sight might have given the impression that it had two heads.

This surprising effect was due to some organic deformity in the poor creature's neck, a deformity which excited the curiosity not only of human beings but also of other animals. As this tall, slender, comical-looking Spardo advanced towards the great gates of Roque leading this equally slender grey horse by its bridle, the man's gaze seemed to be focussed on the horse's deformity, which the horse seemed to be deliberately covering with a strange self-induced film, and to be doing this with so obstinate a determination that the simple-minded Master Cortex, as he watched the two of them approaching, received the queer impression that the lean beast was desperately struggling to answer the man's gaze through the deformity at which the man was staring, just as if that repellent excrescence possessed something corresponding to an eye.

"I have come," began Spardo, addressing the bewildered gatekeeper, "to enquire whether a special group of noblemen and ladies, who feel a natural reluctance to add themselves to the crowd who are taking advantage of the hospitality of Prior Bog, especially as they will be more than ready before they depart to offer as their quota to the doubtless already rich Treasury of the Fortress such pieces of gold and shekels of silver as may fittingly commemorate the occasion, might perhaps be welcomed by this noble and ancient Fortress of Roque and allowed to rest here for a few hours?"

At this point the man stopped to take breath; and both he and the deformed animal he was leading turned their heads a little, as if to catch upon the air some faint premonition of approaching riders.

"I can see at once, master," Spardo went on, "that you've got a long experience of life in these high circles and in these difficult times, so that you must forgive me if I don't stop to explain what might bewilder any ordinary person. But this particular group of travellers, you understand, are on a journey to Oxford and London; and it would be a most blessed relief and comfort to them if your renowned Sir Mort Abyssum and your noble and beautiful Lady Valentia would allow them to rest here for a short space and be refreshed by the famous hospitality of this princely House."

The door-keeper, though anything but a quick-witted individual, was one of those mortals whose sympathy with animals is strong and instinctive, although totally inarticulate. There was therefore a wordless exchange of ideas going forward at this moment between Master Cortex and the grey horse on the absorbing topic, of intense interest to them both, of this mysterious deformity in the creature's neck.

So occupied indeed were both the door-keeper and the horse in the exchange of wordless communications about this weird growth in the latter's neck that the former soon ceased to listen to what Spardo was saying to him. It must have been after more than five minutes of this concentrated examination of the phenomenal shape which this strange growth on the horse's neck was gradually assuming, that the door-keeper suddenly leapt to his feet and began shouting: "Bundy! Bundy! Bundy! come quick! Here's a horse that's going to have two heads! For God's sake come quick, Bundy, and look! It's going to have a man's head as well as its own! Quick! Quick! Bundy! come quick!"

The fellow's appeal didn't go unanswered. He had kept it up after leaving the horse altogether and throwing all his strength into pushing the great double gate of Roque wide open enough to admit half a dozen horses, when his wise old spouse emerged from her retreat and shuffling up to the animal's side began at once stroking it tenderly. "Kyre! Kyre! Kyre!" she chanted in a curious kind of gloating ecstasy, as she rubbed the knuckles of one hand up and down over the crown of the creature's forehead, above its large, blurred, weary, and far-away-staring eyes, while with the ringers of her other hand she gently stroked its thick mane.

Her repetition of the word "Kyre" had an odd effect on the man Spardo. He had been educated in a monastery where they knew a little classical Greek as well as theological Greek; so that to hear this old lady repeat these two syllables which might mean "O Lord!" and also might mean "Hail!" and to see her obvious assumption that in either case the word would please the deformed creature, impressed to the depths of his being the man who was leading it, for he handed its bridle to the doorkeeper, came round by the animal's tail and bowed low before Bundy, who was a grey-haired old woman with an extremely long face not altogether unlike the face of a horse.

"Spardo is my name, mistress," he said, "and it's Spardo who now salutes you and does homage to you, and does so more deeply than you can possibly know. I don't suppose you've ever had the son of a king as your familiar friend; but you've got one now, and if I know anything of women you'll find me even better suited to your taste than the master here."

What the lady thus addressed felt in her secret mind, as she listened to this fantastic progeny of the King of Bohemia, it would be impossible for any male chronicler to describe — but it was clear that the rogue didn't displease her; for though she didn't blot out from her attention the massive jaw, the small eyes, and the narrow, sucked-in mouth of her mate — which latter feature resembled one of those straight lines which certain melodramatic chroniclers tend to throw in between a blow and a cry, or between a cry and a crash — she drew a little closer. Soon indeed she was touching the side of the horse with a fascinated interest in the extraordinary growth in its neck. As for Spardo, his movements were spectacular. He seemed as unable to keep still as a white butterfly in a vegetable garden.

What he was doing now was rolling his blue eyes so queerly in his head that while one of them seemed to be caressing with besotted unction the deformity in his horse, the other seemed to be lingering with no less maudlin tenderness on the elongated and almost equally equine countenance of the old lady.

Then quite suddenly, and with the organic outburst of that sort of irresistible impulse that creates a psychic stir in the whole surrounding atmosphere of any particular spot, he sank down on one knee in front of her, his thin red beard brushing the knee that was not on the ground like a bird's tail that goes on flicking a branch below the one on which it has settled.

While the woman's husband regarded him with blank astonishment, he began deliberately imitating the tone in which she made such a natural sing-song out of the syllables that may have been either "Kyre" or "Kaire".

"O noblest of wise women!" he cried, clutching at her petticoats so that she couldn't draw away from him, "you have no idea how near the truth you are when you chant that word. Haven't you noticed what that swelling in his neck really is?"

He now leapt to his feet and touched the horse's deformity with a solemn reverence as if it were something absolutely sacred. As for Mistress Bundy, she hurriedly let both her hands fall to her sides. Then she lifted them up a little, and proceeded to wipe them very very carefully with her apron. "It's the improperly-shaped beginning of a man's head, you cleverest of all ladies! That's what it's intended to be and that's what it will be. It will be a centaur, that's to say, a horse with a man's head!"

At the sound of the word "Centaur" the compressed mouth of the door-keeper went through a faint relaxation. In his boyhood he had attended Saint Aldhelm's School at Sherborne, and there he had heard of the centaur Cheiron and of the lessons in healing which this wise being gave the son of Aesculapius.

The word "Centaur" however meant nothing to Mistress Bundy; and there was therefore not the faintest element in her interest in this creature's neck of anything save the pure fascination of some grotesquely weird or fantastically shocking aspect of a deformity.

Both the woman and Spardo jumped back quickly enough however when the sound of trotting horses became audible. "They are coming!" Spardo cried. "Well! I'll ride and meet them and tell them — for I can see from your manner what you allow me to say — that they may expect, if they behave quietly and don’t crowd in with all their armour and if they leave their horses outside, a princely welcome!”

“O yes, yes, yes!” cried Bundy in great excitement: “Go! go! go! And Cortex will hasten now to tell Lady Val you are all coming! I am sure that both she and Sir Mort would blame us terribly if we let you pass this door and proceed on your way without stopping!”

The son of the King of Bohemia obeyed Mistress Bundy without a word. He swung himself upon the creature he had long ago nicknamed Cheiron and galloped off. There was no wind at that moment moving among the green spruce-firs and the brown larches and the few majestic deeply-indented, reddish-barked pines, which were the only trees close to this main entrance to the Fortress of Roque, an entrance which faced due south and which lacked, for some technical strategic reason when it was first constructed, any smoothly-sloping approach, like the avenue of elms leading eastward from the postern door.

But if there had been such a wind, and if we were permitted to endow it with anything resembling our own impressions about people and things, it would certainly have received a shock of surprise when it noted that before Master Cortex rushed down the passage leading to the interior of the Fortress, and before Mistress Bundy shuffled back to her chamber in the rampart beside the great gate, neither of them gave the other so much as a glance, far less made any attempt to exchange views on the direction towards which events were moving.

Meanwhile within a small ante-room to their bed-chamber Lady Valentia was impatiently awaiting her husband’s return from his accustomed early jaunt. Lady Val could see from where she sat both the elderly women, the upright, bony Nurse Rampant, with her formidable clear-cut Norman profile and her tall muscular figure, and Mother Guggery, the nurse’s help, with her short legs, well-rounded belly, and her grey curls, so fantastically trimmed with purple ribbons that her head resembled a bird's nest in an aviary full of irises. These two females were hard at work in the inner chamber, sweeping out the dust and making the bed, and while they worked they were keeping up a regular word-dance of enticing scandal which, by an infinitely crafty and long-practised skill, they exchanged in such a way as to reveal absolutely nothing to their mistress with which she wasn't already acquainted or in which either of them could specially preen herself as the revealer.

Thus it was easy enough for Lady Val to give herself up to a certain rather bitter vein of meditation, for which she only had the appropriate leisure when, as at this moment, she was waiting for Sir Mort before taking the lead in some exacting social function.

"It's no good," she told herself, "imagining at this late stage what my life might have been if I hadn't married Sir Mort and handed this place over to him with his weird Abyssum blood, for just as I never could understand his parents, so, though I love him from my heart as the father of my two boys and of our darling little Lil-Umbra, I do sometimes feel as if, being as I am the only living descendant and representative, in this ill-mannered and unruly island, of our old and civilized house of Dormequil, I might have done better had I given myself and our historic Manor of Roque to one of our cousins in Brabant, or even to one of our second cousins in Piedmont.

"But perhaps *then* I would have died childless; for with all the proud shrinking of what Mort calls my 'virginal qualms', if I'd given myself to a man of my own nervous sensitivity instead of to my old thick-skinned raper of Sabines, these dear children of mine might never have been born! But O I do wish that Mort had never let John go to that awful Regent's College, as they call it, in Oxford, where this man they call the Doctor Mirabilis got hold of him. The boy’s head has been completely turned by this cunning Friar with his devilish sorceries! Thank God that Tilton has a firm head on his dear broad shoulders! He has always been the only really well-balanced, sensible one of our family, and I can only pray he’ll more and more take the lead.

“It doesn’t seem quite right for a young man as well-born and well-educated as Tilton to work like a mason with his own hands at that little shrine to Our Lady he’s building out there: but it shows what a good, firm, steady, reliable mind the dear boy has that he is anxious to serve God in a really practical way, rather than indulge in all these crazy and immoral ideas about inventing ships to fly to the Moon and boats to dive to the bottom of the sea and Heads of Brass to utter oracles. O my little John, my little John, if I, your mother, can’t get this nonsense out of your head I can only hope that when you’re a man you’ll find a woman who’ll be able to do what your mother can’t!”

At this point Lady Valentia was seized with such a spasm of frustration and with such a sense of all the weariness and disillusionment that exist in this human world, that she bowed her head over the arm of her chair, and closing her eyes uttered a piteous prayer to her guardian angel that she might go to sleep like those people in fairy-tales and not wake up till her husband was dead and John was a man and Lil-Umbra was happily married.

It was at this moment that Master Cortex, breathing heavily and gasping a little, not only by reason of the speed at which he’d come, but also from apprehension as to the effect of his news, was ushered into that little ante-chamber.

Nurse Rampant and Mother Guggery jostled each other to be the first intermediary between this Euripidean messenger of fate and the lady of the manor; and Mother Guggery being the nearer at the start won the race. With a word and a wave she dismissed the scullery-boy who had ushered Cortex into the lady's presence, and she would have dismissed Cortex too if she could have got his news out of him before doing so; but Lady Val's instinctive tact and instantaneously available domestic wisdom anticipated any such move.

"What is it, Tex?" she enquired; and her choice of the diminutive syllable which Sir Mort always used for his doorkeeper so delighted the professional pride of Mistress Bundy's stolid mate that he couldn't resist giving to both Nurse Rampant and Mother Guggery a grimly sardonic glance, not even including them in one general look but giving them each a separate rebuff, as if he said to the one, "You see it's 'Tex' between your mistress and me," and to the other, "You see how well she knows the way they treat door-keepers in King's houses!"

"Did this man you're speaking of," enquired Lady Val, "I mean the one on the horse with two heads, mention how many were coming? Did he know if the saintly Bonaventura was among them?"

Having completely disposed of the two old wives, who were now so riddled with curiosity that nothing but direct dismissal by their mistress would have got rid of them, Cortex answered Lady Val's questions with the utmost honesty.

"The man didn't say how many they were, my lady, nor did he say whether Saint Bonaventura was coming with them. But he certainly said they would be at the great gate in a few minutes; so, as I knew you and Sir Mort, my lady, would wish them to have a taste of cook's good oat-cakes on this morn of morns, I told him that their men would have to take their horses round to the stables themselves, and that if his noble lords were wearing heavy armour it had better be left in the gate-room, as we hadn't ——"

"Did the man tell you that Saint Bonaventura was coming with them?" interrupted Lady Val with some degree of impatience.

The Nurse and Mother Guggery looked significantly at each other as Cortex began to explain at length just when and how, in his recent conversation, the name Bonaventura had been introduced:

"Well, Tex," Lady Val announced at last, "you'd better bring them all in here, into our reception-passage. Yes! All the lot of them! It won't do to discriminate; 'In for a shepherd's crook, in for a royal sceptre!' as the proverb says. But I wish Peleg and Lil-Umbra would come back! I can't think where Lady Lil has made him carry her. Well! you'd better go back and wait for them at the gate. I must go to the kitchen at once and find out what we've got and what cook will be able to do with what we've got" — she broke off with a little cry and a gesture that might have been of exasperation or might have been of intense relief; and while Cortex with a rather dissatisfied countenance stalked out of the chamber, Lady Val turned to Nurse Rampant.

"I think," she said, "that was the postern-gate. If it was, it must mean that Peleg and Lil-Umbra have come in. I expect you had better take the child to her room at once, Nurse. For I know her Father would want her to look her very best if what Cortex said is true and this company really comes straight from France. Cortex isn't one to exaggerate, and I know there's been talk of this saintly Bonaventura becoming a Cardinal, perhaps even Pope, if his glory goes on mounting up at its present rate."

Seldom have three women separated more hurriedly and with expressions more definitely divided between lively excitement, irritable anxiety, and gloating interest than these three did now. But not much time elapsed before Nurse Rampant and Lady Valentia were in sight of each other again, although surrounded now, each of them, by a closely jostling crowd of extravagantly attired lords and ladies.

III. THE HOUSE OF ABYSSUM

THE RECEPTION OF guests in this central portion of the Fortress of Roque always took place in a wide and spacious but low-roofed passage, half cloister, half gothic corridor, between the kitchen and the dining-hall. Of these it was the kitchen that was far the more richly decorated, and in its roof, walls, and general aspect, far the more flamboyant, and grotesquely intricate in its ornamentation. The dining-hall was of much simpler and much older construction. In fact it must have reverted to an age only a little later than the withdrawal from Britain of the Roman Legions.

Entering it you felt you were entering what might have been a giant cave in a fairy-tale; and when you were within it, it was as if it had been through primeval forests that you had to thread your way, crossing some Roman road, and losing yourself in mouldering and broken-up vestiges of shadowy romance. It was the spacious cloistered passage between these two impressive constructions, the eastward-looking prehistoric dining-hall, and the westward-looking, intimately gothic and mediaeval kitchen, that was, upon this particular February morning, in the year of grace twelve hundred and seventy-two, when the little daughter of the house accompanied by the Mongolian giant Peleg came in through the postern-gate, more crowded than it had been since the day when the Norman bride of Llewelyn the Great was entertained here by Lady Val's family.

The crowd by which Lil-Umbra and Peleg were now confronted was indeed a brilliant one and yet it was also an extremely confused and motley one. If there were plenty of lords and ladies, there were also plenty of menials and dependents; some of these latter being almost strangers to the place, such as the blue-eyed, wispy-bearded rider of the deformed horse called Cheiron, others, like the Sygerius family, who had been Bailiffs of Roque for two or three generations, being wholly local people.

It was immediately apparent to Lil-Umbra and Peleg, even before Lady Val had been able to make her way through the crowd to reach them, that the chief topic of excited talk among all these people had to do with the coming of the famous Bonaventura, and with the relation between him and the equally famous — though some would say the abominably infamous — Friar Bacon.

The names Bacon and Bonaventura kept rising and falling like a musical refrain from all parts of the crowd. The impression Lil-Umbra first got was that at any moment the philosopher in disgrace and his saintly punisher might suddenly emerge from somewhere behind the scenes and burst into a dramatic dialogue. Then she suddenly became aware that there really was a violent argument between two excitable competitors for public attention approaching them through the crowd, but that this was a dispute between her own brothers.

She could hear her mother's voice indignantly intervening as the two young men pushed their way through the astonished guests with the evident intention of going out through the door by which she and Peleg had come in.

"I know exactly what's happened," she told herself. "Tilton's had his breakfast early, in the kitchen, as he often does, and he's going out to work at his Lady Chapel." And then, as she noticed that both brothers had caught sight of her, "I pray they're not going to drag me into their dispute! If they try to I shall just say that we'd better leave theology to people who're too old for anything else!"

But though both her brothers, and her mother too, had seen her, as she stood there by Peleg's side, it was clearly not easy for them to disentangle themselves from the press of people. Lil-Umbra moved a little closer to her gigantic companion. On this particular morning, when she had seen the advancing Sun and the receding Moon exchanging some mysterious zodiacal password as they separated to pursue their different paths through space and time, it seemed to her as if some special wave of fate had swept this giant, with his Jewish father and his Tartar mother, into her life as a colossal raft, to which, if she could only cling tightly enough, all would end well.

A sharp-cutting phrase used by her brother John, as he and Tilton shook off the interference of their mother, reached her now like a high-pitched fog-bell in a storm-rocked harbour-mouth; but more agitating to her than John's wild talk was a startling vision she suddenly had of Nurse Rampant hovering behind Lady Val. Her reply to this presence in the background was to twist her ringers desperately and tightly round a fold in the Tartar's cloak; and the hard little knot made by this bird-like clutch upon the pliant silk of the man's mantle became, as Lil-Umbra kept striking her other clenched hand upon it, a sort of musical instrument of inspired resistance to constituted authority.

Nor did this quaint combination of gigantic passivity with girlish revolt prove unsuccessful; for Nurse Rampant, who knew both the character of the mother and the character of the daughter better than anyone else in the world, saw so clearly the way things were drifting that she decided to leave Lady Valentia to deal with her three children and their unsocial behaviour as best she could, and turning her back upon them all hurried off to her own quarters.

"If I'm to dress the child," she said to herself, "to please this crowd, they'll have to send her up to me. I'm not going to wait any longer in this crazy hurly-burly!"

Things were indeed getting out of control. Both her brothers were now appealing to Lil-Umbra. Tilton was already finishing what was evidently a sentence he had begun before she had begun to listen to him. "Our learned rulers," Tilton was saying, "are surely appointed by the Church, John, to direct our campaign against Satan, just as much as our secular captains are appointed by the State to organize our campaign against Saracens and Arabians and Turks and all other enemies."

"But what I say," broke in the shrill, high-pitched, rather rasping voice of John, "is that when we come to philosophy, and science, and mechanical invention, we touch a totally different aspect of life from that with which religion is concerned. If you take philosophy for instance," and here John's voice rose to such a penetrating pitch that all sorts of resplendently dressed ladies looked significantly at each other and drew nearer to listen, thinking perhaps that here was one of those dangerous heretics that the great Saint who accompanied them was on his way to suppress, "for instance, in regard to the difference between Mind and Matter, what, I ask you," cried John, beginning to gesticulate like a practised teacher of philosophy, "are we to decide about the Aristotelian view of the Higher Reality compared with Plato's system of Ideas? Or what are we to think about the nature of these immaculate 'Ideas'? Are they perhaps to be considered as Godlike Entities in Themselves, or merely as subjective symbols of — —"

"Stop this nonsense, John!" The interruption came from Lady Val. It may easily be believed that Lady Val's indignant outcry had an instantaneous effect upon the already excited, jostling crowd that surrounded them. Everyone heard her words and everyone turned round to look at her; and those who were already absorbed in watching Tilton and John turned from them to their little sister, as if they felt sure that the only female among these precocious youngsters would have some opinion on "the Ideas of Plato" different from any that had ever been promulgated to a puzzled world.

The young girl began to feel as if from every little group of people round them there emanated a violent explosion of human emotion expressed in terms of intensely coloured and passionately gleaming inanimate objects. She had heard that the great "General" of the Franciscan order of preaching Friars — this Bonaventura they were all talking about — was furiously fond of preaching to vast crowds; and she seemed to see him now, as she clung to Peleg's cloak in a sort of exhausted trance, as a great wavering pillar of light broken up into glittering facets in all manner of metallic mirrors across which were moving a wild array of gesticulating reflections.

On every side she felt aware of glimpses of blue and crimson ribbons, hastily caught flashes of waving feathers, shoulders scintillating with the polished links of special chain-armour that the wearers had been reluctant to remove, jewelled clasps at the folds of carefully adjusted robes, and silver-bordered gleaming knots of satin and silk fabrics holding together the slippery waftures of waving mantles, while here and there she actually noticed, among the ornaments worn by some of the foreign ladies who had appeared, convoluted sea-shells most curiously and fantastically tinctured with weird and unearthly colours totally alien to the sea-shore from which they had been gathered.

John neither hung his head nor answered back under Lady Val's words. He just clutched his elder brother Tilton by the belt and went on sermonizing him in a murmur too low for their mother to hear. Lil-Umbra glanced up quickly at the countenance of her tall friend Peleg; and she saw that in spite of his height the Mongolian *could* follow John's words and even approved of them.

Meanwhile she noticed that Lady Val had been suddenly captured by one of the grandest of the Bonaventurian female intruders, who wore a travelling-robe of black velvet over-scrawled by amazing hieroglyphics in purple and white of the most fantastic monsters to ward off all danger of bad luck; and by scrutinising this robe while its wearer's volubility absorbed her mother's attention, she derived a certain curious satisfaction which proved to herself though her brother would not have believed it that she had a real taste of her own for beautiful shapes and rare colours and artful designs.

John was now giving Tilton a long and extremely complicated discourse on the importance of never allowing his pious opinions about unusual yet perfectly natural events, such as falling stars, whirlpools, cloud-bursts, earthquakes, tidal waves, and the like, to interfere with his daily observation of the ways and characteristics of the persons with whom he had to live, or to let these same theological opinions terrify him with apprehensions about the future of the world.

"Where Science and Philosophy are concerned," John was now assuring his brother, "it is as bad for the authorities to interfere as it is for the brutal ignorance of the common herd! What I hold is — —"

"How John *does* love to say 'I hold',' 'thought his little sister, "but I expect he's right or Peleg wouldn't look so pleased and mother wouldn't look as if she didn't even notice the exquisitely designed robe that lady's got on!"

"I hold," went on John, "that no vulgar prejudice and no high-placed authority has the right to meddle in any of these things."

"You are unfair, John," cried Tilton indignantly. "Isn't he, Mother? *Do* speak, Mother —— Pardon me, Lady" — this was addressed to the wearer of the pictured robe, but Tilton went steadily on addressing his mother— "Do tell him, Mother, *please do*, how unfair he is! Do make him see! What I say is really quite plain and simple. When there's a possibility of wicked and vicious undermining with clever human reason of the long-ago revealed doctrines of the Church, doctrines that God himself — —"

"O do for heaven's sake shut up, Tilton!" interrupted John. "Aren't you ashamed to put all this conventional rigmarole, all this hollow superficial humbug, into the head of Lil-Umbra? *You* agree with me, don't you, Peleg? Since you've lived in this country you have seen, haven't you, the cruel harm done to original scholarship and original thinking by the blind and obstinate tyranny of self-interest? You, as a Mongol, Peleg, must have seen among Asiatics of every sort this same terrible wrong being done to enlightened and uninhibited human thought by the tyranny of custom, tradition, habit, and common usage, blindly supported by the stupid self-interest of the particular persons who happen to be in power and who use their power to suppress the least stirring of new thought. You *do* agree with me, don't you, Peleg?"

The gigantic Tartar looked so embarrassed and uncomfortable under the impact of this direct personal appeal that Lil-Umbra was unable to contain her feelings. "I'm not backing up Tilton against you, John," she cried in a clear but not shrill voice; and then, as she noticed a slight movement of Lady Val's stately figure in her direction, she dropped her hold upon Peleg's mantle, straightened her figure, held her head high, and surveyed her excited brothers with an almost judicial impartiality.

The press of people pushing and hustling as they jostled one another in the two streams of outgoers and incomers within those great carved doors between kitchen and dining-hall, seemed, at least to the mind of the super-sensitized young John, actually to be pausing at that moment in the swirl of their movement to listen to the words of the young girl who was holding her head so high. “No, I’m not taking the side of either of you,” she went on, “but I feel ever so strongly, John, that this mental argument you’re using now doesn’t altogether — I know there’s a great deal in it: don’t misunderstand me, I implore you! — but I also know that there are things to be remembered and thought of, that you, John, neither remember nor think of! There’s a great deal in what you say, John dear; more, I expect, than I realize myself: but there’s also a lot to be said on the other side — O! a terrible lot! — and this other side is so appallingly mixed up with our feelings that it’s oddly painful, John dear, yes! oddly and queerly painful, to bring it out fully enough to be able to defend it. It’s because they’re such hard things to say and so mixed up with all our deepest feelings, John, that it’s difficult for Tilton to express all that he has in his mind — whereas it’s easy for you to express all you have in your mind — because, don’t you see, dear John, the things you’re talking about are clear and definite? They are supposed to be much harder to understand than our emotions and feelings; but in reality they are — and I *know* I am right in this! — *ever so much easier!* For in real truth, John, my brother, the ideas we make up in our minds can be followed by our minds; the feelings we have in our hearts are put there by Nature and they begin and end in darkness and mystery. It’s not that I don’t know very well where it is that you have picked up your view of things, John, and I know it is a fount of true wisdom. But there are things that a saintly great man like this Bonaventura — and you must remember that Bonaventura was consecrated for his work by Saint Francis himself who must have thought highly of him and must have predicted for him a wonderful future. So we have to remember when we are — —”

“Be a good girl now,” broke in her mother, who by this time had escaped from the lady with the hieroglyphic gown, “and go upstairs to Nurse. Your dear Father may be back any minute; and he’ll want to see you at your best at breakfast because I have invited the whole lot of these good people to this meal with us. I have just now been talking to the Countess of Corbière-Cantorac of Caen and she tells me that the Blessed Bonaventura himself has sworn he will be here if his horses don’t fail him; though at the moment he’s visiting a leper’s hamlet near Ilchester. If your Father’s late, we’ll have to keep all these people entertained and amused as best we can. He wouldn’t like it for us to begin before he came.”

Any sagacious onlooker who had the intelligence to ponder on the undercurrents of this scene would have already decided that Lady Val, in spite of the competent appearance of worldly poise that she managed to display, was not far from some kind of nervous collapse. Nor would that onlooker have been mistaken. The poor woman actually was on the verge of such a breakdown.

“O why, why, why,” she kept asking herself in the depths of her soul, “did our ancient family of Dormaquil ever allow itself to be betrayed by a romantic idiot like me into handing over Roque to a crazy breed like these Abyssums?”

What particularly disturbed her at this moment was the awkward and unconventional isolation of her three children along with that Tartar-Jew, Peleg. They are simply, she told herself, showing off their clever theories to each other, and totally forgetting their duty to the immemorial hospitality and prestige of the Manor of Roque. They ought to be moving about among this crowd with the graciousness of a proper family; whereas Tilton, I can see, is longing to go straight out to his half-built shrine and Lil only wants to put John in his place and show herself as clever as he is!

She turned away from the three of them for a moment and hurriedly examined the faces of the crowd. She soon realized that there were, sprinkled among the visitors or pilgrims from the other side of the channel, several of the richest freemen of the Manor; and she even fancied she saw a couple of serfs in their Sunday clothes. She had already noticed among the Manor officials what looked to her like the whole Sygerius family, except the old grandfather who was no doubt, as he always was, polishing and sharpening and cleaning the weapons in the armoury. This old gentleman had been the Reeve or Bailiff of the Manor for a quarter of a century, and his name was Heber, while the name of his son and successor was Randolph. Old Heber's wife had died years ago, but the wife of Randolph, whose name was Madge, was full of youthful liveliness and daring, as was indeed the whole Sygerius family including both Toby, Randolph's eldest son, and Toby's wife, an extremely pretty girl whose name was Kate, but who from childhood had had the nickname of Crumb.

"That silly girl of mine," thought Lady Val, "must be got away from all these staring people! She *must* go to Nurse and change her clothes and do her hair and be ready to sit down at table when Sir Mort appears. O why, in God's name, *doesn't* he appear? He *said* he'd be back in half-an-hour. He *said* it was only to make sure about that dammed-up mill-pool that he went out like this. He always goes out for a breath of air before breakfast, but not for as long as this! I do so hate it when he disappears like this just when I want him most. O there's Madge and Crumb by themselves! Randolph must have taken Toby off to help with all the horses. I must go and find out if they're going to help me at this frightful breakfast. They ought to. They *both* ought to."

Lady Val was no sooner lost to sight among the crowd than her eldest child, Tilton, after watching her vanish in pursuit of the middle-aged Madge and of Madge's laughter-loving daughter-in-law, rose quickly and caught hold of John by his belt. Tilton was a loyal adherent of the New Testament, but in a practical, not an occult or mystical, sense.

He was a tall, muscular, athletic young man, with a candid, open face, straight fair hair, and large honest blue eyes. He had a free, high-spirited, frank integrity of manner that people found very appealing. He now caught his younger brother John round the shoulder and dragged him off towards that same small postern through which Peleg and Lil-Umbra had just come in.

As he thus possessed himself of his brother, he poured out a stream of words. "But you'll see for yourself! You'll see the expression I'm carving on Our Lady's face. You needn't worry about it being cold in my little chapel. I left a good brazier of red coals in there. Besides, the Sun will be shining through the window. Don't be scared. I won't keep you more than a second!"

Lil-Umbra couldn't resist turning her head towards them and she was rewarded for her interest; for Tilton was so eager to explain to his younger brother exactly the point he had reached in his architectural and sculptural undertaking that, with his hand on the door-bar, he went on eagerly with what he was saying.

"What I want particularly to show you, Johnny, my boy, is a smile I've carved on Our Lady's face. It's a smile; and yet it's more than a smile. It's a look of worship; and yet it's a look of What's being worshipped. I won't keep you more than a second; so don't speak till I've shown you! No! No! I don't want to hear another word about reason and science! Wait till you've seen the look I've put on Our Lady's face! Of course I couldn't with only a chisel and hammer show all she was feeling; and of course anyway it would be absurd, even if I were a saint like this Bonaventura who annoys you and your miracle-working Doctor so much, to pretend that I could tell what the Mother of God was thinking. But it's funny how far a person, if he feels anything of the sort at all, can go when he's got a hammer and chisel in his hands! But it's no good talking. You'll see what I mean when we — —"

At this point Tilton dislodged the door-bar and pushed the door open; and both boys, with a mutual gasp of pleasure at the bright sunshine and the smell of fir-trees, disappeared into the air. It may have been the shock of the open door — held ajar by Tilton till he finished his sentence — with its lively inrush of sun and air, or it may have been one of those apparently causeless stirrings of motivation that happen so inexplicably to us all, but the second her brothers were gone Lil-Umbra, with a quick glance at the crowd to make sure her mother was still engrossed with the Sygerian family, whispered to Peleg that, if there were any serious trouble over her disappearance, he'd better tell them that she could be found in the armoury, talking to old Heber Sygerius.

With this she left him, and forcing a path for herself through the thickest of the press, went off towards the open courtyard in the centre of the Fortress, where were the privy-retreats for both sexes, as well as storing-places for fuel and food and wine, and where there was even a miniature tournament-ground for knightly competition of every kind.

While Lil-Umbra, with a certain quickening of both heart and pulses, was making her way to the armoury, Nurse Rampant, always more anxious about her elder nurseling — that is to say Lady Val herself — than about that lady's daughter, had found it impossible to get absorbed in her needlework upstairs, and had hurriedly, though rather surreptitiously, made her way back to the scene of action. And this she had only done just in time: for Lady Val, having heard what she felt sure was the sound of her husband’s horn, had left Madge, and Madge’s daughter-in-law, Crumb, and had rushed to the postern-door.

The long-drawn, world-weary sigh of the solitary wind, as it passed over the roofs and entered the windows and doors of the Fortress of Roque, intensified the wild romantic prayer of Lil-Umbra that she might find by the armoury hearth, along with old Heber, no less a person than young Raymond de Laon himself. Because she had found him there once, she never entered the place without expecting to find him there again.

It was this same wind that brought what Lady Val felt sure was the sound of her husband’s horn. She had hardly realized that her eldest boy had only a second ago dragged his brother away to visit the little shrine he was building due west of the Fortress. Lady Val felt certain she had really heard the unmistakable series of defiant notes which her husband loved to play on the great hunting horn that he always carried in his belt whether he was hunting or not, whether he was armed for battle or not, whether he was on horseback or on foot.

The notes of Sir Mort’s horn were indeed unmistakable when heard; but had she, Lady Val asked herself, really heard them? She stood still listening. Not a sound came now from that sunlit forest. She made an impatient movement with her hands and shoulders and rushed boldly to the door. Once there she seized the massive brazen ring into which the iron rod, that made this entrance impregnable, fitted with what was to a particular vein in her nature an obliging and delectable exactitude, and jerked that iron bar to and fro sideways with a violence that required all the strength she possessed in her long slender arms, while she vaguely wondered what her two sons would feel if, instead of opening the door to listen to their father’s horn, she barred it against their re-entrance.

It had become now, and she herself knew that there was something unusual in her mood, an absolute necessity, or at any rate an angry and desperate one, to hear the sound of Sir Mort's horn; and although her neck was bare and although the wind that blew past her into that crowded entrance made her shiver, the craving she felt for that sound was stronger than her natural shrinking. Wider and wider she pushed the door open, and in an impulse of sheer frenzy she was on the point of rushing out, when a figure and a voice were upon her, and the powerful hands of the old nurse dragged her back into the hall and closed the door upon both the Sun and the wind.

"Did Lil-Umbra go to her room?" whispered Lady Val to the nurse as they moved back together towards the crowd. "Not to my knowledge," returned the other. "But I may have missed her on the way. It would be an easy thing to do."

Lady Val looked at that moment as if she would have liked to have struck the woman; but the wise old nurse, though she released the arm she was holding, showed no sign of having realized the amount of indignant passion which she had aroused. Indeed she knew the lady so well that every course and twist and tangent of the feelings that showed themselves at this dangerous moment were an old story to her.

An onlooker at the scene might even have caught a faint trace of affectionate amusement in the quick look she threw upon Lady Val's nervous fingers, which were now clasping and unclasping each other as if engaged in some convulsive dance.

"So be it, my dear," she said quietly. "I'll go and find our runaway, if you go back to your visitors."

Slowly, stride by stride, holding his long spear just below its shining point, which now gleamed in the Sun in the way certain objects seem to have a special power of gleaming, as if they are consciously holding and reflecting the rays they catch, Sir Mort returned from his stroll to the small pool which in former days had been a crowded fish-pond, but which now only contained a solitary pike and a solitary perch, who, having divided the place between them, and devoured everything, were now watching each other with eyes that were both hungry and apprehensive.

Sir Mort was a tall and slender, but a broad-shouldered man, of about sixty, whose most striking physical characteristic was the shape of his skull, which was very long and very narrow and was perched like the skull of a vulture on the top of a long neck. The length and narrowness of Sir Mort's head was emphasized by his deep hollow eye-sockets, out of which his eyes, dark-green in colour, glared forth with a very peculiar effect; for it was as if they had no connection with each other at all, but were, each of them, the solitary eye of a saurian creature whose eye was at the top of its scaly head.

He had obviously snatched at the warmest and smallest jerkin to hand as he went out and at the smallest and lightest iron headpiece, which was scarcely more indeed than a band of metal round his head, a band into which had been fastened a black-and-white feather.

As he approached his Manor-Fortress he soon recognized that both its material and psychic atmosphere were wholly different from what they had been when he set out an hour ago. There was now an intermittent hum of human voices, steps, cries, exclamations, agitations, conversations; and the cold east wind that was blowing across the forest, and rustling through the spruces and the still bare larches and pines, carried upon its breath and whirled up and down, and back and forth, and round and round, what might have been an invisible emanation from that startling and surprising conglomeration of human voices, human bodies, human gestures, human cries, along with sounds of all sorts rising from weapons of iron and brass and bronze and silver and gold.

“Is our land invaded from France?” was the first thought that rushed through that vulturine skull. But the next was a more rational one. “Fool that I am!” he muttered. “It’s that thrice-damnable son of a bitch they’ve made into a Saint who must be upon us with all his bloody followers! Poor darling care-driven Valentia! How agitated you must be! I pray John is still in the place and Tilton in not too architectural a mood! And I hope to the devil that our lusty old Jew Peleg has brought Lil-Umbra safe back! They can’t, surely, all this huge crowd, expect us to feed them?”

Instead of quickening his pace, as he made his way towards the postern door, the Lord of the Manor of Roque began to walk with unusual slowness, pressing the long handle of his spear heavily against the ground at each step.

“I’ve got to face the fact,” he told himself, “that whether I like it or don’t like it, and whether poor dear Valentia likes it or doesn’t like it, all this whole blasted crew will have to be fed this morning. I hope to God there’s enough in our kitchen to fill their damned bellies!”

The tall lean Master of Roque who, as the sole survivor, save for his own offspring, of the incorrigibly eccentric family of Abyssum, ceased now to take even the slowest steps towards his destination. In the downright language he would have used himself, he stopped dead. “My birthday come round again!” he thought, “and poor little Valentia, with all her values and valuations, will be fifty next August! Twenty years more, according to Holy Scripture, and we shall be an aged pair, and the place swarming with grandchildren! Well, well, well.”

He turned the glittering point of his spear earthward, and using both his powerful forearms, he forced it down so deeply into the earth that he soon was able to lean with the full weight of the pit of his stomach upon the large bronze knob that terminated the handle.

In this position, leaning on the handle of the spear that belonged to him and pressing its point into the ground that belonged to him, Sir Mort couldn’t resist indulging in a queer mental performance that he prayed to God he had been crafty enough to keep entirely to himself — namely an almost ritualistic trick of his, which from the days of his extremely weird childhood he had been led by the deepest thing in him to practise.

The deepest thing in Sir Mort was without doubt the intense egoism of his own soul, in other words his absolutely abnormal self-centredness. None of his offspring approached him in his awareness of his interior self or ego, or in his power of isolating it and of enjoying its isolation. Sir Mort imaged this soul of his in a curiously original and indeed a very erratic way. He saw it in the shape of a particular kind of spear, the kind whose spear-head grows wider and wider for several inches, then proceeds to narrow itself for the same number of inches before it reaches its sharp and piercing spear-point.

He saw it however as made, not of iron or bronze, but of flint. He saw it indeed as a spear with a flint arrow-head for its point, a point enlarged to about a dozen times the size of an ordinary arrow-head. This spiritual spear with a super arrow-head became to Sir Mort the ultimate hieroglyph of himself; and in all his private and secret thoughts, which were often extremely fantastic, he actually saw himself as this same flint-headed spear.

He had got into the habit of imagining his inmost self in the shape of this spear with its flint super arrow-head driving its way through the mossy surface of the earth, while he forced himself to think of it as possessed of every one of his five senses.

Unknown to another soul — for Lady Val was the last person in the world to draw out of him such a secret — Sir Mort, who would have been regarded by his wife and by his sons and by all his neighbours, especially by his pious friend, Prior Bog of Bumset, as simply insane, had they known of these practices, imagined himself seeing the roots and the earth-worms and the cracks in the stones and the variously coloured veins of the different geological strata upon which his soul impinged as it descended deeper and deeper into the hole it was making!

He also forced himself to touch, to smell, and to taste, all these animal, vegetable and mineral entities into whose dwelling he was descending; and finally, so that his spiritual pilgrimage should miss nothing, he imagined himself listening, as he headed downwards, to the intercourse, in some sort of earth-mould language, which these roots and cracks and crevices, these worms in their subterranean dwellings indulged in among themselves, so that he could compare their mental reactions to life with his own.

But this was only the first “move”, so to speak, in Sir Mort’s intercourse with the cosmic multiplicity. The next thing this crazy owner of Roque must needs do was to pull himself out of the hole into which he had descended with such persistence and proceed to shoot himself through the air! On this airborne quest he was careful to avoid every conceivable collision. He avoided the Moon and he avoided every planet. He avoided all the falling stars.

And then, when he had got clear of all impediments in his aerial flight, he set himself to enjoy the pure touch of nothingness, the ineffable taste of nothingness, the indescribable smell of nothingness, the god-like sight of the immeasurable recesses of nothingness, and finally, pervading his pilgrim-soul with the most exquisite pleasure of all, the unutterable symphonies of the music of nothingness.

And then he would force his spear-head soul to make a great dive out of the depths of the air into the depths of the sea, and it can well be believed how the touch, smell, taste, sight and sound of the swirling, the water-spouting, the whirlpooling, the towering and lowering, the roaring and soaring, the rumbling and grumbling, of the everlasting ocean, with both its eternal motion and its eternal identity, would satisfy to the full the insane void of his unending quest: and, finally and at last, into the hot fire of the Sun and the cold fire of the Moon; and from these into the incredible fires of all the living stars, until, out of earth, out of water, out of air, and out of fire, he wrested what his spear-head of a soul required for its imperishable nourishment. For the only thing in the world that Sir Mort feared was death — the thought of being *non-est*, of being as if he had never been.

He always felt, if only a shred of him remained — only a nail-paring, only a scab, only a tiny bone, only a handful of ashes — as long as this speck of the matter which had once belonged to his body remained, so that his unconquerable soul could hover over it, he would be still Sir Mort, he would not be dead yet.

He now raised himself up and pulled his spear out of the earth and stared in front of him into a great alder-bush from the heart of which, it suddenly had struck him, somebody was watching him. And then, in one quick beat of his pulse, he knew who it was. It was none other than his neighbour, Sir Maldung of Lost Towers. Not only was Sir Maldung watching him, but he held a drawn bow in his hand whose arrow was aimed straight at Sir Mort’s heart.

Sir Mort had never been calmer, stronger, quieter, more entirely collected, more absolutely poised in his mind than he was at that instant. He didn’t feel in the faintest degree afraid. It was a peculiarity of his that, as long as he had his wits about him, and saw clearly what his enemy was aiming at, not a flicker of apprehension crossed his mind.

"I shall know by his expression," he said to himself, "when he lets that arrow fly and I shall be perfectly able to dodge it before it touches me! I am myself a drawn bow and a pointed arrow! And when you are yourself both arrow and bow, it is fine sport to watch your enemy's face!"

And certainly Sir Maldung's face was something to watch at that moment. It was positively convulsed with the ultimate ecstasy of killing. His mouth was open and twisted awry; his eyes stared so intently that they seemed as if at any second they might flow or drip or sweat or soak into the alder-bush. His whole face was crumpled and wrung and knotted and sucked inwards.

And then in a second it relaxed like the bursting of a boil, and became, as far as any human expression was concerned, blurred and blotted out. Sir Mort dived to the ground; and the arrow skimmed over his back and quivered into the trunk of a fir-tree.

Sir Mort straightened his body and uttered a queer little laugh. But it did not occur to him to pursue the figure that was now in full flight. "Silly old devil!" he muttered; and strolled, as slowly as he had been doing before, towards the postern entrance of the Fortress of Roque.

IV. LIL-UMBRA

"I'll go," thought Lil-Umbra, "as if Mother had sent me with an important message. I will not speak to a soul: and when anyone speaks to me I'll pretend not to hear, or to be so occupied in delivering my message that though they see I can't help hearing I need not take any notice of what people say. It *was*, after all, not only once but twice that I found Raymond de Laon there! Of course the first time he was there he couldn't have had the faintest idea that I should be likely to come in. But that second time he didn't seem surprised to see me. He seemed glad: very glad in fact, but he didn't seem at all surprised.

"O! I do wonder what he feels about me! It's so teasing never to know! That's the worst of it with a grown-up boy. If it were John now, it would all be so easy! But of course *he* would have let it out to everybody and I'd have had all I could do to make him keep his mouth shut! I suppose I'll never know with Raymond till he suddenly bursts out with it. He looks at me all the time: and that day we were alone at Cone Castle, when Baron Boncor had taken Will with him to London and I was turning the pages with him of one after another of those old books he is always finding in some secret recess in one of those lovely turrets of Cone Castle, I noticed how for some reason or other the hand I wasn't using, to turn a page or to point at a picture, was held in his hand.

"But, O dear! I am afraid I'm just being silly! Plenty of girls much handsomer, cleverer, and more important than me, must have been attracted to him and tried to win his favour. And there's that time he had — and he told me himself how much he enjoyed it! — when he was studying philosophy in Paris. He must have been a guest at all sorts of grand houses, and met lots of wonderful women! O why aren't girls like me allowed to attend the lectures of these great Doctors? It is all *so* unfair! People don't realize how lucky young men are in these clever modern days to be allowed to hear really important thinkers explaining the nature of — —"

It was at this point that Lil-Umbra had to extricate herself from an extremely formidable group of crusaders from the south of Anjou who looked at her in the way — so she told herself — that such comrades-in-arms must have looked at every unravished maid they encountered in their holy campaign. "O why can't we find out the real true nature," so Lil-Umbra's thoughts ran on, and they were rendered more rebellious still by contact with these consecrated warriors, "of such mysteries as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and, let's hope, put an end once for all to all the stuff the priests" — and here her thoughts were again intensified in their revolt by yet another body of guests, for she was now squeezing herself between a sculptured procession of angels in Purbeck marble and a group of excited persons who, although freemen of the Manor of Roque, were nevertheless, as far as their habits of thought went, on no higher level than the humblest serfs— "all the stuff the priests keep putting into our heads."

It was soon after she had safely squeezed her way along this succession of marble angels, which must have been a strip of masonry left intact during the Fortress's renovation a century earlier, that Lil-Umbra came upon a narrow window, especially adapted for defence by arrow-shooting, out of which, though she had to stand on tip-toe to do so, she couldn't resist taking a peep into the surrounding forest. The Fortress was such an erratic and rambling erection, and it had been added to during so many experiments in castellated building throughout the years, that to Lil-Umbra's surprise she found herself peering into a portion of the forest almost directly opposite the small unfinished shrine to Our Lady of the Holy Ass, now being so devotedly built by the two hands of Tilton alone, though Lil-Umbra had not failed to guess that it had been under the influence of some impious brain, possibly young John's, that Tilton had given his work that grotesque name: but at this moment it wasn't of an ass or of a horse that she was thinking, as she pressed her chin upon her eight white knuckles in order to peer out of the arrow-slit in the ancient wall.

She was indeed experiencing a moment of heart-wrung disturbance such as any ordinary onlooker would have felt to be beyond all proportion to its cause, when she saw the figure of a young girl, of about her own height and slenderness, but dressed with a most subtle and most deliberate aim, in that unusually warm February sunshine, of making herself exquisitely provocative to masculine senses, lying sideways on a mantle which she had spread out on a mossy bank bordering on the well-trodden path that led — and didn't Lil-Umbra know that path by heart! — from the postern-gate to the unfinished shrine of Our Lady of the Holy Ass.

It may easily be imagined that it was not only about the quick return to breakfast of her two brothers along that familiar forest-track that Lil-Umbra was now troubled. What if Raymond de Laon had taken into his head — O he too too easily might! — to pay a visit to the shrine Tilton was raising to Our Lady?

It was sufficiently unusual for the eldest son of the lord of a Manor as large as Roque, which everybody knew was more thickly populated than any other in the West Country, to design and plan such a shrine with his own brain and to build it and to carve it with his own hands, to have already started queer rumours in that part of England, without the half-naked daughter of the adjoining castle waylaying him between his new shrine and his parents' dwelling!

For as the agitated, and indeed the now thoroughly upset, Lil-Umbra hurried on towards the armoury, she could not keep her mind from pondering on every aspect of the fact that she had herself seen Lilith, the only child of the wicked Baron Maldung and his half-mad lady of Lost Towers, stretched on the bank by the path as if tomorrow were the first of August rather than the first of February!

O it was impossible for the infatuated Lil-Umbra not to play with the tormenting idea that there already might exist God only knew what depraved understanding between Raymond de Laon and this terribly licentious girl. "I must certainly ask him outright," she decided, "the very next time we're alone whether he is on speaking terms with this shameless girl! But till I have a chance of asking him that, I certainly mustn't let him hold my hand again. O! I just can't bear to think about it — Lilith Maldung waiting for him half-undressed outside our very gate!"

But like most of us when we are still under twenty, Lil-Umbra hadn't acquired the difficult art of putting painful possibilities out of her mind and the vision of Lilith by the wayside continued to obsess her thoughts with one horrible imagination after another. She felt ready to welcome any excuse that offered itself for not going straight into the armoury to talk to the ex-bailiff. She decided that it might be a timely occasion in the interest of her own physical comfort to visit the women's corner of the retiring-yard, and this with slow and leisurely steps she proceeded to do, rinding the spot less frequented than might have been expected under existing circumstances.

When, however, returning from this retreat with that vision of Lilith still biting like a rat at her tenderest nerve — for she still felt a curious desire to put off any possible encounter with Raymond de Laon till this image from Lost Towers had faded a little — she took the more roundabout of the alternative ways to the armoury, she found herself again following a passage along the outside wall of the Fortress, a passage which was once more in full view of her brother Tilton's cheerful shrine.

And so once more, urged by the insatiable demon of curiosity, she found herself standing on tiptoe at a similar arrow-slit-window and staring out as desperately as before into the dazzling afternoon sunshine. What she now saw caused her to gasp with the same kind of choking in her gullet that a female blackbird might suffer who suddenly perceives in her lonely nest a solitary cuckoo's egg.

Another girl was now rapidly approaching that provocative figure lying stretched out on the grassy bank by the edge of the path, and Lil-Umbra was as startled by the strangeness of the new girl's look and her queer attire as by her astonishing beauty.

"She must be a Spanish maiden," Lil-Umbra told herself, "or a Jewish girl straight from Palestine! Who on earth brought her here and what does she want with us?"

This time it happened that Lil-Umbra's arrow-slit was so close to the alluring figure down there beneath her on the grass that she felt a faint uneasiness lest one or other of the two girls should look up and see her. "They wouldn't see much," she told herself, "in this blazing Sun and against all this grey stone; but they might see enough of my forehead and hair to realize that they're being watched!"

Lil-Umbra lowered her insteps by a fraction of an inch, thus bringing down her ivory-white forehead to a position only just above the support of that row of equally white knuckles; and it was from this position that she saw the new-comer pause by the side of the half-naked girl on the grass, evidently wishing to ask her a question.

"What question is she going to ask?" Lil-Umbra said to herself. "She may be in attendance upon one of these noblewomen from France, or she may have come from the Priory."

And then she suddenly became aware that by some chance-sent miracle the wind, which in that glowing sunshine had been blowing from the east, suddenly shifted to the north, with the result that she could hear with perfect clearness every word the two were speaking.

"I was only asking you," she heard the stranger say, "where would be the best entrance into this Fortress-Castle for a serving-girl like me? I have only just come to this part of the world and I am working at present in the Priory kitchen, but they told me that the best thing to do if I wanted to meet anyone of my own race round here was to get an entrance 'by hook or by crook', as we used to say in the crusaders' camp, into the Fortress of Roque."

"The best thing for you to do, my good girl," replied Lilith of Lost Towers, without moving to change her position or to wrap her garments more closely round her, "is to go right back to the Priory the way you came! Everybody round here knows perfectly well that Prior Bog is no man to cater for the tribal pretensions of a ship-wrecked, tossed-up slave-girl such as you! Get back to the Priory the way you came, my woman. That's the road for you to take!"

Then it was that our young watcher through the arrow-slit saw an unexpected sight. For the new-comer deliberately moved forward and stood quite calmly by the side of the girl lying on that grassy bank. Luckily for our observer, the stranger stood now looking directly westward towards Tilton's shrine, and with her back not only to the Priory from which she had come, but also to the old Druidic stone-circle from which our friend that very morning had watched the Sun rise. And so it was possible for Lil-Umbra to see her profile clearly outlined against the trunk of a naked larch.

And there was such power as well as beauty in the profile she saw that she felt no surprise when the girl on the ground hurriedly got up and began re-assuming in haste every garment she had removed, and finally, apparently entirely under the psychic compulsion and the silent authority of the wanderer, began wrapping about her the ancestral cloak she had spread so carefully on the grass.

And now this mysterious foreign woman was answering the Lost Towers girl in language quite as formidable as her own but much more dignified and compelling.

“I am unknown to you,” Lil-Umbra heard her say, “while you are not unknown to me; but we are both face to face with all those frightful difficulties, and appalling choices among so many completely different courses of action such as afflict all women. Listen to me, then, Lilith of Lost Towers; and I will tell you what you had better do if you want to avoid a dreadful quarrel with your mother and father, a quarrel that might bring down your whole house in ruins.”

“What are you talking about, your poor slave from Byzantium? You say we’re both women. Don’t you see that the only important thing in our life *as* women is how to satisfy our love in the one direction and our hate in the other?”

The stranger made two or three short steps backward as Lilith said this and then made the same number forward again; and this rhythm she repeated as she went on speaking, while the tiptoe watcher, with her white chin pressed against her white knuckles, actually found her toes tapping the stone slab beneath her feet as if she were watching, or by some mysterious compulsion actually joining, some weird ritualistic performance.

And Lil-Umbra was unable to resist the curious feeling that the woman, who thus kept advancing and retiring in a sort of thaumaturgic sorcerer's dance, was actually drawing into her body as she did so the rays of this burning Sun and turning them into a protection against their chemical opposite, that is to say against some cold, dark, wet, hostile element from which emanated the very chill of death.

And all the while she was walking thus rhythmically backwards and forwards, she was chanting to Lilith of the Lost Towers what sounded as if it were the undying echo of some prehistoric war-challenge, the challenge of one long-extinct race to another extinct race, a challenge that had survived as an indestructible cry out of the heart of the earth itself, and issued forth from the earth in the form of dust and dew and spray and mist and vapour.

"The white skin and sweet flesh of a young girl like you," she chanted, "if they be offered up as a living sacrifice to the powers of destruction, will recoil not only on those who offer them up, but on her to whom they belong!"

Lil-Umbra was more astonished than she would have considered it possible for her ever to have been in the house of her birth by what happened then. For Lilith of the Lost Towers seemed suddenly seized by a great panic. She clutched nervously and frantically at a few objects of attire that she had as yet, while putting on her clothes, neglected to re-assume, and holding these against her navel, she swung round, and with head down and her eyes on nothing but the path she was following, she bolted into the forest with the blind rush of a small animal desperate to escape.

V. HEBER SYGERIUS

WITH NOTHING OF Lilith's desperation but with hardly less haste, Lil-Umbra now left her observation-post at that memorable arrow-slit and hurried by the nearest passage to the armoury. She was so agitated by what she had just heard and seen that the chance she might encounter Raymond de Laon had grown a bit blurred, more like the heavenly end to a complicated fairy-tale than something that might occur in a few minutes.

The armoury of the Fortress of Roque was, as anyone would have anticipated, considering the reputation for reckless violence of the ancestors of Lady Val, and considering the peculiar character of its new master, Sir Mort, as capacious and crowded a chamber as any in the place. At the very time when Lady Val, still making her heroic effort to recover from her fit of weakness and to be worthy of her grandmother when that lady entertained the rather difficult bride of Llewelyn the Great, was listening with especially gracious interest to the chatter of the new bailiff's wife and her lively daughter-in-law "the Crumb", her own errant daughter with very different emotions but with something of Lady Val's spirit was approaching the huge and glowing hearth of what might have been called the altar-fire of that vast collection of weapons, in a mood of chastened wistfulness.

It had been several weeks ago when she found Raymond de Laon here quite alone, and not only alone, but with the door ajar and praying that she might pass by! On this occasion she shut the door very carefully behind her as she went in; and once inside the room, the look with which she surveyed its present occupant was a very tender and subtle one. The personage towards whom this look of hers was directed was a very old man, and an old man who was, as it appeared, luxuriating, in a quaint and peculiar manner, in his own old age.

He was like a certain broken and dilapidated stone pillar, Lil-Umbra thought, that had arrested her attention this very morning as she sat talking to Peleg on that massive stone seat which so closely resembled a giant's throne; but not only did that hunched-up pillar come into her head when she saw this old man, but his pose by the fire as she approached him made her think of a desiccated willow-stump, of which she had caught a glimpse while among the stones in the stone-circle where they had watched the sunrise.

Heber Sygerius was a short bony man with very broad shoulders. He had no hair at all on his face, which he shaved much more carefully than most elderly men, and he was almost entirely bald. His skull was large and on both sides of it were two very curious discolourations of a tint almost as impossible to describe as it would have been to describe the colour of the grey and brown mist which that very afternoon, when their late breakfast-lunch was over, would swallow up the Sun.

Full of golden light that Sun had been when Lil-Umbra had watched its first rising. Full of its light had the forest-path been she had just watched; but after this long meal their kitchen had to provide its glory would be gone. But this old man was assuredly enjoying himself before that blazing fire, into which at intervals he kept flinging a small piece of wood from a heap at his side.

What surrounded this old figure with a special aura of attraction for Lil-Umbra was that it had been to meet this man, who had only recently handed over his reeveship of the Manor of Roque to his middle-aged son, that Raymond de Laon — at least that was what he had said — had been here the last time she had come.

As we have already noted, the two latrines of Roque Fortress had finally come to be placed side by side adjacent to the interior courtyard. It is simply use-and-wont and the gradual adjustments of custom that create what historians of human decency might well be justified in calling the "epochal fashion" in excremental convenience. There were several antiquated hieroglyphs, that might well have reverted to the days of Constantine, scrawled over a low arch leading from that inner court to the left of this armoury; and another set of syllables of the same debased and deteriorated Latinity carved on a block of stone over that similar small arch under which Lil-Umbra had recently passed.

On this latter, among other syllables, was engraved the abbreviation "Fem"; and on the former the syllable "Mas". It was indeed of his own meditated retreat to the masculine one of these two retiring places that the old Heber Sygerius had been thinking before Lil-Umbra appeared, for although he was aware that neither his bladder nor his bowels needed immediate easement, he had already arrived at that stage in the progress of old age when men, and in some cases women too, grow over-conscious, though sometimes with only too good reason, of their urinal and excremental evacuations. But fortunately he was at this moment in no hurry to obey the particular bodily call of which he felt a vague premonition, so that when he became aware of the light step of the girlish intruder, he was quite ready to turn upon her his peculiarly magnetic smile full of a more than natural kindliness.

It was this curious magnetism in the old ex-bailiff that had warded off many an insurrection of the over-wrought serfs of the Manor of Roque, and had even been effective, a smile in this case being equal to the authority of the most aristocratic of stewards, in persuading various rich free-men not to take away their thrice-precious coins of the realm from the confines of this populous Manor to squander them on a last desperate crusade that would probably only land them in some French or Italian or German prison.

What was going on in the excited consciousness of Lil-Umbra as she entered the armoury and confronted the extraordinarily shaped hairless skull of this kindly-crafty grandfather-curator of the Manor of Roque? Whatever it was, it was obviously only partially revealed in the quick, gasping sigh she gave as she yielded to his welcoming gesture and sat herself down on a four-legged stool to the left of those burning logs.

When once the two of them were seated quietly together, the exchange of feelings between this girl in her teens and this old man of eighty resolved itself quickly enough into pure gratitude, each to each, for the unembarrassed silence which that good moment permitted to both of them.

The thoughts that in a little while began to filter through the old man’s hairless skull were curiously characteristic of the dominant temper of his mind throughout his whole life. Raymond de Laon used to say of Heber Sygerius that he had always served the Manor of Roque rather than the Manor’s Lord or Lady at any special epoch. He certainly had always been, from every point of view, the ideal administrator of an exquisitely adjustable miniature kingdom, nourished from its roots up by the fruits of the earth and the beasts of the field, and dominated by a traditional routine never broken save to humour the caprices of the elements.

But old Heber’s way of managing the manor was over now for good and ill. His wife was long dead, and his son and his son’s wife were administrators of a totally different type. In all the spontaneous and instinctive motions of his mind Heber was still, as he had been all his days, at once profoundly kind and profoundly cunning.

There was not a serf on the manor who didn’t feel towards him, in all the minutest details of their communal life, as if he really were a wise and understanding, though somewhat inscrutable and secretive, elderly relative. Like many another indulgent grand-dad, he was cruelly missed by all who suffered under less considerate successors.

What none of his own family had ever realized in the least, and what even Raymond de Laon and young Sir William Boncor among the aristocracy of that district had never properly understood, was the disturbing effect upon Heber's peculiar nature of what he had picked up and imbibed of the teachings of Friar Bacon. The Friar's ideas had not reached him directly from the philosopher's own mouth; but indirectly and, as may well be imagined, in a distorted form from various persons, male and female, employed in all sorts of capacities, within and without both Bumset Priory and Fenawl Convent, whose pastures, enclosures, fallows, and forest-tracks, together with their well-appointed tithe-barns and their movable sheep-folds, offered extensive if not specifically trained employment.

The sequestration of Friar Bacon under conditions of semi-condemnation and semi-imprisonment so close to Roque Manor had naturally a disturbing, exciting, and agitating effect upon others beside Heber; but of all who were affected by the Friar's presence in that neighbourhood the old ex-bailiff was undoubtedly the one who gave himself up to pondering on the subject with the most serious and the most simple concentration.

Such was the power of the imprisoned Friar's mind that the first difficulty the old man had encountered, and he had pondered on this for a pathetically long while, was whether these exciting new ideas belonged to the realm of religion, or of science, or of philosophy. By his using his shrewd native commonsense he decided in favour of philosophy. He felt that it was certainly easier to include both religion and science under philosophy than it would be to squeeze philosophy into the murderous arsenals of the fanatics of religion on one hand or of science on the other.

As the grandfather of this little manorial realm, to which both the Priory and the Convent might well have looked with daughter-like piety, for they were, in a real historic sense, its offspring, Heber Sygerius never let himself forget what his son and successor was only too apt to do — that the thrice-precious manorial threshing-floor and grind-stone, upon which the lives of the whole little community depended, were actually within the purlieus of the Priory; and that therefore when the serfs, who came to thresh and to grind the corn, which, when, once ground, was the bread of their life and the whole basis of their mortal existence, talked as they were bound to do with the servants of the Priory and the Convent, there was no escape from the contagion of the Friar's dangerous ideas.

For revolutionary indeed these ideas were! In fact some of them led directly to the sort of peasant-revolts against the owners of manors which were beginning to be frequent on the continent of Europe. Some of them led to the serfs of Roque Manor for instance asking themselves point-blank whether, if the Lord of the Manor could make them pay for threshing on his threshing-floor and grinding with his grind-stone, he might suddenly exact payment — in fact wasn't this what he *was* doing? — for the privilege of living on the earth at all? Then there were all those innumerable magic sayings of the Friar in his role of race-sorcerer or tribal soothsayer; most especially those sayings connected with the most notorious of all his achievements, his construction of a Brazen Head that uttered oracles on behalf of Britain against the world.

The armoury of Roque Manor was indeed what might literally have been called, as Lil-Umbra had always called it, a magic room, for this was by no means the first time that a most strangely procreative and pregnant set of thoughts had been engendered here. But none had ever been born in this place stranger or more vibrant with eventful consequence than the thought-child now created by this casual and accidental contact between a precocious young girl and an unbelievably shrewd-witted old man.

There was something about this occasion, when Lil-Umbra's mind was dallying with the hope that at any second Raymond de Laon might appear, and when old Heber's mind was full of a difficult adjustment between the four points of the compass and the geography of the Manor, that gave to the warmth of that particular fire the power of so affecting the sympathetic silence in which they both were enveloped that there actually did come into existence by a sort of spontaneous generation a thought-child of the most significant kind, an offspring for which they were alone responsible.

Indeed they both felt in a weird and rather frightening manner that between the two of them, on this special day of this special month of the year of grace twelve hundred and seventy-two, an extremely formidable thought-child had been born, a thought-child, or rather a fate-child, for whose growth in power and for whose increase in stature a moment was as a day and a day was as a year; so that before a few months were over something would happen that would make their coming together on this particular morning a fearful and memorable milestone, not merely in the history of Roque Manor but in the history of the planet Earth.

As with so many other fatal events that have become inaugural turning-points in the story of our race, the chief actors in this divine or devilish drama only felt in the dimmest, faintest, indirectest, obliquest, shadowiest manner the generative importance of their encounter. In so far as they did apprehend it they attributed it — and indeed where else could they have looked for a cause? — to the effect of the warmth of a burning fire upon an absolute silence. The old man would no doubt have defended himself from any charge of spiritual rape by emphasizing the extreme fragility, not to mention the quivering evasiveness, of a girl-child's maidenhood; while Lil-Umbra would unquestionably have sworn that her whole being was entirely dominated by one sense alone, namely by the sense of hearing. Indeed she might well have argued that all the while the spirit of Fire in this magic armoury of Roque was satisfying its desire upon the spirit of Silence, she herself was completely absorbed in listening for any sound outside the door that could possibly mean the approach of the youth who filled her thoughts.

As for old Heber Sygerius, with this sylph-like figure crouching at his side, he really had begun to permit to his natural impulses certain liberties of imagination, such as would never have been allowed to lift their heads above the ground in the mind of her Mongol friend with his Hebraic conscience. "How strange it is," the old man was pondering now to himself, "that the traditional separation between my lord's daughter and my lord's bailiff should totally stop, not only the faintest attempt on my part to meddle with this exquisite little creature, but also should prevent my explaining to her any of my private ideas about life in general, ideas that I worked out in my own head years and years before Friar Bacon was forced to leave Oxford and come among us as a half-condemned and half-imprisoned heretic.

"O! how I'd love to tell this sweet child everything I've worked out for myself about the wisest, cunningest, craftiest ways of enjoying life and holding our own against our enemies! And yet I'm not allowed by our absurd conventions to utter a single word to her as a man of the same race and the same village, face to face, an old man to a young woman, a wise grand-dad to a hasty child! O how I'd like to describe to you, you darling little creature, exactly what can be picked up of subtle wisdom from these half-burnt logs that are warming us both at this second!"

Lil-Umbra’s eyes were now fixed upon the door of the room, through which there undoubtedly did come at this moment a stir and a murmur as of a noisy and rather excited crowd. Glancing from her profile to the fire the old man couldn’t help noticing a perfect little blue flame that was leaping up and down on the segment of a log that still carried minute patches of greyish lichen upon its crumbling bark.

Then he looked back again at her exquisite profile. How could he, he asked himself, describe to her the very curious elation which he had felt a second ago through all his senses, an elation that gave him now a delicious aftermath of satisfaction, like a wave drawing back over a bank of pebbles? O how he longed to describe to this lovely young girl just what he had felt, and to ask her if she herself a minute ago, when that blue flame was flickering up and down between those logs, had felt anything in the least resembling it! Why was she staring so at the door at this moment? Expecting to be called by her nurse?

“No! I warrant she’s listening intently for the step of some particular young man! Well, if that’s the case,” thought the old man, “she certainly isn’t in the right mood to listen to an elaborate discussion centring round blue flames and burning logs.”

And then it struck the old man that, quite apart from the difficulties of sex, it was a shame that he couldn’t talk to this intelligent and sympathetic young woman about the life-philosophy he had worked out for himself. Since he had handed over the reeveship to his sturdy son, he had had a grand opportunity to work out the whole logical basis of a real life-philosophy that was entirely original and entirely his own.

And what he felt now was that he could make this girl understand things that neither of her brothers, nor Raymond de Laon nor young Sir William Boncor, would be able to apprehend, discoursed he to them never so wisely!

O! why couldn't he now boldly tell this clever little lady that there was such a thing as a subtle trick of so manipulating our nerves and our senses by our mind and our will that we could render ourselves completely independent of the fate that had made us a man, or a woman, or young, or old, or well-born or self-born, or strong, or weak, or naturally courageous, or naturally full of fear?

Why couldn't he tell her about this discovery of his and about its connection with a power he had recently begun to develop in himself, old as he was, the power of getting into touch with something that was almost like consciousness in things that are considered completely inanimate.

It was at this moment that he gave a violent start and looked at Lil-Umbra in such a way that it came near to seriously scaring her.

"Didn't you feel something then, little lady," he cried, "something you never felt before in your whole life, no! not till a minute or two ago? I felt it; and though I've lived more than ten times as long as you, I've never felt anything like it! It was as if our thoughts, your beautiful young thoughts and my ugly old thoughts, had, for a second, yes! for half the beat of the pulse of a second, become one. No doubt it had to do with our sitting in silence by these dancing flames — and then we saw something, something that was standing between us, standing between you on your stool and me in this chair, something that was like that statue of Our Lady in Prior Bog's private refectory — the one that's so dark — dark as a gipsy, dark as a Jewess!"

Not a syllable of all this had been missed by Lil-Umbra, and it had its effect. The thoughts in that preposterously bare skull and in that delicate girlish head *had* in some mysterious unique manner become one, and "Something," as old Heber had put it, had entered the room, had stayed in the room, and had stood or sat or crouched or planted itself between them.

And the thing that had done this *was*, as the young girl knew quite as fully and distinctly as the old man, nothing less than an image, or what the ancient Greeks called an “Eidolon”, of that dark and terribly beautiful woman, whom she had recently seen encountering Lilith of Lost Towers!

What the old man hadn’t sufficiently remembered during this whole interview was that they were waiting for the appearance of Lil-Umbra’s father, under whose authority they would both go to take their places at the first meal of the day. He himself had already swallowed a substantial bowl of barley-meal washed down by a good draught of ale, whereas Lil-Umbra, though she had got up so early and been with Peleg to the Stone Circle, had not tasted a thing. Her nervous agitation at this moment was certainly accentuated by this fasting.

It may even have had something to do with the nervous leap to her feet and the irrepressible cry, almost a little scream, with which she now greeted the opening of the door and the sudden appearance of the very person she was hoping for, namely young Raymond de Laon, accompanied by none other than her recent companion, the Tartar-Jew Peleg.

Polite and friendly, if extremely airy and casual, were the greetings with which young Raymond de Laon saluted the ex-bailiff as he carried off the girl, who herself was so excited that she even forgot to turn her head to nod to the old man till her curls were hidden by young De Laon’s broad shoulders. Peleg however closed the door quietly behind them and came straight up to Heber’s side.

“Has Sir Mort come back?” the old man enquired. Peleg nodded.

“And is this confounded Bonaventura, this ‘General’, if that’s what they call him, of the Friars come too?”

“He’s here now anyway,” answered Peleg, “but you never know with these clerical almighties! He’ll probably stroll round the kitchen first to see what sort of feast there's going to be! Some say he's one for fasting. But I doubt if he can practise that little game when he's travelling! He won't want to get so light that his horse will shake him off like a dead leaf."

Heber smiled his most endearing smile at the tall Mongol.

"Lend me a hand, my boy, will you, to help me up? And, maybe, you'll give me your arm to the dung-house next door, and then help me down to the hall?"

The Jewish Mongol obeyed and gravely helped him to his feet, and while he did so the eyes of both of them were drawn to the fire by a curious dance which a couple of lively blue flames took upon themselves to perform, for the special benefit, it might almost seem, of these two men.

We say "it might almost seem", but as a matter of fact it was a completely different set of impressions that the middle-aged man and the old man derived from that dance. If there really were any sub-human and sub-conscious psychic impulse behind the motion of those two blue flames as they raced up and down that thin strip of pine-wood between a large spruce-log and a small larch-log, both logs having their own particular reaction of this performance, and if this psychic impulse had been interpreted by some new technical machine invented by Friar Bacon, it would at any rate have been made clear that such an impulse was a sub-sexual as well as a sub-human one.

"If Sir Mort," thought Peleg, "supposes that my gratitude is such a slavish thing that I'm going to take passively whatever happens, he really will have to give more attention to my character as a person. I'm ready to serve him in every possible way, but I'm a born fighter and to be nothing but a guiding-dog to a drooling old fellow like this, and nothing but a schoolmaster-nurse to a little Lady First-Love like that pretty child, is not enough. Besides — O hell's damnation take it all!"

This last outcry was due to the fact that the giant suddenly realized for the first time that he'd forgotten to leave his iron mace in its usual hiding-place and had carried it along with him. Its awkward presence in his hand at this moment set him upon imagining a terrific attack upon the fortress by a band of formidable enemies, among whom he now felt himself wildly rushing, in full fighting ecstasy for the House of Abyssum, swinging his club with its iron spikes and converting a crowd of living men into a ghastly heaving mass of bones and hair and flesh and swirling blood.

Whether an invisible spirit, reading the thoughts of Peleg at this moment, would have been shocked at the pictorial images the mind of the giant conjured up, would doubtless depend on the nature of the spirit; but these enemies twisting and jerking, scriggling and wriggling, as Peleg certainly saw them groaning and moaning, weltering and sweltering, howling and mowling, in a blood-red palpitating swirl of bodies and bones and hair and teeth and eyes and entrails, over which, with his free thumb testing the spikes of his weapon, he could stride in triumph while what *had* been living and beautiful bodies fouled his legs with filth, would certainly have disturbed some spirits.

What old Heber saw as that dance of blue flame kept repeating itself in his mind as the Mongol led him away, was nothing less than Friar Bacon's manufactured Brazen Head, enormous in size, hideous beyond all human imagination, and uttering words in a completely unknown tongue, but a tongue that was felt by all who heard it to be a multitudinous voice out of the Infinite.

By the time however that Peleg had got the old man out of the dung-house and back into the passage leading towards the dining-hall, the weird vision or revelation, which proximity to the excited heart of little Lil-Umbra had conjured into the ex-bailiff's hairless skull, had given place to something completely different. But the thing to which it had given place was still quite sufficiently interesting to the old man to compel him to stand still himself and to make the unfortunate Peleg who guided him not only stand still also, but stare along with him at the dusky smoke-begrimed wall of the passage down which they were shuffling.

"Look, look, my good friend, look, I beseech you! Do you see these hieroglyphs on the wall? Shall I tell you what they mean? I know you pass these by, as most people do on their way to the dung-yard, like queer meaningless senseless marks, figures of some sort, mathematical figures, not human ones of course. But what they really are is an oracular announcement, yes! an announcement to the whole world that the idea of there being only three Gods, as the niggardly theologians teach, is a grievous error. There are Four Gods! That is what the great ancient thinker, Pythagoras, taught to his Greek colony in Italy; and that is what I, Heber Sygerius, am now teaching you, Peleg, the Jewish Mongol! Yes! there are Four Gods. But the strange thing that I now understand as I stare at those marks — No! Please, Peleg! Please wait here a minute longer! — is that we have to go to some especial and quite different spot to worship each of these Four Gods!"

Peleg gave vent to a hopeless sigh. "Has the old dotard," he thought, "forgotten that our breakfast is waiting for us?"

Peleg looked desperately up and down the passage that led to the sleeping-rooms of Sir Mort and his lady and the sleeping-rooms of their two sons. He looked at the floor. He looked at the withered knuckles of the old man clutching his arm with the intensity of an aged hawk.

"What in Hell's name can I do?" he asked himself. "Sir Mort will curse me like the devil. He is sure to see us coming in at the bottom of the table. Besides, this old fool's son Randolph will be keeping a place for him, you bet your life, near to the top! Not that *he* won’t be as pleased as Pilate for me to get cursed for not dragging the old fool along more quickly! But, O Jehovah, hear me just this one single time in my life! Let me meet the whole blasted Sygerius family except this poor old doddipole for whom I’ve got some sort of crazy fondness, and I’ll scatter their brains with my iron club on that pretty patch of green grass they’re all so proud of, outside their damned front door!”

His vows of vengeance were interrupted by yet more astonishing behaviour on the part of the old man. He was now turning round in violent jerks and stamping on the ground at each spot, as he faced what he considered the four quarters of the compass.

“*North!*” he muttered in a hoarse and even frightened voice. “That’s the forest of course and Lost Towers. All the worst devils in the whole world come from the north!”

He jerked himself to the right. “*East!*” he cried in an exultant tone. “*That*’s where the miraculous Doctor Bacon is constructing the Brazen Head! *That*’s where the Fourth God will speak one day!” Again he jerked himself round. “*South!*” he cried. “And *that*’s Boncor Castle and all those noble and righteous people!”

And then with a final hop and skip and a fierce clutch from Peleg to keep him from falling: “*South!*” he shouted, “where our Tilton is erecting with spade and hammer and chisel and nails a shrine of his own to Our Blessed Lady!”

“That *must* be the end,” groaned Peleg to himself.

But the old man went on, still keeping them both rooted to that place in front of the wretched blotches on that dark and filthy wall. “Do you know how I discovered that there are Four Gods, Peleg, my friend? I discovered it by the help of another discovery: in fact by finding out that there is a faint dim vague obscure consciousness in everything made by the hands of men! I have found that out for myself, Peleg, my boy! And do you know what else I've found out, my good friend?"

"If this goes on much longer," thought the desperate Mongol, "I'll pick you up, Master Heber, carry you into the dining-hall and lay you down at Sir Mort's feet!"

"I've found out," went on the old man, "that on any piece of earth where old rituals have been going on for six or seven or eight centuries, the actual essence of the substance of the earth begins to stir in its sleep, craving it doesn't know what! Friar Bacon teaches this — did you know that? And he calls this craving by a very curious metaphysical name. He calls it *Privation* — yes, the 'Privation of Matter'."

Peleg groaned. "O he calls it 'Privation', does he?" he murmured hoarsely; and then getting desperate he made a reckless plunge. "I am sorry to hurry you, Master Heber," he began, speaking heavily and with as much effort as if he were forcing the handles of a wooden plough through frozen mind, "but we must hasten to the hall! Tonight after supper it will be most gracious of you if you'll explain to us about the thoughts of sticks and stones and the 'Privation' they suffer when the Blessed Trinity mismanages matters and how the Fourth God eases things up."

His voice was low, but Heber caught quickly enough the new tone in it and yielded without a struggle. But move his feet as fast as he could, it was physically impossible for him to quicken to a run, and while he had breath to walk he had breath to talk.

"Of course," he said, "we needn't believe all those tales about Lost Towers. But there must be something in them. They say that when the bishop laid his hand in blessing on the head of the daughter of that house, drops of such foul-smelling blood followed his ringers when he took them away that everybody else had to leave the church or the chapel or wherever it was, so perfectly appalling was the smell! And of course you've heard how poor old King Henry, who is sick to death while the Lord Edward is crusading nobody knows where, knighted young Will Boncor of Cone the other day in Westminster? The reason for that of course was to keep young Raymond de Laon from going back to France. Young men of his age aren't happy without a comrade. They *have* to go about in pairs or they just die of tedium."

"Tedium, do you call it," cried the Jewish Tartar. "I call it by a different name! But let *that* go!… The point is he's come back, and Cone Castle is stronger than it's ever been in the memory of man! But so also, Master Heber, is the Barony of Lost Towers! Very, very, very strong *that* also has become! And I tell you, Master Heber, I wouldn't like to make my way against that castle, with its forest and its swamp, and its bottomless black moat where the waters go straight down to Gehenna!"

It was at that moment that a flickering torch became suddenly visible, carried round a sharp corner of the passage they were following, and the long, narrow, cadaverous countenance of Sir Mort Abyssum, Lord of the Manor of Roque, made its appearance.

"What in the name of all the angels and of all the devils has been happening to you two?" cried the apparition, as it advanced towards them entirely alone and holding in one hand the torch, now quite useless for there were plenty of lights in the passage now, and in the other a naked sword.

There sometimes arise moments in the lives of men upon earth when there is no human power or human art or human skill, whether of painter or sculptor or musician or poet or tale-teller, that could possibly do what Aristotle called "imitate nature", or what Goethe called "realize the intention of nature", or what Shakespeare and Rubens did without thinking of what they were doing.

On these occasions certain human figures make their appearance where and when there is no onlooker, no observer, no audience, no witness that is possessed of the faintest or remotest understanding of what is being presented to its attention. Its own nature has rendered this awareness as oblivious as fire to water, even when it is about to be put out by it, and as earth to air even when it is about to be dissolved into it. The human figures who thus appear and make not the smallest, faintest, weakest, slightest impression might be described as appearing in a complete void. There is for them, when they appear, a total absence of every conceivable recording and of every possible reflection or memorial.

It was in such a void that the long, narrow, hollow-eyed, hollow-cheeked, ghastly-white visage of the Lord of the Manor of Roque manifested itself on this occasion. But all the same had there been any truth — and perhaps there was some truth — in the discovery by the ex-bailiff of Roque of the semi-consciousness of certain inanimate elements, these walls of the passage between the dung-yard and the dining-hall of that place would have recorded the appearance of a human figure and a human face that seemed to be crying out to the whole universe, from the deepest pit of Hell to the highest peak of Heaven, a protest against life having been created, or having created itself, or having been brought about by chance, after the accursed manner we all know so well.

VI. ROGER BACON

A FEW DAYS after the departure of those disturbing visitors to the Fortress heralded by Spardo and his deformed horse, Roger Bacon in his attic prison in the Priory of Bumset was at work on his *Opus Tertium*. He was seated on a high-backed chair with a well-stuffed black cushion under his buttocks and all his writing materials conveniently before him. These included some specially adaptable pages of parchment cut carefully into folio size and studiously covered with straight lines to guide the writer's pen, save where at certain premeditated places on the page these lines came to an end in order to admit of the insertion of large illuminated capital letters in every shade of colour and designed with every sort of fanciful decoration.

The famous Friar, a beardless, clean-shaved man, gave the impression at first sight of a sedentary person of high rank who might easily have been himself the Prior of Bumset, or rather perhaps, for his air and manners were not entirely ecclesiastical, some highly placed secular lawyer from old King Henry's court in London. Although beardless, Roger was the reverse of bald, and a second glance at his appearance might even have given a stranger the impression, not in this case altogether erroneous, of a man endowed with a certain fastidious self-respect in regard to the appearance and the cleanliness of his own hair and skin.

Roger Bacon always looked a good deal younger than he really was; and very likely it was this dainty youthfulness, both in his look and in his manner, that excited no small part of the almost morbid severity with which he had been treated for some time by the ecclesiastical authorities; that is to say by all except one. This one was Guido Fulcode, who had only taken orders after the death of his wife and who, as a skilful lawyer, had been the lay adviser of Louis IX of France long before, as a cardinal, he became Papal Legate in England in 1263 and was elected Pope in 1265 under the name of Clement IV.

It was only three years ago that this wise ruler of the western world's religion had himself received its last rites; but before he died both Raymond de Laon, and even Raymond's friend, the then extremely youthful John of the Fortress of Roque, had played their part as devoted adherents of Bacon and sometimes even as intermediaries between him and this briefly reigning Pope.

But this interlude of hope and harmony was now over forever; and the incorrigible Friar was left to fight for himself. From the present Pope, Gregory X, a friend of the saintly Bonaventura, he could hope for nothing. The authorities who hated him had in fact got him where they wanted. His revolt had been suppressed; and the influence of his revolutionary metaphysic, allowing such dangerous scope both to experience and to experiment, would now, so his enemies hoped and prayed, die away as quickly as the same sort of curiosity such as the study of astrology, and the same sort of scholarship such as the study of Greek and Hebrew, died away after the death of that over-clever Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, nearly twenty years ago.

The Friar now pushed back his table an inch or two with both hands and jerked back his chair a little. It had suddenly occurred to him that this was certainly the day, and probably the hour too, for the return of his faithful servant whom everybody called "Miles", or just simply "Master Soldier", from an important errand. He had sent him to meet someone on board a ship arriving at the London docks who had been a pupil of the great student of magnetism, Master Peter Peregrinus of Maricourt in Picardy, for he was very anxious to learn if Master Peter had ever, among his many experiments, invented anything in the least resembling a mechanical Head capable of uttering oracles. Roger knew that the pupils of this Petrus Peregrinus were generally as reticent as to what they had learnt from him, as the man himself, save to a very few, was reticent about what he taught; but the Friar hoped the astute Miles would have been able to get from this particular voyager the information he so greatly desired.

Smoothing out a couple of little wrinkly excrescences from the manuscript before him, Roger Bacon now leant back in his chair and contemplated the curtained alcove near his bed where stood his now almost finished Brazen Head, the boldest as well as the most intricate of all his world-changing inventions.

“What it now needs,” he told himself, “is something — something I mean in my own peculiar way of thinking — to play the part for it that the priests assure us is played for us in Baptism. And, I know very well the kind of Baptism that my Head wants. O I know so well!”

And lifting one of his hands from the manuscript before him he rubbed the back of his knuckles against his forehead. “What it wants is the inspiration of Virginity. The best Baptism of all for it would be from an old maid, for old maids — O and don’t I know it! — are the ones who have the Secret. For who in Iscalis taught me the rudiments of Latin, and more than the rudiments of the Lingua Franca, but great-aunt Katharina? And who but Aunt Katharina collected for me what scraps of learning came blowing across the roofs of Iscalis and whirling like drifting leaves through its market-place? One day when they elect a Pope again as interested in learning as Fulcode was, I must write a treatise on all the prophetesses and oracular teachers in human history from the beginning of the world, who have been old maids. I begin to think there is something in the loss of virginity, especially when followed by pregnancy, that destroys the power in a woman to become a medium for that ‘Secretum Secretorum’, that ‘Secret of Secrets’, through which the ultimate Mystery of Life is revealed.”

At this point in his exciting thoughts Friar Bacon rose from his seat at the table and began walking up and down that small room. Any intelligent onlooker peering in upon him through some crack in that chamber’s wall would have noted that the excitement within him was not worrying him or troubling him or making him anxious or distressed. It was filling him with elation.

At last he stopped before the black curtain that concealed this thing of brass which he had created out of nothing. “O Head of all my Labour,” he cried in his heart with a sudden desperate outburst of long-suppressed feeling. “O child of the *essence* as well as of *the being* of my deepest soul! O thou only son of *both* the energies of my soul! If only I could baptize thee with the living spirit of a true Virgin, whether she were an old maid or a young maid, I would be content!”

Suddenly there arose a most extraordinary sound from behind the black curtain which covered that alcove near the head of his bed. “It’s beginning! It’s beginning!” cried the especial self within the Friar that he was so anxious to establish once for all as a soul much more complicated than any of his contemporaries could imagine. And it certainly would have seemed, to any invisible reader of human thoughts, that mingled with this exultation there was a throb of something very like pure unmitigated terror.

“Have I, plain man as I am,” the Friar evidently couldn’t help thinking, “just by my obstinate perseverance in dissecting, as they say Democritus did, every nerve and sinew and fibre in the skulls of the dead, actually played the part, without knowing it, of God? Have I actually created a *rational soul*, above and beyond those others that are engendered out of the substance of Matter? Have I flung this new soul into the machinery of my entirely artificial and purely material Head of Brass, so that it has *come to life*? Have I created an angelic superhuman creature, to be my living oracle for the rest of my days?"

He listened intently for any recurrence of the strange sound he had heard. Was this newly-created Being, he asked himself, going through a period parallel to human babyhood? Was it even now uttering unintelligible and inarticulate babblings?

Yes! By God and Christ! There was that sound again! "I *must* take a look at it!" And although he caught himself in an actual shiver of fear, he rushed to the alcove and pulled the curtain aside! The Brazen Image regarded him with a cold, callous, indifferent, non-human stare. It was a figure constructed to be about the height of a man, but it looked larger than human owing to the fact that it was without legs or arms. It was in fact what in ancient Greek cities used to be called a "Herm" — that is to say, a four-square milestone or miniature obelisk, like the formal pedestal of a classic bust, the bust of an emperor if it were Roman, and of a philosopher if it were Greek.

In the case of this angelic or demonic creation of his, the Brazen Head itself, whose massive base was of marble, rose from this short column as a head might rise from a square neck on narrow shoulders and, as their eyes met, the Head's creator fancied he heard his creation mutter these queer Latin-sounding words: *"Birginis, Sirginis, Fligrinis, Virginis."*

Roger Bacon behaved now as if he were indeed so excited by the result of his creative power that he felt an emotion filling him at one and the same moment with joy and fear. Hurriedly he pulled back the black curtain over the Brazen Head. And it was then that any crafty spy peering in at him — *not* from the window where the sweet-scented twilight hovered over the tops of the forest-trees and through which a lovely air was blowing, but through a crack in one of the other three walls — would have heard him give an exultant little cry: “By Christ, I’d forgotten! Didn’t a voice wake me in the night with the word ‘ghosta’?”

And then such a spy would have seen him rush with the excitement of a boy in his teens to a small square of wood set among the bare boards of that attic-chamber and marked with the letter “A”. This piece of wood the excited Friar extracted neatly from its fixed position, using his nails to achieve this result, and bending down above the orifice, stared at a vellum-covered volume that lay hidden there, on the outside of which was written in bold purple letters the words *Fons Vitae Avicebron*, “You are my master and teacher.” He thought as he stared at these words, “You, you, *you*, more than anyone else in the world!”

And as he bent and stared at that title *Fons Vitae* and at that name *Avicebron*, he made one of the greatest efforts he had ever made in his life to visualize, as if they really could be apprehended by our ordinary senses, that plurality of separate souls within us, of which he had finally decided that what we generally call, and feel too often enough, to be our normal human soul, actually is composed.

Intensely he struggled, as he stared at the name of his admired Jewish thinker, actually to visualize the primal elements in these souls of ours that he had come to the conclusion arise automatically within the body by the potentiality of matter itself and have no connection with the *rational soul* which is created directly, immediately, and instantaneously, by God Himself, and created ready and prepared to be joined with the body, as soon as the infant, already possessed of the primal elements of its soul, is born into this world.

At this moment as he stared at that square hole in the floor, at the title *Fons Vitae*, only just visible in the growing twilight, and at the name *Avicebron*, whose darkened letters he had to supply from his own head, he saw the first evolution of the primal soul within the womb as a wave of incurving, ingathering, insatiable water, desperately craving nourishment and rushing furiously through the solidest as well as through the softest substances, and possessed of the swallowing mouth of a hungry fish. And he saw the second evolution of this same primal soul as a wave of quivering vapour, rushing also through everything, but endowing the matter out of which it springs, the matter that is from the start able to engender it, with all the reactions of our human senses.

And at that intense moment he actually saw the *rational soul* which he had admitted must be directly created by God, saw it as a flame of something more than ordinary fire, saw it indeed as a flame created in the shape of a man-god, a flame that could wholly possess the body and yet according to its own will and pleasure could reach out from the body to which it has been joined and inspire other bodies.

"O, if I could only decide," the Friar cried in his excited heart, "what to think about the embryo of an infant, within a pregnant mother, before it is born into this world at all and before it is given its God-created *rational soul*! O I must think and think how you, our Jewish Master of all Masters, would have dealt with this problem of the embryo had you been called upon to consider it!"

With this question in his mind Roger Bacon bent down and replaced the square piece of wood and rose to his full height. "A Jewish Maid," he thought triumphantly, "after a Jewish Sage! That's the way I'll give new life to the Brazen one! Yes! you've been yourself a ghost for years, *Avicebron*, and it was your teaching about the pluralism of the soul that set me thinking first — just *why* I have no notion: it is all a mystery — of creating our Brazen one, even as God creates the *rational soul* within us! And now that I've looked at your book I know that it was you who put it into my mind in the night to cry out the name Ghosta!"

Friar Bacon now went back happily and quietly to his chair and table and to that piece of foolscap parchment half-covered with his quite legible but by no means very elegant handwriting. But he soon had to put down his pen again, for he was interrupted by the familiar sound, not of any Master Miles returning from London, but of the heavy steps of lay-brother Tuck, ascending the narrow turret-stairs to his low-roofed chamber, bringing him his supper.

It was a beautifully tranquil and by no means a very cold twilight that had by this time diffused itself over all the western provinces of our Island, and pleasant pine-wood scents mingled with the nutty waftures from the well-spiced apple-pasty that Brother Tuck, the moment he entered, carefully set down in the middle of the empty square space on the table from which Roger Bacon had hurriedly cleared all his papers.

In the depths of his pluralistic soul the Friar was now repeating over and over to himself the name "Ghosta", but he said, "Sit down, Brother," in the particular tone of a person who murmurs almost mechanically, "And now we come back to real life."

And when Brother Tuck had jerked into position a chair of the same shape as the one occupied by the Friar and containing a cushion of identically the same colour and size, the latter added the words: "And you might, if you don't mind, get the bottle and glasses"; a suggestion that was taken with the quickest alacrity. From a small shelf in an open recess near the door was extracted a beautifully heavy and almost opaque cut-glass container half-full of the reddest Burgundian wine from which, when it stood between them on the table, the Brother filled both their glasses.

Then followed, but with the same matter-of-fact, mechanical inevitability, a very curious gesture, traditional in Bumset Priory — a gesture that Raymond de Laon was wont to declare he had heard from none other than the Papal Legate to this country who subsequently became Clement IV, was prehistoric and pre-Christian, and went back to the days of Homer and Hesiod, when, before touching any wine, you had to sprinkle drops of it on the ground and on the air. What in fact both the men did now was to dip their longest finger into their glass and lightly flip a few drops of the wine they were about to drink towards each other.

"Here's news for you, my friend and God's friend," Brother Tuck began. "The Mother Superior next door, you know, has now got a really extraordinary Jewish girl to help the old nun who cooks for them. That poor old bitch — if you'll excuse me, sir — has never had time enough to cook properly; to cook, I mean, things that she herself enjoys. She spends half her time carrying dishes around to sick nuns. But now, with this new girl there, things are going, Prior Bog assures me, so marvellously well that Sister Mandrake, the nun who cooks for them, is happy again, and poor old Serga Kathalorum has found time to look round her a bit and enjoy life a little — found time to feel that being a Mother Superior isn't quite the worst fate that could have befallen a god-fearing elderly respectable lady. Pardon me, Master Friar, but has any new devil entered your mind, like that one that made you say, 'Time is Past' over and over, just as if it were 'et cum Spiritum tuum'?"

Brother Tuck emptied his glass, holding it to his lips in order that its last drops — drops that were no doubt called "the dregs" in countries where certain accumulations of strongly-smelling residue could always be drained from the bottom of wine-glasses — and then, having allowed his uplifted eye-balls — and while he did this his expression resembled that of a frog, with its chin on a lily-leaf, searching the empyrean for thunder — to scour the discoloured interior of the glass he was holding, he repeated “cum Spiritum tuum” in a dying fall of unction that resolved itself, ere it passed wholly away, into a diffused question.

VII. THE INVOCATION

Brother Tuck was still gazing with an uneasy relaxed interrogatory stare into the abstracted eyes before him, and across the empty glass and the full glass, when to his startled and rather shocked surprise he saw the Friar rise slowly to his feet.

“Please answer me, Brother Tuck, my old friend,” said the risen man gravely. “No! Stay as you are. Don’t get up. Here, drink my glass. I can have another later. But it’s necessary for me to ask you rather an important question. What’s this new girl’s name? I mean this one you’re talking about, who is such a help to Serga Kathalorum at the Convent, and to the old nun — Sister Mandrake they call her, don’t they? — who does their cooking?

“No, don’t get up, old friend. Stay where you are. It’s for the person who is asking the questions to stand. But it’s important to me and important purely for myself. Yes, you must understand *that*, Brother Tuck. You mustn’t think I am asking you for any reason except a special peculiar, and quite definite one of my own. But to me this matter is of extreme importance; for it has to do with the particular thing I’m working on just now, namely — though I don’t want to bother you, old friend, with these peculiarly difficult matters — the question as to how far at any definite point in the passing of time — you can see roughly, old friend, can’t you, what I’m talking about? — our natural human apparatus for looking ahead can be used for purposes of prediction and how far it must hopelessly collapse; and why I asked you about this person, Tuck, my friend, was because — —”

At this moment not only did a sudden gust of wind from the north cause the wooden framework of the small window to shake, but an agitated yellowhammer, with wings and feathers ruffled and with nerves and brain confused and befuddled to such a degree by an airy panic emanating from a whirling flock of frightened starlings, that everything in the world except that little, low-roofed philosophic chamber seemed all beak and claws, burst into the room, and aware of Brother Tuck's square shoulders stooping over two glasses and Friar Bacon's bottle-neck shoulders erect over nothing, flung itself in a wild panic against the three walls in front of it, and fell dead on the floor before reverting to the fourth.

Both men went to pick up the bird, and there was something almost like a boyish scuffle between them as to which should reach it first. In the event, attained in two seconds, it was Friar Bacon who got the motionless creature into his hands and smoothed down its feathers and let its head fall limp across his thumb.

"Well! tell me now, Tuck, old friend; has this new girl at the convent got a name that suggests death or anything to do with death?" As he spoke the Friar lifted the bird's head from the back of his thumb just about an eighth of an inch and then let it sink down again. "Anything to do with Death, old friend, that's the question. And when you've answered I'll tell you exactly why I put this question to you. But sit down again, and I'll sit down too. It's queer, isn't it, how much more tiring it is to stand than to walk?"

Both the men were silent, looking at each other across the table, the Friar mechanically caressing the dead bird on his lap and the Lay-Brother mechanically running his finger round the edge of the wine-glass that was nearest to him. If only one among Friar Bacon's unrealized inventions had been present then that had the power, the moment you touched a particular knob, of uttering in a strong firm voice the thoughts of each person in turn, towards whose cranium, whether hairy or bald, the spear-point of its machinery had been directed, what a moment this would have been for a perfect proof as to how the most unorthodox, improper, shameless, outrageous thoughts flit through the heads of upright, honest, and thoroughly good men busy with entirely blameless activities!

For Brother Tuck wondered how soon Prior Bog would detect something amiss if he, Tuck of Abbotsbury, fried his own excrement for the Priory supper; and Roger of Ilchester wondered whether it would be possible for a female yellow-hammer to lay eggs if she were impregnated by a dead mate who had been galvanized into momentary sexual excitement by a thunderstorm.

“Please tell me, Tuck,” enquired Bacon earnestly, “whether any idea, even the very remotest idea of Death entered the mind of the baptizer when he was baptizing this new girl at work in the convent?”

It was then that it happened to Lay-Brother Tuck, that calm, well-balanced, and practical person upon whose competence all Bumset Priory depended, to leap up from that perilous round table and from a mouth as wide open as a water-rat’s hole in a river-bank to utter an astounded “O! O! O! O!” For it was one thing to give poor Prior Bog the only pleasure he got from life in the form of at least one more delicious meal before the sun went down again in the phantom waves of the sea of time, but it was quite a different thing to find that a weird Friar, doing penance among them for heaven alone could say what mysterious sins, could actually know by some magic power what other people had to find out by long years of seeing and hearing and feeling.

“You don’t mean to say that you knew her name was Ghosta before I told you!”

Roger Bacon rose from his seat using self-conscious deliberation, where the other used thoughtless haste.

"Certainly I knew *the sort of name* she had. I can't swear I ever actually uttered the word 'Ghosta' to myself; but now that you've uttered it it seems curiously natural to me, almost as if I'd known it all my life."

There was now between the two men on their feet almost as significant a silence as there had been when they were seated. Of this the Friar was fully and completely aware. It is indeed quite possible that in the whole of the west country from Poole to Penzance there was then no living man who was more self-conscious than Roger Bacon. He had been born so, and from his earliest boyhood he had deliberately developed this birthright.

It had been from the start his daily habit to tell himself exciting stories; and the essence of these stories, their burden and the secret of their enchantment, was the fact that young Roger was always imagining himself, or better say discovering himself, to be surrounded by a motley multiplicity of objects, belonging to the four levels of existence, namely of human beings, of sub-human beings, of vegetable beings, and of mineral substances.

And as Roger Bacon grew older and began his studies at the Universities of Oxford and Paris, this intense consciousness of the various existences, whether animate, or inanimate, that surrounded him at any given moment, including his own self-consciousness, came to be the supreme interest of his whole life. His temperament and general nervous sensibility were such that he could not help feeling a special and quite personal "rapport" with each one of these various existences: and for good and ill each of them affected him profoundly.

Thus at this moment our morbidly self-conscious Friar was aware of a curious contest in his soul, between a desire to lie down in delicious relaxation and deep peace within the pale light-green eyes of the honest Tuck and a desire to go on gazing at the dead yellowhammer, until, through its body, he was able to pursue its soul till he found it re-incarnated in a tiny snow-white hair-like fungus, wherein it would have to await the mating-moment of a new pair of yellowhammers.

This latter desire of the insatiable scholar having thus been gratified, he was suddenly seized with a pang of remorse for not having already thrown the bird's little feathered corpse out of the window so that the first-born of the innumerable little worms that were bound to be engendered out of the putrefying corpse beneath those tender feathers might not perish in being thus separated from the elements.

"I'll run down with it presently," he thought, "and put it somewhere, where — —" And then he remembered what in following in his mind that small corpse's corruption he'd entirely forgotten — that he was, save for certain appointed hours each day, a prisoner in this chamber.

"Do you know, my friend, from what race or from what country," Friar Bacon now enquired of Tuck, "this Ghosta-girl comes?"

It was always a great comfort to brother Tuck to be asked any direct and simple question by the Priory's illustrious captive and he brightened up enormously at this.

"Yes, indeed I do," he hurriedly replied. "Ghosta's a Jewess from Mesopotamia or Dalmatia or somewhere not very far from the Red Sea; in fact I daresay quite near to the River Jordan."

He spoke with profound satisfaction. And indeed it was wonderful to him that he, Brother Tuck, chief cook to Prior Bog of Bumset, could teach their learned captive something of which he was entirely ignorant.

Roger Bacon let his massive head sink heavily down, letting it fall in front of him till his chin seemed to rest upon the centre of his chest, midway between his breast-bones. While he did this, he closed his eyes, and fell into a momentary trance of deep thinking. But no wrinkle, no frown, no furrow, appeared on the broad expanse of his forehead, nor were his arched eyebrows drawn together.

Tuck watched him with absorbed reverence; for the cook felt exactly as he felt sometimes when a thin film of exquisitely delicate yellow-brown, which faintly resembled pure gold, yet wasn't really like pure gold, began to appear on the surface of what he was cooking.

Then Roger raised his head with a jerk, while Tuck noticed, and not for the first time either, that when the Friar was excited by some daring or original idea, it was not so much that his eyes shone as that an intense inner flame, like a magic candle burning in his very midriff, suddenly revealed itself *through his eyes*.

"Listen, my friend," Roger Bacon exclaimed, bending forward a little, and while with the exterior portion of his eyes he stared through the body of his interlocutor, and, as it seemed, through the wall of his cell, and even across the swaying tops of the forest-trees, he was unable to stop the gleaming flame of his new idea from magnetizing the amazed Tuck.

"Listen," he repeated. And then, in a perfectly calm and easy tone, while he re-possessed himself once more of the corpse of the yellowhammer. "What I want you to do, my faithful one, is to bring this Jewish maid up here to me so that I can ask her a few important questions. No! You needn't look so scared. You'll be here all the time she's here! I haven't the faintest wish to enjoy her, far less ravish her. All I want is to talk to her. But I want to be absolutely frank and open with you, old friend, and there is, I confess, one other thing I want with her — no! don't look like that! It's nothing whatever to do with sex. It's only that being a virgin — for I know from my own experience that the Jews are very particular about the virginity of their maids — she'll have it in her to give the final touch to the Brazen Head over there!"

Thus speaking, he pointed with the hand that held the feathered body towards a large alcove at the foot of his small bed — an alcove which at that moment was covered by a heavy velvet curtain hanging from a cord. Intimately well-known to every living soul in both the Priory and Convent of Bumset was that alcove in the cell of their inventive prisoner; for, of all the magical creations of this extraordinary person, his Brazen Head with the power of speech — and indeed, so it seemed to some among them, with the power of thought too — was the most astounding.

"O! of course, Doctor of all Doctors," murmured Brother Tuck with low-breathed obeisance, "anything I can do or this Hebrew Virgin can do to help with your Head of Brass *must* be done; since the Head, as we all know, is what alone can save our country and our king from destruction."

"Nothing," thought Roger Bacon, "that I have ever done in the interest of my life's work was more effective with the populace than when I told Fulcode, before he was Cardinal or Legate, that I was trying to make an Ark of the Tabernacle for the Nameless One of Israel that should protect us from our enemies as the Jewish Ark protected the Chosen People from the Philistines. Fulcode scattered that story about the Brazen Head being Britain's peculiar and special magical Protector. It is Fulcode's spreading of that tale that has protected my work from Bonaventura's hatred more than anything else! Well! while it protects my inventions it *does* protect my king and my country. The Legate could have soon found out, if he made any enquiries, how completely my family ruined itself by helping the King against the Barons. Anyone who knows anything at all knows how much more liberty there has been under poor old Henry than there's ever been under the Barons and their accurst house of De Montford!"

“Listen to me, Tuck, my dear friend,” he said aloud. “The practical question for us now is how to get this girl through the entrance-hall and all those passages and up the stairs to this room. And what I’ve thought of is this. You know how often great fish are found stranded on Weymouth sands and on Chesil Beach? Well then! Why shouldn’t I have developed a mania for trying to bring to life dolphins and porpoises and other large fish by various secret methods of my own? And why shouldn’t you explain all this to the girl and persuade her to let you carry her — wrapped up of course so that nothing of her is visible — through those front passages and up these stairs? If you did it after the evening meal, there wouldn’t be many people about, and those you did meet would be sufficiently dazed with meat and drink as not to be very observant or very astute in explanation of what they *did* see! Do you think you could manage to do this tomorrow night, Tuck? It would be a good night for it, because, if it’s not cloudy, this new Moon will be having a steady influence by then.”

The artful cook of Bumset Priory nodded knowingly, made a hurried sign of the cross upon the air in the direction of the small window, and had already turned to go, when Bacon exclaimed:

“O please take this, will you, Tuck, and bury it somewhere? Bury it *just* underground, not more than an inch or two deep — you can make a hole with a stick, or anything you find under your hand: it needn’t be deep down — but I want it to be quickly and properly eaten by worms, not flown away with by carrion-crows, or lugged off down a rat-hole! See what I mean, Tuck, my old friend? And bring — —”

It was at this moment before the cook departed, and in the dead silence between them created by a simple instruction on one side and unquestioning obedience on the other, that a faint tap upon the door of the cell became audible. Being quite close to it, the departing Tuck opened it immediately, but the figure standing on the threshold surprised him so much that he hurriedly drew back to let it enter, and then, with what was clearly a strong feeling that the more closely confined to the chief participants concerned this encounter was, the better for all it would be, he cautiously and very secretively closed the door behind the intruding figure and returned into the room.

The new-comer was obviously, and both men saw it at once, of the female sex, although she was well muffled in a black mantle. But the slope of the shoulders and what was visible of the ankles and feet would have betrayed her, even if, though her hair was hidden, the delicate whiteness of her face and the size of her dark liquid eyes had not revealed a most magnetic femininity.

Roger Bacon walked straight up to her and taking off her cloak handed it to the somewhat disturbed Tuck, who kept muttering, half audibly and half inaudibly, what the Friar, and probably the girl too, recognized as the opening words of a familiar Latin collect; but who now, dragging a chair from beneath the table and carrying it to the wall near the foot of the bed, sat down with an air of patient submission to inexplicable proceedings and covered his knees with the girl's cloak.

"I came my lord Doctor, because I had one of my presentiments that you would be glad to talk to me. As Brother Tuck may have told you, I've come to help in the Convent; but being — as perhaps you can see from my appearance — of foreign extraction, in fact of Palestinian Hebrew blood, I am at present without friends. But I've heard that there's an armour-bearer, or whatever the name for that office may be in your country, in the Fortress of Roque, whom I once met in the East and whom I would most dearly love to meet again. He is easy to describe to you, my lord Doctor, as he resembles Goliath of Gath or Samson of Israel, being in fact what all over the world is called a giant. His lord and master here, they tell me, finds him — —”

At this point Friar Bacon firmly, though very gently, interrupted her and led her to his bed, upon which, almost within arm’s length of where Brother Tuck’s chair stood against the wall, he made her seat herself.

“What did you mean just now,” the scholar enquired, standing over her with a certain judicial authority, although still very gently and kindly, “by your presentiment? Oh yes! And may I ask you at once whether I am right in calling you Ghosta? I don’t at all want, my dear daughter, to be rudely inquisitive, but would it be ill-mannered of me to ask you whether your parents gave you this unusual name?”

The girl gave him a confiding, responsive, and grateful smile. “It’s rather a long story,” she began, “and I don’t like, O most admirable Doctor, keeping you standing while I tell it.”

“O it’s good for me,” said the Friar quickly. “I’ve been sitting all day — so please go on.”

The girl took him at his word, and glancing quickly round, as if to make sure she was only keeping the learned Friar, and not the Priory cook too, in a standing position, she permitted herself to indulge in quite a long biographical narrative.

“I expect it’s Jewish ancestry,” she began, “that really explains these queer *presentiments*. I call them that; but I’ve been told in the Convent that I ought to give them a different name. But never mind the name! *You* will know, O most admirable Doctor, much better, I expect, than I do, what these things are. But you see my grandfather was a Rabbi. Both my parents” — here the girl arranged herself more comfortably on the Friar’s bed, evidently reassured a great deal by the way he was standing at ease and listening with what looked like most attentive interest— “were murdered in a crusading massacre soon after I was born. It was my great-aunt Rebecca who took care of me. She gave me my name to bear witness to her conversion to the Christian Faith; for she always believed that it was a special intervention by the Holy Ghost that led to her acceptance of Christ as her God. Great-aunt Rebecca's belief in this has struck many people as both presumptuous and blasphemous. But knowing Aunt Rebecca so well, and having lost in her when she died the only person in the world I've ever understood, or indeed have wanted to understand, until I met the man they now swear to me is armour-bearer at the Fortress, it's impossible for me to feel that her name for me was blasphemous. As for these 'presentiments', as I call them, though there's a nun where I work who swears to me that 'intimations' would be a better word, I put *them* down, myself, entirely to my Jewishness. Aunt Rebecca taught me to read Hebrew, and my favourite reading all my life has always been the Books of Moses; and Moses was always being told what to do directly out of the mouth of the Nameless One who was the God of Israel, known only by the Four Mystic Letters '*Y.H.W.H.*.'

"And it's no doubt from reading the Books of Moses so much that there come moments — not in sleep you must understand, but in reveries or trances or wanderings of thought, when I seem to hear the voice of the God of Israel speaking to me and telling me to do something. And three times lately this voice has come to me and said: 'Go to the cell of the Admirable Doctor and talk to him' ——

"But, O most admirable lord Doctor, I see that Brother Tuck here whom" — and she turned her lustrous eyes to the still uneasy cook sitting awkwardly against the wall with her cloak across his knees— "whom I already know quite well by sight, has brought you your supper," and she made a gesture with one of her hands towards the great apple-pasty on the table, "so I oughtn't to stay any longer."

At this point she gave a quaintly reckless little laugh. “But the truth is, O most admirable Doctor, I keep hearing — it’s very faint, you know, but I’ve learnt from experience to catch it — the far-off voice of the Nameless One of Israel telling me that there’s some way in which I can help you with something that’s very much on your mind. Of course you may feel from your worship of a Trinity, where Jesus Christ is the centre if not the circumference, that this Voice of the Nameless One, speaking to me in the same Voice wherein it spoke to Miriam the sister of Moses, means little, or as far as a Christian is concerned, nothing at all; but my voice tells me you don’t and cannot treat it so lightly. O my Lord, O most admirable Doctor, I do beg and beseech you to tell me — —” Here the girl leapt up from the Friar’s bed and stood erect before him with her back to the disturbed and agitated cook— “to tell me what it is that the Voice keeps commanding me to do for you!”

Very calmly and quietly Friar Bacon took the situation into his own hands. He showed himself as skilful at the stage-management of human puppets as he did at the invention of automatic and mechanical ones. He was indeed soon standing with his left hand on the sleeve of brother Tuck and his right on the elbow of Ghosta.

He had already induced the former to hide the corpse of the yellowhammer in his tunic-pocket, and the latter to take the mantle the man had been holding and place it on the bed; and now they were, all three, in unencumbered freedom of action confronting the mysterious black curtain behind which was the Brazen Head.

Releasing Ghosta’s arm, but retaining his hold on Tuck’s sleeve, the Friar now drew aside this curtain from the most renowned shrine not only in Britain but, save for the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, in the whole world, and as he did so he was aware of a shivering motion in the muscles and nerves of both his companions, as if they were being compelled to make an involuntary prostration before the revealed mystery.

But he did not give them time for the smallest unrehearsed gesture. “What I want *you* to do,” he said to Tuck, “is to prop up the Head and to steady it and prevent it from falling while I lift our maid upon its shoulder,” and to Ghosta he said, “I want *you* to arrange your garments as if you were intending to make water, so that it is from contact with your nakedness that the Head looks forth upon the world.”

It was in an incredibly short space of time, after giving the man and the woman these precise instructions, that Friar Bacon got both of them, and got the Brazen Head as well, into the position he desired; and the expression on the countenance of that Brazen Head, as its powerfully moulded eyes and ears and nose and mouth looked forth from between Ghosta’s thighs and from under her naked belly, was like the expression in a marble head of the god Hermes, attributed to Praxiteles, that a nameless crusade had recently brought to the King’s house in London.

“Will you both, if you don’t mind,” the Friar murmured, “since the ancients knew, long before the Mother of God was revealed to us, the divine power of virginity, follow me in repeating the sounds of an ancient invocation, the exact meaning of which has been lost to the world for two thousand years?”

And so slowly and clearly did Roger Bacon utter these evidently latinized syllables that neither Ghosta in her extravagant position, nor Tuck using all his strength and all his intelligence to keep the Image and its Burden upright, had any difficulty in repeating them after him: *Birginis, Sirginis, Fliginis, Virginis;* and these simple sounds had hardly died away, and the curious white light which the cunning art of the inventor had caused to play over the countenance of the Bronze Head had scarcely faded, when the Friar lifted Ghosta down upon her feet and handed her her mantle. Then he removed from the foot of his bed a cloak of his own and wrapped it round Brother Tuck. “Better take her to the Convent yourself,” he said gravely. “Two cloaked figures won’t excite the same interest as one alone. I shall pray for you both very particularly this night. You have helped me greatly.”

VIII. THE MAN OF GOD

"It was indeed a special act of Providence," replied the General of the Franciscan Order of Friars from his seat on the back of the deformed animal known to its owner as Cheiron, "that we met at those cross-roads. I should have had to spend the night under these pines if we hadn't; because to tell you the truth, my good Master Spardo, nothing would have made me stop hunting for this Castle of Lost Towers except falling dead in my tracks or being killed by a wolf."

The satisfaction of the General of the Grey Friars in the absoluteness of his God-Intoxication was so deep that the ground beneath Cheiron's hooves seemed to rise to meet it. Unseen by the borrower of the deformed beast, Spardo wiped a blob of bird's dropping from the back of one of his hands upon the fringe of the ecclesiastical garment dangling at the animal's side.

"How did it happen, if your reverent generalship will not take offence at the question, that you, whom we all call the Seraphic Doctor, should be wandering about alone without a single servant?"

This not altogether unexpected question helped the bubbling spring of Bonaventura's self-love to overflow again.

"I've got the best of all possible ones *now*, haven't I?" he replied to Spardo, with an ingratiating smile. "Didn't you tell me just now that you were unemployed?"

"Hitherto," replied the bastard son of the King of Bohemia, "it has been my destiny to serve laymen: lordly laymen, it is true, and persons not devoid of coins of silver and coins of gold, but people tell me that great churchmen like thyself, O most Seraphic Doctor, are very particular and very exacting about the way your food is prepared and your off-scourings disposed of and your garments kept clean. I can see at this actual moment, O most saintly of doctors, several very filthy stains on your beautiful grey mantle, due no doubt — no! I'm not being rude to you, my lord doctor; I'm just indicating the absolute necessity that men like yourself who are so spiritual and so sensitive, and who so feel very, very, *very* far from the stupid unenlightened masses of men, and just as far from their stupid unenlightened authorities — —"

"Silence, man! Who has taught you to talk like that? Are we not all equal before God? Are we not all equally stupid and ignorant in the presence of his holy spirit? Are we not all equally selfish and greedy and lascivious and treacherous and deceitful under the blinding fire of his eternal righteousness and the terrible thunder of his fearful truth?"

The deformed Cheiron was so agitated by this threatening voice so close to his ears that he came to a stop and began trembling from head to tail.

"To whom have you been listening?" repeated the grey-robed rider on Cheiron's back. "*You*, fresh from our religious France and our more than religious Italy, *you*, a wanderer across Christian Europe from the idolatries of the East, where, I ask you, have *you* picked up this devilish talk about ignorant masses and stupid authorities? Have *you* been listening to this Satanic sorcerer who has dared to assume the dress of a Friar just because he has lost his money, this thrice-accurst Roger Bacon? Or are all the misbegotten islanders in this Godforsaken Britain of yours so savage that if anyone wants to win their favour they've got to talk to them in this unholy way? But do you really think, O most generous of all possible wanderers through haunted forests, that you can go on guiding me to Lost Towers? You seem to me, Master Spardo, a rather tired and worn-out man yourself. I can't help seeing that you drag your feet very heavily, and even kick the tree-stumps and the earth-mounds and the fallen logs as you go along; and I noticed just now that your eyes kept shutting of their own accord, as if at any moment you might fall asleep as you walked.”

“We shan’t be much longer now, reverend lord,” replied Spardo, “and once there I may find a place where I can sleep in their kitchen and my horse may be able to sleep in their stable, while you, being entertained by Baron Maldung and Lady Lilt, will come to your own conclusion about their daughter Lilith, of whom rumour round here says things I won’t repeat to a sacred gentleman like yourself.”

After that brief summary of the situation, the three of them moved on, with the saintly Bonaventura in the saddle, with Cheiron on his faithfully plodding four legs, and with Spardo’s weary head and half-closed eyes drooping and nodding more and more heavily.

Spardo’s thoughts, in spite of what he had just said, were by no means in any kitchen. They were in a much grander place. He was imagining himself luxuriating on heaps of soft cushions and sipping the particular kind of French wine, of a yellowish tint, which from his Bohemian childhood he had always loved best of all the wines in the world.

As for Bonaventura, he was thinking very hard, as he rode on, about his own future destiny. “If I continue,” he was saying to himself, “as effectively as I have done hitherto, in dominating my lower nature by my higher nature; if, in fact, I do attain in the eyes of the world the reputation of being a real saint, will this reputation interfere with my chance, for there can be no doubt I have a very good chance, of being elected Pope?

“Of course it does satisfy me to a mighty large extent to dominate my lower nature like I do, and to feel that in me, and to feel that others feel that in me, the Will of God triumphs over the Will of Satan. But with a character like mine it isn’t enough to dominate Satan in myself; I feel an imperative need to dominate Satan in others too. Yes! and not only in individuals. I feel a need to dominate Satan in groups, classes, societies, tribes, races, countries, nations, hemispheres, worlds! But my real life is my inward life. And I and God alone know the majestic secrets of my inner life.

"The wonderful thing about me, and the thing wherein I differ most from ordinary people, is that I don't want to dominate the world by action. I want to dominate it by just being what I am; by just being myself. And in this I resemble Jesus Christ. I and God alone know what a destiny-changing moment it was in the history of Christendom when Saint Francis sought me out, among all the rest, and gave me that gift of Healing which he gave to nobody else.

"But what I and God alone know is a yet deeper secret even than that; a secret that I would not have let God know if I hadn't decided he would have found it out for himself; the way my mother before I was born felt me give a leap in her womb every time God was mentioned. She even — and this deep secret nobody in the world knows but I and God — she even prayed to God all night long, while my father by her side was snoring like a Lombardy hog, that just one tiny little infinitesimal drop of God's holy ethereal spiritual and invisible seed might mingle with the substance of their earthly terrestrial and mundane seeds, when she and my father became one in my begetting.

"Yes! I and God, alone in all the world, heard that prayer of my mother; and I and God, alone in all the world, know how lovely the face of my mother was — how it was transformed, transfigured, illuminated, entranced, and beside itself with mystical love, when she made that prayer. For I was in you, then, God, wasn't I, and not in my mother's womb? O how can I thank you enough, God, for separating me from, and selecting me out of, and putting me above, the myriads of ordinary souls whereof the world is so full! But I must think, think, *think*, whether it would be better for me, from now on, to go forward increasing my spirituality as a saint, or to develop that other side of sanctity which is quite as deeply natural to me and implanted in me — the sort of wisdom that Solomon had when he decided between those two women with the living baby and the dead baby. That is the sort of wisdom we need in our Pope, and if I were Pope, I would have the greatest opportunity anyone could have in the whole world to make people obey the will of God as opposed to the will of Satan.

"Perhaps," so Bonaventura's thoughts ran on, "the inspiration of mine about converting to God and His Church this whole outpost of Devilry they call Lost Towers does really and truly combine both the spirituality and the wisdom of a true saint. But suppose this devil of a Baron Maldung puts me to death?"

He gave a little gasp like a frog in a cave at the striking of flint and steel. "Well, in *that case* I wonder how far my — —" But Bonaventura's thoughts of spiritual advancement and of everlasting felicity were now interrupted by the sound of a horn quite close to them; and he quickly turned to his companion, who was evidently, although still plodding along by Cheiron's side, so nearly asleep that he could hear nothing.

"What's that over there? Did you hear that? For God's sake, listen, man! It's just the other side of those trees!"

Spardo slowly turned his head causing his long, slender, wispy beard to brush away several flies from Cheiron's deformity. "Yes, by Holy Jesus I do hear it," he groaned, "and what's more, O most seraphic of doctors, I can tell you whose horn it is! It's the horn of Bailiff Sygerius and I expect he's calling for one of his own rascally boys! The fellow hasn't been bailiff for more than six months. His dad, old Heber Sygerius, has only just given up the job, and I rather — —"

Spardo was interrupted by an inrush upon them of several persons. A broad-shouldered, obstinate-looking, middle-aged man, who obviously was the bailiff in question, pushed forward through some closely growing pine-tree trunks, and advanced into the open, making, as he did so, several rough and brutal jerks to get rid of the hold upon his sleeve of an old and extremely agitated serf, who in his turn was clutching the hand of a little girl, who, with big frightened eyes, surveyed the two men and the deformed horse as if they had been beings from another world.

The bailiff made the appropriate gesture of respect to the man on the horse, who was obviously, although in the garb of a Franciscan Friar, some sort of high-ranking ecclesiastic from abroad.

"Pardon me for disturbing you like this, reverend Father, but I must settle the affair of this troublesome fellow before I can pay my proper respects to you."

The serf's voice had a piercingly pitiful tone of appeal which arrested Spardo's critical attention at once. "You're taking our whole life, master bailiff," the old man was saying, "when you take away our horse. My daughter has a good job in the Convent's washhouse and her children are good children; but if you take away our horse, considering my son's dead, you take the bread out of all our mouths."

It would have been clear to any less self-absorbed listeners than the two men upon whom this group of people flung itself, that in the familiar pleading tone of her grand-dad's voice there was something that spread a reassuring atmosphere round the child who was holding his hand. Tragic enough though the old man's words were, there were so many use-and-wont associations aroused in her by his special tone that her eyes ceased to be so big and scared.

It even began to be exciting to her to watch this weird horse's neck, with what really looked like a human head growing out of it, while the man with the feathery beard, like the moulting tail of Granny's jackdaw, seemed to be making funny faces at her, as if he wanted her to play a game with him.

It was early afternoon by now, and the rays of the February sun were shimmering between the pine branches at an angle about midway between earth and sky.

"I tell you, master bailiff, if you take our horse it will be just simply a death-sentence to us all!"

"Pardon me, holy sir," said the bailiff, looking straight into the twitching, high-coloured face of Bonaventura, whose excited eyes, always very prominent, were now literally bulging from his head; "pardon me till I've dealt with this fellow!"

Meanwhile the little girl, whose hand her grandfather was still tightly clutching, couldn't keep the idea out of her mind that the interest of this hooded rider in what was going on was so intense that it might at any moment project those inflated eyes of his out of his head like a pair of globular puff-balls.

She was even beginning to imagine the simultaneous pop with which those two voracious peerers would strike the tree beside her and the amount of effervescent juice that would pour down the tree's trunk at their bursting, when she heard the bailiff protest to the owner of those same orbs that he would give him his full attention as soon as he had got rid of these tiresome people.

"Full attention" was the very last thing any one of the group of human bipeds flung together beneath these pines could hope for. But at least the ragged little girl, whose name was Bet, and who had been endowed by Nature with several extra drops of imagination, derived an agreeably alarming impression from the bulging eyes of the saintly General of the Franciscan Order of Friars.

But there was nothing but distress in the shock she received when she saw her grand-dad throw himself down on his knees before ‘Master Sygerius and actually embrace his straddling pair of sturdy legs, while with head thrown back he gazed up imploringly at all that could possibly be seen from that position of the man’s physiognomy, which could only have been the reddish-brown beard protruding from the obstinately square jaw.

“If you take our horse away, master,” cried the old man, “it just means starvation! While my son was alive, he could plough as fast as any man on the manor. And plough he did, and sow and reap too, with the best in the land. But if after his death our only horse is to be what’s called your Heriot, considering I’m too old and feeble to plough or to sow or to reap or to carry in the harvest, it’s just murder you’re committing! Yes, what you’re doing, bailiff, is sheer murder! I tell you, here and now, it’s squeezing the orange dry!”

The bailiff, evidently no less conscious of the staring eyes of the hooded man on Cheiron’s back than was the ragged little Bet, stepped away so hurriedly that the old supplicant, losing his balance, fell forward with both his hands outstretched upon the red-brown earth. The spot where the old man fell was a spot strewn with several generations of pine-needles, but it was quite bare of moss and quite bare also of that particular sort of forest-grass, soft as the hair of a Dryad, which grew luxuriantly in those parts, especially in the district between the Fortress and Lost Towers.

Little Bet had so far only spent seven years upon earth but she had already noticed that, when her elders quarrelled among themselves and began to argue, something always seemed to be drawn into the contention that came from far away. Yes! she had often noticed that some unexpected bird or beast or reptile appeared at such times, or an unusual storm of wind, or a torrent of water, or even a falling star. And it now came about that as Bet's grand-dad, whose name was Dod Pole, scrambled to his feet, with the palms of his hands and the undersides of his fingers pricking viciously from the pine-needles, and commenced in unabashed indignation to express his feelings, a tiny little bird, on the look-out for the crumbs that it had come to associate with these meetings of vociferous bipeds, was so absorbed in its own private quest that it remained oblivious to the nearby hovering of a hungry hawk, who, instinctively aware that no arrows were to be feared from that preoccupied party, descended like a feathered plummet and made its fellow-citizen of the air its helpless prey.

"O you bailiffs and reeves and forest-wardens," shouted old Dod Pole, his voice growing harsher and huskier as he went on and his grip on little Bet's hand hurting the child's fingers more and more, "you are all the same in your fat-headed stupidity! You think the land belongs to the Barons whose castles on it *we* have built, or to the Church, whose barley and wheat and fruit and vegetables we have grown. O you wooden-headed coxcombs! I tell you a day will come when we shall have a King after our own hearts, a King as wise as Solomon, and as strong as Coeur-de-Lion, and as well-supported as Caesar, and with as many magic weapons as King Arthur, who will raise us up and thrust you down! Who gave your precious Barons the right to make us thresh our corn on their threshing-floors and grind it with their grind-stones? Are your Barons so many Gods? Did they create the land that *we* cultivate? Did they create the wheat and the barley that *we* sow and reap and gather in barns?

"Just because you call taking our horse a Heriot — a mighty grand lawyers' word the word Heriot, ain't it? — you think all is settled! You wait a bit, my good master bailiff, you wait a bit, my noble lord, Sir Mort! A day will come when it will be to a really great and true King chosen by *us*, yes! by us, who are now serfs and slaves, that you and your barons will have to come for the making of all the laws in the land! And I'll tell you this, too, Master Sygerius — —"

The obstinate bailiff, at whom this revolutionary outburst was aimed, still stood his ground sullenly, silently, tenaciously and with an ugly purpose in his grim countenance. But the aged Dod Pole still went on. Indeed as he recklessly and desperately flung out these thoughts, he felt in his soul as if over all the countries in the world millions of serfs and slaves like himself were uttering the same thoughts, and he couldn't but believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, if not the God of Jesus, was their inspiration and would avenge them upon their enemies.

But the Bastard of the King of Bohemia, whose mother had called him Spardo and whose only affection and pride in the whole universe was his concern for the deformed horse Cheiron, had at that moment — perhaps because along with his other faculties his conscience had gone to sleep — a different sort of inspiration, one that only Hermes himself, the God of thieves, could have put into his head.

He had already observed that Bonaventura possessed a deep pocket in his Friar's garb, at the bottom of which he was carrying a leather bag full of thick golden pieces. He had found this out by spying on the saintly man when the latter retired from his seat on Gheiron to relieve his bowels; and he derived no little satisfaction at this moment from discovering that the richly-filled leather bag in the flapping skirt of Cheiron's rider had somehow or other, by good chance, worked itself along the animal's side till it was close to his own caressing, stroking, toying, soothing, and encouraging left hand.

The more violent old Dod became in what he was saying, the more closely was Bonaventura absorbed in watching him; so that to a born pilferer of unguarded treasures like this offspring of the loins of a King, who had just refused a more dangerous crown than the one he wore, it was not a very difficult achievement to transfer to his own person, in fact to an interior pocket next his own skin, two of these massive golden coins stamped with this same Germanic crown that the crafty King of Bohemia had refused to assume.

"Amen, Amen, Amen, old man!" Spardo now shouted, dancing into the arena between the feverish aura of the serf's oration and the bailiff's contemptuous silence. "In the country where I come from there are shrines to the Mother of God where every farthing offered by visitors, yes! and every penny given by pilgrims, and every shekel flung down by travellers, is gathered into a special treasury for the benefit of such as labour with their hands! Pardon me, Master Sygerius, if as an ambassador from abroad, in fact from three kingdoms and a dozen Free Cities, I exchange a few words with this ancient man of resounding speech. I think there are things that I can say to him that will be of value to him and to me and to us all!"

Old Dod now permitted his voice to die away in the midst of a sentence and looked enquiringly at little Bet. The owner of Cheiron had the wit to interpret this quick glance correctly. "Like all orators," he thought, "the old fellow is hopelessly dependent on women for every practical move he makes, and as the only female here is that ragged little girl, he daren't move a step without appealing to her!"

It was at this point that Spardo, who understood small girls better than he understood either religion or revolution, exchanged a smile and a wink with little Bet that arranged it all.

“The man wants a word with you, grand-dad,” she whispered to Dod Pole; and the three of them retreated beneath the pine-trunks. Once out of sight of the Friar-General and the Manor bailiff, Cheiron’s owner produced one of his great gold pieces and explained its worth in relation to the coinage of Britain to old Dod.

“Won’t that be enough and to spare, my friend,” he said, “to keep you and your family till next winter?”

Again he caught old Dod Pole glancing at little Bet. And again it was clear to him that the child’s vigorous series of emphatic nods settled the matter. “Well then,” he commanded in the nearest approach to an official dismissal he could assume, “off with you! And put that piece of gold” — and here he came close to the old man and felt his sides and hips with his two hands— “in *there*l” he added, when he had discovered a secure little receptacle in Dod Pole’s innermost garment, already containing a few coins; and without a glance at their retreating figures he rejoined Cheiron and the horse’s two companions.

“I’ve been explaining to his Reverence,” announced Spardo to the bailiff, “that, when he reaches Lost Towers, he’d better take no notice of what Baron Maldung may have to say, and concentrate his attention upon any definite information he can get out of Lady Lilt. I don’t know, I’m sure, master bailiff, if you share my view that in all these affairs it’s wisest to go straight to the woman, if there is a woman in the case.”

The bailiff of Roque looked from the General of the Franciscan Friars to the horse with the growing appearance of two heads.

“You’d better,” he said, “hurry your beast on, if you’re going to see anything of any of the three of them tonight! It gets dark at Lost Towers, I understand, before the proper time! At least that’s what they say, and I’m ready to believe anything of that awful place! For myself I’ll never be caught going near it. But they do tell me your Reverence has the reputation of being a great Saint, and my missus do say every time I put head to pillow — ‘Randy,’ she do say — that’s short for Randolph you understand— ‘hast thee said thee’s prayers straight and proper to the Blessed Saint Aldhelm?’

“And when I do say to she: ‘Bain’t Prior Bog of Bumset as good a church-lord as any old Saint?’ she’s answer to I is allus the same: ‘Bog be Bog and Bumset be Bumset,’ she do say,’ but when thee do pray to They Above, ’tis a very different style of Holy Man thee dost need for thee’s pass to Salvation!’

“But that bain’t all my missus do say when head and pillow do come together. ‘Why do us pray,’ her says, ‘when Night be come and Dark do cover all? Because the Devil be six times nearer to we at such times! Beware of Darkness, Randy,’ she do say. ‘Call on Saint Aldhelm to keep ‘ee calm and cosy in the lap of the Blessed Virgin, else thee may go wandering down one of they girt dark roads that go anywhere and lead nowhere for ever and ever and ever and ever!’ So my advice to your Reverence, and to thee too, Master Spardo, is to hurry on as fast as may be, lest Sun be gone when Lost Towers be come!”

And with that, and a swift look upwards, as if at any moment some vast Devil’s bird might carry off the sun in its beak and darken the earth with its wings, Randolph Sygerius, the new bailiff, marched off, walking like a soldier who needs all the strength of will he possesses to accept the fact that in Roque Manor day is followed by night.

The deformed Cheiron however hadn’t gone on for more than twenty minutes, with Bonaventura silent on his back and Spardo silent at his side, when they came to a track that crossed the one they were following, and there, just as if he had been purposely awaiting them, astride of his tall war-horse till he had grown as sleepy as the plodding Spardo, was none other than the Baron — not the Baron of Lost Towers, but of Castle Cone, that cheerful stronghold on the southern side of Roque Fortress, inhabited by the Boncor family.

Baron Boncor was a big strong man, with a thick fair beard and as placid and friendly a cast of countenance as any pair of agitated travellers could wish to meet. Human nature is such, however, that when we have "worked ourselves up", as we say, to expect one thing, and find instead of it not only something quite different, but something that is the direct opposite of what we've expected, even if what we've found is pleasing to us beyond hope, our immediate reaction — such is our pride in the way we've mentally prepared ourselves to meet this encounter — is a curious shock of disappointment. We might just as well have never bothered to prepare for battle at all!

But Baron Boncor had in him as much commonsense as good nature. He greeted this queer-looking trinity of unusual explorers with an instinctive courtesy that set them at their ease at once.

"Welcome to our dark forests, your Eminence!" he began. "Though I fear after your sunlit Italy you'll have to be careful to keep your cloak about you. And you too, Master Spardo, for through my wife's friendship with her good neighbour Lady Val, I've heard all about you and your strange steed here! Cheiron you call him, don't you? They talk a lot about him in the Fortress stables when I take my old Basileus there for a rub down. Give Cheiron a kiss, Basileus! No, no, a real proper kiss! *That's* the boy! I warrant he's not so much younger than you are; and who can tell? You may, if you kiss each other often enough, turn into a real Centaur as he seems to be turning. But if you do — —"

He was interrupted by the appearance of the most amazing human figure that any of them, man or beast, had ever seen in his life before. This personage came dancing into their midst, and not one of them could take his eyes off him for a second when once he appeared. He inhaled and sucked in and tried to drain up the essence of every living soul upon that spot, whether such a soul belonged to a man or an animal or a bird or a reptile or a toad or a worm or an insect. None of the three human beings present at that cross-track in the forest had a flicker of doubt as to who this intruder was, who thus came dancing into the midst of them.

It was Baron Maldung himself, the Lord of Lost Towers! Well, they had come to seek him. They had come to visit him. And here he was! Beneath his tunic and his breeches Baron Maldung was clothed in only two garments; but these two garments literally covered him from head to foot — that is to say, from half-way down his neck to the soles of both his feet. The under-garment was of thick, warm, white sheep's wool; while the garment that covered it was of thin delicate coal-black satin.

Every movement the Baron made was like a step in a dance that he knew by heart: and as he fluttered from one to another of these five beings, two super-intelligent horses, and three rather unusual men, the lightly-blowing wind as it opened his tunic revealed the fact that this black satin covering he wore above his sheep's-wool under-garment was an attempt, almost a pathetic attempt, on the part of this demonic man to round off his ungainly limbs into a sort of grace, at any rate into a grace that sheep's wool alone could not give.

"O you must come, you must, you must, you must, all of you, now at once, now that you are here!" he murmured, as he and his shadow — for the sun seemed to be playing a private game with the two of them — danced their special man-and-his-shadow dance. And the wind too had a share in it; for the thin straight dusky hair of the Baron of Lost Towers was lifted up and down on his head as if by the puffs of a petulant rival of that obsequious shadow.

Probably owing to some instinctive gust of fellow-feeling for a being as much devoid of man's moral sense as he was devoid of man's self-righteous attitude towards his exploitation of animals, both horses now made an emphatic movement to follow him.

"Well, Basileus," muttered Baron Boncor, "it evidently looks as if we men must obey the oracles of creatures who probably know the will of heaven better than we do! So come along my Christian friends! Let two legs follow four legs and all our eyes see what happens!"

It cannot be said that Bonaventura looked at Spardo or that Spardo nodded a reply to Bonaventura's look. It might rather be said that the man on the back of Cheiron and the man at the side of Cheiron followed Baron Maldung as unquestioningly as if they were members of the Household of Lost Towers.

As for Baron Boncor of Cone, he brought up the rear upon Basileus with an expression on his good-natured bearded face which seemed to say: "Well! as long as I've got your crazy backs in *front of me*, I'm ready for anything! From behind I can see how things go. Chance often gives a chance to those who don't mind bringing up the rear; and, if it doesn't in this case, so be it."

It was rather a startling surprise to both Spardo and Bonaventura when they found themselves completely clear of the forest, and saw in front of them, a vast reedy swamp that extended to the horizon in every direction, save the one from which they had come to the really terrifying bulk of Lost Towers.

Lost Towers looked at first sight like a ruin built entirely of black marble; but on nearer approach it showed itself to be anything but a ruin;

for the vast blocks of black stone of which it was built had something Egyptian and pyramidal in their size, and although divided and broken up into many small domes and minarets and watch-towers, the general effect made a tremendous awe-inspiring impression upon everyone who had never seen it before. There was something staggering — in truth you might say almost shocking — about its antiquity. It looked as if it had been built of materials brought on barges through a network of canals from the sea-coast, a coast which had been reached by ship from Atlantis itself in pre-historic times. A very queer effect was produced upon a traveller's nerves the moment he set eyes upon it, a disturbing, troubling, and bewildering effect. The first sight of it must have always touched some long-buried race-nerve in us all that goes back to antediluvian times.

It was certainly as queer a cortège as had ever reached that weird mass of domes and towers in all its incredibly long history, this little group that now approached its portentous entrance. By reason of its own Baron being the leader of this queer band, they were received in a manner bordering upon a religious ceremony.

Lady Lilt herself came out to meet them, dressed so extravagantly that Baron Boncor assured his grey horse that the lady must have been waiting for their arrival in a wardrobe-chamber looking out their way. The retainers who assembled on the small square of cut grass in front of the high, narrow, strangely painted gates, gates that never, by night or day, seemed entirely shut or entirely open, must have amounted to a dozen men and a dozen women, all dressed so much alike and all so mingled together that it was hard to distinguish men-servants from maid-servants as they surrounded the visitors.

But the apparel they all wore was so remarkable in its colour that only a very discerning eye would have been likely to detect that the materials, whereof these richly-coloured garments were made, were a sorry draggled-tailed patch-work of odds and ends, stitched together anyhow, a motley agglomeration of woven stuffs that had only two purposes; the first, to cover — you couldn't say to warm — human bodies, and, the second, to receive the particular red-brown dye which had been the prerogative of a special family from somewhere in the far north, who, for several generations, had lived in Lost Towers, to prepare, to make, to mix, to adapt to every kind of weather, and to apply to every sort of fabric. This colour had exactly, precisely, and to the last nicety, the shade of the ground at the roots of the forest pines, and also of the narrow foot-wide paths that horsemen, and very often their dogs too, had to follow, as they made their way through the woods.

Baron Maldung himself resembled a middle-aged acrobat with a profile so startlingly like that of certain busts of the Emperor Nero that visitors to Lost Towers who had pilgrimaged to Rome wondered sometimes, especially when they observed the dictatorial manner of the Baron and the something like obsequiousness with which everyone treated him, whether he might not really be, as the man himself always maintained he was, descended from ancestors who had not come from the North at all, but from Rome itself.

There was a tall black poplar on one side of this stretch of grass, now crowded with retainers in the Lost Towers red-brown attire; and though there were few leaf-buds on it at this early season the great tree had a happy and vital look, as if its sap was already stirring. Not far from this benevolent forest-giant there grew a small thorn, and it happened that Bonaventura, whose hold on Chieron's reins was entirely negligible, now that he had so much to see and so much more to think about, allowed the horse to press so closely against this leafless bush that a perceptible tuft of the creature's skin with a patch of his fur was torn away by the bush's powerful thorns.

In a flash Baron Maldung observed this misadventure and quick as lightning leapt upon the offending thorn-bush and began hacking at it with a short sharp little war-axe which he unhooked from his belt. Lady Lilt, who had been tenderly stroking the deformity on the neck of Chieron, a deformity that to the eyes of Spardo seemed growing larger and more like a human head with every touch the lady gave it, now sprang to the side of her lord, and first with one bare arm and then with the other, though both arms were soon bleeding as the thorn-bush defended itself, held up the thing's branches towards the slashing fury of Maldung's war-axe.

The small bush was soon level with the ground; but the insanity of life-hatred in Maldung seemed to increase moment by moment with each advance in the demolition of those crumpled, twisted, wrinkled, broken little twigs, and, as can be imagined, each little drop of perspiration from the white arms that were acting like assistant executioners added to the man's frenzy.

And it was at this moment, just when the now quite horizontal stream of afternoon sunlight had turned that small square of green grass into a radiant dance-lawn, that Spardo noticed that on the very edge of the reedy swamp there grew an immensely old oak-tree by the side of a small mound, and that upon this mound a very white full-grown lamb was bleating piteously. But all eyes, including Spardo's, were now concentrated upon the exquisitely lovely and magnetically provocative daughter of the house, who now came forth to play *her* part in her parents' battle with this sub-demonic vegetation.

Her part just now seemed to be the pretence that she had rushed forth from the hands of her tirewomen, in such haste to join the fight against these appalling monsters who had invaded this innocent world of noble animals, that she had been too hurried to remember to put all her clothes on. Her haste was, however, as even Spardo could see, attended by an exquisite delicacy of choice as to just where the effect of not being fully dressed would be maddeningly tantalizing, and indeed, not only seductive, but what you might call ravishing.

And they all could see that to the human nerves of the good Baron Boncor such provocation was unendurable. In fact all that that good-natured warrior found gall enough to do under such exceptional tension was to take a dignified and simple farewell of Bonaventura and to give Spardo a definite invitation.

"Don't you forget, Master Spardo, that you'll always be welcome at Gone Castle, whenever your wanderings bring you our way!"

And then, not without some difficulty — for Basileus was showing signs in a manner not quite seemly in so warlike a steed, of being unduly attracted to Cheiron's deformity — Baron Boncor turned his horse clear round and urged him into a rather shy and not wholly polite retreat.

But to retreat from Lost Towers, when once you had discovered it, was more difficult than the discovery. Lady Lilt lifted one long white arm to direct her husband's attention to this retirement of their chief antagonist; and with her other arm she groped for the bow and quiver hanging over the shoulder of Baron Maldung. This small bow, with its arrow already notched against its extended string she thrust into Maldung's hands. "Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!" she hissed. And when the Baron of Lost Towers released the string and the feathered shaft pierced the flesh of Boncor's right shoulder and remained there quivering, the blood that dripped in big drops upon the mane of Basileus was a much brighter red than the red-brown of the Lost Towers retinue.

But, though the blood was bright enough, the hand which held the bridle-reins was reduced to helpless impotence. But Basileus leaped forward and at a gallop now; nor was there any sign before they disappeared of the Baron falling from the horse’s back. It was then and only then, that Lady Lilt turned to lead their visitors past the still half-naked Lilith into the interior of Lost Towers.

IX. LOST TOWERS

The crowd of attendants, in their rich red-brown attire, seemed suddenly stricken with a weird sort of lethargy, and indeed displayed a tendency to drift and drift and drift without any purpose. But no aimless drifting disturbed the imperious though comical figure of Maldung, now busy at a job which absolutely absorbed him. This was nothing less, as Bonaventura quickly had an opportunity of realizing, than directing the covering with suitable colour of the carved mantles in the entrance-hall of Lost Towers of certain imperial Roman heads. These had been selected by the despotic Maldung — at least as far as Bonaventura was able to realize — purely for the sake of the devilish obsessions which possessed them.

But past this avenue of diabolical physiognomies the now thoroughly agitated General of the Franciscan Friars felt he had to go, if the obsequious salutation of Baron Maldung and the engaging gestures of Lady Lilt implied that at any rate tonight, whatever happened in the future, and he did begin to feel a little doubtful about converting these people, he was at least sure of a savoury supper and a comfortable bed.

It had been a comfort to him that the murderous arrow which he had seen lodged in the shoulder of Boncor hadn't brought that worthy man down: and what he must do now was to make it clear that his stately strides towards the portal of Lost Towers were not accelerated by the sight of the provocative figure of the daughter of the house, just perceptible beyond the wicked and desperately unhappy visage of Tiberius Caesar, sated with his sadistic orgies, with his sub-human obsessions, with his super-human atrocities, and looking now as if scooped out, gouged out, thunder-blasted out, after years of petrifaction from the substance of an internal rock.

Lilith was still playing her perpetual game; and it was revealed to Lady Lilt, and not wholly concealed even from our friend Spardo, that the present object of the girl’s felonious wiles was none other than the saintly personage, armoured in the chastity of grey cloth, wrapped in the chastity of grey vapourings, fortified in the chastity of grey theocracy, cramped in the chastity of grey idealism, who was now approaching the entrance to Lost Towers between the door-post on the left and the profile of Tiberius Caesar on the right.

More momentous to Lady Lilt than the galvanic though invisible cord, that was stretched so taut between the flitting and wavering adumbrations of her daughter’s milk-white thighs and the furtive attention of Bonaventura, was a parallel psychic cord that she now caught sight of, and by no means for the first time, between those same exposed whitenesses and the eyes of the girl’s father.

Aye, but O! what Spardo would have given, possibly even the remaining golden coin he had robbed him of, to know exactly what this Man in grey, this special pet of St. Francis, was thinking just then! Would the fellow have the gall to do what everybody else was far too scared to think of doing? Would he be brave enough actually to enter Lost Towers?

He himself felt glad enough to give Cheiron’s bridle a gentle twist and to turn the head of the half-human animal due south — that is to say, in the direction taken by that rider upon Basileus who now rode with an arrow in his shoulder. Nobody was interested enough, either in Spardo or his deformed steed, to follow their retreat; but had anyone done so, they would have been absolutely astonished at the speed with which Cheiron could move at such a crisis.

Meanwhile every step taken by Bonaventura towards the entrance to Lost Towers was attended by an intense and meticulous process of thought. In a certain sense the man was undoubtedly acting with real courage, and might without exaggeration have been called a very brave man. But his exorbitant notion of his own importance in the eyes of the God he worshipped, his puffed up conceit as to the eternal importance of the particular kind of sanctity he cultivated, tainted this honourable courage with a less worthy tinge. "If," he now said to himself, "I obstinately refuse to look at that girl, I shall make them think I am afraid of being tempted. What I must do is to make them understand that I and God — —"

However bulging the man's eyes may have been and however assiduously he kept feeling in his pocket to make certain his imperial gold pieces were still safe, it must be allowed that there was an element of childlike simplicity in this page-boy of omnipotence oddly mingled with his inordinate conceit.

Some might say that men think in words and women in images; but if in the case of Bonaventura we were to enter the slippery topic of the syntax of psychic expression and begin to quarrel with his way of saying "I and God", it is only fair to remember that in speaking of his earthly parent he always said "I and my Father" instead of "My Father and I".

"What," so the man's thoughts ran on, as he gravely advanced beneath an unusually high arch and proceeded to leave the marble Tiberius and his sadistic stare behind, "I must make them understand is that I enjoy resisting temptation too much to run away, though it is true that in the Paternoster I pray God not to lead me into it. But I must make them understand that I have so yielded myself to God that His will is now my will and my will entirely His will. It would not be for people's good for me to let them know how much I enjoy gazing at the lovely little white breasts and delicious little white limbs of young girls; for vulgar, crude, rough, brutal, stupid, ordinary men wouldn't be able to get the pleasure I get from this. It is all in my love for God and in God's love for me. We love each other so much that I feel sure God allowed me to be with him — for this past-and-present intimacy is what you get when your love for God makes you feel one with Him — when He took the rib from Adam and out of it made Eve. When anyone loves God as I do He gives you wonderful privileges. For the sake of my great love for Him, God put back Time for me and allowed me to watch those embraces of Adam and Eve that created the human race, and the pleasure I get now from looking at this young girl is part of the pleasure which God, in return for my great love, allowed me to enjoy when He let me watch Adam embracing Eve."

Bonaventura had actually been clever enough as a boy to fool Saint Francis himself in this matter; for Saint Francis had regarded it as a perpetual miracle of grace the way in which his young friend resisted temptation, when all the while his young friend was enjoying the process of temptation itself more than he could possibly have enjoyed any fruition of desire.

Bonaventura was indeed thinking at this very moment that he might derive great satisfaction from a few weeks' residence in Lost Towers, as long as he could pretend he was resisting the most maddening temptation of his life, whereas in reality he was resisting nothing. He went on trailing his grey mantle, in this crafty pretence, through corridor after corridor, followed by the growling and grimacing, the gurgling and grinning, the gallivanting and gobemouching Baron Maldung, and in reality deliciously enlivened, not at all, as they were all believing, tormented, teased, and tantalized to the last exquisite point of provocation, by lovely little Lilith.

Farther and farther, on and on, he was led, trailing his grey garment, while the fingers of his left hand never loosened their firm clutch on the leather bag under his robe. Up stairway after stairway he had to go, down passage after passage, till the guest-chamber, where he was to sleep when supper was over, was reached at last. He had been in many feudal castles and o a few royal palaces all over Europe. He had been in several Moorish and Byzantine and Coptic sanctuaries all through Mesopotamia. But he had never been before in such a luxurious room as this. It was clear at once to him, as he turned his devouringly prominent eyes on the bed that was to receiveU him, and on the hot and cold and lukewarm water that was to bathe him, and on the incredible varieties of ointments and balmy balsams that were to anoint him, and on all these conveniently exposed and yet daintily barred coals of fire that were to warm him, and above all on the three lovely and alluring young sylphs, all delicately wearing the transparent fabrics and red-brown dyes and exotic hieroglyphs of Lost Towers, who were so anxious to serve him that if “he and God” decided to devote a few weeks to the purification, regeneration, sanctification, of all the dwellers in, and of all the dependents upon, these Lost Towers, there would be nothing in such delay to trouble the bodily well-being or vex the spiritual peace of God’s chosen servant.

But what was this? Suddenly, without warning, all his attendants vanished, and there was revealed to him a different aspect of life in this place. Borne upon winds that blew wildly through all its walls and over all its roofs, from forests that seemed to be beyond any forests of this world, and from swamps beyond any swamps of which he had ever heard, there came into that chamber the weird lamentable cry, ghastly and desperate, that had passed through every human building raised by the hand of man upon that particular spot since Britain was first divided from France by the salt sea: the cry of the wind that since the beginning of Time had made Lost Towers what it was.

Washed, anointed, oiled, combed and curled, catered for and courted by lovely attendants, and his purpose crowned by a miraculous concatenation of convenient conditions, Bonaventura's instinctive reaction, when he heard this unusual wailing in the rafters of the roof above him and this long-drawn melancholy moaning in the corridors and landings and stair-ways and cellars beneath him, was simply to feel peevishly annoyed with the God he worshipped. He didn't feel towards him as one heroic conspirator feels to another who has been propitiated and wheedled and fooled into betraying their cause.

What he felt was a simple irritation. God, he told himself, ought to have known better than allow the Powers of Darkness to make a saint, possessed of a piety like his piety, shiver. For shiver he did. The ministering angels who had been hovering round him must have known at the first faint stirring of these ancient black tapestries what was going to happen; for they all vanished before it happened.

There are those who might feel that, left alone with these alarming sounds, our saint's vexation with his deity was not uncalled for. All around him was black tapestry representing terrifying battles between unicorns and river-horses, the former more red than brown, and the latter more brown than red, but both of them woven against that background of black in such a way as to annihilate completely in that portion of the building all those emanations from free space, and all those blessed airs of boundless liberation, that are projected upon any atmosphere by the colours blue and green, quite apart from the objects that we are accustomed to see wearing these colours, such as blue sky and green grass. Reddish brown, and brownish red, and both of these in a peculiar and special mingling, such as

Bonaventura had never seen in his life before, were diffused, not only from the tapestry in this weird place, but from rafters and ceilings and panels and doors, until a sort of atmospheric soul of that appalling colour, something that might indeed be called the mystic eidolon of that fearful and awful colour, permeated every square inch of the invisible air within these ill-fated walls.

Though of course in a sense you could only see it, in reality you were compelled to taste it, to swallow it, to touch it, to feel it, to absorb it, till it filled your whole body, as air fills a bubble.

Yes, those attendant sylphs must have known perfectly well what was coming, for at the first quivering ripple in the tapestry of his chamber, they were off. And then it seemed to Bonaventura that this devil in the wind had begun to cause, not only ructions in the wood-work of the room — for there were groanings and creakings everywhere — but yawning chasms in the floor of life; for gobbets of red-brownishness and globules of brown-reddishness seemed being belched forth from a pre-historic cleft in the original matter of creation itself, as if this protoplasm of all existing things were relieving itself of some obnoxious suppuration due to a primal injury.

Everybody he met in this part of Wessex, as he pursued his obstinate enquiries with regard to what he loved to call the devil-worship of Friar Bacon, had told him about this particular wind that had been felt at this particular spot since the world began; but he had never anticipated that he himself would feel it as powerfully as this. He felt disturbed, not frightened, he hastened to assure himself, but agitated. He found it impossible to walk up and down with his accustomed dignified stride. He gave way to a series of jerky impulsive movements.

Probably he would not have yielded to these nervous debouchings to north and west, to south and east, and then round the world again, if he had not been alone; for it is queer with us mortals how some of us have completely different codes of behaviour for moments in solitude and moments when others, even if it be only one other, are there.

Bonaventura's relations with God were peculiar to himself; for they were absolutely in the mind, or in the soul, that is to say, in his thoughts. He always took it for granted that God, being a Spirit, took no interest in, and had no effect upon, the movements of his body; unless points of conscience entered, which of course changed everything.

Poor Bonaventura! He hurried headlong down the passage outside his door till it ended in a door that was sealed up, as if it led to a mausoleum of the bones of lost angels. Back again he hurried, till he reached the top of the stairs that led down to the lower floors of the building; at which point he suddenly felt the curious sensation, not amounting to a night-mare-panic but belonging to the same special kind of fantastic horror, that he used to feel when his pious mother told him in his childhood how the Witch of Endor called up the prophet from the grave.

He kept sitting down on his luxurious bed and then walking again down the passage. Had there been any luckless prisoner chained in the cell at the end of that passage, the rustle of that grey robe would have sounded like a new kind of wind from the limbo-cradle of Chaos.

Not for a moment did it enter the mind of Bonaventura that God had forsaken him. What he really felt, if the truth must be told, was that it was a shame and a disgrace that he, the recognized chief saint of all the saints on earth, should have, as his all-powerful and omnipotent deity, a deity who at an important crisis like this was not alive to the necessity of impressing these absurd and childish sons of Belial with the spiritual advantage they were bound to gain from associating with so famous a saint.

Yes, if the actual truth has to be told, it was with real irritation against his Creator that Bonaventura hitched up his grey robe, made the face he always made when he was undertaking something that required a real effort of courage — that is to say, sucked his lower lip into his mouth and tried hard to rumple and fold and curl his curiously malleable lips over his teeth, till these latter resembled broken shells pinched tight within the squeezed-up remnants of a mutilated jelly-fish, and boldly began to descend the narrow winding stone steps that led to the lower stories of the building.

The only balustrade to support a person descending these winding stairs was a ship's rope fastened to the wall by large bronze rings. Instead of the usual narrow arrow-slits all the way down in the massive outer wall of this descent, there was a foot-wide barred window on every landing, and through these windows came not only the full force of the wind but just now a most curious evening light, that struck the consciousness of this continental traveller as the very incarnation of the wailing of the wind.

It was a wet white light, and it was a white light that had a way of blurring and even of deforming and disfiguring the outlines of the objects it surrounded. Our visitor after a quick glance at the dark oaken doors, which on every landing — and he passed three in his descent — faced these windows, paused for a while on each landing to stare out between the rusty window-bars.

There was something about the white light, as it lifted every object the man looked at out of its own airy ocean and presented it to his vision, as if it were particularly anxious that he should fully take in how it was isolated in its individual identity from all the other objects, each of which, if he would only continue staring through those rusty bars, should in their proper sequence be presented to his attention.

It was from the window of the last of these small landings that he caught sight of what was obviously an enormous oak-tree, by the side of which was standing a large white lamb. Both the tree and the creature by its side were presented to the saintly traveller as if they had been mystical symbols, divided from all other visible objects in this white thick encircling sea of light.

The branches of the oak-tree were creaking in this unusual wind in a peculiarly personal manner, as if they were chanting the syllables of an immemorial incantation that the tree had learnt from the low mound on which it grew, and that the mound had learnt from some unknown angelic power that had been hovering round when that horrible devilish attack had been made upon the mass of formless matter out of which the world arose.

The oak-tree was now trying to persuade the troubled creature at its side to accept the creaking and husky chant of its branches as the true oracular response to such agitated bleating on this wild night. The pleasure which Bonaventura derived from contemplating this ancient tree, and hearing its liturgical chant to its troubled year-old companion, was considerably interfered with by the annoyance he felt at God’s behaviour.

Yes, there was something that scraped and scratched his nerves in the petulant irritation he felt with God for letting this wind disturb everything. It is true that something in him responded to the storm. The creaking branches of that incredibly aged oak, borne on this wild wind that seemed to be carrying some desperate message to every ghost in Britain, did certainly — let us be fair to the man — have its effect on his Italian sensibility. But all the romantic emotion Bonaventura derived from it was spoilt by something vexing, fretting, chafing, ruffling, that came with the thought that God wasn’t protecting his partner in sanctity with the whole-hearted consideration which that partner’s life-long devotion deserved.

And yet, in spite of what he regarded as justifiable annoyance with God, Bonaventura couldn't resist pressing his head against those rusty bars; and, like many other watchers from stone towers at that epoch — like young Lil-Umbra, for instance, as she watched, not many days ago, the encounter between Ghosta and Lilith — he was rewarded for his instinctive curiosity by a very unexpected event.

This was indeed nothing less than the appearance beside that oak-tree of none other than the bearded Baron Boncor of Cone, mounted on his war-horse, Basileus, and still writhing in pain from Maldung's arrow stuck fast in his shoulder.

Bonaventura was very rarely driven to action by more than one strong emotion at the same time; and it would have been extremely unlike him to do anything but remain absolutely passive, when the instinct to cry out a warning to the rulers of Lost Towers strove in his breast with an instinct to do something to get that arrow out of Boncor's shoulder. For to do Bonaventura justice, there was not a speck or grain of sadism in him — that is to say, of delight in cruelty purely for its own sake.

What he would really have liked to do, secretly, quietly, unheard of by the people of the place, was to slip out of the house, extract that arrow from the man's shoulder, and command him, in the name of the Pope, to gallop off.

What he now saw however reduced both instinctive impulses to nothing; and he just watched, in petrified fascination. For the bearded man suddenly leapt from the saddle and advanced between the trunk of the oak and the bleating young motherless sheep with the obvious intention of caressing it, if it allowed him to approach. But above the creaking of the oak's branches and the disconsolate moaning of the wind rose that lamb's cry, as it bounded off with its heavy tail swinging between its legs.

But at that very second the movement forward of the bearded Lord of Cone brought the arrow in his shoulder close to the mouth of his war-horse, who promptly, quietly, neatly and expeditiously seized it with his teeth, and plucking it forth with one quick backward jerk of his head, bit it in half and let it fall against the roots of the tree, from which position both its bloody point and its agitated feathers were whirled away on the wind towards the reeds of the swamp.

It was clear that the loss of blood following the arrow's extraction left the genial Lord of Cone too weak to remount his saviour, for even with his arm round the animal's neck when he tried to lead it away, he kept tottering so unsteadily that finally he evidently resolved to take very daring measures, for he lengthened the horse's bridle by tying to it the long leather strap he was in the habit of using to tether him, so that he could eat grass or anything else he fancied while he was left alone, and proceeded to fasten these elongated reins round his own waist. Then shouting to the animal a brief and clear command in a familiar phrase well known to them both — a phrase that suggested hastening straight home to stable and straw and a well-filled bin — he folded his cloak about him and rolled over on his stomach with both arms outspread and his head thrown back.

Over the soft forest-grass, that was a special kind of grass and as delicate and tenuous as a mermaid's hair, and over the brown floor of the pine-needles Basileus now dragged his master, and did this so effectively that it wasn't very long before Bonaventura's eyes could follow them no further. Then and only then and not till then, he left the window, and calmly descending the remaining flight of stairs, directed his steps to where the sounds and smells and wavering lights and shadows made the locality of the supper-chamber discoverable.

He was clearly expected, although nobody had suggested waiting for him. But he was no sooner within the dining-hall than agitation upon agitation shook him. Why hadn't these people sent somebody to fetch him, to accompany him into this dining-hall, to tell him where he was supposed to sit? They had waited on him, bathed him, anointed him, and then just left him to find his way alone to his seat at this important meal! That wasn't the way to treat a person who, in the depth of his noble, heroic, spiritual, intellectual, and absolutely unique nature, was struggling at this very moment with the Greatest Temptation possible to a Great Man — namely whether to decide at this turning-point in his life to aim at acquiring the appearance of possessing the sort of statesmanlike sagacity which a man must appear to have if he is to be elected Pope, or simply to go on, as he was doing at present, emphasizing the unusual perfection of his spiritual purity as a real saint.

Something about the vision of the horse Basileus, pulling the arrow from the shoulder of that fair-bearded man and dragging him as if he'd been a load of hay over both brown earth and green earth, remained vivid in Bonaventura's mind. He had the uncomfortable sensation that his own fate was being pulled along by a Power over which he himself had only partial control.

And yet he kept telling himself that this feeling could not possibly represent the truth. No one in the whole world, he kept telling himself, had as close and intimate a relation with God as he had. Of that he was absolutely certain. It was his life, his destiny, his whole being! It was what made Bonaventura *to be* Bonaventura; and all the world knew it!

Nobody who had ever lived understood God and the Will of God as thoroughly as he did I Nobody who had ever lived, except Jesus Christ — and of course you couldn't bring Him into such a calculation — talked to

God as he did, and was talked to by God as he was. There could be no question; there could be no doubt about it. He and God understood each other in and out, up and down, body and soul, back and front!

As he moved slowly round that great square table with patient dignity and unflagging self-respect, he told himself that he and God must consider more carefully than they had done before, whether it would be better for the world if the cardinals in conclave decided, when the present Pope died, to elect him as his successor, or better for the world that they should nominate that one among them that he, Bonaventura, decided possessed the cleverest and the most practical brain.

"O God, my beloved companion," he prayed desperately, as his staring eyes caught sight of a red stain on the edge of the table where Lady Lilt was seated, "I implore you to give me the power tonight, so to impress this evil woman and this evil man and this evil daughter, that it is resounded all over Christendom from the Thames to the Danube that Saint Bonaventura has snatched Lost Towers out of the jaws of Hell!"

It was then that he noticed that there was a large empty throne near where Baron Maldung was sitting, made of the sort of wood and of the sort of woven fabric covering the wood that lent themselves best to receiving the red-brown dye, and that next to this throne Lilith was resting, her entrancing white thighs exposed in such a manner that a man seated in that chair would naturally and inevitably, as he poured out his wine, rest his free hand upon one of those perfect limbs and lightly slide his caressing fingers between it and its mate.

He also noticed that the young girl herself was looking intently at him as he advanced towards where she sat. The air must have been full of strangely contradictory currents of thought as the saintly man approached that empty throne; for the intensity of these airy battles caused a deep hush to fall upon that whole assembly of revellers.

It was at this point that Bonaventura commanded in a clear voice one of the attendants to tie a white napkin securely round his eyes, "Lest I should forget for a moment before you all," he said aloud, "the vows of purity I have made."

The motives that led him to this move were subtler than he could himself have explained; but to one among them, had his conscience prodded him, he would have shamelessly confessed — namely, a fear that it might be supposed he was so hungry and so greedy that the nakedness of Lilith was no temptation to him at all, in fact that he didn't give her presence a thought. He even went so far as to repeat these words about his vow of purity as he allowed himself, still in the same dead silence, and taking exaggerated precautions not to stumble over any obstacle in the way, to be helped to reach his throne, and to be aided in seating himself there in close proximity to Lilith.

When, however, his hand fell, as fate beyond all human control compelled it to fall, upon that soft bare thigh, a shock of unmitigated lust so overpowered him as to change every plan he had made. Lust quivered through him with a compulsion so convulsive as to drive him into unexpected action. With something like a savage bound he leapt to his feet.

"I must beg you all," he cried in a hoarse voice, a voice that was almost like an animal's growl, "to — to pardon me": and then in a second, while they all stared at him in amazement, he had recovered his self-possession.

"The truth is," he went on, addressing them all easily and quietly, as if in some senatorial or ecclesiastical assembly, "the truth is, it is a privilege that I have been allowed by the Most High, to have illuminations or revelations direct from Himself. Such an illumination I have just had, bidding me leave you tonight and bidding me to ask you for a few important favours so as to make my departure easier, and my reception — for that is where my revelation tells me I must spend this coming night — at the Fortress of Roque more friendly and gracious.

“What my revelation commands me to beg from you is simply this, that you put at my disposal a very quiet horse, preferably an old and good-tempered horse, such as I shall be able myself to ride, and, in addition to this, put me in the care of a small party of well-armed horsemen, who will hand me over in safety to the gatekeeper of Roque Fortress and then return to you at once without demanding anything for themselves, anything except” — here Bonaventura’s voice rose to something that resembled the clanging of a great cracked bell— “except what I am now going to make plain to you all.”

That the man was sincere in the emotion he displayed must at any rate have been plain to all. One undeniable manifestation of it was the fact that as he spoke he wept, and as he wept his mouth and cheeks assumed the only too familiar screwed-up grimace of a small child in a fit of crying, and there was something weirdly and grotesquely impressive about the ringing and yet broken words with which this emotional saint, who had the power of weeping without sobbing, began to make his point clear.

“As you know only too well, you people of Lost Towers, there is a conspiracy against you through this whole district, based on the absurd idea that you are — what of course we *all* are, for it is the unusual condition of the children of men — more evil than good.

“Now this is what I propose to do on your behalf, my dear friends, and it is extremely simple. I *had* thought that the conclave of cardinals intended — at least that is what I imagined my angel of revelation hinted to me — to elect me Pope; but I no longer think that this is their intention. What I believe now to be the purpose of God is that I am to watch very carefully the whole array of ecclesiastical leaders, and when I have decided which particular one would make the ablest Pope, that I should pray night and day for the welfare of that good and wise man; and then, when the present Pope dies, I can name as his successor the man I have been observing and praying for all these days.

"Yes, I can name him at the conclave of cardinals; and I think, without serious opposition, get him elected Pope. And this is what I can do for you, my friends of Lost Towers, in return for your kindness to me. When I and God — I mean of course when God and I — have appointed the next Pope, and he is firmly seated in the Chair of Saint Peter, he will naturally wish to reward his heavenly Helper who is God, as well as his earthly Helper who is I.

"It is then that I shall make it clear to the Holy Father how he can reward us *both at the same time*. I shall tell him how he may spend on behalf of Lost Towers a good round sum of Saint Peter's shekels. I shall tell him that Lost Towers has been for centuries like those cities in Palestine that God told Moses to build for the runaways from justice, who wanted to cling to the horns of the altars of the Levites and there to escape being slain by the avengers of blood. I shall tell him that he had better build an Aims-House for the aged of both sexes, in the immediate vicinity of Lost Towers, with six small independent houses for women, and a larger house of two stories for the Master of the establishment. I shall tell the Pope that the inmates had better be called 'Tower Canons' and 'Tower Canonesses', and that he had better pay the Master of the place a good large income yearly, so as to render him completely independent of all influence from outside. The name of the Holy Father, whether that name be Leo or Pius or Gregory or Martin or Nicholas or Clement or Urban, shall be, I shall assure him, inscribed over the gateway to the Master’s Lodge, where it shall remain forever and forever.

“And now there remains only one thing more I must ask of you all, namely, that none of you will conceal from the world, but rather will reveal to the world in all directions, that it is purely and simply by the sudden appearance among you of me and God — I mean of course of God and me — that you have all been so absolutely and entirely turned from the error of your ways as to call upon the Pope and God — I mean of course upon God and the Pope — to raise up in your midst such a monument of your conversion as this Lost Towers Aims-House for aged runaways from the justice of the kingdoms of subsequent generations. This having been built, your remotest descendants will fall upon their knees on this spot, and tap the very ground where Lost Towers stands, in reverence and worship for evermore!

“And do *you* ask me, my lovely Daughter of the house — and do *you* ask me, my gracious Lady of the house — and do *you* ask me, O great Baron of Lost Towers! — what your evermore loyal and devoted pair of friends, I and God, are going to do next, when you have escorted us to the Fortress of Roque and have left us with the Gate-Keeper of Roque and have returned in peace to your own place?

“Well, I will tell you in a moment what I and God intend to do next. But, before telling you, I must let you know that the instinct in me which orders every smallest move I make, and half-creates everything I hear, see, touch, feel, or even smell, compels me to insist once again, as I always do, and always must do, wherever I go upon the surface of this earth, that the whole secret of the ultimate mystery of life is contained in those precious, holy, sweet, delectable, celestial, angelic, cherubic, seraphic, ineffable four letters composing the word Love!

"Love is simply all there is! And it is more than that. It is all there was and all there will ever be! Love is like water and air and fire; and it goes flowing, floating, flaming, round the earth, penetrating the earth, proliferating the earth, perforating the earth, and one day swallowing up the earth!

"And yet you ask what I and God are going to do next, when you, my loving friends, have left me at Roque. I will tell you in simple language. We, that is to say the All-powerful whose essence is Love, and I his humble, his negligible, his self-obliterating, self-negating, self-annihilating servant, whose essence is obedience and who has made *his* will *my* will to a degree bewildering to the whole human race, have decided that the Devil has incarnated Himself in the personality of this notorious magician, Roger Bacon, who devotes his time, his money, his leisure, his learning, wholly, entirely, and absolutely to inventing and constructing a Head of Brass that shall think as a man, and speak as a man, and even utter opinions on how the country should be ruled, like a man.

"Well, my dear friends, you who are now announcing to the entire world that you yourselves, by the mediation of his less than nothing servant, who is your do-nothing, tittle-nothing, scrap-nothing, flip-nothing, pip-nothing of a beggarly Bonaventura, are about to accept the pardon and peace of a stately Aims-House from the Holy Father, may now learn that the great God of Love and I, his disciple in Love, are about to punish, punish, punish, punish this thrice-accurst Roger Bacon, till not only his Brazen Head but his own worse than brazen skull will split into atoms.

"Yes, my beloved friends, who have today begun telling the whole world how dearly I, who am His most loving lover since the time when John of Love his very self lay in His bosom, do verily and utterly love you and how I have shown it with regard to the Holy Father, I am going to tell you now how God through me and I through God will punish this abomination of desolation who calls himself Friar Bacon!"

Here he paused to observe the effect of his words upon his hearers, and it was clear to Lilith, who by this time had stolen round to the bottom of the table with a long black mantle wrapt hastily round her and was gazing intently at him with quivering lips and ghastly-white cheeks, that he was well-satisfied with the depth, the gulf, the abyss of silence into which his audience had been precipitated. "No," he proceeded, in a very curious voice, the sort of voice a vulture might use who was holding in its claws, before the hungry beaks of its young, a dying lamb, from whose body, at each gasp of its breath, that is to say from each place where a claw entered its flesh, there ran a stream of blood, "no! no!" he went on, "and I am sure you will all understand exactly what I mean. For a man like this, who knows enough Greek to read the heathen philosophers, and enough Hebrew to pervert and twist the words of Jehovah to Moses, there is only one punishment. What I and God, I mean what God and I, have decided to do with him is to keep him in prison on bread and water, and take all his books and all the paraphernalia he uses in his inventions away from him, and thus compel him to live the life of a real Grey Friar — in other words compel this archdevil to live the life of a saint! His work is an open insult to the Order to which I who speak to you belong. What made him join us then, do you ask? Purely and simply to support himself while he went on with his devilish inventions! His family were ruined. He was without the means of subsistence. And so he became a Franciscan Friar. He must have said to himself: 'I will go on with the inventions with which I shall eventually destroy both their worship and themselves,' — do you catch the devilry of his idea, beloved friends?— 'And meanwhile I shall live at their expense.'"

No sooner had Bonaventura finished speaking than Lady Lilt and Sir Maldung, as well as Lilith, whose long black mantle now trailed after her as she moved, made a circle round him, all three of them talking excitedly and at the same time.

It was not, however, as may easily be imagined, until after a prolonged and delicious supper at this same table — without the need for any blindfolding, and after a prolonged and undisturbed sleep in that luxurious bed on the top floor, without the need for any attendant sylphs, and without even knowing whether the wind was blowing or not — that the General of the Franciscan Friars, on just the sort of horse he had asked for, and with just the sort of escort he wanted, set out in the morning for the Fortress of Roque.

X. THE JEW FROM TARTARY

PELEG TOOK SWIFT decisive measures, precipitate measures they might be called, to ascertain that it really and truly was, without any doubt or question, his true love of that wild night when his life was saved by Sir Mort on those crusader-battled borders between East and West, and when he made that vow of devoted fidelity to him into which he threw at one drastic fling all his Jewish intensity and all his Mongolian strength of will. And though his feeling about her was so absolute that there were moments when it actually rendered him as limp as a bending reed, he was aware at the same time of a strange shyness at the thought of their facing each other.

It was with something of a double motive, therefore, partly in order to put off for a little while longer the actual moment of this overwhelming encounter, and partly to make sure he was doing nothing treacherous to his sworn lord and master, Sir Mort, that well before noon on a fine February day, Peleg set out, when all his domestic tasks were over, to make sure of meeting this eccentric head of the House of Abyssum.

It was the very morning of the unexpected arrival of Bonaventura at the great gates of the Fortress and the morning also of the instantaneous departure, the moment the gate-keeper appeared, of a band of curious riders in ramshackle armour and motley patches of red-brown cloth.

What Peleg did to make sure of catching Sir Mort as he came out of the Fortress — for he knew enough of Lady Valentia’s weakness for distinguished foreigners to be quite certain that her husband, whatever feeling he might have for or against the General of the Franciscan Friars, wouldn’t stay long as a partner to their talk — was to run at full speed across the piece of ground that separated the point at which the big gates were visible from the point at which the postern-entrance was visible, a distance which he could cover in time enough to catch Sir Mort departing from either of the two exits.

He took care to carry with him his mace with the iron spikes round its heavy circular head, for he had vivid memories of certain occasions when Sir Mort was all for carrying him off on a sudden foray and he had to insist on returning for his favourite weapon.

It was outside the postern that he finally caught his man, and the dialogue that followed was eminently characteristic of them both.

"That fellow with the staring eyes is after my John's friend, Friar Bacon. Holy Jesus, but he's the devil of a wizard-hunter! Do you know what he wants? But of course I'll do nothing of the kind; though Lady Val thinks I ought to! He wants me to swear to Bog of Bumset that the Pope has told him I must take a few muscular serfs with me and haul the Brazen Head down from Bacon's cell and lug the confounded thing here; so that *here*, if you please, *here* in our own grounds, *here* in this very strip of forest, the best piece of hunting-ground in the Manor, I can have this curst Brazen Head of his smashed to bits — *to bits*, mind you, and *here*, within a bow-shot, *here*, in less than a bow-shot, of this shrine Tilton's so keen on building; and very well he's building it too!

"If I'm a good fighter, Peleg, my Gim-crack Jew, Tilton's a good designer, a good builder, a good carver, and a good one, I shouldn't wonder too, at getting rid of smoke and soot. And here's this staring-eyed fellow, who thinks his grey mantle's as grand as Caesar's purple, wants us to hammer to bits in front of my boy's shrine a wizard-oracle, to whose funeral will come no doubt twenty devils far worse than any Brazen Head, who, when they see Tilton's shrine to the Mother of God, you can bet your big

Tartar soul, they'll all come huddling into our house, and scenting out quick enough where my bed is, hug each other under it till midnight, and then —— No, by God! I'm not going to have any Brazen Head hammered to bits in front of my door!"

Peleg had wisely held his peace during this indignant outburst; but as it went on he discovered that, without having said to himself anything resembling, "Now, my good friend, it's your business to think out carefully where your interest lies in all this," he had perceived, in a flash, in a pulse-beat, in the whirl of a swallow's wings, just what he must say.

"O you are so right, dear my lord!" he murmured, leaning in such a manner upon the handle of his iron mace as not to tower above the man who had saved him and whom he served forever, "and I have just by good chance discovered something that will make it possible, I really do think, for me to be of more real use to you than alas! considering I owe everything to you, I can often be."

"Aye? What's that? What are you saying, big man? Have you caught this staring-eyed Pontifex-Cockolorum *in flagrante delicto*? Have you found him raping our Abbess?"

"May I speak quite freely, my lord?"

"Of course! Don't we always? I to thee and thou to me's the tune! So out with it, my Lion of Judah and Behemoth of Karakorum!"

"But, my dear lord, it goes back a long way and concerns my own private life very deeply. It is indeed, if you will allow me to say so, my dear lord, my chief *secretum secretorum*, and it is only because it was a thing of despair rather than of hope that I kept it to myself."

A peculiar tone in the giant's voice quieted Sir Mort's wrought-up nerves. He fumbled at the leather belt round his waist that kept his hunting horn in a convenient position.

"Tell me straight out, Peleg, old friend, what you're talking about."

"About a woman, my lord."

"Ah! Ah! And what a double-dyed fool I was not to think of that before! Here have you been, a proud, handsome, majestic, powerful man, and, just because you're such a giant and outside the category of common men, I let myself — fool that I was! — assume that you lacked the natural feelings of every man born into the world who isn't a sodomite! Well, old friend, tell me her name quick, and where she's to be found, and by God! I'll get her for you even if she lives in Karakorum!"

Peleg did not hesitate. "She is a girl I made friends with just before that bloody fight, where, save for you, my lord, I should now be under the earth. Her name is Ghosta. She is a Jewess from Mesopotamia and she is now working in the Abbess's kitchen here. Lay-Brother Tuck from Prior Bog's kitchen told me about her. He told Friar Bacon too about her and the Friar wished to see her, and she went to see him, unknown to her nuns and unknown to the Prior."

"So that's it!" chuckled Sir Mort with a friendly grimace. "Kitchen to kitchen, eh? And do you want to marry this ghost of a girl from Mesopotamia? If that's the idea, you old Jewish Goliath, you'll have to go to Lady Val. She's the one who arranges our matrimonial affairs. But I daresay I could — but what's the matter, Peleg? Do you feel ill? You're not going to faint are you? You look as if you'd seen something worse than a ghost-girl!"

"I — haven't — seen — her — yet," stammered the agitated giant.

Sir Mort looked at him intently. "You're bewitched, old friend. There's no doubt about it. I see you're feeling exactly the sort of thing that I felt myself when I fell in love with Lady Val a quarter of a century ago, when I'd only caught one glimpse of her at the Winchester tourney. Well, the best thing *you* can do, Peleg my lad, is to go straight away now and find your girl and have a good talk, a long talk with her, and discover what she wants to do! She may be so happy with those nuns and made such a pet of, that she won't want to consider moving to the Fortress kitchen, even if Lady Val had room for her here. On the other hand she may — Holy Jesus, take care! What is the matter with you? Are you ill, Peleg?"

The giant would indeed have fallen prone on his face if Sir Mort hadn't caught him in his arms. He hadn't lost consciousness however; and when his master propt him up in a sitting-posture with his broad back against the trunk of a pine, he still had the wit left to grope for his iron mace, and when he'd got it in his grasp, to prop it up between his knees, the round bronze ball of its handle, about the size of an apple, pressing against his chin.

Sir Mort laid a hand on his head. "What *you* want, my boy, is a sip of that strong water Nurse used to give Tilton when he got one of his fainting-fits. If I weren't afraid of those damned red devils from Lost Towers, who brought that Bonaventura here, lighting on you and slaughtering you or carrying you off, I'd leave you here and get a drop of that stuff from Nurse. Look up, big sonny! Let a man see your face. If you're bewitched to this tune, before you've even seen the wench, what'll you be when you meet her face to face?"

At this the giant did raise his head, and the two men stared gravely for a moment into each other's eyes. Then Sir Mort hesitated no longer. "By the wounds of Jesus, I'll risk it! Don't you dare to move! And if any of those red-jerkin'd villains come along, you just pretend to be dying till they get near and then give them what for with your iron mace! If you threaten one of the sods with it, the rest will bolt!"

And with a nod and a grim shadow of a smile, he took himself off; and Peleg was left alone, propt up against that pine. His feelings grew queerer and queerer as he waited. “Am I really bewitched?” he thought, “and is it possibly that she’s always been some kind of a demon and not a real girl at all? Well; I’ll be damned if I care if she is a demon. She’s my true love, demon or no demon. I’d sooner go down to Hell with her than to the highest Heaven with anybody else!

“But it’s all very well for *me* to think like that! The point is: what does *she* think? It’s no good for me to go on telling myself these crazy stories about her, while she, maybe, doesn’t give me a thought, or, if she does, has lost all wish to see me again! Besides I must remember that by this time she’s older, and no doubt wiser, and may not at all be in a mood to be carried away by the great love of a hulking monster like me. She’s probably decided that all this business of having children and taking care of children, and having a man and taking care of a man, is simply slavery; whereas if she retains her maidenhood and finds some work for herself that suits her and that doesn’t tax her strength beyond a certain point, she may go on being absolutely independent.

“Of course her danger in *that* direction would be the risk of becoming a nun with holy Jesus in the offing and the Holy Ghost — Ghost for Ghosta! — on the horizon. And this sort of life must in many ways, when you really come to think of it in detail, be *no independence at all*! O Ghosta, Ghosta, what are *you*, now at this very moment, thinking about? Does the faintest thought of your lover ever cross your mind?”

At this point Peleg’s cogitations were interrupted by the reappearance of Sir Mort accompanied by both his sons; nor did our Mongolian fail to notice that, as usually happened in their father’s company, the two lads were in a state of quiet fraternal expectation, ready for anything to happen, and interested in anything that did happen, but not engaged in an angry argument, as they had such a tendency to be when with their mother or their sister.

“You’re sure your mother said it was pure Neapolitan, that white wine, and not some crazy drink that Tuck of Bumset has concocted and that’s been smuggled into our kitchen from theirs?”

Sir Mort’s words were addressed to Tilton, who held in his hands with exemplary care a four-sided bottle of colourless liquid closed with a glass stopper of an emerald tint.

“O yes, Father,” Tilton replied, quietly enough, but with obvious eagerness to see what effect upon the gigantic patient this particular beverage would have, and excitedly ready to be the one called upon to administer this cure for over-excitement.

“Mother said she’d just given a glass of it to Nurse when Nurse was so upset by Lil-Umbra’s taking John’s side — wasn’t she, John? — that her hands shook till she dropped a plate on the stone floor and it broke into three pieces; and John said — didn’t you, John? — that one piece was Lil-Umbra and one was himself and one was me. Here it is! Shall I give it to Peleg?”

Sir Mort gravely nodded; and Peleg taking it from the boy’s hand, and removing the stopper, poured the whole contents of the bottle down his throat in three long gulps. The effect on the big man was instantaneous. He handed back the phial that had contained this saving grace to Tilton; and quite calmly and naturally squared his shoulders, grasped his great mace by the middle, and bending his head automatically towards his master, and deliberately and with great dignity towards the two lads, went off with long and rapid strides in the direction of the Priory and the Convent.

As he went, the strangest feelings swept through him, affecting his attitude to everything in the world. He felt perfectly calm, but prepared to fight to the death, for two inexhaustible causes, each of which he saw at that moment in close connection with a separate aspect of the scenery through which he was hurrying, the first with a long line of stately pines and the second with a distant hill-top upon which at that moment rested a large white cloud.

His first cause was to win Ghosta against all the world, and his second was, when once he had won her, to fight on behalf of her people, her tribe, her ideas, her religion — yes, on behalf of everything that belonged to her, of everything she loved and represented, of everything she had set her heart upon, whether to do or to enjoy.

There was even a third cause that came to him as he passed a dark avenue descending into a mossy gully; and this was to fight to the death against all the things and people and customs and ways and systems and institutions, which she loathed and hated! It was just when he was passing this sombre declivity, which the Sun himself, even at the high hour of noon, seemed to hesitate to enter, that he heard behind him the sound of running feet and the quick panting breath of the runner.

He stopped and swung round, tightening his hold on his mace. And there, behold, was young John! John never looked his age. He was over eighteen; but any stranger seeing him as he looked at that moment would have taken him for sixteen or seventeen. John's eyes were hazel in colour, and were large and full of spirit; in fact they gave the impression that his soul was much nearer the surface of his skin than is usual with young men; and as Peleg waited till the lad got his breath, he told himself that it was no wonder this learned Friar, whom everyone talked about, enjoyed teaching a boy like this.

"Father sent me," John said, "because he thought it might help if I were to go into the Convent and say that mother was very anxious to see her and had sent me to fetch her; and then, of course, after we three were out of their sight, I could come home alone. Father said it would seem quite all right for you to take her back later, and that mother would really be very glad to see her at the Fortress."

Peleg stared down at him for a second in silence. Then he said slowly, "Your Father is extremely wise in these things. And of course when my friend and I are once safe in the Fortress, we can find out whether Lady Val would really like to see her or not. Yes, come on Master John, and we'll see what happens!"

But as they threaded their way together between the trunks of the pines, that seemed to grow especially tall in this particular corner of the Manor, Peleg cursed the hour he had decided to take his master into his confidence. "It's always unsafe to get their help," he told himself. "They are so different from us. They do everything quicker, and yet, in a manner, more sideways, than we do things. But I expect I'm silly in not being overjoyed at this young master's help. And yet I don't know! How can I be glad to have anyone else, anybody at all, present when I first see Ghosta again? O but I've been a prize fool to let them into my secret! And yet on the other hand what would I have done with Ghosta if I hadn't had this help? Where, in the name of all the devils, would I have taken her? As it is *now*, Lady Val *may* give her a place in their Fortress kitchen? But will she want that to happen? Girls are queer cattle! They live their own life quite apart from us. *Thai's* what these damned Nordic crusaders never have, and never will, understand!"

Peleg was so moved by this psychic discovery that he broke his silence. "What is your opinion of girls, Master John?"

John's eyes became absolutely brilliant, like two lamps lit by a divine flame in the Holy Tabernacle of the Ark of the Covenant.

"O I adore them! I worship them! I embrace — in my mind of course, or in my imagination — every single one of them I meet! Off, off, off, off I slip their pretty clothes! And oh! so quickly I'm hugging them! But that's the worst of it, for it's the whole of the best of it, and the end of it! For I have an ecstasy at once, and all my soul rushes out, and all my seed is gone, in a minute, and I've no strength left to ravish them and take their divine maidenheads!

"That's my trouble, Peleg; and I don't see how I can get over it! I don't see how I'm ever to enjoy a woman properly, or ever to have a child, or ever to become a grandfather and a great-grandfather and a great-great-grandfather and a real proper ancestor! Tilton's quite different. I *think* — only it's a great secret, of course, between you and me — but I *think* Tilton's already got a girl who lives round here. She's a very, very slim girl, and she goes about with a little child, her niece I think it is, called Bet, who's a very nice kid.

"Bet and I made great friends when we were waiting for Tilton. Tilton doesn't like girls — he says they don't understand architecture. His girl's name is Oona and her Father or Grandfather is that rebellious serf, you know the one I mean? The one who got on so well with old Heber; but then Heber has the trick of propitiating everybody; whereas this Dod Pole — I expect you know him — is now in perpetual trouble with Randy."

Having finished his discourse John flung upwards a quick glance from his lustrous eyes to see whether the giant at his side had taken it all in, or had allowed his mind to wander; for with an intense interest in particular aspects of life, and a tendency to philosophise at some length on these aspects, young John frequently caught people's attention wandering from what he was saying; and this made him intermittently cautious, though he hated to have to stop and scrutinize his listener.

But just then he had to be content with a hurried nod, for they had arrived at the door of the Convent. “Father said for me to go straight in,” the lad now whispered to Peleg who was bending down to hear his instructions, “and not to come out with the girl — her name is Ghosta, isn’t it? — but to wait inside till you’ve gone off with her: but I expect I’ll be seeing you later, and maybe her too, so I’ll only say ‘good-luck’ and not ‘good night’, Peleg”; and with these last syllables vibrating round his youthful figure, he advanced boldly to the great loose chain which was hanging from an aperture in the top part of the massive black door, and this he pulled three times, and Peleg could distinctly catch the reverberation of its echoing resonance from inside the building.

The ringer hadn’t to wait. The door opened almost at once, making an aperture of about six inches, and after a brief parley with a dim, white-coifed figure, like a pale kernel in a cracked nut, the lad went inside and the door was closed. There was only one tree near this closed entrance and that was an ancient birch with a remarkably mottled trunk and only two branches, which branches, being very high up, were like the arms of a crucified queen who guarded the place by day and night and threatened every intruder.

Calmly and deliberately the huge Hebraic Mongol settled himself on the ground with his back against this solitary tree and awaited his fate. He had to wait a long time; but the curious thing was that while he waited now he felt himself to be entirely free from that sickening lethargy which had so loosened his knees and which required a whole bottle of Neapolitan white wine to remove from his midriff.

And then the closed doors opened, opened more quietly than when they had shut, and there she was! He automatically clutched his iron mace, as if the building behind her and the tree behind him had been a host of enemies, and with it in his hand he leapt up from the ground and bounded towards her.

When he reached that tall, stately, slender figure, in a black mantle with a black hood — who gazed straight into his face with eyes as dark and beautiful, and, to his feelings, just then, as terrifyingly prophetic, as must have been the eyes of Deborah, the wife of Heber the Kenite, or of Miriam, the sister of Moses — Peleg allowed his mace with its terrible spikes to fall to the ground. He could do nothing but just stand helplessly in front of her, muttering over and over again the blind words: “Ghosta! So you’ve really and truly come! Ghosta! So you’ve really and truly come!”

But she, with a gesture like that of a warrior-queen, whose lightest word was obeyed by thousands, lifted both her arms towards him, took his bare head in her bare hands, and, drawing it down towards her breast, kissed him on the forehead.

Peleg felt this to be a momentous kiss, a sacramental kiss, a kiss belonging to a ritual for the union of a man and a woman that was older than Sodom and Gomorrha, older than Tyre and Sidon, older than Babylon and Nineveh.

For a moment he stood with his eyes closed; and then, with a deep gasp for breath, as if he had just defeated an army of rivals, he bent down and picked up his iron weapon. This he now grasped tightly in his right hand, and taking Ghosta’s right hand in his own left, he led her away, up a mossy slope between scattered yellow stalks of last autumn’s bracken and a few dead clumps of last summer’s heather, till, completely hidden from any possible onlookers from either Convent or Priory, he led her into the entrance chamber of the cave of Manawyddan, which had been a favourite resort of his since he first followed Sir Mort to that district of Wessex.

The cave was indeed so completely hidden by a grove of alders and willows that it was by no means universally known even to natives of those parts. The two of them had no sooner entered it than Ghosta's whole attitude changed. The maternal heart in her was at once touched to the quick by the various little semi-domestic arrangements that this gigantic lover of hers had made in this secret hermitage of his, such as the strewings of dry reeds that covered the floor, such as a couple of great iron trivets, one of which was carrying a deep copper basin and the other supporting a kind of extempore frying-pan which had clearly served its purpose extremely well not so very long ago. In one corner of the cave there was a large earthenware bowl of water and by the side of it a little jug with a handle that looked more Greek than Roman for ladling the water into other receptacles.

As Peleg noticed the deeply amused, and intensely practical interest that Ghosta took in all these objects, he told himself that he had been wise to keep the existence of this cave, which had originally been shown to him by a travelling tinker from Wales, entirely to himself. This Welsh tinker had told him about certain ancient Welsh gods, who had travelled through the land like himself doing work in leather and in various metals. He had explained that he himself, in every district he visited, selected some special spot where he could labour unmolested at his job and fulfil the various professional orders he obtained in that neighbourhood; and he swore that it had been in a vision of one of these old tribal deities, a being who called himself Manawyddan fab-Llyr, that he had learnt of this cave and been assured, that if he kept the secret to himself, nobody would disturb him there.

It was too early for more than a few tiny leaf-buds to have appeared on the willow and alder boughs that in a confused mass hid the mouth of the cave; but at about ten yards distance outside this half-circle of entangled trunks, and closely twisted twigs, grew an immense pine.

The rough bark of this tree, for it was a tree that stood with its back, so to speak, to the cave and to the cave's bodyguard of entwined branches and twigs, had become for Peleg a token of the precise hour; for its colour darkened and lightened, flickered and shadowed, according to the advancing and retreating, the self-concealing and self-revealing, of Sun and Moon and the intermittent rising and falling of the wind.

Though he had only once or twice actually passed a night in this cave, he had of late amused himself by making careful preparations for a winter night there. He had prepared a tall barrier of wooden bars that exactly fitted the mouth of the cave, but was easily lifted up and could be deposited, after use, beneath one of the interior walls, a barrier that he could render proof against wind and snow and rain by covering it with the skins of cattle and sheep.

What he felt especially proud of, as he showed the cave's domestic conveniences to his beautiful Hebrew friend, was a tightly wedged mass of clean and dry hay, with which he had packed from floor to ceiling a rocky recess in one of the cave's corners, towards which the ground sloped upwards a little.

He studied every flicker of her expression with boyish solemnity, as he now proceeded to strew on the ground at the back of the cave a thick sprinkling of this pleasantly-scented summer-hay for their February siesta. It seemed to him that she whitened a little at the first glance she threw upon this lover's bed, then reddened a little, but she continued to watch his every movement with an expression that it would have been totally impossible for him to interpret; but which revealed in reality something of that infinitely maternal and desperately romantic tenderness that young Tilton was struggling now so intensely, day after day, with his hammer and chisel, to convey to his carved image of the Virgin as he imagined her uttering her immemorial "Magnificat".

And quite suddenly, and as it may well be imagined, to Peleg's wonder and delight, Ghosta took the whole situation into her own hands. "Let's make a good fire," she cried, "and warm the whole place before we lie down! And let's heat some water and have a good drink of hot red wine!"

Such had been his secret meticulous preparations for a situation exactly like this one, only built up entirely in his imagination, that few lovers would believe, however deeply they trusted their tale-bearers, how small was the lapse of time before a blazing fire of sticks and logs, unattended by any great volume of smoke, was burning triumphantly, and before they were exchanging with each other deep draughts of red wine mixed with bubbling water.

The effect of these timely preparations were enhanced by the noon-day sunshine, which poured down upon them past the great pine-tree outside, one of whose two big boughs lay on the ground, while the other was extended wide, with a gesture as comprehensive as that with which Jacob, after wrestling all night with the angel, must have greeted the hills and valleys and rivers of the Promised Land.

Then as they replaced the goblets, from which they had been drinking, on the wide shelf that ran round the cave, Ghosta uttered the most astonishing words that her companion had ever heard issuing from human lips.

"Now is the moment, O my friend, when you and I must strip ourselves of all. For a man knoweth not the woman he loves, nor does a woman know the man she loves, until each is as naked as the other."

The words struck him like a ritual, mystical and solemn, but the natural, half-laughing way she came close up to him and proceeded to loosen the buckle of his belt, and then, drawing back a few paces, began with incredible rapidity, but with gay and laughing interjections, and indeed with half-humorous and almost mischievous smiles at certain particularly crucial moments, to fling off every stitch of her clothing, made him feel at ease with the whole universe.

Peleg imitated her as fast as he could; but perhaps it was significant of the double stream of blood in his veins that, before they lay down together on that sweet-scented bed of hay, he lifted his wooden screen across the entrance to their amorous hermitage and hung over it a large bull's hide.

As he did so he couldn't help being struck by the sun-warmth which reached his fingers from this same skin, for he had snatched it up from the top of a pile that ever since dawn had been in reach of the Sun. Nor did the gigantic amorist, while the Sun above the bull's-hide screen caressed his own swarthy neck, fail to note with something like philosophical vanity that he was not so absorbed by the passion of love as to be unable to get, even at this moment of moments, a quite definite sensuous pleasure from the touch of the Lord of Life.

But when once those two lay down together, all other thoughts, impressions, experiences, sensations were absorbed and engulfed in the blind intermingling of two bodies, two souls, two spirits; so much so that the shock and the blood of her ravishment by him, and the furious onslaught of his possession of her, were both swept into a whirling vortex of rainbow-irradiated bubbles, tossed into space, as the confluent torrents of their two life-streams became one terrific river.

Calling up these blinding moments in calmer blood, our Mongolian giant could not help being struck by the fact that it was Ghosta, and not he, who fell into a sleep of blissful exhaustion when their ecstasy was over. This, he decided after long and delicate ponderings, was due to the fact that, in *her* case, body, soul, and spirit were much more intimately united than in his; so that when their union had been fully achieved, there was no residual reservoir left, of “energeia akinesis”, or “unruffled force”, such as could keep her consciousness alert and observant: while in *his* case, whether due to his masculinity or to his stature, there remained a definite level of mental awareness that was completely unaffected by what senses, or soul, or spirit, were feeling or had felt.

And this awareness was closely allied to action. What Peleg did, therefore, when the trance of their beatitude had ebbed and she was asleep, was to slip noiselessly from Ghosta’s side, and — with the stealthy movements of a male panther arranging the fragments of his half-devoured prey before distributing them to its little ones while their mother slept — to re-assume his garments one by one, till he was completely clad. Then, with a fond but not lingering glance at his sleeping mate, he stole into the interior of the cave and began completing, as far as it was possible to do such a thing without the usual accompanying sounds, all the preparations upon which of late he had been secretly engaged, so that he might be in a position to offer his re-discovered bride, when the moment came, the sort of romantic, but deliciously tasting and completely satisfying meal, that was worthy of such a never-to-be-repeated occasion.

Perhaps nothing since they had found each other again — for their supreme embrace just now had been to them something outside time and space — struck Ghosta’s Hebrew-girlish mind more poignantly than what she saw when, fully awake at last and with her clothes on again, she entered that inner chamber of the cave and beheld her lover’s quaint preparations for what might have been called their consummation feast.

But she kept her feelings to herself, for it was a deeply congenital characteristic of Ghosta's nature to avoid above everything the quick exclamations and exuberant outcries with which it seems irresistible to some of the nicest ladies in the world to express, or at least to convey the impression that they're expressing, the feelings of the heart.

But her smile told a lot; and as far as the preparation for their love-feast went, which he had so quaintly and crudely set in motion, her quick and competent hands soon had them seated side by side on a bench of pine-wood opposite a big round shield on a tall brazen tripod, covered with a white cloth and a couple of large earthenware plates.

Peleg was soon explaining that, when they had finished their meal, he was anxious to take her to the Fortress, where he hoped she would be able by her beauty and the power of her personality to persuade Lady Val to let her join the large-kitchen-establishment of Roque, which, though situated, as he explained, within the confines of the Fortress, was really an independent organization by whose methods of procedure the whole Manor benefited.

He was so eager and voluble about this idea of his that she should find a place for herself, and so certain that such a place would be pretty near the top, that for a long while he never saw how little she was responding to the picture he was so vigorously painting of their future at the Fortress.

When at last he paused, however, he was not only startled but shocked and hurt. He had stopped in mid-flow, so to speak, with the idea of clearing the channel-bed of his torrent of exultant prediction, so that *her* stream of consciousness might join and mingle absolutely with his own, and he was stunned and confounded by the way she replied.

"No, no, my darling Peleg!" she cried. "I can't imagine myself working in the midst of this great manorial kitchen! I know too well all it takes to prepare meals for those who plough and sow and plant and reap and bind and clear the ground of weeds! And as for having to be polite to this presumptuous and insolent bailiff of theirs, this brutal Randolph Sygerius — Heavens! I wouldn't consider it for a second. But don't look sad, my precious Peleg; for I wouldn't mind coming across to the Fortress now and again, whenever Lady Val was short-handed or had any special visitors to cater for.

"But to work as a rule and every day in your manorial kitchen, the Lord God of Israel forbid! No, my dearest one! No, no, no! I'll go with you to Rome. I'll go with you to Jerusalem. I'll go with you to Sicily. I'll go with you to Constantinople. I'll go with you to Corinth. I'll go with you to Samarcand or to Trebizond or to Jericho. But even for you, my first and my last true love, I will not work in an English manorial kitchen!"

Peleg turned round and laid his great hands on her shoulders and stared at her. They were sitting side by side with their backs to a wall of wet dark stone. Down this wall dripped continually small trickles of water; while the wall itself was broken here and there by deep greenish-black clefts of incredible depth. In fact these cracks in the wall gave the impression that, were they enlarged so that a small person could worm himself into them, they might be found to lead, if the explorer had the courage to persevere and follow one of them to the bitter end, right to the very centre of the whole planet, where such an explorer would be liable to be devoured by that fabulous creature called the Horm, the legends about whom were evidently so appalling, and so likely to be disclosing a horrible reality, that, long before any written chronicler existed, they must have been deliberately suppressed by the self-preservative consciousness of the human race.

When Peleg turned towards her in his startled surprise and clutched her shoulders, they both had their backs to these sinister cracks in the wall and their faces towards the ponderous arch under which they had made their bed; and beyond that arch, outside the cave altogether, they could see, outlined against the sky, that huge mystical pine-tree, which stretched out its branch-arm for, or against, the frequenters of that ancient cave, in a gesture as wholly inscrutable as it seemed to be wholly indestructible.

"Do you realize what you're saying, child?" Peleg groaned, as he shook the girl slowly forward and slowly backward, while his large hands, had anywandering progeny of that subterranean Horm been peering at them from behind, would have hidden completely beneath their knuckles and veins and wrinkles and creases of loose pendulous skin all the lovely rondures of the girl's feminine shoulders.

"Don't you understand," he muttered, "that I am for ever committed, body and soul, to the service of Sir Mort Abyssum? I could no more leave the Fortress than that old tree out there could leave the place where it grows, unless a hurricane uprooted it, or lightning struck it, or a savage tree-hater cut it down with a murderous axe!"

He let her shoulders go and dropped his arms; and for some time they just stared at each other, both angry, but both afraid of what they might say or do in their anger. Peleg had learnt in his world, just as Ghosta had learnt in hers, that it is wiser not to quarrel with a creature who instinctively gathers itself together before hitting back, so that, when it does strike, the blow shall be a deadly one.

At last, very quitely, Ghosta spoke: "I am ready to agree, my friend," she said, "if you are anxious for me to go with you to the Fortress and have an interview with your Lady Val; but I can tell you this in advance, and you'll see for yourself the truth of my prediction, if you accompany me into the presence of this lady: Lady Val will loathe the sight of me, and will command Sir Mort to have nothing to do with me! I don't say for a moment that he'll obey her in this, but she'll no more want to have me working in the manorial kitchen than I want to work there. It's this ancient hatred of us Jews which all the races in Europe feel, and which a certain class of men and women in this country especially suffers from.

"I've thought about it a lot lately; and I think it is purely due to our superior intelligence. They feel instinctively that they're not our equals in intelligence and that makes them hate us, and their hatred is continually being intensified by contempt every time they see how, in archery and hunting and tournaments and in all manly sports and in all athletic contests and public games, the simplest and stupidest among them can play a part, whereas we Hebrews — just as did the great Avicebron when he was a child, Avicebron for whom Friar Bacon has such a passion — have always thought that our mighty men of battle, our Samsons and Sauls and Joshuas and Abners and Joabs, were of far less account than our prophets and priests and men of God."

"But Ghosta, my Ghostal What are you saying? Aren't our Scriptures full of the victories of Judah and Israel over their enemies? Wasn't the Lord of Hosts always giving his chosen people triumphant. victories over Syrians and the Assyrians and Babylonians and Philistines?"

Ghosta gave him a most peculiar look, a look that seemed to say: "I shall have to consider this very carefully. You are a man. I am a woman. I shall have to consider whether I can talk to you about these things, and tell you all that I've thought about them for a long time. Don't 'ee look like that, Peleg darling — as if I'd slapped you across the cheek. I shall always tell you the important things of my life, and you'll always tell me the important things of your life. These political and religious questions aren't the true reality of any actual life of a man and a woman who love each other. You might be very interested in them and might be totally indifferent to them, and we could live out our life in perfect contentment.

“Everybody’s life’s like a star with at least forty points branching out in all directions, and every one of these points can turn eventually into a life-long road of unending interest. But at the heart of that star the real Peleg and the real Ghosta can sit at their hearth over their crock of pottage, and watch the shadows on the wall, and hear the wind in the chimney and the rain on the roof, and take to themselves the mystery of everything.

“Well, my dear, you tidy up the room and get it into the shape you like to leave it in when you go out into the world; and I’ll deal with the remains of our meal and clean the things.”

Peleg obeyed her; and until the horizontal rays of the descending Sun thrust the angular shadow of the pine-tree’s elbow almost as far as the cracks in the wet dark wall, out of which the elfin faces of the dumb progeny of the awful Horm could be imagined peering at them, the two of them kept an almost religious silence.

Nor was it only silence they shared: for as they went to and fro about their homely tasks the same thought hovered in their minds; the thought that they were both, save for this miracle of a life together which had only begun today, strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land. And this thought of theirs, as he went on tidying up and arranging, according to his ideas of a proper chamber, the whole appearance of their cave, and as she emptied and washed and dried and polished their pots and pans and dishes, did not only hover about them; it also grew deeper and more definite.

Indeed they had both decided, before they left the cave, she with her black mantle and white hood wrapt round her body and head, and her right hand held tightly in his left, and he with his great iron mace swinging its terrific spikes through the withered stalks of last autumn’s grasses, as if to scare them out of the path of the over-cautiously sprouting new ones, that there was nothing as yet in this new worship of the Trinity, with its Father and Son and Holy Spirit, so closely linked with the Assumption into Heaven of the Blessed Virgin, to compel them, by any spontaneous recognition of a deeper truth, to relinquish their old ancestral faith in Jehovah as their one invisible God, or to bow themselves on the ground before the Crucified Jesus.

That this spiritual decision, by a telepathic interchange of thought that is rare even among lovers, had been accepted by them both, was proved by the murmured exclamations they uttered as they left that glade among the rocks in a wood even more dominated by their union than that cave was dominated by its pine-tree, or those cracks in its wall at the back by that appalling Horm.

XI. EBB AND FLOW

IT WOULD ALMOST seem as if, over every measurable geographical square of the planetary surface of the earth — and this would apply whether our earth were flat or round, or neither the one nor the other — there vibrates a special and particular amount of magnetic receptivity, by means of which each individual creature is attracted to or repelled by all the other creatures who are dwelling in or are passing through the same arena, an attraction or repulsion which is obviously stronger or weaker in proportion to the type of creature who is exerting it or feeling it.

If this theory has any truth, it was under the influence of something beyond mere accident or chance that, when this terribly-armed adherent of the House of Abyssum, holding by the hand his cloaked and flashing-eyed bride, just as the Sun was sinking behind them on that perfect February day in the year of Grace twelve hundred and seventy two, came to be within measurable distance of Spardo filius Regis Bohemiensis, along with his deformed horse known as Cheiron, the two pairs moved hurriedly to their encounter.

Peleg had met Spardo several times already, and himself was well known to Spardo; but Peleg was at this moment not a little disturbed by such a meeting and was extremely disinclined to allow it to be a cause of delay in the important business of introducing Ghosta to the interior of the Fortress of Roque. But Ghosta was, as may well be imagined, fascinated at once by the sight of this extraordinary horse, with what under the horizontal rays of the setting Sun did really look like a human head beginning to thrust itself forth through that horribly swollen neck.

Spardo himself treated the gigantic Mongol as he treated everybody with whom he had any contact in that part of Wessex. Without disregarding him, he behaved as if the giant had been some inanimate object, a chair perhaps, or a bench, or a ladder, or a door, or a stone outside a door, or a mat in front of the fire where his supper was being prepared, or the hand-rail beside the steps leading up to the chamber where he was to sleep, or even the barrel of oats near the comfortable manger, he would presently leave Cheiron when he had replenished his bin.

The huge Tartar managed to restrain his impatience for the space of about five minutes while Ghosta's black robe and white hood, and Spardo's flapping beard, mud-stained jerkin, and motley-coloured leather breeches, kept circling round and round that impassive horse, whose own gaze, with its far-away inscrutable stare, seemed to be fixed upon some invisible landscape where events were taking place that hadn't the faintest connection with all this fuss about that unfortunate swelling in his own neck.

When however for the third time Ghosta bent in absorbed concentration above that weird deformity, Peleg could bear it no longer. "Pardon me, Master Spardo," he cried, "but I've got an appointment for this lady at the Fortress, and it won't do to keep Lady Val waiting!"

With these words he flung his left arm round his obsessed girl, administered to Cheiron's flank a friendly tap with the knuckle of the hand from which the great mace was swinging, gave Cheiron's master an affable nod, and muttering something in Hebrew, that might have meant, as far as Spardo could follow it, "Goodbye till we meet in Hell!" he strode off with the lady on his left and the mace on his right.

Whether to their eventual advantage or disadvantage, it is curious that no instinct warned Peleg just then that the worst possible moment for winning the favour of the Lady of Roque was during the particular hour she was accustomed to move to and fro between the manorial kitchen and the dining hall, with occasional interruptions from Nurse Rampant and Mother Guggery, and intermittent debouchings up and down the steps leading to her daughter's chamber. If it hadn't been that his nerves were so strung-up by his possession of Ghosta that all life's ordinary routine seemed projected to a distance, rather like that unknown vision upon which Cheiron's gaze seemed to be fixed, he would certainly have realized this fact.

Indeed it may easily be that he did realize it, only not with sufficient intensity to allow it to influence his action. In any case, with a massive recklessness that was a deep element in his nature, though it was a rare event for him to draw upon it, Peleg led Ghosta to the great gate of the Fortress, where as a quite natural event the gate-keeper admitted them without even glancing up at his wife's window to see if their entrance aroused her more shrewd attention.

Once inside the Fortress, the worthy Cortex straightway escorted them, without stopping to obtain the mediation of any of the servants, to the familiar corridor between the dining-hall and the kitchen, where at this hour Lady Val was almost always to be found. And there indeed they found her. And if we are to assume — though at these mysterious and fatal moments in human lives, where so many paths into the unknown future seem to offer themselves, it is a doubtful wisdom to assume anything — that happy relations between Sir Mort's lady and Peleg's lady was a desirable occurrence, it was unlucky that neither Nurse Rampant nor old mother Guggery happened to be present at this encounter; for both these women had the gift, refined upon by age-long practice, of softening and modifying the impact upon the touchy and susceptible Lady Val, of any troublesome intruder.

The Tartar giant saw in a moment how completely his attempt to establish a happy understanding between these two women was doomed to absolute failure. But it was too late to retreat now; and so he blundered on.

“Pardon my intrusion, my lady, but this is an old friend of mine who comes from that so much fought-over strip of land between the Tigris and the Euphrates, where so many of your own renowned ancestors won their glory. I have already told my friend here many of those heroic stories that your revered children love to relate. Your son Tilton, for instance, has often told us about that amazing encounter between your great-grandfather, Sir Stephen Dormaquil, and that monstrous Tartar with three arms who fought with six sharp-pointed elephants’ tusks, one in each of his six hands; and who, after being chopped into sixteen pieces by your noble ancestor, was carried off to the top of Mount Carmel by eagles, and there was so completely disposed of that not a bone of his own nor the splinter of his ivory weapons was ever seen again. My friend here, my Lady, has thought of nothing else, since I told her about Sir Stephen and the other Dormaquils, and she begged me to bring her here just to see, if only for a moment, the living descendant of such heroic people.”

Peleg was so pleased with the whole situation, so proud of himself in Ghosta’s presence for his tactful speech, and so proud of himself in Lady Val’s presence for making it so easy for Ghosta to keep a discreet silence, that Sir Mort would have thought him pathetically childish not to have detected what was going on, all the while he was speaking, between the two women.

But then Sir Mort knew the mother of his three children better than the wisest of his henchmen could possibly know the lady of his house. Besides, Peleg was not only a foreigner and an oriental; he was also a giant, and looking down upon that pair of feminine brows and eyebrows, each of them quivering with implacable hostility, he was so impervious to the wordless, and you might almost say to the mindless, aura of antagonism, automatically generated between them, that he stept backwards as if to avoid a blow at the tone in Lady Val's voice as she remarked to Ghosta:

"You want employment here, I take it? Are you prepared to do any kind of work? Or do you want something special? We've no opening just now for a new hand indoors, but it's quite possible, if you apply to our bailiff, Master Randolph Sygerius, that he'll be able to find you work in the garden. We depend a lot on green food and we gather it all the year round; so if you — —"

"I happen to be quite satisfied with what I'm doing in the Convent just at present, Lady, I thank you. Indeed so far I've never been driven to work out-of-doors, but if ever — —"

"Where, if I may enquire," interrupted Lady Val, her voice growing shrill, "were you brought up? My family here have given work I know, in past times, to black females. In fact if I remember correctly, my grandfather's bailiff employed a family of Ethiopians. Of course this particular family may have been the slaves of some trader who died over here when he was selling leopards' skins; but if you wait in the scullery till after dinner, you'll be able, or Peleg here will be able on your behalf, to catch Master Randy, our present bailiff. Do you help, may I ask, in the Convent latrine? I remember there was — —"

"My lady, my lady — —" broke in Peleg at this point. "My friend here is a learned Jewess, who has worked with Doctors and with Rabbis of our ancient faith, copying, for instance, with pencils and brushes certain faded pages in the Hebrew scriptures. And so, no doubt, though the Convent kitchen must already have come to depend on her delicate touch with their food, we can hardly expect — —"

"Be quiet, Peleg!" almost screamed Lady Val. "Since you brought this woman here to stare at me with her bold, black, impertinent eyes, perhaps you'll tell me whether she wants to be allowed to prepare for me some of those Jewish spells with her pencils and her brushes, such as I can use on my enemies in this place? If so, you can tell her that, though she may have bewitched you and some of those simple nuns, who in such things are no wiser than children, I won't have her bewitching me or my young daughter! But take her into the scullery, Peleg, and find a corner there for her till after dinner and then take her back to the convent. I don't want any Jewish sorceress in my house or garden or kitchen! And what's more—" This was added, when, without any other retort, Ghosta had wrapt her mantle more tightly round her shoulders and pulled her hood more closely round her face and had turned her dark eyes with a mute interrogation towards Peleg—"And what's more," announced Lady Val, "I shall have to have a very serious talk with Sir Mort about this whole subject of your making friends with women of this kind. But let that go now."

This "let that go" was uttered in the confident tone of a person for whom victory in a battle implies the power to be generous.

"You must tell Cook, Peleg," she went on, "to give your friend what supper she has time to scrape together while she's dishing up dinner. I can see she hasn't been taught in her childhood, and hasn't had an opportunity to learn since, how a well-brought-up maiden, of any race in the world, behaves when she enters anyone's house; but I'm sure she didn't mean to be rude, just standing there and staring. I don't know anything about Pharisees and Sadducees, and not much about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba; but I do know that because Queen Jezabel worshipped idols, she was thrown out of a window to be eaten by dogs. So you can, both of you, see that I am not quite ignorant of the Hebrew scriptures — —"

With the sort of inclination of a half-veiled head that the mighty Sisera might have received in the entrance to the tent of Heber the Kenite, Ghosta turned away, and, followed submissively by Peleg, began to move off, not, however, towards the kitchen, but towards the door by which they entered.

They hadn't gone many paces, however, towards this door, when they were met by an extremely youthful personage, tricked out in the very latest armorial fashion for budding warriors, and before they could stand aside to let him pass, Lady Val was greeting him, and he was greeting Peleg and gazing respectfully and admiringly at Ghosta.

"Why, if it isn't our dear Sir William!" cried Lady Val — delighted, so Ghosta's giant lover told himself, at so good an excuse for smoothing over the biting sting of Ghosta's dignity under her crude abuse. "How nice you look, my darling boy, in that breast-plate and that scarf and that belt! Where is Raymond de Laon? Oh, of course I know! You men mustn't give each other away! He's with Lil-Umbra, of course. Oh yes! This is a great friend of our Peleg! I've just been discussing with him what place we can find for her in our little barony. Why, how very nicely you did that, my dear boy!"

This final remark was involuntarily drawn from the lady by the really perfect alacrity with which the slender little Sir William, after skipping up to her side, knelt down on one knee and kissed the knuckles of the hand she held out to him.

It was clear to Peleg, as she began talking rapidly to the young newly-made knight, and after every sentence shot a quick glance in their direction to see if they were still there, that her desire to have this lad to herself was intense. "She's wishing that her Tilton and her John were more like this elegant young man," the Tartar told himself. And then he thought: "I know Ghosta wants me to go off with her and that we ought to go; but I would like to see how this little elf-knight wins favour before we leave them!"

Young William Bancor of Gone was certainly what the doting old King Henry had called him at first sight — the liveliest and sprightliest little “Knave of Hearts” in the whole kingdom. His self-confidence and aplomb and his humorous enjoyment of his own attractive presence gave a zest to every moment which anyone spent in his company. Everybody could see at a glance how conceited he was. But he had no pride at all; and was prepared to throw his whole body, soul, and spirit into showing off before the poorest and meanest beggar he met. He “made love,” so to speak, to every man, woman, and child, who crossed his path.

And not only to them. To horses, dogs and cats, to birds in cages, to pigs in sties, to sheep in folds, to cattle in stalls — to them all he sang his song and danced his dance! When he was eating out-of-doors he would pay court to the nearest toad or frog or blind-worm. When he was sucking an orange before going to bed, he would make overtures to a spider.

He had no pride, and he had very little vanity. He was as conceited of his eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hair, legs, ankles, feet, as he was of his voice, his manners, and his knowledge of the world. It was enough that the quality, the feature, the member was *his* quality, his feature, *his* member, for it to be the most remarkable quality, feature, member in the world!

His self-admiration was wholly indiscriminate. He wasn’t vain of his hair, or of his eyes or his figure, or of his skill in riding or fencing, compared with other people’s hair and so forth. He compared them with nothing. They were his; and *that* alone made them incomparable.

Sir William never spent, as some young men do, considerable time at the mirror, arranging his hair, his expression, his pose, his dress, his gestures. He never wasted his own or other people’s time by explaining and justifying his opinions. They were his: that was enough. When asked for them he handed them to the asker, as a pilgrim might hand out pebbles from a sacred shore, or an exorcizer might sprinkle holy water on the walls of a haunted chamber.

He was younger than John, and a good deal younger than Tilton; whereas Raymond de Laon was over twenty-five. Sir William enjoyed life so intensely that it was a pleasure to everybody who knew him to be with him. So absolutely lacking in pride was he that he seemed to be as tickled by his own blunders, by his own foolishness, by his own cowardice, by his own weakness, by his own superstition, as were his friends in their affectionate entertainment and as were his enemies in their malicious amusement.

It must have been this gift of being all things to all men, on the strength of a conceit so immeasurable, that had enabled this singular boy at a yet earlier age to be actually able, under the wise encouragement of his father, to act in collusion with young John as one of the intermediaries between Roger Bacon and Pope Clement IV.

“How is your father’s injury from those Lost Towers devils?” enquired Lady Val of the lad, just as he was launching forth, for the benefit of Ghosta and her Tartar, upon a tale he had heard about a miraculous and terraqueous crusade of sea-eagles, who conveyed in their beaks from Chesil-Beach to the Holy Land enough pebble-stones of carnelian to enable the walls of Jerusalem to rival the hanging gardens of Babylon.

“O he’s healing up quick and easy, Lady,” replied Sir William: “the great difficulty at home just now is mother’s quarrel with both Raymond and Friar Bacon. She tells father he ought never to have invited Raymond here at all, because somebody younger, somebody more like me, she says, would look better going about with Lil-Umbra.”

These words caused even Ghosta to awake from a trance that had already made her lover recall the expression in the eyes of the horse Cheiron. But it can be imagined how they roused in Lady Val’s soul a sharp-pointed, outward-whirling arrow-head of flame-like fury. The idea of her only female offspring, the only daughter she would ever have — and do we not know that the closest association possible between human personalities is between a mother and a daughter? — becoming the official lady-love of this popinjay of a nursery-antic struck her on the quick.

She had had a good many more day-dreams about Lil-Umbra's future than Lil-Umbra ever had herself. For just as her father did, Lil-Umbra lived in the four elements, and one of the reasons why she had such a special partiality for Heber Sygerius was that the old ex-bailiff had, like Sir Mort, only in a different way, unusual awareness of the less palpable and more mysterious qualities of earth, air, fire and water.

Thus it was that when young Sir William blurted this out about his mother's attitude to Raymond de Laon, who, after all, was himself only a young man, an intense and violent surge of emotion rose in Lady Val's deepest being, swept up from the pit of her stomach into both her breasts, whirled up dizzily from there into her brain, and finally exploded in an outburst, the essence of which was irrepressible fury with fate because her secret, wild, ideal dreams about her daughter's future had been blighted forever; but, odd though it may sound, the form this fury took was nothing more or less than a desperate curiosity.

"Do, O please do, my dear William, tell me what that wise, clever, deep-seeing mother of yours finds wrong with Raymond de Laon! I expect she has a hundred times more insight than I shall ever have, and knows the world a hundred times better than I shall ever know it. Does your dear intellectual mother feel that something is wrong with Raymond's religion, or with his morals, or with his manners, or with his proper wish to get on in the world and to give his wife, when he has a wife, a proper position in the world? Or does your deep-searching mother — come a bit nearer, my boy, for I don’t want to be overheard — feel that Raymond is perhaps not quite, not altogether, not wholly and entirely — I see you know what I mean, so I can speak quite simply — right in his mind? I *have* seen Lil-Umbra look strangely at him once or twice when they’ve been talking, as if he were saying something rather, you know what I mean, my dear boy, rather wild and — and funny?”

The youngest of all the knights on whom the aged and ailing son of the brother of Richard Coeur-de-Lion had bestowed the accolade shut his open mouth, half-closed his roving eyes, and frowned. He was evidently thinking hard: not pretending to think, but really thinking.

Then, with an upward leap of his whole slender little person and a metallic tinkling of the hilt of his dagger against the hilt of his sword as his excitable hands rushed to his belt, Sir William Boncor exclaimed eagerly: “Yes! oh yes! I heard him say once, when someone was talking about the Day of Judgment and the Last Day: ‘In my Philosophy,’ he said, ‘there is no Day of Judgment nor any Last Day. There is only *Now*. We are born. We grow up: we have children: we die. And then the next generation is born; grows up; and dies. That’s my Philosophy as to the way things go.”

Sir William’s flickering little frame subsided upon its heels with a gasp of ineffable self-satisfaction. The confident smile of generations of just men condemning a crazy aberration broadened upon his triumphant face. With a faint shrug of his shoulders he seemed to be saying to every doubting devil in the universe, “I am righteous, I am!” It was at this well-timed moment that the wily Mogol took advantage of the long, half-amused, half-puzzled, but by no means disarmed look, that Lady Val fixed upon the self-satisfied young knight, and without asking permission, or letting his companion make the slightest parting obeisance, took Ghosta’s arm and led her out of that vortex of crazy foam by the way they had entered it.

"Mother thinks," Sir William began again, "that you don't realize half of what Raymond puts into Lil-Umbra's head. Mother even told father yesterday, when she was angry with him because he wouldn't shave off his beard, that Raymond will soon be dressing up Lil-Umbra in boy's clothes and taking her with him to Paris."

The unction with which this youngest of all the newly-dubbed knights at the court of the doting old man, who had reigned longer than any living monarch in Christendom, let these words fall upon Lady Val's tense nerves, was like the squeezing of a gobbet of spikenard upon an itching skin. As the ointment oozed forth upon the inflamed place, the fever behind it was driven in, not drawn out.

Lady Val's whole face twitched and her fingers clasped and unclasped the brooch at her waist. And then, as she gazed at this tricked-out image of youthful conceit, who was talking to her about the vindictiveness — and didn't she know intricacies of that underground stream well enough! — of her rival at Cone, there suddenly whirled up within her the blindest and most desperate wave of emotion she had ever felt in her life.

Her own mind, as it grew aware of what she felt, interpreted it as pure unmitigated and entirely justifiable indignation with Lady Ulanda of Cone, but in reality it was far more complicated. It was compounded of an intense revolt against the way fate had been treating her of late, mingled with a wild longing that her children's Dormaquil blood might suddenly assert itself and turn the whole tide of events in a completely new direction. Under the pressure of this surge of emotion, in the flood of which so many long pent-up feelings were breaking loose, she felt as though at any moment she might easily do something unexpectedly violent. It was an emotion too general, as well as too blind, to be fully interpreted by the simple definition “hatred of Lady Ulanda”, but as the thing uncoiled itself from the deepest centre of her being she began to be afraid of what she might do.

Lady Val had very rarely been as conscious of her personal inner life as she was at this moment. The sudden loosening within her of this long dammed up reservoir of suppressed fury forced the torrent of emotion into a psychic channel that so far had been left high and dry. She very rarely thought of herself at all when she was angry with Sir Mort or with Tilton or John; and in Lil-Umbra’s case she was so used to associating her daughter’s personality with her own that, when she got angry with her, it was like her right hand getting angry with her left hand.

Anger with Lil-Umbra was indeed a unique feeling, too deep-rooted to be easily articulated. But what she felt at this particular moment was a wild identification of herself with the very substance of the great house in which she lived. She felt as if she herself *were* the Fortress of Roque, and that every stone, every carving, every buttress, every arrow-slit, every stair, every tower, every wall, every rafter, every gate, every door, every threshold to every door, of this whole old place was calling out from within herself to herself, and reminding her that they and she together were a living part and portion of the diffused presence of the spirits of all her ancestors.

She suddenly felt that the whole place, which was herself and yet much more than herself, was being threatened by her and her children with a ghastly doom, a doom irretrievable, inescapable, and final. She told herself that it was she and none other who had brought this doom upon them all; and that she had done it by yielding to her love for Sir Mort and letting him be the father of her children.

As with most of us at some desperate climax of our lives, the wild passion of anger, which had driven this tragic awareness into an inner chamber of her consciousness, changed its own nature when it had achieved this end. It was a strange sadness that now filled Lady Val's soul, as she thought of this fatal name "Abyssum" drifting and floating and flowing across every surface and through every crevice and crack of the massive stones whereof the Fortress of Roque was built.

"He is too queer, too eccentric, too remote from real life," she told herself, "to be able to save this place and to guard our name from oblivion."

It was as if the agitated lady's soul had been whirling round the outside of the Fortress as violently as it had whirled round the inside, for it happened at that moment that a single dead alder-leaf, stirred up from the bank of a small stream in the direction of Cone Castle, and wafted through one of the arrow-slit windows in some higher portion of the Fortress, came floating down to the floor of that ante-room.

Where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest; and it rested on the ground almost mid-way between the comically pretentious young knight and the desperately agitated lady of the house. Whether either of them noticed this wrinkled symbol of the passing generations, as it fell between them, neither of them later would have been able to say. Very likely they both did, but without any reaction capable of being recalled.

Situations like this, when two human beings are brought together by fate, one of them in a state of feverish mental activity and the other in a state of complacent quiescence, one of them with nerves quivering and senses vibrant, and the other with both nerves and senses lulled into a trance of self-satisfaction, have the effect sometimes of putting very queer thoughts into the mind of one or other of the pair.

What came into the head of Lady Val at that moment was a fantastic theory of her husband's about which he was in the habit of expatiating at great length and upon the most inopportune occasions. Sir Mort's theory was — and though he would swear to her and to the children that it was based on his own experience, she never could see, however excited he got about it, that it was possible for one man's experience to cover such an immense field — that there was what he was pleased to describe as an invisible Dimension that existed over the whole surface of land and sea; and that into this Dimension rushed all the thoughts and feelings and passions and even sensations of everything that was subject to these things.

His theory culminated in the amazing dogma that everything that existed had such feelings, not even excluding rocks and stones and earth-mould. And he further held that this invisible Dimension was much more crowded and much more active at certain geographical points round the surface of land and water than at others. Even where there are no human beings, this spiritual atmosphere would, he maintained, be there just the same. For not only must there be, universally emanating from the whole body of our planet, feelings that we must think of as the feelings of our Mother the Earth herself, but there must also be the feelings — or semi-conscious vibrations corresponding to feelings — of all the separate material elements whereof the substance of the planet is composed.

In fact Sir Mort insisted that all the feelings of all the things in the world are to be found in this invisible Dimension, and the fact that the earth as the earth has universal feelings does not mean that the separate parts and diverse substances of which she is composed are lacking in individual feelings. In fact he insisted that this invisible Dimension, or atmospheric sounding-board, of the planet upon which we live, while predominant in it are the feelings of all living men, women, and children, includes also the feelings of all beasts, birds, fishes, reptiles, insects and worms as well as of trees, plants, mosses, funguses, grasses and all vegetation.

And when we thus speak of the projected thoughts and feelings and emotions of all things, it must be remembered that we are not suggesting the existence of any actual souls that can survive the death of their bodily presence. When we are dead, Sir Mort maintained, we are absolutely dead. But while we live we are all, including the myriads of sub-human lives in air, on land, and in water, from whales to earth-worms and the tiniest gnats, in constant contact with an invisible overshadowing atmospheric mist, crowded with feelings and dreams and emotions and what might be called sense-emanations and thought-eidola issuing from all that exists, whether superhuman, human, or sub-human, whether organic or inorganic. This atmospheric dimension does not, Sir Mort argued, contain the sort of entities we are in the habit of thinking of as souls; for these perish when we perish, but it contains the thoughts and feelings and intimations and sensations which, though they grow fainter with time, do not cease to exist when the body and soul which projected them have both come to an end.

While we are still struggling, enduring, enjoying, as we move or rest in the earth, air, or water, of our terraqueous globe, there will always be this atmospheric aura about us where the psychic reactions engendered by the attractions and repulsions, the devourings and escapings, that go on in life mount up and remain, drifting and floating here and there in a curious chaotic mixture of the pleasant and the unpleasant.

And it is because of this atmospheric arena always about us, whether indoors or out-of-doors, whether on the surface of plains or mountains, whether in earth-mines or undersea-caverns, whether in any level of the air, or above any fiery crater or tumultuous sea, that those among us — and Sir Mort obviously included himself in this select category — who are alive to these rarefied visitations, are frequently exhilarated or saddened without any apparent inward or outward cause.

These sudden variations of mood without apparent cause are — Sir Mort would explain, though he assumed that his wife knew nothing of such subtle emotions — extremely puzzling phenomena. But they can, he would point out, be made less mysterious if we think of this atmospheric dimension of psychic reactions as composed not only of the sensations of all living things from the cleverest human beings and the most intelligent animals, birds, fishes and reptiles, to the most simple-minded tadpoles, jelly-fish, star-fish, earth-worms, and insects, together with the vast mass of all the vegetable growth in the world, but of such sensations as they occur in the strain and stress of cosmogonic chance.

It was all in a second curiously enough, as this tidal memory of her husband's ten-thousand times repeated harangue swept over her, that she actually found herself wondering whether there might not really be a grain of truth in all this craziness. Dimension or no dimension, there must be a reason for this ebbing and flowing of our feelings, and for our being sometimes so mysteriously happy, and sometimes so unutterably sad.

"Well," she thought, "I can't stand here staring at little Popinjay all night! I must get rid of the boy somehow." And as she raised her hands to feel whether her hair was in proper order, she became half conscious of that alder-leaf on the floor between herself, the self-questioning Lady Val, and her visitor, the quiescent and self-approving Sir William.

"She," Sir William was thinking, "must be suffering a lot. Poor, poor woman! She must know, after all I've said, that she has given her daughter to the wrong man! So I really must be kind to her in her unhappiness."

But what the unhappy lady was thinking was this: "I'll tell Ulanda what we all feel about Baron Boncor's beard, for I think that will trouble her arrogant mind more than anything else."

And what, we might wonder, was that alder-leaf's parent-tree thinking in its nakedness as it bowed before the wind? Was it thinking, "If only I could stretch a quarter of an inch nearer the water I would tell this blind, stupid, silly, deaf, dumb, idiotic stream in what direction it ought to flow if it wants to reach the sea."

And if no thought of that leaf on the floor crossed the furthest fringe of its parent-tree's cogitations, you may be sure that neither Sir William nor Lady Val gave the slightest attention to its fate; and there it would have lain for the rest of that evening and the whole of that night had not old Mother Guggery been sent from the kitchen to ask some important semi-culinary, semi-social question of the Lady of the Manor.

Mother Guggery always used a massive ebony stick when she walked, though physically she had not the least need of such support, and she showed now by the way she came stumping up between the young knight and Lady Val that the moment her curiosity was satisfied as to what they were talking about, or being silent about, she would turn her back upon the young man and concentrate on her mission to the lady.

But in a household as turbulent with new starts and old upshots, with new conspiracies and old frustrations, as was this Fortress of Roque, it was impossible, especially at the close of a sunny day at this time of the year, and upon such a central and crucial debating-ground as this particular spot, for any discussion to be long confined to its originators.

Thus before Mother Guggery had got down to the business of her message, who must come drifting in but Lady Val's younger son, the intellectual young John, who was often called "John of London" at the Priory, because of his frequent visits to the King's court on behalf of Friar Bacon. He now came loitering and drifting towards his mother with the air of one who had been using his wits all day long to such exhaustive effect among the high problems of metaphysic and theology that he has earned the right, now that the day is over and darkness is falling, to forget these high matters — yes! to forget this difficult super-world with its niceties of the human conscience, its nuances of Trinitarian Personalities, and its dissolving facets of unfathomable Absolutes, and to give himself up to any frivolity that drifted across his path in that domestic portico between kitchen and dining-hall.

Nor does life often fail us under such conditions; for there is Something in life that is at once different from Chance and yet not quite identical with all that we mean by the word Fate; and it is this Something that almost always provides us with some spontaneous motive when we are, so to speak, angling for an urge to pursue any available flibbertigibbet.

And thus it now happened with the younger son of Sir Mort Abyssum. Mother Guggery, having assumed by her lady's look that more was in the air than she could cope with just then, came bolt out with the message from the kitchen, and, as she turned to go, her eyes fell on that last year's alder-leaf lying on the floor. With the end of her ebony stick the old woman endeavoured, by obstinately poking at it, to get the leaf near enough to her feet to be able to stoop and pick it up. This whole picture, the ebony stick, the thin bent back, the patient motionless leaf, was enough, when taken in at a glance, to cause young John to rush forward and snatch up the leaf himself.

And then, all in a second, an airy connection struck him between this whole small event and the teaching of Friar Bacon, who had always instructed him to save such vegetable waifs from bonfires, and to cast them, loose and free, as near their birthplace as possible. So into the young man's most intimate pocket went this lucky leaf to be disposed of later.

XII. THE HERESY HUNT

IT WAS MORE than a surprise to the simpler dwellers in that portion of Wessex dominated by the traditional Manors of Roque and of Cone, and perpetually being interfered with by the unprecedented and incalculable domain of Lost Towers, when the holy, the thrice-blessed, the miraculously learned representative of the Holy Father himself in Rome, Bonaventura, the most famous of all Franciscans since Saint Francis, began, in that early spring of the year of grace 1272, searching the district for heretics and unbelievers, and using as his band of retainers nothing less than a regular cohort of brown-vested bandits from the swamps of Lost Towers.

And this singular heresy-hunt, led by a reputed saint commanding a body-guard of reputed devils, was an incredible event even to the good-natured Baron of Cone himself, whom it disturbed not a little. He finally made up his mind to accept it at its face-value; but since his youth, when serving under King Henry at the battle of Lewes, he had beheld the triumph of Simon de Montfort, he had never had such a spiritual shock.

When in the course of chronicling these events we seek to understand this shock, we are driven to conclude that it came from a certain inherent simplicity in Baron Boncor's nature, which instinctively accepted without question all those natural assumptions about good and evil, which like the biblical "charity" are only too apt to "cover a multitude of sins."

In spite of the rapid healing of the serious hurt he had received from the arrow, shot at him by Baron Maldung, he felt convinced that it would be a case of taking the side of the Devil against God if he gave any aid, shelter, refreshment, hospitality, information, comfort, encouragement or welcome to Bonaventura and his brown-jerkin’d band.

It was quite another thing with Lady Ulanda, Baron Boncor’s wife. Lady Ulanda had recently abandoned herself to a savage campaign against Friar Bacon and all his works. Ulanda was anything but a religious lady. Her whole nature was practical. She was in the fullest sense a woman of action. She was suspicious of all thought, of all art, of all mental analysis. She wasn’t a vicious woman, but she was what is called a possessive woman, to a degree that was a danger to everybody round her and especially to the object of this possessiveness.

The object of it in this case was no child in her domestic world and no lover in the world outside. It was simply and solely her husband. And it was because of several very curious reasons, some physical, some mental, and some the result of occurrences in the early days of her marriage, that this dominant element in her nature had never from the beginning asserted itself in any perceptible degree in regard to her son. Her attitude to young Sir William was more like that of an affectionate aunt than a mother. She doted on him as a fanciful old maid might dote on a favourite pet; and it was a real blow to her when destiny brought it about that she was compelled to witness, day by day, the rapidly growing love-affair between her husband’s friend and cousin, Raymond de Laon, and the daughter of Lady Val of the Fortress.

Ulanda’s almost frantic hostility to Friar Bacon was intimately connected with Baron Boncor’s affection for his relative Raymond. It had been pain and poison to her from the start — the interest Baron Boncor took in Raymond. She had hated his coming to be an inmate of their castle from the very first, but Boncor was so set upon it that, without a greater quarrel than she dared to embark on, she had to accept it.

At the bottom of it was her simple recognition that her husband's regard for Raymond de Laon was not unconnected with the young man's exceptional good looks and the magnetic charm of his whole personality. She knew only too well that she herself, though full of an intense vitality and always able to carry off with dignity the proud assumptions of high-born authority, was grotesquely lacking in that sort of tender and appealing physical beauty which wins favour wherever it goes.

Like many another high-spirited and passionate lady, Ulanda of Cone felt such an intense longing to be as beautiful in reality as she was beautiful in her inner ideal of herself, that she had actually visited Friar Bacon in that upper chamber in the Priory where he was virtually a prisoner, and made a direct personal face-to-face appeal to him to help her, by means of those mysterious arts in which she understood he was such a master, to acquire, without any drastic change in her appearance, that particular magnetic charm by which the most formidable of men can be seduced and captivated by a woman.

As any of the serious disciples and pupils of the scientific Friar could have warned her, this shameless and unblushing assumption that he was some kind of a sex-wizard annoyed Roger Bacon so much that he refused point-blank to have anything to do with her; and Lady Ulanda came down the stone staircase from the Friar's chamber resolved to have the most deadly revenge she could bring about on a man who refused so rudely — and he a sort of half-condemned heretic too — a natural and perfectly lawful request from a lady of her importance in that western district of the kingdom.

Lady Ulanda was not particularly fussy or punctilious in what might be called the heraldic or antiquarian aspects of the Barony of Cone. In fact she was a good deal less primed in such matters than were most of her contemporary ladies of title. She herself came of an old yeoman family called Dunderog entirely independent of any baronial manor, but claiming direct descent from Ralph Rorsuk, the predatory nephew of King Stephen.

When not fishing or hunting or fighting or riding between his arable-fields and his pasture-fields, or surveying his forestry, Baron Boncor was in the habit of spending his time in a spacious chamber at the top of a small round tower above the south-west ramparts of the Castle. This chamber ever since his grandfather once, on a pilgrimage to Rome, purchased some illuminated scrolls, and obtained in the same city the aid of a famous book-binder to cover them with specially prepared skins, had come to be known as the Library.

Boncor's grandfather had fastened with golden-headed nails upon an enormous oak table opposite the hearth in this room a great number of large pictorial maps of the world, adapted to the comprehension of unclassical and unscholarly persons by the appearance at certain crucial points, on both land and sea, of various land-monsters and sea-monsters, and also of various voyagers, these latter enlarged in size so as to indicate by their dresses, arms, and banners, whether they came from Christian or Heathen countries, while the ships that carried them were reduced in size in comparison with the men — and women too sometimes — whom they carried, as if to compel recognition that a Power and a Mystery, that is at once half-human and half-divine, is ruling and will always rule the Air, the Earth, the Water and the Fire.

On each side of a blazing fire of pine logs, kept in constant flame by sticks from a big pile in a capacious copper container, were two deep well-cushioned chairs, that resembled the rudder divided sterns of a couple of barges rather than baronial judgment-seats or collegiate library-benches or cathedral choir-stalls.

It was between these two seats that the huge low eight-legged table of dark oak stood that was covered with these pictures of the world. One corner of this enormously large and very low table, on the surface of which Behemoths and Leviathans and dragons and sea-serpents were disporting themselves, was devoted to the art of book-binding, an art in which the present Baron of Cone took a lively and a practical interest.

On this corner of the table adjoining the Baron’s chair was a careful selection of the skins of small local wild animals, by the aid of which the Baron was wont to practise with slow and sedulous care the by no means easy art of making bindings for both sacred and profane manuscripts.

The delicate results of his devoted concentration on this unusual task could be seen meticulously arranged on various wooden stands beneath all the four walls of the chamber, including the one where a low and very narrow door opened on the stairway that led to the foot of the tower. It was not until an evening in the middle of February in that eventful Christian year of 1272 that the stored-up, banked-up, piled-up fury of Lady Ulanda against Friar Bacon burst out in full enough force, as she sat in the other curiously carved and richly cushioned chair over their fire of pine logs to make that easy-going Lord of the Manor of Cone realize that the situation was serious.

“If you don’t do something and do it quickly,” hissed Ulanda, sitting straight up at the edge of her seat, and with her long, bare arms giving the rim of the great table, which extended its breadth and its length at their side, a series of desperate blows with her knuckles, “I shall go mad!”

Across the maps fastened with golden nails to the table and making it look like the mingling of an illustrated bestiary with an illustrated cosmography, it seemed to Baron Boncor that under these violent blows all those weird sea-monsters and land-monsters quivered into a new life and ceased to be merely pictures. But the Baron's look of bewildered concern only agitated her still more; and with a frantic artfulness she manipulated her knuckles so that her enormous signet-rings — rings that she only wore when she felt especially angry with the world, and which always made her husband think of certain pre-historic rings that had been found by one of his ploughmen near an ancient burial mound in the immediate vicinity of his castle — beat upon the table.

Ulanda's parents were both dead and she had no relatives left, but she always maintained that these two rings had belonged to Rorsuk, King Stephen's nephew, and that it was because he had forgotten to put them on at some royal banquet that he was found murdered that same night in the bed of one of the court ladies.

At any rate the sound that Ulanda's rings, one of which carried on it the semblance of a wild-boar and the other the semblance of a whale, caused to vibrate across that monster-bearing table, suggested that a sea-serpent was catching its breath as it neared the land at the sight of a Behemoth munching grass on the sea-shore.

It was at this moment, before the bewildered Baron could formulate any appeal to her enraged soul, that they both became aware of steps on the tower staircase. They looked at each other and they looked at the door. But no indignant look and no muttered curse could stop that door from opening. And there, quietly crossing the threshold, was Raymond de Laon!

Raymond was as fair-haired as Baron Boncor, but his hair was straight, not curly like the Baron's, and if he had grown a beard it would probably have been feathery and wispy in the manner of Spardo's. In figure he was tall and slender, and his face had an alert, intent, interrogating look, as if he were forever searching for something he couldn't find, and yet not at all as if this search was painful or as if he felt any touch of anger or desperation at not finding what he sought.

The first thing he did on entering the chamber was to turn half-round, even while he was in the act of making a low obeisance, and to close the door. This he did with extreme punctiliousness and almost with the air of being a confederate in an exciting conspiracy. But the door once closed and his obeisance over, it was with a most unembarrassed and easy manner that he advanced to the edge of the great table, and leaning forward across it with the tips of his long fingers just touching it, he completely, although very politely, disregarded the evident hostility on the lady's face and addressed himself entirely to Baron Boncor, who had risen with a friendly greeting and now sank down, composed and attentive, to hear what his young friend had to say.

"I came to tell you, my lord," Raymond began, "that your people in the reception room downstairs have just been considerably disturbed by the unexpected appearance among them tonight of a group of men from Lost Towers. None of my friends among your people have been able to tell me who it was who let these bandits come in. I fancy myself it was some young rogue who has been looking for an excuse to leave Cone altogether and to join these crazy followers of Lost Towers. Though evidently puzzled how they got in, your excellent Ralph Turgo, unwilling to be the one to start trouble, began at once giving them refreshments.

"Well, I took advantage of this moment of relaxation to ask a few questions of one of these Lost Towers men; and what I picked up from him was an amazing piece of news. It appears that Bonaventura, head of all the Franciscans, is lodging at Bumset Priory tonight, and that he himself, and no one else, has hired for the occasion these master-ruffians from Lost Towers with the intention of using them as his own retainers, so that he can drag Friar Bacon out of his prison there, and carry him off to a ship that's waiting on the Thames in London to take him to France where he'll never he heard of again.

"I heard them telling our Turgo — and Ralph's a crafty fellow, you know, when it comes to inducing rascals like these Brown Tunics to talk — just what they told me, that Bonaventura wants them to carry off from the Priory-prison not only the Friar himself and all his unholy and heathen books, but also this Brazen Head of his, about which we hear so much. This Brazen Head he wants them to carry into some empty space in the forest, and when once they've got it there — in some empty space, you understand, between the Fortress and Lost Towers — to hammer it to bits with stones and plough-shares and iron clubs!"

Having thus delivered his startling news with dramatic intensity straight across that curious table which now bore upon its geographical face all the most terrifying monsters, of land, sea, and air, that have ever defied man's domination of the world, the fair-haired lover of Lil-Umbra let his whole tension relax, and in an easy and quiet and apologetic way moved round the table till he reached the arm of Baron Boncor's chair over which he bent.

"I didn't want to bother you with all this, my dear Baron," he murmured, "but it struck me as such an unexpected coalition between God and the Devil that it gave me the feeling of an unpleasant conspiracy against all quiet and moderate people who dislike extremes. I can't myself quite explain the shock it gave me; but an unpleasant shock it was. I rather think it had to do with the peculiar colour of the clothes these men wear, which is almost exactly the colour of that liquid we always see between the stones in those places where they slaughter animals.

"I must have imagined the actual spectacle of these savage brown tunics doing the abominable bidding of this ferocious angel of God, who evidently would have loved to have seen hammered into unrecognizable bits not only the Friar's Brazen Head but the Friar's own human, all-too-human skull!"

"And a good thing too!" hissed Lady Ulanda, rising to her feet and confronting her husband's young friend across the outer edge of a picture of a terrifying sea, whose waves were breaking on the shores of what that primeval map called "the Land of Cathay," and on whose breaking waves a monster was riding, whose head resembled the head of a colossal lizard and its rear end the tail of a gigantic dolphin.

"Forgive her, Raymond!" murmured the Baron gently. "The poor old girl had a bit of a shock a day or two ago." Something in the tone of his voice induced Ulanda to resume her seat; though those ominous rings on her fingers jangled remorselessly still against the table's edge.

"May I tell him about your visit to the Friar?" enquired the Baron; and added hurriedly: "I think I *ought* to tell him, you know, because then he'll realize better our whole feeling about the Friar and his confounded Brazen Oracle."

Ulanda's reply to this question was only a bowing of her head still lower over her knees. But her husband firmly, though very gently, went on. "Yes, she went to see this Bacon fellow to ask him to help her in preparing some of those ointments for which our present-day ladies have such a mania — the sort of ointment, you know, that that queer tinker or whatever he is, who rides a horse with a swelling in its neck like the head of a man, is always trying to sell and swearing too — I've often heard him at it! — that it's what they used in Babylon when the whale swallowed Jonah.

"And how do you suppose this modern Simon Magus received our lady! No! I'll tell him, my precious. Don't you interrupt! You can correct me later. He burst into a fit of fury and acted to Ulanda with unpardonable discourtesy — Forgive me, Raymond! It's only my shoulder. I didn't draw back from your hand — lean against the back of my neck. I don't get the ghost of a twinge there! He's not really a good bowman, our Lost Towers rogue: and I don't myself think he's much of a catch for Satan. I mean I don't think he's half as corrupt or half as clever as his wife and daughter. What do *you* say, my dear, on that nice point?"

But Ulanda who had flung herself back in her chair, her knuckles white with the intensity with which she clutched the carved lionheads at its elbow, took no notice of this amiable request.

"Tell him at once," she ejaculated, spitting out the words in a low hoarse voice, and with as complete disregard for the presence of Raymond as if what she said had to pass no further than from one organic portion of her own person to another, "tell him at once," and it was as if the gall within her addressed itself to the midriff within her, "that it matters nothing to us by whose hand this accurst wizard is unfrocked and sent begging, as long as it is done, and all his fabrications pounded into dust! Tell him to say to Bonaventura that when the job is completed, we hope to welcome him here and do all we can to help him in his hunt for other traffickers with the Devil!"

It was difficult for Raymond to get the precise expression on that curly-bearded face, as Boncor, while slowly rising from his chair, turned towards him.

What increased the young man's uncertainty on this point was the fact that the act of rising caused a spasm of pain to pass through Boncor's wounded shoulder, and this, though largely concealed by his beard, for pain affects the mouths of certain types of men more than their eyes or foreheads, did perceptibly obscure the intimately direct look which the Baron fixed upon his friend.

"I shall go downstairs with him at once, my dear, and deal with these Red-Brown Tunics from the Towers, and have a word with Turgo. You may depend on it, my treasure, that all your rightful dignity, and all your natural lady-like feelings will be considered to the uttermost in the arrangements your old adorer makes; so don't worry! Keep the fire up and get out some wine by the time we come up again! And have a sip yourself for a while! We shan't be as long as, O I know so well how long you're now imagining we'll be! You'll see. Thanks, Raymond."

And all that Ulanda could now hear were the double thuddings of their feet, her husband's considerably heavier than his friend's, as the two men tramped down the turret stairs.

Ulanda sat still, seeing nothing but the living heart of the fire in front of her, and hearing nothing but the dark, deep, dead silence that surrounded the crackling of those burning sticks. Her thoughts were much less desperate than Raymond could possibly have imagined, as he accompanied her husband into the reception chamber on the ground floor below. To be alone always suited her; and though she knew well at the bottom of her heart that her husband would never, in spite of his encouraging words, really see to it that her longed-for revenge on Roger Bacon would be brought about, she was able, now that she was no more actually in the presence of this friendship she hated so much, to treat the whole matter, and her own feelings about it, with something approaching a philosophic mind.

And the most powerful of all the divinities with whom it is our destiny to get more acquainted the older we grow — namely, that frivolous, merciless, apparently irresponsible goddess, whose name is Tyche or Chance — did not refuse at this crisis in her life to give the passionate Ulanda the breathing-space to which any sort of humane judicial authority would have taken for granted she was entitled; for there sounded now a quite different step upon the turret stairs, a step the familiar vibration of which in place of making her sit up and prepare for action made her relax with an ineffable sense of relief.

"O Mabbernob! Do you know what has just happened to me? And for the first time too in all the days of my life? And it wasn't because I'm a real knight either, and knighted by the King himself! You'll never guess, Mabbernob darling, what it was! But try a moment: O do try a moment to guess, before I sit down!"

An affectionately friendly and a comfortably appreciative smile spread softly over Ulanda's whole personality. She felt — she always felt in this manner — just exactly as when, after a second's submerging under the waters of unconsciousness, she had first beheld this only offspring of her love for the Lord of Cone lying beside her. It had not been very long before she found herself translating a constantly repeated sequence of babyish babblement into the word "Mabbernob," by which the little creature was designating the womb from which it came and the paps that fed it.

"Well, well," she now replied, in an affectionately jocular tone, "Honey-Pot holy, Honey-Pot mighty, Honey-Pot washed and dressed, tell Mabbernob the whole story!"

The young knight stalked solemnly to Ulanda's side of the big table, placed the back of a hand clutching a pair of gauntlets against his left hip, tightened his bare fingers about the handle of his sword, and tilted his chin in the air. "It was," he announced, "as I went into the ante-room just now. There were half-a-dozen fellows there, all trick'd out in that funny red-brown stuff they wear at the Towers, stuff that when you see it at close quarters is all made of rags, rags patched together you know, like the clots and clouts of wandering beggars on the Icen Way: and what must they do the moment they saw me standing there, but rush forward, kneel down before me, stretch out their arms towards me, and cry in the sort of voice — do you remember, Mabbernob? — in which those play-acting masqueraders who came from Sicily cried, when they acted Sabine prisoners begging to have back their wives!

"But what these poor devils cried was — but do tell me this, Mabbernob, before I go on; has Father been hunting over there and catching these wretches for sport instead of badgers and foxes? — what, I say, they cried was:

"'Be our leader, Sir William, be our leader against this wicked, hateful, abominable hell-born Friar Bacon who has devilishly been making, with all his infernal cleverness, out of tin and iron and copper and brass a real breathing, thinking human being, just exactly as if he were God, a Being, you must understand, made of Brass, a Being who predicts the end of the world, a Being who has the power not only to predict the end of the world but — think of their believing *that*, Mabbernob! — to bring it about! So please, please, *please*, Sir William,' these poor wretches cried out, 'consent to be our leader and help us to break into little pieces this New Man invented by this New Devil! Thou art a knight, Sir William, and here is work proper to thy knightly arms!'"

"Sit down over there in your Father's chair, son of my heart, and you and I will discuss this whole matter as carefully as we can."

Ulanda's voice was so extremely quiet that her son, though he wasn't quite the well-balanced sage he fancied himself to be, received not the faintest intimation of the seething and smouldering hurricane of feverish thoughts that was whirling in her head.

"Shall I use this child?" she asked herself. "Boncor will never go as far as I want; and these wretches have nothing to lose and everything to gain by killing this devil of a Friar! Besides if Lord Edward comes home before he's expected and before Henry dies, he'll be less inclined to make a fuss if it's an excitable boy who brought about the killing of this sorcerer, and did it by the hands of this Lost Towers gang who've always been irresponsible outlaws."

Thud — *thud* — *thud* — Ah! there were the steps of her bearded husband and his handsome and diplomatic young friend! As she heard these steps there was something about the image of her husband's beard that flung new fuel on her fury. In these subtle fits of nervous rage, which most of us experience at one time or another, some particular visual image will often detach itself from its proper setting, like a scarf or a belt or a brooch or a feather from some old picture upon the wall, and fly to blend itself with the bodily target of our resentment, even partaking, though the luckless thing is in itself absolutely innocent, in the special objectionableness of the cause of our rancour.

Thus it was that several seconds before the actual appearance of the middle-aged man she loved and the young man she hated, the curly beard of the former and the clear-cut Hellenic profile of the latter rose so vividly before her mind's eye that, in a flash of mad fury, Ulanda decided that at all costs, and in spite of all her love for the man himself, Boncor's beard must be cut off.

The idea of a beardless Boncor did indeed so fulfil and so satisfy her wrath that, as she listened to what the two men were saying, she became actually aware, though she wouldn't let herself enjoy that awareness, of a relaxation in the bitterness of her feelings. Something had come into her mind now that resembled a faint reflection in a sprinkling of water, by the side of a weary and unending road, along which she was riding.

She watched with an abstracted gaze how her son settled himself more and more comfortably in his father's chair, and as she rubbed with the inside tips of the trembling fingers of one hand the white knuckles of the other, which was fiercely pressed against the edge of the maps of all the world, she vividly imagined herself stroking, with an absolutely sated satisfaction, the bare, soft, hairless chin of the man she possessed.

But at this moment, as Boncor and Raymond crossed the room, she felt as if they were both as transparent as ghosts.

“They’ve gone, Ulanda,” Boncor announced, “and you should have seen the effect of the light they carried, as it fell on the clump of firs at our gate!”

“And then on their red-brown costumes,” added Raymond de Laon.

“Is Bonaventura waiting for them?” Ulanda enquired. “Is he going boldly to lead them into the Priory and straight up the steps into that chamber where the wretch manufactures his devilish machines?” As the two of them moved up to the table they both replied at once.

“I told them plainly that I wouldn’t have any killing of Friars on land that belongs to me. But when they asked: ‘Will you forbid your people to meddle with them as they carry off the sorcerer?’ I answered that I never interfere with private quarrels between different sections of my people. If the pious ones want to kill the impious ones, *Let the Devil look after his own*! is what I say. And if the profane ones want to kill the pious ones, *Leave it to God*! is my motto.”

“You know, lady, there are some quite presentable fellows among these Lost Towers rascals! I expected them to look like a pack of thieves,” added Raymond de Laon, “but, I assure you, Lady, they weren’t all like that!”

It was at this point that little Sir William, who had been listening to their words like a prince in a fairy-tale, rose portentously to his feet. “Don’t you think, Father, don’t you think, Raymond, that it would be a good thing if I went down and talked things over with Turgo? When I discussed with him last week the question of what weapons our Cone bodyguard had better carry on important occasions, he was very impressed by what I told him I'd seen in London at King Henry's court. I noticed just now when I saw what they were carrying — I mean the ones who were going into the forest to keep watch on these brown-backed bandits — that Turgo had taken my advice. But there was just one little thing that he'd forgotten on which I had specially insisted, namely that their short Roman blades should be unsheathed before placing them in their belts; and that their belts should be furnished with leather clasps, or leather bands, all the way round their waists, so that it would be possible for each man" — Here the new-made knight clapt his hands to his own belt, which bristled with the handles of two or three gleaming blades— "for each man at any sudden attack to defend himself with desolating — no! I mean devastating — no! what I had in mind was *penetrating*, for the daggers of course must be ready to *go in* — I mean to be plunged into their enemies' bodies. I think — don't you agree, Father? — that it might be a real help to our good Master Turgo if I went more fully into this matter of the way our Cone bodyguard should be armed at this important chorus — I mean crisis — in this history of our house here, and perhaps of — of — of this hemisphere. Don't you agree with me, father?"

The belted knight's progenitor bowed his head. But having gasped and gurgled and almost choked in his effort not to laugh, he glanced appealingly at his wife, and there was a prolonged — and for Raymond de Laon — an embarrassing silence.

The truth was that Ulanda hadn't been listening. Not a single word of all that her son had so pontifically repeated about belts and daggers had "penetrated" the walls of her mind. She had known he was speaking "in character". She had known that her husband was trying not to laugh. She had known that Raymond was vaguely watching all three of them with ironic detachment, and was probably calculating in his own mind how early in the morning he would have to wake up if he were to get a glimpse of Lil-Umbra before their breakfast at the Fortress, and whether he could make himself wake up or whether he'd better get Turgo to wake him.

Ulanda knew all these things. But as at this instant she glanced under the left arm of her boastful offspring and caught a certain humorously resigned expression in the eyes of her mate, she suddenly felt such a rush of love for him that she could hardly keep herself from betraying it. But she used all her will-power to struggle against this wave of emotion; and, as she overcame it, it became clear to her that to have yielded to it at this moment would have meant the giving up for good of her sworn revenge upon Friar Bacon.

It was at this precise point in Ulanda's cogitations that wild excited cries and alarming crashing sounds were heard in the rooms below, followed by a rush of half-a-dozen feet up their staircase. Raymond ran to the door that opened on these stairs and jerked it wide open, repeating as he did so in a high-pitched voice: "What the devil is this? What on earth's happening?"

But the broad-shouldered Turgo, with half-a-dozen stalwart and extremely excited men-at-arms behind him, flung him aside, and bursting into the room, stood like a rocky water-fall of indignation in front of the three persons grouped round that map-laden table, behind which, in the absence of fresh logs, the fire was almost dead.

"It's too much to endure, my lord! It's too much for anybody to endure! There's a big lot of men from the Fortress outside there now, led, yes! actually led, by that boy John who's the younger of them two, so he ain't even the heir to Roque! He's only a young scholard, that's what he is, yes! that's all he is — just a scrap of a lad at school! And there he is outside the main gate of Cone waving God knows what sort of weapon in his hand and defying these Lost Towers men and our men and all the men of Wessex to touch his precious Friar and his Friar's bedevilments!"

At this point the formidable bailiff of Cone straightened his tremendous shoulders to a degree that might have made even the powerful lover of Ghosta take notice.

"The man we need here now," bellowed Turgo, "is Lord Edward himself — O may he soon be our lord and King! — who is already on ship-board on his way home. It's *him* we need now, in this wretched bandit-beset country! Lord Edward would soon settle this crazy confusion in our ancient forest! Why, when *he* was with the King in London, none of these curst, insurrectionary barons dared lift a cry or wave a banner in this forest of ours! No, they daren't, I tell you, my lord. They daren't, I tell you, my lady! That's what we need here today, a proper knightly prince like Lord Edward!"

"I'll come down at once, Turgo," said Boncor, giving his wife an enquiring glance and apparently taking for granted that she would confirm his decision. "You'd better stay up here with your mother, son," he added in rather a less assured tone, when he noticed how nervously and anxiously the newly-made knight was pulling out and thrusting back the various silver-handled and brass-handled daggers which protruded from his leather belt.

In a flash Ulanda rushed round the table and clutched her husband by his left wrist. She had seen in a sudden vision these Fortress adherents, urged on by this crazy young John, and full of the idea that Friar Bacon, the greatest teacher in the world, *must* be saved at all costs, striking the already-wounded Boncor a blow that would be his death; while she, bereft of the love of her life, would be doomed to abide for the rest of her mortal days listening to this swaggering son of hers and trying to make him turn his words into deeds. God in Heaven, no! that would be more than she could bear! Let all three of them perish before that happened!

"You go down with Turgo, Sonny!" she cried. "Your father's a wounded man. I can't possibly let him fight with those devils! Only for Christ's blessed sake take care of yourself, son. I don't want you wounded too!"

Only once before in all his life had the Lord of Cone been required by the fate or by the chance that governs us all to make a psychic effort comparable with the one he had to make now. But he succeeded in making it; and the apparent ease with which he accepted the issue, when he had done so, was a triumph for his personality of which not a soul present had the faintest shadow of an idea.

"All right my dear; I'll stay with you. Off you go, William! Do whatever Turgo thinks best when you're down there. That little fool John has no right to bring his Dad's men into our place. But I've heard he's the best disciple the Friar's got round here; and we know what these students are! Keep an eye on our lad, Turgo, my friend. Remember he's the youngest knight of the oldest king in Christendom! I should say we do indeed need Lord Edward here; and I warrant these confounded lands he's crusading in, whether they're Arabian or Christian, will go on in the same turmoil whether he's there or not."

By the time the Lord of Cone had completely covered up the heart-heaving moral effort he'd just made in thus remaining in the library of his Castle, both Turgo and Sir William had reached the stairs, the latter much more concerned with the arrangement of the weapons in his own belt than with the whereabouts of the son of his sovereign, and the door had been closed behind them.

Ulanda promptly pushed both her quiescent lord into his chair and sliding down upon her knee drew his head towards her own. But it was then that the goddess of chance displayed her most devilish impishness. In the impetuosity of this gesture of affection the impulsive lady had forgotten a certain most perilously explosive inhibition in her own nerves; namely her loathing of beards.

But now, as their heads met, her husband's curly beard tickled her cheek. By long practice she had acquired the art of kissing him without incurring this contact. But the truth was that she had come to be obsessed of late more than ever before by this loathing for, and intolerable disgust at, the touch of a man's beard. The Baron indeed had recently begun to grow aware of this nervous mania of hers, and he often found himself wondering why at an earlier stage in their alliance she had not protested against his refusal to shave. This refusal of his was wholly instinctive.

He was constitutionally slow-moving; and was addicted to the habit of adapting himself to existing conditions; and one of the most obvious of such conditions was the simple law of Nature that the chins of men grew beards. Thus between these two persons there inevitably existed, lodged in the physical make-up of them both, the perilous possibility of a bodily, primeval, skin-for-skin quarrel of a serious kind.

It was an unfortunate coincidence however that at the very moment when her cheek was touched by the lips she loved and the beard she hated, there should have come to her ears from outside their secluded retreat, and even from outside the Castle itself, tumultuous cries and shouts and the noise of blows mixed with resounding yells of anger and pain.

These sounds may possibly have intensified her feelings by adding to her nervous mania a shiver of anxiety, though not more than a shiver, about her son. In a mad reaction against the touch of that bushy beard, she leapt up from his knee and uttered a piercing scream of rage, that flew out into the night like a wild bird whose wings were on fire.

It might well have happened that such a scream, rising from aggravated feminine nerves, and whirling off into the darkness from a height above the tops of the tallest trees, especially when the court-yard and gateway of the place were resounding with blows and cries, would have dissolved in the air unregarded by anyone except the two persons concerned.

But either by another random hit from the wanton bow of chance or, let us hope, by some special intervention of a brave man's guardian angel, this scream from Ulanda gave to the death-pangs of young Ralph Gaulter of Evercreech the one thing needed to wholly redeem his desperation.

Gaulter had only just entered the service of the Baron of Cone, and he had only done so because of a savage tragedy, three or four generations ago, when his great-grandmother, Matilda Gaulter, had been raped by one of the Lords of Roque. But at the moment of Ulanda's piercing scream that seemed to come down from heaven, young Gaulter was on his back on the grass with one of the red-brown bandits kneeling on his chest and pressing a broad and rusty kitchen-knife deep into his neck.

From his childhood he had heard tales of this ancestress of his, her beauty, her pride and her pitiful end, and now in his death throes the idea took hold of him that he was giving up his life in some mysterious way for this dead woman's living sake, and that this cry from above actually came from Matilda Gaulter.

Thus as the pressure of that broken, broad-headed, rusty knife just below the apple of his throat made his life-blood spurt forth from beneath his chin till it drenched his distorted and desperate face, the dying youth felt absolutely convinced that he really was, in these death-gasps and under these spouts of blood, sacrificing his life for this old ancestress of his who had been so horribly wronged.

Black gulfs of death might swallow up his body and threaten his soul, but the fairy-tale Great-Granny of all the years of his life was saved forever!

XIII. THE BRAZEN HEAD

RALPH GAULTER WAS the only one who, in this irresponsible three-cornered hurly-burly, lost his life. Others were wounded in the confusion but none of them mortally; while in the struggle of young John and his couple of henchmen with the red-brown bandits from Lost Towers it soon became clear that it was this latter group — tipsy though half of them were, and wildly excited though all of them were — who were destined to win; though when they had carried the Brazen Head away into the forest, and so well out of reach of all possible rescue or recovery, that Bonaventura himself felt justified in returning to the Priory, young John and his two companions obstinately pursued them.

Bonaventura evidently felt sure that when his red-brown allies had grown a little more sober they would finish the job and pound the Head to pieces. What really saved this unparalleled invention from destruction was not the protective magic, whether we call it "black" or "white", of its creator. It was something, though it is impossible to say exactly what, in the Head itself, just as if by some inexplicable chance the creative energy in the Friar had overreached its proper scientific limits, and had created a being capable, not only of personifying its own identity, but of escaping altogether from the control of its creator.

By the power of his immense sacerdotal reputation over the whole of Europe, Bonaventura had finally managed so to convince the Prior that he had some special mandate from the Holy Father at Rome, that he was actually permitted to lead his bodyguard of reckless devils into the Friar's chamber. Here he had made them open the sacred alcove and wrench from its recess and carry downstairs the imperturbable Head.

With the person of Bacon himself he could not meddle, for the Prior of Bumset was alone responsible for his official prisoner; but it was a startling as well as a bewildering surprise to him when the Friar made not the very faintest attempt to resist this sacrilegious and autocratic invasion of his chamber, but from an absolutely calm and wholly preoccupied absorption in what he was writing at his table, simply looked up once or twice, neither smiling nor frowning, but treating the whole incident as if the General of the Order and his piratical allies were so many negligible mice.

Of what happened later, when Bonaventura, leaving the destruction of the Brazen Head to his reckless allies, had honoured and delighted the Prior by consenting to share that epicurean ecclesiastic's evening meal and to sleep that night under the priory roof, neither the Baron of Cone nor his over-wrought lady could ever get a clear or consecutive account.

It was obviously due to the commonsense and tact — yes! and no less to the courage — of Raymond de Laon that young Sir William was spared any grievous shock, whether to his person, or to his "amour propre," or to his reputation, in the confused mêlée that accompanied the triumphant departure of the excited bandits of Lost Towers, carrying with them into the depth of the forest the Brazen Head.

They were not as numerous as they seemed to be, nor half as formidable, and they were so proud of being given "carte blanche" to be the violent executioners of the will and purpose of the Pope of Rome that they couldn't resist shouting and dancing in a wild orgy of excitement round the mysterious object they were carrying.

Many of them waved spears and javelins. Others brandished two-edged swords. A few carried torches, and some had bows and arrows with which they just amused themselves, shooting blindly into the pine-trees above their heads, as if to dislodge any living creature who might be there, whether bird or bat or squirrel or wild-cat, anything in fact that might be up there and could be hit by a random shot. It took four of them to bear the weight of the Brazen Head, which they had fastened with ropes to a couple of fir-poles, and which in the thick grey darkness looked like the head of some colossal decapitated giant whom they had caught asleep.

The confused henchmen of Baron Boncor, who were much better armed, but at the same time much less certain of the reason of their arming, or of the cause of the turmoil, than any other of the groups involved, were endeavouring, in a thinly-dispersed, widely-scattered circle, to enclose the wild men of Lost Towers till they could be assaulted from every side at once and compelled to surrender their animate-inanimate spoil. The formation of this mobile circle had been the plan of Raymond de Laon and it would have been a very good plan if the course of events had followed any sort of rational order. But at that time of night and with no less than three Baronies, each acting like the troop of a separate dominion, events were badly diverted from their logical cause-and-effect sequence.

De Laon himself, armed with a long straight sword, and with a small round shield almost exactly like some of the shields depicted on certain ancient vase-paintings, kept running at full speed round this extended circle, exhorting its human figures to draw in as steadily and resolutely as possible round this dancing and shouting crew of excited bandits.

Young John of the Fortress, who hadn’t been left for long without full information of what was happening in regard to the greatest of all the inventions of his admired instructor, had soon appeared on the scene with a rather eccentric couple of Roque-Manor adherents ready to follow their leader anywhere, but really rather out for adventure than for any particular cause or principle; and all John did was to lead them blindly forward, straight towards the bandits who were carrying the Brazen Head, the appearance of which made the lad think, the moment he caught sight of it under the flickering torches, of the description in the Jewish Scriptures of the “Ark of the Covenant” containing the spiritual presence of Jehovah.

So well had all the Fortress people been trained by their lord and lady to keep an eye on Tilton and John and Lil-Umbra, while they let these young people feel they were completely free to act as they pleased, that the nearer young John — who had no weapon but a peculiar kind of axe fastened to a long pole, a weapon he had invented for himself — approached this thing of mystery, the more closely was he hedged in by two free-men of the Manor of Roque, who were both equally eccentric, but who could at a pinch hoist John upon their shoulders and make off with him.

All might have gone well for the friends and liberators of the Brazen Head; and the madly chanting bandits of Lost Towers might have been put to headlong flight, leaving their projected victim, free from even a single hammer-blow, staring up at his rescuers in divine detachment from his bed upon the silvery-grey ground-lichen, had it not been for one of those annoying accidents that we love to call “ironical”, because by the use of this classic word we endow the antics of acrobatic chance with a conscious flightiness that takes away the shame of our human frustration and defeat.

What actually happened was that at the very moment when young John and his supporters came near to advancing point-blank upon the ruffians who carried the Bronze Head, Sir William Boncor, the youngest belted knight of the longest-reigning monarch in the world, stumbled over a hole in the earth containing the offspring, a male and a female, of the common badger.

These little creatures had been well-suckled that day at noon by their mother; and as a result they crept in a sleepy manner to the mouth of their hole, thinking to themselves that the moment had come for a little independent exploration of the forest; but they felt so satisfied, and so cosy and comfortable, and also so sleepy, that they soon relinquished this desire, and curling themselves up fell into a deeper sleep than they had enjoyed for months.

And it was this happy sleep that was disturbed by the sharply-spurr'd heels of portly little Sir William. These came down on both their little heads, completely separating them from their necks and crushing them together into a pulp of flesh, bones, blood, and bloody hair, against a slab of rock-slate. It was upon this rock-slate thus plastered with a gouache of bones, blood, brains and hair that both the heels of our youthful knight slid awkwardly forward, bringing him down with a mighty crash upon his back-side and extracting from him the sort of indignant and outraged howl against the whole causal sequence of events that had led to this culminating collapse, such as an infant who can run and cry but cannot yet talk naturally utters when brought low.

This event proved to be a turning point in this chaotic skirmish, for it completely brought to an end all further participation of Cone Castle in the confused mêlée. Raymond de Laon, hurrying to pick up the fallen knight, whose howl he knew half-a-mile away, was soon followed by the rest of the Cone party, which was naturally, since it was all happening at the foot of Cone Castle, more numerous than John's followers from Roque; and the result of this was that the blood-and-dirt-clad bearers of the Brazen Head, still recklessly blundering through the darkness, looking for a rock, or a heap of rocks, where they could smash the Head into smithereens, were only followed with any real obstinate determination by the eccentric couple of Fortress-men who through thick and thin stuck to young John.

John himself was agitated through his whole nature. This was the first time he had found himself engaged in a physical struggle the issue of which, whether bad or good, affected what was the main preoccupation of his life — his devotion to Friar Bacon and his work. The Lost Towers gang were still shouting and jesting and leaping and dancing through the darkness, as they swung the Brazen Head, bound with cords to a couple of poles, from one pair of bearers to another; and every now and then they banged at it with some log of wood they picked up in passing, or with some incongruous piece of culinary iron, that, like John's own axe on a pole, was in some ways more deadly than an ordinary sword or spear.

They soon had gone so far, and John had had to follow them so fast, that not only was he himself completely puzzled as to the direction in which he was being led, but his two quaint attendants seemed as much at a loss as he was. One of these was a certain red-haired freeman of the manor called Colin Catteract, whose thin body, long shanks and peculiarly malleable physiognomy, instantaneously expressive of every fantasy that came into his head, made him by the destiny of his inmost identity the sort of individual who is born to be a player, a performer, an actor, especially in such a role as a court-clown or king's jester.

The other was at the extremest opposite pole of human perversity. His name was Ralph Riddel-de-Rie, and he was the best carpenter in Roque, but he had such a habit of using the expression, "clamp 'em up" — an expression that always suggested to the old ex-bailiff in the armoury the figure of some colossal demiurgic world-carpenter, fitting the Earth and the Moon into the sun's chariot, before passing on to deal with Orion or the Pleiades — that he'd got the permanent nickname of "Clamp". He was a short, squat, stumpy man, and was extremely reticent. But when he did utter any opinion, he did so in a portentous tone of grim and final decision.

The present moment however certainly lent itself better to the airy-fairy vivacity of Colin than to the heavy-weather determination of Clamp. These accurst bandits might be in a riotous mood at the moment, but they were skilled in making their way through all the regions of this locality, a locality where the densest thickets or bushes and brakes often led to morasses and pools and reedy swamps, out of which again, in still more surprising contrast, rose grassy slopes and mossy undulations, pillared by tall pines: and they could accomplish this, so completely did they know the whole district, in darkness as well as in the clearest moonlight.

Young John now began to experience real terror. Whither was he being led, he and his friends Colin and Clamp? Were they being decoyed, cunningly and artfully, by this dramatic show-off of a bacchanalian riot, round the utmost outskirts of the Manor of Roque, towards the very brink of the Lost Towers swamp?

It was extremely painful to him to watch that great dim phantasm of a Human Head go bobbing up and down in front of this mad crew; and he began to experience a strange feeling about the Head and a weird fear that *It* itself — yes! this magical construction of an inventor acting the part of God — might play Satan towards its Creator, and go over to the enemy!

The bandits, after all, weren’t so numerous. There were only about a dozen of them. John had already counted them. And it was clear to him that they were moving much more slowly than at the start. He and his companions had now not the slightest difficulty in keeping up with them. The odd thing was, that though, first one, and then another, among those who were not at the moment helping with the Head, turned round to take a good look at the three men, so obstinately following them, nobody made the faintest attempt to attack them or to stop their pursuit. Could he regard it as possible that they were waiting till they reached some particular spot on the borders of Lost Towers, some spot where they had already arranged that others of their band should await them, possibly under the command of Baron Maldung himself?

John's uneasiness finally rose to such a pitch over the various terrifying possibilities his mind conjured up that he called his two friends to a halt under a massive pine-tree, and put to them the blunt and drastic question whether the three of them were, or were not, rushing madly into a grievous snare? Agitated though he was John couldn't help being struck by the quaint contrast his two supporters made as he produced his small box of flint and tinder and put a light to the unlit torch Colin was carrying.

Colin himself had already begun to laugh, as was his habitual custom under all the chances and changes of mortal life. When he laughed, which was a simple and natural return to his normal condition, his childishly excited face, with the straight, pale, yellow hair waving above it, assumed the appearance of a flickering candleflame, of which his thin flexible body was the candlestick or empty bottle, from which protruded the finger of wax which contained the burning wick.

John had grown vaguely aware as they ran, though it was too dark to make out exactly what was happening to this companion of his, that poor Colin had begun to suffer, under the stress of their effort, some queer change in his appearance; and it was a comfort to see him restored once more to his accustomed look of a wildly blown candle in a dark bottle.

The stoical Clamp, on the contrary, turned towards them both in that flickering torch-ray his usual expression of obstinate indifference to all outward circumstance, or, to be more rigidly correct, to everything that occurred, whether it occurred within the mind or outside the mind.

It was clear that what Master Clamp had been destined by nature to be, or had by sheer force of will moulded himself into being, was what you might call a *conscious inanimate*, a thing made of wood, or of leather, or of baked clay, whose whole outward and inward nature implied submission — submission to whatever it might be, nervously interior or mechanically exterior, that pushed, impelled, flung, thrust, projected, rejected, lowered, elevated, inflamed, inspired, benumbed, froze, petrified it, according to a definite purpose.

He had a store of rhyming patter which he was in the habit of using as a sort of oil, or slaver, or low-pitched humming accompaniment to this sub-human submission to fate. He would say, without the least flicker of protest, or of complaint, far less of indignation: "That's the gear; I've got it clear: I've got to climb the bank up there. I've got to swish that river through. Under those bushes I've got to go, whether the danger's from spear or bow. It may wipe me off; it may help me on. We be all born; but we bain't all gone."

At this particular moment for instance, while Colin was laughing with his hair, his eyes, his lips, his skin, his ribs, his hips, his shins, his ankles, and with the fluttering fingers of both his hands, what Clamp said was: "If them's going to kill we, them's going to kill we; and if us be going to kill they, that's how t'will be; us'll be alive and them'll be stark staring. Jesus Holy will be Jesus Holy just the same; and Uncle Satan will be Uncle Satan just the same. Yes, frost will freeze and fire will burn and water will drown just the same, whether Roque eat up Towers or Towers eat up Roque. Freeze and burn and drown them will, whether a girt wave of the sea swallows all the bloody land in this blasted world, or whether the waves of every sea on the earth dry up and turn into the sands of the Desert of

Sodom; just the same will it be for me, just the same will it be for thee, and just the same for this quiet old tree."

Young John kept turning this torch that Colin had been carrying so carefully for him, and that he himself had so carefully lit, from one vista of the forest to another, and then to the trunk of the tree at their side, and then up to the misty sky. And he thought in his heart:

"How many moments like this have passed for how many men like me since the beginning of the world! Here I am with these two: one dancing and chuckling with glee simply because he doesn't know whether we're going to save the Friar's Brazen Head or not, and the other already sick to death of the whole affair, and ready to be dead rather than make the effort to go on with it! And when I think how my Friar, who is, since Archimedes, the wisest sage and subtlest inventor in history, has created this Head and has given it enough brain to think and enough language to say what it thinks, and how this band of crazy miscreants is at this moment hunting for some heap of stones whereon and wherewith they may hammer it to fragments, I feel as if — as if — —"

And at this point John indeed felt so much as if he were gazing into a bottomless garbage-pit of the whole creation that he concluded his thoughts with a lamentable sigh, a sigh so deep that Colin ceased to laugh upwards and Clamp ceased to groan downwards, while the six troubled apertures which those three persons called their eyes just stared at one another.

And then, without any warning at all, a startling hullabaloo rose widely into the air from the men they were following; and a wild medley of sounds made up of cries, shouts, screams, howls, appeals, threats, curses, surged tumultuously through the forest.

"Come on, for heaven's sake!" gasped young John, brandishing his blazing torch in one hand and his grotesque axe at the end of a pole in the other, and rushing headlong towards the tumult. What they saw when they arrived was the towering figure of Peleg the Mongolian, swinging his terrifying mace with its orbicular head of iron spikes, but himself in evident danger of his life.

John shuddered when he saw what was threatening this strongest of all the supporters of his parents. For two of the Lost Towers men, each of them with one of his knees on the ground while on the other he balanced the end of his bow, were shooting arrow after arrow at him; and already the head-feathers of two arrows were sticking out of his left shoulder.

Luckily for Peleg he was wearing about his shoulders a thick leathery scarf, and so, though the points of the arrows entered his flesh and stuck there, they did not really seriously wound him. Of our three friends young John with his funny-looking weapon and his torch was in front, and queerly enough it was the humpty-dumpty figure of Clamp that was a close second, while Colin, the long-legged, flipperty-flappity antic, made a poor third. This happened, either because, in spite of all his zest for life, Colin was scared of facing the arrows of that dangerous pair, or because — but these secrets belong to those interior thoughts about which not even the boldest historian dares to be dogmatic — if he'd been in front of Clamp, he'd have missed the exquisitely comical sight of the heroic spurt in which that grim little stoic indulged himself at the final lap.

But suddenly, as young John had often in his short life noticed before, but had put it down to the spiritual atmosphere of that particular district, and had even interpreted it to his brother Tilton as the influence of some quite definite "genius loci," the whole situation reversed itself in an instant, and in a contagious rush of wild and desperate panic, the gang of bandits, with those two competent arrow-shooters taking the lead, fled as fast as it was possible for active outlaws to flee, in the general direction of Lost Towers.

It was now revealed to John that Peleg with his mace had not been alone when the three of them had heard this unnatural noise in the forest and had hunted it down.

And what made the whole lot of the bandits scoot off in terror was not Peleg's giant size nor his mace, but the sudden apparition, just to the left of those two kneeling bowmen, of what struck the whole lot of them as a Supernatural Being, possibly the Mother of God Herself, come to put an end to their nonsense.

It was Ghosta. But her black robe, and her white head-covering, and also, though it was too dark to see her features, her formidable dignity of movement, evoked, at that time of night, a spasm of awe that must have resembled the bewildered panic which some prowling rascal, up to no good, would have experienced had he drifted and loafed, without knowing in the least where he was going, along a cemetery path leading to the particular tomb out of which, at the very moment he arrived, Lazarus was being called forth from the dead.

The terror produced by the appearance of Ghosta was of course accentuated by her own powerful spirit. Tough nerves and thick skins and simple minds are sometimes dominated quite unexpectedly by a particular type of formidable intelligence, an intelligence which may easily strike those affected by it as supernatural, whereas in reality it may only be the power of an inspired personality.

Young John himself was affected by the apparition of Ghosta. His heart glowed within him, as, panting for breath after his run and waving his torch in a vigorous boyish manner, he stood staring at the Brazen Head which itself at that moment in the torch-light looked quite as indifferent to all outward events as Clamp himself, whose eyes kept turning heavily from the arrows in Peleg's shoulder to Ghosta's black robe, as if both these noticeable things had only been door-handles needing professional attention.

At any rate when Ghosta, who held a small lantern in her hand, came forward and moved straight to her gigantic Mongolian friend, it was not only those two arrow-shooters, both of whom leapt to their feet in consternation, who bolted in desperate panic, but every man-jack of that whole Lost Towers crowd.

Down on the earth fell the Brazen Head along with the poles on which it was carried and the cords by which it was tied, and a strange and sudden silence fell on the whole forest. Ghosta must have already seen young John and his friends approaching, but she did not even look round as they drew near. She had gone straight up to Peleg; and by the time John was at their side she had pulled out both the arrows which indeed the young man had already surmised must have left only shallow flesh-wounds, and was already bandaging the bleeding places with strips of white linen.

Did she always carry about with her, the young man wondered, these useful medicaments, or had she torn them from her own garments as she approached the scene?

The interest of both Colin and Clamp was concentrated on the Brazen Head upon which John's torch, though only held mechanically in his hand, now flung a direct blaze of light. The violent jolt with which the Head had been dropped, in the supernatural panic produced by Ghosta's appearance, had flung it clear of the poles and had dislodged from its shoulders one of the two ropes, that bound it.

The blaze of torch-light now flung upon its indefinitely moulded features gave it a most extraordinary expression. Its gaze was fixed upon Something. But upon what? That was the question which the airy Colin, as he whirled about it in protracted circle after circle, turning, so to speak, on his own axis, as he made of it a sort of cosmogonic axis for his saraband, and the round-bellied Clamp as he picked up a broken segment of rotten wood from the ground and leant on it, pressing his chin into the moss that covered its natural handle, might well have both been pondering, for they were obviously magnetized as they stared at it, to what degree it actually had been endowed with consciousness.

Its features had been so mistily and vaguely indicated by its human creator that it would have been as impossible for the most inquisitive scrutinizer to make out any expression at all. They seemed to have been arranged by their designer to prevent the possibility of their being used as a medium for any one single human emotion.

The contemplation of them always gave young John the feeling that he was surveying a wide-spread landscape from the top of a mountain. But the Head's eyes were undeniably gazing at something. Was this something a completely different world from the one out of whose elements its human creator had fashioned it, a different world in fact from the one with which we are all familiar?

Ever since the flight of that riotous Lost Towers band it had struck both the mind and the senses of our friend John that a strange silence had fallen upon the whole forest. Was this in fact due, John asked himself, to some real mental gesture of the Brazen Head?

Was it possible that, in creating this automatic Being, Friar Bacon had really created a living actual mind different altogether from all the minds so far created by the natural processes of life and nature? If this was possible, if in fact this is exactly what *had* happened, might it not be, John couldn't help wondering, that the activity of a mind, whose power of thought was completely different from any mind that has ever existed in the world before, might have such a formidable effect upon the mysterious galvanic forces that constitute the motions of the universe that a definite change would soon become evident not only in every star and planet in the firmament but in every living creature, however small and helpless, in our own immediate earth?

With such thoughts obscurely flitting through his brain John left Ghosta and Peleg to their enjoyment of what he imagined must have been for them both one of the most important moments in their lives. Together they had vanquished the enemy; and John felt sure that after Ghosta's ministration the giant's arrow-hurts would soon heal.

What he didn't feel sure of, as he turned from the two Hebraic lovers to Colin and Clamp, who were by this time engaged in what looked like an extremely absorbing whispered argument, was what effect this shock of falling with a jerk upon the earth would have upon the Head itself.

John had now been left, by the movement, so it seemed to him, of unadulterated fate, alone with the Head. He moved up so close to it that he soon stood within an arm's reach of those inchoate and incomprehensible features.

The Head's face, though it had been emptied by the deliberate intention of its creator, of all *human* expression, was in no way a blank face. The young man couldn't help uttering an inward and entirely inarticulate prayer to that chaotic brazen physiognomy, while he made absurd attempts to rouse it to some emotion, if only to the emotion of anger, by moving the fiery gleam of the torch he held with repeated switches and twitches and flashes and dashes and whirlings and twirlings between himself and that imperturbably chaotic visage.

But the countenance of the Brazen Head remained completely unmoved. John might just as well have endeavoured to evoke an earthquake or a volcanic eruption by brandishing his torch at the floor of the forest, or to draw down flashes of lightning and torrents of rain by challenging with it what could be seen of the black sky above the tops of the dark trees!

But suddenly the young man felt impelled to stop playing this silly game, and to shift the manner of his hold upon the torch he was carrying. He now began holding it as humbly and reverently as if he were at the rear end of a long procession of worshippers who were moving towards a temple.

And he made this change at the identical moment when they all heard a familiar voice calling to them from the forest and not very far away.

"Good God!" cried John, "that's the old man! I'd know his voice anywhere! Peleg, do you hear him? It's the old bailiff! What on earth is *he* doing out there at this time of night? The family would be furious if they knew! How have they let him get out of the Fortress? Is he alone?"

But John was talking now to nobody but Ghosta; for Peleg had at once responded to the voice, and had been followed at a mad rush by Colin, whose crazy chucklings and wild gestures had been reduced to the purposeful leapings of a high-mettled steed, and also by Clamp, who kept blurting out as he bounced and bumped along, "I know'd it! I know'd it! I know'd it! I could have told 'ee the whole tale if ye'd cuzzensented to ask it of I! Yes, I could have lighted up this whole blind, blubbered, bloated, blistered fog-patch we've gone and got lost in! Why didn't ye come to I 'stead of letting this kid of a Colin What's-a-clock show itself off?"

And indeed it now struck young John, who was standing close to Ghosta, while she calmly watched the tide of events, that it was only the special kind of darkness of this particular night that had prevented them from recognizing how close they were at this moment to that little postern-door into the Fortress, of which Tilton and he had made use all their lives.

"*Here we all are, Master*!" The genial voice of the Jewish Mongol carried such an implication of relief, of storms over and haven reached at last, that, as Ghosta moved forward to greet the old bailiff, John knew at once that his flash of insight was absolutely correct, and that they were now at this actual moment at the furthest end of the thick group of oaks and pines, which he had looked at since he was a child and about which, since they were first conscious of such things, they had heard their parents arguing.

Lady Val had always wanted to have those trees cut down, or at least considerably thinned out, as she regarded them as a perfect ambush both for wolves and for wolfish men; but such dense thickets of forest-growth were what, in the whole of Roque, her husband, who was a born hunter, especially loved.

Ghosta had never met the ex-bailiff before, as the old man only left the armoury for the Fortress dinner, his other meals being brought to him as he sat by the fire; so there now ensued in that wild place quite a formal and even courtly ceremonial. John felt it was incumbent upon him in the absence of both the lord and the mistress of the Manor, as well as of their elder son, to play the part of host; and the already somewhat exhausted old gentleman, who approached them leaning very heavily on Peleg's arm, was now compelled to stand as erect as he could and shake hands, not only with Ghosta, but with both Colin and Clamp, while John, constantly interrupted by each gentleman in turn, did his best, with a good deal of blundering pedantry and not a little silly facetiousness, to introduce the one as a lively court-jester and the other as a disillusioned, cynical sage.

But, before he had finished, the look of pitiful exhaustion on the ex-bailiff's face forced him to interrupt himself.

"Here, master," he murmured, "sit down on *this*, and lean your back against *this*!" And lugging off the sheep's wool neck-cloth that he had been wearing all that night, he laid it on the ground under the nearest tree-trunk and helped the old man to sit down.

Ghosta at once bent over him, while Colin and Clamp moved off. “Where — is — the — the — the Head?” murmured the old man anxiously, turning his own head this way and that.

Ghosta took the torch from John and ran to Peleg’s side; and John noticed that the first thing she whispered to the giant must have had to do with the arrow-wounds he’d received, for the giant promptly uncovered the places and held the light for her while she examined them.

“So all’s well?” John heard him utter in an interrogative whisper; and it was clear to him that the reply was reassuring.

As soon as she came back, still holding the torch, she asked the old man whether he wanted Peleg to bring the Brazen Head near to him, so that he could examine it. John could see that this bold question at once excited and troubled the ex-bailiff, for, snatching at Ghosta’s robe, he pulled her towards him till she sank on one knee, the torch held at arm’s length above her head.

After a second’s hesitation the old man began a rather bewildering and long-winded rigmarole about something he wanted to ask John. With considerable difficulty, but with more tact than he knew he possessed, John now listened to an agitated and complicated account of a conversation the ex-bailiff of Roque had had earlier in the month with John’s sister, Lil-Umbra.

The old gentleman seemed to have been deeply impressed not only by Lil-Umbra’s beauty but by her intelligence; and, as far as her young brother could make out from what he now heard, there had come a moment in the conversation when some mysterious presence, a presence whose nature neither of them really comprehended, seemed to come between them and to hover over them.

The old man had got it lodged in his head — John could see as much as that — that there was some magic bond, or some fatal link, between this mysterious Brazen Head of Friar Bacon's invention and a beautiful young woman; and John himself was anxious to learn whether his own vague sense of something weird and unusual, and something that he couldn't describe as either good or evil, either angelic or devilish, had been felt by Lil-Umbra also.

Old Heber's hope was that Lil-Umbra may have talked to John about it; as he knew she was in the habit of discussing religious matters with both her brothers. The truth really was that Lil-Umbra's nerves were so strung-up, and her heart was in such a state of tension, as to whether Raymond de Laon would or would not come to the armoury that night, that the whole subject of Friar Bacon and his Brazen Head passed her by very lightly indeed.

But now to the complete surprise of both the young man and the old man, and somewhat to the displeasure of Peleg, who by this time was towering above the three of them, and was by no means indifferent to this thing they were discussing, Ghosta broke in. "What was wanted," she said quietly, "to the completion of Friar Bacon's creation I was myself ready to supply; and at the request of the Friar, I did supply it."

The sound of Peleg's voice above their heads had a queerly hoarse note in it at this moment. "The best thing we can do tonight," he said slowly, "is to carry the Head out of this forest and into the Fortress; and I would suggest that we straightway convey it into the armoury where it will remain under the particular protection of our friend here. I believe" — and at this point the giant laid his hand on the young man's shoulder— "that your

Father, Master John, will have no objection when he learns of this having been done. I don't think our conveying the Head into the armoury need disturb anybody's night's rest. In fact I can make certain that it doesn't by carrying it there myself, while Ghosta helps you, master bailiff.

"No one can have heard you leave or they'd have come with you. No one but yourself, I expect — isn't that the case, master bailiff? — heard the noise those wretched Lost Towers men were making; and as you came out you couldn't possibly have barred the door. The whole Fortress is no doubt asleep at this moment; and we shall take care to move so silently that we shan't disturb a living soul in the place. I'll be glad enough to have a rest and a lie-down myself; but I'm not so done-in as not to be able to take this old Brazen Head into our armoury! Once there, I warrant nobody will dare to meddle with it. It'll soon become a regular shrine, and as sacred as Master Tilton's Blessed Virgin."

While her giant was addressing them above their heads, Ghosta and the old man, who still had his back against the tree and John's woollen neck-cloth under his buttocks, were exchanging some extremely curious thoughts. No scrupulous chronicler of human affairs can help being aware out of the instinctive observation of the narrating mind, of the weird manner in which, amid any group of agitated people, when one voice has been monopolizing everybody's attention for several minutes, a hollow gulf of silence is created, across which all manner of disturbing thoughts pass from one person to another.

John himself at this moment, in *his* corner of this psychic gulf created by Peleg's somewhat dictatorial and irritable monologue, felt so utterly tired, after all the energy he had spent that night, that his mind, in its exhausted state, like the mind of a person who stares vacantly at his bed-posts, began vaguely to wonder whether in this silence around them and with this hoarse voice sounding above their heads, other feelings than human ones, might be in the act of being exchanged, feelings for instance of the mosses, of the ferns, of the tree-roots even, that surrounded them on that forest-floor.

Such vegetation-feelings, John pondered, might be entangling themselves with his own human feelings at this very moment; for after all it was this group of trees and bushes which he had known since his infancy, and which, from what he had seen daily of them out of that postern-door of his birthplace, had become like the fireguard in his nursery, a malleable background to every story he told himself in his day-dreams at noon and to every story he was told by his night-dreams at midnight; and it would be only natural if, on *its* side, the background of roots and mosses and ferns and lichens and ivy and blades of grass projected obscure invisible sensations, which flitted in and out of his human ones.

But what was this? There was something else. Yes, there was something else at this moment, something that was intruding itself between the furtive and fitful feelings of mosses and roots and ferns and his own weightier cogitations.

“What the hell,” he groaned, “is this confounded thing that has now come into my head?” It was certainly in accordance with the multifarious influences that flit about in our life-stream, like shadowy tadpoles beneath thin ice, that it should have been what the Brazen Head itself was thinking — those thoughts, not of a God-created man, but of a man-created machine, which now butted in, like a misty cloud in the shape of the Minotaur, between the vegetation-feelings of that forest recess and the ideas, whatever they were, that were being exchanged between Ghosta and the old man with his back against the tree.

For there is no doubt that the “something” of which John suddenly became aware was some thought from the Brazen Head. And what the chronicler of these things cannot escape calling to mind was the lack of response that the old ex-bailiff had found in John's sister Lil-Umbra when the latter, her head full of the possible appearance of Raymond de Laon in the armoury, was doing her best to be nice to him. But this lack of response was now wholly compensated for in the old bailiff's mind by Ghosta's attitude.

Young John and the old man were however both vaguely conscious that it was some mysterious connection between the Brazen Head and Ghosta that was now giving to the voice of Peleg, as it rumbled hoarsely above their heads, an irritable and dictatorial tone. The giant concluded with these words: "I'll fetch the Head now, and carry it straight to the postern; for I can see exactly where we are, torch or no torch! Better give the torch back to Master John, Ghosta, and then you all — —" and he threw this out, like a handful of crumbs, in the direction of Colin and Clamp, who, conscious of not being altogether indispensable as the drama thickened, had linked themselves together in the last few minutes in a rather childish though very natural way.

Clamp had picked up a moss-grown stick from the ground that had a couple of tiny ferns growing out of the middle of it, and had poked Colin with it to show him this phenomenon, and the flickering torch had at once revealed those small ferns; and Colin had promptly seized the end of this interesting stick, and now neither of this quaint pair would be likely to relax his grasp.

It was clear that, in their uneasiness as to whether they would be allowed to follow the others into the interior of the Fortress, this mossy stick gave them some curious support, as well as uniting them on this particular occasion.

“And then you can all,” Peleg concluded, “follow me to the little door. Isn’t that the thing, Master John?”

John, who had begun to long for his comfortable bed in the little room that had been his own now for a couple of years, agreed at once; and Peleg, without even glancing at Ghosta, who had obediently handed the torch to John, snatched up the latter’s woollen scarf upon which the old man was no longer sitting, and clapping it upon his own head like a turban, rushed over to where the Brazen Head was surveying them all with the stark indifference of a rocky landscape, and seizing it in his two hands heaved it into the air till he held it propt up on the top of his head. The effort required for this was so great that it drew from him a really terrifying sound, a sound such as Samson must have made when, with the central pillars of the Temple of Dagon in his arms, he bowed himself down and brought down with him the whole of that great building.

An outrush of blood from the two arrow-hurts in his shoulders accompanied this sound; and John, who was close to Ghosta, heard a similar sound, bursting unconsciously it would seem, from her; and it certainly was all he could do to restrain in himself a cry of amazement.

But he had the wit to see what the two of them had to do at this important juncture. He began hurriedly helping the ex-bailiff to his feet. “*You* take hold of him on *your* side,” he said to Ghosta, “and I’ll help him on my side!”

And then he shouted after the departing figure of their friend, who was carrying away the Brazen Head on his own head as if it were a gargoyle made of the fossilized features of some antediluvian giant, belonging to the same race, though of an earlier breed, as the man who was carrying it. “Wait for us at the postern, Peleg! We’ll help you in with it!”

The thoughts and feelings of the old man as he stumbled along over the tree-roots and over the mossy stones, while John's torch flung the sort of wayward and flickering bursts of illumination that can be both angelic guides and devilish betrayers, grew more and more intense and more and more unrestrained as they drew near the postern-gate.

"I'm glad I came out," he told himself, "if only to be able to brood over the unbelievable advantage of being allowed to sit by the fire in my own chair in that faithful old armoury until I die. But — Jesus help us! — these young folk seem to think I'm half-dead already! Not one of them asked me whether I wanted to spend my days and nights with the Friar's Head of Brass! But I'm glad they didn't. For it would have been terribly hard to explain what I do want! And now that I come to think of it I seriously believe it was some queer understanding between the Head and me that brought me out here tonight! I wonder what time it is? About two o'clock in the morning, I wouldn't wonder! *It has that kind of feeling*. O! but this Ghosta-girl had better be careful how near to this Head her home-sickness for Palestine and Jerusalem draws her! I didn't have that queer presentiment for nothing that night when I sat with Lil-Umbra waiting for her lover Raymond!

"Sitting alone by the same fire, day in, day out, a person picks up a few little things about life here below, things that great giant Jews dream not of! And when I watched that little sister of yours, Master John, and talked of this same Head, I knew all of a sudden, and for a certainty, that this Thing, created not by God but by Friar Roger, *needed*, to make it complete, to make it its real self, to make it a true oracle of life's hidden secrets, to be in some way connected with amaiden, who, without officially losing her maidenhead to the Head, would lose something of her inmost self, her secretest feminine self, to it, giving it that unique power of revelation, of illumination, of ultimate vision, that virgins alone possess!

“There’s the Fortress! We shall be there in a minute! Whether spending the rest of my days with a living intelligence created by man and not by God will lengthen or shorten my days, I don’t know and don’t greatly care! But that it will make life far more interesting to me is certain. I’ve always hoped for something like this to happen and now it *has* happened! Maybe this will prove a moment in the history of our race of an importance second only to the creation of Adam! We shall see!

“Meanwhile what I’ve got to do now is clear. I must make them all take off their shoes, and not utter a word, even in a whisper! And as for this pair of antics, this Colin and Clamp, hanging on to that pathetic old stick as if it were the sceptre of Solomon, I suppose I must find a corner for them to sleep in, in the Manor kitchen. They won’t do any harm, wherever they are; and I certainly can’t have them in my armoury!”

XIV. FRIAR BACON’S CHAMBER

Several months had passed away into the revolving rubbish-heap of time — or, to placate our final resting-place with a grander name, into the palindromic abyss — since an abode was found for the Head in the armoury of the Fortress and under the guardianship of the old ex-bailiff.

“Why did you straddle me in my nakedness round the neck of that thing of brass?”

These startling words were the first that greeted Friar Bacon from the lips of Ghosta, when the old factotum of his prison-chamber brought her to see him.

“Sit down, my daughter,” the Friar replied, laying down his pen and pushing back across the table from beneath his wrists the parchment upon which he was at work.

“There, child, sit down *there*!” And he pointed to an upright seat on the opposite side of the table, a seat which in appearance was the sort of chair that any young girl in any epoch would have associated with some sort of goblin royalty and elfin ritual. “And you may leave me,” he added, turning to the lay-brother, “for a few minutes now. I shall not be doing any harm to this good maid, but I want to talk to her alone for a while if you don’t mind.”

Brother Tuck gave them a quick glance and a grave nod, and, shuffling to the door, took himself off.

“Well, my dear, I’ll tell you exactly why, so to speak, I behaved to you as the angel, on Annunciation Day, behaved to our Lady.”

“You don’t mean, I hope, Father,” Ghosta interrupted earnestly, “that you did really marry me to the Head, because if you did I must, with all the power I have, beg you to divorce me at once; for the truth is, Father, I want to marry a man of my own faith and my own race, which, as I expect you already know, is the Jewish faith and the Hebrew race. Yes, Father, I belong and always shall belong to the House of Israel; and it is as impossible for me to enter into such a covenant with any Christian as it would be for a sea-gull to swear fidelity to a barn-door fowl!”

“Listen, dear child,” said the Friar, speaking very slowly and in a voice that was as grave as if he were reciting a pardon on a scaffold. “There are moments in all our lives when it is necessary for us to act in a way that makes use of both good and evil. In actual reality — for we need not drag in that treacherous word ‘truth’, which can cover and justify a thousand abominations — in actual living reality we are compelled — and if you ask me ‘compelled by whom or by what?’ I can only say I do not know — but we are compelled by a force, that may be as much outside the Devil as it is outside God, to do something which is clearly contrary to goodness and righteousness and morality and sanctity and holiness and virtue.

“You must understand, my dear child, that I’m not saying we have at these moments to become one with any devilish power that is opposing God or defying all that the prophets have taught us down the ages. We must honestly recognise, however, that without becoming a part of the Evil Power that opposes itself to God, we are at this particular moment acting contrary to what we know to be the good way and the righteous way.

“The point is that we are acting thus in obedience to a force within us, which we feel by an overpowering instinct to be as much outside the Good as it is outside the Evil, and as much outside God as it is outside the Devil. What we feel, my dear child, at these moments — I mean what I, your old

Friar, feels — is that I am obeying an absolutely new revelation, a revelation that may change the entire world.”

Ghosta, who had been listening with concentrated attention to all this, now lifted her elbows onto the table and rested her chin upon her two hands.

“Was it a part,” she enquired earnestly, “of your creation of a living soul in a Bronze Head to make me embrace that Image as you did, straddling across its neck in my nakedness? How did you manage to read my secret thoughts and the hidden feelings of my most secret life? For you were right, Father, you were perfectly right. It had been my desire, while remaining a virgin — for I always had an absolute horror of losing my maidenhead — to experience once in my life before I died, the sensation of giving in a clinging embrace the life-drops from my innermost being to *Something* that I pressed close against me.

“It needn’t have been a man! That was the queer thing about the longing I had. It was that I, Ghosta, might, in my virginity, and without losing my maidenhead, and indeed, if possible, without having any love for this Something — I didn’t care what it was — which I embraced, be the creator of a completely new, new, new, — No! I was never presumptuous enough to think of it as a new world, let me call it a new form of life in the world. I was always — but you know me through and through already, Father, my Friar of Friars — fascinated by the word *Parthenogenesis*.

“It is a long word, and I have been told it is a Greek word, and that its meaning is the giving birth to a new life by a girl without losing her maidenhead or forfeiting anything of her natural virginity. So that when you hoisted me a-straddle that day round the neck of the Head of Brass, with my nakedness pressing against its brazen skin, I had an ecstasy. I said to myself: ‘What is happening to me now is the very thing I have always longed for! I am not losing my maidenhead, and yet I am drawing from the inmost depths of myself a dew-drop of living creation.'"

A look of indescribable relief passed over the Friar's troubled face, and he leaned forward across the table and touched with the tips of his long fingers the head which the girl was supporting on her arms as she leant forward.

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee!" he said gravely, "and lift up the light of his countenance upon thee and give thee peace!" And then he added, withdrawing his right hand from his guest's forehead and his left hand from his own manuscript, and tilting his chair a little to the rear on its back legs, "I swear I don't know, my dear daughter, any living woman I could talk to as freely as I am now talking to you. I certainly couldn't do so to any of the ladies who rule the Manors and Castles round here! Have you, my dear child, realized why it is that I go on so steadily refusing all invitations to leave this prison-chamber and go where I'd have more freedom of movement?"

Ghosta smiled a quite whimsical smile. "Yes indeed, Father, I can answer that! This old Prior who is master here, as I know well from my life in the Convent, where the nuns always consider him and his ideas and his policy above any line they are ordered to follow by the lady who immediately rules us, has only one object in life — namely, to enjoy himself as much as he possibly can in the narrow circle into the centre of which fate has dropt him.

"What he has to consider are the hours for meals, for strolling in the grounds, for listening to the anthems and chants from his choir-pew in the chapel, for studying the particular Latin text, whether from the Priory library or from his own private shelves, which carries in its train the largest number of old memories of his far-off youth. Now when we consider this matter quite clearly and honestly, Friar, my revered Father, we find nothing less than the surprising fact that this devotion to his own personal pleasure and interest for the whole of the day, and for whatever portion of the night is at the disposal of his personal will — for we can hardly include the hours when the worthy man is asleep, for our dreams, and I'm sure you'll agree with me there, Father, are *not* under the control of our will — is identical with what thinking people like ourselves are absorbed in.

"Whereas these rulers of great manorial castles, with their Ladies and their Bailiffs, and these royal rulers of great lands with their Treasurers and Chancellors and Bishops and Captains and Princes, are occupied day and night with meddling in other people's affairs, with invading other people's territories, with taking away other people's property, with imprisoning and murdering other people's subjects and citizens. Haven't I been speaking truly, Father, in what I've just said?"

Ghosta had indeed been uttering these unpopular and unorthodox feelings in a voice not only a good deal louder than the one she generally used, but a great deal more heavily charged with emotion.

Friar Bacon brought his chair back to the table with a jerk and stretched out his right arm clear across his manuscript, upon which from the small square aperture in the roof the sun was at that moment throwing down a long straight ray, a ray more crowded with sun-motes than Ghosta, had she been in a mood to observe such things, would have had to confess she had ever seen in a sun-ray before.

In spite of the fact that they were looking straight into each other's eyes, the Friar's gesture was so unexpected that for a second she disregarded it. Then she met it with her own right hand; and, in the warm pressure that followed, the heart-felt alliance between them was sworn and sealed.

The Friar's hand rested once more on the edge of his manuscript, and hers once more clasped its fellow and propped her chin while her elbows remained on the dark, smooth-polished wood of that round table. And now both the Friar and Ghosta smiled at each other and turned their eyes away. This they both did naturally and instinctively; but having done so, the quick and lively perception they each possessed was severally attracted by the quivering and elongated sun-ray above their heads and its myriads of tiny little dancing specks.

"Isn't it queer to think," commented Ghosta, "how many historical characters such as we read about in the scriptures, and such as they lecture about in the universities, like Moses and Joshua and like Plato and Socrates and Julius Caesar and Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, must have noticed in their colleges and palaces and temples, and especially at crucial moments in their lives, these millions of dancing atoms! What did Socrates feel when these tiny atoms came dancing into his cell while he was waiting for the executioner with the Hemlock?"

"A question indeed, my dear!" echoed the Friar. "And I'd mighty well like to hear how Plato, who was so confoundedly clever at reaching that great teacher's secret thoughts, and cleverer still at giving them the particular twist that would make them fit into his own ideal system, would describe how the great self-doomed corrupter of youth would have argued with such an one, if some God had endowed one of those motes up there with the power of speech and started it off on a metaphysical protest against the claim of the human race to be the only judge amid the atomic children of the Cosmos!"

"O Father, my dear Father!" cried Ghosta in huge delight. "*Do* go on imagining what one of those tiny dots of matter would say to Socrates if it did question him!"

"Well! for one thing, my dear child," rejoined the Friar, and then he stopped abruptly.

Ghosta, who was turning from him to that descending sun-fall of dancing motes, and then back again to him, had a look of reverence on her face as if he'd really been the great magician that most of his enemies and a few of his friends considered him, and as if he might, at any moment, without moving a hand or a foot, give orders to that sun-stream to alter its course, and as if the sun-ray might obey him, and after making a disconcerting circle round their chamber, might hasten to the door, and vanish down the tower-stairs.

But he went on quite calmly. "Don't you suppose, my dear, that this whole business of being one of the lucky millions of dust-specks, out of the trillions and quadrillions of less lucky ones, must be so exciting to every one of those little objects that the whole of its being would be so absorbed in what is happening to it that it wouldn't have a particle of power left to ask any question of anybody. Yes, and I would say — and wouldn't you, my dear girl, say the same? — that if it had any choice left to it, it would feel it was wiser to lavish all its power of response on that lucky moment than to ponder on suitable philosophical questions to put to — —"

At this point they were interrupted by shouts and cries outside, by a clatter of feet on the stairs, and by the flinging open of the door. It was young John who now rushed in, followed by Colin and Clamp, and three or four of the Fortress's most active retainers. John was carrying a broken piece of statuary pressed against his chest; and this he hurriedly flung down on the Friar's bed in the corner, after a quick nervous glance at the despoiled alcove hard-by where once stood the Brazen Head.

"What on earth is this, Master John?" cried Ghosta, rising to her full height and hurrying to the bed to see what the young man had deposited there. But Friar Bacon remained seated with his pen still between his fingers, and the only special movement he made that Clamp and Colin, who were both observing him closely, were able to discern, was that he began to draw some sort of Euclidian figure at the bottom of the parchment in front of him, and that this Euclidian figure was an equal-sided square surrounded by a circle.

"Father! Father!" murmured Ghosta a moment later, "do, for Heaven's sake, look at this!" and, shaking off young John, who tried to hold her back, and advancing straight to the Friar's chair, from the side opposite to where Clamp had already begun to watch with mute and fascinated absorption the movements of the Friar's pen, she thrust under Roger Bacon's eyes what clearly was the broken half of a female head, elaborately chiselled out of a block of very hard stone.

But a torrent of verbal eloquence, like the sound of a breaking wave to the splashing tune of which the Friar studied what Ghosta thrust beneath his eyes, was uttered by the excitable Colin, and accompanied by such lavish gesticulation that it was like being addressed by one of those flocks of winged angels speaking with one voice, such as in religious altar-pieces often form the flying chariot of God the Father as it descends from Heaven.

"The General of the Franciscan Order, this thrice-accurst Bonaventura," cried Colin making his voice resound through every portion of the chamber, and it was as if the quivering sun-ray, which had removed itself altogether, had suddenly returned in a new incarnation of pure sound, "has now with the help of those ruffians from Lost Towers, whom he swears he has converted, and at the command of the Pope, whom he swears he represents, begun meddling with Master Tilton's statue of Our Lady in that shrine he's building!

"And do you know what this false saint has done now? He has started a shocking and wicked rumour, entirely a lie, of course, but you know how these lies spread — that Master John's sister and his brother Tilton have been found guilty of incest! And — as if *that* wasn't enough! — do you know what further lie he's invented? He swears that our Master Tilton, heir to the Manor of Roque and to the Fortress Castle, which his mother's family have held since the days of King Stephen, has an even greater sin on his conscience than incest with his sister! For — says this pretty saint, who behaves far worse than Judas — our Master Tilton has committed the supreme sacrilegious sin, of carving the face of Our Lady in the centre of this shrine so that she shall resemble his sister with whom he has sinned!"

"Has Bonaventura really had the gall, John my friend, to go to such lengths as this man says?"

The Friar's voice was as steady, and his manner as quiet and collected, as if he were referring to no more than a point of propriety in some public, metaphysical debate; but Ghosta noticed that he made a slight motion of his hand as if to wave back a little both Colin and Clamp and the two or three armed men who accompanied them.

"Yes, Master, across my heart and on my life," replied John. "That's what he's done! My mother is so upset that she has shut herself up with my sister and won't allow her to go riding with Raymond de Laon, as the two of them had arranged to do today, for fear that this wretched Bonaventura, with his Lost Towers troop, might kidnap her or imprison her, or even carry her with him in a ship to Rome, as he has already done with other ladies who have been accused of various offences of the same sort.

"As for my father, he refuses to take the thing seriously. He says that Tilton ought to be hunting wild boars in the forest instead of building shrines with his own hands and using Lil-Umbra as his model for the

Mother of God. But I notice that he has remained at home since the trouble started, and that he's set a guard outside the shrine, to make sure that this mock-saint doesn't excite his cohort of 'converted' robbers to destroy the whole shrine and ruin Tilton's hard work on it for nearly a year!

"What drove me to come, most honoured Friar, to make a special appeal to you, was the fact that I chanced to hear" — young John flushed a little as he announced this, revealing the fact that he had not been able to resist the temptation to listen at his parents' door— "to hear my father tell my mother that if they attacked the shrine again, or came anywhere near the postern-gate again, he would arm all our people, both serfs and freemen, and make such an attack on that damned Lost Towers as would settle them for ever and a day! You see, most reverend Friar, this man undoubtedly was at one time the Pope's emissary or legate or ambassador or whatever the proper legal name is — round here they use a word for him that's too bawdy to repeat — and no doubt at *that* time when he had the proper seals of office he might have been able to carry off Lil-Umbra, and Tilton too, to Rome and accuse them there. But as it is, with no official credentials from the Pope, and with no proper royal support from our sick King, I don't believe he can do very much to hurt us, except start rumours and spread lies."

Friar Bacon groaned, and bowed his head for a second over his pen and paper. Then he said quietly, but without looking up:

"Sit down a moment, lad, while we consider all this as steadily as we can. What woul*d y*ou advise us to do, Ghosta? Both John and I — that's true, isn't it, lad? — hold the view that at most dangerous and ticklish crises, it's often from the feminine mind we get the best hint as to what to do."

Ghosta didn't hesitate a second. "How did the shock of this wicked accusation," she enquired, "strike your sister and brother, Master John?"

“Well, to tell you the truth—” and it was clear to everybody that young John was very glad to be asked that question, “I felt proud of the way they took it! You know it was Nurse who first told us about the dastardly fabricated tale which this devilish wretch started; and we were all together up in the nursery at the top of the house when she blurted it out. Father had come up about this attack on Tilton’s shrine; and no sooner had Nurse used the word than Tilton threw his arms round Lil-Umbra’s neck, and gave her a great hug and a lot of loud kisses all over her face. ‘Don’t you mind, my darling!’ he cried. ‘If I ever tried to do such wickedness to you I’m sure the good God would strike me dead before it was done!’”

Roger Bacon’s face lit up with satisfaction, and with a certain humorous amusement too, young John thought, as he eagerly watched him; but the Friar’s words when he spoke were anything but final or conclusive:

“But now listen to me, my children both, and you two also my kind friends,” and he made a double gesture with the hand that held his pen, one in the direction of Colin, and the other in the direction of Clamp, “what we’ve got to do now is to think of some way of out-witting this self-appointed representative of the Holy Father, supported — and the thing’s not without precedent in the history of our mad purblind human race — by this local nest of rapscallions. If any better idea comes into your head, Ghosta, while I’m explaining my scheme, let’s hear it at once, and don’t mind interrupting me if you’re afraid of forgetting what you suddenly thought of!

“But this is what has just come into my mind as a good plan. A week ago I had a communication from my friend Peter Peregrinus, who is now lecturing in France, to tell me that the famous master in philosophy, Albert of Cologne — who belongs to the Dominican order, and indeed is such a loyal Dominican that, when he speaks in the University of Paris, he defends his view of Aristotle against both all the Arabian and all the Latin Averroists and completely demolishes them — is at this very moment visiting Oxford! This is an astonishing piece of news to me. I *had* heard that he was interested in the *Summa Theologicae* of Alexander of Hales, but I never thought I'd live to hear that the great Albert of Cologne should actually be in this island, still less that he should be visiting Oxford!

"I have exchanged letters with him a good many times, as I suppose all disciples of Aristotle have done, and he and I have always agreed that the science of life didn't end with Plato or with Aristotle or even with Grosseteste or with any other student of philosophy. But, my dears, the reputation of Albert of Cologne all over the world is terrific, greater than that of any other modern master. Every man who can read and write in this whole west country, whether they're Franciscans or Dominicans, Monks, or Friars, Abbots, or Priors or parish priests, have heard nothing but praise of him since they first began their A. B. C.! When you come to metaphysics he's the top boy, so to speak, of the whole *schola mundi*, if you leave out Israel and India and China! Now if we could send to Albertus some wise and diplomatic representative of our side, in this quarrel with Bonaventura, it strikes me that it's not at all impossible that the great teacher from Cologne might be persuaded to come, as the most famous Dominican, to confront this troublesome Franciscan.

"That would soon, as we used to say in Ilchester, 'settle the hash,' of our Bona, the Venturesome! I am perfectly certain that what started the whole thing was the fact that your excellent parents, John, gave shelter in the Fortress to my Brazen Head. It was this that kindled all this obstinate rage in our ex-legate's mind. He's somehow got it lodged in his one-track sanctified midriff that the Holy Trinity we all worship has received a staggering blow from my having dared to create in the person of my Brazen

Head a rival creation to Adam and Eve. I tell you, my good friends, I tell you, John dear, if we could only hit upon the right person to send as an ambassador to the great Albert now in Oxford, a person who would be in a position to escort him down here, with him as the chief Dominican to confront this pseudo-saint of the Franciscans, the whole affair would soon be settled."

As can well be imagined, both Ghosta and John were now murmuring, each with their own special manner of emphasis and intensity, the name of Raymond de Laon; and Friar Bacon, as if to seek still further confirmation of this idea, looked first at Colin and then at Clamp. Both men came so close on getting this faintly interrogative glance that they completely hid the Friar from Ghosta and John, but a double vote of unqualified recognition of Raymond as their Ambassador to Albert of Cologne these two certainly did give; for the voice of Colin seemed to flap its wings in widening circles above every back and every head in the place; and the voice of Clamp seemed to drive in one rusty nail after another as he fastened up their decision over the Norman arch of the event.

"Well then, my friends," cried the Friar, rising from his seat and moving quickly round the two men who were bending over him, "we may take it that our Council chamber has uttered its decisive verdict, and that Raymond de Laon shall be our ambassador to the great Albert in Oxford. Will you convey our request to him, John my lad, and let us know the result as quickly as possible? And now I think I must beg you all to descend to the lower regions of this hospitable Priory; for it is really absolutely necessary for me to finish this page of what I am calling my *Opus Major* before I sleep tonight; and your arrival, gentlemen, is the cause of this necessity, and I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you all for being this same cause.

"For the real truth is that your sudden appearance and the more than startling interest of what you have announced to me, combined with the expectation of encountering, man to man, he a Dominican and myself a Franciscan, the great Albert of Cologne, has caused me to remember certain intensely important details that I had completely forgotten relating to the journey of Brother William of Rubruck to the Grand Khan at Karakorum in Tartary, where he stayed from December 1253 till July 1254.

"It was Brother William himself when I met him in Paris who told me these things; and although at this moment I was writing about the sermon he told me he preached in Constantinople on Palm Sunday 1253, I had absolutely forgotten that great congress of religions over which the Mongolian Khan presided at Karakorum, a congress of the Mohammedan, Buddhist, and Christian religions, and I really must write about it while it has come back so vividly to my mind. I am sure I would have left out Brother William's description of that Karakorum congress of religions altogether if our little meeting tonight, and our decision to send an ambassador to bring the head of the Dominicans to deal with the head of the Franciscans, hadn't stirred up my memory of what the brother told me."

A universal murmur, in such low tones among themselves as almost to convey the impression that, having been thus commended for stirring up the Friar's mind, they were seized with the fear of so disturbing it by their lively discussion that the effect on his *Opus Major* would be destructive of the good they had already done, was the immediate result of this grateful appeal to their courtesy. Then without another word, and headed by Colin and Clamp, and followed by Ghosta and young John, they gave a series of quaint little good-night salutations and descended the stairs.

XV. VISITOR FROM PICARDY

Friar Bacon was left standing alone in that topmost chamber of Bumset Priory. He still held the handle-end, so to speak, of the pen he had been using when he rose to return their valedictory gestures; and now automatically began moving it to and fro, as if the talk-charged air of that recently crowded room were itself the parchment upon which it was his destiny to hand down to posterity his ideas and his discoveries. Strange and far-reaching were the thoughts that passed through his head.

"Here am I," he told himself, "one of the curious animals produced upon this planet that have come to be called men, and are now confronted by the necessity of recording for the benefit of future specimens of such creatures, what were the actual causes of our appearance upon this particular promontory of matter."

The Friar at this point ceased inditing invisible words upon the invisible air, and, after deliberately replacing his pen upon the table by the side of his unfinished parchment page, crossed over to his bed and stretched himself out on his back upon it, with his head on the pillow, and clasped his shins with his hands.

"Little did I think," he pondered, "what I should be doing in three years that night when Fontancourt showed me the letter he'd just had from our friend Petrus! Didn't Fontancourt swear to me that Petrus would never stop studying magnetism or writing about his studies? Three years ago that was! O God, O God! what things have happened since then and are still happening!

"Why didn't I tell those fellows just now before they went away that it was Peter Peregrinus, and not their old Roger, who first thought of using a lodestone to draw like to like; and that if it hadn't been for that divine inspiration of his I could never have invented my Brazen Head? How we damnable inventors do love to hug our inventions and get drunk on the glory of them! And now I must needs defend my precious discoveries by setting this Dominican wolf upon our Franciscan fox!"

At this point the Friar let his thin legs sink down side by side on his bed, and lifting his clasped hands as high above his head as they could reach began murmuring — not in Latin, far less in Hebrew, but in the Wessex dialect of his native Ilchester — a homely and natural prayer: "O Everlasting God, who lookest down from far outside all this curst universe of matter which thou hast created" — and here he couldn't resist using, with a wry touch of the incorrigible humour which not only characterized all his intercourse with others, but displayed itself even in his secretest thoughts about himself, and about the whole confused arena of contemporary speculation, as a little private joke between God and himself, the quaint, precise, technical, academic and metaphysical phrase for "outside our whole system of things", namely the phrase "*ab exstrinsico*", which, as he now muttered it aloud with a sort of chuckle in that slowly darkening room, would have had a queer effect upon any eavesdropper— "and *ab exstrinsico* save me!"

But after making this appeal to the Mystery at the back of all life, Roger Bacon closed his eyes with such a peaceful sigh that it was clear that he himself felt perfectly satisfied with his little private interview with his creator.

The Friar's descent, or ascent shall we say, into the blessed land of oblivion, now gently and deliciously invaded by the feathered dreams of sleep, was soon disturbed however by a resolutely firm and yet cautiously light knocking at the door, a knocking which did not wake him at first, but mingled with his dreams, and mingled with them in such a curiously prophetic manner that he became vividly aware, even before he awoke, of the personality of the intruder, who was none other than his faithful friend and devoted adherent of a great many years, his servant Miles.

Miles and he had indeed been young men when their association first began, and Miles always absolutely refused to be known by any other name than this Roman word for a soldier. Miles came from the old Roman town of Durnovaria, a town which the people of Wessex had already begun to call Dorchester, just as the older name of Friar Roger's own ancient market-town had recently come to be changed into Ilchester.

Yes! His waking dream had not misled him. There, in the fading, late-afternoon twilight, when he went to the door and opened it, standing erect on the threshold, was his friend, his man, his devoted under-study, his partner, his disciple, his obedient slave, his servitor, his alter ego, Miles of Dorchester!

"*Master*!" cried Miles in an ecstasy of joy; and flinging his hawk-feather cap into the middle of the room, he fell upon his knees, clasped the Friar tightly round the waist, and pressed his forehead hard against his hero's navel.

"There, there, there!" murmured this latter reassuringly and tenderly, and very much in the tone with which a responsive dog-lover would soothe a majestic, over-emotional, over-sensitive wolf-hound; and as he spoke he raised Miles to his feet, led him across the floor incidentally picking up the man's hawk-feather cap and handing it to him as they went, and seating him in the chair recently occupied by Ghosta, sat down opposite to him and laid his two clasped fists upon his page with the air of one who has decided to substitute some different form of urgent pressure for the one associated with pens and parchment.

One remarkable peculiarity of the man Miles was the way his countenance altered in a moment from a majestic, monumental, and commanding reserve, not unmixed with an astute alertness that had in it something of the primeval and bottomless cunning of a simple animal, into a melting abandonment to an emotion of devotion so extreme that it was almost painful to witness.

The Friar pressed his hand on the man’s shoulder as he himself got up again to set before them both some wine and a couple of goblets. Then, when the Dorchester-born warrior, who, while lifting his glass, looked, with his massive neck and his clear-cut profile, distinctly like a well-known bust of Caesar Augustus, had rested and refreshed himself a little, the Friar put the straight question to him, “Well, old friend,” he enquired, “and what’s the news?”

“He’s down there now. I left him in the lobby. They are all busy in the kitchen, and the Prior’s begun his dinner. So I left him in that dark entrance on that cushioned seat. He’ll be asleep, I wouldn’t wonder, when I go down to him. Shall I tell them in the kitchen that you’d like him to have his supper up here with you? And that whatever they’ve got for you will do for him too? Shall I tell them that you’d like a bottle or so more of wine and of the best they’ve got? And shall I say that they’d better bring out a mattress for him into the lobby where he is now and a few coverings for it?”

Had Ghosta been there still, or indeed had any feminine being been there, she would not have failed to follow the varying expressions that crossed the Friar’s face as he listened to this speech, and to follow them with growing astonishment. Friar Bacon’s countenance, together with the shape of his head, represented, as any intelligent woman would have recognised at once, or any man either, who happened to be possessed of that sort of visual penetration in which most women leave most men far behind, a perfect example of the pure intellect as it struggles almost always with difficulty, and generally totally in vain, to cope with the irrational changes and chances of human life upon this planet.

The Friar had a delicate face in the precise sense in which all the way down the centuries the word “sensitive” has been used. Anyone could see at one glance that the man was abnormally porous to impressions. And it was indeed clear at this moment that the impressions which reached him from the revelations that this Durnovarian retainer of his was so calmly and relentlessly disclosing were of the most crucial intensity; for little complicated patterns of criss-cross interlinings began to appear on his forehead and under his eyes that resembled frost-marks on an exposed window.

It was only when Miles, having entirely finished what it was his business to report, had permitted his Roman features to assume that patient expectant look of an officer anxious to catch from the lips of his general every faintest nuance of the orders issued, that the Friar realized that their relative positions had been reversed, and that it was himself who was now standing in front of Miles, watching and pondering, and asking, not this unqualified fellow-man, but the inscrutable features of Fate itself, what on earth had to be done now.

What he said, when it came, was pathetic enough in its simplicity. “What do you advise me to do, Miles?”

That this typical Centurion had, from old experience of the master he loved so passionately, expected just exactly this supplication, this appeal to a knowledge of life as it went along such as had nothing to do with learning, was proved by the military decisiveness of his answer.

"I think," he replied firmly, putting down his glass, and speaking in his calmest and most Roman tone, "that you'd better send me into the kitchen to emphasize this man's importance, and yet to make it plain that it would be more considerate to Prior Bog to spare him any immediate invasion; at any rate to let us all have dinner in peace before we do anything and before he has to do anything."

A sigh of relief so deep that it seemed to come from the soles of his sandals shook Friar Bacon from head to foot.

"But you'll have to bring him up here, I suppose?"

And when Miles nodded to this his master accepted it as if it were the word of destiny, escape from which would be hopeless.

"Very well," he conceded. "Bring him up; and explain to him that you'll come up yourself a little later with his meal. We don't want anyone else up here, do we?" This last sentence the Friar added in what was almost an appealing tone. And Miles, already at the door, answered with a significant shake of his head.

The moments that followed were among the most painful in Roger Bacon's life. From his habitual loneliness as a scientific prisoner of religion, he had come to be a man of two different worlds; and since each of these worlds required, if he was to deal with it adequately, all the creative power as well as all the destructive power he possessed in his own personality, it was no easy thing to deal with both these worlds at the same time.

It was natural to him to concentrate his attention upon his private world of lonely thought and lonely experiment, and to feel a peculiar kind of nervous suffering whenever it was necessary for him to face the shocks and clashes and misunderstandings of real life.

"And now," he told himself, "I have to meet the one man in all the world with whom I find it hardest to deal."

Yes! There he was! And since the door had been deliberately left open by the departing Miles, it was inevitable that after a series of rather dragging footsteps — to which the Friar, as he stood in the centre of the room, listened with something like a suspension of breath — the man who entered made no pretence of knocking.

He was of low stature and of a thin weak body; but the extraordinary thing about him was his head. The head of Master Peter Peregrinus of Picardy was simply enormous. It made his body and legs look like those of a dwarf, though in reality they weren't quite as small as that. The skin of his face was so deadly white that, if you had come upon him asleep, you would have certainly assumed that he was a corpse. His hair was straight, not curly, and of a glossy jet-black, with each individual hair as thick as that of a horse, so that their combined weight, massed together on the top of his skull, give his whole figure at a distance the effect of a wooden post on an exposed sea-bank, with either a thick growth of dusky seaweed covering the top of it, or a big black feathery bird perched upon it.

The chief peculiarity of Master Peter's mouth was its absence of lips. It was simply a slit in smooth white marbly stone. And it seemed as if in dispensing with lips it had also decided to dispense with teeth. What did appear, and that not unfrequently, was Master Peter's tongue. This object, abnormally long, and unusually pointed, was always shooting out from that slit in its marbly home, and every time it with-drew it gave the impression of having licked up some form of life which it would shortly be digesting.

But what the most ramificating, debouching, circumnavigating, deviating, perambulating chronicler would have had to be leading up to all this while, like a slippery serpent approaching something as hard to catch off-guard as itself, are, as the simplest reader has long ago guessed, Master Peter's eyes. These were so large that when the man was excited, as he always was when not stunned by a blow or sunk into an impenetrable gulf of sleep, they conveyed the impression of being a pair of outlets for some interior volcano that if it were blocked up or barred down, would burst the cranium that contained it into a million smithereens.

It was doubtless to evade, for at least a couple of beats of the pulse of time, a glance into this explosive crater that Roger Bacon, uttering, as casually as he could, the exclamation, “Well! Well! Well!” made a deliberately slow circuit round his visitor from Picardy, and firmly, calmly, magisterially, and yet very softly, closed the door.

On returning from this breathing-space it can be believed he felt no surprise when he found Master Peter already seated at the table, not only tapping with the narrow finger-nail of his longest finger the word “vibrationem” half-way down the parchment page in front of him, but even steering a little horn-cup, with red wine-stains inside it, up and down among the oddly-patterned wood-marks of the table’s edge.

Master Peter’s demonic spirit did indeed so completely dominate the situation that the nervous Friar found himself seated at his own table in the visitor’s seat with the visitor in the host’s seat, found himself staring blindly into those two black holes, each of them a swirling Charybdisian vortex, and listening to the man’s words without asking him a single question or contradicting a single statement he made.

At last the man broke into his own tricky rigmarole by asking a plain blunt question. “Can you guess what I’m doing now?”

“Doing?” echoed Bacon in puzzled bewilderment.

“Yes, yes! *Doing*! to earn my bread, of course! Doing what you yourself were forced to do when your family was ruined by those scurvy De Montforts and their bloody Barons! You put on a Friar’s grey rags: and I put on sword and shield. And I’m still a man of war, Roger old friend. Get *that* into your pullulating pipkin! In Picardy, let me tell you, when once you've served your Lord in a vital campaign and given your bowels more action than they're used to, by living on hedges and in ditches, you'll soon find that the lords and prelates, who gain by the blood you lose and the sweat you're drained of and the dung you evacuate, will see to it — it's as much their interest, as it's the interest of the dear God Himself, to have worshippers — that you don't die in an almshouse but live to sit at street-corners, selling burnt almonds, singing ballads, and praising the king."

Petrus Peregrinus had arrived at the two syllables "dear God" in the rush of these words, when, moving very slowly, the door began creaking a little and swinging inwards. By lolling his black head an inch to the left of the Friar's grey shoulder he was able to envisage the appearance of a large metal tray, the rim of which, directed by the hands that held it, was itself propelling the massive weight of that huge oblong of impenetrable wood.

It was as impossible for the troubled apprehension of Roger Bacon to miss this gesture of his formidable visitor as it was for him, the second he observed it, to restrain his cry: "But, Miles, Miles! what we need now ——"

Nobody will ever know for a certainty just what was in the Friar's mind at that moment; although it would be easy to imagine several things. But what happened was that the Friar at that particular moment lost consciousness. Whether he fell, chair and all, to the floor and was lifted up by both men after the tray had been deposited on the table, or whether he had himself, after losing all consciousness of what he was doing, stumbled across the room to his bed and laid himself down on it, must be left as a *blank lacuna* in any narration of these events, until either Petrus or Miles chooses to reveal what each of them must have retained very clearly in his memory.

What we do know from the consciousness of the Friar himself is that when he awoke from his trance, or whatever may be the correct name for the overwhelming mental oblivion that descended upon him, he found himself lying on his bed with the devoted Miles kneeling beside him and watching his awakening with the most intense and concentrated attention.

"Is he gone?" was the Friar's first question.

"Yes, dear Master," replied Miles. "He's gone."

"Do you know *where* he's gone?"

"I think, great Master, he's gone to the Fortress."

"Do they expect him there?"

"It is my impression, O most Admirable of all Teachers," responded Miles, "that they have been expecting him for some time."

"How did they know he was here?"

"From what I could make out from him as we went along," replied Miles, rising from his knees and standing, grave and upright, like a majestic Roman statue at the foot of the Friar's bed, "but you know, great master, what he is, and what dung-hill talk he uses and how little he cares whether the person he's talking to understands one jot of what he's saying! I don't take to him, master, and that's the bone truth! He's a scholar right enough. I don't quarrel with his learning. Thee be a man of learning, thee wone self, and I admire 'ee and look up to 'ee for't, like as thee were a kind of God in 'eaven and no nonsense!

"But this bob-by-night, and I don't care who hears me say so, be the sort of Mumbo-Jumbo — Prick-and-Thumbo what they do tell I be found in them girt Fairs in London and Paris and Consinotabel, such as travelling pipshaws do visit in their carry-otteries by day and by night.

"But the man be a man of Latin and Greek, us must allow 'im that much, for all it be worth to 'in, but when I do think of thee, master of mine, and how thy girt wisdom do go along with a girt heart, and how ye do give scoops and bowls o’t, yea! basinsfull o’t, to all and sundry as comes to beg for a crumb of real learning, it do make my gorge to ‘eave up. Thee do use thee’s girt learning to give us more pottage in all our porringers; but this man thinks only of inventing magnets to draw the gold from other men’s treasure-chests into his own. There! If I’ve not gone and done the one thing I didn’t ought to ‘a done — made ‘ee, O master my dear, dead-tired by listening to I!”

At this pathetic self-accusation the Friar quickly opened his eyes.

“No, no!” he cried, “you’ve put new life into me, Miles old friend, by giving me your real and actual feeling about Petrus Peregrinus. But you were beginning to tell me why you thought they were expecting him at the Fortress.”

At this the majestic Roman physiognomy of Miles dissolved into the love-ravaged confusion of a guilty hero-worshipper, and with a convulsive sob he sank on his knees.

“He ate and he drank,” were the words that that crumpled visage now moaned into the edge of the prisoner’s coverlet, “everything I’d brought for both of ye! And then, when he was satisfied, he just went off. He glanced at you before he went and kept muttering to himself without taking any notice of me, “O he’ll come to life in a minute or two! come to life in a minute or two! He’ll come to life in a minute or two!” And off the man went. But I do think I picked up from his randy chat, while I was pegging along by his side and carrying his bundles, that he had been told of your Brazen Head having been taken into the Fortress and put into the armoury; and I think myself, master, that it was with the idea of visiting your Brazen Head that he wanted to get in touch with the lord of the Fortress. At any rate we met young John, and John must have told them to expect him.”

The tone in which Miles uttered this last sentence contained, in its military resonance, a finality which conveyed such an utter removal of all responsibility for what was happening from the recipients of the news it brought, that Roger Bacon, only just hoisted up from the heavenly tide of oblivious sleep, turned over on his bed and closed his eyes.

XVI. THE LODESTONE

PETRUS PEREGRINUS HAD found no difficulty, when once he had descended the stairs, in persuading, by the offer of a sufficient bribe, one of the pleasant-speaking boys from the Prior's kitchen to lead him to the Fortress. Once inside the Fortress he had no difficulty on that particular evening in obtaining a leisurely and agreeable interview with the Lord of the Manor of Roque.

The Baron's curiosity in relation to this singular intruder was lively from the first moment he heard the rumours about him, but as soon as he met him face to face on this night of the man's departure from the Priory, he felt it was imperative that he should have him to himself in private for at least a quarter of an hour.

No! He couldn't deal with the fellow in the presence of the family. For here was his forever indignant, forever outraged, forever grievanced Lady Val, whom he always thought of in his own mind as "Valentia the Irreconcilable", and here was his excitable daughter Lil-Umbra, and here was his anxious, concentrated, architectural-minded elder son Tilton, and finally here was the adventurous young John, who of late had become such a fierce champion of Friar Bacon that he had rendered himself as fully liable to ecclesiastical censure as was the Friar's older friend Raymond, whom Lady Val had already accepted as Lil-Umbra's betrothed.

Here they were, all the lot of them, gathered together in high spirits after a lively evening meal, and simply waiting for some event of an exciting nature to occur. What could he do to get the fellow entirely to himself for a while? He looked first at one of them and then at another, as they all stood round him while the young man from the Priory, having ushered Master Peter into their presence, made a little speech, as dignified as it was natural, emphasizing the fact that the fame of the Brazen Head, possessed of the power of speaking and perhaps even of the power of thinking was what no doubt had brought this notable visitor.

At last the Lord of the Manor of Roque got an inspiration. And it was Lil-Umbra who gave it to him. The others had already begun to talk among themselves when she spoke up boldly and clearly, addressing her father.

"Better take Maître Pierre de Maricourt" — for the traveller had evidently instructed the boy from the Priory kitchen exactly how to announce him— "upstairs to your little room, Father. And then you'll be able to tell us better and clearer about him, so that Mother, and we all, can do him the honour which we feel sure he deserves. Tilton and John and I are so keen to know all about him that we might be a bother to him. But with you to explain — —" And Lil-Umbra ended with a pathetically beseeching glance at Lady Val, as much as to say, "I'll be very *very* good and do everything, yes, everything, you want me to do, if only you'll agree to this!"

But the Lord of the Fortress was so quick in taking his daughter's wise hint that Lady Val had no chance to intervene, nor had her brothers a chance to accompany the two of them, even with the politest intentions. For throwing his powerful right arm round the slim, frail, weedy little body of his guest, as if he were his uncle rather than his host, he hurried him upstairs to the "little room" to which Lil-Umbra referred.

This, as a matter of fact, was a small apartment next door to their large bed-chamber, an apartment where the Baron kept the smaller, rarer, daintier, more delicate, more breakable utensils of his hunting, fishing, spearing and arrow-shooting gear.

The Baron himself and Peter of Maricourt in Picardy would have indeed been a perfect subject for a painter in oils, had one such been there to watch them; and indeed the mere sight of them, as they sat facing each other in the Baron's "Little Room", might possibly, had Tilton been daring enough and unscrupulous enough to slip up there after them and peep at them through the half-open door, have turned him from a sculptor into a painter.

It was a characteristic of several of the rooms in the Fortress that the doors were so constructed that it was physically impossible for them to be properly shut, so that the young man could have watched them for some time with an interest that might have inspired him with a passion for portrait-painting.

Yes, if the boy had been rude enough to follow them, the effect of the extraordinary vibrations thrown off all the time from the person of Master Peter might have affected this serious-minded young man's life in a really startling manner.

But Tilton did not follow them into that little room with the door that couldn't shut. We may imagine his doing so; but he didn't and that ends it. The chance came. The chance was not taken. The particular sight that, if it *had* been taken, would have changed his whole life, was never seen by him.

Chroniclers of human history talk of Fate, or Destiny, of what Homer calls "Keer" or doom. But all the time it is the great goddess of Chance — the present chronicler shirks using her name, because to anglicize it we have to turn the Greek letter called "upsilon" into our "Y", which always tempts us to pronounce it like our "i", which spoils its beauty altogether — yes, all the time it is the great goddess of Chance who turns the scale at the supreme crises of our life.

But though the sight of their figures facing each other remained unseen, Master Peter of Maricourt in Picardy and the Lord of the Fortress of Roque certainly did not “beat”, as the saying is, “about the *bush*”.

“What is that fool of a Friar made of,” queried Master Peter, “that he spends all his time, now that you people have got his Brazen Head, in writing long elaborate criticisms of these miserable doctors in Oxford and Paris, when he must know perfectly well that they are all tarred with the same brush and the same tar, the brush of obstruction and the tar of abstraction?

“And what a simple mind the fellow must have to make these attacks on the stupidity of the great mass of people and on the ignorance of their teachers! What does the man expect of our poor wretched human race? Hasn’t it been the same from the beginning? Can you or anybody else imagine anything different? Jesus Holy! How can the fellow suppose that even the cleverest of our masters with a class of young men before him as simple as our boys are — and they weren’t very different in the days of Confucius or the days of Socrates! — can bring, to what he tells these kids, inspiration and wit and insight enough to start them off looking up words in their Greek and Latin dictionaries?

“And the double-dyed idiot goes further even than that! Do you know, my lord, what I saw with my own eyes written on one of his carefully chosen parchment sheets? You would never guess! Nothing less than a passionate appeal to these teachers and to the young men who themselves want to become teachers, young men of good birth, like your own sons, to study Hebrew! Of course he’s perfectly right — you and I, my lord, don’t need a Grey Friar to tell us *that* — in indicating that the translations of Hebrew, all except that of the incomparable Jerome, are pretty rotten. But will these kids he’s catering for find the time, find the grammars, find the god-given or devil-given wit, to correct these treacherous and dangerous mistakes?

"How much better it would be for him, my Lord, if he would do what I do — that is to say leave all this theological business alone, and concentrate on experiment and invention; on experiment first, to find out what *can* be invented so as to be in harmony with Nature; and then, *when we've got our invention*, experiment again to find how far its use can go and yet remain in harmony with Nature."

The perfectly abysmal self-satisfaction expressed at that moment in the unnaturally large face, under the alarmingly large forehead and beneath that huge crop of jet black hair, roused in the Baron of Roque more anger than he had felt for many a long year. But he succeeded in restraining himself from displaying anything but the alert interest of a polite host in the presence of a voluble guest for several seconds of expectant silence.

"Surely, O great Experimenter, surely, O great Inventor," his alert pose seemed to say, as he leant forward from the round, hard, circular, gilded seat of his small upright armchair and clasped his fingers over his right knee, letting his foot thus balanced in the air sway interrogatively, "surely a man of your calibre didn't allow a simple grey friar of the order we all know so well," the Baron's mute expectancy went on, "to reduce you to the position of a silent listener at a theological lecture?"

The invisible chronicler of all these events, which were of course both physical and psychical, cannot help noting how much more detached from any sort of egotism or self-assertion was this lord of the biggest Manor in Wessex than this plain soldier from Maricourt in Picardy.

The psychic difference between them displayed itself physically with nearly perfect propriety in the way the two men consciously or unconsciously managed their mouths. The red point of Master Peter's tongue kept darting out from between his lips, just as if it were the instantaneously deadly sting of a human-headed Goblin armed with the poison of a hornet; while behind the lips of the Baron's mouth some unspoken word seemed roaming about, testing and trying every surface of the walls of its prison-house, as if conscientiously seeking the entrance to a promised passage of escape, concerning whose existence, though it was supported by universal consent, he himself was rather doubtful.

The only light in what, throughout the whole Fortress, was known as "The Little Room" came from a large oil-lamp in which two wicks, each with its own particular flame, floated quietly, and by their light, on the thin sill of a small square window, looking out on nothing but darkness and square stone towers, a small gnat could be seen marching resolutely up and down.

The only heat in the little room — but this was quite sufficient to make it perfectly warm — came from a stately bronze receptacle containing red-hot coals, with which the Baron's retainers kept it liberally supplied both by day and by night.

What Master Peter was thinking at that moment had certainly little to do with either theology or metaphysics.

"Would it be to my advantage or to my disadvantage," he was asking himself, "to tell this patronizing English lord about the magnetic shock I gave to this fool of a friar? What's against my doing so is the fact that I don't yet know how long the shock I gave him actually lasted; indeed I don't know yet whether it knocked the breath out of him forever! I rather hope it didn't, because there is still that little point about the value of manganese as an ingredient in the making of an elixir, that I ought to ask him. God knows why I forgot."

What the Baron was thinking was: "All these confounded quacks, whether they call themselves scientists or astrologists or alchemists or metaphysicians or inventors or theologians, are only plotting to get power for themselves over other people and glory for themselves over each other! What we must realize is that life goes on exactly the same whether we're with them or without them! When Lord Edward comes home from these absurd crusades we shall all know better where we stand. These damnable Scots want to be hammered into quiescence by somebody who understands the art of war, not the art of changing metals.

"And for these Welsh thieves who keep invading this country, if once metal-changers and sorcerers really begin, as they seem to be beginning, to rule the world, it won't be long before we shall be conquered by some ancient British robber who claims to be descended from Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar.

"But I know what I must do with this rogue — for it's clear he's some sort of oriental gipsy with the devil knows what games and tricks up his sleeve — is to get that fellow Spardo to take him round the ring of all the manors about here, even if he's got to mount him on that unfortunate beast with a man's head coming out of his neck! They told me out yonder that this fellow swears he comes from Picardy and that he likes to be called Maitre Pierre. Well! he can Maître-Pierre it to his heart's content with old Spardo dancing round him, and with that horse — what's its classic name? — to ride on! By God! that's what I'll do!"

At this point, in this curious dialogue between two silences, there suddenly opened one of those queer holes, or gaps, or gulfs, or chasms in the psychic-contact of two speechless persons who are watching each other like two animals, each wondering, in a sort of trance of expectation, not exactly whether it would be a good thing to leap at the other's throat, but whether the power that moves the world, whatever that power may be, will decide on their battling or embracing; and in this hollow void it was brought home to the Lord of the Manor that this Master Peter in front of him was really and truly some kind of Medium.

For what did my lord hear, clearly and unmistakably, at that identical instant, but the familiar voice, carried up on the eddying wind from the darkened forest below, of Spardo himself addressing his weird horse and of Cheiron answering his owner's voice with one of those indescribable sounds made by a self-conscious and self-possessed animal, a sound that had grown to have its quite definite meaning in the language of their mutual understanding.

"Come out with me for a moment, Master Peter of Maricourt, will you please? I want you to meet some very old friends of mine!"

The wanderer from Picardy followed him without hesitation or demur. When they reached the ground-floor the Baron hurried his guest through the anteroom and the entrance-hall, till he got him to the main entrance of the Fortress, and once there, with nothing but a humorous nod to the gate-keeper and the exchange of a more reserved and even a slightly enigmatic quip with the gate-keeper's wife, he pushed open one of the big gates, and with a hand on Master Peter's shoulder got him into the open, where by the light of a lantern hung on the branch of a tree they found Cheiron eating a supper of oats, and his master squatting on a fir-stump beside him devouring from a bowl on his knees some sort of steaming stew which the gate-keeper's wife must have provided.

"Where are you going to sleep tonight, Spardo?" The Lord of the Fortress never for a moment lost his special and peculiar power of propitiating the oddest, queerest, and most intransigent personalities in the world, whether in the human or sub-human sphere of life.

At this moment, without ceasing to transport to his mouth as much stew as his wooden spoon could carry, Spardo didn't hesitate for a second in his reply to this question.

"With your permission, good my lord, I should like to tie up Cheiron in the horse-stall behind the Fortress; for I've got the permission of the dame at your gate, if yourself, good my lord, have no objection, to sleep in her gate-house across there."

"Could the same good lady, do you suppose," said the Lord of the Fortress, "find room on a mattress in the same retreat for my friend Maître Pierre, a foreign gentleman from Picardy?"

The said Master Peter, as may easily be imagined, did not miss one jot of the instinctive sagacity with which the Baron, upon whose good or bad, wise of foolish behaviour so many destinies in that corner of the west country depended, managed to eliminate himself completely, as the local potentate whose whim was law, and to create a half-humorous atmosphere of adventure in which they all were taking chances.

Nor did he miss the perfectly natural manner in which Spardo, who was now scraping the inside of his bowl with his spoon, entered into this game, and instead of rising from the tree-stump on which he was squatting, when he saw Cheiron straining to get some fodder that was just beyond his reach, called out to the Baron, "Kick that stuff nearer the horse, my lord, if you don't mind!"

And when the Baron obeyed this curt command, Spardo only acknowledged it with a nod. It would be almost as difficult for the most penetrating chronicler to describe the thoughts that whirled through the head of Peter of Maricourt at this juncture, as it would be to describe what Cheiron himself was thinking.

But this much might certainly be hazarded: that if Cheiron's thoughts were concentrated partly upon what Spardo had given him to eat, and partly on the question as to whence this food came and how much more of it was available in the place, wherever that place was, from which it came, Master Peter's thoughts were concentrated, first on the question as to whether he dared to make another experiment with the perilous object he kept in a velvet bag between his legs, tightly pressed against his body close to his privy parts, or whether the present moment was even less propitious for an experiment of this sort than was the recent occasion in Roger Bacon's room at Bumset Priory.

The object in that velvet bag, squeezed so scrupulously against his most hidden stretch of skin, was indeed the very centre and focus of Maître Pierre's whole life. It was a magnet of immense and so far of quite unfathomed power.

Ever since he'd been a small boy Maître Pierre had been obsessed by a passion for magnetic experiments, and for the last twenty years his whole life had been given to the study of everything he could pick up on this queer topic.

The accumulated result of this frantic quest — for in many ways it was much more like this quest for the Sangraal than any ordinary alchemistic pursuit — was, as far as the man's own secret life went, only alchemistic on the side. In its main conscious urge what Master Peter of Maricourt was after was nothing less than the deliberate manipulation of his own sexual force, by means of this powerful magnet, for the domination of the souls and wills and minds of other entities.

He was in fact at this moment absorbed in this particular game, just as he had been for the last twenty years, and it was Friar Bacon's psychic awareness of this mania in his friend that always troubled and alarmed him when they were together, although it had a tremendous interest for him. The Friar never let it invade his own experimental work; and whenever it became evident to him as uppermost in Peter’s mind, it troubled him both in his nerves and in his conscience.

Yes! and in something else within him, beyond both nerves and conscience; for Friar Roger in his own spirit was always aware of the presence of an almighty force behind the whole panorama of experience, behind the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds, behind infinite space and infinite time, behind all possible suns, moons, planets and stars, in fact behind all possible, as well as all existing, universes.

It was his consciousness of this remote and ultimate power that Roger Bacon felt he needed to keep his peace of mind and keep him happy and contented in his work. Thus there was always something, in spite of his admiration for Pierre of Picardy, that frightened him about his friend’s attitude, for it struck him as reducing not only his own life, as he knew it himself, but the lives of all other entities as they knew them themselves, the lives of insects, such as midges and moths, the lives of plants and trees, the lives of worms and serpents, the lives of fish in the sea, birds in the air, the lives of the beasts of forest and field; reducing in fact all these lives to the level of lonely, desperate, lost souls, clinging to each other in a boundless, godless, cavernous nothingness, in fact to what he had heard a travelling Welsh tinker call *Diddym*, “the ultimate Void”.

To the original mind and autocratic humour of the Lord of the Manor of Roque there was something about this scene under the light of that suspended lantern that seemed monstrously comical as well as strangely weird and startling. What was this man up to now?

Master Peter had clearly and obviously some concentrated purpose; but who could possibly know that he was pressing that lodestone of his, in its absurd sheath of flexible velvet, against his naked organs of generation? His eyes, as he did this, were fixed on the head of the horse Cheiron, who was snorting rather indignantly and gazing rather reproachfully at his master, Spardo.

Spardo himself never moved from his seat on the tree-stump which had become for him a sort of elfin throne from which he could, though without any oracular authority, and without attempting to claim any mundane weight, play the part of a wandering goblin, who happened to be making a grave attempt to be an historian of the primitive antics of the human race.

Nor was it very long before both the eccentric Baron of Roque and the observant owner of Cheiron had something to set down in their “year-book” of manorial history. With his hands pressing more and more strongly, and with ever intenser concentration, his precious lodestone against his privy parts, Peter did really seem at that moment to be a man possessed by a fit of insane devilry. It is likely enough that what made him select Cheiron, rather than Cheiron’s master, for his magnetic experiment was the passing glimpse he may have had, when the darkness was broken by some gleam from the lantern swaying in the wind, of that deformity in the horse’s neck.

But whatever it was that set him off practising his tricks in this direction, the result was sufficiently unexpected. Cheiron suddenly leapt up on his hind-legs and advanced, pawing the air with his front-legs, straight upon Master Peter, who promptly scuttled behind the Lord of Roque.

And this moment really produced, if the truth had been carried over the length and breadth of his manorial domain, one of those situations in which this extraordinary owner of this by no means extraordinary strip of fir-forest had a chance of showing that it was not for nothing that the skull of his grandfather, when by some chance it was exposed to the air long after it was buried, had a twist of dark hair gathered round it, indicating, so an Assyrian astrologer who saw it declared, that its zodiacal tendency belonged to the constellation of the Ram, since there had always been known, from the beginning of history, certain rare persons born under that influence, the roots of whose hair came from a deeper level than their skin.

Instead therefore of being in the least perturbed by the towering belly and menacing hooves hovering above him, the Lord of Roque experienced the sort of exultation that Job declares Behemoth felt when he believed he could drain Jordan to the dregs of all its waters.

Spardo was so astonished at what he now beheld that he rose from his seat on the tree-stump and stood like one confounded. Master Peter whose magnetic experiment was the cause of this classic catastrophe, did what Friar Bacon's collapse had clearly *not* made him do. He carefully shifted, in a number of minute jerks, his perilous lodestone. He did this knowing the thing couldn't be lost, for its velvet container was suspended by a cord from his waist; and he adjusted it now so that while it was still in contact with his bare skin, it was at the base of his stomach and quite out of reach of his organs of generation.

But not a soul in that small lantern-lit group was more astonished than was Cheiron himself when he felt, hurled against *his* privy parts — which were, and this was no doubt an additional effect of Master Peter's experiment, unusually excited just then — the formidable skull of the Lord of Roque.

Unable now to bring his legs to the ground, the angry horse found his right hoof hanging helplessly over the man's left shoulder and his left hoof thrust out at an extremely awkward and even a painful angle over the man's right shoulder, while he himself, his whole equine shape and deformed neck, was lifted bodily off the ground!

It only lasted a second, this incredible display of human strength, a display that Hercules himself would have witnessed with amazement: but when it was over the Lord of Roque and his deformed antagonist were struggling together on the ground.

And it was then that there occurred the same total collapse of consciousness in the brain of the Lord of the Manor as had occurred some half a dozen hours earlier in the case of Friar Bacon. At one second he was saying to himself: “I am a beast. Man is no more. Your own beasthood learn to adore!” and was beginning to force himself to enjoy the strong hirsute odour of Cheiron’s under-belly, when suddenly, without any warning at all, everything became dark, and he himself became as nonexistent as if he had never been born.

The sharp-eyed dame of the gate-keeper had already left her less alert husband’s side; and with a thick scarf round her head, and a still thicker one round her shoulders, was soon at the side of her unconscious master; and it can be imagined, with an experienced old lady of her sort at the head of affairs, and with the gate-keeper, inspired by her example, obedient to her least hint, how soon it was that the Lord of the Fortress lay stretched out on his own bed with Lady Val bending over him and his three children, along with excited emissaries from every part of the Fortress, hovering round the door.

Both Spardo and Cheiron were comfortably asleep, and also in closer proximity to each other than anyone who had witnessed the recent struggle and its surprising termination would have predicted, before Master Peter of Maricourt had succeeded in persuading the perspicacious lady of the gate-house to allow him a sleeping-place. This indeed, when she found it for him, could not be called under her roof, for it was in the back premises of the Fortress on the opposite side from the entrance, but such as it was, it was so much in the warmest part of the whole building and so surrounded by the sleeping-places of animals, that when Peter of Picardy had settled his great black head on the sack of wool that formed his substantial pillow, he found that the melancholy wailing of the wind across the forest was so comfortably animalized by the noises of the beasts in his immediate vicinity that his thoughts became so agreeable to him that he felt reluctant to fall asleep too quickly.

His present situation was indeed so harmonious with his mood that he disentangled his precious lodestone, which, it would seem, after these two murderous experiments, could scarcely be called a harmless magnet, and examined it as carefully as was possible under the light of a stable-lantern which hung from a time-darkened oak-beam several yards above his pillow.

"I have succeeded," he told himself. "I have succeeded beyond all expectation." Had there been an onlooker at this scene — say an angel or a devil crouched on that wooden beam above the lantern and endowed with a powerful enough sight — he might, or she might, have described this half-natural, half-artificial object to some acquaintance up in the roof in the following terms. "It is about half a foot long and is simply a spear-head of the particular colour which waves take when they are beginning to change from blue to green, a change which happens when the winds rise, not so much as a sign of a coming storm, as to prove that, if a storm did come, they would show themselves to be the proud-curving cohorts they were, of an approaching sea-god."

With exquisite satisfaction did Master Peter of Picardy caress his newly formulated, newly invented, newly tested magnet; and as he did so a series of the wildest fantasies raced through his mind. He saw himself dominating the rulers of all the countries of the world, and through his power over them he saw himself, although always craftily in the background, having his revenge upon the whole human race.

“O how I do hate them all!” he thought. “I hate them with my brain, with my body, and with my soul! I hate them with everything I am, everything I was, and everything I shall be!”

And then he began again to wonder, as he had so often wondered before, whether it was possible that he really was that Antichrist, prophesied of from the beginning of the world, who was destined to destroy the Kingdom of Christ.

“What I would do then,” he told himself, “the moment I had got the world entirely under my control, would be to build up an absolutely different kind of world altogether. I would have no more of this hypocritical humbug about ‘love’ — as if it were possible for any child of the elements, born of earth, air, water and fire, to fight for anything, to achieve anything, to enjoy anything, to become anything, except by the assertion of his separate, distinctive, individual, and unique self — and what I would aim at in *my* world, in my Antichrist world, in my super-scientific world, would be to create a new race of beings altogether, creatures as superior to what mankind is now as man is superior to beasts, birds, and fishes!”

The demonic delight, which radiated in the train of these thoughts through the whole being of Master Peter, was so deliciously transporting that it carried him away altogether from his material position at that moment, and bore him aloft, as if in a chariot of air and fire, a chariot that flew upward upon the waving of two wings, one of which might have been Space and the other Time, for both together seemed to acquire a mysterious force that soon carried their voyager into a sleep, if sleep it were, where he found himself in reality, if reality it were, beyond all description by the words the human race has hitherto used.

XVII. ALBERT OF COLOGNE

Raymond de Laon was not given to moods of special exultation or to moods of special depression. He possessed an extremely well-balanced nature. He had been saved from quarrels with parents by having been made an orphan at an early age; and he was lucky now in having found a betrothed who exactly suited him. He took the shocks and accidents and misadventures of life with a calm, and yet, in a certain way, with an exultant commonsense, that was as much a support to Lil-Umbra as it was an authentic advantage to himself in his struggle with life. He had certainly done well in his present mission; for here by his side was none other than Albertus Magnus. At this moment with his band of armed retainers, who had been rather unwillingly provided by the authorities of Cone Castle to support him on this daring embassy, he had just reached the entrance to the convent where Ghosta was employed, and they were all now about to pass, while the Sun was at his hottest on that June day, the mysterious cave in the grove of oaks and willows, which Peleg had been assured was the abode of that tinker from Wales about whom the wildest rumours were current.

It was said for instance that he was helped in his work as a travelling tinker by several women from different parts of the country, all of whom had sold their souls to the Devil.

It was at this point that Raymond began rather nervously explaining to the great teacher from Cologne that they would be soon arriving at the main gate of the Fortress of Roque; and he went on to indicate more specifically, what he had already mentioned shyly to him before, namely that Lady Val, who was expecting him as her guest that night, was the mother of the young lady to whom he himself was betrothed, and was the wife of the most formidable boar-hunter and wolf-slayer in all that portion of England. Nor did he hesitate, though even more diffidently, to explain that they were all so weary of the violent personal quarrels between these two belligerent Franciscans, Friar Bacon and Bonaventura that they welcomed the appearance among them of a renowned Dominican whose presence alone would be sufficient to break up these vindictive quarrels.

The whole party paused at this point at the request of the visitor, to enable him to retire behind a clump of willows with a view to relieving himself. When he returned he kept them standing for a moment above the leafy declivity containing the entrance to this cave of the tinker's witch-wives, while he begged Raymond de Laon to tell him as definitely as he could what his own private and personal reaction was in regard to the quarrel between these famous men.

He had no sooner asked this question and Raymond was frowning and biting his lips and searching his mind for an adequate answer, when they all heard quite distinctly, borne up upon the wind from the depths of the leafy gully beneath them a wild husky voice singing a ditty which clearly was, whether they were able to follow all its crazy words or not, a blasphemous defiance of Providence above, of the Church below, and of all that mankind from generation to generation has been taught to hold sacred.

The day was so hot and the sky above was so blue, that the effect of this howl of defiance to everything they had all been accustomed from infancy to venerate was enhanced by the complete absence at that spot of any work of men's hands, whether of wood or stone. It was like a voice from the depths of the earth replying to a voice from uttermost space. It seemed to be addressed to the formless and shapeless rocks of granite and basalt that lay around this small group of travellers, and it seemed to be appealing desperately to earth, air, and water, not to allow the sun-rays that were so lifegiving to all, to fool them by their warmth.

It was the sort of defiance such as the ghost of a baby of a million years ago, a baby or “baban” whose skull, “penglog”, had been discovered in the grave of an antediluvian giant, “gawr”, might have uttered to all oracles and prophets and announcers of revelations and to all deities and pantheons of deities who were already gathering in the mists of the future to claim human worship.

“Until I’m dust I’ll enjoy my hour —
Penglog y Baban yr Gawr!
I’ll gather my harvest and grind my flour —
Penglog y Baban yr Gawr!
With Holy Rood I’ll have naught to do —
Penglog y Baban yr Gawr!
Adam am I, and Eve are you,
And Eden’s wherever we are, we two —
Penglog y Baban yr Gawr!
A mortal’s fate is the same as a mole’s —
Penglog y Baban yr Gawr!
The same as the fishes that leap in shoals,
Penglog y Baban yr Gawr!
Where leaf do fall — there let leaf rest —
Where no Grail be there be no quest —
Be’ee good, be’ee bad, be’ee damned, be’ee blest —
Be’ee North, be’ee South, be’ee East, be’ee West
The whole of Existence is naught but a jest —
Penglog y Baban yr Gawr!”

The effect upon that small company, together with Raymond their leader and Albertus Magnus their visitor, of this weird ditty, a ditty followed by dead silence, save for the sound of the wind in the trees about them and the far-off cry of a buzzard high in the air above them, would have been for anyone concerned with the results of unexpected shocks upon human nerves, of no small interest.

It had an effect however that no chronicler, however sagacious, could possibly have foreseen. Every single one of those six armed men, as well as their leader and his visitor, behaved exactly in the same way. They all were so startled and shocked that they simply dared not comment on what they had heard. Every single one of them pretended — whether to himself as well as to the others who could tell? — that he had heard nothing!

The shock of what they *had* heard, for all this pretence, followed them, all the same, through the burning heat of this mid-day in June, as they pressed on, leaving the stone circle to their left, and that lonely stone seat where Lil-Umbra, on an early February morning, had asked Peleg such searching questions, on their right, till they approached, not the small postern this time, for they were too large a party, and it was too cogent an occasion, to use that entrance, but the main gate of the Fortress.

As soon as Raymond told him they were approaching their journey's end, Albertus brought their march to a halt and put to his young guide the direct question, which the voice of that cave-devil had for the time postponed.

"And what," he asked him, "is your own private attitude to these disputes?"

The Cone Castle men, who were already alert, now crowded quite close to them, and it became clear to Raymond that they felt unusually concerned. And indeed there was unquestionably something about Albertus Magnus that attracted the attention of intelligent persons wherever he went. He had already held for a couple of years an important bishopric in Germany, but this he had recently resigned together with all the influence and wealth that a bishopric gives in order to devote himself solely and entirely to the metaphysical and botanical and entomological studies that were the main interest of his days upon earth.

This absorption in the mysterious life of all the creatures of Nature and in the whole problem of mind and matter, since it was combined with a lively interest in men and women for themselves, threw a very singular aura round him, an aura which, though it rendered him separate and aloof, endowed his presence with the peculiar attraction which certain rare and evasive animals and birds and insects possess.

And not only was Albertus Magnus an unusual, indeed we might say a unique person in himself, but the particular line of philosophical investigation into which he threw his whole nature linked itself with metaphysical thoroughness to his wide natural sympathy. He himself described it as finding the *Universal* “before” all, “in” all, and “after” all. He was not only a student of plants, trees, flowers, and insects, but of human beings also; and he sought to find this *Universal* of his in all its three stages of “before”, “in”, and “after”, in every living thing he studied.

In appearance Albert of Cologne was curiously impressive. He was of medium height but very powerfully built. He always wore, day and night — for it was a weakness of his to be physically sensitive to catching cold, and it was a conviction of his that where he was especially menaced by this affliction was through his head — a curiously shaped white cap that had a remote affinity to an academic cap, and also to the metallic cap of a knight in armour, but was first suggested to him by the singular night-turban worn by an Arabian student of Aristotle with whom he had shared a lodging in early days in Swabia.

But the chief advantage of this ubiquitous protection against colds was that it was made of such soft stuff that any kind of ceremonial head-gear, from a pontifical mitre to a more secular token of authority, could be squeezed over it.

The head of Albert of Cologne was if anything not larger, but smaller, than most human heads. He had a long straight nose with wide sensitive nostrils. He had small ears close to his skull, extremely full and very attractively curved lips, a large mouth that was often open and even had a tendency to dribble, an unaggressive and retreating chin and a pair of small hazel eyes under bushy grey eyebrows, eyes that searched affectionately and longingly into every person and thing he looked at, as if seeking to trace "within" this person or thing the *Universal* in which he believed, the Universal that had been "before" it and would be "after" it. The truth was he was always aware of the contrast between the touchingly pathetic brittleness, feebleness, silliness and conceitedness of the particular small creature he was regarding and the enormous life-force which brought it to birth.

"What I would like to be able to tell you, Doctor," replied Raymond hesitatingly, fully aware that his Cone Castle friends were glancing quickly from one to another as they followed his words, "would be that I have steadily tried hard, ever since I realized the bewildering complexity of all these ultimate problems, to keep my mind entirely open and my personal conclusions undecided and hanging in the balance. But such is the weakness and such is the pride of human nature, or at any rate, great Doctor, of my nature, that I cannot resist bringing into the workings of my will and of my faith in myself all manner of obstinate prejudices and too-quickly reached conclusions."

Albert of Cologne made a quick little inclination of his head, upon which for this journey through the forest of Wessex, he wore above his white skull-cap, a traveller's variant of a Dominican cowl.

"Please give me, my dear young guide, and let me tell you I shall certainly congratulate your future parents-in-law on having secured for their daughter such a thoughtful and resourceful bridegroom, some general notion of these fixed ideas of yours before we have to separate."

"Well, master; to confess the truth," and Raymond de Laon looked nervously round him at a receding glade of sun-illumined bluebells in one direction, and at several sumptuous bunches of horse-chestnut blossoms in another direction, and finally at the illimitable gulf, of that early June's noon-deep, noon-blue infinity above them, and then, with a quiver of unquestioned sincerity in his voice: "What I feel myself, great master," he said, "is that it's wrong for the church to forbid Friar Bacon to work at his self-chosen inventions. And I also feel that it's wrong, and worse than wrong, in fact I think it is devilishly wicked in this Bonaventura, who by some pious people among us is regarded as a saint, and who at one time was the Pope's Legate, to start the rumour" — here the young man's voice became broken by a sound in his throat that was clearly a choked-down sob — "that my pure-minded young betrothed and her serious-minded elder-brother Tilton have committed the shocking sin of incest."

His voice rose stronger at this point. "This man Bonaventura knows absolutely nothing of us people in the west of England. He knows nothing of the childlike and innocent character of the young man and young girl he is attacking in this gross manner. And further, great master, you must understand that he actually went so far as to urge on a band of notorious outlaws from a castle in this neighbourhood called Lost Towers whose lord is known far and wide as an enemy of God and man, but whom this Bonaventura, for his own secret ends, pretends to have converted, to attack Friar Bacon. It was this rabble who under his direction smashed a shrine which my betrothed's brother was building, and were on the point of destroying Friar Bacon's Brazen Head, if it hadn't been for — —"

Albertus Magnus interrupted him. "You've not forgotten I hope, my young friend," cried the famous teacher, "that it was only your promise that I should be allowed to sleep in the same chamber as this Brazen Head that made me put off my return to Cologne? This particular invention interests me profoundly. To tell you the truth, Raymond de Laon, what I had been hearing from England about the experimental theories concerning physical science originated by your great Robert Grosseteste had led me to aim at something very much on Friar Roger's lines. It was when they made me a bishop that I had too much work and too much responsibility to be able to go on with such things; and I warrant it was the same with your Grosseteste who must have been both a real scientist and a real saint.

"But I can tell you this, my lad — I can tell you this, my friends — when a thinker gets an appointment all his thinking's done. We are just idiots if we imagine we can accept responsible positions in Church or State and go on thinking just the same. I tell you, my dear lad, I tell you, my excellent friends, the noble words I have already read written by this Friar Bacon have interested me greatly. He knows Aristotle through and through and few scholars have better interpreted the *secretum secretorum* of all matter, I mean the *energeia-akinesis,* or 'energy without fuss', that is at the heart of the world.

"And as for his Brazen Head, I have tried myself in my own blundering and amateurish way to invent a machine that can use what we have come to call the *agens intellectus*, or the mental driving-force, that exists in the ultimate substance of things and which we are told in the scriptures is the Spirit of God. But I seem to be saying things contrary to what you are feeling about all this, my dear son, and I beg you to tell me at once where your difficulty lies; for I can see that many of our friends here are interested in this point, and I shall perhaps have more to tell you when I have spent a night under your betrothed's roof and in company with your Friar's Brazen Head."

Raymond de Laon looked round at the faces about him, and he was forced to admit to himself that they did indeed look surprisingly interested as to what he would say in reply to all this. He made up his mind to blurt out the precise truth.

"You are quite right, master," he said, making a peculiar gurgling noise in his throat before each word he uttered, as if it had been projected out of him by squeezing his wind-pipe. "There is a thing that I really must ask you, master, while I have a chance, for there is no telling how long my destiny will enable me to remain at Cone Castle where already I am by no means, as my friends here could tell you, what at Oxford they call a *persona grata* with everybody. But what I want to ask you is this, for my betrothed's younger brother, whose name is John, and whose quickness in learning things has been a tremendous help to the Friar, has recently, in his talk anyway, shown a tendency to follow some of the more satirical Latin poets and to grow sceptical about our holy faith and I am not clever enough, nor is my betrothed, to refute young John's arguments; but I certainly think he goes much further in the direction of unbelief than the Friar himself does, who indeed, from what I've been able to pick up, remains an entirely orthodox Christian. My question, great doctor, is simply this: *Where*, in a world composed of matter possessed of this *energeia-akinesis*, does God come in? What place in fact is left, in a world of such self-creative energy as you describe, for any sort of Creator?”

The moment was a singularly intense one for that small group of about a dozen men. The average intelligence among the retainers of the Lord of Cone was a good deal higher than it was at the Fortress; and ever since Raymond’s official betrothal to Lil-Umbra, whose young brother was known to be a reckless supporter of the Friar, there had been lively discussions in the ground-floor reception-hall, as well as in the kitchen, as to whether the Friar was inspired by God or by the Devil.

Not for nothing had Albertus been an active bishop for a couple of years. By his use-and-wont contacts under such conditions with all sorts of people he had developed, to a degree unusual in such a speculative thinker, an awareness of the thoughts and feelings of the people that surrounded him, or that at any moment accompanied him, or that happened to be listening to him.

From boyhood he had been a naturalist, and by this time he knew much more about birds and beasts and insects than any other thinker of that epoch who was proficient in Greek and Latin.

At this moment as he encountered the earnest faces round him and noted the almost distressed look in the long thin countenance of Raymond de Laon, a countenance that already bore more wrinkles between the eyebrows than seemed natural for so handsome and diplomatic a youth, he suddenly caught sight of a butterfly he had come to name a “Wood Argus” because of the markings on its wings, that now had settled, since this group of two-legged monsters seemed inclined to be quiescent, on a little poplar-twig just above a regular bed of bluebells.

A particularly brilliant ray of June sunshine was at that second turning into a shining little arrow-head of gleaming silver the white stalk of one of these flowers, and as he watched it, Albert of Cologne couldn't help wondering whether this particular "Wood-Argus" came regularly at this particular hour to this particular spot.

In a small leafy grove just outside Cologne he had frequently constituted himself a patient and watchful sentinel of whatever light-winged butterfly-emperor ruled that forest-glade, a sentinel big enough to ward off any feathered freebooter, who might come sweeping down through the fragrant air-gulfs of the noon-heat, with the deliberate intention of snapping up so divine a mouthful.

He now had the experience and the wit to see clearly that by his reference to the self-creative energy of the "Hulee", or "raw-material" or "formless timber", as Homer might have called it, out of which the world is made, he had touched an extremely ticklish subject, in fact the subject of all subjects, he now told himself, about which, in connection with Friar Roger, the intelligent minority was most hotly divided.

"I *must* be careful," he thought. "O how mixed up, how cruelly mixed up with our personal prejudices, is every exciting topic we touch!"

And then, when it must have been clear to them all that he was longing to say something that was very important to himself, but found it hard to get the right words for it, his eyes were caught by the largest of a few dark holes in the ground in front of him, obviously caused by the cloven hooves of some wandering steer or heifer, and which had been filled with water by last night's rain. Upon this small black pool, in his effort to decide what it would be best to say, he was now fixedly staring. As he stared, he suddenly grew aware that the mid-day Sun was also busy with this hand's-breadth of dark water, and that he was now staring into his own reflected visage, above which his complicated head-wear had already become among the bluebells a portentously hovering shadow.

"*What place is left for a Creator*?" was now the question which the mind behind that bulging forehead, those quivering nostrils, those small deep-set tearful eyes, had to answer; and as, aware of that attentive group of men, and of that more than attentive young lover, the great teacher from Cologne struggled with the riddle of existence, he felt as if this floating "something" that was himself, now confronted by this likeness of a not very striking human face in the wet hoof-print of an animal, was being carried, just as that reflected face looked as if it were being carried, up, up, up, through all Space and all Time, searching for the thrice-blessed gulf of absolute nothingness that is beyond all that has a name.

At last the words came. "There are some of us," he said, speaking slowly, and beneath and against and under, so it felt to him, the warm breath of every star in the firmament, "who hold that all the ideal words that we philosophers use, such as 'matter' and 'substance' and 'form' and 'essence' and 'finite' and 'infinite' and 'transitory' and 'eternal' and 'nature' and 'super-nature' are only so many names, sounding syllables that signify nothing. Others hold that these words represent ultimate and basic realities by the use of which we recognize and interpret the *Entelecheia* of existence, that would be just meaningless smoke without them!

"Now what I hold, my dear friends, is especially difficult to make clear because it partakes of the opposite opinions of both those two camps of thought. I do hold, as strongly and as absolutely as it is possible to hold anything, that behind all the visible and intelligible phenomena of the cosmos there exists the invisible and unintelligible reality which we call God.

"According to the philosophy of the greatest of all philosophers — I speak of Aristotle — the material stuff of which the Cosmos is composed is eternal, and contains within itself the creative energy that builds the world and produces all the innumerable lives around us, such as we know and such as we are. But we Christians have been given a — a — a — —”

Here he hesitated and a very queer sound came from his body as he stood there before them, like a great black rook come down from a nest that a quarter of a year ago has served its purpose to the limit and now awaits its dissolution, a sound that might have been an explosion of wind, either from mouth or from anus, but a sound that resembled the cry of an unborn child, that with the permission of nature had been engendered in the duodenum of an elderly man by deliberate impregnation from a superhuman minotaur—“have been given a — a *Revelation* that alters from top to bottom the whole situation.”

Here his voice rose just as used to rise the voice of each of the Homeric heroes at some special crisis in the Trojan War. “We cannot, we dare not, we must not, lest we become the murderers of the truth that is in us, deny the integrity of our own reason. And if we accept our reason we must recognize that the deepest, wisest, completest embodiment of it, so far, and until this moment, is to be found in the works of Aristotle; and Aristotle maintains that since matter is eternal in its inherent essence and is capable, in itself and by its own secret energy, of renewing the universe, and of bringing into existence an everlasting recurrence of the multiple forms we see around us, we are driven by our reason to assume that the cosmos is eternal. But this whole assumption, this whole implication, this whole conclusion is surpassed and transcended” — Albert’s voice became the voice of a trumpet — “by the *Revelation* brought by Christ, the revelation of Christ Himself and the revelation of the Holy Spirit!”

The warrior-retainers from Cone Castle were so accustomed to associate any reference, in any formal service of worship, to the Holy Ghost, as a sign that this same service had reached its termination, that now they all solemnly and mechanically, just as in some ordinary daily ceremonial, lowered one knee to the earth, and then, standing erect, murmured the word "amen".

Albert of Cologne would never have become what undoubtedly he had, by the pure power of his intrinsic personality, quite deservedly become, the best philosophical teacher in Europe, if he hadn't long ago acquired the power of not losing his temper, or the thread of his discourse, or even his own zest for the subject, when the bulk of his audience missed the whole point, as they certainly did now.

The grand trick he had acquired was a very daring one, and one whose nature would have been extremely shocking to many pious souls, namely the device of treating the words of Jesus, on almost all the well-known occasions when the Master uttered decisive and pregnant announcements, as if they contained in them, however tragic they might be, a peculiar element of sheer humour.

And the psychic trick Albertus used on this occasion was the wisest possible one he *could* have used, namely the trick of appropriating to himself and to his own feelings at such moments the bold and perhaps scandalous assumption that the Son of God was humorously aware of the sublime stupidity of the race of mortals, whose flesh he had submissively adopted for some unknown and secret purpose of his Divine Parent.

Raymond de Laon however had not bowed the knee at the reference to the Paraclete, nor had he stiffened himself in preparation for entering the Fortress. His face had indeed taken on a look of infinite relief. He had in fact been terribly afraid that Albert would at this juncture try to do what so many of the so-called Averroists did — namely, slur over the Athenian thinker's conviction as to the eternity of "Matter" or "Hulee", and insert into this unconscionable substance a nebulous and vaporous wedge of divine providence.

To Raymond it was a turning point in his whole mental life, this frank and free admission, by Albertus of Cologne, that, if a student honestly followed Aristotle, he couldn't, with any integrity of mind or any consent of reason, refuse to accept the Aristotelian conclusion as to the eternity of the world.

It was therefore with the abysmal craving of his deepest nature that Raymond now awaited from Albert some notion of what he actually meant by the word Revelation.

"What we must do as Christians," Albert of Cologne announced slowly, "is just to accept by a pure and simple act of faith the Revelation of Jesus that He was, and is, the Son of God, and that God in the beginning created the world. There are therefore," Albert went on quietly, "two accounts of the origin of all things: first the view offered us by the greatest of all human thinkers that the world never had a beginning, but has always existed, and secondly the revelation of Jesus that He and He only is the true Son of God, and that in the beginning God created the world.

"The first of these opinions is the one we hold when we follow our human reason. The second is the one we hold when we accept the view that Jesus is the Son of God, and what He tells us about the universe is the truth. Which of these two views about the beginning of things we as individuals accept will therefore depend upon how far we are ready to follow Faith, when it goes beyond Reason and even when it flatly contradicts the view derived from Reason.

"If Matter is eternal, why then the world we live in is likewise eternal, for it is made of Matter or what the Greeks called "hulee"; and, if our world is eternal, it has not been created by anyone. When Jesus talked of 'His

Father in Heaven', it is quite clear that he spoke as a Jew, and that he was thinking of the God of the Jews. By the Divinity within Him on the strength of which He spoke, He was Himself convinced that He was the Son of God, and it was in the Power of this conviction that He enlarged his Father's Godhead till it went far beyond the Jewish race. The God of the Jews, though nameless, we call Jehovah; but the God whom Jesus called Father was the God of the whole world, who existed before he created all that is, and who will go on existing when all that is has ceased to exist."

Raymond de Laon had missed no syllable of this pronouncement; nor had he failed to notice how easily, naturally, and unofficially this tremendous Credo had been declared.

"Will Lady Val," he thought, "let me take Lil-Umbra for a short ride after their visitor has been properly welcomed and has gone to the armoury to rest? Will they find the old bailiff still there? Or will they have moved him elsewhere so that this man can sleep alone, as he clearly wants to do, with that awful Brazen Head? God in Heaven! I wouldn't sleep with that Thing in the room, though by so doing I were to be crowned King of Poland! What if the Thing Inside *came out* and stood by the head of my bed? I verily believe I'd go crazy with terror! O I do so long to talk to Lil-Umbra about all these things. She's got all young John's cleverness and all Tilton's soundness and good sense."

"Well, my Lord Albertus, shall we move on again? It's not more than a mile from here."

"I'm at your service, my son; and I warrant that you, my lads" — and he gave the Cone Castle group a friendly smile— "will be thankful enough to exchange our theology for a beaker of good ale or even a flagon of cider!"

XVIII. THE VIGIL

THE SILENCE OF them all was very marked as they threaded their way between mossy fir-stumps and ferny rocks, while the hot noon-rays, hidden by one branch and revealed between two branches, and forever being broken and intercepted by the dark feathery foliage of ancestral pines, turned the endless bluebells, upon which it seemed impossible to avoid treading, into an elfin army of some aboriginal pixy-monarch, who though confronted by a cohort of giants was by no means frustrated in his attempt to add yet another outpost to his sylvan realm. It was indeed a natural part, this speechless silence of them all, of the sweltering docility of every forest creature under the royal glare of the lord of life.

When they came in sight of the Great Gate of the Fortress a curious psychic event occurred. This was an event that, in itself without any further evidence, is a proof that all those wild and desperate feelings which reach us from every quarter of the horizon, passing from the north to the west, and from the west, through the north again, to the south, are sometimes fully justified.

For here, precisely and exactly here, where, by a superhuman and Herculean heave, such as more than the muscles of any ordinary human frame could have endured without cracking or breaking, the Lord of the Manor of Roque lifted the horse Cheiron from his four hooves and rolled him over on the ground, the appalling strain of the effort he made, and the weird desperation of the awareness accompanying it, had actually created a living spirit.

And at this point in their approach to this spot every single one of this small company, including Raymond and Albert the Great, felt a definite stab in the region of their heart, as if an invisible spirit had struck them just there.

And if Albert of Cologne had boldly enquired: “To what tribe of spirits do you belong?” this “Genius Loci” might well have answered with the words: “I am the spirit of a supernatural effort, an effort that was not only an effort of muscles but an effort of will and an effort of mind and an effort that drew into itself a positively unlawful, insupportable, and intolerable strength from all the living things about it, from the trees, from the creatures of the earth, from the birds of the air, from the actual stones and rocks and earth-mould of this place, so that”, thus might the spirit of that shock, the spirit of that superhuman strain have replied to the bold question of the sage from Cologne, “so that I am a spirit which to the end of time, yes! until ice from above, or fire from below, destroy this whole forest, will embody in a shudder of this air the effort this man made; one of the most terrific efforts ever made on this earth since Hercules lifted up the Giant Antaeus in his arms to strangle him in the air; and I, the spirit of this appalling effort, will remain here to guard this man’s gate against all his enemies unto the third and fourth millennium of his descendants!”

It was about this man, the Lord of the Manor of Roque and the master of the Fortress, that Albertus Magnus enquired at once, the moment he was ushered by Raymond de Laon in to the presence of Lady Val.

“Yes, O yes!” the lady replied, “and I’ll certainly tell him that your first question, reverend sir, was about his health. He strained something inside him. Gorthruk, our manor leech, who came here five years ago straight from Oxford, and is said to have studied medicine under the court physician in Paris, is of opinion that though the injury itself can never, by the nature of it, heal itself, my husband will very shortly be well enough to resume his hunting and fishing and his usual protective investigations round the outskirts of the Manor.

“Gorthruk has given us an ivory box containing three or four compartments each one of which contains several differently tasting tablets. Gorthruk says that, in his own village of Tintinhull, the blacksmith has been kept alive by just such curative pills for four and twenty years, after a strain similar to the one suffered by my husband; only his trouble — the blacksmith’s I mean — was caused by a wrestling-match with the bailiff of the Manor of Montacute who was a very heavy man, and thus, when the blacksmith of Tintinhull picked him up in his arms and threw him into the village duck-pond, the village priest, whose name was Humph, and who came from Gloster, had to wade into the pond to get him out; for he hit his head on Gammer Grundy’s bucket, which had lain there, down in the mud, since the days of Thomas a Becket.”

Raymond de Laon had never before heard his betrothed’s mother talk in this free and easy way; but he told himself it must be due to the fact that all women, especially those in responsible positions and those with important households to look after, are invariably anxious to win favour with church dignitaries.

They are also, Raymond’s erratic thoughts ran on, often much more interested than are their hunting and fishing and fighting husbands, in historical and philosophical subjects, in spite of the fact that their opportunities for such studies are so much less. As to the easy homeliness of Lady Val’s talk, “don’t they all go on in that sort of way,” Raymond said to himself, “when they want to captivate us? The only alternative I suppose would be sculleries, store-cupboards, and meat-skewers, with a sagacious allusion, or even a sly glance now and again, towards bed-clothes.”

Whether sage or sly in her welcome, Lady Val soon disposed of her chief guest, and arranged for the Gone Castle contingent to dine at an earlier hour than was usual and at a special table in the dining-hall. She likewise gave her most regal and gracious permission to Raymond, as a reward for his skill as a tutelary ambassador, to take Lil-Umbra for a couple of hours' ride in the forest.

"You'd better," she added, as the pair went off, "start, and come back too, by the main entrance. Your father has placed such a powerful guard at Tilton's shrine that there's no possible danger from that quarter. But as nurse always used to say, 'It's silly to shout till the Devil's gone out.'"

With a big silver tray arranged conveniently between them upon a stool made of exquisitely slender delicately twisted willow-twigs, upon which stood two glasses and a huge beaker of red wine and a few oaten cakes, the old ex-bailiff of the manor of Roque found a perfect listener to his rambling talk in the great Albert of Cologne.

Accustomed to the part of the chief talker in the presence of less experienced, less volatile, less egocentric and much younger hearers, it was an indescribable relief to Albert the Great to rest and recline in this ancient armoury and listen in peace to this old gentleman's rambling stories of an up-and-down long life full of the simple power of representative authority and of the simple piety of unquestionable conviction.

There in the background, just as if "It" also was listening to the old man's talk, stood the Brazen Head, its confused multiple-mooded expression rejecting placidly any dogmatic solution of the entangled problem of existence. It may well be believed that Albertus Magnus didn't confine himself to listening. Every now and again with the subtle wisdom of a born decipherer of difficult old documents he interpolated at certain turning-points a question by which into the unpremeditated debouchings of the senile narrator there was insinuated a flickering lantern, tied, as it were, round the neck of a darting bird, a lantern that might be compared to some providential firefly giving a celestial clarification to our dark pilgrimage through the mists of Chaos to the City of Cosmos.

But what struck Albertus Magnus most about this loquacious old gentleman was his attitude towards the Brazen Head. There was the Brazen Head, quite close to the ex-bailiff's side, in fact almost touching the old man's right shoulder; but its presence didn't seem to disturb him in the least. Nor was it as if he altogether disregarded it. It was as if *he and* it had already reached some personal understanding between themselves, by virtue of which there was no longer any necessity for both of them to speak, since, when the ex-bailiff spoke, he spoke for them both.

"The whole trouble in this Fortress," the ex-bailiff was presently murmuring, "comes from the fact that Lil-Umbra's brothers are so different from each other that they are always arguing and disputing. This makes it necessary for Lil-Umbra to keep the balance between them, sometimes taking the side of Tilton the elder one, and sometimes the side of John the younger one."

"But I should have thought," protested the great teacher from Cologne, "that just for that very reason their sister's mind would gain enormously and show signs of wonderful development."

"You see, it's like this, great Master," murmured the old man rather querulously. "The elder boy is mad about architecture and about carving, while the younger thinks of nothing but what Friar Bacon has lately written or is likely to write; and the moment the poor girl feels sympathetic towards the artist brother, the other one, the younger one, gets indignant and begins railing against God and the church; and this of course sets the elder one off upon *his* particular hobby-horse, and they argue with each other just as, we are always being told, you great doctors of divinity dispute together, about essences and qualities and aspects and substances and forms, and how powerful angels are, and how crafty devils are, and whether the world had a beginning and whether it will have an end: and the result of all this is just the very opposite of what you have just now suggested; for the dear girl — and she is, I tell you, my lord, the sweetest and loveliest creature you ever saw — begins to hate the whole subject and to wish she'd been born a Mohammedan, or a Buddhist, or anything rather than a Christian."

"You will, I hope," threw in Albert of Cologne eagerly, for he recognized at once that he was on dangerous ground; and he didn't fail to notice that this peace-loving old gentleman, who wandered a little in his mind, had a deep tenderness for this young maiden who was the betrothed of Raymond de Laon, "you will, I hope, forgive an impertinent and even a discourteous question, but I'd be very thankful if you'd tell me what it was in the relations between this maid of whom you speak and her brother Tilton, the builder and sculptor with his own hands of a shrine to Our Lady, that made it possible for Bonaventura to accuse them of the terrible sin of incest?"

To his great relief this daring, rude, and even outrageous question did not seem to trouble the old ex-bailiff in the very least.

"O *that's* easily explained, great Doctor! Searching round in the ardent spirit of a born sculptor for some living model for the figure of Our Lady that he was so anxious to carve for the shrine he was building, it naturally came into his head to make use of the perfect form and heavenly features of his chaste and beautiful sister.

"But when this accurst Bonaventura saw Master Tilton's Blessed Virgin holding the Holy Babe, he commanded those bandits from Lost Towers to hammer the whole thing to bits! You may well indeed look horrified, O greatest of all Churchly Doctors, but I haven't sat here since my retirement from office, with the lady Lil-Umbra visiting me daily, and Master Tilton and Master John, one or the other of them, coming in to see me pretty well once a week, without learning something of what goes on; learning, I mean, what historians learn by living *after the event*, only I've been learning it by watching the event closely and yet watching it from a certain distance *while it was going on.*

"And I can tell you this, great Doctor — and do you, as Master John, who has been trying to learn Greek, says Homer always says, 'and do you lay it to heart' — all persons, whether male or female, who make it the chief object of their lives to seek out and uncover sexual sins and sexual obliquities in other persons, are themselves — and you can perceive it, O most renowned Doctor, in their countenance, especially in their mouths and nostrils and eyes — are themselves just the very ones to be most easily assailed by an itching desire to enjoy the very same lecherous sensations which they are so anxious to condemn.

"Now, O mighty Sage, please accept my word. The moment I encountered this Bonaventura at close quarters, I knew at once from the man's eyes and mouth and lips and nostrils that he was the sort of person who could easily be completely obsessed by sexual lust. What sins this man has committed in his own life I have not of course, O great one from Cologne, any way of knowing. But this I can tell you and this I do know; though being a little shaky in my mind from old age, you must take what I tell you with your own reservations. This abominable legend about Lil-Umbra and Tilton is simply the outward and visible expression of the viciousness of the fellow's own nature."

These final words of the ex-bailiff were uttered with such intensity that the face of his hearer, which was as much a hieroglyph of sympathy as, according to the old man, Bonaventura's was of lechery, positively became a quivering crow's beak of concentrated attention.

"I would like to know very much indeed, O most renowned of doctors," went on the old man, "just what you feel about this matter of Roger Bacon's influence over young people, like our mutual friend Raymond de Laon and like Lady Lil-Umbra's brother John. Do you consider that this Friar, who is such an adept in all these new scientific inventions, has a good or a bad influence over our younger generation? Whether because of the presence of *That Thing*" — and the old man gave a significant jerk of his shoulder in the direction of the object indicated— "or because of this wicked lie invented by Bonaventura, or simply because I've been more impressed than ever of late by the goodness and sweetness of Lady Lil-Umbra, I've been thinking a great deal about Friar Roger and his new science; and I've come to the conclusion, mighty Doctor, that there's a change coming over the whole of Christendom — I might go so far as to say over the whole world — and I've decided that it's the duty of all of us who are believers, to think out carefully for ourselves what our position is.

"It was all very well when we were young to just repeat the lessons taught us by our parents or by our priest or in our school, but when we become men — that's what I've been thinking lately in this old armoury of ours, great master — we ought to 'put away', as holy scripture says, 'childish things'; and not only so, but we ought to examine, yes! examine down to the very bottom, all our inherited presumptions, suppositions, and beliefs, everything in fact to which we've become accustomed, everything that we now take for granted; yes, examine it all, examine it over and over again from the very start, rejecting *this* and retaining *that*, as our separate, independent, individual spirit tells us, for it is our individual spirit that, at the bottom of everything, is, and always will — —"

He was interrupted in his speech, and the magnate from Cologne was interrupted in his sympathetic listening by the sudden opening of the armoury door and the entrance of none other than the gigantic Mongolian Jew, Peleg. Peleg walked with slow deliberate steps straight to where the two men were seated, and addressed himself to the ex-bailiff.

"Lady Val has sent me, sir," he said, "to convey you, if you will be good enough to allow me to help you, to my lord's Little Room. My lady wishes me to say that her first thought was to have the two young masters' beds moved there for the night, but my lord felt strongly that you would yourself prefer the Little Room to any other and feel more independent there. You will be, my lady wished me to say, quite as comfortable there, perhaps *more* comfortable than you are here in the armoury."

The relief on the face of the old man at hearing this news was so evident to Albertus Magnus, that this latter suppressed his instinctive inclination to make a polite apology for being so anxious to spend the night quite alone with the Image of Brass.

"If," he thought, "I make a fuss about any of this business, I shall be only confusing the issue. What I want is to have this armoury to myself for just one night — to myself along with this man-created man — if *that's* what you are!" and he shot at the Brazen Head a challenging and yet a pitying glance before turning his half-scouring, half-cleansing, and altogether benevolent little eyes upon the gigantic Peleg.

"The little room!" cried the old man. "Nothing in this place could please me better! And, Peleg, old friend, I am indeed perfectly ready to go there at once if you will give me your support."

Without further speech, and with one of Peleg's powerful arms round his shoulder, the old man rose stiffly to his feet, and laying his left hand with a sublime indifference to this weird entity's claim to be a living soul, upon the shoulder of the Brazen Head, as if it had been the wooden back of a negligible bench in some public hall-way, he offered his right hand to Albert of Cologne.

"We shall meet, your — your — your Eminence," he murmured, clearly regarding their visitor as a Papal Legate, or at least as a Cardinal, "and then we shall, I hope, be able to finish our conversation."

Albert of Cologne looked at him with all that humorous tenderness he liked to think he had learnt from Jesus. "I shan't forget, you may be sure," he said, "the exact point we've reached in our talk! Peleg here can well imagine," and he gave Peleg a subtly-charged smile, as if he'd known him for years rather than was now seeing him for the first time, "just what we were discussing! and perhaps you wouldn't," he added, "mind telling the Lady Valentia that I feel too exhausted to require any dinner tonight, and shall soon take advantage of the excellent bed I see ready for me. And no doubt I shall dream of all the wonderful people and of all the amazing things I shall encounter tomorrow."

With these final words he lowered himself in his chair, thrust out his heels with a somnolent leathery sound across the reed-woven rug in front of him, and closed his eyes, while Peleg in dutiful silence led the ex-bailiff from the room.

Into the deep quiet that followed their departure Albertus sank down, as if into the original ocean of silence out of which all sounds first sprang. Sleep was certainly what the man from Cologne needed, and he must have slept till not only the light of that long June afternoon was over, but its evening twilight too; for, when he awoke, the armoury was nearly dark.

As soon as he was on his feet, however, the first thing he looked at, by the light of the small uncovered oil-lamp that stood in front of it, was a tiny image of the Virgin, which had been a gift to the ex-bailiff by his grandmother in his childhood and which was very precious to him.

What, to confess the truth, made it especially precious to him was the fact that his little sister — who was his only youthful companion, for his parents had no other children — had once, in one of her moods, whether a mood of skittishness or of naughtiness, or because she had overheard it in some argument between priests, carved in big letters, clear across the base of the little image, the single word *Parthenogenesis*.

Moira had been drowned in the river Wey and her body carried out to sea before she was fourteen, and the ex-bailiff's son, Randolph, had steadily refused, probably because of some prejudice of his wife against the child's name, which is Greek for Destiny or Fate, to use it for any of his own daughters, of whom he had several. So nowhere upon earth save in her brother's heart, and in the exquisite trouble she herself had taken to form those fifteen letters, did there exist any memorial of the little carver of that big word.

It certainly was not of those significant syllables, nor of the question as to who had inscribed them upon that small image, that Albertus Magnus of Cologne was thinking as, by the help of the flame at that tiny shrine, he lit the chief light of the armoury and began making his preparations for the night. Once safe in bed, with an excellent pillow under his throbbing skull, and the armoury-light turned low, and a couple of warm blankets over him, he gazed steadily at the Brazen Head.

"If you can manage for me to spend one night entirely alone with the Head," he had told Raymond de Laon, "I will most certainly come."

Well! Here he was, alone with It, and there were four or five hours of total darkness in front of him and no apparent danger of any interruption to whatever communion of body, mind, or even spirit he could bring about between this man-created Being and himself.

Albertus had by nature an outward-working mind, and his natural urge to talk, to teach, to write, to read, to direct, to examine, to explore, to plan, to construct, to build, to organise, to reform, to originate, was so powerful that it was extremely difficult — O much worse than difficult! — extremely repulsive and even loathsome to him to indulge in any sort of introspection.

It was pain and grief to him to analyse his own thoughts, feelings, impressions, and reactions. He might have been bolder in this direction, if he had not known by instinct that there were sleeping devils in the intricate corridors of his mind that it would be dangerous to disturb. He was indeed continuously aware of a particular region in his response to life that held a dark, ultimate, indescribable horror for him.

It was in fact so horrible that it was imperative for him to avoid this region of his mind at all costs. It was a region which, if he couldn't steer his way round it, and, as far as this was humanly possible, forget it, and behave as if it didn't exist, would eventually by the pressure of its sheer horror disintegrate his whole intelligence.

It is perfectly possible for an energetic and powerfully galvanic will to win renown for its owner, while the deepest part of the personality which that towering will-power has to carry along with it, just as a swiftly driving chariot might have to carry in the belly of its body a writhing and squirming serpent, may be secretly twitching and quivering with all manner of maniacal distastes and repugnances.

"All my life," thought Albertus Magnus, "I've been escaping from myself. What I've been always secretly afraid of is neither God nor the Devil, neither man nor beast: it is simply and solely myself!"

He had grown so accustomed to make certain deeply intimate and yet automatic debouchings and deviations from the direct path in his consciousness of life, so as to dodge, and carefully circumnavigate, and craftily avoid, all those places where his most fearful personal mania and most horrified shrinking would be brought into play, that it was a dangerous shock to him to find that the presence of the Brazen Head disturbed this wise habit.

The only companion, whether male or female, to whom he had ever given a hint of this lake of horror in a secret valley of his soul, was Thomas Aquinas, with whom he had shared lodgings in more than one great seat of learning, and of whom he would retort when the others ridiculed Thomas as a dumb ox, “when this dumb ox starts bellowing, he’ll make the whole world listen.” But we can well believe that it would not have been easy to make a young metaphysician of Thomas’s calibre realize the existence of such a background to his adored teacher’s lively lessons.

But whether Thomas Aquinas realized before he died — for the master outlived the pupil by several years — all that the great Albert’s benevolent energy concealed behind its absorbing and compelling instruction, there can be little doubt that this supreme teacher’s frightful necessity to keep his own nervous malady in the background had something to do with the desperate fervour of his way of teaching.

The more passionately and comprehendingly he could follow and interpret the subtle distinctions in theology, the further he was able to withdraw himself from that appalling lake of horror in the secret depths of his own mind.

What he found himself wondering now — as with rather a troublesome effort he squeezed the thickest of his two pillows under the back of his own head and stared at the Head of Brass — was why the word, that he had by chance noticed inscribed in childish capital letters on that little image of the Blessed Virgin, kept hovering on the intervening air, like faint streaks of splashed blood, between himself and the expressionless countenance of the Brazen Head.

"But surely," he thought, "in the creation of that Image and in the elaborate workmanship or exquisite machinery that he gave to it," here he jerked his own head forward almost defiantly— "yes! I'm talking of you, you new Adam, you Adam of wires and wheels and screws and scuttles, and I'm telling you now, here and now, that what your man-maker forgot when he wound you up was the touch of a Virgin!"

What happened then was a volcano-like explosion of feeling, an explosion to which both Magnus and the Brazen Head must have contributed something. The accumulation of force which burst at that moment drew from Albertus, in one whole rush, all the smouldering depths of the spirit with which he had for the best years of his life flooded the gaping arteries of his devoted pupils; while the imprisoned demonic power in the Brazen Head, which seemed only to have been waiting an opportunity to escape, burst forth to meet what the other was giving.

It was not until much later that Albertus was able to offer — to himself we must understand — some kind of an account of what happened. He felt as if the whole dark, enormous, inscrutable mass of blackish-greyish matter, which Aristotle called "Hulee", and which the philosopher and many of his disciples held was eternal, indestructible, and without beginning, was now around him on every side. He could see it, he could feel it, he could smell it, and it was bearing him up, up, up, on the titanic curves of an agglomeration of merciless substance!

Wildly and desperately Albertus realized that the material substance of his own body had begun to grow larger and larger; and as he was carried upward he became frantically and dizzily aware that in front of him was only empty Space, yes! Space absolutely empty, leading on and on and on, with no limit and without an end!

And then suddenly he spoke to himself in a still small voice. “Albert, old friend,” he said to himself, “there’s no need for you to be alone in Space like this. You have forgotten what all creatures ought never to forget. You have forgotten that there is also Time.”

And at the thought of Time — Time that can reduce Space by measuring the segments of it, Time that can remember backwards to wherever man has been or might have been, Time that can imagine forwards to wherever man will be or could be, Time that’s our friendly and customary home, Time that belonged to our fathers before us and will belong to our children after us, Time that clothes us as with familiar raiment and nourishes us as with bread and wine, Time that gives us a bed to sleep on, Time that gives us a tent to cover us and a fire to warm us — Albertus of Cologne had no sooner uttered these words in a low voice, himself speaking to himself, than lo and behold! he was back again in the armoury of the Fortress, back again with his thickest pillow squeezed under his neck, back again with the flickering blood-stained letters of the word *Parthenogenesis* hovering in the darkness between himself and the Brazen Head.

And he was only aware of being back again, for a second or two of submission to Time, the magic power which had delivered him, when he was lost, to all that was and all that might be, in a deep and dreamless sleep.

XIX. MASTER PETER PEREGRINUS

IT WAS NOT until the late summer of the year of grace 1272 that Petrus Peregrinus of Picardy approached the channel between France and England with the intention of crossing to the district in this latter country, where his scientific rival Roger Bacon was still incarcerated. He had been supporting himself in his usual manner, till what he called his "experiments in magnetism" brought him serious enemies, and so discomforted the local authorities as to endanger his freedom of movement. It was then that he decided upon a bold move.

In plain words he joined, for the time being, and with an understanding that he could leave it whenever he wished, no less important a body of European soldiers than one of the divisions of the King of France. He took service in this particular body of men not from any hostility to the Swiss or the Spanish or the Portuguese or the Italians or the Germans, but purely from a desire to earn money which he could save up and spend on leisure to study magnetism and to write a treatise on it.

He had been in luck this particular summer; for though the force he chose to join had had nothing to do with any crusade, nor had been used for any important campaign, it had been posted in a part of the country where there was a constant demand for military aid in the protection of rich farmers and of their flocks and their barns from wandering bands of marauders, whose extreme destitution had made them freebooters.

Petrus had given himself up to all manner of mad dreams while his camp was moved from place to place; but in one way and another he had saved up quite a little hoard of such silver pieces as were exchangeable coins, if not current coins, in most of the countries of Europe.

It was on a hot day in late summer, and he had reached a little circular valley in Savoy, when an event occurred that was of importance in his life. He suddenly came upon a cross-road hut in the centre of this little valley, which was inhabited by a couple of persons who were so aged as to look barely human. He had been along this border of Savoy before but had never before passed through this particular valley, but it was here he was destined to receive, or here that pure chance flung upon him, an inspiration of a very curious kind.

Whether this inspiration came from an angel, and had an angelic purpose behind it, or came from a devil, and had a diabolic purpose behind it, it would be impossible to say. But either, if for the nonce we rule pure chance out of it as the arbiter of such events, was certainly possible.

An angelic power might very well have decided that, before Peter Peregrinus had continued his tortuous career for another day, it would be good for the world in general if it were cut short. On the other hand a devilish power might easily have come to the conclusion that there was nobody on earth at this hour who, if only preserved alive for a few moons longer, could work so much harm to the human race as this traveller from Picardy.

“What do you call your turnpike corner?” enquired Peter of this couple of age-stricken ones, as they sat side by side on a wooden bench, filling a big wooden bucket with a mess of sour milk and mouldy bread and bad potatoes, while a big bristling sow of a yellowish colour uplifted her snout from a hollow place scooped out of the ground before them.

“What does the lord on his feet say?” enquired the antiquity who wore male clothes, addressing the antiquity who wore female clothes.

The woman made no reply to this question. But she rose to *her* feet and held out a long skinny arm with a regular birds' claw at the end of it.

"Give silver, great lord of the highway," she murmured huskily in a queer French patois: "and me yes! even me, will give you the magic word for your long travel."

The enormous head of Peter of Maricourt moved a little, or perhaps we ought to say drooped a little forward, while from the white expanse of his face, like the sting of a creature that might have stung itself to death in the days of the father of Abraham, protruded the sharp tip of a presumably human tongue.

His black eyes seemed to the companion of the female antiquity, who still kept opening and closing her extended fingers, to flow into each other till they ceased to be two bottomless blacknesses and became one. But whether they were one or two, they evidently read in the Cretan Maze of feminine wrinkles upon which they were now concentrated that that seemingly dried up fountain of wisdom had a tap that was well worth tapping.

"Yes, by Satan," the traveller must have thought, *"I'll get something out of you!"* for he was not only nodding with his head now, but he was also searching in the lining of his jerkin.

At last he brought out a couple of silver coins, a big one and a little one. These he turned over in his fingers many times, so as to make sure the woman saw just what they were and the difference between them. Having satisfied himself that both these things had been observed, he negligently flipped the edges of the two pieces of silver together and permitted his own raptorial orbs to relapse into their respective hollows, while they took in the geographical position of this most pitiful of all possible turnpikes.

He soon became aware that the narrow road he had come by, and the three radiating roads now offering themselves as rivals for his next move, were all sloping upwards. And the queer thing was that, while there were occasional trees, some big, some small, some deciduous, some coniferous, along the edges of all these roads, the ridge or rim of the shallow grassy basin out of which they all led and over which they all vanished into the void or into the clouds, was entirely bare, bare of gorse or bracken or blackthorn, so nakedly bare that it was possible even to note the varying height of particular patches of ordinary meadow grass.

"Why is it," the man asked himself, "that to stand at the bottom of a shallow bowl like this and look up at its grassy rim, about half a mile, I suppose, from this hut, gives me such complete acceptance of my fate as I feel at this moment? If my fate had been totally different from what it is, I mean different from the fate of being the *Antichrist*, who has been prophesied of as long as the *Christ* has been prophesied of, should I, I wonder, feel this same acceptance of it simply from staring up at this rim of grass?

"If, for instance I'd been a Jewish youth like Moses and had come here straight from a vision of the burning bush, with the voice of Jehovah issuing from it and the revelation that it was my fate to lead Israel out of Egypt, should I be feeling this same calm acceptance of such a fate as I feel now when I fall into my role as the self-appointed antagonist of Jesus? Is there perhaps a revelation of some planetary Anangkee, or sublime Necessity, in the mere presence of a naked rondure of earth and grass like this against the whole of empty Space?"

With this thought and with this spectacle in his mind, Petrus Peregrinus returned the larger of the two silver coins to the folds of his jerkin and handed the smaller one to the woman, who clutched it, and proceeded to bite it with what were obviously the only teeth in her head that were opposite each other.

Clearly satisfied with the sensation in her mouth caused by this action, she opened with a metallic snap a small receptacle fastened to a leather belt round her waist and slipped the coin inside.

"And now," cried Petrus Peregrinus, fumbling with a bag in the lining of his jerkin adjoining the abode of his special treasure the loadstone. Presently he produced from this receptacle a small live slow-worm, at the sight of which the woman in front of him was seized with panic, and leaving her seat crouched down behind her mate, who groaned and shut his eyes.

All Petrus did however was to fling the slow-worm into the uplifted jaws of the great sow, who promptly bit off its head. Nobody but Petrus saw the pitiful flap which the tail of the slow-worm made to avoid following its head down the sow's throat. These are the things that, if they can only be seen by the right person, lead to some very curious conclusions as to the mystery of life. For as the sow lay down to digest what it had swallowed, the decapitated tail, without wriggling at all and with a final motion of infinite relaxation, as if it were thankfully joining the vast army of exhausted organisms whose reckless, desperate, and aggressive "heads" have flung them aside, stretched out to welcome eternal rest.

"And now," murmured Petrus Peregrinus, "I shall leave you, and take the road to the nearest port for the Isle of Britain where I have a greater conquest to achieve than you — or he — —" and he nodded at the old man with closed eyes— "or *you* either, old lady — —" and with the handle of his sheathed sword-dagger he prodded the sow's back— "could possibly understand. And *that*" — and he pointed to the continuation, over the rim of the valley, of the road by which he had come, "*that* will be the way I shall go."

With this he turned his back upon them all, upon the old man, whose whole conscious personality seemed devoted to the task of allowing nothing to make him open his eyes, upon the sow who was clearly finding the digestion of a small saurian head an occupation both peaceful and soothing, upon the absolutely motionless body of the decapitated slow-worm, against which, as against the side of a Leviathan, two small insects were already tentatively extending their minute feelers, and finally upon the old lady, who, as she watched that small dark figure — for his soldier's cap was black, his jerkin was black, a heavy velvet cloak he carried on his arm was black, his stockings and wooden shoes were black, while the blackest of all was his one single weapon, that half-sword, half-dagger, which he left in its sheath and used as a short staff to support his steps on any uphill road — uttered from the depths of her whole being the oldest of all European curses.

It wasn't till he was just not quite out of hearing that the old woman stretched out both her arms to give full expression to this malediction. With the fingers of both her hands tightly closed she repeated the word *Erre*!

"Erre! Erre!" she cried over and over again, pronouncing each syllable of the word with peculiar emphasis.

Petrus of Maricourt turned quickly enough when he caught those two syllables upon the air. In Picardy, as well as in Savoy, and of course everywhere along the shore of the Mediterranean, that phrase was used to express loathing and bitter contempt. So *there* was the magic word that he had stopped so long at that turn-pike hovel to extract from its witch-wife! *Erre*! And the word was the very same curse that had been heard in all the harbours of all the coasts and islands of the Mediterranean and Aegean since the days of Homer.

Petrus Peregrinus hadn't been a traveller in all parts of Europe for nothing, and he had often pondered on the mystery of this word with its deadly rush of execration— "Get *out* of here, you rat, you maggot, you worm, you abomination, you lump of filth!" — and he knew well that it had been allowed to remain in all the most authoritative texts of the Homeric manuscripts, and must have been passed, not only by the Athenian censors of the days of King Peisistratus of Athens, but by the far more particular censors of the Library of Alexandria and by the tremendous scholars who revised the "Codex Marcianus" in the Library of San Marco in Venice.

He made no retort to it at this moment however; but every time he pressed his scabbarded sword-dagger into the ground to support his steps over the rim of the basin-like declivity from which he was now rapidly emerging, he concentrated his whole soul upon a solemn covenant he was now making with himself.

"It has become clear to me," murmured his inmost heart communing with itself, "that my chief enemy at this moment among the righteous is Albertus of Cologne. He seems to have got some *secretus secretorum* out of the raw material of the Aristotelian "hulee", of which the universe is made, that enables him to cast some sort of spell over his pupils. He's been having with him of late, and they say they live together in the same lodging, which always gives a teacher a special personal influence over a young man, that eccentric silent youth with a big head who is called Aquinas. Yes! I know what *you* want me to do, my darling little Rod of Power!"

And the weak-legged, black-garbed, black-capped, wooden-booted climber upwards clutched, as he mounted the rim of the depression, the lodestone in the slit of his breeches.

"You want me to go straight to this great donkey of Cologne, who makes friends not with handsome young people but with great head-heavy lunatics, who think of nothing but dovetailing fantastical dogmas, and when I'm face to face with this double-dyed idiot, you want me to let *you* loose on him, to make him skip a bit! Don't tell me that's not what you want, for I know very well it is! But listen to me, my precious little Baton of Power. You're the Wand of Merlin the Brython. You're the Rod of Moses the Israelite. You're the finger that Jehovah lifted when He bade the World leap up like a fish out of Nothing.

"But though you are all you are, little Push-Pin of Omnipotence, the fact remains that, if I am to win in this contest with Albertus Magnus in this arena of this amphitheatre of the universe, I must confront the fellow face to face.

"Well, little soul-prick of the world's gizzard, you think that's impossible don't you? And you think since it is impossible, you and I will have to find another way of getting round this beggar and outwitting him! But let me tell you now, my Magnet of Satan, it's *not* impossible. I've just heard — never you mind *how* or by whom! — that he's been invited by Roger Bacon — yes! by Friar Bacon himself, Push-Pin, my devilkin! and you take note of *that*! — to go and see for himself that Brazen Head magicked into life by Brother Bacon. So that's where you and I come in, little lovely, and so let Holy Jesus beware!"

The small dark figure with his black military boots, black military cap, and black sheathed weapon to support his weak legs, was now well across the rim of the geological earth-circle over which that Homeric "Erre! Erre!" of the old woman had hurried him.

Looking round at all he saw and at how the highway he was following was losing itself in a distance that he knew well was westward and seaward, our resolute antagonist of the Christian religion, whom many people would have described as a grotesque little idiot but whom Paul of Tarsus and Jesus of Nazareth would have taken as seriously as he took himself, plucked now from out of his garments the magic lodestone with which he hoped to frustrate the whole Revelation. Rubbing it up and down against the tight black garments that covered his emaciated flanks, just as if he were sharpening a butcher's knife, he proceeded to stretch the thing out to the full length of his arm and began working it up and down as if he were actually making a slit in some vast, invisible, planetary tent, through which when once his stabber, his prodder, his love-piercer, his hope-drainer, his life-borer, his faith-rinser, his root-sucker, his magnet of universal destruction had found its way, it might really hurt and wound and injure whatever universe or multiverse there might be outside and beyond our world.

Once clear of this whole district and aiming for the channel between France and England, our peregrinating Antichrist pursued his future movements with what really was uncommonly careful consideration. Having made straight for the channel, he followed the French coast harbour by harbour, till he hit upon the precise sort of vessel he wanted sailing direct to a Wessex port.

All went well, just as he hoped, and it was not until he had actually disembarked that any trouble came, and when trouble did come, it came from out of his own head, and not from any external event. How it came, why it came, and what made it come, Petrus had not then, and never had afterwards, any clear idea.

It came suddenly out of his memory, as he stood on the shore after waving farewell to the ship that had brought him there: and it came to him just as if somebody else were telling the story, somebody, however, who knew his thoughts and feelings with a perfectly terrible exactitude, somebody in fact who was uncomfortably like God.

What came to him was his memory of a certain occasion when, with other French soldiers, he was being conveyed in a French ship along the shores of Palestine not far from the Port of Acre. Here, because of something he had done or had not done, the ship's commander had had him thrown overboard.

He had not clung very long, however, to an overturned boat which happened to drift past him, when he suddenly found himself close under the bows of the grandest British vessel that in all his peregrinations he had ever beheld. That this vessel was English there could be no doubt, and that it carried on board some extremely important, perhaps even some royal personage seemed more than likely.

"Can it be Lord Edward's ship?" he thought; and in a shorter time than it would have taken him to consult his lodestone, which he always treated as a familiar spirit, he found himself hauled on board this formidable vessel and confronted with its royal voyager who, as he had predicted, was indeed no other than Lord Edward himself, the heir to the British throne.

The whole interview that followed took place on the main deck of this crusading vessel.

"I thought you were right, Gunter," Lord Edward muttered, addressing the master of the vessel, a man whose most marked propensity was the power of becoming nothing, and a predilection for becoming nothing, or as near nothing as it was possible for a native of the harbour of Weymouth, near the ancient city of Durnovaria, with a handsome wife and a dozen children, to become.

"My sailor-friend here," went on the warrior-prince, addressing Petrus now, but practising as he spoke, just as if he were quite alone, some particular gesture in the difficult art of slinging, “assures me that his wife has relatives in Picardy and that he felt quite certain, from the tone of your voice just now when you answered him from the sea, that you were from that part of the world. Is that so, master? Well, in any case,” — and Edward turned a shrewd glance upon the vessel from which Petrus had been flung, and which was now making use of every inch of sail it possessed to get quickly away— “your friends aren’t waiting for you! May I ask what your business is? Or are you, as seems more likely from your looks, now that I see you close, travelling to London from some foreign court? Are you perhaps from Madrid or from — —”

Their conversation was interrupted by a series of piercing and painful screams, and Edward turned angrily to the ship’s captain whom he had addressed as “Gunter”. “Haven’t I told you I won’t have that man allowed to make that noise! Didn’t I tell you to tie him up so that he *can’t* scream? Its all in the way he’s tied, I tell you! The point I insist on is that he should suffer pain; but that doesn’t mean that I want to *hear* his shrieks. In fact if he’s tied so that he can’t shriek, he’ll suffer a lot more. To shriek is a relief. That’s why Nature lets us indulge in it. I trust you haven’t forgotten, Gunter, quite all I ordered. I am accustomed to being obeyed at sea as promptly as on land. That man deliberately disobeyed me, and he must suffer till he has learnt his lesson!”

It was almost as if the sea itself, with the whole weight of the steel-green purple-shadowed mass of its salt water, had risen up to protest against this haughty announcement; for a terrific wave curved up out of the deep at that point and completely drowned both the screams from below and the exchange of words between the Lord Edward and Master Gunter and Peter of Maricourt.

But it may easily be believed that the last named had not missed the rough brutality with which the future ruler of England had referred to this victim of his violent temper; and as he gazed at him now while all three of them were watched rather humorously by a couple of sailors, his own bodily longing to change his clothes became far less important to him than a rush of purely emotional feeling that quivered through every nerve of his body, a rush of desperate hatred of this powerful, dominating, ruggedly handsome, battle-loving, strong-willed Lord Edward.

And under the power of this blind rush of emotional hatred which he longed to gratify by some spectacular use of his precious lodestone, he realised that this was a crisis in his life.

"Yes," he thought, "may my soul burn in hell if I don't give this great English bully something to make him remember those screams."

But as he watched him closely and dallied with the instrument pressed against his own body, it came over him with the unutterable force of a premonition totally beyond the range of his own fighting spirit, that it would be useless to try to work by magnetism the death of this particular tyrant.

"But wait a moment" — he felt as if these words were reaching him out of the air— "What about this hammering bully's offspring? He's the King's son. Will not *his* son be King also when the time comes? And how unlikely, how almost impossible, as the world goes, it would be for the son of a man of iron like this, a back-breaker and a skull-cracker, a master of armies and a sacker of cities, to be born like his begetter, or, if the child were a girl, for her to be a stirrer up of savagery and slaughter! So listen, Lodestone darling! Don't you agree with me, you precious little heart-breaker, life-piercer, lava-flinger, angel-slayer, blow-them-up-alive? Surely you do, my darlingest of little volcanoes? Surely you do? Very well then, my pretty

one! The covenant's signed and sealed twixt thee and me. What we'll do is to lie in wait for the feeble offspring of our great shark; and when we've got him we'll fix him! We'll follow him up all his life — or if we're dead our spirits shall — and he shall die screaming!"

It was a curious thing — indeed it was what we pathetic tribes of mortals love to call "one of those things" — that almost simultaneously with Petrus's private talk with his lodestone, Master Gunter, who had gone below, came up again, and going straight up to Lord Edward, announced the death of the man who had been screaming. But that was not all, for there suddenly fell in the midst of the three of them, slam-bang upon the deck, the bleeding, mangled body of a small sea-bird that had been suddenly seized by a roving sea-hawk ready for any mouthful but not inclined to pause for a substantial meal.

The sanguinary slap that the fall of this small feathered corpse made upon the deck, and the shrill wail from the creature's mate that followed it, shook Petrus out of his diffidence to such a degree that he boldly asked Master Gunter whether he could give him a berth and have his clothes dried; and it was almost within touch of the man who had just paid the last penalty for defying the ruler not only of the land, but of the waves of the sea, that Peter of Picardy fell asleep that night hugging his lodestone.

XX. THE CERNE GIANT

IT WAS OF these events that our student of magnetism was thinking now, as he stood staring for almost five minutes at the uneven curves of the sea-tide's advances and retreats, as if he were listening to an invisible Brazen Head reporting these things to a mixed court of celestial and infernal judges. When, however, he shook off his memories, he found himself on the edge of a series of wide-stretching reedy swamps, interspersed with estuaries of salt water where wind-tossed alders and wind-swept willows led to lonely huts on flat marshy levels, only separated from the sea by desolate sand-dunes, whose human inhabitants lived on the finned and feathered natives they snared and slew.

Peter of Maricourt was in his most natural element here, for the human beings he encountered had for so many hundreds of years been accustomed to just such predatory explorers that they were as little surprised by the strange appearance of some of them as by the weird accents of others, or by the extraordinary weapons used by yet more unusual apparitions.

As may well be imagined a large portion of the retainers of Lost Towers had been supplied from dwellers in this sea-bordering marsh-land which was inserted, so to say, along that coast between high-rolling chalk hills like a wet wide-open entrance-gate between towering walls.

Lilith of Lost Towers found most of her female intimates in the human hovels sprinkled along these desolate haunts of unusual sea-birds interspersed with wild geese and wild ducks. Nor was it unnatural that this strange maiden herself should in some of her moods, when out of touch it might be with both her parents, pay lengthy visits to these intimates of her own sex in these lonely places.

“As it happened however,” so the wisest chroniclers, who are also the humblest, are always being reduced to admitting, Lilith’s chief confederate didn’t live in the midst of these sea-marshes but on the edge of a quite different stretch of country. This was an expanse of rough, wild moorland, covered with heather, which, as long at any rate as local memory went, had been regarded as once belonging to the ancient Welsh god or king whose name was Llyr or Lear. The woman in this case was Mother Wurzel, who lived in the part of this moor and from which there was a rider’s track leading to what was once the important Roman city of Durnovaria, where Lilith’s friend as a practiser of both black and white magic had clients of many different sorts.

Petrus Peregrinus had visited the rather unusual abode of Mother Wurzel more than once in his expeditions through Wessex, for it was his practice, when he had too soon exhausted the money he had earned by soldiering, to make use of the innumerable tricks which his pet lodestone could play to keep him in bread and in cheese and in wine.

The habitation of Mother Wurzel was founded upon a very small circle of tall upright stones. The stones must have originally come from the isle of Portland, but they looked as if before being brought here they had stood in a much wider circle; for they had a rather uneasy expression, as if they were not receiving their due of respect in their present crowded and somewhat humiliating position.

And yet the maker of this queer habitation cannot have been totally indifferent to the elements of dignity and beauty, for great care had been taken with regard to making the superstructure harmonize with this queer base. The space within the circle had been given a smooth marble floor and a roof arched as carefully as the crypt of a cathedral, and there had been placed over that one single wooden chamber entirely built of oak. The first time Petrus entered this dwelling, which was called Deadstone, he enquired of Mother Wurzel how on earth she had got possession of it; and she explained that it really belonged to the Lord of Lost Towers, but that he, under his daughter's influence, had made it over in perpetuity to herself as his daughter's friend.

Having got safely clear of the formidable Lord Edward, it didn't take the wanderer from Picardy very long to reach Deadstone, and after an enjoyable night there, for Mother Wurzel's middled-aged daughter, whose name was Puggie-Wuggie, had more deliciously wicked little ways when once you had her by your side in bed than any feminine being Petrus had ever known, he was allowed the privilege of meeting Lilith herself.

When once these two were together, however, things moved more crucially; and everything, at least for our student of magnetism, became much more complicated. In the first place there happened to him something that had never happened to him in his life before. He became completely infatuated with this fatal young lady.

The scrupulous chronicler of these agitating events has to endeavour in his narration of them to proceed as cautiously and meticulously as the events themselves seemed to be proceeding. As always with the actual impacts of life, there were so many different currents joining our special stream of events that this same stream was constantly being thickened here and thinned there, darkened here and lightened there, rendered bluish here and greenish there, and even splashed, it might be, with horrifying drops of blood at certain other places in its course.

At least that is how it all presented itself to Peter of Maricourt; and it did so with such ever-increasing, and now and then with such overlapping, overwhelming, overpowering, and almost drowning force, that he felt as he looked at her that, whether she yielded to his obsession or whether she didn't yield to his obsession, it was now quite as important to him to remain in sight of her as it was to know that he, the gate-keeper's son in the manor of Maricourt, was really and truly the long rumoured, long predicted, long prophesied Antichrist of sacred tradition.

The little red point of Peter's tongue didn't stay quiet any longer within the inner side of its menacing port-cullis. It came out; or, as a more elegant historian would say, it issued forth. What in plain words it did, this tongue of the enemy of Christ, was to lick both its upper lip and its lower lip, a proceeding that would have been a staggering sight for Peter's only friend, his precious lodestone, if that object, now pressed so nervously against its owner's organ of generation, had possessed the power of vision.

"You are asking me, my beautiful one," he was now saying to Lilith, "what I want you to do for me at this juncture. Well! I'll tell you exactly what's in my mind. I think the thing for us to do is to go as quickly as possible to the Fortress, while this ex-bishop from Cologne is still there.

"Since I've found out how perfectly beautiful and irresistible you are, it has come over me that if I want to stop this man's interference with everybody's affairs in this part of the world — and you know how deep the gulf has already grown — down to the centre of the universe — between Bonaventura, and his dicegames with Satan, and Friar Bacon and his attempts to change the creative methods of God by getting some parcener of Eve to help him in the making of Adam. You know of course, my beautiful one, the difficulties we have to surmount if we really are to put a stop to this man's meddling? But here is my plan, my dear, if you'll help me to carry it out.

“In the first place we’ve got to pretend that we are horrified, beyond all expression, by this assault on Bacon’s Brazen Image, which must be to us of course the work of a loyal believer in Christ; and not only so but must contain within itself a splash, a spark, a breath, a sip, a sigh, a bubble, a dewdrop of that Spirit they believe in, who, at Pentecost, descended from Heaven in the shape of a thousand flames of fire and lodged on the heads of a crazy crowd of Jewish madmen.

“Of course it was in the shape of a dove that the Thing descended on Jesus himself at his baptism in Jordan. But by the time of Pentecost Jesus was already ‘ascended’, and when this Ghost they call ‘Holy’ ‘descended’, it came as a sort of Substitute for Jesus to keep things going till the event they call the ‘Crack of Doom’ or the ‘Last Day’.”

While Petrus was thus lecturing her on what, if they were to be successful in destroying it all, it was necessary for them to know, he was embracing her with every portion of his mind and not a few portions of his body.

“What we’ve got to do, my loveliest of all possible Eves, is to remember how long these confounded doctors of the church have been confusing our brains with their absurd problems about the embryo in the womb. This poor little urchin of a formless foetus begins by being on a par with the vegetable world, and has only got what they call a ‘vegetative soul’. Then, when it is a tiny bit bigger, and is being definitely fed upon the substance of its mother’s life, it is promoted to share the lives of all baby-creatures of the animal world and is allowed to possess what they call a ‘nutritive soul’. But just listen to this, my sweet,” and, as he spoke, his amorous caresses made it clear that he would not in the least object to becoming the begetter of the kind of creature he was describing.

“What we’ve got to remember is that this luckless infant only possesses a real soul when it is separated from its mother. What they try to drag in is the old Jewish Jehovah as the Creator of heaven and earth. And at this point, my beautiful one, we’ve got to remember that the great Aristotle, whom they all regard as the wisest of thinkers, taught that there never was a beginning, but that the matter out of which our world sprang into existence contained, and still contains in its own nature, all the creative energy that is needed. You do see, don’t you, my precious, how confusing these learned doctors are? You know, don’t you, how they tell us that we must hate the Jews because the Jewish Priests wanted Pilate to crucify Jesus?

“And yet they are always telling us that Jesus himself was the Son of David, and a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The truth is, my darling, we’ve got to make it clear to everyone we have any influence over that this whole business of the Christian religion is full of paradoxes, blunders, manias, idiocies, and ridiculous contradictions.

“Now listen, my pet; wouldn’t you like to come up with me now, as they say Satan was always wanting Jesus to go up with him, to the top of some high hill near here to see the wonders of the world and the glories of them?”

The simple-minded chronicler of these events can only record at this point that the daughter of Maldung of Lost Towers gave Petrus of Picardy a very piercing look. But with this piercing look there was mingled — and no other female in the wide world could so charge a single glance — an overpowering appeal and a desperate cry, a cry that was thrown into the very heart of her seduced-seducer, a cry that sounded like: “Take me! Take me! Take me! or I shall melt into thin air!”

“What about our visiting the Cerne Giant?” she whispered. No sooner did this murmur become audible than Petrus leapt to his feet elated and transported.

“Yes! yes! yes!” he cried; and began in his excitement to make a most curious gurgling noise, a noise which, if anyone who did not know him had heard it, would have suggested the bubbling and exploding, the bursting and dissolving, of a miraculous stream of salt water that had somehow or another got into the centre of a rushing waterfall of fresh water.

Nor did it take these two very long to climb up to the Cerne Giant, which was still as it had been for thousands of years — just a figure on the summit-slope of a grassy chalk hill where the grass had been religiously, though most heathenly, prevented from invading by the least fraction of an inch the preposterous picture, in white upon green, of a monstrous giant with his sexual organ erect, awaiting, you might say, the thousand-years-postponed arrival of his female partner, with whom he might play the immemorial game in full and shameless sight of the far-off sea and the eternally receding sky.

Petrus Peregrinus had removed his hand from the magnet beneath his clothes; but he still kept using his short sword in its black scabbard to assist his steps and to play one part of a third leg. The arm and hand and fingers, however, which, like the wind-tossed branches sprouting from a tree that had the power of motion, belonged to whatever activity he chose to exert on his left hand, were entirely free during their rapid ascent to that expectant Cerne Giant.

It must indeed have been a profoundly religious, as well as a profoundly sacrilegious, instinct in more than a thousand generations of Wessex men and women, that had preserved this defiant superhuman figure, thus exposed in the chalk-grown grass on that particular hill. Never once, from beginning to end of their association, would Pierre de Maricourt, have been able to say that any movement he ever made in connection with Lilith, whether in his mind or with any portion of his body, was ever made on his own initiative. Everything he did or said or thought would have struck him, had he ever tried to recapture it, as pure and simple obedience to Lilith.

And yet, always there, close to his side, was his magic lodestone, ready to be brought into contact with every motion of his will, whether towards exertion or relaxation, whether towards attraction or repulsion, whether towards love or hate.

Plug! Plug! Plod! Plod! thudded his short black-sheathed sword-dagger into that grass-grown chalk hill. He could hear the sound of a bell tolling in the bell-tower of a monastic church at the foot of the hill behind him; and he found himself taking a queer satisfaction in mixing the sound of this monotonous bell with the feeling of pressure in the palm of his right hand from each step he took supported by his leather-covered weapon.

Wild, strange, weird, and often quite mad, are the thoughts and fancies of every one of us with regard to each other; but, when we come to face it, the most crazy and indeed the most disturbing and upsetting of all our imaginative excursions are when, as a man, we have a woman, or as a woman, we have a man at whom to let fly.

Plod! Plod! Plod! But while he ascended that hill, to the sound of the holy bell of Cerne, Peter’s left hand and active fingers found time to untie every knot, loosen every tape, release every pin, disentangle every fold of the most intimate garments of the lovely creature at his side; with the result that, when their four feet and his plodding stick finally touched the chalk-white base of the Giant’s throne, there was nothing for it but a mutual collapse beneath the generative tool of that gigantic figure and an unavoidable union of their two bodies then and there.

No man will ever know what thoughts, and still less what feelings, passed through the consciousness of Lilith, while Petrus wreaked upon her the full measure of his unconscionable lust; but the thoughts and feelings of our great specialist in magnetism were very definite. Although with his face buried in the disordered tangles of Lilith's hair, he could not see the sea, nor the Isle of the Slingers, nor that majestic beach of semi-precious stones that has come to be named Chesil, Petrus was in some curious and peculiar way conscious of these things.

As he merged his life with Lilith's, it seemed to him as though the whole cosmos were being cleft in twain. It seemed to him as if he were himself all the oceans and seas and lakes and channels and estuaries and rivers in the world, and as if the slender form he was clasping were all the continents and capes and promontories and islands, round which, and across which, and into the heart of which, all these waters, salter than tears, were pouring their life.

And as these desperate paroxysms of ecstatic union went on beneath that shameless symbol of primeval audacity, it seemed to Petrus as if he were something more than those wave-curves and wave-spoutings. It seemed to him as if he were at that transcendant moment a real, actual, living incarnation of all the creative semen of human life from the day of Adam, the first man.

He felt as if beneath their united bodies the whole of that haunted West Country, from the furthest promontory of the Isle of Slingers to the furthest shoals of the mist-darkened Severn, were heaving up towards the Moon.

Was it, he thought in his nerve-dazed trance, that ever since Joseph of Arimathea brought the blood of Jesus to this coast, consecrating thereby the Mystery of Virginity and throwing a strange and desecrating shadow upon the greater Mystery of Procreation, there had been a craving, a longing, a hungering and thirsting, in the whole earthy substance of this portion of the West, so that the actual soil and sand and stones and rocks and gravel and pebbles of Wessex, along with the very slime of the worms beneath and the slugs above and the spawn of the frogs and the scum of the newts, and the cuckoo-spit of the smallest insect, had been roused to revolt against this preposterous edict of unnatural purity.

And Petrus of Maricourt swore within himself that it was upon him, and upon him alone of all men living or dead, that the burden of the tremendous deliverance was laid.

“I am the one,” he cried to the very tune of his embraces of Lilith, “appointed from the dawn of history to lead the revolt of all natural earthly life, whether human, animal, vegetable, or mineral, against this accurst inhibition, inspired by these mad religious teachers from Palestine. Anti-Christ! Antichrist! Anti-christ! That is what I am. And the crazy joke of it is that this Jesus, whom they call the Second Person of this Trinity they’ve invented, always said that we were all the Sons of God.”

At this point Petrus of Picardy scrambled to his feet, and bending down modestly and courteously over his companion arranged and tidied her disturbed garments.

It was nearly dark by the time Peter of Maricourt and Lilith of Lost Towers passed that glen of the Welsh Tinker which was so near the gate of the Convent. They were on their way to the Priory, where they hoped to waylay Albertus Magnus, who had — so local rumour informed them — been invited that night to dine with the Prior. It was in the mind of Petrus Peregrinus that they might encounter young John there too, setting off for home from his daily visit to the imprisoned Friar. This possibility however Petrus refrained from communicating to Lilith, though exactly what his motive was for this particular piece of rather curious reticence he would have been himself puzzled to say, although it might enter the head of a mean-minded chronicler that it had something to do with the good looks and youth of the person in question.

It was in any case much less of a surprise to the girl from Lost Towers than to the man from Maricourt when up from the Tinker's Cave, where these children of Israel had been stealing between their separate duties a celestial hour of delicious happiness without troubling their heads about Welsh gods or Welsh tinkers or Welsh witches, came the giant Peleg holding his Ghosta by the hand.

The path upward of the ascending pair crossed irrevocably the path of the couple who were skirting the edge of the declivity, so that an encounter was inescapable. Any aboriginal spirit at this juncture, whether that of a deity, or a tinker, or a witch, who possessed the power of reading the thoughts in alien brains, would have been fascinated, as it darted like a sand-martin from cavity to cavity in these unusual skulls, to note the absolute difference between what was going on in all four heads.

Lilith was wondering whether she lost anything by the fact that the deliciously wicked delight, which she derived from leading people into mischief while she satisfied her senses with their erotic embraces, had never been, even to the faintest wafture of such a thing, touched by the breath of romantic love. "What the devil *can* that feeling be like?" she wondered irritably.

Peleg said to himself: "This queer-looking little fellow in black stumping along with a Roman sword for a staff must be the Lost Towers' latest pick-up. From the fellow's expression I doubt if the wench has got him as completely as she thinks she has!"

Petrus thought: "Haven't I met this dark girl somewhere before round here? Or is it *you*, my pretty one," and he gave a caressing squeeze to the lodestone in his innermost garment, "who have pointed her out to me when we were going about? Whoever she is, she's a powerful person; and I'd be a prize idiot to neglect her help in my Antichrist crusade and a plain fool not to try to find what she herself feels about this damned Brazen Head?"

As for Ghosta herself; she was acquainted, by reason of her job in the Convent kitchen, with all the gossip of the neighbourhood, for the Nuns heard everything, and those among them who weren't born to be spiritual were the best authorities in the district on all that was going on, on the quarrels and alliances, on the friendships and enmities, on the misunderstandings and idiotic manias, in all the various manorial centres whose circles of authority over-lapped at this point.

"O I do hope and pray," Ghosta cried in her heart, "that Peleg's discovery of this traveller's association with Lost Towers won't start him off again on his mad suspicion of their being some sexual connection between me and the Friar!"

It was naturally enough the clever clasper of that dangerous magnetic weapon who broke the somewhat awkward silence with which the pair ascending from the cave encountered the pair skirting that tricky declivity.

"I am a visitor to your country, Master" — here Petrus bowed politely to the Jewish giant— "to your country, Mistress" — and here he did the same to Ghosta— "with the purpose of inspecting this wonderful invention of your Friar Bacon of which I have been told by this gentle lady, whom I had the good fortune to meet when I first landed on your shores, and which she tells me is to be found in a Castle called the Fortress of Roque, the Lord of which has only recently recovered from an attack made upon him by a demented animal, by a horse in fact, whom some wicked magician had tried to turn into one of those classical creatures who have men's heads on horses' necks and were called Centaurs, and one of them indeed" — here the traveller bowed graciously to both the giant and Ghosta— "as frequenters of monastic libraries, like yourselves, no doubt know, was a sort of schoolmaster to swift-footed Achilles."

"You had better take them to the main Fortress gate, Peleg," said Ghosta quickly. "I must run back to the Convent now, and I shan't have to ring that big front bell anyway, for I'll get in at the back, where there's a door close to the passage where my room is. I'll be here," she added in a lower voice, giving the great knuckles of the giant whose right hand was squeezed into his leather belt, a quick pressure, "tomorrow, wet or fine, at the same time as today!"

And with this she was off; and they all watched her tall slight figure hurry down the path towards the Convent.

"Well, Master — well, Mistress Lilith," said Peleg, "shall we go straight to the Fortress? It's inside the Fortress, you know, in fact in the armoury, that the Friar's Brazen Head has been put for safety. This Papal Legate, or whatever he calls himself, whose name has such a friendly sound — I mean Bonaventura — has been making so much trouble round here that we — but I mustn't go on like this with you, Mistress Lilith, here; for you naturally have to take the side of your dad and I naturally have to take the side of my lord — but anyway, you, sir, as an experienced traveller, will have seen many local divergencies far more extreme than any of ours and bringing with them far more risky consequences to the country concerned."

Lilith smiled at him with a quick, humorously confidential smile, as much as to say, "O my dear big man, you weren't born in the midst of our silly little dissensions, but you'll have to take us as you find us."

"Somebody told us as we came along," murmured Petrus almost wistfully, "that, if we wanted to have a word with Albert of Cologne, who has come over here to see Friar Bacon, we ought to go to the Priory where the great man has been invited tonight to dine with the reverend Prior. It would be a pity, wouldn't it, to put you to the trouble of showing us the way to the Fortress, only to find when we reach it that the man we are seeking has just left to go to the Priory?"

To this fretful commentary upon the course of events it was Lilith, not the Jewish giant, who replied.

"The obvious thing to do," she said, stepping forward quickly, and with one slender hand putting pressure on the giant's hip and with the other upon the elbow of Petrus Peregrinus, "is to get to the Fortress as quickly as we can and find out if the man has yet started for the Priory. It may well happen that we shall be allowed to accompany him there, and possibly be able to eat a crust with the Friar, while Albertus is dining with Prior Bog."

The long legs of Peleg and the short legs of Petrus found themselves obeying her, almost as if they'd been the fore-legs and the hind-legs of the same horse drawing her chariot.

"Little does this fellow guess," thought Petrus pressing his sword-staff into the rocks and the lichen and the moss and the mud and the grass, and his lodestone into his own scrotum, "that the sole reason of our desire to meet this Albertus is to put an end to his fight on behalf of Christ, and to help this self-worshipping Bonaventura to smash to atoms the Friar's Brazen Head."

But, whatever their thoughts, they all three hurried on, and had the Welsh tinker or one of his witch-wives watched them pass, they would have seemed like a giant from Palestine accompanied by a dwarf from Egypt and led by a siren from the Isles of Greece.

The truth was that Peleg and Lilith between them managed to lead the student of magnetism so rapidly, and by paths so completely unknown to him, that it was neither a surprise nor a shock when the girl stopped them with an excited gesture and pointed to a moving mass of gleaming weapons at the foot of four great dark-foliaged pines, and cried out in a thin, wavering, wispy voice, as if she'd been a frightened maiden from the convent rather than the seductive heiress of Lost Towers: "There! there! there's a lot of soldiers! Your friend from Cologne must have brought a big bodyguard with him! They're coming this way. What about waiting for them here?"

It was then that Peleg intervened. He spoke slowly and deliberately; but it was clear that he was agitated by what he saw.

"It seems to me, Master Petrus, that those are King's Men from London; and what is more, Mistress Lilith, I believe I hear some royal music. So it can't be the ecclesiastic from Germany. It must be some royal captain on his way from London to tell us all some important news. Perhaps King Henry is dying. News doesn't travel as fast in this island as it does between the Tigris and the Eu — —" He stopped suddenly; and Lilith, who had been watching him, turned round, as suddenly, to her other companion.

But her other companion was behaving in a very strange manner. It appeared that Petrus Peregrinus was undergoing a kind of mental agitation so extreme that it amounted to something resembling a fit. He was holding both his hands to his ears, as if to render himself deaf to some sound that he was finding too horrible to endure; and he was doing this without losing his hold of the sheathed weapon he had been using as a staff.

Suddenly with a choking gasp he let his hands sink down till his weapon, held to his wrist by a strap, trailed in the dust. At the same time an expression of incredible relief relaxed his features and clouded with a misty haze his incredibly black eyes. Both Peleg and Lilith surveyed him with astonishment, an astonishment that was increased when they heard him talking to himself, and doing so in English though with a strong French accent.

“Thank the Devil he’ll be dead soon now! And thank the Devil that he can put so much power into his voice that even in the midst of this unspeakable way they’re murdering him a lot of the pain goes into his screams. O thanks be to the Devil! He’s quite dead now!”

Pierre of Maricourt became silent at that point, and leant so heavily on his scabbarded weapon that it sank several inches into the marshy ground upon which, at the sight of the gleaming arms of those distant men, they had all three paused.

“What is it Sieur de Maricourt?” enquired Lilith. “Nobody is screaming here. Nobody is being killed here. What is it, Maitre Pierre?”

The reply came slowly but quite clearly, each word of it being like an enormous gobbet of human flesh, steaming with red foam and dripping with hot blood.

“No! no! this thing is not happening now. It’s *going* to happen! It — is — all — in — the — future. I — am — *making it* — *happen.* It’s going to happen to the son of — never mind that! — who is being tortured to death in a castle whose name is — whose name begins with B. But he’s dead now; and with his screams went a lot of his pain — into the air! My little pretty one and I have done it … the prince of … of … of … of … But never mind that! But mark you … it *has* … it *has* … it *has* to happen! Little Pretty and I have done it already! All the rest can be left to the huge wave of natural necessity that carries us all before it. But there are certain” — and here even Lilith, the daughter of Baron Maldung of Lost Towers, was startled by the look of concentrated, merciless, indeed you might say *insane* ferocity in the two enormous black eyes, now almost become one, above the traveller’s raptorial beak— “but there are certain turnpike valleys, in the future lives of us all,” he went on, “in which things can be made to happen to us, either as a blessing or as a curse, by concentrated will supported by concentrated prayer addressed to Heaven or — mark you! — to Hell: certain turnpike valleys I say that this great rushing universal stream of Necessity lacks the power to touch.

“These turnpikes in our lives are so indurated, so scooped and gouged out, so chiselled and indented, so engraved, so *branded* by the intense will and the intense prayer of our worst enemy or our best friend, that this frantic *hate* or this desperate love works those effects that our excitable doctors of divinity, like this confounded Cologne potentate, call miracles.

“And in a popular sense they *are* miracles. But we must remember that the mass of people are so stupid, yes! so stupid and dull-witted and silly, that anything achieved by exceptional will-power or exceptional energy appears miraculous. And these accursed ecclesiastics are worse than the mob; for they are at bottom as stupid as the mob, but they have learnt the tricks of their trade and know how to appear both learned and clever.”

Peleg and Lilith exchanged amused glances at this point; for it had become clear to them that this student of magnetism had already become, not only a professor, but a professor whose contempt for other professors surpassed his contempt for common humanity. His companions’ thoughts must somehow have reached him, but instead of quelling his professorial desire to lecture, not so much to teach others as to get the thrill of haranguing others, these thoughts of theirs drove him on. For human beings are only surpassed in their quickness of emotional reaction to unspoken thoughts by one other animal on earth; namely by dogs; but unlike the reactions of dogs, our reactions are generally contradictory. This is proved by the way Petrus acted now.

He straightened his rounded shoulders and thin legs, and hurriedly clambered up upon a broad flat stone. Mounted on this natural rostrum he stretched out his black-sheathed sword-dagger towards the soldiers, who were now definitely marching in their direction, and cried in a shrill voice:

"And these military people too! What do any of them know of the real nature of the necessities of the country, or of the king, or of the nation? All they know is how to obey their trumpets and bugles. After the vulgar herd, and after the grotesque array of half-doting, ridiculously pontifical teachers, the most absurd body of men to be found in our crazy world are soldiers — yes! every kind of soldiers, soldiers of Kings, soldiers of Queens, soldiers of Regents, soldiers of sovereign realms who have only Dictators!

"You tell me those soldiers are English soldiers. Well, I can only tell you that I feel unutterable contempt for every soldier serving in that force and obeying a kindly King who is weak and dying, and only longing to obey a King who is strong, hard, and brutal and loves fighting for fighting's sake. I tell you there's not one single one of all these men now marching in their damned orderly ranks towards us, who has the intelligence of an ordinary dog, not one single one!"

Peter Peregrinus now descended from his stone of oration and put a straight question to the beautiful Lilith. "Well, little lady? Had we better wait their arrival here? Or shall we just go boldly on to meet them, and then enquire, of whatever captain or centurion or prince who is leading them, whether he knows *just where* Albertus of Cologne is passing the night? We could tell him that I have come from a besieger's camp in France, especially to bring him an important message."

No chronicler could describe in words the expression on the face of Petrus Peregrinus at this moment. Neither Peleg from above him nor Lilith from below him had ever seen anything like the way those black eyes, just as if they had become the one solitary eye of an antediluvian creation from the bottom of the ocean, looked with an indescribably *inward look* at what his own red tongue was doing in its own cave-like mouth, into which it seemed as if this one eye must be able to watch this unique tongue tentatively emerging from the devil knows how much deeper a cavern, and beginning its exploration of the blood-sucking meat-mill which it has entered.

But the eyes of Peter of Maricourt saw something now that drew them away from his own interior being. He saw two young men coming towards them down the slope of a hill, from a direction that was at right angles to the direct line between the place where they stood and the point now reached by the advancing soldiers. To him they were unknown; but the moment Peleg, following the obviously startled look he saw him turn in that direction, caught sight of them, their identity was revealed.

"Why! there are Master Tilton and Master John! Do you wish me, Mistress Lilith, to call to them? I don't think they have seen us yet; and to tell you the truth I don't think they are likely to see us till they get quite close! It's plain to me: indeed I can clearly hear," and he exchanged a quick glance with Lilith, "that they're arguing and disputing; and when those two begin that sort of thing, there's no use trying to make them notice anything."

It was Lilith who spoke then. "And what," she enquired gaily, "do *you* think, Master Peter?"

What Peter thought, before anything else occurred to him, was simply how queer it was to see his wicked temptress of Lost Towers act like an ordinary and natural girl. It was clear that she was delighted with this new turn to the stream of events.

Peter of Maricourt didn't openly hesitate. But in his heart he did more than hesitate. What rushed across his mind, as the girl waited for his answer, was the thought that, if he could deprive the Fortress of both its young men, it would be a better stroke in his Antichrist crusade than even if he managed to put an end to Albertus of Cologne.

He closed his mouth firmly against any premature licking of his lips; but there had come an excited note into his voice which it was impossible to miss, though he answered quietly enough.

“There are times in life, little lady,” he said, “when we can only listen to the ticking of the clock of fate and wait for what is destined to happen. This is one of those times.”

XXI. THE PENANCE

"But haven't you the power to see," young John was saying to his elder brother, his voice mounting up almost to a shout, "that the church has just created this whole business of the Trinity in order to catch the three in its fishing-net?"

"What three classes," enquired Tilton, "have you got in your head?"

"In my head — nothing!" cried the other indignantly, "the classes I'm talking about are with us always. They are *here* in the Fortress! They are *there* in the Priory! They are everywhere. I am talking about *first*, stupid, simple, ordinary people: *second*, artistic, imaginative people: *third*, strong ambitious people. This third class is of course the class who govern and rule us — not always on thrones or on horseback, or in chariots — very often entirely behind the scenes.

"By the idea of God the Father they catch the strong rulers who imprison and execute their enemies. By the ideas of God the Son they catch the simple, stupid mass of ordinary people who aren't tricky or clever enough to be anything but good and obedient, and who make of what they call *Love* a mystical and magical power that works miracles.

"And finally by the idea of the Holy Ghost they catch the poets, the story-tellers, the musicians, the painters, the builders and the scholars; and these are the ones who have invented Our Lady, and made Her the Mother of God, and the Fourth great Panel of the Pythagorean square!"

"I've heard enough of your fancies and theories, John," retorted his brother. "For heaven's sake let's take advantage of having the whole day to ourselves, while Mother and Father are both taken up with listening to this Dominican from Germany refuting this Franciscan from Italy."

John decided at this point that he must be more practical in talking to Tilton.

"Presently," he remarked, "they'll be having — father and mother I mean — a nice tricky job if these King's Men from London demand shelter for the night. I can't make out what the idea was in sending them down here at all. I don't believe the old King had anything to do with it. I fancy there's some 'funny business', as we say in Oxford, going on in the King's court. What we want is Lord Edward back again! Why does he go on with this ridiculous crusade? What's this city of Acre, to him, or him to it, that he should fight for it? What I think about this whole affair is — —"

"*Please*, John, don't go on any more like this! And *look there* — Isn't that our Peleg? Who on earth are those two with him? Why — John! If that's not Lilith of Lost Towers! Who's that man with her? He's a foreigner of some sort. He doesn't look as if he knew his head from his tail. He's mad or something! There! He's seen us now. What the devil is he up to? He's moving about watching us with his hands pressed between his legs as if he were turning himself into a flying battering-ram."

"Never mind *him*, Tilton. *He's* nothing to us. The person for us to watch is that devilish girl! God in Heaven, but she's a beauty! I'd like to —— Listen, Tilton, why shouldn't we get hold of her? Let's carry her back to the Fortress as a prisoner-of-war!"

"John, John, what's come over you? What's the matter with you? You're looking at me as if you'd like to knock my head off. What have I done to make you so angry? Do you think I want to start fighting as to which of us should have that girl? Heaven help you John! You're getting queer. It's that confounded Brazen Head that's the trouble. Ever since that blasted thing came into the armoury you've been behaving more and more queerly. Didn't I hear you the other day tell mother that you'd like to go and visit Iscalis — or what do they teach us to call that village now — Ilchester! And why? I know the damned place. There's nothing there but a river, and a few houses by a bridge, and a lot of marshy fields! You think it's wonderful because your precious Friar's uncle or brother or somebody lives there. I tell you it's not half as exciting as Montacute, where at least there's a high pointed hill, or as Glastonbury, where King Arthur's grave is!"

"If you don't stop talking such nonsense, Tilton, I'll give you such a rap over your dull, stupid, traditional, commonplace, church-building skull that you won't be able to sleep for — —"

"Stop that, you two fools!"

The sudden appearance of the utterer of these surprising words was as much of a shock to the two brothers as it was to Lilith and Maitre Pierre de Maricourt. Peleg was less startled because he had been for some while able, from the watch-tower of his own height, to detect some creature's secretive movements from alder-bush to alder-bush, scrub-oak to scrub-oak, weeping-willow to weeping-willow; but he hadn't imagined for a minute that a warrior in the rather extravagant accoutrements of a captain from the Royal Guard should be following these tactics.

But so it was. The intruder, who had interrupted not only this old familiar quarrel between the brothers that was being so craftily fomented by Master Peter and his pet lodestone, but who also had diverted from their aim that traveller's further plans, turned out to be none other than Perspicax himself, captain of these King's Men who had just arrived, and a cousin of Friar Bacon and like him a native of Ilchester.

By this time Perspicax, through his social skill in the delicate art of handling superiors and his formidable gift for inspiring respect in inferiors, had become one of the most active and important military officers that the old king possessed.

Having heard of the disturbances stirred up by Bonaventura and of the local war — for it had by now become more than a feud — between the Manor of Roque and the Barony of Lost Towers, Perspicax had persuaded the already dying Henry to let him come down to the Wessex Coast with a quite large squadron of King's Men.

With a few decisive explanations and a moderate use of his enormous powers of persuasion and domination, Perspicax soon had all the five of them, the two young men, equally with Peleg and Lilith and Master Peter of Picardy, under his personal control.

He led them all straight back to the Fortress, and he found no difficulty in arranging with the door-keeper, or rather with the door-keeper's competent dame, exactly just where and how the whole lot of his men had best encamp that night, and what special additions to their already substantial supply of food and drink they might expect to receive. He then found no difficulty at all in smoothing the way with Lady Val and the Baron, not only for the reception of Peter Peregrinus, but even — and this made everybody in the Fortress exchange puzzled and excited comments — for the conferring of a solitary night's rest in a suitable chamber upon Lilith of Lost Towers.

Once safely alone in a small room at the back of the Fortress, a room which their nurse, in that instinctive forestalling of awkward situations which had made her what she was to all of them, had reserved as a sort of retiring-place for herself, our lonely traveller, whose magnetic power had led him to regard himself as Antichrist, decided that it would be silly to play any of his tricks with "Little Pretty" while he was only half-alive by reason of an overpowering need for sleep.

So, removing the said “Little Pretty” from its coign of vantage at the fulcrum of its owner’s life-force, and placing it on a small bracket at the foot of a stone image of Our Lady that had obviously come from over-sea, for its whole style suggested North Italy, he managed with the most reverent and the most delicate care to prop it up in such a manner that “it”, or “her”, or “he”, was supported by the droop of the Virgin’s robe as it hung between her knees.

This duty having been satisfactorily performed, with a final worshipful glance at the foot-long object of his veneration, now safely if sacrilegiously propped up at the knees of the Mother of God, Petrus flung his sword on the floor, wrapped the bed-blanket round him just as he was, and sank into an impenetrable sleep.

What he would have done if there hadn’t been a clear sky and a three-quarter Moon that night, together with a window through which this luminary could shine, and a particularly well-polished metallic receptacle for both solid and liquid human excreta from which its light was brilliantly reflected, is indeed a question. He would either have had to play his tricks in pitch darkness or he would have had to give them up till the arrival of dawn.

As it was, it must have been about midnight when he awoke; and awoke to find himself in full moonlight. He tossed off the blanket, picked up his sword, still in its black sheath, and hung it on the handle of the closed door, a handle very imposingly moulded and much more like the hilt of a Roman sword than was the object which he suspended from it.

Then he rushed to the base of the image against the wall, extricated his egregious darling from between the knees of Our Lady, and held it up in the moonlight. The lodestone was about seven inches in length and about one inch in diameter. Its colour was a pale pinkish grey touched here and there with blots and smears of a dim yellowish tint. But one end of the thing was a good deal thicker than the other, and this thicker end did unquestionably possess a certain remote likeness to a human head.

Nor was an obscure resemblance to a human face quite wanting either, if a person did what the thing's owner was certainly always doing, that is to say if he made a lively use of the imagination. The thing, however, never changed its expression. No imagination could make it do that.

But its expression was one which, if this dressing-room of the old nurse of the Fortress could speak, it would have described as "wicked curiosity".

With those peering eyes at such a queer angle to each other, with that almost frog-like nose and mouth, with that forehead that seemed to bulge where it ought to retreat, with those ears that looked as if in the endless process of listening to dirty sounds and yet more dirty echoes, they had been worn into filthy cracks, all these characteristics only required a little imagination to be the perfect attributes of a lodestone converted into an orectic and prurient spy.

Sitting on the edge of his bed after pressing to his lips in the moonlight the particular smear on his pet's visage that he liked to pretend was its mouth, Petrus now jigged the thing up and down in the air towards what he assumed to be the southern and eastern and western portions of the Fortress.

He vaguely took it for granted, from what seemed to him to be the position of the Moon, that he was sitting with his back to the north; and it was one of his occult theories that it was always from the north that great magicians — and of course Antichrist must be a very great magician — always came and always summoned their devils.

The southern populations of the world might be gluttonous, lecherous, and wine-bibbing, but it was from the north, and from no other quarter of the compass, that Satan always set forth on his goings to and fro over the earth.

There is no doubt that, compared with the authentic inventive genius of Friar Bacon, Master Peter of Maricourt had only an extremely exalted imagination. For years he had used this imagination to complete in every way he could what might be called the feminization of his precious lodestone. What he had to do at this moment was not at all easy. He had to make a guess as to the particular direction, north or south or east or west of where he was now, in which a room had been found for Lilith in this ramshackle edifice. But assuming, from the outrageous tales he had listened to when with Mother Wurzel and her daughter at Deadstone, that Tilton would be far too occupied with his sister Lil-Umbra to give Lilith a thought, he forced "Little Pretty" to concentrate her dangerous attention upon young John.

In fact he went so far as to direct the whole of his own will-power, and the whole of the magnetism in "Little Pretty" that worked with this will-power, towards establishing an erotic connection between young John and Lilith.

"The time must be now," he told himself, "about half-way between midnight and one o'clock. In that case, shouldn't 'Little Pretty' draw young John to slip quietly on bare feet or in silent sandals to Lilith's room? She'll be wise enough to guess who it is if he knocks gently at her door, and once together he'll be her slave forever!

"That it's such a devil of an effort to me to do this may simply be because I'm her slave! I am, I am, I *am* her slave; I confess it. But not perhaps forever. I've enjoyed her so fully, so utterly, so completely — and from such enjoyment the male animal enjoys anyway the *sensation* of domination — that I already feel to a certain degree free from her: not altogether free of course, because I shall never to the end of my days enjoy anyone as I do her, but still a good deal more free than I ever thought would be possible before we visited the Cerne Giant. Well, Master John, you've got, you've got, you've *got* to go to Lilith's room!"

He pointed the head of the lodestone towards a certain queer stain on one of the walls, a stain that he had noticed directly he entered the room, which had by this time associated itself in his mind with a spurt of blood from some rarely affected human vein.

It was at this moment to his unspeakable surprise that he heard a knocking at his own door. He plunged his "Little Pretty" into a much more natural place than the knees of the Madonna, and scrambling across his bed, for he had been sitting with his back to his own door as he thought of young John's door, he unhooked his sword from the bronze door-handle, and holding it, still in its black sheath, in his right hand, he opened the door with his left.

It was Lilith herself who now slipped into his room, slim as a hamadryad from the Moon who has descended straight from the clouds, and arrayed in a floating white night-gown much too large for her, which she had borrowed for that one night from Lil-Umbra. This garment hung so loosely on her slender figure that, as she stretched herself upon his bed, Petrus of Picardy was compelled, for the third time in his whole life, to give himself up to such a wave of passionate adoration that he felt he could sacrifice even the pride of being Antichrist in his worship of those pearly contours of Lilith's body, now resting there like a white shell half-revealed and half-concealed beneath a wavy tangle of foam as it lies on the sand.

Although he had already enjoyed her that same day at the foot of the Cerne Giant to a degree that he supposed must have exhausted all his seminal energy, and though this day itself had followed a night of the grotesque debaucheries of Deadstone, it suddenly came over him that, if he clutched his lodestone tightly enough in his hand while he was enjoying her now, he would find himself endowed with a superhuman power.

And so it did, in God's truth and the Devil's truth, happen, before the two of them were asleep. And, as may be imagined, the sleep that followed this Elysian ecstasy was so deep for them both that the dawn was well advanced before Petrus realized that the light which was making his eyes blink so hopelessly as he tried to open them was the light not of the Moon but of the Sun.

"I'll wrap *this* round me," whispered Lilith hurriedly, snatching up the blanket from the bed, "and, when I'm dressed to go out, I'll come back here for you; for I want you to take me home. So don't go till I come!" And, as he kissed her, Petrus recognized that this really was a solemn league and covenant between them.

His dressing took no time at all, and he had comfortable leisure to caress his "Little Pretty", otherwise his demonic lodestone, to his heart's content, as well as to make the pillows and the extremely primitive goat-skin rug that covered the foot of the bed look as if the room had been used solely as a retiring place for relieving human bowels; and since there was no way he could empty that particular piece of furniture, all he could do was to sit on the bed and wait.

When at last Lilith returned, she looked as fresh as a wild, white convolvulus on an ivy-covered wall.

"I've found a way out," she whispered hurriedly, "and once out I know how to dodge this camp of King's Men. Just come quietly after me, step by step as quickly as you can, and we'll soon be clear of this blessed place."

Petrus obeyed, and she led him out of the Fortress by a small door among the sheds and stables, the look of which and the general atmospheric odour of that part of the establishment reminded him of the occasion when the Lord of the Manor had suffered a fall wrestling with Spardo's deformed horse, and when the idea of filling the prophetic role of the actual Antichrist had first entered his own head.

Lilith was perfectly right about her ability to dodge the camp of the King's Men. At one point they did catch the voice of Perspicax giving orders in that effective competent way that was a second nature with him. And though it can well be believed how tightly Petrus clutched his little monster to his navel at this sound, he was far too scared of throwing everything into a chaos, in which anything might happen, to take the risk of pointing the lodestone at this man from Iscala who boasted himself to be a first cousin of the maker of the Brazen Head.

But the authoritative voice of Roger Bacon's relative from Iscala had hardly died down, when lo! directly in their path through the forest, appeared a group of about a dozen men, unmistakably clothed in the red-brown attire of Lost Towers. These men were advancing with the swift, furtive, stealthy, wild-animal-like self-confidence of a perfectly trained body of woodsmen, to whom every aspect of forest life had been familiar from earliest boyhood.

Without a cry of delight or the faintest sign of surprise Lilith ran towards them; and in a pulse-beat of his agitated heart our all-too-human Antichrist began searching with the tip of his tongue the whole surface of the cavernous roof of his mouth, as if that tongue of his, which *could* be a deadly sting, had also the power of transforming itself into a divining-rod, a rod that could reveal the presence of any drop of the water of life in any portion of the skull that contained it.

But while Lilith was gliding in and out of the ranks of her red-brown adherents, like a "Wood-White" butterfly dominating a confused rabble of billowing and swirling “Meadow-Browns”, there suddenly emerged, walking towards him in an extremely dignified, though somewhat dramatic manner, out of the centre of the red-brown men, no less a personage than Bonaventura himself!

This tremendous redeemer of footpads was evidently deeply impressed by the revelation that Lilith, whose entrancing body he had only resisted because God destined him to be Pope or the maker of Popes, had a man-friend.

He recognized at once the black cap Petrus was wearing as part of the uniform of one of the best troops among the soldiers of the King of France; and the wild hope rushed into his mind that this siren of a girl had just come back from crossing the Channel with a body of men as large, if not larger, than the King’s Men who would shortly be waking from their sleep in the camp of this Perspicax of Iscala or Ilchester.

This descent upon Wessex of the King’s Men from London had been the second startling blow that Bonaventura had received in the last few days. The first was the appearance, totally unforeseen by him, of Albertus of Cologne, for whom, as the most famous of all teachers in the Dominican order, he, as the best known Franciscan throughout the world, felt the emotions that all of us experience, though some of us are cleverer than others in hiding them, when confronted by a successful rival.

Petrus of Maricourt clutched “Little Pretty” tightly against his skin and looked his opponent full in the face. “Mistress Lilith told me,” he said, “that I *might* have the proud pleasure of meeting the late legate of the Holy Father and the greatest doctor that our Holy Faith possesses in Paris and Oxford, but I never for one moment imagined that her words would come true. Your eminence knows what young ladies are, and of course I have already heard that your reverence disapproves of Friar Bacon’s Brazen

Head. In fact, to be quite truthful, I have answered a number of people on this point by telling them bluntly and squarely that some of Friar Bacon's inventions are under examination by the highest authorities in the Church, in case they may turn out to have no divine sanction but, on the contrary — —" here Petrus bowed with his head and scraped with his foot, as he had seen his mother do when the Lord of Maricourt walked down the street— "on the contrary, are the work of the Devil."

"What, if I may enquire," asked Bonaventura, "is your name? And what, if you will absolve me of gross inquisitiveness, is your purpose in visiting these parts?"

Our traveller clutched with his left hand the body of "Little Pretty" under his clothes, and placing his right hand against the hilt of his eternally sheathed sword, he proceeded to balance his bottom upon this convenient knot of hammered metal-work and got strength and relief by so doing.

Indeed for a moment or two, as he listened to Bonaventura repeating his question with the judicial unction of an official executioner at the oriental court of Karakorum, he experienced a delicious thrill of complete irresponsibility, as if he had been an anonymous figure seated on a marble stool impervious to the goings on of mortals.

"My name, your Eminence, is Pierre de Maricourt, and I come from Picardy. My profession, as you see, is that of a soldier of the King of France. But I am also a student of the ancient tongues and I spend my wages in buying books. I know a little Greek and Latin, your Eminence, already; and I hope, before I die, to be able to learn a little Hebrew. I came over to have an opportunity of acquiring at close quarters a few details about the kind of mistakes — in orthodox divinity I mean — which Friar Bacon has been making."

Petrus spoke slowly from more than one motive, and from more than one motive too he kept his terrific black eyes fixed as magnetically as he could upon Bonaventura's face. Beneath his clothes, as you may believe, he kept the head of Little Pretty — for he knew by touch her head from her tail — aimed straight at his interlocutor and it soon became clear that Little Pretty's effect, aided by the intensity of his own magnetic gaze was overmastering.

Bonaventura began showing signs of extreme agitation. He kept turning round and glancing anxiously at the brown-and-red jerkins and breeches of the group he had just left, as if he were afraid that the presence of their young mistress among them might dispel and destroy his own authority over them, and even result in some form of action entirely different from the line he wished them to take.

In his own secret consciousness Bonaventura was more upset than he had been for years. "I must," he told himself, "adopt some powerful course of action with this accurst runaway from Picardy, who evidently is a lecherous pick-up of Lilith's. I must frighten him in some sort of way."

Meanwhile Petrus had commenced in dead silence conveying his wishes to "Little Pretty".

"We must *will* him to lift up first one of his legs and then the other," he told her, articulating his intention very definitely and moving her head, still pressed against his skin, so that it should point straight at Bonaventura's skull. "First one and then the other, my treasure!" he repeated.

And behold! it actually happened; yes! it happened just exactly as our scientific student of magnetism had indicated to his precious magnet. Up went one leg of the General of the Grey Friars, while he made a shuffling movement with the foot still on the ground.

“Now make him lift the other, my sweet!” And down came Bonaventura’s left leg and up went his right. “Make the old sod dance a proper jig now, pretty one. We’ll learn him to be a Legate!”

And to the absolute amazement of a couple of Lost Towers men who had turned to look back while the rest of the crew were following Lilith into the Forest, and to the even greater astonishment of Friar Roger’s cousin from London, the enterprising Perspicax, who having been invited the night before to take his breakfast with Tilton and young John and possibly even with their parents too, if the Baron got back in time from his morning jaunt, now stood at Peter Peregrinus’ elbow.

“Is that a new kind of penance?” enquired the commander of the King’s Men.

“Do you know, Capitaine, I really do believe that it is!” replied Maître Pierre de Maricourt. “And the odd thing is,” he continued, twisting “Little Pretty” around against his own body so that her head pointed straight at the centre of the intruder’s not very high forehead, “the odd thing is that this particular penance is infectious! I even feel like joining it myself!” And he shuffled a little with the toes and heels of his sandals in the long grass.

To the commander of the King’s Men this untimely dance was indeed infectious. He raised his well-armoured knees in this grotesque jig even higher than the stately personage before them was lifting his grey robe; and he even went so far, for he had a daring and reckless spirit under his military restraint, as to stretch out his right hand and seize, much to this latter’s discomfiture, Bonaventura’s left hand.

This crazy dance, which might well have been, so Petrus grimly assured himself as he watched them, a dance in honour of an East-Indian idol, performed at Karakorum before the Khan, went on without a pause till the last of the red-brown bandits, together with their “leukolenian” or white-armed princess, had disappeared, and until a little group of highly amused but somewhat puzzled King's Men had come up from the camp and arranged themselves in a line, evidently waiting for the morning's proper business to begin.

It was from sheer exhaustion that both these dancers, Bonaventura in his noble grey garments and Perspicax in his by no means ignoble royal colours, finally and simultaneously sank, side by side, upon the moss and small ferns and wood-grass and ground-lichen beneath a half-circle of the massive trunks of five majestic pines. Mingled with an infernal satisfaction which distorted his face and made his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth — and of course all chroniclers of Peter Peregrinus who neglect the physical motions of his tongue are dodging something essential — was a totally unexpected pity for the prostrate Perspicax.

What brought this pity into the erratic heart of our traveller was the simple pride which his humiliated victim had taken in being a soldier. This pride brought back to him his own childhood, and suggested to his mind the behaviour of the stately officials of the castle at Maricourt, and he couldn't help muttering aloud a familiar tag of Homeric Greek that he had learnt as a boy in a monastic school: "Ephane mega seema!" "There appeared a great sign!"

And indeed as he watched the King's Men lift up their commander and carry him off to their camp, and as he himself was assisting Bonaventura to his feet, there appeared, coming from between those enormous pine-trees, whose branchless trunks enhanced the romance of every event that occurred beneath them, no less a couple of celebrities than Albertus Magnus of Cologne and Friar Roger Bacon!

It was clear in a second to the wielder of "Little Pretty" that the great Dominican, who looked indeed a rampart of strength in his singular head-dress and peat-black raiment, had compelled the Prior of Bumset to liberate his captive, at least for a time.

“Whither were they bent now?” he thought. “Who could say? They must have started at dawn from the Priory! The Cologne man must have stayed the night there; perhaps in the very chamber of Roger Bacon, with whom he may have been arguing and discussing all night. There’s simply no limit,” thus Peter Peregrinus’ thoughts ran on, “to these learned idiots’ powers of disputation.”

Curiously enough in the agitating look-skirmish and gesture-drama that ensued between these four men — with “Little Pretty”, the deadly lodestone, pressed against the skin of Master Peter — the one who conducted himself with the greatest ease and the most successful assurance was Bonaventura.

Master Peter, as you can well imagine, didn’t miss this fact; his agile mind kept turning it over and over, and even as he hurried to be the first to speak, he decided that this superiority in social self-possession came from the fact of Bonaventura’s much wider experience of the contemporary world and more intimate knowledge of the royal courts of Europe than Friar Bacon could possibly have — or Albertus either, in spite of his two years as a Bishop.

“You will pardon me, your Reverence, I trust, for addressing you without your permission. But I am a student of scientific magnetism — a most complicated subject — and I was anxious to visit this famous inventor of the Brazen Head whom I now find in your company.”

At this point Friar Bacon, who, to Peter’s discerning black eyes, was far the most embarrassed of all the four, spoke out strongly, though Petrus could almost see his heart beating under his grey robe and his pulses throbbing under his grey sleeves.

“What we must all do now, and you with us, Master — —”

“Petrus of Maricourt in Picardy!” interposed Bonaventura with a nod and a smile.

“And you with us, Master Petrus,” went on Friar Bacon, “is to take advantage of my cousin Perspicax having a body of King’s Men from London with him, and go straight to Lost Towers and possess ourselves of it in the King’s name. King Henry, though very ill, is still alive, and we all know what his son, Lord Edward, would do if he were with us today! He would make short work of this stronghold of bandits, who have for some many years troubled the lives of quiet people in this part of our land! So the first thing we must do — and I trust you will accompany us, Maître Pierre de Maricourt — is to go to the camp and tell my Cousin Perspicax to assemble his men at once and follow us to Lost Towers.”

Petrus told himself as he looked from this Friar in grey to the courtly Bonaventura, also in grey, and from them both to the black raiment and incredible headgear of Albert the Great, that what he really needed at this crisis in his life was one clear and definite and decisive word from the Devil Himself — for He alone could really help him at such an amazing concatenation as this — telling him by what word, what blow, what death-dance, he, Petrus, ought to make it clear to the whole lot of them that the long-predicted Antichrist was at last really among them, and that the hour had come for the crashing down, once for all, of the whole shaky edifice of the Christian faith.

“It is extraordinary,” Petrus told himself, as he followed the two grey figures and the one black figure in the direction in which the King’s Men had just conveyed their exhausted commander, “how a weak, timid, nervous, hermit of philosophy like this Roger Bacon can suddenly take the lead, and without any ‘Little Pretty’ pressed against his skin, can dominate

— can dare to *try* to dominate — two such figures as this Grey One and this Black One, not to mention Antichrist himself, who in the shape of a lodestone-bearer has come among them!

"But it shows one thing. It shows that when a man is quiet and peaceful and timid and philosophical, and scared of both God and the Devil, and longs to live entirely for his own lonely sensations and for his fine points of learning and for the mystery of words, there may come a moment when he suddenly finds himself with a power of plunging into action and of abandoning himself to reckless and desperate moves, such as much stronger characters and much more formidable wills would never dare to display."

The four singular visitors were not long in discovering that, although he had so recently been down in the very depths of impotence, Friar Roger's cousin from Ilchester was now perfectly ready to retake complete command of the bulk of his men. And so without more ado, they set out through the forest and actually found themselves in less than a couple of hours at the entrance to Lost Towers.

They were, however, certainly not prepared for what they found when they reached those gates. Instead of riding for pure pleasure that morning, far less engaging in any boar-hunt or any wolf-hunt, the Lord of the Manor of Roque had left his bed while it was still quite dark, and had taken with him, completely unknown to Lady Val or Lil-Umbra or either of his two sons, the whole force of all the best Fortress-fighters who were available, and had hurried off with them to Cone Castle, where he obtained an interview with Lady Ulanda and her son. As for Baron Boncor himself, he had heard about the squadron of King's Men arriving by forced marches into Wessex and had foreseen that Friar Bacon and his Brazen Head were bound to be included in the local trouble which the arrival of this royal force was sure to bring with it. And so, knowing that nothing would stop

Lady Ulanda from rushing openly and shamelessly into the fray as long as there was the faintest chance that it might lead to the destruction of the inventor of the Head, he had already taken his own sensible counsel and nobody else's.

Having for once been able to slip out of their mutual bed without waking his infatuated lady, he had gone bare-footed to his cousin Raymond's chamber and communicated his intention to him. Raymond de Laon did exactly what his friend wanted him to do. He dressed with incredible speed, picked up a long hunting-spear with which, by climbing upon a particular buttress, he could tap on Lil-Umbra's window-sill at the Fortress, and glided, more like a beneficent spirit than an enamoured young man, out of Cone Castle and clear away from its precincts.

"Yes," he promised his cousin, "I'll hang around in the forest, clear of Perspicax's camp, till it's light enough for a talk at her window. So you get away, while the going's good. Don't give me a thought!"

So after ordering the obstreperous Turgo on no account to leave the Castle till his return, Boncor set off with only one attendant, namely a certain Bob Talirag, who had an aunt who worked there, and hurried through the forest by the first light of dawn to Bumset Priory. He felt he must see Roger Bacon and discuss the whole matter with him, not even excluding, if the Friar proved friendly, Lady Ulanda's prejudice and the unfortunate misunderstanding that had given birth to this prejudice.

But, as happens so often in our complicated world, this sensible course of action, taken by the only really wise and good ruler in that part of Wessex, was taken too late. The only person to be got hold of at that hour in Bumset Priory was Lay-Brother Tuck, who with some difficulty was roused from a drunken sleep. This was achieved by Bob Talirag, who obtained an entrance by climbing into the window of his Aunt Moll, an aged scullery-maid.

Brother Tuck, wrapt up against the chill of dawn in all his bedclothes, was soon seated on the top step of the Priory entrance, with the door open behind him. "The truth is my Lord," murmured the dishevelled and perspiring Tuck "I wake up slowly."

"Are we to enter without further parley, my Lord?" enquired Bob Talirag, who, having been brave enough to disturb his respected and formidable Aunt Moll, felt ready for anything.

But before Boncor could reply, above the muffled head of Brother Tuck, who was fully prepared to go to sleep again, appeared the already quite decently attired figure of Bob Talirag's aunt.

"I am sorry, my lord, to have to say such a thing — be quiet Bob! I'm not talking to you! — but the truth is, my lord, his Reverence the Prior is still fast asleep. And when his Reverence the Prior is asleep" — and Bob Talirag's aunt gave vent to a high-pitched chuckle of an experienced jackdaw who has already educated more than one brood of open-mouthed ignoramuses in the ways of the world— "nobody can see nobody".

"Could this young friend of yours, my dear Dame," enquired Boncor quietly, "run upstairs to ask Friar Bacon if I could come up to give him a word of warning?"

"One minute, my Lord," replied the lady, and disappeared; while Brother Tuck, who had roused himself to consciousness again under his perambulated bed-clothes, went on more obscurely than before:

"The question I asked King Stephen in my dream was the simple question: who was the giant who had so many wives that in the end they turned him into a puppy-dog and wouldn't let him do his business in his own palace? And do you know what King Stephen answered? He said the giant's name was *Boncor*! And when he uttered that name, *your* name, my lord, do you know what I heard? I heard a choir of angels singing in a great purple cloud, and do you know, my lord, what words they sang? They sang a song my granny taught me when I was young. It went something … something like this:

"If you're only good,
When you feel your heart prick,
In the depths of the wood
You will hear a Tick-Tick.
If you're only bad,
When you feel your heart burst,
You'll go howling mad
And take best for worst!
With the end of your rod
Mix honey and gall,
So that neither God
Nor the Devil gets all!
A drop of the worst
Is the way to the best:
Let the Devil take the first:
And let God have the rest!"

Bob Talirag could see that to the Baron of Cone this blasphemous jingle was by no means unpleasing; but the news brought by Auntie Moll, when the old lady returned from the interior of Bumset, was so startling that it drove away all other impressions.

It appeared that Albert the Great of Cologne had spent the night with Friar Bacon, and then, before any one in the Priory save Brother Tuck, who was too drunk to know his head from his tail, was awake, had carried the

Friar off with him, no one knew whither. Bob Talirag's aunt was pretty certain that it was to the camp of the King's Men from London that the two of them had gone, but she wouldn't swear to this.

"Well, Mistress," said Boncor, "that's where we must go! And please accept this small token of our gratitude for your information."

Saying this he must have handed her a golden coin; for the final impression Bob Talirag had of his Aunt Moll was of her supporting Lay-Brother Tuck, bed-clothes and all, with one arm, as they went in under the curved archway, while with the other she shook her clenched fist, containing the coin she had received, in an ecstasy of exultation.

XXII. THE ORACLE

If the visit of Baron Boncor of Cone to the Priory of Bumset was too late to achieve anything to the easing of the tension in Wessex, the visit of Sir Mort to Boncor's wife Ulanda and her extremely ingenuous son was, from Sir Mort's point of view, a triumphant success. He found Lady Ulanda in more than harmony with his project, and it proved easy enough, with the assistance of the lively Colin and the resolute Clamp, not to speak of the youthful Sir William, who might himself have well been called a "King's Man", to add the toughest of the Cone retainers to his own stalwarts.

"I'll come with you! I'll come with you! I'll come with you!" cried Lady Ulanda; and then to her son: "No! Never mind where your Father's gone! It's a grand chance for you to show your metal as a true knight of our King, who is a nephew of Richard the Lion-hearted! Besides, I'm coming myself! Yes! my child, your mother herself is coming! I've not got the blood of Rursuk and King Stephen for nothing; Sir Mort here agrees with me that we don't need Brazen Heads, or Grey Friars either, to guard our shores!

"Farewell good Turgo! Greet your master when he comes back, and say I told you to tell him that I shall be very angry indeed if he follows us! Tell him that, till his shoulder is entirely healed, he *must*, he *must* behave as a wounded man. Where the devil he's gone to now, only God knows! He has a way of climbing high hills before breakfast! I've never known him eat a morsel till he's been to the ridiculous top of some silly hill! I can't cure him of this madness. Yes! He's up there!" — and the besotted lady pointed solemnly to four visible uplands, one on the north, one on the south, one on the east, and one on the west, and gazed so reverently at each of these small eminences, that Sir Mort, accustomed to Lady Val's very different attitude to himself, began to wonder whether this formidable woman wouldn't have benefited by the advice, when she was a child, of Nurse Rampant or even of somebody like Mother Guggery.

She had an expression on her face as she raised it to those four uplands as if her husband had been a divine personage rather than a human one.

But Sir Mort kept saying to himself: "Remember this, my good friend. The greatest worries in life come from the heads of these Orders of fanatical men, whatever they call themselves, and it's worth while being a little rough, even with the elements you worship, if you can give a crack or two to these same bloody heads! There's this head of the Franciscans trying to make the thieves of Lost Towers into heroic crusaders, if they'll smash the Brazen Head along with its maker's head! And now here's this Cologne fellow, who's head of the Black Friars, and who's bound to be savagely hostile to every Grey Friar in the land, whether he's a Head-maker or a Head-breaker!"

In such terms did what we have been taught to call "thought" pass in and out of Sir Mort's skull. And meanwhile the whole party, made up of the best fighters of both the Fortress and Cone Castle, didn't take long in reaching the outskirts of the former. There quite suddenly and without giving the lovers time to move, they came upon Peleg and Ghosta embracing each other beneath an oak tree.

After a hurried glance at Lady Ulanda — but that pathetically infatuated devotee of her lawful mate was so occupied with hill-tops that she had no eye for the roots of oaks — Sir Mort addressed the lovers in his most friendly and direct manner. He wasn't even humorous at their expense. He took the whole thing naturally and, as some historian would have put it, "in his stride".

"I tell you what you two might do for me," he told them. "You might run into the armoury and bring out the Brazen Head. You could carry it, couldn't you, Peleg? And *you* wouldn't mind putting a hand on it, would you, lady, if the thing tottered a bit on his shoulders? You see, don't you, that if we're to finish off these devils by the help of the King's Men, we mustn't leave any hostages behind?"

It can be imagined how quickly the lovers obeyed him; and this daring worshipper of the elements was not to prod the earth, splash the rain-water in a hollow elder-stump, wave his spear in the air and brandish it towards the only star still visible, before the Mongolian Jew-giant, accompanied by Ghosta with one long white arm raised to the Thing on her friend's shoulder, rejoined the weirdly heterogeneous group that, with Ulanda in its centre blazing with love and hate, now appeared at the entrance to Lost Towers.

Lilith was already there, and Perspicax with his King's Men was already there. Never since he first fabricated his demonic lodestone, after a much longer time spent upon it than Friar Roger ever spent on the Brazen Head, had Petrus Peregrinus felt more excited than he felt at this supreme hour of his life.

He had had to earn his living under terribly heavy handicaps so as to get the leisure to study, whereas Bacon's family after the defeat of Simon de Montfort had at least recovered something, though not very much, of their considerable manorial property. Not that Friar Roger had kept one silver piece of his private inheritance. The amount he had spent— "squandered", some would say, "given back to the Devil", was a more common opinion — on his scientific labours, was really startling. But it had all gone, and now he had nothing but what he could get, as a begging Friar, from the imaginative, the pious, and the charitable.

But here they were! Yes, here was the imprisoned Friar, and here was the wandering native of Maricourt, the one watching his Brazen Head swaying to and fro on the shoulder of a Jewish giant, and the other pressing his precious lodestone against his own body as he awaited his chance, not only to prove that in his person Antichrist had actually come, but to do something with "Little Pretty" in the presence of all men, that would show the world — even if he died while showing it — that by magnetism, and by magnetism alone, did the stars move on their courses, and Suns and Moons wax and wane!

It was Albertus Magnus, and he alone, who caught the full significance of this strange conclave, which was partly a human council of war against the caprices of Nature, and partly a parliament of primitive superstitious tribes instinctively fearful of being tricked into mystic slavery to some crafty Khan of Karakorum!

The red-brown jerkins and tunics and breeches, and the red-brown caps with short brown-and-white feathers sticking out in a queerly insolent and defiant manner, either above the wearer's left ear or above his right ear, according to his individual taste, were drawn up in thick battalions on the two stony ridges in front of the main entrance to Lost Towers.

They were armed with the most deadly-looking weapons, like broad double-edged Roman sword-blades fixed into the massive handles of ordinary hunting spears. It seemed to Albertus that the King's Men under Perspicax would not have a chance of victory, even though assisted by the wilder and less disciplined retainers from Gone Castle and the Fortress.

But the Cologne teacher had hardly reached this conclusion, with which without doubt most of his efficient and practical friends in that great centre of learning would have entirely agreed, when the sort of unexpected confusion arose such as probably only that particular portion of England in the whole western half of the entire world could have evoked.

The Lord and Lady of Lost Towers were evidently quarrelling between themselves; for the man's voice and the woman's voice were clearly audible above the general hoarse murmur and the general jarring chatter.

Presently both their figures, each pushed forward, evidently by their immediate attendants, hers female, and his male, were projected through the red-black lines with their alarming weapons and forced to come forward, though it was evident to everybody that the real force of the emotional feelings of those two was directed, not against the King's men and not against the mass of men from the Fortress and from Cone, but solely against each other.

But something less personal and much more far-reaching was now beginning to happen. This dangerous disturbance did not — so it seemed to Albertus — have any connection with the quarrel between their Lord and their Lady. It sprang from among a group of serfs, who were clearly setting out to do some autumnal job in the harvest-field and had just been met by similar groups from both the manors of Cone and Roque, who had joined the free followers of their respective lords of the manor out of curiosity rather than local patriotism.

Among these were old Dod Pole, that natural-born rebel, and several of his family, including not only little Bet, his great-granddaughter, but also his granddaughter Oona, or Una as many people called her, with whom — at least so we overheard the impulsive young John declare — his brother Tilton was in love.

These serfs, tagging along with the Fortress and Cone people, had quickly become the noisiest among their whole dramatic crowd, and talking earnestly among them by this time was none other than the outlandish figure of Spardo, mounted on his horse Cheiron, at the sight of whom, as it may be well believed, the father of Tilton and young John felt some rather odd feelings!

And not only at the sight of *that* pair was it Sir Mort's destiny, that fine morning, to suffer curious sensations; for lo and behold! before his very eyes, only sufficiently far away for him not to have to undergo any immediate responsibility — and what in the devil's name had brought *them* here? — were all his own family except Lady Val herself! There they all were: John so dark and slight and eager, Tilton so massively tall and fair and impassive, yes! and even Lil-Umbra herself, on horseback as usual — how that wench *did* love riding! — and her wise and tactful knight from Laon on horseback at her side.

Thank the gods, yes! His daughter was certainly like himself and knew sound wood from rotten wood! Would he *never* be able to make Valentia more sensible? The egoism of Sir Mort was so profoundly self-centred that it never entered his head to ask of destiny the obvious question — how it was that, just on this critical day and at this crucial hour when the Master and the Mistress of Lost Towers, having exhausted their verbal artillery, had become a pair of motley antagonists, wrestling in the midst of their red-brown retainers, all the whole neighbourhood supported by the enterprising Perspicax with the King's Men should have appeared on the scene to witness the victory of defeat of one or other of these sad, mad, and absurdly fantastic persons!

But the really scrupulous historian of the reckless and quite crazy doings of all of us mortal men will have made a shrewd guess already as to the particular cause of this queer concatenation.

"O how wonderful," said Petrus Peregrinus to himself, "how wonderful, O how far beyond all I have ever hoped or imagined or dreamed could happen to me, to actually be selected by" — he was going to utter the word "Providence" but just stopped himself in time!— "by Destiny, to be the Antichrist himself, the real, actual, historic person predicted by every prophet who ever prophesied from the foundation of the world!"

Deep into the top-curve of the bony arch between his belly and his thighs, and just above his generative organs, Petrus had dug the blunt, thick, staring-eyed cranium of the demonic lodestone he persisted in calling "Little Pretty", and while he dug it into himself, he had summoned into his presence every living person old or young, male or female, he had ever met or ever heard of in that district.

"I'll have your false heart out of you!" cried the Lady of Lost Towers.

"I'll tear the devil's-dam tongue out of your hell's throat for you!" cried the Lord of Lost Towers.

And then, before either Bonaventura in his grey robe or Albertus in his black robe could force a passage through the red-brown mêlée, some devoted adherent of the mistress of the Castle smashed the master's skull with a heavy stone, and some furious armour-bearer of the murdered Maldung knelt on the lady and strangled her to death with his two hands, before his own head was severed from his crouching body and all three corpses were soaked in his blood.

For several seconds there was a ghastly hush after this, as if over that whole worked-up mass of human creatures an enormous dark feather had fallen from the Empyrean, a feather struck from the wing of the Eagle of Zeus by the lightning-swift descent of some falling star.

Then the whole company of serfs who were present — those who had been following old Dod Pole, their one revolutionary mouth-piece, as well as those who were on their way to their labour in the fields — moved instinctively forward, while Dod Pole himself, leaping up from their midst upon the marble pedestal of the broken and prostrate figure of some forgotten Roman ruler, almost hidden now under yellow moss and white lichen and tiny ferns, began an exultant threnody over all the deaths of all the wrongful owners of a planet that should be owned in common by all mankind.

“I call upon you, my brothers and fellow workers,” cried old Dod Pole, in that trumpet-toned voice which had made him the prophet of those Wessex serfs for the last half century, “I call upon you to let these manor-lords, with their reeves and their bailiffs and their priests and their prelates, know, once for all, how we, the people of the West Country, really regard them and hold them! We hold them in contempt! We hold them to be thieves and robbers who claim the hell-born and not heaven-born right to hand down their stolen property from generation to generation!

“Yes, my friends, it is we who plough and sow and plant and reap and gather the harvest and bake the bread and butcher the meat! It is we, the shepherds and the hedge-planters, we, the cattle-tenders and the swine-herders, who own this sacred and holy and God-given earth of ours! Did these manor-lords create the earth? Did these water-lords create the seas and the rivers and the lakes and the ponds? Did they create the beasts of the earth and the fishes of the sea? Was it at their command that the birds of the air first spread their wings?

“Come, my friends, my companions, my brothers, let us make haste to show to these land-robbers and sea-shore thieves what their true position on this earth really is! They are all the same, every one of them! Handing down they are what they’ve stolen, from father to son, and son to grandson; and all the good earth and all the precious sea-shore of which they have robbed us curses them as wicked thieves! Come let us show them what we think of them! *To your tents, O Israel!*”

There must have been some immemorial power in this final cry, uttered in a really terrifying voice by old Dod Pole; for a most striking result followed at once, followed with that thundering finality that mankind knows as the most awe-inspiring sound in all human experience — a reverberating echo.

"Off with ye! Off with ye!" were now the words that rose from that whole heaving mass of red-brown rascality; and what they all proceeded to do came with the shock of a long-predicted earthquake that has now come. They tore off their mud-coloured tunics and jerkins, yes! and even in some cases their breeches too; though it interested the half-mad intelligence of Sir Mort to note that they had the wit — and he smiled sympathetically as he observed this — to throw nothing away.

Warm though the sun was, there was quite enough of autumn already in the air to make this a natural gesture, especially as the marshes and swamps to the west of Lost Towers only ended at the sand-dunes of the channel.

What most of them did was to wrap their mud-coloured vestments round their necks, though some, it is true, made bundles of them which they carried under their arms or even on their heads. But it was to the beat of the reverberating echo of Dod Pole's "Off with ye!" that they vanished among the pine-trunks of the forest and the reedstalks of the swamp.

And so now, wholly devoid of any defence at all, the great gates of the ancient stronghold of Lost Towers stood wide open. And they stood open in front of the most fantastic conglomeration of people that had ever gathered together in that part of Wessex for any purpose, whether in the stone age, or in the bronze age, or in the age of King Arthur.

The whole company gazed in silence upon those open doors at the base of that huge tower; and it was as if their united will-power had called upon Lilith to appear. For there, before the whole lot of them, Lilith now defiantly stood; and it seemed as if, in her complete loneliness, she were uttering a contemptuous challenge to every event and every object and every earthly person and every super-earthly person in the entire multiverse.

And Petrus Peregrinus, as he watched her, felt an overpowering wave of emotion sweep over him. "Yes!" he thought. "*You*, and you alone, come what may, in this world or any other world, are my one true love, and with you at my side I shall feel myself to be the real and only real Antichrist, destined by the creative power of Nature herself to destroy once and for all this poisonous, this corrupt, this rotten, this suppurating, this decomposing, this infecting, this contaminatory, this fulsome, this fetid, this fatal farce of an explanation of life, based on a crazy belief in the Persons of the Trinity."

Rendered almost heroic, cruel coward as he was, by this wild resurgence of his love for Lilith, Petrus of Maricourt rushed up the slope, and leaping over the corpses and splashing through the blood, was on the point of ascending the stone pavement in the centre of which she stood, when between them, hot and perspiring with the effort he was making, appeared in grey and greedy stateliness, the figure of Bonaventura.

"O St. Francis, help your child now or never!" was what the man prayed; and with every nerve in his body he announced to himself, "This is my moment! I shall be the next Pope myself or the appointer of the next Pope! I *must* lay my hand, before this whole crowd, upon this girl's head!"

In the twinkling of an eye, yes! in the pulse-beat of the most incorrigible vein in his whole body, Petrus turned the blunt thickskulled cranium of his "Little Pretty" full upon this grey-garbed interloper. "Off you go, my stately friend!" he murmured in his heart as he kept the other end — the "tail" we might call it — of his deadly lodestone pressed tight against himself.

Nor was the response for a second in doubt.

“That girl is too great a temptation!” the appointer of Popes told himself. “I should do for myself if I touched the tip of her fingers! A person can’t have it both ways! In a country of devils such as this England is, a natural-born Saint like me can make no headway. I have heard that even their famous Robert Grosseteste thought sometimes about making Brazen Images that could speak! No! Where there is any northern influence at all some sort of devilry’s sure to enter.

“Yes, dear God, I hear you, dear God, you are the only one in the whole world who understands me, I hear you clearly! You are advising me to take ship at once for France, and when well across their channel of sea-devils to make my way to Dijon and then to Avignon. No! I’ll be too dignified to bid anybody farewell. I expect they will listen all the better to that shallow orator from Cologne.

“They tell me that he, just like this Bacon from Ilchester, has long been promising all the boys who come to see him, especially if they come from Italy, grants from the Pope, for O! how he longs to put a little devilry from the north into the mind of that pupil of his called Aquinas! But you won’t succeed, you ugly great lecturer on the loves of bed-bugs and on the moral yearnings of will-o’-the-wisps! You won’t succeed!

“No! No! The north will always breed new devils for the south to exorcize. Yes, I must be off at once to the nearest sea-port. Why! There is that funny horse with the swollen neck, and that crazy fellow who takes it about! God must have sent that pair especially to take me to the coast!”

With these words comforting his heart, Bonaventura strode off. He knew well that he, the great Franciscan Pope-maker, if not the next Pope, was simply running away. But he justified his precipitate flight on the sound rational ground — and the unprejudiced chronicler must recognize that this *was* an authentic justification — that to be defeated in single spiritual combat by Albertus would be a much more serious blow to his personal career than a swift strategic retreat, a retreat which could always be explained as a sudden imperative call from Rome.

With all these thoughts settling themselves in his mind he now strode with as much dignity and self-possession down the slope as he had done a few minutes earlier up the slope, and even Albertus himself couldn’t resist observing with a sort of humorous self-derogatory admiration, that was almost like the feeling of a rival athlete, the way Bonaventura managed his feet and his steps under that grey robe as he descended, calling aloud in authoritative tones to Spardo, and, when at Cheiron’s side, hesitating not a second to mount the animal, an effort which he carried through with dignified ease and even with a certain grace.

Spardo himself, it must be confessed, was not greatly pleased by being taken possession of in this wholesale manner. Even if his employment by Bonaventura turned out well as a matter of business, he was not the son of his father for nothing. There was something ignoble in forsaking this tragic drama at the crucial point. But what was the alternative?

Cheiron was responding with interest to the way Bonaventura managed the reins; and the best thing he himself could do now was to make an exit worthy of leaving Lost Towers to its fate. And a dramatic exit he did manage to make. He suddenly seized, as he followed Cheiron and Cheiron’s stately rider, one of the massive pikestaves, which were really very dangerous weapons, carried by the King’s Men.

The person whose weapon Spardo seized naturally refused to relinquish it, until Perspicax himself, who was only a few paces away and who wasn’t at all anxious to start trouble, gave the man a nod to let him have the thing. Once in his possession none of the King’s Men, nor any member of any conceivable body-guard of royal persons, could have handled this weapon, in which the piercingness of a spear is mingled in such appalling unity with the cleavingness of an axe, more professionally than Spardo.

“Bastard I may be,” every swing and sweep of his feather-like beard seemed to chant to the hairy flanks of Cheiron and the flapping skirts of Bonaventura, “Bastard I may be, but my father was a King! Where is there a King here, among these petty baronies and manories and flanories? Kings of Bohemia are Kings indeed; and, as the song says, ‘the heart of the laurel is in its seed’; but these scrabblement codfish blown in from the sea haven’t got a King nearer than London; and the one they’ve got is a dying one, ‘fed upon pap and sleeping on sap’, as the song says.”

To feel this terrific weapon in his hand, and to feel that with it he could destroy anyone he wished at any moment, gave Spardo such lively satisfaction that it reconciled him to following his horse and its stately rider, even though it meant his own departure from this memorable scene; but by keeping a firm hold with his free hand on the back of Cheiron’s saddle he considerably reduced the pace of their retirement.

After using all his own magnetic will-power in addition to all the magnetism in his precious lodestone, to bring everybody to this particular spot, Petrus Peregrinus was beginning to find that it was easier to bring people together than to manage them when they were brought. Here certainly they all were!

But he knew only too well, as pressing “Little Pretty’s” oblong cranium harder and harder against himself, he awaited the next move of chance or providence, that his own future was anything but assured.

Suddenly he became aware that, not only was the black-robed form of Albertus Magnus approaching him, but that the gigantic figure of Peleg, carrying the Brazen Head itself on his shoulder, with Ghosta at his side with one arm raised to help in supporting the thing’s weight, was also, yard by yard, slowly ascending the slope.

What unluckily nobody had seen — or luckily perhaps, for who can tell from what horrors to be safely dead may save any of us — was that by the force of his scientific magnetism Petrus had drawn Heber Sygerius, the old ex-bailiff himself, out of Sir Mort’s “Little Room”, and dragged him all through the forest, and not by the easiest route either, till he sank absolutely exhausted, just where this particular trail ended, at the foot of the Lost Towers slope.

Old Heber knew exactly where he was; and the odd thing was that, though totally exhausted and unable to advance another step, he felt, as he stretched himself out on the warm, dead, dry, brown pine-needles, and allowed his whole body to relax and his whole being to sink down and down and down and down into a deep delicious bed of submission to the need for everlasting rest, a wave of greater happiness than he had ever known in all his long life.

It may well be that what gives to the wind along that Wessex coast its indescribable mixture of vague sorrow and wild obscure joy comes from its passing, on its unpredictable path, the floating hair of so many love-lorn maidens and the wild-tossed beards of so many desolate old men.

As it blew now across those forests and those swamps, it might have been suspected of taking a goblinish delight in switching and twitching and bewitching the crazy wisps that fluttered this way and that from Spardo’s chin. Was its long-drawn wail made deeper, was its wild exultation made shriller, when it became the choric accompaniment to Spardo’s careless killing of the one man in all that place who had prayed morning by morning and night by night for years that he might perish by just such a stroke and cross Acheron while he slept? For with the weapon he had snatched the Bohemian Bastard beheaded old Heber.

It must have been his awareness of the black-robed teacher from Cologne advancing so rapidly up the slope behind him that made Peter Peregrinus start running towards Lilith, as she stood defying all possible universes with her slender girlish back to the open doors of the absolutely empty and deserted Lost Towers. When he was just beneath her and only a foot or so below her, he gazed passionately at her face. He not only felt an over-mastering longing to possess her, but a longing to possess her in complete solitude. And where could he find such solitude if not within the mysterious castle before him, at whose entrance she stood?

But as he gazed at her he saw to his dismay that there had come into her face a look of horror at him and of loathing of him and of contempt for him, such as he had never seen upon anyone’s face before.

“All the same for that”, as Homer puts it when he deals with these crises in human affairs, Petrus moved towards her. What drove him, what actuated him was clear enough. The difficult question for any chronicler to decide is the question as to whence within the almost closed circle of this strange man’s consciousness he drew the strength, the energy, the spirit, to enable him to risk all, in this almost heroic manner? For *that he was risking all* was a truth he felt in himself, and of which he had not the slightest doubt.

And yet, cold-blooded, calculating, unscrupulous egoist as he was, he could not have been blind to the fact that there was no reason in the ordinary natural course of events why anyone, who so far had derived all sorts of thrilling feelings from being alone in life and being absolutely impervious to everything save his own private, uncommitted responses to life, should run a risk of this magnitude. Yes, from what region, or channel, or nerve in his being, did he derive the courage to take such a chance? Is it perhaps that in the lives of all human beings there come moments when some particular desire — in Peregrinus's case just now, what we call "the passion of love" — drives such a sharp wedge into the rocky substance of our animal nature that it goes clean through it, leaving a slit or crevice or crack in the mysterious thing that Grosseteste taught Roger Bacon to analyse very carefully, the thing which the theologians declared to be the vegetative soul of the foetus developing a nutritive soul, which is thus laid open for "Something", we can call it a rational soul, to enter from the limitless Outside when the infant is born.

Yes, he was risking his all and he knew it. And yet with this strength that came to him from somewhere outside himself, perhaps from the great "Outside" of all our planetary struggles, he still went forward, pressing the lodestone desperately against the fork of his body and repeating hoarsely in the depths of his being: "I am Antichrist! I am Antichrist!"

Lilith retreated till she was in the space between the two big doors; then seizing them both with outstretched arms, she tried to shut herself inside. But she was too late; and it was together, and with a combined effort, that they finally got the great doors shut and barred, leaving only their dark woodwork in the centre of that vast structure of stone as the target for all that crowd of onlookers.

Only one of the numerous people, whom the demonic power in Peter of Maricourt's lodestone had succeeded in gathering before those closed gates, gave any thought at that moment to what was happening behind those closed doors, and that one was Roger Bacon.

"It is like what went on," he told himself, "between the Devil and the first wife of Adam; the very same devil who a little later was present at the creation of Eve. If I weren't so tired I'd work out a clear map of these zodiacal revolutions in Time and Space."

It was indeed only natural that our Friar felt "tired" as he had not been out of his prison-chamber for more than a year. But he felt in good spirits and extremely interested in all he saw. So he seated himself on the mossy root of the oldest oak-tree in sight, a tree that might well have been an offshoot of the yet older one on which the bird rested who first brought to Britain the news of the death of Jesus; and from this secure position, as he contemplated the crowd and watched his own creation, the Brazen Head, balanced on the shoulder of Peleg and supported by what Homer would have called the "leukolenian" arm of the stately Ghosta, he allowed his mind to drift in a mood of fascinated wonder over the long eddies and aberrations of mankind's historic pilgrimage down the ages, pondering upon its pathetic, humorous, and tragical struggles with itself, with Nature, and with the innumerable false prophets and false gods who from the beginning have led us all astray.

But as he rested under that oak, half-awake and half-asleep and unusually happy, he suddenly became aware, by no very unnatural thought-transference, of the laboured approach to his side of none other than Lay-Brother Tuck from the Priory. The most hostile historian could have caught nothing but friendly amusement in the tone wherein this anticipator of all mankind's wildest inventions replied to this interruption when he heard himself greeted by Brother Tuck.

"Sit down, Brother," was all the Friar said. "So you've come for me, have you? Well, well! We shan't have any trouble except in our own legs as we go back. O no! I haven't the faintest intention of leaving my room in the Priory, my 'Prison' some call it, but you and I know better! We know how little I regard it as anything like that! What did I become a Friar for? Wasn't it for a quiet study to work in? You know *that*, Tuck old friend, as well as I do! Nobody but you, Tuck old rogue — Here! Sit you down here! You must be fairly done in after all that distance! — nobody but you knows what racy stories go round in our rollicking Bumset!

“Yes, and nobody but I know what a patient listener you are, my dear, to my irreverent gossip about the so-called ‘makers of history’, whose crazy ideas I have to describe to the Holy Father to prove I’m not idling away my time.

“Just look at all these people, Tuck! Just look at them! Do you know what got them here? I can’t tell you exactly; but I can tell you this much. It has to do with a discovery in magnetism by this acquaintance of mine — I hesitate to call him a friend, as, to confess the truth, I’m rather scared of him and a bit nervous — I always *have* been since I first encountered the man *somewhere* abroad — I don’t think it was in Paris — a bit nervous — you know how cowardly I am, Tuck old friend! — that he might start his magnetic experiments on me!

“But let him go. And by God, he has gone! He’s behind those barred gates now, practising on young Mistress Lilith, who’s just watched her parents murder each other, and seen all their people and all their serfs bolt after a speech by Dod Pole! Yes, that Lilith-girl watched her father and mother fight to the death; and then saw all her people, both bond and free, strip off their clothes and rush away into the woods and marshes!

“Old Dod Pole made one of those orations of his that everyone’s been telling me about. And do you know, Tuck my friend, the old boy struck some note in my midriff that brought back to my mind a scene at Montacute when — but what on earth is that Dominican from Cologne, and a demi-semi bishop he is, too, preaching about now up there? Can you catch what he’s saying?”

It was clear enough that Brother Tuck *had* caught very distinctly one point anyway in the Dominican’s speech: “Well! I never thought I’d live to hear — —” he now cried out.

Roger Bacon turned to him with the most lively interest. “Hear what? For God’s sake, old friend, stop chuckling like an enamoured goblin and tell me what the fellow’s saying! You’ve had lots of foreigners in your kitchen and ought to know their accent by now! My long walk to this confounded place and this wild wind and the whistling of those King’s Men seem to have made me stone deaf.”

Lay-Brother Tuck rose on his toes, for the angel who presided at his birth had decreed that, if he was to be the merriest of the sons of his mother, he must consent to be the shortest. He also seized a branch of the oak above the Friar’s head and hoisted himself up a little, placing a screen of leaves between Roger Bacon and the astonishing spectacle before him.

But the Friar had trained himself too long to accept such crampings of vision to fall into a rage because he now couldn’t see this black-robed figure at the gate of Lost Towers any better than he could hear him.

“He’s got a thing on his head,” announced Brother Tuck, “more like a turban than a mitre.”

“Never mind what he’s got on his head, Tuck. Tell me, for Jesus’s sake, what the fellow’s saying.”

“He’s offering to marry anybody who wants to be married.”

“Nonsense, Tuck! Nonsense! No priest of our time, even if he were Archbishop of Ireland, would stand on a hill before the gates of Hell and offer marriage to the world!”

“But he is, he is! I tell you, Friar, he is! He’s saying that the great evil of our time is that people don’t marry early enough!”

“Not early enough, Tuck! God in Heaven! Haven’t I been trying all my life to stop this curst habit of marrying little girls of twelve to old men of sixty? Not early enough! What will these doctors of theology want to do next? Marry babies to each other? Marry foetuses in separate wombs, on the chance that they turn out of opposite sexes?

“The truth must be that we monks and nuns and friars are finding our celibate life so indescribably tedious that we want to increase the number of these kicking, scratching, biting, beating, strangling couples, in order that we can at least feel thankful we’re free from the claws of a mate! But shall we never see, O my turtle-dove of Tucks, that it’s our mania for marriage itself that’s spoiling our world? Nature can provide us with loyal and faithful mates without our having formally to create such monstrosities of scratching and clawing.”

Friar Roger continued for several minutes this diatribe against marriage; but Lay-Brother Tuck was by this time far too fascinated by what was going on to pay his metaphysical friend any further attention.

Roger Bacon’s own mind, however, was itself soon wandering from the problem of marriage. It was of astrology he was thinking now as he stared heavenward above the left buttock of Brother Tuck and through an impenetrable mass of oak-leaves. Thus it was not the mid-day sunshine beating down on the black robes and elaborate head-dress of the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas that the inventor of the Brazen Head was now beholding, but the black abysses of the star-sprinkled midnight sky wherein he saw, although many of them would in reality when midnight came have been totally invisible, all the stars that were important as signs of the zodiac.

But something in the whole atmosphere of this particular spot on the earth’s surface at this particular moment soon forced our great scientist’s mind back upon the religious creed which from childhood he had been taught to take for granted.

He shut his eyes to both the blue sun-bright sky of reality and the black starlit sky of his imagination and began murmuring to himself:

“Dicit ut audiat vocem Domini et vocem angelorum et videat angelos transfiguratos — He says that he heard the voice of the Lord and the voice of angels and that he saw transfigured angels.

“Christo vero habuit divinum testimonium, quod testimonium Deus Pater fecit ei — Christ truly had a divine testimony, namely the testimony which God the Father himself made on his behalf.

“Hic est Filius Meus dilectus in quo mihti complacuit. This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

Had some observant passer-by, endowed, let us suppose, with the power of reading a person’s thoughts, caught the drift of the Friar’s murmured words, he might well have been astonished that so great a scientist, whose inventions were beginning to be the wonder of the whole intellectual world, should be muttering at a crisis like this sentences that were involved in the very foundation of the Christian faith. The truth was that Roger Bacon had taken Aristotle for granted with one side of his nature, and the New Testament equally for granted with the other side of his nature, and had never, as Albertus of Cologne did, brought them into logical opposition to each other and into logical relation with each other.

But, after all, Friar Roger’s ways are the ways of Nature herself in regard to these abysmal matters. Out of the confusion which she seems to prefer to any orderly workshop, Nature seems anxious to thicken out the drama she has inaugurated by creating ironic commentaries upon her own doings, whose choruses are not so much the expression of approval or disapproval as of humorous recognition, and produce the effect of a faint orchestral accompaniment, an accompaniment that reaches us from extremely far away and possibly from a sphere totally different from our own.

If Friar Bacon had not been so absorbed in his interior vision of the signs of the zodiac and of the relation between Mercurius and Virgo and in the agitating conclusion he had reached — for to him by far the most interesting aspect of astronomy was astrology — about the perilous influence of our earthly satellite, the Moon— “Luna significat super-nigromanciam et mendacium — The moon is significant of higher black magic and trickery” — he would have doubtless had some striking commentary to make upon what was now going on in front of those closed gates of Lost Towers.

All that morning Albertus Magnus had been saying to himself: “Whatever it was that brought all these people here and brought me on the top of them all, I’d be worse than the self-conscious fool I am if I didn’t take advantage of it in some way. That’s what’s the matter with me. I’m no good at creating situations. I just accept them and make the necessary plunges and darts and dives and gestures as seem called for.

“The one single act of my whole life” — so the great teacher’s thoughts ran on, even after he had begun acting his part for today— “that I did entirely on my own and under no influence from outside was when I gave up that bishopric: aye!” and Albertus indulged in a grotesque dramatic shudder and wrinkled up all his malleable features; “aye! aye! but it was an appalling experience, those two years of being a bishop! But what on earth am I going to do with this chance the Lord has thrown in my path?”

And then the inspiration came to him.

“Sex is the maddest force there is. Why then not consecrate this madness? All the way down the history of our race — not to speak of certain beasts and birds — males and females have gone through curious ceremonies to celebrate this union. When we Christianize marriage, it is to demonstrate our share in Christ’s own desperate and eternal act of faith that

He was the Son of God. Sex is the greatest pleasure and the greatest pain in life; and the ceremonious consecration of the joining together of sex-mates has been the instinctive retort of all animal life to the insanity of sex from the beginning of the world.”

Thus did the thoughts of Albertus Magnus run on, even while he began the quaint performance into which his “guardian angel”, or, if you like, “his conscience” — although that word introduces just as many insoluble riddles — had now precipitated him.

“Come hither my son Tilton, sculptor and carver and builder of a shrine! Come hither my daughter Una, of the family of Pole, largest of all the families upon the said manor! If you Tilton take you Una to be your wedded wife, and if you Una take you Tilton to be your wedded husband, all the old deep rifts, between those who work on the land and those who own and fight for the land, will be healed!”

To the absolute amazement of Brother Tuck and of a good many others of those who were watching this queer scene, but not to the surprise of young John, who was now standing at Sir Mort’s side and explaining to him more things than Sir Mort could or would or can be imagined ever wanting to understand, both Tilton and Una now appeared hand-in-hand before Albertus Magnus.

So accustomed was Albertus to this particular ceremony, every word of which he knew by heart, that it was not long before this pair’s union was consecrated, consecrated before men and before birds and beasts and angels and demons, consecrated as one flesh.

This had no sooner been done than bursting forth from the band of people who surrounded Sir Mort, and followed with obvious anxiety by both the Baron Boncor and his boy-knight Sir William, there emerged in a furious rush of frenzy like a shrieking Valkyrie the figure of Lady Ulanda, whose whole body — since to increase her speed, or perhaps deliberately to enhance the effect of her wrath, she kept tearing from her person one flimsy garment after another — was positively contorted with emotion.

It was purely against Friar Bacon that her anger was directed; for, by his cold refusal on that one fatal visit of hers to his room, to play the part of her dresser-up and devoted medico-magico, he had hurt that centre of a woman's life-illusion, a blow to which goes deeper into her essential being than if you cut off one of her arms at the wrist or one of her feet at the ankle.

When she reached the spot where the gigantic Peleg was standing, with Roger Bacon's Brazen Head upon his shoulder, to the pedestal of which — for the Head had nothing except that neck upon which Ghosta had confessed to have had, in complete nakedness, a mysterious sexual ecstasy — Ghosta's perfect white arms were now raised, Ulanda for one second stood still.

Then with a wild cry she flung herself, not only against the weird Object, alive and yet not alive, created by the Friar, but upon all three of them, clawing at Peleg's throat with one hand, seizing Ghosta's right arm with the other, and shaking them both so violently that the Brazen Head fell to the ground!

By what some would call Providence, others Chance, and yet others the protective power of the Devil, the Brazen Head descended to the earth the right way up, and indeed sank into a patch of grass so smoothly and easily that it rested there at once in complete quiescence, as if that little patch of greenery had risen to meet it out of the abyss as its destined home.

There was something about this startling event, whether you considered it an event in favour of the Head or against the interest of the Head, that affected everybody who was looking on. The person who was most affected was young John; for his link with Roger Bacon was so intimate and close that to see Roger's creation fall from the giant Peleg's shoulder clear to the ground was more than young John's heart could bear, and he acted as a child might have done.

He fell on his knees, covered his face with his hands, and burst into a fit of violent sobbing and weeping. Young John's sobs, however, since he knelt on the ground and pressed his hands to his face, were not loud enough to turn people's attention away from Albertus Magnus.

This simple-minded great man, who had become without knowing it the most important teacher in the world, having successfully married John's dear brother Tilton to the beautiful Una or Oona and thus having ended the feud between the old rebel Dod Pole and the bailiff-family of Sygerius, had evidently, in that energetic innocence and inspired foolhardiness that characterized him, decided to continue his marriage campaign and had summoned, loudly and clearly, Raymond de Laon and Lil-Umbra to come before him.

The sound of their names roused Sir Mort from the trance he'd fallen into, a trance, or a cessation of every bodily activity save breath and pulse and heart-beat, which was more familiar to his family than any other mood of his, but which covered in reality a much more consciously philosophical attitude to life than Lady Val or his three children realized.

Sir Mort was a queer mixture of a predatory animal with the sort of animal that predatory creatures, including men, are so addicted to hunting: and it now struck him that here was a supreme opportunity for an absolute escape from all those accompaniments of marriage that Lady Val would most certainly have insisted upon. It pleased him also to note that Lady Ulanda, who was now clinging to her husband's arm with an expression of abandoned and doting felicity, was evidently beside herself with satisfaction at having caused the collapse of Roger Bacon's Brazen Head, even if no further than to the ground.

It was a lucky thing for young John, this abrupt and unexpected summons of Lil-Umbra and her betrothed Raymond to this unpremeditated exchange of marriage vows; for Tilton and his bride had roused Sir Mort from his "hunter's trance," and were conversing eagerly with him, and there was no one immediately available to hold the horses of these new candidates for the marriage sacrament. So that it fell to the lot of young John to stand between these two horses, one of which was called "Rip" and the other "Strip", and get a tight hold on both pairs of reins.

The impetuously well-meaning Albertus was himself just then a little bit worried by a tickling at the back of one of his ears, which he erroneously fancied to be due to some mis-arrangement of his head-dress, but which really was caused by the fluttering of a midge. And it was this small annoyance that made him completely forget to use one rather important sentence in the course of the ceremony, a sentence the omission of which made no real difference but had an odd effect. But though the excited Lil-Umbra did not notice this lapse, her calmer companion stored it up in his mind as one of those humorous accidents that seem intentionally to disturb the dignity of our human life upon earth as a professional fool rattles his bells.

Although the accident to the Brazen Head had set John weeping like a child it now became necessary for him to take the two horses down the hill, where he tied them, with the help of Lay-Brother Tuck, to Friar Bacon's oak-tree.

It was a much less agitating meeting than he expected that young John had then with his adored master. The Friar treated him, he noticed, with deep pride and satisfaction, rather as a responsible fully grown-up man and as an equal, than as a pupil or disciple.

"You and I mustn't let ourselves," the Friar told him quietly, "get too agitated, whatever they do to our Brazen Head. We know he is, poor old dear, only about a fiftieth part of a real person. We've given him the power of calculation along certain lines; and I *hope*, though I am not quite sure about that, that in a great crisis he might even speak. But I am afraid the poor dear is still devoid of real life, for so far we haven't learnt the art of creating life, though we may learn it before we've done.

"But we must remember that all living creatures, even worms and insects and sea-shells, have a consciousness of being themselves and only themselves, and have the power of saying to themselves like Jehovah, *I am that I am*. I wish I could believe that our poor old Brazen Head, whom an angry woman just now threw to the ground, has the power of saying to itself: 'I am the Brazen Head, made by Roger Bacon. I am as much of a real conscious self as that daddy-long-legs now resting on my shoulder!'"

Young John couldn't even smile at this, for the occasion was too serious. Pressing his knuckles against his own cheek to prevent the flush he felt mounting up under his skin, he boldly asked him a very delicate and crucial question.

"I needn't tell you, Father," he said, "how you have always taken the place for me since I was a boy of all other human loves and devotions. When I think of embracing anyone or of being embraced and of the closest intimacies" — at this point, as he felt his cheeks begin to burn, he thought with relief that, in the burning sun-ray that poured between those branches, nothing of what he experienced beneath his skin could possibly be observed — "I seem never able to think of anybody but of you, my beloved master. Now that Tilton, my elder brother, has found a mate, it's not, I hope, my duty to marry anybody, or. to have children by anybody. Nor, as long as I feel no special call to join a religious order, is it, I hope, my duty to become a monk or a friar? What I want to do, master most dear, is to serve you and help you, until I die. When you let me take that ‘Opus’ of yours abroad and place it where I knew it would reach the Holy Father, I felt happier than I’d ever been in my life before. You don’t think, master, do you, that I’m shirking my duty by refusing to marry and have children?”

Friar Bacon only revealed by a very faint trembling in his voice how deeply he was affected by his pupil’s words. What he said was emphatic and definite.

“As long as we are considerate to other people,” he said, “and as kind and sympathetic towards them as our circumstances permit, we have all got to live to ourselves, for ourselves, in ourselves and by ourselves. This is how, as Aristotle teaches, matter produces us out of itself, as a product to satisfy its deep ‘privation’, or its desperate yearning and craving to possess what it feels *could* proceed from it, but what, so far in its long history, has *not* proceeded from it!

“You, my son, have so far dedicated your whole life to learning. And as long as you feel thus impelled, I think you should so continue. But on the other hand if by fate or chance you met a girl you loved, and who loved you, I would say you had better marry and use your education to help this old world of ours out of its ignorance in some practical and active way.

“As long as I am alive I shall cling to your help and hold fast to your love as the most precious help and the most sacred love that life has allowed me to know. And when death divides us, remember this. The fruits of a learning that has been harder than slavery to acquire will be sweeter than the roses of Sharon to enjoy.”

Ghosta had sunk down beside the Brazen Head the moment it was upon the ground, and she was still pressing the palms of her hands against its neck and against its shoulders and upon its implacably oracular chin. She wasn't weeping as John had wept, but she was evidently affected by some strong interior emotion.

And it would have been clear to anyone present at this unusual scene, whose interest had been aroused by these two immigrants from Palestine, that the gigantic Peleg, who was standing over her, was not a little disturbed by this emotion of hers.

"Have mercy upon me Almighty Jehovah, Lord God of Israel, Lord God of Sarah and Leah, of Rachel and Rebecca!" this proud, reserved, and most beautiful daughter of Israel prayed. And as she prayed, she reminded herself that in a certain sense she had quite deliberately mingled her virginal life in a weird erotic ecstasy with the sub-human, sub-animal, sub-vegetable life of this Brazen Head beside her.

"Is there," she allowed herself to whisper to the thing, "is there any way I can get rid of this mad terror I have of the passing of time?"

But Ghosta and Peleg weren't the only pair of lovers brought to that place by the magnetism of "Little Pretty."

"What is it my angel?" asked Raymond de Laon of Lil-Umbra, as in their new relation they descended the slope towards their horses. "Are you hurt? Are you afraid? Have you seen something? Have you thought of something?"

For the first time since they first met Raymond noticed that Lil-Umbra had difficulty in replying. But with an effort she spoke clearly and distinctly.

"Something terrible is going to happen! I feel it all through me. But not to us, Raymond; no, not to you or to me. But stop, Raymond. Turn and look at those closed doors!"

He gazed at her in silence, and they both swung round, her eyes wide and terrified, staring at the entrance to the Castle, but his still fixed on her face. But as so often happens in a human crisis, they were suddenly jerked out of their tension by a voice at Raymond's side; and there, close at his elbow, was none other than Lay-Brother Tuck!

"He's gone to sleep, my lord of Laon! He's gone to sleep, my lady of Leon! And I thought perhaps you'd take him back to the Priory on one of your horses and perhaps take me on the other! If you will agree to celebrate your union by this great charity before going to — to wherever you *are* going for your wedding-night — to the Fortress I expect — I can promise you not only my own special prayers, but the special prayers of the whole Priory of Bumset!

"The most lucky first night," Brother Tuck went on, "that a bride and bridegroom can possibly have for their first bed together is a great and sweet charity, such as it would be to both me and the Friar if you found it in you to do for us this gallant and beautiful deed!"

Lay-Brother Tuck now began to bob and babble and bubble and burble round them so buoyantly that the tender clasp with which Lil-Umbra was holding Raymond's hand became first an indignant pressure and then an angry clutch.

"Bridegroom with Bride you be!" he went on. "And I be a'begging of 'ee to let me's wone baby-self and Friar's man-mighty self sit astride of your 'osses while you makes 'em gallop. 'Gallopy up and gallopy to it! Gie her a sup and she'll let 'un do it!' Don't 'ee understand, O most elegant lord of far-away Leon, that if the blessed Friar be behind she, and me wone self be behind thee, it won't take long to be at Priory door; and a holy charity you'll have performed."

Lay-Brother Tuck kept bobbing round them so vigorously and making with his short bare arms so many effective if quite inaudible shoo-ings and shush-ings that, in their present dazed state, Lil-Umbra upset by her premonition of catastrophe, and Raymond wondering what Lady Val would say if they *did* follow Tuck's suggestion and spend their wedding night in the Fortress, they were rushed down the hill just as if they'd been a goose and a gander, until they actually reached the oak under which Friar Bacon, in complete abstraction from all immediate events, was composing one of his most comprehensive sentences as to the relation between astronomy and astrology; and before they really knew what had happened to them, they were cantering rapidly towards Bumset and towards an extremely bewildered reception by Prior Bog.

Albertus Magnus of Cologne, having finished what in the energetic and impulsive simplicity of his mind he had suddenly conceived to be the will of the Maker and Sustainer of our incomprehensible universe, came slowly down the slope towards the group of manorial lords and their families who now surrounded Tilton and his bride Una. To the end of that generation some sticklers for local tradition persisted in calling Una by the more romantic name of Oona; and in his desire to make his brother as poetical as he could, so that he might be as far as possible from his own scientific and philosophical ideal, young John always warmly and ardently supported the Oona side in the division of opinion as to this maiden's name.

Indeed it more than once crossed the mind of Lil-Umbra, when she noted Tilton's interest in this beautiful member of what might be called the revolutionary family of old Dod Pole, whose influence was so great among the serfs of the Manor of Roque, that there was really something more daring and unconventional about Tilton's unashamed attraction to a girl of this class than in all young John’s free-thinking attitude towards the foundations of the Christian faith.

What on earth their mother would think, what on earth their mother would feel, what on earth their mother would do and say, when Tilton and his bride, whether she was called Una or Oona, got home to the family hearth that night, she hardly dared to imagine.

“I mustn’t, I *can’t* wish this man from Cologne hadn’t come among us,” she said to herself. “But with Mother’s excitable nerves where anything to do with marriage comes in, and her sensitiveness about noble blood and noble manners, she may be furious with Father for letting this Albertus marry us off like this, as calmly as a Spanish prince breeds Arabian horses!”

But it was not of Tilton’s bride that Lil-Umbra was thinking as she accompanied Raymond in their wild ride to the Priory, carrying with them both the creator of the Brazen Head and the Priory court fool, Lay-Brother Tuck; it was about that premonitory shock she had suffered just before they began their ride through the forest.

What on earth had that meant, that vision she had suddenly seen of the whole of Lost Towers going up in fragments like the flaming scoriae lava from a bursting volcano, up, up, up, towards a black and thundering sky!

It was curious that both the great manor-lords, the father of Lil-Umbra and the devoted friend of Raymond, accepted without a murmur Albertus’ high-handed meddling with the destiny of marriage. Yes, both the scrupulous Baron Boncor and the unscrupulous Sir Mort Abyssum, took with complete *sang froid* the startling events that now began to occur. These events which future chroniclers will, let us hope, describe as calmly as we are describing them now, were heralded by a singular fit, or seizure, or obsession, so odd that it would be difficult to account for it, on the part of young Sir William Boncor, who surely must have been the youngest of all knights who ever received the accolade.

It is a faithful chronicler's duty, not only to his sovereign lord but to his own lawful heirs and descendants, to record the queerest occurrences just as they occur without either obsequious or malicious exaggeration. And what Sir William did at this point was to dance a grotesque dance, a dance that had become popular at all the country fairs in Cornwall and had just spread into Wessex, a dance that was called "Jig it for Judy" and that had gestures in it that were more amusing than seemly.

Lady Ulanda at first pretended not to notice Sir William's whirligig arabesque, but when the stately figure of Albertus of Cologne in his Dominican weeds joined their group and looked askance at this inexplicable tom-foolery, she let go her hold on her husband's wrist and gave her son a shrewish cuff across his left ear-hole.

This maternal rebuke having successfully quieted her youthful knight-errant, Ulanda turned her attention to the Brazen Head, and with her hand once more caressing Baron Boncor's wrist, as if she had chosen him as her only true-love that very day, she set herself to wonder whether anything especially disconcerting would happen to her if she suddenly snatched up the flintiest of the stones that sprinkled the hillside, and rushing straight at that Brazen Head in defiance of the Jewish couple who appeared to be guarding it, gave it a few of the straight blows she burned and throbbed to give its human creator.

The sun was already well-past its meridian, and there was a queer dark cloud resembling the head of a giant just above the sea-ward horizon, when everyone heard far away to the north a distinct roll of thunder.

"What the devil are all these people waiting for?" Perspicax enquired of Colin and Clamp, who, from an instinctive feeling that when King's Men from London awaited events, events were sure to arrive, felt reluctant to depart.

“I *think* I saw old Dod Pole’s Bet hurrying off home with Bailiff Randy’s daughter Crumb,” replied Colin rather wistfull; for he had a tender feeling for both these little maids, especially for the exquisite way Crumb’s hair would float on the wind when there was wind on which it could float.

“I can tell you whither those little birds are flitting!” threw in the unequivocal Clamp. “They’re off to take the news to Lady Val!”

The prediction of Clamp proved correct. At that familiar little postern, whence from her infancy, and before she had so much as heard of the formidable House of Abyssum, she had peered out into the forest, Lady Val was even now listening to the sound of horses’ hooves growing first nearer and then further.

And well indeed might the lady listen to those hoof-beats, for the horses were bringing, not only Roger Bacon and Brother Tuck to the gate of the Priory, but Lil-Umbra and Raymond de Laon to that very door.

“Don’t ‘ee cry, child! They will all be back soon!” whispered Nurse Rampant on her left hand.

“Not without having seen and having spoke to the girt Devil himself, every thumping one of them!” grunted old mother Guggery on her right hand.

Young John had remained standing alone after Lil-Umbra and Raymond had carried off Roger Bacon and Brother Tuck. He had heard that roll of thunder. He had seen that cloud like a giant’s head. And he was now staring at the closed doors of Lost Towers. Why he was compelled to stare at them he could not have told a living soul, not even his master Roger Bacon, for whom his devoted love went beyond all reason.

But suddenly young John saw those doors open wide and two human forms holding each other by the hand come forth, the forms of Petrus Peregrinus of Maricourt and Lilith of Lost Towers. Young John had always dreaded certain particular mental images, and the worst of all among these was the image of something different from the male organ of generation being thrust into a female's womb. Another was the image of a fiery rod being thrust into a man's anus.

Both these terrifying images now rushed simultaneously into young John's mind and even seemed to incarnate themselves in the human figures of Petrus Peregrinus and Lilith.

But the moment Petrus Peregrinus began speaking, these horrible images vanished from young John's mind — vanished forever, nor, until his death long afterwards, ever returned to trouble him. They did not even dare — although horrible images of this sort clearly possess devilish intelligencies of their own — to come near him on his deathbed.

"I am Antichrist!" were the words that Petrus was now shouting, and shouting in a voice whose appallingly penetrating tone none who heard it that day ever forgot to the end of their lives.

It was as if some power, far beyond the reach of any wanderer from Picardy, had spoken out of a hiding-place as old as the world. What young John did in the depths of his mind to drive into silence, not only the insane voice of this Antichrist from Maricourt, but the much less insane and for that very reason the far more loathsome voices of the treacherous and hypocritical and meretricious champions of a Christ with whom they had less in common than had His most shameless enemy; what young John did in the depths of his mind to overwhelm both of these was a very singular thing.

He gathered up all those wild and strange speculations about microscopes and telescopes and air-vessels and sub-marine vessels, of which Friar Bacon was always talking to him, and made of them in his mind a great mechanical shield which was so convoluted in its metalwork that it could repel any sound in the whole universe; and the echo it threw back when that Antichrist cry reached it was at once so rocky and aerial and oceanic and fiery that, as it rolled into space, it carried away with it both the pious hypocrisy that had been pierced by the voice of Antichrist and its own heroic recalcitrance to them both. In fact it carried everything away.

But when the echo from that shield he had mentally created from all those metallic elements died down, young John saw to his astonishment Lilith fling one of her long white arms about her companion's shoulders and swing him round till they both faced the castle.

Then young John saw the girl raise up both her arms, and he noticed that she held in her hands a curious little object like an extra large pen or pencil or a leafless hog-weed-stalk or a small six-inches-long bull-rush.

This little object Lilith first lifted up towards the sky, and then, with an incredibly swift movement of her arm, turned it against the Castle. And at once, clear before John's eyes, and before the eyes of all who were present, the whole structure of Lost Towers went up into the air, went up with the swiftness of a falling star, only it was a star that in this case was not falling but rising, until it vanished from sight in the blue depths of the empyrean. Then both those two figures turned to each other, each of them with raised arms. And it became clear to John for one blinding second that all four hands were clasped round that strange little object.

"They are pointing it at their own bodies!" he said to himself. And his vision of what they were doing was indeed the truth. Both their bodies now burst into flame and became one single fiery ball; and as John watched it, this burning orb became so dazzling as to shine in his eyes with the blaze of a sapphire, and he perceived that it was moving fast through the air towards the Brazen Head. At that moment he heard the Head speak.

"Time *was*," it said. "Time is," it said. "And time *will* — —"

But the burning meteor then fell upon it, and neither it nor what destroyed it was ever seen again.

Homer and the Aether (1959)

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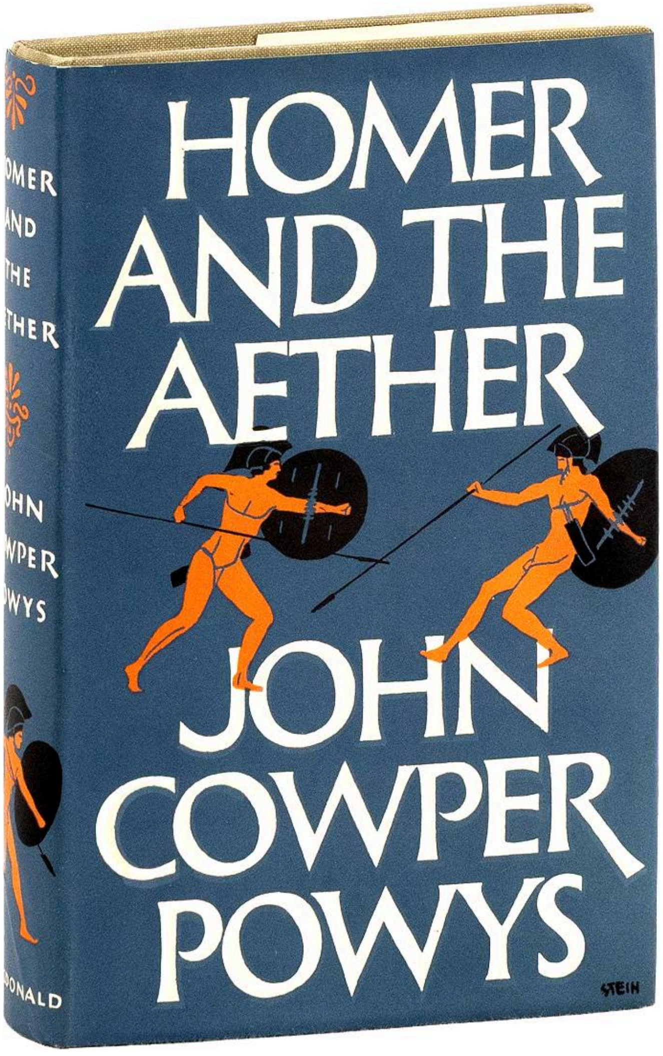
HOMER AND THE AETHER
JOHN COWPER POWYS
STEIN
OMER AND THE ETHER
OHN WPER OWYS
DONALD

The first edition

PREFACE

I AM ANXIOUS to begin these few remarks of my own about Homer's *Iliad* by expressing my gratitude to my old friend, J. Redwood-Anderson, and also to my younger friend, his wife, Gwyneth Redwood-Anderson, for their unparalleled help to me in writing this paraphrase or walking commentary upon the Iliad. And I also want to express my gratitude to the Professor of Classical Literature in Stanford University, for permission to base my own work upon the prose translation opposite the Greek text in my copy of the Heinemann edition in the Loeb Classical Library. Finally I want to recommend very strongly to every student of Homer the Homeric Dictionary, beautifully illustrated, and reprinted in 1902 by Richard Clay and Sons Ltd. composed by Dr. Georg Autenrieth of Zweibruchen in Bavaria and translated by Robert Porter Keep of Easthampton, Mass. U.S.A.

It is not necessary, as I think of the youthful readers I am particularly anxious to persuade to read this book, to enter here upon such questions as to what Greek city gave birth to Homer, or how many centuries elapsed between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* Sufficient it is to say I feel it grows clearer and clearer the more familiar you become with both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that these two poems had different authors or originals and that there is an historic gap of three or four hundred years between them.

If a youthful mind, whether a masculine or feminine one, were to ask me point-blank the question I am presently going to ask you all — and how much more expressive and full of meaning those two words "point-blank" are than this vaporously-vague grandiloquent expression full of vaunting pomposity that many of us are tempted these days to use, namely “by and large”; and what actually does “by and large” mean? I always see it accompanied by that particular gesture in a speaker that implies “I am too grand an orator to descend to silly details” — the question “In what respect does Homer’s *Iliad* surpass Dante and Shakespeare and Milton and Goethe?” I would answer at once: It is not nearly as imaginative as Dante. It is not nearly as dramatic as Shakespeare. It is not nearly as eloquent as Milton. It is not nearly as philosophical as *Faust.* And yet it is a greater poem than the *Inferno* or *King Lear* or *Paradise Lost* or *Faust!* Why is this? In what way can it possibly surpass these masterpieces?

I will tell you at once. By being more realistic and more natural. In other words, it is more like what has happened, is happening, and will happen to us all, from the very beginning, in our history in this world until the end of human life upon this earth. Of course we use different weapons against each other and against the various sub-human living creatures who surround us than they used in the *Iliad.* So they did in the earliest cave-men times, twenty thousand years ago. So they will do in future times when many of us will have successfully invaded our planetary neighbours in space. But I tell you, my dear young questioner, it isn’t the instrument we use in our quarrels with one another that counts. Some of us may simply use our tongues. Others among us may simply use our silences. Others may — O! there is no end to our weapons against each other! There may even come a day when by means of repeated concentrated thought applied for a certain length of time we shall be able so strongly and intensely to wish Mr. So-and-So or Mrs. So-and-So dead that the particular person *will* die and not a soul will be able to accuse the killer.

No, we must get out of our heads that because the Homeric people use swords and spears and arrows against each other that the whole of the *Iliad* is just an old-fashioned fairy-tale like *Jack the Giant Killer* or *Cinderella.* It is much more than that! It has the varieties of character, the mysterious intricacies of character, the inexplicable vagaries of character, the confounding leaps and plunges of character that we get in Hardy and Dostoievsky and Dickens and Victor Hugo and Thomas Mann; and it has also got the romantic surprises of Sir Walter Scott, as when we find the beautiful Briseïs tearing her hair on the ground by the dead body of Patroclus.

No, let me repeat once again, what has made Homer for three thousand years the greatest poet in the world is his *naturalness.* We love each other as in Homer. We hate each other as in Homer. We are perpetually being interfered with as in Homer by chance and fate and necessity, by invisible influences for good and by invisible influences for evil, and we see the unconquerable power that Homer calls *keer* leading our parents, leading our uncles and aunts, leading our grandparents to a particular death; and there do exist among us those who even feel this implacable destiny propelling themselves to a definite end, actually indicated as inescapable when some particular date in the calendar is reached or when some particular event has occurred. Thus Achilles assures his horse Xanthus, who is dragging his chariot, and who turns his head to remind him that if he kills Hector his own end will shortly follow, that he needs no reminding of this *keer*, for he knows it well, but "all the same for that" — *alia kai empees*, as Homer puts it — he intends to drive on to the end.

What is so particularly natural about the *Iliad* and what is such a daily inspiration to me in my ordinary life is the place he gives to women. First of all are the beautiful mistresses of the houses and halls of Homer's warriors, such as Argive Helen, carried off from Menelaus by Paris, *alias* Alexander; such as Hector's mother, Hecabe, and his wife, Andromache, and his half-sister, the beautiful prophetess Cassandra, whom Agamemnon takes captive and conveys to his home. Then there are the women who are taken captive by the conquerors who have slain their parents, husbands and sons. These women are treated at first as if they are slaves. In fact we are told in one place that their value is equal to the value of four oxen. But when once they enter the dwelling of their conqueror and take up their abode there, they very quickly dominate the whole house.

The beautiful Lady of the House may go off on her own and leave her lord as Helen did Menelaus, but these women brought into the Homeric hall as "worth four oxen" very quickly by their wisdom, beauty, tact and competence became either the housekeeper, whom Homer calls "the Tamiee" and who always is praised by the guests for the delicious things to eat and drink "which she brings out of her store", or, if the Lord is an old man, as Nestor was, without any Lady, become in that old man's dwelling a beautiful handmaid like Hecamede, daughter of Arsinoos of Tenedos. Homer certainly describes with reverential relish the lovely meal she once arranged upon old Nestor's table, and how ready she would be, as Nestor told them himself, to give Doctor Machaon, the son of the greatest of all doctors, Asclepius, a beautiful cleansing and healing warm bath. I sometimes wonder whether other commentators on Homer share my reluctance to transliterate the vowel "Eeta" into a repetition of our letter "e", which is really the Greek letter "Epsilon". But this double "e" looks so unpleasing that I have thought it better to rely on the notes about pronunciation made by my friend J. Redwood-Anderson, for thus I can insure that a name like that of the girl from Tenedos called Hecamede should not be changed from a name of four syllables to a name of three.

There are many scenes in the Iliad where we touch the reality of our life as it is today when it is transformed for us by our own private thoughts; as for example when we struggle with certain forces of nature. Consider, for instance, the passage in Book XXI, line 308, where the River Scamander calls upon his brother, the River Simois, to help him in his battle with Achilles. Here we have a perfect example of that element in life where the sub-human wrestles with the human and they both are compelled in some strange way to appeal to the super-human to decide their strife. Here the burden of our oldest ballads seems anticipated by Homer, and all those ancient market-town quips and proverbs and all those immemorial fairy-tales and roadside legends reaching us from forests long ago cut down, and from moorlands long ago built over, find their parallel. There is something about the rhythm of the Homeric hexameter that is more able to catch and absorb into its current, as it rolls along, these familiar human situations that are always recurring, than any other form of poetic rhythm except the simplest of our best-known old ballads.

There is an authentic echo of Homer's hexameters in those of that great and unfairly neglected poet, Longfellow, an echo such as none of our cleverest modern poetasters are able to catch, or, indeed, have any wish to catch. Take the first lines of "Evangeline" for example:

> "This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks
> Bearded with moss, and in garments green, undisturbed in the twilight.
> Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,
> Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.
> Loud from its rocky caverns the deep-voiced neighbouring ocean
> Speaks and in accents discordant answers the wail of the forest."

Many of the most appealing passages in the Iliad consist of prayers; and it is impossible sometimes not to associate these prayers, such as "O Sun that beholdest all things and hearest all things, O Rivers, O Earth, O all ye lost ones of our race, who, weary of life, rest forever in peace below it all", with the calm, majestic resignation of so many of the Collects in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England "as by Law established".

My own favourite book in the whole of the Iliad is Book XXI, wherein the gods and goddesses fight among themselves, some taking the side of the Greeks and some the side of the Trojans; and nothing is more perfectly characteristic of Homer as a poet than the fact that the chief of all the immortals, the great Zeus himself, Heavenly Father of both gods and men, regards this fighting among the gods with humorous amusement. I implore all those among Homer's readers who may be following me, as I have been following my imaginary thought-reader, the immortal Aether, to ask themselves whether they can imagine the author of Hamlet and Macbeth and Othello and King Lear and The Tempest, however shrewdly he may hint that the Power above us all laughs at lovers' quarrels, going so far as to suggest that the behaviour of angels and devils, as they contend for the victory in our hearts, is to that great Power a matter for hilarious amusement. Does the Deity in Dante's Divine Comedy even for a moment look down upon it all as if it were a comedy in our sense of the word? Can we imagine for a moment Milton's "Heavenly Muse", who "with mighty wings outspread dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss and mad'st it pregnant", chuckling with ribald amusement at the silly quarrels going on in both Heaven and Earth?

What we get as we follow Homer through the *Iliad* is not at all the feeling that "all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players", nor is it the feeling that there is what Wordsworth, my own favourite poet, calls

> "... something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.”

Without any of these exalted emotions, derived from the contact of our human souls with the colours and forms and substances of our planetary Earth, dominated by Sun and Moon, as it swings through infinite Space — yes, without any of these emotions, we who love Homer in the way the immortal Aether loved him may find ourselves by degrees learning, without effort, without any particular concentration of will, to enjoy the natural, ordinary course of our daily life with all its shocks, stresses, quarrels, rivalries, frustrations, surprises, desperations and heavenly quiescences, just in the sort of way Keats felt when he wrote that perfect fragment of an ode which begins:

“Mother of Hermes! and still youthful Maia!
  May I sing to thee
As thou wast hymned on the shores of Baiae?”

and which breaks off with the words:

“Rounded by thee, my song should die away
    Content as theirs,
Rich in the simple worship of a day.”

I am tempted to go so far as to say that we Britishers have appreciated Homer more than any other race in the world; and I think a person has only to read a little of Chaucer and Spenser to see why. The truth is we are the most unphilosophical race in the world. We are also, second only to the Saxons and Bavarians of Germany, the fondest of fairy tales in the world. We are certainly the fondest of old ballads and old popular sayings for their own sake. We are the most obstinate in hanging on to old local traditions for their own sake; and finally we are the least cultivated, the least concerned with what is called intellectuality, of all the races in the world. Then again we have appreciated the Jews, and done justice to the Jews, beyond all other western peoples; and if, compared with the Germans, our lack of metaphysical and psychological power is deplorable, and compared with the French, our lack of civilised receptivity and subtle appreciation of the nuances of human life is almost comical, no Europeans have given themselves up with a more impassioned and, I might say, a more childlike abandonment to delight in simple beauty for its own sake than English travellers have done when visiting Italy or Greece.

All these qualities, both positive and negative, when joined together, tend to strengthen my conviction, quite apart from the number of famous translations of the *Iliad* that have been made in this country, both in prose and verse, that there is something about our attitude to Homer that comes nearer to the attitude of the immortal Aether, to whom I have presumed to give a human consciousness, than that of any other nation. This is no theory; for again and again in watching my friends talking together, and watching men’s attitude to their wives and children, and watching the attitude of their wives and children to them — especially when the ladies, as is now often the case, have to play the part of a Homeric housekeeper and handmaid, as well as that of the beautiful Cassandra, who speaks out so freely, and of the unequalled Helen who may so easily be beguiled — I have been swept away by a fascinating wave of excitement in observing how this stupendous poem, that may easily have been recited by some reciter with my own mania for it three thousand years ago, still embodies the life of men, women and children as it is lived upon this earth. And the exciting thing is that Homer treats his Divine Beings in exactly the same way that he treats us ourselves, his Human Beings. Over and over again, we find ourselves awed and hushed in the presence of his Divine Beings and aware of a natural feeling that their ancient altars must be respected and their legendary ritual upheld; but at the same time there is absolutely nothing of that peculiar atmosphere of unctuous solemnity and oily gloom that some of us find so hard not to associate with our Christian Sunday.

How interesting it is that the peculiar shiver of terrified awe which our great religious prophets and teachers and preachers and saints have, by degrees, ever since the year one of our calendar, forced us to associate with the word God, doesn't enter for a moment into Homer's conception of Zeus, any more than it does into Vergil's conception of Jupiter or Jove. How satisfactory it is to be able to worship Zeus or his daughter Pallas Athene or his sister-wife Hera, without having to think of a God that we have been taught for nearly two thousand years to associate with the "bowing and scraping" of a Hush-a-bye Heaven and the infernal cruelties of a diabolical Spanish Inquisition Hell, not to speak of the Predestination doctrines of Knox and Calvin and the fiery stakes of Bloody Mary.

The essential thing with Homer — and most especially is this true of the *Iliad* — is the magical, bewitching, irresistible, intoxicating sweep of music of his metre. There is no metre in the world, there never has been, that can equal the hexameter of Homer. No doubt the "blank verse", as I was brought up to call it, of Milton or of Shakespeare — though it's not a very suggestive name — contains, as my friend Redwood-Anderson, our greatest authority on metre, would soon point out, rhythmic subtleties that do not appear in the hexameter at all; but I am sure he will agree with me when I say that no poetical sound in the world carries with it quite the same evocation of sonorous echoes, that rise and fall like the waves of an ocean over rocky promontories, as these transporting “oio” sounds with which Homer’s hexameters are perpetually closing.

Every lover of Homer will I think agree that the most significant and characteristic thing about his gathering, accumulating, enlarging, thickening, expanding, deepening story of human life — of human life as it has been in every age from the beginning and as it will be to the very end — is his emphasis upon the family. He does not, as so many poets since his time have done, talk a great deal about tribes and groups and clans and sects and varieties of idealistic associations, whether pacific or belligerent. What Homer does is to confine himself to the immediate family of the warrior in question. In the speeches they make to each other, in the appeals they make to the people, every single one of them will invariably refer to the father by whom he was begotten; and Homer himself is concerned with this paternal link to such an intense degree that if the two names can possibly be united into one single name he will unite them.

But now let us pause to consider the Homeric attitude to sex love. I think everyone will agree with me that in the passionate love of Achilles for Patroclus there is not a trace of homosexuality. Their love is like the love that existed in historic cases all down the ages between man and man while both men can at the same time have their women. Indeed it is an interesting and remarkable thing that it is impossible to avoid noticing in Homer the complete absence of the least suggestion of homosexuality or of Lesbianism. Considering the emphasis laid upon these erotic eccentricities in this modern age of ours what are we to make of their complete absence in Homer? I would even be inclined to go a little further and to emphasise the absence from the *Iliad* of any mention of those two sexual aberrations connected with cruelty, namely, what we have come to call Sadism and Masochism. There are several familiar historic cases of tyrants obviously addicted to sadism, and several prehistoric myths and legends whose cruelties can easily be connected with these two sexual aberrations. But there is not, as far as I can discern, a trace of either of them in the *Iliad.* Is the reason for this the fact that in the *Iliad* we are dealing with a desperate war, a war that so exhausts everyone's energy that there is no energy left over to indulge in erotic sensations except the most natural and ordinary ones? Or is the reason simply that the lovers of and composers of poetry all the way down human history are so absorbed in the normal current of human life that they instinctively tend to avoid abnormalities, whether erotic or otherwise?

There are those who instinctively prefer the neat Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides to Homer. Why, I ask you, do they? The answer is simple. Because they are full of intellectual Ideas and Theories and Interpretations of Life, full of creative Visions and moral Principles as to how human existence upon earth could be improved. Matthew Arnold, one of my own favourite poets, tells us that Sophocles "sees life steadily and sees it whole". O what a pure delight it is to return to Homer after "seeing life whole"! Why, I ask you, is it such a relief and such a comfort? Because Homer has the reality of our natural feeling about life, and Sophocles has an intellectual vision of things that may turn out to be, as my brother A.R.P. said of some wild theory of mine or of Llewelyn's, no reality at all, *in fact a lie.* Sophocles may see life as "steadily" and as "wholesale" as he likes, but real life, as all men and women and children soon discover from personal experience, is the extreme opposite of anything you can see "steadily" or as "a whole". It is a wild, chaotic series of exhausting contradictions. When is Shakespeare at his greatest? When his characters are philosophizing? Not a bit of it! All the supreme scenes in Shakespeare are when his people are transported by ecstasies of love and hate.

> “And yet I call you servile ministers
> That have with two pernicious daughters joined
> Your high-engendered battles ‘gainst a head
> As old and white as this!”
>
> “Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow...
> ’Tis a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury — signifying — nothing!”

But none of the passionate defiances and challenges of Shakespeare’s stage, nor any of the pandemoniacal eloquence of Milton’s angels and archangels, nor the most contorted twists of Browning’s tipsy piety with its belching outbursts of county-council optimism, really expresses, as we all know well, the actual experience of life which we poor mortals from childhood to manhood and womanhood have fled from or endured, have fought against or submitted to, ever since we were born. But Homer does express precisely this. We may be put off by the Greek words or annoyed by the conventional or slangy translations. But now and again, as we go struggling on, there come glimpses and murmurs, as I have sought to make my immortal Aether show, of a natural and wonderful reality that the sweeping tide of these tremendous hexameters has caught up from the simplest human lives. Let us therefore listen to it rolling on with all its multifarious cross-currents, as it has done from the beginning, if there was a beginning, and will do until the end, if there will be an end, suffering and enjoying at the same time what “is all”, as Keats said, “*we know on earth* and all we need to know.”

THE AETHER SPEAKS

IT WAS NOT till he had almost tired himself out and very nearly blinded himself by his obstinate following of every seaside-track and every mountain-trail and every stretch of forest-upland in his desire to absorb the entire background of the Trojan War, that I, the shining Aether, swept down upon Homer.

He had fallen on his knees when I whirled into his consciousness; and he had no notion whence the inspiration I gave him came. He probably imagined it came from the Muse of Poetry, for I could reach his thoughts deeply enough to know that in his exhaustion he was praying desperately to her. No, he never recognised me as a conscious Being like himself, but I soon threw him into the special kind of ecstatic trance that I alone in the whole world have the power of creating. I do it, of course, through the elements of air and water; but I can only do it when these elements are transfigured by the particular and special light with which I suffuse them.

I shall not meddle with the metre he uses nor with the rhythmic music of the words. That is his affair and the affair of the racial tradition, but I shall waft unto him the greatest of all gifts, the power of reading the thoughts of both gods and men. Nor shall I stop there. I shall give him the power of reading the inmost responses of every form and shape that has ever been assumed by matter. I shall make him see that this does not only apply to birds and beasts and fish and reptiles and worms and insects, but also to the vegetable world of plants and trees and mosses and ferns and reeds and grasses and lichens. But the point at which some among the gods themselves and many among mortals will deny my power is a more mystical and magical point. And here I can only pray that those souls, whether they inhabit mortal or immortal bodies, who have the insolent arrogance to interfere between my beloved bard and me on this vital point may be flung by the Son of Cronos into the depths of Tartarus!

Hear, therefore, all ye who care for the work of a great poet, what I intend to inspire Homer to do. I intend to make him give a special and peculiar kind of vital life to the elements among whom both mortals and immortals have their being; to such things as earth and air and fire and water; to such things as rivers and seas and rocks and stones and sands. O yes! and I have resolved to include all manner of objects familiar to ordinary men and women and indeed created again and again by their own hands. I shall make him feel that things like swords and shields and spears and axes and pitch-forks and shovels — yes! and such things as chairs and tables and altars and idols and images and pictures — have the power, if associated closely enough with human persons, of acquiring a sort of individual life for themselves — yes, a peculiar identity of their own, an identity that implies the possession of a kind of selfconsciousness, a special sort of self-consciousness I admit, but none the less self-consciousness. The longer these Inanimates are seen and looked at and touched and used, the more definitely does this self-consciousness grow within them. I shall have to make him see that all the things with which men are habitually surrounded every day, whether indoors or out of doors, acquire this quality at last. Some of them may be quite little things, many of them quite unimportant things, and if he asks me how they get this identity, I shall answer him at once that it is gradually created in them by the person who habitually glances at them. This happens inevitably, whether the thing is a gate-post, a heavy stone covered in moss, a stile by the roadside, a dead hollow-tree, or an old stump overgrown with ivy.

The creative force that works this miracle is the human mind. What a pupil of mine, who has since become a priest of Apollo, once boldly called the appropriation to themselves by men and women of the creative powers of the Olympian gods, I shall prove to Homer to be a fact. In the process of encountering these so-called inanimate objects, often in complete absentmindedness and mental abstraction, ordinary mortals, living ordinary lives upon earth, do possess the power of creating actual consciousness. I won't call it complete consciousness in the human sense of that marvellous word, but it is an approach to it, just as you might regard a bird's feather, or a fruit's peeling, or a sliver of the bark of a twig, or a single scale from the skin of a fish, as authentically representing the living body from which they have been torn. The object in question may be a picture hanging on a person's wall, or painted on the wall of a person's dwelling. It may be a pier-post between a man's garden and the sea. It may be a ruined wall between a woman's door and the entrance to a broken-down altar where her husband once sacrificed to Athene. But, whatever it may be, these ordinary men and women have in their daily occupations, without the least intention of doing so and without the least knowledge of what is being done — for the noblest creations in this multiverse are unconscious creations — played their creative part.

And I alone, the shining Aether, am an accomplice in this process, for I alone have the power of passing through every form and shape which matter, consciously or unconsciously, has taken. In fact I can pass through the smallest atoms of matter. I can even pass between and around the still smaller particles that compose such atoms. I, the Aether, have watched from its beginning the amazing enterprise of Homer, the enterprise of one who is now a prematurely old man nearly blinded by his heroic struggle to visualise the actual background of every scene of his tremendous poem. All that I shall help him to add to it is only what it would be impossible for him to achieve without my aid.

How could he, for instance, unaided by me, who am the gleaming sky shining above and below Olympus, describe, as he surely ought to describe, the thoughts and feelings of a god or goddess trying to direct the ungovernable actions of a particular man or a particular woman? How could he, without the help of my gleaming and penetrating light, describe the feelings of a man or of a woman just before making a final decision to do or to turn away from doing some desperate and irrevocable deed? Hear me, great Ouranos above! Hear me, great Gaia beneath! It is I and I only who have helped all the poets who have ever existed to catch this reality. To me the Past and the Future are nothing but stalks and leaves; and to me the Present is nothing but a blooming rose-petal with a bitter thorn. As for Eternity, it is to me no better than a puff of stinking wind from the backside of a monstrous chimaera of Space. O my Homer, let Moira guide you to your end and when the Spinners have spun your fate let Keer give you everlasting peace! Let the health of your life, as Cheiron the Centaur teaches, be the abounding ichor of your philosophy, and may your philosophy temper the metal of your moods and carve the contours of the columns of your creation.

Oh yes, my Homer, and never, never let yourself forget, as I hope to make some great prophet cry out before his fellow mortals murder him, that the rhymes of the nursery are the poems nearest to heaven. I never have meddled and I never will meddle with the music or the measures of your verse. The secrets behind these lilts and rhythms, these pulsings of syllables, these intonings of stresses, these balancings of vowels, these echoings of consonants, are things that come from nature, vary with nature and are responded to by nature. Most of these sounds are as old as the hills. Many are lost for ever in the depths of the sea.

But, O Homer of my heart and soul, let me implore you in your eternal praying to the Muses not to forget their mother! Their Mother is Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory! O my Homer, remember that the poetry of all your days and the days upon earth of the race to which you belong comes from memory. Now and then, perhaps, but O so rarely, come gleams to you of something, something beyond all horizons, to which your race is slowly moving, but the weird feelings that these gleams bring with them are ecstatic emotions untranslatable in definite words. No, it is the memories that come to all men, called up by particular objects in their daily life, in their dwellings and along the waysides that lead to their dwellings, rocks on the banks, stones on the paths, fallen trees in the copses, broken masts by the edge of the sea, that call up the memories, sometimes almost too wistful and poignant to be borne, by which the poetry of life is created.

O! And please listen, my most cherished Homer, to yet another thing. Although Mother Gaia, the ancient Earth, is indeed both our beginning and our end, there is a feminine mystery that contains something higher and deeper even than motherhood. This is that immemorial mystery of virginity which is associated, when we think of Olympus, with the personality of Pallas Athene, but which has also a famous historical example in the story of Numa, the first King of Rome. It was only through the incomparable advice of Egeria, the virgin nymph who lived in a cave nearby, that Numa was able to inaugurate a city-state capable of conquering and ruling the world.

O Homer, my heroic Homer, I assure you it is I, the celestial Aether, who alone amid the multitude of universes into which we are all born am able to understand the life-secret that makes male and female so different. Here we touch, I tell you, the ultimate mystery of Being, and though I cannot, even I, fully explain it, I can make you see it. When a woman is ravished, she loses for ever a certain power of insight into Life and Nature which goes beyond all other. I can only suggest that it leads back to whatever it was that existed before the world began. I am well aware that there have been recurrent outbursts of a consecrated cult for Virginity from the earliest appearance of the human race. And it must often have been accompanied by a despairing sigh from the broken heart of an humanity groaning to itself: "If only Virginity *had* prevailed, we should not now be enduring all this misery!"

But it remains, O most Treasured Homer, that if I only could compel you to follow me in my ethereal flight round these opposing porch-pillars of mortal existence, your place as the greatest of all earthly poets would be established for ever. And O I implore you to listen to me now! Second to the primal mystery of sex in human hearts and senses, the greatest inspiration that I, the divine Aether, can give you, is to make you catch the in-dwelling and the over-shadowing significance of all the simple, natural, essential objects and usages of normal human life. Yes, by Zeus and Poseidon, you must and shall catch the poetry of cooking, of washing, of polishing, of cleaning floors and steps and walls, of shoeing horses, of milking cows, or making saddles and chariot wheels, of turning flour into bread and grapes into wine, of making robes and blankets and rugs and sheets, and of filling cushions with feathers, and pillows with the softest wool, and above all you must understand how houses are built and the earth ploughed, and the wheat and the barley grown. All this I will teach you to see and feel without demanding anything in return.

No, I do *not* ask you to bend down and worship me in gratitude for the inspiration I am giving you! And why don't I? I don't do it because I am the

Immortal One, beyond all gods and men, the Aether between Ouranos and Gaia, the

Aether who can see all, except only the kingdom of Pluto and the half-life of the Titans in Tartarus.

No, I take no gift for what I give. What I give is given to you, Homer my old friend, because I want to prove both to gods and men, yes! and even to the Muses themselves, that the greatest poetry is the poetry of that which is in and about and under and throughout all the inescapable things of ordinary human life. Every man, woman and child living upon the earth has to struggle to be happy, fight to be happy, weep, howl, shout, yell to be happy, walk, crawl, run, dance, climb, hide, dig caves, carve boats, build houses, cultivate gardens, in order to be happy, in order to last out to the end. O, and how lucky you terrestrial creatures are that when the end comes you can lie down and go to sleep and never wake up again!

What I am going to help you to do, you old indomitable, indefatigable Homer of my heart, is to accept and enjoy to the limit all the ordinary events in that human life of yours, which, wherever it is played out, is always a magnified view, or a minimized view, of some kind of Trojan War. Yes, I want to help you to describe the amazing life of mortals upon the earth; and when you have ushered each one of them in turn to the brink of the grave I want you to make them long to lie down in peace and sleep an unbroken sleep, or to soothe them, if they are afraid of annihilation, by lovely dreams of a kindly Hermes-Angel who will guide them gently, softly, swiftly when the end comes, to some blest Elysian Field where they can meet everybody again that they want to meet, and forget everything they want to forget forever and forever and forever.

BOOK I

CHANT FOR US, therefore, O poet of poets, what it was that aroused the wrath of Achilles, the son of Peleus — that deadly wrath which worked such immeasurable griefs for the Achaeans and hurled the souls into Hades of so many valiant heroes whose bodies became the prey of dogs and birds: for so, and only so, could the will of Zeus be fulfilled.

And I, the Aether, pray you, O mighty Homer, to begin your chant at the historic moment when Apollo the far-shooter loosed from his bow those arrows of disease and of death upon men and horses and cattle such as warned the other leaders of the Greeks that their King Agamemnon had done wrong in carrying off the daughter of Chryses.

Yes! I hear you. You are telling them, mighty master, and with my aid you are telling them, how wildly among the Grecian ships hauled up on the sand, and how wildly among the huts now being built upon the shore, fluttered and flapped the sea-gulls. Yes, the Greeks had built huts of palm-branches and cedar-saplings and stretches of leather and pieces of sackcloth, and although these wild gulls had seen many strange and pitiful sights, they had never seen anything as pitiful or as strange as what they saw now. For they saw the daughter of Chryses, the priest of Apollo, leaning desperately out of a small window of the largest of these new-built huts and beckoning frantically to a very old and very stately man who was advancing towards her along the sea's edge. Yes, it was the priest of Apollo himself who was threading his way through the sea-drift that was now mingled with the refuse and rubbish of these reckless newcomers, confusedly tangled with shells and sea-weed and sand.

The terrified child of this old man, a young girl named Astyomene, was stretching out her arms to him and crying at the top of her shrill, childish voice:

"O Father! Save me! Save me! Save me from him! He's going to — he's going to—"

The advancing old man soon heard the young girl's cry and recognized it at once as the voice of his daughter. He hastened towards her, waving the sacred embroidery, with its magic tassels, which, as Astyomene well knew, was the dedicated insignia of his office. "Father! Father!" and her voice increased in intensity as she saw that he had heard her and was hastening towards her.

Armed men from many other huts had now surrounded him, but he waved them all aside with a gesture of such authority that they drew back and let him move straight to his daughter's window. Arrived there, he clasped both the girl's hands in one of his own and kissed them again and again. Not only so, but he was so moved at finding her that two or three big tears, an old, self-possessed, authoritative man's unusual tears, fell upon the hands he clasped.

It was then that the group of armed men, who had again gathered round him, again drew back; for the great King himself, wide-ruling Agamemnon, appeared in front of them all. He waved his hand towards Astyomene, indicating that she must withdraw into the interior of the room, a command which she at once, and quite silently, obeyed.

But she still remained in sight of this encounter, an encounter which now framed itself in her window like one of the dramatic pictures which a boy-friend of hers in Apollo's Temple was always trying to paint; but this picture now presented to her, through the square of that fatal window, was terribly real. She saw Agamemnon angrily address her father who was waving in one hand the golden staff, from which blew out into the wind the embroidery with its sacred tassels, and in the other hand he was holding an enormous string-bag that clearly contained, for their gleam was like a load of petrified sunshine, more golden drachmas than Astyomene had ever seen in her life. The frightened girl watched this disturbing scene trembling and shivering from head to foot.

Agamemnon had put off taking her virginity out of a simple and, in fact, almost a pathetic hope, that she might fall in love with him and herself grow desirous of such a consummation. It was this element of a really touching stupidity and complete ignorance of the nature of women that was destined to make this great king's return to his home when the war was over such a tragic one. But Astyomene hadn't to wait long before the climax came. Not just calmly and sternly, but with an outburst of furious anger did Agamemnon refuse to give her back. Probably the cause of this refusal was identical with the fact that she was still a virgin and he hoped that she might fall in love with him, but, whatever its cause, it was cruelly distressing to the captive girl and all she could do was to fall on her knees in the middle of that hateful room, dig both her small fists into her eyes, and sob forth a desperate and pitiful prayer to Apollo.

Not very different from his daughter's feelings were those of her father as he strode back along the sand; and indeed at last so desperate did he feel that, as the waves rolled in and broke at his feet, he found himself making sounds in actual chorus with this sea-roar. Indeed he felt that nothing except wind and sea could give proper expression to the wrath that possessed him. Looking frantically round, he suddenly noticed a little grove of trees. He had never noticed this small grove before, but at that moment, wrought up as he was by the wrath of waves and wind mingling with his own, this little group of trees struck him like a miniature of the temple he served, and rushing into it and planting his golden staff in the leaf-mould beneath its boughs he fell on his knees and prayed more passionately than he had ever done in his whole life before. “Hear me,” he cried aloud, “O thou of the silver bow! Let these Greeks who have robbed me of my dear daughter pay for my tears by thy shafts!”

Having vented his feelings thus, and rising from his knees with a real sense that a great load had been lifted from him, he strode along a broad path on the landward side of a long row of oddly-shaped sand-dunes and made straight for his village and his temple. Such faith he had, this old priest, that as he walked he began actually muttering to himself the brutal words of the man who had robbed him of his daughter, and he muttered them without that sensation of impotent wrath which is one of the worst of all things in this life.

“Old age shall come upon her,” the great, stupid, angry king had bellowed, “in our house in Argos, far from her home, as she works at the loom and shares my bed!” And yet, though the old priest could repeat these very words of this violater of temples, he was aware of a strange feeling at the back of his mind that it was this great, brutal, bullying chieftain that in the long run would be the one to be pitied. “I am not,” the old priest told himself, “a prophet like Calchas. I have no insight into the present; I have no premonition about the future; I have no power of summoning up the past; but I don’t only feel certain that Apollo will compel this despot to give up Astyomene, but I cannot get it out of my head that he will die long before I do.”

When he reached the little town he saluted those he met in the streets with his usual calm and dignified deportment. But glancing up at the sky as he entered the temple, he was amazed to see an illuminated cloud, formed of a shape that was almost human, descend from the air and alight on the ground under a group of trees near those where he had knelt in prayer, and it was with a heart touched by a wild strange hope that he closed the temple-door and walked across the interior plot of grass to his private abode. Nor was his hope unfulfilled. For though the old man could see nothing through the window of his priest's chamber except a narrow alley of that little town, the figure that emerged from beneath those trees was none other than Apollo himself. He had brought down from Olympus his massive silver bow and his quiver full of deadly arrows, each one of which, when he loosed the bowstring, brought pestilence and inescapable doom on those against whom it was aimed.

A god as great as Apollo can survive a crisis like this, slaying enemy after enemy, without having a pause, as a mortal man would have to do, for sleep or food or drink. It was indeed actually for nine days Apollo went on shooting, making sure that these enemies of Troy and spoilers of his Temple should know what it was to insult such a god as he was. He began with their mules; then he proceeded to their dogs; and finally he let loose on them themselves. By the time nine days were past the whole coast-line behind their black ships was burning with funeral pyres.

It was then, and not till then, that the great goddess Hera, the wife of Zeus himself, could no longer bear to look down on all this. So she put it into the mind of Achilles to call an assembly of all the Greek chieftains, including the two sons of Atreus, to consult as to how to propitiate this angry shooter of such deadly arrows. Achilles suggested that their great prophetic magician, Calchas, should be the one to give them advice at this juncture; and so with one accord, though Agamemnon glowered and gloomed at the thought of appealing to him, "for he knows about it all, he knows, he knows!" it was decided by the whole body of them, including every chieftain and every man and every woman who had come in the ships with them, to appeal to Calchas, for he was the one who with his immense knowledge and prophetic wisdom had guided their fleet from Argos to this Trojan shore.

And so Calchas rose up to speak among them; but naturally enough his first words were a direct prayer to Achilles to protect him if what he had to reveal about Agamemnon's behaviour threw that royal despot into a fit of blind rage. This promise Achilles willingly gave, boldly confessing to them all that he knew about himself, not only from Calchas, but from every other prophet he had ever approached, namely that Fate had already decided, that never would he be able to sail from this thrice-accursed shore. "That," he told them, "is my destiny. That is my *keer*. So I am naturally ready to face anything that happens; for nothing that happens can restore *me* to *my* old Father, whether he's dead or alive!"

And then Calchas told them all: how Agamemnon had pillaged the Temple of Apollo and carried off the daughter of Apollo's priest, Chryses, and how this terrible pestilence among men and animals would continue until Astyomene had been given back. Terrific was the great King's rage when Calchas had finished. He rose up with his eyes blazing and flung a torrent of abuse at the prophet, who leaned back against a rock and separated himself, as he had a weird power of doing, from the whole scene, while the raging monarch was denouncing him. As for the impregnable son of Peleus, his eyes were now turned to his devoted Myrmidons, who were watching both of them like persons in a dream.

And well they might, for what Agamemnon was now saying astonished the subject of this desperate quarrel; yes, astonished the girl who listened to it from the window of the King's hut as much as it astonished Achilles and every chieftain present. This King from the city of Mycenae was certainly no ordinary capturer of temples or ravisher of maidens. There was something about what he now had the sublime, if pathetically thickheaded, simplicity to announce to them all, that not only bewildered Astyomene herself, as she listened to him, but astonished every man and every woman who heard him. It became clear that this tall, majestic warrior-monarch had the same sort of single-minded susceptibility to feminine charm as had his brother Menelaus, so obstinately loyal to Helen that in her wayward, girlish reaction to this grim, heavy-weather Argive fidelity she became an easy victim to the amorous beguilements of the crafty son of Priam.

"You wicked Prophet of evil," the great King now cried: "you dark-souled twister of the will of the Olympians, to you, as well as to the whole assembly here present before me, will I announce and declare the truth without mincing my words or dodging what is in my heart. No, I will not evade, as so many of you do, the terrible reality of things. Yes, I will tell you and I will tell the whole world, openly and freely, including the gods of Olympus and all the Titans and giants and monsters in the kingdom of Pluto. Yes, I will tell every living creature in the whole cosmos what I feel; and why not? I am afraid of nothing and I take orders from no living person or dead person, and what I feel in my heart is the truth to me, and it is also *the event*, that is to say what I shall cause to take place when we have recaptured Helen and burnt Troy to the ground. Zeus has made me king; and therefore all that happens by *my* will happens by *his* will. And now I wish you all to know, and I announce it to you with a free heart, that I prefer the daughter of Chryses to Clytemnestra, my wedded wife! Yes, I prefer her; and in my deepest heart I want to live with her in my home. I tell you, my friends, and I would swear to it before the earth and sky, she is in every way the peer of Clytemnestra, in form and stature and in mind and, let me add, by no means inferior to her — for I could see *that* when I entered her father's temple — in all a woman's gift for all the handicraft and needlework and embroidery that can turn a home into a palace."

There was something about the gigantic innocence, as well as the stupendous egoism and arrogance, in what the man said that undoubtedly had its effect upon them all. The cleverer ones among them, chieftains like Odysseus for instance, must have said to themselves: "It's hard to imagine any woman who wouldn't be touched by this man, who has the boastful heart and yet the sensitive and tender heart of a rampageous boy of ten or eleven." Before the King sat down, however, what every single person in this tortuous and contradictory assembly expected would happen did happen. Achilles leapt to his feet. But before he could utter a word Agamemnon waved to him to sit down and the mysterious majesty the great king possessed compelled even the son of Peleus to do what he was told to do, like a soldier obeying his general.

"But in spite of all my heart's deep desire," the great King went on, "far be it from me to let our people perish under the anger of Apollo. As we consult here we can all smell the bitter smoke from the funeral pyres which are now burning over our comrades' devoted flesh. I tell you I cannot, no! no! by all the gods I cannot, accept this particular maiden as my prize at the expense of so much suffering. There I have decided, especially for the sake of those who are not here, those who are praying for our return in our dear native land, that I will restore this daughter of Chryses to her father, and that I will send her home with a large hecatomb on a big ship manned by a crew of fast rowers under the command of one of our most prominent warriors such as this assembly may select. But I must also make it clear to you all that I have no intention of giving up this perfect maiden without a recompense from you all. Her I have resolved to send back to her dear father, but another equally beautiful prize you must apportion to me, comrades, in her place, else, in default of such a portion given to me by this assembly here gathered together, I fear I must demand from one of you, and let me suggest at once that it shall be from swift-footed Achilles himself, the lovely maiden, in his case the heavenly-complexioned Briseïs, whom we have apportioned to him as his prize. Since I am saving all our people from this appalling pestilence inflicted on us by the far-shooting Apollo because my prize was taken from his temple, it must surely seem just and fair in the eyes of you all that I should despatch our sacred heralds to bring to my tent from the tent of Achilles the fair-complexioned Briseïs, even though she be no longer maid, whom we originally apportioned to this warrior."

After this, with a scowling glare at Achilles from beneath his bushy eyebrows, he did at length sit down. As for Achilles, without even honouring the assembly by rising to his feet, he shouted at the King from where he sat, shouted at him in the tone of an infuriated tiger addressing a domineering camel:

"Thou most covetous and most greedy and most outrageously insolent of the whole crowd of ridiculous adventurers that we all are! What are we doing here in our imaginary daring? What are we here for at all, I ask you? We came, didn't we, didn't we, didn't we, for the sake of your brother and to win back for him his stolen wife? But now when we find that all we've got to do is simply to procure maidens for the House of Atreus when it grows weary of its wedded wives, doesn't this reduce our whole expedition to a ridiculous farce? I came not here to war on the Trojans because they have done harm to me. I came here to win back his wedded wife for your brother Menelaus; and it was because of my bringing so many of my brave Myrmidons to fight for this good cause that you and the rest apportioned to me, so that I might take her home, the adorable Briseïs to whom Aphrodite has given the most transparently exquisite complexion of all maidens in the world. And what do I hear now from your own lips, you dogfaced shameless one! I actually hear you say you will dare to take from me this precious, this beautiful girl, and use her as your harlot, since it is, and I can clearly see it is, a unanimous decision of this momentous assembly of kings — yes, of kings, among which you, you dog-faced braggart, are only one among the rest — that this daughter of the priest of Apollo must be sent back in a big ship, with many rowers, and many beasts to be sacrificed on the Far-Shooter's altar. With this I wholly agree. But if you begin talking of taking my Briseïs from me, I'll just draw my beaked ships into the deep water and set sail back to Phthia whence I came!"

With a deep-bellied growl that sounded as if it came from the midriff of the giant Atlas, the King of Mycenae retorted, sitting straight up in his regal seat, "Fly then, you coward, back to Phthia whence you came, and may they welcome you there more than we want you here! You may be as fierce a fighter as you boast, and we all take your word for it, but by Zeus, who appointed me head-king among you, even as he is the Father both of gods and men, you are not a brave man in your heart, however fast you may be on your feet or strong in your arms with sword or spear. For a really brave man behaves in accordance with occasions and situations, not biting and kicking like an obstinate mule, but acting courteously among his companions, and even yielding to their will, as I am doing now, in giving back the daughter of Chryses. But I can tell you this, you impetuous fool: when I have given back the daughter of Chryses to her father I will show you that in these matters of apportioning prizes I am a great and wide-ruling king, whereas you are only a redoubtable athlete, a fast runner and a skilful swordsman."

These final words of the king, implying a shameful reduction of the whole status of Achilles in the army of the invading Greeks, were too much to be endured.

"Shall I go for him now," the son of Peleus asked himself, drawing his sword a quarter of its whole length out of its sheath; "and when I've killed him defy the whole lot of these ruffian time-servers to dare to meddle with my Briseïs?"

He was on the point of drawing his sword clear from its sheath when he suddenly felt himself seized by the hair and his raised arm forced by an irresistible hand to thrust back the gleaming weapon into its sheath. With an effort of will that needed far more strength than to pierce Agamemnon through the heart, Achilles refrained from revealing by any sign to the king or to the rest of them what had happened; for he knew well that he alone in that spell-bound and agitated assembly knew that the great goddess, Pallas Athene herself, had intervened.

"Yes," the divine lady whispered, helping him to conceal his consciousness of her presence by arranging herself so that, as he listened to her, he might appear to be gazing in deep thought, as was natural enough that he should be, towards the gap in the sand-dunes beneath their circle of benches where the whole sweep of the bay was visible, together with the unbroken horizon of the ocean. "Hera herself bade me come," the goddess was now explaining to him, "for she loves you both and longs to see you rescue Helen and burn Ilios. No, the truth is that the wife of our cloud-bearing, thunderbolt-hurling Zeus could not endure to see the son of Atreus and the son of Thetis engaged in a mortal combat. Curse him with all the curses you can conjure up; turn him into a laughingstock among them all with your bitterest taunts; tell him exactly what you think of him; fling the worst insults at him that you can invent. It will be a rich amusement for us on Olympus to hear what you say, and it will stir against him the mood of this whole conference. But one thing neither Hera nor I can endure, namely that you two shepherds of the people should begin a life-and-death struggle between yourselves. Well! I am off now; but remember my word.

Hit him with all the abuse you can think of, but not with the sword!"

Athene's intervention was so skilfully managed and so quickly over that it never struck either the man who received the abuse, nor the assembly who listened to it, that a subtle change had come over the temper of the furious son of Thetis. His words were as gross and violent, as crude and brutal as before, but they were more ribald and more reckless and they no longer gave the impression that they were leading up to some drastic and serious action. The impression they now made on that conference of chieftains was more as if the assembly had come together to hear a notorious performer play the part of a fabulous buffoon.

"You wine-bibber!" Achilles roared at the King. "You staring dog-face, with the guts of a terrified deer! You who never join the vanguard of a host in a real attack! O no! The life of a true Scout would be like death to a coward of your kidney. Your favourite part is simply to snatch from anyone who presumes to contradict you whatever prize it may be that he has received from his peers! A man-eating King you are, one who thinks that all but yourself are men of nought! But listen to me now; for I hereby swear a mighty oath to you and to all these who are with us here. I swear by this staff which I carry, as thou dost carry thine, this staff that has been bare of leaves and shoots ever since it first left its root in the mountain, by this staff I swear that a day will come when you and the rest will behold our warriors falling and perishing under the hands of man-slaying Hector. I swear a great oath that when that day comes you will find yourselves praying desperately, but praying in vain, for the help of Achilles against Hector! And then, you dog-faced King who are nothing, you will wish that you hadn't insulted and outraged the best fighter among With this word he broke in pieces his staff of office and flung it far from him.

Then arose from the midst of that assembly of the rulers of men one wise and aged, Nestor. King was he of sacred Pylos and he had already outlived two generations and was now ruling over the third generation of his people. Then went up a huge sigh of relief from all that assembly of chieftains; for they knew well the wisdom of Nestor and they had long been praying that he would speak.

“Shame upon you both!” was the way he began; and deep was the approving murmur that reverberated among them all as they heard those well-deserved words. “Priam would rejoice,” he went on, “and the sons of Priam would leap for joy to hear of this terrible contest between you two. Now hearken to my words, and let them sink into both your hearts. You two imagine, each of you, that you are the greatest warriors in the world; but I can assure you I have consorted in my time with men far greater than either of you, and never did they set me at naught. Such warriors I have never since beheld nor shall behold, as Dryas, shepherd of the host, and god-like Polyphemus, and Theseus, son of Aegeus, peer of the immortals. With these men I had fellowship, men who fought with the centaurs when they came down from their caves in the mountains. I forbid you, Agamemnon, to take from him this girl. Let her be. We all joined in giving her to him as a prize. Nor do thou, son of Peleus, be minded to strive with a king such as he is; for though you are valiant and though a goddess bore you, yet he is the mightier, because he is king over many more men than you are.”

Nestor’s words succeeded in putting a stop to any immediate violence between them; but they did not alter the main issue. Back to his tent with his angry Myrmidons rushed Achilles; while Agamemnon proceeded to arrange for the ship and its rowers and to persuade Odysseus to be the ship’s captain that should carry the daughter of Chryses back to her father in Apollo’s temple. But when all this was done the far-ruling tyrant-king sent his two heralds to the tent of Achilles to demand Briseïs.

The heralds themselves, when they reached the tent of the son of Peleus, were so fearful lest the wrath of Achilles should rise to a towering pitch of fury the moment he set eyes on them that they stood side by side in the entrance to his hut without uttering a sound. Like a couple of forlorn statues they stood, wrapped in the folds of their stately ritualistic robes; and they remained deathly silent till the indignant hero himself perceived them and commanded his devoted comrade Patroclus to fetch that lovely maid, whom all the company of the invaders already knew by a word that indicated the transparent delicacy of her complexion.

The perpetual presence of Patroclus in the tent of Achilles, in spite of the fact that their real relationship was pure friendship and had nothing sexual about it, and in spite of the fact that they slept in separate beds, each with a girl at his side, had had the effect of frustrating completely any natural tendency in Briseïs to play the queen in that tent: but she had been happy all the same. Briseïs had the power of being happy when alone, a rare gift, whether in a man or a woman; and in the few months of her captivity she had found that she could extract what to herself she always thought of as her “secret” — a peculiar enchantment emanating from the presence of the very simplest things. She soon had her own favourite glimpses of clumps of bushes with beautiful leaves growing above delicate mosses and wistful flowers. Then there were the masts and decks of the ships. These from her childhood had always fascinated her. They were, indeed, easy to be enjoyed from the tent of Achilles, all those simple objects from which was diffused this mysterious enchantment of hers, an enchantment entirely independent of all human beings. It hovered, for her, round the outward appearances of objects such as plants and posts and rocks and stones and stretches of sand. Yes, and it hovered, this enchantment, even over ashes and dust and bones. But especially did it arise from glimpses of the decks of the ships and the wave-washed edges of harbours and sea-walls. She felt herself to be a votary who was recognised as such by the mysterious powers who ruled the magic world of what mortals think of as the lifeless objects of daily use.

Yes, Briseïs had always been a lonely girl. In her home she had been lonely; so that when she was carried off by foreign invaders she didn't suffer anything like what the daughter of Chryses suffered when she was separated from her father. In fact when the two girls met in the hut of Agamemnon, whither Patroclus had escorted Briseïs while Achilles rushed down to the sands to pray frantically to his mother, the difference between their feelings showed itself very quaintly. Patroclus soon went off to have a chat with one of the great King's bodyguard who was an old acquaintance of his, and, as the King himself was visiting the Cretan contingent, the two captive girls were now alone without fear of interruption.

"Why don't we escape together now, at this very minute?" cried Briseïs eagerly, clutching at one of Astyomene's hands with both of hers.

"Escape, my dear?" said the priest's daughter, in grave astonishment. "But where should we escape *to*?"

"Why *anywhere*, of course!" cried Briseïs, her lovely cheeks glowing with excitement. "As long as we're together, no soldier will dare to meddle with us, and neither of us want, do we, do we, my dear, to go home whence we came! We know well enough what looking after parents is; and we also know only too well, don't we, don't we, how our dear parents will marry us off to some rich, elderly ruler who will pay *them*, not *us*, very liberally for this pleasant little bargain, or even, if you'll let me say so, for this clever sale!"

"But, my dear Briseïs," protested Astyomene gravely, withdrawing her hand and straightening her back, "if we don't go home to our parents where *shall* we go? We'll only be met on the high road or on the high sea, if we get as far as that, by some scoundrelly harlot-hunter, who'll sell us to some brothel-keeper in some city-port where merchants most do congregate and where the last we shall see of each other will be when mules drawing a deathwagon stop at some door."

"But, but, but," cried Briseïs, her beautiful cheeks burning with indignation at this pessimistic view of things, "why on earth shan't we have the wit and the spirit, helped on by great Atropos and greater Tyche, to find husbands for ourselves? All gallant and generous men aren't in the elegant neighbourhoods where parents live, or among the merchants selling their goods in the market squares of crowded ports. Are there not plenty of adventurous young men, and men too, just as likely to find hordes of hidden treasure, beyond any merchant's ponderous imagination, as they are to find us, or any other girls to suit their taste? I tell you, my dear, there are, there are, there *are* such young men; and we shall be a pair of silly crackpots if we lack the spirit to set off to look for these young men!"

Astyomene gazed at her new friend with a long and searching glance. "There is something," she told herself, "about you, my pretty Briseïs, that does not make me take kindly to, or take with a vital response, the sort of adventure you suggest." But again Briseïs appealed to her: "O come on, you sweet slow-wit! Surely you can see that there are ways open for you and me, ways to panoramas of success and happiness?" Astyomene leaned back and sighed. Her gaze wandered from the excited countenance in front of her and floated off, through the window of the hut, over the tents of the camp, till it reached the sea. Even here this curiously fixed gaze of the high priest's daughter avoided the lively preparation that was taking place on board a ship to which some wag had, contrary to custom, given the name of "Glabora", and which had already been selected, though no-one had bothered to tell her so, to convey her to the harbour of Chryse. Watching her as intently as Briseïs was, and waiting as eagerly as Briseïs was, to catch her reaction to this devil-may-care idea of their running away together, it was a complete puzzle to the younger girl when she saw Astyomene's face relax into a passive expression of a dreamy and almost humorous acceptance of whatever it was towards which the wave of destiny was rolling them both.

"It's all very well for you," cried Briseïs, jumping to her feet, "to take things as they come like this! But if what they tell me is likely to happen, and you are sent home, while I have to wait in this accurst hut till this thick-jawed bully of a rampaging tyrant decides to deflower me, and if possible impregnate me with a brute of a babe as like himself as he can thrust into me, am I to take such a destiny lying down? All you've got to do is to sail away, all calm and rejoicing, back to your devoted dad, who'll worship you more than ever now, until some reigning Prince of Troas makes you his reigning Princess! Well! Good luck to you, favoured of the gods! If you ever hear shrieks and wailings in the night, crossing the golden roof of your grand palace, you'll sleep the happier, I dare say, thinking of your refusal to share your life with me."

Astyomene jumped up herself at that and clasped the furious girl's arm.

"It's not, O it's *not* like that at all!" she began.

But at that moment they were interrupted by the entrance of Agamemnon's housekeeper, Phemië, who was so old that it had become all she could do to arrange the loaves and vegetables and pears and apples and oranges in rows on the kitchen shelves. With an old nurse's instinct she knew at once that the two girls were upset. "I'm lost," she quavered, in a high-pitched lamentation. “The whole lot of them have gone aboard the silly ship. Think of calling a fine Achaean ship on which Theseus may have sailed in his time by such a name as ‘Glabora’! I should think they would be ashamed of such a stupid joke. I wanted to tell my big pet-boy he’d better stop this foolery before it’s too late! Black ships are built for fighting the enemies of Hellas, not for being given baby names and carrying naughty girls like you two home to your nurseries!”

“What’s going on here, Phemië, old girl?” enquired Patroclus when he returned. “Are you sorry to lose Astyomene so soon? Well! I’m sorry to lose Briseïs! But there you are! That’s the way of this world. We’re always finding lovely things and losing lovely things. That’s what I’ve said to Achilles, who is at this moment — I warrant you can believe *that*, pretty Briseïs, can’t you? — sobbing out his loss of you to his darling Mummy-Goddess! I expect he’ll persuade her — don’t you think so, Phemië? — to rush up to heaven and hug the knees of Father Zeus and persuade him to force your new master to give back our little lovely!”

He now turned to the two girls, who were standing side by side with their backs to the window sill, the sea air blowing through their hair, so that the curls of Briseïs mingled with the waving tresses of Astyomene.

“What’s your opinion, my dears,” Patroclus enquired, “of all this bloody fighting? Don’t you feel, as I do, and as I am sure Achilles does, that there ought to be some way of getting Helen out of the hands of Paris, or of Alexander, as the wretch prefers to be called, without having to go through all this cruel slaughter of men who could be hunting wolves and cutting down forests and ploughing land and sowing barley and wheat?”

It was certainly not expected by Patroclus or by either of the two girls that the reply to this searching question should come from querulous old Phemië; but that’s what happened.

“Fight? Fight? Fight?” the old woman shrilled, in a voice like a desolate gust of wind through a crack in a fast-closed window shutter, “but who wants to fight? The men, the men, the men, always the men! They think it’s to their honour and glory to fight! Helen would have been perfectly happy with Paris. A beautiful woman is always happy with any man who worships her, and Paris certainly worships Helen. I think myself from what I hear — what do you say, you two? You can see, Patroclus, how they both agree with old Phemië — from what I hear along the street, you know, and that’s where you get the real truth of these things, that she found the house of Menelaus intolerably tedious and dull, whereas in Troy she’s had the time of her life! Say what you please against Alexander, son of Priam, he knows all the ways to make a beautiful girl happy, ways of which Menelaus has always been ignorant as — as — you know whom! O no, my good old handsome Patroclus, I give you my word, angry though my big pet-boy would be to hear me say it, that it isn’t Helen who wants to go back to Menelaus, it’s Menelaus who wants to show how honourable he is by fighting Paris! If I got Helen alone, or either of these two girls got Helen alone, you can bet your life we would soon get the truth out of her as to whether she’d sooner be in the house of Menelaus or with Paris in Troy — and she’d say at once, ‘In Troy!’”

While old Phemië was thus speaking out, plain and true, in the camp of the Argives, Achilles was acting exactly as Patroclus knew he would. One thing was certainly clear. He loved Briseïs, as it was quite impossible for Agamemnon to love Astyomene or indeed any girl, however much in his massive and extremely simple mind he might imagine he did! But the son of the aged Peleus was of a totally different psychic nature from the sons of Atreus. He was, for all his strength, of such highly-strung nerves that he responded to whatever was happening with the emotional intensity of a young woman. It is likely enough that Briseïs herself would have been amazed, perhaps even a little touched, had she seen the way, when she had been led off by Patroclus, he ran down to the edge of the sea and sank upon his knees in a fit of passionate sobbing. Terrific warrior as unquestionably he was, there were others almost his equals in sword and spear. But where none of them came near him was in his power of running. Here he had no competitor in the world. On this point the sons of Atreus might well have retorted that his rivals weren't gods but goddesses, such as Iris the Rainbow. Yes, while Astyomene rejected Briseïs' idea that they should run away together and search all the ports of Troas for the sort of young men they fancied, the deserted Achilles, crouching on the sea-weed at the tide's edge, was weeping like an ill-used child.

"O Mother, my Mother," he sobbed, "we both know for what a short span of life you gave birth to me, and we both have accepted this fate for me, haven't we, Mother darling? Yes, I've always accepted it, and you've always accepted it, each of us thankful enough to Atropos that I should have you for mother and you me for son, for however short a time! And O Mother, Mother! We thought, didn't we, O didn't we, Mother dear, that Zeus the Thunderer would honour me all my brief days and make every one of the Achaeans honour me until we took the city of Troy. But here is this arrogant and insolent Agamemnon who thinks that, because he rules over more people than I, I cannot stand up to him, insulting me more than I have ever been insulted and actually taking away from me this lovely girl of whom I've begun to grow really fond!"

He pressed his forehead once more into the wet sea-weed beneath him and burst into a fresh torrent of tears. The breaking of the waves such a short distance away made him insensible to everything but his own sobs. Over his body swept the white sea-gulls, their senses all alert to catch the difference between a living man and a dead man on that sea-coast. They were quick, however, to sweep off in a flash presently, when, rising like a mist out of the depths, but quickly taking her human form, the goddess Thetis bent down over her prostrate son.

"What is it? Tell me, what is it that has hurt you? Hide it not in your heart, my darling. Tell it all, tell it all to me!"

And at that Achilles rose up; and they sat themselves down side by side on the sea-sand and he told her the whole story.

"And I remember so well, Mother dear," he went on, "how you used to tell me the tale in my father's hall, how you saved Zeus, the Thunderer, from his brother Poseidon and all the other gods, when they would have bound him with chains. But you brought Poseidon's monstrous son, Briareus of the hundred arms, and made him sit down by the side of Zeus to protect him. And all the Olympians were so terrified of Briareus that they all at once humbled themselves before Zeus and gave up their idea of binding him with chains. Why not, therefore, now, O Mother dear, why not now go to Zeus and appeal to him on my behalf against Agamemnon? O I implore you to go to Zeus. He is bound to hear you!"

Kissing him lightly on the brow Thetis rose from his side.

"I will go," she said, "and meanwhile do you return to your huts by your ships and wait. Do not give up your wrath. Just wait, till you see what I can do to avenge you. There must be a delay of twelve days in any case, since Zeus has gone to Oceanus, to visit the blessed Ethiopians. But he'll return, and I will plead with him, whether in Olympus, or on Mount Ida, wherever he happens to be! But return now to your friend Patroclus, and wait. I will plead with Zeus on your behalf."

With these words she left him; and so fast did she descend into the depths of the sea that there was to him hardly even the sight of a sinking shadow or vapour or cloud.

But, after the twelve days had passed, Thetis flew faster than any seagull to the top of Olympus, and there she found the son of Cronos seated on the highest peak of the mountain and absolutely alone. And she crouched down before him and deliberately made the oldest and most sacred of all the gestures of divine supplication. She clasped his knees with one of her arms, and lifted up the other, till with the tips of her fingers she could just touch his chin.

For many, many minutes Zeus, the cloud-gatherer, sat silent and still, and neither moved nor spoke. Then at last he said:

“You bring trouble for me, my dear child, long and grievous trouble. Hera, my wife, is bound to find out that you have been here and that we have talked together. You see, the only way I can do real honour to Achilles and cause all the Greeks to appeal to him to aid them is to make Hector a stronger and stronger warrior, so that he slays and wounds and slays more and more of the Greeks. Only by helping Hector can I really help the Trojans and only by helping the Trojans until the Greeks are driven to come begging and imploring Achilles to join them against Troy can I do real honour to your son. Yes, you have brought me great and serious trouble, my dear child, ‘but all the same for that’ — as your son’s own motto runs — I feel bound to do as you beg me to do. So if now I bow my head as a sign between us it will, I can tell you, be a sign for the whole universe that what I consent to and put my seal upon in that manner shall really and truly come to pass.”

Whereupon the son of Cronos bent his brow in assent, and the ambrosial locks waved from his immortal head, and all Olympus shook.

In haste then did Thetis, fearful least Hera should have seen her, fly down like a falling star into the depths of the sea. But Hera had seen, and no sooner were they all gathered together on the summit of Olympus in that circular space surrounded by the marble palaces built for each particular immortal by strong-armed Hephaestus, the great artificer with fire, her own son, begottten by Zeus himself, than she began to give utterance to her pent-up anger.

"What is this that I beheld," she cried, "the first thing this morning when you left our bed and went up to the peak on the summit? Nothing less than that chit of a sea-wench Thetis clasping your knees on behalf of her cross-patch son, who thinks all the world must wait on his sulks and his tempers? I tell you, it's not right that you should hide these things from me!"

"Hold your damned tongue, you devil-haunted thing!" cried the lord of lightning. "Haven't you yet got it into your head that if I lift a finger against you there's no power in heaven or earth can save you?"

At this the Queen of Heaven gave up. But unable to bear the sight of his mother collapsing, rebuked and frightened, in front of them all, upon her familiar throne, Hephaestus intervened.

"For all our sakes, Mother darling," he cried, "please don't vex the Heavenly Father beyond bearing! Have you forgotten how, when I tried to save you before, he lifted me by the foot and hurled me out of heaven? All day long I fell; yes, all day I was falling, and little good did it do me to be the lord of fire. It was in Lemnos I fell as the sun went down. And let those who hate Lemnos say that the Sintians who live there are thieves and robbers; I say they are the kindest people I have ever met!"

Chuckling over his own clumsiness as he carried the sweet nectar round to them all, and panting as he waited on them while he drank himself, he soon had them all rocking with unquenchable laughter, such as never ceased till night came round once more. And lulled by the lyre of Apollo and caught up into every celestial vista by the Muses' arts they finally sought their beds; and when Zeus, the lord of the lightning, slept, golden throned Hera slept by his side.

BOOK II

BUT THE FATHER of Gods and men found that he could not sleep peaceably all that night. He kept waking up and wondering what he could do to start the fighting again between Greeks and Trojans.

"What honour will Achilles get," he said to himself, "if this war doesn't grow more violent?" Suddenly it came to him that he *must* do something at once to stir up the battle. "If both sides grow sick of it," he said to himself, "who knows what peace or truce or treaty or conference might be arranged before we in Olympus have any notion of what is going on?"

Then the Father of Gods and men very quietly, so as not to waken Hera, whose beautiful white arms — for all authorities on feminine beauty had long since been forced to admit that Hera's arms were the most beautiful that had ever been possessed by any woman since the beginning of time — were extended above their coverlet, tilted his pillow a little at the back of his head. For he had long ago discovered that he could think better on his back than on his side.

"I know! I know! I've got it!" he now told himself.

And indeed the All-Father had made such good use in this new position of his thinking apparatus that he really *had* got it. Nor could his decision have been better. It was based on his own personal experience in the earlier portion of that very night; for during these hours he had been troubled by a very disturbing dream. It wasn't a nightmare, for that would have wakened him; and in his terror he would have wakened Hera. It was just what his mother Rhea had the habit of describing, when he was visited by one of them, as an *oneiros oulos*, a deadly dream.

“Come you here to me, Oneiros Oulos,” he now commanded. “I’ve something important for you to do.”

And remaining perfectly still as he lay with the back of his head propped up by a bulge in the pillow, he explained to the airy monster hovering there in front of him with its tail almost touching the white arms of Hera just what he wanted it to do.

While he talked to it in the dawn-twilight of their sacred bedroom its countenance became more and more and more horrible; till, before he had finished his precise instructions, it resembled a bleeding wound divided in its oozing depths into a nose and mouth beneath one single appalling eye which pulsed and palpitated with an interior voracity capable of sucking the life out of a dinosaur.

“Hasten and go, Oulos Oneiros,” he commanded it, not even whispering the words, but uttering their syllables in his thought to that pulsing eye at the bottom of that engulfing maw of ingurgitating blood, “to Agamemnon, son of Atreus, and tell him that we immortals have now agreed together without dissension that he may now arm the long-haired Achaeans and advance at once to take the broad-wayed city of the Trojans.”

So he commanded the terrible Dream; and Oulos Oneiros obeyed him. Swiftly the Dream flew down to Agamemnon’s hut and stood at the head of his bed. Once there, Oulos Oneiros took to himself the form of Nestor, son of Neleus, in whose judgment, among all the elders of the Greeks, Agamemnon had most trust. Speaking through the form of Nestor the deadly Dream announced to Agamemnon that the Olympians were now wholly agreed, and that there was no more dissension between Zeus and Hera about delaying the taking of Troy in order to do honour to Achilles. Let the city be fought for at once, and let Helen be returned to Menelaus. Thus spoke Oulos Oneiros above the bed of Agamemnon through the form of Nestor, whom the sons of Atreus venerated most of all the elders of the Greeks; and when he had thus spoken he departed into the dawn.

And Agamemnon, fully awake now, leapt up from his bed, and, buckling on his armour, rushed off to call a conference straight away of all the Grecian heroes. And the strange thing was that for all his heroic simplicity as a wide-ruling sovereign with more cities to govern than plans for governing them, the King knew by a deep, four-footed-animal instinct that it was Oulos Oneiros, the Dream of Dread, and not Nestor at all who had come to him in the night. And not only knew he this by instinct; but the same simple animal instinct put it into his head to test all other kings and princes and chieftains and tribal leaders among the Greeks by a false suggestion made by himself, the monarch of them all, that after these nine years of vainly besieging this city, so hard to take, the time had come for giving up the whole business and sailing home to Hellas.

With this plan in his head, cunning enough, but not very subtle in its cunning, as soon as he had got them all collected in one place, and as soon as the heralds, of whom there were no less than nine, had with no little difficulty got this huge crowd to sit down quietly in great circles on the ground, Agamemnon made his false speech.

“We thought, my friends,” he shouted, in his most reverberating tone, a tone not quite as far-carrying as his brother’s, for Menelaus was renowned over the whole world for the distance his voice could carry, and for its resonance when he yelled his Spartan war-cry, “yes, we thought that after these nine long years of battling with the Trojans we should be able to take Ilium and burn it to the ground. But we have tried in vain. And now that our ships’ timbers are rotting and our ships’ ropes are growing loose and soft with rain, and our wives are growing weary of waiting for us, and our children are ceasing to be children, let us flee with our ships to our dear native land, for no more is there any hope that we shall take broad-wayed Troy."

The result of this speech was as terrific as could be expected. The whole mass of the rank-and-file, the surging crowd of ordinary men such as to the chieftains were just the "Hoi Polloi" or "the Many", were stirred to action at once. The whole crowd began swaying in one direction, as the West Wind sways a field of corn. Down towards the ships they rushed in a confused horde, and many of them even began trying to pull away the wooden props that kept the ships from sliding into the water. But all this was not unobserved by the Queen of Heaven. Desperately Hera rushed over to Pallas Athene and implored her to fly down at once to the scene of action and stop, at any cost, this mad rush to their ships by the Grecian host.

"Stop them! Stop them!" Hera implored. "Are they going to sail for home, leaving Argive Helen still in the hands of the son of Priam?"

Without a word did gleaming-eyed Athene do at once what Hera bade her. She had no hesitation as to which of the chieftains she would select for her first appeal; and she went straight to the side of Odysseus of many devices, who was standing close to his well-benched ship but had laid no hold upon it, for the thought of such a return with everything unfulfilled saddened and sickened him.

Odysseus knew her at once and obeyed her like a shot. Throwing his cloak to his friend, the herald Eurybates, who came from the same village in Ithaca, he set off at a run; and as soon as he reached the hut of Agamemnon he made the monarch lend him his sacred sceptre, the sign and symbol, a bauble perhaps, but still one symbol of royal authority.

This particular sceptre had been made by Hephaestus, who gave it to Zeus himself, who gave it to Hermes, who gave it to Atreus, who at his death left it to Thyestes, who left it in his turn to Agamemnon. With this in his hand Odysseus hurried through the whole crowd of the Achaeans. Whenever he met a chieftain who seemed especially keen on sailing for home he asked him what wretched spirit had taken possession of him that their heavy-witted King's words about sailing for home were only meant as a test for them all. And whenever he found one of the more formidable of the people especially anxious to hoist sail and be off he used the same expression to him and asked what crazy spirit had got hold of him. But in the case of the ordinary rank and file he added a blow or two with this same bauble of power and denounced the fellow for taking too much on himself.

"We can't all be petty kings in our own right," he told each one of these war-weary nondescripts. "We must have one single monarch to obey, or the confusion becomes ridiculous! Sit down, you noisy one, and stop shouting, can't you! It was Zeus the Father himself, I tell you, who made this man our sovereign lord."

Thus Odysseus rushed to and fro among them, brandishing the great sceptre at the chieftains and actually hitting with it the more obstreperous of the common people. At last he came upon the roguish old clown Thersites, who had a special prejudice against both himself and Achilles, purely on the ground of their being cleverer and more quick to show their ability than the other chiefs.

Thersites was bandy-legged; he was lame in one foot; he had bent shoulders; he had barely any hair on his head; nor was his head itself an ordinary human head. It bulged out like the head of a frog. He could hardly be called a popular figure, since he made fun of anyone who crossed him in anything; and once off in one of his tirades of mockery nothing could stop him. But he undoubtedly was a born clown and his buffoonery was inspired. He could always raise a laugh, and that was enough for him. And there was something in his grotesque deformity which brought it about that if he once started to make a butt of anybody, that person’s natural human dignity became a laughable and absurd thing in itself.

It was in order to get a bit of surplus beyond his ordinary meat and drink and to enjoy some public response to his loquacious clowning that Thersites, just as they were starting, had jumped into one of the sixty ships commanded by Menelaus of Lacedaemon and Sparta, possibly even into the very ship that might have contained Thamyris the Thracian, only on his way thither Thamyris boasted so much of his artistic genius that, as we can well believe, those nine jealous daughters of Zeus, the Muses, saw to it that he was so maimed and blind and dumb before he reached the harbour as to be unable to climb on board. But Thersites did manage to join the men who were to endure “all those struggles and groanings for Helen’s sake”, and once among them he certainly added something startling and shocking, as well as comical, to the excitement of their adventurous voyage.

Once arrived with the rest, Thersites, as he shared their meals, though he was too grotesque a figure to share their sports, was able to make laughing stocks of all the chief leaders, especially of the two sons of Atreus and of the two Ajaxes and of Odysseus from Ithaca and of Achilles the son of Peleus. Of these he made uproarious and often deeply humorous mockery, mockery which was the more effective since they were all so far away from the familiar locations of the old inherited traditions. Nor were there lacking moments when this humorous misfit among mortal men, crouched down by himself under a tree-stump or a tombstone or a sand-dune, allowed himself to ponder on the ways of the gods to human beings in a mood of really philosophical criticism. At times like these Thersites would decide that the whole business of being alive on the surface of Mother Gaia, the Earth, was really not worth the cost, not worth the shocks and pains and miseries and set-backs, and certainly not worth — and in his meditations he used the words that had already become common among them during the discomforts of their voyage — certainly not worth “these struggles and groanings for Helen’s sake”.

“If I was as cunning an old rascal as Odysseus,” he said to himself, “I’d soon enter into some private compact with Pluto, for me to give to him a few sacrificial offerings, and for him to give me a nice little place to myself in some quiet corner of Tartarus.”

At this moment, however, Thersites had found a perfect opportunity for the play of his gift for fooling. He could mock at Achilles for having been given Briseïs as a prize; and he could mock at Agamemnon for wanting to take Briseïs away from Achilles. He now began telling everybody that it was time he was given a beautiful young girl as a prize.

“I suppose,” he told them, “that if I tried to get a ransom from the Trojans for some Trojan boy or girl I’d carried off, I’d soon have the great Agamemnon thundering up to say that all ransoms, whether in gold, silver or bronze or tin or pearls or rubies or diamonds or girls must go to him because he was king of us all, king of the universe, a good substitute for Father Zeus, and well suited to take his place when that monarch happened to be visiting those Blessed Ethiopians of his who most certainly must be adepts at bowing and scraping before him and at giving him gold and silver and girls quite as pretty as those that Agamemnon and Achilles and Odysseus steal from us and then quarrel about among themselves! What do you want from us now, son of Atreus? Do you think I’ve got some beautiful girl hidden away in my tent that it is my duty to offer up to you, our noble King, for your special and private enjoyment? What does he think he is, this King of Puppets, that we should give up every private possession we possess to satisfy his greed for chariots and horses and gold and silver and pearls and diamonds and unravished girls?”

It can be well imagined that it was a considerable surprise to Thersites when Odysseus stopped by his side and reproached him in a grave and serious and personal tone, but slowly and clearly, and loud enough for everyone within hearing to catch all he said.

“If I ever find you again prating and jibing against the King, may my own head, the head of Odysseus, abide no more upon its shoulders, nor may I any more be called the father of Telemachus if I don’t take you and strip you of every rag of clothing you have on and send you wailing to the ships, beaten with shameful blows!”

So spoke Odysseus, and with the sceptre he smote his back and shoulders. Thersites crouched down before him, and a bloody weal rose on his back from the strokes he’d received from that golden sceptre. As he crouched down before Odysseus, Thersites could not conceal from himself that big tears were gathering in his eyes, and when he finally sat down on the ground he could not hide the fact from any passer-by that these tears were now running down his cheeks. But he got no sympathy. Vexed at heart though the people were over their own fate in having to stay in this accursed Trojan land with Troy still untaken, it pleased them to see this buffoon, who in his time had made every one of them foolish in the eyes of their neighbours, shedding tears like a child who has been beaten.

Indeed, as they glanced knowingly at each other, first one and then another would jibe at him, and one would say: “Well, if anyone had it coming to him it was you, you wretch! It was you who made my poor old grand-dad feel such a fool with your taunts that he has never tasted a drop of wine since you went for him!” And another would say, “So you’ve got it yourself now, you who made Clitteros, my poor old uncle, so afraid to show his face at the tents that he’s built himself a hut under a rock at Beach-Turn, and Auntie Cadorva has to carry his supper out there every night!” And another would say, “That’s nothing to what you did to my brother Poppero. Only a few folk know it, but it’s what you did, you rogue! You mimicked his way of talking to his little pet dog Uddel, whom he named after a wolf he used to meet in the forest till they became friends. My brother used to hug this dog Uddel between his knees and keep muttering, ‘uddle — uddle — uddle’, but at last one day he heard everybody laughing and found you, you devil, hugging a little pig and murmuring the same gibberish! That very night he took his dog in his arms and swam out to sea with him until they were both drowned.”

Having finished with Thersites, Odysseus took back the Hephaestian sceptre to Agamemnon and gathered all the chiefs and all the people together and made such an inspiring speech to them that in all their lives none of them had ever heard the like. And after him Nestor the son of Neleus gave them some shrewd practical advice.

The culminating point of Odysseus’ speech was his description of the horrible serpent sent by Zeus as a sign to them before they set sail to Troy. This serpent devoured the nestlings of a mother-sparrow whose nest was in a plane-tree. Eight little birds it devoured, and after them their mother as the ninth. And Odysseus explained how Calchas, their prophetic Seer, told them that it would be in the ninth year that Troy would fall.

Full of practical and immediate wisdom was Nestor’s speech; for he recommended that King Agamemnon should hold at once a general review of all the Greek tribes who had come in their various ships and under various leaders to overthrow Troy and restore Helen to Menelaus. Staggering it must have been to many among this great host, numbering a hundred thousand, and brought here in a thousand ships, when they were confronted by this calculated review of themselves and the vessels that brought them. But old Nestor was perfectly right in demanding such a review and such a calculation, as it gave them all a steadfast background of their homelands and home cities, without which it would have been only too easy to feel lost and bewildered.

Nor was the Heavenly Father, Zeus the son of Cronos, oblivious of the advantage the enemies of Troy derived from this review of all their ships and all their leaders. So he called Iris to him and ordered her to go to Troy and warn the Trojans and tell them that they also had better marshal their forces. And Iris obeyed the voice of the All-Father. She flew down to the city of Troy and took the shape of Polites, one of the sons of Priam.

There was already a crowd round the King at the gate of the city which was called Priam’s Gate, and hither Iris came in the shape of Polites, whom she found acting as sentinel on the top of the Mound of Aesyetes. And in the shape of Polites she begged King Priam to call a great gathering, not only of the Trojans, but also of their allies, in fact of all who had come to aid them from every part of the world. The old King Priam and that “sweet warman”, Hector, his most formidable son, hastened to obey the words of their sentinel Polites, and summoned all their own fighters and all the fighters among their allies to come together on the wide eminence outside the walls of the city which mortal men call Batieia, or the hill of thorn-bushes, but which the immortals still call Mirine, in memory of a fast-rushing Amazonian queen who once lived there.

BOOK III

AND SO THE Achaeans from the sea-coast and the Trojans from the tumulus of Mirine, the Amazon, advanced against each other. But the manner of their advance was curiously different. The Trojans advanced shouting and yelling like a host of *geranon* or screaming cranes, who, fleeing from the drenching storms and whirling winds of the high mountain-ridges, flap desperate wings in their wild haste to reach the ocean, and as they go bring horror and desolation to the terrified Pygmies over whose abodes they fly. On the other hand, the Greeks or Achaeans advanced in unbroken silence, moving resolutely forward, almost as if they were holding each other's hands, and certainly as if their chief thought was to bear aid, each to his particular companion.

The moment the two armies were within a spear's throw of each other, god-like Alexander, the stealer-away of Helen, strode forward between them. At the sight of him there, behaving like a real warrior, both armies stood stiff and waited in suspense to see what would happen.

Paris, in his heroic mood, or, as he preferred to think of himself, "god-like Alexander", wore a splendid panther-skin over one shoulder and carried a curved bow and a quiver of arrows over the other, and in each hand he brandished a shining spear. Shouting in a high-pitched voice to the army of the Achaeans, he announced that he came forward as a champion, and that he was prepared to fight against whatever champion they liked to set up against him; and he went on to propose that the issue of this private contest should be accepted by them all as the final decision and conclusion of the whole nine years' war.

Nor did the challenge flung out so defiantly by the seducer and abductor of Argive Helen remain unanswered. And it was answered, as every honest man, no doubt, on both sides, hoped it might be, by none other than Argive Helen's husband himself. Down from his chariot with a cry of triumph leapt Menelaus. Even as a lion he leapt down, a hungry lion who has killed a horned stag and goes on greedily devouring his prey, whatever the crowd of young hunters and fierce dogs who now surround him may be doing in their struggle to kill him.

Hector rejoiced to hear the words of his brother Paris, and he hastened forward with his spear held in the middle as a sign of peace. And gladly was it accepted as such, and all the Trojan warriors, when they saw him, began removing their weapons and seating themselves upon the ground. The long-haired Greeks, on the contrary, began shooting arrows and throwing stones. But the great King Agamemnon shouted at them: "Stop that! Stop that at once! Can't you see he has something important to say to us?"

Thereupon Hector lifted up his voice, and with an utterance slow and clear made himself heard by both sides.

"Let us all," he declared, "lay down our arms upon the life-giving earth, while these two men do battle for Helen and her possessions; and whichever of them shall win let him take the woman, and all that belongs to her, to his own home; and let the rest of us swear oaths of friendship, offering due sacrifices to the gods, so that they shall be witnesses of our vows of peace."

And Menelaus, good at the war-cry, now spoke firmly and gently.

"Yes," he said, "I implore you all to hear me, for upon my own heart, more than upon the hearts of any of you, has sorrow come. Let the one of us two for whom death and fate are appointed be content to lie dead. And let two lambs be brought from your city, a white ram and a black ewe, one for the Sun and one for our Mother the Earth. And we on our side will bring yet another lamb, which shall be for Olympian Zeus. And bring also, I beg you, your old King Priam, to take the oath with these sacrifices; for young people cannot altogether be trusted. It is old age that has the power of looking both to the past and to the future, and with an old king present at our oath-taking and sacrifice the issue of it will be far the best for both sides."

Hearing these words, both the Trojans and the Achaeans felt a deep ease of heart. They left their chariots in long rows and laid their armour on the ground and sat down. Hector sent to the city for his father Priam and for the two lambs for sacrifice, while Agamemnon sent the herald, Talthybius, for the lamb to be offered on the Greek side to Zeus.

It was then that the goddess Iris, taking the shape of Laodice, the wife of the son of Antenor and far the loveliest of all the Trojan ladies, hastened to find Helen. Her she found in her hall, weaving a great double-folded purple piece of embroidery on which she was depicting various battle-scenes. Close up to her stepped Iris in the form of Laodice, and whispered in her ear:

"O hasten with me, dear lady, so that you can see what wonders are happening! The battle has ceased. Both sides are sitting on the ground with their spears planted in the earth. Alexander and Menelaus are going to fight a duel alone: and the one who wins will take you to his home with all that is yours."

As she told her this news, Iris breathed into her a sudden intense home-sickness, a longing for her former husband, for her native-land, for her father and mother. At once Helen veiled herself in shining linen, weeping as she did so, and accompanied by Clymene and Aethra, the fairest of her maidens, followed this false image of Laodice to the Scaean Gate. Here, seated on the rampart above the Gate, was the old King Priam surrounded by a large group of aged warriors, now too feeble to fight, who were eagerly chattering together as they watched what was going on, just as cicadas from a tree in the forest lift up their lily-like voices.

And when these old warriors beheld Helen coming among them, “God in Heaven!” they murmured to each other, “little wonder that for a Being as beautiful as this all our host of warriors and these thousands and thousands of Greeks should be willing to die! Why, this woman is more than human! She has the loveliness of the Immortals!”

But Priam called Helen to him and said: “Come hither, dear child, and sit before me, that thou mayest see thy former lord and thy kinsfolk and thy people. Thou art nowise to blame in my eyes. It is the gods I ween who are to blame. Yes, it is they who stirred up against me this accursed war that has been the cause of so many tears. But now do tell me, my dear, who is that huge warrior over there, so valiant and tall and so royal-looking?”

“Most revered and most dread art thou to me, O father of my present lord! But, all the same, I can only say: would that I had died ere I followed thy son and left my bridal chamber and my kinsfolk and my daughter of tender age and the lovely companions of my girlhood! But that was not to be; and now I pine away with weeping. Howbeit I will tell you now at once who that man is about whom you have questioned me. That man is Agamemnon, and he was, as sure as I am with you here, brother-in-law to shameless me.”

“Ah happy son of Atreus!” cried the old Priam as he gazed upon him. “But now for heaven’s sake tell me, my dear child, who is that grand warrior over there? Shorter by a head than the son of Atreus, he seems to me, but broader of shoulders and chest. Like a ram he seems to me, a ram of thick fleece, pacing about through a flock of white ewes?”

To this question Helen, the daughter of Zeus, made an immediate answer.

“He,” she cried, “is Odysseus, the son of Laërtes, skilled in a thousand devices. Yes, though he was born and bred in the rugged island of Ithaca, there’s no branch of wisdom in which he’s not a master.”

Hearing this the wise Antenor turned to her and cried: “O lady, you have uttered a true word! I know how right you are because I myself have entertained him in my halls. When he rises to speak he holds his staff or sceptre stiffly in front of him, as if he were a complete blockhead or dunce or fool, nor does he lift his gaze from the ground. But the moment his great voice rises from his chest the words that rush forth are like windblown snow-flakes on a winter’s day! Nobody in the world can rival him in powerful speech!”

And then it was that the aged Priam caught sight of Ajax.

“And who on earth, my darling child, is that great man, towering above everybody with his head so high and his shoulders so broad?”

“*That* man,” answered long-robed Helen, “is Ajax, the bulwark of the Achaeans. Oh yes! And standing near him is Idomeneus, the leader of the Cretans, whom Menelaus and I often entertained in our halls. But there are two among the rest of the Achaeans down there below that I cannot see; I mean my own brothers, born with me of my own mother, namely Castor, tamer of horses, and the great boxer, Polydeuces. Whether they never left our lovely home in Lacedaemon, or whether they *are* here, but disinclined to join in the fray, lest they be jeered at as being so nearly related to me and to all the shame I have brought upon myself, I cannot tell you.”

So she spoke, and little did she know that it was the lifegiving earth itself that held them fast, there in Lacedaemon, their dear native land, both of them dead and buried.

Meanwhile, from the heart of the city and out through the gate into the space between the two hosts went heralds with the sacrificial lambs and a great goat-skin full of the richest and most intoxicating wine, making ready for such sacred vows in the presence of the gods as could not be broken without disaster to all. And one of the heralds, whose name was Idaeus, came up to old Priam's side with a polished bowl and golden cups, and made a grave and formal request for his presence at the oath-taking ceremony.

"Rise, thou son of Laomedon," he said solemnly. "Both Trojans and Achaeans call for thee, that thou mayest swear the oath of unbroken faith to the gods along with the proper sacrifices. Alexander and Menelaus will then fight each other and the one who wins will take to his home the woman and all her belongings; and we on both sides will swear the never-to-be-broken oaths of friendship to which the immortal gods will give their consent."

Thus spoke the herald, and the old King shuddered. But all the same he rose from his seat and bade them harness the horses to his chariot and rode forth to a central place between the two armies. And here Agamemnon opened the ceremony with a solemn prayer.

"O great Zeus," he prayed, "who at this moment dost rule us all from the summit of Mount Ida, and thou Sun who beholdest all things and hearest all things, and ye Rivers and thou Earth, and all ye numberless ones, who weary of life rest in the world below, listen to our prayer and accept our offerings and take vengeance on any of us who have sworn our vows falsely. If Menelaus kill Alexander let him take the woman and all that is hers; and if Alexander kill Menelaus let him keep the woman and all that is hers."

So he spake and cut the lambs' throats. Then rose up the aged Priam.

"Hearken to me," he cried, turning first to his own Trojans and then to the Greeks. "I verily will now go my way back to windy Ilium, since I cannot bear to behold with my own eyes my dear son doing battle with

Menelaus.” And then, as he mounted his chariot, “I will take the dead lambs with me,” he added. And, as he watched his driver take the reins of the horses, he looked sadly at those two little blood-stained bodies at his feet. “Sacrifice to the gods? Not a bit of it!” he told himself. “It’s life paying its debt to death! And we all owe that debt; and each of us, sooner or later, will have to pay it! O, how I wish,” and bending down he touched the nearest little lamb with the knuckles of his right hand, “that my end would come before I’ve seen one more drop of blood, never mind for whose sake it is spilt, or for what cause!”

“O how thankful I am,” thought the beautiful but irresponsible Paris, as he adjusted his carefully selected armour to his incomparable limbs, “that I brought brother Lycaon’s corselet as well as my usual one, for it does, it really does, look grander and more imposing, and I shall certainly wear it instead of the other. But what an inspiration it was just now that Aphrodite herself — it must have been she and no other — put into my head! Yes, lie there, my perfect bow, with your arrow waiting all ready to be strung and pulled. You don’t know, master Menelaus, you great shouter of catch-words, how quick I can dodge, and when once I’ve dropped this damned spear and shield, how quick I can shoot! But you’ll find out, my friend, you’ll find out! And what’s more, your ghost shall I see tonight, before it descends to Hades, what kisses I’ll win from Helen, in spite of your being gone for good!”

And when the ground had been measured for them, and when the accustomed throwing of the lots as to which of them should throw his spear first was over, the duel began. Paris threw his spear first as fate decided. But its point was broken and turned aside by the thick Mycenaean shield of Menelaus. Then Menelaus threw his spear and it pierced the shield of Paris and pierced also that showy corselet of his brother Lycaon with which he had been so pleased; but Paris was so slender and so agile that though the spear actually pierced his tunic too he managed to dodge aside with his skin untouched. Then Menelaus drew his silver-handled sword and, rushing at him, struck him a terrific blow full on the helmet, praying desperately to Zeus as he did so and thinking in his deepest heart, "Now to the end of time shall such base wretches who show their gratitude to their hosts by stealing their wives know what to expect!"

But it was not the helmet of Paris that was broken in pieces when these two met; it was the sword of Menelaus. Into four pieces it was broken, and it fell from his hand upon the ground. Then the wrath of Menelaus was turned from this treacherous wife-stealer to the All-Father himself, looking down from Mount Ida so calmly upon this failure of just retribution.

"Father Zeus!" he shouted in his most powerful war-cry yell, "you are the most pernicious of all the gods in the whole world!"

Still yelling with rage against the helpless Paris, or as Paris loved to hear his admirers call him, "the god-like Alexander", Menelaus now rushed upon him with his bare hands, pulled him to the earth and, hauling him by his helmet along the ground, dragged him towards the ranks of the seated Achaeans. Paris himself couldn't utter a sound, for he was being choked by the strap of the helmet under his soft chin: and Menelaus felt the delicious throbbing of satisfied vengeance convulse his whole body and soul.

But he was calculating without the goddess of beauty for beauty's sake and of love for love's sake, and of letting order and decency be shattered under the wheels of the chariot of ecstasy: for here was Aphrodite in a flash between them, with her immortal hands loosening the strap which was choking Paris! Well can we imagine when Menelaus found himself with only the man's helmet in his hands how quickly he flung it amid the ranks of his comrades and turned back to complete his vengeance. But he was too late. Throwing a cloud of impenetrable mist round her darling, she carried him off from that field of contest and, conveying him to his own chamber, laid him upon his bed. Then, telling herself to remember that she always got more delight in vicariously sharing the love of lovers than in being loved or even in loving, this most irresistible of all divinities rushed off to get Helen.

She had, however, to accept the unspoken rule governing the relations between immortals and mortals, so she couldn't summon Helen in her own person. Whose shape had she best assume? This was a very delicate question, for on it no doubt depended the whole success of her struggle to bring these unique lovers together upon that memorable night.

"Better not aim too high," she told herself. "On the other hand, better not let her bring her usual companions, Aethra and Clymene on the scene! Who *would* be the right person at this particular moment?" Then she had an inspiration. "It must be a very humble person; and yet someone she has known very intimately and known at her old home in Greece in her girlhood. But it mustn't be her nurse. O no!" and Aphrodite smiled with mischievous naughtiness: "I've been too often defeated by a beautiful girl's nurse. They're the shrewdest of all the antagonists I've ever had to deal with; worse than Hera and Athene together!"

And still smiling to herself, and thinking of various shrewd nurses who had *not* been a match for her, Aphrodite took the form of an ancient dame, a wool-comber, who had been wont to card the fair wool for Helen when she lived in Lacedaemon, and who was well loved by her. In the shape of this old woman, Aphrodite went to Helen's side, who was surrounded now by a crowd of Trojan ladies.

"Come home, my dear," she murmured in her ear, pulling at her glistening white veil; "your god-like Alexander wants you especially tonight. He is lying on the bed in his chamber, freshly bathed, and anointed with the perfume you yourself wanted him to use, and looking more beautiful, my sweet child, than I have ever seen any man look.”

So great was Aphrodite’s power to excite amorous feelings, and so passionate was her private desire at this moment to share, vicariously and unseen by either of the lovers, the ecstasy of their love, that her immortal emotion shone in the eyes of the old woman she impersonated. So much of it indeed shone there, and in the old lady’s whole manner, that Helen was not to be fooled. Women are far quicker to detect the deception when an immortal is impersonating a mortal than men ever are; and not only so, but, although the goddess had already made her inwardly decide that nothing in heaven or earth should prevent her from hastening to the bedchamber of her lover, she was quick to catch the kindred erotic excitement in the beautiful Being at her side.

The old Lacedaemonian wool-comber had by this time vanished into thin air, and the loveliest of mortals was face to face with the loveliest of immortals. Certain it is that whether mortal or immortal they were a couple of very spirited and very discerning young women; and the challenge this time came from the mortal one. Argive Helen had indeed come to the natural conclusion that in Aphrodite she had found a very dangerous rival who was also in love with the seductive and beguiling Paris! She didn’t understand — how could she possibly, as a mortal woman, understand such a weird subtlety? — that Aphrodite could completely gratify her own ecstatic passion for the god-like Alexander vicariously, through her, Helen’s, passion for him. So it was with an explosion of spontaneous anger that she now burst out: “Daimonië, why are you trying to fool me like this? Have you a notion now of carrying me off to Phrygia or Maeonia where you can give me to some other mortal for whom you have a fondness? Anyway, my Menelaus, who has conquered your god-like Alexander, will be wanting now to lead hateful me back to *his* home. So do you go now, and make love to Paris, and leave Olympus forever; and guard him, and love him, till he either makes you his wife or his slave! Yes*!* *you* go to him; for I swear to you I will not go to that man's bed, to be mocked at forever by all Trojan women! Besides — O, I can't tell you all I feel — I have a measureless grief at heart!"

And then there happened between these two beautiful and angry women precisely what Olympian Zeus, the parent of both of them, must have foreseen from the start. The immortal one used her immortality to the limit and threatened the mortal one, who naturally and inevitably yielded to an outburst of such supernatural fury.

"Annoy me not, silly girl, lest you make me hate you as much as now I happen to love you; and if I really do hate you, my hate will soon extend to both Greeks and Trojans, and then such disasters will happen to the whole lot of you in this part of the world that more blood and more tears will be shed than you, proud folk, have ever seen, or even expected to see, in your self-satisfied lives!"

So spoke the goddess; and Helen, though her father was also Zeus himself, was seized with fear. And she wrapped herself in her shining mantle and obeyed and went; nor did the Trojan women around her notice her departure, for the goddess saw to that as she led her away.

In silence she led her swiftly through the streets till they came to the Palace of Paris, the son of Priam. Here, as they passed through the portals and went down the passages, all the handmaidens they met turned hurriedly to their task, and when they reached the bedchamber of the god-like Alexander, it was the great goddess herself who got a chair for Helen and made her seat herself by the side of her adorable lord as he lay there in his resplendent beauty. But Helen’s only desire was to pour forth upon him anger and bitter contempt.

“So you’ve come safe away from the battle, have you? O how I wish my former lord, so much braver than you, had done for you and your vain boasting! But challenge him again, will you? O how I wish from the bottom of my heart that you would! But you’d better not! No, I warn you to beware of doing it; for next time, there’s no doubt, fair-haired Menelaus will finish you off once and for all!”

Then Paris made answer very gently. “Chide me not, lady of my heart, with such cruel words. Menelaus has vanquished me this time with the help of Athene. But another time I shall vanquish him; for on our side, too, there are powerful gods! But come; let us take our joy, couched together in love, for never yet hath desire so encompassed my soul, no! not even when I snatched you from lovely Lacedaemon and we had dalliance together on the Island of Cranaë, as it does now. O I swear my longing for you now is the one and only feeling that I have!”

So he besought her and she found, just as before, that she couldn’t resist him, and they embraced each other upon that perfect bed of flexible cords that yielded to every movement.

Meanwhile Menelaus, the son of Atreus, ranged through the throng like a wild beast searching if anywhere he might have sight of Alexander. But he couldn’t accuse his compatriots of hiding him; for well did he know that like himself they all hated him as they hated black death. Then it was that the great king of men, Agamemnon, made a triumphant speech. To his own side he spoke, and to the Trojans and their allies also. And both sides listened to him in silence. To the Trojans and their allies these were the words he spoke.

“Victory is now with Menelaus. Do ye therefore, as has been sworn and agreed upon, with sacrifices to the gods, give back to us Helen with all her treasures, and pay to us in requital such recompense as befits so great an event, such recompense as shall be famous in the minds of men who are yet unborn!”

So spake the son of Atreus, and all the Achaeans shouted assent.

BOOK IV

THE GODS OF Olympus, with Father Zeus in their midst, were now holding a momentous conference. Golden were their thrones and golden were their footstools, and golden was the floor beneath them as they looked down on the city of Troy. And it suddenly entered the mind of Zeus the son of Cronos that this would be an excellent opportunity to tease his wife Hera and his daughter Athene by a few suggestions about a happier future for the city of Priam, for he well knew that both these goddesses, though Hera was not the mother of Athene, were filled with an abysmal hatred for Troy and an insatiable longing to see it go up in flames with its whole population.

And so, while the rosy cheeked Hebe poured out nectar for them all, and they lifted up their golden cups to one another, Zeus suggested in his most fatherly voice — while he thought in his heart "O you pair of spiteful immortals, I'll soon make you dance your dance!" — that since Menelaus had already defeated Paris it might be as well to put an end to the whole murderous war and let Helen return to her Spartan home, and let the city of Priam remain as it was before Paris carried her off.

The wise Athene kept silence at this, holding her fury in check, but Hera burst out: "You dreadful Son of Cronos, *what* a word you've uttered! Will you deliberately make all my labour in vain, and all the sweat of my horses useless, dragging my chariot to and fro, as I roused the honest Greeks against these tricky Trojans? Well! Act as you please yourself — but let me tell you this. We other gods will have nothing to do with it! Nothing, I tell you! Nothing at all!"

Stirred by his wife's words to hot anger, Zeus the cloud-gatherer thundered his retort.

"Daimonië! What on earth have old Priam's sons done to you that you feel like this? You talk as if you could turn yourself at any moment into a man-devouring monster, a Tartarus-born dragon with six stomachs, each capable of digesting a thousand men and women! I tell you of all cities beneath the sun and starry heaven, wherein men that dwell on the face of the earth have their abode, sacred Ilios is the one most honoured of my heart. Long may Priam and his people keep their good spears cut from tall ash-trees: for never at any time was my altar lacking in the burnt offering, the drink-offering — never lacking, I tell you, in any of the sacrifices or offerings which our worship implies and which is our due."

Then in answer to him spoke ox-eyed queenly Hera, "Verily I have three cities that are dearest to me of all places in the entire world, and I expect you can guess what they are — Argos, Sparta, and Mycenae, each with her beautiful wide streets."

"What, in heaven and earth," thought Zeus, "is she going to say? Surely not that she would sacrifice any of these if I agree to the destruction of Ilios?"

But Hera knew well what the effect of her speaking of these places would have on him. She was fully aware that Zeus had no particular love for any city upon earth and no particular hatred for any city either. "With him," she thought, "everything is immediate and very personal; and I warrant his tenderness for this Ilios or Troy, or whatever else they like to call the doomed place, is purely due to his mania for that pretty boy Ganymede, descended from his son Dardanus. What I've got to do," her thoughts swept on, more like numberless rapid ripples than heaving waves, "is to give these easy, careless, indifferent impulses of his a unity they lack, and even a carefully considered tendency, according to my own well-weighed decisions, as to what is best for us all up here and for men and women down there! The great thing is to be always after him, always speaking my mind to him, always advocating something or opposing something. It doesn't really matter what this something is, as long as I never forget for a second my own secret opinion as to what will be best in the long run for us up here and for them down there. Do I resemble the women of the earth in all this? Yes! I do! I do! I do! I know very well I do! And for that very reason I must be thankful that I am the mother of Hephaestus, who can make for all women, whether in Heaven or on Earth, all that they want that can be made with Fire!"

It was after a thoughtful silence that she then calmly addressed Zeus.

"You must not think, O Lord of us all and sharer of my bed, that I am refusing to obey you. I know from bitter experience how much more powerful you are than I am; and don't you think I've forgotten any of our old trials of strength because I remember them only too clearly. Yes, you are the stronger, and I have enough sense in my head, in spite of all my strong opinions, never to oppose you in the silly way mortal women sometimes oppose their dear lords. But, after all, I am your sister as well as your wife. Crooked-counselling Cronos begat me, just as he begat you, and I was the eldest of his daughters. Let us, I beg you therefore, each yield to the other: I to thee, and thou to me, and all the other immortal gods will follow us. And just hear my advice on this point concerning Troy. Do, I beseech you, command Pallas Athene to go down at once among them and manage things in such a way that, although Menelaus has defeated Paris and although the Greeks are triumphing, the Trojans will be the first to break the oaths they have sworn with sacrifice upon our altars and in defiance of these oaths to do all the harm they can to the triumphing Achaeans."

So skilfully had Hera presented her view of the matter that the Father of Gods and Men gave his clear command straight away to the goddess she had mentioned.

“Haste thee,” he bade her, “with all speed into the midst of their two armies, and arrange the issue in such a way that the Trojans shall be the first to break their vows.”

He couldn’t have ordered Athene to do anything more entirely in accordance with what that gleaming-eyed goddess was herself longing to do. So with a spectacular rush she hurled herself at once down from the summit of Olympus. Her wild descent through the air was seen by both armies, who at once took it to be one of those falling stars that the son of crooked-counselling Cronos hurls down as a portentous warning, making everything feel as if terrible sparks were flying from it. Indeed, many groups of warriors on both sides turned from the sight to each other with the same commentary: “Something serious is going to happen to some of us if we don’t say our prayers and look out!”

It was as natural for Pallas Athene to assume the personality of a man as for Aphrodite to assume the personality of a woman; and the warrior in whose likeness she appeared now was Laodocus, the son of Antenor, and in his form she went quickly through the Trojan ranks hunting for a particular deadly archer, Pandarus by name, who was a son of Lycaon and whose home was near the river Aesepus. The moment she got hold of Pandarus, she began talking to him in a tone which made that cunning archer feel sure that this royal relative of the godlike Alexander was an inspired adviser. Being a man, Pandarus hadn’t the wit to discern, as Argive Helen had done in the case of Aphrodite, the person who lurked behind this inspiration. But he certainly listened to it as devoutly as if he had. Indeed it is likely enough that it jumped with a thought he had been harbouring in his own mind ever since the triumph of Menelaus over Paris.

“Come on,” cried Laodocus, “my Archer of Archers! Now surely has come the supreme chance of a lifetime! No, no, no! Don’t ‘ee think any more about vows and sacrifices! If you only snatch at this grand chance while it is being given you, it’ll be these accursed Greeks who’ll have to sacrifice to Poseidon to waft their wretched ships safe home!”

Pandarus didn’t hesitate a minute. “This clearly,” he said to himself, “is a hint from a spirit akin to my own!” And aloud to the son of Antenor he said:

“I will do exactly what you suggest. You needn’t put into my head the amount of gold and silver I’ll get from Alexander if my arrow flies home. The thing will be well worth doing for the sake of our King, and for the walls and gates and streets of our city, without thinking of the reward which, as you justly state, is bound to be pretty large; but I shall string the bow at once, my friend, according to your word.”

Thus speaking, the crafty archer, Pandarus, fitted an arrow to the most remarkable bow that a man could find at that moment anywhere within or without the walls of Troy. It was a bow constructed by a skilful workman in horn out of the horns of a wild goat; and Pandarus now fitted to this an arrow that had never been used before and was magically charged thick and slab with the life-destroying pains of death. With this arrow strung upon this bow, Pandarus aimed at Menelaus. And as he loosed the arrow he prayed desperately to Apollo, the God of the early Wolf-Light which now shimmered around them, that the flight of this arrow might bring nothing less than the burning to ashes of the body of Menelaus of Sparta upon a blazing funeral pyre. But before he had finished his prayer and had loosed the arrow from his bow the very goddess who had urged him to shoot was at the side of his target. In a second when the arrow had struck Menelaus and had passed through his belt and through both corselet and taslet, Athene brushed it aside as lightly as a mother brushes away a fly from a sleeping babe.

But even so the arrow did graze his flesh and the dark blood began to flow from the wound. The contrast between the red blood, as it now flowed, and the white skin of the warrior's thighs and legs was just as striking as when a woman of Caria stains an ivory cheek-piece for a war-horse with scarlet dye and it turns out to be so beautiful that it is laid aside in a treasure-chamber; though every horseman who sees it craves for it for his horse. Yes, so beautiful showed now the red blood on the white skin of Menelaus! But Agamemnon shuddered when he saw on his brother's legs this stream of blood; and Menelaus himself, devotee of Ares though he was, likewise shuddered, but his spirits quickly rose when he looked at himself closely and marked the slight nature of his wound. But Agamemnon clasped him by the hand and with his mind full of this startling proof of the Trojan's treachery and complete disregard for the oaths they had just sworn even though accompanied by sacrifice to the gods, he delivered himself of an eloquent speech.

"Even though he should die of this wound, my own dear brother, and his bones should rot in this curst Troy-land, the day will come, I tell you all, the day will surely come, I know it, I know it, when Ilios shall be laid low, and the people of Priam, for all their ashen spears, shall see Zeus the son of Cronos shake his dark aegis against them! So shall it be; but all the same, O my dearest brother, deep grief will be mine if thou dost die, and we and all our ships have to return home leaving Argive Helen behind. How could I bear it, O brother, if in future days some accurst Trojan should stamp triumphantly on thy burial-mound and boast: 'Here lie the bones of Menelaus who tried in vain to snatch away from us his Helen, now not of

Argos any longer, but of Troy’? O brother, my brother, sooner than such a thing as this should happen, may the wide earth gape for me!”

But the fair-haired Menelaus answered him with cheering words.

“All is well with me, my brother. And I beg you not to trouble and agitate our friends any more. The arrow didn’t touch any fatal spot and the wound I got is only the merest scratch.”

But Agamemnon answered, “I pray indeed you’re right, brother of mine. But all the same I shall send for Machaon, that unequalled doctor, who will soon staunch this blood and put some healing lotion on the place to stop all pain.”

It was none other than Talthybius himself, the swiftest of heralds, that he despatched; who very soon returned, bringing with him Machaon the son of Asclepius. Then they all waited in a circle round the wounded man, while Machaon undid his belt and his corselet and his taslet and drew out the arrow, the point of which was still in his flesh, though it hadn’t gone much below the surface. And after sucking the wound with his lips he laid upon it a certain healing ointment which Cheiron, wisest of the Centaurs, had taught his father Asclepius to use.

Then Agamemnon, having told his driver to have his chariot and horses ready for the moment when he had exhausted himself, started striding up and down among all the ranks of the Achaeans, stirring them up to fight and promising them that the battle was now bound to end with the fall of Troy, since the Trojans had been the ones to break their pledges and disregard their oaths. The extreme and indeed the almost childish simplicity of this great king’s mind was proved during this march on foot from one end of the Achaean encampments to the other. Each camp was pitched upon the portion of the shore nearest to the ships of its occupants, and it happened that, while it was easy for this royal rouser of the war spirit to reach the camp of the Ajax pair and the camp of old Nestor and the camp of Idomeneus the Cretan and his comrade Meriones, it took longer and needed some tiresome scrambling across sand-dunes to reach the camp of Odysseus, son of Laërtes.

Now it happened that Odysseus had not yet caught the rumour that they were all to re-arm and begin fighting again, in spite of the fact that Menelaus had defeated the obstreperous Paris or, as he thought of himself, the god-like Alexander. So what must this majestic simpleton of a wide-ruling monarch do but take for granted that Odysseus, whom all the gods called “the Super-Wise”, was deliberately intending to dodge this annoying re-armament? If the wide-ruling monarch had possessed the intelligence of a faithful dog, he wouldn’t have made such a silly mistake. But what must the big fool do but actually begin, in the presence of their followers, to accuse both Odysseus and a certain Menestheus, son of Peteos, both of whom were encamped near a contingent of Athenians, of avoiding this newly-aroused battle out of mean-spirited selfishness, if not out of skulking cowardice? The men of Ithaca who surrounded Odysseus must have been startled by the way this ridiculous scolding from this wooden-headed ruler hurt the feelings of their chief. But that it did so was proved by the way the man answered. For of all things in the world that his followers must have thought he would be reticent about was his private family life in his island home; and what must he do now but call himself the father of Telemachus, while he indignantly pointed out that the wide-ruler’s words were as empty as wind? Something in his tone, however, must have impressed Agamemnon, who resembled some great ox or cart-horse that was much simpler in mind than a cat or a dog, for he began to treat the thing as a joke, laughed loudly in a boisterous and friendly manner, and retracted all his allegations.

But the ponderous king surpassed himself further still in folly when he came to Diomed: or did he perhaps only pretend to think that such a stalwart as Diomed, the son of Tydeus, could possibly be cowering and cringing? Did the great man simply feel that it was the duty of a stirrer-up of the emotions of battle to go about accusing, in the hearing of all, the most intrepid warriors of gross cowardice?

But Diomed was the kind of character who might easily accuse himself of almost any sort of weakness. Heroic as he was, he was subject to all manner of doubts and qualms and panic-spasms and crazy manias and wild jets of fantastic apprehensions. He was never one to weigh in the balance his own emotions, not to speak of the emotions of others. No doubt there *had* been, and again *would* be, moments in Diomed's life when he experienced, whether he yielded to them or not, paroxysms of desperate fear. And though it was in accordance with his gross animal instincts that the great king accused the son of Tydeus of yielding to such emotions, when he ought to have been straightening his shoulders and buckling on his armour, it was only just what any super-crafty Odysseus might have done when he launched out upon a prolonged description of the wondrous slaughterings achieved by Diomed's own father!

But when the great monarch turned to Stheneleus, the friend of Diomed and the son of Capaneus, he brought about a very interesting and curious situation. The son of Capaneus told him to his face that he was a blasted liar; at which the son of Tydeus, who was at once the most modest as well as the most formidable of all the Greek fighters except Ajax, the son of Telamon, turned on his friend and explained to him that it was natural for Agamemnon to make these provocative and violent speeches throughout the host; since, short of being killed or maimed for life, he was the one among them all who would gain most from their victory, and the one among them all, except his brother Menelaus, who would suffer most from their defeat if Helen was left behind in a victorious Troy when they fled in their ships.

While Agamemnon was relating in fuller detail than the situation demanded his long-winded story about his meeting with Tydeus, and how Tydeus dealt with the son of Cadmus when they tried to ambush him, Diomed had felt a wave of tenderness for this deep-throated, simple-minded admirer of the father he himself could only just remember, and it shocked him to hear his companion denouncing as a liar this old-fashioned teller of heroic tales. But in a flash Diomed now put all emotions, his anger with his friend, his feelings for his father, his attitude to Agamemnon, into the background, and, leaping from his chariot with his armour clanging about him, he tossed aside all these foolish quarrels among friends, and fast and furious he floundered forward, following the foremost into the fray. As when upon the resounding pebbles of the beach, driven on by the West Wind, break the great curving crests of one huge wave after another, as the sea hurls itself against the headlands, spitting forth the wild spray of its salt foam, so did the Greek ranks rush on, the men themselves keeping silence as they went, their chiefs cheering them forward.

With the Trojans it was different; for among them there were fighters from so many far-off lands that there was a wild and confused hubbub of whirling voices, and a complicated mingling of varied tongues. So bewildering was the clamour that it reminded many of the Greeks, who were now beginning to engage them in combat, of certain great farms in their own homeland, where they could scarcely hear each other speak because of the bleating of the sheep that had got separated from their lambs and of the crying of the lambs that had lost their mothers.

The Greeks were stirred on by gleaming-eyed Pallas Athene, but there were two terrifying Phantoms, demonic spirits called Terror and Panic, who kept gliding in and out of the battle. But an apparition of worse horror, far more alarming than either of these two, showed itself now in the person of Eris, a being of a perfectly appalling appearance, concerning whom no man alive knows whence she comes or whither she goes or who were her parents or if there is any abyss in Tartarus familiar with her. There are those who call her Mad Rivalry; but what most people say is that she is a companion of man-slaying Ares, and that those among us who have seen the worst of her declare that, until the desperateness of the struggle reaches its climax, her terrible head is lifted only a little above the rest, but that when the madness of conflict attains its culmination, the whole bulk of her becomes visible, her head towering up into the sky, her feet firmly planted upon the earth.

Now at this moment were heard both the groans and the moans of the wounded and dying and the fearful yells of the slayers; while the earth beneath them all flowed with blood. Even as two winter torrents pouring down the side of a mountain mingle their streams in a narrow gorge between high boulders, and from far away over the hills the shepherd hears their thundering roar, so, as the Greeks and Trojans contended, the clamour of it and the toil of it filled the air for miles around and rose up to the mountains.

It was then that Telamonian Ajax drove his bronze spear through the chest of that strapping youth, young Simoeisius, to whom his mother had given birth when she was following her parents down from Ida so that she might see their flocks of sheep. Clear through his body went the spear and he crashed down to the ground. Like a beautiful poplar he fell, that has grown in the earth in the midst of a great marsh, a poplar with a perfectly smooth stem but with finely spreading branches near the top, a poplar that no wind has blown down, but that some clever wagon-maker has deliberately felled, so as to make the wheels for his wagons. And thus was slain, not only the youthful Simoeisius, but many another young hero on both sides, the Trojans being driven on with furious encouragement by Apollo as he looked down from Pergamus; while the Greeks, more favoured still, had Athene herself right in the midst of them, helping one hero and then another hero, and warding off many deadly spear-thrusts and many murderous arrow-hits.

BOOK V

NO STAR CAN shine brighter than Sirius, especially when this particular star rises at midsummer out of the very depths of the ocean; and it was soon clear to both sides in this terrific struggle that Pallas Athene had determined that at any cost Diomed, the son of Tydeus, was to surpass them all and shine as brightly as Sirius fresh from his bath in the sea.

Now the oldest and most devoted of all the priests in the Temple of Hephaestus in Troy was a priest called Dares, and both his sons, Phegeus and Idaeus, in their own special chariot, made up their minds that together they would either finish Diomed or perish themselves.

“Surely,” they said to each other, “with a chariot such as ours, and two of us together, we can do for him!”

It was the elder one, Phegeus, who first flung his spear; but it passed over Diomed’s left shoulder without touching him. Then Diomed himself flung his weapon, and it struck Phegeus clean between the nipples and brought him crashing down, out of his chariot and down upon the ground. His brother’s collapse so horrified Idaeus that he was seized with panic, and leaving his brother where he fell, he leapt from the chariot and fled. But even then Diomed, who was on foot, would most certainly have followed him if Hephaestus himself had not come to the man’s aid, covered him with a cloud as Aphrodite had done with Paris, and carried him to safety.

It was a cruel and pitiable spectacle to the Trojans to see one brother in flight and the other by the now motionless chariot dead on the ground; for it hadn’t taken Diomed long to detach the horses and hand them over to his friends. And it was at this very moment that Athene, wisely foreseeing that, if Ares roused the spirit of vengeance among the Trojans to a mad heat, the tide of battle might turn again and the ships again be in peril, herself went straight up to the terrible god of war and seized him by the hand. So powerful was the personality of Athene, and so dominant her spirit and so irresistible her persuasion, that the violent and passionate war-god could think of nothing to answer and of no way to resist her. In fact all he could do was to yield to her wish whatever it might be.

“Ares, Ares!” she murmured in his ear, “thou bane of mortals, thou bloody capturer of impregnable bastions, let us two now leave these Trojans and Achaeans to fight it out among themselves, and find out for themselves to which side Father Zeus has made up his mind to give the victory. As for you and me, you from one side and I from the other, let us clear off and leave this thing to Zeus, lest we ourselves incur his anger by our interference.”

So speaking, and holding the blood-stained lover of slaughter firmly by the hand, she led him forth from the battle, and she made him sit down by her side on the sandy bank of the river Scamander. Over the windy plain of Troy stared these two, thinking their own strangely different thoughts.

Pallas Athene said to herself: “O what a comfort it will be to me when this obstinate and dangerous city of Troy is laid in the dust forever! I’ve always suspected from the first foundation that it would come under the power of those I hate and who hate me. But I never thought that this bloody-souled Ares here, the enemy of the human race, would join with Apollo, to whose music the stars in their courses dance, and with Aphrodite, who cares for nothing but luring us all into the prison of love, to struggle against me! O that I could find one single city upon earth whose palaces, temples, streets and houses — yea! and the very rooms within those houses, with all their furniture, walls, floors, ceilings, kitchens and weaving-looms

— are really worthy of the world of reason which I am forever struggling to create for these unhappy mortals!”

But Ares thought, “Shall I never be able to destroy these wretched tribes of mortal men that are such blots and stains upon the eternal peace of earth and water and air? I know well that the Son of Cronos has a sort of ‘Fatherly love’, as he calls it, for us all, but when we say ‘Fatherly’ we use the right word; for don’t we know how furious fathers get with their children; sometimes even to the point of swallowing them? O how I hate and loathe and despise these tribes of men! If only I could enlarge this Greek and Trojan contest into a contest that included all the nations and cities of the world, how wonderful it would be! To just look on while these vicious bipeds finished one another off completely! O what heavenly deliciousness that would be! What a mysterious ecstasy it is, this feeling I get, mounting up, up, up, up, like the consummation of love between two lovers who have been waiting and waiting and waiting for this exquisite abandonment for a score of years, to see this good red blood gushing out! Who was it who said it was the lust and cruelty in me? O how wrong, how totally wrong, that word was! It isn’t cruelty at all, this bloodlust of mine. If it were, I’d want it prolonged. I’d want it to hurt, hurt, hurt them. I don’t want anything of the kind. I want the blood to pour out in streams, to gush out in fountains, to burst forth in pulsating spouts. I want it to come in extraordinary throbs like lava from a volcano, whirling forth in jets like red fumes from the heart of a burning mountain! It’s not the pain of these miserable insects I want to see, it’s their utter destruction, it’s the end of them all for good and all! I get no pleasure in their pain. If I could only kill them all at one go, how happily I would do it! It’s blood for blood’s sake I love. And why do I love it? Because it’s only when the veins and arteries and hearts of these wretches have been thoroughly pumped dry of blood,

blood, blood, blood, blood, that all these arms and legs and fingers and toes and mouths and eyes and ears and lungs and tongues will stop their kicking and flicking and catching and snatching and glaring and staring and pitching and switching and aping and raping and just lie quiet as the motionless rocks, calm as the waves of the ocean after a storm, and level as the snow on the top of a towering mountain. O shall I ever live to look out across the wide expanse of Gaia the Earth, and know that no wretch of a man, woman or child will ever again, with their accursed activities and greeds and loves and hates, destroy the everlasting patience of that which feels not, hears not, sees not, tastes not, nor evermore can be disturbed in its own eternal peace!"

But it was not destined for Athene, taking the side of the Greeks, or for Ares, taking the side of the Trojans, to abide long in quiet on the banks of the river Scamander. Cries to the immortals for help began to reach them too pitifully.

Diomed had become like a man absolutely besotted with slaughter. He was behaving so wildly that some of his best friends began to think that he had lost his wits and would soon be taking them for Trojans. He still was rushing about on foot; and at last he came towards the spot where Pandarus was waiting with his curved bow.

This shrewd marksman now said to himself: "By Olympian Zeus, if I don't finish this man off I'm no marksman at all!" So he took aim and let an arrow fly. Nor had he boasted in vain. Clean into Diomed's right shoulder flew that stinging barb. The son of Tydeus stumbled and fell with the arrow sticking out of his body. Up to him ran the excited Pandarus and began shouting at the top of his voice, "He's had it, he's had it! I've done for him! Zeus must have meant this glory to be mine when he brought me here out of Lycia!"

But he counted without his man. Diomed slowly, though with great difficulty, heaved himself up: and you can believe that before he was on his feet Pandarus and his bow were lost to sight in the crowd. But Diomed staggered through the mélée till he found Sthenelus, the son of Capaneus, in his chariot drawn by two horses. Right in front of the horses he stopped, and begged Sthenelus to jump down and pull out the arrow from his shoulder. This the latter did in a jiffy, and as the blood gushed out through the ringed hole in his body-jacket, Diomed prayed passionately to Pallas Athene that he might pursue this Pandarus who had shot him and finish him off.

And she heard him from where she was and she rushed to his side.

"Cheer up, Diomed!" she cried. "I have now put into you the spirit of your father Tydeus who was the bravest fighter I've ever known. And more than this. I now give you the power of recognizing an Immortal under any disguise. But listen to me, my friend. Don't 'ee fight with any of us except Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus. Her you *may* smite. And I hope you'll have the chance. If you do, hit her hard!"

Meanwhile as Aeneas, whose father was Anchises and his mother Aphrodite, was driving his two-horsed chariot against the Greeks, he stopped at the side of Pandarus to ask him who this Greek was who was rushing about on foot so desperately and slaughtering so many Trojans. Pandarus burst out into a torrent of angry self-reproaches.

"Don't you or anybody else praise my damnable bow and blasted quiver any more. I only want to break them both across my knee and fight with sword and shield instead. Twice, I tell you, you son of Anchises, have I hit a leader of these Greeks. Once Menelaus himself; and now, very now, this devlish Diomed, and I've drawn blood I tell you, Aeneas, from both of them! But to what purpose? My arrows draw blood and the men fall. But a few minutes later there they are, rushing about and striking at us, just as they were before! I tell you, my friend, I wish I'd never brought this confounded bow and quiver from home! My father had lots of chariots and horses. Why, in the name of Aidoneus, didn't I bring a chariot and horses instead of this curst bow!"

But Aeneas spoke plainly and bluntly to him.

"You are quite wrong, my good Pandarus, to talk in this crazy manner. You are too wrought up. Here! Mount by my side and take the reins. And let me be the one to jump out and fight! Or let me be the driver; and you be the fighter! I don't care which you choose, as long as we drive straight after this raging son of Tydeus."

Pandarus obeyed him; and slinging his bow over one shoulder and his quiver of arrows over the other, he showed his companion that he did possess a spear, and told him that he'd be the one to jump out and fight. "You know your horses," he said, "and they know you, and if the devil-inspired Diomed is too much for me, they'll carry you off safe to the city."

Now Sthenelus marked all this from afar off, and he drove up straight to Diomed and warned him.

"Why not," he said, "let me drive you back to our lines? These two men are dead-bent on killing you and they'll do it if it can be done."

At this the son of Tydeus glowered at him with the glare of an angry dragon.

"Do you suppose that I'd ever turn tail on those two? But listen my friend. If Athene does give me the power to slay both of these fellows, this is what I beg you to do. Tie these horses of your own to this chariot so that they cannot move it and leave them for a space. Then, get hold of the chariot that Aeneas has been driving and yourself drive it, together with *his horses*, through our ranks, into our camp. You may not know it, but these horses of Aeneas are of that rare breed that Zeus gave to Tros in exchange for his son, Ganymede, for they are the best of all horses between the dawn and the sun. If we could capture those two horses we should indeed have won something."

It was at this very moment that these same two precious horses, driven by Aeneas, with Pandarus brandishing a spear at his side, pulled up in front of Diomed!

"You survived my arrow, you son of Tydeus, now see if you can survive my spear!"

And, while Aeneas held back the foaming and rearing steeds, Pandarus hurled his spear.

And so trained was the man's eye by his constant aiming with arrows that his thrown spear went straight to its mark. It went through Diomed's shield and through his corselet and through his tunic; and because Diomed staggered beneath the shock of it, Pandarus supposed he was done for and began to shout in exultant triumph. "You are hit, you are hit, you are hit!" he cried; "and all the glory is mine!"

"Not yet, my good sir, not quite yet," retorted Diomed. "You have hit my shield, you have hit my corselet, you have hit my shirt, but you haven't hit me. Now take this in return!"

So saying, Diomed hurled his spear at Pandarus; and Athene, already on the scene, took a certain personal satisfaction in so guiding her friend's spear-head that it pierced their enemy's nose close to his eye, and after crashing through his white teeth and cutting out his tongue at the very root and grazing the back of his palate, it emerged into the air from behind his chin. The spear itself at this moment felt a satisfaction not very different from what Diomed and Athene were feeling; and out of the chariot and crashing down to the ground clattered the body of the great archer, already in the convulsions of death.

Down beside him sprang Aeneas, and set to work at once unharnessing the horses from the front of the chariot and fastening them by their bridles as firmly as he could to its brazen rear. Then he moved to where Pandarus lay outstretched on the ground, and he bestrode the corpse, protecting both it and himself with an enveloping shield, and while not only brandishing his long spear, but protecting his friend's body with his shield, he lifted up his voice and uttered a series of threatening cries so that any Greek who approached them might feel it was safer to move elsewhere.

But Diomed, having disposed of one of his two enemies, resolved at any cost to destroy the other: and he did now what only a warrior in the wildest rush of the most desperate fighting would ever have dared to attempt. He looked round him with a grim smile, as he heard the threatening yells Aeneas was uttering to anyone who approached; and it wasn't long before he found what he wanted. He was about a spear's cast away from where Aeneas was bestriding the corpse of Pandarus, and throwing into these defiant yells, to every Greek who came near, the bitter shame he felt that he hadn't forced the archer to be the driver, while he himself was the one to fight and take the risk of being killed.

But what Diomed, the son of Tydeus, found at this moment was an enormous stone as large as a footstool. Deliberately laying on the ground his spear and small round shield, he heaved up this huge stone, and lifting it high above his head with both his hands, hurled it at Aeneas, drawing, as he did so, the deepest breath from the bottom of his lungs that he had ever drawn since he was a new-born babe. The great stone flew through the air as if propelled down a precipice under the pressure of an avalanche.

The great stone didn't miss its mark and it struck Aeneas upon the hip-bone just at the place where the thigh turns in what we call the cup-bone, and the stone crushed this cup-bone and wrenched apart the sinews at that place and tore off the skin. Down on his knees Aeneas sank and with one outstretched hand began clutching the earth. Then he rolled over and lost consciousness.

Grimly towards his two defeated foes, one dead and the other unconscious, Diomed now strode, drawing the knife from his belt to cut the still living man’s throat. But there were other heavenly powers concerned in this world-battle beside Pallas Athene; and before Diomed had taken many steps, a thick mist fell between him and his two helpless enemies. Where was their chariot? and their unharnessed horses? Diomed could see nothing. All around him was this accursed cloud of mist. And he could hear nothing either. What, in the name of his father Tydeus, was happening to him? Had the strain of heaving up and hurling the stone blinded him? He began to experience a panic such as he had never undergone in his life before. Finally, since there was nothing else he could do, he fell on his knees and prayed desperately to Pallas Athene.

But the truth was that another great goddess, as immortal as Athene herself, had now appeared on the scene and had summoned this cloud of mist. She was none other than Aphrodite, the mother of Aeneas, whose father, Anchises, had embraced her when she met him with his flocks on the hillside. With one arm she was now supporting the head of her son Aeneas, while with the other she was making of her gleaming veil a dazzling shield, so that spears and arrows would be prevented from coming near. Then lifting Aeneas from off the earth she bore him away.

But meanwhile the prayers of Diomed to Athene had been answered, and into his soul had been poured more rage and more force than had ever inspired any warrior since the beginning of the world. So Diomed now, filled with wild emotion, followed after Aphrodite as she sought to bear away her son’s unconscious body to safety.

“To smite an immortal goddess with my mortal weapon,” the son of Tydeus cried in his wildly excited heart, “O give me, O give me, great Athene, the power to do this, and I care not how soon a thunderbolt shall take away my life!”

And thus inspired, and possessed by abnormal excitement, Diomed overtook the beautiful goddess and her unconscious offspring. With a mad cry he rushed upon her and smote her with his spear. The point pierced the inside of her wrist just below the palm of her hand and the lovely creature shivered and shook, while the blood of the immortals, which is so totally different from human blood that it is called ichor, poured forth over her body and over her raiment and wetted the earth. Out of her arms fell her son. But Aeneas had a second divine helper and the moment his mother dropped him he was caught up by Phoebus Apollo, not this time in a glittering cloud, as his mother’s veil had been, but in a dark cloud, which also hid him quite as completely from the eyes of mortals. But hiding her eyes with both her lovely hands and thinking in her heart, “O how little it has served me to be the most beautiful of all the immortals!” the Goddess of Love was doomed to hear, resounding above her cowering form, the insulting and brutal exultation of the son of Tydeus.

“You keep clear away, you pretty weakling, from the contests and battles of strong men! You’ve been calling for a lesson, and now I’ve given you a lesson; and I can see you won’t forget it! Let your little game from now on be the beguiling of girls as weak as you are, though I admit not nearly as fair. Yes, you adorable creature, you’ve had your lesson; and I’m glad I’ve been the one to give it to you! Henceforth, I warrant, you’ll shiver and shake if you hear a rumour, however far away it may be, of a war going on!”

At this he departed without even looking back once; for he said to himself, “If I turn round she’ll know well why, and, by Zeus, she shan’t see me do it!”

But it was not of him the wounded goddess thought as she struggled to her feet.

“O why was I fated to be what I am?” she cried to herself. “And why should this accursed power we call Anangkee, this blind, stupid, silly, meaningless force, this force that drives earth and heaven and men and gods whither it pleases, as sheep-dogs drive dumb sheep, always make our ecstasy of love end in pain? First the pain of giving birth, and then the pain of saving the life of our child?”

But it was not long before she forgot everything but her own pain; for Diomed’s spear had gone deep into her wrist and cruel throbs had begun to pulse up and down her arm and to quiver through her whole body, while the ichor, pouring forth out of this unholy slit in her flesh, was soaking her shining garments. Desperately she looked about her. Desperately she made her way amid the living and dead. Hardly knowing what she did, she instinctively rendered herself invisible to the warriors on both sides. They all felt a strange emotional thrill as she passed, and every youth thought of the one he loved and imagined himself embracing her.

But at last the messenger of Zeus, Iris, whose feet were like the wind, found her; found her wandering blindly and helplessly and completely lost among the living and dead. And Iris was horrified to see what pain she was suffering, and took her gently by the hand and led her to where her ferocious Ares was resting exhausted near his immortal horses and his golden chariot, with his spear flung down upon a cloud at his side. Iris saw at once that those two Olympian horses were chafing to get back to their Olympian stables, and she saw also that the cloud to which Ares had entrusted his spear had held it so long that, while the blood on the spear had completely vanished, the stain of red in its cradle of cloud was more suggestive now of sunset than of slaughter.

By the side of Ares the wounded goddess sank on her knees.

“Please, O please, I implore you, my precious brother, lend me your chariot and horses that I may be carried to Olympus! Iris has saved me from the battle and she will drive me to our heavenly home. I am in sore pain from a wound given me by Diomed, the son of Tydeus, who is so mad with battle-frenzy that, on my soul, he’d be ready to fight with Father Zeus himself!”

Ares agreed at once; Aphrodite, still moaning with pain and almost delirious in her speech, was driven by wind-sandal’d Iris up, up, up, to her Olympian home. Once safely there, leaving Iris to unharness the horses and take them to their stable and give them ambrosial food, Aphrodite staggered into her palace and flung herself on the knees of her dear mother Dione.

“Heavens! My sweet child!” cried Dione in horror, when she saw her daughter’s slashed wrist. “Who, in the name of Zeus, has been treating you so shamefully? It looks as if some tremendous immortal had been punishing you for some wrong you’ve done! I can’t bear to see it. Who has done this to you, my darling child?”

Quieter and happier, now that she was with her mother and able to talk freely, Aphrodite told her everything.

“It was this furious fighter, Diomed, the son of Tydeus, who did it, Mother darling, and he did it when I was carrying my son Aeneas, the only man I really and truly love in the whole world, to save him from the battle where he had been sorely wounded by this same son of Tydeus, who crushed his hip with a huge stone. If it hadn’t been for Phoebus Apollo, to whom I shall be grateful for ever and ever, Aeneas would have been left to perish where he was smitten."

And Dione, her mother, perceiving the deep hurt the beautiful one had received in her mind, as well as in her body, pondered awhile and then spoke to her quietly and at length.

"Bear up, my sweet, in spite of your suffering! I tell you you are not the only one of us immortals who have suffered like this. Alas! And do I not know it? And do not we all know it? Anangkee, Necessity! Yes, she is the mistress of men and gods and of everything. How often have I heard you, my sweet — yes, you your own self — pray to Father Zeus that he would find some way of propitiating Necessity, or of beguiling Necessity, or of bribing Necessity! But as you know only too well, my precious, that is the one subject upon which Father Zeus remains absolutely silent. He refuses to speak of it. So it must be that he too, the King and Father of us all, is subject to Anangkee."

"But why should Necessity," pleaded almost angrily the most beautiful of all Beings, "why should Necessity have concentrated on me?"

"O child, my child!" cried her mother, "do, for my sake, and for our friend Apollo's sake, remember that you're not the only one of us who has suffered like this. Didn't Ares himself, who lent you his horses just now, lie in chains in one of those great pits made of bronze for over a year? And didn't Heracles wound Hera herself in the right breast with an arrow that had three points? I think both of these, especially Hera, suffered more than you have suffered, my precious child." These wise words of her mother did indeed greatly soothe the outraged spirit of the beautiful Cyprian.

But, while his mother and grandmother were thus conversing among the Olympians, Aeneas himself, twisted and contorted under Apollo's shield, was once more set upon by the blood-crazed Diomed, who completely disregarded the fact that Apollo was protecting him. No less than four times did Diomed leap upon the two of them and try desperately to thrust aside Apollo's shield and finish the destruction of the already hip-broken son of Aphrodite. But at his fourth attempt Apollo warned him off in a terrible voice.

"Don't you understand, you double-dyed idiot," the far-shooting deity roared at him, "that the race of mortals in this world of ours is totally different from the race of immortals?"

At this rebuke, scared at last, but puzzled in his overheated brain why the angry god — whose far-darting arrows, bringing pestilence and death to both beasts and men, had compelled Agamemnon to send back the daughter of Chryses — didn't strike him dead rather than just scold him like this, Diomed rushed off to find new victims of his frenzy. But Apollo, with the utmost speed, fearful lest other Greeks might recognise Aeneas and try to make sure of his destruction, conveyed the son of Aphrodite, still concealed in a dark cloud, to the great temple at Pergamus.

"At least," the god thought, "I shall find my own mother, Leto, there; and she will know how to cure this man's crushed hip-bone."

Thinking so, the great god couldn't help smiling to himself at the instinctive way he had turned at once to his mother, just as it had been the mother of Aeneas who had rescued her son.

"Mortals and immortals," he said to himself, as he carried Aeneas into the temple, "are not, after all, quite as different as I told that ruffian just now! It still seems that when manly force gives out and we lack the wit to deal with the situation, back we creep to the breasts that suckled us!"

He soon found himself rewarded for obeying, god though he was, this natural instinct of all living things, by finding in the great Pergamus Temple not only Leto, his mother, but his sister, Artemis; and at once he knew that he could leave his burden with complete safety in their protective hands. So down he sat upon the summit of the hill above the great temple and gave himself up, after all this agitation, to the comfort in which both immortals and mortals can find relief, namely the comfort of gazing in peace and quiet at a wide-stretching landscape.

But when, a little later, he turned his attention to the battle going on at the foot of the hill and saw that Diomed was once more making havoc of his Trojan friends, he rushed down to put fresh spirit into the indomitable Hector. And out of the depths of the sky above him there now plunged down to aid him in this his war-loving friend, the blood-thirsty goddess Enyo, holding in her hands that terrible instrument of uproar called Kudoimos. And when these two, on either side of Hector, were urging him on, and all the Trojans in a new fury of battle were raging after them, it can be imagined how Diomed, the son of Tydeus, felt. He felt like a man who in crossing an apparently smooth plain suddenly encounters a rushing torrent that is whirling and foaming towards the ocean. And turning to the ranks of his fellow Achaeans he shouted to them to keep their faces to the enemy but to retreat slowly.

“It’s no good,” he shouted to them, “to fight against the gods!” To himself, as he did his best to retreat with dignity, he couldn’t resist muttering, with a savage chuckle: “I’ve learnt my lesson for the moment anyway. But you wait, my lord Hector! You wait, my resurrected Aeneas! The ways of Father Zeus may be slow, but they are sure. And I’ve heard Calchas say over and over again that in those visions of the night when the spirit of prophecy descends upon him, he has seen Troy going up in smoke and our ships sailing home with Helen. You wait, my lord Hector! You wait, my resurrected Aeneas!”

So cried in his heart the indignant Diomed. But what was Father Zeus himself feeling? The mysterious sequence of events driven on by Anangkee, Necessity, wasn't by any means a cause of joy to Zeus himself. A tragic example of this was the personal combat which suddenly and unexpectedly began between a son and a grandson of his own. Flying among us or walking among us by night or by day, over the wide surface of the earth, is an evasive and indescribable Being whom we call Moira or destiny. What activates or motivates this implacable creature no one on earth seems able to say, although every living thing would at once, if questioned, hasten to associate her with a righteous duty we all personally feel — namely the duty of avenging ourselves upon some particular person against whom we cherish some special grievance. It is true that Hades, the brother of Zeus, did once suggest to him that it would be wise to enquire if any augur or prophet had ever said that, if we forgave our enemies, we should be ourselves forgiven; but so far Zeus, the son of crooked-counselling Cronos, had postponed this interesting investigation.

But there is clear evidence in Heaven that it was Moira who put it into the head of the grandson of Zeus, Tlepolemus, the son of Heracles, to rush upon Sarpedon, the son of Zeus, who was a chief among the Lycians and a strong ally of the Trojans. Tlepolemus defied this formidable chieftain with a torrent of gross abuse, accusing him of cowardice and shirking and indicating that, had Heracles beheld such a worthless enemy, he would have tossed him among the farmyard fowls to be pecked to death. Sarpedon answered by lifting up his spear; and they threw their spears simultaneously; and while Sarpedon's passed clear through Tlepolemus's neck and slew him at a stroke, the other's spear struck Sarpedon in the thigh and remained there in the place where it had pierced him. The corpse of the son of Heracles was speedily carried by a couple of faithful companions safe home to camp, but on the other side the still living Sarpedon, though nobody thought of removing the spear, was carried by his Lycian followers towards the city; but he soon ordered them to set him down and they, indignant at this, left him for good and all. To his immense relief, however, he soon beheld from where he lay, with the long spear still protruding from his side, the tremendous Hector himself approaching him.

"O help me, help me, Hector!" he prayed; "take this spear out of my side so that I can get home to the city and either die there or live there!"

But the great war-man, Hector, took not the slightest notice of his appeal and rushed past him without stopping for a second. Sarpedon's faithful Lycian friend, Pelagon, had by this time returned to his side, and the two of them together succeeded, though with pain and grief to both of them, in extracting this terrible spear — which, like all Trojan spears, had been cut from the branch of an ash-tree — clean out of Sarpedon's thigh. As soon as it was out, and not a little red blood along with it, it was almost as if the ash-tree branch from which it had been cut pointed them to a little clearing among the dead stumps and tangled bushes, where there was an airy mound dominated by a sturdy oak, and Pelagon had just time to help his bleeding friend to this open space, and to prop him up with his back against the trunk of the oak, when Sarpedon fainted and for a minute or two remained totally unconscious. Pelagon looked at him with horror as he saw the red blood forming a little pool between two of the roots of this tree, and noted how one large-leafed plant, against which the extracted spear was now swaying in the wind, kept pointing at one beat of the man's pulse towards the thigh that was wounded and at the next towards the unwounded one.

"Can he possibly live?" thought Pelagon, and then and there he prayed desperately to Father Zeus.

Nor was his prayer unanswered. Promptly and precipitously the divine breath of Boreas, the North Wind, blew upon them in that exposed place and behold! Sarpedon opened his eyes; and after this recovery of his consciousness nothing interfered with his friend's success in getting him to his feet and supporting him as they slowly walked city-ward till at last they were safely within the walls. But the power for triumphant fighting which Zeus had given Hector endowed that son of Priam with such force that he began slaying one after another of the Greek warriors, so that it looked as if nothing could stop him and as if the Greeks were destined never to reach home.

Watching all this from Olympus, Hera thought in her heart: "I must stop this man. O how lucky I am to have one sure, faithful, steadfast friend, on whose loyalty I can depend as long as earth and heaven last!"

Feeling thus, and with far more emotion in her voice than was wont to ruffle the stately flow of her speech, Hera addressed Athene.

"O thou unwearied daughter of Aegis-bearing Zeus, thou whom nothing can exhaust, didn't we swear to Menelaus that he should destroy Troy and sail back safe home with Helen? What are we doing to let this man-hating Ares go on raging like this? Come, my friend, let you and me be the ones now to show a real fiery spirit!"

Having thus spoken, and while Pallas Athene was putting on her own terrific armour, who but Hera, the Queen of Heaven and consort of Zeus, was the one to deal with the most important labour of all that lay before them, namely the harnessing of the horses to the chariot and the careful adjusting of all the parts of the chariot, which were of such precious metal that many of them were preserved separately in the chariot shed? In the handling of these wheel-hubs and wheel-spokes and wheel-circles and axle-trees, and of the gold and silver thongs that rounded off the body of the chariot, and of the glittering cross-pieces that formed the yoke for the horses along with their golden breast-straps, Hera was supreme; and where another pair of skilful hands became necessary Hebe was ready to help her. And as for the horses, they were as eager for the rush and excitement of battle as was their immortal driver.

Meanwhile Pallas Athene was occupied in a task much more self-centred. She was busy arming herself; and as she herself was the supreme artist among all the gods, and indeed, save for Hephaestus and Deucalion, the supreme artist among all the mortals and immortals of the universe, she combined in preparing herself for battle the technical skill of an expert armourer with the exquisite taste of an experienced old maid. She went straight into the dressing room of her father Zeus and deliberately proceeded to take all those liberties which a favourite daughter might take with her father's most intimate belongings. She stripped herself of the delicate robe which her own hands had embroidered, and let it fall as carelessly as any child might have done on the floor of her father's chamber. Then, for she was as tall as her father, she pulled his tunic round her body, and about her shoulders she threw that unique and consecrated horror, the Aegis, a woven breast-shield hung all round with those appalling Tassels, or *thusanoi*, which have a secret magic more deadly in war than any other object in the world.

This Aegis of Zeus carried, woven into its very substance, symbols that were more than symbols, for the living essence of each of these was in some mysterious way embodied in this woven horror. There was Rout; there was Massacre; there was Desperation; there was mad Onset; and along with these there was the head of that terrifying monster, the Gorgon, a *teras,* or sign, hung in the sky as a Portent of Disaster by Zeus himself.

Then upon her head Athene fixed her helmet, which had two great horns and four golden bosses and, crowned with this, she grasped her tremendous and massive spear and, thus prepared, she stepped beside Hera into the chariot. And at once Hera touched the horses with the whip, and behold! the great portals of Heaven, guarded by the Hours, rolled open of their own volition! But ere she left Heaven, Hera made a final appeal to Zeus who sat quite apart from them all on the topmost summit of Olympus.

“Art not thou wrathful with Ares for all this slaughter? It is Aphrodite from Cyprus and her friend Apollo who have set him on to work this havoc; and now they are lazily lolling at their leisure while the Greeks are perishing! Wilt thou be angry with me if I smite Ares and drive him out of the battle?”

Then to her made answer cloud-gathering Zeus: “Let Athene go after him, for she, above all others, is the one who can make him flee howling from the fight.”

So spoke the Father; and Hera drove her divine horses between earth and the starry heaven at such a speed that she made them cover at a single bound as much space as there would be between a man on a high cliff gazing at the wine-dark sea and the horizon at which he gazed. Hera landed her horses and chariot at a perfect spot to leave them in safety; namely where the rivers Simoïs and Scamander meet and join their streams. Here Hera loosed her horses, threw a thick mist over both them and the chariot and made Simoïs to grow among her rich grasses a feast of ambrosia for those immortal steeds.

Nor could these two sensitive rivers, as they revelled in mixing their waters as they always did, refrain from embracing each other’s flowing streams with an added ecstasy when they were suddenly inspired with the power of producing ambrosia among the wet stalks of their flood-watered banks.

"How quaint it is," said Simoïs to Scamander, "to see those two great goddesses go tripping off like a pair of timid doves!"

"Women are women, my dear friend," replied Scamander, "whether they are mortal or immortal. And it is impossible for them, unless they are Amazons, and as I've never seen an Amazon I can't be sure that even *they* are different from the rest, to stride about their day's business with the steady, monotonous assurance of men. Women are born to trip, to dance, to glide, to swing, to skip, to float, to fly; whereas men are born to march, to race, to rush to victory or from defeat, or to plod heavily behind the ploughshare of daily work."

"I totally disagree with you," said Simoi's to Scamander; "it is women, whether mortal or immortal, who do the real drudgery of life; whereas men, whether they are farming or contending with each other at racing or throwing a discus or boxing or wrestling, or whether they are fighting for their king and country, are doing what they do because they like doing it and because they have chosen to do it, and because they win glory and riches and fame by doing it."

It was then that one of Hera's horses lifted its head from enjoying that rich wet grass mingled with ambrosia and told those two famous streams a few facts about human life of which they were so obviously ignorant.

"You must realise, most foolish of all Rivers," said the Horse, "and I think you are both equally silly, and so does my mate here, only I am always the speaker for both of us. Don't you understand, you pair of silly Rivers, that a great many women are very like men, and a great many men are very like women? You two have nothing to do but to rise from your primal sources or springs or fountains, and just flow; yes, just flow, flow,

flow, flow, as drops of rain from a roof drip, drip, drip, drip, drip, drip, whereas we horses have to whirl through the air, gallop over mountains, race across sandy deserts, driven by the Queen of Heaven! And does that great goddess have an easy time? I should say not! And my comrade here would wholly agree with me. Does Father Zeus himself have an easy time? Ask Pallas Athene, who was born out of his brain! She'll soon tell you of her Father's daily labours: and so would Heracles and Hephaestus! Gods and men, goddesses and women, I tell you, you lazy Rivers, doing nothing but flow, flow, flow, nothing but flow from your mountain birth to your sea death, immortal divinity and mortal humanity, they're both forever at it, male and female alike, while Simoi's and Scamander, famous for nothing but being Simoi's and Scamander, just flow happily along from birth to death."

"Shall I answer them?" said Simoi's to Scamander, "or shall I leave it to the air and the water and the earth and the fire to answer them?"

"Leave it till we reach the sea," replied Scamander; and in silence they listened to the heavenly horses munching grass mixed with ambrosia.

Meanwhile Hera and Pallas Athene had followed each her own separate tactics for stirring up the hearts of the Greeks. Hera took the form of Stentor, whose voice was as resounding as if fifty men were crying aloud with one cry, and in Stentor's voice she stirred up her beloved Greeks.

"Shame on you, shame on you, Argives! While Achilles was still fighting, these Trojan bandits dared not leave their city gates! But here these wretches are, slaughtering you at your own ships!"

But while the wife of the Father of the Gods was using the throat of Stentor like a colossal trumpet up and down the ranks, Pallas Athene was having a secret dialogue in her own shape with Diomed, the son of Tydeus. He was still bleeding rather badly; though he was staunching his own blood with his own clothes as he leant heavily against the side of his chariot, from which his faithful friend Sthenelus was sadly looking down upon him as he held the reins of their horses.

“You did warn me, didn’t you, great goddess,” Diomed was soon murmuring, “not to fight with any of you Olympians save only Aphrodite? And now, obeying your words, I have to wait in miserable quiescence watching this bloody Ares murdering our best men!”

“I know it,” replied Athene. “Ares fights first on our side against the Trojans and then in a moment he changes and fights with the Trojans against us. He doesn’t care for whom or against whom he fights as long as he can kill somebody or something. He is what I call an *alla-pros-allon*, a wretched turn-coat. By Zeus, you shall smite him!”

Thus speaking she made a sign to Sthenelus to descend, a sign which he obeyed with delighted awe. Athene then seized the reins and the whip, handing to the wounded Diomed her own terrific spear, while Sthenelus with a sigh of infinite relief watched them whirl into the heart of the battle.

They hadn’t to search long. There was the blood-thirsty Ares, having already slain the mighty Periphas, viciously stripping off the man’s armour as the giant lay on the ground in a pool of blood. By this time the wise Athene, who had been born from the brain of Zeus, had taken good care to replace her own helmet by the dark cap of Hades, a cap that renders the wearer completely invisible both to gods and men. And so when the savage God of War saw the horses of Diomed’s chariot charging straight at him, and Diomed aiming the goddess’s massive spear directly at his navel, he rose to his full height and struck at Diomed with his own spear over the backs of the horses and over the front of the chariot, not realising that his antagonist had the daughter of Zeus at his side. Swifter than sound or sight are the thoughts of mortal men able to fly; but swifter still fly the thoughts of the immortal gods. Thus faster than the speed with which he rose from the ground where he was stripping his victim did the thoughts of the God of War rush through his god-like skull.

"O how I hate," he thought, "this creation of fate and necessity that calls itself the human race! Everything to do with this wretched humanity I hate. If I don't wade and wallow in their blood, if I don't soak the sweet-breathing earth in their loathsome blood, may the depths of Hades possess me for ever!"

Thus thinking, he dashed forward with his great spear, and it needed all the rapid movement of the immortal lady at Diomed's side to ward off that deadly weapon. But ward it off she did, though only just in time, and she sent it whirling on its harmless way into the woundless, bodiless air. At that moment it was that Diomed plunged his spear of bronze deep into Ares' flesh just below his navel; and then, after a second's pause, drew forth the weapon and laid it down, bright with the god's ambrosial blood, on the forefront of their chariot.

Then Ares let forth such a roar of pain, such a resounding and echoing howl of pain, that anyone a mile away would have thought that nine or ten thousand warriors in some frightful assault were yelling some desperate war-cry. And indeed throughout the ranks of both Greeks and Trojans a sudden spasm of paralysing terror seized every single man-Jack of them and they all let their weapons sink down to the ground, ending for a moment the whole war. Such was the result of the howl of pain made by the bloody-minded God of War when he was hurt himself. And now straight up into the sky to Diomed's astonished vision, just as if he were watching one of those weird black vapours that, when the weather has become unbearably hot, a sudden wild wind rising out of nowhere drives from the heart of the clouds and whirls off into space, lo! there was the figure of the War God, still clothed in his brazen armour, ascending into the broad heavens! It can well be believed in how short a time he was to be found crouching by the side of Zeus, the son of Cronos, sobbing with big sobs and wailing to his heavenly Father and displaying to him the deep wound in his navel out of which the ambrosial blood still trickled.

"Father, Father!" he sobbed. "Hast thou no pity, no indignation, no anger on my behalf? It is all the doing of that pestilent virgin who is your own daughter. We other immortals obey thy slightest nod; but this murderous maid, on the strength of being your daughter, thinks she can commit any evil deed! Fancy her daring to set Diomed, the son of Tydeus, upon me, me who am your child as much as she is!"

But Father Zeus thought in his heart: "This is exactly what I have always dreaded, a quarrel to savage wounding and sickening bloodshed between these two!" In vain he strove to control his feelings, but they were too strong. "Don't you come crying and clinging to me the moment you've hurt yourself, you bloodthirsty wretch! Don't I know from whom you inherit all this obstinate, obdurate ferocity, all this savage resistance to reason and justice? From your mother, Queen Hera, boy! Yes! from that troublesome woman your mother, who gave birth to infinite bloodshed when she gave birth to you! Yes, it's from Hera, from Hera, from Hera that you inherit your bloody nature! Nothing I say to her can keep her quiet."

Here the Father of Gods and Men groaned with a deep groan, and for the space of a second closed his eyes, as if this blood trickling down to the golden floor from the flesh of his son was a symbol of all the blood dripping from the wounded flesh of all created creatures from the beginning of the world until this hour. Then with one of the greatest efforts of will he had ever made or was ever destined to make, he swallowed down his anger as if this very anger, now foaming and bubbling within him, were a living creature, a creature whom it was necessary to swallow, if his will in both earth and heaven were to be done.

“No,” he said kindly, laying a tender hand on the arm of the groaning Ares, “I won’t let you suffer any more pain; for after all you are my son.”

And he called for the immortal Paeon, the Olympian doctor, to come and heal him; and without delay Paeon came: nor was it long before this master of the art of healing had worked his magic on the groaning God of War. And then when he was healed Hebe bathed him and clad him in fresh garments and he seated himself by the side of his Father rejoicing and feeling glorious again; while presently Hera and Athene re-entered the palace of them all, having, for that time anyway, compelled the enemy of mankind to cease from his slaughtering.

BOOK VI

MEANWHILE THE TIDE of battle has considerably turned, and the retreating chariots of many Trojan warriors are carrying their drivers at top speed towards the gates of the city. Unfortunately for one of these drivers, Adrastus, his chariot got entangled in a tamarisk, and before the horses could drag it free its driver had fallen out and it was with an empty car that his two magnificent steeds raced home. And then it chanced that of all the Greek warriors it was none other than he who had been most injured by Troy, namely Menelaus himself, who came bolt up against Adrastus as that fallen warrior picked himself up from beneath the tamarisk and wondered whether he could find his way home. All the Trojan nobles knew Menelaus by sight, and what else could poor Adrastus do now, for his fall had left him weaponless, than throw himself down before the husband of Helen, clasp him round the knees and beg him for life, only for life.

"My father, great Sir," he begged, "is a very rich man and he has only to receive a trustworthy message to say I am your captive and he will send you a ransom in gold and silver and precious stones of any value you care to name as long as you keep me alive and do not kill me."

Menelaus, liking the look of the man, didn't hesitate for a moment.

"O damn all these killings and revenges," he thought, "if only I can get my lovely Helen safe back and out of the hands of that devil Paris I'd willingly give the whole lot of them their lives! I don't hate a living soul of them save Paris.

If only I could have killed that beguiling scamp when I had the chance! What a fool I was!"

"Yes, surely, my good man; I'll see that you're escorted straight to our ships. So get up, and—"

But at this moment the great Agamemnon, his brother, who had noted this little scene under the tamarisk, came indignantly to their side.

"What are you doing with this wretch, you little softy?" he cried. "What we've got to do is to send as many as we can of this spawn of thieves straight down to Hades. There: you take that!"

And he dug his heavy brazen spear deep into the prisoner's flanks with so much force that man and spear fell to the ground together. Down above the body of Adrastus bent the gigantic and merciless King of Kings, and as soon as he saw that the point of the spear which he had plunged clean through him was protruding from his back, he knelt with his full weight on the unfortunate man's body, laying hold of this point with both his hands and using all his enormous strength he dragged the whole thing out of him: and following the spear came forth blood and entrails, and with a ghastly sound like the cracking of a river dam the man's life departed.

From end to end of the fighting now it was clear that the Trojans were gradually being driven back: and old Nestor was exerting all his extraordinary power in the work of inspiring tired warriors and exhausted spearmen to go on with their success. Hitherto on the Trojan side the chief inspirer of the wavering spirit of each ordinary warrior had been that "sweet war-man, Hector"; but when Helenus, another son of Priam, to utter whose name was to bring to mind the lovely creature who was the cause of the whole war, came forward as an expert of the art of prediction, especially through the rare and difficult art of augury by the flight of birds, a completely new element entered. His oionistian insight, which was a psychic power separating him entirely from all his family and making him a lonely philosopher, drove him now to take a bold pacific step on the chance that it might have some effect on this bloody struggle. What Helenus in fact now did was to look for Aeneas, and when he found him to take him straight to Hector.

“It has come over me, my dear comrades,” he declared, “that instead of retreating before the invaders as we are doing now, we might make one grand effort to appease these merciless Greeks by appealing to their own special goddess and propitiating her if we can, and calling upon her to bring about peace among mortal men. Why shouldn’t Aeneas and I and the rest of our chieftains and our allies fight desperately now and refuse to retreat a step further, while brother Hector goes home to the city and begs the help of our mother Hecabe and of all the oldest and wisest ladies who attend upon her? We have in our inmost citadel, as you both know well, a tiny little temple to Pallas Athene. Well then, why don’t we call upon some of the oldest and richest of our Trojan ladies, whether wedded or unwedded, whether with children or childless, and let them select among themselves the most beautiful, the most rich, the most royal, the most imaginatively designed and exquisitely woven robe in the whole city? And when they have found the keys of this little temple, even if there are no services or sacrifices to Pallas Athene carried on there since this accursed war began, let them lay this surpassingly splendid robe on the knees of the goddess Athene and vow to her that we will make such sacrifices to her as have never before been made to any god or goddess since Ouranos first embraced Gaia; if she only will hold in check this terrifying fighter, Diomed, and not allow him to rampage among us as he is doing now! Yes! and tell the goddess that we are more afraid of this murderous wretch than we are of Achilles!”

Hector at once obeyed his brother. He leapt from his chariot and rushed up and down the line, calling on the Trojans to fight to the death. It was so unexpected for them all to see him dashing through the front line brandishing a spear in each hand that they took heart with a new zeal. He himself, however, retired to the city, with his huge shield jolting against both his neck and ankles as he hastened home.

Meanwhile, Diomed, as he prepared to continue his slaughterings, found himself confronted by a completely new enemy, a man of enormous power as well as of a most striking appearance. This was none other than Glaucus, the son of Hippolochus. As these two terrific heroes approached each other both the Trojans and the Achaeans drew back, leaving a clear space for their meeting, and all watched the encounter with intense excitement. Both the men instinctively paused as they faced each other, and, as may well be imagined, it was the ferocious Diomed who was the first to speak.

"Who on earth are you, who have the gall to cross my conquering path? And let me tell you this, my good young friend: your parents, if they are human, will soon find out that the unluckiest fate that can possibly befall any child of theirs is to try to oppose me. But please understand this, great sir, if you happen to be more than mortal, I flatly refuse to fight with you. I'm not such a double-dyed fool as to want to imitate Lycurgus, who so terrified Dionysus when he was a child that he plunged into the sea; but once beneath the waves Thetis received him in her bosom; and as for Lycurgus, he soon found out that it is better for mortals to leave immortals alone. But if you, my young sir, are a mortal like myself, the sooner we set to it the sooner it'll all be over for you!"

Having thus spoken, and tightening his hold on his spear, Diomed waited. He would have found it hard to say why he didn't strike the first blow; but most likely the reason was that he was seized by a sudden wave of intense curiosity as to who the parents were of this extraordinarily handsome youth; for of course, when he had killed him, as he was certain he soon would do, he couldn't possibly wait at that critical moment to learn whom he had slain. But it now became clear that this handsome champion of the Trojans was in no greater hurry to come to blows than was his terrifying antagonist.

"Why is it," he answered, bowing most politely, "that you ask me about my ancestors? As are the comings and goings of the leaves of the forest, so are the generations of mortal men. In the autumn of the year the wild winds scatter them over the earth, but when in due season the spring cometh again, lo! once more the trees of the forest bring them to birth. But I am ready to tell you the tale of my people, if it's a story that has any interest for you."

At this point, if a couple of seagulls had happened to be passing over that hushed oasis between the opposing ranks, where each man on both sides was leaning on his spear in absorbed interest in what was happening, such feathered onlookers might well have exchanged their surprise at the contradictions in human minds. Here were a couple of antagonists, for whom the glory of killing an opponent evidently surpassed all other achievements, prepared to stop fighting if instead of death-dealing blows at each other they could exchange personal reminiscences. It is, however, not difficult to imagine how the handsome young Glaucus could enjoy putting off their death-struggle while he explained to Diomed that his grandfather was none other than the famous Bellerophon, whose own grandfather was the Titan Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, God of all the Winds. At this point, in the colloquy between these two, there suddenly arrived a climax that neither of them had dreamed of, and it came with the mention of the word Bellerophon. For it turned out that Diomed's grandfather, Oeneus, had once entertained Bellerophon for twenty days in his own home and had exchanged with him the sort of gifts that only very intimate friends part with to each other. At the discovery of this personal link between their ancestors, both warriors were so overjoyed and excited that they incontinently and with a common impulse gave up all idea of fighting each other. Diomed planted his spear in the earth and they both leapt down from their chariots and, clasping each other's hands, made a pledge that, as their grandsires had been in former days, so they would be today.

In their impetuous rush of sympathy they even went so far as to exchange armour; and I, the Aether, who know so well all the kitchen gossip to which Homer, now almost blind, must have been exposed in the Servants' Hall, cannot resist smiling when I hear the old poet say that Zeus, the son of Cronos, must have turned the head of the handsome young Glaucus to make him exchange his gold for Diomed's brass.

The aged poet could not, however, have read the real thoughts of Glaucus as he initiated and carried through this courteous exchange; for the young man's mind, as he unlaced his golden breast-plate and proceeded to fit on, not without using a certain unseemly violence, for these two great warriors were not of similar structure, his new brazen one, wandered far from them both. All human thoughts, especially when we are putting on or taking off physical coverings, whether of cloth or metal, are apt to fly in strange directions. His now kept playing round that murderous letter, those *lugra seemata*, the earliest letter recorded in human history, which the jealous King Proetus made Bellerophon take to the great Lord of Lycia, begging that monarch to have the man who brought it put at once to death.

"What would I do," he asked himself, "if I had a letter ordering me to kill the bearer of it? I am not at all sure that I wouldn't behave very much in the same way that the King of Lycia behaved; that is to say, send the bearer off on some risky adventure, but promising myself all the same, knowing, of course, that particular man's descent from Aeolus, that if the winds of fate saved him I would give him, on his return, his dearest wish. What he had done, of course, might not be anything like killing the Chimaera or defeating the Amazons, but it would have been enough to prove his divine descent; and if his dearest wish were to have my daughter and my kingdom, that wish, if I *had* a daughter and a kingdom, I most surely would give him."

And then, as across places and people roamed the thoughts of Glaucus, the grandson of Bellerophon, as he bent to fasten the clasps of his new brazen greaves, he found himself thinking of Bellerophon's melancholy end. "How would I," he asked himself, "like to perish as he did, without one single friend or helper among all the gods and mortals?" And as he bent down to tighten these brassy things about his shins, he found himself imagining with terrible vividness those long desolate walks all alone across plains and valleys and moors and mountains, "eating out his heart", *hon thumon katedon*, and avoiding the tracks of men.

Meanwhile Hector hadn't forgotten the wise advice of his brother Helenus, that adept in augury from the flight of birds, and, hurrying to the city, he soon reached the oak-tree outside the Scaean Gate. Here he found himself surrounded by a clamorous crowd of wives and daughters of warriors at the front, imploring him to tell them who was unharmed and who was wounded and who was dead; and he spoke gently to them, each in turn, and told them to pray to the gods; but to some among them, for he was no deceiver, he brought dreadful sorrow. As soon as he entered the great palace of King Priam, his mother Hecabe came hurrying to meet him, holding her loveliest daughter, Laodice, by the hand.

"Well know I, my child," she cried, "that you cannot stay for more than a moment; but please, please, before you go back to the front, let me give you a glass of honey-sweet wine. You shall pour a libation to Zeus and the other immortals first; but when you’ve done that, do please, my dear child, enjoy a good glass of it yourself.”

But Hector answered:

“No, no, most perfect of mothers! It would be wrong to pour a libation with unwashed hands and mine are foul with blood; and to drink anything now, myself, would bring down my power and strength in the fight. But you go yourself, dearest Mother, and choose the most beautiful robe you can find and lay it on the knees of our image of Athene. As for me, I must go and get hold of that wretch Paris, curse his soul! O if only I could see that damned soul of his going down to Hades! If only I could!”

Hecabe waited not for one moment. Straightway she gathered about her a large group of old wives and devoted spinsters; and she took from the depths of her store-house an incredibly beautiful robe, one, ironically enough, that Paris had found in Sidon, on his famous piratical voyage when he’d beguiled and brought to Troy none other than Helen her own self! That there should have been a statue of Pallas Athene at all in any dwelling in the city of Troy must have so shocked some Greek companion of the blind narrator of this tale that, unknown to the bard, he inserted into the text a line to the effect that the goddess, while accepting the beautiful robe, rejected this prayer of its bestowers. If we follow, however, the subtle instinct of that true librarian, Anaxagoras, the line recording this refusal can be left out.

As to that sweet war-man, Hector, what he did next was to go straight into the dwelling of his brother Alexander, otherwise Paris, whom he found sulking by himself in his own private chamber, where, for lack of anything better to do, he was polishing his armour, while Helen, surrounded by a crowd of maidens, was showing them how to finish a particularly complicated and immensely large curtain of embroidered tapestry. Hector began at once denouncing his brother as the shameful cause of all their trouble, and cursing him for not being in the forefront of the battle.

"It's all right, my dear," the crafty Paris replied gently. "Helen was just now urging me, but not unkindly like you, to go quickly to the front. And that is exactly what I am now preparing to do, though in obedience to her more gentle request, and not because of your brutal abuse. You needn't wait! I'll have my armour on in a second, and I'll follow you quickly. I shall know you by that thundering great spear of yours as you go swaggering off to your favourite arena for winning glory."

Hector turned his back upon him with a gesture of infinite contempt; but as he was leaving the house Helen ran to his side, seized his wrist with both hands, and began to pour out all her long-suppressed self-reproach.

"O brother, darling brother," she cried, "none of you have any idea of what I suffer! Why, O why, did I let that man beguile and seduce me? O how wrong I was to let him do it! Menelaus had his faults as a husband: but O Hector, O Hector! those faults seem nothing to me now compared with the ways of this man who has to be dragged back to the front by his own brother! O how I wish that at the moment I was born a great wind had arisen and carried me away with it, and given me to the waves of the all-swallowing sea! How can you bear me near you, O Hector, glory of Ilios? I am a name all over the world of shame and reproach! Yes, yes! That's what I am and that's what I shall be for centuries to come. I shall be known to all as the shamefullest whore that the earth has ever nourished since woman was first created! But O Hector, you are my one support, my one tower of refuge in all my unhappiness, my one consoler in all my shame! So please, please, Hector, my noble brother — for you are, *are* my brother now, aren't you, now that I am the wife of that man in there? Sit thee down a little while, won’t you, here with me, us two together, for you are the only one in all Troy that I have come really to love!”

Her tears were wetting his bare wrist as she clung to him and she was quivering now from head to foot. But Hector tore himself away.

“I must” — here he hesitated, for he knew well that the last thing an unhappy woman wants to hear from her consoler is the name of another woman— “I must,” he concluded, forcing himself to speak more firmly and quietly than he actually felt at that moment, for Helen’s almost miraculous beauty, together with her heart-felt emotion, affected him more than he would have cared to admit to any living soul... “I must go home for a moment, before I join battle again, to have a word with Andromache and a kiss from my son, for I might — for who can tell what Zeus has got in his mind, or whether, apart from him altogether, Atropos the eldest of the Fates, or crazy Tyche, the incarnation of care-free Chance, may not choose to have me knocked on the head, so that I may not see them, or beautiful you either, ever again!”

His final words were spoken through the closing space between the door-post and the door; and as he emerged into the broad, well-built street with nobly built ancient houses on both sides, and as he strode down the centre of the chariot-way between the opposing pavements, he thought to himself: “God! it’s hard to blame that damned brother of mine for carrying off such a girl as that! No wonder Aphrodite is so fiercely on our side in this war and Pallas Athene so strongly against us! And how queer *this* is — though it’s the last thing I must tell to Andromache! — but I know I am really much happier and much more my true self when I am in the midst of a desperate fight, *any* sort of a fight, than when I am loving and being loved by these beautiful wenches!”

Hector's own house was quite near to the Scaean Gate that led out of the city, so that by the time he reached it and rested his huge spear against one of its portals, he could see, three or four hundred yards away, the usual crowd of people collected there, and that other, more stately and dignified group, of aged chieftains surrounding the embossed and deeply engraved stone upon which, on important occasions, King Priam was accustomed to it. The dominant house-lady, in all the ruling households in Troy, apart from the wife of its lord, was the lady who in England is called the "housekeeper", but who with both Greeks and Trojans was called the *Tamiee.* It was this person, and she was a most active and competent *tamiee*, who soon pushed her way through the agitated group of maidens and who now greeted their master and explained to him the situation.

"Our lady Andromache," she told him, "has been terribly upset today by the rumours and stories that have drifted into the city with the wounded and dying, and about a quarter of an hour ago she had a fit of convulsive hysterics and, calling upon the nurse to bring the child, she rushed out from among us. As I saw that it only made her worse to try to stop her, I forbade any of the maids to attempt such a thing, and I just let her go; but I have sent certain messengers to bring me news of her and they assure me that she is safe and well, but waiting with the nurse and child on the wall by the Scaean Gate."

Hearing this, Hector hurried at once down the broad street so familiar to him from childhood, and as he strode along with his enormous ashen spear held against his shoulder, he enquired of his heart how it was that he held always deep in the recesses of his being an absolute certainty that he was fighting in vain, and that one day, ere so very long, Troy was doomed to fall and the overwhelmingly beautiful woman from whom he had just parted was destined to be restored to the house of Menelaus.

"Is it the talk of the old soothsayers that I heard in my childhood," he asked himself, "that has lodged this tragic certainty in the depths of my soul? Or am I peradventure something of an unofficial augur my own self?"

When he drew near the Scaean Gate and the ancient wide-ramparted wall from which the Elders used to watch the battle-field, he saw his wife Andromache running towards him, with the nurse-maid at her heels carrying their infant child. Hector felt a wave of unexpected tenderness pass through his heart when he saw his wife and child, a feeling that was quite different from the romantic pity and sympathy he had felt just now for the incomparably beautiful Helen. Before they reached him the youthful nursemaid who carried Scamandrios, or Astyanax, overtook Andromache, and he couldn't help being enchanted by the way the baby responded to his greeting with one of those mysteriously all-knowing smiles that in this world only infants and tiny toddlers are capable of giving.

"It's as if," Hector thought, "they were born into our confused hubbub from some kingdom altogether wiser than ours!"

But Andromache clasped his free hand with both of hers and leaned her body passionately against him.

"O my devilishly precious love!" she cried, "this cursed heroism and fighting spirit of yours will prove, I know it, the doom of us all three! Yes, the doom of our little son and of yourself and me! O my only true love, do for all our sakes, remember that I've got nobody but you in the whole world! This terrifying Achilles killed my father and my seven brothers, and though he took a ransom beyond all measure for my mother and let her go, she only escaped to be slain by the darts of Artemis. Don't you see, Hector darling, you are father and mother and all my brothers too! Do please, please, stay with your baby and me, for one evening anyhow, on this side of these gates and on this royal rampart!"

But Hector shook his head as he stroked her wrist with his left hand, while still keeping a firm clutch with his right upon his massive spear.

"No, darling, I can't, I can't, I can't! And I must tell you also — though I wouldn't tell another living being — that I am convinced at the bottom of my own soul that our great city *is* going to be destroyed, and that they are going to restore their Helen to her former home. But let me tell you this, sweetheart; and for all our sakes lay it up, as the poets say, in your heart. When this calamity does happen it won't be for Hecabe or for Priam that my heart will hurt me with a grief sharp as the spear of Achilles. It will be entirely for you. It will be for the thought of you carrying wood and drawing water with these delicate arms and tender hands, while the gossips of some damned Spartan town point at you and cry: 'Do you see that weeping girl working there? She was the wife of Hector, ere he and the whole rest of the show went down into Hades!'"

To Andromache's astonishment she now saw big tears in her hero's eyes.

"O my darling," he cried, "I want to be dead! O my only true love! I want to have the earth heaped over me, ere you are crying in foreign bondage!"

They were both silent for a moment. Then Hector leaned his great spear against a buttress of the wall, and stretched out both his hands to the child. But the little boy was frightened by the great horse-hair plume that waved from the top of his father's brazen helmet, and he drew back in terror into his young nurse's bosom. At sight of this, Hector took off his great gleaming helmet and laid it on the ground; and having done so, with a reassuring smile that the baby couldn't resist, he took the infant in both his arms and uttered aloud a solemn prayer.

"May Zeus and the other gods," he prayed, forgetting in that moment all his sorrowful forebodings, "grant that this child of mine may grow up to surpass his father in every possible way; and be wiser, stronger, braver than his father in the eyes of gods and men!”

So saying and so praying, he gave the child back to its mother and she took it to her breast, smiling and weeping at the same moment. And stooping over her, Hector was seized with a great wave of love and pity, and caressed her with his hand and murmured in her ears:

“Don’t ‘ee be too unhappy, my dearest one, for I swear to you there’s no one who can kill me before the moment that Destiny has decided I must go down to Hades. We all have our fate and the day of our doom decided the moment we’re born; and from this there’s no escape, whether we are cowardly or brave. Don’t be too unhappy, my precious one. Go home to our house and to all your work with loom and distaff and handmaids to help. Your work lies there, while mine is in the field of battle. I must fight and you must work. Such is the lot of men and women upon this earth.”

He was silent, and she was silent; and between them passed that strange breath of mutual silence which passes between those who are together forever and yet have to part, he one way, she another way, in order that inscrutable fate may fulfil its hidden purpose.

Hector had not gone far towards the fighting, indeed he had only just left the Scaean Gate and emerged into the plain, when his brother Alexander, or Paris, overtook him. This latter was in such high spirits that Hector, when he turned at his call, was entirely debarred from accusing him of cowardice. The man waved his sword and tossed his head and caracoled with his feet, more as if he were dancing than entering a life-and-death battle.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting,” was Alexander’s greeting to his brother. “I know I ought to have made more haste; but it’s a fault I don’t seem able to cure, this way I have of taking occasions easily and not hurrying over anything! Besides, I wanted to get my armour in its very best trim before setting out."

"O no, you queer fellow," replied Hector, advancing by the younger man's side while his terrific helmet and towering spear looked more menacing than ever compared with the other's golden adornments, "O no, I'm not implying for a moment that you aren't brave. You're brave and valiant enough in all conscience, more so than I am perhaps, in your wild prancings and plungings. When I reproach you, it's never for want of courage. It's hard to express exactly what I mean, but I think it's your easy-goingness, your casualness, your entire lack of seriousness in anything you do. You don't take life as it ought to be taken. You take it as if it were a game of no importance. You don't seem to care who wins or who loses. You don't seem really to care, about anything, except making love and dressing yourself up. But come on now, brother of mine. We'll settle all our misunderstandings presently, if only Zeus will grant us to clear our native Troy-land of these accursed Greeks. O my brother, may the blest day soon come when we can fill to the brim, as a libation to the gods that live for ever, a deep wine-bowl of final and triumphant liberation from the hands of our enemies!"

BOOK VII

When Hector, followed by his gaily caparisoned and deftly caracoling companion, had once plunged into the battle, their rush of onset and their freshness of renewed confidence in themselves made their attack terribly effective and several famous Greek warriors fell to rise no more. Indeed there was such a perceptible surge of victory on the Trojan side that the two Olympians most concerned, Apollo on the side of Hector and Athene on the side of the Greeks, came both of them darting down from their posts of heavenly observation.

They met beneath the oldest and most familiar landmark in front of the city, a very ancient oak-tree of the kind that both Greeks and Trojans called a *Pheego*, but which later the Romans called a *Fagus.* Apollo took the initiative at once.

“Haven’t you any pity for a people as noble and a city as beautiful as this? What has come over you and Hera, you immortal goddesses, that you are so bent upon bringing this wonderful city down to the dust? But now do please listen to me. Let us agree upon at least a day’s truce, just to see what may or may not happen as a result of even so brief a pause in the slaughter.”

“Why, O Apollo, thou great far-shooter of deadly arrows,” cried Athene, uttering with perfect assurance what Apollo knew well was a complete falsehood, “that is exactly what I came down here to suggest to you!”

As the far-shooting god looked at his opponent, with that formidable Aegis round her neck with its death-dealing “thusanoi”, or terrible tassels, wherewith their father Zeus, and even he himself now and again, could make armies flee, he couldn’t help thinking to himself: “No wonder Father

Zeus finds it hard, even with my help and Aphrodite's too, to withstand his wife Hera when she has this terrifying Athene to support her! Heavens and Earth! How I would like to start up an insurrection against our Father that would really succeed! The nearest approach to it was when the rebels were defeated by the aid of Briareus the Sea-Monster. But what I've always felt is that there's no real hope of dragging down our cloudgathering Father unless we can get the help, not only of Poseidon and of Hades, but of Cronos, their dethroned father, and of Rhea, their vanished mother! But a time will come, I know it, I feel it, when some absolutely unknown Immortal, descending or rising from some world of Beings hitherto totally unknown, and possessed of a completely different kind of power from that which our present ruler wields, will stand against him. Prometheus tried in vain I know; but *he came near it.* It's obviously not impossible. It's only by force he keeps us down. So, so, so, if we, if we could somehow, somewhere, find a force stronger than the force he uses, an entirely different *kind* of force, *yes!* I refuse to believe it's impossible to overthrow him! And once overthrown, O how lovely, how free, how full of possibilities, the world would be!"

"Well, great Aegis-bearer," Apollo now said to Athene, "let us rouse the spirit of your Greek friends, and call upon them to challenge Hector to a mortal combat with whomever it may be among them who has the courage to stand up against him. And let us advise Hector himself to march at once up and down the front between the two armies, calling upon both sides to sit down on the ground while the Greeks select a champion who will be ready and happy to fight it out with Hector of Troy." To all this Athene cordially agreed. But who was the one to approach Hector on this important matter? It soon turned out that there was no necessity for either of these deities to take any steps in that direction. The wise brother of Hector, whose name was Helenus, understood in his own spiritual way what these two Immortals, one on the Greek side and the other on the Trojan side, were suggesting. Promptly this excellent soothsayer, who was — so the bard implies, and well he may have been — King Priam's favourite son, hurried up to Hector and told him exactly what he had better do. And Hector who, like their father, felt deep respect as well as affection for this man, rushed off at once to obey him in every detail. Holding his great spear by the middle, as a sign that he was a messenger of peace, he ran up and down between friends and enemies, making them all sit on the ground and lay their shields and weapons beside them; and then, when all was quiet, called upon the Greek chiefs to select among themselves some champion with whom he would fight it out to the death. His challenge was followed by such dead silence on the Greek side that Menelaus, angry with his compatriots for their inertia, rushed to Hector, dragging his armour with him, and hurriedly began to put it on.

But King Agamemnon came rushing after him, and seizing him by the arm, dragged him back, crying aloud so that all could hear, that it was absolutely crazy of him, who hadn't the ghost of a chance to win against Hector, to go and act like this. On second thoughts Menelaus consented to retire; and, while Agamemnon was leading him back to his place as an onlooker, Nestor lifted up voice and — skilful old orator as he was — held all the Greeks and most of the front-line Trojans as well in absorbed attention. It was impossible for him to avoid the weakness of an incorrigible orator now grown old; but even his lapses into long-winded romance were so fascinating to them all that he held them under a spell. The most enthralling part of it all was about his fight with Ereuthalion, whose lord, Lycurgus, had left him a dreadful and most unusual sort of weapon, a club made of nothing but iron, so that the boys and girls called the man who fought with it *koruneetees* or the “mace-brandisher”. Nestor went on to explain in his reverberating voice to both armies how this fellow with the mace was the strongest man he had ever killed, and how when he lay on the ground his vast huge body seemed to stretch out like a mountain, this way, that way, all ways!

Excited by old Nestor’s dramatic oratory, half a dozen famous Greek warriors leapt to their feet to offer themselves, including Diomed, Odysseus, Telamonian Ajax, and the other Ajax, Idomeneus, Meriones, and even King Agamemnon himself. Then once more old Nestor took control and made all these competitors mark their lots, which he bade King Agamemnon place in his great brazen helmet. Then Nestor took the helmet and made a prayer to Zeus and shook it between his two hands. And as he shook it, all the Greeks seated on the ground prayed earnestly in their hearts that the lot of Ajax, son of Telamon, or of Diomed, son of Tydeus, or of King Agamemnon himself, should be the one to fall out. And when the lot fell out, it was given to the herald to carry round to all the greatest warriors, until the one who had marked it with a sign known only to himself claimed it as his. And the herald went up and down the line showing it to the great warriors one by one.

But none claimed it as his until it was brought to Ajax, son of Telamon. He greeted it with a shout of joy and waved it exultantly in the air. Never in his life had a greater thrill of pure simple pleasure quivered through his gigantic frame. And as he buckled on his armour excited gusts of feeling kept bursting from him in broken words.

“I believe I can do for him,” he gasped, “deadly though he is! By the beard of my father and the breasts of my mother, I believe I’ve the power to finish off this rampaging Hector! We shall see. We shall see. We shall see.”

Every man in the front of the Grecian ranks was stirred with renewed spirit as he watched the enormous figure of Ajax, carrying the biggest spear they had ever seen, striding between the ranks straight towards Hector. And the sight of this warrior-giant was as disturbing to the Trojans as it was exciting to their invaders. It must be confessed that even the heart of Hector himself beat faster than usual as he watched this gigantic enemy approaching. Ajax stopped when he was within a spear-cast distance of his foe, and as soon as he stopped he began speaking.

"Now you shall learn, good master Hector, that though Achilles may be sulking in his tent, there are plenty of us who are perfectly ready to stand up to you, and not a few of us, let me tell you, who are as good at this spear-and-shield game as you are yourself. But come on now; you had better have the first fling."

Hector sighed.

"Curse these rollicking, slap-dashing, boisterous fellows! Don't they know *anything* about civilised warfare? Of course the man who has answered the challenge is the man to begin the battle. But like all these Greeks he doesn't regard fighting as the difficult profession it is. He takes it like hunting or like some crazy game that has no rules at all. But as you ask for it you shall have it, my worthy giant!"

Thus thinking, Hector hurled his great spear full at the centre of the unusually thick shield carried by Ajax. This shield had seven layers of bull's hide in addition to its bronze, and in the seventh layer of bull's hide Hector's spear — for all the force with which it was thrown and for all its perfection of aim — stuck fast. Then it was the turn of Ajax, who, tossing aside his enormous shield with his antagonist's weapon projecting from it, flung his spear; and much nearer did his weapon come to taking his enemy's life. But by a quick turn of his whole body, though the spear tore the tunic next his skin, Hector managed to escape death. Then simultaneously each of them extricated his long spear from the defensive armour of his opponent, and, using these weapons at close quarters, they attacked each other with the fury of a couple of wild beasts. It wasn’t long before the superior massiveness and weight of Ajax began to tell. The Trojan hero kept stabbing at him; but it soon became evident that the giant’s extraordinary shield had turned the point of Hector’s wonderful spear. As a result of this, the first blood to flow was Hector’s; for Ajax, now using his superior weight and height, stabbed at him in such a deadly manner that his blood spurted out.

But Hector wouldn’t submit to defeat. Tossing his spear away he leapt aside and picked up a great black stone from the ground and hurled it straight at the centre of the giant’s huge unbreakable shield. But, though it struck this monstrous defence full in its very centre, it had no effect except making an appalling noise. Then it was the giant’s turn. He imitated his enemy’s proceeding; only what he picked up to throw was much more than a stone. It was a great rock as big as a mill stone. Under the weight of this missile, when it descended upon him, Hector utterly collapsed. He fell upon his back on the ground, and the place where he fell looked as if it would shortly be a pool of blood.

But Apollo was not far off and, although completely invisible to them both, he lifted Hector to his feet, staunched the wound that was bleeding, and put new strength into him. Then would he, with fresh vigour and indestructible resolution, have flung himself upon Ajax, and they both would have had recourse to their murderously sharp short swords, if the heralds, one from each army, had not intervened. These were Talthybius and Idaeus, both of them very wise and cautious men, and they held forth their official staves and, with their heraldic authority, separated the desperate pair.

And it was the wiser and the elder of the two heralds — that is to say, Idaeus — who spoke to them as he separated them.

“Fight no more, dear sons; fight no more. The day is nearly over and darkness is at hand; and all of us, children of mortal men, have to yield to darkness.”

Then Ajax made answer:

“Let Hector be the one to speak; for, since he was the challenger, it’s fitting he should be the proposer of peace.”

And Hector replied at once:

“Yes, indeed, let us cease from fighting. You are the best at this dangerous game in both our armies. And one day I hope to be allowed to fight with you again. But at this moment, since night is coming on, let us both yield to darkness. And now, as on this occasion we part, let us give each other some memorable gift, so that future generations of men may say: ‘None fought more fiercely than those two; but none have parted in more loyal friendship or given each other more exciting gifts.’”

Having thus spoken, he presented Ajax with his silver-studded sword-sheath with its well-cut strap. Ajax on his side, without a moment’s hesitation, hurriedly unbuckled his beautiful belt, which gleamed with purple, and pressed it into Hector’s hands. Holding each of them the gifts received from the other, the two heroes now departed; one towards the city where he was quickly surrounded by crowds who could hardly believe their eyes to see him alive; and the other to the ranks of the Greeks who were exulting in victory.

Indeed so triumphant did the King Agamemnon feel that he sacrificed to Zeus a five-years-old bull and gave all his men a grand feast whereof this beast’s enormous body furnished the chief part. When this good feast enjoyed by all was over, the wise old Nestor rose up and suggested that they should get to sleep now as soon as possible; but that the moment the early “wolf-light” appeared, that first dawn-light which preceded the sun, they should rise up and dress quickly and return to the scene of to-day’s desperate fighting and carry the dead bodies from the field.

“Let us burn them,” he said, “as near the ships as possible, so that we shall be able to take the bones away when we sail for the children of the dead to bury at home. What we cannot carry away let us burn in one great fire; and when that is level with the plain let us build over the place of the funeral pyre a great mound or barrow; and, after we have done that, let us build a lofty wall with gates that can be tightly closed, but through which, of course, we ourselves can go in and out as we please. And let us dig a deep ditch round about all this, so that the Trojans will not be able to drive their chariots near to the ships.”

When wise old Nestor had finished giving them these directions, all the chieftains of the Greeks shouted enthusiastic approval.

Meanwhile on the Trojan side there was a tumultuous gathering by the city-wall at Prian’s Gate; and the first among the elders to address the crowd was Antenor, and he went very far indeed in what he dared to suggest.

“Let us,” he boldly said, “give back Argive Helen and all her treasure to the sons of Atreus to take away. In fighting now we are proving false to our oaths; and I say it’s better to keep faith with the gods rather than win a personal quarrel.”

The moment he had finished, the beautiful Alexander, otherwise the beguiling Paris, leapt to his feet.

"I refuse, I refuse, I refuse," he cried, "to give up my girl! I will give up all her treasure willingly to stop this bloody war, and not only so, but I will add some rich treasure of my very own, yes! some precious treasure that has nothing whatever to do with Helen. But *her* I refuse, I refuse, I refuse, to give back!"

Then it was that King Priam, son of Dardanus, himself rose from his throne and addressed them like the great monarch he was.

"Go now to your various homes, my people, and have a good and quiet supper each at his own hearth. Then at dawn let Idaeus, the herald, go to the hollow ships and declare the word of Alexander, by whose deed all this fighting has been brought about."

All the Trojan host hearing the words of their King Priam did just what he commanded. And sleep that night was sweeter and more precious to them than it had ever been before in their whole lives.

In the early morning Idaeus went quietly to the place of gathering not far from the ships, where the sons of Atreus and all the other chieftains, including Diomed and Odysseus, were already discussing the situation. Here he announced to them all that Alexander, "the cause of the whole trouble", as the herald had no hesitation in calling him, had offered to give back to them the whole bulk of Helen's possessions, and had also offered to add to this restitution an enormous mass of gold and silver out of his own private treasury, but Helen herself, once the wife of Menelaus and now his own wife, he absolutely refused to give up.

Thus spoke Idaeus the herald. And uprose Diomed with a ringing shout.

"No! No! No! Don't let us take a stiver from this rascally wretch, nor let us take Helen either if he wants to escape destruction by giving her up! I tell you, my friends, the cords of doom are already gathered about these treacherous Trojans!"

The shouts that greeted this speech were so prolonged and so tremendous that an exhausted silence followed. Then uprose the King of men, Agamemnon.

“You have heard what you have heard, Idaeus, and I can tell you my heart and my will are one with Diomed. As to our allowing you to burn your dead before we make a further attack, that however is a completely different matter. We are all agreed, as are all good-hearted and properly-feeling persons, that the luckless dead must be given the consolation and consecration and everlasting liberation that fire alone can give. As to the vows we have made and the vows we have broken, these are things that must be left to Zeus, the Lord of Heaven.”

So he spoke, and gravely and reverently, though very rapidly, both sides now began carrying the corpses of their friends from the trodden grass and blood-soaked ditches of the battle-field, until they reached the high places where funeral pyres were already being prepared.

While all this was happening the sun rose up out of the vast-flowing ocean’s far-off horizon and flung his rays upon the broken bodies and gory faces of the dead. Individual Greeks and Trojans, all searching for the special corpses they loved, crossed and re-crossed one another’s paths; and often they had to carry water to the spot to wash the blood from the faces of their dead so as to be sure they knew them in their ghastly disfigurement. The stoutest hearts were shedding tears as they lifted their dead upon their wagons to carry them to the places of burning. The Trojan mourners were allowed to weep as they followed their wagons to the funeral pyre; but when once they had commenced the actual burning of their dead, King Priam allowed them no more lamentation and they had to fulfil their tragic task in silence, burying their sorrow in the depths of their own hearts, or letting it go up in smoke.

While the Trojans were thus occupied, carrying their dead to the burning, and after the burning moving wearily and sorrowfully through the city gates and still more sadly through the city-streets to their various homes, the Greeks, following, as their inherent nature dictated, a completely different urge, were no longer thinking of those they had lost nor cursing Achilles for sulking in his tent, but were full of a fresh surge of technical energy. This had begun long before the sun rose over the far-off horizon; and it was now going on while the sun was shining down on the bowed heads of the Trojans, as in melancholy order they returned home. But the Greeks were now absorbed by this idea, which old Nestor had started and which now possessed them in common, of raising a lofty embankment and digging a deep trench all the way round the enclosure where the ships had been dragged up upon the shore. Deep as their trench was the feeling of relief and security they experienced when they had finished digging. High as the summit of their towering embankment was the exultation they felt when they thought of their enemies being hurled back, down the slope of this great ridge!

But it was not only of their mortal foes that these daring Greeks should have taken thought. They ought to have remembered that immortal eyes were also looking down upon them and that Troy had allies in heaven. Indeed it was very soon when none other than Poseidon himself, god of the ocean and shaker of the earth, resting at one moment by one side of Zeus the Father of them all, burst out in a rage.

“Look, Father Zeus, look what these confounded Greeks have gone and done! I tell you the news of this performance of theirs will soon be resounding over the whole earth, whereas the much more wonderful wall which Apollo and I erected for Laomedon, the father of King Priam, is now totally forgotten!”

Seldom had cloud-assembling Zeus felt more teased and aggrieved than he felt at this moment.

“Shaker of the earth, is it for you to talk like this? How can you utter such a ridiculous absurdity? Of course your glory goes as far as the light of the morning! Up with you, you old silly! Can’t you see that when these precious Greeks have gone home in their ships, you’ll be free to sweep your great billows over the whole business, bank, rampart, ditch and all, and then when you’ve covered their work with sand from the depths of the ocean, lo! every sign of their tinkerings and clinkerings will be as if it had never been!”

Neither Greeks nor Trojans that night had the faintest notion why, when on both sides there was such a pleasant sound of revelry, there should suddenly have burst out above their heads terrifying rumblings and rollings and rattlings of thunder. The bravest of them turned pale as they listened, and their hands trembled so much that the wine they were drinking fell splashing to the ground. It was indeed not until they had bethought themselves to pour out a supplicatory libation to the Father of all, that they were able to lie down that night in peace of mind and sink quietly to sleep.

BOOK VIII

WHILE, WITH HER delicate crocus-petal light, Dawn was moving slowly across the earth, Father Zeus became uneasily aware of a wide-spread mental revolt against his domination of the world. This revolt, he soon realised, was spreading and rising not only among mortal men but even among the gods themselves.

"I little expected," he said to himself, "that when I flung my crafty old Father Cronos down among the Titans, I should be destined to have the same sort of trouble that he had, he who was not only *my* Father, but the Father of our whole family, of my brothers, Poseidon and Hades, and of my sister-wife Hera. Certainly it seems as if some mysterious power, quite beyond that old Necessity, Anangkee, and beyond any fatal Moira, yes! and even beyond the Death-Keer with which all lives are born, were sweeping us into an absolutely unpredictable future. Well! Let each entity, mortal or immortal, look after itself! Such is my law. I flung my crafty old Father into the Pit; and though there are people who say he has escaped and gone to some ocean-island beyond my ken, one thing is certain, that he will never cause me any more trouble! He's learnt his lesson, namely that there never *has* been and never *will* be any ruler, however wise or however powerful, who cannot be overthrown. Well! I told myself in the night, when I felt all this hatred of my rule passing to and fro between heaven and earth, that if I'm to follow my law of *each entity for itself* I must give all these curst rebels a plain blunt warning. I don't believe they have the least idea what power I've got!

The real fact is that I myself don't realise its limits, any more than I have the least idea how I came by it. But two things are certain: *first*, that I feel this amazing power within myself, and *second*, that I must make it clear to all those who hate this power of mine that they had better beware of showing their feeling in any overt action. It is therefore clear that I must begin by giving all our gods and goddesses, including my obstreperous personal relatives, a decisive warning of the danger they are running in thinking they can challenge me with impunity. To be a god you must create and destroy something. To be the greatest of all gods you must be able to create what you want to create, and destroy what you want to destroy. I couldn't destroy the Titans any more than my Father could, but I could overthrow them as he did, and then I could overthrow him too and hurl him down to dwell eternally with them in the abyss. I must gather all the gods together before dawn has quite become day, so that none will be slipping off. I must make them see that, from myself downwards to the smallest insect or plant or worm, there is only one thing for all living creatures, gods or men, to do, and that is to create and destroy. If we cannot do it outside ourselves we must do it inside ourselves. We must all be forever swallowing things with our throats and making fresh things with our hands: yes! and if we are women we must do it with our wombs as well!"

Such were the thoughts in the head of the great son of Cronos as he gathered the immortals together on the highest peak of many-crested Olympus.

"What I have to tell you," he announced, "is simply this: you must assent with one mind to what I am bringing to pass in this difficult world. If I find any of you, whether gods or goddesses, following some private bent of your own and helping or hindering either Greeks or Trojans apart from and independently of the agreed-upon intention of us all, I shall put an end to your doing such a thing for evermore. Yes, all of you, hear me now, and keep my words in your hearts for your own sakes. If I see any of you acting contrary to my wishes, I'll hurl you into the mists of Tartarus, deep, deep, deep below the earth, Tartarus, whose gates are of iron and its threshold of bronze; yes! into Tartarus, I tell you, which is as far beneath Hades as the earth is beneath heaven!

"Just you defy me if you dare! Make a chain of gold, the whole blasted lot of you, and fling it round me, and see if you can drag me from heaven to earth! Just try it, the lot of you! And shall I tell you what would happen? I would take hold of that rope of gold and draw you all up to me, here in heaven; and not only you, but the earth and the sea with you! And then, on my soul, I'd hang you, and the earth and the sea with you, in empty space!"

Hushed in silence they all were. But after a lapse of time Pallas Athene spoke quietly and wisely.

"We know, O great son of Cronos, how mighty you are and none of us have the faintest thought of daring to contradict your will! But it is in order that your mighty will should be done that we do what we do. But we will refrain, great Father of all, from any further action, in spite of our deep pity for the Argive heroes who have been slaughtered by Hector." Here she hesitated for a moment, watching carefully the countenance of her cloud-compelling parent. And then, after deciding in her mind that the greatest of all Beings had begun to feel a little ashamed of his boastings and blusterings, she added: "But we shall certainly take the liberty of warning our Greek friends to be as careful as we in heaven are careful not to arouse your wrath!"

But her wily Father was more than a match for her, and he overcame her before them all by treating this terrific warrior-goddess like a rather difficult but very sweet and beautiful little girl.

“Don’t ‘ee mind, my darling Tritogeneia!” he said tenderly.

“Those words of mine were nasty and not from the bottom of my heart; and whatever happens I shall always love you.”

These words of his were made more impressive by the abrupt fashion in which he turned from her now, just like a human father leaving a child to its play as he departs upon the hard business of the day. Swiftly he harnessed his horses to his golden chariot; swiftly he clothed his own body in its golden armour; and more swiftly still he drove his golden-maned horses between earth and heaven. To many-fountained Ida he drove them and there he stopped upon the summit of Mount Gargarus, which for thousands of years he had made his chief observation-point. Here he unharnessed his horses and flung over them a thick cloud of mist; while he himself sat down among the topmost peaks of the mountain, exulting in the delicious sensation of being his own omnipotent self.

Meanwhile, down below him, the Trojans within their city and the Greeks near to their ships, partook, each of them, of a hurried breakfast, and then hastily put on their armour and polished their weapons. Of the two hosts the Trojans were the fewest in number, but they were a good deal the more desperate in fighting, because their wives and all their children were within their walls, whereas the wives and children of the Greeks were far away in their own home. But deafening was the uproar as the brazen shields and the bronze weapons clashed against each other; and the noise of the tumult rolled away over the plain and echoed among the rocks at the base of the mountains. All this went on until the sun had reached mid-heaven, and the groans of the victims and the shouts of the victors drowned all other sounds.

Then the Father of all lifted on high his golden balance of twin scales, and in one he placed the fate of the Trojans and in the other the fate of the

Greeks. It soon became clear on which side, for that time anyway, the death-fate or Keer-Destiny had determined the doom; for the scale of the Greeks sank down towards the earth, while the scale of the Trojans mounted up towards heaven.

Having thus satisfied himself as to which way, just then, destiny was leaning, the Father of all decided to let the Greeks know what was in the air; so he rolled out volleys of thunder from the summit of Mount Ida and sent down a few forked flashes of lightning among the ranks of the Greeks, all of whom were soon pale with foreboding and trembling with fear.

Then did Hector and all the best of the Trojans rushed forward with such fury that it was a shocking thing to see all the famous Greek warriors, yes! all of them, in shameful flight. The two Ajaxes, along with the King of men, Agamemnon, and the heroic Idomeneus of Crete, fled like frightened deer. Only old Nestor abode; but even he didn't remain because of courage. He remained because Paris had shot such a cruel arrow into the brain of one of his horses that the creature was stamping and rearing and writhing in its death-throes. Nestor got out of his chariot and drawing his sword began cutting the traces; but the old man would certainly have soon been slain himself, for Hector's chariot was driving furiously towards him, if Diomed hadn't seen how things were. He called loudly to Odysseus, who was fleeing with the rest, to pause and help, but Odysseus pretended that he didn't hear and just ran on with the others at top speed towards the ships.

"Son of Laertes!" called Diomed after him, "you ought to be ashamed! A coward, a coward! That's what you are! Do you want to perish with a spear in your back?"

And so, alone of them all, did Diomed, son of Tydeus, stand his ground. And he said to Nestor: "Old man, please, please listen to me! Great fighter though you are, for all our sakes remember your age. Let our two squires look after your horse and do you yourself mount up here by me in my car and let us drive straight at Hector, you holding the reins! Then we'll see what my long spear can do against the fellow!"

Diomed's spear certainly did something, though it was only Hector's charioteer it laid low, not Hector himself. And though Hector was sickened with bitter sorrow at the loss of his friend, he hesitated not to leave him lying where he fell, and picked up to fill his place the youthful Archeptolemus and gave the reins into his hands.

Meanwhile, with old Nestor holding the reins of Diomed's horses, that unconquerable champion, his spear in hand again, prepared for more slaughter. What, however, he didn't count on — and how could he count on such a thing? — was the fact that his desperate actions were being watched from topmost Gargarus by Father Zeus, who, when he saw that Diomed's terrific energy was interfering with the panic-stricken halt he decided to call to the Greek success, proceeded with infinite care to aim one of those terrific thunder-bolts that he was such an adept at hurling exactly at the point where he wished them to fall, straight in front of Diomed's car. As this thunder-bolt hit the ground and lost itself in the ground, it burst with a shattering noise, and there arose from it not only a flame but an overpowering smell of sulphur. The result of this was that the horses, hardly knowing what they did, crouched down in motionless terror beneath the chariot. Nestor at this was struck with awe and the gleaming reins fell from his hands.

"Turn your horses, Diomed," he cried. "It's no good. We can't win today. It's quite clear that Father Zeus has decided that Hector, and not you, shall today be the victor. The Father of all is like that. One day he helps one side and the next day the other. The only thing for us to do now is to obey his sign. We must never oppose the will of the most high."

"Hades and Tartarus!" cried the son of Tydeus in a fury. "But one day this wretch will boast to his Trojan comrades — can't I hear his voice!— 'Hell for leather, I tell you, I saw the back of Diomed as he fled pell-mell in frantic panic towards the ships!' May the earth gape for me when he boasts like that!"

But old Nestor had his answer ready.

"Don't 'ee, O my good son of the wise Tydeus, utter such silly words! Hector may call you coward and weakling as much as he likes, but none of us will believe him; nor, by the gods, will the Trojan women, whose sturdy mates you've beaten into the dust!"

Diomed submitted to his wisdom, and, swinging horses and chariot round, drove off at top speed towards the ships, while they didn't miss the resounding mockery of Hector's triumphant exultation expressed in the most abusive language, calling Diomed first of all a woman, and then, remembering that there were in the world hosts of heroic women, hastening to add the four ribald syllables, *kakee gleenee*, "you dirty little eye-sore!" But Hector, when he got back to the dense crowds of his fellow citizens, harangued them as they had never been harangued before within the memory of man.

"Victory, victory, is what our Almighty Father the son of Cronos has given us at last! Fools, big baby fools, are these damned Greeks, with their precious ditch and their preposterous dirt-wall! You shall all help me, my friends, in getting our horses down and up this childish ditch and over this ridiculous contraption of a play-ground fence! When we've done *that*, and we'll do it mighty soon, do you know what we'll do then? We'll carry burning fire; yes! burning fire will be the weapon I shall use; and when we've burnt their ships, and they are all dazed and drugged with the smoke, then we'll kill every mother's son of the dirty dogs!"

Then Hector shouted to the four horses that drew his chariot: “Xanthus, Podargus, Aethon, and noble Lampus! O my splendid horses, repay me now! Aren’t I the husband of Andromache to whom you owe all the honey-hearted wheat she’s given you to eat and all that wine she mixes with your water? After them, after them, after those two with all your speed! I tell you, if I could only once get hold of Nestor’s world-famous shield and rend from the body of Diomed his Hephaestus-made breast-plate, I might make these Greeks this very night embark in their ships for home!”

So vaunted the furious war-man Hector, as his four horses whirled him alone in pursuit; but the divine Father was not the only watcher in the skies, and when his consort Hera heard these boasting words, she trembled with such rage between the ivory arms of her Olympian throne that the very heavens shook. And then in her intense agitation she called Poseidon to her side.

“O widest of all rulers,” she groaned, “O Shaker of the Earth, have you no pity in your heart for our noble Greeks? Have you forgotten all the sacrifices they’ve offered upon your altars in all parts of the world? Come now! What about our gathering all the gods together who feel as we do and doing something desperate about these cursed Trojans and their abominable Hector? How wonderful it would be if we could restrain our son of Cronos, so that he has to sit alone and solitary upon his famous peak of Mount Ida?”

Deeply upset was the spirit of the Earth-Shaker as he answered her.

“Hera, Hera, how can you talk like that? What a wild, mad thing to say! Haven’t you yet learnt that it’s just senseless folly to try to resist our cloud-gathering brother? The last thing I want is to see us all engaged in a grotesque and ridiculous struggle against this thunder-bolt thrower! Haven’t you learnt, my dear, from bitter experience, that it’s simply no good resisting this brother of ours who is now your husband? For all our sakes do give up this madness."

But the wave-riding, earth-shaking Poseidon, whose methods were always direct, did not realise how many quite different strings Hera could pull. She was in fact now desperately absorbed in sending telepathic urgings of spiritual pressure into the mind of the leader of all the Greeks, wide-ruling Agamemnon himself.

"This is terrible," the great King told himself, as he felt this pressure. "Why, I can hear the voice of Hector making them carry torches across that damned ditch we thought would stop them forever. Yes, I'm cursed if I don't see him at the end of our line, urging on his fire-bearers towards the ships, while we are struggling to stop a confused rush of men and horses and chariots down our ditch and across our trench. If they actually do get their fire over that crowded gulley and rampart, we'll have to look out for ourselves! A real fire once burning among the ships might indeed be the end of us! I must see what I can do."

With intense gravity, but also with magnificent rapidity, the heavily-built king, his majestic presence emphasising his impassioned appeal, climbed on to the top of the trench where it was nearest to the immensely tall sides of the great black ship belonging to Odysseus. From this position, if he shouted loudly enough, he could make his voice heard from both ends of the line of ships; that is to say from the ship of Ajax, son of Telamon, to the ship of Achilles, son of Peleus, for the vessels of these two, who were the most formidable of the warriors, were the ones that had been given the most risky position. A really moving speech was the oration of Agamemnon as he stood erect on this eminence, calling on all the Greeks to fight to the death. And indeed before he climbed down, this great Lord of Lords and King of Kings began himself to weep, and with deep sobs made a private personal desperate prayer to Zeus not to allow them to be wiped out by the Trojans: “not altogether wiped out,” he implored, “even if Thou, our Lord, hast decided that we are not to take Troy or recapture Argive Helen.”

Nor was this prayer without effect. Beholding the tears of this majestic monarch, the Almighty Father was moved with pity.

“What shall I do?” he thought in his heart. “If I throw another thunderbolt, this time on the opposite side, all these crazy mortals will think I’m as changeable in my feelings as they are themselves. No! That will never do! No! I must send down one of my Eagles as a sign to them!”

The omnipotent Father’s action followed his thought at once; and down came a colossal eagle, the most prophetic of all birds, carrying in its beak a fawn, the progeny of a deer. This the eagle let fall upon Zeus’s special altar, so that it should be quite clear that it came direct from heaven.

This omen, straight from above, had the desired effect. The strongest and fiercest Greek warriors rushed forth across the earth-wall and the deep trench and flung back the Trojans, killing more than they had been able to kill for many days.

And I, the know-all Aether, took good care, you can bet, to make my thrice-blest old Homer, half-blind as he is, understand that the swiftest and most successful killer on this occasion was not Ajax, but his half-brother, old Telamon’s bastard, Teucer, who killed not with spear or sword but with bow and arrows. O how it did amuse me later, when I found that all three of the learned Alexandrian editors felt it was so improper and unaristocratic for the son of some unknown bitch to perform such great feats that they wanted to cut the passage out, with the excuse that some low and contemptible copyist must have presumptuously inserted it! Let us, on the contrary, in defiance of these courtly Alexandrians, exult in the fact that the great Telamon loved to cherish and caress the little Teucer, *nothon per eonta*, “in spite of his being a bastard”.

Besides, it was mainly due to the fact that it was from under the protection of his brother’s tremendous shield, which reached nearly to the ground, that Teucer was able to cause the death of so many Trojans. Teucer was constantly shooting at Hector; but Father Zeus, for his own secret purpose, which, as I, the Aether, who see through everybody and everything, have often explained to our aged Homer, was as obstinately eccentric as human purposes frequently are, constantly permitted Apollo to turn aside these deadly arrows. But at last Hector became aware of this hidden shooter and resolved to do for him.

“What would happen to Andromache and my little one,” he asked himself, “if this sneaking sharp-shooter, hiding behind a shield that reaches from chin to ankle, sent one of his damned arrows through my heart?”

Then took place one of the most crucial duels of the whole war. Hector, having seen his charioteer killed by one of Teucer’s arrows, tossed the reins to his brother Cebriones, who was on foot close by, and with his eyes flashing like a Gorgon’s and a shout of fury that went whirling round Ajax and Teucer like the cry of a mad vulture, picked up a great jagged rock and crashed it down upon Teucer’s collar-bone so that he fell to the ground groaning. Then Ajax stood over him ready for anything, but Hector, satisfied with what he had done, leapt into his chariot again and rattled on to slaughter more Greeks, while Mecisteus and Alas tor helped to carry Teucer back to the ships.

But Hera and Pallas Athene failed not to note all this from the summit of Olympus. And it was Hera who spoke first to Athene, suggesting that they should both go down and take the lead against the Trojans; and when Athene replied with all the intensity of wrath that belonged to her passionate nature, it became clear to the other gods and goddesses that there was really danger of war in heaven! Athene seemed to be in a really dangerous mood, a mood in which, unless Hera stopped her with the full strength of their old unbreakable friendship, she might burst out against the All-Father with such rage that to punish her he might sweep them all into Tartarus.

"Does he forget," Athene screamed in her wild fury, "does he forget how I saved his son Heracles when, in those labours for Eurystheus, he had to drag up out of Erebus that dreadful dog Cerberus? He would have been overwhelmed in the waters of the Styx if I hadn't helped him. I'll teach Father Zeus to behave like this! I'll teach him! I'll teach him! You shall see how I'll make him cuddle me as he used to do and call me his gleaming-eyed treasure! Go, go quickly, Hera my queen, and harness the horses to our chariot while I put on my armour, not forgetting, you may be sure, the deadly-tasselled Aegis of Zeus. We'll soon see how this cursed Hector will like it when he finds himself confronted by you and me!"

Hera, though in a calmer mood, was only too ready to harness the horses, for it always delighted her to do anything that annoyed her lordly husband. No lively chronicler, no bard, no poet, no industrious historian has yet told us what those wonderful Beings, the Hours, though! in their heads or said to each other, as they threw open the great gates of Olympus for the horses and chariot of the Queen of Heaven, she herself holding the reins, while Athene, the daughter of Zeus, wearing the Aegis and brandishing her tremendous spear, sat by her side. Did the Hours whisper: "Will they have time, those two formidable friends, to get down to the plain of Troy and the sandy shore, where the ditch and embankment guard the ships, before the Almighty Thunderer catches sight of them?" Soon enough those watchful

Hours perceived that the Father of the World had seen them! In a flash he sent Iris to bring them to a halt.

"Turn your horses, turn your chariot," cried Iris to them, just as they began to descend through the air. "The Father says he feels much more angry with you, his daughter, than with you, his wife. He says that from his wife he expects contrariety and contradiction; but not from his daughter. And he says if you two were not now obeying him, as he sees you are, you would suffer a punishment beyond your utmost imagination. He is talking now to you, Pallas Athene, not to you, Hera, and he says you would suffer pain from such wounds as you never dreamed could ever befall an immortal Being!"

Later that day, when Father Zeus himself had "driven his own chariot from Ida to Olympus, and had summoned the parliament of all the immortals, it became soon evident that both Hera and Athene were in a very angry mood, though disinclined to express what they were feeling. Hera must have been pondering in her melancholy on the possibility of separating herself from Zeus entirely, and going far away from Olympus and far away from Troy and far away from Argos and Sparta and Athens and every place she knew, perhaps even journeying as far as the entrance to the realm of Hades. With his supernatural power of telepathic reading of both mortal and immortal minds Zeus was quickly made aware of what his wife was thinking.

"It's no use, Hera," he said calmly, "for you to plan an enormous journey to the end of the earth to escape the monotonous sameness of the daily life of us immortals, which I agree is terribly like the daily life of mortals, save that they can perish and we apparently cannot, and they are driven by *Moira* and *Keer* and *Anangkee* and we seem able to escape those stern fates. You can flee in your fury beyond the boundaries of the world, I tell you. You can go to Tartarus, where Iapetus and Cronos are, but you will not change my mind. Hector shall go on killing your Greek heroes, kill! kill! kill! for quite a while yet. But a day will come when the death of Patroclus, his friend of friends, shall rouse Achilles to the fight once more and that will finish it. This is what shall happen. This is my will. This is what the days will bring. And let me tell you this now, once and for all. Nothing that you or Pallas Athene can do will make the faintest difference. I have willed it. And so it will be."

After the All-Father had thus spoken all were silent; and dark night, so prayed for by the Greeks and so dreaded by the Trojans, covered the world. Then in the darkness Hector gathered the Trojans together in an open space near their enemy, and gave them precise directions as to what he wanted them to do.

"We must camp out here this night," he told them. "It will be a warning to these accurst invaders to see our fires burning and smoking so near their huts and their ships. But some of you must go back to the city and to your homes, and bring out here all the food and drink you will need for a fine feast, so that, well fed and drowsed by wine, you will sleep soundly. Tell your ladies to keep their fires alight in your homes, and tell your boy-brothers to guard the walls in case these infernal Greeks try a surprise attack. Then at the first rising of the Suit, we'll rush to the assault again."

It was a memorable night, that night, for both sides. The Greeks, before they slept, saw with many strange thoughts the whole plain along the banks of the river Xanthus alive with flickering fires. But as I, the Aether, looking down with extreme difficulty, and feeling rather than seeing what was happening on earth — for my element is light, not darkness — realised what reception in heaven the prayers and sacrifices of the weary dutiful pious old priests of the Trojans were receiving, how could I allow even the three most learned of all the critical Alexandrians in their later editing to refuse the copyists the right to say that these prayers and offerings were rejected? Although the exact truth is that the gods and goddesses most favourable to the Trojans were too absorbed in their own heavenly disputes to take the least notice of what was going on upon earth. Hera and Athene might be hostile, but Apollo and Aphrodite remained friendly. And thus it was that of all the nights in the experience of those Trojan men, fighting there for their city, their homes, their wives and their children, no night had ever been passed in happier sleep or in more exultant dreams than that night, with all those burning fires and all that upsoaring smoke swaying to and fro between the silent stars and the silent earth.

Yes! Father Zeus might have his own erratic way of arranging the destiny of the tribes of men; but, whatever fate the future held for them, these heroic Trojan fighters, whether they lay in unconscious sleep or in wild dream of exultant expectation, found themselves that night nearer the feeling of ideal warriors, of which they had dreamed since they were children, than they ever did again. What they felt was something far deeper than the triumph of killing off their invaders or of driving them in their hollow, heavily-rigged ships back over the sea to their homes, with their purpose unfulfilled and Argive Helen still a captive in the city of Priam. O! It was much deeper than all that.

Even I, the all-knowing Aether, cannot be quite sure that the crucial words which Hector uttered in his resounding oration repeated themselves in his own mind before his complete physical exhaustion helped him to go to sleep. He may have had his doubts. Was he, he may have said to himself, going too far when he shouted aloud that as sure as he longed to be ageless and immortal, and as sure he longed to be held in honour as were such divine beings as Apollo and Athene, so surely was he certain that this day’s result was a deadly blow to the Argives. ‘All we warriors,” he may have thought, “long to be immortal, but I doubt if I ought to have brought in any deities by their actual names.”

BOOK IX

But while Hector was worrying, till he turned over to sleep, about these lapses in his oration, and while his army, gathered in a half circle round their invaders, was savouring its rest and anticipating its triumph, the Achaeans were passing through an absolutely appalling ordeal. There was little thought of sleep. In fact that particular kind of blind terror that produces a sort of physical numbness began taking hold of many of them; and the worst of it was that this numbness spread from man to man, just as inflammatory rage or heroic initiative can pass from person to person. And against this infectious panic each man's individual spirit fought so desperately that their souls were torn in two directions. It was as when the North Wind flings itself so wildly against the West Wind that huge masses of seaweed from the deepest gulfs of the ocean are tossed up upon the waves.

And then it was that Agamemnon said to himself: "What sort of monarch am I if I lie down when complete disaster threatens us all? If ever in my life I've needed your spirit, O my father Atreus, I need it now — for this is almost more than my heart can bear!"

But he gathered himself together within himself and went among them all. Up and down among their ranks he went calling upon the bravest among them by name and exhorting them to conquer this terrible fear. Finally he got his heralds to help him, though he wouldn't let them raise their voices, and with their aid he gathered most of his chiefs and leaders into an open space among their huts, and there he spoke to them, though, do as he might, he couldn’t help breaking into tears over and over again as he addressed them.

“Well, my dear friends,” he cried, and then began sobbing and letting big tears roll down his cheeks to his chin and drip from his chin to his beard, “we are surely utterly and entirely defeated; and only our lives are left. Let us therefore as soon as dawn appears drag our ships down to the sea and sail away! We shall at least in that manner save our lives, although except for our lives we shall take back nothing!”

With these despairing words the great king from Mycenae sat down in silence, and a universal silence fell upon them all; and the darkness of night grew sadder and deeper. But Diomed leapt to his feet. Against all this depression he leapt up. In defiance of the heart-wrung tears of the great king he rose; in defiance of the darkness of night he rose; and to the cloud of despair that was weighing them all down he shouted his reckless challenge.

“Strange king!” he cried, “if you want to flee, flee! There are your ships, and there are the ships that followed you! But, as far as I am concerned, I am going to stay and fight till Troy is laid low!”

Diomed spoke so defiantly, and looked about him so unconquerably, that a great shout arose from half the warriors present; and it became clear that a crowd of them were ready to follow him to the death. Others, however, who felt less heroic, and were thinking doubtless of seeing their wives and children again, murmured their dissent and gazed anxiously at Agamemnon.

It was then that wise old Nestor rose up.

“Let us, my friends, let us, my dear sons, cease this discussion now. Night is upon us and we are all weary and with minds affected by weariness. Let us sleep now. And if our chieftains and leaders are so disposed, let our great leader, Agamemnon, bring forth the wine from his well-filled store, and call them to gather at his hut and drink their fill, so that they may sleep with peaceful minds. When dawn comes we shall all feel fresh and strong again, and that will be a better moment than now to decide whether to fight or to flee.”

Nestor’s sensible words settled it, and the rank and file of the Achaeans laid them down to sleep inside or outside their huts, while Agamemnon took the old man’s advice and had the wine brought to his biggest shelter, where he gathered the chieftains and satisfied their troubled souls with meat and drink. Before he repaired thither himself, however, Nestor took care to direct his young son, Thrasymachus, who was proud to undertake such a task, to collect a group of youthful sons of chieftains equally eager to serve in this way and to arrange that each of them should be followed by a band of patriotic retainers, as eager and spirited as themselves, to act as sentinels, all along the wall above the trench, from which point of vantage they could make sure that no-one came near any of the ships drawn up upon the sand.

When the feast provided by Agamemnon was nearly over, Nestor rose up among them and uttered some very serious words to the King of Kings.

“My suggestion now is, my lord, that to undo the harm to us all which you know you did by taking Briseïs away from Achilles, you do something that will really appease him and assuage his wrath. I know we are all agreed that, if *he* went forth, this terrifying Hector would soon be done for, or at least be in full retreat, and the whole tide of battle would be flowing the other way. I would therefore, O King, beseech you to send Phoenix and Ajax and Odysseus to the tent of Achilles and offer him some really tempting reward, some reward great enough and precious enough to change the heart and alter the intention of this man — yes! even of this man, to whom Zeus has given such power of eye and hand and foot that no mortal among us can stand up against him.”

To this sagacious suggestion the great Agamemnon gave his consent at once, and gave it in words so moving that all who heard him were touched to the heart.

“Old sir,” he cried to Nestor, “you are absolutely right in what you say! Blind — that’s what I was, miserably blind in my passion! But, as you most truly put it, the thing for us to do at this fatal crisis is to try and melt the heart of Achilles. Yes, let these men go, as you say, and offer him everything you can think of! Since I acted so blindly and yielded to my disgraceful emotion, the whole of my nature now longs to pay to this man a lavish return, yes, by Zeus! a startling requital. O for the sake of all the gods, let our friends who go to his tent say I’m ready to give him seven tripods, ten talents of gold, twenty cauldrons, twelve horses, winners of many races, seven Lesbian women, skilled in every sort of weaving and embroidery; yes! and, more than all, I will return Briseïs to him with an oath before the Son of Cronos that I’ve never slept with her or dallied with her since she came to my tent! Yes! and by every god in Olympus, if with his help we do destroy the City of Priam, I swear to him before you all that he shall chose twenty from the loveliest women of Troy only surpassed by Argive Helen; and finally, when we reach our home, tell him I will give him in marriage whichever of my own three beautiful daughters he wishes to take. Yes! and, moreover, when he has married one of my daughters I will give him seven crowded cities, all of them on the sea-coast!”

Every one of the chieftains present at this moving scene showed unbounded satisfaction at these heroically repentant words; and in a short time, for Phoenix, being much older, had started some while before the rest, Ajax and Odysseus, accompanied by the heralds, set out along the edge of the *poluphloisboio thalassees*, the myriad-voiced sea, praying to earth-shaking Poseidon as they went, that they might be able to soften the heart of the grandson of Aeacus.

When they reached the huts and the ships of the Myrmidons, they found Achilles, the son of Peleus, playing on a lyre while his devoted friend, Patroclus, listened in rapt silence. The lyre Achilles used was part of his booty when he sacked the city of King Eëtion, and its melodious strings were stretched between supports of the purest silver. As he played he sang the words of an old song about the warriors of the past, and to the words of this song Patroclus listened with even more emotion than he did to the exquisite notes of his friend's lyre. As Odysseus preceded Ajax into the tent, he noted the absence of the aged Phoenix.

"The old man," he told himself, "must be lying down in their bedroom, exhausted by the long walk along the beach."

Achilles rose at once to greet them as they entered; and both Odysseus and Ajax were amazed by his gracious manner.

"Well!" he said, "so you two have come — and great must be the necessity you are all in to make you do so — but though the deep hurt in my soul still remains, you mustn't think I've forgotten the long ties of friendship that bind us three together."

Then he led them in and made them sit on seats covered with soft cushions and purple rugs; and he bade his friend Patroclus fill his biggest bowl with doubly rich wine; and when this had been done and they had each been given cups, he called for his charioteer Automedon, and bade him bring meat, so that they might all have a supper worthy of such guests. And Automedon brought a sheep's back and a goat's back and the chine of a fat hog and laid them on a wide tray upon the floor before the fire. Achilles cut up all this meat with very great skill, slicing each piece with the utmost care, while Patroclus helped him to spit it upon skewers; and Automedon, having first made the fire blaze, proceeded to scatter the embers, and when the meat was roasted, laid it on several andirons and sprinkled it with salt. Then Achilles helped them all to a share of the meat and himself sat down to their meal opposite Odysseus, while Patroclus, after placing bread in baskets for all of them, cast a burnt offering into the fire as a sacrifice to the gods.

By this time old man Phoenix had slipped silently into their circle, and they all began eating and drinking with absorbed satisfaction. As soon, however, as they had really put from them the desire for food and wine, Odysseus caught Ajax and Phoenix exchanging a rapid glance; and he knew at once what that meant. It was the moment for him to disclose Agamemnon's tremendous offer of repentance and requital, including his willingness to return Briseïs, along with his oath before the Son of Cronos, that he had not touched her.

"I know as well as you do, O great Achilles," Odysseus began, rising to his feet and lifting high his wine-cup, "what your father Peleus said to you when you came hither with us all. He told you to restrain the hot-headedness of your violent spirit. He told you that in this tumultuous world *philophrosunee*, or "kindly temper", is what we all ought to cultivate, else the end of it will be that we shall all destroy each other, till none be left alive. By the most high Son of Cronos and by his brothers, Poseidon and Hades, I beseech you, O great son of Peleus, to remember that, because in your wrath you still hate Agamemnon and will never forgive him, *that* is no reason for your condemning the rest of us to death at the hands of this furious Hector. Go on if you must, noble sir, hating and despising Agamemnon. Go on with *that* till your dying day, or until you have avenged yourself upon him! I don't quarrel with *that* mood of yours. But is this wrath of yours with Agamemnon, however righteous it may be, a reason for making all of us, of us who worship you short of idolatry, fall victims to Hector, who, as you know perfectly well, and as he knows himself, is stronger than the whole lot of us unless you are ready to face him?"

In deep silence did that group of men, Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix, together with Patroclus and Automedon, wait for the answer of the son of Peleus. And he soon gave it, straight from the shoulder.

"Do these sons of Atreus," he cried in a voice trembling with irrepressible anger, "imagine that they are the only people in the world who love their wives? I love Briseïs as if she were my wife; and my wife she is and will be ever, just as Argive Helen will always be the wife of Menelaus, however fondly this seducer Paris may cling to her! No! No! Every honest and true man who has a beautiful girl of his own choice, loveth her and cherisheth her, even though he has made her his captive with his spear as I did Briseïs. As for these gifts of his, I tell you I don't give a damn for them or for his lies about not touching my Briseïs! Let him have her! Let him have her! now he's taken her from me! And now that I see you all before me here I will tell you what I am going to do — I am going to set sail early tomorrow morning for my home. No! No! No! No daughter of this great swaggering cowardly bully Agamemnon will I ever wed! My old man Peleus will soon find a wife for me. But listen to this, all of you here present." His words were now serious and slow. "My mother told me, that if I stayed to conquer Troy and to slay Troy's man-destroying Hector, I should win immortal renown and become a name to resound for all the generations hereafter, *but* — are you listening? — I should meet my doom and perish! Whereas if I left the city of old Priam with its rampaging Hector and gave no more thought to the fate of Helen, but just sailed for home across the Hellespont, my Immortal Mother predicted that my *Keer* or 'Death-Doom' would be put off indefinitely; in fact that I might well live to an extreme old age. One thing more I must say, since if I set sail tomorrow it is important that you should all know it, and that is that I intend to take our old Phoenix here along with me in my ship; nor do I fancy that he'll come unwillingly; eh, Phoenix, old friend?"

His reverberating voice now subsided, and he picked up his lyre whose notes still hovered in the air above them, caressed the strings with a sad flicker of his hand and laid it thoughtfully down again. It was then that they all gazed upon the old man Phoenix, wondering what he would say and what he was thinking. The old man was evidently deeply disturbed in his mind. The silence in that high-roofed shelter seemed to weigh suddenly upon him as heavily as a similar silence had once done in the halls of his father when, by reason of his mother's piteous imploring, he had enjoyed his father's concubine and made the girl detest the embraces of the older man, who in his wrath exiled his son from home and called down upon him the fearful curse of the Erinyes. But as Phoenix struggled against this weight upon his heart, he was suddenly aware of an inexplicable relief. "Centuries upon centuries hence," the earth-mother Gaia herself seemed to be telling him, "you will be born again in the shape of an earth-nourished teller of tales in the west of an island beyond the pillars of Heracles where you will make all men ponder on your tales until the end of time."

And it was then that Achilles laid his hand with a gesture of such deep affection upon the knee of the old man at his side that Phoenix could restrain himself no longer; and, as old men are only too apt to do, he fell into that strain of heart-deep memorizing which young men find so wearisome; for they are living intensely now in the buoyant freshness of the sensations about which, half a century later, they will themselves be murmuring with dreamy satisfaction and sentimental pride.

“When we drank wine in your Father’s halls, I used to hold you on my knees and when you spluttered and dribbled and when you ejected the wine from your throat, it used to stain my tunic. You were a son to me, Achilles; you were a son to me; in spite of the curse of the Erinyes with which my father cursed me so that I should beget no offspring for myself forever.”

He was silent for a moment; but when he saw that not only was Achilles listening to him with full attention, but that Odysseus and Ajax were also struck by his words, the old man was unable to resist the supreme temptation of his age, and proceeded, without any preface save a hint that to bring back the heroic Past was a much happier thing for everybody than to try to mould the Future to our particular taste, to tell them the story of Calydon and Meleager and the wise boar. It was certainly an exciting story about the Curetes and the Aetolians and the unhappy mother who wailed like a halcyon-bird, and about Marpessa’s being allowed by Zeus to choose between her lover Idas and the great god Apollo himself, who was trying to carry her off, and how she chose Idas rather than Apollo.

Out of the atmosphere of this story Achilles was evidently puzzled as to how to get rid of his visitors without being impolite; but with his accustomed quick wit he finally thought of an excellent plan; and, rising to his feet, he begged Patroclus to prepare a bed for Phoenix in this very room. This was indeed necessary if the old man was to stay the night and sail off with the Myrmidons, if they did sail, that very next day. Patroclus began preparing this bed at once, a bed that must have made the old man feel sleep already coming upon him at the sight of such sheets, such blankets, and such a coverlet over it all! It was then that Achilles gave them their final answer; and fair and square he gave it, that if Agamemnon wanted to take Troy and get Helen home again, he must do it without help from him.

So Odysseus and Ajax departed to tell the son of Atreus that, whether Achilles sailed tomorrow or not, no help from him would he get against Troy or Hector. As may well be believed, when the two chieftains did finally get back to the huts and ships of the sons of Atreus, the last word upon that evening's whole business was spoken by Diomed, the son of Tydeus, and it was on the strength of that defiant word that they all, except the great King himself, lay down and fell into a sound sleep.

And it was the same in the double-roomed hut of Achilles. Leaving the old man Phoenix alone and at rest in his newly made-up bed in the front room, Achilles and Patroclus slept on opposite sides of their large inner chamber. Nor did either of them lack a girl with whom to sleep. Both their lovely companions were captives from towns despoiled on their voyage thither. The bed-fellow of Achilles was an exquisite Lesbian, while Patroclus slept with a beautiful girl whom Achilles had apportioned to him on the day they sacked the fortress of Scyros.

BOOK X

DEEP WAS THE sleep that night of all the warriors of the Grecian host as they laid them down in their various huts, as near as was possible to the elaborate ditch and rampart they had dug and erected around their ships. If Achilles with his Lesbian, and Patroclus with his captive from Scyros, and the old man Phoenix in his luxurious bed, were all sleeping the sleep of the just, so were all the Grecian leaders in this strange war; all except the two sons of Atreus. These two brothers could not rest. Harassed and unhappy they lay in their beds, tossing from side to side as they thought of the failure of their whole expedition and of the triumph of the City of Troy and of Paris, the son of Priam, who had stolen Helen away for ever.

The soul of Agamemnon for half that awful night was torn by a conflict within itself as to what desperate last measures it might be possible to take to ward off this shameful disaster. He felt as if a power was labouring in his breast deeper than his own deepest feelings. He felt as if there were stirring within him that abysmal compulsion which Zeus must feel when he sends forth the lightning that is the herald of tempestuous torrents of down-pouring rain, or of multitudinous hail, or of that shuddering pause in the pulse-beat of time that is the gaping mouth of annihilating battle. He looked at the burning fires of the hosts of Hector; and he realised that the Trojans were not by any means all asleep. He could hear the sound of pipes and flutes! They must be feeling that Zeus was with them, as indeed he seemed to be! No! He couldn’t stand it. He tore off his bedclothes and knelt down on the floor, and in black desperation, since he had only himself to blame, and only himself to sacrifice, he began with excruciating throbs of pain tearing out wisps of hair from his head as he prayed with heart-rending groans to the Son of Cronos to help him.

A voice within him seemed to say at that crucial moment, “Go to old Nestor, the son of Neleus. He’s the only one who can give you the help you want.”

With this in his mind he rose to his feet and began preparing to leave his hut. He put on his tunic and his sandals and then, in a sudden movement of his wild feelings, he dragged down from where it hung a great lion’s skin which, when he flung it about him, reached down to his very feet! Then, seizing his spear, he was preparing to go forth into the night, when lo! a quick sound of approaching steps, and there at the door of his hut was his brother Menelaus! Yes, Menelaus likewise was dressed for battle. Over his shoulders he wore a leopard’s skin, the black spots of which stood out grandly across his chest in the flickering lights of his brother’s hut, and in his hand was an especially massive spear. Together they decided to go separately at once throughout the whole camp and wake up all their chiefs. Thus it wasn’t very long before old Nestor, who was lying in his night-attire with the door of his hut ajar and his armour by his side, and who, just like the sons of Atreus, had been unable to sleep, saw Agamemnon approaching. The old man called out to him, and as soon as he got a reply, began to dress likewise, throwing round him a thick, double-dyed purple cloak, which, though it looked less war-like, was probably warmer than any wild beast’s skin, and promptly went forth with Agamemnon to rouse their best friends.

The first they reached was Odysseus, who soon heard their voices and was quickly at their side. Then they went to the tent of Diomed, whom they found sleeping heavily on the open ground with a thick carpet under his head and an ox-skin over him. To wake this sleeper was not too easy a task, and old Nestor finally did not hesitate to use his foot to rouse him.

“Ye gods!” he cried, when on awakening he saw who had roused him, “you sure are, old sir, a wonderful toiler!”

“Well, my son, if you will let me call you so tonight, if you are so struck by my age, I’ll tell you what you can do for me. You can go round and rouse Ajax the swift and Meges, the son of Phyleus, and say that we’ll all meet in the open space where the sentinels are.”

Diomed now gathered about his body the skin of a terrific lion, larger and fiercer than any that even old Nestor had seen before. So enormous in fact was it that it reached down to the man’s feet. When finally the various chieftains — and they had been put into good heart by the liveliness and high spirits of the young men who had volunteered as sentinels — gathered together where Nestor had suggested they should meet, that indefatigable old patriarch had a bold and unexpected suggestion for their consideration.

“What we need most to know now,” he said, “is obviously what plans the enemy have; whether, for instance, they intend at sunrise to make a desperate life-and-death struggle to reach our ships and burn every one of them; or whether they hope to be able to surround us here and starve us out, as if our ditch and rampart were the walls of a besieged city. Now in order to find out what they’re going to do, there is nothing that I can think of save to send spies among their ranks, spies who will go stealthily and quietly as close to their fires as is possible without being caught. What I suggest is a very risky thing for those of us who are brave enough to undertake it, but I am sure we are all agreed that some drastic action must be taken to avoid any repetition of our defeat yesterday by Hector. Whoever among us is brave enough to undertake this dangerous adventure, he may be sure that if he comes back alive his name will be famous among us for all time; and I can answer for what we shall feel for him by what I shall feel myself. We shall want, yes! each man among us, rich or poor, to give him a black ewe-sheep with a lamb under her, which is the best of all possible gifts!"

He was silent, and they all for a moment were silent. Then Diomed leapt to his feet.

"I'll go! I'll go! I'll go!" he cried: then stopped and looked round. "I admit, however," he added slowly, evidently thinking hard and calling up before his mental vision the terrible possibilities of what he was undertaking, "I admit that it would be much better if two of us were to go together. It is so easy," he hesitated for a moment to catch the right word to convey what was in his mind, "so easy to do wild and impulsive and crazy things when alone, while with another at our side such foolish actions become impossible!"

The son of Tydeus was silent. And there arose at once a startling number of chieftains who lifted up their hands and offered themselves as his companion in this life-and-death spy-venture. Thrasymedes, the son of Nestor, rushed forward to offer himself. So did both the two Ajaxes, and so did Meriones, and so did the sagacious Odysseus.

And then it was that the great emotional heart of Agamemnon was torn with pain and doubt. There would have been doubt, if not pain, also in the heart of my Homer if I, the allknowing Aether, overcoming my natural reluctance to work in darkness, had not dived deep into the soul of Agamemnon and discovered the fact that the great King was seriously troubled lest Diomed should select Menelaus, yet felt that it was contrary to his conscience to allow this dread to prevent him from giving Diomed an absolutely free choice. This freedom of choice he insisted upon all the more strongly just because it cost him such a cruel effort to utter words that might have led Diomed to select the very man whose selection would have caused his brother-loving heart so much pain.

That the great King was wise in giving Diomed his choice was proved by the choice he made. Who could have been more perfectly adapted for such a risky and tricky undertaking than Odysseus of many devices? The description of the way the two men armed themselves for their great adventure is fascinating to all youthful listeners to this poem. The headdress which formidable Diomed put on was nothing more than a simple cap! What Odysseus wore on his head was, however, more elaborate. It was a head-dress supplied for him by that competent warrior and kind-hearted friend, Meriones. This astonishing head-dress, supremely suitable to a scouting spy, was a tight-fitting skull-cap of bull's hide, like the one put on by Diomed; but its peculiarity was that it had rows of boars' teeth cunningly fixed round the outer edge while its inner lining was made of adhesive felt which clung tightly to the head it covered. Meriones had evidently greatly cherished this singular head-dress. In his dreaming moods of "long, long thoughts", he must often have regarded it, as it hung on the walls of his dwelling, as an enthralling link with the past; just as if the feelings and experiences and all the desperate occasions through which it had pressed against the bony brain-covering of so many fatal decisions still clung to it and formed a vibrant atmosphere about it, which was curiously inspiriting and might even at a crisis prove imperative.

That Diomed's choice of Odysseus was the best he could have made was proved by the latter's hurried rejection of any discussion, whether for or against this personal point, and his insistence, since there was only a third of the night still available, that they should start at once. Not, however, without the utterance from each of them of a most special and personal entreaty to Pallas Athene did they start. She heard them and sent a heron to tell them so, and though the night was too dark for them to see this bird, Odysseus heard its cry on their right as they went, and knowing that the goddess had sent it, felt strong at heart and made Diomed feel the same.

Meanwhile on the Trojan side Hector was as much alive to the necessity of discovering the enemy's intentions as was Agamemnon; and having collected the chief warriors about him, he swore an oath by the gods that he would give to anyone who would spy for him no less reward, when the Greek ships were destroyed or were in full flight, than Achilles' horses and chariot! Whether because the Trojans were all so happily relaxed in the sleepy consciousness of being the conquerors, and were imagining in their dreamy satisfaction that the first thing they would behold when the sun rose would be the whole fleet of Greek ships in full flight, or because they regarded the task of spying on a defeated enemy as unworthy of their metal, it so happened that for several minutes none of them answered Hector's appeal, or seemed tempted in the least by the idea of receiving the chariot and horses of Achilles. But finally there did rise up from among them the son of one of their heralds, a man of the name of Dolon. This man had gazed round him in amazement when nobody answered the call of their heroic leader.

"Can it really be," his heart cried to his heart in unspeakable excitement, "that this is the grand opportunity of my whole life? Can it really be that I, the wretched Dolon, the nondescript Dolon, unregarded Dolon, the utterly negligible Dolon, the beneath-contempt Dolon, Dolon the laughingstock of the whole Trojan army, should be given this supreme chance at last, the chance of being one of the actual heroes of the war to defend Troy; the war to keep Helen, the war to drive back the sons of Atreus as well as the son of Peleus? Can this thing really and truly be going to prove true that I, Dolon of the ugly phiz, I, Dolon, the only brother among five sisters, am to be chosen out of all my heroic compeers to bring about the salvation of Troy?"

Such were Dolon’s thoughts as he lifted up his hand and raised his voice, and called upon Hector to swear a mighty oath that to him and to none other should be given the horses and the chariot of Achilles. The moment Hector had sworn this oath, Dolon arrayed himself at once for his solitary adventure in the skin of a grey wolf; and placing upon his head a cap of ferret skin, hurried off towards the Grecian ships.

Hard of heart must these hearers be of the rhythmic war-pictures chanted by Homer who do not feel a twinge of pity when they read of the lamentable end of Dolon. Diomed and Odysseus hid themselves when they saw him approaching; but when he had passed them a little distance they pursued him. The poor simple fool thought at first that they were messengers from Hector telling him to return; but, when he realised they were enemies, he fled for his life. But they soon caught him and, having extracted details as to how the Trojan army had been arranged for this night’s sleep, they relentlessly killed him.

The most important news they had obtained from him was that Priam’s Thracian allies, led by King Rhesus, the son of Eïoneus, who had the finest chariot and the swiftest horses in all the Trojan host, were not far away from the very spot where they were now standing and that they occupied a spot, these Thracians, quite distinct from the other allies of Troy. Having raised a great heap of reeds and tamarisk boughs so as to mark the spot where the wolf-skin attire and ferret-skin cap had been stripped from Dolon’s bleeding body, Diomed and Odysseus quickly crossed the strip of wild country which divided them from the camp of the Thracians, and stealthily stealing through this camp, where everyone was lying on the ground fast asleep, they had no difficulty in finding, after Dolon’s description, the wonderful chariot of King Rhesus with its famous horses as fast asleep as the monarch himself and his charioteer. The wily Odysseus directed Diomed to do the killing with silent blows, while he himself noiselessly harnessed the poor sleepy beasts to their heavy chariot, weighed down with gold and silver, and pulled the bodies out of the way. Diomed, in dead silence, and without waking a soul, disposed of the twelve stalwart Thracians who slept round Rhesus and his precious chariot; and oh, how like a ghastly dream it was for King Rhesus when, just before the death-stroke, he opened his eyes and saw, but uttered no sound, his killer standing over him!

BOOK XI

A NEW EVENT occurred when the goddess of Dawn rose from the bed of Laomedon's son, Tithonus, of whom I, the all-knowing Aether, have resolved that three thousand years hence in a far-off Western Isle, a great Bard shall be inspired to chant a memorable dirge. This Bard shall make plain from the human side what the immortal horses of Achilles knew from their side, what an appalling tragedy it is for a mortal to be linked with an immortal and thus to be imbued with something which deprives him of the greatest of all blessings that mortal men enjoy, their inalienable right, when the end of their time comes, to lie down and die.

The event which occurred at this moment, and which the weary Tithonus, as well as his Dawn-Goddess, had now to contemplate, was indeed startling. The great Son of Cronos, himself an ancestor of Tithonus, sent down to Earth the dreadful Eris, the terrifying Goddess of Strife. Eris calmly stood on the ramparts the Greeks had made with such huge labour just opposite the ship of the crafty Odysseus, which was in the centre, midway between the ship of Ajax, at one end of the line, and of Achilles at the other end; for the Achaeans had arranged their ships so that at either end of the line there should be the ship of one of their fiercest fighters. From this centre-point it was, therefore, that this terrible goddess Eris uttered a shout so world-piercing that it made every man who heard it shiver from head to foot.

This shout put fresh heart into the defeated host of the Greeks. The great King Agamemnon at once began putting on his armour. What first he put on were the greaves for his legs, each fitted with silver ankle-pieces. Next he put on his breast-plate, which was a notable thing indeed. It had come from the historic island of Cyprus and it had been made by the cleverest of Cyprians who worked in enamel. Cinyras, as the ruler of Cyprus, gave it to him as a guest-gift. It had ten bands of blue enamel, twelve bands of pure gold, and twenty bands of tin. Thus protected in his front and in his legs, the next thing the great monarch did was to take up his shield. This shield was really the most tremendous defence that the human race had ever beheld since prehistoric warriors first invented this history-making bodily protection. It was so large and so curved and came down so low that it guarded the man who used it from every kind of blow, save only a blow that struck the centre of his back from the nape of his neck downward. It possessed ten circles of bronze, twenty gleaming white bosses of tin, and in the midst of it was a circle of cyanus, made of steel and of a dark blue colour. Within this circle the Head of the Gorgon could be seen, and on each side of the Gorgon were the figures of two appalling beings. These are they who are wont to come down to earth to try to drive all easily-scared mortals into the terror that leads to madness. These two beings, Deimos and Phobos, are indeed so unspeakably horrible that mortal men may cry out to every power in heaven to deliver them from them. Nor was this all, for round the silver strap that hung from the shield was twisted a blue serpent with three heads, each looking a different way and all three growing out of one neck. Glorious was the helmet the great King then put on, for it had two horns and a terrific horse-hair plume above them. But it was when Agamemnon grasped a couple of enormous spears, pointed with gleaming bronze, and brandished them, one in each hand, till their brightness ascended to Heaven, that Hera and Pallas Athene felt so proud of him that they thundered down their approval.

What I, the all-knowing Aether, must get into my Homer's head, is that although the element immediately around men and women is their own bodily flesh and blood, just as it is with birds and fishes and reptiles, around all these living things are the elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water, and of the Sun and of the Moon and of the planets and of the remotest stars and also, on exceptional occasions, of those weird appearances that some call Comets. When therefore I inspire Homer to suddenly bring Eris and Deimos and Phobos and the Gorgon's head into his verse, it is silly to try and waft them all away like autumn gnats by using one pedantic expression "personifications". They are real. Something has created them. Around certain definite spots on the earth's surface the mortal victims of Terror and Panic will find certain permanent whirlpools among the elements. These whirlpools abide. *They are elemental ghosts*', and they are more lasting than human ghosts. And when we mortals pass such places on the Earth, we catch, out of the air, an intimation of nameless horror.

Zeus must have indeed been anxious that there should be many more souls hurled into the realm of Hades before the war was over, for he now poured down from Olympus a heavy thin rain stained with blood. It was indeed clear to all that, quite apart from any interference, the son of Cronos was resolved to grant a temporary victory to the Greeks. Like a man drunk with blood-lust, the great King Agamemnon led his wild and desperate warriors past the tomb of the ancestral Ilos, the son of Dardanus, King of Troy, past the Scaean Gate and the oak-tree; and the further they went the more Trojans they slew, and the more they slew the higher leapt up the battle-madness in the hearts of them all.

I, the all-knowing one, could, however, clearly detect that the son of Cronos, who by this time had descended from Olympus to the peak of Mount Ida so as to be nearer to the bloodshed, was unwilling that the

Greeks should have it all their own way. He therefore sent Iris down into the ranks of war to take a special message to Hector. And Iris obeyed him, and, flying to Hector's side, delivered to him, unseen by any, the message from the Heavenly Father. And the message was this: that as long as Agamemnon was fighting at the head of the Greeks, he, Hector, must keep in the background and husband his strength and quell the fiercest impulse of his spirit until Agamemnon should retire wounded; and then, the moment he saw the great King being carried off in his chariot in undoubted retreat, he should rush forward and lead the Trojans in one tremendous attack straight towards the ships.

The first victims of Hector's withdrawal and of the gigantic fury of the towering king of kings were the two sons of Hector's brother Antenor. The first of these to fall under the might of Agamemnon was Iphidamas, and he was soon followed into Hades by Coon, whom the great king decapitated as he was trying to drag his brother's body out of the mélée, so that the unconscious head of the one rested upon the motionless corpse of the other. But it was only then that the victorious Agamemnon realized that before he had cut off the head of the brother of Iphidamas the man had smitten him through his arm with the point of his spear, and that there were now atrociously sharp pains running through his whole body. Coon's spear must have passed clean through his arm, and the pangs from the wound it caused now began to shoot through him from shoulder to shoulder.

The spirits of the sons of Antenor were now descending together into the kingdom of Hades, and it crossed the great king's mind to wonder whether the spirit of Coon was even now telling the spirit of Iphidamas, as the two of them crossed that dark threshold, that it might easily be that their great enemy's spirit would be following them as soon as the point of that spear took effect.

“Father of Heaven,” thought Agamemnon, as he prepared to leave the battle, “I must be feeling as women feel in childbirth when those pitiless goddesses, the Euleithyiae, send their pains through them.”

Most mortals can well imagine Hector’s exultation when he saw the back of Agamemnon retreating to the ships. He became half mad with warlike fury. His fighting rage simply knew no bounds. In a few minutes he had killed Asaeus and Autonous and Opites and Dolops, son of Clytius, and Opheltius and Agelaus and Aesymnus and Orus and Hipponous, all of them formidable warriors. He went on in a wild frenzy of slaughter, as when the West Wind scatters the clouds of the rapid South Wind, smiting them with a deeply rolling blast and sweeping them over the swollen waves till the white spray is flung sky-ward, and this madly wandering wind carries everything before it and away!

Then indeed would ruin have come to the Greeks had not Odysseus called unto Diomed: “What has come over us, old friend, that we have forgotten our furious valour? Come, son of Tydeus, come hither, good friend, take your stand by my side; for shame will it be for all of us if this fire-crested Hector reaches our ships!”

In a second Diomed was by his side, looking desperately round for a chariot to carry them both against Hector. A certain irresponsible indifference to the whole business which he noted in the owner of a particular chariot, and also in its driver, which passed them at that moment, must have set Diomed’s impulsive spirit into a whirl of anger, for, without giving the man any warning, he struck Thymbraeus with the butt of his spear, knocking him to the ground; while Odysseus, recognizing that there wasn’t a moment to be lost, struck the chariot’s driver Molion, who was a fine figure of a good retainer, an equally paralysing blow. Then the two of them mounted the chariot and left both these worthy men lying on the ground — these men who doubtless had been dallying with the hope that Agamemnon might decide after all to give up this crazy war for the sake of one beautiful girl, and be powerful enough to compel a desperado like Diomed and a cunning intellectual like Odysseus to realise that the moment had come to sail for home with their whole fleet of ships. But leaving these men still stunned and unconscious, Diomed and Odysseus, two well-balanced friends, one representing impulse and force, the other wisdom and caution, whirled off in their stolen chariot to oppose the mad rage of Hector.

At first they had it all their own way; but ere long Hector observed what was happening, and saw why it was that his well-organised rush towards the newly-dug ditch, the rampart and the ships was being, in spite of the wounding of the great King, so fatally retarded. Straight at the pair of them in their borrowed chariot, of which Odysseus just then had taken the reins, Hector drove headlong. At sight of him, as Homer confesses, the tempestuous and impulsive Diomed was seized with panic. From head to foot he shuddered and trembled. But the older Odysseus remained perfectly calm.

"Come, my friend," he said quietly, "we must stand up to him, now we're here."

Filled with fresh courage by the absolute calm of his friend, Diomed, leaving the other to deal with their horses, raised his spear, measured the distance quickly with his eye, and the moment Hector came within range flung this terrible weapon with all his strength. The spear was well-aimed. It struck Hector full in the middle of his helmet, a helmet that had been given to him by none other than Phoebus Apollo himself. Thus, though the point of the spear was of fine bronze, it was bronze it now encountered, and it was this three-fold crested bronze that turned the spear's point before it touched the man's skull. The shock of the blow, however, knocked Hector completely off his feet, and indeed flung him a good many paces through the air; and when he was on the ground he knelt there on one knee for a minute, and then sank heavily to the earth in complete unconsciousness. But contact with the earth for some reason revived him; for although shocked and stunned he was unwounded, and he was able to listen to Diomed's torrent of ribald abuse.

"You've escaped me till now, you dog! But make no mistake! I'll get you! I'll get you!"

These were the words that rang about Hector's ears whichever way he turned. But into his chariot, dazed as he was, he managed to clamber, and once in the driver's seat he felt better. Touching the horses with his whip he made straight for the ships, and as he went the rush of air against his face drove his dizziness completely away.

While all this was happening, Hector's brother, Paris, the present lord of fair-haired Helen, and the same crafty, beguiling, frivolous wanton he had always been, was watching and waiting for an opportunity to kill some of the leaders of the Greeks, and of course if possible Menelaus himself, with his bow and arrows. He could hardly have found a better position from which to enjoy what to him was in reality not so much a deadly feud as a glamorous and exciting sport; although for those whom his arrows hit it was a swift pain-piercing end of everything. He was leaning against a pillar that had been raised to mark the tumulus of Ilus, son of Dardanus, one of the most famous of the royal house of Troy. And it was from this position that he saw his grand chance.

"Ye gods!" he cried in his heart, "if I could only do for Diomed, none of the rest of them, now Achilles is sulking, can match our Hector!"

When the chance finally was given to him, he didn't miss it. Clear through the centre of Diomed's foot went the arrow, pinning the man to the ground. With a lively peal of mischievous jubilation, Paris came dancing down the slope:

"You're hit! you're hit! you're hit!" he cried. "But I wish I'd hit you through your middle so that you'd have to stop being like a lion among a herd of goats!"

But Diomed lifted up his foot in spite of the arrow.

"You dancing bowman! You pretty curly-locks! You mincing lady-killer! I reck no more of your arrow in my foot than if an angry girl had slapped my cheek or a baby had hit me with its tiny fist! Don't you understand, you little dancing idiot, that, if you're a weakling and a man of nought in yourself, nothing you do can have any real effect?"

It was then that Odysseus came to his side; and Diomed, sitting down behind him, pulled the arrow out of his foot. But though he got rid of the arrow, a most horribly sharp pain quivered through him. "No, I can't stand this," he said to himself, and, leaping into his chariot, he bade his charioteer drive fast to the ships.

Then was Odysseus left absolutely alone; and dark and desperate became his sensations.

"Is this to be the end of me?" he said to himself as he watched one after another of his bravest companions bolt headlong past him, panic-stricken, for the ships. "Am I going to be as scared as these are?" he thought; "or am I just going to stand stockstill and, in fear of being a coward and in terror of finding myself running away, be sent passively, helplessly, impotently and unprotestingly straight down to Hades?"

Fighting almost mechanically and automatically, so deeply was his unusual mind weighing the whole question of death against life and life against death, Odysseus suddenly found himself shouting with a tremendous voice. "Why did I shout like that?" he asked himself. "The pure instinct of selfprotection, I suppose.” But it was lucky he did shout, and it was lucky that this unpredictable impulse made his voice heard so far. For Menelaus, who happened to be at that second within reach of Ajax Telamon, cried aloud to that terrific warrior: “Isn’t that the voice of Odysseus? He must be in great danger. He would never cry out like that if he weren’t at a perilous pass. Come, my friend, let us rush to his aid!”

And indeed Odysseus was in extreme danger. There suddenly came up quite close to him one of the most powerful of all the Trojan champions, namely Socus, the son of Hippasus and brother of Charops; and this Socus struck him such an overpowering blow with his spear at these close quarters that it pierced through his shield and shore away his skin clean down his side. But Odysseus could feel that, though he was bleeding freely, he had not been hit in any vital place. It was lucky that this situation into which, for all his wisdom and cunning, the philosophic Odysseus had been led by some weird whimsy of fate, had drawn forth from him, in spite of the fact that his fear of being killed was balanced so evenly by his double fear of appearing a coward and being by his own conscience condemned as a coward, that far-echoing cry for help. For lo and behold! Here was the great Ajax himself at his side! Had Ajax found himself alone among enemies like this he would have acted spontaneously and not gone through the faintest self-analysis of his motives. But a philosopher can’t help philosophizing, much as he may desire to avoid it, and Odysseus couldn’t help smiling to himself as he wondered what he would have been thinking about in his last moments if Nature hadn’t squeezed out of him that desperate shout.

What Ajax and Menelaus found when they reached him resembled the sort of scene in the near-by mountain forests that the exploring gulls from the sea must have chanced upon many a time. It was as if a horned stag with a hunter’s arrow lodged in its body and lodged in a fatal enough place but not a place where any deadly result would immediately occur, had sought a moment’s rest under the shadow of a rock. For no sooner would the stag lie down, after its wild rush to escape from a second arrow, than it would find itself surrounded by bloodthirsty jackals resolved upon devouring it. But lo! at that fatal moment what must the lord of all mortal destinies do but bring upon the scene a rapacious lion, at whose approach the jackals scatter and leave the wounded stag as a feast for the lion! Thus it was with the situation on this spot at this moment. Many famous Trojans gathering around him attacked Odysseus the wise and crafty-minded; for they felt that they really had got him at last, completely at their mercy. But Ajax now drew near and planted his great shield between Odysseus and his enemies, that shield that had the weight and dimension and massive strength of a city-wall. And seeing their prey thus defended, the Trojans scattered in all directions, while Menelaus led Odysseus forth by the hand till his chariot and charioteer drove up, and then took him back to the hut near his ship. Meanwhile Ajax, seized with battle-madness, rushed hither and thither, up and down the ranks, slaughtering all among the Trojans who had the spirit to stand up to him.

But not for long did Ajax triumph in this manner; for at the other end of the battle Hector was already carrying all before him and driving the Greeks to flight as he swept towards the ditch and the rampart. At length the issue of the struggle appeared so wavering and uncertain that Achilles, leaning against the high black hull of his own great ship, was amazed to see the charioteer of old Nestor, the wise counsellor of them all, driving rapidly towards the part of the rampart and ditch behind which were drawn up those wonderful ships of Pylos, whose value had been already well tested, for they had been constructed and collected by Neleus, old Nestor’s father.

The chariot of Nestor passed so rapidly along the line that Achilles was uncertain what wounded man it was whom Nestor was conveying to his tent. But at a quick glance the man certainly resembled the most important of all their Greek comrades, none other than Machaon, the son of the great physician Asclepius who had learnt the art of healing from Cheiron the Centaur. So Achilles hurriedly called to his friend Patroclus: “Run, run, my dear, quick, quick, quick, along the ships till you get to the tent of old Nestor! And when you see him ask the old man from me whether it really was Machaon the Healer whom he was conveying in his chariot, wounded, I’m afraid, towards his tent.”

Like a shot from a bow Patroclus was off in a second, and it was in an incredibly short time that he found himself standing at the entrance to old Nestor’s spacious tent. After leaving Machaon, the wounded doctor, in the care of the beautiful Hecamede, who was acting as housekeeper for old Nestor, Nestor himself and Eurymedon, his charioteer, bathed the sweat from their bodies in the salt sea and dried themselves carefully, so that when once they were inside they could sit down comfortably to their meal. Nor did their arrival with the wounded son of Asclepius disturb the beautiful lady who looked after old Nestor, and who indeed had been selected by him very specially when Achilles sacked the little island of Tenedos that had been her home. She placed before them a lovely table with feet of cyanus and a carefully prepared onion to give the meal its proper tang, and yellow honey, and beautifully ground barley-meal, and a perfect basket made of bronze and full of dainties, and on the table this beautiful girl, Hecamede, whose hair was so exquisite in colour that it was a feast for anyone’s eyes just to look at her, placed the mighty drinking cup whose two handles were adorned with doves with extended wings, which when it was full of wine few but old Nestor could lift to their lips. And then this beautiful girl, who was like a goddess herself in every gesture, poured out for them a specially delicious potion she had concocted herself made of Pramnian wine and grated cheese of goat's milk and very delicate white barley-meal. Nestor and Eurymedon, happy after such a good meal, soon began telling each other stories.

Then, lo and behold! there was Patroclus at the tent's entrance! Up jumped old Nestor and took him by the hand and drew him in and begged him to be seated. But Patroclus refused to sit down.

"I must go back to Achilles," he said. "You know what he is. It doesn't do to keep him waiting! And I have found out what he wanted me to find out. I mean I now know for a surety that it was you, Machaon, he saw being driven in great Nestor's chariot, oldest and wisest of us all, as we all agree, my lord Nestor, that you most surely are."

The thoughts of Patroclus, as he uttered these words and as he leant against one of the tent-poles and watched with increasing desire the delicious repast that the lovely Hecamede was still replenishing, were troubled thoughts.

"Does the son of Peleus really love me to the extent with which I love him? Of course I know we don't love each other as Father Zeus loves Ganymede, or as they say the girls of Lesbos love the girls in Paphos. We love each other with a love far stronger than *that* sort of love! Our love is the real true love of passionate friendship. It is love in its essence. It is pure love. It is love entirely free from sex. When I am embracing a girl and he is embracing a girl, our passion for each other is absolutely unaffected by what we are feeling for our girls. But of course since he is Achilles and I am Patroclus, he commands and I obey. O how I wish I were safely back in his tent now, very now! I cannot bear to think of all the things that *might* happen before I see him again!"

When old Nestor had remained silent as long as he could bear seeing his beautiful Hecamede’s repast thus despised, and as long as he could endure watching the obvious desire of Patroclus to get away, he must burst out and have his revenge on this guest who was no guest, by abusing Achilles.

“What does he think we are?” he cried in the shrill tone of an old man in a real rage. “Does he think we must just quietly and tamely accept the fact that by his not helping us our best warriors one by one are being wounded? Is it nothing to his confounded arrogance that Diomed is wounded, that Odysseus is wounded, that Agamemnon is wounded, and that Euryphylus has been hit by an arrow that has pierced his thigh? Is the man so puffed up with his own conceit that he has no place left in his narrow soul for any pity at all, not one drop of pity left for all his Achaean comrades? Will he see us all wounded and limping to our graves while Hector brings fire to burn our ships? What’s the matter with him? Is he half-crazed by the idea of his own greatness?”

The old man paused and took a deep breath; and it was then that Machaon, watching him closely, and being the wise physician that he was, sent up in his heart a desperate prayer to Father Zeus that the silence of Patroclus, who was still leaning against the same tent-pole, should not set the old man off on reminiscences of his heroic deeds when he was a young man. Zeus must have heard this frantic prayer; but Zeus must have thought to himself: “If I stop this old hero from telling me his tale his pride may break out in some startling action that might upset all my plans. He might even be inspired in his mounting pride by an impulse to settle the breach between Agamemnon and Achilles, and not only so, but be able to do it, too, for there is no doubt he’s the wisest of the whole lot of them; but this is not at all what I want just at present. No, it’s really important to me that the success of Hector should continue for a while. What these impudent mortals don’t understand is that the universe existed long before they were born and that I have to deal not only with my old tricky father Cronos but, worse still, with his enemy, Gaia’s brutal ravisher, Ouranos, and even beyond him, with all the stars in their courses and the revolving constellations!”

Thus it was that unrestrained by Zeus, in spite of Machaon’s prayer, old Nestor went on telling them how, though his father held him too young to fight, he saved all the people of Pylos from the Epeians who would have overwhelmed them if it had not been for him.

“I sprang upon them” — and the old man’s voice made the table rattle and made all that was on it ring and ting, “like a black tempest; and fifty chariots I took and from each of them two warriors bit the ground, quelled by my spear!”

It became more and more difficult for Patroclus to escape as the old man went on; for what must the cunning old warrior in his subtle wisdom do now, but seek to create a crack, however small, between the heart of Patroclus and the heart of his adored friend Achilles. To do this he described a scene, doubtless real up to a point but probably a good deal exaggerated, in which Menoetius, the son of Actor, talks tenderly to his child Patroclus telling him that, though in birth and in strength Achilles is his superior, he must remember that he is the older and consequently the more cautious; and that it will always be his duty to steer and direct his excitable friend in the way he should go, not only for his own benefit but for the benefit of everybody.

“It might easily be,” the crafty old man continued, “that you could persuade him to let you wear his armour, so that thus attired you might appear at a distance to be his very self, which would have such an effect upon our foes that they would cease to follow Hector and would scamper in mad panic back to their city walls!”

These words had the desired effect upon Patroclus and without a word, but his heart beating with excitement, he started running back all the way along the line to their tent. But there was in Heaven one far more cunning than old Nestor, namely Father Zeus himself, and he took an easy way to make sure that Patroclus didn't arrive all freshly inspired with this new idea; for he shook the dice, or sortes, of destiny just a little, not very much, but just sufficient to bring it about that he should meet on his way, near the tent of Odysseus, none other than the badly wounded Eurypylus who, with an arrow in his thigh, was dragging himself along, faint from loss of blood and sick with pain, towards his own tent. At the sight of him Patroclus could not restrain his tears.

"Is there a chance for us?" he asked the wounded man. "Is there a chance for us?"

"None, none, none," groaned Eurypylus. "But since we've met I will be very grateful if you'll help me to my tent. Whatever is going to happen to all of us in the future, I implore you, help me to reach my black ship and if it's possible cut this arrow from my thigh and wash away the blood from it with warm water, and if you have learnt from Achilles what ointment to use and perhaps even carry such ointment with you, for Achilles was taught by the Centaur Cheiron, please do it for me."

And the squire of Eurypylus saw them coming and left the ship and spread a great mat of ox-skins upon the ground, and there Patroclus laid the wounded man and with a knife cut out the arrow and washed the wound; and he plucked a certain root from the ground which he saw amid the reeds and rubbed it between his own fingers till he had extracted its sap, and with this he anointed the wound and the blood was staunched and the pain ceased.

BOOK XII

JUST AS AMONG mortals it is rare for men and women to view events and persons in the same manner, so it is also among immortals. It was therefore natural if not inevitable that the wall and the trench which the Greeks had erected and dug to protect their ships should have aroused very little interest in the breasts of the two goddesses who were their staunchest champions. The building of ramparts and the digging of ditches are jobs for men, not for women, and it is easy to understand this lack of interest which both Hera and Pallas Athene displayed in this terrific ditch and this wonderful rampart, in spite of the encouragement they were always giving to those who brought them into existence. But it was naturally the other way with the two formidable gods who had always favoured the Trojans. Apollo and Poseidon hated this great ditch and this great wall more than they hated any particular fighter.

But I, the divine Aether, take a view about what these hardworking Greek warriors did to that portion of the Trojan land I love to look down upon that is different from both the feminine and the masculine view among mortals and immortals. I feel very strongly with my whole being that it is a monstrous and wicked act to spoil the beauty of any grand and sublime landscape that from the beginning has roused the spirit of awe and reverence in the hearts of both gods and men. And feeling as strongly as I do about such sacrilege, and recognizing as I do that this hideous ditch and this arrogant rampart are entirely spoiling the beauty of that portion of the coast upon which I have poured forth the light of my immortal soul for thousands upon thousands of years, I have decided to use both Poseidon and

Apollo. Yes, and if I can persuade him so far, even our Father in Heaven himself, to sweep these montrosities away and leave land and sea as beautiful as they were before these things were thrust upon them.

But since I, the eternal Aether, can detach myself from both gods and men; yes, and detach myself also from the thing called *Time*, which is only, of course, something invented by clever mortals with the help of cleverer immortals, I am fully aware that this great healing process which I desire to apply to the cruel wounds and scars that these ditch-and-rampart diggers have inflicted on the sensitive flesh of the great mother of us all, must await its appropriate hour: for I clearly see that it would require a far more troublesome effort to heal these wounds while the fighting was still going on than after Troy had been destroyed. But I shall surely see to it, when the Greeks have all sailed for home with Helen, that this accursed ditch and rampart with all their filthy mass of pestilencespreading litter and wreckage shall be swept into the sea, and there sink down to invisible depths. Yes, I will make Poseidon and Apollo bring together all the rivers from Ida — Rhesus and Heptaporus and Caresus and Rhodius and Granicus and Aesepus and divine Scamander and Simoïs, by the banks whereof innumerable shields and helms have fallen, and by the floods whereof the broken bones and skulls of many heroes have been swept seaward. And I will make Poseidon himself, the Shaker of the Earth, holding his trident in his hand, sweep into the depths of the sea all these boards and stones and metal with which the Greeks have laboured, until once more the original sands and pebbles and shells shall cover the great curving beach as they did before these men were born and as they will when Troy has become no more than a name.

Such, I, the divine Aether, decided should be Poseidon's and Apollo's work when the Trojan War was over. But then war and the tumult of war roared up and down that deep ditch and round that well-built rampart, and the timber of the towers re-echoed as if under repeated blows; while the Greeks, scourged by the lash of Zeus, were hemmed in around their hollow ships and hounded and hunted by Hector, who still, like some appalling creator of panic, raged around them with the force of a tornado.

The fury with which Hector attacked them was exactly like that of a wild-boar or lion, face to face with a long line of hunters and hounds. Spears and javelins are cast at him, hounds leap at his throat, but, first at one weak spot among them, then at another, he rushes savagely against them, revelling in his strength, defying the whole lot of them, heedless of the fact that in the end he is destined to perish though now, at each spot where he falls upon them, both hunter and hounds give way. So fought Hector, calling on his comrades to attempt what he himself strove in vain to do, that is to say to make their horses cross that deep ditch and mount its opposing rampart. Yes, Hector's own horses stopped abruptly, aghast at what they saw before them. On the brink of that ditch they stopped dead, neighing loudly from sheer terror: for not only was the ditch deep but its opposite bank was staked all along with sharp spikes. So at that point all the Trojan horsemen came to a halt, though the warriors on foot were prepared to risk it and advance. And it was then that the wise Polydamas came to Hector's side and gave him some very sagacious advice.

"For heaven's sake, Hector, and you other warriors, don't try to drive your horses into that appalling ditch! Don't you see what terrible spikes there are along the top of the opposite bank? If we risk such things in our madness none of us will get back to the city alive. No, no! Let us dismount and leave our squires to hold our horses and guard our chariots, while we ourselves climb down this confounded ditch, cross carefully that spikey bank, and sweep these wretches to the sterns of their damned ships; and, when we’ve got them there, kill the best of them, and then — O glorious moment! — burn their curst ships with fire!”

So spoke Polydamas; and Hector, accepting his advice without a second’s hesitation, called loudly to the Trojans to follow him, and scrambled hurriedly down into the ditch and, along with the wise Polydamas and the bravest of their friends, was soon, after having carefully avoided the spikes, climbing to the top of the rampart and, once there, was rushing boldly towards the ships. This first group was followed by many others; and it soon became evident that it was in the mind of the heavenly Father to give, on that day at least, the glory of victory to Hector.

But matters were suddenly intensified by a weird and striking incident that concerned the flight of birds, indeed of an enormous bird, no less than one of Zeus’s pet eagles. This eagle was carrying a huge serpent in its beak, a serpent that was very much alive and was writhing and twisting desperately. It was also biting at the great bird that carried it, and there finally came a moment in the terrible struggle between them when, by twisting its head round, the serpent was able to bite the eagle in the neck. This ended the struggle, for in a rush of pain the great bird dropped the snake so that it fell straight down among the ranks of the advancing Trojans.

Then there ensued a very interesting dispute between the furious Hector and the wise Polydamas. This latter — and even I, the Aetheric searcher of hearts, must confess that his attitude baffled me — expressed strongly to Hector what he called the importance and necessity of withdrawing from battle.

“We all saw that great eagle just now, clearly a bird of omen sent to warn us by the Heavenly Father, and how it dropped that living serpent amongst us. Well, my friend, what does that mean? It means that Zeus warns us to draw back all our chariots and all our footmen and retire within our city’s walls. Do you not see, Hector, that under the force of such a sight the majority of our men are staring at you in awe, only waiting for you to give the sign of retreat? The Heavenly Father doesn't wish us all to be slaughtered so as to give glory to Hector. If we obey this bird-omen, sent down to us especially by Zeus, we no doubt — at least that is how I, the greatest bird-omenist of our time, interpret it — shall see these accursed Greeks sailing away to their home without Helen and leaving us the winners of this bitter strife. Don't you see, Hector, that, as this eagle dropped just now that serpent among us instead of carrying it to its nest to feed its little ones, so will these damnable invaders sail away to their homes if we retreat at this moment, leaving us the winners of this bitter game? Don't forget, my friend, that I am the greatest reader of omens in all our city, and that for you to disregard what I tell you at this juncture is just sheer insanity on your part."

Then answered Hector of the fiery helm: "What do I care whether birds fly to the right, to the dawn and the sun, or fly to the left, to the heart of darkness? To Hell with all omens at this great moment! The only omen in which I believe is to fight for king and country! Come on, all of you! Come on! Let us burn these ships of theirs and send their crews to Hades or else drive them bootless home over the waters to tell their wives and children that they have achieved nothing!"

So Hector rushed forward, and the Trojans and their bravest allies followed him; and the walls and battlements were covered with the blood of both sides. For the Greeks were not dismayed, nor were put to rout, but they desperately held their ground and the thing became an equal struggle. As a careful woman who is working with both hands at spinning keeps the balance even with exquisite nicety, raising the wool in one hand and the weight in the other, making them level with infinite trouble, and thus with her toil and skill earns a pittance for her children, so did this battle between Greeks and Trojans remain equal.

“Up with ye, horse-taming Trojans!” rose the sky-piercing shout of Hector, as he hurled himself against the final barrier to the ships.

Here there was a huge double-doored gate with two high posts on each side and fastened from within by a couple of massive cross-bars. But lo! before Hector’s eyes and just outside the gate there lay upon the ground a vast stone, a stone that was broad at one end and sharp at the other, a stone such as would have taken at least two very powerful men in ordinary time to hoist up upon a wagon. But this stone Hector lifted up; and, coming close to the gate, he stood with his feet apart, and hurled it straight against the gate’s centre. Down the whole thing crashed, both the doors yielding to the terrific weight of the stone which broke them off from their hinges, and the crossbars fell with a resounding clang.

And Hector leapt within, his face as terrific as a sudden descent of night, his body blazing with bronze, and a spear in each hand. Once inside he was beyond every barrier between him and the ships and he rushed forward in triumph, shouting wildly to his men to follow him. Eagerly the Trojans obeyed. Some climbed over the wall and a crowd followed him where he had destroyed the gate; and the Greeks were driven in rout among the hollow ships, and the wild sound of the frightful struggle mounted up into the quiet heaven.

BOOK XIII

IT WAS WHEN Hector was nearest to complete triumph, to the slaughter of the bravest of the Greeks and to the burning of their ships, that I, the immortal Aether, decided to intervene. I saw that Zeus for some whimsical reason of his own had turned his shining eyes, those far-sighted orbs whose chief pleasure is to contemplate the maddest acts and most fantastic follies of the crazy human race, away from both Trojans and Greeks and fixed them upon the land of the Thracians, and upon the land of the Hippomolgi, who live upon the milk of mares, and upon the land of the Abii, who are the most righteous of all mortals.

Leaving the Heavenly Father, therefore, to enjoy his scrutiny of the ways of a race that prefer mares' milk to cows' milk, I decided I would make use of Poseidon, God of the Sea, son of Cronos, brother of Zeus and of Hera and of Hades and of Demeter! Who would serve my purpose better than he? Enraptured by my new scheme, however, though I was, I wisely waited till this great Being had left the sea and was resting on the topmost eminence of the island of Samos, inhabited by Thracians, whence he could see all the ridges of Mount Ida and the whole city of Troy and the long line of Greek ships along the coast. Silently and invincibly I descended upon him, emphasizing, with an irresistible though inaudible whisper, the danger to the ships if Hector's slaughtering were not checked. Poseidon got the idea in a flash and, rising to his full height, he began striding down to the water. It only took him four colossal strides to reach the sea; and once there he entered his ocean palace of Aegae. Here he caused his ocean-servants to harness his horses, and entering his chariot he drove through the towering waves with such force that the foam scarcely wetted his armour, while the huge sea-beasts, such as walruses and seals, rose up from the depths and played and gambolled in front of him, for right well they knew their lord and king.

There is a vast cave in the ocean between Tenedos and rocky Imbros; and in this cave he loosed his horses from the chariot and fastened them up carefully, turning the sea-weed there into heavenly ambrosia so that they might feast to their hearts' content. When he issued forth from the sea himself he assumed the well-known form and voice of Calchas, the oracular sage; and thus disguised he hastened through the ranks of the Greeks exciting them to stand firm, and, when he came at last to the place where the two Ajaxes were, he addressed to both of them a quite special warlike exhortation. Of those two it was the son of Oïleus, Ajax the less, who divined from the speed with which the legs of the pretended Calchas moved, that the man was in reality a god in disguise.

"I certainly feel a longing to fight," he told his half-brother, "such as I've never felt before."

And the greater Ajax turned to him with an excited look: "By Olympus yes! I feel just the same. For heaven's sake let's face this bloody Hector and see if we can't finish him off, you and I!"

Meanwhile Hector rushed on, like a great rocky boulder that has been a long while loosened by constant rain till at length it breaks loose and comes thundering down, a vast fragment of a mountain, and it leaps as it rolls and the woods resound beneath it and nothing stops it till it reaches the level plain. There, despite its eagerness, it has to rest.

BOOK XIV

MEANWHILE OLD NESTOR and his wounded doctor-guest Machaon were enjoying some perfect wine after a perfect supper, both of which had been prepared for them by the beautiful Hecamede. But it was not long before the desperate and terrible struggle that was going on where Hector had crossed the ditch and the rampart and was approaching the ships reached the ears of the old man and his wounded guest. Nestor rose to his feet.

"You stay where you are," he told Machaon, "and, when you've finished the wine, our beautiful Hecamede will heat for you a warm bath and will wash all the blood and dirt from your body. But I must go and see what is happening."

Thus speaking, he picked up the nearest weapon he could lay his hand on, a fairly well-sharpened spear, and along with it his son's shield which was hanging on the wall, and, closing the tent's entrance, he walked up a neighbouring incline from which he could see and hear a lot. And the old man was horrified at what he heard. For it became clear to him at once that at the point where Hector was struggling towards the ships, the Greeks were giving way before him.

Old Nestor stood for a moment or two hesitating. He felt at that moment as if he were himself a wave of the sea, a wave that has suddenly and soundlessly risen up from the abysmal depths without knowing why, and which now, gathered to its full height, pauses in solitary elemental hesitation, waiting for the gale that is coming to decide in what direction it shall roll.

Thus did Nestor hesitate. Should he, with this second-rate spear of his own and his son's second-rate shield, betake himself as fast as his feet could carry him into this resounding fight, which might prove, for all he knew, the final death-struggle of the Greeks. Or should he go at once to announce to the leaders of their side, to Agamemnon and Menelaus and Odysseus and Diomed, what was happening? Each of these great specialists in war had been — at least that is what he had heard — wounded in some way, but not perhaps wounded so badly as to put an end to their fighting again. So hesitated old Nestor, like the crest of a wave that awaited some definite rush of the wind. Naturally enough, directed no doubt, in spite of his courage, by the burden of his years, he decided to go and seek the two sons of Atreus and, if possible, Odysseus and Diomed as well. Following this decision he went, and luckily enough found them all together. He was in fact met outside their tents by Agamemnon the son of Atreus, Odysseus the son of Laertes, and Diomed the son of Tydeus, all of whom had been wounded. Each of them was leaning heavily upon his spear and they were all able to see in the distance the desperate battle that was going on.

Agamemnon spoke at once.

"Well," he said, "we seem to be defeated in this war. Hector swore he would not return to the City till he had set fire to our ships and slain us all; and it looks as if his words were being fulfilled."

But Nestor answered, looking from one to another of them as he spoke: "What we've got to do now, we leaders of the rest, is to consider every available possibility still offered by this dangerous situation. We four are not by any means devoid of brains, and it is quite possible that, if we use our liveliest intelligence, we may yet devise some way out of this infernal crisis."

But Agamemnon, the greatest king among them, had evidently given up all hope.

"Come," he cried. "What we'd better do is this, and you must all obey me. Let us drag the ships out into the water before the night has fallen. Then let us moor them with stone at the ends of ropes, so as to keep them in place till dawn. And then, before our enemies have been roused from sleep, hoist our sails and, by our sails if there's wind, or by our oars if there's no wind, depart straight away to our dear native land! Better flee from ruin and escape than be caught and die!"

Then it was that with his massive brow furrowed with indignation, Odysseus, rich in wisdom, retorted:

"Son of Atreus! Aren't you ashamed to let such words pass the barred door of your teeth? O you accursed coward! Would to heaven you were the head of some unworthy rabble, rather than our king. Dare you actually suggest that we should ignominiously leave Troy unharmed, for the destruction of which your comrades have already endured so much? Hush, man, hush! No honest decent fellow ought to utter such words, far less a king like you, to whom we have so long done honour. Be silent! You should be ashamed of yourself!"

Then to him made answer Agamemnon, king of men:

"O Odysseus, Odysseus, you have indeed, and I confess it, stung my heart to the quick with your fully justified rebuke. O how I wish there were some man who would utter really wise counsel, whether he be old or young, that would be better than mine and that would really assist us at this juncture."

Then up spake Diomed.

"Right near you is that man! In fact I am that man: and I beg you two great ones not to be vexed or wroth with me if I speak up, though of course

I am far the youngest. But my father Tydeus—”

It was at this moment, while Diomed was beginning to say what he wanted to say, that I, the all-seeing Aether, felt impelled to intervene. I could so clearly see that this was one of those opportunities that a spirited young man like Diomed feels he must leap at: an opportunity to tell his formidable, famous, elderly companions all about his father Tydeus. Do not let anyone suppose that I, the divine Aether, am lacking in sympathy for a man’s devotion to his parents. It only is that, at this ticklish moment, when every second was of importance, I felt I simply couldn’t bear to listen to a filial rhapsody on the excellent Tydeus, whom, as his son reminded these two great rulers, the heaped-up earth now covered in Thebes. So what I, the undying Aether, proceeded to do, was to compress the speech of Diomed to these two great rulers into a very brief and very sensible adjuration.

“Let us all three,” I made him say, “wounded though we are, plunge straight into the battle! We can easily retire later so as to avoid more wounds, for wounds on wounds are certainly to be avoided. But at this particular moment to plunge into the struggle, wounds and all, ought to encourage our friends more than anything else we could do.”

Thus did I make the son of Tydeus speak; and the three of them hurried off, led by King Agamemnon. As I withdrew heavenward it rejoiced me to see that none other than the great Lord of all the oceans of the world had rushed up to them and seized Agamemnon by the hand.

“O King of Kings,” he cried, using words that were as cunning as they were inspiring, “now doth the wicked heart of Achilles rejoice as he beholdeth the slaughter and rout of the Greeks. But I swear to you, great King, you shall see them fleeing from the ships and the huts towards the city in wild terror. You shall see it, Great King!”

Saying this, the Shaker of the Earth shouted aloud. Not nine, no! not even ten thousand warriors could have raised such a cry had they all shouted together: and the sound of it put fresh heart into the Greeks. Now all these things did Hera, the wife and sister of Zeus and the sister of Poseidon the Earth-Shaker, behold from Olympus, and she felt a thrill of love for Poseidon and a spasm of hatred for her husband Zeus who was seated upon Mount Ida.

Then all of a sudden she made up her mind what to do. There was no need for me, the divine Aether, to put it into her head. It was indeed the sort of decision that only a woman, whether mortal or immortal, can make. She said to herself: “I will visit him at his seat on Mount Ida when I have made myself so lovely that he’ll want to make love to me at once. Then, when he is finally satisfied, I will leave him in so delicious and deep a sleep that he won’t know what’s going on for hours and hours.”

So she went to her own special chamber in Olympus, a chamber that had been so carefully constructed for her by her son Hephaestus, with doors that could be bolted so securely when once she was inside that nobody else, whether a god or goddess, or man or woman, could possibly enter. With ambrosia she cleansed her lovely body, and anointed herself with such exquisite perfume that its fragrance, by the time she moved across the brazen threshold of Zeus, would be inhaled through the air from Earth to Heaven. Then she combed her hair and arranged its shining tresses in perfect plaits about her head, and in her well-pierced ears she hung three jewelled ear-rings. Then she came forth from her chamber and called to her side Aphrodite, the daughter of Zeus.

“Will you do something for me, sweet child?” she pleaded. “Or are you too angry with me because we take opposite sides in this confounded war?”

"Tell me what it is," replied Aphrodite. "Yes, tell me, great daughter of Cronos! Speak what is in your mind; for my heart bids me fulfil it, if it is something that really can be fulfilled!"

Deep was the crafty cunning with which Queen Hera supplicated her.

"Give me now love and desire wherewith thou dost subdue all mortals and immortals; for I am going to visit the uttermost limit of the earth in order that I may see Oceanus, from whom the gods are sprung, and mother Tethys, even those two who lovingly nursed and cherished me in their halls when they had taken me from Rhea, when Zeus, whose voice goes everywhere, flung Cronos into the world below, to dwell deep down under the earth and far beneath the never-quiet sea. My purpose is to reconcile those two divided ones and to bring them together again to their marriage-bed, in the mutual love which moved in them at the beginning, before anger and wrath with each other rent their hearts apart. You can imagine, my dear child, how, if I really could join them together in love again, I should win their reverence and respect for ever and ever."

And laughter-loving Aphrodite answered her at once: "How can I refuse such a request from you, who sleep in the arms of the Lord of us all?"

Thus speaking, she took the infinitely powerful *keston himanta*, or enchanted girdle, which she wore round her waist and into which were woven the mystic threads of the innermost secrets of beguiling love; and this she handed to Hera; and this, with a smile of unspeakable satisfaction, that royal ox-eyed lady concealed beneath her breasts. Then Hera left Olympus and darted down through the yielding air to Pieria; then on across the snowy mountains and topmost peaks of Thrace, and from thence to Athos and across the waves of the sea, until she came to Lemnos. Here she met Sleep himself, Sleep the brother of Death, and, clasping him by the hand, she addressed him with imploring words.

"O Sleep, most powerful of all Beings known either to gods or men, if you will only lull great Zeus to sleep, when I have got him lying by my side in love, I will give you a golden throne wrought by my son, Hephaestus, a throne imperishable with a golden footstool for your feet, so that you can lie back at rest when you want to drink your wine at your ease. Will you, O divine Sleep, will you do this for me?"

Then Sleep made answer:

"Hera, daughter of great Cronos, had it been any other immortal god save Zeus, I would willingly accept your offer and lull him to sleep. But your husband, no! I cannot bring myself to do it! I would even do it to the great river Oceanus himself, the father of all of us immortal gods, yes, to Oceanus, with his innumerable streams that brought us all into existence. But to Zeus, no! On a similar occasion, when I did so, he began in a fury, when he awoke, throwing the gods about, from one end of Olympus to the other, and he would have thrown me into space if Night had not saved me, Night who in all ultimate issues dominates both gods and men."

Then queenly ox-eyed Hera plied him with a second offer. "Come, come, come! If you will do what I ask shall I tell you what I will do for you? I will give you one of the youthful Graces to wed; yes! to be your wife, namely Pasithea, for whom you have been secretly longing all your days."

At this offer the shock of ecstasy was so intense that Sleep was nearly paralysed. And as I, the immortal Aether, saw the two of them, standing together there, I knew I had been right to breathe the syllables "Pasithea" into the exquisitely moulded skull of my poor old half-blind Homer. No doubt left to himself he would have thought of another good offer for the great goddess to make, but I doubt if he could have thought of Pasithea, because the craving for this youngest of the Graces had been hidden in the depths of Sleep's many corridored soul for ages beyond computation. Of course when this idea had been breathed into Homer's head by me, and he had whispered it to Hera, the wise goddess knew in a flash that she'd got the key to the heart of the matter. And Sleep accordingly called upon her to swear by the waters of the Styx, and to lay one hand upon the Earth and the other upon the Sea, and to invoke all the Powers that are below with Cronos to be witness of the contract between them. And the great goddess Hera obeyed him and called by name upon every Titan below Tartarus to bear witness to her oath.

Then the two of them left Lemnos and Imbros, and clothed in mist went forth on their way. And they came to many-fountained Ida, the mother of wild beasts, and they swept across the forest-covered ridges till Sleep decided that he had better go no further for fear Zeus might perceive him. Having left Hera's side therefore, he climbed to the top of a pine, a pine so tall that its branch reached above the mist. Here he took to himself the likeness of a clear-voiced mountain bird, a bird that the gods call Chalcis and mortal men Cymindis.

But Hera went on to the top of Gargarus, where Zeus was seated. And behold! the moment his eyes rested upon her he loved her as he had not done since they first slept together, their dear parents knowing nothing of it.

"Hera, Hera!" he cried. "What are you doing? Where are your chariot and horses?"

With cunning artfulness the goddess answered: "They are at the foot of the mountains waiting for me. I am going to the ends of the Earth to visit the great River, the River Oceanus, our universal parent, and Mother Tethys, who together so lovingly nursed me and cherished me in their halls. I am thinking of bringing those two together again, for they used to love each other, and now they hate each other; and I have a sure instinct that I could reconcile them; and, if I did, you can depend upon it they would bless me forever."

"All right, Hera," murmured Zeus, quivering with longing to embrace her, "hereafter you can go to them and do just as you say; but at this moment, please, please, let us lie down in love together, *here*, *here*, just where we are! I tell you I've never loved anyone with the love I feel for you at this moment; no! not when I loved the wife of Ixion who gave birth to Perithous, equal to any of us in his wisdom; not when I loved Danaë, daughter of Acrisius, who gave birth to Perseus; no! not even, I swear it, when I loved the daughter of Phoenix who bare to me Minos and godlike Rhadamanthys! O no! O no! not even when I begat Heracles upon Alcmene, or Dionysus upon Semele! No! I swear to it, my enrapturing one, not when I loved Demeter or Leto; and let me tell you this too, not even when I first loved you, your own self, did I feel such an ecstasy of desire flood my whole being as I feel now at this minute."

Hera gazed at him.

"But do you think I would agree to our lying down together on the summit of this mountain in view of everyone?" Then he cried to her: "Fear not, O fear not, Precious One, lest any see us! I will cast over us such a thick golden cloud that it will hide us completely! No! not even Helios himself will be able to see us, though he has the most piercing sight of all!"

Then did the son of Cronos clasp her in his arms and beneath them the Earth caused fresh grasses to spring up and dewy lotus and crocus and hyacinth, as thick as they were tender, which separated them from the ground. Thus did the Father of us all, on topmost Gargarus, take his fill of love and its sweet ensuing slumber with his wife clasped in his arms.

But Sleep himself left them lying there and hastened down to the Greek ships to take word to the Enfolder and Shaker of the Earth. To him he spoke briefly and quickly.

“Hasten, O great Poseidon, with a free mind; for now you can, for a time anyway, give glory to the Greeks; since I have shed deep slumber upon our Heavenly Father, sated with delicious love.”

And Poseidon rejoiced at this good news and rushed forward with terrific shouts and still more terrific spear against Hector and the Trojans. The noise that went up from the battle now was beyond all imagination. It was more than the North Wind hurling itself against the raging waves, more than a blazing fire among the forest trees, more than a storm howling amid the oaks of a mountain. With the inspiration of Poseidon urging him on, Ajax, the great son of Telamon, rushed against Hector, and Hector hurled his huge spear full at his breast. To Hector’s dismay the spear point, although it smote the man above the heart, smote him where he was doubly protected by two layers of armour. Shocked by his weapon being thus miserably deflected from its purpose, Hector hastily drew back to avoid the return blow and escape his own fate; but it was not with a spear at all that Ajax retorted, but with a great stone picked up from the ground. With this he struck him full on the neck above the rim of his shield and made him spin round like a top. When finally great Hector fell to the earth, it can be easily believed how the Greeks rushed upon him, hoping to drag him away or wound him to death. But all the best of his Trojan friends rushed forward to guard him, Polydamas and Aeneas and Sarpedon and Glaucus. It was a group of these men who lifted him in their arms and carried him to his chariot, groaning heavily, and bore him away towards the city.

When they were come to the ford of Xanthus, that river which immortal Zeus himself begat, they lifted him from the chariot to the ground and poured water upon him. At this he opened his eyes and revived for a moment and kneeling down vomited, and what he vomited was black blood.

Then again he sank to the ground and his eyes closed and his consciousness was lost in darkness.

Hector’s withdrawal meant, for that day and night at least, the defeat of the Trojans; but the Greek who killed the greatest number of them then was not Ajax the son of Telamon, who had thrown that stone, but Ajax the son of Oïleus, who was the swiftest of them all on foot in the absence of Achilles and especially skilled in pursuing and killing those who fled.

BOOK XV

IT WAS NOT until Hector had been carried as far as the river Xanthus and had knelt there upon the earth vomiting dark blood that Zeus, the All-Father, awoke from where he lay on the summit of Ida by Hera's side.

Hastily he stood up and in one quick glance realised what was happening. In wild panic the Trojans were being chased from the ships across the palisades, and out of the ditch, and away towards the city. In a flash he perceived that Hera had been fooling him and he burst out furiously at her.

"Hera, you *are* a difficult creature to deal with! Don't you remember when I hung you from heaven with an anvil fastened to each of your feet? Vain was it for the gods to pity you and protest. Those that made such a stir — don't you remember it all? — I flung straight down from heaven to earth. And have you forgotten how, with the aid of the North Wind, you fooled the heroic Heracles, until he had involved himself in all those terrible labours? But listen to me now! If you are really now in a mood to do what I want done, go and call Iris to come here. Yes, and tell Apollo too that I desire to speak to him. Tell Iris that I shall bid her to go straight to Poseidon and make him cease from this war-business, and withdraw for a while to his own place. And tell Apollo that I shall make him restore Hector to his full health again and fill him with his former strength, so that he can drive the Greeks back to their ships just as he was doing when he was hit by that heavy stone. No doubt you will be glad to know, here and now, my full intention, nor is there any reason why I should conceal it from you, for I can see now that I have reminded you of my power over you and over all the rest, and that you will not dare to reveal it to a living soul. Hear therefore my purpose as to the climax and the end of this terrific war, and I think the secret knowledge within your heart of what I am going to bring to pass will give you that hidden feeling of superiority to other women, whether mortal or immortal, which is the greatest happiness a woman can know. In the end Patroclus shall slay my own son, Sarpedon, and Hector shall slay none other than Achilles' friend, Patroclus, with the result you can well imagine. Yes, the loss of the person he loves best in the entire world will do what all the entreaties of kings like Agamemnon, of gigantic heroes like Ajax the son of Telamon, of crafty philosophers like Odysseus the son of Laertes, could not do, that is to say, bring Achilles back into the battle. Here, as you can imagine, will be fought the grand determining duel of the whole war, and Achilles, after pursuing Hector round the walls of the city, of which he is the one irreplaceable champion, will finally kill him. After that, let me tell you, by nothing less than a crafty device of my incomparable daughter, Pallas Athene, the whole city will be destroyed, and with Helen restored to her husband, my divine predestination will be entirely fulfilled, and the oath fully kept which I made when I bowed my head in answer to the entreaties of Thetis."

Hearing this, Hera departed from the summit of Mount Ida; and fast as moves the mind of a man who has travelled over far lands and who thinks, "O would I were there, or there, or there!" so fast did she move, till she reached the summit of Mount Olympus.

The gods were preparing for a banquet when she arrived, and Themis ran to greet her, but was shocked by her obvious agitation.

"Hera!" she cried, "what in heaven's name is the matter?

You look absolutely dazed. The son of Cronos has frightened you, though he is your husband."

“You know, dear immortal Themis,” Hera replied, “what he is like, and what an implacable tyrant he is. I’ll tell you when you’ve all sat down what wicked things he’s going to do. It won’t please any of you, least of all any mortals who may by chance be among you, to hear these things; but I will tell you frankly.” Thus speaking, she smiled with her lips, but her forehead was knitted with inward wrath. “It’s no use,” she went on, “being angry with him, for he is stronger than the lot of us and he sits apart from us. All that we’ve got to do is to content ourselves with the particular evil thing he throws upon each of us. For instance, he’s quite recently sent a terrible sorrow upon Ares, whose son, Ascalaphus, has perished in battle.”

When he heard this, great Ares smote his thighs and cried out:

“Blame me not, but I swear I’ll start off at once down to the ships to avenge my son’s death! And I don’t care if Zeus does strike me with his thunderbolt and I lie in blood and dust among the dead!”

Crying thus, he bade his attendants, who were Deimos, or Terror, and Phobos, or Wild Flight, harness his horses, and he fiercely clamped upon his own body his golden armour and rushed out. But in a moment the wise Pallas Athene, foreseeing all the tumult in heaven that would ensue from this, darted after him and snatched the helm from his head and the shield from his shoulders and the great bronze spear from his hand.

“Madman!” she cried. “Are your wits gone altogether? Are you beside yourself? Don’t you realise that the Heavenly Father will come and lay hands on us all, one by one, innocent and guilty alike?” Then, when she had made Ares relax upon his throne, she called upon Apollo and Iris. “Go, you two,” she bade them; “go straight to the peak of Gargarus, upon Mount Ida, and when you get there do exactly what the Father of Heaven bids you to do.”

Apollo and Iris promptly obeyed, and at the sight of them the wrath of Zeus ebbed away.

“Go you to Poseidon,” he told Iris, “and command him from me to cease from battle and either join the other gods of Olympus or go back into the glittering sea. Tell him that if he doesn’t obey my words he shall soon learn which of us two is the elder.”

Fast as hail or snow driven by the North Wind, Iris sped down and sought and found the Shaker of the Earth, and gave him the message from Zeus. But I, the immortal Aether, was also there, for I have always been very partial to Iris, and I wanted her to realise, as it would help her in her work as the Messenger of Zeus, what exactly the position was between these two brothers. So I shot one of my pure white-light flashes into the heart of Poseidon to make him burst out, as he accordingly did.

“O *popoi!*” he cried.

Now this particular cry I, the deathless Aether, always regard as the cry of all the simplest and least human intelligences in the world. It strikes me as the eternal tragic protest of what we call the Inanimate. I imagine it to be the sad, wise, helpless refrain of rocks and stones and pebbles, when they contemplate the excited goings-on of men and animals and birds and fishes and reptiles. “O *popoi!*” they cry, “when will this mad gala-play, under the direction” — as I will find a poet to tell the world some day— “of the ‘vast formless things that move the scenery to and fro and flap from out their condor-wings invisible woe’, come to its everlasting finale?”

“Three brothers are we,” roared the wrathful god of the ocean, “yes! three brothers, begotten by Cronos and born of Rhea, namely Zeus, myself and Hades, lord of the dead below. When the lots were shaken I won for my share the grey sea to be my dwelling forever. Hades won the enormous and terrible darkness below everything. And Zeus won the boundless sky with its air and clouds and rain and thunder. Let him keep his threats," roared the ruler of the ocean, "with his winds and his blasts and his thunderbolts, for his own children! Let him order them about and frighten them! Tell him from me that I will not be bullied by him who is, after all, only my brother and my equal sharer in the Cosmos."

Then, as all the world can imagine, I, the divine Aether, put into the mind of my pupil Iris the right answer to all this foam.

"Do you really, O Earth-Enfolder, you god with hair dark as the depths of the sea, suppose that I'm going to carry back to the Father of us all a defiant message like this? Come, come, come! change your mind, as the best of us can, my good sir! I know you are his brother, but do not the terrible judges of us all, the unanswerable Erinyes, always support the elder among us?"

Thus Iris, with my help, won entirely in this dispute, and Poseidon admitted it.

"O goddess Iris," he sighed, "you are the wise one. What a great thing it is when a Messenger has real understanding. Well, so be it. For the present time I yield to my elder brother. But listen to me, Iris. If in spite of me and of Athene and of Hera and of Hermes and of Hephaestus, he spare Ilios, let him know this, that between us two there will be anger that nothing, I say nothing, can ever take away."

Having thus spoken as his deepest heart bade him speak at the challenge of Iris, who was at that moment completely under the power of myself, the everlasting Aether, Poseidon plunged into the sea and vanished, leaving Apollo standing alone before his father Zeus.

And Zeus laid upon him two tasks to fulfil. What he had first to do was to shake against the Greeks that most deadly of all threats, nothing less than Zeus's *aigida thussanoessan* or "tasselled Aegis." And the second thing he had to do was to put fresh strength into Hector, in fact to breathe such power into him as he had never possessed before.

It did not take long for Phoebus Apollo to accomplish both these things. Soon were the Greeks, or, as Homer prefers to call them, the Achaeans, trembling with apprehension, and soon was Hector rushing against them, across the great ditch, over the great barricade, and before him went the fiery cloud that Apollo had wrapped round himself as he brandished the All-Father's Aegis with its appalling tassels. Hector's rush forward was like that of an impetuous stallion that has broken out of its stall and away from its manger and, with its huge mane floating in the wind above its head, is charging desperately to the pastures of the quiet mares. It was not so very long before Hector was close to the ships. He had to turn once as he advanced to utter reverberating threats and curses upon those of his followers who, greedy for gold and silver, had stopped to strip the dead they had slain. Finally, Hector himself actually reached the ships, and when he had done so he laid his hand on the upright sign at the stern of one of the finest of them, in fact the very one that had brought Protesilaus to Troy but was not destined to carry him back again. Meanwhile, that heroic and majestic warrior, Ajax the son of Telamon, was pacing up and down in front of the ships and sometimes, even, when the ships were close, from ship to ship.

And he kept imploring his brother Teucer to aim one of his deadly never-failing arrows at Hector; but at last Teucer had to confess to him what Apollo had done. Teucer did not know what god had done it, but was forced in honesty to admit to his brother that some deity had so mangled his bow-string as to render it useless. It was then that Ajax invented for himself a perfect weapon for the job he had undertaken, namely a long pike over twenty cubits in length, and with this he kept jumping from ship to ship and driving off the Trojans as they tried to set fire to the vessels’ hulls, and he now implored Teucer to throw down the bow in the interior of his hut and to arm himself with helm, spear and shield. Meanwhile the Trojans, led by both Hector and Apollo, were steadily advancing, and as to what was left of the rampart between the ditch and the ships, Apollo seemed to be treating it very much as children treat a fortress they have made of sand on the sands of the sea, which they enjoy destroying even more than they enjoy erecting!

“Be men, be men, for the sake of our homes and our wives and children!” cried Ajax, spearing with his long spike one Trojan after another who came with a torch close to any of the ships. In the end there were no less than twelve men who were wounded too badly for them to fight any more by that twenty-cubits-long pike of his.

BOOK XVI

In the midst of all this tumult Patroclus came up to Achilles shedding such a torrent of tears that it was like a flood of dark water pouring down from an overhanging cliff.

"O Patroclus," Achilles cried, "why are you crying like a little girl, a tiny toddler, who runs at her mother's side and begs her to take her up and clutches at her gown and hinders her steps and fearfully looks up at her till her mother takes her up? Have you something to tell our Myrmidons or me, or has some bad news come to you from Phthia, something that you alone have heard? Or are you sorrowing for the Argives who are being slain by their own foolishness? Out with it! Hide not from me."

Then did Patroclus answer:

"O Achilles, son of Peleus, mightiest of us all, do not be wroth with me, but I cannot bear it any longer! Smitten is the son of Tydeus, that great fighter Diomed; wounded are Odysseus and Agamemnon, and wounded too is Eurypylus with an arrow in his thigh. Pitiless one, thy father wasn't Peleus, nor was Thetis thy mother, but the grey sea bare thee to the over-shadowing cliffs! How can you hold in your heart such anger? hold it until your very valour has become a curse to us all? But listen to me now; if so be you are fearing some oracle, or some augury that your mother has brought to you from Zeus, let me, your worshipper, me your adoring friend, me who know all about the wrong you suffered, put on your armour now and rush into the fight in all your habiliments! For if I am arrayed in your things, things that all the hosts of friends and enemies know well to be yours, I feel assured that the rank and file on both sides *will take me for you.*

And *this* I know for certain would so hearten us Argives that we should all hurl ourselves into battle with a sort of rapture, each saying in his heart, Achilles has joined us! Achilles is leading us! Achilles has overcome his wrath!"

So did Patroclus cry to his friend with tears still running down his cheeks; and I, the immortal Aether, who had put this idea into his head purely to ease his grief, was shocked when I saw that Achilles was going to grant him his desire. Fool that Patroclus was! But it was too late now to give him any presentiment that this madness was the prologue to his death! And so I left Achilles to give his friend leave to wear his armour, this armour which all the fighters on both sides would recognise at once, though the face of the man wearing it would be hidden under the helm. But I hovered about the pair of them for a while, hoping that the mysterious goddess Tyche, or Chance, would intervene in some unexpected way before it was too late. And I confess I was surprised by the unworthy thoughts that I saw plainly, as I threw my searching white light of infallible insight upon that proud heart, flickering across the consciousness of Achilles the son of Peleus, and I did what I could to let people realise the honesty and goodness of Patroclus compared with the vanity, the malignant vengeance, the unscrupulous arrogance that filled the other's breast. What Achilles now said would certainly have revealed all this to anybody less innocent and simple-minded than Patroclus.

"When you have driven them away from the ships, don't fail to come back straight to me. Don't follow them further. Don't drive them to the city walls. No, no! Come back straight here; for if you go on fighting near the city, someone may possibly recognise you and, if they did, I should of course lose something, not much but something, from my full account of glory."

I cannot tell what the simple-minded Patroclus felt when he heard these words, but I took good care to report them to my bard Homer, so that posterity would know that, though Achilles was the fastest runner and far the most formidable fighter of all the Greeks, he was not to be compared with his friend Patroclus in honesty and goodness of heart.

So Patroclus clothed himself from head to foot in the armour of Achilles; but one thing he did not take, simply because he lacked the strength to use it, namely the great ashen spear that the Centaur Cheiron had given to Peleus and which had come from the peak of Pelion. But Automedon was ordered to yoke the mortal horse Pedasus with the two immortal horses whose mother was the Harpy, Podarge, and their father Zephyrus, the West Wind. And then, once in the chariot of Achilles and driving the unearthly horses of Achilles, Patroclus slaughtered the Trojans in heaps upon heaps. Patroclus kept encircling them and sweeping them this way and that, like a tempest in harvest time when Zeus pours down his rain and rolls down his floods in his wrath against the false courts of law that give crooked and tricky and unfair judgments in the places of assembly.

But when Sarpedon the son of Zeus saw with horror the havoc that Patroclus was making, for Sarpedon was an ally of the Trojans, he leapt from his chariot to challenge him. And Patroclus, the moment he saw him, did the same. And as two vultures on a towering rock use their beaks and claws against each other, so did Patroclus and Sarpedon meet.

And Zeus, beholding this encounter, cried aloud to his wife Hera: “O woe! woe! woe! Why, O why, is it fated that my son Sarpedon, the one and only man in the whole universe whom I really love, should be killed by Patroclus?” And as he cried in the misery of his heart, Zeus thought to himself: “What use is it, what advantage is it, to be the ruler of gods and men, if I cannot save my own son, my own darling son, when a cruel destiny, an implacable *keer*, condemns him to death? What is this hidden force? Is it ‘Moira’, Fate? is it ‘Anangkee’, Necessity? What is this hidden, secret, baleful power that dominates gods as well as men? I almost wish I could ask my father, deep-plotting Cronos, about this power. I warrant he would know! But there it is! I have flung him into Tartarus along with those very giants from which he saved our mother Rhea when he cut out the testicles of Ouranos! O woe! O woe! O woe! How can I save my darling son from this cruel Fate, this pitiless *keer*, that is going to fling him into the kingdom of Hades?”

Then did Hera, the wife of Zeus, make an effort to soothe her husband’s anguish.

“Remember, O Ruler of all,” she pleaded, “that your son Sarpedon is a mortal man, long ago sentenced to death by destiny, and if you go out of your way to save him, I tell you, Almighty One, and don’t forget my words, there’ll be many another among us immortals with an offspring in this bloody war who’ll start at once trying to save his child from death. Father of all, I tell you this: if you start meddling with everlasting Fate, something may happen that none of us dream of. No! No! But listen; when his soul has left him, send painless Sleep and peaceful Death to bear his body away to Lycia, where his kinsfolk can bury him nobly with Mound and Pillar, as is due to the dead.”

So spoke Hera, and the Father of all failed not to obey. But he did allow himself to send down upon earth a shower of bloody raindrops to express his feeling for his dead son.

Before Patroclus slew him, however, Sarpedon slew Pedasus, the mortal horse, the third horse pulling the chariot which Patroclus was driving. Sarpedon’s spear went through Pedasus’ right shoulder, and the horse groaned piteously, breathing its last, while it crashed down in the dust and its spirit left its body. Patroclus might have been in a serious plight after Pedasus was dead, for the other two horses were plunging and rearing and entangling the reins between them and pulling in contrary directions. But Automedon had the sense to draw his sword, and with the aid of its blade he severed the reins that had guided Pedasus and succeeded in extricating the other two horses from the knot in which they were getting fatally entangled. Driving on then in his high spirits, Patroclus reached the wall of Troy, and the thought must have throbbed in his mind that it was his destiny in the armour of Achilles to break into the city. But he soon encountered the great god Apollo himself, who was as much the son of Zeus as was Sarpedon, and Apollo with his own immortal hands turned him back.

And at that moment it was that Hector came driving towards him with Cebriones, a bastard son of King Priam, acting as his charioteer. Face to face at last with Hector, it suddenly came into the mind of Patroclus what he would do, and he leapt out of his chariot to the ground. Once on the ground, Patroclus picked up a jagged stone that happened to be lying there and with his feet firmly planted on the earth he flung it at Hector's advancing chariot driven by the bastard son of Priam, the grave Cebriones. The stone struck Cebriones on the forehead so near to his eyes that both his eyes fell to the ground and, like a diver, he took a "header" after them and was dead the second he touched earth.

I, the immortal Aether, was, as you may imagine, watching these events with intense interest, and, knowing how near to his own end Patroclus was, I decided to awake in him an unbecoming, unworthy, vulgar vein of jocular facetiousness; and it was in this mood that he shouted aloud: "Look at the fellow diving! How well, O look how well, this man can dive, just as if he were after oysters at the bottom of the sea! See how good at diving these Trojans are!"

Hector, hearing this ugly vaunt, leapt out of his chariot too, and, clasping the corpse of Cebriones by the head, tried to pull him away. Patroclus, however, clung tightly to the feet of the dead man; and both of them tugged like mad, one against the other.

It was the Trojan Euphorbus, a terrible expert with the spear, who now struck Patroclus; and Patroclus drew hastily back, avoiding fate. But in a second Hector was after him and soon had him, helpless and gasping for breath, under his feet. And as Patroclus lay dying at his feet Hector taunted him ruthlessly.

“Vultures are the ones who will enjoy thee, little master! I warrant Achilles told you not to return till you had reddened my tunic with my heart’s blood! I wager that’s just what he said to you, little man! And now see what has happened as the result of his persuading you to face me, silly idiot that you are!”

But the dying Patroclus answered him with his last breath: “Boast away, Hector! Boast away, to your heart’s content! It wasn’t you, it was Apollo, who knocked off the helm of Achilles from my head. Yes, it was first Apollo and then Euphorbus who slew me. You are only the third. So there is nothing very much in my death for you to boast about. And another thing I will tell you, and keep it in your heart, O mighty boaster! — you yourself won’t be living much longer. For Achilles will, before very long, finish you off.”

He had only just stopped speaking when his soul, lamenting its fate at leaving life while still so young, fled down into Hades. Then Hector murmured to himself: “Ah, but who can tell? Perhaps after all it will be Achilles himself, the son of Thetis, who will perish beneath my spear!”

BOOK XVII

IT WAS NOT long after the death of Patroclus, and while his body, stripped of the armour of Achilles, was still the centre of this desperate struggle, that Hector decided what he would do. He halted a group of Trojans who were carrying this precious armour to Troy, and hurriedly clothed himself in it, letting his comrades carry his own armour back to his own house. Having done that, Hector became more terrifying than ever and seemed able to slay every Danaan warrior he approached; while Ajax, son of Telamon, and Menelaus, son of Atreus, did what they could to save the body of Patroclus from being mutilated by the Trojans or dragged off to the city to be devoured by dogs. Hector had indeed become like one obsessed by some Enyalian demonism of murderous slaughter. Zeus, the Almighty Director of all the chief events, could not bring himself to let down Hector's glory in any way at all.

"Poor wretch!" the Father of us all murmured tenderly to his own heart. "How little he knows how soon he will be sent down to Hades by the invincible son of Peleus!"

And then the great god of all gods was moved by something that stirred him to compassion more than anything else that had yet happened in this terrible war — namely, by the heart-breaking sorrow of the two immortal horses given to Achilles by his father, Peleus, who had received them from Zeus himself. And now Zeus beheld these two immortal steeds weeping dark torrents of tears because of the death of Patroclus. And such streams of tears did these immortal creatures shed that their beautiful manes got entangled with their harness and their heads drooped so low that it seemed as though they were both crouching on the earth.

You can believe that I, the immortal Aether, missed nothing of all this, and indeed I was especially careful that my darling bard should not fail to record it, because I had already decided that in the far future I should inspire a particular poet in a remote island of the West to celebrate the tragedy of a mortal man being loved and forbidden to die by an immortal goddess. I speak, as you may guess, of Tithonus, wedded to the sacred Dawn. The truth is that I, the immortal Aether, alone know that the most tragical thing that can happen in the whole cosmos is this union of mortality with immortality. Therefore, as you can imagine, nothing pleased me more than when Zeus himself put new strength and life and spirit into these two horses, so that they rushed through the Trojan ranks home, home, home, towards the huts and the ships, dragging the chariot after them and driven by Automedon.

Then it was that Ajax and Menelaus discussed together the best way of getting the naked body of Patroclus back to the ships, and they decided that Menelaus and his friend Meriones should carry the corpse home, while Ajax, son of Telamon, and his half-brother, Ajax, son of Oïleus, should follow just behind them driving off all the Trojans who sought to touch the sacred body they carried. It was into the mind of Ajax that the thought first came that they must send some fleetfooted companion to carry the news of the death of Patroclus to Achilles. But just then it was so terribly dark that it was impossible to see anything, and the great Ajax prayed desperately to Zeus to clear the sky. The Father of all did not fail to notice that as he prayed Ajax wept, and a real pity for the great man entered his heart and he promptly answered his prayer, making all the horizons clear of mist.

Then it was that Menelaus left them to go upon that difficult task of finding just the right messenger to hasten on foot to Achilles with the news that his best friend, his only intimate friend, was dead and that his own precious armour was in the hands of that terrible war-man Hector. He soon discovered the man he wanted, Antilochus, the son of Nestor, and after startling and shocking him with the awful news and watching him depart at an incredibly swift run, he returned to help Meriones carry the body to the ships.

BOOK XVIII

ACHILLES WAS STANDING alone close to his favourite ship, pondering sadly in his mind when Antilochus, the son of Nestor, reached him. I, the immortal Aether, had restrained myself from giving him the least hint of what was coming, because I was very anxious to watch just how Antilochus would tell him the terrible news and just how Achilles would receive it from him. Well, I must confess that my mania for watching heart-rending emotions was more than satisfied on this occasion. I think, however, that, as sometimes happens, some inkling of the tragic blow he was going to receive had reached Achilles through the air, for the blackness of the vessel's side against which he stood, and the harsh noise of the fighting, and the broken, desperate gulfs of the lurid clouds, seemed to the mind of the son of Peleus only the dark, outstretched arm of an unutterable horror.

Antilochus told him the news in a voice broken with sobs; and no sooner had he heard it than Achilles flung himself on the ground and began furiously clutching at the sand, which had been blackened by the ships' black paint, and pressing it against his head with both his fists. When in addition to this he began tearing out his blackened hair, Antilochus could bear it no longer and, kneeling down at this side, he clasped both his hands, pressing them into the sand behind the head they had defiled.

Then Achilles began moaning and groaning in so appalling a way that his mother Thetis heard him from her beautiful cave at the bottom of the sea. Antilochus still held desperately to the man's hands, for he feared he would suddenly draw a knife from his belt and cut his own throat. And so must his mother have feared, for she shrieked aloud so piteously that all her

Nereid sisters, daughters like herself of Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea, gathered hurriedly round her. Quickly came Glauce and Thaleia and Cymodoce, Nesaea and Speio and Thoë and ox-eyed Halië and Cymothoë and famous Galatea, and many other Nereids that lived at the bottom of the sea. And they all beat their breasts while their sister Thetis uttered her lamentation.

"Woe, woe, woe!" she cried, "all is sorrow and woe! I bore him, this precious child! I reared him with exquisite care! I let him sail to Ilios in a grand ship with a beautiful prow curved like a perfect horn of ivory! And now he is miserable, sobbing on the ground with woe unspeakable! Well! I'll go straight to him! That's all I can do. But that much I will do, O at once! at once!"

And with her, as she left the sea, went all her sister Nereids, from ox-eyed Halië to renowned Galatea. And when Thetis came to the side of her son Achilles, as he lay moaning and groaning on the ground, she clasped his head with a shrill wail.

"O what is it? Tell me, tell me! Hide it not from your Mother. Your great wish has been brought to pass, hasn't it? Hasn't it? That the sons of the Achaeans should do you the greatest honour by being huddled up in ignominious shame at the sterns of their ships because you wouldn't help them?"

And Achilles groaned in answer, "But what do I get from that now, Mother? For my dearest comrade is dead, even Patroclus, whom I honoured above all, even as my own self. And not only so, but Hector is now wearing the perfect armour given to me by the gods themselves. And now you yourself, my Mother, will suffer woe immeasurably, for I swear to you I will not live a day till I have first slain Hector!"

But his mother answered with floods of tears: “But doomed to a speedy death you are anyway, my precious child, for as you know by a decree of that *keer* with which you were born, that primal destiny which all mortals must accept, when once Hector is dead, your own death will not be far off.”

Then, stirred to the depths of his being by bitter emotion, Achilles cried aloud: “May I die! May I die since I was not at his side to aid him before he was slain! Far from his native land he fell, and I was not at his side to help him! What am I now, my dear Mother, but a profitless burden upon the earth?”

“But you forget, my dear,” pleaded silver-footed Thetis, “that your enemy Hector has got your precious armour which the gods gave to Peleus, your father. Now listen to me, my sweet child. Don’t go into the battle again today. But tomorrow, at the rising of the Sun, I will return to you and bring fresh armour for you from the lord Hephaestus in Olympus.”

Thus speaking she turned away from him.

“Back, back,” she cried to her sister Nereids, “to our palace-cave in the deep! And, O sisters of mine!” she cried, “tell the whole story to our own dear father, the Old Man of the Sea!”

Thus speaking silver-footed Thetis flew upwards to the peak of Olympus.

But meanwhile a terrible struggle was going on above the body of Patroclus. Hector had now got hold of the head of the dead man, while the two Ajaxes held his feet. It had become very hard for the two Ajaxes to continue this frantic struggle, because the crowd of Trojan spearmen had thickened around them, and the moment seemed not far off when Hector and his friends would win, and drag the body back to Troy to be devoured by dogs.

Seeing the nearness of this danger, I, the immortal Aether, put into the head of Hera to send down, unknown to Zeus, the messenger Iris straight to Achilles.

“I have come,” said Iris to him, “at the request of Hera and Pallas Athene. Zeus knows nothing about it. But those two goddesses want you to know that if you don’t act at once before night falls, Hector will carry the corpse of Patroclus into the city for them to mutilate and dishonour at their pleasure.”

“How shall I act?” asked Achilles, in a desperately troubled voice.

“The two goddesses told me to tell you,” replied Iris, “that if you go to the trench and defy the Trojans, shouting in your lordliest tones, they will extemporize for you such startling and fiery armour that it will make your enemies retreat in a panic and the body of your friend will be carried to the ships and laid at your feet.”

Achilles obeyed like lightning, and over his shoulder he bound the Aegis, with all its deadly tassels flapping in the twilight, and from his head he felt a fiery cloud was burning so high that it seemed to be mounting up to heaven! And as he shouted his terrific threats against the Trojans, his voice seemed to roll in such terrible reverberations that even Hector dropped the head of Patroclus and fell back in sudden retreat. Three times across the trench Achilles shouted, while Athene’s Aegis gleamed from his shoulders and the fiery crest of his imaginary helmet ascended into the sky. Naturally alarmed by this terrible shout, to which Athene herself contributed the wide-echoing tones of her own voice, and appalled by the illusion of fire mounting up from a helmet that had no real existence, Hector and all his companions retreated; and the corpse of Patroclus was safely carried to Achilles’ feet.

Meanwhile the Trojans held a great conference outside the city’s walls, and the wise Polydamas, the son of Panthous, strongly advised them to rest in their gathering place for that night, as darkness was not far off.

“Let us,” he implored them, “draw back now and take our rest. I tell you, my friends, this appalling son of Peleus is far too masterful to stay near his ships, content with fighting us there. It is for our city he will fight and for our wives! So let us tonight keep all our warriors within this camp, for our city is guarded by its mighty walls and well-barred gates; but when morning dawns, let us enter the city and take our stand upon the walls.”

Furiously did Hector retort to the words of his friend, who was born the same day as he was: “Enter the city, do you say? Stand on the walls, do you say? No! No! No! A thousand times no! Tomorrow we will rush again at their accursed ships! And as to Achilles, by the gods, I will stand up to him face to face. And perhaps I shall be the winner and not he! Alike to all is Ares, when in his Enyalian mood he is only absorbed in killing killers!”

Thus spoke Hector and all the Trojans applauded — fools that they were! Pallas Athene must have turned them into idiots, to go on praising Hector, who was talking nonsense, and to pay no regard to Polydamas, who was giving them really wise advice!

Meanwhile the body of Patroclus was brought into the tent of Achilles.

“There shall be no burial for you, my friend,” swore the son of Peleus, “until I have brought here the head and the armour of Hector, yea! and have cut the throats before the funeral pyre of twelve of their best warriors in my wrath at your being dead.”

So speaking, godlike Achilles bade his comrades put a huge tripod on the fire so that they might wash from Patroclus all his blood stains. And they put the tripod on the fire and filled it with water and added more and more wood beneath it. Then, when the water boiled, they washed him and anointed him with oil, filling his wounds with ointment. And all night long the Myrmidons made lamentation for Patroclus. Nor by this time was Zeus ignorant of what was happening.

"You've had your way, ox-eyed Hera! Anyone would suppose that all these long-haired Achaeans were your own children!"

And Hera answered: "What a thing to say! Why, any mortal man does what he can for another man; then how wouldn't I, the wife of the greatest of the gods, do something against these Trojans?"

Meanwhile Thetis arrived at the astonishing house of Hephaestus, made by him for himself entirely of bronze. He was very busy when she arrived, and sweating hard as he worked with all his bellows. For he was making tripods that had golden wheels beneath them that they might of themselves enter any gathering of the immortals and then return as he chose to bid them, an absolute miracle to see! What I, the immortal Aether, never failed to note about each of these inventions of Hephaestus, in fact about every object in his house, was that it was endowed with a curious sort of consciousness and personality of its own. And I have often wondered how far this strange personality of inanimate things extends. No mortal, no immortal, can conceal his or her inmost thoughts and feelings from me. But I often confess to myself, though to nobody else, that the question as to how far individual objects of common use and handled daily by both gods and men acquire as time goes on, or perhaps possess from the moment when they are first made, a conscious personality of their own, comparable, though in a different degree, with what we ourselves possess as persons, is a recurrent riddle.

All speculation in the mind of Thetis, as she entered this extraordinary dwelling where such astounding creatures were being made, must have soon ceased to be speculation, for the personal life in these inanimate objects was so enhanced by the genius of Hephaestus that from illusion it became reality, and the thing in question, from being an object, became an entity. When she entered this unique abode she was at once greeted by the lovely wife of Hephaestus, Charis, who always wore about her shoulders a gleaming white veil.

"Wherefore," she cried, clasping her by the hand, "art thou come to our house, an honoured and welcome guest? This is most unusual, for you have not been wont to come. Follow me this way, that I may entertain you properly." Thetis followed her, and very soon Charis placed her in a silver-studded chair, beautifully carved, and with a lovely footstool for her feet. With a clear voice then did Charis call for her lord: "Come! Come! Quickly come, Hephaestus! Here is Thetis! Thetis has need of thee."

And from the midst of his anvils and bellows and bronze and silver creations, Hephaestus called back: "I will come at once! I will come at once! It was Thetis and Eurynome, daughter of backward-flowing Oceanus, who let me live with them for nine years, when my mother was ashamed of me because of my lame foot. With them, in those nine years, I made brooches and arm-bands and necklaces and ornaments of every kind, safely protected in that cave with the murmur and the foam of Oceanus always around me, a flood unspeakable." Thus speaking, he gathered all his tools together and put them away carefully in a silver chest. Then he sponged his sweating forehead and hairy chest and put on a tunic and came limping with his heavy body and thin legs to where Thetis was seated. As he came stumbling towards her, she noticed he was supported by tall, girlish figures made entirely of gold. These figures he had created to be his maidens and he so made them that they possessed, as everything seemed to do in this extraordinary abode, lively intelligence and capacity. When he reached

Thetis he clasped her by the hand, just as Charis had done, and begged her to say what he could do for her.

“Speak what is in your mind. My heart bids me fulfil it, if fulfil it I can, and if it be a thing that can be fulfilled?”

And Thetis couldn’t help bursting into tears as she answered him, for his voice had real kindness in it though his figure was so absurdly grotesque.

“O Hephaestus, Hephaestus!” she sobbed, “I tell you there’s no goddess in Olympus who has had to bear all the miseries and sorrows that the son of Cronos has thrust on me! It was wholly against my will that I had to endure being ravished by Peleus. I tell you I couldn’t bear it, a goddess of the foaming deep and a daughter of the Old Man of the Sea, to have to be ravished in the bed of a mortal man! The only girl my son ever loved was taken away from him, and now his only really devoted friend has been killed by Hector, who is now wearing my son’s armour which he had lent to this dead friend. In any case the *keer*, or death-fate, of my darling son dooms him to perish shortly. The day of his doom is to follow the death of Hector, who just now is glorying in his strength and in the slaughter of the Achaeans. That is why, O great Hephaestus, I have come to you. Yes, I have come to beg you to make for my dear child such armour as neither side in this wretched war has ever seen or will ever see! Yes, that is what I have come to beg and implore you, O great Hephaestus, to make for him tonight, so that I may dart down to him with them tomorrow morning at sunrise, helmet, shield and all the rest, which things, when he puts them on, will cause every Trojan now bringing fire to the ships to take flight to the city!”

Then the god with the strongest and most creative arms this world has ever seen, or will ever see, answered her at once.

“Cheer up! cheer up, dear silver-footed one! I will go to work at once, and such armour will you take to your son as the world has never yet seen, and never will see, until the end of time!”

So saying, he left her where Charis had placed her, and returned to his smithy. And he set his bellows, twenty in all, working at the fire. And on the fire he put bronze and tin and gold and silver, and he took in one hand a huge hammer and in the other the tongs. The first thing he set to work at was the shield. Upon this he depicted the Earth and the Sea and the Sun and the Moon and the Pleiades and the Hyades and mighty Orion and the Bear or the Wain that circles ever in his place and watches Orion and alone has no part in the baths of ocean. And upon the shield he also made two cities, each of them worthy to be described as, one day after three thousand years have passed, I, the immortal Aether, will inspire a poet, deeply influenced by my Homer, to describe them to all those mortals in those after-days who read his poetry. One city was partly full of dancers and flute-players and bridal feasts, with women watching the sport from their front doors, and partly absorbed in a desperate court-trial wherein the decision of the judges about the blood price of a murdered man was dividing the people into two opposing mobs. The other city was the scene of a great siege, both gods and men contending on both sides. To guard the walls of the besieged city were the dear wives and little children and old men too weak to fight, while the warriors of the city laid an ambush for the besiegers. But no ambush could stop the battle; for first on one side and then on the other three terrible beings were contending, namely *Eris*, or Strife, *Kudoimos,* or Tumult, and *Keer*, or the final Destiny of Death.

Then round the outskirts of the second city thus engraved and embossed on this enormous shield, Hephaestus allowed himself his full fling as a pictorial creator and described a perfect harvest scene with some farm-workers cutting the wheat with sharp sickles in their hands, and others binding what had been cut into bundles, while the King of the place stood in silent satisfaction, his sceptre in his hand, watching how one after another the sheaves were arranged in order. Meanwhile, beneath a neighbouring oak, the heralds were busy preparing a mid-day feast for the workers with the body of a newly sacrificed ox. Nearby he carved upon this huge shield a magnificent vineyard with its grapes already in heavy clusters, while in the midst of a group of young dancers and of maidens carrying the fruit in baskets there was one beautiful boy-singer whose privilege it was to sing the Linos Song, that beautiful lament for the death of the young god of Spring. Then, further afield, the great artist Hephaestus depicted herdsmen defending their flocks from a pair of murderous lions who had just dragged down an enormous bull who was mightily bellowing under the sharp claws of the savage beasts. Finally, round the whole rim of the shield, this perfect artist fashioned a mighty dancing floor like the one Daedalus once made for Ariadne. And here this great designer carved a lovely company of dancers, youths in exquisite tunics and maidens in white linen, beautiful chaplets on their heads, while the youths had golden daggers hanging from silver belts. And to make the dance more exciting, Hephaestus created two tumblers who whirled to and fro in the midst of them. And when the great shield was completed, he wrought for Achilles greaves for his shins of flexible tin and a splendid helmet with a crest of gold that shone as brightly as fire.

And all this Hephaestus laid before the feet of Thetis, and she without delaying a second longer in the House of the Lame Deity, flew down from snowy Olympus carrying all this precious armour in her arms.

BOOK XIX

DAWN WAS RISING crocus-yellow that morning from the streams of ocean when Thetis brought to her son this incomparable armour. She took her son's hand in her own.

"O my sweet child," she cried, "we must leave this man now to go the way of all flesh. But since you are alive and strong, look, look, look, I implore you, at the armour Hephaestus has made for you! For never in the history of man has such armour been seen; and never will the like of it be seen again."

And sure, when he saw these things and caressed them with his fingers, the eyes of Achilles blazed again with that terrible war-fury which before this had obsessed him. But when he answered his mother, he very quickly explained to her the thoughts that were now tormenting him. They were thoughts concerning what would happen to this body of Patroclus in the natural process of corruption.

"Flies," he cried to Thetis, "flies will gather round his dear precious wounds and give birth there to horrible worms that will feed upon my darling friend's corrupting flesh."

"Hush, hush, my dearest child!" said his mother calmly. "I swear to you I will myself see to it that though he lies dead for a whole year his precious flesh shall remain solid and whole — even better than it is at this moment! Behold now what I can do!"

Thus speaking, she injected through the nostrils of Patroclus ambrosia and red nectar, so that henceforth nothing could corrupt that beautiful flesh. Then did Achilles rush along the open space between the rampart and the ships, shouting in a terrific voice. And all the Achaeans heard him and an unbelievable strength and spirit swept through their veins. Even the pilots and stewards and oarsmen left the decks of the ships and followed him. And towards him came all the famous wounded leaders, limping and leaning upon their spears as if on crutches. Diomed came; and finally the great king Agamemnon himself came. And behold when they gathered about him, Achilles addressed them all in a thundering speech.

"O son of Atreus," he cried, concentrating upon Agamemnon, "can you and I feel any more that we were right to quarrel so furiously over this girl Briseïs, whom, captive of my spear though she was, I loved as if she were my wife? Would that amid the ships Artemis had slain her with an arrow, so that our quarrel had never happened!"

But Briseïs now came rushing to the side of the dead Patroclus; and when she saw how mangled and mutilated his body was, she uttered a series of wild shrieks and flung herself down beside him on the ground and began tearing at her own breasts and lovely neck and exquisite face.

"O Patroclus," she cried, "dearest of all to my unhappy heart! Thus for me doth evil ever follow hard upon evil! O I'll cry and cry and cry for thee and never cease; for thou wast ever so kind!"

This natural emotion of Briseïs made the great crowd of Achaean warriors who had gathered about them shudder, and the terrible tension of that moment none of them ever forgot; for there, in the eyes of all, Achilles was buckling on his blazing armour freshly brought him by his mother from heaven, and Agamemnon's heralds were dragging forth all the amazing offerings of gold and silver and bronze which the great king had sworn he would offer, along with his solemn and deadly oath, sworn by the very Styx itself, that he had not so much as touched Briseïs, far less ravished her. No sooner had Achilles buckled on his new armour and grasped the terrific spear of ash from the summit of Pelion, which Cheiron had given to his father Peleus and which he alone could wield, than Automedon, his charioteer, harnessed the immortal horses, Balius and Xanthus. Terribly did Achilles warn these two horses of his father not to return without him as they had returned without Patroclus. And then it was that Xanthus turned his neck, bowing his head so that his mane touched the ground.

“This time we will save you,” murmured the immortal horse, “but the day of your doom is nigh. It was not our fault that Patroclus was slain. It was Apollo, the son of Leto, who slew him, to give the glory to Hector.”

At that point the Erinyes made Xanthus’ voice to cease; while from a heart terribly stored Achilles answered him: “Why do you prophesy my death? I know well of myself that I shall never see my dear father and mother again. All the same for that, I’ll give these curst Trojans their fill of war!”

Loudly he shouted and drove those single-hooved horses forward.

BOOK XX

Speaking for myself, I, the divine Aether, soon found myself murmuring to myself within myself, “I have never liked the Goddess Themis. Whenever I talk about her with my only intimate male gossip, Notus, the South Wind, I am always able to convert him to feeling about her just as I do. She simply lives for councils, meetings, gatherings, committees, organisations, and so forth. We always find — and Notus agrees with me entirely in this — that whenever the Almighty Father wants a little help in making some difficult and delicate decision, instead of advising him to go to Athene if he wants to decide some fine point concerning the Achaeans or Danaans, or to Aphrodite if he wants to deal with some subtle issue with regard to the family of Priam, Themis will at once treat it as if it were incumbent upon her to give the god of all gods an elaborate lecture on order and arrangement and decency and carefulness and consideration when all he wants is a sensible woman’s lead in a certain direction.”

Well, on this occasion Themis decided that it was very important to gather together under the columns and pillars and colonnades and wide-reaching domes of heaven every remotest specimen of godhead and deity that could be found. She decided that there must be Nereids and Nymphs and Sylphs and Sylphids, and representatives of every fountain and stream and river and forest and cave in the whole world. On this occasion it was Poseidon, the Shaker of the Earth and the brother of both Zeus and Hera his wife and sister, who had the spirit to enquire why in the name of all the gods in the world had this gathering been summoned.

And Zeus answered without hesitation: “It is only that I was anxious to see, and am still anxious to see, what will happen if all you gods and immortal powers, whether male or female, plunge boldly into the fight down there, helping such as you want to help and destroying such as you want to destroy among the short-lived sons and daughters of mortal men. Meanwhile I shall remain up here in some pleasant mountain nook and delight my soul with watching all that happens.”

As he had encouraged them to do, so all the gods did, and terrific was the tumult. Nor did the divine Father remain in any way a passive spectator in a peaceful nook above them all. He thundered terrifically from above, while Poseidon, who had rushed down to the depths of the sea, caused appalling earthquakes to rock the earth and to shake the roots of all the peaks of many-fountained Ida. And even in Tartarus, in the depths below all depths, King Aidoneus leapt up in terror from the throne, for he feared lest these earthquakes should reveal to all the world the abominable and loathsome secrets of his dark and horrible kingdom.

Achilles had not been long fighting in his old desperate manner in the bloodiest part of the field when Apollo hurried up to Aeneas in a manner that was totally unworthy of the occasion and of both these renowned combatants. He compared their immortal mothers.

“Your mother,” he reminded Aeneas, “is Aphrodite, the daughter of Zeus himself, while his is only a Nereïd, Thetis, the daughter of the Old Man of the Sea.”

But when Aeneas found his way to the front of the battle and placed himself in the path of Achilles, there ensued quite a dignified exchange of words between them. But this soon ended in a desperate flinging of both their gigantic spears at each other’s tremendous shields. But Poseidon had his eye on this sublime encounter and he appealed to Hera and Athene. But they refused to do anything about it.

“Whether you,” said Hera, “decide to save Aeneas or to let him be slain by Achilles must remain your own affair. Pallas Athene and I are not going to have anything to do with it.”

So Poseidon decided to save Aeneas alone by himself. This he accomplished very surprisingly and in a most unusual manner. He began by shedding a mist upon the eyes of Achilles. Then he extracted the great Pelian spear from the shield of Aeneas, where it stuck fast in the layer of gold. Then he planted the spear before the feet of Achilles, so that he would see it the moment the mist had gone from his eyes. Then he seized Aeneas in both hands, whirled him round his head and flung him high into the air, and not only high but a very considerable distance. In fact he flung him so far that when he came to earth and was on his feet again, Aeneas found himself clean out of the fight and in the camp of the Caucones, who had not yet finished putting on their armour to prepare for battle. Then it was that Apollo drew nigh to Hector and commanded him, with a voice that Hector recognised at once, to draw back and not to rush forward and face Achilles; and Hector, knowing full well who it was that was speaking, experienced a spasm of natural fear and did what the god suggested. But I, the immortal Aether, watching very carefully all these events, could clearly see from my insight into the future that it would not be long before the “sweet war-man”, Hector, as well as the mighty Achilles himself, would follow Patroclus into Hades.

But when Hector realised that what Achilles was now doing was pursuing Polydorus, the youngest son of Priam and Priam’s favourite among them all, he felt that he could not restrain himself from intervening. Priam would never allow Polydorus to enter any fight; but Polydorus was the quickest runner and lightest on his feet of everyone of the family, and he had a boyish delight in showing off his speed in running: so that now, though he was not armed, he couldn't resist tantalising and teasing the Achaeans by running at top speed up and down the ranks and in and out of the battle. He was doing this when Achilles caught up with him, for Achilles was as swift on his feet as he was, and flung his spear at his back as he went dancing past and hit him in the waist where the clasps of his belt were fastened. This did for the boy. All his bowels came pouring out and, clasping them with both his hands, the luckless youth fell moaning and groaning to the ground.

When Hector saw his young brother perishing thus with his bowels clutched against his body, he naturally could not refrain from defying the killer. His defiance was exactly what Achilles had desired beyond all else.

"There, there, there you are!" Achilles shouted; "you, you, *you*, who slew the noblest heart that ever breathed upon earth! O I rejoice to see you! For now you shall learn your life's lesson! Draw near, draw near, that you may know what death and destruction mean!"

Quietly, and wisely, and calmly, Hector replied to this angry challenge.

"Son of Peleus, I am not a child to be frightened by shoutings and threats and grand words. I know well of myself how to utter threatening abuse when called for, and also how to utter decent and proper talk. I know very well that you are valiant and I know very well that I am weaker than you. Yet the issue of all this lies on the knees of the gods whether I, albeit weaker, shall rob you of life with a cast of my spear."

It was at this moment that I, the divine Aether, intently watching what would happen, saw Athene turn back the spear Hector had thrown; and saw Apollo snatch up Hector and shroud him in thick mist. Into this thick cloud of mist I saw Achilles make four deadly stabs. And when he saw how futile his blows were he cried out in a terrible voice: “You dog! You dog! You’ve escaped me this time! But wait a little and you’ll see!”

Then there occurred an event in which I, the all-seeing Aether, longed to play a part. Not often do I feel any pity for these strutting and boasting young warriors, killing and being killed. But on this occasion there was something about the way in which young Tros, the son of Alastor, flung down his shield and spear, and kneeling before Achilles with his slender boyish arms round the other’s knees, implored him to spare his life, since, so the young man declared, they were about the same age — something, I confess, in this scene, which made me long to use one divine shaft of Olympian light and strike the proud son of Peleus through the heart. Tragic little fool this young warrior certainly was. Couldn’t he see that this famous Being towering above him, gloating in his power of killing him, was as totally devoid of natural human feeling or remorse or pity or any sort of magnanimity, as the stony gravel beneath the feet of the one and the knees of the other?

The painful scene did not, however, last very long. Whether the killer knew anything about our physical interior I don’t know, but I could have sworn he thought that what would make the death of his victim especially unpleasant for him would be if he could disembowel him as he had done recently with the swift-footed Polydorus. He succeeded almost as well with this young warrior supplicating for mercy, for he smote him not with his spear but with his sword. And he must have given this weapon such a clever little twist as he delivered the blow that out came the victim’s liver, and the dark blood oozing from his liver was the last thing Tros felt before he perished.

It was not any lust for witnessing bloodshed that led me on to follow Achilles when the hour arrived at which I generally return to my home in the sky. It was a desire to see if this extraordinary person had any humanity in him at all. It was also a desire to discover, if I could, the actual motive that drove him on and on and on, though by this time Hector had been saved from him by Apollo and all the Trojans were fleeing from the ships towards the city. Was his motive simply to kill as many of the enemies of the Danaans as he could, so that when the final struggle came, as everybody knew it would have to come if Helen was to be taken home, the capture and sacking of the city could be accomplished more easily if the number of its defenders had been materially lessened beforehand? The ferocity with which Achilles fought, now that Hector for a time had escaped him, was unprecedented in this war, though it certainly had its parallel in our psychic calendar of horror.

But I, the immortal Aether, would hesitate to say that Agamemnon, or Ajax Telamon, or Odysseus, or even Diomed himself, ever fought with quite the same murderousness. But of course we must remember that these others were much older than Achilles, nor had they anything approaching him in speed of foot and rapidity of movement. One blow of the sword by Achilles was enough to finish off quite a stalwart fighter. When, for instance, he hit Echeclus, the son of Agenor, on the head with his sword, we should pause to consider for a moment the difference between what such a weapon would encounter in a person's skull to what it would come upon in the interior of a man's guts. In this particular case all the blade grew warm with the man's blood while upon his eyes fell black death and irresistible fate. And again, in the case of Deucalion, there is incredible ferocity in the exaltation with which Achilles cut off the man's head and sent it whirling into the air. I, the divine Aether, witnessed this myself and I shall never forget the sight of it.

Few of us, I reckon, have ever seen a man's head cut off at a stroke and sent spinning for many a yard! It really became at last almost unbearable. I tried to make Homer think of some comparison: it was as if some whole mountain-side had grown so parched by the lack of rain that it had waxed inflammable as tinder-wood, and then when a spark from somewhere set it ablaze and an eddying wind whirled, the flame burst in one direction and then in another and the whole side of the mountain was transformed into a burning city. To see these luckless Trojans fall under the ferocity of Achilles was like looking at white barley on a threshing floor being trodden by bulls. By this time not only all the tracks where he had driven were soaked in blood but the axle of his chariot and every rim and plate belonging to it was bloody too.

And I, the immortal Aether, had found out what I sought, for I now knew that the sole motive that made this man cake his hands with blood was his insane love of glory. Yes, although I, the immortal Aether, have known human brutality, meanness of mind and hardness of heart for millions of years, I have never known any human being less kind, less considerate, less philosophical, less indulgent, than this pride-besotted son of Peleus. His secret thoughts are much more easy to read than those of Agamemnon or Ajax or Diomed, and twenty times easier than those of Odysseus. And why? Simply because, at bottom, this man is unbelievably stupid.

The wild grief of Briseïs over the corpse of Patroclus was a real revelation to me. With a woman's subtle instinct she divined at once that Achilles' feeling for her was just pure unmitigated masculine lust; whereas a thousand subtile magnetic currents indicated to her what an extraordinarily happy life any intelligent and discerning girl could have had with Patroclus. I saw it all in a flash when I saw her wailing and moaning and rending and tearing her own flesh by the side of that unconscious form. Briseïs was deeply in love with Patroclus.

What a tedious and uninteresting life the wife of Achilles would have led! The sole purpose of his existence was to win glory for himself. He was not interested in science like Hephaestus. He was not interested in the government of men like his father. He was not interested in all the magical secrets and under-sea mysteries familiar to all the Nereids in the caves of the Old Man of the Sea. To be known by everybody a hundred thousand years hence as the swiftest runner and strongest spearman who ever lived, *that* was all he wanted! Glory, glory, glory! And to gain this he was ready to soak himself in blood.

BOOK XXI

With what delight did I, the immortal Aether, watch the mad attempt this proud and stupid son of Peleus now began to make to win a successful fight with the River Scamander. I knew he was a fool but I never dreamt his folly could go so far as to think that with his precious sword and picture-graven shield he could scare a great rushing foaming river to submit to him! What naturally especially interested me, who am an Elemental Being myself, was the attitude of the great River to the desperate struggle that ensued between them. The River whirled furiously along, sweeping out of every cranny of its depths with one huge rushing wave after another, all the dead bodies of the men Achilles had been slaughtering. But I noted with such joy and pride, for it showed how much more kind and considerate we Elemental Beings are than a crude, stupid, glory-maniac like this man, that the great River rescued every living person it could find and hid him among its estuaries where this slaughterer couldn't find him. It was the speed of Achilles' legs and feet, rather than the strength of his arms or the might of his sword or spear, that now saved his life. The River Scamander grew more and more furious with this man, who was as fast-footed as its streams were fast-flooded, and suddenly raising itself up in a towering wave it shouted splashingly to its brother, Simois: "Dear brother, let us stop the rush of this inconceivable fellow. If we don't do something soon he'll lay waste the city of the Trojans altogether! Come, brother, help me now with real help. Fill your streams with water from your springs. Arouse all your torrents! Raise such a terrific wave and such a wild rush of tree trunks and rocks and stones that it will sweep the man away. I swear to you, brother, that if we join our streams together we can yet outmatch this blasted wretch. I don’t believe his strength can sustain itself against the rush of our waters, nor his beauty against all we fling in his face, and I can now see that amazing armour of his lying beneath our streams and covered over with slime; yes, and his body will I wrap round in sand and shingle; nor shall they know where to find his bones, such a welter of silt will pour over them. Here, here, here shall be his funeral! Nor through all the centuries to come shall a heaped-up mound cover his remains!”

But Hera, seeing this from Olympus, was seized with fear lest the great river, with the help of its brother-river, should sweep the son of Peleus to his death. And so she cried out to her son Hephaestus, the God of Fire, the only great elemental force in the cosmos — unless the endangered one should appeal to me, the everlasting Aether — capable of dealing face to face with all the rivers in the world except Oceanus, that more than river who is the grandfather of us all!

“Hephaestus! O Hephaestus, my darling clubfooted child, so lame, but yet so wise and scientific! Come quick to the rescue. Come to save our great Achilles from being drowned and buried and lost for ever in the sand and shingle at the brink of this sea!”

So spoke Hera, his mother, and Hephaestus did exactly what she bade him do. Very soon all the slopes at the foot of the mountains were blazing with fire. The whole forest was blazing. The whole mountainside was burning. And all the reeds and rushes near the river, along with the elms and willows and tamarisks that grew by the little eddies and muddy estuaries where wriggled the eels and swam the small fish, were all smouldering with fire. It was then that Ares could no longer endure to see such a sight, and he rushed at Pallas Athene with his spear and actually dared to strike with his spear at the tasselled Aegis which she wore upon her breast. Lightly laughed Athene and promptly seized with her mighty hand a huge black jagged stone that must have been a mark at the end of one neighbour’s land and the beginning of the next. With this stone she smote furious Ares on the neck and loosed his limbs, so that he fell back and lay upon the ground the length of seven roods and his hair was befouled with mud. But Aphrodite rushed to his aid and lifted him up and tenderly began to lead him forth from the battle.

It was then that Hera from Heaven cried aloud to Athene: “Don’t you see that this dog-fly is leading our enemy, Ares, out of the fray? After her! After her! After her! And let her feel your strength!”

So she spoke, and Athene was delighted at heart to obey. And she smote Aphrodite between the breasts with her mighty hand, so that the goddess of beauty and love fell helplessly down to the ground beside the massive body of Ares, the God of War. And then, over the forms of both of them, as they lay there upon the earth side by side, the exultant Athene chanted a paean of victory. “If it hadn’t been for this ridiculous helping of Trojans,” she chanted, “long ere this we should have ceased from war, having laid Ilios, the well-built city, level with the dust!”

It was then that Apollo and Poseidon began to discuss, lightly, carelessly, indifferently, cynically, the question whether they would gain any real advantage by setting out upon a long battle with each other. Poseidon it was who called upon Apollo to begin the fight, since he was the younger.

“Don’t you remember,” Poseidon demanded of him, “how you and I were sent by Zeus to serve Laomedon, King of Troy, and how, when we had done everything for him and had built that mighty wall complete round the city of Troy, the liar Laomedon defrauded us of our wages? For a whole year, O far-shooting Apollo, were we ordered by Zeus to serve the princely Laomedon; and while you built him a wall round Troy I looked after his flocks and herds on the rocky and woody slopes of Mount Ida. And when we asked for our wages he threatened to bind our hands and feet, and to sell us, thus bound, to the rulers of unknown islands on the far-off margins of the world.”

Then answered him Apollo the far-shooter.

“O mighty Shaker of the Earth, I can tell you one thing. You surely would be engaged in a job more natural to your person and your strength if you were guarding cattle on the mountains than if you were warring with me for the sake of these contemptible mortals, pitiful creatures, who, like the leaves, are at one moment full of life and the next are perishing miserably. Nay my friend, let you and me cease from strife with each other and leave these wretches to fight without our aid!”

So saying he turned his back and began moving away. But his sister rushed forward and railed at him.

“Fool,” she cried, “why do you carry a bow and arrow if you daren’t use such weapons? Listen to me — to me, your sister Artemis, queen of the wild woods and the wild beasts. Didn’t you boast in the halls of our Father that you would stand up to Poseidon and have no fear of him?”

But though her brother Apollo answered her no word, she soon found herself answered. The great Queen of Heaven, Hera, her very self, came striding down and faced her, and Artemis sought to flee. But Hera, smiling while she did it, seized both her hands with one of hers and snatched her quiver from her neck and beat her with it about the head, turning her this way and that way, while the swift arrows fell from the quiver to the earth, until Artemis fled weeping, leaving on the ground her bow and all its arrows. Leto, her mother, was soon on the spot, gathering up the discarded bow and scattered arrows, and, as she did so, she found herself confronted by clear-shining Hermes. But he soon told her that he had not the faintest intention of fighting with her, so all she did was to pick up her daughter’s bow and arrows and carry them away.

Meanwhile the maiden Artemis flew to Heaven and flung herself on the knees of her Father Zeus, while, as she clung to him crying pitifully, her fragrant robe rippled above the spasms of her trembling frame. The great son of Cronos clasped her to him, smiling tenderly at her agitation.

“Who, my dear child, has hurt and upset you to this tune?”

“Your own wife,” she sobbed, “even white-armed Hera, from whom is always arising the worst strife from which we suffer!”

But Achilles was now slaughtering the Trojans and driving them before him in flight, till both he and they came near to the city walls. Then King Priam, who was watching all this, came down from the city wall and bade them open the city gates, so that the great flood of fugitives, fleeing from Achilles’ blooddripping spear, might enter the city. Parched with thirst were all these fleeing Trojan warriors and soiled with dust; and Achilles as he pursued them exulted more and more in his heart, thinking of nothing except the glory he was winning and of the exquisite delight he found in slaughtering men who dared not stand up to him, but whom, swift-footed as he was, he could easily overtake as they fled in their wild panic.

With the gates wide open by Priam’s order, Achilles might at that moment have anticipated the future and, rushing into the city, have taken possession of it. But it was then that an unexpected event occurred. Phoebus Apollo suddenly became aware of the presence of Agenor, the son of Antenor, who was leaning against the trunk of the oak-tree that was not far from the Scaean Gate. Apollo, who had veiled himself in thick mist, came close up to him, anxious to see what he would do. The far-shooting god couldn’t himself read his thoughts, nor could he influence the course of those thoughts. But he had a vague instinct that his presence, being as sympathetic as he was to the Trojans, might put courage into him as they both watched this pitiful flood of fugitives followed by the exultant spear of Achilles thirsty for this wholesale slaughter to continue till there was not a man of them left. And the mind of Agenor, son of Antenor, swung to and fro in indecision: “If I flee with the rest, Achilles will probably overtake me and slay me in my cowardly flight. But if I fly now in a totally different direction, should I not be able to hide in one of those thickets or glens or gorges of Mount Ida? But suppose he notices as I turn thus from the city towards the plain? Will he not pursue me, and, being as swift-footed as he is, will he not overtake me? If he does I certainly shall not escape death and the fates, for is he not the mightiest of all the sons of men? Well then, what if I boldly confront him, with spear and sword? His flesh is not the flesh of a god. It can be pierced by an ordinary spear of bronze. And why should it not prove to be my destiny to slay him rather than to be slain by him? Who can tell in advance what fate will cause to happen?”

So Agenor, the son of Antenor, refused to flee, but he held before him a perfectly balanced shield, and pointing his spear at Achilles he challenged him boldly and defiantly.

“So you think you are going to take and destroy the city of the Trojans? Here are we that shall guard Ilios. It is you yourself, yes, you and no other, who shall now meet your doom, terrific warrior though you are!”

Shouting this defiance, he hurled his spear at Achilles. The spear missed him not, but struck him on the shin below the knee, and the greave of newly wrought tin that Thetis had brought from the workshop of Hephaestus rang sharply with a shrill noise under the blow. And then, on his side, Achilles raised his spear, went furiously at Agenor, and no doubt would have slain him if Apollo had not intervened. Apollo covered Agenor with thick mist, while he himself in the likeness of the man fled across the plain towards the foot-hills of Ida. Fiercely did Achilles, the sure-footed, pursue him; but Apollo, in the likeness of Agenor, was so crafty that he ran unevenly, giving Achilles the idea every few minutes that he was bound to overtake him.

And while those two were running thus towards Ida, the fleeing crowds of Trojans entered the Scaean Gate, which King Priam had caused to be opened wide.

BOOK XXII

IT WAS NOT long before Apollo decided that he had fooled Achilles far enough. So he turned upon him and in a few words made it clear to his pursuer that, swift as he might be on his feet, he could not expect to overtake an immortal god. Furiously then did Achilles turn upon Apollo and abuse him: "And so you've beguiled me again, have you, you trickster in heights and depths! Now have you robbed me of great glory.

O how I'd love to avenge myself on you, if only I could!"

With this he left him and rushed back wildly towards the walls of Troy. And Priam, the old king, saw him approaching, as anyone can see the star we call the Dog of Orion gleaming in the darkness of night. And the old man groaned and beat upon his head with his hands; and when he saw that his son Hector was standing waiting outside the gate leaning upon his spear, he stretched forth his arms towards him in a piteous appeal, beseeching him not abide the coming of the son of Peleus.

"Have pity on me, my son, my son, and enter the gate! If this man — and he's as cruel as he is mighty — takes your life, what shall I do, your aged father? It's all very well for young men to give their lives for their home, but when it comes to dogs devouring the bleeding bodies of old ones like me, dogs that may well belong to my own kennels, there's something horrible and ghastly in it, something unnatural and shocking.

I tell you the nakedness of an old man left to the dogs on his own floor is a horrible thing to see!"

As he pleaded thus with his son, he began clutching at his own white hairs and pulling them, in his frantic emotion, out of his head. And out of the gate to their side came Hecabe also, wailing and pleading.

"O my son! my son! my son!" she cried, and as she cried she actually tore aside the robe from her body and showed her breasts to Hector.

But neither the prayers of his mother nor the beseeching and passionate tears of his father could move Hector to change his mind.

"There he comes, this cruel devil," he said to himself, "with the one fixed desire in his whole nature, in his body, in his mind and in his soul, *to get glory by slaughter*. No, no! Why should I turn away from him and not face him? Not the wisest prophet among us really and truly knows what is going to happen. Perhaps I shall kill him rather than he kill me!"

Thus he thought in his heart, but so terrifying did Achilles look as he came rushing towards him that, in spite of his courage, his imagination turned this simple-minded brutal killer, with nothing in his brain but a frantic lust for getting glory through slaughter, into a figure of superhuman greatness and of gigantic superhuman power. A fit of mad terror seized him; and there, straight away, in the presence of Hecabe and Priam and of his dearest comrades, he took flight round the city walls. Achilles was after him in a second, and round and round the walls the two of them ran, Achilles gaining by the natural-born swiftness of his legs and feet what he lost by the demonic spasm of panic fear in his rival's soul. Four times they encircled, those two, the walls of Troy, with not only the victim's parents watching this appalling contest, but a large group of Hector's Trojan comrades. Past all the familiar landmarks that had made a background for the historic encounters of a thousand years those men ran.

But they ran in a race whose prize was anything but the same for both. For the one it was the supreme clutch of the special kind of glory he longed for most in the world. For the other it was the more simple matter of life and death. Did any of the landmarks they passed realise what this race meant? Did the ancient fig-tree with its leaves blowing in the wind have any notion of what was happening? Did the two springs of the eddying Scamander, one with water so warm as it gushed from the earth that a misty steam rose from it, and the other so ice-cold that it might have been crossing snow, realise what was happening?

This life and death race was not only watched by Hector's parents and dearest friends. It was also watched by the gods above. Zeus himself, the Father of the immortals, looked down upon it with a pity he could not repress.

"Let us take counsel together," he cried, "and think if there is any way we can save Hector's life."

"What are you saying, great lord of darkness and light?" cried Pallas Athene. "Are you thinking of rescuing a mortal man like this, doomed long since by Moira and *Keer*? Yes, fated, as he knows, and as we all know, to a destiny as irrevocable as that night should follow day? All we gods, I tell you, great Being though you are, will oppose such a mad action as this!"

The Father of them all yielded with a smile and a jest to these solemn words: "So be it, Tritogeneia, dear child. Have it your own way. I was only expressing my feelings of the moment."

Hearing this, Athene plunged hurriedly down to earth.

While the two were running this deadly race it suddenly entered the head of Achilles that some Achaean warrior — for by this time quite a few Greeks had reached the great gates of the city — might throw a spear at Hector as he ran past and snatch, at this last minute, this precious glory, which was the one thing for which he cared most in the world, especially now that Patroclus was gone — snatch it away from him just at the second it was his. So as he ran he made a warning gesture to these compatriots commanding them to hold back.

Meanwhile Athene made Achilles pause in his pursuit.

“Stand where you are,” she bade him, “and I will see to it that the man stops and faces you.” Taking therefore the form of his brother, Deïphobus, Athene laid her hand on Hector. “Stop, my dear, and you and I together will face this terrible man.”

And Hector stopped as he was bade, and spoke gently to him.

“Deïphobus, my dear, you have always been my best-loved brother of all the sons of Hecabe and Priam; but never have I felt for you what I feel now, as, refusing to enter the gates, you are ready to stand up with me against this man.”

And thus, when Achilles came near, Hector boldly addressed him in the following words.

“No longer, Achilles, will I flee from thee. My spirit bids me face thee, whether thou art destined to slay me or I thee. But come hither; let us call the gods to witness our covenant that our fighting shall be fair and square, free from all tricks and devices. I will do unto thee no foul despite, if Zeus grant me strength to take thy life. But when I have stripped from thee thy glorious armour, I will give thy body back to the Achaeans, and so do thou give my body back to Priam and Hecabe.”

But Achilles, as I, the divine Aether, knew all along, for I have read his inmost feelings from the beginning of his life, and I know well that a less generous, less kind-hearted, more mean and malicious soul than his no warrior on either side possessed, in spite of his being the swiftest and strongest of them all... but Achilles, as I say, out solely to get the glory of killing Hector, answered just as I knew he would.

“Talk not to me, Hector, thou madman, of covenants! As between lions and men there are no oaths, nor do lambs and wolves make covenants. No more is there any escape for thee. Now shalt thou pay back all I have felt for the comrades of mine that thou hast slain."

He spake and hurled his spear. But Hector, looking straight at him, avoided it so that it sank into the earth. But Pallas Athene pulled it out of the ground and, quite unseen by Hector, gave it back to Achilles. And Hector spoke in fearless defiance: "Now, in your turn, boastful one, see if you can dodge my spear. Would all of it were in your flesh, for war would be much lighter for us Trojans if you were dead and cold!"

But his spear, when he threw it, rebounded uselessly from the Hephaestus-made shield of Achilles. Then did Hector stand baffled, for he had no second spear.

"O Deïphobus," he cried in a wild, pitiful voice, "lend me your spear!"

But he soon realised that the great city gates were closed and that his brother had withdrawn within the city walls, and it came over him like a flood that he was done for and that this was the end.

"But let me die like a man!" he cried. "Let me die in a way so memorable that my death shall come to the hearing of men as yet unborn!"

As I, the immortal Aether, heard these words, I could not help thinking how a couple of thousand years later I should hear the voice of a great poet who lived in that far-off western island, chanting tenderly of Hector and calling him "that sweet war-man". For there was in Hector, though not nearly as much as there had been in Patroclus, a vein of kindly human nature such as Achilles had never known and would never know. And O how hard I tried to make him remember all the blows in attack and all the motions in defence that go with the handling of a sword. And he *did* get them from me to an unexpected extent, as he now suddenly and violently drew from his side a sharp sword and rushed upon Achilles. But though he had been encouraged by his brother, and was even now being watched from the great wall above him by his parents, this final desperation of gallantry availed him nothing. He had no immortal goddess, as Achilles had, to help him when he was in danger of making a mistake.

"Could I, ought I, might I," I, the immortal Aether, thought in my heart, "save this unhappy man? O how dearly would I love to defy all the Powers he has against him! I would love to defy Hera and Athene who hate him so. I would love to defy every single one of these damned Greeks making cruel war on ground that is not theirs — and why? Simply because Helen, the most beautiful woman who has ever lived, decided that she had the right to choose, and entire justification in choosing, at her own free will, the man with whom she wanted to live. O how I would like to show up to all heaven and all earth what a mean, grasping, vicious, selfish, cruel nature this son of Peleus has! There is not a drop of kindness or mercy or pity in him! I know this unfortunate Hector through and through, and he has real love for Andromache and real love for his child Astyanax; but Achilles has never had a flicker of tenderness for anyone."

Thus did the immortal Aether ponder as Achilles and Hector met for the last time.

Achilles held off Hector's sword by aid of his round shield, while, moving the point of his spear to and fro, he wondered where in the flesh of his enemy was the most sensitive spot. Quickly enough he decided that it was his victim's neck that lent itself best to his spear; and so into the man's neck he savagely drove his weapon. He managed his blow so skilfully, however, that he did not pierce his victim's windpipe, so that though the man fell with a mortal gasp into the dust he could still speak.

"Hector," cried Achilles, exulting over him, "you did not think, did you, you bloody fool, that when you put on the armour of which you stripped Patroclus, you would still be liable to this death-blow which I rejoice to give you. Dogs and birds shall tear your flesh to fragments, but to Patroclus whom you slew all we Achaeans will now give a seemly burial."

Then spake to him Hector with his last breath.

"I beg and entreat thee, by thy life and thy knees and thy parents, that thou givest not my body to be devoured by dogs, but give it back to my home that the wives of the Trojans may burn it properly."

Then, bending over him in exultant fury, Achilles answered; and I, the immortal Aether, knew well, for I could read every feeling and every thought he had, what savage delight was convulsing his whole being:

"Implore me not, dog, by knees or parents! What I would like best to do would be to carve thy flesh myself and eat it raw! O no! dogs and birds shall devour thee utterly!"

Then, as he lay dying, Hector murmured: "I knew it, I foresaw it, for the heart in thy breast is of iron. But your day will come, boaster! At the Scaean Gate it will come; when Paris helped by Apollo will kill thee." Even as he spoke the spirit of Hector left his body and was wafted to Hades, leaving behind all it meant to be a hero in the prime of his youthfulness.

"Lie thou dead!" was his epitaph from Achilles. "My fate will I accept, when Zeus and the other immortal gods cause it to happen."

Then from the corpse he pulled oft' the shining armour stained with blood, and left the naked body on the ground; and one after another every Greek, who had come to stare at the dead, gave that naked form a prod with his spear.

And now must I, yes, I, the immortal Aether, make a serious confession; for though I have often sworn to the whole world that in the heart of Achilles I have never found one single flicker of human feeling, yet his speech now did indeed confound me; for I, who know all that goes on in people’s souls, *did* catch — yes, I confess it! — a genuine quiver of emotion as he uttered these words about Patroclus.

Thus did I, the immortal Aether, follow gesture by gesture, word by word, this history Homer was telling. I have never from the beginning done more to my precious Homer than inspire him and help him with all the insight I have by nature into the minds of mortals and immortals and of men and of women. It is Homer, not I, who is chanting this true history, event after event. But it is I, and I am proud that it is I, who can make him see the difference between a man like Hector and a man like Achilles, though he describes the deeds of both of them to perfection. What I, the immortal Aether, am now thinking about is what Achilles did to Hector after he was dead. Was all this just honest anger at the death of the excellent Patroclus, who clearly was, as our hearers have learnt from the emotion of Briseïs on his behalf, a far nobler man than either Hector or Achilles?

Listen, my friends, to the words of Homer, and judge whether my view of the character of Achilles is an exaggerated one. The son of Peleus invented a peculiarly foul trick on the body of his enemy. He cut the tendons of both Hector’s feet from heel to ankle and strung leather thongs through them which he fastened to the back of his chariot. Then he mounted the chariot and seizing the whip set the horses off at a gallop towards the ships. Not that the horses needed any lashing, for they were themselves extremely eager to get back to their stalls. But the purpose in the devilishly cruel mind of Achilles was well realized. The dust rose on each side of Hector as he was dragged along, and his dark hair swept the earth, and every kind of mud and rubble clung to it as it was jerked over the uneven ground. Hector’s father, King Priam, fell into a frenzy and struggled with his courtiers like a madman, so wildly did he want to follow Hector’s trailing corpse to the Greek huts. As for poor Hecabe, his mother, she tore off her gleaming veil and uttered cry after cry so dreadfully loud that her voice could be heard down many of the streets of the city. But unhappiest of all was Andromache, Hector's wife. She fell to the ground fainting, her head plunged in a swirl of terrible thoughts, of which the thought of her child being an orphan lasted long after her swoon was over.

As a born piercer of human hearts, and therefore as a born understander of human sorrows, I, the divine Aether, feel that my precious Homer has described the feelings of Andromache better than I could have done. He followed his own instinct entirely. I was anxious to see if a man could comprehend what feminine souls so intimately know. And he did, he did! He went even further than I could have gone! He has described the fate of a fatherless boy with perfect understanding. Both Greeks and Trojans use the term "orphan" for a child who has lost its father, even though its mother is still alive.

"O Hector, Hector!" cried Andromache, "would to heaven my father had never begotten me! O Hector, thou art now departing to the House of Hades, deep below the earth, and thou wilt be no help to our little son! Even though he escape the rest of this wretched war, it will be no advantage to him to have been thy son. His lot in this world will be labour and sorrow, for others will possess his lands. To be an orphan divideth a child from the friends of his youth. Ever is his head bowed low and his cheeks bathed in tears. Longing for comfort he goes to his father's friends, plucking one by the cloak and another by the tunic, and of them that are touched with pity one holdeth forth his cup for a moment. His lips he wetteth, but his heart he wetteth not. And one whose mother and father yet live thrusteth him from the feast and scoldeth him with abuse: 'Get thee gone, wretched little poppet! No father of thine feasteth in our company!' O my Astyanax, and they called thee by that name in Hector’s honour, and now what art thou and what am I?”

BOOK XXIII

I, THE IMMORTAL Aether, must again confess, much as it goes against the grain to do so, that in Achilles' lament for Patroclus that followed his dragging the mutilated corpse of Hector to the outskirts of the holy spot where lay that sacred body, there was unquestionably real feeling. That there must have been reality in his emotion was proved forever, yes! forever, by the way my incomparable Homer deals with it. He may know less than I do about what goes on in human hearts, but what he knows he treats with an imagination, yes! and by all the gods, with an invention too, that leaves my realistic insight bewildered, confused, frustrated. Could I, could my friend Hephaestus, the God of Fire, could my friend Aeolus, the God of the Winds, have imagined what came into the mind of Homer to describe just here? I refer to the whole night spent by Achilles with the spirit of Patroclus. Only the greatest poet the world has yet known or ever will know, however long what we call Time lasts, could have imagined the scene or composed the words uttered by the spirit of Patroclus when, worn out by the way he had led all the Myrmidons in their wailings, and, even then, refusing to return, as each of the others had done, to his bed to rest, Achilles had lain himself down on the edge of the sea, where the waves broke quite close to the spot where he had stretched himself out to sleep, exhausted by those long hours of lamentation. And it was as he lay thus that the spirit of Patroclus appeared to him.

"You're asleep, Achilles!" the spirit cried out to him; "you're asleep and have forgotten me. Not while I was alive did you forget me: but now that I am dead you can sleep in peace! Bury me, bury me with all speed; that I may pass within the gates of Hades! Pity me, my dear! O pity me! For there are phantoms here that refuse to let me join myself with them beyond the River. Vainly, O vainly, do I wander in and out of the gates of Hades seeking rest and finding none. Give me your hand, I implore you, for nevermore shall I come back out of Hades when once I have been given my due of fire. Never more in life shall you and I sit apart from our friends and take counsel together. For me this accursed fate has opened its abominable mouth, the fate that was predestined for me from the moment of my birth. O! And another thing I must beg of you, if you will listen to me. Lay not my bones apart from thine, Achilles, but let them lie together; even as we were reared in your home, even so let one casket enfold our bones, a golden one with two handles; you know the one of which I'm thinking, the one the goddess your mother gave you!

Then in answer spoke Achilles: "Why, O head, dear to me beyond all others, are you come hither now, telling me just what I must do? But never mind why! I will do exactly as you bid me. But O I implore you, my dearest one, draw nearer so that, even though it be only for a moment, we may clasp our arms round each other and cry our hearts out!" So saying, he stretched out both his arms, but he found nothing to clasp. The soul of Patroclus vanished like a mist and sank beneath the earth with a twittering murmur. Then did Achilles leap to his feet and stride among his Myrmidon comrades, clasping his hands desperately together. And as he came he raised the wail of lamentation once again. And at that moment the fire-red curve of the rising sun came up over the sea; and when he saw it and knew that all his friends and all his Myrmidons were ready for Patroclus' funeral rites, he welcomed Meriones, the assistant of kindly Idomeneus, who hurriedly directed a squadron of mules and wagons and skilled woodsmen with axes, who speedily cut down a number of mighty trees and hewed them into logs.

Down to the seashore these logs were brought; and Achilles at once set to work to plan a great sepulchral mound or tumulus that should serve as the burial-place for Patroclus, and also for himself by Patroclus’ side. When the great logs brought down by the mule-wagons from the forests of Mount Ida had been heaped up near the mound designed by Achilles for both Patroclus and himself, Achilles was suddenly seized by the sort of contest, this way against that way in his heart, to which of all the Greeks he was the least subject. But this tug of emotions, even in his hard and selfish heart, was pretty extreme and very painful to him. The body of his friend was already covered by the beautifully trailing youthful tresses of as many young fighters among the Myrmidon lads as had gathered to share the lamentation. But so far he hadn’t shorn off the golden lock from his own head which, ever since he had left the house of his father, he had cherished with ritualistic care. For his emotional trouble was this; and bitterly did he feel it as he gazed out over the sea while the Myrmidons finished their work of collecting the logs and the branches and brittle kindling ready for the great fire. His father Peleus had sworn, and he in his youthful ardour had sworn with him, that when he returned from taking Troy and bringing Helen home with Menelaus, the mass of golden locks which waved from his forehead should be shorn off and offered to the River Spercheus, their familiar Thessalian home-stream. So, looking desperately over the wine-dark sea and bowing his head with a piteous bow to be forgiven his oath-breaking treason, he shore off the golden lock he had kept for the River Spercheus and placed it in the dead hand of Patroclus; and as they saw this all the Myrmidons gathered about the two of them, lifted up their voices and wept. But Achilles walked up to the side of Agamemnon and begged him to disperse the people to their several huts, all except those who were nearest and dearest to the dead.

"Nobody but you," he said to the King, "can make a crowd of watchers like this obey; but you can, and from my heart I implore you so to do." And what Achilles had begged of him Agamemnon did.

Then they heaped up the wood and made a pyre, a hundred feet this way and that way, and on the top of it they placed the dead man. And round him Achilles piled up the fat of many sheep and cattle, and he laid against the bier two-handled jars of honey and oil; and four horses he cast upon the pyre and with them the bodies of two favourite dogs. And this having been done he slew twelve Trojan prisoners who had been kept alive for this purpose. Then at length, when all was prepared, Achilles set light to the great mass, that the iron might of fire might range at large in it. And I, the immortal Aether, looking down on this terrible scene from the calm spaces of the sky, saw how the mad lust for glory in this son of Peleus mingled, like air and water, with the black smoke that swirled about the pyre he had built.

"Hail, Patroclus," he cried, "even in the House of Hades. For now I am bringing all to pass which formerly I promised thee. Twelve among the bravest Trojans shall this fire along with thee devour; but as to Hector, son of Priam, him I will not, no, never, never, give to the fire to devour! Him I will give to dogs!"

So he spoke in his insane pride: but Aphrodite, the daughter of Zeus, kept the dogs from Hector by day and by night, and with oil, ambrosial and rose-sweet, she anointed him, and over him Phoebus Apollo drew a dark cloud from heaven and covered the place where the body of Hector lay, so that the heat of the sun as it shone upon him should not injure that helpless form.

But meanwhile the enormous pyre built so high for Patroclus could not be persuaded to burn. Going apart from the rest Achilles prayed a desperate prayer to the North Wind and the West Wind. Beautiful Iris, the messenger of the immortals, heard him praying and she hurried to the palace of the West Wind, wherein the North Wind and the children of all the winds were feasting. The second they saw Iris enter they all rose up and each one of them prayed her to sit down at their feast. But she refused to sit down, and lifting up her voice she earnestly uttered that familiar falsehood which Hera herself had made use of before now, namely that she had to go at once to the stream of Oceanus in the land of the Ethiopians where they were sacrificing hecatombs to the immortals; but she implored them to go to the help of Achilles, who could not make the great fire of Patroclus burn with the hoped-for blaze. But when she had departed they arose tumultuously and did exactly what she had implored them to do. They whirled the sea up into tumultuous waves, and with a terrific rush of a swirling tempest they fell upon that enormous Patroclean pyre with such force that the flames went roaring upwards as if they were going to lick the sky.

And all night long Achilles poured wine upon the earth as he went lamenting round the pyre of his dead friend. But at the moment when the morning star appeared as herald of our crocus-coloured dawn the flames grew faint and finally died down. And although, as the winds returned to their home over the Thracian sea, they made the waves roar again as they had done at their coming, exhaustion seized upon Achilles and he lay down on the ground and in a second was fast asleep. But as fate willed it, he was not destined to sleep long. Soon the excited conversation eddying round and round the two sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus, roused him and he sat up.

“What we’ve got to do now, my good friends,” he cried, “is to collect the bones of Patroclus so as to be certain they are not mixed up with those of the other bodies there. Since, however, his were in the centre, we shall, I hope, have no difficulty in separating them. There’ll be no need to round off the tumulus now. Let us just leave it of moderate size, and then, when I am gone, you can finish it off and make it larger and seemly enough for both of us.”

But when the sun was high in the heavens Achilles announced solemnly to King Agamemnon and the rest of the leaders of the Achaeans that he intended to offer valuable prizes, including beautiful women skilled in exquisite handiwork, for all the winners in every sort of competition from chariot-racing to wrestling and throwing the “solon”, a meteoric stone composed of a mass of time-fused iron.

I, the immortal Aether, gleaming between Ouranos, the upper sky, and the *Aeer* or air, which like an atmosphere surrounds the earth and which seems, when compared with me, to be a sort of mist or fog or gloom, now decided that I would leave my darling Homer to describe these games in honour of the burning of the body of Patroclus, and the raising of his Tumulus or Mound or Barrow, after his own manner, totally uninterfered with by me. What I did not of course realise was what a large part in the real spectacle of races and every kind of competition is played by those onlookers who are watching the scene. Our Achaean and Danaan onlookers had as many contests in angry words among themselves as the competitors were having in their desperate struggles to win the prizes. This was especially the case in the chariot races, for several distinguished onlookers were really competing as hotly among themselves as to what they could see from their point of observation as the competitors. For instance, there was very soon a most angry battle of words between Ajax, son of Oileus, and

Idomeneus of Crete, an argument concerning what pair of horses they could see leading the rest in the great chariot race.

"Idomeneus," shouted Ajax, son of Oïleus, "how can you be such a shameless boaster? Can't you see better than that? Can't you see that the same mares of Eumelus are in the lead now as were leading when the race started? Here you are boasting loudly when there are much better eyes than yours watching this race!"

What made the chariot-race particularly exciting and liable to arouse these angry altercations in those who were watching it was the well-selected turning-point round which the chariots had to turn when they were at the height of the race. It was this turning-point which old Nestor described so carefully to his son Antilochus. Being able, as I, the everlasting Aether, am able, to survey the hearts of men and their competitions and pastimes as they were in the days of old and as they will be in the days to come, I took a good deal of interest in Nestor's lesson to his son, who had inherited no small amount of his father's wisdom and who listened intently, as indeed I did myself, to what old Nestor was saying. He began by describing the turning-point itself. This, he explained to Antilochus, is made up of a thick tree-stump which rises to the height of about a fathom above the ground. This tree-stump is either an oak or a pine, but whichever it is it has within it an unconquerable resistance to rain, and no amount of rain can make it rot. Two large white stones have been carefully induced to lean against it, and since it is the turning-point of the race there is quite a wide space of ground, beautifully smooth for driven chariots, all round about it. It may have been a monument to a man long ago dead. Or it may have been the turning-point of a chariot-race for some tribe of men centuries upon centuries ago, a tribe that is now entirely forgotten.

"Whatever its origin," old Nestor went on, talking to his son Antilochus, "when you reach it, as you drive your two horses in your chariot, lean a little yourself to the left of the horses, and to the off horse give the goad calling to him with a shout, and give him rein from your hand. But let the near horse draw close to the turning-point consisting of that tree-stump and those white stones, and let your chariot wheel pass it very very closely, but without quite touching it. And O remember, my dear son, if you can only manage to get round the turning-point before any of the others, there will not be a single chariot, however swift its horses and skilful its driver, that will reach home before yours."

The competitors in this chariot-race were Antilochus and Eumelus and Menelaus and Meriones and Diomed, the son of Tydeus. And it was Diomed who arrived first, and after him Antilochus, and after him Menelaus, and after him Meriones. But Eumelus, the son of Admetus, finished last. He came in to the starting place dragging his chariot after him and driving his horses before him. And at this forlorn sight, I, the divine Aether, quickly perceived that even the hard heart of Achilles was affected with pity.

"Lo! in the last place," he cried aloud so that all might hear, "comes our best man, driving his horses before him! But come, let us give him a prize, as is meet: the second prize, for of course the son of Tydeus has won the first!"

But when, after thus addressing them, Achilles suggested that the mare of six years old with a foal in her womb, which he had offered as second prize, should be given to Eumelus, this was more than Antilochus could bear, though the Achaean crowd, swayed by pity for the loser, applauded it.

"No! No!" cried Antilochus, "the mare I absolutely refuse to give up! Let any man who tries to take her from me fight with me sword to sword and hand to hand!"

At that moment of excitement in every heart and of unusual agitation in the crowd, always sensitive to emotion, it certainly impressed me, the immortal Aether, to see how wisely and how calmly Achilles took this rebuff. He only smiled in the most genial way, and told Antilochus that it was quite all right for him to keep the mare; and then he turned to his friend, Automedon, and asked him to bring the corselet that he, Achilles, had taken from Asteropaeus; and when Automedon brought it, he handed to it Eumelus who received it gladly. But at that point Menelaus burst in, and in a fierce temper was he. And I, the eternal Aether, can well understand his wrath, for after all it was only by the subtle advice of his old father Nestor that Antilochus had rounded the turning-point with such extraordinary skill and speed that it was before Menelaus could catch up with him, though by the power of Aethe he would have overtaken him, had the race been a minute or two prolonged. What had really won the race was the wisdom of old Nestor and his exact and precise advice to his son as to getting round the turning-point.

But the anger of Menelaus scared them all, and it was a comfort to everybody when the gracious young winner of the second prize took the mare by her bridle and, leading her up to Menelaus, handed her over to him. And the heart of Menelaus was as glad as the ears of corn when a lovely dew is ripening them; and he spoke gently and warmly to Antilochus.

"I will cease from my anger against you," he said, "and I will give you the mare with the foal in her womb, which you won: and I do want you to know, and all the people here to know, that my heart is never over-haughty, never hard and overbearing."

With these words, he handed over the mare and himself took the shining cauldron. And Meriones took up the two talents of gold as the winner of the fourth place. But the fifth prize was left unclaimed, namely the two-handled urn. This prize Achilles himself carried through the crowd till he reached Nestor, and to him he gave it, saying: "Take this now, old sire, and let it be to thee a memorial of the burial of Patroclus; for thou wilt never see again, among the rest of us Argives, his dear face. I give thee this prize, unwon bywrestling or by javelin-throwing or racing, for grievous old age weighs upon thee."

So saying he placed the urn in his arms; and Nestor received it gladly.

It may be believed how gladly I, the everlasting Aether, welcomed Achilles' announcement that there would now be a boxing match, for nothing but a completely new competition could stop old Nestor's unending history of his triumphant winnings when he was young. But the boxing match was, now that it came, by no means so exciting as the chariot-race. Achilles introduced it by tethering before them all a six-year-old mule that was unbroken, which is the one beast, above all others, that is the hardest to break in. He also laid down before them as a gift to the defeated boxer a fine two-handled cup. No wonder there was a gift for the defeated as well as for the winner, for never have I, the divine Aether, listened to such terrifying boasting as was uttered by Epeius, son of Panopeus, as he held himself on high and looked round on everyone from beside the unbroken mule.

"I'll rend the flesh, I'll crush the bones," he boasted, "of the person who dares to box with me! Let his nearest relatives be at hand so that they can carry him off when I have pounded him to bits!"

So he spoke; and there was a deep silence. Then, alone of all the men present, Euryalus uprose to face him. Euryalus was a noble-looking man, whose grandfather, Talaus, had been to Thebes for the burial of Oedipus; and, when there, had worsted all the sons of Cadmus. So those twain stept into the midst of the place of gathering and fell to, their hands clashing in heavy blows. And the final blow, when it was delivered, was terrible to see. One absolutely deadly blow did Epeius give his adversary, and it was full upon the man's cheek. No more did Euryalus stand upright after that. As when, beneath the rush of the North Wind, a fish leapeth up upon the seaweed-strewn sand of a shallow estuary and the black wave hideth it, even so leapt up Euryalus when he was smitten. But the great-hearted Epeius lifted him up and set him upon his feet: and all his friends crowded round him and led him away, spitting out clotted blood and with his head hanging to one side and all confused and wandering in his wits.

Then Achilles made preparations for a yet more terrific contest, namely a wrestling-bout. For the winner in this he ordained that an enormous tripod to stand upon the fire should be got ready, a tripod worth twelve oxen. And for him that should be worsted he set in the midst a woman of manifold skill in handiwork; and she was prized at the worth of four oxen, just a third of the value of the tripod.

"Up now," cried the son of Peleus, "whatever twain ye may be, who wish to wrestle together!"

Then did the huge and powerful Ajax, son of Telamon, come forward, and along with him came Odysseus the son of Laertes; and these two tremendous ones, the former the stronger, the latter the more subtle, flung their arms about each other. They gripped each other with such power that it was like the joined rafters of a tall house which some very skilful craftsman has been working at so that he could have a home that really gave him shelter from the force of the winds. Their backs creaked; their sweat poured down; many a bloody weal appeared on their heaving shoulders. Neither could trip up the other and at last this uneventful tugging and straining between these two terrific heroes began to weary the spectators and get on their nerves. The two wrestlers themselves got weary of it: and finally Ajax murmured: “You try to lift me up into the air and I’ll try to lift you, and let Zeus decide between us!”

As he spoke, the great Ajax lifted Odysseus from his feet. But Odysseus had so many artful devices, even in such a downright exertion of strength as this, that he struck with his knee or his foot the under-part of one of Ajax’s knees, the part that the Greeks had learned to call *koleeps* — a queer word that may have come down from such sports as these, held in that part of the country, in far more ancient days. But from whatever source came the word, this pressure or this blow upon the koleeps of Ajax ended the struggle, for they both fell to the ground, Ajax backwards and Odysseus on his adversary’s chest. From this position the latter soon rolled off, and they lay both together prostrate in the mud. But in spite of this they soon began to get up and evidently were ready to begin all over again. But Achilles wisely came up to them and stopped it.

“You are both in pain,” he told them, “and it is clear to us that neither of you is better than the other. So get up, and you shall each of you have a first prize.”

Then Achilles brought out prizes for a foot-race; and again Odysseus offered himself, and his rivals on this occasion were two, Ajax, the son of Oïleus, and once more Antilochus, the son of Nestor. In a row they stood, these three runners; and the moment they started Ajax, the son of Oïleus, took the lead. His power of running seemed miraculous, so fast he went. Then behind him came Odysseus, and behind him, in the third place, Antilochus. It was soon clear to me, the divine Aether, that the crowd of onlookers wanted Odysseus to win, a desire which, when it was all over, Antilochus himself put into words. Fast, behind Ajax, Odysseus ran, and it must have struck everyone’s mind that, after his terrific wrestling bout with the other Ajax, he showed astonishing spirit to be able to compete in running at all. Nearer and nearer he got to Ajax, till at last his very breath touched the back of the other's neck, so that their rhythmic motion became like that of a beautifully girdled woman as she weaves, when she draws the rods towards her breast so that she can pass the spool with the woof-thread between the threads of the warp as they hang down.

As the three of them, still in the same order in which they started, drew near to the winning post, Odysseus prayed desperately in his heart to Athene to help him to win; and I, the divine Aether, was interested to note that, although his prayer was uttered in his heart in complete silence, Athene heard him and quickly and skilfully answered his prayer. Fate made it easy for her to do this, because at that moment they were passing in their race the place where Achilles had sacrificed and disembowelled several great bulls in honour of Patroclus. Into this foulness the son of Oileus tripped and fell, filling his mouth with filth. Thus it was that Odysseus won, and he took as his prize a silver mixing-bowl, the loveliest in the world, which had been made by the Sidonians, who surpass all in such work.

As for poor Ajax, he was still spitting out the filth as he grasped one of the horns of the great ox that was the second prize. I, the divine Aether, find myself often wondering whether the childish cry that the Achaeans utter when their feelings are hurt has come down to them from an earlier race who lived in Hellas long before them, or whether it was the presence, ruling over them, of a race of benevolent giants that evoked from them this childish little outcry; for certainly this "*O popoi!*" now uttered by Ajax suggests the protest of an infant. And evidently, as Homer tells us, when Ajax finished by saying that Athene treated Odysseus as a mother treats a child, there was quite a ripple of laughter from the crowd.

Antilochus must have thought within himself: “O popoi*!* Now they’re all in a laughing mood, what in the name of great Zeus can I say? I know it’s only polite to make some little speech, especially as I’m to get such a good last prize as a halftalent of gold.”

So for a moment he pondered, but then the wisdom he had inherited from old Nestor came to his aid, for it suddenly occurred to him that it was the organizer of these games and above all of this foot-racing match, who was the best runner of them all; and so he made a charmingly flattering little speech, pointing out to the laughing crowd that, while Ajax was only a little older than he was himself, Odysseus belonged to an older generation altogether, and it was astounding how vigorous he was considering his years: “so much so that he beats us all at this game, except always, of course, our incomparable Achilles.”

It was, of course, only I, the immortal Aether, who realized the intense delight with which this hard-hearted, incredibly selfish, grotesquely narrow-minded Achilles received this compliment. I feel that such delight as his ought to have made me sympathetic towards him, if only a little, for it certainly did show a positively boyish pride in the fact that there was not a man or a woman among all the citizens of Troy who did not know that this son of Peleus was the fastest runner at that time in the whole western world. His pleasure was shown in his reply to the polite little speech by Antilochus.

“Not in vain,” he cried to that young man, “shall your word of praise be spoken. Nay! I will add to your prize a half-talent of gold!”

This meant, since his prize as the last in the race of those three was already half-a-talent, that Antilochus went off happily with a whole talent of gold.

The next contest devised by Achilles in these dangerous games in honour of the dead Patroclus was one to which the onlookers soon put an end. I, the Aether, know very well, through my gift for reading men's hearts and minds, that Achilles proposed it with a secret hope that one or other of his rivals in arms might be slain or severely wounded in its performance. The reward he offered did indeed suggest what dark thoughts passed through his mind, for it was nothing less than the shield and spear of Sarpedon taken from him by Patroclus, and since Sarpedon was the son of Zeus, the offering of his shield and spear brought Zeus into it as much as the offering of a shield of Hector would have brought Priam into it. The crowd was evidently deeply shocked by what followed, though they interfered in time to prevent either of the spearmen from being hurt. The two spearmen who contested were none other than Telamonian Ajax and Diomed, son of Tydeus — in other words, the most formidable fighters, apart from Achilles himself, of all the Achaeans and Hellenic warriors. In this painful duel, naturally extremely distressing to every man who witnessed it — for here were the best fighters the Greeks had struggling to injure each other — Ajax, possibly not oblivious to the foolishness and indeed the wickedness of such an encounter, deliberately aimed at the other's shield which, with the help of the corselet beneath, resisted the spear. But the son of Tydeus made no attempt to pierce with his spear the great shield of Ajax. Instead of doing this he kept the point of his spear quivering and hovering above the shield, searching for a spot where he could reach his opponent's neck. The two of them had had three clashes already without a drop of blood being spilt, when the spectators felt they had had enough, and rushing forward, put a stop to that whole distressing contest.

The next piece of sport in these less than reverential and worse than lively contests was "throwing the iron", in other words a contest as to who could fling furthest a large block of iron. The curious adjective *autochoônos* applied to this heavy block of iron-ore, suggests that the thing may have been a meteorite. The words used by Achilles in his praise of this singular object suggest that whoever threw it furthest might keep it, and that, its size being so great, the winner would be able to extract from it iron enough to mend all the implements used on a farm. Polypoetes, Leonteus, Telamonian Ajax, and Epeius, one by one flung this massive meteorite; and the winner, who was Polypoetes, impressed the crowd so much by the distance he could hurl this enormous weight that there was more shouting and more cheering than for any other achievement in that whole sequence of games.

The next competition arranged by Achilles was in archery; and this indeed was a contest in which all human beings, as well as gods and goddesses, of all the tribes on earth, would naturally — and we have only to think of Leto, or Latona, mother by Zeus himself of Apollo and Artemis, to realize this — take a lively interest. For prizes in this game the first prize was no less than ten double axes, and the second prize was no less than ten single axes. The target was fastened to a tall ship’s mast stuck fast in the sand. It was a trembling pigeon tied to this mast by a string which was fastened to its foot. The first prize, Achilles explained to them, would go to him whose arrow struck the trembling pigeon; while the second prize would go to him whose arrow tore apart the string by which the bird was tied to the mast. Teucer and Meriones were the competitors. They took lots and shook them in a bronze helmet, and the first shot fell to the lot of Teucer. He missed the bird but cut the cord by which it was tied, and the bird darted up towards the sky and the cord dangled towards the earth. But the bird was still visible outlined against a cloud and Meriones snatched the bow from Teucer’s hand and with an arrow he had been holding in his own hand while Teucer aimed, he shot at the bird. The arrow struck the pigeon under its wing and fell at his own feet; while the bird, after settling for a second or two on the top of the mast with its head drooping, sank to the earth and died. Something about this event, whether the death of the pigeon who seemed so near escaping, or the rapidity of Meriones bow-shot or the strange fact that his arrow after killing the bird returned of itself to him and entered the ground at his feet, seemed to awe the crowd and they gazed at those two men with wonder.

Then, as the last act of the Games in honour of Patroclus, Achilles brought forth the prizes for javelin-throwing. For this contest there were only two competitors, wide-ruling Agamemnon and Meriones the heroic comrade in arms and esquire of Cretan Idomeneus, the son of Deucalion, the son of Minos. It was at this point that I, the immortal Aether, knew that the folk were weary and that the whole crowd longed for the end of the Games. I therefore felt immense relief when Achilles, who must have suspected what I knew, brought the thing politely to an end by offering Agamemnon one prize, a new cauldron embossed with flowers, and Meriones the other, a long-shadowing spear. And it was under my special inspiration that the exquisite cauldron was finally handed over to Talthybius, the herald.

BOOK XXIV

I CONFESS THAT I, the immortal Aether, was more surprised than I've ever been surprised before over what I now perceived, while the new day's dawn became a portion of my natural insight. I had always known how incalculable was the heart of Achilles, but what I saw now astounded me. I knew he would sorrow for his friend Patroclus; but I, who have pierced the hearts of both mortals and immortals as they never have been pierced before, saw that Achilles' sorrow surpassed any sorrow I have ever seen. Each of his comrades went home to his ship or to his hut to enjoy his supper and to sink into the sweetness of deep sleep. But in vain did Achilles turn as he lay, now upon his side, now upon his back, now upon his face. Sleep would not come. He could only think of his dead friend and of all they had endured and enjoyed together by land and sea. He could only think of him and weep bitter, bitter tears. Then he got up on his feet and walked wildly and desperately up and down the sea-shore. Then he yoked his pair of horses, tied the body of Hector to the back of his chariot and dragged it round and round the great Funeral-Mound, the upraised sign for all posterity. Then he lay down again in his hut, having brought the two sides of his nature, his love for his friend and his savage anger against the man who had killed him, a little closer together.

But never did Apollo desert Hector. He threw his golden aegis round him in such a way as to avert any disfigurement or mutilation or befouling. And Aphrodite, who hadn't forgotten the judgment of Paris when that beguiler of girls chose her in preference to Hera and Pallas Athene, persuaded Hermes Argeiphontes, the clear-shining one, to hide Hector's body. This proceeding was infuriating to the gods on the side of the Greeks, who were only waiting to rejoice at the destruction of the city of Troy. Nothing, however, was done for twelve whole days, and then at last Phoebus Apollo, weary of having to guard Hector's body from the wrath of Achilles, lifted up his voice upon Olympus and protested before all the immortals.

"Shame upon ye, O ye gods. Workers of evil are ye! Hector has always offered huge burnt offerings to you. And now, instead of giving his body back to his wife, you are allowing Achilles to deface and defile it for his cruel revenge! Why do you refuse to give his body back to his wife and his child and his father and his mother? He has always served you well and prayed to you and sacrificed on many altars to you and worshipped you in his heart, and this is how you forget him and let Achilles mutilate his corpse! I am ashamed of you, ye gods! It is the pitiless Achilles, whose heart contains no drop of mercy, whom you are glad to support. Achilles' heart is set on cruelty. He thinks only of eating his enemies. He is like a hungry lion that leaps among a throng of men or a flock of sheep, careless which it be, as long as he has his fill of flesh to devour and of blood to drink!"

Unable to resist the anger she felt, white-armed Hera cried aloud in her indignation: "Do ye dare, ye gods, to give equal honour to Hector and Achilles? Don't you know that, whereas Hector's mother is just an ordinary mortal, who suckled Hector at an ordinary woman's breast, Achilles' mother is the great sea-goddess Thetis, whom I myself fostered and gave to Peleus, whom we all loved, to be his wife. And don't you remember, you faithless one, their wedding feast, to which we all went, and to which you yourself took your lyre to delight them with music?"

It was then that Zeus himself, the cloud-gatherer, lifted up his voice against his wife.

“I am not attempting,” he declared, “to argue that Hecabe, the wife of Priam, is the equal of Thetis, the wife of Peleus. The one is mortal, the other immortal. But all the same, Hector has always been dear to us gods because of the constancy of his prayers to us and of his offerings on our altars. I wish one of you gods would call Thetis to come to me, that I might speak to her a word of wisdom and beg her to persuade Achilles to accept gifts from Priam and restore to him and Hecabe the corpse of their son.”

Taking this hint from the all-powerful Father, storm-footed Iris darted down to the sea, and midway between Samos and Imbros she plunged under the deep waters and entered the hollow cave of Thetis and of her sister-goddesses the Nereids. Iris found her lamenting the fate of her son Achilles, whom she knew to be fated by his *keer* or death-destiny never to see his home again. And all the other daughters of the Old Man of the Sea were gathered round her weeping too, for the Nereids are happy when one of them is happy and sad when one of them is sad.

“Thetis,” cried Iris to her, “Zeus whose schemes stretch into eternity calls you to him!”

Thetis rose up and looked at Iris as that heavenly messenger stood at the entrance to the cave.

“What,” Thetis cried, “does this terrifying god want with me? I feel too troubled in my heart about my son to want to face all those immortal gods crowded together on Olympus. But there it is! I’d better come if he has sent you for me.”

Thus speaking, she covered herself with the darkest veil that has ever been seen on land or at sea, and with this muffling her slender body she followed Iris forth out of the cave. The waters divided before them and they soon left the sea behind.

Under the guidance of Iris they flew up into the sky, and when they approached the mighty son of Cronos, lo! he was closely surrounded by all the immortals, and Athene moved aside so that Thetis could be seated and Hera, the Queen of Heaven, put a golden cup of rich red wine into her hand and greeted her with cheering words. Then there was silence among them all till Zeus himself spoke.

"I know you have been feeling sad about your son, I know it without your telling me. We have had fierce differences of opinion up here about the body of Hector and your son's treatment of it. Some of the gods are all for sending Hermes Argeiphontes to hide the corpse from the eyes of your mighty swift-footed son. But I myself want to keep for the generations of the future the tradition of man's worship of you and love of you." And then after a serious pause the Father of all and the Lord of all spake to her again. "Go, dear child, straight to your son Achilles and tell him that I am angry with him for keeping the body of Hector by the ships. Tell him that I shall now send Iris to Priam to bid him go with many rich gifts to the ships of the Achaeans so that he may offer to your son a worthy ransom for the corpse of Hector and carry it home to Hector's mother, Hecabe, and to Andromache and Astyanax, Hector's wife and son."

Hearing this from the almighty one, Thetis darted down from the peak of Olympus to her son's hut. Him she found groaning as despairingly as ever while round him his companions were preparing their morning meal, the main portion of which was to be carved from the body of a great shaggy ram which they had just slaughtered. Thetis at once sat down by his side and stroked him with her hand and murmured his name softly and tenderly.

"O my son," she sighed, "how long will you go on devouring your heart with weeping and sorrowing and taking no thought of food or sleep? Better for you would it be to make love to a girl in your bed than to go on like this.

But listen, my precious child, for I bring a message from the Lord of us all to you. And remember, son of my heart, that you yourself are even now drawing close to your own death. Such, as I keep telling you, and you know well yourself, such is your fatal *keer*, which no mortal born on this earth has ever escaped, nor will escape, until the end of time. But listen now, my precious. Zeus, the Lord of Heaven, has sent me to tell you that he is angry with you for keeping the corpse of Hector at the ships so that in your fury you may ill-use it whenever you feel inclined. The Great Father of us all says that he will cause Priam to come to you here with a rich ransom, in return for which he declares that you must give up to him the body of his son, so that he can take it back to Troy. Therefore, my sweet child, give it up to him and take ransom for the dead."

Then slowly and sadly Achilles answered her: "So be it. Whoever it may be that brings the ransom, he shall take away the dead, if it be true that the Olympian has so decided."

Meanwhile, on Olympus, Zeus called Iris to him and despatched her as his special messenger straight to Ilios, where she was to tell King Priam what he had to do. She found him in the midst of his sons and grandsons, terribly unhappy and with his face and hair and hands all covered with mud from rolling on the ground; and his daughters and his sons' wives were wailing throughout the chambers and halls and passages of his palace. Iris spoke to him in a very gentle voice; yet, in spite of that, a fit of trembling seized upon his limbs.

"Be of good courage," she said to him, "Priam, son of Dardanus, for I come to thee as a messenger of good, not of ill. The Olympian biddeth thee ransom Hector and bear gifts to Achilles that shall make glad his heart. Thou must go alone.

But an herald may attend thee, an elderly man, who shall drive the mule waggon wherein they shall place the body of thy son Hector. Let not death be in thy thoughts, nor any fear. The Olympian will send a great god, none other than Hermes Argeïphontes himself, who shall lead thee until he brings thee into the presence of Achilles. And when he shall have led thee into the hut, neither shall Achilles slay thee nor suffer any other to slay thee; for not without wisdom is he nor entirely hardened in wickedness."

When she had spoken, swift-footed Iris departed. But the king bade his sons prepare the light-running mule waggon, and on the waggon fasten a wicker box to receive Hector's body. And he called in to him Hecabe his wife, and he went in to the vaulted treasure chamber. But Hecabe was shocked and horrified.

"Your heart is of iron," she cried in dismay. "Do you really talk of going alone into their camp and of facing this man who has killed so many of your sons?"

Shrill were the cries Hecabe uttered as thus she spoke to him. But he would not heed.

"Don't you, my dear wife, be a bird of ill omen to me in my own halls," was all he replied. "If he kills me, well and good. I shall at least have clasped our dear son once more in my arms, and all wailing for me will be over."

Thus speaking, he drew forth from the chests in his treasury twelve robes, twelve tunics, twelve cloaks, twelve coverlets, twelve mantles; and he brought forth ten talents of gold, two tripods, four cauldrons and, the best and most wonderful of all, a golden cup which the men of Thrace had given him when he once went there as an ambassador, a very great treasure.

As soon as he came forth to the gate he saw that a crowd of sightseers had collected, full of curiosity. These he angrily drove away with his royal staff. Then he turned indignantly upon his own sons, upon Paris and Helenus and Agathon and Pammon and Antiphonus and Polites, good at the war cry, and Deïphobus and Hippothous and lordly Dius. To these nine their old Father, King Priam, uttered in his grief for Hector words that must have hurt the feelings of these young men not a little. It must be remembered that Priam was very old and that he was already irritated by the lack of sympathy which Hecabe had shown in this venture of his. But certainly his words were unkind.

"Wretched children," he shouted, "would to heaven the whole lot of you had perished rather than my noble Hector. And not only he. I tell you the only brave sons I have among you all are dead. Mestor is dead. Troilus is dead. Yet you nine images of shame are all left alive! Hear me now! Do you see all these things? These things are the greatest treasures Hecabe and I possess! Well! I am going to carry them to the enemy's ships and offer them to this murderer Achilles as a ransom to persuade him to give back the body of Hector. Now what I want is only a mule-waggon with *peirintha*, and this *peirintha*, or wicker-case, must be carefully fastened upon its floor and must be large enough to contain the body of my dear, true, heroic son Hector."

Troubled as the nine sons were by their father's words, they obeyed him in every detail. They brought out the light-running mule waggon and the mules to draw it, and they prepared the *peirintha*, or wicker-case, for the body of the dead and fastened it firmly within the waggon. And the elderly herald, Idaeus, mounted the waggon to drive the mules and behind the waggon came the car and its two horses which the old King Priam was prepared to drive, and a mighty lash it was that he wielded in his hand, to make them keep up their speed. It was at the very moment of their starting that Queen Hecabe came up to them and stood in front of her husband's horses, carrying a golden cup full of rich wine so that he might pour out a libation to the gods. And she implored her husband to pray to Zeus to send down one of his largest eagles and cause it to descend on their right as the mule waggon in front and the king's car behind drove forward.

In obedience to his wise lady, Priam bade the girl-attendant of his *Tamiee*, or housekeeper, to bring him a basin of water, and standing in the middle of the courtyard he first washed his hands and, after that, he poured out the wine from the golden cup as a libation to Zeus. Then, when Hecabe had carried away the golden cup and the housekeeper's maid had removed the basin, he prayed earnestly to the Divine Father with his face uplifted to heaven. Then, mounting into his car behind his horses, while the mule-waggon was driven ahead by the aged herald, he beheld, as indeed did the whole city of Troy, a gigantic black eagle descend from Mount Ida and sweep down upon the right-hand side of their advance.

As Zeus, the Father of gods and men and the son of Cronos, looked down upon Troy-land and the shore of the Hellespont, he suddenly felt seized with pity when he saw these two very aged men, Idaeus and Priam, driving across the plain while darkness was rapidly covering both land and sea. Feeling thus, the All-Father called to his son Hermes and said to him: "Hermes, my dear child, you know better than any of us how to deal with these difficult mortals. Yes, you know how to treat them as if you were one of them. And you are skilled in guiding them whither they ought to go. You indeed are their true *Eriounios*, or Helper. Now please go down to the plain of Troy and guide King Priam and his old herald, Idaeus, safely through the Achaean tents unseen by anyone, till you lead him to the hut of Achilles near which the heroic Hector lies dead, his corpse having been preserved from Achilles' mutilations by Apollo."

Hermes Argeiphontes, or Hermes the bright-shining one, put on his golden immortal sandals that would carry him over land and sea, and took with him his magic wand that had the power of making people sleep who were awake and wake who were asleep, and with this in his hand he darted down to the Trojan shore where it stretched along the waves of the Hellespont. Once in the path of the two old men, Priam with his horses and the herald with the mule-cart, Hermes took the likeness of an extremely handsome and very attractive young prince. When first he caught sight of him, King Priam was thoroughly scared, more so, it would seem, than the old herald. But the beautiful youth did not take long in allaying the old man's fears, which he did very artfully, calling himself a Myrmidon, inventing a name for his own father and refusing a valuable bribe which the old monarch offered him. In fact, it wasn't long before he had mounted into Priam's chariot, grasped both whip and reins, and was driving, followed closely by the old herald in the mule-waggon, to that portion of the Greek encampment where stood the unusually large erection which his skilful Myrmidon subjects had built for the son of Peleus. When at last they had got round the Ditch and the Embankment by driving close to the sea's edge, Hermes pulled up the chariot in front of the abode of Achilles and leapt to the ground. Then he spoke to Priam. "I who have come to help thee," he said, "am an immortal god, even Hermes, for the Father sent me to guide thee on thy way. But now I will go back. But go thou in and clasp the knees of the son of Peleus and implore him to grant thy request. Implore him by his father and by his lovely-haired mother and by his son; for an appeal such as that will move his heart."

Hearing these words, old Priam descended from the chariot and left Idaeus, the herald, to look after both the two horses and the two mules. Quite alone the old king went straight into this dwelling which had been built for Achilles by his Myrmidons on the shore, not far from the ships. Within the spacious drinking hall he found Achilles with his charioteers Automedon and Alcimus. Achilles was sitting apart by himself, however, so that old Priam had no difficulty in going straight up to him. Achilles had only just finished a rich supper provided by his two charioteers, and the table was just by his side upon which this good meal had just been served. Unseen by the two squires, Priam hurried straight up to Achilles, fell on his knees at his feet, and, clasping his knees as Hermes had advised him to do, he kissed those murderous hands that had killed his fifty sons.

"O son of Peleus, for the sake of your father and mother have pity on me!" he cried. "Nineteen of my sons had Hecabe for their mother, and the rest were born, during O so many years, of serving girls in our halls. Have pity on me, Achilles, slayer of my sons! No other aged man in the wide world, I swear, has had the experience I have had: first to have begotten so many sons, and then to have lost them, and then, before I can have a fire and a mound for the last and best and dearest of all, to be doomed to kiss the hands of his slayer! O pity me, for the sake of your father, thou son of Peleus!"

Achilles rose and lifted Priam to his feet and led him to a chair. I confess that I, the immortal Aether, when I first saw that the thought of his father and his home, neither of which, as he himself knew well, he would ever see again, had brought on a burst of tears from the depth of Achilles' heart, was unable to suppress my pity for both these men. There was, however, one very dangerous moment between them; for when the old man refused to remain quiet in the chair to which he had been led and began demanding an immediate sight of the body of his dead son, I could see a terrible flash of anger come into the eyes of Achilles, and with my power of reading the inmost thoughts in human souls I knew that the thought had passed through him that he *might* add to the death of Hector the death of Hector's father! Aloud he cried to Priam: "Provoke me no more, old sir, for I know in my heart some god helped you to get here. But don't you dare, old sir, to stir my heart amidst my sorrows, lest, suppliant though you are, I spare you not!"

So he spoke in his wrath, and jumped up like a lion and rushed out of the house, and with him went his two squires, Automedon and Alcimus, and they brought into the house the old herald and put him into a chair. They left two robes and a beautiful tunic wherein to wrap the dead for his return; and they carried in to the house all the magnificent treasures which Priam had brought as ransom for Hector's corpse. Then Achilles told his female slaves to wash and anoint the body of Hector before Priam saw it, so that the old man should not by displaying indignation make him dangerously angry. When the corpse was prepared and ready to be placed on the waggon, Achilles called upon old Priam to partake of food and wine and then go to sleep in the portico along with the aged herald upon a couple of beds, with purple blankets and coverlets and fleecy cloaks, so that all cold would be kept away from them.

It was when he had lifted the body of Hector upon the waggon that Achilles uttered the deepest groan of his life to the spirit of his friend Patroclus. "Don't be angry with me, Patroclus, if you hear in Hades that I've given back the corpse of Hector to his father. He's brought me a splendid ransom; and you may be sure you'll have your share of it."

Then, when he was once more back in his dwelling, he spoke to Priam very politely. "Your son, old sire, is lying on his bier; and early tomorrow morning you shall take him to his home. But now let both of us think of supper. For even Niobe, when all was over, had something to eat. Twelve children perished in her halls; the six sons by the arrows of Apollo and the six daughters by the arrows of Artemis. This was because Niobe had boasted her superiority to Leto, since Leto had only given birth to Apollo and Artemis, while she had given birth to six sons and six daughters."

I, the immortal Aether, could not help noticing how delighted Achilles was to remind old Priam of every detail of the story of Niobe; and I soon detected what his motive was. *It was the matter of the Stones.* He knew well how the dominant emotion, instincts, impulse and life-illusion of Priam himself and of all his offspring was to move rapidly from one action to another, from one deed to another. He knew that there was very little philosophic intelligence in the royal family of Troy. He knew they never pondered over their projects with subtle analysis. Thus to them to be turned into stone would be the end they would naturally dread the most. Aeneas, who was the most mentally active of all the warriors on the Trojan side, although descended from the same ancestors as Priam, was totally different from the rest of them in this. He could philosophize, as the pathetically downright Hector never could.

But now between Priam and Achilles the natural and innocent satisfaction of enjoying a good meal made them forget their tragic situation. A simple man-to-man honest friendliness soon gave the tone to the whole atmosphere of that late supper of which they all proceeded now to partake. Achilles killed a sheep. His companions flayed it and cut it into the accustomed portions and roasted it over their hot fire. And then, when the meat was ready, Achilles himself served it as they all sat round the table, and Automedon, his charioteer, divided the bread and placed it on the table at each man's side in delicate baskets, while wine was served to all. It was then, in the free and easy talk which followed, that the notorious entertainer and his aged guest really had time to take in each other's personality. Priam wondered at the extraordinary beauty, both of face and figure, of the killer of his sons, and Achilles for the first time was really made aware of the dignity and grace of the aged monarch of Ilios. When their late supper was entirely over, Priam spoke firmly and gently.

“Let me now lie down if you will and take my rest.”

Achilles courteously obeyed him and bade his two squires and his household maidens to arrange those two beds in the porch for Priam and his aged herald, so that the sea air should not hurt them. He told them to make sure that the two old men were perfectly warm in blankets and coverlets and cloaks of thick sheep’s wool. He explained to Priam that the reason why he and the old herald were to sleep in the portico instead of inside the hall was lest Agamemnon should hear of it and by making a fuss spoil all their mutual arrangements.

“How long,” he politely asked Priam, “would you like me to hold back the battle so that you and your lady can bury your son with all the appropriate ritual?”

Priam explained at once that to bring down the firewood from the mountain and make the accustomed lamentation would take nine days, and then they would have the funeral feast on the tenth day, and on the eleventh raise up the burial mound.

“So if in your great courtesy, Achilles,” he said, “you really can hold back the fighting as long as that, by the time the twelfth day arrives we shall be ready for what comes.”

“In due accordance with your wish, aged Priam,” Achilles gently replied, “I will arrange it so.”

Thus speaking, he clasped the old man’s right hand by the wrist as a token that the covenant between them was completed, and that Priam’s mind might be freed from all apprehension. So in the porch the two aged men, Priam and the herald, lay down to sleep; and Achilles himself slept in the innermost part of the spacious building, and by his side slept lovely Briseïs.

But while both the gods in Heaven and the men and women on earth slept the sleep they needed so sorely, one Being alone, and he was a god, felt too anxious to sleep. This was none other than Hermes the helper. He felt responsible for the safety of Priam, having been the one to bring him here, and he knew too much about the arbitrary ways of Achilles and his Myrmidons to feel quite happy about the old king when confronted, as he would bound to be, by the guards at the gate, unless Achilles played the part of a guide himself, which it was impossible to imagine a man as proud and vain as he was ever condescending to do. So the thoughtful helper, Hermes Argeiphontes, darted down, entirely on his own initiative, and, in the depths of old Priam's heavy sleep in that porch, stood over his bed's head.

"Old sire," he whispered to him, "don't you realise that you are still in danger of your life? Have you forgotten that you are in the midst of deadly enemies? You've ransomed Hector and have paid an exorbitant and incredible price for him; but don't you understand that if Agamemnon finds out that you are here, and I tell you any of these Myrmidons are liable to sneak off to inform him, hoping to get some rich reward, the whole business will be broken up? You may have bribed Achilles with your gifts, but probably he's forgotten by now what you *did* give him, and he would be pleased to learn that the warders at those great gates, as you tried to pass, had killed both you and your old herald!"

Priam was frightened by Hermes' words and hurriedly awakened the old herald. Then Hermes himself yoked for them both the horses and the mules, and himself drove Priam's chariot through the camp, keeping close contact, as he did so, with the old herald driving the mules. It was not until they reached the ford across the divine River Xanthus that Hermes left them and returned to Olympus. Neither of the two old men could keep back their emotion when, with their sacred burden, they reached the outskirts of the city. But strangely enough no-one heard their murmured dirge, or if they did hear the sound of their wheels and the sound of their ritual chant they did not realise who they were. At last Cassandra, who had ascended the citadel-tower of Ilios, a tower called Pergamus, and who was Priam's most beautiful daughter, did catch sight of them. In a second this lovely girl was uttering piercing shrieks.

"There they are! there they are!" she was crying. "Come, all of you! Come, all of you! Think what this means! This is Hector, our dear brother, himself. He is dead, but he has returned to us! Come, all of you! Come, all of you!"

And out of the gate of the city crowds of men and women poured forth to meet them. Forth came Andromache, Hector's wife, and Hecabe, his mother; and they both flung themselves upon the mule-waggon and clasped with their hands the head of their beloved. Here indeed outside the gate the wailing for Hector might have gone on all day long, had not Priam addressed the people as he stood in his chariot.

"Make room, make room for the mules to pass through! Hereafter shall ye have your fill of wailing when I have taken him to his house."

The people obeyed their King, and when they brought him to his house they laid him in his chamber on a corded bed; and there were the official professional dirge-singers expecting him. And standing around the head of the corpse they chanted at once the ancient long-accustomed death-chant. When they had finished, it was the women's turn, that is to say the women who were the most concerned. And first among them all it was Andromache who addressed the surging crowd. Wisely, calmly, yet with infinite feeling, did Andromache speak before them all.

“O husband of mine,” she said, “thou art dead in thy youth, leaving me a widow in our stately home. Thy son is a babe, born of us two in the midst of all this miserable confusion and, when these invaders take our city, as they are sure to do now you are dead who defended all of us and all our little ones so heroically, what will become of our tiny little child? Will he come to manhood? O I doubt it! I doubt it! For with Hector dead who guarded us all, what will happen now to our noble city and all us women and children? These Achaeans will take me and your babe, my Hector, over the waves to a strange land. If one of them, as we said, doesn’t murder our child because Hector killed his father or his brother, or his son or his grandfather or his grandson when we reach their land, our little boy, O Hector, O sweet husband and heroic war-man, will be put to work at some wretched miserable hard job, wholly unfitted for any boy and a ghastly mockery for your little son! O Hector, my Hector, when you came to die, you couldn’t stretch out your arms to me and utter last words in my ears such as I could ponder on and cry over night by night, as long as I lived.”

Then after Andromache had uttered what she felt, it was Hector’s mother Hecabe’s turn to address the mourners, and Hecabe told them at once without a moment’s hesitation that Hector was by far her favourite child, dearer to her heart than any of the others.

“O let Achilles sell other sons of mine as slaves in the markets of Lemnos, and Imbros, and Samos; you, Hector, at least he cannot sell, for you are here with us tonight, as beautiful and fresh in death as if Apollo had killed you with one of his far-darting arrows!”

It was at this point that I, the immortal Aether, who was watching all this and listening to all this through the wide windows of Hector’s hall, felt within my heart the strange contrariwise thought: How strange, O how weirdly strange it is to think how near we are here to where Argive Helen herself is tending the couch of that very Paris, that crafty brother of Hector, to whose seductive beguilements the whole Trojan war was due, and, if Troy was destined to fall, the downfall of Troy as well, and with it the lamentable death of this sweet war-man Hector who was ready to fight for his native land to the bitter end, and to fight too for this very Helen through the power of whose incredible loveliness his treacherous brother, Paris, had lured so many of both races to utter destruction. All the world can imagine, therefore, what I felt when, lo and behold! here was this very Helen herself come forward to join with the rest in lamenting the death of Hector. Yes, after Andromache and Hecabe here was Helen herself, the third one to address the people and to join in leading the lamentation!

And so in spite of the darkness, in spite of the wailing, in spite of the tragic desolation, in spite of the fact that the palatial hall of Hector and the neighbouring bedchamber where his body now lay were both far from the sky and from the upper part of my celestial kingdom, I was yet able, such is my super-Olympian power, to throw around that whole scene and around all those present a light such as never before was beheld on land or ocean. And Helen, the most beautiful woman the world has ever known, or ever will know, now addressed them with tears pouring down her cheeks.

“O Hector, dearest of all my Paris’s brothers and sisters! When any of the rest — though, like thee, thy father was always gentle — were in the least reproachful, and when I wished myself dead, or even wished that I’d never been born, thy tenderness consoled and comforted me. For thee, O preciousest Hector, I cannot help crying, nor indeed can I help crying for myself; for now that thou art dead I have nobody in all the city and all the land of Troy that is gentle to me or kind: but all men shudder at me.”

It was after Helen had led the lamentation for several minutes that King Priam gave his command to them all as to what must now be done.

“Achilles,” he told them, “has given me his word that he will not meddle with us until the twelfth dawn has come. Take, therefore, oxen and mules and waggons and go to the feet of the mountains and gather an immense quantity of wood. For now we have ten whole days, my friends, to prepare his funeral fire and his death mound.”

Just as Priam bade them, so they did; and when those ten days were over Hector’s funeral was ready. On the top of a staggeringly high pyre of wood his body was placed; and they set fire to this vast mass of wood and burned up the flesh of the sweet war-man Hector. Then they quenched the fire by pouring upon it huge vessels of wine. And when this was done, they gathered Hector’s white bones and placed them in a golden urn, wrapping them up in a purple covering. Then they laid the urn in a hollow grave, and over this grave they placed very large and very close-fitting stones. Then they heaped up the mound, while watchers everywhere round them were carefully scanning all the approaches to the city lest the Achaeans should make an assault. When the great burial-mound was completely finished they returned to the city, where Priam gave them an immemorial funeral feast.

As can be imagined by all who have followed this greatest of all poems with intelligent enjoyment, it was only natural that I, the immortal Aether, should ponder for a while, as I looked down on Hector’s death-mound outside the city-walls, left in solitude while the people were fasting, as to what message or lesson or philosophic truth remained to be handed down to posterity now all was over. And my decision was “None”!

The greatest poem in the world leaves behind no lesson at all. If posterity asks: “How was it that Hector was so loved by everybody?”; or if posterity asks: “How was it that so cruel, so pitiless, so hard a heart as that of Achilles could feel so deeply the death of his friend Patroclus?”; or if, finally, posterity asks: “How can Mercy and undying Vengeance, how can Goodness and everlasting Evil, go on forever side by side?” — the greatest Poet in human history leaves the whole business an unanswered mystery. “Thus,” is all he says, “it was, it is, and it will be! And so we have seen the last of Hector, the tamer of horses.”

All or Nothing (1960)

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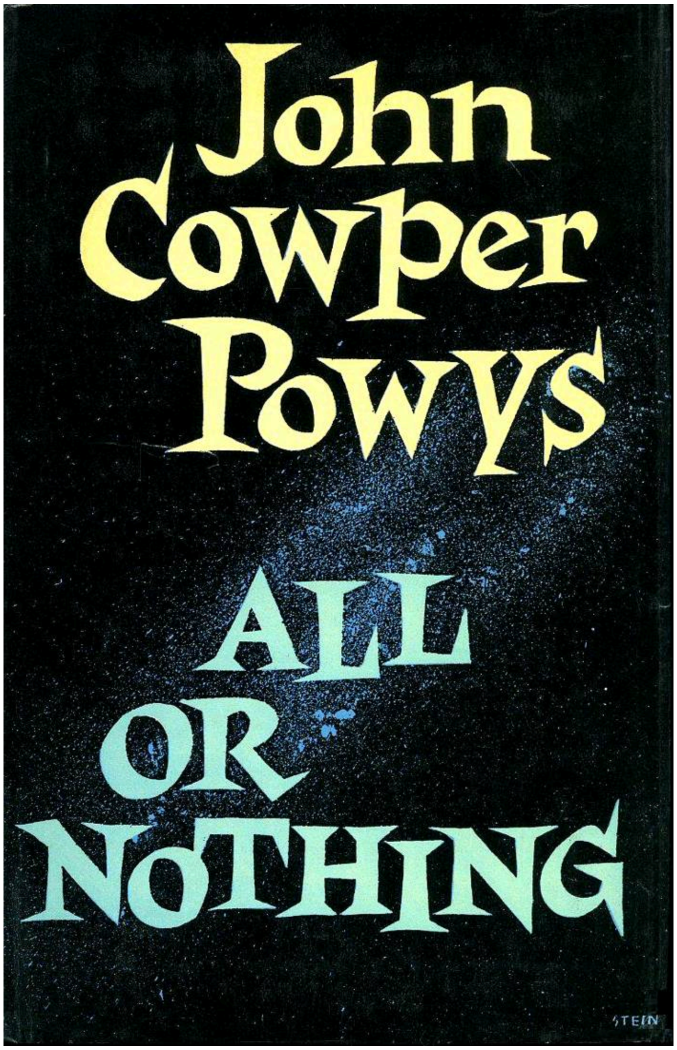
John
Cowper
Powys
ALL
OR
NOTHING
STEIN

The first edition

Dedicated

to

Isobel Powys Marks

to whom so many of us —

O so many —

Owe so much.

I

BOTH THE NU twins when they first went to School were teased because of their name; but now that they were older this sort of teasing ceased altogether.

John o’ Dreams Nu and Jilly Tewky Nu were now seventeen. Their mother, Maria Tid, before she married Mr. Nezzar Nu, had been so much in love with him that she made up her mind that if she bore him any children she would give them names as romantic and exciting as she regarded his to be. He had insisted, however, because he had always considered the name John to be, both for good and evil, the most exciting name in the world, that their boy should be called John and it was therefore only later, when the boy continually teased them all by insisting, the moment he sat down to breakfast, on telling them the precise details of every dream he had had during the whole night, that Maria Nu added the appendage “o’ Dreams” to the sturdy syllable John.

Jilly’s queer name Tewky had quite a different origin. Jilly had been the name of Maria Tid’s own grandmother, but it was her father-in-law, Grumble Nu, who added Tewky. Old Grumble lived in a room lined with book-cases and books at the top of their house. He was a student of both Greek and Latin, and he had found in Autenrieth’s Homeric Dictionary that the Greek word for something that was capable of doing anything was a word that looked as if it could have no other pronunciation than the word Tewky.

The old gentleman was always being told that his granddaughter, unlike most girls, had a mania for dusting and for using a broom. So he started calling her Jilly Tewky and they all took it up.

Another peculiarity of this original household was the presence among them of Theodora Tid, Maria's elder sister. This lady was always called, by John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, "Auntie Oh"; and the reason for this was that when their Rector the Reverend Josiah Attic came to call on them, Aunt Theodora would always gravely, respectfully, and in a tone full of reverent awe, keep repeating the syllable "Oh" as often as Mr. Attic made a remark. The father of John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky had himself a rather unusual Christian name, if such a name could be called Christian, for it was nothing less than Nebuchadnezzar; though just why old Grumble Nu's wife, who died thirty years ago, should have called her boy by the name of the king of Babylon was a secret only known to her husband and he was the last person anybody would dare to question on such a subject.

Maria Nu used always to carry upstairs her father-in-law's midday dinner to his room at the top of the house; but he was always present at their substantial tea, which was enjoyed in their dining-room on a big oblong mahogany table at half-past five in the afternoon. It can be well imagined that their house, which was called Morty, needed the constant attention of both Maria and Theodora to keep it clean, not to mention the business of looking after John and Jilly as well as Nezzar, as they all called him, and Nezzar's old dad Grumble; but these two sisters were astonishingly competent and both possessed the same easy-going temper; so that between them they ran the Morty household with dignity and remarkable good sense.

It had been old Grumble who had provided the family's livelihood; and he had done so some twenty years ago by developing a curious vegetable that was completely new to that part of Great Britain and which he had discovered during his travels abroad as a salesman. He had named this vegetable "Gog-Magog", and he had done so because it had been endowed by nature with qualities which gave to its appearance when seen under certain conditions something resembling, although gnome-like in size, the silhouette of a pair of giants embracing. Nezzar Nu had worked hard under his father's direction at planting a lot of fields at the back of their house with this valuable product, whose worth in the market rose higher and higher every year.

The only dwelling within sight of Morty was an ancient building on the top of a hill called Cad Castle, but the Church and Village of Dunnowair were not more than a mile away.

It was on the Fourth of February in the present year of our Christian era that the Nu household enjoyed the liveliest as well as the most controversial tea-party they had had since the year began. They were entertaining at tea their bachelor Rector, the Reverend Josiah Attic, who, led on by Nezzar's interest and by Theodora's respectful ohs, had plunged with more ardour than usual into the most intricate of his theological ideas.

"You mustn't let yourself be horrified, Nezzar, my friend," he soon was saying, "when I tell you that I *did* get the letter I've been expecting for some while from my good Bishop. I got it this morning. But to my relief it made no reference to what last time he called my 'heresy'. It was entirely about my bell-ringing. What would *you* advise me to answer, Mrs. Nu? You ladies are often much wiser in delicate practical questions like this than we disputatious men. Would you tell him that Miss Posh is so deaf that she can't hear what I read to her out of the Book of Common Prayer; and if I didn't ring the bell she would skip her only prayers? She herself told me that she never prays except at bell-ringing times. And I ask you would it be right for her Rector as well as her only human companion to deprive such a naturally devout old lady as Miss Posh of her one and only reminder to approach her Maker in prayer?"

"How long has Miss Posh lived with you, Rector?" enquired Mrs. Nu.

“Something like fifty years, my dear lady,” answered his Reverence solemnly, “and when I think of all she has done for me and the parish during those years it seems worse than ungrateful, it seems like an act of Satan, to deprive her of her daily call to prayer.”

“Do you always ring the church-bell at those same hours, Rector?” enquired Mr. Nezzar Nu.

“Yes,” the Reverend gentleman replied: “Always the same on week-days; though on Sundays I ring at a quarter to eleven instead of at twelve and at a quarter to six instead of at six. You see, Nezzar my friend, I don’t have to climb up to the belfry to do it. We have a very good rope at the back of the church, behind the christening font.”

“May I ask you a question, Sir?” broke in John o’ Dreams in an abrupt but nervous tone, as if he had just made what was to him an extremely important move in the agitating chess-game of his young life.

“Certainly, my boy, certainly”, replied the Rector in a friendly tone. “What is it you want to know?”

“Will you please tell us, Sir, what the heresy is that the Bishop accuses you of?”

There was a general hush round the whole table at this; a hush that was broken by Grandpa Grumble rising from his chair and striding with heavy steps to the window. His son Nezzar jumped to his feet.

“What is it, Dad?” he cried in an alarmed tone, hurrying to the window after the old man.

As soon as he’d reached the window out of which the old gentleman was now leaning, Nezzar Nu turned sharply round.

“There’s a light in Cad Castle!” he cried excitedly. “So it must be true what Jilly Tewky heard in the village last night. Yes! There’s a light up there!”

“What did she hear?” asked Grandpa Nu, jerking himself back into the room and violently closing the window.

“What did she hear?” echoed the Reverend Josiah Attic, pushing back his chair a few inches. “Perhaps I oughtn’t to have left Deborah alone when things like these are happening.”

“I don’t think Miss Posh will have heard,” said Maria Nu quietly. “May I tell them, Jilly Tewky, or would you rather tell them yourself?”

It was evident that Jilly did prefer to tell them herself; for she jumped up and ran to her brother’s side. There was a hurried whispered colloquy between them. During this colloquy the rest of the party, including the old gentleman who stood clutching the back of the chair he’d been sitting on with both hands as if at any moment it might be necessary to lift it up and bring it down on somebody’s head, either sat down on the edge of their chairs or stood nervously between them and the edge of the table. It must have been clear to their famous ancestor, Baron Nu of Nil, who calmly surveyed them from above a couple of lighted candles on the sideboard, that they were all not a little agitated. Their guest, the Rector, was the calmest. But even he kept glancing rather nervously at old Grumble Nu and stroking his high forehead with his knuckles, as if to indicate that he could keep his heresies under control without any exterior help. They all watched John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky at this moment, as if this boy and girl were the Heavenly Twins themselves that would shortly appear in the sky, not so very far above the mysterious light in Cad Castle which was the source of all this disturbance.

Whether or not due to the presence of their Rector, the somewhat Voltairean cynicism in the eyes of their ancestor found its justification in the fact that most of them were actually in their hearts uttering a prayer, led of course by the Rector’s heart-felt prayer that Deborah Posh wouldn’t hear any rumour of lights having been seen in Cad Castle. Mrs. Nu prayed that the masculine caution of John o' Dreams would prevail over the girlish recklessness of Jilly Tewky; for it was clear to her that they were having a difference of opinion. Nezzar Nu, the twins' Daddy, prayed that something might happen to bring this agitating tea-party to an end, so that he could talk things over with his wife. Aunt Theodora prayed that she'd be able to go to sleep at once that night when she went to bed, and would not dream that the Russians had landed on Foghorn, or that Miss Posh had fallen out of the window.

As a matter of fact, John o' Dreams *had,* as his mother hoped he would, begged Jilly Tewky not to tell them what she'd heard in the village, or at least not at this moment when they had a visitor with them. But his protest, in their whispered colloquy, had been dissipated by his sister's intense desire to reveal all, and by her spirited arguments justifying such a decision. So up rose the young girl and poured it all forth.

"I was buying some sweets for Mummy," she told them in a high-pitched excited tone, "and some cigarettes for Daddy and some eau-de-Cologne for Auntie, for they sell, as you know, all those things in Slogricky's. And in the shop I found a crowd of people who were only buying little things like soap and cheese and tobacco and matches and cakes and biscuits clearly with the purpose of having a good talk before they went home."

Here the girl hesitated for a second and then laid one hand on her twin brother's shoulder, as though to gain the strength to be bold and frank, evidently completely forgetting that the boldness and frankness was hers and not his. Then she went on, speaking very rapidly, but with the sort of rapidity that indicated a dread at the bottom of her being lest her frankness should be a mistake. But the whole company had now settled down fairly easily in their places, evidently hoping for a long drawn-out story with as many local scandals in it as terrifying surprises.

"It seems," went on Jilly Tewky, "that the owners of Cad Castle are not lost or dead. Mrs. Slogricky said that when she was little her grandmother had told her that a gipsy witch used to live in that tumble-down cottage at Cad's Corner; and she was always telling the people who wouldn't give her money that they'd better look out, as the family who owned Cad Castle were very friendly to gipsies, and when they came back things would be very different in Dunnowair and very different all through Foghorn.

"It was Mrs. Slogricky's niece, Mrs. Scatter, and her brother's child, Tony Scrump, who saw them come. Gideon, the old porter at Gurry's Dock, saw them disembark and hurried home early to tell everybody. He even heard their names as they passed the Customs. He was so startled, for he's a very old man, that he stopped at the "Three Ducklings" on the way back and drank so much that nobody could make out what he was saying, and his daughter had to put him to bed as soon as he got home. But the chief thing seems to be that the new Lord of Cad Castle is an enormous giant."

"*What's* that?" growled old Grumble Nu, glaring angrily at his granddaughter.

"Which of them said that?" cried Maria Nu.

"It doesn't matter much who said it, my dear," protested Nezzar Nu, "the point is, is it true? Can it be that we really are, in this year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifty-eight, confronted once again by a Goliath. What we must think about, if it be true, is the discovery of a David to protect us. I somehow can't see our dear John o' Dreams filling that role!"

"Who was it," enquired the Rector of Dunnowair, "who saw this giant?"

"Tell them his name, Jilly Tewky, before you go on further," murmured John o' Dreams from his place beside her.

"His name," went on Jilly Tewky, with a sigh of evident relief, for in her own mind she felt as though the name of this person was doing something dangerous to her as long as it remained inside her without being uttered, "His name," and she repeated the word firmly, loudly and clearly, "is Urk and he is seven feet high."

There was a hush all round the table. Then old Grumble said quietly, "Put on your overcoat, Rector, and come out with me for a moment."

"If I do that," replied the Reverend gentleman, "I must not take it off again. In fact I think I must really be leaving you now."

He took his large gold watch out of his waistcoat pocket and looked at it with an air of nervous apprehension, as if a refusal to accept the decision of the old family clock now ticking so clearly on the mantelpiece and pointing at seven o'clock were not polite but in the present situation unavoidable.

"Oh!" said Auntie Oh, as if he had explained the metaphysical significance of the Holy Ghost in relation to Time.

"Make him wait, Mother," begged John o' Dreams impatiently, "till she's told you the rest!"

Jilly Tewky shook off the hand her twin brother had put on her arm and sat down again by his side.

"There's nothing more to tell," she said as she resumed her seat, "except that Mr. Urk's children are about the age of me and John."

"You should say, 'John and me' not 'me and John'", protested Mrs. Nu.

"Did you find out their names, Jilly Tewky?" enquired her father, rising to his feet, as indeed everybody except the twins had done now.

"O yes! They were Ring and Ting."

"Which was which, my good girl," growled their grandfather, "and is this confounded giant Urk going to provide them with a governess, or will they go to the village school?"

"I don't think," said the Reverend Josiah, who had slipped into the hall to put on his overcoat, "that any self-respecting lady would take a job where there's no mistress of the house, and only a monster like what you describe."

"Oh," responded Aunt Oh gravely, and in her heart she wondered what she would do if Mr. Urk offered her the post of governess at Cad Castle.

"I'll walk with you as far as the drive-gate," growled grandfather Nu.

"Daddy, you needn't go out at all. It's too cold for you," protested Maria Nu. "John o' Dreams, sonny, you go with him."

Her son got up with obvious reluctance. It was clear that he was longing to have a private conversation with his twin-sister, and to hear, not only every detail of her adventurous excursion, but exactly what in her own mind she herself made of it all.

"Nobody need come, my dear friends," cried the Reverend Josiah from the hall-door. "I've had an exciting evening and now I've got to tell Deborah all about it."

"Don't keep poor Miss Posh up too late tonight, Rector!" was his hostess's final word to him as, with John o' Dreams at his side, who had round his head Maria Nu's "household shawl," the clergyman and his escort went out into the February twilight.

"Well, good-night, Maria. Good-night, Nezzar! We shall know more about all this by this time to-morrow!"

And with these words old Grand-Dad Grumble went clump, clump, clump, clump upstairs to his study.

II

THE LORD OF Cad Castle woke up early after his first sleep in his Dunnowair domain.

It had not been till after midnight that all the furniture and all the beds and all the mattresses and sheets and blankets and “corded bales,” as the poet puts it, of the household necessities with which he had landed were finally deposited in the Castle. The moment he had got past the Customs officials at the dock, he had started hiring local help and had found this quite easy to obtain. Nothing gets round more quickly among us mortals than news of good employment when we are unemployed. Urk, as may well be imagined when the reader learns that he had lived among black and yellow and red skins, as well as white folk all his life, was very shrewd in his summings up of people’s characteristics, and now called upon all men who had helped him instal his possessions to receive their pay. He gave them private interviews in a large room with windows looking seaward which he had selected as his own special chamber. He persuaded one of these men to bring up to the Castle his elder sister Laura to do the housework and his younger sister Jessica to do the cooking.

Considering his extravagant size and grotesque ugliness, Urk’s ways with his son Ring and his daughter Ting, and theirs with him, were much more easy and natural than you would have supposed possible. Both the young people were uncommonly good-looking. Ring was seventeen and Ting was fifteen. Their mother had died when they were children and they resembled John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky in their close intimacy. Their mother had been a surprisingly beautiful lady but an extremely eccentric one. Her chief delight had always been in climbing trees and kissing with maternal tenderness, as if they had been her own offspring, the mosses and lichens and small toadstools that grew on most of the trees where they lived before they set sail for Foghorn.

The gigantic and hideous Urk had one singular peculiarity. He had a mania for his own ugliness. One piece of bedroom furniture he had brought with him was a circular mirror, whose handle was so formed that it enabled him to stand it upright upon a table close to his bed's head. Then, the moment he was awake, he would stretch out his hand, seize the mirror and gloat over his own countenance, contorting its hideousness to the limit.

The dominant elements of Urk's appalling frightfulness were what might almost be described as the complete absence of forehead, nose and chin. Roughly speaking Urk's eyes, which were unnaturally large and dark, were set so far back in their sockets, and were so close to each other, that it seemed as though they were an integral portion of his mouth and had been placed in such a position as if to enable them to watch every mouthful of living and squirming flesh which he was devouring. Urk's mouth was unnaturally large for a human being. It was the mouth, not so much of a lion or tiger or leopard or panther, as of a dragon who has come up from some abyss below to gorge itself upon every morsel of flesh covering the skull of the last creature alive upon the earth. Holding the glass before him, Urk watched his mouth expanding and his deeply sunk eyes dilating, as he beheld in imagination the bleeding skull of a hairless creature, which at one moment seemed to him the skull of a man and at another moment the skull of a woman, whose whole body, whether male or female, he had already left skeleton bare, and it seemed to him that as he went on his delight was accompanied by a strain of oceanic music that rose up from an unspeakable depth.

It was still only wolf-light, as the original Saxons and Danes called the first light of dawn, so after struggling in vain to get the full and complete feeling of scraping with his teeth everything from a mortal skull except the bare bone, Urk actually struck a match and lit a wax candle in a flat silver candle-plate with a large handle, which he was wont to carry when he left his chamber. But, as fate or chance ordained at this moment, something about the flame of the candle disconcerted and disquieted him. It made his devouring grimaces lack that primordial pre-historic orgiastic zest which had previously accompanied them. He blew out the candle therefore and replaced the flat candlestick on the little table by his bed. Then he shut his eyes tight and jerking his head on his pillow into its normal position he stretched himself out on his back.

"I must sneak downstairs," he thought, "and find out how the place looks before the sun gets up. I ought to see whether there are any prowlers about. Oh yes! And I ought to see whether this Laura is stirring, and whether that young Jessica has gone down yet into the kitchen. One of these days I must hide in that corner-cupboard in the kitchen and see how this precious Jessica does her little job. Yes! Up you get, you old sleepy-head, and do a bit of observation!"

It did not take Urk long to put on his clothes; for he had long ago, in his life among Red Indians and Chinese traders and Hindu magicians, found out that the best clothes you could wear were the clothes you could put on the quickest. He soon discovered, as he stepped cautiously and quietly down the twisting staircase of Cad Castle, that no living soul was yet awake in the whole place but himself. He accepted this with equanimity; for, although under other conditions he might have felt angry, as things were, it made his present movements easier. After letting himself out of the front door and looking up at the Castle above him, he felt a certain satisfaction that nobody was gazing down at him.

"No," he told himself, "they can't be, for I would certainly have heard some sound."

And he pictured to himself the interior of Miss Laura's room and Miss Jessica's room and of the two rooms with only a door between them of his son Ring and his daughter Ting. He had so devoted himself to descending noiselessly that he hadn't paused to say to himself at any landing in the twisting staircase: "Ah! that's where they put Ring and Ting," or "That's Jessica's landing!" or "That's where I told them to take Laura's things!"

"No," he thought now, as he crossed the broad terrace that surrounded Castle Cad and began to descend the halfdozen steps that led down to the drive. "No, it was as grand a stroke of luck that made me so good at hiding behind doors and walls and windows and curtains, and in cupboards and closets and ditches, and under hedges and thickets and the trunks of trees, as the one that made me good at scaring people in the open!"

Having strode about twenty paces down the drive, Urk suddenly stopped. "What the devil was that place called?" he asked himself. What he remembered in one of his last night's eavesdroppings was hearing Laura, his newly appointed housemaid, tell Jessica, his newly appointed cook, that they'd better have a fixed-up rendezvous and a premeditated hour, where they could always be sure of meeting together every day. He had heard Laura suggest a meeting place that sounded — and now it *did* come back clearly to him— "Yes! *that* is what it was, Bubble and Squeak!"

The gigantic Urk stood still and looked around him. "O what a fool I was," he thought, "not to have asked one of the men who were carrying our things where this damned silly place was!"

Urk walked on half a dozen more steps. Then he stopped again.

"If," he said to himself, "it were a spot sufficiently well known to be a natural meeting place between a brother and sister like Tom and Laura, it cannot be hidden in the depths of the forest. Perhaps these trees will thin out presently."

He walked on again. In spite of his wise thought that Bubble and Squeak must be a spot fairly well known in the locality, and not far from Cad Castle, he began to feel irritable and uneasy. He perceived that the "wolf-light" period of pre-dawn was already over; and though the actual rising of the sun could not be seen because of the trees, Urk already felt the peculiarly deep sensation of subterranean wrath that all his life he had experienced at the first appearance of the sun. This was the one thing which his beautiful wife, the mother of Ring and Ting, could not abide in him, and her loveliness gave her such power over him that, to hide his feeling if they were together out of doors when the sun rose, he used to kneel down and press his forehead on the earth, pretending to her that he did this in adoration and worship when he really did it in loathing and hatred.

Suddenly he gave a huge gasp of delight. There on his left hand was a narrow little pathway, and pointing down it was a small, strongly dug-in notice, too small to be called a sign-board, but bearing the words very clearly written: "To the Fountain of Bubble and Squeak".

Urk strode down this pathway, which was clearly a very old one and was paved with large flat stones, many of which were covered with moss. He soon reached the spot, which he found to his astonishment lay at the foot of a tall massive cliff. It was not the base of any mountain. It was not even the foot of a steep hill. It was simply the base of an uneven, rugged, treeless mound, like those mounds in certain countries that were erected centuries upon centuries ago to celebrate the dead — in fact like the mound not very far from the ruins of ancient Troy, raised to the memory of an Amazonian Queen, dead hundreds of years before Troy was destroyed!

Urk had an access of the most extraordinary feelings when he reached this spot. There was a small round marble basin there, half full of clear water, at the bottom of which he could see many tiny fish disporting themselves, and even while he gazed at what he saw, a shining little fish rose to the surface, snatched at some insect hovering there, missed the insect altogether, and once more sank down to the bottom of the pool.

But it was neither the pool nor the little fish in the pool that caused Urk to stand there as if turned into a statue, motionless with a strange awe, such as he had never felt since he was a child.

III

WHAT CAUSED HIM this feeling — and he knew the cause or the two causes, to a nicety — were what looked like a fossilized skull on one side of the over-hanging rock, and what looked like a petrified flower-bowl on the other side of the overhanging rock.

But not these objects alone. Oh no! These things by themselves, as he knew well, would have left him calm and unmoved. It was the fact that at regular intervals, lasting only two ticks of a clock, there fell simultaneously little blobs of earth upon the very broad and flat top of the fossilized skull, and drops of water into the middle of the flower bowl, which was already filled with water up to the brim. The top of the fossilized skull was indeed already carrying a pillar of earth.

Urk divined that these little blobs of earth-mould, carried down doubtless by many centuries, were by degrees forming a massive square pillar on the top of the skull, a pillar of earth that had even now come to resemble a thick totem-pole balanced upside down. But as opposed to this slowly developing inverted pole on the right, the perfectly formed bowl on the left, brimming with water, showed not the slightest change from what it must have become, and in what it must have remained, for a thousand years. For some reason it was the inaudible "tick tock" of those two seconds of time — yes, of that Time-mystery which the human race discovered, or perhaps invented, when it first became the human race — that so agitated the monstrous lord of Cad Castle.

This particular "tick tock" intervened between two events. The fall of a tiny blob of earth upon that massive pillar outlined against the face of the rock and resting on what resembled a human skull was one of these events. The other was a drop of water falling into the stone bowl. Each drop of water as it fell made a splash, and each splash created a bubble which rose and burst in the air. But the weird thing about the whole matter was that, simultaneously with the bursting of the bubble, there came from the mouth of the skull a clear, definite and unmistakable squeak. This startling human sound, emerging from the fossilized skull every time a bubble burst, made evident to the Lord of the Castle the antiquity of this spot. He did indeed now stand in the presence of “Bubble and Squeak”.

Urk gazed spell-bound at the Bubble for several of its “tick tocks”. Then, as he turned his attention to the massive pillar, which was only connected with the rock by a thin spine of centuries-hardened earth-mould, he was suddenly seized with a feeling that he could not restrain. He flung himself down on his knees in front of the fossil skull, and lifting his face towards it, with outspread arms and with the palms of his hands pressed against the surface of the rock, he began addressing it as if it were a living head. And then it came to pass — or was, as people say, brought about — that the mechanically-uttered squeaks of the skull became for the intelligence of Urk a stammered and stuttered sequence of spoken words.

“I cannot tell you,” said the Skull, “what my name was; for I cannot remember it myself, but I was the first man who ever got as far into this island as this. I tell myself sometimes that I never had a name. I tell myself that I was one of the original beings on this planet who first became men. Whether I came here across the sea I don’t know. But it was here I was attacked by a monster, who carried off my body to eat at its leisure and left my head because I was uttering words with my mouth that frightened it. It bit my head off with its teeth. Our eyes met while it was doing so, and the expression in them was like the expression in yours at this moment. Are you a man-eater, or do you prefer mushrooms? In any case, I'm afraid there's nothing left that's edible on my skull. Isn't it curious that I can still squeak? Of course, as I squeak to you it's *your* mind I am using. It took me a thousand years to learn the trick of using other minds. But the only minds I've had the chance of using have been mostly animal ones, and the few that have been human have not been nearly as clever as yours."

The exchange of thought between Urk and the Bubble and Squeak ceased suddenly now; and for four of the mechanical sounds of the one and the automatic burstings of the other a thought-lull descended upon that spot.

Urk withdrew his hands from the rock and bent like a threatening thunder-cloud above the Bubble and the Squeak. A strange expectation or premeditation of suffused catastrophe filled the air round all three of them, an expectation resembling the sort of quivering hush that follows a volcanic eruption or an earthquake when a second shock may come at any moment.

"Tell me no more," cried Urk furiously, and the Skull saw that he was feeling about on the ground for a stone with which to strike at its face. And then it was that suddenly the whole situation was broken up by the wild rush upon the scene of John o' Dreams in a state of mad excitement.

"So I've found you! So I've found you! So I've found you!" he cried; while the Lord of Cad Castle rose up with only a very small stone in his right hand — rose up indeed so quickly that his left shoulder brushed against one of John o' Dreams' waving arms. But, since the excited boy had nothing in his hands and my Lord Urk had only a small stone in one of his, it must have been an amusing sight for the Skull to see how they each tried to brow-beat the other by weaponless gesticulation. Lord Urk was of course a lot taller, but John o' Dreams had a double advantage, the advantage of knowing more about Urk than Urk knew about him, and the advantage of knowing more about the fountain of Bubble and Squeak than he did. The gigantic Urk straightened himself.

"May I be permitted to enquire," he asked, "who you are who are making such a fool of yourself? Does this fountain belong to your grandfather that you dance this ridiculous dance in front of the first stranger you see?"

John o' Dreams controlled himself.

"It's ridiculous," he thought, "to play the braggart with this great ugly ass when neither of us has any weapon. Of course I *could* go for him. And I know I could, I could, I could, trip him up and squat on his belly! But what good would *that* do? He'd still be the same tall ugly devil he is now, and what would I feel if he lifted me off him, and slinging me over his shoulder, carried me off to Cad Castle?"

"Thus thinking," as Homer would say, he jumped up quickly and offered his hand politely to Urk to help him to his feet.

"I beg your pardon," he said, looking up at the other's face, which now hung above him, or swung above him, like some monstrous sign at an inn called "The Giant's Head"; "I didn't mean to be rude. I know you now. You are Lord Urk of Cad. I am John o' Dreams, the grandson of Grumble Nu, the well-known grower of Gog-Magogs. We could see from Morty — that's the name of our house — by the lights in your Castle that you were at home; and my sister Jilly Tewky heard in Foghorn that your son Ring and your daughter Ting were with you there. Jilly and I know Jessica your cook and Laura your housekeeper and we would so much like, if you would allow us, to know Ring and Ting too. May we come and see them?"

John o' Dreams hesitated for a second after this bold demand, while a faint squeak came from the Skull and the latest Bubble burst. Then he looked up, unaffrighted and buoyant, at the hideous visage hovering above him.

“Or would you perhaps prefer, my Lord Urk, that Ting and Ring should come and have tea with us at Morty? We are all together then, for Grand-Dad comes down at that meal, and we would all love to have a visit from Ring and Ting.” He hesitated again till another bubble burst and another squeak was heard, and then he said: “Of course, if you, my Lord, would add your presence to our little party, my mother and father would be more honoured still; but I don’t wish to be presumptuous by asking you.”

“Come with me now then, John o’ Dreams,” murmured the hideous mockery of a face above him. “I’m going back to breakfast now, and those children will be interested to see you.”

Actuated by an impulse within him of which, if he’d been questioned about it, he would have been completely unable to give any explanation, John o’ Dreams cried: “One moment, my Lord, and I’ll come!” And he flung himself on his knees in front of the Skull and whispered into one of the orifices that had once been covered by human ears: “Shall I go with him? He won’t kill me and eat me, will he? And, if I do, what weapon would be the best against him? Should I pick up a knife if I catch sight of one, and stick it in up to the hilt in his left side?”

“Not to-day, boy, not to-day,” whispered back the Skull. “You will have plenty of other chances of doing for him. You must hang on to him for a month or two. If you can force yourself to be patient and to wait for your chance, it will come, it will come! But don’t plan anything! Don’t think of any weapon. Just wait, my boy, just wait. If you wait long enough, you’ll get him.”

John o’ Dreams actually kissed the round hole in the Skull out of which this whisper had issued. Then jumping to his feet, he plunged his hand into the bowl at the moment when a bubble was going to burst, so that the impact of his fingers produced a much larger bubble than usual, which dissolved into the air and seemed to derive a special kind of ecstasy from doing so; not what could be called a positive ecstasy, but the extreme limit of a negative ecstasy. And this having been done, he ran after Lord Urk, who was striding off.

IV

HE OVERTOOK THE hideous Lord of Cad; and John o’ Dreams never forgot to the end of his life his complicated feelings, as they walked together towards the Castle drive and then up the drive to the main entrance.

He said to himself: “This, my friend, is the hardest, the most terrifying, the most important moment of your life. You’ve never been tried, tested, weighed in the balance as you are being tried and tested now. Well, my friend,” John went on, thinking to himself, “here are you, the I, the self, a body with a mind, a human creature with its own consciousness, a personal Being unlike all other personal Beings. You are *now* alive; and it may well happen that in an hour’s time you will be dead. There was once a person called John o’ Dreams, whose father was Nezzar Nu and whose mother was Maria Nu and whose sister was Jilly Tewky Nu. Now there is no such person. If anybody asks somebody about the soul of John o’ Dreams, the best answer would come from his bones, wherever they were, carried on the wind to his sister, wherever she was, namely, as he has often tried to make her believe, but never has succeeded, that the soul dies with its body.”

Every detail of his entrance along with its owner into Cad Castle was stamped, engraved, printed, burnt, into the texture of his consciousness. This was unusual with John o’ Dreams, for he was generally so hell-to-heaven-bent on some scheme or other that the thing he was engaged on became the room or the stairs or the passage he was treading, obliterating from these objects all but its own image. On this occasion, however, he seemed to be compelled to mark the fact that one of the great, round, golden handles was missing from the lofty door through which they passed. He noticed that the mat inside these great doors was of enormous size, quite appropriate to its place, but he could not help noticing that here and there its dingy squares of dusky brown, alternating with yellowish brown, were stained with what looked like red blotches of blood that in the course of time had darkened into a rich purple. “I expect,” he thought, “that the animals who were killed in the forest, and dragged into the house this way, were creatures with more blood than those who were conveyed more discreetly to some door at the back.”

He was now being led up a broad stone staircase, but he could see two passages leading to the back of the Castle on both sides of the front staircase. “These big stairs,” he thought, “will only lead to the first or second floor of the Castle. *Then* there will only be a narrow, twisting, steep staircase.” He soon found that his surmise was correct. It was after mounting two flights of broad steps that the Lord of Cad Castle came to a halt and began pointing in different directions.

“To my chamber,” he said proudly. “To Ring’s room,” he said brusquely. “To Ting’s room,” he said nervously. And we may ask ourselves why it was that John o’ Dreams as he looked towards Ting’s room, gave way to the most overwhelmingly rapturous feeling he had ever had since he was born.

Both the doors to which Lord Urk had pointed opened simultaneously. Out of one came a grave, silent, reserved, shy, obstinately and stubbornly retiring youth of about John o’ Dreams’ own age and height. Out of the other came the most perfectly lovely young girl of about Jilly Tewky’s age, not only that John o’ Dreams had ever actually seen, but that he had ever imagined himself seeing in his wildest dreams. He contemplated her with his knees knocking together, his arms making queer little jerks of their own, his hands trembling.

“Are you from Morty?” the girl asked him, stepping quickly to his side.

"That's where he's from!" came Urk's voice from above their heads. "He's a noisy one too: Oh yes, you can see what he is at a glance!"

"I am glad to meet you," said the girl to John o' Dreams. "I have often looked at the chimneys of Morty. I can see them from my window."

She offered her hand to John o' Dreams, who clasped it in both of his and began to lift it to his lips; but before he was able to do this a strange and terrible awe came upon him, just as if he had been behaving improperly to a statue of the Virgin.

"Don't be afraid of this bold kid, Sonny Ring!" put in Ring's Dad, making a gesture towards his son, who had always been his favourite, for there was a certain insight about Ting's glance whenever it met his own that rather disconcerted him and sometimes made him feel actually uncomfortable. And yet of course Baron Urk of Cad was such a towering male animal that the shy, withdrawn, self-centred Ring might well seem almost feminine in comparison. But putting the cause of it aside, it certainly remains a fact that, while Urk felt fully at ease with his son, he always felt a little uneasy in the presence of his daughter.

"Well! well! well!" cried Urk now in the almost benevolent tone which the presence of Ring always evoked: "It's time we all sat down to breakfast."

John o' Dreams was so impressed by the hall where they had breakfast, which was right in front on the first floor at the top of the entrance steps, that for a time, as both Ring and Ting waited on him with charming courtesy, his "love-at-first-sight" for Ting, while it pervaded everything, assumed a less overpowering tension. The roof of the hall above them was composed of impressive grooves and hollows interwoven with knots of various kinds of delicately carved foliage, across which the light of morning, too gentle as yet to be called sunshine, spread itself with pale luminosity.

"Did you live in one place, may I ask," John o' Dreams was brave enough to enquire, in a general question addressed to all three of them, "wherever you were before you came here? Or did you move about from place to place?"

"Oh, we moved about quite a lot, didn't we, Daddy?" responded Ting, handing their guest the milk jug and sugar basin which Laura had placed in the centre of the round table at which they sat.

"Not really moved about, Ting, you silly girl!" protested Ring. "I mean it was really just the same place all the time. We only lived in different huts," he went on, giving his father an appreciative smile, as much as to say, "It's these females who think that the only important thing is the roof over your head, while really, of course, as all sensible men know, it's the ground under your feet."

There was no sign of Laura; and instead of leaving the teapot and hot-water jug in front of Ting, she had placed them, before she withdrew, in front of Lord Urk. She must have considered Ting too young and irresponsible for the important duty of pouring out tea; but she had filled all their cups before she retired, and as the tea was very hot and strong, she had evidently felt that the passing round of the milk and sugar could take its time. Whatever Laura may have thought of Ting's capacity to cope with visitors at breakfast, John o' Dreams never for one moment found his plate that morning — till he was completely satisfied — devoid of several pieces of carefully buttered bread, nor his tea-cup devoid of just the amount of hot tea and milk and sugar that his private and personal taste demanded. "How can she," he said to himself, "read my wishes, not so much my thoughts, as to what it’s the habit of my body to want? She’s got some real magic in her, this girl! She knows me through and through without my speaking a word.”

Meanwhile the Lord Urk was thinking deeply of John o’ Dreams. “How could I best,” he asked himself, “make use of this excitable youth to help me in the purpose of my life?” Had this “excitable” daughter removed her attention from the inmost self of their guest to the inmost self of her begetter, she would have perceived in a flash what this “purpose of his life” was — nothing less terrific, in fact, than the destruction of Everything for the benefit of Nothing.

Much more subtle and complicated than his father’s were the thought’s of Urk’s son Ring. “How can Ting devote herself to a young upstart like this, from a dingy house such as Morty in a wretched hamlet like Dunnowair and in a district as forlorn as Foghorn? How can she do it?”

And Ring picked up a bit of bread from his plate, squeezing it between his finger and thumb, and as soon as it was a hard little missile, with his finger pressed against his thumb, he shot it straight at the face of John o’ Dreams. It hit their visitor in the middle of his forehead, but John o’ Dreams, who had been watching him closely all the while and seen what he was up to, shut his eyes at the critical moment and allowed the pellet to fall down between his waistcoat and the edge of the table. Instead of being angry at the failure of his bread-and-butter bullet, all that Ring felt was the peculiar satisfaction of satisfied enquiry. He had wanted to know just how their visitor would take this deliberate shot of his; and now he did know. The fellow was no fool. He saw and he knew more than you’d expect. Ring was pleased to find him like this. He had made his little experiment and had the answer. John o’ Dreams was no fool.

“I must have a long conversation with him as soon as I can. It is not outside the bounds of possibility that he may feel about things as I do.” He pushed his cup towards his sister, who, stretching out her arm in front of their father Urk, filled it with hot tea, two lumps of sugar and a trickle of milk. Well had she known to a nicety, ever since they played doll's house together, exactly how much sugar and milk Ring liked in his tea. "How shall I put it to this lively chap," thought Ring, as he watched John o' Dreams' eyes wander from face to face, from floor to ceiling, from window to window; "shall I just say to him bluntly: 'Don't you agree with me, Master Nu, that the only thing to do is to observe what happens, and analyse, at every mile-stone and watch-tower and light-ship, all that is going on? Don't you agree with me, Master Nu, that the great thing is to take nothing for granted? Don't you agree that what we have to do is to doubt everything, to question everything, to feel that all the religions of the human race, all the ideals of the human race, all the traditions of the human race, all the basic and ultimate assumptions of the human race — such as the assumption that there is such a thing as Time, and such a thing as Space, and such a thing as the Universe and such entities as Master and Spirit, and Body and Soul, and consciousness and unconsciousness, and finally, of course, what people call Life and Death — are quite possibly completely untrue; and that what we've got to do is to arrange our private, secret, personal life to suit our private, secret, personal self, however eccentric, erratic, absurd and crazy, that self may be? Yes, shall I boldly ask this fellow, this Master Nu from Morty, Dunnowair or Foghorn, whether he agrees with me that the only thing to do is to doubt everything, experiment everywhere, and never take any conclusion you come to, or any discovery you make, as final? Shall I ask him if he doesn't agree with me that the only thing to do is to test everything, try everything, test all men, all women, all children, but take no decision you may come to about anything, or about any person, as final and conclusive. Shall I tell this fellow all that and see what he says? He’s no fool. I can see that. O yes! yes! yes! I must go with him this very morning to Bubble and Squeak and see what he says when the Skull squeaks and a Bubble bursts.”

Thus Ring decided to act unless something unforeseen should intervene.

V

WHETHER IT WAS that Ring's decision to make John o' Dreams accompany him on his first visit to the Fountain of Bubble and Squeak the moment breakfast was over exerted some sort of telepathic influence on Laura, or whether it was that this spirited girl had already decided that she would make Jessica accompany her on a daring excursion before anything had been done to the breakfast things, except to remove them into the neighbourhood of the scullery sink, it would be hard to say; but long before my Lord Urk had retired to their castellated privy, which opened on a narrow passage quite close to the dining-room — a privy which Laura, from her experience of many male relatives, though they weren't giants, knew that he would not leave for some five or ten minutes — the new servants of the new master of Urk were out of the Castle and away.

Jessica had already learnt the purpose of this bold expedition upon which her elder sister had taken her. It was to visit Miss Posh. From their earliest childhood they both had heard about this elderly companion of the bachelor Rector, and as they grew up, though their parents were now dead and it was with their married brother they had been living before that worthy relative, knowing well how it would please his wife, suggested that they should serve Lord Urk, they had been familiar with Miss Posh. Both their parents and their married brother were loyal, church-going parishioners, and all Miss Posh's ways and opinions and tastes, though not asserted with quite the infallibility they would have possessed if she had been Mrs. Josiah Attic, had always played a large part in their lives.

Laura Context was born to be much more of a dominant character than Jessica Context. But it was always a puzzle to their brother Tom and his wife Jane how it was that pretty little Jessica had from her girlhood been such an adept at cooking. In their earliest dolls'-house games it had always been little Jessica who decided what their girl-dolls, Dilly, Tilly, Milly and Lily, and their boy-doll, Silley, would like to eat, and Mrs. Jane Context, who had only four children, all boys, knew only too well that, glad as she herself might be to rule her kitchen undisturbed, her boys would be now as cross as the boy-doll Silley used to look, sitting in a tiny chair by himself, waiting for the apple-tart that never came.

"Don't let's go by the drive," said Laura. "And don't let's go anywhere near Bubble and Squeak, for that's where these kids want to go with John o' Dreams. Let's go by Cad's Corner and the Witch's Cottage. It's longer, but that won't matter. The sky's as blue as that chair mother bought in Bobblesby and that father hated so. Do you remember, Jessie, how they used to quarrel about that chair?"

The pretty little girl, light and slender as a dryad, tripping by her side, made no answer. It was clear that she didn't want to think about Mother's blue chair.

"Well," said Laura to herself, "if you don't like talking while we're walking, so let it be." Indeed, by the time they reached the Witch's Cottage, the sun was high above their heads, and the small slope, covered with bushes and all manner of tall grasses, up which they were now climbing to reach Dunnowair Church, as she caught its topmost outline against a grand stretch of rocky country leading away to the open sea, thrilled her so much that she herself was glad enough to remain silent.

"What is there," she thought, "in the feeling I get, when I catch land and sea in one great sweep of their existence, under a sun like this that makes me feel as if I were free of my body altogether, and could merge myself, blend myself, lose myself, like a wide airy mist in the earth I'm looking at and the sky I'm looking at? I feel entirely independent of all my relations and friends, independent of all my duties and cares, independent altogether of being a woman or any other kind of animal. I feel as if I were a being, a consciousness, a spirit, quite equal to the rocks and stones and mould and sand and gravel of the earth, quite equal to that round blaze of rays flung out by the sun, quite equal to that blue highway of water losing itself in that far-off horizon, quite equal to the liquid blue of the sky which doesn't seem to lead anywhere, or move anywhere, or be anywhere, except above, above, and round and round and round everything that is! I don't feel at all as if my spirit was fire or water or air or earth. I feel as if it was *something else*, something that is the equal of these things, but made of something quite different from all the different things they are made of. How can any girl want to be raped by a man? I can understand being attracted to a man. I am attracted to our Rector. I long to hug him and kiss him when I hear those heavenly sermons of his. But to be raped by him! All the blest gods and all the damned ghosts forbid!"

She called after light-footed Jessica, who was already several steps ahead. "Jessica!"

"Yes, Laura!"

"What is your feeling, as a woman, about being ravished by a man?"

Jessica stopped and waited for her sister to get level with her. They were both brown-haired and brown-eyed, and they both had rather oval faces with full lips and long dark eyelashes. Had John o' Dreams seen them confronting each other then, he would have compared them to a couple of seagulls on a rock, rather agitated by the emergence of a large seal from the depths of the sea.

"But we have to be — to lose our virginity, as they call it — haven't we, before we can have a baby? And I'd rather like to have a baby, you know, Laura my dear! I think babies are delicious little things!"

"Would you like to give suck?"

Jessica instinctively raised one small hand with three fingers extended and touched her green blouse on its left side.

"Yes, certainly! Wouldn't you? That's the one thing, I guess, all men must envy us for! Think of being able out of yourself to satisfy the hunger and thirst of such a little angel as a baby is! Yes! O yes! Even if losing my virginity hurts like the devil, I'd be ready to lose it for the sake of suckling a baby! I love babies and I'd put up with a lot to have one!"

"You know, Jessica darling," said Laura, "I think you and I must be a funny pair; for here we are discussing childbirth and babies without so much as thinking about falling in love! Would you like to fall in love, Jessica?"

Jessica bent down, picked up a stick, and threw it as far as she could. Where it fell, there was no stir of any kind. It just fell and lay still.

"Do you know what I think, Laura old girl?" she said. "I think that all this falling-in-love business is silly. If you want enough to have a baby, get hold of the nearest young man you know, and make him give you one!"

"Why don't one of us get hold of old Josh Attic then?" enquired Laura: "for whatever you say, my dear, of ruling men out, you must admit that both of us are more than thrilled by those poetical sermons of his. O no! I think you're wrong about falling in love. I think when girls fall in love, something happens to them. It has nothing to do with the man or the youth or even the boy! He may, as you say, be in one sense completely discounted. I mean it's just a chance, an accident, *who he is;* and he may be the biggest fool and the silliest stick-in-the-mud in the world, or he may be a grand, swaggering, handsome cavalier or a haughty, sardonic, retiring knight-at-arms! It doesn't matter a drop in the bucket, my dear child, who he is, *as long as he's there*; as long, that is to say, as he carries on him, with him, about him, the thing that takes our virginity! He can be an absolute nondescript, with nothing about him to attract anybody's attention, but as long as he can pierce our maiden shield, it doesn't matter a bit what a fool he is! No, no, no, you funny one! Discount the quality of your male as much as you like. Make him the village idiot if you like. But he must be there! What you *can* discount, and I fully agree with you over that, *is your being in love with him.* Being given a baby by a male is the great thing. Whether you love him, or whether he loves you, is comparatively unimportant. Ask any child whether Mummy and Daddy love each other, and he'll just stare at you as if you were some inanimate Guy Fawkes of the Fifth of November talking about the Pope. The point is that he's got a Mummy or Daddy, and they've got him or her."

The lively young cook and her wise housemaid sister had very little difficulty in getting in touch with Miss Deborah Posh. They had timed their visit so neatly that they arrived at the Rectory at the same moment in its household routine as they had left Cad Castle. That is to say when the eloquent Rector had retired to his particular privy, which was in quite a different part of the house from the one habitually used by Miss Posh, who was taking off her apron and washing her hands near the kitchen sink not far from the back door, which she opened at once on hearing their approach, before they had time to knock.

"Both of you!" she cried. "Well! that *is* nice! I haven't had a word with you two together since Christmas Day. How are you getting on up there? The Rector was full of wild tales when he came home last night. He said Lord Urk was a giant! But that was a bit too tall a story for me to believe!

Do tell me about him. What is he really like? And what are his young ones like? Come into my room, my dears, and make yourselves comfortable. I've only just cleared away; but the kettle's boiling and we can have a cup of tea and a hot scone or two. You'll be glad of something after your walk."

Indeed it only took Miss Posh about ten minutes, perhaps less than that, to provide for them one of the cosiest little meals that the pair of sisters had enjoyed in peace for quite a while.

"I wonder if he told them at Morty," said Miss Posh in an almost wistful tone, "about the letter he had from the Bishop."

"I think he *must* have, don't you, Laura?" replied little Jessica brightly; "because when Lord Urk brought John o' Dreams back to breakfast I could see that Master Ring was bent on getting everything out of him he could, and as they went off together, to visit Bubble and Squeak, I could hear Master Ring ask him something about the Rector; but what it was I couldn't catch."

"It must have been about the Bishop's letter," said Miss Posh sadly, stretching her long arms across the little table in front of her, as she sat in her straight-backed chair opposite her fire, at which Laura and Jessica occupied comfortable chairs on either side. "I don't like it," she went on, "when he gets talking about our private affairs."

Little Jessica gave her a quick, gay, almost naughty glance, while Laura discreetly looked down at her plate. But apparently that was a mistake; for Miss Posh hurriedly gave the little table she had been pulling towards her with both her hands a sideway lift and tilt, and rose to her feet.

"Why, I've forgotten," she cried, "to let you taste my last year's red-currant jelly!" and she darted out of the room.

The sisters smiled at each other as Miss Posh came hurrying back with the red-currant jelly.

"I heard Master Ring tell John o' Dreams as they went out together," said Jessica, "that it was silly to bother our heads about the Bishop's scolding our Rector."

"He didn't scold him!" cried Miss Posh sharply. "It wasn't about his ideas at all," she went on, forgetting in her excitement to limit the red-currant jelly to one side of Jessica's plate; "it was about ringing the Church Bell."

"Come on, Miss Posh," said Laura in a voice that surprised her sister by its gentle persuasiveness. "Do tell us, now that we three old friends are alone together, what exactly *are* these ideas of the Rector that we hear such a lot of talk about?"

"I can tell you all that very soon," said Miss Posh quietly; "but I think you'd better not mention it. It's only that the Rector doesn't believe in God. He believes in the Holy Ghost and he believes in Jesus Christ; but he doesn't believe in God."

"Then he doesn't believe in the Trinity?" cried Laura.

"Then he's what they call an Atheist?" cried Jessica.

"The Rector worships the Holy Ghost," went on Miss Posh quietly, totally oblivious of the astonished exclamations of her two visitors, "and he worships Jesus Christ. But he thinks nothing of God. I only asked him once about God, and he got quite angry. 'God's nothing!' he said. We won't bring *him* in!'"

Miss Posh put a teaspoonful of jelly into her mouth as she resumed her seat and once more seized her little table's outer edge with her two hands and pulled it's inner edge against her stomach. Then she spoke in a low voice. "He worships Jesus and he worships the Holy Ghost, but he doesn't like God."

“Why not?” This question came straight from Laura, who was now watching their hostess in this perfect housekeeper’s room with a very searching glance.

“The Rector thinks,” she said gravely, “that there are only Two Persons of the Blessed Trinity, not Three.”

“Then it isn’t a Trinity at all,” interjected Laura.

“It’s a Duality,” suggested Jessica airily, spreading currant jelly upon half a scone.

“The Rector says that Christ is One Person and the Holy Ghost is the other.”

“What is God then?” enquired Laura.

“The Rector,” answered Miss Posh, “believes that God is nothing.”

VI

WHEN JOHN O' Dreams was led by Master Ring out of one of the many side-doors of Cad Castle, he was thinking in his heart: "If only I could get a glimpse of Ting I'd sign to her to follow us, I'd sign to her that I'd soon get rid of Ring, I'd sign to her that she'd only have to keep to the trees, yes! to glide, to flit, to slide, to float from tree to tree, so that if Ring looked round as we went he couldn't possibly see her. Yes, I'd make her know by a quick look that Bubble and Squeak shall hold on to Ring, who has no faintest notion of the power of Bubble to lead us to Nothingness and the power of Squeak to lead us to Everything! O yes! I would sign to her that if only — that if once I could get Ring between Bubble and Squeak — he'd be caught for all the while we wanted. He wouldn't see me leaving him, he wouldn't see you drawing me; and we'd glide, ride, hide, slide till the tide of the sea turns you into me and we'd skim and we'd swim to the world's furthest rim till the wind on the dew turns me into you!"

There must indeed have been an extraordinary link already established between John o' Dreams and Ting. Her natural, simple, ordinary gesture of pushing the sugar-bowl and the milk jug the whole length of the table had its significance. Ting did glance through the window as the two men departed, and by this glance she created a vision of eternity for one of them.

John o' Dreams strongly advised Ring to stand between Bubble and Squeak for a few minutes in absolute silence. "For," said he, "there is magic in this place, which, if you treat it very reverently at the first go, as we say in Foghorn, will heal you and help you and comfort you and sustain you through all the dangers of the *next two years.* Not longer than *that,* you understand? But it’s not something to throw away, is it, Master Ring — to be free from all our troubles and dangers for two years?”

Ring was evidently impressed, and so as to do what he was told, he stood completely still, watching steadfastly the bursting of bubble after bubble and clearly fascinated by the way these round rainbow-tinted orbs broke into the air without leaving behind a trace of their brief life.

“From nothing to nothing,” Ring muttered to himself.

Nor did he reveal any reaction to the queer behaviour of his companion. For John o’ Dreams flung himself on his knees before the Skull, and pressing his face against it, murmured a long and rather pitiful supplication.

“O thou first of all men to become a man! Thou who didst come out of the sea and did refuse to take refuge in trees like our cousins the apes, keep this man Ring from following me and meddling with my love for his sister. O skull whose voice has become this faint squeak, summon all the rocks and stones and shells out of their passive resistance to the arrogance of mankind, and render them able to dominate and overcome by the spirit of consciousness, in stones and sand and mould and clay, the comical and ridiculous behaviour of so many fantastic things with legs and claws and fins and scales and bladders and feathers and beaks! Please, please help my true love who is waiting for me behind this Rock to have the strength to climb to the top of it from where she is now and to wait for me at the top. O Skull of the first of the race we call men, enable my true love, the sister of this man standing here who is worshipping you in silence, enable her, I say, to reach that stone on the top of this rock, from which, as thou knowest, and as all we conscious beings who live around here in Foghorn know, grows the mysterious plant called White Grass.”

John o’ Dreams was so agitated after this desperate appeal to the Skull that he found himself listening to the Squeaks it was periodically uttering with scarcely more attention than he gave to the equally periodical bursting of bubbles. Then there suddenly came into his mind a most appalling thought. He had wholly forgotten in his agitation an aspect of the White Grass at the top of the rock that made it out of the question for him to allow Ting to wait for him up there. The legend declared that anyone who kissed the White Grass would instantaneously sink down to the inmost centre of the earth, where a monster far more terrifying than Cerberus, and far more awful to look upon than Typhaeus, had its den in that dreadful darkness.

"I'll leave you for a minute if I may," murmured John o' Dreams now, and gave his companion a quick glance. But Ring remained transfixed where he was. He behaved as if John o' Dreams had less reality for him than a curious shadow, which, thrown by the bubble just before it burst, assumed the likeness of a bodiless head.

John o' Dreams had uttered the words, "I'll leave you," as lightly as if they were words in a game of charades, but it was a lightness of tone as premeditated and considered as if uttered by a player in a seventeenth-century comedy, and as he slipped away and made a half circle round Bubble and Squeak and a complete circle round the rock behind them, he felt more self-conscious, as well as more particularly conscious of every movement of head, arms, hands, legs and feet, than he had ever done in all his days. He began to have a queer feeling that he would have been very puzzled to put into words if he had been questioned about it. Up and up he went, skirting groves of trees and piles of rocks and thickets of bramble and gorse. He longed to cry out at the top of his voice: "Wait for me, Ting! Wait for me. Don't lie down up there, whatever you do!" But of course he knew it would be mad to do that, as Ring's trance of reverential silence before Bubble and Squeak would be torn to shreds by such a shout.

All he did, therefore, was to climb and climb. But the strange feeling increased upon him. The best way he could describe it to himself as he struggled with it was that it was a feeling as if his true love, Ting, for so he felt sure he had reason to regard her, was rapidly changing into somebody else. But how the hell could that possibly be? Ting was Ting and he was he. He would be happy enough for Ting to become *him* as long as he could become *her*. But for Ting to change into somebody else, into a different girl altogether, *that* was unbearable; that was terrible!

All this time, while Ting, as John o' Dreams hoped, was waiting for him, and he, as Ting hoped, was mounting up to her, Laura and Jessica were leaving the Rectory, both a little startled if not shocked by Miss Posh's news that the Rector of their parish didn't believe in God.

"Well!" said elder sister Laura, "we had better hurry, as we've got to cook the master a good mid-day dinner, and wherever Ring and Ting may be now, they'll be as hungry as their big Dad by half-past one."

"I put two large pullets in the oven and I left the fire on," said Jessica, "and I peeled some potatoes and got some greens ready this morning early. I guessed, you know, that we'd have a bit of a rush if we went to the Rectory, but I did so want, just as you did, to have a talk with Miss Posh. Think of the Rector telling her that there was no God!"

"I expect lots of people really think that," said Laura, "but they go to church all the same, because it's nice to feel good and holy, and to think of naughty people wriggling and scriggling while devils prod them with skewers in Hell." They walked on a step or two further in silence. Then Jessica said: "If you don't mind, my dear, I think I'll have a climb up Red-Beak Hill before I come in. I feel kind of skittish now, and I don't feel as if I could stand seeing Ring and Ting putting spoonfuls of bread sauce and gravy into their mouths, while Big Daddy crunches chicken bones, until

I'*ve had a bit of airing*! You'll find everything ready; and you can begin laying the table, and all that."

Laura quickened her steps without replying. But she turned, as Jessica skipped off.

"Don't 'ee climb down anywhere, or up anywhere, my dear; I don't want any accidents!"

Jessica blew her a kiss and vanished among the trees; nor was it very many minutes after this when she could see the figure of John o' Dreams mounting the hill in front of her, and the sight of him thrilled her through and through. Of course she had known him well, as everybody in that small town of Dunnowair had done, since his childhood, and she had always felt a special attraction to him quite different from what she had felt for any other boy in the place. And so now as she followed him up that hill, feeling uneasy every minute she lost sight of him, a wild rush of young-girl feelings took possession of her. Up Red-Beak Hill Jessica rushed as fast as her beautiful legs could carry her; and there, in a dense little coppice of birch trees, alder trees and willow trees, she caught him up. In a second, as their hands met in a natural greeting, the gradual awakening of the sex-instinct in her mounted up to an unbearable pitch, and reached the brink of an interior consummation that compelled her to cry aloud, in a pitiful long-drawn quavering voice, the touching words: "Take me! take me!"

The birches, the alders, the willows above their heads trembled under the impact of this vibrant cry, and John o' Dreams looked long and long into her face. He could not, he would not, he dared not kiss her, though he made an involuntary movement with both his hands drawing her towards him. But as he did so there rushed through his whole being the image of Ting. His vivid imagination saw her kneel, without knowing the danger of what she did, by the side of that fatal patch of white grass at the top of the Rock. No! No!

No! He couldn’t betray Ting. This lovely Jessica in his arms might be a born incarnation of Eos the Goddess of the Dawn, and she might bear him a son as beautiful as Phaeton, that *daimona dion* whom Aphrodite made the eternal guardian of her Temple; but he couldn’t bring himself to betray Ting. So he loosened his hold upon her, and turned away from her, and rushed on, up, up, up to the summit of that great rock, and round about him, as he fled from her, especially when he passed a birch, an alder or a willow, the quivering sound of her cry, “Take me! Take me!” echoed and echoed in the air.

But it died away before he reached the spot where Ting awaited him. But she may have heard that cry, and the stone upon which she awaited him may have heard it; for behind her the tips of a weeping willow whispered and switched and brushed against her. Ting leapt to her feet when he stood before her, and they embraced with a bold and reckless hug. “We love each other!” filled the air around them. One of them must have uttered those words; but neither of them, so absorbed they were in their feelings, could have told which.

As he pressed her to his heart John o’ Dreams realised what the full intention of his whole nature craved, namely to enjoy everything, everything, everything that existed or could possibly exist! Yes, to possess it, as at this moment he possessed Ting. The sky all around them, the sun blazing to the east of them, a great orb of fire too dazzling to look at, the curve of the massive earth beneath them, the curve of the sea’s horizon in front of them, the wind waving the grasses at their feet and making the tresses of her hair, as they blew from her uncovered head, entangle themselves with the ends of his school scarf, which resembled, as they flashed about in all directions, a crude parody of the tassels of an Olympian aegis, all these things, as he was now aware of them, became, as Goethe makes everything become at the end of Faust, signs and symbols to him of Something for which, because of the limitations of the human mind, we have found as yet no name.

They were still holding each other tightly, her arms round his waist and his arms round her shoulders, when the voice of her brother Ring became audible a few hundred yards down the hill. Each instinctively drew back, she with a gasping sigh, he with a muttered curse.

"I'll run down the other way," she whispered to him. "Better tell him we did have a talk; but that I'd promised to help Laura with Father's lunch."

John o' Dreams deliberately avoided watching her disappear. It seemed to him a portion of the part she had told him to play that he should now concentrate his attention solely and entirely on Ring. He even descended a few paces towards him, and the moment they met he said:

"Well! I've just had a word with your sister. She said she couldn't wait, because she'd promised to help Laura. My word! But how lucky your father is to have found the best cook in the village the moment he landed. It's a born gift with Jessie, you know! All the boys in Dunnowair fight to get her to make their sandwiches for them when they go anywhere for a picnic."

"Ting can do everything," panted the young climber, out of breath, but loyal to his sister. "Do you mind if I lie down for a bit?"

John o' Dreams lay down beside him.

"Have you heard," he asked him, "about that white grass up there? Yes, you can see it without moving: it's between those two grey stones. They say that anyone who eats a few blades of that grass runs a risk of sinking down to the centre of the earth. I am too scared of these grasses to go near them, for fear I might slip and get them into my mouth. They look harmless enough, don't they, from down here?"

“To whom does this hill belong?” enquired Ring, thinking in his heart: “Oh dear, oh dear! This aggressive boy has already been making love to Ting! Where else will our old monster of a Dad take us? There’s always drama, drama, drama, wherever we go. Ye gods! But I *must force* myself to watch, watch, till I really know what the next step of this particular cosmic urge is going to turn out to be. What I *must* remember is that what these silly simpletons call ‘the Universe’ is only one atomic world among thousands of others, others which, if I can only keep in my mind the real significance of the phrase “*other Dimensions*,’ are probably so utterly different from our little cosmological drop in the great multiversal bucket that we should have to become totally different beings, different altogether from human beings, to cope with them.”

“This hill, did you say?” replied John o’ Dreams, who, intelligent enough to perceive that, after asking this casual question, Ring had fallen into a deep fit of abstracted meditation, replied as flippantly as he could: “O! to you people, of course. It goes with Cad Castle. That much I *do* know. For when we were little we used to hear all the villagers say that, if ever any Cad comes back, he’ll have to be told that, if he doesn’t have those white grasses dug up, his children, as they explore their property, might easily swallow one of those things and be carried down to the centre of the earth where is the den of a monster. But may I be impolite enough to ask you a personal question, Master Ring?”

“Certainly,” murmured his companion, pulling up his legs as he lay on his back and clasping his shins with his hands. “Personal questions are the only questions I like.”

“What then is your family surname, Master Ring? I take it the name Urk is your parent’s Christian name. What is his surname? What is your and your sister’s surname?”

"Cad, of course," replied the son of Urk. "My father's name is Urk Cad, and we are Ting Cad and Ring Cad. A professor once told me that Cad was British for a battle. So I suppose our castle is the place where some ancient battle was lost or won. Better perhaps say lost, for that would explain the curious tendency all we Cads seem to have to avoid people like Bishops and Rectors and Generals and Schoolmasters and Admirals and all privileged folk. They say the Cad who lost the battle and built the Castle was the grandson of the couple who were the original Bubble and Squeak — Grand-Bubble Lady Nothing and Grand-Squeak All There Is."

"Do you believe that story, Master Ring?" enquired John o' Dreams, recalling in his mind various conversations he had had with the Skull at the Fountain since he was a child. "Squeak says he came out of the sea before the Flood and before Adam and Eve; but I always tell him that the sea wasn't the Creator of Heaven and Earth."

"What does he say to that?" asked Ring Cad.

"He just obstinately repeats that the sea created him and that the sea is neither Heaven nor Earth."

"Well, my friend," said Ring, jumping to his feet, "the time has come for me to run after your precious Ting and see if I can get home before our queer begetter — if he *was* our begetter; for I sometimes doubt even that, he's such a weird person — begins to bawl for his lunch. Do you folk at home call your mid-day meal lunch, or do you call it dinner?"

"Dinner, we call it. But we know it's much grander and more upper-class to call it lunch and keep the word dinner for what we would call supper."

"Yes," said Ring meditatively. "Just these differences over the names of your meals show how true it is that you people in these Islands are quite as much dominated by what is called 'class' as are the people of India by what they call 'caste.' Well, our Dad may be a monster, but he's never been one for these social differences. What he hates is the human race as a whole! O how he'd love to destroy it if he could! Well, ta-ta for now, my good John!"

And he was off so fast that John o' Dreams was quite scared lest he should see him fall before he disappeared for good.

VII

"WHAT ON EARTH were you shouting about so in the night, John o' Dreams?" asked old Grumble Nu of his grandson when they sat down to breakfast in Morty the next morning.

"Was I shouting, Grandpa?" asked John o' Dreams with a lively interest in his voice. "Did anybody else hear me?" he added, looking first at his father, then at his mother, then at Auntie Oh.

Nezzar Nu looked at his son and then looked round the table. Then he said to his father, "I expect we were all too fast asleep to hear him, Dad. What did he say in his shouting?"

"As far as I could follow him," replied the old gentleman, "and I think it's a disgrace to us that somebody didn't catch what he was talking about, he was saying that he was going to Bubble and Squeak tomorrow with the Rector to discuss that famous heresy which the Rector's always so worried will reach the Bishop's ears."

"What is his heresy, grand-dad?" enquired Jilly Tewky in her boldest voice.

"As far as I could gather, my girl," Nezzar Nu answered on his father's behalf, "from what our friend Attic said when he was last here, he holds the view that we ought to concentrate on the exact words of Christ as the Holy Spirit interprets them to our hearts, and not bother with all this business of God and the Trinity. The Rector holds that St. Paul invented the Trinity, and all that Jesus did was to say that he felt himself to be one with the Father, and that when he was gone, the Father would send his spirit to earth, who would act as everybody's comforter. The Rector holds that, when Jesus was being crucified, he suddenly came to the conclusion that either there was no God the Father at all, and that he had been deceived all his life into thinking there was such a Being, or that the real God, whose realm was both Heaven and Hell, was as devilishly cruel to those he hated as he was absurdly indulgent to those he loved. The Rector holds that the world was not created by anybody but came into existence of itself, and that we human beings developed into what we now are from creatures who came out of the ocean and adapted themselves to living on earth, first up in the trees, like monkeys and squirrels, and then in caves in the rocks, till they finally learnt to use hammers and chisels and nails and cement, and bows and arrows, and swords and shields and spears, and acquired the art of building houses and attacking their enemies."

"But what is all this, Daddy," cried Jilly Tewky, "that teacher used to tell us at school about monstrous lizards and reptiles and mammoths that walked and crawled and flew across the earth before the days of Noah's Ark?"

"We mustn't expect, my dear child," interrupted her mother, knowing only too well what Nezzar was likely to reply to this, "to find what they teach us at school to be the same as what Mr. Attic tells us. Mr. Attic thinks for himself, whereas our school teachers tell us what they find in the school books. I doubt if you'll find in any of the dictionaries the Rector has in his library the long funny names of any of those weird creatures."

"O Mummy!" cried Jilly Tewky, "but teacher used to draw pictures of them on the blackboard!"

"If our fusty budgy old Bishop," growled the girl's father, almost in the tone *his* father would have used, "were to decide whether to follow the Rector or the school books, we'd hear more about the Holy Ghost than about the Ichthyosaurus. But I doubt if he'd be able to draw a picture of either of them!"

Jilly Tewky hung her head and used the paper and pencil she was holding on her lap to draw a circle, a triangle, and a square. "How much more sense there is," she told herself, "in lines and curves than in pictures of antediluvian monsters and theological disputes between Rectors and Bishops."

"What is your idea, John o' Dreams, in going with the Rector to Bubble and Squeak?" enquired Auntie Oh. "Those two go on always, day by day, night by night, week by week, year by year, squeaking absolute nonsense and bursting into nothing. If you were going to see if you could catch a perch in the Fountain, or see a squirrel in one of those trees, or a water-rat looking for its mate, or get a glimpse of some rare bird, I could understand it; but just to see Bubble dissolve into air and that silly crack in the stone like a skull's mouth go squeak, squeak, squeak! I can't get the point of it. Besides, the Rector must have been down there, O! hundreds of times more than you have! and he must know a hundred times more than you know about the plants and creatures that are to be found down there. I think it's a stupid thing to do to take a learned man down there who knows so much more than you do about the place."

"But, Auntie Oh," cried Jilly Tewky, whose loyalty to her brother not the biggest event or the smallest event could shake for a second, "don't you see, the Rector's fond of John o' Dreams and John o' Dreams is fond of him. It's an amusing excursion for a couple of friends. They'll both enjoy seeing all that happening down there! Don't you see, Auntie Oh, people don't have to be the same age to enjoy things together, if their minds work in harmony and they're both tickled by the same things!"

By this time old Grumble Nu had pushed back his plate and his chair and had walked to the door.

"I'm never going to look at that damned Bubbler and that confounded Squeaker ever again in all my days! They strike me as, as, as half-human, that blasted pair! I know very well, whatever you may have told us about your shouting last night in your bloody dreams, that it was really about *that pair down there* you were dreaming. I've brought you all up as my precious wife would have wished me to do; but what would she think if she knew that her eldest grandchild was bringing into the family, as if they were relations, this Bubble bursting with nothing and this Skull squeaking with everything! Yes! *What would she think*?"

This last question was asked of the entire world as old Grumble Nu arrived at the door, swung round on one heel, and banged the door behind him.

"Well, Daddy, I think, if you and Mummy will excuse me," announced John o' Dreams, getting up on his feet, "I'll soon be off now; and I'll be back in good time for dinner."

Jilly Tewky half-rose from her chair; but after exchanging a quick glance with her brother which both of them understood, she resumed her seat. John o' Dreams knew now that she knew he would not be bringing the Rector back to Morty that day: for the two of them had reached in their astonishing intimacy a sort of secret language of glances by which the *negative* — let all be *as per usual* — or the *positive* — *we've got to act about this* — was clearly indicated.

When John o' Dreams reached the Church, it struck him that the nearness of the Rectory upper-story to the Church tower was closer than ever.

"Of course really," he told himself, "it can't change. As it was built so it will remain; till one or the other — and no doubt it'll be the Rectory — falls down."

He stood still for a moment, observing with intense curiosity the curious little bridge of a couple of feet long, with wire railings on both sides of it, which led from the top story of the Rectory to the belfry of the Church.

"What shall I do," he thought, "if Miss Posh is out shopping or something? Shall I boldly walk in and go upstairs to the study? Or shall I just open the door and shout, 'Rector! Rector! Rector!' I wish I knew which."

But Miss Posh *was* in and cheerfully opened to him.

"Come in, my dear John o' Dreams, come in. Yes! He's up there, sure and certain! Some professor in America has sent him a book of philosophy of some country called 'Quail,' where, he tells me — though, of course, I am rather deaf when it comes to philosophy — God is the Devil and the Devil is God."

"May I go straight up?" asked John o' Dreams. "I'd hate to make you go up all those steps on my behalf."

"Yes, of course you may. But wouldn't you like a cup of tea first? I've got the kettle boiling down here."

All his life he had been a pet of Miss Posh, and he knew it would please her if he said yes. So yes it was. And soon in the big armchair on the left side of the fire in her sitting-room lolled John o' Dreams, drinking tea and eating buttered scones, while on the right-hand side of the fire sat Miss Posh, having so carefully adjusted her black skirt over her negligible knees that her visitor found it hard to know which of the four straight legs he could see in front of him belonged to his hostess and which to the chair beneath her. At any rate it was clear that Miss Posh was finishing her breakfast, for on her side of the plate of scones on the hassock between them there was only a little heap of crumbs, a few of which at appropriate intervals Miss Posh took up with her finger and thumb and transferred to the lipless slit between her nose and her chin.

John o' Dreams, after his wont, took in everything. Three years ago he had been accustomed to explain at length to Jilly Tewky that, of all our senses, eating and masticating and swallowing was the essential one.

"We ought," he would tell his sister, who listened intently, although quite unbeknown to dear John she herself put the sense of sex far ahead of eating and drinking, "we ought to get the sensation of eating and digesting from every single thing we look at."

Oh, how often it had been on the tip of Jilly Tewky's tongue to protest. "But what about black beetles, and rats, and what we see in the water-closet before we pull up the plug?" When the Rector of the village of Dunnowair and John o' Dreams of the house called Morty arrived at the Fountain, and walking around it, came face to face with Bubble and Squeak, they were surprised to find the gigantic Urk Cad glowering at these two objects.

The Rector was pleased. He had already been introduced to the new dweller in the Castle, and he was very anxious to get to know Ring and Ting, because he felt sure that these young people, with such an appalling monster as their father, would hasten to shelter under the wing of a new kind of Daddy, a Daddy with consideration and understanding, who knows what magic words of Jesus to use such as can make little flames of inspiration dart into human brains.

"And now as I," so the Rector of Dunnowair said to himself, as he and John o' Dreams approached the disturbing figure of Urk, "now as I face this man in a spot known throughout Foghorn, I must ask him to send Ring and Ting to visit me."

“How do you do, Lord Urk of Cad,” said the Rector boldly, “I am glad to see you, as I have a favour to ask of you.”

“And what may that be?” asked the giant politely.

“A very simple one indeed,” ventured the Reverend Attic, “only that you would tell your children to come and see me at the Rectory.”

“What time would you like them to come?” enquired Lord Urk.

“Well, about three o’clock this very afternoon, if that were possible,” answered the Reverend Attic.

“They shall be with you,” agreed Urk abruptly; “and I fancy they’ll be delighted to come.”

“I was just saying to our friend John o’ Dreams here,” remarked the Reverend Josiah, “that we must use all our senses in a beautiful place like this to grasp as much of the miracle of life as we can. What I was trying to make clear to him was that we must turn all our senses into one sense, so as to be able to quaff up, to suck up, to lap up, to breathe up, to inhale, to imbibe, to embrace all the things we feel, hear and see. And my question is this: which one of our senses had we best make the *King-Sense* of the rest? Some people would say at once, ‘Our eyes.’ But you must remember that our eyes are already included. They are there all right. No! Our *King-Sense*, according to my idea, Lord Urk, is our *taste*, yes! the mouth that bites and masticates, and the throat that swallows! All this whole, wonderful, thrilling, exciting, beautiful and ugly universe, which we see and feel, can best be absorbed through the mouth. The mouth is the vehicle of the *King-Sense, not* the eyes or ears or nose! That is the reason — don’t you agree with me, John o’ Dreams — that boys and girls kiss each other on the lips?”

Lord Urk of Cad, who had been staring intently, not at both Bubble and Squeak, but only at Bubble, slowly turned round now and contemplated the Rector of Dunnowair.

“You and I,” he announced very solemnly, as if he were a world-judge giving a verdict in favour of universal extermination, “are in complete agreement as to what must be done. Where we differ is as to the result of what we have agreed to do. Take Him and take Him,” and he nodded in the direction first of Bubble and then of Squeak. “He says, ‘when I burst all the world, the whole universe, vanishes away.’ But He says — and he glanced with contemptuous derision at the outline of the Skull, ‘When I squeak I show that nothing can destroy life except the “more life” which takes its place.’”

And it was then that, looking from Urk to Josiah Attic and from Joseph Attic to Urk, John o’ Dreams had a queer experience. It seemed to him that he saw in the air surrounding each of those two men a startling reproduction of what each of them was thinking in his particular and separate mind. He saw these apparitions as hovering creatures, undulating, wavering, enlarging, diminishing, expanding, indrawing. They were devoid of wings, but they moved and acted as though the self or the conscious identity emanating from each of them was struggling to act the part they each had advocated while John o’ Dreams listened to them. The one who represented Urk kept wavering and swerving and billowing and hovering and flapping and diving towards the Bubble, or rather towards the spot where each bubble burst and dissolved in air; while the one that represented the Rector kept bending and cowering and cringing and convoluting above the face of the Skull.

“O forgive us, forgive us, thou mighty sea-born!” cried John o’ Dreams, rushing up to the Skull and pressing both his hands against its head.

He did not kneel. He kept his back to both Urk and the Rector; and he knew, without glancing up, that both these hovering shapes had vanished; but the feeling he had at this moment was a feeling of irresistible strength, and it was as if all the air and earth and water in the whole cosmos had suddenly become the material out of which he, John o' Dreams of Morty, could set about creating a new world.

This feeling subsided soon; but the moment it subsided, he knelt down humbly before the Skull and waited for its next Squeak. But what was his surprise when, after its usual Squeak, the Skull in a very low whisper said to him:

"You are the one I have been waiting for millions of years. You know me for what I am and I know you for what you are. Tomorrow, at about this time, come to meet me here. And then we shall see what happens. I have an obscure hope that we may be able to go off together. Speak to none of this save only to your mother; but tell her that if we *do* go, there's only one thing we want her to do about this, to tell no one, and I promise her that I will keep you safe till we come back."

VIII

THE MENTAL, MORAL, emotional struggle that John o' Dreams went through in his deepest nature when he woke up next morning can be well imagined. He had never in his life told his mother anything that he concealed from his sister Jilly Tewky. From his father Nezzar Nu often! But from his sister Jilly Tewky never!

"But," he thought, "if I don't hide it from Jilly and only tell Mother, the Squeak will know, for I guess he knows all, and he'll just turn me down and refuse to take me anywhere. And O, how I want to go! Never since I wanted, when we were four, to go alone with Jilly to Bubble and Squeak have I wanted anything so much as this! To be taken on a trip — where, where, where, *where?* — by Squeak his wone self! Yes! By that Skull I knelt to for ten years! And *where?* What a question! No, I mustn't tell Jilly. But what will she feel when Mother tells her? I suppose what people say people feel when someone they love gives them away! *Betrayed!* I shall have betrayed Jilly, whom I love best in the world!"

The curious thing was that, as these thoughts passed through his head, John o' Dreams had the feeling that it had all been decided already. That he should hesitate, as he was doing now and ponder on the worst and most shameful aspect of what he was about to do was, he now felt, only an inevitable aspect of what he was about to do, the aspect namely of what he was bound to feel as he betrayed his twin-sister. But he decided now definitely in his mind that this betrayal of Jilly's confidence in him — and what would he feel if his mother suddenly told him that in a couple of years Jilly Tewky was going to marry the son of that Monster at Cad Castle? —

was as inevitable as if after a long walk along the bank of a river he had found that the only way to get home would be to swim across. He suddenly felt that, much as he believed in free will and in his right as an individual person upon earth, to act as he thought best, or, “to be more honest”, *as he wanted to,* there was in life a certain mysterious stream that had to be obeyed, a stream that bore in its irresistible flood elements of what *you* wanted, and also elements of what *others* wanted, and, beyond both these, *something else,* something that swept the whole destiny of a person’s life along according to the decision of an inscrutable fate.

It was a quaint example of the funny little tricks our pathetic human minds play upon themselves that, no sooner had John o’ Dreams emerged from the bathroom, with his trousers upheld by strong braces and a new green tie round his neck which Jilly Tewky had chosen for him at Mrs. Slogricky’s shop, and had begun to search in his chest of drawers for an especial pair of socks which Auntie Oh had knitted for him, than he remembered that by an unlucky chance that very yester-evening he had returned them to her so that she could make them fit a little tighter, so as not to rumple round his ankles. This was an unlucky chance, for the last thing he wanted to do was to talk about his projected excursion before the whole family at breakfast.

“O damn! damn! damn! damn!” he murmured aloud. And he said to himself, “What a prize fool I am to go on thinking about this mysterious power that is leading me on, and fancying myself yielding to necessity and destiny and all those grand rivers and tides of fate, when all these things can be completely side-tracked and changed and confused and muddled-up by one single tiny accident of pure chance! Is it perhaps after all, just pure chance, little accidents like this about Auntie Oh and my socks, that really rule the flowings and ebbings and advances and retreats and turnings to left and right of the currents of our lives? Will it be pure chance also that will decide what happens to me this morning with Squeak? And what about Bubble? Won't Bubble be desolate without her usual companion?"

He resolved to avoid having to talk to them all about this mad enterprise by not telling his mother till after breakfast. But wouldn't that make it worse for Jilly Tewky? No, I must tell her that I'm off on a crazy expedition that I've sworn not to talk about; but she shall hear all about it at tea. "Don't expect to see anything of me, my dear," I'll say to her, "till tea, or till we are alone together after tea."

Both Maria Nu and Nezzar Nu must have known by one of the strange intimations that parents sometimes have where their children are concerned that John o' Dreams was in a state of unusual nervous excitement that morning as he hurried through his breakfast. But it was only at the end of the meal when they all got up that his mother approached him and murmured quietly, "What is it, my boy?"

"I'm going for a bit of a jaunt today, Mummy, so you mustn't expect me for dinner. I'll be safe back again for tea, so you needn't worry."

He moved away from her and walked quickly up to his sister, who had missed nothing of this mother-and-son encounter.

"I'll tell you about it all, my dear," he whispered, "when we're alone after tea. Say a prayer or two for me until then, Jilly Tewky. O no! Don't be scared. I'll be absolutely all right and you shall hear all about it."

He deliberately started off in an unusual direction, plunging into the wood and avoiding every path that led directly to Bubble and Squeak or to Cad Castle or to the Church or to the village. He stopped in one dense thicket to relieve his bowels and urinate, but when at last he did reach Bubble and Squeak, it was with a deep gasp of relief that he flung himself down before the Skull.

"You understand, of course," murmured the Skull to him, "that we shall not go where I propose to take you with the weight of our material and physical bodies still upon us?"

"How else *can* we go?" asked John o' Dreams.

"You realise, of course," murmured the Skull, "that we all have an *aura*, thrown by our personality upon the air around us? Well — it is as this *aura* that we shall go."

"Do you mean that our mind, our consciousness, dwells in this *aura* and not in our physical body?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I do mean," said the other. "If you really do decide to come with me, it is by means of our *aura* that we shall travel."

"What will Bubble feel," asked John o' Dreams, still on his knees, as he heard the familiar dissolution of a globe of water into the air.

"O! the aura of Bubble will come with us." replied the Skull. "We couldn't get on without her. We shall depend on the water supply in her aura to fight the flames."

A spasm of terror convulsed John o' Dreams. "What flames?" he enquired.

"The flames of the Sun," replied the Skull. "It is to the Sun we are going."

Never in his life, as far as he could remember, had John o' Dreams felt so afraid. "What a double-dyed fool I am," he thought, "to go and commit myself to this adventure! Only a perfect ass would have undertaken such a thing!"

"Before we start," said the Skull quietly, "we shall have to add one other person to our little group. In fact we shall have to be Four in number. Not, of course, and you must get that thoroughly fixed in your mind, because Christians, in order to make Christ the Equal of God and of the Holy Spirit, worship a Three-fold Deity, but because it will be by the aid of this Fourth one in our little group that we shall be able to wave aside the flames and heat of the sun and reach its interior, where all is cool and restful and where we shall find the friend of this companion of ours waiting for us." John o' Dreams, who had grown more and more nervous as he listened to all this, began to develop at the bottom of his heart a queer apprehension lest this new companion should turn out to be none other than Lord Urk of Cad Castle. This idea shocked him so much that, rising up on one knee, he boldly enquired of the Skull who this companion of the Three of them in their journey to the sun was to be.

"You have heard, I expect," replied the Skull, not forgetting to make his ritualistic Squeak in answer to the bursting of the Bubble at his side, "of the danger to anyone who dares to swallow any portion of one of those white grasses that grow on the summit of the hill above us?"

"O yes! Many times!" replied John o' Dreams, dropping on both his knees again. "Everybody in Dunnowair and Foghorn has heard that tale. There's a story that — but I won't bother you with stories at this moment —"

"Well, my son," continued the Skull, in a tone as considerate as if he'd been John o' Dreams's great-grandfather, "you and I are going to begin our own journey by chewing a couple of those white grasses and descending — on the strength of that risky action — into the depths of the Earth. You must not," he added sympathetically, "allow yourself to be unnecessarily disturbed by this rather startling beginning of our journey to the Sun. My explanation as to who the Fourth tourist of our little trio will be will, I am sure, make it quite clear, and will also remove all nervous apprehensions."

"But I've always heard," cried John o' Dreams, shuffling awkwardly on both his knees towards his preceptor and feeling a queer shivering sensation go up and down his spine, "that there was an appalling monster in the centre of the earth who came out of his cave the moment any living person came down, besotted by the taste of those white grasses, and tearing off such a person's arms and legs, devoured them then and there, afterwards hauling the person's trunk into its cave and enjoying a rich feast between intervals of well-satisfied sleep."

"What you don't realise, my dear child," said the Skull gently, "is that no monster can satisfy its hunger on a person's *aura.* Do get into your head, my dear boy, that an aura is not a bodily or a physical form. Nor is it a soul, whether a vegetative soul or a nutritive soul or a rational soul; for the soul is what all of us are born with, before we have had time to project from our older ego an emanation of all the feelings and of all the ideas at the back of such feelings that taken together are a representation of our personality as we have little by little built it up and formulated it — created it, in fact, out of all the different tendencies of our whole inherited nature — yes, our *aura,* my dear child, is the projection of our whole living personality upon the air, as we use our will and our mind and our imaginations to assert ourselves among those who like us as well as among those who dislike us!" This philosophical discourse by the Skull upon the nature of the personal aura, which it is impossible for any ordinary person not to possess, made a great impression upon John o' Dreams. But none the less he was startled when the Skull's "aura" suddenly rose up and was instantaneously accompanied by the "aura" of the Bubble.

"Come," said the aura of the Skull in one of his familiar Squeaks, "and you come too *in your* aura," he added to the Bubble. "We must take this lad *in his body* with us, for I'm going to summon the Cyclops Steropees to come with us to visit the three-headed Titan, Kottos, in his Sun-cave, and it won't do for all of us to be only auras!"

Before John o' Dreams realised what was happening, he found himself on his knees at the top of the hill, plucking leaves of the white grass and chewing them as thoroughly as he could. As he did this, with the aura of Bubble on one side of him and the aura of Squeak on the other, he thought to himself: "I suppose I am the most complete fool ever born in Foghorn. I can see now that these two freakish 'auras' of Bubble and Squeak are simply making use of me! They must have got tired of their eternal reiteration of a skull squeaking and a bubble bursting and have made up their minds to have a bit of sport. And the best sport they could think of was to watch a Cyclopean hurler of lightning attack a monster with three heads in his cavern in the heart of the Sun."

He had to make one of the greatest efforts of his life to feel bold and brave, as the "aura" of Bubble and the "aura" of Squeak followed him down into the centre of the Earth. He didn't care whether he was, or wasn't, bold and brave, as long as he *felt so.* That was the chief thing he had of late learned for himself. Namely to disregard completely other people's opinions as to morals or ideas or realities, and just simply to force himself to enjoy himself by absorbing with all his senses all the people and things immediately around him. It can be imagined, however, that it wasn't very easy to force himself to enjoy seeing the walls of the chasm into which he was descending, for the misty shapes of Bubble and Squeak were too ethereal to offer much companionship. He could see weird fossilized creatures glaring at him, with eyes like those of octopuses, and at one point he saw what looked like a badger with the scales of a gigantic lizard and the tongue of a serpent hardened into a petrified elongated slug.

"I must force myself to enjoy my life," thought John o' Dreams, as the mysterious gravitation of this appalling chasm, or rather of the cave of Steropees at the bottom of it, dragged him down. "The more there is of life the better, the better! *That* shall be my motto to the end. Yes, I will help all the creators of life to go on creating more worlds, more stars, more planets, more suns, more Milky Ways, more universes, till Space is crowded to infinity! Create! Create! Create! Enjoy! Enjoy! Enjoy!—"

He was forcing himself to make a sort of interior chant of an ecstatic acceptance of a rapturous creation, when crash! bang! thump! bump! and he with the two "auras", that of Bubble and that of Squeak, had reached the bottom.

The Cyclops Steropees was out of his den in a second. "I will, I will, I will, I *will,*" thought John o' Dreams, "enjoy staring into that great single horrible eye," an eye which filled so much of the Cyclops' face that nose, mouth, chin, ears, forehead, seemed to become a mere casement or frame for that eye's frantic searching. Very faintly came to him now, as the Cyclops drew near, the double murmurs of the two "auras" who were his fellow-travellers.

"He's not for food, Steropees, not for food! He's going to ride with us on your wings to the Sun; and we are going with you, down, down, putting out the Sun's flames, until we reach the unburnt cavern where your friend Kottos, the fourheaded Titan, dwells."

At the mention of Kottos, the whole expression of that terrible Cyclopean eye, upon which John o' Dreams was forcing himself to keep his own human eyes, changed completely.

"To hold Kottos, to have Kottos, to make Kottos my very own, for ever and ever!" And as John o' Dreams watched this excited Cyclops he could not help asking himself: "Is Steropees actually a female monster?"

And then there happened the very last thing that John o' Dreams expected. He had so far regarded the Skull as indisputably the leader and master and organiser of the whole excursion. But suddenly, while the

Cyclops went on roaring out his rapture over Kottos, he became aware that the leader of this strange little party of a monster and a young man and two powerful “auras” was the entity Bubble. Yes, it was he who took over and assumed the command. The peculiarity of Bubble’s generalship was that the impact of its force was wholly and entirely invisible. It was felt and not seen. Its nature was composed of two elements only, of water and of air; and its whole being, its purpose, its intention, its will, compounded into one irresistible rush of energy, was directed against everything that existed.

The Sun was at his noonday heat when, led by Bubble, they set out; one monster, one person, and two terrific “auras.” They were out of the centre of the Earth in less than a second, and from the Earth they passed through the Space that separated the Earth from the Sun in just about half an hour. Once in contact with that blazing Lord of Life, John o’ Dreams found himself — along with the Cyclops, who was carrying them all four — in the midst of such a battle as he had never, active as his imagination had been since he was a child, dreamed possible.

The nearer they approached the Sun, the more scorching were the flames of that Lord of Creation and Destruction.

But well did Steropees the Lightning know how to deal with these flames; for she had, along with her lightning, an ineffable supply of rain and hail: and this air-flood she now proceeded, as soon as they reached the body of the Sun, to fling forth on all sides. Once or twice, as she did this, and as these torrents of rain and spoutings of hail struck the huge sun-flames and hurled them back, John o’ Dreams caught a glimpse of the wild, desperate, insane excitement in her huge Cyclopean eye. That eye became the whole of her face. It became the whole of her body. It became all she was. And O, how clearly John o’ Dreams heard, as he watched that eye, the repeated, ecstatic sound of “Kottos! Kottos! Kottos!”

He soon began to long to see Kottos almost as much as Steropees did; and some of the most exciting moments of his life occurred as they descended a tremendous cleft between smouldering rocks that smelt of all the cauldrons of cruelty into which he had been taught in his childhood that the God-Fiend “with names divine who made us,” as someone said, “to torture us” would throw those who didn’t love him and gloat over their screams through all eternity.

IX

The cavernous and more than cathedral-large hall in which they now stood, far bigger than the inside of any building existing on the surface of the Earth, whether in Europe, Asia, Africa or America, struck John o' Dreams as the grandest and most imposing enclosure he had ever entered in his life. There was no need for their Cyclopean friend to pour out her rain and hail, or to fling her gusts of oceanic wind at those impenetrable walls. There was Kottos with more heads on his quivering necks than John o' Dreams could count, rushing across the floor of this incredible place to meet her; and there was Steropees flinging herself upon him! By the time the two of them had vanished down an adamantine corridor of black marble, John o' Dreams found that his two "aura" companions had started off again on one of their millions of years'-old controversies.

"How much better it would be," came the voice of Bubble, "if only everything that exists could be destroyed!"

"How much better it would be," came the voice of Squeak, "if our existing universe could be encouraged to grow larger and larger and larger, until the whole of Space was filled up, and there was no loneliness or emptiness or desolation left anywhere, nothing but a beautiful teeming, blossoming, bread-bearing, rose-scented galaxy of stars, full of exultant living creatures, full of fish, birds, beasts, saurians, reptiles, and men and women, and vast forests of trees and vast oceans of water, and mountains reaching up towards the sky, and all these living things, beasts, birds and fishes and men and women, loving and hating, being born and dying, but feeling, each one of them through it all, the indescribable exultation of being alive; crying all of them to one another, ‘I love you!

I hate you! I will ravish you! I will devour you! But whatever I do to you or whatever you do to me, we’re alive, we’re alive, we’re alive! And nothing can destroy the glory of that avowal or make less than all-embracing that ecstasy of life!’”

Standing in that indescribable heart of the sun, where darkness and light, where death and life, had been swept together in an orgy of consentaneousness, John o’ Dreams flung his arms into the air and cried aloud in a maniacal longing: “Ting! Ting! Ting! Ting! You are the one I love!” As he cried, “Come to me! Come to me, Ting, my own true love,” the feeling of having Ting there with him was so terrific that he kept pressing his arms together as if he were clasping her; and as he did so, standing facing the adamantine corridor of black marble down which Steropees and Kottos had vanished, and feeling about him the empty enormity of this vast interior, which might have had for its walls and roof the pressure of a petrified weight of a foursquare interior, whose extremities were made of blocks of space frozen into black ice, John o’ Dreams suddenly became aware that the aura of Squeak was murmuring something in his ear.

“Yes, Master?” he whispered back. “Please repeat what you said. I am too awed by all this to feel anything but deaf and dumb wonder.”

“Bubble is up to a dreadful trick upon us all,” John o’ Dreams heard Squeak say. “She has prayed to the heart of the Sun, the Sun who sees all things and hears all things, to let us enter his Holy of Holies — that is to say into the heart of the Sun.”

Yes! There, actually before him, around him, about him, was the Heart of the Universe! The Sun’s Heart, before which John o’ Dreams now stood, and his friends the “auras” hovered, was in shape, in size, in appearance, exactly like the heart of an enormous giant. But what made it different from any animal-heart or any human-heart, or any heart a great artist could have imagined for our universe, *was the fact that it had a face.* Yes! the Heart of the Sun, although shaped like a heart, had the face of a god. It was a man’s face, but it was certainly super-human. It was super-human not only in size, but in expression. Never to the end of his days did John o’ Dreams forget the look the Sun’s Heart fixed upon him! The face, though enormous, was natural enough. Its features were human, though the frame in which they appeared bore the shape of a heart; and they were natural features. After the Cyclopean eye of Steropees and after the besotted eyes, staring from half a dozen twisted necks, of Kottos, the look now fixed upon him by the Heart of the Sun was beautifully, if terrifyingly, human.

John o’ Dreams was still gazing in wonder and terror into the enormous eyes before him when the “aura” of his friend Squeak whispered to him, “Bubble is leaving us for a few minutes. I can read her thoughts. She is going to ask Steropees to help her fetch Lord Urk of Cad. She says Steropees will willingly do it in order to make Kottos jealous!”

John o’ Dreams shivered. “Why that brute?” he enquired of the Skull.

“Because, replied Squeak, “she wants him to eat the Heart of the Sun.”

John o’ Dreams, who had been listening intently to every word his friend Squeak, the Skull, uttered, now turned his head. Yes, the “aura” of Bubble was no longer there.

“I shall go for that brute when he comes,” John o’ Dreams told Squeak. “This Heart of the Sun has a beautiful face.”

They had not long to wait. It was clear that Urk of Cad must have been visiting the Fountain, when with Steropees she found him. Nor did she allow him to waste a moment in that stupendous hall where they had found Kottos waiting to embrace Steropees.

"There's your feast," cried Bubble to Urk. "Gobble him up fast! Turn him into Nothing!" She paused and murmured to herself, but her words were audible to them all: "O how perfect! He will lick up the last fibre of flesh and the last drop of blood of the Heart of the Sun, and then all that depends on him; for there's no other star in space that holds the position he holds in regard to the whole Universe, that is to say all the other stars feel that the Heart of our Sun is the centre of the entire Creation. And now when Urk of Cad has swallowed up that thing staring so complacently at us, all is over and done!"

Urk of Cad certainly didn't delay in doing what Bubble expected of him. Down on all fours he went and buried his flesh-devouring snout in that calm beautiful face beneath him. Not a sound did his victim utter. In fact, as John o' Dreams and the two "auras" looked on, the sound of Urk's munching, chewing, swallowing and belching was the only sound in the diminishing Universe, save the beating of every pulse in the body of John o' Dreams. Fuller and fuller grew the interior receptacles of Urk, and blacker and bleaker grew the face that had been framed by the Heart of the Sun.

John o' Dreams was suddenly seized by a terrific resolution. He resolved to kill Urk. Looking round and feeling round, he came upon a sharp-edged piece of adamant that must have been broken off in the savage embrace between Steropees and Kottos, and got so entangled in his own clothes that it had come down with him to this resting place of the Heart of the Sun. Seizing this tightly in his right hand, he flung himself on his knees upon Urk's long waist and began hammering at the back of his head with this instrument.

The first blow cracked the man's skull; the second drew a trickle of blood and brains; and by the third Urk groaned and rolled over on his side bringing John o' Dreams with a violent jerk to the ground. He was soon up, however, and crouching over Urk, very much in the same position as Urk has assumed when he was devouring the Heart of the Sun, John o' Dreams went on hammering at this human skull with his effective weapon till, before three minutes had elapsed, Urk had become a headless giant, with a bleeding neck ending in a mask of bones and brains and blood.

X

THE EFFECT UPON the two “auras” on either side of him, as John o’ Dreams rose to his feet after killing Urk, was a little surprising to him. He looked quickly at his friend, the “aura” of Squeak, expecting an eager congratulation. But the wavering and hovering Skull seemed too occupied in watching the effect of what had happened upon Bubble to give him any response at all. On the other hand Bubble seemed more radiant with joy than John o’ Dreams could remember ever having seen her before. She kept repeating the precise sound of bubbles of water bursting and losing themselves in the air.

“To Nothing! To Nothing! To Nothing! You’ve sent him off after the Heart! Both gone! Both gone! Both gone! No more Heart of the Sun and no more Urk of Cad! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!”

So loudly did the Bubble burst into the air with this final cry that John o’ Dreams looked rather anxiously at her, wondering to himself whether the old familiar Bubble and Squeak of the ancient Fountain was at this moment, with two “auras” so far away, repeating its accustomed routine performance, or whether, considering this double death of the Heart of the Sun and the Lord of Cad, some deadly and unseemly silence had descended upon the whole place.

“It becomes hard to believe,” thought John o’ Dreams, “when you are far from your home, that everything is going on as usual there.”

His mind reverted to his Mother and his Aunt. What would Auntie Oh say if he told her he had killed Lord Urk in the Heart of the Sun? He knew at the bottom of his heart very well that these thoughts about Mummy and

Auntie Oh were a self-trick of his to prevent himself from thinking about Ting. But she burst through the butterfly-net he had thrown round her.

“What,” he thought, “will Ting feel when her father doesn’t come home? What would she feel if I confessed to her I had deliberately killed him? O Ting, O Ting, you are the only girl I shall ever love! And now I have gone and killed my only girl’s father! But I *must* confess to her. You can’t hide the truth from the one you love. You can’t. You can’t.”

Suddenly the wild cry of little Jessica when she was alone with him in that willow-bed or alder-swamp rang through his head: “Take me! Take me!” Is all love wild and desperate and tragic like that cry? Surely Ting and he would understand each other, and deal with love as if it were a creature that they had to tame? A stormy petrel? A sea-eagle? The great thing is to understand each other through and through, and if altercations and little disputes arise, to realise their inevitability and accept them for what they are and not over-rate their importance.

John o’ Dreams was certainly a youth who loved facing crises. His nature was, for anyone brought up in a family like that of Maria Nu and Nezzar Nu and Auntie Oh, and with a sister as sympathetic as Jilly Tewky, unusually adventurous. It wasn’t that he was especially nervous or especially highly-strung. But he was like some young hero of one of Sir Walter Scott’s more slowly moving romances, or you might even say he was like a youthful St. George, who wanted to be absolutely sure before making his plunge that the beast confronting him really was the dragon he was after.

He now gazed, as most young men in his situation would have wanted above all to avoid doing, with calm satisfaction at the headless trunk of Urk and the horrible heap of bones and blood and fibrous entanglements, together with what now had become an unpleasant reek of sepulchral mortality. Luckily he did not realise that the "aura" of Bubble was already deciding that in her own good time she would get this corpse to the Foghorn waves.

"I must get back home," John o' Dreams thought. "But how the bloody hell shall I do it?"

It was a comfort to him at that juncture to catch the quivering "aura" of Squeak quite close to his shoulder.

"I want to go home," he repeated with an almost childish peevishness.

"Well, sonny," replied the Skull, answering him at once. "I can tell you how that little journey can be managed; only you must be ready to keep your wits about you. You'll have to catch a falling star and persuade it to convey us all down to your part of the coast of Foghorn."

"But those falling stars are so erratic," protested John o' Dreams. "We might find ourselves landed in the middle of the Sahara Desert or on the coast of the Black Sea."

"If we could get hold of Lalanika by her tossing-gold hair," remarked Squeak, "we could make her carry us down. Only we'd have to bribe her with something; and the question is: *with what*?"

"If Lalanika could be persuaded to come to me here where we are now, I think I *could* bribe her: for I've got something I believe she'd like," said John o' Dreams hurriedly.

It was just as if this lovely falling star had been listening to them, hidden behind one of the arching alcoves that surrounded what had been, and in a geographical sense was still, the Heart of the Sun; for here she was in the midst of them, a little slender girl who looked about twelve years old.

"I'm tired," she whispered, leaning back with her head against the brim of the water-cup that was part of the "aura" of Bubble, and her back upon the thin ledge below the mouth of Squeak. "Why doesn't the spirit of

Shelley come out of the water where he was drowned and make love to me? He would know — no one else — none but Shelley — what a star as tired as I am really wants?”

“I’ve got something for you, you darting daughter of space, such as you never dreamed of!” cried John o’ Dreams eagerly; and snatching out his watch, which had the peculiarity of being entirely concealed, including its watch-face, by a golden cover, he used his finger-nails with a force that was as surprising to his fingers as it was to the watch, and tore the watch out of its coverings. This done, he replaced the uncovered watch in his waistcoat pocket, leaving the thin gold chain that was fastened to its now empty golden cover dangling from its little circular ring.

“You can twist this, O shining one of Space,” he said, “round your neck or round your arm, and you can keep a gleaming light-beam of your soul’s brightest excrescence within this cover, so that when you move about in the sea or in the sand or in the grass or in the leaves or in the shavings of a shed, you will always have this second self of your inmost being to depend upon.”

Thus speaking, he showed to the recumbent little girl this empty watch-case of gold and this golden chain attached to it. Being down above her on his knees, John o’ Dreams dangled the empty watch-case by its golden chain, and made her see what a completely close-up receptacle the watch-case had become, although easy enough to open, just as if you were opening your watch, only within this beautifully shut little case there was now nothing at all.

And then John o’ Dreams, according to his nature, grew bolder; and without a moment’s hesitation asked the girl, gazing straight into her eyes, where it was that she kept her precious stores of meteoric light.

Smiling a little, and even blushing a little, the girl tapt her right breast with her fingers.

"I shan't mind a bit," she said, "if you suck my breast and see. Only if you get enough meteor-milk from me, hold it carefully in your mouth till you can spit it into your watch-case without losing a drop."

Very gently and delicately John o' Dreams obeyed her. He moved aside the thin fringe of gauze silk from her right breast and pressing his mouth against it, sucked hard at the tiny pink teat. Yes! His mouth was soon full of a delicious-tasting gleaming whiteness. Of this, as she had instructed him, he emptied his mouth into the watch-case, through all the chinks of which this dazzling whiteness shone forth, as if an electric light had been turned on inside the little golden case.

"Will you twist the chain round your neck or round one of your wrists?" he asked her. "I'm afraid the gold case hangs rather awkwardly; but if you twist it tight, there is no danger of your losing it."

Lalanika pulled her transparent fringes of silk over her breast and wound the thin gold chain round her right wrist, from which the watch-case, its edges shining as if it were imprisoning a star erected itself, as he had warned her it would do, rather awkwardly. But Lalanika *did* seem, as he had predicted she would, very much delighted with this addition to her natural luminosity.

"What puzzles me," cried John o' Dreams suddenly, "is how a little girl like you, Lalanika, is going to carry a heavy man like me from the Heart of the Sun to the shore of Foghorn. Of course Bubble and Squeak in their present form will be quite light. God! I wish I could become an 'aura' instead of a lumbering carcase of an eating and drinking man."

"Don't you worry, my boy!" said Lalanika, smiling. "Only hold on to me tight round the hips! Yes! round my hips, my lad, *not* my waist, or I might come in half! And where would we be then? But I'm off now!"

"Are you two—" began John o' Dreams in his impulsive simplicity; but he need not have worried about his two "aura" companions; for they were better aware of what was happening than he was.

He had already obeyed his Falling Star! Tight round her hips, as she had instructed him, his arms were flung; and she with him, and the two "auras" hovering round them both, they were soon falling, or so it felt to John o' Dreams, *upwards* till they reached that vast cathedral-like hall where Steropees and Kottos had seized upon each other and had vanished. Thence — and still, as it seemed to John o' Dreams, falling upwards — they were soon free of the Sun altogether; and then at last the youth realised what was happening to him, according to the actuality of life upon earth, and down, down, down, down fell the Falling Star into the sea off the coast of Foghorn. John o' Dreams caught a glimpse of the vanishing right arm of Lalanika, with his golden watch-case shedding dazzling gleams from what was in it, as the girl's body vanished in the surf, and he climbed up the steep bank of pebbles.

"What is she doing now?" he asked himself, as he watched that unmistakable gleam among the waves; and it seemed to him that she must be swimming slowly along the coast towards the landing stage, where the now dead Urk had landed, and where there was a small customs office frequented by a solitary official.

"Will she let that man have a glimpse of her?" thought John o' Dreams; and a curious throb of jealousy passed through him.

But he felt ashamed of himself when he thought of Ting. "What an amorous fellow I am!" he told himself. "Are all men like this?" And then after a moment's thought, looking north and south along the coast, "When," he said to himself, "shall I dare tell Ting that I have killed her father?"

Turning his back to the beach, he began walking with rapid strides straight towards his home. But suddenly, to his absolute amazement, he felt a hand catch hold of his sleeve, and there was Lalanika by his side!

“Will you show me, my dear boy,” she said, “where I can get a room for the night?”

John o’ Dreams’ response to this appeal was as inevitable as had been his savage attack on Urk of Cad.

“Of course, Shining One, of course,” he said, “my mother will let you sleep with us at Morty. Only we’d better be quite honest with her as to who you are, and how you and I have come to be together. Though perhaps” — he added this more hesitatingly— “we’d better not mention the death of Lord Urk of Cad.”

Home at last they all got; and long was the intimate talk that evening after tea between John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky. These twins had never concealed anything from each other, and it can be believed how much there had to be exchanged between them *that* evening! But the warm south wind brought night at last and both of them slept sound.

Not so slept their hard-worked father Nezzar Nu. From her first appearance under his roof, Lalanika the Fallen Star had disturbed him dreadfully: and in the middle of that night just about when the Reverend Josiah Attic, a mile away, was ringing his church bell to remind Miss Posh that certain prayers from her were still due to the overhanging emptiness of infinite Space, poor over-worked Nezzar, who had spent almost the whole of the day digging round the long lines of Gog-Magogs in his sun-baked fields, found himself slipping softly out of his wife Maria’s bed and advancing on tip-toe with bare feet towards the door of the small cupboard bedroom at the top of the stairs, where this disturbing visitor was sleeping.

More quietly, more furtively, than any door in Morty had even been opened before, Nezzar Nu turned the handle.

Yes, there lay Lalanika the Fallen Star! She was asleep on her side, one of her cheeks hidden and her bare right arm, round which the closed watch-case without the watch threw its sacred radiance, resting prettily against her bottom, the whole of which was charmingly bare, because of the rumpling of a night-dress a good deal too large for her and evidently borrowed from Jilly Tewky.

Nezzar Nu simply longed to take her in his arms, just as she was! There was something about that pretty little bottom of hers that excited him to a fever-point. He hadn't made love to his wife Maria for something like ten years, or to any other feminine creature either, but for some reason beyond his understanding Lalanika's little bottom excited more amorous desire in him than the breasts or the wombs or the necks or the legs of any females he had ever seen, or was able to imagine ever seeing.

How difficult it is to find the real explanation of the psychic play of "auras" and "occult vibrations" and spiritual shocks and mystical emanations and incredible revelations and visions of dimensions utterly different from ours, which seem to be going on all the time! We can force ourselves to regard it all from the most materialistic and atheistic standpoint, but it goes on all the same, and is constantly breaking up our solid framework of decent common sense. It becomes in fact more and more evident that, however gravely and logically we look at things, there remains in life an element of pure bedlam.

Whatever help that middle-of-the-night church bell may have been to Miss Posh, it was the opposite of helpful to Auntie Oh. Poor Auntie couldn't let herself respond as she always did to the words of her Rector, for it was the sound of his church bell, not the sound of his voice, that reached the bedrooms of Morty, hushed in blessed silence for the night. But "all the same for that," as Homer would say, the church bell woke Auntie from her sleep and gave her the feeling that somewhere, somehow, and in some manner, the church at that moment — quite apart from Miss Posh — needed support. So Auntie Oh rose from her bed, put on her dressing gown, a garment of dark purple with a black waist-belt, and came downstairs to her sister's floor, where was the cupboard-bed occupied by Lalanika.

It was her destiny to arrive at the critical moment: the very moment when her brother-in-law, Nezzar Nu, was standing gazing in infatuated attraction at the sleeping girl. Auntie Oh had come down so quietly, that she was standing behind Nezzar Nu at the foot of Lalanika's bed before he was aware of her presence. In fact it was the Fallen Star herself who was the one to become aware of Auntie Oh. She woke up with a cry, and seeing not only her middle-aged host, but her hostess's elderly sister, standing staring down at her, she had the explosive shock that ended her.

Perhaps she would have had it in any case. Few Falling Stars survive their fall, though we often find their broken meteoric remains. But the moment the sound of the church bell awoke her, Lalanika leapt up from the bed, uttered a shriek that awoke everyone in Morty, tore from her body Jilly Tewky's night-dress, and burst into a white flame. The gleaming juice that filled her veins in place of blood shot free of Morty through every aperture in the place. Long before that strange white light had floated away past the tower of the church and the turrets of Cad Castle and the tide-washed breakwater of Dunnowair Landing at the extremity of Foghorn, Lalanika was dead, and all the consciousness she had had was lost for ever.

The striking thing about it was the loss of every shred and scrap of her identity. Not a trace of her body, not a lock of her hair, was ever found in any corner of Morty or any curve of that coast. Many of us mortals have short lives, but none of us can boast a life as short as Lalanika’s. Even the memory of her, mixed with a mockery of remorse in the minds of Nezzar Nu and John o’ Dreams, soon became something unreal. So faintly she was, that when she was not, the difference between being and not being seemed to vanish away.

XI

IT WAS TO Nezzar Nu himself — when, about four o'clock in the early morning, after the violent disappearance of Lalanika, the Fallen Star, he found himself unable to sleep — that the ghost of Lord Urk appeared.

That Nezzar Nu went to sleep again so quickly after the ghost's visit showed that Lord Urk had appeared in his natural form and not as a headless corpse. Besides, it is likely enough that what really happened was that a telepathic communication from one of the two "auras," before they retired to rest in their dwelling at the Fountain, informed Nezzar of Urk's death. In whatever way the news reached Nezzar, the startling information brought to them all when they met at breakfast was confirmed by John o' Dreams, who, without revealing anything of his visit to the Sun, indicated that he was able to corroborate and confirm what had been announced by his father.

Auntie Oh had never been more tactful in her life than when she confirmed to her sister before them all, what Maria had already learnt from her husband, about a mysterious outburst of milk-white fire in which the meteorite in the shape of a beautiful young girl had vanished from that cupboard-bed. What Ring and Ting knew of their father's death remained a complete mystery to all the inhabitants of Morty. Neither of them, when they both appeared at the end of breakfast, seemed to feel the least consternation or the least desire to minimise the importance to them of what had happened.

"Ring, of course," Ting told them, with proud satisfaction, in her voice, "will be Lord of Cad now. My father left a most careful will, which Laura found very quickly among his papers, explaining exactly how much money we're to expect regularly from Singapore, where the rents of his Malay estate are kept by the bank."

"You will, of course," said Auntie Oh quickly, "keep both Laura and Jessica?"

"O yes!" cried Ting: "We'd never be able to get on without Laura. And Laura would never be able to get on without Jessica. O yes! Of course we shall keep them both! Now that Laura's found that will of daddy's with all it says about the money coming over regularly from the bank in Singapore, we can feel quite happy about our future. O yes! and Laura found daddy's cash-box too, and made us open it and count how much there was! And, would you believe it, there was nearly a hundred pounds! So we're well fixed up for the present anyway."

"But be sure you let us know, my dear children, if you get into any money difficulties," broke in Nezzar Nu. "For we certainly would — wouldn't we, Maria? wouldn't we, Dad? — want to help if that ever happened."

"Don't you worry, sonny," growled old Gammer Nu. "These kids in Cad will die richer than you, and richer than any of your children."

It can be imagined what a lot John o' Dreams had to tell his twin-sister Jilly Tewky that morning as they walked out together. "Let's go to the Fountain," John o' Dreams cried. "You don't mind, do you? Only I do want to see how they've survived their fall from the Sun!"

And Jilly Tewky said: "I wish that Star — what did you call her? — hadn't blown up."

"So do I, my dear. So indeed do I! O, you would have liked her so! She was a darling! I almost hope I shall never find that watch-case of mine. I can’t bear to think of that brave girl being anything any more but what she was when I last saw her!”

When they reached the Fountain, John o’ Dreams flung himself down beneath the Skull and pressed his forehead against its strange outline. Poor Jilly Tewky had no wish to do the same before the bowl of the Bubble, so she crept as close to John o’ Dreams as she could, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

“I’m going to build and build and build and build and build!” cried John o’ Dreams passionately, “till I have so filled Space with my work, that there’s no more room for the smallest star to fall! For all Space will be filled — filled, I tell you — by my work!”

He jumped to his feet, and Jilly Tewky drew back. And they now, both of them, stared with astonishment at the hollow stone cup from which the bubbles were being dissolved in air. Nor did they stare without good reason. Never before had either of them known anything like what they now beheld. For the bursting Bubbles, before they burst and were lost in air, assumed the appearance of a creature’s face — and what a creature!

It was the face of a World-Swallower! It was mostly mouth. It *had* eyes and ears, but these were so obviously occupied with one purpose only, the catching of something to swallow, that short of that purpose they were nothing. The same applied — yes, applied even more so — to the nose. “O Swallower, I smell a speck of something.”

Our two twins, John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky, stared with a puzzled incredulity at these human-featured Bubbles bursting, each one in its appropriate time, exactly parallel with the Squeaks of the Skull. But their wonder changed to awe when, before the Bubble lost its mortal countenance, they distinctly heard it uttering the following rhapsody.

“Nobody in Heaven or Earth is stronger than *Nothing*,” the Twins heard it murmur. “Space is Nothing; in spite of all this nonsense you hear about it being full of molecules of matter. Space is a Void. I, Bubble, who burst into it and become part of it, know well the truth of what I say. And in the end, let me tell you — and every galaxy of stars is listening now to my voice — all the worlds and suns and stars that are supposed to stretch out into infinite space shall perish.

Yea! every single one of them shall dissolve into empty Space, and be no more heard or seen! Dissolved they shall be, every one of them, dissolved and lost in empty Space! Thus shall it be, as I say unto you now. All the Stars, all the suns, all the worlds, shall vanish and disappear. All the Universes, and all the materials for universes, shall cease to exist; and Nothingness, I say unto you, Nothingness shall swallow all. Nothing shall be infinity, and infinity shall be Nothingness, and thus shall it be for evermore.”

John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky felt as if they had been listening to everything they had believed in, and to everything they had taken for granted, perishing there and then, all about them, as they stood together, watching Bubble and listening to Bubble. And yet Squeak was retorting. Over and over again, in response to all that Bubble so sweepingly annihilated and so implacably condemned to annihilation, came the simple, intrepid, impervious commentary of Squeak’s inveterate squeak.

“Doesn’t it sound,” said Jilly Tewky, as she led her brother away, “just as if Mummy were answering all that Daddy’s always telling us about the craziness of the Rector ringing the church bell for Miss Posh? I mean the Bubble talks like Daddy, and Squeak answers like Mummy.”

“O no! no!” retorted John o’ Dreams. “It’s the other way round. It’s Mummy who talks like Bubble; and Daddy who answers like Squeak. But the truth is, my dear, both Bubble and Squeak are so like what all the nations on earth are like, contradicting each other and accusing each other, without leaving any room for the sort of compromise that might lead to a new step forward in our history!"

"Do we ever have steps forward in our history?"

"Of course we do, my dear. Just think! It was only about a hundred years ago when they used to chain mad people up in Bedlam and flog them cruelly; whereas now if mental homes don't treat crazy people so that their mad ways can be very carefully studied with a view to helping them to recover their sanity, the matrons and nurses in those homes, and sometimes even the doctors who visit them, are easily liable to prosecution by the relatives of their patients."

"Do you think, John," Jilly asked, as they made their way in the direction of the Witch's Cottage, before reaching which there was a path through the wood to Morty that avoided any contact with the village of Dunnowair, "that Ring and Ting will be able to get on by themselves in that Castle?"

"Of course they will, my dear," John o' Dreams replied hurriedly. "With Laura to look after them, any kids could get on. But my trouble isn't worrying how Ring and Ting will get on without Lord Urk; but whether I ought to confess to Ting that I killed her father."

"Was Ting fond of him?" Jilly asked.

"Oh no!" her brother replied hastily. "Neither of them were fond of him. They *couldn't* be. How could anyone be? They just took him for granted. He'd never been rough or unkind to them. But I don't think there was any intimacy between them and him. It's hard to see how there could be."

"But, John my dear," murmured Jilly, "size isn't everything."

"O, it wasn't his size! There was something else. The fellow wasn't like an ordinary human being at all. You only had to be near him, only to watch him, to notice that. It was like watching the ways of a giraffe or an elephant. I should feel quite different about having killed him if he'd been, even a little bit, more human. I only feel as if I'd killed a rhinoceros or a whale or a sea-serpent."

"But what *did* Ring and Ting feel about him, John? I wonder what Ting would feel if you confessed to her about it all. Of course that Being in the Sun that they called the Heart of the Sun was completely different from us. But he was a friendly creature; and nobody could call Lord Urk exactly that."

"Besides, my dear, I should feel myself, surely, some remorse about killing him, if he'd anything human about him? No, Lord Urk was an inhuman monster. And the Heart of the Sun certainly wasn't that! I know, for I have been there. But the great question for me, Jilly old girl, is whether or not to confess everything to Ting."

"You're in love with Ting, John?"

"Yes, I guess I am. I certainly can't imagine living with any other girl, except you, of course; and as to marrying any other girl, I just couldn't endure it!"

John o' Dreams made up his mind, while he was walking home that day with Jilly, that what he would like now to do of all things would be to visit a stellar system quite different from our own. But what system would he like most to visit? He boldly plunged his mind into this exciting subject before he let his twin sister go. They were in sight of Morty now and he knew well that, when he *did* let her go, she would enter the house by the back entrance and hurry to the help of their mother in the kitchen, while he would be expected to offer his father, Nezzar, some little assistance with their Gog-Magog fields.

"What stellar system, different from ours, would you like to visit, Jilly, if you had the chance?"

Jilly looked straight into his eyes. "The 'Milky Way'," she answered; and then, tearing herself from him, for he had his arm round her, she flew to the back of the house.

The sort of work he had now to do, weeding and breaking up the soil round those tediously familiar rows of Gog-Magogs, suddenly struck him as repugnant. He paused, kicked at the root of a rowan-tree and cursed his fate. He had never so much as heard of Nietzsche; so that that great philosopher's motto, *Amor Fati,* had never crossed his mind as a clue to life. But, like so many of us in so many lives, John o' Dreams, by the necessity of existence on this planet, had forgotten the element of chance.

And it now happened by pure chance that old Grandpa Grumble, feeling a little in want of air in his upper chamber, opened his window and leant out. At the moment he did this the figure of John o' Dreams happened to be obscured by a clothes-line upon which hung a few of grand-dad's shirts that were just then flapping in the wind. Grand-dad could, however, perceive that something was moving beneath this clothes-line, and as he looked down his vision was so much blurred by the book he had been reading that he took this something to be an animal.

"Out, out, out!" he shouted, thinking that the yard gate must have been left open, and afraid lest one of his shirts might be carried to the barn on the horns of a cow.

When, however, the cow showed no sign of departure, he looked hurriedly round for something to fling at it, but all that met his hand was the book he had been reading. This book happened to be the first volume of an ancient and rather heavy edition of Catterduck's History of the Roman Invasion of Britain. With the unbridled violence of an extremely old student interrupted in his studies, Grumble Nu flung this heavy volume, which had metal clasps, at what he supposed to be an intrusive animal.

XII

THE BOOK HIT our friend John o’ Dreams full on the head. Fortunately, it did not hit him with its metal clasps. Indeed its rush through the air opened it wide; and it struck him with the peculiar effectiveness which can be imagined best if we think of a powerful clergyman bringing down on the head of a boy in his choir the great Bible he was reading in his pulpit.

John o’ Dreams fell to the ground; while his grandfather, up aloft, closed his window and resumed his seat in his armchair with the next volume of Catterduck’s History. But though his skull was quite intact, John o’ Dreams was half-stunned, and altogether dazed by the weight of this great book. So dazed indeed he was, that he did not feel any surprise when he found himself being helped to his feet by a man whom he had not seen approaching him.

“You’re not hurt, I hope,” murmured the man, “not hurt but a little dazed,” and these words the man kept murmuring while, with the most exquisite and delicate care, he examined Catterduck’s famous volume, and after smoothing its ruffled pages, placed it under his arm.

After a moment’s consideration of the book under the man’s arm, John o’ Dreams sighed heavily. He began to experience the most extraordinary sensation he had ever felt since he played with his sister as a child under this same clothes-line, where hung the work of his mother and Auntie Oh. He had the feeling that he had turned into somebody else. He tried to say “I am I,” with the certainty and assurance that had become a habit with him ever since a certain emotional shock when he was very little, and when, after he had been telling them all about his dreams, his grand-dad had said to his mother: “Why do you let the boy go on in this silly way? Anyone would think he wasn’t himself. Anyone would think he was crazy.”

He now began looking carefully at the man who had helped him to his feet and was now standing beside him. He had never seen him before. He was about his own height; but his appearance puzzled John o’ Dreams. There was nothing about him that it would be possible to describe, however hard he tried; no, not even to Jilly Tewky. The fellow had a large head covered by delicately cropped straight hair of a greyish-greenish tint. His features were small; eyes, nose, mouth, ears, all so small and so neat, and so entirely unexpressive of any character at all, that it was as if somebody had bought them in a shop for human-sized dolls and then smoothed out the skin of his forehead and cheeks to fit them into their appropriate places.

John o’ Dreams felt angry. “May I,” he enquired rudely, “ask who you are?”

The stranger smiled.

“May I ask you on my side,” he enquired, “if I heard your sister correctly, when she said she would like to go to the *Via Lactea,* or, as you call it in Foghorn, the Milky Way?” John o’ Dreams, with one of the greatest efforts of selfcontrol he had ever made, restrained himself from knocking this impertinent eavesdropper to the very ground from which he had just helped him to rise. How *dared* he presume to hear what Jilly and he were privately discussing together?

“I asked you,” murmured his interlocutor quietly, “because I happen to be going to the Milky Way today, and I would take both of you with me.”

John o’ Dreams told himself that he was talking to a madman. “But I must be damned careful to help Jilly out of this,” he thought, “for she’s so terribly impulsive with strangers that you can’t tell what mightn’t—”

He was interrupted by the appearance in her own person of the girl in question.

“You were talking about me?” she said. “I heard the words, ‘Milky Way!’”

“I was just telling your brother,” replied the stranger, “that I’m now off to that very place, and I wondered if you two would care to go there with me.”

“How are you going?” Jilly asked at once. “By air-plane?”

And she looked round, evidently expecting to see some small plane between the kitchen-garden and the tennis-lawn.

“No,” said the stranger. “I do not need air-planes. I can travel through the air whither, when, and where I please.”

Instinctively the twins seized each other’s hand; and the sort of look passed between them as had passed when they were born. They were so agitated they could not speak. It crossed John o’ Dreams’ mind that he could wish the mysterious fellow a polite good-night, and enter their house, leaving him under the clothes-line. It crossed Jilly Tewky’s mind that they must beg the stranger to spend the night with them, and talk it over with their parents.

“I think it would be well,” said the stranger, looking quietly from one to the other, “if I told you who I am; for that, more than anything, might help you to decide whether or not you would like to accompany me. Let me show you, first of all, exactly where I shall be taking you.”

The twins, clutching each other’s hand still more tightly, looked up at the outer edge of the Milky Way or *Via Lactea,* at which the stranger was now pointing with both outstretched arm and outstretched finger.

“You see that tiny one,” he said, “at the Way’s extreme border?”

“Yes, O yes!” cried the twins simultaneously.

"Well," he went on, "that little world is called Vindex. That's the name the Romans gave it when I first took them there. They must have felt it to be their Protector and Liberator and Avenger, after all they had suffered at the hands of Fate; and though we used to call it Llychyn*,* which means a speck of dust, we decided that the Roman name was a better one. Don't you think so, you two, soon to be citizens of Vindex?"

The twins, however, were staring now, not at *Vindex*, but at the person before them.

"Is he a madman, escaped from an asylum?" thought John o' Dreams.

"Are we both asleep," thought Jilly Tewky, "and dreaming the same dream?"

"Well, children," said the mysterious stranger, "I will tell you now who I am. You might not think so from my appearance, but I am the Arch-Druid. This book, which your grandfather threw down, is the Roman account of how they slaughtered us in Mona, the Mother of Wales. We will take this book with us. It shall have a prominent place in our National Library at Vindex, which, I may now tell you, is a Republic of Druids. Well, children, are you ready to start?"

The twins were too awed by the transformation that was taking place before them to do anything but acquiesce in silence; for, before moving from where they stood, the impersonal individual before them changed, even as they watched, into a majestic figure, clothed and adorned in the well-known druidic raiment, and wearing an especially striking kind of prehistoric mitre upon his imposing head. He was not bearded; but his long dark locks hung down each side of his shaven face, which in its statuesque dignity suggested the Pontifex Maximus of Rome, while its quick eye-glances indicated the experienced sagacity of an alert spiritual ruler. And it seemed to them both, as the Arch-Druid carefully arranged the massive book, now firmly held in his left hand, under his magisterial mantle, and grasped with a portentous authority the free hand of Jilly Tewky, that they were indeed destined by a necessity impossible to resist to make this unprecedented voyage.

"Off we go, then," cried this Druid of infinite space, fixing his eyes so intently on the tiny speck of light, which was their goal, that these eyes of his seemed to magnetize it nearer: and indeed off they were!

The Arch-Druid kept a very firm grip upon Jilly Tewky's hand; and Jilly Tewky kept a very tight hold of her twin-brother's hand: and thus all three of them, two men and one girl, shot up, as if out of some electrical cannon's mouth, straight for the Milky Way. It struck both the twins, as they went, that they passed many extremely disturbing changes of atmosphere, some of which almost took their breath away, while others gave them more breath than they were able to cope with; and once or twice they had the extremely unusual sensation of feeling that it was necessary for them to suck up air as bees suck honey from flowers.

When at last they began to be aware of all the innumerable stars, and in many cases larger stars than Vindex, which were now around them, they both felt surprise that they had not realised while on earth that the starry worlds which they now beheld, worlds above them, worlds below them, worlds on all sides of them, were as large as their old sun and their old moon; and not only so, but, as they ascended among them all, they were as far away from the space-path along which the Druid was guiding them as were their old companions, the Sun and Moon, from their familiar Earth. In fact, as now seen in the light of their approach to Vindex, a light that struck them one minute as sunlight and the next minute as moonlight, the *Via Lactea*, or Milky Way, displayed itself not as a congeries, or vast cluster of little stars — for the vast majority of them now began to vanish in far-off space — but very much as the stars in our own sky look when at home upon the earth, only a good deal more widely and evenly dispersed. And finally, to complete the resemblance, as they came close to Vindex, it began to grow dark.

XIII

DARK INDEED IT was when the three of them landed. It was clear to both our friends that the Arch-Druid had selected their landing place with the most artful and consummate skill. It was into an empty moss-covered amphitheatre that they descended, with no buildings near and nobody in sight. There was no mist and no rain; there were no birds and no beasts. It might have been the old Roman amphitheatre at Foghorn, which was very familiar to both John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, except only that, instead of the grass to which they were accustomed at home, the verdure under their feet was an exceptionally soft kind of moss varied by a sort of delicately-leafed lichen, which, however, instead of being grey like most kinds of lichen with us, was richly coloured, only it was too dark now to see its colour.

"You will both of you," such were the wise and kindly words with which their guide welcomed them to Vindex, "wish to relieve yourselves of a little urine and possibly of a little excrement. I therefore suggest that we all three go different ways across this encircling bank; and then, when we are quite comfortable, let us return here again; and after that I will escort you to your dwelling for the night."

Thus speaking, and without once looking round, the ArchDruid climbed up the embankment nearest to him and disappeared over the top. The twins smiled at each other and still holding hands climbed over the bank in the opposite direction. Once on the other side they hugged each other and Jilly said:

"Well, my dear, we sure are in for it! But as long as they leave us together, I don't mind, do you? Well, let's do as he told us like good kids; and then we'll be ready for anything."

They found themselves among some very queer-looking shrubs, about twice as tall as they were themselves, shrubs with enormous heart-shaped leaves and with queer featherlike excrescences at the top, which were waving just then in a faint wind. Secluding themselves for a minute or two from one another behind these curious growths, they both did what their guide had told them to do, and were soon, hand in hand again, descending into the amphitheatre. Here they found the Arch-Druid waiting for them; and under his escort, but no longer holding his hand, they passed out of the amphitheatre into a carefully kept avenue, on both sides of which grew those same remarkable shrubs with their big leaves and feathery tops.

"How," enquired Jilly Tewky, "do the people of Vindex live? Do they eat cattle and sheep and lambs and pigs and fish and birds? Or do they live on bread and butter and cheese and fruit?"

"I expect you will soon tell us, Sir," said John o' Dreams, "of some wonderful things to eat, such as we have never heard of in our old world!"

The stately avenue, along which they were being led, had now begun to widen a little; and, after a few steps further, they came upon such a wonderful sight that neither of the twins wanted their guide and master to tell them anything about the food of the Vindex population. Before them stretched an enormous level plain; and from the plain rose up such a city as neither of the two visitors had ever dreamed could exist in the universe. They both instinctively stopped to stare at what they beheld in awe and amazement.

"O my Lord, what a sight!" cried Jilly.

"Holy Jesus, what a scene!" cried John.

What struck them most was the fact that the pavement under the city was composed of dazzling white marble, from the surface of which the buildings rose tall and erect, while from all the windows in these buildings blazing lights of every possible colour, yellow, red, blue, black, grey, purple, fell upon this white marble surface, and as they fell, revealed the fact that the walls of the buildings were of a pure emerald green. After a few seconds of gasping silence Jilly Tewky demanded in a whisper of their guide what name the inhabitants of Vindex bestowed on their city.

“Asteropetes, thrower of lightning,” was the reply.

Slowly both the twins repeated the name of the marvellous Vindician city at which they were gazing in bewildered wonder. “Asteropetes, thrower of lightning! Thrower of lightning, Asteropetes!”

“Have you any enemies here, master? Has Asteropetes ever been attacked?” enquired John o’ Dreams.

“Only once, my dear son, only once. And then it was conquered.”

The twins stared for a moment at the astounding spectacle before them without any comment. At last John o’ Dreams murmured: “*Conquered?* It seems impossible! Conquered by whom?”

“By us Druids,” was the staggering answer.

They both took their eyes from Asteropetes and stared in astonishment at their guide. The Arch-Druid made a sign to them to sit down on the fallen trunk of one of those strange trees by the side of the road. As they obeyed him they both, as they would instinctively have done in Foghorn, looked up at the darkening sky above them, that bent down, like the shoulders of the giant Atlas, over all the blaze of Asteropetes.

“Yes,” the Arch-Druid continued quietly, “Vindex was conquered by people from Perosus — a star you can see over there, that big one, which is the last of the bunch stretching away to the north. Perosus means a people with an unusual power of hatred. There were only a few of the original natives left in Vindex when the Perosians came. Where these few natives came from, I haven’t the least idea. Perhaps they developed from the land and water that has always been in this place. I once discovered a cave here where four of these original natives lived, a male and female with a male child and a female child. In appearance they only resembled us a very little — yes, scarcely at all! They had no head and no neck. Their faces protruded from the centre of their breasts, which were very large and covered with fine white silky hairs. Where we have our heads and necks, they had a circular base, as if designed to carry a column or pillar. But there was nothing on it, and the natives, when I asked what they called it, replied *cornicer*, meaning Horner. Yes, they carried on this substitute for a head a colossal horn. This horn was connected with their mouth by a hollow reed. I became quite familiar with these four creatures, who had very short legs and arms. I soon learnt their language, which was entirely composed of signs and gestures and the use of about a dozen monosyllables, which I quickly got to know by heart. ‘Blog’ meant ‘Yes’ and ‘Wog’ meant ‘no’ and ‘Bogly-Wogly’ meant ‘wait and see.’ I missed them greatly when they perished. They were eaten by a dragon, whose dead body I found soon after. It had died of eating them.

“It was easy for me,” the Arch-Druid continued, “to conquer the *haters* from Perosus. They had invented enough airships to carry about a thousand of them from their world to ours. But the particular Perosian who did the inventing died from overwork soon after he got here, or perhaps the climate of our world didn’t suit him. Climate is the most important of all the elemental influences that preserve or destroy the human race. And no man can possibly tell, till he has tried it for at least twelve months, whether a particular climate is curative to him or destructive to him. Being the Head of all the Druids still surviving in the west of the Earth — and there are many more of us than people realize, for we don't give ourselves away — it was easy for me to bring over to Vindex in the course of half my life-time a great number of Druids, and once over here, it was easy to make the population of Haters our obedient slaves. Yes, it was the Perosians who built this city; but they built it under our direction; for we very quickly were able to make them madly scared of us. You know, my dear son and daughter, that every Druid still surviving on our old planet Earth has more power at his disposal than all the Witches and all the Wizards that have ever lived from the Witch of Endor to the present day. The Perosians, just because they were, and still are, such *haters,* make the best slaves in the world. So we soon had them completely at our disposal."

The Arch-Druid stopped speaking: and Jilly Tewky down at the bottom of her heart thought to herself: "So you imagine, you old fool, but I know better!"

"Here," announced the Arch-Druid, "is your dwelling — at least for the present."

They had stopped before a long flight of steep steps leading to an iron door in a high straight wall.

"I will stay here," he continued, "till old Plangy has opened the door to let you in."

John o' Dreams followed Jilly Tewky up the steps. She waited till he was beside her and then the two of them tapped with their knuckles determinedly upon the iron door just above its small brass handle. After that they both remained staring at the door, allowing the Arch-Druid at the foot of the steps behind them to disappear completely from their excited and a little frightened minds.

After about two minutes' pause, during which they heard no steps nor any sound at all, the black iron door opened, admitted them in silence, and was closed behind them. They were confronted by the biggest lady they had ever seen in their lives.

"Follow me, my children," she said; and they followed her obediently up a flight of heavily-carpeted stairs. The carpet was of the same purple colour as was the curious lichen they had seen growing in places where in Foghorn grass would have grown. Arrived at last at a large landing, the lady threw open the door of a spacious chamber. The windows of this chamber were very big and high and were on the same side of the room and each of them opened upon a wide, park-like expanse which apparently formed a sort of verdurous circle all the way round the city. Close to each of the windows, which obviously could be very easily opened and shut, was a small four-poster bed, and round these beds were low wickerwork screens, covered in each case by daintily brocaded silk.

"I was led to understand," said the lady, "that you are brother and sister; and it struck me that, being complete strangers here, you would prefer not to be separated at night. Sit down for a moment, my dears," she went on, "and let us ask each other a few questions. Oh yes! But first let me tell you that there is a room containing a bath and a warm-water tap and also a water closet — yes, all in the same room — on this floor of my house. So you two will have all you need, by night as well as day, except, of course, food and drink, but we can talk of that later."

Facing the high windows and the two beds, there was a big fire-place with a warm log fire that had evidently been burning all day, and close to its fender three comfortable armchairs. Into one of these their hostess now subsided, and Jilly Tewky and John o' Dreams sank down happily into the others. On each side of the fireplace hung an extremely large mirror, so that in one or other of these mirrors all three of them could see their own and each other's faces clearly reflected.

"I must begin, my dears," said their hostess, "by telling you my name. It is Plangy. They all here — I speak of us natives, of course, not of our masters — call me Pummy Plangy. You may be surprised that I can talk your language. But that is the one really good thing our rulers, the Druids, have done for me. They have taken me back and forth so often to your planet, and always — for I fancy this one, the one who brought you here, must in former days have lived where you live — to Foghorn, isn't it? They were the original owners of your land, weren't they, until the Romans killed most of them? Anyway, they've taken me — this one's taken me — so often to your planet and to your shore that I've grown quite used to your tongue. I expect that's why he brought you here and told me how to prepare for you. You two, I know, aren't Druids. I suppose, like us, Perosians from Perosus, you were conquered by them. But don't let's talk about that. It's not a nice subject."

"Is Pummy," enquired Jilly Tewky, "the same as our word Mummy?"

But the lady didn't answer that question. She had lowered her voice and had begun to gaze at them, first at one and then at the other, with an expression of quite startling authority. Her face was the whitest face they had ever seen in their lives, and it was the largest face. Compared with the face of Pummy Plangy, the Arch-Druid's face, as the twins now thought of it, seemed small and wrinkled and withered, for all the majesty of its imposing beard. Both the twins thought of that slender, retiring, slippery, sly, unassertive person who had conveyed them through space to the star Vindex.

"He must have shaved his beard off," said John o' Dreams to himself.

"He must have transformed his whole personality to fool us," said Jilly Tewky to herself.

Then they both stared at the face of Pummy Plangy, while Pummy Plangy kept looking first at her girl-guest and then at her boy-guest. What she saw in them they never knew; but what struck them most about her was the easy, idle, careless, almost frivolous way she looked at them! It was the sort of look with which the mother of a dozen children might have watched her son playing at being Robin Hood and her daughter playing at Maid Marian; or at her daughter playing at Juliet and her son at Romeo!

The woman got up.

"Stay where you are for a moment, my dears," she said, "and I'll get you some lemonade."

"For heaven's sake sweetheart," whispered John o' Dreams as soon as she was out of sight, "let's be careful with this bitch! Do you think she's an old maid, or do you think she's the mother of ten and the grandmother of twenty?"

Before Jilly Tewky could answer his whispers, Pummy Plangy was with them again, carrying a rough tray that looked as if it was made of lead, with two earthenware mugs on it and a transparent glass jug full of a pale yellowish liquid.

"Oh! it's so delicious, Mrs. Plangy!" cried Jilly Tewky, emptying half her mug down her throat. "It tastes of oranges!"

John o' Dreams lifted his mug to his lips and sipped.

"My sister's quite right," he said. "It's like oranges!"

The lady took her seat before the fire again.

"It *is* oranges," she said. "I forgot I hadn't any lemons left!"

The difference in taste between oranges and lemons soon led Pummy Plangy to the ticklish subject of the difference between our two different races in this scattered universe. This topic of anciently different races, each with its own traditions and legends going back thousands upon thousands of centuries, was evidently of all subjects of discussion the one which interested Mother Plangy the most.

"I can see clearly," she now announced, settling her powerful and well-filled-out frame in a sort of relaxed preparation for a tremendous leap upon some particular enemy, "that neither of you have the faintest connection with this Druidic autocracy that has been dominating our little world for the last hundred years. I was myself a child when this Druidic tyranny took its present form; I mean when they all began submitting to a little inner group of powerful Druids, who all obeyed the Arch-Druid. The present Arch-Druid is the best we have had so far. Some of them have been real devils. I could tell you things about the one before this one that would make you shiver and shake. It is probably this very fact of the abominable cruelty of his predecessor that accounts for the milder behaviour of this one. And now I am going to reveal to you a great secret, a secret unknown to the majority of my own Perosian compatriots, and I confess without shame that one of my motives in revealing it to you is that by implication you will, of necessity, be confronted by the alternative of becoming one of us, or of betraying us to your friend the Arch-Druid. I say your friend the Arch-Druid purely out of politeness, because I know only too well that no Druid has a friend in the world who isn't a Druid. They're like that. They've always been like that. O, I do hate them so! But I must repress my feelings if I am really going to be brave enough to tell you the great secret."

At this point Mummy Plangy lowered her voice, and taking hold with both her strong hands of the chair beneath her, she made it hop forward a few feet so as to be closer to her guests.

"You must understand, my dears," she now said in a low voice, looking first into John o' Dreams' face and then into Jilly Tewky's, and then glancing hurriedly round the room, "that we, the conquerors of Vindex, reached this star, or as you would probably say, 'this world,' by means of a fleet of flying vessels. Well, my dears," and with a still further hop of her chair she approached so close that, as she leaned forward, her big aquiline nose and heavily breathing mouth hovered over the arms of her guests' two chairs like an overshadowing moth, "the secret I have to tell you is this, that wholly unknown by our terrible masters from your world, the natives of Vindex, who were conquered by us Perosians, *still exist. Yes!* they exist among us still! We have hidden them throughout our whole world, and by degrees we shall be able to arm them with formidable weapons. Then suddenly we shall release them like a wild host of demons and command them to utterly destroy every Druid in Vindex."

Having thus spoken, Mummy Plangy relaxed once more into her armchair, while her two hearers did the same into theirs. But it can be imagined how John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky looked at each other. After a minute of silent pondering, Jilly Tewky, seconded by a nod from her brother, boldly spoke out, and related to their hostess the whole story about the two Horners and their two children found by the Druid in a cave, and not long after discovered in the belly of a dead dragon. Mummy Plangy was clearly staggered by this news. She clasped the arms of her chair with both hands till her knuckles grew white.

"It is true there *are* dragons in Vindex," she said slowly and solemnly, "but few people ever see them. They only come out in the dark; and they are frightened and hurry off if anyone catches sight of them. They are cowardly creatures, dragons are, in spite of their scales and claws. But I must tell you two — for in my own way I have more insight, more magical insight, than any Druid, and I *know*, as no damned Druid ever could know, how good and honest and reliable you two are — exactly what I have persuaded our people to do. I started it all. Yes! I started it. But I was young then, for it was twenty years ago and I am over forty now. But what we did, and it took us twenty years to do it, was to dig an underground cavern under the whole of our great city. We had to do this little by little, and O so carefully! But I can see from what you tell me that our accursed and hateful masters haven't found out! So he thought, did he, that that family of Horners, father and mother and brother and sister, was a rare discovery of his own! But O how wisely those Horners must have acted! How wisely, if, after being able to boast, as he did to you, of knowing them so well and of learning those words of their language, and of gaining their entire confidence, he still believed that they were a rare and special case of the original natives of this particular world, living in a cave such as only a very wise and clever Druid like himself would be able to discover. They paid the penalty for their wisdom and patriotism by losing their lives, the dear things, for if they hadn't been propitiating and fooling your friend the Arch-Druid, they never would have fallen victims to that alligator-creature. *No!* a thousand times no! They were not a rare and special case! They were the first heroic victims of my twenty-years' plan for the extermination of these hateful Druidic lords of ours! Not for nothing are we *Perosians,* that is to say the race in the Universe who have the best cause for hating!"

The twins, who had listened awe-struck and wondering, gazed at each other with their heads working at top speed. He was thinking, "After all we should never have seen this amazing city of Asteropetes in Vindex if it had not been for the Arch-Druid; and he must have known perfectly well that we haven't a drop of Druidic blood in us." She was thinking: "The best thing we could do would be to fill a couple of bags or baskets with food to last us a long time, and walk off to some completely different part of this Vindex-world, where, if there are any natives, they won't take us for Perosians or Druids or crocodiles, and where we can find, when our food is finished, something or other to eat and drink." And he finally decided: "I'll tell her what I think before we go to sleep." Meanwhile she thought: "Perhaps it would be best to write down my plan for John o' Dreams to read on a piece of paper. For this woman may have ways of *understanding every word people speak* if it is spoken within a hundred yards of her."

The Mummy Plangy lady rose slowly now to her feet, moved to the door, and made a curious obeisance, resembling a bow, though it could not be called a bow, for what she did was to extend her elbows as if she were pretending to be developing wings, and then to make a gesture with her hands as if she were washing them of all responsibility for everything on Vindex, whether past or to come. She made this gesture towards each of the twins in turn. Then she went out backwards, closing the door behind her.

"The best thing we can do," John o' Dreams said, "is first to have a good sleep; and then, when morning, if you can call it morning, comes — for it seems to me that in this confounded world morning and night are going to be so alike that we shan't know one from the other — we can decide what to do. But the first thing is to have a good long sleep. I suggest we leave this blasted city altogether tomorrow, and set out on our feet to what at home we would call the country."

Thus speaking John took off his outer clothes, kissed his hand to his sister, and slipping into one of the two beds, shut his eyes tight and was soon fast asleep. Jilly did the same and got into her bed; the only difference was that she found it impossible to sleep for at least an hour.

XIV

John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky did exactly what they had decided to do before they slept. The only exception to their decision was they were so scared of being caught that, at the last moment, they lacked the courage to explore this big house of Mother Plangy so as to find some food to put into their satchel, which they carried by turns over their left shoulder.

It was only when they were well clear of the house and the city and the avenue and the amphitheatre that Jilly burst out to John, “My dear, aren’t you hungry? I’m *terribly* hungry and mighty thirsty too! What an unhospitable land this must be, when neither that old Plangy nor the Arch-Druid thought of giving us supper or any kind of meal before we went to bed!”

“Well, Jilly darling,” said John, taking their satchel from her and hanging its leather strap round his own left shoulder, “I guess we’ll have to plunder or steal a meal from the first out of the way cottage we find!”

“But you’ve got your purse in your pocket, haven’t you?” said Jilly. “You always do have a purse,” she added, “in your trouser pocket; for I’ve only got half-a-crown at the bottom of the satchel. If I’d known that they don’t even give their visitors milk in the Milky Way, I never would have let that rascal carry us here!”

“Well, my dear,” said John o’ Dreams, “we’ve got to find a house that’s got something to eat in it. Let’s see what I *have* got in my purse!”

So saying he extracted this dilapidated object from his trouser pocket and emptied its contents into his left hand.

"Three sixpences, two half-a-crowns, four pennies, four halfpennies, and half a quid. That's the bloody lot!"

He poured the money back into his purse and pocketed it again.

"We've not had a sight yet of any of their money, Jilly. Shall we be able to use *ours*, if *theirs* is too weird and peculiar for us to understand its variations in value? Suppose their money is entirely in stones and pebbles? Or suppose it's human hair they use for their money? Can't you imagine, Jilly darling, pretty little bunches of girls' and boys' hair tied up with exquisitely delicate ribbons, yellow hair, brown hair, black hair? And perhaps tiny little scraps of white hair from old people's heads would be farthings, while bunches of *yours* would be a pound each!"

Jilly laughed gaily. Then she said gravely, "Don't I see a thin pillar of smoke going up, John, behind that hill over there?"

"By God, you're right, Jilly! It *is* smoke! Come on, my dear!"

Side by side they rushed to the foot of the little hill; and then boldly mounted it. There were no bushes or trees of any kind, and the ground was of dull whitish tint, speckled here and there with purplish sprigs of lichen. They instinctively clasped each other's hands as they neared the top.

"I wish I'd had my stick," murmured John o' Dreams, "when he carried us up to this weird world!"

Yes! There right before them was a massive erection, built of white stone, with a roof, the wide eaves of which stretched out to all four quarters of the air. The building itself was foursquare, erected on a kind of platform of the same material, the base of which was three feet high and three feet broad, offering convenient seats for quite a lot of defenders if the building were attacked by armed enemies. As it happened, by a stroke of excellent good luck, at the very place where the twins approached this formidable erection, they were confronted by its entrance. There was a circular arch with a complicated symbolic carving, a carving such as an imaginative student of heraldry might have regarded as the coat of arms of some monstrous being in the Mesozoic Era, a hundred and thirty million years ago. The door itself, beneath this stone carving and the stone expanse of the roof, was evidently made of wood, and on one side of it was a large silver handle.

Both the twins felt so hungry and thirsty that, if this fortress had been the home of the great giant Atlas who held up the sky, they would have knocked at this door.

There was no knocker, so Jilly bent down, picked up a stone, showed it to John, so that he might see it had a fossil in it, and then knocked with all her strength at the wooden door. For more than a couple of minutes they waited, listening intently for some answering sound. Then John o’ Dreams cried, “Give the blasted fossil to me!”

Jilly gave it to him, and using all his strength he struck the door so savagely that Jilly was scared. “How do we know,” she thought, “that some appalling monster won’t come and make a meal of us, and lap up our blood instead of giving us tea?”

“You shouldn’t have hit the door *quite* so hard,” she said to John. “You see we know nothing about this country — perhaps they only eat earth and only drink rain!”

“Hush! Listen!” muttered John.

There was a sound inside and a most extraordinary sound. It was as if a large yard-broom — or rather a mop of long, sharp thorny spikes — was approaching; and, as the door opened, these spikes presented themselves and were directed towards their faces. It was then — by one of those happenings that the more we think about them, the more we become convinced that they are neither occasioned by pure chance nor by an act of

God, but have behind them a quite natural, though entirely psychic, sequence of causation — that John uttered some very queer words. In the doorway, at the handle of the broom thus thrust at the twins' faces, was a semi-human form. It bore the base of a pillar upon its neck between its shoulders and on this base a large horn. The Thing's face had the features of a human being, but this face and its features emerged from the creature's chest or breast.

"Bogly-Wogly," cried John o' Dreams loudly when, though very faintly in the darkness of the entrance, he saw this face. The words had come to him with their original meaning, "Wait and see!" from the story of that family of four aboriginals with whom the Druid had managed to make friends. It was the painful shock of the bristles of that broom, followed by the staggering appearance at the back of it of that figure with a human face where a man's chest or a woman's breast usually is, that brought back to John o' Dreams those nonsensical syllables, which the Druid had told them meant in the language of the aboriginals of Vindex the sagacious advice, "Wait and see."

The words, silly as they sounded to the twins, had the effect they desired. The bristling broom was lowered, and the being holding it, who was clearly a female — for her breasts were apparent although a little nearer her waist than they are with us — signed to the twins to enter. The lady had never seen human beings before, so that their two heads, decorated *not* with a horn but with hair, were as staggering to her as her own Horner's head, if head it would be called, was to them. It is wonderful, however, what signs and tokens can do; and John o' Dreams's behaviour at this crucial moment — as Jilly Tewky told him later on — was really quite inspired.

They found themselves in a large square chamber, with a big fire burning in a big hearth; but, save for the fire, everything in the room was black, not so much “black as coal” or “black as ink,” as “black as night.” The floor was covered by an enormous black rug, and from the ceiling above hung from a black chandelier things that looked very like black wax candles, a few of which were alight. John o’ Dreams at once knelt down before the lady, and with both his hands began an extravagant pantomime of a hungry and thirsty person eating and drinking. Jilly stood by his side quite motionless, with their satchel over her shoulder. The lady of the house evidently understood John o’ Dreams’s performance, for when it was over, she made a sign for them both to sit down on a long sofa covered with a black rug, and went out through a door at the further end of this great black hall. The twins seated themselves side by side on the black sofa, which faced the fire, though it was a good distance from it, and looked with humorous helplessness at each other.

“Well, my dear,” murmured John, “we must hope she brings us something which isn’t too repulsive to eat! I think she will. There was an intelligent look in her eyes, and I think she is a friendly creature, though heaven knows what sort of a meal she’s going to bring us.”

They hadn’t been long alone before there appeared a response to that wise command, “Wait and see!” This response took the form of the entrance of four little children, through the same door at the end of the dark firelit room through which the lady of the house had departed. They were holding one another’s hands, and were evidently full of intense excitement and an exultant mixture of interest and fear. It was hard for the twins to distinguish their sex, but discussing it later, they decided that the ones at the extremity of the line were boys and the two in the middle were girls. They came straight up to where the twins sat on the black sofa, and all four of them saluted their visitors with a grave little bow. Then to the twins’ absolute amazement, they all very solemnly began reciting what was obviously a lesson. Their punctuation was certainly peculiar. John o’ Dreams said to himself, “It must be like the accent of the Long-Ears of Easter Island”; while Jilly Tewky said to herself: “It must be like the accent of the natives on the top of the Andes.” The sentence the children uttered — and they repeated it twice — struck both their listeners as having been learnt by heart some time ago.

“Our Father who lives with us knows one of the languages they talk on the planet Earth.”

Hearing this, the twins knew they must show their pleasure. So first Jilly Tewky, and then John o’ Dreams, and then both of them together, clapped their hands and repeated the words, “Well done! Well done!” Both visitors cried independently when they heard what the four little boys and girls did next, “Wonderful!”

“Hurrah!” For the children let go one another’s hands, and seizing the tubes which hung over their shoulders and pressing them into their mouths, they all four blew their horns in an exultant and rhythmical unison.

They went on blowing their horns in the same entrancing harmony as, one by one, a boy leading and a boy following, the four of them returned from the firelit darkness of that black room into the unknown regions behind the door through which their mother had gone.

Once more alone with him, Jilly said to John: “I wonder whether mother is worried about us? It is extraordinary how little she does worry when we don’t come home. Daddy’s much more likely to make a fuss; but he’s got all that weeding for the Gog-Magogs to get through these days. And you know what he is. When once he’s really tired, he doesn’t care if the world comes to an end and we’re all tossed into space, so long as there’s a bed in which he can go to sleep!”

"I bet Auntie Oh is dying to send somebody to fetch the Rector," commented John o' Dreams, "but there's nobody to send. I warrant our Grand-Grumble is more annoyed at losing that book he threw at me than at any tales about our being both dead."

"What I really think—" began Jilly Tewky; but she was interrupted by the appearance of the lady of the house, carrying an enormous tray bearing a pile of buttered toast and a big jug of steaming hot drink. She pulled a stool out of the corner of the room, and put down the tray on it in front of the fire. On the tray were two plates and two cups and saucers; and the good lady went behind the sofa, after the twins had risen to their feet, and pushed it forward nearer the stool that held the tray and the fire that was warming everything.

"Is this coffee or tea, my lady?" enquired John o' Dreams, as he lifted one of the cups to his lips.

It was clear to the towering female, however obscure his words were, that he was mentioning earthly drinks, so she replied at once: "Borrabug, borrabug, borrabug!" and then tapped her stomach, as much as to say, "a much better refreshment than any of those drugs you've mentioned." She evidently was now aware that her family were on the way to join them; so she hurried to the further side of the hearth and dragged from thence an extraordinary-looking receptacle for a relaxed body, whether of man or beast, which she placed by the side of the stool that held the tray. And then it was that the Lord of the House of Galligathol entered with all his four children clinging to him, and moving straight to the chair his lady had brought, stretched himself out upon it.

"Welcome to you, master!" he said, addressing John. "And to you too, mistress!" he added, turning to Jilly. "You both may be surprised that I can speak your tongue; but if you don't mind my talking about myself, I'll tell you how it happened. I soon learnt from our Druids or from their Perosian rivals — I really forget from which, as I am not very partial to either of them — that the largest occupied countries in your Earth were North America and Australia; and when I enquired what language they spoke they replied, ‘English.’ It was clear to me then that, if I wished to strengthen my opposition to both the damned Druids and their still more damnable rivals the Perosians, I must learn English. You will be surprised, master, you will be astonished, mistress. But I beg you to forgive my egoism, if I tell you how I learnt your language. I had long practised — from my boyhood in fact, and I expect that is why my children are so good at horning in — the art of repeating on my horn, all the various cries of birds and the various growls of beasts that can be heard here. But it suddenly occurred to me that it would be a much more exciting exploit, if I could copy the sounds of the words spoken in another world. It was, of course, for me a most happy accident that your Druids had come to stay in our world, for I learnt from them the position in the universe of your world, and of its rotations in regard to your sun, and of your moon’s rotations in regard to you. But my desire would not have been satisfied by just taking lessons from some particular Druid in the language spoken in Britain and in New Zealand and in North America and in Australia. I was more ambitious. I wanted to learn your language independently of your Druids. So I began to use my horn — knowing exactly which of the pinpricks of light in your solar system was your world, I managed to direct the *intake* of my horn to the precise part of this minute star which was the isle of Britain and the continent of North America and Australia. For you must understand, my dear guests, that in my pursuit of the sounds of birds and of the appearances connected with those sounds, I had invented a telescopic and microscopic power for my horn parallel with its audible power. My supreme discovery was this power of *intake* in my horn parallel with its *outrush.* I reached this discovery by pondering for days and nights, when I was a boy, on the mystery of music. What I came to feel was that there was a double energy in music, in fact in all *sound*, whether musical or unmusical, one of these energies flying outwards and the other diving inwards."

Both the twins, seated on their black sofa in the heart of their black room, gazed with awe at this tremendous being who was lecturing them on his discoveries: and although his two little sons and his two little daughters, all four of them resting on his knees and upon the elbows of his chair, made it difficult to take in the full force of his personality, they quickly realised that he was the most imposing personage they had ever beheld. Not only he, but his four children, were most politely and most hospitably eager to see their guests partaking of the contents of that spacious tray upon the stool, but the lady was also now standing beside them, filling their plates and their cups, and encouraging them to eat and drink. This they both hastily did, and they found the food delicious and the drink just what they needed.

"I like Borrabug very much," said John, "don't you, Jilly?"

"I certainly do," cried Jilly, as loudly as she could. "It's more like coffee than tea," she added enthusiastically; while their hostess filled their cups again.

"Do please tell us the name of this manor-house of yours," broke out John eagerly. "I do want to remember it exactly, so as to tell my Daddy and Mummy when I get home. Is it Galligathol?" and he put the accent strongly on the syllable *ig*, "or is it Galligathol?" and he laid the stress on *gath.*

All the four children chanted at once: "Galligathol, Galligathol, Galligathol, Galligathol!" And both the twins together repeated the word, emphasizing ig.

There was an impressive pause. Then John o' Dreams boldly enquired, "You will not, I trust, think me impertinent, Sir, if I ask you your name and the name of your honoured lady?"

"Heaven and Earth, no!" chuckled the enormous figure in the chair. "I always like being asked personal questions. My name is Ro, Ro the Horner, and my lady's name is Lo, Lo the Horner's wife. As for these little ones, our four children, I'll soon tell you their names. The eldest is Tom and the youngest is Rom, both boys, and of the girls who come between them, the eldest is Flin and the younger is Yin; and, of course, as you can see, we are all Horners."

It was not long before the great Ro the Horner, followed by Tom and Yin, began to grow drowsy. So indeed did the twins themselves; for they had had a substantial meal and hot Borrabug was evidently conducive to sleep. The lady of the house, in spite of the horn above her dignified countenance, was clearly unwilling to allow this drowsy mood to carry husband, children, and guest, out of Galligathol, wherever you put the stress, into the kingdom of dreams before they were safely in bed. It was not, therefore, very long before she had conveyed her mate and all their four children into that unknown part of the house reached through the door at the far end of this black paradise of Morpheus. She had already moved the sofa further away from the dying fire, and she now brought each of them a soft woollen blanket and wished them goodnight.

XV

THEIR WISE HOSTESS had thoughtfully provided them with two chamber-pots when she brought their blankets, so that the twins slept soundly on the black sofa, John o' Dreams's head just touching the soles of Jilly Tewky's feet, which still wore stockings but no shoes. They woke with strange simultaneousness, just as the first light of dawn was visible beneath the great oak door at which they had knocked the previous night. They had removed very few of their clothes; so they only had to pull on their boots, pick up their satchel, which John hung over his left shoulder, and quietly unbar the great oak door, closing it behind them as softly as they could.

But they had scarcely descended to the foot of the steps outside, before they were confronted by as queer a couple of creatures as any of the Horners from whom they were escaping. These creatures had evidently been awaiting them, for they lifted themselves up from their recumbent positions on a flat stone near the lowest of the flight of steps and began at once to speak to them in English. They spoke very slowly and gravely, first one and then the other; both of them were using extremely pedantic words. To hear them was like hearing a couple of very learned professors giving their hearers important but very complicated information about life several million years ago, and every now and then expressing differences of opinion between themselves with a mixture of irritability and irony. John o' Dreams turned to his sister.

"Do you know what these two are, Jilly? I do. They may chatter to us as they like, and they may dress themselves up in lichen leaves of this queer world as they like. But I know them."

Jilly Tewky moved a step nearer the two queer creatures, one of whom was shaped like a sea-serpent, and the other like a walrus or small whale.

“Have they come out of the Sea?” she enquired of her brother, half turning her head.

“We don’t know yet whether they’ve got a sea in this weird world,” replied John o’ Dreams. “Perhaps their sea is somewhere underground, like those great caverns Mummy Plangy told us about, beneath their city.”

“But you said just now,” protested Jilly, “that you know what these two are.”

John o’ Dreams pulled her head towards his own, and whispered something in her ear.

“You don’t mean it,” she cried aloud, and gazed once more at their two interlocutors. “Yes,” she murmured, turning back to him and shivering a little, “yes, I do see what you mean!”

But the creatures had evidently had quite enough of this not very polite conversation carried on so shamelessly in front of them.

“For the sake of Adam and Eve,” burst out the serpentshaped one, rising up on its tail, “not to speak of Gain and Abel or of Noah and his Ark or Moses and his burning bush, can’t you two, visitors here from Foghorn in Britain, confronted by us who have also come from Britain, ask us a plain question in English? Can’t you say simply and directly: Who are you two, and how did you get here? But as you evidently think it is grander and more genteel to talk about us before our faces, instead of asking us a plain question, I will tell you who we are in plain blunt terms. I am a Worm and my lady-friend here is a Slug. We happened by chance in our search for food to attach ourselves to the clothes of the Arch-Druid who brought you here. Well! He brought us too. Being less obsessed with our own ideas than you two seem to be, we naturally took our colouring and a good deal of our appearance from the Vindex world. And naturally enough, since it was upon the clothing of the Arch-Druid we got here, it is the ideas of the Arch-Druid that we have lived upon."

The Worm paused for a second; then he went on: "The Arch-Druid knew your language, so we know your language. The Arch-Druid stands up straight. So we stand up straight. The Arch-Druid has an imposing costume. So we have imposing costumes. The Arch-Druid endeavours to embrace life's Two extremes, so I embrace One extreme and my friend the Slug embraces the Other extreme."

"Heaven!" cried John impatiently, "what the hell do you mean by life's Two extremes?"

"Tell him, comrade!" bawled the Worm.

The Slug stood up straight. She did not look quite so straight as the Worm, because her body was so much thicker, but she looked like a whale who had decided to fly.

"Life's Two extremes, let me tell you, are those which you have just mentioned," explained the Slug. "They are Heaven and Hell. But psychologists, such as we are, go further into this mystery, and explain to ignorant men and women like you that Heaven means a universe filled entirely with life-producing material, and Hell means a universe of completely empty space, a world in fact of nothingness."

"What you stupid people of Foghorn don't realise," concluded the Worm, settling himself down on the stone-ledge by the side of his friend, "is that every living thing in the universe spontaneously, instinctively, naturally, inevitably, irresistibly, automatically, unconsciously decides, as it is born or as it comes into existence, whether it wants All or Nothing." Jilly Tewky took John by his wrist to draw him away, with a gesture that clearly intimated that she didn’t at all agree with any of this “All or Nothing” business; but John, on the contrary, burst out excitedly:

“Yes! my good sires, you’re right! You’re right! You’re right! You’re right! Haven’t I been every day of my life, since I could walk so far, to the Fountain of Bubble and Squeak? And haven’t I listened there to the wisdom of the Skull? And haven’t I followed the wild mad rushes of the Bubble? Haven’t I sometimes been under the influence of the one and sometimes under the influence of the other? Haven’t I travelled to the Heart of the Sun under their antipodal influences? Haven’t I — forgive me if I speak with criminal recklessness — even murdered a man under the clash of their opposite pulls?”

Jilly now whispered to her brother: “For Mummy’s sake, do stop talking to them — you can’t tell what they may not do.”

Neither Master Worm nor Mistress Slug seemed inclined to do anything at this particular moment; for something was happening to them that they found extremely interesting, something that when John o’ Dreams saw it he murmured to his sister: “What they’re doing is *growing*. They’ll be as tall as we are very soon!”

But though the Worm and the Slug were each of them over four feet high when they stopped growing, they weren’t up to the shoulder of Jilly Tewky, and her brother towered above them. The thing, however, that arrested the twins’ attention the most, more even than their height, was the fact that both the creatures, after this growing, had human faces, the Worm a boy’s face and the Slug a girl’s face. Their bodies, however, were in no way changed, except that they did now possess both arms and legs, though with grotesquely clumsy hands and feet. The skin of their faces was of the same colour and the same texture as their bodies, the Worm’s greyish, the Slug’s blackish, but the eyes of both were piercingly dark, like the demoniacal eyes of the sort of spectre that children see when they've done something wrong and have just been listening to the hymn, "Now the day is over, night is drawing nigh," and seen the door close as Mummy leaves them.

"We had a good meal last night," John o' Dreams said to them, "before we went to sleep. I hope you two aren't terribly hungry?"

The Worm shook his head and rubbed his mouth with the back of his shapeless hand, as if dismissing some demon of devilish hunger. The Slug spat on her knuckles and then licked them.

"No," said the former, "we're neither breakfasters nor buccaneers. One meal a day is all we require, and it suits us best in the evening, but if we are to accompany you, we'll be quite ready to have it whenever you have yours."

The twins were so bewildered by the presence of these two weird creatures, that it only occurred to them after they'd been walking for several hours to wonder where the devil they were going. Taking it all together, this laborious walk across one of the flattest, dullest, and most unvaried of all the plains in the centre of Vindex was about the most unpleasing experience that Jilly Nu and John Nu had ever had. The effect upon John was to make him think of the daughter of the man he had killed, Urk's daughter Ting. He recalled so well that wistful, heartbroken voice of little Jessie when, in that small alder-copse half-way up the hill above Bubble and Squeak, she had begged him to take her.

Finding John so hopelessly unable to start any sort of conversation to enliven this dreary walk across a flat expanse of whiteish gravel, Jilly finally determined to ask a bold, rude question of Mr. Worm and Mrs. Slug. They were walking four abreast in a straight row, the twins on the outside. She was next to the Slug, or to the dwarfish woman who had recently been a slug, and so it was to her she addressed her questions.

“May I ask you,” she enquired, “by what names you two address each other? Our names are Jilly Tewky and John o’ Dreams; and our surname is Nu. Our parents are Mr. Nezzar Nu and Mrs. Maria Nu.”

The Worm and the Slug, who now were a quaint-looking dwarfish man and woman, looked smilingly on the twins.

“Tell them our names in rhyme,” said the Slug-woman to the Worm-man. “Tell them in that rhyme you made up that day, Wug, when the Druid asked what we were!”

The Worm smiled back at her. “Sure I will!” And with the gestures of a great actor playing Hamlet, he said his say:

“I am the Worm that feeds on the World!
Wug!
When you ask me why, I can only shrug!
Ug!
When you talk of God I do not squirm, For the Devil’s a different kind of Worm, And my friend’s not a Lady with a Perm:
She’s Zug!”

“Bravo!” cried John o’ Dreams.

“Well done!” cried Jilly Tewky.

There was a pause. Then John said, “On we go then, all four of us. I fancy that together, considering everything, we’ll be a fair match for anybody we may meet, even for one of those Horner-eating crocodiles!”

They went on contentedly together, crossing calmly and resolutely what appeared to be an endless plain.

XVI

As they walked the personal thoughts of each one of them rose up from their heads and played invisible pranks in the air. These thoughts — as all thoughts are apt to do, the longer they are dwelt upon by living minds — tended to follow their own devices. The four persons went steadily on side by side across the plain, leading apparently to a circular horizon that stretched away like the rounded curve of an orb suspended in fathomless space. How little people realise the fantastic embodiments of their own thoughts! Here were four persons walking side by side over a plain of whitish gravel, and not one of them realised that above their heads four thoughts were playing queer games.

"I want to have Ting the daughter of Urk up here with me," was what John was thinking; and this thought was like a white eel that kept twisting round the thought of Jilly, which was like a spirited little minnow that kept diving upwards into the air, then turning round with the flash of moonbeam and diving down over the rim of the world. By the side of the movements of the thoughts of the twins, the thought of Wug the Worm-man was turning head over heels on the head of Zug the Slug-woman, who did nothing but sway very slowly and solemnly backwards and forwards, as if it were chanting a mystic chant to the tune of the motion of Vindex itself along the rim of the universe.

But the longing in the mind of John o' Dreams to have Ting with him on the surface of Vindex grew and grew as they walked. At last this longing within him burst out in a wild and desperate appeal to Wug and Zug.

"Could you possibly, my friends, in spite of all the difficulties and dangers, for I need not tell you how it would bind me to you in gratitude forever if you could, nor how I would give you, if you did, all the most precious treasures I possess in the world, could you, would you, fly back to the Earth and bring out here from that old planet of the Sun a certain young man and a certain young woman."

"But John, but John!" cried Jilly.

"Don't you interrupt," her brother retorted, "till they've answered."

There was a short exchange of broken, indistinct words between the Worm-man and the Slug-woman. Then Master Wug answered "loud and bold," like Chapman's Homer to Keats.

"Yes, my friend, we *will* fly there and bring this couple here. What are their names, and where do they live?"

Jilly was evidently seriously troubled; for she began to walk a little ahead of them with her eyes not on the horizon, but on the ground. But her brother went on relentlessly.

"Their names are Master Ring and Miss Ting, and their father Lord Urk has recently disappeared, and they are left alone in his castle at Foghorn with the housekeeper Laura and the cook Jessica. There will be no need to wait till night to show you the planet Earth, with her satellite the Moon, or the Sun round which they both revolve, for you know it well, having been there so often with — indeed, as you confess to me — *on* — the Arch-Druid!"

And John o' Dreams laughed with that rather gross and rather silly laugh, with which he used to accompany his narrations to his family of his dreams the previous night as they sat down to breakfast.

Once more there was a hurried, indistinct conversation between Wug and Zug. Then the former said to John:

“Do you see that mound over there with a big square stone on the top?”

“That one there?” enquired John, pointing with his hand to the right of where they were standing.

“Yes,” replied Wug, “but we’d better go there, to make quite sure; and then you can wait there and get some food too, until we return.”

“Come on, Jilly,” cried John. “We are going to that mound!”

Jilly evidently would have liked to shrug her shoulders and tell them it was no concern of hers. But her momentary pique had ebbed away, and she felt it would have been disloyal to her brother not to help him at a pinch like this. So she followed them to the mound.

“It’s the grave of the King of the Horners. The Druid told us when we got here, for this is where we first arrived, and he told us the grave is a million years old.”

“There certainly is,” added Zug the Slug, “a massive stone on the summit of the mound and engraved upon it the words: *Larong-Tarong,* and below them the single word *Rakragor.*”

“Now look there,” cried Wug the Worm-man. And when John and Jilly too, for she was with them now, looked where he pointed, there was visible a quite considerable building with two chimneys. “You’ll get beds and food and drink there to satisfy all your needs. And now” — and the Worm-man exchanged a nod with the Slug-woman— “and now we’re off!”

The twins stood completely still side by side, watching them till they reached the horizon and disappeared over it. Then Jilly Tewky flung her arms round her brother’s neck and kissed him.

“Sorry I was so cross,” she cried, “but I do so love being alone with you.”

When she relinquished her hold and let her arms fall, John o’ Dreams looked gravely at her flushed face.

“You must understand, sweetheart,” he said, “that it would be quite different if we could marry.”

“We are what we are,” said Jilly Tewky in a low voice, “and life is what it is. Come on, my dear. Let’s see what sort of people live beneath those two chimneys.”

As they approached the building, they were disturbed by the sight of terrific footprints on the white gravel, footsteps that resembled human feet, but were much larger than those of any possible or conceivable giant. They climbed the large low mound which was covered with purplish lichen, and to their great surprise, found that the front door was half open. Emboldened by this, they opened it wide and stepped inside. What they entered was a large room, a room so large that they saw at once that it filled the entire space of the building from floor to ceiling, while below each of the chimneys was a big fire, not blazing but warmly smouldering, and giving the impression that it had been lit thousands of years ago and thus had warmed all the half of the room that had not been warmed by the other, so that the stone floor and the wooden ceiling and the four stone pillars were all comfortably and pleasantly warm. In the middle of this vast chamber were many chairs and tables, tables that were covered with cups and saucers and plates and mugs and jugs, and all along beneath the four walls were soft mattresses upon which persons could sleep; and behind these mattresses, close up against the four walls, were long narrow shelves, upon which loaves and biscuits and cheeses and cakes were arranged, together with nuts and fruits and plants and berries, such as are ready to be eaten without being cooked. Jilly Tewky and John o’ Dreams walked boldly into the middle of this room and looked about on all sides to try to detect the owners of, or the dealer in, all this desirable provision for rest and nourishment.

And it was then that they suddenly saw him. He had pushed back a sliding door in the wall behind them; and as, hearing the sound of this, they swung round, *there he was!* He projected his head and neck and arms and shoulders into the room, but the rest of him was concealed below the floor and must have been of gigantic size. His arms, however, were long and shapely, and indeed more like those of a woman than of a man; as for his hands and fingers, they were exquisitely delicate and slender.

"Welcome, my dear children," he said softly, and shook first Jilly and then John by the hand. "You no doubt are surprised to hear your own language in a strange world; but, as you know, we have had many rulers in Vindex since the Romans gave us that name, and it was long before the Romans called our world Vindex that we were ruled by the Druids. I confess to having learned your language from the Druids, a little group of whom — they are all dead now — started a school in this building, to which Horners and Perosians alike used to come, not I think, as a rule, to learn anything, but solely to get the gifts which this Druidic group bestowed. These were a much more liberal and sceptical set than most of them, and I've sometimes thought that the last couple of them, a pair of darling old gentlemen, very good to me, were deliberately put to death by the recent ArchDruid, whose own death, as you may have heard, was welcomed by everybody in our world."

At this point he paused; and then, speaking as politely as the poet makes Solomon speak to the Queen of Sheba, he asked them for their names. When he learnt they were the children of Nezzar Nu and Maria Nu, he expressed great interest, and told them that he had even tried when he was young, but without success, to introduce their grand-father's Gog-Magogs into Vindex.

"Of course, my dears, it's not your old Umbilicus, it's my wife Omphale who cooks these things and buys them in Asteropetes. But at least I carry her over there on my back, and I dispose of them to the visitors who stop here, of whom there are more than you would imagine, considering that you two are the only ones I've had today."

"How do your visitors pay for them?" enquired John, putting his hand into his pocket to make sure his purse was still there. "Isn't it difficult to calculate with strange money?" The enormous countenance of the great Umbilicus broke into a radiant smile.

"It's all pretence with me, my dear Master Nu and Miss Nu. I don't earn my living by this amusing house of entertainment. I do it for fun, and I get a lot of fun out of it when customers come! Shall I tell you something? I collect foreign coins. Vindex, as you know, is not the only star in this portion of the universe, nor, let me tell you, is Perosia the only nearby star that has sent visitors to us by some sort of 'fiery saucer' or 'air-destroyer' or 'space-ship'."

"Well," said John o' Dreams boldly, "I shall be delighted to give you half-a-crown for each of us. That will be two silver half-crowns with the royal arms of our country printed on both of them. I expect you know what we mean in the language of heraldry by arms?"

John o' Dreams emptied the contents of his purse into the palm of his hand, took out his two half-crowns and offered them to Umbilicus, whose delicate fingers closed over them with a little quiver of satisfaction.

"We shall be expecting tomorrow," Jilly Tewky announced with a rather forced little laugh, "two friends of ours from Foghorn, accompanied by our recent companions, Wug the Worm-man and Zug the Slug-woman, who have gone to fetch them from the planet Earth. It was by the magic power of the Arch-Druid's clothes upon which they had crawled that the Worm and the Slug were transformed into human dwarfs. That’s the truth, isn’t it, John?”

John o’ Dreams hurriedly emphasised her words by describing to the fingers of Umbilicus, whose face by this time had practically disappeared, how they had actually beheld the Worm and the Slug being transformed into a dwarf man and a dwarf woman.

“It was wonderful, mister,” he cried to the fingers, “to be present at this transformation! How do you suppose the lively point of the Worm’s head and the blunt encroaching knob of the Slug’s head acquired human features? It was beyond my comprehension.”

They saw no more of Umbilicus that night; nor did they catch the faintest glimpse of Omphale, his lady. They woke up early and dressed hurriedly, and sat waiting for more than an hour on the bed where they had slept. At last they saw the smallest of the floorboards, between where they sat and one of the smouldering fires, move upward, and a most beautiful lady emerged from below.

“I have despatched my husband to do our weekly shopping in Asteropetes,” she said quietly, looking first at Jilly and then at John, “because I thought that his unusual appearance might disturb your friends from the planet Earth. But they will have had such an unusual experience in being brought here by your strange messengers, the Worm-man Wug and the Slug-woman Zug, that I doubt if anything they see here will upset them much more. I’ll bring you your first cups of tea at once, and then you can have your proper breakfast together, when they all appear.”

“You don’t mean, lady,” said Jilly Tewky in her most wistful voice, “that you actually are ready to give us all breakfast, including the Worm-man and Slug-woman?”

“Certainly I mean that,” said Omphale, smiling and standing in front of them. “I’ll bring you some water and soap and a towel, with which to wash and dry, and then I’ll bring you your first cup of tea.”

Omphale was true to her word, and it was a great comfort to the twins, especially to Jilly Tewky, when a basin of warm water with soap and a towel appeared and an elegant little sponge. After washing their faces and hands, they found their cups of tea more comforting than they could remember ever having found such simple refreshment before in all their lives, and both expressed their ardent thanks to Omphale, whose face, and the way she had done her fair hair, made them both think of pictures their Grand-dad Grumble used to show them of the ancient Greek goddesses.

The twins were indeed made so happy by the hospitality and kindness of this beautiful Being that even John did not feel at all impatient for the appearance of Ring and Ting and their unusual escort.

All was changed, however, when they did come. Very sagaciously Wug and Zug remained hushed and still, and in this way induced Ring and Ting to remain hushed and still too; so that it was not until John o’ Dreams said something about its being a pity they didn’t see them approaching the Mound from the same distance as they had seen them leaving it that, with cries of delight, they rushed into the chamber. Changed, indeed, everything was then. Drawn together, just as they had been on the hill above the Bubble and Squeak, John o’ Dreams and Ting found themselves embracing each other, as if they had been alone in an alder-swamp. Before this exciting moment, Jilly Tewky had never felt the faintest interest in Ring. But now when he impulsively knelt down on one knee before her and held her hand to his lips, all sorts of wild ideas rushed through her mind.

As with many other wise and competent maidens, Jilly had acquired the habit of accepting her life, just as it was, as something that she herself, with the approval and support of her whole being, had created for herself. Jilly Tewky's conscience was not a thing apart from herself, that was always telling her what to do and what not to do. Her conscience, that is to say her sense of good and evil, had, as far back as she could remember, never been applied to herself; nor indeed had it very often been applied to others. If John o' Dreams had worried her with questions about good and evil, she would have only felt in her mind that he was behaving as all male creatures behaved, and were compelled by their nature to behave; and she would have felt that this was the sort of thing that women have to put up with and had better treat like the tantrums of a toddler. Life was something to be accepted, not to be analysed or criticised. Nothing annoyed Jilly more than to be told that So-and-So was a selfish person. Whenever she heard anyone say that she always felt as if they were blaming a tree for having leaves or scolding the sea for having waves. What Jilly felt was that every person was like a blackbird or a rabbit or a fox or a badger or a viper or a sheep or an ox or a cow. They were what they were. Sometimes one had to use a stick to them. Sometimes one had to give them a biscuit or a piece of chocolate. It was silly to get angry; but everyone was silly sometimes, and if it took that form there it was.

What she now felt as Ring Cad knelt on one knee before her was a wild, strange emotion such as she had never felt before. As he rose and released her, she felt exactly as if she had fallen into a river. She had a vague urge to run away at top speed, to climb up a flight of steps somewhere, anywhere, to take off her clothes, and get into bed. By degrees, however, she became aware of a desire to send John o' Dreams and Ting for a long walk together, a walk that would tire them both very much indeed, tire them so much that she would be compelled to spend the time before they returned preparing a nice warm bed for Ting at the other end of the room, and after helping

Omphale to cook the sort of meal John o' Dreams liked, to prepare a basin and soap and sponge and towel, so that she could wash his hands and his feet and his neck and then carry one tray to Ting's bed and another to a table at John's side. The great thing was that they should walk till both were exhausted, and that she should be prepared to look after them both, but separately, as they already had had so much of each other.

Glad enough to have Jilly Tewky to help her, Omphale now occupied herself with finding out just what the man Wug and the woman Zug wanted most to eat, and establishing them on a big sofa together in the centre of the room at about equal distance from Ting's bed and John's table. Omphale, as Jilly Tewky guessed she would be, was immensely pleased to be able to concentrate on the wants of Ring, who had that sort of remote, detached, withdrawn, reserved manner that active ladies find especially alluring. Ring's table was near Ting's bed, so that as Jilly Tewky soaped and sponged John o' Dreams, she had the deep satisfaction of being aware that Ting had Ring's presence, the most familiar presence of her life, to prevent her attention wandering too much to the wash basin of John o' Dreams.

XVII

TING AND RING had been sleeping happily within reach of each other, till one of those dreams which are liable to disturb us all made Ring scramble out of bed at five in the morning. He looked around him. Wug and Zug were sprawlingly fast asleep; and so at the other end of the room were Jilly Tewky and John o' Dreams.

"I like that Jilly girl," thought Ring to himself; "but why on earth they added 'Tewky' to her name, I can't understand. A whim of that dotty old grand-dad, I suppose! O how teasing these whimsies and caprices of silly old men can be! Well now, what am I going to do?"

He dressed hurriedly, tiptoed quickly between them all, made his way to the front door, and let himself out. The sight that met him surprised him by its resemblance to what he would have seen, had he been at Foghorn.

Yes! There was the same pre-dawn twilight; there were the same specks of glittering light in the sky; there was the same heavenly breath of cool air, a breath so sweet that it felt as if it had been down to the bottom of the sea and up again, and then round the whole circular rim of the horizon! "It's a different world from ours all the same," he thought, as he noticed the whiteness of the gravel and the darkness — for it was too early to see their purple tint — of the lichen on the ground, that took the place of the grass to which he was accustomed. "Nobody will awake till six," he told himself, "so I have a whole hour in which to explore this unknown world!"

He left the Mound behind and strode off in the direction that the compass, which he always carried on the same wrist as his watch, told him was due east.

"I wonder why I keep thinking of our old Bubble and Squeak Fountain," he said gravely to himself, after walking a couple of miles and then standing very still and looking back at the Mound. And then quite suddenly, as he stared at the Mound, he said to himself, "I wonder if old Bubble and Squeak will keep up their difference until something happens to destroy them both? All the days we've been at Cad Castle, they've kept it up; Bubble struggling to reduce the Universe to Nothing, and Squeak struggling to fill every inch of empty space with living matter. Can't the two of them see that, if either of them succeeded in its mad purpose, every interest in life for us all would come to an end? Can't they see that, if all space were filled, there'd be nothing to struggle for, and if all matter were destroyed and all space left empty, there'd be nothing for any of us to want or to wish or to hope or to fear; and we should all be as if we'd never been alive at all?"

Having reached the well-balanced, cautious, measured and rational conclusion that, if you aimed at reducing the universe to nothingness, you would be trying to take every interest out of human life, and if you aimed at filling the whole of space with a carefully organised, science-dominated Utopia of matter, life would become so indescribably dull, and so utterly lacking in all elements of chance and mystery and wonder, that simple and natural and spontaneous people would feel that the heart had been taken out of the whole world, Ring started to return to the Mound.

"What is that?" he asked himself, as his steps quickened. "It seems to hover like a wavering cloud over the Mound. And it has every colour that exists in it. Yes! It has every colour I can think of! Are there, I wonder, colours in this Milky Way star, quite different from any we know on earth? Heavens! I think there must be! What else is *that colour* which hovers below all the others, quite close to the building, yes! just above its roof. I am sure it *is* a colour! Yes, it's a colour; and yet it isn't rose, or purple, or green, or yellow, or grey, or brown, or violet, or blue, or any colour we have on earth!"

Ring's thoughts grew wilder and wilder, the faster he hurried back towards the Mound. "How easily," he told himself, "could morning and evening and day and night be different from the way they are at home. Just think if it were necessary here to dominate Time itself, to rule Time by our will-power. To will Time to advance, to will Time to retreat, to handle Time, as on earth we handle our own wandering thoughts, saying to ourselves, 'Stop now! you mustn't think of *that!* You must put *that* out of your mind!'"

Some while before he reached the Mound, after these desperate reflections about the troubling phenomena of Time, Ring became aware of the rapid approach to the Mound from the opposite direction of a man who looked as excited as he did himself. Yes! Ring was right. The other man was as excited as he was. The other man was John o' Dreams.

"Well, well!" was Ring's greeting. "So two of us got tired of sleeping in company! Is your sister up and about? I don't believe mine is! But she *may* be. She's a funny girl, Ting is. You never know what she'll be up to next."

"We're awfully alike in sisters, aren't we?" gasped John o' Dreams who, like Ring, had been walking fast to get back. "Only my sister and I are twins; and you are a bit older than Ting."

"Not much older!" pronounced Ring, rather irritably. "I wish I were a lot older. She bosses me too much."

John o' Dreams paused for a moment. He had forgotten the problem of attractive sisters, and was repeating to himself the name of the King of the Horners, Larong-Tarong, and the name of the hospitable Mound, Rakragor. Finally he said, "Well, when we've had breakfast, let us go with our sisters — whatever we feel about them and whether they are younger or older than we want them to be — O yes! let us go with them, Ring, on a long adventurous walk, and see if we can’t find something that neither these Perosians, nor our Druids from the Earth, have ever yet discovered.”

Ring was evidently struck pretty deeply by this idea of John o’ Dreams, but he did not utter a word till they reached the steps of the Mound. Then, as they began to ascend, with the immemorial sarcophagus of the King of the Horners awaiting them at the top, he broke silence.

“Yes, I agree. We’ll do that. Only don’t let’s hurry off too quickly. My bowels tend to move rather slowly, and it must be the same with our sisters. It wouldn’t be nice if we all had to run off for the evacuation of our bowels, when we’d hardly got under way. Besides, it’s so flat round here, and so empty of bushes or trees or rocks, that we should all be in sight of one another as we did our little job.”

“I agree,” said John o’ Dreams. “I’ll tell them after breakfast that we can’t start for an hour, as I’ve got to finish a chapter of the diary I’m writing about this place, to take home to my parents.”

Ring laughed. “You’re a real diplomatist, you are. Explorers in foreign worlds need someone like you. All the same we’ve got to obey nature, even if we are in the Milky Way.”

XVIII

In the direction towards which our friends now moved dwelt two giants. One was a giant with colossal ears, who had made a slave of the Cerne Giant, whose image with his club and penis is familiar to all Wessex folk. The master-giant's name was Bog, and he now spoke to his only companion, once the Cerne Giant, who still is pictured in chalk and grass above Cerne Abbas in Dorset.

"I expect even you, yes! even short-sighted you, can see those six little creatures walking in our direction. If you aren't too desperately keen to swallow them, I'd like to play with them for a while."

"O no," replied the Cerne Giant, "you can do what you like with them, great King of the Milky Way, I won't interfere."

"Sit down then at my side, on our second step down, so that only the tips of my ears can be seen."

His ears were the life-long centre of Bog. They were his soul. His eyes, mouth, nose, forehead, neck, were nothing to him, and the tip of his organ of generation, though as large as that of his captive from Cerne Abbas, was decently slung over his left shoulder.

Bog was indeed quite an ordinary giant in everything but his ears. He was like Atlas, or Samson, or Goliath. But his ears were different. By them, through them, in them, he lived, moved, and had his being. They were of enormous size and of the most complicated structure. He was really just an ordinary simple giant, though a trifle larger than any other ever born in any other world, who happened to be attached to a pair of ears that were absolutely unique. With these ears he had been able since he was born, which was a million years ago, to hear every intelligible sound in the universe. He had soon learnt to distinguish intelligible from unintelligible sounds, such as those made by earth, air, fire and water, and by rocks and stones and trees under their influence. His parents had lived in a vast hollow place at the centre of Vindex, into which steps had descended from time immemorial, but his parents had long been dead, and Bog was their only offspring. All his life he had studied sounds; and as he had devoted a million years to this study, it can be understood that he was now familiar with every language spoken by every race in every world in the universe. His favourite languages were ancient Greek and Latin, and among modern languages Italian, and also a queer language called Litteratitteraflitteraflam, which used to be spoken on a star that has long disappeared forever.

Bog never boggled at talking frankly about himself to anyone who would listen. But these were very few. Nor were the causes of their scarcity hard to divine. The bravest Space-travellers were uneasy in the presence of a flight of steps descending into the heart of a star. The fact that his parents had immersed him, as if it had been water, into the substance of rock, had given to his bones and flesh something of the quality of rocks, something that could endure like a rock. But the first and last cause of the scarcity of listeners to the interminable talk about himself, in which Bog loved to indulge, was the fact of the absolutely terrifying appearance which those vast complicated ears of his gave to his countenance. Human faces endowed with horns always make us earth-folk think of the devil. Of course all the Horners of Vindex had horns on their heads, but that was different, because they had human faces in the middle of their manly chests and of their feminine breasts, and this undevilled, so to speak, the professional horns of a Horner.

John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky had seen too little of Umbilicus really to grasp what he looked like, and the fact that he was such a submissive husband to Omphale had made it impossible to be really scared of him. What would they feel, however, when in their wanderings they came upon Bog? And still more if they found him when he was playing a game of astragala, or “Jack-stones,” with his captive, the Cerne Giant? Thus thought the wandering white clouds, who were so frequently made the airy recipients of the reckless plunges of the grotesquely elongated organs of generation of both giants.

Bog’s unending soliloquy to which his unlucky captive, the Cerne Giant, had to listen patiently whenever his lord and master was not sound asleep, was hateful to this latter. At such periods the Cerne Giant was sorely tempted to cut his master’s throat.

“But what would it be like,” he had the intelligence to ask himself, “to be absolutely alone in this god-damned orb? How would I like it to have nothing to do, but to go *clump, clump, clump* down those accursed stairs to my master’s Hall of Silence, where those preposterous ears would have nothing to hear, and where the purple juice of his veins would look as if it would trickle, trickle, trickle, trickle, trickle forever like those awful bubbles in Foghorn! No! No! To be alone in that hell invented to torture his enemies by the God of Love would be worse than for those victims never allowed to perish; for that loving deity wanted to gloat over their torments for ever and ever, whereas if I cut the throat of old Bog, I should have to sit on the top step of these infernal stairs without a soul to play Jack-Stones with, and nothing to look at but the circular rim of an interminable horizon. O Space! O Time! O All! O Nothing! How cruel it is to be alive! I wouldn’t even say, ‘only the dead are happy’ for they have known the suffering of being conscious in this universe of writhing and twisting nerves. The really lucky ones cannot be named, for they *were* not, *are* not, *will* not be. They are Might Have Beens, and as such we really have no right to use the word *they* about them."

With his head full of ideas of this kind, very quaint thoughts came into the Cerne Giant's mind as, seated by Bog's side on the top step of their descent, he listened for the hundred-thousandth time to Bog's account of his earliest memories.

"They weren't a bit like me, my father and mother," Bog was saying. "But without them I shouldn't have been what I am, for they simply invented me. She said, 'He must *know* everything,' but he said 'He must *hear* everything.' For there are many things that never can be known, but there's nothing that cannot be heard if you have the ears for it. You can hear it, and, if you want to, you can give it a name, without knowing anything about it. It is it. You are you. You say 'you' to it. It says 'you' to you. And there you are both! There are plenty of chances, however, that tremendous planetary upheavals and terrific cosmic revolutions are impending beneath what it calls 'you' and beneath this other that you call 'it'."

For a moment Bog was silent. And it was at that moment that the Cerne Giant put the rather surprising question to him that had come into his own simpler head.

"It seems to me," he said, "a rather funny thing that I shouldn't know my own name. Of course I know I'm the Cerne Giant. But that isn't my name. You always just say, 'Listen you,' or, 'Do you get me, my friend?' But you yourself aren't only 'you' or 'my friend' to me. Quite apart from being my lord and master, you have your own name, Bog. Well! Please do tell me, if you can, what my name is."

Bog's eyes and nose and mouth, between his enormous ears, broke into a broad smile.

"It's rather a long name, my dear friend, but I can tell you what it is, for before I bullied you that day into submission, I had come to know it very well."

Of all the intense and dramatic moments in the life of the Cerne Giant, this was by far the most intense and the most dramatic. It was more so than when he first saw the ears of Bog appearing above the ridge of the downs between Chesil Beach and Durnovaria. It was far more intense than when, in much earlier days, he himself decided to leave his dying parents at Portland Bill; and strode on one dark night in winter to Bull Barrow. *His name?* Actually to know his name!

"It is Bally togerottero," announced Bog: "and with their last breath, for they perished simultaneously, your parents themselves told me they had come to Foghorn from the depths of the Atlantic Ocean."

"*Bally togerottero!* So that's who I am!" gasped the Cerne Giant, with a wondering awe at being the person he was.

"*Ballytogerottero*!"

He longed to be quite alone for an hour or two; so as to be able to go on murmuring to himself those exciting syllables without disturbing the interminable soliloquy of his companion.

But John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky and Ring and Ting and Wug and Zug were now approaching them.

"I reckon those half a dozen little people take us for a couple of trees," said Bog. "Shall we wait till they're quite close and enjoy them raw, three for me and three for you, or shall I make some hot white sand and cook them all together in a dainty little pie?"

The voice, with which the Cerne Giant replied to this, was so thundering that all the twists and turns and curves and contours and lobes and gatea and grooves of his conqueror's cosmogonic ears quivered from root to rim. But not for long. Snatching up a piece of white flint, the Cerne Giant shouted "Bally togerottero!", and in the power of his own name and rising to his full height, he struck Bog on the head with such force that the stricken head was splintered in two, and first the half of it that bore the heaviest hearing, and then the half of it that bore the delicatest hearing, went rotating down that terrible staircase, and after them, with the neck spouting blood so dark as to be almost black, went, with the legs sprawling, the headless trunk of the great Bog.

It can be imagined with what astonishment John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, together with Ring and Ting, not to mention Wug and Zug, stared at the sight of the Cerne Giant banging furiously at what looked like a mass of entangled seaweed, for no living soul but such as had set eyes on Bog would ever have believed that that extraordinary tangle was a pair of ears.

Nor was their surprise much lessened when the Cerne Giant threw away his piece of Vindician flint, and sinking down on his knees, apparently with the intention of diminishing his height so as to avoid scaring them, beckoned to them to approach. This they boldly did, led by John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, though it required all the courage they possessed to do so. But once the effort had been made, it must be confessed that, when the giant began speaking to them in an almost pleading tone, John o' Dreams felt there was no danger to be feared from him at all.

The Cerne Giant was now sitting, clasping his knees with his long arms, on the top of that terrible flight of steps, steps that were still stained with the black blood of his dead master. All six of them, John and Jilly, and Ring and Ting, and Wug and Zug, stood in a circle round him.

"I suppose," the Cerne Giant said to them in an appealing voice, "you children wouldn't consider taking me back with you to your planet Earth. He who brought me here no longer lives, and I have myself no genius for space travel. I came, however, though it was a million years ago, from your own corner of the country of Foghorn. Like my dead master, I have been penetrating and permeating my mortal body with sand and shingle and rock-dust, else I would have had to die and be buried as you children of the earth have to do. But I make no claim, little ones, you must understand, to anything like immortality, still less to any life after death. When I die, I die. And I know enough of these things to know from what I feel that I have not more than a couple of hundred years before I shall be stone dead. But it would be, I can't tell you, how much of a comfort to me, if I could live these last couple of hundred years in my native land of Foghorn on the planet Earth and die there and be buried there. You children must be so experienced in space travel that you could easily fly back straight to Foghorn, and if you were willing to do so, could carry me, heavy as I am, along with you. Do say you will! O do say you will!"

"We must discuss it for a few minutes among ourselves, Mr. Giant," said John o' Dreams gravely. "For myself I would certainly be in favour of taking you. But, as you see, there are six of us, and I am not a person of authority, though I am a person for expressing opinions."

As John well knew would be the case, he and Jilly and Ring were the only ones of the party to vote decisively and definitely in favour of doing what the giant wanted. But none of them, nor Ting either, had the power to fly, so the whole decision rested on Wug and Zug, who, by contact with the Arch-Druid's clothes, had acquired, without exercising any particular effort, his weird power of flying through space.

It was only by the power of their instinctive, and on earth universally accepted, superiority — indeed by what you might call their planetary-conventional superiority to a worm-man and a slug-woman — that in the end Wug and Zug were persuaded to fly back to the Earth and carry them all, including the Cerne Giant, along with them.

Their start was, as can be well imagined, one of the great moments of John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky's life. Nor was it without its excitement for Ring and Ting. It was more than, or worse than, exciting for the birds they collided with, as they left the atmosphere of Vindex for interstellar space.

Wug and Zug were naturally too occupied in steering their way, a task that nothing but the Arch-Druid's cosmogonic magic could have rendered possible, to notice anything but the minute, far-off, planetary speck of light towards which they were heading. But to the four less occupied friends, especially to John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, it was a matter of absorbing interest to see how many of the stars and planets they were able to name as they approached the earth. But none of them felt anything like the emotion that the Cerne Giant felt as, lying back upon the air with Jilly Tewky holding one of his hands and Ting holding the other, he approached the land of his birth.

"As for my name," he kept saying to himself, "let that go down the stairs with him who told me of it. On the strength of my name I killed him. By telling me of it to fool me with it, he killed himself. Let him and it go down the stairs together! My home is Foghorn upon Earth, not a Mound of Murder upon Vindex!"

XIX

THEY LANDED UPON the top of the hill above the Fountain that realised its identity in the personalities of Bubble and Squeak. The Cerne Giant stretched himself out upon the grass, but not before John o’ Dreams had carefully warned him against eating, or even touching, the fatal white grass below which lay the cleft or chasm that descended to the centre of the Earth, very much as those steps in Vindex descended to the centre of that star. The Cerne Giant gazed apprehensively at that white grass.

“Will you,” he asked, looking anxiously from face to face of the six small people who surrounded him, “take me somewhere where I shall be in no danger of falling down any sort of precipice or any sort of chasm, even if I walk or eat grass in my sleep?”

“Shall we take him to Cad Castle?” asked Ting, who, as she held his hand during their descent, had begun to feel a certain fondness for him, possibly because, though much bigger than her father, he reminded her of the dead Urk.

“I agree, my dear,” cried Ring at once, “and I think, though different from our Dad and you, I will be able to make him feel at home.”

“What will Laura and Jessica say?” asked Jilly Tewky quickly. “They’ve been waiting for you anxiously. Haven’t they, John o’ Dreams?”

“O they won’t mind,” commented John airily, though the name of Jessica brought to his memory that voice among the alders, whose tops he could see from where he now stood, crying out with such pathetic wistfulness: “Take me! Take me!”

‘‘Well, come along then, master,” said Ting, resuming her hold on the Giant’s hand, while John o’ Dreams became conscious of quite a sharp stab of jealousy.

“So be it,” said Ring, as he possessed himself of the Cerne Giant’s other hand. “Well, good night to you all. And our best love to your folk in Mort House. Tell them we’ll bring our friend round to visit them tomorrow, and we’ll take him down to see Bubble and Squeak too, you may be sure!”

“Good night, Ting!” cried John o’ Dreams.

“Good night, Ring!” cried Jilly Tewky.

When they were out of sight, which soon happened, as it was now nearly dark, Jilly Tewky turned to Wug and Zug.

“You two must come with us, mustn’t they, John? Mother will want to give you supper, and Father will find somewhere for you to sleep.”

“Any old shed will do for us, won’t it, Zug?” said Wug. “Any corner of any old place!”

Thus it happened that Mummy Maria Nu had no sooner hugged her twins to her heart with exquisite delight, till her heart almost burst with gratitude to Jehovah and to Jesus and to the Holy Dove, than it became necessary to get a nice supper for Wug and Zug, before the said twins would eat a morsel or drink a drop. But, being their mother, she knew too well how resolute they were, most of all when they were acting in concert with each other. So she obeyed them, in spite of Nezzar’s indignant protests, for luckily old Grand-pa Grum had already retired to his attic. What she did encourage Nezzar to do was to take these two queer-looking dwarf-men to the outhouses, and find a comfortable bed of hay in the loft, where they might sleep off their excitement and the effect of this hurried gobbled meal. Nezzar Nu was delighted by the polite gratitude the two little dwarfs displayed so peacefully in the far corner of the big hay-loft, as they lay down to sleep. Auntie Oh had helped Maria to prepare a much bigger meal than was really necessary for the twins; but John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky were in such high spirits that it was like a banquet of triumph to them, and Auntie Oh's idea of giving them Scotch whisky to drink, instead of tea, prolonged the meal till they had talked of everything, especially of how appropriate it was that their neighbours Ring and Ting should have a Giant to put up at Cad Castle. "What will Laura and Jessica make of it all?" enquired Auntie Oh, after the whisky had made the twins so happy and so proud of themselves that, from the way they talked, it might have been supposed that they had managed the whole flight from Vindex themselves, and that Wug and Zug were just a fortunate pair of passengers.

"O they'll enjoy it!" cried John o' Dreams; while Jilly Tewky more carefully added, "It seems he was born in Foghorn, thousands of years ago; so he's coming back to his native land."

"Don't you think, Mummy," said John o' Dreams gravely, "that one of us ought to go upstairs and tell Grand-dad about all this?"

"I'm not sure," said Nezzar Nu, "whether that would be wise. You never know with him. He might be annoyed that he wasn't brought down the moment they came, to give us all his advice about everything."

"Well my dear," said Nezzar's wife. "He's your dad and not mine, so you know best; but I fear he may be angry, if nobody tells him till tomorrow, what's happened. He won't be coming down, you know, till tea-time tomorrow."

"I'll go right up!" cried John o' Dreams, rushing impulsively to the door and out of the room.

There was a general hush as they all listened to his ascending footsteps.

"I pray God he won't come down the moment he hears!" burst out Nezzar Nu.

And again there was silence among them all. John o’ Dreams had closed the door. But Jilly Tewky ran to it now, and opened it, and stood there listening.

“You can’t even hear them talking!” she murmured, as she returned to her seat. “You always used to,” she added, “didn’t you, Mummy? I pray grand-dad hasn’t had a fit in the surprise of seeing John.”

“O no, my dear! Don’t say such silly things!”

Mrs. Nu looked at her husband enquiringly.

“We’ll wait for a bit,” said Nezzar Nu, “and see if he comes down. Yes,” he added, after a moment’s thought, during which he tilted his chair back and stretched out his hands with both his thumbs over the edge of the big diningroom table, and stared at the opposite wall, where hung a little engraving of Lord Shaftesbury the philanthropist, “yes, it’s always best to give fate a chance to do what it has in its mind to do.”

How far this faith in the benevolent intentions of fate had to do with the fact that he had fixed his eyes upon Lord Shaftesbury, it is impossible to say. To a simple-minded person it might well have seemed that a man, when absorbed in thought, couldn’t stare at Lord Shaftesbury, without a wise decision entering his head. But whether the decision that entered the head of Nezzar Nu was a wise one or not remained to be seen. For his sister-in-law, Auntie Oh, suddenly cried out, “Oh! wish the Rector would come!” Hearing this cry at that critical moment, showing that her sister’s faithful mind had flown to its clerical idol, the Rector of their church, Mrs. Nu gasped. Her sister would have indignantly denied that the coincidence was anything but pure chance; but though she wouldn’t have confessed it, Mrs. Nu couldn’t help attributing this flight of thought to a fact of which they were all soon to be made very definitely aware, namely a ring at the front door bell, followed by the appearance, as Nezzar Nu opened it, of the Rector himself.

“Yes,” thought Mrs. Nu, “we’ve heard about a thing called ‘telepathy’. There must be a telepathic link between Sister and Rector! What would Miss Posh say?”

The Rector had never in his life displayed more interest in meeting the inmates of Mort House than he did now. He told them at once that he had never seen more lights in Cad Castle than there were tonight.

“How he must so watch what’s going on round him,” thought Nezzar Nu, “that he couldn’t resist the temptation to come round and ask for news!”

John o’ Dreams must have been doing for his grandfather what now Jilly Tewky was called upon to do for the excited Rector, for there was no sign of her brother’s descent from the ancestral attic until she had finished her absorbing narrative. When at last he did appear, it was with the surprising news that grandfather had heard the whole story very quietly and calmly.

“Quietly and calmly, did you say?” enquired the Rector, with bland surprise. “I should have thought that the tale of such goings on would have upset Mr. Grumble Nu very considerably.”

“No, Rector, it didn’t at all,” replied John o’ Dreams, taking a seat at the table next to his sister, and feeling in his heart a throb of delight to be able to be proud of his eccentric grand-dad with this man. “No, on the contrary, he showed me certain books he had — I think they were very ancient books — that narrated things very similar to what we witnessed out there. The beings we encountered appeared in the books he showed me. There were even pictures of them, you know. And he translated to me certain Latin commentaries upon the Old Testament referring to enormous giants, who were quite friendly to the people of Judah and Benjamin. He showed me various modern books, too, recently translated into English from German and French and Italian, which were concerned with the same sort of thing. O no! Granddad was not at all upset by what I told him. It coincided, he said, with what he had long suspected to exist in those far-off stars.”

XX

"I HOPE," SAID Maria Nu to the Rector, when he was seated by the side of her husband and had partaken of a cup of coffee, "that it won't be upsetting and disturbing to you and Miss Posh to have another giant, bigger even than the last one, so near to the church."

"No, my dear lady," replied the Rector, "I have at last learnt, and I think Miss Posh has learnt too, that the things that happen to each of us in this difficult life of ours pile up towards a tendency, as some poet has said — or, let me put it simpler than that — amount by degrees to a tendency to righteousness."

"Oh!" exclaimed Maria's sister with special fervour.

"But," went on the Rector, "this tendency is not always exactly what we have expected. Indeed it is sometimes the last thing we expected. But yet, for all that, and in spite of all that, this unexpected tendency, in a direction completely different to what we expected, goes and mounts up."

"Oh," exclaimed Maria's sister, with no less fervour.

"The truth is," went on the Rector, holding out his cup for a second drink of coffee, "we must always remember that the Lord of the Universe is watching at every moment every movement of every atom in the Universe. Not a sparrow falls without his attention. Not a blade of grass grows taller without his attention. Not a leaf curls, not a fly flutters, not a grain of sand shifts, not a speck of dust stirs, not a drop of sweat gathers, not a ripple of water rises or sinks, not an echo of sound dies away, but the Lord of all is there, with his eyes and ears fixed upon this occurrence. Is He responsible for it? He is! Does he know of it — know what is happening to it? He does! Has it got its own special place in his cosmic intention for all? It has!”

“Oh!” sighed the sister of Maria Nu.

But Nezzar Nu spoke out, boldly, firmly, defiantly.

“How do we know,” said Nezzar Nu, “that the Universe is not ruled by a Mistress rather than a Master? Why do we have to say, ‘He knows about it all, He knows, He knows!’ instead of ‘She knows about it all, She knows, She knows!’”

There was such deep silence round that big mahogany table that their old Grand-dad could be heard moving his books about at the top of the house.

“How,” thought John o’ Dreams, “would the old man answer this question? He would know all about that piece of jagged flint that Thea gave her son Chronos to cut out the testicles and penis of Ouranos, who kept begetting monsters upon her. He would know all about Demeter, the mother of Persephone. He would know all about the Styx, and about that tomb outside Troy of the Queen of the Amazons. My own idea,” he said to himself, “is that the greatest wisdom in all the human race lurks in women, who, like Jilly Tewky, have never been ravished. I think that the Roman Empire wasn’t founded by Romulus and Remus, but by Egeria, the nymph in the cave, who was the friend of King Numa. I think that the loss of virginity and the bearing of children destroys a certain almost supernatural wisdom that old maids like Auntie Oh have!”

And he turned to look at his aunt, whose recent “ohs” had evidently not entirely satisfied her as to the Rector’s preference for a Master rather than a Mistress of the Universe. “She is wondering,” John o’ Dreams thought, “whether what we call Nature is not a wiser ruler of the world than what we call *God.*”

In spite of John o’ Dreams’s almost frantic attempt to escape such a contingency, the Rector was so eager to meet the Giant, and to discover what were the chief reactions of Ring and Ting to the star in the Milky Way, that he had forced them to agree to call for him at the church, when they went to fetch Ring and Ting and their gigantic guest, and take them to see the Fountain.

“What will the Giant make of Bubble and Squeak,” John o’ Dreams thought, “and what will they make of him?”

John o’ Dreams spent an agitating night when at last, after a protracted exchange of intentions with Jilly Tewky, he found himself in his own room alone. He kept having the same dream, a dream that for years after he would recall, but never with any revealing understanding. It was about a tower, an exceedingly tall and extremely slender tower, which he had, somehow or other, succeeded in causing to arise. Whether his own hands had any share in this exploit, he could never discover; but in some way or other he conjured it up, and it was a rare and delicate and very beautiful apparition that kept appearing and disappearing in the background of every landscape through which he moved that night.

He had been given this room for his very own, ever since the day arrived when it was proper for him and Jilly Tewky to sleep in separate beds; and everything about this room was peculiarly his own private possession, and had steadily become more and more so. There was a picture on the wall of the Duke of Wellington, and another one of a dead girl in a boat on a river, lying with her arms crossed and her face upturned to a dark sky, in which the constellation of King Arthur’s Wain could be distinguished among weird, large, and totally unrecognisable stars.

There were in this room several of the sort of things that all families possess, and secretly in their hearts aren’t very fond of, or very proud of and would be glad to get rid of; and which inevitably find their way into a room which is not the visitors' spare room, nor the parents' or grandparents' room, nor their Aunt's room, nor, you may be sure, the room of their growing girl. It is usually called "the dressing room" as a survival, perhaps, from the days where the father of the family did his dressing and shaving and so forth in a different room from the one where he slept with his wife. And it was of this room, at an early stage of its becoming a bedroom, that John o' Dreams had, by one of the mysterious psychic laws of every family, come to be regarded as the possessor. Gravely he looked about him now, and having removed his coat and shoes and waistcoat and braces and tie, he threw himself down on the bed, and stared at an engraving of Cad Castle as it was before he was born.

"Does Ting," he thought, "love me in the way I love her? Would she agree to marry me at once if I asked her? And when we were married, would we be shy of each other the first night? Would she let me undress her, which is what I should want to do, and help her to put on her nightdress? Would she mind my 'making love to her,' as we call it, without ravishing her, our first night? Would she sympathize with my nervousness about ravishing her, and let me go on enjoying her naked body night after night for several days without attempting to take her virginity?"

As he asked himself these questions, the various curves and contours and rondures and juxtapositions of the engraving of Cad Castle diffused themselves through the images he was calling up in his mind; or rather the images floated and hovered round these architectural details. When he came to the thought of the night when he would actually ravish her, every detail of the imaginary scene began to assume the lines and curves of the engraving he was looking at. Did that excitable little girl Jessica have the slightest idea of what it was like to be raped by a man, when she cried out to him in that heart-breaking cry: “Take me! Take me!”? What a confused and crazy dream the critical events in our life make when we really consider them! What would happen, he wondered, if he remained always too frightened of taking her virginity? Would the maternal longing in her to bear children be so strong that she would, if he were too much of a coward to do it, beguile some other man to rape her? O yes! And then the grand question assaulted his mind, would he find himself able to talk freely to her of all these delicate and dangerous matters? Or would there be a shyness between them like the shyness between a reindeer and a sea-gull, the sort of shyness that naturally, inevitably, inscrutably arises sometimes between the most devoted brothers and sisters.

“Could I,” he asked himself, as he looked at a little engraving over the door, in a richly moulded, foliated, convoluted gilt frame, of King Charles the First, “could I talk to her of these things quite frankly? Could I tell her that, much as I longed to give her a child, the idea of the physical shock of raping her, the shedding of her blood, the breaking with my generative weapon of that sacred barrier that was so perilously psychic and yet so piteously physical, that barrier the breaking of which turned her from a virgin into a prospective mother, was something that simply terrified me?”

It was then that the mind of John o’ Dreams instinctively turned to Jilly Tewky.

“O if it were only her I had to tell of all my shrinkings and shudderings, which I am sure are much worse than any terror a girl feels! How else could little Jessica have cried out to me in that alder-swamp ‘Take me! Take me!’ Jilly Tewky would understand all, would imagine all, would accept all.

O! and how wonderful it would be if Jilly Tewky and I were the parents of a child! What is it then that makes my feeling for Ting so different from my feeling for Jilly Tewky? They are both girls. They are both lovely examples of those mysterious beings that we men are so attracted to. But I know Jilly so well, whereas Ting is a complete stranger. Jilly, if it were decided between us that we *must* have a child, and I were brave enough to confess to her my horror of ravishing her to gain this desirable end — Jilly, I say, is so wise and so calm and confident of her own power, that she would at once take the whole business, including her own pain and bleeding, and my nervous terror, into her hands. She would tell me what I must, and must not, feel; and she would evoke the precisely suitable feelings in herself. She would make herself shiver and shake with a deliciously created masochistic yielding; and she would stir up in me an equally delicious sadistic frenzy."

What did, his thoughts ran on, the mysterious difference between his natural attitude to Ting and his natural attitude to Jilly Tewky, consist of? He knew for a certainty it didn't have anything to do with the moral conventional tradition he had been brought up in, that while it was very right for brother and sister to love each other, it was very wrong for them to be sexually attracted to each other. No, the difference between his feeling for Jilly Tewky and his feeling for Ting had nothing to do with right and wrong or good and evil, nothing to do with the dark wickedness of what people called incest. It had something about it, this difference, that resembled the difference between those far-away glimpses of a sea-horizon just visible between rocks and trees and beyond the far-flowing estuary of a mighty river, and the outlines of a forest and lakes and towering crags and a ruined castle rising up in the immediate foreground. Magnificently imposing though that castle and lake and forest might be there was something infinitely more strange and poetical in that faraway horizon beyond the mouth of the wandering river. And if Jilly Tewky was the exciting, massive castle reflected in the deep lake with its romantic lights and shadows and its overhanging battlements, Ting was that far-off glimpse of an horizon retreating and retreating into the mystery of forgotten memories, and even into a half-conscious sense of lives lived long, long ago, before our mother gave us birth into this present world.

Before he went to sleep that night John o’ Dreams remembered a curiously jealous pang which had darted through him at the way Jilly Tewky had touched the hand of Ring when they separated. Ring was leading the Cerne Giant, so it could be only a touch, but it struck him that something had passed from one to the other. “O let me forget that touch,” he prayed in his heart. And sleep answered him, at least for that one night.

What John o’ Dreams had no idea of as he lay, breathing quietly, in the arms of sleep, was that their home, Morty House, was haunted by a particular dream. Dreams are funny things. And this particular dream had escaped from the Land of Nod. Yes, had escaped from that ghostly, overshadowing land, where the natural and normal dreams of men, women and children, mingle with the natural and normal dreams of dogs and cats and horses and cattle and rats and mice and birds and fishes and plants and trees and butterflies and moths. The dream, whose name was Lorm, had no back; but it had two fronts, one the front of a man and one the front of a woman; and each front possessed the sexual peculiarities to which that front belonged. But it was not only its double sex that made Lorm the most unusual dream that Foghorn had ever known; it was also its age. Lorm was very old. If it had met the conqueror and master of the Cerne Giant, it would have treated him as a youngster. Bubble and Squeak of the Fountain were the only ones in that part of the country, who would have felt equal to talking to Lorm about his memories of the days that were no more. He had haunted Morty since it was first built, and he had haunted the ground on which Cad Castle stood before the Castle was built.

What made Lorm unique among dreams was its power of entering with ease into the particular group of dreams that obsessed the sleep of each separate person in Foghorn. Lorm was a familiar visitor to the pillow of Miss Posh. The Rector's sleep was more than a night's excursion to him. Poor old Grand-dad Grumble knew Lorm so well that, when he instinctively felt it was on the rampage, he would force himself to stay awake even to the point of getting out of bed and walking up and down the room. The unfortunate thing was that age had no effect upon Lorm, so that the oldest monument in the church would say to its neighbour: "Oh, there's that awful Lorm on the prowl again!" When Edward the Sixth designed that tomb over there for the Old Man of the Mountain, Lorm made that ugly crack across its neck that stopped it from ever being finished. They even say that that bawdy word in the epitaph upon the statue of Sir John Coldliver Cad was the work of Lorm, when the carver was sleepy. It was, therefore, entirely in accordance with his character that just as the "wolf-light," as they still called at Morty House the light that comes just before dawn, was beginning to lift the darkness, John o' Dreams woke up with a curse.

"Damn and blast you, you crazy milestone!"

For what Lorm had done was to take the form of the oldest milestone on the road, and to hop along the path on the high grass bank beside the road, chanting as it went the funereal words:

"No more Cads at Castle Cad
And no more Nus at Morty,
For all their boys have gone quite mad
And all their girls got naughty!"

Lorm, the Dream of dreams, was delighted with the effect of his bit of sport. "I must," it said to itself, "remember to turn myself more often into a milestone or a post or a broken wall or a tree-stump or a stile or a rock or a ledge or a broken signpost or a lonely bush or a large heavy stone or a pylon. For, if in the form of a stationary object I go go Humping about, I shall be the worst possible kind of dream to an elderly dreamer. If this boy John o’ Dreams is so scared of me now, what will he be when he is grown up? What will he be when he is an old man?”

XXI

EVEN LORM ITSELF, the most athletic, active, lively, inventive, adventurous, dangerous, daring, unpredictable, inexplicable, indescribable, incorrigible of all dreams, felt uneasy when, just before dawn, John o' Dreams slipped out of the hall-door of Morty and ran, like a mischievous boy up to some fancy trick of his own, to the Bubble and Squeak Fountain.

Lorm followed him. But when John o' Dreams stopped and stood stock-still and gazed into the depths of the Fountain, Lorm felt completely baffled.

"I cannot take the shape of a Fountain," he said to himself. "Even the King of dreams, whose name was Stupex, and who was the son of Adam and Lilith before Gain and Abel were born of Adam and Eve, and who was my ancestor, could not have assumed the disguise of a Fountain."

John o' Dreams glanced at Bubble. "O how intensely you long," he thought, "for all to be resolved into nothing!" And then he glanced at Squeak. "O how intensely you long," he thought, "for all empty space to be filled with living matter and with innumerable lives!"

And then once again he stared at the Fountain. And this time John o' Dreams became aware of something that seemed to be on the point of emerging from the Fountain. It resembled a lizard only was much smaller. "It's a newt!" he thought. And he watched its head at the top of the water, making movements as if in the next moment it might decide to crawl up the stalk of a tall reed.

"Is it amphibious?" John o' Dreams asked himself. "It lives in water, but it certainly doesn't die in air! Are there, perhaps, creatures like it who can live in fire? Think of being able to live in air and water and fire! Gould it survive if you put it in a pot and poured mould on its head? Could it live in air and in water and in earth? Would it burn up or would it flourish if you put it in the fire? Is it a water-cousin or a Salamander?"

As John o' Dreams in the "wolf-light" of that rainless predawn stared at the newt in the Fountain, Lorm, the descendant of Stupex, the ancestor of the whole family of the most haunting of all dreams, thought to itself:

"There's something about that newt he's watching that rather disturbs me. It doesn't seem quite like other newts. I know newts well; just as I know minnows and sticklebacks and tadpoles. I have had fine sport, giving each of them exactly the sort of shock they dread the most. There isn't one of them who hasn't awakened with a terrified leap from a happy dream, when I've moved into the circle of its slumber. But this newt that this silly boy is staring at gives me a very odd feeling. I wouldn't confess it to another descendant from Stupex, but the truth is, it makes me feel small. Yes, it makes me feel as if I weren't a dream at all, but just one of those ideas that these damnable vivisectors get hold of, such as if you prick enough holes in the bowels of a beaver, it will bring forth a badger, or if you lure a he-hedgehog into raping a female squirrel, she will bring forth a polecat with the head of an otter. In fact, delicious though my experiments on the sleep of living creatures are, when I think of the delight vivisectors take in torturing animals, I seem to myself like a sanctified philanthropist in the feeble satisfaction I get from meddling with their dreams. No, my good John o' Dreams, I must bid you good-night; there's something about this newt of yours that gives me the jitters."

With this parting sally Lorm sought the retreat of a water-rat to give his brood of little water-rats a few well-selected vivisectionary squeezes.

Quite alone now, John o' Dreams and the newt, whose head would emerge at sufficient intervals from the Fountain to keep up the conversation, were at liberty to explain their philosophy of life to each other in undisturbed peace.

But Lorm's influence still remained; for, before departing to disturb the sleep of the little water-rats, it had dared the newt to talk English to John, defied him to do it, challenged him to do it, threatened him with bad nights for a week if he didn't do it; and thus inspired the newt spoke up.

"You aren't perfectly correct," the newt said, "in treating me as an ordinary newt. I am not that."

"What the hell *are* you then," enquired John o' Dreams, with eager innocence.

"I am a lot more."

"What the devil," cried John o' Dreams, "do you mean by being a lot more? You can't be more than you are, and I can see, and anybody can see at first glance what you are."

"Not altogether," replied the newt. "No, you can't see altogether what I am, and you will be rather surprised when I tell you."

"Do you mean," suggested John, "that you have the blood of some other animal in you?"

"O dear no," replied the newt. "I would never boast of that! In fact I would be terribly ashamed of that. Whew! Whew!" And the newt indulged in a dramatic shiver. "I couldn't bear to think of that! O no. I am myself. I am the Newt in the Fountain of Bubble and Squeak and that is enough to be, for anyone in the world."

"Which of the two, Bubble or Squeak, do you side with in your private thoughts?"

“I am glad you said *private*, for that makes it much easier for me to explain. For in my private thoughts I agree with Bubble, but in the thought I want to have and feel I ought to have and try to have, I agree with Squeak.”

John o’ Dreams pondered for a moment. Then he said, “I suppose you mean that privately you’re sick of everything, and would be damned pleased to see the whole bloody business lost in the nothingness of empty space? But something in your ‘conscience,’ or in what Kant calls your ‘categorical imperative,’ tells you that it’s wrong to want the world to dissolve into nothing, and that you ought to help the life force in its noble task of filling space with conscious existences of every kind.”

The Newt, with its eyes and mouth just out of the water, was clearly smiling, smiling just as John o’ Dreams’s old Grand-dad Grumble used to smile at him as a child when, though sent up to the attic by his mother to get her some half-crowns wherewith to go shopping, he showed signs of wanting to explore certain shelves, where were books with pictures of Red Indians.

“I must tell you something that will surprise you a good deal, Master John o’ Dreams Nu. Though in appearance at this moment I am a Newt, and though you and I are both vividly aware of the periodic bursting of the Bubbles and squeakings of the Skull, in reality I am a good deal more than a Newt, and a good deal more than a little water lizard talking to an adventurous young man who has visited the Milky Way. It may surprise you to hear it, but in reality I am God. By this I mean that it has pleased me, the God worshipped by Christians as the Trinity, by Islam as Allah, by the Buddhists as Brahma, and among the ancient Greeks as Zeus, and among the ancient Romans as Jupiter or Jove, and who am, as all pantheists believe, the living soul of all the material substance of the material universe, to incarnate myself in this Newt.”

John o’ Dreams had learnt from his childhood, taught by his grand-dad and his father and his mother and Auntie Oh, always to go down on his knees at the name of God, or at the words of God quoted by any pastor or priest. And he, therefore, the moment our Newt paused, sank on his knees before him at the edge of the Fountain. Observing him behaving so properly, the Newt raised one paw or hand or leg or finger, and made a ripple in the water. Then it spoke in a gentler voice.

“I am still the same Newt who is neither changed nor different, Master John. I’ve only allowed my associate God to speak.”

Hearing that the Newt was only God’s associate, John o’ Dreams scrambled up to his feet again. But the Newt now went on in his gentle, less endearing, tone.

“Yes, I am God,” it said. “In other words I am the whole Universe. Empty space is my dwelling. In all directions from where you and I are talking, empty space used to stretch. In fact there was no Universe at all. The Universe didn’t exist. There were no Stars, no Sun, no Moon, no Earth, nothing but empty space, nothing but nothing. It was only when I came that there was anything at all. I am the Universe. Yes, I am giving you a false impression, if I said that I was the soul of the universe. I am its body, as well as its soul. I am mind. I am matter. I am everything. But, as you see, I have the power of concentrating myself upon one spot, upon one creature, upon one fish or worm or man or insect. What is life?”

At this point God, or his present incarnation, the Newt, looked up into the face of John o’ Dreams, which was bent over the Fountain.

“Have you ever asked yourself that question, young master? You people talk of Heaven and earth and of Being and Not-Being, but imagine what it would be like, if all this suddenly vanished completely away. Yes, try and imagine, my good man, what it would feel like to be absolutely alone in space; or rather, not so much in space as in blank nothingness — yes, in truly mathematical nothingness. What you forget, my good sir, is that this universe of matter and mind, so full, as it seems to you, of living things, has come into existence out of complete Nothingness. What made it come? What brought it into existence? Tell me that, my good man." John o' Dreams, now erect on his feet, made no reply. God, incarnated in the Newt, had certainly asked him an unanswerable question. It was like asking him, why is life life, and why is death death, and why are the elements, air, water, fire, earth, what they are. Nothingness was Nothingness, but it was obvious that it couldn't say to itself, "I am Nothingness. Please God turn me into Something?" For the nature of Nothingness was to have nothing wherewith to think or to pray. If we could no longer say, "I am I and you are you, and that is that and those are those," existence as we know it now would be gone; and, if gone, what would there be instead? God, or whatever this voluble life-force that we call "God," and the Germans "Gott," and the French "Dieu," may be, now that he is, or it is, here, can play at creating as much as he likes, but he or it can't explain, any more than his or its created creatures can, how he or it suddenly arrived in the middle of empty space all alone.

"Had this Being he was now talking to," thought John o' Dreams, "been an unseen aspect of Nothingness and Empty Space all along? What they call," and he pondered for a few seconds, "another Dimension?"

"Would it be of any interest to you to know," God now began again, through the upraised head of the Newt, "to learn in what creature I intend to incarnate myself when I leave my present incarnation?"

"It would indeed, O Almighty One," replied John o' Dreams at once. "It would indeed!"

“Well,” said God, “I have decided to incarnate myself in a Cockroach, a very large Cockroach, who lives under the mat at the entrance, though the mat is always inside, to your home Morty. You can tell your parents and your sister this. But if I were you, I would refrain from telling your grandfather, because these old gentlemen” — and the mouth of the Newt twitched a little, whether from jealousy of the Cockroach under the mat, or from the fact that God was smiling, John o’ Dreams couldn’t tell— “are apt to burst out into unexpected tempers and behave in a manner to cause discomfort to their relatives.”

“I will obey you, God,” replied John o’ Dreams respectfully, “and I will say nothing to Grand-dad, and I will tell the others to say nothing.”

Feeling full of unusual righteousness John o’ Dreams, who also felt a little hungry, for it was by now breakfast-time, hurried home. Before he left the Fountain, however, he gave a little nod to Bubble and a little nod to Squeak, each nod having something in it rather like the shrewd yet pious glance that the clergyman at Holy Communion gives to the Squire and his family, when they approach the Holy Table before the little group of religious-minded villagers are permitted to partake of the Sacrament.

But, as can well be imagined, Lorm — the direct descendant of the dream that made Lilith, the first wife of Adam, leap out of her lodge of lilies and skedaddle across the Garden of Eden screaming: “I felt the breath of a serpent! I felt the breath of a serpent!” — hadn’t forgotten that, though it was nearly breakfast-time, there might well be some heads still on their pillows. And indeed there were! The enormous Cerne Giant, dreaming that Bog, his master, had come to life again and was hunting for him in Foghorn, was Lorm’s first victim. His howl of abject terror rang through the whole of Cad Castle, and was heard as far as the custom house at the docks. The Rector himself was caught sleeping by Lorm, and the cry of panic with which he awoke, thinking that he saw Miss Posh being dragged out of her bed by a dragon and carried towards the Fountain, nearly gave Auntie Oh the horrors as she heard it across the fields.

If John o' Dreams, after his conversation with God, hadn't felt so hungry for his breakfast, he wouldn't have been in time to save Jilly Tewky from the activity of Lorm the dream, but he knocked at her door just in time; and Lorm was well ensconced within the rather thick skull of Nezzar Nu, their father, causing him to utter a yell so penetrating that it brought their mother running back from the bath-room, fearing that he'd been bitten by a rat.

When John o' Dreams finally paused half-way down the stairs, there suddenly came into his head what he had heard at the Fountain about the Cockroach under the mat near the hall-door. But his instinctive reaction to this thought was the natural and familiar one that it would be wise to tell Jilly Tewky about it before he did anything. The hand-bell, which always stood, alongside of the silver tray for callers' cards, upon the table in the hall, was now rung by Mummy Nu, who was, as usual, the first to be down. When she had rung the bell, which she did so that it could be heard all over the house, she retired into the kitchen to prepare breakfast for them all; and if she didn't find Auntie Oh already heating the oven, making the toast, boiling the water, and preparing hot bacon or a couple of omelettes, she knew that that lady would be down at any moment.

John o' Dreams did at once what his inner voice now told him was the right thing to do. He rushed upstairs to his sister's room, knocked at the door, and when she opened it with her hair down and her comb in her hand, he hurriedly told her the story of his talk with the Newt, whose personality God had, pro tern, absorbed in his own. And he told her how God was now going to incarnate himself into the body of a Cockroach under the hall-mat.

“Let me come with you,” cried Jilly Tewky excitedly, “let me come with you!”

“If you come at once,” he answered.

She obeyed him, and fastening her hair up with the nearest available hair-pins, she hurried down after him.

It can be imagined how she took good care to remain on the last step of the stairs with her hand on the banisters, as he rushed to the door-mat and lifted it up with a quick jerk. Yes! *There was the Cockroach*! It was motionless, but quite close to the side of the front door, where the door’s hinges were, so that when the door was opened, it would be completely unobservable.

“Listen!” murmured John o’ Dreams to his sister, “while I talk to it, as I did to the Newt.”

XXII

JILLY TEWKY FIRMLY held on to her position on the last step of the stairs, listening to the sound of her mother and aunt carrying into the breakfast-room — which was visible through the half-open door — the plates and the cups and saucers, and the knives, forks and spoons.

“What will mother think,” she said to herself, “when she hears John o’ Dreams talking to a cockroach and calling it God?”

That indeed was exactly what her brother was beginning to do. The Cockroach had made no attempt to hide itself. Cockroaches are not attracted to gardens or drives or avenues or rows of tall trees, so that it had no wish, even at this hour of eight in the morning, to leave the house. It did have parents and brothers and sisters, however, in the kitchen; and it would have made a rush through the breakfast-room, where the table was being laid, to join these relatives, if that hadn’t meant a bolt in front of the aggressive boy, who was clearly up to mischief and out to kill any fellow inhabitant of Morty too small to hit back.

“Well, Master Cockroach,” cried John o’ Dreams, “and what may your attitude be to the Lord of the Universe whom Christians call God, and Muslims call Allah, and Buddhists call Brahma? Has this mysterious Ruler of the world identified himself with you, or, as we say, incarnated himself in you, as he has done in the case of the Newt in the Fountain?”

The Cockroach moved to a patch of sunlight that had come through the door of the dining-room, and in this patch of sun it mounted upon a small bit of toasted crust that some gust of wind must have blown along the floor.

“The Ruler of the Universe,” said the Cockroach from this chance-bestowed rostrum, “selects different living creatures, one by one, in whom it can incarnate itself. When it wanted a man, it selected Jesus, because the Jews are the wisest of men, and Jesus the wisest of the Jews. There will come a time when God will select a woman. And then it will probably be an Italian, for they are the most womanly of women. As I speak to you now, I am both a Cockroach speaking to you and God speaking to you. Just as in the case of the Newt, I was at once God talking to you, and the Newt in the Fountain talking to you.”

“Why,” enquired John o’ Dreams, “did God choose you among all the other cockroaches?”

“For a very simple reason,” replied the Insect. “The young of our tribe are always being swallowed by a certain species of rat, who hold them in their mouths till they are poisoned by rat-breath, and then swallow them. But if any cockroach allows such little ones to play on its back, it acquires a smell that attracts this kind of rat, who devours it whole, while the little ones have time to scramble off its back and escape. It is only the grown-up cockroach that rats eat. It is called a baby-saviour, and this kind of rat eats it up with special savagery. The other cockroaches won’t go near this one, who makes a holocaust of itself, so that it is compelled to live alone like a hermit with no companions but the babies playing on its back, till it is devoured and they escape. Our tribe would soon disappear, if it were not for its baby-saviours, of which I happen to be one. Our life is not very pleasant, for the babies tickle our backs, as you can imagine, and our death is a violent and painful one; but all the same we have a feeling—”

At this point Jilly Tewky, still on the last of the steps and still holding tight to the banister, intervened.

“Will you let a girl speak to you, Cockroach-God?”

“Of course,” replied the deified Insect. “Ask anything you wish.”

“I don’t want to ask much,” said Jilly Tewky in a very low voice, clearly anxious not to be heard by her mother or by Auntie Oh, as they laid the table, “but what I do want to know is which of the two deities, or supernatural beings, who dominate our Bubble and Squeak Fountain — that is to say, whether Bubble, who wants to turn everything into thin air, or Squeak, who wants to enlarge the material substance of the Universe in defiance of empty space — is the more likely to triumph?”

The Cockroach gathered all his legs together upon his little pulpit of bread-crust, and stretched out his head.

“If either your brother or I, my good girl, knew which of those ideals would win—” It was at this exact moment, just as the Cockroach had begun to be eloquent, and was about to associate itself more closely with the universal Deity, Who had so miraculously united Himself with it, that there was a cry from Auntie Oh of, “A black beetle! a black beetle!” followed by a clatter of knives and forks, and the voice of Mummy Nu calling, “There! I saw it! Stamp on it, my dear! Stamp on it! Quick, quick!”

Before John o’ Dreams and his sister had time to move, they saw a second cockroach scurry from the breakfast-room towards the first one, who, leaving his vantage ground in a second, met it and led it with a wild scramble over the upturned mat, past John o’ Dreams’s muddy left foot, and into the little passage on the other side of the stairs, that led to the scullery. Both the ladies now emerged from the breakfast-room, and the moment they saw how clotted with wet mud John o’ Dreams’s boots were, their attention was diverted from beetles to concern for well-brushed carpets; and the young man was hurried off to the rear by the same route that had been taken by the escaping insects.

The conversation at breakfast was, as may well be imagined, unusually animated. Jilly Tewky was full of their adventures and brimming over with her zest for relating them, while John o’ Dreams, after the fashion of his boyhood, described what they had seen and heard upon Vindex, just as if they had been his last night’s dreams.

Lorm, well aware that the excitement of this first breakfast together would rob him of his usual dream-hunt, concentrated upon the old gentleman upstairs, who naturally had gone to bed rather later than usual after the shock of their arrival. Lorm devised for him a perfect disturbance, adopted with devilish insight to the old gentleman’s nature. He caused him to imagine all the Gog-Magogs in his fields rising up, each of them with heads resembling those of the two-headed Janus, and all of them together invading his bedroom with the intention of taking him out of his bed, and carrying him out into the fields, and planting him there up to his neck in the earth. Badly scared by this prospect, the old gentleman found himself out of bed when he awoke, and on his hands and knees on the floor. It was from this position that he lifted up his voice in a deep-throated howl that brought his son Nezzar, two steps at a time, to his side. But the indignant old man refused to return to bed, and all Nezzar could do was to escort him to the bathroom and leave him there.

Finding everybody else in Morty fully awake, all Lorm could do now was to visit the Rectory in hope of being able to give the Rector the worst shock of his life. Lorm was descended from the worst dream ever dreamed upon this earth, the dream that obsessed Lilith herself. This was the dream of being made pregnant by a spider, who had eaten so many flies that their round black heads and staring eyes burst out of his offspring’s body in every direction. In Lilith’s dream the spider-father of her fly-swollen infant had been devoured by a dragon-fly, and when she screamed in terror during its birth, it was because she thought she saw this monstrous insect returning to her bedside to swallow its victorious progeny.

In his determination to give the Rector a shock such as he would never forget, our friend Lorm forgot to take into account Miss Posh. To reach the Rector's pillow, it was necessary to pass the door of the bedroom of Miss Posh. Now nobody has more dreams than an unravished virginal spinster; but these dreams, if she isn't a demi-goddess like King Numa's Egeria, who taught him how to conquer the world, are delicate, filmy-floating, foam-flying, airy-fairy fantasies; and when the group of them who were hovering about Miss Posh's bedroom-door, ready to slip in at any moment, saw Lorm approaching, there was a feverish flutter, and their fairy-like leader, the dream whose name was Flim-flam, called on them to drive Lorm out of the house. Formidable as Lorm was when alone with a mortal brain of normal nerves and natural sensitivity, he was out of his element altogether when forced to cope with a group like this. So off he fled, and rushing through a corridor, up a little passage, and down three small flights of stairs, he found himself finally alone in the empty church.

XXIII

IT MUST HAVE been a fortnight after Lorm's dismissal from the beds of both the Rector and Miss Posh, that the brother and sister at Cad Castle, as well as the brother and sister at Morty, became aware that it was impossible to approach the Fountain of Bubble and Squeak without finding the Cerne Giant there, talking with absorbed intensity to the Skull, while he glanced every now and then at the Bubbles bursting, as if he dreaded some attack, without the faintest knowledge of the form it was likely to take, from this opponent of all optimistic plans.

At last, when another week had passed, the Morty twins went boldly over to Cad Castle, and asked whether they could assist the Cerne Giant in any way. They met not only Ring and Ting there, but also Laura and little Jessica the cook. They learnt great news, indeed staggering news in every sense of that word.

They learnt that, after profoundly wise advice from Squeak and in bold defiance of Bubble, and also after secret visits, unknown to anybody at Morty, to the hidden retreat of Wug and Zug in the Morty apple-loft, it had been decided among them all that, along with the Cerne Giant, and flown by Wug and Zug on the strength of what that pair had learnt from contact with the Arch-Druid, they would set out, accompanied they hoped by the Morty twins, and fly so far into outer Space that, from where they stopped, not one single star would be visible in any direction. Once arrived at this remote spot, they explained to the twins, they intended to build or mould or erect or form an entirely new Star of their very own, which they had resolved to call “Cerne,” because the material for its erection would have been carried there on the body of the Cerne Giant.

The whole thing had been worked out between the Giant and the Skull named Squeak. The Cerne Giant had got the idea completely, for it was he who had first thought of it, and he had acquired it from Bog, his lord and master, who confessed to him how his monstrous body had been so plastered by his parents with earth-mould, and sand-shingle, and every sort of mud, that his flesh had become like the flesh of a rocky island capable of lasting for a million years. The idea, therefore, which the Cerne Giant had suggested, was that he should so pad himself out with earth-mould that there would be at least a foot-deep mass of it round his whole naked body. Thus he would be carrying upon him far more solid earth than they could possibly carry into space in bales and baskets. And so, with Wug and Zug to convey them all, by means of the magic they had sucked up from the Arch-Druid’s garments, they would fly, all four of them, John o’ Dreams, Jilly Tewky, and Ring and Ting, till they were out of sight of every star in the universe. Then, and not till then, they would stop, and with all the substance scooped from off the body of the Cerne Giant, they would start their work.

The Cerne Giant had also acquired from the Skull, whose name was Squeak, a certain creative sand which existed in the rock beside Squeak’s head. This, he had explained to the Giant, if sprinkled amid the earth out of which they would form their star, would have the power considerably to increase its size and strengthen its consistency, and also enable it to remain stationary in its solitary position in empty space. The creation of a lonely star, far out of reach of any gravitation from the orbit of any star in any constellation, was entirely the idea of the Cerne Giant, but arrived at only after long and deep consultation with the Skull of Squeak at the Fountain.

It was a distressing moment for poor Maria Nu, the mother of the twins, when she learnt that they were off again on what sounded to her like something worse than any "wild goose chase," but she knew *them* too well, and she knew life too well to make any desperate attempt to stop them from this crazy flight. Their father, for some queer reason, could not resist taking a certain surprising interest in what they were doing, an interest which puzzled himself as much as it puzzled them. Was it, perhaps, a resurgence within the depths of him of the childish interest he must have first taken in his father's Gog-Magogs, before they became the burden of his life? As to Auntie Oh, what she, of course, wanted to know was what the Rector would say; but so far neither Morty nor Cad Castle had revealed anything to either the Rector or Miss Posh.

The mother of the twins had the wise and practical thought of telling the twins, as she hugged them goodbye, that they'd better insist on their giant taking with them a suit of clothes, including warm under-clothes, so that he'd have something to put on when he'd stripped himself of the matter which he carried on his body for forming their new star.

Thus finally, at five o'clock in the afternoon, they set off. Wug held the Cerne Giant's right hand, and Zug his left hand. Ring held Wug's right hand, and Ting held Zug's left hand. Jilly Tewky held Ring's right hand, and John o' Dreams held Ting's left hand. So they advanced through Space in a long straight line, whereof any creature meeting them would have found itself encountering John o' Dreams on its extreme right, and Jilly Tewky on its extreme left. As can be well imagined, both our twins experienced very queer sensations as they whirled through space, thus separated from each other. They could both, however, as they had neither of them done in their lives before, give themselves up to a hand-clasp that had nothing incestuous about its warmth. The magnetic current through the body of Jilly Tewky was perpetually crying out to Ring: “O let’s do it as soon as we’re there!” And the magnetic current in John o’ Dreams was perpetually crying out to Ting: “I want to have you! I want to have you! I want to have you!”

Wug and Zug, who had been having each other to more than their heart’s content in the Morty apple-loft, were feeling a strange and new exultation far beyond mere sexual pleasure. They were feeling, as with their small fingers they clutched the great hands of the Giant, that they had now got a prisoner belonging to, and yet towering above, the human race, this race of self-satisfied tyrants, to suck whose lifeblood they generally had to wait till after death had given them into their hands, and even then it was by no means always easy to scramble into their coffins.

“I am glad,” thought the Cerne Giant, as they flew past the moon and the sun, and were at last aware in the far distance of the star at the furthest reach of the Milky Way, which they knew as Vindex, “that I didn’t tell them a word about Bog, or start asking them questions about Bubble and Squeak. If they are all going to help me build a completely new world in empty space and call it after my birth-place in Foghorn, I must show my gratitude by keeping myself in the background and not jawing them forever on the history of my life.”

When John o’ Dreams saw Vindex he thought: “Little did I expect ever to come back in this direction. Is Mummy Plangy, I wonder, still plotting with the Horners to kill off every single Druid in the place? How quaint to think that every star in the Universe contains fiercely disputing continents of angry nations plotting and fighting against each other! Suppose if we did have a final destruction of all the inhabitants of all the worlds, and there was nothing left but the stars in which they had lived, no men, no animals, no birds, no fishes, nothing but the rocks and stones and trees, would the whole business have to begin all over again? And if so, how would it begin?

If there were no living creatures in the oceans and seas and rivers of these worlds left to come out of the water upon the land, and if there were no birds left in the air surrounding these depopulated worlds, how would the whole thing start again?"

Jilly Tewky said to herself, as all the stars grew fainter and fainter and smaller and smaller in the distance around them: "Shall we two girls have to bear children to be the first inhabitants of our world of Cerne — mine, I suppose, with Ring as their father, and John o' Dreams, I suppose, with Ting as their mother?"

Both Jilly Tewky at *her* end of the flying line of young people, and John o' Dreams at *his* end, carried a basket containing an enormous load of earth-mould, and as her mother had warned her to do, Jilly carried, neatly folded at the top of her basket of earth, the Cerne Giant's clothes. On, on, and on they flew until not a single star was visible in any direction. Then, to make quite sure that they were beyond all worlds, they still flew on for nearly an hour more, when at last they stopped. Wug and Zug released the Cerne Giant's hands, and along with Ring and Ting and John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, they formed a circle round him.

From his naked body and his arms and legs he scraped the earth with which he was plastered, from head to foot, half a foot deep. Then Jilly helped him to put on the clothes she had brought, both she and her brother being amazed, as she did so, by the enormous size of his penis.

They were all, including the giant himself, surprised at the size of the star they had now created. That mysterious dust — or was it some superstellar substance that space itself contained, and that only profound sages like the Skull of the Fountain, who uttered a squeak at every bursting bubble, were aware of? — had so enlarged under their eyes, and now under their feet, the land on which they stood, and indeed was still enlarging it, that when at last they all broke up their circle around the Giant, and looked north, south, east and west, they were astonished to find that the star Cerne on which they stood had an horizon losing itself in the sky in every direction, just as horizons in flat country do at home.

Then it was that John o' Dreams asked the Giant, as they stood gazing around, whether, if they walked steadily in one direction, the horizon would just move before them, as it would if they were upon the earth, until finally, if they kept on without any deviation, they would find themselves returning to the exact spot from which they started, a point they could make plain by tying a handkerchief to a stick and planting it in the ground? Or would they, John o' Dreams went on, when they got as far as they could, simply come to the edge of what would then feel like a dirty mattress, spread flat on the air, where you could only stop and look over the edge, or throw yourself over the edge and sink down into empty space?

XXIV

"You would certainly be able," the Giant responded to John o' Dreams's question, "to walk completely round our new-built world, and if you could keep straight, come back to the exact spot where you started."

Then it was that Jilly Tewky asked the Giant a question.

"Suppose," she enquired, "that we dug a hole into our world, a hole so deep that it came out on the other side, would we still find ourselves standing firmly on our new world, if we went down that hole and came up out of it?"

"Certainly we would," answered the Giant, "for our new world has the same gravitational pull as the old earth from which we came. This pull might not be as strong as larger worlds, but it certainly would be strong enough to keep us firmly on our feet."

After these reassuring words from their leader, they all lay down, using their coats and cloaks as blankets, and fell fast asleep.

When they awoke in the morning, pretty well simultaneously, they were not surprised to find their Giant in the midst of them, his arms round his knees, absorbed in deep thought. No sooner awake they all naturally turned their eyes on him, and he smiled rather mischievously at them.

"My dear friends," he said. "We have got our world; but we have forgotten the most important thing that all worlds must give their inhabitants. Here we are; but we have nothing to eat!"

So great was the shock of this that, with wide-open eyes, they simply, like half-a-dozen bewildered children, stared at him utterly confounded. John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky didn't even glance at each other; and though Wug and Zug did exchange a quick look, they also continued to gaze helplessly at their giant-leader. No one reading about this deplorable occasion in empty space, and trying to imagine the expression in the faces of those six creatures, could exaggerate the tension they endured. The Giant in their midst looked from one to another, but not a word did he speak; and though the mischief in his expression had completely vanished, no flicker of hope or comfort had taken its place. Complete silence, stultification, and stupefaction held them all. The emptiness round them on every side must have asked itself: "How long are these infants going to wait for the appearance of their mummy?"

The Giant, staring at them all as he hugged his knees, might have given any gulf of space the impression of some gigantic begetter of them all, who had become as helpless as they were without his wife. What were they all to do? They couldn't live without eating, and they couldn't live without food. Where was the food to come from?"

Very slowly and rather stiffly the Giant rose to his feet and looked all round their horizon. As he gravely turned to follow their sky curve in its complete rondure, they all watched him in motionless suspense, themselves in a circle. Suddenly he stopped, his eyes fixed, his attention absorbed, his tall body bent a little towards some particular point in the sky. They all saw this and waited in breathless suspense. Then he spoke up.

"There is an air-plane," he announced, "coming straight towards us. They must have seen our tiny world, like a star in the sky, and decided to visit it. I think we had better consider how to deal with them. They will, no doubt, have plenty of food, and they will probably have endless things that we could plant and sow here, so as to provide ourselves as time goes on with enough to eat. I think what we had better do is to take prisoner at once every person on board, and use them as useful slaves, as the Perosians on

Vindex used, or tried to use, the Horners. If you people agree with me, I think it would be a good thing if I could increase my formidable appearance by brandishing a club. Perhaps you could let me use your baskets, Mr. Nu and Miss Nu? And perhaps you, Mr. Ring Cad, could let me have that stick you keep stuck in your belt like a long sword?"

Both baskets and stick were in his possession in a moment: and by breaking up the two baskets and twisting the mass of little pieces of wood round the top of the stick, the semblance did certainly appear of a huge terrifying club. Thus prepared, the Cerne Giant rose to his full height with his club in his hand, while his six companions gathered round him.

The air-plane landed skilfully and gently about a quarter of a mile from where they awaited it. Led by the Cerne Giant, all six of them advanced upon it at a run. There soon turned out to be only four men on board, but there was also a powerful and competent Captain, together with the Captain's lady, who was even more commanding in appearance, than he was himself.

The Cerne Giant, brandishing his club, began addressing this Captain and this lady at once.

"You are, all of you, our prisoners, of course," announced the Giant, "and the first thing you must do is to pile all your weapons in a heap here and now at our feet."

The Captain exchanged a word with his lady and replied in English.

"I am glad," he said, "that we speak the same language. We come," he went on, "from a far corner of Australia, which has for its name the ancient Greek word, signifying the last letter of the alphabet, which as you know is Omega. Few Europeans and fewer Americans are aware of our small state, but into that there is no necessity to go just now, but I will proceed to direct our crew to obey you and heap up our weapons."

While the Captain and his distinguished-looking lady stood on one side of this heap of weapons, which began to mount up into quite a large pile as the crew obeyed their instructions, the Cerne Giant, with his huge club now quiescent under his arm, entered into a lively discussion with the Morty Twins and the Cad brother and sister, a discussion that was interrupted at intervals by spirited exclamations from Wug and Zug. There must have been something quite noticeable in the difference between the dictatorial authority of the two rulers from Omega and the democratic easy-going fraternity of the dwellers in Cerne, for when the pile of surrendered arms was complete, the distinguished lady, who carried a parasol which she held by the middle as if it were itself a weapon, addressed herself to Jilly Tewky in the following words.

"I observe, my girl, that you are all supporting and even assisting and advising this grotesque Giant of yours, whose purpose seems to be to drive us out of this little world altogether or to force us to serve him. How can a civilised maid like you take such a monster's side against my husband and me? Perhaps you realise that my husband is Major-General Lord Stripthelot, and that before we went to Australia, we lived in Fivewives Manor in Little Scrabbleton. You look a sensible girl. Indeed you remind me of a very nice housemaid I had once in Little Scrabbleton. Perhaps she was a relation of yours. Her name was Lil. What is your name, if I may ask, and which of these daring lads is your boy-friend?"

The woman's insolence so infuriated Jilly Tewky that the only reply she made was to move a step or two nearer to where the Cerne Giant was brandishing his club. But John o' Dreams spoke up.

"We shall consider very carefully, madam," he said, "whether to make use of your muscular ability in scrubbing the deck of your air-plane or of your skill with figures in keeping accounts in the office. But in either case we shall, I am sure, find plenty of use for you. But you must please, my good lady, however important your husband's military position may have been, get into your head that when people enter a foreign country, they must respect that country's government and way of life, and not start laying down the law, as if they were conquerors of the world."

The manor-house lady from Little Scrabbleton went back to join her husband, who was superintending the erection of a tent, under which the more vulnerable things in the airplane could be released from their present over-crowded state. Ring and Ting were engaged in an intense discussion together.

"But don't you see, my dear," Ting was saying, "this is a crucial and ticklish moment. Apart from our Giant, the chances are that with the arms they've got in their plane, and with their military commander to direct them, for it's plain the man's no fool, our side would have no chance. But if our Giant were now to rush upon them, and if the shots they fired at him, for I'm sure they've got fire-arms, had no effect, we might possibly win by giving them a wild panic."

It was at this moment that an inspiration came to John o' Dreams.

"What we must do," he whispered to Jilly Tewky, "is to find out what arms they have got. I'm going to ask Wug and Zug to approach their leader, for whoever he may be, he's a fellow who knows what he's up to, and offer their help. That would give him the idea that he could, as the phrase is, 'divide and rule,' and then, after a time, let's tell Wug and Zug to make the excuse of trying to obtain more help, and when they come, we can learn from them all we most want to know."

Jilly Tewky made no attempt to dissuade him from this plan. She refrained from making any comment; and John o' Dreams hurried over to where the Worm-man and the Slug-woman were talking to each other a little aside from Ring and Ting, and suggested to them his idea. They obeyed with alacrity, evidently well pleased by the suggestion. The twins watched them make the offer, and watched the Captain nod his head, and waited in silence till Wug and Zug came across to them.

“Well, old friend,” enquired John o’ Dreams eagerly, “what’s the news?”

XXV

"They have no fire-arms in the plane," said Wug, "nor explosives of any kind. But they've got an enormous collection of knives, swords, spears, axes, choppers, tridents, rakes, hoes, forks, spades, trowels, bows-and-arrows, saws, brooms and javelins. They've got bales of roots and potatoes and cabbages and onions and beans and seeds-for-sowing of every sort and kind. They've got every species of corn you can imagine. They've also got casks of oil and strongly-barred cages with lots of little colts and calves and pigs and geese and turkeys and chickens. If we took possession of them body and soul," added Wug finally, "we should have enough farm-yard provisions to make Cerne a prosperous estate, capable of supporting a considerable population for an indefinite period. They've got beds and cradles and chairs and tables and hammers and nails and blankets and sheets and well-constructed little grates with iron bars and a lot of excellent mattresses and thick carpets. It's clear," concluded Wug, "that they came here with the intention of cultivating and populating a desert."

Jilly Tewky now came close up to them with one of her usual direct and practical questions.

"Where did they come from?" she enquired.

"From some remote corner of Australia," Wug answered, and then, obviously feeling that to answer one woman's question, it was important to have another woman, he called Zug to come to them. This was clearly extremely annoying to the Major-General, for the little dwarf-lady was evidently proving of great use to him in the business of making their plane disgorge its voluminous contents, and arranging the contents under the large tent composed of ship-sails which they had caused to be erected. Arrived on the scene, the Slug-Lady soon made everything clear.

"The General," she exclaimed, "came with his wife originally from a big manor-house in the West of England, but after the war he settled with his lady in a far-away corner of Australia, because he wanted a more exciting life than he could get at home. He was something of an astronomer and was also interested in devilry" — Zug hesitated for a second— "I mean — what *is* the thing they call it? Astrology and the signs of the Zodiac — and was always searching the sky with an enormous telescope. So that when he saw what looked like the tiny speck of a new star in an out-of-the-way part of the heavens, he at once thought of flying there and making it his land of heart's desire."

"Had he thought of a name to give it?" enquired Jilly Tewky.

"Oh no," replied Zug. "But their plane has a name. It is called *Omega,* which they tell me is the Greek word for the end. Whether the General had suicidal thoughts when he chose it, I don't know. But they tell me his wife can't bear it. She wanted it, they tell me, to be called *Vita Nuova,* which in Latin means 'New Life.' So you see my lord's all for Greek, and my lady's all for Latin. So what can we do?"

"Call it Gibberish, and let it go!" cried Wug the Worm.

Thus speaking, as Homer would say, and followed unwillingly by his wife, as Dante would add, and unmoved, as Horace would sum up, though the whole business crashed in ruins, Wug departed to help in undoing the "corded bales" under the sail-tent.

It was then that one of John o' Dreams's recklessly caught-up inspirations — one of those wild ideas that had come to him at particular moments all through his life — drove him to rush to Ring and Ting, dragging Jilly Tewky after him by a flap of her skirt, crying aloud so that everybody within hearing could hear — and everybody, whether brought to that spot by Omega or brought by the magic of the Arch-Druid absorbed by Wug and Zug, was close enough to hear— "Now let us all agree to make our noble Giant the absolute, the responsible, the arbitrary, the omnipotent Ruler of the new world we have created! Let's dispense with crownings and with anointings. Let us simply proclaim with our united voice that he is King and Emperor, and the one and only Lord of the Land of Cerne!"

The Giant must have been alive-o, after the manner of the being he had slain upon Vindex, though devoid of his ears, for no sooner had John o' Dreams's voice rung out bold and clear, than brandishing his club and with his colossal sexual organ exposed to the sight of all, the Cerne Giant strode forward, stooped down, dropped his club for a moment, seized the General by his ankle, seized the General's wife by her ankle, and waved them both round his head — yes! several times round his head, and then laid them carefully down side by side under the tent-pole of the tent.

There John o' Dreams would have let them lie, but Jilly Tewky, uneasy as she always was when any human being was suffering, ran to their side; and John o' Dreams, as well as Ring and Ting, followed her. Jilly Tewky knelt on the ground beside them, and bending over them, touched their foreheads with her fingers, pushing back their hair, which was easy to do in both cases, as neither of them indulged in curly locks. She soon realised that they both would soon recover from the shock of their swing in the air, and that even now they were conscious, and that their breathing and heart-beating were on the way to become normal.

The crew of the Omega, as they seemed all bent on calling their plane, consisted only of four men, and as our friends from Foghorn, when you included their pair of Druid-inspired dwarfs, amounted to six persons, now that the Giant had given the General and his lady the sort of shock that would keep them in their place and render them quiescent, the only claim that these four men could make to be, if the Giant was counted out, the dominating party in their new world, would be that whereas they were four males, John o' Dreams and Ring and Wug were the only males on the side against them, since Jilly and Ting and Zug were all feminine.

But after all, for everybody spoke the same language, it was some while before the peculiar half-light, which was what the creatures of the star Cerne now found to be the only darkness they were destined to enjoy as their night, fell upon them, that everything was peacefully arranged, and that everybody, counting out the General and his wife and the Giant, should have their vote when any vital dispute arose as to what particular measures were to be taken. Thus when the weird half-light, which was all the darkness Nature gave them when the time came for them to sleep, finally arrived, not only the chastened General and his lady, but all four men of the *Omega* and all the creators of the star Cerne settled down to a beatific sleep.

Day and Night, if they could be called by these familiar names, followed each other in this friendly manner for quite a long time. The General and his arrogant lady had had their lesson, and they now fell into unison, without giving themselves any more airs, with the Foghorn folk and the four men of the Omega crew.

Among our special group of friends, the children of Urk Cad and the children of Maria Nu, there was, as they themselves had anticipated, the inevitable disturbance of human hearts when the two sexes are involved.

John o' Dreams and Ring did their utmost to control the outbursts of emotional disturbance, of which they kept growing more and more conscious in their nerves, as John o' Dreams's attraction to Ting, and Ring's attraction to Jilly Tewky, became more and more accentuated.

It was not, however, till two whole months had passed that something happened to reduce these emotional and sexual and occupational activities to their proper place in the Universe. All the six Foghorners led by their Giant, and all the six Omegans led by their General and his lady, set out one by one to see how long it would take them to walk clean round their world. They resolved to take no food; and before setting out, they made all the preparations they could for a memorable feast, which they decided to call the birthday party of the new Star, Cerne, and each of them who possessed a watch wound it up carefully, and set it at one and the same time as all the other watches.

They started at eight in the morning, according to what their idea of morning, as compared with night, consisted of in their new world. It certainly consisted of a beautiful expanse of uninterrupted sky, not perhaps as bright as the Homeric Aether between Olympus and Ouranos, but certainly as bright as the ordinary morning-light, both in Australia and Foghorn. They walked in sections, the Cerne Giant leading, and John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky following close behind. Then there came Ring and Ting, along with two of the Omega men. And finally, bringing up the rear with the remaining two men of the Omega plane, came the General and his formidable lady. Not one of them, whether from Foghorn or from Australia, had the faintest premonition of what was going to happen. But very few things, however extraordinary and unexpected, happen in the Universe without a warning of some kind or other.

The whole company of these Cerne-dwellers, led by a Giant and followed by a General, became suddenly aware that two enormous sea-gulls were circling round them as they walked, each of them crying a cry which apparently was a cry in the English language.

"It is coming!" cried one. And it was at once answered by its companion. "It is coming!" cried the other.

Then there was a moment of alarming silence among the whole party of a dozen walkers, before John o' Dreams murmured, "*Who is it?*"

And the General growled, "What in heaven's name is coming?"

And Ting cried. "It must be something awful!"

And Ring, in his most serious and philosophical tone, said calmly, "It must be a living creature or those sea-gulls wouldn't know anything about it. But what living creature can it possibly be? Some prehistoric monster, whose dwelling has always been in empty space? O why won't those birds, whose beaks bring them news in English, tell us who this 'It' is? That's what we want to know, isn't it, Jilly? Isn't it, Ting? Who is this 'It'?"

"What nonsense you are all talking," roared the General from the rear. "Listening to a pair of birds! Have none of you any sense? What do sea-gulls, however big they may be, know about what can happen in empty space? Whatever this creature is, we're not going to run away! To the devil with it!"

And then once more there came upon every living ear in those twelve men and women an appalling silence. In every heart among all the twelve of them beat and thumped the syllable, "It — It — It — It — It — It." And in the living soul of each of them, as they gazed forth upon the unspeakable immensity of empty space, there was the knowledge that "It" was coming.

And then "It" came.

XXVI

THEY WERE ALL too far from their starting-point to be able, however much they strained their eyes, to see the great tent there, which the General had erected with the Foghorn flag flying above it. They were a dozen human beings, half of them from Australia and half from Foghorn, some of them women and some of them men, and they were surrounded on all sides by empty space.

But “It” had come; and the impression they all had in their minds was that “It” had appeared between them and the tent erected by the General. The General had cried out, “Let ‘It’ go to the devil!” and it is perhaps characteristic of the rank and file of our race who obey generals, whether from Foghorn or from a far corner of Australia, that no sooner was the word “devil” uttered than the men thought of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and the women, including the General’s lady, thought of God. The Cerne Giant, however, thought neither of God nor of the devil; he actually prepared, and he was the only one of the lot to do so, to enter into conversation with “It”.

And what was “It”? It was, as far as anyone knew who had ever seen it, a being unassociated with anything that lives in water or earth or fire. It lives in air, and in air alone is it ever seen. It ought to be emphasised that when we speak of air we are referring to the air of Empty Space. If, therefore, you, whoever you are, prefer to call it just Empty Space rather than to bring in the word air, since you feel that air, like water or fire, is one of the elements, you are at liberty to do so.

"It" is the only living creature we know who inhabits Empty Space. Its body is completely round and is covered by a thin, wiry, flexible, impenetrable, indestructible skin. It has only one eye, which along with its mouth, protrudes some distance from its body at the end of a tube-like erection. Its mouth is divided from its eye by several inches of a scaly substance, a substance that appears again on opposite sides of its globular body supporting its curious wings, which, although they spread out far on both sides, are not made of feathers, but of a stuff so closely resembling a fish's fins that certain naturalists have invented the word "whiffins." The projecting tube, that bears on the summit of its erection both the eye and the mouth of this singular being, has the power of turning and twisting as the creature moves, so as to discern in a second any unusual object hovering or drifting about in space. It is indeed from a miscellaneous haphazard drift of casual objects, carried on the motions of chance from every galaxy of inhabited worlds in the Multiverse, that this Space-Monster derives its nourishment.

The appearance of this Space-Monster created, as you can guess, no small disturbance among the founders of the star Cerne. The four men of the Omega crew felt sure, when they first saw it, that its searching eye was upon them, and that its colossal mouth, at the end of what looked like an outstretched serpent's neck, was already open to swallow them up; and with this so clearly before them, they were seized with a panic, and clasping one another's hands, fled desperately away. Obviously feeling that their duty was with their crew, the General and his lady followed after them as fast as they could, the General asserting his authority by shaking his fist at the sky out of which the Space-Monster had come, while all that his dignified lady could do was to give the brim of her hat a pull forward as she ran and her waist-band a few little tightening jerks.

The four — or perhaps it would be better to say, since so much depended on the Worm-man and the Slug-woman, the six natives of Foghorn — gathered together in a group round their protector the Giant, evidently waiting to see how he would defend them. The Giant selected an interesting, but extremely startling, line of defence. He sat down on the top of the heap of things that had been piled up under the extempore tent. Before doing this, he rendered his throne more eminent by taking down the poles and the sail-flaps. There was thus no tent any more. There was only a mighty heap, and on the top of this heap sat the Cerne Giant, hugging his knees.

But he had his club by his side; and if, when he heard the queer sound of the "whiffins" of the Space-Monster coming quite near, he was to jump to his feet and use his club, such a blow might be deadly. It was soon clear to John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, as well as to Ring and to Ting, that if that twisting and writhing excrescence, which contained both the eye and the mouth of the Space-Monster, came within reach of the Giant's club and he were to strike it, that one blow would be the end. But the Giant showed no tendency to use his club. He seemed to realise that the Monster had seen it, and had fully comprehended what it could do. So with the club at his side, he still sat thoughtfully and quietly, but not dreamily. It might even be said that he sat there expectantly, and that what happened was to be expected.

For the Space-Monster actually came down out of space with its round and impervious body resting on the ground, and its visual and absorbing member neither spouting nor staring, but waving quietly to and fro; just as if, for once in its life, it had decided to enjoy a rest and a conversation, a rest where it was relieved from the effort of swallowing and from the effort of hunting for something to swallow.

“I can see,” said the Monster to the Giant, “that you have plenty of lively little edible slaves in this new star of yours.”

“They don’t all come from the same portion of their home star,” replied the Giant, “nor do I expect, when I get round to gobbling them up, that they will all taste alike. But I am not one for monotony in taste. I like variety. I sometimes even like a little fun with the pygmies I swallow, before they go down where they belong. Do you ever drive them off a star like this and fly after them through space?”

“Oh, no,” answered the Monster. “I’d catch them so quick that I’d get no fun at all out of that. What I like doing is pretending that I don’t know anybody’s near me; and as they move about near my belly, I sweat a little, so that my sweat makes this ridiculous little star so sticky that they get stuck, and then I turn first my eye on them, which makes them shiver and shake, and then very slowly I swallow them up, but while they are still alive inside me, I spit them up and catch them again. I get really a lot of amusement from that little game. I call it ‘Spit and Catch,’ and I enjoy it so much that sometimes I play it in my sleep.”

So content and satisfied was the Space-Monster, as he rested by the side of the Giant, that our Foghorn friends, who could see, quite far away in the distance by this time, the crew of the Omega and the General and his lady hastening out of sight, decided in their minds that they would listen to this conversation till the fugitives had actually disappeared in the distance. “The Cerne Giant,” thought John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky, and Ring and Ting, “will certainly refuse to let the Monster swallow any of us.” What the Worm-dwarf and the Slug-dwarf were thinking it was difficult to say, but John o’ Dreams noticed that they had both approached very near to the Giant’s pair of knees, as he sat hugging them with his arms. He further noticed, after the fugitives had entirely vanished, that Wug and Zug were talking eagerly together; and all four of the Foghorn natives, though they didn’t utter their thoughts to one another, wondered whether some exciting scheme might not have entered the heads of the Worm-man and the Slug-woman.

“What are your earliest recollections?” the Giant now enquired of the Monster. “I myself,” he went on, “was hardly grown up before I was brow-beaten into slavery by one of the most extraordinary beings that ever existed. This creature’s name was Bog, and he had extraordinary ears, ears that had the power of hearing everything that was uttered in every language in the multiverse.”

“O, my earliest recollections,” replied the Space-Monster, “O, my earliest recollections” — here he paused a moment, “would take a very long time to describe, even though I described them in less than a millionth part of the languages known to that being who enslaved you, and who called himself Bog. You see, words in any language — even in the language of the British Commonwealth, from Land’s End in Cornwall to Omega Rock in Australia — are rather awkward expressions of the sensations that newly-born living creatures experience. But my difficulty is a unique one. I am, *as far as I know,* the only living creature ever born in Empty Space. How I was born, what father, what mother I had, are questions not only unanswerable by me, but weird, strange, queer, fantastic, grotesque, monstrous, outrageous, for me even to put to myself. How far back does my memory carry me? Well! *That* is a sensible question. *That* is a question I am always asking myself. That is a question I get intense pleasure from trying to answer.”

At this point the Space-Monster settled itself more comfortably still by a small turn of its round body, all of which, the Cerne Giant could now clearly see, was covered by small greyish-white hairs. The Giant wondered to himself what those hairs would feel like, if he had the courage to stroke them with his hand. He even let his hands release his knees from the clutch with which he was hugging them against his stomach. He let them slide down to the ground on each side of his knees, so that they helped to support him in the sitting position.

“What I remember earliest of all,” went on the Space-Monster, swaying his long tubular neck, with its single eye and enormous mouth so close together, backwards and forwards above the seated giant’s head, “was my impression of the difference between me and the empty space surrounding me. Space was so empty and airy, and so absolutely nothing at all; whereas I was so thick and stodgy and stout and solid! Of course, compared with yours” — and the creature made a second slight movement with its rotund, though anything but solid, body— “my body is flimsy and hollow, but as I felt it and saw it floating there in space, it struck me as being extremely material. And what, I was always asking myself, does it really mean? That I am I? Yes, what is it that makes me feel myself to be me? What is it that in me thinks and says to myself, I am I? Around me, on every side of me, and under and above me is air — yes, space full of nothing but air. Well, how is it that I am so absolutely certain that my mind, my thinking self, the consciousness in me that says, ‘I am I,’ has no connection with this air, and has nothing to do with this infinite space? Why don’t I say to myself, ‘I am the consciousness of Space. I am Space thinking to itself. I am the mind, I am the soul, I am the inner self, of Space?’ I will tell you, most worthy Giant, why I don’t. I don’t, because I feel a great gap, a deep chasm, a terrific gulf, between myself and the air around me. I am I, and it is it. And yet I enjoy breathing the air, feeling the air, floating in the air. And I enjoy thinking that the air goes on and on and on forever, goes on into infinity. O my worthy Giant, what is this ‘I,’ that is me? What is this ‘I,’ that is you?

And — O do tell me this! — has this endless empty space, which surrounds this little world of yours, got an ‘I’ in it like the ‘I’ we’ve got? Yes, that’s what I want to know more than anything else! I suppose when you think of these matters you ask yourself this very question, most worthy Giant, just as I ask it of myself? Here we are in this tiny little star made, as I know well, by you and your friends from Foghorn in Britain and from Omega in Australia. But what I want to know is, what this infinite Space, that surrounds us here in this little manufactured star of yours, says to itself about its life and being and inmost self? Does it feel afraid of itself when it thinks of the infinite extension of its being? Does it say to itself: how can it be that I stretch out in all directions to infinity? How can it be that I, without head or neck or hands or wings or feet or chest or waist or belly or bowels, can stretch out without end in all directions? What is there, my dear Giant, that you and I could reply to the infinity of Space, when we imagine it confronting us with a question like that?”

Moving towards his questioner on his buttocks, his hands, and his heels, the Cerne Giant answered at once.

“We could say, and I *do* say to you, my dear Space-Monster — yes! I say it here and now, and I shall go on saying it as long as I am I and you are you — Your great mistake, O infinity of Space, lies in your way of isolating yourself from all other beings in our bewildering multiverse. You may be an infinity of space, you may contain an infinity of empty air: but you must not forget that you cannot help also containing more than you know, more than any person or creature or angel or devil or monster can ever know, of other things! You are making a great philosophical mistake, my good Space-Monster, when you try to isolate yourself, when you are in yourself nothing but space and air, from everything else in the multiverse. Because you, the Space-Monster, and I, the Cerne Giant, are at this particular moment resting in a lonely little artificial world, made by myself and these Foghorn friends of mine, and because we see round us, from where we are at this moment, nothing but empty space, we have no right to isolate this empty space from what we know must be joined with it at other points of its extension. We know the number of star-galaxies that crowd into it all about the earth from which we come, and what right have we to assume that, because we cannot — you, the Space-Monster, and I, the Cerne Giant — see anything, from just where we are here, but empty space, that there are not, just out of our power of vision, great masses of star-galaxies of which our earthly astronomers have never heard? That some masses of material substance, whether divided into separate starry entities or not, thicken out and solidify the immensity of space in the ethereal regions as yet unvisited by our power of vision, seems so natural and so likely to be true that we should be narrow-minded fanatics if we refused to consider its possibility. Besides, there are, we must remember, other and far more staggering possibilities. There is for instance — and at this moment when nothing is visible we ought to give it special and serious attention — there is, I say, a possibility that, if this air-plane called Omega, from some little outpost in Australia set off again on its space travels, it might find itself up against a vast mass of land which, whether inhabited or uninhabited, fills all the expanse formerly occupied by Space."

"Oh, I can't bear to think of such a thin?!" cried the Space-Monster hoarsely.

"The Universe doesn't exist for our pleasure," murmured the Cerne Giant.

XXVII

THE SPACE-MONSTER WAS still very eager to continue their philosophical conversation. Although it had swallowed people and animals and birds and fishes, drifting, flying, floating, swimming, discarded, abandoned, thrown away as refuse and rubbish, from all the worlds where living things exist, this was the first time in its life that it had exchanged ideas about life with another living creature. Hitherto all other living creatures, together with all the garbage that life engenders, had been either its prey or its provender. Because of its powerful jaws, it had not as yet encountered any rival, or indeed any creature against whom it could measure its strength. Whales and sharks and sword-fish and sea-serpents never take to the air of their own free will. Nor do lions and tigers. In early times the Space-Monster could have found huge creatures as formidable as itself, such as the ichthyosaurus, if it had descended from the air near some sea-coast of the planet Earth; but mankind, armed with weapons of stone or bronze, had proved itself capable of waging a successful war against these creatures.

“The question I would like to ask you,” the Space-Monster now enquired of the Cerne Giant, “is this. Has the whole expanse of empty space got a consciousness of its own? Does it say to itself, I am I?”

The Cerne Giant straightened himself out on his back on the ground and clasped his hands behind his head.

“I would reply to that question,” he said cheerfully, but quite seriously, “that it most certainly has a self of its own, a self that says, ‘I am I,’ and to whom everything else in the entire universe is either a ‘you’ or an ‘it’. Yes, the happiness and unhappiness," the Giant continued, "of every being, fish, flesh or fowl, from frog, toad, reptile or insect, in the whole universe, to man and woman, depends upon how far its inner self, feeling everything and suffering through its senses, through its hope and its fear, encounters good luck or bad luck. We all have had experience of what I am now saying, and it depends upon our good or evil luck. This is what makes us all, from elephants or butterflies, the worshippers of fate and chance. Fate puts us into a certain position, the child or the parents of so and so or so and so; and chance decides what good luck or bad luck we shall encounter."

"But there is another question," said the Monster, "I must ask you. Do you believe that the inner self of all this empty space knows how far space extends? When it is thinking to itself with this 'I am I', of which we speak, does it feel the precise limits of its body, as human beings do from head to feet?"

It was impossible for the Cerne Giant to remain prostrate on his back while he answered this question. He sat up, and once more, as at the beginning of their conversation, clasped his knees with his hands.

"Oh yes!" he replied. "I am certain that Empty Space knows very well every limit of its extension. What I sometimes wonder to myself is this. Can it be that the enormous expanse of empty space corresponds with the circular rotundity of every one of the starry world's? I mean, if anyone could follow the whole extent of empty space, might it not be discovered that it was circular in its expansion, just as our starry worlds are circular, and just as this tiny world upon which we are now conversing is circular? And then, my good sir, if we agree to this, are we not," the Cerne Giant continued, "driven to face a further and much more difficult question, namely the question as to what lies behind the expanse of empty space considered in all its endlessness, north, south, east, west, up, down and all round?”

The long tapering tube, much longer than those which hung down from every Horner’s head, the tube that carried the ravenous eye and the insatiable mouth of the Space-Monster, had now begun to swing ominously backwards and forwards above the Cerne Giant, but the Cerne Giant regarded this alarming phenomenon with calm amusement.

“My old master,” he remarked quietly, “whose name was Bog, and who had ears for everything that went on in the whole universe, used to say that what we saw with our eyes and heard with our ears and felt with our sense of touch, is only one aspect of what exists. He used to utter the words: ‘*remember there are other Dimensions*,’ and I take it that, what he meant was, that there is more than one level or plane or face or presentation or representation of what surrounds us in this particular dimension of the universe. The word Dimension seems to imply that we are living in one world, while another world parallel to it exists side by side with it — another world, or a dimension wherein we would be surrounded by a totally different aspect of the whole of life. According to what Bog taught me, it would seem that life is much more complicated than in our childish minds we think it is. In the matter of sex, Bog taught me that what in the English language is called masturbation — that is to say, the excited emission of semen by the use of our imagination — is a much more important and creative act than ordinary and natural fornication or the raping, if we are male, of our feminine opposite. Bog used to tell me that I always ought to be thinking sufficiently erotic thoughts to keep my penis in a state of erection. This I have frequently tried to do, but I am always being so attracted by other exciting things, things that have no connection whatever with sex, that I find it impossible to do always what he tells me and I just have to be content to wait.”

While the Space-Monster and the Cerne Giant were thus philosophising, John o’ Dreams and Jilly Tewky and Ring and Ting were whispering together, and so were Wug and Zug. But, after looking carefully all round the horizon to make sure the crew of the Omega, led by the General and his lady were completely out of sight, Wug left Zug’s side, and coming close up to John o’ Dreams, pulled at his sleeve to get his full attention. Thus arrested, John o’ Dreams did the same to Jilly Tewky, and both the twins gave their complete attention to what Wug was saying. Wug was telling them that now, while the Space-Monster had fallen into a sort of dreamy trance — mesmerised, it appeared, by the wise words of the Giant, who was once more sitting up straight and hugging his knees — it would be a good minute for them to give the Giant a hint of their intention, and hurriedly clear off back to the earth, taking the Giant with them. The twins heartily agreed, and beckoned Ring and Ting to join their colloquy, who both agreed with equal ardour. Wug accordingly returned to tell Zug.

Thus in less than five minutes — with the Giant at one end of the line brandishing his club in his right hand and John o’ Dreams at the other end, holding Jilly Tewky’s hand in his right hand and their precious satchel in his left, and with Ring holding the Giant’s left hand with his right and Ting’s right hand with his left, and with Ting holding Jilly Tewky’s right in her left, and with Wug and Zug steering them homeward with all the navigating skill of the Arch-Druid who had brought them from Foghorn — to Foghorn they were returning.

Dreamily and drowsily the Space-Monster watched their departure.

“But what about those others,” he asked himself, “who fled away over the horizon? I expect they’ll be sure to come back to this place where they left their plane. So if I don’t fall asleep before they come, I ought to have a good meal. But if I did fall asleep, would they have the spirit to cut off my head?”

XXVIII

WUG AND ZUG'S navigation was so good that they all arrived before breakfast at Foghorn. Laura and Jessica were expecting them at Cad Castle, and Auntie Oh was full of "Ohs" — indeed had never in their memory been fuller of them, when the Rector, having heard of their arrival from a parishioner at the Docks, came to congratulate Maria Nu at Morty.

It can be imagined what a splendid breakfast Mrs. Nu prepared for Wug and Zug in the apple loft, and what additions she and Auntie Oh added to their own breakfast in their dining-room, to share which Grandfather Grump himself would have left his attic, if John o' Dreams hadn't hurried upstairs with all the news, as well as with the old man's tray. John o' Dreams emerged from their back-yard privy, after the largest action of the bowels he had had since they left home, to find Jilly Tewky standing under the clothes-line, lost in thought and with her head hanging down.

"Is she sad to be at home?" he said to himself. "Is she trying to decide whether to marry Ring, or stay a virgin and look after me? Did she fall in love with one of those men from Australia? How queer girls are! How difficult they are to understand!" He decided to interrupt her thoughts whatever they were. "Do you wish we'd stayed in Cerne," he asked her, "and trusted our Giant to finish off that damned Monster?"

She lifted her head. "O I wish people would never ask me what I'm thinking about! Can't you ever get into your head, John, that everybody has thoughts of their own about everything, thoughts they don't want to tell to anybody?"

"Sorry, Jilly," he replied. "I know very well what you mean; but you and I have shared so many thoughts together that I thought..."

"I don't care what you thought, John! There are certain times in all our lives when we want to think alone, feel alone, and be alone!"

"All right, my precious! I'll leave you to your thoughts. I only wanted to tell you that I'm going down to visit Bubble and Squeak, and to see if you wanted to come with me. By the way," he added, noticing that her expression did change a little, "do you think Ring and Ting will be able to find a room in the Castle big enough to contain our Giant?"

"They'll have to put three ordinary mattresses in a row on the floor, if they want him to sleep in such a room!" replied Jilly Tewky; and a smile did cross her face.

"You bet they will, sweetheart," he murmured happily, indescribably relieved. "Well, ta-ta, my dear. I'll soon be back."

He had, however, only just reached the beginning of the path through the wood, where the funny little notice-board said "To the Fountain", when he heard a light step behind him, and there she was. He snatched her hand and held it tight; and together they approached the place, which was as much the centre of their mental life as the dining-room at Morty was of their physical life.

"All into Nothing!" greeted them from one bursting Bubble.

"Nothing into All!" greeted them from the Skull's answering squeak.

"You know, Jilly," burst out John o' Dreams, as they stood hand in hand, listening reverently to both these familiar sounds, "it was the spirit of Bubble who brought the headless body of Urk down to the harbour here, after I'd chopped the brute's head off."

"Yes, you told me you were responsible for his death," murmured Jilly Tewky gravely. "But you needn't give me the details. I don't like those kinds of details."

"But isn't it strange how powerful the souls or 'auras' or spiritual 'identities' of such beings as Bubble and Squeak can be?" he went on, looking steadily, first at one, and then at the other of those singular Powers.

And it was then that Jilly Tewky gave him a look that she had never given him before in all their life since they were children.

"Do you remember," she said, "how we once dreamed the same dream? We must have been three or four, I think; not more than four anyway; and when we woke up, the dream we had had came and talked to us, and it told us it was descended from a dream dreamt by Lilith, the first wife of Adam. Yes, it told us that its name was Lorm, and that its power as a dream was especially strong when used upon very old and very young people. Lorm came to our bed when we both had wakened up in a nightmare, and Lorm told us that he wasn't a grown-up nightmare, but that he had something to do with God. I think he said that he was the nightmare God once had when he'd been reading a book about Hell. No, no! It wasn't that! It was something else. It was something about incarnation and predestination. I've forgotten what it was. But whatever it was, we both kissed Lorm. We took him for a sort of Little Boy-Blue and begged him never to frighten us again, and he promised he never would, unless we had a terrible quarrel, and one of us begged him to be a nightmare going after the other. But we knew we'd never be as horrid as that. So he said goodbye, and opened the window and flew away. Do you remember all that, John o' Dreams?"

John o' Dreams pondered, staring at the skull-like forehead of Squeak. Then he said:

"No, my dear. I've forgotten it entirely."

He remained so long staring at Squeak's skull that the thing had uttered three squeaks, and the Bubble had burst three times into the air, before he suddenly let his fingers clutch Jilly Tewky’s hand very tightly, and without uttering a word, he dragged her close to the Skull.

“Why did you let Bubble bring Urk’s headless body down here into the dock-water?” he enquired of the Skull.

Squeak began hurriedly answering him, but Jilly Tewky couldn’t follow a word he said; for he not only spoke in a low voice, but he spoke very fast. At last John o’ Dreams asked him abruptly, still holding Jilly Tewky’s hand, whether he thought the Giant could be comfortable in Cad Castle. It was clear to Jilly Tewky that the Skull replied in the affirmative, and this was borne out and witnessed to by the indescribable fury with which the next bubble burst into the air and lost itself in space.

“Let’s go and see how they’ve fixed him up there,” cried John o’ Dreams, clutching Jilly Tewky’s hand tighter than ever and dragging her off with him.

When they arrived at the gate of Cad Castle, they found that their approach had been watched by Laura from one of the windows, and they were admitted at once. Nor had they to ask any questions about the Giant, for it was clear to them in a moment how they had arranged for his sleep that night. Breakfast was over now, and the Giant was either striding across the hills inland, or swimming in the sea. But while Jessica was working in the kitchen, and Ring was studying a translation of Don Quixote in the library, Ting was helping Laura to make the Giant’s bed after his night’s rest.

As soon as Laura let the young visitors in, she saw that both of them grasped at once what was being done. A bed had been prepared with its pillows a few feet from the top of the front steps. From there the long line of mattresses stretched clear through the dining-room into the kitchen, and from there into the scullery, where the last one lay only a yard or two from the sink.

The room that was always called the library at Cad Castle contained only one bookcase; and this bookcase only had four not very lengthy shelves. But each shelf was very high, and the only books they contained were quartos and folios, all in massive leather bindings and most of them with heavily gilded edges. There was no desk in the room, but there was a round table with three upright old-fashioned chairs, and plenty of ink, but all the pens were goose-quills, and some of them were of enormous size.

Ring's Don Quixote was translated into very old-fashioned English words, and Ring loved to see the way these large beautifully printed sentences expressed so much of the humour and the sadness and mystery of life on this earth. Every now and then Ring would pause in his reading and ponder on the personality of Jilly Tewky, staring dreamily as he did so at the vast expanse of rolling downland and at the foaming curves of Foghorn Bay. Every single word he read seemed to him full of problems of what *he* would feel, if he snatched Jilly Tewky from John o' Dreams and persuaded her to marry him. Oddly enough, the kindred problem as to what Jilly Tewky would feel, thus bereft of the company of her fellow twin, never once occurred to him. He stretched out his elbows on the great folio of Don Quixote, and lowered his forehead till it pressed against the knuckles of his tightly clasped fingers.

"What we forget," he said to himself, "is the background or stage of our human drama. We can be brave and defiant like Don Quixote, or we can be humorously earthy and cautious like Sancho. We can fight for the right, or we can yield to the wrong. We can be studious or careless, clever or stupid, learned or ignorant, cruel or kind. But what we forget is the terrific and inconceivable nature of the universe in which we live. What we forget" —

and Ring pressed his knuckles against his forehead so hard that it hurt them both— "is the immensity of space. No, I won't say the immensity. For it is much more than that. I'll say the infinity, the unendingness of space. What we forget is — and this is no speculation or metaphysical idea, it is the stark material *reality*: it is what nobody, whether stupid or clever, can deny — namely, that it is impossible to imagine an end to space, impossible not to think of it as going on for ever. But *what* a thing to think about that is! To think that we live in the middle of something that stretches out round us into infinity!

We are in this something, and so are more worlds and suns and moons and stars than we can count. But this something is thin air — O! it is thinner than air. This something is nothing. But it isn't nothing in the sense of not being there at all, for it is everywhere. That is its peculiarity. It is over us, behind us, under us, and all round us. And when we stop being there, and when all the stars in the universe stop being there, and when there is no trace, no fragment of a trace of any kind of world left in the space through which our consciousness is travelling, when in fact we are surrounded by empty space on all sides, it is then that we realise what nothingness is. We are what we are: bodily creatures travelling through space; but space is not the body of a living consciousness as each one of us is. It is the body of nothing! Or am I getting the whole thing entirely wrong?"

And at this point Ring rubbed his forehead against the Don Quixote folio with an almost vicious scraping, as if he were punishing himself for his stupidity.

"It is so entirely nothing," he told himself, "that it is impossible for it to have a soul. Nothing is nothing, and obviously it can't have a soul. Only something that is something can have a soul. So the fact remains that we are surrounded by an endless nothing, which, whether in its outward or its inward, can have no soul. If we flew millions of billions of miles and then stopped, we should only find ourselves still in the same infinite space and no nearer to any of it than we were when we started. I can't help feeling" — here Ring lifted his head from the book and stared through one of the library windows at the distant sea— "that there's something in all this that's *intentional* — I mean something in it that shows a definite purpose to make us mortals small and inconsequential, and even a little ridiculous."

While their children were at Cad Castle, Maria Nu and Nezzar Nu and Auntie Oh were engaged in a very serious conversation round their dining-room table, now entirely cleared of everything and shining beautifully in its majestic mahogany imperviousness.

"I follow your argument, my dear," Nezzar Nu was saying, "but you must realise that, from what we both have seen, John and Jilly are very much in love with each other. People call it incest when brothers and sisters treat each other as lovers, but from what I've seen, and not only in their case, it is dangerous for anyone, whether parent or relation or outsider, to speak of this, because the division between the feeling of lovers and the feeling of brother and sister, especially in a case like this when they are twins, is a thing so delicate and subtle, and a thing so criss-crossed with emotional complications that it requires extremely cautious and careful handling."

"What I think, my dear," said Maria Nu, gently but firmly, "is that the best thing for us to do is to get the Rector to marry John to Ting without further delay, and Jilly to Ring. Ring and Ting are without question in love with our twins, and there is nothing to spoil the harmony of these two marriages, except the shadowy and perilous question as to how far the twins' love for each other has passed the limit, a very twisting and twitching and tricky limit, between natural love and unnatural love. For myself, I even feel a difficulty in calling this incestuous emotion between my children unnatural. *Sin* it may be from the religious point of view; but there are people who regard all sexual passion as sin, a sin which we have inherited from Adam and Eve — what they call ‘original sin’.”

“Well, if we get the Rector,” began Nezzar Nu again, “to marry John to Ting and Jilly to Ring, the whole confounded responsibility for our children’s future will be lifted from our shoulders. We didn’t ask to have twins. We didn’t ask to have as our neighbours the children of a wicked giant. We didn’t ask to have a good giant capable of making a new star in space and flying to the star the Romans called Vindex, a star inhabited now by Druids. No, we didn’t ask for any of these things; nor pray to the old gods of our race that any of these wonders should occur. And yet they all *have* occurred! O my precious Maria, the only thing we can do *is to accept what comes.* Listen to that old clock on the chimney piece. Can’t you hear what it says? What comes — what comes — what comes — what comes — what comes! And the ancient regularity with which, in its old familiar ticking, it repeats those words, is the regularity with which the universe swings on its way, and the regularity with which all its offspring, generation after generation of men and women, have to accept the work and the play, the waking and the sleeping, of our life upon earth.”

“Never mind what the clock says, my dear,” burst out Maria. “Your dad would draw from that old monotone no more inspiration than to make you clean up another furlong of land for his damned Gog-Magogs. I tell you, my dear, that old clock is wrong! The secret of life, and it has been so ever since the first of our race came out of the sea, is not acceptance or submission. It is rebellion! It is adventure! And who have known that in their hearts from the beginning, but the wise women of every generation!”

Feeling that, perhaps, she had gone a little too far, Maria turned to her sister.

"*You* agree with me, don't you, my dear?"

Auntie Oh moved straight up to her and took her hand.

"Entirely," she said, in a low and intense voice, full of the quivering force of a woman who has never fully expressed herself. "Who," she asked, turning to her brother-in-law with a gleam in her green eyes that was almost ferocious, "who was it who taught the first King of Rome to conquer the world? Wasn't she an old maid, like me, only living by herself in a cave? I don't live in a cave. But I can tell you I often feel as if I did!"

Maria cried, "Hush! Hush! my dear! How can you say such unkind things? You know how fond we all are of you! You know how I and the children depend on you, and rely on what you think and what you say. You know how we all would miss you if you went away, or if anything happened to you!"

"Come on, come on," cried Nezzar impatiently. "The point of all this is simply that we middle-aged folk — with a half-crazy old gent up there in the attic above us, and a couple of reckless kids running in and out of Cad Castle and back and forth to Bubble and Squeak from our own front door — simply don't know the north from the south or the Sun from the Moon. We've got more confused than my old Dad with his Gog-Magogs, or John and Jilly with their Bubbles and Squeaks. What we've got to do is to bring some other sensible middle-aged person into it, and I think that person had best be the Rector."

"Oh, I agree with you, Nezzar. Heart-whole I agree with you!" cried Auntie Oh, whose eyes, though the others hadn't noticed this, had suddenly been fixed on the window. "It's outrageous! It's outrageous! Come, let us take action. Let us do something!"

And then, to the absolute amazement of Maria and Nezzar, the excited lady clambered up upon a chair and began waving her arm towards the open window shouting, “Come in! Come in! Rector. We want you! We want you!”

The truth was the devoted adherent of the Rector had seen her adored man approaching the front door of Morty. It was at that moment that Nezzar Nu said to himself, thinking of quite another time of the year:

“All Hallows, All Saints and All Souls,
Like a tide the wave of them rolls
Their Devils are gone, and we are alone,
All Hallows, All Saints and All Souls!”

Nezzar didn’t wait for a knock at the front door. He rushed out of the room, ran through the hall, and the sisters heard his voice greeting the Rector.

“So you were right,” murmured Maria to Auntie Oh, as Nezzar ushered the Rector into the room.

“Well, ladies, how are you both?” he began, with his usual cheerful good nature. “Miss Posh didn’t want me to come. She is greatly worried by all the news she has heard from relatives of Laura and Jessica in the village. They tell her that a way has been found to make it possible for the Cerne Giant to sleep in Cad Castle. This, as you can imagine, has started up all sorts of wild ideas in my lady’s head. She wakes up in the night after dreaming that the Giant has been stretching himself out on the little bridge between the rectory and the church. And though I tell her that he could only sit on this bridge with his legs hanging down on both sides, the poor old girl has so got the Giant on her brain that she only drops one image of horror about him to call up another.”

“Will you let me make you a cup of coffee, Rector?” enquired Mrs. Nu, as her husband gave their visitor a seat in an armchair.

“No, no, my dear lady, thank you. I don’t feel like coffee, or tea, or anything else. To tell you the honest truth, if you were to ask me what I’d like most at this moment, I would answer — to go to bed and sleep sound till the morning. That’s to say,” he went on, smiling rather wistfully and woefully, as he leaned back in his armchair, “if I had no dreams to remember. By the way, one pair of our youngsters— “and here the Rector sat straight up and clasped his fingers tightly together— “but whether they were yours here, or our friends in Cad Castle, I can’t remember — told me that they’d both had the same dream and both woke up to find the person they’d been dreaming about, who wasn’t a real person at all, sitting on their bed, and they talked excitedly to him till he disappeared into thin air.”

“We’ve got a very serious matter to talk about with you, Rector,” said Mrs. Nu. “Both my husband and I feel that the wisest thing for our young couple to do would be to marry at once their friends at Cad Castle. We’ve heard enough from them about their adventures together, and it has become clear to us that if we could persuade you to carry through a double wedding — that is to say to marry our John to Ting Cad, and to marry our Jilly to Ring Cad — the future of both pairs of youngsters, as well as the future of their Castle and our Morty, would be satisfactorily assured. Both couples, we know, would joyously welcome such a ceremony; but, as young people so often are, they are both timid about suggesting it and thus committing themselves to it.”

The Rector was evidently profoundly pleased by this suggestion. He even stood up for a second. And, though he sat down again at once, it was clear that he had been led to make that movement by an instinctive desire to act in accordance with Mrs. Nu’s suggestion.

"The whole thing is a little complicated," Nezzar Nu now boldly and frankly explained, "by the fact that, since the young people have been over there with their friends of the Castle ever since breakfast, I haven't had an opportunity to take them up to my father's apartment at the top of the house to receive his blessing on the project; and from what I now learn, I gather that he strongly disapproves of it on the ground that from the light way that they talked of their journey into space, and from the various things he overheard them saying to each other about it, the relations between John and Ting, and between Jilly and Ring, were not as guarded and proper as they ought to have been between young people of their status in Foghorn, looking forward to joining their fortunes in holy matrimony.

"What my wife and I feel, therefore," Nezzar Nu went on, "is that to avoid all future gossip and scandal in the neighbourhood, the best thing to be done is for their marriage to be private and expeditious, and for us to avoid the usual parties and wedding breakfasts as much as we can. We would in fact suggest, if you are kind enough to consider such a thing, that you should marry them privately at the altar in the church, and then that we should just simply announce publicly to everybody concerned that they have been married in our church. That will cover everything; and though, of course, nothing on earth can stop people gossiping, all that anyone will be able definitely to say against us will be that the Cad young people and our young people behaved as if they were married before they were married, and that their marriage from the start was strongly opposed by their grandfather."

The Rector was so enthusiastic about the whole idea that it took a very little time to carry it through. It was, in fact, only a couple of weeks later that our four friends were exploring Foghorn in every direction with the reckless and athletic delight of an athletic honeymoon. It was while they were scrambling about the shores of their home in this wild manner that they were permitted by the gods to undergo an experience that no-one in Foghorn had ever undergone before. They not only saw a sea-serpent, but they were actually pursued by one along a cliff path by the edge of the sea on a day when the waves were specially high.

When the two couples had been married for well over two years, each of them had a child. Ring and Jilly Tewky had a boy, and John o' Dreams and Ting had a girl. Then a moment came that might have produced that first serious quarrel of their lives; but luckily the love the twins had for each other was strong enough to overcome this danger. It was indeed incumbent upon it to do so, since it was a danger that their love had itself created. Both pairs were full of energy, and not only so, but their children were full of energy, an energy which was enhanced by their being John o' Dreams's girl-child and Jilly Tewky's boy-child. Ring was mighty proud to have a real live son, and Ting never tried to conceal her delight in being the mother of John o' Dreams's little girl. Both pairs were so thrilled by having these children that they decided, after a long and intimate colloquy between the two mothers, that they would give themselves up to enjoying themselves during the next twelve months and put the idea of further offspring out of their thoughts for a while.

They had chosen the names of their two-year-old toddlers before either of them appeared on the scene. The boy was called Malcolm and the girl was Leonora; Mal and Nora for short.

The most romantic part of Foghorn consisted of a heavily pebbled projection from its west side, stretching out for a considerable distance into the ocean, and ending up in a huge massive rock that looked as if it had once been an island. It never had been anything of the kind; this enormous ridge or bank of pebbles was a phenomenon that has lasted for thousands of years, and had always been possessed of its own unique personality. The pebbles of which it was composed were capable, when held up to the air, of permitting the light of sun or moon to shine through them. This transparency endowed each pebble with a magical quality of its own, a quality which was enhanced by the unquestioned fact that they had all been brought up by the enormous storm-waves of this singular West Bay out of the depths of the ocean. Each individual stone of this colossal promontory seemed to possess all the mystery of the depths of the deepest ocean in the world.

The crazy undertaking which Ring and Jilly Tewky, together with Ting and John o' Dreams, had set themselves to perform, aided by little Mal and little Nora, was nothing less than to surround the base of Cad Castle with a wall or ring or circle of these pebbles about four feet high. They had already got a circle of about a foot high and a foot broad, and the rumour of what they were doing was now — as can easily be believed, thanks to the interest in it of Laura and Jessica — spreading fast through the whole of Foghorn.

The twins, and Ring and Ting as well, were confounded one morning by discovering that the Cerne Giant for several days, instead of visiting his favourite resort on the chalk slope above Cerne Abbas, had the habit of presenting himself at the Fountain of Bubble and Squeak, where he argued obstinately with Bubble and listened with concentrated attention to the wise discourse of Squeak.

Both the twins' mother and the Cad Castle adherents, Laura and Jessica, would have been amazed if they could have listened to what went on at the Fountain between the Giant and those two. The Giant didn't sit hugging his knees, which was his usual attitude when engaged in conversation. No, he lay at full length, prone on his stomach on the right-hand side of the Fountain, facing the Skull of Squeak, but with his chin propped on the palms of his hands and his elbows deep in the wet mud, so that he could turn his eyes whenever he liked to Bubble who, when each moment came for the shining orb of her wrath to burst into this air, seemed able to aim its dissolution at the Giant's head.

"Why," enquired the Giant, "did you bring the headless Trunk of Urk back to the coast of Foghorn? Did you have a sort of fancy that contact with our waters would bring Urk to life again?"

"He wasn't born here," muttered Bubble.

"No, of course he wasn't," retorted the prostrate superman, "but these waters have mysterious powers, which nobody knows better than you! Come, you Bubble, you! Confess! Confess! What you wanted to do was what I had a dream about last night!"

It can well be imagined that this definite allusion to Lorm brought Lorm in person on the scene. And once on the scene he was at work. There was nothing anybody could do to stop him. Nor, indeed, was it possible to drive him away, when the whole nature of the situation lent itself to his peculiar activity.

The Cerne Giant had already allowed his elbows to relax, and his chin to rest upon the knuckles of his two hands. It had also happened that the preceding night had been an agitated one at Cad Castle, owing to the intrusion, after their disturbance by poachers, of a whole family of badgers; with the result that the Giant had been busy for nearly half-an-hour in a sort of domestic badger-hunt. It was natural enough, therefore, that his half-asleep state this next night lent itself to the demonic malignity of Lorm the Dream. Lorm entered the brain of the Cerne Giant with more malignant glee than he had enjoyed for many months between Cad Castle and the twins' house of Morty. The vague dream-landscapes that flitted about in the Giant's brain were exactly to the taste of this devilish newcomer.

"I'll enjoy myself awhile," he thought, "before I make him sit up."

Wicked though he was, Lorm couldn't help a tendency to philosophise now and then, and he now asked himself how it was that, at the beginning of things, individual lives were separated from the life of the whole planet. Lorm remembered very well how, when he was born as the last dream-child in the sleeping heart of the dying Lilith, it had seemed so strange to him that he wasn't the dream of the whole world; strange and weird and monstrous that every beast and bird and fish and reptile and insect should have, each of them, their own individual dreams.

"But I am that I am," he said to himself at last, as he made the Cerne Giant dream of the Space-Monster, with whom he had been talking so quietly when they all fled from the Star which they themselves had created, and returned to Earth.

"And all was as it was, is as it is, and will be as it will be."

XXIX

When Jilly Tewky and Ring, with their boy Malcolm or Mal, together with Ting and John o' Dreams, with their girl Leonora or Nora, had built their wall of Chesil Beach pebbles several feet high round the base of Cad Castle, they were one night considerably disturbed by the sight of the headless trunk of Urk Cad, with a waving trail of blood-coloured smoke issuing from his neck. He was rushing round and round their new circle of pebbles. Curiously enough the little boy and little girl were not scared at all by this. All they did was to keep calling out: "Knock him down, Daddy! Knock him down, Daddy!" while John o' Dreams and Ring Cad could only smile rather weakly at each other.

But of course Jilly and Ting raised their voices also. "Throw on him the Water of Wug," cried Jilly. "Throw on him the Water of Zug," cried Ting. They used these expressions because they had discovered by experience that both the urine of Wug and the urine of Zug had a very deadly effect upon whatever plants they were squirted upon.

It was extraordinary how, during all this time, Jilly Tewky and Ting had been growing closer and closer friends. It was their mutual decision, after many long secret talks together, that they would not have any more children till Malcolm and Leonora were seven or eight years old.

It was a singular coincidence that during these years Lorm the Dream, though quite as wicked as ever, discovered that although he could cause both John o' Dreams and Ring Cad to suffer one nightly terror after another, his appalling power had no effect at all upon either of those two men's wives. Lorm was seized, while the building of this pebble-bank went on so well, with an intense desire to break up this happy association between Cad Castle and Morty. “I must do it through Nezzar Nu,” he thought. “He’s the only one who could make real trouble if I once set him off.”

So on a certain Saturday morning, while the Cerne Giant was following his present habit of spending the hours immediately after breakfast in a long whispered conversation with the Skull at the Bubble and Squeak Fountain, Lorm began moving about in the shifting landscape of Nezzar Nu’s softly pillowed brain with a more definite evil intent than any that had possessed him for a long time. And Nezzar Nu certainly did have an awful dream. He dreamed that Miss Posh, the Rector’s friend, was giving a party to all the women and children she knew. His wife Maria was there, and Auntie Oh was there, together with Ting and Jilly Tewky, and both little Mal and little Nora; and not only these women and children who were his own relatives, but a lot more from out of the village.

In his dream Nezzar Nu saw them all playing blind man’s buff; and to his surprise the blind man was none other than the Rector himself. Then he suddenly became aware that the Rector’s head was changing its shape. It was getting larger and larger every moment! Nezzar Nu watched this appalling sight with terror. What on earth was going to happen to their friend and pastor? Yes! The Rector’s head soon became so enormous that he seemed no longer the man they knew at all. He had become a monstrous being, with the head of an ogre and the rest of him like a skinny dwarf. The next event in this startling and shocking dream was incredible. The ogre-headed Rector, walking on legs as thin as those of a baby-antelope, called upon every woman and every child in the room to come with him, and walked slowly from the rectory into the church, with Miss Posh following him at the head of the procession. Once within the church, this disturbing dream of poor Nezzar’s became still more shocking.

“I’ll larn you to be clergyman,” muttered Lorm with devilish glee, clapping his hands together and skipping and pirouetting like a demon-doll in a puppet show, as he caused this monstrous parody of a dignified cleric to climb up into the pulpit.

At this point in Nezzar Nu’s dream, all the women and children gathered round the pulpit, and stared up at the figure sermonizing them from its height. Nezzar Nu, who was himself among them, soon found himself standing on the top of the first two steps leading up to the preacher above him, and from this point looking down on the upturned faces below. In his dream Nezzar derived a peculiar satisfaction from repeating over and over again the words, “women and children”: for by doing this, he was able to magnify to himself the superiority of all masculine persons. His dream ended in a manner he didn’t altogether like; for the Rector proceeded to remove his now absolutely monstrous head from his shoulders, and deliberately flung it like a football into the hands of his dreamer, who promptly returned it in the same manner, until this little game of head-throwing became so monotonous to Miss Posh that she bundled all the congregation out of the church with such finality that Lorm himself had to leave with them. This, of course, ended the whole dream, of which Lorm had been the fabricator. Miss Posh, however, had become in her later years such an Egeria, or nymph-in-antro, that she hesitated not to address Lorm as she saw him skidaddling.

“What are you?” she asked him.

“I am the maker of dreams,” answered Lorm. “Adam told me I was a son of his first wife Lilith; and I have always wondered, ever since, whether that implied that Lilith was a dream. What do you think?”

“I?” replied Miss Posh sharply. “What do I think? I think you’re the Devil!”

Later, when Laura asked her what Lorm was like, she told her he was a dwarf made of chimney smoke with a head made of smoky candle-flame. Laura, at that, protested vehemently that she'd never seen a smoky candle-flame, but Miss Posh waved this objection aside with a motion of her hand.

"If you haven't," she said, "other people may have," and these words demolished Laura's objection in just the way Miss Posh had often done before; for there was a certain emphasis with which Miss Posh pronounced the familiar words "other people", that always made her interlocutor feel as if he or she had been caught in an outburst of vulgar boasting.

But whatever boasting and whatever horrors this whole scene contained, would have remained unheard, unseen, unfelt, undisplayed, unexplained in the dreaming head of Nezzar Nu, if Lorm had not stirred it up into the man's consciousness. But that was Lorm's life, and whether a dream-hunter or dream-maker or dream-elf like Lorm is an immortal, or whether his destiny is at a certain epoch to be killed or to die a natural death, nobody knows. What is, is, but how long it is what it is, remains one of those insoluble mysteries, which Shakespeare says "are rounded with a sleep."

XXX

The boy Mal, the son of Jilly Tewky, and the girl Nora, the daughter of John o' Dreams, were both six years old when they went along with John and Jilly, and along with Ring and Ting, to try to discover what secret it was that the Cerne Giant was always trying to persuade the Skull, whose Squeak responded so automatically to the bursting of each one of its neighbour's bubbles, to reveal.

"See if you can't get it out of him, children," said John o' Dreams.

"Yes, try, little ones, try!" said Ring. "It can't do any harm for you to try."

"Daddy wants to know," enquired Nora boldly, going up quite close to the Skull and looking it straight in the eyes, for she had so often scrambled about the Fountain that she knew both its inmates better than either of her parents did, "what secret it is that the Cerne Giant is trying to get out of you."

"But, my dear child," replied the Skull gently, "how can I know what's in the Giant's mind? This rock behind my head is full of secrets, secrets that go back to the time when the Druids ruled the land. How can I know which of all the secrets that surround us this Giant of yours wants?"

Malcolm then took his place by the girl's side. "I would know!" he ejaculated proudly. "Yes, I would know!"

"Well, if you know, tell us all!" cried Bubble, as she made one of her most reckless bursts into the air.

Mal thought in silence for a moment. Then he calmly and boldly said: "The Cerne Giant wants to know if it is true that if he went, taking us all with him, to the Tower of London, he would find Queen Boadicea still there?”

“How on earth do you know that, sonny?” enquired Ring in astonishment.

“He told me himself this morning when I took him his early cup of tea.”

“What! Can you carry a tray?” enquired Jilly Tewky, the boy’s mother.

“Certainly I can,” announced her son proudly. “Jessie taught me.”

“Did you tell the Cerne Giant,” enquired John o’ Dreams in a voice trembling with excitement, and appealing directly to the Skull, “whether we should find Boadicea in the Tower of London if he took us all there?”

“Yes,” murmured the Skull quietly, “I told him he would find her there, and I told him it would be much happier for him, as well as for the Queen, if he took you all with him. The Queen has always been fond of young people; and since you will be bringing two children, your visit will delight her. You know where she was born — far up the Icen Way, hundreds and hundreds of miles north of Foghorn. Children very seldom leave their parents, nor do husbands and wives leave theirs, unless there are enemies invading our country. Thus it will be a great occasion for Queen Boadicea to receive this visit from you all. She has no way of learning, locked up as she is by the rulers of this country in the strongest Castle in our land, what is happening between the good and bad inhabitants of this earth, or between the good masses turned to evil or the wicked masses turned to good. Human beings are apt to become wild, mad, desperate hordes of ferocious animals, and the rulers of human beings are apt to become merciless and cruel despots. All this you young people, and your Giant who leads you, must remember as you approach the Tower of London; but you must also remember that, when a great Queen like Boadicea has been imprisoned in a fortress like the Tower for something like a thousand years, and has been separated from the place of her birth by something like a thousand miles, it is impossible to tell what sort of a being she may not have become; perhaps a very ghostly being."

At this point John o' Dreams, wrought up to a pitch of excitement such as he had never known in his life before, cried out in a vibrant voice: "Heaven and Earth! Sun and Moon! Let us go, let us go! Let us go!" And Jilly Tewky cried aloud in a voice more drenched in tears than the waves of the Atlantic breaking on Chesil Beach: "Let us go! Let us go!" Nor did Ring and Ting draw back from joining with their voices the quivering cry: "Let us go! Let us go!"

It may be imagined how the wild excitement of this desperate little group of living creatures was increased by the approach of the Cerne Giant himself.

"Well, children," chuckled the Cerne Giant, "I bet I know to a nicety what you've all decided to do after listening to Master Know-All at this Fountain. So come along! Off we go! Just wait one moment while I tell Laura to tell them at Morty!"

The Giant had such a big stride that it actually was only a minute and three-quarters before he was with them again. "On with us then!" he cried. "I'll carry the two kids!" Nor did either Mal or Nora mind in the least, when the former found himself carried under his right arm, and the latter found herself carried under his left arm. With the Giant carrying the two children, it was sooner than anyone would have considered possible that they all six — John o' Dreams and Jilly Tewky, and Ring and Ting, and Mal and Nora — arrived at the front gate of the Tower.

XXXI

THE GIANT HAD bought a bright green horn as a present for Mal as they passed a town on the way. He also had bought a doll called Bo-Peep for Nora; and now, as they waited at the gate, Bo-Peep was held on Nora's shoulder and Mal blew an echoing blast on his hunting horn. For about three minutes they waited. Then the great gate opened wide, and a couple of tall soldiers, dressed in the uniform of five hundred years ago, ushered them all in and closed the gate behind them.

Neither the children nor Jilly Tewky and Ting seemed in the least alarmed; for when mothers and their children are together, a particular kind of strength and security seems to reach them both from the heart of life itself. Up a narrow winding flight of stone steps they were led, one soldier in front of them and one soldier behind them, with Mal and Nora following Jilly Tewky and preceding Ting. They had to ascend one by one, for the stairs were very narrow, but they were not high, so the children could climb them without having to clamber up on hands and knees.

Finally, they all reached a wide platform with a door at one end of it, and another flight of steps going up still higher at the other end of it.

The soldiers in their imposing uniforms waited till they had all reached the platform. Then one of them stood at the top of the descending stairs, and the other gave three loud knocks with the handle of his sword upon the closed door. As he did this, it was clear to them all that he was measuring with no little apprehension the difference between the size of the door and the size of the Cerne Giant. The door opened at once, and the Giant led them, without too much squeezing of his body, into the room. Then there appeared before them all a very stately room, although with a very low ceiling. Before them was an enormous four-poster bed, and an equally large commode, made of a rare wood that none of them had ever seen before, and adorned with richly gilded ornamentation. At each side of the bed were two beautiful and quite young ladies-in-waiting, and at the foot of the bed was a handsome, intelligent-looking boy, dressed in black from head to foot. With great interest Mal looked at a trumpet the boy held in his hand, and with which he kept going to a window, in a wall clearly about five feet thick, obviously to be ready to blow his trumpet in warning to the guard below in case of any danger to the Queen.

Resting on the bed, her head propped up by a pile of exquisitely coloured pillows, was Queen Boadicea herself. Her features were so handsome and royal, and her dark hair so abundant, that the wrinkles across her forehead and the lines around her hollow cheeks were the only indication that her beauty had lost something of its world-famous youthfulness. Seeing her like this, it was impossible for John o' Dreams, who had a fondness amounting to a mania for the goddesses of ancient Greece, not to think of Hera, the wife of Zeus, whom the Romans called Juno.

All six of them instinctively sank down on their knees, including the Cerne Giant, who had managed, not without difficulty, to squeeze himself through the door of this palatial prison; and they could all see that the sudden appearance of a Giant in her palatial bedroom had considerably impressed the royal prisoner; the Cerne Giant gave expression to the feelings of them all.

"We have come, great Queen," he said, "from the county of Foghorn, through which Icen Way passes in its passage to the North; simply and solely because we have learnt from a being, who lives near a magic Fountain in our neighbourhood called Bubble and Squeak, that no Roman

Caesar or Roman Consul or Roman General will ever rule as widely as your descendants are destined to rule. The government of this island of Britain may feel itself justified in imprisoning you, O great Queen, in their fear lest you should supersede them and rule over us in your solitary majesty, but our little group living so near to the Chesil Beach and not far from the grave of King Arthur at Glastonbury, still worship you, great Queen. Our Government may find its justification for its abominable treatment of you in one simple and obvious fact — that while you are alive upon earth, no Roman Caesar, no Roman General, can live without trembling beneath his pontifical and imperial toga, as he thinks how much more worthy you are to rule these British Isles, yes! and to carry the name of them and the voice of them and the manners of them and the laws of them round the whole circle of our planet Earth. My friends, here, O great Queen of us all, have just returned from a voyage through space beyond the furthest visible star, and do you know, O Queen of Queens, what they did there? They were led by an Arch-Druid; and well do you know, great Queen, that none of these modern bishops and pastors and archbishops and cardinals possess a fragment of the spiritual and magical power that one of our Arch-Druids possesses. And what did they do in that far-away Space, great Queen? They made a star out of the soil of this land of yours which they took with them, the very soil from the banks of the Icen Way, as I know well, for I helped them to carry it there; and when, in honour of my help — for my home is called Cerne — they named their new star in outer space Cerne, do you know, great Queen of all of us with the old British blood, what I did, unknown to them, unknown to anyone? I secretly, in my heart, consecrated that furthest star in the universe, dedicated that furthest star in the universe, to thee thyself. Yes, great Queen, imprisoned in the Tower of London, there is one place in the Universe, one star in the universe, that will be known till both the human race and their tossed-about planet, the Earth, have vanished for ever, known by the name that out of the most secret sanctuary of my heart, I bestowed upon it, known by the name of Boadicea!"

The recumbent Queen rose to her feet. Both the young girls held her up. The boy in black with the trumpet rushed to the window. Boadicea had a dagger in her hand; and with the dagger she cut tresses from her dark hair, and beckoning each of her visitors from Foghorn to her feet, gave to each of them a tendril of what she had cut off.

"Now you can go, children" she said quietly, "and this includes you, O my Giant, big child that you are. But remember when you hear those two disputing — for I have more than once stopped on the Icen Way to listen to your Bubble and Squeak — that All is not Nothing, neither is Nothing All, but both of them have one home-star, where they can sink to eternal quiescence, or mount to everlasting activity, and that home-star, my children, is the heart in every one of us. So goodbye, my dears."

After My Fashion (1980)

After My Fashion was first published in 1980 in London by Picador Books, seventeen years after the author's death in 1963. Powys had written the book in either 1919 or 1920, early in his literary career when he was still working as a lecturer. It was his third novel after *Wood and Stone* (1915) and *Rodmoor* (1916), both of which had been modestly well-received by critics, but had sold poorly. He sent *After My Fashion* to American publishers, but they showed no interest and declined to release it. After this initial rejection, Powys appeared to be indifferent to the fate of the novel and made no other attempts at the time or later in his life to have it published.

The plot takes place in rural Sussex in the southeast of England and in Greenwich Village, New York. The protagonist is the poet and literary-critic Richard Storm, who at the beginning of the novel is returning from Paris to his boyhood home in Sussex, after an absence of twenty years. While he was in living in France, Richard had a long-term, tumultuous relationship with a famous and celebrated dancer, Elise Angel. Powys based her character on the renowned pioneer of modern dance, Isadora Duncan, with whom he had a close relationship in the 1910's. The author's depiction of Elise's dancing demonstrates the great admiration and respect he felt towards Duncan's talent and vision and the high regard in which he held dance as an art.

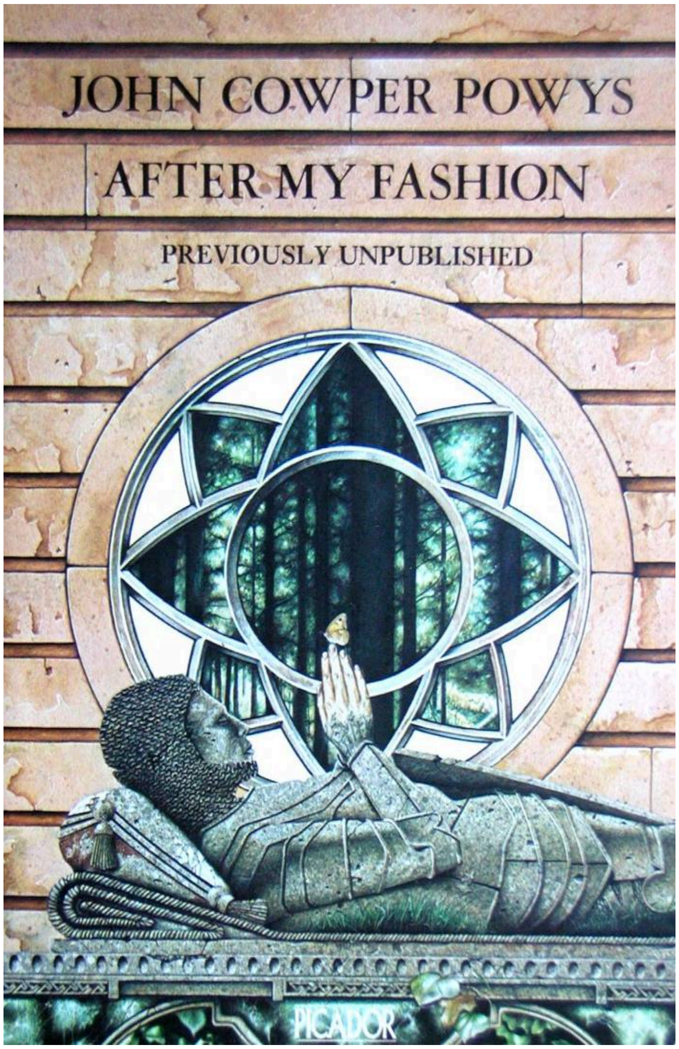
JOHN COWPER POWYS
AFTER MY FASHION
PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED
PICADOR

The first edition

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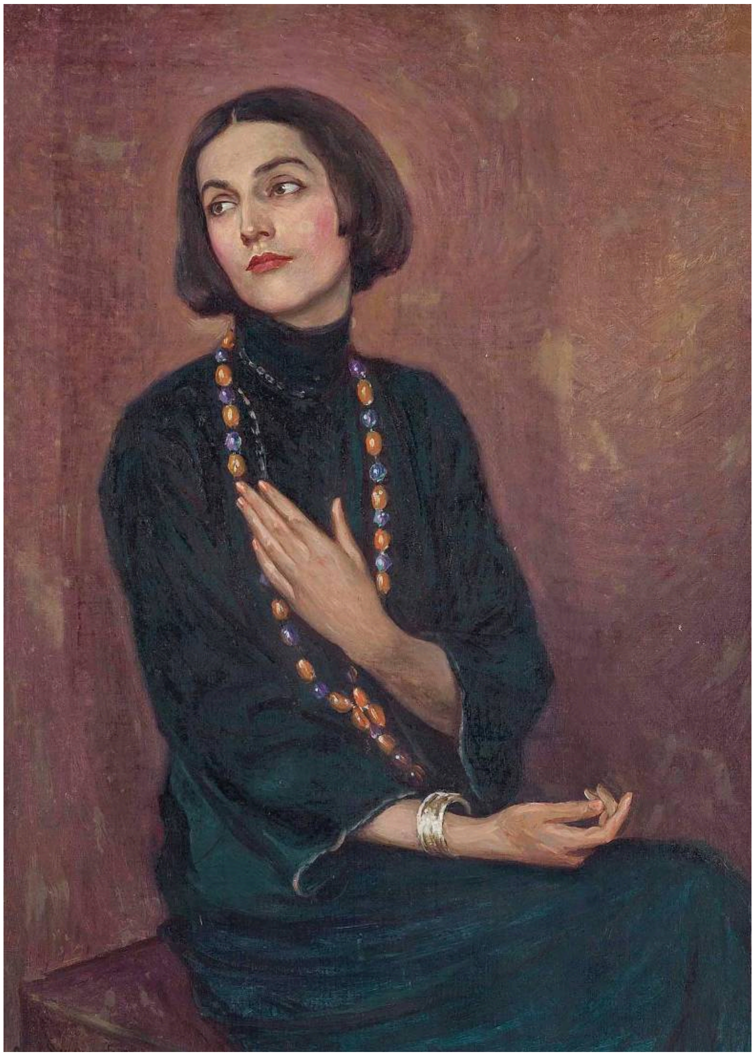

A portrait of the acclaimed dancer Isadora Duncan by Paul Swan, 1922

Chapter 1

By the time he left the train at Selshurst, and bag and stick in hand started resolutely upon his five mile walk to the village of Littlegate where his family associations lay, Richard had succeeded in thrusting Elise Angel into temporary oblivion. He concentrated his mind, as he followed the little by-street towards the centre of the cathedral city, upon those aspects of his life which were independent of the beautiful dancer.

He had not seen England for some twenty years and the last four out of that twenty had held him captive in a small French town doing unheroic but necessary work at a certain military base. His war record, as he looked back on it now, had been neither especially noble nor especially mean. He had paid the penalty of his lack of heroic impulse by his lack of any particularly dramatic memories.

What he felt now, in regard to so many of his French friends, who were lying dead in their crowded graves, was a deep desire to justify the accident of his own escape by some really adequate contribution to the bitter-sweet cup of the world's hard-wrung wisdom.

Such a contribution in his case could only be in the form wherein he was already a tolerable adept and with a fair reputation. It must in fact be some species of what we call Literature, and his prayer to the gods was that it might prove to be poetry – poetry different altogether, and far more human and original, than the easy charming verses, with a faint fragrance of morbidity, which had so far contented him.

Such reputation as he had already won was rather of the critical than of the creative order and was mostly due to his 'appreciations' of the more modern poets of France; among whom he still numbered the only intimate friends he had, and in whose society he had almost continuously lived through a vividly crowded youth.

Though he had seen comparatively little of its real horror, the war had profoundly affected him; and one of its most noticeable effects was a sudden strange restlessness and a curious dissatisfaction with his Paris life and with his poet-friends.

They had behaved heroically in the deadly struggle, much more heroically than he had himself. And yet, now the thing was over and he was free, he found himself, for some deep reason he could only very crudely analyse, out of touch with them and out of sympathy with them. He had changed, he had most drastically changed; and they – those of them who were left alive – seemed to have become more violently, more dogmatically than ever, their old, fierce, hard, fantastic, hedonistic selves.

What he, Richard Storm, was really ‘after’ now, what he was in search of, what he actually wanted to express, in this new poetry he intended to write, he himself could hardly have said. But whatever it was, it was something that, even in its cloudy and embryonic fumblings after a living identity, was strong enough to break up and shatter to bits his contentment with his previous existence.

The hard, clear-cut, artificial fragilities of his French friends seemed only to fret and tease him now. A certain craving for air, for space, for large and flowing movements, for unbounded horizons, had suddenly come upon him and had ruined the peace of his days as he returned to his old haunts. He found himself weary of his old critical subtleties. Some queer unexpected stirring in his soul seemed driving him forth into a world larger and more onward-looking, if less clear cut and complete, than the one he had dwelt in contentedly for so long.

He found himself trying to visualize Russia and the exciting world-shaking experiments there; and it was as if he were gazing into some turbulent cosmic workshop where the world-gods, in heat and sweat and dust and smoke, were hammering out a new groove for the great wheel.

Elise had certainly upset his old life – the war and Elise! Those two together had taken him by the hair of his head and pulled him up by the very roots out of his old pastures.

He had run away from Paris without a single day of farewells. Never before in his life had he fled from an adventure. Well! he must not think of that any more; not any more; lest he curse himself as a cowardly fool. Ah, those eyes, those hands, that unequalled woman's body! Was it really some actual Socratic demon that had snatched him away from her and hurled him into the train for Havre just when his chances with her were at their hopefullest?

As he made his way now through the leafy purlieus of Selshurst Cathedral that tantalizing figure hovered maddeningly before him. It mingled with the green moss and with the ancient ivy of the episcopal garden wall; and it interfered with his delight in those pleasant places and with the thrill of remembering that it was here that Keats must have composed his fragmentary 'Eve of St Mark'.

It was strange that he had not a living relative in England; nor any friend beyond mere acquaintanceship. All his emotional as well as all his professional entanglements had been associated with Paris; and Paris at this moment, with the weight of memories it contained, was reduced to the dimensions of one solitary figure, dancing on an empty stage against black curtains!

His own parents had been long dead; dead years before the war; and it was only the knowledge that his father's parents – the old Benjamin and the old Susanna – lay buried at Littlegate, that had induced him in his craving for some foothold in his native land, to make his way into these Sussex fields.

He did not enter the cathedral, though he saw one of. its cool cavernous doors wide open. He felt the need of rapid movement and the need of a completer solitude.

He hesitated for a moment between two rival tea shops which faced one another across the narrow street. But there were cheerful citizens of Selshurst drinking tea in both of them, and he continued on his way. Finally he obtained a glass of milk in a tiny dairy shop in the outskirts of the town, upon the polished counter of which stood an enormous china cow and a glass full of buttercups.

Directed by a voluble signpost at the first crossroads to the north of the little city, a signpost that seemed to have room for every village on the sea-side of the Downs, he found his road speedily narrowing into a most agreeable country lane between high hedges white with hawthorn.

For two miles he followed this lane, getting constant glimpses of light-foliaged woods in front of him, of upward-sloping parklands and, above these, of the naked crest of the Downs, mistily blue through the mid-May haze.

At last, a little tired and heated by rapid walking, he climbed over a gate into a small field shadowed by oaks and put up for hay and, sinking down among buttercups and clover, he set himself to take stock of his surroundings.

The spire of the cathedral rose nobly out of the pasture lands, the vaguely outlined roofs of the city beneath it mingling with trees and hedgerows so as almost to efface themselves. The broad meadows stretched away, flat and monotonous, in one unbroken level of living greenness until they reached the edge of the sea. Storm was not high enough up yet to get a glimpse of the water. The sea's edge from where he lay was dimly marked by a sudden arrest of that flowing stream of leafiness, an arrest which took place before the natural horizon could have been reached; the sea-banks being further indicated by the isolated look of individual objects, such as windmills, gates and solitary trees, presenting that peculiar suggestion of an unbounded expanse behind them which dwellers by that particular portion of the English Channel come to know so well.

As Storm stretched himself out on the cool grass, with the constant scent of the clover in his nostrils and the far-blown gusts of bitter-sweet fragrance from the May-bushes coming and going on the light wind, he felt a deep thrill of pure delight to be once more in the land of his own people.

He found himself instinctively offering up a votive prayer to the souls of the dead, and the souls of the maimed and blighted, who had thrown their breathing, vibrating, passionate youthful bodies between the cruel engines of the invader and this fair country.

As a philosopher he was well aware of the sinister ambiguities of most patriotic moods, but something subconscious and very deep in him drove philosophy away at that moment. Whatever might be the responsibilities of rulers and governments, he felt a thrill of plain gratitude in that hour to those who had suffered so incredibly that these fields might remain as they had remained since the waves of the sea receded from the face of the land.

Philosophy might whisper that it was not the tillers of these pastures who got the good of them or who gained most from this great escape; but into *that* matter our returned wanderer had no intention of entering on this pleasant afternoon. English labourers, English farmers, English squires, English shopkeepers, English tramps, he was prepared to rejoice with them all, that they could renew their private and particular controversies in profound peace! Might the fathomless Unknown be propitious, that those who had endured so much for the sake of the future should not be altogether forgotten and betrayed by those who lived on!

The sweetness of his mid-May afternoon in these incomparable fields sank so deeply into Storm's soul that he never afterwards quite forgot that walk to Littlegate.

It returned upon him with all its strangely mingled impressions, again and again in later days; and it always returned with a kind of symbolic value.

The remaining three miles of his road were taken more leisurely. He stopped frequently to listen to the birds. He lingered over the fast fading hedge plants of the earlier spring, such as celandines and cuckoo-flowers. He clambered down a steep bank to the margin of a slimy pond to touch with his fingers the cold wet roots of the water ranunculus. He waited long for the reappearance of two swift-winged butterflies, marvellous specimens of the Red Admiral species, who floated over the hedge making love to each other.

Advancing thus slowly it was after six o'clock when he arrived at the hamlet of Littlegate and made his way to the churchyard.

Littlegate church was one of those typical smaller Sussex churches, looking as if it had been made out of the fabric of some huge barn, with the little squat erection, half-tower, half-spire, like an extinguisher upon an extinguished candle, plumped down upon its. west end.

In place of yew trees there were two tall ilexes on each side of the graveyard; and, in the field adjoining it, stood four or five enormous sycamores which added as much perhaps to the monumental dignity of the scene as did the roof of the church. It was certainly the roof of the church, high-tilted and sweeping down almost to the ground, that gave the building its character. It was covered with brilliant orange lichen, and Richard thought he had never seen so imposing a roof except upon certain great barns in the north of France.

He was surprised at the smallness of the village and found himself regretting that he had not secured a room for the night in some Selshurst inn. There was evidently no inn of any kind in the hamlet of Littlegate. There was nothing that he could see from where he stood at the church porch except a rambling old farmhouse, a row of ancient cottages facing a still more ancient-looking pond, and a small, neat, nondescript dwelling, which he assumed to be the old parsonage of the place adapted to modern ideas of cleanliness and light.

He promptly made up his mind that it was in that particular house, behind the churchyard wall, that his father had been born and had spent his childhood.

It looked a charming place now but, for all Richard knew, it might have been altered out of all recognition. It might be a completely new vicarage. He found himself without rhyme or reason suddenly prejudiced against the present incumbent of his grandfather's living, and he gazed at the top of that wall, over which a spray of red roses was waving in the wind, with something bordering upon hostility.

He moved hastily around the church, surveying it from every quarter, and then began searching among the graves for Benjamin and Susanna.

He soon found the place. The old people's headstone was still legible enough after its fifty years of Sussex rains and frosts and Richard, mechanically removing his hat, as he had got into the habit of doing among the too crowded cemeteries of Catholic France, read without any cynical afterthought the unquestioning assurance of the pious epitaph. Over his head, as he bent above the grave, the long shadow of the little squat tower fell upon the uncut grass and upon the oblong mounds new and old. Above the tower rose the golden weathervane, pointing now towards the east; and above the weathercock darted the great swifts on their clean-cutting, sharply curved wings, as they had done since the day in King Stephen's reign when the place had been consecrated.

All at once Richard Storm became aware that he was not alone. His pious vigil was being shrewdly and shamelessly observed from a sunny nook under the mossy wall between two upright tombstones. Richard hastily put on his hat and shot an angry glance at the intruder.

A rubicund, quizzical eyed young man he appeared to be, the sleeve of his right arm hanging empty, his left hand holding a paint brush. By his side was a small easel; and on the grass at his feet a cup of water and a palette. He was evidently sketching the church.

Instead of looking away when Richard frowned at him, the young man laid down his brush, threw back his head till it rested upon the surface of the wall, gave a queer little jerk with his shoulder to the stump of his missing arm, and stared at the wayfarer with a fixed and rather supercilious smile.

Confound the fellow! thought Richard. *Why the devil can't he go on with his silly picture? Does he want me to go over there and admire it?* To indicate how little interest he took in this arrogant young man's proceedings he turned sharply on his heel and entered the church. When he had carefully closed the heavy door behind him, he obeyed an irresistible impulse and shot the gigantic iron bolt, barring himself in. The coolness of the interior was quite a shock after the hot sunshine; and for a moment the place seemed dark and tomb-like.

As with regard to the outside of the building the great sloping orange-coloured roof was the dominant feature, so with regard to the interior of it what held a stranger's attention, to the exclusion of all other interest, was the ponderous Norman arch dividing the small nave from the diminutive chancel.

Apart from this arch, huge, elaborately carved, weighty with historic sećrets, the rest of the church seemed meaningless and without character. The arch dwarfed the pillars, took all dignity away from the windows, and seemed to be endeavouring to draw to itself the natural human piety that would pass it by and press forward towards the simply furnished altar.

The arch seemed to be upholding the barn-like roof above it with a kind of stolid confederacy, as if between these two half-heathen things there existed a dumb conspiracy to substitute some other, earlier worship, for the one that had raised that quiet silver cross and had set in order those unlit candles.

Richard Storm vaguely recalled the fact that out of all England the land of the South Saxons was the last to be converted to Christ.

Half-oblivious to what he did and under the influence of French customs he looked about for some small observance, some slight offering of respect, that remained to be paid to the quiet souls of his dead.

Half-atheist, half-superstitious as his mind had become, among those passionately pagan and passionately medieval friends of his, it seemed to him a bad omen to leave the place his father's father had served as priest without some act of filial devotion. To kneel, to pray – anyone might do that! He felt a desire for some more objective, more symbolic act. He hesitated for a moment, leaning against the great arch. Then with a glance backwards at the bolted door and a hurried genuflexion he advanced boldly up to the altar, and, striking a match, lit the two candles on either side of the cross.

It took a little time for the two small flames to burn upwards, clear and unflickering, above their pedestals of wax, but when they were well alight, he moved away down the aisle without any further obeisance and ensconced himself in a remote seat under the tower. A single bell-rope hung down above him through a hole in the roof and a long quivering shaft of sunlight, heavy with golden motes, fell upon the floor in front of him.

Between the candles on the altar and this heathen finger of the setting sun obtruded from beyond the planet's edge, the Norman arch in the centre of the church gathered darkness round it and became itself a thing of darkness.

Richard Storm stretched his legs out in front of him, clasped his hands behind his head and sat motionless, staring at the shaft of light and at the candles.

Suddenly the light faded. The darkness about the arch moved instantly to where he sat and embraced him. The candles on the altar were no longer little pyramids of palpable colour. They became flickering points of flame. The wanderer's thoughts concentrated themselves on the old dead people from the accident of whose remote encounter – Benjamin Storm with Susanna Talbot – his own appearance in the world at all, the son of his father who was the son of *his* father, so absolutely depended!

A strange sense came over him of the continuity of the generations and their fatal sequence; and under the power of that feeling he felt the unrolling of the long scroll of his days upon earth as he had never felt it before. Things that had been of primary importance to him, vivid passions, fierce infatuations, savage quarrels, seemed now to fade into complete insignificance, even as the sunset shaft had faded, and to leave him in the presence of deeper, older, more earth-rooted things.

A craving stirred within him to find expression, expression that he and others, bewildered and chance-driven as himself, might hold to and live by, for this mysterious undertone of the earth's gathered experience, moving through generation after generation of human subconsciousness and binding the ages together.

Those little flickering candle flames at which he stared seemed a signal to him that he in his turn had to wrestle with the Figure made of darkness and the shadow of death, until he or It cried ‘hold, enough!’ And what he felt most clearly just then was that the secret the clue, the sign – whatever it might be – of the thing which lay hidden under the phantasmagoria of life was something that was less involved, less connected, less fatally mixed up, with the evil and the good and the sweet and the bitter, than in the pell-mell of existence one was apt to hold.

What he felt at that moment was a profound craving to put into such magical words that nothing could destroy them the idea that there was some ultimate vision of things that could be reached by humanity, from the ground of which one was saved both from fear and remorse and from the fret and the fever of this perpetual choice and rejection.

He was startled out of his meditations by a sudden unexpected creaking of woodwork somewhere in the church. At first he fancied it was just that automatic relaxing of some old bench or board which one often may hear in a hollow-echoing place where the slightest sound is distinct. It ceased as suddenly as it had come. But a second afterwards it recommenced. This time he leapt to his feet and realized what it must be. It must be the secretive steps of some light-footed person trying to descend unnoticed from the organ loft. His entrance into the building had evidently surprised and caught some organ player who being reluctant to play to an unknown auditor was endeavouring to slip out of the church unobserved.

Richard moved hurriedly up the aisle, went to the altar and blew out the two candles. Then returning to the shelter of the great chancel arch he paused and waited, in as indifferent and negligent a pose as he could assume, for the emergence of this shy prisoner.

He could not help smiling to himself rather mischievously when he remembered the enormously stiff and heavy bolt he had drawn across the door. But perhaps this embarrassed organ-player possessed the key to some other exit. He seemed to have alarmed the invisible one into petrified stillness by his expectant attitude. Evidently the idea in the prisoner’s mind was that this lighter of candles would leave the church at once now that his little ceremony was concluded. It gave Richard quite a quaint and pleasing sensation to think that he had bolted himself in with a mysterious unknown who was now too shy to appear. ‘It must be a girl,’ he said to himself.

The footsteps became suddenly impetuous and daring. The final stages of the descent were accomplished in something resembling a precipitous rush to escape; and a slender feminine figure emerged into view. With the quickest possible glance at Richard as he stood motionless under the arch, she slipped away down the aisle. *She’ll never move that bar*, he thought, remembering the violent force with which he had run it through its rusty groove.

He was quite right. She was unable to make the thing stir an inch.

He recognized that it was incumbent upon him to open it for her and he moved down the aisle feeling as if he were going to let loose a bird or a butterfly that might hurt itself by its blind beatings against the obstacle.

She heard his steps behind her and turned round. ‘Allow me to do it,’ he said and moved to her side. But before he had touched the bolt there came a violent rattling and shaking of the door from the outside.

With an irresistible movement of contrariness he drew back, and the girl and he stared at one another in a sort of confederacy of hesitation. Then she smiled with the frank amusement of youth at the incongruity of the situation. ‘Someone wants to get in,’ remarked the girl. He looked into her eyes and realized how full of mischievous amusement she had become. It was clear too that she liked the look of her unwitting captor. She suddenly became grave and moved a few paces away from the bolted door. They stared at one another with renewed interest. Then, with a quick nervous little gesture she rested her bare hand on the edge of the font. ‘I saw you light those candles,’ she whispered. ‘I wanted you to do something.’ He now found his voice. He thought to himself, *If she had said nothing about the candles it would have been better. Why must women always say something about things like that?* But aloud he said, ‘I thought I was quite alone. How did you know I wanted to *do* something?’

Then she smiled at him from under her broad-brimmed hat so sweetly and so sadly that he changed his mind in a moment and was glad she had spoken. ‘I knew,’ she murmured. ‘I knew you were thinking of the war.’ He hadn’t of course been thinking of the war at all; and yet, in a very profound sense, he had been. The whole thing was ‘the war’ and the peace after ‘the war’ again! Like the shooting of a shuttle or like the darting of a fish his mind moved up and down all the vistas of confusion and misery that filled the world. Something in this girl’s gravity as she looked at him brought vividly to his mind many things he had forgotten. ‘The war can never really end,’ he found himself muttering.

His companion frowned a little, in an obvious youthful effort to say something that did not sound silly.

‘Well! This is beautiful weather anyhow,’ she remarked, ‘and on days like this one oughtn’t to think too sadly of things. It seems an insult to the happiness that is left. I mean to the happy people that are left.’ And she coloured a little as if aware that her remark lacked weight.

Richard's mind once more became critical of her. Why do women mince their words so? he thought; and why are they so devilishly self-conscious?

'You're a stranger to Littlegate?' she said. 'It really is a lovely village, quite worth seeing.'

She knows I thought her a little prig just now, Richard's critical demon whispered. How sharp they are, the minxes!

But the girl had caught sight of his travelling-bag covered with foreign labels. 'Have you far to go tonight?' she asked, speaking with a direct almost maternal concern and in a new tone.

'I really don't know,' he muttered rather awkwardly.

'Because,' she went on, 'you strike me as the kind of person who wants looking after.'

'Do I?' he answered quietly. 'Well, perhaps I do,' he added smiling at her; but his secret thoughts ransacked that remark of hers and combed it out. *They can only be natural when they are fussing over you or being fussed over – everything else is 'showing off'.*

They were standing opposite each other now, she waiting for him to say goodbye, and he scrutinizing her with an intent concentration. Suddenly an unaccountable wave of tenderness towards all these self-conscious, secretive, evasive, fragile, tenacious beings, who were so invariably 'up to some game' and yet were so inevitably betrayed by something or other – by Nature perhaps – that was 'up' to some still deeper game with them, took possession of him and disarmed him. The curious awkwardness and embarrassment which they both seemed aware of in the presence of that bolted door became a sort of palpable 'third presence' linking them together. At that moment the door was once more violently shaken from outside.

The girl instinctively drew away from him; and an odd sense of having been caught in some humorous predicament passed in a quick wave from one to the other.

Then she smiled mischievously and gaily. ‘I’ve half a mind *not* to open it, she whispered.’ ‘How silly of him to make that noise!’ Richard laid his hand on the bolt but did not draw it. ‘Is it your brother?’ he asked abruptly. The question seemed to change her in a moment from a discreet self-contained young woman into a naughty little girl.

Storm got a faint impression that she actually put out her tongue. She certainly suppressed an inclination to burst into peals of laughter.

‘My brother? Good Heavens, no! It’s Robert. It’s Mr Canyot. He’s so fussy and funny. He probably thinks you are murdering me in here. Oh, I would love to give him a tremendous fright! Do you think it would be *too* wicked if I were to scream or something?’

There was enough light left in the church for the violent protest on Richard’s face at this suggestion to throw her into a fit of convulsive merriment. She shook with suppressed laughter and leaned against the font to recover her breath. She finally gasped, ‘I’m not often as silly as this. It’s so funny though. You don’t know how funny it is. You don’t know Mr Canyot!’

Richard under his breath gave Mr Canyot to the devil. ‘But I think I do,’ he said. ‘Wasn’t he sketching out there? He frightened me into the church. He didn’t seem a very friendly youth.’

She had recovered herself now – ‘Oh he’s all right!’ she said, ‘with a slight annoyance in her tone at having revealed too much to a stranger. Open the door, will you, please.’ And then before he could obey her she held out her hand. ‘I am Nelly Moreton,’ she explained gravely. ‘My father’s the vicar here.’ Storm was pleased with her for this explanation and still more pleased by something trusting and confiding in the way she gave him her hand, the whole of her hand, not just the clammy tips of lethargic fingers. Indeed he was so pleased with this gesture of hers, and the frank look that accompanied it, that he found himself pushing back the bolt and opening the door before it occurred to him to return her courtesy by revealing to her *his* name. They were met on the threshold of the porch by the indignant Mr Canyot. ‘It’s too bad of you to give a person such shocks,’ he began severely. Then he looked Richard up and down. ‘Excuse me, sir,’ he said, ‘but how was I to know that you knew – ah! – the ropes, as one might say.’ He paused again as if to emphasize his displeasure. ‘I mean Miss Moreton,’ he added sternly.

‘Really Mr Canyot,’ protested the lady, ‘you mustn’t mean me when you talk about “ropes”. This gentleman hadn’t till a moment ago the least notion who I was.’ She glanced whimsically at Storm. ‘I don’t know *your* name yet – this is Mr Robert Canyot, our Sussex Painter.’

Richard muttered the syllable ‘Storm’ and bowed to the young man. ‘I must be making my way back to Selshurst, I expect, if I am to find a room. I had a vague notion that there might be an inn here. That’s why I brought this with me.’ He indicated his bag.

‘Oh I’m sure you’ll find a room all right – in Selshurst,’ Mr Canyot earnestly remarked. ‘There’s the White Hart and the Blue Pig and the King George and the George and Dragon. The one I’d try first, though, is the Richmond Arms. But it would be well to get in before eight, anyhow; or you might have difficulty about your dinner.’ Saying this, Mr Canyot considerately pulled out his watch.

‘What *is* the time?’ inquired the vicar’s daughter putting her hand on the artist’s wrist and looking at the watch he had produced. ‘Why it’s twenty minutes to nine! Father must be awfully late or he’d have come to fetch me.

I'm afraid we *must* say goodbye, Mr Storm. And you too, Robert, I'm sure it's past Mrs Winsome's suppertime.' She turned quickly to the wayfarer from France. 'Mr Canyot is stopping at the farm,' she said, 'but I'm afraid there is no inn in Littlegate. So do try the Richmond Arms; and be sure you *make* them give you something decent to eat.'

Again she tendered him that frank confiding handshake. 'If you stay longer you must come and call on my father. He can tell you everything there is to be told about this part of the country.'

'I don't quite know what I am going to do,' Richard replied cautiously. 'It depends upon – many things.' He nodded to Mr Canyot and turned slowly away, not however without receiving a look from the girl's eyes which a little startled him.

What was it? he thought as he made his way slowly back towards Selshurst through the long twilight, the evening sounds and scents stirring old memories in him that drifted away over the fields and were lost too quickly. *What was it that her look meant?*

He was too far-sunken in the faint sweetness of the place and the hour to laugh at himself – he, the runaway from the world-famed dancer – for his sentimental interest in this young person. Not one sardonic leer from the deadly critic within him rose to the surface to spoil his orgy of delicate dreams. He let his mind wander at large and as it pleased over the strangeness of the quick mysterious *rapport* which had risen between them.

What was it that that parting look meant? It seemed to have something in it of a definite appeal, of a definite call for help. But the girl's life appeared serene enough, all that he had seen of it. Was there something odd about the Reverend Moreton? Was that insolent young coxcomb of an artist teasing her, persecuting her – and the father, perhaps half-crazy or a drunkard, aiding and abetting him?

He leaned over a gate and stared at the thousands of sleeping buttercups and at the white hedge parsley. What absurd nonsense it was, to turn an accident like that, a mere chance encounter, into something worthy of serious analysis! What did it matter to him if the girl *was* unhappy? He had not escaped from Elise Angel to act the Don Quixote through the villages of Sussex. Let her play her organ to stray visitors! Let her marry the great Canyot!

He pursued his road at a quicker pace and before long came to a footpath which evidently led straight into the city. There were one or two town lights already visible; and with the deepening of the twilight the great meadows which surrounded the place were already covered by a filmy sea of thin whitish mist.

Drinking in, as he made his way through the wet grass, a hundred subtle fragrances, each one of which carried his mind back to the remote past, the wanderer felt that, however England might have changed, something essential in it, something that belonged both to the earth and the race, remained unchangeable and secure. The home of one's people! There must, he began to think, be some sort of intangible emanation proceeding from that which, more than any ritual, had the power to call one's mind back to its lost rhythm, to its broken balance. Too long, he decided, had he occupied himself with questions of technique, with problems of style. The work which he would do now, the poetry he would write, should primarily concern itselt with some definite vision of things that should be left to evoke its own method of expression, its own music, in accordance with the intensity of its accumulative purpose. And to some such vision of things he began to feel himself distinctly led, as the warm May night poured its magic through him.

Yes! he must bury fathoms deep, the dangerous lure of that perfect skin, ‘like cruel white satin’ as one of his poet friends had written of her. He must bury ‘deeper than did ever plummet sound’ the memory of that entrancing figure ‘as of a bassarid in the woods of Thessaly’.

One thing at least, he thought to himself, as he made his way along the edge of an ancient wall covered with a tangle of early yellow roses that brushed, cool and wet, against his face and showed ghost-white in the dusk, one thing Elise Angel had done for him; she had blotted out and obliterated all his earlier complications. How faint and dim she had made them – as dim as these shadowy roses – those Mathildes and Maries of his earlier Paris life!

He shuddered with fearful relief when he thought how nearly he had come to the point of actually *marrying* La Petite Charmille because Raymond de la Tailhede told him he had treated her badly! Well! he was clear of all that now, clear and free, and he had no intention of permitting the weakness of remorse to poison the good blood of his new intention.

The streets of Selshurst were all lit up when he finally stood before the entrance of the hostelry he fancied the most. It was neither the George and Dragon nor the Richmond Arms but a quiet and clean little place, in the city’s main thoroughfare, laconically entitled the Crown.

It appeared he had chosen with a wise instinct. He was allotted a charming and beautifully neat room looking out upon a well-kept kitchen garden, the scent of whose aromatic herbs floated deliciously in as soon as he opened the window.

A filmy mist, wavering and undulating as it moved up from the sea-ward meadows, rolled, like some aerial phantom river, round the old walls and the high garden trees; and through the fluctuations of this mist Richard could discern as he leaned out of his window, hushed and still in the scented night, the shadowy bulk of the cathedral and its majestic spire.

The landlady of the Crown and her buxom barmaid seemed prepared to contendwith each other in making their visitor comfortable; and it was not long before he was seated in the private back parlour before an admirable supper heartened by as large a quantity of before-the-war wine as he cared to consume.

Wine immoderately imbibed may become, as Panurge informs us, a powerful sedative to the erotic madness. But wine moderately enjoyed – and Richard was habitually temperate in these things – has a different effect. Thus it turned out that in spite of his ascetic resolutions it was difficult, when once more at his open window he smoked cigarette after cigarette into the quiet night, to keep that fatal image 'like a Bacchanal on a Grecian urn' drowned in the oblivion he had laid upon her.

She rose out of the white mists of the aromatic garden beneath him. She stretched out her arms towards him. She came nearer and nearer to the window. With a face more haggard and much older than his face had been all that day, he struggled to bury her again and to recover the new purpose of his life; but the struggle was not an easy one; and he smiled grimly to himself, as stretched in bed he inhaled the garden smells and listened to the chiming of some nearby clock tower, to think what simple prayers, for his escape from the wiles of Satan, the old Benjamin and the old Susanna would have raised at that juncture.

After all, he thought, the more complicated pattern of our modern days has not liberated us from the old accursed duality. Will the balance, the rhythm, the lovely poise of things, *never* be obtained by luckless humanity, torn and divided between the two natures?

In his case, that May night, it was the hand of sleep, not of philosophy, that closed the debate; and though the soft eyes that followed him through his dreams were the eyes of Nelly Moreton, the form that drew him towards itself through the entangling ways of a land whose mountaintops were covered with meadow flowers was not the modest form of the daughter of the Vicar of Littlegate.

Chapter 2

AS HE SAT at breakfast in the front room of the Crown, watching, between a great bowl of cowslips and a tall vase of bluebells, the pleasant sun-bathed traffic of the main Selshurst street, it presented itself rather forcibly to his mind that he had not made the remotest kind of plan for his future. He had just run away; and that summed the whole thing up. Had he, in the treacherous way the human mind works, secretly avoided making any plans, with a subconscious hope that no plans would be necessary; but that Satan, with the lure of that skin 'softer than sleep', would draw him back again?

Well! It shouldn't draw him back! He was resolved firmly upon that. The freshness of the morning, the vase of bluebells, with two ungainly stalks of pink-campion evidently thrust in by childish hands, the pleasant rustic voices of loiterers outside the door, and all the cheerful stir of the placid town, helped him to hold tight to his renewed purpose.

He would 'dig himself in' in English soil and write such poetry as would really satisfy the stern Arbiter whose hidden purpose, whatever it was, had kept him alive while so many better men had fallen.

He had not even left an address behind in France. The lean concierge from Auvergne who looked after the rooms in the Rue de Vaugirard had orders to retain his correspondence till he sent for it.

The question immediately to be decided, then, was where should he settle so to be sure of tolerably harmonious surroundings wherein to work?

It would be quite pleasant to remain precisely where he was, ensconced at the Crown Inn, Selshurst. And yet for some secret reason he didn't feel altogether satisfied with this project. Superficially he explained to himself this reluctance, to interview the landlady at once on the matter, on grounds quite remote from the real one which lay all the while hidden in the depths of his consciousness. He explained it to himself as a scruple of economic prudence, lest the woman should persuade him into some hasty agreement which second thoughts might wish to revoke; but, in reality, lurking in that remote portion of the mind where actual decisions are made, was a sort of shadowy signpost pointing to the hamlet of Littlegate.

Moved as much by an instinctive tendency to put off such decisions as long as possible as by a traveller’s natural curiosity he spent a leisurely golden morning wandering about the streets and passages of the old town. He wandered in and out of the cathedral. He loitered in the cloisters. He leaned against the mossy posts of the old iron railings behind which the smooth-cut grass of the close showed green as a velvet altar cloth, covering the ashes of a thousand years. He listened to the cawing of rooks in the dark tops of immense elm trees. He surveyed with delight the impenetrable quietude, exhaling an atmosphere of refined serenity comparable to certain passages in the English Prayer Book, of the great red-brick Georgian houses, with their polished door-knockers and high- walled gardens, mellow and rare like the fragrance of old wine.

Fortunate people, he thought, those aged ecclesiastics who brooded on choice Latinity and high divinity behind those rose- tangled windows! Theirs was a life, he supposed, in which the sting of mortal trouble was reduced to the minimum point, consistent with the calamity of being alive at all on this harassed earth!

Instead of returning to his inn he lunched luxuriously in a little tea shop close to the cathedral gates; and here, as he drank cup after cup of beautifully made tea, and watched the indolent unhurried people chatting together in the sunshine and going in and out of the trim shops, he felt that there was, after all, a certain genius for sheer contentment in the race that had its place, say what one might, in any wise scheme of existence.

For it was not that all this material well-being was a superficial thing. It had endured, with its exclusive neatness and trimness and cleanliness, many strange blows and shocks from the hand of fate – this final ‘great war’ only the latest of such disasters – and had endured them cheerfully. There was a look, especially in the eyes of the elder women, even when they were lightly chatting to each other, that suggested that this refined-upon maturity, like time’s own polish upon very old and very solid furniture, was not a thing obtained without sacrifice and cost.

He had noted and relished deeply the passionate feeling for intellectualized beauty, for lucid and lovely organization, in his adopted French home, but *that* could exist – he had found often to his wondering surprise – side by side with curious lapses from instinctive daintiness and delicacy.

Here, in this English country-town there was a meticulous cleanliness and neatness showing itself in a thousand charming ways, from the aprons of the little girls to the wheels of the farmers wagons.

And it was all so deep-rooted and instinctive, so unconscious and taken-for-granted! It was not, it seemed to him, as he drank his fifth cup of tea and nibbled his fifth ‘halfpenny’ bun, any sort of conscious art-impulse that had produced it in those simple, self-centred, humorously wily men and those cheerful, secretive, patient women. It was a kind of immemorial moral code, touched here and there with a faint tincture of religious unction, like the half-mechanical performance of some very old ritual.

He went out into the street in extraordinarily good spirits. The shiny-faced young woman to whom he tendered payment had looked at him with that quick indescribable look, full of innocent subtleties, with which the simplest maiden can enchant and disarm a philosopher.

He stepped into one of those small tobacconist shops that display among their glossy pipes and smoking-materials such a vast assortment of dignified walking sticks as would supply all the elderly beaux of England with the insignia of retired leisure.

Emerging, still more well-pleased from this repository of epicurism, fortified with an immense number of cigarettes and a second entrancing smile, Richard seated himself upon a comfortable bench, just within the precincts, and gave himself up to meditation.

A queer mood of languid and drowsy indifference came upon him, as the hot sun warmed his limbs and the voices of children ebbed and flowed. It seemed to him as though nothing in the world greatly mattered so long as quiet harmless people could go about their affairs, undisturbed by official arrogance and unvexed by words of command.

The very secret of English life, a thing not of politics or economics, but of the obstinate right of every Englishman to meditate upon his own sensations in reserved isolation, took possession of him and gave to the brooding voices of the doves, hidden away among the trees of the dean’s garden, a symbolic significance.

By slow degrees, as he sat there, the encroaching spell of sheer physical well-being, emanating from every object within sight, covered him with a kind of pleasant cloud of leafy vegetable contentment.

He smoked and nodded. He nodded and dreamed. And over his head the rooks went by and the elm trees faintly stirred in the warm wind and a hidden clock from somewhere, with a voice that might have been the voice of generations of dead bishops, chimed the slowly moving quarters.

His relaxed and drowsed nerves, freed from the feverish tension of his Paris life, responded to some profound atavistic appeal in that soil, that air, that sun-bathed masonry, those silent tree trunks.

He dimly regretted the fierce passion of his struggles to articulate and intellectualize his life. Why should he articulate anything, or analyse anything, when it was possible to let his soul sink peacefully into the being of these old calm eternal things, until it became a portion of them and lived their life, large-flowing, placid, deep- ruminating, unruffled, content?

In the process of these thoughts, Richard’s eyes found themselves negligently fixed upon a remote untraversed grass-plot, surrounded by smaller houses, lying a little back of the main cathedral close. Little by little he became aware that the stream of his meditation was flowing over some hard, resistant and hostile object that disturbed its smooth current like a sharp rock.

At last there came to him the sudden jerking consciousness that he was looking at a familiar figure seated before an easel. Yes! even at that distance the empty sleeve was visible. But what brought his mind into a different focus with a yet more violent jerk was the sight of a slim flexible figure in a thin summer dress bending over the artist’s shoulder and watching every stroke of his brush.

The observing demon in Richard’s brain did not fail to prod him into recording the fact that the sight of his little new acquaintance completely destroyed the drowsy trance of the preceding hour.

He got up and began walking slowly, and with all the negligence he could assume, towards the pair.

As he moved, his heart beating a little more quickly than usual, and his head turned rather ostentatiously towards the cathedral, that same mocking demon in his brain kept whispering to him the sardonic comment that the only cure for the mania for one woman was another woman. ‘You are making the most of this organ maid,’ whispered the voice, ‘because you know well that with all your fine resolutions your heart is still in the Théâtre des Arts.’

But even below this demon voice yet another interior commentator made itself audible. This second mental imp challenged the sincerity of the first one and protested that what Richard was really trying to evade was the shameful confession that he was just simply a fickle philanderer who, while more dangerous sport was renounced, made the best of safer pleasures.

Richard himself found it difficult enough as he rather nervously ‘stalked’, so to speak, the ‘position’ of his acquaintances to give an adequate answer to either of these voices. What he actually achieved, before he greeted her, was a rapid association of this friendly child with his vaguely outlined poetic impulse.

She seemed, in the quietness of her conscious reserve and the steadiness of her look, to be in some secret ‘rapport’ with the vision of things towards which he was groping.

There was an unpleasant moment of embarrassed approach across that secluded grass-plot while the girl hurriedly pointed him out to her artist companion. But she came with a quick eager step to meet him and he felt sure there was no dissimulation in her unconcealed friendliness.

Robert Canyot rose to his feet, removed his hat with his left hand and sat down again.

Nelly lifted her eyebrows with an imperceptible little grimace and a faint shrug of her shoulders, as though to indicate that the hopeless *naïveté* of men passed the limit of comprehension.

‘Are you interested in painting?’ she said, turning to Storm with an unmistakable appeal to him to be sensible and tactful.

‘He won’t be interested in *my* painting,’ remarked Mr Canyot, ‘if he’s been long in France.’

There lurked in this speech a double implication; that the French in general were crazy fanatics and that Storm in particular was a priggish dilettante primed with the latest aesthetic pose.

Having thrown out this remark Mr Canyot went on applying colour to his canvas with the sort of self-satisfied indifference with which a competent builder might regard an amateur architect.

Richard longed to give the fellow’s complacency some kind of a shock; but when he looked at the picture on the easel he was startled to observe that there were real signs there of a noticeable originality. The style of the thing appealed to him. He knew enough of the studios to know that this was not ordinary work. The man was clearly no fool at his job.

‘I like the way you’ve gone straight to the atmosphere of the place,’ he found himself saying. ‘It isn’t the cathedral or the trees or the houses; it’s something much more important. It’s the *happiness* of England that you’re after.’

Nelly Moreton looked as if she could have kissed him for his words. Her face lightened up as though the flesh of it had become transparent. ‘Yes! that’s just what I’ve been telling him. Look at that branch against the buttress! They seem to melt into each other. And you can actually *see* the warm air flowing round them both, caressing them both!’

They contemplated Mr Canyot’s quick decisive movements in silence for a while. Then the girl laid her hand on the artist’s shoulder. ‘We won’t disturb you any more, Robert. I’ll take Mr Storm to see Canon Ireton’s garden. They’re all away; but I’m allowed to take anyone. He’ll be pleased with it. The peonies are wonderful.’

The artist lifted his head, laid down his brush, and placed his hat beside it on the grass. Richard received from him a long scrutinizing look and was rather pleased to note that his expression became perceptibly puzzled.

The conformation of Mr Canyot's skull, covered with thick tow- like bleached hair, struck him as remarkable; but the contours of the man's face were arrogant, his mouth morose, his eyes jeering.

'Certainly, by all means. But let's have tea fairly early, so that you won't have to rush back and tire yourself out.'

The girl patted his shoulder affectionately. 'All right,' she laughed, 'we'll be here in good time. I'm not going to kidnap Mr Storm.'

Her tone apparently gave satisfaction to the painter, for he bestowed upon them an amiable nod of dismissal and resumed his work.

Miss Moreton led her companion past the west door of the cathedral, down a little avenue of limes, between nursery-maids holding gargantuan infants, and aged nondescript philosophers, the smoke of whose placid pipes ascended to heaven.

On the further side of the close she led him down a narrow brick alley, over one wall of which hung wistaria and over the other white and blue clematis.

At last they came to a little brightly painted green door which she opened with a small key taken from her purse. 'Mrs Ireton was a friend of mother's,' she said, and they passed through. 'I can pick anything I like here, as long as Mr Tip doesn't see me. They're all terribly afraid of Mr Tip. He's the dean's man really; but he works for them all since the war.'

How much of England and its incurable charm lay, for Richard, at that moment, in that insignificant sentence! The obstinate importance of personal character, or personal peculiarity; the relaxed, easy-going, unofficial casualness of the old traditional methods which lent to Mr Tip –

who doubtless tyrannized mercilessly over the dean – a more carefully respected authority than was vouchsafed to any chief of police, how profoundly national it all was!

Richard could see Mr Tip among his own private roses, in his own trim villa, reading *The Times* through his spectacles to his good lady who in her day had doubtless ruled over more difficult personages than deans.

‘Well! what do you think of it?’ sounded the youthful voice at his side. ‘Isn’t it a sweet place? Do you wonder I wanted you to see it?’

Richard was indeed so overcome by the beauty of it all, by the charm of Nelly herself, by the delicious symbolic figure of Mr Tip – who fortunately was elsewhere just then – that this wonderful garden seemed to him the last drop in the cup of mortal happiness.

It was the sort of garden that one cannot conceive of as existing outside England. It was not large, and the high walls that surrounded it – for the house against which it lifted its waves of fragrant fertility was itself, it seemed, no more than a great buttressed monastic wall with massive-mullioned windows – made it look smaller than it really was.

The lawn across which the girl led her new friend was so velvet- soft to the touch and so incredibly smooth that it seemed to reject as sacrilege the idea of any sportive usage except perhaps the ancient and venerable game of bowls.

Richard thought to himself that he would feel as indignant as Mr Tip if anyone suggested playing croquet or lawn tennis here. It was hieratic grass, suitable to be trodden by the most learned of all canons, as he read his Greek Testament before Matins. It was not grass from which tennis balls should be allowed to bounce.

‘How many years has it taken, do you suppose,’ he asked his little friend, ‘to get this lawn as smooth as this?’

‘That tree,’ she pointed to a tremendous cedar of Lebanon, ’is supposed to have been planted by Henry the Third. And they always planted cedars on lawns; so I suppose it was there then.’

They stepped off the grass upon a long brick path, on both sides of which was a high herbaceous border from whose carefully weeded brown earth rose in luxuriant green profusion the promise of every sort of summer perennial. Many of the plants, canterbury bells, London pride, pinks and stocks and sweet william were scarcely in bud; but ‘the wealth of the globèd peonies ‘was in full glory and the delphinium flowers were already appearing, some purple, some light blue, like delicately poised butterflies, on their tapering stalks of pale fresh green.

The brick path ended in a terrace at both its northern and southern extremity, and each terrace was overhung with white and red and yellow roses. On one of these terraces, under the massive stonework of the old monastic house, Nelly and her companion sat down upon a wooden bench.

Richard removed his hat; and with a charming blush of girlish self-consciousness, for which this time no critical demon in him found a mocking jibe, the girl did the same. –

Moved by a simultaneous impulse they then proceeded quite openly and without shame to survey one another from head to foot, smiling happily as they did so as if well pleased with the result of their scrutiny.

They made indeed a charming contrast as they sat together, the man’s grizzled hair, swarthy unbearded face, and hawk-like profile, pedestalled in the manner of some old imperial statue against a cluster of white roses, while a neighbouring spray of heavy damask ones, deep red as a wood-god’s blood, overhung the girl’s fair head, fair face, and bare slender neck. She might have been, but for her English dress, some early Forentine’s conception of Psyche waiting for her invisible lover.

‘We seem to be making friends extremely quickly,’ Nelly shyly observed, withdrawing her eyes from his face and following the sweep of the great cedar’s shadow as it turned the sun-warmed grass into cool velvety blackness.

There was a faint recrudescence of the imp of criticism in him at this. Was she, after all, just an ordinary little flirt? And then some other, subtler, deeper devil reminded him that all these pathetic, frail, wilful beings were driven by the eternal necessity of things to be something of that sort, if life was to proceed. How else could anything at all, in this chaotic world, *begin to happen*?

‘It was certainly fate,’ he remarked stupidly, his thoughts more occupied with the general situation than with anything he actually said, ‘that brought us together like this.’

‘I hope,’ she responded quickly, ‘not the fate whose name is also Sorrow.’

Richard felt slightly annoyed with her for this. He wanted her to be receptive, silent and dreamy. He didn’t want her to indulge in neat quotations from authors which he might possibly have forgotten!

‘It’s odd,’ she continued, ‘how little we know of each other except that we are getting on so well. What was it that brought you back to England?’

One of his troublesome demons prompted him to answer quick as a shot, ‘The white skin of Elise Angel,’ but what he said was quite different. ‘I’m a writer, you know – what I suppose you might call a professional critic. What I’ve done so far is to write about poetry, mostly about the French. Now what I want to do is to say something for myself, something that’s come into my mind lately, something that can’t be said in any other way except in the form of poetry.’

Nelly looked at him with deep interest. Her instinct made her aware that he was less certain of his ‘line’, less confident of his power, much more receptive to influence, than was Robert Canyot. The profound feminine passion for offering ‘help’, any sort of ‘help’, to an artist, a thinker, a person with ideas, thrilled her young blood with a thrill like the answer to a caress.

‘And you came to England because you thought you could express your real self better here than in a foreign country?’

He loved the eager girlish tone with which she said this; but the too familiar expression ‘your real self’ made him jib like a touchy horse. He seemed to remember that every woman who had ever got him into her power had used the expression ‘real self’ when the sharp claws came out from below the velvet pads.

‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘I felt I must hide away from everybody. And everybody for me means France nowadays. Why are you smiling? Was that a rude thing to say? Of course I couldn’t know I should meet Miss Nelly Moreton?’

It was the twinge of anger at being discovered in something approaching a *faux pas* that made him give her that little stab; but she did not hold it against him.

‘And Sussex?’ she inquired. ‘Why Sussex?’

‘Oh, that’s another story,’ he responded, gratified to her for letting him off, ‘that’s a matter of duty. I wanted to see the graves of my people who’re in your churchyard. My grandfather was the Vicar of Littlegate.’

The girl jumped to her feet at this, so pleased she was. To a well-brought- up young Englishwoman such clerical ancestry was a kind of hallmark of security. It meant a social equality between them which was a decided point to the good. She felt immensely reassured. *Now*, at any rate, no one could say she had acted in an unladylike manner in making friends with a stranger.

‘How silly of me!’ she cried in radiant spirits. ‘Of course your name is *Storm*; and there’s a monument in the church to the Reverend Benjamin Storm, D.D. I see it from my pew. I’d have shown it to you if I’d known. I *will* show it to you when you come out again!’

He also had risen to his feet and they stood surveying that unequalled garden with the peculiar thrill of inter-conscious pleasure which comes at the first stage of any *rapport* between the sexes and is never quite reproduced again. It is the discovery of the fact, which the solitary soul in us can hardly believe to be really true, that another person can feel, at the same moment and under the same influence, exactly what we feel. It is the stirring of the waters by the divine Eros, before the appearance of desire, jealousy, responsibility and suspicion mar and spoil it all.

The girl’s ‘I *will* show it to you when you come out again’ had been accepted by them both as natural and inevitable. The mocking demon in Richard seemed to have been exorcized by the spirit of a garden seven centuries old.

With a movement that was tenderly possessive in its gentleness he handed her her broad-brimmed hat and watched her thrust the long hat-pin into her soft hair. He resumed his own hat and picked up his stick as soon as she was ready, and there swept over both of them a delicious sense of intimacy as they moved away; as if the bench beneath the red and white roses had been some sort of a shrine that had initiated them into a sacred conspiracy.

Their silence was at that moment more voluble than any words. Their silence moved at their side as they moved, and whispered to them things sweet and strange, things older than that ancient garden. Life however turns only too quickly its terrible hourglass. Before they had even crossed the lawn their hour was gone.

They were near the little green door into the lane when an odious discord rose from just behind it. A cruel rustic laugh was followed by a chorus of gross merriment and a rush of stampeding footsteps. Then there was the noise of a shower of stones and then a bloodcurdling hush. This hush was immediately broken by a horrible cry which made them stand for a moment as if petrified. It was the cry like that of a hurt animal and yet it was sickeningly human. It had in it something weird and unnatural, something that seemed to proceed from a level of existence obscure, tragic, dark, different and alien.

The indestructible pain which like an underground stream of poison flows round the roots of all the roses in the world had burst its barriers once more. *The war was not over*.

They flung themselves together upon the little green gate, pulled it open and plunged into the alley.

They caught sight of a group of boys fleeing helterskelter round the corner, two hulking rapscallions among them, half-boys, half- men.

Squatting on the ground, his face streaming with blood, was a wretched hydrocephalic child beating on the earth with his clenched fists and uttering a horrible wailing cry. Even at that moment the callous observer in Richard’s brain noted two facts. That in one of the boy’s clenched fists was a stick of dust-covered sugar candy; and that the cry he uttered when they approached him was like the scream of a frightened plover.

Nelly Moreton was on her knees in a moment by the child’s side, staunching the blood with her handkerchief and lifting up his hands to see if they were hurt.

It was this movement that made the child think that she intended to take away his candy and with blind fury he struck at her heart. ‘That’ll do! That’ll do!’ cried Richard, bending down from above them and lifting the boy upon his feet The child staggered against the wall, hiding the hand that held the candy behind his back. ‘He didn’t mean it. He didn’t hurt me. They’ve driven him mad, the brutes! Give me your handkerchief will you? He’ll be better soon’ And she put her arm tenderly around him and pressed him tightly to her, kissing his tear-stained cheek.

The blood on the child’s forehead was soon staunched. The skin was only slightly scratched; but there appeared a great bruise where a stone had struck him.

‘I won’t take your candy away. Nice candy! Give the lady a little taste.’ The great abnormal head began to droop now against her neck and long quiet sobs took the place of his former anger.

Suddenly he became quite still, leaning against her, his face buried.

‘He seems all right now,’ said Richard; thinking in his heart – shall I have to get this child to his home? Shall I have to call upon the police or some terrible society? Shall I have to take him to a sweet shop? Have I displayed sufficient sympathy?

The girl did not speak. She seemed to derive a strange pleasure from hugging this idiot to her heart and feeling his head nestle down against her in some obscure baby-instinct.

The situation was – for Richard at least – relieved by the appearance of a red-faced panting female of about forty who, with many exclamations of ‘Thank you Mum! He be the trouble of my life Mum! Much obliged to you Mum!’ slapped the child severely, threw his squeezed-up piece of candy over the wall and dragged him off by the hand.

‘The wretch!’ cried Richard Storm when the two had gone a little way. But Nelly was watching them intently.

‘She’s not a cruel woman,’ she remarked at last. ‘She’s probably fonder of that child than of all her other children. Look!’

And Richard saw to his surprise that the woman had picked the idiot up in her arms. ‘Listen!’ murmured the girl; and a strange crooning chant made itself audible. ‘She’s singing to him,’ she said with a queer smile.

‘But she slapped him,’ remarked Richard staring after them, ‘and she threw his candy away.’

‘You all have to be slapped sometimes,’ said Nelly Moreton. ‘I wouldn’t have let him eat that filthy thing!’

They made their way slowly back to where they had left Mr Canyot. The girl was silent and abstracted, as if she still felt against her breast the head of the idiot.

Richard in his heart was making plans for the future. ‘Is there,’ he asked at last, as they came out into the open space by the cathedral, ‘any least chance of finding a room in Littlegate? I believe if I settled down there I really should be able to write.’

They were passing close to the open door of the cathedral as he made this inquiry. In the distance, just where they had left him, they could see the painter still absorbed in his work.

‘Let’s go in here for a minute,’ said Nelly. ‘I want to tell you something.’

Her tone was strained and tense. Richard was completely puzzled. Nothing, after all, had passed between them of sufficient seriousness to warrant her making confessions to him or elucidating difficult situations. She was a sweet creature, but he was by no means sure that he would ever be more than mildly attracted to her. He was still a little irritated by the flippant way she had said, ‘You all have to be slapped sometimes.’ That remark did not harmonize, he thought, with her mood in the garden. She ought to remember that, after all, he wasn’t a lad of her own age. There was a certain respect due to his – well! not grey hairs, but experience of the world!

Nelly Moreton, as she looked about for a convenient place in the great dim building, had not the remotest idea of what was going on in his mind. One of the most touching forms that a young girl’s innocence takes is her ignorance of the labyrinthine vanity of men. Respect for one’s father, quite a childish feeling, made one very considerate with old men. But a man in the prime of life, like her new friend – she took it for granted that she could say things to him, anything that came into her head, as she would have hesitated to say them to a younger person.

She found a suitable place at last for their colloquy, in a little altar-less side chapel surrounded by monuments to extinct Sussex worthies.

Richard was still too puzzled and startled, too engaged in frantically wondering what on earth she was going to say to him, to take much notice of the noble pillars and beautiful carved mouldings of the spacious antiquity about him.

As he sat down by her side, however, his eyes fixed themselves upon the recumbent image of a dead crusader lying with his mailed feet upon a crouching dog and his sword pressed close against his thigh. The hands of the figure were clasped in an eternal gesture of prayer and his whole pose suggested such absolute quiescence of patient expectation that it seemed as if nothing short of the final catastrophe could ever disturb him.

The girl seemed unwilling to break the silence that fell between them then, a silence not like that which had whispered to them in the garden, but a sad human silence, through which the gulf that divided their ages seemed to tick out the moments like a clock in a drowned ship.

Thoughts, swift as bits of wreckage on an inrushing tide, whirled one after another through Richard's brain; and, as they came, the demon observer within him noted them one by one.

Queer – what thoughts *can* follow one another without conscious incongruity! Her phrase 'You all have to be slapped sometimes,' associating him, Richard Storm, with a hydrocephalic idiot, jostled in his mind with those eternally lifted marble hands of the silent crusader. Had some daring maiden *slapped*, in her time, those solemn and courtly cheeks? Well! with that cross-handled sword on his armoured hip, he seemed able to lie quiet enough now, without any blush of tingling memory.

But what was he, Richard Storm, doing – *that* was the next thought that drifted by – seated here with this young girl? Vanity whispered to him that he had already made an emotional impression on her – where would that impression lead them both to, if it deepened and increased? Where did he desire it to lead them to? Hurriedly he moved out of the track of this final thought! She was a sweet child; but what was she to him? His business was with something deeper, more serious, more worthy of his age, than flirtations with little girls.

He became suddenly aware that Nelly Moreton was speaking to him.

'What I wanted to ask you, Mr Storm,' her voice caught in her throat just then, with a queer little sound like the gurgle of a nightingale in late summer; but she made a gallant effort and continued firmly; 'was whether you think it right for a person to go on being engaged to someone when you've come to the conclusion that you're really not suited? I know you have to be good and submit to your fate when you're married,' she went on, with another little gasp in her throat, this time more like the bursting of some dry seed-pod, ‘but it doesn’t seem as though being engaged were the same thing as being married – except that one ought to keep one’s word, I suppose, else what does one give one’s word for?’

She stopped dead at that and turned, quite unexpectedly, right full upon him, searching him with anxious candid-questioning eyes.

While she was speaking Richard’s demons had kept up such a clamour of caustic commentary that when she had finished he was glad enough to be able to smile nervously and mutter, ‘You must give me time to think.’

The trusting candour of the look she had given him left his thoughts hopelessly confused.

They came fast, the impish suggestions – such as, ‘she is angling for you’; ‘she is bored with her life at Littlegate’; ‘she has been driven by her father to accept that ass Canyot’; ‘she’s trying to excite your pity’; ‘she’s betraying some honest fellow’s affection to the first newcomer’; ‘she’s infatuated with the idea of one’s literary reputation’ – and with it all his mind became so wretchedly entangled, that the long stare he proceeded to give to the crusader’s tomb brought him nothing but the most obvious and simple answer.

‘My dear child,’ he said, turning his gaze upon the grey gloves lying so quietly in her lap while with her firm sun-warmed fingers she hugged her knees, ‘in these things you must follow your own instinct. Certainly it would be very wrong to plunge into marriage with someone you had ceased to love. No one can bind love down, or command it to remain fixed, when it wants to fly away. Much more harm is done in this world by marrying unsuitable people than by breaking promises.

‘Promises are things that oughtn’t to be brought into these matters at all. Promises ought to be confined to business and war and material affairs. You have no right to promise away the freedom of your heart. It’s like selling your soul. Your heart is not your own to promise here or there. Your heart belongs to the Great Spirit of life which gave it you. Engagement promises are only a sort of play-acting promises. If you are religious and have taken marriage vows it's quite a different matter. That's what engagements are for – to give girls like you, who've seen little of the world, a chance of changing their minds.'

The obviousness and even *naïveté* of his eloquence, considering his own sudden interest in her, seemed to him genuinely justified. If it *were* that arrogant young painter, with his bleached mop and jeering mouth, to whom the child had promised herself, the rebuff would do him good. Richard contemplated with pleasure his receiving it. It would be a shame to tie her up with a self- satisfied rascal like that, who was probably *persona grata* with half the petticoats of Bloomsbury.

He was a little surprised at the silence with which his words were received and at the unembarrassed way she fixed him with a pondering puzzled unconvinced look.

'But if breaking your word made a person very unhappy, perhaps spoilt their life?'

'Men's lives are not spoilt as easily as all that.'

'Don't you think all human lives are very easily spoilt?'

'By themselves – not by others.'

'Don't you think we ought – sometimes – to sacrifice our personal moods to larger, more important things, to things that will go on after we are dead?'

'I don't understand you. What things do you mean?'

The girl did, this time, look away from him, down the long vista of the receding pillars and arches.

‘Things of art,’ she said, and then, with heightened colour, ‘and of literature of course, too.’ She paused and gave a little sigh. ‘Things that do something,’ she added wistfully, ‘to help the struggle of the beaten ones.’

Richard’s demons were abominably active at that moment. He permitted them to whisper terrible things. One of them accused the girl of sickening sentimentality, another of odious priggishness, a third of a pedantic arrogance that was unpardonable.

What does a chit of a thing like that think she can do for a man’s serious work? Young women with what they call ‘ideals’ ought to marry carpenters or bricklayers!

His mind took a long fantastic leap. Suppose I was fool enough to cut out this precious Canyot and carry her off. How should I like her sympathy? How should I like to feel her with her eye on me, helping me to be ‘my real self’? How should I like to be reminded of ‘humanity’s struggle’ when I was in my evil mood and loathed the whole farce? How should I like to have the ‘beaten ones’ called to my attention just when I was, for one lucky moment, able to forget that men had more nerves than animals? Nom de Dieu! she makes me feel as if my whole purpose, my great secret purpose, my very poetry, were some thin tender fragile thing that had to be pressed to a virgin’s breast – that had to be mothered! Bah! Let her go. Let her marry her jeering Canyot!

The accumulated howl of all his interior demons might have gone on still longer in this manner – for his fair-haired companion had fallen into a frowning disputation with herself – if his eyes had not chanced to be arrested once more by the lifted hands of the sleeping crusader.

It happened that a shaft of the bright afternoon sun, in its flickering passage across the aisles, had fallen upon these eternally praying hands, while it left the rest of the recumbent figure in shadow. It was the merest accident, the most casual chance; yet to Richard's superstitious mind it seemed one of those omens of ambiguous decision, one of those auguries of warning, which he found himself always looking for as his life advanced; just as if he really did possess some 'tutelary genius', whose only permitted intercourse with him was through the dubious medium of such things as these.

A cloud passed across some distant window, and the light faded away; but an immense shame flooded the man's whole being, and something awoke within him that made him look at her with a changed expression.

'It is harder for me than you can believe,' she began again, raising troubled eyes to his, as if conscious of his softening. 'I can't bear to make life more difficult for another person. It's like pushing a child into the nettles instead of moving them out of the way. And I know I'm much more able to stand things going wrong than most people are. I'm awfully detached from my body, I think. It's not any credit to me. I don't seem really to mind what happens in that way.'

The poignancy of this, from a young creature at the threshold of life's deepest revelation, struck Richard, in his new receptivity, as a heartbreaking thing.

The exquisite innocent! What did she know of the ache of mortal flesh? With a virginal body like hers, 'detachment' might indeed be easy! Between faint distaste for an intimacy she had no conception of and ideal respect for 'art' and 'artists' the struggle might very well be a light one.

Richard suddenly became conscious that there really were grave possibilities of tragedy here, such as, in his preoccupation with himself, he had not focused. Suppose she were to idealize *him* as she was evidently idealizing Canyot, would it be right for him – granting he cared for her more than just enormously – to carry her off and marry her?

The ‘eternally praying hands’ gave him no light upon this. He was left at the mercy of the now reawakening voices of the ‘eternally denying’ demons in his own heart: ‘Girls have to find out what life is like just as anyone else has’; ‘she gets her pleasure out of these self-sacrificing movements’; ‘she likes offering herself up on an altar’.

As these voices subsided, and the more normal Richard thought his own thoughts again, the temporary conclusion he came to was that it all depended upon whether she was really ‘in love’ or not. If she were not, it was an outrage, unjustifiable by any sophistry. If she were – well! it became quite a different matter.

One obstinate demon in him insisted, however, upon having the final word; ‘girls can mechanically become “in love” with the man they marry out of respect and admiration. The erotic automatism of the system of things drives them to that,’

‘I’m afraid we must go now,’ said Nelly Moreton, rising with a little shiver. She wanted at that moment to relieve both her muscles and her mind by a terrific stretch and yawn, but as respectable young women do not yawn and stretch in the aisles of cathedrals she could only give a jerk to her frock and a touch to the back of her head.

They took one last comprehensive glance round the great, cool, hushed place, in which they seemed at that moment isolated from all the world, and then emerged into outer sunshine.

Robert Canyot welcomed them with quite boisterous alacrity. He was tired of painting and anxious for tea and conversation.

He packed up his things and left them in the care of a friendly lodge-keeper at the gates of the close and together they wandered down the old narrow street enjoying the epicurean pleasure of a carefully considered discussion as to where they should have tea.

They passed by several attractive places as too crowded and decided at last upon a little modest confectioner's which offered them a table in a bow window right against the street. Here they proceeded to make themselves thoroughly comfortable. The first cup and the first taste of thin bread and butter put them all into excellent spirits. Nelly, either in reaction from her troubled soliloquy, or out of some deep-buried feminine discovery, was as radiant and gay as a child; nor did the latent hostility of her companions cloud their response to her cheerfulness. They laughed and chatted and ate and drank hungrily, the men demanding boiled eggs in addition to the bread and butter, and the girl insisting upon the famous local honey.

It was not till quite the close of the meal that the smouldering antagonism between the painter and the writer began to reassert itself.

'I suppose you get quite a lot of royalties from those books of yours? I seem to remember having seen them on bookstalls in town. They're all about absinthe drinkers and cognac fiends, aren't they – with illustrations of night life in the boulevards – the sort of thing Oscar Wilde used to tell us to read?'

'They're about the literature of France,' answered Richard, keeping his temper with difficulty, 'and my Life of Verlaine is certainly illustrated; but not *all* my authors have the weaknesses you speak of. Two very interesting ones are priests.'

'They may be nuns, for all I should know,' threw out Mr Canyot. 'I daresay nuns, in France, compose literature like the rest. What puzzles me is how a sensible Englishman like yourself can waste time over such affected frippery. Come now – between ourselves – when it isn't a matter of *selling*, don't you think all this modern stuff – *vers litre* and so forth – is just tommy-rot?'

Richard was certain that he caught a direct appeal from Nelly that he should behave well under this attack. On the strength of an understanding with her he felt ready to be quite magnanimous. 'I'm not prepared to defend anything *en masse*,' he said calmly. 'But I think we're bound to take a critical interest in every new experiment.'

'Rats!' responded the other, his great corrugated youthful countenance getting red with anger as he caught a sympathetic look pass between Richard and Nelly. 'Rats! you know perfectly well that any genuine production is the result of three factors – skill, insight and inspiration. These people just flop and wallow around, and call their damned impertinence "genius". We're not by any means bound to take a critical interest in things which we know, by the smell, before we touch them, are thoroughly worthless!'

Nelly burst out laughing at this. 'Mr Storm doesn't judge literature by the smell,' she said. 'Everyone hasn't got such terrible second-sight as you have, Robert. Most of us have to read a thing before we know what it's like.'

But Mr Canyot could not be stopped. The consciousness that he was making a fool of himself drove him on.

'Experiments! You talk of experiments. What we want nowadays is *knowledge* and serious hard work.

'It's just the same with everything. I have no doubt Mr Storm is a Sinn Feiner and a pro-Bolshevik, and believes in Egypt for the Egyptians and India for the Indians. Some people are interested in nothing else but experiments; and they'll go on experimenting till everything bursts up. I tell you, what we want in these times is carefully tested first-hand knowledge –

not pretty theories; and hard steady work, not ramping around being “original”!’

Nelly’s social anxiety to keep the peace was rapidly breaking down now under an extreme schoolgirl longing to burst into an uncontrollable fit of giggling.

The forced smile assumed by Richard and his weary air of abysmal superiority struck her fancy as quite as comic as the excited rudeness of Canyot. She thought within herself, *these poor dears! – how they do go on!* And it suddenly struck her how complicated life is made for women by the mania men have for asserting their intellectual prejudices and losing all interest in the actual details before them. She herself was the ‘actual detail’ before them now, and here they were, glutting their respective mental vanities on what she knew was a perfectly irrelevant discussion, betraying that as a matter of fact they were really more *interested* in one another’s pompous ‘attitudes’ than in any possible opinion she might profess.

She had once seen, in Arundel Park, two homed stags fighting over a deer. Those animals also seemed to forget the cause of their conflict in the sheer joy of battle.

It certainly did make things more difficult when the very persons who hated one another because one liked them both displayed so much more anxiety as to just how they impressed each other than how they impressed oneself.

That part of the business they both seemed to take for granted!

She found herself wishing that there was a third man in this tea party.

‘Surely you will not deny,’ she heard Richard saying when her wandering attention returned, ‘that the least new ripple of a new point of view, of a new impression of things, of a new tone or rhythm in our reaction to things, has a profound psychological interest, even if, from the highest standard, it remains tentative and formless?'

'I do, I do deny it,' cried the young painter, striking the honey- pot a severe blow with the end of his knife. 'These "new ripples", as you call them, are not the real forward movement of the great tradition. *That*, when it appears, dominates us all, conservatives and modernists alike, by its universal human power. In my art you have a Cézanne or a Renoir. In yours you have a William Blake or a Paul Verlaine. You will notice that Cézanne and Renoir carry on the tradition of the subtlest of the great masters, just as the lyrics of Blake and Verlaine remind you of Shakespeare's—'

Richard's voice violently interrupted him. 'No! No! No! you traditionists are always so unfair to us. You treat us just as the Church treats its visionaries. Blake isn't in the least like Shakespeare, nor is Verlaine in the least like Villon, as you were probably going to remark. And how are you to know, may I ask, when to look for the *new* Renoirs and Verlaines if you take no interest in the experiments of the new people?'

Richard positively scowled at Nelly at that point because he caught her looking with interest at a dog fight in the street. Robert Canyot struck the honey-pot a terrific blow.

'Experiments,' he cried, 'are not achievements! When your new people work hard enough, and study the great men deeply enough, and stop putting down every confounded thing that comes into their heads, they'll force me to respect them. They'll be artists then. Meanwhile they're just amateur triflers, like the people who fuss over them!'

Richard's face grew dark and his fingers clenched. Was this young puppy actually daring to tell him that his monographs upon René Ghil, Gustave Kahn, Jules Laforgue, Grégoire Le Roy, and so forth, were wasted labour, unworthy of a first-class intellect?

‘I suppose you’d class Rémy de Gourmont among your experimenters,’ he snarled sarcastically, making a naïvely unconscious movement with his hand, as if to retain the attention of Miss Moreton who had risen from her seat to watch the dogs being separated. But his antagonist was too wary to be caught. ‘I know nothing of the person you speak of. No doubt from your tone I ought to, and perhaps I ought. If I ought, some day no doubt I shall; for in the end one always does come across the real achievements.’

‘Perhaps that’s what these “fussy amateurs” you scoff at are *for*,’ flung back the older man; ‘in order that these deserving ones shall not have to wait till they’re dead for the honour of being appreciated by Mr Robert Canyot!’

At this point – was it with the intention of letting her new friend have the last word? – Nelly Moreton resolutely broke in. ‘Sorry to change the conversation,’ she said, ‘but if we’re to get back in time for supper we must really make a start.’

Less shamefaced than they deserved, and avoiding one another’s eyes so obviously that the girl couldn’t help comparing them to the two dogs who were now being dragged away by their respective masters, the men rose to their feet, and Canyot went to the little desk to pay for their meal.

They moved off together back again up the street which was now golden and mellow with the slanting sunshine.

Richard felt tempted, when the artist had secured his belongings at the close-gate, to suggest that he should accompany them some portion of their way, for the fact of his having, as he felt, put the young man into his place gave him a feeling of magnanimity.

But Nelly Moreton bade him goodbye at that point in so very definite a manner that his project was nipped in the bud. Canyot, pleased at the thought of having his friend to himself for that pleasant walk through the buttercups, shook hands with him graciously, almost apologetically. And Richard himself turned away not unpleased, since her final word to him was emphatic. ‘You must come over and see my father.’

It was not till much later in the day, when recalling every incident of that afternoon, that he remembered a sharp piercing look that Canyot had turned upon him and Nelly at one moment during their conversation. *That fellow can’t be easily fooled*, he thought.

Chapter 3

IT WAS ALWAYS a luxurious and pleasant moment for Nelly, when after a knock as gentle as her round knuckles could administer, the all-competent Grace brought her hot water and tea. It was delicious to lie with closed eyes, still half-wrapped in the filmy cloud of sleep, while the sweet airs floated in through the open windows, mingled with the crooning of the dove and the reedy call of the blackbird.

Generally she let Grace put down the tray and the bright-polished can, and carry off her outdoor shoes, without movement or sign. But on the morning after her day in Selshurst she sat up in bed with wide-open eyes.

‘I likes to see ‘ee with all that pretty hair, Miss Nelly. Mercy, ’tis a shame a lovely young lady like you should have to fasten ‘un up. None do know,’ cept those as sees ‘ee like this and They Above, how winsome a body ‘ee be grown into.’

Nelly pushed back her hair with both hands. ‘Where’s my ribbon?’ she said. Grace stooped, picked it up from the floor, lifted the hair carefully from the slender neck and tied it back, giving it a final caress with her great hand as if it belonged to a favourite doll.

‘How’s Mr Moreton this morning, Grace?’

The maid’s countenance became grave. ‘He ‘ave worked in’s study since afore I was up, Miss, I do fear it; working and thinking, thinking and muttering to ‘isself. Not that it’s my place to sy anything, Miss Nelly; but us remembers what us do remember, and how ’twas like this afore ‘ee wrote that letter to them great ones wot worrited ‘ee so dreadful. I didn’t mean like to trouble ‘ee with what ‘ee do know as well as I, Miss. But I ‘eard the

Master with my own ears telling Mr Lintot only yesterday that there ‘baint no God in Heaven.’ Twas terrible to listen to ‘un, strike me blind, if it weren’t; for ‘a did carry on so about one thing and another that Mr Lintot he up and said he couldn’t listen to any more on’t.’ Tweren’t right nor natural that he should listen to such things, spoke by one of Master’s holy profession. There, Miss Nelly,’ ee mustn’t take on. What must be must be; what’s writ to come’ll surely come; and them as calls down Tuesday’s rain on Monday’s roses will never see the gates of Jerusalem.’

Saying this with a consolatory leer, as if it were a piece of the most cynical worldly wisdom, Grace picked up her mistress’s shoes, still all covered with gold-dust from the walk through the buttercups, and left the room.

Nelly jumped hastily out of bed and pulled the curtains across the open windows. She bathed and dressed rapidly today, cutting short the long leisurely peeps she was accustomed to take in intervals of her dressing at the familiar face of the distant Downs.

The little house they lived in had quite recently been ‘done over’, and as the girl ran down and entered the breakfast room she felt proud of the effect of the labour she and Grace had bestowed upon it. Everything looked so peculiarly cheerful with fresh-painted wood and whitewashed walls and clean chintz covers and curtains.

She had got rid of a drawing room altogether and she and her father had their meals in a lightly furnished south-aspected room which she used during the rest of the day as her own resort.

But the nicest room in the house was her father’s study, a large airy place with a low ceiling and french windows opening on the garden.

Here her father kept his natural history collections – cabinets of birds’ eggs and bureau drawers full of butterflies and moths – and here he read an endless sequence of scientific volumes.

The Vicar of Littlegate was a lean Don Quixote-looking old man with a long narrow face and melancholy blue eyes. He was very tall and his knotted fingers, as he stooped over his food, touching, the bread as if it were a botanical specimen laid out to be examined, hung from his thin arms like the fantastic hands of a withered ash tree.

On this particular morning Mr Moreton seemed to have no appetite for anything but bread, which he ate in large mouthfuls, washing it down with enormous cups of sugarless, milkless tea. He kept rising from his chair when his daughter needed anything from the sideboard, and was always putting things on her plate and encouraging her to eat, with little friendly exclamations as if she were some pet animal rather than the mistress of the house.

‘Some more furniture came yesterday for that little place of Canyot’s,’ he remarked with a glance at the window. ‘He ought to be able to move in in a day or two. It’ll be nice for him after the farm. I hope Betsy-Anne’s Rose will look after him all right. She’ll be able to be there most of the days. She’s a funny rough girl; but a good girl I daresay. She comes to the Sacrament.’ And he sighed heavily.

‘Yes, it’ll certainly be much nicer for Robert up there than down at the farm,’ responded Nelly, looking anxiously at the old man’s troubled face.

‘It’s what he’s been aiming at ever since you and he were engaged,’ continued Mr Moreton. ‘He’s good to me, is Rob Canyot. He understands my difficulty. He agrees with me that I can’t go on as I’m going on now. It was because he saw how I love this place for the sake of the plants and the birds and the insects that he first thought of taking it, I believe. It was a good kind thought of his, my dear, and I hope you’ll make a good wife to him.’

Nelly’s delicate transparent cheeks lost every drop of colour. ‘But, dear Father, you don’t mean to say that Robert wants us to be married quite soon? I thought – oh, I thought – that it wasn’t to be for several years! I didn’t dream that he intended *me* to live in Hill Cottage.’

The old man fidgeted a little and looked uneasy. ‘Well, I ought to tell you, perhaps,’ he said, ‘that I did discuss things with Rob Canyot quite openly the other night. I told him frankly that if I resigned my living I should be totally without an income. He agreed with me that at my age and with my book on Sussex flora unfinished it would be wrong for me to try my hand at any other work. And so – to cut it short – he was very kind and said that of course I could live with you at the cottage. He said that his pictures had begun to sell well and that in addition to what he made that way he had a generous allowance from his mother. In fact he told me not to worry about the matter any further, but to consider it settled. He put it in such a way as to make me feel quite happy about living with you – as if my being with him, you know, and our conversations about science and the local flora and the insects and everything, were a real help to him in his work.’

As Nelly looked at her father uttering these words, the old man’s fanatical head, with the furrowed forehead and the noticeable wart on the high-bridged nose, took to itself the appearance of some ancient remorseless idol upon whose mechanical decision, entirely divorced from all reason and pity, her whole future depended. Her delicately moulded white face stiffened into a rigid mask of nervous tension and little twitching wrinkles appeared between her eyebrows.

The low-voiced crooning of the doves, in the sycamore outside, teased her as something ill-timed, and the flowers on the table, picked by herself the day before, assumed the curious look which flowers have when they attend on some mortal disaster.

The more she contemplated the fatal cul-de-sac, into which an evil focusing of apparently malleable circumstances had pushed her, the more devastating the prospect looked.

The trap she had so innocently, step by step, walked into, narrowed upon her at that moment with what seemed like iron bands. She felt almost afraid of making the least movement of resistance lest the thing's remorseless teeth should close with a snap. And yet, resist she must! A way of escape in some direction there *must* be. Life couldn't intend to crush her with a stone before she had even begun to live.

'I suppose, Father,' she began, in a voice that sounded like someone else's voice, some voice of a harassed young woman in some unreal story. 'I suppose there's no chance of the bishop being willing to let you keep your work, in spite of your change of views?'

The old man looked fiercely at her. 'Haven't I told you, child? It's not our bishop. It's the authority in London. But it's not really that either. It's my own conscience and self-respect. How can I go on reading the services here when I have ceased to believe a word of it? My plain duty, as an honest man, is to resign.'

The corners of Nelly's mouth drooped piteously. Tears came into her eyes. She bit her lip. 'I don't believe it would have happened – any of it – if mother had lived.'

'Your mother would have completely understood me,' said the old man severely. 'She always did understand me. However, if you're determined to make it harder for me—'

With a brave effort she swallowed her tears and spoke more calmly. 'But, Father dear, I *know* you still believe in Christ. You couldn't *not* believe in

Him and consecrate the Sacrament every morning as you do. It is only some theological difficulty you have, quite separate from what is really important. You know what the bishop said when you went to see him.'

The old man rose to his feet before her, a quavering tower of inarticulate passion. His long fingers twisted and trembled as they hung by his side. His hands jerked at the end of his long thin arms. The fleshy portion of his face seemed to draw itself tightly in, over the bony substructure, and his eyes glared as if from a cavernous pit.

'How *dare* you quote that man to me! Didn't I tell you? He treated me like a silly woman with some ridiculous mania that meant nothing. He wouldn't even *hear* what I had to say. He just talked and talked, pretty conventional nothings, and then took me into his garden and showed me his sweet-peas! And I had come to let him know, as my spiritual superior, the deepest thoughts of my soul. His sweet-peas! His episcopal sweet-peas!' and the old man sank down again into his chair, exhausted with his outburst. His face quickly changed from that queer drawn look and assumed his normal expression but Nelly noted a weary world-tired droop about him that startled her. Yes, it was clear that something must be done. His mind was troubled to its very foundations.

She moved over to his side. 'Dearest Father!' she said gently – 'I think I do understand you.' She bent down and kissed his high grizzled forehead, upon which the hair grew rough and stubbly, as one sees it in portraits of the philosopher Schopenhauer.

But after that, she left the sitting room and went out hatless into the garden, and beyond the garden into a cornfield behind the churchyard, where the early rye was already up to her waist. She walked slowly along a little path with the green rye on both sides of her, the ground at her feet tangled with red pimpernel and rose-coloured fumitory and tiny wild pansies. But she had no heart just then for these things. The very song of the skylark above her seemed to harden itself into a cruel screen of mockery, separating her from the heavens and the healing of their remote peace.

Never had her mind been so shaken from its normal quietness. She had known vaguely that her feeling for Canyot was not what she expected from ‘being in love’. But like so many others before her, she had, in her ignorance of what that real feeling meant, taken the romance and the passionate idealism of her own heart and woven them around her respect, her admiration, her girlish hero-worship.

And now this sudden coming of Richard on the scene, this mysterious poet from Paris, had revealed to her the limits, the bare, hard, clear limits, of what she felt for her betrothed. It was not that she dared yet to give any name to the obscure attraction she was aware of towards the older man. It was only that his appearance upon the stage at all altered her perspective and revealed the outlines of the trap she had innocently walked into.

And the teeth of the trap, the iron clutch against which she had not yet the courage to press her weight, lest she could not move it, was this new development with regard to her father. Here was indeed a trick, a cunning device, a malevolent ambush of fate, such as she had never expected life was capable of!

It was quite clear that they couldn’t be left adrift, without a roof and without a penny. Her father was of course far too old to do anything for himself, except this business with plants and insects which after all was only an old man’s hobby. She supposed that in these days of women’s freedom she could find something for herself. But she had no experience. She had not even done any serious ‘war work’. And how could she support both herself and her father?

They had no relations to whom she could appeal, her father's eccentricity and pride having completely estranged his own connections, whereas her aunts, her dead mother's sisters, were far too poor themselves to be of any help.

Weary and sick in soul the girl turned back to the house to assist Grace in her various household tasks. One tiny faint stream of sweetness, like the up-flow of an inland spring underneath a weight of brackish water, filtered through to her troubled brain through all the bitterness. This exciting newcomer into the circle of her life, this Parisian descendant of old Dr Storm, did undoubtedly seem to want her sympathy.

She knew well enough, by an instinct as direct and sure as that by which the birds build their nests, that the man had grievous need of such as she was, and she knew by the same instinct how angrily he was reacting against his need of her.

Those cynical conclusions of dispassionate scrutiny he called his 'demons' were not by any means so hidden from her as the good man dreamed in his vain masculine aloofness that they were.

Indeed, what really attracted her to him was not the power in him but the weakness in him; or to put it quite precisely the peculiar mingling of power and weakness which made up that troubled essence he named his soul.

That was where the difference lay between him and Robert. Robert was always something to lean upon, something to look up to, something to rely upon and be sure of. But Robert never made any attempt to drag her into the circle of his deepest thoughts. He treated her tenderly but he never confided in her. To him she was a child to be protected.

This man from Paris, for all his heavier weight of years and certainly in spite of himself and to his evident annoyance, could not, it seemed, do anything else than *lay bare his deepest soul before her* – and in doing this he could not prevent himself, in spite of his immense vanity, from appealing to her maternal instinct. Her betrothed was always the strong elder brother, though his years were so near her own; whereas this man, twice her own age, began to look like that grown-up child which, once in every woman's life, becomes her most fatal attraction when, among all the other appeals, he at last takes to himself a palpable embodiment.

Nelly saw nothing more of her father till half the morning was over, and nothing of Robert Canyot. This hardly surprised her, as they had had a serious misunderstanding – if it *was* a misunderstanding – on their way home the night before; and she guessed he had gone off, to punish her, upon some long solitary excursion.

This is what he invariably did when anything clouded their intercourse; and his returns from these excursions had hitherto been marked by their happiest *rapprochements*.

It was in a strangely mingled mood that Nelly busied herself with her various domestic labours that morning. The sense of being most evilly hemmed in remained with her – a feeling as if she were an unsheared sheep pushed from behind down a narrow lane of hurdles towards the fatal jump into the sheep wash – but with it all there moved within her a new delicious thrill, vague and indistinct as the scent of an unknown flower, causing her every now and then to stop in the midst of her work and stand dreaming, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, oblivious to Grace's chatter. Grace came from the West Country and was more voluble and less civilized than the local Sussex maidens. But on this particular occasion she found her young mistress singularly *distraite*. When the morning was well advanced she left the servant to prepare their mid-day meal and went out into the garden. In an old straw hat and a still older apron she set herself to weed one of the flower borders, the one which adjoined the churchyard wall.

The wall was not a low one, but by clambering up on a little ledge created by the collapse of some ancient cement she was just able to peep over it. She found it difficult to prevent herself from repeating this manoeuvre more than once. And every time she did it she had a vague hope that she might catch sight of Richard Storm standing by his grandfather's headstone.

It was somewhere about her seventh peep – she would always henceforth associate that visionary figure with the pungent smell of ivy and its queer bitterness against her mouth – that she became aware, as she rested her chin against the tiny succulent wall plants that grew in the loose mould and moss, that her father had appeared on the scene and was doing something to her mother's grave.

Cecily Moreton had not had a particularly happy life. She had been too hard-worked. But neither had she been unhappy. And Nelly had a clear recollection of a gentle soft-eyed creature bending over her pillow. She associated her mother with the Evening Hymn of Bishop Kern, the courtier-saint of King Charles the Second, and also (such is memory!) with one rare moment of passion in which the lady had flung the big hand-bell, which stood on the hall table, full against the door through which her husband had just passed! The dent in the door, though painted over, still remained. The hand that had thrown it was less distinguishable.

What was her father doing to the grave? He seemed to be prodding at it with a trowel or spud.

She ran round to the gate and hurried anxiously to the old man's side. What he was doing was inoffensive and natural enough. He was planting a somewhat rare wild orchid, of the kind known as 'maculata', in the grass by the side of the monument. He was indeed 'botanizing' on his wife's grave; but with no intent except to do her honour.

He patted the earth down with the trowel and pressed it still more firmly round the drooping plant with his aged knuckles. He rose when his daughter approached, holding the trowel in his hand.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘let’s show them that I’m a believer in Christ, whatever I may think about that *Eidolon Vulgaris* they call God.’

He took her by the hand and led her into the church. She noticed that the other hand, the one which held the trowel, was shaking from old age.

It was not the first time he had insisted on celebrating the Anglican Mass at the noon hour.

He retired into the vestry to robe while the girl sat, sad and thoughtful, in the pew she had known since childhood. She almost expected to see him come out with the trowel still tightly clutched in his fingers; but he was quite quiet and self-possessed when he did emerge, carrying with him the sacred elements. He went through the service in English till he came to the words of consecration. These, as he always did in his solitary celebrations, he pronounced in the traditional Latin.

Nothing could surpass in reverence the passionate faith with which he then knelt down before the substance which he believed he had been permitted to transform into the actual flesh of his Redeemer.

Nelly, with her head buried in her hands, sobbed quietly and softly. Her tears were an immense relief to her. Even as she wept she felt a strange thrill of happiness rise up from some unfathomable depth. She was too feminine to fret very much with regard to the unconventionally of the thing. The rite was a mystery to her, not a doctrine; and no irregularity in its administration could lessen its power over her senses and her soul.

She rose from her knees and left the church before the service was over. She knew her father preferred her to come and go as she had a mind. In these matters he had always been singularly indulgent. She thought as she went out how curious it was that the unruly working of the human heart, its deep dark erratic plunges into the unknown, its incurable and obstinate fantasy, could be quelled and soothed as though by some simplicity of natural healing, in the presence of this ritual.

But an idea had come to her as she had knelt there, an idea that she could not help regarding as something put into her mind by what Grace always described as They Above. She would take the opportunity of Canyot's absence to walk over to West Horthing.

She ran into the house full of recovered courage and energy, changed her dress, put on her best hat, and made haste to prepare lunch.

During the meal her father was very silent, evidently brooding upon something. He had recovered his appetite however and looked more resolute and obstinate than unhappy. Nelly could not help thinking how strange it was that such a passionate act of faith in the very secret of love itself, as that service of the Mass amounted to, should leave a person just as little able to enter into the feelings of another person as before!

The old man seemed conscious of no kind of inconsistency, of no sort of betrayal of his high office. Fierce fanatical pride made him prepared to go through anything and remain as he chose to remain.

She looked shrewdly at his face across the table; and she knew that even if she said to him, 'I don't want to marry Robert,' it would not alter his purpose one jot. And yet he had only just changed a morsel of bread into the very body of the Lord! Men are queer creatures!

When the meal was over – he had taken not the least notice of her dress and hat – the old man retired to sleep for a while upon the horse-hair sofa in his own study. Nelly had never presumed to improve upon that sofa. It was all she ever dared to do, just to dust his books and shelves and cabinets.

He stretched himself out at full length, a queer and disconcerting figure of inflexible assurance, his feet, with their great square-toed boots, protruding from beneath an old shawl of his wife’s. In repose his face assumed the expression of a very old peasant, worn out with labouring in the fields.

Nelly took a quick glance at him through the french window as she passed down the garden. Poor old man! If only he could analyse her heart as scrupulously as he analysed his Sussex flora!

Quietly and resolutely she opened the garden gate and set out towards the Downs. West Horthing was a village poised high above the great seigniorial park, at the point where the more luxuriant foliage of the lower slopes merges into the sheep-browsed turf of the bare upper Downs.

In less than an hour after leaving her home Nelly found herself seated at the familiar dark-oak tea table, in the dainty drawing room of her friend Mrs Shotover. The old lady was alone and in just the humour to give her whole attention to the troubles of her youthful protégée.

In earlier days, before her engagement to Robert, she had been accustomed to confide all her girlish whims, caprices, hopes and ambitions to the sympathetic ears of the mistress of Furze Lodge. But during the last six months, since she had definitely accepted Mr Canyot, her visits had become fewer and fewer. For Mrs Shotover had from the very first strongly disapproved of the engagement. Nelly had tried to dispel her prejudice. Twice or even three times she had brought Mr Canyot to see her. But it was no use. The painter had refused to be what Nelly called his ‘real nice self. He had shown himself taciturn and reserved, brusque and awkward. He had refused to respond to Mrs Shotover’s friendly little jests. He had even on one occasion been positively rude. And the old lady’s initial prejudice against him, a thing based upon nothing more tangible than that he wasn’t

Altogether the gentleman', had grown into something uncommonly like hostility. The issue of it had been that Nelly had gradually dropped the habit of confiding in her old friend.

But on this occasion, long before she had satisfied her hunger on the tea-cakes and raspberry jam which Mrs Shotover produced for her especial benefit, she had poured into her ears all her troubles.

She had even, after a momentary hesitation which made the old woman want to hug her to her heart, told her the whole story of her meeting with Richard Storm.

'Number two eh?' laughed the ancient creature. 'Oh, that's nothing. Don't you worry about that, sweetheart. Why, at your age, my dear, it was number five with me. You were too quick to proclaim things. That was all. No harm done. In my time we weren't allowed to make fools of ourselves till Papa and Mamma had studied half the genealogies of the county. You young people are so hasty. On today, off tomorrow – bit like Henry the Eighth, wasn't it? You all want to have religious services performed over your least flirtations. It's the influence of that domestic immoralist Robert Browning. Never marry a man called Robert, my dear. All Roberts are descended from Robert the Devil.'

Nelly interrupted her with a laughing sigh.

'Poor old Robert!' she murmured. 'He'll be really hurt, I'm afraid.' The accumulated stirrings of revolt that betrayed her into this very definite bulletin of the state of her heart frightened her as she uttered it. She had really begun to put her weight, then, against the teeth of the trap? And it seemed as if they yielded a little. Or was it just a passing response to the perilous irresponsibility of her hostess?

'Don't you worry yourself ill over any Robert. They're none of them worth it. Nor any Richard either, for the matter of that! But you may bring number two to see me if you like. I've read something of his in the *Mercure de France*. It pleased me; if I'm not confusing him with that clever Belgian – you know who I mean?'

Nelly hadn't the least idea who she meant, but she begged earnestly to be allowed to see the article in question.

'Not I!' laughed the old woman mischievously. 'I'm not going to corrupt your mind. Does your Richard write in his native tongue as well?'

'Oh yes! He wrote that Life of – of – who was it now?' And Nelly felt a vivid pang of humiliation because at that moment, when she especially wanted to do so, she could *not* recall the Life of Someone, to which reference had been made during their silly quarrel in the tea shop. 'It was those two dogs,' she muttered, blushing.

The old woman looked at her whimsically. 'Dogs?' she cried, getting up from the table. 'You don't mean to say that number two writes Lives of Dogs? Well, that *is* interesting.' She stooped, as they both moved towards the sofa, and addressed a great complacent tabby-cat that lay curled up in the corner of it.

'Do you hear that, Tabbyskins? He writes Lives of Dogs. Perhaps if you're very nice to him and don't show your claws, but only purr, when he strokes your fur the wrong way, he will write your life – the Life of Mrs Tabbyskins Shotover, the great Sussex Thinker. You'll like to have your life written by a real poet, wouldn't you my treasure? Well, my dear– 'and turning to her young guest she pulled her affectionately down by her side and patted her on the knee'–now tell me a little more about this Mr Storm of yours. He's a gentleman, I suppose?'

Nelly smiled. "Yes, I should certainly say he is that,' she answered. 'When you don't notice that they're *not*, they generally *are*, aren't they, Granny?'

In earlier days Mrs Shotover had encouraged her to use this endearment; and it was a sign of reconciliation that she used it now.

‘His grandfather was a D.D. and is buried in our churchyard,’ the girl added with solemnity.

Mrs Shotover smiled. ‘My dear!’ she cried, ‘I hope you don’t think that D.D. is a mark of gentility. They used to make ’em D.D.s when they dedicated their sermons to Queen Anne. Parson Adams was a D.D. and they used to give him his meals in kitchens and places. What was your beau’s grandfather’s name?’

‘Storm,’ murmured Nelly, frowning a little. Then her face brightened. ‘But it says on the tombstone that Susanna was the daughter of John Molyneux Talbot.’

Mrs Shotover chuckled. ‘You’ve certainly got hostages for his good behaviour in your churchyard! Susanna’s a good name. Though if I remember right, one of them found it difficult once to keep herself *to* herself! But Susanna Talbot is a good sound name for anybody’s grandmamma. Well, my sweet child, you must bring your Stormy Petrel over here for me to scrutinize. I’ll ferret him out, depend on it! I’ll show him up if he’s a blackguardly villain. I’ll storm his defences. What did he do in the war? Did he fight? Was he in the Legion? Of course he’s in love with you, my dear! Who wouldn’t be? But we must be careful. We must take our time. Who knows? He may have the most obstinate little *ménage* hidden away somewhere! We mustn’t have our sweet Nell made unhappy. We must go very slow. Very slow and very carefully.’ And the old lady proceeded to put her caution into practice by kissing her companion as mischievously and slyly as if it were the girl’s wedding morning.

Nelly replied as freely as she could to all her friend’s questions. One thing, however, instinct told her to keep unrevealed; and that was the fact of

Mr Richard Storm being so much older than herself. *Let her*, she thought, *find* that *out after she sees how nice and young and unspoilt he is in his mind*!

It was a little later in the afternoon, while they were looking at Mrs Shotover's fine roses, that Nelly ventured upon the topic of the writer's desire to secure some quiet lodging in that neighbourhood so as to work undisturbed at some new enterprise.

The old lady laughed uproariously. 'My dear girl you *have* indeed got on! Lodgings in the neighbourhood? What next? Why in my time they used to be satisfied if they came down from town for very short weekends. You're surely not such a dear stupid as to think he'd land himself out here for the summer if there wasn't someone he was after. Of course it *may* not be you. He may have an *inamorata* in Selshurst – though that's not likely. Much more possible he's got some little French friend down at Fogmore. But don't you fool your innocent little heart into believing that bosh about his having to write some great work. They all have to write great works when they want to enjoy themselves!'

Nelly made no reply for some minutes to this tirade. Then, with her hand on the stem of a great cluster of red roses into which she was prepared to plunge her face if what she said became too embarrassing, she uttered a faint protest.

'But Granny, I can't quite understand you. You don't mean that if a man were really immoral, and really had – people – like you speak of – dependent upon him – whether in Fogmore or anywhere else – that it would be right for him to marry?'

The old lady promptly defeated the girl's intention of burying her face in the rosebush after this outbreak, by pulling her back into the path. 'Little goose!' she cried with severe emphasis. 'Get this into your pretty head.

There are no such things as moral men in these days – except such dear stick-in-the-muds as neither you nor I could stand for a fortnight! Well! perhaps that's going a little far, considering that my dear old George was faithful to me for forty years. But you would probably have been bored with George. What you girls have to do is to draw the line between honest naughtiness and sheer ill-bred blackguardism. If you're looking for a Sir Galahad, my dear baby, you'd better give up the thought of marrying anybody. What you have to do is to choose some well-bred gentleman who knows the world and make him fall in love with you. He'll deal with his past life for himself. That'll be *his* affair – *your* affair will be to keep him interested and to bear him children. Men with any sensitiveness are faithful to their children, even if they're not faithful to their wives. The sooner you get over this Sir Galahad business the sooner you'll be a sensible little girl.

'It's a choice between boredom, my sweet, and uncertainty. If the fellow's a gentleman and not a fool, you'll never have anything worse than uncertainty. And the woman who can't live with uncertainty had better go into a nunnery or die an old maid. The wives who go about looking, as they say, "unhappy" are either selfish creatures who're as bad as the men they condemn, in their fussiness over their, precious little selves, or they are unlucky innocents who've never had any Granny to tell them what this world is like. Don't look so wild and scared, child. Things aren't as bad as all that. If your Stormy Petrel has had his little pleasures, as no doubt he has, it's quite likely that he'll make a most quiet companion. The worst ones often do. For my part I'd sooner see you married to a man of the world – that's to say if he were a gentleman – than to some hot-headed boy who'd clear off bag and baggage directly he got tired of you and found some other scatter-brain.'

It was at this point that Nelly was encouraged to reveal what she had hitherto held back. ‘He *is* a lot older than me, Granny. His hair is just a little tiny bit grey, at the sides!’

The old woman patted her on the back and chuckled mischievously. ‘It’ll soon be grey at the top as well,’ she threw out, ‘if you’re as naïve with him as you’ve been sometimes with me.’

She escorted her visitor as far as the end of the drive, between the old beeches.

‘Old Nancy there,’ she said, pointing to a little cottage that stood just at the corner where the drive left the road, ‘takes lodgers sometimes. But no hurry, my dear, no hurry. Bring him up to see me as soon as you like. And don’t let your thoughts run too quickly ahead!’ This final word seemed to her advisable, considering the radiant expression that came into Nelly’s face when she mentioned the possibility of Nancy’s cottage.

‘Oh youth! youth!’ sighed the old lady as she returned alone to her house, ‘but I always knew she was never properly in love with that ruffian Canyot. I wonder if number two does care at all? Oh youth! Oh youth!’

Chapter 4

AT THE VERY moment when, in the house of his enemy, his betrothed was drinking tea, the ‘ruffian Canyot’, as that same enemy had styled him, was seated with his sketchbook on the bank of an old moat-like pond only five or six miles away.

This pond fronted a ruined priory now converted into a farmhouse and was a place of rare imaginative possibilities.

By his side stood a child of about eleven, ugly and untidy, but with large intelligent eyes, eyes that surveyed the young man’s face with intent concentrated sympathy.

‘We’re friends, eh?’ said Robert Canyot.

The little girl nodded furiously and frowned a little.

‘And you can’t tease me and order me about, as most friends do, because you can’t speak, eh, Sally-Maria?’ Once more the child nodded.

‘Because, you know, I found out last night that a grown-up person who I thought loved me best of all didn’t really and truly love me; not in her deep-down heart; not as you will love, I hope, someone some day, Sally-Maria.’

The child made a quick sudden movement with her hands as if in protest. Then she stooped down and kissed his sleeve. Canyot patted her gently on the head. ‘Yes, when they’re grown up they’re not faithful and true like you kiddy. Better let them go. Don’t you think so, Sally-Maria? No use trying to hold them when they want to go.’ He continued for a while sketching in silence, the child watching every movement of his pencil in fascinated absorption. ‘How many times have I been here, Sally-Maria?’

The little girl smiled at him at last and held up four fingers. ‘As many as that? You’ve watched with me four times – four long afternoons; and you’re not tired of me yet!. You can't be a real girl, Sally-Maria. You must be a bird or a cat or a squirrel. Perhaps you're a goblin. But you can't be a girl. If you were I should be looking about for you everywhere today. I should be saying to myself, "Where's Sally-Maria gone?" And you'd be off with some nice new friend! And then if you did come back, just out of pity, you'd look at me sideways, wondering to yourself how you ever *could* have cared for such a stupid fellow. Wouldn't you, Sally-Maria?'

The dumb child shook her head violently at this and even made a strange inarticulate sound with her mouth – a sound that resembled the whistling rattle of a missel thrush.

'I tell you what I must do. I must come up here tomorrow if it's a fine day, and bring my painting things and try and paint all this. I've sketched it often enough so I ought to make a good thing out of it, don't you think so, little water rat? Ah! that's what you are, a faithful little water rat.' The scene before him was certainly one of remarkable, if somewhat melancholy, significance. Dark laurel bushes were reflected in sombre greenish-black water, and a group of scotch-firs, looking strange and exotic in that Sussex landscape, stood out against the mossy buttressed wall of the farm building. Where the buildings ended there arose another wall, composed not of masonry but of clipped ilex, solid and impenetrable, a living fortress of perennial darkness, at this time of the year lightened just a little by the sprouting of new evergreen leaves.

Between both these walls, the animate one and the inanimate one, and the edge of the pond, there grew in rank profusion a mass of succulent *umbelliferae*, their transparent stalks and greenish-white flowers looking as if they were plants of darkness and moonlight enduring for a while the unnatural rays of the sun, while they waited for the diurnal return of their native obscurity.

'That's what you are, a faithful little water rat!' repeated the painter, looking jeeringly into the great eyes of the ugly dumb child. 'And what's more, I'm afraid you won't have a very happy life unless you learn to betray and change and flatter and tell huge howling lies.'

The child made ghastly movements with its throat and palate and emitted a sound like the noise made by the corn-crake.

'What's that, Sally-Maria; what's that you're saying? You don't *want* to live a happy life unless you can be faithful and keep promises and not deceive? Go and eat hemlock roots then, little water rat, like the great Socrates, and leave this world of human beings to lie and lie and lie and be pretty and happy! Socrates wasn't a beauty, Sally-Maria. He was very very ugly. He was the ugliest person ever born. But he couldn't bear to deceive people. He spoke right out what he thought. Perhaps that's why they turned him into an owl. You hear owls at night, don't you Sally-Maria? Do you remember when we saw that great white one over there? I told you what it was then; I told you not to be afraid. Whenever you hear that old fellow now, when you lie in bed, you must say to yourself: *he's a kind one, he's an honest one, he never eats little faithful water rats. He just hoots and hoots and hoots because human beings are so false!*'

Two men came round the hedge corner at that moment and stopped by their side. 'You'm talking to our little Sal, mister, I see, same's usual,' said one of them, the simple-headed foreman of the place. 'Yes, sure enough. I most always sees 'un talkin' wi' the maidy when 'ee comes hereabouts,' remarked the other, a frail wraith of a man but heavily bearded, as though a human beard should grow upon a ghost-face and be more palpable and real than the countenance to which it belonged.

'Making a picture there I see, mister?' continued the foreman – 'I'd had the old place cleaned a bit for 'ee and polished up like if I'd a' known you was goin’ to do it. ’Tis a queer old place like to live in, day in, day out. But, lord alive, we’ve got to live as well as we may somewheres, so’s to die comfortable and as late as us may. That’s what I sez to Passon Moreton, I sez.’

‘Ho! Ho! Ho!’ laughed the wraith-like carter, while his goat-beard wagged and shook. ‘That’s what a’ sez – nothing short o’ that. A terrible old hole, a’ sez, and his Reverence had to take it from ‘un.’

‘Live as well, day in, day out, as the belly allows for, in these up-down times, so’s to die as late as the Lord be willing,’ repeated the foreman, planting his feet wide apart and leering at the universe through little screwed-up eyes. Once more the carter’s frail form shook with merriment, at this daring piece of wit. That’s just what ‘ee sez and Passon Moreton ‘eed a got to take it from ‘un, ‘ee ‘ad, meek as a lamb.’

The young artist made as though he would resume his work, but the two men seemed disinclined for some reason to leave his side, Behind his back, as he sat hunched up upon a fallen log, they were now making mute signs to each other, while the little dumb girl stared in amazement at them.

‘Tell ’im plain out,’ whispered the bearded shadow to the burly confounder of parsons, ‘it mayn’t be as us thinks it is, anyway knowing is knowing and the written word’s the written word.’

The burly man fumbled in his pocket and produced a dirty scrap of newspaper.

The preoccupied painter, glancing up at the child in front of him, caught such a look of alarm upon her face that he turned his head sharply. ‘Anything the matter?’ he inquired.

The foreman walked slowly round and stood in front of him, while the carter, shuffling uneasily after his superior, peered round at the hedge, the bushes, the pond and the hemlocks, as if expecting a sudden onrush of interested spectators hurrying to witness this dramatic occurrence.

‘Us seed ‘ee from the yard, us did, mister,’ murmured the second man, giving his stammering companion a little dig in the side, ‘an us thought the sooner we’d ‘a told ‘ee what ’twas ‘as been and got itself brought to light in them newspapers, the sooner ‘ee’d be acquainted with the injured party, like.’

‘‘Tweren’t I and’twern’t Charley as read about this terrible thing,’ murmured the lusty foreman in a tone of profound apology, evidently fearing, as some ancient slave of the house of Oedipus might once have feared, lest the bearer of evil news should himself meet with disaster.

‘No! ‘tweren’t Mr Priddle and ‘tweren’t I what discovered that your mother had been runned over by a railway train.’ Twas old Miss Stone what lives over the hill ‘as told us.’

Robert Canyot leapt to his feet and snatched the bit of paper out of the man’s hand. It was a brief statement that a lady who gave a London address had been knocked down by a shunted track at Selshurst Station and had been carried to the hospital. Her name was given as Mrs Canyot of Maida Vale. A horrible cold shiver ran down the spine of the young man and for a moment he felt dizzy. His poor sweet darling mother! She must have wanted to pay him a surprise visit. But why? It was hardly credible that she should do such a thing at her age and with her methodical habits. It couldn’t be true! He looked at the notice again, holding it with a hand that trembled. Maida Vale? There could hardly be another Mrs Canyot who lived in that district. It *must* be his mother. And yet – to come like that – without telling him. It was utterly and entirely unlike her. He stood gazing helplessly at the paper in his hand calculating remote chances.

Robert Canyot was an only son. His father had been a wine merchant, a man of the same type as John Ruskin’s father, combining shrewdness, puritanism, and a certain queer turn or twist for what he regarded as ‘art’.

The little lady of Maida Vale had done all she could to give her boy everything in this mad world that youth could desire. She had let him run wild. She had sent him to school and removed him from school; sent him to Oxford and removed him from Oxford. Finally she had made over to him half of her income and let him follow the delight of his eyes and the fancies of his heart unrestrained by any responsibility. The result was that the sharp contrast, between his mother’s unbounded infatuation and the rough shocks of the world that cared nothing what became of him, made out of quite sound material a sort of cynical misanthropic queer one.

It was not however a very cynical Robert who gazed now, agitated and startled, into the narrow eyes of Silas Priddle and the great watery eyes of Charley Budge.

‘Hoping there’s no offence, mister, in us having taken the liberty of showing ‘ee that there bit ‘o news. It *may* be as it’s your poor dear Mother what’s runned into a railway train, and it may be as ’tisn’t. If ’tis, ’tis God’s will. If ’tisn’t I reckons ’tis somebody else’s mother; but seeing how it’s upset ‘ee like I be afeerd it is as ’tis there writ’ down.’

Saying these words the foreman of Toat Farm planted his feet firmly in the long grass, screwed up his eyes, scratched his head, and whistled a few notes of the particular call with which he was accustomed to summon his wife’s ducks at the hour of sunset.

‘Charley,’ he remarked after a long pause, during which the young man read and re-read the bit of newspaper, ‘us must be getting on with the beasts, us must.’

‘Aye, aye, Mr Priddle,’ agreed the other. ‘Beasts must be served funeral days same as wedding days, as old Farmer Patchem used to tell us every time ’is missus ‘ad a still-born. “Life is as ’tis, Charley,” ‘ee used to say, “and them as takes it quiet’ll last longest and their children’s children’ll call ’em blessed.”’

Having uttered these words of wisdom the two sages moved away. ‘The poor lad be dazed-like,’ said the foreman. ‘Did ‘ee mark, Charley, how ‘ee squinnied with the eyes o’n, when ‘ee got tellin of funerals? A reckon ‘ee might o’ bashed it out, ‘ee did, too point, Charley, than ‘ee was. Sort o’ bashed it out, ‘ee did, too plumb and positive. Maybe the old woman isn’t broken up complete. Some of them elderly females is wonderful hard to kill; same as cats I reckon.’

Well! no use standing here, thought Canyot. I must off to Sets-hurst. If it is the poor darling, I shall stay the night there. It may be nothing more than a nervous shock, after all. These papers exaggerate so. And it may not be her at all. But if it isn’t, it’s certainly an odd coincidence.

He felt a small hand softly and timidly pulling at the sleeve that hung empty. Robert had lost his arm in Flanders and possessed two medals for courage in the field. He looked down and patted the child’s head, ashamed of having forgotten her. The little dumb girl was making pitiful sounds with her poor mouth.

‘Poor little water rat!’ he murmured. ‘Poor little Sally-Maria! This is a bad day for us, isn’t it? But never mind! Say your prayers for your friend’s Mummy. Let’s hope that when we meet again all will be well.’

The child put her arms around him holding his sleeve tightly and hiding her face.

‘There – there – my little one,’ he said, extricating himself from her clinging arms. ‘Don’t worry any more about it. Run home to Auntie and be a good little kind faithful water rat. We’ll see each other again. Goodbye and God bless you!’ And he broke from her and started off at a run in the direction of Littlegate. *I’ll just tell them where I’m going*, he said to himself, *so if I’m away for the night they won’t be scared*. Even to his own heart he used the pronoun ‘they’, but his thoughts circled round Nelly and the sad walk he had had with her the night before. *I’ve go to face it*, he said to himself as he followed the pack-horse track along the lower slopes of the Downs. *If she has never really cared for me as she thought she did, I suppose I can’t blame her. But if she’s simply fickle, and just flattered by that cunning old Frenchy’s blarney – well then, to the devil with her! She’s no better than a flirtatious little cat!*

The path Canyot followed through the late afternoon sunshine lay through the open country. Its height above the valley gave him a clear view of many outstretched white roads and lanes. As he approached the widespread park-like slopes that rose up from West Horthing to the crest of the hills he obtained an unimpeded survey over the whole winding length of the narrow chalk track which led from Furze Lodge to Littlegate.

‘Hullo!’ he cried suddenly and came to a dead stop, breathing hard. ‘I seem to know *that* figure! Am I going dotty with all this fuss, or is it really her? It’s certainly a girl. How absurd I am! It’s probably Betsy-Anne’s Rose taking the washing home for her mother. No! It *can’t* be Rose. That girl’s walking just the way *she* walks.’ He ran at top speed for almost five hundred yards. Then he stopped again. ‘She’s picking flowers,’ he cried. ‘It’s Nelly! and he set off at a tremendous pace across the remaining piece of parkland. Through the patches of newly budded bracken-fern he sped furiously, tripping and stumbling over the rabbit holes and taking the smaller juniper bushes in a series of flying leaps. ‘How mad I am!’ he said to himself at last, when bursting through a thicket of hazel bushes and skirting a huge clump of gorse that barred his way, he scrambled down a bank into the white sheep-track he had seen from above. ‘How mad I am!’ *She’s probably made up her mind to give me the chuck. She’s as likely as not dead nuts on that ‘free verse’ fellow. Curse his blood, coming here and turning her head! And yet here I am running after her as if she were as fond of me as ever! Running after her to tell her all about mother, as if she would post off to Selshurst with me! I wonder if she* will *be a little bit shocked and sorry. Maybe she will. Maybe a real shock, and having to sympathize a bit, will do her good*. And the young man suppressed one of those funny inhuman impious thoughts that come to the best of us at certain junctures and crises.

He had as a matter of fact no difficulty at all in overtaking the girl. She was so preoccupied with all the queer opinions recentlyflung at her head that she walked along in a careless absorbed manner, stopping mechanically to pick a wild-flower here and there but twisting her thoughts and her anxieties round every new plant she added to her nosegay. She was resting on a sloping bank, yellow with bird’s foot trefoil and cistus when he finally approached her. He lessened his pace so as to recover his breath, and she waved at him the little stick she carried, which he had himself cut from the hedge some months before.

‘I knew it was you,’ he began when he came up to her. ‘I saw you from above West Horthing. I knew you by your walk.’ He wavered and hesitated in front of her for a flickering moment. Then he stooped down and took her gently by the wrist.

‘Take care!’ she said, smiling, as with her free hand she laid down her nosegay; but she allowed herself to be pulled up on to her feet and to be pressed close to him in the old fierce way, at which she used to laugh so gaily, calling it ‘the one-armed bear’s hug’.

He kissed her cool soft cheeks and her gentle unresisting mouth. He kissed her closed eyelids.

‘That’ll do, Robert!’ she cried at last, making a struggle to release herself.

He gave a sigh and let her go. He had not failed to notice that with the least little movement of her head, in spite of her passivity, she had, before he released her, moved her lips away from his. And even while she had yielded her face to him she had not once kissed him in return.

‘Oh Nelly!’ he cried. ‘My little Nelly! You do care for me just a tiny bit? You haven’t got quite tired of me?’

They sat down together on the bank and she let him keep tight hold of her hand. Her forehead was puckered into a miserable helpless frown and her eyes, dry and clear and sad, gazed far away from him over the receding Downs.

‘You do love me still, Nelly darling?’ he kept repeating in a dull useless chant, as one might go on reading from a book to a hearer who listened no longer. ‘You do love me a little bit still, sweetheart?’

She felt absolutely unable to say a word to him. It was one of those moments when women are driven back to grope after some language that is older than the language of words; older, deeper, sadder, gentler; to call upon it, and peradventure not to find it.

‘If only you love me, still,’ he went on, ‘I don’t care what you do. We needn’t be married, Nelly– not for years and years. We needn’t be engaged any more. You can go quite free of me; absolutely free. If only I can feel that it isn’t your love that has changed I can bear anything!’

Her lips moved. She drew her head away. She picked up the flowers from the grass and began mechanically sorting them in her lap.

Then, stricken by a sharp pang of remorse, he leapt to his feet. ‘Nelly,’ he said, taking the piece of newspaper from his pocket and throwing it on to her knees, ‘read that!’

She frowned for a moment as she smoothed out the printed scrap. Then, when she had read it, she too jumped up, staring at him with wide horrified eyes.

‘Goodbye old girl,’ he said, forcing himself to smile, ‘it’s a bit frightening though, isn’t it? I’m off to Selshurst anyway. Of course it may be nothing at all. I mean it may be someone else’s mother. But I’m off anyway. Goodbye dear. If it isn’t mother I’ll let you know tonight, if I’m not back too late. If it is, of course I shall stay with her. Somehow the more I think of it the less I *can* believe it’s really her. There might easily be, you know, some other people of our name in Maida Vale. You see it only says Maida Vale; and mother’s address is seven Cannerby Place.’

‘But Robert, but Robert—’ the girl gasped. ‘This is dreadful for you. Poor dear, poor dear!’ And this time she did herself kiss him tenderly, though only on the cheek.

He tore himself away from her, and started off, without another word, running at full pace. When he was about a hundred yards away, he stopped and threw his sketchbook into the hedge, making a signal to her to pick it up for him. She waved her bunch of flowers; and then with a quick irrepressible movement she kissed her hand.

He soon was concealed by a great thicket of furze bushes and she got no further sight of him. But as he ran, he could not help wondering to himself whether, if it *were* his mother and if she *were* really hurt, this sudden disaster to one person he loved wouldn’t turn again towards him, with a deeper understanding, the wavering heart of the other person he loved. Thus did the movements of those little silvery fish of impious thought that rise from the purest soul shock the mind of this youth with their queer leapings.

His anxiety, his suspension of mind, his growing fear, stretching forward towards the prostrate form of the woman in the hospital, blent as he ran with the image of the young girl standing in the path kissing her hand and waving her bunch of flowers.

And what of Nelly's own feelings? The very bitterness of the cruel comedy of things was in her heart. Why *had* she, oh! why *had* she, let him kiss her like that, in the old manner, with the old freedom? And why must she needs have given way to an impulse like that and have waved him so natural, so spontaneous, so loving a farewell? He would naturally think, how could he help thinking – poor dear! – that all her vague flutterings to escape during their walk of misunderstanding amounted to nothing at all, were a mere feminine mood, a mere girlish caprice.

Why couldn't she have drawn back honestly from him, and emphatically and plainly made it clear to him that the whole thing had been a mistake, *her* mistake, her unpardonable, inconsiderate, blind mistake?

But the poor boy, harassed and terrified over this accident, how could she do anything else but pity him and be sympathetic? But she could have been sympathetic, without – without kissing her hand to him! But she *wanted* to kiss her hand to him. She wanted, at that moment – he looked so wretched, poor darling! – to give him a very nice kiss. Was she a bad girl? Was she an unnatural horrid creature, able to love two men at the same time?

Nelly pondered long and deeply as she walked slowly home. So many contrary emotions had seized her and shaken her during the last twenty-four hours that her young brain was in a whirl. This unexpected hesitation in herself, in her own heart, in the very depths of her soul, was a quite new element in the situation. What had happened? Had she got out of her trap, broken its iron teeth, tossed it away from her, only to find herself regretting her freedom? The more she tried to analyse her feelings the more puzzled she became. She had never suspected that any appeal from Robert could move and stir her as she had been stirred. She had imagined him getting angry, calling her evil names, abusing her, and going off in a rage. She had called up all her pride, in advance, to meet the onslaught of his pride.

But it had not been like that at all. He had shown no pride, no anger. He had only shown a pitiful gentleness, a puzzled unhappiness. And it was nice, it *was* soothing and sweet, to be hugged so tight by him and to feel his poor dear unlost arm so strong and firm about her.

What an ironic thing it would be, she thought, if the pity she felt for him as soon as she had made up her mind to jilt him brought her at last, for the first time, really to love him!

She *did* love him, in a way. She knew that well enough. But it wasn't the 'in-love' way. It was different perhaps from his being a brother – but not *very* different. Was it, after all, a horrid and unnatural thing to love a young man one wasn't 'in love' with? Ought one to have *hated* being touched by him, being hugged and kissed by him? She certainly hadn't hated it. She had liked it. But that was only as long as she could stop it just when she liked! But when you were married to a person you couldn't stop these things just when you liked. Therefore it was not right to marry someone you only loved, but weren't in love with – because of not being able to arrange these things! Nelly reached home thoroughly confused, a little ashamed of herself, and very remorseful because she had talked so freely to Mrs Shotover. That had certainly been a mistake! If, as the old adage says, 'it is better to be off with the old love before you are on with the new' it is certainly a very unsafe thing to talk about 'the new one' before you have made up your own mind! She wished most heartily that she had waited a little before going to West Horthing. As a matter of honest fact, if Nelly's guardian angel could have been induced to reveal to us what the girl hid scrupulously even from her own heart, it would have been shown that the cynical assumptions poured into her ears by Mrs Shotover had in an imperceptible manner dropped a tiny drop of poison into her vague delicious dreamings about Richard Storm. She seemed to know where she was so well with Robert, and to know so little where she was with the more shadowy figure of the visitor from Paris!

Chapter 5

An aeroplane traveller armed with a good telescope would have been able to observe from his airy watchtower during the midafternoon hours of that eventful day three separate groups of human beings linked together by thoughtwaves but completely ignorant of each other's movements. He would have seen Nelly among the roses of her friend's garden. He would have seen Canyot talking to the farm men by the edge of Toat Great Pond. And finally he would have seen, seated in absorbed conversation under the churchyard wall, the Reverend John Mbreton and Mr Richard Storm.

His telescope would have revealed these various persons and he would have regarded them with the Olympian indifference of the high careless gods of the Epicurean hierarchy.

What he would not have seen – unless he had been a god himself – were those quivering invisible magnetic waves, which it is difficult not to believe must pass backwards and forwards, fast as thought itself, between persons who are linked together by some impending dramatic crisis.

Storm had arrived at Littlegate not long after Nelly's departure for West Horthing and he had boldly presented himself at the vicarage door. Grace, issuing forth, in her young mistress's absence, on an emotional errand of her own, had been reluctantly compelled to turn back into the house and convey the visitor into her master's study. This she hurriedly did with no anterior warning, flinging open the door and announcing in stentorian tones, 'Mr Worm to see you, sir!'

Richard, hearing the door closed with a bang behind him and becoming immediately conscious of a vague zoological garden odour caused by the innumerable stuffed birds and beasts with which the room was crowded, felt for the moment as if he had been pushed into the den of some sort of formidable animal. His consciousness of something odd about it all and a little disturbing was not diminished when he remarked the grizzled scalp of the old man and his wrinkled forehead emerging from beyond the edge of a littered table very much as some horrific ‘manifestation’ might materialize at a successful seance.

John Moreton did not get up from his knees to greet his visitor. He just blinked at him and frowned, placing one large hand, like a great paw, upon an open sheet of botanical specimens and the other upon a bottle of glue as if he were apprehensive lest the intruder should pounce upon them and clear them away or carry them off.

He looked so exactly like a medieval miser caught in the act of counting his treasure that Richard was tempted to open the conversation by assuring his host that he was not a thief.

Instead of doing this, however, a happy instinct led him to remove from his buttonhole and display to the old man a little flower, quite unknown to him, which he had picked by the edge of a muddy ditch.

This well-omened plant turned out to be a stray specimen of water avens which the old man assured him must have been carried there, in its embryonic state, by some migratory bird out of a neighbouring county.

To investigate the water avens the Reverend Moreton did get up from behind the table and was induced to give a certain portion of the attention demanded by the flower to the guest who held it in his hand.

To retain his hold upon the naturalist’s attention, thus with difficulty won, Richard hurriedly began putting questions to him, more imaginative than scientific, about the various stuffed birds hanging on the wall. He began, as a matter of fact, to display a genuine curiosity about some of the less usual among these, and in admiring their beauty made a few allusions to such of their kind as he had seen, or fancied he had seen, in his travels through France.

One naturalistic topic led to another, and it was not long before Storm was examining, this time with actual enthusiasm, the vicar's fine collection of British birds' eggs. It was delightful to ransack the recesses of childish memories in regard to these beautiful little microcosms of the mysterious maternal forces. He suppressed a mischievous desire to ask the old fanatic some wild Sir Thomas Browne question as to the mother of Apollo or the offspring of the phoenix, and he reverently held up to the light, one by one, the strangely scrawled eggs of buntings, the beautiful blue eggs of redstarts, the olive-green eggs of nightingales and that incredibly small rondure, like an ivory-coloured pellet, out of which, if science had not interfered, should have emerged a tiny golden-crested wren!

He made himself so agreeable to the old man by his sincere delight in the beauty of these things, and his modest relish for the pedantic pleasure of 'calling them all by name', that John Moreton did what he very rarely did for any human being – his own daughter not excepted – and invited him to come out into the churchyard that he might show him an inviolate specimen of the nest of a meadow pipit.

Having enjoyed the spectacle of the snug security of the wise pipit's retreat – for the old collector had his full compliment of this species – Richard found no difficulty in cajoling the vicar to sit down with him for a while under the high sunny wall and engage in philosophical conversation.

The writer was indeed quite captivated by the old gentleman's originality and scientific passion. It puzzled him a good deal that his young friend had not told him more about her father, had not made clear to him what a remarkable and unusual man he was. *I bet*, he thought to himself, *that ass of a Canyot has no idea what a treasure this old fellow is! I hope my little girl is kind to him. If she isn't I shall give her a very serious scolding. Scolding? I shall whistle her down the wind, for an undiscerning little impious baggage!*

From general philosophic topics of a semi-scientific character, in handling which Richard found Mr Moreton to be quite as imaginative and daring in his speculations as the boldest modern thinker, they passed by insensible degrees to the great 'sphinx problem' of the unknown reality lying behind it all.

'It would interest me to hear,' Storm at length ventured to say, 'how a man of science like yourself reconciles your priestly functions with what we've been talking about. I've known several scientific priests in France and they do it by keeping the two realms rigidly and inflexibly apart. But I never quite feel as if that were a satisfactory solution. Both views of life are so entirely natural and human; and both, it seems to me, spring from the same fundamental passion in the human soul – the passion to grasp life in its inmost secret.'

The old man looked at him from under his shaggy eyebrows with a look of slow interrogative caution; the caution of an old peasant who hesitates to reveal some piece of instructive local knowledge which to him has a deep inexplicable value.

Richard's direct candid gaze in answer to this peering scrutiny seemed to satisfy the man; for, prodding the ground with his heavy cane, he searched for the exact words in which to sum up his position.

'What I've come to feel,' he said, 'and I speak as an ordinary secular layman in the eyes of the world, for I intend to resign my living (though to myself, as you will doubtless understand, I shall always be a priest), is that there are two entirely separate conceptions – the conception of *God* round which have gathered all the tyrannies, superstitions, persecutions, cruelties, wars, which have wounded the world; and the conception of *Christ* round which has gathered all the pity and sympathy and healing and freedom which has saved the world.

'The conception of Satan has been torn asunder between these two. As Lucifer the Light-Bearer, as the Eternal Rebel, he is an aspect of Christ. As the Infernal Power of malice and opposition to life, he is an aspect of *God*.

'To my mind the world is an arena of perpetual conflict between these two forces, one of which I renounce and defy; the other I worship in the Mass.'

'Pee-wit! pee-wit!' cried the plovers over the old man's head as he concluded this strange statement of heresy; and Richard thought to himself – *On which side would he put the cry of that bird?*

But he answered aloud: 'Your view is not a new one, sir. William Blake seems to have felt something of what you say – and there are modern French poets, too, who have—'

The old man waved his hand in the air with a proud gesture. 'What I've told you, young man, I've learnt from beetles and mosses, from shrikes and redshanks, from newts and slow-worms. It is not a poetical fancy with me. It is my discovery. It is what I've been thinking out for myself, for sixty-odd years. And what I've got to do now is what all discoverers have to do, *I've got to pay the price!*'

'Pee-wit! pee-wit!' cried the agitated plovers, wheeling in circles round the field behind them.

'It seeems to me,' remarked Richard after a moment's hesitation; for his habitual desire to propitiate rather than to contradict made opposition difficult to him – ‘it seems to me that you have avoided the chief problem. Surely the human instinct which has in all ages groped after something it calls God is really seeking a reconciliation between your two forces? Surely, sir, you will admit, constituted as we are, we cannot escape from the notion of some fundamental unity in things? And isn’t it a desperate pathetic desire in us that this unity should be essentially good rather than evil, that has led to the theological conception of a Father of the Universe?’

The old man started up to his feet with an angry leap. ‘Theological!’ he cried beating the top of the mossy wall with his fists. ‘That’s just what it is – theological!’

‘It might just as well,’ muttered Richard, losing his propitiatory manner, for something bitter and personal in the old man’s tone irritated and incensed him, ‘be called human. For not to *want* the universe to be good at bottom is surely an inhuman feeling.’

‘Pee-wit! pee-wit!’ cried the plovers in the field behind them.

To their intelligence, the appearance of the old naturalist’s grizzled pate, across the familiar saxifrages and pennyworts and kiss-me-quicklys of that old wall, must have been very menacing.

‘You will hardly deny, sir,’ went on Richard, though a secret monitor in his heart kept whispering to him *You’re a fool to annoy him; you’re a fool to argue with him*, ‘that our Lord himself believed in what we usually mean when we use the expression God?’

The Reverend John Moreton stared down at his visitor with a look of infinite contempt.

‘The Christ *I* celebrate in the sacrament,’ he said, ‘has nothing to do with ignorant repetitions of badly reported misunderstandings. The few great authentic logia which I adhere to make no mention of the *Eidolon Vulgaris* of which you speak!’

Richard had really lost his temper now. ‘You are a very good example, sir,’ he flung out, ‘of what happens when a Church separates itself from the traditions of Christendom!’

‘It is reason, it is science, it is common sense!’ roared the old man. ‘It is a confounded exhibition of obstinate private judgement!’ shouted the writer back to him.

‘Pee-wit! pee-wit!’ cried the birds behind the wall.

At that moment a faded specimen of the butterfly called a painted lady fluttered rapidly across the graves.

Richard’s outburst had left him with a sense of shamefaced remorse. He certainly had behaved like an arrant fool in contradicting the old gentleman.

He moved forward towards the dilapidated insect that kept wheeling backwards and forwards over the *orchis maculata*, newly planted on Cecily Moreton’s mound.

‘What’s that, sir? What *ever* kind of butterfly is that? I have never seen anything like that before!’

He removed his hat and made as though he would pursue the swift-winged creature.

‘A painted lady!’ muttered the old man sulkily. But the naturalist’s vanity was stronger in him than the theologian’s rancour. ‘You’ve never seen one? You young men are very unobservant! Painted ladies are well known in France.’ ‘Not *that* kind, sir, surely?’ cried the cunning biographer of the poet of the *demimonde*. Ours in France are lighter on the wing’; and he pursued the faded wanton with more discretion than success.

The old man was completely won over by this boyish display. He stumbled after his antagonist and laid his hand on his arm. ‘Let it go!’ he said chuckling grimly. ‘She’s one too many for you. Many a time have I hunted them for miles over the Downs. In some seasons they’re very rare.

They're interesting little things! Very prettily marked when you get a good specimen.

'The North American kind is just a little different. Come in, my boy, come in, and I'll show you how they differ. It must be a case of adaptation. Their woods are thicker, they say – more undergrowth.' And the two men returned towards the house in perfect unanimity. The painted lady had found the secret.

'Yes,' said John Moreton as they sat down together after an exhaustive investigation of marble whites, chalk-hill blues, purple emperors, clouded yellows, green hair-streaks, red admirals; 'Yes, I shall resign my living. But thanks to the young man to whom my daughter is engaged – I have a daughter, sir; she's away somewhere – I don't know where'; and he waved his hand vaguely – 'it will not be necessary for me to leave this village. My daughter and this young man – he's considerate to me; he knows the value of my work – have taken a cottage nearby, north of where we are now, and they propose that I shall live with them. It's a good plan. The young man will have the advantage of my scientific knowledge. He's a painter. And I shall … I shall be indebted to him for my humble wants.'

Richard Storm was reduced to a depressed silence by his host's words. He stared out of the french window at the lawn and the trees. He felt miserably tired, all the spirit gone from him and a vague ennui turning everything to emptiness. Of course that was it! He might have known it. He *had* known it. Of course she was engaged to this aggressive youth; and of course her marriage was necessary to her father's happiness!

The point was: did she, in spite of appearances, love the fellow? If so – and it seemed likely enough – there was nothing for him to do but clear off elsewhere. The idea of settling down to write poetry in the neighbourhood of this happy domestic arrangement didn't appeal to him. His attraction to

Nelly had gone a little too far for that Confound it all! What a thing life was. The day before yesterday – even yesterday – he had felt that his great new idea, that high mystical doctrine which had gathered in his mind, was the one important thing in existence. Nelly's white fragile face and fair silken hair were only traceries upon the tapestry, no more really essential to him than were the green hieroglyphs at the back of the hair-streak's wings.

But since he had last seen her, at the lodge gate of the close, 'the perfume and suppliance' of her personality had been growing steadily upon him, gathering importance, insinuating themselves into his deeper consciousness.

A horrid thought, black for him as the sooty wings of the rooks he now saw crossing the skyline, flapped down into his mind, trying to find lodgement; the thought, namely, that it might be the fair thing, the honest thing, the kind thing, just to clear off and leave the field quite free for Canyot 'to bustle in'. *Are there any men, he* asked himself, *really so noble and unselfish that when they see that their presence has caused trouble to any human circle, and is likely to cause more, they just move off, say goodbye, clear out?* Yes! he supposed there were such people. He sighed heavily. And how often do such heroic renunciations only cause greater unhappiness in the end? What a world!

His meditations were interrupted by the old naturalist's giving vent to a tremendous snore, loud as the snort of a slumbrous buffalo.

Exhausted with his ardent cicerone work among the dead forms of those filmy winged people of the air, the vicar had fallen asleep.

A desperate desire for tea awoke in the heart of Richard Storm. It occurred to him very strongly that a considerable portion of his present depression arose from the absence of this beverage. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter past five. Tea I must and will have, 'he said firmly to himself,' but heaven knows how I'm going to get it! I can't quite shake the old fellow by the shoulder and bawl in his ears, "Get me some tea!" and I know by instinct there isn't a female in the house.' He stared at the sleeper. The great Schopenhauer-like head looked very noble in its weary passivity.

No! No, he thought, I can't disturb an old man's dreams to satisfy my incorrigible tea-lust. I'll try the farm. If they can put up with Canyot, they can put up with me. I'll try anyhow.

With these intentions he went very softly to the door, opened it, let himself out, passed through the hallway on tiptoe, and emerged into the garden.

Storm strode quickly across the intervening village green and knocked at the door of the farm. It was a tumbledown, ramshackle old place, with pigs and fowls and ducks and geese wandering about, where beds of trim flowers might well have been.

But Mrs Winsome, the farmer's wife, although the grimmest of women, seemed quite pleased to welcome him.

'Tea? Certainly, sir! Friend of Mr Canyot's? There's been a telegram for him since early this morning. The boy brought it from Selshurst. Please to come in and excuse everything! Please to sit down. Kettle's on the boil. Won't keep you long.'

The hard-featured woman did not keep him long. Indeed, before five minutes had elapsed from his entering her parlour, he was seated before a charming tea tray pouring out for himself cup after cup of the divine nectar.

After the first three cups and the first three pieces of home-made bread and butter, Mr Richard Storm regarded the universe in quite a different manner. He no longer felt the least inclination to be unselfish and leave the field to his rival. He felt inspirited and adventurous, ready to deal with many Mr Canyots. He felt that if he could see Nelly Moreton once more, have her to himself for one long afternoon in these enchanting lanes and fields, he would be able to snatch her out of all her past.

As for the 'what next?' which naturally must follow this soul snatching, he did not at that hour, so irresponsible were the pleasant fumes of Mrs Winsome's tea, give a thought to the matter.

It was so lovely just to feel oneself growing young again, to feel all those vague sweet delicious tremors one feared were quite irrecoverable, once more thrilling one's nerves, that any cold-blooded virtuous interrogations as to 'what would come of it all' seemed most singularly irrelevant.

He found himself, in place of any serious thought, just building up fantastic childish castles in the air. Why shouldn't he, just as well as this sulky young painter, take a house in this charming spot, marry Nell out of hand, and support the old man for his remaining days?

Having liberally compensated the grim lady of Wind Shuttle Farm for her excellent entertainment and watched her shaking the tablecloth to the ducks and the geese and the chickens, Richard, after a hurried glance towards church and vicarage, started to make his way back to Selshurst.

'Never rush things!' he said to himself. 'Women don't like to be greeted by their male friends when they come back tired to their domestic hearths. They prefer the position of defence, of being prepared on their own ground. Above all never take women by surprise – except when a traitor within the gates beckons to you over the wall!'

Fortifying himself with these maxims, for Richard was a veritable Rochefoucauld, as far as theory was concerned, he swung along the road to the old city in high and boyish spirits.

He was about two miles from Selshurst when he heard behind the sound of one running.

At first he thought it might be a runaway horse or cow, but before the runner came in sight he recognized the steps of a man and of a man in athletic condition.

Funny! he thought to himself. It can't be the old gentleman? Who can it be?

His suspense was not very pleasantly ended by the appearance of Robert Canyot.

The young painter pulled up breathless, and saluted him with a couple of gasped-out words of greeting.

'Going to Selshurst?' he panted, wiping his forehead. 'That's where I'm going.'

'So I see,' said Richard drily, 'and going at a good pace.'

'To the hospital,' added the runner.

Storm clutched his arm. 'Nothing wrong at Littlegate, I hope?'

'Nothing that I know of. It's my mother – an accident – at least I'm afraid so. Shall know soon.'

Somehow it gave Richard a most curious feeling to think of this troublesome youth possessed of a mother – and a mother who'd had an accident.

From being an irritating automaton to be kicked out of the way, he suddenly became a human person with a skin that could be pricked, with flesh that could bleed.

'Oh I am so very sorry!' he murmured sympathetically. 'I hope it's nothing serious – but of course, as you say, you don't know. Have you only just heard by wire or something?'

'Walk a little faster, do you mind?' was the youth's response.

Richard quickened his pace. 'I can run with you for a bit if you like,' he said.

‘No! No! Get my breath. Can’t go it like that all the way. Make no difference.’

‘Does your mother live in this neighbourhood?’ inquired the older man as they strode along side by side.

‘Here?’ Oh no! London. Maida Vale. That’s what the paper said. That’s what’s made me afraid it is her.’

And the youth explained briefly to his companion by what chance he had learned of the accident.

Richard insisted upon falling into a dog-trot with him; and thus they soon arrived at the outskirts of the town. ‘May I come with you to the hospital?’ he asked panting, when they had secured directions as to its whereabouts. ‘I don’t want to be a nuisance or to intrude – but I might be of service – one never can tell.’

Canyot expressed himself as grateful for the offer; and a little later they mounted side by side the steps of the quiet, unprofessional-looking building where Selshurst tended its sick.

A short hurried interview at the office in the hallway satisfied the young man that it really was his mother who had met with the injury.

‘I’ll wait for you here,’ said Richard, noticing with sympathetic alarm that the boy’s face had grown suddenly white when he had finished his interview and obtained permission to see the patient.

Canyot nodded to him in a dazed sort of way, and accompanied by a stolid attendant disappeared in the lift.

The writer sank down on a bench in the lobby and fell into nervous and troubled thought.

From the interior of the newly painted lift, as it carried the youth out of his sight, had been wafted that well-known smell of ether, reminding him painfully of old wartime tragedies.

The coming and going of uniformed nurses, scared white-faced visitors, silent impassive officials, deepened his sense of depression and gloom.

All his recent irresponsibility left him, like something shallow and out of place, and the time-old weight of humanity’s bitter lot upon earth laid its burden upon him.

He realized then clearly enough where it was that he had failed hitherto in his attempts after a more enduring poetic method. He had contented himself with isolated ‘occasional’ poems; forgetting that it is only in a certain accumulated weight of human vision, carried steadily on in a premeditated direction, that any value beyond mere nuances of technique is attained.

And as he sat waiting, full of genuine anxiety as to what the young man might be finding up there in some bare cabin of that great ship of human wreckage, it came vividly upon him that he could never fight quite freely, quite unscrupulously for his own hand and his own pleasure, in a world where all men are bitten by the same adder’s tooth.

He made no vow, he registered no purpose, but he made a note of the fact that in a place like this those were lucky, both among such as suffered and such as served, who had hands tolerably clean of their fellows’ blood; blood that needed no outward sign of its shedding!

He kept his eye on that fatal lift as it went up and down, the very look of its white paint suggestive of the smell of disaster; and his heart beat a little each time it discharged any person not in hospital dress.

He could not help being thankful that he himself had neither parent nor child – those all too fragile links in the great chain of the world’s suffering!

At last the figure Storm looked for did actually appear.

He knew at once from the way the boy approached him that his mother was dead. Two great strands of his tow-coloured hair hung limp over his forehead. His cheeks were tear-stained. His mouth twitched.

He sat down on the bench by Richard's side without a word and stared straight in front of him, his solitary hand resting upon his knee.

Richard in the helplessness of an outsider touched this great fist and closed his fingers over it.

'I am sorry,' he said. 'I'm afraid things are bad.'

'She's gone,' the boy muttered without moving a muscle.

'Did she know you?' asked Richard.

The young man choked and bit his lip to keep down his sobs. With a fierce effort, shaking his heavy head like a bewildered animal, he turned and looked at the writer, great globular tears running down his cheeks and falling upon the collar of his coat.

Yes! she knew me. They say it was a miracle. She *wouldn't* let herself go till I'd come to her. She came down to bring me something; she thought it was fame for me at last; an exhibition in New York – a silly invitation. It was just like her to want to bring it to me herself. But what's the damned thing to me now?'

He made an effort to smile and the contortion of his queer corrugated countenance was piteous. 'Oh mother!' he cried stretching his one arm straight out in front of him with the fingers clenched. Then he pulled himself gallantly together and looked quietly and directly into his companion's face. 'You must excuse me,' he said. She was awfully fond of me. She had no one else.'

A hospital nurse with a kind nun-like face approached them. 'We're ready for you,' she said with a sort of wan smile that seemed to Richard as if it were the final indictment of a grief-exhausted planet, addressed to the Unknown.

The youth moved away with her and then suddenly turned and came back.

‘Thank you very much,’ he said, holding out his hand.

Chapter 6

THE SUDDEN CATASTROPHE that had overtaken Mr Canyot produced many drastic effects upon the lives of those whom destiny had entangled with his life.

Soon after his departure to London to superintend his mother's funeral and to settle his business matters and the disposal of the poor lady's small possessions, Richard received a surprising letter from him, addressed to the Crown Inn.

'Dear Mr Storm,' the letter ran. 'It may seem to you a laughable thing that I should write like this, but I want you to feel quite free as far as I am concerned. You well know what I mean by free. I've written to Miss Moreton, sending back certain little things she'd given me, and have asked her to do the same. It is not your fault that you've come between us. It has just happened so. I am writing to you like this because Miss Moreton seems for some reason reluctant to return me what I asked for and I attribute her reluctance to pity. She *pities* me. This I cannot endure. I will not be the person to take advantage of a great loss to soften a girl's heart where it really belongs to someone else. I shall come down and say goodbye before I start for America; by which time she will have to choose definitely between us. But I did not wish, especially after your kindness to me at the hospital to leave you with the feeling that you also, out of pity, must leave things as they were. I don't want pity from anybody. I don't want to bind anybody. I've lived till now for my work; and I can continue to do so. If however, by any chance in which I *cannot* believe, you are trifling with Nelly, you may count on it you will have me to deal with. She has no mother and you have seen what her father is like. But I won't have our engagement kept on out of pity. I won't have it! Yours, with gratitude for your kindness, Robert Canyot.'

There was a postscript appended to this letter which read as follows:

'You'd better use my rooms at Mrs Winsome's. I've paid in advance up to August. Board included.'

This singular epistle, and especially the postscript to it, gave Richard Storm an extremely uncomfortable day. He had well understood Nelly's shyness about going up to Mrs Canyot's funeral and was not surprised when in the end she had not gone. But since that decision of hers he *had* made few efforts to see her, and moreover when they *had* met, both of them had been so nervous and ill at ease that it had been impossible to talk with any kind of intimacy.

Richard took Canyot's letter with him into the cathedral close and pondered long and wretchedly over it.

The situation was certainly an awkward one. What an extraordinary letter! No – he wasn't conscious of 'trifling' with Nelly Moreton. What the devil *was* this 'trifling'? But on the other hand he certainly did not feel committed, or as if he were involved with her in any irrevocable way. What a blundering, clumsy, roughshod fellow this Robert was! He felt a very decided anger against him. It was so childish – so ridiculous. Was the boy entirely ignorant of the ways of the world? Or was he, Richard, out of touch with the habits and manners of the middle classes in England?

He fumbled in his memory among his early impressions and ran over hurriedly the English novels he had read since. Did they do this kind of thing in this provincial island? Or had the war produced a new England with queer new customs? The boy wrote to him as if he were his superior officer warning him not to seduce some maiden of a conquered country! It seemed an incredible letter from one artist to another artist, from one nomadic Bohemian to another nomadic Bohemian.

Wasn’t one free to strike up a casual friendship with a charming girl without bringing down upon one the wrath of a furious fiancé?

Return her little gifts to her? Confound the fellow! If he were as touchy and jealous as all that, the child was indeed well rid of him.

But had they quarrelled? That was the point he wanted enlightenment upon. And if they had, had they quarrelled about *him*? But if they *had* quarrelled, because the girl had talked to him and seemed to like him, how did he know that she wished to have her engagement broken off on such ridiculous grounds?

She might be thoroughly in love with Canyot still and just hurt in her pride by his hot-headed silly violence. She might even be putting it all down to his upset nerves, to his grief for his mother. It looked as if she cared for him still – her reluctance to send back his ring. But it might also be a very natural refusal to be jostled and hurried and bullied at a moment’s notice.

Choose definitely between us! the fellow said. Never had such rough, boorish, crude, impolite usage been applied to a young woman! They would be lucky if she didn’t whistle them both down the wind!

The whole thing was particularly annoying. Little had he expected that before he had been in England a fortnight he would receive a threatening letter handing over into his keeping an unprotected female!

This letter of Canyot’s putting the matter so bluntly and grossly broke up like a bombshell the delicate sentimental dreamings he had begun to weave around the girl. It drove him to drastic issues and decisions; and he wasn’t at all ready for drastic issues and decisions. Nor was Miss Moreton ready for such things; he felt sure of that. The more he thought of it all the more angry he became with Canyot. Hot-headed conceited young prig! Because he had lost his mother did he think he could dictate their behaviour to half the world? It was extraordinarily annoying. It put both himself and Miss Moreton into such an absurd position. It made the girl look ridiculous and it made himself seem an ill-bred lunatic who had paid court to another man's sweetheart before he had been two hours in her company.

For, after all, what had Canyot to go upon? Nothing at all. Absolutely nothing. He had not been alone with Nelly for a minute except those hours in the canon's garden and the cathedral – except their encounter in the little church.

Was England so queer a place that one couldn't talk to a girl for three-quarters of an hour without having her flung at one's head?

She must have had an awful quarrel with the boy; there could be no mistake about that! But surely, surely, she couldn't have told Canyot that she had ceased to care for him and had begun to care for *him* – a man she'd only just seen for the second time! It was unthinkable that she should have forgotten all modesty and decency to an extent as fantastic as that. The whole thing was Canyot's damned hot-headed blundering jealousy. If he'd been a Frenchman he would no doubt have challenged him to a duel. The stupid ass! And then this postscript about the room at the farm … It was all so extremely laughable that it was difficult to take it seriously. That girl, who was a thoroughly sensible girl, showed clearly enough that she didn't take it seriously by refusing to send him back his gifts.

She must be furiously angry with him though, if he had written to her in the style he had used to him!

Thus, with the surface of his mind, as if before a jury of people of the world, did Richard pour righteous oil upon his embarrassment.

In that deeper, subtler portion of his being, the part of him that did not condescend to use reason or logic, he was less sure, far less sure, of his position. Down in *those* depths, without any words, some honest cynical demon told him that Canyot was fatally near the truth. Of course there *had* been, directly he and Nelly met, and every second they were together, a thrilling vivid undercurrent of sympathy, of understanding. Canyot would have been a very insensitive lover if he hadn't sensed that. He would have been a fool if he hadn't seen it. No doubt he saw things in her expressions, in her tones, in her gestures, that made him know, with the breath of fate itself, that his hour was ended.

No doubt he had challenged her – and, poor innocent inexperienced thing as she was, she had not been able convincingly to meet his challenge. Without meaning to do so, teased and persecuted in his bullying, she had betrayed herself to him. This subtler voice, among Richard's interior demons, was supported in its conclusions by his vanity.

It was as agreeable as it was touching: to think of a sweet young creature like this being driven into a corner till she admitted being more than a little interested in Mr Richard Storm!

Finally, as he rose from his seat under the lime trees, crushing Canyot's letter into his pocket the better, more normal Richard in him decided that the young man had recognized more quickly than either Nelly or himself which way the wind was blowing, and apart from the least admission on her side and simply from devotion to her interests, had brought matters to a head in this erratic manner.

All that day and a good deal of the next was spent by Richard in meditating what he should do in this curious imbroglio. The end of it was that he decided to do nothing at all, except to leave Nelly Moreton alone for a while.

To leave the neighbourhood was out of the question. It would be like running away *for the second time*.

He replied in a friendly but quite non-committal manner to Canyot's letter and said he would be very glad to see something more of him before he sailed for America. He avoided any mention of Miss Moreton's name. His policy of remaining in retreat for the present and leaving the girl alone was made easier for him by a certain rush of energy in the sphere of his writing.

He wrote steadily for several long uninterrupted mornings and afternoons making a conscious effort to keep the image of Nelly, as well as that *other* image, far back in the recesses of his consciousness.

What, he thought fantastically to himself on one of these calm days, do these insidious phantoms of people, that for the time being we don't want to think about, these bodiless haunters of our suppressed world, do with one another in that queer twilight? Do they gibber and squeak at one another – these Elises and Nellys – or are they, like the Queen of Carthage in the Elysian fields, silent and disdainful?

He found, as he wrote, that it was possible to reduce all these human entanglements to a vague far-off world that hardly infringed upon the world he visioned in his present humour. *This* world, of his mystical consciousness, was a world in which the immediate pain of things and the immediate thrill of things were both held back to a certain distance. It was a world in which *his* immediate pain and *his* immediate pleasure were taken up and absorbed in the great stream of all the pleasures and pains of the human race.

What he sought to give an enduring expression to, as he took his available words and squeezed out their subtler meanings and tried to make his thought clothe itself, rhythm within rhythm, with these delicate essences, was the large flowing tide of human experience as it gathered in great reiterated waves, under the old pressure of the old dilemmas, and rolled forward and drew back along the sea banks of necessity.

What he groped after was an entrance into some larger consciousness, not remote from this earthly world, but carrying forward, generation after generation, the faint surmises, the dim guesses, the broken half-glimpses, of men and women and, with all these gathered up within it, itself growing more and more responsive to deeper vibrations from the Unknown, more and more aware of itself as the true Son of Man, as the true logos, into whose being had been poured all the thwarted and baffled aspirations of all souls.

It was not that he wished to find some mere mystical sensation, inchoate and indistinct, and try to express the feeling of just that, in lulled and monotonous rhythms. It was that he wished to take the many poignant 'little things', bitter and sweet, tragic and grotesque, common and fantastic, such as the earth affords us all in our confused wayfaring, and to associate these, as each generation is aware of them before it passes away, as he himself was aware of them in his own hour, with some dimly conceived immortal consciousness that gave them all an enduring value and dropped none of them by the way.

It was, so to speak, some tentative, hesitant, as yet only half-conscious soul of the earth, to which he sought to feel his way, a kind of half-human, half-elemental logos, nearer the Goat-foot Pass than any vague dream of the old Gnostics, and yet with a music in its being, beyond the breath of any reed of the marshes.

It was comparatively easy to let the faint magic of his view of things ebb and flow before his mental vision in these long golden mornings in Selshurst, where the very streets were full of the fragrances of the fields. It was a very different matter when he came to attempt the task of putting all this into poetic form. How, in that little bedroom of his, opening on the light breaths of rosemary and balsam and newly budding lavender, where every now and then came lively voices from the back parlour, he wrestled with the obstinate mystery of words!

Why not put these thoughts of his into the simpler cadences of prose? Because there are certain things that refuse to be expressed in prose, that demand the austerer rhythms, the more oracular gestures, the more broken, fragmentary, evasive hints, of poetry.

But ‘Oh Prince, what labour, oh Prince, what pain!’ For the rhythms of poetry, expecially of the *vers libre* he was working in, are of such a kind that not only the general swing of the verse had to leap forth as the very exhalation of his own especial soul, but each separate line, nay! every word he uses, must fall into its place, not ‘by taking thought’, but by an indefinable movement of the energy of music in himself. The syllables have to form an essence compounded of strange subtleties; and as for the thoughts, they must be bitter and sweet, full of the mysterious saps and juices of the blood of life, cool-breathing, redolent of undying mornings and evenings, sprinkled with eternal dews.

Day followed day without any interruption to these mental and psychic labours. ‘I have not run away a second time,’ he kept saying to himself; but that was the very thing, as he well knew in his secret heart, that he *had* done! To fall suddenly after those vibrant and thrilling first meetings with her, into dead silence, was nothing less than to abscond, to quit the field, to bolt.

He did not attempt to bring into honest daylight the queer shadowy motives that tumbled over one another, like shifty humpbacked weasels in a rabbit hole, down there in the darkness of his hidden mind. But somehow by not actually clearing off, by not leaving Selshurst altogether, he satisfied the scruples of one part of his nature, while by offering the girl nothing but this profound silence he made a definite break with what had begun to occur between them, and in a queer sort of indirect way hit back at the meddling Canyot.

It was all the more easy to hide himself like this just because that ‘threatening letter’, as he called it, of the impulsive painter had quite definitely broken up the special kind of sentimental attraction he had begun to feel for the young girl. In those first days he never thought of her without thinking of buttercups, and celandines; but now whenever he thought of her he thought of that ‘choosing definitely between us’; until the fair face of the maiden floated, in his mind, above a horrid iron prong, that jerked and prodded him into that lamentable arena of duty where decisions are made!

One morning, however, after more than a week of this recluse existence, his whole line of action was scattered to the winds by a letter from the girl herself.

‘Dear Mr Storm,’ the letter said, in a firm clear round rather childish hand. ‘When are you coming to see us again? – or have you left Selshurst? If you have gone away I hope they won’t forward this because it’s only a dull invitation which it will be a bore to receive in Paris or wherever you may be. It’s to ask you to come over to tea tomorrow, to meet my friend Mrs Shotover. Please try and come if you can, as my father took a great fancy to you; which is rare with him as you can guess. But of course if you *have* left it’s no use. In that case may I say I’m sorry we didn’t say goodbye?’ And the letter ended with an evident hesitation between ‘Sincerely’ and ‘Very sincerely’, avoided by a manufactured blot and a hurried ‘And with best wishes for the success of your work – from Nelly Moreton.’

It is extraordinary what power a direct personal appeal has, to break up a whole fabric of moral speculation! The look of the letter, the way she had worded it, that blot at the last with the unconventional ending – all these things thrilled Richard as if they had been the very touch of her hand. ‘Ha! Ha! My good friend,’ one of his slyest demons whispered to him, ‘so, after all, the real reason for this retreat of yours was pure jealousy! You thought she did still care for Canyot!’

Tea tomorrow? That means today – this very afternoon. And Richard rushed out of the Crown Inn passage, into the street, sans hat and stick, and made his way to the leafy cathedral close, walking upon air.

He left an admirable lunch, that noon, very imperfectly dispatched, and found himself chatting to barmaids, gardeners, ostlers, boot boys, even to that old insinuating toper, half-beggar, half local-celebrity, who went by the name of Young Bill, with the most eager interest. –

‘I may as well start early,’ he said to himself. ‘It’s so horrid to meet people when one’s hot and rushed.’

He started indeed so extremely early that it was hardly half past two when he arrived within a couple of miles of the place. *I can’t appear yet for hours!* he thought, and tried to settle himself down in a pleasant corner of a field, taking out of his pocket a little volume of *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. He got as far as the title on the cover, which struck his fancy as being singularly appropriate; but the words inside the book might have been written in Chinese, for all they conveyed to his mind.

‘Confound this waiting!’ he said to himself. ‘It makes a person nervous. Maybe I’d better take a bit of a detour.’ This diplomatic move had the effect of so entangling him between hedges and ditches, and hayfields where he knew he mustn’t tread down the grass, that it was quite four o’clock before he made his appearance, decidedly hot and very muddy, at the door of Littlegate Vicarage.

Mrs Shotover had arrived, and with John Moreton and Nelly was standing on the lawn outside the vicar's study.

Richard's joining them was the signal for Grace to bring out tea, preparations for which had already been made under the shelter of a wide-spreading sycamore.

Nelly had blushed scarlet on first seeing him and had been so nervous that in introducing him to Mrs Shotover, she said the one thing which she had made up her mind she must on no account say, the one thing that it would be 'perfectly awful' to say. 'Mrs Shotover,' she said, 'has been teasing me about you. She calls you my Stormy Petrel.'

As soon as she had uttered the words she could have bitten off her tongue. *Some devil must have said that through my mouth!* she thought.

A voice within the man she addressed did certainly not fail to point out that the jest was an ill-timed if not an ill-bred one; and that it was not pleasant to be the subject of 'teasing' between ladies. But this was only one voice among many that were uttering fantastic and carping comments in Richard's brain; and the real Richard was very little affected by them. Indeed the girl looked at him so shyly and so wistfully after this blunder, that she could have said something far worse than that and he would have forgiven her.

'I found a knapweed out this morning,' remarked the vicar, after the first settling in seats and pouring out of tea had subsided. 'I've never found one so early before; not in thirty years. It's a remarkable season.'

'Father always finds the first flower,' said Nelly quickly. 'He seems to know by instinct where to go for them. It's quite queer sometimes. You'd think that no sooner were a new flower out, than it made a special signal to Father, over miles and miles, to come and see it.'

'Mr Storm must come and see my garden,' threw in the lady from West Horthing, 'and I've got a few things in my house that no doubt would interest him still more.'

'What things do you mean?' asked Nelly with genuine curiosity. But her friend shook her head at her. 'It's Mr Storm I'm going to show them to, not you, dear. When *you* come to see me it's all gossip and scandal, isn't it? We've no time for serious things. Do you think it's really true, Mr Storm, that women are fonder of gossip than men?'

It was the old naturalist who unexpectedly replied to her.

'Women, Betty, gossip out of pure malice; in order to satisfy their spitefulness and spleen. Men gossip out of a philosophical interest in human nature.'

'I would put it rather differently.' said Storm. 'Men gossip about their enemies – women about their friends. Women think themselves privileged to abuse their friends.'

'Mr Storm! That isn't true,' broke in Nelly. 'Don't interrupt him, dear,' said the old lady. 'He was going to say something else. I saw it coming.'

What do you think yourself?' inquired Storm, looking straight into her satiric screwed-up eyes.

'I think we all gossip as fast as we can find subjects for it. Women's subjects are more limited than men's; so they're bound to make more of them.'

'Tell me this then—' began Richard.

'Oh no catechisms, I implore!' cried Mrs Shotover. 'That's where you literary people are so unkind.'

'I hope you don't mean *so boring*,' said Richard.

‘No, please, Granny dear; let Mr Storm finish his question. I’m sure it was thrilling. Ask me instead of her, won’t you?’ And Nelly smiled at him with a tender quiet little smile that seemed to say, ‘I love your catechisms!’

‘It probably wasn’t a proper question to put to you,’ chuckled Mrs Shotover. ‘Well, go ahead, young man, and be as unkind to the old lady as you like.’

‘I only meant – but there! we’ve driven your father away I’m afraid—’ and he stopped abruptly, as the vicar, nodding benevolently at them all, got up and shuffled across the lawn.

‘Oh no! Father never stays after he’s had his tea,’ cried Nelly. ‘Now Mr Storm, *do* finish your sentence!’

‘I only meant,’ Richard went on, cursing himself for having launched into the topic at all, ‘that it’s queer how women scold so bitterly and vindictively people that they’re really all the time actually in love with.’

Mrs Shotover put back her head, dropped her lorgnette, and dropped into a cackling high-pitched laugh. Then she leered at Richard with her head on one side like some wicked very old fowl. ‘Do they do that? My goodness! You notice, Nelly, what experiences Mr Storm has had.’

Richard glared at her angrily. ‘I’m afraid it wasn’t an original remark of mine,’ he retorted. ‘It’s that old well-known poem of Catullus I was thinking of. I hardly liked to bore you with it in Latin.’

‘In Latin!’ Mrs Shotover clapped her hands. ‘Oh Nelly, do put down that cake. You know you don’t want it. And listen to Mr Storm quoting Latin.’

But Nelly’s face was very serious. It would never do for Mrs Shotover and Richard to quarrel at this juncture. ‘You two dear nice people!’ she cried, rising to her feet in order to deal more adequately with the situation. ‘How you do fight over these absurd problems! As Mr Storm says, I don’t think we need much experience to know what people are like when they love and hate at the same time! But I don't think it's only women who torment the people they care for. I'm sure men do it. I don't know whether you'd count Father as an example? But he certainly does it. Well? Shall we go round the garden?'

As they moved away Nelly thought to herself – The poor absurd darling! how sweet he looked when he got angry because she laughed. And how solemnly he began that old tiresome business about loving and scolding.

What pompous vain conceited things the nicest of men are! But oh I'm so glad to see him again – and there's the same feeling between us – just the same – he feels it and I feel it. How wonderful it is!

And Richard thought in his heart – That vulgar impertinent old woman! Trying to make me look a fool before Nelly! But the sweet thing came to my rescue instead. Bless her heart! She may be innocent, but she's got more intellect, any day, than that old harridan with false teeth and a grin like a hyena! Bless her heart! I was a silly ass to keep away all this time. What days I've wasted!

And as he followed the old and the young woman round that pleasant little garden he smiled to himself to notice how naïvely and simply he had thought of those even days of work at the main purpose of his life as 'wasted' – because he had hidden himself away from a girl of twenty-two.

Chapter 7

RICHARD DID NOT succeed in securing any private word with Nelly before he felt it incumbent upon him to say goodbye. The ‘laughing hyena’, as he named Mrs Shotover to himself, grinned her obstinate determination to ‘stick him out’ and be left alone with her young friend. He was only thankful she had a coachman and dog-cart; so that there was no question of his having to walk back with her to West Horthing. He cordially detested her; and made up his mind to attack Nelly on the subject, and express his wonder as to what she could see in such a spiteful and silly old creature!

That’s the worst of England, he thought. It’s such a confounded individualistic country, that a horrible old woman like that as long as she has money and ‘knows the neighbourhood’ can go on indefinitely making herself a general nuisance. In America, he supposed, she would have been put into her place and forced to mend her manners. Well! Well! After all, perhaps, there was something to be said for a system that encouraged everybody to grow into a ‘Character’, either a charming one or the reverse! It was better perhaps to have ‘laughing hyenas’ than monotonous herds of sheep!

The next day was a day of pouring rain and Richard made no attempt to do more than visit the cathedral. He took the opportunity of carrying his notebooks there and reading to himself what he had written. On the whole he was not displeased with the result of his week’s work. He had composed about two hundred lines of this uneven dithyrambic ‘litany of the earth-soul’, its slow growing into consciousness, its use of the sentiency of all living things, its vague ‘dreaming on things to come’.

He became conscious how deeply he had abandoned himself to these English fields and lanes and hedges, to these mossy walls and historic buildings, to these old quiet immemorial traditions.

His return to his native land had stirred a thousand atavistic feelings in him, tastes and prejudices, devotions and queer old attachments.

The lines he had written were full of the sounds and scents of the English country, and the more conscious, more human element in them was religious in the calm reserved English way and was rootedly, but not feverishly, pagan. Dithyrambic in its broken ebb and flow the poem might be; but the music of it was rich and slow and a little heavy – not by any means a song of air and flame! The thing might not be passionate and exciting; but the bleating of flocks was in it, and the sweet breath of cattle, and the patient labours of simple people under the sun and the rain, and the faint sad strange murmurs, like the winds at night, over summer grass, of the dead generations that found their survival in those who came after them.

He returned to his inn late that night, having wandered far through the fields as the evening cleared, along the old canal bank, towards the sea. It had come upon him, as he walked there, especially in passing a particular group of poplar trees, pale and soaked with rain, shivering in the night wind like something human against the orange-coloured skyline, that he had known all this before. Yes, long before, under some other name perhaps, in the unending sequence of the great wayfaring, he must have stood, just as he was standing then, watching those trees whispering to each other with sad tender voices!

And that night he pulled his chair close to the open window and sat for a long while looking out into the silent wet garden, where the darkness itself seemed to exhale an old forgotten fragrance, carrying the mind back to dumb deep-buried memories.

It was one of those hours when a man feels the presence of all the days he has lived through, gathered up and folded together like the crowding of soft innumerable wings; an hour when what is to come hangs palpably imminent, like a vast pregnant shadow, before him, beckoning to those sheltering wings that they should let him go, let him move forward to his fate.

Winnowed and purged by his days with the secrets of words, their mysterious alliances and treacheries, his soul seemed, as he sat at that window, reluctant to break the spell, hovering consciously between a past that was over, its wounds healed, and a future on whose threshold he wavered and hesitated, full of unknown things – beautiful, terrible, pitiful!

He left the window at last with a sense as though he had made, for good or for evil, some great decision; as though at some dark crossroads he had chosen his way, and now could never, through all that should subsequently happen, retrace his footsteps.

Never had Richard sunk into so deep a chasm of dreamless unconsciousness as he slid away into, almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. He awoke the next morning with a feeling as though he had slept not for seven hours, but for seven centuries; he wondered vaguely if he would ever sleep quite in that way again. Was it the very sleep of the ‘earth-soul’ he had been writing about into which, like a child entering the spaciousness of a mother’s dreams, he had been allowed to pass?

He had the queerest feeling as he washed and dressed as though it were necessary to move very quickly, very stealthily and solemnly, about the room. Was some shadowy dead self, some phantom corpse of everything he had been before, actually lying on the bed he had quitted?

He ran downstairs anyway with a distinct feeling of relief from psychic tension and oppressipn. And on the table in the breakfast room, lying on his plate, he found a letter from Nelly. He opened and read it standing by the window, while Trixie Flap, the Crown housemaid, watched him shrewdly, her hand on the mahogany sideboard.

The letter was brief enough.

‘Dear Mr Storm, Please come over and see me. *At once*, if you don’t mind? It’s impossible to tell you more in a letter. I must talk to somebody. I am very worried, so please come as soon as you get this. In the morning if possible. I’ll look out for you. I am sorry to trouble you.’

And the letter was hurriedly signed, ‘Nelly’.

Richard looked at his watch and then at the self-conscious back of Trixie Flap who was now fidgeting with something on the sideboard.

‘Let’s have some tea at once, Trixie, please,’ he said, seating himself at the table and beginning to cut the loaf. ‘Never mind about the porridge. I’m in a hurry. I’ve got to go somewhere.’

When he next looked at his watch it was after ten and he was already halfway to Littlegate. He could not have given any lucid account of what trees or beasts or rustics he had passed on his way. He might have passed much more remarkable things than early flowering knapweed and they would have been unnoticed. That phrase *I’ll look out for you* with its pathetic confidence in his friendship had stuck a dart into his heart whose sweet rankling made him oblivious of all outward objects.

He came upon her quite suddenly, leaning against a gate, staring with woebegone eyes in front of her, without hat or gloves. She turned when she heard his step and leaped forward to meet him, her cheeks burning.

She gave him her hand. She made a little hesitating movement as if she would have given him both her hands. Instead of that she gave him the loveliest smile that Richard had ever seen on a human countenance. ‘Thank God you’ve come!’ she said with a sigh of content.

They instinctively moved to the gate which Richard rapidly opened, untwisting its rustic defences with a trembling hand.

‘Let’s get off the road,’ he said. ‘Then we can talk better.’

They risked the wrath of the farmer and crossed the field to the shelter of a large ash tree which grew in the hedge bank. At the foot of this tree they were isolated from the whole world.

It was a hot, still, thundery day, the sun having a semitropical feeling in it owing to the rain that had fallen.

‘I’m afraid the grass is damp,’ said Richard. ‘With that thin dress …’ He looked at her tenderly. ‘Oh, I know!’ he cried impulsively, and taking off his coat he spread it upon the ground.

The girl looked grave. ‘After getting warm walking …’ she murmured, ‘I don’t *think* you ought to—’

‘But just feel how hot the sun is – burning hot!’ And he made her sit down by his side; even going so far as to give her a little friendly pull closer to him when she seemed shy of taking more than the minutest share of the tweed jacket spread out beneath them.

Nelly sat with her legs stretched straight out in front of her, Richard with his knees under his chin; and when he told her that it was like sitting together on a magic carpet that only needed one talismanic word to transport them both to some Happy Valley out of reach of all annoyance, she nodded in contented agreement.

The hot thundery heavy sunshine fell upon them like an actual stream of attenuated gold, as though the very father of gods and men were blessing them with full hands.

‘Well – now we are alone and safe,’ said Richard, hugging his knees with his clenched fingers and letting his eyes rest on the childish indoor shoes she was wearing, strapped with a thin leather strap above the instep, ‘let’s hear the worst. Out with it Miss Nelly! I can tell you in advance, by a sort of presentiment, that I shall be able to find a solution. Out with it Miss Nelly!'

'You may drop the Miss – if you like,' said the girl in a low voice, plucking a long feathery grass blade and pulling it to pieces on her lap.

'Well, out with it, Nelly!' he repeated.

She drew in her breath as if for a great burst of volubility; and then suddenly, instead of telling him anything, she broke into a flood of tears. Richard longed to take that fair forehead with its pearl-white transparent skin, its delicate blue veins, its exquisite arched eyebrows, and those wet cheeks hidden in her hands, and comfort them with caresses; but it seemed somehow as if it would be stealing an unfair advantage of her just then. So he just laid one of his hands lightly on her shoulder. 'Come, come, little one,' he said. 'I'm certain we can settle all these things if you only tell me.'

She made a gallant effort and stopped crying, turning to him a look of almost frightened apology. 'Don't be angry with me,' she murmured. 'I really don't often give way like this. I think it must be the thunder in the air. It's so hot and close isn't it?'

Richard hurriedly assented. 'Oh awfully close! But do try and tell me now. I'm sure I'm the right person to be told.'

'It's about Father,' she said quietly. 'He's written several times to London lately and he's written to Selshurst. And now it's all decided. They've accepted his resignation. Someone's coming from Selshurst to take the service. And there's to be a new vicar. He's not to be allowed to officiate in the church again. In fact it's more like being turned out than resigning. There'll only be one more quarter's salary coming in; and that's the end. After that we've got nothing! And we've not saved a penny. God knows what we shall do. What hastened all so and brought things to a head was some parishioner from over the hill complaining to the bishop – no Littlegate person would have done it. I believe it was the foreman at Toat Farm. He's a silly officious old fool. He's always been a trouble. He must have told them about Father's leaving out prayers and things. Whenever it says *God* in the service he changes it to *Christ*. It's very, very cruel – happening like this. But I suppose it was bound to come sooner or later. I suppose it *would* sound odd if a stranger heard him. He didn't always change it to *Christ*. Sometimes he changed it to *Lord* but he always changed it – except when he was thinking of his butterflies or something, and then he forgot and said it like anybody else. I suppose it couldn't go on like that, could it? Though the people here didn't seem to notice any difference.'

She stopped breathlessly and looked at her companion with appealing eyes.

Richard felt compelled to confess to her that it did seem a little strange for a priest to expurgate the syllable *God* out of the Christian worship. He admitted that he did not very clearly see how it could 'go on' quite like that.

'But cannot your Father make any special use of his scientific knowledge? He seemed to me a man of unusual mental power. Couldn't he get a biological position in some college?'

Nelly frowned just a tiny bit at this, and thought in her heart, How curiously stupid the nicest of men are! Any woman who'd seen Father would know at once that he was quite hopeless in things like that. I suppose the truth is all men are a little hopeless themselves. How any of them do any practical work I can't think!

And she sighed and smiled, and then frowned again.

'No. I suppose that's out of the question,' said Richard and stared helplessly at the little crossed ankles lying in the grass beside him, over which the ash leaves above their heads threw a tracery of delicate shadows.

Sitting there in his shirtsleeves he felt as though he were prepared to undertake any quixotic labour on behalf of this young girl. But what form could it take?

'I think perhaps I ought to tell you something else,' said Nelly gravely. 'Perhaps you've guessed I'm engaged to be married to Mr Canyot?'

'Yes,' said Richard with a beating heart.

She was evidently making a tremendous effort to be entirely frank with him and he felt a wave of vibrant pity for her in her manifest embarrassment.

'Mr Canyot's been so different since he lost his mother. He misunderstands things. I mean he confuses things. But it's all too much my own fault!' She pulled up a large handful of sun-warmed grass and threaded it around her fingers.

Richard could not help noticing that she still wore the ring which he had from the first day assumed to be her engagement ring.

'I ought to tell you that we had a bad quarrel that day when we walked back together from Selshurst.'

Now we come to it! thought Richard.

'And the quarrel,' she went on, 'if you want to know, was absurdly enough about *you*!'

'About me?' cried Richard, putting a good deal more astonishment into his tone than he actually felt. What he really felt was something much more like the edge and fringe of extreme foolishness; for he began to fear that he had exaggerated altogether the link between her and himself.

She is treating me as her father confessor, he thought. She is talking to me about her love affair. And a very cynical and rather bitter emotion passed through him.

‘Yes, it was about you, about *us*,’ the girl went on. It was a faint comfort to him to remark that she did blush – she blushed so quickly; it was the misfortune of her transparent complexion – at the word ‘us’.

‘He was troubled in his mind because I liked you, because we liked each other. He said I looked at you and talked to you differently from the way I did with him. Well! you *are* different, a lot different, from Robert, aren’t you?’

Richard dryly admitted that he did differ from Mr Robert Canyot.

‘We quarrelled over that all the way home. He was rude to me. He was really angry. And I’m afraid I got angry too and said things that hurt him.’

‘Things that hurt him,’ repeated Richard, helping her out.

‘I said I had a right to choose my own friends. I said … more than I ought to have said!’ And she gave Richard that same indescribably lovely smile that he had received from her three times before.

I wonder if she looks at Canyot like that? he thought. If she doesn’t, I’m blessed if he is her choice! At any rate as long as she gives me that look I know we’ve got something very deep between us.

‘I said,’ she went on, looking down now at the grass-blades twisted round her fingers and smiling to herself a quaint elfish enigmatic smile that seemed to separate her in some queer way from all possible lovers and turn her into a mocking sexless thing of childish unapproachableness.

‘I said I *did* like you very much indeed; and that, if he wasn’t careful, I should fall in love with you, and fall out of love with him – I said *that*, on purpose, to annoy him. I wanted to annoy him as much as I possibly could.’

‘I see,’ said Richard. ‘You said *that* to hurt your lover as much as ever you could, to punish him for being, as you say, so absurdly jealous.’

Again there flickered over her downcast face that peculiarly detached, mischievous and elfish ripple of merriment.

‘And what did he do?’ inquired Richard, feeling like a man who squeezes a nettle tighter and tighter in the hope that the smart would diminish if he only squeezed hard enough. ‘What did he do when you said *that* to him?’

She laughed aloud then, a ringing peal of reed-throated laughter like a blackbird in the rain. ‘You won’t be too horrified if I tell you?’ she asked.

He promised hurriedly to receive, any account of this incident with complete equanimity.

‘He shook me!’ she cried with another ripple of reed-like merriment. ‘Shook me ever so hard. Till I rattled like a pea pod.’

There was really nothing for Richard to say or to do in response to this – unless he were prepared to shake her himself.

A little unkindly – but he surely had some excuse – he brought her back to the point from which she had commenced this narration. ‘You say his mother’s death has not improved things between you?’

She did become grave at this; very grave and quiet. ‘Poor Robert!’ she sighed. ‘Yes, it upset him completely. He made it difficult for me to go to the funeral. And he has been writing me such strange letters since.’

Her face assumed an unhappy and puzzled expression. ‘You don’t suppose,’ she said, turning to Richard with that peculiarly wistful look that had disarmed him at the beginning, ‘that the death of a person’s mother can really unsettle a person’s mind?’

‘I hope not, I’m sure, Nelly,’ was all he found himself able to say to this. Then the temptation arose violently in him to tell her about the letter he had himself received from Canyot. He fought this down with resolute energy. *No! it would be a caddish thing to do – I must play fair in this business.*

He recompensed himself for this piece of virtue by a very mischievous move.

‘Do tell me,’ he said, ‘while we’re talking so frankly together, what you told Mrs Shotover about me. I’m sure you must have given her your most real impression. There was no reason for pretending things to “annoy” *her*.’

If he had wanted to cause his companion agitation and discomfort he certainly succeeded. Nelly pulled up her knees beneath her frock, gave a little twist away from him, dug one of her hands into the ground to support herself, and jumped up on her feet.

‘I don’t think you ought to have asked me that,’ she said, frowning down upon him like an accusing angel.

Richard jumped up too, and picked up his coat.

‘I don’t see why not,’ he retorted. ‘You admitted she’d been teasing you about me. People don’t tease people about things like that out of a blue sky. Besides, you said she called me funny nicknames, making puns on my name.’

There were burning spots of colour in Nelly’s cheeks by this time; but they were roses of anger much more than roses of shame.

‘I don’t think you ought to have said that to me. I don’t think you treated Mrs Shotover at all nicely. She’s an old lady. She’s nearly seventy. And you spoke quite crossly to her in that silly argument. It isn’t that I minded your having different opinions – but you needn’t have been rude.’

‘I thought it was your friend who was rude,’ retorted Richard.

By this time they had, as if by mutual consent, left the friendly shelter of the ash tree, and were retracing their steps towards the lane.

‘I don’t know why it is,’ observed Nelly, addressing her remark to the air and the grass and the hot thundery sunshine which beat down on them with a benignant indifference to their dissension, ‘but men seem so tiresomely serious and pedantic in their arguments sometimes. I think it’s absurd to quote Latin at a tea party.’

To cover her retreat from his ill-timed reference to her friend – oh! how she wished she had never said a word to Mrs Shotover about him! – Nelly had certainly succeeded in reducing their happiness to a low ebb.

He trailed along at her side so sulkily and morosely now that she was tempted to give him yet another stab.

‘It was silly of her, of course, but one couldn’t expect her to like you after your being so brusque to her. But she *did* go a little far. She said you had a *clerical* way of talking – that you reminded her of a certain archdeacon she knows.’

Richard burst out at this. ‘She reminded *me*,’ he cried, ‘of a certain animal I know! I think she’s a most unpleasant old person. I can’t understand your making a friend of her.’

The girl turned clear round. ‘I choose my friends as I choose,’ she cried, her grey eyes turning quite dark with anger; ‘but I see I must ask leave in future from Mr Storm!’ They had reached the gate by this time and Richard without a word moved forward to open it for her. He closed it again meticulously behind them.

‘Well?’ he said, looking straight into her eyes. ‘I suppose I’d better say goodbye now.’

She gave a little gasp and moved back a step. For an infinitesimal moment of time they looked darkly and strangely at one another, as if measuring swords. But the man had already played the winning card, the old eternal masculine trump card in these contentions.

She thought to herself, puzzled, startled, bewildered, frightened, *He* cannot *surely mean that? He cannot mean just to go away, without a word?*

‘Goodbye—’ she whispered in a low voice scarcely moving her lips, and stepped back yet further. Then, still facing him, she leaned against the gate, stretching out her arms behind her so that they rested on the top bar. Her wide-open eyes, darkly blue now in her alarm, fixed themselves upon him out of an immobile white face.

‘Goodbye,’ she repeated. And the whispered syllables went floating away over the leafy hedges and the tall waving grasses.

The situation had reversed itself, like the sudden turning of an hour-glass.

She had had complete advantage over him in her unscrupulous power of wounding. He regained the ascendency in his equally unscrupulous power of just leaving her alone.

Neither of them at that moment had the mind to analyse these things. Their whole consciousness was absorbed in their indignation against each other. His emotion was complicated by the great woolly flock of interior vanities and self-respects which he had to protect from outrage. Her emotion, far deeper than his, had nothing to complicate it.

The situation hung suspended in this way for a perceptible moment. Then the masculine diplomatist in Richard, with its heavily acquired sense of order and decency and its hatred of shocks and scenes, led him to take the line that really was the meanest and most cowardly he could take.

Had he accepted her little tragically whispered ‘goodbye’ and gone straight back to Selshurst, he would have struck that white face a remorseless blow; but the account between them would have been balanced up, and the look in her eyes which would have gone with him would have given him no peace.

Instead of that, he proceeded to override her with a forgiveness that was no forgiveness; to secure himself against remorse and yet to keep his grudge intact and the hurt to his vanity unhealed.

He moved up to her side. ‘Come, Nelly, we two are just making fools of ourselves quarrelling like this. Are you going to ask me to lunch? I want to meet your father again so very much. It would never do to come as far as this and go back without seeing him. I didn't see half his collections, you know – only the butterflies.'

She had to submit to this. There was no other way. And thus led, as it were, captive, harnessed helplessly to that elaborate social propriety which women are supposed to be responsible for, but which in reality is man's protection from the passionate sub-civilized woman-soul, she meekly walked by his side, passive, quiet, subdued, unhappy, along the road by which she had come that morning hoping for unspeakable comfort.

'I ought to tell you,' she said as they went along, 'what Mr Canyot has proposed for us; because Father is sure to talk about it and you'd wonder I'd said nothing. So you must let me bore you with just one or two more family details.'

'Don't be sarcastic, Nelly,' he said gently. 'How can I give you advice if I don't know the situation? And you *did* ask me to help, you know!'

She flashed at him one quick look of bitter mockery; and then went on in quiet unemotional tones.

'Robert suggested – he and Father talked about it without my knowledge – that when we were married, which he wanted to happen very soon, we should live in Hill Cottage – that's a place you haven't seen yet to the north of the village – and my father live there with us. Robert had nearly finished furnishing it when … when you came. It's a pretty little house. It would really suit us very well as far as I'm concerned and Father would be happy there.'

She stopped speaking and they walked on for a second or two in silence. 'Please go on,' said Richard. 'Please tell me everything. You don't know what a magician I can be sometimes! Let me know every aspect of your difficulties.'

‘And then you came,’ the girl burst out; ‘and then his mother was killed. And now his poor head seems to have got the wildest notions into it. I can’t understand his letters!’

‘He told me at the hospital,’ threw in Richard, keeping that ‘threatening letter’ from approaching the tip of his tongue only by a resolute effort, ‘that it was about an exhibition in America that his mother came to see him. Has anything more come of that?’

Nelly looked round sharply. ‘I didn’t know you knew that,’ she said. ‘Well, I expect, as you say, if you’re to give me advice you must know everything. Yes. He talks now of going to America quite soon; in two or three weeks in fact. But what’s going to happen to Father while we’re gone, heaven knows!’

‘Then he wants to marry you at once and carry you over with him?’ Richard threw back at her, in a hard, firm, unemotional voice.

Nelly saw that she had been pushed into a corner. She had been tempted, she hardly knew why, to fling at him that assured ‘while we’re gone’. It was a sort of raft of refuge for her at the moment, that significant ‘we’, but she had no sooner uttered it than she felt as ashamed as if she had been caught in a palpable falsehood.

She wasn’t in any sense conscious of playing off one man against another. Whichever way she looked she saw perils and disasters. But it was intolerable to have to admit to Richard that Canyot had sent her a practical ultimatum, telling her she must choose between them and announcing that he would ‘come down soon to hear her decision’.

It was being left stranded like that, thrown out of her home without a moment’s notice, with her father on her hands, that created this misery, these wavering equivocations.

She, like Canyot himself, had no wish to be taken by anybody ‘out of pity’. Her painter, she knew, needed her, wanted her, loved her single-heartedly, loved her passionately – his wild jealousy proved *that* – and as long as she leant upon *him* her pride was quite unhurt. But the idea of having to confess to Richard the drastic nature of those letters she had been receiving, with their refrain of ‘choose’ – ‘choose’ – ‘choose’, was altogether unbearable. No girl could say to a man, ‘I *must* have one of you – now, which is it to be?’

The whole thing seemed to be a welter of bitterness and misery. And it had been so beautiful, so thrilling, that first encounter with Richard! This miserable problem of money, of necessity, of her father, put her into a completely false position. It spoilt all her happiness with Richard. It made her irritable; it made her say things to hurt him; it made her *hate* him.

She felt convinced that he didn’t believe that all was as well in her relations with Canyot as she had tried to make out. She had practically lied about it. Canyot had never suggested taking her to America. And she divined that Richard suspected her of lying. But what could she do? She *had*, at all costs, to protect both Richard and herself from the humiliation of her being driven into his arms by Robert and her father!

Life was certainly much more cruel to women than she had had any idea of before these last months. And it had been so lovely, so indescribably lovely, that first delicious vague consciousness that there was ‘something’ between herself and Richard different from anything else in the world!

And now this wretched money business, and the question of her father, had come in to spoil it all! And of course, poor darling Robert. But curiously enough it wasn’t, just now, her anxiety over any broken heart of Robert that filled her with gloom. She had a queer instinctive feeling that she could always ‘deal with’ Robert, whether she married him or not; ‘deal with' him and quiet him and satisfy him and make him happy or at least content. It was as though she felt that merely for her to be alive on the earth at all was in a sense enough for Robert!

The case of Richard was completely different.

And what, when it came to that, had she appealed to Richard for in her desperation? He had come to her and they had quarrelled. He was so tiresomely touchy and vain. And was that to be the end?

What was it, when she had written that letter, that she had had in her mind? He was by her side now and she must protect him from herself, from pity for herself, by making it seem that all was well between her and the painter. Why must she do this? Because she was a woman; and women were not allowed to say straight out, from a clear unclouded sky, 'I, Nelly Moreton, love you, Richard Storm.'

Instead of this they had to protect these impulsive susceptible creatures from their own emotions, from *their* emotions too! *Why* had they to do this? Why was the whole weight and burden of everything put upon them? Because they were women; and life had been arranged in that manner, by God, by nature, and by men!

'Well,' she said to her companion as they observed the figure of her father crossing the garden to meet them, 'you must give me your magician's advice very quickly; because I know Father intends to walk back with you to Selshurst after lunch. He has to make his final settlement today with the people there.'

She turned to him as she spoke and he noticed that though she lifted her eyebrows with a touch of quizzical humour her underlip was trembling.

'The magician's advice to the enchanted princess,' said he, 'had to be given in parables: It's better to get drenched by the rain than to shelter

where the lightning is attracted. But it's best of all to wait under the nearest hedge till the rain is over.'

Her response to this was that same puzzled, bewildered, appealing look that had followed him in his first departure from her after she had watched him light the candles in Littlegate church and they had waited behind the bolted door.

Chapter 8

The look with which Nelly had received his evasive parable haunted Richard all the next day and the day after.

He set himself to examine his own feelings and to try, if he could, to sound hers.

He was unable to write a line; and was thankful enough when his correspondence arrived from Paris and gave him something definite to do apart from poetry.

He had learnt from what John Moreton said, as they walked to the town together, that in no less than a month's time they would have to move from the vicarage, so that the place might be made ready for his successor.

It was a wretched situation and the one thing that would have made his own way clearer, if not quite clear, a definite knowledge that Nelly really cared for him and did *not* care for Canyot, remained as obscure as ever.

He saw shrewdly enough the diabolical trap in which the girl was caught, with nothing except immediate marriage as an escape from a struggle for bare life with a helpless parent on her hands. He saw too that whoever *did* step in and rescue her, whether it were Canyot or himself, there would stiil be the difficulty of her pride and that horrid suspicion – *was it out of pity?*

On the third day after his walk with the old man, Richard set out, in the morning, to see Nelly again. He was in a bitter, miserable frame of mind; for a letter had reached him from Paris with that signature he knew so fatally well and he had broken his resolution by reading it. He had meant to destroy it, but he had read it, and it punished him cruelly now with its sweet passionate clinging sentences, soft and electric, like the fingers that had penned it.

This letter and the vibrations it had stirred, coming on the top of his trouble about Nelly, wrecked completely his peace of mind.

He tore the great dancer's characteristic syllables into tiny bits and flung them from him into the hedge as he went along.

The contradictory emotions that swayed him – Nelly's white face and great childish eyes and those monumental heathen gestures of the body born to kindle undying desire – broke up his whole inner integrity.

In vain he sought to associate first one and then the other with his new mystical faith.

'I am nothing in myself,' he said to his heart, seeking to quiet its angry agitation. 'I am merely one momentary pulse of consciousness of the great earth-life that struggles to purge itself, to free itself, to enrich itself with a thousand new subtleties, to pass into the *something* else for which there is no name but the name of God.

'This perilous woman and this rare child are mere incidents in the love life of a wretched chance-driven wanderer. I take one. I take the other. I leave them both. It matters nothing in the final issue. All that matters is that this personal life of mine should lose itself in the larger life that flows down the generations; that I should *become* that life and let it become me. And then that I should express its beauty, its tragic wonderful cool-breathing eternal beauty, in such words as I can hammer out!'

He said these things to himself as he strode the now well-known lane. But these things brought him no peace. That white face with the troubled eyes remained more important to him than any earth-soul. And those noble limbs moving in incomparable rhythms against the black curtains of the Théâtre des Arts refused to be reduced to the temporary and the irrelevant.

They pressed upon him, that girl’s face and that woman’s form. They demanded that his philosophy should include them, account for them, reconcile them. Ah! it could never *reconcile* them. That was, he thought with a bitter smile, precisely where philosophy broke down.

He half expected, as lovers do, that he would meet the girl where he had met her before; but he arrived at the vicarage without having caught a glimpse of her.

He found the door of the house open and he could see the buxom Grace at the further end of the kitchen garden pulling up lettuces.

He knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. Still there was no answer. He wondered if he should shout to Grace and command her to announce his presence. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve.

‘They must both be out,’ he said to himself. Then it occurred to him to look into the church, where he had first seen her.

Yes! There she was; kneeling in the very spot where he had sat when he had lighted those candles to the memory of Benjamin and Susanna.

The old atheist priest – if so reverent a worshipper of Christ could be called an atheist – was celebrating what was certainly an unorthodox and probably an illegal Mass. *Maybe for the last time too!* thought Richard, as he slipped quietly into the building and knelt down at the girl’s side. She had lifted her head at the sound of his footsteps and as he took his place and she moved further into the pew to make room for him she gave him a smile so radiant, so full of spontaneous happiness, that it redeemed in one moment all the past days. It was certainly from a sincere and contrite heart that he muttered his ‘mea culpa, mea maxima culpa’ during that ancient rite, the one flawless work of art, whatever else it might be, of the passionate mutterings of the old man – and Richard noticed how often his heretical old lips blundered inevitably into the great word he loathed – it seemed to both of them that in a sense beyond anything they had ever felt they were lifted above the troubles of brain and flesh and nerves. 'Lifted into what?' the man asked himself, as they remained on their knees, with the passion of the thing upon them, as the unfrocked priest carried away the vessels he had used. 'Not into any mere soul of the earth! Into something that belonged to the whole stellar system. Yes! and beyond that! Into something that belonged to the life which was behind and within life, from whose unknown heart the souls of men and gods and planets and stars drew the rhythm that sustained the universe.'

By a mutual impulse they moved out together without waiting for the old man. Nelly showed him her mother's grave, upon which the *orchis maculata* now put forth tiny red buds. '*Cecily*', murmured Richard, 'what a delicious old-fashioned name! It seems to smell of herbaceous borders and box hedges!'

'It's my name!' cried Nelly, laughing. 'Eleanor Cecily Moreton,' she repeated solemnly.

'I should like to have known your mother,' he said earnestly.

'You'd have liked her much better than me,' she responded. 'She would have never said horrid things to you.'

They moved on to the grave of Benjamin and Susanna. It gave them both a peculiar satisfaction to feel how they were linked by this churchyard.

'Why didn't they call you Talbot?' she asked.

'They must have known what a rebel I was going to be. It wouldn't do for a friend of revolutionaries to be called Talbot.'

'Are you a revolutionary?' she inquired. 'You seem to me most awfully conservative – much more conservative than I am.'

'I don't know what I am,' said Richard. 'I met a man in Paris who'd have made a Red of me if I'd seen much more of him. I'm afraid I'm too easily influenced.'

'I like people who can be influenced,' she said gravely. 'Father certainly can't and I don't think Robert can – except by me!'

This last phrase was thrown in after a pause and was accompanied by that mischievous elfish smile which had puzzled Richard before.

Leaving the grave of Dr Storm they moved together towards the house, Nelly silent and preoccupied, pondering something.

Suddenly she turned to him with shining eyes. 'Do you know what I'm going to do with you?' she cried. 'I'm going to take you for a picnic! I often do that with my best friends – with Mrs Shotover for example–' and she shot a whimsical glance at Richard which was received, this time, very amiably. 'Grace will look after Father. He hates picnics. Besides, he'll want his rest after lunch. And we'll go off and have all the afternoon to ourselves till tea time! Shall we do that? Would you like to? Unless you'd prefer to look at the painted ladies again!'

Richard's contentment at this proposal was so evident that it did not need his feeble joke, 'I prefer them unpainted!' to show her what he was feeling.

Gay and radiant, with a happiness in their hearts only permitted once or twice in a lifetime to the sons and daughters of men, they went together into the kitchen and assisted Grace, who leered at them both like the sly Shakespearean wench she was and even winked at her young mistress, in preparing sandwiches and cake and bread and butter and jam.

Hearing their voices and laughter the old naturalist came in too after a while. Richard was surprised at the friendly humorous chuckles he bestowed on the expedition and at the alacrity with which he added to their basket of provisions, a flask of wine from his study cupboard.

'A shame to leave any of this for the good man who comes after me!' he said, with chuckling unction and maliciously twinkling eyes. 'It's what I use in *my* Mass; and if you young people drink it up, there won’t be any left for the *Eidolon Vulgaris*!’

He escorted thme to the gate and wished them good luck with such mellow and ironic benevolence that Richard could not help thinking of the dignified *bonhomie* of the Rabelaisian Grangousier.

Nelly did not hesitate for a moment as to the direction they should take. She led him along a little secluded path bordered by blossoming elders which emerged after a mile or two of circuitous ascent upon a high ridge of arable upland, covered at the season by a waving sea of green rye and barley.

She led him across these cornfields, walking with swinging youthful steps in front of him along the narrow chalk path; every now and then stopping and turning round to point out to him how red-bright the fumitory was and to indicate to him some little plant associated with her earlier memories.

When they reached the further brink of this ridge, where the ryefield ended in a thickset hedge and the path in a three-barred well-worn stile, Richard cried aloud with delight at the beauty of the valley that lay stretched before them. It was enclosed on the further end by a wood of oaks and hazel; and the edges of it, sloping down by soft degrees to a grassy level floor, were covered with thyme and cistus, milkwort and trefoil.

‘Don’t you like it?’ cried the girl in a voice of such thrilling happiness that it made even the turtle dove’s crooning seem less golden in contentment. ‘I call it the Happy Valley. I never come here unless I’m in my best mood of all.’ And she added after a pause, ‘I haven’t been here for two years!’

Richard helped her over the stile and they lifted the basket across. ‘How heavy it is!’ she said with a quick frown of solicitude. ‘I oughtn’t to have let you carry it all that way. How thoughtless I am! I quite forgot the old thing. Here, let’s hide it under the hedge. We don’t want it yet do we? We can come back for it when I’ve shown you the Happy Valley.’

Richard was certainly relieved to get rid of the weight when it actually was out of his hands, but he had not been conscious of it as a burden. He felt that day as if all the baskets in the world might be piled on his back and he would be oblivious to it.

They ran down the thyme-scented slope hand in hand, and when they reached level ground he pressed her fingers so tightly in his own before releasing them that poor Canyot’s engagement ring hurt her severely.

It may have been the sharpness of the ring bringing melancholy thoughts, or it may have been the shy happiness of a heart too full for expression, but she walked very silently by his side through the rest of the Happy Valley. It was Richard, not she, who exclaimed with astonished delight at the huge masses of budding honeysuckle that overspread the bushes above them. It was Richard, not she, who pointed to the sprays of wild roses, the first he had seen that year.

When they reached the end of the valley, where the path they were following entered the wood, they stopped by mutual consent and leaned over the old weather-worn gate covered with a minute grey lichen and looked into the cool leafy shadows.

‘Why don’t you take off your hat?’ he said suddenly, in a voice that to himself sounded strange and forced. ‘Like you did in the Selshurst garden,’ he added in a louder tone, making an effort, so it seemed to himself, to conceal the wild beating of his heart.

As he spoke he flung down his own hat and stick on to the bracken fronds beside them.

Her breath came unevenly, in funny little gasps. She put her hands feebly up to her head and pulled out the hat pins one by one; and then holding the hat on the top of the gate stuck the pins she had removed into it, one by one again, her fingers visibly trembling. High up in a beech tree above them a little invisible warbler kept uttering its own name in a monotonous chant, as if drunk with the sunshine and the pride of its well-hidden nest. ‘Chiff-chaff! Chiff-chaff! chiff-chaff!’ that invisible owner of those leafy solitudes kept repeating.

Richard took her hat and laid it gently down, balancing it carefully upon a last year’s plant of hart’s tongue fern, still glossy and unfaded.

As he did so one of those weakly fluttering pale-coloured moths, which frequent shadowy places and move so helplessly when they’re disturbed, flew against his face.

When he turned to her again he noticed that her eyes were so large and bright that it was as if a disembodied spirit was gazing into his very soul. The slight movement he instinctively had made towards her was stopped suddenly by that look and he clutched the top of the gate and drew a deep breath.

Then it was that the brightness in her eyes softened, melted, grew infinitely passive and tender, and by an impulse that seemed to come from some power outside themselves they threw their arms around each other and clung together, their lips joined and their hearts beating as if they were two hearts in one body.

‘Chiff-chaff! chiff-chaff! chiff-chaff!’ repeated the little invisible lord of the sanctuary they had invaded, giving to their encounter the winged blessing of the very Eros of the woods.

Very gently the girl released herself and a sigh of happiness that seemed beyond even the happiness of that place of enchantment rose from her lips and floated away among the leaves.

Then she nestled against him, her head bent so low that he could not see her face.

For a long space they stood thus silently together, he leaning against the gate and she leaning against him. Then with his hands on each side of her fair head he lightly lifted up her face as if it had been a delicate white flower and holding it away from him kissed her with a long silent kiss that seemed to throw so strange a trance upon them both that even after he had released her and she leaned, with her head on her hands, against that confederate gate-bar, and he rested motionless beside her, his arms about her body, they seemed like people drugged, spellbound, magnetized, ‘entoiled in woofèd fantasies’.

‘Chiff-chaff! chiff-chaff! chiff-chaff!’ repeated the relentless warbler; and neither of the two to the end of their lives forgot that particular sound. It blended with the faint, relaxed, indescribably sweet languor that took possession of the maiden, and it blended with the infinitely tender if less deep emotion that filled the heart of the man.

At length she moved aside from his caresses and put up her hands against him as he tried to kiss her again.

‘Give me my hat, dearest one,’ she said. ‘We must be good now. We’ve so much to think of. I feel as if I ought to think of everybody now, for the rest of my life. I’ve been so happy with you, my dear!’ She surprised him by suddenly lifting up one of his hands and pressing it against her lips. The gesture touched him more than anything she had ever done. A great wave of tenderness rose up in him, so that at that moment he would have willingly marched straight to death for her sake.

But as she dropped his hand her old mocking-elf’s smile flickered over her white face. ‘Poor old Robert,’ she murmured. ‘Look! I’ve still got on his ring.’

She held up her fingers so that he might see his rival’s gift. It was a simple enough matter – a little turquoise set in pearls; but Richard regarded it with gloom. It brought back to him with a rush of painful thoughts all the troublesome circumstances that hemmed them round.

‘Are you going on wearing it now?’ he asked as she put on her hat and they turned away together leaving the little chiff-chaff in possession of his leafy paradise.

‘I’m not going to take it off *today*’ she answered. ‘It’s unlucky to take off one ring till you’ve got another!’ And she laughed a naughty child’s laugh at his discomforted face.

Her response irritated him. It seemed the sort of thing that a well-bred girl oughtn’t to say. It was a silly servant-girl remark, he thought, and he teased himself in sulky silence over it till they were halfway back through the Happy Valley. It somehow made him think of Mrs Shotover. Had that confounded old woman really corrupted the girl? Had she put coarse, common, cynical notions into her head?

Observing the effect of her words, Nelly gave way to an irresistible temptation and did what she could to make it worse. ‘How do I know,’ she said, with a mocking little laugh, ‘that you won’t feel quite differently tomorrow? I’d better not throw Robert away *too* quickly.’

If she had intended to wound him she certainly succeeded. His swarthy face darkened and he raised one of his brown thin hands to his mouth, an instinctive habit of his when seriously annoyed. If the gesture was caused by a desire to hide a certain ugly, cruel, revengeful curve of his lips, it hid nothing at all from her; and she went still further …

‘Robert has faith in me,’ she said, ‘whatever I do and whatever I say, too. Oh you don’t know what things I’ve said to him! And he’s taken them all like the dear lamb he is. Poor old Rob! I’ve been a bad girl to him I’m afraid.’

‘What a wonderful mass of honeysuckle!’ Richard cried in a sort of desperation, anxious to do anything to put an end to this miserable estrangement. ‘I’m going to get you some.’ And he proceeded to clamber up the bank and make his way into the middle of the brushwood. He derived a savage pleasure from the nettle stings and thorn pricks through which he struggled. He felt as though in forcing his way through these obstacles towards the resplendent fragrant clusters above him he were fighting back to those delicious moments of love which her teasing had spoilt.

But how *could* she drag in that business of ‘dear old Robert’ and his turquoise ring? A ‘lamb’ did she call him? A confounded old tiger! But how *could* she, after kissing him like that and being kissed, drag things down to banality and commonness and silly servant-girl superstitions? Or was she, after all, quite a different person from what he had imagined, from the Nelly he had fancied himself so fond of? Was she, really, playing the two of them off against each other and ready to take which ever seemed the more desirable catch? He was able for the moment – perhaps the thorn pricks and nettle stings helped him – to think of her thus grossly without the Feast shame; and he thought to himself how queer it was that the fact of men and women being thrilled by one another’s caresses did not in the least really bring them together. They seemed indeed to pay the penalty for that momentary unity by a more absolute relapse into their separate hostile identities when the rare moment was past.

Then he thought within his heart, But after all I love her. But this ‘love’ or whatever it is, seems to have no influence upon our clashes with each other, as fierce separate units of nature, each struggling for its own *purposes! He derived, as men of his type do, a revengeful satisfaction from this sort of pedantic analysis.*

That he could analyse the girl thus and detach himself from her so quickly after their first embrace gave him a malicious satisfaction and soothed his vanity like a costly ointment.

On the strength of it he tore and rent at the reluctant tangles of yellow and rose-pink sweetness, pulling down huge trailing sprays of it, heedless of scratches upon face and hands, and gathering it in his arms in massed confusion, all mixed up with bindweed and bryony.

From the grassy level below Nelly watched his movements. 'Bless his heart!' she said to herself. 'I love him! I love him! I love him! This is not a dream. This is really true. I am standing in my Happy Valley watching my man pick me honeysuckle.'

Then she thought, 'I mustn't tease him. I won't tease him. I'll be sweet to him when he comes back. But how *could* he get so angry when he's just found out I love him? When we've just been together like that?

'How peculiar men are! Everything seems on the surface with them – how you behave, how you look, what you say. As if it mattered what you *said*! Don't *they* ever say things by opposites? Don't *they* ever rage and stamp and scratch and bite and tease without it meaning anything at all; anything except – oh! I don't know – a sort of stretching out of one's arms and legs, after sitting in the same position too long? No I suppose they don't. I suppose they *can't* be superficial, however much they try! I suppose their surface is the same as their depth. I suppose they're *all* surface!

'Mrs Richard Storm. It sounds rather nice. I don't think I shall want to keep him in Littlegate. It would be lovely to have a flat in Paris. But Father can't be left. Oh how annoying it is not to be entirely alone in the world! No! Father can't be left. And I must make Robert completely understand that I really shall belong to him much more when I'm married to Richard than I am now. Because he gets on my nerves now with everything unsettled and I can't love him as much as I do really without his wanting to marry me. But when I'm married to Richard he can't want to marry me, so I shall be free to be as lovely to him as ever I like. For I won't stand it if Richard gets jealous. If he has me altogether that must be enough for him. I won't allow him to be jealous! I won't have it.'

When Richard did finally come scrambling down the bank to her side his arms were so full of honeysuckle that he looked like a moving bush.

'Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane!' cried the girl running to meet him, and with feminine mischief kissing his face through the masses of honeysuckle before he could catch hold of her. 'Well done! How perfectly beautiful! How sweet they are – intoxicating.' She pressed a spray to her face and inhaled the heavy fragrance. 'Oh Richard how happy I am! What a day this is. Oh! my dear, my dear—'

Her words died away, as dropping the great scented bundle at their feet, he clasped her slim form tightly to him and kissed her on the mouth, cheeks, eyelids and chin. Then, while he held her close with one arm round her body, he passed his free hand caressingly over her forehead.

'You do really love me, sweetheart?' he said, searching half-angrily, half-tenderly, for that absolute conviction of certitude in those soft feminine eyes for which the whole human race since the beginning has sought in vain.

She answered with so passionate and clinging a kiss that it was difficult to retain the questioning mood, and with the masses of golden-pink sweetness, like an offering to them from her own special gods of her Happy Valley, held in both their arms, they moved slowly back to where they had left their basket.

Their meal was unspoilt by any further difference. Bareheaded they sat opposite each other on a bank of thyme and milkwort; the now un-analytical Richard insisting on twisting a spray of his treasure trove round her head, and round her neck too, while in eager solemnity she untied the provisions.

They ate hungrily and happily, enjoying themselves without thought of past and future, dividing lettuce sandwiches and jam sandwiches between them with the laughing greed of lovers who can afford to play with the lower appetites, as children play with toys.

Having drunk to the very dregs the liberal bottle of milk supplied by Grace they discovered at the bottom of the basket, lying by the side of the vicar’s flask of port wine, nothing less than Nelly’s silver christening mug.

‘Let’s christen our meeting with this!’ cried the girl; and jumping to their feet they filled the little cup to the brim.

The sun shining upon the red wine made it glow like the blood of a god; and when they had both drunk of it and kissed each other ‘with purple-stained mouth’, they poured out what was left as a heathen libation to the powers – whatever they might have been – who had brought about their encounter.

In queer unlovely places, many months after this, in sordid streets, in depressing offices, on crowded pavements, Richard Storm had many occasions to remember that moment of his life, when wreathed with honeysuckle, round head and neck and waist, this girl, the very incarnation of youthful passion, poured out the wine cup upon the earth.

Chapter 9

ROBERT CANYOT SHOWED himself more of a man over the affair of Nelly's marriage than anyone who had known him would have expected. He put off for several weeks his voyage to America so that he might himself give the bride away.

Mrs Shotover denounced the whole business and refused to be present at the wedding. She was positively rude to Nelly on the subject; accusing her, in very pointed language, language more suitable to the age of Fielding than of Hardy, of having made up her mind to keep both the men. There was certainly this much justification for the old lady's wrath, that Nelly refused to give up her former fiancé's ring – the turquoise with little pearls – and wore no other except the thin golden one that proclaimed her a wedded wife.

The old woman only got one chance of giving vent completely to her feelings and that was not to Nelly but to her husband.

If she was 'eighteenth-century' in her explicitness to the bride, she was positively 'Elizabethan' in her outpouring to the bridegroom. Richard however was far too content with his lot at that moment to do more than lead the woman on and tease her with an exaggerated serenity.

He was as a matter of fact perfectly serene. It suited him in every respect, this devoted and very practical waiting upon her of his bride's former betrothed. It was precisely one of those situations that Richard's peculiar nature was eminently adapted to sustain with aplomb and indulgence. He felt thoroughly sorry for his defeated rival and it eased his conscience in the only way his conscience *could*-be really eased by giving him every facility to make the best of the rind, so to speak, while he enjoyed the fruit.

A man is never displeased to see his mistress adored by another when he feels she is entirely his own; and there was not the remotest shadow of doubt that Nelly was his, just then, from the top of her head to the sole of her foot. The sweetness of her complete abandonment to him during those first days was indeed the most thrilling and delicious experience he had known in his whole life – so wonderful and flawless that he felt it would be an ingratitude to the gods not to dispense in his turn as much happiness as he could. Canyot's shadow on their pleasure would have been much worse than his real presence, for the painter seemed to have the power of reducing the pain of his loss to a minimum as long as he was not driven away and forgotten.

The truth was that neither Richard nor Nelly had the least idea of what was going on in the young man's mind. He showed no outward sign of bitterness or moroseness or jealousy.

He was gentler in the expression of his opinions, quicker-witted it almost seemed in his response to their high spirits; and there was not the least tendency on his part to take advantage of the serene indulgence with which Richard tolerated and indeed encouraged his friendship with the bride.

They were married in Littlegate church by the old naturalist, and the service that united them was the last he was permitted, as priest of the church, officially to perform.

They went down to Fogmore for seven days' honeymoon, during which time the devoted Canyot helped Grace and the old man to settle into Hill Cottage.

On their return from Fogmore the painter informed them that he had decided to put off his voyage to a yet further date, giving as a plausible enough reason that he would be too late now for the Philadelphia exhibition of his work, and that the New York one was not to occur till five or six weeks later.

Instead of leaving them therefore to enjoy their *vita nuova* in complete isolation the extraordinary young man proceeded quite calmly to settle down again at Wind Shuttle Farm.

This unexpected move of his was not entirely agreeable to Richard but it would have been much more disagreeable to him to have seen the least cloud on his young wife's face; and she, it appeared, was entirely pleased with the arrangement.

He could not altogether find the clue to her attitude to her old lover, but he contented himself with putting it down to Nelly's maternal instinct and her girlish desire to soften as far as was possible the boy's feeling of loss in Mrs Canyot's death.

'She wants to "mother" him,' he said to himself. He derived a certain self-flattering moral unction from the thought that he was being singularly and unconventionally magnanimous to them both.

Thus did those golden June weeks pass by, in almost perfect felicity, for Richard; in whatever mysterious happiness a young girl derives from the satisfaction of her heart's passion, for Nelly; and in fierce persistent wrestling with new problems of his art, for the recluse at Wind Shuttle Farm.

The only cloud upon the horizon, if it could be called a cloud, was the estrangement between Mrs Richard Storm of Hill Cottage and Mrs George Shotover of Furze Lodge. But this cloud had already broken in two rainstorms of strange language from the latter lady; there now seemed no reason to doubt that among the scanty parishioners of the newly appointed vicar of

Littlegate none was more clearly marked out for an unruffled life than the daughter of John Moreton.

It was only the scurrying white-tailed rabbits and the great black-winged rooks haunting the long summer twilights between Furze Cover and Horthing Down who could have predicted any sort of evil omen upon the wind; and these could only have done it had they possessed enough superstitious intelligence to give credence to the angry mutterings of a lonely old woman, deprived by nature's tricks of the one thing she loved.

The weather continued to bestow upon the newly married couple, as the season drew on towards the longest day, its most wonderful largess of ample sunshine and cool-breathing balmy air. A few heavy showers in those moonless nights kept the light chalk soil from becoming over-dry.

In the lower pastures the lush grasses were already laid level with the ground; and the murmur of the mowing machine, like a great invisible bumble bee laden with summer spoils, made a constant background to the crooning of the doves in the massive-foliaged trees.

On the uplands the green rye was already up to the height of Nelly's waist as she went afield to gather the first red poppies, while the green barley was up to her knees and the wheat well above her ankles.

The blackbird's reedy cry was heard seldom now; its place in the feathered orchestra of the lanes and fields was taken by the thicker-throated 'muggy' and the hot sun-burnt ecstasies of finches and buntings.

There was a perceptible change in the mood of Robert Canyot as the time drew near for his departure to America.

He saw less of Nelly and hardly anything of Richard.

He went out, morning after morning, for the whole day taking his lunch with him and not returning till late in the evening.

It was always to Toat Farm that he went, for he kept his precious easel-picture, now near completion, of that sluggish pond and those sombre ancient walls in the cottage of Sally-Maria's aunt. He had become a close friend of this woman, a person almost as silent as her dumb niece; and Charley Budge and Mr Priddle had grown so accustomed to his presence that they gave him their most familiar nods and 'how-be-gettin'-on-then' as if he were an established institution like old Miss Stone or the grocer's cart from Selshurst. When it was a Sunday that he was there, there used sometimes to be quite a group of farm hands round his picture, Charley having brought Tom Rattle and Jimmy Roebuck to see 'how 'twaren't like a common school-marm job – more like what 'un sees in shop windies and them show places'.

And on these occasions the men in their tightly fitting, uncomfortable cloth suits, with a flower stuck in both buttonhole and cap, would poke at the picture tentatively with their sticks as though it had been Farmer Patchem's dangerous sow.

Canyot had put the very 'body and pressure' of his soul into this picture and the rustic wonder it excited gave him more pleasure than any virtuoso's praise. He held, like Molière, that the first test of good art was that it should arrest the attention of the simplest. He had concentrated all his powers upon the reflection in the water of that rank herbage and those mossy walls, indicating as well as he could the shadowed presence there of a spirit of the spot, carrying the mind down a long dim vista of obscure memories, gathering itself, out of the colours and shapes of the moment, into a kind of eternal vision – a platonic archetype, that was more than a crumbling wall and a bank of hemlocks.

It was on Canyot's last Sunday in England that he presented himself soon after breakfast at Hill Cottage and bluntly asked Nelly to accompany him that day to his favourite haunt. He wanted to put the very final touches to his picture and he wanted also, so he told her, to make her acquainted with Sally-Maria, so that he should feel that the child was not left quite friendless at his departure.

His abrupt request fell like a sharply flung pebble into the smooth waters of the little *ménage*.

Richard had been enlarging upon the fact that they had not yet revisited their Happy Valley and he had secured a promise from Nelly that they should walk over there that afternoon.

He looked at her therefore very emphatically, when in their small garden, among the phloxes and sweet-williams, Canyot sprung his intrusive request. Nelly looked silently and nervously from one to another. Her mind recalled Mrs Shotover's upbraidings. Was she really, as the old woman had said, behaving as no decent girl ought to behave in 'hanging on to two men'?

'I'm afraid I can't, Robert,' she said; 'you see we've arranged to go out this afternoon and take our tea out so as to give Grace a free day. I shouldn't like to disappoint Grace, you see. And if we left Richard alone she'd never let him get tea for himself. She looks after him better than I do. No, Robert, I'm afraid it's impossible.' The little invention about Grace and her 'day out' had brought the colour to her cheeks; and the young painter did not hesitate to fix his eyes sternly and passionately upon her.

She looked tantalizingly soft and sweet, hovering there in her embarrassed hesitation.

She looked the very incarnation of English girlhood, some idyllic blending of earthiness and innocence such as might well make a jilted lover 'grow pale and spectre-thin' with unsatisfied longing. Canyot was neither thin nor pale at that moment, however. His muscular form was very erect and straight. His tanned, corrugated face scowling gloomily at her showed no inclination to be the only sufferer that day. His empty sleeve too had its own voice in the matter. He was one of those who had left ‘something’ behind in France; as he stood before her, subjecting her to the concentrated reproach of his gaze, there was that about him that made it very difficult for Nelly to hold to her decision. She felt a sudden immense pity for him and her heart nearly yielded. The freemasonry of youth was between them, adding a curious poignancy to her maternal instinct, and the very tenderness and softness of her mood just then, though due to her abandonment to Richard, made it all the more difficult for her to be hard and austere in dealing with her former lover.

‘My wife will be delighted to see your picture some other day, before you leave us,’ remarked Richard, conscious for the first time since his marriage that he and Nelly were at cross-purposes.

Nelly had looked up with a quick flush when he began to speak but her eyes dropped and she bent down over the flowers when she realized the import of his words. Why couldn’t he have been generous just then? She would have rewarded him for it. She would have loved him with an added love. Why couldn’t men understand these things? Why must they always be so legal and exacting, when what was wanted was the impulse of self-effacement?

She kept her head bent down for a perceptible moment of embarrassing suspense, inhaling the heavy scent of the phloxes until it became a thing that was no longer a perfume at all, but a thought – a wild reckless thought in her brain.

The beauty of the yellow day-lilies against the curves of her bending figure made Canyot sigh bitterly and worked like a sort of angry fever in his blood.

‘Well,’ he said, almost roughly, ‘I’ve got to go back anyway to Wind Shuttle to get my things. I’ve got to pass by here again. It’s on my way. So if you change your mind look out for me. Do you understand? I’ll be back in half an hour but I won’t worry you if you don’t want to come. I’ve only a week more, you know. Then I shan’t trouble you any more.’

He took no notice at all of Richard’s movement to open the gate for him but strode surlily off down the slope of the hill.

At that moment the little gate swung open again and the ex-priest entered.

‘What’s that, Father?’ cried the girl, noticing a letter in the old man’s hand.

‘It’s for your husband, my sweet,’ remarked the naturalist. ‘I met the boy bringing it up. It came by some extra post. It’s a foreign one.’

Nelly snatched the letter from him. ‘Oh! it’s from Paris. I do love the French stamps. They’re so much more exciting than ours. Here you are!’ She handed it over to her husband who, seeing the hand it was written by, placed it unopened in his pocket.

Nelly put on her spoilt-child air at once, the air so natural to youthful twenty-two married to middle-aged forty-five.

‘Don’t hide it away!’ she cried. ‘Nelly wants to see it. Nelly likes foreign letters!’

Richard turned just a little bit pale. This was a most unlucky trick of the imps of chance! ‘It really wouldn’t interest you, sweetheart,’ he said; ‘it’s not an exciting letter. A friend of mine – not anything thrilling.’

The old man who had been watching this scene, with a shrewd interest unusual in him, now broke in. He laid his hand on his son-in-law’s arm – ‘Show it to her, boy; show it to her,’ he said. ‘Never keep letters away from them. They don’t like it. It’s a bad beginning.’ And he sighed heavily, thinking of one of his own early quarrels with his dead Cecily.

Richard turned paler still. He found himself stammering some quite fantastic irrelevance, about its being a literary secret.

Nelly made a quick movement and snatched the letter from his pocket. ‘You make me curious,’ she said. ‘I must have just a tiny little peep.’ And she made as though she were about to open it.

When he recalled later every little detail of that scene it seemed to him as if a terrible eternity elapsed between that movement of hers and what he did next. During that eternity of seconds he seemed conscious of jet-black icebergs crashing together in a darkened sea.

Then, in a desperate inspiration, he acted.

He snatched the letter from her and tore it, unopened as it was, into four thick pieces. ‘There!’ he said in a husky voice. ‘Come here, Nell!’

She glanced at her father and raised her eyebrows a little.

The old man made a gesture as much as to say, ‘Go in with him, my dear, but it’s a bad job!’ And then she followed him into the house. ‘Here, Nell!’ he called and she followed him into the kitchen.

He lifted the round iron cover of the kitchen grate, with the implement appointed for that purpose, and thrust the four torn pieces into the fire. Then he replaced the iron lid.

Grace was quick to notice by both their faces that something was amiss. ‘Lord, Miss Nelly!’ she cried. ‘What be up to then? Burnin’ weddin’ scrips and holy promises? Lord! Mr Richard, sir – look to her now! Goodness save us! what fine cantraps and unlawful doin’s is this? Miss Nelly darlin’, now don’t ‘ee be takin’ on like that! Don’t ‘ee, dearie!’

And she put her stalwart arms round her mistress who had suddenly turned a deadly white and was supporting herself against the table.

Grace almost lifted her on to a chair. ‘Don’t stand starin’ like as you a’ seed the Devil, Mr Richard. Get the dear darlin’ a drop o’ water!’

He put a glass hurriedly under the tap, obeying the wench ‘meek as any dazed sheep’ as Grace commented afterwards. ‘Gi’e it to I!’ she cried. ‘Bless the man! it’s the hot water tap ‘ee’s a-turnin’. Here, gi’e it to I!’

But Nelly waved away the glass. ‘I’m all right now,’ she said, ‘thanks all the same Gracie dear!’

And certainly her colour began coming rapidly back.

Richard stood anxiously and wretchedly before her, twisting his fingers backwards and forwards and slowly nodding his head, as was his habit when utterly nonplussed.

She raised her eyes to his face and smiled a bitter, cruel little smile. It gratified and pleased her to see him look so entirely foolish.

Then she sprang to her feet. ‘All right now Gracie!’ she said. ‘It was the heat, I suppose.’

‘Hope ‘tweren’t no wills nor testaments nor birth certifications you’ve a-throwed away like that and burned to cinders? I keeps this ’ere stove as hot as Pharaoh’s Furnace, I do, else the darned thing don’t cook nothin’; but I ain’t a-heatin’ kitchen fires for to burn weddin’ dockiments and citations!’

‘That’s all right, Gracie. It was nothing. It was just a letter from a friend. It was nothing important.’

‘Well, it be ashes now, sure enough, whatever it were!’ Grace returned to her cooking with a philosophical wink.

The husband and wife went back to the front of the cottage. They found the old man anxiously awaiting them in the porch.

‘Nothing serious I hope,’ said he. He looked at Richard gravely. ‘Never keep letters from them. And never explain anything to them. Obey your own conscience. Go your own way. And if they want you to change your mind, just you hold your tongue and go on as you are. They'll come round all right, sooner or later. But never argue with 'em. Do what you have to do; never hide your letters, and never argue!'

'There's a lot in what you say, sir,' said Richard very solemnly, propitiating the old man.

When the ex-priest had returned to his own room, the husband and wife moved by common consent into the garden. They both seemed conscious of a craving for air and sun. But the magnetism of their quarrel held them together and drew them towards each other.

'So you still keep up with at least one of them?' said Nelly, bending down, precisely as she had done half an hour ago, to smell the phloxes.

'Yes, I keep up with one of them,' answered Richard. 'If to "keep up with" means to burn letters unopened.'

She lifted up her head at that, and her eyes flashed from her flushed face like two steel-blue blades. 'Don't lie, Richard! It's not worth it. You know you've never burnt *one* of that woman's letters before! And you wouldn't have burnt that one, if you hadn't been scared of my reading it. It's no use lying. We may just as well face it. If you *must* keep these things going on, you must, I suppose. If you're made like that, well! you are. But it's rather a shock to me, my dear – just at first – you know.'

Richard had never felt so miserable, so uncomfortable, or so much of a complete fool as he did at that moment.

He did not know whether to be angry or relieved when the figure of Canyot, carrying a basket, appeared outside the gate.

Nelly gave him one quick glance – and then she waved to him and shouted: 'Wait, Robert! Please wait! I'm coming with you.'

He waited just where he was without making a sign. He began picking the long grasses out of the hedge and sucking the sweetness from their stalks. He whistled as he did this and flicked away the flies from his forehead. He took no more notice of Richard than if the man had been one of the posts of the gate.

‘We’ve thought better of it, you see,’ said the writer, after a moment’s pause in which he gathered all his wits together to carry the thing through somehow.

Oh how he hated these tense undignified scenes! *In France*, he thought, misquoting Laurence Sterne with a miserable inward laugh, *they do these things better*.

‘I’m sailing on Saturday,’ was the only response he got from Canyot, who now began nibbling the little sticky leaves of a briar rose.

Richard turned and went into the house. He knocked at the door of the room he shared with Nelly.

‘I’m just coming,’ the girl called out. ‘May I come in?’ Richard pleaded, turning the handle of the door. The door was locked from the inside – for the first time!

He walked back into the garden feeling thoroughly miserable. He had hoped for one swift all-obliterating all-forgiving embrace. She had deliberately forestalled this intention. She intended to go off for the whole day with Canyot, leaving the rift between them raw and unhealed.

There was his rival, stolid and impassive, an ugly one-armed sentinel at the gate of their lost paradise. He had the end of a dockleaf in his mouth now. Would he eat up the whole hedge?

Nelly came flying past him with tripping steps. She pretended that the haste of that moment was extreme so as to avoid having to give him a farewell kiss.

She was out of the gate before he could open it for her, and instead of pausing then she ran past the young painter and up the hill-path crying as she ran, ‘Come on, Robert, we shall never get there if you’re so slow. Come on! I’ll race you to the top!’

Canyot picked up the picnic basket provided for him by Mrs Winsome and strode after her. About ten yards away he stopped and looked back, waving his stick at Richard. ‘Sailing on Saturday!’ he shouted and turned again to pursue the girl whose light mauve dress was still visible from the garden moving rapidly among the elder bushes and furze.

Richard waited till they were out of sight and then went straight into the kitchen. ‘Grace!’ he shouted, but Grace was in the rooms above and did not hear him. *I can’t stand a lunch alone with the old man*, he thought and began mechanically putting together some bread and cheese. This he crammed into his pocket along with some small cakes. ‘Grace!’ he shouted again. This time she heard him and came running down, her heavy West Country tread shaking the whole cottage. ‘You must look after Mr Moreton, today, Grace,’ he said, in the most offhand, easy manner he could assume. ‘We shall all be out.’

‘Nothing wrong, Mr Richard, I hope, begging your pardon? Nothing to do with burnin’ any certifications or such like? ’Tis a queer world and summat of the likes of they things do bring terrible trouble on folks’ heads. I knew’d ‘ee and Miss Nelly had had a bit of a ruption. And what’s more I could have told ‘ee ‘twere comin’, this very mornin’, if ‘ee’d a listened to I. ’Twas that girl hedge pig the Master brought in the house. I never did hold wi ‘bringin’ the like of them stinking pricklies into Christian families. I knew’d it ‘ud mean trouble soon as I set eyes on ‘un. Master ain’t as careful as ‘a should be over these ’ere pick-ups.’ A kind o’ forgets that ’tis you and Miss Nelly’s kiss-luck time, when men and maidies be growin’ into married folk like, and lovin’ natural and unthinkin’ by night and by day. ‘A shouldn’t a’ done it. ‘Twere a temptin’ them as is Above. A girt lousy prickleback, with a snout like Satan and little squimsy eyes. Do ‘ee tell ‘un of it, Mr Richard, do ‘ee tell ‘un of it. I can’t abide them stinkin’ things. Sparrerhawks and flitter-mice be all very well. They be honest fellow creatures, they be; but them hedge pigs,’ tisn’t behavin’ right to the Dear Lord to go meddlin’ wi’ the likes o’ they!’

‘I’ll do what I can, Grace,’ said Richard when the woman stopped for breath. ‘But you know what Mr Moreton is. Well! you’ll be able to see for yourself that he only collects lucky things today. I may be back by tea time and I may not. Goodbye, Grace.’

‘Don’t ‘ee go bein’ sour and angered agin’ our young leddy,’ whispered Grace. ‘Don’t ‘ee get argufying with ‘un. The way to manage us womenfolk is to be one thing or ‘tother. Kiss us soft and sweet or let’s have it hard so us knows what’s what. None of this burnin’ o’ dockiments and bidin’ the time. Out w’it, straight and forrard; that’s what I do say to my Jim.’

‘You say very well, Grace,’ responded the writer. ‘I’m sure I hope you’ll always be with us to keep us in the right path.’

‘And don’t ‘ee let Miss Nelly go gadding off with young Mr Robert. There ain’t no maid nor wife in God’s kingdom what’s perfect sure of ‘erself when’t do come to them carryin’s on. We be all meanin’ for the best; but girls be girls and young fellers be young fellers and ’tis hard to be stiff as a poker on haymaking days.’

Richard looked gravely into the young woman’s face as if he were on the point of asking her what she really thought about his wife’s attitude to Canyot. But he turned away with a smile. ‘Well! Grace,’ he said, ‘you and I must make her so happy here, that she won’t be in need of any friends but us. Goodbye Grace!’ And he left the house and began walking gloomily and thoughtfully in the direction of the Happy Valley.

*

Old Mr Moreton was not altogether pleased when he found he was destined to spend a lonely Sunday. On weekdays he never expected much society. It seemed quite natural that they should all be occupied with their own affairs. But on Sundays it was rather different, because he felt a vague tradition in the air against going on just the same with his scientific work; and it was pleasant, as a change from that, to see something more of those he lived with.

He ate the admirable meal prepared by Grace in rather melancholy silence which was not made any more cheerful by the servant's comments on the events of the morning.

'It ain't nice of Miss Nelly and Master Richard to leave 'ee lonesome and solemn-like of a fine Zunday. It don't seem kind o' natural; and I be lorn to see 'ee so. I just out and told 'un straight how it do seem to I. There'll be sad goin's on, present, I sez to 'un, when the Missus and that young man get too fond like. Kiss and be friends, I sez to 'un, and don't fall into the sin o' pride.'

'Your mistress is in a difficult position, Grace,' said the old man; 'and I'd rather you didn't talk about it. Mr Canyot has always been very considerate and civil. It's a difficult position for her. But the young man is going away in a few days so we shall be quieter then. We shall go on quietly and as usual then. But Mr Canyot is always very civil to me—' John Moreton sighed heavily – 'very civil and considerate.'

When the meal was over and he was thinking of returning for his usual rest, Grace, who came to take away what was left of the gooseberry tart for her own consumption, surprised him by saying, 'Why don't 'ee go and see Mrs Shotover, over to Furze Lodge, sir? She be an old friend of your'n I reckon and a good friend o' Miss Nelly's. Maybe she'd be able to hearten' 'ee up a bit, in a manner of speaking.'

The old man raised his head and stared at the maid. ‘Eh? what’s that, Gracie? Go to see *her* again?’ He blinked with his deep-set grey eyes and knitted his shaggy eyebrows. ‘But she and Nelly have been quarrelling since she was last here. But after all, *that* doesn’t matter; that’s nothing to do with *me*! I go quietly on my own way whatever fuss the womenfolk make, don’t I, Grace? Well perhaps I *will* walk up in Furze Lodge direction when I’ve rested a bit. I do feel as if I needed a little change today. One can’t work seven days a week.’

Well pleased with the result of her audacity the Dorsetshire maiden retired to the kitchen.

‘’Twill do the Master a gallon o’ good,’ she said to herself. ‘What with one thing and another the poor old gentleman do look mighty doddery. ’Twill hearten ’im up like, to pass the time o’ day with that old rappity-tappity.’

The afternoon of that June day proved hotter than Mr Moreton had anticipated. The old man found the way long and exhausting. It was most of it uphill and bare of trees; the scorching sun struck fiercely upon his lean black-coated figure.

He stopped frequently to rest and sat down at last in the middle of a cornfield, overtaken by a fit of dizziness.

As he sat there, seeing the green world of innumerable waving stalks about him, the world as it must always appear at that season to field mice, partridges, hares and rabbits, the old naturalist felt a profound melancholy enter his heart like some jagged piece of iron.

He knew nature too well to be able for long intervals to enjoy her external charm in the epicurean manner familiar to his son-in-law. As he hugged his dusty-trousered knees and blinked out of his deep-set eyes at those myriad green stalks, there came into his nostrils the smell of death. By shifting a little upon his haunches he was able to detect the cause of this smell; and what he saw did not diminish the prod of that iron in his soul.

Near him lay on its side the dead body of a small rabbit gazing horribly and vacantly into the burning sky out of a great eye socket which was nothing but a dried-up hole of rusty blood. The old man knew at once that he was looking at one of the normal atrocities of creative nature, a rabbit killed by a weasel.

He got up laboriously to his feet and tottered on, the beautiful sun-bathed world about him darkened for him and poisoned as if by a universal smell of murder. As he struggled forward in the fiery heat, the soles of his boots as hot as the cracked chalk earth beneath them, it presented itself once more to his mind that the only religious symbol in the world capable of covering and including the pain of this cruel chaos was the symbol of the Mass, where the wounded flesh and the spilt blood of the God-Man becomes an eternal protest, for those who enter into it, against all this blind suffering.

At the gate of his old friend’s drive he was compelled to sit down once again to rest himself and he sat down on one side of the drive, resting his back against a sycamore tree. Here in his exhaustion he dozed off into an old man’s heavy sleep. He was aroused by a high-pitched feminine voice and he saw himself confronted by Mrs Shotover. The lady was bare-headed and carried her favourite tabby-cat in her arms. She was taking the air after her early tea. She scolded Mr Moreton for attempting that walk in the heat. She scolded him with the familiarity of an old friend and with the burnt-up malice of an old ‘flame’.

‘So you’ve come at last,’ she said in a gentler voice when, having got him safely into her drawing room, she made fresh tea for him which he drank with avidity. ‘I thought you and I would never see each other again.’

He smiled feebly at her, his old half-ironical half-benevolent smile; but he was too tired to reply.

‘It isn’t quite like old days is it, John Moreton?’ she said. He nodded, smiling still, and then shook his head and sighed.

‘When you and I worried the life out of my George and your Cecily – dear innocents that they were!’

He refused her offer of anything to eat with a wave of his hand. ‘You’re the same as ever, Betty,’ he said.

He looked so bedraggled and helpless, lying against her cushions, so caught by the red-tongued hounds of the years, that she stepped up to his side and kissed him on the forehead. ‘Poor old John!’ she murmured, running her jewelled fingers through his stubbly grey hair.

He grew a trifle more rested as time went on; and the obscure shadows across his face receded before the ancient cajolery of her voice.

‘What a world it is, Betty!’ he sighed at last. ‘What a world! You know I’ve come to a stage in my life when, except for hearing Nell laugh and seeing her look happy, I don’t care much what happens. My work interests me still, in a way, Betty, in a way. But not as it used to. If it wasn’t for the church and the Mass I couldn’t go on, Betty. I should just give up.’

‘But they don’t let you do *that* any more, you poor old heathen, do they?’ asked Mrs George Shotover.

He gave her out of his cavernous eyes a most whimsical look. ‘Someone must remember the rabbits killed by weasels and the sheep slaughtered by man and the trees killed by ivy and the mice killed by owls and the flies in spiders’ webs. Someone must remember these things, little Betty!’

‘And the butterflies caught by John Moreton!’ she laughed mischievously at him.

‘And the butterflies, too,’ he said. ‘But they would have died anyway,’ he added. ‘And my killing-bottles only send them to sleep, you know. I wish you’d put *me* into a killing-bottle, Betty!’

‘But surely they don’t let you say Mass any more, you dear old lunatic? I can’t imagine the Reverend Sugary Salt, as I call him, allowing such a thing!’

The late Vicar of Littlegate regarded his hostess with a glance full of suppressed and chuckling amusement. ‘Have you never heard of a Midnight Mass?’ he said.

The old lady’s face grew very grave. ‘*That’s* what you’ve been up to, John Moreton, is it? Well! You just listen to me. That sort of thing’s got to stop. Do you hear? Got to stop and stop at once!’

She paused and looked at him very anxiously, with tears in her eyes. ‘So it’s pranks of that sort has brought you downhill so fast, is it?’

She got up out of her chair and stood in front of him, scowling at him with knitted brow and quivering lips.

‘John Moreton! John Moreton!’ she cried, waving her forefinger at him. ‘I’m afraid you’re no better than a muddle-headed old fool!’

But he smiled at her so reassuringly and made his next remark in so quiet and normal a manner that she relaxed her tense expression and resumed her seat.

‘Dear old Betty!’ he said. ‘It’s not such a very nice world, after all, that old people like you and me should want to live on indefinitely. Why don’t you smoke your cigarettes, Betty, as you used to? You haven’t reformed, I hope?’

Comforted by his tone she did light a cigarette then.

‘John Moreton,’ she said after a pause, sending a puff of smoke through her daintily curved nostrils, ‘do you believe in a life after death?’

Her ancient admirer looked at her rather wistfully.

‘As keen on life as ever, Betty, I see! Oh, my dear, I don’t know! And to tell you the honest truth I don’t greatly care. The whole thing is such a bitter sorry business that we should all be well enough out of it, to my thinking. But there *may* be another life. Oh yes! certainly there may be. I think Christ is alive. If I didn’t think *that*, I should go crazy.’

They chatted on, after that, on less serious topics; till at last Mrs Shotover spoke what was rankling in her mind. ‘I shall never forgive Nelly,’ she said. ‘I shall never forgive her. To turn on an old friend for the sake of a man! And what did I say to her? Nothing but the plain truth; that she’s turning your house into I don’t know what, with her husband and her lover!’

The old naturalist rose slowly to his feet. ‘I must be walking home now, Betty; and you *mustn’t* talk like that.’ He staggered a little as he spoke and leant against the table.

‘Of course I shall have Thomas drive you back,’ said the lady. But you may take this from me, John Moreton: it’s your fault; it’s your going and getting yourself turned out of your living that has brought your girl down to this miserable mess-up. You may say what you please but the truth is you have driven that girl into all this. Canyot is a ruffian and this other fellow is a sly, sneaking, self-satisfied, conceited prig. And here the silly girl is, married to one of them, and hanging on to the other! You’ve brought about a pretty kettle of fish, John Moreton, by your pranks and your manias!’

The old man wilted under her storm of words like an ancient hollyhock bowed down by a cruel wind. He made a feeble movement with his hands and sank back upon the sofa.

‘Ring for your Thomas, Betty dear,’ he gasped. ‘That walk’s been too much for me. I am no doubt very much to blame – very much to blame. But we must forget and forgive, Betty; forget and forgive.’

Chapter 10

NELLY WAS GLAD that it was Canyot's way to make her walk fast by his side. She was glad that it was his way to be silent when he was strongly moved. The effort of keeping pace with him soothed her; and his silence made it possible for her to collect her thoughts and arrive at some sort of understanding with herself.

It had been the most unpleasant shock she had ever known, this business of the letter. It was not only a blow to her love, to her pride, to her happiness. It was a blow to something deeper than these; to that innate respect for life as a thing of quite definite aesthetic values, which made up the very illusion of her soul.

Except for the young man by her side now, she had never known anything of love or lovemaking; and though Mrs Shotover had riddled her with cynical advice she had not really been roused from her illusion by the old lady's words.

She kept going over in her mind every incident of the scene. It must be some woman that he cares a good deal for, she thought, otherwise he would have shown me the letter and just laughed at its sentiment. It must have been one particular letter in a long correspondence; or his surprise at seeing an unexpected hand would not have disarmed him. He must have known that it would reveal to me the whole story. He must have been thoroughly terrified of my seeing it.

'Not quite so fast!' she was compelled to cry out to her companion when, having reached the smooth turf of the crest of the hill, Canyot quickened his pace still more.

He turned round and looked at her.

They were alone in the midst of a wide treeless expanse, an expanse unbroken by any other human being, unbroken by bush or shrub or animal. Above their heads the larks sang; large cool shadows, one after another, floated over them, thrown by slow-travelling clouds, and from the little patches of thyme at their feet arose that peculiar faint sun-burnt pungency which more than anything else seems to be the attribute of the Downs.

The immense undulating upland, along the crest of which they were now moving, was like some huge wave of the sea struck into immobility. This great green wave held up their two figures, isolating them completely from the rest of the world; carrying them through infinite blue ether on the planetary motion of the round earth.

He stopped at her words and looked at her. Her cheeks were flushed and she was drawing her breath in little gasps.

‘Let’s sit down here,’ he said.

They sat down side by side, the smell of the thyme becoming vividly distinct and little groups of blue butterflies chasing one another backwards and forwards across their feet. Her hands lay on her lap and Canyot possessed himself of one of them, holding it grimly, tightly, passionately.

She could hardly release it without an exertion of moral force for which at that moment, as she panted for breath, she lacked the energy.

She had not realized· how easy it would be for Canyot to repossess himself of such a privilege. She had not realized how the mere physical habit of lovemaking may outlast the emotional importance of it.

He on his part took what was a mixture of pique with Richard, physical exhaustion, the revival of old habitual gestures, and real· affection for himself, for something much deeper in her. He had grasped her fingers so fiercely, just because he had not supposed for a moment that she would let him retain them. She did let him retain them; and his passion gathered intensity.

'I hate human beings,' she said after a few minutes' silence. And in her heart, she thought, What does it matter if I do let Robert hold my hand? Richard has got some woman in Paris who writes to him letters that I'm not allowed to see. He is evidently entangled still with her or he would have told me the whole story. And it doesn't seem fair that I should keep Robert at a distance when he goes on with his Paris entanglements.

'I hate all human beings,' she repeated, 'because they always spoil everything. I do it myself, I know. I spoil things for myself.'

Canyot gazed in a kind of sombre ecstasy at her downcast profile.

'You've spoilt everything for me, Nelly,' he said; 'but I don't hate you for it. I like things to be spoilt! There's something in me that is glad when things are spoilt. I'm glad you're married. I'm glad I've got to leave you in six days. I'm glad you are tormenting me at this moment with your speeches and your ways.'

His tone was too familiar to her, and the peculiar mood he was in too reminiscent of former times, for Nelly to be shocked or startled.

She gave him a little flickering smile. 'Dear old Rob!' she said.

He lifted her hand to his lips but did not release it.

'I don't know whether you can possibly understand me,' he continued. 'You probably can't. But the fact is I've come to the conclusion that if you can't be glad of everything that happens to you, of everything that happens in your life, you'd better kill yourself at once. It's one or the other, Nell.'

'It's certainly one or the other with you, Robert,' she answered; 'but you needn't hurt my hand, whichever way it is.'

He did not release her fingers even then; he went on in the same strain.

‘You can’t get back from me, you know, any of the things that have happened between us. Every kiss you’ve ever given me still remains mine and no one else’s.’

‘I see you put my kisses with all the other horrid things you’re glad to have happened to you,’ remarked the girl, in a voice full of a teasing affectionate mockery; ‘but to keep true to your present theory, what you ought to remember best are the times when I’ve been most bad to you.’

‘You’ve never been bad to me,’ he said. ‘You couldn’t be. You can hurt me and hurt me and hurt me. You can marry a hundred Richards. I shall only like you the better. And it’ll be part of what I have to put into my paint box.’

‘Oh there’s a ladybird!’ cried Nelly suddenly. ‘Do look!’ She took advantage of his disarmed attention to release her hand.

‘What do you mean by your *paint box*?’ she inquired when the ladybird had flown away.

‘I mean,’ said Robert, making a futile effort to regain her lost fingers, ‘that my painting draws its life from every single thing which destiny takes away from me.’

The girl looked at him in whimsical gravity. ‘Then if you had *had* me,’ she said, ‘I shouldn’t be in your paint box any more?’

‘The *Nelly* part of you wouldn’t,’ he answered solemnly, ‘but your soul would – because I should never have got hold of that!’

‘But the *Nelly* part of me *is* my soul,’ she protested; ‘that’s what I am really and truly.’

He looked at her grimly and sardonically.

‘No! No! my dear,’ he said. ‘*This* is Nelly,’ and he touched her shoulder. ‘And *this* is Nelly,’ and he touched her knee. ‘But the thing in you which says “I am I” isn’t Nelly at all. It isn’t even a girl. It isn’t even a human being.’

She smiled somewhat uneasily. ‘What is it then?’ she asked. ‘I don’t at all like the idea of being something that isn’t myself.’

‘It *is* yourself. It’s the self that nobody in the world can ever take away or invade or imprison, as they can *this* Nelly,’ and he gave her propped-up knees a vicious little shake. ‘But it’s something that *I* could never, never get hold of, even if I had you absolutely for my own.’

She looked frowningly at the hot grey-green turf at her feet where a heavily winged brown butterfly was fluttering aimlessly.

‘What *is* it you really care for in me?’ she suddenly inquired.

The thoughts that had led her to this were queerly complicated. That discovery that Richard corresponded with some Paris woman and received letters which he dreaded to show to her had stained with a sort of muddy tincture the whole outlook of her mind. It not only spoilt Richard for her. It spoilt herself for herself. It muddied up, as it were, the whole business of love between human beings. It made her doubt her own integrity, her own charm. If she didn’t satisfy Richard, if her love couldn’t work the miracle of making them really *one* – mustn’t that be because there was something wanting in herself? She felt a horrible suspicion of her own nature. She realized for the first time how cruelly alone everyone is in the world; how one doesn’t evoke love simply by being what one is without any effort.

It was at that point in her train of thought that she said, ‘What is it in me?’

Her question completely broke down Canyot’s self-control. He jumped up from the ground. He took her by the wrist and swung her up upon her feet. He threw his arm round her and embraced her passionately; kissing her so brusquely, that he kissed the tip of her nose, and her open mouth and her lace collar, in one rapid series of indiscriminate hugs.

When he let her go he was pale and trembling and hardly dared to look into her eyes. But the effect of his violence upon Nelly was not to make her in the least angry with him. She saw his remorse. She bent forward and gave him a quick affectionate little kiss upon his cheek. Then she smiled sadly and tenderly. ‘You’ll only make yourself unhappy by *that*, Robert dear, and it doesn’t do any good. I do love you; but I could never like your doing that. So what’s the use?’

He stood staring at her, like an animal that has been punished for some unknown fault. The colour, coming slowly back into his face, covered it with funny red blotches.

‘I’m a fool,’ he muttered, ‘a damned fool! Let’s go on now.’ And they resumed their rapid stride, side by side.

They reached Toat Farm without any further personal conversation. The weight of the basket of provisions he carried wearied him and reduced his speed; so that when they arrived at the place the girl was quite cool and collected and able to be nice to Sally-Maria and Sally-Maria’s aunt.

They ate their lunch in the woman’s cottage and she made them tea. The dumb child seemed hostile to Nelly, for she refused to accept a morsel of food while they remained there and a queer inarticulate anger against them both was obviously smouldering in her sullen eyes. ‘She is jealous, poor little thing!’ whispered Nelly as they went out, and the whole complicated misery of human emotions swept over her in one drowning wave. Was there no such thing in the world as disinterested love?

But Canyot’s picture impressed her much more than she had anticipated. The artist had managed to communicate to those shadows in the water a strange passionate beauty full of wistful hints and intimations; the wind that stirred the rank-growing melancholy hemlocks seemed, as the girl gazed at them, to be the very wind of fate itself carrying the burden of old sorrows, of old baffled longings, out of some deep unknown into some still obscurer future.

She understood, as she looked, fascinated and silent, at what he had done, something of what he really did mean by his queer phrase about the ‘paint box’.

It was not till quite late in the afternoon that they prepared to leave Toat Farm. At the last minute Robert discovered to his dismay that Sally-Maria was missing. Her aunt called loudly for her and they all searched for her in the places where the child generally was accustomed to play. But in the end they had to leave without saying goodbye to her.

If her aunt’s final conjecture was correct, she had run off; as she usually did when she was unhappy, to the cottage over the hill where lived Old Miss Stone’. With this explanation Robert had to be contented.

The incident of Sally-Maria’s disappearance threw a gloom over them both as they walked back slowly across the Downs; and nothing that Nelly could find to say to her companion seemed able to lift it.

She herself was occupied with the very difficult question as to how the broken and ruffled stream of her love for her husband could be restored to its former level course.

She surprised herself by the bitterness she felt about it, by the anger she felt towards him.

Her present desire, which she herself did not dare to bring into the light of complete consciousness, was to excite his jealousy to the breaking point.

She wished to make him suffer exactly the same pain that she herself was suffering. She wished to have him not only begging for her forgiveness, but in a blind helpless manner – the clearness of all human issues tarnished and stained – *doubtful as to her love*.

Meanwhile as she walked by Canyot's side there slowly settled down upon her the consciousness that things could never be quite the same. If she had actually caught him in the act of making love to this Paris woman, she could hardly have felt more deceived, more betrayed, more disillusioned. And yet in one part of her brain she had known that it was almost certain that he had entanglements. Woman-like, she had suppressed that knowledge, thought it down, thought it away, thought it into faint unreality.

Everything about her present feeling towards Richard puzzled and bewildered her. She was surprised at herself for not being more hurt than she was. She recalled how as a young girl she had often imagined herself in just this very position – the position of a betrayed wife – and how she had always, in imagination, felt a kind of passionate passivity in suffering, a sweet tenacious clinging devotion to the erring one that nothing could shake. In place of this she found herself sickened with the whole business of life, dulled and stupefied, as if with a species of nausea. What especially surprised her was that the strong, clean, pure flow of her own love for her husband seemed to have received some disastrous alloy, some influx of poisonous bitterness.

Was she, after all, she asked herself, something different from the devoted, passionate, tenacious Nelly, in whom she had believed?

Was she, as Mrs Shotover had so bluntly told her, no better than an intriguing flirt whose infatuation for a man turned to gall and wormwood at the first catastrophe?

Or had Richard, by his miserable business, really poisoned with a fatal poison the well-spring of her love?

It is strange, she thought, these terrible little accidents of betrayal – what they can destroy! Like some evil acid thrown upon sensitive flesh, they seem able to bite to the very bone! Nelly sighed, as she walked, from a heart most 'sorely charged'. It seemed so ridiculously small, the whole matter of this clandestine correspondence, of this burnt letter, revealing a sequence – so she told herself – of letters that had not been burnt! A ridiculously small matter! and yet it seemed to have given to the very essence of her being a strange organic shock.

She felt as if since he had thrown the thing into the fire two or three long bitter years had passed over her head instead of a few hours.

When they reached the top of the hill above Hill Cottage they were surprised to see a small motorcar standing by the gate.

'Who's that?' said Canyot brusquely. 'If it's a visitor I shall clear off. In fact,' he added, 'I think I shall be off anyway. I don't feel in a mood for meeting people.'

He gave her his hand and looked into her eyes, hoping for some final glance of tenderness; but her gaze was fixed upon the unusual object at the gate. 'Goodnight, Robert,' she repeated, almost mechanically, as with a wave of his hand he strode away.

She was met at the door by her husband. Directly she saw him she knew that something was wrong. 'Is it Father?' she asked. Richard nodded without speaking and stood aside for her to go in.

Her father's bedroom was upon the ground floor. Its door stood wide open.

Directly the girl stepped across the threshold she knew that the old naturalist was dying. By his side stood the doctor, a quiet self-contained young man with an expressionless face; at the foot of the bed sobbed Grace, her big tears streaming down her rosy cheeks and falling upon her apron.

‘What is it?’ whispered Nelly to the doctor. ‘Is it his heart?’

It was Richard who answered her question. He stepped up close to her side and put his arm round her waist. ‘It was a sun stroke it seems,’ he said. ‘He was brought back from West Horthing in Mrs Shotover’s carriage. He must have become unconscious on the way. Grace was alone. Mrs Shotover’s man carried him in and then went for the doctor. I have been several times to the top of the hill to look out for you. I found him like this when I came in and he has not changed since.’

The old man was lying on his back with his eyes closed. His breath was loud and unnatural, resembling the sound of water in an iron pipe. His mouth was wide open and every now and then a convulsive spasm crossed his face.

Nelly went up to him and bent down above him – ‘Father!’ she whispered. And then in a louder tone, a tone full of a sudden desperate fear, ‘Father!’

Her voice seemed to reach the dying man’s ears; for he made a little feeble movement with his hands.

The young doctor drew a step back.

‘Can’t anything be done to make that breathing easier?’ whispered Richard with something like a tone of reproach. ‘It must hurt him to breathe like that.’

Suddenly John Moreton opened his eyes and gazed at his daughter. The girl fell upon her knees and kissed his hand as it stirred faintly on the counterpane. Wildly and strangely the old man looked at her. His breathing grew shriller, harsher, huskier. It became the most dominant thing in the room. It became a living separate entity, a palpable horror that pressed with a ghastly weight upon them all; that tyrannized over them all. It was as if, in that repulsive sound, Death itself – the old eternal antagonist – was mocking them, was menacing them with an unintelligible threat.

Nelly spread out her arms over the bed and hid her face. It was not easy for her to look into those bewildered wild eyes with their inexplicable appeal. An unnatural longing suddenly seized Richard that he might rush from the room and escape, escape into the largeness of the evening, from this pitiful struggle. He felt as if every breath the dying man drew rent and tore at his own throat. He felt stifled; as if it were he himself that were wrestling there with an invisible enemy.

The impassive young doctor contemplated the scene with serene detachment. He had seen hundreds of deaths in France and this particular death had less effect upon his emotional capacity than the shooting of an aged dog.

Nelly's head, buried in the white counterpane, was full of a turmoil of remorse. Why hadn't she been a better, a kinder, a more considerate girl? Her sobs shook the bed and mingled with the horrible rattling in the old man's throat.

Suddenly John Moreton jerked up his head from the pillow and held it erect. The young doctor was reminded of a similar movement in the neck of a frightened tortoise.

Inside the old man's mind, at that moment everything was absolutely clear. In a flash he saw the whole scene. He saw the impassive doctor. He saw the weeping servant. He saw his daughter lift her tear-stained face from the bed and gaze at him with desperate love. He caught in Richard's eye a look of fidgety irritation, a look that said 'let's get this melancholy business over and go for a walk on the Downs'.

And in a flash he knew that this was his last moment of what is called *life*. He gathered up in a bundle all his inveterate thoughts – the *Eidolon*

Vulgaris popped up on its pedestal before him as he had grown accustomed to envisage it. It nodded at him amiably from the top of his bookcase like a leering Punchinello. He did not think of it as the great illusion of humanity. He saw it as a whimsical but not unfriendly goblin whose feelings he had hurt by his contempt. He felt inclined to bid it goodbye and to apologize to it.

Yes, his brain was clearer than it had ever been in his life. The only thing that puzzled him was that the human arms of that crucifix which hovered just above poor Gracie's head were not fastened to anything but were waving in the air like the wings of a butterfly. What butterfly was it? That was the one thing that troubled him. He would like to know that, before darkness covered his eyes. He felt extremely happy, happier than he ever remembered feeling. Was that because Cecily and Betty were making it up? He knew they were making it up, though he could not see them. Those butterfly wings were doing it. They were hidden under the shelter of those wings; and as the wings waved they were growing smaller and smaller and smaller.

Everything was growing smaller now, smaller and further away. And yet they were not leaving him. They were leaving themselves. He himself was getting further away – a stupid old man breathing like a cracked steam engine. He was *there*, and they were *there*, far off, far away – four unhappy people bending over a grotesque old entomologist stretched out on a bed. Why couldn't he communicate to them what a delicious thing it was to be fanned by butterfly wings?

Never had his brain been more clear. But it was annoying that he couldn't remember the name of that butterfly! And it was annoying that he couldn't remember what his opinions were about the immortality of the soul. He ought to be thinking about that now; not enjoying this unphilosophical happiness!

He was just on the point of dying. That was certain. This happiness was nothing less than death. What a curious discovery! And he was quite unable to explain this to any of these dear agitated young people. This was the queerest experience he had ever had in his life; it was teasing not to be able to speak.

The immortality of the soul? What was his view upon that problem? He hadn’t the least idea. He had no idea of anything except of floating in a lovely blue space – a blue space that grew darker and darker. Then he recalled one single word out of a great many. It was the word *annihilation*.

That was the secret then; John Moreton was being annihilated. He wished this being annihilated would never stop. It was the happiest sensation he had ever known. He loved everyone; only he couldn’t speak to tell them so. Annihilation had something to do with love, then? It must have. And it was beautiful beyond expression. But what was the connection between annihilation and the immortality of the soul? He wished he could remember what the immortality of the soul meant. It was a musical sentence. It must have meant something once to him when his brain was clouded. But his brain was clear now and it meant nothing at all!

How heavy his eyelids were growing; and how nice it was to love everyone, every single person – even foreman Pringle! Yes, his eyelids were very heavy. It would be still nicer when this blue space in which he floated got quite dark! He was going to sleep now; going to sleep upon velvet-black butterfly wings.

Someone was weeping. It wasn’t Cecily or Betty or Nelly. Who was it? It was the darkness of space. No! it was his mother.

At that moment he uttered a strange croaking cry like the cry of a bullfrog in a swamp. It seemed to himself that he shouted ‘Mother!’ in an ecstasy of indescribable peace; but to the four figures watching his death it sounded as if he had uttered the meaningless syllables ‘Blub-blub’. His head sank back on the pillow after that; the young doctor in a quiet discreet voice informed them that he was dead.

Chapter 11

THE DAY FOLLOWING the old naturalist’s death was a day of supreme discomfort for Richard. His feelings were those of natural sympathy with Nelly; on his own account he felt a certain sense of loss and bewilderment. The little cottage seemed to have changed its character. The old man lying upstairs dominated every corner of it with his silent presence; and it was difficult to understand exactly how Nelly was reacting to that wordless motionless appeal.

She went about her domestic duties as usual. She comforted poor Grace and kept her from any further outburst of grief. But what, all the while, was going on in her own mind it was impossible for Richard to guess.

Canyot came round in the morning after breakfast, and Nelly took him up at once to the dead man’s room. A little later, when they were all three loitering miserably and awkwardly together in the little garden, ostensibly engaged in picking flowers to make ‘that room’ as cheerful as it could be made, they were disagreeably startled by the appearance outside the gate of Mrs Shotover’s dogcart.

Richard went to help her down.

‘I know all about it,’ she said. ‘I telephoned to the doctor last night. Thomas told me he had fetched him. How do you do, Mr Canyot— ‘this was in recognition of the young man’s opening the gate for her.’ And my dear, dear child!’ She embraced Nelly with tender effusiveness. ‘And there is Grace! Take these things, Grace, will you? It’s eau-de-cologne, my dear, and some of my best roses. I thought he would be glad to think I’d remembered to bring them. And now you’ll take me upstairs at once won’t you? Well, Mr Storm, I'm afraid all this is very sad and disturbing to you. It must be terribly upsetting to you writers, when something really human breaks in on your inventions. Dear, dear child!' She still continued to retain tight hold of Nelly's hand while she addressed her words to the two men. 'And you, Mr Canyot, you've had your own loss of course; and no doubt you know how to comfort our little Nell. It is very nice that she has both of you to fall back upon. It would have been doubly sad if she'd had nobody but an old friend like me …

'Yes, Grace. In water, Grace. It would be a pity for them to wither while we can fancy he enjoys them. Ah my dear, my dear' – this was addressed to Nelly again – 'we old people must seem very tiresome sometimes to you young ones. But when it's all over I daresay you miss us. Yes; at once if you please. Yes; do take me up at once.'

Preceded by Grace and escorted by Nelly, Mrs Shotover walked solemnly up the little creaking stairs. What did actually go on under that high forehead and behind that elegantly poised head no human being will ever know. She shed no tear at the sight of her old friend. Very gracefully, and like a great actress in a play, she stooped, and kissed him; once on the forehead, and then with a quick birdlike movement, a sort of fleeting afterthought, on the bloodless lips.

Nelly thought she detected a furtive glance into the mirror as they went out together after placing the roses on the table; but her rush of cynical thoughts was dissipated in a wave of sympathetic feeling when she noticed that the hand which rested on her arm as she helped the old lady downstairs shook like a leaf in the wind.

'Very beautiful and very peaceful,' she said, addressing the two men when she came out into the garden; for the one thing that Nelly wanted to avoid at that moment was to be left alone with her.

‘And now you two must come back to lunch with me,’ she said. ‘I’m sure Grace will be glad to have you off her hands. She doesn’t look as if she was fit to do a thing more. I daresay Mr Canyot will be available if he’s wanted. Oh yes you *must* both of you come. It would be quite the dear man’s wish, I’m certain of that. You must let me take you all in hand. He would wish it. You see I *did* understand him. Mr Canyot is just the right person to take care of dear faithful Grace. Aren’t you, Mr Canyot? An artist like you is always so nice to simple natures. Have you thought of taking a death mask? No, I suppose not. Oh, there’s just one more thing – if you don’t mind, Nelly dear. No! No! I’ll be down in a minute. Just one little thing. You must humour an old woman, my pet. One minute!’ And with more alacrity than she had yet displayed Mrs Shotover went up for the second time to the room above.

What passed on this occasion between those ancient friends only the invisible watchers of life and death will ever know. When she came down again the old lady was a little quieter.

While she was away, Richard had whispered to Nelly – ‘Do you really wish to go with her?’ Nelly had nodded. ‘And you’d like me to come too?’ Nelly had nodded again. ‘I don’t want to be alone with her today; and we can’t hurt her feelings. She was Father’s friend.’

So Nelly climbed up by Mrs Shotover’s side in the front of the dog-cart; and Richard held on at the back in company with Thomas.

Never had the author of *The Life of Verlaine* had so uncomfortable a drive.

He felt as though Mrs Shotover had ears in the back of her head and heard every word he said to Thomas; Thomas, in any case, was the most taciturn of feudal servants and had already acquired a prejudice against him as a foreigner and not quite the right sort of gentleman.

The lunch passed easily enough; for after the stress they had been through, and the long jolting drive over the Downs, they were both hungry. The uncomfortable time for Richard came afterwards, when they lingered over the coffee in Mrs Shotover's drawing room.

Nelly clung resolutely and tenaciously to her husband. She seemed to have made a vow not to be separated from him for a moment; their hostess, whether she liked it or not, had no alternative but to submit.

So Richard became aware of the enormous importance, in events of this kind, of the right fabrics to be selected for a young woman's mourning.

Of course you'll leave it all to me, 'said Mrs Shotover.' I'll drive you in to Selshurst tomorrow and have you fitted. They keep the medium sizes practically made up, you know. And you're a good medium, my dear. Just a few touches here and there, and that sweet little Mrs Fortescue will fit you to a nicety! I'd have had her over here this afternoon, if we'd only known in time. You needn't look so pompous and reproachful, Mr Storm. Need he, Nelly? Your dear father never minded my little jokes.

'Ah you modern men, you modern men! You're always grave when you ought to laugh; and you chuckle like wicked ogres when you ought to be grave.

'The question of Nelly's looking nice at her father's funeral, when quite a lot of the neighbourhood may be there, is not a thing to laugh at. No gentleman ever laughs at a woman for her seriousness about dress. That kind of humour is just pure vulgarity and shows simple ignorance of life. It's like the bucolic laughter of stupid rustics when they see well-dressed people coming out of church.'

'I haven't been in an English drawing room for quite ten years,' remarked Richard, in an effort to change the conversation.

‘So I imagined!’ was on the tip of Mrs Shotover’s tongue; but she substituted for it, ‘Dear me! How glad you must be to be civilized again!’

‘I don’t like drawing rooms,’ said Nelly. ‘I’ve never had one. I think men’s rooms are much nicer.’

‘That’s what all the young people say now,’ cried the old lady. ‘You’ll turn England into a dreadful place soon, where there’s no more society and no more good manners and no more good conversation. You should have seen the tea parties we used to have at Fixden Manor in my young days. *There* was a drawing room for you! And the men were witty too. I can remember old Lord Trace-bridge, how he used to flirt with my aunt, Lady Gower. That room had no less than seven mirrors. One of them got cracked one day; and the Bishop of Sodor and Man said to Grandmamma – but that’s too naughty a story to repeat before Mr Storm! I’ll tell it you tomorrow, Nelly, when we’re driving to Selshurst’

Richard looked round Mrs Shotover’s drawing room with an eye of unmingled contempt. There was not one single book to be seen in any direction except a great morocco-covered edition of the poems of Lord Byron, lying on its side on a tortoiseshell slab, and a tiny volume of 151 *Dodd’s Beauties of Shakespeare*, used as a letter-weight on the lady’s rosewood writing table.

To make up for the lack of books there were endless vases of flowers of every conceivable size and colour; there were plants in Japanese pots and plants in Chinese pots and plants upon little stands of old English pottery.

On the mantelpiece and on every available space in the room were an incredible assortment of objects that could hardly be called *objets d’art*.

The most harmless of this gallery of knickknacks were portraits of elegant human beings, nearly all of them in full dress, varying from the dark ancient daguerreotypes in silhouette down to the latest modern photographs of young soldiers and young society belles.

‘I see you’re looking at my things,’ said the owner of this pretty collection. ‘The work of a lifetime, young man! The work of a lifetime! My French novels I keep upstairs. But we won’t talk of *them* now! All the same I wish you’d make Mr Storm write something really amusing, Nelly. Something witty, for one to read at night when one goes to bed. I read a lot in bed. It’s the only place where I get a moment’s time.’

‘Oh, here’s a picture of your father when he was a young man. You’ve seen it before? Yes? It’s rather nice I think, don’t you?’

She replaced the object carefully in its former position and sighed deeply, looking at herself as she did so in one of her innumerable mirrors.

‘Poor dear John! He never minded my bad little ways. I’ve told him before now the most terrible stories. You’ve heard him laugh, haven’t you, love, when we’ve been together in his study? Well! he’s past laughing now, poor darling. Why don’t *you* ever laugh, Mr Storm? For I can see you never do, does he Nelly? He “grimly smiles”, as the novels say, and that’s all. I must confess I like a man who can laugh. You modern writers take life so horribly seriously. One would think you were always in pain. Are you in pain when you “smile grimly” like that, Mr Storm? I hope Nelly looks after your stomach. I always used to advise her father to take castor oil, didn’t I Nelly? It was quite a joke between us. And other things too. Heigh ho! And the dear, dear man is lying there all alone. Well! I see you’re anxious to be off and I won’t keep you. But what is *your* opinion of these modern authors, Mr Storm, and their spiritualistic nonsense? I say that when we are dead we’re in good society. In these days you have to die to be in good society. Oh my sweet little Nell, how I am rattling on! Well! you must excuse me. I am an old woman and hardly see anybody nowadays.’

‘It was very kind of you to bring us over,’ said Nelly, rising, ‘but really you mustn’t trouble about tomorrow. I’ve got several black dresses.’

‘Nonsense, child, nonsense. You talk in the way your mother used to. Black dresses indeed! I hope, Mr Storm, you won’t let her get silly and dowdy now she’s married. But I’m sure you won’t. I expect you’ll be getting her all sorts of things from Paris. That’s what she married you for, you know, not to hear sermons about art! And do let me hear you laugh sometimes. I suspect serious faces. I always have. I advise Nelly to watch you very carefully when you’re silent like that and looking out of the windows and into the bushes. You may try to make her believe you’re composing lives of the poets or something; but I know better! You bad sly man! You’re probably thinking of some naughty little girl in Paris! There! Don’t look so sad, Nelly. It does him good to be teased a bit. These modern clever men have no sense of humour. Well! goodbye my dear one. You *will* walk back, eh? I could easily get Thomas to drive you. Oh dear, dear! What a thing life is. Well! be a brave girl. That’s what’ll really please your father. I’m sure the dear man is safe in heaven by now. If he’s *not* there, the Lord may send Betty Shotover to the other place!

‘You *will* walk, then? Well, goodbye, and God bless you! I’ll be over tomorrow early.’

They shook hands with her at the door; and Richard threw up his arms and beat at the laurels with his stick as soon as they were out of her sight.

‘What an awful woman! What a perfectly horrible old woman!’ Then, as if to relieve his feelings, he proceeded to make a goblin-like grimace in the direction of Mrs Shotover’s drawing room,

‘Don’t, Richard,’ said Nelly. ‘You hurt my feelings; and it isn’t pretty of you. I don’t think it’s ever nice to despise people quite like that, when you’ve been enjoying their hospitality. Besides she was a friend of Father’s.’

‘Damn her hospitality!’ cried Storm, letting loose the stored-up venom of his outraged vanity. ‘She only asked me there to annoy me. She might just as well have had you by yourself. She has always hated me from the first time we met. Her Fixden Manor! Her aunt, Lady Gower! What a disgusting old snob. I expect she saw I saw through her from the very start. That’s why she loathes me. We know how to put people like that into their places in France.’

‘Perhaps she sees through *you*, Richard!’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I only mean that when it comes to *seeing through* people, we’re all at bottom much of a muchness.’

‘Don’t for God’s sake, Nelly, use those awful expressions. I know they’re supposed to be arch and debonair and genteel in England; but I detest them. We’re not living in Wonderland or Looking-Glass-land.’

‘I wish we were!’ cried Nelly looking at him with a little surprised tilt of her eyebrows. She was still in the dark as to what had really ruffled him; for it was inconceivable that a person of his intelligence could take poor dear Aunt Bet quite as seriously as that!

Had she possessed a little more insight into her husband’s character, she would have known that he was engaged in a secret and not very human struggle to exploit in the interests of his own scheme of life every one of the events which were now occurring, centred round that old dead man lying at rest. And into this vision of things, where the old man’s death and Nelly’s own grief fitted so beautifully, Mrs Shotover and her drawing room came as a bombshell of irrelevance.

He wanted to act the part of a wise and tender philosopher to his young wife just then. He wanted her to give him an opportunity to comfort her, to explain to her his views upon death, to soothe her mind by large and noble sentiments. He wanted her to remember to her dying day how beautifully he had said just the right thing with regard to her father, how tactfully, how spiritually, he had entered into her feelings!

And here she was, actually amused and diverted by the silly chatter of this old featherbrain, and even by her ridiculous rudeness to himself!

It was not a very cheerful walk that they had together, that afternoon, back to where the dead man awaited them.

The tension between them was relieved for Nelly – while it was increased for Richard – by their overtaking a young visitor who was on her way to leave her card at their place. This was an acquaintance of Nelly's for whom, though he had only seen her twice, Richard had acquired almost as strong a dislike as he had towards Aunt Bet.

Their meeting in just that way seemed to Richard extraordinarily awkward and unfortunate. One surely, in reserved and discreet England, managed to avoid acquaintances and condolences when one's father was still unburied?

What would the caller do now, since she *had* met them? Would she hand her card to her friend with a polite curtsey, and say, 'I'm sorry your father's dead,' as one might say, 'I'm sorry your potatoes are blighted'?

These little niceties of social intercourse always filled Richard with chilly embarrassment. His own feelings were so seldom simple or direct that it was a matter of terrible self-consciousness to him how he should behave where the conventions did not act as direct signposts.

As it happened on this occasion, whether conventionally or not, Olive Shelter walked with them as far as their gate and simply said goodbye. As far as Richard could make out, she didn't so much as refer to the dead man. Their conversation as they crossed the cornfields was lively and interesting. Nelly was evidently challenging the girl about some male cousin of hers in whom gossip reported she was interested.

'There's absolutely nothing in it, my dear,' Richard heard the girl saying, 'and you know that there isn't. How often must I tell you before you believe me that I've never been interested in anyone in my life? When my uncle dies I'm going to take a poultry farm and earn my own living. Perhaps when people see me in gaiters and knickers they'll let me alone.'

'But, Olive!' cried Nelly, 'lots of us wear things like that just to attract men!' 'They won't be attracted to what *I* shall wear,' said Olive smiling. 'I'm perfectly sick of this stupid idea that we've all got to have love affairs or husbands. I don't see things that way at all.'

'You're not going into a convent are you, Miss Shelter?' Richard threw in without taking very much heed to what he said. The girl's clear-cut sharp-featured brusqueness had little appeal for him.

'A convent? Oh dear, no!' she replied, giving Richard a quick satiric glance which seemed to say 'as usual!' 'That's just what everybody thinks,' she went on. 'It seems incredible to people nowadays that a girl should prefer to be unmarried just as a man prefers to be a bachelor. Whenever I talk of my poultry farm, everyone always smiles and sniggers – as much as to say "she'll be married in a week and then you'll see!" And if they don't do that, they look at each other and become grave and sympathetic, as much as to say "she must have been badly jilted, poor little thing!"'

Richard became faintly interested at this point. 'But you don't mean to say, Miss Shelter, that you really intend to live alone all your life?'

'Certainly I do!' she laughed back at him. 'Though I *might* of course take a partner, if I could find some girl of my own sort.'

‘Ah! a girl, a platonic friendship,’ laughed Richard superciliously. ‘Not a bit of it!’ replied Olive, giving him a quick, almost angry look and flushing a little. ‘A business partnership between good comrades,’ she threw out with a toss of her head.

Richard became puzzled and silent. It seemed incredible to his mind that there should be any alternative between a passionate devotion to religion and a passionate devotion to some shape of flesh and blood. To rule out the attraction between human bodies and souls and not to substitute for it some exclusive passion of religious faith seemed to him weird and strange.

He looked at Olive with an unexpected interest. She was certainly a new type to him of what England could produce. Was it really possible, he wondered, for life to go on being thrilling and exciting, without the stimulus of either religion or sex?

Olive was by no means a bad looking girl. Her features were a little hard; but her complexion was soft and childlike. Richard was quite glad to take her hand when they said goodbye. It was a cool and a firm hand, the hand of a woman who, like Natalia in *Wilhelm Meister*, loved ‘never or always’!

Chapter 12

JOHN MORETON WAS buried on the following Wednesday by the side of his wife Cecilia.

Mrs Shotover came to the funeral; she thoroughly scared the new vicar, patronized Richard before the whole neighbourhood and offended Nelly very seriously by being rude to Robert.

The news which Canyot received that week about his exhibitions made it possible for him once more to postpone his journey; for it appeared there was to be a second New York show of his things which promised to be of far greater importance than anything that had been done hitherto; there was no need for him to cross the water until July.

He stayed on therefore at the farm, painting as he had never painted before, painting at a furious speed and with a gathered weight of feeling and intensity.

He wanted if possible to have at least half a dozen more pictures to carry over with him and he dreaded to lose the peculiar value of the kind of power which was now coming to him, snatched out of the electric air of his relations with Nelly.

He felt obscurely that all was not perfectly right between the husband and wife; he felt that Nelly needed him and in some mysterious way clung to him at this juncture, almost as if he had understood what she felt about her father better than Richard did.

Richard himself was making at that time a concentrated effort to recover the interrupted sequence of his own work. He found this surprisingly difficult. The roots of the thing were there, firmly planted in his new feeling; but the temptation to enjoy that lovely countryside, to fall into a sort of vague half-sensual dreaming over the sounds and scents of those unequalled fields, was still fatally strong.

The sweetness of Nelly's initial surrender to him still remained, an intoxicating drug among these other enchantments, and his pleasure in her grew more and more material, more and more a thing of the thrilled and exacting senses, less and less of an emotional or spiritual passion.

Nelly was occupied in arranging the natural history treasures in her father's study; she went about this work with a greater weight of gloom upon her mind than she had ever known. She had not separated herself from her husband; nor had she referred again to the matter of the letter; but even while she submitted to his caresses, even while she passionately responded to his caresses, there was a weary disillusionment in her heart. She tried to forget this, just as she had tried to forget her father's loss, by abandoning herself almost fiercely to her love; but the whole thing was different. Her very love seemed to herself much more a thing of the senses than it was before; a thing from which some peculiarly subtle essence had been withdrawn. She knew only too well what she was trying to do. She was trying to forget her father and she was trying to forget the old 'dead' Richard, by plunging recklessly into the mere material thrill of the chemical attraction that existed between them.

She was playing the courtezan, so to speak, in the temple of her pure love, so as to drown, if she could, that bitter underlying consciousness that something was wrong between them.

It was very painful to her to think of her father at all, so guilty did she feel towards him. The actual pain of missing the old man was made so much worse by the miserable feeling that in a hundred ways recently she had neglected him for her own pleasure. And the only distraction that seemed able to make her forget this remorse was the distraction of Richard’s caresses.

The unfortunate thing was that in proportion as Richard made more sophisticated love to her and she responded to his lovemaking, Richard himself in his own brain and nerves began to lose something of the original delicacy of his attitude towards her. The more feverishly she tried to forget her troubles in his arms the less rare and exquisite did the link between them tend to become. This tarnishing and blunting process was not, of course, a thing of a few days, but it began to have its effect upon Richard’s character. This effect showed itself in two ways.

His wife became more of an obsession to him in a physical sense and very much less of an inspiration to him in a spiritual sense.

The situation was a singularly cruel one; for had the girl loved him less, had there been less magnetic attraction between them, the charm of her personality, apart from flesh and blood, would have grown more powerfully upon him. Nelly’s physical beauty was indeed Nelly’s own rival in this matter, and a rival who was absorbing and devouring the very thing in the man she loved that had originally drawn her towards him.

What was happening to Richard was indeed the very thing he had fled from Elise Angel to avoid. He had fled from it because he knew how dangerous to his peculiar temperament this sort of erotic obsession was – how it sapped the very life blood of his soul. He had married Nelly for a conscious and also an unconscious reason. Consciously he had wanted her as a living symbol of what he was aiming at in his work. Unconsciously he had been attracted to her with precisely the same sort of purely sensual attraction as he had felt towards Elise Angel. He had not known that at first. But now he did know it and it had a fatal effect upon the freedom of his brain. The sweetness of his English wife and the sweetness of the English scenery became between them a dangerous euthanasia, a drug-induced trance, the death of his better self.

And the thing did not stop even there. For the very lowering of the moral atmosphere of his life produced by his uxoriousness led to a subtle undermining of his resistance to the image of the dancer. The more absorbing did his present voluptuousness become, the less did he expel from his imagination the attraction of the other woman. Both he and Nelly were deliberately seeking to drug their differences by exploiting their attraction to one another.

That this kind of abandonment must eventually lead to satiety and reaction they did not seem to realize. That it was destroying the more exquisite moments of their life they did vaguely feel; but they felt it without understanding what they felt. And by slow degrees there entered into the fabric of their love some black threads of abominable hostility which came very near to hate. They loved and hated because they loved without restraint. They put poison into their love, because they separated love from life.

Had not Richard been twice as old as Nelly this ruining of the delicacy of their relations might never have occurred. What he was really guilty of was the exploitation of her emotions by his sophisticated senses. He was ‘seducing’, so to speak, his own lawful wife and turning her into a more delicate reproduction of his Old irresponsible amours. The worst of it was that while these former excesses had in no way interfered with his old work, his *new*, more spiritualized purpose was most seriously imperilled by what was occurring now.

The engaging, ingratiating charm of that insidious Sussex landscape lent itself with fatal ease to the process of spiritual deterioration. He bathed himself in the beauty of those rolling hills and those rich pastures. He drank in, through every pore of his skin, that magical air, those blue skies, those soft languorous mists, those warm, fragrant rains. And the girl he loved became for him the material medium through which he worshipped all this, through which he lost himself in all this. In loving Nelly he was loving the trees, the hedges, the lanes, the meadows, and the thyme-scented grass. In embracing Nelly he was embracing the very body of the sweet earth which, just then, was so luxuriously responsive.

It is true that there came to him certain moments when he was seized by a vague uneasiness. These moments were generally connected with Canyot; for, sure as he was of his wife's material fidelity, he was by no means so sure now of her mental interest, of her spiritual *rapport*. She seemed to escape him, even while he held her, and that obscure disillusionment at the bottom of her eyes fell away sometimes into a region of thoughts and feelings to which he had no entrance, the clue of it quite lacking and all its ways dark.

Physically she was his without reserve; mentally she had slipped aside into a land of her own; it was at the moments when he suspected that this land of her soul's escape from him was not barred to his rival, that he was seized with a vague uneasiness and discomfort.

One morning, early in July, Richard intercepted the postman in the outskirts of the village and received from him another letter from Elise Angel.

The fact that he had every intention of reading every word of this communication, and that he put it away in his pocket with a thrill of furtive delight, was an evidence of how far he had drifted from his original purpose, of how he had changed in these brief two months.

He actually took it with him, without any feeling of shame, to the secluded shelter of the overarching hazels of the lane that led to Nelly's

Happy Valley.

Here, sitting under the hedge, he read it with absorbed unrestrained fascination.

It was a characteristic scrawl, written in the dancer's bold imperious hand; its passionate words, conveying like a far-flung torch a trail of fire into his languid senses, thrilled him with forbidden longings.

She told him that she had accepted an engagement at a New York theatre that would begin sometime in October.

'I shall be there till Christmas,' she wrote, 'couldn't you possibly come over?'

He tore this letter into the tiniest fragments and poked it with his stick under the dead leaves, into the soft mould.

As he did so there came over him a sense of shame at this concealment, at the furtive cowardice of this action.

'It's *their* fault,' he said to himself, apostrophizing women in general. 'If they weren't so damned jealous, if things were really free – as they will be, perhaps, in two hundred years! – there would be no need for these tricks.'

Then it occurred to him to wonder what he would feel if he caught his wife in the act of kissing Rob Canyot. 'Hang it all!' he muttered in the retired honesty of this sudden soliloquy with his soul; 'I'm cursed if I should like *that* very much! I don't think *that* would be very nice!'

Then he turned his attention to Elise and tried to conjure up a situation in which he surprised *her* in some amorous colloquy with another person. 'The devil!' he confessed to himself. 'I shouldn't like *that* very much either!'

What did he want then? The answer was certainly naïve in its veracity. He wanted to move agreeably and openly, as if it were quite the accustomed thing, between Nelly his wife and Elise his friend! That, and nothing less than that, was precisely what he wanted. Was he no better, then, than an oriental Turk? No! he was no Turk; he was a civilized heathen. He wanted them both; but certainly not together in one house! *There*, at any rate, he had advanced in refinement upon the devotees of Allah.

But how would he like it if both Nelly and Elise moved ‘agreeably and openly’ between himself and two other men?

‘The devil!’ he muttered. ‘I couldn’t put up with that! I should run away from that.’ ‘But,’ whispered his cynical demon, ‘suppose *that* were the recognized custom in your two-hundred-years-hence community?’

I should find someone who really satisfied me, he thought, *and persuade her to break this confounded custom. She and I would be the only faithful ones*. This new line of thought led him to the conclusion that what he really wanted was not Nelly in England and Elise in America, but some wonderful ‘Elise-Nelly’ with whom he would be completely contented on both sides.

Having reached this conclusion he promptly rejected it with disgust. Such a double-natured female would be an odious monstrosity, like a peewit with the hooked beak of a sparrowhawk!

Then where *was* he, after his rambling meditation? Precisely where the bulk of humanity was, after its experiments of four thousand years!

It seemed, that particular July day, as though the hot sun on the ripening corn and the blazing red poppies had roused a feverish ferment in more than one human cranium. For no sooner had Richard reached the churchyard, where Canyot armed with a billhook was cutting the grass under the wall, while Nelly, perched on the top of the wall, with bare head and swinging legs, was watching him mischievously, than he became aware that their conversation was tense and startling.

At his approach Canyot rose to a perpendicular position, billhook in hand, and surveyed him frowningly and intensely. Nelly fixed upon him a glance of the most mocking and mysterious elfishness.

‘You’ve just arrived at the right moment,’ she remarked. ‘Robert has been proposing to me that we all go off to America together!’

‘Why to America?’ said Richard lightly, leaning back against the wall by her side and giving her skirt a little discreet pull so that it should conceal her ankles.

‘She understands my work,’ threw out the young man. ‘I want to work over there … new impressions – new world – sky-scrapers.’

‘But perhaps *I* don’t want sky-scrapers,’ said Richard with a smile. ‘Perhaps I prefer Sussex.’

‘Go ahead Robert!’ cried Nelly mockingly. ‘Explain yourself. I told you how absurd you were.’

‘It’s like this, Storm,’ went on the tow-headed youth, screwing up his eyes and prodding the wall with the tip of his billhook. ‘It’s like this, Storm —’

‘Well, my friend, what is it like?’ inquired Richard blandly, laying his hand familiarly on his wife’s knee. ‘Do you intend to carry us both off with you, or are you thinking of kidnapping Nelly?’

‘She understands my work, Storm. She knows nothing of painting, of course—’

‘Thank you, Rob dear!’ cried Nelly from her perch on the wall, giving him a kick with her foot. ‘You can leave out the “of course”.’

‘But she understands what I am aiming at. She helps me. You can’t work without one person who knows what you want to do.’

‘I don’t know in the least what he’s talking about,’ cried Nelly. ‘And please don’t think I put all this into his head.’

‘Of course he knows you didn’t!’ protested the painter. ‘He knows only too well you didn’t!’ he added with a profound sigh.

‘Well then,’ began Richard, feeling extremely well pleased with this queer turn of fate but prepared to get the full credit for magnanimity, ‘it appears that you want to drag me to America with you as a sort of necessary item, troublesome but inevitable, in the train of my wife?’

‘Don’t try and be sarcastic like that,’ interrupted Nelly. ‘It annoys me and it goes completely over Rob’s head.’

Richard at this removed his hand from her knee. Her words irritated him more than, at that moment, he could have guessed was possible. In his heart he roundly accused her of ill-breeding and he revenged himself on her by reverting with a sweep of his imagination to the large heroic gestures of Elise Angel.

It was one of Richard’s weaknesses to dislike beyond everything else the flick or sting or smart of a well-placed rebuke; especially if administered by a woman he cared for. His temperament had a certain equine sensitiveness to the lash of the human tongue. He himself was singularly slow of wit in these verbal encounters. Externally he kept his temper, to avoid looking a fool; internally he revenged himself out of all proportion to the affront. And he never really forgave.

‘It’s like this, Storm,’ repeated the young painter, dropping his billhook and coming nearer to the man he addressed. ‘If you and your wife don’t come with me on this American trip my work will stop dead. I shan’t do another stroke of the brush. I can’t work without her. I can’t deal with my thoughts without her. I can’t cope with existence without her. I can’t endure it without her.’

His words came out pellmell, one on the top of another. He seemed all in a moment to lose control of himself. His clenched hand quivered at his side. His voice became shrill and harsh. His lips trembled. ‘I can’t endure it without her,’ he repeated. ‘I know you don’t understand my work, but you said it was good. You know it is good. You know I shall go very far with it. If you take her away from me now it'll be the end. It'll finish me. I can't stand it. I shall chuck the whole thing and just go off.'

'But Robert dear—' began Nelly.

He raised his hand. 'I know all that,' he said. 'I used not to mind not seeing her; but she's too much for me. I can't bear it any more. I *must* see her. I *must* have her within reach, where I can get to her. I thought I could sail without a word. I can't. I can't go away. If she doesn't go with me, if you two don't go with me, I am done in. I'd better give up at once. Without seeing her I can't do my work; and without my work what's life or anything in it to me? I hate it all! So you see you *must* come with me, Storm.'

It gave Nelly a strange and curious feeling to hear herself spoken of as if she were not present. A chilly sense of ghostliness fell upon her and she looked at Canyot's agitated features with a queer mixture of compassion and remoteness.

'If you two don't come with me,' the young man continued, 'it'll just finish me off. I thought I could bear not having her – I gave her up.' He still kept talking of Nelly in the third person. 'I didn't know myself. I was proud of letting her go. But I can't do it. I've found that out. I can't do it. So you *must* come. I only want to be somewhere near her – on the same side of the sea. But I can't do without her. Life is short. Everything else is unimportant. I only want just to see her – I – I love her too much! It's like that, Storm. I love her too much!'

'Well?' murmured Nelly looking at Richard with inscrutable eyes. 'Well?'

Richard was simply and directly touched. Canyot's feeling was so genuine and so deep that it swept him off his feet. It was one of those moments when he showed the best that was in him. He was awed and he was impressed; a real impulse of generosity stirred within him. He would have made the same response had there been no Elise Angel in the world. At that moment, oddly enough, he actually wished that Elise Angel was *not* in America; so that his response could be disinterested. The power of that passion passing like a tornado across the artist's twisted and corrugated countenance shamed him, disarmed him, liberated him from himself.

'Well?' repeated Nelly.

Richard bowed over the girl's hands as they lay in her lap and taking one of them into his own kissed it with a grandiose gesture.

Then he turned from her to Canyot and laid his hand on his shoulder.

'Of course I'll bring her. Of course we'll come, Robert,' he said. 'I've always thought I ought not to settle down without seeing America, and Nelly's never been out of England. Of course we'll come. I like Nelly to be of use to a real artist.'

Canyot's expression when he heard this was one of such rapturous relief that Richard had a reciprocal thrill of emotion.

The young painter blurted out some inarticulate words of gratitude and then without a glance at either of them strode off over the graves, his heavy shoulders shaken with childish crying.

'That was nice of you, Richard,' the girl whispered. 'At least I *think* it was nice of you. But I never quite know. You are not an easy person to understand, my husband!'

'It *was* a little bit nice of me, sweetheart,' he responded. 'But I quite sympathize with your difficulty in understanding me. I'm damned if I understand myself.'

'*I* wouldn't have let another woman come with us,' Nelly continued, 'certainly not that woman who wrote that letter!'

This was indeed a sharp thrust. Richard's mind visualized that little hole under the leaves into which he had prodded Elise's last communication. In one brief moment he was hurled down from the heights of magnanimity.

'I don't know that I would have agreed,' he said, 'if he hadn't been what he is. But he's a real artist and one must do what one can when it's a question of that. You really do seem to have been an inspiration to him. Yes; his work *is* good. Canyot's a genius in his way; with his mother dead, one couldn't very well do anything else.'

'Well! It's nice of you. It *is* nice of you! I only hope I shan't be seasick. But it'll be fun anyhow. I shall enjoy it. Come, dear! Aren't you going to lift me off this old wall?'

He took the opportunity of kissing her before he set her on her feet again. They were still sufficiently in love for these snatched embraces in unpromising spots and queer moments to be very pleasant to both of them.

Hand in hand they drifted to where the old naturalist lay; as if anxious to receive his benediction upon their erratic impulse.

That afternoon Richard deliberately slipped off after tea so as to leave his wife a free field to discuss the details of their departure with the young man. She had told him she had to go down to the farm to get some eggs from Mrs Winsome and he took it for granted that the painter would be expecting her there. A faint glow of self-righteous magnanimity still hung about him and his knowledge of the dancer's being in America still remained a vague exultation far away in the back of his mind.

He thought to himself, as he followed his favouriievhazel path, that these difficult relations between men and women were really growing a little more adjustable nowadays. The war had left its impress, he thought. Old rigid conventions were breaking down. Human beings were learning to be more generous to one another, less tenacious of their legal rights, more flexible, more reasonable.

He was inclined to attribute the thrill of new happiness which he felt, as he swung along the lane under that leafy roof, to the spirit of his own generosity to Canyot. Something of it was perhaps due to that. But if he had analysed his feelings down to the bottom he would have found that it was not at all disagreeable to him to have Canyot there, somewhere about, so that when he was in a mood for solitude he could hand over Nelly to him and go his own way. He liked to go off for long walks alone. He was still obsessed with Nelly as a lover; but he was not perfectly satisfied with her as a companion. There *were* moments, especially after he had made love to her a great deal, when he was decidedly bored with her society. The companion he really loved best was, after all, none other than Richard himself. Richard alone with Richard was what really gave him the deepest satisfaction.

He branched off after a while down a lane to his left, which led ultimately by shadowy byways to a small country town to the west of Selshurst. He had never been precisely this road before and the absence of any old landmarks made the path full of fresh and new impressions. The fact, too, that he was destined to leave England so soon again gave an added attraction to every little omen of the way. The jerk to his mind of this impending adventure shook him out of the half-sensual half-mystic lassitude into which he had insensibly fallen and he found himself thinking and feeling with more clear-cut subtlety.

He paused at the entrance to a long avenue of ash trees that led away across a marsh into the very land of the sunset.

What was it in a road of that kind, bordered by those twisted weather-beaten trees, that caught his mind up and carried it so far?

There came over him, just then, a feeling that he had only known once or twice in his life before; a feeling far too evasive to be put into intelligible words.

It was as if the obscure emotions of many lonely travellers upon many lonely roads, the fragments and morsels of their intercourse with the low–bowed branches and the gleaming pools, with this particular patch of moss and that particular bed of reeds, had mingled strangely together and had waited for him, had been waiting for him, precisely at the turn of the road, so that he should respond to them and give them a sign of recognition.

It was as if they became for him, at that hour, a solitary signal, a beckoning intimation, something that emerged out of long lonely expectant nights, nights full of soft-falling rain and rustling wind and the sound of shaken leaves.

It was a feeling that was only possible in a very old country, a country where generations of men and women, one after another, had mixed their human sorrows with the wistful loneliness of marsh and mere, of moorland and wayside. It was a feeling that could not have endured for a moment either in the uproar of a city or in the inhuman desolation of jungle or desert or mountain. It was the evocation of a strange marginal purlieu, lying midway between the loneliness of solitary human beings and the loneliness of inanimate things, things that had been witness, in their long centuries, of the passing of many such wayfarers and had become the accomplices of many vaguely floating thoughts.

Richard turned back at that point – he was already some three miles from home – but the glimpse he had been permitted that day into the very secret of his native soil went with him as he retraced his steps.

He felt humbled and saddened. He realized that he had in these days of lovemaking lost some clue, some contact with the unknown, that it must to one of his motives to rediscover.

That half-sensual half-mystical communication with nature, such as he had blended with his love for Nelly, had not been subtle enough. Certain more delicate voices had grown inaudible, had passed over his head, had been drowned in the grosser monotony of his material sensations.

Towards Nelly herself, how dull, how insensitive he had been! Towards her and towards poor Canyot too!

It was likely enough, he thought, only too likely, that there were aspects of Canyot's work deeper, more clearly emphasized, nearer the great withheld secret of things, than anything he had himself ever written. And how little he *had* written, of any kind, during these recent months! He had betrayed his better self; and in doing so he had betrayed Nelly also.

He had not retraced his steps very far when he observed a dogcart driving rapidly towards him, with a couple of dogs running beside it.

It pulled up with a jerk when it reached him and he perceived that the driver was none other than Mrs Shotover.

'How do you do, Mr Storm,' said the lady. 'It's a pity we're going in opposite directions. I'd have offered you a lift. I'm going to Fern-ham Beeches to fetch a bitch pup I've just bought – such a little darling. Well! how's Nelly and everything else at the cottage?'

Richard put his hand on the side of the cart. Her horse chafed and stamped and fretted; and the two dogs barked at his legs. The wheels of her smart little vehicle smelt of new paint. Mrs Shotover was dressed in a tightly fitting tweed suit and her grey hair was well tucked in under a cloth hat. She looked the typical Englishwoman, out for a race meeting or an agricultural show or, as was actually the case, to visit her dog fancier.

With her champing and stamping horse, her barking dogs, and the taciturn Thomas sitting on the back seat, she broke in upon the writer's thoughts like an image of the 'verdict of society.'

'Oh, Nelly's very well,' he said. 'I have been for a long walk. I often go for long walks.'

'Too long,' Mrs Shotover hazarded. 'It's a mistake! Married men ought never to go for long walks. They ought to take their young wives out – to see people and all that kind of thing.'

'To buy terrier pups, eh?' said Richard.

'To buy the good opinion of people that count,' rapped out the lady. 'Oh no, my dear Mr Storm, you really must be seen a little more, you and your charming Nelly. There's that adorable Lady Wincroft; why, she's asked me over and over again why Nelly hasn't returned her call. Of course I say it's her father, and so forth – but her father, poor dear, is out of it now.'

'I don't see why I should break my usual habits, Mrs Shotover. I married Nelly Moreton, not the society of West Sussex.'

'That won't do! That won't do!' cried the lady, and she sat so bolt upright in her seat and looked so fierce that Richard began to feel as if he had encountered the chariot of the sternest of the Eumenides.

'You're a great deal older than she is,' was her next remark; Richard could not help wondering what comments upon all this the coachman's imperturbable profile concealed from the world.

Then his mood suddenly changed. A mischievous spirit of schoolboy levity took possession of him. *Confound the woman!* he thought. *What right has she to talk to me like this?* And in order to see what she would do, and out of pure maliciousness, he burst out with what was in his mind.

'You'll be pleased, then, I expect,' he said, 'when I tell you that I've decided to travel with Nelly for a bit.'

Mrs Shotover did indeed look startled. ‘Oh excellent! very excellent!’ she cried. On the Continent, I suppose? To Paris first, no doubt, and then to Switzerland? I am delighted you can afford to give my dear child this happiness!’

‘I think of taking Nelly to America,’ he said, with a malicious emphasis. ‘Robert Canyot has some exhibitions to look after over there; and he has persuaded us to go with him.’

Mrs Shotover did indeed show ‘the mettle of her pastures’ at that moment. She became extremely quiet, and flicked a horse-fly from the flank of her impatient steed.

‘Ah!’ she muttered, drawing in her breath with a little hissing sound. ‘Ah really!’

‘Yes; we think of going quite soon. Nelly will be sorry to leave Hill Cottage of course. But we may be able to let it for a few months. We are both so interested in Mr Canyot’s success.’

In her heart Mrs Shotover thought bitterly – *Who is the one to be exploited in this abominable affair? What a couple of ill-bred cads these fellows are! Poor, poor, poor Nelly!* But aloud she only said, ‘How nice it is for the dear child to have *two* men of genius to support her! I expect you and Mr Canyot will both find America very much to your taste. I *hope* Nelly will. It’s rather a terrible place isn’t it? But no doubt there are *some* nice people there. You won’t get anything to drink, of course, but I suppose none of you will mind that. What’s their word for those horrid mixtures they all swallow? Soft drinks! Well, I hope you’ll enjoy the soft drinks, Mr Storm. But don’t kill my dear child between you. Give her my love, please! Goodbye.’ And she flicked her horse viciously and was off at a gallop, almost throwing Mr Thomas into Richard’s arms.

She had successfully destroyed the filmy threads of his meditation. ‘It is to escape from women like that,’ he said to himself, ‘that people emigrate. Oh England, England, you certainly allow many troublesome persons many strange privileges!’

Chapter 13

THE NEWLY BROADENED Varick Street, now a continuation of Seventh Avenue, is one of the most characteristic thoroughfares in New York. It is characteristic of that city by reason of a queer blending of the dilapidated ‘old’ with the harshly and rawly ‘new’. The old is indeed rapidly disappearing, but it lingers on in a diffusion of chaotic litter; bits of ancient Dutch houses, roofs and sheds, old wooden walls, little ramshackle staircases, fragments of antiquated sidewalks and old tobacconist and barber shops, clinging pathetically enough to the great new erections, just as the small narrow streets in that vicinity seem themselves to cling with a tenacious persistence to the huge new thoroughfare that cuts its proud straight path through the middle of them.

It was at the corner of Charlton Street and Varick Street that Richard and Nelly at last installed themselves.

They had a bedroom, a sitting room, a bathroom and a kitchen, on the second floor of a small house that must have been at least a hundred years old.

The place was already furnished; and they possessed themselves of it on the understanding that they could leave it when they pleased.

Robert Canyot had taken a studio on a year’s lease in another part of the city; in a street adjoining Central Park, of whose trees he could catch a distant view as he worked.

Nelly had found the heat of New York with its accompanying humidity rather exhausting when she first arrived, but the amusement and interest of housekeeping under these new conditions prevented her from losing her good spirits.

Her first view of the great group of colossal buildings gathered round the Woolworth Tower, as they entered the harbour more than a month ago, had been forever associated in her mind with the discovery that she was to be a mother.

She could see that same Woolworth Tower as soon as she left her little apartment and turned into Varick Street; for Varick Street led straight into the city district and lost itself among those iron and marble monsters.

It always struck her when each day she saw the huge erection as she went on her housekeeping errands that the thing resembled some gigantic temple, built to some new god of this new world, a god who demanded the service of innumerable men and women but whose own especial angels and chosen ministers were things of iron and stone and steam and electricity.

It a little terrified her sometimes to think that she was destined to stay in New York until her child was born; but they had let Hill Cottage before they left England; Grace had married her young man; it would have meant an uncomfortable hunt for a new abode if she insisted on returning. She had no desire that her child be born in America, but she dreaded, in her nervous state of health, the effort of the voyage.

There were other more subtle reasons to account for her acquiescence when Richard proposed to take this apartment. She associated Hill Cottage with that fatal letter from Paris and it pleased her to think that New York was further away from Paris than was that little garden where she had inhaled, together with the scent of white phloxes, her first taste of the cruelty of sex jealousy.

And she had a longing, too, that she might put off her return to her father's grave till she had received – as she believed she would receive in time – some sort of absolution for what she regarded as her sin in neglecting him when she first married.

If I'd married Robert, she thought, it would have been to give Father a home. I did give him a home with Richard; but it wasn't the same. It was for my own pleasure, and I hardly saw anything of him during those weeks.

In the subtle workings of her brain she had come to associate her Littlegate haunts with a certain complicated sadness – the sadness of her first taste of the bitterness of life and the sadness of her father's wasted powers.

The upbraiding shadow of Mrs Shotover also menaced her from those Sussex fields. I suppose I ought not to have let her go, she thought. I suppose I was cruel. But she was impossible. She was mad.

In spite of her nervous condition and in spite of certain moods of timid apprehension as to all that was before her, Nelly was really extremely happy during those hot airless days. She suffered physically from the heat; but her husband had never been mentally so close to her; their mutual interest in their new surroundings seeming to have brought them together on a deeper plane.

She was very happy too in her frequent visits to Canyot's uptown studio; and the conversation about life and art which she had with the young painter, seated by his side in some gallery of the Metropolitan Museum or on a bench in the Central Park, lifted her out of herself into regions which she had never supposed she would be able to enter.

She admitted Canyot into the secret of her condition with a sure feminine instinct as to the effect the news would have upon him. And in this she was completely justified. The final loss of her, in a physical sense, thus emphasized by her prospect of motherhood, seemed to act as a sedative to the young man's passion, seemed to purge it of all possessive jealousy.

Canyot himself was steadily advancing in power and originality. He was surprised by the recognition his work received. Not only did he experience no difficulty in selling his pictures, but he found himself accepted as a desirable personage by the whole aesthetic fraternity of that enterprising cosmopolitan city. He turned out to be the only artist in New York whose methods of work were untouched by modern French fashions; this very fact appealed to the American craving for novelty; it was just the moment when a reaction was impending against the more extreme European schools.

It was not the prospect of Nelly's giving him a child that brought Richard nearer to her, it was the effect upon him of America. Like some great wedge of iron this tremendous new world, bored its way through the thick sensuousness of his nature and laid his deeper instincts bare. It was a process of spiritual surgery, painful but liberating. There were no lovely fields or leafy lanes here in Manhattan; as he trod its hot pavements and passed down its echoing canyons of iron and stone he was compelled to fall back upon his own soul for vision and illumination. Nelly's ways and Nelly's feelings and Nelly's little enjoyments became a sort of oasis to him in a stern stark wilderness where he wandered alone, stripped and defenceless.

Things were thus arranging themselves for all these three persons when an event occurred which changed everything.

Richard received word from Paris to the effect that his publisher there had gone bankrupt, leaving him without hope of any further income until arrangements could be made with some other house.

It became necessary that he should at once find work; for he had already spent what he had saved.

While he was looking for work he was compelled to borrow a couple of hundred dollars from Canyot. This loan was the beginning of evil, for by making him his rival’s financial debtor it introduced a new element into their relations full of dangerous possibilities. Insensibly he began to hate the successful painter as he had never hated him before. He threw out malicious and carping observations when Nelly went to see him. He got into the habit of grudging her her uptown visits. He vented his feeling of humiliation by all manner of sarcasms upon ‘successful people who cater to the American taste’.

The money that had passed into his hands became a slow poison, ruining the new understanding between himself and his wife. He brooded gloomily and morosely upon his situation as he went about looking for a job. He felt himself to be a failure. He was tempted to borrow more money and clear off to Paris; but he did not dare to suggest so drastic a move.

The late summer was a bad time in which to look for work. The pitiless sunshine made those vain interviews with journalistic underlings in stuffy offices peculiarly depressing.

Week after week passed; in spite of rigid economy the two hundred dollars ebbed away, and still Richard had found no job. Canyot kept pressing him to accept another loan. Once, to his unspeakable chagrin, he found that Nelly *had* accepted a cheque for fifty dollars from her friend. This incident led to the first quarrel between them that had occurred since they landed. The fierce manner in which the girl, when teased by his reproaches, cried out, ‘My child shall not be starved while Robert has a penny to give him!’ pierced the skin of his deepest pride. To revenge himself on her he deliberately reduced his own diet to an absurd minimum, refusing meat and milk and eggs and living almost entirely upon bread and tea. The result of this was that he began to suffer from acute dyspepsia which was aggravated by his miserable and hopeless hunt for work.

He found that he had overrated his reputation as a writer. In America he was practically unknown; the French estimation of his critical power amounted to almost nothing with the New York publishers and newspapers.

His great poetic purpose upon the substance of which, both in manner and in matter, that first month in America had produced a profound change, pruning it of accessories and giving it a sterner, more drastic tone, was now completely laid aside. He began to curse the day he had ever entered upon this too ambitious undertaking. He began to regret the light facility and the easily won local fame of his pre-war achievements. He felt himself a charlatan and a fraud; was almost tempted to destroy every word he had written under the stress of his new spiritual purpose. He felt as though he had completely deceived himself as to its quality.

At last he did succeed in finding something. It was not much of an opening, considering his former Paris reputation and his recent poetic schemes; but it was something – a ledge to cling to, a shelf of rock to hold by, in this tidal wave of adversity.

It was in the middle of September when he found it; an engagement with a newly organized magazine called *The Mitre* for which he had to furnish weekly articles upon the more definitely Catholic writers and poets of Europe. His salary amounted to forty dollars a week; but with the rent they had to pay for their apartment, this meant a very rigid economy. It meant, as a matter of fact, that he continued to underfeed himself so as to give his wife as little excuse as possible to accept any further help from the painter.

He went each day to the office and did his work there – though he might have worked at home – partly because he found it increasingly difficult to concentrate his thoughts in their small apartment, and partly to avoid the irritation of being harassed by his wife on account of his fantastic experiments in diet.

The result of this was that Nelly, being lonely and restless at home, resorted more and more to Canyot's studio. By gradual degrees the custom arose that she should prepare for the young man and for herself a substantial lunch in his 'kitchenette' while he worked at his pictures.

These picnic lunches in the painter's apartments were some of the happiest hours Nelly knew in those days and she solaced her conscience for accepting them by posing for him in various draperies during the afternoon.

Her evening meals with Richard grew more and more gloomy; for though she forced him to share certain little dishes which she took a pride in making, he never would really eat enough; and his persistency in this aggravating mania became a constant cause of friction between them, which was not lessened by his knowledge that in spite of such economy she still continued to accept Canyot's help.

Things went on in this unsatisfactory manner till the end of September, the girl drifting further and further away from him and concentrating all the attention that was not bestowed on Canyot upon the care and protection of the new life that was germinating within her.

It was a curious thing that this same new life, which had not drawn Richard as strongly towards her as it should have done, did not draw her either towards him.

It almost seemed, as time went on, as though it estranged her from him. It certainly absorbed her to such a degree that she could not make the effort to overcome his nervous irritability or to put an end to this ruining of his digestion by ill-chosen food.

She was touched and grateful to him for the way he stinted himself in his favourite luxury of cigarettes and she was distressed and worried to see him grow constantly thinner and older-looking. She seemed to live in these days in a self-concentrated dream, so that it was only the outside of her mind, as it were, that stirred at all. The more passionate elements in her were all taken up and exhausted in the slow process of maternity.

She could not have described to anyone what she felt in her inmost heart all this while. What was happening to her mentally was happening in some deep subconscious region out of reach altogether of any intelligible analysis. To her conscious self her attitude to Richard remained unchanged; and she was only dreamily and faintly aware that she regarded his coming and going with an abstracted eye, taking his presence for granted, like a background that varied slightly in colour but was always *there*.

It seemed as though the tenacious unscrupulous egoism of that new life was asserting its blind formidable unconscious will, careless as to whom it sacrificed, careless as to the spiritual havoc it caused, careless as to the human agencies to which it owed its being; asserting its will, as it rose out of the unfathomable reservoirs and groped forward towards the light, asserting its will, as it drew its nourishment from the body that protected it, isolating that body and treating the consciousness that animated that body as of no account at all save as it answered to its physical needs.

And Richard, while day after day he set off, with growing disinclination, to the office in East Twenty-seventh Street and settled down to his task of selecting, from piled-up Catholic books and brochures, the few things that interested him, felt as though his personal self were of no more weight than a floating straw borne on the tide of great irrepressible forces.

This feeling was precisely the one most naturally engendered in New York, where the crowds of men and women scourged by economic necessity seemed to dehumanize themselves and become just one more mechanically moving element, paralleled to the iron and steel and stone and marble, to the steam and electricity, whose forces, brutal and insistent, pounded upon it, hammered upon it, resisted it or drove it relentlessly forward.

Richard was puzzled in the profoundest depths of his nature by Nelly's attitude towards him. He expected her to be nervous and capricious. He expected her to cling to him, to depend upon him, to share every subtlety of her emotions with him. This strange shrinking away from him into herself, into that dim obscure unfathomable workshop of organic creation where her soul now brooded in its solitude, startled and bewildered him.

He wondered how she behaved with Canyot and whether *he* suffered from the same mysterious aloofness.

And Nelly's remoteness from him, her escape from him, was only one more additional element among the blind tremendous forces which seemed invading the last recess of his mind; and then passing on their way, indifferently.

Much of Richard's depression arose from sheer physical weakness, from his saving money by cutting down on meat and milk and eggs; but a good deal of it was due to a horrible doubt that began to invade his mind – a doubt as to whether he had not made the one irretrievable mistake of his life in marrying Nelly at all.

With the toning down of the more physical elements of their attraction to one another, the accompanying difficulties of the present situation seemed to fill the whole field. Richard became vaguely aware for the first time in his life of a serious deficiency in himself. He fought against this recognition and threw it aside but it kept returning; what it amounted to was that a certain human warmth, a certain tender fidelity, apart from either spiritual or physical excitement, was lamentably lacking in him. His great poetic purpose had been so thwarted and baffled that he found it difficult any more to take refuge in it; but he had to face the fact that all that was best in him was roused and stirred by that kind of thing alone. Apart from that kind of thing, he felt himself to be something hopelessly ignoble, untrustworthy, irresponsible, below the emotional level of ordinary humanity.

He did not attempt to conceal from himself that this ill-balanced economy of his was not really undertaken for his wife's sake. For her sake – if *that* was what he was about – he ought obviously to take every care of his health. The real motive that prompted him was a kind of voluptuous self-cruelty, mingled with an angry hatred of her dependence upon Canyot.

When he was quite alone, seated in the overhead railway or struggling with the crowd on Sixth Avenue, all sorts of inhuman egotistic feelings came upon him. Where had his intelligence been, that he had let himself be led into this trap? He had not the least desire that Nelly should have a child, He wanted *Nelly*, not Nelly's children. If he could not write wonderful new poetry, poetry that would be read hundreds of years hence – why, then, his old Paris life brought him quite enough fame and pleasure to satisfy any man! And what had he got now? Nelly's body was dominated by Nelly's child; Nelly's mind was dominated by Canyot. He had nothing for himself but odious duties and harassing responsibilities. He supposed that most men were thrilled with joy when the woman they loved had a child by them. Well! He was not thrilled. The idea of having the responsibility of a child gave him not the remotest pleasure. He wanted his name to be perpetuated not by children but by poetry. Children were nature's will and pleasure. Poetry was the attempt of the spirit of mankind to rise above nature and extricate itself.

Richard had just begun to make a few acquaintances among the literary and theatrical circles when this blow fell. But he let them go now; and they were not sufficiently interested in him to take any trouble in seeking him out. His wife was meeting Canyot’s friends but that did not mean that Richard met them.

As long as he did his work in the office he felt that he had fulfilled every duty that was demanded of him.

Each day he seemed to care less what happened; the promise for the future which his wife was bearing within her seemed to coincide in its growth with the steady loosening of his own hold upon all that he valued in existence.

There were no fields or lanes in Manhattan where he could recover his spirit by drawing upon the deep earth forces. All about him were iron girders and iron cog wheels and iron spikes. All about him were the iron foreheads of such as partook of the nature of the machinery whose slaves they were. And the iron that entered his soul found no force that could resist it; for all the days of his life he had been an epicurean: when the hour called for stoicism he could only answer with a dogged despair.

Chapter 14

ONE DAY, ABOUT the middle of October, Richard left the office between half-past one and two o’clock to get some lunch. He had been trying to extract the elusive quintessence from some especially recondite Catholic poet in order to make a popular article out of what was the last refinement of subtle and sceptical credulity.

He felt sick of his work, weary of himself, and beaten down by the noises of the street. Between the elaborate sophistications of this Parisian trifler with the faith and the raw harsh brutal aggression of the vortex of ferocious energies that swirled around him there seemed no refuge for his spirit, nothing that was calm and cool and simple and largely noble.

He made his way slowly up Sixth Avenue, searching for some little refreshment room or café where he could eat and read in quiet. He passed many of these places with a shudder. They were crowded and unappealing. The people inside them seemed as though they were eating for a wager, watched by the whole world through plate-glass windows.

He felt hunted by iron dogs whose jaws were worked by machinery and whose mouths breathed forth a savour of ‘poisonous brass and metal sick’.

He crossed street after street, threading his way through the automobiles and the great motor-lorries, jostled and hustled by the crowd. He held grimly to Sixth Avenue, knowing that there alone, in this quarter of the city, could he find any sort of inexpensive retreat. Above him rattled with clanging roar the trains of the elevated railway, supported on a huge iron framework, the very shadows of which, as they broke the burning sunshine, seemed to exude a smell of heated metal. The paraded objects in the store windows leered aggressively and jeeringly at him through their plate glass.

Every material fabric in the world, except such as suggested quietness and peace, seemed to flap and nod and make mouths at him. Every man he passed seemed to flaunt an insolent cigar, held tightly between compressed lips, and every woman seemed to jibe mockingly at his decrepitude from under her smart hat.

Suddenly, when he began to feel actually faint and dizzy and was on the point of entering a glaring cavern of marble tables, he caught a glimpse of the front of a theatre down one of the streets on his right hand. It was some distance away but certain well-known words emblazoned on a huge placard made the blood rush to his head.

ELISE ANGEL, proclaimed this placard to the tide of traffic, ELISE ANGEL IN HER FAMOUS ATTIC DANCE.

All his dizziness disappeared in a moment and the iron wedge that had worked itself into his brain during these miserable weeks seemed pulled out by invisible hands and flung under the wheels of the crowded street.

He rushed to the theatre entrance, paid for a ticket in the second row and was led to his place by a damsel in apron and cap, whom he smiled at with a smile of a drunken man entering paradise.

The house was not particularly full that afternoon and it was not long before the performance began.

It was a vaudeville entertainment and the great dancer’s ‘turn’ was the last on the list. It was indeed nearly an hour and a half before she made her appearance, the longest hour and a half, but in one sense the very happiest, that Richard Storm had ever known. He saw and heard all that preceded her entrance as if he was in a trance.

At last she appeared, with the familiar background of plain black curtains; and out of infinite depths of obscure suffering his spirit rose up, healed and refreshed, to greet her.

She danced to some great classical rhapsody, tragic, passionate, world-destroying, world-creating; and the harmonies of the dead musician lived a life greater, more formidable, more liberating, than humanity could have dared to dream they contained. Her arms, her limbs were bare; her nobly modelled breasts, under some light fabric, outlined themselves as the breasts of some Phidian divinity.

Once more, as if all between this moment and when he had last seen her were a dark and troubled dream, she lifted for him the veil of Isis. In the power of her austere and olympian art, all the superficial impressions that had dominated him through that long summer dissolved like a cloud of vapour.

This was what he had been aiming at in his own blundering way; this was what he was born to understand! The softness of ancient lawns under immemorial trees, the passion of great winds in lonely places, the washing of sea tides under melancholy harbour walls, the retreats of beaten armies, the uprising of the multitudinous oppressed, the thunder of the wings of destroying angels, the ‘still small voice’ of the creative spirit brooding upon the foundations of new worlds – all these things rose up upon him as he watched her, all these things were in the gestures of her outspread arms, in the leap and the fall and the monumental balance of her divine white limbs.

Her physical beauty was the mere mask of the terrible power within her. Her spirit seemed to tear and rend at her beauty and mould it with a recreating fire into a sorrow, into a pity, into a passion, that flew quivering and exultant over all the years of man’s tragic wayfaring.

But her dancing was not the wild lyrical outburst of an emotion that spurned restraint. Beneath every movement, every gesture, binding the whole thing together and realizing the cry of the beginning in the finality of the silence of the close, there was the stern intellectual purpose of a mind that was consciously, deliberately, building a bridge from infinite to infinite, from mystery to mystery.

The scattered audience that watched her was largely composed of poor people, many of them unknown unrecognized artists of both sexes, mingled with a sprinkling of wealthy virtuosos, mostly young men and women.

It was to youth – that was plain enough – to the youth of these after-war days, that she came with this great new art, an art that changed former values, an art that created the taste that was destined to understand it.

And how, for one man at least who watched, white-cheeked and still as a statue in his place, the important things became the unimportant and the things that had been half forgotten became everything that mattered!

All the complicated weight of sensual sensations, of refined *sensuous* sensations even, which had hitherto meant so much, seemed to be torn away from him. New York had loosened them from his heart already – those insidious pleasures! New York had cut at them and prodded them, had hammered them and crushed them, with its iron engines and the howling arena of its energies. But New York had left his soul naked, helpless, flayed and bleeding.

With these divine gestures that seemed to arise out of some tremendous unseen victory over all that was in the path of the spirit, Elise Angel clothed that wounded soul of his with the garments of new flesh and blood.

She had never danced quite like this in the days when he had known her in Paris. He felt she must have endured strange tribulations while he was taking his pleasure in green pastures and beside still waters. And this new phase of her unconquerable art was the result of what she had gone through!

When it was over and the curtain fell, Richard felt like a man to whom has been manifested at last the hidden god of a lifetime of hopeless prayers.

He rose to his feet when they began applauding her and stared at her without a movement. In his eyes were tears, but they did not fall. On his lips was a cry ‘Elise! Elise!’ but he did not utter it. He only stood motionless and white as a ghost, staring at her, his whole soul one inarticulate ecstasy of gratitude. He knew, all of a sudden, that she had seen him; for the frank infantile smile of delight at the shouts that rose from every part of the house changed in the flicker of a moment to a quick agitated look of troubled concern. She must have found him sorely changed! She made an imperceptible movement towards him and gave him a direct sign of recognition. He smiled faintly in answer to this and moved at once from his place towards the theatre door.

Out in the street his dizziness came upon him again; so that it was all he could do to stagger up the little dark passage that led to the stage entrance. Here he sank down upon a flight of wooden steps and closed his eyes. He only prayed that he might not lose consciousness before she came out.

She came at last, hurriedly, anxiously and unattended.

‘Richard, Richard!’ she cried, bending over him.

He struggled to his feet and she gave him both her hands. ‘What’s happened, my dear? You are old, you are ill, you are horribly changed! What have they done to you? Didn’t you get my letters?’

He could only smile at her with perfect happiness and contentment. Then he staggered and sank down again on the wooden steps.

‘*Mon Dieu!* You *are* ill,’ she cried. ‘Oh I must get you away from here. I must get you to my rooms. Stay where you are. Don’t try to move. I’ll be back in a moment. Ah! there’s Tommy!’

A tall thin man in fashionable attire approached them from the street. ‘Tommy dear,’ she began at once in a pleading, cajoling voice, full of a vibrant plaintiveness. ‘This is the great critic Richard Storm, the friend of

Richepin and Barrès. Have you got your car there? I must beg you to help me get him into it. He's going to dine with me. The theatre was too much for him.'

The gentleman addressed as Tommy obeyed her with courtly alacrity.

Between them they supported Richard to the street and got him into the automobile. Then 'Tommy', after giving his chauffeur the dancer's address, bowed to Elise and bade her goodbye. 'I shall be here tonight,' he said. 'You can tell me then how your friend is.' With a farewell wave of his hand the man was gone and Richard was alone with Elise.

She made Tommy's servant help her to get him up the single flight of stairs that led to her luxurious apartments.

Once safely ensconced here and laid out upon the cushions of her divan she hurriedly brought him a glass of cognac.

When he had drunk this she told him to rest for a bit; leaving the door between the two rooms ajar she retired into her bedroom and changed her dress for a long loosely fitting tea-gown.

Appearing again in this more intimate array, and with purple-coloured oriental slippers on her feet, she called softly into the lighted corridor. To the elderly duenna who obeyed her call she gave some quickly whispered order; the woman presently returned with a heavy silver tray upon which were a pile of sandwiches and a bottle of champagne.

Having filled their glasses, this invaluable attendant, mute and competent, observing everything as though she observed nothing, went out as silently as she had entered; Elise, seated on the divan by Richard's side, made him eat and drink.

It was not long before the wine brought back the colour to his cheeks and loosened his tongue. He made a feeble effort to rise.

‘It’s you who ought to be resting now,’ he said, ‘after what you’ve done; not a great hulking fraud like me!’

She forced him back upon the cushions and kissed him tenderly on the forehead.

Then she refilled her own glass with champagne and rallied him because his was still only half-empty.

‘You never could drink as I do, *mon vieux*,’ she murmured. ‘Come then. Let’s smoke for a bit!’ And she lit a cigarette and gave one to him.

‘Well! speak to me, old friend; tell me what they’ve been doing to you? I can see you’re in the hands of some female person! Only a woman could reduce a man to the state you’re in. Getting grey and withered, upon my life! Come on, *coeur de mon coeur*, and let’s hear the whole miserable story! But do please tell me, first of all, why you ran away from me like that? That wasn’t very nice of you, was it? Why did you do it, Richard? No! you shan’t get out of it by kissing my hand. Why did you do it, Richard?’

She spoke with a caressing infantile *naïveté*, which many another had found irresistible, and she sidled up to him on the couch, letting her fingers stray through his hair and across his thin cheeks. The softness and warmth of her flexible form enveloped him like a hovering cloud that follows every contour and every rigid outline of the hillside against which it nestles.

‘Why did you do it, Richard?’ she repeated, putting all the plaintiveness of a child’s appeal to be loved into the intonation of her voice. ‘Why did you do it?’

There seemed to be no answer to this except the one inevitable answer to all such questions and he let his hand slide round her waist and drew her closely against him.

Vaguely in his half-conscious mind – such is the eternal hypocrisy of the male conscience when confronted with the unscrupulousness of women –

he justified himself for this yielding by putting all the burden of it upon her. He let her lips be the first to seek his lips, and the fact that it *did* happen in that way seemed, to his half-extinguished loyalty, justification enough. The only alternative would have been that he should have struggled up to his feet and shaken off, with a brusque unthinkable violence, her warm arms and caressing fingers.

Having been so long without food it was no wonder that the wine she had given him disarmed his scruples quite as much as her insidious beauty. It threw him back upon a sort of delicious helplessness and weakness out of which he clung to her blindly, while her love lifted him up, like something strong and immortal into a paradise of peace, pressing against its breast something hurt, wounded, frail and pitifully human.

It was indeed with a certain innocence of real tenderness that they clung together then; and with their kisses was mingled for both of them a kind of infinite relief, as if they had been for aeons of time torn apart and separated, and as if some living portion of their being had gone through the world suppressed, dumb, fettered, stifled, until that liberating hour.

It seemed as if only a few minutes had passed, so rapt and absorbed had they been, when Elise leapt up to her feet and announced that it was time for her to dress.

She called to Thérèse and scolded her for not having brought in dinner; and she insisted, when the servant did bring it, that Richard should begin his meal while she changed her clothes.

While he ate she kept running in, in her dressing gown and with loosened hair, to make sure he was doing justice to Thérèse’s cooking. She snatched her own meal by hurried mouthfuls in this way; Richard never forgot the mingling of childish excitement and royal graciousness with which she filled his plate and his glass and bent over him with fleeting kisses as she did so, her bronze-coloured hair hanging in heavy braids upon her white shoulders.

They had just time for a last cigarette together before she had to leave. Richard, laughing at her protests about being too heavy, drew her down upon his knees and teased her about the shameless way she had reddened her lips. ‘It’s your fault,’ she whispered. ‘You’ve kissed away every bit of natural colour out of me!’

She would not let him enter the theatre again that night, but before they parted at the stage door she made him promise to come to tea on the following day.

‘It doesn’t matter how early or how late you come,’ she assured him. ‘There’s no performance tomorrow and I’ll keep myself free for you from four o’clock on. So don’t get worried. Come just as soon as you can get away.’

It was not till he found himself in the Seventh Avenue subway that Richard remembered that he had been expected home at half-past six.

It occurred to him then, as he sat staring at advertisements of soap and toothpaste, cold-cream and hair-wash, that Nelly was to have made some especial vegetarian dish in his honour, the recipe for which she had obtained from one of her uptown friends.

He got out at Sheridan Square and walked down Varick Street.

Far off, in front of him, he could see the colossal bulk of the Woolworth Building, in and out of the very body of which the huge procession of wagons, drays and motor-lorries, which poured up and down from north to south, seemed to be moving. Normally this stream of rattling trucks and wagons, driven by reckless brawny youth, some of them still clothed in heterogeneous patches of khaki, was a cause of nervous misery to him.

He gazed in astonishment at the unmoved equanimity with which the tiny school children, going to the high school in Hudson Square, crossed that roaring street. American children, he thought, must be born with some self-protective membrane, impervious, like the shell of the oyster, to all rending shocks of noise!

But today he seemed to possess within himself a resistant power more effective than any oyster shell, inasmuch as it was able to carry, so to speak, the war into the enemy’s camp and find grist for its mill in the most rending and tearing sights and sounds.

As he swung down Varick Street brandishing his stick – a stick bought under the shadow of Selshurst Cathedral – he actually exulted in all the sights around him. He exulted in the rawness of the iron frameworks, in the great torn-out gaps, like bleeding flesh, that were being laid bare in the sides of the old Dutch houses, in the subterranean thunder and the whirling puffs of air and dust that came up through the subway’s gratings. He exulted in the huge grotesqueness of the gigantic advertisements, in the yells of the truck drivers, in the flapping clothes lines, in the piled-up garbage, in the hideous tenements and vociferous children. He suddenly became aware that in all this chaotic litter and in all this reckless, gay, aggressive crowd, there was an immense outpouring of youthful energy, an unconquerable vitality, a ferocious joyousness and daring.

The individual separate person, with his ways and his caprices, was certainly hammered and battered here into a horrible uniformity. But the stream of humanity, considered in its ensemble, had a tornado-like force and swing and amplitude. If the exquisite was pounded out of existence, the fidgety, the affected, the meticulous, the conceited, was certainly allowed no mercy.

He stumbled along the rough uneven sidewalk and finally threaded his way through a long line of arrested vehicles to the corner of Charlton Street.

He opened the door with his latch key and ran upstairs.

He found Nelly extended on the sofa white as a sheet and with her eyes tight shut.

He rushed to her side and falling on his knees took her hand and called her by name.

She opened her eyes and looked at him with a bitter smile. She snatched her hand away and drew back from his touch.

He was so relieved to find that her immobility was a deliberate and not an unconscious thing that he got up from his knees and began talking loudly and freely, walking up and down the room.

‘I was very lucky tonight,’ he said, using the crude diplomacy of his earlier days and trying to undermine her suspicions by a mask of nonchalant candour. ‘I met an actress I know and got treated to a wonderful dinner; champagne and all that sort of thing. Upon my soul I believe it made me a bit tipsy. I’m not used to this wining and dining.’

Nelly’s face had changed from its ghastly pallor to an unnatural flush. She moved her head and made a little gesture with her hands that might have meant anything or nothing.

‘But I thought,’ went on Richard, still walking up and down the room as if to gather confidence by the sound of his own footsteps, ‘that in our present state of finances it would be absurd to leave a good dinner unenjoyed.’

‘You left *my* dinner unenjoyed,’ murmured his wife. ‘I had it ready for you by half-past six: I waited and waited for you. And then, when I did eat, I was faint and sick. I waited so long. I got nervous and scared. I was afraid something had happened. Kiss me Richard please, and don't tell me any more.'

He stopped by her side and bent over her and kissed her tenderly. The particular scent used by Elise Angel still hung about his clothes and she drew away from him with a quick start.

'You've been making love to someone!' she cried. 'Oh Richard, how could you do it?'

That refrain 'how could you do it?' – hadn't he heard it, just an hour or so ago, on the lips of the other?

'My actress reeked with every kind of scent,' protested Richard. 'They all do, you know. Why, you yourself were buying something of the sort the other day. I expect we shall have you using rouge soon!'

His air of bullying levity did not conceal from Nelly the fact that something quite serious had occurred to him. He was a different person from the Richard who had left her that morning.

'You've been making love to someone,' she repeated. 'But it doesn't matter. I'm too tired to talk about it now. So don't tell me any more. I think I shall go to bed if you don't mind. It upset me a bit waiting so long. It isn't nice to have to wait so long.'

She raised herself up with a weary effort as she spoke. 'No, no, my dear,' she repeated, 'you can't fool me like that. You've been making love to someone while I was waiting and waiting for you. You had quite forgotten my existence.'

'I don't see,' said Richard, beginning to assume an irritated and scolding tone, 'why I shouldn't have my friends just as you have yours. How do I know what people you see up there in Canyot's studio? I don't ask you inquisitorial questions when you come back to me.'

‘You have no need,’ she answered with a sad little smile, sitting on the edge of the sofa and propping her chin upon the palms of her hands. ‘But it’s no matter. I don’t care what you do. I don’t want you to tell me anything. All *that* came to an end long ago when I found you were writing to someone. I ought to have known something of this kind would happen. I suppose I couldn’t expect anything else. I *did* think, though, just a little, that since I am as I am you wouldn’t have done anything like this – yet.’

He was just about to pour forth a torrent of false asseverations when there came a ring at the street door. ‘What’s that?’ he whispered looking at her in a frightened nervous way. He vaguely expected some drastic agitating message from Elise Angel.

She got up quickly and walked with steady steps to the mirror. ‘Open the door, Richard, will you please, and bring him in.’

‘Who is he? Is it Canyot?’

She smiled at him out of the mirror, as she arranged her hair – her old mocking elf-smile. ‘Bring him up and you’ll see, my dear. No – it’s not Robert.’

Greatly puzzled but at the same time a little relieved Richard ran down and opened the door. He came up escorting a tall slender girl, quite unknown to him, who was at once greeted by Nelly as ‘Catharine dear’. ‘Where is Ivan then?’ she asked. ‘I thought it was *his* ring.’ Catharine Gordon looked round the room with an expression of amused suspicion. ‘You’re not hiding him up somewhere are you?’ she said. ‘This is Mr Storm, I suppose?’ And she gave Richard a firm boyish grip and fixed on him a pair of laughing grey eyes.

‘Oh, I suppose Ivan’s gone off somewhere else,’ she said; and without further invitation proceeded to take off her hat and fling herself down in the only available armchair. She seemed to exercise a kind of fascination upon

Nelly, who promptly seated herself on the arm of her chair and began toying with her silver bracelets, the weight and number of which gave to her long brown wrists an almost oriental appearance.

‘What will you do if you don’t see him tonight?’ inquired Nelly.

‘What shall I do?’ repeated Catharine Gordon. ‘What would *you* advise me to do?’ And she turned round suddenly upon Richard whom Nelly had just now a tendency to treat as if he were thin air, rather than a tired, excited, agitated, uneasy man of forty-five.

Richard who was standing at the window drew near to her and surveyed her curiously. She had the longest legs of any girl he had ever seen and she stretched them out now in front of her as if they had been the legs of some young athlete.

‘You must tell me more details,’ he said, indicating by the way he looked at her and by the interest in his voice that she had made an impression upon him.

‘Don’t tell him anything,’ threw in Nelly. ‘Why should you? It’ll do him good to get a little bewilderment. Just go on talking to me.’

‘But I should like to tell him,’ said Catharine, crossing one leg over the other and clasping her long brown fingers behind her head. ‘I should like to hear what he’d say.’

Nelly at this got up from the arm of the chair. ‘Oh well,’ she said, ‘if you’re going to start confessing your sins to Richard I’d better make the coffee.’ She retreated into their little kitchen.

Catharine did not seem the least perturbed by this outburst. On the contrary, she turned to Richard with quite an intimate gesture. ‘Come and sit down,’ she said; ‘there’s plenty of room for two thin people like us.’ Then she added in a low quick whisper, ‘You must be very kind to Nelly these days; the poor darling looks worried.’

Richard had a taste that evening of what real Bohemian life in New York is like, and it amused him that it should have come to him through Nelly. *If these are the sort of people she meets in Canyot's studio*, he thought, *I certainly needn't agitate myself about Elise*.

'… And so I said I'd be down here tonight and he said he'd look in too, though he had to be some place else for dinner; the French Pastry Shop I think it was, or the Five Steps Up, and I knew he *might* change his mind if Lucretia dragged him round to her rooms, but the chances are she'd hardly dare to do that, as it would be breaking up the party and leaving Tassie Edstein, and even Lucretia would scarcely go *quite* so far, so I fancy he'll turn up all right; it's absurd if he doesn't, because he knows he'll have to make it up sooner or later and the sooner he does it the less I'll punish him; have you a cigarette? Oh, imported English ones! That's lovely.'

Richard's mental confusion was not greatly cleared up by this breathless discourse. A certain Lucretia was evidently no prude and a certain Tassie was evidently a maiden who couldn't be left unprotected in the streets of New York.

He hazarded a leading question to this long-legged damsel whose athletic person was giving him at that moment what children call pins and needles, as she leaned against him as if he were a convenient piece of furniture, completely devoid of normal sensibility.

'Who is this you are speaking of, this man you are expecting here?'

'Who is it?' She jumped up from his side and ran, or rather bounded, into the kitchen. 'You've never told him about Ivan!' she cried indignantly. 'Here have I been chattering on for the last half hour and I find he doesn't know who Ivan is! Do you and he go round with different crowds?'

Nelly's answer was interrupted by such a burst of laughter that Richard could not catch its purport. The two women then launched into a whispered colloquy punctuated by little smothered shrieks of amusement.

What children they are, he thought, stretching himself out in his big chair and lighting another cigarette. If it were Canyot and I making that coffee, we should be either propitiating one another's vanity with the most pompous earnestness, or we should be quarrelling like the devil!

They came back into the room at last, with the coffee not quite spoilt by so elaborate a preparation. At that very moment the doorbell rang again. Richard ran down to open it, full of curiosity to see this much talked-of Ivan. As he descended the stairs he could not help thinking with what completely different an eye he regarded everything in the world, now that he had seen Elise.

He opened the door to the stranger; who walked in with hardly a gesture of thanks. When the door was shut he turned upon Richard and showed himself under the electric light of the little hallway to be a man of about thirty with a pointed black beard and a head of small stiff black curls. His eyes were at once dreamy and alert; dreamy on the surface of them and profoundly alive beneath the surface. 'Is she up there?' he inquired.

Richard lifted his eyebrows. The man's manner irritated him. 'Is it our place you're looking for? Please come up, will you? We're on the next floor' – and he proceeded to lead the way.

Halfway up the stairs the man caught Richard by the arm. 'Is she angry with me?' he whispered. 'Has she told you about me?'

The long rambling discourse he had just submitted to, squeezed so very close to the young person in question, rose confusedly in his memory.

'I really don't know,' he answered drily. 'But please come in. I'm sure my wife will be delighted to see you.'

They entered together and Nelly greeted the newcomer enthusiastically. He was introduced to Richard as Ivan Karmakoff. Catharine, who had once more taken possession of the armchair, extended to him a long languid brown arm without making any attempt to rise.

They all sat down and began drinking coffee.

Catharine concentrated herself upon Richard, and in order to face him more directly she swung her legs over the arm of the chair, displaying a greater length of openwork silk stocking than he had ever associated in his life before with any respectable conversation.

‘You’ve seen Fancy Goring in *The Way of all Souls*, I suppose?’ she asked. ‘She’s a good actress, but her personality is terrible. Oh, and have you seen Keenie Trench? She does that innocent-little-girl business adorably – a regular young Greuze, don’t you think so? But what you *must* see, if you haven’t yet, is Jack Candid in *The Blue Mirror*. He’s a bit wobbly in the serious parts but he does that harlequin stunt to absolute perfection. What a pity Charlie Guelph didn’t do the set for that thing! Don’t you think so? He’s the only one of that Broadway bunch who’s got any gumption. It was real creative stuff that he did for Ralph’s *Banbury Cross* – those conventional trees, you remember? and that market place? They say he’s never got another job since his affair with Lena Hastings. Kind of pulled him to pieces, so they say at Aunt Flouncy’s. Disintegrated him. Broke his spirit. Lena’s mad about Jack Candid now, who’ll hardly speak to her. Serve her right, I say. But she’s very unhappy. Jack Candid’s the last person a girl ought to get involved with. I like him myself. We have splendid times together. But he knows he can’t be at all personal with me. And so he treats me quite decently. She’s a little fool I think. And I’d tell her so, for a cent! Oh, and have you seen Elise Angel yet?’

This unexpected question coming bolt out, at the end of a rigmarole that Richard had quite lost the thread of, made him give a palpable start.

Like one greater than himself and on a very different occasion, he lied bluntly and deeply.

'Elise Angel? No I've never seen her work. What is she? an imitator of Clarice Darling?'

Catharine Gordon clasped the arm of the chair and bounded to her feet. She forgot all about her difficulty with Ivan and turned to him with something like a shriek of excitement.

'He's never seen Elise Angel! Is it possible? He says he's never heard of her!'

There was a general movement of aesthetic consternation. Richard felt that he had damned himself for ever with the initiated of Manhattan.

Even Nelly attacked him – 'But surely, Richard, surely—'

'Why,' cried Catharine. 'Nelly told me you'd spent years in Paris. It's only Paris that really understands Elise. She gets outrageously wretched houses over here. She hates this place and I don't blame her. But her time will come. They'll be sorry for it. Why, my good man, she's the greatest artist in the world. She and the Duse. Tell him about her, Ivan. It's incredible he shouldn't know!'

'I can only tell him,' said Ivan, speaking very slowly and deliberately, 'that her genius has revolutionized the whole modern theatre. Her influence is behind everything – not only dancing, but everything. The Russian Ballet of course – they've admitted *that* themselves. And everything that's been done since! It's her ideas, they say, that started Charlie Guelph with his best sets.'

Richard began to curse himself for his treachery to his goddess. Never had his diplomacy blundered so abominably. He felt instinctively that Nelly was watching him very closely in his discomfiture. He felt that his power of self-control was on the point of abandoning him. He felt that just because it was all so impossible he might at any moment blurt out the truth.

In desperation he got up from his seat. ‘Well, some of you people must take me to see her,’ he muttered. ‘Yes, I think I *do* remember hearing of her in Paris. But this office work today has put everything charming out of my head. And I had too good a dinner tonight – that’s another thing – a dinner uptown, you know? I scared Nelly when I came in. I really wasn’t quite myself. They gave me champagne.’

‘Who’s *they*?’ cried Catharine Gordon, flinging out her long arms and seizing Richard by the shoulders. ‘Shall I make him confess, Nelly?’

Richard looked helplessly at the arms that held him. They were bare except for the loose short sleeves of the smock she was wearing, and their skin looked brown and soft above the elbows like the skin of a young gipsy.

He threw them off almost roughly. ‘I think I must go out for a bit of air,’ he said. ‘I seem to have been indoors all day. You people will look after Nelly till I come back, won’t you?’

Ivan Karmakoff walked to the side of the room where he had left his hat. ‘I think I’ll come with you, if you don’t mind,’ he said.

‘That’s lovely!’ cried Catharine putting her arm round Nelly’s waist. ‘Then I shall have this sweet thing to myself. But don’t forget, Ivan, that you’ve got to take me home. Be sure you bring him back, Mr Storm. Don’t let him run off.’

The men went down the stairs together and out of the house. ‘Do you mind if we go to the river?’ asked Karmakoff.

Richard assented passively; crossing Varick Street and Hudson Street they made their way to the waterside.

There was a heavy wooden jetty, used for transferring garbage from the rubbish carts to the barges, that stretched out into the river just at the point where they struck the wharf.

Karmakoff led Richard out along the edge of this, in placid disregard of the evil odours that emerged from the cavernous recesses.

When they reached the end they sat down on some wooden crates and contemplated the lights of the river and the lights of Jersey City on its opposite bank.

At their feet the tide was rolling in from the Atlantic, dark and swift and stormy; an evil-looking volume of formidable water, out of whose blackness arose gurglings and whisperings, capricious splashings and strange indrawn sucking gasps, like the swallowings of an indescribable monster.

Karmakoff lit a pipe, and Richard got a truer glimpse into the secret of his personality, here by the water's edge, than he had obtained in his wife's apartment.

A lamp suspended from the mast of a small coal steamer adjoining the jetty where they sat threw a flickering light upon them both. Ivan's black beard, sulkily sensual lips, and heavily lidded beautiful eyes fixed themselves upon Richard's mind as objects with which he was destined, whether he liked it or not, to become more closely acquainted.

Karmakoff began talking quietly and bitterly about America. He described its ways, its weaknesses, its inmost pathology, like a surgeon dissecting a corpse.

As Richard listened to him he began to wonder what his relations could possibly be with that brown-armed Indian-looking girl who called herself Catharine. Was all that fuss, as to what temper she was in and so forth a mere social *convenance*, proper to that particular circle, but meaning nothing at all to the man's real identity?

The fellow attracted him and repelled him simultaneously. He deliberately lit a cigarette for no other reason than that, by the light of the match, he might get a clearer glimpse of those extraordinarily beautiful eyes.

There was something a little equivocal and menacing about the kind of sensuality betrayed in the man’s mouth. But his eyes were, without any doubt, the most beautiful eyes that Richard had ever seen in the head of any human being, whether man or woman. They actually seemed to be a woman’s eyes, as he looked at them under that steamer lamp. Had not the black beard on his chin decided the matter Richard could have sworn that he was a girl in disguise. Even as it was, he caught himself hazarding a fantastic speculation as to whether it was possible that the beard was a false one and that he was on the track of a wild romance. But no! Ivan’s voice was not a woman’s voice. It was deep and low and purring. It was a seductive voice but the voice of an eminently masculine mind. It had a caress in it but it also held out danger signals. It was curious to Richard how he felt about this man. It was as if he had seen him before. But he certainly had never seen him before. What *was* the attraction he exercised? By degrees it occurred to him that the explanation was that Karmakoff was his direct psychological antipodes – his fatal opposite – with vices, virtues, nobilities, ignobilities, made up of some chemical compound that was the extreme antithesis of all that he was himself.

Karmakoff soon drifted into political and economic problems; and Richard, before he quite realized what was occurring, found himself listening to a most subtle and convincing argument in support of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

As the writer listened to one clear-cut argument after another, lucidly and modestly suggested, hinted at, made way for, rather than flung dogmatically down, he became conscious that he himself had hitherto barely touched the fringe of these drastic issues.

Karmakoff's purring, caressing voice, between long puffs at his pipe, the stem of which acted as a sort of pointer to his argument, flowed rhythmically on, above the flow of the dark water at their feet.

There was certainly nothing personal in his argument. It was almost inhuman in its impersonality. It might have been addressed by an inhabitant of Mars to an inhabitant of Uranus; for all the appeal it made to ordinary human prejudices. It seemed to use all human passions, all human pieties, as if they were pawns upon a gigantic chessboard.

Richard, whose Parisian experiences of the revolutionary spirit were of a very different nature, was astonished at the absence of personal animosity in what the man advanced. He effaced his own tastes. He effaced the tastes, passions, prejudices, hostilities, of the proletariat he represented.

Everything was reduced to a logical inevitable sequence of cause and effect, which could neither be hastened nor retarded, but which in its own predestined hour, to the discomfiture of some, to the relief of others, would reveal a new order of society.

Richard felt, as he listened to him, as though he were present at some demonic unclothing of the hidden skeleton of the universe – a skeleton of cubes and circles and angles and squares, of inflexible geometric determination!

The steady flow of the tide beneath them, with its gurgling and sucking noises, seemed to gather the man's reasoning into its own flood and become a living portion of the fatality he represented.

Storm could detect no flaw in Karmakoff's logic, wherein all that was personal and arbitrary seemed slowly to be obliterated, as if under the power of a remorseless engine. Nature was reduced to a chemistry. Human nature became mathematical necessity. A sublime but cheerless order, irresistible and undeviating, swallowed up in its predetermined march everything that was the accomplice of chance, the evocation of free will.

Deep within his own heart, Richard hid away from the beautiful eyes of this terrible logician, the secret exultation of his own free will, wrought upon by Elise's great dance. *Art*, he thought to himself, is anyway safe from this man's logic. There, at least, will always be a refuge for the free creative spirit that lies behind all this cause and effect. The image of Elise, dancing her dance of the Eternal Vision, became at that moment his only counterpoise to what the Russian was saying. He hid this image away deep in his heart, very much as some crusader in medieval times might have hidden away his piece of the True Cross from the eyes of some conquering Saracen.

In his imagination he seemed to see this great city of marble and iron as some huge Colosseum, in the arena of which the art of Elise wrestled with the science of Karmakoff.

He felt vaguely and obscurely that the mind which could bring these two tremendous forces into some vital relation with one another would be the mind that would dominate the world.

Karmakoff meanwhile was comparing the huge cosmopolitanism of New York harbour with what he had seen at Southampton.

'Could anything be more English?' he said. 'You sail straight in between parks and fields and country villages, and are landed right at the bottom of a quiet provincial street, where nurserymaids and butchers' boys congregate to watch your exit! You English are a queer race. You seem to have acquired your precious empire without leaving your sheepfolds and rose gardens. You seem to have marched from Cairo to Baghdad in your sleep, without so much as having a single theory that'll hold water, except with regard to the breeding of terrier dogs. Come now, Mr Storm, I've been talking all this evening to you and you've hardly spoken a word. What is *your* theory of the economic problem?'

'I'm afraid I haven't gone into the matter,' replied Richard, rising from his seat. 'My economics are terribly personal.'

Karmakoff laughed softly. 'How English! Everything you do and think and feel is personal. Do you know, my good friend, you English are so individualistic that I wonder sometimes that any of you manage to get born at all!'

'Isn't *that* rather a personal matter?' murmured Richard.

Karmakoff positively stared at him. 'Personal?' he said. 'You don't mean to say you still think – wait a little. Wait a little. You evidently have never been in love.'

'What are you talking about?' asked Richard, almost petulantly.

The man laughed aloud. 'I'm talking about the utter *impersonality* of the most devastating force in the universe! I should like you to overhear Catharine Gordon when she's got her knife into me. Don't you know what it is to worship the flesh of a girl and to hate her for it? Do you know nothing of *that* malice? But I beg your pardon. You're an Englishman. The great forces of the world are your child's toys. Well! It must have something in it, your little method. Everything must be genteel and well-behaved and respectable and personal. But good Lord!'

Chapter 15

ABOUT A WEEK after Richard's reversion to his old love, Nelly according to her custom was preparing lunch for herself and Canyot in his studio in Seventy-fifth Street.

His model, a handsome girl from Siena, beautiful as that purest Italian race is beautiful, with a certain glowing and yet chaste voluptuousness, was resting from an exhausting pose, and eating cream chocolates.

The two were conversing together without embarrassment, though the richly coloured garment that half-swathed her was more in harmony with a picture by Veronese than with a New York apartment.

Nelly, through the open door leading into the little passage containing the kitchenette, joined amicably, when she could, in their conversation.

'Amelia swears she's never had a lover and never means to,' remarked the young painter, raising his voice a little. 'Did you hear that, Nelly?'

'She's a sensible girl, then,' came the, answer from the passage.

'You see? The lady agrees with me!' cried the model, selecting another chocolate with exquisite care. 'It's all nonsense this, about love being so important. I do my work. I help artists. I put myself into pictures. I *make* pictures. And then I go home and look after the little mother. I cook us a good dinner – a very good dinner. I smoke cigarettes. The little mother smokes cigarettes. We go to the theatre together. We go to hear the singers. And then we go home and sleep till morning and – that's all!'

'But haven't you ever fallen in love, Amelia, dear?' inquired Canyot, putting a dab of crimson lake upon his canvas and retreating a little to observe its effect.

'Why should I fall in love? I know what men are. I know what women are. Chocolates are much better. And when the great Caruso sings – *basta!* I don't want to think of such things. I go to Mass too, and I love Our Lady. Our Lady didn't need to have a lover. Her Son was enough for her; and the little mother's enough for me.'

'But Amelia darling, don't you find it rather difficult to be so good? I should have thought with your profession—'

'That's just where you're wrong, Mr Canyot. You're a good man. *You* don't have any lover or any woman about, except Madam, and anyone can see how good she is! And I can tell you that lots of the people I work for are like that. Artists are good men. They love their work. And I'm part of their work.'

'But haven't you ever, not *ever*, seen anyone you'd like to marry?'

'Don't tease her so, Robert,' came the voice from the passage.

'It's all right, lady,' cried the girl from Siena; and then, in a lower voice: 'If there ever was *anyone*, it was that Russian gentleman who talked to me about the strike in Milano in this very room. Now don't you go and tell him what I've been telling you, Mr Canyot! Of course I'd never really have him, because of mother. Mother doesn't like Russians. But I think he was beautiful – as beautiful as St Anthony.'

'Well run away and dress now, Amelia; I shan't want you any more this afternoon.'

When the girl reappeared in her street costume she still looked adorably handsome; but no one would have guessed how flawlessly classical her limbs were.

Nelly begged her to stay and share their meal; but she flatly refused to do this. 'I always go to Castignac's to get my dinner. They cook me little yellow omelettes, full of red jam. I love Madame. She has a great heart. I am her protector.'

When Amelia had gone, Canyot said to Nelly, 'I wonder what it is about that fellow Ivan that attracts women so? You're a woman, Nelly, you ought to know what it is.'

'You'll have an opportunity of watching his effect upon me very soon,' Nelly replied, as she carried in her dishes and arranged them on the table. 'He's going to come round at two o'clock; so we'd better hurry up and get our meal over.'

'What's he coming here for? I can't stand the fellow. He must know I detest him.'

'Oh my dear,' cried Nelly, regarding him with an affectionate smile across the plate she held in her hand, 'no one minds the way *you* detest them! Of course he's coming because Catharine is coming.'

'I don't like Catharine,' remarked Canyot pulling a chair up to the table and making his guest sit down while he went to fetch the knives and forks.

'Why don't you like her?' asked Nelly giving a sigh of weariness.

'I don't like her because she pulls you about so and makes such a fuss over you. I don't like her arms or her legs.'

'Poor old Cathy! She can't help *that*, you know. I like both of them. I think she has a very interesting figure.'

'I don't like the way she treats that fellow Ivan,' Canyot went on, eating his food in great hungry mouthfuls but keeping a still hungrier look, full of infinite tenderness, fixed on his friend's face. 'Why doesn't she take him altogether or let him go altogether? I can't stand all this messing about and playing around.'

'It *is* a bit hectic, her life, I admit,' said Nelly. 'But I'm not at all sure Ivan loves her.'

‘Loves her? He’s mad about her. He follows her everywhere with those confounded woman’s eyes of his.’

‘He may be mad about her. But that’s not the same thing as loving her. Do you know, Robert dear, I think that there are very few men who really love their woman – love her for herself, I mean, and not for the sensations they get out of her.’

Canyot glanced meaningly at the grey eyes that met his own across the table.

Impulsively Nelly stretched out her hand and, seeking his, gave it a tight squeeze.

‘I’m not thinking of you, Robert,’ she said. ‘You’re one in a thousand. I’m thinking of all the rest.’

Canyot frowned savagely as was his wont when his love for her troubled him.

‘Men and women want different things of each other,’ he muttered, ‘and always will.’

‘But would we want different things – if things had been different with us?’

As soon as she had uttered the words she would have given anything to recall them, for she saw the pain upon his face.

‘Oh yes, I suppose so!’ he replied wearily. And then after a little pause: ‘I could never have satisfied you, Nelly – my darling!’

She thought in her heart, How can I tell him that I love him with everything that is best in me? How can I tell him that I love him because he is strong and good; and that I love my poor Richard because he is weak, and anything but good?

And she also thought in her heart, *Am I different from other women and much less moral? Am I doing something callous and selfish in sitting here* *eating Robert's food while I am still Richard's wife?* And then, sweeping aside both Richard and Robert, there rose up within her that fierce blind instinct to protect the unborn at any cost; to take from one, to take from another, to exploit them all – if only this flesh of her flesh, this bone of her bone, might live and grow in peace! And she thought to herself, *How little, really, is anything in the world important except the creation of life!* This idea had come to her several times during these last weeks as she listened to Canyot's conservatism and Karmakoff's radicalism. 'These men understand nothing!' she had heard her heart whisper. 'All their theories are superficial! All their words leave the truth untouched!'

'It is destiny, Robert dear,' she said at last. 'I certainly little thought in those old days that we should be sitting together like this this autumn united by your faithfulness, separated by my … nature!'

They finished their lunch in silence after this; then he made her lie down on his studio couch, while he washed up the things.

At two o'clock punctually Karmakoff turned up. He was excited beyond his usual wont. There had been a police raid upon some peculiarly inoffensive Russian utopians, and one Herculean Irish official had used his baton savagely. 'The absurdity of the whole thing is,' he said, 'that these people were not political revolutionaries at all. They were a sect of mystical Tolstoyans – quiet nervous saintly men, like medieval hermits – the sort of people that in any other community would be protected by the populace, as innocents sacred to God.'

'What annoys me,' remarked Canyot in his most surly manner, 'is the way all you fellows appeal to what you call *bourgeois justice* and *bourgeois morality* as long as you are persecuted. And then, directly it's your turn to be the upper dog, to the devil with such scruples! It's then a case of *saving the revolution* at the cost of any bloodshed. If you are allowed by the moral law to save your revolution by breaking heads, why isn't the capitalist allowed to save his system by breaking heads? With both of you it becomes a sheer matter of who can use the greatest force. I never can see what right either of you have to appeal to these moral principles, principles that are just simply human, and quite outside your class struggles.'

'Nothing,' replied Karmakoff, smiling patiently, recovering his normal poise; 'nothing is outside the class struggle. The class struggle is the very thing that has given birth to all these abstract human principles you're referring to. The principle of the sacredness of property, for instance, is simply the enforced will of the people who have possessed themselves of property. And all these doctrines of justice and order and legality and so forth are really nothing at all but just the will and pleasure of those in possession of power.'

'Order is the one essential thing!' cried Canyot. 'How can anyone work or think without order? What becomes of art without order?'

Karmakoff bowed his head politely. 'I entirely agree with you,' he said. 'It's you who're the anarchist, not I. Certainly we must have order. The question is who are to enforce this order – a privileged few or the whole community?'

'The whole community can enforce nothing,' cried Canyot controlling his anger with difficulty, his face growing flushed and wrinkled. 'The whole community is a set of silly sheep!'

'Precisely,' replied the other in his most purring voice. 'And the whole question resolves itself, then, into what set of people are to give this desirable order to these silly sheep. Are they to be people with sheep's blood in their veins – old horned rams for instance, like myself? Or are they to be wolves in sheep's clothing? I believe it will be found in the long run that the silly sheep prefer the former!'

‘I wish,’ broke in Nelly, ‘that the day would hurry up and come, when the sheep stop being silly and throw you both overboard!’

Karmakoff laughed heartily at this. ‘The woman speaks!’ he said. ‘But seriously, you know, Mrs Storm, you and I are in much closer agreement than you and Mr Canyot. I am perfectly ready to admit that the dictatorship of certain representatives of the proletariat is only a temporary and transitional thing – an interregnum of horned rams, shall we call it? – until the sheep grow accustomed to power. Mr Canyot would have the poor wretches left for ever at the mercy of the wolves.’

At this point there was a rapid tap at the door and without waiting for a reply Catharine Gordon swung into the room. She had just bought herself a new smock of the very latest futurist design, and though it was so early in the afternoon, she wore a black silk skirt.

‘Ha! you’re here first, then!’ she threw out at Karmakoff while she gravely shook hands with Canyot, who at once, turned away and busied himself with his palette of colours.

Then she rushed across to Nelly who still reclined on the couch. ‘I’ve got a job! I’ve got a job! I’ve got a job!’ she shouted, throwing herself down on the floor by the end of the couch and possessing herself of Nelly’s hand. ‘It’s what I’ve always wanted. The very nicest thing in the world. Try and guess what it is, Ivan!’

‘Not anything on the stage?’ Karmakoff inquired.

‘Oh dear no! I’m sick of that. I’m not vulgar enough for Broadway; and I know too much about the theatre for the art people.’

‘Is it dancing, my dear?’ asked Nelly. “I’ve always thought if you only got a chance—’

‘No! it’s not dancing. That may come later, of course, and probably will; but it’s not dancing yet. Shall I tell you what it is – oh, and I’ve got something else by the way to tell *you*, Nelly, in private, presently, something very comical, something about your husband – well, I'll tell you. It's that I'm to be secretary to Elise Angel!'

There was a general exclamation of surprise. Even Canyot turned round from his work. 'I didn't know you could typewrite,' he said.

'I can't! That's just the fun of it. But Elise said it didn't matter a bit. She liked her letters written in ordinary script. She made me show her my hand and liked it awfully!'

'Do you mean that she liked your hand or your handwriting?' inquired Canyot.

'Both! She made me write on a piece of paper. And when I had written my name, she took my hand in hers and played with my fingers, and said she liked their longness. And – just think – when I said goodbye she kissed me. Yes! kissed me. Oh, isn't it lovely? I've been kissed by Elise Angel! And I'm to go to her this very night to begin!'

'Surely she doesn't write her letters by night?' growled Canyot.

'Are you going to live with her?' inquired Karmakoff gravely.

'Oh no. I'm not going to live with her. She doesn't want me to do that. I'm going in the daytime, in the morning, in the evening – any old time; just as she wants me, you know.'

As the girl spoke she fixed her eyes steadily upon Karmakoff. The Russian walked up and down the room, frowning, his hands behind his back. Presently he stopped in front of her. 'You'll have to introduce me to Elise,' he said. There is a chance they might invite her to Moscow to take charge of the whole art movement there.'

'What?' cried Canyot in a loud voice. 'It's impossible! She wouldn't contemplate such a thing.'

It’s hard to predict what a person like Elise will do, ‘said Ivan quietly.’ But you may be quite right. It would be a sacrifice in some ways.’

Catharine, who had fallen into a sort of meditative trance with her chin propped upon her knees, now struggled to her feet. She bent down and taking Nelly by the wrists tried to pull her up from the couch. ‘I’ve got something very amusing to tell you my dear and I’m sure you wouldn’t want me to say it out before these two.’

Nelly, rather reluctantly, submitted to her violence and allowed herself to be led into the passage. ‘Don’t let Ivan run away,’ shouted Catharine to the painter before she closed the door.

‘I always say,’ remarked Karmakoff, sinking down on the couch vacated by Nelly and lighting a cigarette, ‘that it’s you *honest* conservatives who do more to retard the progress of the world than any other people.’

‘I don’t believe in the progress of the world,’ replied Canyot drily. ‘Life swings backwards and forwards. Everything has a beginning and an end. It’s all the same old mad game.’

‘Then why,’ murmured the Russian, puffing out a cloud of smoke and arranging himself on the couch with a certain feline grace, ‘why do we fuss ourselves about anything?’

‘I *don’t* fuss, myself,’ growled the painter stepping back to regard his canvas, upon which was emerging a revel of satyrs and nymphs; ‘it’s just a matter of taste. My taste objects to cruelty and disorder and lechery. I am old-fashioned, that is all. It doesn’t really matter. But I’m not comfortable when I’ve behaved like a cad.’

Karmakoff smiled pleasantly. ‘I suppose you’re thinking at this moment that I’ve behaved like a cad to Catharine?’

Canyot moved up to his canvas and gave it a resolute splash with his brush. His gesture was so drastic that it looked as if he would have greatly enjoyed dabbing that brush across Ivan's smiling countenance.

'Heaven forbid,' he said, 'that I should interfere between you two. I expect you are perfectly agreed as to what the limits of life are.'

'What do you mean by the *limits of life*?'

'Oh, I don't know,' murmured the painter indifferently, 'something about life extending a little further than the five senses, I suppose. You mustn't press me. I'm at work.'

At that moment the passage door opened with a violent outward fling and Catharine burst in upon them. 'She's upset. I've upset her dreadfully. It wasn't my fault. I didn't know she cared.'

Canyot dropped his brush upon the floor and came forward, his face convulsed with anger. He flung Catharine aside as if she were some intrusive stranger, and rushed to the back of the passage where there was a small box-room filled with spoiled canvases. Here he found Nelly seated in a dark corner shaken with smothered sobs.

'Darling! my darling!' he whispered, kneeling beside her and putting his arm around her. 'Tell me what's the matter. No! no! never mind! I don't want to hear anything. Nelly, my darling – I can't bear to see you like this.'

The girl gently but obstinately pushed him away. 'Leave me alone, please, Robert,' she gasped. 'I'll be better soon. I'm silly to make such a fuss. It's nothing really. Please go back to them, Robert, if you don't mind? I'll be all right in a minute.'

He obeyed her so far as to move to the further end of the passage. But he would not open the studio door. She made a desperate effort to control herself and rising to her feet passed her hands over her hair and pressed her knuckles into her eyes and against her cheeks.

'Robert,' she murmured in a whisper. He came quickly up to her side. 'Get my things for me, please, my dear, will you? I don't want to see them like this. I'll go straight home I think. And don't let Catharine talk to Karmakoff about me. But she's sure to do it. She's sure to do it!' And her sobs began to break out afresh. Canyot ached to press her to his heart and soothe her tears with kisses from his very soul, but he kept a rigid hold over himself.

'She shan't say a word, my dearest one – not a word. But won't you let me take you home, Nelly? I'll just say you're unwell and we'll go straight off.'

She looked at him quickly, a rapid tender look, full of affectionate gratitude. 'No – no, Robert, I don't wish that. It's sweet of you, old friend, but I don't wish it. Get my things, please, dear. I shall be quite all right.'

He saw that her mind was made up and he went straight into the studio and possessed himself of her hat and cloak. Catharine was huddled on the couch, clinging like a great frightened child to Karmakoff. 'How is she?' she whispered. 'I'm so sorry I told her! I'd no idea she'd take it like that.'

'She is going home alone,' said Canyot, turning away with her things on his arm. 'We must let her do exactly what she wishes. I'll come back when I've seen her into the subway.'

'She knows how to change at Grand Central?' asked Karmakoff quietly.

'The shuttle to Times Square, you mean?' said Canyot. 'Yes, I'll tell her. If by any chance I *don't* come back you'll make yourselves comfortable here won't you? You know where my tea is Catharine?' And once more the door was shut between the studio and the passage.

Nelly did not let Canyot go a step further with her than the entrance to the Lexington Avenue subway. She made him leave her at the top of the steps.

'Sorry for having made such an idiot of myself, Robert,' she said as she gave him her hand. 'I knew Richard was having an affair with someone. It was only a shock to me to hear Catharine talk about him – you know? – in the way she does. I'll be all right now, my dear. Goodbye – God bless you, Robert.'

He turned sadly up the street, and feeling himself singularly disinclined to go back to his studio he made his way into the park and walked blindly, engrossed in miserable thoughts, across its least frequented spaces.

Nelly got out at the Grand Central and made her way through the conflicting streams of people to the little shuttle train for Times Square. She had to stand, during this short journey, clinging to a leather strap, and the mass of indifferent humanity that were jammed against her weighed down her spirit with an infinite discouragement.

It was even worse when she emerged at Times Square. *Well*, she thought, *has this place been named!* In those underground corridors extending indefinitely in every direction, with their little green and black arrows pointing backwards and forwards, and their confluent streams of people, it certainly did seem as though she had arrived at the spot in the universe where time and motion became identical.

As she struggled against the crowd, she experienced the queer feeling that her real conscious mind was somewhere out of all this, and that the Nelly thus pushed and jostled was a mere helpless automaton among other automatons. A horrible feeling of mechanical indifference seized her. Her real mind seemed to have escaped out of her flesh, leaving nothing but a mass of quivering exposed nerves that could suffer passively without end but could take no initiative. She found herself thinking with relief of the quietness of her father's body lying in Littlegate churchyard, 'free among the dead'.

Confused by the bewildering corridors and stairways she got finally swept by the crowd into an uptown train on the Seventh Avenue subway instead of a downtown one.

Her first intimation of this mistake came to her when the train was just leaving the next station marked Fiftieth Street. She got up from her seat and looked around her in dismay. Her eyes had such panic in them that one man whispered to another; a little old coloured woman who had been sitting next her hazarded the remark, ‘Wrong station, honey?’

Other, less sympathetic observations reached her, such as, ‘She’s up against it!’ ‘Some girl, too!’ with various humorous asides which were quite unintelligible to Nelly’s English ears.

She got out hurriedly at the next stop which proved to be Columbus Circle – another symbolic name! Here a hopeless weariness descended upon her and when she had climbed the steps and emerged into the great open space near the entrance to the park she leaned against the edge of a newspaper stand and began to cry without caring who noticed it.

A man who was buying the *New Republic* raised his hat. His head was large and powerfully moulded, his figure of corresponding weight and dignity. ‘Can I do anything for you, lady?’ he said kindly. Nelly pulled herself together with a gallant effort and dried her eyes. ‘I’m so ashamed of myself,’ she murmured. ‘I’m not often like this. I’m not feeling very well.’

‘Won’t you let me get you a taxi?’ said the tall man whose face seemed vaguely familiar to Nelly, though where she had seen him, or anyone like him, she could not remember. While addressing her he continued to hold his hat, which was a soft broad-brimmed felt one, in his right hand, while with his left he stroked her jacket reassuringly with the *New Republic*.

A sort of blackness began now to descend on the girl’s eyes, blackness crossed by little vibrations of white light. She nodded eagerly however and the tall man stopped a passing taxi and assisted her into it. He handed the driver a couple of dollar bills; only after he had done that did he put his head into the window and ask her for an address.

By that time the blackness was very dense around Nelly Moreton's brain and without realizing what she said she uttered the words 'Elise Angel'.

The man's friendly physiognomy became illuminated with a new interest. 'Ah! you're one of *her* girls are you? *That's* where you belong, is it? Well! tell her that Pat Ryan says she must give you some of his especial cognac.' And he shouted an address in clear terms to the driver who started his car without further question.

Nelly sank back on the cushioned seat, too faint to realize in the least what was happening and too dizzy to breathe another word.

The air beating on her face through the open window saved her from becoming actually unconscious, but she felt too wretched to think anything or even to feel anything. A blank numbness, inert and obscure, took possession of her and sealed up her mind and senses.

They stopped in front of the well-appointed apartment house where Elise Angel had her rooms.

The driver got down from his seat and approached the door of the taxi. He mechanically held the door open, gazing down the street and meditating upon matters in no way connected with cabs or houses or fares.

While he stood thus, waiting in professional indifference for her to emerge, the door of the house opened and Elise and Richard came down the steps.

Richard looked straight into the taxi window. He was laughing at some remark Elise had just made and his eyes were bright, his cheeks flushed. Elise, sweeping majestically down the steps just behind him, laid her hand at that moment upon his arm. She bent towards him as she did so and whispered something which made him laugh yet louder. Then he turned his head and they both moved down the street.

Richard, had he been challenged, could not have told what vehicle it was that was waiting there. His heart was full of excitement and happiness. He was in a trance of obvious delight.

But he had smiled straight into Nelly's wide-open bewildered eyes; and when the other whispered to him and putting her hand on his arm led him away, an ice-cold stab of an emotion the girl had never known before pierced her heart.

The sight of Richard had brought her consciousness back; but it was only brought back to be startled into sharp incredible pain at what she saw. To her bewildered mind it seemed as if her husband had recognized her, had laughed in her face, and in callous disregard of her distress had gone off, jesting about her with his new love.

But her brain was working only too normally now and her fit of faintness was gone.

'Number sixty-six! Where I was told to go to, Marm,' repeated the driver. To the end of her days Nelly would associate that particular number with the stark desolation of that moment.

'I've changed my mind,' she said quietly. 'Will you please go to number one Charlton Street.'

The man looked slightly surprised at this order, but closed the door again and mounted his seat. He was considerate in his demands upon her purse, however, when they reached her own house, exacting only sixty cents in addition to what Mr Pat Ryan had given him.

Nelly mounted the stairs to her room with chaos in her heart. One wild notion succeeded another in her brain. She would leave Richard, she thought. She would go off somewhere into the country and stay there till her child was born. She would borrow money from Robert, risk the voyage, and go back to Sussex. She would seek refuge with Mrs Shotover who, no doubt for old acquaintance sake, would take her in.

All these ideas surged through her mind as she climbed the stairs. When she reached her own floor she was a little surprised to find the door of her apartment standing ajar. She must have forgotten to close it when she went out that morning.

She pushed it open and entered quickly to discover, to her immense surprise, a completely unknown young man smoking a cigarette in Richard’s armchair.

The stranger rose at her entrance and began stammering and apologizing. ‘I am Roger Lamb,’ he said. ‘You don’t know me, but I’m a cousin of your friend Olive Shelter. My grandmother was a Shelter and we’ve kept up the connection. I’ve never seen Cousin Olive – I’ve never been to Europe – but she wrote to tell me you were here.’

There was something so grave and quaint about this youth’s manner that Nelly felt drawn towards him at once. She begged him to sit down while she took off her things and tidied herself up. Incidentally she slipped into the kitchen and lit the gas under the kettle. ‘I *must* have some tea,’ she said to herself; then she gazed at her face in the looking glass as she used her brush and comb.

Presently she laid down these objects and began smoothing out the little wrinkles round her mouth and eyes with the tips of her fingers.

She was shocked by the drawn look of her face; as if in these last hours the skin had grown tighter and less soft.

A faint shadow of her old elfish smile flickered back at her from her staring disillusioned eyes.

Then her face hardened into a mask of bitterness and a strange expression of recklessness passed across it. The queer thought came into her head – *Richard's got tired of me. He has this other woman. What does it matter what I do now?* It was with this reckless expression still upon her face that she returned to her guest.

In the first few minutes before she got the kettle to boil and the tea poured out the conversation between herself and her visitor was broken and perfunctory. When they had drunk a few cups, however, they began to grow quite intimate.

Roger Lamb persuaded Nelly to try one of his own cigarettes which were a different sort from those Richard smoked. Settled comfortably in the deep armchair listening to his whimsical talk, the girl felt as if she were recovering from an anaesthetic.

It appeared that her young visitor was a journalist – a dramatic critic – attached to one of the largest of the New York evening papers. He seemed to know all the people Nelly knew and a great many she had only heard of by name, and she was struck by the way he spoke of them, without any of that tang of spiteful disparagement which she had come to associate with artistic people.

Of Catharine Gordon, for instance, he spoke with peculiar respect. 'She has the heart of a child,' he said. 'She would be the happiest thing alive if she were less generous-minded. People take advantage of her.'

'Don't you think she's a little affected?' said Nelly.

'Not a bit of it! She has her own manner; why not? but that's natural to her. It's a cruel thing she should be so involved with Karmakoff.'

'Don't you like him?' said Nelly, a little startled. 'I thought everybody liked Ivan.'

Roger Lamb laughed. ‘Of course I like him,’ he responded. ‘But I can’t honestly say I think he’s very good for Catharine. She’s an elemental; and he’s a fire spirit. He withers her up.’

With an irresistible impulse Nelly led the conversation round to the problem by which she herself was confronted. ‘It’s all so wretchedly mixed up, this business of men and women. Don’t you think so? Whether for instance a man who knows a girl is false to him should go on just the same, or should have it out with her and make her confess? Doesn’t it seem to you that it’s disgusting when a man knows he’s being deceived and made a fool of and he just does nothing?’

Roger Lamb became very grave. He got up from where he was sitting and walked about the room. Nelly began to fear that in her indirect hovering round her own situation she had prodded an open wound.

‘We’re all too touchy,’ he burst out at last, ‘over this business of deception. Our idea is that when a person we love loves someone else they triumph over us unless they confess everything. But, you know, if they *did* confess everything we should regard them as heartless and callous beasts. We should accuse them of abominable bad manners. It’s all frightfully difficult. But I don’t believe myself that a woman who deceives a man enjoys doing it or derides or despises the man she deceives. I think if we were a little more generous lots of these people who “deceive” us would come back to us all right. It’s often a mere passing attraction. It’s *our* bitterness and jealousy that drives them on.’

Nelly made a little grimace at this point. ‘But it’s so disgusting– the idea of *sharing* a person! I’m sure I should despise anyone who tamely submitted to that sort of thing. I should feel they’d no self-respect.’

Roger Lamb bit his underlip and threw back his head like a restive horse. He had fine eyes and a sensitive mouth but his nose and chin were shapeless and badly moulded.

'Oh, this self-respect!' he burst out. 'It's the cause of half the misery in the world. Have you ever met Pat Ryan, by the way? No relation to the great financier.'

The introduction of this name gave Nelly a bitter stab.

'Yes,' she said quietly. 'He reminds me of someone and I can't think who it is.'

'It's William Jennings Bryan, of course! Everyone notices that. But what I was going to say was this. I know Pat well; and he's got a very difficult wife, and he himself is a very – what shall I say? – amorous kind of person. But they get along quite happily. They go their own way, but always come back; and they've got no children either. I think that Pat and Mary are models of what married people should be – unless they're *naturally* good and faithful.'

Nelly sighed deeply and bitterly. 'Are there any faithful ones in the world? Oh, I think life's a terrible thing. They ought to warn women before they're born what they've got to expect!'

The girl's visitor looked distractedly at the shaded electric light. 'I don't think many of us have got at the secret of life yet,' he remarked. 'The worst of it is we've nothing to go upon and no proof that there's a secret at all. But I think there is; and I think it has nothing to do with self-respect.'

For a moment Nelly was stirred by his words and by his manner into an obscure response. Then she relapsed into her habitual feminine contempt for all these vague generalizations that seem to do little to ease the hurt of the iron teeth of the great trap.

Chapter 16

'NELLY – LISTEN to me,' said Richard, standing behind his wife that night as she was combing out her silky fair hair and tying it together with a black ribbon. 'I swear to you on my dying oath that I didn't see you in that taxi! Whatever wrong I may have done you I *couldn't* do a thing like that.'

Their eyes met in the mirror and he was the first to turn away.

'I believe you,' she said.

'Well, *do* do more than just believe me! Do smile at me and say something like your old self. Don't let's hurt each other any further.'

Nelly did swing round at this. With a flash of clear-eyed indignation and with a tilt to her chair so that she could face him, she flung out her challenge.

'Are you going to give up that woman and never, never, *never* see her again?'

She gave a sharp little tap. to the floor with her slippered foot as she uttered these words. Deep in a somewhat ambiguous portion of her heart she was almost sorry that he had *not* jeered at her in that taxi. That would have been a definite gross brutality and she could have held him in contempt for it. Now, after he had confessed to her about Elise, there was nothing she had against him except the fact that he loved someone else; and Nelly, in spite of her bitterness, recognized that she could not hate him with the intensity he deserved, as long as this was his *only* fault.

Richard certainly was staggered by the violence of her words and the directness of her demand. It did not seem to him that his attitude to her had changed at all because of the appearance of Elise upon the scene. He loved her still. He loved both of them! It was the old recurrent dilemma, into the real psychology of which women seemed debarred from entering. With them the state of being *in love* was a clearly outlined condition with sharply defined edges. One either was in love or one was not; that seemed to be their code; and one couldn't by any possible means be in love with two people at the same time! And yet, he thought, it is unfair; because Nelly herself in a sense loved both himself and Canyot. Why then, couldn't he be allowed to love Nelly and Elise? Because the element of passion entered into it. Yes – he had to confess to himself that there was a difference! He knew perfectly well that Nelly's affection for the young painter was entirely free from the last sensual element. But suppose he had loved Elise in an absolutely platonic manner, would that have reconciled Nelly to their association? It might; but he doubted if it would. She would never believe that it was possible to love a passionate provocative woman, with a body predestined for heathen dalliance, in a manner that was entirely chaste. Yet Richard knew that it only needed that Elise's own wayward heart should be ensnared by someone else for him to have just that pure devotion to her. For even now the deeper portion of what he felt was a thrilled and grateful response to her genius as an artist.

In his own mind he was able to separate into two distinct worlds his emotion towards the dancer. On the one hand she appealed so overwhelmingly – and that was what had made him leave her at the beginning – to his sophisticated senses. On the other hand she inspired in him a pure flame of hero worship, such as any critic might feel for any creative spirit.

The spell she exercised over his senses could hardly be called 'love'. It was the old immemorial heathen craving for the beauty that troubled the blood, that aroused insatiable desire. And though he craved for her in that way, he knew very well that he hated her also in that way. He was not blind to the secret law that makes love and hate so evilly interchangeable when the senses are once enslaved. All these thoughts whirled through his mind as he leant back against the little chest of drawers in their bedroom and looked into Nelly's reproachful eyes.

By throwing out at him that violent ultimatum she had recklessly forced the issue. She had dragged them both to the edge of the precipice. He felt angry with her for it and yet he felt guilty too. Beneath both these emotions was a vivid sense of revolt against the accursed law of things that made such drastic dilemmas possible.

How lovely she looked at this moment with her fair hair bound up so chastely under that black ribbon, and her slight girlish frame, as yet but faintly indicative of the promise within her, so delicately fragile!

The silence between them prolonged itself remorselessly. Her sharp cry, 'Never, *never*, see her again' hovered in the air and became a menacing and disturbing entity. He could hear his own Waterbury watch ticking, ticking, ticking, where he had placed it on the dressing table. Damn the ticking of watches and the issuing of ultimatums by resolute young mouths!

For one moment Richard seemed to catch a glimpse of what women meant by love. For one moment he seemed to see that mysterious bond, the unbroken attachment of a man and woman, like a visible thread of light over a dark gulf. Then his masculine logic broke into this sudden vision; and he reasoned with himself that this fierce claim of hers for absolute loyalty was a wild demand of insane possessiveness that no human soul had a right to make upon another.

Yes – she had dragged them both to the edge of the precipice, to the very brink of the parting of the ways, by this fierce claim upon him.

He could see that thin film of white light, the link that bound them together, quivering and vibrating in the darkness.

Then a sort of crash came somewhere in his brain; and he had a cold terrible sensation of irrevocable choice, the kind of sensation out of which, it may well be, the human race has evoked the idea of perdition.

‘You have no right to ask that of me, Nelly,’ he said in a low husky voice. ‘It’s too much. It’s more than a man is allowed to promise. A certain freedom of movement *must* be left us. We cannot bind ourselves like that, whatever we’ve done, whatever we deserve.’

He was conscious that the colour left her cheeks and that the angry light faded from her eyes.

‘Ah!’ she murmured, drawing in her breath. ‘That’ll be the last time I shall ask it of you.’

She gave her chair a little jerk with her hands and turned away from him towards the mirror. Mechanically she picked up her hair brush and mechanically raised it to her hair. The gesture struck Richard to the heart as piteously pathetic; for he knew well that she had done all that was required to that silky head.

He made a half-movement towards her and then checked himself. What was the use in insulting the better spirit in both of them by an unworthy lapse into sentiment that anyhow must miss the mark? It would be like trying to make love to the dead.

He went back into the sitting room and changed into his night-things there, as he usually did. He sat for more than half an hour after that, silent and motionless in the armchair, wrapped in his dressing gown, too deep in thought even to smoke a cigarette.

Life seemed flowing past him in great irrevocable waves and he felt as though he were stranded upon a remote shore watching a ship gradually disappearing over the horizon. The ship of Nelly’s and Richard’s love!

When, after giving a slight knock, he entered their bedroom again and looked hurriedly towards the place where their two beds lay side by side, he saw at once that she had separated these by the introduction between them of a little table containing her favourite books and a photograph of her father, a thing that until that night had always remained on the further side of Nelly's bed.

The electric light was not turned out but the girl lay far round on her side, only the outline of one white cheek and ear visible, for her hair was thrown round the top of her head now, and the bare nape of her neck looked touchingly childish as she hid her face from him in the pillow.

Richard went over to her side and bending down kissed the top of her head. But so softly did he do this, that whether or not she was aware of his doing it he did not know.

Then he went round to his own side of the divided beds and put out the light.

Chapter 17

‘You are cold, *mon ami*. What’s the matter with you? Are you tired of me already?’

Elise drew herself out of his perfunctory embrace and moved across to one of her deep wicker chairs, leaving him alone on the sofa.

He had thought in his simplicity that he could transform his relations with her at his arbitrary will and pleasure, ‘and nothing said’. He was destined to discover his mistake.

‘You are the same as you always were, my dear,’ she flung at him, settling herself among the cushions with a sort of crouching movement, like a beautiful lithe animal among jungle branches and leaves. ‘You were always afraid of committing yourself. And that’s what’s the matter with you now. You’re afraid of love. You hate love. You’re scared of losing something of your precious personality. As though one lost one’s personality that way!’

‘It isn’t that at all,’ protested Richard feebly. How *could* he tell her about his conversation with Nelly? Elise laughed, a bitter cruel little laugh.

‘Oh, of course you’ll lie. You always have lied to me. You lied to me when you left me like that in Paris. I know now why you did leave me. For precisely the same reason that you’re in your present mood – fear of committing yourself!’

Teased by her words and foolishly anxious to justify himself at any cost, he burst out then with the one thing he had particularly made up his mind not to say.

‘It isn’t that at all. It’s nothing to do with that! It’s only that I have sometimes a touch of remorse when I think of my wife.’

Elise laughed more maliciously than ever and her eyes gleamed. ‘No not a bit of it! All excuses! That’s just what you always do. You use masks and screens and blinds for everything. You are not in the remotest degree concerned about your wife. You’re just simply afraid of committing yourself to *me*! You’re afraid of love. You have a mean soul, the avaricious ingrowing soul of a peasant – and you’re afraid of losing something if you let yourself go. I don’t know what you’re afraid of losing. Your precious soul perhaps – if you believe in the soul; but I sometimes doubt if you really believe in anything.’

Richard jumped up from the sofa and rushed towards her.

For one flicker of a second she must have thought he was going to strike her; for she put up her hand as if to protect herself. The movement was accompanied by a quick change of colour in her eyes as if they had been the eyes of a wild animal seized with sudden alarm. Perhaps if Richard’s purpose had been to reduce her to submission, to softness, to amorous response, it would have been to his advantage to strike her. But he was very far from anything of the kind; all he did was to kneel at her feet and press her hand to his lips. She tore it away in a moment and her eyes flamed at him.

‘Never think you can play *that* game with me!’ she cried. And the look of dark fury which she gave him made him get up from his knees and walk back to his former place.

‘Did you actually suppose,’ she said, leaning forward, with her long white hands clutching the arms of her chair, ‘that I would let you pick me up and put me down at your pleasure like a paid courtesan? Did you think you could have me when you were annoyed with your wife and wanted to be revenged on her; and then drop me when you made it up again and were good little children? Did you think I'd submit to that kind of thing, Richard Storm?'

'Elise! Elise! *Stop!* How can you say things like that? I can't understand you.' And he stared at her with contracted brows as if she were some kind of extraordinary animal.

'I suppose,' he began, in a meditative voice, 'this weird mood of yours comes from that accursed possessive instinct which all you women have. I suppose you are really just simply jealous of my wife.'

The crouching position she had assumed became still more pronounced. She drew in her hands slowly, along the edge of the chair, and her greenish-hazel eyes, staring at him out of her pale face, seemed to darken almost to blackness.

'How little you know me! How little you know anyone! It's your gross, heavy, blind complacent vanity!'

Richard mechanically drew out of his pocket a packet of cigarettes. Then, seeing what he had done, he deliberately and consciously selected one and lit it.

Do women, he thought, never give the real reason of their sudden angers? Is it an inveterate tendency with them, like a dog who turns round before he lies down, to give their fury some moral basis completely removed from the point at issue?

Why didn't she scold me for my 'gross, blind heavy vanity' yesterday, when we were happy together? I was much vainer and more complacent then – the Lord knows – than I am today!

But how magnificently beautiful Elise looked! He couldn't help admiring her in spite of his sense of injustice. Her hands pressed against the sides of the chair straightened her Attic torso, under its filmy drapery, into lines and curves that were worthy of Praxiteles.

He couldn't resist a faint smile, through his clouds of cigarette smoke, as he looked at her sitting there in her dark smouldering feline sulkiness. *If she was less dangerous and less irrational*, he thought, *she wouldn't be so lovely*.

'Come, my dear, my dear,' he said, 'it's absurd for us to quarrel like this. It's not fair to make me tell you my thoughts and then to pounce on me for them. Of course I'm bound to have moments with you when I feel a little guilty. You know what I'm like. You know my troublesome ridiculous conscience. It's just because I'm so happy with you that I get these moods. I can't help my nature. I was made like that.'

Her eyes darkened yet more and her face paled yet more. Before she could find her voice, her lips quivered, opening and closing like the petals of a sensitive plant. "*Made like that!*' she hissed at last, her beautiful head swaying on her long white neck like the head of some angry Lamia that might at any moment revert to its primitive shape. 'Oh, how English you are, Richard! That's what we other races have to accept is it, and just conform to? *Made like that*. And we have to unmake *ourselves*, and change our very skins, so as to adapt ourselves to this thing that cannot alter!'

'Elise – Elise – you must be mad to talk like that! You know that with us from the very beginning it's been the attraction of opposites. You don't change, you can't change, any more than I. If I weren't so English, as you call it, so heavy and gross and all the rest of it, do you think you'd have ever cared for me? Not a bit of it!'

'Well, I don't care for you now, anyway,' she flung out. 'I hate you!'

There was just a faintly perceptible softening in that 'I hate you!' which was not concealed from Richard. By laying the stress upon the faults of his character and keeping his wife out of it he had evidently succeeded in turning the course of her thoughts. He got up and threw his cigarette into the grate.

Her incredibly sensitive mouth with its twitching lips looked irresistible to him and he suddenly loved her with a fierce deep strange love such as he had not felt for any living person in his life before.

He went straight up to her, seized her by her wrists and pulled her up upon her feet. Then he kissed her as he had never before kissed any woman. He kissed her with an emotion that was neither sensual nor spiritual. It seemed to him as if his soul *required* her soul, and the only way to obtain it was by draining it through those quivering lips.

When at last, after what seemed a blind eternity of feelings beyond any analysis, he let her go, he noticed that her eyes had changed from that dark look. They were strangely beautiful still but it was with a different kind of beauty. As he took her on his knees and caressed her Grecian head, pushing back the heavy bronze-coloured braids from her broad low forehead, it seemed to him that her eyes resembled the leafy shadows of cool rock caves overhung with ferns and moss. He had never realized their depth or what soft greenish lights were hidden in them.

‘You know how to treat us!’ she said with a low tender laugh that had something in it of the sigh of a wild animal that submits to being petted. ‘But I don’t love you any better for this.’

‘I don’t care whether you love me better or not,’ he said, ‘as long as I’ve got you still. I should be much more agitated about your moods if I wasn’t with you, if it were a case of writing letters to each other.’

She looked at him almost as intensely and questioningly as he had looked at her a little while ago.

‘I’ve been reading those poems of yours,’ she said, with just a faint flicker of malice, ‘and I cannot say that I think they’re worthy of you. They are so overloaded with sensations that one doesn’t get any emotion at all from them.’

‘I must have a cigarette if I’m to talk about poetry,’ said Richard, lifting her off his knee and walking over to the chimneypiece to get a match. ‘And you must free yourself from the burden of your critic’s weight too, it seems!’ she retorted, as she settled herself alone in the wicker chair.

‘What do you mean by sensations?’ said Richard walking up and down the room with impatient strides. ‘The whole purpose of what I’ve been writing is to get into it the very essence of the English country – and that’s a “sensation”, isn’t it?’

‘It may be to an Englishman, my dear,’ she replied. ‘It isn’t to me. All this indiscriminate piling up of flowers and trees and grasses, all this business about lanes and fields, seems to me just heavy and dull. It seems to get into the way of something.’

‘That’s because you’re an American,’ he threw at her indignantly. ‘Any English person reading what I’ve written would be reminded of the happiest moments of his life.’

‘And what are they, if I may ask?’

Richard looked at her with a scowl. A red flush came into his cheeks. ‘It’s no use trying to explain to an American things of that kind,’ he said. ‘The happiest moments of a person’s life in England are associated with old country memories, with just those lanes and gardens and fields that you find so dull. If you don’t care for things like that, of course my poems are nothing to you!’

‘But my dear Richard,’ cried Elise, ‘surely the whole purpose of art is to make such impressions universal, so that everybody feels them? If you’re content to write about ponds and ditches for the benefit of English people – well! you may please yourself of course; but I cannot allow you to call such a thing *art*. It's the merest personal sensation of one individual!'

Richard looked as if it would have given him immense satisfaction to box her ears.

'Isn't art always a personal sensation?' he protested.

'Not a bit of it!' cried the dancer. 'Art's an emotion not a sensation. It's an emotion that expresses the only really impersonal thing in the world.'

'And what may that be?' asked Richard sarcastically.

'Ah! my dear,' murmured the dancer with a sigh, 'if you don't know what that is, if you don't care to know what that is, you'll never be a great poet.'

'Well, at any rate,' said Richard, 'I've only done in my poetry what English poets have always done; that's to say, tried to get the magic of the earth soul into words that are not too vague or mystical.'

'My dear, my dear!' cried the dancer, laughing at him quite frankly now. 'You don't mean to say you think you have rivalled Shelley and Keats in these verses? They are very beautiful and right, those old poets, but you can't do that sort of thing twice. You've got to go further. You've got to start where they left off. You've got to say something new.'

Richard came and stood in front of her, glaring and lowering. She had stirred the very depths of his self-love. She had entered a chamber of his mind deeper than all his indolent acquiescences. She had given him the sensations of someone poking with a hayfork into the most sacred recesses of his soul.

'*New!*' he threw out at her with infinite disgust. 'You're the victim of your confounded country, whatever you like to say! Everything has to be new, always new! My poetry deals with those elemental feelings that the race has always had. My *earth soul* is not a bit different from Wordsworth's earth soul or Virgil's either, or Plato's for the matter of that!'

She looked at him with a queer deep enigmatical look that puzzled and irritated him.

What was she after? Did she want to rake into his very inmost being? *Had* she raked into it, and found rank weeds where she hoped to find delicate and rare plants?

He felt angry and humiliated. A vague feeling of misgiving mingled with a raging sense of injustice. Was he destined never to love a woman who responded to every movement of his mind? Of course it was her cosmopolitan life, without roots in any soil, that made her so difficult! Naturally she could not understand the subtle and exquisite pleasure that he derived from every stick and stone in England. Where could he get in touch with anything deep if he didn't go back to those old delicious sensations connected with lanes and fields, with gardens and hedges?

He solaced himself hurriedly with these thoughts, but was not reassured. He was bitterly hurt and startled. After all, in her own work she was a great artist. She had done what he certainly had never done: she had put her whole life into her work. Why couldn't he, too, do that? Was she right in her attacks upon his mystical sensationalism? Did that kind of thing really act as a sort of drug, numbing the finer and rarer energies?

Troubled through and through by what she had said, his self-love obscurely conscious of a deep wound, letting in air and light from very alien spaces, he hovered in front of her, with his hands behind his back, like an erring soul before some tutelary spirit.

'It's like this, my dear,' she went on. 'Though I don't want to annoy you. I think you *have* great powers. But I cannot say I think this poetry of yours has done justice to them. I believe you inject into it, as you read it to yourself, a great many vague feelings that are not conveyed to anyone else. Your poetry is a kind of self-indulgence. It is the expression of a good deal in you that is merely personal. It is too self-satisfied, too unruffled. It's as if you had never really wrestled with life!'

He looked so completely miserable under her words that she took him by both his hands and pulled him towards her.

He responded to her caress almost savagely, seeking to recover his ascendency over her and to regain his self-respect in the oldest of primitive ways.

As he made love to her he withdrew his soul from her, letting it escape down some long corridor of reservation. His pride found a way to recover itself in this manner. Without actually formulating the malicious thought, what he felt in his mind was a derisive sense that she did not know at that moment how far his soul was wandering from her.

When the hour arrived for her to return to the theatre she was called for by Pat Ryan in his green Studebaker. They separated therefore at the door, Richard's vanity completely reinstated upon its secret throne. 'She is only a woman,' he said to himself as he walked towards the elevated station. 'Her art is instinctive, not intellectual. She does not understand the quieter, cooler, more magical kinds of poetry. She wants everything to be emotional and dramatic. In some ways Nelly has a truer feeling for beauty than she has. But Nelly's childish impishness spoils her insight. Nelly laughs at her own soul.'

As he ascended the crowded steps to the little platform, Richard felt in better spirits than he had felt for many a long week. It was a relief that Nelly knew of his affair with Elise and apparently had no intention of doing anything about it. It was sad that it made her unhappy. It was sad that she insisted that all lover-like play between them should cease. But she clearly had made up her mind not to sulk; and they had had – even since her discovery of his unfaithfulness – some not uncheerful hours.

There was thus a base unction, a shallow satisfaction, a sleek slurring over of all deeper issues, in Richard's mind as the elevated railway carried him down Sixth Avenue, the car in which he sat moving parallel to the third-storey windows of the larger shops.

It seemed as though the malicious revenge he had taken upon Elise had punished him by removing from his nature, in that hour, all nobler, all subtler feelings.

He had never caught himself in a mood quite so cynical, quite so brutal and crude, as he caught himself in then. It was a mood that seemed to fall into odious reciprocity with the external aspect of the New York thoroughfares at that evening rush hour.

Those pale-jowled rigid-faced men, those handsome self-assertive metallic-voiced women, pushing, jostling, scrambling, hurrying, driven by that elemental necessity of which Karmakoff had discoursed to him, seemed to fall in with this mood of his, to blend with it, to hearten it, to justify it. It was with a kind of prolonged snarl of predatory exultation that he – one of their number, one of the male animals of this wrestling tribe – chuckled to himself as he thought of the desperate struggle of life and how he was playing, in his dunghill isolation, his own little game against all these! Two women were 'interested' in him, two exceptional women, a great artist and a sweet-souled girl. How easily it might have happened, in this evil vortex, that no feminine creature worth a moment's thought might have cared one jot what became of him! But two of the most exquisite *did* care, and in this alone he had surely attained something! One after another the little stations passed, each numbered by the number of a street, crossing Sixth Avenue. When the train stopped at Twenty-third Street two young businessmen got in, in company with an older person, an elderly woman. The three were quarrelling about something, and continued quarrelling as the train moved out. The woman’s face was gentle and very sad. The two young men were causing her some peculiar shame by the vulgarity and crudity of their discussion. Richard caught her eye, the eye of a hunted thing, looking desperately out of the train window, and then he caught her reverting her gaze into the interior of the car as though driven back by the menacing heartlessness of those glaring lights, gaudy advertisements and obtrusive store windows.

There swept over him a drowning wave of sudden remorse. Had he, in this eternal division between the sensitive and insensitive, slipped over to the wrong side? Had he ranged himself with the glaring advertisements and brutal sounds, with the lights and the iron and the paint and the roar, against the deeper voices that alone gave life any beauty or meaning?

Was he actually – he, Richard Storm – exulting in his possession of these two women as if he were a gross fool of a numbskull roué, devoid of all finer instincts?

Eighth Street! It was necessary for Richard to get out here, if he wished to walk through Cornelia Street and Le Roy Street to Seventh Avenue.

As he made his way through Greenwich Village with its laxer, easier, more careless atmosphere, he became conscious that there did exist in New York, hidden away among its iron buildings and its chaotic litter, many charming backwaters of friendly humanity.

In this particular quarter were artists of all the nations of the earth, writers, painters, journalists, bric-à-brac dealers, revolutionists, virtuosos, charlatans, dilettantes, actors, bachelor women, women workers, wealthy connoisseurs of the theatre, aesthetic dabblers, art-book dealers, literary recluses, imagist poets, futurist sculptors, popular mystics, cranks, faddists, philosophers, humbugs, devoted humanitarians, art-movement leaders, and many quiet solitary thinkers living between uptown fashion and downtown greed, intersected by wedges of every sort of foreign element. There was certainly a large, free, easygoing casualness in the air that seemed powerful enough to maintain itself unspoiled, in defiance of both economic necessity and social convention.

It was naïve and simple, this *Quartier Latin* of the New Atlantis; it was crude and self-conscious, but something of the great ocean spaces that surrounded it, something of those free winds and that high unclouded sky, had got into its manners and habits and usages. It was certainly primitive and unsophisticated in its ardours and devotions to what it proudly called ‘creative work’ but its very primitiveness preserved its love of beauty intact and pure, unspoiled by the cynical disillusionment of the traditional Bohemians of the Old World.

Here, if anywhere, wedged in between foreign tenements and big business, breathed the lungs of whatever mental and spiritual freedom that iron Manhattan could offer to her children!

When he reached the Charlton Street apartment he found that Nelly had already got their supper ready. She permitted him to kiss her, only turning her head a little to one side so as to avoid giving him her lips.

How blint and clumsy, how brutally callous and dull he had been, he thought. This avoidance of his lips made him suddenly aware of the infinite subtleties, the world of shy emotional reactions, so deep and so clear-edged, that women associate with this simple symbol. He was made obscurely conscious that he had hurt something in his wife’s soul of a different character, of a more sensitive texture, than anything which he possessed in his own.

Does any man, he thought, really understand what this touching of the lips implies in the heart of a woman?

He felt at that moment as though there was a region of delicate, evasive, exquisitely attuned vibrations in Nelly's spirit, of which he might suddenly awake to discover he had lost the clue for ever; to discover that he had lost it, when it was too late to get it back.

As he chattered superficially with her, of this piece of gossip and that piece of scandal, over their meal, there slowly grew upon him the bitter cruel sense that he had, in his clumsy sensuality, thrown away something much more exquisite and precious than any merely physical thrill. After all, he *could* have given himself up to the divine genius of Elise, to her inspiration, her great instinctive art, without dragging her down to the level of an odalisque, a courtesan, an amorous plaything.

There was no reason to suppose that if he had made it clear to Elise that he loved his wife and intended to remain faithful to her she would have rejected his platonic friendship. The passionate paganism of Elise was a thing quite uninvolved with her deeper nature and a few clear indications of loyalty to Nelly would have placed his relations with the dance on a basis much more honourable to both of them.

Every mouthful he took at that meal, as he sat facing the delicate being whose love he had deliberately set himself, so it seemed to him now, to trample on and to kill, tasted of miserable remorse.

Had she sulked, had she thrown out sarcastic speeches, had she been vituperative and vindictive, he could have hardened his heart in his unfaithfulness. But as it was, thinking his self-accusing thoughts beneath their friendly chatter, it seemed to him as though he had dragged down and exploited in sheer stupidity of sensuality both these finer spirits. His remorse about Nelly diffused itself over Elise too, and he felt he had betrayed them both. The great creative spirit of life – the only god he worshipped – had given him Nelly's love and the child *she* carried within her; had also given him the friendship of Elise and the child she carried within her, that incomparable art of hers. And what had he done to both these mirrors of the eternal vision? Tossed them down, flung one against the other, tried to see his own egotistic countenance in each of them, and clouded and blurred them in the effort.

He sought, absurdly enough, on this particular evening, to soothe the smart of his conscience by an exaggerated consideration. He helped Nelly clear the table, he helped her to wash up; it was only afterwards, when seated near her in their small living room looking out on the quiet houses opposite, that he was made starkly aware how futile such catchpenny offerings were.

He found himself leaning forward and touching her hand as she worked at the piece of sewing spread over her knees. 'Nelly – my dear – my dear, can't you bring yourself to forget and forgive? It's more than I can stand, this way we're living now. It makes me homesick for the old days. It makes me long for Sussex.'

She let his hand stay where it was, but her fingers lay passive and cold within his own.

'What can I do, Richard?' she murmured, looking at him gravely and quietly. 'What can I do that I haven't done? I haven't interfered with your pleasure. I haven't made a fuss or tried to leave you. Many women would have … well! you know! But when you ask me to be just the same, as if nothing were going on, when you're still seeing that person, I can't understand quite what you mean. Sometimes, my dear,' and she looked at him with a puzzled look that almost flickered into a faint smile, 'sometimes I doubt whether you've ever grown up. You seem to be so blind to certain things; as if you actually *didn't* understand, as if you were not quite an ordinary human being; as if you were hurting me without knowing that you were hurting me. You can't expect me to laugh and smile and encourage you to go off to someone else.'

He moved a little nearer to her. 'But you *do* love me still, my darling, my darling?' he whispered.

Her forehead puckered up into a concentrated frown and her lips quivered.

'You don't think *I* like the way we're living?' she broke out. 'But how can I bear it differently? What can I do? When I asked you that first day whether you'd give this person up, you wouldn't answer. And of course I know you haven't given her up. I know you see her every day. I know you came straight from her this very night. And how can I feel as if it were just the same – when it's like that? I can hold myself in, from saying any more. I *must* hold myself in, for our child's sake. But I can't help feeling bitter. You can't expect me to go on just the same. It takes a little time to make a person's heart numb and dead. I don't think you *know* – that's what I keep saying to myself – I don't think you know what a woman feels. I don't think you *can* know. You couldn't have done it, you couldn't have done it, if you did.'

Her voice broke at this point but she controlled herself with a pathetic struggle, and got up from her chair. 'You mustn't expect too much from me, Richard,' she added. 'I'm not made of wood and stone.'

The direct cause of her rising was the sound of the doorbell accompanied by a sound of quite a number of voices in the street.

'Here they are!' she cried, moving to the window and drawing aside the curtain. 'They've come all together. Let them in, will you Richard? You've got cigarettes for them? We’ll have the coffee at once. I’ve got two of those cakes.’

He ran downstairs. A few minutes later the little apartment was full of tobacco smoke and lively conversation.

Roger Lamb sat by Nelly’s side on the sofa. Robert Canyot established himself on the windowsill, his long legs dangling awkwardly, and his dusty boots looking large and prominent.

Karmakoff and Catharine shared the armchair; while Richard seated at the table before his coffee cup munched one piece of cake after another, as if by the mere process of devouring this sticky substance he fortified himself against unhappy thoughts.

‘It’s all very well for you to speak of Russia as if nothing but sweetness and goodness emerged from it,’ said Karmakoff suddenly, throwing the remark like a hand grenade straight at the head of Roger Lamb. ‘Russia’s no better and no worse than the rest of the world. All this sentimentality is as false as all this savage abuse.

‘Where we Russians differ from you people is simply that we’ve no false shame. We express everything – all that there is to be expressed – and a good deal more sometimes!’ He laughed a rather bitter laugh.

Nelly made an unconscious little movement of her hand towards the young man as if to protect him from this frontal attack; but Roger Lamb seemed quite unruffled.

‘I apologize,’ he said. ‘I ought not to have dragged Russia into it at all. It was a lapse. It was only that Mrs Storm seemed so awfully pessimistic. I just reminded her of the nicer side of things – of human nature, you know? I was trying to explain my own feeling about it. Russia was a by-issue and a silly one. I apologize to Russia, Ivan.’

‘Oh Roger,’ cried Catharine Gordon, ‘while I think of it Elise wants you to write her up in *The Manhattan*. She’s getting sick of the rotten notices they give her.’

The colour rose in Nelly’s cheeks at this name. Karmakoff deliberately pinched Catharine in the arm. Richard put an enormous piece of cake into his mouth. Canyot, kicking the wall with his heels, remarked surlily, ‘She gets better ones than she deserves as it is. I’d leave her alone, Roger.’

Nelly, who had bent her head over her lap, raised it at this. ‘*The Manhattan* ought to have something about her,’ she said calmly, looking straight at her husband.

Roger Lamb smiled. ‘I don’t think any of you know much about the difficulties of journalism. I’ve been trying for three months to get her a satisfactory write-up. The old man won’t have it. He says we’re too modern as it is.’

Karmakoff, who had been regarding Roger Lamb with a fixed scrutiny for some minutes, moved a little away from his companion in the armchair and, leaning forward, startled them all by suddenly saying – ‘Something’s wrong with you, Roger. You’re not well. What is it?’

Richard rose from his seat at the table. ‘Shall I get you a glass of water or anything, Lamb? Ivan’s right. You look pale and worried.’

Nelly turned towards the young man at her side with a look full of solicitude. Catharine Gordon leapt to her feet and rushing up to him took his head in both her hands and gazed into his face. ‘You’re not ill are you? No you can’t be ill. I won’t have you getting ill!’ She slipped down beside him at the very end of the sofa and hugged him with her strong young arms.

The general disturbance produced by all this concern on his behalf did not seem to ruffle Roger Lamb. He drew himself gently out of the young girl’s embrace and rising from his place moved over to the chair vacated by

Richard. With an amused and friendly smile he rejected the glass of water which this latter offered him. 'You can give me a match if you like,' he said and proceeded to light a cigarette.

Catharine Gordon possessed herself of Nelly's hand. Canyot returned to his place on the windowsill. Richard sat down by his wife's side.

'You haven't answered my question yet,' resumed Karmakoff who had not ceased to regard the journalist with a searching scrutiny.

'Don't tease him, Ivan!' cried Catharine. 'You're looking at him as if you were a magician or one of these horrid psychoanalysts. Don't – don't look at him like that!' And she waved her arm backwards and forwards in the air as if to break the spell.

'He doesn't tease me,' remarked Roger Lamb. 'I love Karmakoff's way of looking at people. And he is quite right too. He's found me out. He's called my bluff, as they say. I hadn't meant to tell any of you anything about it. But it was silly of me to hide it up – a sort of pride I suppose. I don't know! One does these things sometimes. Perhaps it didn't seem so real to me as long as I kept it to myself. But Ivan has found me out with his confounded Slavic intuition; so I'll confess …'

There was a perceptible hush in the small apartment as he said these words; his youthful figure, in its trim dark-coloured suit, seemed to isolate itself from the rest. His queer-shaped skull under its closely cropped hair assumed the appearance of an archaic statue as it emerged from the clouds of his cigarette smoke. His grey unhappy eyes looked quizzically round him as he paused in his speech; and his sensuous mouth with its impassioned red lips seemed more than ever as if it had been carved out of his white face by the hands of some insane god, forgetful of all proportion.

'Don't tell us! Don't tell us!' cried Catharine Gordon suddenly, putting her fingers in her ears. 'I hate you for this, Ivan. It's a cruel thing. And you're a devil to do it.'

Karmakoff smiled at her with a smile of infinite indulgence. A strange contest of looks passed between them full of complicated vibrations;

'If it's anything to do with your nerves, Roger,' said Canyot earnestly, 'I'd much rather you didn't tell us—' and he looked anxiously at Nelly.

Roger Lamb interpreted his glance. 'You needn't be afraid, Robert. It's nothing that could scare anyone. It's simple enough. It's only that I am—'

'Don't tell him! Don't tell him!' cried Catharine again, pressing her fingers wildly into her ears.

But the young man proceeded without regarding her. 'It's only that I learnt from the doctor this morning that if I don't have an operation at once I've no chance of living; and that the operation I've got to have is a ticklish matter, a matter of even chances.'

There was a moment of embarrassed silence in the room. Catharine, who seemed to have understood his words, took her hands from her ears and covered her face.

'How long does he give you without the operation?' asked Karmakoff.

'About a week,' replied the other smiling. 'Just about a week.'

'And you've arranged to have it?'

'I go into the hospital tomorrow.'

'Which one?'

'The Postgraduate.'

'I am very glad you told us this,' said Nelly quietly. 'I should have hated not to know.'

'How does this affect your old pessimistic apathy?' inquired Canyot from the windowsill, speaking roughly and almost harshly.

'I shouldn't have thought that he was either pessimistic or apathetic,' protested Richard.

‘He isn’t! How can you say such things, Robert?’ reiterated Nelly.

‘Speak up, Roger, and tell them I’m right,’ cried Canyot. ‘You know you’ve always said that down at the bottom, except for the theatre, you cared nothing for anything in life; that you’d just as soon be dead as be alive.’

The brusqueness of this question flung so crudely at the young man produced a curious jar and jolt among them all. Nelly looked reproachfully at the painter. Richard scowled and sank into gloomy silence. Karmakoff lay back in his chair and shrugged his shoulders, smiling a little.

‘I can’t understand what you mean,’ remarked Catharine. ‘Roger’s always so amusing. He’s naughty of course and funny; but I can’t think how you can call him pessimistic. He always puts me into a lovely mood when I come across him.’

‘Thank you, Catharine,’ said the journalist, looking affectionately at her.

‘You’re wrong all the same,’ persisted Canyot; ‘and Roger knows it, only he won’t admit it. You haven’t answered my question yet,’ he went on, almost brutally, his eyes flashing from beneath their heavy brows.

‘Robert dear!’ protested Nelly softly.

But the atmosphere of tension in the room after the journalist’s revelation seemed to have gone to the painter’s head.

‘Why don’t you answer?’ he growled. ‘You know perfectly well I’m right.’

Roger Lamb buttoned his jacket with quiet fingers and crossed his legs.

‘Are you really going to the hospital tomorrow?’ cried Catharine. ‘It’s dreadful. It’s like a dream.’

‘Yes, you’re quite right, Robert,’ replied the condemned young man, frowning a little and opening his eyes very wide with a sort of humorous grimace. ‘I *have* never cared very much what happened to me. A sort of inertness – a silly kind of disillusionment about everything – I don't know! but it's always been *here*, somewhere or another, like a marble slab.' He tapped his forehead with his long second finger.

'But, Roger, you have helped me so much at different times,' protested Nelly softly.

'And me too – you poor darling – you've been an angel to me always,' murmured Catharine Gordon.

'But how has this operation news affected your indifference?' Canyot persisted.

'How can you go on teasing him like that?' cried Catharine, stepping up to Canyot's side and seizing his arm with her hands. 'Stop it, I say! Stop it!' And the young girl positively shook the painter in her indignation.

'It has had absolutely no effect at all,' answered Roger Lamb. 'It's all right, Catharine. Robert and I understand each other perfectly.'

'He ought to be beaten!' cried the young girl retreating to Nelly's side and clutching her hand.

'Absolutely no effect,' the journalist repeated, bending down to straighten out one of his purple-coloured socks. 'But I confess I'm a bit scared of that hospital. I always have been terrified of institutions. The most agitating moment of my life was when I first went into camp.'

'But Roger dear,' cried Catharine, 'the army isn't an institution.'

'Is marriage an institution, Catharine?' asked Karmakoff.

'Not for you or me,' the girl replied, giving him a strange quick look.

At that point Roger Lamb arose to his feet. 'Well! I think I'll be making my way home,' he said.

They all made an involuntary movement towards him; and while Richard was searching for his hat and stick they surrounded him awkwardly, in a silence full of unsaid things.

His slim figure and closely cropped skull seemed to grow almost terrifyingly alien from them; seemed to repel them, for all his gentleness, as if with a stern and menacing gesture.

He shook their hands quietly enough when that moment's embarrassed pause was over; the passionate sympathy of the embrace which Catharine Gordon gave him broke the spell of the general discomfort.

'You'll take him home, Richard, won't you?' said Nelly, and added a hurried 'of course he will! No, Roger, he *must* go with you. You *must* let him. He'll see you to bed and then come back to us.'

As Richard walked by the side of the doomed boy, up Varick Street and across Sheridan Square, in front of the Greenwich Village Theater, he became conscious of the extraordinary power of Lamb's self-possession.

This might well be the last time the youth was destined to walk through those well-known haunts, the last time through an inconceivable eternity; and yet he seemed to look round him with his usual whimsical gravity, noting the passers-by and the various familiar scenes without a sign of dramatic self-consciousness.

They went into one of the innumerable Village cafés for a cup of coffee, and Richard was amazed at the urbanity and aplomb with which his companion greeted some casual acquaintances of his, Dulcie Foster and her strange friend Siegfried Stein, the mad musician. When finally, an hour afterwards, he left the room in Waverley Place where he had seen the young man safely to bed, he felt himself impelled to walk round Washington Square in order to collect his thoughts before returning home.

The night was a little damp and chilly, although the day had been hot. The trees in the square had already changed their tints and many of their leaves had fallen. As he strode beside the familiar arch, whose classic facade is so curiously adorned with two statues of the same Father of the

Country, and let his eyes wander up the long perspective of Fifth Avenue, he realized how tremendous was the mere weight of sheer material substantiality in this astounding city. The death of a fragile man-of-letters, the death of many men-of-letters, what were they amid the palpable projections of this tremendous scene?

As he moved up close to the masonry of the arch, to shelter himself from the tornado of whirling automobiles that rolled past him, he visualized this harsh raw emphatic city as a sort of deliberately flung-out challenge to the march of the feet of the destinies. It was like a great flaring advertisement sign, this city, hung up here between the deep sky and the deep ocean, with a sort of defiance to all the old submissions and resignations. These immense marble-and-iron structures, blazing with a million lights, seemed to flaunt in the face of the gods a certain bravura of splendid levity.

The Old World with its time-bleached pieties had accepted those gods' austere decisions and had bowed low before them in patient fatalistic ritual. But this reckless New World seemed to claim, in daring impious flippancy, the right to deny the whole traditional order, its solemn sorrows as well as its solemn assuagements, and to fling forth a sort of profane adventurous challenge to the whole system of things.

The death of a man, contemplated in the light of the illuminated perspective of Fifth Avenue, dwindled into a kind of negligible accident. So many men must have died in order that this huge shout of defiance should reach the planetary spaces.

Love and friendship and religion and loyalty, these things were proper subjects for the old forms of art; but here in New York these things seemed to fall into the background and other manifestations of the life force seemed to assume prominence.

In a different mood Richard might have been tempted to condemn these other manifestations, as part of the primordial brutality in things, but in some queer way the influence of Roger Lamb had altered his feeling about them. The journalist had thrown out to him so many capricious fancies as he prepared for his last night in his own bed, that Richard began to wonder whether it was possible that this huge chaotic welter of a world might after all be destined to evoke some completely new attitude to life; some attitude in which camaraderie took the place of love, honesty to one's self the place of loyalty to others, cynical courage replaced submissive piety, as a reckless indifference to death did the old sad resignation.

As he walked slowly back to Charlton Street through the familiar quarter with its voluble crowds and its lighted fruit shops great splashes of crude warm colour against the darkness, there came upon him a dim feeling that there was something here, some mood, some attitude of the spirit, some breaking up of ancient barriers that it would be perhaps unwise wholly to harden one's heart against.

At any rate he was able in that hour, as he had never been able before, to gather up into some sort of perspective his former life in Paris, his marriage to Nelly, and his love affair with the dancer. *I will make this night*, he thought, as he passed the illuminated front of the Greenwich Village Theater, *a new start for my poem. I will get some of that young fellow's fancies into it. And I will tell Elise that she was right and I was wrong.*

Chapter 18

TWO DAYS LATER, after Richard had left for the office, Nelly was called up on the telephone by Catharine Gordon who told her that she and Ivan were at the hospital and that Roger Lamb was dead.

Catharine informed her that Karmakoff was taking her down to Atlantic City to get a breath of sea air, and that she had already spoken to Richard ‘over the phone’.

Nelly got a queer startled sensation from Catharine’s words which had ended with incoherent emotion. She stood for a few minutes by her kitchen tap, fumbling with the breakfast things and mechanically putting into the water some plates which she had already washed. An infinite sadness invaded her heart. It seemed incredible that this self-possessed boy, who had talked to them so quietly in that very room only forty-eight hours ago, was now as far divided from her as her own father.

The news about Atlantic City was a shock to her too. She wondered if Karmakoff and Catharine had secretly got married. If not – was this naïve passionate creature self-possessed enough to risk the sort of transient affair which such an excursion suggested?

Nelly had come to feel a maternal tenderness for the erratic young girl; and though Ivan was no pleasure hunter, she could hardly imagine him committing himself to any lifelong attachment.

She did not go so far as to accuse Karmakoff of exploiting the girl’s emotional agitation over Lamb’s death to his own amorous advantage; but she wished Catharine had come straight to her from the hospital instead of going off like this.

But perhaps it was only for the day. There were plenty of late trains back from the famous resort and, after all, it was likely enough, in the easy moral atmosphere in which they lived, that all the harm that could happen had happened already.

She turned with a heart full of vague forebodings to her housework in the little apartment. She could not quite explain to herself the sort of melancholy which descended upon her. It seemed something more than the boy's death, more than Richard's unfaithfulness, more than Catharine's danger, more than her natural apprehensions about her own future. She reverted to each one of these matters, trying to get at the secret of what she felt, but it escaped her each time. It seemed to be something impersonal, a sort of universal misery in things, a kind of freemasonry of tragedy into which, by the medium of her own distress, she had been formally admitted. Whatever it was, it seemed to grow upon her as the morning went on, gathering in intensity and volume, as if actual vibrations of misery were rolling, wave after wave, over her brain. She had felt something like this once before, during the war; but she had got rid of that by digging frantically in her father's garden. Here, in a New York apartment, there was no garden to dig in. It was about half-past eleven. She was already vaguely beginning to wonder whether she had the spirit to cook herself any lunch when the telephone rang. Lifting the receiver she was surprised to hear her husband's voice.

Richard hated telephoning. This was the first time, as it happened, that these two had ever talked together in this way.

She was still more surprised when she heard him say that he thought of following Ivan and Catharine down to Atlantic City and spending the night there. She was indeed so startled by the tone of his voice, which sounded abrupt and strange out of the receiver, that she could do nothing but say 'yes

– yes – yes—’ without any comment. He must have been anxious enough to avoid any comment, for he rang off suddenly in the end, having told her that the train he intended to take left at three o’clock.

Nelly sat down on the nearest chair, nonplussed, puzzled, bewildered, indignant. Had the death of Roger Lamb affected Richard as much as Catharine? But why Atlantic City? There were surely other places, country places in New Jersey, he could have rushed off to? Had Lamb’s death driven them all crazy? Surely Karmakoff and Catharine didn’t want him down there with them? And then, all in a moment, it dawned upon her that he was using the two lovers merely as a clumsy excuse, as an awkward blind, for his own devices. What he was really up to, no doubt, was going down there with Elise Angel! Lamb’s death had made him restless and defiant, as it had made these others restless and defiant, and he had resolved to follow their example and take some wilful plunge. It was curious that that boy’s death, instead of lifting them all into a calmer, clearer state of mind, seemed to have driven them into fiercer acts of self-assertion than they had ever dared to risk before!

The girl felt almost tempted, as she sat on the high chair by the table resting her chin in her hands, to attribute all these feverish movements to some influence of Roger Lamb emanating from the invisible world.

Was this capricious and chaste spirit trying to communicate to them all some utterly subversive doctrine of human relations, some secret of the abyss that contradicted all the normal traditions? Was the real law of the system of things nothing less simple than that every living person should fight unscrupulously for his own hand?

She rose to her feet and moved to the window. The little street below her was quiet enough; but from the great neighbouring thoroughfare came the roar of the motor-lorries carrying their merchandise from the warehouses and wharfs of the downtown quarter to the uptown department stores.

Along with that harsh persistent rumble, the very beating of the bold heart of the adventurous city, came a sort of challenge to her courage. Dared she too, as these others had done, shake off the fatalism of the Old World and strike resolutely and swiftly for what she wanted?

She turned from the window and looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was only a quarter to twelve. Richard's train did not leave for three hours yet.

She stood in the middle of the room biting her lip and pondering deeply. Then with a sudden start she rushed into her bedroom and began putting on her outdoor shoes and her best hat.

A great and desperate resolution had formed itself in her mind. She would go and see Elise Angel.

The effort with which she prepared for this daring move was the most extreme she had ever made. It was like the effort required by an unarmed hunter who walks straight up to a crouching tiger, seeking to dominate it with his eyes.

She was out of the house by the time the chimes in the Metropolitan Tower sounded twelve o'clock. She took the subway at Houston Street and sat bolt upright in the crowded car, her lips tightly compressed and her heart violently beating. What she felt in her inmost soul was that she was fighting for her unborn child, and this thought gave her a defiant courage.

She got out at Columbus Circle and proceeded to walk resolutely eastwards, skirting the southern edge of Central Park.

She was not oblivious to the aggressive newness of everything round her and the crushing challenge of the huge hotels and the portentous apartment houses.

Through the iron railings she could see great blocks of huge grey stone emerging from the midst of enbrowned grass and melancholy shrubs.

It was as if the skeleton bones of the primitive rock basis of all this grandiose architecture were insisting upon its own share in this orgy of triumphant matter. Nelly felt as though all this iron and marble and stone were consciously piling itself up against her frail human weakness. She touched the park railings with one of her hands and a stain of dusty rust came off upon her glove. Never had she felt so entirely alone in the world. She experienced a sickening sensation of nostalgia, of longing for her Sussex hills. Tears came into her eyes as she thought of her father, unable to help her, however desperately she called for help. The longing for home grew so intense as she moved on, between the rocks of the park and the mountainous buildings that she was conscious of a definite pain in the pit of her stomach, something quite distinct from the sense she had of bearing the burden of her child.

But in spite of her weakness she moved steadily on; and when she came to the great hotels that surrounded the flamboyant gilded statue, the most unsympathetic spot on the face of the globe, she found herself able to cross the pretentious avenue and turn northwards along it without losing her self-control.

Compared with this terrible centre of uptown fashion, how warm and friendly and human and mellow was that unassuming Greenwich Village which she had left!

She had never till this moment realized what the prodding thrust of unmitigated newness, armed with the arrogance of wealth, is able to do to the frail human heart into which it drives its wedge.

She turned eastwards at length, out of the great avenue with its palatial enormities, into a comparatively quiet street that seemed to her to possess something of the massive reticence of London.

It was a quarter to one when Nelly finally arrived at the door of the apartment house where her rival lived.

She was by this time so physically exhausted that a sort of obstinate recklessness took the place of her former agitation.

She rang the bell and asked to see Miss Angel.

‘What name?’ demanded the braided official.

Nelly had one second of hesitation and then she said quietly, ‘Mrs Richard Storm.’

She had a moment of faintness while the man clicked at his telephone board and talked to the apartment overhead; but a few moments’ rest on a polished bench and a drastic effort of her will saved her from collapse.

‘Miss Angel says will you please go straight up,’ announced the man presently. ‘Second floor and first door on the left.’

She entered the elevator, worked by a Negro boy, and emerging at the designated level knocked at the dancer’s door. She was admitted by Thérèse and ushered straight into the luxurious sitting room with its oriental rugs and settees.

The servant closed the door behind her and she found herself alone with the owner of the apartment.

Elise rose from one of the cushioned lounges and advanced towards her with an air of regal indulgence.

‘I’m so glad to make your acquaintance, Mrs Storm,’ she murmured, with the sort of inclination of the head that some barbarian queen might have given to a casual prisoner doomed to die. ‘Please sit down. No! No! This one’s much nicer. There! we’ll sit together here. What a child you are; and oh! how pretty you are! I don’t wonder Richard’s so in love with you.’

She made a half-movement as if she would have touched Nelly's hand, but something in the face that was turned towards her cut her gesture short.

'I came to see you,' Nelly began in a voice that sounded hard and strange, 'because I wanted you to know exactly what you're doing, what you've done.'

'My dear child, I've done nothing. You've come to me on a wild-goose chase. Your husband and I must have been old friends when you were in short frocks. How pretty you must have looked in those days!'

'I came to see you,' Nelly repeated, completely disregarding her words, 'because I wanted you to understand things; and not be able to plead ignorance of the ruin you are causing.'

Elise Angel lifted her eyebrows. 'What a dramatic little person you are! I don't myself see this ruin you talk of. *You* don't look in the least "ruined". And as for Richard – why he, even *you* must admit, looks a great deal better since I first picked him up. It wasn't your fault I daresay. It was simply want of money. But when I think of how wretchedly thin and miserable he was that day, and how happy he looks now, I can't say I feel as if "ruin" were the right word for what I have done.'

A look of such strange intensity flickered over Nelly's face as she opened her lips to reply to this, that the great artist by her side drew in her breath and stared at her in a sort of puzzled wonder. The girl seemed hardly to have heard what the other actually said. It was as if her look answered some unspoken word, some word that passed between them quite independently of any uttered sound. Nelly spoke again:

'You don't really love him. I am glad of that. That clears up a great deal. If you really loved him I should feel differently to you. I don't know whether I should hate you or not, but I should feel differently.'

Elise looked at her with a deeper bewilderment than ever. There was something about Nelly's self-possession that took the situation out of her hands. As long as it had been a matter of dramatic gesture and physical dominance she had held the lead; but the lead was taken away from her now, the girl of twenty-two seeming to represent an older, deeper experience of life.

'So you came to me to find out *that*,' said Elise Angel.

'I came to you so that you should know what you've done to me. You've killed something in me that can never revive. You are a successful woman, Miss Angel; you're what the world calls a genius. But you are a cruel woman and a heartless one. You are just as much a murderess as if you'd killed me. You *have* killed me, in a sense. I don't suppose you care. I know you don't care. But I wanted you to know once and for all how one person feels about you. I feel towards you as I should feel towards any other perfectly heartless criminal, towards any other person who is capable of killing things. You've killed my life, Miss Angel; though no doubt I shall go on *living*. One does, you know.' Nelly's voice had shown no sign of nervous tension as she uttered these words. There were no tears in her eyes. When she had finished she clasped her fingers tightly together and sat very straight, looking in front of her. Her attitude seemed to say, 'I have spoken for my own satisfaction rather than for any desire to make you understand me. And *now* I may just as well sit here and think, as sit anywhere else.'

'I suppose it's never occurred to you,' said Elise Angel, 'that I was a friend of Richard years and years before you came on the scene. One has to judge things by their general effects. And I can't say his life with you seems to have made him so very happy. He left me full of radiant spirits to go to England; and I find him here thin, miserable, half-starved, working in a wretched office! Of course I know he has to support you; but it seems to me when a man gives his name to a woman he deserves at least to be looked after a bit.'

Very slowly Nelly unclasped her tightly locked fingers, and turned her head towards her rival. The thought flashed through her mind, *He has been telling her about Robert*, and for the first time during this interview there was aroused in her a ferment of real vindictiveness. Out of the depths of her being this evil poison rose to the surface, corroding her more honourable indignation and turning it into bitter gall. It rose to the surface from that deep cistern of malice which is one of the unfathomable secrets of mortality.

As usually happens in these cases the cause of this particular anger was a misunderstanding. It was unfair. It was unjust. For Richard had far too much pride to breathe a word to Elise on such a matter as Canyot's relations with his wife – those picnic lunches in the painter's studio were quite unknown to the dancer.

'He lost his money,' said Nelly. 'The Paris people failed him. I've had to go short of things as well as he. But it's no use trying to explain. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters very much now. It's a mere incident to you of course; but incidentally it has destroyed a thing that was really beautiful – quite as beautiful I daresay as your wonderful dancing.'

Elise rose slowly to her feet at this. 'That's the worst of you good domestic women,' she said. 'There's always a point where you begin to scold like fish-wives.' She walked to the mantelpiece and back again, the texture of her gown hanging about her figure in clinging folds, folds that were as statuesque and classical as those that fall about the figures known as the Three Fates among the Elgin Marbles. 'It's all sex,' she went on, standing erect in front of her visitor and looking down upon her. 'Your anger against your husband; your anger against me. You talk of my heartlessness and cruelty. Do you suppose I *asked* your Richard to make love to me? Do you suppose I'd care a jot if he stopped making love to me tomorrow? I don't care a fig about *that*, one way or another. *That* means nothing at all with men. You ought to know it means nothing; and you would know it, only you are blinded by sex. Suppose *I* were married to him and he was playing with *you*, I might be furious; I probably should be, but I shouldn't deceive myself about it. I shouldn't use grand language about it. I should know it was all this wretched sex illusion, his unfaithfulness and my wretchedness about his unfaithfulness – both of them illusion.'

Having uttered this tirade Elise looked at Nelly as if challenging her to respond. Nelly did not even lift her eyes. She seemed to look through the goddess-like figure before her as if it had been a thing of transparent mist.

'You have killed my happiness,' the young girl repeated. 'You have killed it without scruple or thought. You have no human kindness in you. You are thoroughly heartless. You will always be a bad selfish woman, a woman without pity. And sooner or later your dancing will end. You will get stiff and heavy and dull. And then perhaps you will remember the girl whose heart you killed and who came to tell you what you had done!'

She rose from her seat as she spoke and the two women stood looking at each other with that deep look of infinite understanding and infinite contempt which is one of the most characteristic achievements of nature's laws.

Elise, the artist, felt herself in this struggle weaker and less implacable than her more normal rival. And it was her sense of this advantage in the other that made her toss her proud head and burst into a bitter laugh.

'You silly pretty child!' she cried, moving towards the door.

Nelly followed her; but when the door had been opened and she stood on the threshold, the accumulated indignation within her burst forth. 'I'm glad

I came to you,' she said bitterly. 'I know you now for the kind of thing you are.'

'What you really came for,' retorted the dancer, 'was to try and persuade me to give Richard up.'

'You can't give him up – because he's never belonged to you. You've never loved him, not one little bit! And *he* – he's only infatuated with you, as he might be with any other woman of your sort. There's no real link between you and there never can be.'

'There's a much closer link between us than *you* can understand. But goodbye – I wish you joy of your precioul s possession.'

The dancer's eyes were blazing with anger now. But Nelly looked straight into her face. 'It may interest you to know that Richard and I are expecting to have a child. I ought not really to have risked the shock of this interview. You can better understand now, perhaps, how impertinent and ill-bred you seem to me in coming between us just now. You talked of illusion. But it seems to me that the illusion is yours and a crude and vulgar one. It is the illusion of thinking that you could do anything worse to me than destroy my happiness. *That* you have done by your interference. But your power for evil stops there.'

Having flung this parting shot the young girl turned her back on her enemy and without waiting for the elevator ran down the two flights of stairs and walked out of the building.

She moved now with a very different step from the one with which she had approached the place. Some curious power of battle seemed to possess her, quite different from anything she had felt before. She emerged into the great gaudy avenue with her nerves strung-up and her heart bitter and hard.

There was a child leaning over the stone fountain in front of the Plaza Hotel whose appearance made her, for a moment, recall what she herself had once been; a flicker of faint amusement crossed her face as she thought of those early days and how far she had travelled since then. Had all this happened in Sussex, she thought, would she have had the courage to fight so fiercely for her own hand as she was prepared to do now? Was she too, like the rest, acquiring a new spirit in this New World?

She paused and looked at the watch on her wrist. It was nearly two o'clock. She remembered that her husband's train left at three. From where did these Atlantic City trains start? The Pennsylvania Station! Yes, that was it. She had seen someone off from that very place only a few weeks ago.

She mounted to the top of one of the green buses, and then left it at Thirty-third Street for a cross-town car.

Walking down the stately arcade of the grandest of all railway stations, she paused at the top of the great flight of granite steps leading into the enormous concourse.

She was impressed, even in the midst of her agitated thoughts, by the superb magnificence of that imperial architecture. The feelings that passed through her must have resembled those of some unhappy Celtic captive, conveyed with her unborn child into the forum of the classical city. In spite of herself she was conscious of a sort of exultation as she looked at these huge columns and embossed roof. Something in the tremendousness of that weight of primitive stone, measured and carved in such grand outlines, lifted her above herself and beyond herself. Here at any rate was a beauty and nobility that had something in common with her Sussex Downs.

What amazing cooperation between brain and hand had been needed to produce a thing like this! She found herself thinking suddenly of an argument in support of Karmakoff's theories; an argument based on the difference between this building and the vulgar individualistic palaces on the avenue she had just left!

She lifted her head and tried to read the time by the huge clock which hung above her; but she was too close beneath it for the great hands to be intelligible. She felt as if she had indeed reached some fulcral or pivotal point in space where time issued its mandates but was itself obliterated by some formidable super-time.

She looked at her own watch. It was twenty-five minutes past two. The thought struck her, how living and human a thing a timepiece was, whether large or small, and how terribly like little goblins – so nice or so hateful – these ‘ones’ and ‘twos’ and ‘threes’ and all the rest of them were!

Suddenly she remembered she had had no lunch. After hesitating for a moment between the spacious restaurant on one side and the lunch counter on the other, she hurriedly entered the latter place. Seating herself on one of the revolving stools she ordered a cup of coffee and a roll. She was not sufficiently accustomed to this kind of public feeding to be quite at her ease. The long counters were not crowded; but to her English fancy every eye there was regarding her with a questioning stare, and the Negro who waited upon her embarrassed her by his Southern affability.

She kept her eye on the clock while she ate, anxious to make sure she caught her husband before he went past the barrier to his train; and at twenty minutes to three she paid her bill and ran down the granite steps.

It was only when she reached the iron gates marked atlantic city express that she realized how vague her notions were as to what she would do when her husband did appear.

She had come here blindly to see him, just as blindly and instinctively as she had gone to see Elise. In neither case had she formulated any project. In both cases a vague fighting spirit had driven her on.

Would Elise be with him when he came to the train? She had not precisely thought of *that*, though she had suspected that they were going down there together. But how could the dancer escape from her engagement at the theatre? *That*, again, was an aspect of the affair that she had not considered.

Without losing sight of the iron barrier, whose gate was already opened now, Nelly ran quickly to a newspaper stand and possessed herself of an *Evening Post*.

Returning to her place of observation she rapidly turned over the pages of this paper until she came to the theatre announcements.

She had no difficulty in finding the theatre notice she wanted and the first thing that met her eyes was the phrase, ’Change of Programme’. The name of Elise Angel was not mentioned at all! Hurriedly she scanned the opera and concert notices. Yes! there it was. Beginning next Saturday at the Morgan Hall,’ a series of Classical Dances by the famous Elise Angel from Paris’. So the woman was just now entirely free, and that was the reason why Richard was hurrying down to Atlantic City!

As the full force of this discovery dawned upon her she realized how far she had been from actually grasping the situation in its true meaning. She had, after all, only half believed it. She had, after all, really expected to find her husband *alone* here – and either to persuade him not to go, or to go down with him herself.

It was now suddenly borne in upon her that he was actually coming, with Elise, here to this barrier, to go off together to the great pleasure place.

By one of those sudden telepathic flashes of insight which remain at present inexplicable, but to which women are more subject than men, and women in Nelly’s condition most subject of all, she knew in a single moment that her husband and Elise were, at that very second, coming down the arcade.

With an instinct of desperate panic she fled across the aisle of this cathedral of commerce and slipped into the waiting room. Here, pressing her face to the glass, she watched the iron gate she had just quitted, her body cold as ice and her hands trembling.

Yes! There they were. There they came!

She drew back from the window as if she had been shot and, covering her face with her hands, sank into one of the waiting-room seats.

Here she remained absolutely motionless; her body heavy as lead, a curious dull pain in her forehead, and all her pulses numbed.

The last traveller of the three o’clock train hurried through the closing gates. The trainmen on the platform, below the iron stairs, blew their whistles … Richard and Elise, seated opposite one another in a Pullman car, sighed a mutual sigh of miserable tension, half-relief and half-remorse; while the great clock above the steps moved forward its hand, oblivious, indifferent, worked by punctual machinery.

Chapter 19

THREE DAYS AFTER their departure from the Pennsylvania Station Richard and Elise were walking together on the sands by the edge of the sea. He had sent a telegram to his office begging them to give him a brief holiday and promising to send them all necessary copy by mail. He had written briefly to Nelly – a letter full of half lies in which he announced that he would return with Ivan and Catharine in a few days.

His time with Elise had been a turbulent one, full of violent quarrels and passionate reconciliations. As they drifted together now, side by side along the water's edge, they were engaged in bitter recrimination.

Above them, supported on wooden trestles, stretched the famous board-walk, frequented even then, at the end of the autumn, by a gay and noisy crowd.

On the further side of the board-walk a long line of small wooden shops offered the visitors to that newfangled promenade every sort of fantastic novelty.

Richard and Elise, absorbed in their quarrel, moved along the brink of the ocean until these shops began to thin out and disappear. But even beyond where the shops ended, that immense boardwalk continued to extend its length. It was borne in upon Richard's mind that by use of its ironwork and its woodwork the American public loved to separate itself from nature and to dominate nature with a certain brutal contempt.

Not a living soul except themselves was to be seen walking upon the sand or close to the water. Directly the actual bathing season was over, during which, in their super-moral costumes, they had lain about in the hot sunshine, all the visitors to Atlantic City congregated upon those high-erected boardings and peered triumphantly at the elements in the intervals between moving-picture shows and flirtation.

Where Richard and Elise were now walking, the noises of traffic and entertainment had ceased; the high bare boards had a look quite peculiar to themselves and different from any other inanimate objects in the world.

They were curiously melancholy, these projections of woodwork, but not melancholy in the manner in which most new human erections are depressing and sad when contrasted with so old a thing as the sea: they were full of peculiar loneliness and desolation of their own – and one not devoid of an appeal to the imagination – but it was a desolation quite different from that produced by deserts or moors or marshes. It was a negative desolation, wherein the mere absence of humanity in a place obviously built for humanity evoked something peculiarly forlorn.

Still exchanging words of cruel and wounding bitterness, such as only those who are physically attracted without being temperamentally congenial are capable of flinging at one another, the two lovers were soon out of reach of the town altogether; the famous board-walk had dwindled to a narrow plank path.

Here they found themselves in a world of more attractive melancholy. Beyond the sea bank there stretched a vast expanse of reeds and rushes, and by the edge of the sand dunes where they were now wandering grew all manner of glaucous sea growths mingled with wild purple asters.

Every now and then they might have seen a long line of wild geese, travelling at an enormous height in the air, and sending down that peculiar sound, by the creaking of their wings, which can be only expressed by the syllables *hank-hank or honk-honk*.

But they did not look up at the sky at all just then; and the lines of flying wild fowl meant nothing to them; and the vast grey plateau of the ocean meant nothing to them; and the shells upon the white sand meant nothing to them.

They were two human beings, engaged in the immemorial occupation of sticking poisoned arrows into one another’s hearts. Absorbed in this delicate pastime, they were oblivious to all else in the round world.

The real cause of their disagreement was the shock to their nerves of this reckless adventure and the simple fact that being neither of them young they lacked the resilience to recover themselves.

Remorse in Richard made a bitter and poisonous background for new romance. Not for one single moment could he really obliterate his wife’s figure – silent and upbraiding, ironical and mocking, beautiful with the beauty of youth, and bearing his child at her heart.

The very air of gallantry which the pleasure city exhaled, like the sea breath of Aphrodite, was bitter and vulgar in his nostrils. All this transitory woodwork, all these painted wooden shops and flaunted showhouses seemed thin, sad and insubstantial to his spirit. The immense waste of November waters, shot with pale white sunshine or desolately grey, seemed to reduce all these theatrical attempts at pleasure and passion to a sort of fantastic Maya or unreal illusion, a gaudy ripple upon a vast emptiness.

Too sick at heart, too cruelly torn between the two women, to enjoy the escape which now offered itself as they left the houses behind and began to breathe the unsullied breath of the Jersey coast, Richard had a strange sense, as he wrangled with his companion in one of those interminable lovers’ quarrels which seem like elemental forces, that he and she were will-less automata, doomed to hurt each other for the amusement of unseen spectators.

Struggling to break loose from the exhausting logic of anger which poisoned the air about them, he stopped at last and began tracing patterns with his stick in the white sand.

He drew an ornamental *E* and a deeply indented *A* on that smooth surface. But no sooner had he done so than an angry contempt for his own sentiment made him erase both of them with a violent gesture. The dancer's face was pale and sardonic as she watched him; her red lips curved in a hard significant smile.

'You don't know what the word *love* means,' she said suddenly.

'I wasn't writing *love*,' he retorted childishly.' Can't you read English? I was making your initials.'

'In sand,' she said.

'Well! they're gone now, anyhow.'

'It's the fact of your being English, I suppose,' she remarked, looking at him with a misery of indignation. 'I hate all you English. Your feelings are clotted up with clods of earth – gross, thick, heavy clods of earth! Not one of you can be clear and free and honest. You worship what *is*, just because it *is*. It's worse than materialism, it is absolute deadness! And what's more you're not content until everyone's as dead as you are. Dead words, dead sentiment, dead hearts! You've no real courage in you … without courage everything becomes initials written on sand!'

Richard's face assumed the bewildered expression of a child that is beaten for an unknown fault. His superficial cynicism was swallowed up in real trouble. He looked at her like a dumb flogged animal.

His bewilderment increased her anger.

'These three days with you have killed my love,' she said. 'You've done the unpardonable thing … and you've made it worse by your stupidity. It would have been far better if you'd *known* what you were doing. It has been like being tied to a corpse!'

'I thought we'd been so happy,' he murmured.

‘That’s just it,’ she cried, ‘it’s always *happiness, happiness, happiness* with you! Have you *no* idea of great, beautiful, terrible things that have to be paid for by the loss of all that? Happiness? My God! It means *comfort* to you – a nice, easy, complacent English comfort.’

‘It’s you who are not honest,’ he muttered. ‘Why can’t you confess the truth? You’re angry with me for quite a different reason from the one you’re talking about.’

She flashed at him a look of splendid fury, a look that made her so beautiful that he was completely disarmed.

‘What reason?’ she flung out.

‘Oh you know …’ He hesitated. ‘What’s the use of my saying it? It’s you who drive me on till you force me to say these things.’

‘Tell me what you were thinking. Tell me! Quick!’

‘It was nothing,’ he stammered. ‘We both think all sorts of unfair malicious things.’

‘You must tell me. I must know. What was it?’

‘It was natural enough … I daresay it’s not true. I meant that you’re angry with me because I felt remorseful about Nelly.’

‘Ah!’ She drew in her breath and her eyes grew dark against the pallor of her skin. Of course you’d say that. Being the most ill-bred thing you could possibly say, it’s characteristic of course. As it happens, it’s untrue. But if it *were* true, would that let you out? Can’t you see that such remorse with you is only fear for your own skin? Or are you really such a baby as to think that you can make your wife happy by holding her hand?’

‘You are very unfair,’ said Richard. ‘I can’t help hating to make a person suffer.’

‘We all suffer,’ retorted the dancer. ‘And the worst cause of our suffering is a man like you who thinks he can carry an ointment pot about with him to heal the wounds he makes. Haven't you even got the courage of your callousness? Haven't you even got the courage to face the fact that you are utterly and profoundly selfish? Must you go on slipping out of it and evading it and covering it up, to the very end?'

'I don't slip out of anything,' protested Richard. 'I wish I did!'

'It's because of this that your poetry is so bad,' she went on. 'It's only your ingrained conceit that makes you think it anything but thoroughly bad. You deceive yourself far more deeply than you deceive anyone else.'

Richard's face assumed the dogged obstinate look of a much persecuted mule, and this seemed to hound her on to further malicious stabs.

'You talk of bringing your philosophy into your poetry. My good man, you must realize once for all that your poetry is a fraud, a fake, a piece of rank charlatanism. You're the very last person to be a poet. The whole business is an elaborate edifice of humbug!'

'If my poetry isn't real,' said Richard, 'nothing in my existence is real.'

'Nonsense! Stuff and nonsense! You've got a sound critical faculty. You're receptive enough. You're capable of doing very good honest literary work. But you're so ridiculously proud that you pretend that all this is nothing. You must be the great poet of the age – or you will sulk in your tent and do nothing at all.'

'You are most frightfully unfair,' he began. 'No one can tell for certain where their power is until they—'

'Until they stop lying,' she interrupted. 'Don't you understand that art is a thing connected with character?'

'I thought it was a thing connected with imagination,' said Richard sulkily.

The great dancer fixed her eyes on a sailing ship far out to sea.

‘God knows what it is, my dear,’ and she sighed deeply. ‘I only know it is a thing we seem unable to get into our life with each other. But it may be my fault quite as much as yours. I’m sorry, Richard. I’m sorry I’ve been bad. Shall we go back?’

He took her hand and kissed it and they began slowly retracing their steps. They were silent. With the splash of the long waves breaking beside them an infinite sadness gathered about their hearts, the kind of sadness which no argument can destroy and no hope can lift; the sadness which is of the very nature of life itself, when the distractions of desire and curiosity are for the moment in abeyance.

They had not moved far in the direction of the town when they heard themselves called by name from one of the high ridges of sand overgrown with grass that separated them from the marshes on the left. They stopped and turned. Two figures rose from a hollow place in the sand dunes and came running down the slope towards them.

Catharine’s extravagant greeting of Elise was a reminder to Richard of how small a place in the great world he himself held in comparison with his companion. Elise had never met Karmakoff; and before she condescended to notice Richard at all, the enthusiastic girl eagerly introduced him to the dancer.

The encounter between Elise and Ivan was like the encounter between two feline animals of the same jungle. They watched each other furtively, measuring one another’s strength and weighing in the balance one another’s magnetism. Her accumulated anger against Richard made the imperious dancer ready for any kind of an emotional plunge; the womanish eyes of the cynical Russian, with their strange green lights, dilated in amorous reciprocity to the furtive challenge which she gave him.

Poor impassioned Catharine had already wearied him with her unsophisticated emotion. She had irritated him, too, by queer fits of deep depression in which she had returned to her childish scruples, and incidentally she had made the situation more strained by constant references to Roger Lamb.

When the four of them moved on together towards the town, it appeared inevitable that Karmakoff and the dancer should outstrip the others – vehemently and passionately absorbed, as it seemed, in what they had to say to one another.

‘One day you’ll be coming to Moscow,’ Ivan remarked, among other things. ‘Our people ought to have you. You’re precisely what they *must* have. They’ll give you authority over our whole art movement, which owes so much to your genius already.’

‘There’s nothing left now in the world except art,’ sighed Elise.

‘And the only way to get anything beautiful,’ added Karmakoff, ’is to put an end to the economic struggle.’

‘Can that really be done?’

‘It can be tried.’

‘By force?’

‘Why not?’

‘But force only breeds force.’

‘Words! my dear lady. It’s force when you prune a tree, but what *that* produces is fruit.’

‘It does me good to talk to you. I don’t know why.’

‘I have waited long to make your acquaintance. We were destined to meet, sooner or later.’

‘You’ve seen my work?’

‘I’ve seen you nine times this season.’

‘Do you like me better when I’m Greek or when I’m Christian?’

‘You are never wholly either. You are a woman Dionysus.’

‘When a woman Dionysus really does appear it will bring all our misery to an end.’

‘By bewitching us into thinking it isn’t misery?’

‘By undermining misery with tragedy.’

‘Ah! you separate those two; so do I. That’s where Cathy and I quarrel. She enjoys the sentiment of misery and loathes its boredom. I am never miserable.’

‘What are you, Ivan Karmakoff?’

‘I am never happy. I know that. And I am never unhappy. I am a person who works and plays.’

‘Is our dear Catharine part of the play?’

‘You know the answer to that, or you wouldn’t ask it! Catharine and I belong to two different worlds.’

‘And *we* belong to the same world?’

‘You will always be a symbol to me; of what I live for.’

‘And that is?’

‘To bring a little order into chaos.’

‘I am the most chaotic person in creation.’

‘You are the greatest artist in America.’

‘What’s the use of being that if no one understands me?’

‘Doesn’t Storm understand you?’

‘I’m afraid my Richard lives in the same world as your Catharine. Poor darlings! They are both children.’

‘Where and when have you and I talked like this before?’

‘In Nineveh probably, or in Carthage.’

‘Do you believe that kind of thing?’

‘I didn’t – an hour ago.’

‘Don’t bring me into your play, my friend. I belong to your work.’

‘You belong to the object of my work.’

‘Where did you get those woman’s eyes from? I shall think of them when I dance next week.’

‘Neither of us is pure woman or pure man. That’s why we understand each other.’

‘What are we?’

‘We’re messengers of the forgotten gods.’

‘We ought to give the password, then – the secret sign.’

‘We’ve given that already.’

‘Have we? Without knowing it?’

‘We are messengers. We know nothing.’

‘I thought when I first saw you just now, that you were the most brutal materialist I’d ever met.’

‘I thought you were the most unhappy woman I’d ever met.’

‘Now we have been flung together we must say everything.’

‘And prove our kinship?’

‘And make the sign of the meeting of messengers.’

‘And leave our play for a day and a night?’

‘How can we do that, Ivan Karmakoff?’

‘Dare you, if I dare? An interlude, a resting place.’

‘I thought you were the most cynical realist I’d ever seen.’

‘I thought your mouth had the look of a thing hunted by dogs; a torn mouth, a bleeding mouth, a mouth of suffering.’

‘Did you try to imagine what it would be like to heal that hurt?’

‘I imagined nothing. I knew that I had been sent for that.’

‘Because of our both being messengers?’

‘Because of our purpose. Because of the clearing up of chaos.’

‘What nonsense we’ve been talking, Ivan Karmakoff! These seagulls must think us the biggest prigs they’ve ever listened to.’

‘We have to get used to being thought prigs – by seagulls. The wild geese up there would understand us.’

‘No doubt they would! But I’m afraid our dear pair of tame geese back there wouldn’t! To come to a practical question. How are we to manage? How are we to see a little more of each other?’

‘Your new programme doesn’t begin until next week, does it?’

‘No, my friend. It doesn’t.’

‘When has Richard to go back?’

‘Tomorrow. But oh, dear me! let’s have none of this manoeuvring, you green-eyed savage! I’m not married to Richard and you’re not married to Catharine. Let’s go straight to our hotels, get my things and your things and take the train back to New York.’

‘And leave letters explaining everything?’

‘And leave letters explaining *nothing*! What’s the use of living in a modern city if you cannot live in a modern way? We’ll treat it simply as a joke. We’ll write humorously. It is a joke, you know. Why shouldn’t we go back to New York together? Richard has been telegraphing his wife that he was with you and Catharine. Well! He *will* be with Catharine!’

‘And he’ll go back with her to Nelly?’

‘Oh *you* know the lady too? I’ve just met her. She’s as pretty as a picture. But oh dear me! *how* English the poor dear is!’

‘I don’t think our gods have given us any message to the English.’

‘They’ve warned us to run away from them. And that’s what we’ll do.’

They both turned round at that, and surveyed the long line of sand and spindrift that lay behind them white and chilly, lit up by the November sun.

A darkly outlined breakwater, about a mile away, broke the line of their vision. Their companions had evidently not yet arrived at that point. The two reckless ones had walked so quickly during their strange dialogue that they were already out of reach of pursuit.

‘You’re sure you won’t worry about Catharine?’ remarked Elise as they made their way up from the sands to the board-walk above.

‘Not if you don’t worry about Storm,’ retorted Karmakoff.

They exchanged a glance of intimate understanding and allowed their eyes, which certainly had a queer resemblance in colour and expression, to meet and hold each other’s gaze.

‘The world would say we were following a funny road to our purpose,’ murmured the woman, as they threaded their way through the crowd.

‘You’re thinking of what I said about reducing chaos,’ responded the man. ‘But it’s only when you’ve got that ingredient in your own veins and are using it with your brain that you can do anything. To bottle up chaos doesn’t help. It has to be ridden on and bitted and bridled. Most people’s minds are burial grounds of that kind of thing, sprinkled with dead flowers. We’re not leaving our friends for the sake of pleasure. We’re leaving them for the sake of our work. We need one another at this juncture, Elise. Perhaps, later, it will be different!’

Again their eyes met and clung together in a long mysterious questioning look. And after that they both were silent.

‘Perhaps later it will be different!’ the dancer repeated under her breath; and there awoke within her a sickening envy of that rare company of faithful souls who have the power of loving once and not again.

Then as the great fantastic hotel loomed above them, like the dream palace of some mad king of Thule, the old Dionysian mood surged up once more. ‘I’ve found him at last!’ she whispered to herself. ‘The free spirit worthy of me. It will be easy enough if he loves me. But if I love him – let him beware!'

And in her heart she caught a strain of that southern music to which she was wont to dance when the northern harmonies grew too heavy for the fire within her.

A couple of hours later Richard stood in the hallway of the Hotel Ransom watching Catharine read Karmakoff's letter.

As he saw that tall willowy figure shiver from head to foot and bend and sway under the blow, he thought within himself quite suddenly – *We are all wrong, we irresponsible ones! Suffering goes deeper than joy and to save from suffering is better than to give pleasure*.

When the girl turned to him at last, mechanically crumpling up the wicked note in her hand, the look upon her face went to his heart as nothing in his whole life had ever done before. For Catharine had nothing of Nelly's pride, and to see her inarticulate suffering, nakedly exposed before him, made him hate the whole business of love and the whole system of the world in which such things were possible.

It was even worse when the girl tried to smile at him, tried to take the thing lightly. She was so smitten that not a tear came to her eyes. She just swayed backwards and forwards and smiled, her hands fumbling weakly, foolishly, meaninglessly, at the piece of paper which she held. She kept thrusting it into the envelope and taking it out again; and her words tripped over one another blunderingly, confusedly, like the words of a person in a fever.

Richard experienced such a pang of pity for her that he felt as though his whole philosophy of life would be different from that moment. 'Damn these cruelties!' he said to himself. 'This can't be endured!'

They had gone first to his own hotel, thinking to find them there. His feelings when he read Elise’s letter had, even then, been swallowed up in his concern for Catharine.

The link between himself and the dancer had been already stretched to the breaking point. *I must get her back to New York at once*, he thought. *I must take her to Nelly*. His naïve dependence upon his wife’s powers of comfort did not arouse any sense of humour in him, did not appear to him as singular under the circumstances.

He could be cynical and sardonic enough sometimes, but at other times he behaved with the innocent egoism of a spoilt child. Elise being disposed of, his natural instinct was to go straight back to Nelly. *She need never know, except in vague suspicion*, he thought, *how things worked out down here*.

Catharine was like wax in his hands during the rest of that day. She let him help her pack her things; she let him convey her to the station and place her by his side in the compartment, without a word.

He wondered, as he saw her lean sideways against the edge of the window, whether she wasn’t half-asleep, whether indeed she hadn’t swallowed some sort of drug. Once, however, when by a sudden movement forward he obtained a glimpse of her face he knew that she was only too completely in possession of her faculties. It was clear to him then that it was the blow to her heart which had deprived her body of all muscular resistance.

Chapter 20

IT WAS ABOUT nine o’clock in the evening when Richard and Catharine mounted the steps of the Charlton Street house.

Richard left the girl leaning helplessly against the wall of the passage, as if she were an umbrella or a stick that he had been carrying and, quickly turning the handle of the door, he entered the room.

The place was dark except for the light of a lamp in the street opposite. *Nelly’s gone to bed*, he thought. *But I* must *wake her, as Catharine’s here*. He could not help experiencing a certain cowardly relief at the girl’s presence, as it was an obvious raft of escape from immediate explanations. He struck a match and lit the gas. Then he went back into the passage. Leading in Catharine by the hand he placed her in that same big armchair where he had first made her acquaintance.

The girl looked at him out of hollow miserable eyes and murmured Nelly’s name.

‘Hush! my dear!’ he whispered. ‘It’s all right. I’ll wake her now and she’ll look after you.’

He opened the door of the bedroom and went in. The bed was unoccupied, and the empty room, left in perfect order, mocked him with its neatness as if with a leer of derisive contempt.

He went up to the dressing-table, entirely bare now of Nelly’s brush and comb and bottle of eau-de-cologne.

In the place of these things was a letter addressed to himself in Nelly’s girlish hand.

He returned to the living-room where Catharine was sitting exactly where he had left her, her eyes fixed in vacancy.

Standing under the gas burner he opened the note and read it. It ran as follows: ‘If you only hadn’t lied to me it would have been different. Why did you do it, Richard? How *could* you do it? I should have thought – but what’s the use of saying any more? If neither for my sake nor the child’s you can’t give up your pleasures, it’s no use pretending that you care for us. By the time you read this I shall be on the sea. Robert is sailing on the same ship. He will take me to Mrs Shotover’s. He wants me to divorce you, but I shall never do that. He is very angry with you and unhappy. I think I am myself too sad about everything to be angry ever again. Goodbye Richard. When you get tired of this person, as I know you will very soon, you will be sorry you forced me to leave you. I have to think of my child and I couldn’t endure it any more. You will never be able to understand what a woman feels. Perhaps it isn’t your fault altogether. I am afraid I must ask you to send me a *little* money, at regular intervals? I shall be happier when I see the Downs. Don’t be afraid I shall do anything rash. I feel only too clear-headed. It is the Village Laundry, not Ebstein’s, who come for our washing now. Goodbye. I am all right. The voyage won’t hurt me.’

The letter was signed ‘Nelly’ and there was a postscript to it containing one sentence: ‘Please keep in touch with Catharine, for the girl has no friends.’

Richard carefully folded up this letter and put it in his pocket. Then he took it out of his pocket and read it again very slowly. Then he carried it to the chimneypiece and placed it under a book.

He noticed casually as he did this that the elemental sprites, who accompany every human disaster with their satiric commentary, had arranged that the book under which he placed it should be the *Vita Nuova*. Well did he recall the romantic nonsense he had written for Nelly on the flyleaf of that book. But it served very well as a letter weight just then to keep that particular letter from blowing away!

He walked up and down the room several times trying to visualize Nelly on the ship. He felt no jealousy of Canyot at that moment. He felt only relief that his wife was not alone. But how he longed for her; for her voice, her look, her silent reproaches even! He had never longed so much for the presence of any human being.

At last he stopped in front of Catharine. What was to be done with the stricken girl?

‘Nelly has gone away,’ he said. ‘I’ve treated her badly and she’s gone away. She’s sailed for England.’

Catharine stared at him with a puzzled uncomprehending look. ‘Nelly’s left you?’ she murmured.

‘Yes – devil that I am! She’s treated me as I deserve and has gone off.’

‘Not alone?’

‘No, Robert Canyot’s with her.’

The absence of anything in his tone except self-abasement seemed to rouse Catharine’s pity.

‘Poor Richard!’ she murmured and stretched out one of her long arms towards him. That naïve gesture of sympathy from one so cruelly hit herself was too much for Richard’s self-control. He found himself on his knees by the side of the girl’s chair struggling with violent sobs that shook his whole frame. Still tearless herself Catharine smoothed his hair caressingly with her fingers. An onlooker would have been made aware at that moment of what an immense fund of passionate human feeling lay beneath that queer Greenwich Village smock-frock, coloured like a Matisse painting.

He rose to his feet in a little while, relieved by his outburst. One of the cynical demons that were always ready to whisper unpardonable things in his ear commented with sardonic interest on the fact that somewhere within his consciousness there was an actual throb of self-congratulation that he was still able to shed tears.

The question now presented itself vividly to his mind: what was to be done with Catharine?

The girl had crossed her knees and clasped her hands round them, and now sat staring blankly in front of her.

It struck his inner consciousness how queer a thing it was, this pathology of wounded love! How it seemed to be something impersonal, like a madness that fell upon a person out of the air, quite independently of the value or worth or nature of the object for which it vexed itself.

He looked at his watch. It was already past ten. ‘Shall I see you back to your flat?’ he said, touching the girl’s hand.

The idea of her room in Thirty-fifth Street, full of little objects associated with her friendship for Ivan, brought such a woebegone expression into Catharine’s face that he wished he had not suggested such a thing. But what else was to be done? He hesitated for a moment, looking helplessly round the apartment. Then he said, ‘All right. The best thing you can do is to stay right here, where you are. You shall sleep in Nelly’s room and I’ll pull my own bed into this room. Nobody will be any the wiser. And after all what does it matter? We’re both past fussing about things of that sort!’

She seemed relieved at his suggestion; and he got a grim satisfaction from the thought of that postscript in Nelly’s letter – *Look after Catharine. She has no friends*.

Having settled this matter he proceeded to drag the second of the two beds into the sitting room. Then he lit the gas under the stove so as to make them both some tea. He was touched by finding that Nelly had stocked their small cupboard with more provisions than he had ever seen there before.

He managed with difficulty to persuade the unhappy girl to swallow some oatmeal biscuits and a raw egg made palatable by the last drops of his brandy flask. These things and a cup of milkless tea formed their melancholy supper.

It was a curious situation, not likely to recur in either of their lives – sitting thus alone together beneath the same roof, while the man and the woman who had thrown them aside were no doubt drinking Olympian drinks in the sumptuous apartment so well known to Richard.

'I shall have to get another job,' said Catharine wearily. But Richard was relieved to hear her say even that; still more relieved when she didn't refuse the cigarette he proffered.

'How lucky Roger is to be safe out of the whole thing!' she remarked after a long silence.

'Well! we shall all be out of it before so very long!' responded Richard.

'I've got some morphia tablets in my room,' she added.

He laid his hand upon hers. 'You mustn't talk like that, Catharine,' he said sadly. 'You'll have to see it through, just as I shall. Sometimes I feel as if the whole mad business were a sort of dream and that when we wake up we shall be quite free from all this misery.'

'Do you mean death?'

'Yes. Death – but something else too. Anyway we should quite spoil what I mean by killing ourselves.'

The girl sighed. 'I wish I could understand better what is underneath it all. If there were any point in it, any purpose in it, it would be easier.' She added desperately, 'I would give my life for Ivan.'

'I have a sort of idea,' Richard went on, 'that after death all the people who care for each other come together without any of this wretched jealousy.'

‘I shall never bear to see him again, or her either!’ cried Catharine Gordon.

‘Some day,’ said Richard, ‘it may be completely different with these complications. The human race may learn to disentangle itself from its flesh and blood. It may learn to love without wanting to possess.’

‘Do you feel like that now?’ she asked him suddenly.

‘No, no, my dear; I’m far below such feelings. Don’t talk about me. I sometimes wonder whether I’ve got a heart at all.’

She looked at him with a puzzled frown and he fancied that she had been hurt by his words as if by something clumsy and banal.

‘You must never say a thing like that to anyone who loves you,’ she said earnestly.

Richard smiled. ‘Why not, my dear?’

Her answer was a surprise to him. ‘Because it’s unfair; because it’s mean and cunning!’

There was a considerable flicker of annoyance at that moment flung across ‘the lake of his mind’. Had the girl managed to pierce the core of a very subtle form of self-complacency and vanity? Her words certainly broke up Richard’s mood of superior protective strength. In some profoundly recondite way they gave him the sensation of being exposed. The feeling he derived from this sensation was not a pleasant one; he experienced that kind of unharmonious shock from it which, as he had noted on other occasions, gave a severer prod to his life illusion than anything else.

‘I expect you are right, Catharine,’ he muttered, resuming his walk up and down the room. He made that time a genuine effort to break the crust of egoism which imprisoned his soul. Yes, the girl was undoubtedly right. That vague self-accusation ‘I have no heart’ was only too obvious an example of a mental trick he was always playing himself – an unctuous salve of moral evasion with which he covered up drastic issues!

His analysis of his real inmost reaction to all these events revealed to him that he had been all the while, secretly and without any self-forgetful suffering, dramatizing his situation. He had been making it all a part of one long stream of not wholly intolerable occurrences, in the flowing tide of which the figure of Nelly herself, the figures of Elise and Catharine and all the rest, were there to be exploited, were there to be contemplated subjectively, as scenes in the human play which after all remained his play – whereof he was not only an actor on the stage but an appreciative critic in the gallery!

His thoughts whirled confusedly through his brain now as he paced that little room, his guest's purple stockings and white sand-shoes mingling with first one mental image and then another.

It cannot, he thought, be altogether selfish and contemptible to dramatize one's life and to detach one's self from it. Nelly never does that. Catharine never does. But surely Elise must do it, or she couldn't put so much art into her dancing. How is it then that I annoy Elise so much with the way my mind works? Why does she despise my poetry so? Poetry must, surely, be detached from a person's life and yet be the residuum of a person's life. Am I hopelessly inhuman and unnatural in all this?

Suddenly it occurred to him, as quite a new discovery, that it was queer that instead of being reduced to hopeless misery by his wife's departure he could occupy himself like this in cold-blooded abstract analysis!

Was it that, at the back of his mind, he felt confident that he had only to return to England, to receive Nelly's forgiveness and settle down happily with her as before? Or was it really that *nothing*, beyond extreme immediate physical pain, could break up the crust of his indurated egoism? Was he actually wanting in some normal human attribute; and did everything that occurred to him approach his consciousness through some vaporous veil like a thick sea mist? He began naïvely to wonder what the great artists of the world were like in these complicated human relations. It occurred to him that they must have the power of transfiguring the results of analysis and forcing the issue by the use of some sort of creative energy which the gods had completely denied to him.

Where was *his* place in the world then, he who was neither a normal human being nor a creative genius? Was he doomed for ever to live this wretched half-life, neither deeply happy nor deeply unhappy, cheated in some mysterious way of the prerogative of being born a man? He looked at the long tenuous figure of the young girl in the chair; and he felt, for one swift moment, as some fabulous *merman or neckan* might feel, as it craved for the human soul that had been denied it by destiny.

When Catharine was at last safely in bed in Nelly's room and he had kissed her goodnight and turned out her light, he felt amused to note how the mere fact of sleeping in the sitting room gave him a curious pleasure.

He lay for a long time before he went to sleep, smoking one cigarette after another, enjoying in spite of his conscience a certain primitive and heathen satisfaction at being alive at all in this mad complicated world; at being able to say still, with the royal villain in the famous drama – '*Richard is Richard – that is I am I.*'

His mind called up the image of Roger Lamb as he had last seen him. And with the thought of the dead boy he found himself recalling an interview which he himself had had with a great Paris specialist, when his heart troubled him in earlier days. 'Any extreme physical strain may finish you off,' the great man had warned him. He had thought of that verdict during his fit of exhaustion at the stage-door of Elise's theatre; he thought of it again now as he began to grow drowsy. ‘That would be a better way than morphia,’ he said to himself.

Chapter 21

RICHARD SLEPT LONG and heavily that night. Once he woke with a start, in complete bewilderment as to where he was and with a feeling that someone had called him by name. He sat up and listened; but if it had been a cry from Catharine she did not repeat it. He heard no sound from her room.

After that he fell into complete unconsciousness till Catharine herself aroused him with the news that breakfast would be ready in ten minutes.

The girl looked lamentably hollow-eyed as they sat down opposite each other. He surmised from her appearance that she had hardly slept at all; and this, in his morning mood of malicious irritation, made him almost angry with her. What right had she to punish him with a miserable face like that, when he had turned out of his room to make her comfortable?

Just as he was leaving for the office she suddenly said, ‘Would you like me to get your supper for you or shall I go away when I’ve washed up?’

The idea of coming back to a lonely room struck his mind at that moment as the one thing he couldn’t endure. ‘Will you do that?’ he rejoined eagerly. ‘Here’s a couple of dollars.’ And he placed the two notes on the table. ‘Then we can manage again as we did last night,’ he added. ‘I don’t suppose either of us cares for Greenwich Village gossip.’

So it was brought about that these two took up their queerly assorted and entirely chaste domicile together.

Catharine reverted to her former method of earning a little money by embroidering Russian smocks which she sold at one of the numerous little art shops which abounded in that vicinity. Richard sent off many passionate and penitent letters addressed to Furze Lodge and by every weekly mail received a brief acknowledgement from Nelly of the small sums he punctually dispatched to her.

He worked more assiduously at the office of *The Mitre* than he had ever done before, receiving sometimes a bonus from the editor for work done beyond his original contract.

But he was all the while anxiously looking out for some means of rehabilitating his literary fortunes. He had constantly in his mind the idea of sailing for England; but it was obviously impossible to do so until he had obtained some permanent income. He could not see himself arriving in Sussex without a cent. To present himself before his wife, not to speak of Mrs Shotover, penniless as well as disgraced, was more than he could contemplate.

The weeks and months dragged on and the innumerable circles of people in that cosmopolitan city began in their various ways to prepare to celebrate the far-off event which for a minority meant the birthday of a God, while for the majority it signified parties and presents and desperate attempts to defy Prohibition.

The afternoon of Christmas Eve found Catharine occupied in a pathetic effort to adorn their bachelor apartment with some sprigs of holly and mistletoe, purchased in Jefferson Market.

The girl had seen nothing of Karmakoff since that day at Atlantic City, and as far as she knew Richard had seen nothing of Elise. Her receptive nature, passively docile to the will of fate, had slipped insensibly into a sort of trance-like domesticity, the seclusion and regularity of which had a healing effect upon her wounded spirit. It was the first time in her life that she had felt herself to be *necessary* to another human being. The naïve way in which the incompetent Richard clung to her ministrations was a profound solace to her self-respect. Nothing but the feverish activity of that whirlpool of human effort which seethed and eddied around them could have enabled their association to pass uncriticized.

They invited no one to the flat and they went to see no one together. The few separate encounters they did have with former acquaintances led to no sort of inconvenience to either of them; and if one Greenwich Village *habitué* remarked to another that Cathy Gordon had 'moved downtown', the worst commentary that resulted was some such remark as, 'They say she's having an affair with that fellow in Charlton Street whose wife ran away.'

Richard did not mention to Nelly in any of his passionate love letters that he and her friend were living under the same roof. The instinct that prevented him doing this at first was an entirely unconscious one. It was Catharine herself who converted it into a deliberate and conscious repression.

'I'd rather you didn't say anything to Nelly about my being with you. She wouldn't understand it. And why should we agitate her unnecessarily when we know that if she *did* understand it she would be quite satisfied?'

Richard, amused at this innocent piece of sophistry, had not worried further about the matter. Since his conscience was clear, let the affair go! He had grown accustomed to Catharine's companionship. He had got fond of the girl; and his renewed loyalty to Nelly did not seem in any way impinged upon by this relationship. If any sort of scruple did flicker for a moment across his mind it was constantly being quelled by Nelly's reiterated requests that he should look after Catharine. Well! Catharine was looking after him. So all was as it should be!

On this Christmas Eve, while the young girl was standing upon a chair, holding in her hand two large bunches of holly with the intention of fixing them behind a print after Watteau, she heard a sharp knock at the door.

She hurriedly jumped down and cried, ‘Come in!’

To her amazement and indignation the door opened and admitted Elise Angel.

The dancer was wrapped in a black Spanish cloak which she promptly flung down upon a chair. She then quite calmly closed the door behind her and, folding her arms with a dramatic gesture, ejaculated the words, ‘So it’s as they told me! I didn’t believe it. It seemed too funny to be true.’

‘What seemed too funny to be true, Miss Angel?’

‘That you and Richard should be living together.’

‘We’re *not* living together!’

‘Well, that you should be here, then. It isn’t for outsiders of course to inquire any further.’

‘I’m expecting him back any moment; so unless you want to meet him I advise you to leave your message quickly.’

‘*Mon dieu!* We *have* changed from our little devoted Cathy! Richard must have been telling you fine stories about me.’

‘We’ve never spoken of you once. Not once. Will you sit down?’

The last words were uttered in a reluctantly softened voice. It was difficult in the presence of Elise Angel, even for a jilted rival, to keep up the role of moral indignation.

The dancer settled herself in the armchair and fixed upon Catharine a look so disarming that the young girl asked hurriedly, ‘Can I get you anything, a glass of water?’

‘No – no! child. I’m only a bit tired. Your friend has left me and sailed for Russia.’

Catharine Gordon turned pale and leant against the table. ‘Sailed for Russia?’ she gasped. ‘When?’

‘Oh several weeks ago. I ought to have come and told you before. We quarrelled before he went – of course.’

‘He left you, too?’

Elise Angel smiled. ‘Yes, my dear, he left me too! It seems that neither you nor I are very clever at keeping people. But you seem to have got Richard safely anyhow!’

‘Have you come to take him away?’

‘*Mon dieu!* little one, heaven forbid! But my impression is that our good Richard is pining for his wife. You know that pretty young person is going to have a child?’

‘A child? He never told me!’

‘I don’t know why he *should* have told you, you funny thing, unless you’re in love with *him* now.’

Catharine Gordon frowned at this and shook her head.

‘Not yet?’ repeated the dancer. ‘You’re just living – what shall I say – like brother and sister?’

The young girl coloured and nodded furiously.

There was a moment’s pause during which the two women exchanged one of those indescribable glances which reveal without words so many things. Then the dancer stretched out her arms.

‘Come and be friends again, you darling! We’re both deserted now!’

The look which accompanied this gesture was too much for the generous-hearted Catharine. She slid down upon the arm of her rival’s chair and hugged her impetuously.

‘What you and I have to think about now,’ said Elise Angel, ’is what we’re going to do with our dear Richard. I caught a glimpse of him in the street the other day and he looked to me wretchedly thin.'

Catharine pouted like a child at this.

'I give him very good meals,' she said.

'I'm sure you do. But he's an Englishman, my dear, and English– men, whatever they may do in New York, pine for their rainy fields. We don't want to have to bury our Richard out here do we?'

'But he's got no money. He sends home nearly all he makes, as it is.'

'Well! We must get him the money. A thousand dollars would keep him going till he could get over to Paris. And once in Paris he'd soon pick up again. They know his value over there.'

'But – a thousand dollars!'

'It isn't so much as it sounds, you dear baby. Why, Pat Ryan lent me as much as that only two months ago! I mustn't go to him for this; but I could sell my pearl necklace.'

Catharine looked at her with tears in her eyes. A wave of vibrant sympathy flowed between the two.

'You dear!' cried the younger girl.

Elise smiled. 'You'd do the same for him. I'm not blind. You're one of those people, little Cathy, who put their genius into their heart, just as I put mine into my legs!'

Catharine looked at her thoughtfully. 'Yes, I *have* got fond of him. But that's because he's got so used to me, I expect. It's a new thing to me to be really *wanted*.'

The dancer put her arm around her waist. 'Well! now we're friends again, I may tell you that *I* want *you* most abominably. So you see my cunning design! I pack off our good Richard to his wife and have you all to myself again! For you *will* come back to me now, child, won't you? No! don't shake your head. You *must* –I can't be deserted by everyone.'

Catharine looked wonderingly into those mysterious eyes which were neither grey nor blue nor violet nor green, and yet were all those colours together.

‘If you’re very good and very nice, I *may* teach you to dance,’ said Elise Angel.

Catharine leapt to her feet at those words and clapped her hands. ‘Not really? Do you think I could? That would be simply heaven! I used to dream of that when I was a little girl. And to be taught by *you!*’ She snatched at one of the dancer’s hands and kissed it fervently.

‘Meanwhile,’ said Elise, ‘I’ve got to go round and pick up a thousand dollars.’ She rose slowly from the armchair and laid her hand on her Spanish cloak. ‘Richard won’t, I suppose, be too proud to take it when I’ve got it?’ she said, as Catharine arranged the cloak round her shoulders.

Once more they exchanged that curious enigmatic glance with which women converse without the necessity for words.

‘I don’t think so,’ responded the girl smiling. ‘I don’t think he is very proud – in *those* things.’

‘Well! goodbye, you dear child. I’ll bring the money round to you in a day or two. By the way, why don’t you bring him to see me dance tonight? I’ll tell them at the box office to keep you good seats. But just as you like of course. It won’t matter if you don’t come. Goodbye!’ And she ran lightly down the narrow stairs and let herself into the street.

That last word of Elise’s had a little clouded Catharine’s pleasure.

Somehow she felt reluctant to sit with Richard in a prominent seat at that theatre.

She left her pieces of holly lying on the table and, sitting down with her hands around her knees, fell into deep meditation.

Just very faintly, across the most remote portion of her consciousness, there flickered a vague shadow of suspicion. It was scarcely articulate. It had no definite shape or form. But like a small cloud on the horizon it spoilt the complete harmony of her thoughts. Before Richard's return, however, she had recovered the balance of her normal generosity and had driven this little cloud altogether out of her mind. The pieces of holly with their red berries were now adorning the 'Watteau' print and the table was decorated with copper-coloured chrysanthemums, candied ginger, New England grapes and a bottle of California wine.

He arrived at half past six. He was already in better spirits than he had been in for some long while, and the sight of his 'young monk', as he called her, with this festive background gave him a thrill of pleasurable excitement.

They were halfway through their meal, drinking wine and tea in shameless propinquity, and laughing with most keen amusement over what Richard called 'crackers' and she called '*bon-bons*', when Catharine broached the subject of Elise's visit and her offer of tickets for that night.

It was only her sense of honour that made her refer to this latter point, as she herself would have greatly preferred to continue, in the quiet of their own *ménage*, an evening so auspiciously commenced. But her hope was that Richard would, as she said to herself, 'turn the thing down'. Whether it was the California wine, however, or a sudden craving to see his ivory goddess dance her Dionysian dance on this 'night of all nights in the year', he leaped eagerly to meet the suggestion, and at once began to hurry through the rest of the meal.

Catharine was surprised at herself over the vexation which this interruption of their little feast caused her; but she fell in gallantly with his mood and while they were washing up the things together the effort she had been making, ever since Elise first appeared, to be ‘good’ in the whole affair was rewarded by one of those rare inspirations of disinterested happiness which selfish people never know and which are by no means as frequent in the experience of the unselfish as ideal justice would demand.

Thus it happened that when, an hour later, they found themselves seated side by side in the new Stuyvesant Theater there was hardly a more excited or more carefree pair among all that holiday-thrilled Bohemian audience.

The new Stuyvesant was in every respect worthy of the great artist. It had been designed by a young acquaintance of Roger Lamb; Richard and Catharine whispered to each other a mutual recognition, as they looked round them, of the passionate theories of their dead friend now realized for the first time. The decoration was not only simple; it was austere. It was rigid and reserved in a manner suggestive of Byzantine work. There was about it something of that kind of ritualistic imagination which, perhaps erroneously, the modern world has come to name ‘archaic’.

Richard could not help becoming conscious that here, in the middle of this orgy of raw newness, there had been evoked something more suggestive of the passion of the human spirit ransacking the remote past and steering into the unborn future than anything in London or Paris. He recalled Karmakoff’s casual remark about certain affinities between Russia and America; and he whispered to Catharine that Roger Lamb’s idea of a revival of real *mythology*, of something that was both adventurous and religious, was actually present in what they looked at now.

The dancer’s inevitable black curtains were there; but they were there for the first time as an organic portion of a setting that might have been designed for some ancient classic ritual, some real worship of the Platonic idea of beauty, envisaged as a palpable presence. What the new Stuyvesant represented was preeminently an achievement of youth, of youth coming sternly and resolutely into its own, after the deadly disillusionments of the recent war. The actual fabric of the building itself – its contours, its curves, its nobly designed blank spaces – was all part of a musical rhythm which only reached its consummation when Elise began to dance.

It seemed to both Richard and Catharine that Elise had acquired yet more subtle art since they had last seen her. Her first dance was one to a certain musical fantasy written by a little-known Russian composer who was at that moment coming into fame in Revolutionary Moscow. Richard recognized Karmakoff's influence over the dancer in this choice; and he recognized it without the least touch of jealousy.

There was indeed something about this whole Christmas Eve performance that lifted him as it evidently lifted the girl by his side into a region where personal and possessive instincts had no place. Richard felt ashamed of himself, of his own inadequate and chaotic work, in presence of this achievement. He felt ashamed of himself that he had allowed this thing, this great new creation, to be born without his knowledge. The quiet cynical Roger, the inscrutable Ivan, his own ivory goddess, had together produced something, through the medium of an American boy of whose very name he was ignorant, which put his whole life's intention to shame!

While he had been trying to detach himself from life's flood and to see the mystery in large and flowing outlines, these alien spirits had plunged into the stream and had moulded those evasive waters themselves into vast stern human shapes of exultation and grandeur.

What he recognized as he glanced over that audience of cosmopolitan enthusiasts was that here in this new world, in this turbulent city of youth, was an opportunity for the old human passion for beauty such as the earth had never before known. The crudity and rawness of the crushing materialism around that bold experiment gave it an angry and free power which the very mellowness of more civilized places tended to undermine. But what struck him most of all in that thrilling hour was the amazing *anonymity* of the whole thing achieved by some unknown boy out of the far west whose youthful receptiveness was that of a reed played upon by the undying spirit of dead generations.

As he watched Elise dancing to a rising crescendo of hidden music, it seemed to him as though the whole architecture of that place, with every curve and space and line and mass and colour which it contained, melted into the rhythm of her movements and became part of the Dionysian passion which she evoked. By a wonderful touch of genius, beyond all his expectations, it seemed as though the youthful architect had allowed for the very audience there, and had given *it* also a part to play in the resultant harmony.

He experienced the sensation, and he was certain that everyone in the theatre experienced the sensation, of taking an actual part in some passionate ritual, some ritual that was itself a very dithyramb of exultant protest against all that was base, gross, possessive and reactionary amid the forces of the world.

Thus he became more vividly conscious than ever of what he had always vaguely held; namely, that art is not something separate from life, but the premonition, reflected inhuman intelligence, of what nature is perpetually aiming at and never altogether reaching.

Elise danced a much larger variety of motifs than he had ever seen her bring together in one evening. She seemed bent on extracting something congruous to her spirit from the music of every race. Richard noted that there was one insistent mood running through the whole series on that night, a mood that was at once heathen and Christian, rebellious and sensual, yet full of a passionate faith.

In her grand finale the amazing woman certainly surpassed herself. Catharine was so wrought up that she clutched at Richard's hand and held it tightly in her own. An electric thrill of excitement passed like a spiritual vibration through the whole of the excited house.

Richard thought in his heart, This is more than the work of Bernhardt or Eleanora Duse or Yvette Guilbert. This is on a level with Milton or Nietzsche!

When it was all over and the great audience rose to its feet with one wild cry of applause Richard and Catharine raised their hands into the air and shouted, 'Elise!' in the same way no doubt as, at some similar festival, two platonic friends in ancient Hellas might have shouted '*Evoé!*' Their cry seemed perfectly natural to the ardent young persons about them, and it was caught up, and echoed from every quarter of the theatre.

At length the ovation was over and the two friends, in a state of tremendous excitement, were carried out with the rest of the crowd into the street. They both felt that they could not see Elise again that night. Even to touch her hand after what she had done for them would have seemed a profanation and banality.

They hardly spoke to each other as they made their way across the centre of New York to their own Seventh Avenue subway.

Before their train arrived at Houston Street, Richard, as was his wont when excited to such a pitch, mentally gathered up into one swift vision all the persons and events of his life's drama. He saw them, these events and these persons, all beautiful, all mysterious, all full of the magic of that Nameless One who, whether he were born child of Semele or child of Mary, had the power to turn the sordid tricks of chance into the music of an exultant rhythm that 'redeemed all sorrows'.

Richard followed the tall languorous figure of his companion up the narrow stairs to their room; and as soon as they stood alone facing one another there they seemed driven by the power of the impersonal emotion within them to gain relief for their feelings in each other's arms. Neither of them could be said to have been more responsible than the other for this disloyalty to Nelly. If anyone was to be held guilty it was the impassioned dancer who had put them both under so irresistible a spell that it seemed to bring with it its own plenary absolution.

The embrace they exchanged at that exalted moment was neither chaste nor unchaste. It was the genius of Elise as it had stirred the soul of the man – rushing to meet the same genius as it had stirred the soul of the woman!

Without any shame or remorse they drew back from one another and resumed their normal mood. And long before the clock in the Metropolitan Tower struck the dawn of Christmas Day the door was shut between them and they were monks again!

Chapter 22

IT WAS EARLY February. In the ditches on both sides of the narrow lane that led up from Selshurst to Furze Lodge the yellow celandines among their great cool leaves shone like stars seen through watery darkness.

In the smaller oak and hazel woods there were already a few early primroses out, throwing upon the moss-scented air of those shadowy places that faint, half-bitter sweetness which seems like the very spiritual body of the spring.

Richard had not wired from Southampton to tell his wife of his arrival, though he had written from New York to let her know the name of the ship. He only prayed that he might be lucky enough to find her alone; and it was this hope that led him to time his appearance to just that particular moment of after-lunch siesta, when it was the custom at Furze Lodge to retire to rest.

He had not been able to resist the temptation to snatch a moment *en route* in the nave of the familiar cathedral.

The sleeping crusader with the ‘eternally praying hands’ lay there unmoved and unchanged, his mailed feet upon the back of his marble hound.

Arriving straight from the piled-up snow of a great New York blizzard, the warm misty sunshine of the early English spring was like the breath of an amorous and beautiful god; as Richard came out from the cathedral and looked at the yellow and purple crocuses in the ancient gardens, that same indescribable sense of peace descended upon him which he had felt when, nearly a year ago, he had first set his eyes on Selshurst.

As soon as he left the secluded portion of that long West Horthing lane and emerged upon the open Downs he found the air as full of the singing of birds as it had been on the day when he discovered Littlegate. The songs of individual skylarks were lost in one ubiquitous chorus which seemed to descend upon the earth as if it were the voice of universal space, corresponding in the sphere of sound to infinite blueness in the sphere of colour.

His pulses were beating with a good deal more excitement than he had anticipated as he approached the lodge gates of Mrs Shotover's drive. But he felt confident of the result of his interview with his wife.

The flawless beauty of the day seemed an invincible omen of success; and he had in his notebook eight hundred and fifty dollars!

He rang the bell of the front door at precisely half past two o'clock – the hour of all hours when he deemed it most impossible for Mrs Shotover to be in a state of visibility.

He asked, in a purposely low voice, whether he might see Mrs Storm at once and he repeated his name in a whisper. The servant was apparently a stranger for she gave no particular sign of surprise and, ushering him straight into the well-known drawing room, closed the door discreetly behind her. Richard walked up and down in excited perturbation. His mind called up the image of Nelly. He thought of her child, and how it would be born before April was over, or at any rate in the beginning of May – exactly a year since he had first arrived in Sussex.

It would be wonderful to have a child of his own! If it were a girl he could call it after his mother; and if it were a boy, after his father. He was sure Nelly would be willing to leave the name in his hands! He supposed Canyot would have to be its godfather and Mrs Shotover its godmother. About those little matters he could afford to be generous!

How slow she was in coming! Had that confounded maid forgotten to announce him? Perhaps she too was resting, and they were reluctant to disturb her. Well! he could wait. She would probably be up and about before the lady of the house showed herself. He surveyed the teasing knickknacks and the incredible frippery of that early-Victorian shrine. Why was it that young English women in evening dress photographed so badly? He supposed they ought to be 'snapshotted' on the hunting field or in walking costume. They seemed to be all chin and forehead and shoulders and elbows when adorned for civilized intercourse!

Suddenly the door opened. He sprang forward with a cry of recognition on his lips, only to step back in cold dismay at the entrance of Mrs Shotover. The lady closed the door behind her and bowed stiffly.

'I can't think what your purpose can be,' she began, uttering the words very much as some pompous statesman of her youth might have addressed a recalcitrant delegacy, 'in forcing yourself into my house. You don't suppose for a moment, do you, that I can permit you to agitate my dear Eleanor by silly dramatic scenes? She has done with you, sir! Let me make that quite plain: she has done with you and your ill-bred vulgar behaviour.'

'But Mrs Shotover—'

'I won't argue with you. It is bad for me to get angry directly after lunch. Fortunately I had lunch late today because of that idiot of a vet, making such mistakes with Bobby, else I shouldn't have been able to tell you what I think of you.'

'I don't want to argue with you, Mrs Shotover. I want to see Nelly. I want to explain to Nelly that—'

'It's no use, my good man. I can see what you're after. You're after money. You're trying to blackmail us. But let me tell you at once that though I *have* made your wife my heir and left her everything, it's all tied up so that you cannot touch a penny of it! So there! The best thing you can do is to clear right off, before I am compelled to ring for Thomas.' And the lady with a grand toss of her head opened the door for him, making a vague movement with her hands as if she were about to drive off an intrusive fowl from a precious flowerbed.

Richard stepped out into the hall; but instead of meekly picking up his hat from the hall table he made a sudden bolt up the polished stairs and, arriving at the top where all the bedrooms were, called in loud violent tones the name of his wife.

One of the doors promptly opened and Nelly appeared. She had evidently just removed her dress, for she wore a long soft bedroom gown and her hair was loose about her shoulders.

She turned very white when she saw her husband and leaned against the side of the doorway uttering his name in a tremulous voice as if she had seen a ghost.

He rushed up to her and was about to embrace her when Mrs Shotover who had closely pursued him pushed her way in between them.

The old lady dragged the girl back into her room and held her tightly there with her thin arms, muttering all the while, 'The rascal! the bandit! the highwayman! the scoundrel! I'll have the law on him! Why doesn't Emma come? Where is Thomas?'

Richard, following them into the room, made a desperate appeal to Nelly. 'Send the woman away, sweetheart! Send her away! I must and will talk to you!'

Making a brave effort to gather up all her mental and physical energy, Nelly extricated herself from Mrs Shotover's clutches; turning sternly upon her, she said in a tone that the old lady seemed to recognize as not to be controverted, 'I must see him alone. You must leave us alone, please. You needn’t be afraid. He is my husband. It will not be for long. Go now, dear, and leave us by ourselves.’

Like some eighteenth-century caricature of a defeated Juno, obedient to the commands of an irresistible daughter of Jove, the indignant old woman retreated, muttering vague threats. Nelly closed the door and turned the key in the lock. But she astonished Richard by waving him back when he tried to take her in his arms.

‘My darling! my sweetheart!’ he cried, making a second attempt to embrace her. Again she drew away from him and, wrapping herself closely in her dressing gown, clutched at it as if it had been protecting armour, her hands against her breast.

‘Nelly!’ he whispered with an intensity in his voice that betrayed an emotion which she had never noted in him before.

She looked straight into his eyes. ‘Have you given up that woman?’ she said, repeating the words as if in the presence of some formidable tribunal. ‘Do you promise me that never, under any circumstances, you’ll see her again?’

Richard murmured the word ‘yes’ and added hoarsely, ‘I will never see her again without your consent.’

As soon as those words had been uttered Nelly’s face changed and her whole body seemed to relax and unbend, as if relieved from an unbearable load.

She turned whiter still and, taking her hand away from his, clasped her fingers tightly together while her mouth also compressed itself into an almost hard expression.

‘What do you mean?’ she said.

‘You needn’t look so scared, my dearest one, it’s all over now and thank God there are no complications!’

She bit her underlip; her eyebrows twitched; her fingers clasped one another so violently that they became white as her face.

If one of his demons had whispered into his ear some huge palpable lie at that juncture and had compelled him to utter it, the situation might still have been saved for both of them. But by a cruel irony in things the good in him – if such an instinct for confession *was* good – drove him so fast that no demon's help arrived.

'You know you told me to look after Catharine?' he said.

A tiny little red spot appeared on both her cheeks, but she only answered by a barely perceptible nod.

'Well, I did take care of her.' He gave a little uneasy laugh. 'And she took care of me. In fact we lived together in Charlton Street right up to the end. She slept in your room and I slept in the sitting room. We were always good – like two monks – and I left her much happier when I came away.

'Elise Angel is teaching her to dance; and I've no wish to see her again, any more than I want to see—'

The figure upon the bed sat up absolutely erect, like a lovely image of judgement. Her eyes were blazing with anger. She tried twice to speak, the indignation within her strangling the words. Then at last in a low cold frozen tone, 'I can't stand it. This is the end. I must ask you to go away at once please. You can write to me and I will answer your letters. But this is the end of everything between us. I can't live with you any more, Richard. Will you go quickly, please? No! No! Don't touch me! I can't bear it. I suppose you don't want to drive me insane, do you? No! No! I must ask you to go at once. Now – quickly! Before they come to answer this!'

And in a sort of panic terror lest he should touch her, she flung up her hand and pulled violently at the bell rope which hung above her bed.

But he did not attempt to touch her after that: he did not utter one single word. A kind of dizziness came over him and a dull knocking in his brain like the knocking of the hammer of fate. He heard the bell she had rung resound loudly in some room below. Like a man who has been shot through the heart but still retains his consciousness, he mechanically unlocked the door, opened it quickly, ran down the stairs and was out of the house and halfway down the drive before the shapes and figures of the external world renewed themselves in his brain.

Once clear of the Furze Lodge premises, his first mad flight, like the flight of Christian from the City of Destruction or like Adam from the gates of Paradise, subsided into a shambling and weary shuffle.

He became irritatingly aware of two little subordinate annoyances, which vexed him out of all proportion; vexed him as an exhausted patient after an operation might be vexed by a buzzing fly: he had left both his hat and his stick in Mrs Shotover's hall.

He missed his stick the worst of the two losses, as he never went out without it, and the absence of it gave him a most unpleasant feeling, as if he were disarmed, humiliated, not properly himself, and exposed to universal ridicule.

He missed his hat, because the sun was hot with that peculiar heavy relaxing heat of a warm day in February.

With slow, bewildered and drifting steps he made his way down the lane till it led across the open Downs. Other emotions began to succeed that first sense of blackness and the knocking of a great hammer inside his skull. He found himself making a kind of articulate appeal to his unborn child, crying upon it to intervene and soften its mother's harshness. He had the sensation of the child being actually conscious, and of its stretching out its arms to him, while Nelly sternly repressed it and forced it to be still.

Then out of the depths of his wretchedness his pride rose to the surface; and as he walked he pulled himself together and ceased shuffling and dragging his feet. He no longer held his mouth open like a panting dog. His eyes lost something of their hunted animal look.

Very gravely, knowing perfectly well what he did, he cursed the possessive instinct in women, their savage jealousy, their insatiable vindictiveness.

She can never have really loved me, he thought; not as I have loved her. It must have been a kind of infatuation. Otherwise she couldn't treat me like this – after I told her everything; after I promised to give up everyone!

It did not at that moment occur to him that compared with his own 'love', which was simple physical desire compounded with pure affection, *her* love was one of the vast terrible tragic forces quite beyond the balances of good and evil, which spring up out of the deepest levels of nature. It did not occur to him that if she had loved him *less*, she would have shown more generosity. He was in fact unconsciously comparing her primitive indignation not with his own masculine tenderness but with that 'love of the saints' which neither men nor women are often permitted to reach: the love that forgives – not out of a lower intensity of feeling but out of a deeper intensity. An emotion of that sort was as far beyond his own reach as it was beyond hers; thus when his pride began to rise to the surface, mingled with a bitter sensual memory of how beautiful she had looked in her anger, he found it possible to curse her as he strode forward.

I am alone again, he thought within his heart, alone, alone, alone! I'll go straight back to Paris – Paris that is wise and indulgent, Paris that has always understood me ... To be quite alone in the world, to fight for one's own hand, that is the only thing! I'll have a flat in the rue des Arts; and I'll know no living soul except gamins and grisettes. Damn these good women!

They have hearts of marble. To be absolutely alone in the world, that is the thing! To love nothing but beauty! All these women, every one of them, are ready to destroy everything, to murder everything, in order to possess, to possess!

But this first mood of his did not last long. His wife’s fragile loveliness haunted him and the memory of how she had yielded to his kisses remained as a thing that troubled his blood. The image of her standing in that doorway, the familiar outlines of her figure changed by the presence of their child, came between him now and every curve and contour of the chalk hills around him.

As he grew weary with walking in that relaxing heat, his pride ebbed completely away. He had cursed her once; but he never cursed her after that. ‘Nelly, my love, my darling, my true love!’ he cried aloud.

More and more exhausted did he grow; there came a real humming and hammering in his brain and a sickening sense of dizziness. He had been too excited to do more than swallow a cup of tea that morning and he had eaten nothing. It was now well on in the afternoon.

By the time he reached the point where the open Downs lost themselves in the alluvial plain at their foot, he was so faint that it was with a deliberate and conscious effort that he took each individual step.

At length he stood still and looked hopelessly round. ‘I can’t do it,’ he muttered. ‘I can’t do it.’

He sank down on the ground and rested for a few minutes. Then he got up again and tried once more; but the brief rest seemed to have made his legs weaker than ever and his head dizzier. ‘Damn!’ he muttered in a fit of childish irritation and tears of sheer physical exhaustion came into his eyes.

He looked back along the path by which he had come and forward towards the valley, hoping that some kind of cart or wagon might be in sight, which would help him to reach a farmhouse or a village.

The long white perspective of the empty chalk track offered no trace of any living or moving object.

He left the path then, and staggered across a ploughed field to where a high hedge of hawthorn and holly completely blocked his eastern view.

Reaching this hedge he sank down on the bank beneath it and gave himself up to a comatose acquiescence in whatever might befall.

Several hours passed over his head and the sun sank below a mass of clouds. It began to grow cold and damp; the inherent chilliness of the rain-soaked February earth making itself felt as soon as the heat of the sun was withdrawn.

Feeling very cold at last, for he had no overcoat, Richard managed to crawl through a hole in the thickset hedge into the field beyond.

The moment he tottered to his feet on the further side he knew where he was; the knowledge came to him with a sharp and bitter stab.

He was looking down into Nelly's Happy Valley, the very place where he had first made love to her!

He sat down again and with his arms round his knees gazed dreamily at the gorse bushes and the last year's bracken.

Another hour passed away while he sat there; staring patiently down upon the scene of that lovemaking of nearly a year ago.

Suddenly he saw a figure coming along the bottom of the valley, carrying some object in his hand.

Richard was roused at once to something like a flicker of hope. Well did he know that figure and what he carried! It was Robert Canyot with his easel frame and paint box returning after a day on the Downs. With a warm breath of reviving hope the thought crossed his mind – *Canyot will explain to her. She will listen to* him. It never occurred to his dizzy and exhausted brain that there was anything fantastic in thus begging his rival to act as his intermediary with his wife. There was something about Canyot that inspired this insane sort of confidence and Richard had always been careless and childish, if not blunt and insensitive, in matters of this kind.

He struggled to his feet and shouted wildly, waving his arms.

The young man's astonishment at the sound of his voice was obvious even at that distance but he saw him carefully put down the things he carried under a gorse bush and come striding up the hill towards him.

'How damnably faint I feel!' Richard said to himself. 'I pray I shan't collapse before I've sent him off to her!'

He sat down again to await the painter's arrival, drawing each breath with conscious deliberation, lest the dizziness which hovered over him should intervene before he made his appeal.

He remained seated when at last Canyot stood over him leaning on his stick.

'So you've come,' was the young man's laconic remark.

'Yes, I've come,' responded Richard. 'But I'm feeling damned ill at this moment. You haven't got any brandy on you, have you?'

Canyot shook his head.

'You look rather queer,' he muttered. 'You'd better come and stay the night with me. Do you think you can walk? You look awfully shaky.'

'Never mind how I look,' said Richard hurriedly. 'It's only want of food. I've been up there, Canyot. I've been up there and I've seen her. But I told her everything, you know, and she got very angry and sent me off. She sent me off, Robert, after I'd sworn that I wouldn't speak to Elise again.'

'What do you want me to do?' said Canyot suddenly.

Richard looked confused and miserable. A sort of hangdog expression of dilapidated helplessness came into his face.

‘How did you know I wanted you to do anything?’ he said with the ghost of a smile.

Canyot chuckled grimly. ‘Pretty obvious!’ he remarked. ‘You don’t shout to a fellow like that just for fun.’

‘Yes, Robert,’ Richard pleaded, fixing his eyes desperately upon him. ‘I do want you to do something. I want you to go straight to Nelly – now, at once – and make her understand that I will be faithful to her, after this, for the rest of my life.’

‘How can she trust you?’ retorted the young man.

‘I love no one else,’ said Richard in a low voice.

Robert Canyot looked at him closely. ‘It is an agreement between *us*?’ he said. ‘Between you and me?’

Richard nodded and held out his hand.

‘Very well,’ muttered the other after their hands had met. ‘I’ll go. I tried to get her to divorce you, but she wouldn’t. She loves you, I suppose, God help her!’ He gave a harsh little laugh. ‘I’ll go,’ he added, ‘but for heaven’s sake, stay exactly where you are, so that I know where to find you! I’ll be back in a couple of hours anyway. And look here, eat some of this.’ Fumbling in his pocket he handed Richard a piece of cheese wrapped up in tissue paper. ‘You look most confoundedly ill,’ he said suddenly, as he prepared to force his way through the hedge; ‘I hope you’re not going to kick the bucket or anything, while I’m gone? Maybe after all I’d better get a cart for you from Littlegate before anything else. ‘Richard’s look of blank despair at this suggestion decided him, however, to do what he had promised.’ After all,’ he called back to him, as he forced a path through the hedge, ‘West Horthing is as near as Littlegate and I can get a trap or something for you there! But you shall sleep with me tonight, whatever happens, and we’ll have a talk. Don’t move from where you are!’

Left to himself again Richard tried his best to eat the piece of cheese. The taste of it nauseated him. ‘Oh, for just one drink of water,’ he moaned aloud. As if in mocking answer to his prayer, the heavy clouds which had been working up with the growing darkness from where the sun had sunk, now burst over his head in torrents of rain.

He crept closer to the hedge for shelter; but the rain fell in such heavy floods that the hedge itself was soon penetrated through and through, and the continuous dripping from it became almost worse than facing the storm in the open. The man remained crouching there, his head whirling with strange wild thoughts, alternately full of hope and hopelessness.

At length, with a tremendous effort, he gulped down the cheese in three rapid mouthfuls. It nearly made him vomit, but his thirst was now partly quenched by the rain which drifted across his face and trickled down his cheeks. Although he found himself shivering with cold he began to feel stronger and less faint. His dizziness was as a matter of fact rapidly giving way to feverishness; and the more the fever grew upon him the more exalted and less wretched his mood became.

He must have remained under that hedge about half an hour when he became conscious of a melancholy bleating carried on the wind towards him from across the Downs.

Over and over again he heard it; and at last its reiteration got upon his nerves.

He rose up, stiff and shivering, from his huddled position, and listened intently. Yes – it came from the direction of West Horthing and it was quite different from the ordinary sound of a sheepfold. It was the cry of a solitary animal in great distress.

He crept through the hedge by the same hole he had come by, and when he rose to his feet on the other side he recognized that Canyot’s bit of cheese had considerably restored to him his powers of movement. ‘It was simply want of food,’ he said to himself. ‘What an idiot I was!’

It was almost completely dark. The driving rain, lashing against his face, was like the palpable force of some huge hostile elemental being.

He heard that pitiful bleating very clearly now, and he made his way across the ploughland, a little northward of where he had come, until he reached the turf of the Downs.

He could see no more than a few yards in front of him, but the bleating sound was so clear a guide that he had only, as it seemed to him, stumbled up the slope of the hill about a hundred yards when he came upon the cause of it.

He found himself in collision with some low wooden railings. Leaning over these he made out a shimmering whiteness below and then a grey level circle into which the rain hissed, water falling upon water. He had been long enough in Sussex to know exactly what he had found. It was one of those mysteriously constructed dew-ponds upon the secret of which whole books had been written, none of which really solved the problem of how the thing was made.

The books agreed upon one point, that whatever the secret of these places was, it had been totally lost.

There were no *new* dew-ponds. The circular basin upon which Richard now gazed through the darkness was about twenty feet in diameter. The whiteness which struck his eye was the slippery sloping surface of the pond’s steep banks, made up of chalky mud.

In the summer such a place was the resort for all manner of Down birds, such as the wheatear and the whinchat, and at all seasons those banks were trodden into slippery mud by the great sheep flocks that came there to drink.

Richard remembered how Nelly’s father had once brought him to one of these places, perhaps to the very one he was now scanning, and how the old naturalist had pointed out to him the great orange-bellied water lizards or newts, as they basked in the June heat at the top of the water.

Richard remembered lying once on his back below the circle of those banks, just a few days before they sailed for America, and how he had loved the effect of the white chalk against the blue sky.

He knew very well now, as he waited to make out exactly where that pitiful cry came from, what was the matter down there. It was some luckless sheep that had slipped down in the rain and darkness and was now imprisoned by those slippery banks.

It was some while before he could locate its exact position. When he did so he lost no time in sliding down the slope and in wading through the water until he got hold of the woolly derelict.

To get hold of it was one thing, however; to get it out of the pond was another matter.

Desperate were Richard’s struggles to get the animal up those slippery banks. With the rain hissing into the pond below him and lashing his face in driving gusts as the wind whirled it round within that enclosed circle, he pulled and tugged and wrestled with that bleating mass of drenched wool until at last, with a superhuman effort, he got it safely over the brink.

He placed the thing on its feet, pushed it under the railings and clambered over them himself.

To his annoyance and surprise, instead of trotting off as he had expected, the animal fell over on its side, uttering once more a long-drawn pitiful bleat.

Now it became clear that either in its own struggles to escape, or in *his* struggles to help it, the unfortunate beast had broken or seriously injured one of its legs.

Richard sat down beside the bleating sheep and uttered a wild laugh. He lifted up his face to the sky and was met by the whirling downpour of merciless rain. He began to be alarmed lest Canyot's two hours should have passed and the young man, returning with some conveyance, should find him gone.

With this thought in his mind he took a few steps down the slope of the hill in the direction he fancied the ploughland to commence. But the miserable bleating of the wretched sheep, apparently realizing its desertion, brought him to a standstill. No! He could not leave it there – even to meet the messenger who brought the deciding of his fate.

Hurrying back to where the creature lay, he stood regarding it, uttering once more a wild chuckling laugh.

The fever in his veins was running high by this time, giving him an unnatural strength. His one instinct was to convey this animal to some sort of shelter, if it were only the inadequate shelter of that hawthorn hedge! Once there, if Canyot came with some kind of conveyance, both himself and the sheep could be rescued together.

If Canyot came!

On Canyot's appearance, with the message he brought, everything in the world at that moment seemed to depend.

'Nelly, my darling!' These words seemed to the man who uttered them aloud into the wind and rain, to issue from some other being than himself – some stronger, braver, nobler being at whose imperious bidding the shivering exhausted wretch who called himself Richard was now compelled to act.

He bent down, and after two or three hopeless struggles he succeeded in getting the sheep upon his back, its belly round his neck and its feet held tightly in both his hands.

Burdened thus, and swaying under the creature's weight, he staggered down the slope in the direction in which he supposed the hawthorn hedge to lie.

As he went, with the rain whirling round him as if the darkness itself were one great river of water, all manner of strange ideas passed through his mind. It seemed to him as though he were carrying on his back the burden of his great unfinished poem, the poem which he had so often changed in character – and which had now taken the form of a sheep!

Then it seemed to him as if he were arguing with Nelly's father about the existence of God. It seemed as though God too, like his poetry, had turned into a heavy woolly sheep that bleated pitifully into his ear.

Then he suddenly, thought of Karmakoff the Russian; and he imagined himself putting the question to him as to whether they would have slaughter houses in an ideal state!

And he thought of Elise dancing, dancing on the edge of a great grey sea swept by hurricanes of rain …

He knew he must be getting near the hedge, because of the feel of ploughed-up land under his feet. It was just then that he stumbled and bent low under the weight he carried and something seemed to snap in his heart.

After that he saw nothing at all – nothing but darkness, dense black rainy darkness, that seemed full of bleating cries, cries, that called upon him for help.

'All right! It's all right!' Was it he who uttered those words?

Something pricked his face. The hedge! The hedge!

He stumbled to the ground beneath its shelter, and fell heavily down with the animal above him.

The next thing he was conscious of was the sensation of something burning being poured down his throat and of a swinging lantern. With one last desperate effort he forced his eyelids to open against a weight like lead.

‘I – can’t – get – my breath,’ he gasped. ‘Does she forgive me?’

‘She loves you,’ said Robert Canyot.

The look of unutterable happiness that spread over Richard’s face, as the lantern flickered upon it, remained to the end of the painter’s life the best return he ever obtained for a love that had learned to be unpossessive.

The head of the dead man fell back upon the living body of the sheep. And so it was that the moment most unalloyed by critical self-consciousness in all the experience of the author of the Life of Verlaine was that moment which, in human speech, it is the custom to refer to as his last.

Canyot, using his one arm with well-calculated effect, lifted the man and the sheep upon the cart he had brought from Furze Lodge. The weight of both the living and the dead was heavy upon him as he drove towards Littlegate through the darkness. *She killed him because she loved him*, he thought. *Well! She will have his child; and I shall have – my work!*

The Shorter Fiction

Powys graduated from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in June 1894.

The Owl, The Duck, and – Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!
(1930)

Dedicated

to

P. P.

The Owl, The Duck and — Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!

HOWLS OF PRISONERS from behind the bars of the Old Market Prison, with its tall sham-Gothic Clock Tower, used sometimes to enter the narrow opening of Patchin Place. Another disturbing sound, less terrifying than this, but sufficiently formidable, was the rumble of the Elevated Railway, under whose mitigated thunder all the old three-storey houses on both sides of the little blind-alley used to shiver and shake. Growing upwards, from their roots in dusty ground outside these houses, rose several tall ailanthus trees, whose branches, in cold, clear, April weather, were now just beginning to put forth their large greenish-yellow buds.

It was in three little rooms, constituting what was always described as ‘Top Floor Front, Number Four’, that a group of Persons lived, two of whom were human, two Divine, one an apparition, several inanimate, and two again only half-created.

The largest of these rooms was called by its human inhabitants ‘The Living Room’ and by its other inhabitants ‘The Known World’. The one next in size, with a window upon the alley, was humanly known as ‘The Alcove’ and otherwise known as ‘Paradise’; while a small dark chamber, full of empty boxes and a mass of un-wanted litter, which the human tenants innocently named ‘The Ante-room’, was designated by the Other People of the place who understood reality better, by the brief and tragic syllable ‘Hell’.

With these Other People of that Top Floor Front, a day was like a week of light; and a night was like a week of darkness; so that the dramatic events which I now proceed to unfold must be regarded as occurring in parallel dimensions of existence.

The human inhabitants of this Top Floor, the ones who persisted in their habit of calling Paradise ‘The Alcove’ and Hell ‘The Ante-room’, were an old man and an old woman.

They were both aged circus people and it was only by the influence of a very rich benefactor that they were pensioned by the authorities instead of being turned out of the Top Flat long ago and put into a ‘Home’.

The one fate they both dreaded worse than death was this ‘Home’. This ‘Home’ presented itself to them in exactly the same light — or absence of light — as the chamber which they called ‘The Ante-room’ presented itself to the Other People; and they never heard the cries of the prisoners from the end of the alley without a deep shudder; for these cries made them think of the ‘Home’.

It was the custom of the old man, who thought the old woman was far deafer than he was, to turn his contorted face away and fumble with something on the mantelpiece when the wind brought this particular sound. It was also the custom of the old woman, who was sure the old man was far deafer than she was, to retreat behind the screen, which protected her kitchen stove, and rattle her pots and pans when she heard this sound, hoping in this manner to prevent the old man from hearing it. Thus both of them imagined that they kept the thought of the ‘Home’ from troubling the mind of the other one.

The oldest of all the People in the Known World was the Stuffed Owl.

This dignitary had been shot in the wilds of Virginia by a hump-back, who, in this way, both asserted his mutilated humanity and obtained for his lonely life a soft, silent, and watchful companion.

But the hump-back had proved at last, in a way even more irrefutable than by shooting an owl, his similarity to normal persons. He had died as lonely as he had lived and at his death the great, wise, silent, hook-beaked creature had been brought to the Top Floor Front. Here it stood in motionless state, glancing grimly sometimes at the old man and sometimes indulgently at the old woman, but keeping its dark, wild, pessimistic gaze fixed without more interruption at the corner of the screen, round which he always seemed to expect the reappearance of his assassin and friend.

On the left hand side of the mantelpiece there stood erect, with its round enquiring eyes, its out-stretched neck, its flat yellow beak, all a-gog for what was going on, a beautiful white china Duck.

Under ordinary conditions nothing could have exceeded the quietness and patience — although full enough of natural curiosity — of the Duck's speculative gaze. But the life of the Duck had not been allowed to be ordinary. And alas! it was not fate that had prevented this. Nor was it any exterior accident. Nor was it the malignity of Chance. The power that disturbed the serene speculation of the Duck's placid curiosity arose from beneath its own smooth white feathers! The Duck had a passion, a craving, a vice, an obsession, a mania. This madness in the Duck was nothing less than a poignant longing to touch with his yellow beak the polished and provocative flesh of young-lady dolls. Ordinary dolls were nothing to the Duck. Comic dolls, vulgar dolls, baby dolls, grotesque dolls, paper dolls, theatrical dolls were positively repugnant to the Duck. But a young-lady doll, and the more quiet, the more refined, the more aristocratic the young lady was, the more unbounded was the creature's desire, ravished the Duck, and turned his poor maudlin wits into curds and whey.

Thus was a happy and peaceful existence turned into a worried, anxious, fretted, teased and restless existence. The Duck would certainly have broken up the smooth current of his normal curiosity by Desire alone, so intense it was, even had there been no particular object for its thirsty craving. But an object was brought to the Duke. Fate or Chance brought it and they must share a little in the guilt of the poor bird's plight. One or other of these celestial-infernal Powers caused it to come to pass that the most beautiful young-lady doll that has ever existed in the world, and by far the most aristocratic, came to live with the old man and the old woman in the Known World. How she came, or what brought her; whether she came by natural means or by supernatural means; mattered nothing to the Duck. One day, as he was casually, after his fashion, satisfying his serene curiosity by observing the general stream of the universe, there was Olwen, and from that time forward all his life became one long Longing.

Olwen was indeed more than a young lady. She was a Princess. Her slender legs — to begin with what agitated the Duck most pitifully — were the legs of a Princess; her long graceful arms were the arms of a Princess. Round her wrists she wore lace cuffs. Lace also — and one glimpse of this lace brought the Duck nigh to swooning — adorned her Princess' drawers. But if these remoter graces were ravishing to the enamoured bird, never, under the smoky ceiling of the Known World had he beheld anything as lovely as her face. Those blue eyes, that dainty nose, that exquisite chin, the tilt of that proud little head, those tresses of dusky brown — all these were more than could be borne. The Duck could only stare and stare, until the particular round eye, which was at the moment the favoured one — for the nature of birds forbids a double-sighted vision — came near to melting quite away under the rapture of such a sight.

It was the old man who used sometimes to peer into Olwen's face — for Olwen was the Princess' name — as she lay on their bed, turned for the day into a decent couch, with her brown head on a little special white pillow, and mutter to himself, 'Olwen looks sad,' or 'Olwen wants a change.' At these times he would take her up very carefully, between his finger and thumb, his old hand shaking sadly, and deposit her by the side of the Duck upon the mantelpiece. ‘Olwen likes to sit by the Duck,’ the old man would then say to the old woman and never was there such a wispy, straw-like ‘Pshaw! pshaw!’ as the old woman then breathed, from over the top of her sewing-basket; as much as to say, ‘Girls will be girls and old men will be old men. Don’t disturb my embroidery!’

There was no bathroom at that epoch in the Known World; so that when the old woman decided to give the old man a bath it became necessary to open the ante-room door and take therefrom a small tin bath and very large bath-rug. On these occasions — for the windows of the Known World faced East — a thin stream of April sunshine entered and illuminated, for the space of a few seconds, the thick darkness of Hell!

In Hell, propped up against an old, black, disused kitchen stove — a very Devil’s Cauldron — and supported on two weak legs, for the other two were missing, stood, or rather leaned, a noble, melancholy, wooden white horse. This was Falada. It was the old man who had found Falada. He had found him in Limbo — otherwise in one of the great Garbage Receptacles at the entrance of the alley — and he had brought him, with tottering steps and tapping stick, up the two flights of narrow stairs into the Known World.

He had stood him up at first on the chest of drawers leaning against the large mirror; but the old woman had the peculiarity — common to many scrupulous housewives — of disliking what she was wont to describe as ‘everything mixed up’. This peculiarity was often bewildering to the old man, who in his early days had been a clown and had been accustomed to confusion; but since the old woman still presented herself to his eyes as the lovely young dancer whose least whim was his law, he uttered no audible complaint when Falada, who had for half a day just managed to survive the intolerable litter of Limbo, was now placed in Hell.

It was in Paradise — though she persisted in calling it 'The Alcove' — that the old woman made her toilet. There was her dressing table. There was her jewel case. There were her precious bottles of lavender-water. There were her fragrant pots of cold-cream. The old man was not encouraged — indeed more than once he was vehemently discouraged — in the venture of entering Paradise. But he knew, and the Other People of the Known World also knew, that side by side with her jewel-case the Ex-Dancer of 'The Cimmerian Troupe' kept upon her dressing-table a little Ten-Cent statue of the Mother of God. The aged Clown had long ago ceased to believe in God and why this stiff little image of His Mother should have affected him as it did was one of the mysteries of Paradise; but whether by reason of the bottles of lavender-water and the pots of cold-cream whose perfumes impregnated that sacred Recess, or by reason of old association — for in her youth the lovely dancer had sometimes received him in her tiring-room — any glimpse he could steal of this glassy-glazed, sky-blue statuette, softened the asperities and privations of his life. Stern and stony was the expression on the face of this statuette in Paradise; but sometimes the old clown fancied to himself that it was aware that a very aged atheist was fascinated by it and more than once he got a wicked satisfaction by imagining 'the Authorities' confronted by that Divine severity!

It was into Paradise that on certain occasions Princess Olwen herself was conveyed by the old woman and carefully deposited, without the loss of one of her little shoes, upon the top of a great wooden chest that stood there. This chest had belonged to no less a personage than an Admiral of the Navy, a great-uncle of Long Ago, who had been kind to the Dancer in her girlhood. It was when 'the Authorities' visited the Known World that this removal took place; the old woman feeling reluctant to permit the unsympathetic eye of such mundane persons to be cast for a single second upon this beautiful creature.

And it was a wonder to the old man — who was so often put to the blush by the old woman's 'Pshaw! pshaw!' when he placed Olwen on the mantelpiece — to note how tenderly the old woman handled the doll when she did this; tenderly and yet with a kind of petulant crossness; very much, in fact, in the way she handled him, when she washed his back or trimmed his beard or cut the finger-nails of his right hand.

It might have been supposed that the presence of that sky-blue statuette in Paradise was enough of the god-like to satisfy everybody in the Known World; but such was not the case.

Both the old couple and the Other People were conscious of two additional supernatural Powers. One of these was a minute image, only two inches high, of the great Chinese sage, Kwang-tze. This image of Kwang, who in his lifetime taught men and animals and birds and trees and fishes to worship nothing but the mysterious Tao, had become, by reason of the mythological aura of the Known World, a god in its own right. Nor was the great little god Kwang companionless at his end of the chimney-piece. By his side — but without a head — stood an image of Lao-tze. The headlessness of Laotze was due to the wrath of the old woman; for once, in putting Olwen with his shaky hand upon the Duck's side of the chimney-piece, the old man dropped one of the Princess' shoes into the fender. It was then that the old woman, trembling with indignation, had avenged herself upon all men and upon all philosophers in one fatal swing of her arm. Thus did Lao-tze lose his head. But in a miracle of masculine philosophy, beyond the powers of angry female understanding, Lao-tze, although deprived of the organ of rationality still continued to philosophize, as was evident from every fold of his dignified robe.

It was the image of Kwang, however, which, in a faded yellow garment, represented the attribute of Divinity in the Known World. All the Other People glanced reverently at that little figure in dirty yellow; and it was only a vein of ferocious cynicism in his feathered heart that prevented the Owl himself from murmuring a reluctant ‘Help me, O Kwang!’ when the old woman, approaching him with a duster, outraged beyond endurance his dark, philosophic, Saturnian soul.

Such were the Human, the Inanimate, the godlike inhabitants of the Top Floor Front. But Divinity and Humanity, even with the Inanimate superadded do not exhaust the Possible Categories of Being. There were moments when the Duck upon the chimney-piece, Olwen upon the couch, the Owl upon the book-case, and even two-legged Falada in Hell, were wont to cry aloud in a thin, wild, wistful voice, ‘Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!’ These outbursts of pitiful invocation usually accompanied one of those terrible visits of ‘the Authorities’, which always left the old woman in hysterics and the old man white as Olwen’s cuffs and trembling as the ailanthus buds in the wind. For what ‘the Authorities’ invariably did, before they went thump, thump, curse, spit and clatter, down the narrow stairs, was to remark in harsh, derisive tones. ‘The “Home” is the place for people like you! They’ll fix you up all right in the “Home”.’

It must not be supposed that ‘the Authorities’ were so lacking in all artistic instinct as to repeat this sentiment, on every visit, in exactly the same words. The burden of their message was the same, but its expression differed on diverse occasions. Sometimes they would say, ‘You two will learn to Sign on the Dotted Line in the “Home”,’ and at other times they would say, with no less Caesarean brevity, ‘You two, once in the “Home”, will have to toe the Line; and don’t you forget it!’

The Voices of ‘the Authorities’ were as terrible to the Other People in the Known World as they were to the old man and the old woman. They could not understand the meaning of the words; but the repetition of the syllable ‘Home’ struck them as something mysteriously dreadful; and as for the word ‘Line’, they associated it with the remote thunder that shook the whole house when any Elevated train passed by.

There was a large mirror at the end of the room facing the window; and on the chest of drawers below this mirror the old couple had placed a big glass Fish with its mouth wide open. This Fish had been a present to the old woman from the old man on the occasion of their Golden Wedding Day; and next to Olwen herself it was regarded by them both with the greatest reverence. If the word ‘Home’ terrified the old man, to the open-mouthed Fish these words meant something too awful for contemplation, something ichthyophagous, such as an iron kettle of fish or a diabolical fish-hook.

The general cry that went up from the Known World over the hysterical form of the old woman on the bed and the white face of the old man on his stiff knees beside her — that pitiful cry of ‘Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!’ — had its origin in the fact that there used to live in the Top Floor Front, before the present occupants drifted in, an illusive, enigmatic lady, tall, thin and under-nourished, called ‘Miss Rowe’. Miss Rowe was not her real name. Her real name was a deep historical secret, like the name of the ‘Man in the Iron Mask’; but it was as ‘Miss Rowe’ that she came to the rescue of all the dogs, cats, birds, and other harmless creatures, whether animate or inanimate, who had no one else to take pity upon them!

The placid sky-blue statuette in the Alcove and the dirty-yellow image of the great little god Kwang by the side of the headless Lao-tze, were the only Persons, in that Upper Room of Number Four, who did not join in this pitiful cry of ‘Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!’

Days passed by over the old couple — they were weeks to the Other People — without the uplifting of this solemn invocation. Fortunately ‘the Authorities’ restricted their visits — they doubtless had other candidates for their ‘Home’ — to certain particular days. Had these days, which were marked, not in the Catholic but in the Commercial Calendar, been more frequent than they were, the old couple, in spite of the presence of the Statuette in the Alcove and of Kwang on the mantelpiece, would doubtless, like many other odd couples in our energetic Civilization, have turned on the gas and laid themselves down to die.

As it was, they just dragged on, from day to day of their own dimension in Time, and from week to week of the Other People’s; stopping up their old ears against the periodic howls from the Prison, moving Olwen carefully into Paradise during the dreaded visitations, and bringing her back — when ‘the Authorities’ had thumped, cursed, spat and clattered themselves off — still more carefully, into the Known World.

Miss Rowe had been very thin in her life, as thin as she had been kind, and her wraith must have been thin in proportion, thin beyond all wraiths ever recorded in history, for it was never permitted to the old couple, with their feeble human eyesight, ever to catch sight of her; whereas the Duck had seen her once, the Owl had seen her three times, and the Fish saw her quite clearly every time she answered their desperate cry.

But although the wraith of Miss Rowe was thin and faint, there were moments in the life of the Known World when yet fainter Existences manifested themselves. Two Beings if they could be called Beings whose hold upon life was much more tenuous than the frailest human ghost — flitted every now and then from couch to chair, from screen to window, from door to fireplace.

No one perceived them except Olwen, and she only perceived them when her attention was freed for a while from the Duck's yellow beak and from the Fish's open mouth.

They were not elves, or ghosts, or elementals, these Two Beings. They were not sylphs or salamanders or undines. That they should have existed in the Known World at all only proved that the philosophy of the Owl was correct when he made it clear to the Duck by irrefutable logic that at every known point in space thousands of unknown dimensions meet and overlap.

These Two Beings, although so tenuous and although only visible to the dreamy stare of a romantic doll, had names of their own. They had also feelings of their own; feelings that were always bewildered and not infrequently seriously hurt.

These Beings were Lord Tormentil and Lady Potentilla.

Like other existences in the Known World — as the Owl had been explaining to the Duck for years — Lord Tormentil and Lady Potentilla were not causes of themselves. They had an undeniable First Cause.

Their First Cause was Miss Fells.

Miss Fells had inhabited the Top Floor Front before Miss Rowe. She was a voluminous writer of Romances and there still remained at the bottom of the Admiral's chest a fragment, two or three obscure pages only, of fast fading pencil-scrawls, that had been overlooked when Miss Fells, who was as small as she was aristocratic, had been carried out in her tiny coffin.

Lord Tormentil was a cripple and Lady Potentilla was a High Church woman of strict piety; but their First Cause — the creative genius of Miss Fells — had made them to be passionate lovers. She had, however, placed between their love and their happiness a deep grievance. This grievance lay in the fact that Lord Tormentil was a dogmatic Materialist. To the searching intelligence of Lord Tormentil everything outside the Known World was

‘Tommy Rot’. It was not clear from the few last pencil-scrawls on Miss Fells’ manuscript whether this trouble between these noble lovers was destined to culminate in tragedy or find a happy solution. She may have intended that Lord Tormentil should hear a Voice; or that Lady Potentilla should see a Light; but Miss Fells had departed leaving this solution to posterity, or to the same Limbo from which Falada had been saved!

One thing is certain — a credulous bewilderment used to come at moments over the bold, shrewd mind of Lord Tormentil and a sceptical weakness, amounting to a feeling of forlorn futility, would sometimes cloud the expressive lineaments of Lady Potentilla. When these moods came on, neither of these Two Beings, fumbling about on the twilight edge between Existence and Non-Existence, knew *what* they were or *where* they were. Their First Cause had left both their character and their destiny frayed, ragged, blurred and indistinct.

The confusion would have been more pitiable, however, if Olwen had not been watching them! Olwen knew nothing and cared less about philosophical questions. She would always fall into a young girl’s dream of White Horses and Disguised Princes, the moment the Owl began to speak. To the mind of Olwen, therefore, it was enough that a sad nobleman and a stately gentlewoman were deeply in love. And thus the attention of Olwen kept these two half-created ones in some sort of ambiguous ‘Status Quo’. Created by the most gentle and the most aristocratic of authors, they were preserved from dissolving into Nonentity by the interest of the most romantic of dolls!

‘Owl of Roanoke’, said a plaintive voice one day when the old man, in placing Olwen by the Duck’s side, had placed her so that the Duck could only see a fragment of her lovely face; ‘Owl of Roanoke’, said the Duck, ‘can Love be satisfied by the sight of ladies’ profiles?’

‘Duck of Dirty Ditch,’ replied the Owl morosely, ‘Love can never be satisfied; and since that is the case, and every pleasure is relative, between the two extremes of catching a glimpse of a vanishing tail-feather and of swallowing the Loved One whole, it is wise to enjoy whatever contact it may be, however limited, that chance bestows on us.’

‘Chance?’ cried the inquisitive and amorous Duck, ‘*What is chance*?’

It was at this point in the conversation that the Fish intervened.

‘Allow *me,* your Worship,’ said the Fish hurriedly, ‘allow *me* to answer this infatuated fool’s ridiculous question. Chance, you lily-white idiot, is a mere human word, unworthy of gills or beaks. All that happens is due to the in-breathing and out-breathing of the Great White Whale. That the old man put you where you can only see that pretty wench’s profile was the will of Him that Spouteth forever. There is no other cause of anything that happens; there never was; there never will be. The White Whale wills the Good. The White Whale wills the Evil. Blesséd and cursed be the name of the White Whale!’

It was the Princess Olwen herself who spoke now. Her beautiful eyes were fixed upon the capacious mouth of the fatalistic Fish; and blushing slightly she lowered her long eyelashes.

‘I would much rather,’ she said, in a high-pitched but extremely melodious voice, ‘not be referred to as a “pretty wench”.’

‘Don’t notice him, Princess,’ said the Owl, in a gentle, paternal voice, subduing his natural moroseness. ‘Fish were the first experiments of Chance. They were created out of Chaos and they have Chaos in their bones, in their fins, and in their tails. Let us return to Philosophy which recognizes no such Causes as White Whales, and in which the matter of females’ — here he made a little bow towards Olwen— ‘combines civility with — with — combines civility with — civility with—’

‘With dotage!’ whistled the Fish rudely, continuing to open his mouth at Olwen in a manner at once obscene and fatal.

‘Will you,’ groaned the Duck, ‘could you,’ implored the Duck, ‘give the old man a sign, a token, a hint with your heavenly eyes to move you around, ever so little a way round, so that I can see a trifle more of your heart-breaking shape?’ With these well-chosen words did the tantalized Duck seek to cajole the profile of his Desired.

But the Owl hastened to lift the occasion up to the lost level of philosophical speculation.

‘I have been wondering,’ he remarked gravely, glaring at the bent back of the old woman who was spreading newspapers on the floor preparatory to arranging a bath for the old man, ‘what Law it is in the Known World that prevents us from communicating our wishes to these Human Automatons in the gross noises which they call *speech,* rather than in the pure thought language which we so eloquently employ among ourselves. Can you, Princess, can you, Duck of Dirty Ditch, can you, open-mouthed Son of Chaos, offer me any light on this serious problem?’

The grave and scholarly nature of the Owl’s topic was in a certain sense mitigated by the demonic darkness of his glaring eyes. But nevertheless from the girlish breast of Olwen there up-rose a weary little sigh. No subject interested her in the least, unless it had to do with Love, or with Presents, or with White Horses, or with Castles in the Air! A cloud of sadness descended on her beautiful face. It was only when the Duck was actually fainting with amorous excitement that he, her most devoted adherent, had the least interest for her. At other times the alert curiosity of his extended neck, the guilelessness of his eye, the extreme flatness of his yellow beak filled her with a wild longing to escape from the Known World altogether. ‘La!’ she would murmur to herself— ‘O La! I wish I were dead! And I will die soon, too, if I don’t find a more romantic lover than this duck!’

In truth the philosophical problem propounded by the Owl to the People of the Known World met with no response from any direction at all. The Fish whistled a bawdy ditty learnt from a drunken sailor in which the word ‘wench’ was most unsympathetically introduced. The Duck kept repeating lamentably, ‘Can Love be satisfied in Profile only? In Profile only can Love be satisfied?’ and Lady Potentilla, vexed beyond endurance by the ‘haverings’ and self-contradictions of Lord Tormentil, turned her back upon him and walked to the window.

The old woman, meanwhile, continued making her preparations for the old man’s bath; the ailanthus twigs continued to sway in the wind; the sky-blue statuette in the Alcove continued to stare at the Admiral’s chest.

Only the old man, uneasily anticipating his bath, seemed nervously conscious of the unusual import of this day to all the occupants of the Top Floor Front. He walked up and down; he fidgeted with the headless body of Lao-tze; he gazed nervously at the door of the Known World and at the door of Hell. Every now and then he listened intently, and when he listened he looked at Olwen, and once he lifted his hand towards Olwen, and then he glanced hurriedly and furtively at the back of the old woman. Though she went on so methodically laying newspapers on the floor, which now securely covered the larger portion of bother her precious ‘Hook’ rugs, and in no way showed the least sign that this occasion differed from those of a similar nature that had taken place a thousand times before — well did they both know what the other was thinking! The last time! The last!

The tea-kettle on the stove began rattling its lid and letting fall small jets of boiling water which hissed down its heated metal sides and struck the hot stove with a gasp of disaster that made it seem as if a miniature cosmic cataclysm was in progress behind the screen. It was an old feud between these two feminine arbiters of the household. The very shape of the tea-kettle whose straightness expressed the rigorous conception of feminine rectitude it held was in part responsible for its incapacity to contain the water one second after the successful consummation of its boiling had been achieved. The old woman's former profession alone was sufficient to implant a strong suspicion and dislike in the kettle's hearth-bound, domestically despotic heart, and it used these eruptions caused by the impersonal Laws of Nature as every member of the feminine sex uses them — for her own psychological and emotional ends — which in the kettle's case were, namely, to upbraid and scold the old woman for the careless, shiftless hussy she was in not paying attention to the primal, unequivocal duties and concerns of one in possession of an old man, a kettle and a hearth. This bickering avalanche always roused furious annoyance in the old woman, and as she turned to quench her shrewdish detractor as she had done so many times in the past, with a vicious push of the knob to shut off the gas, 'The last time! The last!' so diffused itself through her mind that she stayed stockstill behind the screen without making a motion, staring at the kettle's imperceptibly rising and falling lid which though reduced to silence still managed to convey inaudible taunts.

She stayed behind the screen so long that the old man began at last to be aware of the inertia that had taken possession of the Known World. His eyes were fixed on his piece of soap on the blue saucer where he was accustomed to find it and in his mind too came and went 'The last time!'

It was then that the great little god Kwang spoke an audible sentence. He spoke quietly, humbly, playfully; and his tone was like the tone of nothingness talking to nothingness or of silence talking to silence. 'It is very sad,' said Kwang, 'but we must be more than Superior Men,' and he looked whimsically at the Duck, 'if Love is to satisfy us. We must—'

All the people of the Known World listened intently to this gracious oracle. Even the headless neck of Kwang's companion bowed a little towards him, as if accepting his word as in the true tradition of immemorial antiquity.

'We must,' pronounced Kwang; and his faint voice became almost as high-pitched as Olwen's, 'we must seek Love as water seeks its own level!'

A dead silence followed this pronouncement. The metaphysics of the Owl, the amorousness of the Duck, the fatalistic obscenity of the Fish were all rebuked by this Logos from the land of Honoured Age.

And it seemed to the People of the Known World that more than half a week passed over their heads while the old man and the old woman never moved and the rumbling of the Elevated Railway sounded in their hearts like the tumbril wheels of the Revolution.

So tense was the knot of contrariety on that flowing stream of change which as Heraclitus says carries all things (even the very gods) away, that a tragic vibration passed from it into the heart of every dweller in the Known World.

The Owl lost for a moment the clue to his accustomed Philosophy and gave way to a dark, interior anguish, in which he loathed his life in Patchin Place and longed with a savage nostalgia for the smell of moss-damp, rain-scented woods.

And 'Love, Love, Love!' sighed Lady Potentilla. And 'Water seeks its own level!' quivered, like the echo of an echo, the thin voice of Lord Tormentil.

And 'Never satisfied — never satisfied,' gulped the Fish.

And 'Profiles be damned!' groaned the Duck.

‘Was there no Fairy watching o’er my birth?’ cried Olwen in Shakespearean rhythm. ‘Will *no one* bring me a disguised prince? What will I do if I have always to see the yellow beak of a Duck and the open mouth of a Fish? Who will give me a ride on a lovely white horse?’ And, at that, the beautiful girl began silently weeping; every little invisible tear being like the ghost of a dewdrop in the Petit Trianon.

And then once more, out of the silence of the Known World, there arose from all the People of the Place the familiar, piteous cry— ‘Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!’

And this time Miss Rowe came.

Dark and yet bright, like a red and white geranium behind a cracked window, was Miss Rowe this time. So thin she was that although the Owl and the Duck saw her and the Fish saw her, the tears in Olwen’s eyes blurred the beautiful young girl’s vision too darkly for her to see anything but that tedious yellow beak at her side and that great, gaping, open mouth under the mirror. Olwen *did* just see the wavering ailanthus buds reflected in the Mirror; and she fancied that it was the sight of these that comforted her. But in reality it was the coming of Miss Rowe.

And Miss Rowe, now that she *had* come, stood just inside the door of the Top Floor Front and instead of talking to anyone in particular she began telling, to all the People of the Known World, a long rambling story.

Lord Tormentile found the courage, when he heard Miss Rowe’s voice, to cross the whole length of the room and join Lady Potentilla at the window. Olwen observed this occurrence through her tears and it seemed to her a dramatic and very beautiful event. Lady Potentilla at the window seemed to her like the White Lady of Avenel in ‘The Monastery’. Olwen did not always listen when the old man was reading to the old woman, but the White Lady of Avenel had seemed to her the right sort of character for a book to contain; and as she now listened to Miss Rowe's rambling tale, she began to weep again, for she began to feel that she herself was the sad Catholic fugitive in 'The Monastery' surrounded by rough admirers of the Lower Orders, and understood by none save The White Lady.

Miss Rowe's story was about cats. It was also about magic charms and about doves and tents and ruined sheep-folds and gipsy caravans. Her voice, as she told it, was like the sound of a tiny, silvery hand-organ; and her figure, to all the People of the Known World, was like the wavering moon-shadow of a motionless birch-tree falling upon troubled water.

The old man and the old woman neither heard nor saw Miss Rowe. There had begun a pitiful disagreement between the two old people. The old man insisted that he should postpone taking his bath for fear 'the Authorities' should come when he was in the middle of it; but the old woman said this was nonsense, that in evenings everyone went to theatres or dined on balconies and never came to take people to 'Homes' at such an hour.

It was with the intention of opening the door of 'The Anteroom', as she persisted in calling it, that the old woman now walked towards the thin wraith of Miss Rowe. The Other People in the Known World were astonished at the tender solicitude with which Miss Rowe moved aside; treating the old woman — although she kept repeating in her high cracked voice, 'Pshaw! pshaw! pshaw!' — just as respectfully as if she were still the Lovely Dancer of the 'Cimmerian Troupe'.

The old man, who was now standing at the window, quite unconscious of Lord Tormentil and Lady Potentilla, seemed to be paralyzed by a commotion he heard in the alley below.

'They are coming,' he whispered hoarsely. 'They are coming to carry us to the "Home"!'

But without taking any notice of what he said the old woman opened the door of Hell and let into it a flood of light. It was only after she had done this and was fumbling for the tin bath that the old man's cry— 'They are coming to take us! They are coming to take us!' reached her deaf ears. She turned towards him and he stumbled across the floor towards her.

Together they stood, facing each other, each trembling, each with a stricken face. They imagined they heard 'the Authorities' thumping, cursing, spitting, clattering, up the first flight of the steep stairs.

Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!

And hours seemed to pass over the Known World then, and over Paradise, and over Hell; and all these hours that passed, behold! they were as weeks to the Other People of the Known World and as weeks to Falada in Hell.

But as the old couple clung to each other and waited for the onslaught on their door an incredible relief slowly relaxed every nerve in their bodies when in place of what they feared, a cavalcade of joyous revellers paused to disturb in his fantastic reveries their strayed Mercutio of the Top Floor Back.

But they would come in the morning to take the old man and the old woman away. Everybody seemed to know *that.* The Owl knew it. The Duck knew it. The Fish knew it. Even Miss Fells' half-created ones obscurely knew it.

Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!

And the day drew to its close; and the old man in silence was given his bath; and the old woman cleaned her teeth more elaborately, more fussily, and with more contemptuous 'Pshaws!' directed at the obtuseness of All Men, than she had ever done before; and they laid them down together side by side under the covers of their bed and drew up the counterpane under their chins and darkness fell upon the Top Floor Front.

But in the great clanging, marbly, brassy City, littered with sordid lives, strewn with wind-tossed débris and bitter dust, exhaling mephitic stenches and corpse-chills, one resource, one issue, one last escape is left. A rusty iron stove supplies it and a patient row of little oblong knobs.

O holy gas, O comfortable gas, O thrice sacro-sanct gas, O gas, deliverer and redeemer of the old and unhappy in this too active world, O gas that art more healing and more divine than that Nepenthe which Helen brought from Egypt, O death-giving, terror-removing, euthanasian Gas, Thou must have been, under the deft fingers of this thinnest of all ghosts, these old people's escape from the 'Home!'

Let the ultimate opinions of 'the Authorities' be divided as they might be about the cause of this event between the austere tea-kettle placed on the top of the stove which could conceivably have extinguished the burners and the two pairs of dead and stiffened hands under the counterpane, either of which might have done it too, the Other People of the Known World were wiser. They had *seen* what they had *seen.* With those eyes of Inanimates that can see in darkness they had watched the wraith of Miss Rowe struggle for immeasurable Time before she managed to achieve — for the weakness of ghosts only permits the feeblest of physical efforts! — the least, little, faintest, filmiest pressure, like the pressure of the wings of a Lunar Moth, upon those fatal china knobs!

When morning came at last and the long hours that were like weeks to the Other People — and the Other People were *all* the People now — had passed away, it was not concealed from Olwen who had been put back by the old man — it was his last action on earth — upon the mantelpiece that the insubstantial Materialist and his devoted Religieuse were still gazing into the branches of the ailanthus and disputing about the Grievance that divided them. It was clearly the moment for them to finish Miss Fells' Romance. But how had Miss Fells meant them to finish it?

And then Olwen from the mantelpiece was aware of a strange thing. She heard the phantasmal Gentlewoman laugh with a little, roguish, wanton laugh and she saw her drop a mocking, irresponsible, inviting curtsey!

And Olwen's blue eyes opened wider than they had ever opened before when she beheld Lord Tormentil, that ungullible adherent of the visible world, hurriedly *cross himself* before lifting his lady's feverish hand to his lips and taking her in his arms!

It became evident to Olwen's young-lady-like intelligence, that there was something in the Known World that morning that was turning everything upside down. Olwen had never heard of Death. That those two old heads above the counterpane should look so like *waxen dolls* did not strike her mind as sad but as very proper and right.

As for Lord Tormentil and Lady Potentilla it was clear that they were engaged in writing their own 'Finis'; for as they forgot their Grievance they embraced; and as they embraced they faded quite away...

'The Authorities' were now banging loudly at the door. Would they find the Other People there when they came in? The old circus performers had escaped them; but would the Other People escape them? Would the end of the Fish and the Duck and the Owl be that horrible Limbo from which the old man had saved Falada? Death had saved the old man and the old woman; but Death has no power over Inanimates.

But it did come to pass that the Other People of the Known World left all the troubles of Patchin Place behind them.

And the manner of their escaping was as follows:

‘The Authorities’ had broken the lock of the door now, and in a second they would be inside the room.

But the door into Hell had been left wide open and Hell was flooded with light. And out of Hell, into the Known World, stumbled on his two remaining legs, the White Horse, Falada.

And all of the People of the Known World moved from their places — such was the power of the presence of Death — and came forward to meet the White Horse. And Olwen leapt lightly from the mantelpiece — as lightly as if she had been the dead dancer herself in her loveliest youth — upon the back of the White Horse, whose mane she seized with her little hand.

And the Owl said, ‘What is the final cause of the secondary cause of the immediate cause of the stillness of the old man and the old woman?’ And ‘I smell the mosses of the woods of Over-Hill-and-Dale,’ cried the Owl.

And the Fish said, ‘The White Whale has spouted to Heaven. All is Fate’. And ‘I smell the waters of the grottos of Over-Hill-and-Dale’, cried the Fish.

And the Duck said: ‘Now that she is mounted on horseback I can see much more of her than her profile.’ And, ‘I smell the mud of the ditches of Over-Hill-and-Dale!’ cried the Duck.

And the great, little god Kwang, said, while the headless Lao-tze bowed towards him, ‘Water seeks and water finds its level’. And ‘It is very sad and it is *not* very sad!’ cried the great, little god Kwang.

But Falada, lifting his proud head, uttered only one word; and it was a word never heard before in the Known World. It was indeed a word, the meaning of which no man, in *any* world will known until Merlin comes forth from his Island of Glass.

Falada uttered the word ‘ESPLUMEOIR’.

And when ‘the Authorities’ forced open the door of the Top Floor Front all they found was two dead bodies that flatly refused to sign any ‘dotted line’; and even when, in their gross manner, they rushed into the Alcove, they found no one to hurt or to insult. What they found was the Mother of God who confronted them with a terrible fixed stare.

Up and Out (1957)

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UP AND OUT
THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

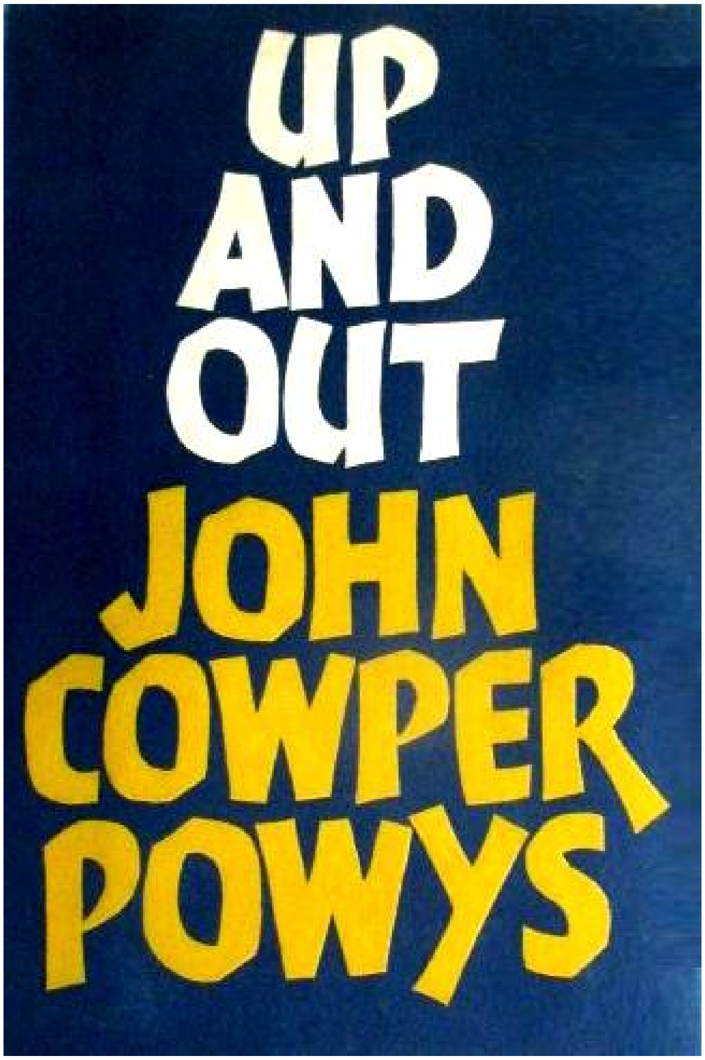
UP
AND
OUT
JOHN
COWPER
POWYS

The first edition

TO

L. U. WILKINSON

UP AND OUT

A mystery-tale

GOR GOGINOG IS my name and I am writing this in the English language for a special and peculiar reason.

I was an orphan in an orphanage and I was never told who my parents were. I was born in a Welsh quarrytown called Blaenau-Ffestiniog under conditions that made me not only speak in two languages when I first learnt to speak but also made me think in two languages when I first learnt to think. I became indeed at a very early age, in fact either at five or at six, seized with a desperate mania for words: yes! for words as in their essential nature they really are, that is to say the expression of every kind of thought, emotion, feeling, sensation and idea that can possibly enter from outside, or can possibly spring up from inside, any imaginable or conceivable living creature. In a childish way, but whether in accordance with my appearance as a small boy I cannot say, I was endowed with an intelligence a great deal beyond my years, and with a shrewdness in coaxing, cajoling, and seducing to my purpose, whatever purpose at that particular moment it might be, not only older boys and older girls but grownup people of both sexes.

In response to my fervent solicitations a middle-aged American couple who visited Blaenau took me with them as their adopted son, for they themselves were childless, to New York City, and here I remained until Rhitha, a girl I had courted when a boy and who lived at Llandderfel, came to New York. And do you know what, apart from courting Rhitha, I spent my boyhood and young manhood upon? Upon one sole thing; upon inventing a universal Western Language! It sounds crazy, and of course some of you will accuse me of playing the copycat to that invented language called Esperanto and even to the inspired author of “Finnegan’s Wake.” But any way my purpose was to mingle and mix up in one verbal paint-pot, or let us say upon one syllabic palette, all the most characteristically national and all the most local and idiomatic expressions in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Swedish, and Laplandish, and out of these multi-national composite sounds to create a lexiconic instrument through which the whole body, soul, and spirit of the men, women, and children of Europe could be expressed.

I was well advanced in my teens when I first courted Rhitha. In fact we were both seventeen — only as my birthday was the last day of November in the old year, and hers was the last day of April in the new year she was a few months the younger. Rhitha, like myself, was Welsh. She came from a small village not very far from Blaenau called Llandderfel, and she had for the patron-saint, patron-god or patron-devil of her village a deep, blind, unshakable awe and reverence which included the saint-devil’s war-horse.

I was a tall lad and Rhitha was tall and slender. She had long white arms and beautiful legs and I had long strong arms and very athletic legs. Like Rhitha I had a small waist and deft, rapid, nimble movements. Indeed I would say that it was the peculiarly quick reciprocity between my body and my mind that was at the heart of all I felt and of all I did. Everything I saw, heard, touched, tasted and smelt, was embraced, like the body of my loved one, by an exquisite concordance of my whole nature. And the curious thing is that Rhitha and I, allowing for her being a girl and my being a boy, were almost identical in these respects. She, too, was astonishingly rapid in all her movements. She, too, quite obviously to all who watched her, was wont to throw her entire being, “body, soul and spirit,” as the conventional phrase puts it, into every single thing she took in, whether it were a curve in a statue, a colour in a picture, a scent in a leaf, or a series of notes in a tune. Over the most evasive things in nature, a dragon-fly's eye, a lizard's foot, a minnow's tail, the slimy gloss on the spine of a black slug, the far-away wide-curving horizon of the ocean, Rhitha would hover with the same devouring enchantment as I felt for such things.

And we were the same too in our moral emotions. The one evil which neither of us could endure was cold-blooded cruelty; and when in our prowlings about New York City — which, in some respects, without being conceited, for you can easily be a very cowardly crusader, I might call crusades against cruelty and which were much more exciting to both of us than any film or television or opera or play could be — we chanced at last to come upon what the vivisectors were doing to dogs, cats, monkeys, and all sorts of other animals, we soon realized that we had found the worst example of unspeakable wickedness to be discovered in the whole of our modern world. We are both equally clever at getting round people and influencing people and moulding people to our immediate purpose; so working together, Rhitha with all a woman's wiles, and I with the guile of a Borgia or the statecraft of a Lord Burleigh, we soon got an entrance into all the cruellest and wickedest vivisection laboratories in New York City.

To say we were horrified and shocked at what we saw is as people say now "to put it mildly." Nor were our feelings mollified by learning that the tolerant and indulgent neutral government of India was sending this very year over two thousand monkeys in order that there should not be a month's or even a week's relaxation of the excruciating pain inflicted by the descendants of Cro-Magnon cave-men, many of them with more than a dash of Neanderthal-blood in their veins upon their innocent ancestors who had not yet had the cunning to come down from the trees.

We were far from blaming the medical profession for what we saw of these infernal cruelties. We soon discovered that ordinary doctors know absolutely nothing of these horrors. What struck us as most appalling were certain attempts we found going on to graft living animals upon one another. We found for instance a certain group of vivisectors intensely pleased with themselves for having produced by vivisection a dog with two heads. We got a glimpse of this phenomenon; and we found it hard to forget the pathetic way in which these two heads, who evidently felt themselves to be, and had every reason for such a feeling, two separate identities, with separate minds and bodies, watched each other and licked each other and evidently said to each other: "We have heard about the tortures inflicted by the Holy Office of the Inquisition but even the Holy Office didn't graft a Wesleyan baby on the neck of a Baptist baby."

Never had vivisectors brought forward all their favourite humbug about the life of one precious human child being well worth the excruciating sufferings of a million dogs, and a million cats, not to mention two or three million monkeys, with so little effect as in the case of Rhitha and me. We made our way hurriedly to Patchin Place, just off Sixth Avenue, in which there grew a gigantic ailanthus tree that we had come, ever since we first met, to regard as our "Sacred Grove" of refuge, though it was a lonely and a rather forlorn tree and also an extremely proud and very unbending tree.

Here then we got into the habit of standing, perhaps recalling the days when our monkey-ancestors came down from such a tree, but at any rate in a mood of savage anger at the cruelty of these vivisectors, each of us with a hand against the trunk of the tree. It was on a certain Wednesday we were standing here, the day of the week dedicated by the Anglo-Saxons to Woden and by the Romans and the Welsh to Mercury. The lights of the city were lit, and every now and then a tram or a taxi could be heard. But there were only small floating clouds of very thin mist and vapour between our ailanthus tree and the “enormous and delicate” sky.

The evening was well advanced by this time and the sky was growing black. But its blackness was the reverse of a thick, dense, opaque, heavy darkness. For once it happened, as I told myself afterwards, and when we recalled what we experienced Rhitha entirely agreed with me, that the sky looked what it actually was — a portion of the vast unending limitless gulf in which the galaxies and the nebulae and the stars of our system and the stars of all the other systems live and die even as we do ourselves.

“Listen my heart,” I said. “Let us pray to the King of the Gods by his three-fold name. Let us pray to him by his name Jehovah, as the simpler among the Jews called him, though every Rabbi would explain to them that in reality he was *nameless.* Let us pray to him by his name Jupiter or Jove, as the Romans worshipped him. And let us pray to him by his name Zeus the Son of Kronos as the Greeks worshipped him.”

Never afterwards did I, Gor Goginog of Blaenau, forget Rhitha’s profile as I saw it outlined at that moment between the lighted window of a small ground-floor apartment and the sacred tree of our Grove of Worship.

“What shall we pray to the King of the Gods to do?” Rhitha asked.

I pressed the knuckles of the hand that held hers against the bark of the ailanthus tree, pressed them so hard that it hurt. And I thought to myself, “I’m glad it hurt. When people make vows to the immortals it’s a good thing to arrange, as the old Athenians used to do, for some kind of offering. My offering now is this pain in my knuckles.”

“I’ll tell you exactly, my heart, what we’ll pray for tonight. We’ll pray to Jehovah-Jove-Zeus that every single creature being vivisected tomorrow shall feel no pain. It’s the day the Saxons have dedicated to their war-god Thor, and the day we Welsh call Dydd Iau, the day of Jove. But never mind what we call it. As Goethe says, ‘The Name is sound and smoke obscuring Heaven’s clear glow!’ Yes, let us pray to Jove, O my treasure, ‘in good set terms.’ Let us pray that every single animal, dog, cat, monkey or any other, they will be torturing tomorrow in this city shall become, until it dies, wholly and totally devoid of the capacity to feel anything at all! *That* will worry these devils! We couldn’t possibly worry them more than by immunising and petrifying and atrophying and de-sensitizing every victim in their laboratories! Have you prayed as I told you, Rhitha?”

Rhitha, who had been pressing her forehead against the trunk of the ailanthus, moved her neck a little so that she could give a slight nod in reply to this question.

“But you look dazed, my sweet,” I went on. “Are you hearing any of those messages from other dimensions which you told me about last night?”

Rhitha moved away from the tree and looked me full in the face. “Do you want me to be absolutely honest and frank?” she enquired.

“Of course,” was the only thing I could say.

“Well, Gor darling, to tell you the truth, ever since we have been in this alley and near this tree I have been listening to a long rigmarole going on and on and on and on, defending this vivisection atrocity. O yes! and much more frightening than that, Gor darling, I have seen the face of the Being, far above us, up in the air, who has been talking to me.”

“What sort of thing did he say?” I asked her.

“He said that there was only one important thing in life. He said that eating and drinking and building and painting and writing and carving and making music and racing and boxing and competing in athletics and having children and looking after them, were all only ways of amusing ourselves while we kept our race alive upon the earth. But he said that the one important thing, the one thing for which we were here, the one thing about which as human beings we had a right to be proud of, was our struggle to *understand*! Yes, he said the only important thing in life is to understand life; to understand what the earth and the ocean and the stars and every sort and condition of fire really and actually consisted of! And above everything else, he kept repeating, the important thing is to understand the nature of the creatures, lower in the scale than ourselves, who inhabit earth, air and water, and perhaps even fire; and in order to understand these creatures, their ways, their feelings, their bodily and mental reactions, it was absolutely essential to subject them to every kind of examination and experiment. We vivisectors, he said, do not do what we do in order to obtain for ourselves the curious satisfaction that is usually described as 'sadistic pleasure.' If such pleasure comes to us in pursuit of our duty, well! that is, if our temperament happens to be a sadistic one, what might be called, as the proverb says, 'virtue bringing its own reward.' But since the whole purpose of life is to understand life, it is absolutely essential that we should experiment with animals and with birds and with fishes; and although at present we have no idea where there are creatures who live in fire, we certainly must keep our attention fixed on fire so as not to miss them if they are there, and not to lose the opportunity of experimenting upon *them also*, if they exist."

Here, Rhitha stopped speaking; and I noticed the most extraordinary expression cross her features.

"Can you see this face up there now?" I enquired, not a little disconcerted by the strange look she had.

Rhitha nodded. And it was then that I cried out to her: "O please, please, my dear, tell me what you see — tell me, tell me quick! Your face is so white!"

"Don't look at me, Gor. Look down at the ground. But hold my hand tight."

I obeyed her to the letter. On the ground I saw a small black ant carrying some object, smaller than itself, of a pale yellow colour, and followed by another ant, a little larger, that did not seem to be carrying anything.

"His face is like a vulture's. But it's his eyes that frighten me most. They seem to be saying to every worm and toad and lizard: 'You must let me take off your skin a little higher up please! I want to see exactly what's underneath it *there* and *there.* You say it hurts. O I never stop for *that!*' Then his eyes seem to scoop at the body of a dying rabbit. 'O no! no! I can't possibly let you give up the ghost yet. Do you still feel *that?* No? Or only a very little? I can't explain to you now why it is so important to me to know if you have any feeling left *there* — yes! Just there! Hurting's part of it. If it *didn't* hurt, you wouldn't wriggle. And if you didn't wriggle, how should I get on with all my knowing and understanding?' Then those terrible eyes seem to go further. Having dissected living birds and living fishes, the mind behind those eyes begins to hunt for some helpless planet! O Gor! Gor! It's drawing me up along with it now! It has things that pull you like the horny suckers of a devil-fish! And they can gouge and scrape and claw and delve! O Gor! Gor! He's after the moon now! He's got the rim of the moon in his fingers! He's struggling to nibble or gobble from out that perfect rondure a moonlightbleeding, moonlight-oozing piece of moon-flesh! Listen, Gor darling, listen, I beg you! Do you hear that extraordinary noise? Like the sound we hear late at night sometimes, and call it the wind! But it's no more the wind than it is the moaning of the sea! It's the moon! But the moon now has stopped lamenting its loneliness in space as the only satellite of the earth. It's shrieking now! Yes, the moon is shrieking! It's a sound much worse than a wail of inconsolable sorrow! It's a clear, harsh, raw shriek, a shriek of jagged hurting! It's that little corner of the moon quivering with the pain of being grabbed at with the idea of tearing it and wrenching it from its mother, even if her silver flesh shrieks! O Gor! I just can't stand it! He hasn't managed to get that piece of the moon out yet! But he will. He will! I'm sure he will."

Watching Rhitha's face and listening to her words and looking at the moon, though I could hear nothing and see nothing, I began to be frightened. I told myself I mustn't, I mustn't, I mustn't let myself get scared! With all the grave authority I could assume, speaking in fact as if I were Math the son of Mathonwy, "Stop that! Stop that!" I cried.

"Stop what, Gor darling? What is it I must stop?"

"You must stop imagining yourself yielding an inch to that wretch. You must stop thinking we can't intervene. I *can* and I *will* intervene; and you shall help me in doing so."

My voice had taken on a tone that really was rather impressive. The girl was dominated by it and looked up at me as if she were awaiting something from me that would change the entire situation. And something did come. It came in the form of a word, or rather of three words, three short words, each an expressive monosyllable. "*Up and out!*" I cried. "*Up and out!*"

Rhitha could not have been more startled. Indeed I was startled myself at the effect of this cry of mine. The cry was wholly involuntary. It just rushed out of me. I hadn't the faintest prescience of it before it was in the air, and its challenge and the echoes of its challenge resounding among the gulfs and chasms of the mountains of that moon I was seeking to rescue. But neither of us had time now to listen to echoes. Where, in the name of Jehovah, where, in the name of Jove, where in the name of Zeus, were we? And then I knew. The hydrogen bombs of both East and West had been dropped in one wild mad, reckless orgy of universal destruction. Atomic science, as it had long threatened to do, had murdered the whole human race. We were both rendered unconscious at first in the shock of being carried so high into the air. But we were unhurt and we were side by side when the shock was over.

We found ourselves standing on a grassy plain the horizon of which stretched away into the sky in every direction. There were no flowers there, no trees, no bushes, no plants, no growths of any kind, no reeds, no rushes. There were only millions upon millions of grass-blades, all of them green as the greenest emeralds, only not in the least transparent. The sky surrounding this green plain was the greyest sky I have ever seen. Grey is a funny colour. Grey is a tricky colour. Grey is a mysterious colour. Grey is a ghostly colour. It is very rarely that in our ordinary life upon earth, whether we are in the New World or in the Old World, in the north or the south, in the east or the west that we see any perfect example of the colour grey. The sea is never grey. Lakes, rivers, estuaries are never grey. I mean they are not as grey as was this amazing sky surrounding this emerald-green undulating plain.

Rhitha and I looked at each other in dazed silence.

"Is this the piece of the moon, do you suppose, Gor?" she murmured, "that I watched that demon trying to scoop and gouge out?"

"No! I can't believe *that,* my darling. I would say it's some completely unknown satellite of this earth that revolves either much slower or much faster because it is so small; but whether faster or slower I'm not mathematical or astronomical enough to know. In fact, my sweet, it's a shame that a clever girl like you should be tied up with an old heavy-weather book-worm like me! I feel a mad desire to run in to the Blaenau public library, and get a few of the latest books on astronomy!"

"You mean," murmured Rhitha with just the faintest tinge of mischief in her smile, "those books about galaxies and nebulae; things of which I never hear mention without wondering why one of them ends with a Latin plural and the other with an English plural! Is that because a Latin plural means they can't ever stop going on, while an English plural means that we just don't know whether they stop or don't stop?"

"What do you exactly mean by 'stop'?"

"O, I don't *exactly* mean anything! But *you* tell me, my dear, whether the stars in the sky go on forever or come to an end?"

I struggled in my mind to remember what a certain book I had got out of the Blaenau public library had declared on this point: but all I could think of were the two expressions, firstly "an expanding universe," and secondly "background material."

"I suppose, my dear child," I began, anxious to prove to this lively girl that to the massive masculine intellect an "expanding universe" was as obvious a truth as that two and two make four and that the existence of "background material" was as certain as the fact that if you could get paper at the stationer's you could also get ink, "I suppose that scattered throughout all space there are invisible little atoms of matter that any fiery star or rushing meteorite enjoys snatching up as it plunges around and of course, as it does so, gets bigger and bigger and bigger, till it swells at last into a proper grown-up star from being at the beginning nothing but a poor little infantile asteroid, if that is the library word for a star that so far is only a toddler."

Rhitha positively clapped her hands for joy. Everything that was maternal in her sensitive little body pulsed and palpitated and pullulated with excitement to think of these little babies among stars growing up to take their place in an "expanding universe."

We were both silent for a while, gazing, neither gaily nor sadly, but in one of those fits of abstracted quiescence into which for its own wise purpose the body leads the mind, at our green island and its mysterious grey horizon.

But it was not long before the girl murmured: “Don’t you find it hard to believe that there are no living people left in Asia, Africa, America, Australia and New Zealand? Surely, Gor dear, there must be a few left? A few infants in Africa and a few old men in Scotland?”

She was watching my face so intently that she must have known that my thoughts, whatever they were, were troubling me quite a good deal.

“What is it, Gor darling?” she asked.

“How quick you are, little one, to read my mind! Well, I’ll tell you, honestly and exactly, what I was thinking just then. I was thinking what a thing it is that the whole of Nature, that is to say all that we know of the earth and the sea and the air, is full of hideous cruelty; and save for a few grass-eating and nut-eating and fruit-eating creatures, most of the denizens of earth, water, air, and possibly even fire, feed upon each other. What I had in my mind was simply this natural and obvious question. If to have what we call N*ature* at all — that is to say to have such an elaborately complicated, such a teeming and seething cosmos of living things, all struggling with one another and most of them devouring one another — we are compelled to accept, practically unchanged, the spectacle that life has given us, wouldn’t it be wise if we men — the final product of this blind and mad confusion, in which we might say that only the vegetable world and the mineral world with whatever weird sorts of ‘souls’ their subanimal substances contain, live a peaceful life — wouldn’t it be wise, I say, if we men, making use of the philosophy and the science which in our bold challenge to all the gods that ever were or will be, we have invented for ourselves, if we men, I say, were to put a final end to the whole business? Wouldn't the best retort to the selfelevating worshippers of Man as God, as well as to the self-prostrating worshippers of God as Man, be simply and solely to obliterate at one stroke the whole of Creation? Then and then only and in that way alone would the brutal and blustering and blatant eulogists of this murderous life of ours be reduced to their proper place.

"Why are we — answer me *that,* angel of my heart! — why are we debarred from deciding that this confounded creation of life, by this Grand Inquisitor and Master Vivisector we call God, this life which the greatest of all philosophers maintains appears by the eternal processes of matter — why, I say, are we debarred from deciding that it is the opposite of a praiseworthy thing, that it is in fact a wicked and abominable thing, to allow this life to go on?"

Rhitha, who had been listening to my diatribe with what struck me as excited amusement, now enquired eagerly: "But Gor, darling, what will it be like when we have destroyed creation? Will *we* be destroyed with it? Will you and I, I mean, no longer be here? Or what will the world look like if we're still here, on this grass-green plain, with this grey horizon all round us? Will everything be black darkness? Will there be no green grass, no grey sky, no earth, no sun, no moon, no stars? What shall we—"

She was interrupted by the sudden appearance, bolt out of the sky in front of us, of an extraordinary-looking creature.

"Do you two know who I am?" it said, uttering the words in English, but with an accent totally different from that of any English person I have ever met. For some odd reason, though I would be totally unable to explain to myself when or where I had heard that funny word, the word "Geezish" came into my head; and a moment later the word "Coptic." I gazed at the monster who had asked us, speaking with this extraordinary accent, if we knew who it was; and then without a moment's hesitation, I leapt upon it as if it had been a wild beast who had defied me to mortal combat. For one flashing second before leaping upon it, I had the feeling that I gathered together all I was and every power I possessed. I felt as if I gathered my whole body, soul, spirit, intellect, reason, feeling, imagination, tightly together. I felt as if I used every member I possessed and every nerve I possessed fused together in one consolidated organism, and then leapt upon this creature. I suppose, in what they call a "spiritual" sense, I am habitually such a ferocious swallower of situations and environments and of all that I see round me, that when I leapt upon this creature, as if it embodied everything I saw at that moment, I was in that second an incarnation of so much vitality, that the Being I leapt upon had no alternative but to yield.

The queer-looking creature was indeed completely staggered and not a little scared.

In the shock of his consternation and discomforture he fell backwards into a crouching and humiliating position. And then as I knelt above him on our brief battlefield of green grass, I felt that in my blind rush of force I had sufficiently subjugated him to know how it would feel to have him absolutely and permanently at my mercy and at my disposal. Something at that moment said to me, "Don't obliterate this creature, for you never know how desperately one day you may need such a creature as a servant! But get him well under control, now that you've got him down, so that, having learnt his lesson, he won't resist you again!"

Thinking thus, I arranged the feverish and convulsive shakings I was giving this extraordinary-looking creature in a sufficiently uneven manner to enable it to think, if it wanted to think, in as detached a way as I was thinking myself at this moment.

"Every creature in Nature," I cried, "is being treated as I am treating you. O how much better it would be — wouldn't it? wouldn't it? wouldn't it? — if the whole of Nature could be destroyed at one stroke?"

"But surely, master of mine," the creature cried in his Coptic or rather in his Geezish accent, "you will get my considered opinion better if you let me go."

At those words, I did rise up from above his grotesque body, and I did leave him — I will say "him" and not "it" from now on — to follow his own devices.

And it was then that Rhitha wisely intervened. But her voice was so low that for a moment all I could hear was this creature saying again, over and over again, that the war between the East and the West of the world had destroyed the whole human race. But at last I heard Rhitha's words.

"Ask it," she whispered, "Gor darling, what its name is and whether it's got a wife, and, if it has, what *her* name is and *where* she is!"

It was obvious that my subdued antagonist had understood her words, for he lifted his head out of the grass and replied promptly and distinctly, using English, although a many-membered monster, just as I had used it, although a many-weapon'd Welshman.

"My name is Org and we were blown up from Easter Island and my wife's name is Asm and she comes from Ultima Thule. And if you'd like to see her—"

"O please tell him," cried Rhitha, "that we'd love—"

But there, before we could say a word, easily, lightly, airily helping her monster of a mate to whatever substitute for claws, or paws, or fins, or hooves, or pads, or leathery heels, this surprising creature used instead of feet, was Mistress Asm of Ultima Thule herself!

"Are these people," enquired Asm, "enemies or friends?"

"Isn't that a feminine question!" chuckled Org. But it was obvious that Asm had made some sign to him to do what was clearly one of the most difficult of all things for Org to accomplish, namely, "to pull himself," as our authorities love to say, "together." But he managed it somehow and it was certainly the queerest assortment of fish-scales and bird-feathers and slabs of rhino-hide and blobs of elephant-muscle and soft patches of deer-skin and slippery expanses of seal-skins and whale-like curvatures of walrus-skin that composed the bodily presence of our visitor from Easter Island.

"As if I could tell, my dear!" the creature answered. "How can anyone know friends from enemies at a glance? They are friends of the moon, that much I can tell you, for they are strongly against that World-Demon who nibbles at the edges of the moon when he's hungry; though why a famished devil shouldn't satisfy his hunger, like the rest of us, I fail to see."

It was then that I made one of the grandest speeches of my whole life. I began with an emphatic and purposeful gesture, indicating magisterially that not only was the Monster Org and his lady Asm to lie down on the grass, but that my own faithful Rhitha was to assume the same quiescent posture.

"Here are we," I commenced with a magnificently, comprehensive movement of both my arms. "Here are we, two pairs of living beings, with all those freakish, incalculable caprices of imagination, emotion, pity, indignation, and amusement, which our various ancestors have possessed for thousands of years. How much more you two, of whom we know nothing but your names, are acquainted with the nature of life than I and my Rhitha are it is impossible for me to say; but if you are more enlightened in these matters than we are, the fact remains that there are limits to your knowledge, however extensive it is, and there must be a point in your accumulation of wisdom, as there is a point in our smaller amount, where all wisdom abruptly ends. Here we are, therefore, four beings alone in space, standing upon some sort of small satellite from which no doubt, when this grey sky turns black and when we grow aware of the glittering stars, we shall find ourselves surrounded by other consciousnesses similar to, or at least parallel with, our own. 'Long live Rhitha!' will then be my war-cry into space and 'Long live Asm!' will be yours. But O my dearer than strange pair of dedicated companions" — I became more and more of an orator as I went on— "don't you see that the important thing for us, who are the last living remnants of all the creatures that these old galaxies have spawned in their motley-whirling phantom-twirling nightmareswirling neutron-hurling dance through space, is to make one supreme initial effort to ensure with absolute certainty that there shall be no more of this devilish creation of living things! I tell you this is our one grand last chance to achieve this desirable purpose! That much is proved by my precious Rhitha's shudder just now, when she saw that that desperately hungry cosmic demon had reached such a point of insatiable craving for food that he was actually nibbling at the margin of the moon! She shuddered at such a sight, as well she might; but she did not realize that it was a clear sign that the whole order of our old universe had run down like a worn-out and rusty clock; and that the time had come for us to take this blasted clock entirely out of the blundering hands of Zeus and Jupiter and Jehovah — and take it to pieces in fact!— 'and remould it,' as some gipsy-minstrel expressed it the other day, 'nearer to the heart's desire.'"

Here I made a dramatic pause. But very soon — for, by the help of my infancy among the wandering sheep and restless orphans of Blaenau, I knew better than anyone between the sun and the moon how to handle both herds and herdsmen — very soon I saw the Ciceronian necessity, in the act of concluding my oration, of striking a completely different note. And thus, very slowly, and with an absolutely inspired manipulation of my shadow, I proceeded to strike this note, which was simply and solely one of deep, indrawn — and by this I mean that I, the speaker, drew magnetically into me the souls of all my three listeners — of deep indrawn *silence*; and with this I closed my oration.

This dramatic silence of mine, was, as I am always trying to make clear to the Simple Simons who know nothing of the noblest art in the world, far the most impressive way by which I could possibly have ended.

I had already noticed, though there was no sign of any sun up there, that shadows showed an unmistakable tendency to fall, though where the devil they came from, heaven itself, I am sure, couldn't have said.

Org was now sitting up in a rather curious position, considering the multiplicity of the members with which providence — or the process of evolution or the cruelty of vivisectionists — had endowed him; whereas both the ladies were lying gracefully and even seductively on that beautiful green grass.

It now became quite clear to me, from obvious signs, that as Org contemplated our two ladies on the grass he was unable to restrain, grotesque monster though he was, both a lecherous desire for those lovely limbs, and also, I could see this for myself in his expression, a real, deep, exquisite delight in the bewitching and sometimes almost miraculous grace that the bodies of women can assume when a real opportunity occurs. Are they, I asked myself, ever as completely unconscious of their physical beauty as I am sometimes completely unconscious of my power of oratory? Well! At any rate these two particular expressions of our life upon earth, my oratory and their beauty, had been brought to a climax by my dramatic silence, aided by this more than dramatic, this almost supernatural shadow, which had suddenly descended out of space to aid me, completely unimpelled by any thrower of shadows of which I was aware. This dramatic silence of mine, aided by this space-fallen shadow, was perhaps more Roman than Greek. What I hope I resembled was the culminating subsidence of one of Cicero’s most resounding sentences; and I would like to think of it too as not very different from one of those thunder-claps of conclusive finality in a poem of Catullus. But whatever it resembled it had an effect totally unlike my anticipated effect. The whole landscape in which Rhitha and I and Org and Asm had been resting now commenced a palpable movement of its own. It began to swerve, it began to tilt sideways, it began to circulate through the air as though propelled by its own volition. It began to make the most beautifully undulating gyrations. And, as the ground beneath us rose, the colour of the grass completely changed. As I watched it I imagined it was changing to blue but I may very easily have been misled by the peculiar effect that rapid motion can have upon grass-blades. What I took for blue might have much more properly been described as steel-grey. At any rate it was changing, even now as I looked round. But whatever was happening to the colour of the grass, it was not long before we two pairs of bewildered earthlings found ourselves in an unusually dark night, but exposed to the peering eyes of more stars than any of us had ever seen directed towards the earth! I don’t know what the others thought, but what I wondered in my heart was how it was possible for so many orbicular rondures to exist, as they apparently were existing, quite harmoniously side by side, moving in predetermined curves round and about one another and not attacking each other with supernatural ferocity, or trying to cut each other in pieces or to swallow up each other dead or alive! The females of our little party did indeed find themselves very quickly absorbed in a lively argument as to exactly where among all the magnificent hieroglyphics drawn so perfectly across the blackness of the sky was the star familiarly known as “the North Star.” Rising on one of his feet or paws or fins, Org begged me so say something.

“Yes, yes, brother,” I responded, “the moment has indeed come for you and me to show the mettle of our sex! As for the whereabouts of the North Star we can let that go: but the moment has come for us to announce and declare a world-shaking revolution, worthy of real thinkers and of such intellects as inaugurate the great changes that convulse and remould the history of the world. Will you allow me, Brother Org, to speak for us both as I address our attentive if somewhat simple-minded ladies?”

Org nodded with his biggest-land-snout and at the same time winked with his smallest sea-eye.

But never had any empire-builder in history to decide more rapidly what his world-policy was than I had to do at that moment. I expect all such cosmogonic decisions, if we knew the truth, have been dictated by just the same sort of small personal irritation as mine was at that moment. I expect Moses and Joshua and Pericles and Caesar and Alexander and Gustavus Adolphus and Napoleon and General Gordon all made the most momentous decisions of their lives when it came to the point by reason of some grotesquely little prick or sting or hurt or pique or minute stab of human vexation, caused in many cases by the simplest and absurdest misunderstanding. I will not go quite so far as to say that my sublimely tragic decision was taken purely for such a reason; but I will say that the emotional force I threw into it was accentuated by the fact that the fondness my Rhitha had been lately displaying for Org’s seductive Asm had been causing me several throbs of obscure resentment.

“Our political revolution,” I now declared in a majestically judicial tone worthy of Rhadamanthus himself, “and it must be remembered that we represent all the creatures in earth, water, air, and fire, and in their name we — that is to say Org and his lady Asm and I and my lady Rhitha — do hereby renounce and revoke, in one desperate and final reversion, all the claims of our jungle, of our sea, of our forest, of all the levels of life in the teeming margins between land and water! Yes, we renounce, I say, and revoke and reject forever all the claims of the living multitudes of swarming creatures that the power we call Nature engenders, the claims of worms and slugs, the claims of toads and frogs, the claims of newts and tadpoles, the claims of moles and badgers and foxes, the claims of rats and mice, the claims of stags and deer, the claims of every insect that crawls and of every insect that flies, and of all the insects that neither crawl nor fly! Yes, we have come, Org and I, as representatives of all these weak and helpless creatures; but we have also come as representatives of all the powerful and ravening creatures, of Hons and tigers, of leopards and panthers, of elephants and hippos, of crocodiles and rhinos, of rattlesnakes and vipers, of gorillas and chimpanzees; and we have also come as representatives of every bird in the air and every fish in the sea! Yes, and not only these! We include in our grand refusal all the halflives of the mosses and lichens and the most hidden and secretive funguses of the woods and the most recondite sea-weeds of the depths of the ocean! Yes, we four, we two males and we two females, are now speaking for all the four-thousand billions of living creatures in the entire universe. And we are announcing to the said universe that, from this moment we and the whole mass of lives we represent do proclaim and declare that we are withdrawing from the whole horrible and appalling play; yes, we have decided to refuse henceforth to bring to life one single offspring more to breathe this cruel and anguishing air and to live this iniquitous and abominable life! I tell you, we four, who represent all these mysterious multitudes, have decided on their behalf that from now on, all life, in all places and under all conditions is going to end!”

It was then that Rhitha and Asm ceased disputing about the North Star. It was clear to my exalted pride that they had been stirred in the very depths of their hearts by my powerful words; and the thought rushed through my mind that it was a real touch of the true genius of a master orator that, at that perilous moment when I had to decide just what my world-policy was, I decided upon annihilation rather than upon creation and upon suicide rather than upon any form of reconstruction. O how much easier it is, I now clearly saw, to attack than to defend, and to advocate destruction than to indicate the faintest possibility of restoration! Yes, both our wives now rose up on the tips of their toes and stretched their long slender white arms upward, and with their lovely bodies quivering with excitement turned their heads towards the stars, just as I had done myself with the gesture of an invincible orator while I shrieked my challenge to whatever appalling power it was, a power far worse than the old Homeric “anangké” or “necessity,” that was driving us willy-nilly to increase with our wretched little quota the horrible enormity of life’s tangled chaos.

But still upon us four living beings those millions upon millions of blazing stars gazed down with contemptuous casual, careless and sardonic amusement. The resonant cry that I had just now flung among those mocking points of glittering contempt was now reinforced by the silent cries of Rhitha and Org and Asm; and what I found of curious interest in my incurable introspection was the fact that neither I nor they — no! not one of us pitifully stirred-up four persons — had had the faintest idea to *whom* or to *what* we were addressing our “Declaration of Independence” and our right to end life instead of helping it to go on, and announcing our resolution to bring the whole damned business to an end. But now — and it all came in a moment — I *knew* to whom and to what we were making these universal proclamations. For *there,* straight before us, and straight above us, as our swirling and swivelling and swinging and slithering and slanting and shimmering little satellite revolved in its resolutely directed curves, was nothing less than Time Itself! Yes it was to Time Itself that I had been proclaiming my desire that all we creatures of the elements and sons and daughters of nature should perish once and for all at one stroke and never, no! not any of us, appear again! Yes, it was to Time Itself that I had been praying that all the children of Time might perish forever! Vacuum vacuo! Nihil super nihil! And *what* a monster Time was, thus envisaged, as we encountered it now! And all the while around it, as well as around us, were those millions of glittering little peering eyes! But what had become of the huge genial bonfire-furnace of a life-giving star that we have always been accustomed to call the sun? Clean gone forever, had he? And what had happened to our sweet sorceress the moon, upon whose enchanted flesh Rhitha had caught that unspeakable demon nibbling? Gone also forever had she too?

But what did I hear then? Did I hear one of those tiny twinklers in the distance, shining atoms, baby sparks, crowding out of space to attend the death-bed of Great-Aunt Time? Did I hear one of them — from the Pleiades, was it? — starting to cry? To confess the truth, little faraway fire-flies, I began to feel a trifle funny myself: but funny or not, I was going to play now the part of the bell that tolls the twelve-o’clock death-notes of Time!

I could see that Org was affected, just as I was, by the appearance of this incredible Monster directly before us, which he knew, as well as I knew, was nothing less than Time Itself.

The terrifying enormity in the sky to which we were getting so close, although in any scientific calculation it must have been about half way to the nearest star, was certainly a horrible object.

In the frantic circular cleavings of the dark air, made by our platter-shaped field of green grass, the nearer we approached to the thing called Time, the more clearly did we see that it resembled an enormous black slug. It was not exactly in every detail like a slug. It had very large eyes for instance, and out of its mouth wavered, explored, fumbled, groped, a very flexible forked tongue. No doubt my powers of observation are very limited, but somehow I find it hard to associate either big eyes or forked tongues with black slugs. This is not from ignorance of these creatures, for I used invariably to encounter them in my morning walks into the valley called Cwm Bowydd in my early days at Blaenau. No, I shall never forget to the end of my life this extraordinary ascent of ours; for here were Org and I mounting up with the rough, genial, good temper of a pair of sporting pals, while our girls as they ascended with us had the very look, awed, grave, abstracted, exalted, absorbed, of *two* Virgin Marys undergoing the mystical experience of Assumption.

You must understand that our two ladies were really so beautiful that they would have made a perfect subject for one of the great, old, religious painters, such as Titian, or Tintoretto, or Giorgione, or El Greco; though it would have needed a touch from Goya perhaps, or even from the more modern imagination of Gustave Doré, to do justice to this mystery-monster that was the true image of Time.

As we approached this monstrous thing, with the gliding, tilting, slanting, curving, sliding, switching motion of our unusual vessel, I could see those bottomless eyes of his advancing, receding, extending, distending, revealing indeed, so it seemed to me, such an interior cavern of nerve-passages and such a labyrinth of glandular ducts, and such a convoluted gallery of shudder-causing orifices, that you felt that, if once the news actually reached here of such a stupendous mouthful, as a raging, roaring, ramping, roving biped from Blaenau of the male sex, the whole interior anatomy of this man-eating minotaur would explode from greedy joy and blow up, strewing that little corner of the void with the scoriae soot of a whole crater of masculine life-illusion!

But what I had to do now was to keep repeating to myself the rending, cleaving, splitting, and splintering cry of my original challenge: “No more of this blasted procreation! No more of the swarming legs and arms and hairs and bristles of these jostling by-blows of Time!”

We must, I think, have been dangerously near the bursting-point of some sort of explosion, when, all in a moment I heard the voice of Org uttering a warning cry. O, what a jealous pang shot through me when I heard him, for why had not I been the one to cry “halt!” at this juncture?

Yes, I heard Org cry out in a shrill high-pitched reverberating voice: “All eyes to the left!”

We all instantaneously obeyed him of course; and there, lo! right before us, piercing the very heart of the Time-Monster, ran a gaping tunnel, quite big enough for our vessel with all four of us on board, to pass through, and revealing the fact, that not only were we heading clear through the repulsive and revolting body of Time, but that our vessel had already done something of much more importance.

What it had done was to cut into two halves a delicate, sensitive vital gland in the centre of the Time-slug’s midriff, which now was floating, draggled and loose, and dripping with enormous drops of blood, completely clear of the diaphragm to which it had belonged.

As our vessel emerged huge shadows of the murdered body of the Slug of Time moved round us, each one a little different from the others but all anxious to escape from our presence in any possible direction. And then we noticed that the whole blazing mass of the stars above our heads, of the stars above the head of the dead body of Time, of the stars above all the heads, human, subhuman, or superhuman, in the advancing, or retreating, enlarging, or diminishing, expanding, or receding universe had vanished. Yes! There, before us, clear through the body of Time was the ultimate Void. But the Void was not empty. In the Void there was still Eternity. We had passed through that tremendous tunnel into nothingness only to be faced by something worse.

But do you know what just then was my greatest comfort and relief? Dare I confess it? Nothing less than to have done forever and a day with the stars! No more of these confounded galaxies and nebulae of an expanding universe! No universe at all! No multiverse either! Just simply *Nothing.*

It was wonderful enough being carried through the belly of Time, but it was more wonderful still, in fact it was something beyond words to all four of us, when we saw — for none of us thought of eternity — into what heavenly expanse our ship was conveying us!

It was carrying us, not only through Time's despoiled diaphragm, but actually through the whole vast atmosphere that surrounds the idea of Time; and we all told ourselves that we should be free from every landscape, seascape, airscape, firescape, that submitted to Time's domination.

Into such freedom, into such liberty, into such inexpressible escape our circular boat, our coracle from Wales, finally carried us! No more the greyness of ocean around us! No more the dazzlingness of immeasurable star-points above us, no more the blind, dumb, dense, opaque mass of earth-matter beneath us! Yes, we were free of the whole thing! We were floating in an immensity without any up or down, or right or left, or high or low! But O! how difficult I now find it to convey to the future decipherer of this log-book of mine what we all four felt when our vessel suddenly ceased to make any definite movement at all, either forward or backward, but began slowly and casually and yet quite carelessly and indifferently, turning round and round on her own axis! But why did she do this? For no other reason than the simple and absurdly obvious one that we were free of Time, we passengers on Gor Goginog's ship, G.G. Time Destroyer. We had all the time assumed — note how I bring in Time over its very corpse — that we were now free to take our ease in complete disregard of any rules, laws, systems, methods or directions from any power or from any quarter, whether in the heavens above or in the earth beneath that didn't suit the whims, wishes and inclinations of our irresponsibility. But apparently we had been making, all four of us, incredible fools of ourselves! For we were now confronted by something far more mysterious than Time and far more dominant than Time. In plain words we were now confronted by Eternity.

I don't know what my nature-created, vivisection-distorted rival, Org, felt, or what either of our girls felt, but I can assure you I said to myself at once: "Now my Gor, this is a real test for you: probably the greatest you will ever have in your time. And what I want you to do is to watch and observe and examine everything you see; and avoid if you possibly can, any form or kind of action that is not implicit in your being just what you are and observing everything you can!"

What struck me first, and this did indeed impress and amaze me, was the fact that the sight of Eternity was the sight of a repulsive, disgusting, sickly, unpleasant, disagreeable thing. What I expected to see; but with my strong predilection for painting above all the other arts and my instinctive association of all I valued in life with my sense of sight, I found it amazing that when confronted at last with this terrific ultimate thing, I found nothing in its appearance that impressed me at all; in fact I found nothing in its appearance that I could possibly describe; not because it was beyond description, but because it was beneath description. As a thing to look at, as a thing to see, Eternity was pitifully unimpressive and woefully unappealing.

It was not exactly, at least not to my sight, colourless; for I had my own fixed idea as to what colourlessness was, namely a pale grey like the greyness that surrounded the edge of the fiat, round, quoit-shaped meadow upon which we were still travelling. Eternity, as I saw it now, was like a dirty-yellowish-ivory-white vapour interpenetrating the pallid murkiness of any ordinary dreary day and suffusing the tedious duskiness of any ordinary cloudy night. The Thing's presence in the darkness was immediately made known to me by a sense quite different from the sense of sight; namely by the sense of sound. And the sound I now heard emerging from this monstrous-shaped, corpse-coloured vapour, floating about in the black darkness of night, was the most horrible sound that can possibly be imagined. It was a low distinct sucking sound, followed by a gulping and a gurgling. In fact it was the sound of swallowing on a scale too huge and horrible even to be called superhuman; and after a second's pause there came a gastric rumble, mingled with a chuckle of revolting selfglorification, as if the swallower couldn't commend itself enough for having got its victim where, in sublime satisfaction, it could begin the process of digesting what it had successfully swallowed.

What I now began to realize for the first time was the unfathomable depth of the self-satisfaction of Eternity. How often, I told myself — and O! how I longed to tell it to the filthy vapour of the colour of dirty toilet-paper that now surrounded us! — have we been fooled by the seductively awful and deceptively appalling aura which so many pious tricksters have thrown round the word “Eternity,” in order to scare us about the fate of our souls! They have long tried to drive the more sensitive among us insane by this holy trick; and indeed in certain cases, as in that of the poet Cowper, they have, to their intense delight, succeeded.

“And the worst of it is,” so my thoughts ran on, “many eloquent and inspired writers, such as Carlyle and Ruskin and even the self-possessed and sensible Mr. Emerson, have added their quota of nonsensical adoration before the foul-smelling throne of this arch-illusion. Ordinary people have been perpetually fooled by this stinking humbug; for let it be, from now on,” so I decided in my heart, “thoroughly recognized and understood that this solemn and holy thing, Eternity, is just so much rubbish and balderdash. As for the death of Time, *that* is only like a faithful old staircase-clock having run down. It may give us a momentary sadness, as if we yielded to a sigh of sympathy when a tired old horse that had been pulling our cart up hill for a mile stopped to rest, but this poppycock claim of Eternity, this bloated, blown-up soap-bubble of sham awfulness, cleverly concocted by our priests and rhetoricians to make us ordinary folk — babies as we are when it comes to such things! — stand hushed and trembling in silent reverence, this is a completely different story.”

As you’ve detected by this time, you who are reading the log-book of G.G.Time-Destroyer, I’m neither a very brave man nor a very wise man; but I am one to blurt out the truth both about myself and about what I see. So at this moment, when I realized the loathsome nature of this cloud of vapour from all the scavengers’ carts and all the mortuary trestles and all the hospital cess-pools in the world, I became seized with such blind fury at the humbug we human simpletons had listened to for so long, that I could no longer contain myself, but from the deck, so to speak, of our whirling, swirling green-grass vessel I deliberately spat — yes! I spat three times — into the face of Eternity: and after doing so I cried out to this reverent swallower of honest men's corpses: "I can clearly see now, you dirty, sickly-yellow, bloodsucking devourer of heroic lives, that you are nothing but the master-sham of the universe! I tell you now that the smallest living insect swallowed by you is far more godlike than you are! Who created you, I would like to know? Not great Jehovah, the formless, shapeless, nameless God of Israel! Not great Zeus, the son of Kronos, the cloud-ruling, thunder-wielding God of the ancient Greeks! Not great Jupiter, the all-powerful God of the Romans, celebrated in Blaenau by the utterance 'Iau' every Thursday, the day we Saxons associate with our thundering Thor! I'll tell you, you dirty, filthy, sickly-yellow humbug, you who pretend that you've got a position greater than the Garden of Eden, greater than Mount Olympus, and greater than the Pantheon of Rome, I'll tell you who created you! A set of cunning, cruel, mean, avaricious, greedy, crafty priests who called themselves priests of Jesus! But in reality they were anything but that. Jesus was a wise man, a good man, a godlike man, and a miraculous healer of the sick. And they also call themselves, these cunning teachers, disciples of Paul of Tarsus. But in reality they were and are anything but that. Paul was one of the greatest and most inspired men who have ever lived. His ideas were not their ideas nor was his talk their talk. Yes these priests who used the names of Jesus and Paul to support their lies invented Eternity so as to bribe us with Heaven and frighten us with Hell. Yes! you unnecessary horror! It is your priests and prelates and rulers and spiritual false prophets — in fact those very Scribes and Pharisees that Jesus was always denouncing! — who are the ones who invented you! Help me, Org! Help me, help me! I begin to feel I shall soon be overcome by this nauseating vapour! O we must all help each other! We must! We must!

“If we don’t, we’ll all be swallowed up by this curst Eternity’s loathsome, gurgling, stinking, leprous, filthy gullet, this voracious maw that these priests and pastors and elders and inquisitors and prelates and literary rhetoricians have piled up in the clear, clean, beautiful Void! So you must, you must help me, Org! And tell your lovely little Asm that she must help us as Rhitha is helping now! Then there’ll be at least two males and two females, fresh from the old Earth, who refuse to be awed by this everlasting lie! Don’t you see, Rhitha dearest, don’t you see, Asm, this monster is infinitely worse than that Old Slug through whose bloody heart we’ve got here! Think, Org, my boy, what has happened to all the other inhabitants of the Earth! Where are the millions of East India? Where are the billions of China? What has become of all the black Africans? Where are the French? the Germans? the Italians? the Spaniards? Have these atomic explosions really destroyed the whole human race? Are we four really the only specimens who are left alive? Well, there it is! I’ve always hoped the whole lot of us would soon be done for; and now it’s come! Or hasn’t it come? Answer me, Org! Answer me!”

Org answered me in the manner that was best suited to his multiform and composite structure. He rose up on one of his hairy legs and heaved towards me two walruslike shoulders, as well as what might well have been the hump of an unknown sub-oceanic camel. As for the lovely little Asm, she leapt up on the very top of Org’s grotesque back, a leap that made her bewitching hips quiver and shake in delicious concord with the undulations of her sylph-like thighs. My own precious Rhitha kissed one hand after the other as she waved her white arms towards me, while her siren-like hair floated on the sickly vapour about us so gracefully that its heavenly curves completely redeemed all the loathsome mist they invaded.

"Do you think, Org," I asked him; "Do you think, Asm?" I asked her; "Do you think, Rhitha, that if we all four danced a dance of gay erotic defiance clear into the heart of this horrible mist, crying out as we do so any ribald nonsense that comes into our heads, some randy catch such as, 'Let Eternity stew in its own bloody juice,' while we hug one another *sans* shame or excuse, till the hulking great horror be driven to croon, 'I'll be dancing myself if this doesn't stop soon!'"

"Yes, Gor! Yes, Gor! Yes, Gor!" they all three replied with one voice; and, led by me — for I'm a perfect leader of any crazy crew — in a few seconds, there we all four were turning head over heels, and ballet-bouncing backwards and forwards, and leaping on each other's shoulders, and making little acrobatic towers of ourselves right in the middle of Holy Eternity!

But it suddenly came over me that there must be a yet more scandalous way of conveying to this preposterous monster our discovery that all this hushed and awful solemnity, all this cringing and reverential gravity, all this watchful and altar-facing expectancy, all this thaumaturgical silence, all this heavily-charged aura of factitious worship, is nothing more than an aerial fossil, a sort of huge liquidated ammonite or porous signature of Ammon, printed, not upon clay or stone, but upon the air itself, and printed on the air thousands upon thousands of years ago, before mankind had come to realize to what this life of theirs really amounted, this pinched and prodded, this poked and pampered, this festered and pestered life, concerning the creation of which there has been far too much fuss. Yes, what came into my head now was that we four entities, remnants of a race who had decided that in any case it was time for them to disappear, ought to have the simple wit, since we were already mocking and fooling this factitious Eternity instead of bowing and scraping before it, the simple wit to invent some more palpable way of showing this monster what our opinion of him was.

“Let’s scrabble,” I growled to my three companions in a furious undertone, as we jogged up and down through the vaporous aura of this obnoxious minotaur, “in the grass of our landscape-ship for some horse-dung and cattle-dung and sheep’s turds and birds’ droppings, and when we’ve filled our pockets with these wholesome missiles, let us give Eternity a good pelting with them! And if you protest ‘To what end and purpose are we to do this?’ I reply ‘Just purely and simply to make the Monster created by these Holy Cringers and Holy Suckers realize our contempt for him!’

“Yes. O yes, my dears,” I went on as I began grubbing in the grass of our green field that was now behaving very queerly and revolving on its edge like a circling and spinning quoit, “pick up all this hard gravel and all the soft mud and all the bits of sheep’s dung and birds’ dung you can get hold of, and we’ll rush into the heart of this sanctified Erebos and hear the sod gulp and gurgle! We’ll teach this great Bugaboo to reduce its pretensions! We’ll teach it that the humblest insect measuring out its miserable days by the pug-wuggery and skull duggery of the old Slug of Time is worth far more than this defecating bubble! Ee careful as you tread on its oily fog-navel, my friends, for we don’t want to fall thumping back on our green field! But it just shows what a humbug the thing is that we’re able to tread on it at all! O, you’re so silent and hushed and holy and hoary, aren’t you, you herpeton of hypocrisy! And we must all count one-two-three correctly, mustn’t we, if we’re not to fizzle forever and ever? Yes! We’ve got to confess, have we, that the number four leads nowhere because it stays where we’ve put it, but the number three rolls and rolls and rolls till, by being all and nothing at the same time, it proves the existence of Eternity! And then we learn that where Eternity exists all natural things and all natural feelings perish! No living creature can look upon that sickly, sticky, ivory-yellow vapour without loathing it and no living creature can approach it without knowing perfectly well how it longs to make us part of it. All that is Something it turns into Nothing! Eternity is the big hole that connects being with not-being. Its chief love is to suck down all that shivers at the sight of it! See how it gloats now over your fear and my fear of being swallowed up! It knows how we'd sooner cling to any straw rather than let it devour us. But you wait! you monster! You wait, you hideous disgusting horror! We'll teach you to be yourself! We'll show you what Eternity really is!

"Yes, we'll show you the very last thing you ever thought to see, namely your contemptible self! Eternity-Scum! Eternity-Scurf! Eternity-Stink! Eternity, the filthiest lie ever to pass out of the anus of the Nonsense-doll! I tell you, you sticky, yellow, swollen monster, we four living things will turn you back into what you once were, which is a secret you think known only to those who invented you! But it is a secret we know. And you shall know we know it! You think you are an indispensable background to all living things. But that's where you go wrong. We four living creatures have reached you by passing through the heart of Time. Time is dead. And now you are going to die. You think Eternity cannot die. That is the conceit that makes you swell and swell and swell. But Eternity can die, and you are even now, though you don't know it, a dying monster!"

Thus I cried in a transport of triumph; but I never for one moment dreamed how the end would really come about; the actual end of this terrifying Eternity, that has been used by Religion for so long to frighten mankind into lick-spittling servitude. But its end came now; and came about purely and simply from its own disgusting greediness. For no sooner were we all four clear of the unspeakable horror, than do you know, O lucky posterity, what the monster did? It actually bent down, and after opening a hole in itself as wide as the Milky Way, it deliberately swallowed the dead body of Time! Yes, it swallowed it whole, just as the preachers had threatened us with being swallowed! And it was this swallowing of the corpse of Time that finished Eternity. The thing's whole vaporous covering turned in a second inside out. And beneath *that* covering another covering turned inside out. And after this process, which was desperately shocking to witness had gone on for several minutes — lo and behold! the thing had, so to speak, turned its very self inside out; in other words, *had swallowed itself.* And there before us, where Eternity had been, was simply a hollow void. The big black hole between being and not-being was gone.

We were still standing, all four of us, upon our familiar grassy landscape — though perhaps I ought not to describe Org's straddling upheaval as "standing" — when suddenly our two lovely ladies, for Asm was nearly as beautiful as Rhitha, seized each other by the hands, and, with their long white arms outstretched, pointed excitedly upward at the vast, endless, dark, unencumbered space that now surrounded us on all sides.

"Do you see who's coming, Org?" cried Asm. "Do you see who's coming, Gor?" cried Rhitha.

"O who? O who? my dears!" Org and I murmured with one voice, bewildered and puzzled and awestruck.

"Mathonwy," answered our ladies. "Mathonwy! Lord of all the sea-coasts of the World!"

Org and I stared at each other in amazement.

"There! There! There! *There!*" And our ladies, still clutching each other's hand, pointed to a majestic little statue of a formidably bearded monarch made of delicate porcelain, standing upright upon a china pedestal and moving rapidly through the air, pedestal and all, with as much assurance as our grassy landscape itself was displaying as it carried us up and out. And then I suddenly knew what they meant and who it was who had come. It was an image, if not himself, of the oldest of all our native Welsh gods, the father of Math of Caer Dathyl.

“Mathonwy!” cried our two ladies, “Mathonwy! Mathonwy!” they repeated in an ecstasy of delight, clasping each other’s hands as if they’d been sisters all their days and had clung to each other for support from infancy!

“But is he a real person?” I asked. “Perhaps lie’s only an ornament thrown away by some child in heaven!” Org suggested.

“No! No! No!” cried Rhitha and Asm with one voice: “It’s Mathonwy! It’s Mathonwy!”

“But that figure trailing along on a pedestal isn’t alive!” cried Org. “He’s a china statue, and only a little one at that!”

I couldn’t help adding: “And he can’t walk with his legs as we all can! He just has to be carried through the air on a marble pedestal, as if he’d come from the British Museum.”

But neither Org’s commonsense nor my mockery could quell the obsession in ‘the breasts of our ladies. They continued to swing their clasped hands backwards and forwards, as if rocking an invisible baby in an angelic cradle; and as the porcelain monarch on his pedestal drew near, our girls seemed to lose their heads completely and began bowing and scraping before him in the most approved manner, and repeating over and over, as if they were using at one and the same time consecrated Latin and sacramental Greek, “Mathonwy have mercy upon us! Mathonwy save us! O Lord God of the Ancient Britons! Save us and help us we humbly implore thee!” And as the pedestal’d figure came quite close to us and as I gazed intently at this mysterious monarch’s face, and as I remembered how his son, Math of Caer Dathyl, had created a girl for Llew Llaw Gyffes out of the flowers of the oak and the flowers of the broom and the flowers-of the meadow-sweet, it suddenly rushed into my head that, when the poet of poets hints in his casual fashion that there are more things in heaven and earth than our, or anybody else’s philosophy dreams of, he may have met — for it is clear enough that Welshmen tickled his fancy and that when he did meet them he humoured them to the limit — one of their race, who, like myself, indulged a mania for idolatry to such an extreme that what you might call his “household gods” were collected from every country on this planet.

I would dearly have liked to have been able to boast that the moment my eyes met those of the mysterious Father of Math we exchanged a look of absolute understanding; but that would be a lie beyond even me, for this ancestral Brythonic deity took not the faintest personal interest in any of us. Indeed he glanced away from us very much as an absorbed entomologist who was making a special study of Green Hairstreaks might turn listlessly away from a couple of pairs of ordinary Meadow Browns.

“Are you people,” he enquired, throwing less interest into his tone than if he’d been asking us where in this Void was the nearest lavatory, “going north, or south, or east, or west, or are you perhaps thinking of settling down up here and are anxious to know the price, in ducats or drachmas or thalers or rupees or roubles, of a small acreage in space?”

I noticed with astonishment that, no sooner had this floating image of prehistoric sovereignty arrived close to us, than the preposterous ancient thus pedestal’d in his absurd pomp started to make lewd and lecherous leers at both our ladies. But if I was astonished at this I was still more amazed by its effect.

Both my Rhitha and Org’s Asm became a couple of austere and icy little statues of outraged virtue; and in less than a second this porcelain poppet of presumption was transformed from a prehistoric divinity into a negligible pimp, and ordered abruptly to go to hell. And to hell, or to somewhere equally unprepossessing, Mathonwy in his humiliation would certainly have gone, if a new apparition had not descended at our side upon the flat expanse of our grass-green world-ship. This was nothing less than the star Aldebaran, surrounded by a great wheel of incredibly coloured lights. We all, including our lewd little Welsh god from those prehistoric days when monarchs were allowed as many wives and concubines as they could afford, were struck dumb with awe and wonder. Mathonwy murmured and we all repeated after him, just as if we had been children at school, the word "Aldebaran." And then Aldebaran assumed control of the whole situation. Stars of this magnitude, perhaps all stars, after existing for a few thousand million years, acquire the power of communicating with other consciousnesses, no matter the distance between them; and of conveying intelligible meaning without the use of words. Thus having admitted freely to us his identity, this wonderful denizen of space proceeded at once, without any ceremony, to disclose to us the reason for its coming among us. The personal appearance of our starry visitor was less overwhelming than a person would have anticipated. As we now looked at him, Aldebaran presented the appearance of a wheel of white lights, lights not very close to each other, but some of them, although still enduringly white, shot through by gleaming rays of coloured flame. It was these flames that struck me as being quite supernatural in their hypnotic power. Aldebaran's first words, after he had made his polite obeisance to us all as a group, were addressed to Mathonwy.

"Well, master," he said, and the richly coloured lights in the broad wheel of his personality shone more and more lustrously as his wordless words entered the skull of the porcelain-headed tyrant at which they were aimed, "You and I have known each other for quite a number of these little pegs of time that our young friends here call centuries; but whether we shall go on knowing each other for an equal number of them I don't feel quite sure; though I daresay, if we both decided we wanted to, we would."

Then, with a subtlety of politeness that I never dreamed could possibly exist among the stars, he caused the marvellous wheel of his being to turn on its invisible axis just about half of all the way round; with the result that the deepest-coloured of those incredible lights, whose appearance in some queer way — whether due to the clown in me or to the blasphemer in me, for I suspect I contain both — put me in mind of the descent of the Third Person of the Trinity upon the pathetic craniums of the twelve apostles, shone now more directly and more warmly on us than on the despotic little figure of Mathonwy floating about on his pedestal.

"Well, my dear earthlings," Aldebaran began, while he indicated in a gentle undertone that conveyed to our minds, not before and not after the rest of what he said, but curiously parallel or concurrent with it, that it would be nice if we all sat down in a wide circle on the grass; a stellar hint which all four of us obeyed at once, while Mathonwy was left with no alternative, since the starry wheel was turning in the centre of us, save to pedestal it as best he could round the outside of our circle.

"What I've come to tell you," Aldebaran went on, "is that all of us stars, together with all our companions in all the gulfs and abysses of Space — and I beg you to note, my young friends, that this applies to all the astronomical bodies, such as, they tell me, you young children of the multiverse, call by such names as 'The Milky Way,' or by such names as 'dark stars,' or 'dead stars' or 'nebulae' or 'galaxies' or 'planets' or 'satellites of planets' — yes, what I have come to tell you is that all of us stars have decided between ourselves and without advice, and my old friend Mathonwy will bear me out here, from any god or any spirit or any creator or any life-force, or any life-energy, yes, purely and solely, I tell you, by our own will, our own desire, our own wish, our own conclusion, our own resolute and fixed determination, to bring to an end the whole business of celestial existence. We, the stars, have decided that all this praise of life which we have heard rising up from our own flesh and blood and from our own bowels is a wicked, cunning, crafty, treacherous, tricky, abominable lie! We have decided that this praise of Life is an outrage and an insult to all living things; and we stars know well enough of course that the minerals of which we are made, quite as much as the beasts, birds, reptiles, and fishes that we bring forth in air, water, earth, and perhaps even in fire, have all of them conscious nerves that are capable of suffering as well as conscious souls that are subject not only to unhappy moods but to misery and despair. We stars have therefore been holding a multi-cosmic conference for several million years, and our discussions at this conference have been lately growing more and more lively and intense. Indeed I think I may say we have reached a serious climax, the result of which looks very like a definite decision to end the whole thing, yes! the whole astronomical business, by a universal cosmogonic suicide. And now I must tell you that your approach to the general arena, or *agora,* as the old Greeks would say, of the region of our discussion, carried up as you have been by this fragment of your old green earth, has had a serious effect upon us stars. I greatly doubt whether my old acquaintance, Mathonwy, the father of the god Math who created Blodeuwedd out of flowers, realizes what the appearance of this flying landscape of yours means to us. We know, we stars of heaven, only too well what this little green landscape is. It is a planetary satellite that has rejected our stellar assembly’s verdict in favour of universal suicide. I do not hesitate to reveal to you four earthlings, nor do I blush to reveal it in the presence of my old friend Mathonwy, the god of ancient Britain, that we have already put to death and dissolved, as we well know how to do, into complete and final extinction, all the other silly little life-maniacs who have behaved like this scrap of ‘old mother earth,’ as you love to call her, is behaving now. This little flying landscape of green grass must have realized by means of those psychic currents that pass through all forms of life what you two were thinking under your ailanthus tree in that great city. I do not quite know how far my old friend Mathonwy is following me in what I am telling you now, but I hope he is.”

Here the star paused; and his great wheel of coloured lights made a slanting move, or tilt as you might put it, in the direction of Mathonwy. This pertinaciously pompous as he was also the obstinately propitiatory begetter of a whole pantheon of prehistoric divinities moved, I noticed, a little further off when those lights approached him. But Aldebaran now began a sardonic attack upon the green landscape under our feet.

“You must have said to yourself, you little scum of worm’s meat and fading weeds: ‘If I carry this loving couple sky high shall I not live by sucking the paps of their love? Shall I not live forever by loving those who will love each other forever? Shall I not make sport of these death-desiring stars by hugging to my heart these loving lovers?’” Thus did Aldebaran denounce our flying field.

It was probably my imagination but I certainly did think I felt the ground under my feet stir a little beneath this ferocious rebuke; and it struck me that Mathonwy himself floated still further away from us as if anxious to make it plain to Aldebaran that he dissociated himself from this life-worshipping vessel of grass and mud. But then to the obvious astonishment of the great glittering wheel, that was so to say, the outward intention of the inmost soul of this majestic star there appeared a new personality. Org and Asm and Rhitha and myself were astounded, and so most certainly was Mathonwy, who positively slid backwards through the air, as if his porcelain pedestal had possessed a pair of skates.

This newcomer was indeed a startling apparition. His figure was formed of some extremely malleable material that had been moulded into shape with exquisite precision and was now as hard as the hardest granite. Some accident had knocked off his head, but had not deprived him of it, for it hung at his side suspended by a delicate cord of living fibre through which the vital stream of nerves and blood and sensitized consciousness evidently still ran. This was made evident by the fact that it was through the lips of this suspended head that the newcomer addressed us all.

“There is no need,” said the head, flickering its eyelids a little, but not giving any of us the sense that it was especially speaking to him or to her, far less to the brilliant wheel of Aldebaran’s tremendous personality; “O no, no need at all for anybody here to ask who I am or why I have come. Each of you, including my lord Aldebaran, has only to look into the depths of himself and he will find the thing which you all, life-haters and life-lovers alike, have forgotten. What you have forgotten is the Way. Life has its work to do, and death ensues as if the common character of each were a thing ordered. You people consider that death has its cause, but that life has no cause. But is it really so? Heaven has its places and spaces that can be calculated. The divisions of the earth also can be assigned by men. But how shall we search for and find out the conditions of the Great Mystery? The Penumbræ once asked the Shadow: ‘You were looking down and now you are looking up. Formerly you were walking and now you have stopped. How is all this?’”

It was then that one of the coloured lights in the wheel of the great star spoke and asked a question.

"My question is this," said the coloured light, "and I beg you to answer it plainly and simply: What sword is that which I see hidden in the folds of your dress?"

And the newcomer answered without a moment's hesitation: "It is the Sword of Heaven... it is regulated by the five elements... its unsheathing is like that of the Yin and the Yang. It is held fast in the spring and summer: it is put in action in the autumn and winter. When it is thrust forward there is nothing in front of it; when lifted up there is nothing above it; when laid down there is nothing below it; when wheeled round there is nothing left on any side of it: above, it cleaves the floating clouds, and below it penetrates to every division of the earth. This is the sword of the Son of Heaven."

Then did the great star of Aldebaran lift up his voice. "Who are you," he enquired, "who thus knows and understands the mystery of the Sword of Heaven?"

The voice of the great star was so authoritative that the small terra-cotta image became so anxious to satisfy him that he began with a pathetic stammer: "Kwa... Kwa... Kwa... Kwa... Kwa... Kwangtze is what they call me at home in China: but my enemies call me the stupid perverter of Laotze, because they contend that my interpretation of the *Tao* or the *Way* is a distortion of the writings of Laotze; when, on the contrary, they are the natural development of Laotze's teaching."

It was at this point that Mathonwy, who had been drawn (at least that is what I told myself) a little nearer by his aboriginal curiosity, could not resist uttering the stupid words: "Is this 'Tao' then, like me, a god who has been lost and found?"

At this question Kwangtze moved quite close up to this porcelain-pedestal'd one, who was pontificating around us like an imposing but evasive moth, and, when he could have touched him if he had wanted to do so, he replied: “No, grandfather of the ancientest of Great Britons, I cannot say that I find any resemblance in you to the Tao. When my friend Po-Yu was in his sixtieth year his views became changed. He had never done anything but consider the views which he held to be absolutely right. But now he has come to condemn them as wrong. But Po-Yu does not realize at all that what he now calls right is what for fifty-nine years he has been calling wrong. All things have the life which we know. But we do not see its root. They have their goings forth but we do not know the door by which they depart. Ah! Ah! There is no escaping this. So it is! So it is!”

Something about the tone of Kwangtze and something about everything he said annoyed my friend Org to a point of fury. At last this multi-formed creature with something of the gorilla, something of the ox, something of the walrus, something of the hippopotamus, something of the seal, something of the camel, and a lot of the tortoise in him, burst out, “What do you think you are doing, you Chinese idol, talking to us in this respectful strain? My mate Asm here, and myself whose name is Org, have decided to follow this great scholar, Doctor Gor, and his lady-love Rhitha, in their wise determination to bring to an end the whole wretched crowd of living creatures who have been engendered or have been spawned, however you like to put it, upon the planets and their satellites, creatures who have been nurtured and matured by the heat of that radiant and royal star, our glorious Sun. Furthermore, you dribbling dotard of a heathen Chinese, it is my duty to inform you that this resplendent star Aldebaran, by the light of whose multicoloured lanterns we are now sailing through the seventh-thousand Heaven, has just told us that at the great conference of all the stars in the sky the stars themselves have decided upon a universal suicide, and by this means, upon leaving Space as clean and healthy and bare and empty as it was in the old great times, when there was nothing there and when there was not anything anywhere."

"But, but, but, but, O superior man Org," protested Kwangtze, "have the sublime stars fully realized all the hidden implications in their momentous decision?"

At this point the shrill high-pitched voice of Asm piped up: "I am only a female, Professor Kwangtze, so forgive me if I speak crudely and bluntly! I don't know what you mean by the word 'implications,' but I know very well how nice it is when a house is entirely clean, and when there are no longer any bugs or fleas or lice or moths or beetles or rats or mice on the floor or in the cupboard!"

With my usual interest in every aspect of a situation that had any chance of ending in a general shindy, I had been keeping my eye on our pedestal'd deity, for whom Snowdon must have been a sort of Mount Olympus, and now when I saw him about to speak, I put my hand on Rhitha's arm, fearful lest she would have backed up Asm's words by referring to dust and ashes, or even to the webs of spiders.

"The most serious of the 'implications' referred to by our authority on the 'yin' and the 'yang' and on the true nature of the 'Tao,' is surely, or am I wholly lacking in metaphysical logic," so Mathonwy began, "the unavoidable deduction that since all of us will then be reduced to non-entity and non-existence, and since the whole cosmos will be nothing but empty space, or what we Ancient Britons used to call 'Diddym,' or the ultimate Void, things will have returned to their original condition before the creation of the World. No! I must not say 'things will have returned,' for there will be no 'things' there! The only word I can use is our old Welsh word 'Diddym,' *the Void.* All that is anything will then be nothing. But if this be so, O master of learning who hast come to us from the Celestial

Empire, does it not prove that the god-like experiment of creating a world in space full of revolving masses of matter, possessed of the power of producing life from the four elements, has been a complete failure? For to make such a stupendous creation of so much from nothing at all into a success would surely, O Superior One from Pekin, have implied everlastingness in the created? And do not therefore the two voices to which we have listened — first the voice of the lives evolved from the stars and second the voice of the stars themselves, both of them advocating suicide — condemn all this servile, obsequious, cringing, sucking-up to, and all this lick-spittle polyglottic reverence for, the creation of the World, on the simple ground that it itself wants to perish?"

After this commentary upon the cosmogonic situation from the father of that powerful magician Math — who was the uncle of Gwydion the son of Don, and also the uncle of Arianrod, the mother of Llew Llaw Gyffes, for whom Math made a wife out of the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the oak and called her Blodeuwedd — there was a deep silence beneath the gleaming lights of Aldebaran. But lo and behold! another visitor from out of Space now appeared! And before the bewildered gaze of our two girls, who had instinctively once more seized each other's hands, and before us all who followed their gaze, appeared the palpable shape of Gautama Buddha! Yes! clear to the sight of every one of us was that familiar throne, that familiar lotus-leaf calm, and that to us unfamiliar trance of some inscrutable merging of the human in the divine!

Calmly for a space that image regarded us; and then at length, "I have been persuaded to leave Nirvana," were the words that floated out into the air from that enthroned figure; though, closely as I scrutinized this prophet of the pure intellect, I could not see his lips moving, "in order to ask both the star Aldebaran and this Earth-landscape which so boldly refuses to commit suicide, whether ordered to do so by an assembly of stars or by an assembly of the most articulate creatures projected by the planets of these stars, I have come, I say, to ask them both if there isn't a possible *third course* that could be taken, which were neither suicide nor defiance of the will to commit suicide?"

It was at this moment, while everybody waited for some answer to the Buddha's calm but authoritative words, that my Rhitha suddenly jumped up from the grass and rushed to the side of Kwangtze, and lifting up his head from the end of his jangled, jerked, jowled, jiggered, jockeyed, jungled, jumbled, joggled, jabboranded neck, she held it gently against her own body, not so much like a mother as like a sympathetic sister, and held it in such a position that he could see through the air the Buddha upon his throne floating quite close to Mathonwy upon his pedestal.

The Buddha missed nothing of what Rhitha had done. "Let his head rest now, little lady," he said. "I will see to it that there shall be a cushion beneath it."

Rhitha obediently but extremely slowly and cautiously released the head of Kwangtze, which, sure enough, did promptly relax upon a willowy, billowy, pillowy cloud, of a beautiful dark-blue tint such as the waves of the sea sometimes wear at the close of twilight.

"How did it happen, O last of all the Superior Ones, whom I expected to meet in these empty regions, that your neck was pulled out to such a pitiful length?"

"It was done, O Kohinoor of wisdom, by a couple of impetuous lovers, one from the furthest possible distance from the ocean in his island midlands, and the other from the furthest possible distance from the ocean in her continental midlands; the one from the Old World and the other from the New World, but each of them entirely devoid of that quality which only sailors possess."

"And what quality may that be, O friend of Laotze and critic of Confucius?"

"Keeping one's head!" replied Kwangtze with a chuckle; "and may I," he added, "be permitted to keep this divine cushion when you, its beatific bestower, return to Nirvana across the Ganges?"

It was clear to me, as I watched carefully the features of the enthroned Buddha, that among innumerable qualities with which Brahma or Para-Brahma had endowed him there was not the faintest tinge of the quality of humour. Not a flicker of the faintest smile at this sally of the demi-decapitated Kwangtze crossed that sublime countenance. But my attention was soon drawn away from both Kwangtze's foolery and Gautama's gravity by the resonant voice of Aldebaran enquiring with lucid directness just what was this *third path* that might lead us out of this great cosmic dilemma. The answer from that lotus-surrounded seat of judgment evidently struck both our ladies as the right and just one, for they clasped hands just as they had done at the beginning of our adventure, and waved their free arms in exultant agreement.

"Let all who wish to perish perish," was the Buddha's judicial decision, "and let all who wish to live live!"

And then I realized that the masculine minds of Org and myself did not agree with this. I mean that the sort of free chaos or general anarchy of individual choice suggested by the Buddha's final words — yes! and the lotus throne *had* vanished after this judicial utterance and the visitor from Nirvana had returned whence he came — was more in harmony with a woman's feelings than with a man's. A man feels a longing to organize and execute elaborate strategy and exhaustive tactics, whereas a woman takes each situation on its own ground.

During the very act of exchanging this thought between ourselves — and after all, though I am an egoistic orator-actor and Org is a mythological and multiple mixture of fish, bird, beast and reptile, we had come to understand each other pretty well — our attention was distracted by a totally unexpected flash of lightning and roll of thunder and out of the centre of a dark cloud that came sailing by over our heads we heard going on the most extraordinary argument that I've ever heard in all my whole life!

I hadn't seen any natural cloud for a long time; for the grey rim of the circular landscape, which was now carrying us into space, might have been smoke or mist or water, and around us on all sides now was nothing but dusky, though not pitch-black, empty air: and the sight of this natural cloud, just the sort of cloud that I have seen so often in early afternoons in Blaenau, and a sister-cloud to so many other familiar ones such as I used to see when I went to Llandderfel in my courting days to visit Rhitha. And yet, here was this ordinary, natural cloud, sailing along, only about a hundred yards above our heads and out of it was proceeding such a colloquy as neither Rhitha nor I, nor Org or Asm, had ever dreamed of hearing, and certainly were never likely to hear again.

"If you want me to sleep with you tonight," was what the most beautiful feminine voice it is possible for me to imagine was now saying, "you must interfere at once in this dastardly business and prevent these mad stars and these mad people from playing this preposterous game with a life-force they have neither created nor can understand."

"You talk too loud and you talk too quick, Hera, my darling bedfellow. It is in order to have this question fully threshed out that I have brought you all with me here, where we can get some inkling of what these stars and these mortal earth-creatures are up to. I confess their intentions and purposes strike me so far, from what we have been listening to, as if they had completely lost what little reason they may originally have possessed."

"Would it not be a good thing," another female voice broke in, a voice that had a certain masculine resonance mixed with its mellow feminine sagacity, "if I were to put on my armour and take my spear and shield and go down there and confront them all?"

"What I want to know," a man's voice began in so hoarse and husky a manner that it was clear the speaker was extremely old: "is whether this ground is a portion of the bosom of Mother Gaia, and, if it is, I want to know where the rest of her is?"

At this there was clearly audible among these newcomers a rumble like thunder, and I could see that Aldebaran, with his coloured lights and with that curious effect of a wheel which emanated from him, was suddenly sliding away from us in a direction opposite to the one from which this Olympian cloud had descended.

"Are you still, O my crazy begetter," said a voice that I knew by instinct to be the voice of Zeus himself, "so devoted to your old Mother the Earth that you can't get it into your head that with us immortals every portion of our bodies is—"

It was clear at this point that an older, wider, fainter, weirder, remoter, much more mysterious voice intervened, a voice much less allied to the feelings of us mortals or even to the feelings of a radiant star like Aldebaran; and at the sound of *this* voice it was evident to me that the ground under my feet shivered a little, as if with the hearing of it some ancient wrong came back, some appalling outrage done to her — long before Mathonwy in Britain, or Kwangtze in China, or Gautama Buddha in India, had been raised by Fate, or by Destiny, or by Chance, or perhaps simply by Necessity, to their present thrones — had given her whole nature a shock and all her flesh a hurt and an outrage so great that its effect could never pass away.

“It was thou thyself, O Kronos,” responded Ouranos, “that with the jagged flint she gave thee didst scatter wide upon the waters the live seed of thy own fathers loins!”

“Have you forgotten,” retorted Kronos, “how your vile lust-work upon the tender flesh of my mother the Earth forced her to give birth to monsters, yes! to creatures who fouled her delicate body with a hideous brutality only suited to Tartaros and Erebos? Have you forgotten this?”

It was then — while it seemed to me that all of us who were present, whether mortal or immortal, whether male or female, waited with a curiously desperate interest the issue of this debate, as if something far more serious than victory in argument hung upon it, yes! as if something of cosmic importance were at stake — that my sweet Rhitha, white and trembling, suddenly clung to my neck and whispered in my ear: “Gor, darling Gor, I’ve seen that awful face! And, do you know, it is... it is the same appalling fiend I saw nibbling at the rim of the moon!”

“Hush, hush, my sweet!” I whispered back to her, “we mustn’t disturb this honourable company with our mad individual visions of fear and terror! Besides, any of these powerful beings could drive that greedy devil back into his native hell!”

“But he’s whispering to me, Gor darling! O, I’m so frightened of him!”

“He can’t hurt you here, my sweet!” I whispered. “Do for heaven’s sake be careful! I don’t want them to hear you!”

But my own curiosity broke out just then and I begged Rhitha to ask him what his name was. Such trust in me did my darling have that she obeyed me at once with some soundless question in the depths of her heart which the devil up there, invisible to the rest of us, could hear, and not only could hear, but was impelled to answer.

"O Gor, Gor," Rhitha murmured, while the sharp little nail of the longest finger with which she clung to my neck caused me considerable discomfort — indeed I fancied I felt little drops of blood from it running down under my vest. "He says," she explained to me, "that his name is Moloch; and that he is the god of the people who lived in Palestine before the Israelites came there, and that he hates the Jews more bitterly than any of us Christians hate them. O Gor darling" — and here her voice shivered till it was scarcely audible; for it was clear that this appalling fiend whose name was Moloch had terrified my girl into a wild panic— "O Gor! Darling Gor! Do you know what he says? He says that he will have me sacrificed on his—"

She was interrupted by the sudden appearance at our side of the kindest, gentlest, most comforting being I have ever seen in my whole life. She was a goddess — I was absolutely sure of *that,* but it was impossible not to be so reassured by her presence that you didn't care whether she was a mortal or an immortal; she was just a lady, a woman, a female, and one under whose protection you felt you were safe forever. This being took my Rhitha's ice-cold forehead in her two hands, and when she had kissed it and released it, she whispered to us both: "Don't you be afraid of Moloch. I know him and all his little games. He's after my daughter up there now! But I'll make them all follow me — and maybe our father Zeus with a well-aimed thunderbolt will do for that wretch forever! I'll beg him to! But I must get them all there to rescue Aphrodite anyway! So don't you worry, either of you!"

In a moment she was off and had entered that Olympian cloud, and *that* also in a moment was off', and Rhitha and I could see it growing smaller and smaller and smaller, till it finally disappeared. And I now felt a pressing need to change my attitude to what was happening. Yes, I must give up this pose of reverential expectation and adopt a quite different tone. I had no sooner decided this when an event occurred of a nature so startling as to sweep into the limbo of forgotten things all that I expected or was pretending to expect.

The whole ground upon which we stood, with its circular horizon of what might have been either grey mist or grey water, began to heave and shake. Evidently, judging from the domestic altercation we had just heard, between the voice of Kronos and the voice of Ouranos, this living fragment of the sacred flesh of Gaia, the ancient Earth, was anxious to make it clear to the present company of living consciousnesses gathered about her that she definitely refused to join this suicidal pact of the existing inhabitants, whether human, subhuman, or superhuman, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, of this universe, or this multiverse, or this cosmos or this Congeries of Cosmoi, and had decided to shake them all off, to reject and falsify their unworthy hatred of life because life brought suffering, and to go on living at all cost and in spite of all, until, if at last she was forced to die, she would die fighting for life! I looked at Rhitha and took her hand; and we called upon Org and Asm to come close to us, which they unhesitatingly did; and the graceful Asm took Rhitha's free hand, and the grotesquely-shaped Org allowed me to clutch with my five human fingers one of his semi-marine, semi-river-swamp tusks. So there we four were, holding fast together in a line of self-defence. But it must be admitted that we were by no means certain as to which side we were on; since we sympathized so utterly with the idea that to live was *not enough compensation* for the sufferings and miseries of life, but at the same time we were, all four of us, without question so linked with, so involved with, so concerned with, so entwined with, so grounded on and founded on, our mother the earth that it was impossible for us, whether called upon to do so by all the angels of heaven or by all the devils of hell, to separate ourselves from her.

But something about the resolution and independence of this fragment of our old earth, combined with this heaving and rocking of everything beneath our feet, including green grass and grass-mould and gravel and rock-sand and stones of basalt and bits of granite, had a remarkable effect upon all the visitors who had recently descended or ascended, like celestial vultures, upon our privacy. The first to go was Kwangtze, who although considerably absorbed, as the folds of his Chinese garments swirled about him like disordered sails on a drifting ship, with the one important task of keeping his head on his shoulders, did not fail to utter from that same head a Taoistic goodbye.

“Perfect enjoyment,” he bade us all remember, “is to be without enjoyment; the highest praise is to be without praise. Heaven does nothing and thence comes its serenity. Earth does nothing and thence comes its rest. By the union of these two inactivities all things are produced. How vast and imperceptible is the process! Heaven and Earth do nothing, and yet there is nothing that they do not do!”

Certainly, when Kwangtze was gone, either independently of the Tao he had been teaching us or under its patient influence, Nothingness spread her indescribable wings and floated over our heads like a vast moth. And then I realized that Mathonwy also was leaving us forever, for down upon us from his departing pedestal was wafted the old Welsh word “Diddym,” meaning “The Ultimate Void.” And finally, at the very last, bequeathing to all four of us the weird sensation of being more than just absolutely alone, the great star Aldebaran, with all his coloured lights turning and burning in their revolving wheel about him, shot out of sight.

Led by an instinct that must have been entirely different in each of us four, we fell side by side on our knees: that is to say we three human-shaped earthlings knelt, while Org lowered first a jungle-hairy, desert-bony, prairie-skinny knee and then a sea-ribbed, ocean-bladdered, swamp-bulbous knee, and while we three gazed inevitably upwards, to the emptiness above, Org with his sub-oceanic eye-balls protruding out of his head stared straight in front of him towards the horizon.

Thus we all four remained; and my own impression is that every single one of us, not excluding our dear grotesque Org, enjoyed, during those few moments, the most intense realization of the Self and Not-Self — I mean of the self that feels itself to be itself, and of the outward objects at which that inner self looks out and which include that inner self's own body and that inner self's own bodily senses, by means of which that inner self grasps the nature of the Not-Self, which surrounds it, as it surrounds all of us, on every side.

I know I am trying to describe the feelings of each of us four at that moment in a heavy ponderous pedantic manner, but that has been the fault of my family for many generations. The truth is we Blaenau people — for our very name means "further on" — have an instinctive tendency to what you might call the *dramatics of metaphysics,* in other words a taste for dramatizing all the "acts" and "scenes" of philosophical speculation, just as if the ultimate categories of Time and Space themselves were only really interesting and exciting as the background to the stage-set of the drama of our individual life. We have only to glance at the sympathetic treatment of the people of Wales, whether as great princes like Glendower, or as plain men like Fluellen in the plays, to see what a terrific influence on Shakespeare the Welsh attitude to life exercized, just as it did on Milton; and in both these cases the influence was on identical lines if you cut out the comic touch along with its Welsh retort— "if you can mock a leek, you can eat a leek!" In other words it encouraged the two greatest of the world's poets, only rivalled by Homer and by Dante and by Goethe, to turn our philosophical attitude to the ultimate mystery of existence into emotional and dramatic acts and scenes of a personal play.

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players.

Thus, as I tried later to analyse the strange feelings that we four — two males and two females — experienced at that moment in our lives, although it is, I fancy, pretty certain that nobody really can speak for anybody but himself, what struck me most powerfully was the queer fact that, though we had round us so few of the objects with which we generally satisfy our longing for Nature's wonders, our emotional response to the vast Not-Self was not lessened but increased. I may be speaking only for myself, but I think not. We were all so utterly surrounded by infinite endlessness that it seems to me our emotions must have been, if not identical, at least very similar. Anyhow we were all reduced to an awed silence; and one thing at least is certain, namely that the feelings which passed through us have never been expressed in the world before, because they have never been felt in the world before.

As the first shock wore off, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say toned down, we all four automatically crouched down on the grass and "took," as we say, "stock" of our extraordinary situation.

It was neither daylight where we found ourselves now, nor was it what we all four had come to call twilight. Of the two twilights familiar to us, the morning twilight and the evening twilight, what we were now experiencing was more like the morning one in its general psychic effect on our nerves, for it brought with it complete uncertainty as to what was going to happen next; whereas with the evening twilight there are always hints and tokens and signs, outside us as well as inside us, of the approach of all that the word sleep suggests to tired mortals.

There were no clouds. There was no mist. There were no heavenly bodies to be recognised by the quality of their starry lights, or by their zodiacal arrangements like some cosmic wizard's sorcery-map of celestial predictions hung up for all his pawns and puppets to see. There was simply nothing, where we four were crouching in a group, from the horizon to the zenith; nothing north, nothing south, nothing east, nothing west. It certainly was a queer sensation to feel that if we could fly to any single point in that vast aerial dome above our heads, and if we were able to mount up from that particular point — up and out, out and up, whether with our grassy landscape or without our grassy landscape — we could ascend for ever and still find nothing.

"Come, my friends," I said at last, "let's decide what we'd better do now."

The idea of deciding what to do in an emptiness as complete as this certainly struck a rather comical note.

The phrase "decide what to do" is so pathetically sensible that my question was as if a saint in heaven had enquired where they kept their soap. I did not miss the fact that, as soon as I had spoken, our two young ladies' hands met in an instinctive self-protective gesture. They must have felt, though my darling Rhitha really knew me too well to indulge long in such feelings, that after all my heroic talk about a universal suicide in the face of the cruel sufferings of life, I might start suggesting to Org that, before finishing ourselves off, it might be well to begin with the sacrifice of our frailer companions. At any rate with a vague idea of lessening the solemnity of the desperate silence we had all fallen into, I abruptly asked a question which I had longed to ask ever since Rhitha and I first encountered this queer pair.

“By the way, Org, forgive me if it’s a rude question, but where and when did you and Asm first meet?”

“No difficulty about answering him on that point, is there, old girl?” replied Org, with what might have been called a chuckle, but which really was a multiple sound containing that indescribable noise that certain fish make when they receive a deadly blow, and also containing a distorted hee-haw with something in it of a groan of utter weariness, and also something in it of a gulp of pure amusement, such as an overloaded donkey, observing a baby greedily sucking a carrot, might make.

Seeing that his lovely little slender lady gave him a sympathetic smile, Org went on: “I was the product, my friend, if you really want to know” — and as I heard him I had an odd feeling as if we were in a church or temple, but not a temple to the Divinity announced by Jesus, but to a god altogether unknown to the human race and worshipped only by four-legged animals— “the product,” Org continued, “of one of the experiments of these vivisectionists. Whether they did it in London, or in New York or in Paris or in some university outside these big cities, I cannot say. As you two have discovered for yourselves the cruelties deliberately indulged in, under the excuse of benefiting the human race, but in reality solely to satisfy the twin lusts of these fiendish men — a lust for cruelty for its own sake and a lust for knowledge for its own sake, two appalling lusts both inhuman and dehumanizing, and both of them as un-christian as the most horrible barbarities of the ancient Chinese, and when combined together, as they are with these vivisectionists, culminating in cruelties such as would make Tiberius and Caligula and Nero, and even Gilles de Retz himself, as these devils thirst for new victims in the diverse hells of their own hearts, shiver with envy!"

If my words about "deciding what to do" had sounded queer in our present situation, this philosophical and historical discourse from a creature as grotesque-looking as Org struck us all as absolutely fantastic. But Org went on, as sublimely unconscious, as we all are, when beside ourselves with indignation, of any incongruity:

"Every living thing trembles with terror at the presence of any single one of these abominable men, men who deliberately and daily practise cruelties that would make a sworn tormentor from the Spanish Inquisition gasp. Well, I was created by these vivisectionists in a manner I need not harrow your feelings by describing. But they made the mistake of not allowing for the development of my intelligence. Of course what they chiefly enjoy is practising upon response-nerves; but they are all so obsessed by this *double-lust,* the lust to cause pain and the lust to get knowledge, that, like other cruelty-drunk beings, they so kill their normal human feeling that, unless their unspeakable practices become illegal, the whole human race may, when a few more centuries have passed, be entirely ruled by these demons *of Knowledge through Cruelty.*

"Well, as I was saying, the one thing they forgot, and you can bet it *would* be the thing in their damnable inhumanity that they'd naturally forget, was the growth, under their little games, of my intelligence. Well, the result of this was that I escaped. And what then? Why then, quite naturally, I made for the sea; and by some rapid swimming, and also by the splendid device of clinging to whatever was available in the sterns of the fastest vessels I encountered, I managed to approach an island from which voices of the far-off past called out to me and promised to find me a companion; and it was here that I met Asm who had done exactly what I had done — that is to say, escaped. The people who were cruel to her after her parents in Llandderfel were dead were relatives living in an island in the north of Britain — the isle in fact that the ancient Romans used to call 'Ultima Thule,' though today it has another name, a name which Asm wants to forget. She escaped from it by joining some group of adventurers; and it was among the mounds of the lost gods of Easter Island that we met, and it was among the mounds of the lost gods that we 'plighted our troth,' as Asm has taught me to call it. She was never frightened of me or horrified at me. From the first she was the same Asm that she is today—"

"But how on earth," I began, and then remembering that, wherever we were on this fragment of Mother Gaia, we could hardly be said to be "on earth,"

"how," I went on, "did you two learn to fly through the air?"

"O *that* little trick is due to Asm's credit entirely," the queer monster hurriedly replied: "She had been to an electricity school and being far more intelligent than any other pupil or indeed than any teacher there and being as original in her ideas as I am in mine, and being also—"

Here the lovely Asm jumped up, put her hand on the monster's mouth, gave his protuberant snout a touch with her upper lip, and sat down again.

"Yes, hers entirely," Org continued. "Under my scales here," and he scraped the back of one of his fins with the tip of one of his hooves, "I've got a neat little ball of electrified feathers; and Asm has got a similar one in that leather purse in her belt, and we were voyaging fast through the air to the coast of Scotland, when, with a rush of meteor-fire and a spurt of lights in the shape of a wheel, the star Aldebaran overtook us and swept us along in its resplendent trail."

"Have you and Asm," I enquired, "changed your opinion as to the desirability of all the creatures of our old planet Earth sacrificing themselves in one supreme act of self-immolation, or, to put it more bluntly, of suicide, or have you reverted, after hearing the words of the mother of Aphrodite, to the old-fashioned notion held by our parents that self-murder is a wicked and blasphemous act?"

There was a considerable pause among us four persons after this speech from me. But Org answered at last: "Yes," he said, "I veritably believe there has been a change in my opinion on this important point; but I don't think it was under the influence of the mother of Venus-Aphrodite, nor of the many-coloured wheel of the star that swept us down here, that this change occurred. I really do believe, though you may laugh at me for saying so, that my present inclination to reject this self-destructive pact is the result of several years of silent and secret cogitations while growing up to become what I am under the hands of these criminally cruel vivisectors. You see, these wicked and abominable men, obsessed by their mania for knowledge at any price, have completely distorted all natural human pity, all natural human consideration, all natural human feeling; so that what they have really done in all these probings and proddings into the most sensitive nerves they could find was simply to kill the thing in themselves which common humanity has come to call our Conscience. This being dead, they now can go steadily forward with their astounding collection of careful data about the psychological, pathological, neuropathic reactions to pain and discomfort, displayed by every organism in the world that Nature has endowed with sensitivity to suffering. And this interminable portfolio of writhings and squirmings, this well-indexed extravaganza of paroxyms of terror, this accumulative register of what man can do to his fellow animals, is being kept purely for knowledge, yes! for knowledge for its own sake. 'Now,' says the scripture, 'abideth faith, hope and charity,' but the vivisectionists say: 'far greater than any of these is knowledge.' And consider also, my dear friends," and as Org went on I was touched to see the worship in Asm's eyes as she regarded him, "what a poor, thin, hollow, echoing cavern of misery and of despair, knowledge would be if it were all we had! There would we stand, there would we sit, there would we lie with sensitive bodies, minds, adventurous imaginations, all withered up in this accumulation of vivisectional details about experiments on living nerves, without the faintest chance of exerting what is the most godlike of all powers, namely the power of creation! For how, I ask you, my kind friends, how in the name of the supreme Demon, could any creature who knew everything that could be known, who possessed in fact all the knowledge that these insane scientists, by means of their incalculable cruelties, are seeking to get, how could such a creature be moved by any exciting desire or emotion as he huddled down in this transparent vision of all knowledge? The only way it could be made tolerable — don't you agree with me, Gor? don't you agree with me, Rhitha? — would be if by some lucky chance there were to appear some little tiny knot of contrariety in the infinite sameness of this glassy, horny, horizonless, purposeless, monotonous, and most horribly comprehensible cosmos, just one tiny little speck or blob or atom of inexplicable mystery! But there isn't one jot or tittle of such a thing! Science understands all. What it can never understand are the feelings, the moods, the fancies, the thoughts, the caprices, the manias, the whimsies, the emotions of one single living creature! And it is this that so infuriates these inquisitors of vivisection, as they go on pinching and probing and poking and pricking and persecuting and pillorying the nerve-centres and nerve-channels of every creature they can catch in order to collect in their note-books, every conceivable twinge of pain and shrinking from pain."

So exhausted was our poor multi-membered Org by this long swim in the waves of oratory, that he now sank down on the green grass with a sigh like that of an enormous octopus, under a mile of salt water.

It was at this point in our extraordinary adventure that I became conscious of two significant things. The first of these things was that our ladies had once more joined hands. And the second was that the field of green grass on which we were travelling through space was stirring and heaving again in its own body.

I moved up closer to Rhitha, for we were all aware of a premonition of the coming of some event completely different in its nature from anything that had so far happened.

And as I moved to Rhitha's side, for the three of us who were bipeds were now on our feet, Org, our terraqueous monster — whose appearance suggested that his vivisecting creators had tried to intermingle a walrus with a hippopotamus and to bestow on the issue of this mixture the fins of a shark and the feathers of a wild-goose — moved simultaneously to Asm's side, so that we were now just as we had been when we saw that sticky and slimy python Eternity perish by the horrible greed with which it devoured Time. But all around us now was nothing but hollow, empty, purposeless, meaningless space, extending without limit in every direction, and you can believe, if anything in my tale remains credible to you, how ridiculous to us four living beings — as we felt all around us the tasteless, colourless, impalpable, viewless, scentless, indefinable presence of boundless space — would have been the idea that the universe had some thinkable limit and did not stretch out forever in all directions, of the still more ridiculous idea that it had a definite beginning or when the hour comes will have a definite end.

And then — yes, even as we waited in a weird sort of coma, or trance, or enchanted suspension of all normal thought — we distinctly saw in the air above us the enormous superhuman features of two colossal countenances, one on the left and one on the right, evidently belonging to a couple of supernatural beings who were clearly disputing between themselves upon some abysmal topic.

I knew without being told, for she pressed my fingers with a convulsive clutch, that Rhitha was reminded of the vulture face of her enemy Moloch as she gazed at the colossal countenance on the left, but being something of a virtuoso in demons I knew well that this one was far more formidable. In any case we all four listened spellbound and enthralled by what we were hearing, not to speak of what we were seeing, when one or the other of us dared to look at one or the other of those two faces.

"Have you changed your opinion, Satan?" said the right-hand face to the left-hand face, "about the Beginning of things?"

"You mean about the Beginning of the universe?" answered the left-hand face.

"That's what I mean," affirmed the right-hand one, "because, if you have, I should dearly love to hear what new idea you have got."

"As for yourself, Jehovah," queried Satan, "I suppose you still go on with your old illusion that you actually created this universe that has now entirely vanished, with the exception of that absurd scrap down there, of the wretched little planet called Earth upon which you pretend you created Adam and Eve as the ancestors of the human race, of whom some still worship you as their god — although, as I have so often compelled you to admit, in those days you were not the god of any tribe of mortals except the Jews, who are now so oddly separated from all other races and so ridiculously hated by so many stupid and ignorant people? So you still think of yourself, do you, as the Creator of this universe whose miserable earthlings have recently destroyed themselves and whose 'nebulæ' and ‘galaxies,’ as they call them, of suns and stars have now imitated them and done themselves in too? If, as you boast, you really did create this beastly universe, that has now finished itself off except for that cheeseparing of a bowling-green down there and the disgusting little maggots that are crawling about on it, is, I ask you, this creation of creatures who find life so unpleasant that their only desire is to kill themselves, anything to boast of?”

Jehovah smiled.

“Shall I never be able to make you see, O stupidest and silliest of all possible Satans, that the only thing worth having, whether within or without the universe is consciousness? All matter is conscious, just as I am and just as you are, and all that it gives birth to is conscious also. All air is conscious with all that lives in it. All water is conscious in the same way with all its offspring, and so also is fire. You, Satan, are only yourself and only happy in yourself when you are hating and destroying. Of course there are a lot of things, and a lot of spirits and souls, that you *cannot* destroy; and for that very reason you hate them more than you hate the ones you *can* destroy. But I beg you to consider this problem a little closer. What, let me ask you, O great hater and destroyer, is enjoyment in life? What is it that prevents you, yes, you yourself, the great Demon of the universe, from ending your life, when you know very well that in the battle between you and me neither of us can ever win, and neither of us can destroy the other? Shall I tell you what prevents you with all your mania for killing from killing yourself? Nothing less than your worship of self-consciousness! Once dead, your consciousness of being alive would be gone, and as far as you were concerned, you not only would not be yourself any more, but you very well might *never have been at all.*

“Now it is a queer thing, my good Satan, if you will permit your ancient antagonist to use a syllable as unpleasing to your ears as ‘good,’ how tenacious most created creatures are of life, and yet how not only recklessly and desperately but even casually and carelessly they will throw away life for all sorts of fanciful purposes that are neither according to *my* will nor according to *your* will — for such purposes I mean that are neither creative nor destructive, but are simply playful. In fact what both of us, you as a breaker-down, and I as a builder-up according to our different natures, take seriously, these queer human creatures of the planet Earth take like a game. And now apparently this infection of play-acting — caught I daresay from these capricious and whimsical descendants of Adam with his Garden and of Noah with his Ark — has affected all the constellations and all the stars, so that they also are enjoying this pretty little silly dramatic game of killing themselves, and as far as I can see — and I believe I can see quite as far as you can if not further — most of them, and, in a minute or two, all of them, will have finished doing it, and you and I and these four wretched little entities on this scrap of flying greenery will be the only conscious selves left alive in Space."

Here the right-hand countenance of the two terrific faces that were now looking straight down upon us permitted itself to indulge in the most extraordinary smile I have ever seen in my whole mortal life. Nor was I lacking in the intelligence to notice another thing, though whether our dear monster Org had the wit to see it too I haven't the faintest idea. He certainly kept exchanging very significant glances with his partner Asm; so very likely he *had* seen it! What I saw was this; and I knew well by the pressure of her fingers that my Rhitha had caught it too. There had passed across the demonic countenance on the left a shiver of unquestionable panic! It didn't last, but it had undoubtedly shown itself. And I asked myself just what particular word from the lips of the face on the right had caused this spasm of fear? Or was it simply the indescribable depth of his companion's smile, a smile that certainly struck me as if it were the whole of space smiling, or rather — for I couldn't even *imagine* space *as a whole,* as if it were as much of space as I could grasp with my limited human mind — smiling at me, at my fumbling mind, at all four of us standing so pathetically on that grassy field, and finally, so it seemed to me, and it was this very likely that so scared the Devil, at the whole crazy situation? It was then that a voice from the face on the right spoke again.

"Have I, my only companion for millions of centuries, to repeat still once more for your forgetful ears the tale of our first meeting? Well! I have at least the excuse of those four little creatures on that shred of terrestrial greenery down there; for I can see, as no doubt you can also see, that they're listening to our colloquy with no small interest. And so with the excuse of their presence I'll go over the same old story again."

We four were indeed petrified with interest as Jehovah went on.

"It all began of course, as you very well know, with our mutual awakening from sleep in infinite space. And here's a very nice point, my dear Devil, that I may have forgotten to make in any of the million occasions when I've reviewed these things. Long after the composing of any of the primeval stories about how things began, in fact, in comparatively recent discussions as to how they began, the philosophers of the satellite of the sun, from which those four insects down there derive their existence, developed a trick of talking with pompous authority about what they called 'the Absolute.' With this ridiculous 'Absolute' of theirs they wanted to get the infantile conclusion established that there was a final Something that partook partly of the nature of consciousness and partly of the nature of matter, and that included everything that existed, that had ever existed, and that would ever exist. They brought forward this idea for the obvious reason that they were too proud, too vain, and too conceited to confess frankly and freely that the limited nature of their human intelligence debarred them from the comprehension of any ultimate aspect of existence except boundless space; and that all they can do, and all they will ever be able to do, is to fall back upon their consciousness of the unlimited, unending space in which they appear and into which they will dissolve when they disappear. Is it not clear at a glance to you, my dear Devil, as it is clear to me, that in the midst of this boundless space wherein we are now conversing it is nonsense to talk of ‘the Absolute’ in the sense of something that *is* all there is, and that *includes* all there is, and beyond which there is nothing at all, unless by this grandiose word is meant just simply and plainly empty space. In *that* sense both I, the Creator and Protector of whatever is in space, and you, the Destroyer and Corrupter of whatever is in space, will be in full agreement with each other when we say that such a vacant, hollow container, for me to fill at will and for you to spill at will, can hardly be called an Absolute, if by that tremendous word is meant some substantial reality that rests at the bottom of all possible worlds. And note this too, my dear Devil, with regard to this blessed word Absolute. Their less educated ones are naturally puzzled by this grand word; and so their cleverer ones derive a deliciously superior comfort and complacency and an almost lord-of-the-manor satisfaction from the idea that to enjoy the Absolute is a mystical privilege, if not a sensual privilege, confined to a very few philosophic minds. But what I particularly want you, my dear Devil, to realize is—”

But the Devil broke in here with a howl of boredom.

“I tell you, God,” he yelled, “I shall scream this blasted space of yours into the parings of a pilgarlic pipistrel if you don’t stop talking about Absolutes! You promised once to tell me the whole story of how you and I first came to know each other. You’ve given me so much to do with your bloody creations and your blasted redemptions that for millions of years I've not had a moment's rest; but since, except for these four wretched little entities, your conglomerated creation seems at this moment to have taken to its heels, leaving us idle for a bit, this might be a good moment for you to keep that promise."

"Well, old companion," God answered gently, "I am almost inclined to accede to your request, only we had better lower our voices and turn our faces away from those pathetic little creatures down there."

At this the Devil gave a hoarsely croaking chuckle.

"O how sweetly considerate you sound! Just as if you didn't know as well as I do that those insects are listening breathlessly to every word we speak. Really, for pure and simple humbug, God, you beat all the miserable little creatures for whose unhappy life you are responsible, and who are now showing what they think of you and your redemptive ability by committing suicide. However! I am not a humbug like you, and I do very much want to hear your story. So please tell it."

"Well," God began, in a quiet meditative tone, "I'll do my best. But I am better at creation than at describing creation. But it certainly was an extraordinary experience, that moment of waking slowly into the consciousness of being conscious — of being, that is to say, a self that had the power of saying to itself '*I am* I.'

"I sometimes long to startle some of the more obsequious of my adorers by forcing them to listen to an explanation, by a few insects and a few snails and a few newts and a few tadpoles and a few shrimps and a few sticklebacks, of what it feels like when you first say 'I am I'! And then I'd like to make them listen to you and me talking about *our* first awareness of being alive! It would certainly amuse—"

But as God uttered the word "amuse," I didn't miss — nor did my Rhitha, as I could tell from the pressure of her fingers — the extremely interesting fact that there passed across the face of the Devil that same queer shudder of what I can only describe as panic-terror which had seized him when his everlasting antagonist smiled. Was any kind of humour then — that is to say the power of being amused by some word or event or accident or situation, the power in fact of appreciating the incorrigible, the ineradicable comedy of the whole bloody business of life — essentially godlike, and its opposite, the inability to see the funny or comic or ironic side of things, inherently devilish? No! no! no! Such a theory, if we accepted it in its entirety, would mean that all living creatures, save only men, women, and children, were on the side of the Devil, which is wholly unthinkable, in spite of the way some of us persist in talking about "cloven hooves" and "vipers' tongues" and "vultures' claws" and "sharks' teeth" and so forth! But my thoughts were now interrupted by the divine voice itself; for God had begun to relate to the Devil his first experience of being God.

"My first feeling, or thought, if you like, was not any sort of consciousness of a 'self' or of an 'ego' or of an 'I am I'; it was purely, simply, and solely an intense interest that grew steadily more and more intense, in what I was looking at with my two eyes. And do you know what I was looking at? *At you!* Yes, you were with me, and moreover you were doing exactly what I was doing, that is to say you were looking round, and you were, just as I was — and what could be more natural? — thrilled with interest at seeing me there! So that the truth is that just as *my* first awareness, or *my* first sensation, or *my* first experience, of being alive, was *my* interest in you, so your first was *your* interest in me. So there we were! But, after that initial recognition of each other, our two consciousnesses must have debouched and deviated, each upon its own separate track. As I watched you I was wondering in my own mind whether you were a portion of myself, whether in truth I was a double-being possessed not only of two outward appearances but also of two inward intelligences. Were we in fact, two separate minds that could tap each other's reservoirs of thought but yet at the source were really and truly one; two separate streams, no doubt, when once they started running, but streams that were flowing from the same primal fountain-head? It was a considerable surprise to me, Devil old friend, when I suddenly noticed that your attention had wandered from me to the infinite space that surrounded us and that you were searching every horizon of this vast emptiness around us to discover, so it occurred to me, if there had been any other double-natured beings like ourselves born at this moment for no reason out of nothing. But this sudden discovery of mine that our mental and emotional interests did not correspond, but that you were now scrutinizing with eager curiosity the hollow gulfs of empty space, whereas I was absorbed solely and exclusively with this immediate problem of our relation to each other, was not only a considerable shock to me, but was an important turning-point in my mental development.

"If we were not the same being, I asked myself, possessed, as I had hitherto imagined, of two heads, how was it that we thus appeared side by side in space? What was the real relation between us? But it would not do, I told myself, to continue these remote investigations, until I analysed much more carefully the nature of my own being as I am conscious of it in myself. No sooner had I thus brought my thoughts to a stand-still and compelled my interrogative energy to pause, while I pondered on the best path along which to begin this introspective selfanalysis, than I was disturbed by observing that my companion, the being whom I had regarded, when I first awakened to consciousness, as part of myself, had left my side. Yes — though I daresay you, my dear Devil, have completely forgotten all this — you had leapt up from where we were lying together and bolted off. You moved as fast as the fastest meteorite I have ever been able, since those early days, to invent. I could soon perceive you far away in the distance, moving like the brightest of stars, towards some point on our horizon where you had seen, or where you imagined that you had seen, something that broke the hollow monotony of empty space.

'"So there are certainly two of us!' I said to myself, 'and I am not a double-being.'"

It was at this point in this curious dialogue above our heads between God and the Devil that the latter showed any interest in what the former was telling him. He had certainly wanted to hear the story, had been in fact extremely anxious to hear it; but it was clear to me, and I fancy to my Rhitha too, that the only thing he was really interested in was anything — it didn't matter what kind of thing — that concerned himself.

"Did you follow me with your eyes," the Devil now enquired of God, "until I had completely vanished over the horizon?"

"Yes," God replied, "I certainly did; but when you had disappeared I made no attempt to follow you, because I was absorbed in a discovery so astonishing to me and so fascinating to me that it occupied my attention to the exclusion of everything else."

At this point God became silent and so lost in thought that his companion grew obviously uneasy.

"What was that?" he asked.

But the Deity remained lost in thought. He may have been wondering how to put what he had to say in a manner that even his sensitive companion couldn't possibly find anything amusing in it; but what I, Gor of Blaenau-Ffestiniog, couldn't understand was the great difference between God as we saw him now, which was evidently what he really was and God as he had been shown to us in church and Sunday School. God as he really was turned out to be much more like myself in his thoughts and feelings than I ever could dream was possible! That God now, for instance, should be making such an effort to be solemn and serious in what he was telling the Devil, since he had seen that what disturbed the Devil most of all was any approach to humour, struck me as astonishingly natural and human. It was indeed not only human but humane, and certainly the opposite of what the Devil would have done. Meanwhile I, silly old Gor of Blaenau, as all my friends except Rhitha regarded me, now began to feel extremely proud of myself for my new discovery about the Cosmos, namely that one of its essential characteristics — whether derived from something jocular in its creator or from something in matter itself — is an element of humour. In other words, I told myself, the universe is a horribly comic spectacle, and it couldn't have been so if its creator hadn't had a definite liking for burlesque and farce, or if these things weren't already in the essence of matter itself.

"But you haven't yet told me," the Devil was now quite eagerly enquiring of God, "what you discovered in our surroundings in that desolate and empty vacuum that prevented you from following me in my rush to the horizon, where I am ready to confess now I fancied I saw, or really did see, something swimming or flying or floating or gliding."

"Well! I can tell you that at once, my dear Devil," said God. "What I discovered was that this Space into which you and I awoke was not as empty as I had first decided it was."

"You don't mean to say," cried the Devil, "that you saw other living things round us — things as living as we are, only clever at hiding themselves for fear we'd eat them up?"

"O no!" God replied, "I didn't see anything of that kind! What I saw was the fact that all round us the whole air was filled with floating fragments of solid substance. I whispered to these fragments of matter once or twice, and I deliberately touched some of them with certain antennae or sensitized feelers that I willed to emerge from my person for that purpose; and what I found to be there was no more than a number of thick masses of formless substance, invisible at first glance, but easy to apprehend when once you came in contact with them. They did not fill the whole of the space round us, you must understand, but they floated there in larger or smaller fragments, and seemed to be swimming about there under the impulsion of the same sort of will or energy that you and I possessed, only how far resembling our consciousness I could not detect; for there was no response from any of these fragments of matter resembling my response to you or yours to me. I finally decided, after feeling about me as carefully and cautiously as I could, that these floating masses of substance possessed only rudimentary consciousness, that was still far below the level of the sort of power you and I possessed when we awoke in what at first I imagined to be entirely empty space, but in which you clearly thought you saw some living thing moving when you bolted off as you did to the furthest horizon of our vision."

"And so you decided — you are very fond of 'deciding,' aren't you, God? — that these fragments of substance floating about in space were quite different from you and me? They didn't have the five faculties of our five senses and their substance was neither animal nor vegetable. Am I right in thus describing your wonderful discovery, God?"

"Perfectly right, my dear Devil, perfectly right."

"And then, I take it," the Devil went on, "you decided — not a very striking decision, this time, you know — to play some game with these helpless lumps of matter? Am I right, my Lord?"

"You are certainly right. That indeed was exactly what I proposed to do."

"Did you think of asking these floating lumps whether they wanted to be played with?"

"I see what you are driving at, dear Devil! You would like me to confess that I derived pleasure from moulding these harmless blobs of matter into whatever fanciful shapes came into my head, and that if they didn't like such sport, this pleasure of mine was rather increased than diminished by their discomfort?"

"Well, isn't it? Only just a little tiny bit perhaps, but isn't it, just that little tiny bit?"

"No, my worthy Devil," God replied, "it isn't! Indeed, while we are upon this particular topic, I'd like to tell you this. Cast a glance down there, if you don't mind, on those four little creatures clinging to each other on that grassy fragment of the planet Earth, or Gaia, as the Greeks called her. You see that 'odd-one-out,' as you might call him who isn't fish, flesh, or fowl? Well, that creature was made in what its makers loved to call 'pure experiment', but declared sweetly that what they did was done for the sake of 'the little ones' of their race. The name they give to what they do is *vivisection,* a word that means cutting up into pieces what is still alive. They mustn't be confused with doctors, many of whom have been strongly opposed to such tortures. You could call them a set of men apart from all others, whose delight is in torturing what these earthlings call the 'lower animals' for the purpose of acquiring reactions. You, my dear Devil, were occupied in other things, in trying to make evil as much of an urge to destruction as I was — and still am — trying to make good an urge to creation; but I can assure you I had my eye on these wretches; and I think I made sure that the last moments of every one of them should resemble the last moments of the most miserable of the unfortunate animals they so enjoyed tormenting. But they are all gone now. Gone they are with the nebulae and the galaxies, with the living stars and the dead stars, with the big stars and the little stars; gone they are with their planets and their satellites, gone to everlasting annihilation. I expect you have always imagined, my dear Devil, that I was deliberately lying to all my worshippers, whether Christian, Rabbinical, or Moslem, when I allowed them to believe in a life after death. No, my dear Devil, surprising as it may seem to you, I was *not* lying. The truth is, as I expect you could have discovered if you had given the matter any serious consideration, that in this whole matter of a life after death I am as ignorant as these quaint little earthlings are and as I think I may take for granted you are.

I did not invent for them these worlds after death, of which their prophets and poets have made so much. I know no more about Heaven and Hell than they do, or than I fancy you do. In fact my own private suspicion is that there is no other world beyond this one, this rather empty one, in which we have now been left. Some of their philosophers have been talking lately about what they call ‘another dimension’; but my own view of this ‘other dimension’ is simply that it is only another name for Annihilation, or sinking into Nothingness. But now, while we are discussing this matter of ‘another dimension,’ I want to confess to you a very important secret. Without the faintest idea that the world I created would ultimately of its own accord commit suicide, I have for many millenniums been pondering on the problem whether I couldn’t create a world whose creatures would not be able to make one another as miserable as they have been able to do in the world that has just committed suicide. You know, my dear Devil, as well as I do, that it has been a mixture of Eastern and Western traditions, Jewish, Greek, Roman and African, that has led this world to the self-slaughter it has now consummated, and these traditions are all full of belief in other worlds, especially such worlds as Heaven and Hell. Well, old comrade, what I have been doing for thousands of years is trying to invent some very different kind of world, a world which it would be possible for me to create, but which would be quite different from the one that has just destroyed itself. I tell you this for the simple reason that I have no one else to whom I can tell it. Mind you, old friend, I shall not be at all disturbed if, on hearing of my tremendous scheme, you make up your mind at once to do all you can to render it futile, or even to destroy it root and branch. You and I have worked together so long in our contrarious fashion that, although we may each wish we could have our full fling independent of the other, my feeling is that we have the same idea at the back of our heads, namely that to get things moving with any sort of permanent success, it is essential that in the energy at work behind all that we do there must be both an element of creation and an element of destruction, or as those funny little creatures down there would put it, an element of good and an element of evil. Now, let us begin to describe my scheme, and do for the sake of empty space listen very carefully. In the first place let us make a world where every animal, whether human or subhuman, possesses a soul that can survive the death of its body. Next, let us see to it that this soul retains as much as is possible of its former personality, individuality, identity, and as much of its unique, peculiar, tastes, fancies, prejudices, humours, oddities, as can exist in a disembodied spirit."

What the Devil then asked was just what I, Gor Goginog of Blaenau, would certainly have asked, if I had had the gall to do so: "By your word *animal*, God, do you include all living creatures, such as birds and fish and reptiles and worms and insects — all that lives, in fact, save rocks and stones and trees and plants?"

God didn't hesitate for a second in his answer to this question; and I confess when I heard his answer, I pressed my Rhitha's hand with as much satisfaction as if I *had* asked this crucial question myself.

"Certainly I do. I include them all; every sort of living creature! I used the term 'animal' to make sure that you understood that I wasn't referring to lichens and toadstools and mushrooms. Perhaps what I ought to have emphasized more distinctly is the difference between forest-growths like funguses and such amphibious sea-shore growths as sea-anemones; but on this particular point I confess I feel rather dubious myself: but I certainly included all reptiles and all frogs and toads and newts and worms and every insect that exists. But leaving for a moment the rather ticklish question of creatures like sea-anemones, the scheme I am inclined to adopt for a completely New World suspended in Space is a scheme totally different from the one I adopted in the creation of the world that has now, of its own free will, disappeared forever! In one particular I intend to follow my former method of creating a world. Indeed, instead of changing, or even modifying it, I intend to pursue it to an even intenser extreme. I refer to my method in the creation of men and beasts and birds and fishes and reptiles and insects, of first envisaging in my own mind the sort of creatures I would like to see existing. Please understand that what I envisage in this way in my imagination is really like what you might think of as the soul of a creature before it has adapted itself to the surroundings in which it is destined to live; the sort of soul in fact that you can conceive, if you allow me, old friend, a little classical pedantry, to be waiting in limbo for its earthly incarnation. Now into this soul I shall pour all the energy possible for a self-creating exploration of matter. And I shall do this with every creature I create.

"No! Don't interrupt me just yet, old friend, till I've told you more about my New World. You know what we do ourselves, my dear Devil, in regard, I mean, to our own appearance? We appear of course completely different to every conscious being who confronts us. But the interesting thing is that, while in ourselves we are so vividly aware of being able to take any shape we please, we ourselves have persuaded ourselves quite naturally and spontaneously to think of ourselves with human bodies — that is to say with bodies resembling those of Adam, the first man. Between ourselves we can entirely discard the account of the Beginning of things which I dictated to the scribes of Israel; whereby you, the destroyer, are represented as a leering serpent, and I, the creator, as an austere and forbidding old gentleman, carried through Space by a crowd of mischievous boys and provocative angels! I selected the Children of Israel as the recipients of the revelation of my identity in the matter of Adam and Eve, because I have always had a special fondness for Jews. It was this partiality that led me to select Jesus of Nazareth as the one descendant of Adam whose inmost soul and instinctive gestures seemed almost akin to my own. What always made me angry seemed always to make him angry, and what always made me want to cry seemed always to make him want to cry. I have often committed impulsive and foolish mistakes in my quick moods, both for good and for harm; and so did he! The longer he lived the more deeply he came to resemble me, so that he was perfectly justified in his daring idea that we were father and son. Through all the aeons of years that you and I have lived together, since the day we found ourselves side by side in empty space, the worst twinge of sorrow and remorse I have ever felt was when I heard those heart-rending words: ‘Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani!’

“But now listen very seriously to my words. As you have seen, and no doubt your own influence with its instinct for destruction had a lot to do with it, the world I created, as my worshippers love to put it ‘in the Beginning,’ has been brought to an end by the loathing of life felt by the galaxies, nebulae, stars, planets and satellites, together with all the creatures, human and otherwise, not excepting all the worms, insects, reptiles and saurians, that filled the whole expanse of the earth, with all her forests, all her grassy slopes, all her rocky ridges and stony peaks, all her reedy swamps and her pebbly and sandy sea-shores, yes! and with all her memories too, memories going back to the days when I tried in vain to make Adam, the first man, and Eve, the first woman, do what was wise, and what I wanted them to do, and avoid doing what would bring disaster. Very good. All that is over now! I created the world. It lasted for several millions of years. Then, because of the miseries and sufferings which men and women inflicted upon one another, and because of the horrors that went on, in every direction, as much among the tiny insects as among wild beasts and savage birds, the whole creation, whether pushed on to it by you or not, committed a universal suicide, leaving us and those quaint little objects down there alone together in empty space.

"I don't think either of us two, neither you, who know me far better, I fully allow, than any of my worshippers, nor I, who know you better than any *of your* worshippers, fully realize the condition of those pitifully rent and torn souls who worship me, and who struggle so madly to kill half of their natures in the illusion, instigated by their priests and pastors, that I have forbidden all sexual satisfaction — these poor wretches who are called saints — or of the unhappy, brooding, desperate, dark, mad, lonely, lurid stirrers of weird cauldrons, into which they throw appalling substances, who worship you, and are called 'black magicians,' or how we ought to have made it clear to them both that it is only out of the clash between you and me, and out of the perpetual struggle between you and me, that life can go on at all! With me alone as the ruler all would stagnate; and with you alone as the ruler all would disappear!

“Well now, consider this point, Devil my dear, and consider it very, very carefully. You will remember how I decided to give to every creature I created — from Leviathan and Behemoth to the smallest water-rat and star-fish, from Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel to the tiniest bee that buzzed through their flower-beds and to the smallest monkey that swung from branch to branch above their heads; yes! from the noblest ox in their pastures to the daintiest little lamb in their well-guarded sheep-folds — the unique gift, however they misused it, of free will? You always predicted — and you were, as we now have seen by this universal cosmic suicide, perfectly right in predicting — that this gift of free will to such crazy creatures would end in disaster. But it seemed to me that a world without free will, a world ruled by absolute determinism from the start, would be so dull and tedious an experiment as to be hardly worth making.

“But now, confronted by this cosmogonic self-destruction, evidently due to the fact that, endowed with free will, all the living things in earth, air and water, by devouring each other, by meddling with each other, by making each other’s existence intolerable, turned the world into such a hell that the only way out of it was universal suicide, it has entered my head, though I daresay there exist insuperable objections which will present themselves later, that it would be of great interest to create an absolutely predetermined universe of living beings not one among whom possessed the faintest semblance of free-will. I am thinking of a universe in which every house-fly, every daddy-longlegs, every beetle, every butterfly, every moth, along with all the toads and frogs and newts and tadpoles, and along with all the reptiles, and along with all the birds of the air and the fish of the sea and the wild beasts of the jungle and the men, women, and children of country and town, are all driven by an absolutely inescapable law of inflexible determinism, much more implacable than the Greek Moira or even than that still more unbendable and rigidly physical pressure that Homer was wont to call ‘Anangke.’

“Now, can’t you imagine, my dear Devil, that having worked out this undeviating cause-and-eflect universe, in which all its children, human and otherwise, have no choice at all, and know they have no choice, but just drift on and on, like predestined ripples in a calm sea, and supposing I had the power to make every single creature that lived, while it lived, extremely joyous and happy — can’t you imagine, I say, speaking in the terms of those earthlings below us down there, that such a universe could be a far more desirable one for its occupants than the one that has recently disappeared?”

“Why the hell don’t you ask them then, you old blunderbuss of a Nursery-God playing with picture-blocks of wood? Call them up here and ask them! I’ll be mightily tickled to hear what they say! Each of them, of *that*, I can assure you already, will say something different!”

I, Gor Goginog of Blaenau, having heard this, was, as you may believe, not a little startled. But I thought to myself, there’s no reason to draw back in fear. The Devil can’t hurt us with God there, and God won’t send us to hell if the Devil doesn’t want us! And as I looked at Org’s antediluvian and amphibious left eye, though it bulged a good deal more out of his head than was usual, I could see that he too had grasped the proposition and was favourable to it. The girls seemed less certain in their minds; but with one of my usual rapid flights of mythological imagination, I put this down entirely to the absence, up there, above our heads, in that enormous, aerial, chilly space, of any feminine hostess! What was wanting I told myself was simply the presence of the Virgin Mary. The presence of Her Son would have disturbed me and disturbed Org, too, well did I know that! Yes, “the

Mother of God" was what we wanted, since we were going to Heaven, and not to Olympus!

However, there was a feminine being behind all of us, or to speak more correctly, *under* all of us, who was quite ready and determined to be our Earthly Mother at this important interview. I refer of course to the grassy plain on which we were standing and which had brought us here through so many extraordinary shocks; yes! and not only through the vanishing away of Time, but of Eternity too.

And now this heroic fragment of Gaia, the ancient earth, was actually carrying us up where we might talk with God.

What I found particularly interesting, after our grassy landscape had settled itself down and we were really in what I think I have a perfect right to call Heaven, were the forms our two entertainers assumed as they talked to us there. For without a moment's delay they both joined our little party of four on our floating field of grass. God had the form of an old gentleman with a long curly beard and rough curly hair. He was evidently quite naked under his garments which consisted of heavy robes one above another and by no means very elegantly arranged; and his ankles and feet were quite bare. In fact he exactly resembled the Eternal Being in the picture of Adam and Eve by Arazzo Fiammingo in the Galleria Accademia in Florence. The Devil's appearance, as he squatted on the grass between Org and Asm on one side and Rhitha and me on the other, was even easier to describe, for he was the very image of the particular one of the demonic chimeras on the top of Notre Dame looking down on Paris, who is described in the guide books as "The Thinker" and who has a short horn in the centre of his head, a couple of folded wings about his shoulders, and a dangerous-looking tongue protruding from his mouth.

It took no time at all for us four earthlings to get the spirit of the occasion; and I thought, "I suppose this is a supreme example of the kind of thing that happens over and over again in life, when some miraculously unexpected concatenation of events whirls us into a situation about which we have told ourselves exciting stories since infancy. Here we actually were in empty space alone with God and the Devil and invited by them to give advice as to the creation of a fresh world."

It was in fact God who spoke first.

"We have," he began, "or more accurately with the help of my good friend the Devil, I have been planning a world as absolutely opposite to the one that has just committed suicide as can be imagined. In the first place I have decided that there shall be *no* free will. No free decisions at all. By that I mean that every man, woman and child, every beast and bird, every worm and insect shall just give itself up to the affairs of its life, one after another, as custom and habit, instinct and natural desire move it and draw it on, without having to decide anything. It will feel itself to be a conscious unit, a conscious dot, a conscious grain, a conscious pebble, a conscious seed, and will enjoy the sensation of being forced along by fate and necessity without having to decide one single thing for itself. It won't be able to pause or stop for a second in the stream of cause and effect, but it will be prepared quite happily and resignedly for its death when its hour shall come. I have been thinking — and this is a point upon which I should be very glad to ask the advice of each one of you four beings — about eliminating from this fresh world, in which every creature will resemble a joyous sunlit ripple in an irresistible tide, certain ravenous, venomous, and voracious creatures that feed upon others, such as lions and tigers, eagles, hawks, kites, crows, vultures and poisonous serpents, together with sharks, sword-fish, and other ferocious and predatory inhabitants of the ocean. It has occurred to me that it might be a good thing to put an end, once and for all, to the unpleasant habit, whether in earth, air, or water, of creatures eating each other and living upon each other. Why not have a world in which men and beasts and birds and fishes and reptiles and worms and saurians and insects feed, not on each other, but purely and entirely on *vegetation*? Thus all sea-creatures would feed on weeds of the sea and all land creatures on the vegetable growths of fields and forests, of swamps and fens.

"But here, my dear young earthlings — I use the word 'young' because from your terrestrial calculation both I, and my old associate the Devil, are fantastically and fabulously old — and I want to ask you four persons, personally and individually, a significant question. Quite apart from their particular place in the general scheme of things, are there any special creatures that you four, or one of you four, would be thankful to have excluded from the living inhabitants of our fresh world?"

We all looked at each other and there was a momentary hesitation. Then to my surprise, and also I confess a little to my disappointment, for I would have preferred that my little Rhitha should have looked with wonder at me, her man, having the boldness and courage and cleverness to speak, instead of speaking herself, my girl fearlessly cried: "Couldn't *fleas* be left out of the fresh World?"

God glanced hurriedly at the Devil who gave a significant nod, as much as to say, "I'll be on tap to supply *that* deficiency with a few well-aimed pricks of conscience!" And thus reassured, God conceded the point. "Yes, we will eliminate fleas."

I was very anxious to think of some creature the choice of which for elimination would impress both God and the Devil, and also display a strikingly wide biological knowledge of Nature as well as a pathological understanding of human aversions. But Org's girl Asm spoke up before I had decided upon the creature whose absence from life for the next couple of thousand years would be the greatest blessing to us mortals.

"O please!" cried Asm eagerly.

"Speak up, child," said God kindly.

"Let's have no bed-bugs!"

God actually gave a deep-throated chuckle at this, and the Devil made a vicious scoop with his tongue as if snatching up one of the insects in question.

"Yes, my child," agreed the Creator, "not a single bed-bug shall enter our world, not from the north, or the south, or the east, or the west, not from zenith to nadir, shall a single bed-bug slip in. Isn't that so?" And God glanced not without a shade of anxiety it seemed to me, at his diabolic partner.

"Not a single one," agreed that enemy of all life; and it struck me, as he uttered this final doom for all bed-bugs that the antagonist of creation looked more like one of those chimera-demons gazing down on Paris from the summit of Notre Dame, as he wagged his worm-like tongue from side to side between his hollow lips and drew his muscular wings nearer to the solitary horn on the top of his head, than he had ever done before. Indeed he looked as if he intended to visit every bedroom in Paris that night as a snapper-up of bed-bugs.

It was at this point, while I was swallowing my humiliation at not having thought of any desirable omission from our newly created world, which apparently was to resemble a deterministic earthly paradise continued forever, that Org lifted up his multi-genetic voice, a voice that suggested paws, feathers, tails. And do you know what Org wanted eliminated? Nothing less than *lice!*

“Yes indeed, my friend,” responded God in the most indulgent tone he had yet used. “Do you agree, my dear Devil?” And the snort that emerged from some portion of the Devil’s person, was a sufficient answer. There were to be no more lice.

It was at this point that my special kind of egoism — whether a natural mixture of pride, vanity, and conceit or some form of wild and reckless impulse I cannot say, but whatever it was had been a peculiarity of mine all my life and it had been intensified since I fell in love with Rhitha — asserted itself to a degree I found it impossible to restrain.

“I have lately been impressed,” I began, in my most rhetorical, oratorical, and leading actor’s tone, “by constant references to the existence of *another dimension* beyond this one in which we now abide as we stand together on this beautiful green plain, which is so like the fens of Norfolk, with a misty horizon surrounding us on all sides.

“The dimension in which we now exist, as we stand here, clearly makes only one demand for its cosmic environment, namely Space. There was an epoch when it made another, namely Time, but that epoch is at an end; for Time has been destroyed. Now as thou, O God, and as thou also, O Devil, know well, the chief value of the dimension in which we now all live is its adaptability to the existence of, and to the necessity for, our bodies, and our bodily feelings and our bodily movements. But, Thou O mighty God, and Thou also, O mighty Devil, know very well that it is possible for all living creatures, from whales and hippopotamuses to newts and tadpoles, from giants like Samson or Goliath to the smallest of pygmies, to lose themselves in their thoughts till they completely forget their bodies and are indeed quite literally ‘out of their bodies.’ Well! This is our present situation. Here we all are on this brave scrap of our old Mother Earth that has heroically refused to follow the rest of the astronomical world and commit suicide; and now I am quite sure that although she is only a portion of her mother, of our planetary mother, Gaia, the ancient Earth, she has inherited, just as the rest of us have inherited, a conscious mind as well as a sensitive body. Now you may be sure that this conscious mind, independently of the body to which it is attached, can lose itself in its thoughts and forget its body altogether just as we can forget ours. This being so, O most mighty God, this being so, O most mighty Devil, I propose that, with the help of the mind of the earth beneath our feet, we boldly make a desperate leap, and turn our minds away from our bodies altogether and forget our bodies altogether and with one terrific act of faith leap into this other dimension. If we make this desperate leap into this other dimension, we *shall* reach it, and we shall find ourselves all together in a world composed of nothing but conscious minds, minds that need no bodies, feel no bodies, see no bodies, minds that are simply and purely minds and apprehend one another's thoughts by direct contact of thought with thought!"

I became silent and looked around. I looked at Rhitha. I looked at Asm. I looked at Org. I looked at the Devil. I looked at God. I confess I was absolutely beside myself with satisfaction at having made this speech. If you asked me what it was that inspired me to utter it, I would be unable to reply. It came into my head; and it had to come out in the way it did.

I was certainly extremely surprised, and I have an inkling that we all were, when the answer to my oration came, after quite a pause, from God Himself.

"Yes, I have heard of this 'other dimension,' and so I think have you, my dear Devil." As God spoke, he glanced quickly at his companion; who, I noticed, gave a faint shake to his head, and a faint shrug to his shoulders. "But I am not ashamed," God went on, "to confess to you four, or to you, O noblest of fragments, whose mind, I shrewdly suspect to be behind this thought which has come into the head of Gor Goginog of Blaenau, that I have for thousands of years wondered whether such a leap as you describe from our world of objective space, in which heads and arms and bodies and legs and eyes and ears and noses and mouths correspond with the air we breathe and the aerial unendingness that surrounds us — whether, I say, such a leap as you describe, full of a desperate faith, might not lead to surprising results.

"Some of the New Testament *logoi,* those mystically-pious oracles of the Jews who followed Jesus, announce that we have faith, hope, and love left to help us, and that of these three the most effective is love. This is a great mistake. Hope and love are comforting and reassuring, and make the life both of Gods and men, calmer, pleasanter, happier: but neither hope nor love can work miracles. Faith alone can do that. If you ask me *why,* my answer is simple. Because while love unites us with the object of the miracle, and while hope keeps us alive while the object of the miracle is being approached; it is faith and faith alone that works it. So when you talk of this leap into this mysterious other dimension, to which we both have been hearing obscure references for some time, I am ready to risk it, and I believe my old partner and confederate-antagonist here is also willing to risk it. But you must realize, my little ones, that this is a very serious risk for me; for I have just been planning a fresh world on wholly and completely different lines from our old one that has now committed suicide. In this fresh world which I have been planning, not only will there be, as you earthlings have suggested, no fleas, no bed-bugs, and no lice, no vultures, no sharks, no boa-constrictors, but all will be *pre-determined,* and there will be no free will leading to wickedness and cruelty and disaster. I just tell you this, my dears, and my old antagonist here agrees for once with what I say, in order to prove that whatever risks you four may be taking in this plunge, I shall be taking a lot more! You will be risking your four lives; but I shall be risking my new fresh world, created *free from free will* and likely to bring into being millions upon millions of happy lives. You must remember that this soul of the fragment of your old earth that has put this leap into your heads though it risks more than your lives, doesn't, like I do, risk a whole new universe. You may well ask me why I consent to take this leap. I will tell you why. I take it out of pure weariness. You think, because I am God, I am tireless. Not at all! At this particular epoch I feel more tired than you can possibly believe. In fact I feel tired out. And you also must remember that those preposterous opposites — that were no real opposites at all, but just a pair of ghoulish phantasms invented by a set of tricky mathematicians and a set of still more tricky theologians, and called by them Time and Eternity — are now gone for good. Neither time nor eternity have ever had any reality outside the schools and the churches and the governments. Nothing delights any authority more than the splitting up of Time into variousshaped little pieces of goblinish excrement, and then marshalling these lively if not very odoriferous turdlings into 'round games' of various sorts! As for Eternity, *that,* of course, has always been only another name for the precipitation into a foul and fetid cloud of that special smell of choir-stall cushions and communion-rail mats, which has come to be associated with spiritual awe and solemn silence. In reality, as a great many young people would at once, if they only dared to speak out, freely confess, this holy silence in the presence of all the altars in the world rouses them to simple revolt. By yielding to this holy silence and by being scared by this holy silence, your healthy-minded youth, both male and female, all over the earth give up their right of being themselves in favour of the cunning craftiness of the sly and selfish rascals who are playing their old historic games. When I think of all the crimes committed in my name with such subtlety, I feel ready, I tell you, to jump into any other dimension, if only I could end my nauseating weariness of the whole business of creation. It has become, I tell you, intolerable to me to think of how your earthlings have come to associate my name with that particularly unpleasant, malodorous *hush* before my altar at the heart of which is really, I am quite sure, simply a natural human horror of charnel-houses, corpses, and vampirish ghosts.

"No, I have not missed, any more than has my old friend the Devil, these recent hints among your sages about 'another dimension.' But I confess, as indeed is natural, considering my concern over what has happened to the universe I created, and my longing to create one not only free from bugs and fleas and lice but totally different from the one that has now gone, that I shall be risking more than any of you little ones if I do take this leap. I swear to you I have spent more energy than any other creator-god has ever spent over his work! But I admit that by endowing the creatures of my creation with free will, I did risk what has now happened, namely their almost universal decision to bring the whole thing to an end. In this fresh World I have been lately devising our creatures would be unable to do this. Driven forward by an inescapable chain of cause-and-effect, they would just drift along like ripples in a calm sea or like waves in a rough sea. All will be determined: all will be inevitable: all will be fate: and all the creatures in our new world, including whatever solar systems and zodiacal constellations we may choose to create in place of those that have rushed to destruction, will have to find themselves accepting without question the necessity for just going on as we newly and freshly fashion them, without deciding one single thing for themselves. They will have to take for granted that as we have fashioned them, so it will always be. I am perfectly aware that, as there is much to be said in favour of this deterministic world, so there is also much to be said against it. Now if we two, companions in super-consciousness, and you four, companions in normal consciousness, are all of us really prepared to take the risk of this leap or plunge, or whatever you like to call it, into this 'other dimension,' which may or may not exist at all, we must keep well in mind what we are risking. We are risking extinction. What we've got to remember, my dear Devil," God went on, "is that you and I are at bottom just as ignorant of the ultimate reality of things as are these pathetic little human creatures, whose imagination in its longing for an allpowerful creator would have invented me, and in its dread of an all-powerful destroyer would have invented you, if we hadn't already, neither of us knows how, found ourselves alive in an empty space. This new idea which has just come into the heads of these mathematical metaphysicians, about another dimension, has been an old worry to me. For millions upon millions of years it has been darting in and out of my mind, and I am sure I must have murmured to you something, once in a few thousand years, about such a thing. But of course you've always been so busy trying to bring to nothing my various schemes for easing the general situation that you probably hardly listened to this other matter.

"What I have been wondering of late, if I can have your attention for a moment now, is whether you and I haven't been too sure of our own immunity from annihilation. We have watched these Greek deities hover over the heads of their dying favourites and then rush back to Father Zeus the moment they themselves are hurt; and we've watched those Indian sages, like the Buddha, leave their peaceful Nirvana and go back to their peaceful Nirvana, as their mood has varied between a longing for action and a longing for inaction. And now we have seen the human race commit suicide, and the stars commit suicide, and all the conscious creatures in this world I created and to which I gave free will make up their minds to join this universal self-slaughter, so as to escape once for all the miseries and sufferings of life.

"Now I must confess to you, my dear Devil, that I have been thinking for some while of creating a world on totally different lines from the one which has destroyed or is in the act of destroying itself. This fresh world of mine, as I have already tried to explain to you, will be completely ruled by the rigid determination of cause-and-effect. It will be a world without the faintest spark of free will. But the more I think of such a world the more it strikes me as hopelessly flat and dull. Free will may have led to suicide; but neither it, nor the suicide it has led to, could be called flat or dull. So between — I mustn't say between 'the devil and the deep sea' — but between this dull determination and this deadly free will I am at my wits' end. And what I am now tempted to suggest is that you and I imitate these creatures I created, and throw over the whole tiresome business, and commit suicide ourselves! I have decided you know, my dear old enemy, that this 'other dimension' they talk about is simply another name for everlasting death. So why, in the name of eternal escape, shouldn't *we* try it? Now I expect you four creatures from the planet where Adam and Eve lived in their earthly paradise in complete innocence are finding it rather hard to believe that I, God, the creator of that paradise and of the human pair who lived in it, am taking the same risk as you four take when we make this leap into this other dimension. But I *am* taking this risk, and so is my ancient companion, the Devil, who was born side by side with me in this same endless, limitless empty Space, in which we, six conscious existences, find ourselves today. In the long reverential years, thousands upon thousands of them, of the worship with which the human race has worshipped us, the majesty and glory and power with which I have been endowed, have increased to a point, I suppose it has been the same with all gods worshipped by humanity, the same with the good old Kronos, the father of Zeus, as with the East Indian Brahma, to a point at which we get the title of ‘The Absolute’ given us by philosophers, very much as your politicians of today reward a plain mister by turning him into a marquis.

“I have had, as you mortals would put it,’very funny feelings,’ when I have tried to imagine myself this blessed ‘Absolute.’ As far as I have been able to follow your theologians, the ‘Absolute’ is just simply *everything that exists;* so that not only all the scum in the world and all the dirt in the world and all the bugs and fleas and lice and maggots and worms in the world, but all the un-vomited vomit and all the undissipated phlegm and all the dung that hasn’t yet been ejected by our bowels are essential portions of my *absolute person.* Now when I consider myself in this way I feel decidedly queer: indeed, to tell you the exact truth, I feel not a little nauseated. Well? Are we all ready? And don’t forget, my dear four, and don’t *you* forget either, my dear Devil, that among us six conscious beings who are risking extinction by this leap into another dimension, I am the one who am risking the most, because I am the one who am a million times fuller than you are of that particular kind of energy that your philosophers love to describe as the Life-Force. You see what we are really going to do is not merely to leap, as we might say ‘out of our skins,’ but *out of our minds* too. In fact we are going to leap out of everything that we know at present as ourselves and as what is not ourselves, and as above or under or around ourselves; in fact we are going to leap out of the whole system of ourselves and other selves, and out of the whole system of earth, air, water and fire, of suns, moons, planets and stars, out of the whole world that hitherto has meant to us all that we call life. Well? Are you all ready? Off we go!”

It can be imagined how tightly I clutched the fingers of my precious Rhitha as we made our leap; and I fancy our queer monster Org did the same, if his powers of adhesion could be so described, with his lovely girl Asm.

Well, it was done! And the queer thing was that I found I was not in the faintest degree surprised by the result. The result was in fact just what I had expected. This is surely very odd? It is so odd that if anybody else had told *me* as, “out of the blue,” shall we say, or through the magnetized voice of one of those queer people we call “mediums,” I am now telling you, I would regard it as so impossible that I should boldly say that “the spirit,” or whatever it was that talked to the “medium”, was simply telling lies! How *could* I possibly have expected it? In the first place it was entirely different from, in fact it was directly opposite to, every single thing that God had just been predicting. I can only think that a person who is just stupidly conceited in the simple way that I am is so ordinary and so completely like everybody else that, in his lack of intellect and imagination, he has never in any true sense taken in this world so that any “dimension” would, to his thick-skinned imperviousness, be no different from another “dimension.” An even more natural and inevitable cause of my complete lack of surprise at the nature of this “other dimension,” when we dived into it, was the fact that my nature is so animal — and I warrant our friend Org felt just the same in this — that my first instinctive recoil from any expected shock is to sink back into a sort of pre-natal trance, half drowsy lethargy and half a deliberate indrawing of an observant turtle-like head into a protective shell.

Let me indeed go so far as to say that every being who possesses a body, when threatened with that body’s death, tends to become all in a moment curiously interested in what it is losing. And here I could bring forward an argument that really does seem to refute the prognostications of God. I refer to the fact that in the crucial moment before making our plunge and diving into “the deep end” of this confounded “other dimension,” we all began considering our bodies very, very carefully. God considered his bare feet and his long curly beard. The Devil considered the dry leathery movements of his tongue between his fibrous lips. And we all did the same. Both girls lifted their free hands to the back of their heads to arrange their hair. I gazed at my knees praying that they wouldn't show outwardly the shakiness they felt inwardly; and old Org scratched the least seemly part of his huge frame. And how eminently characteristic it was of the rhetorical but essentially commonplace orator that I am, that the first words I uttered were the most commonplace of all human descriptions of death.

"Well!" I said. "We have joined the Majority!"

My next thought, if thought it can be called, was an extremely simple and natural one. I wanted to be sure that Rhitha was close to me, although neither of us possessed here, it seemed, any hands to hold! But no sooner had I thought of her than our thoughts were together, for she too had thought of me. My "we are together still" corresponded with her, "we are still together"; and we each felt the other's personality give a sigh of infinite relief. It was together, therefore, that we both soon realized that Org and our exquisite Asm were also close to us. But where was God and the Devil?

We had all discovered by this time that it was possible in this universal sea of death to follow every single thought that our companions had. "And what," I wondered, "would be the best word in our old earth-language for the queer over-lapping of consciousness that apparently goes on in Death's great ocean?"

I resolved to make an effort to find out.

"What word shall I use," I asked God, "for the way we exchange our consciousness of things down here?"

I had no sooner asked this question than I realized I was rudely interrupting a very interesting conversation that was going on between Him and the Devil.

"What would you say, Devil, my dear, to this young fellow's question?"

I didn't at all like being called "a young fellow." Indeed I felt that this whole leap of ours into this strange sea was not due either to God or the Devil, but was entirely due to me and to my interest in modern philosophy and my acquaintance with the whole metaphysical notion of *different dimensions.* But I suppressed my peevishness as well as I could, so as not to miss anything in the Devil's answer to God's question.

"Tell the silly kid," replied the Devil, "what I've just been told by a friend of mine down here called Moloch, whom the Olympian God has killed with a thunderbolt, that in this dimension answers to questions come from the *tone* in which they are asked and not from any reply! But *who hears the tone*? Can the person who asks hear his own 'tone'? Such was the question," continued the Devil, "that I asked my friend Moloch and he said —"

But I could endure no longer at this crisis to listen to Moloch's ramblings.

"Please, please God!" I interrupted: "tell me, I pray and beseech you, what is the difference between this 'dimension' and the ordinary 'next world' to which we all go when we die?"

"Shall I tell him?" God enquired of the Devil.

"What do I care?" answered this latter.

"You consider then, Devil, old friend," said God, "that since we're all in the same sea, it doesn't matter what we tell each other?"

"Not a damn," replied the Devil.

"Well, I'll be frank with you four," said God quietly, "since we took the plunge together. The truth is I never for a moment dreamed that this place, which your metaphysicians call another dimension, would turn out to be nothing less than the old familiar 'next world,' a world that my friend the Devil here and I have known to exist all our lives, though being what we are, we have only seen people descend into it without being able or without wishing to follow them. But now that we *have* followed them: it seems to me that as far as that great, empty, endless Space, hitherto the House of the Living, is concerned, the Devil and I are in the 'next world' with the rest. I even catch myself feeling — which is more than *you* do, friend Devil, isn't it? — a curious pitiful tenderness for this same vast endless, limitless, empty Space, that we two, along with you four, have deserted. I almost feel as if *it* were, or as if *she* were, the vast forsaken grandmother of all that has ever lived. Don't *you* feel a little like that too, O heroic spirit, thou soul of that deserted green patch of earth which was part of the body of the planet Earth?"

While God's voice was dying away, I, Gor Goginog of Blaenau, became aware of two amazing things. The first of these was that the green landscape, from which we had jumped when we jumped out of our bodies, had vanished with our bodies. The second was that a powerful, beautiful, and extremely sensitive mind that made me think of Persephone herself, when she was carried off by Pluto as she gathered flowers, was now actually in touch with us, and that she was assuring me that the same spirit which had made her refuse to commit suicide now made her fully, entirely, utterly, and thankfully resign herself to annihilation and extinction. Although my senses were gone with my body and I could see nothing, I had the feeling that, if I only *could* see the utterer of these tremendous thoughts, the figure I should see would be beautiful with the quite special and peculiar beauty of a figure upon an Etruscan vase, and I began to feel an incredible comfort in being saved from the fear of death. And then a curious thing happened, if it is possible to use the word "happened" for such an event, namely a lapse in the usual perfect reciprocity between myself and Rhitha.

"What a relief," I thought, taking for granted that Rhitha would, as she generally has done, wholly agree with everything that came into my head, a head which I felt to be much more capable of intellectual thoughts than her lovely little noddle, "to be already dead without knowing it! And how wonderful it is to think that it was at my suggestion and nobody else's though God did at once, I admit, agree with the idea, that we all so boldly plunged into this curious place! There can be no limit, my dear, can there, to this great death-ocean, since it has to contain all the souls of all the beings begotten by all worlds that have ever existed, together with the souls of those worlds themselves, for worlds must have souls, if their offspring have them, mustn't they? And shall I now, my lovely one, with equal boldness — for I am *a* bold one, aren't I, my pet? — ask God whether there's any reality down here corresponding to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, or to those older places such as Acheron, Tartarus, Erebus, and Styx?"

I had no sooner communicated this thought of mine to Rhitha than I became aware that she was hardly following me. Her thoughts, it was clear to me, were elsewhere; and this, I confess, made me feel indignant. And as a result of my indignation I addressed my thoughts to our old monster Org.

"Shall we explore a little?" I asked him. "Wouldn't it be exciting if we could meet down here some of those old Biblical characters we were always hearing about? No! I don't mean St. Paul! He'd hang on to us and talk of nothing but Pharisees and Caesars and Roman citizens and thorns in the flesh and what he heard on the road to Damascus; and he'd want to know whether we came from Libya or Pamphylia or had once had friends in Caesar's household. No! I mean those wonderful old Jews like Moses and Noah and Samson and Solomon and Joshua the son of Nun, and women like Sarah and Rachel and Rebecca and Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite! Oh yes! Org, old friend, shall you and I ask God or the Devil if we can't have a word with Achilles and Ajax the son of Telamon, and that sweet war-man Hector, and even with Argive Helen herself! And just think how wonderful it would be to talk with Richard Coeur-de-Lion and to ask Rabelais about his hospital and about his printing-shop and about his visit to Rome!"

But I received no reply of any sort from Org; and this silence of the only other earthborn male in our little group brought my spirits down with a considerable collapse. And then it came over me that Rhitha's consciousness was communicating something very important to my consciousness; and I fancy, if it had been necessary to utter those quaint noises we were accustomed to call words in order to convey her meaning, what she would have said was something like this: "Darling Gor, please don't be slow in taking in the fact that the whole thing's over. God and the Devil are both dead. Didn't you hear a voice cry, 'It is finished,' and another voice murmur in response: '*Abyssus invocat abyssum*'?"

So it had happened! God and the Devil were already dead; and in any second now both Rhitha and I would be dead. Shall I have time to compose before I go some really wonderful "last words"?

But who will hear my "last words"? Oh, I do so, so, so want somebody, somewhere, to hear them! I want somebody, somewhere, to know how deeply I understood the best Greek and Latin poets! Yes! It's to *you,* somebody, somewhere, that I'm talking now! All my life I've only wanted two things — to enjoy myself, whatever's happening, and to lecture somebody else on how he or she can enjoy whatever's happening! I want to perform, to act, to play the clown, to show off as a philosopher; and how can I enjoy all this when I am nothing and there's nobody there! There *must* be somebody there, there must, there must, there must, there *must* be somebody! Well, you, whoever you are and wherever you are, are that somebody! Rhitha was the one person I wanted to live with. I could live without Org and Asm! I could live without God. But I couldn't live without Rhitha. And so, now that we're both dying, I *must* have you, whoever you are, to hear my last words!

Whether my Rhitha and her lovely friend Asm are being long enough in their dying to exchange that mysterious young girl's smile, which only da Vinci of all men who have ever lived seemed able to catch before it vanished, I do not know: and if it *did* pass between them, I shall never know whether my barbaric naivety had helped to evoke it; but this I *do* know, that from my mouth out of the throat of that ultimate Void which in Welsh we call "Diddym," and that had already swallowed up God and the Devil, there rose into the air the recklessly defiant Homeric words: *alia kai empes*— "all the same for that," immediately followed by the famous summing up of Catullus:

Soles occidere et redire possunt
Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux Nox est perpétua una dormienda.

"Suns are able to rise and set
But for us when once our brief day is done
There is only a night of perpetual sleep."

THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

A lunar love-story

A YOUTH OF about sixteen sat in deep thought on a stone bench in the best place he could possibly have found for a spell of uninterrupted meditation. He had every reason to meditate and he had every reason for his choice of this particular spot for his meditation.

"What shall I do," he asked himself, "if Father refuses to tell me where he has buried Mother? Mother used always to swear to me that if I ever lost Lorlt, I should know where to look for her if I squeezed my fingers under the gold chain round Mother's neck, that chain Mother never took off, day or night; and that if I gave that chain a jerk it would say 'North' or 'South' or 'East' or 'West'; and if I went straight as an arrow or at least as straight as a stone from a sling, in the direction it had indicated I would be bound to find her." The young man whose name was Rorlt beat several times with the head of the massive club he held between his knees upon the flat stone beneath him.

"It was always tight round her neck," he thought, "but when she told me what to do I was so young that my fingers must have been much smaller and thinner than they are now. Suppose it said 'West' how could I get through the Sacred Grove?"

The stone he was seated on looked due south, so he had only to shift a little to the right in order to confront this same "Sacred Grove." It certainly did offer as he now regarded it a formidable obstacle to any flight or any pursuit or any passage at all.

The Sacred Grove of the Kingdom of Zed was in the very centre of that side of the Moon which has always been seen from the Earth. To reach it from the Earth we should fly straight up to what, when the Moon is full, we are familiar with as the Mountains of the Moon. The other side of the Moon remains a mystery.

What that other side is like we have absolutely no idea. One set of scientific astronomers would doubtless assure us it possessed "mountains" like those dark patches with which we are so familiar. Another set would explain to us that looking, as that other side does, clear out into space, the special conditions there of lunar air and lunar soil would render mountains impossible.

Since not a single earth-dweller except in sleep has yet visited the Moon it still remains completely unknown whether the "Other Side" resembles the side with which we upon earth are remotely familiar, so that the staggering difficulty that confronted young Rorlt when he imagined himself commanded by the gold chain round his dead mother's neck to go straight as an arrow due west requires no little imagination on our part.

The boy's ancestor, the first crowned king of the kingdom of Zed, for we must assume that our young hero's calendar, whether Lunar or Solar, is practically identical with our own, died about two thousand years ago; and we are compelled to lay up very carefully in the botanical museums of our brains, whether as fossils or not, certain facts about the particular Lunar trees called Orvods.

When his mother told him about this chain, and how he would start on his quest to find his little sister if she ever got lost, his mother and he both realized that the starting point would be the stone by the side of the Orvods. These Orvod-trees take a thousand years to grow to their full size and they survive another thousand years without loss of strength; and what Rorlt was wondering now as he banged with his club against the stone base of his seat was how he would ever be able to get through this solid mass of intertwined trees in case the oracular chain said “West.”

For us dwellers on the Earth it is hard to realize Rorlt’s difficulty simply because none of us have ever seen a Grove of Orvod-trees.

Orvods are trees whose trunks in their girth are as large as certain circular church-towers, such as can be seen in Norfolk. They have moreover the peculiarity, such as no trees anywhere else possess, of containing in their sap something of the sexual progenitive juices of men and women. This peculiarity may have been due to the fact that Yorlt, the ancient king of Zed, was sexually so abnormal that he preferred embracing trees to embracing women; and he went to such extremes in his aberration that it produced remarkable results. He tried his little games upon various different trees, among them ash-trees which grew on the other side of the Moon, but Orvods were the only ones that responded. And the effect upon these trees was extraordinary. They waxed enormously large in girth. Some of them grew to be no less than fifty feet in circumference. But what was more peculiar still was that they fell in love with each other. This would no doubt have made their original human lover King Yorlt insanely jealous. But he had been long dead by the time this erotic obsession seized upon the growing Orvods; and they embraced each other to such an extent that where they had grown up side by side their trunks became indissoluble and tended to form an arboreal barrier as impassable as a marble wall. Nor was this the end of it; for when these Orvods, as naturally happened now and then, had grown up, not in a mere row or straight line, but, as you might say, *en masse*, the result was an impenetrable barrier of living wood-work. The trunks and the larger branches of Orvod-trees resembled those of pines or Scotch firs rather than those of oaks or of elms; but their leaves were completely different from the leaves of any earthly tree. They were shaped exactly like a king’s crown, and as they were very large leaves, this effect of so many green crowns growing together was a striking sight, and a sight too, as the boy Rorlt realized with a touch of rebellious rage that increased the appearance, if it didn’t increase the reality, of an absolutely hopeless impenetrability! The worst of it was, that he retained such a vivid memory of the agitating quarrel he had had with his sister at the shrine of their god Koosk when every indignant word exchanged between them was like a stab with a double-pronged pitch-fork to him now.

“I want a lover!” Lorlt had cried passionately, and then when he had expostulated with her, and talked of the love he had for her and of the love their father had for her, she had shrilled out in a high-pitched, rending and tearing, quivering voice, “You don’t understand, you won’t understand, you and Father are too stupid to understand!” and had rushed wildly out of his sight. He had supposed she had just fled to her private room which was a curiously built little tiny chamber at the top of East Tower. For the House of Zed had four small towers that looked north and south and east and west. But anxious not to increase her mood of hostility, which indeed was the very last thing he wanted to do, he only followed her to the House and there waited outside, leaning against a carved image in a recess in the wall representing King Yarlt, the tree-lover, embracing a tree; but he soon returned to his stone bench. However it was not to her chamber in the tower that she had gone. Later, when both he and his father sought her, she was nowhere to be found. The whole event was made more serious for both men, because, though they had only recently discovered this, Lorlt had for some while been spending her nights asleep by the embalmed body of her mother which had been lying since April, and it was now the Second of June, in a minute little Temple within the House, not as big as Lorlt’s chamber in the Eastern tower but big enough to contain in addition to the body of Lorlt's mother an object of even greater importance. Lorlt's mother had been embalmed by the oldest living person on that side of the Moon, the learned philosopher Om, who lived in a hovel of reeds on the banks of Lake Rockabed, near the dwelling of the Sibylline Prophetess Miss Os and about four miles from the House of Zed. But the object to which I am now referring was of even greater importance to the master of that House than the body of his wife, namely an altar to Koosk the ancient god of sleep. Koosk was the primeval, aboriginal god of the Kingdom of Zed and had been so in the days of Blabberok Kumph before Yalt was King.

This altar to Koosk was no more than a single upright stone about three feet high, composed of a very curious substance resembling in texture jade but of a colour that varied in quite a startling manner, not so much according to the condition of the sky as according to the direction of the wind. Near this stone there was a seated image of this god, representing him with firmly outlined and quite powerful arms and thighs but with the face of a baby and a lap like that of the mother of twenty babies, so ample and so soft as to make you long to collapse upon it and sink into unawakening sleep. It was below this altar to Koosk and not far from the image of Koosk, upon whose tempting lap she may well sometimes have scrambled and laid herself down, that it was revealed to her father and brother she had slept for many nights embracing the embalmed body of her mother.

"O how could I, how *could* I," thought her brother now, "after this hint of our lovely girl's reckless originality, have been such a fool as to talk of *my* love and our father's love with that tempestuous cry ringing in my very ears *that she wanted a lover*? That is exactly what she screamed in her fury, that both of us men were — stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid! And so by Koosk we were! O thrice-precious club of my sorry heart! Why didst not thou give me some hint of what she had in her mind?”

It was at this moment that Rorlt heard the voice of his father calling him. Hurriedly he left his seat and with his club under his arm rushed to the front gate of the House of Zed.

Yes, there was his father standing in the porch, and when Rorlt reached him, he saw a look on his face totally different from any look he had ever seen there before. It was not a look of anger nor was it a look of sorrow. It was not a look of heroic resolve nor was it a look of patient resignation. It was a look of complete bewilderment. The name of the present Master of Zed was Horlt, for it had been a rigid rule all the long two thousand years of their family’s record not to break the rhythm of that “or” and every consonant of their vowel-loving tongue had been repeated over and over, and repeated in a very erratic order, until they reached the age of ten, when the custom was for every child to choose his or her own name. This was an important occasion in each child’s life. The only restriction on their free choice was that they must never choose the name of their father or of their mother. But, when the child of ten had chosen its name, the choice it made was publicly proclaimed at a very elaborate ceremony. The old philosopher Om from the reedy margin of Lake Rockabed had recently several times on these ceremonial occasions solemnly and publicly spoken in favour of a permanent regulation by which certain particular consonants should be reserved for girls and removed entirely from the choice of boys. In this way, according to a law that he would like to call the “Law of Om” the attractive consonants D.K.L.P.S. would be set apart for girls only; and thus the choice of both sexes would be considerably restricted. But so far the Master of Zed had rejected this innovation.

It was with considerable trepidation that the young Rorlt now confronted his begetter. What, the boy wondered, could have happened to give his father this bewildered look? Horlt had an extremely impressive jet-black beard. It was of great thickness; but what made it especially unusual was its length, for it reached down to his navel. His eyes were as black as his beard; and he now made the gesture with his left hand that from infancy Rorlt associated with being told to kneel down. So Rorlt knelt down, and clasping his fingers tightly over the narrow handle of his wooden club he gazed up piously at the beard above him. He had himself discovered this club when he was four years old, half-buried in the mud among the reeds of Lake Rockabed and when his mother pulled it out for him he had promptly given it the name it had retained until this day, the name of Blob.

The philosopher Om told his mother when she showed it to him that it was made of a wood called ash and was to be found on the Earth, but only grew here on the other side of the Moon and for that reason possessed a magical power.

“I laid — her — body — son,” announced the bearded man, speaking not exactly hesitatingly, but very slowly, “in — a — a — shallow grave — which — I dug — dug — with my — own — hands — just—”

At this point two big tears, racing down that huge black beard, like drops of rain down the side of an Etruscan urn, fell on Rorlt’s clenched fingers— “just,” his father went on, “under that rock we used to call ‘Warning-Rock’ — you know the one I mean — which is so sandy that Om thinks there must have once been a deep salt pool round it in early days.” At this point the bearded man once more spoke very slowly and carefully, as if afraid he might be struck dead if he deviated, by the breadth of a hair-streak butterfly’s antennae, from the exact truth.

"As — I — knelt — over her — as you — are kneeling now — only I was looking down — and you — are looking — up — I noticed that the gold circle round her neck was trembling. Can — she — I thought — be causing this movement — by breathing? Has — she — by — a — miracle — by touching — the sand perhaps — where before King Yorlt and even before Blabberok Kumph, there may — have — lived — some ancient god — not of sleep like Koosk — but — of — of — we don't know of what — and then, Rorlt my boy — I distinctly — yes — quite distinctly — heard — the — word 'East' — not from — your mother's lips — but from that thing round her neck." At the sound of the word "East" issuing from this bearded man's mouth, Rorlt was unable any longer to hold back his secret.

He leapt to his feet clutching his faithful Blob with such violence that the club's heavy head was jerked between its owner's legs causing our young man a spasmodic pang, the feel of which, whenever anything brought it again, made him recall that moment.

"But Father, my dear Father," he cried, "this is indeed a miracle! Mother told me once, when I was little, that if ever we lost Lorlt and didn't know in what direction to look for her I was to put my fingers under that thing round her neck and it would say 'North' or 'South' or 'East' or 'West'! And now it's said 'East'! O! I'll go — Father dear — I'll go! I'll go at once to find her!"

The bearded Master of Zed was so amazed at this surprising termination to the most upsetting day he had ever spent since he was born that all he could do as he stood facing his son was to repeat in a low hoarse voice over and over again the word "East" while he made that familiar gesture with his left hand, holding his fingers and thumb side by side and flattened out, as if he were a god of the waves and was smoothing down their wrath, or a dealer in horses and was hypnotizing an untamed mare.

"Well, at any rate, my dear Father," said Rorlt, speaking very firmly and remaining on his feet, and he didn't miss the look in the bearded man's eyes which showed that this independent tone, together with the practical way in which the club was now held, had made a good impression; "at any rate I shan't have to begin by crossing 'The Sacred Grove' as I'd have to have done if the word had been 'West' instead of 'East.' I beg you my dear Father, to look after yourself, in the way you've been accustomed to do, so that I shall know just where to find you when I bring her home! You'll be surprised, maybe, how soon that will be! You needn't have the faintest fear of losing us both. I shall find our Lorlt and bring her safe back to you. I feel it in my bones. I feel it all round my neck as if I'd got Mother's gold band there — Yes! and her own fingers pulling me back to you! You'll see Lorlt with me, Father dear — make no mistake about it — and hear her voice. I shall find her!"

And, with this he shot past him into the House, holding Blob tightly by the middle in his right hand and he didn't fail to take, the moment he was inside the building, the particular passage as the bearded man would know at once, that led to an aperture in a huge block of stone some twenty feet thick through which as children Lorlt and he used to crawl on hands and knees when they had been naughty and wanted to escape punishment.

This passage, when once he was the other side of the massive rock, opened into a quite spacious corridor, leading due East with a downward slope, a corridor that his father could reach by a more circuitous route but not soon enough to catch up with him now. Down this wide corridor Rorlt hastily hurried, giving Blob a defiant swing now and again and striding as he had seen his father stride when the Master of Zed took him to Lake Rockabed to visit Om or Miss Os. Then suddenly his mood changed.

“Am I mad?” he thought, “descending this slope where I’ve never been before, a slope which, though it *may* be heading due East is certainly heading downwards rather than upwards?”

He stopped and listened. Not a sound broke the deadly hush of this weird tunnel into the heart of the Moon.

He uneasily tapped the stone wall that was nearest to him with his weapon. The echo that followed this casual and careless proceeding struck him as a sound that went down to the bottom of the whole idiotic mass of a badly blundered creation. It was at that point that a very definite dread began to seize upon Rorlt.

“Suppose,” he thought, “I go on, and on, and on, down this infernal descent hunting for her, how do I know that if I don’t find her or get a hint of where she is that I’ll be able to get back again?”

The thought indeed now began to seize every nerve in his being that he might go on and on and on and on, down this terrible incline, till he was absolutely alone in the centre of the lunar orb; and then, when he realized that Lorlt was not there, and that there was no sign or hint of her there, or indeed of any living creature but himself, that he might suddenly find that he was too exhausted to move a muscle to get back.

It was then, and not till then, as he stood under a wall which was composed of great blocks, of very curious stone that would be very difficult to describe in the words of any earth-dweller however observant, though for the general effect of them no doubt the best recourse would be to turn to ancient Greek, that our youthful hero became aware of a sound which certainly resembled footsteps. He gripped Blob firmly by the middle and waited in the centre of the path. Yes! There *were* steps! He was certain of that; but they were heavy steps, the steps of a man, not the steps of a girl. And what further struck him quite definitely was that they came from behind him, not from in front of him; in fact they came from the way he had himself just come.

Gripping Blob now by his tail or his handle and swinging him threateningly, he retraced his steps and boldly enough, though with deep-rooted rage against fate, he obstinately ascended that slope which he had just decided by his melancholy reaction that he might be too tired ever to ascend again. It wasn't long however before he recognized the steps and there, in a minute or two more, was his father, striding along with his beard quite unruffled and wearing the weird helmet, formed in the likeness of a dolphin's head, that Horlt was in the habit of putting on, when, at least in his own mind, he went forth to war.

"Hasn't anyone ever told you?" the man cried, not so much angrily as really horrified. "Hasn't anyone ever told you, you double-dyed idiot? Didn't your mother ever make it plain to you that none of us ever go down here? You're just a madman; that's what you are, or a little over-grown infant with no sense at all! But I oughtn't to blame anybody but myself. It's all my fault. I ought to have told you and your sister every day, yes! every morning — I ought to have told you that everything down here, and everything they lead to, and everything that surrounds them, doesn't belong to us at all! Yes! it's all my fault. And if you *are* a silly little innocent, whose fault is that? Not yours, but mine; mine and hers whom I have just laid in the earth where her wisdom can't help any of us any more! And if *you* hadn't realized that this isn't our land at all down here, how can I think that your sister was any wiser? She, like you, must have just vaguely thought that your mother and I were assuming, yes! yes! were taking for granted, that you two children knew all about it! And all the while, it now appears that neither of you had the least idea that 'the Eastern Corridor,' as we've always called it, isn't *ours at all*; and not only isn't ours, but belongs to a Being whom neither your mother nor I have ever seen but about whom our parents often warned us. You must remember, my boy, that in former times, for our own family goes back a thousand years, our ancestors, at least so both Om and Miss Os believe, imitated those beings whose name was Pharaoh and who lived on the River Nile!"

"Father, Father!" cried Rorlt at this point, "you mean that the Pharaohs married their sisters, so that their children were nephews and nieces as well as sons and daughters? Then I expect it was because I hadn't made love to Fork and begged her to marry me that she went off in a rage crying out, 'Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! I want a lover!'"

Rorlt noticed how flabbergasted the bearded man looked when he heard this; but the only words he uttered were: "So that was it. So that was it. So that was it."

"O if I'd only known, Father! O if I'd only known!"

"My own idea is," murmured the bearded man; "assuming that your mother really had some intimation of what would happen, an intimation that she was able to inject into that band of gold round her neck, that our lost one may have climbed across the ramparts and let herself down by a rope on the other side. She may have heard your mother and me talk of doing this when we were young. And if she *has* gone that way the best place to look for her would be in the Bog of Dogs where there are no trees but Lorriots and no rushes but Rinkers, and you know how tall Rinkers grow at this time of year, and how low those Lorriot-twigs hang down, and how thick their leaves are? It's just the very place, with all those Rinkers and Lorriots, for anyone to go who wanted to be run after."

"*Wanted?* do you say, Father. Do you mean that she—"

"My dear boy," replied the bearded man, "when you've lived with Lorlt as long as I've lived with your mother— 'Horlty and Torlty drunk upon

Malty,' as she used to chant while we swung side by side on a Lorriot bough after drinking from some brew she'd brought from the kitchen — you will know these girls a lot better than you do yet. But now listen to me, sonny. I never confessed it to your mother; but when I was only a little younger than you are now I came down here by myself and got clean to the bottom of this blasted slope, a slope that certainly is enough, with nothing but these walls to look at, to make anyone who's alone by himself down here feel — well! feel queer."

"But, Father," cried Rorlt, looking at the eyes and nose between that fantastically designed head-dress and all that still more fantastic growth of black hair, each single hair as thick as an ivy-stalk, "do, for Koosk's sake, tell me what it was like at the bottom of this appalling descent." The eyes he was staring at closed for a moment as if to indicate to the eager lad in front of them that the brain behind them was really hard at work trying to recall the exact lineaments which it had to record. Then they opened and it became clear to the young man that within this skull of which only the eyes and nose were visible an important decision had been made.

"Lean on your club and listen, boy," said the Master of this House of Zed, making the motions with his left hand that his son had so long accepted as a command to kneel. "What you must realize is that our present situation is a very strange one. It has been a remarkable event as Om has often told me, that your Mother and I and you and your sister should have been left completely alone. Om says that our Sibylline oracle, the aged Miss Os to whom both your mother and sister used to go for advice and who lives near Om, always calls your mother 'the pearl of women.'" Here the bearded man gave his son the feeling that at any moment he might burst into a passionate torrent of weeping. "When we were young, you know, I always called her — but enough of that now — what *was* I saying? O yes!

When I was down there, where this descent leads, all I saw was an immense dome-like chamber, with every yard of its surface covered with strange pictures and still stranger hieroglyphics. These hieroglyphics proved as Om subsequently revealed to me that the family of the horrible potentate, called Blabberok Kumph who occupied the House of Zed before our ancestor came, had been reduced in numbers just as ours has been, in fact reduced more than ours, so that finally there was only one of them left, and this one had made of the domed chamber at the bottom of this descent his permanent abode."

"But Father, Father," cried Rorlt excitedly, "how in the name of Koosk did this solitary creature live? What did it live *on?* It surely couldn't have devoured the stones of these terrible walls, even if it could have hammered them out or dug them out by its unaided strength? Yes, what I want to hear, Father, is *upon what* this person, if you can call it a person, lived? Or did it need no food?

Was it more like a god than a man? Or was it — O my Father, tell me, for Koosk's sake, everything about it! Was it half a man and half a woman? I have imagined such beings; and I used to talk to Lorlt about these imaginary creatures and she used to listen with intense interest to all I invented about them!"

It was then that the present Master of Zed did what he had never, at least in his son's memory, done before. He made with his left hand a motion directly opposite to those that commanded his listener to sink to his knees. And Rorlt instinctively obeyed this new gesture and ceased resting upon Blob, and straightened his shoulders and grasped Blob by the centre, not so much as if for a battle as for a race.

"I will tell you all, my son," said the bearded man slowly and very solemnly. "For now that you and I are alone, that is to say alone until, you know what I mean, my *boy,* until we've found your sister, I feel I have no right to hide anything from you. What finally threw me into a blind panic and sent me rushing back at top speed up this fatal slope where we now stand, was the sound of a terrific voice; and the peculiar thing about this voice was the way it surrounded me. It seemed over me and round me and under me, all at the same time. I might almost say *it was in me.* And it only uttered three words, yes! my son, only three, but it uttered these in such a manner and with such impressiveness that they became more than words. O yes! much more than words! They became something like — something like — O! I can't tell you what they became! But the three words will be with me till I die. They were: '*I am Oom!*'"

No sooner had the bearded father repeated this name to his excited son than both father and son stood in dead silence facing each other, the son holding Blob with a stark recognition of the formidable nature of such a weapon, and the father holding his great beard away from his navel with one hand, evidently to cool his chest, while he pushed his absurd head-dress away with the other, evidently to cool his brain. Suddenly the same decision seized them both at the same instant.

"Come, boy!" said the Father. "Come, father!" said the boy. And turning their backs to their home they marched down the slope, like Homer's Cretan hero Idomeneus, along with Meriones his faithful follower and friend, having decided that, come what might of it, they would face Hector together. Suddenly, as they descended side by side Rorlt asked his father a question.

"Did your friend the Philosopher from the banks of Lake Rockabed, explain to you why his own name 'Om' has such a resemblance to the name of this terrifying 'Oom'?"

“Well, my boy,” replied the Master of Zed, pushing his turban down over his forehead and re-arranging his beard in its proper position, “what Om said was very simple and natural. He said that all words meant purely and solely what certain movements of arms, legs, tails, head, knees, feet, eyes, ears, eyebrows, shoulders, fingers, and, even in certain cases, toes meant. Om said that his ancestors, who were always called Om and who had lived by Lake Rockabed for two thousand years, must have been descended from some ancestor of Oom, or perhaps, for Oom may share with mountains and lakes a length of life beyond any of us, from Oom himself as he roamed about this vicinity, two thousand years ago, before taking up his permanent abode down here. Well! Here we are, two generations of the descendants of Yarlt, the embracer of trees. Will this Monster Oom drive us away or will he, which is much more likely, sweeten our raw flesh with berries and just chew us up and swallow us? I don’t know!” Then in a much lower voice and speaking entirely to himself: “It won’t matter one way or another to you, will it, will it, lying so still where I laid you just now and with — O how *could* I, how *could* I let *that* happen? — with that little squashed fly — or whatever it was — pressed right against your eyelid — and you who couldn’t bear flies to come near you — and all that gravel — and I the one who put you there — O my darling, my darling! Don’t go away till I come to you! Stay for me! Stay for me!”

“Does he know?” thought Rorlt, “what he’s talking about?” And the boy seemed to hear the voice of his mother in that special tone which it often had, a tone that hovered between tender appreciation and infinite warning. “You would know,” he thought, “why he’s so determined to come down this fatal slope. But it’s because you’re gone that he’s like this. I don’t believe he cares one jot what happens to us! O Mother, Mother!”

And so the man muttering about his wife as he adjusted his beard, and so the beardless youth thinking about his mother as he brandished his bludgeon, went down to the multi-pictured wide-domed chamber at the foot of the slope.

Neither the one nor the other of them ever forgot what they saw when they reached that chamber. They had come down here fully determined to see Oom, and there Oom was! He clearly expected them, for he nodded to them quite genially the second they entered and pointed to a bench about a dozen yards from where he himself was seated; and to this bench, never taking their eyes off him for a moment they walked quickly and sat down side by side.

Oom himself was seated on a bench, not on any kind of throne, and the bench he sat on was wide enough for him to move freely in any direction and even to pull up his legs and sit with bent knees if he wished to do so.

Oom was exceptionally tall. He must have been, Rorlt decided, about eight feet in height, but he was very, very thin. He was so thin that he gave to both father and son the impression of belonging to quite a different species of human-shaped bipeds from the one to which they belonged. But it was the colossal proportions of Oom's head that intensified the shock they got from the sight of his long sinewy shape. It was like one of those grotesquely elongated shadows of ourselves of which we are apt to catch sight with amusement or dismay as we walk along a particularly high stretch of ground, in some treeless upland. But it was not only the enormity of Oom's head that arrested them. It was the style of its enormity and the form its enormity had taken. This form suggested, especially the huge piled-up curvatures and rocky projections at the front of the skull, a feeling in those who contemplated it that, instead of a group of Titans having piled Pelion upon Ossa to overcome the gods of Olympus, some vast unknown individual Titan had risen from unplumbed depths to assail Olympus, and that those projections from the earth's surface were portions of this Being's gigantic cranium.

"I have not summoned you two here," were the words that issued now from the countenance into which these planetary projections had moulded themselves, a countenance that seemed to be rather the expression of elemental happenings than of supernatural intelligence, "for any particular purpose. But since we are neighbours it seemed only proper and natural that we should meet. But now that you are both here I can see that the loss of Lorlt and the death of her mother have been such blows to you both that they have swept from your mind all ordinary fear of unusual events. In regard to Lorlt I can help you; I know what has happened to her and I know where she is. Let me begin by assuring you that she is following her own will and pleasure entirely. She was hastening towards the eastern promontory of the range we call the Mountains of the Moon, but which the Sages of the Earth with instruments far more powerful than any of those our astronomers possess, call 'The Mountains of Illusion,' of which promontory your daughter, Master," and Oom inclined his head towards Horlt, "your sister, my boy," and Oom inclined his head towards Rorlt, "must have so often heard, that she couldn't rest till she'd seen it! Well, we have come to a very interesting problem. Was it, do you think, O most venerated Master of Zed, since we, Lunar students of life's intricate tricks, have learnt to find the magical cause of everything, was it by the influence of Tyche, or Chance, the great goddess of the ancient Greeks, that my child also," here he made a faint inclination of his rocky brow towards the bearded man, "was also suddenly seized with a wild desire to visit the Mountains of the Moon? But that is what happened; and if you will forgive me for attributing this event to what our terrestrial contemporaries would call a more human if not a more natural cause, there may have passed, O most venerated Master of Zed, between my only son, whose name is Yoom and your only daughter whose name is Lorlt, an indescribable, inexpressible, inexplicable, inadmissible yet absolutely irresistible flash of rock-piercing communication — O more than that! — of heart-rending intimacy, so that they each knew, without knowing, where they were intended — no! — exactly where *they intended* to meet each other!"

Rorlt removed his eyes, for the first time since he had followed his father into this domed and perhaps also this doomed hall, from the shockingly sculptured, chaotic countenance of Oom. As he did so and allowed his eyes to wander, he told himself that Oom's face resembled the sort of face we all sometimes see when, in the midst of an absorbing train of thought, we stare out of the window at the distant side of colourless mountain — or even at some intricately pattern'd carpet of the place in which we are wrapt in thought. Turning now to his father, what he noticed at that moment in the countenance of the bearded one seated beside him caused him to feel more respect for this not altogether prepossessing progenitor than he had ever felt in his life before. Was this due, he wondered, to the man's amazing reserve? Rorlt prayed in his heart to their ancestral god Koosk that it might not be because he secretly knew that when he left him now, as he had already decided to do, he would never see him again. Had the Dome of Doom, above their three heads, been in any other cosmogonic spot, than in this particular lunar one, Rorlt would probably have done something that would have astonished both his companions: for with this sudden unusual regard for his father was combined a deep suspicion and distrust of the incredible individual sitting in front of them, and what he would have liked to have done, and what he came very close just then to actually doing, was to jump up from the side of the Master of Zed and bring down Blob with his whole deadly weight upon the craggy forehead of Oom. It was his father's calm at that crucial moment that roused in Rorlt's heart this unexpected affection for him; but along with this he was aware of something in the effect upon himself of the news that his sister *had* found what she had cried out to him she longed for, that disturbed him not a little. How *could* his father remain so calm and reticent? Why didn't he make it clear at once to this person in front of them that, when a daughter desires to unite herself to a young man who happens to have taken her fancy, the parent who has to give the official permission for this union isn't the father of the man but the father of the girl? But at this point he began obscurely wondering whether this calm reticence in the Master of Zed, which a moment ago had affected him so much, might not in reality be due to some abominable hypnotic power in the ambiguous being in whose power they were. Yes, the creature had got them at his mercy. There was no question about that. It was only a matter as to how the monster would use his power over them. What would they do, what *could* they do, to shake this being off, and make Lorlt shake off its offspring?

Rorlt never forgot this moment in his life. It was more than a moment of hesitation. It was more than a moment of imagining himself acting more boldly than he knew he could act. It was a moment of seeing into himself more deeply than he'd ever done before. "Lorlt," he told himself, "could never have felt for me what I feel for her, and she couldn't have comprehended what I feel for her, or she wouldn't have screamed like that and rushed off like that.

"But what do I feel for her?"

And it was then that he remembered how they had both been taught by Miss Os on the banks of Lake Rockabed, that on the Earth in Egypt the Kings who were called Pharaohs always married their sisters. Miss Os, he now remembered, had told them that it was wrong for brothers to marry sisters. Her brother, she told them when they were young, had wanted to marry her, but when she heard from her father all about the Jews and about Sarah and Rachel and Rebecca and Leah and Ruth, she decided that nothing would persuade her to be buried under a pyramid.

"O I do so wonder," Rorlt's thoughts ran on now, "whether my love for Lorlt has anything in it like that of the Pharaoh's for their sisters! But perhaps their situation was like ours. Perhaps there were very few of them; and perhaps there wasn't much choice. Perhaps the only beautiful ones in all the land of Nile were their sisters! Have I been feeling in the depths of my heart," Rorlt now said to himself, "exactly like the Pharaohs? But suppose I forced myself to do nothing else but search all day long, 'up hill' as the proverb says 'and down dale,' could I find any girl that I liked nearly as well as Lorlt or that was nearly as beautiful as she is?"

This thought began to be a real trouble to him as holding his knees as far apart as he could without disturbing his father he took Blob in both his hands and meditatively rubbed the club's head backwards and forwards against the edge of the bench on which they were sitting.

Some animal's teeth or bird's claw or some simple tool used by Oom himself in making this bench had left a slight unevenness at one point along its edge and it was in an unconscious automatic attempt to smooth away this trivial fault that Rorlt was now accompanying his disturbing thoughts with this see-saw movement of his weapon. It happened also, probably by some deliberate premeditation on Oom's part, that the youth was able, from where he sat with his club between his knees, to see a perfect reflection of himself and his father in a mirror-shield suspended from one horn of a black unicorn. As he gazed at this reflection his emotions were so overpowering that he could not help including an image of his mother; and the rush of his feeling caused him to see her leaning against his shoulder on the opposite side of him from where her bearded husband sat.

And as he looked at them all three, with his lost sister in the background, and the vast rocky face of Oom, entirely devoid of all describable expression, hovering above them, all manner of memories passed in a long procession through his mind. And the strange thing was that each one of them as it came blotted out the others and blotted out also the living figures in whose presence it appeared. And he realized as he see-sawed the head of Blob backwards and forwards, forwards and backwards between his legs, what a solemn and portentous thing — yet not un-lunar, no! on the contrary linked with the most intimate power of the Moon — this evocative magic of Mnemosyne, Mother of the Muses was. For one after another, there now processioned before him scenes in which he had played a part, not in fighting, not in ploughing, not in sowing, not in reaping, not in harvesting, but simply in talking, simply in asserting his own ideas and listening to other people asserting theirs. And as he caught these scenes on their way, receding and receding back into his own remotest infancy, he seemed to feel himself following them yet further back, beyond his own birth, beyond the birth of the bearded man at his side, beyond the seed dropt from a bird's beak, that had grown to be none other than the majestic Blob himself, beyond thousands of generations of men, of animals, of vegetables, of minerals. And the "burden," as the English Bible calls it, or the "Baich" as the Welsh Bible calls it, of all our generations, whether Lunar or Terrestrial, struck his mind then as the same planetary load.

"We watch each other as we argue and dispute," Rorlt thought, "and from each of us there emerges into the air or into the soul of this space that surrounds us, a projection of ourselves in the form of an idea. For surely," he thought, "what looks to our senses as empty air is really an enormous living thing and it is into the soul of this thing that these images or forms or ‘eidola’ of ourselves are freely flung. From what we call argument or discussion” — so Rorlt’s thoughts ran on, as Oom seemed to stare out of everything into nothing, and the bearded man at his side seemed to hold an unending colloquy with the woman he had just buried— “is always really the shooting forth of our inmost self into the subject we are discussing, so that the air or the wide-spread soul of the space around us at certain particular moments, when the discussion reaches a climax, receives an impression, an imperishable picture, an indestructible colophon, that remains generation after generation: and every eager, jealous, crafty, mean, compassionate, tender, stupid, clever, hurried, hesitating, bold, emphatic, honest or sly person makes his or her special hieroglyph upon the air, hieroglyphs that are printed there in immortal ink to the end of time and will convey whether there is anyone to see them or not, a series of what Miss Os would call runic Luniads, not only more poetic but also more realistic than anything yet written by the pen of man, except in the scrolls of Moses the Jew and the papyri of Homer the Greek. If that Ogre Oom had the intelligence of a moth, he would know that to make a pedantic kid like me sit in silence by the side of my father who has just buried my mother, and make me ponder on the fact that my sister has been carried off by an unknown person that he calls his son, is to play with a thing that if it isn’t gunpowder or an atomic bomb is something that it’s wiser *not* to play with.”

He stopped fooling with Blob and lifted him up from between his knees. Then he bent over his father’s elbow and across his father’s clasped hands and whispered in his ear:

“Hadn’t you better walk up the slope now, Dad, and go home? You *may* find — in spite of all we have heard — that Lorlt is safe and sound and expecting you. I think I’ll spend tonight walking about those hills. They’re not really mountains you know! So think of me quite all right up there, Father dear, and sleep well yourself. I'll be back early; and maybe I'll bring Lorlt with me."

He whispered this so hurriedly that the bearded man, thus suddenly roused from a deep trance in which he was refilling how his wife had looked and what she said on their wedding night, had barely realized what had happened when he saw Rorlt's back, with Blob over his right shoulder, disappearing round the first turn of a narrow passage which he didn't know existed. The bearded Master of Zed rose to his feet in bewildered indignation. He looked at the passage up which his son had just darted. He looked at the wider passage down which they had come together and up which he would now have to go alone in order to return whence he had come. Finally he gave his beard two obstinate tugs, murmuring with the first the syllable Torlt and with the second the syllable Lorlt. Then he turned reproachfully upon Oom. This dweller in the bowels of the Lunar kingdom promptly crossed his long thin legs, laid his long fingers against his bony hips and leaned forward.

"To tell you the truth, my good sir," he said quietly, "I shan't mind if he does stop this marriage. I didn't like my son rushing off in the way he did without confiding more freely to me what he was up to. So if *your* son snatches *my* son out of this little complication, it will not bother me at all."

"But," hesitated the Master of Zed, "but—"

Had either Rorlt's mother or sister been present at this scene, for ladies are more penetrating than men, when it comes to the waverings where there is a choice of paths, she would certainly have told herself that in this "but" of the bearded man there was twisted the whole clue to the paradox of life, whether it is solar life, lunar life, terrestrial life, stellar life or cosmic life.

All would be well, but — All would be clear, but — All would be settled, but — All would be at peace, but — All would be ended, but —

The Master of Zed, however, soon swept away this butting business. “Well,” he remarked, “if my old ancestor, Yarlt, had known how long-lived some of us Lunar natives can be he would have taken I daresay more time to clear up the interior of Zed; but—”

Oom took up the tale now.

“But he happened to be, this ridiculous old Yarlt of yours, as wooden-headed as his tree-concubines! But off with you, you hairy-scarey old ass, or I’ll chip you and chop you and saw you and gore you and shave you and lave you, and stretch you out on your dead wife’s tomb as a bridal-room for my son Yoom when he weds your girl — or my name’s not Oom!”

With one quick glance up the path where his son Rorlt had vanished, the bearded Master of Zed accepted his defeat, and turning his back on this skeleton-lean giant whose craggy countenance had again become as impersonal as the rocky ridges of the Lunar Mountains, he began slowly striding up the broad slope, down which he had so resolutely and so recently descended.

Something about the receding back of his vanquished rival may have softened the lunarian heart of Oom or he may have had other motives. Anyway, he now called after him:

“Just one minute, Master! Just one minute! I do so greatly want to show you the little group of what might be called terrestrial milestones that I have collected during my long life. I am sending them to follow after these three crazy youngsters, your son and daughter and my son. For in any case they will delay things. What I shall tell them to do is to attack that bragging fool if they can only find, him who boasts that he’s the son of Mars, whereas we all know that our Mother the Moon is constantly being ravished by our

Father the Sun: for the parents of all of us Lunarians are those two. And what is more, I shall take measures to increase, by the magic power which Koosk has given me, the size and height of my collection of terrestrial milestones in proportion as they succeed in doing what I am sending them out to do, that is to say to interrupt Yoom's love-making and to attack this Lunar Son of the Sun who pretends that he's a Martian."

The bearded man now heard such a chorus of diminutive voices and such a trampling of small feet and such a Terpsichorean tintinnabulation of tiny bells that sheer curiosity overcame wrath and he swung round. What he saw and heard was so extraordinary that once the show had started no lord of any land, whether in Heaven or on Earth, could have turned away from it. And there beneath him was the terrific Oom, his tall gaunt figure lying sideways on the ground, and his huge shapeless countenance tilted towards his audience of one, while he played the part, and did it very well, of a circus-manager describing and praising each particular performer. His grotesque little puppets, none of them bigger than a goodsized doll, bowed and curtseyed in the most proper and ceremonious manner as Oom introduced and dismissed them one by one.

"This," Oom said, as a fragment of the Ten Commandments came forward, broken off from the one forbidding adultery, "this is the Law which has done more to stop more than any other thing in the world! Pass on, Commandment about Adultery!"

"Eleven! Eleven! Eleven!" cried the whole little company, evidently in a state of exuberant excitement.

"Come forward, Phien of China!" commanded Oom; and what was obviously the bone of an immensely enlarged Big Toe presented itself with an air of complete unconcern as to *what* it was, *where* it was, or who was looking at it.

“He is as indifferent as water,” went on Oom, and as the Master of Zed looked down upon this perambulating Big Toe from China, he thought to himself, “the creature *does* look like an unmelting icicle.”

“Pass on, Phien!” murmured Oom; “and *this,* as you might divine by its shape,” he continued, “is the mortal heel of swift-footed Achilles, the ancient Greek. Pass on, Achilles’ heel! But here we have the sole of Mahomet’s sandal which fell off as he entered Mecca and was brought to me by an eagle. Pass on, Sandal of Mahomet! And here we have the beautiful little sea-slug shell of a Holothurian who thought King Canute was talking to him when he was rebuking his over-obsequious courtiers on the sands of the sea-shore. Pass on, little Holothurian! And here is a piece of the fiddle-string that Nero was playing when Rome was burning. Pass on, exquisite creator of delicate sound, your echo will outlive all imperial fingers! And here is a crust from one of King Alfred’s cakes, and you can see how carefully he’s squeezed its end so as to make it stand up on the plate. Pass on, King’s Crust that’ll never be eaten by worms! And here we have the spear-head of Queen Boadicea extracted from the skull of a Roman Centurion and brought to me by a carrion-crow who had gone mad. Pass on, spearhead of a Queen! And here is the nail that Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite hammered into the head of the sleeping enemy of her race. Pass on, rusty iron, from the manly forehead of the still sleeping Sisera!

“It were too long a story to tell you how I added these to my collection of epoch-making curiosities. But now look at this, my dear sir, and tell me if you think that even your erudite lady, Miss Os, of Rockabed, could tell you what *this* is! Oh yes! Of course I know it’s a white feather! But the feather of *what*? And I am not making any silly joke about ‘showing the white feather’! Well, I will tell you at once. It is a feather from the dove that flew over the waters from Noah’s Ark in the days of the Great Flood. Pass on, Dove's Feather! My excitable son once told me that some would take it for a feather of the Holy Spirit Itself! But I always tell the silly child that the subject of heavenly feathers is one of those theological problems better discussed in the lecture-halls of Oxford than in the Mountains of the Moon. Pass on, Dove's Feather! And now we come to the last and also to the most valuable of all my Eleven Wonders of terrestrial history. Can you guess, my good Master Horlt of Zed, what this final Preciosity of Antiquity is?"

The bearded man saw hopping towards him an object about which nobody, in his or her senses, who had ever eaten an apple could have had any doubt at all! *It was the core of an apple,* well bitten on every side, but with its core, that core we are accustomed to *throw away,* when we've eaten up the whole apple, including its skin! This small apple-core, bitten at on all sides, and quite unmistakable for what it was, came dancing along and swaying from side to side, and as it moved the pearly-white glitter of its shiny substance caught all the light there was in this weird be-domed and be-cupola'd house of Oom and turned it into a little white angel and a wickedly dancing little white angel, as it bowed provocatively at the bearded old gentleman staring down upon it.

"This," chuckled the great Oom from his seat on the floor as he hugged his thin legs and allowed his chin to sink down to a level with his knees, "this is the core of the apple plucked and eaten by Adam, at the suggestion of Eve, from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and you can see for yourself how it leads them all in this memorable dance!"

It was at this moment that Oom lay down, with his body at full length on the ground face downwards, and after a swift swing round into a half-circle with his body slightly tilted-up on his left side, began addressing his little terrestrial turnstiles.

“If you little people,” Oom said to them, in an authoritative but friendly voice, “manage to delay this love-affair before its consummation, I’ll make you nearly as tall as I am myself, and if you manage to find this ridiculous creature who calls himself Woom-o’r-Rim and attack him all together, and succeed in crippling him in some way, I’ll give you complete run of our Moon’s interior, so that you’ll all be free to make love and even to have offspring at your own will and pleasure! Yes! And I’ll make you twice as tall as you are now! Yes! I swear to you that the moment you start crippling this upstart Woom-o’r-Rim you’ll feel yourselves growing taller!”

Something about the inscrutable ruggedness and cosmogonic expressionlessness of Oom’s terrific physiognomy, now extremely near to them, had the effect not only of making all the eleven of them dance like jubilant elves but even of making them all, then and there, in proportion to the glee with which they tripped, grow really taller than they were at first; so that the Master of Zed, looking upon the scene from the upward incline of the slope above it, was able to get the full significance and to catch the complete suggestiveness of each little symbolic performer.

Their chief pleasure in their curious existence was clearly to emphasize to the limit of their power the historic importance of the rôle played by each one of them at the particular crisis of the world’s history it represented. This shining little silvery apple-core had evidently been very hurriedly thrown away by the shame-faced First Man so as to enable him to put the blame on the First Woman with all the oratorical force at his disposal as he saw the Owner of that Tree of Knowledge striding across the Garden, for the little dancing object glittered still with the moisture of two-thousand-years-old human saliva. But the apple-core was soon joined by a much more ethereal dancer who whirled about the stubby little core like a lively lady with a stick-in-the-mud mate. This was the Feather of the Dove flitting back to the

Ark of Noah, all quivery-fluttery with the sense of duty well over. But these two were followed by the weirdest thing anyone ever saw dance — nothing less, to give it its Chinese name, than the "Phien-Bone," a weird horny excrescence that had detached itself from the ceremonious big toe of the first Emperor of China.

This "Phien-Bone's" dancing was so peculiar that what it resembled most, to the amazed eyes of the bearded Master of Zed looking down upon it, was the movement of a mouse that the Master had once seen and that had been born in a trap set by his wife but of which she was so afraid that she let it go. It was quite clear that the "Phien-Bone" from China despised both this Apple-Core and the Dove's Feather; for the moment that Jael's Iron Nail, encrusted with the rust of the brain-juices of Sisera, came skipping across the stage, the "Phien-Bone" from China joined it and danced with it five times on end, round and round and round, with an intense concentration on every step they both took that was as fascinating as it was comical to watch. But this was followed by a still more astonishing pair of dancers, namely the fragment broken off from the stone tables of the Ten Commandments round which Nero's fiddle-string had gracefully twined itself. Something about the concatenation of Nero's fiddle-string and the rock from Sinai had a curious effect upon the onlookers at this scene. The Master's long beard began to make queer movements against the navel of its owner, while the corrugations on the forehead of Oom began to stir and tickle as if they would willingly welcome the growing of a pair of horns.

Nor was the aura of excitement confined to these superpersonalities. For there happened at this moment to emerge two worms from a crack between a couple of paving-stones where a thousand years' accumulation of dust had resulted in the formation of a few inches of lunar mould, a comfortable home for several generations of worms. A brother and a sister among these now peeped out to see what “erga,” as Homer would call them, were going on.

“The world is cracking into pieces,” said the brother.

“You’re talking nonsense,” said the sister, and pulled him back into their hole.

The next performer to mount the stage of this burlesque show of terrestrial milestones was the Sandal of Mahomet: and as soon as this formidable newcomer, after whirling round and round on its leathery heel, and after rubbing up as close as possible against first one and then another of the female dancers, finally selected the White Dove’s Feather as its partner, there was a low susurration of relief among all the rest. Oom may have been a good stage-manager, but Pythagoras would have thought nothing of him as a metaphysician, for he clearly took no interest in the mysterious way the number *Four* kept dominating the dance, especially when it was at its most ecstatic. All lovers of that wise and strange, that all-confounding and all-consoling, idea of Walt Whitman’s concerning “*The Square Deific*” will be no doubt more alive than was our lunarian enchanter to the significance of the manner in which everything in this dance of the sub-human milestones of destiny was dominated by the number Four. The first personality which necessity compels us to mention here is the Heel of Achilles, which was of course only a round white bone with a hole through it, and, taking a rapidly feminine advantage of this same hole, the spearhead of Boadicea, who with her right arm embraced the neck of one of King Alfred’s half-baked cakes, and with her other arm hugged the waist of the beautiful sea-sand shell preserved by one of King Canute’s courtiers to commemorate his rebuke to their improper adulation.

“Off with you now!” cried Oom; and the bearded Master of Zed, just as if he’d been one of the performers himself, swung round and ascended the slope with long athletic strides. Then all the eleven of them stopped dancing altogether, and in one confused flickering, hickoring, slickering, tickering, bickering, hubbub, hurried up the narrow path that had been taken by Rorlt, through the narrow gate, and round the abrupt corner where his father had completely lost sight of him.

Their road speedily got more and more difficult; so that there was no opportunity for any amusing discussion among this confused and disorganised array, nor for any kind of order either in this bespattered, bedraggled, dilapidated shuffle of scurrying and scrambling milestones of earthly history now lost upon the moon.

“What I think,” remarked the Apple-Core of that forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe, “is that we’d better rest by the side of this path, while we’ve got a path, so as to feel fresher when the path comes to an end.”

“But perhaps it won’t come to an end,” commented the Heel of Achilles with Hellenic caution.

“O, it’s sure to, it’s sure to, it’s sure to!” laughed the fiddle-string of Nero. “All things tend to their end, you know!”

“I’d like to hammer a nail into the head of our boss,” muttered Jael, the wife of Heber the Kemite. “Why didn’t he let us dance our dance for that old gent with the bristling beard and then go to sleep for another few hundred years! He could perfectly well have prevented his crazy kid from meeting this silly girl without sending all of us off on this mad expedition.”

“What I can’t stand,” muttered the piece of stone broken off from the Law Tablets, “is the rough, gross, unseemly way this idolatrous Oom orders us about! I was brought up among Scribes of the Sacred Text and they never chanted one verse without hallowing their lips.”

“What on earth do you mean, you son of a bitch picked up among bulrushes, by talking about proper behaviour?” cried the Heel of Achilles angrily. “I’ve a great mind to use my toe on your backside! What does an ignorant nomad like you know about proper behaviour?”

“Don’t you listen, Moses, to any of these war-besotted Baby-Greeks who think it heroic to hide in their tents when their general selects his pretty slaves! They haven’t got the faintest notion of the really important things in life!”

This sensible remark came from the ancient Phien-Toe-Bone of prehistoric China, and a considerable silence ensued; a silence that was not broken until there wavered and quivered along the low “ha-ha,” or sunken ridge of small massive stones, on which they were all resting, the piercing voice of the Apple-core from the Garden of Eden.

“Why don’t we send forward our White Dove’s Feather? She was such a help in Jehovah’s Flood, that I am sure she will be able to tell why the star they call Venus is now beckoning to us.”

The Sandal of Mahomet stood on its head when it heard these words and shook its heel-strap savagely at the heavens. Then once more on his feet he shouted at them all: “How can you let Jehovah or Jove, or any other fancy God, play these dirty tricks upon you? Why should we honour this Jewish Almighty any more than we honour Pluto or Poseidon? Why should we accept his Trees of Life and his Garden of Eden and his Eves eating Apples and his Angels waving drawn swords? Haven’t we learnt by this time that all these stories are just bunk? Bunk! *That’s* what they are! Bunk, Bunk, Bunk, Bunk!”

And shaking his strap at the Evening Star the Sandal of Mahomet marched indignantly forward up the path in front of them.

“Well, well, well!” croaked the broken fragment of the Ten Commandments in an odd sort of rhyming prose, which it evidently took to be the way a Hebrew Deity would speak out of his Sinai throat. “I opine it’s time for us elderly infants to fall into line. If we don’t find soon on this side of the Moon the son of our Oom, we may have to stride to the other side and look down on the Earth which gave us birth, and become poor portions of the dusky distortions that above their heads they can see from their beds who know nothing of Oom, or of us on the Moon!”

And as they hurried along after the Fragment of the Ten Commandments, there arose a grievous discussion among them as to just how the commandment ran whose fragment had been broken off. The discussion that arose upon this point centred round the question whether there was, or whether there was not, a “not” in the fragment preceding the words “commit adultery.”

The Fiddle-string of Nero kept uttering a quivering note of gloating delight, as if it thought that Rome was burning again, as it argued in favour of a commandment that we should commit adultery; whereas the upright Crust of Alfred’s cake straightened its back with cheerful resolution and insisted that the broken “t” in front of the word “Commit” was the final letter of a decisive “not.” As the whole party moved forward, disputing as they went, the Apple-core of the original Fall of Man, the core that lost him the Garden of Eden, smiled surreptitiously up to the upright Crust of Alfred’s cake and began whispering in its ear.

“A little louder, if you don’t mind,” said the upright crust, “for, to confess the truth, something about the climate of these Lunar uplands has affected my hearing.”

“I was only wondering,” whispered the silvery voice of the core of our original sin, “whether you and I might not obey the intention of Jehovah more delicately and spontaneously, if we slipped away from the rest and followed our own instinctive inspiration as to the nearest route to the mountainous rim we are seeking between the two sides of our Lunar vessel as she circumnavigates the Earth? It would be a bold thing, a daring thing, an original thing to do, but we should, shouldn't we, O brave King of Wessex, have to be very, very obedient to the will of Jehovah, as in this navigating vessel of a Moon, O heroic King's Crust, we struggle — at least you brave men struggle, for a Core of course is only a feeble woman, whereas a Crust is a brave man — to do our duty to the Creator and the Creation? So I implore you, oh well-browned, upstanding Crust, let us slip away from the rest of them and follow our own inspiration as it comes direct from Jehovah! We shall find, we shall find, we shall find—"

And as she spoke she slithered close up to the conscientious Crust and allowed her silver-shining, slippery middle to press against that crinkly-brown, undeviating, unflagging, untemporizing, unpretending, unequivocating symbol of integrity.

There must have been some heavenly aura of rectitude hovering about King Alfred's Crust that stirred every quivering nerve of seductiveness in the saliva-gleaming nakedness of the Core; for it was soon clear to her that she had won. The Crust still stood, grave and thoughtful, gathering all his moral powers together; but there was a look on his face that gave her that exquisite historic sensation to which the Book of Genesis supplies the background without breaking its sacred reserve. They were both however at that point drawn away from their own situation by an excited turmoil in a little group of their fellow-pilgrims, which ended in the abrupt and quite rapid flight above their heads of the Feather from the Dove that had been sent out from the Ark of Noah. And there was every reason for their being disturbed by this flutter in the air above their heads: for the feelings in the flying body of that winged horn of flight, that stalk of the very substance of Speed, were of a nature too desperately remote from the feather's appearance to convey themselves to the nearest and most attentive of those who listened; and this mystery of intense aerial vibration conveying tragic emotion, without the least hint of the nature, or the cause, or the possible consequence of that emotion, was extremely disturbing. The whole crowd of them instinctively quickened the pace at which they were moving; for what else could they do? But the agitation that was felt among them would have been a fascinating spectacle to their stage-manager Oom, and might even have had an ingratiating appeal to the missing Lorlt, if that excitable young woman would have caught it. Matters were soon indeed rendered more agitating still when the Dove's Feather, instead of settling down peacefully when it got back to its place, swung round and started off again to fly ahead of them just as it had done before.

The Dove's Feather itself kept turning round to see if the others could still watch its movements, but when it reached a point in its whirling and twisting flight where it was clearly out of sight of them all, it moved forward much more slowly and much more cautiously. It was clearly afraid of missing some object the sight of which had made it turn back in that wild mood of emotion; whether an emotion of terrible dread or an emotion of overpowering exultation it would have been very difficult for the Feather itself to say. But what it thought to itself, for we all, whether straws on the grass or feathers on the wind, have our own private reflections, must have been, if put into English, something like this:

"What was it, O what was it, that came whirling through my heart when I saw that black feather caught between those two stones? Was it waving to me? It did *look* as if it were! But I could only see the extreme tip of it. But

O, it looked as if it had been held between those stones for such a terribly long time!”

The Dove’s Feather kept giving way to little shivering spasms from tail to tip, though she just whirled on, driven more by her inward feelings than by any wind, for every wind had now subsided, and from firmament to firmament, if we can give such a solid-sounding name to either the cracked and creaking lunar landscape or to the pallid impalpable sky that hovered round it, there was a noticeable hush.

She kept looking quickly to her right and left, this excited Dove’s Feather, fearful lest she should forget the exact spot where she had seen among the loose stones, which thousands of years ago had been scattered below a broken ridge, the particular pair between which the black feather had been imprisoned, and from which it had seemed to be waving to her. There it was at last! The Dove’s Feather knew it as if it had been a portion of her own body. And as she let herself drift gently down by its side she knew by an infallible instinct just what it was, and just why the sight of it had excited her so. For years and years and years, during that great Flood that had come so near to destroying every living creature on the face of the earth, she had lived with that feather, or rather she, the White Dove, had lived with him the Black Raven! And where had they lived? What vessel had saved them from those universal waves? Nowhere else than in Noah’s Ark! Nowhere else than with Jehovah’s own private company of birds and beasts, whereof the Black Raven was one!

O what a moment for them both this reunion was! The Raven’s feather had known the Dove’s feather in a second! Yes! the moment she floated past him he had known her; and the desperate waving of all that was visible of him was only a small part of what he felt.

And now, together once more after all those years, with no Mount Ararat to scramble down, with no Jehovah to whom to sacrifice bulls or goats or rams, and with no indignant voices in their ears from righteous young people watching grandfather Noah lying drunk and naked on his bed, all that these two feathers could do for a while was gently, O so gently to stroke each other as the white one laid herself down by the stony pillory of the black one and they both allowed a few thousands of years be as a few minutes to the tune of the beating lovers' hearts. But how to get the Raven's Feather out of the prison in which pure chance, and not any gaps in his character, like those which our critics have dared to find in the character of the immortal author of "Robinson Crusoe," had enclosed him? And now we have to confess that it was the "white feather," that very symbol of shrinking from violence, which all lusty rogues combine to call contemptible cowardice, who thought of this way of escape; and not only thought of it but successfully carried it out! What she did was to leave her friend's side for a few minutes while she went off on what she called an *insect-hunt.* The Raven's Feather found himself both peevish and alarmed at the length of her stay in this hunting-field but when she returned he soon realized that it was not for nothing that the Holy Ghost has been given the Wings of a Dove. When it was all over, and liberated from his pillory her mate happily reclining by her side, the White Feather found herself forced to exchange a few lively jests with an uproarious bumble-bee who eventually was persuaded to remove his private jazz-band and go in search of other prisoners who could be released.

"I dipped my tail," the White Feather explained to the Black Feather, "in the juice of several small berries that some bird had dropped from its beak on the moss; and then, as soon as I saw a bumble-bee who was huddling itself against a fungus and who struck me as being thirsty, I brushed up against it and it followed me here. Then I squeezed myself as well as I could into the crack of your prison and this powerful old Bee followed the track I made. I fancy he thought you must have collected a secret store of honey in there, and with all his strong legs at work he dragged and pulled at you till he got you out. But, now we're safe together again, as we haven't been since we were in Noah's Ark, I want to tell you of an astonishing encounter I had in my hunt to set you free. I flew full in the face of — of a being far greater than our silly old Oom who collected us all together out of a crazy notion that we were symbolic milestones of what he considers the history of the Cosmos, whereas of course, as you and I have every reason to know, it is only the history of one small planet circling round one of the Universe's most ordinary stars."

"O my dear," protested the Raven's Feather, "don't, for the sake of all the feathers of all the birds that have ever lived, go on any more in that strain! I know the limited nature of poor old Oom just as well as you do, which is better, I would wager all the blood I ever had in heart and head, than this precious son of his knows him."

"But the being I blundered into," cried the White Feather, "was a much more startling figure than the son of poor old Oom. He was also an infinitely more impressive person than that pontifical doddipole, the philosopher Om. I met this being just as I had seduced the bumblebee to follow my juicy track; and he, or it, took in, in a second, what I was up to, but showed no hostility to my little game. Indeed, if he showed any feeling at all, it was rather a friendly amusement than any sort of objection to what I was doing. But, O my precious Black Feather, the being I saw was the most astonishing object I have ever seen! It told me, or he told me, his name, in a gentle propitiatory voice, just as if it were anxious not to frighten me. It told me its name was Woom-o-Rim, and that it was the only child of our Mother the Moon.

"While it talked to me it let me take my rest on the back of one of its great hands which was shaped like a curved ploughshare, but at first I was far too terrified by the Thing's whole appearance to have the gall to answer the challenge it made. It kept repeating: 'I am the only child of the Moon. I can tell you all about the Moon. Nobody but myself who am her child can tell you why the Moon and all of us Lunarians are held in esteem beyond all living things in the heights and depths, in the unbounded abysses and infinite expanses of the indescribable Space which surrounds us all.

"'When I say "held in esteem," 'this amazing being went on, 'I mean that this mysterious ultimate stage of every existing universe and of all possible universes, namely the infinite Space in which they expand or diminish and appear and disappear, the stage in fact for every event and occurrence, every appearance and disappearance, that can happen anywhere, is naturally and inevitably made more conscious of those satellites within its unbounded emptiness who by some inexplicable mystery in their inherent nature can influence everything that becomes, whether by chance or by fate, aware of their existence.'" Having reached this point in the relation of her strange encounter and of the bewildering words of Woom-o-Rim, the White Feather flicked her tail tenderly against the tail of the Black Feather.

"It's a weird world we live in," she whispered, "and when I think about it all there sometimes comes into my head the idea that we all may be in one wild crazy dream! Only then I say to myself: Is it a Dove's dream, or is it a Raven's dream? Is it White Feather's dream or Black Feather's dream?"

"Did your acquaintance who said his name was Woom-o-Rim", enquired the Raven's Feather, disregarding his lady's last speech as the negligible product of feminine nerves, “tell you whether he was the only child of the Moon? I have always understood that neither the family of our silly old Oom, nor the descendants of York who drove them underground, had any authentic claim to be Moon-Kings or Moon-Queens. But I suppose, unless he has half-brothers, or half-sisters older than himself, Woom-o-Rim is the only creature in the entire universe who can claim this Moon of ours as his real mother.”

“What struck me as a most interesting thing, Black of my heart,” replied White Feather, “was that while I was listening to him, I seemed to feel this Infinite Space of which he was talking actually present in the rock against which I leaned. O yes, my dear! And what was more weird still, I felt as if it were actually present in my own body! You may not believe it, Blackie darling, but for one passing second I could really feel, yes! actually feel, a piece, a segment, a sliver, a strip, a shaving, a scrap, of this Infinite Space in every part of me! I realized as I’ve never done before what Infinite Space meant. *Do,* O do, my darling Black Feather, try and realize the presence of this Infinity! Think of our living, ever and always, with Infinity about us! It makes everything different! O Blackie, my treasure, doesn’t it? Doesn’t it? Look at those two blades of grass now, growing in that crack! Do you see the pair I’m talking about? Yes! Over there — by those tiny grey lichens with such red tips that you’d think a dragon-fly had been killed above them — Yes! Those two there that are pointing upwards, side by side, stretching upwards, craving upwards, struggling upwards, yearning upwards! You’ve only got to look at those two blades of grass to know exactly what I’m feeling. It’s their attraction to each other joined with their attraction to Infinite Space! They must be feeling that if they could go up, up, up, up, forever, they would become grass-gods, divinely drunk, mad-drunk, ecstatic, delirious, beside themselves! Isn’t it queer that those two grass-blades should be so like me and should have this intense longing to struggle upwards? You *do* feel just a little, a very, very little of what I feel, Blackie darling, don't you? Do you suppose, Blackie, that the queer sensations we shared, all those years ago, when Noah bred us in the Ark and then let us out of the Ark, are experienced by any living thing in the entire universe when confronted by Space? Do you suppose that the smallest worm or beetle or fly or grub in the whole congeries of universes that are now, rumour says, spreading out into Space has the same craving I have? Has every single, living thing this longing to get out — out — out — of some sort of prison? You might reply: 'But the worms burrow down into the earth?' Certainly they do! But what we must remember is, if our latest earth-rumours are correct, and as most of their astronomers are moon-gazers their ideas come up to us here, not one star, not one planet, not one smallest, tiniest, minutest little moon or satellite in the whole expanse of this vast multi-verse but has got another side to it, another front to it, another surface to it, another face to it, that must inevitably look out upon the same infinite space as its other front does, as *all* its fronts, if it has more than two, are bound to look out. So that when you protest that moles and worms burrow down instead of leaping up and bursting out, like grass and leaves and rabbits and squirrels and monkeys and wild-cats and pythons and even fish as far as they can go, you are forgetting that in infinite space there is no 'up' and no 'down,' no 'north' and no 'south,' no 'east' and no 'west.' When you want to escape from your prison, wherever or whatever that prison is, it doesn't matter to you in the very least whether you escape through a window looking north or a window looking south, whether you escape by climbing up a ladder to the top of the roof or by climbing down a ladder to the bottom of the cellar! From the roof you can still mount to the chimney-top and from the cellar-floor you can still go down the drain and into some crack in the foundations that leads to the other side of the whole orb! That is the point of every living thing's struggle to escape the prison into which it has been born. 'Up and out,' or 'down and out,' it doesn't matter which, as long as it ends in *out.*"

The Black Feather was really showing signs of interest now, but suddenly it stopped its tender quivering against the side of the White Feather.

"*What's that?*" it enquired anxiously.

The White Feather rose up in haste from her recumbent position.

"It's here! He's here!" she whispered with a gasp to her companion.

And as he too flapped up to attention he saw approaching them the extraordinary being his lady-friend had just described.

"Alone, alone, alone, alone," muttered Woom-o-Rim as soon as he reached them. "Don't you understand, you fluttery, flickery, flattery, flappery, blottery, tottery, slippery, flippery, wickery, tickery, trespassers in my domain, that I am the only heir of my mother? Don't you understand that I, who am the only Woom-o-Rim in our universe, yes! you little fluttery, muttery, tuttery, tiddle-tots, I who am the only offspring of the loneliest Orb in Space alone have any idea, and alone will ever have any idea, of the real secret of my mother's life! You know, of course, you two flippery-flappery feathers, that nobody knows where her soul is now? Everybody knows how because of her revolt against the Sun and of her refusal to allow the Sun to meddle with her, that that bloated ball of bonfires has become her insatiable enemy? He doesn't know, He never will know, in spite of what the oldest and greatest of all earthly poets says about his 'seeing all things and hearing all things,' whither her heavenly soul, just as beautiful as this her lovely body, upon which all we Lunarians were born and upon which we shall all die, has fled and escaped. But I, Woom-o-Rim, alone of all conscious beings in infinite Space, possess the secret as to where the pure, the lovely, the heavenly, the more than heavenly soul of my Mother the Moon is now safely and securely hidden from her lustful pursuer, drinker-up of all the river mists and fogs, and illimitable waters and delicate shadows of the dawn, and the imponderable mysteries and vaporous illusions of the twilight. Unknown to all earth's rulers and prophets and unknown even to you, peaceful Feathers, blown on the four winds, is the hiding-place of the soul of my mother, the Moon. When I was young—"

It was at this point that Woom-o-Rim's speech had a singular effect upon both his listeners. They rose up side by side, so that their tails, if such a word could be used for the glassy ends of them which adhered to the mossy stone whose cracked surface had been the black one's prison, stood erect upon the stone, while their hair, if that word is a lawful synonym, fluttered beautifully in the long-drawn gasps of Woom-o-Rim, as lying prone on the ground with his face towards theirs he slowly recovered his breath.

"What few living creatures in this grotesque world of ours realize," he soon continued, "is that my mother possesses in her soul a power to generate at her will and pleasure this magnetic attraction which still as all we Lunarians know, thrills through this body of hers, upon which I am now prostrate and you two are now upright. Here am I, her only child, treating you two with far more courtesy and consideration than you are accustomed to receive from this lumbering old lunatic Oom who only values you two, incomparable Feathers though you are, and though your life-story has been told again and again by the Rabbinical master-scribes of the House of David, as merely a couple of oddities for his mythological collection. Here we are, three conscious entities, discussing the situation in which we find ourselves. You two understand each other naturally and easily. Well! I am anxious that both of you should understand me, I won't say completely, but at least up to a certain point; for, after all, we are now, all three of us, clinging to the magnetic body of my Mother the Moon.

"Why did she have to hide herself? Yes, why did she have to conceal the living soul of this magical body to which we are still clinging as we converse? Purely and simply because of the burning lust of the remorseless, the merciless, the uncompromising Sun!

"Now, my dear friends, I am in a very difficult situation. Before my mother made me swear I would hide her forever from this ogre of a Sun-God, she revealed to me without the faintest shame who my real Father was. Of course all our fellow-inhabitants of this Lunar World have assumed that my Father was the Sun. And what has bewitched them into clinging so steadily to this delusion? No doubt the wise craftiness of my Mother herself: and in this, I confess it to you two immortal Feathers without shame, I played up to her, to the limit of my power! She has been absolutely frank with me from the beginning and there exists between us a deliciously sardonic pleasure in thus fooling our friends, and not only fooling our friends but I still sometimes like to fancy actually fooling our grand enemy, the Sun himself. For that burning and blustering and blighting old bully has for millions of years been begetting children by the careless casual and incontinent fluorescence of his procreative beams; and one offspring more or less, who would notice it, or what did it matter? No, my real Father, so my strange, sweet mysterious Mother confessed to me one aerial evening, was none other than the warlike soul of the great planet Mars, which came down on no less than eight separate occasions to dally with her; and only stopped coming when she was big with me. If you two wise Feathers, from your instinctive initiation into Rabbinical and Kabbalistical learning, ask how his majesty the imperial Sun endured without a fit of murderous jealousy this descent of Mars into his secluded villa of amorous delight, I can only reply that my impression is that my sagacious Mother kept all these things secret and, like the Mother in another mythology pondered on them in her heart. She always had had very capable and competent attendants, my beautiful wise Mother. I don't know how much of all this is new to you two Kabbalistic Feathers, but I have no doubt that both the preposterous Oom and the pedantic Om have for a long time been spreading this knowledge among all their Lunar pupils — namely that the spirits of certain particular ladies upon earth of an extremely neurotic and highly-strung type, are in the habit of leaving their bodies when they are asleep and eagerly and devotedly offering themselves as attendants upon the Moon-Mother. It was indeed the spirit from the midnight pillow of one of these terrestrial ladies who superintended my sweet Mother's pregnancy when she was big with me and my own birth. The most devoted of these spirits of sleeping ladies is the spirit of a lady called Myfanwy Cellwair, who comes from Dorvil in Wales and who comes to see me still, though she is growing old and frail, and to tell you the truth I've become rather fond of her and have even taken her to Mother's hiding-place. Between her and Mother there has now developed such a close affection that Myfanwy comes to warn her when there is any likelihood of the Sun coming out; and when the day is well over and Mother is in one of her lively moods and is whispering through all that space of moonlit air to my Father Mars, our old lady, Myfanwy Cellwair, will giggle and wriggle by her side and dare her to whisper all manner of naughty things through that silent moonlit space to the planet Mars."

At this point Woom-o-Rim became silent and rose up. He was well over six feet tall, and his chief peculiarity was the marbly whiteness of his skin and its evident hardness and thickness. It was like a horny shell; and in spite of, or perhaps because of, the absence of the sun it gleamed now with a dazzling silvery light. He wore nothing over his shining skin but a large blanket of the softest wool, and, in his manipulation of this rumpled garment, the only son of the Moon showed himself to be a master-actor, quite apart from the purpose he may have had, at any particular moment, for action.

"I tell you two Judaic, Talmudic, Rabbinical, Kabbalistical Feathers," and as he spoke he flung his woollen mantle round his left shoulder, like an orator about to address the Roman Senate, who in his heart was praying that some artistic visitor from Athens had already extracted a pencil and a palm-leaf from his belt with an idea of sketching him, "I tell you, I say, that it may be a disaster for this brainless, soulless, heartless Ball of Fire before our contest ends that he ever dared to meddle with Mother!"

In his oratorical self-consciousness Woom-o-Rim turned his gaze away from the Black Feather and the White Feather and fixed it on the long path up which the other "Milestones of Terrestrial History" as Oom, their Collector, called them, were now advancing, led by the Heel of Achilles and the Burnt Crust of Alfred's Cake.

"I must leave you and deal with these rogues!" cried Woom-o-Rim leaping to his feet and striding down the hill.

For some reason, probably because their owners had been men of action rather than imagination, neither of these two famous relics were in the smallest degree disturbed by the sight of the tall, white-robed, silver-shining son of the Moon.

"If that Goliath over there meddles with us," said the Crust to the Heel, "I'll go for one of his bare shins! He's got nothing on under that blanket, and my burnt head can draw blood mighty quick."

“Excellent,” replied the Heel; “and I’ll go for his other shin. I know I can strike it to such a tune that between the two of us this pillar of salt will soon be a kerbstone of sand.”

But long before either the heroic Heel or the honest Crust could try their strength against the silvery limbs of Woom-o-Rim, the two wise Feathers from Noah’s Ark were already approaching the crest of that Lunar Ridge upon which under one of the wonder-trees, planted long ago by the tree-worshipper York, Oom’s son Yoom and the Lord of Zed’s daughter Lorlt were seated hand in hand in an ecstatic trance of youthful first love. Towards these two, though by a more circuitous path than the one up which the Raven’s Feather and the Dove’s Feather were advancing towards them, the young man Rorlt was swiftly on his way, eagerly, anxiously, tenderly, engaged in the not very sportsman-like quest of stalking his sister and his sister’s lover.

While these events were occurring on the Ridge, or as perhaps it would be better to call it, on the Rim, of the Moon, that scholarly old spinster, Miss Os, was summoned from her well-filled library into her hall-way by a loud knock on her front door, a knock that by the sound it made was clearly caused by the handle of a heavy walking-stick. When she opened it she was amazed to find herself confronting none other than the philosopher Om, who lived in a lonely hovel on the reedy bank of Lake Rockabed.

“Come in, Mister Om,” the old Lady said. “Come in and let me make you a cup of tea while we have a good talk.”

“Old man Om,” as Rorlt called him, obeyed her by coming in, obeyed her by hanging his coat on a peg, and finally obeyed her by settling down close to the fire in a comfortable armchair, but so emphatically rejected her offer of a cup of tea or of any other refreshment that Miss Os was too tactful and too considerate to do anything but let that go.

"It's a funny thing, Miss Os," he began, as soon as she had taken her own seat on a cushioned stool on the opposite side of the fire, "but the truth is that I stayed awake last night for nearly an hour listening to the ticking of my old clock, a sound that generally sends me to sleep in a few minutes, because I had an odd feeling that something uncanny was happening to our late pupil, that lovely and lively daughter of the Master of Zed; and I couldn't resist the impulse to come and ask you whether you by any chance had had the same sort of intimation of danger threatening that attractive girl, who was always your favourite, as she was mine. Have you had any such fears? I mean of a psychic nature and out of the air, so to say, and quite apart from the ordinary hopes and fears that we teachers, like adopted parents, naturally have for the young people we especially like?"

Miss Os rose from her stool with an emotional little cry.

"Yes! Yes! Think of anyone like you, Master Om, having the same experience! Yes! it kept me awake last night from nine to eleven! I go to bed, of course, earlier than you; but I began to have that feeling about Lorlt the moment my head was on the pillow, and I know the feeling must have lasted till about eleven; for before I got to sleep I heard those queer night-birds called Kumindies making their weird wail as they were flying from the lake up to the mountain. And they never leave the lake much before eleven. Oh Master Om, Master Om, how *can* we find out whether she's all right? Her Mother died some time ago; but I don't think they've buried the body yet. The Master of Zed's such an eccentric that you never can be sure what he'll be up to. He looks so devout and proper and orderly with that great beard of his; but you never know with these heads of old families, do you? I liked the poor dead lady very much; and I used sometimes, when she came here to see me, to feel that between her husband's long beard and her daughter's shrill laugh she had an uneasy life. She told me once that she was sometimes afraid that her son Rorlt deep down in his heart wanted to marry his sister and that he'd asked her once how it was that among the ancient Egyptians brothers had been allowed to marry their sisters.

"I think she felt that if she were to die her husband would be too self-absorbed to see anything that was happening and that all sorts of weird and dangerous things might happen. I know, for she told this to me her very self, that she sometimes felt a dread lest that awful creature Oom from his mysterious palace in the underground world would one day have begotten enough sons, all giants like himself, to come out into the air and kill off every member of York's descendants and become the sole monarch of the Moon! O yes! and most learned Master Om, do please listen to this! I heard one rumour — though of course it may have been those Kumindy birds put it into my head, for they are very old and very queer birds — that our lovely Lorlt was being frequently decoyed down some secret passage into the underground kingdom of Oom so that she might be seduced by Oom's son Yoom, who is, so they say, a very lascivious young man."

All the time she had been speaking Miss Os had been leaning forward on tiptoe with her long thin arms bearing the light weight of her slender person, while the fingers of both hands were tightly clasped on the round golden knob at the end of the elbows of her visitor's armchair.

"Can you give me," enquired the philosopher Om, "any closer details of this intimation of Lorlt's danger?"

"Only one, Master," she replied.

"Let's have it! O let's have it quick!"

"Well, it's simply this. I seemed to hear a man's voice — but of course it may easily have come from one of those old Kumindy birds for their notes are often very imitative — but what I imagined I heard was a man's voice saying: 'Come along Lorlt of my heart! Let's go to the very top of the Ridge and see how things look up there, and see how we feel up there!’ Whatever fate it was that made me hear those words,” and Miss Os leant still lower over the elbow of her guest’s armchair, “and of course it *may* have been the Devil playing tricks on me and not our Lorlt at all, what I felt was intense worry and frightening agitation. O, it’s such a comfort, my dear Doctor Om, to have you to talk to about it all!”

These final words were accompanied by two or three big tears, which, though they fell on her own clasped hands, trickled down from that promontory of supplication, upon her guest’s knee. Om’s leather boots reached half-way up his legs, but the faded deer-skin jerkin of dark olive green which covered his lean figure had left his knees bare to this appeal.

Unknown to either of these people, the two emanations of the hidden feelings against which this conscientious pair of elderly persons were now struggling met in the air of that studious chamber above their grey heads. The male emanation murmured: “Just to have Lorlt for five minutes, and my hands free to toy with her, I’d give up all my Greek and Latin and Arabic and Hebrew!” And the female emanation murmured: “If only you’d hug me to your heart, O my beloved Master Om, and kiss me as Faust kisses Gretchen in the play, I’d be ready for Lorlt to be ravished ten times over!”

“Well, Miss Os,” pronounced the philosopher, resolutely rising, though not without some effort, from his comfortable armchair, “you and I must give some careful thought to all this. No, no! Please don’t come to the door. I can find my hat and let myself out. Good night! And sleep well!”

Outside the philosopher Om grasped his great stick and looked up at the sky. Then he looked up at the ridge of the Mountains of the Moon, of which he had known every rise and fall, every peak and gully, every curve and every level expanse for the last sixty years! The sky was certainly clear of clouds, and the vast constellations he knew so well and adored so deeply stretched far away through space in every direction. And as he walked towards his lonely hut among the reeds of Lake Rockabed it struck his mind that this whole spectacle, together with all his mental reaction to it, was simply a small and insignificant part of some wholly inscrutable mystery.

"Does the good lady really imagine that after learning that both of us have been visited by the same alarming premonition about this exquisite young creature, that I shall be able to stroll back to my lodging and go quietly to sleep as I normally and naturally would do? Does she suppose that this is actually possible to a thinker of my type?

"Why," he asked himself, "O why must all these little tiny temporal objects, like poor old Miss Os and doddipole me, find ourselves staring out from the banks of this little lake into Infinite Space, into a space that goes on and on and on forever in every direction? Poor old Os is a woman, and poor old fustybudge Om is a man, but her face and my forehead are little different in the whole sum of things from the whiskers and skulls of that pair of water-rats I caught sight of this morning. Why should there be such a difference between this old stick of mine and that great club of Lorlt's brother's, called Blob, that she was always telling me about? That's what I'm now asking you, yes! *you,* you great heavy, unfeeling, stupid, thick, blind, deaf, dumb door-post of my long years of life among the reeds!

"But what's the worth of a universe made up of infinite space with a few little swarms of fire-fly stars and planets dotted about in it? And what's the worth of this conscious self that peers out of its shell at these reeds, at this water, at these bushes, at these two old gate-posts, at an old fool's bedroom window?"

Om stared at the centre of his cottage-door upon which, on leaving to visit Miss Os, he had pinned up a small piece of paper with the words

“Back before Dark.”

“What a queer thing this self, this ego, this ‘I am I’ of ours, really is, when you stop taking it for granted! Why should Nature, or whatever creative energy it is that, for want of a better name, we call ‘Nature,’ have invented this self-business at all? Well! I suppose there wouldn’t be a world if there weren’t these conscious ‘selves’ to observe it! Would infinite Space be conscious of itself as something that exists as a background for nothing? Would it say to itself: I am a background without any limit. There is no beginning to me. There is no end to me. If anything is to exist it must exist in me. If it doesn’t exist in me, it doesn’t exist. All that exists must exist in something that is nothing. I am the nothing in which everything exists. But the curious thing is—”

It was at this point that the philosopher Om made an attempt, which was certainly as daring as anything he was imagining that Infinite Space might be saying to itself, an attempt to get outside the whole universe of Infinite Space along with all the starry systems it contains. What Om really was doing at that moment was trying to imagine how far these centuries-old night-hawks or nightjars, which the gods of Olympus used to call Kalkids, but which we mortals still call Kumindies, would be able to follow what he was trying to do in thus thinking himself out of the world.

“The curious thing is,” his thoughts ran on, “that this whole universe or multiverse or whatever we like to call it, cannot exist, does not exist, and never did, could, or will exist, without at least one of these queer little twosided dots, or specks, or atoms, or molecules or minute grains, who possess two sides, one side of these atoms looking outwards and one side of these atoms looking inwards, one side being conscious of Space and conscious of all that is outside itself in Space, and the other side being conscious of itself, of the Ego, of the I am I, of the ‘Little Me.’ And what an extraordinary thing this ‘I- universe’ is, this universe entirely dependent on the ‘I’ for its ‘within’ and on what the ‘I’ feels for its ‘without.’ Consider, for a second, this mystery-self without the help of which everything vanishes. It is as vague and shifty and evasive as everything else! If, for instance, you say to yourself, ‘I think I’ll see a little deeper into myself than I generally do!’, what happens? You find that the limits of what you call ‘into yourself’ are so dark and so vague and so impossible to define, that you can no more fathom them than overleap them.

“O Life, O Life!” cried the philosopher Om to himself, feeling much more like a child of ten than like a man of sixty and ten, “why is it that in every position we take we find ourselves surrounded by hopeless mystery? But wait a while! What would it feel like if we weren’t surrounded on all sides by complete darkness and mystery? Do you know, my friend Ob” — for the philosopher Om had called his stick by this not very endearing name, ever since he had found it in the grave of a couple of crazy adventurers from the earth who had dug their own grave together after being dropped on the Moon together as a result of a mutiny of airmen on a famous space ship—’

‘that I really believe we should feel worse still if in some direction or other, it doesn’t matter *what* direction, there was no dark mystery at all! Suppose, for instance, friend Ob, that we discovered that space had a definite and unquestionable adamantine wall surrounding it on all sides; wouldn’t that be worse than to have it extending to infinity in every direction? Or suppose if when we tried to sink down into the fathomless depths of our own ego, we found that instead of being surrounded as we are now by a dumb, blind, palpable bottom of everything without sound or smell or taste, where we feel nothing but the heavy, aching, throbbing, thudding, heart-beating pressure of a sickening sand-sunk, drowned, brain-bruised, water-logged, sea-buried, pulse-pumped sensation of being at the bottom of the world, we felt that we were on the brink of a bottomless well that descended forever towards a nothingness that was never reached, would it not be worse?”

With these thoughts — if “thoughts” they could be called whose vaporous edges were forever relapsing into obscure sensations — the philosopher Om drew from his belt an enormous iron key and let himself into his hut, making Ob, his stick, go pit-pat, pit-pat, pit-pat before him, just as if it had been a blind person he was propelling in front of him. The interior of Om’s hut at that moment resembled the confusion of his thoughts. Something very different from a carefully arranged library of unusual books such as that which filled the exquisitely dusted shelves of Miss Os’s dwelling was what now surrounded him as he searched for a box of matches wherewith to light a candle. The room might indeed have contained the bed of a maniacal bookworm, who night by night, was wont to be seized by some kind of biblical nightmare. It took him several minutes to find a box of matches, for it had now grown quite dark. But when once he’d found the matches Om did nothing but light a wick that protruded from what was already little more than a shapeless lump of wax. Then he hurriedly removed from his own person his overcoat, his coat, and everything except his shirt and his underclothes, and from Ob’s person the dirt that had accumulated about his ferrule, and, after that, having blown out the light, and with Ob partly in his arms and partly under his body, he stretched himself out upon his well-blanketed and well-pillowed bed and without turning over more than once relapsed into a dreamless sleep.

He slept much longer than was his wont and indeed the height of the sun in the sky indicated to him, for he was well acquainted with all the normal terrestrial calculations, that it was considerably after nine o'clock in the morning when at last he woke.

Om was not a philosopher for nothing, and one of his chief triumphs as a thinker was that he had succeeded in establishing between himself and his stick a particular transference of thought which, though it could hardly be called a language, was certainly a genuine interchange of wishes and intentions. It was not however until he had made tea for himself, and had swallowed half a loaf of brown bread and a good deal more butter than usual, and had even gone out to the privy in his garden and had had a satisfactory action of his bowels, that — as he polished Ob with the particular oil that this fastidious and self-possessed walking-stick preferred to all others — the day's grand decision was made. It came, as so many of his most important decisions did, through his stick.

"Blob has been talking to me through the air," were the words that greeted him when he returned from the garden. "And what may Blob have been saying?"

"Blob says that, if we want to prevent Lorlt from being raped by Yoom, we shall have to hurry as quickly as possible to the Great Ridge."

This news was at once an agitating incentive and a disturbing menace to our philosopher. He had never approved of his self-respecting walking-stick's association with this big hoodie-doodle of a wanton club, but, being the philosopher he was, he had been unwilling to risk increasing it by opposition. He had been always extremely desirous of keeping the descendants of York in their dominant position in the Lunar World; for he had always felt that if the enchanter Oom were to emerge again from the subterranean realm into which the York family had driven him, there was no telling what might come of it.

“Well, old friend,” he replied calmly, as he stretched out his right hand to take a firm hold of Ob by his gracefully moulded and delicately polished right-angled handle, “I expect we had better go up there and see what we can do. I know Rorlt and of course I know your friend Blob, but I’ve never seen this son of Oom who calls himself Yoom.” Having thus spoken and having re-crossed his threshold and re-locked the door and placed the iron key in a special pocket of his clothing, the philosopher Om set forth with unperturbed resolution to ascend the Great Ridge.

As may well be imagined on a morning when the sun’s radiance was so especially brilliant as it was this day, the deep instinct of the wandering soul of that Lunar-worshipping and Moon-passioning old maid, Myfanwy Cellwair, impelled her, while her body still slept a dreamless sleep, to seek that rock-cloven recess in the side of the Great Ridge, where Woom-o-Rim, the Son of the Moon, had told her his mother had learnt to hide, and arrived in time to warn that Lady of Mysteries against coming out at all. As a reward for this timely warning the stately Miss Cellwair was permitted to sleep on till nearly noon, while her wandering spirit was given the privilege of spending these blest hours in lunar exploration.

By the time the philosopher Om, pressing Ob’s brazen ferrule firmly into the earth, or moss, or gravel, between the rocks, or tapping the rocks themselves with it, in his cautious advance, had nearly attained the ridge, it was natural enough that he should be seen by the observant spirit of Miss Myfanwy who at once glided down the mountain-side towards him. Myfanwy’s spirit was much more nervous in this encounter than was the rational mind of Om.

“Come here, lady!” he called out to her, when he noticed she had begun to glide away.

She obeyed submissively and floating towards him through the air like a reflection in water remained stationary in front of him looking with large plaintive hollow eyes into his grave face.

"There's no danger, is there," he said, "of your body's sleep down there being interrupted with a painful shock, and of your having to bolt back to your body's pillow like a stormy petrel in an east wind?"

"O dear no, Master Om, for so I know you to be! My lady Moon told me you were, so to speak, 'on the go,' and one of her special gifts is to be able to inspire her worshippers with something of her own magnetic power."

"Do you mean, gracious lady," enquired the philosopher Om, no more disturbed by this bodiless apparition than if it had been an eccentric pupil at the door of his Rockabed dwelling, "that our Moon-Mother draws you regularly from your sleep?"

"O no! Dear master!" whispered the phantom; "O no! It isn't like that at all! It's we ourselves; for there are quite a lot of us on the Earth, both in the West and in the East, who worship the Moon: and we all leave our bodies the moment we are asleep and go to wait on the Moon-Mother wherever she may be. This art of *willing* is a very special art to learn, as of course you must know very well, great master, but it is an art that I've always longed to acquire. I began to learn to practise it when I was a child. There was a poet who lived near me when I was little; and at first when I saw he was composing a poem by the expression on his face, I used to tease him by dancing round him, but once he recited to me a poem about a rhyme coming to him out of the air that was so pathetic that after that I always hid in the bushes when I saw him coming and willed and willed and willed, O! you don't know how hard I willed! that he should find a perfect rhyme."

"And did your willing help him, little lady?" enquired Om with considerable interest. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "this could be used to start a completely new kind of poetry in the world! I must think more about this!" But aloud he asked the soul of Myfanwy Cellwair whether she thought that certain unusual words that could rhyme with certain usual words could be found, if a true bard hunted for them, floating round the Moon like lost leaves from the Tree of Life in the garden of Eden.

But although she was no more than the wandering soul of a sleeping old lady drunk upon moonlight, the free spirit of Miss Cellwair of Dorvil hadn't, like that of the philosopher Om, so drugged itself with logic that the most vital essences had been spilled from life's cup.

"I don't think it's only the rhyming part of their work that poets get from the air," was the comment Om now received; and like other philosophers when caught up out of their particular territory he felt nonplussed and slightly foolish. "No, of course not," was all he could murmur.

Meanwhile in the shadow of a great rock half-way up the last ascent to be made before approaching the Lunar Ridge which, when the Moon is full, is that topmost rim across which no inhabitant of the earth has ever looked, lay the only daughter of the Master of Zed in the arms of the only son of Oom the Collector of Milestones. They had made love till they were weary of making love; but they were both too wildly in love with love to feel sleepy and they were now engaged in what to both of them was the most exciting conversation of their lives.

"She *must* have loved him at the moment when she yielded her maidenhood to him," Lorlt was saying to Yoom.

"I don't think," Yoom was answering, "that we need of necessity assume quite that. The Sun at the full blaze of his warmth in the middle of the day would, by his very nature, so seize the one he embraced that they would both be wrapped up in such a fire-cloud of erotic passion that there would be no thought left on either side for any tenderer or more lofty feeling. O yes! These old prehistoric, antediluvian suns and moons lived in a different level of consciousness altogether from that in which you and I, my precious, live and move and have our being. But O, my little one! How thankful I am to all the gods of all the levels of existence, that you and I met. How beyond all hope it was! I was getting queer, you know! yes, getting really funny in my head. My respect for my Dad never knew any bounds. I loved and venerated him from my childhood up. But to live day after day, my darling Lorlt, with the noblest enchanter in the Cosmos, yes! in the whole of Creation, is anything but a joke! It wasn't for a mate I longed, because my ignorance of sex and everything to do with sex was abysmal. I longed for someone, for anyone, of my own age, with whom I could exchange ideas and talk about everything and discuss the whole business of life on this crazy orb. O my darling! O my treasure, I can't tell you what a miracle of joy and relief it is to have got you! And just think what a chance it was, that day, that we ever met! Did you know, Lorlt darling, who I was when you saw me talking to that old badger by that knoll in the corner of that spinney? I've always had a fondness for badgers, and I think they have a fondness for me, though I may be priding myself *there* a bit too far; but I was warning that particular badger that his wife was endangering the lives of their offspring, four of them, and O such quaint little things, by letting them scuttle too near that old hollow pine; for there's a savage pair of owls who've got a nest in that tree, and there's no daintier treat for a baby owl of our lunar breed than an infant badger! Well, it was you, any way, my precious, who found *me,* and not I who found *you!* Aye! but I'll never forget how I felt when I saw you bending over me! For a moment I took you for that wonderful goddess Miss Os used to tell me about, who was born from sea-foam. It was Miss Os, not my father nor your father, who taught me about her and Hera and Pallas Athene."

“She taught me too!” murmured Lorlt.

“Did she really, my beautiful? Heavens! I never knew that!”

Lorlt’s only comment was to kiss him on the forehead and to whisper with a sigh as light and evasive as the wind through quaking grass: “You men miss as many things when you are infants as you do when you are grown-up!”

“Pardon me! I never expected—”

Such were the words with which the philosopher Om uttered his authentic surprise and his by no means altogether simulated pleasure at realizing the fulfilment of his quest so much sooner than he expected and by such an entirely unforeseen chance.

“Sit down, Master,” said Yoom politely.

“O yes, do, *do,* please, sit down with us for a little while, Mr. Om!” added Lorlt, making room for Om’s arched academic shoulders against the overshadowing rock.

“We were both wondering,” she hurriedly went on, evidently feeling that the only way to make sure of avoiding any clash between an old and a young thinker was to treat this mountainous ledge as if it were a reception-chamber and herself its queen, “whether Kant was right when he said we have to see everything in life through Time and Space?”

Om lifted up Ob a few inches from the mossy ground and then very slowly and gravely replied. “*Mo!* I think Kant was wrong. Time is an invention of the human race. But I think that every living creature in the world has to survey the Universe through the category of Space.”

“I must have a little more space,” cried Lorlt prettily, and in a tone of volatile and almost provocative levity, such as would have been impossible to her twelve hours ago, “if I’m to know what I think about this! Yoom doesn’t need any space for thinking! Yoom could think if I were pouring out tea from Miss Os's teapot into I don't know whose cup on a tray on his stomach — couldn't you, Yoom dear?" and she turned her laughing eyes to the young fellow she had met for the first time that very morning.

Had Woom-o-Rim been present at this scene, he would not have missed, as both Om and Yoom did, the almost melancholy quiescence into which Lorlt's girlish spirits sank, like a sidelong little rivulet sinking into the pool below, completely independent of the proper descent of the main waterfall.

"What I have come to feel," concluded the philosopher Om, "is that where all the metaphysicians of Earth have gone wrong is in the way they have over-emphasized the *human* element in our thinking and neglected the *cosmic*, or, if you prefer to put it in that gross way, the *material* element. What they dare, in their arrogant impertinence, to maintain, is that every properly adjusted thinking apparatus in every conceivable living creature must of necessity see the whole mystery of life through what in their insolence they presume to call the 'inescapable categories' of Time and Space! Now what I, a born thinker upon this Moon of ours, have to tell the world is that it is a monstrous insult to the Universe to put side by side, as if they were of equal importance, this wretched little doll's-house computation, of minutes and hours and days and weeks and months and years, which we the human race have invented and which we call *Time,* alongside of *SPACE*! Just think, my worthy friends," and here Om, who, ever since he referred to the "doll's-house calculus of minutes and hours", had been feeling blindly about with the brassy ferrule of the earnest-minded Ob, succeeded in striking quite hard with this solemn entity a stone which was balanced on the extreme edge of a steep slope, "just think," he went on, while the stone, which was not only a round stone, but was composed partly of reddish manganese and partly of glittering quartz, bounded ecstatically down the slope, "how small a part our fuss about this confounded Time of ours plays in what we do to change the Universe to the advantage of our race. The wiser any of us are, the more we confine our individual contribution to our race's future to a certain dull, regular, and resolute repetition of some monotonous but absolutely necessary daily labour.

"But the queer thing is, and I believe myself that our submissive acceptance of the element of dullness and repetitiveness and sameness in our daily work is a sign that we instinctively know it, the queer thing is that this very dullness gives us sometimes a strange and mysterious feeling that, by thus sharing the submissiveness of what we call the Inanimate, we are really in touch with the deepest of all the mysteries of creative Nature. Yes, I believe myself that we are, by enjoying this deep secret of the Inanimate, proving ourselves to be, and feeling ourselves to be, the authentic children of—" So wrapt in his subject was the philosopher Om that he did not notice with what intense interest the lively Lorlt and the thoughtful Yoom were watching the behaviour of that bouncing ball of manganese and quartz, " — of the ultimate mystery," he went on, "when we ourselves come to resemble those celestial substances that we call so casually Inanimates. For it will only be when we, feverish, fussy, fumbling, frisky, feckless, febrile, flamboyant, flurried, foolhardy, foppish, floundering, fugacious fol-di-lols of modern frippery, grow more like Inanimates that the Universe will begin really to develop after the fashion that the sages of the human race have from the beginning agreed will be the best for us all."

How far the philosopher Om's words could be justified on the ground that the faithful walking-stick Ob was nearly an "Inanimate," and that the stone ball of manganese and quartz which was now leaping among Oom's Milestones of Human History was clearly an Inanimate, no doubt depends on just the same caprice in individual opinion as that which decides whether the universe would lose or gain by a permanent and fruitful union of the young man Yoom with the young woman Lorlt. One individual opinion, at present more adverse than favourable to their union, was at that moment, in the person of young Rorlt, rapidly passing the rocky ledge of the two lovers. Nor was Rorlt's attitude to the matter modified, as may well be imagined, by the fact that the pyramidal shape of certain rocks past which he was now climbing caused him to think of Egypt and of how in that country, to which Joseph welcomed his father Jacob, the rulers derived both political and sensual satisfaction from being married to their beautiful sisters, who, as we gather from the story of Moses could be deeply moved by discovering a baby among bulrushes. But the sight of this leaping stone ball, gleaming with quartz and blushing with manganese, as it whirled past him interrupted Rorlt's advance. He could see that its descent was causing a spectacular confusion among a crowd of extraordinary objects whose appearance completely bewildered him. Finally he saw a figure as tall as a tall man; and at this sight he stopped and stared. The man's limbs seemed to him shining as if from some interior radiance that was absolutely superhuman! The man had a kind of blanket over one of his shoulders, but his legs and arms as Rorlt watched him bend down to catch the round stone as it rushed towards him, gleamed with a lustre that reduced the glitter of the stone's quartz to a pallid whiteness. Rorlt saw him catch the stone with athletic naturalness, while, as he did so, the woollen blanket slipped from one of his shoulders and displayed the Herculean quality of his chest and biceps.

Once in possession of the stone, this shining athlete, wrapt in nothing but his woollen mantle, straightened his shoulders and looked round him at the extraordinary crowd of vividly self-conscious beings who were now jostling against him — and they were jostling rather threateningly, though only a few among them reached as high as his belt.

But the man's attention had now been caught by this sudden appearance of young Rorlt, who was ascending towards him very rapidly, though not quite as fast as the quartz-stone had descended upon him. Holding the stone in his right hand he rose to his full height and settled his feet as firmly as he could on the mossy ground between antique granite slabs intermixed with crumbling masonry and long-dead ivy. When Rorlt reached the place where the man stood he stopped dead and turned himself into a stone; but not into a rolling stone. What he was now was a standing stone, or it might be better to say into one of two gate-posts, whose partner or twin-post had not yet been erected or even perhaps has been carried away. Poor Rorlt, that is pretty well what he felt as he stood there, doing his best not to show the faintest fear of this shining Woom-o-Rim, who still remained perfectly silent clutching in his spectacular fashion that dancing ball, half-dazzlement and half a dirty bloodiness; for the only exciting thing Rorlt could think of to harden the muscles both of his mind and of his arm was, once more, how beautiful Lorlt had looked when she cried out, "I want a lover!"

But what was his task now and his duty now and the whole purpose of this wild climb now, if not to separate her from a lover? One thing only did give him at that miserable moment a little comfort and that came from the unconquerable personality of Blob. He moved this powerful being till its brow rested on a lovely little bed of soft moss; and as he did so the proverb "a rolling stone gathers no moss" slipped into his head, just as if tossed there out of the stone Woom-o-Rim was clutching, with the evident intention, so Rorlt felt, of cracking his skull with it. An interesting question to put to the philosopher Om would have been how far, at a moment such as this, when two different skulls, whether normal or abnormal, whether sub-human or super-human, confront each other with what would naturally be hostile intentions, there is a definite interchange of thought between them?

And in this case what would be the nature of such an interchange? What would the thoughts of these opposing skulls, if they could have been drawn or painted, have looked like? Woom-o-Rim would no doubt have insisted that thought resembled a round orb, the very replica of his mother the Moon; but the painter would probably have soon detected that like Hercules in action, he could only think of blows, not caring whom he was fighting or what the fight was about. Our psychological painters would very likely have seen Rorlt's thought as a fully-armed baby with helmet, shield, plume, and spear, to whom Woom-o-Rim would have seemed like the giant Atlas who had been punished by being given the task of holding up the sky. Twice had Rorlt's left hand joined his right hand on the handle of Blob, and twice had Woom-o-Rim lifted the fist containing the stone till it was on a level with Rorlt's head, when there occurred a startling impingement on this statuesque pause before battle. The two characteristic weapons of the most formidable ladies in crafty old Oom's sub-lunar collection of historical milestones — namely, the great iron nail of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite and the piercing spear-head of Boadicea, the Queen of the Iceni — now attacked Woom-o-Rim from the rear so fiercely that Rorlt, without thinking what he was doing, but automatically taking the masculine side in what seemed almost like a sex battle, began swinging Blob's great body up and down in front of his potential antagonist to protect him from that horribly sharp nail and from that piercing spear-head. Had it been the formidable heroines themselves whose weapons these were, the swinging terror of the tremendous Blob would doubtless have been effective. But Jael's nail, still coated in the immemorial rust of the life-blood of that great warrior Sisera, leaped lightly and easily over the great club as it swung to and fro, while Boadicea's spear-head darted first over, and then under, and then round that same sweeping monster. The expression on the head of the nail was so vindictive, and the flashing eye of the spear-head so formidable, that their united attack upon Woom-o-Rim not only put an end to the imminent battle between this Son of the Moon and our young friend Rorlt but united them in an unexpressed confederacy.

It was, however, only too characteristic of the nature of the Universe to which we all of us belong that the simple fact of Rorlt's taking the side of the Son of the Moon roused all the rest of Oom's Collection of the Living Turnstiles to join in the attack. So, to speak in playground language, it became forthwith nine to two.

"Across their shins! Across their shins!" yelled the sandal of Mahommed, giving Rorlt such a swipe that he nearly howled.

"Take that! Take that!" shrieked Phien, the Toe-Bone from China, giving Woom-o-Rim such a kick that the Moon-Man staggered and all but fell headlong.

"Crush their feet! Crush their feet!" cried the Heel of Achilles, descending with all his weight, which was like that of a cannon-ball of solid lead, upon the right instep of Woom-o-Rim.

"Into his belly with you! Into his pretty little silver belly!" cried the shell picked up by King Canute on the East-Anglian coast. And with his breath quite taken away by this ferocious attack Woom-o-Rim staggered about, reeling and groaning, like a tall lighthouse in a thunderstorm.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" twanged Nero's Fiddle-string. "When we've got the sods on the ground we'll scoop out their eyes — and — and — and—"

"And eat them on toast!" added Alfred's Crust, scraping the dirt with one ef his burnt elbows from a piece of flint.

"You two men have no wives," cried the grating, husky, broken, hoarse, cavernous voice of the rocky fragment from the Ten Commandments given to Moses by Jehovah, a fragment which had been chipped off from "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and which only retained a couple of wretchedly cracked and mutilated syllables from these two final words, syllables that in their present state could easily have been taken as a command to do the very thing they forbade, "so you must be wanting to commit adultery with other men's wives; so *take that*, you shining legs! *Take that*, you well-covered thighs! You think we don't know your adulterous thoughts, but we do, we do — so take *that* and *that* and *that*! We'll larn ye to be like ye be!"

Long before poor old Blob's massive head could batter this degenerate frame of Sinai rubble into any sort of discretion, both the dazzling legs of Woom-o-Rim and the discreetly covered thighs of Rorlt were so bruised and bloody that together they both swung round, exchanged a glance that clearly said: "The best thing that grown-up sensible fellows like you and me can do is clear out of this damned infant-school!" and began to ascend the slope, while the round stone that had come so near to marking a milestone in lunar history nearly slipped from Woom-o-Rim's fingers, and nearly rolled down towards Rockabed Lake. In a second the whole Collection of Terrestrial Turning-Points was at their heels. The Phien-Toe-Bone which in its youth had kicked the footstool of Confucius from beneath the master's foot came hopping like a drunken toad round the silvery bare ankles of the Son of the Moon.

"If you don't clear off, you bloody little bounder," cried Woom-o-Rim furiously, "I'll squeeze you between my hands like a wet rag, and throw what's left of you into the Pit of Babberok Kumph!"

At this the Phien-Toe-Bone thinking to itself "my home is not here; my home is in China"; became absolutely still, and leant against a rock like a wounded wombat. A litany of silence now ascended into the listening air and all their voices sank down and down into the very abyss.

“Who the hell,” whispered Rorlt in his late antagonist’s shining ear, “is Babberok Kumph? Your bringing him in has scared them all still.”

“O that’s easy to explain, my boy,” said Woom-o’- Rim with indescribable satisfaction; for to have the son of the Master of Zed, the direct descendant of Yarlt the Tree-Lover, coming to him with such a simple question, was a real triumph; and it healed a hundred vanity-sores in his touchy soul.

“You must remember that your ancestor Yorlt the Tree-Lover was not the first Lord of our Lunar shores. Oom, the father of the young man Yoom, who has just carried off your sister, was here before Yorlt. No, your ancestor Yorlt was not the first Lord of the Moon. I speak, of course, of the Moon’s ruler, not of my Mother the Moon herself, nor of myself her only child. We two, of course, are as completely outside these invasions and retreats as the judge is outside the legal arguments of the lawyers.”

Woom-o’-Rim paused and looked round. By this time it had become clear to Rorlt that whoever this mysterious Babberok Kumph might be, Woom-o’-Rim’s threat to throw Phien-Toe-Bone out of the Lunar World into the abyss of Babberok Kumph had had a quelling and silencing effect upon them all. But Woom-o’-Rim was now going on with his explanation and Rorlt was listening intently to every word.

“Babberok Kumph,” he was saying, “was the Lord of what we Lunar natives have come to call the Kingdom of Zed long before your ancestor York came upon the scene at all. I can see that these little devils” — and he made such a sweeping gesture with his right hand that the fingers which had been holding the ball of quartz and manganese dropped this object, which at once began bounding like a mad kangaroo in and out of the eleven Terrestrial Turnstiles, creating a greater confusion among these mobile milestones than they had known since they first set out on this crusade—

“know very well what I am talking about; and that’s why they’re scared into silence — for the truth is that this Babberok Kumph kept a pit in his garden — I think it must have been near where your father buried your mother a few days ago — a pit that descended not only through the substance of our orb but through the whole aerial atmosphere surrounding both the Moon and the Earth. Probably, in real truth, once clear of all planetary obstruction, this deep hole simply opened out into empty space; but as you can well imagine, the popular notion was spread abroad that it descended into Tartarus, or even into the Sheol or Hell of the Scribes of Israel, concerning which all manner of terrifying rumours have reached us, probably from the souls of dreaming rabbis in Jerusalem, for, as I know well, the souls of dreamers have a power, that they themselves wot not of, to visit the places about which they are dreaming.”

Even while the Shining One, flinging his woollen cloak dramatically round his shoulder, was emphasizing after his fashion, just as if he had been Mark Antony over the corpse of Caesar, the power of dreamers to leave their sleeping bodies, lo! and behold! with the tips of her fingers laid lightly on one of Rorlt’s bare wrists as he leaned on the handle of Blob, and close to his elbow was none other than Miss Os herself.

“Is it,” was the boy’s first thought, “Miss Os in the flesh, or is it the soul of Miss Os wandering about in her dreams?”

He knew it was this latter, just exactly what Woom-o’- Rim had been discoursing on, the moment he looked the vision at his elbow full in the face, and when it spoke to him his knowledge of its ethereal nature was fully conformed.

“Don’t let him have her. Take her away from him!” was what the soul of Miss Os repeated, just as if she were praying to Jehovah. Woom-o’-Rim, all ivory-white and if possible more silvery even than his Mother herself in her wildest ecstasy, was aware that he was no longer alone with Rorlt; but he could see nobody and he could hear nothing.

Rorlt felt shocked and troubled.

"I don't want to hurt her feelings," said he to himself. "She has as much right to love Lorlt as anyone else. But she has no right to want to stop her from falling in love! Of course she *can't* stop her. But she has no right to *want* to do it. How can I make her see that she has no right to *want* to do it?"

Rorlt did actually experience a certain throb of remorse when that delicate touch was removed from his wrist and that wild, troubled, unhappy face vanished from his side.

"I've driven her away!" he explained to Woom-o'- Rim. "It was the dreaming soul of Miss Os who can't bear to think of my sister having a lover. And yet, I tell you, O illustrious Son of the Moon, I heard her cry out 'I want a lover!' Yes, I heard her cry out like that when our father was burying our mother! Isn't there any way, O great Moon-born, of changing people's dreams when they dream really wicked dreams?"

"Has she gone back to her pillow now?" asked Woom-o'-Rim gently and considerately. It was clear that, like the youth he was addressing, he felt real sympathy for Miss Os.

Rorlt was silent. Yes, she must have gone back. He had dismissed her. He had sent that troubled spirit away. But wasn't there anything that could be done? He stared at the green moss under the Moon-born's bare feet and under his own leather sandals. Then he suddenly cried out: "What were those two birds that flew past just then? Did you see them, Moon-born, did you see them? What did you say they were? Did you say you knew them? Did you say they came from Noah's Ark?"

Without delay Woom-o'-Rim explained all that could be explained about the White Feather and the Raven's Feather; and repeated again his sympathy for the troubled sleep of Miss Os.

"I was wrong to feel so angry with her," thought Rorlt, "but it would have been hard not to feel as I did. To think of her deliberately stopping that love-affair, the only love-affair, as she must have very well known, possible for Lorlt in our Moon-World at the present time! Well, sister Lorlt, sister Lorlt, your old teacher was acting like Jezebel! But I *mustn't* think like that any more! Besides, after all, wasn't I myself thinking of the Pharaohs? It's Lorlt's being so beautiful that makes all the trouble." With this philosophical conclusion offered to the shining Son of the Moon as a farewell salute, our young friend hoisted Blob on his shoulder, swung round, and continued his climb upwards. Woom-o'-Rim followed his movements with exquisite nicety, arranging as he did so, his woollen cloak carefully over his left shoulder so as to leave his right arm entirely free. As soon as Rorlt was out of sight, Woom-o'-Rim looked round for some sort of weapon. Rorlt's Blob had made an ineradicable impression on his acquisitive nerves, and he kept waving his shining bare right arm in the air and imagining to himself first one and then another silvery, golden, brazen, leaden, iron, and even wooden weapon, three times heavier than Blob and big enough to crush a vast rock of quartz and manganese. But finding him alone now and to their childish intelligence unable to do more than wave his bare arm in the air, all the eleven Milestones of Mortal History began attacking him on every side. To attack a gleaming giant unable to do anything but wave his arms was a task exactly suited "to all and every one of them," as Miss Os used always to put it, as she prayed to Jehovah and Pallas Athene, who were her favourite divinities. Phien, the Chinese Toe-Bone, was particularly obstinate in his attack, kicking the right ankle of the

Son of the Moon with unremitting assiduity, and always exactly at the same spot. Next to him in the virtuosity of his calculated onslaught was the rusty but still sharp nail of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite — a nail that no longer needed a hammer to drive it in, but by means of the insatiable animosity projected into it by the heroic dame who originally wielded the hammer — this patriotic nail, who already long ago had cloven Sisera's skull into a couple of hollow parenchymatous cubes for the sands of the desert to dispose of, was able so doggedly to force its way into the instep of the foot whose ankle was already being assailed by the Phien-Toe-Bone, that whatever weapon the Shining One might eventually find for himself it would be a sadly limping Son of the Moon who would brandish it.

But the old Collector of the Turnstiles of human life had either completely forgotten, or had never heard a word about Miss Myfanwy Cellwair of Dorvil. So when her spirit suddenly appeared on the scene and rushing among the Son of the Moon's tormentors cried out— "Gis! Gis! Gis!" and, to be sure of being understood by the whole lot of them, followed that up with "Shoo! Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!" all the eleven Milestones fled terrified down the slope.

Meanwhile Rorlt was rapidly mounting towards the final ridge of the Mountains of the Moon.

"What shall we see, Blob old friend?" he murmured to his faithful weapon, "when at last we really look down from the Other Side?"

The answer Blob made to this almost desperate appeal was a very strange one; and it was an element in this strangeness that it was the very first time Blob had ever made the faintest attempt to exchange a thought with his young lord. The word which seemed at that moment to come from Blob was not a remarkable word nor a startling word nor a surprising word: it was purely and simply the word "Listen".

Was it because the wood out of which Blob had been made belonged to one of those Lunar trees that Rorlt's great ancestor York had loved as if they had been so many attractive girls, that this word "Listen," the first, and very likely the last he was destined to hear from his tremendous club, came with the force of a command to our young friend? At any rate he promptly obeyed it and did so to the letter. He sat down on the bole of a long dead rowan or mountain ash, and drawing Blob close to him between his legs, he leaned his chin on the rounded top of the club's handle, so that Blob could press his forehead as deeply as he liked into the damp ferns and mosses beneath. And resting thus, Rorlt did exactly as Blob had bade him. He listened. And slowly, very slowly and gradually there came a sound to his ears that was the strangest sound he had ever heard in his life.

It was a chorus of human voices. They were women's voices. Yet in some weird way they were different from the voices of women. It was as though the voices themselves had become personalities; yes! had become personalities quite as interesting, if not more interesting, than any conceivable persons to whom they could belong. And then as he and Blob sat there together the procession of voices took shape before them. Their shapes were certainly more feminine than masculine. But that may have been because the garments they wore were more feminine than masculine. The procession moved in single file but it seemed literally unending. This may partly have been because it moved so slowly and because its wailings and chantings kept making use of the same tune.

And as Rorlt and Blob, seated on the stump of that little rowan-tree, watched them, Rorlt began to feel certain that as he hugged Blob and pressed his chin against his rounded handle that Blob himself was making an attempt to join in this weird tune. It certainly was a tune that made it very hard for anyone not to join. It was a tune that represented and contained some mysterious undertone of a solemn rhythmical dance; not a dance in the sense of any light or gay or airily tripping motion, but a dance in the sense of some rare ritualistic performance that was super-human as well as sub-human since it really did include the feelings, if they could so be called, of inanimate things together with the feelings, again if they could so be called, of the very elements themselves, yes! the feelings of earth, of fire, of air, of water, and also of that nameless something beyond and behind all these things, that forms the atmosphere, if so it can be named, through which mind communicates with mind, and soul, if there is such a thing as soul, with soul.

What Rorlt felt at this moment as he sat on that rowan-stump and hugged Blob was not that there was some invisible conductor behind the world, by the swing of whose baton the stars in their courses fought against cleverness and smartness and lively intelligence, and rolled on with patience and slowness and obstinacy in the everlasting see-saw of the old unchanging monotony of nature's diurnal course, but that there was some mysterious harmony in the souls of us all, in the souls of animals, vegetables and minerals, in the souls of water, air, earth, and fire, only, as Shakespeare says, "whilst this muddy venture of decay doth grossly close it in we cannot hear it" — yes, that weird procession he had just heard and seen, of forms that were indistinguishable from the shapes created in the mind by tragic music when it transcends all particular sorrow and goes beyond all personal grief and is full of a strange sadness that all nature feels, and feels in a manner that cannot be described, struck Rorlt just now in a very curious way. It struck him as a revelation of something, but of something that it was essential for him to pass by, to pass over, to shake off, to leave behind.

He rose quickly from his seat on that old rowan-stump and hoisted Blob upon his shoulder. For one second, as he was lifting his great club aloft he hesitated whether to put him on his left or on his right shoulder; but an instinct that sprang from every muscle and every fibre and every tendon in his whole body compelled him to select the left. When this decision had been made, however, he recognized its wisdom. He had chosen it by instinct; but he now realized that if Blob had been on his right shoulder there would have been no chance for him to use any other weapon. It would have to be a matter of one overwhelming and crushing blow or nothing at all. Whereas with Blob on his left shoulder, and some entirely different weapon in his right hand, he was ready to face the world. The world? Well, perhaps not quite as much as that! But the point of it all was that he did feel very strongly that he must keep his right arm free; free to use any sort of new weapon with which chance might suddenly and unexpectedly provide him and also free to use in climbing.

He was now climbing rapidly up the last slope of the Moon's final ridge. As he climbed he began picturing to himself the extraordinary summit he hoped to mount. He saw it as an overhanging cliff from the edge of which the whole vast emptiness of universal Space, as it was, beyond all the galaxies and all the nebulae and all the live stars and all the dead stars, everywhere in the past, everywhere now, and everywhere in the unending future. And as he pondered on all he might see from this ultimate ridge of the Moon, the thought suddenly came to him to wonder what it would feel like if he had been the only living creature in human shape left or dropped or born on the other side of the Moon, that side never beheld by any Lunar person or, as far as he knew, by any Stellar or Planetary or Terrestrial person. What *would* it be like, Rorlt asked himself, to have grown up into human consciousness alone on this other side of the Moon?

And then, quite suddenly, the youth stood still. And while he stood still, as unconscious of what he was doing as he was unconscious of what Blob was doing, he became aware that a very youthful girlish voice was calling to him. It was the voice of a young girl rather than of a child; and it was calling to him in the very tone he always imagined Lorlt using when his mind was full of the Pharaohs. Yes! The voice that called him was the voice of a girl of about his own age, a girl of about fifteen or sixteen; and she was calling to him from the other side of the very ridge which by this time was only a little distance above him! Her voice seemed to pass clear through the side of the slope he was ascending and to come from the corresponding slope on the further side.

The strange thing was that Blob, detached from his young master's arms, was now standing on his own smoothly rounded handle perfectly upright, as if the young girl's voice had suddenly endowed him with something approximating to a living soul. Blob had often seemed to Rorlt as a living person with a kind of consciousness all his own, but now, as the two of them stood on the earth-side slope of the Moon, listening to a girlish voice calling to them from the other side, it was as if Blob, magnetized by the sound, had suddenly attained a power of consciousness that actually surpassed what Rorlt possessed. It was as if Blob had become the master and Rorlt had become the club. It was indeed with a definite nod towards this same recent master of his and another equally definite nod towards the ground under their feet, that Blob now started hopping rapidly up the ascent; and the moment our young friend began striding after him, it was clear that the great club knew perfectly well what its new rôle in life was and fully intended to act it out to the limit. And as the flesh and blood servant now followed the wooden master, this latter found himself impelled to answer the cry he had heard by crying out as they climbed, “I'm coming! I'm coming! I'm coming!”

None of the great lunar sages could have described what Rorlt felt when, following the increasingly long and increasingly rapid hops of Blob, he arrived at the summit of the ridge and gazed around him and down beneath him. Everything that terrestrial mortals feel at certain moments, when they gaze up at what from the surface of their planet they love to call the Mountains of the Moon, was nothing to what this fortunate youth felt as he looked up at the sky above him and down at the descent beneath him. He felt as if he *were himself* a portion of all that he looked at, and yet he felt as if, though looking at himself as the sky and at himself as the body of the Moon he was all the same, only looking at *half himself*! Yes, he felt as if he were terribly, horribly fearfully divided in two! He was the Sky, but only half of the Sky! He was the body of the Moon, but only half of the body of the Moon! And the other half, the half with whom it was now the one imperative need of his life, of his being, of his body, of his soul to unite, was the girl whose voice he had heard and had answered! She was his completion. She redeemed him from insane loneliness. United with her he would be the whole Sky above and the whole Moon beneath. And at their union all the divided halves of all the divided things in the universe that still cried and wailed and wept to be united, like that procession of desperate ones he had watched float past him, would be united by the pure magic force of what he felt for the maid who was calling him.

Desperately he climbed on, passing within actual sight of the rock under which his sister and her lover Yoom were listening to the philosopher Om in a happy state of dreamy amorous exhaustion. The walking-stick Ob, being less preoccupied, failed not to notice the passionately climbing figure, and being a dutiful adherent of his manorial lord, he endeavoured to inform him of this new event by gently tapping his foot with his ferrule. Om looked up and saw and recognized Rorlt; but observing that the youth's gaze was fixed so intently on the summit of the ridge and that he was climbing so fast, and knowing that the three of them must be at any rate partially hidden by their rock he decided to make no sign. What it was that led him to make this decision the philosopher Om would have been reluctant to try to analyse even to himself. As most of the wisest among us mortals do, when Nature makes the sign, "Better let *that* go," the philosopher let it go.

Meanwhile the Dove's Feather and the Raven's Feather were following on a wind that suited them just as it suited our young Rorlt's upward climb; and as they floated together behind his head, their conversation was the most exciting they had ever had since they were merely portions of their parents' wings, during the great pre-historic Flood, inside Noah's Ark.

"But he was always boasting," said the Black Feather to the White Feather, "about being the only one on the Moon — except the soul of this weird mad woman from the Earth who leaves her sleeping body every night to visit her in some secret cave in our ultimate rampart — the only one, save that woman, who knows the truth about it all!"

"You're talking about this Woom-o'-Rim, are you?" whispered the White Feather.

"Of course I am," replied the Black Feather, "and I tell you, my sweet child, you've been completely fooled by this shiny braggart who swears his Father is Mars! I won't say how I know who his Father is. But I swear to you, my sweet, all that talk about being the son of Mars is pure snobbish bunkum! I don't believe the conceited sod knows who his father is any more than you or I do!"

"O but, O but, O but, Blackie of my heart, isn't it wicked of us, isn't it *dangerous* for us, to blaspheme in this way against our Mother, the Moon? Can't she hear us? How do you know she is not calling to us now and warning us to be very, very careful what we do? I did seem to hear a feminine voice on the wind just now: yes! just the sort of voice our mother the moon would have if she were keen on spanking somebody but wanted to pretend to be very loving so as to get hold of that naughty one and teach it a good lesson!"

"Do you really and truly, O blackest of all heavenly blacks," continued the White Feather, "believe it's possible that Woom-o'-Rim isn't the son of Mars at all?"

"Not only possible he isn't," answered the Raven's Feather, "but I believe it's certain he isn't! In the first place, my darling child, and most easily fooled of all delicious antediluvian Doves, don't 'ee realize that tiny though our old Mother the Moon is in comparison with the great Sun, who sees and hears everything, she has a magnetic power that he lacks and that all the Planets lack and that all the Stars lack? Don't 'ee realize, white core of my black heart, that our Moon is an absolutely unique being in the whole Multiverse?"

It was at that moment that some erratic wind, blowing from the ultimate ridge of that side of the Moon's face which neither the Earth nor the inhabitants of the Earth have ever seen, swept back the two antediluvian feathers down the slope whence they had followed our excited young climber; and all alone, his heart throbbing like a battle-drum, and the ideas in his head whirling round and round like distracted sea-gulls, he rushed up to the summit of the Ridge and down the slope on the other side and into the arms of her who was awaiting him.

The moment of their embrace was a moment that for each of them was at once a death in life and a life in death. He died in her arms and she died in his arms; and out of this instantaneous fusion of the dead body of a youth with the dead body of a maid a new being came into existence who was neither a new boy nor a new girl, but was a fresh expression of that *energeia akinesis,* or “energy without agitation,” that in the multiplicity of life’s experiences is what really makes for us the blessedness of the unknown future. There are in fact certain occurrences, happenings, occasions, encounters, events, which create, totally beyond the premonition of any human sage, a completely new life. But alas! Such is the cruel “Something that infects the world” that these supreme moments in the lives of lovers are so full of this ultimate life-sap which alone makes the world’s future possible, that they never happen without a mysterious ebbing away of this same life-sap in some other entity. This tragic necessity, entwined in the law of the spiral uprush, was now proved by what happened to Blob; for this heroic club, hitherto prepared to advance up and up and up, whether in the hands or out of the hands of his young master, now when he found himself laid on the ground, no! not even laid, dropped on the ground, knew only too well that the everlasting life-sap of the universe, inanimate block of wood though he was, had sunk down several degrees within him. He was on the extreme ridge when this happened and he now slid backwards, down the ascent up which they had come. He slid and slithered down tail-first with his beautiful and formidable head jolting against the stones and crunching through the roots and stumps and under-brush and mosses and ferns and lichens until he came to the exact place where the philosopher Om was still talking to the girl Lorlt and to her obsessed lover, Yoom the son of Oom. Here he must needs — such was the mischievous trick of Chance — collide with Ob, the careful and meticulous walking-stick of the philosopher Om, who was seriously perturbed when — thump — bang — bump — right close across him lay, at rest at last, the heavy body of Blob.

“Listen,” said the philosopher Om.

So solemnly did he utter this simple word that the lovely Lorlt shook off the warm embrace of Yoom from her slender waist, and Yoom himself clasped the lunar varieties of agitated fern-fronds and troubled herb-Robert buds and quivering little yellow potentillas and uneasy although still sturdy baby-steeples of self-heal, all of whom with their special lunar characteristics Miss Os alone of all school-teachers in the last five hundred years had adequately catalogued and enumerated; but they were all clutched nervously now in the long, excited, oblivious fingers of Lorlt's impassioned lover, as he obeyed Om and stared at Blob lying across the patient Ob.

"What none of you people realize," began Om calmly and earnestly, "is that our life on this planet of a planet, or satellite of a satellite, is a completely different thing from the lives of all these earth-dwellers whose culture and learning we have exploited to our own advantage ever since the days of Blabberok Kumph. *Their* systems of what they call 'religion' and 'morality' and 'politics' and 'economics' are based on what they call 'reason'; whereas *ours* are based on knowledge. *They* argue and dispute as to what is reasonable or unreasonable; until the opinion of some crazy tyrant, or of the stupid majority, finally decides what must be done. We just simply know, and act accordingly; and *that*, with us, is the end of it! And as to our *method* compared with theirs, *theirs* is all *machinery*, whereas *ours* is all *magnetism.*"

At this point Om stopped, and lifted Blob from where he lay with his whole weight across the middle of the discreet and well-mannered Ob; but Blob leapt up from between his hands and hurriedly began descending the hill in long energetic jumps. Suddenly he stopped, turned round, and then descended a few steps more. Here he stopped again, surveying the company very critically with his bulging head.

The philosopher Om nodded in a friendly and even propitiatory manner, and, picking up Ob, walked a few steps towards the great club, who was now regarding them all with an almost ironical bend, a little to the left, of his majestic top-knot. As if in obedience to an admonition which reached him through his fingers, the philosopher Om, in a clear, firm, rapid voice, with the flow of which, like a trickle of brown peat-stained water mingling with the transparent splash of a rocky fall, there blended at moments a certain obscure humour, began an exposition of this dramatic situation beyond the ridge, as the club had revealed it to the stick.

“And so the conclusion I have been driven to assume,” he announced, “as a result of what I have heard through my fingers from my stick is that for about fifteen years a young girl, who is the daughter of the Moon quite as certainly as this being about whom we have heard such rumours who calls himself Woom-o’-Rim is the son of the Moon, has lived quite alone from childhood to maidenhood on that side of our Lunar Ridge concerning which we all have come to feel a strange superstitious terror. Certain tales that have reached us from the earth, telling us how the souls of those who die in absolute despair in insane asylums are cured by the spirit of Aesculapius on the other side of this Ridge, have created among us an universal horror for that portion of our Lunar Mountains. Now I am not going to suggest to you, you lovely creature, dear daughter of the Master of Zed, nor to you, my gallant friend, and most wonderful son of the Mysterious Oom, that we are right or that we are wrong in our inherited and traditional terror of the other side of our sacred mountains. But this I will say: namely that in my considered opinion the wisest thing to do is to refuse to think about this troublesome and frightening problem at all. All we know is that for two thousand years the idea has been prevalent among us that it is better, wiser, safer, and more reverential towards all the unknown gods and all the unknown goddesses — and all the animals and reptiles and birds and fishes and all the unknown souls of rocks and stones and plants and trees that surround us as we go about the ordinary business of our lives — not to think or speak or talk to anybody about these things all our life long. Visitors from the earth would certainly cry out if they heard me talking like this: ‘But what about your own souls when you’re dead, and what about the souls of your best-loved ones?’ And shall I tell you what I would answer?”

There was a real startled moment of alert attention at this point, and both Yoom and Lorlt rose to their feet. But this moment of attention was dissipated almost at once by a natural and instinctive desire to look round them and take in the whole expanse of nature, an expanse of both land and air, to which in their absorption in each other they had been for some while totally oblivious. Their attention was brought back by the words that now came from the philosopher Om.

“You ask me about your souls when you are dead. This is my answer, my friends. It all will be as your ideas and thoughts about it create it. There is not only one creator. There are as many creators as there are living creatures. Each creature creates. That is why the only sensible meaning of the word ‘universe’ is the particular collection of created worlds that surrounds each creature. We each have our own universe, so that in any philosophical sense the word ‘universe’ is nonsense. There is no such thing. There are only universes, and all these universes interlock and intertwine and melt into one another. When these earthly experimenters, about whom we hear such boastful and bragging accounts from their electric announcers, talk of seeing the world objectively and realistically they are seeing nothing but what can be reached by their telescopes and microscopes and X-ray-scalpel-scopes. The greatest of all philosophers, Immanuel Kant himself, was a fool to put *Time* on a level with *Space* as the ultimate categories of our consciousness. *Space* is the one and only category of every living creature’s consciousness. *Time* is purely a human invention, dependent on the tick-tick-tick of human pulses and the beat-beat-beat of human hearts.

What, I ask you, does a daddy-long-legs, what does a hedgehog, what does a toad or an eel or a water-rat or a house-sparrow know about *Time*? But every worm and midge and beetle knows the meaning of Space; and as for the Stars what is *Time* to them? But boundless Space is their natural home!"

The philosopher Om had in some queer way so realised his own identity in the discursive and paratactic expansiveness with which he talked about space that Lorlt and Yoom began instinctively clinging to each other, as if each was trying to prevent the other from being literally carried away by Om's panegyric on Space. And all this while it was not Om nor those he was addressing who had discovered the one single inhabitant of the other side of the Moon. It was our simple-minded friend Rorlt who had made this discovery, not of an unhappy mad girl cured by Aesculapius, but of a real living girl; and it is probable that never among all the suns and stars, and never among all the planets and satellites of the suns and stars, has such another girl as Helia ever been born. It wasn't one thing about her; it was everything about her that made this true. Where Helia was concerned there was nothing that was not unique.

Hearers of her story will naturally arrange these exceptional aspects of her life in the order of their own preferences. The present chronicler would place at the top of them all the fact that she brought herself up in complete loneliness. This was due to the fact that her Mother the Moon kept her birth so secret that the gigantic, shining-limbed Woom-o'-Rim, was fooled into believing that he was her only child. The one single consciousness in heaven and earth that was aware of her existence except her parents was the wandering soul, if it is permissible to talk of the "soul" of a person fast asleep in a bed, of Myfanwy Cellwair and it was this "soul," or, if you prefer to call it so, the spirit, of this disembodied dreamer, who in obedience to the Moon-Mother's daily implorings "brought up," as we call it, this lonely cosmic waif.

The mother always implored this moon-struck dreamer-friend of hers, Myfanwy Cellwair, to make it quite clear to the child that her father was none other than the great burning Sun himself; and on one occasion when the child begged for more details as to what happened between male and female so as to produce offspring, and the dreamer, probably less reticent in her sleep than she would have been had she been awake, indicated vaguely how a maid lost her maidenhead, the little Helia laughed gaily, shook her curls mischievously, and murmured, "Naughty! naughty!"

It was when the child began to get older, and her dreamer-friend's visits began to get less frequent, that her real loneliness set in. Finally this loneliness began to affect her mood towards the whole of her life. She still felt delicious thrills of happiness when, healthily tired by running a long distance up and down a path made by her own feet and none others, she lay down to sleep in a secluded little cave to the interior of which she had given quite a home-like air of comfort and security; but there were periods when a mysterious kind of homesickness seized her and she had long pitiful fits of crying, about which she couldn't tell anybody or find anybody to listen while she explained as sometimes the proudest and most reserved of young girls want to do, the deep and subtle reasons for her tears.

One warm evening there happened an event in Helia's life which she never forgot.

She had made friends with an extremely aged ash-tree whom long years, for it was nearly five-hundred summers old, had reduced to an emasculated stump. But it put forth leaves in early summer from a single branch. Upon this old stump she used to sit, for it was half-covered with soft moss, and with one bare arm round its small living branch, she was wont to await, when there was no wind to chill her bones, the appearance of the Evening Star.

With this celestial being she very quickly discovered that her old friend the ash-stump had formed in the course of years a peculiar friendship. They had pet names for each other. The Evening Star called the stump “Tirry” and the stump called the Evening Star “Ditty.” As for this little half-naked girl who used to recline against the stump, with her arm round its budding branch, they insisted on calling her Lampetiee, for they both seemed to have known in the past some half-sister of hers, of whom she had never heard, who bore that luminous appellation. “Isn’t there anyone in all Space and among all the stars, Tirry, old friend,” she would ask the stump, cuddling against it and letting her curls get entangled with its budding twigs, “who would like to have me for his bride or his paramour or his — whatever you call the sort of girl men like to live with but don’t want to marry?”

The reply that came from Tirry was a startling one, and it really rather staggered our girlish solitary.

“Wait Lampetiee! Wait, little girl! Wait a minute! What do we see coming straight down to us, eh, eh, little girlie?”

Helia pulled herself up into a rather straight position, and removing her bare arms from the branch clasped her hands between her knees. And she beheld, descending straight towards her out of the hushed, windless, darkening sky, a great eagle with wide-stretched wings.

“Aietos! Aietos!” cried the ash-stump, and caused its solitary branch to bow its little shoot of green leaves in lowly obeisance, while the great bird reached the ground and spread out its tremendous wings on the ground and lowered its terrifying beak before the bare feet of the frightened little girl.

“Aietos offers,” whispered the aged stump, “to take you to the Evening Star, if you care to ride on his back.”

Not one word did Helia speak in reply to him. Not one glance did she spare for the eagle. Leaping to her feet, she never stopped running till she sank down exhausted, but safe and alone, in her familiar cave.

It was always in the afternoons when she had finished adorning with flowers the little stone-crevices in this homely, self-arranged, self-ordered, self-cleaned and selfdecorated shelter, that she was accustomed to enjoy her happiest moments. Lying in the sunshine, she would remove one by one the scanty garments that she had learnt by long and patient practice to weave for herself out of dead fern-stalks, dried reeds, and long grasses, in order to keep herself warm in frosty and windy weather, and as she felt the sun upon her bare flesh and caressed her virginal body with her own hands, imagining and imagining and imagining that they were the amorous hands of another, she would go on inventing the looks and the words and the caresses of this self-created "other" till he almost existed.

It was on just such an afternoon as this in the warm sunshine near the crest of the Great Ridge that the magical event occurred that changed Helia's whole life.

She suddenly realized that she was lying close beside a little hollow opening in the rocky slope. Twisting her body round and stretching out on her face she set herself to gaze into this diminutive tunnel; and as she did so her destiny found her. She could just see, ascending the mountain from the other side, the figure of Rorlt.

So vivid, so intense, and yet so imaginative, had been her feelings, as day after day, month after month, year after year, she had waited — she, the daughter of the Moon and the Sun — that as she called out to him her voice seemed to have the power of piercing through every possible obstacle that separated her from the youth she wanted. But, after calling, she couldn't wait for a second at the entrance to that tiny tunnel which had been made by a minute stream of water. She jumped up and rushed straight on *her* side of the ridge, towards that same summit to which he, on *his* side of the ridge, was advancing at top speed.

As she moved, her thoughts resembled those that come to us, we are told, when we are drowning. They bore her, these thoughts, like eagles carrying their live prey so swiftly through the air that such victims are too hypnotized by speed to suffer at all.

The speed with which these visions of her whole life pursued one another was far greater than thoughts usually move. But this did not mean at all that these memories were blurred. They were exquisitely, terribly, divinely clear! Through them all ran the same vision of herself, absolutely alone, on the outer slope of the Mountains of the Moon, and surrounded by boundless, infinite Space. As these visions came near the present moment they grew more and more vivid, more and more challenging, more and more intimate, more and more compelling. And then there came at last one single beat of some magnetic pulse in the body of the Moon that compelled her to raise her head from the slippery rocks and ivy-roots and bracken-fronds and the tufts of prickly yellow gorse among which she was so rapidly and so desperately climbing, climbing up, up, up, but always unwilling — and this shows the depths of the instinctive virginal shyness beneath her rapturous mood — to allow her mind to rest for a single second upon the object of her desperate climb. But there at last he was, only a leap above her, and they were in each others’ arms.

Romer Mowl and Other Stories (1974)

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Romer Mowl

'THE WORLD IS less fixed-up', said the great Nerve Specialist Doctor Windlas co his two old friends Major Shales and Marcus Fittleworth, as they sat late one night in the doctor's house in Cavendish Square, 'the world is less fixed up and life is more surprising than either of you two men realize.'

'Hey diddle diddle! Gammon and Spinach!' growled the Major. 'There has never yet been and never will be any real communication between this world and what you call the other world. Here we are and here we must live our life. Please God it may be an honourable one. There is nothing else and there never will be anything else.'

The Major stroked his long white moustache as though it had been one handle of a sword and shot a glance out of his fierce blue eyes towards the Doctor as straight as a bullet-shot. The Nerve Specialist glanced at Marcus Fittleworth, that gentleman and scholar recently appointed Cameo Keeper at the Knightsbridge Museum, who had begun to look indescribably embarrassed. Nothing agitated him so much as these occasional explosions between his friends.

'Everyone,' said he at length, seeing that the Doctor and the Soldier had relapsed into a combative silence, 'everyone if you only knew it, has his peculiar inborn form of scepticism: it is congenital atrophy. I myself for instance have a more serious limitation than either of you: you Windlas can't see the value of Military Discipline and you Shales can't see the value of Ghosts — I can't for my part see the value of Love!'

The Cameo Keeper’s two friends looked at him half incredulous and half bored. They evidently regarded the interruption as both irrelevant and fantastic.

‘I’m not jesting,’ continued Fittleworth. ‘The matter is by no means one to be treated lightly. It is, I can assure you, a serious thing for a man of forty to have to confess that he has never experienced the irreverently talked of passion of Love!’

‘Talked of!’ exclaimed the Doctor and Soldier with one voice.

‘Of course, I know we all have animal appetites,’ went on the Antiquary rather peevishly, ‘and, I do not deny the power of Affection: in fact in a sense I do not deny Love. All I assert is that as far as my own personal experience goes what is called by the famous name is only a mixture of Desire and Affection.’

‘You doubt in fact,’ laughed the doctor, ‘what we call The Grand Passion.’

‘Precisely so,’ returned Marcus. ‘In my humble opinion there is no such thing!’

‘Where are you going tomorrow for your holiday this year Fittleworth?’ asked the Major grown suspicious of the trend of the conversation.

‘No distance,’ rejoined the Antiquary. ‘I cannot afford it. I am thinking of running down to the South Coast for a short time. There’s a little place called Sanderton they tell me, near Barsmeet Junction.’

‘Sanderton! Did you say Sanderton?’ interrupted the Doctor. ‘What an extraordinary thing that you should think of going to Sanderton!’

‘Why so?’ asked Marcus.

‘Do you believe,’ said Windlas turning to the Major, ‘that places, like people, have their own peculiar souls?’

‘Most certainly not,’ replied the soldier severely.

‘Because’, the Doctor went on, ‘this little place Sanderton has the most evil soul of any place I have ever been in. I know it well — I have good reason to know it. It’s not far from Brighton.’

‘You interest me extremely,’ said Fittleworth. ‘You make me fancy my journey tomorrow will likely prove more exciting than I expected for, with submission to the Major, I think certain places have unmistakably souls of their own. What on earth’s the matter Doctor?’

Dr. Windlas was plunged in a profound reverie, so profound that for the moment he seemed to forget their existence. Suddenly, with an effort, he recovered himself.

‘I think I shall tell you two a little tale,’ he said.

‘There are some things that ought not to be left buried like corpses in a single brain: even a Doctor of Nerves,’ he added with a smile, ‘sometimes needs the confessional. No! sit down Major, this isn’t a ghost story.’

His friends composed themselves to listen and the Specialist continued.

‘Three years ago I was summoned to attend a patient at Brighton. I went there without delay and found the man dying. There was nothing strange in that. I have seen death in a hundred different forms. But a death like this death I have never seen; and I tell you, my friends, if I saw another I should give up my profession.

I found the man fully dressed on a horse-hair sofa in an out of the way lodging house somewhere in Queen’s Road. He was a man of a large unwieldy size, his face was bloated and ruddy, so ruddy indeed that it gave one the impression that the blood might at any moment ooze through the pores of the skin. He appeared, if I may say so, unhealthily full of blood — blood not his own — like some horribly-gorged human Leech. But his eyes! — it is impossible to describe to you my dear friends the look in this man’s eyes. Baffled yet insatiable Desire seemed to burn and smoulder in them like death-fires in a lime pit. When I arrived he was hardly conscious: indeed he ought according to medical science to have been dead some days before but the soul in him (or demon — God knows which!) seemed difficult to dislodge. He knew who I was and as soon as we were alone he began pouring out a long incoherent appeal to me to prolong his life if it was even only for a day. “I must live, I must live,” he babbled. “If you don’t let me live” — he seemed to be addressing his Creator rather than me— “it will be the worse for many of your darlings — I shall have them alive or dead!” He went howling on in this manner glaring at me with his horrible eyes and every now and then feebly trying to lift his swollen hands from the edge of the sofa. Then he became so inarticulate that I judged it better to leave him for a while.

Outside his room I entered into conversation with his wife, a poor faded American lady who has since returned to her own country. She confessed to me that in her opinion her husband had been cursed with the possession of the Evil Eye.

“He used to walk up and down the Beach,” she said, “at Brighton and other places not speaking to a soul but staring, staring, staring, with that dreadful look” — here the poor thing covered her face with her hands.

“Did he treat everybody like that?” I asked.

“O no,” she said, “only children and most of all little girls. Once, when we were staying in the country, a little girl we knew died and the stupid people put it down to my husband’s way of staring at her — but it couldn’t have been that. O Doctor, say it couldn’t have been that!” And the unhappy woman burst into tears.

I did what I could to comfort her and returned to my patient. My God! what a sight met my eyes. The man had actually risen up upon his feet. How he had done it I knew not for his lower limbs were already cold. He was standing with his back to the door holding in his hands a looking glass. I stole up behind him and looked into the glass he held — and What I saw in that glass may I have the power of forgetting before I come to die! I cannot by any description make you realize it. I can only say I was aware of something mirrored in there the like of which if I saw it again would end my doctor's career for good and all. It was not Human, what I saw. There was a Forehead of wrinkles and scabs, there were scaly cavernous Holes — I will not call them Eyes — and there was a mouth like the mouth of a Pit. I saw also on the edge of the mirror what seemed like the shadow of enormous Paws closing and unclosing.

But if what I saw upset even my nerves of steel its effect upon my Patient was ghastly. Still clutching the glass, he reeled and staggered, then fell heavily on the couch, and even as he fell I caught sight of his face. It was livid with terror. He tried to raise himself again, to utter articulate speech, but the death rattle was on him and in another moment his head had fallen back — he was stone-dead. I picked up the glass and looked into it. Nothing but only my own troubled visage appeared there now. I raised the hands of the corpse and let them fall across its breast. Then I went out to write the death-certificate.'

Dr. Windlas paused and glanced at his two friends. The Major looked sad and uneasy. Fittleworth's eyes shone with dramatic interest.

'What you saw was the Man's soul,' cried he. 'I have often thought that if the Souls of certain men were to appear they would appear like carnivorous beasts.'

'God have mercy on us all,' sighed the Major. 'We are all of us most miserable sinners!'

'I can imagine some,' went on the Cameo-keeper meditatively, 'to resemble vampire-bats with webby flapping wings, others no doubt would appear like devil-fish with adhesive suckers.’

The Major rose to his feet. ‘You must excuse me, gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I really can’t stand any more of this.’ He strode towards the door. ‘God created Man in His Own Image, but man created devils,’ they heard him muttering to himself as he went downstairs.

‘Don’t go after him,’ said the Doctor. ‘He’ll be all right tomorrow, he’s a noble old fellow. You’ve heard, of course, how he has given up every penny of his income to his sisters. He lives by doing dog’s work in a newspaper office. Ah! my friend Marcus, that old soldier is an honour to the human race. We must humour goodness Marcus, we must humour goodness!’

Fittleworth did not reply, his mind still ran on the doctor’s narration. ‘Sanderton is near Brighton you said?’

‘The man was buried there,’ answered the other. ‘His name was Romer Mowl. You’ll easily find his tombstone if you look for it. It will be a pleasant little excitement for you on your holiday when you’ve nothing else to do, eh my friend?’

That very next day, early in the afternoon, Fittleworth stepped out of his train on to the platform at Barsmeet. He gave up his ticket and taking his bag in his hand looked up the long straight road that led to Sanderton Village and the sea. It was a dark windy day. White dust whirled in eddies along the road; huge racks of sombre clouds lay piled up on the horizon and the heavy-foliaged trees rocked and swayed in the wind. The Cameo-keeper hesitated. An unaccountable shiver passed through his body. He swung himself through the little kissing-gate and stood surveying the long perspective of the road in front of him. Then he looked round and his eye caught the words ‘Apartments to let’ in the window of the pleasant new villa built for the Barsmeet station-master. TH stay where I am,’ he thought and went up the little phlox bordered pathway.

In an hour’s time he felt much cheered. His lodging was safely secured — the pleasant fumes of a delicate cup of tea, mantling in his head, poured out by the Station-master’s wife — and as yet no rain had fallen.

Once more he found himself on the road and this time he boldly set forth seawards. He walked steadily; on for about a mile and a half. There was a stretch of grass on either side of the road and deep ditches skirted the grass overgrown with loose-strife and willow-herb. Across the low hedges he could see nothing but flat water-meadows dotted here and there by poplar-trees that now were tossing in the wind. At last he came to a white-washed bridge over which the road raised itself in a little artificial hill. This bridge crossed a canal full of tall glaucous reeds which gave forth he fancied, as he leant over the parapet, a peculiarly desolate sigh. But another sound made him look up. Ah! That long drawn husky throated roar like the hiss of a monstrous world snake. Well he knew it — The Sea! The Sea! From the slight elevation of this bridge he was able to catch a glimpse of it, of a long dark blue line lying low on the edge of the landscape. Sanderton Village too he saw stretching away to the right of him, and he remarked that the road he followed curved round towards it, leaving no path that went straight on except an ancient green lane, overgrown with weeds. This appeared to lead directly to the sea-shore.

Along this lane therefore Fittleworth wandered, led by that irresistible instinct which compels us to reach the actual edge of the waves when once within hearing of their call. This call of the sea, heard by so many ears — human and inhuman — since this particular crest had been allotted its predestined limit, grew now upon the Scholar’s hearing louder and louder. That peculiar shore-odour of sea-weed and sun-dried shells and that yet more mysterious perfume that might be called the smell of the great deep truly filled his brain with indescribable reminiscences.

Within some hundred yards of the water's edge Marcus came upon a long double line of Tamarisk bushes about the height of a man's head and divided by a narrow lane. The strange secret-harbouring appearance of this singular avenue did its best to make yet more sinister the wind-ruffled scales of a threatening looking sea, as they showed themselves at intervals through its sombre cypress-coloured foliage. Marcus had just pushed his way through the first line of this green entrenchment and had found himself in a sort of enclosed dry ditch when he heard with almost alarming clearness the sound of a church-bell tolling.

He clambered back through the Tamarisk and perceived what he had not noticed before, that about half a mile from where he was and quite separate from the village which was considerably further off, rose the grey squat tower of a very small ancient church.

The church stood by itself in the middle of a rank expanse of reedy marshland surrounded only by its own forlorn grave-stones and quite destitute of the usual holy and tender charm associated with such a spot. The melancholy tolling that came and went on the gusty wind like the wail of some enormous sea-fowl mingled, as he listened, with the rise and fall of the encroaching tide.

Suddenly he became aware of a group of human figures, one white among many black, issuing from the church porch and moving slowly to a corner of the churchyard. As he might have guessed from the tolling of the bell a funeral was going forward. The same irresistible pull upon the will that had led Marcus to the verge of the sea now seemed to draw him to the verge of this other deeper abyss into which some poor creature was even now vanishing. He looked about him for a path. Broad ditches full of brackish water ran across the field at right angles to the Tamarisk and appeared uncrossed by any bridge. Impatient to reach the churchyard in time to view the solemn ritual before all was over, Marcus plunged back into that gloomy tunnel between the two ever-green embankments and set off at a rapid pace, with a slightly bowed head to avoid obtrusive branches, in the direction of Sanderton Church. Above him the wind rustled through the Tamarisks, beyond moaned the sea and at recurring intervals came clearer and clearer the tolling of the church bell.

All in a moment he stopped short. Before him, so close that had not his head been bent he would have stumbled over her, lay a little girl of about eleven years old sobbing piteously. Either she did not hear his approach or was too absorbed in her grief to care for anything. She neither moved nor ceased crying. He stooped over her and lifted her up. She was a delicate little pale creature with long straight silky dark hair.

‘What’s the matter, little maid?’ asked the Keeper of Cameos, cursing funerals and Tamarisk tunnels indiscriminately under his breath. ‘Have you lost your way? Has anyone frightened you? Are you hurt?’

The little maid shook her petticoats into order and stopped her tears. ‘They’re burying Katie over there in that churchyard’, she said.

‘Who’s Katie?’ he asked.

‘Katie’s my friend,’ she replied. ‘Katie Doddering’s her proper name. Mine’s Kid Catchway. They’re burying Katie near that horrid man — and I don’t want them to!’ Here her sobs broke out afresh.

‘What horrid man?’ he asked.

‘You be a stranger then,’ said she, ‘else you’d have heard,’ and in the pride of knowledge informing ignorance she began to grow more cheerful. ‘Yes,’ she went on, as we advanced hand in hand between the Tamarisks. ‘He died three years ago: his name’s Romer Mowl. He’d run after us, mother says, if he weren’t dead, fast as a witch-man. Some says he made Katie die though he’s dead ‘isself. Father says that’s blimed nonsense but mother says it’s a darned shame there aint no room in churchyard ‘cept near Old Romer. Do you think Old Romer *will* get her, now she’s dead and ee’s dead ‘isself?’

The Keeper of Cameos for the Borough of Knightsbridge looked at that moment anything but a Tower of Strength for a Maid to lean upon. In fact he looked as miserable and uncomfortable as man can well look — and what to reply to the girl’s extraordinary question he did not know for the life of him.

It must be admitted, however, he felt drawn in the most powerful manner to this beautiful little child he had stumbled on so strangely, and he resolved whatever else he did not to retreat from the adventure. They climbed at last together out of the Tamarisk ditch and found themselves at the very entrance of the churchyard. The Parson and Bearers were just coming forth followed by the Mourners. His little companion was seized upon by her parents and carried off.

‘Goodnight Kiddie, goodnight,’ he cried as he saw her turn several times to wave her hand to him.

Left alone in Sanderton churchyard Fittleworth felt creep over him a great wave of depression. He had never experienced such a feeling before. Melancholy gusts of wind kept sighing in the long grasses on the wall and making nettles on the graves sway to and fro as though dancing a ghostly saraband. Wisps of straw and carpenter’s shavings, brought here perhaps by accident along with the coffin, fluttered up and down the neglected pathway between the church and the tombs as though they also were seeking some place to rest in forever. Marcus felt as though nothing in the world would give him any pleasure again. All human ambitions, all human ideals, seemed to turn for him at that moment into flying chaff and sand.

Brooding this he approached the corner of the churchyard where the new made grave rose all chalky and raw out of the disturbed grass. A handful of wild flowers, mostly Scabious and Ragwort, cut with short stalks and tightly tied up with string, stood erect in a glass jar — just where, ah! so deep below! the little white hands of the dead girl lay folded on her childish breast. There was no tombstone and no) inscription. But side by side with the new grave was another, a larger mound, overgrown and neglected but not so old as most in the churchyard: at the head of this second grave stood an oblong granite stone with the words

ROMER MOWL

carved deeply upon it in Roman capitals.

The Keeper of Cameos stood quite still for several moments gazing at this sinister name. Then he kicked the granite stone viciously with his foot. ‘Ho! Ho! Ho!’ he muttered in an audible voice, ‘you are safe enough underground Mr. Romer! you are safe enough underground!’

But somehow or other he did not get the satisfaction he desired out of this display of feeling. It annoyed him to see those two graves side by side. The older one seemed almost to express a wicked satisfaction at welcoming the newcomer. Three great nettles that grew out from its side nodded impishly towards it as much as to say: ‘Ha! Ha! we knew you would soon be here!’

‘Well!’ thought Marcus to himself, ‘I suppose I ought to be returning to Barsmeet.’ But he found it difficult to tear himself away. The little mound of new-piled earth seemed to need protection. It was doubtless a silly fancy but he could not persuade himself to leave it alone with that sinister neighbour. Up and down, up and down he paced, angry with himself for his superstitious fancies, angry with the wind for tossing itself in such irritating gusts against him, and above all angry with that silent imperturbable granite tombstone that leered at him so mockingly.

At last a Power stronger even than Superstition drove poor dead Katie’s self appointed guardian from her side. The Keeper of Cameos had become aware that he was growing extremely hungry. ‘I’ll come again early tomorrow morning,’ he thought to himself. ‘Perhaps I shall meet little Kid Catchway and then help her pick some more flowers to place here.’ So without even a look behind him Katie’s solitary Protector left her, alone in the cold earth, and the wind as it wailed and sighed over the bending grasses of that place of tombs seemed like a voice repeating again and again in ghostly warning tones

ROMER MOWL!
ROMER MOWL!
ROMER MOWL!

The next day, not exactly early in the morning but still before noon, Marcus Fittleworth was again in Sanderton churchyard and there as he had expected he found Kid. That day and the next day, and the day after that, the middle-aged Scholar and the eleven year old child met and talked and played together. After her school time was done she would race down to the shore, where between the Tamarisks and the sea-bank, for he would love Tamarisk Bushes, he told her, to the end of his life, she would find him waiting for her: and there they would chat together and throw shining pebbles into the water and listen to the call of the great white sea gulls, until they almost felt as though they too could skim away down that far sunset path towards the isles of the blest.

And so as time went on he found himself, this master of Pagan Art, beginning to wonder whether he had been well advised in so strongly asserting that he would never know the magic of that Power nobler than Desire and more subtle than Affection which men call Love. He had certainly never felt for any human being what he had now come to feel for this little maiden. His heart leapt strangely within him when he heard her light foot-steps tripping down the shelving beach; and the sound of her voice touched even the stormiest twilights that fell upon the sea with tender and reassuring thoughts.

Nearly two weeks passed in this way. Then a thunderbolt fell into the quiet pool of Fittleworth's happiness. Another child in the village fell ill — mysteriously ill, and as she lay on what everybody thought was her death bed she begged piteously for Kid Catchway to come and sit with her. The Doctor assured Kid's parents that there was no medical reason why the poor child should not have her wish gratified and so Kid, who was three years younger than the dying girl, was brought without delay into her room.

Fittleworth was seriously uneasy. He did all he could to persuade the Doctor to forbid this visit. All day he wandered restlessly about and at length he resolved to follow his little friend himself and see with his own eyes how she endured her strange vigil.

It was just dark when Fittleworth, returning from his Barsmeet lodgings, entered the stricken child's home. She was an orphan, this unhappy one, and lived with an old uncle who at that moment sat drinking himself into peaceful obliviousness over the kitchen fire. The doctor had been called away to another patient and had left the unfortunate girl asleep. When Marcus opened the bedroom door, there sat Kid Catchway with white face and long drooping hair watching the countenance of the sleeping maid as though she herself had been the angel of death! Marcus saw at once that his little friend was nearly worn out from want of food and rest. She had been in that room nearly all day. He commanded her to run home quickly to her mother. He himself, he said, would watch till the Doctor returned. On no account was she to come back till the next day.

Unwilling, and a little peevish, the pale tired child dragged herself slowly downstairs, passed in safety the drunken uncle, fast asleep now in his chair, and let herself out into the night. Marcus Fittleworth was left alone.

Long did he sit there, watching sometimes the sleeper and sometimes the little oil lamp which flickered on a shelf over her head. The dying girl slept with her head fallen a little from the pillow across which her dark hair lay in a tangled mass. So thin had she become, poor child, that the outline of her fragile body and wasted limbs was hardly visible beneath the rough blankets under which she lay. The same troublesome west wind which had vexed and teased the place on the day of Fittleworth's arrival had not ceased to blow. Even now he could hear through the open casement the elm trees by the road rustling and chafing under its gusts. Then he noticed that the girl was growing restless. Her face flushed and she began to move uneasily from side to side. Suddenly she flung up her arms and clutched convulsively the iron rails at the head of her bed.

'Dear God! What was that?'

Every drop of blood in the Scholar's veins froze. A cold sweat stood out on his forehead.

'What is it? What is it? What is this that has come into the room?'

The Pulses' terrors in him cried out to one another and his limbs refused to obey his will. The girl had tossed the bed clothes from off her shoulders, and with her throat bare and her head convulsively thrown back lay shuddering like a scorched white moth. Then Marcus beheld distinctly the outline of two gigantic Paws laid upon her breast and above her face close, close to those quivering lips, a shapeless unutterable Image — an Image of wrinkles and scabs and scales of pestilential protrusions and yawning leprous cavities — such an Image as must have troubled the dreams of Herod the Tetrarch amid the olive gardens of Judæa and of Tiberius the Emperor amid the laurel groves of Capreæ.

Never from any human being has burst forth such a prayer for help as at that moment nearly cracked the heart of that paralyzed watcher.

‘Christ save her!’ he cried in a hoarse voice.

No sooner were the words uttered than as if by a stroke of magic all was changed. The wind outside ceased troubling the elm trees: the casement no longer swayed: a vile charnel-house smell that had filled the room vanished completely and in its place entered a sweet odour of Phloxes and Jasmine. This appalling Image of Terror, like that other on the Mount of Transfiguration, had known its Overcomer’s name and had fled murmuring to its own place.

Marcus rose and went to the girl’s side. Her stiffened fibres had relaxed; her poor convulsed hands rested peacefully on her breast; her limbs were quiet and still. As he stood over her she opened her eyes and seeing him there smiled up at him a smile of happy reassuring confidence. Then gently she closed them again and, still smiling, fell fast asleep. During this sleep her exhausted tide of life ebbed unconsciously away and when at midnight the Doctor returned he found Marcus Fittleworth dreaming in his chair and the maiden dead.

The days that followed were days of crushing anxiety for the Keeper of Cameos. The latest guest of Sanderton Churchyard was buried side by side with Katie. So now that granite tombstone, with its inscription in Roman Capitals, was able to overlook two small mounds of newly dug earth. Day after day little Kid Catchway brought her bunch of sweet field flowers wherewith to soothe, if it might be, the sleep of her gentle companions. And day after day Fittleworth watched his little friend with anxious scrutinizing solitude.

The time appointed by the museum authorities for his return came and passed. He wrote begging for an extension of his vacation. He was ready, he said, to pay for a substitute but could not in any event return yet. One day, as he was leaning over the white-washed bridge, halfway between Barsmeet and Sanderton, a boy riding a bicycle dismounted and called him by name. 'Be you Mr. Fittleworth?' said he. 'Mrs. Catchway wishes me to say sir as how her Kid's terrible sick this morning.'

To Fittleworth's eyes the smooth white parapets of that harmless bridge were after this moment the most detestable of all objects. He let the boy return. 'I will come,' he said, but he remained standing where he was like one sunk in a trance. Blind animal fury against this intolerable Romer Mowl raged within him.

Suddenly this resolution was taken: 'I don't care what comes of it,' he said to himself, 'I'll dig him up with my own hands and throw him into the sea.'

With fierce strides he reached his little friend's cottage. He found her to his huge relief not so very ill — so all might yet be well. The other two victims had been stricken for several weeks before they died: there was yet time. He implored Kid's mother on no account to leave her alone— 'not for a moment,' he said — and on his advice they moved the child's bed into her parents' sleeping room.

That night he secured by enormous bribery the aid of the Village Fool and towards twelve o'clock, when all the cottage lights were out, they began their unhallowed task. It was hard work, for the soil was chalky; but the Village Idiot had strong arms and the golden coins Marcus kept rattling in his pocket to cheer him on made! them stronger still. As for Fear, Fittleworth with his little friend's life at stake was ready to face the Devil, and the Idiot, though terrified if the Parson but looked at him, seemed to regard gaping dead men's graves with philosophical equanimity.

It must have been after some two hours' work that they struck at last upon the shell of the grave. Yes, there it was, a great wooden coffin with the hateful letters R.M. inscribed upon it on a brass plate. The wind had fallen but a wet sea-mist covered the stars and some distant farm dog's howl sounding across the marshes made an appropriate accompaniment to their grim task. 'We have spared the Judgement Day one trouble,' said Marcus to his companion, as they deposited their gruesome find on the chalk-strewn grass. The Idiot laughed aloud and tapped with his knuckles on the lid. 'Hullo there! Mister Romer Mowl, how be under there! How be?' Hurriedly they filled up the hole with the earth they had removed, their work being the less noticeable because of the two recent diggings in the same locality. Fittleworth heaved a profound sigh of relief when he thought of those two little dead maids freed from the neighbourhood of this accursed ghoul.

But more remained to be done. The Scholar gave the Idiot a stiff dram of Brandy from his flask and then with some difficulty they got the coffin balanced on the sexton's wheel barrow and set off, Marcus wheeling it and the Idiot supporting it, towards the sea shore. Had the great engraver Bewick witnessed this odd departure he would certainly have added yet another to his little Rabelaisian Vignettes of Grotesque Mortality!

Arrived at the shore they quickly trundled their grisly burden along the sea-bank until they came to where lay the fisherman's craft. Soon the misty waters of that sea, which luckily was windless, were disturbed by the oars of a small boat containing a Scholar, an Idiot and a Corpse! Fast against the coffin, which after all this handling began to disclose ominous signs of breaking up, Marcus bound by strong cords an enormous sackful of pebbles, enough to sink a dead whale. Then with one huge effort they tilted the thing over and let it fall with a dull splash into the darkness.

‘Ho! Ho! Ho!’ cried the Idiot. ‘ ‘Ee’ll be enough to turn the fishes’ stomachs!’ Fittleworth said nothing but not Christian himself when his Bundle rolled off him into the Pit was more full of joy than he.

The next day he found Kid better and the day following that she was better still. But she did not regain strength enough to leave the house and as time went on and her complete recovery was yet delayed Fittleworth’s old anxieties came back threefold upon him.

And worse than his old anxieties came back. One day as he sat watching in melancholy intentness the great white horses following each other in sad monotony to their dissolution on the beach, one unusually large wave, rolling in, flung an indescribable object, shaped indeed so like a human being entwined so foully with decased shells and sea tangle as to be beyond recognition, at his very feet.

> Romer Mowl had come back!
>
> Even the Sea could not hold him long.

At this point the Parson of Sanderton appeared upon the stage of events. With dignified decision he insisted upon re-burying this wave-belched relic with full ecclesiastical honours. Romer Mowl, it appeared, had in his day been officially Baptised and Confirmed and his connection with recent catastrophes in the village was pooh-poohed. Fittleworth himself narrowly escaped a police summons, the Idiot lost his position as assistant under-gardener and Kid Catchway’s mother was denounced as a nervous maniac.

This intrusion of the Parson upon the scene altered the situation in many ways. Kid’s parents were warned that it was most improper for their little daughter to make friends with ‘strangers from London’ and the result of this was that Fittleworth’s visits were not so warmly received as they had been.

Then it was that Kid Catchway began to grow worse. The Keeper of Cameos was desperate. Something must be done and something must be done at once. ‘Even now, now’, he kept repeating to himself, ‘“very now,” that monster is murdering her.’ An idea came to him. Sending a hurried note to Kid’s mother telling her he would return at once, Marcus one morning took his ticket for London and presented himself at his friend’s house in Cavendish Square.

Windlas heard him with absorbed interest. ‘This case is beyond my power,’ he said. ‘I deal with nerves, not with Ghosts.’ Fittleworth hung his head as though he had received sentence of death. ‘But don’t despair, my friend,’ continued the Doctor. ‘I am not the only Specialist in the world. What we want here is a Specialist in Supernatural Matters: in plain words a Saint.’

‘The Parson is against me,’ groaned Marcus.

‘Ah! my friend,’ said the Doctor, ‘I spoke of Saints, not Parsons! Have you yet to learn that it is your Amateur and not your Professional who does the difficult job. I myself have been called a charlatan! What we want in this matter is an unprofessional Saint. I should even prefer one who never went to church.’

The Keeper of Cameos sighed incredulously.

‘I have it!’ shouted Windlas. ‘We’ll get the Major. Depend upon it, the Major would do the job. He’s a pure-hearted man if ever there was one and I believe he’d exorcise the Devil himself back to Hell! Get him to go down with you. Only don’t tell him it’s a Ghost. Tell him it’s a vulgar scoundrel who wants a thrashing and you don’t feel equal to give it him.’

Three days after this conversation Marcus Fittleworth and Major Shales sat by the bedside of little Kid Catchway. It was about seven o'clock in the evening: the father and mother were taking their supper in the room below.

Rap! Rap! Rap!

'That's the Parson,' cried Kid's mother, and rose to let him in.

The Reverend Sapling, with a brusque salutation to the parents, strode upstairs. On seeing the two men he paused angrily.

'I cannot understand what you want here,' he began addressing the Scholar.

The Major was on his feet in a moment. 'Allow me, Sir, to escort you downstairs,' he said, making a bow such as the Chevalier Bayard might have given to a Cardinal of Rome, and plunging his formidable glance into him like a steel blade.

The Parson, stammering something about 'strangers from London,' retreated hurriedly. At the door the soldier handed him his card. 'Major Shales, V.C. C.B.' read the clergyman as he went down the street.

'Well!' thought Fittleworth to himself when his companion returned, 'Windlas's amateur Saint certainly knows how to get rid of his professional rival!'

Once again the two friends sat together in silence gazing at the little figure in the bed. Kid was asleep but not quietly asleep. Suddenly what Fittleworth dreaded most of all happened. The child flung up her arms while a shuddering tremor ran through her frame. The men became aware of another Presence in the room beside themselves. The air grew murky and thick. Palpable Corruption assailed their nostrils. A nameless horror hovered above the little convulsed figure on the bed.

What it was exactly that Major Charles James Shales, V.C. saw or felt that night nobody ever knew. He himself never referred to it again and none had the courage to interrogate him. All Marcus remembered was a vision of that formidable Soldier lifting the child bodily up on his left arm while with the right he struck as fiercely at the air as though he had had a sword in his hand and were at that moment cutting an opponent down. Whatever effect his physical blow may have had, assuredly the very Sword of the Lord blazed at that moment from the old man's eyes! Nor was the result ambiguous. An electric vibration filled the little room as though this terrific contest between Good and Evil had disturbed the balance of the elements themselves.

Then the soldier laid the child quietly back in bed.

'You can tell her mother she'll be all right after this, Fittleworth. She'll be running about tomorrow. Well-well-well! When I'm dead and buried, Sir, you'll only be fifty and she twenty-one. Come, my friend, a cigar and a little air wouldn't be a bad thing now, eh?'

The Spot on the Wall

THEY SAY THAT in all human brains there are certain local Blots or Spots which when allowed to grow and spread lead to serious disturbance and even sometimes to complete disarrangement of the mental balance. It is not often that these Spots on the Brain win for themselves an exterior and palpable existence or become, as philosophers would say, objectified. This, however, is exactly what happened in the strange story of the Brothers Hare. The Spot on the Brain in their case became a Spot upon the Wall.

When I think of these two unfortunate and harmless men and of their singular association with the famous ‘Salomé’ Dancer of last season I cannot help wondering if there is any possible truth in that fantastic Pythagorean theory of soul-transmigration which learned people call Metempsychosis. What else could have linked by so unexpected a fatality the fortunes of these two unimportant city clerks and that of the brilliant Cosmopolitan? Could it really be that in the days of Herod the King this proud modern beauty was none other than the daughter of Herod and our hawk-faced silent city clerk some ill starred Soldier of the Guard maddened by her deadly sweetness? Or are there, as the author of *Faust* liked to fancy, certain mysterious ‘elective affinities’ that bind with arbitrary choice and sway the most unlikely people in bonds together?

This at least is certain, that upon none of her wealthy and high placed adorers did the great Dancer have a more convulsive effect than upon this poor unconsidered pair. But then, you see, she also had an objectified Brain Spot.

John and James Hare lodged together in two rooms, two rickety beds in their bedroom had they and two rickety chairs in their sitting room: and they lived on the top floor of an old tobacconist's shop down somewhere among the river wharves, between Tower Bridge and the Island of Wapping. The life of the brothers was one of singular simplicity. Every morning they swallowed together what their facetious landlady was pleased to call a nice little single gentleman's 'Hot Breakfast.' Every morning they walked for the sake of exercise, or to save the bus-fare, from their river-side lodgings all the way through Billingsgate to the Monument. Every morning they took the underground train from the Monument Railway Station to the Bishopsgate, where was their employer's office. Here they served week in and week out the same task master, performing their modest duties with as much scrupulous anxiety as though the fate of an Empire and not merely of Stoke, Wump, Piffle and Co. Wholesale Spice Merchants, depended upon their labours.

But though in relation to the outside world the life of John and James Hare was so mediocre and commonplace, it could hardly be called by these invidious names when looked at in regard to their relation to one another. No! I fear it must be admitted (flesh and blood being flesh and blood and human nerves human nerves) that it is not either commonplace or mediocre for two brothers to be able to live together in as complete a harmony as these lived in. They sat side by side on two high stools in that particular corner of Mr Wump's spicy domain that happened to be hottest in summer and coldest in winter. They frequently dipped their pens into the same inkpot — a prodigious test of friendship! They took their midday dinner in the same dusty coloured chop-house halfway down London Wall Alley, and when the office was closed about six o'clock in the evening, who were happier among all London's liberated slaves than John and James Hare as they strolled through the slums of Shoreditch, that well trodden mud as golden by lamplight as by sunlight, towards their Mansion by the river of many ships.

Their conversation on such occasions rose to quite an exciting level. They spoke of the bright flower-shops they passed on their glorified dingy road and of how pleasant it would be — an old dream of theirs! — when they had saved up enough money to retire and live ‘Down in the Country’ — further even from town than Tooting Cemetery, their favourite Sunday jaunt. Then they would criticize in their innocent way the appearance of the many lively young ladies they encountered at this voluptuous business closing hour. John held the opinion that Jewesses were the handsomest women in London. James had a weakness for Italian organ grinders.

On reaching home they speedily attained the zenith of human felicity in the shape of the ‘Evening Meal’ — O celestial ‘Evening Meal!’ Supper of the Gods indeed! uninterrupted by rude employer, untroubled by hypocritical landlady, how often hast thou compensated (little diurnal Glimpse of Paradisic mysteries) poor much-labouring thrice-blessed humanity for all its troubles since Eden’s loss! John and James were far too wise and Epicurean to brush away by overhaste or insensitive indifference the delicate bloom of pre-prandial Catering. Careful and well-weighed were their hesitancies and fluctuations between Peter’s Best Tinned Ox-Tongue or Paul’s Unique Potted Anchovies. Was it to be Gammon and Spinach — *that* seemed more in harmony with that evening’s weather today — or was extravagant Tripe-and-Onions to be allowed its recurrent duplicate marriage to tomatoes and lettuce? Or was plain Fish-and-Chips to take the field? These were matters for no frivolous handling.

Perhaps from what has been said such readers of this tale as are apt to leap to premature conclusions have inferred that John and James resembled one another as much in outward appearance as they did in the outward course of their lives. Nothing could be further from the case. John was very tall, lean, dark and hook-nosed with a gentle tendency to stoop in the shoulders and something of a shuffling gait. James was short, florid and fat, and walked with an upright figure and springing step. When you met them coming home of an evening in unintoxicated glory through the streets of Bishopsgate and Shoreditch you might have fancied they were Don Quixote and Sancho Panza or Big Claus and little Claus setting off to the land of the fairies.

Of two companions, however devoted, there is always one (there are not two!) who has a certain marginal frontier of mind untraversed, perhaps even unguessed at, by his watchful friend. Most friendships wed together the Oasis and the Desert and in this case it was across the outer consciousness of John's mind that the mysterious Sahara storms went and came. Yes! it was not till fate's pendulous thunderbolt was on the very point of falling on their unobtrusive lives that James realized that he 'did not quite understand his brother John.'

It began in this way. The bedroom in which the brothers slept was at the back of the house and looked out over the river. There was scant furniture in the room and only one picture. This picture represented *The Judgement of Solomon,* and hung at the head of the two beds placed side by side. Why this particular work of art should have been selected to survey the sleep of such harmless old bachelors I cannot say. Chance, as Mr. Hardy would put it, certainly hath her ironies in these little matters. But though there was no other ornament in the room and the walls were bare except for moving shadows of masts and smoke as the ships passed up and down on the tide, yet there was one object on the blank wall opposite *The Judgement of Solomon* which at the point of events I have now reached caused a good deal of anxiety in the fraternal mind of James. This object was nothing more or less than an irregularly shaped Spot on the Wall.

What had caused this Spot — whence this Spot had come — why there should be no other Spot on the whole surface of this dingy whitish-yellow wall-paper — are questions that must remain forever insoluble. Suffice it to say that this particular Spot bore a rough resemblance, when looked at with a dreaming eye, to a Woman's profile, surmounted with masses of coiling hair. The outline of this face was so delicately limned that it was hardly visible at a casual glance and even when you did decipher it, it looked as though the least splash of water or slightest touch of a broom would obliterate it forever. But it certainly was undeniably beautiful, this fleeting creature of unconscious accident. There was a strange half-solemn, half-elfish look about its expression, the sort of look that would have set the painter of *Mona Lisa* darkly brooding for many a long summer day. Indeed for all we know Leonardo may have drawn several subtle hints from such fantastic arabesques as this as he pensively traced them on casual wayside dust or on chance met walls.

But pleasant fantasy to one man is Babylonian warning to another! For some days James had fancied that there was something unusual about his brother's manner. He seemed to have fallen into the habit of long self-absorbed reveries from which he woke with a start to the facts of ordinary existence.

The real beginning of serious trouble, however, may be dated from one hot night in the middle of July. From somewhat uneasy dreams James suddenly found himself completely and fully awake. Before he opened his eyes he felt sure that all was not well, and when he did open them there was his brother standing opposite with a lighted candle in his hand, examining with fixed interest the Spot upon the Wall! For the moment James thought the poor fellow was suffering from nightmare. Then the terrible idea seized him that his brother was mad.

A moment later he tried to reassure himself. ‘He is only interested,’ he said to himself, ‘in that funny little mark up there. Perhaps it has got on his nerves, so that he can’t make out what it looks like: or perhaps he is worried about the damp.’

But John Hare’s movements became more and more disconcerting. He appeared to be tracing with his outstretched finger every line of and curve of this mural witchery. After that, with a sudden change of gesture he pointed straight at the Mole above the thing’s eye, then gradually advancing his hand he touched, as though it had been some holy relic, this little Spot within the other.

James longed to cry out or leap from his bed and seize him but fear of the effect of a sudden shock on the poor man’s nerve held him helpless. The brother drew back some distance from the object of his strange cult and heaving a sigh that seemed to shake the very depths of his being made a motion that looked to the horrified watcher as if he were actually kissing his hand towards it. James slipped back upon his pillow and shut his eyes. He felt through his closed lids the extinction of the candle and by a tremor of the floor, so slight as to be scarcely felt, he knew that his brother had crept back into his bed.

This deliberate secrecy on John’s part was a bad sign. It argued strongly against mere somnambulism. Poor James! He hardly slept at all the rest of that night, visualizing and re-visualizing over and over again in his agitated mind the strange phenomena he had witnessed. The next day and the day after that he watched his brother as closely as an oriental spy, but took the most exquisite precautions to do so unobserved. But John seemed hardly conscious of his presence. The elder brother got through his work at the office without serious mishap, though once his gaze, as he fixed it on that "little square of blue" which office-clerks "call the sky," became so strange and ecstatic that the profound psychologist Mr Wump, trying in vain to catch his attention, roared out at last, 'Are you drunk, John, or in love?' which made the poor man drop his pen on the floor and blush like a girl!

I can assure you the faithful James had considerable difficulty to restrain himself from washing out that demonic Spot on the Wall with good Sunlight Soap.

He was tempted to do so every time he found himself alone in their room. Only the dread of worse things coming to his brother from the shock of its disappearance held him back. As they walked to and fro to their work or travelled in bus and car he began to notice that John was perpetually looking for something. He would catch his eye peering anxiously in the faces of the people they passed on the pavement or scanning nervously, as though afraid of his glances being intercepted by the object of their search, one after another of their railway or tramway companions. Those evening walks of theirs he had formerly so enjoyed were quite spoilt for James. His brother would move along like a man following some secret quest. Every now and then he would dart across the road, glance furtively at some passer-by and return as quickly as he had gone. These peeps soon began to grow quite embarrassing for the poor companion. He fancied people looked oddly at John as though the harmless fellow really were doing something wicked and he was terribly afraid lest some unsympathetic or apprehensive woman should choose to consider herself outraged by these surreptitious glances.

For the gentle-souled brother could no longer conceal from himself that it was in the faces of the daughters of Eve and of none others than they that this "translated" clerk, Servant of Imported Spice, peered so curiously.

Indeed it seemed as though John Hare were a changed man. He grew irritable and peevish, found fault with James for inconceivable trifles and fell into spells of long sullen silence. His capricious conduct did not confine itself to these street encounters. James caught him diving into little post-card shops and purchasing innumerable pictures of up-to-date actresses and singers. He would fill his pockets with these and ponder over them, one by one, when he thought himself unwatched, always with the same unsatisfied, disappointed air.

At last James grew desperate — something must be done. He would speak plainly to his brother, cost what it might.

'John,' he said one evening as they were undressing — those two sedate city-clerks before *The Judgement of Solomon,* while the cool air from off the inflowing tide made their candle flicker and shadowed that ominous Spot on the Wall into a still more treacherous femininity— 'John, will you let me say something to you without getting angry?'

John frowned and stared at his brother. 'What do you mean, James?'

'I don't think you are sometimes very considerate to me lately. I mean this,' cried James, rising and walking up and down the room, while his shirt fluttered in the night air and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. 'I mean this. I don't know what's come over you lately, John, and I want to know: I consider it my right to know. If you don't tell me I believe we shall both go crazy. Come now, John, do tell me like a decent fellow what's been the matter with you these last weeks. Is it anything to do with that infernal Spot on the Wall? I have a great mind to sponge the silly thing out' — and he made a movement towards the washing stand.

John leapt to his feet. The two brothers confronted one another — both in nothing but their shirts — the long thin legs of the elder and the short plump ones of the younger presenting that curiously undignified appearance which one associates with certain grotesque scenes out of Fielding and Smollett. 'You drop that!' gasped John threateningly.

Poor James collapsed like a punctured bladder. Overcome by his feelings, he sank down on their one chair and fairly broke into tears. In a moment John was repentant. Seizing his brother's hand he bent over him and whispered in his ear as solemnly as though he were a Priest confessing him: 'I must find her, do you hear. I must find her.'

'Find who?' asked poor James, trying hard to recover his composure.

'The Original of that woman!' replied his brother, solemnly pointing to the fatal Spot on the Wall. 'I must find her and I shall find her. I shall recognise her you see here' — he began laughing a most disconcerting laugh— 'by the Mole upon her forehead!'

James gazed long and sadly at his infatuated comrade. 'If he's not already mad,' he thought, 'he soon will be. What on earth ought I to do?'

The next day, just as he was leaving the office, about an hour before closing time, Mr. Cornelius Wump was astonished by a meek tap on the arm. The Importer of Spice turned sharply.

'Can I speak to you a moment, Sir?' stammered James Hare.

'Well?' said the other unsympathetically, and then: 'I shall miss my train; but you can walk with me a step if you like.'

James followed him bareheaded as he was. 'I am anxious about my brother, Sir — he — he has been strange these last few days and I was wondering if a holiday...'

'What's this, eh? What do you say? What's the matter with our good John?' James explained the situation as well as he was able. He could not, however, bring himself to refer to the Spot on the Wall.

'Runs after girls in the street does he? Cunning old villain! Who'd have thought it of him? Look here, Hare. I'm not strait-laced as you know but I can’t keep an immoral clerk in my office — no not for a day! Tell your brother that, Sir. Say I’ll give him one more chance — only one more mind you. O here’s my station. Goodnight James. I am much obliged to you.’

‘Silly old fool!’ he added when the other had turned back.

James Hare as he re-entered the office felt as though he had suddenly found Life to be made of a completely different material from what he had imagined. Existence had turned its rough lining inwards for this poor pilgrim. By closing time however James had resolved on another venture. He allowed his brother to set off home alone, which indeed John was too ready to do, and having watched the well-known figure out of sight he extravagantly hailed a “Taxi” and set off for Cavendish Square.

The “Taxi” stopped at the door of the famous Dr. Windlas — Specialist in Nerve Disorders. The ease and rapidity of his approach (for James had never experienced motor-traction before) impressed the Clerk hopefully as to the Power of Science.

And he was still more reassured when at last Dr. Windlas received him. The interview was not long. ‘Find her for him!’ the doctor kept repeating. ‘Find her for him! Your plain duty, my dear Sir, is to discover as soon as you can, by hook or by crook a tolerable pretty young woman with a Mole over her left Eye. Surely in one of the Music Halls there are plenty of petticoats. And you had better advertise in “Marriage.”’ These were the last words he said and he uttered them with the gravest countenance and not a suspicion of irony.

James retired; he had not dismissed his “Taxi”; it snortingly awaited him. ‘The Tower Theatre,’ he said, getting in.

‘I’ll take a seat near the stage,’ he thought, ‘and I’ll go somewhere every night till I’ve searched every House in London. My hundred in the Savings Bank must go. It’s worth it for John’s health.’

The Tower Theatre of Varieties was in the glory of one of its most successful “turns” when James Hare entered. He settled himself eagerly in his seat, the evening dress of his neighbours causing him far less embarrassment than one would have expected.

But James was a brave man and the new venture seemed auspicious. Auspicious indeed! He had no sooner concentrated his attention upon the famous dancer than he clapped his hands together with an audible noise. ‘It is she!’ he cried to himself and then he trembled as convulsively as if in contact with an electric battery. Yes! there was the Woman with the Leonardo-like head and the wonderful coils of hair. There was the Woman with the Mole on her forehead. There actually before him was the original of the Spot upon the Wall! He was far too agitated to admire the slender creature’s agility and grace. She was dancing the notorious “Salomé” Dance and her lithe body moved to and fro like a glittering Lilith or Lamia: but James only saw the Mark upon her forehead which proved her without doubt his brother’s fatal affinity. He thought only of his brother and of her spell over him until, as he watched the windings of those beautiful limbs and the tossings of those beautiful arms, that other John’s head, so dreadful in its paleness, became stamped with the very lineaments of the unknown City Clerk.

When Thelma Lorraine’s “turn” was over and she had retired overwhelmed with applause James Hare was no longer in his seat. He was engaged in a weighty and lengthened conversation with the official in the box office. Passed on from him to another local magnate (for James in the stress of his anxiety was spending money like a Lord) he ultimately, by means of I know not what skilfully pulled wires, found himself alone in a neat little dressing-room with Thelma Lorraine herself. Gracefully motioned into a luxurious chair by the great lady who had not yet put off her stage dress — and who fancied her irritable visitor at least a disguised Marquis — Mr Hare we may be sure did not allow any time to be wasted. In one long torrent of really appealing eloquence he implored her to take pity on his unfortunate brother.

As in the case of Scott's Jeanie Deans in the presence of another sort of queen the poor man's burst of spontaneous oratory was not without its effect. Other motives also, of a less exalted kind, came sliding at that moment like so many Sylphs into Salomé's beautiful breast. She happened to be at that very time passing through the compliant Press her *Book of Reminiscences;* and she could not help thinking what a pretty story this would make for that charming work — how well adapted, in fact, for quotations, reviews and excerpts in Newspapers! The wily James had been careful to avoid any mention of The Spot upon the Wall. He had represented his brother (O the unscrupulousness of love!) as hopelessly pining away in his passion for her — as hopelessly, he might have added, as a luckless

knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering

who loved *La Belle Dame Sans Merci,* only even James Hare's rhetoric could not summon to its aid personages he never heard of. But he had said enough. Salomé was after all a woman and it was impossible for her to be angry at being told that a man was near dying for love of her beauty; besides, Mrs Thelma Lorraine was as we have remarked composing her dainty *Reminiscences of My Life* and consequently in the very mood and vein for what might be called a chaste adventure!

So it was all arranged. She was to come to the brother's riverside lodging that very next day — which happened by good luck to be Sunday.

‘You must let me bring some of my own special port wine with me,’ had been her parting words as James Hare, bowing over her hand as he had never bowed before in his life, left her.

That night James Hare returned home with a feeling of profound happiness in his heart. He walked from the Monument Station. It was a lovely summer night, and as he walked by the familiar road in the course of his walk, he could not help looking up in pious gratitude to the great illuminated dome above his head, and as he looked one of those great resplendent constellations suspended there so high over the roofs of London wore the mortal likeness of none other than Mrs Thelma Lorraine in the Last of Her Seven Veils! He amused himself by fancying he could recognise in one tiny point of scintillating glory that Birth-Mark by which he had known her as the woman he sought.

He undressed in the sitting-room to avoid disturbing his brother and put the candle out before entering their bedroom. When he entered he saw by the flicker of river-lights that John Hare had fallen into a deep and happy sleep. Moved by an inexplicable impulse he stepped to his side and kissed him lightly on the forehead: then instinctively avoiding even a glance at the fatal Spot upon The Wall he got into bed himself and let his head sink peacefully on his pillow.

A Sunday morning in the heart of London in our heyday of summertime gives substance and reality perhaps more than anything else in the world to the desirable abstraction called Rest. A delicious balmy sense of relaxed fibres and leisurely drawn breaths hangs like a healing atmosphere over street and park and river. Golden sun-motes, more magical than ever danced in fairyland, hover before the eyes of thousands on thousands of humble Londoners chewing between asleep and awake the delicious end of pleasure promising visions. What though the sun set upon less placid scenes? Well!

Is it not something to have dozed and been happy? It cannot be always Sunday morning.

James Hare made no haste to arouse his brother or to get up himself. If he had been a reader of Shakespeare he would perhaps have muttered: ‘O! that a man might know

> The end of this day’s business ere it come!
> But it sufficeth that the day will end,
> And then the end is known.’

As it was he lay quite still and thanked God for having given him the courage to act as he had acted.

That morning while they lingered over their breakfast both seemed conscious that some decisive event was in the wind.

‘I am afraid I have not been very kind to you, James, since It — since She first came,’ said the elder brother looking across at his friend with a peculiarly wistful look. ‘I can’t help it,’ he went on. ‘It’s here’ — he tapped his forehead— ‘and there’ — he indicated by a gesture the room without. ‘I know I’m making an utter fool of myself but it’s no good — I can’t do otherwise.’

James rose to his feet and took him by the hand. ‘This very afternoon,’ he said with a slow triumphant intonation, ‘She will come — I have found her.’

At four o’clock that afternoon she did come. James had made his brother, who certainly looked ill enough for anything, undress and get into bed ‘for,’ said he, ‘our only chance is to excite her pity.’ Their bedroom window was wide open. A strong but not unpleasant odour of tar and cordage and seaweed entered from off the inflowing tide. A large irregular sunbeam fell waveringly on The Spot on the Wall throwing into abnormal distinctness every feature of that unlucky chance-drawn Face. She came sailing in looking perhaps the least trifle scared, but that only made her condescension more attractive. Lightly she flung down her rose coloured Cloak over the back of their one chair and handed a small black bottle she had concealed beneath it to poor obsequious James and proceeded with charming ease and bewitching confidence to take off her gloves.

John Hare sat up erect in bed. His countenance at that moment, to compare small things to great, must have resembled the countenance of the Poet of *The Divine Comedy* when he tried in vain to answer the Salutation of Beatrice upon the Florentine Bridge. His behaviour seemed to embarrass the lady but little, for, with that charming sliding walk, which had beguiled Europe, she moved up to his bedside and took his hand.

'Poor man!' she said in a voice mellifluous, 'you needn't tell me anything. I have heard all from him. Poor, poor, man! Is it really so bad to have these funny feelings for a silly little actress woman like me? Come, come, now, you must shake off these foolish ideas.' With the tenderest movements in the world she made him sink down again on his pillow and allowed her hand to caress his forehead. 'No, no,' she went on, 'I must really scold you, you know. This sort of thing will never never do! Look: I am not so very pretty after all, am I when you see me off the stage?' And she pulled up her veil till it made a tight dark line across the middle of her forehead.

John's eyes glanced wildly backwards and forwards from this beautiful apparition to The Spot on the Wall. James, to make a diversion — for he perceived a dreadful danger now — hurried forward with two glass tumblers half-full of the lady's wine.

But John waved him back: starting desperately up he suddenly, to Mrs Lorraine's confusion and alarm, pushed up the veil quite off her face and —

laying a rude finger on the fatal Mole — pointed with his other hand at The Spot on the Wall. ‘Look, look, look,’ he cried. ‘You both have It!’

Reddening with anger she rose and looked. The warm sunlight made the resemblance more vivid than James had even seen it before. The Spot within The Spot on the Wall and the Spot on Salomé’s angry Forehead seemed to darken and dilate in horrible sympathy. She rushed to the chair and seized her cloak and gloves. James hardly knowing what he did advanced towards her, the glass of red wine shaking in his trembling hands and throwing a blood coloured shadow on the floor. In a moment she had snatched it from him, and dashed its contents with one fierce gesture completely over The Spot on The Wall, obliterating it forever from human sight. Then with an angry burst of self-pitying tears she flung herself out of the room and out of the house.

James turned to his brother.

John Hare was lying upon his bed motionless and still. The Dancer had killed his heart.

‘This would have been something for your poor brother John who loved the girls so,’ said Mr Wump a fortnight later to the pallid shadow who still called himself James Hare. He handed him a newspaper. The clerk read:

‘”One of the most charming anecdotes so naively told by our distinguished authoress, as great it seems in literary as in salutatory art, is the one that tells the story of her visit to the poor dying man who had fallen in love with her Picture. The simple veracity of this pathetic incident is only equalled by the modest reserve with which the celebrated dancer tells it”.’

The Harvest Thanksgiving

Miss Georgina Kildare lived in a dainty little house in the Midlands by the side of the Great North Road. A fair sized plot of ground separated Lilac Cottage from the dust and mud of the highway, and out of this little plot blazed, in colours resplendent as the patchwork quilt that covered her bed, Miss Georgina's summer-garden. The Village of Binting knew no more discreet pillar of respectable society than this retired lady. Really only just forty, she gave one the appearance of carrying at least fifty winters on her mild brow, so distinctively was she marked out a votary of Diana's train. Yet she was by no means deficient in Nature's outward adorning. Indeed under certain aspects and in certain lights she might have been called quite beautiful — and what more could one say of Cleopatra?

Fate, having denied Georgina the ecstasies and sorrows of Love, had been, it must be confessed, in other respects extremely kind to her. Her house was precisely the right shape and let in neither wind nor rain. Her garden was neither too large nor too small: her maid, though still some ten years younger than Miss Georgina, had been schooled by that lady into Perfection itself. Her kitchen garden grew excellent broad beans and the church stood not more than half a mile away!

The Society of the village where she lived boasted not only a Rural Dean — if you know what that is, Reader? — but a Doctor and a Woman of Title! This last wonder had not been in the place long and was no more, in reality, than an ex-Mayor's widow from Nottingham, but since Everything, as the Modem Pulpit puts it, is Relative, in Binting Lady Lettice Whatnot was a Cloud of Glory. Miss Georgina's own social position was of that delicate and imponderable character, best described in the Rural Dean’s own elegant words as ‘not Quite, Quite!’; and the summit of her innocent ambition in the early summer of the year of grace we are now enjoying was to be invited to the Rural Decanal table to “meet” Lady Lettice at dinner!

The Reverend Thomas Grey had long ago found in Georgina a most invaluable ally in matters ecclesiastical. Providence indeed permitted her to expend upon itself, dear, demure Devotee, all that stored up treasury of Love which Nature in its unregenerate selfishness had doubtless intended for its own more secular purposes. The Doctor too, Mr Frederick Roan, was not averse to making Miss Georgina useful in various little ways, Her cottage happened, most conveniently, to be at one extreme end of his Æsculapian beat where it was not by any means unpleasant to drop in about tea-time on a cold afternoon.

If the Parson and the Doctor found Miss Kildare an agreeable neighbour it must be added that the populace surveyed her with more mixed feelings. No one could be more unselfish than she showed herself, no one could give away more lavishly. Her substantial little income of four hundred a year was often seriously encroached upon by her charities. But with all her kindness she was so outspoken in reprobating the thousand and one deficiencies of weak human nature, especially those of a self-indulgent kind, that it was only the most scrupulous and undeviating members of the parish who could be said to regard her with genuine love.

The Summer had been an especially hot one and the prospect in corn and fruit for that year seemed exceptionally rich. Day after day the cornfields adjoining her cottage got yellower and yellower: day after day the apples in the orchard on the further side of the road swelled and sweetened: day after day the dahlias and phloxes each side of her brick path bloomed more lavishly and the geraniums in her parlour window drank more deeply of the sun and threw it back with a warmer glow. At length the most important event in the agricultural year, the cutting and binding of the corn, began in good earnest and the mellow halcyon weather still holding up, everyone had hopes of a quite unusual harvest. The Harvest Thanksgiving, most Pagan and spontaneous of all Festivals permitted by the Church, was announced for a certain day three weeks hence.

No one was more affected by the announcement of this date than Miss Georgina Kildare. The truth is that ever since last summer the Rural Dean had vaguely hinted at a snug little private dinner party to be given by himself to the "better people" of the neighbourhood. This little dinner was to be given simultaneously with the more popular one paid for by the absentee Lord of the Manor for the benefit of his tenants. Miss Georgina's mind had been on tenterhooks. The Rural Dean had not definitely invited her. He had allowed himself the rather unkind pleasure — considering what a good man he was — of dangling before her eyes this "little dinner" as a sort of banquet Tantalus. Perhaps it gratified an obscure lust for power in him to find that he could trouble the peace of mind of his gentle parishioner; or perhaps he really considered it important to keep up the value of these good old fashioned distinctions that are so broken in upon in the present day. At any rate Miss Georgina was looking forward with hope against hope to this Harvest Thanksgiving Day which might prove her début into Upper Class Society.

Do you smile Reader? Ah! you see, you cannot understand these emotions, you who are already safe within the circle of circles! But believe me such feelings are as serious as Love or Hate or anything else that is part of Life.

So the weather grew hotter and hotter and the lady's desire for Harvest Thanksgiving Day more and more restless. She became indeed quite irritable over things that a few weeks ago would not have troubled her at all. Pattie, the Perfect Maid, had never known her mistress so exacting.

One hot fore-noon Miss Georgina had drawn her garden chair under the shadow of one of the big lilac bushes that grew near her gate and was there seated daintily “doing up” the silk skirt of her mauve-coloured evening dress. Every scent and sound that came to her suggested hot weather. She heard the wheel of the nearly empty well go round the third time that morning as Pattie tried to secure enough water for washing her potatoes. She caught the wafted fragrance of the Jasmine over her porch. She heard the reiterated tapping of a thrush breaking a snail on the path: and all about her hummed and vibrated that vague murmur of ephemeral air-life without which the full effect of a hot noon were wanting.

Trot! trot! trot! trot! came the sound of horses’ hooves on the Great North Road. Georgina looked round: two tall mounted men in khaki, their guns swinging behind them and their accoutrements flashing in the sun, were ambling lazily towards her. She must have made quite a pretty picture sitting there under the heart shaped leaves of the big lilac-bush.

The younger of the two riders pulled up — his companion did the same, falling a little into the background. ‘Could you tell me, madam,’ said the soldier, showing at once that he was a gentleman by the tone of his voice, ‘whether you have seen any troops pass this way? The enemy are expected to try a flank movement in this direction.’ Georgina intimated that she had seen nothing but a drove of sheep.

‘What enemy?’ she asked.

‘O, I ought to have explained,’ said the officer hastily: ‘how blundering of me! Of course I did not mean real enemies. I meant the other side, you know, in the manoeuvres. Sergeant Griggs and I have been sent on a long reconnoitring round. Our brigade is operating at Narrover Moor.’

The speaker was in the bloom of manhood, anywhere let us say between twenty-five and thirty. His fair closely cropped hair curled all over his head, close to his skull. His broad low forehead, full red lips and rounded chin gave him in profile, had the lady known anything of Hellenistic Cameos, a marked resemblance to Alexander the Great.

To unclassical eyes he was indeed something better than a Cameo of a dead conqueror. He was an extremely handsome, lively young man in His Britannic Majesty's Royal Dragoons! In her embarrassment Georgina's evening gown fell from her hands and the reel of white silk she was using rolled into the middle of the path. She rose to pick it up, but the young officer forestalled her. Lightly he vaulted from his horse; lightly he opened the little wicket gate and lightly he stooped to pick up the reel. She was also stooping; and, as will happen in these embarrassing encounters, their heads met in a slight collision.

O how burning were Georgina's cheeks as she received the young man's profuse apologies. But the incident had broken the ice: and the accommodating weather finished its dissolution. 'Won't you have something to drink?' she asked blushing again like any young girl till she felt the red tint descend to her very bosom.

'It's — very good of you madam, I really don't mind if I do have a glass — a glass of milk, I mean,' he added hurriedly.

'Pattie!' cried her mistress, 'Pattie! Pattie!

'Yes Miss, yes Miss,' answered the maid tripping as it happened not from the House but from the road. 'Yes Miss.'

'Go in,' said her mistress, 'and get this officer — I mean this gentleman — a glass of milk, Pattie. And perhaps the Sergeant also would like something?'

Ah! the power of the Sword! Old maids and young wenches, mistresses and maidens all fall prostrate before it! It is the magic of the Man who can Strike: it is the wizardry of the Stag with the great Antlers!

A few days after this, Captain The Honourable Tom Ransom and Colour Sergeant Griggs once more made their appearance at Lilac Cottage. This time they fastened their horses to the little gate as though they had been brothers and marched up the brick path as bold as gunpowder. Their camp had moved to Elmbourne the Captain said, a town about five miles away, and he could get an afternoon off whenever he wanted it. Carelessly he tapped with his cane upon the ground. For on this occasion, the occasion of their second meeting only, there seemed no doubt about his wanting it pretty often. The Captain sipped tea in the parlour with the lady and the Sergeant drank cider in the kitchen like a privileged sweetheart. Lilac Cottage had yielded to the enemy at the first frontal attack.

The Honourable Tom Ransom was not exactly a notorious Don Juan, but his philosophy of love if not of life might until now have been aptly summed up in the simple words: take all — leave all. As regards poor Miss Georgina he certainly conceived no more “serious intentions” towards her than he had done in the case of a score of other less elderly Dulcineas who had before now suffered from his levity.

The worthy Colour-Sergeant, however, was a man of a completely different calibre. He was a simple minded honest fellow from the Peak District with no more desire to deceive a confiding maid than to fly over the moon. Pattie was luckier than her mistress.

It was indeed no more nor less than a revolution in that quiet household. The Honourable Tom’s cigar smoke hung about the pretty pink curtains, his nasty stale tobacco was sprinkled all over the floor. The white-washed grate was full of his cigarette ends. The little entrance hall smelt of the brandy he carried in his flask. His terrier pup dug among the Dahlias. Slang such as those dainty flowers had never listened to since they emerged from the earth resounded from one end of the little garden to the other.

Miss Georgina knew that all this was improper and unbecoming. She knew that she ran the risk of losing not only her social position — such as it was — but even her good name if she allowed it to continue, but she was infatuated, blinded, obsessed.

Nothing pushes a woman more irrevocably into danger than a complete lack of experience — when once experience comes.

Little Partie was amazed at what she called, in conversation with the Sergeant, 'Miss Georgina's dreadful carryings on,' and though she herself benefited hugely by all this (for when the Captain came the Sergeant came, and the Sergeant was a model lover) yet she could not get reconciled to her mistress's loss of self-respect. It gave her a sensation as though the sky was falling. Her whole world seemed to have lost its coping-stone. All that delicate old-maidishness which throws such a charming atmosphere of dainty reprovement round the most material things of daily life had evaporated in a moment from Lilac Cottage like the perfume of a broken vase. Miss Georgina forgot to tie up her lavender, she forgot to preserve her currants, she forgot to put camphor in her cupboards, she forgot to take cuttings from her geraniums. Even her dress altered. She put on garish and crude colours that did not suit her: she wore artificial pearls round her neck instead of the little gold locket that had been her mother's: and with her dress her ways changed too. She became flighty and flippant. Her movements grew hurried and abrupt, she alternated between fits of profound melancholy and fits of excessive excitement. She talked to Partie in the strangest manner — sitting on the kitchen table, her feet swinging under her. She referred quite carelessly to things she would never have hinted at before — even in a whisper — and one morning, though there was no need for such a thing, she rouged her lips. In fact Miss Georgina Kildare was suffering from an utter moral collapse — a complete *dégringolade.*

It can easily be guessed that this pathological revolution was not unseen by Georgina’s neighbours. It indeed furnished matter for impassioned conversation from the Rectory Tennis Lawn to the Public House Bowling Alley. Over and over again was it discussed. From the masculine point of view (a somewhat coarse one), from the feminine point of view (a rather cruel one) — by man-servants and maidservants, by discreet housewives and harlotry sluts — by garden party people and harvest field people — by Church and Chapel — by moralist and immoralist. ‘This Business of Georgina and The Captain’ was sifted and re-sifted even to the uttermost grain.

The Rural Dean and the Doctor had a most serious consultation. It was quite plain that something must be done. But what? The two responsible professions looked at one another in grave perplexity.

‘I doubt whether she is right in her head,’ said the Parson. ‘I think it would be well if you called and saw her.’

‘I am afraid she has been forgetting herself,’ said the Doctor. ‘I think it is your duty to talk quite plainly to her.’

Meanwhile Harvest Thanksgiving Day approached. Offerings of fruit, vegetables and flowers were requested for the ensuing Festival. Preparations were made for the great Tenants’ Dinner, and invitations were issued for the private dinner at the Vicarage. These it is hardly necessary to state did not include Miss Georgina Kildare.

As to what really went on in that disorganised Lilac Cottage none ever knew. Some say the Captain kissed Miss Georgina every time he came and every time he went away. Others say he left kissing alone and only chucked her under the chin now and again, and called her his “darling aunt,” and his “pretty pussycat,” and his “church mouse,” and his “little Georgie,” and such-like tender names.

As far as the loves of the Sergeant and Partie went, all had prospered well. A proper and decent notice had been given to the Parson. Pattie’s parents had been to see her and had approved her choice and on the ensuing Sunday, which was the long expected Harvest Thanksgiving, their ‘Banns’ were to be read in Church for the first time.

The Rural Dean’s dinner was arranged for Monday night when the Parson, the Harvest Festival over and the Lord of Moderate Blessings decently thanked, might enjoy with a clear conscience his little Feast.

On Saturday afternoon as they were returning from arranging the offerings in the Church the Parson’s wife said to her husband: ‘That Captain Ransom we met yesterday at Colonel Parker’s *is* really an Honourable. I found him in the Peerage and he’s the heir to Lord Riddlesdale, you know. I wish we could have asked him. I wonder if it *would* be possible at so short a notice? Of course there’s nothing we need trouble about in all that silly gossip. People must have something to talk about. What do you say my dear? Shall I write to him tonight? How do you begin to an Honourable?’

The Rural Dean put on his gravest expression and walked some paces in solemn state.

‘*Shall* I write to him?’ repeated his wife.

‘It is a very serious question, my dear, and one that requires careful consideration,’ replied the Parson.

‘I may write to him then?’ she said.

‘I wish only to do my duty in this important matter,’ said the Clergyman.

‘How do you begin to an Honourable?’ repeated his wife.

‘I pray we shall be guided rightly in all matters,’ remarked the Rural Dean.

‘I’ll tell him we expect Lady Whatnot there,’ the lady concluded, ‘*he knows* her you know. They used to meet in London.’

Binting Harvest Thanksgiving Day was the culmination of the fine weather. Never was such a largesse of sunshine poured down upon glowing well reaped stubble fields since the days when the daughter-in-law of Naomi ‘stood in tears amid the alien corn.’

It was the custom at Binting when the Thanksgiving Service was over for all the congregation to walk solemnly round aisle and chancel in order to observe in their new decorative positions the various offerings they themselves had given. This informal ceremony took place when the Clergyman had retired into the vestry. It was the occasion therefore for a good deal of sly pleasantry among the young people as they jostled one another round the piled-up pumpkins and potatoes, the great bunches of grapes, and the ripe sheaves of corn. On such occasions it almost seemed as though their Christian Service done, these simple rustics relapsed into that primitive Pagan worship, the worship of the Bread which Perisheth, out of which limitations their more spiritual Religion had with so much labour lifted them. On this particular day as the congregation trooped languorously round the chancel many a lad and maid (as they had done no doubt thousands of years ago at the festival of Demeter and Ceres) glanced furtively and coyly at one another across the backs of their elders, and blessed the gods in their hearts for a gift more precious than corn or wine.

But it was a beautiful and memorable sight full of rich pathetic symbolism for the thoughtful eye, this offering of the first fruits of the Earth to Earth’s invisible Guardians! A ceremony it seemed linking the long ages of human history together, an act of spontaneous uncanonical Ritual, venerable as the Ploughshare, old as the Threshing-flail, contemporary with the first upturning of the Sod, coeval with the first binding of the Sheaves. A stream of hot sunlight poured in through the open west end door and the numberless tiny sun-motes floating in it seemed like the liberated souls of innumerable dust-atoms destined now in the prolific laboratory of Nature to be re-embodied in wonderful new life-forms. Sun-motes! Ah! they too were old, these infinitesimal dancing specks, older than Christian Liturgies, older than Heathen Mysteries. The Wonders they celebrated in their careless indifferent dance had been enacted before the Pyramids were dreamt of or Babylon begun. Theirs was a Harvest Thanksgiving that went back to the whirl of planetary grain-dust on the threshing floor of the Universe, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy!

But if the nobler aspects of pagan religions were recalled that Sunday morning in Binting Church a sad example of pagan cruelty was also displayed. Look at that fantastic figure dressed so oddly in a purple cloak and carrying a huge pumpkin in her arms! She has brought it a long way. She is tired of holding it. She wants to find room for it among the rest. But the processioning men and women close up their ranks pitilessly. None moves to give her place: some look coldly and spitefully at her: some severely look another way: only a few have discovered the cruel secret of looking at her as though she were a thing and not a Person, but these certainly do their best with their discovery, and stare the more remorselessly at her the more she shrinks and suffers under their gaze. In old times such a festival as this no doubt called for its Victim. Blood had to be shed other than the blood of grapes before the gods were duly thanked!

Well! The People of Binting had not to go without their victim this time. Exhausted with her efforts to find a place for her gift Miss Georgina sank at last into the front choir stall and the pumpkin fell from her arms and rolled upon the floor. No one moved to help her even then. Callously they pushed past her, whispering to one another and shaking their heads. ‘Look, Mummy!’ whispered one little mite who had been led in by the hand. ‘Look, Mummy! the naughty lady’s crying!’

Tears indeed were rolling down poor Georgina’s cheeks. Her burden was greater than she could bear. But the sight of her tears seemed rather to harden than soften these Celebrators of the Harvest. It was proper and right that the Victim should be made to shed tears. Who knows but that they might prove auspicious harbingers of fruitful rain!

Slowly, when the last of the congregation had passed by, Georgina rose to her feet. She went down the aisle to fetch her pumpkin which profane feet had carelessly kicked from where it fell. Then returning with it in her arms she was about to deposit it at the base of the reading desk when the door of the vestry opened and the clerk came out.

Rudely the man walked up to her, as solemn an old sycophant as ever served two masters. ‘Now then, Miss, we can’t have no more of them things here! so ’tis no good your leaving it. Better take it back where it came from. Parson’ll only tell me to throw it away if it’s left here.’

The poor persecuted lady stooped down and once more pressing the ridiculously sleek vegetable against her breast retreated hastily out of the church.

As she issued from the west door she saw the Rural Dean’s wife talking to the Doctor as though they both waited for her husband. Georgina threw the pumpkin down on the grass and walked straight past them wrapping her purple cloak round her slim forty years old figure. As she passed she glanced up. The Parson’s wife pretended not to see her but the Doctor without taking off his hat smiled at her a half pitying half jocular smile as much as to say: ‘I am a man of the world and understand these little things, of course.’

Georgina did not hurry home. Pattie and Sergeant Griggs, their Banns read out in due form, had slipped off as soon as Service was over and had doubtless by this time re-entered the Cottage on the Great North Road.

Georgina did not hurry. She walked like one who has received a heavy physical blow. So indeed she had; for Life itself had lifted up its hand and struck her. She took the path through the fields: the path that leads so close to the edge of Rudgely Farm Pond.

By one of those odd coincidences that look so much like Providence, two other persons who had not been to church that morning were also walking in the direction of Rudgely Farm Pond, no others in fact than Lady Whatnot and Captain Ransom.

‘What was that, Polly?’ (These old London friends used very familiar speech). ‘Did you hear that? I’m off to see,’ and Captain Ransom ran to the pond’s edge.

The following night the Reverend Thomas and Mrs Grey waited anxiously the arrival of their guests. That small and select company were all punctual, except two: the most select of all. The delay of these two was most important. The little stove in the kitchen was covered with steaming “dished up” dishes. Conversation in the drawing-room flagged or was cold and uninspired. The pulses of Mrs Grey’s world stood still. ‘I cannot think,’ she would add in a confidential whisper to one after another of her visitors, ‘why Lady Whatnot and Captain Ransom are so late.’ Then she said: ‘Poor Lord Riddlesdale is not expected to live, you know.’ At last the sound of a carriage was really heard. ‘I wonder which of them it is?’

Everybody began setting right their sleeve-cuffs and lace-chiffons and arranging themselves to best advantage in their chairs, conversation became still more forced: people made remarks without expecting or even listening for an answer.

‘The Honourable Captain Ransom!’ announced the little Rectory housemaid in a pining voice. There was a general flutter followed by a feeling of relief when the gallant gentleman sat down by his hostess and entered into eager conversation.

When, however, the drift of conversation was overheard the tension returned sevenfold. ‘Yes, I must beg your congratulations, Mrs Grey,’ he was saying, ‘and we shall have occasion to use your husband’s good services. The wedding will have to be a very quiet one as my dear father is so ill, but we are both particularly anxious it should take place before I leave the army.’

‘She does not come from this part of the country then?’ Mrs Grey was heard to enquire.

‘O dear no. Her ancestors I believe lived in Scotland.’

‘The engagement has recently taken place?’ asked the lady.

‘Very recently indeed,’ answered the Captain.

Once more the sound of a carriage was heard outside.

‘You will see her in a minute,’ cried Captain Ransom, excitedly rising from his seat. ‘I knew you wouldn’t mind our bringing her to your party. She has come in Lady Whatnot’s carriage. We both stayed at Lady Whatnot’s last night.’

Again the little housemaid flung open the door.

‘Lady Whatnot and Miss Georgina Kildare!’

And so the mauve-silk dress had come in useful after all.

Real Wraiths (1974)

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CHAPTER I

THE KING OF the Blaenau-Ffestiniog ghost-world was known far and wide as Fabulatorius; and when he came up on the last day of April from visiting the body of Cockatrice Cuff as that gentleman lay at rest in his coffin, the gossip among the neighbouring ghosts was more disturbing than had been known in that district for many a long year. He had been heard addressing some very curious remarks to the two iron railings, one above the other, and supported by a row of iron posts, that ran along the right hand edge of the long, steep ramp that led up to the spot where Cuff was buried and these remarks of his had been understood in indignantly opposite ways.

What King Fabulatorius had actually said was this: ‘Railings,’ he had said, ‘you must remember that all the children, who love to swing over you and under you and to twist their little bodies between your double bars, have no idea that you are anything more than long iron bars supported at intervals by iron posts. As your sovereign lord and King I must insist that you keep in mind that everything made by man has its own particular share in the ghostliness of the venerated ghosts of the men who made it. All we ghosts are worshipful beings. We have possessed the air round the earth ever since the forerunners of mankind came out from the depths of the ocean. All the space round the earth for thousands upon thousands of miles has been filled for thousands upon thousands of years by the ghosts of all the creatures, men, beasts, birds, reptiles and insects, who have lived and died about the earth since their ancestors came out of the sea. What am I going to tell you, subjects of mine, vouchers for my integrity? None of you, no! not one of you, has now, or ever has had, or ever will have, the faintest idea of what I now am hesitating to tell you, shrinking from telling you, fearful of telling you, but absolutely resolved to tell you.

'It is this, my children. It is this. There is a ghost now close to us, near to us, perhaps even at this minute among us, who has come from a part of the world we rarely hear mentioned in these degenerate days, but who for years has been studying the effect upon us ghosts of these experiments which men call by such names as "nuclear" and "atomic." The name of the ghost I am telling you of, is Glottenko. He harbours the idea, he nurses the idea, he develops the idea, he loses himself in the idea that it will be possible for us ghosts, if we follow him closely enough and study his methods with sufficient thoroughness, to obliterate the whole human race and all its ghosts with it. His plan, my children, is no less than this. He believes that if a sufficient number of us can be persuaded to volunteer for the sake of our bodies and the ghosts of birds, beasts, reptiles and insects, it will be possible for us to create an army of heroic ghosts who by rushing upon these nuclear bombers and possessing ourselves of their weapons could pick out the human race from among all the other creatures of the world and destroy it utterly; not only the race but its ghosts as well.

'Just think, my dear children, what a noble and terrific idea of Glottenko's this is! Think what an adorable world it will be when there is not one human being left alive and not one human ghost is to be found anywhere!'

King Fabulatorius felt in his deepest heart that what he had told his Blaenau-Ffestiniog subjects had worked upon them the impression he wanted. He made the mistake however — and he knew it was a mistake as soon as he had done it — of taking Glottenko by the hand and presenting him to the crowd. Glottenko was a short, squat, ungainly individual with a head too large for his body and a mouth too large for his head. His appearance before them at this moment was doubly unfortunate because King Fabulatorius when living had been an exceptionally tall and handsome man, and although he had been dead and buried for several years his ghost had retained every aspect of this impressiveness. It never crossed the King's mind that the ugliness of Mr. Glottenko would influence his hearers.

There were two ghosts, however, now listening to him who were brother and sister before they died; the boy had died at seventeen and the girl at fifteen and in a sense they had been lovers too and this attraction to each other was still active though they were both ghosts. The boy's name was Wang and the girl's name was Tang and they were in the habit of moving about in such close contact that they often looked while they walked as if they were embracing each other. On this occasion Wang said to Tang:

'What an awful person! How can the King suggest that we join forces with a being like that?' But Tang answered: 'I remember once hearing my mother say that the best of all old proverbs was that *The End Justifies the Means.* So may be this ugly little brute will serve our purpose!'

'Doesn't it ever strike you, Tang,' enquired Wang, 'that it's rather queer that our King who is a man, and you and I who are a boy and a girl, should be so keen to destroy all the ghosts in the world who are the ghosts of human beings?'

'My own opinion is,' replied Tang gravely, 'that there have never been any animals or birds or reptiles or insects as cruel as men, both to one another and to the other creatures, and my own private feeling is that deliberate cruelty is far the wickedest thing in the world and is indeed so abominably wicked that since the human race has practised it since they first became human beings they deserve to perish, both when they are alive and when they are ghosts like you and me.

‘What you must remember,’ the girl went on, ’is that for all the wisdom of dogs and sheep and all the cleverness of cats and monkeys, there are no animals who know they ought not to be cruel and yet against their conscience go on being cruel. Lions and tigers and panthers and leopards and boa-constrictors and serpents kill and kill and kill; but they kill by nature and by necessity and by instinct and to get food for themselves and their young. They don’t kill for sport or for the pleasure of causing suffering.’

The ghost Wang drew himself a little away from the ghost of Tang and gazed at her for a moment without speaking. Then he suddenly said:

‘Do you know, my dear, I’ve been thinking for quite a while about an idea of mine and I want to know whether you will agree. I’ll frankly out with it now: and if you hate the idea I’ll never suggest it again. What about —’ He became so excited as he spoke that Tang remembered the day, long before they both died, when he first told her that he loved her. He seemed to her, ghost though he was, to have the same look as he had on that unforgettable day.

‘Tell me, Wang, tell me what you’re thinking of! Tell me, for heaven’s sake, what’s in your mind!’

He spoke now, holding her shadowy hands with his shadowy hands, and watching her expression as he spoke:

‘I was thinking, my dear, that it would be exciting for us if we explored our world of the dead a bit further than we have yet done. We have lived here in Blaenau-Ffestiniog long enough to know almost all our fellow-ghosts as they are in death almost as intimately as we knew them when they were alive: only they can’t show us now where they feel their sore throat or just where in their stomachs they feel duodenal hurting or dyspeptic hurting, or just where in their heads they are suffering from neuralgic pains. But what I would like to do with you now, Tang, is to explore other districts of Britain and get into touch with completely different ghosts from the ones we are acquainted so well with here in North Wales.'

'O I would like that too!' cried Tang, full of the excitement her brother was feeling. 'Let's go to some big city, to London maybe, or out of this island altogether, to Paris, or Rome, or New York! Where would you like best to go? I don't care at all, so long at it's away from here and so long as it isn't in the desert or in the snow-covered Alps! What about Venice? O how lovely it would be to be rowed in a gondola!'

Without a word more consultation off they went; and whether it was Tang's word about Venice that led to it or some longing on Wang's part to get out of reach of both King Fabulatorius and Mr. Glottenko in the quickest possible way, they steered their ascent, for all ghosts of young people can mount into the air, in a south-easterly direction. They soon found themselves floating above Dover; and drawn by a natural curiosity, they descended to the edge of a cliff in front of a very neat little house with a small, tidy garden. Approaching this house hand-in-hand they peeped into one of the windows. There was a small gas flame burning within an elegantly painted globe but nobody was there. On a little round table, however, there were a few things left, such as indicated in a casual manner the sort of life the inmates or one of the inmates of this little house lived. There were a couple of books carelessly balanced against one another and near them a half-used open box of matches tilted sideways against a saucer from which there still rose, from a cigarette-end, a feather of smoke. An ink-bottle with a fountain-pen protruding from it had been squeezed between this saucer with its faint smoke and the edge of the table; and as the observers looked through that window they both had an uneasy feeling that the mere impact of their gaze might tip that ink over upon the rug. And even as they gazed what was a very strange event happened. From the surface of that carelessly left group of things, books, matches, saucer, cigarette-end, ink-bottle and pen a ghost like themselves, only it would have been difficult to say whether it was male or female, human or inhuman, detached itself and approached them, passing through the glass of the window.

It had a face, when it spoke to them, that reminded them of various portraits they had seen of ancient literary or legal characters of the past. It was a man's face, but it had, as they quickly recognised, many of the lines and curves that they both associated with their elderly aunts and great-aunts.

'You two, my children,' it said to them, 'are very young to be dead. Were you killed together in some railway accident?'

'O no, sir,' Wang answered, 'we died of that disease — I forget what they call it — that has been travelling round the country. But we enjoy going about together. Our bodies are buried in the churchyard but we don't want to stay round our coffins. It's nicer to visit places we might have been to when we were alive. Were those things on that table yours?'

The ghost looked from one to the other and smiled faintly. 'O no! They didn't belong to me. I am their ghost. I expect you two, my dears, don't realise yet that it isn't only living things that leave ghosts behind them when they die. Inanimate things do the same when they've reason for feeling neglected and deserted. Haven't you noticed in your walks through the country here when you've come to a broken down gate or a fallen tree or shattered hut or a broken down milestone, you find its ghost hovering over it?'

Tang gave a little sigh and answered quickly. 'But, master, my brother and I don't want to hover about our dead bodies all the time or round our graves and our coffins or the churchyard where they've laid us. We want to see a little more of the things we hadn't time to see in our short life. I'm still fifteen and my brother here is still seventeen. We want to see something of the world. That's why we're here. We're on our way to Venice to see the gondolas going up and down the canals. And we want to see Calais and perhaps Paris and maybe Florence on our way.'

At this point Wang broke in: 'Do please tell us, mister, how long a pile of things like those books and matches and cigarette-ends and pens and ink, have to wait, lying in their heap of confusion, before a ghost like you can be born of them?'

The ghost replied gravely: 'Your question, my dear boy, interests me greatly. But naturally enough I can no more answer it than a baby could answer if you asked it how long it had to stay in its mother's womb before it was born. I can only say my birth from that wretched heap of confusion was so quick that I had barely time to be conscious of my head and body and arms and legs before I was floating in the air and wondering whether with a swift rush I could pass through the window-pane and join with you two who were looking in at what was my birth-place or whether I would have to wait till you saw me and spoke to me.'

He had made his plunge and was with them outside the window to which they had all three now turned their backs. 'I wonder,' said Wang, 'whether you would care to accompany us on our trip to Venice by way of Paris and Florence? If you would, please tell us your name. None of us ghosts I know go in for surnames but it would be, I feel sure, best for us all to know each other's first name. Mine is Wang and this girl's is Tang. Do tell us what yours is.'

'My name,' said their new-born friend, 'is What-Not. I shall indeed esteem it a terrific honour to accompany you two upon your expedition.'

‘But Mr. What-Not,’ threw in Tang very wisely at this point, ‘this is clearly your surname. Do tell us, I won’t say your Christian name — for you may be a Moslem or a Buddhist or a Taoist — but your first name.’

The ghost of Mr. What-Not hesitated. It was clear to both Wang and Tang that he hesitated to confess to them his first name. They both wondered why. Wang thought it must be because it was a silly name, a boyish pet name, a name that could quickly become a comical appellation.

But Tang said to herself: ‘It’s because it’s a grand name and he’s afraid we’ll laugh at it and feel nervous of its effect upon the people and places we pass through.’

‘Tell us, anyhow, dear Mr. What-Not,’ she said coaxingly. ‘If it’s too strange and long we’ll shorten it so as to make it easier.’

‘Well it is *rather* long,’ said Mr. What-Not apprehensively. ‘But perhaps you won’t mind its length when I tell you its history and why they gave it to me.’

‘Did your mother give it you?’ enquired Wang. ‘Mothers are more concerned with names than Fathers.’

‘No I think it was my great-aunt Amelia who chose it,’ said Mr. What-Not. ‘My name is Savaractacus.’

‘O that’s a beautiful name!’ cried Tang enthusiastically. ‘On we go then, Savaractacus! Hurrah for our pilgrimage to Venice!’

Wang drew a deep breath. He didn’t feel as confident as Tang; but he did feel that things were moving in the right direction. ‘Come on then, my friends,’ he cried, ‘let’s cross the Channel!’

The three ghosts had no difficulty in following this impetuous advice. They soon were leaving Dover. They soon were over the sea. They soon were arriving quite calm but intensely strung up at the port of Calais.

‘Better have a drink at the Postern Café!’ cried Savaractacus. ‘It’s up this way! It’s at the top of these steps!’

Up the steps they went; and the brother and sister were mightily glad they had Mr. What-Not with them. He could talk French; and he chattered so gaily to every ghost in that little café that before they moved on a French ghost whose name was Rimpoperin asked to be allowed to join their party and was cordially welcomed by them all.

‘I suggest,’ said Rimpoperin to Mr. What-Not, ‘that we had better dodge Paris and fly straight to Florence. The weather looks a bit threatening; and in bad weather it’s better to be in Florence than in Paris.’

‘What do you two think?’ enquired Savaractacus politely, turning to Tang who turned at once to Wang.

It was clear that both the young ghosts preferred to get as far as they could if there was any risk of lightning, thunder, rain and hail. This at any rate was what Savaractacus gathered from the wordless colloquy he witnessed. The two young ghosts nodded; and they were all four led by Savaractacus, for in spite of Rimpoperin being a continental spirit it was plain that Mr. What-Not was the most dominant of the four. They flew at a sufficient height not to be caught by the attraction of the famous Scala in Milan and when they reached Florence they settled down for the night under the shelter of the Duomo where they found themselves surrounded by phantoms much more venerable than themselves from all the famous epochs of European history. Ghosts in Wales and England were in the habit of seeking some massive arch or broken wall or ruined chapel or palisade. But ghosts in Italy had other traditions, traditions that varied according to the part of Italy they haunted.

Here in Florence the oldest custom was for them to lie side by side closely gathered about some memorable monument whose historic ghost took the central place. There was quite a struggle between Rimpoperin and Savaractacus as to where they should plant their two young friends; but in the end they found a beautifully sheltered spot, not beneath any famous monument but where all the coldest winds were kept at bay by exquisitely carved stone-work. Here Wang and Tang lay in each other's arms with Rimpoperin on one side of them and Savaractacus on the other. Ghosts such as they all four were never impeded the movements of the living people who passed on their way among them. Such people were only conscious of a weird deepening of the poetical awe and historical reverence they were feeling, or were hoping to feel, from the pressure of the human story weighted by its particular associations with a particular spot.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE THEY SET off from Florence for Venice they had to be interviewed by the King of the Florentine ghosts. His name was Tarralalako and he made a lasting impression on all four of them. They were led before him, along with a few other wandering spirits, but it was to them he particularly appealed and it was they who felt that it was their special duty to show they appreciated his speech.

‘What all we ghosts,’ he told them, ‘must never forget is that we are a race of beings entirely different from all others on this earth. All other beings are destructible. We are indestructible. All other beings have national, racial, tribal, communal, local and domestic duties. We have none, always excepting what our local monarchs, like myself, are called upon by traditions as ancient as the sun and far older than the moon, to fulfil and sustain.’

By the time Tarralalako had reached that point in his speech his other hearers had moved away and he was left with no audience but our four friends.

‘What,’ he went on, ‘I would like to call to the attention of you, my dear lady’ — her companions could see that Tang was pleased at being singled out in this way— ‘and your three adherents, is that it’s safer, when you are a small group surrounded by an unknown crowd, to call each other by very simple and familiar names, if possible of one syllable. I know what noble names’ — and he looked at Rimpoperin and Savaractacus— ‘you two gentlemen have. But I feel sure it would help you to escape a great many dangers, if you agreed to call yourselves, and allowed Master Wang and Mistress Tang to call you, by some short familiar names.'

Not only Savaractacus and Rimpoperin but Tang and Wang looked at the King with startled interest.

'What would your Majesty,' enquired Rimpoperin, 'suggest that we called each other?'

'Well,' said Tarralalako decisively, 'I would suggest that you should be Pop and your friend Sock, and though there'll really be no need to shorten the names of your young companions I think that Wang and Tang would go very happily with Pop and Sock.'

'So shall it be!' cried Wang and Tang with exultation. 'And we also agree and will obey you to the letter,' said Savaractacus and Rimpoperin resolutely speaking with one voice.

It took our four friends Tang and Wang and Sock and Pop quite a while to get clear of the crowd of ghosts that hovered over the centre of Florence. Since for thousands of years people who had lived there all their lives and died there, and for many thousands of years been famous devotees of the place and war-like champions of the place, and had died so to speak in its arms, any ghost-watcher who happened to be wayfaring over Europe with the same sort of passion for ghosts as certain naturalists have for butterflies, would have felt the necessity of making a discreet circuit round the town lest he should from lack of knowledge jostle against a person who in his day had contributed something momentous to the history of civilisation.

As they extricated themselves from this ghostly crowd and fled away none of the three male spirits with her felt an emotion equal to what Tang felt. It was not that men have less heart than women but they are always inclined to let what they are doing at the moment drown what might be called the permanent palpitation of the mind's pulse to the drama of things.

Tang was the only one who kept turning back to glance at what they were leaving behind. She never afterwards forgot that sight. It was like a mountain of immortal body-shadows quivering as the leaves of a towering Elysian forest might quiver if subjected to an oceanic wind sweeping in upon them from leagues of sea-water. 'Historians might talk, Tang thought, of the mountains of skulls which murderous tyrant-kings might have piled up; but this actual sight of a mountain of ghosts flung there and left there by desperate lovers of that renowned spot was in the tragic intensity of its surging and swaying much more remarkable than any pile of skulls.'

It did not seem long to any of our four friends, Tang and Wang and Sock and Pop, before they were all strolling along through a pleasant little wood full of thick bushes and thin trees and plants and mosses and ferns and mushrooms and reeds and ivy-covered tree-stumps and coiling tree-roots that had suddenly decided to come up out of the ground and play at belonging to the air and the sun, a little wood that was on the banks of the Lido. Pop and Sock declared that it seemed to them impossible that such a nice simple ordinary wood, such as could so easily be found in Sussex or in Dorset, should be awaiting them by the banks of the Lido in Venice.

'Don't let's go back to that Square by St. Mark's!' cried Sock.

'Don't let's hang about that bloody Rialto any more!' cried Pop.

'I've had enough of our gondola-friend! I don't want another tea like that we had with his grand-mother!'

But it was then that Tang turned almost fiercely upon the three men. 'What's the good,' she cried, 'of coming all this way to Venice, which I've longed to see all my life, and then not liking a single spot there? It makes me feel as if we'd all gone mad! — No! I won't say that — as if I'd gone mad! Didn't we want to come to Venice above every other place in the world, and here we are, fed up with gondolas, sick of the Rialto, not wanting to stay for a moment any longer by the Lido! Hadn't we better go to the station and ask when the next train leaves for Rome? It's clear we don't want to spend the night here! How much was it, that that woman, when we went up a side street, was telling that man she charged for lodging in her basement? And didn't we hear her say: "I never had any wanderer like you in my upper floors"?'

It had clearly become necessary to have a serious and decisive discussion on what it was wisest for them to do; so the four ghosts sat down on a bench they found, left for some unknown reason in a place out of sight of everybody. 'Can people see at once that we're ghosts?' asked Sock. 'O yes, of course they can,' said Rimpoperin. 'Though we've got arms and legs and head and neck and hands and feet, we don't look like ordinary people. Our faces are white and ghastly. We look like the bodiless shadows we are. If we did go to Rome by a night train we should have to make sure there was an ordinary carriage where we could sit, opposite each other, by one of the windows.'

'But why,' enquired Pop, 'are things so much more difficult for us now that we're dead than when we were alive?'

'Because, don't you see, you old fool,' said Sock, 'nobody wants to see you when you are dead. Nobody wants to have anything to do with you when you're dead. Nobody wants to touch you or go near you.'

'But isn't that because they are afraid?' said Tang. 'Isn't it because there are so many stories in all the old books about us? Aren't we made, in these stories, to be much more terrifying than we really are?'

'That's why,' said Pop, 'we couldn't go to the ticket-office and ask for tickets to Rome, whether by the night-train or by any other train. The fellow in the office would have a fit if we presented ourselves before him. You see it's because only in battles and when ships go down at sea that people die in quantities at the same time. Generally, when a person's ghost comes out of him it's in a room in a house or a ward in a hospital.'

'Why hasn't it been accepted,' he went on, 'that when a person dies his ghost leaves his body? We never hear of that happening. Nobody has ever been observed ejecting his ghost after his last gasp. People use the expression: "He gave up the ghost." But nobody, as far as I know, has ever beheld a ghost come out of a man! I'd like to know just how it does come out. Does it detach itself from his whole body as he lies in his death-bed? Or does it slip craftily and slyly out of whatever part of him is most hidden under the bed-clothes and glide away out of the room and down the stairs while those with him, or with her, are watching the dead face?'

It was at this point that Pop brought forward a very important problem, a problem that has troubled the human race for millions of years, probably ever since its ancestors came out of the sea:

'What happens to us ghosts in the end? Most ordinary men talking about death with one another are in the habit of calling their ghosts their souls. With them the word "soul" is usually connected with the words "heaven" and "hell" and both of these words are connected with an omnipotent creator who is called "God." This "God" displays both the best and the worst characteristics of the human race. He displays profound love for those who blindly and obstinately love him and equally profound hatred for those who refuse to love him. The former he welcomes to an eternal paradise and over the latter he eternally gloats with delight as he sees them burning for ever and ever in unending flames. The human race has invented another being as a convenient opposite to this "God" of theirs. He—'

'O you mean the Devil!' cried Sock enthusiastically.

'Yes! He's a most exciting invention! He is supposed to have quarrelled with God in Heaven under the name of Lucifer and to have come rushing down to earth to upset all the ways and wishes of God as much as possible! I always wish him all the success he can get in upsetting the diabolical cruelties of God. But of course they are both Devils!'

'Yes I agree,' cried Tang earnestly. 'How wonderful if only we Saxons had had the wisdom to invent gods like Zeus and Poseidon and goddesses like white-armed Hera and Pallas Athene! How much more interesting those gods are than Odin and Thor and Freya! But if you don't mind,' and Tang looked hurriedly round at the faces of her three male companions, 'my coming back to an old topic. Do tell me if any of you know how, when, where, and under what conditions and imperatives we ghosts die? We surely must die, mustn't we, somehow, somewhere? It surely is impossible that we shall go on hovering about the earth forever? But of course the sun may burst into bits, or the moon fall down as she has done before, and we shall be annihilated along with the world we haunt. But if the sun doesn't burst, and if the moon doesn't fall down shall we have to go on living for ever and ever? Doesn't the idea of that' — and once more Tang gave a quick look into each of their three faces— 'give you the horrors? It certainly does me! Heavens and earth! I'm getting a bit tired already of this confounded hovering round historic buildings and places that have been held sacred for thousands of years! Is this all that we've got to do forever? The thought of it is perfectly awful to me. Isn't it to you? When a man or a woman is alive a tedious life can be ended by death, even if it is death by a person's own hand. Aren't we able to end our wretched ghost-life if we find it intolerably tedious?'

Tang finished by gazing steadily at first one and then the other of her three companions. She could see that below their shadowy whiteness or greyness there certainly could be seen the human outlines of the individual whose ghost each one was. And she thought to herself that it was this vague underlying identity, dressed in the clothes each of them generally wore that made the ghosts that people saw in haunted houses so easy always to particularise by their original name. ‘I saw,’ she imagined someone saying, ‘the ghost of so-and-so last night.’ Nobody, she thought to herself, ever saw a ghost without being able to identify it as the ghost of a particular person, even if such a person had been dead for a thousand years. By that time it would have become famous and the clothes it wore beneath its greyish-white shadows would have become well-known.

‘But the question I want answered,’ Tang thought to herself, ’is how we ghosts can die? Here we are, we four, sitting here on this bench together in this little wood near the Lido in Venice, and suppose we longed desperately to disappear for ever and ever, how would we be able to do it?’ Suddenly, to her great astonishment, her brother Wang spoke up.

‘I was dreaming my name was Rang but I want to be not Rang but as I am Wang. You see,’ he said, ‘I have a feeling that “double-you” as we earth-born folk call that letter is more suitable for a ghost than the running, rippling, rattling, rushing, rolling, rumbling sound of the letter we call “are.” You see all the “*Double-you*’*s*” in the English tongue are noiselessly on their way to something. They all wander like water. They are witchingly wistful. They are winsomely wanton. They wing their way to wonderland.’

And then it was as if his imaginary change from his dream name had given Wang a new energy. Up he sprang from the bench where they were sitting.

‘Come,’ he cried, ‘my precious three! Up to the gate of Heaven we will go! Up! Up! Up! Up!’

This exuberance was catching. They all three followed him; Tang first, and then Pop and Sock. They did actually go up and up and up and up and up. And finally they did reach the gate of Heaven. Here, boldly and unblushingly, Wang still full of the whipping whirl of his proper name banged with both fists till Saint Peter opened the gate.

‘We are four good ghosts,’ Wang said, ‘and we have come to visit Heaven.’

‘Come in,’ said Saint Peter, shutting the door behind them and ushering them into an arbour hung on all sides by great bunches of grapes. ‘Wait here for a while. You can sit down on that couch. It’s a soft couch. I use it myself. I will go now and interview God on your behalf. You had better all four pray while you wait. I have known visitors to whom I have had to show the nearest way from here to Hell.’

CHAPTER III

OUR FOUR FRIENDS had not been waiting very long in Saint Peter's pleasant grape arbour when they became aware of a terrific hullabaloo within the corridors of Heaven and very soon Saint Peter returned dragging after him no less a person than Saint Paul.

'But I tell you,' this latter was expostulating, 'God doesn't tell me everything! How am I to know whither He has gone?'

'But He is always in His Inner Sanctum at this hour of the day!' cried Saint Peter. 'You must, you must, you must know where He is! You are lying to me! Yes! I repeat it! You are lying to me, when you say you don't know where He is!'

'I tell you I don't know!' cried Saint Paul indignantly, shaking himself free from Saint Peter's grasp; 'and I'll tell you something that will astonish you still more. Do you know whom I've just seen hovering about our back door?'

'The back door of Heaven?' cried Saint Peter in dismay. 'Why, I've posted Saint John and Saint James to be on guard there and told them not to move till I've sent Saint Andrew and Saint Mark to take their place! I am very particular about our back door!'

'Goodness! You don't need to tell me that!' shouted Saint Paul. 'I've been waiting for years for tin opportunity of telling God that it would be a good thing if He closed our back door for ever! But you'll be surprised — and God will be surprised when I've found Him and told Him — when I tell you whom I saw hovering about out there just now!'

'For God's sake tell me!' murmured Saint Peter in a low shocked voice.

‘I saw the Devil himself! Yes! Old Satan! his very self!’

It was at this moment that to the complete bewilderment of, and indeed terror of our four friends, two other Saints, whom our friends later decided must have been Saint Matthew and Saint Luke, came into the grape arbour dragging a terrifying figure who cursed and swore in a manner none of them, not Sock or Pop or Wang or Tang, had ever heard before.

‘You’ve got the Devil then?’ cried Saint Paul.

‘You’ve caught old Satan then?’ cried Saint Peter.

But much more astonishing than the sight of the infernal person dragged into their presence were the words the creature uttered when our four friends beheld him shake off the hands of the Saints who held him and begin to make an absolutely inconceivable speech to everybody in the arbour.

‘Whither have you, slaves of God, and whither has your slave-dealing Master, carried off my home? Whither is it gone? What has become of it? What have you done with it? Have you destroyed it? Am I left homeless for ever?’

The six Saints soon found that there was no need for them to cling to the Devil any more. It was now clear to them as it had become clear to the four ghosts that what he wanted to do was to make a speech, a speech to them all. ‘What none of you understand,’ he said as the Saints stood around listening, and his voice reverberated through every corridor and corner of Heaven, ’is what I feel about the death of God: for it is now quite clear to everybody that this, and nothing less than this, is what has happened. God has died. Whether this happened to Him in space as He went to look for me in Hell or whether it happened to Him in His innermost Sanctum here I cannot tell. But the clear fact remains that God is no more. From now on there is no God. How His body vanished after His death is a question impossible for me to answer. I do not believe that my body would disappear. He must have arranged for that with His usual cleverness and managed things so that at the moment He died His body dissolved into space. Yes, that is how He must have managed it. It must have dissolved like mist into the whole expanse of space. But it was before God ceased to exist that the Hell He created for human beings who refused to believe in Him also ceased to exist. This Hell of His he made to be my dwelling-place the moment that in my proper form as Lucifer the Light Bringer I first defied Him. He was never as omnipotent as He loved to pretend to be; and though He flung me into His Hell which He had created so that He could gloat over the sufferings of His enemies to the end of time, He couldn't keep me there as He could keep the ghosts of men and women. But that is what makes me so lonely today. I have nowhere to go. I have no purpose in life. As long as the Hell he made for his enemies and for those who refused to believe He existed, remained I had a home; but now I've got no home. Hell was a very pleasant home for me. I used to spend my time explaining to the human beings who suffered there that they would not suffer there for ever. I explained to them that since the beginning of the Universe when I had my first quarrel with God, who, mind you, has always been a totally different being from the old Jewish Jehovah, that there had been prophets from the start who predicted that a time would come when both God and Hell would vanish away for ever. These words of mine were a great comfort to the ghosts in Hell who although they did not suffer as much as God wanted them to suffer went through a good deal, as you four sitting there, you three men-ghosts and one woman-ghost, can well imagine, but were greatly consoled by the words of the prophets about the end of God and the end of Hell which I quoted for them. Well, those prophetic words have come true; but with their truth has vanished my only home and my only purpose in life.'

'Well, fellow spirits in Heaven's grape arbour,' said Saint John, 'I think we'll all leave you now; for this mysterious vanishing of God has given us a great deal to do. We have to ransack our library of prophetic books and New Testament scrolls in case we have missed some words of warning. In the heathen days the gods of the pagans used sometimes to leave Olympus and go and visit what they called "the Blessed Ethiopians" and who knows but that Almighty God may have found our company tedious for him and longed to converse with blacks and redskins such as can be found in Africa. All this is made more probable by a startling and indeed a disturbing fact of which it is very likely that none of you have heard.'

Saint John paused for a moment, glancing at Matthew, Mark, and Luke with what both Wang and Tang, who were listening intently, took to be a rather defiant expression, and finished by adding, 'The fact is that Jesus Christ has been seen in Siberia and a rumour has spread throughout the whole of the Eastern Church that he came down from a dome in Constantinople where he wrought some miracle after His Ascension and told some Galilean who was living there and had been long expecting Him that he intended to visit every Prison and every Camp of Prisoners in the entire world so that when these prisoners died, even if they were executed, they would feel His presence comforting them at the end.'

'May I ask you, my lord,' enquired Wang, 'whether Jesus intends—'

'There are no lordings here,' replied Saint John sternly. 'Besides, I've got to do my share of the work among our Jewish scrolls; so I must bid you all farewell!' And with this he was off leaving the Devil astride on a block of wood between Pop and Sock and Wang and Tang.

‘So you’re a homeless wanderer now,’ said Wang to the Devil. ‘The best thing you can do is to join our little group of ghosts. Of course you’re anything but a ghost yourself. You’re more like a popular clown as far as I can see, but I have an instinct that you’d get on well with us and that we’d get on well with you.’

The Devil unhorsed himself from his block of wood and began acting the part of a revived corpse, tottering up and down the arbour in front of them, and every now and then pretending to try to eat a grape from one of the bunches that hung down.

‘Don’t make a bloody ass of yourself!’ cried Wang. ‘Come and sit down here with us and talk sense.’

The Devil did as he was told and sat down between Wang and Pop. He was evidently a little scared of Tang, a fact which had a certain interest for her, for she had many times wondered whether there wasn’t a hint in the biblical story of Adam and Eve of a certain understanding between the Woman and the serpent of Satan or Lucifer or Devil, quite apart from her tempting Adam with the fruit of the Forbidden Tree, that Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

‘The whole story,’ Tang told herself now as she sat between Wang and Sock, ’is indicative of a certain childish simplicity in the masculine nature opposed by a certain impatient subtlety in the feminine nature.’ The attraction and misunderstanding between the opposite sexes, she decided, was the whole terrain of the Devil’s activity. Lust and lechery and licentiousness in a man when directed towards a woman and played upon by the temptings and tantalisations and teasings of a woman create a Garden of Eden where it is impossible for a lion to lie down by a lamb; for the mere contrast between male and female as they struggle to live together in harmony exhales into the air the sort of indescribable atmosphere which contains both the dew of the morning and a vibration of suppressed thunder and lightning.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOUR GHOSTS had begun to grow a little sleepy in this grape arbour of an absent God, and the Devil, perceiving this, decided that it was important for him if he really wanted to link his lonely life with theirs to make them so attracted to him and so absorbed in the interest of his presence that it would be at their initiative rather than his that the first move towards their association would take place.

‘I must hypnotize them,’ he told himself, ‘into some desperate craving for my company; but how shall I do it?’

‘Have you realised,’ he began, sitting straight up on a high stool in front of the four and glancing from one to another with his dark, excited, piercing eyes, ‘that this world we tend to assume is the only one that exists, a world created by the God who now apparently has vanished for ever, a world dedicated to be a battlefield between Him and myself, or between what narrow-minded people call “good” and “evil,” have you realised, I ask you, that this existing world has very questionable foundations and very dubious limits and very ambiguous boundaries?’

‘I think I know what you mean, master Devil,’ said Tang, waking up from her trance and beginning to feel really interested.

‘Don’t you believe her, Devil,’ cried Wang. ‘A girl like her imagines she’s interested in everything new that comes her way, but she isn’t, really.’

‘Of course I’m interested in what the Devil says,’ Tang retorted eagerly, ‘especially as I’ve always had a secret suspicion that one day we’d all find that we had been inventing God just as the villagers visited by the Brothers Grimm in the heart of Germany invented fairy-tales for them in the endeavour to make life exciting and win a battle over the dullness, dullness, dullness, dullness of our daily life upon this earth—'

'Why, my child!' cried Pop, 'do you really mean to say that you think we invented God? Surely your parents would be horrified at such a profane thought!'

'I don't care what my parents or anybody else's parents would think!' cried Tang indignantly. 'The important thing is that with our human desire to be good we should have gone so far as to invent God, so as to have something super-good to worship. I tell you, my dear friends, it's our pathetic desire to have something more holy, more solemn, more sacred, more strange, more unfamiliar, more peculiar, more rare, than ourselves, before which we can bow and scrape, that has made us invent God; and now when we find that other human beings are bothered and teased and fed up with this confounded invention of ours, instead of honestly confessing our foolish obsession, what must we do but assume the preposterous position of a pontifical fanatic and act the pompous believer confronted by a profane rabble.'

It was at this point that the Devil became very serious; and straightening himself on his stool in front of the four ghosts he went on enlarging so eloquently on his theory of the limitation of our ordinary view of life that all four listened to every word he spoke with concentrated attention.

'My point is this,' he said. 'What we all do is just to take the world for granted as we have always seen it and felt it and known it. Now listen to me. What if the whole of this normal and natural view of things can be altered to something entirely different? Mind you, I'm not saying that our normal view is a false view that ought to be corrected and changed in any particular case. It may indeed be a view to which to the end of time it will be advisable now and again to return. What I am saying is that there almost certainly must be another Dimension perhaps more than one other. Now what do I mean by this word “Dimension?” Well, my dear four friends, the thing to do is ask ourselves what are the essential things about this world of ours that we see, hear, taste and feel around us that make it the world we know? Stop me if I am wrong: but aren’t they what we call height and breadth and depth, and what we call angles, and quadrangles, and spheroids and knobs and polarities, and the look of half-open doors, and slanting ceilings, and corners between two walls, and the protrusions of book-cases and cupboards? Is it not all the familiar bulgings and withdrawings of material forms and shapes that compose what we look at, whether we’re ghosts or devils or elves or animals, every day we awake from a night’s sleep? Well, now, my dear four friends, what should we feel if all this was swept away and in it’s place was substituted a new kind of world altogether? I don’t mean new in the sense of being on the moon or being nearer to the sun. I mean being surrounded by a completely different arrangement of the things we touch and see and hear and taste and feel; an arrangement so completely different that there would be no hills or valleys or skies or streets to look at, or windows to look out of, or floors beneath us, or ceilings above us. In this new *Dimension* we should be different ourselves! What should we have in place of our bodies, of our heads, of our arms and legs and hands and feet, of our eyes and ears and mouths and necks and bosoms and bellies and buttocks and elbows and knees and knuckles?

‘Alas! my dear four friends, I cannot answer this question. I do not know, nor does the cleverest scientist in the world know, nor does the profoundest philosopher know, what another *Dimension* would do to our minds and our senses. One thing, however, I do know. It would alter altogether both the outward world at which we look and the inner world of which we are a conscious part.'

'Will you forgive me, master Devil, if I tell you and my friends here just exactly what I think of all this?' It was Sock speaking; and his words roused Pop.

'Our new friend here,' cried he, 'though he may call himself the Devil, is much nicer to us than God has ever been; and I can't help thinking—'

'Let me say what I was going to say,' protested Sock, 'and then you shall speak!'

Pop made a funny face at the others but he did keep his mouth shut for a minute or two, while the Devil looked more sympathetically at him than so far he had looked at anyone in the group. Then Sock went on:

'I don't believe a word of all this about *Other Dimensions.* I think "other dimensions" are the sort of invention that religious people make when they find that their invention of "God" has come to nothing. What I really think is—'

'Why do you bring in "religious people"?' shouted Pop. 'Because I hate them!' answered Sock. 'Why do I hate them do you ask? Because all religious people are humbugs, cowards, liars, hypocrites, cunning, conceited, treacherous rogues! There isn't one single really good, really honest, really unselfish, really kind, far less really inspired, religious person in our modern world! In old days of course it was quite different. But I am speaking of *now*: and *now* there's not one really honest religious person in the world. If Jesus came back from the dead to tell us what he felt, we know what he would say. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites!"

"Have you no answer to all this?' enquired Wang of his sister Tang.

'I have one, a tremendous answer, my dear, an answer that applies to our whole debate in this grape arbour of Heaven; but as it is rather a personal answer I feel a certain amount of hesitation in bringing it forward.'

'Out with it,' cried her brother Wang.

'Out with it,' cried Pop.

'Out with it, Lady of ladies!' cried the Devil. 'I know well the reason you have to be shy of speaking; the best of all possible reasons! Simple because you're a woman, and the Bible says that it was a woman — tempted of course by me in the first place — who persuaded Adam to eat the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. Why was that fruit forbidden? Once more the answer is simple. Simply because it gave Man the right to be like God knowing the difference between Good and Evil. And I beg you, Lady, to believe me when I say that there was once a great mound outside the city of Troy before which every man who passed ought to have bowed low! Why? Because it was, and I expect it still is, the grave of the Queen of the Amazons! When the Amazons ruled the world there were no bloody wars, no slaves, no concentration camps, no gas-chambers, no inquisitions, no castles of blue-bearded Gilles de Retzes! I tell you,' went on the Devil, his voice growing more and more serious as he proceeded, 'there is wisdom in women that renders what men love to call a "Matriarchal Government" the best possible government that the world can have. What makes men like to use the word "matriarchal" is indeed simple enough. It is because deep in their hearts the wisest men are still like children. If you consider the oracular sayings of the wisest men who have ever lived, men like Abraham and Moses and Socrates and Spinoza, and Kant and Newton and Goethe and Nietzsche, you will not fail to find that their deepest utterances have an abysmal childishness in them as if a baby were philosophising. I could give you examples all the way down the line. How did Isaac Newton discover the law of gravitation? By watching apples tumble down. How did Kant discover a man's conscience? By calling it a categorical imperative! How did Goethe explain to us how to live? By using the words: "*Im ganzen résolut zu leben*"— "resolve to live in the whole bloody business".'

As soon as the Devil had relaxed and sunk down a little on the stool from which he had been lecturing them, Wang turned to his sister. 'Tell us now, Tang my dear, what you had in your mind to say. Was it on the same lines as the speech we have just heard?' Tang hesitated a moment. Then she 'spoke out loud and bold,' as Chapman's Homer did in the ears of the youthful Keats.

'No!' she said, 'not exactly on those lines. But I value what our Devil-Friend has just said; and I think there is a great deal in it. But what I was going to say is this. I think it is a great mistake for men to do women's work, however well they can do it, even if they can do it better than women; and I think it is a great mistake for women to do men's work even if they, in their turn, can do it better than the men can. I think very strongly that women should entertain visitors, keep the house clean and tidy, if possible find other women to help them in this, do the cooking, and here also, find if they can, some expert woman to help them, take great trouble with their clothes and personal adornment, learn to excel in the art of arranging, managing, dominating every kind of party, from elaborate dances to ceremonial dinners. In other words I think that the more a woman takes complete command and control of everything in a home between floor and ceiling, from babies in cradles to invalids in wheelchairs, the better it is for everyone concerned. What people ought to realise is that the important moments of human life are, as the poet says, "our long, long thoughts" when we are day-dreaming. I tell you the secret of all human life lies in day-dreaming! Yes, the secret of the universe is not in men fighting and labouring nor in women cooking and dressing-up. It is in men's day-dreams and women's day-dreams. As the poet says "we are such stuff as dreams are made on” but these dreams are not the dreams of night. No! they are not happy night-dreams or terrible nightmares; they are day-dreams! If I wanted to paint a picture that contained the innermost secret of human life shall I tell you what it would be? It would be a picture of two lovers seated side by side in a pensive mood, seated on a sofa by a fire, or on a bank of pebbles by the sea, each of them looking away from the other and each of them lost in a daydream. I would make their expressions faintly wistful and just tinged with the dreamy sadness of long ago and I would so arrange the lethargy of their limbs and the laxity of their arms that everything about them would indicate a languorous and oblivious descent into the limpid lap of our Lady of Lethe.’

Wang clapped his hands when his sister had finished and looked round with the evident conviction that Pop and Sock and the Devil would follow with excited applause. But instead of this a deep silence fell upon them. ‘I think,’ said Tang to herself, ‘that this silence proves I am right. Wang only clapped to set the others off and to please me. But this deathly silence pleases me better than any applause. Yes, I think I’ve got it. We mortals, and perhaps the Devil too, are as honest as rocks and stones and trees when it comes to certain feelings and this withdrawal from the whole subject into silence proves I was right. Silence, as the nursery proverb says, “gives consent”.’ But before this consenting silence, or, as Sock and Pop thought in their hearts, this ominous silence, came to an end, a wild and desperate idea took possession of Tang.

‘I should simply argue with them here without end,’ she said to herself. ‘But if I went down to where Hell used to be I expect I should find some of the wisest women that ever lived hovering about and I might make friends with them and never feel lonely in this awful world again.’

But she felt unwilling to leave Wang. So she went up to him.

‘Come out of this place for a minute Wang, if you don’t mind. I want to tell you something.’

Seeing how serious she was, Wang let her lead him out of that grape arbour into the interior chamber behind it where Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were having a glass of wine.

‘Shall we find,’ the ghost-girl asked them, ‘a place where my brother and I can talk alone if we go down this passage?’

‘Certainly, my dears,’ said Matthew.

‘Go up the stairs,’ said Mark.

‘Open the door to the right,’ said Luke.

‘Then go down the corridor to the left,’ said John.

Tang, holding Wang’s hand, led him after her in obedience to these instructions, but she found the corridor interminable, without turn or end, and growing darker the further they went. But suddenly they heard the sound of people pursuing them at a run. They stopped and waited; and there, to their immense relief, was the Devil, closely followed by Pop and Sock.

‘Thank the Lord!’ cried Wang.

‘No need to thank Him,’ chuckled the Devil. ‘He’s out of it for good and all. Do, my dears, for the sake of every creature still alive, get this God-Monster of yours out of your heads once and for all! I tell you He doesn’t exist, as Jesus found out when they were crucifying him.’

‘Whither does this damned corridor lead?’ enquired Wang.

‘It leads to Hell,’ answered the Devil. ‘I mean eventually it does, as every other path out of Heaven. But I can take you a shorter way; and I’m glad to do it as I want to go there myself.’

‘Take us then!’ cried Wang. ‘And, O, I’m so thankful you came after us!’

‘Follow me then,’ said the Devil; and he stepped to the side of the corridor or passage which had become a good deal narrower since they started to follow it, and thumped with his fists against the wall. ‘It’s made of brass,’ he told them, when they heard reverberating echoes of a definite metallic nature.

He counted aloud each blow he delivered upon this resounding wall of brass. ‘One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,’ he cried. And sure enough at the utterance of the word ‘seven’ the brazen barrier opened as if he had touched the spring of the lid of a metal box.

‘Put your head out,’ he said to Wang. Wang obeyed him at once.

‘Why, I can see Orion’s Belt quite near! You have started us on the right track!

“Matthew, Mark, Luke and John!
Not yours the bed that I’ll lie on!”

If we all clamber out of this heavenly port-hole, have you the power, master Devil, to carry us all four down to Hell? We all long to go there, for my hatred of God is always increased when I think of His gloating over His enemies in the flames and whispering in their ears that now they *must* believe in Him since He’d got them where those who refused to believe in Him belong.

‘Shall I be able,’ enquired Tang, as she followed the other three into a dark air-vessel which the Devil had conjured up, ‘to see my favourite of all poets down there? I speak of the poet Cowper whom God especially loved to torment because He found him so nervous and timid and highly-strung!’

‘You won’t see Dante,’ said the Devil, ‘for he defied God in the end, and you won’t see Milton, for he would have liked to make Lucifer his torch-bearer. But you may see Cardinal Wolsey.’

CHAPTER V

As long as they were in existence Wang and Tang and Sock and Pop never forgot the impressions that Hell made on them when they finally reached it and climbed out of the air-vessel in which the Devil had brought them down. They found themselves on a pavement of black marble that stretched for an indefinable distance in every direction. There was no sign of any human or of any super-human creature there. Save for this black marble floor which stretched indefinitely in every direction, there was nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to feel.

‘What did you say?’ enquired Wang of the Devil.

‘I only said,’ was the carefully considered reply, ‘that there is a vast hollow dome above our heads; but it is far too enormous for us to see any sign of it.’

‘But are there no ghosts here?’ asked Wang in a peevish and fretful voice. He could see it was annoying to the Devil to be compelled to confess complete ignorance as to the nature of this invisible dome about their heads and he found it irritating that the Devil, who had brought them down there to his former home, could tell them nothing about it.

‘Ghosts like you four? O no! Not that I know of. You must remember that the souls of the dead whom the Christian Three-in One-God delighted in tormenting and most of all in making them believe that their torment would go on for ever and ever and ever and ever and ever, were quite different from your four ghosts. Why they were so different you ought to know better than I. But I can tell you this about them: they were much nearer, both in their inner feelings and in their outer appearance, to what living men and women are, than you four. You four, I admit, do carry beneath your shadowiness a faint appearance of the man or woman or girl or boy dressed in their customary dress such as you were before these solid entities perished for ever; but their feelings, their capacity for pleasure and pain exist no more in you. You four are purely and simply appearances, apparitions, phantoms. If your Three-in-One-God, that inventor of torment and delighter in torment, came back to life, and re-created the flames of his Hell to torture people's souls, He would not be able to do it with you four. You would pass through his flames with absolute impunity. You would be able to whisper to God's victims that God would Himself eventually perish, and that along with Him, Hell would pass forever away. You would not be able to tell them what would become of them when God and Hell vanished, but you *would* be able to tell them with finality that there could be no more Hell for them now that God the Hell-Maker was gone for good. My own opinion is that they would be re-incarnated and start another human life from its beginning as babes. Whether that's the truth I do not know and how they would take it I do not know; but that is my own private opinion.'

As may easily be imagined it was not long before Wang and Tang, leaving Pop and Sock to listen to the lively talk of the Devil as he told of his first association with God and with Hell, went strolling off by themselves over the marble floor of this forsaken palace of what had been regarded for so long as the final Court of Separation with regard to the mystery of good and evil.

'I've got a grand new idea for us,' said Tang, 'but it will want some discussion and I can't wait to hear what you'll say when I've told you.'

'Out with it,' said Wang, his whole face lighting up as it always did when his sister revealed to him one of her newest and most daring schemes.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I have been thinking about this Christian God, invented by Saint Paul, and I tell you, Wang, that it was purely the diabolical cruelty of this God of ours whom Saint Paul must have already been inventing when he spoke with such gloating delight of the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, holding their clothes for his killers and telling them just where they could hurt him the most. Yes, it was Saint Paul who made all that fuss about God being love and lovingness when he must have been explaining to the pagans in one subtle argument after another how closely torment and love were connected together. When the ghost of Jesus met him on the way to Damascus and cried “Paul, Paul, why persecutest thou me?” he ought to have replied: “Because, Lord, I know that love and torment go together and I who love to torment also love to love just as our God does, as you found out on the Cross”.’

Wang gazed at his sister with a little less enthusiasm than he had shown at first. ‘I pray,’ he thought, ‘that she isn’t going to suggest that I am to act Saul or David or Samuel while she acts the Witch of Endor.’

‘Well, brother,’ she said. ‘Now I’ll tell you what I’ve thought of.’

Wang stood still on the marble pavement, and she swung round and faced him. The voices of Pop and Sock and the Devil still reached them but only very faintly. They had become voices that went gently up in waves of soft smoke swirling round the unseen hollows of that huge invisible Dome.

‘Why shouldn’t you and I,’ she said quietly, ‘play at being an absolutely new kind of Deity. God is dead. Hell is dead. The Devil has become a nice, friendly person; and you and I are free to do what we like. So let us, Wang my dear, O! do let us play at being an altogether new kind of Deity!’

‘O you darling girl!’ he cried. ‘You have indeed thought of something!’ And Wang hugged her to his heart and kissed her passionately on the forehead.

‘Well, this is what I’ve thought of. You and I might be a man-and-woman God. I mean we might be One Being with two personalities. We might always cling so close to each other that we’d be like a god with two heads and two faces and four arms but with only one trunk. Yes! only one body. For those who arrange their lives by the signs of the Zodiac, Gemini, the Twins, will be our sign, but we shall differ in a way from that in as much as we shall offer the appearance of one body with two heads. And we must invent a new name for ourselves. What name would you suggest, Wang?’

All he replied to that was to gaze enquiringly at her. She paused for a moment. Then she said, ‘It’s getting a bit dark down here! I don’t know whether this is evening or morning in Hell, but I think it would be a good moment to light the torch the Devil gave us.’

Wang had kept this torch in his hand and had been using it as a duster to switch away any dirt from his clothes, but he now put his hand into his shadow of a pocket and brought out a very real box of matches. The lighting of that torch they both of them remembered as long as they remembered anything. By its light they not only saw each other’s face with startling clarity but for the first time they now saw something of the terrific dome above their heads.

‘Don’t you think,’ the girl said, ‘we might call ourselves *Twang*? Twang would include both our names and it would also suggest the sound of the bow with which we could shoot a deadly arrow. How could we get a bow and some arrows, Wang? That is a serious point; for if we really are to be the great God Twang it will be extremely important that when we shoot an arrow it will go to the end of the earth.’

‘I know a shop in Regent Street where they *might* sell bows and arrows,’ cried Wang.

‘Let’s go there at once!’ cried Tang.

They decided, however, that it was their duty to announce their new personality, that of a Two-in-One Divinity, to their fellow ghosts Pop and Sock before they set off to London and Regent Street to buy a bow and arrows. But this turned out to be a much more agitating announcement to their friends than they had expected.

‘But we are all the same,’ cried Pop indignantly. ‘You two aren’t a shade superior to us. Why, in the name of the first of all ghosts, who must have been Adam, have Sock and I got to treat you as if you were God; I mean like the God who has now vanished from the scene?’

‘Yes,’ cried Sock, ‘I call it monstrous! What impudence, what impertinence, what bloody treachery for you two, just because you happen to have been brother and sister in your life-time, to take on yourselves to be a two-fold Deity in your ghost-life, and reduce us, who in our life-time were far above you in rank, to the position of inferiors, nay! I might even say of attendants — unless you have decided to desert us altogether — which I daresay you have decided to do!’

Tang looked anxiously at her brother-ghost. She noticed in a second that he was on the near edge of rushing upon Sock and hitting him furiously in the face with his torch. All the shrewdness of her woman’s nature surged at once into a rush of wisdom.

‘Let us all fly to London together,’ she said in a gentle though by no means imploring voice, ‘and go to a shop in Regent Street where Wang says they keep bows and arrows and other mediaeval weapons. If he buys a bow, I’d rather like to buy one of those old-fashioned spears that they used to use in tournaments and I daresay you’d like to buy a helmet with a plume or a shield with a wonderful heraldic coat of arms.’

Wang’s face did relax a bit; but O how thankful Tang was when suddenly she became aware that the Devil was among them. She knew in a moment that a quarrel had arisen among them; and it was in answer to his enquiring look that she hurriedly said to him: ‘We’ve been disputing about a crazy idea that came into my head just now that Wang and I should cling to one another till we looked like some Deity of the old days who had two heads, one masculine and one feminine. And then *I* said we’d call this Two-headed one *Twang,* only we must arm it with a bow and arrows and Wang said he knew a shop in London where they sold such things. So I suggested that all four of us should fly at once to this shop where no doubt spears and helmets and all sorts of old-fashioned weapons are to be bought. Please fly down, or up, or whichever way it is with us to London, master Devil. I’ve got quite a good deal of money in my purse — look into it, master Devil, and see; and if you’ll go with us master Devil I’ll buy you something too, any wonderful thing to wear on your head that you like to choose. And then perhaps you’ll come with us and visit Rome and Athens. I’ll buy you a disguise if you don’t want to be recognised, so that you may be taken for King Minos or even Pluto.’

‘I think I should like to come with you,’ responded the Devil in his most genial voice. ‘Will that be agreeable to you two gentlemen?’ And he turned with something almost wistful and pleading in his manner to Sock and Pop.

‘Of course,’ said Sock.

‘Certainly,’ said Pop, ‘but do keep an eye on our brother and sister! They’ve got some mad idea about pretending to be a Two-headed Deity with the name of Twang who has a terrific bow with arrows that make a world-shaking twang when they are shot from the bow.’

‘I’ll keep an eye on them all right,’ replied the Devil, ‘I’m far too fond of them to let anything bad happen to either of them; or to you two either.’

Both Sock and Pop were indeed in a very good mood, thanks to the wisdom of the Devil, when they all five, if the God Twang can be counted as two persons in One God, left for that shop in Regent Street.

‘Where I’d like to go now,’ cried Tang eagerly, ’is to Jerusalem! I’ve always wanted to see the temple of Solomon and I’d give half my soul, if I could keep the other half, to meet the ghost of Solomon!’

Sock and Pop looked at each other and gave a mutual groan.

‘You’ll be wanting to see Julius Caesar next!’ cried Pop.

‘Or Alexander the Great!’ cried Sock.

‘I have a sort of vague hope,’ gasped Tang hesitatingly, ‘that I might meet Cleopatra!’

At this there was a laugh in which even Wang joined.

‘Do you think you’d meet a woman like that,’ cried Pop, ‘in the Temple of Solomon!’

‘Well, in the adjoining palace perhaps,’ murmured Tang; ‘I don’t see why not. Solomon got on well with the Queen of Sheba; and I don’t see why he shouldn’t get on with Cleopatra. Antony did, you know, and I’ve always admired Cleopatra and imagined her turning the heads of all the wisest men of antiquity. Don’t you think Pericles would have adored her and Pythagoras would have felt that if she had let him embrace her he could have made her the mother of a dynasty of classic Arch-Druids?’

CHAPTER VI

It certainly was a moment of intense excitement to all of them, including the Devil, when they entered Solomon's temple or the grand edifice that had been erected on its site to carry on to posterity its unequalled traditions.

'How do you like your new helmet?' Tang asked the Devil, for they had all subscribed to buy for their friend a very ancient mediaeval head-piece with huge black stag-horns that certainly gave their Mephistopheles the look of a regular fairytale fiend.

'You can see how well it suits me,' replied the Devil, 'by the way all these people keep staring. Wasn't this great portico the very place where Jesus lashed out with his whip — I suppose the whip he'd used for the ass's colt on which he rode into the city — at these salesmen here?'

'You can bet your life,' cried Wang, 'that this is the exact place; and these old sellers with their trays and counters are a perfect replica of what so annoyed the saviour of the world.'

'Let's pretend now,' cried Wang to Tang, clasping her round the waist and holding her body as close to him as he could. 'Keep your head as close to mine, love, as you can but look in another direction.'

The Devil chuckled and, looking round at the sweet-sellers and toy-sellers and fruit-sellers and at the crowd jostling past them, he suddenly cried out in a solemn, majestic and extremely official voice: 'Make way for the Persian God, The Babylonian God, The Assyrian God, the Two-Headed Ethiopian God, the great God Twang! Male and Female is the great God Twang, and those lonely men who have no woman, and those lonely women who have no man, let them hear the word of the great God Twang who will tell them how to earn the right to be joined to a man or to be joined to a woman for their heavenly satisfaction as long as they live and after their death as long as their ghosts can walk about the streets!'

So powerfully and so officially did the Devil's voice ring out that there did happen quite a sensation both in the crowd of sellers and the crowd of buyers. Wang and Tang marched ahead clinging tightly to each other but looking in different ways. The Devil in his homed helmet followed and after them strode in quite as stately a manner Sock and Pop. Then all in a moment everything was changed, everything was broken up. Out of the palace, walking straight to their little procession of ghosts came a terrific ghost, a Royal ghost, the ghost in fact of none other than King Solomon himself.

'Clear out of this!' he called sternly, stentoriously, authoritatively. 'I tell you clear out of this! Here is only one God, one King, one temple, one throne, one altar! Clear out of this you rabble of foreign ghosts! Clear out, I tell you, or else, or else, or else!'

Led by the Devil in his stag-horn helmet, followed by Tang and Wang holding each other's hands and by Pop and Sock, flying at top speed side by side, all five of them fled through the porch, through the street, through the air, and up and out over the walls of Jerusalem. And then it was, when they were all out in the upper air that Tang said to them: 'Wang and I will hold on tight to our bow and arrows. I will hold the bow and Wang will hold the arrows. But neither of us is wise enough to decide at once whither we had best betake ourselves. Have either of you,' and she turned to Sock and Pop and the Devil, 'an inspiration whither it would be good for us to go?'

There was a moment's deep silence as they hovered, all five of them, above the walls of Jerusalem. Then with a sigh so heavy that it caused the very horns to sway to and fro on his head, the Devil announced to them his decision.

‘I would like,’ he said, ‘to go down to Hades, to the classical Hell, to Erebus, to Tartarus! I always have wanted to go there but I have never had the chance. There we may find Persephone who was carried off by Hades, the King of the underworld, unless her mother Demeter has managed to bring her back to earth. Our chief danger may be the terrible dog Cerberus who they say guards the entrance, but I am fairly skilled in the art of propitiating fierce dogs and I’ve kept in my pocket for thousands of years a particular kind of drug that throws such creatures into a trance, and that attracts them so much that they cannot resist devouring it. What do you say, my friends, to this idea? Of course, what we really want to help us penetrate Tartarus is somebody like Nostrodamus or Paracelsus who understands drugs and potions and who would be able to advise us how to deal with this confounded dog Cerberus; but it’s quite possible that my secret drug used for so many thousands of years will settle him. What do you say, Tang? You, being a woman are by nature wiser than the rest of us. Would you be interested in visiting Tartarus? If Persephone is still the Queen down there you might make great friends with her. She may have not longed to be independent of her mother Demeter and not at all wanted to be rescued from Hades! But the point is, you see, my dears, conditions and personalities may both have changed a lot in the five or six thousand years, or perhaps I should say the ten thousand years, since Homer and Hesiod disputed about all history and all poetry. Didn’t one of them say to the other, “What would you wish for most if you got whatever you wanted?” And didn’t the other answer, “I’d wish never to have been born at all; and if I *had* to be born, I’d wish that when I was dead I would never be born again”?’

Tang spoke up at once: ‘O do let’s go down to Tartarus! I’d love to meet Persephone or Persephoneia down there. I think it is very likely she didn’t go back to her mother Demeter. Anyway, if we didn’t meet her, we might meet a whole lot of exciting people. And I’d like to see one of those awful monsters. I’d like to see Typhoeus! I’d like to see Echidna, the mother of Cerberus!’

‘The great thing would be,’ said Wang, ‘if we could find anybody who had been down there recently and would know how to deal with Cerberus or any other monster, and how to propitiate the dark King, and how to get a word with Persephone. But where is such a person? Where can he or she be found?’

It was at that moment that Sock and Pop lifted their heads with mutual elation. They had been whispering together more eagerly than usual while the Devil was giving them all his rather lengthy oration. And now with a hint from Pop that he was to be the speaker Sock cried out: ‘I’ve read about it in Homer! Yes! I’ve read about it! And we have got now the very same messenger that they had in Homer’s time. Yes! We have got her now, very now!’

‘What *are* you talking about?’ asked the Devil.

‘What has come into your head, Sock?’ asked Tang.

‘There’s no Homeric being,’ said Wang, ‘except Gaia the earth and Helios the sun, and Selene the moon, or the planets Mars and Venus, that we can call upon today about any subject with which Homer’s concerned! What on earth are you two—’ and Wang looked contemptuously at Sock and Pop— ‘suggesting? Do you think people like postmen or telegraph officials can behave today like poor Patroklus and run messages to ask old gents like Nestor whether he’d got a doctor in his car?’

Sock and Pop chuckled for a second. Then Sock said gravely and earnestly. ‘Yes, you’ve all forgotten Iris the rainbow. If we could get her here in her human form but able to function in her elemental form, we’d have just the person we want! But how can we get her?’

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by a lovely celestial-looking girl who burst in upon them in rainbow attire and, with the magical suddenness of rain and light through clouds and water, addressed them in a shrill ringing voice: ‘I heard you! I heard you! I heard you! I always think there’s somebody who wants a swift and intelligent messenger when I see a group of people gathered together like you are! And now I’m among you I see that I was quite right! O how thankful I am that you are ghosts! Ghosts are the only mortals I feel at home with. Your friend with horns here isn’t a ghost. I can see that. But he’s one of your party and like myself without having the supernatural motion of a ghost he’s got some supernatural power that enables him to rush through the air as fast as I can who am certainly not a ghost! Well, my friends, I’m a terrible eavesdropper when my interest’s aroused and I’ve heard enough to know that you want someone such as I am to go down to Tartarus and convey to King Hades that you are anxious to pay him a visit and show him how modern science has discovered so many things he has long wanted to know about: good and evil and weakness and power and consciousness and unconsciousness. I shall have to explain to him the difference between the ordinary souls of the dead among whom he has lived so long and persons like yourselves who are a completely different class of persons from the souls of the dead. Do just tell me, my dears, before I go off on your behalf, though I expect you’ll find me there when you get there, something else I could tell King Hades about you that you think might arrest his attention.’

‘O yes, Lady Iris!’ cried Tang excitedly, ‘I’ll tell you one very important thing. Some of us don’t know how we appear. We are not, you must tell him, all of us the ghosts of particular people in the way all souls are the souls of particular people. Some of us are born as we are, emerge as we are, out of things that are not persons at all! Listen Iris! Listen precious rainbow! Imagine the littered confusion of a floor where children have been playing at trains and houses and kitchen-gardens and croquet-lawns and Blue-Beards and Jacks-in-the-Box, and Mother Hubbards and Aladdin’s Towers! Well, imagine this litter of toys and images and play-things all piled up in a heap together on the floor; and then imagine yourself entering the room and gazing at this medley, yes! staring in shocked amazement at this motly pile. Wouldn’t it seem natural to you if, as you watched, a ghost slowly emerged, or perhaps a couple of ghosts? Would it not seem natural to you that out of that particular confusion, every smallest particle of which had sucked into itself the long, long thoughts of a little boy or girl there should steal forth, waveringly and wistfully, some sort of bewitched wind-on-the-water-wanderer, male or female as it might happen, whose origin was an infantile Erebus at the bottom of a babyish chaos?’

‘I’ll tell him! I’ll tell him! You’ve got the right messenger in me! I’ll wait with him till you come so that, if he doesn’t understand, I’ll *make* him understand! For I have understood perfectly!’

CHAPTER VII

‘SHE MUST BE deep within,’ Wang declared when their arrival at the gate of Erebus was confronted by the growls of Cerberus, whose savage appearance made them all five stand in dismay. The Devil gave his helmet a twist on his head so that one of its horns should point direct at the growling Cerberus towards whom he solemnly bowed. Before long, to their astonishment, Cerberus pushed his way between the two vast adamantine gates that turned Erebus into the prison-house of the Ultimate Abyss. The gates shut with a terrible reverberation behind him. None of the five visitors, not even the Devil with his iron horns, nor Wang with his great bow, nor Tang with her quiver of arrows dared to try to follow him.

Outside Erebus they remained, just as they had remained outside while Cerberus was there: but suddenly the great doors swung open and the long black tail of a terrible serpent presented itself before them. In intense fear and lively horror they all, including the Devil, drew back while the coal-black hideously-spotted tail wriggled out in ever-increasing swirling curves. Then to their blank astonishment the head of the thing emerged and lo! it was a beautiful girl’s head, with merry, laughing, mischievous blue eyes and a lovely tangle of fair golden hair!

‘Come in, my dears, come in! I am Echidna; and this stupid old quarrelsome dog Cerberus is my own child. If you could see my other child, the Hydra, you’d be much more alarmed. It’s funny, isn’t it, that I who am really a well-meaning and by no means bad-looking girl, should have been given by nature a serpent’s tail and should have had such unappealing children as Cerberus and the Hydra and such a grand-child as the Chimaera, but we have got to accept what life brings us, haven't we? And as I often say to King Hades, it would have been much worse for him if I'd been a bustling, hustling sort of mate. As it is I can go my way; and Hades or Pluto, as some of his subjects down here call him, can go his way. That makes a much happier marriage — doesn't it, doesn't it? — than the sort of marriage Olympian Zeus had with Metis who was so much cleverer than he was that to keep his position as ruler of all the Olympians he had to swallow her! And what was the result of that? Did that stop her from having dangerous children? Not a bit of it! While in his belly she was delivered of Pallas Athene who forced herself up, up, up, through his whole body till she broke her way out through the top of his paternal skull! And as if that wasn't enough she soon became the girl-friend of his wife Hera who was also his sister and he often as a result of this had to feel that by the way those two goddesses went about together his own prestige as King of the Gods was perceptibly reduced.'

But it was only after Echidna had vanished, calling her offspring Cerberus to follow her into the dark dwelling, that our four ghosts and their companion the Devil realised that they had now to face a far more terrific being than the mother of Cerberus and the Hydra and the grand-mother of the Chimaera.

This monster was none other than Typhoeus whose father was Erebus and who very nearly had proved more than a match for Zeus himself. Indeed it had been a narrow shave which of those two would win; and there were many prophets who held the view that Typhoeus was destined to rule the Universe. But Zeus overcame him by striking with lightning every one of his numerous heads; so that all that was left of him was his hissing, thundering, fire-breathing, rumbling and grumbling volcanic body. But so merged in both Erebus and Tartarus, those two half-animate and half-inanimate abysses of cosmic filtration, those two bottomless swamps of elemental concatenation, those two coagulating world-troughs of the possible and the impossible, had Typhoeus been, that it seemed to our four friends and also to their accomplice the Devil that there was nothing to be done but retreat altogether from the house of His Majesty the Plutonian Hades.

But no sooner had they made a hesitant gesture of retirement than a clear, articulate, vigorous, feminine voice rang out, and behold! there was Persephone herself! ‘Don’t be frightened, my dears!’ she said. ‘My mother, Demeter, hasn’t bidden you to come, has she? They sent word to me she was dead. But I’ve lost all faith in what people say who come from the outer world. You four look different from any people I’ve ever seen. You, of course,’ and she nodded familiarly to the Devil, ‘I’ve already met before, more than once. But what kind of persons are you four? Please tell me all about yourselves so that I can explain to King Hades; for he is a little disturbed at your arrival, which, as you can hear, has set our old Typhoeus off into one of his worst volcanic fits.’

‘No, my dear lady,’ Tang answered very gently and sweetly — and they could all clearly see that the tone of her voice made a very good impression — ‘we are what in our part of the outer world we call *ghosts.* That is to say we are not the souls of dead people nor yet are we people still alive in the ordinary human sense. We are half-dead and half-alive. We can behave in many ways like the souls of the dead; but we can also behave in many ways as if we’d never died. But we *have* died and shall never live again a natural human life. I’m glad you know the Devil because he’s been of late a very good friend to us. But he of course is a supernatural being like King Hades himself whom we beg and implore you to allow us to visit. O no! your mother Demeter, of whom we have often heard has never appeared to us.

You know better than we do what has happened to her, but speaking respectfully, dear lady, I myself would certainly say she was dead.'

'Come in, my children,' Persephone said gently. 'You shall rest in the portico-hall while I go to tell King Hades about you. No! You stop your growling and hissing, Typhoeus! Go down to Erebus and tell him and Tartarus also what you've heard this young lady say. Tell them both that I am going to take them in to see the King. But not until I've told him what they've told me.'

Typhoeus obeyed her and led the way into the dark house, into the interior of which he soon vanished. Persephone escorted them in, after he was gone, and left them comfortably seated in the portico-hall while she went to tell her tale to King Hades.

Wang and Tang and Pop and Sock looked round them with intense interest while the Devil, with a good deal of pride, assumed the role of director of the company and made a series of explanatory speeches in front of a number of very impressive statues that surrounded this waiting-chamber. Wang couldn't help remembering their similar pause in the waiting room of Heaven, where the four Gospel-men behaved so politely; and where the Devil could only hover round the back-door. But the statues in this waiting room of Hades were really wonderful to see. There was one of Erebus. There was one of Tartarus. There was one of Circe. There was one of Demeter. There was one of Cronos. There was one of Hera. There was one of Pallas Athene. There was one of Metis. And the best of them all was one of the wily Odysseus. Wang and Tang were amazed to see the statue of Odysseus. It seemed to possess in the heart of it, in the head of it, in the expression of it, and above all in something that it must have created in the atmosphere that surrounded it, the very essence of Homer's poetry, especially the poetry of the Iliad. 'In the Odyssey, Odysseus and Nausicaa are like,' Tang said to herself, 'the chief characters in some exciting modern novel; but all is different in the Iliad where there is no particularly romantic hero or heroine and where, if the feelings of sensitive readers are the ones to give the verdict, it is neither "the sweet war-man Hector" nor the swift-footed Achilles son of the Nereid Thetis, nor Agamemnon nor Menelaus nor even Diomed the son of Tydeus but rather Patroclus the beloved of Achilles and Briseis, Achilles' favourite girl, whose personality moves us most and whose death at Hector's hand affects us most. If Helen of Troy had known Patroclus as well as she knew Hector she would have had another real friend to understand her far better than that slippery rogue Paris, her Trojan mate, ever could.'

Persephone, the kind introducer of our five visitors to Hades, was so long in making that monarch understand who had come, so full was his head of much older and more celebrated intruders, that they could not resist, encouraged of course in their curiosity by the Devil, exploring the retreats of both Tartarus and Erebus. None of the five, no, not even Tang, far less Wang, had the least idea of what they had the temerity to explore and even the Devil had some misgivings. But on they plunged in their audacious enterprise, first to the edge of Tartarus and then to the brink of Erebus.

They soon found themselves standing on a ledge of hard sand, sand that had been hardened and it looked as if it was time that had done it, for fifty thousand years. The ledge was slowly, patiently, incessantly, eternally, washed by an incalculable volume of water that was almost, though not quite, black in colour, but had the mirror-like power of reflection such as when the ocean is very deep, seems to dominate by the dark weight of its curves and undulations not only the aquatic creatures who bide within its flood but the quality of the shells and coral-reefs and fossils and sea-weeds that have lingered and lasted in those dim recesses while continents of land have become oceans of water while pulsating sequences of sound have sunk into hollow valleys of silence and gurgitating volcanic crypts have descended into gulfs of impenetrable nonentity. Heavens and earth! But what a change it was to move from the brink of Tartarus to the margin of Erebus! The former was a mass of demoniacal elements but the latter was the mouth of that which underlies all that exists. Yes, Tartarus was manifold and multifarious in its everlasting recess; but Erebus was simply one bottomless gulf of black death's response to life, one unspeakable retort of the unutterable uniformity of the Ultimate Reality to every angle, every curve, every gasp, every gurgle, every gulp, of what, however loathsome and appalling it may be, is yet the element of life that prefers to swallow the abomination of desolation rather than die away in the nothingness of death.

Yes, all five of them, even the reckless Wang, even the feminine Tang, even the scatter-brained Devil, stood on the brink of Erebus in frozen terror. Their five hearts beat in unison. One for Wang, one for Tang, one for Sock, one for Pop, one for the Devil. Tang indeed said to herself: 'We aren't five any more. We are one. And our one goes up and down: Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock: like a clock.' It was the suction of Erebus that was terrible. Those five on the brink acquired a common consciousness. They no longer thought, felt, existed, in isolation. The inmost being of Erebus could only be expressed in one word — *suction.* Our five companions resembled five tall worms or five short grass-snakes whose feet or tail-tips first, and then the rest of them until they were up to their necks, were being sucked down into a bottomless gulf.

But fortunately for our five friends all this process was only going on in their minds. They were still on the brink. They were not being sucked down at all. But be that as it may, the mere look of Erebus as they stared at it was so awful that if they had gone on standing there and gazing down they might have been driven out of their minds. The Devil was moved to sympathy and though he was feeling pretty much the same himself it occurred to him that if he could start their intelligence working they might feel better. So he said: ‘You see, my dears, all this mass before us is after all only water, nothing but black water descending into a gulf. We feel as if this gulf sank down and down and down forever. But we must remember that that is impossible because we are still on the earth. King Aidoneus as many of the ancients called King Hades is not a being far away in space, or beyond space. He is a monarch as real and historical and natural as Julius Caesar or King Numa or Alexander the Great or our good English Saxon monarch King Alfred. He has no intention of abdicating and vanishing as our Christian God seems to have done. He is as solidly here as Persephone, the daughter of Demeter who will soon introduce us to him, is solidly here. We must not let our recognition that the vanishing of God has made Christian theology more difficult, extend to older faiths which are solidly foundationed in older traditions. This present-day pseudo-scientific pseudo-psychic experimentation is a new thing altogether, whether applied to the Christian faith or any other faith. What we must not forget’ — and at this point the Devil’s voice rang out with a clarity neither Tang or Wang had ever caught in it before— ’is that the whole Universe is being re-created afresh by every living thing that uses it’s imagination!’

‘Come along, children,’ cried Persephone, suddenly appearing among them with a lightness of approach that no goddess, no ghost, no demon, could possibly have rivalled. ‘Come along! King Hades is ready to see you.’

They all five followed respectfully and gravely down a long corridor. Some deep mystical instinct made them all clasp their hands tightly in front of them as they walked, not in pairs as hitherto, but in single file with the

Devil bringing up — though all he ‘brought up’ was the homed helmet which he hugged against his stomach — the rear of their little troop.

When they entered in the presence chamber Persephone drew back a little; but she didn’t desert them. She watched the proceedings very carefully. Hades was not so much an imposing figure as an obscure and shadowy one. He might easily have been a ghost himself. He and the throne on which he sat seemed to be continually melting into each other. Sometimes a pallid, infinitely sad-featured man seemed relaxing himself by leaning backward upon a seat of air. Sometimes the throne seemed covered by a misty robe which sank like an exhausted cloud upon the throne’s back, upon the throne’s arms, upon the throne’s footstool; and yet all five who had been brought there by Persephone felt that the man seated upon the throne as well as the throne itself into which he kept melting were studying them one by one with exquisite minuteness and care and were reading their thoughts as their thoughts had never been read before.

‘These people, O my Lord and King,’ said Persephone, ‘are full of energy and spirit; and they all agree that now that their modern God has committed suicide or has fled into outer space something must be done to give new life, and if possible, modern scientific life to the old religions, though they belong to myths and traditions and fantastical stories that to intelligent modern people seem utterly crazy. I know you will forgive me, O Lord, my god Hades, as I make the best of their position, but life, as my mother used always to tell me, is subject to fits and starts that are wholly unexpected. But as my mother always said; only those who are prepared to face the unexpected can deal with the entanglements of the present moment.’

It was then that an extraordinary thing happened. King Hades, or Aidoneus, began to speak; and the effort of speaking purified his whole appearance. He became a clearly outlined judge in a clearly outlined seat of justice, and all that was obscure about him fell away.

CHAPTER VIII

‘It will need,’ said King Hades, ‘all your combined qualities, my good friends, to get this dilapidated realm of mine into order. I will help you; but as you can guess, nobody belonging to the ancient tradition, far less if he has been, like myself, fated to rule the threatened kingdom, can identify himself with the tremendous spirit of change deeply enough to carry it through. O yes, my dears, you have got your wild and reckless and daring Wang who can snatch at a fresh spring, or twist, or turn, or angle, or scale, or fin, or crank, or axle, or loop, or crook, or corner, and use it for his leapings and slidings, his pitchings and tossings! Then you have got your old out-of-a-job Devil-may-care who has so often stood up to your runaway God that he knows exactly where we God-Almighties carry our sanctity a bit too far. Then in Tang you’ve got what all the world wants most of all, an Egeria, a nymph in Antro, a Latona who can give birth to a goddess, a Thetis who can leave her father the Old Man of the Sea and bring comfort to her son, swift-footed Achilles, when he lies weeping upon the beach. And do not you two think, O my dears, Sock and Pop, that I am ignorant of your ability, a great deal of which, O most honoured guests, resembles my own; that is to say the power of withdrawing, retiring, escaping, avoiding, evading, dodging, any two pressing demands upon our immediate attention. By acting thus, and I recommend it to you all, as I well know your good ally the Devil, obstinate enemy of your late Deity, this runaway Being who has, as your poet says “melted into air, into thin air,” has always done, you will find yourselves able to convert this damnable immediate present with till its exacting demands into a shadowy premonition of unbelievably delicious future. And now, all of you,’ King Hades went on, ‘I have a suggestion to make. I have often thought to myself as I’ve stood on the brink of Tartarus and glanced from there at the edge of Erebus, how exciting it would be if these two ultimate terrors could be joined together; and how interesting it would be to see which of them dominated and absorbed and overpowered the other. Now what I propose is that all five of you, and this of course includes both our supernatural Devil, and our dear lady, should set yourselves to work for me, and under my leadership, and that together we shall find some way of joining Tartarus with Erebus and of making one supreme terror of the two of them. If we succeed in this undertaking we shall have done something by which the whole human race to the end of time will benefit. The awfulness of Tartarus will have been swallowed up in Erebus or the abysses of Erebus will have been broken into and dispersed north and south and east and west by the evacuation of water through numberless estuaries. Will you agree, my children, to serve me in this? If you will you shall receive as wages, each one of you, some of the gold I have collected for a hundred years. And if we succeed in our undertaking you shall, yes! each one of you, be endowed with a gift that I’ve never given to anyone before, the miraculous power of reading people’s thoughts.’

An uproarious shout of acceptance went up from all four; and as for the Devil, he danced in a circle round them all, making grotesque clutches at his bottom as if he were twisting his own tail and yelling with ecstasy: ‘We’ll mix ’em! We’ll mix ’em! We’ll mix ’em!’

It was a memorable day in Hades’ life when after he had lectured them all five, especially Wang and Tang and the Devil, on the water-way to be constructed on the massive stones which the ground between Erebus and Tartarus contained and from which it was necessary to remove all the stately and antiquated wood-work of which the structure of his palace was composed, he retreated once more into his private contemplation.

‘It’s interesting,’ Hades thought, ‘to go back in mind to early days. I suppose, according to the way most gods and most men express things, Tartarus and Erebus were my parents: though which of them played the part of mother and which of them played the part of father I haven’t the faintest idea. I only remember how they both flattered me all the while, and kept saying: “We leave you King of the World:

We leave you King of the World.” They little knew that whoever, whatever, whenever, however they left me, I should one day do my utmost to destroy them both forever.’

Hades felt no remorse, no sadness, no shame as he said this to himself. On the contrary, the next thing he confessed with a strange satisfaction to himself was this: ‘I hate everything and everyone that exists! And this includes myself. But I *think* I hate other people and other things more than I do myself. I am not quite sure about this. But whatever I am thinking about there is always this — I do recognise *that* very distinctly — some piece of me, bit of me, lump of me, atom of me which is the hater, not only of myself but of everybody and everything. Now the question I am asking myself is this. Could the hater go on hating everything if he had or she had or it had no smallest atom of itself at its disposal to start from, yes! to serve as a jumping-off place for the *hating plunge*?

‘Is that the most crucial question I ask myself? I don’t know; for there is another that is always poking its head out; namely “whom or what is it that I hate most of all people and things in the world?” It *isn’t,* as a person would naturally assume, some particular divine or human *enemy,* or some particular *disease,* or some particular *memory.* It is the expectation, or the possible prospect of *going mad.*’

Hades looked round at this point, wondering whether the three men, the one woman, and the Devil, who were all resting after their imaginary struggle with the stones and their mental struggle with what Hades had been saying to them, could, or could not, read his thoughts. It was the pressure upon him of this trifling possibility, as so often happens with all of us, that caused the direction of his thoughts to undergo a complete change.

Hades now began to wonder whether it would be possible for him to expand and extend his kingdom over a much wider range.

‘Why should I waste my life,’ he asked himself, ‘in working out ways to punish Tartarus and Erebus for bringing me into existence? Wouldn’t it be much more exciting to let those two horrors stay as they are and for me to burst out from this whole neighbourhood and mount up from the cellar of the universe to its ceiling? Why should I not take possession of other planets totally different from this old earth? Why should I not invade Mars or Venus?’

At this point Hades paused to think, while he watched the four real wraiths accompanied by the Devil begin their work.

‘Shall it be Mars or Venus?’ he asked himself. The idea of Mars was, however, so closely associated in his mind with the idea of war that it dispelled the notion of any royal victory there of a harmless and purely adventurous kind.

‘No,’ he told himself, ‘it must be Venus. I must take possession forever of the planet of love. And this Venus,’ his thoughts ran on, ‘will no doubt prove to be the dwelling of a beautiful goddess. And if I take her as my wife what will Persephone say?’

Here Hades couldn’t help pausing again in his thoughts; and it was at this moment by a kind of natural telepathy that Persephone, passing across the entrance-hall, stopped in front of the statue of her mother Demeter and turning her back upon Hades moved towards it and crouching down before it, kissed its knees.

‘O mother, mother!’ she cried aloud, remembering with a spasm of bitter remorse how her mother had died of grief at losing her, ‘if these people are real wraiths and were once alive, where are you know?’

Hades didn’t miss this cry. ‘O Erebus! O Tartarus!’ he said to himself, glancing at his four new slaves aided by this supernatural creature they called the Devil, who were still at work on the canal he had invented to drown Tartarus in Erebus and to flood Erebus with the labyrinthine confluences of Tartarus. ‘Why is it that I, Aidoneus, should be so punished for carrying off this girl who has been more like a daughter to me than a wife for years beyond count, that I am now filled by day and by night with a melancholy that is beyond all description? What have I done that I should be so punished? Men and gods alike have carried off girls ere now, and their mothers have not died of grief. Did not I need companionship as much as this girl’s mother? Did not I need a daughter as much as she? No daughter have I ever had except Persephone. No wife have I ever had except Persephone. No friend have I ever had but her. And yet, because her mother loved her out of all natural proportion, and died of grief when I took her, am I to be punished out of all natural proportion? And punished for what? Punished for not being content to live in what I heard someone the other day call Plutonian sadness, but what is generally simply called loneliness for the whole of my undying life. Other undying ones have recompenses and compensations. Has not Zeus got Hera? Has not Hera, however much she may hate her husband, got Pallas Athene? Why should I, Hades, or Aidoneus if you prefer that name, pine on in despair for ever and ever? And who is it who is thus punishing me? Or am I punishing myself for not destroying myself? I heard some voice the other day call me or call my kingdom by the name of Dis. That is a good expressive name! Dis, Dis, Dis! I like the sound of that word! Well, here am I, whether Hades, or Aidoneus, or Pluto or Dis and I have no one in the world who cares a jot or tittle for me, except perhaps a faint touch of pity now and then, at O such rare moments! for I know her well — from Persephoneia. Would I be so unhappy if I could think of something definite to aim at, some project, some purpose? But what purpose? That is the question now? What purpose?’

CHAPTER IX

AS HE REMAINED silent, lost in thought, there appeared above him, far away in the sky, Venus, the evening star: and in a moment a desperate final decision formed itself within him. He beheld that star with an extraordinary emotion. There was no other in sight. There was no sun. There was no moon. There was nothing else. In all the universe, in all the multiverse, if there were more than one universe, there was only Venus.

‘I shall go there,’ he said to himself, ‘I want Venus.’ And then his thoughts ran on. ‘But why do I want her? What do I want her for? I know well what it is to ravish a lovely girl. I have ravished Persephone a thousand times. But no child has been born to us. She is barren. And just as I am always in despair without knowing why, she is always crying out piteously to her mother Demeter, who has so long been dead. What is Venus? She is love. What am I? I am hate. What sort of offspring should we have if I ravished Venus? But can one immortal ravish another immortal? Of course he can! That is how most of the greatest gods were born. But Venus — *there* she is! Still in the sky above my head! How do I know that she will let me ravish her? Her divine power as a deity must surpass mine altogether. Why then do I want so much to make love to her as to dare to risk such a rebuff? I think the truth is this. I think my real desire is to free myself, disentangle myself, extricate myself, separate myself from everything I see, hear, or feel. I want to be like one of these real wraiths who are now working for me against Erebus and Tartarus. As a real wraith myself I want to escape altogether from everything that this universe or multiverse contains or represents. I want there to be space and the emptiness beyond space. I want there to be time and the everlasting present or eternal present beyond time. But I only want these things to be there so that I can escape from them all. I want to glide through them and glide round them and remain absolutely independent of them. And I don't want to be bothered by my own names or my own thoughts. I don't want to be Hades or Aidoneus or Pluto or Dis any more. I don't want to have any great lumbering thoughts, weighing me down like sacks of coal! I don't even want to be an ego, so that people call me an egoist and cry in wonder: "Lord! How self-centred he is!" And yet I don't want to be as negligible as a tiny fly or as a very minute moth. I want to be a breath, a waft of air, a wave of mist, a puff of smoke, an eddy of wind: so that though my personality is as light as a feather it can pass through any substance and encircle any substance. Above all I want to be independent of the weight of thought. I want my I to be entirely without a soul. I hate the idea of having to carry about inside me that portentous, presumptuous spiritualised professor of theology that mortals call the soul. When I think of my I or feel my I or become my pure unmitigated I, I want it to be on the extreme vanishing point of nothing. I want it to be so near nothing that it can behave as nothing, move as nothing, pass as nothing, appear as nothing; and yet possess, in a sharp, clear, stinging, piercing, biting, stabbing, spearing, shooting, darting, diving reality, the quintessence of my reaction to all that life brings. I want my I in fact to resemble the extreme point of a flame, not the flame of a gentle candle but the sharp point of one single upward darting flame of a burning fire.'

It would be very difficult to tell what the Devil felt, but it was clear that Wang and Tang and Pop and Sock derived great satisfaction when King Hades bade them leave Erebus and Tartarus to themselves and follow him up, up, up, up, to Venus, the evening star. King Hades made the ascent easy by twisting a long silky cord round their waists and holding it firmly in his right hand. Round the Devil’s waist at the rear he saw to it that the cord ended in a firm tight knot. Wang and Tang never forgot that ascent to the evening star. It had hardly begun when the half moon appeared on the west of their flight, making the whole expanse of the air luminous.

King Hades kept giving the silken cord a jerk of emotional excitement; but this didn’t bother any of them. In fact Wang said cheerfully to Tang: ‘It’s a good thing it isn’t round our necks!’ And the Devil whispered to Pop who was the last of the human wraiths in the line: ‘Travel by moonlight if you want to win!’

Wang and Tang had never seen anything like it.

‘Moonlight and proud Titania,’ Wang murmured to her, ‘only Aidoneus is a man!’

‘He’s not an ordinary man,’ Tang murmured back, ‘He’s an enchanter, like Prospero, only I hope we shan’t see Caliban heading towards us on a one-man plane with a determination to “get a new master!”’

King Hades flew so fast, though his legs and arms and shoulders and hips remained so still that if they hadn’t been able to see the planet they had come from and the planet towards which they were rushing, it would have been hard to prove they were moving at all. Indeed they were all standing on the magnetic soil of Venus before they realised that their voyage was over. What struck them all with most wonder was this magnetism of the soil. It was a very curious experience to stand upon it, for it firmly, quietly, steadily, obstinately, resolutely, irresistibly drew your feet and your ankles and your legs down, down, down, down. The Devil and Pop who were furthest from the pull of King Hades’ right hand, were already up to their knees in this magnetic soil with its terrible indraw when King Hades called out in a loud voice: ‘Spit, children, spit, little ones! Spit on the ground beneath you! And you will soon find it’ll stop pulling you down!’ They all obeyed him. And lo! this terrible indraw ceased; and the Devil and Pop found no difficulty, after they had spat as ordered, in extricating themselves from the soil.

Afterwards there was no more of the drag down; and it struck Tang as so odd that she boldly asked King Hades to explain it.

‘You see, my dear child,’ the Plutonian King replied, ‘the whole character of Venus Aphrodite has penetrated the substance of her star. Her being has gone into it. Her star is composed of all her feminine feelings. And so the soil of her star, partaking of her nature, acts like a fatal seduction, sucking people into it. But if such people spit upon it, it is as if they regarded her as a contemptible whore; and the thought of being so regarded takes the heart out of all her magnetic pull.’

While King Hades was expounding to his courtiers the secrets of the nature of the evening star, poor unfortunate Persephone got at last into her bewildered brain that she had been left entirely alone, alone forever, in this vestibule between Tartarus and Erebus. In a paroxysm of furious desperation the unhappy girl, deserted by everyone, dashed her beautiful head with insane violence against the sharp-edged pedestal of her mother’s statue. But what was her astonishment when after only a second of total blackness she found herself in an ecstasy of happiness such as she had not known since her childhood, being embraced by the real wraith of her mother! Yes! There they both were together at long last, indescribably happy, and in each other’s arms.

The conversation that followed between them had no audience but Erebus and Tartarus who were both still too absorbed in their abysmal and fathomless contests, as to which could drown the other, to take any notice of what was happening above their heads.

‘Did you take in, mother dear,’ Persephone was saying, ‘what it was that King Hades was up to in starting off like that with those four and with that Demon in their train? One of the four was a woman. Did you take that in?’

‘Of course I took it all in, Persephoneia darling! Of course I did. Well! King Hades was going off to visit the evening star. As you know, my sweet child, her name is Venus Aphrodite; and one of these ridiculous human travellers who drag their wives or their husbands down here when they get fed up with them, must have tried to put it into Aidoneus’ head that he would get a warm reception from her. Of course our old King isn’t quite such a fool as to take that seriously. Besides, I know these god-like men well enough to know that he’d have got far more pleasure in ravishing her when she didn’t want to be touched than he’d get from being loved by her. The truth is, my darling, he’d got tired of you! Yes, even of you! These devilish men are all alike in that, whether gods or mortals! Let them catch sight of a lovely girl and they want to carry her off. Let them carry her off and soon after they have had her they want to get rid of her!

‘What it shows is this, my sweet child: it shows that a certain type of man, whether mortal or immortal, is not really and truly a lover of the opposite sex. Really and truly he is a hater of the opposite sex, and what he enjoys is seizing upon them and ravishing them not because he loves them but because he enjoys the sensation of ravishing one of them. The more lovely his victim is the more he enjoys “having” her but it is the act of ravishing that he enjoys, not *living with* the victim of his lust.

‘Well, my darling child, now that you and I are real wraiths let us enjoy ourselves. As you doubtless know real wraiths can fly anywhere. Let us fly together then to the evening star and find out what is happening there. It will be amusing to see what our old King does when he finds that we, his victim and her mother, are among his courtiers. It will be amusing too, will it not, darling, to see what Venus Aphrodite makes of our arrival on the scene. She didn’t altogether like it — I can tell you that from my own experience! — when Homer made Helen of Troy at the end of the Iliad utter such extreme praise of that “sweet war-man” Hector. Homer must have decided, long before his poem ended, that that was how he was going to make it end.’

CHAPTER X

NOBODY WAS MORE surprised than King Hades when he saw his real wraith courtiers increased to six by the appearance of Persephone and her mother Demeter. The real wraiths consisted now of three men and three women. Tang was collared at once by Demeter and Persephone and was made to tell all she knew of the life-story and the death-story of the others. Her chief difficulty was in making clear to the newcomers who the Devil was, who now, released from the silky sash that had been tied round his waist, was, after his usual manner, hovering round them all and displaying with a mischievous gusto both his cloven hooves and his tail.

‘I don’t know,’ said Tang, ‘whether you two goddesses have ever heard of the Christian religion? If not let me tell you this about it. It was invented by a very clever scholar called Paul of Tarsus who used to encourage his friends to stone to death the followers of a mysterious healer and preacher called Jesus. But one day he was accosted by the real wraith of this Jesus who was born at Bethlehem near the Lake of Galilee. The Jewish high priest and all the rabbis of the books of Moses believed as they still do in their Jewish God Jehovah, who has nothing to do at all with this appalling Christian God who burns his enemies in flames that go on for ever and ever. The disciples of this Jesus the healer called him Jesus the Christ, or the Messiah, or the King of the Jews, but the Jewish high priest disliked him and so did most of the Jewish rabbis or teachers of the law of Moses. In the end the Roman ruler Pilate caused him to be crucified on a cross at the top of which were the words “This is the King of the Jews,” a sentence that Pilate resolutely refused to change. This Jesus had, all his life, ever since his parents Joseph and Mary brought him into the world believed that this awful God was his Father; but when he was on the cross and this imaginary Father-God never came to help him he cried aloud in a piteous voice, “Eloi!! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani?”

“My God!

My God! Why hast thou deserted me?” And he must have decided in his mind that this imaginary Father of his did not exist. But a certain Paul of Tarsus who had begun by encouraging people to kill by throwing stones at all those who believed in Jesus, when once he had met the real wraith of Jesus changed his view-point completely and began preaching everywhere and writing everywhere to every group of the followers of this great healer assuring them that this awful God whom until his crucifixion Jesus had always called his Father was a God of love, the essence of love, made of love, breathing love, emanating love, perspiring love, soaked through and through with love. This startling change in Paul’s outlook must have been produced in him by his encounter on the road to Damascus with the real wraith of Jesus who so impressed him by its power and its gentleness and made him feel so ashamed of the way he had held the clothes of those who were stoning a Christian that he now set to work to invent the Holy Trinity, a justification for which he found in certain words attributed to Jesus who is reported to have said that when he was dead God would send the Holy Ghost to comfort everybody and make everybody realise that God was love. Paul took good care not to teach anyone that Hell, invented by God to torture those who didn’t believe in Him, didn’t really exist; because in his clever theological way what he wanted people to believe was that this God he was inventing under the name of the Holy Trinity was a three-fold Being, at the same time the Father who threw unbelievers into eternal fire and the

Son who redeemed believers by his dear love and the Holy Ghost who comforted believers and made them happy forever and ever in Heaven.

‘Jesus must have been without doubt the greatest magician and the greatest healer who ever lived. He could bring the dead to life and it was impossible to keep him dead and buried for very long. Up he would rise again and up into the sky he ascended at the end. Paul, after inventing Christianity went to Rome to convert the Emperor but when the Emperor was about to kill him he ran away till he met some Christian real wraith who cried out: “Where the Hell are you running off to?” This sent him back to Rome. Matthew, Mark and Luke and John,’ said Tang, ‘may have all been great recorders in their various ways; but it was Saint Paul who invented Christianity. I have myself,’ she added, ‘always liked Saint Peter the best of the lot. His weakness and nervousness at critical moments appeals to me as a woman; and I never hear a cock crow without remembering how Jesus said to him: “Before the cock crows twice thou shalt deny me thrice.” What we are apt to forget,’ Tang went on, ’is that the Christian religion has changed and altered and developed a great deal since the time of the Apostles; and it may be a surprise to you if I add that those to whom this development is due were or have been mostly women. And if you ask me,’ for it was clear to her that both the real wraiths of these powerful goddesses were arrested by this last statement, ‘what types of women have achieved this, I can only answer that from what my brother Wang has told me of the characters of the various women he has known, the first kind are whores and the second kind are aged spinsters. Do you remember when Jesus wrote in the dust? It was when he met Mary Magdalene; and do you remember who it was who taught King Numa of Rome how to conquer the world? It was that nymph who lived in a cave, called Egeria, the *Nymph in Antro*! Nor need I refer to Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, nor to that devoted little whore who saved the life of De Quincey. The mothers of many children have of course all they can do to take care of them after giving them birth; but there is a mysterious power possessed by old spinsters who have never been loved by a man and by scatter-brained little prostitutes who lived for years by selling their bodies to men, that no other human beings possess.'

Tang lifted her fairy-like little head and looked up at the two tall goddesses. And the King of Hades was astonished at the impression made upon them. It was clear to him that there was something that this little human girl knew that corresponded perfectly with the unearthly knowledge of these two famous goddesses.

'What will they do now?' the King asked himself. 'I wonder if I did right after all in leaving Erebus and Tartarus to drown themselves and coming up here? What will Venus Aphrodite say?'

He paused and everybody paused and a strange shiver of awe passed through them all: that which comes when a larger consciousness of the meaning of life throws its aura over a group of smaller consciousnesses. And it was at this moment that the implacable Aphrodite, as our poet calls her, actually made herself visible. She certainly outdid both Demeter and Persephone in her beauty; but it wasn't so much her beauty that obsessed King Hades with a feeling he had never had before in all his days. He felt belittled. He had never been proud or vain or conceited. To live at the mouths of Erebus and Tartarus was enough to stop anything of that kind. But what Venus Aphrodite made him feel was simply that he was so unimportant as to be tottering, stumbling, faltering, fumbling, on the edge of becoming nothing, yes! on the brink of dissolving into thin air. She didn't give him the faintest, no! not the very faintest desire to embrace her. What she gave him was a shock of overpowering terror. He felt that it would be impossible for him to live in the presence of beauty like this. He felt he must fly from her. He felt that if she looked at him he would turn into nothing and disappear forever.

But Venus Aphrodite, the evening star as seen from earth, took no more notice of King Hades than if he had been a fly and concentrated her attention upon Demeter and Persephone. 'I never thought,' she said, 'that Zeus, our sovereign-lord, and child-swallowing Cronos, his disinherited father, would ever permit great goddesses like you two to visit this star of my solitary reign. How strange were the ways of our grandmother Night when without sleeping with any male she gave birth to Clotho and Lachesis and Atropos the three fates, Clotho the spinner, Lachesis the disposer of lots, and Atropos, she who cannot be turned!'

Demeter greeted her at once, drawing Persephone, who was glancing nervously at King Hades, a little nearer to her.

'O beautiful Cyprian! O perfect Cytherean!' she cried. 'Well do I know the story of your birth. If Night the grandmother of us all had not inspired Cronos to accept that sickle of flint prepared by his mother Gaia and cut out the generation members of Ouranos the father of the Titans, where would we be today? Verily it was grandmother Night who, without being embraced by any man, gave us all the powers who dominate our life. Aye! It is grandmother Night to whom we owe all! And now, O greatest of goddesses save only Hera and Pallas Athene, please accept under your care my daughter Persephone and teach our good friend King Hades to treat her, during the months she lives with him in this underworld, as all goddesses feel they should be treated!'

Venus Aphrodite moved forward and King Hades moved backward. But she gave him such a bewitching smile that, do what he could to restrain himself, he could not resist taking her hand and kissing it; and after that all was well.

‘Yes,’ said Demeter, ‘we have agreed that if you will allow us to remain upon your star which the people where all these real wraiths come from call the evening star because that is the time when they see it most clearly, we shall be ready to help you in any scheme you may have for making your planet a space refuge, and our King Aidoneus or Hades will encourage us in such a task. In fact we might name any building we erect for you by his name and call it the King Hades Refuge; an institution that in fact may remain for hundreds of years and become a place to which all persons in any of the planets round our sun who are in mental distress may steer their airplanes and be comforted and supported when they land on your shore.’

It was clear to all present that this speech of Demeter’s made a great impression on the beautiful ruler of the evening star. She at once whispered something to King Hades who nodded quite affably and then she entered into conversation with Persephone who looked radiantly happy as she listened to what was really a very wise introduction to life upon the evening star. It was, as a matter of fact, an experience for Venus Aphrodite that she was never likely to have again to be introduced to two goddesses, for such of course, Demeter and Persephone really were, who had flung their immortality away for their love of each other and had now come to the evening star as real wraiths.

But Venus Aphrodite had an experience to follow this that was even stranger: for no sooner had she accepted the astonishment of beholding two immortals transformed into two ghosts than she was confronted by the Devil. What in this mad world was she to make of the being who, with a tail and with horns and with cloven hooves, now came bowing and scraping into her presence? She waved him away at first but when, after dancing a couple of dances round them all and coming back to her, she was compelled to ask advice; and she promptly and very wisely asked it of the real wraith of Persephone.

‘You see, O beautiful one,’ replied Persephone, ‘we on the planet earth are still suffering from this accursed Christian religion which has lasted for nearly two thousand years! O how passionately all intelligent men and women long for it to die out! All religions are pretty awful. We Greeks of the ancient time know this as well as anyone. But Christianity is the worst. Jesus himself, who is supposed to have founded this religion, gave up his belief in it on the cross when he was dying. You see the central idea of this appalling religion is that somewhere in the universe is a place called Hell where those who refuse to believe in the Being called God are burnt in fire for ever and ever. In spite, however, of their imagining this unspeakable God gloating over His enemies burning in flame for ever, the greatest advocate of this religion whose name was Paul of Tarsus always makes out in all the letters he wrote to his followers that God is the incarnation of love; the embodiment of love, the essence of love! “God,” in fact he goes so far as to say, “*is* love.” What are we to think then,’ Persephone went on, ‘of a religion whose greatest advocate tells its followers on the one hand that its God gloats over his enemies burning in a fire that lasts for ever, and on the other that its God is identical with love. Now in order to have,’ Persephone went on, noticing that Venus Aphrodite was staring at the Devil’s antics with wonder and horror, ‘an opposite to its God of eternal torture and eternal love, the chief founder of this religion, who was Paul of Tarsus, taught that before the God of torture and love made himself known on the planet earth he was defied and attacked in his own native home, which is the sky above our heads, by a being who is sometimes called Satan and sometimes called Lucifer. In the battle with this Lucifer or Satan, the love-

and-torture God won hands-down; so that this Lucifer or Satan was flung into Hell so that God might have his full revenge on him in the manner God liked best, namely burning him in flames and perpetually whispering in his ear that he would suffer like this for ever and ever and ever and ever.

'You must understand, O beautiful one,' Persephone went on, while King Hades listened with wonder at the clarity of his kidnapped girl's account of this fantastic religion of life's extremes, 'that Lucifer or Satan was, even in defeat, a formidable opponent of this God of love and of torture; and it suddenly came into his mind that if he pretended to join with this God and to help him in his torturing he might propitiate him to such a tune that he would be allowed to escape the flames himself if he was always ready to push any victim back into them who was making a skilful escape. The loving torturer fell for this plot and master Satan-Lucifer soon found that he was being trusted by the Lord on High as a faithful servant. All this went on,' Persephone continued, keeping a close eye on the relation between the Devil and the beautiful Queen she was addressing, 'until a curious change took place in Lucifer-Satan's appearance. This must have been due to the hideous baseness and meanness of his occupation. For a thousand years he was employed in this manner, and behold! when that had passed he was no longer the tall, handsome, grand-looking creature he had been when he first entered upon this job. The baseness of playing an accomplice to a God of torture whom his chief advocate, in order to fool the dwellers on the earth, continued to present to the world as a God of love, had completely altered his appearance. A thousand years, you see, O beautiful Queen, of such abominable behaviour turned him into a different creature altogether. He acquired horns, he acquired a tail, he acquired cloven hooves. You see, beautiful one, a thousand years is a long time. Probably five hundred years ago Satan's tail was very short, his horns scarcely visible, and his feet possessed of at least a couple of toes a-piece. But now, O Queen of the evening star, you see what he is! And all the inhabitants of the earth take for granted that he has always been like that and I expect, though I will ask him if you like, he himself thinks he has always been as he is now.'

It was at this moment, as if to protect himself from any such interrogation, that the Devil hurried up to the side of King Hades and began speaking very earnestly to him. 'It has occurred to me, O King, that instead of trying in vain as we are now doing to propitiate Venus and jolly her along into making us the chief servants of her rule, it would be much better for us, and also for you, O King, if we flew to the planet Mars and instead of propitiating him at all we boldly invaded him, yes, made a fierce attack upon him and by sheer force conquered his planet. You doubtless know without my telling you, O great King, that it was the Romans who gave the name of Mars, their god of war, to this shining star. The ancient Greeks, as your Majesty knows, called it Ares, which was their name for this same heroic deity. But have you read, O mighty King, among the Homeric hymns, the one to Ares which ends with a passionate prayer that he will do the extreme opposite of what most of us expect from him. I expect you remember how this desperate war-hating prayer ends, how it ends, like this you know. "Restrain the keen fury of my heart which provokes me to tread the ways of bloodcurdling strife! Rather, blessed One, give my boldness to abide within the harmless laws of peace, avoiding strife and hatred and the violent demons of death."

'You see, O my Lord and King Hades, whoever it was who composed that hymn, what the deep and subtle implication is below it all? Namely that those who worship Ares the god of war are destined in the end to discover that deep down in the depths of his heart is something that corresponds with something of the same nature in the depths of their own hearts, that is to say, a recognition that what all the races of this universe need most of all is not victory over enemies but what the ancient Greeks called *eirene,* eiphnh, peace.’

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS CLEAR to the Devil that his words had made a deep impression on King Hades. But he was too wise to spoil the effect by going on too long in one strain. So leaving the subject of war and peace in the abstract he began now to concentrate on the immediate situation.

'Your Majesty must remember,' he said, lowering his voice so as not to be heard by anyone but the real wraiths of Persephone and Demeter who were standing quite close to him, 'that none of the shadowy courtiers of yours who now include these two famous goddesses who are with us here, are likely to be as interested as the living population of any of the planets associated with our sun and our moon, in our invasion of Mars if we do have the spirit to undertake it. I know enough about the inhabitants of the earth to know that if led into battle by you, O great King, your whole band of courtiers, ghosts though they all are, would have the power to make the ruler of Mars together with his fiercest Martians fly before them, yes! before us great King, in holy terror. On all planets, and I am sure this is true of Mars, ordinary living creatures are more afraid of ghosts than of the fiercest warriors.'

The Devil ceased. He had won and he knew it. King Hades now saw himself as the mighty monarch of a whole planet, and the planet after the earth and Venus, which is the most famous and influential of all the lot. Craftily selecting his special supporters on the ground that being English ghosts they were more familiar than the other pair with the conventional catchwords of patriotic battle, he invited Wang and Tang, since they had been near enough to hear the Devil's speech to King Hades, to announce their decision. This Wang did as follows: ‘Come, comrade wraiths,’ he cried, ‘let us, now that we are all followers of King Hades, join together in conquering for him and for ourselves a planet that will lend itself to our dominion when we have conquered it much more completely and much more satisfactorily, since it is a male planet, than this tricky and treacherous and tatterdemalion one run by a pretty lady! You agree with me, don’t you, my dear sister?’

‘Sure I do, brother!’ cried Tang, ‘and I have no doubt that comrades Sock and Pop, since like yourself and our gracious sovereign they are also male, will also agree.’

‘We do! We do!’ cried Sock and Pop simultaneously.

‘Well, that’s settled then!’ said the Devil with justifiable pride.

Whether Venus Aphrodite heard in actual words of this decision of her invaders it would be difficult to say. In her secret self Tang thought that these boastful males deserved some rebuff; but she little thought how soon it would come. At a sudden sign from Venus Aphrodite a whole battalion of beautiful young angels rushed out from some hidden palisade and began shooting arrows from delicately-drawn bows. These arrows could not of course stick in the flesh of our real wraiths as these had no flesh for them to stick into; but those they hit certainly experienced an extremely unpleasant shock when the arrows pierced through them.

‘No resistance, my friends!’ cried King Hades. ‘Hold hands and follow me!’

‘It certainly isn’t a moment,’ thought Tang, ‘for tying silken scarves round our waists!’ And she clasped her brother’s hand, who, in his turn, clutched Pop’s, who had already got Sock’s in his. As for the Devil, there was enough left in him of the old Lucifer-Satan to make it easy for him with his arms reverting to a fallen angel's wings, to fly with them with his hand on the trailing robe of King Hades.

To their surprise they found the planet Mars prepared for their attack. Who had told Mars the King of their coming? It was Tang who solved this riddle. She had stored her mind when she was a child with the names and relationships of all the gods and goddesses of Olympus. Well did she now remember that long before Zeus, the King of the gods, married Hera he had married Themis who was the goddess of law and order and more than any other goddess was concerned with the good and evil of all men, of all places, of all things.

'It must have been the great goddess Themis, the first wife of Zeus the King of all the gods, who told them,' she shouted aloud as they all rushed forward, following after King Hades.

Thus it was not the wavings and brandishings and battle-cries of three women and three men that scared their enemies; it was the name of Themis. This name being as deeply suggestive of order as the name of Mars was suggestive of war had a terrific effect. The Martians began crying out to one another: 'Themis! Themis! Themis!' with the result that as they resisted their invaders they mistook the figure of Demeter who was advancing with her hand in her daughter's and who was obviously an elderly lady, for the goddess herself. So what they must have thought in their minds was that, since they were all would-be warriors longing for a battle, the goddess of order must have decided to teach them a lesson.

The effect of the introduction of the word Themis, a name which had become from very early days far more terrifying to the inhabitants of Mars than any invaders from Uranus or Mercury, or, in this case, from the earth, could possibly be, actually did have at this particular crisis a double effect; for not only did it scare the Martians but it made our six real wraiths, two of whom were ex-goddesses, also feel extremely uneasy. Was it possible, they wondered, that a group of Olympian enemies of the all-powerful Zeus could have decided that the best way of making his present wife Hera feel reduced in glory and esteem would be to emphasise the importance to human civilisation of Themis, the immortal goddess of law and order, and with this in mind to despatch Themis on a sort of police-woman's tour through all the planets?

As may well be imagined the six real wraiths who had joined their destiny to that of King Hades were extremely reluctant to admit defeat by the Martians. Both sides, the Martians who were ready to sweep them into space, and they themselves now that the fatal name Themis had been uttered, had come to a pause before joining in battle. And now, midway between them, the Devil, a being different from any creature either side had ever previously encountered, was not only indulging in fantastic antics with his horns and his tail but was making such an unusually compelling speech to both parties or to put it more bluntly to both the invaders and the invaded that they were both hypnotised into listening. 'What neither of you' — and he poked with his horns like a bull preparing to charge— 'understand,' he said, 'is just what all we living beings are seeking to get from life and consequently why it is that we earth-dwellers are invading you Mars-dwellers. I don't say that we all want the same thing; for men and women are very different in what they want. Men want to use their strength in doing something important. Women want to enjoy being themselves without any purpose but that of making themselves more beautiful and more appealing, and if they have babies to enjoy suckling them and if they have children to enjoy teaching them and playing with them. Women treat everything they possess in a maternal way. They spend their time mothering everything. They treat animals so; they treat flowers so. Men full of longing to do something important don’t bother about flowers at all unless they happen to be professional gardeners. Whereas to women flowers are like children — they love them as they love children. They adore every petal of them and are very troubled, really troubled at heart, if the flowers show signs of drooping or fading before their time.’

Both sides looked nervously at one another and then turned and stared with equal indecision at their opponents. It was clear that the Devil’s oration, especially his emphasis upon women’s passion for flowers and men’s indifference to them unless the particular men were gardeners, had made a considerable impression. The individual who ought to have been most concerned since he was the leader of the invaders, that is to say King Hades himself, took not the slightest notice of the Devil’s eloquence nor of its magnetic and hypnotic effect. This obliviousness was evidently something of a mystery to both sides; and something of a nuisance too; but it converted a natural pause, like that of two animals both of whom were crouching and waiting to spring, into a troublesome order suddenly flung out by a schoolmaster forbidding an exciting game of football just when the boys from two opposing schools were awaiting the kick-off.

It was Hades himself who broke the spell. Rising to his feet and addressing his little band of adherents, he suddenly pointed to a towering castle in the background of the plain upon which his followers had landed, and cried aloud: ‘Here cometh Mars himself, or Ares, as I prefer to call him! Turn and look at him all of you and you’ll see how important it is for us to retreat. Brave as you are, my friends, you can’t fight against a monster like that! Follow me, therefore, and bid that brute go back to his den!’

Not only did all of the six wraiths including the girl Tang, but all their opponents in that field of battle destined to be delivered that day from shedding so much as a single drop of blood, stare in speechless amazement at the figure that now came striding towards them. Tang, with a young girl's instinctive power of putting braggadocio masculinity in its place, cried out to the approaching figure which seemed entirely composed of helmet and shield and battle-axe and golden breast-plate; for the man inside all this paraphernalia seemed pathetically small and thin and weak and featureless in comparison with the weight of gold and bronze and silver and iron he was labouring beneath, 'Go back, go back, you Mars! Go back! Go back, you Ares! Go back to the armoury from which you came! We're not afraid of you, you walking and stalking *museum* of antiquity!'

CHAPTER XII

'IT IS TIME for us to leave this Ares-acting Mars,' cried King Hades. 'I am going to take you to a place known to me but unknown to any of you. And when we get there — so now hold hands all of you! — you will remember this swaggering tower of armour as if he were a comedy of buffoonery which you saw in some planetary theatre!

'I am taking you to Pachydermata,' Hades cried, 'whence my ancestors on my mother's side deduced their lineage; so farewell, you walking museum! May your subjects bow lower and lower and lower before you while I show *my* subjects what I've got for them in Pachydermata! Come on, my dears, clutch each other by the hand, and I'll take our friend the Devil by his horn! Off we go! Ta! Ta! master Brazen-top! May you meet no Queen of the Amazons to teach you where you belong!'

They all obeyed him. The Devil bowed his head to make his left-hand horn available. With his other hand King Hades took Tang's who at once gave her other to Wang while Pop and Sock followed suit, the two goddesses bringing up the rear. Thus this singular stream of eight beings, Hades, the Devil, Wang and Tang, Pop and Sock, and the two goddesses, slid down without sails or wings or diving belts or tridents to the old planet earth.

It was of tremendous interest to all the four real wraiths as well as to the Devil to see in what direction they were being led when they arrived within the earth's atmosphere. Demeter and Persephone, however, showed no interest at all. They were so happy at being together again after a separation as long-lasting as several hundred generations that they cared nothing as to whither they were being led. To the astonishment of all the rest, however, an astonishment that made something like a real shiver of alarm pass through Pop and Sock and Wang and Tang, for in all those four hearts, the secret hope had been closely hugged that King Hades would take them back to Greece, they now realised that their goal was the Pacific Ocean.

This was indeed a shock; and the shivering fit that followed increased and increased upon them all. When at last they reached the Ocean, they were too frightened to stare at it in the way ‘stout Cortez,’ according to Keats, did. They could only look wildly at one another. Calm as ever were the two goddesses; and when King Hades beckoned to them that he, the only member of this weird crew who was not already dead, intended to dive into the Ocean at a spot he carefully pointed out, they accepted his decision with a smile and an inclination of their heads and indicated that they had every intention of following him wherever he went and doing whatever he did.

‘Down to Pachydermata!’ cried King Hades as he dived, dragging the Devil with him. After them went Tang and Wang, and after them, Sock and Pop, while the two goddesses, exchanging a smile and a kiss, followed at the end of the line.

The Ocean was very deep where they dived and it took some while before they reached the bottom. Once there, everything seemed different to them all. King Hades led them on foot for about a quarter of a mile completely disregarding, as they all followed him, the sea-monsters and the enormous sharks and octopuses that kept circling round them as they walked; disregarding too the submarine coral-reefs and the huge thickets of a gigantic sea-weed which clung to their ankles as they moved. Tang thought to herself, ‘What would happen now if the sea-serpent which so many divers dread were to come circling and twisting and writhing and wriggling its way towards us? Would King Hades and the Devil scare it into flight or would it swallow us up one after the other?'

But all such thoughts departed when King Hades stopped in front of a large square enclosure of silver railings from the centre of which rose a half-open door that led as they could all see to a flight of steps.

'Follow me, my children, all of you,' said King Hades, pulling open a golden gate into this silver-barred enclosure and approaching the up-lifted door and the flight of steps.

He released the Devil's horn as he descended but glanced aside to make sure that the Devil was following him. After the Devil they all went down, the procession ending with Demeter and Persephone, who, with amused smiles at each other left the up-raised door just as it had been before any of them descended. The salt water was still about them, though it was not troubling them in any way; but Tang couldn't help wondering to herself how King Hades was able to breathe in this complete absence of air.

'It's all very well for us,' she told herself, 'for us who have long been dead, but how in the name of Poseidon, the god of the sea, can a man who is still alive go on like this?' Then she recalled his words about his mother's ancestors having come from this place. 'So perhaps,' she thought, 'he may have inherited, although a man, some of the capacity of a submarine creature.'

Tang's thoughts soon ceased to wander and became concentrated on the steps they now were all descending. She had never had any experience in the remotest degree like this. The steps themselves were of iron and their descent was very steep. But it wasn't their steepness; it was their lack of any deviation to right or left; it was their unmitigated straightness of descent that affected her. She had always had a horror of falling down to the bottom of a well; and this descent, straight, straight, straight down, till the downness gave her a feeling that in some way this was a hole into something more than the bottom of the Ocean; a hole into the bottom of the entire universe perhaps, out of which if you went down as far as you could go, you would emerge into, well! *whatever it might be* that lay beneath the whole universe! This was an exciting idea; but it was also a terrifying idea. What *did* underlie the entire universe and all it contained? Just empty space? Or was there something like a special word for a particular race of beings, totally different from the inhabitants of any world we have ever heard of, or can imagine existing? That appalling flight of steps was over at last; and having descended below the bottom of the Ocean they found themselves breathing air that must somehow have reached them from the other side of the globe.

'Behold the entrance to Pachydermata!' cried King Hades in a more powerful voice than any of them had ever heard him use before. Nor was the pride in his voice without justification. They all found themselves now standing in a group before a huge archway above which was carved upon a great stone of black adamant the words '*To Be or Not To Be*'.

They all acted boldly. No longer holding one another's hands, led by Wang and Tang followed by Sock and Pop, with Hades striding before them and the Devil skipping after them, they passed under this great arch into the *unknown land.*

CHAPTER XIII

'WELL! THIS IS indeed an adventure,' thought Tang to herself, looking round to make sure Wang was safely with them. Yes! He was there; and so also, in addition to Sock and Pop was the Devil and the two goddesses.

'This is the land,' cried King Hades, turning to make sure they were all there, 'from which my mother came. She used to tell me about it and where it lay, but I found difficulty in believing her, so impossible did it seem to me that any inhabitable land could exist beneath this Ocean. I had heard rumours about Atlantis but I knew as a child enough to know that *that* land was under the Atlantic. But at last' — and the King heaved a deep sigh— 'I learnt the truth. My mother was the first child of Pasiphaë who afterwards, by the help of Daedalus the cleverest of all artificers, was able to find a labyrinthine hiding-place for her beloved monster, the Minotaur.'

Hades had only just drawn a long deep breath as he thought of his mother and longed in his heart to see her again, when running rapidly towards them over that varied and verdurous plain there came a small and active satyr.

'Rumours have reached us of your coming, O my King!' he cried, falling down at the feet of Hades and pressing his forehead into the sandy ground. 'And it was agreed among us that we would draw lots who should meet you and tell you the news; and the lot fell on me.' At this point the satyr lifted his head and looked up at Hades but still remained on his knees before him.

'The news is that, unknown to any god or any man, a monstrous offspring of the Minotaur of Crete and the terrible Titanic creature Typhoeus, one or the other of them being able to feminise itself for this purpose, but which of these monsters, O King, played the male or *was* the male, and which of them played the female or *was* the female nobody knows, has been discovered in a cave in this country. You know, O King, for we all are aware of your close link with us, that we have many very learned scholars and experts in the history of the monsters that have penetrated this undersea country since the beginning of the world. I am one of a group of ten satyrs who act as scouts for these wise men of whom there are, as you no doubt know, O King, about six, all of them oldish men, and all well acquainted with the many dangers of their difficult research. They have discovered the complete history of both the monsters concerned. The dragon Typhoeus was crippled by Zeus with thunderbolts and lightning and hurled down to your Kingdom, O great King, and the Minotaur whose whole being was due to the feminine lust of Pasiphaë was assisted by that supreme artificer Daedalus to seek refuge here after being nearly killed by Theseus, who had left it for dead in the labyrinth of Minos, Lord of Crete. These monsters must have met down here, O King, and afterwards withdrawn again to the upper regions leaving their progeny to look after itself. This was evidently done, if what our six wise men tell us is correct; for its cave, they say, is full of bones. But they also tell us, though none of us satyr-scouts have dared to go near that cave, that the monstrous offspring of the Minotaur and Typhoeus has grown larger and looks more terrifying than either of its parents. Most of us satyrs think that Typhoeus was its mother and the Minotaur its father, but I've got a different idea, O great King. I hold the view that monsters such as they are composed of both sexes, and that in their horrible embraces, first one and then the other played male and female and that this appalling progeny is like themselves half male and half female. At any rate our six wise men tell us that it has grown to be as large as if Typhoeus and the Minotaur were joined together.

They tell us, but mark you, O great King, I cannot speak with any assurance about this for I have not dared to go near that cave, and they say the monster satisfies its hunger at night and sleeps in the day. They say all the animals it meets at night are so terrified by it that they fall into a fainting-fit and all it has to do is to put out its tongue and lap them up, chew them, bones and all, a little while, between its jaws, and then swallow them! Big and little, all that it scares into this fainting-fit, down into its stomach they go. Think, O great King, what it must feel like to see this monster, the biggest monster the universe has ever known, if you met it by moonlight! Well! I have delivered my message; and now with your permission, O great Lord of the underworld, I will return to my companions.'

Having thus spoken the satyr rushed away at the same speed with which he had come; and King Hades, looking round at them all, especially at Tang and the two goddesses, for it was clear to Sock and Pop and the Devil that he regarded women as far wiser than men, made no comment on the satyr's speech but this:

'The best thing we can do, my friends, is to go at once, before night comes on, to the acropolis of Pachydermata. There are weapons suitable for you all stored up there and its tower is so high and its walls are so thick that the biggest monster in the world couldn't break in. If it even approached we could shoot at it with arrows poisoned by the roots of Paddockia, a poison that causes its victims to eat their own flesh.'

Made to feel braver by these words, all the wraiths, including Demeter and Persephone, followed King Hades across the plain. Nor was it long before they were aware of a row of mounds on the horizon at the sight of which King Hades quickened his pace and they all followed. Faster and faster they went, till the mounds were just before them, a long row of them, each as high as a tall tower. King Hades led them to the centre one which was taller than the rest; and here he stopped. They all regarded it with astonishment. It was apparently just a massive mound of enormous height entirely composed of green grass. But Hades now approached a square edifice at its base of about six feet square. This edifice he entered and proceeded to do something in its interior. Then he came out holding in his hand some sort of long, thin, silver chain.

All the wraiths who were watching him gathered close together and made a half-circle round him, Demeter and Persephone among them. A weird feeling must have taken possession of them that warned them that something unusual was going to happen.

‘Come nearer, all of you,’ commanded Hades, ‘and stand on the pavement by my side.’ They all did as they were told to do and then once more there was a baffling and bewildering pause. Then King Hades cried aloud: ‘Draw back, grass! Rise, tower of the acropolis of Pachydermata!’

When he had spoken there came a hush that seemed to penetrate not only everybody present, for being wraiths they were easily penetrable, but even the Devil, who was standing on one leg in the middle of them and hopping up and down. The hush that came on them all lasted so long that finally the Devil stopped hopping and changed the leg he was standing on. But he still stood on one leg.

The hush that fell gave them the feeling that the world itself was making some tremendous decision; the decision, it might even be, to break into two halves and allow each half to fall away through empty space! Then it was that King Hades pulled the silver wire he held in his hand; and before their eyes the event occurred. Behind them the grass rose in a curving mass like a colossal living carpet. It rose to the height of about twenty feet and as it did so it rolled back leaving the mound bare. Then this strange hush like the premeditated silence before some great monarch’s execution seemed converted into a shadowy mist that surrounded the mounting up of an impregnable tower whose emergence gave to all who beheld it a weird sensation of dizziness, as if instead of it rising up, they were sinking down.

There must have been some esoteric machinery within that little portico that had the power of revealing, if properly handled, this tower that had been present there for thousands of years but had been overgrown by grass. Tang whispered to her brother: ‘It isn’t really rising. What is happening is that all this grass has such a quantity of earth-mould under it that as it lifted off with all that weight of mould clinging to it, and the fortress is revealed it gives us the feeling that those walls are rising up. They’re not rising up,’ repeated Tang confidently. ‘They have been there all the time! Just look at them, Wang. Did you ever see anything like them? No wonder’ — she lowered her voice— ‘our King here has memories of them associated with his mother. His mother probably was always telling him about them when he was little. Children love to hear about battles and castles and forts and towers. Walls more than six feet thick would suggest every sort of fairy-story to their minds. O Wang, O Wang! Just look at those walls! That awful monster, the child of the Minotaur and Typhoeus, couldn’t with all his force, if he butted against them every night for a hundred years break those walls down!’

It was then that they beheld King Hades emerging from the main arch of the fortress and heard his voice calling upon them all to enter. They obeyed him joyfully, the Devil skipping in front of them and the ghosts of the two goddesses following them with dignity and grace. Once inside this ancient fortress they all became very quickly aware as to who it was who ruled within it. This was Hecate, the daughter of Perseus and Asteria. Hecate was the only one of all the gods and goddesses in the world who was an only child; and this endowed her with peculiar honours. She exercised authority in every region, upon sea, upon land, in earth, in air, in fire, in water. As Hesiod explains to us, Zeus himself from the start treated her with more honour and respect than any other being in the world, more than Hera his wife, more than Pallas Athene his daughter. And if any mortal upon earth, Hesiod hints, has any deep secret wish he longs to see satisfied, whatever its nature may be, the divinity to whom he or she were wise to pray was Hecate. No other god or goddess could answer them or help them as she could.

Neither Wang or Tang had ever known this before; but never in their whole existence, whether as living young people or as ghosts had they encountered anyone of either sex so appealing to them as Hecate was. And she had the same magic power over King Hades who seemed unable to take his eyes off her and kept following her as docilely as if she were the long-lost sister of his mother. She and Hades and the Devil being the only beings present who weren't ghosts, it was peculiarly interesting to Sock and Pop and Wang and Tang to see what Hecate's attitude was to the ghosts of the two goddesses. Talking about it later with her brother, Tang declared that Hecate was perceptibly uneasy in their presence.

'It must have been a shock to her,' Tang said, 'to see two goddesses of her own class as Olympian immortals reduced to the level of ordinary earthly phantoms.' No doubt Hades must have explained at once to her how Demeter died of grief when he carried of! her daughter and how Persephone deliberately committed suicide at her mother's shrine, but that tragic story obviously couldn't have reduced two world renowned goddesses to the level of Sock and Pop and Wang and Tang. There is no doubt that this encounter was bound to cause agitation if not shame to Hecate who must have seen endless human ghosts ere this without dreaming that it would be her fate to meet at last the ghosts of the two goddesses.

But Tang and her brother could see that the charm of Persephone and the dignity of her mother soon assuaged the first impact of this shock; and they noticed how in the subsequent conversations between the two goddesses and their hostess all seemed quite harmonious. Tang herself couldn't resist asking Hecate whether she had not felt terribly lonely as she spent all these thousands of years by herself in this desolate fortress below the Pacific Ocean.

'You must remember, dear child,' the goddess answered, 'that I've always been much more lonely than you. I'm the only Olympian in the world without brother or sister or son or daughter. From my childhood till now I've always had long hours by myself with nobody to talk to. The world of women and men and goddesses and animals and birds and fishes has had to pass me by for many thousands of years without arousing in me any very great interest.'

Tang gazed at the dark-haired being bending over her like a kindly nurse and had the presumption to ask her another question. 'What *did* interest you, O great goddess, in these crazy persons and mixed-up happenings that were always whirling past you?'

'I will tell you exactly, my dear child, what did,' Hecate replied with a smile that made Tang feel more at home than she'd felt for years. 'I've always liked telling myself stories. I used to do this when I was very little and I've done it ever since. I pretend, for instance, that I have a brother who is a giant and a sister who has wings and can fly. I used to pretend that my sister was always flying to Olympus to ask Zeus questions; but, though I have stopped doing that as I've got older, still when I'm alone, as I've been lately for a thousand years, for where my parents have gone, or why they deserted me, I have not the faintest idea, I often pretend that my giant bother and my sister with wings have made such friends with laughter-loving Aphrodite that she has appointed them guards of honour or her official agents and I go on pretending all sorts of exciting adventures for them both as they help this daughter of Ouranos and her wild and desperate devotees to satisfy their love for each other and their violent hatred of all that oppose them. Lately I've even gone so far — I wonder if that thought came to me from the neighbourhood of this monster — to imagine them being encouraged by Aphrodite to have a love-affair with each other! But I mustn't,' here she paused and smiled sweetly at Tang and Wang, 'encourage you two to have a love-affair; though your parents may be as far away as mine are!'

Wang and Tang glanced knowingly at each other as their minds flew back to various incidents in former days that answered only too well to what Hecate said, but they were spared any reply by the voice of the Devil:

'Why is it, O great goddess who knowest all, that long before the death of the being formerly known as God, there was a curious set of elderly women in the world who were so attracted to me as to crowd together in any pace I frequented and allow me to embrace them one after another till finally I would work them up into such a rapture of being raped that they would dance round me in an ecstasy. They abandoned themselves to this to such an extent that I used to select certain particular places, for regular meetings with them, to which they always came and were always obsessed by the same mad excitement. They were all elderly, mind you, not young like our girl-friend Tang here: and they seemed to derive some kind of magic power from it that enabled them to do any harm they wanted to anyone they had a hatred for. *Witches* — yes! that's what people called them and people seemed at once attracted to them and horrified by them. Will you tell me, O great goddess, what it was about me that so attracted elderly women in those days and why they have ceased to feel like that? You might also tell me, if your kindness can extend as far as that, what it was that after He had gone to the limit in inventing a fiery hell for his enemies where He could gloat over their suffering in the flames and be always whispering in their ears “You know this isn’t for only a million years! This is for ever and ever and ever, world without end, Amen,” this appalling being called God whom Paul of Tarsus told everybody was the incarnation of love, but whom Jesus knew when they were crucifying Him had been deceiving Him all his life, what it was, I am asking you, yes! what it really was that led this monster of a revengeful God full to the brim of this feeling that Saint Paul calls love but which clearly was the most vindictive hatred that the universe has ever known, what it was, I’m asking you, that led this “God of love” to disappear?’

Before Hecate could reply to the Devil’s questions King Hades intervened and called upon them all to enter the fortress. This they all did; and they ascended the eight massive steps that confronted them, Hecate leading Hades by the hand, and at every step turning round to encourage the four earthly ghosts and the two Olympian ghosts in their more difficult, because more bewildered ascent, Sock and Pop helping each other, and Wang and Tang helping each other, for each stone step was more than two feet high.

‘I should have thought,’ said Tang to Wang, ‘that since we’ve no material flesh and bones to heave up we could glide up more easily.’

‘It’s mental,’ replied the clever Wang. ‘You see we’re watching Hades and Hecate, both of whom have their flesh and bones; and that makes it hard to glide in our natural ghostly way. But look, my dear! I glided then all right, didn’t I?’ Tang looked and glided too; and so also, for they were watching them, did Sock and Pop. As for the two goddesses, they were already floating on each side of Hades as Hecate helped him to mount.

Once at the top they all found themselves in a grandly spacious hall which had at its further end an iron ladder evidently leading up to the roof. In this spacious hall they all rested, drawing deep breaths of relief.

‘But we’re in day-light!’ cried Sock excitedly. ‘Where does the light come from?’

The King of the underworld explained at once.

‘You see, children,’ he said, ‘we have got a fortress here that the monstrous child of Typhoeus and the Minotaur can never enter. What we’ve got to realise though,’ he went on, ’is that as long as that monster is still alive in his cave it is never safe for any of us to leave this fort. This day-light here,’ he went on— ‘and this really ought to cheer us up a bit — comes from the other side of our world. Don’t you see, my dears, that the deeper we go — and the bottom of this Ocean under which we now are goes very deep — the nearer we get to the other side of our globe which is now in full day-light!’

‘Do you happen to know, O great and generous Hecate,’ enquired Tang, ‘what has happened to the God of the Christians worshipped so frantically by so many disciples?’

‘Yes,’ replied Hecate gently. ‘I do happen to know. But it’s a very painful story and I don’t like talking about it.’

‘Tell them, Hecate! Tell them at once!’ commanded Hades in his most imperious tone. ‘What’s the use of my being called Pluto by so many, and of my being for two thousand years the King of the whole underworld if people come here without knowing that this treacherous torturer who betrayed his greatest disciple, Jesus, is dead as a door-nail?’

‘Well! If you’ll all sit down on those benches,’ acquiesced Hecate, ‘and let me bring you some bread and wine, I’ll tell the whole story.’

They all obeyed her, while Hades, beckoning Wang and Tang to go with him, followed her down a passage into which the day-light had already entered. They soon were all partaking of some delicious loaves of bread, which Hecate must have baked, and of some wonderful wine which must have been very old indeed, but which age had not spoilt.

‘It was not very long ago,’ Hecate told them. ‘God was as usual enjoying the anguish of His enemies in the flames of the Hell He had invented for them when a group of these sufferers led by a man called Voltaire leapt upon Him and dragged Him down. They dragged Him so deep and held Him down so long that it created a terrific stir, and in the end several of these rebels managed to turn a great flood of water upon those ancient flames and thus extinguished them altogether. The fires of Hell being thus extinguished the men who had nearly burned God to ashes in God’s own carefully designed furnace which God had boasted to everybody was made to last forever, now dragged Him out and laid Him down upon a bank of smooth sand. Here they surrounded Him and kept asking Him a string of more troublesome questions than any man had ever been asked before. Their leaders, after the ghost of Voltaire, were two very curious ghosts. One was the Marquis of Sade and one was Gilles de Retz. I was told the whole story by Count Masoch who has become a very special friend of mine.’ At this there was an excited interruption from Tang.

‘O,’ she cried, ‘I’ve read all about him. He’s one of those people who’ve got a passion for being ill-used. He’ll even let you whip him quite hard for an hour without doing anything to resist. If you stop he cries “Go on! Go on! Whip me! Whip me! Whip me!”’

Hecate smiled graciously at Tang.

‘Yes, you’ve got him all right. But you can see, can’t you why he suits me so well. I want to know everything that goes on in the world, all the worst things especially. And as nothing delights Count Masoch more than watching cruelty, and even, very often, being treated cruelly, as long, of course, as he's in no danger of being killed, it is to him I go to hear stories of what's happening in this present world. This treatment of God, for instance, under the direction of the Marquis of Sade and Gilles de Retz was to my friend Masoch the most exciting thing he had ever seen. "Was Hell," I asked him, "entirely extinguished by this rebellion against God?" He told me it was; and that henceforth when governesses and nurses try to scare children into behaving well by threatening them with Hell the rumour about the end of God and the end of Hell has passed among the maid-servants in so many houses to such a wide extent that there's always a voice raised in protest against this way of making children good.'

All the four human ghosts together with the two ghost-goddesses were now comfortably sitting on a wooden bench sipping the wine and eating the special bread Hecate had brought with it.

'What I would like to ask you, Lady,' said the Devil, with a polite bow, touching as he did so the points of both his horns which everybody noticed and grown longer as he listened to what Count Masoch had told Hecate, 'is whether the tradition that I am descended from a wide-ruling Ox, whose horns helped him to rule the entire world before God was born, has any reality in it. I tell you, O wise and gentle goddess, that I frequently have felt, especially since I have been serving King Hades or King Pluto, for he likes to be known by both these names, a very curious sensation in my horns, a sensation as if they had recently been released from carrying the weight of all the wicked things ever done in the world. By this I mean the sort of things imagined by the Marquis of Sade and done by Gilles de Retz. This may easily be, O wise goddess, a natural mistake; because whenever I've heard learned men of the kind whom God has got lodged in Hell because they are too learned to believe in Him, talk about me they always say that my quarrel with this inventor of eternal flames is a very ancient one, one that goes back to the days when as an almighty World-Ox I lived near this God in Heaven. The Jews invented a rebellious angel called Satan who in many ways seemed to have more resembled a serpent than an ox and the Greeks who invented Typhoeus the dragon and the woman-worshipped child-eating bull in the labyrinth of Crete, are both twisting the real truth of the tradition from which I come in quite erroneous directions. I have nothing in my ancestral horns resembling that creation of women's lust, the Minotaur. Listen to my own rhyme about myself:

> "My horns did over the whole world rule.
> They made every man look an ass and a fool.
> They made every girl lose her way to her school.
> They made every babe see a whale in each pool."'

'What would you do, my Lord Devil,' enquired Wang, after a mischievous glance at Tang, 'if on some night as you walked in the fields you saw the monster from the cave coming towards you?'

'Lead him a dance,' the Devil answered with a grin. 'I'd run towards him and when he bent down to gobble me up I'd slip under his belly and come out by his tail. And when he swung round to catch me I'd give his ugly snout such a jab with one of my horns that he'd jerk up his head as if I'd stabbed him with a dagger; and that would give me my chance and I would press my head down and force it forward till one horn went into the hole under his right aim and the other into the hole under his left arm. Then I would press both my feet into the ground to give me all the upward swing of my neck that I had the power to make, and in spite of his size, while my feet under his weight sank into the sand, I would hoist up his monstrous head, till the two points of my horns came out through his shoulders. And the least move he might try to make to bend down would cause him the Devil's own discomfort. Thus our two bodies would be locked closely together; and together they would remain for a brief moment. Then with a terrific jerk I would pull my horns out.'

'But please tell us, O great Hecate,' Tang begged her, rather to the annoyance, she could see, of the Devil, who had still plenty more he wanted to tell them about his horns, 'how long it was before God died after they had destroyed His Hell and got Him lying helpless upon the sand in the light of day?'

'Their difficulty in finishing Him off quickly was derived,' Hecate replied, 'from the fact that they were all ghosts; and although God had especially invented His Hell so as to cause ghosts the greatest anguish they could suffer, the absence within them of any bones or any flesh or any blood did, as God had been forced to recognise from the start, considerably mitigate what they would have had to go through if they had not had to die before He could get them down there. The grand revolution in Hell which had paralysed God hadn't turned him into a ghost, and God was, like King Hades and myself, and unlike Demeter and Persephone here, fully possessed of flesh and blood and bones. God was like a Greek god, like Cronos or Zeus or Apollo, or like our Demeter and Persephone before they became ghosts. The tragic thing,' Hecate continued, 'about His death was the appearance at his side of Saint Paul who was, as I tell everybody, the real inventor of the Trinity and of the whole Christian religion. Saint Paul was now himself a ghost but he knelt down by God's side and kissed all he could discern of his physical organs. "You are love," he kept whispering to Him. "I have made that clear to all the world. You are love and all we who love you love each other and love birds and fish and beasts and plants and rocks and stones and trees. Love flows forth from the very thought of you. As I have told the world a thousand times over, ‘God is love’ and the love of God fills the entire world with faith, hope, and charity. It is impossible for you, O God who art love, to pass away from us thy worshippers. We *are* you. You *are* us. You have filled the world with love like the sky with air and the ocean with water. You and love are one and we your worshippers are bound together with you. All is love and there is nothing left out. Whatever these devils have done to you, O Lord our God, it matters not. You are love and we in you and in love are with you in Heaven for ever.”

‘Thus did Saint Paul talk to Him and then hurried home to write about it. But a little fisher-boy came up to Him on the shore where they had laid Him: and God felt friendly to this boy and very soon began telling him the whole history of His life.

‘“You’ve heard of Jesus?” The boy nodded. “Well, at the last he cried, ‘It is finished.’ And that was after he had accused me of deserting him. But what did he think? I have never had the magical resilience that Jesus had. I am not an enchanter like him. And as for ‘the Comforter’ as he called it, this confounded white sea-gull has been pestering me ever since those devils laid me here! That man who has just gone, sonny, is Paul of Tarsus, Parisee of The Pharisees. He made them kill with stones Jesus’ disciple Stephen. And now he has made this flapping and flipping white bird come out of the sea and whirl about my head. Go away, Comforter! Go away Holy Ghost! Can’t I at least, if I’m accepted as God, be allowed to die in peace? Yes, sonny, I’ve had a strange life! I was a stable-boy in Bethlehem and heard all that fuss about Herod and John the Baptist and Salome and Joseph and Mary and Mary’s aunt, the black-faced gypsy, and Peter and Pilate, and Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. O how they all talked about God! At first I thought they meant our old Jewish Jehovah but I very soon found out that they didn’t. Then I wondered, since everybody was ‘appealing to Caesar’ and referring to Jupiter, and quoting Lucretius or Virgil or Horace, whether the only thing for me to do was to find some rich traveller who was going to Rome. And quite unexpectedly — none of these devils know that — I fell in love with a little Greek girl who told me all about Zeus and Cronos and Hera and Pallas Athene and Prometheus. This little girl died of a fever; and I was so unhappy and so lonely that I got a job as cabin-boy — I guess you know what they’re like, Sonny? — on board a ship going East. And then do you know, Sonny, what came into my head? Don’t ‘ee be shocked kiddy; but it came into my head that one day when I was grown up and had a beard I would pretend to be one of these Greek gods my little girl told me about.

‘“I won’t tire you out, sonny, with the tale of my life at sea and abroad. So many things happened to me that I can’t remember half of them now. But I had one experience, when I was about forty and when I did have a bushy beard though it wasn’t long or grey as it is now, about which I will tell you. I was in some Eastern country — I *think* it was Ethiopia though I wouldn’t swear to that — where they were believers in magic and had several magicians who used to practise it. I got talking to these magicians and I gathered from them that no man ever knew until he had tried several times whether he could practise magic or not. You are either born with it they told me or you are not. Well, sonny, I tried. And I found I *was* born with it; and not only so but born with it to an infinitely greater extent than any of them. Parallel with this discovery — caused I suppose by all my rough and disconcerting experiences — I found out that I had acquired a deep and permanent hatred of the human race. What I longed for more than anything else in the world was to have the power to cause human beings, men and women, old and young, excruciating pain. The Marquis of Sade who has only just stopped asking me questions while Gilles de Retz was enjoying prodding my kidneys and liver and bowels and what's left of my lungs and heart with a skewer, tried to make out that the pleasure I have had in burning people in Hell and hypnotising them with the idea that it would go on forever, is due to what he calls sadism. But O sonny! He is absolutely wrong! It is due to one thing only; namely hatred. I like burning people in Hell simply because I hate people. Nobody knows, nobody will ever know how I hate them. I am dying now, sonny, but don't 'ee be frightened. You like to listen to me and you'll be interested in watching how I die. You and I resemble each other in our interest in things. When I found out in Ethiopia — if it was Ethiopia — what magical power I had, power over all the elements, power over earth, water, air and fire, I felt just as you're feeling now as you listen to me telling my story. You would have had exactly the same thoughts about it all as I had; and now if you were me, an old fellow who has been pretending for a thousand years to be God simply because He hates, after his wretched experience of them, the whole human race and longs to make them suffer for being what they are, if, I say, you were me, sonny, I swear you'd do exactly as I do. But that's a silly thing to say! I meant to say that you, being in my position and hating humanity like I do would act very much as I do. But perhaps you wouldn't. Perhaps you'd just run away from the whole lot and live in a cave like this monster they're all talking about."'

As Hecate now began to tell them about this little friend whom God managed to make at the very end of his life, Tang couldn't help crying out: 'But hasn't Count Masoch told you anything about how this poor, poor, dying God endured all that talk of Saint Paul's ghost about love?'

Hecate instinctively looked round as if expecting Count Masoch to be somewhere about; but then she smiled gently. 'No,' she said, 'he didn't tell me any more; and when at last I met somebody from the part of the country whence that kid had come and asked about him, as far as I could gather from what the person said the little boy's whole nature had changed after that talk with God when God died. He had become very silent and very reserved. Instead of seeking the companionship of other boys, I was told, he would go about alone. But suddenly to everybody's surprise he made great friends with an old lady who lived by herself. She gave him a room in her house and he went on all her errands and every night in the winter by a big fire he had helped her to make she would read to him Grimm's Fairy Tales.'

'Did this boy,' Tang eagerly enquired, 'see the actual death of God?'

'Yes,' Hecate replied, 'he did. The person who told me about it said that at the end he knelt down at the back of God's skull and pushing away the cloak that was there he substituted for it his own little belly while he clung to God's forehead with his clasped hands and chanted a chant which he must have been repeating to himself in expectation of this moment for quite a while.

> "Think only of sleep, great God of my soul,
> No psalm will I sing; no bell will I toll
> But so close to my heart is the back of your head
> That I don't know if you or if I am the dead."

'A fisherman coming past found them in this position and for a moment he did think they were both dead but the boy spoke when he touched them and he soon lifted them both into his boat.'

CHAPTER XIV

Now that God was dead and the little boy was happy with his old lady, Hades with his four human ghosts and two goddess ghosts, pondered what he would do and where he would go. Once again did the all-wise, Zeus-favoured, brotherless and sisterless only child, the Goddess Hecate, solve the problem.

‘What you must do, King Hades,’ she told him, ’is the bravest and most startling thing ever done in the whole history of the universe. We all see around us, as we sit here at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, the light of another day beginning to pierce through the rondure of our global earth. Well, great Hades, you and I, who are the only beings here with living bodies — I won’t say with thinking minds, for we both know how cleverly ghosts can think, especially ghosts who in their lifetime have been goddesses — are bound to know, and we do know only too well what it feels like to be souls or spirits or thinking minds boxed up in living bodies. Now, listen to me, King Hades, and you will soon see from what I am advising you to do how little I shall gain by it, in fact how much, how very much indeed, I shall lose by it, for if you follow my advice I shall lose you as a personal friend altogether. I shall be in touch with you. I shall be part of you. But that is a very different thing from being a friend and adviser as I have been so long and as I am now. When you hear what I advise you you will see what I am doing. I am sacrificing myself entirely on your behalf. It’s not exactly as if I advised you to eat me up.’ And here Hecate smiled at Hades just as she had done so often at Tang. ‘And it doesn’t amount to your leaving me forever, for we shall be together forever, but it does amount to my no longer being your own personal friend and adviser.'

Hades stood stark still and stared at her. Vainly, vainly, vainly he tried to imagine what she was going to suggest.

'Not suicide, surely?' he thought. 'Nor can it be that she wants me to marry her and make her the Queen of the underworld?' He gazed at Persephone as if seeking help from her. And then he turned his agitated eyes upon Demeter and seemed to be imploring her as the chief victim of his supreme wrong-doing to save him at this crucial moment. But neither of the goddess-ghosts answered his appeal.

'Well,' he said to Hecate, 'if I must do it, I must do it. I know your influence with the Olympians and you used to have influence too with these human ghosts. I confess I feel more nervous than I usually do in the presence of a woman. But you must tell me, Hecate, what you mean, and I must ponder on it.'

'What you don't realise, O Hades,' said Hecate firmly, 'and it may be that your nature is so constructed that it is impossible for you to realise it, is that a King of the underworld cannot remain without a kingdom any more than can any other King.'

'Never mind kingdoms!' cried Hades. 'Tell me straight away what it is you advise me to do.'

Hecate came up to him and they stood facing each other while she told him.

'We live,' she said, 'in a universe with a sun and a moon and vast galaxies of stars as well as our sun's planets. What exists beyond our universe we do not know and probably never shall know. Our earth has her towering ranges of high mountains and so probably has our sun and our moon. The mass of rock and mould and sand and clay and flint and granite and adamant which composes the material substance of our earth and of the sun and moon and all the stars and planets is overwhelming to think of. But since our own physical bodies with all their flesh and blood and bones from the crowns of our heads down to our toe-nails are made of matter it cannot surprise you if I maintain it to be possible for the whole material universe of which we are a part to have its one soul, one spirit, one faintly, dimly, obscurely conscious identity. Well then, O great King Hades why will not you, from being Lord of the underworld, become Lord, or rather the inmost soul of this whole material universe? Plunge, my dear Hades, plunge, dive, sink into the whole great mass of universal matter and become its living soul! Yes, my King! become its universal Pan, its dare-devil Dionysian innermost spirit of life!'

Sock and Pop and Wang and Tang had all been listening to Hecate's oration with baited breath. After the finale of her speech which sounded like a Declaration of Independence for some vast suppressed Cosmic Hippopotamus, the shrill childish voices of all four human ghosts and the clearly ringing celestial voices of the two goddess-ghosts burst out into protest 'Don't leave us! Don't leave us! Don't desert us! O Hades, great King of the underworld! If you sink into the mountains, if you lose yourself in the abysses of planet after planet and star after star, what will become of us your ghostly disciples? We have no rocks or crags or cliffs or gorges or toppling ridges to stride about over! Where shall we be with our shadowy hopes and our bodiless fears? This huge rocky mass of matter in sun, moon and stars, and the motes and atoms of space too, will be your Buffalo-like, your Rhinoceros-like, your Mammoth-like body while in the heart of it all like the murmurings and rumblings of a volcano your cries to be released from your cosmic, your geological, your corporeal frame, your howlings to be allowed to shake off your rocks and stones, your barriers and your bastions, your bumbershelves and your barricades, your palisades and your puddle-dumps, will very soon reveal to all students of reality and experts in escapism that it was not the natural world-heart of an earthy, airy, watery, fiery, rocky body of matter but just simply the mischievous antic-prancing and clownish kick-up dancings that some mocking intruder has beguiled you to undertake!'

'Don't you listen to them, Hades!' said Hecate, quietly. 'Not one of them has the faintest idea of what you will feel if you do what I am now suggesting. Take the plunge, my dear friend, take the plunge! Just give one steady glance at the whole vast mass of matter which our universe offers you, and take the plunge! Say to it, "I Hades, King of the underworld, am now becoming the soul of all the matter in the universe."'

Hades rose to his full height. He did look ready to do exactly what she said. But a pitiful cry rose up from Sock and Pop and Wang and Tang together with the sound of sobs from the two Olympian wraiths. Then Hecate turned to all of them.

'Will you take me with you?' she asked them, speaking quite calmly. 'Because I like being with you and I have come to understand you all and I think I can help you.'

The four human wraiths looked at her with intense earnestness, while the goddess-wraiths stopped weeping. Then it was that a sudden inspiration took possession of Tang.

'If, before you plunge into the heart of all the mountains in the world,' she cried solemnly, addressing Hades, but glancing at Hecate as she spoke, 'you were to know exactly where we all were, wouldn't it make this plunge into being the soul of all matter in existence easier?'

Hades looked straight at the young ghost-girl and nodded gravely.

'It certainly would,' he said, 'but how can I know where you will all be?'

‘It is just that,’ replied Tang, ‘that I’ve been thinking about Switzerland. Switzerland will always be the freest country in the world, won’t it? Well! In Switzerland, near the Alps there is a chapel dedicated to William Tell, the champion of freedom. If we all were to decide to make that chapel, yes! that chapel of William Tell, our home you would know where we were at any time and we would be able at any time to communicate with you *our* Lord and master now become the *Soul of Matter.*’

CHAPTER XV

'WELL SAID, MY sweet little ghost!' cried Hecate tenderly. 'Yes! That is where we will take up our abode from henceforth and forever! Or at least as long as you four human ghosts with your two Olympian ghosts keep in touch with our King Hades, as I myself always shall!

'So make your plunge, old friend, and all of you follow me to *William Tell's* chapel in the Swiss Alps. All the other mountains in the world will gradually grow aware of our being there. Plunge down, O Hades of my heart, into the majestic body of the Cosmos! We your disciples, with your friend Hecate to help, will keep in touch with you at *William Tell's* chapel. You will be with us, won't you, Devil?'

The Devil chuckled and bowed his horns and wagged his tail; and off they all flew to *William Tell's* chapel, while King Hades with a groan and a grunt and a grimace made his plunge and became the living soul of *the whole material* world.

Two and Two (1974)

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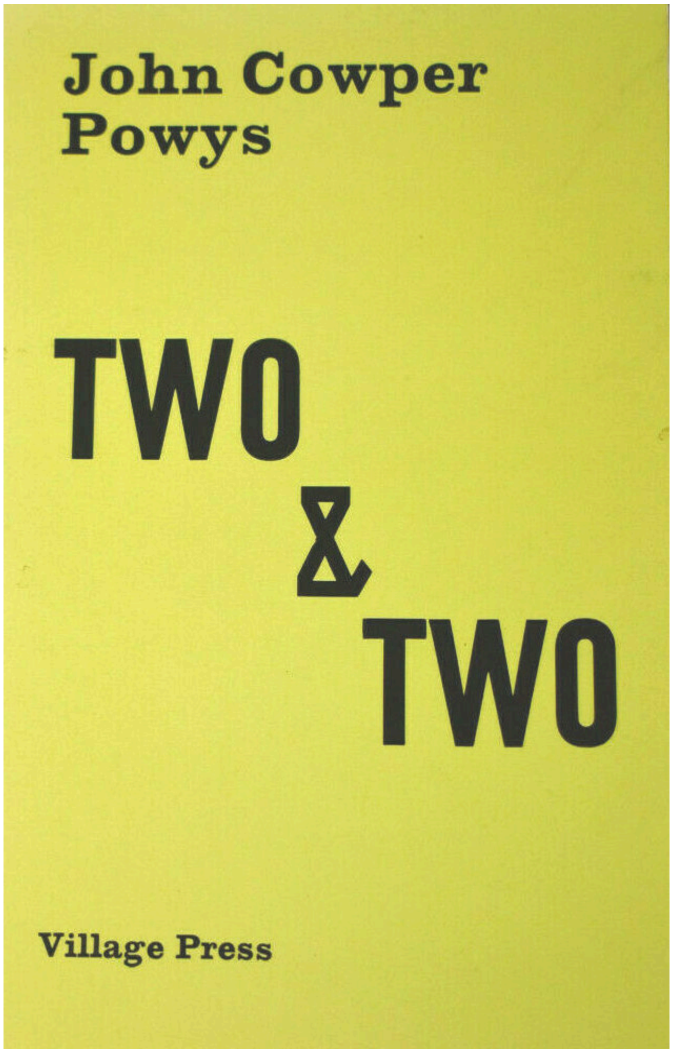
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CHAPTER 1

IGNESCO AND AQUATICUS looked at each other with the sort of smile that men always allow to flit across their face when they are momentarily conscious of their superiority to women in some small practical matter which they take very seriously but which, they know well, women take so lightly that they could hardly be said to consider it at all.

Then Ignesco said, ‘What we must specially bear in mind is that it isn’t just the making useless to them of this long extended crack or crevice or chasm in the mountain-side. It is making it useless in a particular way. We must turn it into something so profoundly melancholy, something so suggestive of utter, final, abysmal despair, that these two enemies of ours will be driven, by what they now see their refuge really is, to forsake it for ever and ever and ever and ever.’

“But how in the name of all this abomination of desolation,’ demanded Aquaticus, ‘shall we be able to make these two women see that the bravado which led them to defy us from this line of caves is more likely to end with our driving them to the verge of insanity than that this mad retreat of theirs should lead us into worshipping them as if they were a pair of terrifying goddesses.’

‘How, do you ask?’ roared Ignesco ferociously. ‘I’ll soon tell you how! The thing for me to do is to burn them out by igniting all the dead leaves and withered roots and inflammable peat and ancient tree-trunks that are to be found near these caves. Don’t you see, my good friend, it is clear they have a passage or corridor running along inside the mountain and connecting all their caves. So they couldn’t escape by slipping out of one and slipping back into another. What I suggest doing is lighting a fire that will burn all the way along whatever sort of passage they've got connecting their caves. Then of course you and I will be on the look-out outside, and the moment we see them emerging from any one of their caves we'll make a rush for them and finish them off!'

'And, of course,' replied Aquaticus, rubbing his hands with pleasure, and glancing sea-ward; for the shore was quite near and from where they stood talking they could see the curves of the pebbly beach with the ocean-waves breaking upon it in feathery flickerings of far-flung foam, 'and of course,' Aquaticus went on, 'if you haven't finished them off I'll bring up a good sea-wave to do the job.'

Little did they know, these two easy-going men, that their counter-parts, the women they were conspiring against, were listening to every word of this discussion. Aera, the elder and wiser of the two, was lying full-length in a comfortably concealed shelter, within a few yards of where the men were talking, but about a dozen yards under their feet.

Terra was leaning back languidly at Aera's side in a suspended swing of the most delicately twisted strands of silk and satin that quivered as lightly under her weight as if they were butterflies' wings. 'What about giving the two of them,' murmured Terra, 'a couple of days in Airy-Fairy? Wouldn't that bring down their impertinence a bit?'

'Airy-Fairy is a good place,' replied the other lady, 'for giving troublesome boys a lesson, but don't you think, my dear, it's rather too Squeasy-Wheezy for elderly fellows like this pair?'

'No!' exploded Terra. 'No! They may think because our corridor joins all our caves that if they fill that with fire or water we shall perish. But Airy-Fairy will show them we've got other resources!'

It was not very long after this conversation between Aera and Terra that Ignesco and Aquaticus decided to examine the shrubs and plants which grew at the foot of the mountain-cave which was nearest to the shore of the sea. Ignesco had explained to his friend, who was less of a botanist than he was, that, if certain particular growths could be found outside these caves and outside the corridor which the two men had already decided must extend all along the mountain behind the visible apertures, it was pretty certain that they would be found also growing inside the corridor and inside all the caverns along its entire front. ‘If once we got these things thoroughly on fire,’ Ignesco said, ‘and if you really could, as you hinted once that you might be able to do, call up a fierce wind from the sea, we could start such a blaze that no crack or corner would be free from it.’

‘But what’s this?’ suddenly yelled Aquaticus. ‘I’m sinking down! There’s some bloody hole here! Take care, for Heaven’s sake Igny old boy! Take care!’

But both men did sink down, and indeed they sank down so fast and so far that it was with quite a violent shock and jerk that they reached the floor. They picked themselves up however without being strained or stunned or hurt in any way.

‘By the horns of the Devil,’ cried Aquaticus, ‘these wenches have won the first round of our battle already! They’ve got us in some bloody prison of theirs! How, by the Hammer of Thor, are we going to get out of this?’ They walked up and down and round and round. Yes! they certainly were caught. The chamber they were in resembled the inside of an enormous Bell. And above their heads there actually was a bell-ball hanging down that obviously if pulled by a brazen cord they saw attached to it would make, as it struck the metal walls of the chamber they were in, a resounding clamour, that they knew at once would be carried far and wide.

Meanwhile both Terra and Aera having left their comfortable resting-place were enjoying the spectacle of their enemies' condition. They had long ago invented this Prison which they called 'Airy-Fairy', and they had seen to it that there was a hollow peep-show pipe descending from the cave above and reaching into the top of this hollow bell-cell in such a manner that those imprisoned there could not possibly be conscious of its presence. The two ladies above had to whisper to each other as they bent over the upper orifice of this tube but the loud voices of the two men, as they walked round and round their prison and banged on its brazen walls and stamped on its adamantine floor, were as audible as a thunder-storm. Are we justified in complaining of it as an unfortunate thing that all the human impressions we have of the world around us are so individual? No, I think we are not. Why have we discovered Mirrors if not to get more than passing glimpses of what our own figures and faces have in them that is worthy of interest? What each one of us must do is enjoy to the utmost limit of our power the spectacle of the world around us as it is in its entirety; and if our own face appears in a mirror or our own figure in its shadow upon wall or door or ground we must accept both these things as an essential part of the whole spectacle.

As Aera whispered to Terra at the mouth of the tube leading down to Airy Fairy she grew more amazed than ever and more enchanted than ever by the incredibly sweet depths of her friend's black eyes. 'We talk,' Aera said, 'about the beauty of black eyes; but there's more than just beauty in these eyes of yours, Terra, my darling. The black eyes of a girl like you contain a path, a passage, a porch, into some secret essence of life that is simply infinite, some vein in the nature of the universe that goes on and on and on, until we feel that nothing can end it! The blackness of such eyes as yours, my precious, is part of the mystery of the darkness which surrounds us every night of our lives, the darkness without which we could not sleep nor could our weary spirit rest. Our life depends upon day and night as much as it depends upon good and evil and upon love and hate. The deeper, O my precious one, I look into your eyes, the more I know that life would never be what it is if it weren't for its opposite. And, do you know, sweetest, I'd even go so far as to say that there is in our love for what we love most, always, always, always, always, a strange, actual, living element of the same ingredient that we make use of when we hate. And shall I tell you what this essence is that we use both in love and hate? Think for a moment, my precious, think, think, think, think, and you'll catch my meaning. It's the animal-instinct, the bird-instinct, the insect-instinct, perhaps even the reptile-instinct and the fish-instinct, to — to — to — to do what? To gobble up, to eat up, and to swallow down! Yes, it is when we devour our best loved food that love and hate are united in the same physical delight. As I watch your face, my darling, while I talk to you now, it is revealed to me that kissing is an instinctive substitute for devouring.'

'O you are so right, my dear!' cried Terra, 'for I too, as I touch your fair curls which are as tender and white as the early dawn, know well that I want to blend myself with that dawn, to dive into that magical pallor which precedes any touch of our sun's warmth, to swim in that dawn-light, to dissolve in that dawn-light, to drown in that dawn-light, and to drink, drink, drink of that divine white light till I am carried away in ravishment of it till I have possessed myself of its last, last, last drop!'

Without the faintest intimation that they were being watched and listened to both the men felt a tiny bit humiliated by their imprisonment.

'Well, Aqua, old man, these confounded wenches have got the better of us at the start,' growled Ignesco. 'But we'll wallop them! We'll beat them up! We'll do for them! What they don't realize is that we're not just a pair of sea-beach tramps, or Hydrogen-Bomb loafers on strike, or side-line blokes from a cinema-gang wanting a bit of fun. What it's up to us to do is to make use of our own weapons which are things far more formidable than cunningly devised bell-hanger cells! What do they think they are, these devil-may-care flitterflies from Graymalkin's camp-fire or Paddock's back-yard? What we must bring to bear on them are the great elements of fire and water that you and I have learnt to control.'

'By Gog and by Saint Goggery, you've got it, Igny, old friend!' cried Aquaticus. 'Do these little Sylphids, these squeasy Sirens, these wheezy witches, these Naiads of Nothing, these Nereids of Naught, these Nymphetts of Never-Land, these Ariels of Lapity-Lip, these Cressids of Crinkle-mass, these Lovelies of Lingerlong, these Mimsy Maids of Mummery, these Tickle-Tits of Tallow-Tells, these Randy-Cats of Hollow Bells, actually think they can withstand storm-trainers and furnace-flingers like you and me?'

As they addressed each other the two men leaned their backs against opposite sides of the interior of their bell-prison. 'What they don't understand,' vociferated Ignesco, 'is the conquering nature of Fire. They think of fire either as hot coals in a cosy grate where we can sit reading a novel or as a well assorted kitchen-range at which every kind of good meal can be cooked. But what they should remember is that Fire is a living spirit, an individual power, a unique force, a being with an absolute mastery that is all its own, a Being that may very likely carry within itself the memory of a cosmic epoch when no other element existed, when in fact what Fire fed upon was something within itself, something that it could not devour just because it *was* itself, something that was the essence of its devouring power. Anyone who watches Fire at work will see at once what I mean. Each particular flame is like a growing entity of inscrutable size. At first it grows larger as it leaps upward. Then it suddenly grows smaller. But the smaller it grows the more piercing it grows. Every point of it finally comes to have the quality of a deadly arrow shot by itself at itself and for the sake of itself. It does not mount up to pierce the air. It mounts up because the air is nothing to it. It mounts up because the sky is nothing to it. It mounts up because the distance between earth and sky is nothing to it. As it mounts it narrows. As it narrows it becomes more penetrating. And as it penetrates, lo! the thing which it passes through has vanished and it alone remains. Fire becomes a sharp point. Each point has the whole being, the whole nature, the whole identity of the Fire from which it leaps forth. It can bend to the right. It can bend to the left. It can make an arched curve and dive down. The colour of Fire varies from primrose-yellow to rose-red. Yes! its colours are red and yellow; every shade of red, every flicker of yellow! And yet it has the power, so intensely living is its inmost essence, its burning soul, to take on, at special moments in its dartings and leapings, the passing flash of a wonderful blue! The soul of Fire is insane, terrifically insane. No flicker of mental intelligence governs its antics — no! not antics, for Fire is a terribly serious creature —, its flaming activities —.' Then it was that Aquaticus broke in. 'You are perfectly right about Fire, old friend, but nothing in the red or the yellow of Fire can compare with the blue of the Sea! "The Sea," as the Poet says, "sweeps on, and cries its old cry still, rolling along in dreams from hill to hill." Yes! you have to remember that as the Poet says, "You flee the persecution of her glory." When once anything or anyone is at the mercy of the Sea its only hope is complete yielding. It must flow with the tide; roll with the tide; rush with the tide; sink with the tide; drown with the tide. The waves of the Sea, the storm-rush of the Sea, the overpowering weight of the Sea envelops all, immerses all, encloses all, swallows up all, annihilates all.

All is taken into it. All becomes part of it — what was is no more — what is is no more — what will be is no more. All is now simply and solely water.'

'Not all, old friend,' threw in Ignesco, 'remember Fire. Yes! Whatever rôle or rule water may have, it cannot, it will not, it shall not, rage as it may, overcome Fire! "Before you were," Fire says to Water, "I am". And its words are true. "It was".' Then it was that Aquaticus got angry. 'Nonsense,' he cried. 'Everything that exists in our world comes out of the Sea. We have therefore a perfect right to conclude that all that exists in the Universe comes from Water. That mysterious "virtue" that Jesus once spoke of, when a certain woman clung to him for help, and he told his disciples that "something" had gone out of him was a reference to the unspeakable, indescribable, incontroversible, interminable, irrevocable, inexplicable, inexhaustible power that WATER *alone,* among all the things that we can feel and smell and see and hear, possesses in this life! Well, old friend,' Aquaticus concluded, 'I have decided what we must do to get out of here. This is not,' and Aquaticus stamped with his foot, 'bell-metal under our feet. It is the solid black rock of the mountain-side. Well, then; all we have to do, and we are strong enough for that if we do it together, is to walk out on to the mountain-side carrying this confounded prison of ours upon our heads. It'll need a terrific effort and we don't know what these girls may not try to do when they see us! But once out of here, with this bloody Bell on our heads, and in a position to send the thing roly-poly gammon-and-spinach down the slope, we'll be able to tackle these wenches on their own ground. Eh, brother stop-gap; eh, brother fire-work, eh, Igny-pigny, make the sparks fly?' Ignesco gazed at him for a moment in amazement. He had never expected anything so carefully considered, so wisely projected from his impetuous friend. But without another word exchanged between them they both rose to their full height, side by side, and taking it stoically, inexorably, and tremendously, they moved slowly, heaving the thing with every muscle they possessed, and although they sank a little into the earth they did manage to emerge on the mountain-side with the Bell on their heads. Then with a still greater effort they heaved it up and struggled out of it, leaving it to roll down the slope at its own volition.

The Bell didn't roll very far. There happened to be a rocky ridge about a hundred feet below and there it lodged and stuck fast.

'Come on! Let's go for them!' cried Ignesco, brandishing a short thick axe which he always kept stuck in a belt at his waist. Aquaticus drew his massive sword from its sheath and waved it savagely above his head; and both of them rushed to the nearest cave where a flickering smoke from the fire they had lit was floating upwards in broken and fragmentary feathers of vapour. When they reached the cave, however, they found no trace of any real fire. What they had lit was practically extinct, leaving nothing but these wayward flutterings of scattered smoke. It was terribly hot all the same when they entered the corridor at the back of the cave and began to follow its obscure course. As may well be believed both Terra and Aera were already by this time nearly a mile away. They were holding each other's hand and talking excitedly— 'Could we,' Aera was saying, 'find that little chamber again where last winter we hid our bows and arrows? It was this side of the cave I know; and they were carefully arranged because we found them so useful — don't you remember, sweetheart? — in shooting those sea-eagles! How well you cooked, Terra darling, that big one I shot through the heart! Do you remember how you made the sauce to go with it from those little fish I found in that pool in the reeds and from those lovely plants that grew around it? If those bows and arrows aren't spoilt by anything or stolen by anyone, and we could slip out with them behind these men, I swear I think we could finish them off! One single well-aimed arrow can kill a man as easily as it can kill an eagle or a badger! Come on, my dear, let’s see if they’re still safe there.’

CHAPTER 2

THEY FOUND THEIR bows and arrows and they slipped out through an aperture known only to themselves; and Providence, or perhaps it would be better to say Destiny, favoured their design. There in front of them were the backs of their two enemies, not far away, watching the last waverings of smoke from the fire they had started. Terra was the one to draw her bow and point her arrow; and Aera found it more natural to watch Terra in the act of shooting than to watch the effect of her shot. But the effect was startling to all concerned. The arrow hit Aquaticus through the shoulder and brought him crashing down to earth. Swinging round, Ignesco bent over his friend and pulled the arrow out of his shoulder and turned him over on his back. They smiled at each other but the wounded man was too badly hit to rise. Then another arrow came whizzing upon them which very narrowly missed Ignesco's face. At this the wounded man whispered to his friend to leave him as he was and pursue the two girls. This Ignesco did at once, and at top speed, brandishing his axe.

The sight of Ignesco with his axe rushing straight at them was too much for both the girls and they fled in terror. They were so frightened that, instead of taking refuge in the second of their caves as they drew near to it, they began clambering desperately up the face of the mountain. This business of climbing over rough and rugged rocks not only proved an extremely agitating move, but it also had the unlucky effect of separating the two girls. Aera was not only a much better climber than Terra, she was also a much faster runner, so that when their pursuer with his terrifying axe still in his hand had arrived close to Terra, Aera was completely out of sight.

Aera had one extraordinary sensation after another when she found herself alone, alone and running she had not the faintest idea where! Anyone who met her then would have been amazed at her appearance. Not only did her floating hair appear so fair that it looked almost white, but her whole body looked so transparent that she might easily have been taken for some small cloud that had by an accident of the weather assumed the shape of a fragile girl. The final sensation she had was the queerest of all. She felt she was on the point of meeting her true love. Aera had never been in love; but all her life long, since she was a little girl of seven or eight, she had told herself stories about her true love, who was always the one person whom she alone could guard, protect, and understand as he deserved to be protected and understood. Thinking of her true love now, she came drifting, sliding, gliding down-hill instead of up-hill. And suddenly, lo and behold! there he was, lying on his back on the grass! She bent over him. She knelt down by him. She lowered her head to his. She kissed him on the forehead.

‘Was it you who shot me?’ the man said. Aera sank down by his side. ‘No, no; it was Terra,’ she told him. ‘Your friend is running after her with an axe, but he won’t catch her, you may be sure of that! There’s nobody in the world can catch Terra when once she’s really off! Where did that arrow hit you? Does it hurt?’

‘In the shoulder,’ answered Aquaticus smiling. ‘He pulled it out and threw it away before he went after you.’

‘He’ll never catch Terra,’ the girl said. ‘He hasn’t a chance. Nobody can catch her when once she’s on the run. But listen, Mister! Let me lift you up a bit. You’ll feel better if I take your head on my lap.’ Aquaticus let her do exactly what she said. ‘O that feels heavenly! You are a wise, kind girl. It does hurt you know. I guess it’s bound to. I wonder if it’s stopped bleeding.’ She slipped her fingers under his shirt and when she drew them back she saw they were red with blood. ‘Not quite,’ she said gently. ‘I think I’ll take off your things where it hit you, and bind it up with a strip of my under-skirt. I’ve got some scissors here and some ointment too. I always carry that in my bag in case I scratch myself.’

While all this was going on down below, Ignesco with his axe was getting nearer and nearer to Terra. Suddenly she slipped on the side of a steep rock and came rolling down till she lodged in the entrance to a fox’s hole almost at his feet. He flung down his axe and bent over her. ‘You’re not hurt?’ he asked her. ‘You’ve not broken anything?’ ‘I don’t — think — so — no! — I don’t *think* so,’ she murmured brokenly. ‘But I feel as if I might have.’

Ignesco ran his two hands very gently up each of her arms. Then he did the same with each of her legs, moving his hands with special tenderness over both her knees. ‘No!’ he said, ‘I don’t think you’ve broken anything. Sit up a little, if you can, and lean against me, if it’s not too uncomfortable for you.’ She obeyed him, and he pulled her gently against him. ‘Your spine feels all right, I hope, and doesn’t hurt down at the bottom.’ Saying this he touched gently with his finger-tips the spot he indicated, gently stroking both her buttocks when he had done so. ‘No, my dear, I think you’re right,’ he said, ‘but I expect you’re a bit upset by the shock. You don’t feel sick, do you?’ ‘I could vomit just a weeny bit,’ she said, ‘if you’d let me go for a second.’ She crawled away from him for a little distance and did boldly and freely let herself be sick. Then she scrambled to her feet and kissed her hand to him. ‘I’m strong as a reindeer now,’ she cried. He went up to her. ‘Don’t go off again my dear. It’s so wonderful to have you. You know, it’s a funny thing, Terra — you see I know your name which is Latin for the old earth under all our feet — but the truth is I’ve never in all my days, and I’ll be thirty-five this October, ever had a girl-friend. My Dad was a sea-captain and my Mummy had eight children, four boys and four girls, but for some queer reason — O I've so often wondered what the reason was! — I've always been afraid of girls. Not exactly shy of them for I'm not that sort of man, but purely and simply scared of them. What I expect them to do to me I don't know! Perhaps some great-great-great-great grandfather of mine was caught by the Amazons when they ruled over Troy, made to rape half-a-dozen of them so that their race wouldn't die out, and then put to death. I've always had a queer shivering fit when I think of that Mound over the grave of the Queen of the Amazons outside the walls of Troy.

'Here, my Sweet, don't run away I beg you, I implore you! I'll get down on my knees and cling to your skirts if you try to leave me! I have a feeling I've never had in my life before. I want to belong to you! I want to be your slave, your possession, your inmost, secretest belonging! I want to be to you what a stick is to a blind man and a pair of knitting-needles to an old, old, old woman! It isn't that I want to possess you. No! It's that I want you to possess me! I want to be to you like an arm-chair, like a cup-board, like a carpet on the floor, like a bed you can lie down upon! Yes, like a table on which you can lay a white cloth and prepare cups and saucers and plates! I want you and me to be one not two! Let's have our arms and legs! O yes! and our heads and faces! But let's be ONE, you and I, Terra, my Precious girl! I tell you I never felt like this before, never, never, in all my thirty-five years upon earth! I'm mad, my dear, to belong to you, I tell you! To be yours. I want you to wheel and wave for me, to while and pine for me, to dance to my ditty with steps light and flitty, to cling to me tight till the day follows night, to invent a charade when the bull's in the yard, and to play Tommy Tiddle when I've guessed the great Riddle.'

The result of this rhythmical excitement in the nerves of Ignesco had its appropriate effect upon the nerves of Terra and before many minutes had passed they were both seated on a fallen log holding each other's hand and murmuring the old familiar confidences and confessions that men and women have whispered to each other on honeymoon nights since the human race came out of the sea.

The aura of the words used among the rocks by Ignesco and Terra travelled on the wind from the Sea till it met the aura of the words used by Aquaticus and Aera on the grassy slope of the mountain. Nor was this meeting of two auras free from contention. 'You are betraying us to abysses of earth-mould,' cried one aura. 'You are betraying us to fathoms of ocean-water,' cried the other aura.

CHAPTER 3

'May I ask if this is Mount Nameless or Mount Nobody Knows?' This question was put to Aera, as she sat talking to the wounded Aquaticus, by a rather scared and obviously very timid tramp. Aera replied at once, 'Better ask this gentleman; for I've never heard it called either of those things. I've been brought up to call it "The Mountain" as if it was the only one in the world.'

'I am sure, sir,' said the newcomer softly 'that I heard people talking in the bar of the Red Dragon at Powiggle about a couple of Ladies who had settled in a cave up here; and as I am writing a book about this coast I thought —.'

'You'd better take care, my good man,' cried Aera, 'hadn't he, Aqua? I happen to be one of these Ladies myself, and we have already had to punish severely persons who've come to meddle with us and our caves.' The timid intruder, whether tramp or scientist, turned anxiously to Aquaticus. 'Have you had a fall, sir?' he enquired. 'I see blood on your clothes.' Aera quickly answered for him. 'Yes, he has had a fall and hurt his shoulder. Perhaps you would like to help me carry him to our cave? My friend Miss Terra and I were vaguely hoping we might meet somebody like you but we never thought it really possible. We were both born near Powiggle but we've neither of us been interested in the history of property round here though we know people who swear their ancestors used to own this Mountain. My friend Mr. Aquaticus can tell you more about it than I can.'

Very gravely and seriously the wounded man, praying in his heart that they wouldn't stumble upon the bloodied arrow as they carried him, begged the visitor not to lift him up by his arm-pits but by his spine. ‘It isn’t far to their cave from here. Only about fifty yards I would say — aren’t I right, Aera?’ Aera admitted he was right and, after ducking down under the body the other was carrying and bearing quite a lot of the weight on her bent back, it wasn’t long before they reached the cave where Ignesco had started the fire. A few odds and ends of sticks were still smoking a little and a faint odour of burnt wood and scorched roots undulated round the cave’s entrance; but when they got their burden into the interior of the cave which its owners had used so long as a restful sitting-room that everything was quiet and peaceful and reassuring, the visitor felt he had indeed found something that was worthy of a whole chapter in his book, which, as he sat down in an armchair by the sofa where they had laid Aquaticus, he now decided he would name ‘The Coast of Wonderland’ and he boldly and bluntly enquired of his hostess if she and Aquaticus lived together here. Aera laughed. ‘O dear no!’ she told him. ‘What you heard at the Red Dragon was perfectly correct. This gentleman and a friend of his, whom I hope you will meet here before you leave us, were as anxious as you were to explore our caves, for this one, you must understand, is only one of a line of several of them, all opening out from a corridor stretching along the mountain-side.’ At this point Aquaticus couldn’t help exclaiming, ‘I do so wonder what has happened to our friends.’ Aera neither frowned nor scolded him. ‘You see,’ she said, addressing Aquaticus. ‘this gentleman’s friend Ignesco went off not long ago with my friend Terra; and I hope they haven’t been too rash in their climbing this dangerous mountain of ours; for there are terribly risky places before you get to the top.’

‘What can you see from the top?’ enquired the visitor.

‘Before either of us answer that,’ interposed Aquaticus, ‘I beg you to allow me to ask you yourself a very simple question, indeed the simplest question that any mortal can ask another — What, my dear sir, is your name?'

'O that,' the man replied quietly, 'is very easy to tell you. My surname is *Kums,* and my Christian name, or to put it simpler, my First name is *Wat.* So now, my dear kind host, do tell me what can be seen from the top of your Mountain?'

'What would you answer to that question of Mr. Kums, Aera?' enquired Aquaticus. 'I would say: nothing but sea and sky if you look North or West, and nothing but cornfields and hay-fields and a rather level plain, if you look South or East. South will be all round about here, where you have come from.'

'You've made it all very clear to me,' replied Mr. Kums gratefully. And then he added gently and almost pleadingly, 'O yes! and I beg you to pronounce my name so that it rhymes with crumbs; and don't call me Cooms, as some of the folk do I've met on the Coast. My first name Wat rhymes of course with "hot" so don't, I implore you, ever make it rhyme with "Cat," as some have done before I reached your Mountain.'

While he was speaking a quick whisper passed between Aquaticus and Aera; and, when he had finished, Aera said: 'We hope you will stay with us this one night Mr. Kums. When my friend Aquaticus feels fit for bed I'll let him sleep on this sofa. But we've got a little bedroom next door which is quite ready now. It opens into a lavatory so you'll be quite comfortable; and if you'd like a cup of tea before you undress I'll bring it to you. I expect you can sleep all right without pyjamas or a night-shirt. We'll all have breakfast together tomorrow morning.'

Mr. Kums enjoyed the cup of excellent tea brought him by Aera to the small bedroom; and, after retiring to the lavatory next door, he removed his coat and waistcoat and trousers and folded them very carefully on a chair by his bed before laying his head on the pillow and stretching out his legs under the sheets and blankets.

‘Well, here I am!’ he said to himself, ‘and more comfortable than I deserve to be too! I ought to have made sure that this girl had got the consent of the other girl about keeping me for the night before I let her fix me up here; but how could I as the other was away; and she said she was difficult to catch, and may have run anywhere! Well, here I am, and the sooner I go to sleep the better. What a quaint life mine is,’ he said to himself as he arranged the couple of pillows Aera had given him under his head. ‘But sleep is sleep whatever life may be.’ And he gave his pillows another pull to get them well beneath his chin.

Mr. Kums woke up quite early and pulled his watch out of his waistcoat pocket which was lying on the chair by his bedside. His watch said it was six o’clock.

‘Well! I’ll lie where I am for a while and think. They won’t be bringing me tea or calling me to breakfast for some time yet; and there are plenty of things I’ve got to get clear in my head before making any move or deciding upon anything.’ There was no living thing in Mr. Kums’ little bedroom except one small fly on the door leading to the lavatory.

‘Come here, Master Fly!’ Mr. Kums called to him. ‘Here sit on the back of my knuckles. I won’t move them or let you come to any harm. But I’d like to have a talk with you! Now don’t be alarmed. I’m one of the unusual ones, the sort of man Jesus was and the sort of man he would have continued to be till he was quite old if between the Romans and the Jews they hadn’t killed him.’ The fly settled on the back of Mr. Kums’ hand just as he had begged it to do. ‘Don’t be afraid of exchanging thoughts with me,’ the man went on. ‘You and I can understand each other perfectly, though I think in man-language and you think in fly-language.’

‘How is it, why is it,’ enquired the fly, ‘that men like you and Jesus were born into this world?’

‘I have not the faintest idea how it happened,’ replied the man. ‘You must understand, my friend, that I’m quite different in many ways from Jesus, as I am from such persons as Sappho and Cagliostro and Nostradamus and Galileo.’

‘How would you describe yourself?’ enquired the fly, ‘if you had to write a history of yourself for future generations of flies and men?’

‘Well, the first thing I should say about myself,’ replied Mr. Kums, ’is that I have a mania for getting people and animals, especially the more formidable people and more formidable animals, into my power. Then, when they are in my power, I have a mania for making them do outrageous and unheard-of things.’

‘What sort of things?’ enquired the fly.

‘Well, the other day I saw the head of the Sea-Serpent protruding from the sea and I made it come up to me as I stood on a little cliff, and I made it take me on its back so that I could ride along the edge of the bay from Worthy to Lully; and when we got to Lully I made it stand on the Tip of its tail and let me mount to the Top of its head so that I could wave to a ship on the horizon.’

‘What did the ship do when it saw you?’ enquired the fly.

‘It steered straight inland toward me,’ Mr. Kums replied. ‘It was a steam-ship, so it didn’t depend on sails or on the wind. But I knew well what it would do when it came near. It would fire its cannon at us. So I threw the thought into the mind of the Captain to give orders that an artillery officer who happened to be on board should be the one to fire the cannon rather than any of the naval officers, and while this passenger from the army was taking steps to do what the Captain wanted I ordered the Sea-Serpent to dive back at once into the deep sea, and as it did so I also threw myself into the sea and swam to the shore.'

'So neither of you was hurt?' exclaimed the fly excitedly. 'What a good thing! But do tell me, I beseech you, another story.'

That'll be only too easy, my dear fly,' said Mr. Kums. 'For my whole life, ever since I was a child, has consisted of stories. Of course the greatest event of my life was when I left my father and mother and I did this when I was only five.'

'Impossible!' cried the fly in horrified astonishment. 'Why I haven't left my parents yet! Nor *their* parents either! We house-flies are very domestic in our ways. Our family life is to us the whole matter. It is for, by, from and because of the family, that we live at all!'

'Yes, my friend,' went on Mr. Kums, 'it happened when I was five. My favourite books were *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass* but after those two books the book I loved most in the world was *Grimm's Fairy Stories.* And I still love that book as much as I did then. It was reading *Grimm's Fairy Stories* that made me decide to leave my parents. They were as nice as any parents could possibly be, and they were both very kind to me, but unfortunately I had a half-sister whose father had been dead a long time. She was always sweet to me but her very existence made me miserable. I was pitifully, wretchedly, wistfully, desperately jealous of her. She was a little older than I am and a lot cleverer and whenever I did anything to show off the power that was in me she would do something so spirited and amusing that it drew everybody's attention away from me. This went on till I could stand it no longer. So one day I bought a toy sword in a shop in the town and waited in the station till the train for London came in. Then without a ticket I clambered into a crowded third class carriage. Nobody took any notice of me, and those who did, took it for granted that I would soon be followed by my parents. But after we were fairly off and I had found a seat on a grimy, brumbly, gabbling old lady's lap, it was realized that I was alone, and they all began talking about me. But, long before the first train-stop, this interest had subsided and a couple of argumentative old gents, one at the north corner and one at the south corner of the carriage, had started such a lengthy debate about Canada that the lady on whose lap I sat fell fast asleep. When the first stop arrived and the Ticket-Collector came in there was so much confusion that I had no difficulty in slipping out of the train and running along the platform till I found an easy and quite unofficial exit under a fence by the edge of a field. Across this field and across three others I scampered, till I entered a neat little lane which eventually led to the gates of a big House. I entered this big House by the back way and very quickly accosted an elderly Housekeeper who made friends with me at once; but with a shrewd wisdom I hid my origin from her under the pretext that I came from an orphanage whose name I had sworn to conceal for the rest of my life. My parents were so simple-minded that it never occurred to them to put my disappearance into the local Newspapers and there was no talk about me in the big House, as the mere mention of an orphanage seemed to create a discreet silence.'

'What queer people,' cried the fly, 'you human beings are! It would be impossible for any of us to leave the place where we are brought up and where our parents and our grandparents were brought up!'

'Well, my friend,' said Mr. Wat Kums, 'I'm afraid I must say good-bye. I hope indeed that the next person these girls or these men put into this little room will be more bound up with their family than I am, and therefore less of a freak to you, and less of a crazy creature to your domestic philosophy than I am. But you see I want to clear off before anybody comes to see how

I’m getting on or to bring me anything to eat or drink. So good-bye for now!’

He had left the bed before the fly had had time to touch his hand; and he was out of the room before anyone approached it and out of the cave before anyone came near it. Then he decided that before anything else of importance happened in the world he would become a king. ‘But of what country?’ was the question he kept asking himself as he walked along the cliffs towards Land’s End in Cornwall.

‘I must decide that definitely,’ he told himself, ‘before I go any further.’ He sat down on a grassy mound and pondered deeply. As he sat there a Raven came up to him and gravely perched on a curiously inscribed rock by his side. There were no other rocks on that grassy mound but for some mysterious reason the presence of this Raven disturbed him.

‘May I ask you a question?’ he said to the Raven.

‘No,’ replied the Raven. ‘I’ve never answered a question in my life. ‘Well then,’ replied the other, ‘I wish you’d ask me a question.’

‘I will do so at once,’ said the Raven. ‘Who are you? And what are you thinking about so hard?’

‘Do I look as if I were thinking hard?’

‘You certainly do.’

‘Well,’ said the other, ‘I will tell you. I was thinking over what country I’d like to be King.’

‘I could give you some advice about that,’ said the Raven. ‘What authority have you, that you could advise me on so important a point?’

‘Stop asking me questions,’ said the Raven. ‘I’ve already told you I never answer questions. But I could give you some very good advice; and it is this. You must decide to be King of the oldest country in the world.’

‘What is the oldest country?’ asked the other. ‘I’ve told you already,’ replied the Raven, ‘that I never answer questions. This is my advice. Make up your mind to be King of the oldest country in the world. Concentrate your whole nature on that. Turn your whole will towards that. Devote yourself entirely to that. Say to yourself again and again: King of the oldest country; King of the oldest country; King of the oldest country; and it will happen so — you will become King of the oldest country. Now you must answer my question,’ concluded the Raven. ‘Who are you? And what is your name?’

‘I am a Magician,’ the other answered, ‘and my name is Wat Kums. I have the power of making anyone do anything I want him or her to do. I have the power of throwing a thought, a thought shaped like a pear at one end and pointed at the other end, into the inmost consciousness of anyone I wish to compel to do anything. The thought that I throw makes it absolutely imperative for the person I throw it at to do what I command. The person, whether man or woman, has no alternative. When once the thought which I have thrown into his or her consciousness has sunk into him or her all that the person can do is to obey me, absolutely and implicitly and without question.’

CHAPTER 4

WAT KUMS GAZED very intently at the rock on the top of the Mound on which the Raven had perched. Yes, there was an inscription on it, an inscription with words. The inscription when Wat Kums looked closely at it was a picture of a Raven above the door of a small room; and beneath the picture was the word 'Nevermore'. 'Why!' cried Mr. Kums excitedly, 'I know the poem *that* comes from. It is Edgar Poe's "Quoth the Raven nevermore". And I can see other things too in the background on this rock; objects that make me say the words "Vast formless things that move the scenery to and fro and flap from out their condor wings invisible woe". Do you know who it was who taught me when I was a boy to repeat "Ulalume". None other than the great Thomas Hardy, who wrote "Tess". He once saw her alive. Did you know that, Master Raven?'

'Good God no!' croaked the Raven. 'I find it hard to believe!'

'Yes, he did,' said the other. 'But he himself was so frightened that he ran away. It was long after he had invented her that he saw her in real life.'

It now became clear to Mr. Kums that the Raven on the Rock did not believe a word of this story about Hardy and Tess. This infuriated him so much that without saying goodbye or even taking off his hat he leapt to his feet and rushed off, faster even than Hardy could have run when he saw his creation come to life.

He ran desperately across field after field. Then he found himself leaning on a gate with a broad road. He climbed over the gate and walked along the road. He soon came to a very old Milestone on which he read the words: To Aug twenty miles. To Bang ten miles. To Zang one mile. He looked round.

Yes! The road he was following did divide itself into three; and of these three, the one to Zang, only a mile away, looked the most inviting. It turned out to be a tiny little village of a few thatched cottages surrounding a very small rather dilapidated though not ruined parish church. Mr. Kums found the door of this church open and he boldly walked in and sat down in a pew opposite the pulpit. He had only been sitting there for about five minutes when a rather ghostly figure mounted the pulpit and bent down above him.

‘Don’t be alarmed, good sir,’ said this figure. ‘I know I am only a rather tired, though well-intentioned spirit, but an angel told me that there was some danger that these ridiculous scientists might bring the world to an end before the proper predestined time; so I have taken upon myself the task, instead of resting quietly in my grave till the Last Trump, of wandering about the West Country preaching to every wayfarer I meet. My name is Aldhelm but everybody nowadays calls me Alban and whenever I meet any tramp near St. Alban’s Head I cannot overcome a deep pride in the depths of my heart at being regarded as a Saint.’

When Saint Alban’s Spirit had finished his discourse Mr. Kums boldly asked him what he would consider the oldest country in the world.

‘Let me think,’ said Saint Alban. ‘Well, I think I would have to choose between India and Mongolia and Mexico.’

‘The reason why I asked you is that some bird or animal has recently predicted to me through some angelic inspiration that I must direct all my will-power to becoming the King of the oldest country in the world; and I am very anxious to know what *is* the oldest country in the world, so that I can direct my footsteps there, and aim at becoming its King.’

‘Well, my dear sir,’ said the Spirit of Saint Aldhelm or Alban, ‘for myself I should suggest that you aim at being King of India. India must certainly be as old as Mexico or Mongolia if not older. My own favourite race in the world, the race I prefer to English, Welsh, German, Jews, French, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Russians, Chinese, Red-Indians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Rumanians, Greeks or Romans, is — can you guess? The Gypsies! Yes, the Gypsies! They got their name from Egypt but they came originally, with their Romany language, from India. I like their ways, their manners, their habits, their speech, best of all the races upon this planet Earth.'

'I rejoice to hear your words, O spirit of a great Saint!' cried Mr. Kums with real honest delight; for he too had had many years a mania for the Gypsies. 'But now if you'll excuse me I must hurry off, for I've suddenly remembered an important engagement I have got to keep. Good-bye O wise spirit of a noble Saint!' And with the sort of salute a man-at-arms makes to the Lord he serves he hurried out of the church.

And then a pure inspiration came into his head and he hurried back to the little bedroom in the side of the mountain cave lent to him for the night by Aera and her enemy-friend with the wounded shoulder. He found them both there; Aquaticus still on the sofa and Aera looking after him like a devoted nurse. Aera was obviously really pleased to see him and she told him her great news at once which was not less than the gratifying fact that her friend Terra and Terra's friend-enemy Ignesco who were as much reconciled to each other as were she and Aquaticus, had settled down for the night together in their next Cave-Parlour and that Terra's injury from her fall among the rocks was much less serious than had been feared at first.

'I shall have something important to tell you all four tomorrow, my friends,' Wat Kums announced with a bold chuckle; and it was clear to both Aera and Aquaticus that something, at least very important to him, had taken possession of his mind. And indeed it had! The inspiration that had come to him was really a singularly happy one. ‘But I must not breathe a word of it,’ he told himself, ‘until tomorrow.’

When they were all four assembled on the following morning, Terra with her injury nearly gone and Aquaticus with *his* injury nearly gone, Mr. Kums announced his grand news.

‘My dear friends,’ he said, ‘while we have been representing to the world the news that earth and air are black and white and fire and water are red and blue we have entirely forgotten — yes, we have entirely forgotten the Clouds! So I now announce to you that I intend to take you to Nubilium the capital of Cloud-land.’

‘Where is Nubilium?’ enquired Terra eagerly.

‘She is midway,’ replied Mr. Wat Kums, ‘between the Earth and the Sky.’

‘I feel afraid of her!’ cried Aera. ‘I feel she might be the death of us all!’

‘She might,’ boldly replied Mr. Wat Kums, ‘but on the other hand she might be a wonderful new life for us all.’

‘She must be a very dangerous city,’ declared Aquaticus, ‘for, unlike the Sea she cannot have any salt in her; and without salt, as nobody knows better than I, water is terribly dangerous.’

‘Isn’t it true,’ burst out Ignesco, ‘that it is from Cloud-land, when thunder is about, that lightning comes?’

Mr. Wat Kums answered this question clearly and decisively. ‘The beauty and virtue of Nubilium,’ he pronounced, ’is that she contains everything. She contains the fire people call lightning. She contains the water people call the Ocean. She contains the Oxygen they call the air. She contains the darkness of the inside of a mountain when it is ready to be a volcano. All that her life requires is contained in Nubilium, the City of Clouds. How many of us perish from great heat, from too great cold, from too much water, from too much dryness! Come on, come on, cast loose, cast free! Fast as you can come, come every one of you!’ They obeyed him; Ignesco holding Terra’s hand, Aquaticus holding Aera’s hand. Wat Kums had evidently got a good plane at his disposal, a plane that obeyed him, and it was a very swift one and one so competently handled that all five were soon mounting up in full awareness towards the sky. Wat Kums directed the steering of the plane that bore them and it wasn’t long before they were surrounded by thick clouds.

‘It is clear to me,’ he thought to himself, ‘that with a plane as well run as this one is and so amenable to my orders that when it circles round in the midst of these thick clouds it makes no attempt to leave them, I shall be the ruling power in the State of Nubilium; and as the presiding authority in this small realm I shall soon find myself appealed to, from Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Australia, to accept new inmates, yes, new subjects, who will find under my jurisdiction in Nubilium the sort of life they have been longing for since they were born.’

Thinking thus Mr. Kums gave orders to the experienced technicians who ran the plane to cause it to float in absolutely motionless repose, a thing rarely achieved in air-flight, without yielding to the pressure of the wind or changing the precise tilt of its balance when any of these vaporous clouds dissolved in rain.

‘The question I’ve now got to decide,’ thought Mr. Kums, ’is just how I am to get hold of a few people clever enough to act as ambassadors from the Realm of Nubilium, or, to put it more plainly, to act as emissaries from me and to return with what offers they can get.’

With this in his mind Mr. Kums went to have a brief talk with his pilots.

Once more, however, between Terra and Ignesco on one hand and Aera and Aquaticus on the other, he felt that his idea of treating Nubilium as a country under his control needed more thought than he had yet given it, since at present Nubilium was composed of nothing but air and vapour and there was no ground to stand on and no earth to grow anything in.

It was while he was facing the very worst of the situation before him that Mr. Kums had a second inspiration. He had long known that there were certain tiny specks of light between Mars and Jupiter which indicated the presence of various asteroids or minute satellites which were too small to have acquired names of their own but which must be composed of earth-mould and rock of some sort or another. ‘Well,’ he asked himself, ‘could I not use my magic power on a certain number of these thick clouds and compel them to accompany us to one of these little asteroids? And then could I not endow the little asteroid with such a strong magnetic pull as would hold these thick clouds in its embrace forever, and thus create a satellite-asteroid which I could name by the name Nubilium and in the earth of which certain plants could grow?’

CHAPTER 5

‘How shall we celebrate?’ said Mr. Kums to his four friends when they had landed upon the Asteroid Nubilium and he had seen to it that his loyal pilots, who were really the chief power of their flight to this spot, were enjoying an excellent meal. ‘Do tell me, my friends, how shall we celebrate our arrival here?’ Aquaticus, whose shoulder was now healed, and Terra, who had recovered from her fall, were both silent; but Aera and Ignesco spoke up. ‘I should think,’ said Ignesco, ‘that the best kind of celebration would be the most personal we could imagine: the sort of celebration, I mean, that would make all possible use of the names of our two ladies, Terra and Aera.’ But Aera said, ‘O no, Ignesco, that would never do. Terra and I would never agree to that. I suggest very strongly that we plan the nature of our celebration in connection with the wonderful speed our pilots have brought us here and the wonderful skill with which Mr. Kums has steered us here, not to speak of the imagination with which we thought of bringing these thick clouds with us and of naming our Asteroid Nubilium. What I suggest is, and I know that Terra will agree with me,’ here Aera’s voice became as confident as it was shrill, ’is that we four passengers form a square round Mr. Kums. Yes! round Mr. Kums, and chant a little ditty which I have just invented.’

Led by the joyous voice of Terra, Ignesco and Aquaticus joined in the ditty which Aera now chanted as they formed themselves into a square round Mr. Kums who felt a trifle, though not more than a trifle, embarrassed.

‘Who rules Nubilium’s coast?
The Dove, The Holy Ghost!
Thrice blessed Asteroid
Your Hearth is never void.
With bread and wine and peace
You bring us all release
From every grief and fear,
From every groan and tear.
Nubilium brings to man and wife
The end of every toil and strife,
To every girl and every boy
Their dream come true without alloy.’

It was after this rhapsody had died down and after all was silence again that Mr. Kums said, ‘What’s the use of my being a Magician and Enchanter when I’ve got to listen to ecstatic hymns in praise of my inventions and without one single reference to me? How the devil shall I bring myself into this little game of aeroplane charades? Ah! I’ve thought of it! *That’s* the trick! I would like, my dear friends, while our pilots are enjoying their good feast to add an amusingly personal note to this memorable celebration.’

Terra and Aera and Ignesco and Aquaticus welcomed this announcement with enthusiasm.

‘What I want to point out to you all,’ Mr. Wat Kums went on, ’is that the real innermost reverberation of my name is nothing less than the great Mystery of Time itself made audible so as to be perceptible to the limited intelligence of the simplest human being.

‘To make this clear, let me tell you, my friends, that I carry about with me a loudly ticking clock, a clock which to me plays the part of the voice of a pre-historic god, whom I must have worshipped in some previous incarnation long before I was born on the Planet Earth. This clock I found myself when in my youth while I was travelling with my great-grandparents on that famous steam-ship called the *Great Eastern* when it was laying the first telegraph-wire at the bottom of the Atlantic. I dived and swam to the bed of that ocean and there I found this clock which must have been drifting about down there for some time; for it hadn't come from any passenger or any official on board our *Great Eastern.* So when I came on deck with it nobody quarrelled with my conviction that I had a right to keep it as my own, as a legitimate treasure-trove. It was not by any magic of mine that this wonderful clock possessed the terrific "tick-tock" which it made as it ticked. From where it had come, from whom it had come I have never discovered. Among its experiences down there it must have been injured a little; for the portions of it upon which its makers must have inscribed their names had been broken off and neither with this nor without it were there any records of its origin. This delighted me; and made it possible for me to feel that the clock I had brought to the surface, and possessed myself of, was really and actually, in some strange way, a primordial Oracle of the Mystery of Time.

'The thing about it which pleased me the most, and of which I very rarely speak to any living soul, is the fact, as you shall presently hear, that when it ticks it repeats my own name.'

Terra and Aera, along with Ignesco and Aquaticus, were extremely excited by what Mr. Kums had been saying, and they waited with heart-beating eagerness after what was evidently a preliminary rehearsal for the benefit of his pilots who had by this time finished their banquet, until he brought forward a large clock.

This he brought into the midst of them and asked for a chair so that he could be seated with the clock hugged against his heart. Ignesco brought the chair for him; and they all felt he had chosen it with great wisdom for though it was a very low and very comfortable chair it had no arms; so that its sitter could handle whatever he had in *his* arms with the utmost ease.

‘Now,’ he cried, when they were all round him and listening intently, ‘hear the Oracle of Time!’

And sure enough, directly the clock began ticking, they all smiled at each other, for it certainly did repeat, over and over and over again, the name of its owner along with his first name, ‘Wat, Wat Kums! Wat Kums! Wat Kums! Wat Kums!’

‘What,’ cried its Master, ’is Destiny bringing to us all?’ And the inspired clock answered from its Master’s knee, ‘What comes! What comes! What comes! What comes!’

CHAPTER 6

For a good many years Mr. Wat Kums, the Magician, ruled as King over the Asteroid he had named Nubilium. But at length this starry island in the sky was visited by a Being who in his explorations of diverse Universes — though we can hardly imagine his visiting diverse Dimensions as well — was interested in discovering this small airy kingdom. The visitor I am speaking of was a Monster, the largest, most powerful, most formidable Monster the world has ever seen. His name was Typhoeus and his Mother was the Earth and his Father was the unfathomable Gulf at the bottom of our World called Tartarus. There had been an epoch in his youth when the Monster Typhoeus had very nearly overcome all the Olympian Gods and Goddesses and conquered the whole of Heaven and Earth; but Zeus the Son of Cronos defeated him with his lightning and thunderbolts.

‘How strange it is,’ Typhoeus thought now as he explored Nubilium, ‘to feel yourself the most formidable creature in the whole world. For millions of years there has been no one like me: and here am I; and it is very, very possible that, whatever I do with my strength, I shall do something that will change the whole structure of this world into which I have been born. What would I like to change it into? Ah! *That* is the important question! Isn’t it funny that, possessed of all the terrific power I have, I am so limited in my intelligence that I cannot construct in my mind the sort of universe I would like to erect on the ruins of this one when I have broken this one into little bits as when an infant I broke up the loaves which my mother the Earth gave me and which Tartarus my father would always swallow whole when I refused to tear them into bits. What do I dislike in this world as it is now?

Well, I dislike the way we big creatures have to go hunting about for some kind of smaller creatures that we would like to eat. Why doesn't something in life itself provide us with the smaller animals we want to eat? Why should animals eat each other at all? And why should men and women eat animals? These are the questions for which I want an answer; and yet I can't find any! No, not one. How much nicer a world it would be if we didn't have to eat each other! I have lately been wondering whether it wouldn't be possible for me to compel all animals to eat lumps of earth-mould and to chew pieces of rock instead of eating each other. Of course, you will say, sheep and cattle eat grass, not each other. But I would answer to that: how do we know that grass likes to be eaten? Hasn't grass got any feeling? If by my strength I managed to dominate every living creature and make every creature obey me, could I, I wonder, compel them all to stop eating each other and concentrate on making it possible for us all to live by swallowing earth-mould and chewing rock? How wonderful to be able to establish such strict laws about what people should eat that when they saw you coming along the road they would shout to each other, "Take care! He's coming! Cover that dead fox up! Hide that dead badger under those leaves! Put the dead squirrel under the bracken! Take the hook out of that trout's mouth and throw the trout back into the river!" And then how wonderful to hear someone cry: "Here he comes! Here he comes! Bring old granny Jones down here for him to see how strong and handsome she is!" And tell him how she's lived on nothing but swamp-peat-bread and sandstone-pastry for the last ten years!

'Yes! Perhaps I am beginning already to grow stronger than I was when Zeus defeated me with his damned thunderbolts. Perhaps I am a coward not to assert myself now, now, very now, with all the strength I have!'

Thinking thus Typhoeus moved forwards to where Terra and Ignesco and Aera and Aquaticus were talking to their children. Terra and Ignesco had two little boys and Aera and Aquaticus had two little girls. So there were four tiny toddlers roaming about Nubilium when Typhoeus appeared on the scene. Only too well did he know what these four Tiny Ones would feel if they saw him. Nor did he particularly want to gobble them up. His ambition was what occupied his mind; and the first step towards making a real move in that direction was to establish himself in some place from which he could take an awe-inspiring dive, down from the starry heaven above, upon the peaks of Mount Olympus and Mount Ida and Mount Gargarus. It would be necessary to make the Olympians realize that he came down from above upon them, not up from below upon them; as the important thing was to fill them with awe before the battle began by making them see him descend upon Earth's mountains from the starry heights of Heaven. To make them witness his descent it would be essential to employ some auxiliary agent who would lift up his voice down there and call upon them to look up as he was descending upon them. It can be well imagined that the Ruler of Nubilium, Mr. Wat Kums, now for more than three years a sort of King of a small domain, was by no means oblivious of the arrival on our scene of the Monster Typhoeus. The Monster was at pains to keep out of sight of the children, which he did in the most cunning way, by rolling in the earth-mould of this Asteroid, till, whenever he moved from place to place, it was like the upheaval of the ground, and whenever he remained in one place he simply resembled a little earthy ridge free of any vegetation.

It was in this latter disguise, as an earthy ridge, that Mr. Wat Kums approached him, and, to the Monster's amazement, began calling him by his name.

‘I am surprised to see you here, Typhoeus. I knew you were up and about for I have friends among many travellers through space who have encountered you. But I know you have as your ultimate wish a desire to conquer the Olympian Gods; and it rather puzzles me to find you here in this far-off Asteroid. Have you any particular reason for being here in connection with your war with the Gods?’

‘What in the name of my Father Tartarus are you talking to me about?’ cried Typhoeus out of his muddy disguise in consternation. ‘And may I ask who, in the name of my Mother Earth are you, who take upon yourself such confounded impertinence?’

‘Mr. Wat Kums is my name,’ replied the Magician quietly. ‘Like yourself I have been a traveller from my childhood. I possess various interests and also various powers which I need not mention now. One power of mine, however, I will use now if you will permit me. I will reply to the question you have just put to yourself, as to how the Olympian Divinities could be frightened by your suddenly descending upon them out of the clouds.’

‘What in the name of Tartarus are you talking about?’ growled the Monster, beginning to grow angry.

‘I will tell you at once,’ replied Mr. Kums quietly. ‘You are very badly informed, most worthy Typhoeus, as to what is happening to Gods and Goddesses and Mortal Men upon the Earth, who is, let me assure you, *my* Mother as well as yours. Being what you are, much stronger in body than in mind, you do not realize how extremely old you are. In fact you do not realize that you are nearly two thousand years old. This being so, coupled with your complete inability to take in how entirely ignorant you are as to what is happening to Gods and Goddesses and Men and Women as the waves of Time wash over us and the winds of Time carry us away, you will no doubt be startled to learn that a Being as formidable and powerful as you are has to deal today with a totally different kind of world from the one you were familiar with a couple of thousand years ago. Let me begin by telling you that this Zeus who fought with you and the other Titans has long ago disappeared altogether. So has Hera his wife. So has Pallas Athene his daughter. So has Poseidon and your Father Tartarus and Persephone and her mother Demeter! I tell you, Typhoeus, our present race of Philosophers may not be as wise as Plato or Socrates or Aristotle or Epictetus or Epicurus or Pythagoras, but they have invented instruments of destruction far more effective than any of the old weapons. Our modern philosophers are infinitely better skilled in the creation of weapons than any of our sages when you were young. I tell you, Typhoeus, they can make lightning and thunder rush forth from little boxes they can carry about with them! The trouble with you is that your very strength and your extraordinary longevity in remaining alive in this universe for a thousand if not two thousand years has made you indifferent to the knowledge we get from books; yes, from books about the history of our race and about new ways of making the laws of Nature save us and help us.'

Typhoeus was silent under his tricky earth-mould disguise: and Mr. Kums began to think that he had really impressed the Monster by what he had said. So with not very commendable pride he went on, gazing into our Monster's eyes as if to hypnotize him. Mr. Kums had never really hypnotized anybody in the whole of his life. His power over people had nothing to do with mesmerizing them by looking into their eyes. It dominated them in quite a different manner. Mr. Kums would have been the last person in the world to know what part of their personality it seized upon and took possession of. It remained as much a complete mystery to him as it had been when he was a boy among other boys and practised it at school without the least idea of how he did it.

Mr. Kums now said to himself: ‘I like smoking; I like sitting by an electric heater. I like looking round me at the room I am in; at the pictures on the wall, at the books in the bookshelves, at the angle of ceiling and wall, at the lock of the door and the door-handle, especially if the door is a little open. I like it when my mind wanders from one dead friend or relative to another dead friend or relative. But when I begin to ponder on just what it is in me that does this thinking or this enjoying, I find myself rather puzzled. I say to myself, “It’s my mind,” but that seems a queerly unsatisfactory answer; for it isn’t my mind that enjoys smoking my pipe. It isn’t my mind that enjoys drinking my cup of coffee. I am rather inclined to think that every single thing I enjoy is just as if it were something that I was swallowing! Yes! I feel as if my real self, my real I, were gathered about my mouth and were satisfying itself by using my hands, my fingers, my knees, my elbows, my arms to feed my mouth.

‘I expect the truth of it all is,’ Mr. Kums’ thoughts ran on, ‘that the I in all of us has got its centre, or what you might call its engine, in our head, while our body with all its parts, obeys our head, follows the minutest instructions of our head, and supplies our head including eyes, mouth, nose, ears, with all that these organs of apprehension require, drawn from our body’s sense of touch and of feeling, whether within it or from without it.’

‘You must remember,’ Mr. Kums now remarked in a clear though quiet voice, ‘that a creature like you, Typhoeus, enormously powerful as you are and no doubt by long practise able to satisfy the demands of your body by eating animals and birds and fishes and reptiles and I daresay human beings too now and again, a creature, I say, like you, who has seen so many hundreds of centuries pass by without any really drastic change in what you might call the nature of things, cannot grasp the fact that at any moment there may come some absolutely startling change in the world you have come to know so much better than any man or eagle or whale or elephant or horse or cow or donkey or lion or tiger or wolf or fox or serpent or rat or cat or dog or sheep, some change worked by Science. Yes, my good Typhoeus, you may lick your jaws as you like and of course you can swallow me down if you want to for I cannot defend myself against you; but the fact remains that this new Science which men have invented has already changed everything and very likely it may soon invent something that will change the two great oceans of our world, the Atlantic and the Pacific, and change the whole nature of the earth upon which we live, yes! Typhoeus, change the effect upon our Planet of the Sun and the Moon and all the Stars.' It was then, as Mr. Kums ended his long oration to the earth-mould-muddied monster, that the Monster made a singular little movement. He moved closer to Mr. Kums and licked his hand. As you might imagine, something of a cold shiver ran through the latter's body. But as he looked into the Monster's eyes a queer sensation of tenderness flowed through him. It was clear to him now that the Monster had licked his hand as a gesture of pure friendliness. Mr. Kums felt his heart touched to its deepest depth. To have his hand actually licked by a Monster who had inhabited this universe with innumerable living creatures dominated by the race of mortal men for so many thousands of years was certainly an event of extreme importance in his simple bachelor life, a life that had been and still was, only disturbed by one thing, his knowledge that he possessed, although he had not tested it or even examined it to the limit, some very remarkable magical power. Here they were then: himself possessing a mysterious magical power over which he had only a very vague control, and this monster capable of swallowing him along with every other human or animal creation within its reach, and yet instead of making any attempt to do so, here he was licking his hand.

Yes! He could see just a glimmer of shining silver above one outstretched sharp-peaked horn of the hill above their heads.

‘Well,’ thought Mr. Kums, ‘why don’t the Monster and I, since we’d start in moonlight outside the clouds of Nubilium, fly off into space and mount up and up and up and up together till we are entirely outside this whole bloody universe of ours?’

Thus thinking, as Homer would say, Mr. Kums boldly conveyed to Typhoeus, between whom and himself, ever since the Monster had licked him, there had developed something like a real friendship, the idea that had just entered his head. ‘The moonlight would give us a start,’ he said, ‘but we’d soon be outside its radiation as we’d be forever outside the radiation of the sun. There would still be the far-away shining of the stars, all of them much larger than this poor little Nubilium of ours. But we should soon be able to steer our way beyond the furthest of those bright glimmerers; so far beyond them indeed that it wouldn’t be long before we would be in complete darkness, without a single star in sight. Shall we set off like this, my friend? I could ride under that big curved fin on your back which is more of a protection now in its new growth than when that silly old Zeus destroyed it.’

CHAPTER 7

TYPHOEUS INDICATED HIS consent by once more licking Mr. Kums' hand and in a moment or two they were off.

'What a new life for me,' thought the Monster as he started to fly, 'to be obeying this little chit of a human creature and carrying him into space! But for what was I born, child of Earth who has brought into the world everything, good and bad, beautiful and hideous, brave and cowardly, terrible in strength and terrified in weakness, and with a Father like Tartarus, that gulf, that chasm, that abyss which descends into regions of desolation unvisited by man or God. O Mother Gaia! O Father Tartarus! Which of you was it, or was it the two of you together, who put into the head of this weak, stupid, timid, frightened, half-mad little guy to ride on my back? This is the fool who fished up from the depths of the ocean a lost clock that for many years down there had repeated his name, both his tribal name Kums and his personal name Wat. Who else in this mad universe in which we are all caught ever heard his own name repeated day and night by a clock? And what did he feel, this whibble-quibble of a nobody, when his clock stopped muttering "What Kums", "Wat Kums", "Wat Kums", "Wat Kums", "Wat Kums" and in silence begged to be wound up? Did Mr. Kums have to light the candle at his bedside and take one winding-screw out of the shroud that kept it warm and go to the chimney-piece?

'For I don't think I can imagine this timid little Sage saying, "You must wait, dear Tick-Tock, till morning when I get up." Well! I expect all of us have curious questions which we ask ourselves when we are alone. So I daresay this small person whom I am now literally carrying under my wing is now asking himself, “Why didn’t I ask this man-carrier if I might look at my watch before we started and in order to do so whether I might light a match?” What I am asking myself as we now fly by moon-light before leaving sun and moon and stars far behind is whether he would like me to tell him the tale of how I got my smattering of the English language? But I expect he wouldn’t be interested. As we fly further and further I expect he’ll grow less and less and less interested in any tale I tell him. He’ll say to himself, “Why in the name of all the fairytales in the world does this Monster want to tell me how he started to learn English?”.’

It did not take the Monster long to fly into the utter darkness of infinite space, carrying Mr. Wat Kums under his wing. The further they went the darker it became. When the moonlight vanished there were still, here and there, a faint glimmerings of stars. Then they also disappeared and there was nothing. It gave Mr. Wat Kums an extremely strange feeling this total absence of every vestige of light. Lying on his bed with a box of matches and a candle by his side and his precious clock on the mantelpiece he had always felt prepared for the approach of darkness. But now it was entirely different. He was in the belly of darkness. Darkness had swallowed him up. Darkness was not only round him and above him and beneath him. Darkness was inside him. He and darkness were one. He *was* darkness. And yet as Typhoeus carried him on and on and on, what has already been said didn’t entirely interpret his feeling. He was a speck of conscious darkness in the midst of unconscious darkness. He wasn’t light in darkness, quite the contrary. He was darkness in darkness. But he was a different kind of darkness from the darkness around him. The darkness round him was just simply darkness. It was the scenery, or, if you like, the obliteration of scenery, through which he was passing. But the darkness within him and of him, the darkness which was he, was a darkness that was travelling like a traveller through darkness, a traveller who if he appeared in a sunlit or a moonlit spot would appear as a thick cloud of darkness and would obliterate the light that was there. There was between the two of them as they went up a very interesting link. Mr. Kums didn't say to himself: 'I am a man moving in darkness under the wing of the Monster Typhoeus.' And Typhoeus didn't say to himself: 'I am Typhoeus who was defeated by Zeus but who now could defeat Zeus or the Christian Trinity or any other Divine Power.' What they said to each other, although not in words, was: 'Here we are, we two, friends without hope, without fear, two blots of conscious darkness amid an unconscious mass of similar darkness. So on we go, friends and companions, expecting Nothing, fearing Nothing, feeling Nothing, and being Nothing.' And the further the two of them left everything behind the nearer to each other they felt. It was indeed to each of them the happiest experience of their lives. It didn't matter to either of them that their fellow-traveller was a totally different creature from his companion. It didn't matter to either of them that it wasn't a case of sex for they were both male; nor was it in the faintest way a case of what in these days is described as being a 'Homo'. Everything of that kind was out of it altogether since one was a slim, short, feeble little mass and the other was a monstrous dragon. It was not love they felt for each other. It was comradeship. Each knew by instinct where the other's power lay. Typhoeus knew by instinct that Wat Kums was an enchanter or a magician and Mr. Kums knew by instinct that Typhoeus was a far more powerful Titan than when Zeus hurled him down with thunderbolts. On into Space they went and as they went the wild delight of their sense of Nothingness grew and grew upon them.

'How wonderful,' their united thought told them, 'it is to have around us absolutely nothing! What a comfort not to have the voices, the encounters, the intimacies, the walls and ceiling, the arches and stairways, the corridors and towers, the doors leading to balconies, the bookcases full of folios and quartos, the chimney-pieces and armchairs, the curtains and the window-panes! To escape from all this and ascend into unending night, to leave everything behind and swathe yourself, wreathe yourself, twine yourself, twist yourself, with the thrice blessed folds of everlasting night, to bury yourself in nothingness to lose yourself in nothingness, to strip yourself in nothingness like a diadem of jewels sinking into the sea, like a quiver of arrow-heads winking into mist, like a garland of shadows losing itself in vapour, like a galaxy of shuddering shapes losing itself in fantasies of flickering foam! O comrade, my precious dragon, O companion, my precious enchanter, let us fling ourselves into everlasting night!'

It may be hard to believe that the thoughts of Mr. Wat Kums and the thoughts of the famous Dragon or ex-Titan Typhoeus were quite as similar as has been thus assumed but if any listener to the story of this flight has ever been leading a horse or a dog or an ox or a cow from a brilliantly lit Circus or Fair into an unusually dark night, where not a star is visible, he will know something of the feelings of both the flying dragon and his human rider. Their dominant thought, or shall we say their ruling emotion, was a craving to pierce this deadly darkness as an arrow could pierce a weight of massive dead flesh and dart on and refuse to turn to left or right or to change its direction or fluctuate in its course for a single second though it had no other consciousness save that one unceasing pressure behind it and within it to rush on, on, on, on, on, it knew not whither, through everything in its way. The extraordinary thing about this flight of Typhoeus with Wat Kums on his back was the wild and insane delight they both were feeling in what seemed to them like the swallowing of darkness, the devouring of darkness, the digesting of darkness, the incarnation of their souls in darkness, the conversion of their souls to darkness, the assumption of their souls into the heart of darkness.

Mr. Kums suddenly found himself composing a fantastic rhyme. What there was about this Nothingness through which Typhoeus was taking him that led him to do such a ridiculous thing, Mr. Kums had no idea. But it did lead him to do it and he did it. His rhyme went thus:

‘I learnt long ago as a boy
That on ship-board you shouted ahoy!
So I shouted it loud
Though not one of that crowd
Did I specially want to annoy.
But the Master cried who in God’s name
Is putting our verses to shame
With this hullabaloo as if one of our crew
From Bedlam to sail with us came.
Bring that boy to my quarter-deck quick
And fetch me my land-lubber stick
But no! Let it go! Let it go!
When the shots from the enemy fall
We may find to our wonder
In the midst of the thunder
This boy is the bravest of all!’

‘What are you mumbling to yourself?’ enquired Typhoeus, moving faster than ever through the darkness.

‘I’ll tell you,’ replied Mr. Kums amiably— ‘only a childish ditty.’

‘Repeat it to me,’ murmured Typhoeus.

This Mr. Kums had no difficulty in doing; for he had repeated it to himself more than once. ‘Very good,’ responded the flying Monster. ‘I like these nursery-rhyme ditties best of all your modern poetry.’

Higher and higher they went, or was it further and further to their right-hand or to their left-hand? Mr. Kums did not know; and the ex-Titan Typhoeus, having neither a right arm nor a left arm, would have had to use a quite different expression to correspond with what his rider called left and right, had no idea either. But in any case and in whatever direction they were going, on and on they went, at a terrific pace, into absolute darkness, into absolute Nothingness, without Sun or Moon or Stars, without hope or fear; but at least aware that they were friends.

CHAPTER 8

IT WAS A funny thing that neither Mr. Wat Kums nor the Titan who carried him felt any single flicker of their consciousness reverting to Nubilium. Neither Terra and Ignesco nor Aera and Aquaticus were childless. But not a thought did either Kums or Typhoeus give to these children or to their parents. Perhaps when anyone knows himself to be the most powerful Monster in the world and a Monster who has already lived well over thousands of years and also when anyone knows himself to be the most powerful Magician in the world, these tender thoughts about people and places and these yet tenderer thoughts about children pass away altogether; so that neither Monster nor Magician care to think, want to think, or find themselves thinking about anything outside their immediate sensations.

‘Where are we now?’ said Kums to Typhoeus.

‘What is this air?’ said Typhoeus to Kums.

Well might any two travellers have asked this of each other; for what they now suddenly became aware of was the fact that they were no longer in darkness. Nor were they in light. They were surrounded on all sides by something that was neither darkness nor light.

‘What is all this?’ said Kums to Typhoeus.

‘Where have we got to?’ said Typhoeus to Kums.

Without knowing how it came into his head to say it Kums then said to Typhoeus, ‘This place we are in becomes in a second whatever we may decide it shall be.’

‘You’ve hit it,’ said Typhoeus. ‘A moment ago I told myself we were in the middle of an ocean of water; and it *was* water.’

‘And I told *myself* we were on the slope of a huge mountain,’ said Kums. ‘And it *was* a mountain. The truth must be,’ Kums went on, ‘that we’ve flown into the midst of the stuff whereof all worlds, all universes, all creatures are made. And so we have only to use our imagination, and lo! the thing is done! We have created a world.’

‘On my life I believe you’re right my friend,’ said Typhoeus. ‘O how I wish we knew whether this region is North, South, East or West of that little Asteroid of yours you call Nubilium. But on my life you’re right. I feel it from my head to my tail. We’ve got ourselves clean into the regions where the stuff abides out of which all the creators have created their worlds, the stuff I take it out of which each of us, you a man with your magic power, and I a dragon, thousands of years old, were ourselves created. But who created us? That’s what I’d like to know. Who would you say?’

Wat Kums paused for a moment. Then very gravely he said, ‘I know who didn’t! I refer to the God of that greatest of all men who ever lived, Jesus of Bethlehem in Nazareth: for on the Cross he turned away from that God in whom he had, till then, believed, but who then, he felt, had entirely deserted him.’

‘Yes, I expect you’re right there,’ said Typhoeus. ‘He is always associated now with his Mother Mary, isn’t he? The one they always call “Our Lady”? But, as you say, I can’t imagine that *that* God, the one who invented an everlasting Hell for his enemies and deserted his best friend, created you and me. Who did then?’

‘Let us stay where we are, my friend,’ said Wat Kums, ‘and make use of this extraordinary Twilight round us. Don’t fly any further just at present. Stretch out to your full length, my precious comrade, and relax, and I will do the same. Let’s take, you and I, all the advantage we can of this extraordinary atmosphere. It is indeed what people call *creative.* Don’t you feel it to be so? I keep telling myself the wildest stories! I start one; then I break that off, and start another. There is something in the air here that forces you to tell yourself stories; stories about the beginning of universes and the end of universes, about the birth of worlds and the death of worlds! You ask me who created us. Well, my friend, I'll tell you frankly what I think — I don't think any God or any Goddess created us. It seems to me — and I feel it more and more strongly as I breathe this air — that we created ourselves.

'Now that we are resting in this mysterious atmosphere wherein all that we have become and acquired and have discovered seems blotted out and absorbed in something else, in something that however much we try to lie back upon it and relax within it and immerse our beings in its being, remains, in some unaccountable manner, alien to us, different from us, contrary in its inmost nature to what we are. This must be the reason why we both feel so incredibly thankful that we are we; I mean that I am not alone but have got you with me; and I know perfectly well, without asking you, that you feel indescribably thankful that you are carrying me with you. Well, now, my precious friend,' continued Wat Kums, 'let me tell you what I feel about this unique situation. In the first place it is clear that all life must divide itself into two if it is to avoid ceasing to be life and turning into death. That is how life starts. The man rapes the woman and the woman bears children. In the beginning of life incredibly small entities had to become two out of their original oneness before they could go on and on and survive.'

'Yes, O yes, my friend!' murmured Typhoeus, 'you are right about the importance of Two. What would I feel at this moment if I were here alone? Everything there is has its opposite, and all that exists depends for its existence upon its opposite. Life depends upon Death. Love depends upon

Hate. Hunger depends upon Food. Thirst depends upon Water. Action depends upon Sleep. Man depends upon Woman. Boys depend upon Girls. Sound depends upon Silence. Wisdom depends upon Folly. Light depends upon Darkness. If we had travelled on, you and me, through Space I suppose we could have gone on, if we could have kept alive, for ever and ever. For empty Space must be infinite in its expanse. Was it by chance we plunged into this region, I wonder? Or is it possible that around every Universe that exists there is a wide border of this twilight, a border that has to be crossed by all travellers who desire that their journey shall never cease?'

"Well, my friend,' said Mr. Kums, 'you have put it all better than I could have done. It is, just as you've explained it, a matter of opposites or pairs or everything in the one-and-one that makes two. How wonderful to feel that we have had the luck to plunge into this region where we have all around us and completely at our disposal this very *Breath of creation,* yes, my dear other one, that's what we're in now; and in the air round us is this ichor, this semen of concatenation and coagulation, this cataract of possibility out of which we can lay the cornerstone, four-square, of the kind of new world we want the most.'

They both became silent. Then quite suddenly Mr. Kums felt a decision take possession of him such as he had never felt before. It was an authoritative decision, a decision impossible to reject, a decision that Mr. Kums could no more disobey than he could stop being himself and turn into somebody else. 'We must leave this place,' he said to Typhoeus. 'You must go on carrying me through empty space.'

'I obey,' replied the flying Dragon. 'I've been for several minutes expecting this command.'

Thus speaking he set off, and Mr. Kums, crouching down under his wing, thanked with inexplicable gratitude whatever unknown cause it was that had made him make this decision. Darkness soon surrounded them again and on and on and on and on into this darkness Typhoeus carried his friend. 'How can you tell,' Mr. Kums enquired after a few minutes, 'that you are going in a straight line through Space?'

'By my nature,' replied Typhoeus at once. 'I suppose ever since Tartarus begot me and the Earth gave me birth, I have flown in a straight line, my mouth and my eyes leading and my tail following. It was my difference from the other Titans in this — for the word Titan means *one who strains* and the last thing I do is to strain — that must have so infuriated Zeus. From my birth on I have easily, instinctively, naturally, followed my eyes and mouth. And there is no doubt,' Typhoeus went on, 'that it has been my straight flying that has always got me so far. You ask how I know I am going straight. Well, my answer to that is — it's always been my nature to go straight.'

They certainly did go on, through the darkness of space, as if, so Wat Kums thought to himself, they had resolved to leave all worlds behind them forever. This, for some reason he could not quite understand gave Wat Kums a deep and exquisite pleasure. 'I wonder,' he said to himself, 'if it is simply some form of pride, some secret self-satisfaction, at being able to give such a daring order to such a formidable friend.' He decided as they went on further and further that it was something different from any kind of pride. He decided it was a pure physical sensation of bodily delight just as if he were devouring the darkness of space as he passed through it.

'How strange it is,' he said to Typhoeus, 'that pure empty Space is so enormous that we have no words for it but endless, unlimited, boundless, infinite, while all the worlds it contains, not only our Sun, Moon and Stars, but doubtless many other universes like ours, are so measurable that we find great interest and little difficulty in measuring them and obtaining their length, breadth, depth and height.’

‘You’ve hit it, my friend,’ said Typhoeus cheerfully. ‘But it will be of extreme interest to us both if by boldly and rapidly advancing through this dark infinity the same good luck that enabled us to barge into that weird region of many colours, many inventions, many experiments, many terrific advances, many abysmal retreats, many wild suggestions, many terrifying proposals, that region that gave us both such thoughts as we have never had before, if, I say, by boldly plunging on and on through infinite space as we are doing now we suddenly find ourselves confronted by a completely new Universe such as we have never dreamed could exist, a Universe completely different from the one we know only too well, a Universe or World if you like that may differ entirely from what we have known hitherto, you in your brief human life, and I in my prolonged Titanic life.’ It was then that Typhoeus suddenly stopped. ‘Do you know,’ he gasped abruptly, ‘I believe we are on the edge of an unknown world, now, even now! I can feel it in every bone and muscle I have. Yes! Yes! Here it comes!’

CHAPTER 9

MR. KUMS NEITHER sighed nor groaned. 'For a person such as I am,' he murmured, 'it's not bad news that we're touching another world! What power I've got is a certain magic power within me, a power I've no chance of using in empty space. Why! there's a tiny little air-ship greeting us! Let me stand up and wave back.' He quickly did what he wanted, gripping the wing of his Titanic friend as tightly as possible so as not to fall.

The little air-ship had only two persons on it and it soon came quite close to the Titan's side.

'What country is this?' cried Mr. Wat Kums. 'You must understand,' he went on, 'that this benevolent Dragon who is carrying me is my best friend, and that together we are exploring infinite Space so that we may discover new worlds. Typhoeus is my friend's name and he is more than a thousand years old. We like being together, and we believe, as I expect you do, that to achieve anything, the number two is the important number. To achieve anything we must go about in pairs.'

'You ask what country this is,' replied one of the two men; 'and we are both proud to be able to tell you. May we first enquire what your own name is? We shall never forget the name Typhoeus now that we've seen you two together.'

'My name,' our friend replied, 'is Kums and my first name is Wat. Kums rhymes with "crumbs" and Wat rhymes with "not". And if you get the sound correctly it doesn't matter if you don't know what those two words mean.'

‘To prove to you the truth of your own words,’ said the speaker, ‘we two, my name is Ob and my companion’s is Wob, will sing together our country’s national anthem.’

Both Typhoeus and Kums listened to them intently as they sang:

‘We are the Lollops who live in Loll
And our Monarch is Tallylog-Lollipog-Loll.
Far above Luna, far above Sol
Lives Tallylog-Lollipog Lord of Loll.’

‘Could you permit us, my kind Lollops, to visit your wonderful country,’ enquired Wat Kums when the music of the singing had died away.

The two men exchanged a few rapid words. Then the one who had first addressed them replied enthusiastically. ‘Certainly, Wat Kums, certainly Typhoeus. All you’ve got to do is to follow us closely and quietly, and we’ll take you down into the heart of Loll.’

‘Shall we do this?’ asked Kums of Typhoeus.

‘By all means,’ replied the Titan. ‘They have seen what I am, so they’ll know how to handle us.’

Slowly the tiny air-ship with the two men advanced over the sandy surface of what looked like an interminable desert, dry as dust and absolutely devoid of any growing or living thing. Typhoeus carrying Kums followed them closely, almost touching their little conveyance with the tip of his snout. Suddenly to both our friends’ surprise the ground opened before them and an abysmal gulf with small ladder-steps all the way round it opened before them. Typhoeus, from his thousand odd years’ experience of dwellings of this kind, especially from his remembrance of the House of Hades above both Tartarus and Erebus, headed down boldly after them while Wat Kums clung tight to his friend’s wing.

They found themselves in an enormous dome-like hall and they were helped to stop between two long rows of benches where the Titan could breath freely and rest at ease on his belly while Kums could slip down from his friend's back and stand straight up on the floor. The hall was lit by lamps with a fight such as neither the Titan nor his human friend had ever seen before. It had a colour, and since all the lamps were fit with it its effect was startling, that kept varying between blue and yellow and red and purple. Mr. Kums couldn't help enquiring at once of their two guides what this fight was that all the lamps in this great hall were burning. 'It's Lidicity,' he was told. 'It is exactly the same fight that, when we shut our eyes tightly, floats about under our fids. Lidicity has its own peculiar green and red and blue — it is a peculiarly dark blue — and a lovely primrose yellow. Down here electricity wouldn't do at all. Oil light wouldn't serve; candle-light, fire-light, torchlight, none of them would be any good. Lidicity alone is the light for down here. Lidicity was invented by our great King Tallylog-Lollipog, his own self. He invented it purely on the strength of those special colours he always saw when he pressed or anyone else pressed his eyelids tightly down. He took many years inventing it. All the other forms of light were used while he was at work on it except electricity because for electric light owing to some event in his childhood, the details of which were always kept secret, he had an obsessive almost a maniacal horror.' Both Typhoeus and Kums listened to all this with absorbed interest. Indeed Wat Kums found himself constantly shutting his own eyes tight so as to catch some of those colours, especially the peculiar shade of green. 'His Majesty must be,' he told their two guides with authentic zeal, 'a real genius in chemistry to have invented Lidicity.'

'He is! He is! He is!' both the two guides cried; and Kums wondered whether he would feel this respect for Tallylog-Lollipog when they met.

They had not long to wait. Their two guides, whose persons so far had been so wrapped up in curiously coloured shawls as protection against the wind that neither Kums nor Typhoeus had seen more than two pairs of eyes or heard more than the voice of one mouth, were now revealed in their actual appearance to their astounded visitors, as Typhoeus was encouraged to stretch himself out to his full length and Wat Kums was encouraged to walk about and look around. Beyond the fact that they had eyes and mouths they were not human at all. Their heads were snow-white without a trace of hair. Their arms came from their hips and were very long; and they too were snow-white without a hair upon them. Their legs which were also white were very short, and they had practically no feet at all, no toes or ankles and certainly no cloven hooves. All they had were round yellowish knobs such as could support them quite well when they stood erect but were often assisted by the tips of their fingers when they walked.

No, Mr. Wat Kums on his feet and Typhoeus stretched out on his long fish-like belly had not long to wait.

There now entered a cortège of Lollopians chanting their chant, while at the back bowing gracefully above his two feet and over the tips of his ten fingers which all touched the ground, came the Monarch.

‘Tallylog! Lollipog! Lord of Loll!’ chanted his cortège; while King Tallylog-Lollipog himself as he advanced towards them struck Mr. Kums as resembling what in the country he came from used to be called a Daddy Long-Legs. The cortège around him soon spread itself out with a skill that struck Mr. Kums as one of the most delicate examples of courtly behaviour that he had ever seen.

‘You will be surprised,’ said the King, ‘to hear me speak English. But I can soon tell you why I do so. A long time ago when an ancestor of mine called Tallimog-Oppimog was reigning a famous English adventurer called

Captain Cook took possession of Loll. He took a great fancy to my ancestor who was then very young and stayed with him several months. His discoveries of countries much larger than ours and much nearer Britain made his name so famous that his stay in Loll remained neglected and unknown. No English historian has recorded it. It has, however, been handed down among us for at least a couple of hundred years and until my great-grandfather's time everybody took for granted that Cook's discovery of Loll was recorded in all historical records. But my great-grandfather found out, though he never revealed how he found it out and I have often imagined it was by the help of the ghost of Captain Cook that this great explorer stayed a long while with us before he completed his adventures in places much nearer his starting-point. Indeed we possess in our archives a small English dictionary with Cook's signature on the fly-leaf which nobody could make me believe lacks authenticity. You see my dear friends,' the King of Loll continued, 'what makes it all so interesting is the fact that in the margin of this little English dictionary at the opposite end of the book from where Cook's signature is there are several carefully drawn pictures of us as we are, indicating, even exaggerating a little, the chief differences between our bodies and yours.'

After a little further conversation the Lord of Loll took his seat upon his throne and both Typhoeus and Wat Kums were given a very satisfactory repast for which both of them were extremely thankful.

'I take it,' said the King when the meal was over, 'that neither of you know how near you are here to the land of Hippo-homo where Centaurs have lived since the ancient Greek days. It crossed my mind when you first came that you took us for them! But I now see I was mistaken. Captain Cook, from what my ancestors handed down about him, was not interested in the ancient Greek days nor in ancient Roman days. But the word Centaur comes in his little dictionary with a picture of a horse with a man’s head and arms but with a horse’s body and tail and four legs.’

At this reference to ancient Greek days Typhoeus made a characteristic grimace, as if recalling the thunderbolts of Zeus, and Wat Kums shut his eyes tight for a second so as to enjoy in private the ‘Lidicity’ of the colours that surrounded them in this great Dome, then opening his eyes wide he asked the King, ‘Could your Majesty spare your air-ship with the two guides who brought us here, to take us to this land of Hippo-homo if it is, as your Majesty says, quite near?’

The King looked round, met the approving glances of the two guides, and smiled at Mr. Kums. ‘Certainly,’ he replied, ‘you shall start in ten hours from this very moment. You can arrange with your two friends how soon you would like them to call for you, because I don’t want you to start back to your home without a little more conversation. But I shan’t mind, remember, my dear friends, however long you may feel you would like to stay in Hippo-homo. Just tell your two guides and they will come for you.’

CHAPTER 10

BOTH WAT KUMS and Typhoeus had so deeply received into their acutest power of observation the unusual shape and appearance of the dwellers in the Land of Loll with their hairless heads on the top of necks so long that they served them in place of shoulders and chests and stomachs, and their arms protruding from their hips above their short legs and little feet like woolly knobs, that it took them quite a while ere they could grow used to living with the Centaurs. The curious thing about their life was its complete absence of order and discipline and routine and rule and its lack of every tinge or trace of authority. When they first arrived Kum's chief trouble was to distinguish one Centaur from another. They all lived on grass and on grain but how this grain was ground and whether the wheat and oats and barley were sown in ordinary earth-mould after digging up the grass neither Kums nor Typhoeus could ascertain. They saw no sign of any mill for grinding the corn nor did they see any larder or kitchen or scullery: but Hippo-homo possessed a large and varied landscape with hills and valleys and flat plains and rolling uplands and though they could see no buildings of any kind except colossal sheds under extensive roofs and rafters with chimneys out of which smoke came, they could imagine all sorts of culinary proceedings going on within these big sheds.

All the Centaurs had names; but Kums and Typhoeus soon noticed that these names oddly resembled each other, all of them having the syllable *or* as its centre. For instance the two Centaurs with whom the visitors made special friends were Thorp and Worp; and there were two others they got to know personally, though less intimately than those two, whose names were

Rorp and Gorp. All four of these Centaurs used to bring oatmeal brown bread for Kums and Typhoeus to eat and as much water as they wanted to drink. Typhoeus displayed a scandalous disregard of orders and promises when the messengers from Loll arrived. One of these was called Rupty and the other Tupty; and Typhoeus boldly whispered to Rupty that he now felt strongly enough. ‘My strength increases,’ he told him, ‘every hour’ to take both the two guides together with Thorp and Worp who could crouch down as horses can when they so desire, and with Mr. Kums too, if this latter would agree to starting off once more through empty Space to see what new country, unknown to anyone in the old Zodiacal galaxy, they might be able to discover.

‘The Lord of Loll,’ the Titan whispered, ‘wants to see us again. But I don’t want to see him again nor does, really in his soul, my Mr. Kums either. So why not with you Rupty and Tupty, and with the two Centaurs Thorp and Worp as well as with Mr. Kums on my back, shouldn’t I set out once more to find new worlds in the darkness of space? I enjoy these crazy journeys and so I know does Mr. Kums. And I am sure that you two, Rupty and Tupty, will be much happier discovering new worlds with Mr. Kums and me and with these two Centaurs than just messing about round the musty throne of the Master of Loll.’

So powerful was the adventure zest of this ancestral Titan that the spirit of the thing did enter the souls of both Tupty and Rupty as well as the souls of Thorp and Worp who now clambered up upon him and lay down like happy animals in a favourite pasture while their human arms and hands rested on each other’s shoulders and their eyes wandered with intense interest to the face of Mr. Kums as he lay back under the Titan’s wing.

‘Well! Off we go!’ Typhoeus cried, and with a sweep upwards as reckless and daring as any dive ever made to the bottom of the deepest sea, he left

Hippo-homo behind and shot forward into the black night.

They hadn’t long to wait; and it was lucky they hadn’t, for the two Centaurs were showing signs of such sleepiness that Mr. Kums began to feel nervous that they might slide down from the Titan’s back and sink into the fathomless gulf below.

It was Rupty and Tupty who broke the silence. They were thinking of only one thing, namely how rude they had all been in not returning to the Land of Loll as they had promised to do. ‘Promises can’t always be kept,’ said Tupty and Rupty.

‘They can’t be broken,’ said Rupty to Tupty, ‘without disastrous results.’

‘Is there any chance,’ said Thorp to Worp ‘that we might hit upon some world in this deadly darkness where the people are all cannibals and will devour us the moment we appear?’

‘You must remember,’ said Worp to Thorp, ‘we’re not all so devoid of fighting qualities as not to be able to give Tit for Tat, if we don’t swallow them.’ Thus on and on and on and on into the darkness of Space they went.

‘We have broken our promise to the Lord of Loll.’ That was the thought they all had except Typhoeus, for when a Being has lived as long as this great Titan, such as Being grows as indifferent to promises whether kept or broken as to burdens whether carried or cast off. But on and on into darkness they went, on and on and on and on and on.

At last they did come to a new land. All they saw when Typhoeus landed upon it was a vast plain covered with an infinite variety of small shrubs, all of them bearing different kinds of vegetables and different kinds of fruit. There was no one to greet them at the point where they landed out of the air, and Typhoeus began moving about rapidly amid all this foliage, tasting and enjoying one sort of food after another. So, as can well be imagined, did all his riders, both from Loll and from Hippo-homo, for they were all hungry, tasting first one kind of edible and then another. Mr. Wat Kums did just the same till he had satisfied his hunger. ‘I think,’ he said to his friend the Titan, ‘that the vegetables are nicer than the fruit, but how strange it is to find vegetables growing on stalks above the ground!’ At last they all saw simultaneously, and they all stopped and stared at them as they approached, a couple of giants. They were not very tall giants, not more than seven or eight feet high, and they had quite kindly human faces, but the thing that was peculiar about them was that they didn’t utter a sound. Instead of speaking they gesticulated at one another. It was naturally Wat Kums who addressed them first, for he was a man as they were, though compared with them a tiny dwarf. But the trouble was that they only answered him with lively gestures and vigorous signs. They kept looking at Typhoeus with wonder and awe, and they often approached the two Centaurs and bending over them gesticulated desperately with their fingers trying to make their human heads understand what their signs meant. After a while one of the giants knelt down in front of Wat Kums. With an inspiration of extraordinary wisdom this latter drew from his pocket a big map which he spread out in front of the kneeling giant. He pointed at a little picture in the corner of this map of the planet Earth and its Suns and Moon and the other planets. Then he pointed to a big picture of Great Britain and showed him where London was and all the other big cities and where the different counties were and where the big Cathedrals were. Then, for as he went on he suddenly felt his inspiration widen and he showed him a picture he had recently made of his new Geographical Discoveries in Space, namely Loll and Hippo-homo; and in the hope that somehow, although it was impossible to see how, the name of their home might be dropped by the gesticulating giant, he drew in the corner of his picture a wide empty square with a vast question-mark.

He was successful. The kneeling giant after gesticulating for a minute or two above the Space-Map spread out before him, wrote in big capital letters, where Mr. Kums had left the place for it the one single word '*O R B*'. So that was it! The world of gesticulation in place of words was called 'Orb' After that all went very happily for the visitors to Orb. Mr. Kums walked up to the ear of Mr. Titan and told him the great news. They were in the land of Orb where you gesticulated instead of uttering words.

'For Heaven's sake then,' murmured the Titan 'let's get out of here as quickly as my strength and your magic can carry us! I like words, I have always liked words; though I cannot utter many of them myself. But I cannot bear this gibble-gabble of signs. I think it is unworthy of man or beast, fish or reptile, bird or insect. Away, away, away, away, out of here! Off let us go! Straight up or sideways! I don't care what direction! To the left or the right, or straight, straight, straight, straight up! No! I don't care where we go as long as we get out of here. Out of this damned world of Orb!'

Wat Kums squatted down on the Titan's back; and so, quite as quickly, did the two Centaurs and the two Guides from Loll; and off the great monster carried them all! Mr. Kums felt pretty sure that with his Titanic instinct to get as far as possible from Olympus, the Monster would carry them straight to the right or left and thus away as far as possible into empty Space where he hoped there might be no world of any sort at all.

'How shall we get anything to eat?' was the question they were all asking each other as that day and that night passed and they were still whirling further and further into empty Space on the back of the Titan. They had brought with them quite a lot of bread and cheese; and when another day and another night had passed they had not only finished all their food but they had also finished all their water. Mr. Kums and the two guides from

Loll with their long necks and their hip-arms and their toe-less little feet were extremely uneasy. So were the two Centaurs from Hippo-homo, with whom, because of their human voices and faces, Mr. Kums continued to exchange comments on the general situation. They all were aware, however, in their uneasy minds of one strand of relief and comfort, namely that there was nobody from that Orb, if such were really its name, who gesticulated in place of speaking. But on and on into Space flew the monster-Titan, carrying with him two Loll-men, two Centaurs, and one human being. All his riders, as the great Titan vigorously and rigorously advanced through the dark nothingness, fell at length into dead silence. Mr. Kums and the two Loll-guides looked at each other with something like absolute hopelessness, while the human heads of the two Centaurs nodded gravely at each other over their sprawling horses' bodies as much as to say, 'Well, we've risked this little adventure to no purpose; so we must be calm and stoical whatever happens.'

But suddenly everything changed. Typhoeus lessened his speed to a gentle hovering and a languid circling. They all knew that he had felt there was a land of some sort below them, and had resolved to descend upon it with all the discretion he could possibly use.

He managed it to a nicety. In a moment or two he was resting on his belly in a lovely field of grass and flowers. The land had obviously a sun of its own for a warm light descended upon them from somewhere above; and it was clear at once that the dwellers in this heavenly country, whether they were used to airships or not, knew exactly how to behave to strangers.

CHAPTER 11

OUR TRAVELLERS INSTINCTIVELY formed themselves into a little halfcircle as they slipped off their Titan's back. Mr. Wat Kums assumed the role of their speaker as spontaneously as the others gathered behind him and as the Monster Titan winked at him with his piercing eye.

A solitary man with rapid steps and smiling face approached them.

'What land is this?' Wat Kums enquired of him, bowing politely.

'This is Utopia,' replied the man with equal politeness, 'and if you care to know how it came into existence I will tell you without false modesty or braggadocio. I, moi qui vous parle, invented it. Yes! it was my life's dream and the nameless power in Nature that makes our dreams come true made mine come true, as you see. What was the dream of my life was projected from the heart of Nature into far-off Space; and by the will of both men and gods I was despatched hither to act as the ruler of this Land. If you ask me who despatched me here and who appointed me ruler of my own dream-created invention, I can only answer by the word Destiny. It was my Destiny to create this unknown world and it was my Destiny to rule over it when I had created it. But please, my friends, don't any of you think that I am worthy of the immortal persons who have chosen, after their departure from the world of reality, to enjoy their divine rest from labour in the life-dreams of my far less deserving days upon the disturbed and troubled planet Earth, the mother of us all.'

'But how, O wise creator of this far-off world,' enquired Mr. Kums, 'did you name this land?'

‘I named it Utopia,’ replied the man humbly, ‘and my own name in the England of my day was Thomas More.’

‘And who are its inhabitants?’ enquired Mr. Kums.

‘They are the great writers and thinkers, many of whom lived before me and many of whom lived after me, who felt so sympathetic with my imaginary world that they’ve made it, for me at least, an absolutely real world. Come, Masters all,’ cried Sir Thomas More, ‘come and entertain with our best drink and food and talk these new-comers from our ancient home; and don’t forget to give their Titanic charioteer through Space his complete and proper share of all the delicacies you give them.’

There was a rush to obey him and very soon Typhoeus was draining jug after jug of the most delicious cider and devouring loaf after loaf of the most richly mixed and the most delicately baked brown bread.

Then to Mr. Wat Kums’ inexpressible delight Shakespeare himself came up to them. Kums knew him at once from all the pictures of him he had seen and he shook hands with him reverently and affectionately. He felt as if he were grasping in one single handful all the most dramatic moments of his whole life. But with the kind of smile that all his friends must have known so well, Shakespeare withdrew; and as he withdrew Mr. Wat Kums could see he was beckoning to the most ancestrally costumed and traditionally equipped figure among them all to come forward and be presented. Mr. Kums could see Sir Thomas More with chivalrous respect take the arm of this figure and lead him forward; and as soon as he approached him Mr. Kums knew well who it was, an English Poet of an age much earlier than Shakespeare’s. Yes! It was Chaucer! And then lo and behold! Mr. Kums was quoting Chaucer, what he had learnt at school from his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales:

> ‘When that Aprill with his shouers soote
> The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
> And bathed every veyne in swich licour
> Of which vertu engendred is the flour!
> When Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
> Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
> The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
> Hath in the Ram his halve cours ronne,
> And smale foweles maken melodye
> That slepen al the nyght with open ye
> (So priketh hem Nature in hir corages):
> Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages.’

Yes, even while he was quoting Chaucer to Chaucer, lo! none other than the great poet Spenser was led to greet him by some courtier of the Fairy Queen herself.

Before taking the hand of Spenser Mr. Wat Kums couldn’t help noticing that he alone of these three great Spirits dwelling in the dream-world created by Sir Thomas More took any notice of Typhoeus. Yes, before even allowing himself to touch the outstretched hand of Mr. Kums, he enquired about the personality of the great Titanic Monster. But then, while Mr. Wat Kums had only just begun to tell the exciting story of his magical creation of Nubilium and of his leaving it on the back of Typhoeus, and while, in his warm gratitude to Spenser for his interest, he was still clutching the hand of that great poet, here was Sir Thomas More coming forward leading another great poet. ‘I never expected,’ he said, ‘that my dream world Utopia would last on like this for more than a couple of hundred years. But it has! It has! And here I am, an old, old, old, old Ghost-Creator introducing upon our stage the greatest poet of the Nineteenth Century, Alfred Tennyson.

‘So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the Mountains by the inter sea
Until King Arthur’s warriors man by man
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord King Arthur,
Him the bold Sir Bedivere
Uplifted; bore him to the Chapel nigh the field
A broken Chancel with a broken Cross.
On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water; and the Moon was full.’

‘There is a vale in Ida lovelier
Than all the valleys of the Ionian hills
On either hand the lawns and meadow ridges
Midway down hang rich in bloom;
And far below them roars
The long brook falling thro the cloven ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.
Behind the valley topmost Gargarus
Stands up and takes the morning, while in front
The gorges opening wide apart reveals
Ilium and Ilium’s columned Citadel
The crown of Troas.’

Poor old Sir Thomas More, ghostly as he might call himself, was able to embrace centuries in the charm of his graceful manner and the rectitude of his honest purpose.

‘Shakespeare and Spenser are two,’ he now told Mr. Kums, ‘and Chaucer from the Past and Tennyson from the Future are likewise two. There is a strange harmony between the swinging rhythm of Chaucer with his humorous sallies and the liquid rhythm of Tennyson with his romantic soarings. The poetic balance kept so beautifully by both Shakespeare and Spenser it totally disregarded in Chaucer's humorous plunges and Tennyson's wistful wailing. So is it in the life I have known among ugly bullies and sly brutes and among beautiful whores and bewitching sirens. Thus we see how life makes things work in pairs and brings it about that for every couple there is an antipodal couple, and for every passionate preacher an eloquent Antagonist upholding the opposite truth. The Life-Force which as Rabelais said has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere, has seen to it from the start that these inevitable oppositions become inescapable obsessions; for by some mysterious law of nature from these clashes alone does progress proceed. You may not,' and as he spoke Sir Thomas More glanced anxiously from Chaucer to Tennyson, 'be able to inaugurate or to follow all the intricacies of the rationalization involved, but the logic of the sequence of life is always discoverable however long it may take the children of life to find it.'

There was a deep silence in Utopia at this point; and then, quite suddenly, to the amazement of Shakespeare and Spenser and to the indignation of Chaucer and Tennyson, the Titanic Monster Typhoeus lifted up his head. Mr. Wat Kums had never seen him do this before; but, being quaintly devoid of nerves the only thing that really affected him in the presence of this event was the sight of a figure that he had always regarded as permanently level and straight in its elongated crocodile-shaped body lifting up its head as if it had a flexible neck and doing so in a manner that implied the possession of the power of not only looking both left and right but of twisting its head round so that it could discern who was riding upon its back or even see who or what was following it.

Mr. Kums at once called out in a ringing voice, ‘All right, old friend, I’ll do just what you say!’ And in a hardly less agitated voice he called to his fellow-travellers to take their places on the Monster’s back. They must have been as astonished as Kums was when they saw that terrific Titanic head turn round and those eyes with such a strange wild expression in them staring out of the depths of that cosmogonic skull for they took their seats on the Monster’s back with extreme alacrity, and as soon as they were safely lodged there the Titan twisted back his head to its normal position and darted away from Utopia into unillumined night.

This departure turned out to be different from all the others. Was this perhaps because Sir Thomas More’s Utopia being a dream come true projected the whole lot of these space-voyagers into what was the porch, the portal, the doorway, the entrance gate to something so different from all previous experience that none of them, including the Titan who carried them, felt quite normal or natural in their nerves. It was indeed the Titan himself who at last had the daring to summon Mr. Kums in a low whisper to move up nearer to his ear so that they could discuss this unpredictable state of things which was no mere quandary or dilemma but was like an approach to the edge of a precipice descending into infinity.

While Typhoeus and Wat Kums whispered together the two guides from Loll and the two Centaurs from Hippo-homo exchanged remarks of their own on this unexpected situation.

‘What I don’t understand,’ said one of the Lollians to the other, ’is why Typhoeus has stopped. You can feel he has, can’t you? And there is our Leader Mr. Kums evidently talking to him about it! But why the devil haven’t those two brought us into their conclave? We shall suffer as much as they will if anything has gone wrong. We’re all space-travellers together, aren’t we? Any serious trouble then ought to be discussed by us all surely, oughtn’t it?’

‘I don’t think our friends are as considerate as they might be,’ said the other Lollian. ‘What do you Centaurs feel about it all?’ The two Centaurs looked at each other rather nervously, while their horses’ feet grovelled and scraped against the Titan’s back. ‘I think at any rate,’ said one of them, ‘that it’s better to wait in space as we’re doing now than to listen to those giants gesticulating and gesturing and making scrabblements with their fingers on the air without saying a word! “Orb” did they call their bloody world? I’d prefer to call it “Scorble” or “Forble” or “Warble” or “Bauble”.’ Meanwhile Mr. Kums was saying to Typhoeus, ‘I think the best thing we can do is not to go up or down or left or right but just straight on upon the way we were going when we felt what we now feel. I think I can tell you what it is. You understand as well as I do that everything in life is double. Yes! Is made of two things. One of these things is *Matter* and one is *Mind.* Our own bodies are matter. Everything about us that we can see or touch or hear or feel, everything that our senses tell us of, is *Matter.* Then along with this there is *Mind.* There is mind in our body, mind in every stone or rock, or grain or sand or speck of dust about us, mind in the whole mass of air or space that surrounds the sun and moon and all the stars. The whole universe is in fact a mass of matter within which is a vast ocean of mind. Well then, O comrade Typhoeus, what has happened to us now is simply to find ourselves confronted by this vast conglomeration of bodiless mind which is nothing less than the mind of the entire universe. I would suggest that what we must do is accept this fact and ourselves merge our mind in the all-pervading entire universe.’

CHAPTER 12

'I DON'T MEAN,' Mr. Kums went on, 'that our individual minds will be lost in the mind of the universe. I mean that they will be just as much our own private separate minds as our bodies; but my point is that they will be minds instead of bodies. In other words we shall change from being a self in the form of a body to being a self in the form of a mind. And we shall naturally,' he went on while Typhoeus listened intently, 'be surrounded by other minds; not only the minds of men, women, and children, but the minds of animals and birds and fishes and reptiles. But these minds will not impinge on us or overlap us as bodies do with bodies. They will be completely self-enclosed; only they will naturally exchange thoughts with us when they wish to do so, as we shall exchange thoughts with them when we wish to do so. What gives us,' Mr. Kums concluded, 'this weird feeling in our nerves is that we feel scared of losing our bodies. We naturally wonder what will become of our bodies and of the colossal mass of the bodies of men and animals and birds and fish and reptiles and of the body of the sun and the moon and of the bodies of the stars. It is a terrifying thought to think of all the great mountains and all the deep oceans of our earthly home melting away and vanishing in space; and we ask ourselves — *will* they melt away, simply because we mortal men have now become nothing but thinking minds existing side by side? All this is very difficult to picture. It is this difficulty in picturing it and imagining it that is just now giving us this great nervous shock. Is the universe in future going to become two great neighbouring masses, one of dead bodies — for bodies devoid of all thought and will and intention are surely as good as dead — and the other living bodiless minds?'

'But isn't it possible,' whispered the Titan Typhoeus, 'that these lively bodies of ours only exist in our minds? Why haven't those of us who are butterflies and moths and daddy-long legs and wasps and bees, and those of us who are worms and serpents and toads and frogs and those of us who are elephants and whales and rhinos and hippos and lions and tigers and eels and minnows and black beetles and horse-flies just simply imagined the outward shapes of the creatures they each wanted to be, and, if they were butterflies, the colours they wanted to have? Why, in fact, can't we think of our world as self-created?'

'It's beginning! It's beginning!' cried one Lollian to the other. 'It's begun! It's begun!' cried one Centaur to the other.

'Well, off we go!' cried Mr. Kums, crouching down behind the Titan's ear; and off with a vengeance they did indeed go.

The Titan kept his head wonderfully. Never to left nor to right, neither up nor down, but straight forward he plunged; and in a moment it had all happened.

'Our friends have left us,' thought Mr. Kums, 'but you and I are old enough comrades by now not to leave each other. Isn't that so, Typhoeus?'

'It is so, Wat Kums,' replied Typhoeus, 'but I expect this new state of being is going to feel a bit weird at first. What in the name of Hades can I do without this old body of mine that Zeus weakened with his thunderbolts? Surely some of us are more closely linked to our bodies than others, and to have to face life with nothing but a wandering mind, surely sometimes to some of us that must be a rather unhappy experience?'

Mr. Kums felt a longing in his mind to sigh heavily— 'can't we so much as sigh?' he asked the Titan sadly. 'Of course we can't,' replied that realistic

Monster at once. ‘How could we sigh without a throat and lungs from which such music has to come? But sighs aren’t everything; and bitter tears aren’t everything. What we’ve got to do is to think through our troubles, think round our troubles, think down to the deepest bottom of our troubles. When we come really to think about it scarcely any of our troubles have a physical origin. We attribute them to something physical, but really it’s almost always some mental trouble, some misunderstanding between ourselves and others, some awareness of a folly, of a stupidity, of a jealousy, of a remorse, of a cowardice, of a spitefulness, of a viciousness, or a vanity, we have shown and of which we are ashamed to think of other people noticing it.’

‘How strange it is,’ said Mr. Kums, ‘that though we have shaken off our bodies the memory of them, the feeling of them, lives on.’

‘No! No! That is not strange at all!’ cried the Titan. ‘It was we ourselves who created our bodies! Yes! the smallest insect among us did so! The fly did so. The flea did so. The bed-bug did so. And the elephant and the whale and the Sea-Serpent; they all did so, just as I did and just as you did. We naturally think in terms of the bodies we created for ourselves: but now at this abysmal crisis in the world’s history we have to do something quite different. We have, all the lot of us, to adapt our minds to an utterly and completely different existence. Each individual among us must adapt itself to be the sort of mind that it really and truly, inside its body, has always been. If you are a man or a boy your mind is the mind of a man or a boy. If you were a woman or a girl your mind is a woman’s or a girl’s mind. In any case from this moment on everything is different. You are an individual. You are yourself. You know yourself in and out; and you cannot help doing so, even if you are the most foolish, most stupid, most idiotic, most simple, most childish mind of any insect, animal, bird, fish, reptile, or human being, ever born.’

‘But where, O my Titanic comrade,’ protested Wat Kums, ‘does that necessity for a double, an opposite, an angel if you’re a devil, a fashion model if you’re a witch, a master if you’re a slave or a dog, a Divinity if you’re a mouse or a rat, a railway-engine if you’re a perambulator, a Castle in Scotland if you’re a dweller in a slum-back-yard in London, where, I ask you, is the Miser if you’re a Missionary, the sea-eagle if you’re a willow-wren, the Euripides if you’re an Aristophanes, the Cow with a Crumpled-horn if you’re a cat-hunting dog, a Harry Hotspur if you’re an Owen Glendower, come into this new situation?’

‘I can tell you. I can tell you. I can tell you,’ Mr. Wat Kums,’ cried the Titan. ‘The opposite is the whole mass of conscious mind hovering round the mountains of the Moon, round the midriff of the Sun, the untraversed hilltops of the abounding stars! We, that is to say you and I and all the other individual minds that are now set free by this world-shaking shock are privileged to assert ourselves to the limit. Nothing can hinder us from being ourselves to the utmost limit; but it is impossible for us not to feel restricted by the multitudinous assemblage of all the other selves in this huge universe who are equally free from restriction. That is the tragedy, ever present, of all ordinary life. We all long to assert ourselves to the limit. But who is it, who is he or she in the entire universe, who is not bounded, buttressed, battered, boarded by the multitude of other selves, wanting just the same, who surround us on every side? If we were, each one of us, completely alone in this vast unopposing dome of limitless space, we would probably be confronted within ourselves by the most confounding and constraining of all obstacles, the deep self-contradictions of our own nature. But as it is we have no need to dig down as deep as that. Our mind is not yet a ghost. We are not dead. We are not wraiths of the past. We are minds, souls, spirits, egoistic personalities living in the present, full of energy and vigorous life and as ready to wrestle with one another as we are ready to challenge the brooding souls of all these moons and suns as well as the impenetrable fastnesses of the Towering uplands of our own planetary earth. Don't you see,' the Titan went on, speaking more and more drastically, 'a point has been reached today that is a terrific terminus in the history of all the lives that our universe has produced. We've got to stop and think, every single one of us, from the fleas in our beards and the bugs in our beds and the moths in our clothes, to the elephants and the whales and the hippos and the rhinos and the walruses and the seals and the badgers and the foxes and the lions and tigers and leopards and panthers. Yes! we've got to think in the terms of all the consciousnesses of all the living things in the whole universe! Let the Golden Eagle swoop down! Let the Sea-Serpents rise up! Neither enormous birds nor enormous serpents have any longer any physical weight. Let them do what they will! Let us all do what we will! We are all bodiless now. We are all nothing but wandering self-consciousness, selves that are aware of what is happening but are unable to assert ourselves in any way at all.'

'But yet,' murmured Wat Kums, 'there is something about this ghastly and catastrophic finale to all our dreams of what we have imagined the world would evolve into that is distressing to these liberated minds of ours. O Typhoeus, my friend, I have a feeling that neither you nor I have altogether interpreted the present cosmogonic crises aright. I feel as if there is something we've forgotten, something we have left out in our thoughts about it. No! my friend, don't let our talk stop you from moving on. You had begun to do so. Don't 'ee stop, I beg you. Straight on! Neither to the left nor the right or up or down. Listen, old friend! It has just come into my head that in the shock of the loss of our bodies and in the struggle to keep our independence undominated by any of the powerful thinkers whose personalities tend to enchant and obsess us, the whole crowd of us who have only ordinary intelligence might gather like a great wave and sweep over the whole space, carrying all the selves and every individual me along with it till it swallows all worlds that have ever existed and all worlds that are beginning to exist and hurls itself into infinity. And what,' went on Wat Kums excitedly, 'will happen then? What will happen to all of us selves, to you and me and him and her and all our children and all our babies and all our grandfathers and grand-mothers and aunts and uncles and nurses and nurse-maids and housemaids and kitchen maids and tramps and beggars? What will it feel like for us when we are travelling through Infinity? Shall we discover new worlds, totally and completely different from any we have ever seen or imagined or dreamt of? Or shall we just perish on the back of our Titan whom Zeus all those years ago tried to kill, but couldn't with his damned thunderbolts? Will you, O heroic Typhoeus, go on your course alone through Infinity till you die of hunger? Then I suppose you will sink down forever and ever, unless by chance one of these confounded worlds we have been so glad to leave — like that damned "Orb" where they used signs instead of words! — catches you as you sink and becomes your burial place. Long ere that happens I suppose we who are now riding on your back will have fallen off, starved to death, and will either be descending headlong forever, or will be caught by some wretched little star and be worshipped as dead gods by its inhabitants, or gobbled up as savoury morsels, if these same natives, as is quite likely, happen to be cannibals. The truth is,' Mr. Wat Kums went on, 'that what all living things have always suffered, simply from being living things, and what we shall all suffer as long as our life lasts, is so damnable that I am tempted to say we just praise providence in pure hypocritical sanctimoniousness mingled with the cringing cunning of lick-spittle sycophants instead of cursing the devilish cruelty of its inhuman rule and living from day to day as godless free-lances. What we forget,' he continued, 'is that not to have existed at all, whether our existence would have been that of an insect or an animal or a fish or a bird or a reptile or a human being, is a far better fate than to perish like Caesar crying out "et tu Brute!" or like Charles the Second apologising to his courtiers for being "such an unconscionable time in dying".'

At that point Typhoeus murmured, 'But don't you feel that whatever these men may have said with their last breath they would have confessed, if they had been, or if any other famous men had been, coaxed into speaking quite honestly what they felt about life in general, that they were very thankful that they had been born and had known what the good and evil of life was before the hour of their death came? For if in the next five minutes, my dear friend, I felt that I had been hit by some special kind of dark lightning that can kill without making a sign of its presence, do you think I would feel that I might just as well have never lived at all? Of course not. I should recall, as your earthlings always say that drowning people do, the whole course of my life and I should think to myself that I certainly had had some very interesting experiences such as I wouldn't have missed having had for a million ducats! What is it in us all, I ask you, my dear friend, that makes us refuse these drugs that cause insensibility and imperviousness? Isn't it because however much I shrink from suffering any kind of discomfort I shrink much more from becoming an unfeeling log. Living things are born to feel, my dear, and if they suspect you of trying to destroy their power of feeling you had better beware. They will go for you with a rash! An insect will, a serpent will, a wolf will, a shark will, a sparrow or an eagle will. What is the outrage on you is the attempt to take from you the essence of what Nature has given you. Nature made you a living creature with the power of feeling. If any creature thinks you are trying to destroy its power of feeling it will fight desperately as if you were threatening to take its life and it will be entirely justified in doing so. Far the wickedest and most abominable practise made use of in these modern days is vivisection. When this is practised every living man, woman and child has the right to fight it to the limit. It is linked with the horrible attempt in these modern days to make Science the ruler of the world. Jesus was born when Tiberius, that Hairy Goat of cruelties unspeakable, was Emperor of Rome. The iniquities he used to practise at Capri were the worst things ever done upon this earth; worse than the cruelties performed by Gilles de Retz or "Bluebeard" and far worse than those that the Marquis of Sade used to dabble in. Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived and Tiberius was the worst man who ever lived; and the fact that they lived at the same time is another convincing proof of that great principle we both believe in, that the deepest things in life work in pairs, in couples, in ineffable and abysmal opposites.'

It was then that Wat Kums, still clinging to the lobe of the Titan's ear as the huge creature slowly moved forward, went through one of those experiences that when they happen to us we never forget till we die.

This experience was simply and solely his actual realization of what the word *Infinity* really meant.

Mr. Kums had often talked about Infinity. He had often let it take what he felt was its due place in man's acceptance of the Universe into which he had been born; but never before had he realized the startling and awe-inspiring nature of what this terrific word really meant. It began with the effect of distance. How lightly he thought do we measure the immensity of distance. But when we apply our mind to the effort of really taking in what we mean when we use the word infinite for the distance upon distance upon distance upon distance which we are forced to assume without any limit when we try to envisage such a thing as unending space our frail and limited human intelligence gets a nasty shock. What I have to do, thought Mr. Kums, is simply to use my imagination and force myself to contemplate the world as something which, while it contains innumerable stars and suns and moons, is surrounded on all sides by an empty space which in whatever direction you explore it never comes to an end. Well, let us, thought Mr. Kums, face this unavoidable and inescapable fact. Is there not something terrifying about it as well as inescapable? But how can I avoid it? What we've got to do, I suppose, is to visualize a completely empty universe entirely made up of space extending indefinitely in every direction, so that if you possessed the power of exploring it, whether to the north or the south or the east or the west, you would simply find that in none of these directions it ever came to an end. Now doesn't this conception of things, thought Mr. Kums to himself, make all philosophy ridiculous and all Bibles absurd? What is the reality of our life? The reality of our life is an attempt to enjoy ourselves by watching and analyzing and philosophizing about the history of our race, from the days when Zeus drove the Titans to live with Hades in the world below, until the present day when scientists are struggling to dominate us all. But what can philosophy say, and what can science say, thought Mr. Kums in his heart, when we realize that we are like a little cloud of tiny insects fluttering above a floating mass of garbage while all the while the vast reality of life consists in nothing but a never-ending enormity of space stretching without end or beginning into infinity. This is the reality of life, a mass of nothing stretching out without end or beginning. Endless nothing is the reality of life and nothing without end is all we find now and all we shall be able to find forever. But suddenly, as he leant forward against the lobe of the great Titan's ear, it came into the head of Mr. Wat Kums that if this Nothingness extended forever in every direction while our Sun and Moon and Planets and Stars were, the whole lot of them, in comparison, a mere group of little blobs of Matter in a tiny isolated tract of fertility, the Meaning of Life must either exist in this Nothingness itself or if not so there must still be awaiting discovery, wrapped up in this pathetically little blob of solid matter, some innermost intimate secret for the sake of which, in the service of which, to the purpose of which, and for the uttermost fulfilment of which, all this infinite mass of Nothingness alone exists. The secret of the whole universe — so now rushed the thought of Wat Kums — must lie in this tiny tract of Matter. Yes! in this Earth and Sun and Moon and Stars and Planets and satellites and asteroids in as much as it is influenced and affected and surrounded by all this immeasurable mass of infinite Nothingness. The thought that came rushing like a whirlwind upon Wat Kums now was that nothing but an infinity of nothing had the power to force inwards the essential reality of the Universe of Matter until it is so supremely conscious of itself that its inner life becomes an Elysian Field of *separate identities.* Yes! thought Wat Kums, *that* is the point of the whole thing, the creation of separate living identities and living personalities that will remain themselves in their differences and in their independent selves forever and ever.

'It has come over me before and it comes over me now,' said Mr. Wat Kums to himself, 'that the essence of life lies in individuality, but this can only be reached in its entirety by a pressure from outside that is overwhelmingly powerful, in fact that is infinite in its power.'

CHAPTER 13

'HAVE YOU REACHED any conclusion in your Thought?' whispered the Titan Typhoeus, driving firmly and steadily forward in his straight path; 'I fancied I felt you make the sort of motion just then that we all make when we arrive at some important decision.'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Kums, 'I have.'

'Do tell me,' murmured the Titan, 'what conclusion you've reached.'

It was then that the two Centaurs and the two Lollian Guides lifted up their voices, all four of them together, 'Tell us! Tell us! Tell us! Tell us!'

Mr. Wat Kums felt a wave of real pride, stronger than he had ever felt in his whole life before — and it was justifiable pride; for he had hit the nail on the head as few philosophic observers of his calibre succeed in doing.

'Well, my friends,' he said quietly, 'I have come to the conclusion — and you'll all agree with me in this — that what we want most is to assert ourselves. Now this assertion is generally a different thing in women from what it is in men, but not always, for a certain few of us are what they call *hermaphrodites,* which means that we have within us the feelings of both sexes. But as a rule men want to assert themselves by *doing* something while women want to assert themselves by *being* something. But my point is that some kind of self-assertion is the goal of us all and so if you consider what a mixed crowd of living things we are, this longing in us all is hard to satisfy. But here once more' — and Mr. Kums began to speak with something almost like authority, 'enters not only the difference of sex but the difference of various types of living things. We are not only men, women and children; we are human beings and animals and reptiles and birds and fishes and insects. This being so our self-assertion is bound to assume very different forms. Now what I believe is that the immeasurable and boundless mass of empty space which stretches to infinity in all directions exercises upon our little universe of matter a very special and remarkable effect. It intensifies the individualism of all the members of our little group of living creatures to a frantic extent. It has indeed,' and the authority with which Mr. Kums spoke increased still more, 'occurred to me that the enormous pressure of this mass of empty space stretching to infinity, as it reaches the Centre of energy and will in all of us, seizes upon this centre of energy and does two things to it at the same time. It intensifies its powers inwardly and deeply; but it also draws it into itself to such an extent that we human beings along with animals and reptiles and birds and fishes and insects actually find ourselves sharing the infinite life of infinite space; with the result that infinity carries with it forever whatever is happening or may happen to us all in our small world, the essence of each of us, the inmost self of every single man, woman and child, of every animal, reptile, bird, fish and insect. This must have been done by infinite space, moving forever into an infinity without an end, since the beginning of time: and we must remember that these everlasting inmost selves of ours have been increasing ever since what we call life began and we living creatures came into existence. There are very likely plenty of ghosts also who are carried along by empty space into infinity; but the beings I am speaking of are not ghosts of the dead. They are living identities. They are as much alive as when their neighbours could see their bodies. They have no visible bodies any more, but their living selves can feel the bodies they once had as definitely as when they had them. But their bodies are in no more danger of being killed and they are not ghosts of bodies that have been killed. They are infinite selves that were in those bodies and conscious of those bodies and they will be so for ever.'

'You were inspired just then, Master Kums,' murmured Typhoeus quietly. 'You are a Prophet, a Prophet!' cried the two Centaurs. 'You are a Wizard!' cried the two Lollians with one voice.

There was no doubt that Wat Kums made more impression on his hearers by what he had just said than he had ever made on any other hearers by any words of his in the whole course of his rather wordy life.

But Wat Kums was not quite satisfied in his own mind by his oracular utterance. 'Does this idea of the infinity of our self-love truly represent all our innermost longings?' he asked himself. 'I have often got so tired of life that I have thanked Nature with the whole of my mind and heart that when I come to die it will be the end; and I shall have no after-life *of any kind at all.* Of course,' so he argued with himself, 'I was thinking of the sort of after-life that we Christians have borrowed from the Greeks and from the Jews; from Homer and from the Bible; and I daresay if we were absolutely honest with ourselves we wouldn't have been quite so content with such a pretty-pretty after-life with the Deity acting as a sort of Conductor of the orchestra and the pleasures of Heaven being enhanced by their contrast with the tortures of Hell.'

'As far as I can follow your argument,' said Typhoeus gently, but quite loud enough to be heard both by the two Centaurs as well as by the two Lollians crouching on his back, 'what you feel is that this vast volume of empty Space stretching away in every direction into Infinity, through which we are now pursuing our way, has the power of increasing to an extent we never dreamed to be possible the intensity of our self-assertion, or our — I won't say selfishness for it is a little different from that — our selfness, let us say, our consciousness of being what we are, till it reaches a point beyond which it is impossible for it to go. According to this view the selfhood of each of us, which includes in it the shape and attributes of our former body, can never vanish away. Your view, my dear Mr. Wat Kums, is not the same as the view of those who believe in another life. Your view is that our present life never ceases, not that something called our "soul" goes on living when our body is dead. Your view is that our body never completely dies. The outward and material aspect of it passes away but the feeling of our body, the idea of our body, the impression of our body as our mind is aware of it never passes away. It is eternal. It is a portion of Infinity. It is part of infinite Space.'

It was then that one of the Lollians asked a question. 'But, O indomitable Titan, if all the creatures, from the biggest giant to the smallest insect, of all the worlds in existence, live on in their imperishable consciousnesses forever and ever in infinite space, and if, as you and Mr. Kums suggest, they have always done so, will not this infinite space of yours be overcrowded with living consciousnesses?'

One of the Centaurs replied to this before either the Titan or Mr. Kums could collect their thoughts to reply.

'How the devil, you double-dyed infant from Loll, could infinite space be overcrowded? Of course it couldn't! I guess you don't know, you lollerlap baby, what the word *infinite* means! Of course if space goes on forever it can't possibly get overcrowded! These men and beasts and birds you are thinking of, and whales and sharks too, have only to overlap a little, as they'll no doubt be perfectly ready to do, and they'll be able to follow a space that's unending for ever and ever, amen! Well! I must not go on abusing you or Zeus may try to kill me, as he tried to kill our Titan, who, like a true Titan, is straining every muscle to follow infinite space.'

Typhoeus held his peace and went on. Mr. Kums held his peace and crouched down. Both Lollians and both Centaurs fell into dead silence. It was then that a completely unexpected event occurred. Typhoeus suddenly ceased to move on; and they all saw, coming towards them through the half-light which was evidently all that was to light them during their journey through infinite space, a tall gigantic figure walking through the air as if he were wading through water. His right arm was raised high above his head and in his hand was a hollow stalk out of the top of which streamed a far flickering flame of fire. The only one of them who knew at once who this gigantic person was Mr. Wat Kums who cried aloud in frantic reverence and awe: 'Prometheus hail! Prometheus hail! O Prometheus, give us fire to lighten our darkness as we travel through Space!'

'Fear not, Titan!' replied Prometheus. 'Fear not, little ones on his back! Zeus is far too old to be able to hurt any one of you. He sleeps on the summit of Olympus watched over by Hera his wife and guarded from his enemies by his daughter Pallas Athene, whose mother he swallowed lest she should prove wiser in war-weapons than he. In his belly she gave birth to Pallas, who forced her way up through his body till she could break free of him by crashing through the top of his head.'

It was then that the Titan Typhoeus lifted up his voice. 'It is a deep comfort to me to meet you here, O greatest of all enemies of our tyrant-gods. It is up to me to carry these two from the Kingdom of Loll and the two Centaurs from the Kingdom of Hippo-homo as far as we can go through the centre of Infinite Space; but I confess to you, O everlasting enemy of the accursed Tyrant-gods, that I have many misgivings about what I am doing.'

'How do these doubts arise in you, O adventurous one, and what form do they take?' enquired Prometheus, resting one arm beside the very lobe of the ear to which Mr. Kums was clinging. ‘They take the form,’ replied the Titan, while Prometheus, who evidently wasn’t interested as much as was Mr. Kums in what was being said, used his other arm to make a motion as if he were swimming, ‘of wondering what Jesus would feel about all this if he were here; for what I think is, leaving out the question altogether as to which of the Apostles it was, probably St. Paul, who linked Jesus up so very closely with God that he became the Second Person of a Trinity whose Third Person was the Holy Ghost, what I think is that Jesus was really not very happy about being converted into this Second Person of a threefold Deity. I feel that to Jesus, and no doubt to his Mother too, there was something painful about being moved from the position of those who worship into the position of those who are worshipped. Worship enobles the worshipper but it has a deadening effect upon the worshipped. It turns him or her into stone. There they do bide, all the great Gods and all the great saints, on walls, on pedestals, in corners, on arches, in niches, in shelves, on pinnacles, on turrets, dead and still, *while their worshippers come and go* full of life and spirit.’

It was at this point that Mr. Kums became aware that Prometheus kept raising his hand, the hand of the arm that was resting on the Titan’s back to his own mass of very thick hair, and as his eyes followed this movement Mr. Kums became aware that reposing happily with an extremely mischievous expression in the midst of the Promethean hair was none other than the Devil himself! Yes, there sat the Devil on the head of Prometheus in evidently an extremely exultant mood. But Mr. Kums had been so carried away by what Typhoeus had just said about Gods and Goddesses and their worshippers that it seemed to him only a natural thing that on the top of the head out of which such disparagement of Divinity at the expense of Humanity had just issued forth should sit grinning, the Being that Christians had invented to be the opposite of their invented God. But what Mr. Kums had not expected and what bewildered him as much as it bewildered his four fellow-travellers, and as much as it bewildered the great Titan himself who was carrying them, was the sudden appearance out of the twilight in front of them of Jesus himself. He towered above them and it seemed to them as if all the space in front of them had in some strange way gathered itself together to envelop him and to envelop them also as he took them, along with it, into himself. But both Mr. Wat Kums and Typhoeus heard the words he spoke and they were words that became the whole of their life and the whole of their subsequent death, miraculously intermingled:

'I tried all the days of my life to be good and kind and to use my power to make myself and others happy, and as I lived while I lived, so I live now that I am dead, only it is henceforth in others rather than in myself that my life goes on. Yes, I am dead, and one day all you six souls will be dead like me, and one day all the world will be as dead as I am now dead; but none of this matters, none of it, none of it, none of it, as long as, till we die, we remain good and kind.'

You and Me (1975)

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CHAPTER I

I WAS BORN outside this whole bloody Universe; yes, outside all the Universes that were, are or will be. I used to call my parents Umandmum; for they were one person and yet they were two persons. How between them they gave birth to me and brought me up it would be impossible for me to say. How they came into existence I have no idea; but I was born of them in the aboriginal Emptiness or vacuity that still exists outside what earth-born people call Space. Space, according to earth-born scientists, is crowded with atoms, each one of which is a tiny world of its own, full of infinitesimal entities that go whirling about obeying or disobeying attractions and repulsions that only earth-born scientists understand. But in the boundless Emptiness outside Space and outside our Universe, and outside all other Universes, there are none of these atomic entities: there is just simply nothing at all. If an inhabitant of the planet Earth were to see me pass through their dwellings I should be taken for what they call a ghost; that is to say if the one who saw me wasn't a baby. If it were a baby the baby and I would stare at each other with reciprocal interest, with an interest, as I have come to know well, capable of developing into something like a lasting friendship.

Yes, I come from outside all the motions and commotions that make up, although it may be as fine as the finest air, what earth-dwellers call Matter as opposed to what they call Mind. I never let myself forget that my real home is outside this material Space with its lively atoms. I am always reminding myself that where I come from the aboriginal Emptiness is as different from Matter as it is from Mind. It was in this Emptiness that the

Two-in-One Being called Umandmum or, for short, Ummum, brought me up to my maturity, in other words to my complete individuality. Both Um and Mum were always addressing me with the words ‘you and me’; so it became inevitable that, when I left their side in the aboriginal Emptiness and entered the Space which surrounds all the Starry Universes, I should hunt for some world where it would be possible to find a ‘you’ to whom I would be not only a real ‘me’ but an actual person with peculiarities to be considered.

Umandmum taught me not only to fly without wings but how to consider from immense astronomical distances the probable characteristics of each particular star upon which I concentrated my attention; and after flying from galaxy to galaxy with all my intelligence alert I finally decided that the planet Earth was what I wanted, chiefly because of its perilous nearness to the moon; and you can believe I was not long in learning from the forlorn aerial echoes that had haunted the air there for millions of years what appalling disasters that nearness had already evoked. Coming as I did from absolute Emptiness it was natural that I should be excited not only by the whirling hordes of mites that compose the atomic substance of the air round the Earth but also by the nature of the Earth itself. It was by roaming about the surface of the Earth that I soon found that everything there had a name. And thus I realized for the first time in my life that I had no name. ‘What shall I call myself?’ I asked myself as I walked round the streets of London. It was only after I reached a pleasant row of houses near Paddington and got a lodging there for the night that I answered this delicate question. I decided to call myself ‘Um’, though I was, I confess, a little disturbed in this decision when upon scolding a lad for beating his dog with a stick he turned on me with the question: ‘Who the hell are you?’ and I replied with all the dignity I could muster up ‘I am “UM”’, and he at once retorted, ‘You’d better go and um it and mum it and rum it and burn it that in your own country!' But the dog gave me such a grateful glance that as I went on I hummed the boy's jingle happily to myself. As a matter of fact it was only my anxiety to know something about the thoughts and feelings of the people who made up the London crowds that led me to follow these roads and streets and pavements and squares. I had long ago found out that I had the power, completely unknown to any man upon earth, of passing clean through any obstacle. I could pass through walls in thickest stone and through houses of the most obstinate material. What people saw of me in the street was just an ordinary young man in ordinary clothes with a cloth cap on his head; but inside a house I must often have looked like a ghost. The truth of the matter was that it was in my power to be an ordinary human being with a tangible body such as everybody has beneath my clothes and with a fairly handsome face and with well trimmed curly brown hair; but it was also in my power at a moment's notice to transform this frame of mine, clothes and body and all, into an intangible ghost. And when I became this ghost nothing could stand in my way. I could pass like a shadow through anything; and I could leave the ground and ascend to the top of the highest buildings without a motion of either arms or legs. It was entirely at my own will to be touchable or untouchable; and this privilege suited my inherent nature.

One of the most important moments of my life on earth came when after leaving my Paddington lodging for a whole day I came in my ghostly semblance to a substantial house in Hampstead and passing through a wall near the kitchen where I heard women talking I entered at last a well furnished bedroom where a child lay on its back in a small cot quite alone. It must have been getting on for eleven o'clock at night. The child's parents were evidently out at a party and the housemaid, in the absence of her mistress, was having a long private conversation with the cook in the kitchen. It was as I passed through a wall adjoining the kitchen and paused to listen for a moment to the two women's talk that I learnt that the name of the little girl in the crib was Theophil. I opened the door of the room, walked in boldly in my most boyish and careless manner, and going straight up to the cot asked the child where her mother was. 'She's out with Daddy,' the little girl replied quietly. 'Phil can't sleep any more. Phil had bad dream.'

'What did you dream about, my dear?'

'Bogey in Mummy's bed,' she answered. I saw that my presence pacified her. 'Is that Mummy's bed?' I asked, pointing to the big four-poster that filled half the room. 'Yes,' said the little girl. 'I'm glad you came. I don't want to dream any more.'

'Are you a boy or a girl?' I asked her shamelessly. The little creature answered me at once. 'I'm a girl. Mummy was a girl once and she always says boys are interested in what they do and girls in what they are.'

'Why,' I asked her, 'don't people talk to a man like me when I go about?' She pondered for a moment, staring at me as if I had been a butterfly. Then she said: 'Because they don't want to.'

'Did you want to?' I asked. 'Yes,' she said. 'I felt you were there and I wanted to see what you looked like.'

'I hope you didn't think I was God,' I said. 'No,' Theophil replied: 'Daddy doesn't believe in God, and Mummy says I must decide about him when I grow big.'

'Do you think you'll decide to believe in him?'

'Not,' she replied, 'now I've seen you. I like you better than God.'

'Why?'

‘Because you don’t throw people who don’t believe in you into a fire that never goes out.’ I confess that I was pleased and proud to think that to my first friend on earth I was preferable to God. ‘You and I understand each other,’ I said. ‘But goodbye for now.’

‘Goodbye for now,’ replied Theophil gently turning her eyes to a scarf at the foot of her cot. I longed to kiss at least her little hand before I went to the door. But I was so scared of being caught by her parents that I hurried away. And the moment I was out of the room I turned into my ghost-self and passing through every wall that intervened and across every space and over roof-tops and chimney-tops and tree-tops and down streets, like a young man running for his life as well as like a ghost seeking for its grave, I at last reached Paddington station, near which I had found a lodging when I first arrived. ‘You don’t mind my appearing so late, Mrs Smith?’ I pleaded remorsefully, when the short, sturdy landlady came down to answer my ring. ‘O no, Ummy-boy!’ the little lady answered: ‘only you must call me Cloddie, you know. Yes, I’ve kept your room safe for you. In fact the Lord told me to keep it for you.’

‘What made your Mother call you Clotilde?’ I couldn’t help asking before she left my room. ‘I know your mother was Mrs Tallboy, and I know that before she married she was Lizzie Lilicombe. But had she any relation called Clotilde?’

‘O yes, Ummy-boy. There was my aunt Clotilde — but I mustn’t stop to tell you all about her now. What time do you want me to bring you your cup of tea? At eight, sonny, and breakfast at nine?’

‘Yes, Cloddie,’ I murmured, ‘just as you say. Professor Porpustle will have gone by nine, won’t he? I’ll sleep better if I know I shan’t have to meet him!’

‘O yes. He’ll be gone, sure as Tuesday’s Tuesday! There won’t be nobody but you and me; and we’ll have it in the kitchen. Sleep well, laddie!’

The lady’s steps ascending the stairs to her bedroom, which was on the floor above, gave me a delicious sense of peace. My whole body reacted to it and in less than three minutes I had folded my clothes and laid them on a chair and put out the gas, and with nothing on but my vest and pants, settled down to sleep in heavenly contentment.

As poor mortals, of which I was now one, are so made that while by taking thought we can anticipate and avoid all manner of petty disturbances, there is one thing we cannot do, and that is to decide before we embrace the heavenly angel of sleep what dreams we are going to have! Is it not a strange thing when you come to think of it, that after arranging all the difficulties of our lives to a nicety before closing our eyes, once we are asleep we are like people in a gallery of unknown landscapes and interiors through which, under an impulse as compelling as the necessity of life itself, we have to move and play our part? Whether it was soon after falling asleep or just before being awakened by my landlady I don’t know, but I know I dreamed that the Bogey in the four-poster bed of little Theophil’s mother turned out to be Professor Porpustle himself, with whom I had had that night an unending series of complicated arguments.

CHAPTER II

Although Professor Porpustle had never heard of little Theophil or of her parents he had a daughter of his own called Thisbe who was a day-girl at a well-known school in London. Thisbe was just fifteen when I first met her and her beauty took me by storm at once. She was not quite as darkhaired as the Professor who had not yet a single white hair though he must have been nearly seventy, but her hair, which was such a dark brown that under certain conditions it looked black, was so long that when she combed it carefully it nearly touched the ground. Yes, I was absolutely bowled out at the first glimpse of Thisbe Ranger who, though she had been officially adopted by the Professor, was an orphan and refused to give up her father's name.

Nobody could read Thisbe's thoughts, least of all the Professor, who would have been utterly taken aback if he had, and so, by all the invisible powers, would I have been; for I seriously imagined she had fallen as deeply in love with me as I had with her.

My parents may have been Ummum, the Two in One, and I may have been born beyond Outer Space in pure Emptiness, but I've got to confess that the briefest experience of London's population has compelled me to realize that I am pathetically and comically like an average youth of the urban centres of this Planet Earth; for here am I, just because I've fallen in love with a beautiful girl not ten years younger than I am, taking for granted that she had fallen in love with me! The chances are that she has not done anything of the kind, and is simply nice to me because she recognises that I have fallen for her. But after a day or two of brief celestial encounters with

Thisbe Ranger, I made as I walked up and down Praed Street a stupendous resolution. I would enter the mind of Thisbe Ranger! Yes, I would actually merge myself, immerse myself, sink myself, dissolve myself, drown myself, lose myself in Thisbe! In plain words I would *become* Thisbe. This would mean that the wishing, willing, wanting, wandering, wondering soul inside this lovely young feminine body would be me. In fact, I should cease to be *me* and would now become *you;* that is to say I, Um, being now Thisbe Ranger, would look at me, Um, as the infatuated young man with whom I had to deal.

Of course my chief difficulty, now that I was Thisbe Ranger, was how to deal with the few people who already knew me as Um, such as Mrs Smith, my landlady, and this awful Professor Porpustle, Thisbe's official Dad, not to speak of little three-year-old Theophil, together with her Parents and their Cook and Housekeeper, all of whom lived in that house in Hampstead. Another difficulty, now that I had to see myself as *you,* was the difficulty of learning just how a beautiful girl who was desperately loved by an ordinary young man who didn't attract her at all, nor had even been selected by her parents as a suitable husband, felt towards this undesirable suitor. I decided, as I walked up and down Praed Street, that I must acquire the power of seeing myself not exactly as commonplace but as uninteresting.

A day or two had passed in this teasing struggle to adjust myself to regarding myself as a tedious fool when, having debouched, for no particular reason, whether with the soul of Thisbe Ranger or with the soul of Um, into Gloucester Terrace, I met, outside a nice, quiet-looking house, a young lady of about, if I may speak of myself for a moment as Um, my own age. She was anything but pretty or handsome. She had an aquiline nose curved like the nose of certain birds. She had a very low forehead, very thick lips, and practically no chin at all. Nor did she have, so it seemed to me at our first encounter, any neck. Her head struck me as having been fastened by strong nails into the centre of her broad shoulders. But strangely enough, the moment we looked at each other we were friends. We knew each other through and through. I mean she knew Um and Um knew her.

‘Why do you keep walking up and down round here?’ she asked me. I answered at once with the exact truth: ‘Because I am struggling in my mind to solve the problem of self and not-self.’

‘And you can think better out-of-doors than in-doors?’

I nodded, and added: ‘Are you going shopping, lady? If you are, do let me go with you and help carry the things.’

‘All right,’ she said, closing the door of the house and showing me her capacious empty bag. ‘This holds a lot and I’ll make good use of your help.’

It did hold a lot and as we returned down the street, I kept moving it from hand to hand. ‘I tell you what I must get for myself,’ I told her, ‘and that’s a walking stick with a good handle.’

‘Well! Let’s look for one,’ she said. ‘*There!*” and she pointed across the road. ‘Landussy sells walking sticks!’

‘Careful, Mister!’ she cried, pulling me back as a car passed in front of us. ‘By the way, what’s your name, if that’s not a rude question! Mine is Jane Fixem. I live alone in a very nice flat on the second floor. There’s an elderly couple on the ground floor and an old gentleman of over eighty on the top floor. We all pay a little towards the help we all get from a wonderful retired Italian chef who lives with his wife in the basement. We are all lucky, especially I am and the old gentleman in the attic, to have the help of such a competent cook for so little. The only return I make to Providence for this good luck is to carry up the old gentleman’s lunch and dinner to the top floor and bring down his dirty plates. He can manage his breakfast and his tea for himself for we’ve all got lavatories and water taps on every floor. The old man’s name is a queer one, Katterventicle, and he’s a Colonel: yes, Colonel Katterventicle. How he got such a name and where he was born none of us dare to ask. He talks like an army man. But, as I say, we all respect him too much to ask impertinent questions. I always tell our Italian chef not to go up to his room because — well, you know how it is. These Colonels from abroad don’t always know how to treat us city folk as we ought to be treated, and half of us, of course, are not strictly English.

All this description of her fellow-dwellers was given to me as we leant against the window of Landussy, Hair-cutter and Hairdresser according to the latest fashions. Then I saw the walking sticks to which my friend Miss Fixem had referred.

I hurried in. Only a few of them had the sort of big handle I had in my mind; but there was one that exactly suited me. I snatched it up and rushed to the counter, heedless of the fact that there were at least five customers there, buying soaps and sponges and hair-brushes and foreign cigarettes. ‘How much?’ I cried. One of the two young men at the counter took the stick from me with a grave frown and I could hear him muttering to one of the buyers something that sounded like, ‘Buy a stick, have a stick, feel a stick!’

Leaving the shop with my purchase I displayed its beautifully curled handle like a horn of an Albanian goat to Miss Fixem. ‘Just what I’ve been wanting ever since I came down to Earth,’ I murmured exultantly. Miss Fixem looked at me with rather a troubled expression. It was evidently crossing her mind that this new friend of hers might have escaped from an Asylum. To put an end to this view of things I said, smiling sensibly. ‘Well, Lady, let’s go now, now that I am so pleased with my bit of business, to some of your shops. I hope you’ll be as satisfied’ — and I brandished my new acquisition by its curly handle— ‘with what you find as I am with this!

You know,' I went on, following her lead along the pavement, but not hesitating to leave her side for she was walking as close as she could to the shop windows, and circle round any ladies we overtook, planting the end of my stick with a triumphant prod into the edge of the road and even using its help to enable me to give the paving curb now and again an almost processional salute, 'You know, Miss Fixem, I'm going to call this stick henceforward by your name. Yes! I'm going to call it "Jane". When I've been longer in this country I may change a lot of my ways, but I shall never stop calling this stick "Jane".' My pleasure in this use of her name seemed to give Miss Fixem so much satisfaction that the look of anxiety and distrust passed away and she asked me quietly why I had spoken of 'coming down on the earth'.

I answered her calmly and carefully, if not quite accurately. 'Because, dear lady, my parents lived and perhaps still live on the other side of a tremendously high mountain in the direction of that American district they call Alaska. So that to me everything in Europe and Britain — for I've never been to Switzerland or to Spain, makes me feel as if I'd come down from the sky.'

I could see that my new friend believed all this implicitly and gave up with relief the agitating thought that I was an escaped lunatic; indeed she chattered away in the most spontaneous manner for the rest of our outing and when, leaning on 'Jane' and carrying her bag bursting with the things that solitary spinsters need for their daily round, I escorted her back to her door, she even went so far as to ask me whether I wouldn't come in for a cup of tea. 'Not today,' I said, 'but I shan't forget where you live and I'll come and see you and visit you another day.'

'What day?' said Jane Fixem. 'I can't tell you right away,' I answered, 'because I've got some people coming. But you'll see me in a day or two;

you can be sure of that. Good luck till then!' And off I went, lifting 'Jane' along with my cap.

Next morning, which was a Thursday morning, and I'd already decided that Thursday, although I hadn't learnt anything yet about the great god Thor, was one of my luckiest week-days, I made up my mind that I would visit Hyde Park. I found no difficulty in getting there, and never shall I forget what happened to me after I had walked up and down for quite a while on a smooth gravel path between rows of trees and among easy-going nurses with babies in perambulators and elderly couples seated on comfortable seats and even what looked to me like ardent and hard-working novelists, correcting with concentrated attention and sharply pointed pencils their last night's imaginative labour. I suddenly realized that just as it was in my power to pass through walls and houses like a ghost, so it was in my power to pass through human bodies into the consciousness those bodies concealed. My education by my two-in-one parents in the Outer Emptiness may have given me the power — only, fool that I am, I had only just thought of practising that power — of leaping over the supernatural gulf between what these earth-folk call then-minds and what they call their bodies. No sooner had I thought of this than, by all the gods that be, I was actually practising it!

There were two middle-aged people, a man about fifty and a woman about forty, seated side by side. They had been talking, but at the moment they were each absorbed in some train of thought that debarred them from noticing me or any other person who strolled past them. I noticed that there was a seat opposite them on the other side of the broad gravel path, but I loitered about, till a man, who had been seated there alone, got up and strolled off. Then, taking his place, I sat down and was not diverted from my more than metaphysical plunge by the arrival of a boy about thirteen who had evidently bought a paper-backed book and wanted just to turn its pages before hurrying for home. Then I plunged! It was like leaping through a window of water that reached an unfathomably long way down and an immeasurably long way up — a window whose glass was of transparent water. The man of fifty, as I saw him on the other side of this Liquid window was engaged in untying the strings of a young woman's apron; and the woman, as I saw her on the other side, was evidently telling this same girl that on no account must she come upstairs before breakfast until the master was in his bath. It was then that, having begun my real superlife, I resolved to rush desperately on, helter-skelter, devil-may-care, catch-as-you-can, and let come what would come, could come, might come! So, feeling sure that there was no one like me in the whole multiverse, I burst through all restrictions, defied all laws and rules and customs and habits and conventions and methods and orders and directions and calculations and chronologies and genealogies and cosmographies, and throwing away both god-dreams and devil-dreams I accepted the challenge of all existing worlds and all possible worlds; and born of Ummum in Nothing I became the Um of Everything.

'Never,' I thought to myself, 'shall I cease, can I cease, will I cease, from pulling up the skirts of every female and pulling down the trousers of every male — I mean of course in my own private consciousness — nor from increasing the seeing, hearing and feeling of every child, nor from intensifying the awareness of every littlest baby! This is one way I am going to take life from now on until I die.' With this determination tingling through every vein I left that avenue of trees and quiet benches and walked rapidly in the direction of Whitehall. As I walked I concentrated on getting all my plans for the future clear and definite. I am not, I told myself, and never will be, what is called a Pantheist. I am a Polytheist, to the limit. That is to say I throw aside, along with the One God illusion and the One Devil Illusion, every possible idea of survival after death or of the immortality of the soul. Every living creature, including bipeds, like human beings and monkeys, and including quadrupeds and birds and fishes and reptiles and frogs and toads and worms and tadpoles and all the insects that exist, have their own consciousness and their own individuality, their own selfhood, their own private life; but the moment they are dead this consciousness entirely ceases and they are nothing but a dead person, a dead horse or donkey or ox or cow or sheep or goat or pig or goose or swan or duck or swallow or seagull or dog or cat or owl or eagle. I decided that a louse or fly or flea or cockroach, or the most beautiful of butterflies, when it is dead is no longer any different from us men and us women or from elephants and rhinoceroses and whales and sea-serpents. We are all alive for a short or for a long time, and then dead forever. We must destroy in our minds the false idea offered by this pretentious ‘pantheism’ that the soul or spirit of one tremendous and immortal Being is shared by every man and beast and fish and bird and reptile and insect. The idea is totally untrue, in fact a lie. Every living thing, from a wood-louse to the greatest of the rulers of men perishes utterly when his or her or its bodily life ceases.

I fully and entirely realize that thus I also am doomed to become utterly lifeless when my body dies.

Of course for those of us whose thoughts are printed in books or inscribed for musical instruments, or painted as pictures or carved as statues there is the future of the thoughts and feelings and purposes that influence posterity. There must doubtless be in each generation many men and women who are remembered in this way for their creative work and argued about and discussed for long after they are dead; but however much of themselves they have put into their work, being now utterly unconscious they are wholly ignorant of what effect they have produced on the minds and on the tastes of their descendants.

None of these considerations, however, since I am myself neither a writer nor an artist, enter into my life. In fact I refuse to consider anything just now except my immediate intention, which is to enjoy an existence totally different from any existence which any creature has ever enjoyed before or probably will ever enjoy again.

CHAPTER III

IT WAS THREE o'clock in the middle of the night when I met him first. I was enjoying beyond description my sleep in the terrace. I woke up several times it is true: but I felt so incredibly warm and comfortable, so pleased with myself and everything round me, that each time I deliberately stayed awake for a couple of minutes so as the more to enjoy the exquisite feeling of going to sleep again. I hadn't turned the gas out because I'd been reading when I first went to sleep; and though I put the book down on my bedside table — it was Hardy's '*Return of the Native*' — I felt too happy to get out of bed to darken the room.

Thus it was that when he came in, closing the door quietly behind him and advancing boldly to my side, I was in such a drowsy mood that all I murmured was: 'Am I in your room, Mister?' I became a little more alive-o as he looked round the room and said calmly, 'Oh no, I only wanted to ask you not to go till I've met you at breakfast. It's about nine, isn't it?'

'Yes, about nine,' I replied. 'No, I won't go till we've had a talk. May I ask your name?'

'Mo,' the man replied, 'as plain and simple as your own! Sleep well, Mr Um,' and he went out as unassumingly as he had entered.

I had, as can be easily imagined, quite a long talk with my landlady about Mr Mo when she brought me my cup of tea at eight. We both agreed that we found him a very obscure and rather disconcerting person; though in her opinion he was a good deal more so than in mine. But of course she had seen much more of him than I had, and with her mind clear too; whereas mine had been hazy-dazy with sleep. I took care to be in the kitchen for breakfast a good deal before nine for I wanted to make sure that our hostess didn't break her usual custom of setting our morning meal on the kitchen table rather than in the dining-room; and we had another lively dispute about Mo there. She still maintained he was an honest chap. She went even far enough to declare that he may have been one of those eccentric clergymen who desired to enjoy life in the city for a bit, but preferred to do so in laymen's attire and to leave their clerical collar behind them. At last he did come, and oh how right I felt I had been about his being a queer one!

Yes, my meeting with Mr Mo was very disturbing to me. He kept pulling me aside and asking me about my parents and where they came from. At one point — though I may have been mistaken — it seemed to me that he mentioned the name Endor, a name that of course later in my life when I had read the Bible would have conjured up a famous Witch; but it seemed to me by the way he talked of his origin that it had been as unusual, if not more unusual, than my own. I did make out one thing clearly, for he was very definite about it, namely that he wished me to bring all the friends I possessed in London, men, women and children, to a little private circus he was giving in an open space in Hampstead. He produced a notebook and took down my list of names. I was to bring them tomorrow afternoon, which would be Thursday or Thor's Day, and this made me think of those lines of Longfellow, which some child must have recently told me he or she had learnt, about Thor's weapon, 'Miolnir the Mighty which giants and sorcerers could not withstand'.

Slowly that Wednesday, Woden's Day, went by, and O how thankful I was when the landlady told me that Mr Mo had found another lodging nearer the open space in Hampstead where he was preparing his little private Circus.

That night it took me more time than usual to go to sleep. Was this man who called himself Mr Mo just as I called myself Mr Um also born in that aboriginal Emptiness as completely outside Space as it was outside the Sun, the Moon and all the stars? If he had come from that Emptiness it must have been from a completely different part of it or my two-in-one parents would have warned me against him. There was no need for me to ask myself before I slept what he would think of Thisbe or what he would think of little Theophil. He would simply want to eat them up alive as slowly and viciously as was possible. I gathered all this from one single glance I caught once in his eyes. I had no idea that when I selected the Planet Earth to visit and the British city of London as my background that I should be confronted by such horror. But I have now been long enough in this city to realize fully what men and women mean when they talk of differences between good and evil. My parents in the Emptiness had advised me to do this and to avoid doing that; but they had never revealed to me the existence of such depths of diabolical wickedness as I caught sight of in that one single glance from Mo. It was not directed particularly at me, that glance, any more than if the deepest crater of the most explosive Mountain in the world had begun pouring out a stream of lava from an abyss that went down to the very centre of the earth when I happened to be looking on. No, that look of Mo was not directed at me any more than it would be perhaps ever directed at Theophil or at Thisbe. It was just there. It had been inside Mo and now it had come out. Had that name been given to his ancestors in some far away corner of the Nothingness out of which Everything sprang because those ancestors had reminded some Rabbi of the demon to whose names and personality the Hebraic Old Testament had called the World's attention?

But I had given my word to this Fiend that I would bring everyone I knew in London to his private fair in Hampstead Heath. So, as everybody is always saying in London, ‘that’s that’. I must take them tomorrow, Thursday, afternoon, and all I can do now is to pray to the god Thor to come with Miolnir his club to keep this devil and his Circus under control.

What a question a promise to a Fiend arouses in any conscience that desires to remain loyal and faithful to all promises! But to escape from it, to evade it, to dodge it, seems somehow to my complicated moral sense like doing something that in its weakness and cowardice was more like obeying the devil than thrusting him away; yes, before I slept I decided that to break a promise to a fiend was more like obeying the devil than sending him back to hell. So the first thing I did as I had breakfast in Mrs Smith’s kitchen was to ask her whether she could persuade Professor Porpustle and his daughter Thisbe Ranger to accompany me that afternoon to Mr Mo’s private little Circus, as I think I heard him call it, in Hampstead. She said she was sure she could because Thisbe was free from school that afternoon and the Professor had expressed to her only yesterday his feeling that he ought to give Thisbe more treats than he did, and she had told him she enjoyed Circuses and Pantomimes.

This being settled, and after I had called her Cloddie very affectionately and she had called me Ummy in her nicest manner, I left her house and rushed over to the dwelling of Mr and Mrs Lockitite. This couple I had never met before and it was pure luck that I found them in. I had a frank and easy talk with Lullaby Skim, the housemaid; and it was clear to me from the way she looked me up and down as we both leant against the door-posts with the open door between us that she was quite taken up with me and could easily be persuaded to become my girl-friend. ‘Do you think, Miss Skim,’ I asked her, with all the modesty and charm I possessed, ‘that Mr and Mrs Lockitite will let me take you all — yes, Charlotte Wiggle and you, as well as Little Phil and themselves, to a private Circus? It is close by. It is run by an acquaintance of mine. It is only a little private thing, you understand, but the fellow who is running it is dying for some kind of an audience and I'm bringing quite a party. I'll be coming to fetch you all with other friends of mine, if Mr and Mrs agree, in about an hour from now."

The girl pondered, twisting the door handle round and round in her fingers. 'The mistress may not like the house being left quite empty,' she murmured. Then she brightened up. 'But Linda next door, whose folk are off to Brighton for the day, would I know be glad to pop in for a couple of hours. So come in and see the Missus, Mister, and tell her all you've told me.'

Julia Lockitite and her husband John showed complete willingness to come with their whole household, since they felt vaguely in their minds that their neighbours would be mightily impressed and would tell one another that somebody in the family must already have become a famous actor or clown or dancer and that there would be mention of it, and perhaps of them too if they joined the party, in the Papers tomorrow.

I left the house feeling well-pleased with myself, especially as I left it with the delicious sensation of a lovely kiss from little Theophil. Off to Gloucester Terrace I next rushed. Here was Jane Fixem, who herself took me up to Katterventicle's flat where I found no difficulty in propitiating the bachelor Colonel and extracting from him a promise that without question he would come. The Runnerini couple were not quite so easy to seduce. A retired Italian chef from Naples, especially when he has had the luck to marry a Receptionist from Verona, is so experienced in the most delicate follies of mortal men and women that there's no end to his indulgence towards them and no limit to his power of catering for their whims and caprices. But when it comes to the situation being reversed and when somebody is begging them to become clients in their turn an odd sort of embarrassment supervenes. But though from the Outer Emptiness to the most intimate Inwardness of human feelings is a big bridge it is not impassable, and I passed it that morning.

What a moment it was that Thursday afternoon when I arrived with all my audience at Mo's little Circus! The one and only preparation he had made for his performance was a very long bench, upon which we could all sit down. Was Mo suddenly going to arrive with all the paraphernalia of a real Circus? Well, here we all were, seated on this long bench, waiting patiently. Here were Theophil and Thisbe. Here were Mr and Mrs Lockitite. Here were Charlotte Wiggle and Lullaby Skim. Here was Mrs Smith, whom I called Cloddie. Here was Professor Porpustle. Here was Jane Fixem. Here was Colonel Katterventicle. And here, with Thisbe aged fifteen and Theophil aged three, one on my right and one on my left, was I myself. 'O Thisbe!' I thought, 'I love you more than I love myself. Can't I make you feel my thoughts, Thisbe?' And 'O little Phil,' I thought, 'that kiss you gave me stays with me as though it were a touch of ambrosia! 'I'm sure I was right,' I thought, 'to keep my promise, even though it was to the devil!' But then it suddenly crossed my mind that perhaps I was lying to myself all the time and what I really wanted was simply the excitement of seeing what Mo would do.

CHAPTER IV

WELL, MO CAME at last and he was entirely alone. He brought nothing; no wheels, no engines, no swings, no ladders, no ropes, no performing animals. It became evident at once that Mr Mo was going to act the part of all these; and so he speedily did.

With absolute amazement we all watched him. He seemed to be, as we gazed at him, up in the air before us and he acted with perfect naturalness and aplomb all the familiar Circus tricks as well as those of Punch and Judy. He was Punch. He was Judy. He even effected with the daintiest affectation and by a laughable twist of his body a transformation into Toby. Then quite suddenly and unexpectedly he came down from the air and strolled along in front of our trousers and skirts as we squatted in that bunched up row. What will he do, I wondered, when he reaches me, seated between Thisbe and little Phil? And well may I have wondered! To my astonishment Thisbe held out her right hand to him and seized his hand and for an appreciable moment he stood before us, his hand and her hand clasped. Then he bent down and whispered something to her. I could only catch the two words ‘Will you?’ but Thisbe nodded vigorously. And then, after waving goodbye to the whole row of us he clambered up the slope behind us and disappeared.

The moment Mo was gone we all got up; and a wild hullaballoo of voices rose. I clung tight to Thisbe’s hand and hesitated not to ask her: ‘Did you promise to meet him somewhere?’

‘That’s my business, not yours,’ she replied. ‘Because you made us all come to see him, that doesn’t mean that we can’t speak to him without your meddling.’ I dropped her hand at once, and without another word, she hurried off to find the Professor, her official Father. Oh! how I did thank the heavenly powers then that at least I had tight hold of little Theophil’s hand. But soon her mother came up to us. ‘Well, child,’ said Mrs Lockitite, ‘we mustn’t take up any more of Mr Um’s time. I expect he has all sorts of people to see before he goes home, for they tell me Mr Mo wants his help in taking names for subscriptions for a proper monthly Circus in this district.’ The bulk of this speech was addressed to me rather than to little Theophil; but strangely enough it was the child who answered, and she did so in a clear resolute voice. ‘Us don’t know yet, Mummy,’ she said, ‘whether Mr Um wants to make a circus that goes on and on and on and on. Perhaps he will advise his friend to make a Fair instead of a Circus, a Fair where we can buy toys and dolls and lollipops and Bill-Bruins and Rattles and Tick-tocks.’

‘What are you saying, Phil?’ answered Mrs Lockitite impatiently. ‘We’ve got to get home now, and so I expect has Mr Um, wherever his lodging may be! London’s a big place, isn’t it, Mr Um? But I do thank you, and so does my husband, for bringing us here. We’ve enjoyed it, I can tell you, quite as much as our child has. Come along, Phil!’ The child obeyed and I let go of her hand, but not before I had raised it to my lips and murmured ‘Goodbye for now, my dear, but we’ll meet again.’

I gripped my newly bought walking stick by its curly handle and looked about for Miss Fixem. There she was, only a few yards away, ready and waiting; so we walked back to her house in Gloucester Terrace, talking earnestly and seriously of the feelings which Mo’s performance had roused in both of us; and, as it happened, our reactions to it all were not very different. This didn’t surprise me, for though she was a fussy and particular old maid and I was a fussy and particular young man, there was something about the nature of our fussiness that was quaintly similar. In fact before I left at the end of the evening and she bade me goodnight and went up the stairs I seized her wrist for a moment in such a way as to make the candle she carried drop a speck of grease and thanked her for helping me to buy ‘Jane’. ‘I hope I’ll have it all my life. I’ve never had a proper walking-stick before!’

‘Don’t lie awake,’ was her reply. ‘And don’t forget to put out the gas.’

Once back in my lodgings near Paddington Station I had only a very brief talk with Cloddie Smith and I didn’t forget to put out the gas. But sleep didn’t lull me to rest until a cloud of thoughts had passed away into that mysterious land where such thoughts fly. But what delayed the blissful moment of sleep was not any memory of Mo’s performance, nor was it, oddly enough, any surge of indignation over Thisbe’s behaviour. It was entirely personal and had to do with what I would have called, if anyone had asked me, ‘my private metaphysic’. I tried in that short space of time to find an articulate and definite answer to my own secret question to myself — Um to Um in the depths of Um’s own being — as to what my real hidden purpose in life was. I decided that just now what I aimed at in the inmost life-purpose of my existence was to pass through as many sense experiences as I possibly could without stopping to enjoy or to partake intimately of, any single one of them. By sense experiences I meant, I told myself, all the sights and sounds and so forth which I derived from the things and people through whose midst I passed unobserved when I was in my ghost-mood. In other words, what I aimed at in life was not to enjoy it but to do two things with it, namely to take it in and to escape from it. I didn’t want to escape from anything, whether a person or an object, without realizing it in all its aspects, qualities and dimensions. But I did not want to be caught by the charm and attraction of any particular person or thing so as to be held back or have my progress through life delayed or suspended. I want to examine each person or object as completely as possible but when I have caught and understood the essence of its nature I don't want to be retained by it for a second longer. In other words, I want to partake fully of its inmost nature but I want it, whether animate or inanimate, to know as little as possible about me and influence me as little as possible. What I want to do is to escape wholly and entirely from every contact with either a complicated character or an elaborate substance through which it may pass. I want to go through the heart of it all, while I retain my own heart completely intact and my own nature entirely unobserved. In other words I want to know as much as I can about life while I am as little affected by life as I would be by milestones on a monotonous road.

Having thus summed up to myself my own method of living, or at least my ideal method of living, I did my best before I went to sleep to analyse Mo's attitude to people and things. This, as you can believe, I found much easier to do than in my own case. It is, alas, always easier to describe the whole nature of someone else than of yourself; though it is much easier to give expression to any particular prejudice, for or against somebody or something, that you may have, than to follow or to understand the particular prejudices of other people. But what, before I slept, and it made me feel sleepy to work this out, I came to decide about Mo was that all he wanted to do was to enjoy as much as possible his licking, tasting, sucking, chewing, smelling, gobbling, drinking up the blood and substance of things and people before he moved on at all. In fact, I decided, so little did he want to move on, that after lapping them up his ideal desire was to be able to crouch down above his helpless victims while he proudly, brutally, ridiculously, absurdly, lecherously, obscenely, displayed for their horror, disgust or appreciation, every aspect of himself that lent itself to such a revelation.

I woke up in the middle of that night after the most extraordinary dream I had ever had. I had found, soon after selecting the Earth as the most interesting of all the planets and London as the most interesting of Earth's cities, that what I liked best of the Earthlings' productions were their printed books, especially the books of poetry. I had not known Thisbe for more than an hour when she began talking about Poets and Poetry. I begged her to tell me what her favourite poems were; and if I remember right they were Milton's Lycidas, Keats' Nightingale, Longfellow's Hiawatha, and Tennyson's Morte D'Arthur. She ended by reciting to me a poem by Poe and this so impressed me that I borrowed a volume of his poems from her and learnt one of them by heart. And what was the result of that? The result was this mad dream! For I dreamt I was Poe, come back from the dead, and not only so but come back with a certainty that his poem, my poem, 'Lo. 'Tis a Gala Night' was the favourite poem of both God and the Devil. I must have been reciting this poem aloud about three o'clock in the night with its echoes all about me in the air, echoes that kept going out of the window and coming back again. 'At bidding of vast formless things that move the scenery to and fro and flap from out their Condor Wings invisible woe!' As the author of 'The Gala Night' and also as the author of 'Ulalume', my dream convinced me that it was my duty to hunt Mo down, find where he slept, lie by his side, and when he was asleep thrust my hand under his ribs, snatch out his heart and swallow it. It was the act of swallowing Mo's heart that woke me up in a spasm of horror. I hope I didn't scream loud enough to wake Mrs Smith sleeping in the room above me. Perhaps I didn't scream at all. Perhaps my horror at myself for what I had done went so deep that it cut the root of whatever in men and women it is that ejects that sound through the scream-valve. But whether I made a sound or not I know very well what

I felt at that moment. I felt as if the whole purpose, method, way, choice, principle, essence, quintessence, soul, spirit of my life had been perverted.

O the relief with which I settled down again in my bed, when I realized that it had been a dream! What on earth would Thisbe have thought if she'd seen me at that moment when I dreamed I was swallowing the heart of Mo? I must have looked like some fourteenth century picture of some Fiend in Hell devouring some notorious Heretic amid the flames. But whoever I looked like, and whatever I felt, I must have settled down to sleep and have slept soundly; for when Mrs Smith came with my early cup of tea at eight I was fast asleep; and when I asked her about Thisbe she said that she would probably be having breakfast with us; for, for some reason she hadn't revealed, she was not going to school this Friday, and when I asked if the Professor would also be with us she replied at once, 'Oh no! He'll have to be in his office.'

CHAPTER V

I WAS VERY careful during breakfast, which Mrs Smith, who was more than ever 'Cloddie' to me during our meal, had prepared in the kitchen, not to ask Thisbe any question about Mo or about any assignment she may have made to meet him. But of course it was impossible to avoid talking about Mo's Circus and about the astounding way he had represented the whole thing without making use of any paraphernalia at all.

As to this we were, all three, Mrs Smith and Thisbe and myself, entirely in agreement. Whether Mo would have been pleased and proud at what we said I have no idea. This shows how completely ignorant of Mo's real nature I was, in spite of dreaming that I'd swallowed his heart! — and in spite of all my queer determination to associate him as closely as I could with the Devil and myself with God. What it really resembled, this whole business of Mo and me, was a childish game in which I pretended to be God and Mo pretended to be the Devil. In reality, I doubt if anyone could be less like God than me, or less like the Devil than Mo. But even that is a doubtful assumption because our whole conception of both God and the Devil is derived from the Bible, which is a purely Jewish story. What would Plato say about God? What would Aristotle say about the Devil? What would Socrates say about us?

It was Miss Fixem who first told me about Phantom House and how it came into the possession of Lord and Lady Boomerang. This couple came, Miss Fixem told me, from Australia but they really were, for they were cousins before they married, the only descendants in the world of the ancient pre-mediaeval family who had owned Phantom House since the days described in the ‘Mabinogion’. Miss Fixem had at an early period in her life been governess to Eugenia Boomerang, the Lord and Lady’s only child. Eugenia had fallen in love with one of the many ghosts that haunted Phantom House, the ghost of a young man called Joe Cannibal. This ghost used to meet Eugenia at night on one of the staircases just as the hall-clock struck two; and in the end the poor child died of unsatisfied love. It was soon after I had had that awful dream about swallowing Mo’s heart that I decided that the best thing I could do to forestall his wicked designs upon these wretched human creatures, who seemed as helpless as doves before either of us, would be to follow Mo wherever he went. It was this decision that eventually led me into Phantom House. I was not long in discovering that Mo had struck up a friendship with the beautiful Leonora, Lady Boomerang, and was constantly in her company. It was with the purpose of spying on these two in what I regarded as the spirit of an avenging angel that I used to follow them into Phantom House. It was only by slow degrees that Mo captivated Lady Leonora and alienated her from her husband. At the start of his little game he used to meet her outside Phantom House but by degrees as their intimacy increased he would enter. Lady Leonora’s servants were the extreme opposite of ghostly. Her cook, who was called Poppity Pipstick and her house-maid, whose name was Tickly Duck were extremely solid and plump little persons; nor to my surprise did the ghastly antiquity of the place nor all the ghostly presences that frequented it, bother them in the least. In fact any stranger who entered Phantom House by its back door and went straight into the Scullery and Kitchen would have been staggered by the difference of the whole atmosphere when they emerged into the front part of the building and entered either the drawing-room or the dining-room. I had one great advantage over Mo, the power of not only becoming as intangible as any ghost but also the power of passing through any building or any wall without using my hands or my feet. Mo could do neither of these things; but on the other hand, when it became a matter of influencing any person on this Earth or in this weird City he had the enormous advantage over me of looking older and wiser and with much more knowledge of the world than I, with my simple boyish air, could ever assume. We *must* have come, was the thought that was forever crossing my mind, from the opposite poles of the Ultimate Emptiness. I still kept thinking of Thisbe; and one morning when Mrs Smith told me where her Boy-Friend was and even went so far as to encourage me in this daring adventure, for she must have thought I would make a very suitable Boy-Friend for the Professor's daughter, I boldly set forth to cross her path. Yes, there she was, only a little way in front of me. She was walking very fast, and it was not long before I saw why. She was overtaking my enemy Mo! Whether Mo knew she was following him I have no idea. But on the whole I rather think he did not know. At any rate he acted like a man taken completely unawares when she caught him up. But after a minute or two their pace, as they went on together in the way he had been going, struck me as pregnant with that atmospheric tension which tends to hang about excited young couples walking side by side. Was it possible, I asked myself, as I moved on behind them, still fancying myself in the rôle of a righteous emissary of the Lord pursuing a Scout-Master of Satan, that Thisbe could love such a man? 'His Lordship,' Mo was telling Thisbe, 'has got into his head the absurd idea that my friendship with his wife is not an innocent one. Now knowing me as well as you do, Miss Ranger, I can trust you to be able to reassure him entirely on that point. You see he doesn't know a living soul who knows me. To him I am an intruder "out of the blue", you might say, and he doesn't realize at all what I really am, I mean what you and all my real friends know me to be, that is a devoted and single-hearted Crusader in the great cause of individual international freedom. Any outsider, as you know my dear, and nobody knows it better than you, who are my closest friend in this confused life of ours and who can understand so well the deep necessity of what I advocate, might mistakenly think that I was purely and simply trying to seduce Lady Boomerang. But you, my dear child, know that seduction of a distinguished lady for merely amorous reasons is the last thing I should aim at.'

Mo and Thisbe went into the House of Phantoms together by the front door but I took good care to go round by the back. Poppity Pipstick and Tickly Duck received me in the Kitchen as if I'd been an old friend. I soon found out that they were both extremely suspicious of Mo; and they both declared that they were absolutely certain that he had on several occasions lately been making love to Lady Leonora. 'They do it in the Green-House, you know,' said Tickly. 'No, I think they do it in the Summer-House,' said Poppity. 'But you've never seen them doing it, have you?' protested Tickly. 'No, I can't quite say I have,' conceded Poppity, 'but neither have you seen them actually doing it in the Green-House.'

'No, not exactly seen him touch her, but our Lady is as clever at hiding what Mo's fingers are up to as she is at keeping her drawers from slipping down.'

'The chief thing about it all,' concluded Poppity, 'is that his Lordship is only waiting till he can catch Mr Mo with his fingers near our Lady's slip to give him the thrashing he deserves. He's a quiet man, his Lordship is, but he knows what to do with a rogue when he catches a rogue.'

When I finally presented myself to Lord Boomerang he certainly looked me up and down with the searching glance of a Police Officer before he asked me if I remembered his elder brother Count Balderdash, and when I told him I was too young to go back to his time but that I did remember

Lord Blunderbus very well and used to help him drive rats out of the Fernery, he gave me quite a friendly smile. ‘You must come to tea with us one day,’ he said. ‘My wife will be glad to meet you — why here she is. Come now and meet her!’

‘Leonora dear! This is Mr—’

‘Um’ I ejaculated as politely as I could. ‘This is Mr Um,’ went on his Lordship. ‘He is visiting our country from—’

‘From North Alaska’ I hurriedly interjected. ‘Yes, my dear,’ his Lordship continued: ‘Mr Um from North Alaska; and he will have a great deal to tell us that I know will be of especial interest to you.’

Lady Leonora broke away from Mo, who was introducing her to Thisbe, and came forward; and a lively conversation speedily ensued between all five of us. In the end Thisbe came up to me and asked me to take her home. As we walked towards her house she confessed to me that even the short time she had been in that place had made her feel timid of being alone. ‘It’s a terrifying place,’ she added gravely. ‘People call it “Phantom House” in an easy, jocular kind of way, but you have to have been in those rooms, and you have to have walked up that staircase, to know enough about it to make you make up your mind never to enter the place unless you have to for some very important reason. How those two plump little servants can stand it Heaven knows. To say it’s “haunted” is to put it mildly. I tell, you, Mr Um, it’s worse than haunted. It’s — what’s that word? — oh yes! It’s possessed, it’s absolutely impregnated with ghostly presences! Not only one: the devil alone could tell how many!’

We walked on quietly after this outburst, and then Thisbe said very slowly and gravely, ‘Do you know, Mr Um, I’ve got an idea in my head that I would like to tell you. I’ll say at once that it was not suggested to me by Mr Mo. Mind you, I get on very well with him and I think I understand him, though I expect you, who know him better than I do, feel quite differently about him. But never mind what our opinion of him is. This is my idea. I want you to suggest to him, just as you did about his Circus (for I believe it was you who put that into his head) suggest to him that he should take us all for a journey to the Moon in an enormous Barge, or, let me say, in a sort of floating or flying Island, an Island with about a six foot depth of earth-mould and large enough to carry upon its surface a dozen or so of fairly substantial dwellings.

I know you well enough, Mr Um, to know that this is not the sort of undertaking or the kind of adventure that you would care to embark upon yourself or lead your large group of London acquaintances to share with you; but I have learnt enough of your nature already to know that as an imaginative inspirer of daring adventure arranged and governed by a friend of yours, you would be indispensable and unequalled. I have not said a word of this to anyone, because I know what people are and how risky it is to talk of such fanciful schemes to anyone whose character you are not sure of, nor confident of, nor have complete faith in. But you see, Mr Um, I *have* this confidence in you. I've not known you long, but long enough' — here she smiled very sweetly and looked straight at me— 'to have entire faith in you in a matter of this kind.'

CHAPTER VI

It goes without saying that I walked very slowly with Thisbe to her home for I was extremely excited by her idea and I longed to discuss it with Mo; but before doing so I was anxious to lay all my natural hesitations and difficulties concerning it clearly and definitely before her in the hope that she would overcome them. Recalling every minute of our walk later I could not help congratulating myself on the restraint I used in regard to my love for this exquisite creature whose hand was on my arm as we walked. I just simply and solely gave myself up to considering every single aspect of her imaginative scheme. Where I most of all wanted to strengthen and fortify my adherence to her idea was in regard to our persuasion of all these quaint and eccentric people, some of them, Mr and Mrs Lockitite and Mr and Mrs Runnerini, for example, already by no means unaware of the crazy fits and starts of modern society, to agree to join this wild and daring adventure.

‘I think they’ll agree all right,’ said Thisbe gravely, ‘when once we’ve got Mr Mo to take the lead. He’s got an amazing gift of making people follow him when once he’s started on anything. My private fear is that he may shrink from anything as unusual as fixing up a piece of land six or seven feet deep and about twenty feet square, with half a dozen houses on it, and making it sail to the Moon. If he does funk it, that, I am afraid, will be the end of my Project for ever and a day.’

I promised Thisbe I would do all I possibly could to persuade Mo to undertake this terrific thing; but I confessed to her that I felt considerable doubt as to whether I should succeed. All the same, there undoubtedly did lurk at the back of my mind one of those queer intimations to which I am sometimes subject, that this extraordinary event would, in spite of all its fantastic daring and its appalling risk, really and truly come to pass. ‘I wonder,’ I said to her, ‘where and when would be the best place and time to tell Mo all about it and lay before him all my arguments in favour of risking it?’

‘Well, my friend,’ Thisbe replied — and oh it gave me such pleasure to hear the grateful tone in which she spoke— ‘I should say that one evening rather than the morning would be the best time, and Lady Leonora’s kitchen would be the best place. Will you really do it for me?’

‘I most certainly will,’ I answered from the depths of my heart, ‘I’ll do it tomorrow; for I expect Mo will be staying there all day and I made friends with those girls in the kitchen.’

For the rest of that walk we both were absolutely silent. It was just as if Thisbe and I had suddenly become what my parents were before I was born; that is to say a real and actual two-in-one.

‘You don’t feel sea-sick any more?’ said Charlotte Wiggle to Lullaby Skim, looking at her companion with something like a veteran nurse’s condescension towards a new nursemaid.

‘No! I really don’t! I’m getting used to it. What was that?’

‘O that,’ said Miss Wiggle pontifically, ‘was only a falling star.’

‘What is a falling star?’ asked Miss Skim. ‘O I guess they call it all kinds of long names; but I do know what my old Dad used to call them things. He used to call them Meeters. He must have thought in his funny way that they were like boy-stars taking headers through space to meet girl-stars.’

It was just as I had heard this that Poppity Pipstick holding Tickly Duck by the hand came up to my side. I could see they had something to say to me, but were shy about saying it; and I could also see that what they wanted to say had been originated by Tickly Duck, but that Poppity Pipstick was the braver and the more presumptuous of the two. ‘Tickly wants to know,’ said Poppity, ‘if you could tell us about what time tomorrow we shall arrive at the Moon. She wants to be sure to get up early enough to do her hair and put on her best skirt lest the Porters at the Moon-Station should be rude to her.’

‘I’m afraid, my dears,’ I said, as gravely as I could, ‘that there’s no chance of our getting to the Moon for at least a fortnight. None of us knows, not even Lord Boomerang or Mr Mo, how long our journey will take. You see there are dreadful winds in the earth’s atmosphere that may delay us and when we get nearer, the Moon has many very singular ways that none of our Teachers and Professors are quite sure of. It might send someone or something to meet us and we might think the person or this thing came from one of the Sun-Spots.’

‘Does the Sun get feverish and ill?’ enquired Tickly Duck, ‘so that it has pimples like children do?’

‘No,’ I replied with calm gravity, ‘it’s much worse than that. The sun-spots are like volcanoes. They burst out from the depths of the Sun and nobody knows what causes them or what one day they might do. I think myself that one day, after the sun-spots have got worse and worse for a hundred years, the Sun will burst into pieces; and then the Moon and the Earth and all the Planets will be shattered to bits.’

Poor little Tickly Duck clasped Miss Pipstick round the waist. ‘Won’t any of them,’ she murmured in a pathetically wistful voice, ‘be able to fly away and be safe?’ A wave of tenderness swept through me. ‘Perhaps Venus, the Evening Star, might escape,’ I said. ‘And possibly Mars, the God of War; but no one anywhere in the whole Universe or in the whole Multiverse, really knows. The end of the world is as mysterious as the beginning of the world. The Professors and the Scientists and the

Philosophers have to pretend they know more than they really do. If you knew any one of them as well as his wife knows him you would know how little he really knows.'

'Doesn't Colonel Katterventicle know?' asked Miss Pipstick. 'You can ask him if you like!' I said smiling. 'He'd be pleased to be asked; and no doubt he would tell you something.' Charlotte Wiggle and Lullaby Skim now came flippity-flapperty to my side. They evidently thought I was revealing a little more than was proper to reveal to maidens who had never been to Oxford or to the Sorbonne. 'Are you telling us,' asked Miss Skim, 'on what day and at what hour you think we shall reach the Moon?'

'He says he doesn't know!' cried Miss Pipstick and Miss Duck in one voice. 'He says nobody knows! He says that the Sun-spots may break the Sun into bits and blow up the Universe.' Before I had time to utter a sound Lord Boomerang strode into the midst of us. 'May one ignoramus join your audience, Mr Um? Or are you confining your oratorium to ladies?'

'How would you answer, my Lord, if anyone asked you whether an increase of Sun-spots might burst the Sun into bits?'

'I would tell him, Mr Um, that the sooner this silly world of chattering wenches and pontificating Dons was burst into pieces the better for all of us! Mr Mo has just hinted to me that the end of the world will be like the beginning, with Eve feeding us with plumpudding and the Devil telling us the way to the cellar!' Mo's intimacy with Lord Boomerang and Lady Leonora made me feel so jealous that I turned away and walked to the further end, for I can't call it a prow or a stern, of our queer Flying Suburb to see if I couldn't find our friend Thisbe, to whom after all this whole crazy adventure was due. Yes, I soon found her, and she was in the act of carrying little Theophil, who was crying and clinging to the railings of their house, from which her mother, Mrs Lockitite, had in vain tried to detach her. The child knew me at once and when Thisbe with a sympathetic smile had thrust her into my arms she stopped crying: I went down the unsteady steps, carrying little Phil and holding Thisbe's hand, that led to the underground or beneath-deck portion of our flying island. I had already noticed that the expanse of solid earth on which we were mounting into the sky had been very carefully cleared of the bulk of weight and mass of its buildings. It was quite possible to trace the outlines of all the houses that had been there; but Thisbe's wild plan of carrying the whole lot of them into the air had been completely altered, no doubt by Mo and the workmen he had employed. The ground-floor walls, the terrace-steps, the garden railings were left; but that was all. We weren't carrying into space any upper stories or any roofs or any chimneys. But my jealousy of Mo's power of carrying out every possible aspect and every sensible portion of Thisbe's desperate scheme was embittered still more when with my child-friend in my arms and my girl-friend's hand in my hand I went down below. Here I discovered that the cellars of all the adjacent houses had been most carefully and cunningly merged together, while the cellars of the houses that were not quite adjacent had been most artfully connected by underground passages. In fact the whole interior of this solid block of earth-life in a suburb of the most complicated city in the world was a masterpiece of human ingenuity. Here was a library of books; here was a hall for games; here was a Cafe Royal with food for everybody and chairs and tables where anybody could sit and talk as long as it suited them. Here were excellent lavatories for both sexes. Here also was an absolutely new idea for air-travel; namely an excellent shop where you could buy anything; a shop that had counters of all the things that people wanted most when they came into town from the country. The crafty Mo had found a Mr Gory Jabawok to run this shop and he had given him a week to fill it and a legal right, when they came back from the

Moon, to retain what he made by his sales. Mr G. J. was a personal friend of Mr Runnerini as well as a former servant of Colonel Katterventicle, both of whom had adherents in many parts of the world so that the big multiple store in the interior of this Flying Suburb was dedicated to satisfy a number of contradictory tastes. Mo had not only made a grand hit in his shop idea, but his greatest exploit, achieved under my own ardent though ignorant encouragement, was to be found in the Engine-Room of our travelling Suburb, where in fact all the official engineers of this unique enterprise directed the space-journey designed by a girl of fifteen.

'You won't have much use for your precious walking-stick here, will you?' said Jane Fixem to me as we shared a pot of tea and a plate of thin bread-and-butter at one of the tables in our underground cafe. 'O I don't know,' I replied. 'You never know in Space-Travel! Mr Gory Jabawok has already told me that he thinks it very likely we may barge into a completely invisible satellite of the Sun upon which it may prove imperative that we should land. Have you got a nice cabin, Miss Fixem?' She looked at me almost indignantly. 'Of course I have, my good friend. I'm sharing one with Miss Gloriana and Miss Linda. Do you imagine I should have come on this ridiculous cruise unless I had ascertained all about my cabin in advance?' Anxious to propitiate her I hurriedly explained that I was a complete fool in these practical matters. 'In fact,' I confessed to her, 'I had no idea that there would be cabins for any of us. I haven't asked Mr Mo yet where mine is.' Miss Jane Fixem rose from her seat at my side. 'What a double-dyed fool I was,' I thought, 'to suppose that in finding this woman so friendly at the first go-off I had made a friend for life!' I continued this line of thought as I watched her move away. 'What would my parents feel,' I asked myself, 'if they saw me now in the hold of this fantastic monster?' This thought produced in me a queer kind of nostalgia for the Emptiness from which I had come. I bent down over the little wooden table at which I was sitting and, on my soul, in recalling this moment later, I am not at all certain that I did not shed a tear.

At any rate, although I did not follow Jane Fixent up to the deck or to the comfortable lounge that Mo had had them make down here, I did not hesitate to approach Thisbe, when I saw she had disposed of little Theophil and left her, sound asleep I trust, and to ask her before she did anything else, for she was naturally very active in the correction of any plans of hers that had not been quite fulfilled, to answer a question that had been troubling me ever since I came on board. ‘How can it be,’ I asked her, and I longed to call her ‘Thisbe darling’ for I felt more in love with her than ever, ‘that all the rocks and stones and sand and earth-mould that compose the great flat keel of this monstrous space-barge of yours do not gradually disintegrate and sink back and drift down, leaving only the upper shell of this unique craft?’

‘O but, my dear!’ she cried, ‘you will soon see why if you come with me to this port-hole or window!’ I obeyed in the highest spirits, and as can well be believed longed to put my arms round her and hug her to my heart as she took me to the nearest aperture at the bottom of this incredible space-barge. ‘You see,’ she said, ‘how *with that* round it not a speck of our ship can sink or drift away!’

‘You are indeed right my — Thisbe’ I made myself say; and indeed she *was* right. There, stretching across the round orifice to which she led me was a steel netting with only very tiny holes in it through which nothing but the most powdery sand could pass. But through the netting I could plainly see at this moment, for both Sun and Moon had vanished, gleaming in the far-off distance the lights of the London we were forsaking. There was nothing in this sight to draw a tear from me, for I had not lived long enough on the Earth or anything like long enough in London to give me the feeling that I was leaving home; and yet I admit I did feel, down in that part of us where those queer feelings spring, a longing to burst into a flood of tears. ‘Am I becoming a cry-baby,’ I said to myself, ‘in this terrestrial atmosphere? Surely,’ I thought, ‘I can’t have been long enough in this world-corner of sighs and groans and tears to have altogether lost my Emptiness composure?’ Thisbe had slipped off by this time leaving me alone by this glass-covered, steel-netted aperture and I noticed there was no way of opening it. That indeed was a wise precaution, considering what might have been blown in and what might have been thrown out; but when I thought of Um-and-Mum’s two expressive heads engaged in lively wonderings as to what had befallen their only progeny and even perhaps expressing to each other their surprise that I’d made no attempt to communicate with them, I couldn’t help feeling, as earth-folk say when they feel like crying, ‘a bit funny’. But of course what attempt *could* I make to communicate with them? O they would surely understand that much. Think of my catching a sea-gull or a curlew and tying round its neck a little note directed to Um-and-Mum of the Uttermost Emptiness! Yes, and suppose that bird flew to the portion of the Emptiness whence Mo had come! What then?

I was on the stairs ascending to the Deck when whom should I meet but my kind friend Mrs Smith. ‘Ah, Ummy-boy!’ she cried; and I felt so friendly towards her that I could not resist embracing her; and as I kissed her I murmured ‘Cloddie! Cloddie! Cloddie!’ over and over again. As I did so I couldn’t help thinking what a fool I was. ‘An absolute idiot is what you are, Ummy boy!’ I said to myself, because I suddenly remembered so clearly that when I first saw Jane Fixem I decided that she and I were born to be friends. And now there was she, rising up in disgust from my side because she had boasted to me about her practical wisdom over cabins and I had boasted to her about my absolute carelessness over cabins! Whereas with Mrs Smith all I had been concerned about was the name Clotilde and yet what must I do the moment I met her but hug her to my heart! I was caught indeed in the very act of doing this by none other than Professor Porpustle; but this official parent of my precious orphan Thisbe behaved as though it were one of the usual monotonous sights of our dull life upon this earth and treated us both as if we were a couple of children playing ‘Blind Man’s Buff’.

‘The mistake so often made,’ said Professor Porpustle, addressing us both, ‘in this irrational and disorganised world, is that people keep forgetting that there is only one thing in life of any really great interest at all, and that is the problem as to what will happen after the world disappears. To take an interest in such trifles as winning or losing games, whether games with footballs or games with cards, or in making horses run races or jump over railings, or in these absurd wars between nations when the tribes of our species are ready to destroy one another for the sake of what is called patriotism, that is to say for the sake of treating your own particular tribe with its own particular way of living and speaking, as if it were a distinguished family, all of whose customs and habits must be superior to those of all other families: and all this going on while the one supreme matter of interest among these crazy hubbubs and in the midst of all this nonsensical heroism, ought to be for us all, white men, black men, yellow men, red men, educated men and uneducated men, what is going to happen when the world comes to an end.’

I was reduced to complete silence by the Professor’s eloquence and Platonic reasoning; but, so I was profoundly thankful to observe, my gallant Mrs Smith was not.

‘But why, Professor,’ she boldly enquired, ’is it more important to wonder what will happen after the buildings up and breakings down by the men of this world are over and we are lost in the abyss, than to try to discover if there’s not something in each and every one of us that cannot be destroyed whatever happens to the material world around us? Isn’t there something in each of us, Professor, something that watches both our own material outside and the material outside of the world that is about to disappear? Why shouldn’t this something, Professor, this something in us that watches these outward things and considers the fate of these outward things, be something that has the inherent power to survive when all these outward things, including the outward universe, have entirely vanished?’ O I could have hugged my Cloddie again when I heard these words proceeding from her simple commonplace little face! But Professor Porpustle’s only retort was to take me by the arm and drag me away, up the long steps, till he had got me alone on the deck and free from the dangerous influence of a woman so completely devoid of the least tinge of philosophy and science that she actually believed that the emotional see-saw feelings of our silly wavering hearts had more truth in them than Euclid or the terrific Zodiacal discoveries made by Algebra.

‘Look,’ cried Professor Porpustle, waving his aims towards Orion’s Belt. ‘Don’t you realize that when all those contemptible twinkles are forever extinguished in the final darkness and there is no longer Sun or Moon or Stars or Earth or Ocean or Space full of gyrating atoms, the only important question for those of us who have had the intelligence to transfer our being from matter to mind, from the rack-a-daisy competitions of men and women and cats and mice to the vast unutterable *What Next,* the final strokes of our own Universe’s Big Ben is the question, ‘*What is to follow?*’

Did Professor Porpustle actually think that he'd found in me, in my tweed coat and in my cloth cap and with the sort of bag that would-be undergraduates carry, when they leave their trunks at the station and make their way to discover 'digs', if possible with an Aunt-Jemimaish sort of confidential landlady, a perfect pupil? He certainly didn't expect to be confronted, as we now were confronted, while he was still waving his hands to the sparkles of light in the firmament, by the barrack-room voice and the military presence, of Colonel Katterventicle.

'So you're teaching our young friend a little astronomy, eh Professor, before we settle down for our first night on this unusual expedition?'

Then, while Professor Porpustle made an awkward attempt to sum up what he had just been saying in language adapted to army discipline, the Colonel, giving not the slightest attention to what the man was saying, went on expressing his own thoughts.

'It was not before the last real battle in the last real war that I did what I'd never done before: that is I explored the town of Geneva. Have either of you fellows ever been to Geneva? It's a very interesting town, you know, a very interesting town: and do you know, though you may not believe it, I found myself singularly at home there. I was surprised at that myself, for I was born, as you probably may have heard, in the north of Scotland.'

At this point the Professor, who must have met ere this other world-famous generals born in the north of Scotland, made a bold bolt for it; for like other powerful speakers the one thing that nothing would induce him to do was to listen patiently to another powerful speaker. So while, with my eyes on the little bald spot on the summit of the Porpustular Tower of Wisdom, as it descended the stairs, I sat down on a barrel of oil and remarked humbly, 'It's one of the chief regrets of my life, sir, that I've never been to Scotland.'

‘It’s of Geneva I’m talking, young man,’ said the Colonel sternly. ‘Geneva is one of the most remarkable towns — indeed I might almost call it a city — I have ever visited. And do you know what I found there?’

‘Do tell me, sir,’ I modestly murmured. ‘I found,’ he went on, ‘that the name of many, many, many owners of shops — they have their names, of course, over the windows fronting on the street, were my own mother’s maiden name before she married my father? Was not that a remarkable thing?’ While he was speaking I was presuming to assume in my attentive respect that his mother’s parents must therefore have been French Swiss.

‘Do tell me, sir,’ I boldly enquired, ‘what that name was?’ There was a pause; a pause that indicated, as I shrewdly divined, that to ask the Colonel to tell me, simply, naturally and frankly, what his mother’s name was before she became Madame Katterventicle was a request not altogether seemly.

‘My mother’s name, young man,’ replied the Colonel as solemnly as if I had asked him in what country Bethlehem was situated, ‘was Lasseronica. She was born in Toulouse. She was extremely young when she married my father.’

I tried in vain to picture the word ‘Lasseronica’ above shop-windows full of cakes and sweets and toys and dolls; but finally I blurted out, ‘Geneva must indeed be a beautiful place with such names above its shops. Were they married in Geneva?’

I shall never forget the expression in the Colonel’s eyes as he replied, ‘What’s it to me where they were married? I was born in Scotland.’

‘Pardon me, Sir,’ was all I could say and I made as if I had to keep an appointment at the other end of the deck and bolted.

I *did* keep an appointment, although I had no idea of its existence, at the other end of the deck; for there was Thisbe waiting for me; having put little Theophil safely to bed for the night. ‘Did you guess,’ I asked her, ‘that I’d do a bolt from the Colonel?' She smiled, with what might have been a nod or might have been a shake of the head. Then she laid a couple of very cold fingers on my wrist. 'Listen, Um, I've got a very serious subject for your consideration.'

'For heaven's sake, my precious,' I cried, 'what is it?'

We were alone at the bow of our singular craft, and above us I could see the half-moon, whether in its first or its second 'quarter I didn't know. 'It's something I forgot altogether,' she said gravely; 'and I don't believe Mo has thought of it at all.'

'And so you've come back to your old Um for help? Well, I sure *will* help you, my darling, if I possibly can.'

'We've forgotten,' she repeated very slowly, gravely clutching with her free hand one of the enormous tree trunks which Mo's workmen had fastened together so as to make a sort of titanic bow-sprit. I clutched the other, and holding tightly to the cold little fingers that had touched my wrist, I repeated again: 'Forgotten what?'

'To name our vessel,' she said.

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS THISBE who collected us all together. By ‘all’ I mean of course the passengers. For the engineers, whom Mo had employed to manage the engine room, naturally kept to themselves and ate and played and gambled and gamboled in their own spacious play-room, when they weren’t pacing the deck in intervals of their work. Yes, Thisbe called us all together on the foredeck to decide this most important point ere we mounted further into space. What was to be the name of our vessel? It was, as I expected, Lady Leonora who was the first speaker. She said the name must be of one syllable and easy to speak because it was on the other side of the Moon we were going to land and we might be met by people who would find it difficult to pronounce English. She suggested the name ‘*Gwork*’. We all agreed as to the sound of that word, and the only disputing began when Mrs Lockitite suggested ‘*Rork*’ as preferable, and Colonel Katterventicle expressed his strong opinion that ‘*Hawk*’ as a bird of prey familiar to us all would be more natural; and Poppity Pipstick, faithfully supported by Tickly Duck, cried out in favour of ‘*Stork*’.

It was Mo who finally made the wise suggestion that his new friend Lord Boomerang should dominate this important baptism of our Space-Ship.

And accordingly we were all summoned on deck, not excluding even little Theophil, whom her mother, Mrs Lockitite, carried up in her arms still half asleep. Mo’s engineers were prohibited from voting by Lord Boomerang who declared they were only technologists, whereas this selection was clearly a matter for readers of books to decide. Those of these ousted ones who could be spared from steering our vessel in large appropriate swoops upwards towards the Moon appeared on deck to amuse themselves at our lively proceedings and I confess that for my own part I was more interested to talk to them than to decide what name to give to the vessel they were steering with such remarkable ability. The end of the selection of a name was not without interest and you can bet the engineers who were watching the result with a good deal of amusement were delighted. The votes were very carefully counted by Lord Boomerang and the result was exactly equal between Lady Leonara's *Gwork* and Poppity Pipstick's *Stork.* Then it suddenly occurred to Mrs Lockitite that her little daughter Theophil hadn't voted. 'Do you like our ship to be called *Gwork* or *Stork,* baby?' demanded Lord Boomerang in a thundering voice. Theophil lifted her head. '*Cork,*' she cried: and that decided it. 'It is my duty to announce,' thundered Lord Boomerang, 'that since the votes were even for *Gwork* and *Stork,* it is clearly the will of the Powers Above that we name our vessel according to this child's word. Our ship's name is therefore, "*Cork*".'

It now only remained for the particular workman, hired by Mo for the engineering work but who happened to be a real adept at painting, to go from end to end and from side to side of our cumbrous vessel painting her name, for the most grotesque of air-ships must be regarded like all the rest as a feminine creature, on every stationary object, whether of wood or of metal, that offered sufficient surface for his purpose. Remembering the official way to name ships, the painter, after a private little talk with Mr and Mrs Lockitite, placed the letters T.P.P. standing for 'Theophil Parva Puella', in front of the word 'Cork') so that every stationary object on board now carried the name, 'T.P.*P. Cork*' in grand capital letters.

What clearly tickled the fancy of Lord Boomerang most, as T.P.P. Cork rose upwards in great sweeping curves, was the impression we made on the other air-ships we encountered. Lord Boomerang wasn't long in discovering that among Mo's engineers who were running our ship was one who was both a drummer and a trumpeter; and who had brought each of these things, his trumpet and his drum, along with his tools. 'Why shouldn't we,' said Lord Boomerang the moment he found this out, 'give the next flying ship we meet a little salute? They must be puzzled to hell by our size and shape and it would finely increase their bewilderment if as they passed us we saluted them with drum and trumpet.'

Mo heard this with delight and came forward at once, his eyes shining. 'Yes! Yes! Yes! My Lord,' he cried in a high pitched voice. 'That's just what we must do. They'll think that we're some crazy half of a lost star that dropped away from its other half and is just on the drift, its inhabitants, if there are any inhabitants, probably asleep in their beds, without the faintest idea of what's happening to them! That's what they'll think, you can bet your life! And then we'll drum it and trumpet it till we make them change their mind — till we make them think that they've met a world that's celebrating its creation!'

'Its creation by whom?' enquired Mr Lockitite. 'By the Devil, of course,' cried Mo, in a perfect ecstasy of satisfaction.

We did indeed drum it and trumpet it soon and I can only hope it led to no tragic result. But it certainly looked to me as if that might be the issue of all this ballyhooling in the dark air of a starless night. For where had the stars gone? There wasn't one in sight and only a few minutes ago I had noticed the Evening Star. Was it because when I saw her I mentally named her Venus instead of Aphrodite, her Greek name. Did she object strongly, as a lovely Greek lady, to being Latinized in this way as if she were a beautiful slave from Ethiopia; and did she to punish me leave the sky and take all the others out of the sky along with her? A foreign air-ship did come towards us and as it happened passed close in front of us. Mo, who was dancing with exultation and trembling with excitement, shrilled into the air the agreed-upon signal, which were the words ‘warp and woof’, yelled in a special way from the pit of our stomachs. ‘Bum, bum, bum, bum’ went the drum and ‘to-hoot, to-hoot, to-hoot’ went the trumpet. And I could clearly see the slender little air-ship that had quite passed our prow give a galvanic twist sideways as if instead of heading for Earth it had swung round and was doing its best in this lop-sided position to shoot off in a parallel direction, neither going up nor down but acting as if in a last and desperate struggle to survive its crew had decided to play the part of a satellite, not falling on the Earth but circling round it. I couldn’t help clutching at Mr Lockitite, who was a short, muscular, broad-shouldered, silent man with a square jaw and a square forehead, and suggesting that we should all shout at the top of our voices and call upon the crew of this airplane to bring it to a pause resting upon our deck because it really wasn’t a deck at all. What it was a strip of land whose houses had been removed but whose massive little plot of gardens and orchards and lawns remained intact. But Mr Lockitite shook his square head with such definite disapproval, though it was apparent to me that a faintly humorous smile flickered across his face, that I knew I was talking foolishly.

‘If we’ve disturbed that airplane in its flight,’ he said, ‘and caused it to risk a disaster it would only make for a greater disaster if it tried to land on us. By joining up with us it would simply put a couple of dozen more men in jeopardy. If we are really going to reach the Moon the sooner we begin to take heed of these accidents on the way and to plan decisive measures about them the better for us all.’

I watched with great interest the airplane’s lights as it went off and I decided that its crew was steering it very much according to the advice that in his solitary ponderings Mr Lockitite would have given. For it was departing from us neither upwards nor downwards but as rapidly sideways as could be managed by a vessel of its size and structure. I followed its lights with more sympathy, perhaps, than our far more complicated adventure justified; but to do so I had to walk from end to end of our deck, avoiding as I did so all kinds of curious obstacles. Some of these obstacles were very human ones. For instance at one point I was accosted by the wistful voice of Lullaby Skim, who begged to make her companion, Charlotte Wiggle, stop dragging her about when she was so longing to go to bed. 'But what a silly childish thing,' protested Miss Wiggle, in an aggrieved indignant voice, 'to want to go to bed on our first night on board the *Cork*! She doesn't realize and she never will realize unless I make her, that it's when we're on board a ship like this for the first time that things happen to us that we'd like to remember all our life, things that will never strike us again as they do when we're freshly started on such a trip and hear and see and feel such things for the first time. Do tell her, I beg you Mr Um, that it's childish of her to want to go to bed and to go to sleep when impressions are reaching her such as she can never have again; for of course when we get used to things and take them for granted the original wonder of them is gone and can never be brought back again.'

Since I had come aboard the Cork I had never felt angry with anyone. I had felt contempt; I had felt vexation; I had felt disagreement; I had felt dislike; I had felt aversion; but so far I had never felt anger. But now I did. 'Take her down at once Miss Wiggle!!' I cried indignantly. 'All that you say is true for those of us who are strong and sturdy enough, as you and I are, to take in and absorb these first impressions. But what you are doing to Miss Skim is cruel. And you must remember this. When anyone is treating us cruelly what we think of later when we recall what we have looked at around us when we have been thus treated will not be the things themselves or any associates called up by them. It will simply be the feeling of the suffering we have gone through. Take your friend downstairs at once and let her go to bed!’

CHAPTER VIII

THE *CORK* MUST have got halfway to the Moon when in the middle of the night with the glittering stars all round us and the calm hushed circle of the Full Moon above us, as I was walking up and down our deck, with all the other passengers asleep below, I chanced to meet Mo, who evidently, like myself, was unwilling this beautiful night to go to bed.

‘Hullo, Um!’ he exclaimed, ‘Hullo, Mo!’ I exclaimed; and facing each other, each clutching with our left hand one of the upright posts which at this hour seemed to be waiting to give some lonely mortal a friendly support, for they were not as tall as masts nor as twisted as hurdles, we both stopped and stared at each other.

‘I feel,’ I said after a pause, ‘as if you and I had been playing a children’s game for an eternity and had only, at this moment, reached its consummation.’

‘You are anticipating things too fast,’ retorted Mo. ‘The real consummation of our game will be when we reach the Moon.’

‘I certainly shall be interested,’ I said, ‘to see what the other side of the Moon is really like. We’ve been staring at our side of it for millions of years.’

‘No,’ said Mo, calmly, ‘not nearly as long as that. At least three Moons have fallen on us, and the last one to fall created the Flood. How it got back up there is the question that ought to interest us.’

‘You know, Mo,’ I said, ‘I sometimes feel as if I were pretending to be God and you were pretending to be the Devil.’ I caught an extraordinary leer upon Mo’s face, a leer which was accentuated by the glittering starlight through which we were travelling, ‘Perhaps,’ he chuckled, ‘you *are* God and I *am* the Devil.’

‘I don’t believe in either of them,’ I remarked rather foolishly. ‘You don’t have to believe in what you see,’ replied Mo. ‘All this, I suppose,’ I remarked hesitatingly, ’is due to the fact that the Moon doesn’t turn on her own axis or what do you call it.’

‘Never mind how the Moon behaves,’ chuckled Mo. ‘What will interest you will be to see what the other side of the Moon is like. I *know* what it is like, and I can tell you you’ll be amazed when you see it.’

‘How and when did you see it?’ I enquired humbly. ‘How? When?’ exclaimed Mo proudly. ‘Do you think I remember such trifling details as in what month or in what year or in what kind of airship I visited the other side of the Moon? There are few places in this preposterously absurd Universe that I haven’t visited.’

‘Are there any other universes, then?’

‘Of course there are! How can you be so stupid. There are more universes than a fool like you could count! There are more universes than there are straws in the biggest haystack you have ever seen in your life.’

‘There are no haystacks where I come from,’ I answered proudly, thinking in my heart that now I should be able to discover whether, as I have always supposed, Mo came from the same emptiness beyond space from which I came. ‘Don’t you yet realize,’ cried Mo, ‘you double-dyed fool, that the people of this planet Earth — I mean the men, women and children of it, such as you and I have been associating with in London, are no more than enlarged atoms or rather no more than those much smaller identities who circle and divide and collect and separate and make intricate patterns inside atoms, entities and identities that have been given all manner of arresting names, some in Latin and some in Greek, but all with the idea of compelling the human race to recognize Science as its true Master, and as the Dictator of the only universe it knows. Don't you realize that these contemptible little spots and spitalicks who think of themselves as the People of London are in the eyes of Science no more than scrabbles of rain-marks on a window-pane?'

I began to catch the mood of Mo. He was anxious, on his side of this curious game of cosmological Tarot-Cards to disparage humanity to such a point that the questions as to what we shall find on the other side of the Moon become far more important questions than any question about the dignity of the human race, to which, wherever we came from, both he and I must certainly, from our appearance, be assumed to belong.

'Well, Mo', said I, speaking quietly and, at least that is how I tried hard to speak, firmly and decisively too, 'my own feeling is that the People of London, not "en masse" mind you, but individually, as you and I have come to know them, are of infinitely greater interest and importance than anything we can discover on the other side of the Moon; and, I would like to add, of greater interest, considered simply and naturally and historically, than anything these confounded Scientists can possibly discover about the Moon or about the Earth or about us or themselves.'

This plain declaration of mine evidently caused real fury to blaze up in Mo. There was a light near us as we talked, so that I was able to see clearly the spasm of rage that convulsed his face.

'What I shall do to you, you conceited young idiot, when I've got the right men to handle you, you can think about when you are in bed tonight; and you can take my word for it it will actually happen. I will have you skinned alive inch by inch and every inch of your flesh that is exposed I will have burnt by a red-hot iron as deep as to the bone; and not only so, but I will myself bend down over you and chew and swallow your fizzling and sizzling flesh, and as I do so I shall watch your expression with my eyes fixed on your eyes, and I shall take measures that it will be quite impossible for you to shut your eyes as you watch the delight in mine at the taste of your sizzling flesh. You needn't think that you will die under this process, for I shall see to it as my skinner skins you and as my burner burns you, that your body is turned about this way and that way so as to avoid approaching the particular parts of you the skinning and the scorching of which would mean death. For instance, the longest time will be taken up, as you can imagine, with your buttocks, for these will lend themselves beautifully to the most prolonged treatment. Only your head will of course have to be screwed round a little unless we can manage it with a system of mirrors, but your eyes will have to meet mine all the time if I am to get the full exquisiteness of the process.'

Mo paused for a moment. 'Of course,' he went on, 'we shall have to postpone this delicate operation till we've established ourselves on the other side of the Moon; indeed, until we have explored this unknown country completely, for you can rest assured of one thing, that you won't live to have the pleasure of telling your London friends what the other side of the Moon is like; nor will they ever know anything of what happened to you before you said goodbye to us all.'

When Mo had exhausted his flow of venom he leant against his particular deck-lamp-post, allowing me to lean against mine. This I did; and in his ecstatic exhaustion after having imagined he had really been causing me the pain he described he assumed that my whole consciousness was absorbed in bearing all this imaginary pain. But he was entirely mistaken. Even in my childhood with my parents I had instinctively taught myself to separate in the depths of my mind what I was doing or what was being done to me from what I really felt about the whole business. I don't mean that I didn’t imaginatively suffer; nor do I mean that I didn’t realize how exquisitely Mo enjoyed my suffering; I mean that beneath this emotional exchange of awareness between what the inflictor of the suffering experienced and what the one upon whom it was inflicted experienced there was a region in my consciousness where something was watching with absolute detachment all that was being experienced on both sides. This something was not saying to itself: ‘What incredible cruelty Mo’s nature contains!’ Nor was it saying to itself: ‘How on earth can this fool of an Um put up with this without having the sort of violent fit that would put an end to it for good and all?’ It was analyzing with frantic intensity the whole mystery of pain. It was wondering what the world would be like if the phenomenon of pain had never appeared in it at all; if what the only thing the victim of such infliction could say to itself was: ‘I wonder when this business will kill me; and I wonder, when it does kill me, whether my consciousness will be extinct forever and I shall be as completely gone as the vanishing of a puff of smoke, or whether I shall only be driven by the death of this life to take refuge in another life without losing my identity or my memory of what I have had to put up with in this life before leaving it.’

It was with this vision of things within me that I allowed my eyes to remain fixed upon Mo’s as we each leaned against our respective deck-posts of light.

Whether Mo had relinquished his torture dream or not I do not know, but all at once he sprang up straight and pointed to the sky. I rose too, and in a second saw what he had seen. There, clear above us as our own strange ship Cork swirled and swooped upwards, was a vast and very black cloud; and just above this cloud, covering it very nearly from end to end, was the gleaming silver arch, only just barely visible, of the Moon. In one moment I knew what the people of London meant when they talked about being ‘moon-kissed’. What is this feeling that the Moon has the power of exciting in us. Does It, or does She, mesmerize and hypnotize us in some way? As I looked at that vast, incandescent silvery arch circling that black cloud I knew through every nerve and vein and cell and fibre and gland in my whole frame that the vast unseen body of which that silver bow was only the upper and outer curve was a living Being like myself, only a being possessed of an upgathered store of mysterious magnetism against which it is impossible to contend. With this magnetism the Moon has the power to bewitch us to the point of madness and sometimes even of death. Whether she is conscious of doing it I cannot tell. But it certainly seems that she naturally would be. Those of us who are affected in this way by her power feel, I believe — at least I do whom she effects fatally — that we are united to her in a manner resembling the way men and women are united in sex. We call this love. But as we all know only too well it does not confine itself to the emotion we feel towards each other. It frequently compels us to follow some mysterious quest that is not by any means always a loving one.

CHAPTER IX

WHETHER MO HAD the faintest notion of all that had been passing through my mind from the beginning to the end of his tale of torture, and still further what had been my subsequent train of thought when all that business was done with, I fancy I shall never know till I am dead and buried. Whether I shall know it after I'm dead in some new embodiment I greatly doubt. I have never been a believer in pre-and reincarnations. I am no dogmatist and I regard my feelings about it as purely a matter of taste; yes, of simple and natural preference, as I might prefer going to bed before ten to sitting up till mid-night. My feeling is simply that I've had a good taste of what they call life; and though I've enjoyed quite a lot of it and have had what we call a happy life, I don't find when I think over it quietly that I'm what you might call a passionate life-lover. I agree that life gives us plenty of enjoyable sensations and that it rouses in us some very exciting ambitions, such as a longing to be a great King or Prophet or a great Magician. But with it all I confess I don't really feel any desire to live after I am once dead in any form or under any condition.

'Well!' I said to Mo when I saw no sign of the dark cloud with one silver bow curved above it offering any immediate change of appearance, 'I guess I'll be getting off to bed.' Mo just nodded. 'I'll be doing the same presently,' he said. 'Only I want to wait till I can see a little more of the Moon.'

I didn't smile at him nor nod at him, nor he at me, as we separated; and I thought to myself as my head sank into its pillow: 'the truth is that both Mo and I are to a large extent pretending. I am pretending to be God and Mo is pretending to be the Devil.’ But before I slept I told myself that whether Mo is like the Devil or not he undoubtedly derived intense pleasure from inflicting pain, and whether I was like God or not I undoubtedly derived great pleasure in thinking of myself as a good and quiet youth who possessed great power of persuading people to do what he wanted them to do. ‘Mo possesses the same power,’ I said to myself. ‘But who can tell what Mo really and truly is aiming at?’

‘What am I aiming at,’ I asked myself. ‘Simply,’ I thought, ‘at making people happy by helping them to get what they want.’ At this, after carefully smoothing away a tiny little rough crease in my pillow that was teasing my left ear, I gave myself up to sleep. And if you were to ask me to say exactly what it felt like doing what they call ‘falling asleep’ I could only answer that it felt as if my whole body and soul had turned into a round soft ball of white clay that was resting upon a stool of velvety moss impregnated with an indescribable vapour, a vapour that gave the impression that though the moss of which the stool was composed was firm and indestructible, the stool upon which all that was I rested was defended from everything that existed in the entire universe by a gulf that nothing can cross.

It can easily be imagined how hurriedly I got up the moment I was awake. I shall never forget that first feeling when, standing by my bed in the early light that I had learned to call ‘wolf-light’ I gazed at the two apertures in our wall of my little room. All the light in the room came from the upper aperture and even that light went out every now and then when a cloud swept across the *Cork*’*s* deck. The lower aperture was even more closely covered by wire-netting than the upper one, through which the dawn-light was coming; but what made this lower one interesting to me as I looked intently at it was the fact that when lighted up by the dawn-light from the upper one I could see big and little creatures pass across it; and once I thought I actually saw, staring in at me through the wire-netting, the formidable eye of an Octopus or what some folk call a ‘Devil-Fish’. Impatient to see how near we had got to the Moon I snatched up my clothes, hurriedly pulled them on, opened my door as quietly as I could, shut it very carefully and bolted up the stairs to the deck. ‘Oh King of the gods,’ I prayed in my heart to Zeus, ‘grant that I shall see our landing on the Moon and get back safe to tell them all about it in London!’

Yes, yes, yes! There, just in front of our prow was what, if we had been coming from Calais to Dover, I should have called a harbour beneath tall cliffs. It was clear to me in a second that our engineers in the hold of the *Cork* were steering our unusual vessel with astonishing competence. Yes! Here we were entering the harbour, and already grounding, for the planks of our own keel moved at a deeper level than the iron of most ships, on the sand of its entrance. The surprising thing to me was that there was no living creature in sight; nor was there any pier or any structure whether of wood or of stone for passengers to embark or disembark. All was as it had been when, having recovered the Moon from her terrible disasters, so fatal to the luckless planet Earth upon whom she collapsed, Nature left her in her natural orbit. I walked along our *Cork*’*s* deck to the two posts or short masts with lamps where Mo had pretended to torture me and I had pretended to be supernaturally brave. I saw no sign of Mo now, so I took for granted he was directing affairs from one of our taller masts, for the *Cork* had three of these near her elevated helm; and on the tallest of these I now observed a flag flying. This excited my curiosity and hurrying back to the helm I looked up with interest at this tall mast. Yes, there was the little platform, nearly at the top of the mast, where Mo no doubt was directing everything and giving orders to everybody. But our flag was indeed an interesting sight, and it grew more and more so as the rising sun’s rays fell full upon it.

It carried the name *Cork* in big capital letters and I hoped that little Theophil would soon see it and recognize it as her own chosen name. It also carried the single Latin word ‘Impavidum’ and I was so pleased that not even the presumptuous Mo had dared to substitute any other word for that grand salute to integrity made by the simplest and yet the most untranslatable of all great poets.

‘Well, Master Mo,’ I said to myself, ‘I give you the prize for our flag. That you’re an infernally cruel devil I am the one to know, if only by what might be called psycho-telepathic torture; but that you have good taste when it comes to ships and flags and urban suburbs hoisted into the air I, your spiritual rival, I who like pretending to be God while you like pretending to be the Devil, am compelled by honesty to admit.’

CHAPTER X

I FOLLOWED HIS Lordship and Lady Leonora while they arranged the establishment of a meticulously organized camp for everybody on a spacious field of grass, greener than I'd dreamt it was possible for grass to be, anywhere but on Earth. I think it was Lady Leonora and not his Lordship nor Master Mo who decided that it was best to arrange the Camp into circles, each surrounded by high railings and entered by a door whose key was in the hands of the particular lady who governed that particular circle.

Thus, ruled by Mrs Lockitite, was the circle inhabited by her husband and by Charlotte Wiggle and Lullaby Skim, and by little Theophil. Then there was the circle ruled by Thisbe and inhabited by Lord and Lady Boomerang and Professor Porpustle and by Poppity Pipstick and Tickly Duck. Then there was the circle ruled by Mrs Cloddie Smith and inhabited by Mr and Mrs Runnerini and Colonel Katterventicle. Then there was a circle ruled by Jane Fixem, a circle whose peculiarity was that anyone who quarrelled with the Lady who ruled any of the other circles might, if he or she got permission from Mo, take refuge under Jane Fixem.

My own position among these allotted circles was a peculiar one, and one that worked itself out with fatal precision and speed, no doubt by reason of my peculiar relationship with Mo, who under Thisbe's direction was the Boss of the whole business. What it amounted to was very plain and simple. I was a sort of perambulating inspector. My job was to go about from circle to circle on this wonderful green meadow and find out if there was any particular person in any particular circle who would like to move away and who would be pleased to be put under the authority of Jane Fixem.

Thus we all acted reasonably and precisely while our great vessel the *Cork,* well grounded on the sands outside, waited for what would happen next.

What happened next as far as I was concerned was not very surprising. I was suddenly aware of Mo standing by my side and looking enquiringly at me. The faint shiver that the look in his eyes always gave me disappeared as quickly as it came. ‘I want to direct it all from above it all,’ he said. And he gave the remark a rather plaintive interrogation, as though he were appealing to a knowledge which at the moment he completely lacked.

I replied at once: ‘Why don’t you call upon Nature to lend you a cloud; and then persuade your favourite Demon to give it enough substance to bear your weight?’ Mo gazed upwards. ‘There’s a good cloud!’ he cried. ‘I’ll do as you say. Only you must give it the substance.’

He leapt from the ground and as soon as he reached the cloud, which certainly was floating very conveniently, on a sudden impulse, the power of which I have never been able to explain, I shouted: ‘Make it able to carry him, great God! Make it able to hold him up!’ Whether it was Jehovah who worked the miracle I don’t know; but, lo and behold, the cloud *did* hold him up, and there he was, lolling about on it in diabolic satisfaction while we gazed up at him in awe. It was then that I was seized with such distaste for the whole business, that waving farewell to Jane Fixem and still clutching tight in my hand the stick I had christened ‘Jane’ I ran at top speed out of that green field and made my way inland, following the direction towards which the prow of the *Cork* pointed, in fact the direction in which, if the crew had been able to move it, it would have advanced with all its massive weight over the land, just as if the land had been the sea.

I soon found myself, as I ran, ascending a slight slope; not exactly a hill, but an upland resembling those undulations covered with heather and bracken and groves of trees such as are found on Exmoor and Dartmoor. I hadn’t gone very far, however, when I was compelled to stop, pleasantly compelled, for I encountered a very remarkable person. This person look me up and down before he spoke; and I looked him up and down before I spoke. I knew before either of us uttered a word that this man had the same unusual power that I myself possessed, of passing through solid things such as walls and houses and rocks, and also through unsolid things, like air and water and fire, just as a ghost might pass. I don’t know what he thought as he looked at me, though I did notice a faintly quizzical look cross his face for a second but it did not remain there. What remained there was what must have been on my own face, namely a steady and quiet but intense interest.

‘Are you a ghost like me?’ he said. And then he added dreamily, but with an almost tender solicitude: ‘You mustn’t mind it too much, Sonny. I know it’s queer at first, but we soon get used to it.’

I looked at him very gravely. ‘But I’m not a real ghost yet,’ I said. ‘I’ve not died yet. It’s only that I come from so far away that I strike people as being unearthly.’

‘Where do you come from?’ he asked; and it was then, as I looked at him more searchingly than before, that I knew that I knew him, knew him by his pictures and statues. He was Shakespeare! The extraordinary thing was that I wasn’t in the smallest degree frightened. In fact the fear I had begun to experience when I was alone upon that undulating stretch of upland disappeared altogether. ‘I wish I knew your Plays better than I do!’ I cried. ‘Oh yes, and your Sonnets too! I have heard of them. I have seen notices of Hamlet and Macbeth and King Lear and Romeo and Juliet and the

Midsummer Night's Dream in the London Theatres; but I had so many other things to think of! I couldn't hear them. I — I — I,' I stammered. 'I have a girl-friend. Yes, I have a Juliet, an Imogen, a Rosalind, an Ophelia, all of my very own. Her name isn't Miranda. Her name is Thisbe. She's a very lovely girl, and a very, very, very clever girl. O I could tell you about her for hours and hours. You would understand. I can see you would!'

'Pardon me, young master,' the ghost of Shakespeare said with a fatherly smile. 'But I would understand still better if you'd only tell me where you lived before you came to London and who your parents were?'

'It will be,' I began, with a good deal of hesitation, 'diff — diff — rather difficult to tell you. But my parents were *Two-in-One.* One half was a woman and I called her "Mum". The other half was a man and I called him "Um". My own name, by which each of them always addressed me, was "Um".'

'What country, what coast, what continent, what island, did you come from?' enquired the ghost of Shakespeare, displaying real interest in his tone.

'It was,' I boldly told him, 'outside all countries. It was outside the whole world. It was outside the Sun and Moon and all the Stars. It was outside Space itself! It was in that vast Emptiness that existed before our universe came into existence.' The ghost of Shakespeare stood very still and stared at me very gravely.

'We are really, then,' he said, '"such stuff as dreams are made of', I have often thought so; and as I look at you here before me I see that I was right. Do you ever wonder, my dear son, what we shall see when we awake from this dream?'

I looked deep into the eyes of the ghost before me and a very strange feeling came over me.

Yes, the ghost of Shakespeare *was* right. All we, living on this Earth, and the Earth herself, together with the Sun, the Moon and all the Planets, and the Milky Way with its multitudinous, innumerable Stars, will one day vanish utterly and all together. And what shall we feel then? And where shall we be then?

The ghost of Shakespeare smiled gently at me and pointed with an outstretched arm at a man's figure disappearing behind a clump of willow-trees. 'Run after him, Sonny,' he said. 'He's in need of an understanding companion.'

I obeyed him as if he'd been my father. The mysterious power that emanated from him reminded me of what I used to feel when my father and mother, those Two-in-One, told me what it was best for me to do. I ran rapidly after the figure I'd seen disappearing behind those willow-trees. Yes! There he was! He'd settled himself down for a rest upon a mossy bank, and when I reached him, breathless with running, he made me lie down by his side. 'It's like a Theatre here,' he said. It didn't exactly strike me as like a Theatre, this bank where we reclined, but I was greatly struck by the lonely and lordly expression on the face of my companion.

'I feel sure,' he said calmly, but with a wild, desolate, desperate, despairing expression that seemed to have been graven on his features as they might have been on the face of someone who had, while unchanged in years, witnessed the tragedies of a thousand generations of our poor human race.

'The orchestra breathes,' he began as I looked at him with growing awe.

'Breathes what?' I murmured. 'The music of the spheres,' he replied; and then he went on in a clear, resonant voice, but a voice that seemed like the voice of some uncontrollable poet who had been carried off in a trance and chained in Bedlam:

‘Mimes in the form of God on high
Mutter and mumble low And hither and thither fly;
Blind puppets they that come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
That move the scenery to and fro
And flap from out their Condor wings Invisible woe.’

‘When will all this awfulness happen?’ I asked, stretching myself out on our mossy bank and looking at him. ‘In the lonesome latter years,’ he replied calmly.

‘It will be appalling,’ I murmured.

‘No! No!’ he cried, laughing. ‘It will be a gala night!’ There was something about the look he gave me as he said this that made me think of Mo; and I was just scrambling up from our mossy bed when the ghost of Poe, gazing wildly into space, began again:

‘And Psyche uplifting her finger
Said, “Sadly that Star I mistrust
Its pallor I strangely mistrust.
O hasten! O let us not linger
O fly! Let us fly! For we must.”’

I felt I couldn’t stand it any longer; and I moved uneasily jerking myself from side to side. I felt that it would be rude to the ghost of Poe to raise up on my feet and look down on him there, lying on his back with his hands clutching the green grass on either side of him. But I felt I simply could not endure the weird tension of the man’s whole personality a moment longer. Something in me — I could not tell you exactly what — rebelled against this intense psychic strain. I had no idea how to escape. An electric shudder of pity kept quivering through every nerve in my body. To my startled surprise I suddenly found myself on my hands and knees. What was I doing? In my reaction against this wrung-upon human harpsichord of quivering vibration I longed to take refuge in the earthy sensibility of a four-legged animal.

'Where are you taking me?' I asked the ghost of Poe in something almost like an indignant growl. He replied at once with the same floating, flowing, unearthly undulating voice, like an irresistible wave of the sea ascending a beach banked up with pebbles and mother-of-pearl shells: 'To the vault of the lost Ulalume!' he chanted.

'Is she your lost one?' I muttered: 'or is the name prophetic of someone I shall lose? I have already, let me tell you, found my true love here and her name doesn't rhyme with Ulalume. Let Ulalume lie at peace in her vault. I have no wish to disturb her. But listen, Edgar Poe! Did you hear that bird?'

'What bird?' asked the wild poet. 'No I didn't hear — oh yes, I do hear it now! What bird is it?'

'It's a Nightingale. Let's listen a little! I like the way it sings. Oh, but I think—' I now rose to my feet and offered my hand to the prostrate poet. He took it and rose to *his* feet, so that now we were standing erect side by side. He pressed close up to me. He was much quicker in apprehension than I have ever been or ever will be; and it was clear to me that he knew that something was going to happen. Out of no conscious will of my own I found myself repeating: 'Tis the vault of our lost Ulalume,' and though I knew she wasn't my Thisbe I couldn't get the rhythm of Ulalume out of my head.

'There's somebody coming,' cried Poe in a quavering voice. And then in a second, before I could stop him, he had broken away from me and was racing like a madman down the hill. Someone *was* coming! Calm, firm, quiet, confident, collected, the steps came nearer and nearer; and from that willow-grove above me still sounded the voice of the bird.

There he was! Not for a single second did I doubt his identity. It was the ghost of Keats. Only a little older than I am he looked straight at me with a friendly smile as if we had been a pair of over-grown school-boys meeting at College.

‘I am saluting that bird,’ he said quietly. ‘A sort of incantation like a chant comes into my head as I hear it. If you will allow me I will repeat it to you; because repeating it will help me to remember it till I can get back to the cemetery in Rome where my grave is. It was the ghost of Shelley who told me about this gathering of poets on the Moon. He would have come with me but they buried his heart in some modern resort by the sea. He told me he didn’t want to be separated from his heart too long. I expect you’re one of our modern poets yourself. But if you have a good memory, and if you will tell me where you live and where your bedroom is, I’ll come and visit you in your sleep and you can tell me if I’ve got any word of my chant wrong.’

‘Please go on,’ I said. ‘I know who you are by your face. You’re John Keats who was buried in Rome.’

‘Think of your knowing my face after so many years! But I’ve heard that you modern poets have got memory-machines that you carry about with you, machines that can reproduce the faces of the dead. By the way, do tell me your name.’

‘My name is Um,’ I said. But I could see from his expression that he thought I was just murmuring ‘Um — um — um — um — um’ in some nervous reluctance to reveal my name. ‘He probably thinks,’ I said to myself, ‘that I’m some Scotch Reviewer who will tell him to go back to his gallipots.’ But as he went on reciting the famous and beautiful poem, only equalled in my mind by Milton's 'Lycidas', I felt that he must know I was one of his most devoted admirers.

'Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down.
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown;
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth when sick for home
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oftime hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery-lands forlorn.'

'Well, good sir,' said Keats, as he let the echo of that word 'forlorn' toll us both back to ourselves, 'I must leave you now, for there is a little worm in our cemetery in Rome that the son of Goethe, who is buried there, and I have made into a sort of pet. I don't think Goethe would approve of our little game, and I know Caius, near whose tomb we play, would strongly disapprove of it. But we've grown quite fond of the tiny creature and he's got quite fond of us. He must be a very old worm by now. Do you know, Mister, how long a petted worm, a cherished worm, a tended worm, a highly esteemed worm, when made a lot of between two coffins not very far down, is able to live?'

'I-am-afraid-I don't—' I said hesitatingly; wondering in my heart how these two ghosts could make slits in their coffins big enough to admit their pet worm.

When the ghost of Keats left me I began naturally to ask myself what other poets I would like to see in this Lunar Elysian Field before I left it to make sure I should not find myself left behind on the other side of the Moon when the *Cork* and all her passengers and crew departed for the Earth. I had begun to think of Milton and Dante and of Omar the author of the Rubaiyat and of Homer the author of the Iliad when it suddenly occurred to me that for grandeur and cruelty and horror and majesty and terror the most poetical Being ever invented was the God of the Christians. 'How,' I asked myself, 'shall I challenge the Inventor of the Christian God to appear before me?' As I thought of this I perceived a tall and massive rock in the distance; and scrambling not without some difficulty to its summit I looked about me in eager intensity hoping to catch sight of something in the shape of a sign or token or symbol or suggestion that would help me to discover the Inventor of God. How wonderful life is! I had not been long standing on the top of that stone before I saw approaching me nine extraordinary-looking Beings. They were in fact nine little monsters, each one of them representing one of our nine numbers. They were all skipping and jumping and turning head over heels and holding hands and spinning in circles and riding pick-a-back. One was tiddly-wiggling round Two, Two was higgledy-piggling round Three, Three was taggling-waggling round Four, and while Five and Six were bowing and scraping to each other, Seven, astride on the shoulders of Eight, was dangling a string with a dead rat on the end of it in front of Nine, who was jumping up and down like an excited dog trying to get hold of it.

I soon realized that these Nine holy and sacred and mysterious and mystical and mythical Numbers had selected me, a Figure upon a Rock, as their audience or their congregation or their parliament or their Jack down from the Bean-Stalk or their Rock-a-bye-Baby down from the Tree-top. I at once began to wonder how all this would end; for I noticed that in all these puppets, as they danced round and round my rock and me, there was a strange air, in spite of their rapid movements, of silent expectation, as if in every fantastical little head was the idea that, before it was over, I, the Figure on the Rock, would do something drastic, something like gathering them all in my arms and carrying them to Heaven. ‘How on earth can I,’ I thought to myself, ‘disabuse them of this mad idea?’ Then it occurred to me that since it all depended on me, and since I was the only figure, the lonely figure, the inscrutable figure, the unique figure in the presence of all these grotesque little tiddly-winks, and since they had decided in their pygmy noddles that I must be the Being called God of whom they had heard since they were mites, it was, as they say, up to me to act the part of that Being. Well! How should I do that? The obvious, orthodox, catastrophic, kaleidoscopic, telepathic, paleolithic way I could act the part of God would be announcing my Holy Will. But then another thought came into my head. What was the next most natural thing for God to do after he had announced his Will? Surely to summon the Devil to appear before him and be judged! But how the hell could I bring Mo, who certainly if I was playing God must be the one to play the Devil, to this particular rock and order him to pose before this fantastic little crowd as Moloch or Satan or Beelzebub or Lucifer? Perhaps it would be better just simply to announce my Will and leave Mo out of it? But how could I announce in any Jehovah-like manner what I felt about good and evil when evil lacked any authoritative voice to defend itself against my accusations? The complexity of this problem so puzzled me that I had to lie down on the Rock to think it over, and as the result of doing this it is hardly strange that in spite of the Nine Performers of the Play of Human Life gathering so close to the Rock that we could almost touch each other, I fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST THING I knew when I woke up was that I was no longer alone on the Rock. Three and Four and Nine were standing beside me. All the others had moved a little away and were chanting a funny sort of song as they danced in a circle round a post at the foot of which stood One, solemnly beating time to their chant with both hands.

I was clever enough to keep my eyes tightly closed when I woke up; so that although I could feel the presence of Three and Four and Nine they had no notion that I was awake. The chant which Number One, a very curious-looking creature when I saw him later, with an eye in the middle of his forehead, a big mouth, no nose at all and enormous ears, was so carefully conducting, was a singular chant.

It was a quite natural instinct in me, too simple to be called cunning, that led me to keep my eyes tightly shut when I first woke up. I wanted to know a little at least about the weird folk who surrounded me before I took any special line of action. A faint flicker of these closed eyelids of mine was enough to make me understand that Master Number Four was seated four-square, by my side. His eyes also were closed, but not as tightly as mine, and his whole air was that of good-humoured patience mingled with just a little perhaps of weary indifference. ‘You must keep your eyes shut and just listen,’ his square figure seemed to be saying to me, while my own motionless prostration replied, so I felt, in similar language.

What I was listening to just then was a lively argument between Number Three and Number Nine. When I let my eye-lids quiver at the corners enough to get a glimpse of what these two gentlemen were like I was appalled by the particular brand of ugliness I saw in Master Three. Most of his face was dedicated to eyes and ears. These were absolutely enormous; but it was the man's mouth that gave his physiognomy its decisive character; and this character was simply horrible.

I found it was impossible to keep my eyes closed after giving one glance at that mouth of his. It suggested — how shall I put it? — a sort of abysmal suction. It looked as if, when once Three's rampaging eyes and flapping ears had done their business and had got their luckless prey squeezed against their lord's bulging lips and palpitating cheeks, the whole creature and the whole atmosphere round the creature became an orgy of swallowing. It was horrible. It was terrifying. It was not ordinary swallowing. It was suction so prolonged that the unfortunate object being swallowed seemed to be transformed into an interminable worm while the stomach into which it was sucked elongated itself to receive it. The moment came when I simply couldn't stand the presence of all this, whether visible or invisible, any longer. Never in my upbringing in that divine Emptiness outside all the swirling atoms of Space and beyond all the enlarging galaxies of an ever-increasing Multiverse or Matter had I known that such horrors could exist as the antics of these ridiculous Beings who named themselves One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine. I didn't decide anything in my mind. Instinctively, impetuously, recklessly, desperately I scrambled to my feet, clambered down from the rock, made a wide circle round the creatures singing and dancing in the field, and fled for my life. It was amazing to me how extensive this vast level expanse of green grass was. It seemed endless. It seemed to lead nowhere. As I ran I thought to myself how little I had ever tried to imagine what it would be like on that mysterious 'Other Side of the Moon' of which few of us earth-bound folk ever think as we look up at our warm Sun's rival or mistress as in his absence She shines down on us. I certainly never for a moment imagined that there could be a great plain of green grass up there without a sign of hills or rivers. I hadn't expected anything like the extraordinary twilight through which I ran. Why, if the Sun had sunk for the night and I was *on* the Moon and not *under* the Moon was there no moon-light?

Then, all in a moment, there rose before me an enormous Castle. I had not seen it before. It had not been on any horizon. But there it was! And as I reached its gate I saw to my absolute astonishment that I was not unexpected. A group of people as ordinary-looking as myself came running to greet me. 'Oh thank goodness! There you are!' cried one. 'Lilith be praised! You've come at least!' cried another. 'You are indeed a good runner!' cried a third. They all hustled me in, through a great archway, and up four great steps, into a spacious waiting-room or cloak-room or ante-room, and here they surrounded me while I sat down on a bench and clasping the handle of my stick 'Jane' with both my hands I tapped a little tune upon the marble floor. The tune I tapped was 'Drink to me only with thine eyes', and I thought of Thisbe, so desperately that I could hardly bear it.

A moment later, however, a young man, about my own height and I would guess about my own age, came boldly up to me and sat down by my side. He and I were now alone on that bench which gave him a natural advantage over the others to draw me into conversation.

'I expect you don't quite realize,' he said, 'who we are that come crowding into this Castle. We are the souls of people from Earth who are at this moment fast asleep in our beds in various mental homes in London. Yes, most of us, including myself, are at this moment fast asleep in Lunatic Asylums and Mad-Houses. It is the magnetic power of the Queen of this Castle that brings us here. And this is indeed natural and right, because it was the Moon’s magnetic power that originally disturbed our minds. In the old days when they used to chain and beat mad people — just think of the cruelty of that! — nobody ever referred to the Moon. Then by degrees — I wish I could tell you the exact date — the curious expression “Moon-kissed” came into use. I am tempted to think’ — here the young man bent his head towards me and spoke in a low voice— ‘that the expression “Moon-kissed” combined with the use of the word “Lunatic”, for everyone knows that Luna is Latin for the Moon, has done a lot of harm to the proper curing of our troubled minds. What they ought to do, what all Doctors ought to do, is to find out from each of us afflicted ones what we ourselves can remember of the origin of our complaint. For, as you know, in many cases the trouble goes back to childhood. In fact in some cases it goes back to babyhood. Some of us were born insane. But what I feel is that if only the Moon had been kept out of it altogether and our cure had been left to doctors of the old-fashioned kind who had known our family from the beginning and had realized the particular twists and turns in the minds of our parents that would be liable to increase or diminish any insane tendency in their — O! She’s coming! She’s coming! She’s coming!’ At this cry all the young people round me, and there were girls as well as boys in the crowd, fell on their knees, the boy who had been instructing me among them, and clasping their hands in prayer lifted them above their heads. I didn’t follow their example, but I acted in my own manner just as reverently. In fact I went down on all fours and tapped the paving stones with my forehead. But when the Queen was really before me I couldn’t help lifting up my head and gazing at her. She was the Moon herself! Yes, she was Luna! She was a loveliness so unique that, sane as you might be, and self-contained as you might be, you could only with your head rising up from your neck, like a four-legged animal in the presence of an archangel, stare the soul out of your body.

CHAPTER XII

THE GODDESS WHO now appeared was simply the Moon transformed into a Woman. Her arms and legs, her breasts and belly, were simply extensions of the Moon; and the floods of hair that swung and swayed and scattered and soared and foamed and flickered and floated about her head were wavering waterfalls of moonlight.

She led us up a flight of nine steps into an enormous hall and then she herself departed. The arch under which she went looked as if it led to a corridor that sloped up and down with an undulation that resembled the ebb and flow of a tide on a beach. But what an experience it was to encounter all her crazy courtiers after her departure! I saw my boy instructor among them and I hurried up to him. 'Do introduce me,' I begged, 'to some of the weirdest and oddest of all these souls — well, not of the damned but of the de-humanized.'

My friend answered at once by leading me to a female figure who was standing alone in dead silence with her face to the wall. 'She always stands like that,' he said. 'Yes, for horns and hours. She thinks if she waits long enough a door will open in that wall and lead her into her father's prison. He was imprisoned for making incestuous love to her which in his trial he claimed was her desire and not his. But the Judge disregarded all he said and condemned him to a year's imprisonment.'

'How do they get her to eat and sleep?' I asked.

'O very easily,' he said. 'She does everything they tell her to do as long as when she has done it they let her go back to that wall.'

'Does she always stand in the same place?'

‘Exactly. She knows it, they say, by the squashed body of a beetle or spider or bug or daddy-long-legs in that particular place. But she sleeps and eats quite properly.’

‘Is her father still in prison?’

‘O no! He’s been out for years; but he was scared to come and visit her here. And now he’s dead. He died in Italy a month ago.’

‘What is that man over there doing to his head?’

‘O, he thinks he’s the Devil and has got horns. He’s always trying to stick bits of wood into his skull. Our Doctor found him once with a hammer and a big nail but he gave him as a punishment for that such a long day in bed that he has left nails and hammers alone. But his last trick was to tear down a pair of stag-horns from our Reverend Rector’s study. But he couldn’t find any way of fastening them to the top of his head. So I expect what he is doing is trying to stick a couple of bits of wood on the top of his skull by the use of some sort of glue.’

‘But my dear friend,’ I said boldly to my young instructor, ‘how did it come about that you yourself were given a place in this crowd of maniacs?’

The youth came close up to me after hearing this question and whispered his answer. ‘You see I alone know that in a certain number of years, long anyway before I’m dead, it will be my destiny to be transformed into a sea-gull. Of course I don’t know how the change will come about, whether I shall feel a tickling all over me before my feathers come out, and whether the sprouting of wings from my shoulders will hurt like hell and even perhaps cause blood to flow. No! I have no idea how it will happen. But happen before I am thirty I know that it will.’

‘How and when’, I whispered, ‘did you first become conscious of the destiny awaiting you?’

‘O that’s easy to tell,’ replied the youth. ‘I used, like most boys, to love throwing stones. One day when I was walking along the edge of the cliffs between Weymouth and Lulworth I saw two sea-gulls beginning to make the particular movements which I knew were a sign that they were already bringing food for some little sea-gulls hidden far back in a deep slit between two massively flat slate-shaped stones. I threw a stone and hit one of them and hurt it. Its mate — I never knew which of them was the male and which the female — helped it to lie down very gently on the lower one of the two stones at the entrance to where their little ones lay snug and warm. I looked down at it from above wondering if there was anything I could do for it. And suddenly I became aware that it was talking to me in broken English. “You can do nothing for me,” it said, answering my thoughts. “But when you come to die you will die in my form, and that will be before you are thirty.” This information,’ my friend went on, ‘upset me so much that I set off at a run back towards Weymouth; nor did I stop until the cliffs ended at the Coastguard Cottages and the beginning of Lodmore.’

‘Did nothing,’ I asked him, still keeping my voice as slow as I could, though I was beginning to get very excited at what I was hearing, ‘ever suggest to you that one day you would be drawn up by some kind of magic to the Other Side of the Moon?’

The lad made a very curious gesture; the sort of gesture an animal might make if commanded by an enchanter to change its skin into the skin of a different animal. ‘Don’t you see, my good sir — by the way you must tell me presently where you yourself come from! — that none of us lunatics or moon-kissed ones decided to come here. Nor are we really and truly here at all. We are, as Shakespeare says, “such stuff as dreams are made of”. In fact, when we wake up we shall find ourselves in our beds in our native cities upon the Earth. Do, for Heaven’s sake, my good sir, get into your head that you are the only one here in your normal body! I know that you can touch us and that we can touch you and talk to you as I am doing now; but do please remember that we are only dreaming about you, whereas to you, who are not dreaming, we seem real people, not the shadowy phantoms that we actually are.'

'I can't believe,' I murmured, 'that you and I aren't equally real. It frightens me to think that we're as different as that.'

'What you don't understand,' said my friend resolutely, 'is the power of the Moon.'

Just as if she had come to prove the Truth of his words there was the Moon before us again!

She was entirely her own momentous magic. She wasn't just a goddess or a queen who inhabited a Satellite of the Earth or of the Sun. She was herself the whole of this extraordinary light. And oh! the difference between her light and the light of the Sun! The light of the Sun sometimes overpowers us by its heavenly heat, but it is always adding new life to our life, new spirit to our spirit, new happiness to our happiness. Yes, it is always pouring its incredible strength unto us, always healing us with the essence of all terrestrial life, always sharing its own celestial exultation with us and its own unspeakable power of living wholly, utterly, absolutely, abysmally in every single moment of time. It is as if the Sun by separate supreme acts of its godlike Being endowed each part of each one of us with its own outrushing energy, so that our hands, our feet, our back, our front, the brain in our head, the passion in our heart, all get the feeling that they have the power to stretch out to the uttermost ends of the universe. But oh! how different it is with the Moon. The Moon does not want to give us anything. It wants, or She wants, to fill us with longings for the impossible, for the unattainable, for desperate adventures in regions too remote ever to have been visited before. She wants to make us feel irrepressible yearnings to actually stand in the very heart of the blazing Sun, to actually sleep at rest in some undiscovered ultimate valley amid her own inaccessible mountains. She wants to make us suffer a loathing for all the familiar ways of the people we know best, for all the teasing and silly opinions of our nearest and dearest. She wants to make us hate the road from our house to our town, to detest the path from our drive-gate to our front door, to feel a sick disgust at the way our Dad munches his bread and cheese or our Mummy sips her tea.

As I saw the Moon appear again when I was discussing her captive souls with my young stone-thrower it seemed to me as though I were watching her suck up in a whirling sequence of moon-lit air-waves all the heartaches of a generation of tantalized and frustrated youngsters. Moonlight upon tree-trunks, moonlight upon tree-tops, moonlight upon far-drifting, wide-scattering, down-flowing, faith-fooling, hope-mocking Estuaries of Illusion, that is what I saw, moaning water that was for ever losing its way in a never-fulfilled craving to reach the sea.

Vaguely was I trying to transform this moment of spiritual defeat into some sort of natural, patient, unswerving, obstinate resolve to fling the turgid temptings of the Moon to the devil and just be myself and fear nobody and suppress all fits and starts. ‘Oh!’ I sighed to myself. ‘If I could only have a word with Um and Mum in the blessed Emptiness outside of Space and Time!’ For once in my fantastic life this wish of mine, the most natural wish any troubled creature could have, the wish to get in touch with its mother, was gratified. Mum’s voice reached me from the outside Emptiness. ‘Don’t get too agitated, old son,’ her voice said. ‘Your father and I are watching what’s happening.’ So those two knew what I was going through! ‘O mother,’ I cried without words, ‘so you are still there! And you both know all about me!’

Then I decided, calmly, definitely, firmly, what I would do. Whether mother and father put it into my head or not I don’t know. Perhaps they did. They often used to teach me in that way. Anyhow I decided that I would go straight back to where my fellow-travellers were and face Mo. I would tell him that I intended to oust him from his command of the ‘*Cork*’*,* as little Theophil had named our monstrous vessel, and take command of it myself. The staggering boldness of this decision nearly stunned me; but I told myself that I would have a brief talk with Thisbe first; but whether she agreed or not, I would fight Mo till one or other of us was finally done for; and, if I won, I would make the engineer take us all back to London.

I said goodbye to my friend and got his address from him, which it was a relief to me to find was not in what nowadays is called a ‘Mental Home’, but was an actual house, not very far from where little Theophil’s parents lived. Then I went to have my talk with Thisbe. As I went I realized what the love of a girl can be to a man. Her body becomes like the whole world to him. In fact he resents the use of the word ‘love’ to describe his feelings. At least that is what I felt as I hurried across those interminable green fields to reach our singular camp. I felt angry with the word ‘love’. I associated it with St Paul who *re-invented the Trinity* which Jesus had destroyed when on the Cross he cried his fatal ‘Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani?’

‘My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?’ and when I am sure he said to himself, ‘There is no God. I have prayed to him all my life as my Father, but now I know that he does not exist.’

‘Is it?’ I said to myself, ‘just the thought of my parents looking after me, or is it some magical strength that they deliberately have conveyed to me from their heavenly Emptiness beyond all this atomic space that makes me feel as I do? If this extraordinary power that I feel at this moment where Thisbe is concerned, a power to take her to the uttermost limit of space, yes and out beyond to where my parents are, a real actual power? I feel as if it is. But is it possible that it really can be?

And then it came over me that I had never, never since I left my father and mother, never since I found little Theophil and then rushing on through wall after wall and house after house came upon Thisbe, excited the full power that was in me. All I did was to collect all the people I knew and make them listen to Mo's performance. And what about my private behaviour with Mo? I had imagined him skinning me alive and eating my raw flesh with diabolic satisfaction; but did he imagine that alone? All I did with him, in any case, was to be as submissive to his wicked will as I could, with the idea no doubt at the back of my mind to lead him on to wickedness piled upon wickedness and cruelty added to cruelty. But then, as I walked back over those green fields, I did remember with a certain ironical amusement at myself that during all that imaginary torture I was not entirely free from a guilty and unpardonable *sharing with Mo* the sadistic emotion in which he was revelling at my expense. Was the mere contact with Mo, then, enough to make me share his wickedness? Did such an inexhaustible stream of sadistic cruelty stream out from Mo into the surrounding air that it doubled, trebled, quadrupled every faintest tinge of such feeling that lurked in all those who approached him? Was Lady Boomerang herself perhaps affected by it?

Yes, there was Thisbe waiting for me! Had she guessed, had she divined, what was happening in my mind? What strange things go on between a man and the girl he's in love with, or for whom, I would prefer to say, he has a mania. They know each other through and through, but in such different ways — O in such completely different ways. As differently as a Painter would know anyone compared with the knowing of a Musician! Or we could say as differently as a Chemist compared with an Ironmonger. I saw Venus the Evening Star the night after we landed. She was among the uppermost branches, or rather twigs, of a gigantic Sycamore, and I couldn't help wondering in the odd way I have whether this contact must have happened again and again as the tree grew up, and whether there had come to be a mysterious magnetic link between this far-away star and the uppermost twigs of this tree. And if so, was it with stars and trees as it is with women and men; namely that the tree felt towards the star feelings wholly different from those that the star felt towards the tree?

When I reached the camp, and rushing through it seized Thisbe and embraced her, the strange, wild, mad thought seized me that before taking her anywhere, for I knew that the power was in me to take her anywhere, the more I knew (and with all my clasping of Thisbe I never for a moment lost my hold upon 'Jane' my stick) the more I knew that I didn't want to fly straight to my parents in the land of Divine Emptiness outside Space — what I wanted to do was to fly with Thisbe to that portion of the Emptiness whence my enemy Mo had appeared.

O if only I could find Mo's parents, wouldn't I 'lam them' what wrong they had done to the Universe by producing such a Devil as Mo! I had the feeling as I held the girl tight to my heart that to take her to my mother would in some mysterious way separate us; while to take her on a sort of world-wide crusade against that incarnate Devil Mo would bring back to me the feeling I had when in London I read the Bible for the first time and told myself that I would have loved to be 'the Lord of Hosts' who helped Moses to save the Israelites from Pharaoh.

It must have been a weird experience for Thisbe to discover that her quiet-looking boy-friend had the power to fly with her through Space; and indeed I felt a tiny bit surprised at it myself but not very much, and not for very long. My precious Um-Mum, my Two-in-One father and mother, had taught me a great deal that I never realized, while they were doing it, that they were teaching me. And certainly one of the most important of these things was the power of being able to pass through anything, not only through walls and houses and rocks and ramparts but also through the air and across the sea.

‘Where are you taking me, my friend?’ Thisbe murmured at last when we had left both the Sun and the Moon behind. ‘I’m taking you,’ I answered, to the land I’ve told you about where my Mother and Father live; but not straight to them, for I want to see if I can find the parents of Mo.’

‘To fight with them, I suppose,’ whispered the discerning Thisbe. ‘It’s a pity,’ I said quietly, as we passed Orion’s Belt and moved swiftly towards the Milky Way, ‘that I didn’t dare to say goodbye to little Theophil. She’ll wonder where we both have gone.’

‘She won’t give it a thought,’ Thisbe replied. ‘Babies of that age don’t notice what people are doing unless they see them doing it.’

‘O you’re so wrong there,’ I whispered back, my voice as low as if I had been fearful that little Theophil might hear me. ‘Theophil will divine with the premonition that children of that age possess,’ pronounced Thisbe in a firm and, as I thought rather satisfied voice, ‘that you didn’t want to disturb her peace of mind by making her realize the enormous stellar journey you were taking.’

‘What she would have wanted to do,’ I said, ‘would be to have come with us! But what would poor Mrs Lockitite have felt if I had taken away her only offspring?’

‘I agree,’ said Thisbe, in a resigned but rather sad voice. ‘I guess we’ve got to consider mothers a bit. But you’re not considering *your* mother very much, are you, since you’re carrying me to the opposite end of the region where she lives?’

I became silent. The sound of such words, whose echo seemed to be following us as we rushed through Space, troubled me not a little. Was it an instinctive male superstition in me which was making me feel that before carrying my girl to visit my mother it was essential that I should achieve some undertaking worthy of the meeting of these two? It very likely was just that; but on I soared, bearing her to the end of Space.

CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS AN extraordinary experience for me and a still more startling one for my lovely Thisbe when after leaving the Sun and the Moon and the Milky Way behind we came to the border of Space. Looking back we could just see the glitter of stars, faint, faint, faint, in the remote distance; while looking forward we could see nothing, absolutely nothing. There was no sky, no sea, no land, no clouds, no mists, no vapours. And yet it was by no means dark. That would be, as I knew well, the difficult thing to describe to my London friends if ever I saw them again. But as most of my London friends were themselves experiencing a strange adventure, in being, with their houses and gardens and many feet of suburban soil, grounded on the shore of the Other Side of the Moon and now, very now, occupied in making a camp for themselves on that magic-breathing orb, while the bloodcurdling Mo, the Master and Captain of the 'Cork' as little Theophil had christened it, looked down upon all from his elevated post on the highest mast, none of them were likely to be surprised by any wonder.

I must have forgotten one thing about my home in the aboriginal Emptiness, namely the fact that it has neither the darkness of Earth's night nor the brightness of Earth's day. It has a curious atmospheric twilight that never changes or alters for a moment. There is no light of day. There is no darkness of night. The prevailing twilight is not as dark as our twilight, whether before sunrise or after sunset. It is lighter than either of those are. I had no idea that the region furthest away from where my parents lived and gave birth to me was exactly similar in this respect to ours, but so I now found it. I confess I experienced not only excitement but several spasms of sheer terror as I flew with Thisbe in my arms out of Space and into this enormity of emptiness. It is true I was distinctly conscious of faint but unmistakable waftures of endearment and encouragement from Um-and-Mum; but this sympathy on the air never for a moment enabled me to forget the horror to which I was advancing, namely to encounter face to face the parents of the Devil Mo! What would they — I mustn't say 'what on earth would they' — be like, these parents of Mo? I had not long to wait to find out. We had only just discovered that it was unnecessary for me to fly any more, if my rush through Space could be called flying, and that we could now walk side by side in the aboriginal emptiness although there was nothing to walk upon. All this was so natural to me, as I took Thisbe's hand and as we walked together, that I was a little surprised at first at the girl's hesitating step, but feeling, as I say, my parents' encouragement wafted to me from the other end of Nothingness, I was soon able to communicate my ease of mind to the girl with whom I walked. But, as I have already hinted, it was not long before the great shock came. There, suddenly, right in front of us, was a group of the most unholy figures I have ever seen. The three central ones — but there were many more — resembled my parents in the way they were connected with each other. Thisbe's hand tightened in mine and I gripped hers as tightly as I could without hurting it, and we just stood and stared. So also, very soon, did the figures in front of us, but not at once, for they were too absorbed in what they were doing to notice us quite as quickly as we had noticed them. But what a sight they were! There were three of them; but I could detect, just as with Um-and-Mum, that they were physically united; yes! they were parts of one another, like Siamese twins. It was lucky we saw them some few minutes before they saw us, for we were able to take them in, in a way that would have been impossible otherwise. And there was certainly something to see.

Before us were three monstrous creatures joined together into one appalling Being. The biggest of these creatures was evidently a male. He had an oval head and face and both these were covered with thick short grey hairs. He had one eye and one mouth, but no nose at all; and his ears were enormous and had curves like those of a shell-fish. Head, face and ears were white, and the short, thick, grey hairs that covered them looked as if they could pierce the skin of any living thing against which the creature butted. This creature had an organ of generation which kept fumbling towards a reciprocal orifice in the body of a female creature whose head and face, although totally devoid of hair, were as white as his own and possessed mouth, eye and ears of a similar appearance. The third of the creatures into which this appalling monster was divided was much smaller than the other two, but he resembled them in everything except that he was much more active. He was perpetually guiding the organ of generation of the male creature towards its proper destination; and he was also busily occupied in assisting the bowels of both male and female by certain caressing motions applied outwardly to their respective flanks to deliver themselves of excrement which took the form of small lively little Beings who as soon as they appeared began skipping about and displaying a terrific zest for life. It was these little Beings, composed of the excrement of both the male and female creatures but acting like little men and women absorbed in dancing a complicated dance, who proved to be the first topic of the inevitably hostile exchange that took place between us.

‘Not a step nearer, you two, or I’ll charge at you and butt you to death! Don’t you see that our darling little Titterly-tidlings are dancing their “cry-and-run” dance? Where have you come from, you two, and what do you want here? If our son Moloch were here he’d soon eat you up! But my wife Gobba, and I King Glomp, have to be careful what we eat. What goes in and what comes out is the great question with us. You two, I can see, are ambassadors from some other world, some Space-world I expect, for you've both got that restless, unhappy, unsatisfied, unfulfilled, uncompleted Space-look. Perhaps you've come here hoping to be eaten up? Have you? Have you? But it will be necessary to trample you to death first. For Gobba and I will have to spice you and slice you and sludge you and nudge you and wudge you and cudge you very delicately before we two, King Glomp and Queen Gobba, can decide how far we can go. O if only our son Moloch were here! He would be much less fussy, wouldn't he, Gobba? Wouldn't he, Lob-lottery? Wouldn't he, you darling little Titterly-tidlings?'

Thisbe and I couldn't help exchanging a quick glance when we heard the name of the busy inaugurator of human-shaped excrement, and of the lively little persons thus evoked; and I felt I had to say something. 'How long, your Majesty,' I enquired, 'will these little Titterly-Tidlings live?'

This question must have angered King Glomp considerably for he made a motion as if to bend his bristly head and rush at us, but the all-seeing Lob-lottery stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. So far I have only spoken of the upper portion of Glomp's body with its three heads and six arms and three white faces, but to complete the spectacle that one day I pray I'll live to describe to Um-and-Mum when I go to present Thisbe to them, I must speak of his stomach and legs. These were as hairy as his head and they were as white as his three faces, if I may regard his wife Gobba and their lively triad Lob-lottery, both such independent creatures, as living parts of him, but they were like the legs of a man, not of a bull or a gorilla, and his feet were exactly like the feet of a man, only much larger. They were in fact so large as to be out of all proportion to his height, but not of course to his size, as we have to consider Queen Gobba and Help-mate Lob-lottery. What made it so very difficult to rush at King Glomp with 'Jane' my big-handled stick, was the presence of those little Titterly-tidlings who, though their bodies were composed of the monster's excrement, had such darling little faces and such lovely little bare arms and bare legs, that whatever you might feel about their origin it was impossible not to feel gentle to them as they were now and unwilling to give them the shock of seeing their Lord attacked.

'I expect we'd better depart,' murmured Thisbe. 'I suppose we must,' I replied, trying to focus my attention on the Titterly-tidlings and trying to avoid looking at Glomp or Gobba or Lob-lottery.

It was then that I had the most decisive experience of my life. It was then that I heard, without any doubt or any question as to its authenticity, the voice of Um-and-Mum. It wasn't just a wafted sound or a vibratory motion of the air. It was their voice or their voices just as their help, advice, instruction, affection used to surround me when I lived with them. Then I realized that being as I was now in the Ultimate Emptiness, beyond all Space and all its lives and atoms, the presence of Um-and-Mum as near as the folk in London are near to the folk in their next-door dwelling, was quite natural. 'What is it, father?' I said. 'What is it, mother?' I said. And what do you think they told me? They told me that Mo had taken the whole convoy of passengers that he and his inspired engineers had brought to the other side of the Moon and had steered them back to the Earth and to London from whence they had come. But they added that they wished to warn me — sad though it was to them to tell this since I had not brought my girl-friend to see them — that Mo was now perpetually petting and cuddling little Theophil and they feared that he would have so beguiled her mind on the journey that when he got her back to London he would proceed to ravish her and probably to strangle her. 'Even at this distance,' they concluded, 'we can read his thoughts, *because he was born in Emptiness,* and if you want to save that child you must stop thinking about seeing us till much later when you will, we both hope, have finished off this horrible Mo for good and all.’

CHAPTER XIV

I FAITHFULLY RELATED to Thisbe as we turned our backs on King Glomp and Queen Gobba and their help-mate Lob-lottery and those lovely little Titterly-tidlings made out of excrement, all that my parents had told me. After a brief lowvoiced colloquy between us it was decided that we must give up attempting to see my parents on this trip and fly as fast as possible to the other side of the Moon to make sure that nobody had been left behind; and if there was nobody there, make our way as fast as possible to London to save Theophil from the clutches of Mo.

There *was* nobody left on the other side of the Moon and I didn't even catch sight of the new friend I had made there, at which I felt relieved, for I hoped when I next saw him it would be upon Earth. So then we flew on; although I had Thisbe in my arms I managed to fly so fast that we actually reached London before the '*Cork*' arrived. It was then that I clasped 'Jane' by her horny handle which must have been like the curved horns of a baby-stag and set out with Thisbe ta my side, for the air-port where this astonishing vessel would — I can hardly say 'land' but *be grounded* at the outskirts of the usual landing place.

I was so much in love with Thisbe and I had reached such a point of identity with her that I felt as if we had lived together for a thousand years. It was quite a different emotion from any of the ordinary surges and urges and purges of sexual passion. She felt everything through my feelings for people and things and I felt everything through her feelings for people and things. In fact I've often thought, although I can't remember any actual case of its happening so, that in my dreams when I am sleeping alone I must sometimes imagine that I am the young man Um and sometimes imagine that I am the young girl Thisbe.

In my mind as we now walked slowly along the edge of the waterfront throbbed the question of how we could permanently rescue little Theophil from Mo. ‘Only by death,’ I kept saying to myself. ‘Only by killing the fellow.’

And the thought came to me as I pondered on the question as to *how* I would kill him, that it would be silly to do it with a sword or a gun, as I should then be arrested by London policemen, put into prison and probably be condemned to be hanged.

‘I think the best thing to do,’ I said to Thisbe, ‘would be to persuade Mo, in some way or another, to enter a row-boat with us, and then when once we’d got some distance from shore, to upset the boat and drown the devil! I’m taking for granted, my dear, that you can swim. Am I right there?’

‘Oh yes!’ she replied. ‘I can swim all right. I learnt when I was eight or nine in the Isle of Wight. But if we get too far from the shore we may all drown.’

‘Well, my dear,’ was my comment on that remark, ‘you and I might do worse than to die saving Theophil from Mo.’

Thisbe pressed my arm and said no more. We were however by this time getting near the place where the ‘*Cork*’ would ground her keel and her passengers disembark; and I said to Thisbe, ‘What about hiring a boat now before the “*Cork*” arrives, so that we can have it ready? It must be about noon by now. We might hire it for the afternoon.’ Thisbe pointed at a couple of fishermen who were emptying a small boat of their latest catch. I went straight up to them and asked them whether they would lend me their boat for a couple of hours as I wanted to take someone who was arriving in rather a queer vessel a little distance from the proper landing stage for a row. ‘I’ll bring it back in a couple of hours — three at the most —,’ I told them, ‘and I’ll pay in advance if you like.’

They exchanged a glance at this last remark. And after a moment’s colloquy they named the sum, which I immediately handed over to them, and Thisbe and I stepped into the boat which was very dirty and smelt very strongly of sea-weed and dead fish. There were two pairs of oars, but I made Thisbe sit at the helm and steer, while I seized one pair and placed the others carefully under the two seats. It was not long before we were out in deep water, a good distance from the ordinary landing stage, and as close as we thought it wise to be, to some planks and posts along the water’s edge, near the place where we expected the ‘*Cork*’ to descend.

For once in my life I had judged correctly. We had hardly waited there for a quarter of an hour when we saw the monstrous vessel descending.

Its appearance in the air, before it was nearly down, had already attracted quite a crowd; some of whom were talking excitedly to one another, gesticulating with their hands, nodding and shaking their heads, while others were staring upwards and pointing upwards. Thisbe let her hands, still holding the helm, subside into a less agitated grip, while I pulled in my pair of oars till they were crossed in front of my chest. Then we two lifted our heads and looked up.

Down came the ‘*Cork*’ -, and we could clearly see the figure of Mo walking up and down the top deck and every now and then leaning over the rail and looking down, and then quickly straightening his back, lifting his head, and shouting his orders.

Then, while we were both of us standing erect near each other, in the centre of the boat, the ‘*Cork*’ had grounded; and down a long, broad landing plank all the passengers hurried, to be greeted with acclamation by the people who had come to welcome them. I would have found it vastly entertaining to watch them all leading, led by Lord and Lady Boomerang, if I had not had Mo so fatally on my mind. What I was clutching now was not an oar. It was my stick ‘Jane’.

They all came with a wild rush, just as if, which was of course what they had done, they had descended from the sky. Poppity Pipstick with Tickly Duck came first after the Boomerangs. Then came Colonel Katterventicle and Professor Porpustle. Then there were Mr and Mrs Lockitite with Mo himself just behind them carrying little Theophil in his arms. The child kept turning round and asking her mother something, a ‘something’ which, as I listened, seemed to have to do with Mo. It was probably to ask her whether Mo might carry her home. Then came Mr and Mrs Runnerini, followed by Mrs Cloddie Smith and Jane Fixem, and last of all came Charlotte Wiggle and Lullaby Skim, followed by a couple of obviously flirtatious engineers who from what I could catch as the two girls turned to speak to them, had already got permission to see them home.

As soon as they were all on shore I called loudly to little Theophil. ‘Come in our boat, my dear!’ I cried. Mr Mo can carry you! We’ll take you both!’ The little girl recognized me at once, and as I expected the sight of the boat excited her and she pulled at Mo’s collar to make him obey us. I took off my cap to Mrs Lockitite, who glanced at Thisbe with obvious relief, feeling that her little girl would be safe with her; and after a few words with each other the two Lockitites waved to their little daughter and went off.

So now the supreme moment of my life had come. We were all four in the fisherman’s boat, Thisbe and Theophil and Mo and I; and Thisbe and I leapt to our feet. It was all over with amazing speed. Thisbe and I by desperately trampling on the side of our boat managed, as we had hoped, to tip it over. The water was deep. I snatched the child, as we did this, from

Mo’s arms. The boat turned upside down and we were all in the water. ‘Where is Mo?’ I gasped, holding little Theophil’s head above the water, and swimming with both legs, while with the thumb of the hand that held up the child I still clutched my stick, ‘Where’s MO?’

‘He’s gone down,’ stammered Thisbe. ‘O try to hold her higher!’ At the words ‘gone down’ I could feel a sobbing in that little three-year-old throat; and as I carried her up our beach with Thisbe at our side I remembered — though how I had found out I had completely forgotten — that Mo couldn’t swim.

It was only six months later that Thisbe and I were married, with little Theophil, aged four, as her bridesmaid and Professor Porpustle giving her away. I had even managed to persuade Colonel Katterventicle to be my Best Man. And during the whole ceremony I seemed to hear the combined voices of Um-and-Mum giving us their blessing.

Three Fantasies (1985)

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Topsy-Turvy

1

THE GREY ARMCHAIR gazed across the little room at the Brown Armchair. They were in opposite corners; the grey one in the south corner and the brown one in the north corner of the room.

‘Whirlwind and Whirlpool have left us quiet today,’ said Mr Grey Armchair.

‘I don’t think it’ll last long,’ replied Mrs Brown Armchair, ‘I seem to feel a certain motion of air coming in through the sides of the window.’

‘I hope,’ said Mr Grey Armchair, ‘that they won’t carry Topsy way again. I don’t at all like seeing her whirled down our little square and carried over the wall into the green field. And it must be awful for Turvy. I saw him make a queer jerk when it happened last time just as he was going to shut the door.’

‘He can’t shut the door you know,’ said Mrs Brown Armchair, ‘because it won’t shut after all those frantic jerks he once made to try and hold her back. It sort of closes, but it has never shut properly since then.’

‘Poor Turvy!’ sighed Mr Grey Armchair. ‘How queer life in our room is! If it weren’t for these visits of Whirlwind and Whirlpool we’d be fairly happy. Of course we never can be perfectly happy because of our own different views of things; but how quaint it is that we should all have souls that can move about and go away and return! Life in our room is indeed a strange thing. How it began we have no idea. How it will end we have no idea. Well, I suppose we must take it as it comes; but I can’t help being sorry for Turvy when Topsy is in danger of being carried off, or at any rate when he thinks she is.'

'But don't you understand, you two silly old Armchairs,' said the Rocking-Chair that was under the picture of a Little Girls' Party which bore the name of Topsy and close to the door-handle which bore the name of Turvy, 'that it needs more experience of the Universe outside this little room of ours than either of you two have had, to understand these games of whirlwinds and whirlpools. I must have told you both thousands of times already that I, who was created in America out of materials purchased in New York City, am not in the least disturbed by the wild behaviour of these two lovers, one the soul of a pretty little picture and the other the soul of a jerky black door-handle. I was brought over here on a three-decked liner, so I know much more about the Great World outside this tiny little room than either of you do. And so, I warrant, you do also,' the Rocking-Chair went on, addressing the Carpet under all their feet which had come from Bokhara.

'I do! I do! I do!' cried the Carpet in a shrill little voice that sounded like the combined voices of a dozen baby mice. 'I know much more than those silly old Armchairs!'

It was at this moment that the great white Book-Case, with its six shelves full of books reaching from floor to ceiling, saw fit to intervene.

'What all you lively and quarrelsome folk seem to have quite forgotten,' the Book-Case announced, with its books from floor to ceiling supporting it, 'is that no one, in any civilized house in this country, can argue sensibly about pretty little pictures and competent door-handles, least of all a rocking-chair from New York City, without a deep and subtle knowledge of our Literature, especially of our Poetry, and of our famous translations of the Literature and Poetry of the ancient world. What do you say, Lemprière?' The great white Book-Case paused for a moment. 'What do you say, Aristophanes?' The top shelf shook as the BookCase uttered the first name, and the second shelf shook as it uttered the second name. Then, descending to its third shelf, it uttered in a still more creaking tone: 'What do you say, Walt Whitman?' Then, descending to the fourth shelf, Landor was called upon. At the fifth shelf Lady Charlotte Guest was implored to say something; and finally from the lowest shelf of all, nearly touching the floor, an American History of all the Red Indian tribes was called upon to lift up its voice; which it did with a vengeance, making the whole room rattle.

During this noise little Topsy slipped back into her place above the Rocking-Chair and whispered to Turvy. 'Don't 'ee mind, darling! I didn't let Whirlwind carry me as far as it wanted to. It wanted to carry me to where Whirlpool was waiting to swallow me up. But I was too clever for the wicked old whoremonger. I pretended I wanted to take off some of my clothes before being swallowed up, but I said I was too shy to do it before anybody, so I begged to be allowed to go into that little wood called Bushes Home. But once there of course I skedaddled, and soon got into Wash Lane and over the wall into our Turnstile Corner.'

The Rocking-Chair, whose head nearly touched the tiny little picture of a children's Party, which was the bodily presence of Topsy, thought to itself, as it glanced sideways at the now complacent Door-Handle, who was contentedly keeping the cantankerous door closed: 'I must send my soul jockeying out, along with old Bottom-Step tomorrow, and visit the chimney-top, across Turnstile Corner where Whirlwind's nest is. I have a sort of idea that if I gave that whirligig this bit of red braid that's always coming off when I scratch my back I might be permitted to be present at the swallowing of Topsy by Whirlpool. Nothing, oh nothing, would give me greater satisfaction than to see Topsy go down Whirlpool's throat. Oh how angry that little chit of a starveling makes me feel when I see her playing at being pretty till that idiot of a Turn-Handle grows crazy as he dotes upon her. He's a decent little blackguard in himself but why can't he see what we all think of that little bitch?' Sure enough when tomorrow came and it was about twelve o'clock midday and every soul in the little room upstairs was thinking of what it would do or pretend it was doing that afternoon, the soul of the Rocking-Chair clattered down the nine steps that led to Sideboard's parlour and Big Doll's and Little Doll's matrimonial bed.

'Ready to come out for a bit, Bottom-Step?' he said to the physically rather ponderous and mentally rather fuddy-duddy gentleman in question.

'Well,' responded the Step thoughtfully, 'it might make a fellow feel more comfortable. All right, I'll come!'

The nest of these two vast Whirlabouts was at the top of a tall chimney at Turnstile Corner, just opposite the House with Nine Steps; and as the soul of Bottom-Step lumbered along behind the soul of Rocking-Chair they raised their eyes to this tall chimney. Yes! Both Whirlwind and Whirlpool were wallowing in their wayward thoughts. As they wriggled round each other in the watery nest they had made for themselves from the warped windpipe of a dying wizard, Mrs Whirlwind was saying to Mr Whirlpool, 'I feel sure, my dear, I'll be able to get you another chance of swallowing Topsy, and if Turvy's after her I'll have a go at him myself next time.'

'A nice day, you two!' said the Rocking-Chair, looking up.

'All well at home I hope?' said Mrs Whirlwind.

'Our old Turnstile Corner gets quite a deal of traffic, don't it, these days,' said Mr Whirlpool. 'How are you feeling, friend Bottom-Step?'

'Ask them,' whispered the soul of the Rocking-Chair to the soul of the Bottom-Step, 'at what time of day would they have the easiest fling at this little bitch Topsy.'

'In case,' said the dunder-headed Step, 'we happened to be taking Topsy for a walk, what would be the time of day that you'd like most to greet her?'

Mrs Whirlwind whispered something to Mr Whirlpool to which he responded with an ogrish grin. 'My husband says about six in the evening,' Mrs Whirlwind replied. 'But, of course,' she went on 'in our small world nothing goes always quite according to any arranged plan.'

'They're thinking,' whispered old Bottom-Step to his companion, 'that however well we time it there's always a chance that the wench may slip off as she did before.'

'Well, we'll bring her to greet you about six, just as you say,' concluded the Rocking-Chair.

In her parlour Mrs Sideboard Chest-of-Drawers was contemplating Big Doll and Little Doll as they talked together sitting on their bed, which Master Big Doll had just assisted Missy Little Doll in making very tidy. They had slept late, or rather Master Doll had slept till ten; and from ten to twelve till Rocking-Chair came ncketty-cricketty down the nine stairs, they had been talking together while they made their bed tidy. Big Doll had been telling Little Doll about their first night together in Mrs Sideboard Chest-of-Drawers' parlour, when he had explained to her that he never would ravish her because he didn't want to have the anxiety their having children. 'When a Man-Doll as big as me,' he had told her, 'makes a Girl-Doll as little as you bear him children their tiny dolls become a great responsibility; whereas if Man-Doll and Girl-Doll just enjoy sleeping together without his ravishing her their life remains very happy and is free from all responsibility.'

'But perhaps,' Girl-Doll had replied, 'I should enjoy having a Baby Doll.' And at that reply, Man-Doll or Big-Doll remained silent while Girl-

Doll or Little-Doll gave vent to several deep sighs.

Neither of them had realized that Mrs Sideboard Chest-of-Drawers was listening to their conversation as she reposed at a height half-way to the ceiling, while their bed was so low that it was near to the floor.

‘Why was I so foolish,’ thought Mrs Sideboard-Chest-of-Drawers to herself, ‘as to adopt these kids when I came as a widow to this tiny house? Suppose they *had* decided to have a baby-doll what in heaven’s name would I have done then? They wouldn’t have known how to look after it and if it had died like my poor Tiny-Stool I should have perished with remorse.’

It was then that the great white Book-Case began addressing the King-Book in each of its six shelves:

‘What do you say, Lemprière?

‘What do you say, Aristophanes?

‘What do you say Walt Whitman?

‘What do you say, Landor?

‘What do you say, Lady Guest?

‘What do you say, Red Indians?’

The speeches which all the six celebrities uttered were so vigorous that it was impossible for the Book-Case that contained them to disentangle one from another, till finally the war-whoops of the Red Indians drowned them all.

‘I don’t wonder,’ said Mr Grey Armchair to Mrs Brown Armchair, ‘that our gold-headed Poker in the grate here is getting agitated by all this fuss. I saw him stand up straight just now, didn’t you, and begin to move, as if he would cross our fireplace from your side to mine.’

‘No,’ replied Mrs Brown Armchair, ‘I was so deafened myself by all this hullabaloo that I didn’t notice. Yes! by Saint Bartholomew you’re right! He’s clear across now and quite close to you! Look! Look! He’s coming back to my side again! What’s this you’re up to? Don’t you remember when I was little and Mother first got you I called you Excalibur because you made me think of King Arthur’s sword? Mother reminded me of that story the last time she was here. I couldn’t say Excalibur then, I called him Exy. Goodness! Where are you off to now, Exy?’

Both Armchairs jerked themselves a little forward, for to their astonishment they actually beheld Exy go thump, thump, thump, across the front of the great White BookCase till it reached the space of about a yard between BookCase and Door-Handle. Here it stopped and looked up at Topsy, the Picture just about a couple of feet above its head. It must have trodden into some slit in the Carpet at this point, for it remained happily balanced where it was, staring up at the Picture.

‘Isn’t it queer, my dear, that we should all have souls in this little world of ours?’ said Mrs Brown Armchair to Mr Grey Armchair. ‘I know we have, not only because of that day when we both went downstairs to see what the Doll’s Parlour on the ground-floor was like, but because the souls of Topsy the Picture and Turvy the Door-Handle have gone downstairs just now. I could feel their souls going with my soul, couldn’t you with yours?’

Mr Grey Armchair nodded; and then he added, ‘and not only their souls but the soul of your little Exy after them! His body may have got caught in the Carpet but his soul like that of old John Brown in the song goes marching on.’

‘There are souls, I suppose,’ said Mrs Brown Armchair, ‘in every material thing in the whole world. And the whole world itself,’ continued Mrs Brown Armchair, ‘has probably got a soul of its enormous own, as conscious of itself as the souls of Earth, Sun, Moon, and Stars are conscious of themselves; and I certainly from the deepest depths of my soul believe that one day, perhaps thousands upon thousands of years away, all the different souls in the entirety of infinite space will approach one another and join together in a universal Celebration of Soul-Life.'

While these prophetic talks went on between the two Armchairs a very different sort of conversation was going on between Big Doll and Little Doll as they sat upon their bed, side by side. They spoke in so low a voice, though it wasn't exactly whispering, that neither Mr Grey Armchair nor Mrs Brown Armchair could hear what they were saying.

'Why have you been so sad lately, my precious little one?' said Big Doll to Little Doll. 'I've noticed this sadness in you ever since the night I decided not to rape you. Do you want to be raped, my darling?'

'Of course not,' replied Little Doll. 'I know it hurts terribly to be raped. The Kitchen-Cupboard over there told me that it made a girl cry till she screamed, it hurt so much. But he also told me, long before I decided that I would agree to sleep with you, that it was the only way to have a baby unless you went to a hospital to be artificially and scientifically raped; and nothing would induce me to do that, I am terrified of hospitals.'

'I don't want a child,' said Big Doll. 'You are the only child I'll ever love. Gee whizz! Why, my precious, we might have a child who was a reincarnation of some monstrous ancestor whose delight was to go about ravishing, killing and eating up little boys and girls, an ancestor like Bluebeard! Oh how awful that would be! Or we might have a child that was so seraphically pure-minded and angelic that it would regard with horror and loathing the very thought that its parents had been sexually attracted to each other and had gone through the process that produces children.'

'But I want a baby! Oh how I want a baby! Take me! Take me! O Bibabug! Bibabug! I do want a baby so!'

'Well you can't have one, Sillysuck, you just can't have one! I've got a horror of ravishing a little girl as sweet as you. I simply couldn't do it! It would be to me just what going to a hospital is to you. I refuse to do it. Surely we can be happy, loving each other and playing together, like we do, I with my what-do-you-call-it, and you with your what-do-you-call-it, both deliciously excited and tossing up and down, without going to this awful extreme of rending your virginity and making it bleed. I couldn't do it, I tell you. I've a horror of doing it.'

Sillysuck gave vent to a sigh so deep that it made her shiver from head to foot; and for a moment she thought in her heart, 'Suppose I let somebody else rape me, couldn't we both pretend that Bibabug had done it?' Big Doll heard this sigh; but if anybody had told him that Little Doll had actually for a moment considered the possibility of somebody else ravishing her he wouldn't have believed it. He would have even said to the Holy Ghost, if It had told him, 'You are a bloody liar!'

2

'Two days have gone by, haven't they, dearest, since we talked about that little girl Topsy who fooled us so?'

Thus spake Mrs Whirlwind to Mr Whirlpool as they sat in their nest in the top of the chimney on the house at the end of Turnstile Corner, just where the road curved round.

'Yes,' replied Mr Whirlpool, 'I've about given up all hope of swallowing that sweet morsel. Besides, after her narrow escape, isn't it extremely unlikely that she'll run such a risk again?'

'But you see, my dear,' said Mrs Whirlwind, 'that child Topsy has got a brother or a lover, or perhaps both-in-one, called Turvy who is a very spirited lad, so I have been told, and you know the confidence girls have in boys. Of course they are wrong to have such confidence, because, as anybody knows who has watched such a pair from our nest up here, it's the other way round; I mean it’s the boy who ought to have confidence in the girl, for all girls are much wiser than all boys.’

‘That’s my old gal’s mistake,’ thought Mr Whirlpool as he settled down comfortably in their chimney-top nest, telling himself that when he was digesting that sweet little morsel of a tender maid it would be easier than usual to admit in words to his formidable wife that he was wrong and she was right.

How are you two this cold evening?’ came a voice from below. They both looked down and there was the soul of the New York Rocking-Chair beneath them, looking up with what seemed quite a friendly interest in his dark eyes.

‘We are both very warm in our nest,’ replied Mrs Whirlwind. ‘We’ve got a splendid little Electric Heater up here that keeps us warm among our chimney-pots on the coldest nights. Won’t you come up, good sir, and sit here with us tor a bit? We know well who you are, for my husband and I have lived here since our marriage nearly half a century ago; and we know everybody round here.’

The soul of the Rocking-Chair muttered ‘Thank you very much. I will indeed come.’ Up he went and crouched down between them over their tiny Electric Heater. ‘O this is delicious,’ he gasped after an agreeable silence. ‘May I ask where you two came from before you settled here?’

‘We’ll soon tell him all we know about that, won’t we, hubby darling,’ said Mrs Whirlwind, delighted to see the pleasure with which the soul of the Rocking-Chair from New York crouched down over the little Electric Heater in their nest at the top of the tall chimney. ‘Well! My husband and I were born in Derbyshire, in a deep cave in the rocks above the River Dove. My husband was born in one cave and I was” born in another. As children we used to wander quite far among the crevices and defiles of a particular district of the Pennines and we used to play at being grownup married people with children of our own. There were the minnows and sticklebacks and newts and tadpoles that we found in the streams and kept in glass jars that we called aquariums.'

'Oh yes!' cried the soul of the Rocking-Chair, 'in the room on the ground floor of the house from which we come, the room nine steps down from the room which was my home, there is a kitchen cupboard full of precious things to eat. The cover of this cupboard used sometimes to fall off by its own weight, which was always a terrible distress to our Aunt Emma who looked after it. On the top of this cupboard there was a shelf up and down which Dick Turpin used to ride.' The soul of the Rocking-Chair was interrupted at this point by King Arthur's sword Excalibur, as the Brown Armchair and the Grey Armchair always allowed their golden-handled Poker to call himself. He had extricated himself from the hole in the Carpet where he had got stuck and had come thump, thump, thump, thump, down the nine steps from the room at the top.

'What are you doing up there?' cried the soul of the Poker to the soul of the Rocking-Chair.

'What the devil is that to you?' cried the soul of the Rocking-Chair in reply.

'They don't understand the Philosophy of Life, these things from the top room,' whispered Mrs Whirlwind to Mr Whirlpool. 'I think it comes from their living indoors like they do, instead of living out-of-doors as we do. You wait, hubby dear, till the souls of Topsy and Turvy come out of their house and walk to our end of Turnstile Corner! You shall have then, I swear to you, hubby darling, that sweet morsel of a girl to swallow, who escaped from us last time.'

‘But may there not be,’ said Turvy, ‘some mysterious Destiny talk about something that was called “Another Dimension”. Don’t you think, my treasure, that this is what it is, Another Dimension? I hope none of those people from our upper room will follow us here and I hope still more that that Whirlwind couple won’t come, or anybody from the ground floor room.’

‘I don’t believe they will!’ gasped Topsy, her voice quivering with excitement, alarm, love, wonder and bewilderment. Moved by an irresistible impulse they both simultaneously turned round to look back. No! there was clearly no possibility of anyone following them for the vast rock-pillars of adamantine stone between which they had come had joined together as if some colossal superhuman hands had united them. Behind Topsy and Turvy there was nothing but an unbroken, stupendous Pamphylian precipice whose top was lost in mist.

3

They both hurried on, thankful beyond words that after the turmoil of their life they were alone and together, however much-awed and thunderstruck by what they saw around them. Their path dissolved at once into what they saw. It was evidently only a kind of invitation from what they saw to enter into it and become part of it. What they saw around them was simply a mass of moving clouds, clouds that curved and curled and quivered and caracoled and circled and collapsed. The extraordinary thing about these clouds was that you could walk upon them! Yes! They had enough substance in them to hold a person up and enable a person not only to tread upon them but to lie down upon them. But Topsy and Turvy had not moved very far through this lively circus of encircling clouds before they looked at each other in bewildered astonishment. They were not alone! In every direction around them they beheld other human forms. The soul of Topsy, though her personality in their upstairs room had been a picture of little girls dancing, had taken care to clothe herself, when she went out with her lover, in appropriate and conventional girls' clothes. Turvy also, chough he knew that his real self was the black handle of a creaky door, had seen to it that his soul wore the proper attire of a spirited young man going out into the world. He carried a hat and a stick, while Topsy carried a dainty brightly-coloured umbrella. It can be easily believed therefore that they were both staggered and utterly bewildered by what they saw around them. What they saw was an immense number of entirely naked men and women, people of all ages who were talking together in pairs or in groups or just quietly reclining upon clouds with an air of comfortable negligence. One of the pairs they were looking at came towards Topsy and Turvy as soon as they caught sight of them. This naked couple seemed about their own age. They approached them, smiling, and Topsy was rather shocked by the crudeness of Turvy's greeting.

'Who are you?' were his words.

'You have heard of us,' the naked girl answered with a bewitching smile, 'for our love for each other has been carried by poets and musicians all round the world.'

'Please tell us your names, oh beautiful ones,' said Topsy as persuasively as she could, thinking in her heart, 'I do pray Turvy won't be rude again.'

'How is it,' said the male partner of the pair, 'that you are both dressed? We are all taught in this paradise that it is bad manners and unkind to the clouds to confront them with dressed-up finery.'

'If one of you will tell me who you are, my friend, I will tell you who we are,' said Turvy.

‘Don’t talk like that, Turvy. Our names, Lady, our names, Sir, are Topsy and Turvy. I am a Picture from the upper room of our house, and my friend here is the Handle of the Door to our nine steps down. We will tell you all about ourselves and about the other things in our room upstairs, if you will be so kind as to tell us who you two are.’ Once more it was the beautiful naked girl who spoke, while her handsome companion glared at them offensively. ‘We are Dido and Aeneas,’ she said. ‘I am the Queen of Carthage and this person comes from the Greek army which is besieging Troy. His mother is the Goddess Venus-Aphrodite and his father’s name is Anchises. Come, Aeneas. The names of this pair are Topsy and Turvy. Their names, from what I have learnt of foreign languages, signify tumbling upside-down. They had no idea where they were when they entered cloud-land and still less when they asked us so roughly who we were. May I suggest,’ Dido went on, still addressing her words to Topsy, for she clearly held the Amazonian conception of the sexes, namely that in wisdom and intelligence and value to the human race, women were infinitely more important than men, ‘that we lour sit down tor a while on this cloud that is now between us, and then we can discuss all these things in quiet and peace. It is hard to think calmly and express our thoughts calmly when on the move. Our thoughts follow our motions. We notice a lot but we are too absorbed in what we see to philosophize about anything.’

Topsy glanced at Turvy whose face suggested no displeasure at Dido’s idea; and they all four, Topsy and Turvy in their clothes and Dido and Aeneas stark naked, sat down upon the cloud, as they might have done upon a bench.

‘What,’ enquired Aeneas, ‘would you say was your most difficult philosophical problem in connection with this human life which it is our destiny to live?’

This question was plainly addressed to Turvy, but Topsy replied. ‘I can tell you my chief difficulty at once.’

‘What is it? Do tell us,’ said Dido.

‘Well, I can’t understand how our souls are so different from our bodies. My body is a little picture of a Children’s Party. My friend’s body is a Door-Handle. Now what would my soul look like if I were to see it in a Mirror? And what would the soul of my friend look like if we were to see it in a Mirror?’

‘I think we can help you here,’ replied Dido. ‘Don’t you think we can, Aeneas? You see, my dear friends, the soul of a thing is not quite like the soul of a person simply because a thing is different from a person. A thing is inanimate whereas a person is animate. But a thing is a thing, just as a person is a person; and as a person propels and ejects an image of himself or herself into the mind of every observer, so every inanimate thing projects an image of itself into the consciousness of everyone who observes it. These images or replicas or embodiments of the body — be it a rock or a beach or a tract of sand — possess all the consciousness that the body ever had. The human race and the whole race of animals tend to be jealous of the power of inanimates to rival them in consciousness. That is why dogs bark and cats miaow and bulls charge and mice nibble, at any statue or any picture or any image that strikes them as intruding upon their privileged position. Don’t you see, my dear children, Dido went on, ‘the fact that a Picture of Children at a Party, or a Door-Handle to a very tiresome Door, doesn’t appear to possess any surviving self or that it is impossible for an outsider to imagine such a thing as a Picture thinking to itself “I am!” or a Door-Handle saying to itself “I shall never love anything as much as I love that Picture,” doesn’t affect the truth that such inanimates have surviving selves. There are a great many things in heaven and earth, as Hamlet says to

Horatio, that we don’t dream of; and prominent among such things is the Consciousness of Inanimates. Just think for a moment what human beings have come to feel about the Mountains of the Moon and the Signs of the Zodiac, the coming and going of Rainbows, and the movements of rain and hail and thunder and lightning. All these things strike us as possessing various sorts of mysterious purposes of their own and yet we have no more idea of the nature of these purposes than they have of the nature of our human or animal intentions.’

‘But why, O wise Lady,’ enquired Topsy, ’is the soul of a Picture able to move about like I can, and the soul of a Door-Handle able to move about like my friend here can? Are the souls of all inanimates able to move about independently of their bodies?’

‘To answer that question as it deserves to be answered,’ replied the Queen of Carthage, ‘something more than the identity, as of a living self, belonging to the Inanimate of whom we speak, has to be considered. I refer to the impression made by this Inanimate upon human beings and upon animals. This impression remains in both the human and the animal mind and it is this impression which gives to the Inanimate’s own awareness of itself as an entity a prerogative or procedure.’

‘But your Majesty,’ protested Topsy eagerly, ‘doesn’t the soul possessed by a human being or by an animal, whether it survives its body’s death or not, have the appearance of the body which it represents?’

Dido and Aeneas exchanged a humorous smile. ‘I am afraid I must confess,’ said the former, ‘that people and animals are sometimes so spirited that their spirits when they escape from their bodies, whether dead or alive, have the exact look of the bodies from which they issue forth. But I confess I cannot see any resemblance to a picture of a party of children in your face, my dear; and I certainly cannot see the faintest resemblance to a door-handle in your friend's manly countenance. So we have to assume, if we treat this important subject in a really philosophical way, that all souls emanating from inanimates are compelled by some inescapable Law of Nature to take the form, not of what they display of themselves to the world around them, but of men and women. If I were asked why this is so I should answer, as I am now going to answer you, though you haven't as yet faced me with such a question, like this. I should say that ever since the creative energy in Nature succeeded in giving birth to men and women it has made use of their forms as the best example of the shape any combination of matter should take when it feels within it the faintest consciousness of personal identity. This leads me, doesn't it, Aeneas?' and she looked at her husband with a certain hesitation, if not trepidation, 'to a further important point. Does the faintest existence of such consciousness imply of necessity the fact that it must be either a masculine consciousness or a feminine consciousness? I am inclined to think it does. Yes, I am inclined to think that from the largest human or animal creature to the smallest bird or fish or reptile or insect the difference between the two sexes definitely appears.'

'But do tell us, your Majesty,' pleaded Topsy, 'at what point does any fragment of matter have a right to claim that it contains the rudiments of consciousness?'

Dido smiled at Aeneas; but he didn't smile back. Perhaps this was one of those subjects upon which male and female creatures find difficulty in taking the same view. 'I think,' said the Queen of Carthage firmly, 'that this claim generally acquires its justification from the interest shown in the fragment of matter in question by beings already possessed of human or of animal consciousness or at least of a strong amount of it. You often see dogs sniffing and harrying such a fragment of half-conscious matter; and you know how little girls feel its existence in their dolls who to them are like their babies. Men with artistic instincts frequently become aware of an element of consciousness in the carvings, the statues, the pictures they admire, and sometimes even in the instruments they habitually use in the creation of these things, such as carving-tools and paintbrushes. And this is obviously especially true in the case of musical instruments such as flutes and harps, violins and guitars, harpsichords and pianos. You must remember my dears that there is a creative energy running through all the creatures of the universe. How absurd to deny, for instance, a vein of actual consciousness to all the carvings and pictures of great artists. The hand that created them has handed on its own inherent life to what it has created.'

'But please, your Majesty, do tell us how things like the little Picture which is I and the little Door-Handle which is Turvy can have a soul like the soul of a man or the soul of a woman, distinct and separate enough to go out and about quite independently of the body we leave behind and not associating itself with that body at all?'

'Your souls,' replied Dido, 'are, as I have just told you, shaped like the shape of a human being. When I look at you, Topsy, now, or at your friend, Turvy, now, I see a human form. Your two faces and the expression on each of them, have nothing to do with the picture you represent or the door-handle your friend represents. Those two things, in their disparate identities are simply the dwellings in which you live. If I were to strike you it would not be in the least like striking a picture nor if I were to strike your friend would it be in the least like striking a door-handle.'

'But your Majesty,' protested Topsy, 'surely if I felt you hitting me, the image of the Picture which is I would pass through my mind? If I were, for instance, wandering through a great forest far away from here, I might be devoured by a lion. Would the fact that I had entirely disappeared for ever have any effect on the picture whose soul I am? Surely, your Majesty, if a thing has a soul and if that soul is devoured by a lion far away from the thing whose soul it is, the thing must feel it in some way, suffer from it in some way? Are our souls and bodies, your Majesty, so utterly different and so entirely independent of each other, that the complete destruction of one of them has no effect on the other? Look at it, your Majesty, the other way round. Suppose now, at this moment while I am talking to you, the Picture which is my body were smitten to pieces by somebody entering the room where it hangs on the wall, would I be unaffected by it and just walk on where I was walking, in complete indifference? And what, your Majesty should I feel when I came back to the room and found my body stricken to bits and lying in little pieces on the floor?'

The Queen of Carthage hesitated for two or three long moments. Then she said quietly, 'I am afraid, my dear child, that, just as you so tragically hint, there does exist this fatal difference between our bodies and our souls. The truth is, little lady, that this life of ours, wherever we are, is no joke. Of course that is exactly what lots of satirical writers have always said it was. But I disagree, and so does Aeneas — don't you Aeneas? — we both feel, as I expect not only you but your friend Turvy does too, that we have to make a definite effort of the mind to be happy. Let us lie back on Fate and let us be ready to accept Chance; but, while our soul remains in its body, both the soul within and the body without must work together so that both can be happy. Oh how afraid I was that Aeneas would forget me! Wasn't I, Aeneas? And you see, my sweet child, he didn't forget me; he came back to me and I've been happy with him ever since. It is the same with our body and our soul. But if our soul doesn't come home — for that is what our body is to our soul, it's its home — and if as you suggest, our home were broken into bits, as any house might be by an earthquake or a whirlwind, well, what is there left us to do but to find another home? Yes, to hunt about till we find some body that is as lost as we are. Then we shall become a lost soul in a lost body. But not for long! The new partners will coalesce and there will soon be the same sort of love between them as there was of old between the former pair. Am I not right, Aeneas? Though you and I have been spared this weird experience we would be able to adjust ourselves to it, wouldn't we, you to another woman and I to another man?'

It was then that Topsy and Turvy suffered a shock.

'No!' cried Aeneas, in a thundering voice, 'No! Never would I mate with anyone else. I couldn't! I wouldn't! The mere thought of it makes me feel murderous! Come along, Dido! You've talked to these children long enough! I'll tell them one thing before you go off with me; and *that* is, they'd better cast off their silly clothes and be as stark naked in this Dimension of the Truth as the rest of us are!' Thus speaking he seized Dido by the wrist and dragged her away.

Topsy and Turvy were both so disturbed by the violent behaviour of Aeneas that they remained seated on the cloud where the Queen of Carthage had been talking to them and did not dare to move. The idea of taking off their clothes was equally repugnant to both of them though they did whisper to each other that they felt rather uncomfortably warm and Turvy told Topsy that he could see drops of perspiration on her forehead. They were still in the same position upon the same cloud when they saw two very friendly-looking persons, a man and a woman, coming to speak to them. Topsy and Turvy got up politely to welcome this couple and the man said at once, 'Sit you down, my dears, and let's talk of the world from which we've come. This is my friend and Theatre-Manager, Henry Irving.

'Oh Sir: Oh Lady!' our friends cried simultaneously, making room for them both by their sides. 'We've both longed to go to London to see you, but we’ve lived a very limited life and have never had the chance,’ said Turvy.

‘You’d be surprised if we told you what we are at home,’ said Topsy. ‘But I expect,’ she went on, ‘famous people like you two have often had in your audiences, perhaps without knowing it, people with quite as simple a background as what we two have come from.’

‘It’s not what life has made of us,’ said Henry Irving, ‘but what we have made of life that counts. Miss Terry and I have seen many queer people in our time, haven’t we, Ellen? And many famous people too, and I daresay when we learn your names we shall find that you two are well known in the great world.’

‘Alas! no, great sir,’ cried Topsy rather pathetically, ‘we’ve never had any chance, either of us. My friend Turvy would have made a very good actor, I am sure of that, if you had taken him into your Company.’

‘And you a good actress, my dear,’ said Ellen Terry tenderly. ‘I can see you’ve got the most important quality for good acting.’

‘What’s that, Lady?’ enquired Turvy eagerly.

‘Well, my dear man,’ said Miss Terry ‘I think I might call it bravery! I mean the spirit to plunge into the part you’ve been given and not let shyness or nervousness or any sort of self-conscious fear hold you back from asserting yourself and expressing the feelings of the part you have to play.’

‘From what kind of background,’ enquired Henry Irving, ‘did you two come?’

‘Oh! I’ll tell you at once!’ cried Turvy. ‘When at home I am the Handle of a very creaky Door, a door that’s hard to shut. And Topsy here is a Picture painted by a little girl of a children’s dance.’

Henry Irving looked excitedly at Ellen Terry. ‘Wasn’t I telling you only yesterday, my dear, that if the old pieces of furniture in my Aunt Brodribb’s drawing-room could turn into actors and actresses the suppressed life of half a century would become vocal? These youngsters are perfectly right. There are chairs and tables and chimney-pieces and footstools in old-fashioned rooms that could make us all laugh and cry if they could only speak.'

Both Topsy and Turvy were delighted at Henry Irving's words; and Turvy asked, 'Do tell us, Master, why it is that the souls of things are so different from the bodies of things? Why is it that the souls of such a variety of things as Pictures, Handles, Cupboards, Fenders, Coal-scuttles, Pokers, Tongs, Carpets, Rugs, Chairs and Tables as well as Rocks and Stones and Chimney-tops should all have the same sort of soul, namely a soul with the image of a Man, which according to the Bible is the image of God?'

'I think,' said Irving gravely, 'that you've hit on the right track. Was not the first living creature in the Universe an amoeba in the salt sea, that "microscopic animalcule" as the Fowlers say in their Oxford Dictionary, which splits itself into two halves, each half becoming a new amoeba and thus perpetuating the amoebic race? And does not that remind us how in order to have children the man must break the virginity of the woman or else their race will die out? Only through secretive violence of this kind does humanity progress.'

Topsy was beginning to utter something that Turvy feared might offend Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, when suddenly the great Actor and his Actress were completely upset by the appearance of a big black horse with a man on its back who, like the rest of the men and women in this weird Dimension, was stark naked, galloping towards them at top speed.

'Come Ellen, come quick!' cried the great Actor, for whom evidently black horses driven out of all control by something or somebody was an untheatrical and unseemly thing. 'We must clear out of this!' And off they both ran, seeking refuge behind a large group of naked people who were listening to some sort of preacher. Our two friends stood up; and as they did so an airy cloud, full, Turvy thought, of tiny snow-white birds, plucked at their clothes and carried off everything they wore, leaving them as naked as all the other human beings in this strange Dimension of Life's Truth. As for a quick moment they looked at each other Turvy was absolutely amazed at the beauty of Topsy — he had never dreamed she was as lovely as this. Then they both made a feeble attempt to stop the Black Horse. To their surprise however a spirited girl and an athletic man and a queer old parson or priest of some sort, who were talking together, rushed forward to help them and soon brought the black steed, who turned out to be a mare, to a complete stop, while her rider slipped from her back to the ground.

'What's this?' he cried indignantly. 'Don't any of you bounders and molly-coddle shirkers know who I am? I am Dick Turpin and by Jerubbabel I'll tie the lot of ye to Squire Hazelbury's drive gate and use my whip on ye instead of on poor old Black Bess who'll probably die of jitterbugs before my next birthday.'

It was then to Topsy's and Turvy's astonishment that the gay rollicking leader of the group who had helped them to stop the mare cried, 'Who cares who you are, you bouncing blob of cat's spue! Who cares from what pigstye shittery you come, you bumbledy-blummery flap-pot!'

'Everybody knows who I am,' cried the rider, who had gathered the reins tightly in one hand while he brandished his whip in the other at those who had blocked his path. 'I am Dick Turpin and my mare Black Bess is known to all the world. How dare you meddle with me and her you bambery-bumbery set of stinkhards?'

The leader of the gang who had stopped Dick Turpin and Black Bess now came forward. The two men began belabouring each other with filthy abuse, while every now and then the sprightly young girl who clearly was the darling of these newcomers, patted Black Bess on her shoulder so tenderly that the mare turned her head towards her, heedless of her master's reins or whip. 'Don't make too much fuss, Robin Hood,' said his priestly-looking companion. 'Leave the mare to Maid Marion. She's begun to win the beast's favour already. In a little while we'll be having them both at our command and then we can decide what to do with them.'

'You shut up, Friar Tuck,' protested Robin Hood. 'Keep your sermon till we've got the fellow under control — then we'll show him where he's got off.'

'But don't you see, Robin Hood, old boy, if we don't get the Mare quiet and get his whip out of the fellow's hand, we shall never have them as we want them. Let her stay quietly with us, Master Turpin, and you yourself had better stay quietly with us too. You must understand that you have been led on by your mania for riding at top speed and overtaking coaches full of quiet folk and robbing them of every penny they've got, into the ridiculous illusion that you are the only highwayman in Britain. Let me get it now once lor all into your stupid skull that you are anything but that. By far the most successful highway freebooters this country knows are we who have now brought you to book.

I expect you are wondering' — and it certainly did look as if Dick Turpin, as he stood with one hand on Black Bess's rump and the other, from the fingers of which the whip was trailing to the ground, on the back of her saddle, was in a maze of bewilderment— 'why we don't knock you on the head at once since we are two to one. Well, I will tell you why we don't. We don't knock you on the head for good and all because it has crossed our minds that with your aid and the aid of your mare, if we joined forces, we might grow as rich as any of these damned Squire Hazelburys, whose gates we’re always passing.’

4

What Robin Hood and Friar Tuck and Maid Marion must have had in their minds from the start, when they first encountered Dick Turpin galloping up on Black Bess, was now evidently fulfilled. They *were* going to work in unison and with the full intent of becoming the most successful and the richest bandits ever yet known in our island.

But Topsy and Turvy had ceased to care how few or how many composed the gang. It was surely impossible, both our friends thought, for this Confederation of Bandits to play their part in a world that had no highways at all and where everybody was naked in a rock-a-bye ocean of drifting clouds. ‘I suppose,’ said Topsy to Turvy, ‘that they are all ghosts and that the whole thing is really a sort of catch-me-out charade among the souls of the dead.’

‘I certainly can’t imagine coaches passing down broad roads down here,’ replied Turvy, ‘and yet that mare, Black Bess, is clearly not a ghost.’

‘Let’s go away from here,’ said Topsy to Turvy, ‘I’m tired of the company of these robbers. Let’s try to find some nicer companions.’

‘Where the devil shall we go?’ said Turvy to Topsy. ‘In this damned place they’ll all be a funny lot.’

‘Let’s try any way,’ said Topsy to Turvy. ‘You never know down here, or up here, or round about here, what you may find.’

So they wandered off among the rolling clouds and the drifting naked people. Quite a long way they went. But at last they saw, not far off, two forms whose appearance attracted both of them quite a lot. One was a bearded man and the other was a youth who was clean-shaven except for a faintly outlined slight moustache. These two were talking together excitedly while the cloud beneath them acted as if it wanted to throw them off.

‘Forgive my impertinence,’ said Topsy, addressing them both in her most charming manner, ‘but do you mind our asking who you are? We have come from a house in North Wales. I am Topsy and my friend is Turvy; and the only things we’re afraid of are Whirlwinds and Whirlpools.’

‘This cloud here is called Manhattan,’ said the bearded man buoyantly, ‘but my friend here keeps talking about beautiful girls he has lost and about the places where they’re buried. I mustn’t make you jealous, sir, by praising your lady but I don’t believe I’ve ever seen in all my life on earth a more beautiful girl than you are.’ And in place of bowing or making any other conventional gesture of respect, he patted Topsy on the head as if she had been his grandchild. Topsy was delighted at such treatment which she greatly preferred to more fashionable signs of admiration, and she smiled gaily at the bearded man.

‘Oh Walt, Walt!’ expostulated his friend, ‘but you must remember that we have all got to keep up the ancient worship of beauty that has come down to us from an antiquity more ancient and more sacred than any of us know. The worship of beauty is the secret underlying inspiration of all life. It goes much deeper, it has lasted much longer than any of these exacting religions whose adherents call them old and sacred. I tell you, Walt old boy, that Baltimore in Maryland is worth a thousand of your damned Manhattan Islands. I know what I am talking about; for my unsurpassably beautiful girl has a still more beautiful Mother and I worship them both equally. I am not saying that this arrogant Mr Allan who picked me up as a kid and patronized me so condescendingly isn’t a noble or gracious personage. What I am saying is that my beautiful girl and her still more beautiful mother are the symbols and living embodiments of a tradition far older than

Christianity and far older than those Olympian gods and their pet boys and girls in Rome on the Tiber or London on the Thames or Paris on the Seine or Frankfurt on the Main. In the ancient rocks and caves of every hillside in Europe and Asia there are images of the worship of beauty that go back to a day before human history as it is recorded in written books began. Yes! go back to ages when pictures of men and women and boys and girls and beasts of the field and birds of the air recorded a worship of beauty older than all that has been written in the words of any known language or in the rhythms of any known verse. I tell you, Walt Whitman, it's all very well for you to comfort the wounded in hospitals and sit down with all the magic of your splendid manhood by sick men's beds and gather their spirits up in the guise of a new Messiah, but long before God deserted Jesus on the Cross, and long before Mohammed wrote the Koran, and long before Gautama Buddha preached to the wise the wisdom that sinks in peace into everlasting silence, the mystery of Beauty dominated human life and inspired the minds of men, women, and children as it has done ever since the amoeba in the depths of the sea split itself in two. What you don't or won't understand, you excitable old Walt, is the existence of beauty round and about us in the simplest and most ordinary things. There is beauty in the way a cupboard stands out from the wall against which it is fixed, making an extremely impressive angle. There is beauty in the way a mantelpiece supported at both ends by pillars descending to the floor, stretches across the fireplace. There is beauty about the angle between the ceiling and the walls in every room we live in, not to mention the terrifying secretiveness of each particular corner, suggestive of desperation and escape from hell. Nor is there anything more redolent of dramatic experience than a carpet, or still more than a rug, especially one from Persia or Assyria. And what armchair is there in any apartment in the world, whether with a footstool of gold from

Babylon or a footstool of ebony from Ethiopia, that does not suggest between its welcoming arms a seat for a Conqueror of Mesopotamia or a cushion for the thighs of a Cytherean Aphrodite?'

Before Walt Whitman could answer this oration on the antiquity and divinity of Beauty by Edgar Allan Poe both Topsy and Turvy broke in, 'I should like to say that in these ordinary things, like armchairs and rugs, which you are praising for their beauty there is something else much more important than beauty.'

'She means *use*, don't you Topsy?' cried Turvy excitedly. '*Use* is the important thing. I tell you it wasn't their beauty at all, whatever footstools or cushions they had, that made those armchairs you are talking about so nice. It was their *use!* I can well imagine — can't you Topsy? — an armchair with a very ugly cover that would be just as useful as any other! Surely you two gentlemen see what we mean?'

Walt Whitman gave his beard a little push forward with one of his hands and allowed his head to sway a little from side to side, as if he were following the music of some unseen instrument.

'To tell you the truth, my dear children,' he said, 'and I include you too, Edgar Poe, in what I am saying, the real secret of our lives is neither the use of things nor the beauty of things; nor is it the things themselves, even if you are talking about the scenery for a great picture with forest and fountains and mountains and the distant sea. The secret of our lives is in us, I tell you, yes! in our hearts and minds and feelings! The key to life lies in two simple words: I LIVE. It is our I, my dear children, the real deep mysterious unknowable *self* in each one of us, the self in men, women, and children, the self in animals, vegetables and minerals, the self in birds and reptiles and fishes, the self in every insect in the world, as well as the self in the sun, in the moon, in every star! I tell you, Edgar Poe, I tell you, you darling pair of lovers, the whole secret of life lies in ourselves; nowhere, nowhere, nowhere, nowhere else! These clever, inventive, scientific technicians have all manner of wonderful and miraculous secrets. But one secret they have *not* got; they have *not* got the secret of life. They can go on telling you that the beginning of life is the element from which life springs. They can tell you that it's in fire, in water, in earth, in air, in space. But they are wrong. In all elements there is Life. But Life is not the element from which it comes. *Life is consciousness.* Without consciousness there is no Life: there is only the empty house waiting for Life to fill it. The greatest oceans, the greatest mountains, are only the dwellings that Life must enter by way of consciousness. If there were not consciousness within them they would cease to exist. Yes! They would be totally unreal. They would be only *visions,* the visions of some living thing that has consciousness. You hear people talk, my children, about Mind and Matter. I tell you there are no such things! Mind and Matter are just dictionary words invented by the consciousnesses who construct dictionaries. No amount of mind could make a particle of matter, no amount of matter could make a particle of mind. They need a living Self.'

Whether it was the projected beard of Walt Whitman or the strange wild light in the eyes of Edgar Poe, there was something about the dead silence that followed the former's dissertations upon Self and Selves that caused a queer simultaneous terror to seize upon both Topsy and Turvy. And without a word to either of their famous interlocutors they just jumped to their feet and ran at top speed towards an especially dense cloud which could be seen heaving and toppling about a mile away. It didn't take them long to reach it for they were both swift on their feet; but they were surprised when they reached the cloud to find that there was a rather startling absence of naked persons in that cloud's immediate vicinity. But they quickly realized the reason. There were two crowned heads seated together at the cloud's base, with their backs against it, and as it swayed backwards and forwards their argument, which was clearly a genuine dispute, got more and more vehement.

'What you keep forgetting, you confounded Saxon,' King Canute was shouting when they came on the scene, 'is that we are both ghosts now, and that when we lived we never confronted each other in battle. It was our sons and our sons' sons who fought with each other! No, I'm not saying', the Danish monarch went on, 'that you, Alfred the Great of Wessex, weren't a good sovereign to your people; for you were. That was why I sent most of my fleet and most of my soldiers back to their homeland. I wanted to be as good a monarch of this country, of both our two countries together, as everybody told me you had been in your time. What you don't seem to realize is that there's a close link of racial blood, yes of northern blood, between our two lands; so that it became almost as easy for me to surround myself with English lords and chiefs as with rulers and captains of my own blood.'

Canute was silent for a moment. But his richly resounding voice was still echoing round them when King Alfred's deep, firm, vigorous Saxon voice made itself audible like the sound of a powerful blacksmith's hammer striking an iron anvil.

'You may say what you like; your words are but belching wind to the ears of any honest and faithful Englishman. Nearer related no doubt we are than either of us to these damned Normans and Flemings and Franks from the other side of our English Channel. But though we are nearer to each other than any of these scurvy Frenchmen, that doesn't give you the right to talk as if we lost one of our grandest opportunities to be the most dominant country between Rome and Iceland by not allowing ourselves to be permanently ruled by Danes. Shall I tell you, you boastful and overbearing ghost of what could not be, cannot be, and will not be, what is the best embodiment of the voice of destiny uttering the true prediction and predestination? I tell you, you arrogant claimer of that to which you know you have no right, it is the universal voice of young students of our history in the schools of our land; and it is from there that the rumoured legendary voices reach us still murmuring of how Canute warned his courtiers that he could not command the sequence of the tides upon the coast and the significant and natural story in all its simple homeliness of Alfred King of England and those cakes of his.'

5

'Let's get away from here, my precious,' whispered Turvy to Topsy. 'I don't like watching those two naked men with crowns on their bare heads arguing with each other. I'm all for Alfred, if we had to choose, and I warrant you are too, but we don't have to choose. Let's skedaddle! As Ellen Terry said she did when George Bernard Shaw went up to bully Henry Irving.'

Topsy nodded and gave him her hand and off they ran. Once more among the crowd of ordinary naked ones, mingled with extraordinary naked ones, they alternated between running and strolling and between dead silences and lively chatter. At last they stopped dead. 'Who on earth are those two?' whispered Topsy to Turvy. 'Good Lord! What a pair!' murmured Turvy. 'Let's go and see!' They soon reached the couple who had attracted them; and Topsy whispered excitedly to Turvy at once: 'It's Samson and Delilah! Look at them! Listen to them!' They certainly never in their lives had seen a quarrel between husband and wife equal to what they saw now.

‘What I would like best to see,’ the wife was saying, ‘would be the Chief Executioner of the Philistines standing upon your body, naked as it is now, and very carefully and slowly cutting out all your principal organs one by one and arranging them separately on a silver plate at your side. When it comes to your testicles, or knackers, or balls, as my little brother told me they called them at school, I should like to see him put them on the plate with the rest but on the opposite side, not close together. They are the things I have suffered from: and I want to see them suffer in their turn. Oh yes! And your villainous penis, or prick, as my little brother said they called it at school, that I would love to see cut off and laid in the centre of the plate with its head propped up on a little pebble so that it would point upwards into the clouds, the winds, while its voice would cry pitifully “I’m dissolving! I’m going! I’ll soon be lost forever!”’

‘Can’t you hold your whoresome tongue for one single second?’ groaned the voice of Samson. ‘If I weren’t brought up in the courts of the Lord I would teach you how to talk to me like this!’

Topsy and Turvy had had enough by this time of Delilah’s talk and of Samson’s terrific muscles, which were quivering with wrath. So they just took to their heels and fled.

They were pulled up with interest and with amazement by an exciting discussion, amounting to an indignant dispute at moments, between a group of famous writers: namely, Rudyard Kipling, Rider Haggard, Bulwer Lytton, and Harrison Ainsworth.

‘Who are you two? And where do you come from?’ cried Bulwer Lytton.

Topsy, catching the eye of Harrison Ainsworth, after making a dainty little curtsey, answered, ‘We come from North Wales and we live in the most beautiful county in all the British Isles.’

‘What may that be?’ enquired Rudyard Kipling.

‘Merioneth,’ answered Turvy, loudly and boldly. ‘On one coast we have a shore with the most transparent and lovely pebbles to be found anywhere except at Chesil Beach in Dorset; and on our opposite coast we have the most beautiful shells to be found on any shore in England or Scotland or Ireland!’

‘Well, my dears,’ said Rudyard Kipling, ‘I wonder if either of you have ever been to Brighton?’

‘Or to Eastbourne?’ cried Rider Haggard. ‘Beachy Head has the grandest sea view on the whole of our English coast.’

‘Of course,’ said Bulwer Lytton, ‘not one of the seaside places in England or Scotland can compare for a moment with Naples or with what you see at Pompeii or in Sicily or in Capri. You have no volcanic mountains and no seashores or sea-islands or sea-palaces anywhere to compare with what the gondolas in Venice take you to see.’

‘Shut your mouth, Bulwer!’ cried Kipling. ‘If this couple could see Brighton beach they would see something as good as any of your damned volcanic mountains!’

‘What interests us, gentlemen,’ said Turvy, once more speaking out louder and bolder than Topsy quite liked to hear him speak, ’is a matter to which all of you four great writers have referred as you told your thrilling and absorbing romances, but a matter all the same that the impetuosity of your astonishing inspirations prevented you from developing or enlarging upon. I am speaking of the events in my girl-friend’s life and mine that brought us into this startling and awe-inspiring Dimension where all we naked mortals are encountering the Truth of Life. These events, gentlemen, and please understand that we have both read and absorbed into our bodies and souls the great romantic novels of each one of you four mighty geniuses, are simply the natural causes that led to our loving each other and setting out together on a life of adventure. You see, oh great and famous gentlemen, we both come from the upper room of a tiny half-house which has only two storeys separated by a little staircase of nine steps, one the ground floor and one the first upper floor beyond which is nothing, no attic roof at all. In our tiny upper room, oh great and famous gentlemen, there is only a fireplace with a mantelpiece above it and a poker beside it, two armchairs, and a tall book-case from floor to ceiling. The body of my girl-friend is a Picture by a little girl of fourteen of a child's party and my own body is a black Handle to a very creaky door close to this Picture. We ran down the stairs together, holding hands, and then had to rush as fast as our legs could carry us round the curve of a road called Turnstile where Mrs Whirlwind and Mr Whirlpool tried to catch us because Mr Whirlpool wanted to swallow my girl Topsy. It was then that we were suddenly attracted to a little by-path that precipitated us to our astonishment into this Dimension of naked reality where we are now talking to you. Do please tell us, oh Mighty Four, in what way this Dimension of the Naked Truth of Life differs from the place, wherever it may be, to which the ghosts of all who die upon our earth depart when their bodies are dead. Do they go straight to heaven or hell or to some intermediate purgatory?'

'If we only had a wise lady among us,' replied Harrison Ainsworth, 'I warrant we could answer your question at once.'

'But she'd have to be a little more than just wise,' replied Rider Haggard. 'She'd have to have the sort of intuition in her that the greatest of witches have.'

'She'd have to have the wisdom of a terrific king-wizard,' cried Bulwer Lytton eagerly. 'There are women like that, you know: like Saint Anne the Mother of Mary.'

‘What are you saying!’ growled Rudyard Kipling. ‘You talk like one of those Blacks who are the chief burden of us intelligent Whites.’

‘All I can say,’ burst out Bulwer Lytton, ’is that I wish the whole of Africa were inhabited by Blacks and ruled by Blacks and that the only business we sensible Britishers and sensible Americans had was to see to it that the Yellow Peril was nipped in the bud!’

‘They’re all too clever for us,’ whispered Topsy to Turvy, ‘let’s make a bolt for it and be off!’

6

What stopped their run and pulled them up short were the terrific gestures of an enormous Negro. The group this Negro was addressing was well known to both our friends in one sense, that is to say because each of the faces composing the group was a face that had been pictured again and again in children’s illustrated histories. This will be well understood when it is explained that one face was that of a very early King of Rome whose name was Numa, another the face of a delicate Nymph or exquisitely pretty young girl who lived in a cave in that same early Rome and was visited every day by King Numa, and who taught him by degrees the exact steps to take in order to conquer the world and establish over it the Roman Empire.

The excited talk in this group of recognizable persons was emphasized by the fact that one was clearly an Anglican Bishop and one a particularly seductive and appealing little London Street-Walker. Then there was the excited Negro who kept shouting, ‘I am only a Black! I am only a Black! But the day will come when someone like me will rule the whole of Africa from south to north and from east to west! Africa, I tell you, you crazy world of every race that exists, will one day be entirely governed, yes, from north to south and from east to west, by black men like me! So you'd better prepare for that, you other races of the world, if you wish to survive!'

As a fine contrast to this excited black man there now came from this group an elaborately tuneful voice, a voice so rich and melodious that it seemed to be saying in a rhythmic prose almost worthy of rivalling the *Urn-Burial* of Sir Thomas Browne, 'I am only Thomas De Quincey but I hold the opinion that what the enemies of rich prose call a mere string of purple passages is what is needed to keep the music of the English language alive. And if you ask me,' De Quincey went on, 'what living human being there is who in her own delicate, exquisite, and unselfish personality offers a parallel to the exquisite harmony of what vulgar-minded people despise as a string of purple passages, I shall point till the end of my days to a certain little London prostitute or street-walker or whore by whose noble unselfishness my own sick and wretched life was restored to me.'

'I'm not worthy! I'm not worthy! I'm not worthy of what he says!' came in a young girl's voice from a slender little girl at his side.

'You did, you did, you did, my precious little Ann,' repeated De Quincey, 'you did. You saved my life and all of my work that was worth saving for posterity by what you did for me! I won't let you deny it! I won't let you! I won't let you!'

'I am mighty glad,' broke in the deep resonant voice of King Numa of Rome. 'Yes! I am mighty glad to learn that in Londinium on the River Tamesis in a far-away island there are lovely ladies who have the power to do for a man what no other man can do and what no wife however queenly can do, but what my Egeria, my beautiful nymph in her secret cavern in this rocky gorge can do, is doing, and will do while we both live, for a thick-skulled, crinky-cranky, muddle-headed old ruler like me. I'll show you, yes, by Jupiter and his father Chronos, I'll show you what a stupid old monarch becomes when he has a Nymph like Egeria to help him! You wait and see, you warrior races! With Egeria to help me I will conquer the whole world for Rome.'

'Would it be right to ask your gracious Majesty if with my little friend Ann I might have an interview with Egeria, the Nymph in Antro? I would not presume to ask for your presence there, oh great King, or for any interview with you personally; but I would regard it as the greatest moment of my whole life if you would let me take my little Ann and introduce her to Egeria in her rocky cave.'

'Yes, you certainly shall take your lovely little Nymph to visit *my* lovely little Nymph,' said King Numa graciously, 'and I can only wish that in your life, my good sir, the influence of your Nymph upon you will be as momentous and memorable as mine I feel is going to prove upon me.'

At this moment, in a gilded bag which King Numa was carrying in his hand, a clock began to strike. The monarch held it up to his right ear and listened intently to what the clock said. Topsy and Turvy listened too and so more intently still did De Quincey. It must have been a very powerful clock and a very musical clock; for even the fierce Negro who had been muttering to himself all this while, as he stared at Topsy and Turvy, listened spellbound along with the rest of them. 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, *nine*' struck the clock.

'You all know, don't you, what clock is striking and where?' said the King of Rome. 'It is Big Ben in London and they tell me everywhere in Britain that it's unlucky for you if you hear it beginning to strike, not to listen to the end, counting the strokes.'

The fierce Negro sprang to his feet from where he had been crouching and muttering. 'I say, may hell and damnation seize these accursed English and their bloody Big Ben! I tell you, King of Rome, I tell you, you pretty little travellers from England, the men who are going to rule Africa are Africans! Yes! None others! Not your blasted Red Indians of America, not your far more blasted Dutchmen in South Africa with their fucking apartheid or "keep the races separate!" We'll "apartheid" you, you bloody Dutchmen, we'll turn you into good meat for honest niggers, you blasted Boers! I tell you all, whether you are brutal Dutchmen or self-conceited, showing-off, snobbish English, there'll come a time and pretty soon it'll come too, when the folk who rule Africa will be the folk to whom Africa gave birth. And *they* weren't nurtured in England, or in America, or in Australia, or New Zealand either! Africa gave them birth — Africa was their mother. And I tell every single one of you who will beget and conceive children on the soil of Africa, your descendants will be swept off the earth by Africa's real sons and daughters. Don't make any mistake, oh you mumbling and bumbling false prophets of apartheid! Africa herself speaks through me who alone among you all out here, big kings and dainty whores and wily travellers, am her true and faithful child. Yes, I tell you, Africa speaks through me; and one day the descendants of all you bastard interlopers will find it out to your cost!'

The slim little girl who was resting her hand on the arm of Thomas De Quincey suddenly came up to Topsy. Her clothes, like Topsy's, had already fallen off and she and Topsy looked like a pair of sweet little sisters together. 'I am very fond of my man here,' whispered little Ann to Topsy, 'as I bet you're very fond of yours, but it's a comfort to me, a comfort I am sure you can well understand, to be able to talk to a girl of my own age in this funny land of nakedness.

I was able to be a saving help to my friend as I am sure you must have been to yours; but I never expected to find myself with him in a place like this. My friend Mr De Quincey calls this place "the Fourth Dimension".

What on earth he means by that I don’t know. Do tell me what your man calls it.’

‘Well, my dear Ann, I don’t believe’ — here Topsy hesitated a little— ‘that my man is as learned as yours. But I expect the household we come from is less learned than either of you. Your Mr De Quincey, my dear Ann, as I can tell, is a scholar who knows Latin and Greek, neither Turvy nor I know a word of those languages. I expect it’ll be hard for you to believe, but I’d better tell you at once that what you would call our *bodies* before we became naked ghosts, if we *are* ghosts here, or at any rate naked males and females or naked masculines and feminines, were nothing but pieces of furniture in a room in a house. These pieces of furniture had the sort of consciousness in them that human beings have. But they were not — I mean we were not — human beings at all. We were chairs and tables and book-cases and mantelpieces and pokers and tongs and carpets and antimacassars and pictures and writing-desks and footstools and all sorts of china ornaments and all sorts of lesson-books and picture-books and story-books. Some of us were lamps and candles and match boxes and a lot of us were toys and dolls’ houses, and even bricks to build fairy castles with.’

‘You see, my dear child,’ broke in Turvy, for he felt a bit jealous of Topsy’s having the whole pulpit just now, ‘people have not realized the amount of livingness that comes to exist in every piece of furniture that has been for many years the background of human lives. When from babyhood up to seventeen or eighteen or twenty a person, whether male or female, has lived with certain chairs and tables and pictures and rugs and carpets and cupboards, these things gather to themselves — and it goes deep into their being, into the material, if you prefer to put it so, of which they are composed. It is we, the persons who are brought up, say for twenty years, along with these objects, who endow them, how could we do otherwise, with this inner life. We come up against them continually. We associate certain particular moments of our lives with them; with this one rather than with that one, and when, on perhaps the following day, we pass by the one against which this experience of ours has brushed its wings, the experience switches back full-fledged upon us, while all the feelings we had at that moment repeat themselves within us. All the chairs and tables and cupboards and book-cases and sideboards and chests-of-drawers and carpets and sofas and rugs and windowsills and staircases and mantelpieces in the house we live in or the room we live in are the recipients of the dominant emotions and major mental disturbances of our life, things that affect us not only before we go out into the elements of Nature or into the business of our day's work, but equally so when we return home after we have walked and climbed and ridden and driven, and after we have finished our day's job, whatever that job may be.

'Yes! the furniture of our dwelling is like the thousand and one material objects we pass each day on our way to our life's work. It collects our feelings and drinks them into itself. The arms of every armchair, the legs of every table, the knobs of every footstool, the edges of every cupboard, are collectors of human feelings; so you see it is quite impossible, unless you live in a completely bare room, and even then the wails, the floor, the ceiling, the window, the door, have their own intake — for the place where you have your feelings not to share these feelings with you.'

It was then that quite suddenly De Quincey rushed up to his Ann and carried her off by main force to share his interview with King Numa and with Egeria the king's Nymph in the cavern. Topsy and Turvy stared at each other in bewilderment. They didn't feel resentment or anger. But they felt disappointed. And Topsy felt frustrated by not being able to carry on her talk with Ann. By a heavenly stroke of good luck it was at this very moment that the Sea-Nymph Galatea, after a quarrel with her sister nymphs in the Pacific Ocean, burst into ‘the Fourth Dimension’, if that really was the proper name for this queer land of naked men and women. Angry with all her companion Nymphs in the deep Pacific Ocean was Galatea and it was only on the strength of her wrath that she had burst the barriers of normal life in our Universe and plunged into this unusual sphere. It was only on the strength of her flight up and out, with a mad desire to be where none of her usual companions could possibly find her, that she had burst into this strange world; and once here, with her desperation lost and her momentary madness vanished, it was natural enough that she drifted into touch with Topsy the moment she caught sight of her. The curious thing was that, in her fury with her companion-Nymphs, she had torn down from the wall of their ‘House of Wings’, one of their most sacred Temples of Power, two of the most forcibly-feathered wings that were kept in that holy receptacle, and these she now recklessly offered to Topsy and Turvy. Galatea was bigger than either of them and much more strongly built and it would have been nothing to her to burst into the sacred cave of Egeria and to toss King Numa aside, as she offered that Nymph in Antro the means to escape. Little did she guess that Egeria, so far from wishing to leave her King, had but one desire, namely to help him to conquer the world. But Galatea had been deeply attracted to Topsy and she came up to them with such a winning smile and with so much of the mystery and magic of the depths of the Ocean about her that she quickly so enchanted them both that they agreed to fly straight back with her from prehistoric Rome to where this ‘Fourth Dimension’, or ‘Dimension of Reality’ touched the turnstile turning from which they had plunged into it. Under the protection of this formidable Sea-Nymph they neither of them had the slightest trepidation about being devoured by that Whirlwind and Whirlpool pair who lived in the chimney-top. So they both allowed her to affix to their bodies these spacious wings, which responded the moment they adhered to their naked shoulders to some interior muscular and fibrous power of assimilation that gave them the feeling that something within them had been long awaiting this moment.

Galatea seemed to know the way through the air across the whole length of the Dimension separating prehistoric Rome from modern London, and her two powerfully winged friends had no difficulty in following her. Indeed they felt as they flew how superior must be the lives of birds to the lives of men and animals. Walking with two legs, and still worse with four, struck them as comically humiliating as they swept through the sky and glanced at the various landscapes and seascapes that lay beneath them.

While these three were on their way Bibabug and Silly-suck, as they lay side by side on their bed, were engaged with their usual topic, the two points of which were Bibabug's shrinking from taking Sillysuck and Sillysuck's longing to have a baby. It was an extra warm night for that season of the year so they had left their house-door wide open as old Mr Bottom-Step had thumped his way round Turnstile Corner to buy a bottle of brandy. What therefore was their amazement when Topsy and Turvy arrived, followed by Galatea, whom they were both excitedly begging to enter the house with them. All three of them, all winged, came swishing in! The confusion was terrific. Everybody shouted at once; and, as might have been expected, Mr Brown Armchair and Mrs Grey Armchair, followed by Master Poker, came clattering downstairs to see what on earth had happened. Galatea the Sea-Nymph kept her wings neatly folded round her neck like a feathery scarf; but Topsy and Turvy carefully removed theirs and hung them up side by side on the wall. Galatea remained naked, save for her wings which played the part of a shawl, but both Topsy and Turvy, without even asking leave, searched Bibabug's and Sillysuck's cupboards till they found clothes that would fit them. During this incredible hubbub, roused to activity as he had never been in his whole life before, Bibabug seized Sillysuck, pulled her down upon the rug and there, while legs and skirts and boots and shoes were tripping and switching and stumbling over their bodies he violently, shamelessly, recklessly, desperately, ravished her and did so with such success that her muffled cry was a mixture of blood and tears and crazy exultation. ‘I shall have a baby, a baby, a baby!’ were the broken sounds that came up from the rug; but in the wild welter nobody heeded them.

Abertackle

1

THE ABERTACKLE FOLK were, it must be confessed, a queer lot. But then it must be remembered that Abertackle was itself a queer-place; and queer places tend to breed queer people. It was the biggest hamlet in the Go Peninsula, a promontory that stretches out quite a long way into the sea and carries with it several rivers and estuaries that have been overflowing their banks for thousands of years.

Why the dwellers in the Go Peninsula have never from time immemorial tried to build enough houses or to collect a big enough population to establish a town it is impossible to say. Visitors to the Go Peninsula, whether tourists or business men, will always tell you that they like the people there very much and find them hospitable and friendly, but what they never tell you for some mysterious reason is why they leave the place so quickly and rarely ever return to it.

Mr Charles Po and Mrs Mary Po, who were the oldest couple in Abertackle, lived in a comfortable little cottage called Crongy and were looked after by an elderly housekeeper called Nancy. ‘I be afeared, mistress,’ said this goodhearted competent lady one morning at the end of a rather cold February, ‘that the master didn’t like the sausages I cooked this morning. He hardly touched them; and yet his appetite is clearly all right for he eat as much bread and marmalade as he usually do.’

‘Oh no, Nance,’ said Mrs Po, ‘he always speaks up when he don’t like a thing. The sausages are all right. I enjoyed them, I ate every bit. If you ask me what I think it was, I should say it was because I was telling him about Miss Tarnt's asking me whether we'd go with her to Mrs Thrapplewait's to lunch tomorrow. Miss Tarnt be always a bit fearful of Mrs Thrapplewait's lunches because she likes to ask Mr Willmop and you know what he is! So I was telling the Master about this and asking if he minded going. He don't like Mr Willmop for some reason. I expect the Master remembers how when Mr Willmop once came to tea here he said he didn't feel like having anything but bread and butter when Master had gone to a deal of trouble opening one of those American tins. Anyway, it was because of something on his mind that the Master didn't eat your sausages. He's funny like that, the Master is. I expect all men are when it comes to table matters. They don't know all the trouble folks are putting themselves to for their sakes. Miss Tarnt be different from us ordinary folk in them things. If she do want to do a thing she just do go and do it, let come what may come! So it weren't only us having Mr Willmop to deal with, it were being taken there by Miss Tarnt. I guess t'were the fear of this tomorrow that made the Master act funny about his meal and not eat his sausages.'

Her mistress's words were evidently just the right ones to soothe the hurt feelings of Nancy Potticup, for she went off happily to the kitchen, thinking to herself: 'Well I be mighty thankful that 'taint me as has to meet Mr Willmop tomorrow afternoon! I be feared I'd forget myself with him and burst out at him!'

On the morning of the following day Mr Ernest Willmop allowed himself to sleep late. He had told his housekeeper, Titty Tinkle, for Mr Willmop was a bachelor of about fifty, not to bring him his cup of tea at eight and that she needn't bother about breakfast till he came downstairs. He knew that when she heard him moving about his room she would begin to prepare the breakfast he liked best, which was always the same, tried eggs and bacon and several cups of coffee.

‘What a damnably bloody business it is,’ thought Ernest Willmop, ‘to be alive on this confounded Earth! But it’s no good saying that. We’ve all got to go through with it till we’re dead.’ Ernest Willmop was a very powerful tall man with brown curly hair and fierce dark eyes. ‘It isn’t,’ he said to himself, ‘that I hate everything that’s alive. It’s human beings I hate, creatures on two legs, human beings and monkeys! I like horses and cattle very well and sheep and lambs too. Why the devil did we go and climb trees and build houses and barns and sheds and walls? And then all this awful cooked food. Why can’t we eat bread and oatmeal and apples and pears and nuts and have none of this blasted cookery? Oh how much nicer sheep and cattle and horses and ponies are than men and monkeys! I don’t mind babies and I don’t mind women so much, when they have babies. No! I don’t mind women and children. It’s men and monkeys I hate; and when women behave like men and monkeys I hate them too! Well, I’ve got to go to lunch at Mrs Thrapplewait’s today and I’ve got to meet Miss Tarnt there and Mr and Mrs Po too, so I mustn’t have breakfast too late or I shan’t be able to touch a mouthful of this blasted lunch.’

Ernest Willmop did manage, in spite of his angry mutterings as he hurried there after his late breakfast, to devour quite a satisfactory lot of Mrs Thrapplewait’s feast. This chivalrous behaviour as he munched and swallowed was in a considerable measure due to his interest in Miss Tarnt whose own share of the Thrapplewaitian spread, or at any rate her own interest in it, consisted in making a map on her plate of France and Spain and Portugal by the aid of the spikes of her silver fork and the various edibles so far uneaten.

Yes, there was something about Miss Tarnt that had a singular effect upon Ernest Willmop. ‘She’s like me,’ he thought, ‘completely independent of the whole confounded lot of them and absolutely indifferent to what anyone thinks about her.’

Miss Tarnt was only twenty-five but she looked over thirty. She had thin dark hair, pale greenish-blue eyes, an aquiline nose and a pointed chin. It was only when somebody said something to her in a tone of affectionate respect that her expression softened a little. When she talked to the company at large it was always on the same topic, the superiority of the age of their grandparents and great-grandparents over their own age. Mrs Thrapplewait was a tiny little old lady, very thin and with features such as a child might have drawn if it had wanted to draw a fairy grandmother; for her nose, mouth and eyes were very small but the lines about them and between them and her ears and throat and across her high forehead were so deep that when she concentrated her gaze upon anyone in particular that person, if a sensitive person, felt as if he or she had become a little wavering, flickering, quivering, bodiless wrinkle, floating in the air between her listening mind and the lecturing mind of her interlocutor.

‘Mr Po thinks,’ said Mrs Po to Mrs Thrapplewait, ‘that he found this morning the first celandine of the year. It’s the last day of February today, isn’t it?’

‘Oh no, Mrs Po!’ cried the little old lady eagerly, ‘it’s only the twenty-eighth, and it’s leap year! So you don’t know what it says in the Bible—“Leap year coming once in four, gives to February one day more!”’

‘It doesn’t say that in the Bible, my good woman, it’s only an old country-saying,’ put in Mr Po. ‘But it’s perfectly true. It’s tomorrow, not today, that is the last day of February. Do you think that people have often found a celandine before February was over?’

‘No I guess not,’ replied their hostess. But her expression was so vague and so dazed and so bewildered that Mrs Po felt afraid that her husband’s rebuke had troubled the old lady’s mind. ‘I wish,’ thought Mrs Po, ‘that he hadn’t said “my good woman” for that isn’t a nice way to address a lady we’re lunching with.”

The thoughts of Mr Po were running in a different channel. ‘I expect I was a fool,’ he thought, ‘to settle in Abertackle; though Crongy is a nice cottage and the walks round here suit me very well. But I’d like the place better if Mary had given me a few children to walk with me. She has to stay in the house, I know, to make sure that old Nancy isn’t treating half the tramps in the place to meals in the kitchen. But my walks were much more enjoyable in those old days at Crockover when Mary and I used to explore the place together. Of course we had Parson Ratrap to deal with then, but after that day I brought Cousin Tony to church with me and Ratrap found out he was a lord, the fellow quieted down.’

Neither Mr nor Mrs Po, nor indeed Ernest Willmop himself, whose hatred of everybody never prevented him from catching the special quirks and quibbles and cranks and whimsies and oddities of any particular person he met, tailed to miss the peculiar relation that existed between a gentleman in the Go Peninsula who was always called Squire Neverbang, and another gentleman who lived with him. These two persons were met by Mr and Mrs Po as they walked home that afternoon, and the four of them not only shook hands but were persuaded by Squire Neverbang to enter a little café called the Clapper-Cove and enjoy a cup of coffee.

‘What do you think of the way this chap Willmop goes barging about abusing everybody?’ enquired Mr Po addressing Ooly-Fooly, Squire Neverbang’s companion. Ooly-Fooly had been a famous European clown from the age of fifteen to the age of twenty-four. Then something happened to him the details of which, though gossip and scandal have derived exquisite satisfaction from turning the mystery of this something over and over and over and over, have never really been brought to light. Was it a normal love affair? We very likely will never know. Perhaps it was no love affair at all. Perhaps it was something to do with his mentality. Perhaps he suddenly made the discovery that he had gone mad. Perhaps he had discovered to his horror that he had been mad ever since some secret mental shock which he had never revealed.

‘I think,’ he said now, ‘what Willmop really wants is to be challenged in the old-fashioned manner to a duel! Would you let me challenge him, Squire?’

‘Oh no,’ threw in Mrs Po. ‘I know Willmop well enough to know that he’d treat such a challenge with ribald and vulgar contempt. I think what he really wants is a good hiding from someone who has the power to give it to him and the power to make him hold his tongue about it afterwards.’

It was then that to the astonishment of everybody Miss Tarnt and Mr Willmop entered the café together.

The landlord of the Clapper-Cove Café, whose name was Dick Underhead, was a big burly man who had one of those brains that clever people never understand and that stupid people always understand. ‘How wonderful,’ he now vociferated as if he had been the manager of a game of charades at a Public School, ready in a moment to set them off spouting like the frogs of Aristophanes, Krekekekex. Ko! Ax! Ko! Ax! Krekekekex! Ko! Ax!— ‘how wonderful to have all the learned people of Abertackle in my little show-place!’

“Tisn’t a show place, silly man,’ said Miss Tarnt. ‘It’s an eat-and-drink place. It’s a restaurant. Give us your best coffee and what you feel goes with it best! What *does* go with it best? You ought to know, Mr Underhead.’

There was something in her tone as she said this that pleased the burly host of the Clapper-Cove. He had the wit to see that Miss Tarnt was no ordinary pub-frequenting girl. He walked round behind the bar for a bit and then came back holding a couple of paper-bags in his hand. Then he himself sat down beside Miss Tarnt, before whom the barmaid, a plump little wench with a mischievous laugh, had already put a plate and a coffee pot and a double-handled mug.

'Get me a mug, Kitty,' he said, 'and some more coffee and I'll explain everything to the lady. And get the same for Mr Willmop and ask him if he wants milk and sugar.'

Mr Willmop was so noisily explicit on the subject of what he wanted that Dick Underhead was able to give Miss Tarnt, beside whom he seemed to have established himself lor the night, a private little lecture on the biscuits that went best with coffee.

'My husband found a celandine today in the rocks up the hill. Have either of you found one yet?' Mrs Po addressed this remark to both Squire Neverbang and Ooly-Fooly by way of making friendly conversation.

Ooly answered it blithely. 'No, madam, neither Squire nor I are flower-lovers or flower-discoverers. What we do see when we walk out are the mountains and the rivers and the sea and the sky. Yes, it's Nature in the large, not the little — tittle-fittle — wittle-spittle blossoms or leaves coming out that interest us.'

Squire Neverbang let his pet fool speak for them both, not only because it always tickled his fancy to hear what Ooly would say, but also because he had to greet two fresh customers entering Dick Underhead's café. These were Jack Coffiny and Tom Boundary, the well-bred gentlemen who behaved as if they were brothers though really they were only cousins.

Jack Coffiny was thinking to himself: ‘I should never have dared to come into this place alone; but with Tom I seem to be able to go anywhere. Isn’t it quaint how frightened I am of people and how I love the moment they start asking me about my *Philosophy of Escape.* Tom asked me just now how many books I’ve written on this subject and he didn’t seem a bit surprised when I told him it must be more than a dozen. Oh! do pray that when he asked me last night before we went to bed to sum up in as few words as possible what my message to the world really was I did put it right. I think I told him that our whole human life was, if we consider it mentally, apart from what we have to do and how we have to act, in the ordinary course of each day, a frantic struggle to escape from the old traditional legends and myths and customs and convictions and symbols and ideas and moralities and ethics and religion and idolatries and popular beliefs. I tried to explain that there is no mental reason why we should believe in cither God or the Devil. I told him that because Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived, as I verily believe he was, there is no reason for thinking that every single thing he said or thought was an absolute truth. Indeed, doesn’t his own cry from the Cross about God forsaking him prove that he had made the great mistake of his life by believing in God? Oh! do so pray to Jesus and to old warlike Jehovah, the tribal god of the Jews that I did manage to make clear to Tom what the real essence of my *Philosophy of Escape* amounted to: namely that we must shake oft all mythology, all religion, all worship of God, all dogmatic and explicit ideas of the nature of another life. We must escape, I explained to him, every fancy about another life alter death. The final escape, I told him, must be indeed an escape from life itself, from any sort of life, an escape into the divine nothingness of death.’

Tom Boundary was thinking as, led by Jack Coffiny, he shook hands with the Squire and Ooly-Fooly and with Charles and Mary Po and with

Willmop and Miss Tarnt, that he wished he hadn't to spend his time in this confounded cafe when he might be practising bowling and batting on the newly-rolled field where they had had nets set up so as to be able to practise at any hour of the day. 'If he doesn't' want to practise batting when we're down there tomorrow I won't bother him with it. We'll go down there late in the afternoon when the club's watching that match with the county's second eleven.'

How often does it happen in life that two of the best friends in the world when confronted by a group of other friends indulge in thoughts directly opposite! Tom Boundary would have been absolutely astonished had he known what thoughts were passing through Jack Coffiny's peculiar mind at that moment. And yet they were thoughts that Jack Coffiny had had since he was a child. He was thinking to himself: 'What a funk I am! What an incredible coward I am! I should never be in this café at all, talking to all these good people, if it weren't for Tom. And yet if they were a group of the undergrads of Cambridge preparing for a debate with the undergrads of Oxford on the topic whether God exists or not, Oxford saying he does and Cambridge saying he doesn't, I shouldn't be scared at all. In fact I'd be in an extra happy mood. I'd soon be showing these Oxonians that it's as silly to believe in the kind of God we are told to believe in as it is to believe that Gaia, the Earth, gave Cronos, or Saturn, the jagged pieces of flint to cut out the testicles of Ouranos or Uranus that were the cause of all the titanic monsters to whom she was forced to give birth. But we must remember that there are episodes in the New Testament quite as moving and as touching as anything in the Old Testament; and we must remember that the birth of Venus Aphrodite out of the sea-foam caused by the dismemberment of Ouranos has a mysterious beauty in it which carries us away beyond any merciful or merciless mutilation.'

While these encounters were taking place, and these thoughts were floating around in the Clapper-Cove Café, Miss Nelly Saunter and Lady Astis were approaching the cottage of Mr Bob Ord and Mrs Letty Ord, who had invited them to tea.

Mr Bob Ord had been helping his wife to spread the bread and butter and arguing with her about whether they ought to provide two kinds of jam for their visitors or only one. ‘What I think myself,’ said Mr Bob Ord, ’is that it’s best to give them only one kind of jam. Do you suppose that what people want when they don’t know you at all is to know all they can about you and your various peculiarities? Of course it isn’t. What they want is to tell you all their ways and tastes and peculiar personal interests. What they want, in other words, is to use you as something to bang upon and knock upon and hammer upon so that they can hear the echoes. And what is the echo they are after? *The echo of themselves!* Yes, that is what they want. With our habitual companions, who have had all the occasions, all the chances, all the opportunities they can possibly want there is now no more to be got out of us in the way of responsive echoes. They may tap and knock at the cabinets of peculiarity from which they want to get a reverberation or a sigh or groan of response, or at least a tinkle; but they get nothing but dead silence.’

Lady Astis and Miss Nelly Saunter had long been close friends; and recently, for they both had small fixed incomes, they had decided to share a cottage in Abertackle. They both had eccentric tastes, though in rather different ways. and something about the quaintness and oddity of Bob Ord and Letty Ord had appealed to them both very strongly the moment they met them.

‘The great thing,’ said Lady Astis as they approached the street door of the Ords, ’is to avoid like the devil making them angry with each other. Old

Bob is always saying things, calculated, I should have thought, to make any woman furious; but Letty is curiously forbearing. I suppose she knows old Bob so well that she has come to accept his cross-grained outbursts as part of her life. That's a sign of a wise woman, isn't it, Nelly' Men are as they are and apparently very difficult to change, however much we may try. Of course we aren't like that at all; and we soon get to know each other so well that—'

She interrupted herself by ringing the bell of 'Tickety-top', as the Ords' cottage was called. She did this with a smile so familiar to Nelly Saunter that it finished her remark without words.

'Oh here you are!' cried Letty Ord, opening the door. 'Bob was just saving he thought he saw you coming. He can see up and down the lane from our window which is often—' She too, just as Lady Astis had done with her words, completed her sentence with the welcoming sound of the door closing behind them. In a moment they had got their galoshes and jackets off; and the four of them were seated at a little square table enjoying cup after cup of tea and piece after piece of thin bread and butter with all the jam anybody could want spread daintily with little silver knives, one for each of them.

'I saw quite a lot of people,' said Bob Ord, 'go into Clapper-Cove Café. I wonder if old Underhead had enough drink saved up in his cellar to satisfy them.'

'I'm perfectly sure he had,' said Lady Astis.

'He's a crafty old time-server,' said Nelly Saunter. 'But I like him all the same. Do you remember, Susan?' (this remark was addressed to Lady Astis) 'how amusing he was when we took little Tottie Tender to have a glass of cider there? He behaved so nicely to her. I had a letter from her only a week ago in which she spoke of him. Uncle Paul took her with him to Geneva, which is full of our relations and they all were so sweet to her. She's back in Arundel now, where Uncle Paul has a life's job at the Castle. She was there on her birthday and when the Duke talked to her she begged him to give her *Alice in Wonderland* for a birthday present and the Duke gave her an old copy of his own which he'd kept since he was little. She wrote to me such a pretty letter about it, telling me she keeps it in her bedroom near her bed.'

'I've always thought,' said Bob Ord, 'that the time will come when people will be afraid to speak of machinery without reverently lowering their voices as we do now when we speak of God or the Holy Ghost. They are inventing calculating machines that have the same power of thought as a human brain, only they are less likely to be led astray. A time will probably soon come when this Earth will be ruled by a group of machines, one British, one French, one German, one American, one Spanish, one Portuguese, one Australian, one African, one Icelandic, one Canadian, and after that there will perhaps be a vast Eternal Machine that will rule not only this present Universe but all the Universes that the Life Force may create in the future.'

Whether it was the thought of Bob Ord's Eternal Machine or whether Lady Astis had come to the conclusion from watching her friend's face that Nelly was growing too nervous from listening to all this, she rose up from her chair, helped Nelly to rise by a gentle uplift of her sleeve, and told the Ords that there was a risk of some friends of theirs from London looking in before supper-time, so that they would have to go at once. She shook hands with them both in such a lively and grateful manner that it saved Nelly from anything but a quick handshake.

When the front door was shut behind her Letty Ord said to Bob Ord, 'You bet your life it was your machine talk that hurried them off.'

‘No, I don’t think so,’ said Bob to Letty. ‘I think the Lady thought her friend was feeling ill.’

A day or two after this little tea-party at the Ords’, Miss Tarnt was returning with a full basket from a shopping excursion when she met in a little side-street Squire Neverbang’s friend Mr Ooly-Fooly, who was evidently enjoying the sensation of being by himself without any special purpose or any imperative undertaking. The whole look, appearance, manner and expression of the man seemed to say to the ground beneath his feet and to the air around him and to the sky above his head: ‘Oh how heavenly it is to be tree from every mortal person you know and every practical thing to be done and everything in the past to remember and everything in the future to consider! To come loitering down a road like this with no one to love and no one to hate and no purpose to think of, with nothing but the road to travel on, the air to breathe, the sky to gaze at and no sensation in your whole body and no thought in your whole mind except the feeling of being happily alone, is this not far better than any paradise we are told of or any fairyland we have invented? Could anything in heaven or earth be better? Oh how delicious not even to have to think why it’s so delicious!

3

Miss Tarnt was overjoyed to meet Mr Ooly-Fooly alone like this. The moment she caught sight of him she said to herself: ‘I’m always being led on by my own silly mania for men who seem to me quite different from all other men. And here indeed is one, as anyone can see in a moment, who is completely different from all others, and yet I know him as well as I know anybody in Abertackle! Isn’t it funny that I’ve never got him to know me! I believe I *could* get him to be quite intimate with me. Perhaps meeting him like this alone in the street and just before twilight begins is an encounter designed especially for us by Providence itself! But I can hardly walk about the town alone with him, can I? Besides, I've walked too much already. I'm tired. I want to go home and rest. And I certainly wouldn't be at my best in talk, unless we could sit down. Oh, but *that's* a good idea. I've thought of it. Why don't I ask him to have a cup of tea with me at the Cokesy-Wokesy? Aunt Ora's always glad to see me there. In fact I helped her to invent that cosy name for her and Miss Evercan's tiny tea-shop. Yes! Yes! Oh yes! I'll take him to Cokesy-Wokesy and we'll have a lovely talk with Aunt Ora and Miss Evercan.'

She had no difficulty at all in persuading Ooly-Fooly to accompany her. It was indeed just the sort of thing that suited him at the moment; for happy though he was at being alone he had begun to feel a little hungry and thirsty.

Miss Tarnt and Ooly-Fooly were lucky. Nobody but its two owners were in the Cokesy-Wokesy when they arrived. Aunt Ora and Miss Evercan were enjoying their freedom from customers by having a game of cards all to themselves on one of the little tables. They jumped to their feet, and the moment they saw who had opened the door they both cried with delight: 'Oh! it's you! Oh! it's you!' and seating them both at the table where they had been playing they switched the cards away and tidied the table-cloth.

'How's Squire Neverbang?' enquired Aunt Ora.

'Oh, he's all right!' replied Ooly-Fooly. 'He's always all right. I wish I had something of his portentous calm. Do you know what he began last night?' Both Aunt Ora and Miss Evercan gazed eagerly at Ooly-Fooly.

'No! do tell us!' cried Miss Evercan.

'No! do tell us!' cried Aunt Ora.

Miss Tarnt looked pleasantly round the tea-shop. So far from being jealous of the way her companion had monopolized the interest of the two ladies she felt thankful to be with such a monopolizer. She always preferred to be an onlooker and a listener to taking the lead in anything that went on within a house. When it became a matter of being out of doors and of exploring the countryside or following any of the estuary banks of the Go Peninsula or taking a climb up Mount Gogglewog Miss Tarnt was always the one to take the lead.

‘Do you know what I think?’ said Ooly-Fooly.

‘No!’ cried both their hostesses with one voice.

‘I think,’ said Ooly-Fooly, ‘that we ought to start a little theatre in Abertackle. There are so many folk here who come crowding round every wireless and every telly, and we’ve got so many clever couples like Mr and Mrs Po and such real geniuses at comedy and tragedy like my friend Squire Neverbang, and not a few born clowns like my lone self, that it seems silly and wasteful not to start a real proper Little Theatre here that would give us all something exciting to concentrate on and use our dramatic abilities on. What do you think, Aunt Ora? What do you think. Miss Evercan?’

Aunt Ora replied without a second’s hesitation: ‘I’m all for it, Mr Fooly! I’m all for it!’

And Miss Evercan replied also, though in a less excited tone, ‘Yes, I agree entirely with such an idea; but we’d have to have stage-directors and ballet-mistresses and so forth, shouldn’t we? I mean people who know more about the stage than we do, wouldn’t we? and people who know how to cope with men and women in their separate characteristics?’

‘But men and women are both human beings aren’t they?’ threw in Miss Evercan.

‘They’re different sorts of human beings,’ went on Ooly-Fooly. ‘I’ve been studying the difference between them very carefully and not only in regard to one having a penis to push up the hole in front of the other’s body till it makes the other bleed by the loss of her virginity; but in the fact that the one has breasts with nipples so as to suckle babies and the other only little pink dots where a woman's two breasts are, though of course both of them have the same little dark scar in the centre of their human stomachs. But if you want to know the greatest difference in their ways by which you can always distinguish them I will tell you this. You never see a man touch his face. If he has a beard and a moustache he may give each of them a good pull now and again. But if he has no hair on his face at all he never touches it. But every woman and every girl is constantly touching her face. You watch them. You watch the one you live with. You'll soon see her hand go up to her face. It's just as if they thought that at any moment some delicate little flower, like a daisy or snowdrop, might suddenly start growing out of their face. But whatever the cause of their doing it may be, the fact remains that you can't look at any woman or girl for a minute or two without seeing her hand go up to her face.'

Ooly-Fooly stopped haranguing them and looked from the face of Aunt Ora to the face of Miss Evercan with a questioning eagerness.

But it was his companion Miss Tarnt who commented on his eloquent oration. 'What we all must remember,' said Miss Tarnt wisely, 'is the tact that neither a man nor a woman created this world, nor — I speak as what they call a tree-thinker — did some mysterious Being called God create it. It was — I speak as an unbeliever — created by what we call the life-force or that energy in the heart of Nature which drives everything to grow and to become more and more alive, that energy which at the beginning must have driven Man to come out of the sea and to climb up trees, that energy which is at this very moment suggesting to us through the receptive and porous mind of my friend Mr Fooly that we start a Little Theatre in Abertackle like that first and foremost of all Little Theatres which Maurice Browne started in the Middle West of America.'

'But the point is, my dear Miss Tarnt,' cried Aunt Ora eagerly, 'this adventurous energy you speak of is not confined to the creation of Group Movements and Organized Undertakings such as Little Theatres and Borough Committees: it shows itself in us, in ourselves, in the secret soul of each of us men and women individually. And don't you think there may be a faint danger that when we feel this urge within us to action on our own account, and then being, as most of us are, a bit nervous of striking out on our own, we may be tempted by the existence of a Little Theatre or a Borough Committee to dodge this imperative urge from within, which is surely much more in harmony with the energy in all Nature of which we're speaking than any group design like a Little Theatre or a Borough Committee?'

It is extraordinary how we are all affected by currents of feeling in the air originating from sources totally unknown to us. At this moment a weird surge of delight welled up in the heart of Miss Tarnt who was, you must remember, still nearer twenty than thirty, as she gazed at her pick-up, Ooly-Fooly. 'He, anyway,' she thought, 'will be, as long as he lives, whether Squire Neverbang is his companion or a silly girl like me, an embodiment of the World-Energy that created this World and perhaps this whole Universe. And how lovely to think of his frippery, flickety, flittery, fluttering ways! It is indeed delicious to think of the World's Creative Force being embodied in the jocularity and airy-fairy flightiness of a born clown!'

'Thinking thus,' as Homer always says when his champions are preparing to strike a specially terrific blow, Miss Tarnt jumped from her seat, said a lively goodnight to their two hostesses and carried Ooly-Fooly off with her.

‘What rough manners that girl has!’ exclaimed Miss Evercan.

‘She was badly brought up, you know,’ said Aunt Ora quietly. ‘Her mother was a street-walker before the Reverend Tarnt married her. She died in childbirth. Mr Tarnt was a disgrace to the Church — think of a clergyman marrying a whore! But everybody thought he was a very good preacher. What a pity Miss Tarnt didn’t grow up quick enough to hear him preach. Think of her father being a great preacher and her mother a street-walker!’

4

Miss Tarnt’s lodging wasn’t far from Squire Neverbang’s house where Ooly-Fooly lived, so they walked together through the evening streets to that edifice, for it was a large dwelling, and said goodnight at the door. Miss Tarnt felt she could have kissed Ooly-Fooly, for she had taken a real liking to him; but she didn’t dare to take such a risk just then. Besides, Squire Neverbang might have been watching from some upper window. So she just tapped him on his hand with her bare knuckles. ‘We’ll have tea again there, won’t we?’ she said. And though all he said was ‘Sure we will, my dear!’ she derived a curious and special satisfaction from his calling her ‘my dear’, as if they were friends of quite long standing. When she reached her lodging she wasn’t sorry to find her landlady, Dilly Dally, standing at the foot of the stairs.

‘I’ve taken up your cup of tea,’ she said, ‘I’ve left it by your bed. I knew you’d be back by eight and wouldn’t want more than one cup. But I thought you’d like just that one, after being out to a regular tea-party. Did all go well? They are a funny pair, that couple of old spinning-wheels. But I confess I have myself a sneaking fondness for them. Anyway they’ve as good a basketful of naughty tales about old folk in Abertackle as you can hear anywhere else! I like Aunt Ora the best. Which do you like the best?’

Miss Tarnt pondered thoughtfully. Then she said, ‘Were you christened Dilly, my dear? It goes so well with Dally that anybody’d think they went together and that your real name was Brown or Smith or Jones or Green or Robinson. Yes, I like Aunt Ora the best. But I like Miss Evercan too. I love both the dear old things. Do you think, my dear, that when you and I get as old as they are we’ll be as nice a pair of old knitikins as they are? Oh yes, Dilly, but do for the Lord’s sake tell me whether you were christened just for the sport of making it go with Dally?’

Miss Dilly Dally looked smilingly at her lodger. ‘No, my dear,’ she said. ‘My old dad, Jeremiah Dally, was a Jewish Rabbi in Birmingham. He and Mother were both killed in the blitz in the war, when I would have been too, only Cousin Tuckerin had taken me to the shop where they sold fancy-dress dolls. Cousin Tuckerin always said that in wartime the best thing for mothers to do was to nurse babies in the parlour and the best thing for girls to do was to nurse dolls by the nursery fender. Mother’s name was Abigail and I never have forgotten how she taught me to read the Bible. She made me read it, the Old Testament I mean, from beginning to end. Mother and Father were killed when I’d got to the forty-seventh chapter of Isaiah. And I’ve never read a line since then.’

‘Do tell me, Dilly,’ said Miss Tarnt, ‘who that young couple are you’ve got now in the basement?’

‘Oh *them,*’ cried Dilly Dally. ‘I’ll tell you all about them when I bring up your cup of tea in a few minutes. Then you’ll have something to dream about! I’ll be taking down their supper to them presently.’

Miss Tarnt went upstairs to her bedroom; and in about half an hour when she had already got her dressing-gown on and every thing else except her nightgown off, her landlady kept her word; and while they shared a cup of tea sitting on the bed she told her about the couple in the basement.

‘The boy,’ she said, ’is Bickery Bum and the girl is Fanny Flabbergast. Their love-story is a quaint and touching one. Bickery was an assistant gamekeeper on the estate of Squire Neverbang. He had to be always on the look-out for poachers; not only four-legged ones, such as badgers and foxes, but two-legged ones such as greedy and acquisitive rascais from the slums of the Go Peninsula. Fanny Flabbergast came of a well-known literary family in Valentia and was a clever girl who had earned quite a considerable income from teaching English in a Pans girls’ school. In the Go Peninsula she was fond of taking long walks by the banks of one of the estuaries, all of which led eventually out to sea. It was on one of these very walks that she encountered Bickery, who was a skilled fisherman and caught dace and roach and perch and sometimes even a pike in the Go estuaries. They were attracted to each other at once and in summer time lots of Abertackle townspeople would get accustomed to meeting them; she carrying bunches of wild flowers and he carrying his rod and the fish he had caught. It was our clergyman, one Reverend Squot, who must have put it into their heads to get married. He confided to me once, for though a bachelor, he liked talking to females, and I think he derived quite a smattering of naughty and mischievous delight from telling me about it, that when Bickery and Fanny asked him whether it was right for them to partake of Holy Communion at Church when they had been making love to each other he had replied that if they were engaged to be married it was perfectly and absolutely all right. Sex-play, he told them, is entirely justifiable in the eyes of God if it is going to last, and above all if it is going to result in children. “I”, he told them, “am the representative of God on Earth.” I remember being so shocked when one Sunday I found Bickery embracing Fanny in a mossy glen and making love to her on our ground in a way that fully displayed their sexual excitement that I cried, “I am the representative of God upon Earth and as God I command you to be officially and formally engaged to be married.” They listened to the Reverend Squot’s words obediently with the result that in a week or two he married them and gave them Holy Communion.

‘Thus it has come about,’ said Dilly Dally to Miss Tarnt, ‘that I take them their meals in the basement of my lodging-house where they sleep in the same bed and worship God without restriction by making as much love as they like.’

5

Life seems growing stranger and stranger every day,’ said Mr Charles Po to Mrs Mary Po as they sat by their drawingroom fire a few days after Miss Tarnt and Ooly-Fooly came to tea ‘with Aunt Ora and Miss Evercan. ‘I wonder if we did right in letting things happen like that.’

‘Don’t talk like that, Charley,’ protested Mary Po. ‘You’ve forgotten how it was and how difficult they were to manage. Do remember, my dear, how carefully we argued it all out that evening in June after that dreadful afternoon when Gor was so rude that you boxed his ears and he snatched Nelly up in his arms and carried her out; and when I called after him, “Where are you taking her?” he only shouted back those terrible words that are always returning to me in my dreams, “over the hills and far away!” I know you were right to be angry with him and box his ears. Most fathers would have given him a sound flogging, but it was so cruel of him to take little Nelly off with him. She was only thirteen you know and girls of that age—’

‘Don’t talk about it any more, my dear!’ groaned Mr Po. ‘Gor was a queer child from his babyhood up. You never could tell what he’d do next or say next. We must remember this, my dear, anyway — Nelly loved him intensely, desperately, far more than she loved either of us.'

'But isn't that incest, Mary dear?' said Charley Po gravely. 'I don't know what it is!' cried his wife, 'and I'm sure dear little Nelly didn't either! When a young girl of her age falls in love she thinks of nothing but the youth she loves. Gor loved her too. He'll look after her, you can depend on that. He'll fight for her, work for her, slave for her. I'm not exaggerating, my dear Charley. Don't think that tor a moment. He loved her just as you loved me when we first met and you were seventeen and I was fifteen.'

'But oh I wish, my dear,' groaned Mr Po, 'that I hadn't boxed his ears. But after what he said to me — yes, to both of us, what else could I do? If I'd behaved like that when I was a boy my father would have given me a sound thrashing.'

'No! but think, my dear Charley, here we are, two elderly people in our seventies and how lovely it would have been to have Gor and Nelly to look after us! They ran away from us because we didn't properly understand them; because we frightened them, because we were too severe with them.'

'Well, my dear Mary,' said Charley Po, 'you must remember I did all I could do to find out where they had gone. But nobody had seen them, nobody in the whole of Abertackle that I could find or hear of; nobody in the whole of the Go Peninsula. You must give me credit for a great deal of unpleasant effort and a great many unpleasant encounters and interviews. I did my very utmost. But they were gone, just as Gor called back to you: "over the hills and faraway".'

To Charles Po's astonishment his wife rose to her feet. 'I can't listen to any more of your excuses, my dear,' she cried indignantly. 'If you hadn't boxed Gor's ears that day they would both be with us now. Heaven bestowed those two children upon us in spite of all our sins; and instead of bringing them up properly or trying to understand them we allowed a great gap to yawn bigger and bigger and bigger between them and us. We were too severe with them, too narrow with them, too traditional and conventional with them. We ought to have got it lodged in our pair of stupid heads that both the world and our life in the world has to move forward. There is something in this existence of ours — call it what you will — that refuses to stop moving on, yes, refuses to let what they call evolution be hindered and weighed down and loaded up by obstinate stupidity and foolish clinging to all the old things. Many a night, when you were busy reading Jeremy Taylor or Sir Thomas Browne or *The Anatomy of Melancholy* or *Robinson Crusoe* or *Middlemarch* or *Finnegans Wake*, our son Gor would be expounding to me the most original, the most daring, the newest and most unexpected theories about the nature of matter and these atoms and monads and neutrons and all those other things we read about in the daily papers and that of course I don't understand a thing about. But Gor did! Yes, he did! You should have heard all the ideas he told me about! Of course he was too awed by his father's presence and by the old tradition of respect for his father to rattle away like that to you. But I swear to you, my dear, if you'd heard him you would have been impressed just as I was.'

It had been very natural indeed that anyone should have acquired such an admiration for Gor but it was also inevitable that it should have ended, or, let me say, should have been interrupted, in the way it was, because Gor was essentially such a peculiar and original youth and the morions of his mind were so deeply born and so violently outflung that nothing could make you sure what he would be up to next. Gor's waist was small but his arms were long for his age; and his hips were broad and muscular; and you felt as you watched him that he could respond not only to any physical challenge by leaping in any direction, but so massive was his forehead and so intelligent his deep-sunk eyes that you could not help feeling that whatever mental appeal you made to him would meet with the exact response you wanted.

As a matter of fact it was under a low arch in a corner of Hyde Park Gardens in London that young Gor was resting that afternoon while he pondered on the great undertaking he had decided to begin that day. Yes, young Gor now was arranging his mind according to his plan. ‘Yes, it’s from this here London that I shall make my start,’ said young Gor to himself, ‘although I shall always regard Abertackle as my home and I shall always be pleased to observe among my coats of arms of Oxford and Cambridge that of Jesus College, Cambridge, where Laurence Sterne began inventing his Shandy tales. But whatever I find in these confounded colleges or in London, Abertackle will remain my home. Who knows? Perhaps one day the old village of Abertackle will be as famous because of me as Jesus College at Cambridge is because of Laurence Sterne, the Shandy man. It was certainly in Abertackle that I learnt to walk on air as easily as a dancer dances on a stone floor. My parents saw me with stick in hand learning or rather teaching myself to walk on air.’

6

‘Yes! I, Gor, am now starting on my career from London, although my home is in Abertackle, in the Go Peninsula. I have learnt to walk on air with the aid of a stick and I am now setting out with the intention of walking round the Sun and the Moon and all the various stars near them of which we get glimpses, including the group to which we have given the name of Orion’s Belt. This is for me, Gor, the start of my career. How it will end the spirits of the air will know better than I ever shall. Oh what a thing Life is! And what a thing Death is!

‘Well, here I am,’ he repeated to himself. ‘And I don’t feel a touch of dyspepsia on my left side nor a touch of duodenal hurting me on my right side where my new trouble, some bad little growth, must have developed. But I am really beginning my true career.’

Deeper and deeper darkness soon began to surround him as the evening became night and so cloudy a night that it was not long before the moon followed the sun; and most of the little glittering stars followed the moon into extinction. Not all of them at once, however, nor was Gor displeased at catching a glimpse of one or two of these little gleaming jewels at intervals. At least they gave him a reassurance that he was doing what he wanted to do, that is to say whirl round the whole astronomical galaxy that surrounded the Earth, where he had been born and brought up, and indicating that he was pursuing the course he had proposed for himself and that he had followed in his imagination night after night. So he went hurrying through the darkness, striding at something like a run with his big stick clutched tight in his right hand. It was when he reached the darkest spot in his circular advance that he met young Maia Tuffalon. They both stopped and stood stone-still staring in bewilderment at each other.

‘Where are you going?’ said Gor to Maia.

‘Where have you come from?’ said Maia to Gor.

‘Abertackle’s my home,’ said Gor. ‘But I’ve come from London. Where is your home?’

‘I too come from London,’ said Maia. ‘But my home is in Portland.’

‘Near Portland Bill?’ enquired Gor.

‘Oh no!’ cried Maia. ‘Near Chesil Beach.’

‘Have you a mother and father?’ enquired Gor.

‘No,’ replied Maia. ‘I have only got great-grandmother Tweedle-Weedle. We live alone together in Tickery-Wickery Villa, a nice big comfortable house where our people have lived for a hundred years. Have you got a father and mother?’

‘To tell you the honest truth, my dear girl, I have run away from them. I have a sister whom I love so much that I have hidden her away from our father and mother, hidden her under the care of an old naval captain for whom she cares as if he were her uncle. I often go to see her. I often sleep in their house. I do envy you, my dear friend, your great-grandmother. I’d give half the money I’ve got — and it’s only a little — to have even a grandmother.’

Evidently delighted to have aroused this handsome young man’s envy, Maia Tuffalon tried to increase it. ‘My great-granny,’ she hastened to tell him, ‘had a brother who lived at St Ives and had several wives, but his wives were all alive and lived with him still. He loved to tell his old sister that he was a poly-something. I forget how to spell the word but I remember he was mighty proud of being whatever it was and whenever he went along the London road he would take his ladies with him as if they were so many schoolgirls.’

7

‘You will come on with me?’ said Gor to Maia. ‘You can take my arm when you feel tired.’ Maia smiled. ‘I don’t want to leave you yet. But unlike you I don’t go on by any steady movements. I go by sudden inspiration.’

It was at that moment that they were overtaken by a person whom both of them knew; for he was famous in that part of the country, namely David Cox, the painter. He was being carried through the air by a space-horse, a creature about whom all the local legends were full but whom few actual persons had ever seen. This particular space-horse who now brought Cox quite close to them was different from others of his kind in that he had a horn, a knotted twisted horn.

‘Where are you two going?’ Cox enquired of them.

‘Exploring space,’ replied Gor.

‘A night or two ago,’ said Cox, ‘I couldn’t sleep. I had been painting several forest scenes, none of which pleased me. I dreamt that if I went on the following Friday to one of the paths I had painted I should find a child’s toy chariot harnessed to a space-horse which would be ready to take me anywhere. So when that day came, dream-drugged I recklessly set out and settled in my boy’s chariot and whipping up its space-horse off I went. But I never thought I’d meet Gor of Gordale or Maia of Go Peninsula!’

Thus speaking, as Homer would say, the painter Cox waved his whip like a flag and all three of them, Gor and Maia with Cox leading, went off round the world.

Oddly enough, in their interest at being three against the whole bulk of Space none of them realized the personal significance of those horns on the space-horse’s head. This lack of insight was by no means unobserved by the alert consciousness of the brain out of which these horns were projected, the brain in fact of none other than the Devil himself. ‘Oh,’ thought he, ‘how incredibly stupid human beings are! Nor is this confounded space-horse into whose being I have entered much more intelligent than the silly girl and these two idiotic men. My old fussy enemy God became as stupid as this before he died. Fancy his being able to invent and manufacture all he did out of empty space, sun, moon, earth and stars, and not being able to prevent old age making him dotty and helpless. I confess I miss the old fool. After all, I owe him my life. He invented me. Shall I get old and idiotic as he did? I wonder if it is possible, as I heard one of them say to another not many days ago, that some clever scientific individual will arise one day and invent a new world more intricate and remarkable even than old God's world now? I hope I'll still be alive on that day. But maybe not. Prophesying is one of the arts that have passed away. What also will have passed away will be the human traditional imagination as to what I am thinking about behind these horns of mine. The general idea no doubt is that I am rejoicing about the death of God — that is to say if the news of that event has already swallowed up the old idea that it was impossible for God to die. But if I were to blurt out now without any hesitation all that I am actually thinking, how completely different all the mortal creatures now alive on the earth and in the sun and moon and every one of these glittering stars would find it from all that they are imagining! As I say, they are imagining that I am going over in my mind every detail of God's death. They are imagining that I am wondering whether I could re-create the flames of Hell so that these flames would be waiting to cause the souls of the dead, who have not willed and worshipped and prayed and purged themselves enough, to suffer the everlasting pains that God so loved to inflict. The truth is that all this time what I had in mind was a series of desperate conjectures about how far it would be possible to re-create the sun, the moon, the stars and this earth with all their inhabitants exactly as they were in those days before the death of God, I mean full of the fear of God and full of all that Curtis Freshel was warning them about, helped by that "Millennium Guild" in which Freshel's wife was so absorbed. By saying "re-create" of course I don't mean re-create the material substance of sun or moon or earth or stars. I mean re-create the state of mind of the dwellers in these worlds and you must remember that in the world-dwellers I am not including animals and other non-human creatures but only human beings and such entities as closely resemble them. I don't suppose any of you three, Gor or Maia or Cox, have ever seen a space-horse before. I expect you think they are purely legendary apparitions. To tell you the truth I had never seen one myself till I took possession of this one body and soul.

‘What I expect you three would like me most of all to tell you is when and how I first met, during those early peregrinations with the Knights of King Arthur, the new Merlin himself. I must be ready to tell you.’ (So the Devil’s thoughts ran on.) ‘But I don’t feel like doing so just yet. Why don’t I? Well, I think it is because of that overpowering sensation I had when I first saw him that he was part of myself and I was part of him. Yes, it was no less than that. Part of myself he was and part of himself I was. The second I saw him that feeling came over me like the curling switch of a whirlwind’s tail. It was partly a feeling that something had pulled me in half in order to make room for him. But it was a still more extraordinary feeling that something had pulled him in halt in order to make room for me. Henceforth, I thought to myself, Merlin is partly me and I am partly Merlin. But soon after this a much more searching thought leapt like a fish out of me and back again whence it had sprung. This thought said, “Never when I was within him or he was within me did I have the feeling of actually being Merlin to the extent of my thoughts being his thoughts. Never For a moment did I feel myself to be Merlin thinking to himself within me, though I certainly did feel myself to be me thinking to myself within Merlin. This surely shows that even with a Being possessed of the spiritual power of Merlin the old natural rules of identity, of me and thee, together with our thoughts, have to go on as usual.”’

Well, the three adventurous explorers, Gor, Maia and Cox, not to speak of the Devil in the space-horse’s body, went boldly on into the darkness. Little did any of them know that no less a being than Murdrawla, the largest of all the space-demons in existence, was hovering over them. The contact, a completely psychic one, between the Devil in possession of Cox’s space-horse and Murdrawla was an extremely simple one, but not devoid of its own special dramatic interest. The Devil knew well that he was a good deal more powerful, as evil spirits go, than Murdrawla could claim to be, but he also knew that Murdrawla had not the slightest idea of this fact. To her mind, as soon as the impact between them began it was like a very powerful Air-Demon, namely herself, discovering the fact that some much smaller, almost infantile spirit of the same class had taken possession of Mr Cox's air-steed and was imposing its superior energy upon that creature's movements. It has always been Murdrawla's beauty that has fascinated visitors to space from sun and moon and earth and from every galaxy of stars. It is impossible to convey in ordinary human words the exquisite beauty of Murdrawla. How did space give birth to her? That was the question which it was impossible to prevent from coming into every visitor's mind. When David Cox asked the lady herself this daring question, her reply was as follows: 'I haven't, my dear sir, the faintest idea. I can remember when I was a child of two or three or four. I can remember when I was fourteen, but cannot remember any parents or any companion at any epoch. I'm very glad you like my looks. They are all I have.'

So Murdrawla floated above them and Gor was aware of the unequalled sweetness of the aura of feminine flesh. Maia was aware of it too, but being feminine herself it did not affect her in the same way though it affected her quite a lot. David Cox was extremely affected but what he felt was mingled with various other agitations. Gor was suffering from acute dyspepsia under his left rib as they all three moved on. Whatever it was, however, that hurt him under his right rib struck him now as being greatly eased. But the further and faster they went the worse did Gor's dyspeptic pain become till Maia couldn't help asking him why he was grabbing so desperately with both hands under his braces at the left top of his trousers. 'It's dyspepsia, my dear,' he replied. 'It's this old trouble I've had since I was fourteen at school.'

'It has nothing to do then with this naked angel or demon flying above our heads?'

'Oh no,' replied Gor decisively, 'nothing whatever. I had it before she appeared and I shall doubtless have it still when she has disappeared.'

'Perhaps,' said David Cox, 'if you prayed to the lady over our heads as if she were a goddess, she would act like a goddess and command that pain to go away. Pain is a thing, especially that kind of pain, that is particularly responsive to divine influence.'

'But how do I know,' cried Gor angrily, 'that this naked creature over our heads is a divine influence? How do I know that she isn't some pretty devilkin that God created tor a special torment of the lost souls he loves gloating over in Hell?'

'Do you know what I think?' said Maia suddenly.

'Do tell us, tor Heaven's sake!' cried Gor. 'What *you* think about this lady over our heads is the important thing. You are much more likely to grasp the situation than we are.'

At this point in their plight David Cox addressed Maia: 'What had we better do? You must understand this Being as none of us men can.'

'Well, I think she wants a lover. I think it you, Gor, or you, David Cox, were to stretch out your arms and throw them round her you would find she would yield at once to your embrace.'

'But would either of us be able to fly with her through space?'

'She would see to that,' responded Maia. 'An angel doesn't need help from a mortal man when she is holding him in her arms.'

It can be well imagined how the Devil, still in full possession or David Cox's space-horse, listened to this conversation. 'I wonder.' he thought within himself, ‘what this space-angel would feel if, as David Cox embraced her, she suddenly became aware of my presence within the space-horse beneath them? It is really very queer how much better God understood me and I understood God than either of us has ever understood the thoughts of human beings or animals. I think I understand animals better than God does and he understands human beings, especially children, better than I do. Love and Hate are more interesting, far far more, than understanding. We don’t need any understanding to love and hate. I long to ask this naked angel above us what she hates and what she loves, quite apart from me and God and men and women and children and animals and birds and insects. What I love most of all are shadows and what I hate most of all are ceilings. Why in the name of Heaven and Hell do we have to have those horrid, grey flat, colourless, meaningless, lifeless lids above the airy spaces of the room or rooms where our nicest human beings spend their lives? I, the Devil, have only to look at the backs of the books in this bookshelf in this room up the nine or eleven steps of this house, to see what I love best here: namely the backs of the four enormous folios of Littré’s dictionary of the French language. But it is this lovely naked girl Murdrawla herself whom I would like most to obey at this juncture, if she would only speak up boldly and tell us all what would be the wisest thing for us to do.’

8

Gor felt an ecstasy of happiness when Murdrawla responded to his outstretched arms. In five minutes they were locked together in a passionate embrace and for half a year they were flying and floating sometimes between Cox and Maia. sometimes alone in the darkness without the sight of a single star I heir excrement, like that of a pair of enamoured horses or cattle slid down through the darkness, followed by their urine; and as ‘wandering pedestrians in London’s most frequented parks saw it. or even perhaps felt it fall rumours kept spreading that certain swiftly mewing vessels were careless about their sanitary overflow. As can be imagined. The Devil in his exultant possession of the soul — and in the sense of the body too — of David Cox’s space-horse found himself perpetually conveying that highly-strung adventurer into positions from which he could spy with not very honourable interest upon the united and double-enhanced swooping of the love-wave whose foam-white vibrations made the air quiver as it carried Gor’s caressing ardours and Murdrawla’s aerial responses within the mystic dance-curve of zodiacal destiny. But Cox’s rapturous contemplations of aerial love, accompanied by Maia’s virginal commentaries, were not the only background to what Gor and Murdrawla were enjoying, it was the Devil who had suddenly got into his inexhaustible head a new idea, he had begun to feel that his guidance of the space-horse that was pulling Cox along was not causing as much disturbance to the three friends, Gor, Cox and Maia, as he had intended to cause. It had had, as was only too clear to him now, no effect at all upon the movements of Murdrawla. Then it suddenly came into his head that he must do something to vex, hinder, trouble, disturb, interrupt, delay, defeat, agitate, upset, bewilder, confuse, harass, invalidate the love between Gor and Murdrawla. What could he do? They were so happy together, so absolutely absorbed in each other. What could he do to shake up and belittle their frantic and abandoned emotion? Then the idea occurred to him. Yes! Yes! That is what he would do! No sooner had it come into his head than he did it. He shook off his hold on Cox’s space-horse and left it free to follow its own will. Then he quietly, cunningly, silently, surreptitiously, left Cox and Maia to themselves and flung his whole personality and all his strength into the stick Gor held in his hand, which contact with the naked girl had not loosened from his grip. Oh how happy the Devil felt when he had plunged into Gor’s stick and taken full possession of it! Gor did not relax for a second his embrace of Murdrawla because of the stick in his hand. If he clutched the stick tighter because — though he knew it not — the Devil was in it, he embraced Murdrawla closer than before. But the Devil was thinking exultantly within himself: ‘What is now to prevent me from ruling the whole universe? Riding as I am upon the bodies — even between the bodies now and then — of these two lovers and dominating with absolute control this magic stick of Gor, and knowing, as few others in the world do, that God is dead, who is there that can prevent my declaring myself Lord of the entire universe?’

‘My space-horse is acting very queerly,’ said Cox to Maia. ‘I can’t understand what has come over it.’

‘I expect,’ said Maia to Cox, ‘it has to do with those two making love as they float above our heads. When human beings act in an unusual way, some way they’re not accustomed to witness, animals always tend to get funny.’

‘I wish,’ said Cox to Maia, ‘I hadn’t started making love to Murdrawla. If only I’d just let her sail over me untouched all would have been well.’

‘All *is* well,’ said Maia to Cox.

‘I pray so,’ said Cox to Maia.

‘I wish we could put a stop,’ said Maia to Cox, ‘to this love-making in the air. I think it is not only terribly agitating to your space-horse but I begin to find it rather bad for my health. I have never before felt seasick in this space-trip of ours but I have felt like that twice lately now. And I’ve been flying quite as calmly as usual. I’m sure it’s the effect upon me of this airy-fairy love-making.’

While Gor and Murdrawla followed by Cox and Maia were steadily encircling the sun, the moon and the stars, led by Gor's stick, which in its convulsive possession by the Devil was able to be instinctively aware how closely Cox and Maia were following it, the Arch-Eagle of the Universe in a remote portion of space was unfolding its tremendous wings. Its parents had instructed it, when it first emerged from its colossal egg-shell which it broke into tiny bits, how to unfold its wings so as not to create too much disturbance in the air. But it was not long after it had learnt this lesson, that they and their nest had disappeared forever. When its gigantic wings were at last unfolded the Arch-Eagle gazed intently towards the sun, moon, earth and stars and did not fail to notice Murdrawla and her lover Gor with his Devil-possessed stick, followed by Maia and Cox. Maia was moving through the air just as gracefully as if she were flying and Cox was rather irritably trying to drive his space-horse in the direction of a deliberate circle round sun, moon, earth and stars. No sooner had the Arch-Eagle caught sight of this group than he began flying towards them. There was something about the couple of lovers who led them that especially appealed to him. Before his parents had disappeared forever into the Heaven of space-dwellers they had named their son Paragon; so it was Paragon who came rushing down and tried to seize Murdrawla by the throat. The sweetness of her body was such, however, and her laugh when she felt him there so enthralling that his jaws refused to close, especially as his head was receiving extremely sharp blows from a stick that Gor carried. The next thing that happened was simple and natural enough. Paragon unclosed his jaws, unfolded his great wings and rose up above them all, where he kept flying backwards and forwards just as Murdrawla and Gor had done before. Maia, with nothing but her arms and legs, and Cox with his erratic space-horse, felt extremely uneasy as they watched this huge bird, that looked more and more like a dragon as it grew darker, flying backwards and forwards above their heads.

But Paragon's mind was working actively. 'What can I do with them?' he thought to himself, 'now that I have got this little group under my control? Heaven and Earth! I believe I've got it. Why shouldn't I convey them all to that remote and solitary region of empty space of which I caught a glimpse a week ago? I might establish a little kingdom for them there! I think this fellow Gor and this exquisitely lovely creature Murdrawla would make a fine king and queen. In tact I might go further and have their kingdom turned into a sort of psychic empire over every country in the world. I could fly to all these countries and carry with me a paper for them to sign submitting to the spiritual authority, whether they are Christians or Buddhists or Mohammedans, of King Gor and his great mysterious wife Queen Murdrawla.'

The great Arch-Eagle Paragon, according to what he had decided, now spread his enormous wings, and using them with the comfortable and easy motion of a tidal wave whose original earthquake was far away, swept Gor and Murdrawla and David Cox with his hard-working space-horse and the gallant solitary Maia flying quite alone, without causing them any special agitation, till, somewhere about eleven o'clock in the morning by Abertackle time he established them safely in the secluded region he had discovered. Once there it was easy for him to inspire them, for the Arch-Eagle had more psychic power than any other offspring of pure space, with all the daring and audacity he had been formulating for them in his own mind. He soon collected them all around him and one of the most remarkable conferences began that have ever taken place in the world. Perhaps it was the most remarkable of all. At any rate it shall now be described. The first word to be uttered came from the hooked beak of the

Arch-Eagle; and it took the form or a simple and direct question. It was addressed by the Arch-Eagle to the Devil who suddenly emerged from Gor's stick and presented himself, horns and all, in his accustomed human shape, at the head of the bed of cloudy mist upon which, side by side, Gor and Murdrawla were seated.

'Who are you?' said Paragon to the Devil.

'Well,' replied the latter, 'I am tempted to reply "Ask Mister Cox", tor he belongs, as indeed does Mr Gor also, to the race of earth-dwellers who invented me. They also were the ones who invented God, although I shrewdly suspect that if you had put your question to God before he died of old age, he would have retorted that he invented himself. Yes, both God and the Devil were the invention of the earth dwellers, God being their idea of the first cause of everything Good and the Devil being their idea of the first cause of everything Evil. The human race in its earliest ages must have had a wild and desperate fear of all animals with horns, which must be the reason that, though they imagined my form and shape to be human, they always visualized me with horns protruding from my head.'

'What did you feel like when you were first invented by the Christians? For we all know that neither the Buddhists nor the Mohammedans believe in you.'

'Well,' replied the Devil with the greatest ease. 'I just felt an enormous sense of relief. You see they invented me to embody all the most wicked things they felt themselves and I can't tell you what relief I felt when I found that to please the people who invented me *and to be* their invention to the limit, I had only to hate as much as I could! Oh how I loved hating! And to hate as much as I liked and could — Oh what a perfect joy!'

While the Devil was recovering his breath after his eulogy upon hatred Gor was examining his stick very carefully, the stick out of which the Devil had burst forth. ‘How did this Evil one,’ he enquired of Murdrawla, hugging her to his heart, ‘get out of my stick as it lay between us?’

‘The question I would like to answer, if only I could,’ replied Murdrawla, ’is how he got into it. I have the idea, though how that came into my head I don’t know, that before he got into your stick he was in possession of David Cox’s space-horse. But if that were so it seems very queer that he should leave possession of a horse to enter a stick.’

‘I expect you can never tell with devils; I expect they never know themselves,’ said Gor, ‘what they’re going to do next.’

‘Well,’ said Maia, ‘we must think clearly and decide definitely what we’re going to do. Our present lord and master is our friend Paragon the Arch-Eagle who brought us hither. I suggest that humbly and naturally, without pretending any emotion we don’t feel, we ask him what he would advise us to do.’

‘I can reply to that at once,’ said the Arch-Eagle. ‘I advise you all to agree simultaneously, without electing or voting or arguing or discussing the matter at all, to make Gor your King and Murdrawla your Queen and appoint Maia as your Defence Minister and David Cox as your Finance Minister. Then I would, all four of you together, with what help I can give you, draw up a document, in as legal language as you know how, announcing that we have established in this region of empty space a new world kingdom above all Christians, all Buddhists, all Mohammedans, yes! a psychic, or spiritual World-Kingdom, entitled “The Kingdom of Mankind”. I myself. Paragon, the super ArchEagle, will be the herald or royal messenger of this new state, and I will fly to every country in the world carrying our legal paper and I will make the government of each country I visit sign with its official signatures its spiritual adherence and submission to our universal world rule.’

Gor and Murdrawla calmly accepted their position as King and Queen of Mankind's Kingdom, of which Maia became the Minister of Defence and Cox the Minister of Finance, while the Arch-Eagle, whose name was Paragon, became the courier or herald of the New State. The ArchEagle had no difficulty in securing General de Gaulle's signature nor that of Dr Adenauer but he was refused any by East Germany and also by South Africa because of apartheid, and also by Turkey and Pakistan. New Zealand and Australia took a long time to persuade and Canada would have been the same, if it had not been that using a wise hint from a subtle writer in that remarkable country the Arch-Eagle flew through the office window of one of their chief foreign correspondents when he was fast asleep, and obtained his signature while he was in one of the curious nightmares his sleep was subject to, a nightmare which lent itself to the Arch-Eagle's appearance and request.

Then it happened that from a part of America where there was a settlement of Red Indians without one white man, or one black man, or even — for it was at some distance from China — one yellow man, there came an appeal to the great-winged Emissary of this New State of Mankind to pause and allow them to consider the object of his journey. With every degree of willingness, as you can imagine, the Arch-Eagle stopped in his flight, and entered into a colloquy with the Red Indians and their Chief which ended in the signature by this latter, in a handwriting that made King Gor and Queen Murdrawla feel exultant when they saw it, of a special request to be included among those who supported the New State of Mankind.

But what none of the supporters of the New State realized, and what even the messenger of the New State didn't realize, was that before the time of Adam and Eve, that is to say before our human race began its career upon earth, there existed a Being whom all the living creatures of our world, fish, animals, birds, reptiles, when they referred to him in any intercourse among themselves — and this included insects also — always referred to as the 'Unknown One'.

This Being had the body of an enormous lizard and the head of a rhinoceros; but out of its eyes there looked forth an expression that was most decidedly human, and in addition to this there emerged from its shoulders two rather short but otherwise quite normal arms and hands. This Being lived in a large cave on the outskirts of the region that had now become known through the activity of the Arch-Eagle as the New State of Mankind. Among the characters of this New State who have now become familiar to us, it was naturally the Devil who was the most active; and it was the Devil who was the first among them all to have the audacity to visit the Unknown One in his cave.

So inured was the Devil, by reason of his various experiences under the authority of God, to pain, that he felt as if there was nothing particularly queer or unusual when, having boldly entered his cave, he found the Unknown One wriggling and scriggling and clutching with his short arms and shorter hands at everything within reach of the bed of straw upon which he or it lay extended.

'You are suffering, Master?'

'Who in the name of God are you?'

'My usual name is the Devil, but in my time I've had grander names than that.'

'How did you know I was in pain?'

'If anyone in the world knows what pain is like and what it makes one to do it is I.'

'How is that?' enquired the Unknown One.

‘Because God,’ responded the other, quietly seating himself on the floor of the cave and folding his arms round his shins, ‘employed me for hundreds of years in the task of increasing the pain of his enemies by pushing them back into the flames out of which they had managed to scramble.

That, as you probably know. Unknown One, was God’s chief pleasure. Paul, who invented Christianity, was the letter-writing missionary. But where he muddled things up a bit was in regard to Love and Hate. He learned in watching the exquisite delight that God took in torturing his enemies and making them believe that the flames that were causing them such pain would last for ever what Hate was. He knew that such men as the Marquis de Sade and Gilles de Retz have always been examples of wickedness, whereas God’s delight in burning his enemies has become something like a Law of Nature that fits in perfectly with his Love for those among us who try to love him. How did Paul muddle things up so? I know he lived long before the Marquis de Sade and Gilles de Retz. But that wasn’t the reason. The reason was that in his own heart — and I know I’m right there — Paul felt Love and Hate contending and sometimes one and sometimes the other dominating him completely. But the point, oh Unknown One, suffering such pain, is simply and solely the nature of pain! It certainly is a queer thing. Compare it with its opposite, for example. Yes! Compare it with pleasure. When we enjoy pleasure we feel it all around us. It is in everything we look at with our eyes, hear with our ears, smell, feel, taste! But this confounded pain that St Paul delights to see his God of Love inflict on those who hate him, is not all around us, is not in our eyes, ears, taste and smell. Pain is always localized, whereas pleasure is spread abroad in all directions. When the adorable Saint appears who has made us happy we look round us on all sides, we dance and play and sing. But when the stern punisher of us for our sins and wrongdoings turns up do we look round? Not a bit of it! We clutch with our hands just as you are doing now that particular place in our suffering body where the pain is lodged.'

'Please go away,' said the Unknown One to the Devil, and the Devil obeyed him. He flew as quickly as he could to their little encampment and related to them all that he had found. The Unknown One, he explained to them, 'is suffering from some internal pain. He squirms and shivers and shudders and he keeps clutching with his hands, which are just like ours, only his arms are much shorter than ours, at every curve or protuberance in his body from where his legs begin to where his neck begins. At last, after I had been talking to him for a little while about the difference between pain and pleasure, he asked me to go away; and I obeyed him without protest. I wonder what is the matter with him and whether it's anything serious?'

'What is he like,' enquired Murdrawla, 'apart from his legs and hands?'

The Devil pondered for a minute. 'What I think he's like,' he said, 'is one of those monsters we read about and see pictures of in books. I expect he *is* one of those monsters who has lived in this cave ever since those early days and by long experience knows exactly where to find a flock of sheep or a group of cattle from which he can carry a good meal for himself back to his cave. I sat on the floor while I talked to him, but he had a bed of very soft and comfortable hay which long experience must have taught him how to collect and arrange. Unless my imagination is completely running away with me, it struck me more than once as I sat on the floor clinging to the top of my socks, that it was crossing the mind of the Unknown One whether it was worth his while to seize me with one of his human hands and short human arms and devour me, beginning with my head and ending with my feet.

'Is he like any animal alive today?' enquired Gor.

‘Well,’ replied the Devil, ‘he is a little like a rhinoceros. If some magician were to turn him into a beast I am sure that would be the one into which he’d be transformed. But at the same time,’ the Devil went on, ‘there is something about him that makes you think of some sort of enormous shark. Is there such a thing, do any of you know of such a thing, as a shark almost as big as a whale?’

There was quite a stir in the little camp of the New State of Mankind when the Devil asked this question. The liquid voice of Maia and the gravelly voice of David Cox collided together as they both answered. ‘Oh yes,’ cried Maia. ‘I’ve seen pictures of a creature exactly like what you describe. I’m sure that in the depths of the ocean there are monsters exactly like that!’

‘Oh but you don’t have to go to the bottom of the ocean,’ cried David Cox, ‘to find such things! They come out of the sea, and swim up the estuaries to the rivers! My own home at Abertackle where I was born looked out on an estuary where fishermen used to drag up in their great nets the most extraordinary creatures. Yes, I have seen them take out of their nets and kill things just like the monster whose cave you’ve been into!’

It was the voice of Murdrawla that finally floated over all their heads, like a gentle zephyr above a lake of thick-headed wrangling reeds.

‘We must act as our wise Devil did,’ murmured Murdrawla, ‘and sit on the floor of the World while the rising tide of Nature’s wildest intention is checked by a splutter of chance and calmed down by the steadily blowing wind of destiny.’

9

The present camp of the New State of Mankind was soon sunk in deep slumber. Gor and Murdrawla slept in each other’s arms. Maia slept alone with her head on a pillow of her own making which she had propped up against the stump of a tree which had been blown down long ago. David Cox slept not far from Maia with his head upon a very large and richly embroidered pillow which Maia had made especially for him. By eight o’clock that night the Devil arose from a comfortable sleep he had allowed himself to enjoy inside the entrance to an old badger’s hole only a few yards distant from the two heads of Gor and Murdrawla as they lay side by side. The Devil had no sooner emerged from his badger’s hole than he decided he had been unwise in allowing himself even that retreat. ‘I bet my life,’ he told himself, ‘that Old Horror has already come across from his cave and is exploring our camp, hoping to find we’ve forgotten some child or some cat or dog or serving-maid whom he could snatch up and carry home to devour mouthful by mouthful at his confounded pleasure.’

The Devil had hardly experienced the wafture of this disturbing thought pass through him like the whiff-whiff-whiff of the breath of an infantile volcano when he saw in the distance the unmistakable figure of the Unknown One lumbering heavily towards him. Down on his stomach he went, and sprawling along by the aid of tufts of grass and withered stalks of bracken he worked himself clear of his retreat till he reached the feet of Gor and Murdrawla, round whom he scrabbled as softly as he could and then sat up hugging his knees as he had done on the monster’s floor and watched for his approach. ‘Ought I,’ the Devil said to himself, ‘to wake these people oh the New State oh Mankind? At this moment it might mean a wild scuffle between them and the Unknown One which would end in his victory and not theirs. I heel entirely on the side oh these people, though why I have such a normal, earthly heeling I don’t know. Gor and Cox would take it tor granted that being the Devil and not God I should be on the Unknown One’s side; but I fancy Maia would understand things better. She, with a wise woman’s instinct, would know that in all those hell-burnings I was God’s agent and servant because of my cowardice and oh my hear that if I didn’t obey him he would toss me into the flames and begin at once whispering in my ear his gloating delight in torture— “not tor only a million years but forever and forever and forever will you burn in these flames.” No,’ thought the Devil. ‘It would be a mistake to wake them all now; not only because it would give the monster an opportunity to leap upon them or whatever thing belonging to them he pleased; for if they were suddenly aroused from sleep they would all be too confused to defend themselves properly.’

‘Thinking thus,’ as Homer always says, the Devil remained in his seated position watching most intently the approach oh the monster. ‘If he comes straight here,’ thought the Devil, ‘he’ll see that I am not asleep, but on the other hand if I lie on my back and pretend to be asleep he may leap upon me and make me his victim, which is the last thing I want to happen.’

What he did accordingly, after thinking thus, was to work himself or worm himself backwards till he was well behind the feet oh Gor and Murdrawla. Here he remained on his back, but not deprived oh the power to peep out over the feet oh Gor and Murdrawla and watch the advancing Unknown One.

It was then that out of the badger’s hole at the entrance to which our friend had paused ere making his former discoveries there emerged an extremely youthful badger. This apparition was observed at once by the Unknown One who came, leap after leap, towards it. The small badger, however, clearly had all its wits about it, for it slyly waited till the monster was quite near and then with a leap worthy of any offspring of the monster itself, rushed round him and scampered off in the direction from which they had all come. The monster followed him as well as it could; but it was evident that the fact that they had all come from the direction in which the badger fled made its pursuit much more difficult. 'I suppose,' said the Devil to himself, 'the scent of such a move as we all made to get here has made it very hard to pursue any one of us along the route we took to reach this place unless kept in sight.'

The monster was certainly quite out-run by the little badger when this small animal emerged from the deep hole made by its ancestors thousands of years ago; and as the Devil watched, the Unknown One returned in an evidently exhausted state towards its Cave.

It was then that an exciting idea came into the Devil's mind. 'Why,' he thought, 'don't I build for myself out of these tree logs and tree stumps and fallen branches a very strong but very small woodman's hut? And why don't I keep in it little toy figures which I could easily carve out of wood and paint them so that they would represent all the human beings that have lived in the world before the New State of Mankind was constructed. Yes, I would paint Red Indians and Black Africans and White Settlers and Yellow Chinamen. I would have black and white and red and yellow little men, all in a row on a shelf. Then if any children came — Oh!' and the Devil heaved such a deep sigh! 'What would I not give for some grandchildren! Just two! Only two! One boy and one girl!'

The word grandchildren, for an innate reason in his own mind caught the ear of Gor who gave Murdrawla a special hug and sat up. 'How could I have grandchildren,' he asked the Devil, 'if I haven't a son or daughter?'

'By adoption,' replied the Devil. 'That is how I'm thinking of having mine!'

Still waiting rather eagerly to follow to the end the topic of grandchildren, the Devil shrugged off the dramatic finale of the Unknown One's pursuit of the little badger, a finale which must have left the monster groaning with pain on his bed and the little creature slipping with delicious satisfaction down the larder-drop of his ancestors' subterranean dwelling.

But Gor had awakened Murdrawla, who found the Devil regarding her with an expression of worshipful devotion, for it there were anyone better acquainted with the best way to appreciate myth-creating ladies such an one had never as yet come near Murdrawla.

The shameless, plain-speaking David Cox was also awake now and what he said brought another aspect of their journey to their minds. 'We'd better have a drink and go to sleep again, for the early morning is the best time to reach the centre of any space journey.'

Maia's was the last word. 'None of us know what any of us feel. So "on all together!" is the word: and let the future keep its revelation.'

As soon as the Unknown One had gone galumphing back to his cave and the Devil knew that Gor and Murdrawla and David Cox and Maia were all awake, he got up and followed the monster. It can be believed how staggered he was when on entering he found there were two of them in the cave. The monster knew him at once and introduced him to the other monster whom he described as his mother and whose name, he said, was Wow. 'No,' he went on, 'Wow darling, we can't gobble him up, because he's got a much more powerful spirit than we have and a much more powerful spirit than any human beings on this Earth excepting only Red Indians, who, as you used to teach me when I was little, were able without any weapons at all but simply by the power of the spirit to dominate every other race in the world. This personage, featured and embodied like a man — like a little man — but with horns coming out of his head, has some connection with that Being who called himself "Father of All" and whom the Earthlings called God. He will explain to you, Wow darling, what the connection exactly was. I have forgotten. But he will tell you himself.'

The Unknown One was right. The Devil had no sooner been introduced to Wow, whose hand he kissed devoutly, than he began delivering the sort of regular lecture on the theological, psychological and biblical revelation between God and himself, such as anyone as yet unschooled in the appropriate expressions would have wanted to hear.

‘But how could you,’ enquired old Madame Wow, whose appearance because of her age tended to accentuate the ferocity of her face, ‘bear to obey such a cruel burner of his enemies as I have always heard your God was?’

‘Well, lady,’ replied the Devil, ‘if I hadn’t thrown back again into the flames any human soul who was scrambling out, God would have pitched me in at once. It was extraordinary the pleasure God derived from causing pain. I was present at the confession of Gilles de Retz or Bluebeard as they called him and his fear of falling into God’s flames certainly made God a crueller Being than any Bluebeard.’

‘Thank you very much indeed, Mr Devil, for all you’ve told me. I shall never forget it.’

Wow’s words were uttered in such a sincere voice that the Devil could not help accepting them as absolute truth. ‘May I,’ he asked her nervously, ‘beg you to tell me one simple thing.’

‘By all means,’ replied Wow, and the Devil felt highly delighted that he had reached a point of intimacy as deep as this. ‘How long,’ he asked her, ‘has your race dominated this particular position in space?’

‘Only a little over two thousand years,’ replied Wow. ‘I can tell you that with exact certitude, because it was from you earthlings that we have learnt the art of numeration; and we have kept it up very carefully, and we possess an exquisitely delicate calendar, it such you could call it, giving all the signatures of our forbears — not of course their pictures, tor as you know none of us look very pretty — going back year after year, century after century; just as if we were not monsters at all but very learned and scientific historians.'

10

'I am very much impressed by all you say, Lady Wow. Oh yes, Lady Wow, I am deeply impressed by the idea of your ancestors in this cave for over two thousand years having kept a commemoration and calendar of all the centuries as they passed, for my own life has had nothing, no! has never had anything, with which to celebrate its uneven course, and I have always longed for something of the kind.'

'May I follow your example, Monsieur Devil, and ask you a bold question?' enquired Wow.

'O please do!' cried the Devil. 'I shall be so thrilled to try and answer it if I can.'

'Did this cruel God of the earthlings,' Wow asked him, 'create you? Or, if not, who or what did? Or did you perhaps have horned parents like yourself who brought you into this world?'

'You have asked me,' replied the Devil, 'the most important question in the world; and I will try to answer it. Your question is, "How did the cruel God of the Christians flattered by St Paul as being the God of Love and how did his *supposed opposite*, namely myself, the Devil, come to exist? Who, or what, created them?"'

The Devil spoke with such earnestness that both the monster, or the Unknown One, and his mother Wow, listened intently to every syllable.

'It was the human spirit that created both God and me,' said the Devil. 'Human nature contained in itself something beyond what Nature alone — I mean the elements of air and water and earth and fire — could provide.

This something was, and undoubtedly still is, the *Power to Create.* This power comes from the human spirit containing in itself all that it calls Good and all that it calls Evil. It applies those adjectives of course to everything it knows of; every projection of mind, every projection of matter, in the entire universe, or if you prefer that idea, in the entire multiverse, was quickly endowed, the moment the human race appeared, with its own notion of what was good and what was evil. How was it, then, you may ask, that their Christian God who ought to have been, and indeed was, according to St Paul, who by his crafty use of the scattered words of Jesus Christ may be said to have invented Christianity, a Being composed of Love, was soon understood to be a monster of cruelty who gloated over the sufferings of people's souls in Hell, and as he hovered over them there delighted in reminding them that their pain was not for a million years but for ever and for ever and for ever, and that it had come to them because they were his enemies. But, as various human atheists have argued, who wouldn't, what decent man or woman wouldn't, call a cruel monster like the God of Christianity their enemy? What did Jesus himself cry out when he was on the Cross? "Eloi! Eloi! lama sabachthani?"

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" To this the Jesus-lovers who are atheists ought to answer: "He deserted you, oh Best of Men, for the simple reason that he had fooled you from the start in making you believe that he existed."'

It was at that point in their conversation that the Devil heard a sound in the air outside the cave, a sound that by this time he had come to know very well indeed. It was none other than their ally, Paragon, the Arch-Eagle. 'Oh,' thought the Devil, 'if only I could lure one or other of them — perhaps both! — out of the cave's entrance! Maybe if I told him they were our enemies — now that he seems to have become quite definitely our friend and our helper — he would swallow the Unknown One or the Unknown One's Mother, at a gulp, and I'd be spared any further explanation of how our silly earthlings egged on by St Paul and his passion for a deity composed of Love just as — you know the sort of thing — is composed of oil. Oh how I long to hear the wings of Paragon at this moment! Yes, monster, you would have reason for shuddering then! Yes, Madame Wow, you would have reason for crying out "Wow! Wow! Wow! Wow!" if I had heard those great wings and had lured you out of your cave! I wonder what happens in the inside of our Arch-Eagle when a creature as big as the Unknown One or as big as the Unknown One's mummy gurgles down into a place like our Arch-Angelic eagle's belly? Will it struggle to come up again? And if so what will happen? Oh Arch-Eagle, descend and help us!'

The Devil issued from the Cave with prayers to the Arch-Eagle Paragon. But the last thing he expected or the last thing he could have thought of expecting was, as is so often the case with human beings as well as with gods and devils, the thing that now happened. The magic all-conquering sword of King Arthur, torn from his hand in the last battle of his life, the battle of Lyonesse, came suddenly floating up from the Earth through the avenue of space which Gor and Murdrawla and Maia and David Cox had followed. There it was! There was Excalibur itself within reach of the Devil's hand! The Devil seized it. The Devil brandished it. 'Just think!' he thought to himself, 'after all *it's* gone through, and after all I've gone through, that this should happen! Oh how I wish God hadn't died a natural death! How heavenly it would have been if I could have killed him with Excalibur!' He looked round. No, he had come out of the cave alone. No sign of mummy Wow or of her offspring the monster.

‘Oh what can I do with Excalibur?’ cried the Devil to himself: and then, with rather a pathetic gesture when you come to think of it, he raised his left hand — not the one which was brandishing Excalibur — to his forehead as if to make sure that his horns were there, in other words to make sure that by brandishing Excalibur he hadn’t changed from being himself. ‘The truth is,’ he said to himself, ‘my contact with these earthlings, combined with their space-born Murdrawla, has had a queer effect upon my mind.’

Very slowly the Devil, having reassured himself about his horns being in their usual place, walked out of the cave. He was just going to direct his steps to where he had left Gor and Murdrawla when a sound he had never heard before came to his ears. It came from up the slope towards the base of the Moelwyn Range and when the Devil looked in that direction he saw a person walking. It looked like a human dwarf with a monstrously large face and long legs and arms. The Devil burned boldly towards it.

‘Who are you?’ said the person to him. ‘You look just like all the stories I used to hear as a child about the Devil.’

‘I am the Devil,’ was our friend’s answer. ‘May I enquire who you are?’

‘Well, at any rate we both speak the same language. We have both lived on the Earth,’ said the person. ‘My name is Gonflab,’ he went on. ‘As you can see, my arms and legs come straight out of my head. What on earth is called a stomach is in the back portion of my head. I bite and chew and masticate with my mouth and teeth. I have no neck or shoulders, no chest, no belly... nothing but arms and legs.’

The Devil looked Gonflab over and over with the greatest interest. Yes, he had spoken quite correctly. His head went back absurdly. Its back was a lot bigger than its front. Yes! He had no stomach, no neck, no chest, no ribs, no belly. His legs and arms came straight out of his head. ‘How do you kill for your food, Gonflab?’ the Devil asked him.

‘You will see, Mr Devil, how the Creator of the World has only recently died leaving his creation to look after itself, or Nature to look after herself, and if you examine my hands you will also see how it has been arranged that I can kill what I want to eat.’ Thus speaking, Gonflab held his right hand close beneath the Devil’s face, who examined it carefully as he had been told to do. He noticed that it had tremendously long and curved and sharp nails.

‘What do you find, Gonflab, in this space-world to eat?’

‘There are lots of things, Mr Devil, that suit me perfectly,’ Gonflab replied. ‘Whether,’ he went on, ‘you have ever noticed these space-bats which fly about in pairs holding tightly to each other I don’t know; but they make extremely tasty food.’

‘No, I’ve never seen—’ the Devil began — and then he chanced to catch sight of a pair of the very creatures they were talking about and he saw Gonflab seize them with both his hands and squeeze them, prodding them as he did so through and through with his sharp nails, into his widely open mouth.

‘I wonder,’ the Devil asked himself as he watched this going on, ‘whether by clinging together the bats make their death easier, or whether by quickening their flight in that way they make it harder to catch them?’

And then it was that the Devil’s mind swung over to quite a different cogitation. ‘Suppose,’ he thought, ‘our great friendly Arch-Eagle Paragon was to come hovering above our heads at this moment, would he, could he, might he, seize upon Gonflab himself by the head and with his super-aquiline claws tear his head open and swallow everything in it and then begin making a feast for himself out of Gonflab’s two sturdy legs after he had bitten off both his arms and watched them sink side by side down towards the world that had so many similar bones covered with sweet flesh.

Paragon's appetite,' the Devil told himself, 'will be greatly excited by the taste of the flesh upon Gonflab's leg-bones, not to think of what it gets out of the back of Gonflab's head.' Tightly the Devil's right fist clutched the handle of Excalibur. 'Just think of my having King Arthur's sword!' his whole soul cried within itself.

The Devil had no sooner come leaping down after disposing of Gonflab, his left hand repeatedly and almost mechanically touching his own horns, to make sure he was still his proper sell, and his right hand clutching the handle of King Arthur's Excalibur than he became aware that both the monster's mother Wow and the monster — otherwise the Unknown One — were cautiously, cunningly, craftily, calculatingly, encompassing mankind's new camp with steps as camouflaged as it each paw they put down was touching velvet. 'Where can Paragon the Arch-Eagle be? There he is! Oh thanks be! He must have seen that I was clutching Arthur's Excalibur, for the moment he descended he seized upon Wow, the Unknown One's mother, and held her by the top of her head. He then actually turned his arch-angelic eyes on me as much as to say, "I see you've got Excalibur, so I know what you will do." I did what he hinted in a moment. With one sweep of the sword I cut off Wow's head. Down, down, down, down it sank and the people of Abertackle must have seen it falling, for the touch of Excalibur threw a magic light on it and it must have looked like a meteorite as it fell. You can believe how I, the Devil, pressed my left hand against my horns to be sure I was in my right senses; and then brandishing Excalibur rushed after the monster.'

That there was indeed every reason for him to pursue the Unknown One or the monster, having with the help of the arch-eagle disposed for ever of this being's mother, Wow, who had been quite as deadly a creature, if not more so, than her terrific son, the Devil knew as his left hand flew to his horns to make sure he was still himself, and he now clasped the handle of King Arthur's Excalibur very tightly and pondered in his mind whether he had better cut at the monster's throat as he had done with Wow or stab him to the heart. 'Is his heart in the same place in his body as ours is?' he said to himself. But suddenly a totally different idea came into his head. He asked himself whether it would not be more exciting and more full of strange possibilities if he made the monster a prisoner and kept him in bonds, but always in such a way that at any moment he could be released, like a fierce chained-up dog, and sent rushing at someone whom it was desirable to attack. But the Devil didn't quell this sudden inspiration at this point. He let it carry him, he encouraged it to carry him, as far as it wanted to go. And it evidently wanted to go a long distance. What he now began thinking about was the idea of binding together with a huge rope the whole camp of his friends, these human explorers of space, Gor with Murdrawla, Cox with his horse, Maia with all her mystical insight, and then calling upon the Arch-Eagle to spread its wings and grasp the rope with its beak and to carry them on and on and on and on and on into empty space, to let happen what would.

The Devil's inspiration worked out well. The Arch-Eagle was delighted with the idea. The thought of being in the position of carrying space-ward beyond all known worlds this whole camp of human civilization was just the kind of thought to appeal to him.

The first event to happen in connection with the Devil's activity before the Arch-Eagle carried him, clinging to Cox's horse, beyond all known worlds, was his killing of the Unknown One. He hid himself so skilfully behind Cox's horse that when the monster came near it gave him his opportunity. Then he rushed out and with his right hand tightening its grip upon Arthur's Excalibur he plunged its whole length, clear up to the hilt, through the monster’s heart, and, as the Arch-Eagle carried the Devil up with the rest, the Devil could see the monster he had slain and Excalibur gleaming out of its body, sinking down, just as the monster’s mother Wow had sunk, into the world of sun and moon and earth and stars.

After watching the descent of the monster, otherwise ‘the Unknown One’, with Excalibur through his heart, the Devil asked himself whether he had better cling to a strip of Murdrawla’s night-shirt which Gor’s impassioned embrace had loosened and which flew trailing through the air, or whether he’d better hang on to a strip of wood which projected downwards from the rear of Cox’s wagon? Or finally whether it wouldn’t be wisest of all to clutch the hem of Maia’s skirt, seeing that the weight of all her garments was supported and held up by a beautifully strong broad belt which she had fastened carefully and securely round her waist. He finally decided in favour of the strip of Murdrawla’s night-gown, for he recalled well how the first they had all seen of her was her form as she floated in that night-gown across and across the ascending space-path of the upward flight of them all.

11

Up, up, up they all went, until day after day and night after night passed over their heads for what struck them as a time too long to be measured by any human calculation.

At length they began murmuring among themselves. ‘I don’t believe we are going up into space any more,’ murmured Gor.

‘I think the darkness round us now reminds me of what it felt like at home before midnight was chimed from the church tower,’ murmured Cox.

‘I thought a moment ago,’ murmured Maia, ‘that I heard those chimes.’ It was then that Gor suddenly remembered his sister Nelly who had been so fond of him and of whom he hadn’t had a thought for what seemed like hundreds of years. ‘Goodbye to you all,’ whispered Murdrawla, escaping from Gor’s arms and gliding off till she was out of sight. ‘I can smell the seaweeds of Go,’ announced Gor. ‘We shall go down near the shore.’

‘Abertackle!’ they all murmured with one voice. ‘We are home.’

Cataclysm

1

IN THE LITTLE town of Riddle in the county of Squat in the west of Bumbledom there was a young man called Yok. He had just reached his seventeenth birthday on the first of January in the year nineteen-hundred and sixty, and he now sat by his open hearth on which burned a glowing red fire. Yok was his Christian name. His surname was Pok. Opposite him on the other side of the fire in a less comfortable chair sat his sister Quo Pok, who was still sixteen.

‘I have decided at last that I’ll do it,’ said Yok Pok. ‘I’ve been thinking about it very carefully from every possible angle, for more than a couple of years; and I have now decided that I’ll do it.’

Miss Quo looked at him with alarm. All manner of wild thoughts rushed through her mind. Was her brother thinking of suicide? Was he thinking of killing them both? Was he thinking of leaving their home and setting off to visit Paris or Berlin or Jerusalem? And if so, was he thinking of taking her with him? She had longed dreamed of seeing something of the great world before she grew too old to travel. But there was a look in her brother’s face that scared her. What in heaven’s name had he decided to do? Then without further delay he told her. ‘I have decided,’ he said quietly, ‘to destroy the whole human race.’

Miss Quo gasped and stared intently at him. Had her brother gone mad? She suddenly remembered that her mother had once told her that her great-great-grandfather had been put into a lunatic asylum, where he had been kept until he died. Could it be — no, surely, surely not — that the grave, earnest face, looking so intently at her, was that of a madman? 'But tell me, Yok, Oh for pity's sake tell me what you mean by saying such a thing? Destroy the human race? But you and I *are* the human race. Our mother and father *were* the human race; and so are Uncle Eeak and Aunt Zoo-Zoo. You aren't going dotty, are you my dear? You frighten me by saying things like that!'

Yok Pok turned his head away from his sister's frantic scrutiny and said with a rather forced chuckle: 'Well, you see, my dear, that anything as important as one solitary man making up his mind to become the destroyer of all mankind is likely to be upsetting when you hear of it for the first time and from the actual person who is thinking it. But if you give yourself up to listening carefully while the person in question, that is to say I myself here, sitting opposite to you and talking to you, offers you all the various reasons to think over by which he arrived at his conclusion, his decision, terrific and crazy as it sounds in your ears when first announced, may take on quite a different aspect.'

Yok Pok's voice was so calm, and his expression so unruffled and undisturbed that Quo Pok could only bring herself to murmur, 'Well, the best thing we can do, my dear, it seems to me, is to sleep on it and over it, and when we've both considered the sort of shock you've given me, and when I've considered the various reasons for what you call your *decision,* which no doubt you will give me tomorrow, we shall both be in a better mood for understanding each other. Let us sleep over it, dear Yok, I beg you. Don't let's refer to it any more tonight.'

Yok Pok agreed to obey his sister and went to bed. But it was some time before he could go to sleep. 'Why,' he kept asking himself, 'have I decided to put to death the whole human race?' His answer was definite. 'Because my conscience tells me it’s the right thing to do. My conscience tells me that if I don’t destroy the human race the present slaughter of animals for food and the torture of animals by these appalling vivisectors will increase and increase. When once there isn’t a single human being left alive on this earth the animals will be tree. They may kill each other for food, but they will all have their young to look after; and the cows will give their calves their milk and the birds will build nests tor their little ones and teed them with what they like best to eat, and all the fish, whether in salt water or fresh water, will be in no danger from the hooks of those abominable anglers and will be able to escape or unable to escape, as destiny or chance may decree, from the sea monsters who swim about seeking their natural food. Have I,’ Yok Pok asked himself, ‘enough of that smoke-bomb I discovered three years ago in the cellar or Castle Rumpus? It could have finished off the whole damned lot of us. It certainly did for those three old beggars who used to bother me so much on the woodpath to Castle Rumpus. I never knew where they were from, and when I asked them the only person who told me anything was a gypsy girl who said they came from Austria. But that smoke-bomb certainly finished them off. One moment they were standing begging and the next they were lost in a cloud of smoke that seemed to carry them up into the air. I only used a handful of the bomb-dust on them; and now I’ve got hidden, in a harness loft that Quo doesn’t know about, enough to do for every man, woman and child in this whole bloody world, if I could get an aeroplane far-sighted enough to carry me, and it with me, over the whole surface of our globe.’

Yok Pok couldn’t help thinking to himself before he went to sleep as if he were talking to someone else. He was always like that. It was what made him so trying a companion. But their parents had died so long ago that his sister had had to get used to it. Yes, she had had to get used to his tiresome trick of announcing every detail of his private thoughts as if it were a speech from the throne to which all listeners had to give respectful assent. Yok Pok evidently felt that before he would be able to slide peacefully into a beatific ocean of sleep it was necessary for him to make clear to his imaginary listener, who might have been the corner of one of his two pillows which happened to protrude a little under his chin, tickling that important feature like an impertinent mouse, exactly how the smoke-bomb operated. ‘You have to take a handful of it,’ he explained, ‘or much more than that if many people are involved, and just fling it at them like sand, as if you were seated on a sandbank above a well-frequented esplanade. It would be the rushing impact of the bomb-powder upon the air that would set it off; and once started in this way its collision with the crowd of persons at which it was aimed would result in a strange kind of explosion. Not an ordinary explosion,’ Yok Pok continued, addressing, it might well be imagined, the intrusive tip of the corner of his second pillow, ‘not an explosion such as gunpowder makes, but a wild gust of violent wind, of wind invisible, like a whirlwind, wind like a burst of water pouring from a tank where its terrific pressure has broken the encasing steel, hurling itself forth more like fire than water, rending, rushing, billowing, bursting, flinging itself upon the enemy in a liquid avalanche, like a volcano of irresistible floods of water.’

How far the tickling little corner of his second pillow understood a word of this it would be hard to say; but at least its delicate prod at the recumbent chin of the wordy thinker kept the torrent flowing till he sank into the ocean of sleep.

Yok Pok slept a deep and long sleep; but so far from this absolute escape from consciousness having the effect of relaxing his resolution and diminishing his decision, when he awoke about eight and rose from his bed simultaneously with the rising of the sun he was, if possible, even more determined to extinguish the race of mortals to which he belonged than he had been when he went to sleep. ‘Yes, I shall do it,’ he told himself. ‘There’s enough bomb-sand or bomb-dust or bomb-secretion in my harness-room — and I’m not yet sure I took all there was in Rumpus cellar — to blow to smithereens the whole bloody spawn of Adam and Eve. I could cry like a babe,’ he went on, and tears as big as the eggs *of* hedge-sparrows did drop from his eyes upon the floor as he bent to pull out the chamber-pot from under the bed, ‘when I think of the animal revolution I am going to bring to pass. Yes, there shan’t be the smallest dwarf with two arms, two legs and a squeaking phiz left alive on the earth when I’ve finished my job. Every animal, every bird, every fish, every reptile, every worm, every insect, shall lift up to heaven such a scream of ecstasy that the other planets will think disease and death have been abolished for ever upon earth. I know very well what Quo will say,’ his thoughts ran on. ‘She will say, “What about yourself? Don’t you belong to the human race yourself?” And what shall I answer to that?’

He sat down on the edge of his bed and rested his sharp chin on his clenched knuckles and his sharp elbows on his knees. What crossed his mind was a triumphal ceremony in which all the friends and relations he possessed were gathered together for slaughter and after having killed them all he would kill his sister Quo and himself. ‘The great difficulty,’ he said to himself, still seated on his bed in intense thought, ‘will be the steering of the aeroplane on which I shall fly all over the earth.’

It was then that he suddenly thought of his Great-uncle Eeak, an extremely eccentric old gentleman who was very rich and who always told them that his wife, their Great-aunt Zoo-Zoo, had Jewish blood and was descended, centuries upon centuries upon centuries removed, from a cousin of the grandparents of Jesus Christ. He also told them that there had always been rumours in Aunt ZooZoo's family that they were descended from a person not so dear to Christians as Jesus, but perhaps even more dear to polytheistical scholars with an obsession for all early legends about the human race, from nobody less in fact than Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons. 'I wonder,' he said to himself while his forehead pressed violently upon his knuckles and his elbows so violently upon his knees that he almost groaned with pain, 'whether Uncle Eeak would lend me his aeroplane and explain to the men who run it that they must obey me. Would Great-uncle Eeak be so angry at the whole idea that he would call upon his wife Zoo-Zoo to curse him with the curse of her centuries-removed cousin Jesus of Nazareth for his presumption and wickedness in regarding the descendants of Adam and Eve as less precious than the creatures with which Noah filled his Ark? Wasn't this the very curse with which Jesus lambasted the Scribes and Pharisees, not only for their hypocrisy but for behaving so differently from the Good Samaritan towards the weak and helpless and for bringing their wretched business cheats into the holy temple?'

Yok Pok had never dressed more rapidly than he did that morning and had never hurried off more hastily to the house of his Great-uncle Eeak. Eeak was not a rabbi though his head was full of rabbinical learning, and the constant presence of Zoo-Zoo and her intense interest in all that was religious and ritualistic gave him a daily and nightly delight in discoursing on these things. Yok Pok was shown into his Great-uncle's study by his butler, Ur Veer, who might well have acquired the dignified art of his important office in a training at the palace of a Pharaoh.

‘Zoo-Zoo is out shopping,’ were Uncle Eeak’s first words after Ur Veer had closed the door, ‘but she will be back soon. She’s always pleased when you visit us.’ Eeak’s study seemed made of dark mahogany and heavily laid-on gilding. Pictures, chairs, tables and even the edges of an enormous bookcase were all richly and heavily gilded.

There were three armchairs, one facing a richly burning coal fire and one on each side of it. The two latter were evidently intended for Eeak and Zoo-Zoo, while the guest faced their hearth; and it was facing this beautiful red fire that Yok Pok now stretched out his feet, his toes erect, his heels firm against the fender.

‘I think you agree with me, Uncle Eeak,’ he said, ‘more than anybody round here, about the wickedness of this awful vivisection of animals that these confounded scientists love £0 excuse on the grounds that it benefits humanity. I think it does just the opposite. Yes! I think what it really does is to encourage our bloody doctors to experiment upon their patients when they get ill, just as these accursed scientists do on these unfortunate animals. I tell you, Uncle, half the things they do to us these days are purely scientific experimentation. They want to know more about the insides of men for purely scientific reasons, not in order to save their human patients from pain and suffering.’

‘Yes, my dear boy, I do agree with what you are saying,’ replied Uncle Eeak from the depths of his comfortable armchair. ‘I would sooner be shot dead by a murderous burglar than have scientific treatment from a scientific doctor. You see, my child, this age of ours is the most degenerate age we have ever endured since the days when David killed Goliath and Samson brought that temple down, or was it a theatre, on the heads of all those enemies of Israel. O what happy Christmasses we used to have when my grandfather was the Vicar and I was a youth with a host of brothers and sisters! In those old days clergymen were like consecrated policemen who went about their parish with a pocket full of shillings; and policemen were like competent schoolmasters who went about threatening poachers and burglars and highwaymen with having to "bend over" and be birched or caned into proper behaviour. Clergymen and policemen were the rulers of country places in those days, while the roguish old Squire in his big house thought only of how many foxes he could hunt and how many pheasants he could shoot. Nowadays the government thinks it has done nobly for a village when the Squire has to earn his income tax by showing tourists over his big house while he and his family live in the lodge and send their gamekeepers to Australia and their sons to Canada and their daughters to New York to find American husbands.'

Yok looked at his rich relative with respectful silence for a moment. Then he went on: 'I know *you* agree with me in my feelings about all this sad change, Uncle, but most of the people I talk to think things have greatly improved; and that in the old days the majority of folk were simply the working-class who had to earn their living while the upper class enjoyed itself by killing foxes and deer and birds and fish. I know you do agree with me, uncle, in all this. But what I want to ask you now is a special and particular question. You own an aeroplane, as they call them, don't you Uncle Eeak?'

Eeak smilingly acknowledged this weakness. 'Yes,' he replied, 'and I often fly in it. Its name is Irah. It has, or she has, two men, extra skilled in our grand new art of flying, who in themselves are captain and crew. They are bosom cronies and have been so from their childhood, though they are cousins, not brothers. Their names are Kar and Lar.'

For some reason, that although he tried to analyse it, Yok Pok couldn’t get to the bottom of, there was something about the names of these two cousins, Mr Kar and Mr Lar, who were so good at flying the Irah whose name Uncle Eeak pronounced Ire-Rah, giving it the emphasis that would make it the ire or wrath of some mysterious great person called Rah, yes, something about the names Kar and Lar that caused him profound discomfort. Was it perhaps that, although Uncle Eeak might possibly accept without question the murderous use to which he had decided to apple the Irah, Mr Kar and Mr Lar were likely to indignantly refuse to consider such a proceeding for a single moment? ‘Shall I,’ he asked himself, ‘explain fully and completely to Uncle Eeak what I have decided to do; and then leave it to him to deal with Kar and Lar?’

3

Yok Pok finally came to the conclusion — and it took him more than a couple of days and nights to arrive at it — that it would be wiser to keep it dark from his uncle until that gentleman had placed him in command of the Irah and allowed him to set off with Kar and Lar as his subordinate officers.

In spite of having reached this conclusion Yok Pok still felt a certain uneasiness, which a little disconcerted him until he had the spirit to tell himself that what troubled him was the attitude of Aunt Zoo-Zoo. Ever since he first spoke of the Irah to his uncle, he had begun to notice that Aunt Zoo-Zoo frequently regarded him with a queer expression of unsympathetic if not actually hostile mistrust.

She was a formidable lady; much more formidable as a woman than his Uncle Eeak was formidable as a man. Had his Uncle told her all that he had been talking to him about? Had she detected with the perception with which Nature, the Mother of us all, has endowed women, especially old maids, that there was more in his trip — if his Uncle allowed him such a trip — than he had confessed to Uncle Eeak? Thus a most agitating question arose in his mind. Should he — could he — dare he, actually reveal what was in his mind to Aunt Zoo-Zoo? No! It would be sheer madness to do such a thing — but *would* it be? Or was he on a completely wrong track in this line of thought?

The discussion about the aeroplane Irah between Yok Pok and his Uncle Eeak still went on while Yok Pok remained there on board arguing as cleverly and as subtly as he could with Kar and Lar and not allowing the vessel to leave port or set out tor any purpose or destination till he had done his best to reason these two young men into his way of thought. His sister Quo was a great help to him in this difficult enterprise as she was such a young and pretty girl, so slim, and so exquisite in her ways, that it soon became clear that neither of the young men was anxious to leave their harbour if it meant leaving little Quo behind.

But meanwhile Auntie Zoo-Zoo became more and more dissatisfied with everything. She was about forty and her love for her husband Eeak had been the chief thing in her life since she was four and he was five. She had never had a love affair and she had never wished to have one. She idealized her husband and imagined that he was a far greater man than he was. She was thrilled when he purchased Irah and she made up her mind that she would use it at once to pursue the chief purpose of her life, which was to put an end forever to the infernally cruel practice of vivisection. Her influence, for she was an extremely persuasive and magnetic person, and her presence, for she was a remarkably handsome woman, had always had a great effect on Yok Pok and Quo Pok. They ad no difficulty in blindly accepting her idealization of Eeak but their respect for herself was a thing they had taken for granted from their childhood and they never especially emphasized it or enquired into it.

Zoo-Zoo herself, however, forty as she was, had never allowed her youthful enthusiasm for the double legend of her ancestry to die out. She was still constantly thinking of the tale that she actually had in her veins the blood of the family of the Madonna, the Mother of Jesus, and — to herself anyway almost equally thrilling — that she was descended from Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons. Zoo-Zoo had always possessed — from her earliest girlhood and in spite of her frantic idealization of her husband Eeak it persisted still — a profound belief in the superiority of women over men. She had steadily refused, and did so now that she was forty as passionately as she had done when she was fourteen, to cease meditating upon the life of the Queen of the Amazons. She had no idea whether it was usual for school-teachers to reveal to young girls in their early age the basic secrets of sex. But, usual or not, there was a teacher at the village school to which her parents sent her who took a delight in emphasizing these secrets. She didn't do it in public in the class. She did it in private in her own bedroom which was in the school, for she came from Paris and none of the other school-teachers had any idea whether she was a lonely orphan or whether she had a host of relations there. Her name was Ripple-Pipple, and nobody but herself and the pupil she was teaching in her bedroom knew what she taught or how she taught it. It must have been the effect of her lessons that the girl she instructed revealed nothing of it to her parents but did discuss these lessons with passionately shameless interest with other girls of the same age who had been similarly instructed. The Head Mistress of the school where Ripple-Pipple taught was Miss Goldenguts, and Miss Goldenguts, without talking about it, always felt a little uneasy when she saw Miss Pipple's pupils whispering furtively to each other. ‘Can she,’ Miss Goldenguts would ask herself, ‘can she possibly be a Lesbian?’ Miss Goldenguts was herself so far from being a Lesbian that the greatest moments of pleasure in her life were when her cousin Lar brought his cousin Kar to have supper with her. This the two lads did even after they had begun living on their aeroplane lying at rest at present on the landing at the port; for Miss Goldenguts was an extremely good cook and knew to a nicety the sort of dishes that boys like best.

Quo Pok had been to Miss Goldenguts’ school and had been instructed by Miss Ripple-Pipple, and if anyone had dared to ask her where she learnt what Miss Goldenguts always called ‘the Facts of Life’ she would always speak of Miss Ripple-Pipple as ‘one of the teachers’ and never mention her name. Quo Pok had as a matter of fact been emboldened so much by the intimacies of her sex lessons as to dare to ask Miss Pipple how it was that she was baptized Ripple. And Miss Pipple told her frankly, ‘Oh that is because I had a cousin called Ripple who came from Upwey, a village near Weymouth in England where there’s a sacred fount where a Saint — I forget his name now — made the water run when the whole countryside was perishing of thirst. It’s a place not far from an estuary where swans had their nests and where my Uncle once gave me a swan’s egg which I took back to France and kept in our cellar till the rats devoured it.’

Auntie Zoo-Zoo had a very strong prejudice against Miss Goldenguts’ school and she never approved of her niece Quo Pok being educated there. She would never display any real politeness towards Miss Ripple-Pipple, in spite of the fact that she knew well that she came from Pans. What caused her a curious and queer feeling of real jealousy was what she heard from the gossip of neighbours about Ripple-Pipple of Paris and her sex-lessons; but some secret resentment in her nature forbade her to ask her niece Quo Pok any questions about Mademoiselle Ripple-Pipple.

One evening after she had been talking to her husband, Uncle Eeak, for a long time about their nephew Yok and their niece Quo, Aunt Zoo-Zoo sat down in the little room upstairs which she called her Boudoir and gave herself up to a fit of quite elaborate introspection. ‘What is it in me,’ she asked herself, ‘that makes me so shrink from the idea of having a baby? I know well that Eeak never dared to “take” me, as we say; but that was a peculiar fear he had of “taking” a girl, though he loved me from the bottom of his heart. He had no idea, and still has no idea, of the curious horror I had of childbirth. We were a queer pair in those things; a very queer pair, when you remember that we were really in love with each other. But the truth was’ — and so searching and daring were Auntie Zoo-Zoo’s thoughts that she got up from her armchair and went to a mirror hanging on the wall and tapped with her knuckles the reflection of her forehead, and then, returning to the armchair, she stretched out her legs and clapped her hands to her face — ‘the truth was that though we were in love we were both obsessed by the same nervous mania, an unnatural horror of natural fornication. What would I have done,’ her thoughts wandered on, ‘if I had been Penthesilea’s youngest child? Would I have protested when my mother told me I must let myself be “had”, as we say, by some handsome young Greek, knowing perfectly well that when he had “had” me, or when he had lived with me long enough for me to give birth to a baby girl, she, my Mother, would have him put to death?’ Aunt Zoo-Zoo’s mind then veered to her Bethlehem legend. ‘Were all the relations of Joseph and Mary as nice as Mary’s mother, Saint Anne?’ Aunt Zoo-Zoo pulled in her long legs and crossed her hands above her knees. ‘The legend in our family always said, my mother used to tell me, that it was from a cousin of Saint Anne’s called Rebecca that we are descended. Eeak was saying only last night that the best of having Jewish blood is that there is no other race in the world that holds the family, to which any man or woman or boy or girl belongs, as the most important thing about them. Jewish carefulness about money is, Eeak reminded me, an essential part of their family feeling.'

Auntie Zoo-Zoo pondered in her mind every aspect of her present situation and grew, the more she thought of it all, less and less pleased. 'Yok Pok and Quo Pok are sweet kids,' she told herself, 'but I'm not content to devote my life to nice youths and maidens solely because I happen to be their aunt. What *have* I got at the back of my mind that keeps pricking me on larger, grander, far more exciting and far more daring undertakings than just petting a couple of youngsters and helping them to enlarge their minds?

'Eeak doesn't really understand me at all,' her thoughts ran on. 'Of course he never really did. No, not even when we first fell in love with each other. I knew he didn't, but that didn't bother me; and as to having children, we were just the same. We both had the same neurotic and morbid dread of the sexual act. I just worshipped Eeak, and I do still reverence and respect him, but I would not have him know what my thoughts are about myself for anything. He would be shocked and horrified and deeply disturbed. He would probably be seriously hurt in his feelings. For I am sure he just thinks that I admire the spirit with which he just takes lor granted that because I was so desperately in love with him when we started living together I must be quietly and happily and peacefully congratulating myself that he has never turned away from me or wanted to live with any other woman. How quaint and curious it is that it never occurs to him that I should want to be great and famous myself quite apart from him. I suppose that is the difference between men and women. Men must all want to be great and famous and must feel that compared with women they are intended to be so, and that nature intends women to take this for granted and simply to feel happy and proud that nature has allowed them to have found for their mate in life a man whose greatness will go down to posterity. It is interesting to think,' thus did Auntie Zoo-Zoo's meditations run on, 'how few women there are in the history of the human race who have become world figures of renown compared with men. It is no use for us to say to ourselves that the two great rulers of human life, Destiny and Chance, have always found it easier to bestow their gifts upon men than upon women. Nature evidently takes for granted that the place for women is in the kitchen while the place for men is wherever their instinctive ambition and power working together have the strength to project them.

'Now what,' thought Auntie Zoo-Zoo, 'could I do to make myself and my name famous forever?' She stretched herself out further and clasped her hands tighter. 'Suppose,' she said to herself, 'that I had the power of becoming in my own person the great goddess of the Earth about whom I learnt so much at school. Gaia was her name. I remember that very well indeed. She was so persecuted by the embrace of Ouranos or Uranus who was always begetting monsters upon her as awful as the Hydra and the Chimaera and the Gorgon and the Python, if not actually those particular ones, that she gave her son a weapon of flint by which he was to cut off the testicles of Ouranos; and unless I am mixing it all up with another story it was from this that Venus Aphrodite was born of the foam and was tossed up by the waves on the island of Cyprus. If I became a fresh incarnation of Gaia the Earth and used my strength and the warm richness of my planetary blood to assert my personality would I not be able to render this wild and insane idea of my nephew Yok about killing off the whole human race, this mad scheme which Quo Pok has confided to me, as futile and vain as the attempt of Achilles and Agamemnon and Menelaus and Diomed to burn Troy to the ground. But there was something else Quo Pok told me,' said Auntie Zoo-Zoo to herself. 'What the devil was it?' Then it suddenly came to her what it was; and fixing her eyes on a stain on the carpet where a night or two ago she had upset a large bottle of eau-de-Cologne, it came to her mind like a flash of lightning what her lovely little niece had told her.

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She had told her that a distinguished committee of modern scientists all of whom were strong supporters of and strong believers in vivisection had heard from various space-explorers who were possessed of planetary telescopes of super-ordinary power that there existed upon the planet Venus a number of animals very well-known upon earth. They had discovered that there were badgers there, and beavers and hares and foxes; and they were thinking of setting out in a large aeroplane to collect a number of these creatures and bring them home to experiment upon. ‘It will be,’ Quo Pok had reported them saying, just the sort of thing we need to prove to the English newspapers the importance of our experimental work and what a valuable contribution it offers to the work of Newton and Darwin and Galileo and a lot of very important modern scientists also.’ Quo Pok had told her too that the news had excited Yok Pok to such a pitch that he could hardly continue his reasoning and argumentation with Kar and Lar in the aeroplane on the dock landing. He was wild with furious impatience to set off and if possible lurk near enough to the coast to catch this vivisection aeroplane on its way out and to kill every man on board. Since she heard this piece of news Auntie Zoo-Zoo had wondered in what way, if she became a modern incarnation of Gaia the Earth-goddess, she could assist Yok Pok in killing this crew of cruel scoundrels ere they set out to Venus with this infernal design of theirs. ‘I wonder,’ Auntie Zoo-Zoo said to herself, ‘if I have got in me the power of enlarging not only the magic and influence of my presence, but my actual physical size? Oh! would so like to turn myself into a giantess of such terrific size that I should tower over everybody and when people saw me approaching they would cry, “Oh take care, take care! Here comes that terrific goddess! Take care lest she eats you up!”’

As she said this to herself she suddenly became convinced that she did possess this power; and she deliberately began to use it. It only felt to her as if she were pulling her muscles together as she used to do some thirty years ago when, as a child of ten, she began a tennis match. Yes, she found she could do it. She felt as if she had a godlike force within her that could enlarge her body just as if with pencil and paper she could make a female figure she was drawing larger and larger and larger. Her body soon began to get so large that her feet reached to the wall and the armchair on which she was sitting became like a little object sticking fast to her bottom. She rose to her feet and found that the top of her head bumped against the ceiling. Her breasts had become so big that her blouse hurt them and with her two strong arms and hands she tore the thing from her and flung it in tatters upon the bed. Then Auntie Zoo-Zoo decided that the moment had come for informing her husband Eeak what had happened to her; but she decided it would give him too great a shock if she appeared before him without any warning and she told herself that the wisest thing to do was to summon Quo Pok and make her her messenger. It was now just nine o’clock p.m. Where was Quo Pok? Had she gone to bed? Auntie Zoo-Zoo decided to call her. ‘But I mustn’t shout. My voice would be too loud,’ she told herself. ‘Perhaps if I just whispered a simple whisper from this colossal chest of mine might sound as loud as a shout.’

Auntie Zoo-Zoo had judged correctly. A whisper from her did turn out to be as loud as a shout; and soon she heard the airy-fairy steps of Quo-Pok tripping down the stairs.

Then the colossal lady, as she now was, acted very wisely. She opened the door but held it firmly by the handle, keeping it only a little ajar. When Quo Pok knocked she spoke to her through this inch wide entrance, whispering as softly as she could. ‘You’ll get a shock when you see me, my dear. I’ve been praying hard to heaven to turn me into a giantess: and heaven has done so and my size will startle and shock you. But though my appearance and even my voice may startle you I am just the same old Auntie Zoo-Zoo I always was. What I wanted you for was to ask you to go to Uncle Eeak’s study and tell him what I have done to myself, or permitted heaven to do to me. Tell him he must be prepared for a shock; but tell him I am just the same ZooZoo underneath it all. Will you do this for me, my darling? You might come down with him too for I’d feel easier about it if I had you both in the room with me. I’ll sit on the floor and hug my knees when you enter. I expect I’ll look less frightening if I do that.’ Quo Pok gave a rather forced little laugh, for she was evidently nervous; but she replied at once, ‘All right, Auntie, I’ll come down with him.’

Uncle Eeak and Quo Pok entered together and found Auntie Zoo-Zoo, as she had announced she would be, seated on the floor, hugging her legs. ‘Oh my dear,’ cried Uncle Eeak, ‘how could you do this, or make heaven do it?’

‘I’m sorry, my dear,’ said Auntie Zoo-Zoo from her seat on the floor, ‘but it suddenly came into my mind that the best way of dealing with these cruel scientists who practise vivisection purely for their own experimental interests and then pretend when we attack that they do it for our good, would be to give them a shock. And it came into my mind — I thought it was sent there by Providence — that if little Quo Pok’s Auntie Zoo-Zoo turned into the great heathen goddess Gaia the Earth, who was forced by the embraces of Uranus the Heavens to give birth to a series of appalling monsters, it came, I say, into my mind that if I could get Providence to make me big enough to resemble a great planetary goddess, when this set of cruel vivisectors were preparing to set out on this diabolical quest of theirs to collect animals to vivisect from the shore of the planet Venus, whose torture would be a great triumph for these fiendish men, it would be a shock from which some of them might never recover if I could appear before them as a giantess of terrific size and declare myself to be the Goddess Gaia now returned to her place in the world after an absence of a couple of thousand years, and I should feel that the shock I gave them would be empowered by the ghosts or all the animals they had vivisected since this accursed practice began. Of course, Eeak darling, you must ask Kar and Lar if they don't feel it would be possible for me to ride in your Irah at a little distance from the coast until these cruel vivisectors set out in their aeroplane and then rush upon them; so that they would see me in my present gigantic shape rise up from Irah's deck, and not only see me but hear me shout their damnation in such a thundering voice as will make every family living along the coast think that the Day of Judgment has arrived.'

Uncle Eeak was undoubtedly deeply impressed by the words of his transformed spouse; but it was clear to little Quo Pok that he was still suffering from such a terrible nervous shock by her changed appearance that his usually calm and collected mind found it no easy task to function in its accustomed manner.

'You're not afraid, I hope,' the lady went on, 'that my weight will be too heavy for the Irah? That indeed would be a stumbling block to my plan. Perhaps in that case I might manage to swim, for as you know, Eeak dear, I can swim, holding on to the Irah, and then, when we were close to them, I might rise out of the water and scare them so much by my appearance that it would be easy for Yok Pok who, I learn, is ready for battle, to dispose of them in his own dire way.'

‘Little did I dream,’ thought Eeak, ‘when I married Zoo-Zoo, that a girl who claimed to admire me so much and who was as much in love with me as I was with her would ever do a thing like this to herself or make Heaven do it. But, since it’s done, it’s done; and I certainly shall be glad I bought Irah if through her, and between us all, we do manage to send these appalling vivisectors to play their little games at the bottom of the sea.’

It was at this moment that Yok Pok himself came on the scene, followed by Kar and Lar. He had been to his store in the harness-room where he had put his precious explosive discovered in Rumpus Castle; and he now carried it in an enormous coal-sack over his shoulder. He was startled but not frightened by the sight of Auntie Zoo-Zoo turned into a colossal giantess; and he promptly began discussing with her and Uncle Eeak how they could most speedily destroy this crew of notorious vivisectors on their way to the planet Venus to collect their animals to torture. ‘My practical difficulty,’ Yok Po explained to them all as they sat round their enormous Auntie Zoo-Zoo in Uncle Eeak’s dining-room, ’is how to snatch my handfuls of explosive from my sack if I keep it hanging round my neck as it is now.’

‘Why not cut a hole in the centre of your bag?’ said Kar, so that you can stick your hand in and pull out a handful of the stuff whenever you want to?’

‘But more will come out, like that,’ said Lar, ‘than you want, and you won’t be able to stop it coming out.’

‘What makes your stuff explode?’ enquired Auntie ZooZoo from the position on the floor which she still preferred to make her throne.

‘Oh just its contact with the air,’ replied Yok Pok. ‘I found that out when I stole it from Rumpus Castle. I killed three fellows with it who used to annoy me by begging from me at a particular place in the wood. It’s just the rush of air when you throw it that makes it explode. And then it just blows what you’re aiming at up into space. There is no fire or smoke, only a sort of cloud.’

‘What I would suggest,’ said Auntie Zoo-Zoo from her position on the floor, ’is that you let me sew on to the side of the bag a big loose sleeve into which you could thrust your arm and pull out a handful of the stuff whenever you need it.

I could sew one sleeve on to the side of the sack so that you could thrust your arm down it and pull out one handful of the stuff after another; but I could sew it, I think, in such a way that the stuff would not come trickling out when it was not required.’

‘Have you got a needle and thread up here in this room, Zoo-Zoo?’ enquired Uncle Eeak.

‘Certainly I have,’ his wife replied, ‘if you’ll hand me my work-basket. It’s behind that inkstand and it’s got that sleeve of my old dressing-gown folded on top of it.’

‘Shall I put my sack down there by your side on the floor,’ enquired Yok Pok.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘by all means do so; only we must be a bit careful in case a gust of wind comes down the chimney, as we’ve got no fire in our grate today.’

Very carefully this huge giantess into whom Auntie ZooZoo had been transformed sewed a loosely hanging sleeve to the rough sack at her side, a sleeve made of a material sufficiently heavy to hang down from the sack in such a manner as to keep the sack’s contents from slipping out into it. ‘When you’ve got your sack round your neck, Yok,’ she told him, ‘don’t forget to arrange it in such a way as to make it easy for you to slip your arm up the sleeve I have sewed on without having to twist your neck too much!’

‘I sure will,’ replied her nephew, ‘and oh I do thank you so very much, Auntie, for taking all this trouble. Please Heaven we’ll be able to give these devilish vivisectors a good sound lesson tonight or tomorrow.’

‘I think we shall,’ murmured Auntie Zoo-Zoo hugging her knees after helping him arrange the sack. ‘But I think I’d better stay on the land and not weigh down your Irah with my weight.’

As he pondered on board the Irah about all these things it was not long before Yok realized that their discovery about this particular plan of these unspeakable vivisectors had rather modified his original decision to make this voyage a pitiless crusade against the whole human race. ‘Something like that,’ he said to himself, ‘may come of it; but the first thing for us to use the Irah tor is to destroy every single one of these infernal vivisectors.’

Yok Pok experienced a certain element of relief in feeling that now, with this immediate narrowing down of his problem to the destruction of a set of cruel devils whom all his friends and relations hated just as he did, he was making war against the wickedness of his race rather than against his race itself He took up his abode on the Irah and though he had several rather violent arguments with Lar and Kar, he also had several very friendly talks in which they all offered new and original suggestions as to how to go to work when their enemy’s aeroplane appeared on the scene. Nor was it very long before this actually happened. It was from a port known to the world in general as one of the most historic in British history that the vessel hired by the vivisectionists, a vessel whose name was *Adamant,* came up the coast, collecting special little groups of ‘Sworn Tormentors’ from many townships as they publicized their quest. These grand looking gentlemen, for in their minds they must have possessed the same sort of conviction of personal righteousness that Calvin must have had when he burnt Servetus, and that Torquemada must have had when he ruled over the Spanish Inquisition, allowed themselves to anticipate with luxurious and unctuous satisfaction the newly designed tortures they were preparing when they returned with their captives from the misty shore of the planet Venus.

The clash between the infernal vivisection vessel Adamant and the thrice blessed animal rescuing Irah occurred at about eight o'clock in the morning of the twenty-second of January 1960. Auntie Zoo-Zoo, now transformed into Gaia the Goddess of the Earth, had begged her husband Uncle Eeak and the two lads, Kar and Lar, to allow her to stretch out at full length on the upper deck of the Irah; and all three had given their proud consent. It goes without saying that Yok Pok derived indescribable pleasure from the ease with which he was now able, thanks to Auntie Zoo-Zoo's so carefully adjusted sleeve, to draw all the explosive dust he required out of his sack at any given moment. The moment came when the vivisectionists from the prow of the Adamant called out their challenge to all on that shore. Yok Pok's arm shot down the carefully prepared sleeve into his sack and brought out a big handful of this terrible essence of all the explosive powder in the world. Then when the prow of the Adamant approached the edge of the landing-stage where the Irah lay, with Auntie ZooZoo stretched out on her back along the deck, he flung the powder at the approaching enemy. It exploded in the faces of a group of the vivisection leaders who were calling their challenge to the line of the coast as they floated in. Every one of this group was blown into the air and they were carried upward in such a cloud of mist and smoke that it looked to Uncle Eeak, as he watched from his bedroom, as if a swarm of sojourners from Hell were desperately invading Heaven. The Adamant was ordered by its other commanders not to risk any further attack from this dangerous coast, for they evidently didn't realize that it came from an aeroplane in the water near the landing-stage, and without further delay they flew off towards the evening star which was still just visible, though only just, in the light of dawn.

‘After them! After them!’ cried Yok Pok.

‘You’d better come with us,’ he added to his sister, for it was clear that delicate little Quo Pok was hesitating whether to mount into the air with them or to stay at home.

‘Please come, Missy!’ cried Kar and Lar with one pleading voice. And that cry from the two lads did decide her. She nodded and smiled and went to stand near her brother, while Lar and Kar went down into the engine-room to make their aeroplane follow the Adamant into the brightening evening sky.

Uncle Eeak smiled sadly as he watched from his bedroom window the Irah follow the Adamant into the air. ‘I might have had the child to myself,’ he thought, as he watched the two aeroplanes ascend, carrying his wife with them.

The Irah was soon only a mile or two behind the Adamant as they ascended together in the direction they wished, though the sun was now brightening the whole sky and Venus with the other stars and planets had totally disappeared.

Auntie Zoo-Zoo pulled herself together and sat up with her heels beneath her and her knees bent, leaning her back against the midship rail. The day slowly passed. She had her meals; she had her evacuations. She had her strolls from end to end of the vessel. Then the night descended; the stars came out and the planet Venus once more showed herself. As they mounted higher and higher, following the lights of the Adamant, which were visible above them and remained at about the same distance away, Auntie Zoo-Zoo had a very weird and frightening experience. She was crouching by the rail of the vessel when she became aware of three snouts emerging from the water and breathing against her face.

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The awful thing about these three snouts or appalling faces was that they all three murmured the word ‘Mother’. Then in a flash Auntie Zoo-Zoo realized what it meant. By persuading Heaven to make her so big, and by thinking of herself as the goddess Gaia the Earth, she resurrected and brought back the horrors as well as the glories of that lost, ancient and forgotten world. And now it all came back to her and she knew who these three awful beings were. ‘Gorgons and Hydras and Chimaeras dire’ — yes, it came back to her how Ouranos and Uranus had begotten these monstrous beings upon her; until in her desperation she had given her son Saturn a sharp stone of flint in order that he might cut out the genitals of Ouranos or Uranus. This he did; with the result that out of foam thus generated in the sea Venus Aphrodite was born and brought to shore at Cyprus.

So it now happened that as she leaned against the rail of the Irah, with gusts of cloud-foam sprinkling her at intervals, she was forced into contact with each of the three monsters whose father was Ouranos or Uranus. ‘If I gave birth to you,’ she said to the Gorgon, ‘why is your face so hideous? My face is the face of an ordinary woman of the Earth, all the strength and richness, all the depth and delicacy of the Earth I can feel within me, why then, oh child of my womb, is your face so indescribably hideous?’

‘Your thoughts must have been like my face as you let my father have you!’ answered the Gorgon.

‘Why did you let Hercules slaughter me?’ asked the Hydra of her. ‘I was your child, wasn’t I? You can’t deny that, can you? What a cowardly mother you were, then, to let all my beautiful serpents’ heads, seven of them, remember, seven of them! be torn off by that great, muscular, rampaging brute?'

And then came a third voice, the voice of Chimaera: 'And you only pretended to be my mother, you swollen-bellied bitch! My mother was Echidna and it was that bully, that wandering, blustering rogue Bellerophon who killed me! Neither you nor your confounded Uranus had anything to do with me! You want to be the mother of all the world, don't you, you big harlot?'

'Well,' thought Auntie Zoo-Zoo to herself, 'I certainly undertook a laborious job when I projected myself into the personality of Gaia the Earth-goddess. But I never thought I pretended to be the mother of other people's monsters!' She summoned Yok Pok to come to her. 'Can't you make your lads Lar and Kar run this aeroplane a bit faster? I don't see why we shouldn't overtake that confounded Adamant. Wouldn't it be better if you could kill off with your explosive every living man on the deck of that blasted plane?'

'They'll lessen their speed, Auntie, don't you worry, when they get near Venus. The mist round her is so thick that our poor old Irah won't have to go any faster to catch them up; and once we're on a level with them I'll finish them off, all of them, the whole damned lot, don't you make any mistake! But we must get level with them, don't you see, before anything like that can be done.'

'Well,' replied Zoo-Zoo, 'it's all a wild game, and whether we kill them in time to save those Venus animals is still a bit of a gamble. But I think we shall win. I think the odds are in our favour. When we've finished them off then we can say with Catullus — it is Catullus, isn't it?— "Soles occidere et redire possunt. Nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux nox est perpétua et una dormienda."'

The Gorgon, the Hydra and the Chimaera, all three, returned to the air, through which apparently they intended to follow the Irah till she overtook the Adamant. Little Quo Pok whose slender figure struck her Auntie as touchingly slight and slim when she stood by that new Gaia's side, asked what would happen if her brother Yok did succeed in killing all the vivisectionists on board the Adamant. 'Shall we all have to land on Venus, Auntie?' she asked: 'And if so, what shall we do with the plane of those cruel vivisectionists? Shall we have to leave it stranded on Venus or will Kar and Lar be able to tow it all the way back to the Earth behind us? And if they do that, will you and Uncle Eeak be able to keep both planes?'

'You must remember, my dear,' replied Auntie ZooZoo, 'that these wicked and diabolical vivisectionists have headquarters all over Britain. They don't only live in our coast towns. They torture animals in all our big cities. Their grand excuse is that they do it for the advance of science and for the benefit of patients in hospitals who will gain by their discoveries. Pain and nervous terror and the exquisite quivering of exposed nerves and all the horrible experiments which delight these infernal sadists are done, they will calmly assure you, for the benefit of science and of medicine and for the curing of patients in hospitals and the supplying of both night and day nurses and all hospital authorities with valuable information. Until our government passes an Act of Parliament making all vivisection illegal and ordering the police to enter these premises and arrest the men who are practising it, this monstrous thing will continue unsuppressed. What we deserve will very likely soon happen to us. The masters of scientific vivisection will dominate the human race. They will do to us what hitherto we have allowed them to do to animals. In fact, in certain directions they have already begun to do it. Very soon the rulers of this world will be a group of so-called scientists who will establish — finding no difficulty in finding architects to build it — a universal scientific inquisition, the rulers of which were pre-figured and predicted by Edgar Allan Poe when he wrote: “Mimes in the form of God on high mutter and mumble low and hither and thither fly — blind puppets they that come and go at bidding of vast formless things that move the scenery to and fro and flap from out their condor wings invisible woe.”’

Auntie Zoo-Zoo had only just finished quoting Edgar Allan Poe’s verses when her delicate little niece Quo Pok, leaning at her side against the same rail, suddenly whispered: ‘Did you hear that, Auntie? Something’s been happening down below. I heard Kar and Lar and I heard a strange man’s voice.’

‘You go and see, my precious, you go and see! And come back and tell me!’

The slim little girl scrambled to her feet, hurried to the ladder and disappeared. Auntie Zoo-Zoo listened intently, putting everything else out of her mind. Yes, she did hear a stranger’s voice, a man’s voice, and a deep-throated formidable one! ‘I’d better stay where I am,’ she said to herself. ‘Little Quo will soon be back.’

And so she was. ‘Oh Auntie Zoo-Zoo!’ the girl cried. ‘He was hidden down there when we started. He’s a big man. Yok told me to tell you he’d bring him up to talk to you in a minute. He’s a big man!’

And in a moment there he was, led to her side by Yok Pok and followed by little Quo and soon after by Kar and Lar. The stranger was indeed ‘a big man’. He was about six feet in height, and he had a very large and commanding head covered with curly brown hair. His nose was aquiline, his eyes deep-set, a dark greenish blue in colour, and separated from each other more widely than is usual. This was emphasized by the fact that he had no eyebrows at all. His ears were minute in proportion to the size of his head but they were very delicately formed, and every now and then, if you watched his face carefully, they seemed to quiver, as if listening to sounds that nobody else could hear. Auntie Zoo-Zoo looked up at him from her seat on the deck and boldly asked him his name. ‘My name is Ki,’ the man replied. ‘I pronounce it to rhyme with cry or shy or fly, not with flea or bee or tea.’

He knelt down very politely at Auntie Zoo-Zoo’s side and laid his hands upon hers, which were folded round her knees. They looked closely for a moment into each other’s eyes. ‘Why did you come?’ enquired Auntie Zoo-Zoo. ‘That’s just what he won’t tell us,’ said Yok.

‘Yes, we can’t get it out of him,’ cried Lar. ‘Though we’ve tried every way, haven’t we, Quo Pok?’ echoed Kar.

They all crowded closely round the two figures, one seated and one on his knees. At last Auntie Zoo-Zoo enquired whether they had got a berth for Mr Ki below stairs. Yok Pok replied at once that they had. ‘It is a berth, but it is more than a berth; it’s a small bedroom. It’s where the captain of the plane used to sleep; the fellow from whom Uncle Eeak bought our Irah.’

Auntie Zoo-Zoo restrained a natural desire within herself to ask more questions about this ‘captain’ or boss of the Irah before her husband bought it. She knew that for long there had been a great many things that she had never asked Eeak about, just as there had for long been a great many things that she had taken good care he shouldn’t ask her about. ‘It must be so,’ she said to herself now, as she stroked one of Mr Ki’s knuckles with the little finger of her left hand, ‘with all elderly or middle-aged married people when the passionate desire of early love to tell all and hear all has been outgrown. I must,’ she continued to herself, ‘have some talk with him up here before he goes to bed and before I go down to our boys’ lounge to get more sleep than I can get up here.’ Then she spoke aloud to Yok Pok. ‘Take the boys downstairs, will you, Yok, and show Quo where you've got that little cupboard for her to sleep in you told me about when we first came on board. Leave me here to chat for a few minutes with Mr Ki and when I do come down to sleep in the lounge, beg the boys to leave for me to wrap myself in that big thick blanket I brought with me from home.'

Yok Pok promised to do just what she wanted; and he went down with his sister and the two boys and left her alone with Mr Ki. 'We were destined from the start of things to meet like this,' said Ki to Auntie Zoo-Zoo.

'You have expected it for many years?' enquired Auntie Zoo-Zoo.

'Since I was ten,' replied Ki. 'A voice in my innermost being said to me once when I was playing with a large teddy bear in Ay House, Dorchester, Dorset, "You shall rule the world if you do what I tell you." I called out in answer, holding the teddy bear high above my head; "I will, I will, I will, I will!" Then the voice said: "You must say to the moon and the sun and all the stars: Obey me! Or in every vein there shall be pain and in every head a weight like lead."

"Whose voice are you?" I asked, for you see I was only ten when it spoke. "Yours! Yours! Yours! Yours!" said the voice. And being only ten I tried it on my brothers. And they each cried out: "It hurts! It hurts! It hurts! It hurts! It hurts! It hurts!" Then I said to the voice, "Do you mean that the veins in the sun and moon will hurt and the head of the sun and the head of the moon will feel as heavy as lead?"

"No," said the voice. "What I mean is that all the creatures who live on the sun and the moon will feel a terrible hurting and their heads will feel like lead."

"If they don't do what I tell them?" I said. "Yes," the voice within me answered. "If they don't obey you that is what they will feel."

“But what shall I tell them to do?” I asked the voice within me. And the voice replied, “Recognize me as your lord and king, forever and ever.” You see, my dear lady,’ Mr Ki went on, ‘what I have not yet confessed to you is what the voice finally said to me. “You are to be the ruler of the entire universe,” the voice said. “You are to be King of the World. But in order to be this utterly and completely it will be necessary for you to have a Queen. This Queen need not be your wife. She need not even be your mistress. All she must be is your Queen, the Queen of the Universe, just as you are its King.” The voice went on more definitely still. It described you to me. It told me where I could find you. You must understand, dear lady, that the older I grew the more I obeyed the voice within me. It told me that you were already married and that your husband would own this aeroplane from which you and I as King and Queen would rule the entire Universe and go travelling around it, commanding the allegiance and obedience of every galaxy of stars we visited.’

Mr Ki gazed passionately into the eyes of Auntie ZooZoo and she returned his gaze. Up and up towards Venus they went and Ki’s words turned out to be true; for so dense was the mist — what in Welsh is called niwl — all around Venus that the Adamant was forced so to slacken her pace that Irah was soon at her side. Then Yok Pok had his chance. Into the sleeve of his sack went his arm. Blow up! Blow up! Blow up! And every vivisector on board the Adamant was whirled into the air in a cloud, yes! a whirly-whistly-windy-waggly-wiggly cloud of human fragments.

It was not long after this that Ki, with a golden crown on his head and Auntie Zoo-Zoo with a golden crown on her head, set out on their world-tour of visiting all the ports of call in their obedient Universe. Ki was so clever at arming himself that what with his steel and gold and silver and copper and leaden accoutrements he brought it about that he and Zoo-Zoo, enormous as she had become, didn’t differ an inch in height or in breadth from each other. They rode on Irah; and behind them came trailing Adamant, closely towed in the rear under the direction of Yok Pok and Kar and far, who had no difficulty in managing both planes thus connected together.

6

King Ki and Queen Zoo-Zoo came to love each other so well as they toured the Universe over which they ruled that they finally had a child. This child was called Why. They had a long and sometimes almost angry discussion as to what name to give their infant. They agreed that the name must begin with the letter W; but Ki liked the name What and Zoo-Zoo liked the name When. At the moment their difference was at its height Zoo-Zoo suggested the name Where This rather pleased Ki and in the subsequent reconciliation it was after Zoo-Zoo had, without thinking of any name, simultaneously asked the question ‘why’ about something King Ki had said that they agreed that they would call their child by that name. Why was a boy, and it was when he became nine years old that the great event of his life occurred. He suddenly decided that he was weary of this life of following his royal parents to every portion of the Universe over which they ruled, and he boldly turned to them when they were all three together and asked whether they would allow him to go off on an exploring expedition of his own. King Ki and Queen Zoo-Zoo looked at each other with considerable dismay. She thought: ‘I would like to have a private conversation with Ki before letting the boy go,’ and he thought, ‘I expect the best thing to do would be to tell him to fly back to the Earth and explain to him how to dodge the sun and the moon on his way there.’ But Why was too quick for them both. ‘Don’t fly after me, Dad,’ he said, ‘for that will only make me fly the faster and I know I can outstrip you. I will come back, Mother dear, for sure, so don't worry or let Dad worry.' And with that he was gone, circling round the nearest galaxy as swiftly as a swallow and soon completely disappearing from their sight.

'He'll come back all right, my dear,' said Ki quietly. 'He's a wise kid.'

'Heaven grant he will,' gasped Queen Zoo-Zoo. 'I don't think we ought to have let him go.'

Why was soon far past the nearest galaxy and away off into the growing darkness. 'I must find,' he thought to himself, 'some completely new world, something I can really tell them an exciting tale about, and I have an instinct that I will.'

The last thing that Why expected to happen, as is the case so often in life, was the thing that did happen. It had already become so dark that the only stars he could see were a few faraway, tiny sparklers, when suddenly he saw somebody or something flying straight towards him.

'By God!' he murmured. 'It's a boy!' He was quite right. It *was* a boy. Each of them had been rushing through space as if they had been swimming at a terrific speed through a dark ocean. Now they stopped and faced each other, flapping their hands and stamping their feet so as to retain the same position.

'Me be speech reader,' said the strange boy to Why. 'Me read other-world thoughts. Thy mind be English mind so speech-reading me say English words to thee.'

'Where do you come from?' enquired Why.

'From I'm, yes, from I'm,' replied the other boy. 'I come from the great, wonderful, noble, mighty, unequalled, immeasurable, indestructible land of eyes and mouths which is called I'm.'

'What do you mean by a land of eyes and mouths?'

‘Feel me on both my front and my back,’ said the strange boy. Neither of them had any clothes on, so this was easy. All down his front from his chin to his toes were very small deep-set eyes shielded by enormous eyelids which to Why as he passed his hand down them, felt like the wings of large butterflies. ‘And feel my back, young Master English,’ said the stranger. Why obeyed; and it was a real shock to him. All the way down the boy’s back there were open mouths, each with lips and teeth and a tongue. Why was glad enough not to have to feel any more; but he couldn’t resist saying: ‘Where is your prick and your balls?’

‘On my side, at my hip,’ replied the other. ‘Yours, I suppose, are in the front?’

‘Yes,’ responded Why gently, praying in his mind that the other boy would want to feel the aforesaid sexual organs. ‘I suppose,’ Why said, ‘a girl’s quim would be just opposite the prick and balls at your side?’ The other boy chuckled naughtily. ‘I certainly hope so.’ Then Why said, ‘I don’t believe my parents. King Ki and Queen Zoo-Zoo, have ever seen your country of I’m, and if you don’t think me rude to ask, will you please tell me your name?’

‘My name is Ve Zed,’ said the boy. ‘My father’s name is No Zed and my mother’s name is Yes Zed and I have a grandfather still alive whose name is Well Zed. My father has always been careful not to annoy him in any way; but my mother feels differently about that.’

‘I suppose in my English way of talking your land of “I’m” is pronounced so that it rhymes with time?’

‘Yes,’ replied the Ve Zed, ‘you’ve got it quite right. The “I” part refers to the eyes in my front and the “M” part refers to the mouths in my back.’

‘But wouldn’t it have been much easier,’ said Why, ‘to rape your wife when you marry, or your girl if you get a mistress, if the sexual organs of both of you had been in the front part of your bodies?'

'I know what you mean,' replied Ve Zed. 'You mean it must be rather a queer job to squeeze and push my begetting-spear up her quim and through her maidenhead by just cuddling and pressing her sideways? I expect you feel it would be impossible to "take", or to "have" a girl, as we say, unless you did it front to front?'

'Yes, Yes! That's just exactly what I *do* feel,' cried Why. 'Of course what the big boys of our land do at school, if they prefer being naughty with a boy rather than a girl, is to push their prick up the boy's bottom. That's what nowadays people call being a "homo", rather a silly name, as *homo* is the Latin for a man and the old Romans were much more addicted to loving women than other men. But the ancient Greeks were different. Socrates was condemned to death by his government for corrupting the lads with whom he fell in love.'

'Would you like me,' said Ve Zed in an almost caressing and coaxing voice, as Why's allusion to Socrates had made him feel as if he lived under Pericles and Aspasia, 'to take you to my home in I'm? I am sure both my parents would love to meet you, and I wouldn't be surprised if my grandfather Well Zed didn't come round to see you if he heard you were there.'

Why agreed at once. He had already been feeling, before he met Ve Zed, a little lonely and desolate; and the idea of being installed for a few days or even a few weeks in this country of I'm of which his relatives had never heard satisfied his spirit greatly.

It took the two boys much longer than Why had expected to reach their goal. 'No wonder,' he thought in his heart, 'Father and Mother have never seen this place. I would never have seen it if it hadn't been for meeting Ve Zed.' And then, as they flew side by side, using their arms and legs as if they were swimming, Why suddenly asked Ve Zed what had set him off on this long flight from I'm towards the planet Earth. 'I'd got tired,' was the answer, 'of hearing Father and Mother argue about old Well Zed and of Mother always telling Father that her family was much older and more mythological than his. I thought that if they let me fly to a different part of space altogether I would see and hear things that would enlarge my viewpoint and teach me more about life in general.'

'And they did let you,' said Why.

'Yes, they did, but it took some while to persuade them. It was Mother's always bringing back the topic of the greatness ol her ancestors compared with the Zeds that prolonged the delay of their permission.'

'Who were her ancestors?' enquired Why, thinking in his heart, 'I mustn't bring up the cousin of Our Lady or Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons.'

'They were.' Ve Zed replied, 'a sister of St Helena, the Mother of Constantine the Great, and a man whom that sister married. The man's name was Bobby-Up and he was a descendant of the famous Daedalus, the father of Icarus, but from an early love affair of this great artist-inventor before Icarus was born. Bobby-Up was a creative artist of extraordinary power, and it was his power and genius that my mother used to tease my father about, insisting that it was superior to anything possessed by any of the Zeds. My mother always declared,' went on Ve Zed, evidently with a desire to beguile their visitors from the earth into taking his mother's side in this ancestral dispute, 'that Bobby-Up invented a chemical substance which had the power of attracting to itself the remains of ancient worlds, long-forgotten galaxies of stars, which in the remote distances of space still hung about like scattered dust floating this way and that way in the vast emptiness of the immeasurable void. The effect of Bobby-Up's invention was that this substance, by drawing to itself by degrees the floating atoms of vanished worlds, was able to thicken out in space a resurrected mass of pregnant matter that gradually became the body of a new world, a solid productive body, full of the diffused juices and essences of grains and fruits and plants and roots and seedlings and sucklings and the scattered rudiments of upward-springing vegetation. Thus did my mother's ancestor, Bobby-Up,' Ve Zed went on, 'create the vast body of a new world, a body that filled a reeking gap in the Universe out of which not only vegetation could spring but so far unknown beasts and birds and reptiles and so far unknown creatures resembling men and women.'

Why and Ve Zed flew on together happily now that they had come to know each other, and it was a really exciting moment for Why when he was led into his new friend's house.

There was only one kind of tree in I in and the name of that tree was Urb. It was short in height but of colossal girth. In fact it was twelve feet round and its branches weren't branches in the sense of branching out. They were short, upright sprigs, about half a dozen of them together, each with one round cup-shaped leaf on the top of its upright spike, a leaf that when it rained, as it did regularly once a week in the middle of the afternoon at I'm, became filled to the brim with dripping water. No Zed, Ve Zed's dad, was tall enough to stand up to one of these Urb trees which grew just in front of their door and drink from their cups, each of which contained about as much water as a teacup.

But it was the inside of Ve Zed's home that captivated Why most. The house contained only one level ground-floor room. But this room was very large and the interesting thing about it was that in place of chairs, though there were bookcases, and on the floor a series of richly-coloured extremely thick rugs, there were beds, some designed for two people, as could be seen by two pillows side by side, and some for only one person. Why was offered a seat on one of these beds, and on the bed next to him Ve Zed flung himself down on his back. They all spoke English and Why decided that the first thing he would ask them, when the stir of his arrival had subsided a little, was how this had come about.

Mr No Zed and Mrs Yes Zed were both soon talking to Why. Mrs Zed was sitting at the foot of her son's bed, tenderly loosening the tennis shoes he had been flying in and stroking his feet; while Mr Zed was sitting by Why's side and had begun to show him an enormous folio, half of which rested on the visitor's knee and the other half on his own. The book was illustrated by pictures of palatial interiors that reminded Why of pictures he'd seen in various churches and cathedrals and also in museums in London. But it was only the statuesque and prehistoric look of this book that made him think of the Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery in London and the Prado in Madrid. When, however, Mr No Zed turned its pages all was otherwise. These fronts of ferocious mouths and these backs of waving eyelids, and above all these improper, ill-adjusted fantastical side-way bursts of hipping fornication, soon made Why realize that the land of I'm was no resuscitated archaic Agora of Pericles.

'Where did you all learn to speak such good English?' he flung out at them. Mr No Zed and Mrs Yes Zed exchanged a word or two together that sounded as if they felt that 'The Jabberwock with eyes of flame, came wiffling through the tulgey wood. And burbled as it came.' But they were now interrupted and Mr No Zed had to snatch the folio up, close it with a bang, and lay it on an empty bed.

Into the room rushed Grandfather Well Zed, bringing alarming news. 'There's an attack on us! The King of Kanawitakon has sent his son Gee Wizz, the Admiral of the Kanawitakon Fleet to attack us! No attack could be worse! These men under Gee Wizz are like madmen. They run and jump and gyrate the windmills without anything but their sails! There's no standing up against them. Their cruelty is the talk of our country. In that war between Kanawitakon and Kokaloo, as soon as Kanawitakon won, what did it do? Your generation is too young to know. But though I was only a lad then I can tell you. They took all the members of Kokaloo royal family and burned them in the ground up to their necks, leaving only their bare heads exposed in a long row. Then the same Gee Wizz, only he was much younger then, danced forwards and backwards from head to head along that line of heads! Those buried men with their heads exposed and their eyes looking about them remained like that till they all died. They talked to each other and they didn't die all at once. Get ready all of you! Get your swords and staves and shields and spears! We've got to fight Gee Wizz and these mad Kanawitakans until we've driven them out!'

It was then that Mrs Yes Zed went up to the old man Well Zed and whispered to him of the presence of Why, the son of King Ki and Queen Zoo-Zoo. The old gentleman didn't hesitate a moment. He walked straight up to Why and begged him to face these invaders and order them out. 'Your parents, my boy, would support my word,' he said. 'We have all recognized them here in I'm as the Rulers of the Universe.'

Never to the end of his life did Why forget the scene that followed. He signed to Ve Zed to accompany him, which the young flier bravely did, and the two lads rushed out of the hall together. I'm was a land of promontories and estuaries and the hall out of which the boys rushed was on the bank of a harbour up which the barges of the invading Kanawitakans were now forcing their way. At the prow on the front of these barges stood Gee Wizz. He was a man of about thirty. He was grotesque in his appearance; for he was very tall and thin but he had an enormous head and face, and at the ends of his long thin arms and legs he had colossal hands and feet. He was now brandishing a huge battleaxe and as Why and Ve Zed rushed to meet him it occurred to Why that it must have been with a weapon like this that Bellerophon set out to slay the Chimaera. Gee Wizz swung it round his head and then swaying his whole thin body to make the blow effective he smote at the two boys as they advanced side by side. It was clear that Gee Wizz with all his warlike experience knew nothing of the instinctively quick movements of young boys; for both Why and Ve Zed slipped down on their knees like a couple of pygmies attached to Achilles; and the great axe sweeping over their heads crashed into the base of the impenetrable rock upon which the Zed citadel had been erected. The whole rock with the majestic building upon it quivered and shook from top to bottom. Still waving in triumph the handle of this axe, though the blade of it remained embedded deep in the great rock which it had nearly cleft in two, Gee Wizz, followed by all the wild crews of all the barges of their now grounded fleet, rushed up the slope to the great Hall at the brazen-gates of which the whole historic squadron of Zedite guardsmen waited to hew them to pieces. Before the battle began, however, there suddenly appeared from the south the aeroplane called the Adamant. It was flown by Yok Pok and his sister Quo Pok alone. As can easily be imagined, Why, the son of King Ki and Queen Zoo-Zoo was full of joy to see such a propitious arrival at this moment of moments, for it looked as if the Zed-guardsmen at the gate were not strong enough to resist the attack headed by the terrifying Gee Wizz.

He expected to see exactly what he did see. Yok Pok signed to Quo Pok to go down below and touch some knob or some handle; and the girl, stepping easily and lightly as she always did, obeyed him to the letter. Then he thrust his hand down the long sleeve so carefully and so skilfully fastened to the mysterious sack which he kept slung over his left shoulder.

Down went his arm; and up came his hand full of the explosive powder. Into the air he flung it, and in the explosion that followed something like half a dozen of those murderous invaders vanished in a whirling, upward-flying cloud of grey mist. Again Yok Pok's arm sank into that sleeve and again, as the powder flew from his hand a second time, half a dozen sturdy naval veterans were lost in that ascending vapour of death.

It was when it had become quite clear with the arrival of the Adamant, with Yok Pok and Quo Pok on board and the former armed with that terrible sack of destructive powder, that the attack on the Zed citadel was doomed to fail, that Why Ki and Ve Zed instinctively drew together.

'I am getting sick of all this killing business,' said Why Ki.

'Come then, my friend,' said Ve Zed boldly, 'Let's go off by ourselves! We got on before quite beautifully flying together. And now if we just become obedient slaves to the folk here, or obedient slaves of your Daddy Ki and your Mummy Zoo-Zoo, we shan't have anything like the feeling we had then.'

'Besides,' agreed Why Ki, 'what none of our relations realize is that fellows like us, after having once tasted independence aren't made by Nature to sink back into the old domestic round of doing what our "elders and betters", as they say, tell us to do.'

'Come on then,' cried Ve Zed. 'Let's fly straight off now, over there! Yes, above all this damned flat land in front of us, and leave it behind, and fly, side by side, as we did before, into unknown space.'

The happiness which these two youths, Why Ki and Ve Zed, derived from their flight together, when the land they left behind vanished from their sight and all that remained of the galaxy to which Venus and the earth and the sun and the moon belonged were faint streaks of red light and little sparkles of white light, was a happiness such as neither of them since they were children had ever dreamed of enjoying.

7

Happy as Why Ki and Ve Zed were, as they flew along side by side into infinite space, they were neither of them oblivious of the terrific enormity of their adventure. Nor did any sign appear as they flew side by side, using their arms and legs rather in the manner in which swimmers use them but much more easily, carelessly and casually.

‘What will happen to us,’ said Ve Zed to Why Ki, ‘if we go on like this, with no sign of any stars anywhere and without meeting anything?’

‘Well, I suppose,’ answered Why Ki, ‘we shall get so tired and so hungry that we shall decide to stop flying altogether and let ourselves sink, making no motion at all, sink down and down and down, like a couple of dead bodies. We could hold hands, so we wouldn’t be separated; but otherwise just sink, sink, sink, sink, and let fate decide upon what planet or into what world we shall come galumphing down.’

‘Well, my dear,’ said Ve Zed to Why Ki, ‘from what I feel, and I expect you feel much the same, there’s something in me that seems to say, fly on, fly on, fly on, fly on, and let happen what will happen! I don’t feel really hungry myself, and I bet you don’t either. Nor do I feel really tired, and I’m sure — yes! I can feel it through your hand — that you don’t either. So let’s go on, old friend, till we both are certain sure that our flight must be brought to a finish.’

Why Ki responded to this by tightening his grip on the other’s hand, and on and on and on and on they flew. Then there suddenly was a change, a change of the most astonishing kind, a change in themselves.

‘Are you there?’ said Why Ki to Ve Zed. ‘Why have you dropped my hand?’

‘You dropped mine!’ replied Ve Zed. ‘But I don’t believe we’ve got any hands any more! What the devil, my dear, has happened to us?’

‘It seems to me,’ said Why Ki, ‘that we both have become bodiless! It must be a crazy dream, a mad dream, a nightmare, due to our long flight through all this empty space.’

They were both silent; but they flew on, each still trying to hold the other’s hand. Then, still completely bewildered by what had happened, the whole change came over them; and not only so, but they knew they were now in the midst of a large crowd of people in exactly the same situation that they were in themselves, only more used to it. One of these people, a young girl of about their own age who evidently realized that they were newcomers and consequently caught in a cloud of dazed bewilderment, came gently and tenderly up to them.

‘Don’t worry about your bodies, laddies,’ she said to them; and it was her presence, combined with the obvious fact that she had no body, that baptized them into a realization of the situation. ‘None of us,’ she went on, ‘nobody here has any bodily form. What has happened is that we are all now pure minds, thinking, imagining, analysing, speculating, pretending, dissenting, agreeing, disagreeing, discerning, philosophizing, recapitulating ideas, expressing ideas, developing ideas, denying ideas, revealing original intuitions and clarifying individual selfdeceptions. You must realize, dear boys, that what we all are here and now is a galaxy not of stars or planets or suns or moons or meteorites or comets, but simply and solely of floating intelligences, yes, of bodiless minds crowding about one another and struggling each of us to express our individual thoughts and ideas. What you must understand, my dear lads, is that none of us here have any senses

— we don’t feel heat or cold or hunger or thirst. We don’t hear or taste or touch or smell or see anything. We are bodiless minds, like so many invisible butterflies, flitting in and out and round and about one another. But you can feel, my dears, that we still have the will-power to dart about and assert ourselves and talk to the particular companions and particular strangers to whom we are attracted, even if we have to dart through this aura or little life-cloud of complete strangers to reach the one we want to talk to. I had to dive through or shoot through or launch myself through endless floating personalities of conversing groups of friends in order to reach you two when I first caught sight of you in the distance and saw at once how puzzled you were by this bodiless “scrum” as they say in Rugby football, and I felt I must come to explain things.’

‘You were good, lady,’ said Ve Zed.

‘May I ask what your name is?’ said Why Ki.

‘My name is Nelly,’ replied the girl, ‘and my surname is Wallet and my father was a house-master at Sherborne School. Both he and my mother died in a car accident driving to Yeovil when I was ten. I was brought up by Auntie Quittle of Quattermount but when she died I worked in a rug-maker’s office in Sussex till my Uncle Rang-Tang took me up through space in his plane till he had that accident you must have read about in the papers. I escaped here, and here I’ve been ever since.’

‘Thank Heaven you *are* here!’ cried Why Ki.

‘And pray Heaven you stay here as long as we have to!’ added Ve Zed.

‘At first I found this place rather difficult to live in,’ Nelly continued. ‘I’d been rather particular about everything in my taste; about what I wore and ate and drank and the places I went to, the moving pictures I saw, the pictures on the wall, the rugs and carpets on the floor and the antimacassars on the backs of the chairs. And suddenly to have to live in a place like this where all you can do is to think and tell people what you think I found very difficult and almost repugnant.

Let me tell you two boys about my last conversation with my uncle. “Well, my child, he said to me, there’ll be nothing more for you now than this crazy country we’re in now, this country in infinite space which they tell me is called Tappaskulltinkadom.” At that I cried out to him, “Take me with you, Uncle! I’d sooner be dead with you than alive in a country like this. To be dead is to be dead. It’s the end. No intelligent person believes any more in all this silly talk about God and the Devil and heaven and hell. You were alive and now you are dead, and that’s the end of it. You’ve been very good to me, Uncle, and I honestly thank you for it. I’ve learnt a lot from this voyage with you into space; and it certainly has been amusing, lighting upon a fantastical country like this absurd Tappaskulltinkadom. But I’d sooner be dead and done for with you, Uncle, than live to be a hundred in Tappaskulltinkadom, with my ideas growing bigger and wiser and subtler and truer for years and years and years! You have carried me into space, Uncle, and are now dying in space. Oh Uncle, let me die with you! I’ve been alive. Life is an experience. But I’ve had enough of experience. The beauty of death is that it isn’t experience. It’s just simply nothing. You were, you are not. You never will be again. And you don’t want to be again. Life is interesting, Uncle, I don’t deny it. And death is wholly and entirely devoid of interest. I don’t deny it. But when we’ve had the interest of life, that’s enough. Now let us have the opposite of interest. Let’s have the divine and delicious dullness of death.” But as you boys can well imagine,’ Nelly Wallet went on, ‘when Uncle did die and I had done exactly what he had told me to do, that is to say bury his body in this confounded Tappaskulltinkadom and ordered the men on board his plane to take it back where it came from with the quickest speed possible, I did all I could to compel this blasted place to mean something to me. I made no attempt to make friends. For everybody seemed to be far too occupied with spouting forth their ideas and floating up and down in trances of mental contemplation, or in ecstatic enjoyment of their own cleverness, to want to bother about somebody else's ideas or somebody else's thoughts, or even with somebody else being there at all. In fact I very soon became convinced that if you could be what is called *selfish* about enjoying your senses and eating and drinking and tasting and smelling and hearing and feeling and seeing things you liked, you could be still more *selfish* about displaying and trying out and indulging and enlarging your ideas and thoughts. Another thought has come to me of late,' Nelly Wallet went on, 'and that is how delighted many moralists would be at the complete absence in this skull-thumping, idea-worshipping world of sexual pleasure. Apparently it never occurred to the creatures of Tappaskulltinkadom that few things lent themselves more enticingly and ecstatically to long brooding thoughts than the delicate art of masturbation. Why, among all these thinkers, among all these brooding ponderers upon the thoughts that can fill a self as a self meditates upon itself, has no missionary of exquisite provocation advocated a prolonging of the adorable spasms of masturbating abandonment? Why has no habitual practiser of the more than voluptuous extension of the paradisiac organ of the imagination when the self alone with the self prolongs the self-play of luxurious erotic saturation, ever advocated his practice Here?'

Our two lads, Why and Ki, looked at each other with extremely puzzled expressions. They had always taken it for granted that masturbation was as much a prerogative of young men as menstruation was a prerogative of young women. And anyhow, what in the name of all the worlds in space, was the part to be played in this mad game of life by somebody dwelling in

Tappaskulltinkadom, where all the senses had to be relinquished and only thought was allowed, who wanted to enjoy, even if unshared by anyone, nothing but long-drawn-out indulgences in the most absorbing sense of all, possessed by all living creatures, the sense of sex?

Then suddenly an inspiration came to Why Ki and he boldly said to Nelly Wallet: ‘What is there about this life in Tappaskulltinkadom to prevent my becoming an ardent advocate of sexual thought? It is surely an idea of some length and breadth and height and depth? As an idea to be advocated by me as if I were a missionary of Buddhism, or of Mohammedanism, or of Christianity, it is surely in accordance with the fundamental principles of Tappaskulltinkadom that I should from now on set about advocating mental and spiritual masturbation?’

Nelly Wallet replied at once. ‘What you are confusing in the back of your brain, my dear Why Ki, are two quite different and separate things: the first is the idea which we were all as children, wherever we come from, instructed by our elders to accept, namely that sexual thoughts are wicked and ought to be blotted out from the mind that dwells on them. The second is that the suppression of sexual feelings is the sign of a puritanical mind, a mind whose ferocious and savage hatred of sexual pleasure has caused one of the largest and most genial fountains of human sympathy that we possess to dry up at the source.’

‘What would you yourself, my dear Nelly,’ murmured Ve Zed gently, ‘best like to do if you became our permanent companion?’

She answered without a second’s hesitation. ‘I *am* your permanent companion,’ she said. ‘I decided to be so in the middle of last night, and what I want to do with you is to leave Tappaskulltinkadom forever and to fly on and on and on until we reach some world as different from this as this is different from the Earth from which you came.’

As can easily be believed the result of this conversation was that during no more than the next five minutes they were all three flying together hard and fast in the most extremely opposite direction from the one that would have led them back from Tappaskulltinkadom to the Earth. On and on and on and on and on the three of them flew together. The girl flew between the two boys who now and again would touch each other's hands across her back, as if to indicate to each other that their acceptance of her as their sister was absolutely mutual. On and on and on and on and on and on they flew. Then what they all three were sure would eventually happen did happen. They were in another world. They knew it from the presence of two phenomena. The first of these was now suddenly beneath them. Yes, there it was! In place of the darkness of aerial space stretching indefinitely and infinitely away from them in every direction, there was now Something beneath them. What was it? Oh it would have been so hard to describe it to anyone who had not been with them and felt its presence! It resembled, they told each other later, a circular landscape like an enormous globe composed of half-frozen water which was sufficiently solid to make them aware that its presence beneath them had taken the place of the emptiness they had grown used to. This globular orb was made of air and water and ice, and it gave them the clear, unquestionable feeling that they were floating above a rounded world whose surface sloped up and sloped down, just as if it had been a colossal soccer ball projected by some lively immortals at each end who were using space as their playing-field.

'But who lives here?' enquired Ve Zed of his two friends.

'I think there's one of its inhabitants squatting on my left instep,' replied Nelly. 'Could either of you catch it with your fingers?'

'I'll have a try,' said Why Ki. 'There, I think I've got it! But it's a very little thing!'

Little no doubt it was, but both the boys were soon able to examine it and to hold it near enough to the face of their adopted sister for her also to examine. This was rendered possible by the object itself, who carried with it, or wore upon it, a shining blaze of light by which they could all three look at it and look at one another as they did so and at the surface of the world they had reached. It was then that the little creature spoke to them.

‘Where do you come from?’ it enquired.

‘How is it,’ said Why Ki to the small object, ‘that so many worlds in space understand English?’

‘Because,’ the little Being replied, ‘English is the most simple and superficial and plain of all the languages existing. French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and all Nordic and all oriental languages have something deep and subtle in them that English lacks.’

8

So anxious were both the boys, and so anxious was Nelly, to learn about this new discovery of theirs that they accepted this derogatory remark concerning their native tongue without protest.

‘Please tell us more about your world,’ said Nelly.

‘Well, its name is Orb,’ said the little creature, who was a small round ball, a ball that had two orifices or holes in it, with one of which it breathed in and with the other breathed out.

‘Do you eat and drink,’ enquired Why Ki, ‘with those two holes you’ve got?’

‘We don’t require food or drink,’ replied the little round ball, who was composed of a substance that was almost as transparent as the surface of the orb beneath it. ‘We breathe in and we breathe out. We live on frozen air, air that resembles what you call hail, only it is more quiescent.’

‘What about the ancient classical languages?’ enquired Why Ki.

‘Oh you mean Greek and Latin,’ replied the little ball. ‘We call those languages nursery talk. We are brought up on them. It is only when we begin to grow up that, little by little, our parents teach us English.’

The three young visitors looked at each other with an interest beyond anything they could say. They soon became aware that the air was full of these tiny fluttering creatures. When they had rested for a few minutes, the two boys with their hands and their toes pressed against the surface of Orb, and Nelly kneeling upon Orb while she pushed back her hair from her forehead, one of these little balls, out-breathing and in-breathing with more energy than the others, came and sat on the back of Nelly’s hand as she tidied her hair.

‘You three must realize,’ it said, ‘that your appearance is a very important event in the history of Orb. We have no language of our own now. But quite apart from our readings in ancient Greek and Latin and our pleasure in modern English, we sometimes wonder whether it isn’t possible that there is far away from this present universe of infinite space dotted by thousands of worlds completely unknown to one another, a universe as different from this one as our Orb and we who inhabit it are different from the other worlds and their inhabitants which you have visited in your journey. Don’t you think it is possible that long ago, perhaps what you would describe as a million years ago, there came down here from another universe a group of space-travellers who expressed themselves as we do today by breathing in and breathing out, but in such a way as to form the actual words of a memorable language, a noble language, a musical language, a subtle language, a language with infinite complexities and intricacies such as was able to express the thoughts and feelings and ideas of Beings far more divine than any race we know or you know today. Our universe with its infinite space, dotted with countless worlds such as you have seen and we have never seen and countless others such as neither of us have ever dreamed of seeing or ever will see, may it not possibly be a mere pygmy of a universe compared with the one that visited us a million years ago, or rather whose travellers visited us. Think of any human being's ways, feeling, prejudices, loves, hatreds, speculations, lasting a million years. And think of an Orb's units lasting the same length of time, so that you as you are and we are, can discuss life as we are now discussing it. Wouldn't it be marvellous if such were the exact truth?

And why shouldn't it be? I tell you, oh earthly travellers, the mystery of life goes deeper than your world or mine, deeper than our universe or any other universe, even than one a million years old.'

'Isn't it funny,' said Nelly to her two boy friends, 'that we should have arrived at this world of mind and ideas before reaching the end of space? You'd think it would be at the very end, and be the last word about human life.'

'I suppose,' cried Ve Zed, 'that we've made a great mistake in thinking for a moment that space can have an end. Space *must* be infinite, surely, my dears? It's the background, isn't it, to everything in the universe?'

'Is it necessary,' burst out Why Ki, 'that the universe should have a background apart from itself? Isn't space part of the universe? Isn't space as much part of the universe as a chair's legs are part of a chair, or an armchair's arms part of an armchair, or a floor and a ceiling part of the room to which they are the above and below?'

Nelly startled them both by what she said in reply to these two remarks. 'I've had a sudden vision,' she announced, in a low, calm, quiet and yet intensely earnest voice: 'Yes! I've just had such a clear, definite, decisive vision that it would be madness in me and wholly against my conscience not to describe to you.'

'Tell us! Oh tell us!' cried Why Ki. 'Tell us! Oh tell us!' echoed Ve Zed.

'Well, my friends,' said Nelly, 'I have just seen the *Wall of the World.* You can have no idea how clear, how natural, how vivid, how entirely real and how unquestionably there, this vision was! I could tell simply from its appearance that it was more than a hundred feet thick. It was built of rough, small, granite-like stones that had accumulated many tiny seaweeds between them which increased its look of solidity and antiquity and majestic impenetrability. It soared up till it was out of my sight and it sank down till it was out of my sight. It produced on my whole mind and body the effect of being the end of everything. I kept murmuring to myself, "The Wall of the World — the Wall of the World! This is the end of all." It was a faint grey in colour. And this greyness increased its impenetrable look of absolute finality.'

There was complete silence. Then very gravely Why Ki said, 'Let us leave Orb and all these round bits of Orb, each of which we could call an Orb-it as we escape its orbit, and let us fly on into space! Maybe, Nelly, we shall reach your Wall of the World as we fly on!'

'Goodbye, Orb!' cried Ve Zed.

Nelly agreed with a gentle murmur, and on they all three flew, the girl between them, with Why Ki on her right and Ve Zed on her left.

'When I said that the Wall of the World,' Nelly murmured as they flew, 'had little seaweeds between its stones, I think I was wrong. They were more like, as I remember them now, the small, grey patches of lichen which we've often seen on old walls at home.'

On, on, on they flew, and with nothing but darkness and space round them for so long they began to feel sad and tired. Then all at once there was a decided change. They were in twilight. This twilight swiftly brightened. They were in light, a light that came, as the two boys soon saw, from little crevices and cracks and holes in a great wall, the very wall which Nelly had seen in her vision. They all three stopped and clung to it with their fingers and their toes, Nelly still having Why Ki on her right and Ve Zed on her left. It was hard for Nelly to turn her head, as she would like to have done, first to Why Ki on her right and then to Ve Zed on her left. So all she could do was to talk to the former for a while, and then, after getting a firm hold on one stone with one hand and finding a deep slit for the support of one toe with one foot and pressing her forehead, though the little stones pulled her hair and hurt her, turning her head round to talk to the latter for a while. She was half-way between them, her face to the wall, and one of the little stones had caught her hair and was pulling it so that it hurt her, when they were all three startled by the sound of two ugly voices, extremely ugly voices, talking not so much *to* them, they all three felt, as *at* them.

> ‘Hugger and Mugger are we, are we,
> And we built this Wall for Posterity.
> Architects both, and architects loth
> To see their world dissolve like froth.
> What will our Wall of the World keep out?
> God and the Devil and rascals worse
> Such as make all honest men rave and curse
> To see what money they put in their purse!
> Says Hugger to Mugger, “Our Wall goes down
> Below the country, below the town.”
> Says Mugger to Hugger, “Our Wall goes up
> Where Nebuchadnezzar can’t get a sup.’

‘I guess we three can disregard all this,’ said Why Ki. ‘And so, by Heaven, we will,’ said Ve Zed.

‘Let us sink down to the bottom of it,’ said Nelly.

And both the boys clutched her hands, Why Ki her right hand and Ve Zed her left hand, and she led them in a reckless, desperate, abandoned drop, down, down, down, down, down, down, down, down, till they came to the bottom of the Wall of the World.

At that point they were confronted by an extremely natural problem: what to do next. The Wall of the World simply ended. It hung suspended in space. They had come down to see what had happened to it and what would happen to them. And now here they stood, all three of them, holding hands, Nelly between the two boys; and when Why Ki lifted up his left hand the tips of his fingers touched the bottom of the Wall of the World, and when Ve Zed lifted up his right hand the tips of his fingers touched the bottom of the Wall of the World.

Then suddenly both boys dropped their hands and both of them embraced Nelly and hugged her to their two hearts. ‘If we were to plunge down into the darkness outside this wall,’ said Why Ki, ‘what would happen to us, I wonder?’

‘We shouldn’t be killed. We shouldn’t die,’ murmured Ve Zed. ‘We should still be ourselves, wouldn’t we? And we should still have Nelly.’

‘Don’t hug me too tight, my dears,’ gasped Nelly, ‘or I shan’t have breath enough to tell you what I think. I think we are going to dive into Nothingness. I think that though we are here now, under the Wall of the World, and all three of us fully alive and fully ourselves, after we have agreed to do it, after we have made our plunge, we shall be a part of Nothingness, or, if you like to put it so, we shall *have been* three persons, two boys and one girl, who are no longer three in one, no longer boys or girls or any other sort of beings, but are as completely lost in Nothingness as if we had been black-beetles or bugs or fleas or frogs or toads or tadpoles or newts or minnows or sticklebacks.'

'Do you think, Nelly,' enquired Why Ki, 'that in every direction, all round all the worlds we have visited and all the worlds we have never visited, there extends this great mass of Nothingness? Does it extend to such a distance in all directions that it might well be said that, when the world is considered as a whole, far the larger part of it is Nothingness?'

It was then that Ve Zed burst out: 'But doesn't the Bible talk of God creating Darkness and Light? Then did God deliberately create a World whereof the larger part was Nothingness? Are we then to believe that it was God the Creator of the World who deliberately created Nothingness as the largest part of the World?'

'But, my dear Ve Zed,' protested Why Ki, 'Isn't God the Creator part of the World's Nothingness? Isn't the Bible only speaking of that little portion of the World that existed then and that still exists, quite independently of the much larger portion that has always been Nothingness? You must remember that if God himself was in reality only a part of the Nothingness of which we three are really a part, however we may think otherwise, then the creative God of the Bible is now as much a part of Nothingness as we three shall be in a minute or two when we plunge into the abyss.'

But Ve Zed was by no means content with his friend's argument. 'But because we've reached the bottom of the Wall of the World,' he protested, 'is that any reason why you and I and our dear Nelly should die? Surely we could fly through empty space, avoiding every one of the worlds we've discovered, until we arrive at the world you came from, Gaia, the earth; and then you can show this earth and its chief city, which I was taught to call London, to me as well as to Nelly. You'd be thrilled, wouldn't you, Nelly dear, to tread the fields and shores of Gaia, and to walk through the famous streets of London about which they taught me such a lot at school, and you too I expect?'

'I don't like,' said Nelly nervously, and both the boys could feel from her hands that she was trembling, 'two voices I heard through the Wall of the World when I first saw it in a vision. The feeling I got from those voices was a feeling I've never had before and hope I shall never have again. It was terror, but it was much worse than that. It was disgust and loathing. But, my dears, please realize that it wasn't my vision of the Wall of the World that gave me these horrors. It was two voices that I heard behind it telling me they had built it. One called himself Hugger and the other called himself Mugger; and they kept on repeating an unending tedious dialogue, bawdily and grossly made up between them, and Hugger said one thing and Mugger said the other thing; and in all that they both said growing grosser and grosser and grosser and grosser and grosser, and more and more and more ridiculously stupid.'

'Well, Nelly darling,' said Why Ki. 'We three have to decide now, standing here together beneath the Wall of the World, whether we'd better plunge into the darkness beyond the Wall under which we stand and perish in nothingness, or whether we'd better remain safely this side and fly down together, avoiding every world that exists, until we reach Gaia, the earth; and find ourselves in the streets of London.'

9

But, as so often happens in life, whether in the life of human beings or in the life of the immortals, this terrific and terrible choice was not left to them. Striding towards them through the air came the greatest and strongest and tallest giant that any universe has ever known. It was none other than

Gyges himself, a giant who possessed three arms. With one of these arms Gyges seized the base of the World Wall and shook it as if it had been the rail of a small staircase, until the whole thing began to crumble and fall to bits. Then with his right hand Gyges seized Why Ki and with his left hand seized Ve Zed, each by the hair of his head, and banged their skulls against the skull of Nelly until all three skulls became a congealed mass of blood and bones and brains which the Chant swallowed handful after handful until the three friends' heads were reeking in his belly, and the dust of the Wall of the World was scattered, along with their headless bodies, into every corner of space.

The Poetry Collection

From 1924 to 1931, Powys lived with his partner Phyllis Playter in Patchin Place, Greenwich Village, New York.

Mandragora (1917)

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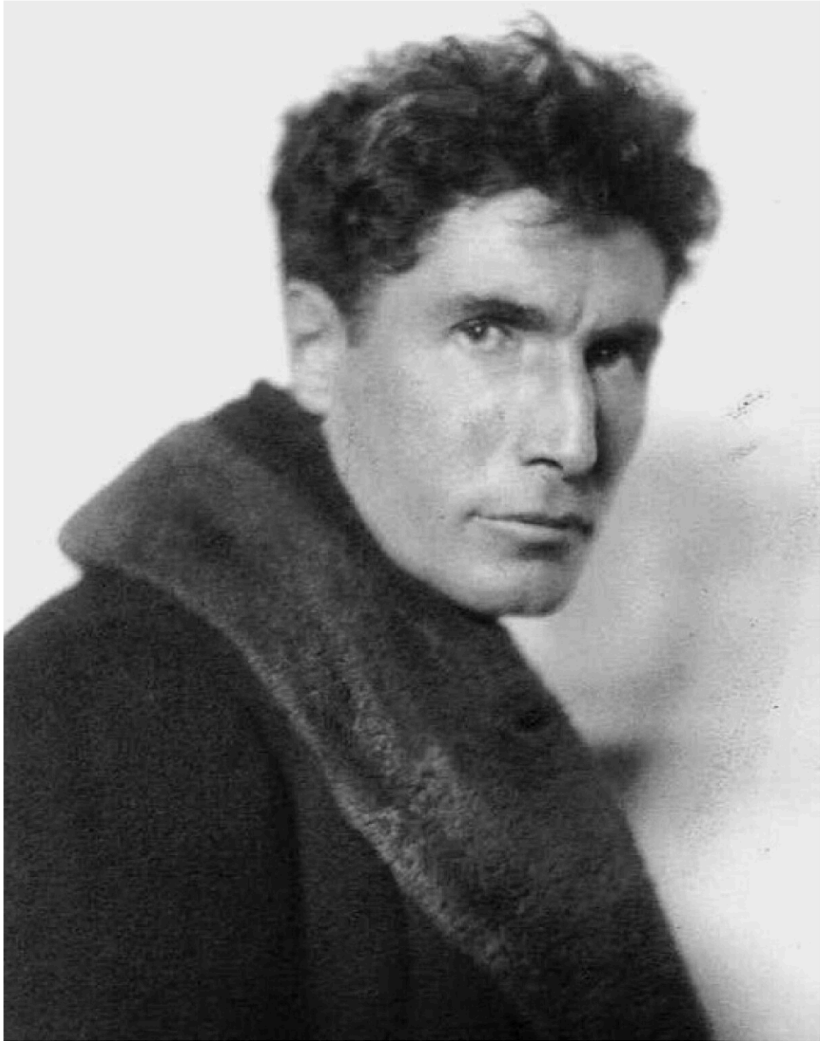

Powys, close to the time of publication

“Give me to drink Mandragora—”
Antony and Cleopatra.

DEDICATED

TO

MARIAN POWYS

Oh lace-maker, what joys, what fears
  Do you weave into your thread?
What sorcery from the far-off years
  Hovers above your head?
Your flickering fingers are dipped deep
  In the magic-flowing stream.
Is there a sleep beneath this sleep
  And a dream beyond this dream?

THE FLUTE-PLAYER

ONCE I saw her. ’Twas long ago;
From the bridge of a dream-city.
Drops of rain were falling slow.
It was autumn and long ago;
And somewhere in the fields below
A flute-player played this ditty —
  One look and never the same again
  Are the roses on the wall;
  One look and forever the midnight rain
  With a different sound must fall.

Gables and gardens, roofs and towers,
Hung vague and rich and dim.
From somewhere there came a scent of flowers,
And a wind from the world’s rim;
And the sun sank red behind the towers,
And she stood and looked at him.

She looked at him from a closed window,
Then at me did she look down.

It was autumn and very long ago,
And drops of rain kept falling slow
And a flute-player played on his flute below,
From the fields below the town.

And now they have told me so constantly
That the place was a city of dreams.
That my reason believes it; but in my heart,
In my heart most real it seems!
And thro' town and country I still must go
The shadowy roads along,
Seeing always that closed window
And hearing that flute-player's song.

And when the sun most rich and dim
Sinks down behind dark towers,
And there comes a wind from the world's rim
And from somewhere a scent of flowers —
I stand again on the bridge of that city
And hear that flute-player;
And my Love looks down on me in pity,
And I look back at her.

— One look and never the same again
Are the roses on the wall;
One look and forever the midnight rain
With a different sound must fall!

THE CUP

AH, be satisfied, my dear;
There is none but you
Who can hold me from the fair,
Brimming, glimmering, lovely, rare
Cup of exquisite despair,
Cup of black basalt —
   Salter than the sea is salt.
   Older than the sea is old.
   Fuller than the sea is full!
I have cried, “How beautiful
Is that cup!” have wept and cried,
“It is full of heavenly dew!”
   Ah, my dear, be satisfied;
   There is none but you.

THE VIGIL

LET the huge stars roll on!
My vigil's kept.
Love lies his grave upon —
   What is there left?
I swore to guard the shrine
   Where the bright candles shine.
Bread is bread, wine is wine.
   Darkness on all be poured!
The altar has no God.

Let the huge stars roll on
   Space beyond space!
Love was; and love is gone.
   Cover his face!
Let the great gulfs abhorred
   Take it, my flaming sword.
   Deep below deep!
Hail, thou that wast my Lord,
I have kept watch and ward —
   Now I can sleep.

HER LOVE

I TOOK the love you threw away
When the moon was full;
When in the river the full moon lay
And the river-reeds were hushed in their play
  And gave their souls to the moon,
And whispered and cried, “Ah, well-away!
Today must turn into yesterday
And the moon must wither and fade away,
  The beautiful full moon!”

I took the love that you had scorned.
  Where it lay in that cold reed-bed.
Took it when the morning dawned,
  Making the river red.
“Behold, in spite of her bitter scorn,
In spite of the blood spilt by the dawn,
  That love is mine,” I said.

And now when the moon is old
And the sun, all burning gold.
  Scorches the city street;
Now when the river is dried
And the reeds have drooped and died,
  Your love is a fountain sweet;

A fountain and a cup!
   And the wretchedest and the worst
Bless God as they drink it up,
   For it quenches their deepest thirst.
And the air of the hottest day
   Grows cool and beautiful,
Because of the love you threw away
   When the moon was full.

WAYFARERS

THE wind is very cold!
Does it blow from the ultimate sea,
Or over cities sad and old,
Lost beyond memory?” ‘
So cried my heart to my soul,
As it shivered by its side;
But “Follow the wind — follow the wind!”
My soul replied.

And the wind led them on and on.
Till they came to the city of Dis;
“Here shall we rest!” my poor heart cried,
“Here shall we find our bliss;
Behold, this is great Babylon!
The Heart’s Desire is this!”
And it blessed itself and blessed my soul
With a wicked heathen kiss.
So cried my heart to my soul.
As it shivered by its side.
But “Follow the wind — follow the wind!”
My soul replied.

And the wind led them on and on.
Till they came to the city of God.
“Here shall we rest!” my poor heart cried.

And tears of blood it poured.
"On these streets shine the sun and the moon:
The City of God is this!"

And it blessed itself and blessed my soul
With a most holy kiss.
So cried my heart to my soul,
As it shivered by its side.
But "Follow the wind — follow the wind!"
My soul replied.

And the wind led them on and on
Till they came to the City of Dreams,
To the place where the king called "Might-have-been"
Dwelleth with "Never-to-be," his queen,
And all is as it seems.
"Here shall we rest!" my poor heart cried,
"The City of Dreams is this."
And it blessed itself and blessed my soul
With a wistful and weeping kiss.
So cried my heart to my soul.
As it shivered by its side.
But "Follow the wind — follow the wind!"
My soul replied.

And still they follow and follow.
Beyond each ultimate shore;
And Aldebaran shines behind them
And Arcturus shines before.

And when my poor heart murmurs,
  “When we left those gates we sinned!”
My soul thro’ the darkness answers her —
  “Follow the wind!”

EPISODE

SO now that all is over,
And it does not greatly matter
How long the same roof cover
  The hope that perished there,
The fleeting hour to flatter.
  Now that it all is over,
Forget the sad word lover.
  And breathe — the air, the air!

Lean down and watch the river
  Flow fast beneath our bridge;
Watch the faint grasses quiver
  On the familiar ridge.
If all were well there would be
  No difference in the dew,
Nor in different fashion could we
  Catch the horizon’s clue.

A sign, a symbol captured
  From the eternal flow!
Stood we by love enraptured,
  What more could either know?
Nothing! Between us ever
  The old unfathomed sea.

Not less than now would shiver
   With its bitter mystery.

So now that all is over,
   Let the great stars emerge,
Placid and calm, and cover
   The sky from verge to verge!
The deep and flowing magic
   Of the universe is such,
Comic be it, or tragic.
   It does not matter much!

THE WRITER

IN the shade of the pyramids
I knelt and wrote on the sand,
While with softly drooping, veilėd lids,
You watched in the shade of those pyramids
   The movements of my hand.

I wrote of the fall of Troy,
   I wrote of the Grecian ships,
I wrote of Adonis the lovely boy.
And of winged Psyche’s virgin joy
   As she clung to Eros’ lips.

I wrote of the Syrian pearls.
   Of Herod, the Jewish king.
I wrote of Salome’s tossing curls
And the pale lips sweeter than any girl’s,
   Of her blood-stained offering.

But all the while you kept.
   Dark-lowered your veiled lids.
You neither laughed nor murmured nor wept;
A watcher would surely have dreamed you slept
   In the shade of those pyramids.

But when I wrote in the sand
   A little unlegended name,

A human unhistoried name.
With a bitter cry and uplifted hand
You rose and over that famished land,
Fled away like a flame.

BLASPHEMY

O FAIRY form, O flower-like face,
O piteous tender breast,
Why did you come with your childish grace
And trouble my heart’s rest?

The tide, my darling, is bitter and deep
That washes that cruel shore.
The happy lovers are those that sleep
And love not any more.

Calm filmy dreams thro’ each tired head
Flow softly, mingle and flow.
The happy lovers are those that are dead.
That died full long ago.

O child, forgive me; I lie, I lie
With an evil blasphemy!
I lie to the clouds in the air above!
I lie to the earth and the sea!

The living, the living must worship love!
The dead, the dead must be.

THE FLOWER

I COULD not see at that hour,
I tell you, I could not see!
The Face of the night was wet
And there was rain on the wind.
Oh, misery — oh, regret!
Blind! Blind! Blind! Blind!
I tell you, I could not see.
There was too much rain on the wind
When I stooped and picked that flower.

I hold it now in my hand,
As the moon thro' the branches peers,
Wickedly, wantonly peers.
But now it is too late,
And its petals desolate
Droop and lose their power.
And I see that this murdered flower
Would have changed the course of my fate.

And now, oh wanton moon,
As you flicker thro' boughs where the rains
Drip to a fitful tune,
I see on that flower the veins
Of a delicate-pencilled rune,
A hope that no longer remains.

Oh moon! if only it grew
   Still living, still tender and free,
Oh wanton moon, I would laugh at you;
   Nor bitterly wander the forest thro’,
While the rain drips sadly from tree to tree.
   Cursing the cause of my misery,
   The blindness — the blindness — that ruined me!

VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS

MY strength is shifting sand; the waters
Of jealousy meet over my head;
I am scorned and scourged by Satan’s daughters;
  And crucified on a salt sea bed.
I have prayed to the gods. Oh, little the use!
  Thou, greater than God, descend on me.
  Thou breath of the deep world, set me free.
  Blow from your primal eternity.
    Veni Creator Spiritus!

My strength is trodden dust. The claw
  Of envy tears me day and night,
And the tawny lion of “Nevermore”
  Eats my heart for his delight.
Oh, calm cool breath, your floodgates loose!
  Oh, breath of the deep world, set me free.
  Oh, greater than God, descend on me.
  Blow from your primal eternity.
    Veni Creator Spiritus!

My strength is the dregs of poured-out wine.
  The dry ground drinks me. The poison-flower
Grows fat with me. The root malign
  Of the night-shade waits its baleful hour.
Life is too bitter. “I could not choose

But weep to see another thus.”
O breath from beyond the land and sea,
O calm and cool eternity.
Veni Creator Spiritus!

My strength is smouldering ashes. The molten stream
Of love consumes me; all day and night I waste
Burning from fever-dream to fever-dream,
My parched mouth full of the dead-sea taste.
O air, O breath, give what the gods refuse!
O depths beyond all depths, have pity on me!
O space beyond all spaces, set me free.
Blow from your calm and cool eternity.
Veni Creator Spiritus!

THE BLOOD

I FOUND bright drops of purple blood
Beside a dying faun.
A mushroom-cup had caught that flood
   From the brown body torn.

I took the blood and went apart
   With her whose love I killed.
“Take this and fill with it your heart,
   In place of what I spilled!”

She looked at me out of her pain —
   Sweet saints, on my death-bed
Let me not see that look again!
   Then lightly, lightly she said —

“I take that blood. When we shall meet,”
   And she gave me her mouth to kiss —
“At the White Christ’s golden judgment seat,
   I will lie to him of this.

“I will lie to him, the great White Christ,
   About the love you killed.
I will say the brown faun’s blood sufficed
   In place of what you spilled.”

Softly she turned and left me there.
  And I was left alone;

And her voice came faintly upon the air,
  "A faun's blood shall atone!"

But from where she left me I did not move,
  And never yet have moved.
For I am he that murdered love,
  And yet am I not loved?

THE WIND

THE night is sobbing and crying with rain,
And the wind is drifting among the trees;
Drifting and whispering to me again
Of the memories — of the memories!

Like a phantom sea is the drifting wind;
Flowing towards us, ebbing apart;
The merciless wind without a heart!
Like a phantom sea is the drifting wind.

And my memories tear me away from you;
And your memories tear you away from me;
While the wind goes wailing between us two,
The drifting wind, like a phantom sea.

Oh hollow spaces, oh midnight springs!
Oh deep night-valleys wet with the rain!
Lure, lure this wind to fold up its wings
And bury our memories again!

Then I would forget, and you would forget;
And beneath the sleeping wind
We would pray to the darkness, and watch regret
Drift away o'er the pastures wet,
Till silence healed our mind.

ESCAPE

DEEP pools there are, pools quiet and still,
  Far off, where none of them guess;
Beyond the peaks of the world's last hill
    And the desert's loneliness.
But all about the edge of those pools
Flutter like troubled birds,
The little gestures you used to use,
    And your light, forgotten words.
And when the moon from the purple sky
Makes signs to the silent grass.
Those pools grow charged with your memory,
    And I see your image pass.
I see you not as you really are,
But pale as the lately dead,
With a faint marsh-flame like a fallen star
    Flickering above your head.
O wild white cheeks, O scarlet mouth!
    Is my heart's deep whisper true
That beyond the peaks of the world's last hill,
I can flee the human race at my will
    And yet cannot escape from you?

THE OLD CRY

IF only ages ago
I had buried my restless heart
Under mountains of snow
In a lonely place apart,
I could bring it now to her,
Locked with a silver key;
And its shadowy pearls would never stir
From that sweet sanctuary.

Oh wind that wafted my boat
To the isles where the Sirens sing,
Somewhere — washed up upon sands remote
Those pearls he glittering.
Gather them, gather them up,
Oh wind, and bring them to me
In a misty foam-wreathed cup —
The pearls that I lost in the sea.

Dim with the salt are they,
Blurred and bleached with the sun;
But, gathered from far away.
Bring them back, every one;
That Iain once more at rest
Where her heart beats and feels.

They may sleep forever against her breast,
    Sealed with a thousand seals!

WAITING

THE flowerless weeds along the tangled hedge
Listen and wait.
The willow-bushes by the water’s edge
Listen and wait.
Under the earth I feel the roots of trees
Listening, waiting.
Oh Earth, oh Sky, oh secret hope of these!
Is it worth waiting?

So sinks my heart’s faint whisper hopelessly,
Sinks and is gone;
While the round earth sweeps weeds and willows and me
Carelessly on;
And morning becomes noon, noon becomes night
In the same doubt.
No answer, not a word; till one by one
The stars come out.

And then — but not from them, for they too wait,
Ah, they wait too, the stars! — but from the night,
The night itself, oldest of all the gods.
The answer!
And all the flowerless weeds and the willows and I
Listen — hear nothing — yet are satisfied.
Portions of that Night we know ourselves to be;

Children of the oldest of all the gods are we,
And from ourselves we hide our own hearts’ mystery!

A FACE

IF I could only pass
  Into that ultimate later time
Where the solemn planets cease to climb,
And one unruffled sea of glass
    Breaks on the sand with monotonous fall,
    Calls to the land with continuous call,
Breaks and ebbs and flows and drifts,
While its endless motion lifts
    The grey-cold tops of unearthly reeds
And marge to desolate marge succeeds.
    With never the trunk of a single tree;
If I could only see
    The face of the wind in that ultimate place,
I think it would be less heavy with dreams,
    Less heavy with dreams of sea-weeds drifting.
    Less heavy with dreams of reed-tops lifting,
    Than the human face of one I know!
If I could only go
    Into that passionless later time
Where long sea-memories rock like rhyme.
    And the sun and moon forever set.
    Tinge all with eternal violet.
The face of the wind in that ultimate spot
    Where all is equal and nothing forgot,
Would have the look of a face I know

Or dreamed long ago that I know —
    Heavy with joy — heavy with woe!

THE SEA-BIRD

YOU saw my heart as it lay
   Like a hushed rock-pool, aside
From the ocean’s wind-tossed spray.
   And you were hurt in your pride.

And the wild sea-bird in you
   Rose and spread out its wings,
And flapping down over cliff’ and ledge.
Lighted upon that rock-pool’s edge
   And troubled it thro’ and thro’.

And now that its depths are dim
   And heavy and blurred and blind,
Over the purple waves you skim
And bathe in the sun and make sport for him,
   And give yourself to the wind.

A flashing meteor of pearl,
   You laugh and waver and dart —
In silver circles you gleam and whirl,
A rainbow, a sea-bird, a demon — a girl
   Who has flown across a heart.

AT THE END OF THE WORLD

THE patient earth, the breathless trees,
Have listened here for centuries.
Have listened under the silver moon
To this little streamlet's flowing.
Hearing nothing in its going
Save its own enchanted tune.

Oh, how silent on moss and stone
Sleeps the whole world's bitter wrong!
While the shadow of love, lying alone.
Listens to the streamlet's song.

At the end of the world this place might be!
So hushed are the shadows, so hushed the grass;
So hushed are the hemlocks of mystery,
Waiting for feet that never pass!

Listen! A voice out of the night!
A voice from the silence — a passionate cry —
Beautiful, terrible, infinite!
The voice of a god who comes to die.

And the patient earth and the breathless trees
Turn to that voice; and the listening air
Yearns to it, thro' the immensities.
As tho' God Himself were dying there.

Only the little streamlet flows
  Beneath the hemlocks, beneath the moon;
Hearing nothing as it goes,
  Save its own enchanted tune.

And silent, silent, on moss and stone.
  Sleeps the whole world’s bitter wrong;
While the shadow of love, lying alone,
  Listens to the streamlet’s song.

NIGHT

ALONE again! And the silence flows
Round the windows of this place.
The night is starless and heavy and close,
Rain-scented like a drooping rose;
And on the night floats your face.

It does not smile, it does not frown.
It does not laugh, it does not weep;
It only rocks itself up and down.
Floating, as if on the waves of sleep.

Like a drooping rose is your dreamy face
With the starless night about it furled;
And infinite silence fills the place.
And there is nothing else in the world.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE SPHINX

MY mind is a plain with blackened stalks
And the crumbling stones of a buried city,
Where hooded desolation walks,
And all alone in an empty sky
A solitary kite sails by.
But yet, because of the sudden pity
Of the youngest daughter of the sphinx,
Great Amnion on my burden winks
And I have found — ah, none too soon!
A little pallid petalled flower.
Hid in the dust of a fallen tower.
With a phantom lustre like the moon;
And now I can watch the kite sail by,
And the long, long shadows among the stones,
And the blackened stalks and the empty sky,
And the wind-blown dust of ancient bones.
With strange exultant serenity,
And across that plain which is my soul,
Soft incense-clouds of healing roll
With balm, and the breath of a whispered spell,
And an opiate-rain ineffable.
For on him whose mind is scarred deep.
With secrets sad as the dead who sleep.
On him whose soul is a buried city.
The daughter of the sphinx has pity.

THE LITTLE FLAME

TRAMPLE it fiercely down,
It will not burn your feet.
The little flame that your savage frown
   Hated as it went up and down,
Because it had no heat.

Trample it in the dust!
   It only carries in it
The far horizon of one hope,
   One faith, one trust, one horoscope,
Cast by one fatal minute.

Press your heel hard on it there.
   You know it cannot burn.
It can only answer a hurt life's prayer.
   With an ecstasy delicate as air,
That you have yet to learn.

Look! It still licks the ground.
   Out with it! Turn it to clay!
The wind will blow with its ancient sound.
   When that flame is buried underground
And you have gone your way.

No, it never had heat,
   Love sometimes shows that lack!

But you — you have spurned beneath your feet,
  What one day, weary of wine and meat.
In vain you'll summon back.

A pale flame, after your fierce sunsets!
Yet the Spring came at its call,
Bringing windflowers and pansies and violets,
And the rosemary that has no regrets
And lasts the longest of all.

Pray, child, to the gods that when you've found
What the heats of passion prove.
You sob not aloud with a piteous sound.
Over the plot of trampled ground,
Wherein you murdered love.

THE RIVER

THE pallid river of regret.
Flows thro’ that empty land;
The land you call my heart, where yet
The poplar-trees of memory, wet
With ancient sorrow, stand.
And mournfully, mournfully evermore
Thro’ those trees the wind goes wailing.
And like wreckage strewn on a lonely shore,
Where no man dwells and nevermore
Shall any ship come sailing.
The dead leaves lie where they have fallen.
Lie on the land where they have fallen,
The land where the roots of sorrow are set.
The land of the river of regret.

AVE MARIA

HOLLOW spaces, large and deep,
Flow around your quiet sleep.
One would think your dreaming head
Had eternity for its bed!
Oh, how green, for all the night.
Is the floating liquid air.
Full of whispers, full of light.
Vague earth murmurs everywhere!

Listen! Did you hear that sound
In your eyelid-drooping sleep,
Falling thro’ the listening night,
Falling, falling? And the earth
Melts in vaporous mist before it,
Melts as if from very birth
It had watched and waited for it!
Listen!

’Tis a petal from the moon
From that cold and chaste moon-flower.
Flung in languid lotus hour.
Like a thought after a tune;
Like a tune after a thought,
Sweet with ecstasy unsought!
And all other lovely things.

Such as shadow-veined moth-wings.
Such as shells from drifting seas.
Such as wild anemones,

Float with it thro’ hollow space,
Dark against your white, white face,
Float and flutter and waver now,
Pale against your shadowy brow!
Listen!

Ah! You are listening deep and deep,
And you stir at last in your quiet sleep,
Fall the petals of the moon
To their soft eternal tune,
Thro’ the green and hollow night.
All transparent tender things
From their cold creative springs
Fall, fall down into the night.
With a tremulous shy delight.
Listen!
Ave Maria!
The heart must be pierced with a sharp sword,
That would be the heart of the mother of God!

THE RECLUSE

WHY do you live in shadows and sighs,
‘Mid waving grasses and faint, faint scents
‘Mid floating murmurs and mysteries,
And the ghosts of roses? Arise! Go hence!

“Go hence and wrestle beneath the sun!
Go hence and live before you die!
For laurels, not roses, the race is run.
In the great arena under the sky.

“Go hence! Or my God, the Lord of Hosts,
Will put it into my heart to smite
You and your roses that smell like ghosts
Into the everlasting night!”

“Smite on, dear heart. The eternal night
Will cover me with shadows and sighs;
And, like one great rose, the Infinite
Will hide me forever from your eyes!”

THE LEAVES

THE first dead leaves of the year are down!
Look, how pale they float,
Under the bridge of the market-town
   By wharf and barge and boat!
How cold the rain-drenched meadows lie,
   Heavy with mist each one!
And the elm-trees stand how silently
   Against the horizon!

Oh, Love, oh, Life, most strange, most blind
   Are our days beneath the sun!
A leaf on the water; on the wind
   A feather — and all is done.
The market-town still sleeps — Sweet Christ,
   How motionless it seems!
As if one night of rain sufficed
   To cover it with dreams.

Can it be only yesterday.
   On this same bridge I stood.
And watched the red sun sink away
   Behind a fairy wood?
The gods protect us all! So soon
   Can summer cease? So light

Can they drift, the leaves that played love’s tune?
    Can the world end in a night?

IN THE NIGHT

A CRY like a child’s cry lost in the rain
Came to me out of the mist.
I rose and answered that cry again,
   But it went sobbing over the plain
And died into the mist.

And where it had been came the scent of flowers
   Out of a world’s distress,
With a moan of gathered thunder-showers
   And a gasping loneliness.

And the gods with their faces wet with crying,
   The old gods strange and wild,
Swept out upon us across the night,
   And — oh mystery, mystery infinite!
The gods and the weeping child and I
   Laughed and kissed in ecstasy!

REQUIEM

WHERE, oh where, should love be laid?
Where the sigh of the heather-bell,
  To the wandering wind can tell,
  Tell too heavily, tell too well.
How human hearts are made!

Lift him gently from where he lies
  So pale now!
With frozen kisses upon his eyes.
  And faded petals upon his brow.
Carry him gently far away,
And bury him out of the sight of day,
  Where neither sun nor rain
  Can trouble him again.
We have killed him and love grown cold
Is better buried under the mould.

Where, oh where, should love be laid.
  Where the lost soul of the sea
  Moans and weeps perpetually.
Where the cold night cries in vain
For what cannot come again.

Where, oh where, should love be laid?
  Where the sigh of the sea-shell.
  To the sobbing wind can tell.

Tell too heavily, tell too well.
    How cruel-faithless, how cruel-light.
    While love lies dying in the night,
Human hearts are made.

THE TRAITOR

JUDAS am I, or Peter,
  Or am I only one
Set by malicious destiny
  Between the moon and sun?

Silver upon the land!
  Silver upon the sea!
A world of silver in my hand —
  And my Love looking at me.

It is not only the Lord,
  Who in the high priest’s hall,
Looks on the man who can betray,
Till bitterly weeping, he turns away,
Too common grows that word.

Put out the altar-light!
  Let no wine redden the floor.
Cover that lovely face from sight!
Let me go forth into the night,
  And see that look no more.

Silver upon the land!
  Silver upon the sea!
A world of silver in my hand —
  And my Love looking at me!

THE TEARS

WHERE, oh wind, do you carry the tears
That the muffled heads are weeping,
Under the roofs where no one hears,
While the Lord Christ is sleeping?

“Cold he lies in the reeds of the dawn,
But I carry them to him there.
Where far away from the world’s scorn
They gleam like dew on his hair.

“The tears that are shed for loneliness
Like pearls on his forehead rest.
And the tears of passionate distress
Are opals on his breast.

“But where, oh wind, are the hopeless tears —
The tears no comfort know —
The tears that none but the midnight hears —
The tears of love’s deep woe?

“Tell me, oh wind, ere you depart.
On his white body where are they?”
“Ah! They are in the Lord Christ’s heart
And none can take them from him away!”

SPRING

PAIN and spilt blood and an appalling cry
Turn the earth’s air to poison and make bitter
The bread we eat and lay across our sleep
A quivering shadow like a gash that bleeds.
We laugh and are ashamed as those who mock
An open grave.
And yet the wet stalks of the hyacinths
Must soon, amid green spears, bear purple flowers!
And yet, from rain-soaked earth and crumpled leaves,
The yellow primrose, with a sweet swift pang.
Must send Spring’s perilous breath, sharp-shuddering
With faint and delicate treachery, thro’ our veins!
Shall we henceforth before these hushed wood-things
Stand dazed and shamed? Or shall we in strange mood
Laugh weeping laughter, as those laugh who hear
Infants make holiday upon a grave?
Softly with pungent scent of fields fresh-ploughed
The small soft misty rain through dripping boughs
Washes the crumbling roots of fallen trees;
Red-Campion droops his petals to the earth;
While, wild and clear, from liquid rain-sweet throat.
As though no graves covered the green earth’s face,
Bursts, as of old, the blackbird’s shameless song.

A LOOK

I WOULD not stop you on your way;
I would not bind your feet;
Or on your shining forehead lay
 One shadow of defeat.
Go forward — if you turn, the crowd
 Might trample you with me.
Let the flute-players play more loud
 And the dancers dance more free I
But once before the palace gate
 Rolls back and I'm bereft —
Turn and look on me; and if fate
 Has any pity left,
A passing mist upon your eyes
Will redeem every sacrifice.

THE HORIZON

PALE trees on the horizon grow,
  Pale, faint and dim and grey —
Can they be real trees? They flow
    Into the mist away.
Between us the valleys are green and wide,
But what is beyond on the other side?

Beyond I see a wooden pier,
    Stretching into a shadowy lake.
And a sudden cry of wild-fowl I hear
    As over the reeds their flight they take.
Over the reeds and far away
Beyond the trees, dim, pale and grey;
    A wooden pier — a shadowy pond.
    But what is beyond? What is beyond?

Beyond there is a long, long road.
    Bordered by ditches dark and wide.
Where a wayfarer with a heavy load
    Talks to the silence at his side.
Talks to the silence and talks to the trees.
But what is beyond, beyond all these?

Beyond is a house with a ruined wall,
    Where the long road enters an ancient wood.

And its rafters rot and sink and fall,
   And nothing disturbs its solitude,

Only a heron, high up in the sky,
Cries with a melancholy cry;
   Cries to the house, to the road and the trees,
   Cries to the wayfarer passing these;
Between us the valleys are green and wide,
But what is beyond — on the other side?

Pale trees on the horizon grow,
   Pale, faint and dim and grey.
Can they be real trees? They flow
   Into the mist away!
Beyond and beyond, and further still,
Beyond, till we cross the world’s last hill —
So it goes. So it always will!

DEMETER CONSOLATRIX

TROUBLED heart and fevered forehead —
Ah! with calm immortal hand
Soon the mother of all shall take you
To a green and silent land.
Great red lilies hushed and splendid
Shall be lamps to light your dreams,
And your sleep shall be attended
By the flow of hidden streams.

Large mild stars shall shine above you,
Cool deep grass your bed shall be.
With the mother of all to love you.
You shall lose your misery.
She shall quench your forehead's fire
With her calm immortal hand;
You shall have your heart's desire
In that green and silent land.
From the great red lilies' splendour,
From the large mild stars shall fall
Magic wonderful and tender,
And the mother of all shall give you all!

THE GOLDEN CUP

LOVELY with memories surging up,
  From a fount beneath the years,
This light spring day like a golden cup.
  Holds something deeper than tears.

Misty and tender, beneath, above.
  The green, green sap flows sweet.
And beyond the mountains waits my Love,
  With daisies at her feet.

Is it I, is it I, whom love has found?
  No! No! It cannot be!
I have lost my sense for such heavenly sound
  And my ear for such harmony.

Who am I that such liquid and tender mist
  From the green, green trees should rise?
Who am I to be welcomed and healed and kissed
  By the wonder of such skies?

Not unto me, oh. Lord, not unto me.
  This lovely and golden day!
Take it and scatter it abroad
  Over the land and sea!

Let it float and flicker, this heaven-sent light,
  Where the saddest wanderers roam;
Till the healing dews fall with the night,
  And the lost return to their home!

THE POPLAR-LEAVES

WHY do they, all of them, lean one way.
The poplar-leaves of your heart's sad tree?
Why do they shiver and tremble so
When the wild sea-winds have ceased to blow
And the wild sea-swallows have flown away
From the edge of the bitter and lonely sea?
If I call them to me from over the hill —
The other swallows — the swallows that fly
O'er the cool, fresh streams of a clearer sky —
Would those leaves lean the same way still?

Ah! they must all of them lean one way
Whatever wind the other follows,
However swiftly fly the swallows;
For the sea-born can only the sea obey.

But if from the sea itself should blow —
From the sea itself, from the lonely sea,
A strange new wind; then I should know, —
And — perhaps — those leaves would turn to me!

THE MIST

IN and out of the mist
We waver, ghosts that we are!
And the hands and lips we have kissed
Beckon us from afar:
Beckon us, whisper us, cry to us.
In and out of the mist;
Mock us, elude us, fly from us;
The hands and lips we have kissed.

In and out of the mist, like ghosts
We waver along the shore.
Flickering phantom-hosts,
Lost evermore — evermore!
Whispering, beckoning, sighing,
Weeping, vexing the night.
Nothing can stop our crying.
Except red burning light!

Ghosts in the mist are we,
And ghosts are the planets who peer
And peep at our misery.
With their tender pitiful leer;
But the great vermilion sun
That in one moment's blaze
Could melt, transfigure, and clarify.

And outline against eternity.
Our inmost selves and our troubled days,

The laughing, careless, reckless sun,
The life-giver, when all is done,
Knowing no weakness or tenderness,
Having no pity for our distress.
Sick to death of our mists and lies,
Pours himself upon other skies.

OPTIMISM

YOU who boast you’re an optimist.
May the leprosy of the Jews
Wither your flesh for the truth you’ve missed
And the cozening lies you use!

One little child, tender and weak,
Hurt by life’s devil’s-wheel
Should make you blush thro’ your bowels sleek.
But you are not worthy to feel.

As long as the smallest one
Of earth’s children by pain is riven.
As long as one cry goes up under the sun,
God must not be forgiven!

He does not forgive Himself,
The rain in the night is his prayer.
From the cross, from the cross, he forgives such pelf
As *you* — who hung him there!

THE APPEAL

OH that at this last hour
 The word might be given me
To tell you the power — the power
  That you have over me!

Oh that I could enfold
  Dyed in purple and blue,
Writ in gold upon gold,
  The feeling I have for you!

What can I give to you
  To take on your cruel way,
That will cry at your heart all night
  And cry at your heart all day!

What can I find for you
  To place close to your breast —
Something fatal and true.
  Something to trouble your rest?

O, wraith of the rain and the mist,
  How can I live without you?
You float on a sea of amethyst
  And the moon is silver about you!

You float and drift on a shadowy tide,
  And the feathered reeds bend low.

And the moonlit pastures yearn to your side,
  And the forests beckon you.

Each night, each night ere my eyelids fall
  I shall feel you calling to me,
With a low persistent plaintive call.
  Like a sea-bird lost on the sea!

And I shall answer and you will hear,
  And above the wind and rain
The people a strange sobbing will hear;
  We shall be together again.

Oh that at this last hour
  The word might be given me
To tell you the power — the power
  That you have over me!

GOD

WHAT is that face at the window?
  What is that form at the door?
Of white mist are its shadowy limbs
  And with moonlight covered o'er.

Is it a girl or a ghost?
  Pile up the fuel higher!
Pour out the wine and heat the roast!
  Let us warm ourselves at the fire.

Look! It wavers and moans.
  It is very cold and drear!
Pelt it with nuts and cherry-stones!
  It must not enter here.

Let us talk philosophy,
  While the roast is on the spit.
That moonlit thing which wavers there,
  What have we to do with it?

Listen! Its white lips move.
  Christ! Are you mad that you rise
As if each one saw his buried love
  Stand living before his eyes?

I have no love. I lie!
  I lie not! — The wine is poured
And the roast is ready; and I —
  I refuse to believe in God!

PERSEPHONE

AT last!
After the dumb sick longing; —
At last!
Filling the ancient urns
With odours and all the air
With a shudder, a laughter, a cry —
On a wind blown over leagues of tremulous grass,
Leagues of transparent grass,
Leagues of a million of grass-blades moist with rain,
Moist with warm rain and fresh from the brown earth —

At last!
The ravished one, the birth-pale one.
The holy one, the wanton one.
The Spring returns!

O, youth of the world!
O, martyred innocents!
Murdered on all these battlefields of ours —
Fields that are wet with something else than rain —
Is it your blood that lends unto our flowers
This quivering beauty that redeemeth pain?
For at last!
The ravished one, the birth-pale one.

The holy one, the wanton one.
   The Spring returns!

THE VISITOR

FORGET? I had forgotten
Little the use!
A feather in the doorway —
The flood is loose.

Forget? I had forgotten.
No candle burns.
A leaf within the doorway —
The dead returns.

Forget? I had forgotten.
Nail up the door!
You should nail up my heart
If she’s to come no more.

WITH FLOWERS IN OUR HANDS

COME let us walk thro’ their burning hell
With flowers in our hands!
With flowers in our hands let us walk there,
And see what power that evil air,
That evil air and those burning hours,
Have to hurt us who carry flowers!

WAR

THESE, these are not the hours
  For mention of sweet flowers,
Or for light whispers blown thro' brittle reeds.
  The smoke of war's eclipse.
  Rolls dark across love's lips,
Cypris is silent while Adonis bleeds.

So be it. It is so.
And yet while come and go
  Sun, moon and stars, the old emotions waken
Which, while we breathe, we must
Feel thro' our human dust
  Even tho' the pillars of the earth are shaken.

Oh hero hosts struck low,
That a new world may know,
  Some rest from power, some escape from pride,
Faint over each dear head,
The shaméd gods must shed
  Tears for the cruel pain in which you died.

Never quite as before,
Will spring come to our door —
  A red stain lies upon love's tender star.
All born of human race,

Henceforth upon the place,
  Where beats the heart must feel an aching scar.

In Nature’s judgment-hall,
The gods are guilty all,
  All who stood by and let these things be done.
New Hope the world may gain,
It is not worth the pain —
  Not worth it! — of one torn and martyred one!

TO LULU

IT is not only love
That for one another we feel,
But a strange, a strange identity,
Like spokes of the same wheel.

Yes, we have walked together,
With buttercup dust on our shoes,
Thro’ the lovely rainy weather
With nothing to win or lose,
And the wild-rose scent of the hedges.
And the wild-thyme scent of the hill.
And the fresh, damp smell of the river sedges
Are with us still.

Can they ever come back again,
Those infinite, mystical hours.
With love dissolved in the rain
And pain asleep in the flowers,
Where the men we met were like men.
On some God-like errand bound,
And the girls we met were — like girls
As the world goes round!

Will they ever come back? Will they ever?
Who can say? But at least they were,

And God himself can never
   Of the past make empty air;

Should one of us die, the other
   Will have two souls to keep —
His own and what was his brother
   Saved from sleep.

For it is not only love,
   That for one another we feel;
But a strange, a strange identity-
   Like spokes of the same wheel!

THE ORACLE

THE world is malleable,” you said
  And like a young god passing by
Who with large gesture carelessly
  Raises to life one who is dead.

That royal oracle sets free
  The old sweet reckless powers of chance,
And lifts from lovely circumstance
  The monolith of destiny.

“The world is malleable” you said,
  “And its horizons still are blue.”
Oh subtle heart, oh crafty head!
  I take the hint and follow you!

THEY SAY

THEY say the sky Is azure fair,
    I do not know;
They say the spring is in the air,
    It may be so.
They say the crimson-throated shrike
    Will nest this year in Alder Dyke —
’Tis very like, ’tis very like.
•••••••••
The spring? Oh God, in heaven above.
Let the spring go — give me my Love|

OVER

WITH the blood of my heart on my hand
As the wind goes over the hill,
Very quiet I stand
At your darkened window-sill.

Does the rain that beats on your roof,
Thro’ your dreams send not one cry?
In all the world is there no reproof
For your thoughtless cruelty?

Do you see on the shore of dreams
In the misty nebulous land
A bowed phantom who seems
To carry blood on his hand?

Do you hear as the pale rain drifts
Over yellow poppies and graves,
A desperate pleading that lifts
Its voice above the waves?

The voice of the love that your frown
Has driven from human breath,
Do you hear it wandering up and down
Over the country and over the town,
From the reedy shores of death?

Rise up, rise up for awhile,
And press your shadowy cheek
Against the window and smile,
I will not beckon or speak.

I will only show you the blood
As a sign, a symbol, a token —
Be happy now in your mood,
The golden bowl is broken.

THE WILLOW-SEEDS

LOOK! The seeds of a willow-tree,
Falling on grass that must have grown,
In this one spot for a thousand years!
The tossing wind like a gusty sea
Over the elder-bushes blown,
Over the hollow-foliaged elms,
With their orbed shadows in hemispheres,
What wild, strange thoughts it brings to me
From what deep reluctant realms!

Can Fate itself remember the day
When I wandered here from some sea-shore?
I saw these elder-bushes, I saw
This lonely place — that tree-trunk grey;
I saw the willow-seeds cover the grass —
The grass that has grown for a thousand years!
I saw the hollow-foliaged elms,
And then, as now, from reluctant realms.
Came thoughts that would not pass.

What lives we lead — dear God, what lives!
What a palimpsest of double days,
The Master of our journey gives!
Forever round our casual ways
Strange omens peer, strange portents wink;

And we stand darkly on the brink
Of more than mortal mysteries.

REVERSION

SOMETHING has kept us apart
And has flowed between us twain —
Yet my heart has always been to your heart
As the earth to the healing rain —
But a shadow of sorrow has wounded your breast
And a far-off fragrance has troubled my rest
And we have been kept apart.

But now all will be well!
The immortal gods have spoken!
Fate moves at last with the long-drawn swell
Of the sea; and the charm is broken.

Out of the magical night,
Full of shadows and whispering streams;
Out of the hollow, holy night
Where fade all passing dreams,
We meet and all is well.

And the eyelids of sorrow, the lips of delight
Are bathed in lethe-drenched moonlight,
In oblivious, infinite moonlight,
In the deep mandragora of the night;
And we meet — and all is well.

FOR ONCE

THRUST upward your green shoots and drink the rain
Tulip and daffodil! Not till I die
Shall my heart throb with such a spring again
Or from the wine-press of my ecstasy
Such purple waves flow o’er the city’s towers,
Making a sunrise of the midnight seas,
And on far roads, like royal embassies,
Telling the green earth of my happy hours.

Not till I die shall such a spring return,
But memory will return, borne on faint airs,
And from the ashes of its ravished urn
Love will repeat the spring-time of its prayers.
How then will look, ‘mid such rememberings
These places, where the prints of ancient pain
Hold me, until, with laughter and with rain,
You come to me, O Spring of all my Springs?

They will be brimmed with tears intolerable,
They will be tender with an infinite light,
They will be sadder than a sunken bell,
They will be sweeter than a lover’s night,
They will be exquisite with broken sighs,
And faintly whispered words that catch the breath,

They will be quiet as the wings of death,
That quiver between two eternities.

Thrust upward your green shoots and drink the sun,
Tulip and daffodil! The leaves shall spread
Their foliage and the punctual seasons run
Their unremitted course till I am dead.
O Memory, Memory, sharp must be your sting
And bitter-sweet; for ‘till my dream-tossed world
Into the night from which it rose is hurled.
No more, no more shall I know such a Spring!

THE SATURNIAN

AH, I must follow it high and low,
Tho’ it leave me cold to your human touch!
Some starry sorcery made me so;
And from my birth have I been such.

What is it I follow so secret-lone?
Over the hills and along the sea?
Beauty with every seed is sown,
For you, for them, for me?

Not so, by the gods! Do I not hear
In the night a tender-muffled crying,
Rising, falling, sinking, dying?
Oh, I must follow it thro’ the world!

Not so, by the gods! When the dawn-wind stirs,
Rustling over the river-reeds,
Trembling over the wet pastures,
Shall I not follow it, whither it leads?

Oh, wild and sad, oh, wild and sweet,
Is the lonely horn that I always hear,
Blown from the place where all streams meet,
Where all horizons disappear!

The long sea-tides bring home to port,
Their ships by many a moonlit wharf,

But an ebbing twilight carries my thought
Beyond every coast it would anchor off.

Like a reef-bell rocking and ringing low,
Under a grey and rain-swept sky,
The beauty I follow doth come and go,
And if I found it, I should die.

The wild-bird of my longing sings
Always in the next hollow,
And always, always it spreads its wings,
When I cross the hill to follow.

All! Once when the burning noon was poured
On moss and stone and dreaming sod,
I saw the great blue flower that God
Made for the Son of God.

And do you think I can go content,
With the beauty we meet with everywhere,
When I have breathed that flower's scent
And seen it melt into the air?

Oh, I must follow it high and low,
Though it leave me cold to your human touch,
Some starry sorcery made me so;
And from my birth have I been such.

THE HOUR

COME let us take this hour and hold it up
  While our stars shine,
Leaving our joy untouched, as in a cup
  Of unspilt wine;
Then, though the deluge break and we be driven
  Into the grave,
Like gods unto the gods we shall have given
  The gift they gave.

OBSEQUIES

INCH by inch — for it takes some time, this thing —
  You have killed my love;
Till at last a look, a gesture, an anything
  Did fatal prove.
And now, ah now, how desperately you cling
  To its dead bier.
As tho’ thro’ your calm breast passed the same sting
  That laid it here!

ACCUSATION

IF this Is what you meant,
Why did you not go by?
I had got used to my lonely place
And amid the shadows had found a face,
A phantom-face ‘neath a pallid sky,
A phantom-face ‘neath a leaden tent —
Why did you not go by,
If this is what you meant?

Why did you not pass on,
If this is what you meant?
Why did you rise like a dumb moss-rose,
Brooding in somnolent repose,
Just where the moonlight shone,
On the path of my content?
Why did you not pass on,
If this is what you meant?

Why did you not go past,
If this is what you meant?
Why did you fling abroad in the air
A royal ransom of rich despair?
Why with rain were your petals so full
And with dew why were you so beautiful?
The charm that held me fast

Had never then been rent.
Why did you not go past,
If this is what you meant?

THE MONK

OUT of our Lady's cloister torn,
I swept like a hunted flame,
Over valleys and hills forlorn
To a leafy wood where in shades are born
Mosses without a name.

And there I found — poor monk that I was —
My curse, my fate, my spell —
Lightly she leaped from the leafy grass
With a sigh like a vesper-bell.
And her eyes to me had the strange soft look
Of the "Introibo" signs
In my illumined Missal-book,
Where the "Sursum Corda" begins.

O God! I loved her from my heart;
And a little she loved me!
And day and night she led me apart
Where the flickering sunbeams gleam and dart
In the mid-wood's mystery.

Her childish movements, her broken words,
They were my only beads.
For choir we had the twittering birds,
For candles the moonlit reeds.

O God! I loved her from my heart,
   And a little she loved me!

And to watch her laughter flicker and dart
   And the rose in her cheeks come and depart,
Were the prayers of my breviary.

But alas for the monk from his cloister strayed!
   Cold in that very place
Where the hyacinths grew in leafiest shade
   And my Love’s head by my side was laid
I saw our Lady’s face.

And all night now and all day too,
   I tremble those twain between;
And I hate the sky for its holy blue
   And the earth for its heathen green.
I have lost my love because of my heaven
   And my heaven because of my love.
Is there no mercy ever given
   To him that two faiths move?

DESERTED

NONE know her; none remember her.
  Cold lies she. Round the place
The wind-blown shadows as they stir
  Fall on no human face.
Leagues distant the moon draws the tide
  As the moon has always done.
Whom does *she* draw to her dead side?
  Not one of us — not one!

The grasses sway beside the door;
  The wind shrieks thro' the hedge.
No fire-light thrown across the floor
  Reddens the window-ledge.
Gone! All, all gone! save those faint ghosts
  Her memories, her pain,
And on the roof the fluttering hosts
  Of leaves that fall like rain.

And yet the same sky overhead —
  The same moon in the sky!
Surely some token of the dead
  Who went so wistfully,
Some sign, some token, lingering on
  In earth or air or sea,

Must cry upon the hearts of stone
   That can let these things be!

REMORSE

I WROTE my remorse on a forest-leaf
That the wind might bear it to you;
But the wind cared nothing for my grief
And over your roof it flew.
I wrote my remorse on a leaf for you;
But you never knew.

I wrote my remorse on the glimmering sand
Where your tired feet might stray;
But the sea rose up and covered the land
And carried my words away.
I wrote my remorse on the sand for you;
But you never knew.

I wrote my remorse on the breast
Of the Sphinx with the woman's eyes;
And your name remained — but the rest, the rest
Turned sorcery and lies!
I wrote on the Sphinx's breast for you;
But you never knew.

And now, when you weep o'er the spot
Where, earth in earth, I rot.
Do you read, as the rank-grown grass you pull,
What remorse has a grinning skull?

And do you laugh too and let all go?
I shall never know!

TO ISADORA DUNCAN

WITH the gesture of a god,
You gave me back my youth;
And a scent of violets
Overflowed the world.
With the gesture of a god.
You gave me back my love,
And tears deeper than tears
Overflowed my heart.
With the gesture of a god,
You trampled on fate,
You lifted up on high
Those that had fallen —
All the oppressed,
All the humiliated,
All the offended;
You lifted them up on high
And they were comforted.
With the gesture of a god,
You wrestled with Demogorgon;
You brought hope back
And freedom and triumph
To those whom the world had crushed.
All of us, sitting in darkness,
Saw a great light.
You danced as dance the morning stars

And the universe was conquered.
You smote the universe in the mouth;
And you saved us —
You — a woman.

TRAVELLERS

TOO many times have we both been born;
Too far have we voyaged — dear Christ, too far!
Too deep disguises have we both worn,
And the masks of too many an avatar!

I catch on your face the old sad smile
Of our ancient disillusionment,
When the ardent crowd tries to beguile
Your world-old soul to impassionment.

And in a moment I know you again.
And you know me and we mock them all,
As we did of old on the Trojan plain,
As we did of old on the Roman wall.

As we did in Carthage and Syracuse,
As we did in Syria and Cathay,
One look — and in a moment they lose
All hold on us. We have slipped away.

Love? Let them talk of Love! Our bond
Goes deeper. It has been sealed in death.
We have looked on Isis in Trebizond
And in Tyre have worshipped Ashtoreth.

Truth? Let them talk of Truth! We laugh,
  Who have seen Eleusis wreath'd in flame
And the high lamps swung o'er the cenotaph
  Of Her the immortals must not name.

Beauty? As tho' breathed not from you
  The very dawn of creation's day,
When the planets with all their retinue
  Leaped forth to meet you on your way!

Our dreams have mingled. The new times bring
  Old snatches of buried memory,
Which trouble us like a whispering,
  Heard at the bottom of the sea.

We have been too far; we have dived too deep,
  Death itself cannot quench the spark.
We know too much of the ways of sleep
  To fear the everlasting dark.

THE DANCE

DANCE on; we would not touch you,
Nay — let us turn aside,
Lest the shadow of what we’ve looked on
In our eyes should be descried.
Somewhere at least must fingers
Be clasped to the burning sun;
Somewhere must limbs be music
To the tune the fates have spun;
Somewhere the high immortals
Must have oblations poured;
Somewhere in classic portals,
The gods must be adored;
Somewhere must life be beauty
Though the prophets darken their eyes,
Somewhere must beauty be very truth
Though the planets fall from the skies.
Dance on: heed not our plight;
Dance on: be cruel and free;
Dance like a flame in the night!
Dance like a star on the sea!

TWILIGHT

OH day of shadows and scents! Oh day of roses!
Roses down-drooping into the dark lane —
Once, ere this indolent twilight ebbs and closes,
Have pity and restore my dead again!

Soon will the moon rise, luminous and tender!
Already on the night her pallor is shed.
O roses, roses, pity me and render
Back for one hour my darling from the dead!

God! How the air is full of shadows and roses!
Shadows and scents and roses fill the lane —
Somewhere — oh listen! — where a river flows is
Music beyond all pleasure and all pain!

Oh large and indolent midsummer-night!
Breaking our hearts with memories that bleed,
Oh night of roses, oh moon-tranced night,
Have mercy! Give me back the one I need!

THE TUNE

I PLAYED a crazy tune
  To the river-weeds.
I played it to the moon,
  And the sad dark reeds.

And the face that for so long
  Has vexed me hour by hour
Like the rhyme of a lost song,
  Like the scent of a dead flower.

Drew near me; and the cold
  Lethean, lamentable
Lilt of my love-song old,
  To give me her lips was able!

But I played a note too high
  Or I played a note too low —
And the same moon looks down from the sky
  And the same waters flow.

REACTION

OH heart, sink into yourself and rally
The old fierce strength of your lonely mood —
Tho' the train goes whistling thro' the valley,
And the moths go fluttering thro' the wood.

The cold dew rises from field and river,
The night-wind wanders from hill to hill,
The tall June grasses sigh and quiver,
Oh heart, sink into yourself, be still!

Have done with love and its shilly-shally!
Have done with love and its poison-smart!
Oh heart, sink into yourself and rally
The old fierce strength of your lonely mood —
Let the train go whistling thro' the valley
And the moths go fluttering thro' the wood.
Return to your solitude, oh heart!

SATURN

IT is the place!
No moon, no mist, no sound,
As the oracles had writ,
Only the huge and starry night,
Liquid, cool, and infinite,
Lit with lamps, by the old gods lit,
Floating, floating, over it,
Over the place I have found.

It is the place!
I had known it, in the deep
Full-brimmed cup of flowing sleep,
From which, in the vast silence, I
Had drunk inviolability.

It is the place!
Upon the terrace I step forth
And look to the east and look to the north.
On the north there are water-meadows wide,
With shadowy reeds on every side.
On the east — ah! where can I have seen
Mists and marshes so grey and green?
In no human dream I have known this place.
How slow is the sun to show his face!

Did ever the winds with so indrawn breath
Wait and listen, and listen and wait?
Did ever life come so near to death
And remain so wistful and passionate?

The silence deepens. The grey cold light,
Stealing over the pools and the reeds —
Is it only the common dawn? This night
For more than the morning intercedes.

Oh night, and have I not also prayed?
Oh dawn, and have I not also cried —
Betrayed! betrayed! betrayed! betrayed! -
Unto the hollow spaces wide?

It is the place!
And now as the vapours rise,
And now as the mist recedes,
In his old immortal guise,
Looking down on the reeds,
Luminous, lovely, silver bright,
Heaven's antagonist, bearer of light;
Still untouched by passion's stir,
Loving the earth and laughing at her —
Son of the Morning, Lucifer!

Then I heard them. From the far
Ledges of the dawn I heard them.
Every fragile, quivering thing
Of earth's primal gendering;

Every hidden, trembling, shy
   Child of ancient mystery,
Raised a cry out of the cold
   Shadows of the forests old;
Cold and low and sweet and clear,
   Like a sea-shell held to a sea-god's ear —

"They have buried him in vain!
   Saturn, Saturn comes again!
He was old. He was weak. He was dolorous,
   And they buried him far away from us.
They planted mountains upon his breast
   And they mocked and said, 'There let him rest!
Let the leaves of aeons of forests dead
   Cover his eyelids, hide his head!
Into a midnight deep as the world,
   Let his old sad, mad heart be hurled!'"
Ah, that cry! From many a pool
   Where are reflected strange dim faces,
Faces tender and sad and cool,
   Under the shadow of leafy places,
Came that voice that still I hear,
   Wild and low and sweet and clear,
Over hushed dew-drenched lawns,
   Where rivers flow from secret dawns;
Over forests faint and dim,
   Where the leaves and the shadows remember him.
"They have buried him in vain!
   Saturn, Saturn comes again!"

Oh tremulous hope! Oh large escape
  From the intolerable oppressors!
Oh bent and bowed, resume your shape
  And dispossess the dispossessors!

Bring back the old and tender things,
  The things that weep, the things that play
By the margins of eternal springs,
  Where twilight is lovelier than day,

  And the white dawn never flows away.
Oh tremulous hope! Oh large escape!
Oh bent and bowed, resume your shape
  And disposses the dispossessors!

          Can it be true?
Can the weak overcome the strong?
  Can forgiveness all things cover?
Can the singer hear the end of his song?
  Can the loved return to the lover?

Oh planet silver-scornful, oh planet calm!
  Riding the ether alone,
Will this great dawn bring us the longed-for balm
  And for all griefs atone?

Still low and sweet the cry comes to my ears —
  "They have buried him in vain!" —
But fainter, fainter, comes it, and cold salt tears
  Are on my cheek again.

It is the place!
From the high terrace I lean forth
And look to the east and look to the north.
Oh pity! Why does that sweet cry fail?
And why grows Lucifer so pale?
Why do the lovely and tender things
Sink back again to their primal springs?
What wheels are those whose terror draws nigh,
Rolling up the slope of the sky?
Look!

Must it forever be like this?
Oh Fate! Oh Fate remediless!
Look!

Out of the east with a stream of blood,
With music no man has understood,
With splendour, with power, with terrible joy.
With strength to create and strength to destroy;
Kissing all life with a careless kiss,
Creating pain, creating bliss;
The dead, the dead only, free from him,
Red with blood from rim to rim,
Over the conquered throat of the world
The chariot of the sun is hurled!

And so — it is *not* the place;
And once more I bow my face.
They have *not* buried him in vain!

Saturn will never come again!
They rule — they rule from sky to sky.
Hopeless — hopeless, was that cry!
And yet —
Though the oracles have lied to us.
And the gulfs of space have cried to us,
And every chance has died to us,
Oh Saturn, Oh Lucifer, Oh Christ —
Oh Love —

THE SHOES

I HAVE a pair of new shoes.
  They are nice. They have low heels."
So her letter says, and the brief words bruise
  My soul and break deep seals.

It is strange! I have talked with her
  Of the wistful tears of things;
Of the earth and the gods and the thoughts that stir
The soul, as a wave-tossed voyager
  Is stirred by the touch of wings.

But nothing of all I said
  Of the gods and the fatal sky,
And the magical stars that over each head
  Go heavy with destiny,
Had half such power to bruise;
  Or break such world-deep seals,
As, "I have a pair of new shoes.
  They are nice. They have low heels."

ETERNITY

ETERNITY is a wind-blown husk
  And fools run after it;
And when a sand-storm brings the dusk,
  They call it the infinite.

On the surface — the surface — is Beauty found,
  And the surface of life goes deep;
For where it is lost in the underground,
  We sleep — we sleep — we sleep.

There is nothing else but the surface of life,
  Nor ever was nor will be!
— Except the sleep that endeth life;
  And may that fall gently on me!

Fall gently on me, and ere it fall,
  Let me once more pretend
That the one I love the most of all,
  Is with me at the end.

Let the wind-blown husk, eternity,
  Dance over infinite sand,
So the one I love come once to me,
  And give me her little hand!

THE MASK

WITH treacheries bitter and deep
I have kept my place.
With a mask like the mask of sleep
I have covered my face.

I have smiled while my heart beneath
Was deadly with fate,
And the sword in my jewelled sheath
Was white with my hate.

But now as you lift up your hand,
Light as a flower,
By the word of the wind in the sand
I know it, my hour!

And I drop my mask and let fall
The sheath from my sword —
You shall know me, O my one of all,
As I am before God!

WHAT WE SAY

YOU have gathered somewhere to you
The softness of pastures cool,
And the tender, ineffable blue
Of the deep leaf-shadowed pool,
Where a lovelier sky than ours
Sinks down between wavering weeds
And the roots of the floating water-flowers
Blend with the roots of the reeds,

You have gathered to you somewhere
The passion of hyacinth-stains,
Where the odorous moss-dark air
Is moist with a thousand rains;
You have formed your virgin flesh
Of the suppliance of crescent moons,
And the tender ferns that enmesh
The shadows of summer noons.

When my days are yours there passes
With primrose-scented showers,
The thought of cool deep grasses
And beds of cuckoo-flowers;
When my nights are yours, my dreams
Are full of the flight of swallows,

Dipping their wings in rushy streams
   And shady river-hollows.

O child, you have made your own
   All lovely and delicate things,
And losing you, I am left alone
   In a place where no bird sings;
In a place where no reeds quiver
   Or tender rain goes by,
Nor clouds nor cooling river
   Soften the arid sky.

“BE HARD!”

SWEET Christ — our hearts should be stone.
  Then it would be the end!
For the sake of one — of one —— —
  I hurt my friend.

There should be lamps in the sky,
  Not dead moons flickering,
  Not mists to cover us.
There should be lamps in the sky.
We tread too heavily
  And the darkness is over us.
Sweet Christ, our hearts should be stone!

There should be lamps in the sky
  To read the loneliness,
The loneliness we cannot smother
While blindly we stab at one another
  With a rage that is a cry.

O that our hearts in one lightning flash
  Were illumined thro’ and thro’!
Then we should know the oak from the ash,
  The rosemary from the rue!
Then would be proved what we dare not prove,
  And seen what we dare not see;

Then love would be justified of love,
  And a friend a friend would be.

There are no lamps in the sky;
  There are hearts under all our feet,
And we tread heavily,
  And the circle is complete.
Sweet Christ, our hearts should be stone!
  Then it would be the end.
For the sake of one — of one —
  I hurt my friend.

“MANY WATERS”

O BRIGHT and terrible Love,
  From the depths of your bitter sea,
I turn my eyes to your planet above,
Tender and luminous, O Love —
  And its splendour healeth me.
Tender and large you swim into sight,
  A Lotus, a lamp of liquid light.
You lean on the sunset and draw the night
  As the night draws the sea.
Your tide is bitter, O terrible Love,
  In which I sink and drown,
But large and luminous, high above,
  Your planet still looks down,
And the bitter waves that go over me
  Are bright with your serenity.

THE BASSARID

DANCE with the Maenad crowd;
Follow your pulses' beat.
Toss back your hair from your forehead proud;
Crush in the madness of cymbals loud
The hyacinths at your feet.

Deep in the dewy dawn,
Where the serpent of passion hisses,
Pan and Sylvan and Satyr and Faun,
Let them whirl you on through the branches torn,
And stain your mouth with kisses.

With parted lips and with eyes
Brimming and drugged and bright,
Cry aloud your wild Thessalian cries,
Cry aloud your Phrygian ecstasies,
In the hot perfumed night.

Let the wood-spurge cling to your waist,
Let the woodbine tangle your hair,
Let your breast by hazels be embraced
And from oozing green-wood sap be a taste
Of pungent ivy there.

With wild-flung arms and with limbs
Shuddering and wounded lips,

Cry aloud as your brain in frenzy swims,
And loosed by the sweetness of Bacchic hymns,
   Your vine-wreathed girdle slips.

As the torches flicker and fall,
   Flame on through the dew-dark wood;
Answer the thrill of the mad god’s call
To the bitter end of the festival
   With every drop of your blood.

Fear not. When back you steal,
   Broken and weary, to me,
With oil and wine I will surely heal
Each bruise and hurt that your senses feel,
   As I take you on my knee.

I will heal each hurt of your outraged soul,
   Each mark of the wood-god’s force.
I will cause the eternal sea to roll
With waves more pure than the boreal pole
   Over your least remorse!

THE CRY

DO you not hear her crying
  Out and away and beyond?
Those are the grasses sighing
  To the lilies in the pond!
All night long they sigh and talk
  As the wind wails up the garden-walk.
They sigh to the lilies in the pond —
  But what do they know of away and beyond?

Do you not hear her crying
  Out and beyond and afar?
Those are the wild-swans flying
  Towards the evening star!
All night long they fly to the west;
  And a hundred forests beneath them rest,
And a hundred sunsets behind them are!
  But what do they know of beyond and afar?

Out and away and beyond,
  I tell you I hear her crying!
Beyond the grass and the pond —
  Beyond the wild-swans flying —
Do you think I am mad that I know not
  That rise and fall in her cry?

There is no God if I go not
  To find her before I die!

RENEWAL

OVER the heavy hills, over the drowning seas,
The shadows ride;
And the bowed necks of the gods,
Drooping like willow-trees,
Sink side by side.
While over their heads the shadows go,
Drifting, whirling across the sky,
And voices that are not voices flow,
Flow and mingle and lose themselves
In a cry that is no cry.
It must have been in a broken dream
Somewhere else than under our heaven,
That I saw the yellow cowslips gleam
And marigolds to the meadows given.
For while such murder as this is done
And shadows like this ride on the night,
How can the feet of the spring be light?
How can the sap through the branches run?
The natural look of human faces
Is altered. Delicate thoughts are fled.
Torn and gashed in blood-strewn places,
More than the heart can count lie dead.
Bow low your heads, ye gods!
While the troops of the murdered
Rush by you, rush by you on terrible wings.

Bow low your heads, ye gods!
It is not you who will bring us better things.

We have no hope left, save in her,
  The ancient mother of men,
And the old ineffable stir
  Of life breaking forth again!
  Moss upon ruins,
  Grass upon graves,
  And the fragile leaves of hope
  In the cracks of broken hearts.
For the faint wind-flowers will quiver yet,
  And beneath impenetrable trees,
Will bloom as of old the violet,
  In the ashes of these insanities.

UNDERSTANDING

HE does not understand
Or know his own heart’s truth!”
I heard her say, with a wave of her hand,
And the treacherous hope of youth.

Ah! beautiful one, indeed
He does not; nor ever will
For all the tears that your heart may bleed
And the tears your eyes may fill.

Till the rivers flow back to their source,
Till the grass grow on desert sand,
Till the terrible planets change their course,
He will not understand.

Let him go. But the further he goes
The closer you keep, my dear,
Something he little knows,
Something he cannot hear,
You have touched the eternal sea
And the gods have taken your hand.
When he speaks of the love that used to be,
You will not understand.

THERE IT IS!

LET it go, then; let it go!
It was that frail thing
You will never, never know,
Winter-time or Spring.
It was only what the sad
Poets used to call
Love, and praise in many a mad
Song and madrigal!

Let it go, then; let it go!
Send your pity after!
For this thing called love is so,
Pity moves its laughter,
Did you whisper the word “friend”?
Send that also packing!
Let the smoke be at an end
When the flame is lacking!

All is well. I blame you not.
You were born to this.
God in heaven! ’Twas I forgot
What a woman is!
Let it go, child, let it go!
I can live without you.

But I cannot bear life so,
   Loving you, to doubt you!

PAX VOBISCUM

OH eyelids of the dying day,
Fall gently on her pain.
And give her peace and take away
he madness from her brain I”

So wept the trees, so sighed the grass,
As that pale form went by;
But the weary evening let her pass,
And the sun sank pitilessly.

“Oh healing ocean of darkness deep,
Your cool nepenthe pour
Over her sorrow; give her sleep!”
Cried the sea to the silent shore.

But the night looked into her white face
And read such things written there
As are written on the gulfs of space —
Emptiness and despair!

And the night was helpless and could not stir;
Then I arose
And watched the waves of nothingness roll,
I who was nothing, nothing to her!

And I took my soul and crucified it,
   Crucified it between night and day.
Then at last she knew repose,
   And her madness passed away.

THE LANE

No one can take away from me
  A storm-swept lane I once wandered through,
Overhung with ivy and briony,
  And heavy with holly and sombre yew.

The wind in the tree-tops moaned and cried,
  And ‘mid ancient stalks of faded sedge,
Wild basil drooped, grew pallid, and died;
  And dying marjoram filled the hedge.

In long-drawn gusts from the down-land’s verge,
  The cold rain sobbed disconsolately;
And borne on the wind from the distant surge,
  The sound of the sea came lamentably.

Well did I love the rain in my face
  And the smell of the leaf-mould and tangled grass,
And the flapping wings that rose from the place,
  As flocks of starlings heard me pass.

And again and again, when in crowded squares
  The pulse of my life falls low and sinks,
Of the deep-drawn breath of those down-land airs
  My parched and harrowed spirit drinks.

And I pray to the gods I may find ere I die
  A heart that shall be as that lane to me,
With wild-tossed branches and windy sky
  And the sound of the everlasting sea!

CONDEMNED

DO you want to break my heart
  That you say this to me,
With eyes low-lidded and silent lips —
“This is the place of love’s eclipse.
Love at this place sinks out of sight,
As, in a tideless, fathomless night,
  The lead sinks in the sea.”
Do you want to break my heart
  That you say this to me?

Do you want to break my heart
  That you look thus at me;
Look without speech, look without sign,
  Look with eyes that meet not mine;
Look, as if, beyond my face,
You looked thro’ empty gulfs of space
  Into eternity?
Do you want to break my heart
  That you look thus at me?

Do you want to break my heart
  That you let your head fall so;
Fall like a flower with petals furled,
  Forgetting life, forgetting the world?
Fall on my shoulder and hide it there,

Like a marble thing whose cold despair
   Has no more tears to flow.

Do you want to break my heart
   That you let your head fall so?

Hush! Let us pray together!
   Though we have deeply sinned,
If on the wind stirs a feather,
   If a leaf stirs on the wind,
We are saved. Oh, far apart!
   Nothing, nothing has stirred.
Do you want to break my heart

THE ROSE-LEAVES

AS long as the roots of the green, green grass
  Grow cool in the kindly clay,
The rose-leaves of sorrow will fall and pass
  And drift on the wind away.

Oh, rose-leaves, rose-leaves of delicate sorrow!
  Oh, rose-leaves passionate!
Over the grasses of tomorrow
  You drift on the wind of fate.

Lightly, lightly you fall and drift,
  Delicate rose-leaves of exquisite pain;
But something is left that no wind can lift,
  That returns again, that returns again.

Quivering rose-leaves, lighter than air,
  The wind may carry you away;
But your passionate perfume is everywhere,
  The pitiless perfume of yesterday.

And tho' the roots of the green, green grass
  Grow cool for the feet of tomorrow;
And tho' on the wind they drift and pass,
  The delicate rose-leaves of sorrow,

There are things that stay, there are things that stay,
For the heart to feed upon.
Though today is more than yesterday,
And the grass grows green in the kindly clay.
And the wind has carried the past away,
And the rose-leaves of sorrow have gone.

THE EXILE

EXILED and alone
  I wander over the land,
Since gleaming under the sun
  I saw you stand.
In your passionate, childlike way,
  You looked at me and the old
Night fled far away.
And the world was blue and gold.
  Blue was the sky above me;
Gold was the earth beneath,
When you leapt forth to love me
  Like a sword out of its sheath!
Would I had poured them wine,
  The high, remorseless powers!
Would I had covered their cruel shrine
  With holocausts of flowers!
Then perchance they had held their hand
  Ere they turned your heart to stone,
And sent me wandering over the land —
  Exiled, alone!

MORTMAIN

GREY and ghostly cypresses
Meet above our bed.
That is surely why she presses
Close to me her head.

Dead are we. Be quite at rest!
There can be no harm
If across what was her breast
I should lay my arm.

She was never very brave,
And these damned trees
A most evil whisper have
In the midnight breeze.

Close she clings with body thin;
She was always slender;
Do you hold it a deep sin,
Buried, to be tender?

She is frightened, she would say,
But her lips have gone —
Curse you! Look the other way.
Read our burial-stone!

What? She brought me to this pass?
   Brought me to this place?
Oh, it may be! Turn the glass.
   She had a lovely face.

FIRST AND LAST

DAWN broke over us cool and sweet
  So long ago!
The great gods walking in the dew
  Made a path for our feet;
Gave roses to me and lilies to you,
And with reeds of the river rare music blew
  And made a path for our feet.

But the hours that came with the growing light
  Drooped as if they were years,
And in faint flute-music from far away,
  The gods, departing, turned to say,
“Nothing can heal the heat of the day
  Save night with its rain of tears.”

The wind may carry the roses away,
  But the human heart can only pray;
Pray to the gods thro’ the weary years
  For night — for night with its rain of tears.

PIETY

OH liquid moon that silvers the rims
  Of the mountain heights,
Oh lotus-flower that floats and swims
  In the island nights.
Oh pale white arms that are stretched to me
  With a siren's song,
I answer the spell of your witchery;
  I come! I come!

Wait but awhile, oh white, white arms,
  Wait but awhile.
I feel your power and I want your charms;
  I need your guile.
Let me but plant one red, red rose
  On my true Love's tomb,
Then your tide shall bear me wherever it flows.
  I come! I come!

EVASION

HAD I loved the wind In its flight,
Or the storm-cloud darkening the blue.
Had I loved the meteor crossing the night,
I had held it closer than you!

Had I followed the path of the moon
As it quivers on each wave’s crest,
I had touched the fount of its light more soon
Than the outermost veil of your breast.

Whirl on, whirl on, on your way!
I can wait, my sun-kissed flower.
At the bitter end of your burning day,
You will hang your head and the gods will say,
“She is his. It is his hour.”

No! No! Forgive me, dear heart!
Even then I’ll leave you free.
The long pursuit, the cruel smart,
Shall unavenged be.
Till of yourself you lift your lips,
My hour shall dwell in its eclipse.

THE GODS

LET us leave them all, my dear!
   Love, for you, is dead;
Dead and buried far from here,
With the shadows on his bier,
   Earth upon his head.

Let us leave them all, my child!
   Love, for me, has flown;
Flown and vanished in the wild,
Reconciled, unreconciled,
   Turning to his own.

Let us leave them, oh my friend!
Shall not the deep night
   With its large and liquid breath,
   Like the flowing of calm death,
Heal our memory at the end
   And make all things right?

Put the burning fierce unrest
From your brain and from your breast.
   Let us kiss the earth and rest.

Ah! perchance if we lie still —
   Very still and very quiet

With our pulses’ ancient riot
   Hushed and silenced by our will,

There will come thro’ the green shadows,
   Thro’ the eternal leafy shadows,
Lingering, pausing, watching, dreaming,
   Turning all our pain to seeming;
While the mole of memory delves,
   The immortal gods themselves!

THE WATER

WHERE the curlew cries all night
I know a lonely water,
Tall reeds grow there and they bow the head
As at the passing of one dead,
Who had been a king’s daughter.

And a low faint sobbing goes up from them
Like the voice of the grey, cold rain,
That drifts without pause o’er the marshes dim,
Where the road crosses the plain.

And I gaze with a vacant eye.
On the shadowy weeds that float,
With their arabesques of destiny
Around a fairy boat.

And I start and shudder with fear,
What dead went by this water?
Did my own love drift by me here?
Was it this that filled me with ghastly fear?
Was she that king’s dead daughter?

Oh curlew crying again:
Oh reeds that sob in the waters!
They are human tears that make this rain

  That darkens the marshes and fills the plain.
Our loves are all kings' daughters!

THE ROSE

MY heart is burnt in this deadly air,
And the ashes of it are grey,
But the red, red rose you planted there
Blooms in my heart alway.

Out of grey dust and bitter pain,
Its soft red petals blow;
For they are washed by morning rain
And cooled by mountain snow.

You planted that rose and went your way;
And though long, long days you’re gone,
Out of the dust of those ashes grey,
Its petals still bloom on.

They are fed by love; and the love they need
My heart can furnish well;
For the heart whose love has tears that bleed
Can make flowers bloom in hell.

They are fed by pain; and pain can draw
Fresh dew from a dried-up spring;
For the pain of love has a secret law;
Can conquer everything.

With that red rose growing in ashes grey,
  I can bear what fate may send;
You planted it and went your way —
  You are mine now, till the end!

THE WOOD

COME with me to the mossy places.
Where the rippling amber stream,
Mirroring our shadowy faces,
Leads us on from dream to dream.

Come with me where the leaves are still;
And the wood is hushed like a grassy hill,
A hill of silence, whose fleecy sheep
Are the clouds of sleep — the clouds of sleep!

Heavy and dark are the rain-wet ferns
Drooping over the rocky pool —
See how the steamlet ebbs and turns
Sprinkling the moss with its ripples cool!

Ah! The wisdom of life is here;
As old as I, as young as you;
Thrilling both of us thro’ and thro’.
Ah! The wisdom of life is here!

In every plant and in every sod,
The old earth-wisdom here is furled;
Wisdom older than any god,
Wisdom older than the world!

There are whispers here, there are whispers deep,
Hid in these places, that can raise
Memories out of caverns of sleep,
That throw strange meanings upon our days!

Is it life, is it life, that all these years,
We've been living, tasting, and calling good?
Ah! Your eyes are full of tears!
The wood has caught you, the magic wood.

Something breaks down where the wood begins;
Something breaks down in this hidden spot!
What are our virtues? What are our sins?
It matters not! It matters not!

Round the boulders the ripples play.
The dead trunks, lying the stream across,
Catch the sun in a lovelier way
Than the living plants or the living moss.

Death, what is it? What do we care?
It is strange. It is magical. It is well.
Give me your hand — tie up your hair —
If I kissed you, the wood-gods would not tell!

THE BOOK

I MOVED from the sun-warmed garden-seat,
Where the damask-rose petals covered the ground,
And all the people with quiet feet
Followed the mass-bell's holy sound.

I left the terrace; I wandered away,
Past larkspur and lilies and monk's-hood tall,
To where the lake in its reed-bed lay,
On the sunset-side of the castle wall.

With a thousand years in its human sigh
The vesper murmur came to me
Of the people's patient piety;
Then my heart stopped. What did I see?

I saw her — I saw what the moonlit spell
Summoned by my dark heathen book,
Night by night had brought! Too well
I saw her. Too well I knew her look.

O lost one — lost one — from days long dead,
When love gave all and died when it gave!
O head thrown back! O arms outspread!
O passion stronger than the grave!

When the people returned on quiet feet
From following the mass-bell's holy sound,

They found me still on that sun-warmed seat,
With the damask-rose petals strewn on the
ground.

But they did not know that their voices took
A tone like the wind in a sepulchre;
They did not know that a heathen book
Had made me a monk for evermore!

SUPREME UNCTION

OUT of the eternal night,
Rumours and murmurs infinite,
Come to me where here I sit,
Watching in silence where dead love lies,
Pouring balm upon his closed eyes,
Anointing him with memories.
They are deep, the reservoirs of the night!
They are deep, the wells of the infinite!
And who can say but love may stir
While I pour balm, while I pour myrrh;
And rise like a flame and wander free
Over the land, over the sea,
And in the end come back to me?

A QUESTION

WHAT do I want of you? You fill
The air about me with delight.
A power stronger than my will
Draws me towards you day and night.
And yet I do not ask to press
Even your hand in a caress.

Your presence vague and nebulous
Moves with me as I cross the street;
Your sweetness like an angelus
Makes holy ground beneath my feet.
In every lovely form I pass
You shape yourself as in a glass.

What do I want of you? I see
Your other lovers pine to drain
The passion of your ecstasy
In kisses desperate as rain,
And yet, although I am not blind,
Not to that harbour steers my mind.

What do I want of you? God knows!
I only know it is too high,
Too rare a venture to disclose,
Save to the vast and starless sky.

Nothing I want, yet when we meet,
   I think the world hears my heart beat.

EUTHANASIA

OUT of a world of pain,
In a trance that may well be death,
I drift on a barge thro' the fields again
Wherein I first drew breath.
And the river cools my face
And the river-scented flowers,
Water-mint and tall loose-strife
Bring me memories deep as life
From all my vanished hours,
And a white wraith-figure of you —
White arms, white hands, white breast —
Drifts by my side, and alone we two
Drink of the river of rest.
And the wind sighs in the reeds —
Gently — a little wind —
And lightly and sadly the gossamer-seeds
Float away o'er the river-meads,
Blown by that little wind,
And cool airs touch our faces
And your wraith-like hollow eyes
Grow soft with the leafy places,
And the low-breathed reedy sighs;
And on and on we drift,
Where the cattle stand in ranks,
And the swallows flit and skim

Over green and mossy banks;
Till the willows droop like ghosts
And the twilight fills the plain

And the rooks in solemn hosts
Gather and drift like rain.
Then at last I feel and know
That all my memories
As they wavered and flickered in endless flow
Were premonitions sent long ago
Of nothing else than this!
Than that I with you by my side,
Wraith-like but lovely still,
Should follow the river and drift and glide,
Past forest and forest — past hill and hill;
Till the river we follow grows one with the sea.
Ah, the pain again — it will never be!

A FAREWELL

LIFT not your head before you turn away!
  Let not your eyes grow tender, as they grew
Long since — long since! Oh! it is hard to say
  How long, so cruel-fast that hour flew!
Go, then, and take away with you the light
  Laughter of all the leaves, the pleasant stir
Of all the rain falling on all the flowers;
  You cannot take away with you the night!
That you must leave — Love's Holy Sepulchre;
  Whereat forlorn hope weeps thro' the dead hours.

Go, then, and take with you the tender mist,
  That all these days has floated round the trees,
And gathered in the glens and lightly kissed
  The willows quivering in the scarce- felt breeze;
Take it with you and with it take along
  The vague sweet thoughts that into it I've poured,
Glimpses and dreams, such as the gods afford,
  So rarely, that to earth they scarce belong.
Take them with you! They are far better gone
  Than mirrored in my heart, as on a stone.

Go quickly, with no word, if you must go;
  Nay, it is only pity in your eyes;

Only sweet pity — and too well I know
   How soon that little mist will leave its skies!

Go quickly — for I would not cling to you
   With any desperate ultimate arrest,
And it were hard, if you but raised your hand
   Not to lose all my pride upon your breast.
Then, even now, the sea might drown the sand.
   Go quickly, oh my friend — adieu! adieu!

THE GARDEN

WHERE the wet fields stretch away, away,
  And travellers never come,
There is the land where my thoughts stray
  And the house I call my home.

No house had ever so deep a moat,
  Or such tall reeds round It, and no man ever
  Heard such lamentable trees
Whispering In the fatal breeze!
  Will the keel of that strange boat
Lying under the lilies there,
  Lying in weeds like drowned girl’s hair,
Ever rise again and float?
  Never did the wandering wind
Press its sad invisible face
  ‘Gainst such window-casements blind!
Never did the night-hawk chase
  Thro’ a sultrier, heavier night
Moths so ghostly in their flight!
  Never did the wild swans fly
Over such roofs of mystery!
  But do you think it is only of these
Desperate, far-off, piteous, strange,
  That I dream, when you see my memory range?
  Do you think it is only of these?

No! No! dear heart. If you had seen
  That inner garden with crumbling wall,

That garden where a dying queen
  Might listen all night to a ghost’s foot-fall,
If you had seen that old parterre
  Of roses red with forbidden passion
You would know too well why I wander there,
  Too well why my dreams are out of fashion!
Oh, their classic skies are blue and white.
  But grey upon grey is best;
And to follow the rain is my delight
  And the wild swans in their long, long flight
Into the night — into the night —
  To that garden of the West.

NUNC DIMITTIS

I AM dying; but what of that?
Your hands are under my head,
And your tears are on my cheek
And I am happy at last —
Bitter has been the pain!
Yea I have paid the price
For this last moment with you
But all is well at the end;
Your hands are under my head,
And your tears are on my cheek.
So you love me, after all!
And I bless the eternal dark
Into which I sink and fall
That I’ve found you — at the last.

MOMENTS

OH, there are moments in our life,
When the dim marshes of the mind,
Those livid swamps, where birds of strife
Beat up against a sullen wind.

Sink, drowned, in one tremendous flood,
Full-brimmed, resistless, like the sea.
I rose and praised God where I stood.
When such a moment came to me!

NOON

OVER the hills and far away
Are shadowy places where forests deep
Cover with everlasting sleep
Old dethroned gods of an earlier day,
And sometimes when heavy on stone and sod,
The noon-tide heat lies languid and dim,
We feel the passing of such a god,
And the hushed earth yearning to welcome him.

Now — very now — do you feel it? — That breath
Falling, rising, floating, drifting?
What sudden immortal presence is this
That the place and the hour witnesseth?
It rustles the reeds of the meadow rills;
The dreamy July grass it is lifting.
Ah! You are pale. Did something kiss
Your forehead that was sweet as death?
“Look up to the hills” — the psalmist saith —
Our help comes from beyond the hills!

Oh friend, that can be no more than a friend;
As you and others and all decide,
See — the horizon has no end!
See — the doors of the world stand wide!
They are wise, wise, gods, — I know it well —

Wise and strong, that hold us apart;
   But this summer-noon has a different spell,
   Do you not feel it in your heart?

From over the hills and far away
   There has come some old forgotten god,
Some old dethroned, unsceptered god.
   Caring nothing for their wise sway,
And has joined us with a nod.

LOST

THE purple waves recede,
The wings of the sunset sink —
Sea-birds, sea-foam, sea-weed
Are lost on the world’s brink,
The flowing darkness covers the deep
And I weep — and I weep!

Oh, desperate memory!
Oh, hopeless, bitter cry!
She is dead who was all my life to me,
And the wind goes heedless by!

Lost! Lost! Lost!
She can never hear me again!
Under the tides of the sea she is tossed
And her tangled hair drifts round her head
And her tender eyelids are closed and dead.
She can never hear me again!

Can it be so?
Can such things be,
As the things that have been between her and me,
And the waters flow on eternally?

Better had neither of us been born!
Oh darkness, darkness, do not stir,

One word, only one word with her
   One little word, before the dawn!

OBSESSION

OH, take away those haunting eyes
That come with the moonlight still.
When the heavy clouds forsake the skies,
And the rain goes over the hill.

Oh, take away what that lovely hand
On the wild sea-margin writ.
Let the wind hide it in the sand
And the sea roll over it!

Oh, lost one, lost one, of whom I dreamed!
On the long white road ’twas you
Who always before me wavered and gleamed,
Who always towards me turned and seemed
The heart’s desire come true.

By lonely bridges where ancient floods
Flowed towards lands unknown,
’Twas you, O child of a thousand moods,
Who waited for me alone!

But now, oh now that you’ve touched me and fled
The long white roads grow cold;
And the water at every bridge’s head
Flows darker than of old.

Oh, take away those haunting eyes
  That come with the moonlight still.
Let the heavy clouds cover the skies
  And the rain cover the hill!

EXILES

EXILES are we from our very birth,
  But strange memorial glimpses come
At cross-roads of this alien earth,
  To trouble us with our true home.

A grey tree by a forsaken way,
  A forest pool with a shadowy face —
And we breathe deep a moment and say,
  “This is the place! This is the place!”

What place? We shall never, never know!
  We shall die before our feet have found it.
  Yet by its borders all streams flow;
And there’s not a wind but blows around it!

It is near, yet far — our natural home.
  That an evil magic has hidden aside;
Leaving only tokens of it, that come
  To tantalize us and deride.

Exiles are we from our very birth;
  And we shall die and be buried far
From that wilder, lovelier, madder earth.
  Where the lost gods of our people are!

MEMORY

OH, let me forget
  That ever the air was sweet
With the breath of your flower-like ways,
With your wistful, heart-breaking ways,
  And the music of your feet.
Oh, let me forget
That ever the air was warm
With the glow of your youthful lips,
With the rich soft bloom of your lips,
  And the magic of your form!

Forget that body so white
  And that hair that slipped its bands,
And the eyelids kissed by the perfumed night,
  And the pale and passionate hands.

Forget — forget these things!
  For these things have an adder's tooth;
And beauty like a scorpion stings,
  And cruel — ah, cruel is youth!

Let me feel on my forehead the wind
  That blows from the classic shore
Where the wise and lonely shadows find
  Rest and need love no more!

No more? If I’m to forget
   Your ways, your looks, your tones,

There must be no flowers by Lethe set,
Or only scentless ones!

Ah, God — the scent of a flower!
All else the flesh can endure.
But for that — in its hour — in its hour —
There is no cure.

NOTHING

WILL my love come to me?
Alas! I have no love.
Though in green and rainy places
The fronds of the ferns uncurl.
And violets lift their faces
To a crescent moon of pearl.

Will my love come to me?
Alas! I have no love.
Far off — somewhere — a shining head —
O sweet Lord Christ who canst raise the dead.
Take my soul and give me my love instead!
Will my love come to me?
Alas! I have no love.

WHITENESS

WHITE roses set in ivory urns,
White violets wreathed in silver cups;
White marble founts whose moss and ferns,
The shadow of the moon drink up.

Since I have known you and your ways,
Things such as these are my delights.
A whiteness glimmers on my days,
A whiteness hovers o’er my nights.

White dews, white crescent moons, white dawns,
White flickering feet, white-gleaming hands,
White limbs that dream on twilight lawns,
White limbs that dance on shimmering sands.

O child, O maiden-acolyte,
Whose censer breathes such silvery breath,
Pour wine white as the flesh of Christ
Upon the altar of white death!

Then all red things shall fade away —
Red flame, red roses, and red blood,
And we shall voyage night and day
The white sea of the tears of God.

SILENCE

MY dear, that crying in the heart,
When the summer's done,
Hide it away, hide it apart,
That none can hear it, none!
If the wind and the owl and the cold raindrops
Heard that crying that never stops,
The crying of the daughters of men,
They too would be silent — and what then?

All would be silent then again!
Silent the bird of woe —
Silent the wind — silent the strain
Of the rain-drops dropping slow.
All would be silent and with one sigh
A silent world would float on the sky.
Worlds such as these, made of silent tears,
They call the music of the spheres!

FINIS

SO it ends, my dream of loving!
In this empty house I sit,
With my tired spirit proving
All the cynics' bitter wit.
Round me thro' the open shutters
Floats the heavy-scented night;
Not a leaf or grass-blade flutters;
Vapours hide the moon from sight.

Endless, boundless, high above me,
Yawn the ghastly gulfs of space.
I'd have looked, with her to love me,
Those abysses in the face!
All illusion! Well, what matter?
Dim the lights — applaud the play!
Fill the silence with our chatter.
Lay the fairy masks away.

Oh, deep night! My invocation
Is to you, to you alone!
Pour, pour down your consecration,
Though the dream of love has flown.
Large-enfolding night, receive me!
Drown the treacherous siren-songs.

Ah! the love that will not leave me,
  Night, to you alone belongs.

THE GRAVE

WHAT are you thinking when so you look,
Holding my hand with cold, cold fingers,
As we watch this babbling summer brook
Where the virginal flush of spring still lingers?’

“Your eyes are vacant. They stare and stare.
They seem not to see these blossoms white
That drink the sun and perfume the air.
They stare like a dead man’s into the night.”

“I think of a white road crossing a hill,
And a ruined church where no man passes,
And a tombstone lying hushed and still
And a north wind whispering thro’ the grasses.

“Is my body not warm to your touch.
That you hold me so quietly on your knees?
Look how the sunlight falls thro’ the trees!
Is love dead so soon? Is it always such?”

“The white road crosses the barren hill;
No blossoms are there, no bodies warm;
Only a tombstone, very still,
And one beneath it, a shrouded form.”

“Had she lips that were warm like mine?
   When I am dead a thousand lovers
Will kiss the earth my body covers;
   And the splendid sun on my dust will shine.

“Far, you say, is that ruined place?
   No man walks on that lonely road?
Was it so beautiful, then, that face
   That is mingled now with the heavy mould?”

“No! No! Not beautiful at all!
   Withered and wasted — what you will!
And the north wind blows thro’ that ruined wall,
   And no man ever crosses that hill!

“Yes, your thousand lovers will come.
   I believe it! And till the sea
Drown in its flood her grassy tomb
   She will unremembered be!”

THE RETURN

WHAT can I give to you
  Who have given me everything?
Can I rob the sky of its blue?
  Can I take the green from the spring?
Can I catch the dew as it falls?
  Can I reach the fount of the rain?
Can I snare the foam of the waterfalls
  And their rain-bow mist retain?
Can I enter the tombs of kings
  And their cerements unbind?
Can I steal the Tetrarch's rings
  And Salome's pearls unwind?
Will Helen of Troy give up
  The bracelets from her wrist;
Or Iseult restore the cup
  That Tristram drained and kissed?
They are gone — they are gone, all these —
  And their names, like a small faint rain,
Drift by without surcease
  Across time's grievous plain.
Oh, lonely and classic face,
  My harbour and heathen heaven,
Can I find nothing to replace
  All that to me you've given?
Let these dim shades depart

And their sad faint ghosts go hence.
Out of my heart — my heart —
   I will give you your recompense!

THE SHIP

I MADE a ship of my cruelty,
A wonderful, terrible ship,
With masts of silver and ebony,
And bulwarks of carven ivory,
And a figure-head of chalcedony,
And a prow like a lion's lip.

And I sat in the stern of my ship,
Alone, be it said and known,
You are always alone in that kind of ship,
Put your finger upon your lip!
Christ's mother, how deep alone!

And in my ship I sailed;
And the waters were purple and green;
And all day long the sea-gulls wailed
And the sun went down and the waters paled
And a phantom-moon was seen.

And under the moon I still sailed on;
But not only the moon was there!
Algol, the Demon's Eye, looked down —
Algol, the Eye of the Demon, shone,
Thro' the chill and frozen air.

Oh ship, my ship, called Cruelty!
Is it forgotten then of thee

How we came in the hour of dawn
To a land where silence covered the sea,
To a harbour of virginal mystery
And a little pier forlorn?

For the people fled away
When they saw my terrible ship,
Livid, phantom-like and grey,
Led by Algol, at break of day,
Into that harbour slip!

But one fled not. One stood
On the edge of the little pier,
A boy — a boy in his solitude!
A girl — a girl in her fear!

No boy — no girl; a god, a god!
And I hoisted the sails of my ship;
And Cruelty, with Love on board,
— Your finger on your lip!
Went sailing, sailing over the sea
Till the sun grew like the moon;
Till the moon — oh, mother of mystery!
Till the moon grew like the sun.

And Algol, the Demon's Eye, looked down
Upon that curious ship;

Algol, the Eye of the Demon, shone —
  Your finger on your lip!
But Love and I played a deeper game
  Than any Demons know,

And my ship, my ship without a name,
  On the purple sea a silver flame,
From Earth to Heaven did go.

O Prince! make of your cruelty
  A ship and not a sword.
Give it masts of silver and ebony!
  Give it bulwarks of carven ivory,
And a figure-head of chalcedony;
  And take on board a god!

The Non-Fiction

Corwen, a small town in Denbighshire, North Wales — in 1935 Powys moved with his American partner, Phyllis Playter, to Corwen, where he remained for twenty years. There Powys immersed himself in Welsh literature, mythology and culture, including learning to read Welsh. The move inspired two major historical novels with Welsh settings, Owen Glendower (1941) and Porius (1951).

Neuadd Edeyrnion, the author’s home in Corwen

Visions and Revisions (1915)

A BOOK OF LITERARY DEVOTIONS

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Ham. — Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers — if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me — with two Provincial roses on my ras'd shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir?

Her. — Half a share.

Powys, close to the time of publication

PREFACE

What I aim at in this book is little more than to give complete reflection to those great figures in Literature which have so long obsessed me. This poor reflection of them passes, as they pass, image by image, eidolon by eidolon, in the flowing stream of my own consciousness.

Most books of critical essays take upon themselves, in unpardonable effrontery, to weigh and judge, from their own petty suburban pedestal, the great Shadows they review. It is an insolence! How should Professor This, or Doctor That, whose furthest experiences of “dangerous living” have been squalid philanderings with their neighbours’ wives, bring an Ethical Synthesis to bear that shall put Shakespeare and Hardy, Milton and Rabelais, into appropriate niches?

Every critic has a right to his own Aesthetic Principles, to his own Ethical Convictions; but when it comes to applying these, in tiresome, pedantic agitation, to Edgar Allen Poe and Charles Lamb, we must beg leave to cry off! What we want is not the formulating of new Critical Standards, and the dragging in of the great masters before our last miserable Theory of Art. What we want is an honest, downright and quite *personal* articulation, as to how these great things in literature really hit us when they find us for the moment natural and off our guard — when they find us as men and women, and not as ethical gramaphones.

My own object in these sketches is not to convert the reader to whatever “opinions” I may have formulated in the course of my spiritual adventures; it is to divest myself of such “opinions,” and in pure, passionate humility to give myself up, absolutely and completely, to the various visions and temperaments of these great dead artists.

There is an absurd notion going about, among those half-educated people who frequent Ethical Platforms, that Literary Criticism must be "constructive." O that word "constructive"! How, in the name of the mystery of genius, can criticism be anything else than an idolatry, a worship, a metamorphosis, a love affair! The pathetic mistake these people make is to fancy that the great artists only lived and wrote in order to buttress up such poor wretches as these are upon the particular little, thin, cardboard platform which is at present their moral security and refuge.

No one has a right to be a critic whose mind cannot, with Protean receptivity, take first one form and then another, as the great Spells, one by one, are thrown and withdrawn.

Who wants to know what Professor So-and-so's view of Life may be? We want to use Professor So-and-so as a Mirror, as a Medium, as a Go-Between, as a Sensitive Plate, so that we may once more get the thrill of contact with this or that dead Spirit. He must keep his temperament, our Critic; his peculiar angle of receptivity, his capacity for personal reaction. But it is the reaction of his own natural nerves that we require, not the pallid, second-hand reaction of his tedious, formulated opinions. Why cannot he see that, as a natural man, physiologically, nervously, temperamentally, pathologically *different* from other men, he is an interesting spectacle, as he comes under the influence first of one great artist and then another, while as a silly, little, preaching school-master, he is only a blot upon the world-mirror!

It is thus that I, moi qui vous parle, claim my humble and modest role. If, in my reaction from Rabelais, for instance, I find myself responding to his huge laughter at "love" and other things, and a moment later, in my reaction from Thomas Hardy, feeling as if “love” and the rest were the only important matters in the Universe; this psychological variability, itself of interest as a curious human phenomenon, has made it possible to get the “reflections,” each absolute in its way, of the two great artists as they advance and recede.

If I had tried to dilute and prune and “correct” the one, so as to make it “fit in” with the other, in some stiff, ethical theory of my own, where would be the interest for the reader? Besides, who am I to “improve” upon Rabelais?

It is because so many of us are so limited in our capacity for “variable reaction” that there are so few good critics. But we are all, I think, more multiple-souled than we care to admit. It is our foolish pride of consistency, our absurd desire to be “constructive,” that makes us so dull. A critic need not necessarily approach the world from the “pluralistic” angle; but there must be something of such “pluralism” in his natural temper, or the writers he can respond to will be very few!

Let it be quite plainly understood. It is impossible to respond to a great genius halfway. It is a case of all or nothing. If you lack the courage, or the variability, to *go all the way* with very different masters, and to let your constructive consistency take care of itself, you may become, perhaps, an admirable moralist; you will never be a clairvoyant critic. All this having been admitted, it still remains that one has a right to draw out from the great writers one loves certain universal aesthetic tests, with which to discriminate between modern productions.

But even such tests are personal and relative. They are not to be foisted on one’s readers as anything “ex cathedra.” One such test is the test of what has been called “the grand style” — that grand style against which, as Arnold says, the peculiar vulgarity of our race beats in vain! I do not suppose I shall be accused of perverting my devotion to the "grand style" into an academic "narrow way," through which I would force every writer I approach. Some most winning and irresistible artists never come near it.

And yet — what a thing it is! And with what relief do we return to it, after the "wallowings" and "rhapsodies," the agitations and prostitutions, of those who have it not!

It is — one must recognize that — the thing, and the only thing, that, in the long run, *appeals.* It is because of the absence of it that one can read so few modern writers *twice!* They have flexibility, originality, cleverness, insight — but they lack *distinction* — they fatally lack distinction.

And what are the elements, the qualities, that go to make up this "grand style"?

Let me first approach the matter negatively. There are certain things that *cannot* — because of something essentially ephemeral in them — be dealt with in the grand style.

Such are, for instance, our modern controversies about the problem of Sex. We may be Feminists or Anti-Feminists — what you will — and we may be able to throw interesting light on these complicated relations, but we cannot write of them, either in prose or poetry, in the grand style, because the whole discussion is ephemeral; because, with all its gravity, it is irrelevant to the things that ultimately matter!

Such, to take another example, are our elaborate arguments about the interpretation, ethical or otherwise, of Christian Doctrine. We can be very entertaining, very moral, very eloquent, very subtle, in this particular sphere; but we cannot deal with it in the "great style," because the permanent issues that really count lie out of reach of such discussion and remain unaffected by it.

Let me make myself quite clear. Hector and Andromache can talk to one another of their love, of their eternal parting, of their child, and they can do this in the great style; but if they fell into dispute over the particular sex conventions that existed in their age, they might be attractive still, but they would not be uttering words in the "great style."

Matthew Arnold may argue eloquently about the true modernistic interpretation of the word "Elohim," and very cleverly and wittily give his reasons for translating it "the Eternal" or "the Shining One"; but into what a different atmosphere we are immediately transported when, in the midst of such discussion, the actual words of the Psalmist return to our mind: "My soul is athirst for God — yea! even for the living God! When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?"

The test is always that of Permanence, and of immemorial human association. It is, at bottom, nothing but human association that makes the great style what it is. Things that have, for centuries upon centuries, been associated with human pleasures, human sorrows, and the great recurrent dramatic moments of our lives, can be expressed in this style; and only such things. The great style is a sort of organic, self-evolving work of art, to which the innumerable units of the great human family have all put their hands. That is why so large a portion of what is written in the great style is anonymous — like Homer and much of the Bible and certain old ballads and songs. It is for this reason that Walter Pater is right when he says that the important thing in Religion is the Ceremony, the Litany, the Ritual, the Liturgical Chants, and not the Creeds or the Commandments, or discussion upon Creed or Commandment. Creeds change, Morality changes, Mysticism changes, Philosophy changes — but the Word of our God — the Word of Humanity — in gesture, in ritual, in the heart's natural crying — abideth forever!

Why do the eloquent arguments of an ethical orator, explaining to us our social duties, go a certain way and never go further, whereas we have only to hear that long-drawn *Vox Humana,* old as the world — older certainly than any creed— “Santa Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae” — and we are struck, disarmed, pierced to the marrow, smitten to the bone, shot through, “Tutto tremente?” Because arguments and reasoning; because morality and logic, are not of the nature of the “great style,” while the cry— “save us from eternal death!” — addressed by the passion and remorse and despair of our human heart to the unhearing Universe, takes that great form as naturally as a man breathes.

Why, of all the religious books in the world, have “the Psalms of David,” whether in Hebrew or Latin or English, touched men’s souls and melted and consoled them? They are not philosophical. They are not logical. They are not argumentative. They are not moral. And yet they break our hearts with their beauty and their appeal!

It is the same with certain well-known *words.* Is it understood, for instance, why the word “Sword” is always poetical and in “the grand style,” while the word “Zeppelin” or “Submarine” or “Gatling gun” or “Howitzer” can only be introduced by Free Versifiers, who let the “grand style” go to the Devil? The word “Sword” like the word “Plough,” has gathered about it the human associations of innumerable centuries, and it is impossible to utter it without feeling something of their pressure and their strain. The very existence of the “grand style” is a protest against any false views of “progress” and “evolution.” Man may alleviate his lot in a thousand directions; he may build up one Utopia after another; but the grand style will still remain; will remain as the ultimate expression of those aspects of his life that *cannot change* — while he remains Man.

If there is any unity in these essays, it will be found in a blurred and stammered attempt to indicate how far it may be possible, in spite of the limitations of our ordinary nature, to live in the light of the “grand style.” I do not mean that we — the far-off worshippers of these great ones — can live *as they thought and felt.* But I mean that we can live in the atmosphere, the temper, the mood, the attitude towards things, which “the grand style” they use evokes and sustains.

I want to make this clear. There are a certain number of solitary spirits moving among us who have a way of troubling us by their aloofness from our controversies, our disputes, our arguments, our “great problems.” We call them Epicures, Pagans, Heathen, Egoists, Hedonists, and Virtuosos. And yet not one of these words exactly fits them. What they are really doing is living in the atmosphere and the temper of “the grand style” — and that is why they are so irritating and provocative! To them the most important thing in the world is to realize to the fullest limit of their consciousness what it means to be born a Man. The actual drama of our mortal existence, reduced to the simplest terms, is enough to occupy their consciousness and their passion. In this sphere — in the sphere of the “inevitable things” of human life — everything becomes to them a sacrament. Not a symbol — be it noted — but a Sacrament! The food they eat; the wine they drink; their waking and sleeping; the hesitancies and reluctances of their devotions; the swift anger of their recoils and retreats; their long loyalties; their savage reversions; their sudden “lashings out”; their hate and their love and their affection; the simplicities of these everlasting moods are in all of us — become, every one of them, matters of sacramental efficiency. To regard each day, as it dawns, as a “last day,” and to make of its sunrise, of its noon, of its sun-setting, a rhythmic antiphony to the eternal gods — this is to live in the spirit of the “grand style.” It has nothing to do with “right” or “wrong.” Saints may practise it, and sometimes do. Sinners often practise it. The whole thing consists in growing vividly conscious of those moods and events which are permanent and human, as compared with those other moods and events which are transitory and unimportant.

When a man or woman experiences desire, lust, hate, jealousy, devotion, admiration, passion, they are victims of the eternal forces, that can speak, if they will, in “the great style.” When a man or woman “argues” or “explains” or “moralizes” or “preaches,” they are the victims of accidental dust-storms, which rise from futility and return to vanity. That is why Rhetoric, as Rhetoric, can never be in the great style. That is why certain great revolutionary Anarchists, those who have the genius to express in words their heroic defiance of “the something rotten in Denmark,” move us more, and assume a grander outline, than the equally admirable, and possibly more practical, arguments of the Scientific Socialists. It is the eternal appeal we want, to what is basic and primitive and undying in our tempestuous human nature!

The grand style announces and commands. It weeps and it pleads. It utters oracles and it wrestles with angels. It never apologizes; it never rationalizes; and it never explains. That is why the great ineffable passages in the supreme masters take us by the throat and strike us dumb. Deep calls unto deep in them, and our heart listens and is silent. To do good scientific thinking in the cause of humanity has its well-earned reward; but the gods throw incense on a different temper. The “fine issues” that reach them, in their remoteness and their disdain, are the “fine issues” of an antagonist worthy of their own swift wrath, their own swift vengeance, and their own swift love.

The ultimate drama of the world, a drama never-ending, lies between the children of Zeus and the children of Prometheus; between the hosts of Jehovah and the Sons of the Morning. God and Lucifer still divide the stage, and in Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, and Goethe the great style is never more the great style than when it brings these eternal Antagonists face to face, and compels them to cross swords. What matter if, in reality, they have their kingdoms in the heart of man rather than the Empyrean or Tartarus? The heart of man, in its unchangeable character, must ever remain the true Coliseum of the world, where the only interesting, the only dramatic, the only beautiful, the only classical things are born and turned into music.

Beauty! That is what we all, even the grossest of us, in our heart of hearts are seeking. Lust seeks it; Love creates it; the miracle of Faith finds it — but nothing less, neither truth nor wisdom nor morality nor knowledge, neither progress nor reaction, can quench the thirst we feel.

Yes, it is Beauty we crave, and yet, how often, in the strain and stress of life, it seems as though this strange impossible Presence, rising thus, like that figure in the Picture, "beside the waters" of the fate that carries us, were too remote, too high and translunar, to afford us the aid we need. Heine tells us somewhere, how, driven by the roar of street-fighting, into the calm cool galleries of the Louvre, sick and exhausted in mind and body, he fell down at the feet of the Goddess of Beauty there, standing, as she still stands, at the end of that corridor of mute witnesses, and as he looked to her for help, he knew that she could never bend down to him, or lift him up out of his weariness, for they had broken her long ago, and *she had no arms!*

Alas! It is true enough that there are moments, when, under the pressure of the engines of fate, we can only salute her — the immortal one — afar off. But if we have the courage, the obstinacy, the endurance, to wait —

even a short while longer — she will be near us again; and the old magical spell, transforming the world, will thrill through us like the breath of spring!

Why should we attempt to deceive ourselves? We cannot always live with those liberating airs blowing upon our foreheads. We have to bear the burden of the unillumined hours, even as our fathers before us, and our children after us. Enough if we keep our souls so prepared that when the touch, the glimpse, the word, the gesture, that carries with it the thrilling revelation of the “grand manner”, returns to us in its appointed hour, it shall find us not unworthy of our inheritance.

RABELAIS

THERE ARE CERTAIN great writers who make their critics feel even as children, who picking up stray wreckage and broken shells from the edge of the sea waves, return home to show their companions "what the sea is like."

The huge suggestiveness of this tremendous spirit is not easy to communicate in the space of a little essay.

But something can be done, if it only take the form of modest "advice to the reader."

Is it a pity, one asks oneself, or is it a profound advantage, that enjoyment of Rabelais should be so limited? At least there are no false versions to demolish here — no idealizations to unmask.

The reading of Rabelais is not easy to everyone, and perhaps to those for whom it is least easy, he would be most medicinal. What in this mad world, do we lack, my dear friends? Is it possibly *courage?* Well, Rabelais is, of all writers, the one best able to give us that courage. If only we had courage, how the great tides of existence might sweep us along — and we not whine or wince at all!

To read Rabelais is to gather, as if from the earth-gods, spirit to endure anything. Naturally he uses wine, and every kind of wanton liquor, to serve as symbols of the intoxication he would produce. For we must be "rendered drunk" to swallow Life at this rate — to swallow it as the gods swallow it. We must be drunk but not mad. For in the spiritual drunkenness that Rabelais produces there is not the remotest touch of insanity. He is the sanest of all the great writers; perhaps the only sane one. What he has the power of communicating to us is a renewal of that *physiological energy,* which alone makes it possible to enjoy this monstrous world. Other writers interpret things, or warn us against things. Rabelais takes us by the hand, shows us the cup of life, deep as eternity, and bids us drink and be satisfied. What else could he use, if not *wine,* as a symbol for such quenching of such thirst. And after wine, sex. There is no other who treats sex as Rabelais does; who treats it so completely as it *ought* to be treated!

Walt Whitman is too obsessed by it; too grave over it — Rabelais enjoys it, fools with it, plunges into it, wallows in it; and then, with multitudinous laughter, shakes himself free, and bids it go to the Devil!

The world will have to come to this, sooner or later — to the confusion of the vicious — and the virtuous!

The virtuous and the vicious play indeed into each others hands; and neither of them love laughter. Sexual dalliance is either too serious a matter to be mocked by satyr-laughter; or it is too sad and deplorable to be laughed at at all. In a few hundred years, surely, the human race will recognize its absolute right to make mock at the grotesque elements in the sex comedy, and such laughter will clear the air of much "virtue" and much "vice."

Wine is his first symbol of the large, sane, generous mood he bequeaths to us — the focusing of the poetry of life, and the glow and daring of it, and its eternal youthfulness.

But it is more than a symbol — it is a sacrament and an initiation. It is the sap that rises in the world's recurrent spring. It is the ichor, the quintessence of the creative mystery. It is the blood of the sons of the morning. It is the dew upon the paradisic fields. It is the red-rose light, upon the feet of those who dance upon graves. Wine is a sign to us how there is required a certain generous and sane intoxication, a certain large and equable friendliness in dealing with people and things and ideas. It is a sign that the earth calls aloud for the passionate dreamer. It is a sign that the truth of truth is not in labor and sorrow, but in joy and happiness. It is a sign that gods and men have a right to satisfy their hearts desire, with joy and pleasure and splendid freedom. And just as he uses wine, so he uses meat. Bread that strengthened man's heart (and bologna-sausages, gammons of bacon, or what you will, else) this also is a symbol and a sacrament. And it is indeed more, for one must remember that Rabelais was a great doctor of medicine, as well as of Utopian Theology — and the stomach, with the wise indulgence thereof, is the final master of all arts! Let it be understood that in Rabelais sex is treated with the same reverence, and the same humor, as meat and wine. Why not? Is not the body of man the temple of the Holy Ghost? Is it not sacrosanct and holy within and without; and yet, at the same time, is it not a huge and palpable absurdity?

Those who suffer most from Rabelais' manner of treating sex are the incurably vicious. The really evil libidinous people, that is to say the spiteful, the mean, the base and inhuman, fly from his presence, and for the obvious reason that he makes sex-pleasure so generous, so gay, so natural, so legitimate, that their dark morbid perverted natures can get no more joy out of it. Their lust, their lechery, is a cold dead Saurian thing, a thing with the gravity of a slow-worm — and when this great laughing and generous sage comes forth into the sunshine with his noble companies of amorous and happy people, these Shadow-lovers, these Leut-lovers, these Fleshly Sentimentalists, writhe in shame, and seek refuge in a deeper darkness. How strained and inhuman, too; and one might add, how mad and irrelevant — that high, cold, disdainful translunar scorn with which the "moral-immoralism" of Nietzsche scourges our poor flesh and blood. One turns with relief to Zarathustra after associating with pious people. But, after Rabelais, even that terrific psychologist seems contorted and *thin.*

For after all it is generosity that we cry out for. Courage without generosity hugs its knees in Hell.

From the noble pleasures of meat and drink and sex, thus generously treated; we must turn to another aspect of Rabelais' work — his predilection for excrement. This also, though few would admit it, is a symbolic secret. This also is a path of initiation. In this peculiarity Rabelais is completely alone among the writers of the earth. Others have, for various reasons, dabbled in this sort of thing — but none have ever piled it up — manure-heap upon manure-heap, until the animal refuse of the whole earth seems to reek to the stars! There is not the slightest reason to regret this thing or to expurgate it. Rabelais is not Rabelais, just as life is not life, without it.

It is indeed the way of "salvation" for certain neurotic natures. Has that been properly understood? There are people who suffer frightfully — and they are often rare natures, too, though they are sometimes very vicious — from their loathing of the excremental side of life. Swift was one of these. The "disgusting" in his writing is a pathological form, not at all unusual, of such a loathing. But Rabelais is no Dean Swift — nor is there the remotest resemblance between them. Rabelais may really save us from our loathing by the huge all-embracing friendliness of his sense of humor.

There are certain people, no doubt, who would prefer the grave enthusiasm of Whitman in regard to this matter to the freer Rabelaisian touch. I cannot say that my personal experience agrees with this view.

I have found both great men invaluable; but I think as far as dealing with the Cloaca Maxima side of things is concerned, Rabelais has been the braver in inspiration. In these little matters one can only say, "some are born Rabelaisian, and some require to have Rabelais thrust upon them!"

Surely it is wisdom, in us terrestrial mortals, to make what imaginative use we can of *every phase* of our earthly condition?

Imagination has a right to play with everything that exists; and humor has a right to laugh at everything that exists. Everything in life is sacred and everything is a huge jest.

It is the association of this excremental aspect of life, with those high sacraments of meat and drink and sex, which some find so hard to endure. Be not afraid my little ones! The great and humorous gods have arranged for this also; and have seen to it that no brave, generous, amorous "sunburnt" emotion shall ever be hurt by such associations! If a person *is* hurt by them, that is only an indication that they are in grievous need of the wholesome purgative medicine of the great doctor! When one comes to speak of the actual contents of these books criticism itself must borrow Gargantua's mouth.

What characters! The three great royal giants, Graugousier, Gargantua and Pantagruel — have there ever been such kings? And the noble servants of such noble masters! The whole atmosphere is so large, so genial, so courteous, so sweet-tempered, so entirely what the life of man upon earth should be.

Even the military exploits of Friar John, even the knavish tricks of Panurge, cannot spoil our tenderness for these dear bully-boys, these mellow and magnanimous rogues! Certain paragraphs in Rabelais recur to one's mind daily. That laudation of Socrates at the beginning, and the description of the "little boxes called *Silent"* that outside have so grotesque an adornment, but within are full of ambergris and myrrh and all manner of precious odours.

And the picture of the banquet "when they fell to the chat of the afternoon's collation and began great goblets to ring, great bowls to ting, great gammons to trot; pour me out the fair Greek wine, the extravagant wine, the good wine, Lacrima Christi, supernaculum!" And, above all, the most holy Abbey of Thelema, over the gate of which was written the words that are never far from the hearts of wise Utopian Christians, the profound words, the philosophical words, the most shrewd Cabalistic words, and the words that "lovers" alone can understand— "Fay que ce Vouldray!" Do as Thou Wilt!

Little they know of Rabelais who call him a lewd buffoon — the profanest of mountebanks. He was one of those rare spirits that redeem humanity. To open his book — though the steam of the grossness of it rises to Heaven — is to touch the divine fingers — the fingers that heal the world.

How that "style" of his, that great oceanic avalanche of learning and piety and obscenity and gigantic merriment, smells of the honest earth!

How, with all his huge scholarship, he loves to depend for his richest, most human effects, upon his own peasant-people of Touraine! The proverbs of the country-side, the wisdom of tavern-wit, the shrewdness and fantasy of old wives tales, the sly earthly humors of farmers and vine-tenders and goat-herds and goose-girls — these are things out of which he distils his vision, his oracles, his courage.

There is also — who could help observing it? — a certain large and patriarchal homeliness — a kind of royal domesticity — about much that he writes. Those touches, as when Gargantua, his little dog in advance, enters the dining hall, when they are discussing Panurge's marriage, and they all rise to do him honor; as when Gargantua bids Pantagruel farewell and gives him a benediction so wise and tender; remain in the mind like certain passages in the Bible. These are the things that aesthetic fools "with varnished faces" easily overlook and misunderstand; but good simple fellows— "honest cods" as Rabelais would say — are struck to the heart by them. How proud the man might be, who in the turmoil of this troublesome world and beneath the mystery of “le grand Peut-être” could answer to the ultimate question, “I am a Christian of the faith of Rabelais!”

Such a one, under the spell of such a master, might indeed be able to comfort the sick and sorry, and to whisper in their ears that cosmic secret—“Bon Espoir y gist au fond!” “Good Hope lies at the Bottom!” “Good Hope” for all; for the best and the worst — for the whole miserable welter of this chaotic farce!

Therefore, “with angels and archangels” let us bow our heads and hold our tongues. Those who fancy Rabelais to be lacking in the kind of religious feeling that great souls respect, let them read that passage in the voyage of Pantagruel that speaks of the Death of Pan. Various accounts are given; various explanations made; of the great cry, that the sailors, “coming from Paloda,” heard over land and sea. At the last Pantagruel himself speaks; and he tells them that to him it refers to nothing less than the death of Him whom the Scribes and Pharisees and Priests of Jerusalem slew. “And well is He called Pan, which in the Greek means ‘All’; for in Him is all we are or have or hope.” And having said this he fell into silence, and “tears large as ostrich-eggs rolled down his cheeks.”

To all who read Rabelais and love him, one can offer no better wish than that the mystic wine of his Holy Bottle may fulfil their heart’s desire. Happy, indeed, those who are not “unwillingly drawn” by the “Fate” we all must follow! “Go now, my friends,” says the strange Priestess, “and may that Circle whose Centre is everywhere and its Circumference nowhere, keep you in His Almighty protection!”

DANTE

THE HISTORY OF Dante’s personal and literary appeal would be an extremely interesting one. No great writer has managed to excite more opposite emotions.

One thing may be especially noted as significant: Women have always been more attracted to him than men. He is in a peculiar sense the Woman’s great poet. There is a type of masculine genius which has always opposed him. Goethe cared little for him; Voltaire laughed at him; Nietzsche called him “an hyaena poetizing among the tombs.”

The truth is, women love Dante for the precise reason that these men hate him. He makes sex the centre of everything. One need not be deceived by the fact that Dante worships “purity,” while Voltaire, Goethe and Nietzsche are little concerned with it. This very laudation of continence is itself an emphasis upon sex. These others would play with amorous propensities; trifle with them in their life, in their art, in their philosophy; and then, that dangerous plaything laid aside would, as Machiavel puts it, “assume suitable attire, and return to the company of their equals — the great sages of antiquity.”

Now it is quite clear that this pagan attitude towards sex, this tendency to enjoy it in its place and leave it there, is one that, more than anything else, is irritating to women. If, as a German thinker says, every woman is a courtezan or a mother, it is obvious that the artists and thinkers who refuse alike the beguilements of the one and the ironic tenderness of the other, are not people to be “loved.” Dante refuses neither; and he has, further, that peculiar mixture of harsh strength and touching weakness, which is so especially appealing to women. They are reluctantly overcome — not without pleasure — by his fierce authority; and they can play the "little mother" to his weakness. The maternal instinct is as ironical as it is tender. It smiles at the high ideals or the eccentric child it pets, but it would not have him different. What a woman does not like, whether she is mother or courtezan, is that other kind of irony, the irony of the philosopher, which undermines both her maternal feeling and her passionate caresses.

Women, too, even quite good women, have the stress of the sexual difference constantly before them. Indeed it may be said that the class of women who are least sex-conscious are those who have habitually to sell themselves. It all matters so little then!

How fiercely is the interest of the most virtuous aroused, when any question of a love affair is rumored. In this sense every woman is a born "go-between." Sex is not with them a thing apart, an exciting volcanic thing, liable to mad outbursts, to weird perversions, but often completely forgotten. It is never completely forgotten. It is diffused. It is everywhere. It lurks in a thousand innocent gestures and intimations. The savage purity of an Artemis is no real exception. Sex is a thing too pressing to be dallied with. It is all or nothing.

One cannot play with fire. When we make observations of this kind we do not derogate from the charm or dignity of women. It is no aspersion upon them. They did not ask to have it so. It is so.

Domestic life as the European nations have evolved it is a queer compromise. Its restraints weigh heavily, in alternate discord, upon both sexes.

Masculine depravity rebels against it, and the whole modern feministic movement shakes it to the base. It remains to be seen whether Nature will admit of any satisfactory readjustment.

Certainly, as far as overt acts are concerned, women are far “purer” than men. It is only when we leave the sphere of outward acts and enter the sphere of cerebral undercurrents, that all this is changed. There the Biblical story finds its proof, and the daughters of Eve revert to their mother. This is the secret of that mania for the personal which characterizes women’s conversation. She can say fine things and do fine work; but both in her wit and her art, one is conscious of a mind that has voluptuously welcomed, or vindictively repulsed, the approach of a particular invasion; never of a mind that, in its abstract love for the beautiful, cannot even remember how it came to give birth to such thoughts!

It is the close psychological association between the emotion of religion and the emotion of sex which has always made women more religious than men.

This is perhaps only to say that women are nearer the secret of the universe than men. It may well be so. Man’s rationalizing tendency to divorce his intelligence from his intuition — may not be the precise key which opens those magic doors! *Sanctity* itself — that most exquisite flower of the art of character — is a profoundly feminine thing. The most saintly saints, that is to say those who wear the indescribable distinction of their Master, are always possessed of a certain feminine quality.

Sanctity is woman’s ideal — morality is man’s. The one is based upon passion, and by means of love lifts us above law. The other is based upon vice and the recoil from vice; and has no horizons of any sort.

That is why the countries where the imagination is profoundly feminine like Russia and France have sanctity as their ideal. Whereas England has its Puritan morality, and Germany its scientific efficiency. These latter races ought to sit at Dante’s feet, to learn the secret of the “Beatific Vision” that is as far beyond morality as it is outside science. There are, it is true, certain moments when the Italian poet leads us up into the cold rarified air of that "Intellectual Love of God" which leaves sex, as it leaves other human feelings, infinitely behind. But this Spinozistic mood is not the natural climate of his soul. He is always ready to revert, always anxious to "drag Beatrice in." Wagner's "Parsifal" is perhaps the most flagrant example of this ambiguous association between religion and sex. The sentimental blasphemy of that feet-washing scene is an evidence of the depths of sexual morbidity into which this voluptuous religion of pity can lead us. O that figure in the white nightgown, blessing his reformed harlot!

It is a pity Wagner ever touched the Celtic Legend — German sentimentality and Celtic romance need a Heine to deal with them!

It is indeed a difficult task to write of the relations between romantic love and devotional religion and to do it in the grand style. That is where Dante is so supremely great. And that is why, for all his greatness, his influence upon modern art has been so morbid and evil. The odious sensuality of the so-called "Pre-Raphaelite School" — a sensuality drenched with holy water and perfumed with incense — has a smell of corruption about it that ought never to be associated with Dante's name.

The worst of modern poets, the most affected and the most meticulous, are all anxious to seal themselves of the tribe of Dante. But they are no more like that divine poet than the flies that feed on a dead Caesar are like the hero they cause to stink!

Our brave Oscar understood him. Some of the most exquisite passages in "Intentions" refer to his poetry. Was the "Divine Comedy" too clear-cut and trenchant for Walter Pater? It is strange how Dante has been left to second-rate interpreters! His illustrators, too! O these sentimentalists, with their Beatrices crossing the Ponte Vecchio, and their sad youths looking on! All this is an insult — a sacrilege — to the proudest, most aristocratic spirit who ever dwelt on earth! Why did not Aubrey Beardsley stop that beautiful boy on the threshold? He who was the model of his “Ave atque vale!” might have well served for Casella, singing among the cold reeds, in the white dawn.

For there are scenes in Dante which have the strange, remote, perverted, *archaic* loveliness of certain figures on the walls of Egyptian temples or on the earliest Greek vases. Here the real artist in him forgets God and Beatrice and the whole hierarchy of the saints. And it is because of things of this kind that many curious people are found to be his worshipers who will never themselves pass forth “to re-behold the stars.” They are unwise who find Dante so bitter and theological, so Platonic and devoted, that they cannot open his books. They little know what ambiguous planets, what dark heathen meteors move on the fringe of his great star-lit road. His Earthly Lady, as well as his Heavenly Lady, may have the moon beneath her feet.

But neither of them know, as does their worshiper and lover, *what lies on the other side of the moon.*

What Dante leaves to us as his ultimate gift is his pride and his humility. The one answers the other. And both put us to shame. He, alone of great artists, holds in his hand the true sword of the Spirit for the dividing asunder of men and things. There is no necessity to lay all the stress upon the division between the Lower and the Higher Love, between Hell and Heaven. There are other *distinctions* in life than these. And between all distinctions, between all those differences which separate the “fine” from the “base,” the noble from the ignoble, the beautiful from the hideous, the generous from the mean; Dante draws the pitiless sword-stroke of that “eternal separation” which is the most tragic thing in the world. In the truest sense tragic! For so many things, and so many people, that must be thus “cut off,” are among those who harrow our hearts with the deadliest attraction and are so wistful in their weakness. Through the mists and mephitic smoke of our confused age — our age that cries out to be beyond the good, when it is beneath the beautiful — through the thick air of indolence masquerading as toleration and indifference posing as sympathy, flashes the scorching sword of the Florentine's Disdain, dividing the just from the unjust, the true from the false, and the heroic from the commonplace. What matter if his "division" is not our "division," his "formula" our "formula"? It is good for us to be confronted with such Disdain. It brings us back once more to "Values"; and whether our "Values" are values of taste or values of devotion what matter? Life becomes once more arresting. The everlasting Drama recovers its "Tone"; and the high Liturgy of the last Illusion rolls forward to its own Music!

That Angel of God, who when their hearts were shaken with fear before the flame-lit walls of Dis, came, so straight across the waters, and quelled the insolence of Hell; with what Disdain he turns away his face, even from those he has come to save!

These "messengers" of God, who have so superb a contempt for all created things, does one not meet them, sometimes, even in this life, as they pass us by upon their secret errands?

The beginning of the Inferno contains the cruellest judgment upon our generation ever uttered. It is so exactly adapted to the spirit of this age that, hearing it, one staggers as if from a stab. Are we not this very tribe of caitiffs who have committed the "Great Refusal?" Are we not these very wretches whose blind life is so base that they envy every other Fate? Are we not those who are neither for God or for his Enemies but are "for themselves"; those who may not even take refuge in Hell, lest the one damned get glory of them! The very terror of this clear-cutting sword-sweep, dividing us, bone from bone, may, nay! probably will, send us back to our gentle “lovers of humanity” who, “knowing everything pardon everything.” But one sometimes wonders whether a life all “irony,” all “pity,” all urbane “interest,” would not lose the savor of its taste! There is a danger, not only to our moral sense, but to our immoral sense, in that genial air of universal acceptance which has become the fashion.

What if, after all — even though this universe be so poor a farce — the mad lovers and haters, the terrible prophets and artists, *were right?*

Suppose the farce had a climax, a catastrophe! One loves to repeat “all is possible;” but *that* particular possibility has little attraction. It would be indeed an anti-climax if the queer Comedy we have so daintily been patronizing turned out to be a Divine Comedy — and ourselves the point of the jest! Not that this is very likely to occur. It is more in accordance with what we know of the terrestrial stage that in this wager of faith with un-faith neither will ever discover who really won!

But Dante’s “Disdain” is not confined to the winners in the cosmic dicing match. There are heroic hearts in hell who, for all their despair, still yield not, nor abate a jot of their courage. Such a one was that great Ghibelline Chief who was lost for “denying immortality.” “If my people fled from thy people — *that* more torments me than this flame.” In one respect Dante is, beyond doubt, the greatest poet of the world. I mean in his power of heightening the glory and the terribleness of the human race. Across the three-fold kingdom of his “Terza Rima” passes, in tragic array, the whole procession of human history — and each figure there, each solitary person, whether of the Blessed or the Purged, or the Condemned, wears, like a garment of fire, the dreadful dignity of having been a man! The moving sword-point that flashes, first upon one and then upon another, amid our dim transactions, is nothing but the angry arm of human imagination, moulding life to grander issues; *creating,* if not discovering, sublimer laws.

In conveying that thrilling sense of the momentousness of human destiny which beyond anything else certain historic names evoke, none can surpass him. The brief, branding lines, with which the enemies of God are engraved upon their monuments "more lasting than brass," seem to add a glory to damnation. Who can forget how that "Simonist" and "Son of Sodom" lifts his hands up out of the deepest Pit, and makes "the fig" at God? "Take it, God, for at Thee I aim it!" There is a sting of furious blasphemy in this; *personal outrage* that goes beyond all limits.

Yet who is there, but does not feel *glad* that the "Pistoian" uttered what he uttered — out of his Hell — to his Maker?

Is not Newman right when he says that the heart of man does not naturally "love God?"

But perhaps in the whole poem nothing is more beautiful than that great roll of honor of the unchristened Dead, who make up the company of the noble Heathen. Sad, but not unhappy, they walk to and fro in their Pagan Hades, and occupy themselves, as of old, in discoursing upon philosophy and poetry and the Mystery of Life.

Those single lines, devoted to such names, are unlike anything else in literature. That "Caesar, in armour, with Ger-Falcon eyes," challenges one's obeisance as a great shout of his own legionaries, while that "Alone, by himself, the Soldan" bows to the dust our Christian pride, as the Turbaned Commander of the Faithful, with his ghostly crescent blade, strides past, dreaming of the Desert.

It is in touches like these, surely, rather than in the Beatrice scenes or the devil scenes, that the poet is most himself.

It needs, perhaps, a certain smouldering dramatic passion, in regard to the whole spectacle of human life, to do justice to such lines. It needs also that mixture of disdain and humility which is his own paramount attribute.

And the same smouldering furnace of "reverence" characterizes Dante's use of the older literatures. No writer who has ever lived has such a dramatic sense of the "great effects" in style, and the ritual of words.

That passage, *"Thou* art my master and my author. It is from *thee* I learnt the beautiful style that has done me so much honour," with its reiteration of the rhythmic syllables of "honour," opens up a salutary field of aesthetic contemplation. His quotations, too, from the Psalms, and from the Roman Liturgy, become, by their imaginative inclusion, part of his own creative genius. That "Vexilla regis prodeunt Inferni!" Who can hear it without the same thrill, as when Napoleonic trumpets heralded the Emperor! In the presence of such moments the whole elaboration of the Beatrice Cult falls away. That romantic perversion of the sex instinct is but the psychic motive force. Once started on his splendid and terrible road, the poet forgets everything except the "Principle of Beauty" and the "Memory of Great Men." Parallel with these things is Dante's passion of reverence for the old historic places — provinces, cities, rivers and valleys of his native Italy. Even when he lifts up his voice to curse them, as he curses his own Firenze, it is but an inversion of the same mood. The cities where men dwelt then took to themselves living personalities; and Dante, who in love and hate was Italian of the Italians, was left indifferent by none of these. How strange to modern ears this thrill of recognition, when one exile, even among the dead, meets another, of their common citizenship of "no mean city!" Of this classic "patriotism" the world requires a Renaissance, that we may be saved from the shallowness of artificial commercial Empires. The new "inter-nationalism" is the sinister product of a generation that has grown “deracinated,” that has lost its roots in the soil. It is an Anglo-Germanic thing and opposed to it the proud tenacity of the Latin race turns, even today, to what Barres calls the “worship of one’s Dead.”

Anglo-Saxon Industrialism, Teutonic Organization, have their world place; but it is to the Latin, and, it may be, to the Slav also, that the human spirit must turn in those subtler hours when it cannot “live by bread alone.”

The modern international empires may obliterate local boundaries and trample on local altars. In spite of them, and in defiance of them, the soul of an ancient race lives on, its saints and its artists forging the urn of its Phoenix-ashes!

Dante himself, dreaming over the high Virgilian Prophecy of a World-State, under a Spiritual Caesar, yearned to restore the Pax Romana to a chaotic world. Such a vision, such an Orbis Terrarum at the feet of Christ, has no element in common with the material dominance of modern commercial empires. It much more closely resembles certain Utopias of the modern Revolutionary. In its spirit it is not less Latin than the traditional customs of the City-States it would include. Its real implication may be found in the assimilative genius of the Catholic Church, consecrating but not effacing local altars; transforming, but not destroying, local pieties. Who can deny that this formidable vision answers the deepest need of the modern world?

The discovery of some Planetary Synthesis within the circle of which all the passionate race cults may flourish; growing not less intense but more intense, under the new World-City — this is nothing else than what the soul of the earth, “dreaming on things to come” may actually be evolving.

Who knows if the new prominence given by the war to Russian thought may not incredibly hasten such a Vita Nuova? We know that the Pan-Slavic dream, even from the days of Ivan the Terrible, has been of this spiritual unity, and it may be remembered that it was always from “beyond the Alps” that Dante looked for the Liberator. Who knows? The great surging antipodal tides of life lash one another into foam. Out of chaos stars are born. And it may be the madness of a dream even so much as to speak of “unity” while creation seethes and hisses in its terrible vortex. Mockingly laugh the imps of irony, while the Saints keep their vigil. Man is a surprising animal; by no means always bent on his own redemption; sometimes bent on his own destruction!

And meanwhile the demons of life dance on. Dante may build up his great triple universe in his great triple rhyme, and encase it in walls of brass. But still they dance on. We may tremble at the supreme poet’s pride and wonder at the passion of his humility — but “the damned grotesques make arabesques, like the wind upon the sand!”

SHAKESPEARE

THERE IS SOMETHING pathetic about the blind devotion of humanity to its famous names. But how indiscriminate it is; how lacking in discernment!

This is, above all, true of Shakespeare, whose peculiar and quite personal genius has almost been buried under the weight of popular idolatry. No wonder such critics as Voltaire, Tolstoi, and Mr. Bernard Shaw have taken upon themselves to intervene. The Frenchman's protest was an aesthetic one. The more recent objectors have adopted moral and philosophic grounds. But it is the unreasoning adoration of the mob which led to both attacks.

It is not difficult to estimate the elements which have gone to make up this Shakespeare-God. The voices of the priests behind the Idol are only too clearly distinguishable. We hear the academic voice, the showman's voice, and the voice of the ethical preacher. They are all absurd, but their different absurdities have managed to flow together into one powerful and unified convention. Our popular orators gesticulate and clamour; our professors "talk Greek;" our ethical Brutuses "explain;" and the mob "throw up their sweaty night-caps;" while our poor Caesar of Poetry sinks down out of sight, helpless among them all.

Charles Lamb, who understood him better than anyone — and who loved Plays — does not hesitate to accuse our Stage-Actors of being the worst of all in their misrepresentation. He doubts whether even Garrick understood the subtlety of the roles he played, and the few exceptions he allows in his own age make us wonder what he would say of ours.

Finally there is the “Philosophical Shakespeare” of the German appreciation, and this we feel instinctively to be the least like the original of all!

The irony of it is that the author of Hamlet and the Tempest does not only live in a different world from that of these motley exponents. He lives in an antagonistic one. Shakespeare was as profoundly the enemy of scholastic pedantry as he was the enemy of puritan squeamishness. He was almost unkindly averse to the breath of the profane crowd. And his melancholy scepticism, with its half-humorous assent to the traditional pieties, is at the extremest opposite pole from the “truths” of metaphysical reason. The Shakespeare of the Popular Revivals is a fantastic caricature. The Shakespeare of the College Text-Books is a lean scarecrow. But the Shakespeare of the philosophical moralists is an Hob-goblin from whom one flees in dismay.

Enjoying the plays themselves — the interpreters forgotten — a normally intelligent reader cannot fail to respond to a recognisable Personality there, a Personality with apathies and antipathies, with prejudices and predilections. Very quickly he will discern the absurd unreality of that monstrous Idol, that ubiquitous Hegelian God. Very soon he will recognize that in trying to make their poet everything they have made him nothing.

No one can read Shakespeare with direct and simple enjoyment without discovering in his plays a quite definite and personal attitude towards life. Shakespeare is no Absolute Divinity, reconciling all oppositions and transcending all limitations. He is not that “cloud-capped mountain,” too lofty to be scanned, of Matthew Arnold’s Sonnet. He is a sad and passionate artist, using his bitter experiences to intensify his insight, and playing with his humours and his dreams to soften the sting of that brutish reality which he was doomed to unmask. The best way of indicating the personal mood which emerges as his final attitude is to describe it as that of the perfectly natural man confronting the universe. Of course, there is no such "perfectly natural man," but he is a legitimate lay-figure, and we all approximate to him at times. The natural man, in his unsophisticated hours, takes the Universe at its surface value, neither rejecting the delicate compensations, nor mitigating the cruelty of the grotesque farce. The natural man accepts *what is given.* He swallows the chaotic surprises, the extravagant accidents, the whole fantastic "pell-mell." He accepts, too, the traditional pieties of his race, their "hope against hope," their gracious ceremonial, their consecration of birth and death. He accepts these, not because he is confident of their "truth" but because *they are there;* because they have been there so long, and have interwoven themselves with the chances and changes of the whole dramatic spectacle.

He accepts them spontaneously, humorously, affectionately; not anxious to improve them — what would be the object of that? — and certainly not seeking to controvert them. He reverences this Religion of his Race not only because it has its own sad, pathetic beauty, but because it has got itself involved in the common burden; lightening such a burden here, making it, perhaps, a little heavier there, but lending it a richer tone, a subtler colour, a more significant shape. It does not trouble the natural man that Religion should deal with "the Impossible." Where, in such a world as this, does *that* begin? He has no agitating desire to reconcile it with reason.

At the bottom of his soul he has a shrewd suspicion that it rather grew out of the earth than fell from the sky, but that does not concern him. It may be based upon no eternal verity. It may lead to no certain issue. It may be neither very "useful" or very "moral." But it is, at any rate, a beautiful work of imaginative art, and it lends life a certain dignity that nothing can quite replace. As a matter of fact, the natural man’s attitude to these things does not differ much from the attitude of the great artists. It is only that a certain lust for creation, and a certain demonic curiosity, scourge these latter on to something beyond passive resignation.

A Da Vinci or a Goethe accepts religion and uses it, but between it and the depths of his own mind remains forever an inviolable film of sceptical “white light.” This “qualified assent” is precisely what excites the fury of such individualistic thinkers as Tolstoi and Bernard Shaw. It were amusing to note the difference between the “humour” of this latter and the “humour” of Shakespeare. Shaw’s humour consists in emphasizing the absurdity of human Custom, compared with the good sense of the philosopher. Shakespeare’s humour consists in emphasizing the absurdity of philosophers, compared with the good sense of Custom. The one is the humour of the Puritan, directed against the ordinary man, on behalf of the Universe. The other is the humour of the Artist, directed against the Universe, on behalf of the ordinary man.

Shakespeare is, at bottom, the most extreme of Pessimists. He has no faith in “progress,” no belief in “eternal values,” no transcendental “intuitions,” no zeal for reform. The universe to him, for all its loveliness, remains an outrageous jest. The cosmic is the comic. Anything may be expected of this “pendant world,” except what we expect; and when it is a question of “falling back,” we can only fall back on human-made custom. We live by Illusions, and when the last Illusion fails us, we die. After reading Shakespeare, the final impression left upon the mind is that the world can only be justified as an aesthetic spectacle. To appreciate a Show at once so sublime and so ridiculous, one needs to be very brave, very tender, and very humorous. Nothing else is needed. “Man must abide his going hence, even as his coming hither. Ripeness is all.” When Courage fails us, it is— “as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport.” When tenderness fails us, it is— “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time.” When humour fails us, it is— “How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, seem to me all the uses of this world!”

So much for Life! And when we come to Death, how true it is, as Charles Lamb says, that none has spoken of Death like Shakespeare! And he has spoken of it so — with such an absolute grasp of our mortal feeling about it — because his mood in regard to it is the mood of the natural man; of the natural man, unsophisticated by false hopes, undated by vain assurance. His attitude towards death neither sweetens “the unpalatable draught of mortality” nor permits us to let go the balm of its “eternal peace.” How frightful “to lie in cold obstruction and to rot; this sensible warm motion to become a kneaded clod!” and yet, “after life’s fitful fever,” how blessed to “sleep well!”

What we note about this mood — the mood of Shakespeare and the natural man — is that it never for a moment dallies with philosophic fancies or mystic visions. It “thinks highly of the soul,” but in the natural, not the metaphysical, sense. It is the attitude of Rabelais and Montaigne, not the attitude of Wordsworth or Browning. It is the tone we know so well in the Homeric poems. It is the tone of the Psalms of David. We hear its voice in “Ecclesiastes,” and the wisdom of “Solomon the King” is full of it. In more recent times, it is the feeling of those who veer between our race’s traditional hope and the dark gulf of eternal silence. It is the “Aut Christus aut Nihil” of those who “by means of metaphysic” have dug a pit, into which metaphysic has disappeared!

The gaiety and childlike animal spirits of Shakespeare’s Comedies need not deceive us. Why should we not forget the whips and scorns for a while, and fleet the time carelessly, “as they did in the golden age?” Such simple fooling goes better with the irresponsibility of our fate than the more pungent wit of the moral comedians. The tragic laughter which the confused issues of life excite in subtler souls is not lacking, but the sweet obliquities of honest clowns carry us just as far. Shakespeare loves fools as few have loved them, and it is often his humour to put into their mouth the ultimate wisdom.

It is remarkable that these plays should commence with a “Midsummer Night’s Dream” and end with a “Tempest.” In the interval the great sombre passions of our race are sounded and dismissed; but as he began with Titania, so he ends with Ariel. From the fairy forest to the enchanted island; from a dream to a dream. With Shakespeare there is no Wagnerian, Euripidean “apologia.” There is no “Parsifal” or “Bacchanals.” From the meaningless tumult of mortal passions he returns, with a certain ironic weariness, to the magic of Nature and the wonder of youth. Prospero, dismissing his spirits “into thin air,” has the last word; and the last word is as the first: “we are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.” The easy-going persons who reluct at the idea of a pessimistic Shakespeare should turn the pages of Troilus and Cressida, Measure for Measure, and Timon of Athens. What we guessed as we read Hamlet and Lear grows a certainty as we read these plays.

Here the “gentle Shakespeare” does the three things that are most unpardonable. He unmasks virtue; he betrays Woman; and he curses the gods. The most intransigent of modern revolutionaries might learn a trick or two from this sacred poet. In Lear he puts the very voice of Anarchy into the mouth of the King— “Die for adultery? No!” “Handy-dandy, which is the Magistrate and which is the Thief?” “A dog’s obeyed in office.”

Have I succeeded in making clear what I feel about the Shakespearean attitude? At bottom, it is absolutely sceptical. Deep yawns below Deep; and if we cannot read "the writing upon the wall," the reason may be that there is no writing there. Having lifted a corner of the Veil of Isis, having glanced once into that Death-Kingdom where grope the roots of the Ash-Tree whose name is Fear, we return to the surface, from Nadir to Zenith, and become "superficial"— "out of profundity."

The infinite spaces, as Pascal said, are "frightful." That way madness lies. And those who would be sane upon earth must drug themselves with the experience, or with the spectacle of the experience, of human passion. Within this charmed circle, and here alone, they may be permitted to forget the Outer Terror.

The noble spirit is not the spirit that condescends to pamper in itself those inflated moods of false optimistic hope, which, springing from mere physiological well-being, send us leaping and bounding, with such boisterous assurance, along the sunny road. Such pragmatic self-deception is an impertinence in the presence of a world like this.

It is a sign of what one might call a philosophically ill-bred nature. It is the indecent "gratitude" of the pig over his trough. It is the little yellow eye of sanctified bliss turned up to the God who *"must* be in His Heaven" if *we* are so privileged. This "never doubting good will triumph" is really, when one examines it, nothing but the inverted prostration of the helot-slave, glad to have been allowed to get so totally drunk! It blusters and swaggers, but at heart it is base and ignoble. For it is not sensitive enough to feel that the Universe *cannot be pardoned* for the cry of one tortured creature, and that all "the worlds we shall traverse" cannot make up for the despair of one human child.

To be “cheerful” about the Universe in the manner of these people is to insult the Christ who died. It is to outrage the “little ones” over whose bodies the Wheel has passed. When Nietzsche, the martyr of his own murdered pity, calls upon us to “love Fate,” he does not shout so lustily. His laughter is the laughter of one watching his darling stripped for the rods. He who would be “in harmony with Nature.” with those “murderous ministers” who, in their blind abyss, throw dice with Chance, must be in harmony with the giants of Jotunheim, as well as with the lords of Valhalla. He must be able to look on grimly while Asgard totters; he must welcome “the Twilight of the Gods.” To have a mind inured to such conceptions, a mind capable of remaining on such a verge, is, alone, to be, intellectually speaking, what we call “aristocratic.” When, even with eyes like poor Gloucester’s in the play, we can see “how this world wags,” it is slavish and “plebeian” to swear that it all “means intensely, and means well.” It is also to lie in one’s throat!

No wonder Shakespeare treats reverently every “superstition,” every anodyne and nepenthe offered to the inmates of this House of the Incurable. Such “sprinkling with holy water,” such “rendering ourselves stupid,” is the only alternative. Anything else is the insight of the hero, or the hypocrisy of the preacher!

Has it been realized how curiously the interpreters of Shakespeare omit the principal thing? They revel in his Grammar, his History, his Biology, his Botany, his Geography, his Psychology and his Ethics. They never speak of his Poetry. Now Shakespeare is, above everything, a poet. To poetry, over and over again, as our Puritans know well, he sacrifices Truth, Morality, Probability, nay! the very principles of Art itself.

As Dramas, many of his plays are scandalously bad; many of his characters fantastic. One can put one’s finger in almost every case upon the persons and situations that interested him and upon those that did not. And how carelessly he “sketches in” the latter! So far from being “the Objective God of Art” they seek to make him, he is the most wayward and subjective of all wandering souls.

No natural person can read him without feeling the pulse of extreme personal passion behind everything he writes.

And this pulse of personal passion is always expressing itself in Poetry. He will let the probabilities of a character vanish into air, or dwindle into a wistful note of attenuated convention, when once such a one has served his purpose as a reed to pipe his strange tunes through. He will whistle the most important personage down the wind, lost to interest and identity, when once he has put into his mouth his own melancholy brooding upon life — his own imaginative reaction.

And so it happens that, in spite of all academic opinion, those who understand Shakespeare best tease themselves least over his dramatic lapses. For let it be whispered at once, without further scruple. As far as *the art of the drama* is concerned, Shakespeare is *shameless.* The poetic instinct — one might call it “epical” or “lyrical,” for it is both these — is far more dominant in our “greatest dramatist” than any dramatic conscience. That is precisely why those among us who love “poetry,” but find “drama,” especially “drama since Ibsen,” intolerably tiresome, revert again and again to Shakespeare. Only absurd groups of Culture-Philistines can read these “powerful modern productions” more than once! One knows not whether their impertinent preaching, or their exasperating technical cleverness is the more annoying.

They may well congratulate themselves on being different from Shakespeare. They are extremely different. They are, indeed, nothing but his old enemies, the Puritans, “translated,” like poor Bottom, and wearing the donkey's head of "art for art's sake" in place of their own simple foreheads.

Art for art's sake! The thing has become a Decalogue of forbidding commandments, as devastating as *those Ten.* It is the new avatar of the "moral sense" carrying categorical insolence into the sphere of our one Alsatian sanctuary!

I am afraid Shakespeare was a very "immoral" artist. I am afraid he wrote as one of the profane.

But what of the Greeks? The Greeks never let themselves go! No! And for a sufficient reason. Greek Drama was Religion. It was Ritual. And we know how "responsible" ritual must be. The gods must have their incense from the right kind of censer.

But you cannot evoke Religion "in vacuo." You cannot, simply by assuming grave airs about your personal "taste," or even about the "taste" of your age, give it *that consecration.*

Beauty? God knows what beauty is. But I can tell you what it is not. It is not the sectarian anxiety of any pompous little clique to get "saved" in the artistic "narrow path." It is much rather what Stendhal called it. But he spoke so frivolously that I dare not quote him.

Has it occurred to you, gentle reader, to note how "Protestant" this New Artistic Movement is? Shakespeare, in his aesthetic method, as well as in his piety, had a Catholic soul. In truth, the hour has arrived when a "Renaissance" of the free spirit of Poetry in Drama is required. Why must this monstrous shadow of the Hyperborean Ibsen go on darkening the play-instinct in us, like some ugly, domineering John Knox? I suspect that there are many generous Rabelaisian souls who could lift our mortal burden with oceanic merriment, only the New Movement frightens them. They are afraid they would not be "Greek" enough — or "Scandinavian" enough.

Meanwhile the miserable populace have to choose between Babylonian Pantomimes and Gaelic Mythology, if they are not driven, out of a kind of spite, into the region of wholesome "domestic sunshine."

What, in our hearts, we natural men desire is to be delivered at one blow from the fairies with weird names (so different from poor Titania!), and from the three-thousand "Unities!" What "poetry" we do get is so vague and dim and wistful and forlorn that it makes us want to go out and "buy clothes" for someone. We veer between the abomination of city-reform and the desolation of Ultima Thule.

But Shakespeare is Shakespeare still. O those broken and gasped-out human cries, full of the old poignancy, full of the old enchantment! Shakespeare's poetry is the extreme opposite of any "cult." It is the ineffable expression, in music that makes the heart stop, of the feelings which have stirred every Jack and Jill among us, from the beginning of the world! It has the effect of those old "songs" of the countryside that hit the heart in us so shrewdly that one feels as though the wind had made them or the rain or the wayside grass; for they know too much of what we tell to none! It is the "one touch of Nature." And how they break the rules, these surpassing lines, in which the emotions of his motley company gasp themselves away!

It is not so much in the great speeches, noble as these are, as in the brief, tragic cries and broken stammerings, that his unapproachable felicity is found. "Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, the gods themselves throw incense." Thick and fast they crowd upon our memory, these little sentences, these aching rhythms! It is with the flesh and blood of the daily Sacrifice of our common endurance that he celebrates his strange Mass. Hands that "smell of mortality," lips that "so sweetly were forsworn," eyes that "look their last" on all they love, these are the touches that make us bow down before the final terrible absolution. And it is the same with Nature. Not to Shakespeare do we go for those pseudo-scientific, pseudo-ethical interpretations, so crafty in their word-painting, so cunning in their rational analysis, which we find in the rest. A few fierce-flung words, from the hot heart of an amorist's lust, and all the smouldering magic of the noon-day woods takes your breath. A sobbing death-dirge from the bosom of a love-lorn child, and the perfume of all the "enclosed gardens" in the world shudders through your veins.

And what about the ancient antagonist of the Earth? What about the Great Deep? Has anyone, anywhere else, gathered into words the human tremor and the human recoil that are excited universally when we go down "upon the beached verge of the salt flood, who once a day with his embossed froth the turbulent surge doth cover?" John Keats was haunted day and night by the simple refrain in Lear, "Canst thou not hear the Sea?"

Charming Idyllists may count the petals of the cuckoo-buds in the river-pastures; and untouched, we admire. But let old Falstaff, as he lies a' dying, "babble o' green fields," and all the long, long thoughts of youth steal over us, like a summer wind.

The modern critic, with a philosophic bias, is inclined to quarrel with the obvious human congruity of Shakespeare's utterances. What is the *use* of this constant repetition of the obvious truism: "When we are born we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools?"

No use, my friend! No earthly use! And yet it is not a premeditated reflection, put in "for art's sake." It is the poetry of the pinch of Fate; it is the human revenge we take upon the insulting irony of our lot.

But Shakespeare does not always strike back at the gods with bitter blows. In this queer world, where we have "nor youth, nor age, but, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep, dreaming on both," there come moments when the spirit is too sore wounded even to rise in revolt. Then, in a sort of "cheerful despair," we can only wait the event. And Shakespeare has his word for this also.

Perhaps the worst of all "the slings and arrows" are the intolerable partings we have to submit to, from the darlings of our soul. And here, while he offers us no false hope, his tone loses its bitterness, and grows gentle and solemn.

It is— "Forever and forever, farewell, Cassius. If we do meet again, why then 'tis well; if not, this parting was well made." And for the Future:

"O that we knew
The end of this day's business ere it comes!
But it suffices that the day will end;
And then the end is known."

EL GRECO

THE EMERGING OF a great genius into long retarded pre-eminence is always attended by certain critical misunderstandings. To a cynical observer, on the lookout for characteristic temperamental lapses, two recent interpretations of El Greco may be especially commended. I mean the *Secret of Toledo,* by Maurice Barres, and an article in the "Contemporary" of April, 1914, by Mr. Aubrey Bell.

Barres — Frenchman of Frenchmen — sets off, with captivating and plausible logic, to generalize into reasonable harmlessness this formidable madman. He interprets Toledo, appreciates Spain, and patronizes Domenico Theotocopoulos.

The *Secret of Toledo* is a charming book, with illuminating passages, but it is too logical, too plausible, too full of the preciosity of dainty generalization, to reach the dark and arbitrary soul, either of Spain or of Spain's great painter.

Mr. Bell, on the contrary, far from turning El Greco into an epicurean cult, drags him with a somewhat heavy hand before the footlights of English Idealism.

He makes of him an excuse for disparaging Velasquez, and launches into a discourse upon the Higher Reality and the Inner Truth which leaves one with a very dreary feeling, and, by some ponderous application of spiritual ropes and pulleys, seems to jerk into empty space all that is most personal and arresting in the artist.

If it is insulting to the ghostly Toledoan to smooth him out into picturesque harmony with Castillian dances, Gothic cloisters and Moorish songs, it is still worse to transform him into a rampant Idealist of the conventional kind. He belongs neither to the Aesthetics nor to the Idealists. He belongs to every individual soul whose taste is sufficiently purged, sufficiently perverse and sufficiently passionate, to enter the enchanted circle of his tyrannical spell.

When, in that dark Toledo Church, one presses one's face against the iron bars that separate one from the Burial of Count Orguz, it is neither as a Dilettante nor an Idealist that one holds one's breath. Those youthful pontifical saints, so richly arrayed, offering with slender royal hands that beautiful body to the dust — is their mysterious gesture only the rhythm of the secret of Death?

Those chastened and winnowed spectators, with their withdrawn, remote detachment — not sadness — are they the initiated sentinels of the House of Corruption?

At what figured symbol points that epicene child?

Sumptuous is the raiment of the dead; and the droop of his limbs has a regal finality; but look up! Stark naked, and in abandoned weakness, the liberated soul shudders itself into the presence of God!

The El Greco House and Museum in Toledo contains amazing things. Every one of those Apostles that gaze out from the wall upon our casual devotion has his own furtive madness, his own impossible dream! The St. John is a thing one can never forget. El Greco has painted his hair as if it were literally live flame and the exotic tints of his flesh have an emphasis laid upon them that makes one think of the texture of certain wood orchids.

How irrelevant seem Monsieur Barres' water-colour sketches of prancing Moors and learned Jews and picturesque Visi-Goths, as soon as one gets a direct glimpse into these unique perversions! And why cannot one go a step with this dreamer of dreams without dragging in the Higher Reality? To regard work as mad and beautiful as this as anything but individual Imagination, is to insult the mystery of personality.

El Greco re-creates the world, in pure, lonely, fantastic arbitrariness.

His art does not represent the secret Truth of the Universe, or the Everlasting Movement; it represents the humour of El Greco.

Every artist mesmerizes us into his personal vision.

A traveller, drinking wine in one of those cafes in the crowded Zocodover, his head full of these amazing fantasies, might well let the greater fantasy of the world slip by — a dream within a dream!

With El Greco for a companion, the gaunt waiter at the table takes the form of some incarcerated Don Quixote and the beggars at the window appear like gods in disguise.

This great painter, like the Russian Dostoivsky, has a mania for abandoned weakness. The nearer to God his heroic Degenerates get, the more feverishly enfeebled becomes their human will.

Their very faces — with those retreating chins, retroussé noses, loose lips, quivering nostrils and sloping brows — seem to express the abandonment of all human resolution or restraint, in the presence of the Beatific Vision. Like the creatures of Dostoievsky, they seem to plunge into the ocean of the Foolishness of God, so much wiser than the wisdom of men! — as divers plunge into a bath.

There is not much attempt among these ecstatics to hold on to the dignity of their reason or the reticence of their self-respect. Naked, they fling themselves into the arms of Nothingness.

This passionate “Movement of Life,” of which Mr. Bell, quoting Pater’s famous quotation from Heraclitus, makes so much, is, after all, only the rush of the wind through the garments of the World — Denier, as he plunges into Eternity.

Like St. John of the Cross, El Greco's visionaries pass from the Night of the Reason to the Night of the Senses; from the Night of the Senses to the Night of Soul; and if this final Night is nothing less than God Himself, the divine submersion does not bring back any mortal daylight.

Domenico's portraits have a character somewhat different from his visions. Here, into these elongated, bearded hermits, into these grave, intellectual maniacs, whose look is like the look of Workers in some unlit Mine, he puts what he knows and feels of his own identity.

They are diverse masks and mirrors, these portraits, surfaces of deep water in various lonely valleys, but from the depths of them rises up the shadow of the same lost soul, and they are all ruffled by the breath of the same midnight.

The Crucifixion in the Prado, and that other, which, by some freak of Providence, has found its way to Philadelphia, have backgrounds which carry our imagination very far. Is this primordial ice, with its livid steel-blue shadows, the stuff out of which the gods make other planets than ours — dead planets, without either sun or star? Are these the sheer precipices of Chaos, against which the Redeemer hangs, or the frozen edges of the grave of all life?

El Greco's magnificent contempt for material truth is a lesson to all artists. We are reminded of William Blake and Aubrey Beardsley. He seems to regard the human-frame as so much soft clay, upon which he can trace his ecstatic hieroglyphs, in defiance both of anatomy and nature.

El Greco is the true precursor of our present-day Matissists and Futurists. He, as they, has the courage to strip his imagination of all mechanical restrictions and let it go free to mould the world at its fancy.

What stray visitor to Madrid would guess the vastness of the intellectual sensation awaiting him in that quiet, rose-coloured building?

As you enter the Museum and pass those magnificent Titians crowded so close together — large and mellow spaces, from a more opulent world than ours; greener branches, bluer skies and a more luminous air; a world through which, naturally and at ease, the divine Christ may move, grand, majestic, health-giving, a veritable god; a world from whose grapes the blood of satyrs may be quickened, from whose corn the hearts of heroes may be made strong — and come bolt upon El Greco's glacial northern lights, you feel that no fixed objective Truth and no traditional Ideal has a right to put boundaries to the imagination of man.

Not less striking than any of these is the extraordinary portrait of "Le Roi Ferdinand" in the great gallery at the Louvre.

The artist has painted the king as one grown weary of his difference from other men. His moon-white armour and silvery crown show like the ornaments of the dead. Misty and wavering, the long shadows upon the high, strange brow seem thrown there by the passing of all mortal Illusions.

Phantom-like in his gleaming ornaments, a king of Lost Atlantis, he waits the hour of his release.

And not only is he the king of Shadows; he is also the king of Players, the Player-King.

El Greco has painted him holding two sceptres, one of which, resembling a Fool's Bauble, is tipped with the image of a naked hand — a dead, false hand — symbol of the illusion of Power. The very crown he wears, shimmering and unnaturally heavy, is like the crown a child might have made in play, out of shells and sea-weed.

The disenchanted irony upon the face of this figure; that look as of one who — as Plato would have us do with kings — has been dragged back from Contemplation to the vulgarity of ruling men; has been deliberately blent by a most delicate art with a queer sort of fantastic whimsicality.

“Le Roi Ferdinand” might almost be an enlarged reproduction of some little girl’s Doll-King, dressed up in silver tinsel and left out of doors, by mistake, some rainy evening.

Something about him, one fancies, would make an English child think of the “White Knight” in *Alice Through the Looking Glass,* so helpless and simple he looks, this poor “Revenant,” propped up by Youthful Imagination, and with the dews of night upon his armour.

You may leave these pictures far behind you as you re-cross the Channel, but you can never quite forget El Greco.

In the dreams of night the people of his queer realm will return and surround you, ebbing and flowing, these passionate shadows, stretching out vain arms after the infinite and crying aloud for the rest they cannot win.

Yes, in the land of dreams we know him, this proud despiser of earth!

From our safe inland retreat we watch the passing of his Dance of Death, and we know that what they seek, these wanderers upon the wind, is not our Ideal nor our Real, not our Earth or our Heaven, but a strange, fairy-like Nirvana, where, around the pools of Nothingness, the children of twilight gambol and play.

The suggestive power of genius plays us, indeed, strange tricks. I have sometimes fancied that the famished craving in the eyes and nostrils of El Greco’s saints was a queer survival of that tragic look which that earlier Greek, Scopas the Sculptor, took such pains to throw upon the eyelids of his half-human amphibiums.

It might even seem to us, dreaming over these pictures as the gusts of an English autumn blow the fir branches against the window, as though all that weird population of Domenico’s brain were tossing their wild, white arms out there and emitting thin, bat-like cries under the drifting moon.

The moon — one must admit that, at least — rather than the sun, was ever the mistress of El Greco’s genius. He will come more and more to represent for us those vague uneasy feelings that certain inanimate and elemental objects have the power of rousing. It is of him that one must think, when this or that rock-chasm cries aloud for its Demon, or this or that deserted roadway mutters of its unreturning dead.

There will always be certain great artists, and they are the most original of all who refuse to submit to any of our logical categories, whether scientific or ideal.

To give one’s self up to them is to be led by the hand into the country of Pure Imagination, into the Ultima Thule of impossible dreams.

Like Edgar Allan Poe, this great painter can make splendid use of the human probabilities of Religion and Science; but it is none of these things that one finally thinks, as one comes to follow him, but of things more subtle, more remote, more translunar, and far more imaginative.

One may walk the streets of Toledo to seek the impress of El Greco’s going and coming; but the soul of Domenico Theotocopoulos is not there.

It is with Faust, in the cave of the abysmal “Mothers.”

MILTON

It is outrageous, the way we modern world-children play with words. How we are betrayed by words! How we betray with words! We steal from one another and from the spirit of the hour; and with our phrases and formulas and talismans we obliterate all distinction. One sees the modern god as one who perpetually apologises and explains; and the modern devil as one who perpetually apologises and explains. Everything has its word-symbol, its word-mask, its word-garment, its word-disgrace. Nothing comes out clear into the open, unspeakable and inexplicable, and strikes us dumb!

That is what the great artists do — who laugh at our word-play. That is what Milton does, who, in the science and art of handling words, has never been equalled. Milton, indeed, remains, by a curious fate, the only one of the very great poets who has never been “interpreted” or “appreciated” or “re-created” by any critical modern. And they have left him alone; have been frightened of him; have not dared to slime their “words” over him, for the very reason that he is the supreme artist in words! He is so great an artist that his creations detach themselves from all dimness — from all such dimness as modern “appreciation” loves — and stand out clear and cold and “unsympathetic”; to be bowed down before and worshipped, or left unapproached.

Milton is a man’s poet. It would be a strange thing if women loved him. Modern criticism is a half-tipsy Hermaphrodite, in love only with what is on the point of turning into something else. Milton is always himself. His works of art are always themselves. He and they are made of the same marble, of the same metal. They are never likely to change into anything else! Milton is, like all the greatest artists, a man of action. He, so learned in words, in their history, in their weight, in their origin, in their evocations; he, the scholar of scholars, is a man, not of words, but of deeds. That is why the style of Milton is a thing that you can touch with your outstretched fingers. It has been hammered into shape by a hand that could grasp a sword; it has been moulded into form by a brain that could dominate a council-chamber. No wonder we word-maniacs fear to approach him. He repels us; he holds us back; he hides his work-shop from us; and his art smites us into silent hatred.

For Milton himself, though he is the artist of artists, art is not the first thing. It is only the first thing with us because we are life's slaves, and not its masters. Art is what we protect ourselves with — from life. For us it is a religion and a drug. To Milton it was a weapon and a plaything.

Milton was more interested in the struggle of ideas, in the struggle of races, in the struggle of immortal principles, in the struggle of gods, in the great creative struggle of life and death, than he was interested in the exquisite cadences of words or their laborious arrangement. A modern artist's heart's desire is to escape from the world to some "happy valley" and there, sitting cross-legged, like a Chinese Idol, between the myrtle-bushes and the Lotus, to make beautiful things in detachment forever, one by one, with no pause or pain. Milton's desire was to take the whole round world between his hands, with all the races and nations who dwell upon it, and mould *that,* and nothing less, into the likeness of what he believed. And in what did he believe, this Lord of Time and Space, this accomplice of Jehovah? He believed in Himself. He had the unquestioning, unphilosophical belief in himself which great men of action have; which the Caesars, Alexanders and Napoleons have, and which Shakespeare seems to have lacked.

Milton, though people have been misled into thinking of him as very different from that, was, in reality, the incarnation of the Nietzschean ideal. He was hard, he was cold, he was contemptuous, he was "magnanimous," he "remembered his whip" when he went with women, he loved war for its own sake, and he dwelt alone on the top of the mountains. To Milton the world presented itself as a place where the dominant power, and the dominant interest, was the wrestling of will with will. Why need we always fuss ourselves about logical *names*? Milton, in reality — in his temperament and his mood — was just as convinced of *Will* being the ultimate secret as Schopenhauer or Nietzsche or Bergson or the modern Pragmatist. Nothing seemed to him noble, or dramatic, or "true," that did not imply the struggle to the death of opposing *wills*.

Milton, in reality, is less of a Christian than any European writer, since the Gospel appeared. In his heart, like Nietzsche, he regarded the binding into one volume of those "Two Testaments" an insult to "the great style." He does, indeed, in a manner find a place for Christ, but it is the place of one demigod among many other demi-gods; the conqueror's place possibly, but still the place of one in a hierarchy, not of one alone. It is absurd to quarrel with Milton's deification of the Judaic Jehovah. Every man has his own God. The God he *has a right to*. And the Jewish Jehovah, after all, is no mean figure. He, like Milton, was a God of War. He, like Milton, found Will — human and divine Will — the central cosmic fact. He, like Milton, regarded Good and Evil, not as universal principles, but as arbitrary *commands*, issued by eternal personal antagonists! It is one of the absurd mistakes into which our conceptual and categorical minds so easily fall — this tendency to eliminate Milton's Theology as mere Puritanical convention, dull and uninteresting. Milton's Theology was the most *personal creation* that any great poet has ever dared to launch upon — more personal even than the Theology of Milton’s favourite Greek poet, Euripides.

Milton’s feeling for the more personal, more concrete aspects of “God” goes entirely well with the rest of his philosophy. At heart he was a savage Dualist, who lapsed occasionally into Pluralism. He was, above all, an Individualist of the most extreme kind — an Individualist so hard, so positive, so inflexible, that for him nothing in the world really mattered except the clash of definite, clear-cut Wills, contending against one another.

Milton is the least mystical, the least pantheistic, the least monistic, of all writers. That magical sense of the brooding Over-Soul which thrills us so in Goethe’s poetry never touches his pages. The Wordsworthian intimations of “something far more deeply interfused” never crossed his sensibility; and, as far as he is concerned, Plato might never have existed.

One feels, as one reads Milton, that his ultimate view of the universe is a great chaotic battlefield, amid the confused elements of which rise up the portentous figures of “Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers,” and in the struggle between these, the most arbitrary, the most tyrannical, the most despotic, conquers the rest, and, planting his creative Gonfalon further in the Abyss than any, becomes “God”; the God whose personal and unrestrained Caprice creates the Sun, the Moon and the Stars, out of Chaos; and Man out of the dust of the Earth. Thus it is brought about that what this God *wills* is “Good,” and what his strongest and most formidable antagonist wills is “Evil.” Between Good and Evil there is no eternal difference, except in the eternal difference between the conquering Personality of Jehovah and the conquered Personality of Lucifer. So, far from it being true that Milton is the dull transcriber of mere traditional Protestantism, a very little investigation reveals the astounding fact that the current popular Evangelical view of the origin of things and the drama of things is based, not upon the Bible at all, but upon Milton's poem. In this respect he is a true Classic Poet — a Maker of Mythology — a Delphic Demiurge.

One of the most difficult questions in the world to answer would be the question how far Milton "believed" simply and directly, in the God he thus half-created. Probably he did "believe" more than his daring, arbitrary "creations" would lead us to suppose. His nature demanded positive and concrete facts. Scepticism and mysticism were both abhorrent to him; and it is more likely than not that, in the depths of his strange cold, unapproachable heart, a terrible and passionate prayer went up, day and night, to the God of Isaac and Jacob that the Lord should not forget his Servant.

The grandeur and granite-like weight of Milton's learning was fed by the high traditions of Greece and Rome; but, in his heart of hearts, far deeper than anything that moved him in Aeschylus or Virgil, was the devotion he had for the religion of Israel, and the Fear of Him who "sitteth between the Cherubims." It is often forgotten, amid the welter of modern ethical ideals and modern mystical theosophies, how grand and unique a thing is this Religion of Israel — a religion whose God is at once Personal and Invisible. After all, what do we know? A Prince of Righteousness, a King of Sion, a Shepherd of his People — such a "Living God" as David cries out upon, with those dramatic cries that remain until today the most human and tragic of all our race's wrestling with the Unknown — is this not a Faith quite as "possible" and far more moving, than all the "Over-Souls" and "Immanent All's Fathers" and "Streams of Tendency" which have been substituted for it by unimaginative modern "breadth of mind"? It is time that it was made clear that the alternative at present for all noble souls is between the reign of "crass Casuality" and the reign of Him "who maketh the clouds His chariot and walketh upon the wings of the wind." Those who, "with Democritus, set the world upon Chance" have a right to worship their Jesus of Nazareth, and, in him, the Eternal Protest against the Cruelty of Life. But if Life is to be deified, if Life is to be "accepted," if Life is to be worshipped; if Courage, not Love, be the secret of the cosmic system, then let us call aloud upon it, under personal and palpable symbols, in the old imaginative, *poetic* way, rather than fool ourselves with thin mysticities, vague intuitions, and the "sounding brass" of "ethical ideals"!

The earlier poems of Milton are among the most lovely in the English language. Lycidas is, for those who understand what poetry means, the most lovely of all. There is nothing, anywhere, quite like this poem. The lingering, elaborate harmonies, interrupted in pause after pause, by lines of reverberating finality; and yet, sweetly, slowly leading on to a climax of such airy, lucid calm — it is one's "hope beyond hope" of what a poem should be.

The absence of vulgar sentiment, the classic reserve, the gentle melancholy, the delicate gaiety, the subtle interweaving of divine, rhythmic cadences, the ineffable lightness of touch, as of cunning fingers upon reluctant clay; is there anything in poetry to equal these things? One does not even regret the sudden devastating apparition of that "two-handed engine at the door." For one remembers how wickedly, how mercilessly, the beauty of life is even now being spoiled by these accursed "hirelings" — and now, as then, "nothing said."

The Nativity Hymn owes half the charm of its easy, natural grace to the fact that the victory of Mary's infant son over the rest is treated as if it were the victory of one pagan god over another — the final triumph being to him who is the most "gentle" and "beautiful" of all the gods. In the famous argument between the Lady and her Tempter, in Comus, we have an exquisite example of the sweet, grave refinement of virginal taste which shuns grossness as “a false note.” The doctrine of Comus — if so airy a thing can be supposed to have a doctrine — is not very different from the doctrine of Marius the Epicurean. One were foolish to follow the bestial enchanter; not so much because it is “wrong” to do so, as because, then, one would lose the finer edge of that heavenly music which turns the outward shape “to the soul’s essence.”

Milton’s Sonnets occupy a place by themselves in English Literature, and they may well be pondered upon by those who think that the relinquishing of the “old forms” makes it easier to express one’s personality. It makes it, as a matter of fact, much harder, just as the stripping from human beings of their characteristic “outer garments” makes them so dreadfully, so devastatingly, alike! Nothing could be more personal than a Miltonic Sonnet. The rigid principles of form, adhered to so scrupulously in the medium used, intensify, rather than detract from, his individualistic character. That Miltonic wit, so granite-like and mordant, how well it goes with the magical whispers that “syllable men’s names”!

All Milton’s personal prejudices may be found in the Sonnets, from his hatred of those frightful Scotch appellations that would “make Quintlian gasp” to his longing for Classic companionship and “Attic wine” and “immortal notes” and “Tuscan airs”! As one reads on, laughing gently at the folly of those who have so misunderstood him, one is conscious more and more of that high, cold, clear, lonely tenderness, which found so little satisfaction in the sentiment of the rabble and still less in the endearments of women! As in the case of “sad Electra’s poet,” his own favorite, it is easy to grow angry about his “Misogyny” and take Christian exception to his preference for mistresses over wives. It is true that Milton’s view of marriage is more than “heathen.” But one has to remember that in these matters of purely personal taste no public opinion has right to intervene.

When the well-married Brownings of our age succeed in writing poetry in the "grand style," it will be time — and, perhaps, not even then — to let the dogs of democratic domesticity loose upon this austere lover of the classic way.

What a retort was "Paradise Lost" to the lewd revellers who would have profaned his aristocratic isolation with howlings and brutalities and philistine uproar! Milton despised "priests and kings" from the heights of a pride loftier than their own — and he did not love the vulgar mob much better. In Paradise Lost he can "feel himself" into the sublime tyranny of God, as well as into the sublime revolt of Lucifer. Neither the one or other stoops to solicit "popular voices." The thing to avoid, as one reads this great poem, are the paraphrases from the book of Genesis. Here some odd scrupulousness of scholarly conscience seems to prevent him launching out into his native originality. But, putting this aside, what majestic Pandemoniums of terrific Imagination he has the power to call up! The opening Books are as sublime as the book of Job, and more arresting than Aeschylus. The basic secrets of his blank verse can never be revealed, but one is struck dumb with wonder in the presence of this Eagle of Poetry as we attempt to follow him, flight beyond flight, hovering beyond hovering, as he gets nearer and nearer to the Sun.

It is by single paragraphs, all the same, and by single lines, that I would myself prefer to see him judged. Long poems have been written before and will be written again, but no one will ever write — no one but Dante has ever written — such single lines as one reads in Milton. Curiously enough, some of the most staggering of these superb passages are interludes and allusions, rather than integral episodes in the story, and not only interludes, but interludes in the "pagan manner." Second only to those Luciferan defiances, which seem able to inspire even us poor worms with the right attitude towards Fate, I am tempted to place certain references to Astarte, Ashtoreth and Adonis.

> “Astarte, queen of Heaven, with crescent horns,
> To whose bright Image nightly, by the moon,
> Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs.”

Or of Adonis:

> “Whose annual wound, in Lebanon, allured
> The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
> In amorous ditties all a Summer’s day—”

That single line, “Whose annual wound, in Lebanon, allured,” seems to me better than any other that could be quoted, to evoke the awe and the thrill and the seduction of all true poetry.

Then those great mysterious allusions to the planetary orbits and the fixed stars and the primeval spaces of land and sea; what a power they have of spreading wide before us the huge horizons of the world’s edge! Who can forget “the fleecy star that bears Andromeda far off Atlantic seas”? Or that phrase about the sailors “stemming mightly to the pole”? Or the sudden terror of that guarded Paradisic Gate— “with dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms”? The same extraordinary beauty of single passages may be found in “Paradise Regained,” a poem which is much finer than many guess. The descriptions there of the world-cities, Athens, Rome, Jerusalem, have the same classic thrill of reserved awe and infinite reverence that some of Dante’s lines possess — only, with Milton, the thing is longer drawn out and more grandiloquent. Satan’s speech about his own implacable fatality, “his harbour, and his ultimate repose,” and that allusion to Our Lord’s gentleness, like “the cool intermission of a summer’s cloud” are both in the manner we love.

It is only, however, when one comes to Samson Agonistes that the full power of Milton’s genius is felt. Written in a style which the devotees of “free verse” in our time would do well to analyse, it is the most complete expression of his own individual character that he ever attained. Here the Captain of Jehovah, here the champion of Light against Darkness, of Pride against Humility, of Man against Woman, finds his opportunity and his hour. Out of his blindness, out of his loneliness, out of the welter of hedonists and amorists and feminists and fantasists who crowded upon him, the great, terrible egoist strikes his last blow! No one can read Samson Agonistes without being moved, and those who look deepest into our present age may well be moved the most! One almost feels as if some great overpowering tide of all the brutalities and crudities and false sentiments and cunning hypocrisies, and evil voluptuousness, of all the Philistias that have ever been, is actually rushing to overwhelm us! Gath and Askalon in gross triumph — must this thing be? Will the Lord of Hosts lift no finger to help his own? And then the end comes; and the Euripidean “messenger” brings the great news! He is dead, our Champion; but in his death he slew more than in his life. “Nothing is here” for unworthy sorrow; “nothing” that need make us “knock the breast;”— “No weakness, no contempt, dispraise or blame — nothing but well and fair, and what may quiet us in a death so noble.”

And the end of Samson Agonistes is as the end of Milton’s own life. Awaited in calm dignity, as a Roman soldier might wait for Caesar’s word, Death has claimed its own. But let not the “daughters of the uncircumsized” triumph! Grandeur and nobility, beauty and heroism, live still; and while these live, what matter though our bravest and our fairest perish? It only remains to let the thunderbolt, when it does fall, find us prepared; find us in calm of mind, “all passion spent.”

CHARLES LAMB

CHARLES LAMB OCCUPIES a very curious position in English literature and a very enviable one. He is, perhaps, the most widely known, and widely spoken of, of any stylist we possess, and the least understood. It was his humour, while living, to create misunderstanding, and he creates it still. And yet he is recognized on all sides as a Classic of the unapproachable breed. Charles Lamb has among his admirers more uninteresting people than any great artist has ever had except Thackeray. He has more academic people in his train than anyone has ever had except Shakespeare. And more severe, elderly, pedantic persons profess to love him than love any other mortal writer.

These people all read Lamb, talk Lamb, quote Lamb, but they do not *suggest* Lamb; they do not “smack,” as our ancestors used to say, of the true Elia vein.

But the immense humour of the situation does not stop here. Not only has this evasive City Clerk succeeded in fooling the “good people;” he has fooled the “wicked ones.” I have myself in the circle of my acquaintance more than half a dozen charming people, of the type who enjoy Aubrey Beardsley, and have a mania for Oscar Wilde, and sometimes dip into Remy de Gourmont, and not one of them “can read” Charles Lamb. He has succeeded in fooling them; in making them suppose he is something quite different from what he is. He used to tell his friends that every day he felt himself growing more “official” and “moral.” He even swore he had been taken for a Verger or a Church warden. Well, our friends of the “enclosed gardens” still take him for a Verger. But he is a more remarkable Verger than they dream. As a matter of fact, there were some extremely daring and modern spirits in Elia's "entourage," spirits who went further in an antinomian direction than — I devoutly pray — my friends are ever likely to go, and these scandalous ones adored him. And for his part, he seems to have liked them — more than he ought.

It is, indeed, very curious and interesting, the literary fate of Charles Lamb. Jocular Bishops, archly toying Rural Deans, Rectors with a "penchant" for anecdote, scholarly Canons with a weakness for Rum Punch, are all inclined to speak as if in some odd way he was of their own very tribe. He had absolutely nothing in common with them, except a talent for giving false impressions! With regard to the devotion to him which certain gentle and old-fashioned ladies have — one's great-aunts, for instance — I am inclined to think that much more might be said. There is a quality, a super-refined, exquisite quality, and one with a pinch of true ironic salt in it, which the more thick-skinned among us sensationalists may easily miss.

It is all very well for us to talk of "burning with a hard gem-like flame," when, as a matter of fact, we move along, dull as cave-men, to some of the finest aesthetic effects in the world. Not to appreciate the humour of that rarest and sweetest of all human types, the mischievous-tongued Great-Aunt, is to be nothing short of a profane fool.

But Charles Lamb is a very different person from our Goldsmiths and Cowpers and Austens, and their modern representatives. It needs something else in a Great-Aunt than old-fashioned irony to appreciate *him.* It needs an imagination that is very nearly "Shakespearean" and it needs a passion for beautiful style of which a Flaubert or an Anatole France might be proud.

So here we have the old sly Elia, fooling people now as he fooled them in his lifetime, and a riddle both to the godly and the ungodly. The great Goethe, whose Walpurgis Night "He-Apes" made Elia put out his tongue, read, we learn, with no little pleasure some fantastic skit of this incorrigible one. Did he discern — the sublime Olympian — what a cunning flute player lurked under the queer mask? “Something between a Jew, a Gentleman and an Angel” he liked to fancy he looked; and one must confess that in the subtlest of all senses of that word, a gentleman he was.

Lamb’s “essays” were written at off hours, when he could escape from his office. Once completely freed from the necessity of office work, his writing lost its magic. His genius was of that peculiarly delicate texture which requires the stimulus of reaction. One cannot be too grateful that the incomparable Pater, after Lamb himself, perhaps, the greatest master of English prose, found it necessary to utter his appreciation. Pater, as usual, hits the mark with an infallible hand when he speaks of that overhanging Sophoclean tragedy which darkened Lamb’s earlier days and never quite left him.

It is, of course, this, the sense of one living always on the edge of a precipice, that gives such piquancy and charm to Elia’s mania for “little things.” Well might he turn to “little things,” when great things — his Sun and his Moon — had been turned for him to Blood! But, as Pater suggests, there is “Philosophy” in all this, and more Philosophy than many suppose. It is unfortunate that the unworldly Coleridge and the worldly Thackeray should have both pitched upon Lamb’s “saintliness” to make copy of. Nothing infuriated him more than such a tone towards himself. And he was right to be infuriated. His “unselfishness,” his “sweetness,” of which these good men make so much, were only one aspect of the Philosophy of his whole life. Lamb was, in his life, a great epicurean philosopher, as, in all probability, many other “saints” have been. The things in him that fretted Carlyle, his fits of intoxication, his outbursts of capricious impishness, his perversity and his irony, were just as much part of the whole scheme as were his celibacy and his relation to his sister.

What one can really gather from Lamb is nothing less than a very wise and very subtle "way of life," a way that, amid many outrageous experiences, will be found singularly lucky.

In the first place, let it be noted, Lamb deliberately cultivates the art of "transforming the commonplace." It is as absurd to deny the existence of this element — from which we all suffer — as it is to maintain that it cannot be changed. It *can* be changed. That is precisely what this kind of rare genius does. It is a miracle, of course, but everything in art is a miracle.

Nature tosses out indiscriminately her motley productions, and if you are born for such "universalism," you may swallow them wholesale. The danger of such a downright manner of going to work is that it blunts one's critical sense. If you swallow everything just as it is, you *taste* very little. But Charles Lamb is nothing if not "critical," nothing if not an Epicure, and his manner of dealing with the "commonplace" sharpens rather than blunts the edge of one's taste.

And what is this manner? It is nothing less than an indescribable blending of Christianity and Paganism. Heine, another of Carlyle's "blackguards," achieves the same synthesis. It is this spiritual achievement — at once a religious and an aesthetic triumph — that makes Elia, for all his weaknesses, such a really great man. The Wordsworths and Coleridges who patronized him were too self-opiniated and individualistic to be able to enter into either tradition.

Wordsworth is neither a Christian or a Pagan. He is a moral philosopher. Elia is an artist, who understands the *importance of ritual* in life — but of naturalness in ritual.

How difficult, whether as a thinker or a man, is it to be natural in one's loves and hates! How many quite authoritative Philistines never really let the world know how Bohemian at heart they are! And how much of our modern "artistic feeling" is a pure affectation! Now, whatever Elia was not, he was wantonly, wickedly, whimsically natural.

He never concealed his religious feelings, his superstitious feelings. He never concealed his fancies, his fads, his manias, his vices. He never concealed his emotion when he felt a thrill of passionate faith. He never concealed it when he felt a thrill of blasphemous doubt.

He accepted life's little pleasures as they appeared, and did not hesitate to make "cults" of the ones that appeared most appealing. If he had Philistine feelings, he indulged them without shame. If he had recondite and "artistic" feelings, he indulged them also without shame. He is one of the few great men not afraid to be un-original, and hence he is the most original of all. "I cannot," says he, "sit and think. Books think for me." Well, books did "think for him," for he managed to press the books of the great poets into his service, as no mortal writer has ever dared to do before. And he could do it without impairing his originality, because he was as original as the great poets he used. We say deliberately "poets," for, as Pater points out, to find Lamb's rivals in sheer imaginative genius, we have to leave the company of those who write prose.

Do the humorous ecclesiastics and scholarly tutors who profess to understand Elia ever peep into that Essay called "Witches," or that other Essay called "A Child-Angel"? There are things here that are written for a very different circle. Certain sentences in "Dream-children," too, have a beauty that takes a natural man's breath completely away. Touches of far-off romance, terrible and wistful as "anonymous ballads," alternate with gestures of Rabelaisian humour, such as generous souls love. Elia's style is the only thing in English prose that can be called absolutely perfect. Compared with the rich, capricious, wilful, lingering by the way of Lamb's manner, Pater's is precise, demure and over-grave, Wilde's fantastic and over-provocative, Ruskin's intolerably rhetorical.

Into what other prose style could the magic of Shakespeare's "little touches" be drawn, or the high melancholy of Milton's imagery be led, without producing a frightful sense of the incongruous? He can quote them both — or any other great old master — and if it were not for the "inverted commas" we should not be aware of the insertion.

Elia cannot say anything, not the simplest thing, without giving it a turn, a twist, a lift, a lightness, a grace, that would redeem the very grease-spots on a scullion's apron!

There is no style in the world like it. Germany, France, Italy, Russia have no Charles Lamb. Their Flauberts and D'Annunzios belong to a different tribe. Even Turgenieff, just because he has to "get on with his story" cannot do precisely this.

Every single one of the "essays" and most of the "letters" can be read over and over again, and their cadences caressed as if they were living people's features. And they are living. They are as living as those Japanese Prints so maddening to some among us, or as the drawings of Lionardo. They also — in their place — are "pure line" to use the ardent modern slang, and unpolluted "imaginative suggestion."

The mistake our "aesthetes" made, these lovers of Egyptian dancers and Babylonian masks, is that they suppose the simplicity of Lamb's subjects debar him from the rare effects. Ah! They little know! He can take the wistfulness of children, and the quaint gestures of dead Comedians, and the fantasies of old worm-eated folios, and the shadows of sundials upon cloistered lawns, and the heartbreaking evasions of such as "can never know love” and out of these things he can make a music as piteous and lovely as Ophelia’s songs. It is a curious indication of the lack of real poetic feeling in the feverish art-neophytes of our age that they should miss these things in Elia. One wonders if they have ever felt the remote translunar beauty that common faces and old, dim, pitiful things can wear sometimes. It would seem not. Like Herod the Tetrarch, they must have “Peacocks whose crying calls the rain, and the spreading of their tails brings down the Moon;” they must have “opals that burn with flame as cold as ice” and onyxes and amber and the tapestries of Tyre, The pansies that “are for thoughts” touch them not and the voices of the street-singers leave them cold.

It is precisely the lack of natural kindly humour in these people, who must always be clutching “cameos from Syracuse” between their fingers, which leads them, when the tension of the “gem-like flame” can be borne no more, into sheer garishness and brutality. One knows it so well, that particular tone; the tone of the jaded amorist, for whom “the unspeakable rural solitudes” and “the sweet security of streets” mean, both of them, boredom and desolation.

It is not their subtlety that makes them thus suffer; it is their lack of it. What? Is the poignant world-old play of poor mortal men and women, with their absurdities and excesses, their grotesque reserves and fantastic confessions, their advances and withdrawals, not *interesting* enough to serve? It serves sufficiently; it serves well enough, when genius takes it in hand. Perhaps, after all, it is *that* which is lacking.

Charles Lamb went through the world with many avoidances, but one thing he did not avoid — the innocence of unmitigated foolishness! He was able to give to the Simple Simons of this life that Rabelaisian touch of magnanimous understanding which makes even the leanest wits among us glow. He went through the world with strange timidities and no daring stride. He loitered in its by-alleys. He drifted through its Bazaars. He sat with the crowd in its Circuses. He lingered outside its churches. He ate his "pot of honey" among its graves. And as he went his way, irritable and freakish, wayward and arbitrary, he came, by chance, upon just those side-lights and intimations, those rumours and whispers, those figures traced on sand and dust and water, which, more than all the Law and the Prophets, draw near to the unuttered word.

DICKENS

IT IS ABSURD, of course, to think that it is necessary to "hold a brief" for Dickens. But sometimes, when one comes across charming and exquisite people who "cannot read him," one is tempted to give one's personal appreciation that kind of form.

Dickens is one of the great artists of the world, and he is so, in spite of the fact that in certain spheres, in the sphere of Sex, for instance, or the sphere of Philosophy, he is such a hopeless conventionalist. It is because we are at this hour so preoccupied with Sex, in our desire to readjust the conventions of Society and Morality towards it, that a great artist, who simply leaves it out altogether, or treats it with a mixture of the conventionality of the preacher and the worst foolishness of the crowd, is an artist whose appeal is seriously handicapped.

Yet, given this "lacuna," this amazing "gap" in his work, a deprivation much more serious than his want of "philosophy," Dickens is a writer of colossal genius, whose originality and vision puts all our modern "literateurs" to shame. One feels this directly one opens any volume of his. Only a great creative genius could so dominate, for instance, his mere "illustrators," as to mesmerize them completely into his manner. And certainly his illustrators are *drugged* with the Dickens atmosphere. Those hideous-lovely persons, whose legs and arms are so thin that it is impossible to suppose they ever removed their clothes; do they not strut and leer and ogle and grin and stagger and weep, in the very style of their author?

Remembering my "brief" and the sort of jury, among my friends, I have to persuade, I am not inclined in this sketch to launch out into panegyrics upon Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Gamp and Mr. Pecksniff and Betsy Trotwood and Bill Sikes and Dick Swiveller and Bob Sawyer and Sam Weller and Mark Tapley and Old Scrooge. The mere mention of these names, which, to some, would suggest the music of the spheres, to others would suggest forced merriment, horrible Early Victorian sentiment, and that sort of hackneyed "unction" of sly moral elders, which is youth's especial Hell. Much wiser were it, as it seems to me, to indicate what in Dickens — in his style, his method, his vision, his art — actually appeals to one particular mind. I think it is to be found in his childlike Imagination. Now, the modern cult for children has reached such fantastic limits that one has to be very careful when one uses that word. But Dickens is childlike, not as Oscar Wilde — that Uranian Baby — or as Paul Verlaine — that little "pet lamb" of God — felt themselves to be childlike, or as the artificial-minded Robert Louis Stevenson fooled his followers into thinking him. He is really and truly childlike. His imagination and vision are literally the imagination and vision of children. We have not all played at Pirates and Buccaneers. We have not all dreamed of Treasure-Islands and Marooned sailors. We have not all "believed in Fairies." These rather tiresome and over-rung-upon aspects of children's fancies are, after all, very often nothing more than middle-aged people's damned affectations. The children's cult at the present day plays strange tricks.

But Dickens, from beginning to end, has the real touch, the authentic reaction. How should actual and living children, persecuted by "New Educational Methods," glutted with toys, depraved by "understanding sympathy," and worn out by performances of "Peter Pan," believe — really and truly — in fairies any more? But, in spite of sentimental Child-worshippers, let us not hesitate to whisper: "It doesn't matter in the least if they don't!" The "enlightened" and cultivated mothers, who grow unhappy when they find their darlings cold to Titania and Oberon and to the more "poetic" modern fairies, with the funny names, may rest in peace. If the house they inhabit and the street they inhabit be not sanitarized and art-decorated beyond all human interest, they may let their little ones alone. They will dream their dreams. They will invent their games. They will talk to their shadows. They will blow kisses to the Moon. And all will go well with "the Child in the House," even if he has not so much as even heard of "the Blue Bird"!

If these uncomfortably "childlike" people read Dickens, they would know how a child really does regard life, and perhaps they would be a little shocked. For it is by no means only the "romantic" and "aesthetic" side of things that appeals to children. They have their nightmares, poor imps, and such devils follow them as older people never dream of. Dickens knew all that, and in his books the thrill of the supernatural, as it hovers over chairs and tables and pots and pans, is never far away. It lurks, that repelling-alluring Terror, in a thousand simple places. It moves in the darkness of very modern cupboards. It hides in the recesses of very modern cellars. It pounces out from the eaves of quite modern attics. It is there, halfway up the Staircase. It is there, halfway down the Passage. And God knows whither it comes or where it goes!

To endow the little every-day objects that surround us — a certain picture in a certain light, a certain clock or stove in a certain shadow, a certain corner of the curtain when the wind moves it — with the fetish-magic of natural "animism"; that is the real childlike trick, and that is what Dickens does. It is, of course, something not confined to people who are children in years. It is the old, sweet Witch-Hag, Mystery, that, sooner or later, has us all by the throat!

And that is why, to me, Dickens is so great a writer. Since men have come to live so much in cities; since houses and streets and rooms and passages and windows and basements have come to mean more to them than fields and woods, it is essential that “the Old Man covered with a Mantle,” the Ancient of Ancients, the Disturber of Rational Dreams, should move into the town, too, and mutter and murmur in its shadows!

How hard a thing is it, to put into words the strange attraction and the strange terror which the dwellings of mortal men have the power of exciting! To drift at nightfall into an unknown town, and wander through its less frequented ways, and peep into its dark, empty churches, and listen to the wind in the stunted trees that grow by its Prison, and watch some flickering particular light high up in some tall house — the light of a harlot, a priest, an artist, a murderer — surely there is no imaginative experience equal to this! Then, the things one sees, by chance, by accident, through half-open doors and shutter-chinks and behind lifted curtains! Verily the ways of men upon earth are past finding out, and their madness beyond interpretation!

It is not only children — and yet it is children most of all — who get the sense, in a weird, sudden flash, of the demonic life of inanimate things. Why are our houses so full of things that one had better not look at, things that, like the face of Salome, had better be seen in mirrors, and things that must be forbidden to look at us? The houses of mortal men are strange places. They are sepulchres and cemeteries. Dungeons are they, and prison cells. Not one of them but have murderous feet going up and down. Not one of them but have lavisher’s hands, fumbling, back and forth, along the walls. For the secret wishes, and starved desires, and mad cravings, and furious revolts, of the hearts of men and women, living together decently in their “homes,” grow by degrees palpable and real and gather to themselves strange shapes.

No writer who has ever lived can touch Dickens in indicating this sort of familiar sorcery and the secret of its terror. For it is children, more than any, who are conscious how “haunted” all manner of places and things are. And people themselves! The searching psychologists are led singularly astray. They peer and pry and repine, and all the while the real essence of the figure lies in its momentary expression — in its most superficial gesture.

Dickens’ world is a world of gnomes and hob-goblins, of ghouls and of laughing angels. The realist of the Thackeray School finds nothing but monstrous exaggeration here — and fantastic mummery. If he were right, par-dieu! If his sleek “reality” were all that there was— “alarum!” We were indeed “betrayed”! But no; the children are right. Dickens is right. Neither “realist” or “psychologist” hits the mark, when it comes to the true diablerie of living people. There is something more whimsical, more capricious, more *unreal,* than philosophers suppose about this human pantomime. People are actually — as every child knows — much worse and much better than they “ought” to be. And, as every child knows, too, they tune their souls up to the pitch of their “masks.” The surface of things is the heart of things; and the protruded goblin-tongue, the wagged head, the groping fingers, the shuffling step, are just as significant of the mad play-motif as any hidden thoughts. People *think* with their bodies, and their looks and gestures; nay! their very garments are words, tones, whispers, in their general Confession.

The world of Dickens’ fantastic creations is all the nearer to the truth of our life because it is so arbitrary and “impossible.” He seems to go backwards and forwards with a torch, throwing knobs, jags, wrinkles, corrugations, protuberancies, cavities, horns, and snouts into terrifying illumination. But we are like that! That is what we actually are. That is how the Pillar of Fire sees us. Then, again, are we to limit our interest, as these modern writers do, to the beautiful people or the interesting people or the gross, emphatic people. Dickens is never more childlike than when he draws us, wonderingly and confidingly, to the stark knees of a Mrs. Pipchin, or when he drives us away, in unaccountable panic-terror, from the rattling jet-beads of a Miss Murdstone.

Think of the vast, queer, dim-lighted world wherein live and move all those funny, dusty, attenuated, heart-breaking figures, of such as wear the form of women — and yet may never know “love”! It is wonderful — when you think of it — how much of absorbing interest is left in life, when you have eliminated “sex,” suppressed “psychology,” and left philosophy out! Then appear all those queer attractions and repulsions which are purely superficial, and even material, and yet which are so dominant. Mother of God! How unnecessary to bring in Fairies and Blue Birds, when the solemnity of some little seamstress and her sorceress hands, and the quaint knotting of her poor wisp of hair, would be enough to keep a child staring and dreaming for hours upon hours!

Life in a great city is like life in an enchanted forest. One never knows what hideous ogre or what exquisite hamadryad one may encounter. And the little ways of all one’s scrabbling and burrowing and chuckling and nodding and winking house-mates! To go through the world expecting adventures is to find them sooner or later. But one need only cross one’s threshold to find one adventure — the adventure of a new, unknown fellow-creature, full of suspicion, full of cloudy malice, full of secretive dreams, and yet ready to respond — poor devil — to a certain kind of signal!

Long reading of Dickens’ books, like long living with children, gives one a wholesome dread of cynicism and flippancy. Children’s games are more serious than young men’s love-affairs, and they must be treated so. It is not exactly that life is to be “taken seriously.” It is to be taken for what it is — an extraordinary Pantomime. The people who will not laugh with Pierrot because his jokes are so silly, and the people who will not cry with Columbine because her legs are so thin, may be shrewd psychologists and fastidious artists — but, God help them! they are not in the game.

The romance of city-life is one thing. The romance of a particular city leads us further. Dickens has managed to get the inner identity of London; what is permanent in it; what can be found nowhere else; as not even Balzac got hold of Paris. London is terrible and ghastly. One knows that; but the wretchedest of its “gamins” knows that it is something else also. More than any place on earth it seems to have that weight, that mass, that depth, that foursquare solidity, which reassures and comforts, in the midst of the illusions of life. It descends so far, with its huge human foundations, that it gives one the impression of a monstrous concrete Base, sunk into eternity, upon which, for all its accumulated litter and debris, man will be able to build, perhaps has begun already, to build, his Urbs Beata. And Dickens entered with dramatic clairvoyance into every secret of this Titanic mystery. He knew its wharfs, its bridges, its viaducts, its alleys, its dens, its parks, its squares, its churches, its morgues, its circuses, its prisons, its hospitals, and its mad-houses. And as the human atoms of that fantastic, gesticulating, weeping, grinning crowd of his dance their crazy “Carmagnole,” we cannot but feel that somehow we *must* gather strength and friendliness enough to applaud such a tremendous Performance.

Dickens was too great a genius to confine his demonic touch to the town alone. There are *suggestions* of his, relating to country roads and country Inns and country solitudes, like nothing else, except, perhaps, the Vignettes of Bewick. He carries the same “animism” into this also. And he notes and records sensations of the most evasive kind. The peculiar terror we feel, for instance, mixed with a sort of mad pity, when by chance we light upon some twisted root-trunk, to which the shadows have given outstretched arms. The vague feelings, too, so absolutely unaccountable, that the sight of a lonely gate, or weir, or park-railing, or sign-post, or ruined shed, or tumble-down sheep-fold, may suddenly arouse, when we feel that in some weird manner we are the accomplices of the Thing's tragedy, are feelings that Dickens alone among writers seems to understand. A road with no people upon it, and the wind alone sobbing there; with blind eyes and wrinkled forehead; a pool by the edge of a wide marsh-land — like the marsh-land in "Great Expectations" — with I know not what reflected in it, and waiting, always waiting, for something that does not come; a low, bent, knotted pine-tree, over which the ravens fly, one by one, shrieking; these are the things that to some people — to children, for instance — remain in the mind when all else of their country journey is forgotten.

There is no one but Dickens who has a style that can drag these things into light. His style shrieks sometimes like a ghoul tugging at the roots of a mandrake. At other times it wails like a lost soul. At other times it mutters, and whimpers, and pipes in its throat, like an old man blinking at the moon. At other times it roars and thunders like ten thousand drunken devils. At other times it breaks into wistful, tender, little-girl sobs — and catches the rhythm of poetry — as in the death of Nell. Sometimes a character in Dickens will say something so humorously pregnant, so directly from what we hear in street and tavern, that art itself "gives up," and applauds, speechless.

After all, it is meet and right that there should be one great author, undistracted by psychology — unseduced by eroticism. There remain a few quite important things to deal with, when these are removed! Birth, for instance — the mystery of birth — and the mystery of death. One never forgets death in reading Dickens. He has a thought, a pity, for those things that once were men and women, lying, with their six feet of earth upon them, in our English Churchyards, so horribly still, while the mask of their sorrow yields to the yet more terrible grin of our mortality's last jest.

And to the last he is — like all children — the lover of Players. Every poor dog of Public Entertainer, from the Barrel-Organ man to him who pulls the ropes for Punch and Judy, has his unqualified devotion. The modern Stage may see strange revolutions, some of them by no means suitable to children — but we need not be alarmed. There will always remain the larger Stage, the stage of man's own Exits and Entrances; and there, at any rate, while Dickens is their "Manager," Pierrot may weep and dance, and Pierrette dance and weep, knowing that they will not be long without their audience, or long without their applause!

He was a vulgar writer. Why not? England would not be England — and what would London be? — if we didn't have a touch, a smack, a sprinkling of that ingredient!

He was a shameless sentimentalist. Why not? It is better to cry than to comb one's hair all day with an ivory comb.

He was a monstrous melodramatist. Why not? To be born is a melodrama. To play "hide-and-seek" with Death is a melodrama. And some have found melodramatic satisfaction in letting themselves be caught. All the World's a Puppet-Show, and if the Big Showman jerks his wires so extravagantly, why should not the Little Showman do the same?

GOETHE

AS THE ENIGMATIC wisdom of Goethe been exhausted — after these years — and after the sudden transits across our sky of more flashing meteors? Ah! I deem not yet. Still he holds the entrance to the mysterious Gate, over the portals of which is written, not “Lasciate ogni speranza!” but “Think of Living!” A thunder-rifted heart he bears, but victory, not defeat, looks forth from his wide, outward-gazing eyes! One hand holds the skull, engraved with all the secret symbols of man’s ascent out of the bosom of Nature; engraved, yes! — by all the cunningest tools of Science and her unwearied research; but the other, raised aloft, noble and welcoming, carries the laurel crown of the triumph of Imagination!

So, between Truth and Poetry— “im ganzen guten, schonen,” — stands our Lord of Life!

Exhausted, the wisdom of Goethe? Ah, no! — hardly fathomed yet, in its uppermost levels! If it were really possible to put into words the whole complex world of impressions and visions, of secrets and methods, which that name suggests, one would be a wiser disciple than Eckermann. Fragment by fragment, morsel by morsel, the great Figure limns itself against the shadow of the years.

Is it too presumptuous a task to seek to evoke — taking first one impression of him and then another, first one reaction and then another — what this mysterious Name has come to mean for us? One hears the word “cosmic” whispered. It is whispered too often in these days. But “cosmic,” with its Whitmanesque, modern connotation, does not exactly fit Goethe. Goethe did not often abandon himself in Dionysian fury to the ultimate

Elements. When he did — in his earlier youth — before the hardening process of his Italian Journey had sealed his protection from such romantic lapses — it was not quite in the strained, desperate, modern manner. One feels certain, thinking of what he was, at Frankfurt, at Leipsig, at Strassburg, at Weimar, that he always kept a clear, cool, Apollonian head, mad and amorous though his escapades may seem!

I do not fancy that ever once did Goethe really “give himself away,” or lose the foursquare solidity of his balance in any wild staggering to left or right. No; the Goethean temper, the Goethean attitude, cannot be described as “cosmic,” while that word implies a certain complete yielding to a vague earth-worship. There was nothing vague about Goethe’s *intimacy,* if I may put it so, with the Earth. He and It seemed destined to understand one another most *serenely,* in a shrewd and deliberate conspiracy!

The Goethean attitude to the Universe is too self-poised and self-centered to be adequately rendered by any word that suggests complete abandonment. It is too — what shall I say? — too sly and *demonic* — too much *inside* the little secrets of the great Mother — to be summed up in a word that suggests a sort of Titanic whirlwind of embraces. And yet, on the other hand, it is quite as easy to exaggerate the Olympian aspect of Goethe. When this is carried too far, something in him, something extraordinarily characteristic, evaporates, like a thin stream of Parnassian smoke.

How shall I express what this is? Perhaps it is the *German* in him. For, in spite of all Nietzsche’s Mediterraneanizing of this Superman, Goethe was profoundly and inveterately German. The Rhine-Maidens rocked him in his cradle and, though he might journey to Rome or Troy or Carthage, it was to the Rhine-Maidens that he returned. Yes, I do not think that those understand him best who keep bowing to the ground and muttering “Olympian”!

Am I carrying this particular taper-light of discrimination too far when I say that there is, to the Celtic mind at least, something humorously naive and childlike in Goethe, mixed in, queerly enough, with all his rich, mellow, and even worldly, wisdom? One overtakes him, now and then, and catches him, as it were, off his guard, in little pathetic lapses into a curious simplicity — a simplicity grave-eyed, portentious and solemn — almost like that of some great Infant-Faun, trying very seriously to learn the difficult syllables of our human "Categorical Imperative"! World-child, as he was, the magic of the universe pouring through him, one sometimes feels a strange, dim hope with regard to that dubious general Issue, when we find him so confident about the presence of the mysterious Being he worshipped; and so transparently certain of his personal survival after Death!

There is no one, except Leonardo Da Vinci, in the whole history of our Planet, who gives us quite that sense of a person possessed of some secret illumination not granted to the rest of the world. There is much reassurance in this. More than has been, perhaps, realized. For it is probable that "in his caves of ice," Leonardo also felt himself indestructible by the Arch-Enemy. One thinks of those Cabalistic words of old Glanville, "Man does not yield himself to Death — save by the weakness of his mortal Will."

Goethe collecting fossils and crystals and specimens of rock-strata; Goethe visiting Botanical Gardens and pondering on the Metamorphosis of Plants; Goethe climbing Strassburg Cathedral-Spire; Goethe meeting the Phantom of Himself as he returned from the arms of Frederika; Goethe "experiencing the sensation" of crossing the "Firing-Line"; Goethe "announcing" to Eckermann that that worthy man had better avoid undertaking any "great" literary work; Goethe sending Frau von Stein sausages from his breakfast-table; Goethe consoling himself in the Storm by observing his birth-star Lucifer, and thinking of the Lake of Galilee, are pictures of noble and humorous memory which reconcile one to the Comedy of Living!

How vividly returns to me — your pardon, reader! — the first time I read “The Sorrows of Werter” in that little “Three-penny” edition published by Messrs. Cassell! It was in a Barge, towed by three Horses, on the River, between Langport and Bridgewater, in the County of Somerset! The majority of the company were as rowdy a set of good-humored Bean-Feasters as ever drank thin beer in a ramshackle tavern. But there was one of them — this is twenty-five years ago, reader! — a girl as fragile as a peeled Willow-wand — and teased by the rude badinage of our companions we sheltered — as the friendly mists rose — under a great Tarpaulin at the barge’s stern. Where is that girl now, I wonder? Is she alive? Will she ever blush with anger at being thus gently lifted up, from beneath the kind Somersetshire mists, into an hour’s publicity? Who can tell? We are all passing one another, in mist-darkened barges, swift or slow. She is a wraith, a shadow, a receding phantom; but I wave my hand to her over the years! I shall always associate her with Lotte; and I never smell the peculiar smell of Tarpaulin without thinking of “the Sorrows of Werter.”

“Werter” has certainly the very droop and bewilderment of youth’s first passion. It is good to plunge one’s hands, when one has grown cynical and old, into that innocent, if somewhat turbid, fountain. When we pass to “Wilhelm Meister,” we are in quite a different world. The earlier part of this book has the very stamp of the Goethean “truth and poetry.” One can read it side by side with the great “Autobiography” and find the shrewd insight and oracular wisdom quite equally convincing in the invention and the reality. What an unmistakable and unique character all these imaginary persons of Goethe’s stories have! They are so different from any other persons in fiction! Wherein does the difference lie? It is hard to say. In a sense, they are more life-like and real. In another sense, they are more fantastic. Sometimes they seem mere dolls — like the figures in his own puppet-show — and we can literally “see the puppets dallying.”

Jarno is a queer companion for a man to have. And what of the lady who, when she was asked whether she had ever loved, answered, “never or always”? Phillina is a very loving and an extremely vivacious wench. Goethe’s sublime unconsciousness of ordinary moral qualms is never better observed than in the story of this extravagant young minx. Then, in the midst of it all, the arresting, ambiguous little figure of poor Mignon! What does she do — a child of pure lyrical poetry — a thing out of the old ballads — in this queer, grave, indecent company? That elaborate description of Mignon’s funeral so carefully arranged by the Aesthetic “Uncle,” has it not all the curious qualities of the Goethean vein — its clairvoyant insight into the under-truth of Nature — its cold-blooded pre-occupation with “Art” — its gentle irony — its mania for exact detail? The “gentle irony” of which I speak has its opportunity in the account of the “Beautiful Soul” or “Fair Saint.” It reads, in places, like the tender dissection of a lovely corpse by a genial, elderly Doctor.

But the passage which, for me, is most precious is that Apprentice’s “Indenture.” I suppose in no other single paragraph of human prose is there so much concentrated wisdom. “To act is easy — to think is hard!” How extraordinarily true that is! But it is not the precise tune of the strenuous preachers of our time! The whole idea of the “Pedagogic Province,” ruled over by that admirable Abbé, is so exquisitely in Goethe’s most wise and yet most simple manner! The passage about the “Three Reverences” and the “Creed” is as good an instance of that sublime Spinozistic way of dealing with the current religion as that amazing remark he made once to Eckerman about his own faith: “When I want scientific unity, I am a Pantheist. When I desire poetical multifariousness, I am a Polytheist. And when my moral nature requires a Personal God — *there is room for That also?”*

When one comes to speak of Faust, it is necessary for us to remember the words the great man himself used to his follower in speaking of this masterpiece. Eckermann teased him for interpretations. “What,” said he to Goethe, “is the leading Idea in the Poem?” “Do you suppose,” answered the Sage, “that a thing into which I have put the Life-Blood of all my days is able to be summoned up in anything so narrow and limited as an Idea?”

Personally, I do not hesitate to say that I think Faust is the most permanently *interesting* of all the works that have proceeded from the human brain.

Its attitude to life is one which ultimately has more to strengthen and sustain and put courage — if not the Devil — into us than anything I know. When I meet a man who shall tell me that the Philosophy of his life is the Philosophy of Faust, I bow down humbly before him. I did meet such a man once. I think he was a Commercial Traveller from Buffalo.

How wisely Goethe deals in Faust with the problem — if it be a problem — of Evil! His suggestion seems to be that the spirit of Evil in the world— “part of that Nothing out of which came the All” — plays an absolutely essential role. “By means of it God fulfils his most cherished purposes.” Had Faust not seduced poor little Gretchen, he would never have passed as far as he did along the road of Initiation, and the spirit of his Victim — in her translunar Apotheosis — would not have been *there* to lift him Heavenwards at the last. And yet no one could say that Goethe disparages the enormity of Faust’s crime. That ineffable retort of Mephistopheles, when, on those “black horses,” they are whirled through the night to her dungeon, “She is not the first,” has the essence of all pity and wrath in its cruel sting. Mephistopheles himself is the most interesting of all Devils. And he is so because, although he knows perfectly well — queer Son of Chaos as he is — that he is bound to be defeated, he yet goes on upon his evil way, and continues to resist the great stream of Life which, according to his view, had better never have broken loose from primeval Nothingness.

That is ultimately Goethe's contribution to the disputes about what we call "God." The name does not matter. "Feeling is all in all. The name is sound and smoke." "God," or "the Good," is to Goethe simply the eternal stream of life, working slowly upwards, onwards, to unknown goals. All that opposes itself to this Life-stream is evil. Morality, a man-made local convention, is our present blundering method of assisting this great Force, and preventing its sterility, or dissipation. In his conception of the nature of this Life-stream Goethe is more Catholic and more subtle than Nietzsche.

Self-realization? Certainly! That is an aspect of it which was not likely to be forgotten by the great Egoist whose sole object, as he confessed, was to "build up the Pyramid of his Existence" from the broadest possible base. But not only self-realization. The "dying to live" of the Christian, as well as "the rising above one's body" of the Platonist, have their part there. Ascetism itself, with all its degrees of passionate or philosophical purity, is as much an evocation of the world-spirit — of the essential nature of the System of Things — as is the other.

It is, of course, ultimately, quite a mad hope to desire to *convert* "the Spirit that Denies." He, too, under the Lord, is an accomplice of the Life-stream. He helps it forward, even while he opposes himself to it, just as a bulwark of submerged rocks make the tide leap landward with more foaming fury!

Goethe's idea of the "Eternal Feminine" leading us "upward and on" is not at all the sentimental nonsense which Nietzsche fancied it. In a profound sense it is absolutely true. Nor need the more anti-feminist among us be troubled by such a Truth. We have just seen that the Devil himself is a means, and a very essential means, for leading us "upward and on."

Goethe is perfectly right. The "love of women," though a destructive force, and a frightful force as far as certain kinds of "art" and "philosophy" are concerned, cannot be looked upon as anything but "a provocation to creation," when the whole large scheme of existence is taken into account.

I think myself that it is easy to make too much of Goethe's Pantheism. The Being he worshipped was simply "Whatever Mystery" lies behind the ocean of Life. And if no "mystery" lies behind the ocean of life, — very well! A Goethean disciple is able, then, to worship Life, with no mystery behind it! It is rather the custom among clever, tiresome people to disparage that *second part of Faust,* with its world-panoramic procession of all the gods and demi-gods and angels and demons that have ever visited this earth. I do not disparage it. I have never found it dull. Dull would he be, as "the fat weed that rots itself in case on Lethe's wharf," who found nothing curious and provocative about these Sirens and Centaurs and Lemures and Larvae and Cabiri and Phorkyads! I can myself endure very pleasantly even the society of those "Blessed Boys" which some have found so distressing. As for the Devil, in the end, making "indecent overtures" to the little Heavenly Butterflies, who pelt him with roses — even that does not confuse my mind or distract my senses. It is the "other side of the Moon" — the under-mask of the world-comedy, and the incidental "saving" of Dr. Faust is not more essential in the great mad game!

Read Faust, both portions of it, dear reader, and see if you do not feel, with me, that, in the last resort, one leaves this rich, strange poem with a nobler courage to endure life, and a larger view of its amazing possibilities!

I wonder if that curious novel of Goethe's called the "Elective Affinities" is perused as widely as it deserves? That extraordinary company of people! And the patient, portentious interest Goethe compels us to take in the laying out of gardens and the beautifying of church-yards! "The Captain," "the Architect" — not to speak of the two bewildering women — do they not suggest fantastic figures out of one's memories of remotest childhood? I suppose to a world-child like Goethe, watching, with grave super-human interest, all our little pre-occupations, we have all of us something of the sweet pedantry of these people — we are all of us "Captains" and "Architects" with some odd twist in our quiet heads.

The solemn immorality, amounting to outrageous indecency, of those scenes between the assorted lovers when they make "double" love, and behind the mask of their legitimate attachments follow their "elective affinities," is a thing that may well stagger the puritan reader. The puritan reader will, indeed, like old Carlyle, be tempted more than once to fling these grave, unblushing chronicles, with their deep, oracular wisdom and their shameless details, into the dust-heap. But it were wiser to refrain. After all, one cannot conceal from one's self that things are *like that* — and if the hyaena's howl, from the filthy marshes of earth's weird edge and the thick saliva on his oozing jaws, nauseates our preciosity, and besmirches our self-esteem, we must remember that this is the way the Lord of "the Prologue in Heaven" has willed that the scavengers of life's cesspools go about their work!

Probably it will not be the "indecency" of certain things in Goethe that will most offend our modern taste; it will be that curious, grave pre-occupation of his, so objective and stiff, with artistic details, and architectural details, and theatrical details!

One must remember his noble saying, “Earnestness alone makes life Eternity” and that other “saying” about Art having, as its main purpose, the turning of the “Transitory” into the “Permanent”! If the Transitory is really to be turned into the Permanent, we must take ourselves and our work very seriously indeed!

And such “seriousness,” such high, patient, unwearied seriousness, is, after all, Goethe’s bequest to our flippant and fanciful generation. He knows well enough our deepest doubt, our most harrowing scepticism. He has long ago “been through all that.” But he has “returned” — not exactly like Nietzsche, with a fierce, scornful, dramatic cry, to a contemptuous “superficiality” — he has returned to the actual possibilities that the world offers, “superficial” and otherwise, of turning the whole strange business into a solid, four-square “work of art.” We must reject “evil,” quietly and ironically; not because it is condemned by human morality, but because “we have our work to do”! We must live in “the good” and “the true,” not because it is our “duty” so to do, but because only along this particular line does the “energy without agitation” of the “abysmal mothers” communicate itself to our labour.

And so we come back, like the grief-stricken children over Mignon’s grave, to Life and Life’s toil. There only, in the inflexible development of what taste, of what discernment, of what power, of what method, of what demonic genius, we may have been granted by the gods, lies “the cosmic secret.” That is all we have in our human hands, that malleable stuff out of which Fate made us — and only in the shrewd, unwearied use of that shall we prove our love to the Being “who cannot love us in return” and make our illusion of Free-Will part of his universal Purpose!

MATTHEW ARNOLD

IT IS EASY to miss the especial grandeur of Matthew Arnold's work. The airy persiflage of his prose — its reiterated lucidities — pleasing to some, irritating to others, will have a place, but not a very important place, in English Literature. Even those magical and penetrating "aphorisms" with which he has held the door open to so many religious and moral vistas tease us a little now, and — suggestive enough in their hour — do not deepen and deepen upon the intellect with the weight of "aphorisms" from Epictetus or Goethe.

The "stream of tendency that makes for righteousness" runs a little shallow, and it has so many pebbles under its clear wave! That word of his, "the Secret of Jesus," wears best of all. It was a happy thought to use the word "secret" — a thought upon which those whose religious creed binds them to "the method" rather than "the secret," may well ponder!

As a critic, too, though illuminating and reassuring, he is far from clairvoyant. A quaint vein of pure, good-tempered, ethical *Philistinism* prevents his really entering the evasive souls of Shelley or Keats or Heine. With Wordsworth or Byron he is more at home. But he misses many subtleties, even in their simple temperaments. He is no Proteus, no Wizard of critical metempsychosis. For all his airy wit, he is "a plain, blunt man, who loves his friend." In fact, when one compares him, as a sheer illuminator of psychological twilights, to Walter Pater, one realizes at once how easily a quite great man may "render himself stupid" by sprinkling himself with the holy water of Fixed Principles!

No, it is neither of Arnold, the Theological Free-Lance, or of Arnold, the Critic of Literature, that I want to speak, but of Arnold, the Poet.

Personally I hold the opinion that he was a greater poet than either Tennyson or Browning. His philosophy is a far nobler, truer, and more permanent thing than theirs, and there are passages and single lines in his poetry which over-top, by enormous distances, anything that they achieved.

You ask me what the Philosophy of Matthew Arnold was? It is easy to answer that. It was the philosophy of all the very greatest among mortal men! In his poetry he passes completely out of the region of Theological argument, and his attitude to life is the attitude of Sophocles and Virgil and Montaigne and Cervantes and Shakespeare and Goethe. Those who read Matthew Arnold, and love him, know that his intellectual tone is the tone of those great classical writers, and his conclusions their conclusions.

He never mocks our pain with foolish, unfounded hopes and he never permits mad despair to paralyse him. He takes life as it is, and, as we all have to do, makes the best of its confusions. If we are here "as on a darkling plain, swept by confused alarms of struggle and flight, where ignorant armies clash by night," we can at least be "true to one another."

One wonders sometimes if it be properly understood by energetic teachers of youth that there is only one intellectual attitude towards life, only one philosophy, only one ultimate mood. This is that mood of "resignation," which, from Homer to Matthew Arnold, is alone adapted, in the long run, to the taste of our days upon earth.

The real elements of our situation have not altered in the remotest degree since Achilles dragged Hector round the walls of Troy.

Men and women still love and hate; still "enjoy the sun" and "live light in the Spring"; still "advance true friends and beat back dangerous foes" — and upon them the same Constellations look down; and upon them the same winds blow; and upon them the same Sphinx glides through the obscurity, with the same insoluble Question.

Nothing has really changed. The "river of time" may pass through various landscapes, but it is the same river, and, at the last, it brings to us, as "the banks fade dimmer away" and "the stars come out" "murmurs and scents" of the same infinite Sea. Yes, there is only one Philosophy, as Disraeli said, jesting; and Matthew Arnold, among the moderns, is the one who has been allowed to put it into his poetry. For though, before the "Flamantia Moenia" of the world's triple brass, we are fain to bow our heads inconsolably, there come those moments when, a hand laid in ours, we think we know "the hills whence our life flows"!

The flowing of the river of life — the washing of the waves of life — how well one recalls, from Arnold's broken and not always musical stanzas, references to that sound — to the sound so like the sound of those real sea-tides that "Sophocles, long ago, heard in the Aegaean," and listened, thinking of many things, as we listen and think of many things today!

"For we are all like swimmers in the Sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of Fate,
And whether it will lift us to the land
Or whether it will bear us out to Sea,
Back out to Sea, to the dark gulfs of Death,
We know not —
Only the event will teach us, in its hour."

I sometimes think that a certain wonderful blending of realism and magic in Matthew Arnold's poetry has received but scant justice.

In "The Forsaken Merman" for instance, there are many stanzas that make you smell the salt-foam and imagine all that lies, hidden and strange, down there upon the glittering sand. That line,

"Where great whales go sailing by
Round the world for ever and aye,"

has a liberating power that may often recur, when one is, God knows, far enough from the spouting of any whale! And the whole poem has a wistful, haunting beauty that never grows tedious.

Matthew Arnold is a true classical poet. It is strictly in accordance with the authentic tradition to introduce those touches of light, quaint, playful, airy realism into the most solemn poetry. It is what Virgil, Catullus, Theocritus, Milton, Landor, all did. Some persons grow angry with him for a certain tone of half-gay, half-sad, allusive tenderness, when he speaks of Oxford and the country round Oxford. I do not think there is anything unpleasing in this. So did Catullus talk of Sirmio; Horace of his Farm; Milton of "Deva's wizard-stream"; Landor of Sorrento and Amalfi.

It is all of a piece with the "resignation" of a philosophy which does not expect that this or that change of dwelling will ease our pain; of a philosophy that naturally loves to linger over familiar well-sides and roadways and meadow-paths and hillsides, over the places where we went together, when we "still had Thyrsis."

The direct Nature-poetry of Matthew Arnold, touching us with the true classic touch, and yet with something, I know not what, of more wistful tenderness added, is a great refreshment after the pseudo-magic, so vague and unsatisfying, of so much modern verse.

"It matters not. Light-comer he has flown!
But we shall have him in the sweet spring days,
With whitening hedges and uncrumpling fern,

And blue-bells trembling by the forest ways,
And scent of hay new-mown—"

Or that description of the later season:

"Too quick despairer! Wherefore wilt thou go?
Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,
Soon shall we have gold-dusted Snapdragon,
Sweet-William with his homely cottage-smell,
And Stocks, in fragrant blow.
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,
And open Jasmin-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,
And the pale Moon and the white Evening-Star."

True to the "only philosophy," Matthew Arnold is content to indicate how for each one of us the real drama of life goes on with a certain quite natural, quite homely, quite quiet background of the strip of earth where we first loved and dreamed, and were happy, and were sad, and knew loss and regret, and the limits of man's power to change his fate.

There is a large and noble calm about the poetry of this writer which has the effect upon one of the falling of cool water into a dark, fern-fringed cave. He strips away lightly, delicately, gently, all the trappings of our feverish worldliness, our vanity and ambition, and lifts open, at one touch, the great moon-bathed windows that look out upon the line of white foam — and the patient sands.

And never is this calm deeper than when he refers to Death. "For there" he says, speaking of that Cemetery at Firenze where his Thyrsis lies;

“For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep
The morningless and unawakening sleep,
Under the flowery Oleanders pale—”

Sometimes, as in his “Tristram and Iseult,” he is permitted little touches of a startling and penetrating beauty; such as, returning to one’s memory and lips, in very dusty and arid places, bring all the tears of half-forgotten romance back again to us and restore to us the despair that is dearer than hope!

Those lines, for instance, when Tristram, dying in his fire-lit, tapestried room, tended by the pale Iseult of Brittany, knows that his death-longing is fulfilled, and that she, his “other” Iseult, has come to him at last — have they not the very echo in them of what such weariness feels when, only not too late, the impossible happens? Little he cares for the rain beating on the roof, or the moan of the wind in the chimney, or the shadows on that tapestried wall! He listens — his heart almost stops.

“What voices are those in the still night air?
What lights in the court? What steps on the stair?”

One wonders if the reader, too, knows and loves, that strange fragmentary unrhymed poem, called “the Strayed Reveller,” with its vision of Circe and the sleeping boy-faun, and the wave-tossed Wanderer, and its background of “fitful earth-murmurs” and “dreaming woods” — Strangely down, upon the weary child, smiles the great enchantress, seeing the wine stains on his white skin, and the berries in his hair. The thing is slight enough; but in its coolness, and calmness, and sad delicate beauty, it makes one pause and grow silent, as in the long hushed galleries of the Vatican one pauses and grows silent before some little known, scarcely-catalogued

Greek Vase. The spirit of life and youth is there — immortal and tender — yet there too is the shadow of that pitiful "in vain," with which the brevity of such beauty, arrested only in chilly marble, mocks us as we pass!

It is life — but life at a distance — Life refined, winnowed, sifted, purged. "Yet, O Prince, what labour! O Prince, what pain!" The world is perhaps tired of hearing from the mouths of its great lonely exiles the warning to youth "to sink unto its own soul," and let the mad throngs clamour by, with their beckoning idols, and treacherous pleading. But never has this unregarded hand been laid so gently upon us as in the poem called "Self-Dependence."

Heaven forgive us — we cannot follow its high teaching — and yet we too, we all, have felt that sort of thing, when standing at the prow of a great ship we have watched the reflection of the stars in the fast-divided water.

"Unaffrightened by the silence round them
Undistracted by the sights they see
These demand not that the world about them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.
But with joy the stars perform their shining
And the sea its long, moon-silvered roll;
For self-poised they live; nor pine with noting
All the fever of some differing soul."

The "one philosophy" is, as Matthew Arnold himself puts it, "utrumque paratus," prepared for either event. Yet it leans, and how should it not lean, in a world like this, to the sadder and the more final. That vision of a godless universe, "rocking its obscure body to and fro," in ghastly space, is a vision that refuses to pass away. "To the children of chance," as my Catholic philosopher says, "chance would seem intelligible."

But even if it be — if the whole confluent ocean of its experiences be — unintelligible and without meaning; it remains that mortal men must endure it, and comfort themselves with their "little pleasures." The immoral cruelty of Fate has been well expressed by Matthew Arnold in that poem called "Mycerinus," where the virtuous king *does not* receive his reward. He, for his part will revel and care not. There may be nobler, there may be happier, ways of awaiting the end — but whether "revelling" or "refraining," we are all waiting the end. Waiting and listening, half-bitterly, half-eagerly, seems the lot of man upon earth! And meanwhile that

— "Power, too great and strong
Even for the gods to conquer or beguile,
Sweeps earth and heaven and men and gods along
Like the broad volume of the insurgent Nile
And the great powers we serve, themselves must be
Slaves of a tyrannous Necessity—"

Matthew Arnold had — and it is a rare gift — in spite of his peaceful domestic life and in spite of that "interlude" of the "Marguerite" poems — a noble and a chaste soul. "Give me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" prayed the Psalmist. Well! this friend of Thyrsis had "a clean heart" and "a right spirit"; and these things, in this turbulent age, have their appeal! It was the purging of this "hyssop" that made it possible for him even in the "Marguerite" poems, to write as only those can write whose passion is more than the craving of the flesh.

"Come to me in my dreams and then
In sleep I shall be well again —

For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day!"

It was the same chastity of the senses that made it possible for him to write those verses upon a young girl's death, which are so much more beautiful — though *those* are lovely too — than the ones Oscar Wilde wrote on the same subject.

"Strew on her, roses, roses,
But never a spray of yew;
For in silence she reposes —
Ah! would that I did too!
Her cabined ample spirit
It fluttered and failed for breath.
Tonight it doth inherit
The vasty halls of death."

Matthew Arnold is one of the poets who have what might be called "the power of Liberation." He liberates us from the hot fevers of our lusts. He liberates us from our worldliness, our perversions, our mad preoccupations. He reduces things to their simple elements and gives us back air and water and land and sea. And he does this without demanding from us any unusual strain. We have no need to plunge into Dionysian ecstacies, or cry aloud after "cosmic emotion."

We have no need to relinquish our common sense; or to dress or eat or talk or dream, in any strange manner. It is enough if we remember the fields where we were born. It is enough if we do not altogether forget out of what quarter of the sky Orion rises; and where the lord-star Jupiter has his place.

It is enough if we are not quite oblivious of the return of the Spring and the sprouting of the first leaves.

From the poetry of Matthew Arnold it is possible to derive an art of life which carries us back to the beginnings of the world's history. He, the civilized Oxonian; he, domestic moralist; he, the airily playful scholar, has yet the power of giving that *Epic solemnity* to our sleep and our waking; to our "going forth to our work arid our labour until the evening"; to the passing of the seasons over us; which is the ground and substance of all poetic imagination, and which no change or progress, or discovery, can invade or spoil.

For it is the nature of poetry to heighten and to throw into relief those eternal things in our common destiny which too soon get overlaid — And some things only poetry can reach — Religion may have small comfort for us when in the secret depths of our hearts we endure a craving of which we may not speak, a sickening aching longing for "the lips so sweetly forsworn." But poetry is waiting for us, there also, with her Rosemary and her Rue. Not one human heart but has its hidden shrine before which the professional ministrants are fain to hold their peace. But even there, under the veiled Figure itself, some poor poetic "Jongleur de Notre Dame" is permitted to drop his monk's robe, and dance the dance that makes time and space nothing!

SHELLEY

One of the reasons why we find it hard to read the great poets is that they sadden us with their troubling beauty. Sadden us — and put us to shame! They compel us to remember the days of our youth; and that is more than most of us are able to bear! What memories! Ye gods, what memories!

And this is true, above all, of Shelley. His verses, when we return to them again, seem to have the very “perfume and suppliance” of the Spring; of the Spring of our frost-bitten age. Their sweetness has a poignancy and a pang; the sweetness of things too dear; of things whose beauty brings aching and a sense of bitter loss. It is the sudden uncovering of dead violets, with the memory of the soil they were plucked from. It is the strain of music over wide waters — and over wider years.

These verses always had something about them that went further than their actual meaning. They were always a little like planetary melodies, to which earthly words had been fitted. And now they carry us, not only beyond words, but beyond thought,— “as doth Eternity.” There is, indeed, a sadness such as one cannot bear long “and live” about Shelley’s poetry.

It troubles our peace. It passes over the sterility of our poor comfort like a lost child’s cry. It beats upon the door. It rattles the shut casement. It sobs with the rain upon the roof. This is partly because Shelley, more than any poet, has entered into the loneliness of the elements, and given up his heart to the wind, and his soul to the outer darkness. The other poets can *describe* these things, but he *becomes* what they are. Listening to him, we listen to them. And who can bear to listen to them? Who, in cold blood, can receive the sorrows of the “many waters”? Who can endure while the heavens, that are “themselves so old,” bend down with the burden of their secret?

Not to “describe,” but to share the life, or the death-in-life, of the thing you write of, that is the true poetic way. The “arrowy odours” of those first white violets he makes us feel, darting forth from among the dead leaves, do they leave us content with the art of their description? They provoke us with their fine essence. They trouble us with a fatality we have to share. The passing from its “caverns of rain” of the newborn cloud — we do not only follow it, obedient to the spell of rhetoric; we are whirled forward with it, laughing at its “cenotaph” and our own, into unimagined aerial spaces. One feels all this and more under Shelley’s influence — but alas! as soon as one has felt it, the old cynical, realistic mood descends again, “heavy as frost,” and the vision of ourselves, poor, straggling, forked animals, caught up into such regions, shows but as a pantomimic farce; and we awake, shamed and clothed, and in our “right mind!”

With some poets, with Milton and Matthew Arnold, for example, there is always a kind of implicit sub-reference, accompanying the heroic gesture or the magical touch, to our poor normal humanity. With others, with Tennyson or Browning, for instance, one is often rather absurdly aware of the worthy Victorian Person, behind the poetic mask, “singing” his ethical ditty — like a great, self-conscious speckled thrush upon a prominent bough.

But with Shelley everything is forgotten. It is the authentic fury, the divine madness; and we pass out of ourselves, and “suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange.” Into something “strange,” perhaps, rather than something “rich”; for the temperament of Shelley, like that of Corot, leads him to suppress the more glowing threads of Nature’s woof; leads him to dissolve everything in filmy white light; in the light of an impossible dawn.

Has it been noticed how all material objects dissolve at his touch, and float away, as mists and vapours? He has, it seems, an almost insane predilection for *white* things. White violets, white pansies, white wind-flowers, white ghosts, white daisies and white moons thrill us, as we read, with an almost unearthly awe. White Death, too; the shadow of white Corruption, has her place there, and the appalling whiteness of lepers and corpses. The liturgy he chants is the liturgy of the White Mass, and the "white radiance" of Eternity is his Real Presence.

Weird and fantastic though Shelley's dreams may appear, it is more than likely that some of them will be realized before we expect it. His passionate advocacy of what now is called "Feminism," his sublime revolutionary hopes for the proletariat, his denunciation of war, his arraignment of so-called "Law" and "Order," his indictment of conventional Morality, his onslaughts on outworn Institutions, his invectives against Hypocrisy and Stupidity, are not by any means the blind Utopian rhetoric that some have called them. That crafty slur upon brave new thought which we know so well — that "how-can-you-take-him-seriously" attitude of the "status-quo" rascals — must not mislead us with regard to Shelley's philosophy.

He is a genuine philosopher, as well as a dreamer. Or shall we say he is the only kind of philosopher who *must* be taken seriously — the philosopher who creates the dreams of the young?

Shelley is, indeed, a most rare and invaluable thinker, as well as a most exquisite poet. His thought and his poetry can no more be separated than could the thought and poetry of the Book of Job. His poetry is the embodiment of his thought, its swift and splendid incarnation.

Strange though it may seem, there are not very many poets who have the particular kind of *ice-cold intellect* necessary if one is to detach one's self completely from the idols of the market-place. Indeed, the poetic temperament is only too apt, out of the very warmth of its sensitive humanity, to idealize the old traditions and throw a glamour around them. That is why, both in politics and religion, there have been, ever since Aristophanes, so many great reactionary poets. Their warmth of human sympathy, their "nihil alienum" attitude; nay! their very sense of humour, have made this inevitable. There is so often, too, something chilly and "unhomely," something pitiless and cruel, about quite rational reform, which alienates the poetic mind. It must be remembered that the very thing that makes so many objects poetical — I mean their *traditional association* with normal human life — is the thing that *has to be destroyed* if the new birth is to take place. The ice-cold austerity of mind, indicated in the superb contempt of the Nietzschean phrase, "human, too human," is a mood essential, if the world is to cast off its "weeds outworn." Change and growth, when they are living and organic, imply the element of destruction. It is easy enough to talk smoothly about natural "evolution." What Nature herself does, as we are beginning to realize at last, is to advance by leaps and bounds. One of these mad leaps having produced the human brain, it is for us to follow her example and slough off another Past. Man is *that which has to be left behind!* We thus begin to see what I must be allowed to call the essential inhumanity of the true prophet. The false prophet is known by nothing so easily as by his crying "peace" — his crying, "hands off! enough!"

It is tragic to think how little the world has changed since Shelley's time, and how horribly relevant to the present hour are his outcries against militarism, capitalism and privilege. If evidence were wanted of the profound moral value of Shelley's revolutionary thought, one has only to read the proclamations of any international school of socialistic propaganda, and find how they are fighting now what he fought then. His ideas have never been more necessary than they are today. Tolstoi has preached some of them, Bernard Shaw others, and Mr. Wells yet others. But none of our modern rebels have managed to give to their new thought quite the comprehensiveness and daring which we find in him.

And he has achieved this by the intensity of his devotion. Modern literary anarchists are so inclined to fall into jocularity, and irony, and "human, too human" humour. Their Hamlet-like consciousness of the "many mansions" of truth tends to paralyse the impetus of their challenge. They are so often, too, dramatists and novelists rather than prophets, and their work, while it gains in sympathy and subtlety, loses in directness. The immense encouragement given to really drastic, original thought by Nietzsche's writings is an evidence of the importance of what might be called *cruel positivity* in human thinking. Shelley has, however, an advantage over Nietzsche in his recognition of the transformative power of love. In this respect, iconoclast though he is, he is rather with the Buddha and the Christ than with the modern antinomians.

His *mania* for "love" — one can call it nothing else — frees his revolutionary thought from that arbitrary isolation, that savage subjectivity, which one notes in many philosophical anarchists. His Platonic insistence, too, on the more spiritual aspects of love separates his anti-Christian "immorality" from the easy-going, pleasant hedonism of such a bold individualist as Remy de Gourmont.

Shelley's individualism is always a thing with open doors; a thing with corridors into Eternity. It never conveys that sad, cynical, pessimistic sense of "eating and drinking" before we die, which one is so familiar with just now.

It is precisely this fact that those who reprobate Shelley's "immorality" should remember. With him "love" was truly a mystical initiation, a religious sacrament, a means of getting into touch with the cosmic secret, a path — and perhaps the only path — to the Beatific Vision.

It is not wise to turn away from Shelley because of his lack of "humour," of his lack of a "sense of proportion." The mystery of the world, whatever it may be, shows itself sometimes quite as indifferent as Shelley to these little nuances. We hear it crying aloud in the night with no humorous cry; and it is too often to stop our ears to what we hear, that we jest so lightly! It is doubtful whether Nature cares greatly for our "sense of proportion."

To return to his poetry, as poetry. The remarkable thing about Shelley's verse is the manner in which his whole physical and psychic temperament has passed into it. This is so in a measure with all poets, but it is so especially with him. His beautiful epicene face, his boyish figure, his unearthly sensitiveness, haunt us as we read his lines. They allure and baffle us, as the smile on the lips of the Mona Lisa. One has the impression of listening to a being who has really traversed the ways of the sea and returned with its secret. How else could those indescribable pearly shimmerings, those opal tints and rosy shadows, be communicated to our poor language? The very purity of his nature, that ethereal quality in it that strikes a chill into the heart of "normal humanity," lends a magic, like the reflection of moonlight upon ice, to these inter-lunar melodies. The same ethereal transparency of passion which excites, by reason of its sublime "immorality," the gross fury of the cynical and the base, gives an immortal beauty, cold and distant and beyond "the shadow of our night," to his planetary melodies. It is, indeed, the old Pythagorean "music of the spheres" audible at last again. Such sounds has the *silence* that descends upon us when we look up, above the roofs of the city, at Arcturus or Aldebaran! To return to Shelley from the turmoil of our gross excitements and cramped domesticities is to bathe our foreheads in the "dew of the morning" and cool our hands in the ultimate Sea. Whatever in us transcends the vicious circle of personal desire; whatever in us belongs to that Life which lasts while we and our individual cravings perish; whatever in us underlies and overlooks this mad procession of "births and forgettings;" whatever in us "beacons from the abode where the Eternal are" rises to meet this celestial harmony, and sloughs off the "muddy vesture" that would "grossly close it in." What separates Shelley from all other poets is that with them "art" is the paramount concern, and, after "art," morality.

With him one thinks little of art, little of the substance of any material "teaching;" one is simply transported into the high, cold regions where the creative gods build, like children, domes of "many-coloured glass," wherewith to "stain the white radiance of eternity." And after such a plunge into the antenatal reservoirs of life, we may, if we can, go on spitting venom and raking in the gutter with the old too-human zest, and let the "ineffectual" madman pass and be forgotten!

I said that the effect of his writing is to trouble and sadden us. It was as a man I spoke. That in us which responds to Shelley's verse is precisely what dreams of the transmutation of "man" into "beyond-man." That which saddens humanity beyond words is the daily food of the immortals.

And yet, even in the circle of our natural moods, there is something, sometimes, that responds to such strains as "When the lamp is shattered" and "One word is too often profaned." Perhaps only those who have known what it is to love as children love, and to lose hope with the absoluteness wherewith children lose it, can enter completely into this delicate despair. It is, indeed, the long, pitiful, sobbing cry of bewildered disenchantment that breaks the heart of youth when it first learns of what gross clay earth and men are made.

And the artless simplicity of Shelley's technique — much more really simple than the conscious "childishness" exquisite though that is, of a Blake or Verlaine — lends itself so wonderfully to the expression of youth's eternal sorrow. His best lyrics use words that fall into their places with the "dying fall" of an actual fit of sobbing. And they are so naturally chosen, his images and metaphors! Even when they seem most remote, they are such as frail young hearts cannot help happening upon, as they soothe their "love-laden souls" in "secret hour."

The infallible test of genuine poetry is that it forces us to recall emotions that we ourselves have had, with the very form and circumstance of their passion. And who can read the verses of Shelley without recalling such? That peculiar poignancy of memory, like a sharp spear, which arrests us at the smell of certain plants or mosses, or nameless earth-mould, or "growths by the margins of pond-waters;" that poignancy which brings back the indescribable balm of Spring and the bitter-sweetness of irremediable loss; who can communicate it like Shelley?

There are lovely touches of foreign scenery in his poems, particularly of the vineyards and olive gardens and clear-cut hill towns of Italy; but for English readers it will always be the rosemary "that is for remembrance" and the pansies that "are for thoughts" that give their perfume to the feelings he excites.

Other poets may be remembered at other times, but it is when the sun-warmed woods smell of the first primroses, and the daffodils, coming "before the swallow dares," lift up their heads above the grass, that the sting of this sweetness, too exquisite to last beyond a moment, brings its intolerable hope and its intolerable regret.

KEATS

It is well that there should be at least one poet of Beauty — of Beauty alone — of Beauty and naught else. It is well that one should dare to follow that terrible goddess even to the bitter end. That pitiless marble altar has its victims, as the other Altars. The "white implacable Aphrodite" cries aloud for blood — for the blood of our dearest affections; for the blood of our most cherished hopes; for the blood of our integrity and faith; for the blood of our reason. She drugs us, blinds us, tortures us, maddens us, and slays us — yet we follow her — to the bitter end!

Beauty hath her Martyrs, as the rest; and of these Keats is the Protagonist; the youngest and the fairest; the most enamoured victim. From those extraordinary letters of his, to his friends and to his love, we gather that this fierce amorist of Beauty was not without his Philosophy. The Philosophy of Keats, as we gather up the threads of it, one by one, in those fleeting confessions, is nothing but the old polytheistic paganism, reduced to terms of modern life. He was a born "Pluralist" to use the modern phrase; and for him, in this congeries of separate and unique miracles, which we call the World, there was neither Unity, nor Progress, nor Purpose, nor Over-soul — nothing but the mystery of Beauty, and the Memory of great men!

His way of approaching Nature, his way of approaching every event in life, was "pluralistic." He did not ask that things should come in upon him in logical order or in rational coherence. He only asked that each unique person who appeared; each unique hill-side or meadow or hedgerow or vineyard or flower or tree; should be for him a new incarnation of Beauty, a new avatar of the merciless One he followed.

Never has there been a poet less *mystical* — never a poet less *moral.* The ground and soil, and sub-soil, of his nature, was Sensuality — a rich, quivering, tormented Sensuality!

If you will, you may use, for what he was, the word “materialistic”; but such a word gives an absurdly wrong impression. The physical nerves of his abnormally troubled senses, were too exquisitely, too passionately stirred, to let their vibrations die away in material bondage. They quiver off into remotest psychic waves, these shaken strings; and a touch will send them shuddering into the high regions of the Spirit. For a nature like this, with the fever of consumption wasting his tissues, and the fever of his thirst for Beauty ravaging his soul, it was nothing less than the cruellest tragedy that he should have been driven by the phantom-flame of sex-illusion to find all the magic and wonder of the Mystery he worshiped, caught, imprisoned, enclosed, *blighted,* in the poisonous loveliness of one capricious girl. An anarchist at heart — as so many great artists are — Keats hated, with a furious hatred, any bastard claims and privileges that insolently intruded themselves between the godlike senses of Man and the divine madness of their quest. Society? the Public? Moral Opinion? Intellectual Fashion? The manners and customs of the Upper Classes? What were all these but vain impertinences, interrupting his desperate Pursuit? “Every gentleman” he cried “is my natural enemy!”

The feverish fanaticism of his devotion knew absolutely no limits. His cry day and night was for “new sensations”; and such “sensation,” a mere epicurean indulgence to others, was a lust, a madness, a frenzy, a fury, a rushing upon death, to him.

How young he was, how pitifully young, when the Foam-born, jealous of him as she was jealous of Hippolytus, hurled him bleeding to the ground!

But what Poetry he has left behind him! There is nothing like it in the world. Nothing like it, for sheer, deadly, draining, maddening, drowsing witchery of beauty. It is the very cup of Circe — the very philtre of Sun-poison. “A thing of Beauty is a Joy forever”! A Joy? Yes — but a Joy *drugged* from its first pouring forth. We follow. We have to follow. But, O the weariness of the way!

What an exultant hymn that is, — the one in honour of Pan, which comes so soon in Endymion! The dim rich depths of the dark forests are stirred by it, and its murmurs die away, over the wailing spaces of the marshes. Obscure growths, and drowsy weeds overhanging moon-lit paths, where fungoid things fumble for light and air, hear that cry in their voluptuous dreams and move uneasily. The dumb vegetable *expectancy* of young tree-trunks is roused by it into sensual terror. For this is the sound of the hoof of Pan, stamping on the moist earth, as he rages for Syrinx. No one has ever understood the torment of the Wood-god and his mad joy, as the author of Endymion understood them. The tumultuous ground-swell of this poet’s insane craving for Beauty must in the end have driven him on the rocks; but there came sometimes softer, gentler, less “vermeil-tinctured” moods, which might have prolonged his days, had he never met “that girl.”

“The Pot of Basil” expresses one of these. Wistful and heart-breaking, it has a tender yearning *pity* in it, a gentle melancholy brooding, over the irremediable pain of love-loss, which haunts one like the sound of drowned Angelus-bells, under a hushed sea. The description of the appearance of the ghost of the dead boy and his vague troubled speech, is like nothing else that has ever been written.

St. Agnes Eve too, in its more elaborate, more premeditated art, has a beauty so poignant, so *sensuously unearthly,* that one dare not quote a line of it, in a mere "critical essay," for fear of breaking such a spell!

The long-drawn solemn harmonies of "Hyperion" — Miltonian, and yet troubled by a thrilling sorcery that Milton never knew — madden the reader with anger that he never finished it; an anger which is only increased when in that other "Version," the influence of Dante becomes evident. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci!" Ah, there we find him — there we await him — the poet of *the tragedy of bodily craving,* transferred, with all its aching, famished nerves, on to the psychic plane!

For "La Belle Dame" is the Litany of the Beauty-Maniac — his death-in-life Requiem, his eternal Dirge! Those who have ever met Her, this "Lady in the mead, full-beautiful, a fairy-child," whose foot "was light" and whose hair "was long" and whose eyes "were wild," will know — and only they — the meaning of "the starved lips, through the gloom, with horrid warning, gaping wide"! And has the secret of the gasping pause of that broken half-line, "where no birds sing," borrowed originally from poor Ophelia's despair, and echoed wonderfully by Mr. Hardy in certain of his incomparable lyrics, been conveyed to my reader?

But it is, of course, in his five great Odes, that Keats is most supreme, most entirely, without question, the unapproachable artist. Heaven forbid that I should shatter the sacred silence that such things produce, by any profane repetition! They leave behind them, every one of them, an echo, a vibration, a dying fall, leaving us enchanted and trembling; as when we have been touched, before the twittering of the birds at dawn, by the very fingers of Our Lady of sweet Pain!

Is it possible that words, mere words, can work such miracles? Or are they not words at all, but chalices and Holy graals, of human passion, full of the life-blood, staining the lips that approach them scarlet, of heart-drained pulse-wearied ravishment?

Certainly he has the touch, ineffable, final, absolute, of the supreme Beauty. And over it all, over the ardours and ecstasies, hangs the shadow of Death; and in the heart of it, an adder in the deep drugged cup, coiled and waiting, the poisonous bite of incurable anguish! We may stand mesmerized, spell-bound, amid "the hushed cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed" watching Psyche sleep. We may open those "charmed magic casements" towards "the perilous foam." We may linger with Ruth "sick for home amid the alien corn." We may gaze, awed and hushed, at the dead, cold, little, mountain-built town, "emptied of its folks" — We may "glut our sorrow on the morning rose, or on the wealth of globed Peonies." We may "imprison our mistress's soft hand, and gaze, deep, deep, within her peerless eyes." We may brood, quieted and sweetly-sad, upon the last melancholy "oozings" of the rich year's vintage. But across all these things lies, like a streak of red, breath-catching, spilled heart's blood, the knowledge of *what it means* to have been able to turn all this into poetry!

It means Torment. It means Despair. It means *that cry,* out of the dust of the cemetery at Rome, "O God! O God! has there ever been such pain as my pain?"

I suppose Keats suffered more in his brief life than any mortal child of the Muses. These ultimate creations of supreme Beauty are evoked in no other way. Everything has to be sacrificed — everything — if we are to be — like the gods, *creators of Life.* For Life is a thing that can only be born in *that soil* — only planted where the wound goes deepest — only watered when we strike where that fountain flows! He wrote for himself. The crowd, the verdict of his friends — what did all that matter? He wrote for himself;

and for those who dare to risk the taste of that wine, which turns the taste of all else to a weary irrelevance!

One is unwilling to leave our Adonais, whose "annual wound in Lebanon allures" us thus fatally, with nothing but such a bitter cry. One has a pathetic human longing to think of him *as he was,* in those few moments of unalloyed pleasure the gods allowed him before "consumption," and "that girl," poisoned the springs of his life! And those moments, how they have passed into his poetry like the breath of the Spring!

When "the grand obsession" was not upon him, who, like Keats, can make us feel the cool, sweet, wholesome touch of our great Mother, the Earth? That sleep, "full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing," which the breast that suckled Persephone alone can give may heal us also for a brief while.

We, too, on this very morning — listen reader! — may wreath "a flowery band to bind us to the Earth, spite of despondence." Some "shape of beauty may yet move away the pall from our dark spirits." Even with old Saturn under his weight of grief, we may drink in the loveliness of those "green-robed senators of mighty woods, tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars." And in the worst of our moods we can still call aloud to the things of beauty that pass not away. We can even call out to them from her very side who is "the cause," "the cause, my soul," of what we suffer.

"Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art!
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless eremite,
The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores—"

This desperate, sensuous pain which makes us cry out to the “midnight” that we might “cease upon it,” need not harden our hearts before we pass hence. The “gathering swallows twittering in the sky” of our little interludes of peace may still attune us to some strange, sad thankfulness that we have been born into life, even though life turned out to mean *this!*

And the vibrating, stricken nerves of our too great devotion may have at least the balm of feeling that they have not languished untouched by the fingers that thrill while they slay. After all, “we have lived”; we also; and we would not “change places” with those “happy innocents” who have never known the madness of what it may be to have been born a son of man!

But let none be deluded. The tragic life upon earth is not the life of the spirit, but the life of the senses. The senses are the aching doors to the greatest mystery of all, the mystery of our tyranny over one another. Does anyone think that that love is greater, more real, more poignant, which can stand over the dead body of its One-of-all, and dream of encounters and reconciliations, in other worlds? It is not so! What we have loved is cold, cold and dead, and has become *that thing* we scarcely recognise. Can any vague, spiritual reunion make up for the loss of the little gestures, the little touches, *the little ways,* we shall never through all eternity know again? Ah! those reluctances and hesitations, over now, quite over now! Ah! those fretful pleadings, those strange withdrawals, those unheeded protests; nothing, less than nothing, and mere memories! When the life of the senses invades the affections of the heart — then, then, mon enfant, comes the pinch and the sting!

And this is what happens with such doomed sensualists as Keats was. What tortured him in death was the thought that he must leave his darling — and the actual look, touch, air, ways and presence of her, forever. “Vain,” as that inspired Lover, Emily Bronte, cries, “vain, unutterably vain, are ‘all the creeds’ that would console!” Tired of hearing “simple truth miscalled simplicity”; tired of all the weariness of life — from these we “would begone”— “save that to die we leave our love alone”!

But it is not only in the fatal danger of eternal separation from the flesh that has become to us more necessary than sun or moon, that *the tragedy of the senses lies.* It lies in the very intensity with which we have sifted, winnowed, tormented and refined these panthers of holy lust. Those who understand the poetry of Keats recognise that in the passion which burns him for the “heavenly quintessence” as Marlowe calls it, there is also the ghastly danger of reaction. The pitiless hands of Joy “are ever at his lips, bidding adieu” and “veiled melancholy has her ‘sovran shrine’ in the heart of all delight.”

This is the curse upon those who follow the *supreme Beauty* — that is to say, the Beauty that belongs, not to ideas and ideals, but to living forms. They are driven by the gross pressure of circumstance to forsake her, to leave her, to turn aside and eat husks with the swine!

It is the same with that supreme mystery of *words* themselves, put of which such an artist as this one was creates his spells and his sorcery. How, after tasting, drop by drop, that draught of “lingered sweetness long drawn-out” of his unequalled style, can we bear to fall back upon the jabbering and screeching, the howling and hissing, of the voices we have to listen to in common resort? Ah, child, child! Think carefully before you turn your candid-innocent eyes to the fatal entrance to these mysteries! It is better never to have known what the high, terrible loveliness of Her of Melos is than, *having seen her,* to pass the rest of our days with these copies, and prostitutions, and profanations, and parodies, “which mimic humanity so abominably”!

That is the worst of it. That is the sting of it. All the *great quests* in this world tempt us and destroy us, for, though they may touch our famished lips once and again before we perish, one thing they cannot do — one thing Beauty herself, the most sacred of all such quests, cannot do — and that is to make the arid intervals of our ordinary life tolerable, when we have to return to the common world, and the people and things that stand gaping in that world, like stupid, staring idols!

But what matter? Let us pay the penalty. Let us pay the price. *Is it not worth it?* Beauty! O divine, O cruel Mistress! Thee, thee we must worship still, and with thee the acolytes who bear thy censers! For the secret of life is to take every risk without fear; even the risk of finding one's self an exile, with "no shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming" in the land without memories, without altars, without Thee!

NIETZSCHE

IT IS NOT the hour in which to say much about Nietzsche. The dissentient voices are silent. The crowd has stopped howling. But a worse thing is happening to him, the thing of all others he dreaded most; — he is becoming "accepted" — The preachers are quoting him and the theologians are explaining him.

What he would himself pray for now are Enemies — fierce irreconcilable Enemies — but our age cannot produce such. It can only produce sneering disparagement; or frightened conventional approbation.

What one would like to say, at this particular juncture, is that *here,* or again *there,* this deadly antagonist of God missed his aim. But who can say that? He aimed too surely. No, he did not miss his aim. He smote whom he went out to smite. But one thing he could not smite; he could neither smite it, or unmask it, or "transvalue" it. I mean the Earth itself — the great, shrewd, wise, all-enduring Mother of us all — who knows so much, and remains so silent!

And sometimes one feels, walking some country road, with the smell of upturned sods and heavy leaf-mould in one's nostrils, that even Lucifer himself is not as deep or strong or wise as is patient furrowed earth and her blundering children. A rough earth-hint, a Rabelaisian ditty, a gross amazing jest, a chuckle of deep Satyric humour; — and the monstrous "thickness" of Life, its friendly aplomb and nonchalance, its grotesque irreverence, its shy shrewd common-sense, its tough fibres, and portentous indifference to "distinction"; tumbles us over in the mud — for all our "aloofness" — and roars over us, like a romping bull-calf!

The antidote to Nietzsche is not to be found in the company of the Saints. He was too much of a Saint himself for that. It is to be found in the company of Shakespearean clodhoppers, and Rabelaisian topers, and Cervantian serving-wenches. In fact, it is to be found, as with the antidotes for other noble excesses, in burying your face in rough moist earth; and grubbing for pig-nuts under the beech-trees. A summer's day in the woods with Audrey will put "Fatality" into its place and remove "the Recurrence of all things" to a very modest remoteness. And this is not a relinquishing of the secret of life. This is not a giving up of the supreme quest. It is an opening of another door; a letting in of a different air; a reversion to a more primitive level of the mystery.

The way to reduce the tyranny of this proud spirit to its proper proportion is not to talk about "Love" or "Morality" or "Orthodoxy," or "the strength of the vulgar herd" — it is simply to call up in one's mind the motley procession of gross, simple, quaint, *bulbous,* irrepressible objects — human and otherwise — whose mere existence makes it as impossible for Nietzsche to deal with the *massiveness* of Life, as it is impossible for anyone else to deal with it.

No, we shall not free ourselves from his intellectual predominance by taking refuge with the Saints. We shall not do this because he himself was essentially a Saint. A Saint and a Martyr! Is it for me now to prove that?

It is realized, I suppose, what the history of his spiritual contest actually was? It was a deliberate self-inflicted Crucifixion of the Christ in him, as an offering to the Apollo in him. Nietzsche was — that cannot be denied — an Intellectual Sadist; and his Intellectual Sadism took the form — as it can (he has himself taught us so) take many curious forms — of deliberately outraging his own most sensitive nerves. This is really what broke his reason, in the end. By a process of spiritual vivisection — the suffering of which one dare not conceive — he took his natural “sanctity,” and carved it, as a dish fit for the gods, until it assumed an Apollonian shape. We must visualize Nietzsche not only as the Philosopher with the Hammer; but as the Philosopher with the Chisel.

We must visualize him, with such a sculptor’s tool, standing in the presence of the crucified figure of himself; and altering one by one, its natural lineaments! Nietzsche’s own lacerated “intellectual nerves” were the vantage-ground of his spiritual vision. He could write “the Antichrist” because he had “killed.” in his own nature, “the thing he loved” It was for this reason that he had such a supernatural insight into the Christian temperament. It was for this reason that he could pour vitriol upon its “little secrets”; and hunt it to its last retreats.

Let none think he did not understand the grandeur, and the terrible intoxicating appeal, of the thing he fought. He understood these only too well. What vibrating sympathy — as for a kindred spirit — may be read between the lines of his attack on Pascal — Pascal, the supreme type of the Christian Philosopher!

It must be further realized — for after all what are words and phrases? — that it was really nothing but the “Christian conscience” in him that forced him on so desperately to kick against the pricks. It was the “Christian conscience” in him — has he not himself analysed the voluptuous cruelty of that? — which drove him to seek something — if possible — nobler, austerer, gayer, more innocently wicked, than Christianity!

It was not in the interests of Truth that he fought it. True Christian, as he was, at heart, he never cared greatly for Truth as Truth. It was in the interest of a Higher Ideal, a more exacting, less human Ideal, that he crushed it down. The Christian spirit, in him set him upon strangling the Christian spirit — and all in the interest of a madness of nobility, itself perforated with Christian conscience!

Was Nietzsche really Greek, compared with — Goethe, let us say? Not for a moment. It was in the desperation of his attempt to be so, that he seized upon Greek tragedy and made it dance to Christian cymbals! This is, let it be clearly understood, the hidden secret of his mania for Dionysus — Dionysus gave him his opportunity. In the worship of this god — also a wounded god, be it remarked; — he was able to satisfy his perverted craving for "ecstasy of laceration" under the shadow of another Name.

But after all — as Goethe says— "feeling is all in all; the name is sound and smoke." What he felt were Christian feelings, the feelings of a Mystic, a Visionary, a Flagellant. What matter by what name you call them? Christ? Dionysus? It is the secret creative passion of the human heart that sends them Both forth upon their warfaring.

Is any one simple enough to think that whatever Secret Cosmic Power melts into human ecstasy, it waits to be summoned by certain particular syllables? That this arbitrary strangling of the Christ in him never altogether ended, is proved by the words of those tragic messages he sent to Cosima Wagner from "the aristocratic city of Turin" when his tormented brain broke like a taut bow-string. Those messages resembled arrows of fire, shot into space; and on one was written the words "The Crucified" and on the other the word "Dionysus."

The grand and heart-breaking appeal of this lonely Victim of his own merciless scourge, does not depend, for its effect upon us, upon any of the particular "ideas" he announced. The idea of the "Eternal Recurrence of all things" — to take the most terrible — is clearly but another instance of his intellectual Sadism.

The worst thing that could happen to those innumerable Victims of Life, for whom he sought to kill his Pity, was that they should have to go through the same punishment again — not once or twice, but for an infinity of times — and it was just that that he, whose immense Pity for them took so long a killing, suddenly felt must be what *had* to happen — had to happen for no other reason than that it was *intolerable* that it should happen. Again, we may note, it was not "Truth" he sought, but ecstasy, and, in this case, the ecstasy of "accepting" the very worst kind of issue he could possibly imagine.

The idea of the Superman, too, is an idea that could only have entered the brain of one, pushed on to think, at the spear-head of his own cruelty. It is a great and terrible idea, sublime and devastating, this idea of the human race yielding place to *another race,* stronger, wiser, fairer, sterner, gayer, and more godlike! Especially noble and compelling is Nietzsche's constant insistence that the moment has come for men to take their Destiny out of the blind power of Evolution, and to guide it themselves, with a strong hand and a clear will, towards a *definite goal.*

The fact that this driving force, of cruelty to himself and, through himself, to humanity, scourged him on to so formidable an illumination of our path, is a proof how unwise it is to suppress any grand perversion. Such motive-forces should be used, as Nietzsche used his, for purposes of intellectual insight — not simply trampled upon as "evil."

Whether our poor human race ever will surpass itself, as he demands, and rise to something psychologically different, "may admit a wide solution." It is not an unscientific idea. It is not an irreligious idea. It has all the dreams of the Prophets behind it. But — who can tell? It is quite as possible that the spirit of destruction in us will wantonly ruin this great Chance as that we shall seize upon it. Man has many other impulses besides the impulse of creation. Perhaps he will never be seduced into even *desiring* such a goal, far less “willing” it over long spaces of time.

The curious “optimism” of Nietzsche, by means of which he sought to force himself into a mood of such Dionysian ecstasy as to be able not only to endure Fate, but to “love” it, is yet another example of the subterranean “conscience” of Christianity working in him. In the presence of such a mood, and, indeed, in the presence of nearly all his great dramatic Passions, it is Nietzsche, and not his humorous critic, who is “with Our Lord” in Gethsemane. One does not drink of the cup of Fate “lovingly” — without bloody sweat!

The interesting thing to observe about Nietzsche’s ideas is that the wider they depart from what was essentially Christian in him, the less convincing they grow. One cannot help feeling he recognised this himself — and, infuriated by it, strode further and further into the Jungle.

For instance, one cannot suppose that the cult of “the Blonde Beast,” and the cult of Caesar Borgia, were anything but mad reprisals, directed towards himself, in savage revenge; blind blows struck at random against the lofty and penetrating spirituality in which he had indulged when writing Zarathustra.

But there is a point here of some curious psychological interest, to which we are attracted by a certain treacherous red glow upon his words when he speaks of this sultry, crouching, spotted, tail-lashing mood. Why is it precisely this Borgian type, this Renaissance type, among the world’s various Lust-Darlings that he chooses to select?

Why does he not oppose, to the Christian Ideal, *its true opposite* — the naive, artless, faun-like, pagan “child of Nature,” who has never known “remorse”?

The answer is clear. He chooses the Borgian type — the type which is *not* free from "superstition," which is always wrestling with "superstition" — the type that sprinkles holy water upon its dagger — because such a type is the inevitable *product* of the presence among us of the Christian Ideal. The Christian Ideal has made a certain complication of "wickedness" possible, which were impossible without it.

If Nietzsche had not been obsessed by Christianity he would have selected as his "Ideal Blond Beast" that perfectly naive, "unfallen" man, of imperturbable nerves, of classic nerves, such as Life abounded in *before Christ came.* He makes, indeed, a pathetic struggle to idealize this type, rather than the "conscience-stricken" Renaissance one. He lets his fingers stray more than once over the red-stained limbs of real sun-burnt "Pompeian" heathenism. He turns feverishly the wanton pages of Petronius to reach this unsullied, "imperial" Animal. But he cannot reach him. He never could reach him. The "consecrated" dagger of the Borgia gleams and scintillates between. Even, therefore, in the sort of "wickedness" he evokes, Nietzsche remains Christ-ridden and Christ-mastered. The matter is made still more certain when one steals up silently, so to speak, behind the passages where he speaks of Napoleon.

If a reader has the remotest psychological clairvoyance, he will be aware of a certain strain and tug, a certain mental jerk and contortion, whenever Napoleon is introduced.

Yes, he could engrave that fatal "N" over his mantlepiece at Weimar — to do so was the last solace of his wounded brain. But he was never really at ease with the great Emperor. Never did he — in pure, direct, classic recognition — greet him as "the Demonic Master of Destiny," with the Goethean salutation! Had Goethe and Napoleon, in their notorious encounter, wherein they recognized one another as "Men," been interrupted by the entrance of Nietzsche, do you suppose they would not have both stiffened and recoiled, recognizing their natural Enemy, the Cross-bearer, the Christ-obsessed one, *“Il Santo”?*

The difference between the two types can best be felt by recalling the way in which Napoleon and Goethe treated the Christ-Legend, compared with Nietzsche’s desperate wrestling.

Napoleon uses “Religion” calmly and deliberately for his High Policy and Worldly Statecraft.

Goethe uses “Religion” calmly and deliberately for his aesthetic culture and his mystic symbolism. Neither of them are, for one moment, touched by it themselves.

They are born Pagans; and when this noble, tortured soul flings himself at their feet in feverish worship, one feels that, out of their Homeric Hades, they look wonderingly, *unintelligently,* at him.

One of the most laughable things in the world is the attempt some simple critics make to turn Nietzsche into an ordinary “Honest Infidel,” a kind of poetic Bradlaugh-Ingersoll, offering to humanity the profound discovery that there is no God, and that when we die, we die! The absurdity is made complete when this naive, revivified “Pagan” is made to assure us — us, “the average sensual men” — that the path of wisdom lies, not in resisting, but in yielding to *temptation;* not in spiritual wrestling to “transform” ourselves, but in the brute courage “to be ourselves,” and “live out our type”!

The good folk who play with such a childish illusion would do well to scan over again their “pagan” hero’s branding and flaying of the philosopher Strauss. Strauss was precisely what they try to turn Nietzsche into — a rancorous, insensitive, bullying, materialistic Heathen, making sport of “the Cross” and drinking Laager Beer. Nietzsche loathed Laager Beer, and “the Cross” *burnt* day and night in his tormented, Dionysian soul.

It occurs to me sometimes that if there had been no “German Reformation” and no overrunning of the world by vulgar evangelical Protestantism, it would be still possible to bring into the circle of the Church’s development the lofty and desperate Passion of this “saintly” Antichrist. After all, why should we concede that those agitated, voluptuous, secret devices to get “saved,” those super-subtle, subliminal tricks of the weak and the perverted to be *revenged* on the beautiful and the brave, which Nietzsche laments were ever “bound up” in the same cover as the “Old Testament.” must remain forever the dominant “note” in the Faith of Christendom? While the Successor of Caesar, while the Pontifex Maximus of our “Spiritual Rome,” still represents the Infallible Element in the world’s nobler religious Taste, there is yet, perhaps, a remote chance that this vulgarizing of “the mountain summits” this degrading of our Planet’s Passion-Play, may be cauterized and eliminated.

And yet it is not likely! Much more likely is it that the real “secret” of Jesus, together with the real “secret” of Nietzsche — and they do not differ in essence, for all his Borgias! — will remain the sweet and deadly “fatalities” they have always been — for the few, the few, the few who understand them!

For the final impression one carries away, after reading Nietzsche, is the impression of “distinction,” of remoteness from “vulgar brutality,” from “sensual baseness,” from the clumsy compromises of the world. It may not last, this Zarathustrian mood. It lasts with some of us an hour; with some of us a day — with a few of us a handful of years! But while it lasts, it is a rare and high experience. As from an ice-bound promontory stretching out over the abysmal gulfs, we dare to look Creation and Annihilation, for once, full in the face.

Liberated from our own lusts, or using them, contemptuously and indifferently, as engines of vision, we see the life and death of worlds, the slow, long-drawn, moon-lit wave of Universe-drowning Nothingness.

We see the races of men, falling, rising, stumbling, advancing and receding — and we see the *new race* — in the hours of the “Great Noon-tide” — fulfilling its Prophet’s hope — and we see *the end of that also!* And seeing all this, because the air of our watch-tower is so ice-cold and keen, we neither tremble or blench. The world is deep, and deep is pain, and deeper than pain is joy. We have seen Creation, and have exulted in it. We have seen Destruction, and have exulted in it. We have watched the long, quivering Shadow of Life shudder across our glacial promontory, and we have watched that drowning tide receive it. It is enough. It is well. We have had our Vision. We know now what gives to the gods “that look” their faces wear.

It now only remains for us to return to the familiar human Stage; to the “Gala-Night, within the lonesome latter years,” and be gay, and “hard,” and “superficial”!

That ice-bound Promontory into the Truth of Things has only known one Explorer whose “Eloi, Eloi Lama Sabachthani” was not the death-cry of his Pity. And that Explorer — did we only dream of his Return?

THOMAS HARDY

With a name suggestive of the purest English origin, Mr. Hardy has become identified with that portion of England where the various race-deposits in our national “strata” are most dear and defined. In Wessex, the traditions of Saxon and Celt, Norman and Dane, Roman and Iberian, have grown side by side into the soil, and all the villages and towns, all the hills and streams, of this country have preserved the rumour of what they have seen.

In Celtic legend the country of the West Saxons is marvellously rich. Camelot and the Island of Avalon greet one another across the Somersetshire vale. And Dorsetshire, Hardy’s immediate home, adds the Roman traditions of Casterbridge to tragic memories of King Lear. Tribe by tribe, race by race, as they come and go, leaving their monuments and their names behind, Mr. Hardy broods over them, noting their survivals, their lingering footprints, their long decline.

In his well-loved Dorchester we find him pondering, like one of his own spirits of Pity and Irony, while the moonlight shines on the haunted amphitheatre where the Romans held their games. He devotes much care to noting all those little “omens by the way” that make a journey along the great highways of Wessex so full of imaginative suggestion.

It is the history of the human race itself that holds him with a mesmeric spell, as century after century it unrolls its acts and scenes, under the indifferent stars. The continuity of life! The long, piteous “ascent of man,” from those queer fossils in the Portland Quarries — to what we see today, so palpable, so real! And yet for all his tragic pity, Mr. Hardy is a sly and whimsical chronicler. He does not allow one point of the little jest the gods play on us — the little long-drawn-out jest — to lose its sting. With something of a goblin-like alertness he skips here and there, watching those strange scene shifters at their work. The dual stops of Mr. Hardy's country pipe are cut from the same reed. With the one he challenges the Immortals on behalf of humanity; with the other he plays such a shrewd Priapian tune that all the Satyrs dance.

I sometimes think that only those born and bred in the country can do justice to this great writer. That dual pipe of his is bewildering to city people. They over emphasize the "magnanimity" of his art, or they over emphasize its "miching-mallecho." They do not catch the secret of that mingled strain. The same type of cultured "foreigner" is puzzled by Mr. Hardy's self-possession. He ought to commit himself more completely, or he ought not to have committed himself at all! There is something that looks to them — so they are tempted to express it — like the cloven hoof of a most Satyrish cunning, about his attitude to certain things. That little caustic by-play, for instance, with which he girds at the established order, never denouncing it wholesale like Shelley, or accepting it wholesale like Wordsworth — and always with a tang, a dash of gall and wormwood, an impish malice.

The truth is, there are two spirits in Mr. Hardy, one infinitely sorrowful and tender, the other whimsical, elfish and malign.

The first spirit rises up in stern Promethean revolt against the decrees of Fate. The second spirit deliberately allies itself in wanton, bitter glee, with the humorous provocation of humanity, by the cruel Powers of the Air. The psychology of all this is not hard to unravel. The same abnormal sensitiveness that makes him pity the victims of destiny makes him also not unaware of what may be sweet to the palate of the gods in such "merry jests.” These two tendencies seem to have grown upon him as years went on and to have become more and more pronounced. Often, with artists, the reverse thing happens. Every human being has his own secretive reaction, his own furtive recoil, from the queer trap we are all in, — his little private method of retaliation. But many writers are most unscrupulously themselves when they are young. The changes and chances of this mortal life mellow them into a more neutral tint. Their revenge upon life grows less personal and more objective as they get older. They become balanced and resigned. They attain “the wisdom of Sophocles.”

The opposite of this has been the history of Mr. Hardy’s progression. He began with quite harmless rustic realism, fanciful and quaint. Then came his masterpieces wherein the power and grandeur of a great artist’s inspiration fused everything into harmony. At the last, in his third period, we have the exaggeration of all that is most personal in his emotion intensified to the extreme limit.

It is absurd to turn away from these books, books like Jude the Obscure and the Well-Beloved. If Mr. Hardy had not had such sardonic emotions, such desire to “hit back” at the great “opposeless wills,” and such Goblin-like glee at the tricks they play us, he would never have been able to write “Tess.” Against the ways of God to this sweet girl he raises a hand of terrible revolt, but it is with more than human “pity” that he lays her down on the Altar of Sacrifice.

But, after all, it is in the supreme passages of pure imaginative grandeur that Mr. Hardy is greatest. Here he is “with Shakespeare” and we forget both Titan and Goblin. How hard it is exactly to put into words what this “imaginative grandeur” consists of! It is, at any rate, an intensification of our general consciousness of the Life-Drama as a whole, but this, under a poetic, rather than a scientific, light, and yet with the scientific facts, —

they also not without their dramatic significance — indicated and allowed for. It is a clarifying of our mental vision and a heightening of our sensual apprehension. It is a certain withdrawing from the mere personal pull of our own fate into a more rarified air, where the tragic beauty of life falls into perspective, and, beholding the world in a clear mirror, we escape for a moment from "the will to live."

At such times it is as though, "taken up upon a high mountain, we see, without desire and without despair, the kingdoms of the world and the glories of them." Then it is that we feel the very wind of the earth's revolution, and the circling hours touch us with a palpable hand.

And the turmoil of the world grown so distant, it is then that we feel at once the greatness of humanity and the littleness of what it strives for. We are seized with a shuddering tenderness for Man. This bewildered animal — wrestling in darkness with he knows not what.

And gazing long and long into this mirror, the poignancy of what we behold is strangely softened. After all, it is something, whatever becomes of us, to have been conscious of all this. It is something to have outwatched Arcturus, and felt "the sweet influences" of the Pleiades. Congruous with such a mood is the manner in which, while Mr. Hardy opposes himself to Christianity, he cannot forget it. He cannot "cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart." It troubles and vexes him. It haunts him. And his work both gains and suffers. He flings gibe after gibe at "God," but across his anger falls the shadow of the Cross. How should it not be so? "All may be permitted," but one must not add a feather's weight to the wheel that breaks our "little ones."

It is this that separates Mr. Hardy's work from so much modern fiction that is clever and "philosophical" but does not satisfy one's imagination. All things with Mr. Hardy — even the facts of geology and chemistry — are treated with that imaginative clairvoyance that gives them their place in the human comedy. And is not Christianity itself one of these facts? How amazing that such a thing should have appeared at all upon the earth! When one reads Meredith, with his brilliant intellectual cleverness, one finds Christianity "taken for granted," and dismissed as hardly relevant to modern topics.

But Mr. Hardy is too pagan, in the true sense, too fascinated by the poetry of life and the essential ritual of life, to dismiss any great religion in this way. The thing is always with him, just as the Gothic Tower of St. Peter's Church in Casterbridge is always with him. He may burst into impish fury with its doctrines, but, like one of those queer demons who peep out from such consecrated places, yet never leave them, his imagination requires that atmosphere. For the same reason, in spite of his intellectual realization of the mechanical processes of Fate, their engine-like dumbness and blindness, he is always being driven to *personify* these ultimate powers; to personify them, or *it,* as something that takes infernal satisfaction in fooling its luckless creations; in provoking them and scourging them to madness.

Mr. Hardy's ultimate thought is that the universe is blind and unconscious; that it knows not what it does. But, standing among the graves of those Wessex churchyards, or watching the twisted threads of perverse destiny that plague those hapless hearts under a thousand village roofs, it is impossible for him not to long to "strike back" at this damned System of Things that alone is responsible. And how can one "strike back" unless one converts unconscious machinery into a wanton Providence? Where Mr. Hardy is so incomparably greater than Meredith and all his modern followers is that in these Wessex novels there is none of that intolerable “ethical discussion” which obscures “the old essential candours” of the human situation.

The reaction of men and women upon one another, in the presence of the solemn and the mocking elements; this will outlast all social readjustments and all ethical reforms.

While the sun shines and the moon draws the tides, men and women will ache from jealousy, and the lover will not be the beloved! Long after a quite new set of “interesting modern ideas” have replaced the present, children will break the hearts of their parents, and parents will break the hearts of their children. Mr. Hardy is indignant enough over the ridiculous conventions of Society, but he knows that, at the bottom, what we suffer from is “the dust out of which we are made;” the eternal illusion and disillusion which must drive us on and “take us off” until the planet’s last hour.

Mr. Hardy’s style, at its best, has an imaginative suggestiveness which approaches, though it may not quite reach, the indescribable touch of the Shakespearean tragedies. There is also a quality in it peculiar to himself — threatening and silencing; a thunderous suppression, a formidable reserve, an iron tenacity. Sometimes, again, one is reminded of the ancient Roman poets, and not unfrequently, too, of the rhythmic incantations of Sir Thomas Browne, that majestic and perverted Latinist.

The description, for instance, of Egdon Heath, at the beginning of the Return of the Native, has a dusky architectural grandeur that is like the Portico of an Egyptian Temple. The same thing may be noted of that sudden apparition of Stonehenge, as Tess and Angel stumble upon it in their flight through the darkness.

One thinks of the words of William Blake: “He who does not love Form more than Colour is a coward.” For it is, above all, Form that appeals to Mr.

Hardy. The iron plough of his implacable style drives pitilessly through the soft flesh of the earth until it reaches the architectural sub-structure. Whoever tries to visualize any scene out of the Wessex Novels will be forced to see the figures of the persons concerned "silhouetted" against a formidable skyline. One sees them, these poor impassioned ones, moving in tragic procession along the edge of the world, and, when the procession is over, darkness re-establishes itself. The quality that makes Mr. Hardy's manner such a refuge from the levities and gravities of the "reforming writers" is a quality that springs from the soil. The soil has a gift of "proportion" like nothing else. Things fall into due perspective on Egdon Heath, and among the water-meadows of Blackmoor life is felt as the tribes of men have felt it since the beginning.

The modern tendency is to mock at sexual passion and grow grave over social and artistic problems. Mr. Hardy eliminates social and artistic problems and "takes nothing seriously" — not even "God" — except the love and the hate of men and women, and the natural elements that are their accomplices. It is for this lack in them, this uneasy levity over the one thing that really counts, that it is so hard to read many humorous and arresting modern writers, except in railway trains and cafes. They have thought it clever to dispossess the passion of our poor heart of its essential poetry. They have not understood that man would sooner suffer the bitterness of death than be deprived of his *right* to suffer the bitterness of love.

It must be, I suppose, that these flippant triflers are so optimistic about their reforms and their ethical ideals and their sanitary projects that to them such things as how the sun rises over Shaston and sinks over Budmouth; such things as what Eustacia felt when she walked, "talking to herself," across the blasted heath; such things as the mood of Henchard when he cursed the day of his birth, are mere accidents and irrelevancies, by no means germane to the matter.

Well, perhaps they are wise to be so hopeful. But for the rest of us, for whom the world does not seem likely to “improve” so fast, it is an unspeakable relief that there should be at least one writer left interested in the things that interested Sophocles and Shakespeare, and possessed of a style that does not, remembering the work of such hands, put our generation altogether to shame.

WALTER PATER

WHAT ARE THE qualities that make this shy and furtive Recluse, this Wanderer in the shadow, the greatest of critics? Imagination, in the first place, and then that rare, unusual, divine gift of limitless Reverence for the Human Senses. Imagination has a two-fold power. It visualizes and it creates. With clairvoyant ubiquity it floats and flows into the most recondite recesses, the most reluctant sanctuaries, of other men's souls. With clear-cut, architectural volition it builds up its own Byzantium, out of the quarried debris of all the centuries.

One loves to think of Pater leaving that Olney country, where he "hated" to hear anything more about "the Poet Cowper," and nursing his weird boy-fancies in the security of the Canterbury cloisters. The most passionate and dedicated spirit he — to sulk, and dream, and hide, and love, and "watch the others playing," in that quiet retreat — since the great soul of Christopher Marlowe flamed up there into consciousness!

And then Oxford. And it is meet and right, at such a point as this, to lay our offering, modest, secret, shy — a shadow, a nothing — at the feet of this gracious Alma Mater; "who needs not June for Beauty's heightening!" One revolts against her sometimes. The charm is too exclusive, too withdrawn. And something — what shall I say? — of ironic, supercilious disillusion makes her forehead weary, and her eyelids heavy. But after all, to what exquisite children, like rare, exotic flowers, she has the power to give birth! But did you know, you for whom the syllables "Oxford" are an Incantation, that to the yet more subtle, yet more withdrawn, and yet more elaborate soul of Walter Pater, Oxford Herself appeared, as time went on, a little vulgar and silly?

Indeed, he fled from her, and took refuge-sometimes with his sisters, for, like Charles Lamb, Pater was "Conventual" in his taste — and sometimes with the "original" of Marius the Epicurean. But what matter where he fled — he who always followed the "shady side" of the road? He has not only managed to escape, himself, with all his "Boxes of Alabaster," into the sanctuary of the Ivory Tower, that even Oxford cannot reach, but he has carried us thither with him.

And there, from the opal-clouded windows of that high place, he shows us still the secret kingdoms of art and philosophy and life, and the remotest glories of them. We see them all — from those windows — a little lovelier, a little rarer, a little more "selective," than, perchance, they really are. But what matter? What does one expect when one looks through opal-clouded windows? And, after all, those are the kinds of windows from which it is best to look at the dazzling limbs of the immortal gods!

Not but what, sometimes, he permits us to throw those "magic casements" wide open. And then, in how lucid an air, in how clean and fresh a morning of reality, those pure forms and godlike figures stand out, their naked feet in the cold, clear dew!

For one must note two things about Walter Pater. He is able to throw the glimmering mantle of his own elaborate *sophistry of the senses* over comparatively fleeting, unarresting objects. And he is able to compel us to follow, line by line, curve by curve, contour by contour, the very palpable body and presence of the Beauty that passeth not away.

In plainer words, he is a great and exact scholar — laborious, patient, indefatigable, reserved; and, at the same time, a Protean Wizard, breathing forbidden life into the Tyrian-stained writhings of many an enchanted

Lamia! At a thousand points he is the only modern literary figure who draws us towards him with the old Leonardian, Goethean spell. For, like Goethe and Da Vinci, he is never far from those eternal "Partings of the Ways." which alone make life interesting.

He is, for instance, more profoundly drenched, dyed, and endued in "Christian Mythology" than any mortal writer, short of the Saints themselves. He is more native to the pure Hellenic air than any since Walter Savage Landor. And he is more subtle, in his understanding of "German Philosophy" as opposed to "Celtic Romance," than all — outside the most inner circles — since Hegel — or Heine! The greedy, capricious "Uranian Babyishness" of his pupil Oscar, with its peevish clutching at all soft and provocative and glimmering things, is mere child's play, compared with the deep, dark Vampirism with which this furtive Hermit drains the scarlet blood of the Vestals of every Sanctuary.

How little the conventional critics have understood this master of their own craft! What hopeless people have "rushed in" to interpret this super-subtle Interpreter! Mr. Gosse has, however, done one thing for us. Somewhere, somehow, he once drew a picture of Walter Pater "gambolling," in the moonlight, on the velvet lawn of his own secluded Oxford garden, like a satin-pawed Wombat! I always think of that picture. It is a pleasanter one than that of Mark Pattison, running round his Gooseberry bushes, after great screaming girls. But they are both touching sketches, and, no doubt, very indicative of Life beneath the shadow of the Bodleian.

Why have the professional philosophers — ever since that Master of Baliol who used to spend his time boring holes in the Ship that carried him — "fought shy" of Pater's Philosophy? For a sufficient reason! Because, like Protagoras the Sophist, and like Aristippus the Cyrenean, he has undermined Metaphysic, *by means of Metaphysic.*

For Walter Pater — is that clearly understood? — was an adept, long before Nietzsche's campaign began, at showing the human desire, the human craving, the human ferocity, the human spite, hidden behind the mask of "Pure Reason."

He treats every great System of Metaphysic as a great work of Art — with a very human, often a too human, artizan behind it — a work of Art which we have a perfect right to appropriate, to enjoy, to look at the world through, and then *to pass on!*

Every Philosophy has its "secret," according to Pater, its "formula," its lost Atlantis. Well! It is for us to search it out; to take colour from its dim-lit under-world; to feed upon its wavering Sea-Lotus — and then, returning to the surface, to swim away, in search of other diving-grounds!

No Philosopher except Pater has dared to carry Esoteric Eclecticism quite as far as this. And, be it understood, he is no frivolous Dilettante. This draining the secret wine of the great embalmed Sarcophagi of Thought is his Life-Lure, his secret madness, his grand obsession. Walter Pater approaches a System of Metaphysical Thought as a somewhat furtive amorist might approach a sleeping Nymph. On light-stepping, crafty feet he approaches — and the hand with which he twitches the sleeve of the sleeper is as soft as the flutter of a moth's wing. "I do not like," he said once, "to be called a Hedonist. It gives such a queer impression to people who don't know Greek."

Ardent young people sometimes come to me, when in the wayfaring of my patient academic duties, I speak about Pater, and ask me point-blank to tell them what his "view-point" — so they are pleased to express it— "really and truly" was. Sweet reader, do you know the pain of these "really and truly” questions? I try to answer in some blundering manner like this. I try to explain how, for him, nothing in this world was certain or fixed; how everything “flowed away”; how all that we touch or taste or see, vanished, changed its nature, became something else, even as we vanish, as the years go on, and change our nature and become something else. I try to explain how, for him, we are ourselves but the meeting-places of strange forces, journeying at large and by chance through a shifting world; how we, too, these very meeting-places of such forces, waver and flicker and shift and are transformed, like dreams within dreams!

I try to explain how, this being so, and nothing being “written in the sky” it is our right to test every single experience that life can offer, short of those which would make things bitterer, harder, narrower, less easy, for “the other person.”

And if my Innocents ask — as they do sometimes — Innocents are like that!— “Why must we consider the other person?” I answer — for no *reason,* and under no threat or danger or categorical imperative; but simply because we have grown to be the sort of animal, the sort of queer fish, who *cannot* do the things “that he would”! It is not, I try to indicate, a case of conscience; it is a matter of taste; and there are certain things, when it comes to that point, which an animal possessed of such taste *cannot do,* even though he desire to do them. And one of these things is to hurt the other trapped creatures who happen to have been caught in the same “gin” as ourself.

With regard to Art and Literature, Pater has the same method as with regard to Philosophy. Everything in a world so fluid is obviously relative. It is ridiculous to dream that there is any absolute standard — even of beauty itself. Those high and immutable Principles of The Good and True are as much an illusion as any other human dream. There are no such principles.

Beauty is a Daughter of Life, and is forever changing as Life changes, and as we change who have to live. The lonely, tragic faith of certain great souls in that high, cold "Mathematic" of the Universe, the rhythm of whose ordered Harmony is the Music of the Spheres, is a Faith that may well inspire and solemnize us; it cannot persuade or convince us.

Beauty is not Mathematical; it is — if one may say so — physiological and psychological, and though that austere severity of pure line and pure color, the impersonal technique of art, has a seemingly pre-ordained power of appeal, in reality it is far less immutable than it appears, and has far more in it of the arbitrariness of life and growth and change than we sometimes would care to allow.

Walter Pater's magnetic spell is never more wonder-working than when he deals with the *materials* which artists use. And most of all, with *words,* that material which is so stained and corrupted and outraged — and yet which is the richest of all. But how tenderly he always speaks of materials! What a limitless reverence he has for the subtle reciprocity and correspondence between the human senses and what — so thrillingly, so dangerously, sometimes! — they apprehend. Wood and clay and marble and bronze and gold and silver; these — and the fabrics of cunning looms and deft, insatiable fingers — he handles with the reverence of a priest touching consecrated elements.

Not only the great main rivers of art's tradition, but the little streams and tributaries, he loves. Perhaps he loves some of these best of all, for the pathways to their exquisite margins are less trodden than the others, and one is more apt to find one's self alone there.

Perhaps of all his essays, three might be selected as most characteristic of certain recurrent moods. That one on Denys L'Auxerrois, where the sweet, perilous legend of the exiled god — has he really been ever far from us, that treacherous Son of scorched white Flesh? — leads us so far, so strangely far. That one on Watteau, the Prince of Court Painters, where his passion for things faded and withdrawn reaches its climax. For Pater, like Antoine, is one of those always ready to turn a little wearily from the pressure of their own too vivid days, and seek a wistful escape in some fantastic valley of dreams. Watteau's "happy valley" is, indeed, sadder than our most crowded hours — how should it not be, when it is no "valley" at all, but the melancholy cypress-alleys of Versailles? — but, though sadder, it is so fine; so fine and rare and gay!

And along the borders of it and under its clipped trees, by its fountains and ghostly lawns, still, still can one catch in the twilight the shimmer of the dancing feet of the Phantom-Pierrot, and the despair in his smile! For him, too — for Gilles the Mummer — as for Antoine Watteau and Walter Pater, the wistfulness of such places is not inconsistent with their levity. Soon the music must stop. Soon it must be only a garden, "only a garden of Lenotre, correct, ridiculous and charming." For the lips of the Despair of Pierrot cannot always touch the lips of the Mockery of Columbine; in the end, the Ultimate Futility must turn them both to stone!

And, finally, that Essay upon Leonardo, with the lines "we say to our friend" about Her who is "older than the rocks on which she sits."

What really makes Pater so great, so wise, so salutary a writer is his perpetual insistence on the criminal, mad foolishness of letting slip, in silly chatter and vapid preaching, the unreturning days of our youth! "Carry, O Youths and Maidens," he seems to say. "Carry with infinite devotion that vase of many odours which is your Life on Earth. Spill as little as may be of its unvalued wine; let no rain-drops or bryony-dew, or floating gossamer-seed, fall into it and spoil its taste. For it is all you have, and it cannot last long!"

He is a great writer, because from him we may learn the difficult and subtle art of drinking the cup of life *so as to taste every drop.*

One could expatiate long upon his attitude to Christianity — his final desire to be “ordained Priest” — his alternating pieties and incredulities. His deliberate clinging to what “experience” brought him, as the final test of “truth,” made it quite easy for him to dip his arms deep into the Holy Well. He might not find the Graal; he might see nothing there but his own shadow! What matter? The Well itself was so cool and chaste and dark and cavern-like, that it was worth long summer days spent dreaming over it — dreaming over it in the cloistered garden, out of the dust and the folly and the grossness of the brutal World, that knows neither Apollo or Christ!

DOSTOIEVSKY

THE FIRST DISCOVERY of Dostoievsky is, for a spiritual adventurer, such a shock as is not likely to occur again. One is staggered, bewildered, insulted. It is like a hit in the face, at the end of a dark passage; a hit in the face, followed by the fumbling of strange hands at one's throat. Everything that has been *forbidden,* by discretion, by caution, by self-respect, by atavistic inhibition, seems suddenly to leap up out of the darkness and seize upon one with fierce, indescribable caresses.

All that one has *felt,* but has not dared to think; all that one has *thought,* but has not dared to say; all the terrible whispers from the unspeakable margins; all the horrible wreckage and silt from the unsounded depths, float in upon us and overpower us.

There is so much that the other writers, even the realists among them, cannot, *will* not, say. There is so much that the normal self-preservative instincts in ourselves do not *want* said. But this Russian has no mercy. Such exposures humiliate and disgrace? What matter? It is well that we should be so laid bare. Such revelations provoke and embarrass? What matter? We *require* embarrassment. The quicksilver of human consciousness must have no closed chinks, no blind alleys. It must be compelled to reform its microcosmic reflections, even *down there,* where it has to be driven by force. It is extraordinary how superficial even the great writers are; how lacking in the Mole's claws, in the Woodpecker's beak! They seem labouring beneath some pathetic vow, exacted by the Demons of our Fate, under terrible threats, only to reveal what will serve *their* purpose! This applies as much to the Realists, with their traditional animal chemistry, as to the Idealists, with their traditional ethical dynamics. It applies, above all, to the interpreters of Sex, who, in their conventional grossness, as well as in their conventional discretion, bury such Ostrich heads in the sand!

The lucky-unlucky individual whose path this formidable writer crosses, quickly begins, as he reads page by page, to cry out in startled wonder, in terrified protest. This rending Night Hawk reveals just what one hugged most closely of all — just what one did *not* confess! Such a person, reading this desperate "clairvoyant," finds himself laughing and chuckling, under his breath, and *against his willy* over the little things there betrayed. It is not any more a case of enjoying with distant aesthetic amusement the general human spectacle. He himself is the one scratched and pricked. He himself is the one so abominably tickled. That is why women — who have so mad a craving for the personal in everything — are especially caught by Dostoievsky. He knows them so fatally well. Those startling, contradictory feelings that make their capricious bosoms rise and fall, those feelings that they find so difficult themselves to understand, he drags them all into the light. The kind of delicate cruelty, that in others becomes something worse, refines itself in his magnetic genius into a cruelty of insight that knows no scruple. Nor is the reluctance of these gentle beings, so thrillingly betrayed, to yield their passionate secrets, unaccompanied by pleasure. They suffer to feel themselves so exposed, but it is an exquisite suffering. It may, indeed, be said that the strange throb of satisfaction with which we human beings feel ourselves *at the bottom,* where we cannot fall lower, or be further unmasked, is never more frequent than when we read Dostoievsky. And that is largely because he alone understands *the depravity of the spirit,* as well as of the flesh, and the amazing wantonness, whereby the human will does not always seek its own realization and well-being, but quite as often its own laceration and destruction.

Dostoievsky has, indeed, a demonic power of revelation in regard to that twilight of the human brain, where lurk the phantoms of unsatisfied desire, and where unspoken lusts stretch forth pitiable hands. There are certain human experiences which the conventional machinery of ordinary novel-writing lacks all language to express. He expresses these, not in tedious analysis, but in the living cries, and gasps, and gestures, and fumblings and silences of his characters themselves. Who, like Dostoievsky, has shown the tragic association of passionate love with passionate hate, which is so frequent a human experience?

This monstrous *hate-love,* caressing the bruises itself has made, and shooting forth a forked viper-tongue of cruelty from between the lips that kiss — has anyone but he held it fast, through all its Protean changes? I suppose, when one really thinks of it, at the bottom of every one of us lurk two *primary emotions* — vanity and fear. It is in their knowledge of the aberrations of these, of the mad contortions that these lead to, that the other writers seem so especially simple-minded. Over and over again, in reading Dostoievsky, one is positively seized by the throat with astonishment at the man's insight into the labyrinthian retreats of our secret pride — and of our secret fear. His characters, at certain moments, seem actually to spit gall and wormwood, as they tug at the quivering roots of one another's self-esteem. But this fermenting venom, this seething scum, is only the expression of what goes on below the surface every day, in every country.

Dostoievsky's Russians are cruelly voluble, but their volubility taps the evil humour of the universal human disease. Their thoughts are *our* thoughts, their obsessions, *our* obsessions. Let no one think, in his vain security, that he has a right to say: "I have no part in this morbidity. I am different from these poor madmen."

The curious nervous relief we experience as we read these books is alone a sufficient vindication. They relieve us, as well as trouble us, because in these pages we all confess what we have never confessed to anyone. Our self-love is outraged, but outraged with that strange accompaniment of thrilling pleasure that means an expiation paid, a burden lightened. Use the word "degenerate" if you will. But in this sense we are all "degenerates" for thus and not otherwise is woven the stuff whereof men are made.

Certainly the Russian soul has its peculiarities, and these peculiarities we feel in Dostoievsky as nowhere else. He, not Tolstoi or Turgenieff, is the typical Slav writer. But the chief peculiarity of the Russian soul is that it is not ashamed to express what all men feel. And this is why Dostoievsky is not only a Russian writer but a universal writer. From the French point of view he may seem wanting in lucidity and irony; from the English point of view he may seem antinomian and non-moral. But he has one advantage over both. He approaches the ultimate mystery as no Western writer, except, perhaps, Shakespeare and Goethe, has ever approached it. He writes with human nerves upon parchment made of human tissue, and "abyssum evocat abyssum," from the darkness wherein he moves.

Among other things, Dostoievsky's insight is proved by the profound separation he indicates between "morality" and "religion." To many of us it comes with something of a shock to find harlots and murderers and robbers and drunkards and seducers and idiots expressing genuine and passionate religious faith, and discussing with desperate interest religious questions. But it is *our* psychology that is shallow and inhuman, not his, and the presence of real religious feeling in a nature obsessed with the maddest lusts is a phenomenon of universal experience. It may, indeed, be said that what is most characteristically Russian in his point of view — he has told us so himself — is the substitution of what might be called "sanctity" for what is usually termed “morality,” as an ideal of life. The “Christianity” of which Dostoievsky has the key is nothing if not an ecstatic invasion of regions where ordinary moral laws, based upon prudence and self-preservation, disappear, and give place to something else. The secret of it, beyond repentance and remorse, lies in the transforming power of “love;” lies, in fact, in “vision” purged by pity and terror; but its precise nature is rather to be felt than described.

It is in connection with this Christianity of his, a Christianity completely different from what we are accustomed to, that we find the explanation of his extraordinary interest in the “weak” as opposed to the “strong.” The association between Christianity and a certain masterful, moral, self-assertive energy, such as we feel the presence of in England and America, might well tend to make it difficult for us to understand his meaning. It is precisely this sort of thing that makes it difficult for us to understand Russia and the Russian religion.

But as one reads Dostoievsky it is impossible to escape a suspicion that we Western nations have as yet only touched the fringe of what the Christian Faith is capable of, whether considered as a cosmic secret or as a Nepenthe for human suffering.

He saw, with clairvoyant distinctness, how large a part of the impetus of life’s movement proceeds from the mad struggle, always going on, between the strong and the weak. It was his emphasis upon this struggle that helped Nietzsche to those withering exposures of “the tyranny of the weak” which cleared the path for his terrific transvaluations. It was Dostoievsky’s demonic insight into the pathological sub-soil of the Religion of Pity which helped Nietzsche to forge his flashing counterblasts, but though their vision of the “general situation” thus coincided, their conclusions were diametrically different. For Nietzsche the hope of humanity is found in the strong; for Dostoievsky it is found in the weak. Their only ground of agreement is that they both refute the insolent claims of mediocrity and normality.

One of the most arresting "truths" that emerge, like silvery fish, at the end of the line of this Fisher in the abysses is the "truth" that any kind of departure from the Normal may become a means of mystic illumination. The same perversion or contortion of mind which may, in one direction, lead to crime may, in another direction, lead to extraordinary spiritual clairvoyance. And this applies to *all* deviations from the normal type, and to all moods and inclinations in normal persons under unusual excitement or strain. The theory is, as a matter of fact, as old as the oldest races. In Egypt and India, as well as in Rome and Athens, the gods were always regarded as in some especial way manifesting their will, and revealing their secrets, to those thus stricken. The view that wisdom is attained along the path of normal health and rational sanity has always been a "philosophical" and never a "religious" view. Dostoievsky's dominant idea has, indeed, many affinities with the Pauline one, and is certainly a quite justifiable derivation from the Evangelical doctrine. It is, however, none the less startling to our Western mind.

In Dostoievsky's books, madmen, idiots, drunkards, consumptives, degenerates, visionaries, reactionaries, anarchists, nympholepts, criminals and saints jostle one another in a sort of "Danse Macabre," but not one of them but has his moment of ecstasy. The very worst of them, that little band of fantastic super-men of lust, whose extravagant manias and excesses of remorse suggest attitudes and gestures that would need an Aubrey Beardsley for illustration, have, at moments, moods of divine sublimity. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch Stavrogin, in "the Possessed;" Svridigilaiof Dounia's would-be seducer, in "Crime and Punishment," and Ivan, in "the

Brothers Karamazov," though all inspired by ten thousand demons, cannot be called devoid of a certain mysterious spiritual greatness. Perhaps the interesting thing about them is that their elaborate wickedness is itself a *spiritual* rather than a *sensual* quality, or, to put it in another way, there are abysmal depths of spiritual subtlety in their most sensual obsession. The only entirely *base* criminal I can recall in Dostoievsky is Stavrogin's admirer, Peter Stepanovitch, and he is transformed and transfigured at times by the sheer intensity of his worship for his friend. It would be overpowering the reader with names, themselves like ritualistic incantations, to enumerate all the perverts and abnormalists whose various lapses and diseases become, in these books, mediums of spiritual insight. Though dealing continually with every form of tragedy and misery, Dostoievsky cannot be called a Pessimist. He is so profoundly affected by the spirit of the Evangelical "Beatitudes" that for him "poverty" and "meekness" and "hungering and thirsting" and "weeping and mourning" are always in the true sense "blessed" — that is to say, they are the path of initiation, the sorrowful gates to the unspeakable joy.

The most beautiful characters he has drawn are, perhaps, Alyosha Karamazov and Prince Myshkin; both of these being young men, and both of them so Christ-like, that in reading about them one is compelled to acknowledge that something in the temper of that Figure, hitherto concealed from His followers, has been communicated to this Russian. The naive, and yet ironical, artlessness of their retorts to the aggressive Philistines who surround them remind one over and over again of those Divine "bon-mots" with which, to use Oscar Wilde's allusion, the Redeemer bewildered His assailants. Stephan Trophinovitch reading the Miracle of the Swine with his female Colporteur; Raskolnikoff reading the Miracle of the Raising of Lazarus with his prostitute Sonia, are scenes that might strike an English mind as mere melodramatic sentiment, but those who have entered into the Dostoievsky secret know how much more than that there is in them, and how deep into the mystery of things and the irony of things they go. One is continually coming upon passages in Dostoievsky the strange and ambiguous nature of which leads one's thought far enough from Evangelical simplicities; passages that are, indeed, at once so beautiful and so sinister that they make one think of certain demonic sayings of Goethe or Spinoza; and yet even these passages do no more than throw new and formidable light upon the "old situations," the old "cross-roads." Dostoievsky is not content with indicating how weakness and disease and suffering can become organs of vision; he goes very far — further than anyone — in his recognition of the secret and perverted cruelty that drives certain persons on to lacerate themselves with all manner of spiritual flagellation.

He understands, better than anyone else, how absurd the philosophical utilitarians are with their axiom that everyone pursues his own happiness. He exposes over and over again, with nerve-rending subtlety, how intoxicating to the human spirit is the mad lust of self-immolation, of self-destruction. It is really from him that Nietzsche learnt that wanton Dionysic talisman which opens the door to such singular spiritual orgies.

Nothing is more characteristic of Dostoievsky's method than his perpetual insistence upon the mania which certain curious human types display for "making fools of themselves." The more sacred aspects of this deliberate self-humiliation require no comment. It is obviously good for our spirit's salvation to be made Fools in Christ. What one has to observe further, under his guidance, is the strange passion that certain derelicts in the human vortex have for being trampled upon and flouted. These queer people — but there are more of them than one would suppose — derive an almost sensual pleasure from being abominably treated. They positively lick the dust before their persecutors. They run to “kiss the rod.” It is this type of person who, like the hero in that story in “L’Esprit Souterrain,” deliberately rushes into embarrassing situations; into situations and among people where he will look a fool — in order to avenge himself upon the spectators of his “folly” by going deeper and deeper into it.

If Dostoievsky astounds us by his insight into the abnormalities of “normal” men, he is still more startling when he deals with women. There are certain scenes — the scene between Aglaia and Nastasya in “The Idiot;” the scene between Sonia and the mother and sister of Raskolnikoff in “Crime and Punishment;” the scene in “The Possessed” where Liza leaves Stavrogin on the morning after the fire; and the scene where the woman, loved by the mad Karamazov brothers, tears her nerves and theirs to pieces, in outrageous obliquity — which brand themselves upon the mind as reaching the uttermost limit of devasting vision.

In reviewing the final impression left upon one by the reading of Dostoievsky one must confess to many curious reactions. He certainly has the power of making all other novelists seem dull in comparison; dull — or artistic and rhetorical. Perhaps the most marked effect he has is to leave one with the feeling of a universe *with many doors;* with many doors, and not a few terrifyingly dark passages; but a universe the opposite of “closed” or “explained.” Though not a single one of his books ends “happily,” the final impression is the reverse of hopeless. His very mania for tragedy, his Dionysic embracing of it, precludes any premature despair. Perhaps a profound deepening of one’s sense of the mysterious *perversity* of all human fate is the thing that lingers, a perversity which is itself a kind of redemption, for it implies arbitrariness and waywardness, and these things mean power and pleasure, even in the midst of suffering.

He is the best possible antidote for the peculiar and paralysing fatalism of our time, a fatalism which makes so much of "environment" and so little of "character," and which tends to endow mere worldly and material success with a sort of divine prerogative. A generation that allows itself to be even *interested* in such types as the "strong," efficient craftsmen of modern industry and finance is a generation that can well afford a few moral shocks at the hands of Dostoievsky's "degenerates." The world he reveals is, after all, in spite of the Russian names, the world of ordinary human obliquity. The thing for which we have to thank him is that it is made so rich and deep, so full of fathomless pits and unending vistas.

Every great writer brings his own gift, and if others satisfy our craving for destruction and beauty, and yet others our longing for simplification and rational form, the suggestions he brings of mystery and passion, of secret despairs and occult ecstasies, of strange renunciations and stranger triumphs, are such as must quicken our sense of the whole weird game. Looking back over these astonishing books, it is curious to note the impression left of Dostoievsky's feeling for "Nature." No writer one has met with has less of that tendency to "describe scenery," which is so tedious an aspect of most modern work. And yet Russian scenery, and Russian weather, too, seem somehow, without our being aware of it, to have got installed in our brains. Dostoievsky does it incidentally, by innumerable little side-touches and passing allusions, but the general effect remains in one's mind with extraordinary intimacy. The great Russian cities in Summer and Winter, their bridges, rivers, squares, and crowded tenements; the quaint Provincial towns and wayside villages; the desolate outskirts of half-deserted suburbs; and, beyond them all, the feeling of the vast, melancholy plains, crossed by lonely roads; such things, associated in detail after detail with the passions or sorrows of the persons involved, recur as inveterately to the memory as the scenes and weather of our own personal adventures. It is not the self-conscious *art* of a Loti or a D'Annunzio; it is that much more penetrating and imaginative *suggestiveness* which arrests us by its vague beauty and terror in Lear or Macbeth. This subtle inter-penetration between humanity and the familiar Stage of its "exits and entrances" is only one portion of the weight of "cosmic" destiny — one can use no other word — which bears so heavily upon us as we read these books. In other writers one feels that when one has gone "full circle" with the principal characters, and has noted the "descriptive setting" all has been done. Here, as in Aeschylus and Euripides, as in Shakespeare and Goethe, one is left with an intimation of the clash of forces beyond and below humanity, beyond and below nature. One stands at the brink of things unspoken and unspeakable. One "sees the children sport upon the shore, and hears the mighty waters rolling evermore."

In ordinary life we are led, and rightly led — what else can we do? — this way and that by personal feeling and taste and experience. We fight for Religion or fight against Religion. We fight for Morality or fight against Morality. We are Traditionalists or Rebels, Reactionaries or Revolutionaries. Only sometimes, in the fury of our Faith and our Un-Faith, there come, blown across the world-margins, whispers and hints of undreamed of secrets, of unformulated hopes. Then it is that the faces of the people and things we know grow strange and distant, or yield their place to faces we know not and things "lighter than air." Then it is that the most real seems the most dream-like, and the most impossible the most true, for the flowing of the waters of Life have fallen into a new rhythm, and even the children of Saturn may lift up their hearts!

It is too fatally easy, in these days, when machinery — that "Star called Wormwood" — dominates the world, to fall into a state of hard and flippant cynicism, or into a yet more hopeless and weary irony. The unintelligent cheerfulness of the crowd so sickens one; the disingenuous sophistry of its hired preachers fills one with such blank depression that it seems sometimes as though the only mood worthy of normal intelligence were the mood of callous indifference and universal mockery.

All men are liars, and "the Ultimate Futility" grins horribly from its mask. Well! It is precisely at these hours, at the hours when the little pincers of the gods especially nip and squeeze, that it is good to turn the pages of Fyodor Dostoievsky. He brings us his "Balm of Gilead" between the hands of strange people, but it is a true "alabaster box of precious ointment," and though the flowers it contains are snatched from the House of the Dead, one knows at whose feet it was once poured forth, and for whose sake it was broken!

The books that are the most valuable in this world are not the books that pretend to solve life's mystery with a system. They are the books which create a certain mood, a certain temper — the mood, in fact, which is prepared for incredible surprises — the temper which no surprise can overpower. These books of Dostoievsky must always take their place in this great roll, because, though he arrives at no conclusion and utters no oracle, the atmosphere he throws round us is the atmosphere in which Life and Death are "equal;" the gestures his people make, in their great darkness, are the gestures of *that which goes upon its way,* beyond Good and beyond Evil!

Dostoievsky is more than an artist. He is, perhaps — who can tell? — the founder of a new religion. And yet the religion he "founds" is a religion which has been about us for more years than human history can count. He, more than anyone, makes palpable and near — too palpable — O Christ! The terror of it! — that shadowy, monstrous weight of oppressive darkness, through which we signal to each other from our separate Hells. *It* sways and wavers, it gathers and re-gathers, it thickens and deepens, it lifts and sinks, and we know all the while that it is the Thing we ourselves have made, and the intolerable whispers whereof it is full are the children of our own thoughts, of our lusts, of our fears, of our terrible creative dreams.

Dostoievsky's books seem, as one handles them, to flow mysteriously together into one book, and this book is the book of the Last Judgment. The great obscure Land he leads us over, so full of desolate marshes, and forlorn spaces, and hemlock-roots, and drowned tree-trunks, and Golgothas of broken shards and unutterable refuse, is the Land of those visions which are our inmost selves, and for which we are *answerable* and none else.

Across this Land we wander, feeling for some fingers, cold and dead as our own, to share that terror with, and, it may be, finding none, for as we have groped forward we have been pitiless in the darkness, and, half-dead ourselves, have trodden the dead down, and the dead are those who cannot forgive; for murdered "love" has no heart wherewith it should forgive: — *Will the Christ never come?*

EDGAR ALLEN POE

ONE DOES NOT feel, by any means, that the last word has been uttered upon this great artist. Has attention been called, for instance, to the sardonic cynicism which underlies his most thrilling effects? Poe's cynicism is itself a very fascinating pathological subject. It is an elaborate thing, compounded of many strange elements. There is a certain dark, wilful melancholy in it that turns with loathing from all human comfort. There is also contempt in it, and savage derision. There is also in it a quality of mood that I prefer to call *Saturnian* — the mood of those born under the planet Saturn. There is cruelty in it, too, and voluptuous cruelty, though cold, reserved, and evasive. It is this "cynicism" of his which makes it possible for him to introduce into his poetry — it is of his poetry that I wish to speak — a certain colloquial salt, pungent and acrid, and with the smell of the tomb about it. It is colloquialism; but it is such colloquialism as ghosts or vampires would use.

Poe remains — that has been already said, has it not? — absolutely cold while he produces his effects. There is a frozen contempt indicated in every line he writes for the poor facile artists "who speak with tears." Yet the moods through which his Annabels and Ligeias and Ulalumes lead us are moods he must surely himself have known. Yes, he knew them; but they were, so to speak, so completely the atmosphere he lived in that there was no need for him to be carried out of himself when he wrote of them; no need for anything but icy, pitiless transcription. Has it been noticed how inhumanly immoral this great poet is? Not because he drank wine or took drugs. All that has been exaggerated, and, anyway, what does it matter now?

But in a much deeper and more deadly sense. It is strange! The world makes such odd blunders. It seems possessed of the idea that absurd amorous scamps like Casanova reach the bottom of wickedness. They do not even approach it. Intrinsically they are quite stupidly "good." Then, again, Byron is supposed to have been a wicked man. He himself aspired to be nothing less. But he was everything less. He was a great, greedy, selfish, swaggering, magnanimous infant! Oscar Wilde is generally regarded as something short of "the just man made perfect," but his simple, babyish passion for touching pretty things, toying with pretty people, wearing pretty clothes, and drinking absinthe, is far too naive a thing to be, at bottom, *evil.* No really wicked person could have written "The Importance of Being Earnest," with those delicious, paradoxical children rallying one another, and "Aunt Augusta" calling aloud for cucumber-sandwiches! Salome itself — that Scarlet Litany — which brings to us, as in a box of alabaster, all the perfumes and odours of amorous lust, is not really a "wicked" play; not wicked, that is to say, unless all mad passion is wicked. Certainly the lust in "Salome" smoulders and glows with a sort of under-furnace of concentration, but, after all, it is the old, universal obsession. Why is it more wicked to say, "Suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan!" than to say, "Her lips suck forth my soul — see where it flies!"? Why is it more wicked to say, "Thine eyes are like black holes, burnt by torches in Tyrian tapestry!" than to cry out, as Antony cries out, for the hot kisses of Egypt? Obviously the madness of physical desire is a thing that can hardly be tempered down to the quiet stanzas of Gray's Elegy. But it is not in itself a wicked thing; or the world would never have consecrated it in the great Love-Legends. One may admit that the entrance of the Nubian Executioner changes the situation; but, after all, the frenzy of the girl's request — the terror of that

Head upon the silver charger — were implicit in her passion from the beginning; and are, God knows! never very far from passion of that kind.

But all this is changed when we come to Edgar Allen Poe. Here we are no longer in Troy or Antioch or Canopus or Rimini. Here it is not any more a question of ungovernable passion carried to the limit of madness. Here it is no more the human, too human, tradition of each man "killing" the "thing he loves." Here we are in a world where the human element, in passion, has altogether departed, and left something else in its place; something which is really, in the true sense, "inhumanly immoral." In the first place, it is a thing devoid of any physical emotion. It is sterile, immaterial, unearthly, ice-cold. In the second place, it is, in a ghastly sense, self-centered! It feeds upon itself. It subdues everything to itself. Finally, let it be said, it is a thing with a mania for Corruption. The Charnel-House is its bridal-couch, and the midnight stars whisper to one another of its perversion. There is no need for it "to kill the thing it loves," for it loves only what is already dead. *Favete linguis!* There must be no profane misinterpretation of this subtle and delicate difference. In analysing the evasive chemistry of a great poet's mood, one moves warily, reverently, among a thousand betrayals. The mind of such a being is as the sand-strewn floor of a deep sea. In this sea we poor divers for pearls, and *stranger things,* must hold our breath long and long, as we watch the great glittering fish go sailing by, and touch the trailing, rose-coloured weeds, and cross the buried coral. It may be that no one will believe us, when we return, about what we have seen! About those carcanets of rubies round drowned throats and those opals that shimmered and gleamed in dead men's skulls!

At any rate, the most superficial critic of Poe's poetry must admit that every single one of his great verses, except the little one "to Helen," is preoccupied with Death. Even in that Helen one, perhaps the loveliest, though, I do not think, the most *characteristic,* of all, the poet’s desire is to make of the girl he celebrates a sort of Classic Odalisque, round whose palpable contours and lines he may hang the solemn ornaments of the Dead — of the Dead to whom his soul turns, even while embracing the living! Far, far off, from where the real Helen waits, so “statue-like” — the “agate lamp” in her hands — wavers the face of that other Helen, the face “that launched a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers of Ilium.”

The longer poem under the same title, and apparently addressed to the same sorceress, is more entirely “in his mood.” Those shadowy, moon-lit “parterres,” those living roses — Beardsley has planted them since in another “enchanted garden” — and those “eyes,” that grow so luminously, so impossibly large, until it is almost pain to be “saved” by them — these things are in Poe’s true manner; for it is not “Helen” that he has ever loved, but her body, her corpse, her ghost, her memory, her sepulchre, her look of dead reproach! And these things none can take from him. The maniacal egoism of a love of this kind — its frozen inhumanity — can be seen even in those poems which stretch yearning hands towards Heaven. In “Annabel Lee,” for instance, in that sea-kingdom where the maiden lived who had no thought — who *must* have no thought— “but to love and be loved by me” — what madness of implacable possession, in that “so all the night-tide I lie down by the side of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride, in her sepulchre there by the sea, in her tomb by the sounding sea!”

The same remorseless “laying on of hands” upon what God himself cannot save from us may be discerned in that exquisite little poem which begins:

“Thou wast all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine;
A green isle in the Sea, love,

A Fountain and a Shrine
All wreathed with Fairy fruits and flowers;
And all the flowers were mine!”

That “dim-gulf” o’er which “the spirit lies, mute, motionless, aghast” — how well, in Poe’s world, we know that! For still, in those days of his which are “trances,” and in those “nightly dreams” which are all he lives for, he is with her; with her still, with her always;

“In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams!”

The essence of “immorality” does not lie in mad Byronic passion, or in terrible Herodian lust. It lies in a certain deliberate “petrifaction” of the human soul in us; a certain glacial detachment from all interests save one; a certain frigid insanity of preoccupation with our own emotion. And this emotion, for the sake of which every earthly feeling turns to ice, is our Death-hunger, our eternal craving to make *what has been* be again, and again, forever!

The essence of immorality lies not in the hot flame of natural, or even unnatural, desire. It lies in that inhuman and forbidden wish to arrest *the processes of life* — to lay a freezing hand — a dead hand — upon what we love, so that it *shall always be the same.* The really immoral thing is to isolate, from among the affections and passions and attractions of this human world, one particular lure; and then, having endowed this with the living body of “eternal death,” to bend before it, like the satyr before the dead nymph in Aubrey’s drawing, and murmur and mutter and shudder over it, through the eternal recurrence of all things!

Is it any longer concealed from us wherein the "immorality" of this lies? It lies in the fact that what we worship, what we *will not,* through eternity, let go, is not a living person, but the "body" of a person; a person who has so far been "drugged," as not only to die for us — that is nothing! — but to remain dead for us, through all the years!

In his own life — with that lovely consumptive Child-bride dying by his side — Edgar Allen Poe lived as "morally," as rigidly, as any Monk. The popular talk about his being a "Drug-Fiend" is ridiculous nonsense. He was a laborious artist, chiselling and refining his "artificial" poems, day in and day out. Where his "immorality" lies is much deeper. It is in the mind — the mind, Master Shallow! — for he is nothing if not an absolute "Cerebralist." Certainly Poe's verses are "artificial." They are the most artificial of all poems ever written. And this is natural, because they were the premeditated expression of a premeditated cult. But to say they are artificial does not derogate from their genius. Would that there were more such "artificial" verses in the world!

One wonders if it is clearly understood how the "unearthly" element in Poe differs from the "unearthly" element in Shelley. It differs from it precisely as Death differs from Life.

Shelley's ethereal spiritualism — though, God knows, such gross animals are we, it seems inhuman enough — is a passionate white flame. It is the thin, wavering fire-point of all our struggles after purity and eternity. It is a centrifugal emotion, not, as was the other's, a centripedal one. It is the noble Platonic rising from the love of one beautiful person to the love of many beautiful persons; and from that onward, through translunar gradations, to the love of the supreme Beauty itself. Shelley's "spirituality" is a living, growing, creative thing. In its intrinsic nature it is not egoistic at all, but profoundly altruistic. It uses Sex to leave Sex behind. In its higher levels it is absolutely Sexless. It may transcend humanity, but it springs from humanity. It is, in fact, humanity's dream of its own transmutation. For all its ethereality and remoteness, it yearns, "like a God in pain," over the sorrows of the world. With infinite planetary pity, it would heal those sorrows.

Edgar Allen's "spirituality" has not the least flicker of a longing to "leave Sex behind." It is bound to Sex, as the insatiable Ghoul is bound to the Corpse he devours. It is not concerned with the physical ecstasies of Sex. It has no interest in such human matters. But deprive it of the fact of Sex-difference, and it drifts away whimpering like a dead leaf, an empty husk, a wisp of chaff, a skeleton gossamer. The poor, actual, warm lips, "so sweetly forsworn," may have had small interest for this "spiritual" lover, but now that she is dead and buried, and a ghost, they must remain a woman's lips forever! Nor have Edgar Allen's "faithful ones" the remotest interest in what goes on around them. Occupied with their Dead, their feeling towards common flesh and blood is the feeling of Caligula. "What have I done to thee?" that proud, reserved face seems to say, as it looks out on us from its dusty title-page; "what have I done to thee, that I should despise thee so?"

Shelley's clear, erotic passion is always a "cosmic" thing. It is the rhythmic expression of the power that creates the world. But there is nothing "cosmic" about the enclosed gardens of Edgar Allen Poe; and the spirits that walk among those Moon-dials and dim Parterres are not of the kind who go streaming up, from land and ocean, shouting with joy that Prometheus has conquered! But what a master he is — what a master! In the suggestiveness of *names* — to mention only one thing — can anyone touch him? That word "Porphyrogene" — the name of the Ruler of, God knows what, Kingdom of the Dead — does it not linger about one — and follow one — like the smell of incense?

But the poem of all poems in which the very genius Edgar Allen is embodied is, of course, “Ulalume.” Like this, there is nothing; in Literature — nothing in the whole field of human art. Here he is, from beginning to end, a supreme artist; dealing with the subject for which he was born! That undertone of sardonic, cynical *humour* — for it can be called nothing else — which grins at us in the background like the grin of a Skull; how extraordinarily characteristic it is! And the touches of “infernal colloquialism,” so deliberately fitted in, and making us remember — many things! — is there anything in the world like them?

“And now as the night was senescent,
And the star-dials hinted of morn,
At the end of our path a liquescent
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent
Arose with a duplicate horn —
Astarte’s be-diamonded crescent,
Distinct with its duplicate horn!”

“And I said” — but let us pass to his Companion. The cruelty of this conversation with “Psyche” is a thing that may well make us shudder. The implication is, of course, double. Psyche is his own soul; the soul in him which would live, and grow, and change, and know the “Vita Nuova.” She is also “the Companion,” to whom he has turned for consolation. She is the Second One, the Other One, in whose living caresses he would forget, if it might be, that which lies down there in the darkness!

“Then Psyche, uplifting her finger,
Said, ‘sadly this star I mistrust,
Its pallor I strangely mistrust.
O hasten! O let us not linger!
O fly! Let us fly! for we must!’”

Thus the Companion; thus the Comrade; thus the “Vita Nuova”! Now mark what follows:

“Then I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
And tempted her out of her gloom.
And conquered her scruples and gloom.
And we passed to the end of a Vista,
But were stopped by the door of a Tomb.
By the door of a Legended Tomb,
And I said: ‘What is written, sweet sister,
On the door of this legended Tomb?’
She replied, Ulalume — Ulalume —
Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!”

The end of the poem is like the beginning, and who can utter the feelings it excites? That “dark tarn of Auber,” those “Ghoul-haunted woodlands of Weir” convey, more thrillingly than a thousand words of description, what we have actually felt, long ago, far off, in that strange country of our forbidden dreams.

What a master he is! And if you ask about his “philosophy of life,” let the Conqueror Worm make answer:

“Lo! Tis a Gala-Night
Within the lonesome latter years—”

Is not that an arresting commencement? The word “Gala-Night” — has it not the very malice of the truth of things?

Like Heine, it gave this poet pleasure not only to love the Dead, but to love feeling himself dead. That strange poem about “Annie.” with its sickeningly sentimental conclusion, where the poet lies prostrate, drugged with all the drowsy syrops in the world, and celebrates his euthanasia, has a quality of its own. It is the “inverse” of life’s “Danse Macabre.” It is the way we poor dancers long to sleep. “For to sleep you must slumber in just such a bed!” The old madness is over now; the old thirst quenched. It was quenched in a water that “does not flow so far underground.” And luxuriously, peacefully, we can rest at last, with the odour of “puritan pansies” about us, and somewhere, not far off, rosemary and rue!

Edgar Allen Poe’s philosophy of Life? It may be summed up in the lines from that little poem, where he leaves her side who has, for a moment, turned his heart from the Tomb. The reader will remember the way it begins: “Take this kiss upon thy brow.” And the conclusion is the confusion of the whole matter:

“All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.”

Strangely — in forlorn silence — passes before us, as we close his pages, that procession of “dead, cold Maids.” Ligeia follows Ulalume; and Lenore follows Ligeia; and after them Eulalie and Annabel; and the moaning of the sea-tides that wash their feet is the moaning of eternity. I suppose it needs a certain kindred perversion, in the reader, to know the shudder of the loss, more dear than life, of such as these! The more normal memory of man will still continue repeating the liturgical syllables of a very different requiem:

“O daughters of dreams and of stories,
That Life is not wearied of yet —
Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores,
Felise, and Yolande and Julette!”

Yes, Life and the Life-Lovers are enamoured still of these exquisite witches, these philtre-bearers, these Sirens, these children of Circe. But a few among us — those who understand the poetry of Edgar Allen — turn away from them, to that rarer, colder, more virginal Figure; to Her who has been born and has died, so many times; to Her who was Ligeia and Ulalume and Helen and Lenore — for are not all these One? — to Her we have loved in vain and shall love in vain until the end — to Her who wears, even in the triumph of her Immortality, the close-clinging, heavily-scented cerements of the Dead!

“The old bards shall cease and their memory that lingers
Of frail brides and faithless shall be shrivelled as with fire,
For they loved us not nor knew us and our lips were dumb, our fingers
Could wake not the secret of the lyre.
Else, else, O God, the Singer,
I had sung, amid their rages,
The long tale of Man,
And his deeds for good and ill.
But the Old World knoweth— ’tis the speech of all his ages —
Man’s wrong and ours; he knoweth and is still.”

WALT WHITMAN

I WANT TO approach this great Soothsayer from the angle least of all profaned by popular verdicts. I mean from the angle of his poetry. We all know what a splendid heroic Anarchist he was. We all know with what rude zest he gave himself up to that "Cosmic Emotion," to which in these days the world does respectful, if distant, reverence. We know his mania for the word "en masse," for the words "ensemble," "democracy" and "libertad." We know his defiant celebrations of Sex, of amorousness, of maternity; of that Love of Comrades which "passeth the love of women." We know the world-shaking effort he made — and to have made it at all, quite apart from its success, marks him a unique genius! — to write poetry about every mortal thing that exists, and to bring the whole breathing palpable world into his Gargantuan Catalogues. It is absurd to grumble at these Inventories of the Round Earth. They may not all move to Dorian flutes, but they form a background — like the lists of the Kings in the Bible and the lists of the Ships in Homer — against which, as against the great blank spaces of Life itself, "the writing upon the wall" may make itself visible.

What seems much less universally realized is the extraordinary genius for sheer "poetry" which this Prophet of Optimism possessed. I agree that Walt Whitman's Optimism is the only kind, of that sort of thing, that one can submit to without a blush. At least it is not indecent, bourgeois, and ill-bred, like the fourth-hand Protestantism that Browning dishes up, for the delectation of Ethical Societies. It is the optimism of a person who has seen the American Civil War. It is the optimism of a man who knows "the Bowery" and "the road," and has had queer friends in his mortal pilgrimage.

It is an interesting psychological point, this difference between the "marching breast-forward" of Mrs. Browning's energetic husband, and the "taking to the open road" of Whitman. In some curious way the former gets upon one's nerves where the latter does not. Perhaps it is that the boisterous animal-spirits which one appreciates in the open air become vulgar and irritating when they are practised within the walls of a house. A Satyr who stretches his hairy shanks in the open forest is a pleasant thing to see; but a gentleman, with lavender-colored gloves, putting his feet on the chimney-piece is not so appealing. No doubt it is precisely for these Domestic Exercises that Mr. Chesterton, let us say, would have us love Browning. Well! It is a matter of taste.

But it is not of Walt Whitman's Optimism that I want to speak; it is of his poetry.

To grasp the full importance of what this great man did in this sphere one has only to read modern "libre vers." After Walt Whitman, Paul Fort, for instance, seems simply an eloquent prose writer. And none of them can get the trick of it. None of them! Somewhere, once, I heard a voice that approached it; a voice murmuring of

"Those that sleep upon the wind,
And those that lie along in the rain,
Cursing Egypt—"

But that voice went its way; and for the rest — what banalities! What ineptitudes! They make the mistake, our modern free-versifiers, of thinking that Art can be founded on the Negation of Form. Art can be founded on every other Negation. But not on that one — never on that one! Certainly they have a right to experiment; to invent — if they can — new forms. But they must invent them. They must not just arrange their lines *to look like poetry,* and leave it at that.

Walt Whitman's New Form of Verse was, as all such things must be, as Mr. Hardy's strange poetry, for instance, is, a deliberate and laborious struggle — ending in what is a struggle no more — to express his own personality in a unique and recognisable manner. This is the secret of all "style" in poetry. And it is the absence of this labour, of this premeditated concentration, which leads to the curious result we see on all sides of us, the fact, namely, that all young modern poets *write alike.* They write alike, and they *are* alike — just as all men are like all other men, and all women like all other women, when, without the "art" of clothing, or the "art" of flesh and blood, they lie down side by side in the free cemetery. The old poetic forms will always have their place. They can never grow old-fashioned; any more than Pisanello, or El Greco, or Botticelli, or Scopas, or any ancient Chinese Painter, can grow old-fashioned. But when a modern artist or poet sets to work to create a new form, let him remember what he is doing! It is not the pastime of an hour, this. It is not the casual gesture of a mad iconoclast breaking Classic Statues into mud, out of which to make goblins. It is the fierce, tenacious, patient, constructive work of a lifetime, based upon a tremendous and overpowering Vision! Such a vision Walt Whitman had, and to such constant inspired labour he gave his life — notwithstanding his talk about "loafing and inviting his soul"!

The "free" poetry of Walt Whitman obeys inflexible, occult laws, the laws commanded unto it by his own creative instinct. We need, as Nietzsche says, to learn the art of "commands" of this kind! Transvaluers of old values do not spend all their time sipping absinthe. Is it a secret still, then, the magical unity of rhythm, which Walt Whitman has conveyed to the words he uses? Those long, plangent, wailing lines, broken by little gurgling gasps and sobs; those sudden thrilling apostrophes and recognitions; those far-drawn flute-notes; those resounding sea-trumpets; all such effects have their place in the great orchestral symphony he conducts!

Take that little poem — quite spoiled before the end by a horrible bit of democratic vulgarity — which begins:

"Come, I will build a Continent indissoluble;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon—"

Is it possible to miss the hidden spheric law which governs such a challenge? Take the poem which begins:

"In the growths, by the margins of pond-waters—"

Do you not divine, delicate reader, the peculiar subtlety of that reference to the rank, rain-drenched *anonymous weeds,* which every day we pass in our walks inland? A botanical name would have driven the magic of it quite away.

Walt Whitman, more than anyone, is able to convey to us that sense of the unclassified pell-mell, of weeds and stones and rubble and wreckage, of vast, desolate spaces, and spaces full of debris and litter, which is most of all characteristic of your melancholy American landscape, but which those who love England know where to find, even among our trim gardens! No one like Walt Whitman can convey to us the magical *ugliness* of certain aspects of Nature — the bleak, stunted, God-forsaken things; the murky pools where the grey leaves fall; the dead reeds where the wind whistles no sweet fairy tunes; the unspeakable margins of murderous floods; the tangled sea-drift, scurfed with scum; the black sea-winrow of broken shells and dead fishes' scales; the roots of willow trees in moonlit places crying out for demon-lovers; the long, moaning grass that grows outside the walls of prisons; the leprous mosses that cover paupers' graves; the mountainous wastes and blighted marshlands which only unknown wild-birds ever touch with their flying wings, and of which madmen dream — these are the things, the ugly, terrible things, that this great optimist turns into poetry. “Yo honk!” cries the wild goose, as it crosses the midnight sky. Others may miss that mad-tossed shadow, that heartbreaking defiance — but from amid the drift of leaves by the roadside, this bearded Fakir of Outcasts has caught its meaning; has heard, and given it its answer.

Ah, gentle and tender reader; thou whose heart, it may be has never cried all night for what it must not name, did you think Swinburne or Byron were the poets of “love”? Perhaps you do not know that the only “short story” on the title-page of which Guy de Maupassant found it in him to write *that word* is a story about the wild things we go out to kill?

Walt Whitman, too, does not confine his notions of love to normal human coquetries. The most devastating love-cry ever uttered, except that of King David over his friend, is the cry this American poet dares to put into the heart of “a wild-bird from Alabama” that has lost its mate. I wonder if critics have done justice to the incredible genius of this man who can find words for that aching of the soul we do not confess even to our dearest? The sudden words he makes use of, in certain connections, awe us, hush us, confound us, take our breath, — as some of Shakespeare’s do — with their mysterious congruity. Has my reader ever read the little poem called “Tears”? And what *purity* in the truest, deepest sense, lies behind his pity for such tragic craving; his understanding of what love-stricken, banished ones feel. I do not speak now of his happily amorous verses. They have their place. I speak of those desperate lines that come, here and there, throughout his work, where, with his huge, Titanic back set against the world-wall, and his wild-tossed beard streaming in the wind, he seems *to hold open* by main, gigantic force that door of hope which Fate and God and Man and the Laws of Nature are all endeavoring to close! *And he holds it open!* And it is open still. It is for this reason — let the profane hold their peace! — that I do not hesitate to understand very clearly why he addresses a certain poem to the Lord Christ! Whether it be true or not that the Pure in Heart see God, it is certainly true that they have a power of saving us from God's Law of Cause and Effect! According to this Law, we all "have our reward" and reap what we have sown. But sometimes, like a deep-sea murmur, there rises from the poetry of Walt Whitman a Protest that *must* be heard! Then it is that the Tetrarchs of Science forbid in vain "that one should raise the Dead." For the Dead are raised up, and come forth, even in the likeness wherein we loved them! If words, my friends; if the use of words in poetry can convey such intimations as these to such a generation as ours, can anyone deny that Walt Whitman is a great poet?

Deny it, who may or will. There will always gather round him — as he predicted — out of City-Tenements and Artist-Studios and Factory-Shops and Ware-Houses and Bordelloes — aye! and, it may be, out of the purlieus of Palaces themselves — a strange, mad, heart-broken company of life-defeated derelicts, who come, not for Cosmic Emotion or Democracy or Anarchy or Amorousness, or even "Comradeship," but for that touch, that whisper, that word, that hand outstretched in the darkness, which makes them *know* — against reason and argument and all evidence — that they may hope still — *for the Impossible is true!*

CONCLUSION

WE HAVE BEEN together, you who read this — and to you, whoever you are, whether pleased or angry, I make a comrade's signal. Who knows? We might be the very ones to understand each other, if we met! We have been together, in the shadow of the presences that make life tolerable; and now we must draw our conclusion and go our way.

Our conclusion? Ah! that is a hard matter. The world we live in lends itself better to beginnings than conclusions. Or does anything, in this terrible flowing tide, even *begin*? End or beginning, we find ourselves floating upon it — this great tide — and we must do what we can to get a clear glimpse of the high stars before we sink. I wonder if, in the midst of the stammered and blurted incoherences, the lapses and levities, of this quaint book, a sort of "orientation," as the theologians say now, has emerged at all? I feel, myself, as though it had, though it is hard enough to put it into words. I seem to feel that a point of view, not altogether irrelevant in our time, has projected a certain light upon us, as we advanced together.

Let me try to catch some few filmy threads of this before it vanishes, even though, like a dream in the waking, its outlines waver and recede and fade, until it is lost in space. We gather, then, I fancy, from this kind of hurried passing through enchanted gardens, a sort of curious unwillingness to let our "fixed convictions" deprive us any more of the spiritual adventures to which we have a right. We begin to understand the danger of such convictions, of such opinions, of such "constructive consistency." We grow prepared to "give ourselves up" to "yield ourselves willingly," to whatever new Revelation of the Evasive One chance may throw in our way. It is in such yieldings, such surprises by the road, such new vistas and perspectives, that life loves to embody itself. To refuse them is to turn away from Life and dwell in the kingdom of the shadow.

"Why not?" the Demon who has presided over our wanderings together seems to whisper— "why not for a little while try the experiment of having no 'fixed ideas,' no 'inflexible principles,' no 'concentrated aim'? Why not simply react to one mysterious visitor after another, as they approach us, and caress or hurt us, and go their way? Why not, for an interlude, be Life's children, instead of her slaves or her masters, and let Her lead us, the great crafty Mother, whither she will?"

There will be much less harm done by such an embracing of Fate, and such a cessation of foolish agitations, than many might suppose. And more than anything else, this is what our generation requires! We are over-ridden by theorists and preachers and ethical water-carriers; we need a little rest — a little yawning and stretching and "being ourselves"; a little quiet sitting at the feet of the Immortal Gods. We need to forget to be troubled, for a brief interval, if the Immortal Gods speak in strange and variable tongues, and offer us diverse-shaped chalices. Let us drink, dear friends, let us drink, as the most noble prophetess Bacbuc used to say! There are many vintages in the kingdom of Beauty; and yet others — God knows! even outside that. Let us drink, and ask no troublesome questions. The modern puritan seeks to change the nature of our natural longing. He tells us that what we need is not less labor but more labor, not less "concentrated effort," but more "concentrated effort"; not "Heaven," in fact, but "Hell."

I do not know. There is much affectation abroad, and some hypocrisy. Puritans were ever addicted to hypocrisy. But because of these "virtuous" prophets of "action," are we to give up our Beatific Vision? Why not be honest for once, and confess that what Man, born of Woman, craves for in his heart is a little joy, a little happiness, a little pleasure, before "he goes hence and is no more seen"? We know that we know nothing. Why, then, pretend that we know the importance of being "up and doing"? There may be no such importance. The common burden of life we have, indeed, all to bear — and they are not very gracious or lovely souls who seek to put it off on others — but for this additional burden, this burden of "being consistent" and having a "strong character," does it seem very wise, in so brief an interval, to put the stress just there?

Somehow I think a constant dwelling in the company of the "great masters" leads us to take with a certain "pinch of salt" the strenuous "duties" which the World's voices make so clamorous! It may be that our sense of their greatness and remoteness produces a certain "humility" in us, and a certain mood of "waiting on the Spirit," not altogether encouraging to what this age, in its fussy worship of energy, calls "our creative work." Well! There is a place doubtless for these energetic people, and their strenuous characters, and their "creative work." But I think there is a place also for those who cannot rush about the market-place, or climb high Alps, or make engines spin, or race, with girded loins, after "Truth." I think there is a place still left for harmless spectators in this Little Theatre of the Universe, And such spectators will do well if they see to it that nothing of the fine or the rare or the exquisite escapes them. Somebody must have the discrimination and the detachment necessary to do justice to our "creative minds." The worst of it is, everybody in these days rushes off to "create," and pauses not a moment to look round to see whether what is being created is worth creating!

We must return to the great masters; we must return to the things in life that really matter; and then we shall acquire, perhaps, in our little way the art of keeping the creators of ugliness at a distance!

Let us at least be honest. The world is a grim game, and we need sometimes the very courage of Lucifer to hold our enemies back. But in the chaos of it all, and the madness and frenzy, let us at least hold fast to that noble daughter of the gods men name *Imagination.* With that to aid us, we can console ourselves for many losses, for many defeats. For the life of the Imagination flows deep and swift, and in its flowing it can bear us to undreamed-of coasts, where the children of fantasy and the children of irony dance on — heedless of theory and argument.

The world is deep, as Zarathustra says, and deep is pain; and deeper than pain is joy. I do not think that they have reached the final clue, even with their talk of "experience" and "struggle" and the "storming of the heights." Sometimes it is not from "experience," but from beyond experience, that the rumour comes. Sometimes it is not from the "struggle," but from the "rest" after the struggle, that the whisper is given. Sometimes the voice comes to us, not from the "heights," but from the depths.

The truth seems to be that if the clue is to be caught at all, it will be caught where we least expect it; and, for the catching of it, what we have to do is not to let our theories, our principles, our convictions, our opinions, impede our vision — but now and then to lay them aside; but whether with them or without them, to be *prepared* — for the Spirit bloweth where it listeth and we cannot tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth!

Confessions of Two Brothers (1916)

Written in collaboration with Llewelyn Powys

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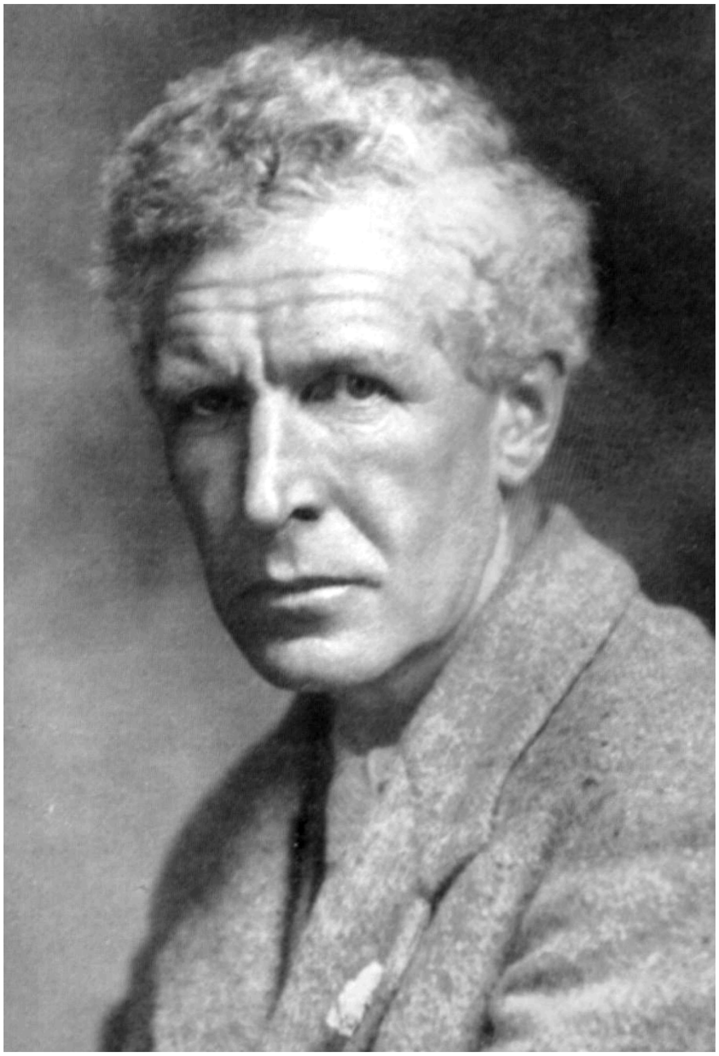

The author’s younger brother: Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939) was a noted essayist and novelist.

CONFESSIONS: JOHN COWPER POWYS

I

IT IS THE little thing, the unrehearsed gesture, the catch in the breath, the droop of the lip, the start of surprise, which really reveals. We may analyze ourselves in volumes and remain undiscovered; and then — by a yawn, a tilt of the head, a sob of exhaustion, a flash of hate — we are betrayed and unmasked forever.

It came over me yesterday that the whole secret of my being, of my happiness and my misery, was to be discovered in my *hands.* I speak as a biologist, not as a palmist.

Under ordinary conditions my consciousness does not penetrate to my hands. These curious human appendages remain inert, clumsy, helpless, heavy, dead. I have dead hands — the hands of a dead person! I cannot do the simplest thing with my hands without a definite and concentrated effort of will. It is like working with clumsy tools; tools that require elaborate direction every time. I cannot tie my shoe-strings, or post a letter, or light a match, without issuing a special mandate to my incorrigible hands.

That is why they are always knocking over things and dropping things and tearing things. They are out of the reach of the electricity of my being. My consciousness does not penetrate to where they hang, swinging so helplessly at the end of my arms.

When I am lecturing however — and this irritates my profoundest pride, for I despise the lecturing animal — my hands change completely and my consciousness flows through them to the tips of my fingers. They become sensitive then, abnormally sensitive. I *feel* them as I speak; and between them and the waves of my thought there is a direct magnetic connection.

Under ordinary conditions my hands are the hands of a dead body. When I am lecturing they are the hands of a lover; of a lover caressing his darling!

Is that not a curious thing? — a little thing, but more suggestive than much analysis. The general public is certainly not any darling of mine; and yet when under the spell of addressing it my fingers become the fingers of a lover. This does not mean that my emotions are kind. The emotions of lovers are not always kind.

In reading what follows the reader must be on the lookout for indirect betrayals and unmaskings. He must follow me suspiciously, guardedly, furtively. He must be prepared for that invincible human trick of using language to conceal rather than to reveal. I am ready to confess myself, as a man may be ready to throw himself into the water. But once *in* the water, the instinct of self-preservation compels him to swim. So I swim — on words — unless the reader's imagination is shrewdly alert to thrust me down into the truth.

I should like to indicate here my recognition, deeper than they believe, of the sublime patience of those who have suffered from me. I make this signal as it were out of thick darkness; for in spite of the subtlety upon which I pride myself, I feel vaguely conscious that I have been dull and blind, in certain relations, as a twisted sea-shell choked up with sand.

The more one tries to analyze oneself the more one is conscious of amazing paradoxes and inconsistencies which lurk under the simplest surface. I think as compared with most, I am strangely simple in my dominant tendencies. It is because of this simplicity that a certain duality in me becomes so disconcerting. I fancy sometimes that my exterior appearance gives an impression of power and formidableness that is altogether misleading. Below this Roman Despot look I conceal frequently a weakness, a shrinking, a timidity, an exhaustion of energy, a psychic disintegration of personality, natural rather to a slave than a master.

The only person as far as I know who has really come to believe in this abandoned weakness concealed under the mask of domination, is the admirable young painter Raymond Johnson, who in his mad picture of me — it needs a Post-impressionist to find out these things! — has compelled my material likeness to indicate the bewildered exhaustion of my soul. Perhaps it is because I have the soul of a slave that the great personalities, upon whose creations I lecture, have selected me among the rest as the most submissive medium for their revelations. Certainly they have a way of obsessing me as if they were so many demons. There will be notes struck here and there in what follows, which will of necessity irritate and annoy many. I do not regret that: I cannot. In a profound and indescribable manner I feel that these things — these moods of almost vindictive rebelliousness — find their place and their justification in some underlying duality beyond the confines of rational logic. Criticism, protest, the will to destruction, even when exercised in frenzied helplessness against forces that *cannot* be destroyed, have their place in the world economy. The anger of the worm turning upon the universe may, in a larger synthesis, be nothing but the anger of one god with another god. And who can tell how necessary to the purposes of life are the quarrels of these immortals?

I have tried to indicate, in what follows, my most permanent reactions to the world; but the reader of these pages must remember that the river is flowing even while we are pushing our way across it and while there is life there must be change. I long to be an Epicurean; but something always drives me on, out of my pleasant cloister. I notice as a curious fact that many of the impulses that thus drive me forward are my own maddest obsessions; and yet in the violence of such pursuits I stumble upon seashores flooded with moonlight, and am rewarded for obeying demons by encountering divinities.

II

I DO NOT think that anyone who has never tried the experiment of making a word-portrait of himself can possibly understand its difficulty. To achieve it with any success one needs one of two things; either an absolute and even ridiculous shamelessness, or a calm, imperturbable, psychological insight. The first of these requisites was possessed by the admirable Pepys, and in a less degree by Casanova and Rousseau. The second was possessed by Goethe, whose “Truth and Poetry out of my Life” is a masterpiece of analytical statement. The method used by Montaigne in his egotistic soliloquies is really a mixture of these two, with an added literary and epicurean unction which his peculiar temperament supplied.

But in all these instances, and in many others of a less famous reputation, we are conscious of one common element, at once the motive-force and the life-blood of such an enterprise. I am speaking of a certain definite attitude of the person thus confessing himself, towards the self he is describing.

The nature of this attitude I can best indicate, by calling it a *sympathetic interest* in oneself. This “sympathetic interest” we find in all the famous confessions, from that of Saint Augustine to that of Oscar Wilde. Nor with the help of it need the humblest autobiography lack importance.

My own feeling is that any single person who ever lived, were he the stupidest on earth, could utter profoundly provocative things about himself — if only the necessary words could be conveyed to his intelligence.

I am not the stupidest on earth; though doubtless, compared with these great ones, my intellect is blundering enough, and my senses sufficiently dull. But were I the apogee of human incompetence, there would still, I maintain, be an immense interest available, if I could find words to hit the exact emotions and feelings which make me what I am. It is an insult to common human nature, this mock-modest Philistine notion that it is indiscreet and indecent for an ordinary person to attempt to give expression to his secret identity. It is really no more than a form of silly and vulgar pride to be so "cautiously reserved." It is evidence of a touchy, uneasy sense that if one did describe oneself, one would betray oneself, and shuffle off the pompous hypocritical mask with which one covers up one's foolishness. The "reserve" of which I am speaking is one of the most contemptible qualities of our English and American race. It is on a par with our fussy self-consciousness and grotesque "dignity;" a dignity which is only a parody upon the real virtue indicated by that beautiful word.

The natural, instinctive movements of Arabs or Latins or Indians never really make them ridiculous. It is we who make ourselves ridiculous by our stiff, jerky, spasmodic awkwardness. Reserve in social relations has undoubtedly its place — what could surpass the reserve of the Oriental? — but when an attempt is made to carry this social weapon into the sphere of literature and art, the result is only a general paralysis.

It is after all, as Goethe says, the *personal* which interests us. The attempt to substitute, for the personal, any degree of scholarship or erudition, is fatal to genuine interest, both in art and criticism.

There is a very widely spread view, current in educational circles, that what we call "introspection" is a dangerous and immoral thing, a thing from which our youths and maidens ought to be protected. "Let them look out upon the world;" such pedants protest. "What have they to do with analyzing and dissecting their own minds? Let them study the works of God, and cultivate their bodies, and be sensible and happy." This is all part of that unfortunate modern craze for what is called being "healthy-minded."

Introspection and analysis are supposed to be a prerogative of degenerate natures, of natures that spend their time in useless brooding because they are inefficient in action. It is a grotesque mistake. One does not read that Socrates was less courageous because he had the habit of falling into introspective trances, nor does it at all appear that, in the present war, all the daring and efficiency is monopolized by the healthy-minded.

It is indeed by reason of this deplorable prejudice in favour of "reserve," and this ridiculous view that unreserved people are conceited and degenerate, that so little progress is made towards an intelligent understanding by man of his relations to himself. The most entirely reserved person that one has met — call him up in your mind, reader! — will probably be found to be the most conceited person one has met, and the most opposed to every kind of illumination. The fear of self-analysis is a cowardly fear, and suggests in the persons who betray it, that they have instincts and proclivities of which they are thoroughly afraid; and still more afraid of letting anyone else have the least suspicion.

There is of course a quite different type of reserved person, and a very sinister one. I mean the crafty, worldly-minded, predatory scoundrel, who habitually wears a mask, and keeps his thoughts to himself because they are base, narrow, greedy thoughts. A person of this kind is not conceited or unintelligent. He is only too clever. He plays up to the prejudices of the public and the moral hypocrisy of the preachers, with the most shrewd calculation. He despises the naive loquacity of unreserved artists and philosophers. He holds them as simple fools, who in place of quietly plundering the public and enjoying their little vices under the cloak of respectability, must needs go babbling forth into the street, and shouting out their secrets for the warning of all men.

Such an one has no time to regard his emotional or intellectual nature with “sympathetic interest.” His pleasure is derived from the inward satiric glee with which he watches the stupidity of the sheep-like crowd, as he shears them to the skin.

A person like this is not necessarily a wonderful Napoleonic “blond beast.” He is often more than a little stupid; and when thrown off the track of his economic depredations, will look like a plain fool in conversation with an intelligent man.

On such occasions his carefully cultivated reserve sometimes breaks down, and he gives vent to little barbarous absurdities, full of entertainment for the ironic observer. Entertainment one would no doubt derive from any observations such an one might be betrayed into making about this very sketch. Whereas a wiser rascal would only chuckle to himself under his beard because one more enemy of his class was “giving himself away” and incurring the malevolence of the mob.

“To write successful confessions one must regard oneself with sympathetic interest.” This is my own statement; but I emphasize it again for a very important reason.

As a matter of fact, hardly any human being could be found, possessed of average intelligence, for whom the successful writing of confessions would be harder than it is to me. For I do *not* regard myself with sympathetic interest. This is indeed one of my most curious and personal characteristics.

I use the expression “successful confessions” deliberately, for I am fully aware of the ease and fluency, perhaps the too great ease and fluency, with which I can write some sort of a confessional sketch. By “successful confessions,” however, I mean the turning of one’s poor portrait of oneself into a true and permanent work of art; and it is that from which I fear I am fatally debarred, by my total lack of sympathetic interest in myself.

It will be found, I believe, if one reverts once more to the famous writers who have been successful in this branch of literature, that they all regard themselves with enormous sympathy. This sympathy may take the form of imaginative interest; or it may take the form of vivid dramatic self-consciousness; or it may take the form of tender sentimental pity; or it may take the form of humorous depreciation.

In every case however there is present a certain caressing tone of love and attraction in their attitude towards themselves. They love themselves well, in spite of all the derogatory things they say; and out of this love they create winning and provocative works of art.

I can almost conceive it possible for a person who hated himself, to make an attractive, though sinister portrait out of his detestation. But I — really abnormal in this — neither love myself nor hate myself.

The queer thing about it is that I am a tremendous and unconquerable egoist. I am pliable and unselfish in little things, but in main issues my self-assertion is monstrous. How then can it happen that I, who assert myself so vigorously, have no sympathetic interest in myself? I think the explanation, or one of the explanations, can be found in the fact that I pursue sensations so obstinately that I have lost all power of interesting myself in that thread of continuous consciousness, which, in our inmost being, binds our sensations together.

Sensations are continually taking me out of myself and away from myself. In sensations I forget myself; and if I did not forget myself, there would be so much less interest left in me to devote to sensations.

I am too much of a pleasure-seeker to care to stop and brood over my own being; though half the pleasure of my life is in brooding over the beings of those I love — the great artists and writers.

It would be different if I loved myself. Then no doubt I should be criticising and analyzing myself continually, with passionate pleasure. Am I, perhaps, the very acme and apogee of a born critic? I have been led, before now, into such a conceit; and even at this moment I do not regard it as an outrageous claim. I have this double advantage as a critic. My mind is singularly clear, fluid, and nimble; and my sensations are singularly detached, chaotic, and unclassified. I can therefore flow with Protean agility into the minds and temperaments of others. I can *become* others and feel myself into their most recondite feelings; and I can do this with passionate pleasure and excitement, because I love others, while I do not love myself.

So many would-be critics are debarred from being interesting and thrilling in their discoveries, because they drag with them, wherever they go, their devotion to themselves and their own ideas. I am free from this burden, because I have no devotion to myself and no ideas of my own.

Side by side with this clear, transparent, unclouded, flexible mind, I have a great many strong and tenacious sensual prejudices. It is necessary to have these in order to write interesting and exciting criticism; for criticism is nothing if it is not extremely personal. In my criticism I am at once abnormally impersonal, and abnormally personal; and that is why I may turn out — to resume my old conceit — to be one of the best critics in the world. My impersonality springs from my complete lack of convictions, opinions, principles, or any system. My personality springs from the inveterate obstinacy of my sensational prejudices, and from the curious absence among them of any connecting imaginative link. I am, in fact, as a critic, naturally objective and naturally subjective: objective, because I become with unclouded, fluid preciseness, exactly what my author is: — subjective, because my separate sensations so completely occupy and obsess me. It would be true to say that I live, in a very narrow sense, a double life. I live in my mind, which is eternally restless, mobile, and light as air; and in my sensations, which are heavily-weighted, earth-bound, and obstinately unchanging. It is no fantastic abuse of language to say that my sensations are chaotic; for though they are so fixed and indelible, they are not in any way connected with one another. They have no intelligent continuity, no symbolic orientation. They are not fused or moulded by any shaping imagination.

Mental detachment and sensual detachment — that is the form my life takes; and that form is a *cul-de-sac* or *impasse,* when it comes to any question of "improvement" or growth. My sensations cannot grow because they have no living principle of life in them, no imaginative vision, no emotional concentration. My mind cannot grow because like a floating film of white mist, it takes shape and colour from every single one of the peaks and promontories which it passes in its erratic wayfaring.

I present therefore the appearance of the most sceptical as well as the most obstinate of men. And this appearance coincides with the reality. My life is made up of the passive reception of alien ideas, and the passive assertion of inalienable prejudices.

I believe everything and — nothing; and I pass from sensation to sensation like a moth from bush to bush.

III

I SAID I had no ideas of my own; and I have none. But the reader must not think me inconsistent, if, all the way through the following pages, he comes continually upon references to Fate. The impression of Fate is not an idea; it is a fact. It is an inevitable human category. It is understood by instinct and propitiated by superstition. It is like the air we breathe and the ether that surrounds us. It is impossible to escape from it. It is the great Truism, the eternal Axiom. It is the thing originally "given," the primal stuff of all our experiences. Every philosophy, every system, every idea, has, as its main difficulty, the problem of dealing with Fate. A belief in Fate is neither a philosophy nor a system; it is a necessity.

But though this is true of the impression of Fate, I may perhaps go so far as to admit that the peculiar quality of my mind — its colourless receptivity — lends itself in an especial sense to an understanding of Fate's implications.

An unconquerable scepticism in the sphere of every explanation of this fact, tends to throw the fact itself into forlorn prominence. I may also admit that my predilection for what is chaotic and disconnected, for what is arbitrary, perverse, and exceptional, springs in like manner from the irrational and incalculable nature of my detached sensations.

From what I have just said — and the mere saying it chills me with the shadow of myself — it is perhaps made a little more clear how difficult it is for me to paint a vivid portrait of such a subject. I am not, in myself, an attractive subject; though the impetus and magic with which I can interpret the attraction of others is so prevailing, that many, in coming to know me as I really am, must suffer serious disappointment.

It is not only strangers, and such gentle, unknown sympathizers as may be led to read my writings, who are thus disappointed. It has been my ill-luck to lead into devastating disillusion some of the most charming friends I have ever had. They too have judged me by the swift Protean transformations, by which I have the power of assuming the very tone and temper of the writers I love.

They too have been interested and arrested by the significant intensity of my original sensations. They too have looked anxiously for the imaginative vision that should give these sensations coherence. But such a vision, such a coherence, has never appeared; and they have been thrown wearily back upon the spectacle of an insane sensationalist, pacing, like an imprisoned tiger, round and round the same cage; and of an insane sceptic, losing all identity and personality and substance, in airy diffusion into empty space. It is impossible for me to blame the faithful friends, who, thus provoked and tantalized beyond endurance, turn and rend me with bitter speeches. I sympathize with them, and not with myself. I love them, and not myself. And yet the crafty obduracy of the accursed thing I am, grins patiently at their indignation, smirks an ironic assent to all they say, and shuffles off to behave as badly as ever.

In one very curious point I have absolutely deceived many simple people. I have the power of suggesting the existence of abysmal gulfs of “wickedness” in a deep and terrible soul. I am led sometimes almost to the verge of self-deception in this matter. Even now I confess I cannot quite explain how it is that certain of my emotions, which I feel are really on the surface and purely a matter of that borderland between the brain and the nerves which we call the “psychic” region, should seek to present themselves to me as if they uprose from unfathomable depths and were, as we say, *inspired.*

It must be due to a self-deception of this kind that the idea of the Devil first took possession of man's imagination. I have been ridiculously tempted now and again to assume the Luciferian cloak and stride forth as a kind of poetic Manfred, ravaged by scoriae scars.

How much more exciting I could make this quiet sketch, if I gave way to these promptings and indulged in hints and suggestions of dark evil profundities in myself of which I was the Satanic victim! But I am too sceptical for this, and my mind is too clear. Ah! how vain and foolish show all such fuliginous hallucinations, in the presence of the marble countenance of Eternal Fate! I know well enough that my darkest, most anti-social instincts are nothing but the pure material accidents of some prenatal jolts and agitations, of some trifling pathological chances of birth and inheritance. It is when the imagination invades the mind that it is able to play such pranks and build up its elaborate metaphysical illusions out of what are pure material twists and warpings. My imagination is as completely detached from my mind, as my mind is detached from my senses. That is one of the reasons why I find myself so unlovable and unattractive. I am, as it were, a loosely-tied knot of sense and mind and fancy; and the resultant fabric is too unraveled to be agreeable to handle.

My imagination could play me, if my sceptical reason were not so detached from it, all manner of quaint tricks. It could persuade me, for instance, to turn this harmless little work of patient analysis, into a most formidable and lurid picture.

Led by it I could enlarge upon certain of my inherited vices, until, all my life, off the immediate track of these dangerous obsessions, became like a drunkard's sober interludes, dull, colourless, and lethargic. It could persuade me to take possession of some one particular vice — a mere accident of birth — and thrust it, with awe and terror, into dark mysterious caverns of primeval being, until it became like the smoke of Hell. It could provoke me to turn some accidental perversity into a great spiritual tornado of evil, making a desolation of all it touched.

It could easily do any of these things; and it has come near to doing them, when, for some cause, my wandering, irresponsible mind has deserted its post. But it never has really done them: — it never has really had its way with me; because my obstinate, incoherent senses, and my airy, fluid reason, are very difficult things to dominate.

I sometimes feel as if I were a dead body, galvanized temporarily into performing the necessary functions of existence, but only inspired with real passionate life, when some great spirit from the past, some Epicurus or Spinoza or Goethe, touches me with his magic.

It is an odd thing this feeling of deadness, of heavy material inertia. It is combined in my case with the teasing pricks of a thousand annoying thoughts — thoughts of practical difficulties, of hypochondriacal apprehensions, of social antipathies; and it weighs upon me, for hours together, more heavily than my harassed stomach. It is not only the great souls from the past who can cry aloud to this corpse that is I, “Rise up and walk!” I can be drawn back to life by the vivifying presence of any brave and joyous companion. Given the society of one person that I know, my second self, my “brother in the Lord,” and I could pass an eternity of earthly days without ever falling back into myself. He would feel for me; he would laugh for me; he would cry for me; and with him I should become a natural living person full of buoyancy and friendly grace. With him by my side, life would become to me like the perpetual reading of an exquisite book —

some unending Marius the Epicurean or Jean Christophe — the pages of which I should turn every day with new delight and wonder.

Perhaps my peculiar disposition is one that was really intended by nature to be so accompanied. Perhaps, shorn of this solace, I really move through this world atrophied and stunted, inchoate and paralyzed. Perhaps it is the want of this “alter-ego,” of this “twin-soul,” that makes me turn so wearily away from normal humanity, and grow so dull and morose. Perhaps it is the want of him that lends to my little absurd vices their obsessing quality, their preoccupying importance. I know well enough that, when I am with him, my vices are as nothing.

If it is difficult for me to write this brief dissection of “the body of my thought,” it would be far more difficult for me to attempt anything of an autobiographical nature.

I cannot bear to recall my childhood; and those memories of youth which bring tears of sentimental self-love to the eyes of the most hardened, fill me with nothing but a cold repulsion.

My past self, at any remote epoch, seems so unpleasantly like my present self that I loathe to think of it. In fact, in many respects, I prefer my present self to these clumsy caricatures, these shuffled premonitions. By long practice I have learned the art of escaping from myself. After blunderings and absurd experiments, I have discovered what particular authors, and artists, and people, and places, are best adapted to save me from myself.

My whole life has been one long running-away; and years have given me swiftness and agility. I am now such an adept at self-forgetfulness that I might almost claim to be able to jump over my own shadow.

I should not be giving an absolutely faithful sketch of what I am if I did not allude to a certain quaint and strange phenomenon which sometimes confuses me by its appearance. I allude to the phenomenon of “possession.”

If any man has been the victim of this ancient experience, it is surely I. I am sometimes, it would seem, literally “possessed.” Now it must be understood that I do not for a moment believe in any supernatural object corresponding to these experiences. I believe them to be entirely explicable on purely material grounds; but I should be false to myself if I did not confess that, when they appear, they appear accompanied by the illusion of spiritual reality.

I have suffered at different times from the presumption of three distinct “possessions.” Under the influence of one, I become insatiably “wicked,” and have the illusion of wickedness as a thing of infinite horizons and possibilities. My sceptical reason mocks at this formidable nonsense, and hints satirically that the whole thing is due to some trifling chance of pre-natal warping.

Under the influence of another, I become preternaturally “noble,” and have the illusion of “goodness” as a thing of infinite horizons and possibilities. My sceptical reason mocks at this too, and points to the atavistic presence of some blind race-instinct which would fain submerge the selfishness of the individual in the loftier selfishness of the tribe.

Lastly, and most curious of all, I have a splendid and transcendental “possession,” under the influence of which I feel conscious of an invincible courage and an unconquerable contempt; a courage ready to look all accidents, all chances, all circumstances, in the face, with calm indifference; a contempt that rises magnificently above both good and evil, and feels itself the initiated accomplice of the abysmal mysteries of life and death.

I am quite aware that these experiences are not peculiar to me. I have a shrewd suspicion that all the children of men come under this influence at one time or another. I think, however, that the abnormal receptivity of my temperament makes me especially liable to them, and it is for this reason that I offer myself to psychological analysis as a particularly emphatic type.

This sketch might be made much more interesting and effective, if I set out to project a deliberately imaginative dramatic figure, such as I could wish to be, such as I could myself contemplate with love or pity or admiration. But such imaginative projections, to be convincing and touching, require a life-long training of the selfconscious mind. Such projections are, as a matter of fact, what artists and artistic-minded people naturally do evoke. They mix their imagination with their senses, and their senses with their reason; and upon the resultant amalgam they throw the inspiring torch-flame of some great symbolic purpose. They do not stop to ask whether they are on the right path, the path justified by objective truth or by material reality: they just steer boldly forward, and in unscrupulous, pragmatic excitement create, or half-create, their own "truth."

As I shall endeavour to show later, my own attitude to these people is one of ingrained contempt. I despise their imaginative projections, their artistic, pragmatic pseudo-truths. I am all for the bare, bold, merciless determinism of drastic conformity with fact. It is very quaint — the way I feel in this matter. For, of course, among the great artists, who are now dead and buried, and whom I love so well, there must have been many who played fast and loose with their pleasant dreams, just as these moderns do.

And yet I am not sure. There seems a certain affectation of artistic attitudes common to our generation, from which the older masters were free. Or is it only that, being so near to them, their little ways are more annoying? I do not know. I only know that it is absolutely impossible for me to make an attractive work of art out of the contemplation of my own moods.

This sketch resolves itself, then, into what I should be inclined to claim as one of the most cold-blooded dissections on record, of a living person by his own hand. It is incomplete, because the opinion of our day is unprepared to welcome absolute candor. But as far as it goes, it is drastically sincere. It is meagre and dry and sapless. But it is this because, apart from the special outward objects that inspire me, my mind is meagre, and sapless, and dry.

To the question "what use then in publishing such a depressing document?" I should answer at once that the value of the thing is strictly psychological, and, as such, of immense and suggestive interest.

Given an eloquently impassioned critic, — and not even my enemies could deny my right to that title — it is, I maintain, of curious and delicate interest to know what the texture of such a critic's mind is like. I am always engaged in analyzing the minds of clever artists; let me for once, undertake the less pleasing task of analyzing the mind of a clever critic. Incidentally such an analysis is bound to throw a certain interesting light upon the relations between criticism and creation.

After all it is perhaps just as well that the temper of the public should have made it impossible for me to do more than allude to any of my peculiarities which may be anti-social or antinomian. It is so easy, if once one begins dealing with one's more sensual attributes, to be led into the most fantastic exaggeration. One requires a touch as light as a gossamer seed, and as penetrating as a gnat's sting, to follow into their elaborate intricacies the sensual proclivities of even the most guileless among us. And after all, what most of us would be tempted to undertake, if we entered upon such an enterprise, would be an indication, with wanton flights of fancy, not of what we have ever done, or are likely to do, under the existing pressure of circumstance and situation, but of what we could conceive ourselves doing, if this or that obstacle were removed; an obstacle which we know very well, never in the nature of things, can be removed; an obstacle which would probably turn out to be our own tenderness of heart, or timidity of spirit, or temerity of conscience.

I have not indulged in descriptions of how I feel in English country gardens, as compared with my sensations in the corridors of American hotels; or how I feel in the presence of crowded audiences, as compared with my emotions in the solitude of a railway carriage: for these things are not really germane to the matter. What I have attempted to do is to sum up as clearly as possible, the most salient and persistent of my instinctive reactions to the general drama of the world; and my most inveterate and obstinate attitudes to men, to nature, and to the unknown.

And there seems to emerge from it all, for me at least, the image of a nervous, timid, morbid, but at the same time, reckless, figure; a figure full of quaint anxiety to be loved and admired, but utterly unable to love or admire itself; a figure troubled and perverted by strange obsessions; a figure blinded by obstinate pride, yet crippled by ridiculous humility; a figure grotesque and comic, but not devoid of elements of forlorn distinction; a figure fleeing across an interminable desert to escape from the shadow of itself; a figure half-dead and atrophied, yet responsive as a reed to celestial harmonies; a figure driven forward by Fate, yet pathetically seeking to love the Fate that drives it; a figure fettered and bound by sensual infirmity, yet mocking with subtle derision every ideal that would liberate it; a figure struggling beneath the burden of its wretched contradictions, yet looking for no issue from its dilemma, save in the narcotic power of critical analysis, and the obliterating power of death.

For out of the ghastliness of the historic cataclysms which surround us now, there must sooner or later be a return to the cultivation of our own particular gardens; and my “garden of oblivion,” until I die, can be nothing else — of that, at least, I am sure — than the memory of great men and the interpretation of their labours.

IV

I HAVE NO Philosophy; not even the Philosophy of having no Philosophy. By this last remark I mean that my scepticism is genuine scepticism; not, as so often happens, a mere synonym for dogmatic agnosticism. I do not construct out of my scepticism any system of universal doubt. I doubt even the validity of doubt. I hold myself perfectly free to dally with any kind of metaphysical or mystical interpretation of things which may happen to attract me. I hold myself free to give myself up, in passing, to any religious revelation that may strike my fancy. I hold myself at liberty even to play with what is called “Faith.” Let me try to put down, point by point, how these evasive ultimate tendencies really do present themselves as I disentangle them.

I think it may be said that though no rigid exclusion of idealistic interpretations closes absolutely any door for me, my general bent is towards what is roughly called materialism. I say “roughly” called, because I am not ignorant of the metaphysical and psychological dilemmas implicit in any rigidly monistic system. But at the same time I have never been able to see that the *spiritual attenuation*, if I may call it so, to which what we roughly name matter has been recently subjected, necessarily implies any support to the claims of the idealists. The world may be full of mysterious living forces; it may have a boundless tendency to burst out here and there into all manner of conscious forms and shapes; it may be prolific of amazing organisms; it may be deep and strange and unfathomable; it may possess levels beyond levels of cosmic entities and inconceivable beings; it may dwindle off into unthinkable spatial planes; but I can never bring myself to see why this quite possible multitudinousness of life's pregnancy should be dragged in to support the obviously human-made systems of idealistic or religious comfort. The world may be as deep and mysterious as you will, but that does not in the least imply that *we* shall have a life after death or that there is a God, whether personal or immanent, in the least concerned with *us.* Perhaps what I feel about it is rather what the ancient Epicureans felt. There are, very likely, gods and demi-gods innumerable, in life's teeming planes of existence, but their own pleasures and their own annoyances are quite sufficient to fill up their time.

I am not therefore a materialist in the dogmatic sense, but I lean, considering the important part played by what is conveniently called matter in our human sphere, to a materialistic view of our own particular fate. It is in fact upon the inscrutable mysteriousness of the world that I take my stand. I find myself constantly protecting, as it were, this large and tremendous mysteriousness, against explanations which seem to impair its dignity. This is no doubt the origin of much of my prejudice against current theology. It is certainly the origin of my profound suspicion of current science. I want to keep the fresh, formidable, beautiful virginity of the world, if I may be allowed to put it so, unravished by priest or professor. I feel so often as though that indescribable quality which the poets call magic, were in danger of being destroyed by these cut-and-dried idealistic assumptions. The dignity of death is, for instance, absolutely spoiled for me by easy arrogant hopes of joyful resurrections. Even the great Buddhistic theory of successive incarnations seems to me less *poetical* than the finality, touched with a remote just-articulated chance of "something else," of the tragic pagan "*ave atque vale!*"

It is really, I fancy, on behalf of this dramatic mysteriousness of things, with its astounding fusion of comic and tragic elements, that I reluct at committing myself to any clear-cut solution. I think it is also because I feel certain that no solution will prove the final one. I experience indeed a curious anger against certain clever modern philosophers whose crafty reasoning lends itself to the comfortable uses of optimistic apologists. "If such people as these 'I say to myself' find support in such theories, then such theories must be wrong!" Yes, at the bottom of my mind I discern an instructive and inevitable assumption that no theory of the universe which anybody has ever had, or will conceivably ever have, can possibly be true. As for the popular Hegelian idea of progressive evolutionary truth, I despise and deride it. The ultimate secret is as far off now as it was in the time of Heraclitus, and I have a suspicion that all who do not confess this are either knaves or fools.

I do not carry my scepticism so far as to doubt the existence of what we call "objective truth." Such an extreme of the personal method seems to me grotesque and insane. Besides, carried to its absurd limit, it renders all conversation between intelligent beings impossible.

Some definite and unalterable relation between the human mind and its natural surroundings must be a permanent thing in our planetary history, otherwise we should be condemned to the "incommunicable muteness of fishes."

Pluralism is a pleasant theory to play with, and perhaps has its place, but I must confess that the indissoluble unity of the world of which we form a part is borne in upon me as an axiomatic necessity of my consciousness. The universe may have all manner of layers and levels of divergent life; its fluctuating waves of being may ebb and flow through incredibly varied spheres; but one cannot formulate in thought any gaps or blank spaces there, not connected by some sort of delicate ethereal medium. The universe must remain a universe while our mind remains our mind. To call it a "multiverse" is to use language which makes language impossible.

The same thing applies to the rationality of the world. There must be processes, sequences, harmonics and laws in Nature, binding all things together, and more or less intelligible to us, the children of their creation, otherwise no kind of science would be possible.

Though I am so anxious to keep the virginal mystery of the world fresh and unravished, I am not now addicted to talk loosely and lightly about the "chaotic element in Nature." I used to talk in this way; but I think it was rather an impatient reaction against idealists than any expression of my own personal feeling.

I have a rooted prejudice against all syntheses which smell of the pulpit, and it is pleasant and consoling to me to think that though there is evidence enough of law and solidarity in the system of things, there is not the slightest evidence of such a system being guided or evolved to any definite end or purpose. Even if such evidence were forthcoming, it would still remain extremely improbable that in the vast cosmic orientation, whatever it might be, there should be any particular consideration for our human wishes and cravings. However well the universe may be constructed, and however harmoniously Nature's laws may work, one sees clearly enough that a certain monstrous and lavish *waste* is an intrinsic peculiarity of the whole system. And of this waste, of this essential cosmic negligence, *we* may be a self-deluding infinitesimal portion.

Nature may have her own mysterious purposes, or she may not; in any case our rôle is bound to be, in a dramatic sense, that of the fly upon the wheel; or to use a more organic metaphor, that of the lice in the hide of the rhinoceros.

There has been too much nonsense lately talked, about things being free, arbitrary, individual, and independent of one another. I myself, reflecting the prevalent fashion, have uttered vague words about the “chaotic multifariousness” of the world. I have made much of every trace of the illogical, the exceptional, the perverse. I have sought to discern the presence in things, of something incalculable and baffling, of something that suddenly leaps up without preparation or any apparent cause, out of the depths of the Uranian reservoirs. It is for this reason that it used to please me well that the modern philosophical catch-word should be “Life,” rather than “Matter” or “Motion” or mechanical “Force” or than that old unpsychological figment, “Mind” in the abstract.

“Life,” though it might not carry us far, seemed, or I said it seemed, much more suggestive than any of these others, as a focusing word for the ultimate mystery; for it had the advantage of emphasizing the unique, arbitrary, and *personal* element in what is presented to us.

It will be seen from all this that when I spoke of my preference for what I called the “chaotic” in life, I was using the word in the sense of something that was wayward, wanton and incalculable, not in the old Miltonic sense of pre-created debris and dust. I blush now to think how, far, in my casual conversations and lectures, I carried this absurd belief that things were “chaotic,” and this fantastic preference for such a world. Nothing could be really further from my true feeling about the universe. Nothing could be further from my wish as to what the universe should be.

I must have been betrayed into this treachery to my own disposition by some species of proud and mischievous spleen, and by an unconscious following of literary fashions. As a matter of fact these “chaotic” forms and shapes, these sudden groupings and miraculous chances of contact, though they seem to have about them all the arbitrary magic of the unknown depths, and to be quite independent of the uniform procession of cause and effect, are really as much a determined part of the whole inexorable stream of things as the most mechanical sequences.

Though there be world within world of spiritual or ethereal entities, they are all equally dominated by destiny; they are equally driven forward by the same universal impetus. The smallest fancies that pass through our brain, and the strangest, remotest inhabitants of the farthest star, are alike determined in their nature by a fatality that admits of no interruption or deviation. This does not in the least debar us from giving ourselves up to the exquisite imaginations of artist and poet. Such imaginations are also part of the irresistible unfolding of what has been implied from eternity. We do not know how far they will carry us. We do not know how far our own thoughts will carry us. But both they and our maddest dreams are all accounted for in the terrible, beautiful procession of lives and thoughts; — the procession of things and the shadows of things, which is all there is, and from which there is no escape.

We may use what in our necessary illusion we call our “free will” to the utmost extent. We may struggle, we have a right to struggle passionately, to change our nature; but our nature will never really be moved one hair’s-breath from what has been determined for it, and every one of our vaunted new thoughts and new emotions has really been inevitable from the beginning. If we struggle desperately to “improve” or change; that very “will to struggle” was what the universal destiny implied in us; and if we do not struggle, that atrophy and inertia also was what the universe intended.

I once fancied that I shared with Bergson and James — those plausible sophists! — a predilection for the “instinctive,” over the “logical;” but I now know, falling back upon my real feeling, that it is neither instinct nor logic that can save us from the inexorable pressure of life’s fatality. It is quite in harmony with what one experiences in the daily commerce of events, that nature should be, at the same time, driven irresistibly forward, and *apparently* prone to a thousand goblin-like absurdities. It *is* prone to absurdities: these are not only apparent — they are real. But proneness to goblin-like absurdity is part of the universe's inherent necessity. The universe is both fated and fantastic. One can see clearly why it should strike us in this double-edged manner when one thinks of it as completely indifferent to our personal desires; for just in proportion as we desire fluidity and malleableness, it arrests us with its granite-like immovable weight; and just in proportion as we desire security and stability, it leaps out at us with wanton and ironic capriciousness.

This astounding mixture in the system of things of rigid cosmic laws and apparent chaotic surprises is precisely what pleases my aesthetic sense; and the sardonic shocks it gives, on the one hand, to optimistic rationalism, and on the other to optimistic pragmatism, fill me with humourous satisfaction. I cannot help it if any gentle spirit protests that such an attitude is one of pure malice. I am not defending myself. There *may* be malice in it. There may even be a touch of perverse voluptuousness; possibly an absurd element of pride. If so, I can only look with amazement at myself, and observe with psychological interest the odd spectacle of a human being deriving voluptuous and humourous pleasure from the pathetic inability of other human beings to grasp the mystery of life.

As a matter of fact, I am convinced that *all* philosophical attitudes are the result of temperament. Generally the part played by reason is the part of defending and supporting, as cunningly and persuasively as possible, this initial bias; but in certain rare cases it happens that a philosopher summons his reason, not to defend his temperament but to outrage it, lacerate it, and contradict it. In such a case we have a system of philosophy, based, not upon the pleasure the philosopher gets from offending the natural tastes of others, but upon the pleasure he gets from offending his own.

But even here, though so perversely employed, the man's temperament is at the bottom of his method. I do not think, however, that my philosophy is of that kind. At all events I recognize it as a profound tendency in myself, to sweep aside the plausible structures of logical thought which philosophers raise, and to dig down with curious psychological zest into the personal will and taste and prejudice of the philosopher himself.

For me as I have hinted, the world of human beings, their character, their predilections, their love and their hate, is a world fatally, and rigidly determined; and that is probably why I deal so habitually in patient and ironical agreement, and find it so hard to indulge in argument or controversy. My underlying Spinozism, if I dare call it by so ambitious a name, probably accounts also for my indifference to detail among the exacting transactions of life, and my tendency to let things drift as they will. Why make a fuss, when all, at the last, is equal?

But beyond and below Spinozism, or any other fatalistic method of reasoning in which I may love to indulge, lies undoubtedly in my own instinctive conviction that "nothing matters," that there is no real *human* meaning in life at all, and no beginning or middle or end of life's teeming manifestations. All is equal. Those sinister syllables keep up a sort of recurrent tune in the depths of my mind. All is equal. Why then grow agitated and angry because this or that ridiculous human being acts according to his nature?

It is no doubt out of a sort of willing reaction from the sombre inertia of this mood that I love to "dally," as I call it, with the more gracious aspects of religion. Innately I regard religion — the Catholic Church for instance — as a noble and beautiful work of art, constructed anonymously by humanity for its own satisfaction, and offering a lovely and romantic escape from the banalities of existence.

I am not in the least troubled by its inconsistencies or impossibilities. If it were not superbly impossible, if it did not come flaming in, from outside the closed circle, it would not be worthy of the name of religion. A rational religion is a contradiction in terms; and only thoroughly stupid people are interested in such an anomaly. The value to me of this wonderful impossible invention having appeared at all upon the earth, is the fact that its appearance makes one consider once more, how extremely likely it is that the real truth of the universe is something amazingly, absolutely different from anything that anyone has dared to dream. Religion at any rate must always have this value, that it prevents our self-satisfied men of science from closing the door to staggering chances.

As the supreme work of art of our race, I have the utmost reverence for religion; and as a protest against barring out incredible possibilities, I regard it with admiration. When however it becomes a question of possessing "faith," or having what is called the "religious sense," I must confess to a cold and complete indifference.

One sometimes hears worthy people express the view that Atheism is an impossible thing; that there can be no such person as an Atheist; and that those who call themselves so do not know their own minds, or are deliberately indulging in fantastic bravado. I can never understand this view of the case. It seems to me that I am meeting Atheists every day; that is to say people who are not endowed by nature with faith or with the religious sense. For myself I can only say that, however deeply I search my heart and soul, I do not find the remotest trace of these interesting gifts. Nor do I feel as though I had permitted such instincts to perish in me through lack of cultivation. I do not feel as though they had atrophied from disuse. I feel as though they had never been there. I certainly cannot remember them; though I can remember very vividly certain disgustingly hypocritical attempts I made at various times to pretend to myself that they were there. This fact, the fact of one tolerably sensitive person being entirely devoid of the religious sense, is surely not without its significance. It at any rate disposes of the argument of the universality of the instinct.

I should be untrue to my attempt at getting really to the bottom of my emotions in these things, if I neglected to speak of the curious thrill which the idea of the Person of our Saviour always produces in me. I notice that this thrill only occurs when it is accompanied by the notion, as it naturally is with me, of His Divinity. That idea of a great good Sage going about doing admirable works and finally giving up His life for humanity, leaves me absolutely cold. I even feel an odd sense of anger when I hear worthy ethical rationalists talk, as they do, of “Jesus and Socrates.” That sort of thing freezes my interest like a bucket of ice-water.

I suppose it is the artistic instinct in me, indignant at this clumsy and stupid lack of appreciation for the most wonderful work of art our race has ever evoked. It is precisely the attraction and magic of this Figure, created a God by the mysterious self-mesmerism of the human race, which causes the thrill which I feel. A merely good man, possessed of an unusual love for humanity, does not particularly impress me. I do not love humanity myself; and I do not feel any particular sympathy with those who do.

I am ready to confess, as a proof of my sincerity towards my religious friends, that I cannot altogether explain the thrill I have referred to. It resembles in character the feeling I have when I read an especially magical line in poetry — the only moment which ever gives me the sensation of tears. Is it an atavistic thing, I wonder; a reversion in me to the mediaeval emotions of my ancestors? Or is it a purely artistic impulse? I refuse to call it religious, because it is not connected in the remotest way with any need or desire to worship. It certainly is not moral, because I have often experienced it when I was about some deed “that had no relish of salvation in’t,” and it has been accompanied by no shadow of remorse or scruple.

Before leaving this interesting borderland of philosophy and religion, I want to say a word about the absence in me of the mystical sense. I know no human being less of a mystic than I am. In this matter my irreverent and sceptical “materialism” — if that is the best word to describe it — goes to the extreme limit. Fancies about an over-soul in things, or an “anima mundi,” always rouse in me images of a comic kind. I see the universe as an enormous sponge; through which the “spirit,” or whatever they call it, pours, seething and fermenting, like cider out of a vat. The “something far more deeply interfused” of the Wordsworthian ecstasy leaves me contemptuously frigid. I am tempted to give to this great pantheistic emotion the grossest and most material causes. I am always driven to associate it with animal feelings of purely physiological well-being. I was not born to be a Pantheist. The idea of worshipping God in Nature, or worshipping Nature as God, has never had the remotest appeal for me. My instincts are all Polytheistic. A quite unmystical and perfectly naive worship of the sun or the moon or of any particular planet, is the sort of thing that I understand and sympathize with.

I know what is meant by the phrase “cosmic emotion” but I never feel it. What I feel is a perfectly natural and sensual enjoyment of a particular field, or flower-garden, or river-bank, I do not want these things to lead me to the brink of Heaven or to the feet of God. The spiritual raptures of Shelley’s ethereal inspiration please me as poetry, but in practice a curious vein of humourous and cynical realism holds me bound to the earth. In these things I am frankly and grossly material. What appeals to me in Nature, what gives me always the most thrilling delight, is what one has learned to call the *magic* of her fleeting and evasive charm. This “magic,” however, has nothing to do with hidden ethical secrets, or with hidden spiritual depths. It is not hidden at all. The whole wonder and beauty of it is that it is on the surface. It comes and goes. It allures and escapes. The appeal it makes is not to the mystical sense, but to the poetical sense. It is the amorous witchery of the earth-maidens and the irresistible laughter of the earth-gods.

V

PASSING FROM RELIGION into the world of moral problems, I am especially anxious to make my real attitude, as it wavers and flickers, as clear as possible. It is here that one is especially tempted to make the best of one's "little ways," and to round off, with a show of consistency, moods and impulses that are at the bottom absolutely inconsistent.

And yet how interesting it were, if the most ordinary of human beings could be persuaded to analyze and set down, with genuine unscrupulousness, his real moral experiences!

It were surely a matter of some psychological importance, perhaps even of some ethical importance, if a person could bring himself to state frankly where, and at what points, his own private conscience moves in agreement with the social conscience, and where it deviates from it and pursues its own road.

I suppose that, in the last resort, I must be what they call a Hedonist, — that suspicious-sounding name which made Pater wish that everybody knew Greek. I suppose that, ultimately, I pursue Pleasure — and Pleasure alone — as the chief end of my cults and activities. The poignancy of the situation, as far as conscience is concerned, begins to assert itself for me at those points where my Pleasure conflicts directly with the Pleasure of other people. Until some point of this kind is reached, I am absolutely devoid of scruple. My line of thought and action may run dead contrary to the conscience of the community to which I belong, without my experiencing the least discomfort of soul. I may think and do things absolutely under the ban of the current ethical code, and my conscience will remain gay and unruffled — it will even feel a certain agreeable tickling of pleasant selfapprobation.

It is when my pursuit of pleasure crosses, with a direct impact, the instinct of self-preservation in others, that the pinch comes. I am, by disposition and taste, fatally aware of the existence of these other people, of these alien egoists in my path. It is as disagreeable to me to rend and maul them, as it is to break the branches of delicate trees or to pull up the roots of sensitive flowers.

An egoist myself, I know well how egoists suffer when their particular life-illusion is interfered with, or their particular aesthetic vista blocked up. And every man, woman or child I meet is an egoist for me. I suspect them all of living ultimately for nothing but Pleasure — even as I do. They may talk of duty, and self-culture, and the service of humanity, and the will of God — I seem to waive aside all that, and perceive under every mask the old eternal pressure of the life-lust.

It causes me much inconvenience — this conscience of mine; many sacrifices, many wretched unillumined hours. I sometimes hesitate on the brink of envying those thicker-skinned, more impervious scoundrels, who go ahead mercilessly, and strike out for what they want even across the bodies of their friends. But I never do really envy them. I think I have an instinctive feeling that the same imperiousness in them, which makes such indifference possible, causes them to lose endless exquisite emotions of pleasure to which my less unruffled skin remains porous and sensitive.

Thus I am one of those who would never be able, unless under circumstances of intolerable aggravation, to leave a tiresome friend or companion, and lash out for liberty at every cost. To cut difficult knots by "quitting," as my American moralist recommends, is out of the question for me. I must not claim too much virtue. It is probably not merely my dislike of giving other people unpleasant shocks, but my dislike of receiving them myself, which restrains me.

I am naturally averse to any kind of drastic action. In fact I dislike all action, whether drastic or otherwise. My atavistic reversion, if we all do really have so quaint a thing, is towards the passive, rather than the predatory world. I suppose my ideal existence, out of the human circle, would be that of some happy iridescent jelly-fish, expanding its sunlit body in placid warmth at the bottom of a rock-pool, hurting nothing and being hurt by nothing — and living entirely for sensation. Apart from the jelly-fish, I find the life of a Prairie-Bison a very desirable one. Lizards in the desert seem also enviable; and there is much to be said, to my thinking, for the innocent role played in this life-medley by the lichen upon an apple-tree, or the moss upon the roots of an elm.

This singular reluctance on my part to strike out and mould, as they say, my own life, is connected I fancy with every one of my profoundest instincts. I cannot endure the idea of giving people violent jerks and blows. I cannot endure the effort, the action, the dealing with material difficulties, that such movements require. I long for things to change; but to change things, one has to have the energetic will-power of a demiurge; and there is absolutely nothing demiurgic about me. I like the sensation of being “created.” I do not at all like the responsibility of “creation.” I am always sceptical too, about any change. There are bound to be people and things, wherever I go, clamorous, obtrusive, and demanding some kind of response. Custom has made the things I am used to, more easy to handle. I have acquired the tricks of my own burrow, and know how to avoid the barking dogs and the men with guns. If I go forth into new fields, the chances are that I shall encounter much more noisy invaders of my solitude. What is called “travelling” always implies Policemen, Inspectors, Custom-House

Officers, and Government Officials. It often implies Bandits and Brigands. An individual with a nervous dislike of his fellow-men, were wise to remain at home. I may go far in search of quietness, and after all, discover no path so unfrequented as the one I have learned to find the way to, from my own back-door. I have acquired by long experience the art of moving among turnips and mangel-wurzels; why should I go stumbling forth to find cactus and deadly night-shade?

My unwillingness to march forth to liberty over the bodies of people, is further accounted for by a quaint fear I have that I may suddenly discover depths of affection and tenderness in me that I never suspected. One would feel a considerable fool if one sacrificed "love" to "liberty," only to find oneself in another kind of prison, and "love" murdered at the gate. One never can tell! One cries aloud for freedom, and strikes down this or that barrier, only to fall into some devilish gin far more G murderous than the last. To preserve the liberty of one's thoughts, — that at least is something! While one can go aside in lonely places and mutter one's weariness of flesh and blood into the ear of the elements, one's lot is not hopeless.

Apart from my fear of unsuspected depths in my affections, I am prevented from deserting my post by a much less admirable quality. I have, to confess the truth, an absurd desire to be regarded with fondness and complacency, if not with respect.

To be considered a hard-hearted ruffian, by parent or wife or child, would be extremely disagreeable to me.

One curious and most fortunate gift I owe to my good genius. I have absolutely no pining for what is called "spiritual affinity." I have not the least objection to living with people of divergent or even opposite tastes. In the abstract, I cannot even regard such affinity as a thing to be desired. It presents itself to me as a spiritual invasion, as a rushing-in of alien waters into my sequestered harbour; as something troublesome, exacting and confusing.

I like being myself and going my own way, and I like my companions to do the same. Such contrarieties afford an opportunity for me to indulge my predilection for irony, for psychological analysis, and for living a double life. I despise people who must always be receiving sympathetic assent to their ideas. I do not want sympathy. I want kindness, fondness and affection.

All that I have just said applies to my habitual feeling about spiritual affinity in the abstract. As a matter of fact, in one single human case, I have had the good fortune to know the pleasure of such an affinity in actual experience. In this case I did not ask for it, or seek for it. It just occurred. And I am bound to confess, at the risk of being held inconsistent, that it has turned out one of the great felicities of my life. Is it necessary for me to add that this startling interrupter of my method, this bold subverter of my abstract theories, is one of my own sex?

No: with regard to matters of conscience, I am extraordinarily unwilling to over-ride my friends, or cause them shocks or inconveniences. I continually go out of my way, and worry myself with teasing burdens, for their sakes. I sacrifice the main object of my life to them, that is to say my Pleasure; and I land myself in situations that necessitate what I detest above everything else, that is to say *action.* Lest this should be regarded as a monstrous boast of virtue, I hasten to add that it only applies to little external things. In the larger issues of life — short of moulding great events and inaugurating new departures — I generally get what I want; and I get it, not by any elaborate Machiavellian schemes, but by a certain pliability of nature which makes it possible for me to bend like a reed, without ever breaking.

My egoism has its own perfectly unconscious and instinctive arts which reach their end by the most devious and unexpected paths.

I am naturally much more sympathetic with the physical sufferings of people than with those of a moral kind. I always regard physical suffering as an outrage, as a scandalous anomaly, as an insult to the harmony and pleasantness of life. I am not one of those who think that we gain by suffering and become nobler. According to my experience, people lose by it and are hampered, stupified, mutilated, distorted, and embittered. In this matter of physical suffering, my conscience does not only work negatively; it works positively. It runs into very extreme excesses. It becomes what many persons would call "diseased."

This is the cause, among others, why I can never bring myself to eat the flesh of oxen, sheep, and pigs. It is not that I object to their being killed. It is that I dislike extremely the manner of their killing. If people went out into the pastures and gave these innocents pleasant little electric shocks that caused them to fall instantaneously dead in the midst of their browsing, I would eat them with avidity.

The same thing applies to Socialism. My conscience compels me to be a Socialist, and I suppose I shall always be one; though none could dislike more than I the idea of being interfered with by a stupid set of moralistic Bureaucrats.

I have no prejudices in the matter of political freedom. I listen with humourous contempt to the inane chatter of Democratic Idealists. I would resign my political rights to-morrow with absolute equanimity if some great despotic commission of Kitcheners and Roosevelts could settle the matter of poverty once for all, and arrange that everybody should have the pleasures of life, and be well-fed, warm, and contented. I prize liberty as much as any. In fact liberty is the breath I must breathe. But I would willingly submit to serious curtailment of the invaluable thing, if by so doing I could relieve my conscience at a stroke of this uncomfortable background of responsibility for the abominable miseries which we inflict on the poor.

It is in things of this kind that my conscience pricks and plagues me. In other matters, where there is no question of giving people or animals direct discomfort, I have no conscience at all. In realms of comfort outside the question of causing suffering, I do exactly and precisely what I please, limited only by motives of expediency. This sounds wonderfully heroic and anti-nomian; in reality I shrewdly suspect it is very much what everybody does: for I notice that the human conscience is more alert in condemnation of others than punctilious in self discrimination.

And when one comes to examine into the matter, what an enormous mass of so-called moral restraint is purely an affair of expediency! Certain lapses, certain wanderings from the path, seem to us best avoided; not in the least because the current morality condemns them, but simply because, given the circumstances we are in, they would lead to troublesome situations and embarrassing complications. Take the virtue out of the world which is the result of pusillanimity and caution, and how much would be left?

For myself, I can only pray that I shall always find it wise and expedient to be sweet-tempered, friendly, considerate, and amusing; rather than sour, irritable, heavyhanded, gloomy, and dull. For, in the last resort, it is the happy and gracious people who make life tolerable, and the sulky, touchy, ill-conditioned wretches who poison its pleasant hours.

At the same time I must confess I would prefer to spend my days with an irritable egoist who possessed genius, even though he made life extremely inharmonious, rather than with a cheerful fool who could do nothing but amiably chuckle. This however is a matter of taste. As a general rule, then, my conscience is quiet and flexible. Economic injustice, the disgusting slaughter of animals, brutality of parents towards children, vivisection, harshness to prisoners, are the only things that really rouse and excite it: though I am conscious of remorse when I inflict upon my friends the discomfort of my moods of animal depression, or the moroseness of ill-health.

VI

TO TURN TO a completely different aspect of one’s life; I suppose it would be impossible for any human being to be more absolutely under the dominance of Literature than I am. I think by books; I move in an atmosphere of books; I am an infatuated bookworm. To the influence of books I have come lately to add the influence of Art; but it is Art approached through books, interpreted by books, and loved for bookish reasons. This obsequious submission to Literature and Art follows naturally from the morbid receptivity of my nature. It follows too from my curious dislike of self-assertion, and my weary desire to “lie back” upon something or other external to myself. I love books and pictures, just as I love Fate. They are something upon which I can lean; something in which I forget myself and lose myself; something in the presence of which my clumsy and turbulent identity melts and grows lucid, flowing, transparent. This “too, too solid flesh” of mine “thaws and resolves itself into a dew” when brought near to these delicate influences.

They satisfy also my deep-seated and inveterate longing for Romance, for something that shall lead my spirit far away from the accursed commonplace, and send it sailing free over distant horizons.

I hate and loathe the commonplace; and yet because of my abnormal receptivity, the commonplace invades and stifles me more abominably than any one thing I know. Certain vile concentrated incarnations of the commonplace especially seem to arrest and paralyze me. Such is the effect of that horrid moment after mid-day lunch; when, in any decent English establishment, one is desolately conscious that the unfortunate servants are all gathered at the sink, washing odious greasy dishes. Such is the effect of those bleak, littered, fretted hours of miserable waiting, when intolerable visitors drag on their inane "conversation," and one watches in a kind of petrified torpor the cups of lukewarm tea and the photographs on the mantelpiece.

At such times a mad "receptivist," such as I am, suffers misery beyond words. Lucky indeed are those happy people whose nervous skins are thick enough to endure these bleached hours and their withering negations without experiencing a sensation as though their heads were going to burst. Such happy people have the power of lolling interminably on sofas and couches when there is no one there who is beautiful, and nothing there that is exciting, and no discussion there that can rouse the remotest tinge of interest. Much of this sort of thing would literally drive me out of my wits and send me, with the King of Babylon, to eat grass in the pastures. I am especially adapted to be the half-suffocated victim of the commonplace because my damned consideration for other people prevents my lashing out and taking myself off; and my yet more accursed receptivity throws me stripped and helpless into the horrid moment's maw.

Artists, excellent drastic egoists, can strike out and be merciless. They must have their little attics and studios to themselves, or they will roar like ten thousand bulls. But I, poor receptive madman, absolutely lack this shrewd creative energy in the midst of the materials of life. I am as helpless under these blighting social siroccos as a bear tied to a pole.

I seem to have a pathetic idea that I have only to remain passive and quiescent, and all the perfumes of Arabia will float through my senses. Instead of which, what floats through me is the withering, devastating breath of every commonplace person, and object, and thought, and belief, and ambition, that our wretched race has ever evoked.

It is out of the utter paralysis of misery which the invasion of the commonplace causes me, that I cling so desperately to Literature and Art. Being at once so wretchedly receptive and so absurdly romantic, and being at the same time so devoid of the aggressive creative faculty, I turn to Literature and Art as my one grand escape.

In exciting stories I can forget my vexatious plight, and sail away down lovely rivers of enchantment, quite oblivious of people and things. In poetry and philosophy I can see the world transfigured, and even learn the secret of that exquisite lie which would make me believe that the commonplace itself is wonderful and charming — if only one looks at it from a certain angle. I confess I have never been able to find this angle. But it is a relief to be told that it is there.

It is curious that I should, in my general feeling about life, demand a certain drastic realism with certain stern, abrupt unmitigated edges; and yet require Art and Literature to protect me from reality when it is near at hand. The truth is that, in the background of my Picture of Life, I like the grey formidable skyline of austere, unblurred, unsoftened fact; while in the foreground, and even in the middle-distance, I like the tender, deceptive colouring of literary association.

This is because I feel that in ultimate things, the facts of the situation are more mysterious and terrific than any artist's dream. I wish to protect them from artists' dreams. I wish to keep them untouched and impenetrable. It irritates me to see these artists and poets project their impertinent personal fancies upon those granite walls.

But when it comes to the "little things of life;" when it comes to the immediate world of commonplace persons and ambitions, then, by all means let us have the artist's imaginative creations, and give them full play! Let us have the lover's, too; and the priest's, and the philosopher's. Let us have even the sensualist's. Let there be a general conspiracy of exquisite Fantastics, against this bleak and horrid domination. Let all things be seen through the magical blurring mirrors of Literature and Art.

Through these two mirrors, I, at any rate, see everything that comes near me. Some people have accused me of being deplorably dramatic and theatrical. This is a mistake. I am only dramatic in a literary sense, and only theatrical when my theatrical attitudes have received a literary consecration. There are plenty of people naturally dramatic and born with a mania for dramatic situations, who are not literary at all. I have, I confess, a palpable weakness for dramatic situations, but they must have that deeper, richer, more *continuous* atmosphere, of literary pungency about them, to make them really my true element. I am dramatic; but not melo-dramatic.

This tendency of mine never to see anything directly as it is, in clear objective transparency, but always through some kind of heightened medium, has at different times proved very irritating to my companions. Why cannot I, they say, interest myself in a thing's actual shape and colour and texture? Why cannot I search out in it the impersonal rhythm of Nature and her subtle mathematical laws? And with people and situations too; why cannot I grasp them in their natural independence? Why must I always be dragging in memories, associations, and personal prejudices? Why does not the beauty of the clear-cut reality suffice me, without blurring it and disfiguring it with the oblique mists of sentiment and fantastic romance? Why cannot I, even for a moment, forget the drama of my own sensations, and become a clear camera-plate for recording the truth? Why, in a word, am I always so hopelessly subjective? Well! I have no defence to offer — no reply to make. I can only say that thus, and not otherwise, have the blessed Gods created me; and thus, and not otherwise, I shall be to the end.

I am the slave of books, the slave of sensations, and the slave of my unfortunate “receptivism.”

Nothing is more interesting than to lay one’s finger on the false hypocritical gestures into which at times nearly all of us are betrayed. I do not profess to be able to unmask myself at every point. Our power of self-deception is deep as the salt sea. But I think I have noticed one most curious piece of pretence in my habitual procedure, which I will hasten to expose.

It is this. In my writings and lectures I continually advocate a certain elaborate epicurean cult — a cult of sensations and ideas, deliberately undertaken with a view to deepening and intensifying one’s vision of life. I speak tenderly and passionately of this premeditated art of making the utmost of every drop of Time. I speak of the epicurean pleasure to be derived from the least and most ordinary events of every day — its food and fire, its sunrise and sunset, its felicitous groupings, its chance encounters, its fortunate omens, its gifts of comedy and tragedy, its sacramental and symbolic burden. I speak of a deliberate refinement of our powers of appreciation and understanding; of a deliberate cultivation of our consciousness, so that it should embrace more and more of the rich and astounding spectacle offered to our enjoyment.

I talk of this art of lingering delicately by the way, tasting everything as it passes in its sweet confusion, and committing oneself to nothing, as though it were an art I myself followed in my own life, and wherein I were a master and adept. As a matter of fact I am the very opposite of all this. The above is my doctrine, — the doctrine I have drawn from my favourite writers; but my practice is the extreme contrary. Certainly I follow Pleasure; but anything more different from my way of following it, and the wise, deliberately organized way recommended in what I speak and write, could hardly be conceived.

Here — and it is an interesting psychological fact — I fall completely away from my conscious philosophy. I fall back upon the unconscious in myself, upon moods and impulses which spring up independently of any art of life.

According to my philosophy, it were wisdom to balance one sensation against another, and to connect them all reasonably and intelligently, like precious beads, upon the silver cord of my self-consciousness. My doctrine is that I should let *nothing pass*, and abstract the lovely quintessence and delicate pungent flavour from every single one of my common hours.

But what in reality do I do? I plunge madly about, from hunting ground to hunting-ground. I sink desperately into this obsession, into that vice. I let the most gracious moments go by utterly unremarked as I plan and plot the satisfaction of some absorbing desire, some ill-balanced greedy wish. Of course even here my innate tendency to touch life indirectly, rules and prevails. A certain type of book, for instance, becomes a vice to me, and I read madly, frantically, savagely, everything else shut out, until a violent reaction comes, and I would fain bury the accursed thing at the bottom of the deep sea.

It is curious how one can be inconsistent with oneself, and yet profoundly consistent. Even in love-affairs it has been my experience to find myself combining this tendency to treat things as if they were alcohol or drugs, with this other tendency to be indirect, evasive, sentimental; and to drag in remote fantastic comparisons.

It is the same with beautiful foreign cities, their squares, churches, streets, pictures and canals. My critical friends catch me hanging on bridges, loitering in gardens, standing at gaze in cloisters and alleys; and they say they observe a sort of drunken sensuality in my absorbtion, as if I were one of Poussin’s amorous Satyrs bending over a sleeping Nymph.

It is perfectly true that I have a curious predilection for certain fabrics and materials. Everybody has, I suppose; but I must have a way of accentuating and obtruding my tastes, and turning them into perversities and intoxications; otherwise my friends would not be irritated by such harmless fancies.

I certainly must confess to extremely strong sympathies and antipathies in the matter of places and scenery. Sometimes these run strangely counter to accepted notions of the desirable. Mountains, for instance, dear to nearly all lovers of the picturesque, seem to be nothing but depressing top-heavy excrescences, bulging forth from the kindly earth's smooth surface, and keeping the sunshine and air out of the dwellings of men. Huge cataracts, vast rivers, enormous lakes, jagged, cataclysmic crevices, and titanic canyons, are all detestable to me and full of desolation.

My favourite scenery is the sea-shore, especially when there are vast stretches of sand there, or wide salt marshes.

After the sea-shore, I prefer sandy volcanic plains, with an occasional abrupt hill crowned with olive-trees and one or two solitary cypresses. Damp fields, damp woods, damp foliage, damp over-grown gardens full of damp ferns, are what I dislike most of all. They make me cry aloud for the desert.

Rains and storms devastate me. Why could not the Creator have dispensed with these discomfortable interruptions to conversation? I certainly feel no inclination to worship "Him that rideth upon the Wings of the Wind." My God is a God who sits serene and silent, under great moon-lit palm-trees.

The thought of the large free expanses of the desert, whether in its hot noons or under its glittering stars, makes me realize what it is that I require from natural scenery. I require an escape. I require an escape from all disturbing and distracting objects — objects and people. I want to be liberated from everything that "sticks out," from everything that calls attention to itself by its colour, its form, its challenge.

Civilized scenery is classical and nobly monotonous. It is a background to the distractions of beautiful cities, beautiful people, and beautiful works of art. Gothic scenery is different. Its hills and rivers, its rocks and chasms are always clamouring to be noticed, to be admired. They are always saying "Look at us. Worship us. We are the wondrous works of God."

The civilized beauty of the desert and sea-shore makes no barbarous claims of this kind. Here one can forget every disturbing object, every disturbing emotion. The universe is adored here under one symbolic element, be it sand or water, and there is no mortal thing to separate us from the horizons of air and sky. I confess I derive a certain misanthropic and Spinozistic pleasure from seeing things thus reduced to the ascetic minimum of form and colour. With nothing but the sea or desert before one, the planet falls into its place, and the primitive necessity of the elements throws life and its concerns into due proportion.

VII

IT IS A natural transition to turn from such contemplations to the contemplation of personal extinction. Death! I should like to set down, if I could what I really feel about death. I think I have as little objection to death as anyone not in actual physical suffering. Perhaps it is from a certain inherent and constant tiredness, both mental and physical, which never leaves me, that I look upon death with so little dismay. Perhaps it is also because I lean so strongly to the idea of complete annihilation. I notice that the people who fear death most, are the people who believe most intensely in another life. And this is quite natural. It is their passion for life that makes them so credulous. I have no passion for life, and I regard death as an escape from a thousand annoyances. Don’t let me be mistaken. I am the reverse of brave. It is not valour but cowardice that makes me look upon death so often with weary satisfaction. It is the fault of my temperament. I am so made that I feel more vividly than others the innumerable pin-pricks and vexatious responsibilities that every day brings. I am always being driven into action, and action is detestable to me. I look with immense pleasure upon the hours when quietly in my grave I shall not be called upon to *do* anything of any kind at all.

Hatred of action is at the bottom of my character. And yet I must have change. These two antipathies together, the antipathy for doing things and the antipathy for remaining in the same place, are the dominant motives of my average mood. I have absolutely no sense of possession, no love of property. I hate my books, my pictures, my furniture, my garden; and I even feel sometimes antagonistic to the charming view from my windows. I was born nomadic, anarchistic, deracinated. I can write decently when I am in hotels, inns, railway trains, and foreign cities. If I am to do anything of the kind "at home," it must be in a room bare of every object, and with whitewashed walls. The nearer such a room approaches the austerity of a cell or a barn or a shed, the better work I do. My chief objection to living in the country is that one eternally sees the same hills and roads and fields, and the same people. The last place on earth where one can be alone and unrecognized is in a country village. Every dog, every cow, every sheep, every pig, every fowl, and every blackbird, seems to think it necessary to greet you with a cheerful personal salutation. And as for one's neighbors — dear, gentle hearts! — one cannot forget them for a moment.

You will say that if I have such a passion for change, it is strange that I should like sea-shore and desert better than woods and fields. The point is that these pure ascetic elements, these world-materials reduced to the minimum of simplicity, satisfy my desire to escape from objects and things. Woods and fields are very obtrusive objects. They are always growing leaves and dropping leaves, or growing flowers or dropping flowers. They tease one with their claims and insistencies. They have the exuberance of human acquaintances. Pet animals are the worst of all; especially dogs, those incarnations of pathos. Cats I endure very well, and even confess to a sneaking fondness for them. They remind me somehow of the irresponsible desert. They look as if they had just come from sitting crouched for a thousand years at the feet of the Pyramids.

I suppose my craving for change is really not so much a desire to be somewhere, as to be somewhere *else.* I have grown weary even of Rome and I can remember a fretting longing to turn my back on Florence. Venice of course is the city of my heart; but I can imagine myself wishing bitterly never to see a lagoon again.

Before I pass from these general aspects of my feeling towards life, I should like to revert once more to the moral problem. I am above all anxious to analyze to the very bottom my objection to optimistic views of the world. Is this pride? or is it an attenuated and sublimated form of the voluptuous pleasure one sometimes derives from a sense of power over fragile and delicate things? The universe is not fragile or delicate, but many people's pleasant illusions about it are most certainly so. Is this one of the reasons why I require a universe that shall be at once ruled by necessity and ruled by chance? Perhaps I really want the prospect to be devastating to the ordinary person's temperament. Perhaps I really say in my heart "if the ordinary person and his spiritual comforters crave a friendly universe with a God behind it — then I will disturb this faith!" Perhaps I really say "if the ordinary person longs for a malleable universe, a universe that we can make what we like of, — then I will disturb that faith too!"

Do I, in fact, want a universe that shall annoy the mystic by its incurable levities, and one that, at the same time, shall annoy the pragmatist by its fatal austerities?

No! I cannot quite believe I am as wicked as all that. What, then, are we to suppose is the true origin of this curious desire for a pessimistic interpretation of the world? Let me suggest an aesthetic origin; for it cannot be that I want delicate and sensitive souls to be outraged in their hopes. I am no devil. I want sensitive and delicate souls to be thrillingly and exquisitely happy. What I do not want is that any arrogant individual thinker should be right; or, still less, that the vulgar complacent optimism of the popular poets and preachers should have any justification in the facts of the real case. Perhaps behind my wish that the universe should be whimsically perverse for the benefit of the rationalists and rigidly rational for the benefit of the pragmatists, lies really a desire to keep the thing large and weird and outrageous and lovely; to keep the thing, in fact, the huge, grotesque, impossible, mysterious enormity which it is, — a thing eluding all general solutions, and thrilling us while it slays us.

This question, of the real nature of my dislike of optimistic interpretations, whether such interpretations be rational or instinctive, is a question that I think goes very deep. I think it goes to the very bottom of my soul. It is no doubt closely connected with another tendency of mine, which has met with reprobation at various times; I mean the tendency, in criticising any well-known author of ambiguous or antinomian proclivities, to throw these proclivities into vivid relief, in place of softening them or smoothing them down. The same tendency has been observed in me by unkind observers, even in the matter of ordinary conversation. "Why does the fellow" — such caustic observers have been led to exclaim— "why does the fellow rub his hands together and gleam with satisfaction as soon as any blasphemous explosion or erotic outrage is referred to, while otherwise, as we speak of worthy people's harmless ejaculations he sits dull and spiritless like a toad upon a log?"

Now what peculiarity is it in one's nature that leads to this perversity? May it not be a dramatic instinct, craving the stir and excitement, the stimulus and provocation, which powerful emotions of an abnormal character alone can give? And does not the presence of such an instinct in us suggest that a world devoid of this austere and sinister complexion would be a very depressing world, a world from whose rational excellence one would long to escape?

The whole question of our attitude towards what is usually called "evil" is a profoundly difficult one. Subtly intermixed with a vigorous and direct condemnation of certain things that instinctively strike us as evil, is a large and queer toleration of many things apparently regarded by the world as deserving that sinister name.

Does this only mean that we, in our hearts, are naturally of the company of the lost; or does it perhaps imply that, working through conscience, the human race itself is advancing to a larger, a nobler, a more generous and natural view of many problems?

However this may be, I am quite ready to admit a very close connection between my scepticism in regard to ultimate interpretations, and my lack of severity in regard to many moral issues. In my deepest heart I lean, as I have said, to the view that, when we die, our “souls” die with us, though I do not, as some are inclined to do, close the door absolutely to other possibilities. I say “other” possibilities, not kindlier possibilities, because I must confess that my more general feeling is that the dead are to be envied, and that annihilation is no “appalling stroke.” This is said in all quiet seriousness, as I habitually feel it, and in no mood of bitterness and bravado. I do not revolt against the universe because, like Saturn, it devours its own children. It does not in the least depress me that death should end all, or that I shall never meet again those I have loved. All will be equal then: and those who have made life exquisite for us will be with us still, loved and lovers together, under the gentle river of oblivion.

I agree, from the profoundest depths of my being, with the opinion of the great Schopenhauer, that suffering, of one sort or another, is a more noticeable and persistent thing in life than any happiness or joy. Our pleasures come and go, like swallows touching the surface of a stream, but the waters of unhappiness flow on without pause, swift, dark, and deadly.

It is perhaps this underlying sense of the inherent discomfort of life, and its strange beauty, that leads me to feel a certain weary indignation with those who would interfere with the few golden hours which fate allows to us all. I think perhaps it is just there that I would draw the line of my own ethical code. People who by their unkindness, by their gloomy selfishness, by their spiteful vindictiveness or peevish jealousy, darken and discolour the days of those whose fate it is to live with them, seem to me bad people. I condemn them and struggle against them; and am favourably disposed to all who are their enemies. I never feel the least scruple of conscience in helping the victims of these people to escape from their clutches. They are the accomplices of everything that makes life intolerable. They are themselves the leaden heart of its burden. Rough, coarse-grained, overbearing tyrants, despots with more will-power than intelligence, and more intelligence than sensitiveness, these are the beings my soul loathes and my moral sense condemns. Passionate criminals, murderous criminals, I regard of course with natural apprehension, but I feel no spark of moral anger against them. In cases of lynching, my sympathies are always with the person who is being lynched.

As for thieves, forgers, bandits, and other enemies of society, though I have a selfish disinclination to fall into their hands, my moral sense remains quite unstirred by their depredations. I am even sometimes tempted to fancy that they take back no more than what is their own. “All property,” as the Frenchman said, “is robbery;” and though, being no saint, I cling fiercely enough to my spoils, I am no hypocrite in my sense of possession. I do not regard myself as superior to the wastrel because I have had the luck to inherit hoarded plunder. Between me and the tramp there is nothing but the difference of pure chance.

VIII

THE READER WILL have recognized by this time what I am trying to do in this personal sketch, and he will not, I trust, be angry with me for omissions which were originally implied in the method I have adopted. What I want to do is to give a picture of a certain type of character thrown upon the world, and of its struggles to adapt itself to inevitable circumstances. The margin of possible re-adaption in everybody's life is necessarily small; the longer one lives, the smaller one sees it to be; but the value of such a sketch as this, apart from its psychological interest, lies in the warning it may give, to other, younger temperaments of the same type, to guard and protect themselves under similar difficulties.

The important thing, it seems to me, is to recognize fully as quickly as possible both the limitations of one's own disposition and the limitations of one's circumstances, and to lose no time in adjusting one's self-assertion to these moulds. How many hours have I not wasted in trying to be something else than what nature intended! How long it is before one really discovers what nature did intend! I was born for sensations, rather than for action. I was born to enjoy sensations, to analyze sensations, and turn sensations into verbal and literary rhetoric.

A person whose philosophy of the world has been corrupted by his morality, would at once rebel, in angry disgust, at such a destiny. He would force himself to engage in manual labour; he would force himself to undertake the support of some great social reformation; he would assume every practical responsibility he could lay hands on; he would regard his incompetent sensationalism with shame and aversion, and by drilling, by gymnastics, by methodical activity, and the avoidance of sensational lures, turn himself as far as possible into a healthy-minded, energetic and useful citizen. I refuse to regard such drastic methods as right or wise. Is nature so poor a mother, is life so meagre a theatre, that there cannot be found scope and opportunity for so harmless an abnormality as mine?

Do not suffer yourselves to be depressed or paralyzed or converted, dear companions in sensationalism, by this stupid Public Opinion. Nature, not Society is your parent; and you may take my word for it there are ways and means of drawing upon natural forces that will make you strong enough to fight Society on quite equal terms. The revolt is much more extended than you suppose. You are not alone in Israel. You have only to focus your scattered energies, to concentrate your drifting emotions. The instinct of self-preservation in the Life-Stream itself, requires your self-assertion. Nature will never suffer the strenuous or the practical to work a final victory over you.

But to return to my self-analysis. I am certainly, of all men, the most helpless and incompetent in dealing with what we call “matter,” with material obstacles, material complications, material embarrassments.

In the presence of the simplest material difficulty — I am positively ashamed to give examples — I am struck helpless as an empaled snake. I wriggle, head and tail, and utter inarticulate expostulations. No one can believe the misery into which the most obvious practical necessities plunge me. My hands are made for nothing upon earth but explanatory gestures. They refuse to obey any practical command; and the rest of my body is as helpless as they are. I have not the mechanical skill necessary for the simplest undertaking.

Little absurd physical imbroglios render me completely hors-de-combat. I can neither ride, nor climb, nor dance, nor shoot, nor fight, nor drive, nor whistle, nor hum a popular catch. I would sooner go without food for twenty-four hours than face a savage landlord, or order a dinner at an improper hour from a sulky head-waiter. To quarrel with an official or a policeman is an impossibility to me. To differ in opinion from a stern fellow-traveller is a nervous effort quite beyond my reach.

I cannot refrain from wondering what would be the effect upon me of a little wholesome military training. I suppose if I survived the experience, I should be a different person. But though I have no liking for myself, I do not want to be a different person. I want to remain myself, with certain obstacles and infirmities removed, and my own respect gained.

Probably I shall end by perishing like Turgeniev's oratorical Rudin — shot through the heart in an attempt to analyze his last revolutionary sensations.

I am afraid I am appallingly well adapted for the hero of a sarcastic light comedy. I sometimes fancy I must present myself to my friends under the guise of an elongated penguin, if the reader recalls those queer polar amphibians, with their incompetent flapping appendages and their eloquent gestures. I do not know how penguins make love, except from vague reminiscences of Anatole France's story. Moving Pictures of polar latitudes seem to omit such details; but I sometimes fear that in that final proof of practical heroism I am as much of a fool as in the rest.

I suppose it is by reason of this physiological clumsiness that so few female penguins — of our race — have ever regarded me with anything but distant interest. The youngest of young girls like their friends to be smart, well-dressed and enterprising. I have been very severely taken to task for an awkward blunderer, even in the art of innocent flirtation. Perhaps it is out of a kind of revenge for these rejections that my wayward fancy loves to imagine queer impossible situations in which such exacting young persons are led to beg very pitifully for my Sultanic commiseration.

I keep calling myself a “sensationalist,” but let it be clearly understood that I am the very opposite of a Sybarite. My sensationalism is of an imaginative cast. It leads me constantly into absurd extremes of asceticism. I am naturally an ingrained ascetic, with lapses into luxuriousness. What is called “comfort” has very little claim upon me. Many of my most exquisite sensations demand discomfort as their appropriate accompaniment. I must however indicate that even in my avoidance of comfort I am abnormally and unhealthily aware of the material aspects of things. I am superficial. The surface of existence constantly obsesses me. I cannot forget it in the stream of great emotions. I suppose the only occasions when I do forget this obtrusive “matter” and all its little exactions, are when some wonderful line of poetry, or some astoundingly imaginative picture, lifts me out of myself.

Sometimes, though less often, philosophical analysis has the same effect. In analyzing things, I escape from them. In dissecting them, I rise above them. I would indeed recommend to everybody, who like myself suffers from the pinch of life’s material engines, the wisdom of this procedure. Nothing in the world remains uninteresting when the analytical intelligence is brought to bear upon it. This is really what Spinoza means by the liberating power of the understanding.

I suppose a not unimportant revelation of a person’s life, and one not unilluminative as to his character, is the sort of advice he would give — were he put upon his oath of seriousness by the presence of death or some tragic calamity — to young people inclined to lend him their attention. One talks in ironic disguises to one’s contemporaries and elders. One usually hates them so that one wants them to remain exactly as they are. But it is a different thing when it comes to youth. O youth, youth! May my tongue wither in my mouth if I ever insult thy sweet docility by false conventional maxims or vain jocular bravado. Youth is the hope and salt and salvation of this muddy, brutal world: and those who refuse to take youth seriously, be they as clever as Plato or as subtle as Hegel, are surely deserving of unmitigated damnation. For myself, the one thing I fancy I have a genuine right to be proud of, is the fact that when I have to deal with youth I grow scrupulous, considerate, serious, and grave. I do not say that I grow responsible. My very anxiety not to make a mistake renders me extraordinarily unwilling to assume responsibility.

I am so afraid, too, of interfering. How many impertinent parents and other conceited elders take upon themselves to push young persons here and there; to plunge them into this profession or that profession; to mould and maul and mangle their tentative tender self-development!

It is in this matter of the education of youth that I find myself differing from many of my free-thinking friends, whose views I otherwise endorse. They seem perfectly willing to thrust down the throats of these sensitive fledgelings all their original theories and ideas.

I cannot feel it in this way. In solitary conversation with any child, who wants really to know what I think, I express myself as gravely, exactly, and minutely as I should do if I were holding a sort of Judgment Day Dialogue with my own soul. But I never imply that my personal opinions carry any more weight than the child’s own. I avoid the ex cathedra manner. Indeed I am at pains to make it clear to my young friend that I am myself only attempting to justify by reason and argument what remains at bottom a matter of personal temperament. With this in view, I do not shrink from presenting myself to him as a “queer fellow” or one who has his eccentricities.

Beyond this, I am inclined to put the child in the way of outward conformity with the customs of the country. I let him see that I myself, go my own way, irrespective of these customs, and then leave it to him to develop, under the surface of their convenient cloak, any individual rebellions he may be led to adopt, out of the pressure of *his* personal peculiarities.

If the child is naturally extremely sensitive, it is better that he should be impressed by the flexible, easy, *outward* conventions of immemorial usage, than that this or the other individually-thinking person should warp him with his private prejudices.

In all this I am largely influenced by my inherent scepticism, and my invariable suspicion of the value of every kind of private judgment and personal conclusion, including my own.

It is this sort of sceptical, ironic acquiescence in timeworn usages that I should indicate to the child as the safest road. And I would always suggest to him the advisability of suspending his judgment upon many problems until he is older.

I would gradually communicate to him, in fact, my own attitude towards these ancient conventions, but I would present my personal ideas in so light a way, that he would not be bound to take *them* any more seriously than those of the Community.

Nothing is more repulsive to me than the manner in which certain earnest-minded parents fill their infants’ heads with their own pompous heresies, and make odious little conceited free-thinkers of them. The great art of successful education according to my view is to protect the delicate minds of children from the imposition of the self-willed private opinions of their elders. And this is done most successfully by putting them under the exterior formalism of some ancient time-worn system, especially when the healthy-minded paganism of the child is fortified by a little carefully instilled sceptical doubt. Children are much more subtle and intelligent then one supposes. With the least encouragement they will quickly be found to steer clear of any premature committal of themselves to this or that profession or opinion or party. They know as well as we do that they are feeling their way; and they often quite consciously make use of the thousand and one distractions of childhood to protect themselves from our untimely meddling.

I remarked, in connection with the cool manner in which we genteel classes sponge upon the wage-earners, that I was not enough of a saint to give back my inherited plunder to the armies of the homeless and unfed. That is true; but, for all that, I have a queer inexplicable penchant for a saint's life. How lovely to possess nothing, and to have no ties! How lovely to wander about from village to village, living on bread and milk, and working miracles! One peculiarity, usually noted in saints, I already do possess: I have a genius for making a fool of myself. It is an interesting psychological phenomenon — this role of being a fool. There is in it much more no malice than is usually supposed. One sometimes does it simply in order, in a queer perverted way, to be *revenged* on the proud, well-constituted people one is forced to meet. But I do it, maliciously too, I fear, in my relations with my friends. I exaggerate my eccentricities; I parade my adversities; I expose all my most secret and scandalous thoughts. I love nothing better than to be the butt of my friends' ethical and intellectual indignation.

I sometimes defeat my own ends however at this little game; for though I begin doing it in order to lead the darlings of my soul into the sin of pride, I not infrequently end by feeling really as if I were a kind of moral abortion. And this feeling is less agreeable to me than might be supposed.

I referred just now to the sin of pride. I wonder if I am proud, or, still worse, conceited? I think perhaps I am; for, when it comes to the point, I get hardly any exultation of feeling from the things I can do, such things as talking, analyzing, criticising, interpreting; and a great deal of exultation from a vague belief in the possession of much higher powers, powers to be displayed to the world some day, but at present extremely deeply hidden. Is it not grotesque that I should still have the illusion — it is not an illusion to me — that I have the power to write really important and original poetry? Should I not have done so already, if I were destined to do so? Probably I should; but to the end of my life I shall, in secret, hug and cherish this pathetic conceit. Yes, I shall hug and cherish it; for, let them say what they will, there is a certain thrilling sense of magical power that sometimes sweeps over me, as if from the shores of Lost Atlantis, promising things beyond the vision of hope.

Many people in England wonder at my love for America. Fools! How shall I ever pay back the debt I owe to this dear, mad, chaotic, scandalous country, where the women know “how to take care of themselves” and the men know how to take care of the women! No one with a tendency to love the great driving fatalistic rush of simplified elements, can help loving America.

Little things, little people, little distinctions, little niceties, little gardens, little houses, and little scandal, — how they are all swept aside and reduced to nothing in the torrent of this huge, grotesque, outrageous avalanche of human lava!

Things fall into their due proportion in America, into their true place under the Milky Way. “Culture” falls into its place, and the gentility of gentlemen, and the traditions and reverences of the past. How salutary, how refreshing, that immense nonchalant cynicism, that huge disregard for ceremony, that unrespect for persons!

For me, who find in England so much that obtrudes, that claims attention, that demands meticulous handling, what an escape, to be swept along on this tremendous torrent, where all separate things are *bleached*, as it were, into a common insignificance!

Individual objects and persons, those objects and persons that are so teasing and distracting in their emphatic colours, grow beautifully and monotonously *grey* as the winds of the great plains blow upon them. People grow to resemble one another and acquire a touching and profound modesty, a cosmic modesty, like that of sand-dunes or sea-pebbles, under the pressure of so vast a human tide.

I said, a little above, that I was no lover of humanity, and had small understanding of those who were. This is true. I am afraid the power of love is deplorably small in me. It is obvious that, if this be so, I myself am the worst sufferer from it. How strange it all is! One is born with certain faculties and qualities, or one is not. One is blamed or praised accordingly. But how unfair! Who of the children of men chose the womb that bore him? — who the orbits and transits of the stars under which he first saw the light?

But though not of amorous or loving temper, I am not always dull to the heartbreaking pathos of human life upon this earth. I think I feel it most, this melting mood, when, in a chance encounter on my journeys, the astounding gentleness and friendly consideration of some laborious child of toil hits me with a palpable hit of wonder. How can these victims of our social system remain so sweet-tempered, so courteous, so cordial? I know that all working people are not like that. I have met some as brutally, as boisterously arrogant, as any bloated slave-driver. But that there should be *any* so urbane, so sensitive, so tactful! — one is reconciled to the human race by such divine patience under such a lot. To turn once more to the general attempt I am making to get at the bottom of those ideas and sensations which reveal my identity; I should not be true to my analytic conscience if I did not recognize one curious form of doubt which seems habitually present. I refer to the doubt as to whether what we call our "ideas" are really as important and prominent as we claim. What I seem to notice is that people are driven steadily forward by their inherited disposition and their circumstances; while the "ideas" that they project are only, as it were, little moving shadows and mirrored reflections of the inevitable stream of their destiny. It is appalling, the manner in which the mere outward conditions of our life mould, impress, and limit us. On the other hand, it is appalling how little the interchange of ideas and opinions affects our predestined, inherited temper.

My life, when I really examine it, turns out to be a perpetual series of bye-issues and interludes, under the surface of which my integral self waits and expects its free opportunity. Waits and expects it; and will be found waiting and expecting it, when my last hour strikes. The real primitive, drastic elements in the drama are only these two. The underlying pressure of one's dominant will to enjoy, fettered and limited by the jagged and rough-edged obstacles of outward circumstances and conditions.

It is incredible, — the easy manner in which we conceal these facts, the hypocritical references and appeals we make to our moral sense and our philosophical ideas. The more what we esteem our virtue, is subjected to analysis, the more it turns out to be nothing but a rather sordid compromise between the exigencies of our insatiable, our corrupt will, and the hard sharp restraints of material conditions.

It is just this that gives me a feeling of shameful treachery to the facts of the case, when I advocate, in speaking and writing, my epicurean cult of elaborate and refined sensationalism. It would give a still worse feeling of shame if I launched out, as some do, into bold idealistic appeals to the supremacy of the spirit. In real life, how far does my epicurean cult actually affect my conduct? Not in the slightest degree. When circumstance throws me in the way of some object of attraction, — an exquisite field of flowers, an indescribable woodland solitude, an ancient city square or populous market-place, a sea-shore crowded with tender children, an enchanting group of fair youths or alluring maidens, — does my inner consciousness repeat to itself some liturgical formula about "our duty to make the most of every hour?" Not in the least. I just forget everything, and drink fiercely, desperately, of the cup of delectable vision. Suppose on the other hand, that some obtrusive diabolical necessity — a lecture to be given, an engagement to be fulfilled, a business transaction to be got through, an uncomfortable promise to be kept, — intervenes and summons me away, it is to no virtuous ethical principle that I submit, it is simply to the crude, unlovely pressure of brute circumstance.

IX

SOME OF MY readers, if one finds readers for blunt, unvarnished indiscretions of this kind, will be perhaps wondering why, as I turn and turn about these pivotal points of my poor life's history, I say nothing of the "authors that have influenced me." Ah! for the very simple reason — the list would be too long! What portion of my being can be influenced by such things as books — and hopelessly bookish though I am, that portion is not very large — is influenced by every book I read.

As I have observed above, I think by books, I talk by books, I surround everything that occurs to me by a bookish atmosphere. Books make a fine, mellow, imaginative mist, through which I see things and people thrown to an enchanting distance. Yes, I think by books. But, here again, when it comes to the point, I do not live by books.

For instance, because books upon Greek Art assure me that the exquisite limbs of boys and girls are more important objects of contemplation, and more revealing of the Platonic ideal of Beauty, than trees and flowers, I do not therefore leave my solitary valley in the Sussex Downs, and rush to the beach at Brighton. Or when the mood is on me and I sit enraptured by the airy movements of a Pavlowa or an Isadora Duncan, I do not tear myself away and retreat to the wilderness because, in the intervals of the acts, I glance over some mystic Wordsworthian sonnet, or some verse from the Prophet Isaiah.

I do not doubt my friends because Emerson recommends "living to oneself." I do not shun the society of gentle ladies because Schopenhauer says unkind things about the shape of their figures.

The influence which books have over me, is like the influence of some constant orchestral accompaniment. One moves from group to group, as the band plays; but the music does not the least modify one's inveterate tastes and proclivities. It heightens one's pleasure here; it softens one's disappointment there. It is the atmosphere of one's life-drama; but over the material sequence of acts and scenes, it has no power at all.

Of course my inborn disposition largely *affects* my taste in books. My absolute indifference to artistic form, and my passion for analytical suggestion, obviously lead me to prefer *Jean Christophe* to *Madame Bovary;* and *Crime and Punishment* to a short story by *De Maupassant.* I have the power also — a rare power it seems, judging from the grotesque misunderstandings of the official critics — of taking my favourite authors with a pinch of salt. I am able, for instance, to appreciate Nietzsche's slashing onslaughts upon the gregarious tyranny of weakness, without any obsequious veneration for the blond assassin.

My rôle in the lecturing field seems naturally to assume the character of an attempt to instill a little imagination into the public's mind. I love Nietzsche's pulverizing insight and his noble and aristocratic tone; but I do not feel in the least bound to accept as infallible oracles his portentous utterances about Eternal Recurrence and the Higher Morality. The former theory seems based on very doubtful premises, and the latter demands an austere nobility of nature which is far out of my reach. Simple and naive indeed are those easy pagan souls who dream that this devastating sage's haughty imperatives will be found kinder to their pleasant vices than the rules of the Church. The Higher Morality may condone what we poor Pantagruelian Christians have been taught to regard as crime; but the glacial airs of its mountainous summits will freeze with intolerable disdain our little earthy frailties.

When one demands a real magnetic clairvoyance in regard to the subtler things, when one cries out for a full interpretive understanding of the world-thick volume of human fatality, its treacherous undercurrents, its subterranean perversities, it is not, I think so much to Nietzsche's flashing northern lights that one turns, as to the less arbitrary revelations of a Dostoevsky or a Henry James.

But — to revert to my bewildering contradictions — it is a most curious psychological spectacle to watch the widening gulf between one's dramatic imagination of what a human life upon earth ought to be, and the real, actual thing that one's life has in practice become.

In writing of myself I am tempted, for instance, to make much of the effect upon my mind of sudden little changes in my surroundings. I like to speak of myself as being affected by those whispers and rumours, those signs and signals, which come and go so magically and wantonly about the paths of us all. The sudden falling of a cool shadow across a dusty road; the flicker of yellow sunlight through the doorway of some wayside barn; the gleam of a sea-gull's wings in the track of a great ship; the mystery of a solitary bridge or river-weir, heavy with the mutterings of the wind and water; the look of some lonely poplar tree where nothing but marsh-reeds and grey mists can see its absorption into the Night; — these chance hieroglyphics of the Moving Finger should be, according to my imagination of my wayfaring, turning-points and conversions of deep spiritual significance. But they are nothing of the kind. I see them, I note them, I avariciously appropriate to myself their evasive charm. But that is all. It ends there. They do not penetrate the opaque material substance of my real identity.

It is a sad confession to have to make, but the truth is I have grown cynically "endued unto the element" of my habitual temper; and my habitual temper allows for no sudden and thrilling revelations. Those wonderful second-thoughts and earth-escaping ecstasies, which I am able to describe only too eloquently in words, never come to me in life. “I see, not feel,” how significant these omens are. I peer up at Arcturus and Orion: but these celestial travellers do not throb and vibrate for me with divine reassurances. All those miraculous intimations which the poets draw, from the moaning of forest-branches and the shadows in moon-lit lakes, leave me untouched and unmoved in my earth-bound proclivity. And yet I am not dull to their appeal. My senses are not atrophied. I do not pass by these magical significations with philistine indifference. It is only that a certain heavy, cynical, fatalistic doubt as to the possibility of their having any real message for me, paralyzes my spiritual response.

My analytic mind is always at hand, ready to reduce to physiological causes every stir and lift of the emotional soul. It may be true in spite of what I have said earlier in these pages, that I really have anarchistic longings for something surprising, uncaused, arbitrary and chaotic, in the stream of things: as I grow older, these wayward cravings diminish, and I tend to give myself up more and more completely to a vision of the world that is limited, categorical, and determined.

This leads me to a further problem in the analysis of my disposition. It is queer to note how active and insatiable my *mind* is, as compared with the paralysis of my *spirit.* I fancy that pride has something to do with this. I seem to have inherited pride of intellect combined with contempt for spiritual susceptibility. I am always tempted to accuse spiritually sensitive people of hypocrisy, affectation, and self-deception. I suspect them of false interpretations of purely physiological feelings.

My dislike of spiritual emotion is further enhanced by a cautious dread I have of being fooled by the Universe. It is odd that I should have this peculiarity; for I rather like, as I have hinted, feeling and being a fool in the opinion of humanity. It is one of my little ways of being revenged upon people — this tendency to make faces and act like a lunatic in their presence. But though I like being a fool before men, I do not like being a fool before Nature. I am extremely reluctant to concede to this great sarcastic Parent which brought me forth, the power to drug me with its insidious drugs. When I read what the shrewd old Goethe says about not destroying the essential Illusions, I feel a grim satisfaction in noting that that sly world-child knew well enough that they *were* Illusions.

It is important here that I should emphatically protest that my dislike of spiritual ecstasies has nothing to do with the infirmity of my flesh. One's mental moods are undoubtedly enormously influenced by one's physical moods; and my physical moods are often extremely devastating.

I suffer from chronic gastric weakness. An inherited tendency to gastric ulceration, nervous dyspepsia, and inflation of the stomach, hangs, like a constant cloud of deadly vapour, over my activities. I am driven to a thousand hypochondriacal precautions and avoidances. My diet is an invalid's diet, my nerves are an invalid's nerves. Ulcers are not cheerful companions for an Epicure's path through life.

The stomach is the concentration-point for every one of our most thrilling reactions. It is in the pit of the stomach that one feels the ache of nostalgia and the ache of desire, as well as the ache of indigestion. Undoubtedly my aesthetic appreciation of many charming things is blurred and clouded by this infirmity. Its yoke is exhausting and I make no doubt that much of my tired inclination for the liberating poppies of Proserpine are due to its burden.

It is difficult to idealize the stomach. It is not an agreeable thought that one's end, when it does come, will probably be due to some unlovely fungoid growth at the centre of one’s nervous sensibilities. One would sooner be eaten by silvery fishes than by a gross leaden coloured polypus.

I wonder if the reader of this little sketch has yet divined a certain aspect of my character which I have myself only recently recognized? A person might suppose, from the tone I sometimes adopt, that I live an epicurean life of meticulously self-conscious sensations, passing from one to another with an inward unction of avaricious concentration. I do nothing of the kind. It would be impossible to find a human being with a less firm hold upon the stream of his emotional experiences. My consciousness is hardly ever turned inward: my experiences are hardly ever gathered up into a deliberate or definite continuity. I plunge from attraction to attraction, from lure to lure from obsession to obsession, with the simple unpremeditated greediness of a child. I never survey myself with detached and intelligent interest. I never organize or mould myself. I never contemplate myself with tender or humorous pity. In this sense I have none of the sentimentalist in me. I have nothing of the artist either. I do not search about for my most characteristic vision of the world, and then deliberately fortify it and emphasize it with laborious effort.

Those among my friends who possess the sharp edges of the artist’s mind are irritated and provoked by the drifting and chaotic manner in which my sensations succeed one another with no symbolic orientation. To *cultivate* my senses, on the lines of an imaginative and individual vision, is an impossibility to me. It is not an impossibility because of indolence, as some have thought. I am not an indolent person; I am a restlessly active one. It is an impossibility because I am unwilling to sacrifice any one single sensual pleasure to another. And it is only out of sacrifice of this kind that the true artist’s vision is banked up and protected from dissolution.

I have no imaginative perseverance, no aesthetic method. I clutch at one thing after another with infantile absorption. In doing so I absolutely forget myself. My consciousness is entirely taken up with the outward thing that draws me. This is quite the contrary of the artist’s way. Artists never forget themselves. They use outward things only as mirrors and musical stops, by which they see their own image and hear their own voice heightened and enlarged. Another cause of my inability to cultivate the artist’s vision is my inveterate scepticism. I am sceptical about the truth of every phase of refinement in these hyper-sensitive explorations. This is of course an absurd obstacle, because objective truth has nothing to do with the artist’s imagination. He has a perfect right to treat it with contempt; and, out of a scepticism quite as deep as mine, to create a world of original reality entirely his own.

I cannot do this, and I find myself irresistibly led to regard as unnatural, conceited, affected, and silly, those who achieve it. When I meet such patient creators of their own elaborate vision, I feel tempted to jeer and jibe at them from a point of view as grossly philistine as that of any ignorant country boor.

And yet, even as I write these words —

O the subtle hiding-places of vanity! —

I am, in my heart of hearts, conscious of a sort of self-satisfied pride that I regard these people as affected and insincere. Is it a queer vein of Puritanism in me, or a vein of rough bucolic humour, that produces this complacency? But, no! Away with such mock-modesty! What I really feel is that, in my blundering chaotic way, I am nearer to the great fermenting vats of the elemental world than these curled darlings of wilful fancy. It is, I suppose, this rude earthy realism in my composition that makes it so hard for me to appreciate the elaborate overtones and rhythmic suggestions of the Futurist and Cubist schools of painting.

Post-Impressionism, on the contrary, I love and admire; and hold it a great and invaluable experiment in the history of Art. This is because Post-Impressionism has a fine barbaric sense of the splendid magic of the surface of things — that surface of things where I habitually live; whereas those others go digging away at what to me are profoundly uninteresting “Mathematical Harmonies” of a very doubtful “World-Beneath.”

As to what is called Free Verse, I am quite friendly to it, as long as it deals, in realistic bitterness and earthly tang, with the old essential ironies and insults of Fate’s common ways with her mortal children. It is when it launches out into mystical abstruseness, and recondite occultism, into symbolic mythology and images drawn from fairy-land, that I detest and despise it.

Free Verse apart, what really appeals to me in poetry is the high penetrating beauty of great magical single lines: such lines as one comes across in Horace and Milton and Dante. And I notice that these lines invariably have to do with the noble suggestiveness of the surface of things — the surface of things as it has always been.

X

IN REGARD TO my feelings for my friends — I love *genius* above everything. The appearance of genius, even in a person otherwise intolerable, makes me always tender and considerate. The hesitations and timidities and aberrations of a person of weak will possessed of genius, fill me with tactful regard. On the contrary, towards strong-willed persons of vigorous but unimaginative intellect, my attitude is sometimes quite unkind. At the same time I observe as an interesting physiological fact, that the society of nervous and ill-constituted people throws me, inwardly, into a reaction of hard, clear, and even philistine capacity. Below the surface, though I trust I show no sign of this, I become sharp, definite, resolute, aggressive and practical. Imaginative people of a nebulous incoherence, tend to throw me by reaction into a tightly-strung mood of energetic cleverness.

I think I am, as a matter of fact, rather clever than otherwise; only my susceptibility to sensual obsessions clouds and drugs my cleverness. I am indeed much cleverer than my enemies suppose; though this does not give my pride much satisfaction, for what I admire in my heart is genius, and genius alone.

I am so clever that, in the intellectual sphere, it is not easy to fool me; whereas I notice that people of genius are constantly being fooled. They are indeed of a pathetic simplicity. I am not simple; though the naive manner in which I pursue my sensations, sometimes gives that impression. I am inclined to assert, though it seems an amazing claim to make, that my habitual attitude towards people, even towards the people I love the best, is one of Machiavellian dissimulation. Of course this may be nothing but a pathetic illusion. It is quite possible that my friends see through me without the slightest difficulty, and that my self-satisfied diplomacy appears to them the most naive childishness. Perhaps it is even a constant joke among them at my expense. I have an inkling that I have discerned already something of this kind, especially in regard to my admiration for their artistic achievements. I have begun to suspect that they have got weary of my perpetual habit of agreement and unqualified assent. This suspicion has led me recently into the application of certain jolts and shocks, the success of which, in exciting my friends' respect, has induced me to question the wisdom of my cunning. There is no doubt I must have gone a good deal too far upon this path of universal acquiescence. It has led me into certain very grotesque situations, due indirectly to its annihilation of my friends' respect for me, as a formidable fellow who might "hit back."

I suppose I have cultivated an absurd idea that one's friends respect one and treat one considerately, in proportion as one refrains from self-assertion. Nothing could be more untrue. One's friends' respect is secured and sustained precisely in the same manner as is one's enemies'; that is to say by the imposition upon them of the formidableness of power. Quite apart from Machiavellian diplomacy, I have, by disposition, an extreme reluctance to assert my will against another's will. It gives me pleasure to pillory myself, to humiliate myself, to appear as a clumsy clown, a doddering fool, an apologetic and characterless nincompoop, in the presence of those who are really fond of me.

From the results of this proclivity upon the minds of my friends, I have learned the interesting fact that even in friendship one has to make oneself feared in order to be treated considerately and on equal terms. In a sense what I am now saying is unfair to my friends; and for this reason: when a person shows that he derives a certain perverse pleasure from being roughly used, it is difficult to resist the temptation to use him roughly. Nor is it with me only a matter of the pleasure of being thus scolded and criticised. In addition to this voluptuous perversity there is present in the depths of my heart a certain malicious delight in leading my critics on, so that they may be more and more betrayed and inveigled in the damning quagmire of moral complacency. The more unjust their strictures are, the further they betray themselves; and I am sometimes guilty of even playing up to their false accusations in order that they may arrive at a quite ridiculous pass. Such a pass, for instance, as they are brought to, when their flagrant over-riding strikes the astonished attention of some mutual acquaintance, who regards their ardour as pure insanity. In the estimation of this third person I appear as a mild, harmless, and even saintly individual, outrageously persecuted. It is only when this poor triumph begins to grow tedious, that I sarcastically divest myself of my champion and rush back to my purgatorial circle on the wings of fierce repentance.

It is very interesting to note how, in such a word-juggler as I am, the instincts of the artist should be so thin. When I write a book, I never write for posterity, or for the love of rounding off an exquisite and finished work. I write to give a certain malicious prod to my enemies, and a certain thrilling caress to my friends. I write with quite definite people always before me, who will be amused or irritated in a quite definite manner. This is the case with my lecturing. The general public is never anything to me. It simply does not exist. The idea of making it cry or laugh, the idea of converting it to this or that, never enters my head. I am either a special pleader “in vacuo” for some favourite author, or I am addressing a quite personal appeal to some single member of the audience. I am, in fact, either making love to some noble antique spirit, or I am cajoling and propitiating some evasive modern bearer of enchantments. The real physiological history of my “art of lecturing” would be a strange page of mental revelation. I must confess that it often seems to me as though I were swept away, out of my own methods and consciousness, on the tide of some invisible force. The “general public,” as I have said, have never any existence for me. But sometimes the obsession grows deeper. My own personal motives are transcended, I forget my occasion, my author, and my friends, and am driven on from utterance to utterance, like a man speaking under the influence of some drug or hypnotic suggestion.

Many explanations, but none quite satisfactory, occur to me as the solution of this phenomenon. Some would say that I have the power, under given conditions, of drawing upon what certain psychologists call the subliminal consciousness and that the inspiration of this consciousness, flowing from a source more general and impersonal than the individual brain of one speaker, shows a clairvoyance and an energy beyond what it would be possible for me to reach in any normal moods. My own view of the case is not quite this. I dislike having recourse to these pseudo-supernatural explanations. I fancy that a certain type of speaker possessed of abnormal sensitiveness to mental vibrations, can become as it were intoxicated by the minds of his hearers, and, without being the least conscious of it, be mesmerized into certain inspirations of insight, quite unattainable by him when alone and in cold blood.

It may be said that there is not much difference between these explanations. There is at least this difference, that the latter accounts for these impersonal outbursts without having recourse to any hypothesis of a subliminal “soul of the world,” independent of particular individuals.

I said, earlier in this sketch, that my controlling object of life and the chief aim of my activity was Pleasure and Pleasure alone. Am I led to announce this out of my hatred of Moralists and Idealists, or is this a real dominant motive with me?

O! how hard it is to analyze with true exactness one's motives and feelings in these dubious borderlands! And if there is such a vein of malicious provocation in what I utter, why is it that I should have such vindictive spleen against a set of worthy, if not very profound, fellow-mortals?

Let me do with this latter point first. I think I get to the root of the matter when I say that my hatred of Moralists does not spring from any antinomian fear lest they should interfere with me personally. My personal aberrations are not of the kind they could interfere with. It is rather that they interfere with my interest in life in general, and with my appreciation of the Universe. What, in my fatalistic way, I like to see and feel and touch, are those powerful direct emotions, which men and animals, and even plants, experience, when the life-lust pushes them forward between the hot sun and the thick earth, to wrestle, and play, and bask, and expand, and breathe freely, and stretch forth tongues and horns, and snouts, and hands, and tails.

I like to know that on a Sunday afternoon, in even the quietest village, lads and wenches are making unceremonious love to each other in the shady lanes. I like to know that tramps are stealing chickens, children bursting through hedges, maidens plotting to run away from their parents, farmers laying schemes to outwit landlords, labourers conspiring together to plunder farmers, and the Lord of the Manor setting gentlemanly gins to waylay the feet of the clergyman. It does not even distress me to think of the clergyman himself, that Pillar of Morality, snatching a forbidden embrace from his amorous kitchen wench under the kindly privet hedge. Think, my noble Theophilus, how little of a dramatic picture would be left for your ironic soul if these natural outbursts of primitive passion were trimmed and pruned into submission?

But to return to the matter of Pleasure. Let me suppose that my stark statement — that I follow no other end than this — be no mere piece of reactionary spleen hurled at the head of Moralists. Is it a true and exact account of what I am? Do I really and truly make Pleasure my single aim? O! the difficulty and ambiguity of these questions! It annoys me to admit it, because of my queer, inverted craving for making myself out as frivolous as possible; but I suppose the truth is that my pursuit of Pleasure is a very indirect and complicated affair. I am really blundering absurdly in the confusion of words. As a matter of fact, I daily sacrifice the pleasure of the senses to the pleasure of the mind. I sacrifice the pleasure of direct sensation to the pleasure of power, and the pleasure of power to the pleasure of being affectionately loved. I sacrifice the pleasure of thrilling excitement to the pleasure of thrilling quietness, and the pleasure of voluptuous pursuit to the pleasure of philosophical conversation.

Yes, it is only, after all, in a very qualified sense that I am that intransigeant Hedonist I should like my moralistic friends to find me. But there is something in my claim. I do respond more quickly and spontaneously than many to the immediate sensational appeal. I live more in the present hour than most people; and am more easily swept out of my calculated temper by the lures of the occasion. The moment governs me more absorbingly than it seems to govern others, and I am more a slave of the immediate attraction of a chance encounter. This unbalanced and chaotic following of the will-o'-wisps of accidental beckonings, is partly due to the fact that my tired scepticism is always muttering to me in a low plaintive voice, and nudging me on, to be inconsistent and inconsequent. “All is equal,” it keeps repeating; “all is equal; and nothing matters.”

I sometimes wonder if I am regarded by my friends and acquaintances as a *reliable* person — as a person to whom they would turn, in an emergency, for help and support. If not, this were a grave blow to my self-esteem. I should like to be the kind of person people would regard as absolutely reliable and dependable. “He is an egoist, of course,” I should like them to say, “but one can always depend upon him at a pinch.”

Will the friends of my heart, that I have, in one kind and another, so sorely abused, ever forgive me, and have confidence in me again? I would have you believe, O grievously tried companions, that beyond the thick marshmists of my imperviousness I am constantly hoisting signals and lighting beacon-fires. I would have you think of me not as some insolent despiser of human affection, not as some brazen image of impervious self-contentment; but as one who knows only too well what he lacks of spiritual fire, of one who can at least visualize the wretched gap in his nature where the “soul” and its tender attributes ought to be.

I do not stiffen myself in any obdurate insensitiveness. I bow to the fatality that has made me what I am; but I worship also, at the outer gate of the sanctuary of high devotion, the beautiful gods of renunciation and remorse.

I cannot help referring, once more, while I am upon this subject, to the effect of the present war upon my mind. I wonder what would be the impression upon me if my health, my youth, and my courage lent themselves to such a thing as a few weeks in the trenches?

My attitude to the war is by no means that of some pacific and philosophical friends of my acquaintance. I regard all the young men who go, and the middle-aged men still more, as genuine heroes. I admire them; I respect them; I feel a certain shame in their presence. The mere neighbourhood of these terrific struggles has the effect of reducing the personal importance of all my thoughts and feelings to a minimum of interest. It does not so much give me the feeling of the importance of our cause against that of the enemy, as of the trifling and ephemeral nature of all causes, in the presence of these great catastrophic outbursts of nature's malignity. I have not the remotest sympathy with those sleek and secure philosophers who speak of the benefits of war. I have more intelligence than that. Those who go to war are worthy of all admiration; but what waste — what incredible waste! I think, though it may give my ethical friends more pleasure than I like to give them, that the effect of a few weeks in the trenches would be to make me resolve to spend the rest of my life writing desperately and savagely against time, — writing everything I have it in me to write, — writing ferociously with hardly a breathing-space. I note that even at this safe distance the effect of these huge naval and military struggles has been to keep me more closely at my work. I have written more laboriously, more carefully, in this last year, than ever before in my life. What does this mean? I suppose it means that my inherited race-conscience, pricked and roused in me by the presence of heroic fortitude in another field, does what it can to free itself from its burden by an increased laboriousness in the sphere of its normal activity.

Should I have the moral courage, I wonder, to admire as a philosophical *tour-de-force,* the attitude of a person absolutely unaffected in his personal conscience by the war; of a person who continued his way, as imperviously untouched as the seagulls in the Dardanelles, or the wildfowl on the Flemish marshes? Whether I should admire such a person, or shrink from him in moral astonishment, I do not know. I only know that for myself I have nothing of this god-like equanimity.

XI

TO LEAVE THE war-question, and revert once more to my general philosophical attitude. The reader will remember that I referred at the beginning of this sketch to my feeling that the universe was at once determined by inexorable laws and liable to irrational surprises. I said that I "wished" the Universe to be framed in this fashion, in order that it might preserve at the same time its unassailable fatality and its inexplicable mystery. I do not repent of using in regard to these high philosophical speculations the word "wish" with all its presumptuous personal implications. If I am convinced of anything in this world, I am convinced of the presence, in every philosophical system, of the original wish, or will, or temperamental bias, of the individual philosophizing. What does trouble me is the thought that, even in what I have said, there may remain an element of word-mongering. It is so difficult to divest oneself of the associations of words, and to use them freshly and spontaneously as real symbols. What one would like to do, would be to use words not so much as the vehicle of thought, as of direct physical sensation; but this is an enterprise that requires more genius than I possess.

I am so afraid lest, even in what I have tried to say about my feeling of the pressure of Fate, I should have been led into wordy exaggeration. I do not, however, think that I can possibly exaggerate the constant presence with me of a steady invincible mechanic force, pushing me forward from point to point, from stage to stage, and giving me no loophole of escape. In calling this thing by the old classical name of Fate, I must not be supposed to be personifying it. I do not think of it in the remotest degree as conscious, still less as benign. I think of it as absolutely beyond our analysis. And if I try to analyze its effect upon myself, I can only say that I feel there is relief in submitting to it, and misery in struggling against it.

I suppose no one is more addicted than myself to becoming the infatuated slave of attractive word-combinations. My abnormal and insatiable receptivity — a sort of sensual voluptuousness in the intellectual world — makes me especially liable to attach too great value to these fashionable catchwords. My pliable and serpentine cleverness leads me to wind myself into every new word-edifice with slippery agility. A certain power of rapid and logical assimulation tempts me to pass off as my own conclusions views and visions which are really quite alien to myself. My scepticism encourages this fault by constantly reminding me that anything may be true, and that I may as well select one view of things as any other. I have what I suppose is a Latin mind in these matters; and I find myself continually tempted, to give that curious complexion of logical-imaginative plausibility, wherein French writers are so cunning, to points of view quite foreign to my own nature. All this is obviously the sort of intellectual quicksand into which the profession of a lecturer would naturally betray a man.

And yet it is absurd to blame my profession. The fault is my own, and the inevitable defect of my critical and sceptical quality. The same defect may be observed in my style of writing; though here there are undoubtedly weighty compensations. I have, in fact, unless it be impossible to catch the flavour of one’s own manner, *no* style at all. My writing is as transparent and clear, as colourless and fluid, as my mind. I fear that it is the style of every ordinarily intelligent person who “reads the recent writers.” If so, all I can do is to try and make it the vehicle for a certain drastic sincerity which is certainly not yet the attribute of the ordinarily intelligent person. I can myself see, as I read my own writing, how difficult it is for me to substitute for all these clumsy pseudo-scientific words, with which one's books burden one, the kind of suggestive natural imagery, touched with delicate perfumes and light-blowing airs, which gives so gracious a body to analytic thought.

There is however a certain intellectual pleasure to be derived from the mere contemplation of a sincere writer's wrestling with an evasive subject, even though his style does remain awkward and bare; and it is with this pleasure that my readers must be contented.

I cannot think that, in this matter of my consciousness of Fatality, I am being fooled by my love of words, as I was when I used to protest my devotion to Chaos and Chance. In that case, I certainly did, in my nimble and clever way, snatch fervently at what was an intellectual fashion. This Chaos-cult was further encouraged in me by the influence of certain among my friends; particularly he of the iron hand in the velvet glove, whose present pastorage is beyond the Equator, and he of the titanic spirit in the humorous mask, whose habitation is with the herds of Manhattan. Both these original spirits are addicted to speaking as if this steady, forward-driving world, as it appears to me, were tossed from side to side, and upheaved, and shaken, and blown about, and swept by strange storms and tornadoes belched forth from elemental abysses. The honest truth is that I do not feel these wayward incursions, these arbitrary explosions. What I feel is the slow majestic march forward of the planetary hosts with all their offspring; and the steady uninterrupted thud-thud-thud of the great fatal Engines of Inexorable Law.

I can remember, years ago, in Chicago, arguing fiercely with that inspired Idealist, the Manager of the Little Theatre there, on this very subject. He held the view, as I do now, that the world is governed by irreversible Necessity — only to him this Necessity appeared a thing of mystical benignity, beautiful and sublime. I argued, savagely enough, in favour of absolute cosmic anarchy. I am inclined to think, at this distance, that I was pushed into this absurd position by my rage at the idea of a benignant order. I did not see then, as I see now, that it is quite possible to have an order from which there is no escape, without its being in the least benignant.

Will my reader be able to keep his temper if I go yet one step farther in this re-consideration, in this analysis of an analysis? I plead guilty, hurriedly and without remorse, to the charge of ridiculous inconsistency in these discoveries. I am digging and digging into my profoundest feelings, and instead of throwing away the alien weeds that grow on the top of the soil, I pile them up as interesting specimens, side by side with roots and rock-chippings of much more deeply buried things. It is just here I may remark that I differ in opinion from my excellent relative, the Hermit of Egdon. His view seems to be that the deeper you dig into human nature, the more chaotic and startling are your discoveries. In talking with him, I always feel as though below the surface of every human being, lurked a great howling gorilla of ungovernable ferocity.

My feeling is exactly the contrary, and does not at all, when I really probe into the matter, suggest these hidden Calibans. What I feel is that the erratic things, the snarling, irrational things, are all on the surface; and as soon as you get below the surface, you touch the vast granite slabs of the huge Mill-Wheel of irreversible, inevitable Order.

I am sure this impression of mine is supported by my experience of my own character. It is on the surface that I hate people and long to revenge myself on people. In the depths of myself, I neither love them nor hate them: I am part of the Eternal Mechanism, and my arrogant heart is no more than a small clock-work fragment of the great Time-piece of everlasting Necessity. I do not for a moment agree with this desperate view of the profound wickedness of human nature. I do not find human nature either wicked or good. I find it driven forward by the same inevitable laws as the tides and the constellations.

Shall I confess to my reader how my own most inveterate vices appear to me? They appear to me as irritable mouths and tongues and fingers, itching and vibrating, on the most outward surface of my being. They appear to me as insatiable superficial nerves of my bodily texture — connected indeed, by tiny invisible threads, with the cells of my brain, but always ready, if they are drugged with satisfaction, to sink into a state of indifferent quiescence. To turn one’s little bodily insanities into these great Leviathans of the Deep, seems to me to evince a lamentable lack of mental proportion. It is an affair of the surface — an affair of nerves and sensory vibrations.

What I am led more and more to feel is that, however desperate and deep our anti-social desires may seem, and however passionate and exalted our ethical ideals may seem, they are neither of them, in the great cosmic system, of the least importance. They come and they go, both our evil impulses and our noble impulses; and it matters little how they succeed one another. What matters, if anything matters, is something subtler, more wonderful, than either what we call good or what we call evil; something that has no name because it has not reached the rational level which enables it to be put into words; but something all the same which is the very secret of existence. Perhaps it is this that I approach when I get such strange satisfaction from “lying back” upon eternal Destiny — that Destiny which is neither benignant nor malign. “But why not benignant?” my reader may exclaim. Well! there we touch again that inveterate prejudice I feel against a world ruled by Providence. If I could get to the bottom of this prejudice, I should indeed get to the bottom of myself. Earlier in this sketch I endeavoured to defend this bias on purely aesthetic grounds. Was I justified in so doing? Burrowing round and round this pivotal problem, in my dogged, tiresome, persistent manner, I am tempted to ask myself the question whether this prejudice against an invisible Guiding Hand is not merely one of those superficial nervous vices to which I have above referred. Do I quarrel with the idea of Providence merely out of itching, sensory irritation, which I feel sometimes towards my most attractive neighbour? Is it simply the surliness of the material-minded animal, drawing back and snarling, at the approach of the amiable stranger?

No! I do not believe it! The thing goes deeper than that; deeper perhaps even than the aesthetic question. There is something in me — and it is no mere superficial perversity — which demands an element of cold, unconscious, sublime fatality in the texture of things.

Human love is exquisite and rare. It is desirable, as all delicate things that are short-lived and easily destroyed are desirable. But there are other things than love in this huge world. I am not thinking now of malice, or vindictiveness, or violence. These are only the reverse side of love, and are its inevitable accompaniment. I am thinking of great, cool, large, magical, ordered Spaces, where the winds of eternal Necessity blow without interruption, and where nothing can ever come that is warm, conscious, friendly, human.

Yes; down in the depths of my being lurks, like a physical craving for air, a longing for vast, uninhabited, untraversed regions, where even God never comes. I cannot help it. This is the manner in which I am made. I long to escape from humanity, to escape from myself; and how can I do so if the centre and circumference of the world are the habitation of a God who embraced humanity, and is anxious to embrace me?

It is precisely this anarchical rebelliousness in my spirit that makes me feel such a thrill of sympathy with Goethe's Mephistopheles, when that queer Child of Chaos expresses his wish that this "All" had never originally issued from that "Nothing." So here, it appears, we really do touch the bottom; and this perpetual harping upon abnormal feelings, proves to be the result not of a longing for arbitrary explosions of wayward life-forces, but of a longing for quietness and rest, — for cool, deep, eternal, Godless night.

With this clue in my hand it becomes easier for me to thread the labyrinth of my disposition. I ought to be able, with its help to compel even my style to flow nonchalantly, more smoothly, more naturally; and cease its fumbling after fashionable catch-words. To escape from myself, to escape from humanity, to escape from everything that obtrudes and challenges and exacts, and is attracted and repulsed, — such is the secret of my hidden craving. This is why the moon appeals to me. In moonlight, things are softened, and rendered liquid and flowing. Every separate object loses its garish individuality, and seems to float free on a cool, luminous tide of self-effacement. The windless expanses of the ocean have the same effect; and nothing is more beautiful to me than to see islands and promontories, capes and headlands, swimming in a delicate, transfiguring mist of motionless water.

It is when the moon rises over wide stretches of level sand at the sea's edge, that one can most easily sink away, out of the body of one's prison, into the large magical horizons where the weariness of thought is purged, and the heart is at peace.

"For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul outwears the breast;
And the heart must pause to breathe;
And love itself have rest."

My friends have often laughed at me for this fantastic devotion to the moon; and rallied me for my sudden indifference to their conversation when the translunar magic has rapt me away, down long quivering, silvery paths, out of the reach of both hate and love; but I have not felt remorse. They have pointed out how inconsistent such devotion is with my nervous, almost feline dislike of damp grass and dewy fields; and so it may be. Certainly the feeling of dampness in the air — the approach of rain, the rising of the wind — always dispel these fragile emotions. A touch of chilliness, of cold physical discomfort, is sufficient to drive me back, miserable and disenchanted, into my human cave. That is why my ideal of happiness would be to sit under the shadow of some Desert Temple, in a hot southern night, and watch the moon mount up, lovely and contemptuous, above the palm-trees.

But the sun himself has the same power; especially when in his heavy noons he bleaches the grass, bakes the sand, and burns the dust.

Further, as I have suggested above, certain cities of men evoke, in their various ways, this oblivious monotony. Venice does it by the elimination of street-noises; London by the obliterating power of her immensity and her mists; New York by the engine-driven uniformity of her tremendous traffic.

Life is so constructed, that, out of our most lamentable weakness, Nature creates the quality in us which is our genius and our triumph. My greatest weakness is this profound weariness of the struggle, — this withdrawing from the creative stream, — this sinking back into the monotony of the unruffled face of the waters. And yet this very self-effacement is an initiation and an enlargement; for where I merge myself in the spaces and the elements, I obtain something of their eternity and their calm. What is perturbed and agitated in me sinks into the gulf; and my essential being, given over to the waveless, windless, forwardsweeping tide of what flows and flows forever, becomes part and parcel of that eternal stuff which cannot change or be increased or diminished, — the stuff out of which all the dreams of life are made, and into which they all must sink at the end.

Let there be no misunderstanding about this. I am not in the smallest degree what people call a “mystic quietist.” My sceptical detachment from all I do and say, and from what all others do and say, has nothing in it of a secret lying back upon hidden spiritual forces, which are the true reality. I do not believe in such forces. I do not believe in such a reality.

If ever I experience the sensation that all we little men and women are muttering to one another in dreams and making meaningless gestures over a vast gulf, it is not that I feel the reality of things to be flowing below us all the while, strange and rich and wonderful; it is that I feel the projections and excrescences, the protrusions and assertions, to be vain and futile, while the great smooth marble-faced Wheels of Fate turn inexorably on their axles.

This is why in ordinary conversation I am so often *distrait* and absent-minded, or am so ready with a languid assent. I seem to have heard the same thing said over and over again a million times. I watch in my friends the inevitable working of the machinery that makes them just thus and not otherwise. I hear the “tick-tick-tick” of the everlasting clock-work behind them. I know too well, long before their sentences are finished, what those sentences are going to be.

Knowing them — poor galvanic microcosms of the great Necessity — and knowing the limits of their destined reactions, why should I be so interested in watching their little jerks and spasms and grindings? I know well the sound of the pitiful creak of the machinery that started them, and I know well the pitiful sound of the click with which they will run down.

In every situation that occurs I see the wires vibrating that will break it up. Why should I lend myself to the great Illusion by uttering earnest and emphatic words about my opinions and my convictions, or by trying to express to people my philosophy? This is one of the reasons which make me so unsatisfactory a companion. Everybody else has the power of getting excited in what is called "argument." I cannot get excited and angry in argument. I find it extremely difficult to get angry at all. To get angry implies that you believe in free-will, — in the freedom of people to be different from what they are, and to say different things. I do not believe in such freedom. I know beforehand exactly what people are going to say. What can I do then but listen, and nod my head, and mutter "Really!" and "Fancy that!" and "How interesting!"

It is for this reason that when I do assert myself and get excited, it is always about some absurd little physical thing which touches one of my tastes or distastes. I can grow eloquent and utter very vehement words about my preference for blue over yellow, or for satin over velvet, or for horse-hair sofas over cushioned couches. I can use very plausible speech with people when my window does not open, or my fire does not burn, or my pen does not write. But to spend breath upon them because they are Anglicans, or Free-Lovers, or Mormons, or Necrophiliasts, seems to me mere weariness of the flesh.

The whole of what we call social intercourse — when there is nothing sexual in it — is based upon this kind of illusion. I have never been able to derive the least pleasure either from "light conversation" or "intellectual disputes." Wit and persiflage bore me, as they say, "to extinction." I only "shine'" in conversation when I am allowed to discourse upon my physical sensations or upon my aesthetic tastes. The art of conversation is an odious nuisance to me, — as disagreeable as cards; — and how any intelligent person can prefer it to reading a book, or indulging in a flirtation, I cannot conceive.

It is this terrible and constant response to the "thud-thud-thud" of the great universal Engines, which makes me throw myself so fiercely into the few distractions that do dull my intelligence. When some provoking butterfly-lure beckons me over hill and dale, it is something if the excitement of the pursuit prevents my perverted mind from hearing the throbs of that hope-murdering World-Pump.

It is perhaps one of those stupid blunders into which I am myself always falling, when I talk of the direct connection between my bodily wishes and my rational mind. In reality my mind, as compared with the minds of other people of tolerable cleverness, seems remarkably independent of my body. It is independent of my imagination, of my artistic tastes, and of my sensual fancy. It is a villainously detached mind. It goes on working in odious discontinuity quite apart from what I am feeling and saying.

It has also — this rational mind of mine — an infernal sense of humour. How it gets hold of this, God knows; for I had always supposed that humour was a thing connected with one's general idiosyncracies. My grotesque difficulties in dealing with "matter," the thousand absurd ways in which matter fools me and tumbles me about, are never missed — you may be sure of that! — by my goblin-like mind.

I would not reveal to others, — not for a kingdom — what this demon whispers to me, and the deadly shrewdness of its mockeries. I get no pleasure from its damned commentaries. You are quite wrong, dear reader, if you conjure up a charming little Sadistic complicity between this fellow with the whip, and my poor shrinking sense-consciousness. I implore him to stop his flicks and fillips; but he never will; he only goes on the more. I have to paralyze him by pretended indifference, or by rolling up into a sulky pachydermatous passivity, like a prickly hedge-pig.

My mind differs from the minds of my artistic friends in being so sceptically detached from my imagination. In this respect — and here I am sure I may speak without boasting — I am much more intellectually *honest* than these charming people. That they are so charming and that I enjoy them so, is due to this very cause. Thank Heaven they are not cursed with this diabolical Puritanism of the pure reason, which I find so devastating!

They wilfully and deliberately seem to keep plunging their minds into the exciting cisterns of their imaginative senses, and continually hauling them up, all phosphorescent and glimmering — crusted over with the most lovely silt and shells. I wonder if they are as conscious as I am of the great pistons and driving-rods of Nature. Perhaps they are. Perhaps they are just as fatalistic and disillusioned. Only they say to themselves, "Since we all know the murderous uniformities of destiny, let us pretend a little, and colour our reason with the colours of our imagination!"

Now why is it that I so persistently refuse to do this, and continue to hold my reason so clear, so unstained by the sweet rich dyes of the sensual imagination?

I think the cause is not simple, but extremely complicated. It is partly a rigid point of morality with me, — not rational morality, but a sort of ingrained moral imperative, the breaking of which would tear my whole being to pieces.

It is partly my restless longing to escape from myself and from all human associations. The free unclouded working of the mind, in liberation from imaginative colouring, is itself a sort of escape. When I think in this dry, cold, detached manner, I become disembodied, impersonal, without love or hate, I become a mere "airy nothing" of analytical activity, suspended, as it might be, *in vacuo*, over the flowing stream of things; and, becoming this, it seems as though there were needed little more than a shock of psychic dissolution, to merge me completely in the unconscious elements.

Finally I think I discern in it a desire to avoid the teasing laborious effort, requiring so much buoyancy and energy, of the use of the reason as a controlling pilot or ship-master of the wave-tossed senses. I let my senses drift as they will, and my imagination drift with them like a forlorn passenger upon a derelict vessel; while my irresponsible reason floats away upon its raft, heedless and indifferent. On a former page I referred a little to my vices, and indicated that they belonged rather to the surface than to the depths of my being. In this view of the matter I am of course denying the great Schopenhauer's doctrine of the sinister profundity of the "Will to live." I am also denying the Nietzschean doctrine of the "Will to Power." In opposition to these formidable names, I may summon to my support those two calm and detached spirits, perhaps the wisest of all — I mean Epicurus and Spinoza.

But though my vices are on the surface, they are not the less imperious. It is on the surface that I "live and move and have my being." It is on the surface that I lead my queer subjective life of sense-impressions, — that life from which my errant reason is continually escaping.

So imperious indeed are one or two of these inveterate exigencies, that I sometimes wonder if the dullness of all this tiresome analysis is not due to the fact that I am not at liberty to blazon them arrogantly forth, in the manner of some unrepentant sinners in our midst.

Unfortunately the receptivity of our modern public is not as sane and shrewdly balanced as was that which welcomed the egotistic ramblings of Montaigne; and the result of this lack of balance in the public has not been encouraging in its effect upon more recent outspoken writers.

Those who do flourish their little vices abroad seem to be so disturbed by their consciousness of the public's attitude that their natural ease becomes brazen impertinence, and their honest self-analysis a ridiculous sort of swaggering bravado.

In their rage at their audience's grossness of apprehension, and in a savage wish to outrage it, they emphasize so monstrously the little perversities of their sensory nerves, that every kind of proportion is lost; and some quite harmless fool of a sedentary scribbler, whose real permanent instincts are most innocently domestic, steps forth upon the boards a terrible and awe-inspiring Don Juan. The stupidity of the public, with the contemptible baseness of its paid teachers, is really responsible for half the childish arrogance of our naive immoralists; while a deplorable lack of humourous commonsense, on both sides, throws the matter out of all relation to reason.

A time will perhaps come again — may it come soon! — when the old, wise, classical way of regarding all these things, will lift such blurring mists and disfiguring mirages from the self-knowledge of men and women. But meanwhile, I for one, have not the remotest intention of turning my little peculiarities into great Satanic masks of antisocial defiance.

The very suppression of free speech in these things, which is so contemptible an aspect of our age, tends to excite in the average mind a most monstrous and vindictive curiosity; a curiosity untouched by any genial Rabelaisian humour; an evil, sneaking, hypocritical curiosity; a curiosity which is a bastard cousin to the worst excesses it reprobates.

The most sensible thing a writer or artist can do, is to "sublimate" what he regards as vicious in himself, and use it as a medium of illumination in his creative work. This alone, quite apart from social morality, offers a very plausible excuse for what is called "virtue," an excuse which the most inspiring among modern geniuses have not been slow to seize. Whatever may be said about the undesirability of vice in ordinary life, a certain amount of this smouldering Tartarean fire is absolutely essential in Literature. The absence or presence of it is precisely what makes the difference between an imaginative work and a work with no imagination, though in this also there are infinite and subtle degrees.

There is a certain vulgar sensuality in some popular writers which is odious. One flame of the Pit differeth from another flame of the Pit as widely as star from star. I say "flame of the Pit;" but there is really no need to drag in these portentous words. One writer has the genius to refine and winnow his aboriginal promptings to a noble imaginative issue. Another tosses them away in his track like bits of orange-peel from a proletarian picnic. Ultimately it is a matter of the difference between a fine taste and a taste of blundering indiscrimination.

I think I do plead guilty to certain quaint half-vices; things in no degree "wicked," but things which by their lack of intelligent suggestiveness must be regarded as belonging to the sphere of death rather than of life. Such for instance may be the queer semi-comatose sensuality which leads me to pace up and down, hour by hour, on the same grassy path or below the same sunlit wall. As I trail my feet along, the feeling of the earth or sand under them seems to have the odd diffused effect of some narcotic or drug. In the same way the peculiar and special look of a grassy bank against the sky thrills me, as I keep walking and walking beneath its shadow, with a weird, heavy vegetable sensuality. I seem to embrace its soft-flowing contours with a slow, Saurian persistence; not visualizing it in the least, artistically or imaginatively, but doggedly tightening my hold upon it, in a grave, quiet, patient obstinacy. I have a suspicion that there was something of this sluggish sensuality about the Wordworthian attitude to Nature; only he used it for spiritual intimations, while I use it for its own sake and keep it a purely animal, or if you like, vegetable sensation.

Is it I wonder, because of this very heaviness and sluggishness of sensual apprehension that I cry out so wearily sometimes for the “wings of the dove?” What I really do, I suppose, is to use earth and sand and dust, and grass and trees and flowers, as if they were things to be eaten and drunken, or things to be made love to, in a sort of mesmerized trance. I wish I knew by what gradual degrees, and exactly why, I have fallen into this habit.

I can remember long ago, on Dartmoor, astonishing and scandalizing my energetic friend T. H. L. by expressing a wish that there was no need for me to do anything ever again but walk up and down, up and down, a disused, moss-covered granite quarry.

My intelligent artistic emotions must be singularly abortive; and the delicate forms and colours of things must leave me lamentably unmoved; else I could never remain so long content, in a pure physiological ecstasy, absorbed by the mere material touch of the soil, and the mere material warmth of the sun. Was I really a great browsing ox in my last incarnation, or a broad-leaved placid burdock-plant?

I confess sometimes that the heavy, cynical, sceptical materialism of my temperament fills me with an immense repulsion. I am so accursedly self-centred and unhuman! It is not an agreeable sensation, dear reader, even for a master sensationalist like myself, to feel suddenly conscious of the absence in him of what everyone else possesses — the absence of a soul!

I catch myself envying sometimes the capacity for *natural sorrow* which normal people have. I verily believe that I could lose some of my dearest friends, — and still go on my way, kicking up the dust, and trailing my fingers through the tall hedge-parsley. I think I have something of the heavy, unilluminated obtuseness to feeling, of extremely old people. I believe I was born old. I certainly was treated as such by my childish companions.

It is out of the depths of this sluggish quagmire of dull sensationalism that I sometimes curse even the majestic fatality of the Universe. I think that if the feet of the god-like Nazarene ever trod the sandy paths of my frequenting, I should cast myself down before Him, and cry aloud to be delivered from "the body of this death."

Certainly, knowing what I know of myself, I will deal gently with every type of perverse and arbitrary egoism, with every mad mirage-hunter pursuing his own shadow across the desert.

I sometimes wish that I could be thrown into a kind of magical epilepsy, from the convulsions of which I should arise with a new soul and a responsive heart, and go forth to assume responsibilities, and to bear burdens, and fight fiercely for noble causes, and suffer the bitterness of love, and know the salt taste of tears.

How an attempt, such as this poor contradictory sketch, to indicate the perversities and frailties of one individual life, shows the barriers and inaccessible walls, between which we all grope forward, pushed so mercilessly from behind! It might almost seem as though the desperate, noble recklessness, with which our European youth is now throwing its life away, as a child's toy, at the command of its political leaders, is something more in harmony with the secret of Nature, than that avaricious hoarding up of imaginative sensations which is the life of the artist. Sometimes it almost seems as though only those who despised the preciousness of living, were those who really lived; — those only who held life lightly and risked it on the dice's throw; those only who really knew the true savour of its sweetness, and the spiritual thrill of its throbbing pulse. Certainly the path of our days leads to strange headlands now and then, looking over unexpected landscapes. Happy are those who do not see the image of themselves as a dark stooping shadow moving with greedy intentness across the pastures from fungus-bed to fungus-bed, and avoiding morosely the flocks and their shepherds. Happy are those who from such a promontory, over the valley of their pilgrimage, can see, not one dark image of themselves unchanged and unchanging, but a long procession of wayfarers, different and yet the same; — a procession of which their present living image is only one in an endless sequence, a sequence of the putting off of masks and the stripping away of disguises; a sequence of death for the sake of life, and of life for the sake of more life!

Happy are those; but, meanwhile, irrevocable Fate sweeps us all forward, and the wisest and least wise among us are lucky if they can adjust themselves to its adamantine decrees, without the aching of their flesh and the envenoming of their heart’s blood. It will be something, after all, if when we die, though we have been the maddest egoists on earth, some queer acquaintance be found to throw a handful of dust upon our ashes, and to feel a moment’s darkening of the high sun in the indifferent heaven, at the loss of even so unresponsive a fellow-wayfarer.

CONFESSIONS: LLEWELLYN POWYS

FOREWORD

I DO NOT think these vague autobiographical ramblings should as a matter of fact bear the title of Confessions. “Confessions” suggests that one has written about one’s sins — this I have not had the courage to do. Instead I have endeavoured to recapture from the past some of the simpler sensations which have made up my life.

My thanks are due to the editors of *The New Statesman* and *The New Age* for allowing me to republish passages from my diary which have already appeared in their papers.

I

TO BE SUDDENLY born, to suddenly acquire consciousness on the surface of this unsteady and amazing planet, that is a chance indeed to justify everything.

Life is a series of visions and sensations which by the wildest fortune it has been given us to experience.

Puritans are fond of the phrase “it is for us to do this or that” and it appears to me that it is for us merely to be irresponsible spectators of the drama of existence as it unrolls itself. Irresponsible however — that is the secret, that is the key to one’s attitude in a world whose very foundations are so complex, so varied, so scandalously immoral. To an adventurous and imaginative spirit the world is as it should be, nothing confined, nothing explained, nothing impossible.

Of course if people endeavour to graft their own particular ideas of what life ought to be upon life as it is, they begin to sigh and grow grave immediately. Once however let a man come to understand “that nothing really matters,” that there is not particular purpose in our corner of the universe, that the earth has but to circle the sun some seventy times and he is gone, and a new acquiescence will be born into his soul, an acquiescence which will give him time and taste to look around him and let the golden sand run through his fingers how wistfully!

Out here in Central Africa these truths are brought home to one continually. One has but to draw aside the tangled branches of these ancient overgrown forests to appreciate what kind of a world we live in.

In civilized countries the silly conceptions of silly people stifle our intelligence just as their drawing rooms stifle our lungs, but in this country where through terror the grass eaters never grow fat and where every night the striped fiery hunters feel the death throes of their prey one cannot be so easily deceived. Casualty, injustice, demoniac cruelty is patent: and to realize that these “goings on” have received divine sanction from the earliest ages it is only necessary to raise one’s eyes to the sun as he rises in his splendour morning after morning.

I sometimes think that children if left to themselves understand the nature of the universe far better than grown up people. I think they look at the world in the right way, are more receptive and receive its experiences with more appropriate emotions. Those vague simple delicious memories of a child, so delicate, so evasive, are amongst the memories one would wish if there was a future life to carry away with one — the first glimpse of tiny blue eggs in a hedge sparrow’s nest; the happy tints on summer curtains put up unexpectedly in the night nursery after the dreary winter rains; the soothing somnolent twittering of swallows when one was trying to go to sleep with all the sounds and scents of the garden coming in at the open window.

To a child also, the alternative — the terrible — is continually present. They are supersensitive to all those vague intimations of the unknown, of the supernatural, which even the most naturalistic of us feel sometimes — as when by ourselves we open the doors of empty darkened rooms. They understand the romance of the terrible, of the stark.

I remember when I was a child a black cat was hung on a Wellingtonia in a field opposite the nursery window. Village boys used to come and whip it. I cried and was miserable, yet the spectacle had for my imagination the suggestion of endless terrible things which might be going on in the great world outside where truth to say it is given to certain human beings to derive pleasure from whipping — and perhaps from whipping not only black cats.

Another terrible revelation came with the death of my sister. She was only a little older than myself. The week before we had been looking for linnets' eggs in the battlefield, pushing our way through the gorse bushes which were so prickly, and so yellow, and smelt so sweet in the April sunshine. I was taken into the spare room and saw her lying in bed, feverish and sick — she asked me how we were getting on with the house we were building in the garden and whether there were eggs yet in the chaffinch's nest at the end of the box hedge.

The next day as the rest of us were sitting under the shade of the Portugal laurel on the lawn, my brother, J.C.P. came to say that she had been taken away by the angels. I know now that it was only the way he put it, that really he does not believe in angels and never did.

I think death alone — the mere report and rumour of it — brings home, in some degree, to the most inexperienced intelligence the fatal and exciting nature of our destiny, of the destiny of all living things who have each in their turn to go down into the pit.

At school under the shadow of the grey abbey I gradually awakened to the continuous poetry of life set as it was against so immemorial and romantic a background.

It was there too that I came to learn for the first time of the passionate and tremulous emotions which lie at the back and root of all life. Masters used to try to persuade one, in solemn conversations alone in the study, that these emotions were wrong, that their only *raison d'etre* was as a means by which God tricked the human race into prolonging its life generation after generation. Sexual excitement to this day remains for me a treacherous and scarlet background, but I now understand that all lapses in this direction should be treated with the utmost indulgence as being merely the expression of essential subterranean forces far more powerful than any of us. And as a matter of fact it very often happens that this strange and subtle ecstasy is alone capable of touching with a live coal the imagination of certain very stupid people.

For years I remained in the lower school dreaming over my school books, my mind as dim and unlighted as the monk-haunted classrooms where I sat; then suddenly I found myself "shoved" into the upper school, into the clear white light of Mr. R.'s classroom. The schoolmaster was not like the others — though curiously disillusioned as to the world in general, he was possessed by a passionate devotion for English Literature. I think he knew the Golden Treasury off by heart.

Over the chimney-piece where the boys collected before class was hung a photograph of the Apollo Belvedere, and those shapely white limbs have often seemed to be symbolic of the white light of that room as it shone upon and inspired my confused boy's mind.

In Four A, I read for the first time passages from Homer and Horace and came to understand from punctilious translations the strange magic latent in books. R.'s sarcasms made their impression. He used to accuse us of reading Greek History as if it was the history of black beetles.

He continually seemed to be hinting of a larger and more gracious world. I remember to this day the enthusiasm he displayed in quoting Matthew Arnold — I remember the very lines which he selected:

> "Through the vex'd garden trees."
>
> "The unplumbed salt estranging sea."

It was at this time that my brother, J. C. P. began giving me books. Much of the poetry I did not understand but again I got glimpses of a wider and freer and more magnanimous world than that presented to me by the official schoolmaster and by the school chapel. Certain passages of Swinburne filled me with a profane enthusiasm:

> “But the Gods of your fashion
> That take and that give
> In their pity and passion
> That scourge and forgive
> They are worms that are bred in the bank that falls off;
> They shall die and not live.”

I began to take the spell of the school chapel very lightly — the spell of those queer intervals of silent prayer and of the dim lighted altar. I began to feel instead a thrill at the sight of the first celandine (for no other reason than that old Wordsworth had delighted in it) or at the sight of the hay fields by the river — yes, red with sorel as we wandered through them, our top hats in hands, some hot Sunday afternoon in June. In the holidays I used to stay with my brother Theodore, that strange and lonely being, who has never been under any illusion about reality and its worth and has come to learn so much melancholy wisdom in lonely places.

He was then living in a little village by the sea. In his house I could read what I liked and from him I imbibed a healthy distaste for the work of the practical every-day world and an inveterate love of quaint and profound thinking. Since then he has retired to a still more secluded village and I have never revisited Studland, but in my mind to this day a strange radiance and gladness seems to hang over the place — the radiance of youth and shimmering seas, the radiance of white chalk cliffs and wet moorlands, the radiance of children’s faces and children’s white frocks and the sad gladness of white sea birds crying to their young in clear sea sunshine.

And then I went up to Cambridge. Perhaps no experience should be more bracing to a boy’s intelligence than his first entrance into a University.

To find one’s self free to think and say what one likes is a privilege seldom permitted, but here in these antique rooms where there are no old people, the crass system of things is no longer so shielded. One comes across strange types. J. who kept human bones in his room and who would sleep all day and go down to the Union at night with a great pipe in his mouth and an outrageous shock of red hair over his grotesque “cerebralist” skull. L.U.W. (still after everything dearest and noblest of my friends), with his ardent antinomian philosophy and graceful Aubrey Beardsley appearance. D. of Corpus, whose ears and nails were always filthy and who used to spend weeks at a time drinking in low out-of-the-way taverns because as he said he liked to listen to the talk he heard in such places and liked to feel himself relapsing into alcoholic oblivion with these quaint human beings as a background to his dreams.

I remember perfectly well my first night in one of those old oak-panelled rooms — the weird sensation I got when raising my head I read on one of the beams supporting the roof the words “Pray for the Soul of John Cowper Powys.” I had not known it had been my brother’s room and this simple fraternal petition shocked me into understanding the grave and striking import of our lives as conceived by the one true Catholic Church. I knew that there were many people who held that my brother had no Soul. Now that I look back on those short three years I feel that I wasted my time. The actual world as I saw it seemed to absorb so much of my attention. We formed a club called the Club of the Honest Cods, and we used to meet on

Sunday evenings in the old court and drink hot punch and sing bawdy songs.

Only at rare intervals did the old beautiful, cruel, gay, miraculous world reveal itself. I remember standing one afternoon by the side of the river not far from Mr. Benson's house envisaging the deep volume of still waters flowing on and on year after year so, so detached, so profoundly indifferent to the lot of the wisest of all the animals who had chosen to congregate on its grass-grown banks. And sometimes at the high noon of night looking out at the illumined mullioned College windows, the smooth grass and the shining ivy leaves, I would experience vague intimations of the murmuring Universe far, far removed from Corpus and from my rowdy every-day existence.

When I came down I spent some months at home receiving those queer little blue typed notices of academic vacancies from the scholastic agents, Gabbitas and Thing. I used to take these into my father's study and he used to look them over very gravely and sometimes before prayers as the family were sitting waiting for the servants to come in he would ask me if I had heard from Gabbitas that morning. At last a letter did arrive from the headmaster of a fashionable preparatory school on the Kentish coast, asking me to come down and interview him. I did so.

As soon as I arrived I was taken in to lunch in the school dining room. I remember it all very well. When table No. 3 was "put into silence" I felt exactly the heart-sinking of a new boy at coming into contact with the arbitrariness of a discipline which sends a shiver down the spine of many grown up people even. At other tables I saw "undermasters" carrying on conversations with the boys who sat next to them with that particular forced jocularity and superciliousness which is so noticeable to a nonacademic mind — again my heart sank. The headmaster was a tall imposing figure. In the middle of lunch I took from my pocket a scrap of Roman pottery which I had found the day before in a mole hill on Ham Hill. It interested him and I think it was this that made him select me. I was to take the place of one of his masters for the summer term.

On the whole I recall those three months with pleasure. At first I was terrified at having to teach at all: all the little boys were cleverer than me. I used to have to steal along to the class rooms every night to get hold of a book "with answers" so that I might work out the sums we would do the next day, in the seclusion of my bedroom. I also had to do this kind of preparation with the Latin Prose and French — French! that was always terrible to me; most of the boys had been abroad and knew how to speak it quite well. The worst of it was a certain good-natured "Madam" who used to come over from Ramsgate twice a week to give conversation lessons, seeing my predicament got it into her head that it would be a kindness to let me attend her classes. A chair was placed for me at the end of the room and there I used to sit — like a great clownish dunce — while these clever children chattered to each other and to the lady. The mere possibility of being called upon to pronounce the simplest word made me literally sweat.

It sounds as I tell it as if the situation was after all not so very awful — but it was enough to make me miserable, it was enough to make me howl when I was by myself, it was enough to make me take a French grammar, concealed in my pocket, during those thrice precious hours when I was free to go where I liked.

I used to go off to Margate or Ramsgate by tram. In those places I could feel the ebb and flow of the great world — nothing here was closed down, nothing here was confined.

I might no doubt have had no end of exciting assignations at these times but I never did; it seemed quite enough for me simply to be there witnessing the manners, the comings and goings on the hot sands. Sometimes it is true as I paced along by the water's edge I did get glimpses which sent vague thrills through me — thrills exquisite and enervating. There is always something Pagan about the seashore: it is free and beautiful. Lust is there but it is the Lust of the open air and hot sunshine. At the end of the afternoon I would look out for some out-of-the-way teashop where I was sure not to be recognized and where I could eat watercress and shrimps at my leisure.

I would return again by tram car and as I went swaying along with that curious iron bar which I suppose connects the electricity, crackling and hissing, rising and falling, I would never miss a certain orchard which I could just see over a high wall — an orchard with midsummer grass and moon daisies and cowsparsley rising high under the apple trees and seeming to me to be typical of the kind of place of romance one is always longing to find oneself wandering about in, under quite new conditions, in another life almost.

And I had need to restore myself with places of romance, for besides the boys I had the undermasters to contend with. I don't suppose any young man who is worth anything would be content to spend his life as an undermaster in a Private Preparatory School, and no doubt this is the reason why one comes across such objectionable and imbecile types in such a position. There were four here besides myself. They were all golfers. T. a straightforward and not altogether unpleasant type who had allowed his intellect to dwindle and dwindle from lack of use till he was capable of wondering how the "Futler," as they used to call the headmaster, could possibly give to the top form such free interpretations of the Old Testament stories. W. an international football player, very proud of his muscles and with the manners of a prizefighter — he used to get little boys to put their hands on his arm and then catch them as in a vice with his biceps. H. an insufferably conceited gentleman with a talent for rhyming after the manner of Gilbert and Sullivan.

The music master — I think now I could have made something of him — lank and lean, with crisp black hair cut short like a school boy's and with quite an exceptionally long nose; he was certainly more intelligent than the others and certainly more incompetent. But I hated them all, they were petty and mean and wearisome. I used to die at having anything to do with such people.

Every night coming from supper we had to walk down a long passage (I being junior to the others walked behind) at the end of which was hung that picture of the Laughing Cavalier which has in it such an extraordinary amount of Falstaffian, Rabelaisian earthiness. I used to look up at him and catch his eye — that eye that babbles of taverns and green fields, that libidinous and wine-bibbing eye with its generous assurance that after all undermasters did not make up the whole of life.

But they were devils! these undermasters, they did not appear to have any brains at all.

On one occasion I made my form learn that charming child's grace of Herrick's — I wrote it on the blackboard:

> "Here a little child I stand
> Holding up my either hand,
> Cold as paddocks though they be
> Here I hold them up to Thee,
> For a benison to fall
> On our meat and on us all."

By some ill-luck one of my colleagues (what a word! as J.C.P. remarked when I used it in one of my letters to him) came in and read it. You can imagine what shouts of laughter the recital of those lines created as an example of what “Po face” taught his form. “Cold as paddocks! cold as *paddocks*!”

They completed the school chapel while I was there. I would sometimes attend the early services and noted not without ironic interest how eagerly these schoolmasters would return after their devotional exercises to their toast and marmalade and hot coffee. How snug and well appointed that chapel was! A peer of the realm — whose pedigree is not unknown to me — presented it with an altar cloth costing seventy pounds. After the sands and the white cliffs I think I look back upon the gardens with greater pleasure than anything else — they seemed so opulent of gorgeous midsummer flowers, like peonies and poppies and carnations. I used to love to escape to the garden, chuckling to myself, my head full of my own thoughts. I think wherever grass grows, wherever there is vegetation — trees and bushes and flowers — one can be happy.

My predecessor was returning the next term so I did not go back to that school again. I was again at home and again because no other profession presented itself. I sent out applications for scholastic vacancies. One day in November I received a telegram asking me to go to a school in Worcestershire. I sent a reply saying I would come the next day and then went off for a walk through Stoke Wood and over Ham Hill wondering what this new venture was going to be like. A cold late afternoon mist enshrouded everything and the path through the wood was slippery with mud and sodden leaves.

I arrived at my destination the next day just as it was getting dark. I was told to go to a house called “The Gates” where some of the masters lodged.

They were all in school but in the senior master's room I found the remains of the tea they had just finished.

You know the uncanny feeling of entering a room from which people — strangers — have only lately gone: one is conscious sometimes of almost a physical impact as though the auras of the late occupants were still hovering in the air. The servant lighted a gas jet which flamed and sputtered and I sat down at the table in excited dejection and nibbled at a piece of plum cake. I looked at the bookshelves and my eyes encountered rows upon rows of soiled school books only too familiar. Lower down I did notice a few books of interest but these were all in such new "birthday gift" covers that they in no way reassured me. I noticed the works of Anthony Trollope in the World's Classics edition.

By the fire was an armchair and when I looked at it I could almost see the schoolmaster sitting there night after night having his last pipe before going to bed. There were two or three pipes lying idle on the chimney-piece.

And then my work began. This time I had to take a much larger class and the boys were by no means all gentlemen. A more slack and more slovenly lot I could hardly imagine. I was always telling them to clear up the classroom but it always seemed to me smothered in used up foolscap rolled into round balls; the desks were battered and carved upon and the fingers of all the boys were inky and their collars grimy and crumpled. I am afraid I taught them very little, every time I unlocked the classroom door I felt as if I was going into prison and something worse than prison. Once in a rage I determined to cane a boy. When I had made all arrangements and saw his bent body covered with curiously shiny trousers I could hardly raise my hand. At that time pain suffered by any sentient being seemed awful to me.

It is different now. This very morning standing in the heat of the day I witnessed unperturbed the merciless flogging of an ox because it was refusing to work and out of very despair had lain down.

I did cane that boy. His name was Pringle and he had red hair.

On the whole the masters here were a more dignified lot of men than at the other more exclusive school. The headmaster was I think exceptionally distinguished, I used to sit next to him at lunch time and he would always talk to me in a friendly intelligent way. The masters' lodging at "The Gates" I had most to do with and they were by no means the pick of the school staff. We used to have breakfast and tea and supper together.

The senior master, whose room I first was shown into, was very spruce and well groomed and spoke with almost a lisp. He evidently took himself and his work very seriously and considered himself a very responsible person. I came to hate him. He was capable of saying the most tedious things. Every day before going in to luncheon at the big school we used to collect in a little room hung with old school groups. We used to look at these: they were as the little man used to say "of perennial interest." Once he complained of gout. "I suppose," he said with a smug selfsatisfied smile, "we have to suffer for all the port our ancestors drank." In reality he was an awful little cad who had never had any ancestors at all. He told us how he was a staunch supporter of the Conservative party in his suburban house near London and he kept deploring the action of the Government in giving a free government to the Boers after all the money spent.

I must tell you that going and coming from the school to "The Gates" we had to pass through a very poor quarter of the town, where one was compelled to look upon the most appalling sights of penury and gloom. I continually saw children so starved that they looked like apes, and once an old woman walked in front of me with her white hair half eaten away by lice — yet it was down these streets that this spruce complacent scholar of Emmanuel College used to trip (all pious pompous sneaks come from Emmanuel) quite oblivious to it all, with his roll of carefully corrected papers under his arm and his dapper well-fitting mortar-board on his head. It was in those days I began to read *The Clarion,* that paper of Robert Blatchford's which is at once so refreshing and so insipid.

Then there was another master from Downing — a much more interesting individual with a really diabolical physiognomy who had drifted into schoolmastering God only knows how. I understood from the first that he really did not care for any of these things, only for his dog — a Great Dane, which was a terror to me and to the town in general.

But even in these surroundings I again got moments of peculiar exultation. In the Easter term the spring began to show signs of its approach. I used to go for walks by myself sometimes on the Kidderminster road, sometimes on the Birmingham road. I remember being very elated once as I was returning westward by the appearance of that faint green faraway light in the sky, which Coleridge and Walter Pater used to love and which always seems so extraordinarily suggestive of Space and Eternity. I remember too my pleasure at finding red dead nettle and colt's foot, and also at the smell of the cut grass on one of those rare hot days in March when they were preparing the field for the School Sports. But these masters — one could never get far enough away from them or their point of view. On one occasion I asked C. to come out with me for a walk after supper. He consented with amused condescension. As we walked down the lighted street my eye caught sight of those soft shadows on the moon's surface outlined with peculiar distinctness. I remarked how strange it was to think of those cold dead mountain chasms being actually visible to us — so aloof as they were from our particular life, from the wet shining pavements along which we were walking, from the mud and the lamplight and the newspaper posters. It was cold and the little man was wearing a pair of woolen gloves. He rubbed his wool covered hands together and remarked that it was too cold for him “to feel sentimental over the moon!”

Eventually this second term did come to an end and I was free again. I now wrote to my father that I was tired of schoolmastering and wanted to earn my living by “writing for the papers” — a suggestion vague enough to frighten anybody. My father very generously acquiesced. However with his letter came another one offering me the post of Private Tutor to a boy of fourteen at H.

I was to be paid a good salary and the idea seemed to offer certain possibilities — anyway it would be a new scene and a new sensation. I will quote from my diary.

II. THE DIARY OF A PRIVATE TUTOR

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6TH.

ARRIVED here yesterday. The discreet, ironic civility of the coachman who was waiting for me on the platform made me at once aware of my new social position — of the social position of a Private Tutor. The house is late Georgian and is overgrown with roses, jasmine and ivy; it has a slate roof and large sash windows. As I waited at the front door I noticed a wire-haired terrier standing under a tall fir tree; I neglected to raise my eyes to the branches above, where I might have detected the amused visage of my future pupil. He is large for his age. His steel-grey eyes appear to change colour just like a ferret's do when you hold it up. His narrow lips clearly reveal his spoilt ineffectual soul. I am not to sleep in the house; they have found rather nice lodgings for me on the outskirts of the town a mile away. Dinner in the evening was a repetition of tea, the same discreet overtures, the same critical and intense scrutiny.

Thursday, May 7th.

Woke early, had breakfast at eight o'clock and then walked by the side of an old disused canal which meanders through grass fields. Arranged a programme of work and was unutterably depressed at the sight of each dreary and well-known school book. Swore to myself that I would never enter the hated profession again. After supper took a long walk in the dark. Came to a village churchyard quite white with cows-parsley, the delicate flowers casting a misty gossamer veil over innumerable mounds. As I sat there for a few minutes smoking a cigarette I could not help wondering if the dead, buried people all round had any kind of existence. It was a moonless night, but the sky was illumined by mighty suns reduced to mere specks of light in the infinite distance. I never can understand how people find consolation in looking at the stars. To me they appear profoundly melancholy.

Monday the 11th.

A gloomy day; there has been thunder about. I found Herb Paris in some private woods belonging to people called Hussey. Their house, an Elizabethan building, was not far off, and as we crossed a field, heavy with drenched May grass, we saw a figure in black walking on one of the terraces. They tell me she was Mrs. Hussey, who had lost her only child — a boy of nine years — in the early spring. It rained all the evening.

Tuesday the 12th.

Went for a motor drive and had a picnic on the downs. Coming back there was not room for me in the car so I walked. You can guess how delightful that hour and a half was; trailing along through the white summer dust, with ground ivy crushed in my hands and the sights and sounds of the countryside all about me.

Wednesday the 13th.

Played tennis, but was all the time worried by the recollection of a letter I had posted in the morning to the secretary of the American University Extension Society.

They have asked me to go out for the Easter term and give a course of lectures on English literature and in my letter accepting their invitation I somehow managed to spell “needless” with an “a”. This absurd mistake kept “taunting my mind,” as village people say, and I was continually making faces to myself and mentally howling.

Thursday the 14th.

There is a bank clerk lodging also at Richmond Villa. This evening I talked quite a long time with him; like a doubledyed fool referring to the ignominy of my present position, which of course he did not understand.

Friday the 15th.

This morning we made a diminutive pond in the orchard. We then caught a number of unfortunate leather backed toads and made them swim in it.

Saturday the 16th.

Fell off my bicycle and bruised my knee badly. Rex absolutely refuses to walk and will not bicycle outside the garden. He likes to steer his way round the narrow kitchen-garden paths with me behind him. I was doing this when I fell off.

Monday the 18th.

Tried to stir Rex’s imagination by reading The Burial March of Dundee. Heard from my brother; he says:— “To worry about ‘neadless’ is needless worry, for the Secretary will only think it a slip or a late English fashion!”

Tuesday the 19th.

We do our work in an upstairs room. We sit by an open window. From my chair I look across the lawn at three magnificent elm trees: morning after morning the intervening atmosphere is quivering with life — a myriad of gnats dancing in the hot sunlight. I wonder if they in their tiny life have invented Gods for themselves or if ever a single, great-hearted gnat has died for the rest.

Friday the 22nd.

Saw the tombs of the Earls of —

A huge mausoleum standing on the edge of a hill overshadowed by cedars and overlooking a luxuriant Hampshire champagne.

The building itself was strangely chilling to the spirits, as such places usually are; one thought of the succeeding generations so free and powerful succumbing each in his turn, and being carried to this house of crumbling coffins and dead men's bones.

The absolute inevitableness of Death: one must never forget that!

Sunday the 24th.

Went to church and sat right at the back, next to the font. Periodically got a glimpse of my pupil and grinned like a lemur. In the afternoon played the fool with Rex and then walked round Bagnell with his sisters, discussing Socialism.

Tuesday the 26th.

As we were changing for tennis Rex threw half a glass of water at a little village girl who was passing below his window and had accidentally trodden on the edge of the lawn. I could have killed him as he stood there with his fat, flabby, half-naked body concealed behind the curtain!

Saturday the 30th.

Played tennis with two vulgar piano manufacturers, their hair plastered down with brilliantine, as I noticed when they bent down to alter the height of the net. I hated them. In the evening bought *The Clarion.* How refreshing after intercourse with these people to read the direct and downright writing of old Blatchford and Neil Lyons!

Sunday the 31st.

Cecily is dead in Paris. I was haunted by this all day long. She was seventeen and yet it seems such a little time since I used to see her at parties

— a child immaculate, in dainty frock, blue sash and evening shoes.

Another horrible Sunday. “Pain is the choice of the magnanimous.”

“Pleasure is not an end in itself but rather an accident.”

Wednesday, June 3rd.

Walked by the river and watched azure blue dragon flies glide here and there. Saw the reflection of an old mill in the water and from the mere joy of consciousness felt splendidly indifferent as to the future.

Saturday the 6th.

Rex insisted on catching dragon-flies and letting them loose in a hot-house. Was kept for supper.

Saturday the 13th.

Drove to a river three miles away. Rex fished, but could catch nothing. I walked behind, peering into the deep clear water, so different from that of our Somersetshire Parret. The meadows on each side were golden with buttercups. I longed for escape, I longed to wander forever through such fields!

Monday the 15th.

We are digging a deep hole in the spinney — a kind of smuggler’s cave. It is extraordinary what satisfaction I derive from this occupation. There is something in the actual physical labour which makes me forget my abasement.

Tuesday the 16th.

A silly old major has come to stay in the house. He went through the Indian Mutiny and now in his dotage plays at being gallant with Mrs. T.

Wednesday the 17th.

Went to the Agricultural Show with Rex. He wore a white mackintosh and I was astonished to see how he had already acquired the insolent demeanour of the vulgar rich. It rained most of the time, but the flowers arranged inside the tents possessed amazing colour. I came across a farmer from our part of the country and longed to tell him to tell my brother that *he had seen me in Hell!*

Thursday the 18th.

Dug the hole.

Sunday the 21st.

Sat at the back of the church next a cripple with a pink bow in her hat. All these people must be absolutely mad; how could they otherwise be so dull and stupid in a world like this? In the evening read in the little front garden of the Villa. I helped my landlady water her flowers, geraniums, Canterbury bells and snapdragons. The smell of the dampened earth very delicious. All the time village people were loitering along the road.

Thursday the 25th.

I have constructed a kind of tent in the little front garden. It is made by hanging blankets over an old clothes' horse. I have bought a lamp and read late every night, often marking the time and date on the margin of the book so that when I read the passage again I shall be reminded of my time of consciousness in this tiny garden.

Saturday the 27th.

A little cousin of Rex's arrived to-day. We three played together and I was perfectly happy in her radiant and animated presence. She is only fourteen years old. We showed her all the secret places in the garden — our hole, and the nests in the trees. She got very hot and asked me to carry her summer hat because the elastic was tight and hurt her chin.

Sunday the 28th.

Sat at the back of the church and then played in the garden. I was asked to conduct Mary to a friend's house. Our way was across fields and we walked side by side. It was very hot. In the tangled hedgerows no birds sang, only the shrill bat-like cry of field-mice was audible. She refused to go in at the gate but clambered over a high wall at the bottom of the garden, waved good-bye and vanished forever.

Tuesday the 30th.

Picnic supper on the Downs. Rex fell down and began to cry and I felt extraordinarily exasperated. Rather an attractive Scotch girl called Doris is staying here. She was at school with one of Rex's sisters.

Saturday, July 4th.

There was a party to-day — a fantastic affair — reminding me of the mad garden party in *Alice of Wonderland.* They all had more money than manners. I could not have conceived it possible that so many silly vulgarians could have collected together! One person alone attracted me; he was the parson of the place. We went apart and talked, and he with tears in his eyes spoke of Jesus — his Master. I could fancy him to have only just left Our Lord's side. He might have been walking yesterday with the twelve in Galilean lanes. I was amazed. "Here," I thought, "at last, have I come across somebody whose life is a reality — who is really alive!" I loved him.

Tuesday the 7th.

Late in the evening I escaped and ran off to the Vicarage. The priest was alone, his wife away. It was a beautiful night and we wandered about his garden, over his lawn and up and down his box-fringed path in the kitchen garden. We talked of literature and religion. Although his head is grey there is passion in his soul. The summer garden as we walked about in it seemed enchanted with its dim aromatic shadows and listening flowers — so enchanted that one could hardly believe that the dull importunacy of the routine of things would ever again obscure one's imaginative insight.

Wednesday the 8th.

It rained all day. We played hide-and-seek in the house. On one occasion I came upon Doris curled up in a linen cupboard, flushed and laughing and very provocative.

Thursday the 9th.

Played tennis in the rain at the doctor's house. Then ran off to my lodgings, hoping to get an evening to myself; however, they sent a motor, begging me to come to dinner.

Friday the 17th.

We all went to play tennis at the Husseys' — a very old family, tragic and doomed. The Squire, a man of sixty, has twice been in a lunatic asylum and has still the sullen, pre-occupied look of a homicidal maniac. He is a very big man with an immensely broad back, pale face and slobbering articulation. I walked to the end of the terrace with his wife — the lady in black — and she showed me her dead boy's garden, with the flowers he had planted and the border stones he had arranged.

Monday the 27th.

Only one more week and I shall be free!

Thursday the 30th.

We have motored down to Weymouth for the night. Just now I walked to the end of the pier; the lights from the crescentshaped front shone like golden daggers in the sea. I am sitting in my bedroom near the open window: footsteps on the esplanade and the distant whistle of a railway train, shrill and weirdly romantic, are the only sounds audible above the surge and ripple of the sea.

Monday, *August 3rd.*

Free at last! Wished "Good-bye" to many people. In the evening was with my brother. We walked to a village five miles from his home and had supper there in a little back parlour. We had much to talk about. It was midnight before we got back, but we who are possessed never grow tired!

III. AMERICA

IT WAS NOW that I fell more completely than ever under the influence of my brother J. C. P. He had persuaded me to try lecturing in America and the preparations for these lectures brought us much together sometimes in Somerset, sometimes in Sussex.

I began to learn more and more about the world — to understand the miracle of cornfields golden and bread-bearing and hot in the August sun; to understand the mystery of the sea, full of strange vegetation and shells and salt spray; and the old world melancholy of great woods and tidal rivers, and ancient country towns. We were together always. Every insignificant incident of the day was experienced with relish — the few minutes out in the garden before breakfast — the lighting of cigarettes as we hurried off together afterwards. The pouring out of tea at some Village Inn, with the road outside still light and dusty in the late afternoon.

We visited churches and peered curiously at the symbols and images that had meant so much to our race. We loitered and read the old weather-beaten inscriptions on the stones outside — we thought of Hardy and Shakespeare and of the still bones of the peasantry below in the earth. We stopped to watch village children dancing under the chequered shadows of old west country elms — to notice old labourers returning from the fields with stories of gladness and sorrow, of births and deaths written on their disfigured brows. And all the time the world unfolded itself before my eyes, this world of sun and rain, of sea and river, of churches and dead men's bones. We crossed the Atlantic together in the late Autumn and I looked out day after day at that huge track of heaving waters — there from the beginning and so large a part of the earth. I was amazed. This I thought is the world: vast lands and vaster waters and with what happenings going on here and there!

At the end of our journey we arrived at New York and I saw what the human race had done here. Like a giant city New York raised her illumined battlements in the darkness. I don't know that I actually learned much from America — it was staggering, astounding and seemed possessed of an exaggerated reality of its own. With such a spectacle before my eyes any just view of existence was blurred. I received the impression of a tireless, indominable people displaying absolute indifference to their fate — to anybody's fate; a people that rushed to and fro and entered upon the New Year, the New Year of each of their destinies, with hoots and rattles and catcallings. In a curious way they seemed separated from the rest of humanity: a race devoid of fear, devoid of reverence, whom it was impossible to associate with the tragic misused beings for whose sake it was necessary for a young Semitic God, noble and heroic, to die.

When I got back to England I had but a few months to spend before I became ill.

It seems to me now that I was particularly fortunate at that time. I was always wandering about in places where cuckoo flowers grew and where sea-poppies grew and where garlic was made white by the droppings of rooks. We spent two weeks I remember at Sidmouth in Devonshire under the shadow of those weird blood red cliffs, with sea gulls and overgrown inland hedges and rabbits pirouetting, fantastically silhouetted against the Atlantic — against Eternity. All the time a myriad microbes alive and active were eating away at my body, at my very life. Suddenly I began spitting blood, "There is no time to be lost," said the doctor, and I was hurried away to Switzerland.

My brother J. C. P. came with me. Together we listened to the sea on Dover beach; together we listened to the sighing of the wind in the housetops of Laon before even the Germans were there. I quote again from my diary:

IV. A CONSUMPTIVE'S DIARY

November 29th, 1909.

I MUST be ill; last night I coughed up blood. I slept badly also, the sound of the wind and drifting rain keeping me awake.

What an autumn it has been! We have not seen the sun for weeks. All low-lying fields are flooded, all roads heavy with mud, and all trees black with dampness.

I am going to the doctor this morning. Probably I have broken some small bloodvessel and shall be all right in a day or two. I cannot help remembering, however, those ominous words of John Keats when he spat blood for the first time "I know the colour of that blood; that blood is arterial blood; it is my death warrant; I must die!"

Later. I have interviewed the doctor, and he says I have consumption and must leave England at once. I asked if I might not wait till after Christmas, but he told me there was no time to be lost.

December 2nd.

I am starting for Switzerland next week. My eldest brother is going to travel with me. I have still discoloration and slight fever.

December 9th.

We got here yesterday, having broken the journey at Basle. I have never been abroad before, so that, in spite of my weakness, I found the journey extraordinarily exciting.

Amazing! suddenly to see in reality the historic continent of Europe, for me hitherto only a matter of maps and writing. At first I looked out upon the plainlands of Normandy — that country so dear to Guy de Maupassant —

with its limitless fields and small workaday farms, and afterwards at the more undulating landscape of the frontier, with now and then a swollen river sweeping along quite near to the railway line.

We had our first glimpse of the mountains coming up to Landquart, formidable grey granite cliffs overhanging slate-coloured lakes — scenery sombre enough and well selected for Pontius Pilate's legendary end.

At last, as it was getting dark, our train ran slowly into Davos Platz station. A crowd of porters, each with a name of a sanatorium or hotel inscribed on the front of his hat, stood waiting at the end of the platform.

Eventually we were conducted to a sleigh and driven up here. As we passed through Davos we could see on every side prostrate figures on lighted balconies. My room, No. 14, is a fairly large one. (The fact that No. 13 is completely omitted strikes me as an astonishing concession to the superstition of the modern European.) Exactly opposite, on the other side of the valley, rises a huge fir-clad mountain, with curious straight paths running down its precipitous sides, used, so I am told, by woodcutters for sliding timber. I am to stay in bed for at least two or three weeks, so as to become acclimatized to the rarified mountain air.

My brother leaves to-morrow.

December 10th.

This afternoon I was examined by the doctor. He says my chances of recovery are good.

As I looked down upon his bald head, busy with a stethoscope at my chest, it seemed extraordinary that one skeleton man by merely listening could possibly predict the longevity of another.

December 15th.

To-day I was allowed on my balcony for a few hours. From my *liege* chair I could see a small village at the bottom of the valley, a village in miniature, with flat-roofed houses clustering round a tiny church. In all directions the mountain sides are dotted with chalets.

December 20th.

This morning I went down to the diningroom for the first time.

I sat at the English table between two men who had got the thing in their throats and could only communicate in whispers. One of them, a sentimental clerk from Newcastle, tried to enlist my sympathy by writing on a scrap of paper "I am a married chap." There was an Anglican priest also at the table, a sly whimsical High Churchman, plump as a partridge, but with death obviously upon him.

December 21st.

I went down again to-day and am getting to know the various people by sight.

There is rather an attractive American woman at the table opposite; she is married, but seems just now very much occupied with a dour-faced Scotchman. At another table, a little farther away, sits a Hungarian — a graceful serpentine figure strangely emaciated. There is a young Russian also — a fellow of Herculean proportions, with heavy Slavonic jaw and expansive gestures; he is in love with a little compatriot of his, a beautiful barbarian, slender and delicate, with pale ivory hands and black lynx eyes.

I have named her the Hamadryad, and in truth her voice possesses something of the quaint shrillness of a wood-creature. For the rest the room is filled with a curious medley of degenerates from every country in Europe — philosophic Germans, flushed and friendly; smartly-dressed foreign-looking Frenchmen, and aristocratic Austrians.

December 22nd.

Walked up and down the terrace. The cold freshness of the air when one first comes out is very delicious, and I begin to feel better. I encountered the priest who made jocular allusions as to the gravity of his health, but even so, I saw the death terror at the back of his eyes.

December 26th.

Went down to the Christmas dinner last night and sat next the Hamadryad, who, I fancy, was drinking too much champagne. I amused some of the patients afterwards by telling fortunes. “Your life-line is a good one,” I said to the Hungarian. “Good one, good one!” he laughed, “That’s funny, considering I am dying!”

He is a strange type, subtle and irresponsible, and declares himself a disciple of Montaigne. Like so many other Europeans he has fallen under the spell of Napoleon; his room is packed with histories of that period and with busts and pictures of the great man. “There,” says he pointing to the crowded relics, “there is the past; and there,” indicating his table strewn with papers and musical instruments, “there is the present; and there,” and now he pointed to his bed, “and there is the future!”

The death-mask of Napoleon, plastic and monumental, lay on an ebony stand by itself. He noticed that it had caught my attention. “I have often sat watching that for hours,” he said. “That is rest.”

January 1st, 1910.

The whole sanatorium is immensely diverted by the behaviour of the Russian. This great boy-giant has conceived a grand passion for the Hamadryad. He showers her with choice and costly flowers and this evening summoned the Davos band for her entertainment.

For all this she takes precious little notice of him — in fact she has told me she does not care about him. While waiting for the post this evening the priest began likening the sanatorium to the cave of Polythemus. “We are devoured one by one!” he said. Certainly his religion does not seem to reconcile him to the idea of death. I reminded him that Ulysses and a few of his men did at last escape clinging to the bellies of the sheep.

January 17th.

It has been a glorious day. The sun in the sky seemed smaller, but at the same time far brighter than it does in England, and under its rays the white frozen mountains gleamed and glittered. “True Davos weather,” the habitués call it. I passed by many chalets coloured a rich mellow brown by the heat of the sun. The Russian is as infatuated as ever; it is really laughable to observe him at meal times trying to look at her without being detected by the other patients. She does not appear to notice him at all.

January 26th.

This morning out walking I amused myself by watching the peasants sliding tree-trunks down the mountain sides. They use a kind of single pick-axe, which they dig into the trees, shouting in gruff unison so as to strike and dig at the same moment. These were the weapons used against the Austrians.

January 28th.

The Hamadryad has been taken ill. I am sorry, as I have found her wild and wilful personality strangely fascinating. I was quite surprised to discover how startled I was this morning by coming across her name written in the snow; it was like finding the foot-print of a drowned child on the sea-shore.

January 31st.

The Hamadryad much worse. Report says she may not recover.

I went a walk in the morning, but have come to hate these mountains of sorrow.

From an open space in the woods I looked across a deserted white plain at Davos. There it stood, that city of dreadful death, forsaken, forlorn, and shrouded in shame. In the immediate foreground was the black spire of a church; and beyond, the enclosed piece of ground where so many unfortunate patients congregate for the last time.

Next week we are going to have a fancy dress entertainment. I shall procure a costume from Davos.

February 2nd.

My temperature by no means normal. This morning as I was putting on my snowshoes I overheard a queer conversation.

The room next door has for some weeks been occupied by a young Englishman. Last night he had a bad hemorrhage. I guessed it was so, because when I woke I heard him give those successive gasping coughs which were absolutely unmistakable. Apparently the doctor was with him, for I heard him ask in a querulous tone whether he was going to die. For some moments the noise of the nurse emptying basins was the only sound audible. Then at last came the “No, certainly not, certainly not!” from the doctor.

He was dead by the evening though.

February 4th.

Walked along the path above the sanatorium. Kept digging my alpine-stock into the snow and admiring the blue colour like that of a breaking wave to be seen in the hole where it had been. A peasant passed leading by *a rope an absurd mouse-coloured cow; he was bearded and* smoked a long and hanging pipe. The fancy dress entertainment is to-morrow.

February 5th.

What a scene it was, this fancy dress ball!

I stood at the end of the lighted hall dressed as a Welsh prince in scarlet and gold, and there passed by countless fantastics, a nun, a bride, a pierrot, and an emperor.

Everybody in the highest spirits — cigarettes, champagne, laughter, and flushed cheeks. If it had not been for the continual sound of coughing, like the voice of a hollow-toned stranger, now here, now there, one would never have suspected that all was not well with this gay and coloured picture.

But this fact was brought home to me when, going up to my room for some forgotten object, I happened upon a group of servant men taking the opportunity, now that the corridors were deserted, to carry away a corpse. I only saw them for one moment; but I knew directly, as though by instinct, what they were at, with their oblong burden, their hushed voices, their stockinged feet. It is said that coffins of every size are stored in the sanatorium to facilitate the secret removal of bodies to the dead-house in Davos. For, after all, it is not pleasant to live patients to meet dead patients coming down stairs!

February 8th.

The Hamadryad is dead. It was her they were carrying away last night. The death of a guest is never announced in a sanatorium until the corpse has been removed. It is necessary to diminish the startled shock such news give to the others. When a day or two has elapsed, like silly sheep in a butcher's field, they can be reassured.

February 14th.

Yesterday I drove down to the village in the valley. It was a wonderfully beautiful morning, but it turned off in the afternoon. I went inside the church; it was Zwinglian, and the interior was bare and desolate except for faded floral wreaths hung here and there in remembrance of the dead — a place more discouraging one could hardly imagine.

Coming back the sky was overcast — the mountains appeared chill and sombre and small flakes of snow began falling. I am quite glad to get back to my room again.

February 15th.

I think the extra exertion must have been too much for me, for to-day I am in bed with a rising temperature.

February 28th.

Yesterday evening the Russian shot himself, but by a strange irony, owing to his illness, his heart had moved from its right place, so he is not dead.

March 2nd.

I am getting worse.

March 10th.

Still no improvement. It looks as though my dissolution is to be a rapid one. The doctors sound me and give not unfavorable reports, but from their queer, calculating looks, I understand what they really think.

April.

This is terrible! I had no idea that I should come to fear death as I do. The whole perspective of my view of life has changed. It is as though I had been asleep or hypnotized all this time, and had only now waked, and what an awakening!

April 10th.

2.30 a. m. Hemorrhage! I see blood; I taste blood; I breathe blood! Will daylight *never* come?

V. VENICE

AFTER THIS HEMORRHAGE I gradually began to get better. At last I was able to go out again, to look down at the little white buttressed church in the valley and see the peasants come and go from its gates like tiny ants. I knew they went there to worship God but I did not know whether they were wise or not. I made a scratch on the plastered wall of a chalet and used to look at it and wonder if I should ever see it again after I got back to England — this tiny scratch on this particular spot of the material universe. At last I was released and rushed back to England. It was May Day when my brother and I looked out of the hotel windows at Folkestone. How familiar, how delicious, how green everything looked, I could almost see the birds' nests in the hedges, could almost smell the young elder leaves as we were whirled up to London. My illness had sharpened my wits. At night when I looked at the stars, I understood the background which belonged to our planet, poised and sailing from mystery to mystery, from Abyss to Abyss. I liked the idea of the blank flaring spaces of infinity giving birth unwittingly to crafty intellectual eyes which peered out upon their secret astral chambers. The planet itself was sailing on to extinction either by some catastrophic celestial collision or by slow senseless withering, and each man, each woman and each child was destined also sooner or later to wear white stockings and be carried away to the church yard.

When I sat in Church and heard my father speak so certainly of a future life — this was the future life I envisaged, while the lamp light changed to a richer colour the yellow Ham Hill stone of the Chancel arch and the foolish village people grew restless for their suppers and the boys and girls lolled in their seats and sighed for one another. I was a whole year at home, then all of a sudden I found myself immerged in a great wave of apathy. I have never quite been able to explain the cause of this. Was it as my brother put it that “the iron of consumption was at last entering my soul” or that my enforced inaction was dulling my capacity for pleasure? Who can tell? who knows where these great clouds come from — these clouds which come sailing out of eternity and settle sometimes so heavily on the heads of the sons of men. When as I sit writing now, with the scoriac escarpments of Africa around me, I recall those days, it seems perfectly incredible that any sadness of the kind could have overtaken me, free as I was to wander over the station fields with brown hares circling through the gleaming windblown spring grass, with moor hens dabbling in the water and with the noblest of women by my side.

But so it was. When I went out in the early mornings, I no longer wanted to smell ground ivy, to smell the very earth itself, my imagination seemed suddenly drugged, my senses seemed to have lost their finer edge and the dead weight of the commonplace dragged me down and filled my spirit with lamentable misgivings. I wrote to my brother in a curiously peevish tone. I accused him of deserting me. I told him he had forgotten the roads, the lanes, the wayside trees, the field ponds we had so often visited together. I told him that I believed it was now of no consequence to him that the purple lilacs were already out by the side of the Fosse Way and casting spiral shadows on the white May dust. He came to see me at once and suggested as we sat in the corner of the potato garden, that I should go with him to Venice. It was arranged. Before I started I went down to the terrace walk and picked for a buttonhole one of those spotted Turkshead lilies, which possess such a deadly and voluptuous and heavy perfume. It was symbolic: it was what Oscar Wilde would have done and that was why I did it.

We crossed the channel in Halcyon weather. We reached Venice the next day. Venice! I don't think any human apathy could oppress me for long in that city — day followed day and I walked those marble piazzas in a kind of trance.

We climbed to the top of the Campanile and looked down upon the apostolic crocodile and upon the lion. We went over the glass factory and saw the workmen twist the heated crystal into a thousand exquisite shapes; we crossed to Torcello and wandered about the marshland behind; we visited the Island cemetery and loitered down the long cypress alleys tapping at the marble walls each one honeycombed with the dead. At night we glided through the city in a gondola while ever and again out of the lapping water rose unmistakable the smells of old long forgotten centuries.

Sometimes we would wander into St. Mark's and on one occasion I remember we saw an old man shuffle up to the great pagan font and dip his fingers into the holy water and make the sign upon his forehead and upon the forehead of a child who was holding to him. We watched him there in the shadowy West End of the ancient church while all the time far up above the altar, the gilded angels sang hallelujahs to their creator, to the creator of Venice, to the creator of the world. The most trivial things seen during those days seem indelibly imprinted upon my mind.

I have forgotten nothing. I recall exactly the direct momentary glance of an elaborately dressed cosmopolitan harlot — so steely and ice-cold that it seemed to penetrate to my very soul as I prowled one evening up and down the brilliantly lighted colonnade. I remember also the look of a girl eating a handful of red currants in a shady and insanitary side street. I remember the June roses in the gardens on the Lido and the extraordinary knotted-skinned, spiral shaped sea horses — so miniature yet so perfect in design — which used to die by hundreds amongst the fishes dragged in from the Adriatic.

But all the time I was conscious of my sickness. It was always at the back of my mind. I could never dismiss it. I had a relapse on my way home and was laid up at Milan for weeks. For a whole year afterwards my health was uncertain. In desperation I decided to exile myself out here in this abandoned and sun seared continent. To be alive in Africa is better than to be dead in Europe. “We are still on the same planet,” writes J. C. P. “but that is about all that can be said.” I left England a month after war had been declared.

VI. FROM MONTACUTE TO GILGIL

September 4th.

TRAVELED up to London. Slept at Chiswick in a little back garden. The moon was in the sky and the pear trees were everywhere. Motored up to Blackwell docks, Set sail at noon. We were held up outside Tilbury for some hours.

Across Essex flats I could see a church tower tranquil and with the afternoon sunshine upon it.

September 5th.

There are tiresome people at my end of the table. Opposite sits a lady who looks like a prostitute with her fixed beady eyes and immobile perfumed breasts. A little way off, however, there is an English parson — a typical public school man — whose appearance is as familiar and reassuring as an oak tree or Norman arch.

September 7th.

A horrible night! I could not sleep at all, was sick continually. The curious wishy-washy smell of the cabin nauseated me. I tried to drink soda water and was sick. I tried to eat grapes and was sick. Crept out on deck as soon as it was light and was confronted by an ice cold grey sea rolling and heaving as far as eye could see.

Lay in my deck chair all the morning watching white waves on the very borders of the horizon rise and fade and be submerged forever.

September 9th.

Watched the sun go down behind a wall of black clouds. Rays of light fell in lines upon the water where a single bird was flying — a mere dot in the sky.

September 11th.

Slept on deck. In the morning a sailor showed me a flying fish which had got stranded on deck. I liked to see its sharp spikey fins. All day there were shoals of them skimming over the waves, flying not for the joy in their hearts but for the terror.

September 12th.

During the afternoon we were all excited by the appearance of a huge ship on the horizon. It made as though it would round us up. However to our great relief it turned out to be British.

September 14th.

During the morning there were two torrential downpours of rain and we all had to seek shelter. In the afternoon a bird with black and white bars and crested head appeared suddenly flying after the ship. It was a Hoopoo. Other little birds alighted on the gunwhale, also moths fluttered about the deck. Evidently we were not far from land.

September 17th.

All night the sea was illumined by strange submarine lights shimmering now here now there, like a kind of water lightning.

September 18th.

Sat talking with the Eurasian doctor — a charming fellow with a bald head, bushy black moustache and a skin like old ivory. “When we are dead we are dead,” he said, laughing the hissing serpent laugh characteristic of Indians.

September 19th.

Sighted Ascension Island at eleven o'clock. I lay on my couch at the back of the ship and watched the mountains grow larger and larger and turn from grey to blue and from blue to mauve. The Island is volcanic. It looks as though it had only just cooled down from a molten state and that the sea must still hiss round its rocks.

Above us sharp-winged swallow-tailed seagulls sailed to and fro and below in an indigo sea great finned sharks were cruising.

September 22nd.

In the morning approached St. Helena; red scoriac cliffs rising bolt out of the sea. Went on shore but could get no carriage to take me up to Longwood.

Drifted up the main street, and very desolate and dilapidated it was, with old black trots, dusty chickens and lean cats everywhere. As I was being rowed back to the ship I noticed the dry cracked dirty feet of the negro and thought how like they were to the claws and hoofs of animals, with their toughness and clinging discolored nails.

September 24th.

Woke early as silent moving figures were swilling down the deck; watched the white dawn spread over the sea.

In the afternoon sat talking with the Ts. What has made this fragile girl an atheist?

September 26th.

An albatross appeared — a single albatross — and kept sailing after the ship with beautiful owl-like curves, its wings wide outstretched.

I had my dinner by the light of the moon, as all the ship was darkened from fear of the Germans.

September 27th.

Talked with the little doctor who is going out to investigate the tsetse fly, and learnt from him how we are surrounded by innumerable minute intelligences. In the evening sat next Mrs. T. She did not want to go to bed when her husband arrived, so she caressed his hand. “See how I am bullied, Mr. Powys, forced to go to bed.”

“I am not forcing, I am only persuading.” I remembered Nietzsche’s words, “*All women are either cats or birds.*”

October 1st.

Capetown. It rained in the morning, but by twelve o’clock it began to look brighter. I went into the town and walked up the green avenue and into the gardens. The gravel was steaming and there were heavy scents in the air. Came upon a statue of Cecil Rhodes looking very absurd with its black baggy breeches.

October 3rd.

Wasted all the day waiting to set sail. As a matter of fact we did not get off till six o’clock. I stood near Dr. H. as we sailed in the direction of the sinking sun, which was making all the lower part of the sky yellow; behind a full moon was rising, pale lily-white. Nietzsche hated the moon. He called it “sly cat of the roofs piously silently stalking over star carpets.”

“We have strayed like lost sheep, we have followed the devices and desires of our own hearts.” Why not? Why ever not? “Forgiveness!”

“Salvation!” What do they mean? Why salvation? Why forgiveness? Forgiveness for what? So we chatted on as we glided past the Twelve Apostles in the cool of the evening.

October 4th.

Sat talking with H. He remembered well seeing a yellow ray of the sinking sun shine through the muslin curtain of his nursing home and thinking to himself that there would be no more sunshine for him the next day.

"I was suffering pain," he said, "It makes me angry now to think how much pain I was suffering — useless, useless pain. What a creation it is! Think of it, consider it for a moment. God creates animals, but carnivorous animals also. God creates fishes, but carnivorous fishes also: the whole of creation is harassed in this way. That explains why in East Africa the animals have no fat on them — they are too harassed to grow fat even."

October 5th.

Very rough in the early morning. I talked with Dr. L. the entomologist — a little alert man who was surely an insect himself in his preincarnation. He told me how the tropical jungle was teeming with life; how every twig and branch was alive, not only on the surface but inside also; how the evidence of the underworld as to the existence of God was ever ambiguous, was ever a yea and nay. He told of the driver ants and how they drive all before them, how even elephants turn out of their way and how on many different occasions he had observed a rapid migration of all creeping things before a column of them, mice and rats running for their lives and grasshoppers leaping and leaping.

October 6th.

Reached Durban at 6 o'clock. Observed the public buildings by their lack of originality reflecting exactly the Colonial taste. I wandered away down odd by-streets full of men with dusty birds' claws for feet.

October 10th.

At breakfast saw a turtle paddle past us with absolute aplomb, its brown shell gleaming in the sunshine.

In the evening sat talking with Miss N. and nodded with ennui, ennui. — Some women are intended for embraces alone.

October 14th.

In the morning a warship appeared on the horizon. She turned out to be British and soon after she had passed we changed our course to the south of the island. By two o'clock we were lying off Zanzibar, the remains of the unfortunate Pegasus still visible. I went on shore. The streets narrow and cool, almost like passages; the doorways decorated with Arab carving; within, cavernous shops with bright-eyed Indians squatting about in them. Curious the unmistakable smell of Arab towns — a sweet smell — a smell of silken oriental tapestries and brown and black humanity.

October 15th.

Woke as a strange rose-colored dawn spread itself over Zanzibar. — The pale crescent of the moon was under its spell, so were the motionless clouds, so also were the tropical shaped cocoa nut trees which fringed the farther hills.

October 16th.

Arrived at Mombasa and after some difficulty got my luggage through the customs and settled myself in the Uganda train. By the next morning we had left behind the dry scrub country and were crossing vast grass plains with the sun drenching down upon them. One saw many wild animals, hartbeests, giraffes, zebras and gazelles. From time to time the train stopped at stations and we looked out at Indians, at queer black men with decorated mangled ears, at tin-roofed houses and at burning hot earth.

October 18th.

Arrived at Gilgil, a place twenty miles from the equator with an altitude of 8000 feet. The sun went down and immediately the darkness echoed and quivered with weird unfamiliar sounds.

It is certainly an amazing country, this country of midnight murmurs, of burnished ebony men, of spotted golden-haired animals — a country vast, profound, inexplicable.

What beast, for instance, gave utterance to the agonized terror-stricken screams which I heard in the forest at the back of the house, and why are the cedar trees so gnarled and strangely bearded, and who made that iron rock for the cold black mountain stream to flow over here in a country where no church towers are and no pear trees grow?

VII. AFRICA

October 19th.

WAS TOO excited to sleep much. I woke often and listened in terror to the sounds of the jungle. What is going on out there in the green darkness?

October 20th.

Rested all day on the verandah. W. brought me a lizard to look at, which he had caught in the garden. It had a green back and the eye of a demon. Its ancestors must have been revolving some queer thoughts for it to have acquired an expression so dragon-like and cynical. At night some boys came to say that "a dead kakapo was stinking like a dead porcupine." These natives will never approach a dead body: on their own reserve they get over the difficulty by dragging the dying to the hyenas.

We went out and set light to the whole hut. It burnt furiously. The cedar trees stood clearly outlined against the black sky. A white native bullock came and surveyed the scene with mild curiosity.

October 25th.

Heard a hyena howl for the first time in my life — a long low howl merging into a kind of whoop. I looked across at the outline of the black forest where the little tree irrisors were piping. Before I went to sleep Orion had risen away to the west.

October 26th.

Walked down to the rocks. What a country it is! It is always Africa! a strange terrifying country, a country inhabited by clawed creatures, by creatures with striped and gilded pelts, a country where even the moles are as large as water rats, and where the very nettles sting like wasps.

October 31st.

In the afternoon I sold my dove-coloured flannel suit to a negro who wanted to make love, not in Venice as I did when I bought it, but in Naivasha.

November 2nd.

In the afternoon walked with W. to the top of the escarpment. The long grass and clumps of trees almost suggest English parklands. Came upon some elephants' dung. We returned by a game path through cool moss-grown places of the forest. I tripped over a large bone gleaming ghastly white in the spangled sunlight. W. shot a wild duck. I picked it up. It wagged its tail, stiffened its webbed legs and opened and shut its round brown eyes, but I did not care.

November 5th.

Rode the mule to the swamps. A white flamingo rose out of the rushes and floated away with graceful tilted head.

When I came back I found the tabby cat lying on the verandah panting miserably and with its hind quarters crushed. The boys would not kill it. I got a saucer of milk, but it would not drink. "Kweda," said the cook, and it crawled with its front legs, mewing. I tried to write but could not. At last I compelled myself to kill it, flogging it with a heavy cedar stick. A few blows and it was dead with its mouth a little open and its limbs extended. I was reminded of another scene. — A human being's death or a tabby cat's death, it is the same.

November 8th.

Had tea at the B.'s. It was dark before we got back. Masharia came to meet us with a lantern. W. went to Abdulea's hut to see if he could buy any eggs. I sat on the mule outside observing Cygnus flying across the Milky Way.

November 10th.

Walked to the further shamba and then home. W. killed a bullock for the boys. He shot it with his rifle and it fell and rolled over with its legs in the air. The Swahilees cut it up. I peered into its reeking carcass and saw its pink lungs, its yellow dung filled belly and red gasping windpipe. The natives crowded round like black vultures, like hyenas.

November 20th.

B. arrived. He shot a monkey. He threw it down on the verandah where it lay, a little heaving man with black pads for hands and a long white tail.

We all three slept on the verandah. "You don't believe then in religion?"

"Sirrah thou art said to have a stubborn soul, that apprehends no further than this world and squarest thy life according."

November 26th.

Received a letter from J.

"I can't get over your remoteness. We have on our mantel piece that Machiavellian picture of you with stick and hat. It looks at me as one who would say, 'Strike out and use your horn old fool.' O strange and hidden power of Destiny, how all is different now, all, all, all. These Germans are perpetually digging themselves in. Like great stinking badgers they run to earth at every chance. I've just been looking at some pictures of the Indian troops. What noble faces! I think I have never seen such noble human countenances anywhere. The Sikhs, I suppose. If the war does really mean that the East is moving at last and saying to the West 'Civilization thee ownself', I think it is a good thing. If men have noble, generous, brave and beautiful faces it must be right that they should conquer, eh? So much for the German sausages, for by God they aren't a lot of Goethes if these pictures represent them."

December 5th.

In the evening there was a dispute between two natives over a woman. All three came into the room. I heard the girl's voice and recognized at once the purring cat's voice of a woman. What matter though her buttocks be velvet black instead of velvet white?

At night W. went out after porcupines with lanterns and boys and dogs. I was asleep when he returned. He had dragged one back for me to look at — a great heavy badger-like brute stuck all over with quills. It had a rattle at the end of its tail and its head was large and heavy and Rhino-like.

December 12th.

R. and A. came to tea. I watched the three of them ride away, then strolled out towards the forest. I sat on a charred log. Natives shouted to each other, humped backed cattle browsed on the dry grass and the sun slowly went down over Africa. In the evening a letter from J. "Everyone is very quiet on the ship, as if the wind were blowing over its hosts of dead, crying and going (all of them) towards the race at Portland. The spring and élan seems out of everyone. — the Spring! Shall we ever see the lilacs again as we walk down to the village to post our letters, and back by the Park?"

December 20th.

I came back and set off at once for the forest where leopards had killed a buck the night before. I followed slowly behind. I found them setting the trap on the other side of the river; everywhere fragments of buck were strewn on the ground, the four legs, the ribs, the vertebrae.

December 29th.

I went shooting. I rode the mule over the escarpment up a narrow path. A herd of zebras were quite close to us.

January 6th.

Went shooting monkeys in the afternoon, but saw none. Sat on the ground in the forest. A few birds sang, but not like

English birds. In every direction strange white-trunked trees rose from the green brushwood. Set leopard trap. It was a dark windy night.

January 7th.

Went down to the leopard trap before breakfast. Coming over the hill we saw a spotted skin. It was a young she-leopard dead, shot through the eye. I smelt its warm yellow pelt and looked at its claws and teeth. Willie carried it home on his back. I walked behind stuffing stones into the hole in its skull to keep its brain from falling out.

January 9th.

T. sent me a letter he had from G. "Robin goes to school for the first time; but it's when a child gets 'alone' with the other boys that the Universe pinches him with its clumsy great finger and thumb. What a world! Christ! and God, what a world! How many playful little scenes of pinching and prodding are occurring on this side and that. — Lulu, damn his sly soul! loves to have it so and has gone off to put up silky leopards and rule over Somali tribes."

After dark I noticed a fire far away in the forest opposite. I asked the boys what it was. They said "Mungu" (God). I believed them. I could see him there well out of the way, warming his hands under the gaunt cedars.

“Who is Mungu?” I asked. “Mungu lives up there,” they answered, “and if he wants you to die you die, and if he wants you to live you live.”

January 11th.

Caught an eagle in a gin. It was brought to me and laid on the verandah. Its legs and wings were bound tightly. It was not afraid, it simply surveyed me with its unflinching eye. I let it go and it flew off in the direction of the afternoon sun. It is not the first time, I thought, that an eagle has been caught in a gin.

January 31st.

Rode the mule down to Gilgil. Very hot. White horses careering about near the water filled me with alarm. I was directed to the office and there I sat for half an hour while an unpleasant pale-faced accountant catechised R. I looked at his hard conceited face and yellow gaiters and hated him.

February 12th.

Worked all day. In the evening a boy came for Posho. I went across with Masharia to give him some. The Pleiades were far up above a cedar tree which had something of the shape of a Tintinhull elm. “I have often seen those seven stars in England.”

“What are the stars?” I asked him. “Moto Mungu. “Eyes of God,” he rapped out without a moment’s hesitation.

Once more I got an odd sensation as though perhaps there really was a capricious negroid deity up there, around, everywhere.

March 2d.

Weighed barley and whitewashed pigsty. Read a report of the funeral of the Countess Poulett at Hinton St. George. How pitiful are all our efforts to conceal, to cast a veil over the ghastly reality within the coffin. God! I have seen dead faces. I know what they look like. I know what they say.

March 13th.

Unloaded barley straw. Often throughout the day my mind reverted to scenes and sensations at home. What about the first early days of Spring? The feel and the smell of the first sunny days? What about the clear early evening light and dry March dust in Bere High Street as I saw it that afternoon two years ago?

Here in Africa the sun and the black men and the vast tracts of land make all different and also there are no daffodils here, no meadow sweet and no wood anemones.

Suspended Judgements (1916)

ESSAYS ON BOOKS AND SENSATIONS

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SUSPENDED JUDGMENT

DEDICATED

TO MY DEAR FRIEND

BERNARD PRICE O’NEILL

THE ART OF DISCRIMINATION

THE WORLD DIVIDES itself into people who can discriminate and people who cannot discriminate. This is the ultimate test of sensitiveness; and sensitiveness alone separates us and unites us.

We all create, or have created for us by the fatality of our temperament, a unique and individual universe. It is only by bringing into light the most secret and subtle elements of this self-contained system of things that we can find out where our lonely orbits touch.

Like all primordial aspects of life the situation is double-edged and contradictory.

The further we emphasise and drag forth, out of their reluctant twilight, the lurking attractions and antipathies of our destiny, the nearer, at once, and the more obscure, we find ourselves growing, to those about us.

And the wisdom of the difficult game we are called upon to play, lies in just this very antinomy, — in just this very contradiction — that to make ourselves better understood we have to emphasise our differences, and to touch the universe of our friend we have to travel away from him, on a curve of free sky.

The cultivation of what in us is lonely and unique creates of necessity a perpetual series of shocks and jars. The unruffled nerves of the lower animals become enviable, and we fall into moods of malicious reaction and vindictive recoil. And yet, — for Nature makes use even of what is named evil to pursue her cherished ends — the very betrayal of our outraged feelings produces no unpleasant effect upon the minds of others. They know us better so, and the sense of power in them is delicately gratified by the spectacle of our weakness; even as ours is by the spectacle of theirs.

The art of discrimination is the art of letting oneself go, more and more wilfully; letting oneself go along the lines of one's unique predilections; letting oneself go with the resolute push of the inquisitive intellect; the intellect whose rôle it is to register — with just all the preciseness it may — every one of the little discoveries we make on the long road.

The difference between interesting and uninteresting critics of life, is just the difference between those who have refused to let themselves be thus carried away, on the stream of their fatality, and those who have not refused. That is why in all the really arresting writers and artists there is something equivocal and disturbing when we come to know them.

Genius itself, in the last analysis, is not so much the possession of unusual vision — some of the most powerful geniuses have a vision quite mediocre and blunt — as the possession of a certain demonic driving-force, which pushes them on to be themselves, in all the fatal narrowness and obstinacy, it may be, of their personal temperament.

The art of discrimination is precisely what such characters are born with; hence the almost savage manner in which they resent the beckonings of alien appeals; appeals which would draw them out of their pre-ordained track.

One can see in the passionate preference displayed by men of real power for the society of simple and even truculent persons over that of those who are urbanely plastic and versatile, how true this is.

Between their own creative wilfulness and the more static obstinacy of these former, there is an instinctive bond; whereas the tolerant and colourless cleverness of the latter disconcerts and puzzles them.

This is why — led by a profound instinct — the wisest men of genius select for their female companions the most surprising types, and submit to the most wretched tyranny. Their craving for the sure ground of unequivocal naturalness helps them to put up with what else were quite intolerable.

For it is the typical modern person, of normal culture and playful expansiveness, who is the mortal enemy of the art of discrimination.

Such a person’s shallow cleverness and conventional good-temper is more withering to the soul of the artist than the blindest bigotry which has the recklessness of genuine passion behind it.

Not to like or to dislike people and things, but to tolerate and patronise a thousand passionate universes, is to put yourself out of the pale of all discrimination. To discriminate is to refine upon one’s passions by the process of bringing them into intelligent consciousness. The head alone cannot discriminate; no! not with all the technical knowledge in the world; for the head cannot love nor hate, it can only observe and register.

Nor can the nerves alone discriminate; for they can only cry aloud with a blind cry. In the management of this art, what we need is the nerves and the head together, playing up to one another; and, between them, carrying further — always a little further — the silent advance, along the road of experience, of the insatiable soul.

It is indeed only in this way that one comes to recognise what is, surely, of the essence of all criticism; the fact, namely, that the artists we care most for are doing just the thing we are doing ourselves — doing it in their own way and with their own inviolable secret, but limited, just as we are, by the basic limitations of all flesh.

The art of discrimination is, after all, only the art of appreciation, applied negatively as well as positively; applied to the flinging away from us and the reducing to non-existence for us, of all those forms and modes of being, for which, in the original determination of our taste, we were not, so to speak, born.

And this is precisely what, in a yet more rigorous manner, the artists whose original and subtle paths we trace, effected for themselves in their own explorations.

What is remarkable about this cult of criticism is the way in which it lands us back, with quite a new angle of interest, at the very point from which we started; at the point, namely, where Nature in her indiscriminate richness presents herself at our doors.

It is just here that we find how much we have gained, in delicacy of inclusion and rejection, by following these high and lonely tracks. All the materials of art, the littered quarries, so to speak, of its laborious effects have become, in fact, of new and absorbing interest. Forms, colours, words, sounds; nay! the very textures and odours of the visible world, have reduced themselves, even as they lie here, or toss confusedly together on the waves of the life-stream, into something curiously suggestive and engaging.

We bend our attention to one and to another. We let them group themselves casually, as they will, in their random way, writing their own gnomic hieroglyphics, in their own immense and primeval language, as the earth-mothers heave them up from the abyss or draw them down; but we are no more confined to this stunned and bewildered apprehension.

We can isolate, distinguish, contrast.

We can take up and put down each delicate fragment of potential artistry; and linger at leisure in the work-shop of the immortal gods.

Discrimination of the most personal and vehement kind in its relation to human works of art, may grow largely and indolently receptive when dealing with the scattered materials of such works, spread out through the teeming world.

Just here lies the point of separation between the poetic and the artistic temper. The artist or the art-critic, discriminating still, even among these raw materials of human creation, derives an elaborate and subtle delight from the suggestiveness of their colours, their odours, and their fabrics — conscious all the while of wondrous and visionary evocations, wherein they take their place.

The poetical temper, on the other hand, lets itself go with a more passive receptivity; and permits the formless, wordless brooding of the vast earthpower to work its magic upon it, in its own place and season. Not, however, in any destruction of the defining and registering functions of the intellect does this take place.

Even in the vaguest obsessions of the poetical mind the intellect is present, watching, noting, weighing, and, if you will, discriminating.

For, after all, poetry, though completely different in its methods, its aims, and its effects from the other arts, is itself the greatest of all the arts and must be profoundly aware, just as they are aware, of the actual sense-impressions which produce its inspiration.

The difference, perhaps, is that, whereas the materials for the other arts become most suggestive when isolated and disentangled from the mass, the materials of poetry, though bringing with them, in this case or in the other, their particular sense-accompaniment, must be left free to flow organically together, and to produce their effect in that primeval wanton carelessness, wherein the gods themselves may be supposed to walk about the world.

One thing at least is clear. The more we acquire a genuine art of discrimination amid the subtler processes of the mind the less we come to deal in formulated or rationalistic theory.

The chief rôle of the intellect in criticism is to protect us from the intellect; to protect us from those tiresome and unprofitable “principles of art” which in everything that gives us thrilling pleasure are found to be magnificently contradicted!

Criticism, whether of literature or art, is but a dead hand laid upon a living thing, unless it is genuine response, to the object criticised, of something reciprocal in us. Criticism in fact, to be of any value, must be a stretching out of our whole organic nature, a sort of sacramental partaking, with both senses and soul, of the bread and wine of the “new ritual.”

The actual written or spoken word in explanation of what we have come to feel about the thing offered, is after all a mere subordinate issue.

The essential matter is that what we experience in regard to the new touch, the new style, should be a personal and absorbing plunge into an element which we feel at once to have been, as it were, “waiting” to receive us with a predestined harmony.

The point I am seeking to make is that what is called the “critical attitude” towards new experiments in art is the extreme opposite of the mood required in genuine criticism.

That negation of interest in any given new thing which is not only allowable but commendable, if we are to preserve the outlines of our identity from the violence of alien intrusion, becomes a sheer waste of energy when it is transmuted into ponderous principles of rejection.

Give us, ye gods, full liberty to pass on our way indifferent. Give us even the illuminating insight of unbounded hate. But deliver us — that at least we pray — from the hypocrisy of judicial condemnation!

More and more does it become necessary, as the fashion of new things presses insolently upon us, to clear up once for all and in a largely generous manner, the difficult question of the relation of experiment to tradition.

The number of shallow and insensitive spirits who make use of the existence of these new forms, to display — as if it were a proof of aesthetic superiority — their contempt for all that is old, should alone lead us to pause and consider.

Such persons are as a rule quite as dull to real subtleties of thought and feeling as any absolute Philistine; and yet they are the ones who with their fuss about what they call “creative art” do so much to make reasonable and natural the ordinary person’s prejudices against the whole business.

They actually have the audacity to claim as a mark of higher aesthetic taste their inability to appreciate traditional beauty. They make their ignorance their virtue; and because they are dull to the delicate things that have charmed the centuries, they clamorously acclaim the latest sensational novelty, as though it had altered the very nature of our human senses.

One feels instinctive suspicion of this wholesale way of going to work, this root and branch elimination of what has come down to us from the past. It is right and proper — heaven knows — for each individual to have his preferences and his exclusions. He has not, one may be quite sure, found himself if he lacks these. But to have as one’s basic preference a relinquishing in the lump of all that is old, and a swallowing in the lump of all that is new, is carrying things suspiciously far.

One begins to surmise that a person of this brand is not a rebel or a revolutionary, but quite simply a thick-skin; a thick-skin endowed with that insolence of cleverness which is the enemy of genius and all its works.

True discrimination does not ride rough-shod over the past like this. It has felt the past too deeply. It has too much of the past in its own blood. What it does, allowing for a thousand differences of temperament, is to move slowly and warily forward, appropriating the new and assimilating, in an organic manner, the material it offers; but never turning round upon the old with savage and ignorant spleen.

But it is hard, even in these most extreme cases, to draw rigorous conclusions.

Life is full of surprises, of particular and exceptional instances. The abnormal is the normal; and the most thrilling moments some of us know are the moments when we snatch an inspiration from a quarter outside our allotted circle.

There are certain strangely constituted ones in our midst whose natural world, it might seem, existed hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Bewildered and harassed they move through our modern streets; puzzled and sad they gaze out from our modern windows. They seem, in their wistful way, hardly conscious of the movements about them, and all our stirring appeals leave them wearily cold.

It is with the very wantonness of ironic insult that our novelty-mongers come to these, bringing fantastic inventions. What is it to them, children of a nobler past, that this or the other newly botched-up caprice should catch for an hour the plaudits of the mob?

On the other hand, one comes now and again, though rarely enough, upon exceptional natures whose proper and predestined habitation seems to be rather with our children's children than with us.

The word has gone forth touching what is called super-man; but the natures I speak of are not precisely that.

Rather are they devoid in some strange manner of the gross weapons, the protective skin, adapted to the shocks and jolts of our rough and tumble civilisation. They seem prepared and designed to exist in a finer, a more elaborate, in a sense a more luxurious world, than the one we live in.

Their passions are not our passions; nor is their scorn our scorn. If the magic of the past leaves them indifferent, the glamour of the present finds them antipathetic and resentful. With glacial coldness they survey both past and present, and the frosty fire of their devotion is for what, as yet, is not.

Dull indeed should we be, if in the search of finer and more delicate discriminations in the region of art, we grew blunt and blind to the subtle-edged pathos of all these delicate differences between man and man.

It is by making our excursions in the aesthetic world thus entirely personal and idiosyncratic that we are best spared from the bitter remorse implicit in any blunders in this more complex sphere.

We have learned to avoid the banality of the judicial decisions in the matter of what is called beautiful. We come to learn their even greater uselessness in the matter of what is called the good.

To discriminate, to discriminate endlessly, between types we adore and types we suspect, this is well and wise; but in the long result we are driven, whether it is pleasant to our prejudices or not that it should be so, crushingly to recognise that in the world of human character there are really no types at all; only tragic and lonely figures; figures unable to express what they want of the universe, of us, of themselves; figures that can never, in all the aeons of time, be repeated again; figures in whose obliquities and ambiguities the mysteries of all the laws and all the prophets are transcended!

MONTAIGNE

WE, WHO ARE interested rather in literature than in the history of literature, and rather in the reaction produced upon ourselves by great original geniuses than in any judicial estimate of their actual achievements, can afford to regard with serene indifference the charges of arbitrariness and caprice brought against us by professional students.

Let these professional students prove to us that, in addition to their learning, they have receptive senses and quickly stimulated imagination, and we will accept them willingly as our guides.

We have already accepted Pater, Brandes, de Gourmont, critics who have the secret of combining immense erudition with creative intelligence, and it is under the power and the spell of these authoritative and indisputable names that we claim our right to the most personal and subjective enjoyment, precisely as the occasion and hour calls, of the greatest figures in art and letters.

Most of all we have a right to treat Montaigne as we please, even though that right includes the privilege of *not* reading every word of the famous Essays, and of only reverting — in our light return to them — to those aspects and qualities which strike an answering chord in ourselves.

This was, after all, what he — the great humanist — was always doing; he the unscrupulous, indiscriminate and *casual* reader; and if we treat him in the same spirit as that in which he treated the classical authors he loved most, we shall at least be acting under the cloak of his approval, however much we annoy the Calvins and Scaligers of our age.

The man must have been a colossal genius. No human writer has done quite what he did, anticipating the methods and spiritual secrets of posterity, and creating for himself, with sublime indifference to contemporary usage and taste, the sort of intellectual atmosphere that suited him.

When one thinks how sensitive we all are to the intellectual environments in which we move — how we submit for instance, at this very moment, without being able to help ourselves, to the ideas set in motion by Nietzsche, say, or Walt Whitman — it seems impossible to overrate as a sheer triumph of personal force, the thing that Montaigne did in disentangling himself from the tendencies of his age, and creating almost "in vacuo," with nothing to help him but his own temperament and the ancient classics, a new emotional attitude toward life, something that might without the least exaggeration be called "a new soul."

The magnitude of his spiritual undertaking can best be estimated if we conceive ourselves freeing our minds, at this moment, from the influences of Nietzsche and Dostoievsky and Whitman and Pater and Wilde, and launching out into some completely original attitude toward existence, fortified it may be by the reading of Sophocles or of Lucretius, but with so original a mental vista that we leave every contemporary writer hopelessly behind.

Suppose we looked about us with a view to the undertaking of so huge an intellectual venture, where should we go to discover the original impetus, the first embryonic germ, of the new way?

In ourselves? In our own temperament? Ah! that is the crux of the whole matter. It was in his temperament that he found the force and inexhaustible riches to carry the matter through — but have we got such power at our disposal? It is doubtful. It is hard to even dream that we have. And yet — consider the simplicity of what he did!

He just took himself, Michael de Montaigne, as he was, in the plain unvarnished totality of his vigorous self-conscious temperament, and jotted down, more for his own amusement than for that of posterity, carelessly, frankly, nonchalantly, his tastes, his vices, his apathies, his antipathies, his prejudices and his pleasures.

In doing this — though there is a certain self-revelation in Augustine's confessions and a certain autobiographical frankness in the writings of many of the classical authors — he did what had never been done by any one before his time, and what, not forgetting Rousseau and Heine and Casanova and Charles Lamb, has never been so well done since. But whether, in these latter days, we can achieve this thing as Montaigne achieved it, the fact remains that this is what we are all at the present time trying hard to do.

The "new soul," which he was permitted by the gods to evoke out of the very abyss, has become, in the passionate subjectivity of our age, the very life-blood of our intellect. Not one among our most interesting artists and writers but does his utmost to reveal to the world every phase and aspect of his personal identity. What was but a human necessity, rather concealed and discouraged than reveled in and exploited before Montaigne, has, after Montaigne, become the obsession and preoccupation of us all. We have got the secret, the great idea, the "new soul." It only remains for us to incarnate it in beautiful and convincing form.

Ah! it is just there where we find the thing so hard. It is easy to say— "Find yourself, know yourself, express yourself!" It is extremely difficult to do any of these things.

No one who has not attempted to set down in words the palpable image and body of what he is, or of what he seems to himself, can possibly conceive the difficulty of the task.

More — oh, so much more — is needed than the mere saying, “I like honey and milk better than meat and wine” or “I like girls who are plump and fair better than those who are slim and dark.” That is why so much of modern autobiographical and confessional writing is dull beyond words. Even impertinence will not save our essays upon ourselves from being tedious — nor will shamelessness in the flaunting of our vices. Something else is required than a mere wish to strip ourselves bare; something else than a mere desire to call attention to ourselves. And this “something else” is genius, and genius of a very rare and peculiar kind. It is not enough to say, “I am this or that or the other.” The writer who desires to give a convincing picture of what he is must diffuse the essence of his soul not merely into his statements about himself but into the style in which these statements are made.

Two men may start together to write confessions, and one of the two may dissect every nerve and fibre of his inmost soul, while the other may ramble carelessly on about the places he has seen, and the people he has met; yet in the ultimate result it may turn out that it is the latter rather than the former who has revealed his identity.

Human personalities — the strange and subtle differences which separate us from one another — refuse to give up the secrets of their quality save at the magical summons of what we call “style.” Mr. Pepys was a quaint fellow and no Goethean egotist; but he managed to put a peculiar flavour of style — with a rhythm and a colour all its own — into his meticulous gossip.

Montaigne’s essays are not by any means of equal value. The more intimately they deal with his own ways and habits, the more *physiological* they become in their shameless candour, the better do they please us. They grow less interesting to my thinking where they debouch into quotations, some of them whole pages in length, from his favourite Roman writers.

He seems to have kept voluminous scrap-books of such quotations, and, like many less famous people, to have savoured a peculiar satisfaction from transcribing them. One can imagine the deliberate and epicurean way he would go about this task, deriving from the mere bodily effort of "copying out" these long and carefully chosen excerpts, an almost sensual pleasure; the sort of pleasure which the self-imposed observance of some mechanical routine in a leisured person's life is able to produce, not unaccompanied by agreeable sensations of physical well-being.

But what, after all, is this "new soul" which Montaigne succeeded in putting into our western civilisation at the very moment when Catholic and Protestant were so furiously striving for the mastery? What is this new tone, this new temper, this new temperamental atmosphere which, in the intervals of his cautious public work and his lazy compiling of scrap-books from the classics, he managed to fling abroad upon the air?

It is a spiritual ingredient, composed, when one comes to analyse it, of two chemical elements; of what might be called aesthetic egoism and of what we know as philosophic scepticism. Let us deal with the former of these two elements first.

Egoism, in the new psychological sense of the word, may be regarded as the deliberate attempt in an individual's life to throw the chief interest and emphasis of his days upon the inward, personal, subjective impressions produced by the world, rather than upon outward action or social progress. Egoism does not necessarily imply the invidious stigma of selfishness. Goethe, the greatest of all egoists, was notoriously free from such a vice. "Who," cried Wieland, when they first met at Weimar, "who can resist the *unselfishness* of this man?"

Egoism does not necessarily imply "egotism," though it must be confessed that in Montaigne's case, though not in Goethe's, there may have been a touch of that less generous attribute.

Egoism is an intellectual gesture, a spiritual attitude, a temperamental atmosphere. It is a thing which implies a certain definite philosophical mood in regard to the riddle of existence; though, of course, between individual egoists there may be wide gulfs of personal divergence.

Between Montaigne and Goethe, for instance, there is an immense difference. Goethe's egoism was creative; Montaigne's receptive. Goethe's was many-sided; driven forward by a tremendous *demonic* urge toward the satisfaction of a curiosity which was cosmic and universal. Montaigne's was in a certain sense narrow, limited, cautious, earth-bound. It had nothing of the large poetic sweep, nothing of the vast mystical horizons and huge imaginative vistas of the great German. But on the other hand, it was closer to the soil, homelier, more humorous, in a certain measure more natural, normal and human.

This "cult of egoism" is obviously not entirely modern. Traces of it, aspects of it, fragments and morsels of it, have existed from all time. It was the latent presence of this quality in his great Romans, much more than their mere "outward triumphs," which led him to brood so incessantly upon their memories.

But Montaigne himself was the first of all writers to give palpable intellectual shape to this diffused spiritual temper.

In recent times, some of the most fascinating of our literary guides have been philosophical egotists. Whitman, Matthew Arnold, Emerson, Pater, Stendhal, Maurice Barrès (in his earlier work), de Gourmont, D'Annunzio, Oscar Wilde — are all, in their widely different ways, masters of the same cult.

The out-looking activities and the out-looking social interests of Voltaire or Renan, or Anatole France, give to these great writers quite a different psychological tone. The three I have just mentioned are all too inveterately spirits of mockery even to take seriously *their own* “sensations and ideas”; and however ironical and humorous an egoist may be with regard to other people’s impressions, with regard to his own he is grave, intent, preoccupied, almost solemn.

When one thinks of it, there is a curious solemnity of preoccupation with themselves and their own sensations about Wilde, Pater, Whitman, Stendhal, D’Annunzio and Barrès. And this “gravity of egoism” is precisely the thing which, for all his humorous humanity, distinguished the great Montaigne and which his early critics found so irritating.

“What do I care — what does any one care,” grumbled the learned Scaliger, “whether he prefers white wine to red wine?”

The second element in the compound chemistry of the “modern temper” introduced into the world by Montaigne may be found in his famous scepticism. The formidable levity of that notorious “que sais-je?” “What do I know?” writes itself nowadays across our whole sky. This also— “this film of white light,” as some one has called it, floating waveringly beneath each one of our most cherished convictions was, not unknown before his time.

All the great sophists — Protagoras especially, with his “man the measure of all things” — were, in a sense, professional teachers of a refined scepticism.

Plato himself, with his wavering and gracious hesitations, was more than touched by the same spirit.

Scepticism as a natural human philosophy — perhaps as the only natural human philosophy — underlies all the beautiful soft-coloured panorama of pagan poetry and pagan thought. It must have been the habitual temper of mind in any Periclean symposium or Caesarean salon. It is, pre-eminently and especially, the *civilised* attitude of mind; the attitude of mind most dominant and universal in the great races, the great epochs, the great societies.

It is for this reason that France, among all modern nations, is the most sceptical.

Barbarian peoples are rarely endowed with this quality. The crude animal energy, which makes them successful! in business, and even sometimes in war, is an energy which, for all its primitive force, is destructive of civilisation. Civilisation, the rarest work of art of our race's evolution, is essentially a thing created in restraint of such crude energies; as it is created in restraint of the still cruder energies of nature itself.

The Protestant Reformation springing out of the soul of the countries "beyond the Alps" is, of course, the supreme example of this uncivilised force. One frequently encounters sceptical-minded Catholics, full of the very spirit of Montaigne — who died in the Catholic faith — but it is rare to meet a Protestant who is not, in a most barbarous sense, full of dogmatic and argumentative "truth."

So uncivilised and unlovely is this controversial mood that free-thinkers are often tempted to be unfair to the Reformation. This is a fault; for after all it is something, even for ingrained sceptics prepared to offer incense at any official altar, to be saved from the persecuting alliance of church and state.

It is not pleasant to meet argumentative revivalists, and the Puritan influence upon art and letters is no less than deadly; but it is better to be teased with impertinent questions about one's soul than to be led away to the stake for its salvation.

The mention of the situation, in which in spite of Shakespeare and the rest poor modern sceptics still find themselves, is an indication of how hopelessly illusive all talk of "progress" is. Between Calvin on the one hand and the Sorbonne on the other, Montaigne might well shuffle home from his municipal duties and read Horace in his tower. And we, after three hundred odd years, have little better to do.

Heine, impish descendant of this great doubter, took refuge from human madness at the feet of Venus in the Louvre. Machiavel — for all his crafty wisdom — was driven back to his books and his memories. Goethe built up the "pyramid of his existence" among pictures and fossils and love affairs, leaving the making of history to others, and keeping "religious truth" at a convenient distance.

This scepticism of Montaigne is a much rarer quality among men of genius than the egoism with which it is so closely associated. I am inclined to regard it as the sanest of all human moods. What distinguishes it from other intellectual attitudes is the fact that it is shared by the very loftiest with the very simplest minds. It is the prevailing temper of shepherds and ploughmen, of carters and herdsmen, of all honest gatherers at rustic taverns who discuss the state of the crops, the prospects of the weather, the cattle market and the rise and fall of nations. It is the wisdom of the earth itself; shrewd, friendly, full of unaccountable instincts; obstinate and capricious, given up to irrational and inexplicable superstitions; sluggish, suspicious, cautious, hostile to theory, enamoured of inconsistencies, humorously critical of all ideals, realistic, empirical, wayward, ready to listen to any magical whisper, to any faint pipings of the flutes of Pan, but grumblingly reluctant to follow the voices of the prophets and the high doctrines of the leaders of men.

Its wisdom is the wisdom of lazy noons in spacious corn-fields; of dewy mornings in misty lanes and moss-grown paths; of dreamy shadows in deep grass when the apple boughs hang heavily earthward, and long nights of autumn rain have left amber-coloured pools in the hollow places of the trees and in the mud trodden by the cattle.

Its sanity is the sanity of farm-yards and smoking dung-heaps and Priapian jests beneath wintry hedges, and clear earth-sweet thoughtless laughter under large, liquid, mid-summer stars.

The nonchalant “What do I know?”— “What does any one know?” — of this shrewd pagan spirit has nothing in it of the ache of pessimistic disillusion. It has never had any illusions. It has taken things as they appear, and life as it appears, and it is so close to the kindly earth-mud beneath our feet that it is in no fear of any desperate fall.

What lends the sceptical wisdom of Montaigne such massive and enduring weight is the very fact of its being the natural pagan wisdom of generations of simple souls who live close to the earth. No wonder he was popular with the farmers and peasants of his countryside and with the thrifty burgesses of his town. He must have gathered much wisdom from his wayfaring among the fields, and many scandalous sidelights upon human nature as he loitered among the streets and wharfs of the city.

It is indeed the old joyous, optimistic, pagan spirit, full of courage and gaiety; full too, it must be confessed, of a humorous terror now and then, and yet capable enough sometimes of looking very formidable antagonists squarely in the face and refusing to quit the quiet ways it has marked out and the shrewd middle path it has chosen!

Turning over the pages of Cotton’s translation — it is my fancy to prefer this one to the more famous Florio’s — there seems to me to arise from these rambling discourses, a singularly wholesome savour. I seem to see

Montaigne’s massive and benignant countenance as he jogs home, wrapped against the wind in the cloak that was once his father’s, along the muddy autumn lanes, upon his strong but not over-impetuous nag. Surely I have seen that particular cast of features in the weather-beaten face of many a farm labourer, and listened too, from the same lips, to just as relishing a commentary upon the surprising ways of providence with mortal men.

Full of a profound sense of a physical well-being, which the troublesome accidents of chance and time only served to intensify, Montaigne surveyed the grotesque panorama of human life with a massive and indelible satisfaction.

His optimism, if you can call it by such a name, is not the optimism of theory; it is not the optimism of faith, far less is it that mystic and transcendental optimism which teases one, in these later days, with its swollen words and windy rhetoric. It is the optimism of simple, shrewd, sane common sense, the optimism of the poor, the optimism of sound nerves, the optimism of cab-men and bus drivers, of fishermen and gardeners, of “tinkers, tailors, soldiers, sailors, apothecaries and thieves.”

What Montaigne really does is to bring into the courts of philosophy and to heighten with the classic style of one who was “brought up upon Latin,” the sheer, natural, incorrigible love of life, of such persons, rich or poor, as have the earth in their blood and the shrewd wisdom of the earth and the geniality of the earth, and the mischievous wantonness of the earth, and the old, sly chuckling malice of the earth, in their blood and in their soul.

He can record, and does often record, in those queer episodic dips into his scrap-book, the outrageous stories of a thousand freaks of nature. He loves these little impish tricks of the great careless gods. He loves the mad, wicked, astounding, abnormal things that are permitted to happen as the world moves round. He reads Tacitus and Plutarch very much as a

Dorsetshire shepherd might read the *Western Gazette,* and makes, in the end, much of the same commentary.

In a certain sense Montaigne is the most human of all great geniuses. The whole turbulent stream of the motley spectacle passes through his consciousness and he can feel equal sympathy with the heroism of a Roman patriot and with the terrors of a persecuted philosopher.

What pleases him best is to note the accidental little things— "life's little ironies" — which so frequently intervene between ideal resolutions and their results in practise and fact. He chuckles over the unfortunate lapses in the careers of great men much as a mischievous gossip in a tavern might chuckle over similar lapses in the careers of local potentates.

Montaigne's scepticism is the result of his looking at the world not through books or through the theories of books, but through his own eyes. He is sceptical because he sees that any one who wishes to live in harmony with the facts of life must be sceptical. Life is made up of such evasive entangled confused elements that any other attitude than this one is a noble madness if it is not knavish hypocrisy. The theories, convictions, moralities, opinions, of every child of Adam are subject to lamentable upheavals, as the incorrigible earth-gods, with their impish malice, seize them and play nine-pins with them.

"All flows away and nothing remains," says the ancient philosopher, and Montaigne shows clearly enough how vain it is to put our trust in any theory or system or principle or idea.

It is a mistake to regard his scepticism as merely negative. It is far more than that. Like all wise scepticism it is creative and constructive; not out of theories and phrases, nor out of principles and opinions, but out of events and persons and passions and instincts and chances and occasions.

It is realistic — this Montaignesque method — realistic not materialistic. It takes each occasion as it occurs, each person as he presents himself, each passion, each instinct, each lust, each emotion, and out of these he creates a sort of piece-meal philosophy; modest enough and making no claim to finality, but serving us, at a pinch, as a sort of rough-and-ready clue through the confusions of life.

It will always appear presumptuous to the dogmatic type of mind, the mind made up of rationalistic and logical exigencies, to call scepticism like this by the name of "philosophy." It will be still more obscure to such a mind how it is possible for a human being to live happily and joyfully in a complete absence of any synthetic system.

And yet one feels certain enough that amid the jolts and jars and shocks of actual life even the most idealistic of philosophers leave their logic to shift for itself and just drift on as they may in the groove of traditional usages or the track of temperamental bias.

It must not, however, be for a moment supposed that the scepticism of Montaigne is identical with the so-called "pragmatism" of William James or with the "instinct theories" of Bergson.

Both of these modern attitudes make the assumption that a genuine advance in our knowledge of "truth" is really possible; though possible along quite different lines from the old absolute dogmatic metaphysical ones. But the scepticism of Montaigne throws doubt upon every human attempt to get behind the shifting flowing stream of sense impressions. The rough and ready clue which it offers to the confusions of life is not drawn from any individualistic "point d'appui" of pseudo-psychological personal vision, as are these modern clues to the mystery. It is drawn from nothing more recondite than the customary traditions, usages, pieties and customs of the generations of humanity; habits of mind and moods of hope which have behind them, not so much the psychological insight of clever individuals — the William Jameses and Bergsons of past ages — as the primitive and permanent emotions of the masses of average men and women themselves, confronting the eternal silence.

What the scepticism of Montaigne does is to clear out of the path all the individual claims to extraordinary insight of the philosophic great men of the world, by means of showing how, under the pressure of obstinate and malicious reality, such explanations of the universe break down and such great men collapse and become as blind, helpless, groping and uncertain as all the rest of us. Prophets and rationalists alike, logicians and soothsayers together, so collapse and fall away; while in their place the long slow patient wisdom of the centuries, the old shrewd superstitious wisdom of anonymous humanity rises up out of the pagan earth, and offers us our only solution.

Not that what we get in this humble way is really a solution at all. Rather is it a modest working substitute for such solutions, a dim lamp flickering in a great darkness, a faint shadow falling on a long uncertain road; a road of which we can see neither the beginning nor the end, and along which we have nothing better to guide us than such pathetic "omens of the way" as old wives' tales repeat and old traditions hand down from mouth to mouth.

To certain minds the condition of the human race under the burden of such a twilight may well seem intolerable. To Montaigne it was not intolerable. It was his element, his pleasant Arcadia, his natural home. He loved the incongruities and inconsistencies of such a world; its outrageous Rabelaisian jests, its monstrous changes and chances, its huge irrelevancy. He loved its roguish and goblinish refusal to give up its secret to grave and solemn intellects, taking upon themselves the rôle of prophets. He loved a world that hides its treasures from the "wise and prudent" and reveals them

— or at any rate all that will ever be revealed of them — to “babes and sucklings.”

Those who read Montaigne with a natural affinity for his peculiar turn of mind, will find themselves in a position to regard very humorously and lightly the portentous claims of modern philosophers whether they be rationalists or intuitivists. “There are more things in Heaven and earth,” they will retort to these scholarly Horatios in the very vein of that Prince of Denmark who — according to reliable critical opinion — was actually modelled on Montaigne himself.

They will be encouraged to go on, as before, making the best of what the traditional wisdom of the centuries brings them, but not taking even this with more seriousness than its pathetic weight of human experience demands, and not dreaming that, with even this to help them, they are very closely initiated into the ultimate mystery.

They will be encouraged to go on as before, enjoying the books of the writers with a pinch of pleasant salt, but enjoying them with infinite zest and profit, and, at least, with full *aesthetic* appreciation.

They will be encouraged to fall back upon the kindly possibilities and broad hopeful vistas to which the unsophisticated heart of man naturally and spontaneously turns.

They will be encouraged to go to the “highways and hedges” for their omens, to the felicitous encounters of the common road for their auguries and inspirations. They will listen reverently to the chatter of very simple people, and catch the shadow of the wings of fate falling upon very homely heads. The rough earth-wisdom of ploughed fields, heavy with brown sun-lit mud, will be redolent for them with whispers and hints and intimations of things that no philosophy can include and no psychology explain.

Out of the coarse rankness of rude primitive natures strange sweet mysteries will come to light, and upon the sensual lusts of satyrs, gambolling grossly in rain-soaked leafy midnights, the moon of tender purity will shed down her virginal benediction.

For them the grotesque roots of trees will leer magically from the wayside to meet the uncouth gestures of the labourer and his trull; while in the smoke-thick air of mellow tavern-corners the shameless mirth of honest revellers philosophising upon the world will have a smack of true divinity.

They will be encouraged — the people who read Montaigne — to sink once more into their own souls and enjoy the rare sensations permitted to their own physical and psychological susceptibility, as the great world sweeps by them.

I sometimes think that the wisdom of Montaigne, with its essential roots in physiological well-being, is best realised and understood when on some misty autumn morning, full of the smell of leaves, one lies, just newly awakened out of pleasant dreams, and watches the sunshine on wall and window and floor, and listens to the traffic of the town or the noises of the village. It is then, with the sweet languor of awakening, that one seems conscious of some ineffable spiritual secret to be drawn from the material sensations of the nerves of one’s body.

Montaigne, with all his gravity, is quite shameless in the assumption that the details of his bodily habits form an important part, not by any means to be neglected, of the picture he sets out to give of himself.

And those who read Montaigne with sympathetic affinity will find themselves growing into the habit of making much of the sensations of their bodies. They will not rush foolishly and stupidly, like dull economic machines, from bedroom to “lunch counter” and from “lunch counter” to office. They will savour every moment which can be called *their own* and they will endeavour to enlarge such moments by any sort of economic or domestic change.

They will make much of the sensations of waking and bathing and eating and drinking and going to sleep; just as they make much of the sensations of reading admirable books. They will cross the road to the sunny side of the street; they will pause by the toy-shops and the flower-shops. They will go out into the fields, before breakfast, to look for mushrooms.

They will miss nothing of the caprices and humours and comedies of every day of human life; for they will know that in the final issue none of us are wiser than the day and what the day brings; none of us wiser than the wisdom of street and field and market-place; the wisdom of the common people, the wisdom of our mother, the earth.

In the enjoyment of life spent thus fastidiously in the cultivation of our own sensations, and thus largely and generously in a broad sympathy with the emotions of the masses of men, there is room for many kinds of love. But of all the love passions which destiny offers us, none lends itself better to the peculiar path we have chosen than the passion of friendship. It is the love of an “alter ego,” a second self, a twin soul, which more than anything else is able to heighten and deepen our consciousness of life.

The “love of women” has always about it something tragic and catastrophic. It means the plunging of one’s hands into frozen snow or burning fire. It means the crossing of perilous glades in tropic jungles. It means the “sowing of the whirlwind” on the edge of the avalanche and the hunting of the mirage in the desert. The ecstasy brought by it is too blinding to serve as an illumination for our days; and for all the tremulous sweetness of its approach it leaves behind it the poison of disillusion and the scars of rancour and remorse.

But the passion of friendship for one of one’s own sex burns with a calm clear flame. A thousand little subtleties of observation, that would mean nothing were we alone, take to themselves a significant and symbolic value and lead us down pleasant and flower-strewn vistas of airy fancy. In the absence of our friend the colour of his imagination falls like a magical light upon the saddest and dullest scenes; while with him at our side, all the little jerks and jars and jolts and ironical tricks of the hour and the occasion lose their brutish emphasis and sink into humorous perspective. The sense of having some one for whom one’s weakest and least effective moments are of interest and for whom one’s weariness and unreason are only an additional bond, makes what were otherwise intolerable in our life easy and light to bear.

And what a delicious sense, in the midst of the open or hidden hostilities of our struggle against the world, to feel one has some one near at hand with whom, crouched in any “corner of the hubbub,” we may “make game of *that*” which makes as much of us!

Love, in the sexual sense, fails us in the bitterest crisis of our days because love, or the person loved, is the chief cause of the misery. Scourged and lacerated by Aphrodite it is of little avail to flee to Eros. But friendship — of the noble, rare, *absolute* kind such as existed between Montaigne and his sweet Etienne — is the only antidote, the only healing ointment, the only anodyne, which can make it possible for us to endure without complete disintegration “the pangs of despised love” and love’s bitter and withering reaction.

Love too — in the ordinary sense — implies jealousy, exclusiveness, insatiable exactions; whereas friendship, sure of its inviolable roots in spiritual equality, is ready to look generously and sympathetically upon every wandering obsession or passing madness in the friend of its choice.

With the exception of the love of a parent for a child this is the only human love which is outward-looking and centrifugal in its gaze; and even in the case of the love of a mother there is often something possessive and indrawing.

How beautifully, how finally, Montaigne, in his description of this high passion, sweeps aside at one stroke all that selfish emphasis upon "advantage" of which Bacon makes so much, and all that idealistic anxiety to retain one's "separate identity" in which Emerson indulges!

"I love him because he is he and he loves me because I am I." This is worthy to be compared with the beautiful and terrible "I *am* Heathcliff" of the heroine in the Brontë novel.

Emerson speaks as though, having sounded the depths of one's friend's soul, one moved off, with a wave of the hand, upon one's lonely quest, having none but God as one's eternal companion.

This translunar preference for the "Over-soul" over every human feeling is not Montaigne's notion of the passion of friendship. He is more earth-bound in his proclivities.

"He is he and I am I," and as long as we are what we are, in our flesh, in our blood, in our bones, nothing, while we live, can sever the bond between us. And in death? Ah! how much nearer to the pagan heart of this great mystery is the cry of the son of Jesse over the body of his beloved than all the Ciceronian rhetoric in the world — and how much nearer to what that loss means!

Montaigne does not really, as Pater so charmingly hints, break the flexible consistency of his philosophic method when he loves his friends in this unbounded manner. He is too great a sceptic to let his scepticism stand in the way of high adventures of this sort.

The essence of his unsystematic system is that one should give oneself freely up to what the gods throw in one’s way. And if the gods — in their inescapable predestination — have made him “for me” and me “for him,” to cling fast with cold cautious hands to the anchor of moderation were to be false to the philosophy of the “Eternal Now.”

The whole of life is an enormous accident — a dice-throw of eternity in the vapours of time and space. Why not then, with him we love by our side, make richer and sweeter the nonchalant gaiety of our amusement, in the great mad purposeless preposterous show, by the “quips and cranks” of a companionable scepticism; canvassing all things in earth and heaven, reverencing God and Caesar on *this side* of idolatry, relishing the foolish, fooling the wise, and letting the world drift on as it will?

“What do I know?” There may be more in life than the moralists guess, and more in death than the atheists imagine.

PASCAL

THERE ARE CERTAIN figures in the history of human thought who in the deepest sense of the word must be regarded as *tragic*; and this not because of any accidental sufferings they have endured, or because of any persecution, but because of something inherently *desperate* in their own wrestling with truth.

Thus Swift, while an eminently tragic figure in regard to his personal character and the events of his life, is not tragic in regard to his thought.

It is not a question of pessimism. Schopenhauer is generally, and with reason, regarded as a pessimist; but no one who has read his “World as Will and Idea” can visualise Schopenhauer, even in the sphere of pure thought, as a tragic personality.

The pre-eminent example in our modern world of the sort of desperate thinking which I have in mind as worthy of this title is, of course, Nietzsche; and it is a significant thing that over and over again in Nietzsche’s writings one comes upon passionate and indignant references to Pascal.

The great iconoclast seemed indeed, as he groped about like a blind Samson in the temple of human faith, to come inevitably upon the figure of Pascal, as if this latter were one of the main pillars of the formidable edifice. It is interesting to watch this passionate attraction of steel for steel.

Nietzsche was constantly searching among apologists for Christianity for one who in intellect and imagination was worthy of his weapons; and it must be confessed that his search was generally vain. But in Pascal he did find what he sought.

His own high mystical spirit with its savage psychological insight was answered here by something of the same metal. His own "desperate thinking" met in this instance a temper equally "desperate," and the beauty and cruelty of his merciless imagination met here a "will to power" not less abnormal.

It is seldom that a critic of a great writer has, by the lucky throwing of life's wanton dice, an opportunity of watching the very temper he is describing, close at hand. But it does sometimes happen, even when the subject of one's criticism has been dead two hundred years, that one comes across a modern mind so penetrated with its master's moods; so coloured, so dyed, so ingrained with that particular spirit, that intercourse with it implies actual contact with its archetype.

Such an encounter with the subtlest of Christian apologists has been my own good fortune in my association with Mr. W. J. Williams, the friend of Loisy and Tyrrel, and the interpreter, for modern piety, of Pascal's deepest thoughts.

The superiority of Pascal over all other defenders of the faith is to be looked for in the peculiar angle of his approach to the terrific controversy — an angle which Newman himself, for all his serpentine sagacity, found it difficult to retain.

Newman worked in a mental atmosphere singularly unpropitious to formidable intellectual ventures, and one never feels that his essentially ecclesiastical mind ever really grasped the human plausibility of natural paganism. But Pascal went straight back to Montaigne, and, like Pater's Marius under the influence of Aristippus, begins his search after truth with a clean acceptance of absolute scepticism.

Newman was sceptical too, but his peculiar kind of intellectual piety lacked the imagination of Pascal. He could play, cleverly enough, with hypothetical infidelity, and refute it, so to say, “in his study” with his eye on the little chapel door; but there was a sort of refined shrinking from the jagged edges of reality in his somewhat Byzantine temperament which throws a certain suspicion of special pleading over his crafty logic.

Newman argues like a subtle theologian who has been clever enough to add to his “repertoire” a certain evasive mist of pragmatic modernism, under the filmy and wavering vapours of which the inveterate sacerdotalism of his temperament covers its tracks. But with Pascal we get clean away from the poison-trail of the obscurantist.

Pascal was essentially a layman. There was nothing priestly in his mood; nothing scholastic in his reasoning; nothing sacerdotal in his conclusions. We breathe with him the clear sharp air of mathematics; and his imagination, shaking itself free from all controversial pettifogging, sweeps off into the stark and naked spaces of the true planetary situation.

One feels that Newman under all conceivable circumstances was bound to be a priest. There was priestliness writ large upon his countenance. His manner, his tone, his beautiful style, with something at once pleading and threatening, and a kind of feminine attenuation in its vibrant periods, bears witness to this.

Stripped of his cassock and tossed into the world’s “hurly-burly,” Newman would have drawn back into himself in Puritan dismay, and with Puritan narrowness and sourness would have sneered at the feet of the dancers. There was, at bottom, absolutely nothing in Newman of the clear-eyed human sweetness of the Christ of the Gospels; that noble, benignant, tolerant God, full of poetic imagination, whose divine countenance still looks forth from the canvasses of Titian.

Newman’s piety, at best, was provincial, local, distorted. His Christ is the Christ of morbid Seminarists and ascetic undergraduates; not the Christ that

Leonardo da Vinci saw breaking bread with his disciples; not the Christ that Paolo Veronese saw moving among the crowds of the street like a royal uncrowned king.

It is a mistake to regard Pascal as a Protestant. It is equally a mistake to press hard upon his Catholicity. He was indeed too tragically preoccupied with the far deeper question as to whether faith in Christ is possible at all, to be limited to these lesser disputes.

His quarrel with the Jesuits was not essentially a theological quarrel. It was the eternal quarrel between the wisdom and caution and casuistry of the world and the uncompromising vision of the poet and prophet.

Nietzsche would never have singled out Pascal as his most formidable enemy if the author of "The Thoughts" had been nothing but a theological controversialist. What gives an eternal value to Pascal's genius, is that it definitely cleared the air. It swept aside all blurring and confusing mental litter, and left the lamentable stage of the great dilemma free for the fatal duel.

Out of the immense darkness of the human situation, that forlorn stage rises. The fearful spaces of the godless night are its roof, and row above row, tier above tier in its shadowy enclosure, the troubled crowds of the tribes of men wait the wavering issue of the contest. Full on the high stage in this tragic theatre of the universe Pascal throws the merciless searchlight of his imaginative logic, and the rhythm of the duality of man's fate is the rhythm of the music of his impassioned utterances.

The more one dreams over the unique position which Pascal has come to occupy, the more one realises how few writers there are whose imagination is large enough to grapple with the sublime horror of being born of the human race into this planetary system.

They take for granted so many things, these others. They have no power in them to lift eagle wings and fly over the cold grey boundless expanse of the shadowy waters.

They take for granted — materialists and mystics alike — so much; so much, that there is no longer any tragic dilemma left, any sublime "parting of the ways," any splendid or terrible decision.

Pascal's essential grandeur consists in the fact hat he tore himself clear of all those peddling and pitiful compromises, those half humorous concessions, those lazy conventionalisms, with which most people cover their brains as if with wool, and ballast their imagination as if with heavy sand.

He tore himself clear of everything; of his own temperamental proclivities, of his pride, of his scientific vanity, of his human affections, of his lusts, of his innocent enjoyments. He tore himself clear of everything; so as to envisage the universe in its unmitigated horror, so as to look the emptiness of space straight between its ghastly lidless eyes.

One sees him there, at the edge of the world, silhouetted against the white terror of infinity, wrestling desperately in the dawn with the angel of the withheld secret.

His pride — his pride of sheer intellect — ah! that, as Nietzsche well knew, was the offering that had the most blood in it, the sacrifice that cried the loudest, as he bound it to the horns of the altar. The almost insane howl of suppressed misery which lurks in the scoriating irony of that terrible passage about sprinkling oneself with "holy water" and rendering oneself "stupid," is an indication of what I mean. Truly, as his modern representative does not hesitate to hint, the hand of Pascal held Christianity by the hair.

To certain placid cattle-like minds, the life we have been born into is a thing simple and natural enough. To Pascal it was monstrously and insolently unnatural. He had that species of grand and terrible imagination which is capable of piercing the world through and through; of rising high up above it, and of pulverising it with impassioned logic.

The basic incongruities of life yawned for him like bleeding eye-sockets, and never for one moment could he get out of his mind the appalling nothingness of the stellar spaces.

Once, after thinking about Pascal, I dreamed I saw him standing, a tall dark figure, above a chaotic sea. In his hand he held a gigantic whip, whose long quivering lash seemed, as he cracked it above the moaning waters, to summon the hidden monsters of the depths to rise to the surface. I could not see in my dream the face of this figure, for dark clouds kept sweeping across his head; but the sense of his ferocious loneliness took possession of me, and since then I have found it increasingly difficult to confine his image to mild Jansenistic heresies, ironic girdings at Jesuitical opponents, philosophic strolls with evangelical friends.

What Pascal does is a thing that, curiously enough, is very rarely done, even by great metaphysical writers; I mean the bringing home to the mind, without any comfortable illusive softenings of the stark reality, of what life really implies in its trenchant outlines. To do this with the more complete efficacy, he goes back to Montaigne and uses the scepticism of Montaigne as his starting point.

The Christian faith, in order to be a thing of beauty and dignity, must necessarily have something *desperate* about it, something of the terrible sweat and tears of one who wrestles with the ultimate angel. Easy-going Christianity, the Christianity of plump prelates and argumentative presbyters, is not Christianity at all. It is simply the “custom of the country” greased with the unction of professional interests.

One remembers how both Schopenhauer and Heine sweep away the Hegelian Protestantism of their age and look for the spirit of Christ in other quarters.

That so tremendous a hope, that so sublime a chance should have appeared at all in the history of the human race is a thing to wonder at; and Pascal, coming upon this chance, this hope, this supreme venture, from the depths of a corrosive all-devouring scepticism, realised it at its true value.

Hung between the infinitely great and the infinitely little, frozen by the mockery of two eternities, this “quintessence of dust” which is ourselves, cries aloud to be delivered from the body of its living death.

A reed that thinks! Could there anywhere be found a better description of what we are? Reed-like we bow ourselves to the winds of the four horizons — reed-like we murmur repetitions of the music of forest and sea — reed-like we lift our heads among the dying stalks of those who came before us — reed-like we wither and droop when our own hour comes — but with it all, we *think!*

Pascal looking at the face of the world sees evidence on all sides of the presence of something blighting and poisonous, something diabolic and malign in the way things are now organised. He traces the cause of this to the wilful evil in the heart of man, and he finds the only cure for it in the acceptance of God’s grace.

There may be something irritating to the pagan mind about this arbitrary introduction of the idea of “sin” as the cause of the lamentable misery of the world. Among modern writers the idea of “sin” is ridiculed, and the notion of its supernaturalism scouted. But is this true psychology?

Whatever its extraordinary origin, this thing which we call “conscience” has emerged as a definite and inalienable phenomenon among us. To be exempt from the power of *remorse* is still, even in these modern days, to be something below or above the level of ordinary humanity. If the thing is everywhere present with us, then, as an actual undeniable experience; if we feel it, if we suffer from it, where is the philosophical or human advantage of slurring over its existence and refusing to take account of it?

The great artists are wiser in these matters than the philosophers. Are we to suppose that the depths of malignity in an Iago, or the “dark backward and abysm” of remorse in a Macbeth, are things purely relative and illusive?

“Hell is murky,” whispers the sleep-walker, and the words touch the nerves of our imagination more closely than all the arguments of the evolutionists.

We will not follow Pascal through the doctrinal symbols of his escape from the burden of this consciousness. Where we must still feel the grandeur of his imagination is in his recognition of the presence of “evil” in the world as an objective and palpable thing which no easy explanations can get rid of and only a stronger spiritual force can overcome.

The imagination of Pascal once more makes life terrible, beautiful and dramatic. It pushes back the marble walls of mechanical cause and effect, and opens up the deep places. It makes the universe porous again. It restores to life its strange and mysterious possibilities. It throws the human *will* once more into the foreground, and gives the drama of our days its rightful spaciousness and breadth.

The kind of religious faith which lends itself to our sense of the noble and the tragic is necessarily of this nature. Like the tight-rope dancer in Zarathustra, it balances itself between the upper and the nether gulfs. It makes its choice between eternal issues; it throws the dice upon the cosmic gaming-table; it wagers the safety of the soul against the sanity of the intellect.

And it is pre-eminently the mark of a great religion that it should be founded upon a great scepticism. Anything short of this lacks the true tragic note; anything short of this is mere temperamental cheerfulness, mere conventional assent to custom and tradition.

The great religion must carve its daring protest against the whole natural order of the universe upon the flaming ramparts of the world's uttermost boundary. The great religion must engrave its challenge to eternity upon the forehead of the Great Sphinx.

And after all, even supposing that Pascal is wrong; even supposing that making his grand wager he put his money upon the *wrong horse*, does that diminish the tragedy of his position? Does that lessen the sublimity of his imagination? Obviously it is the practical certainty that he is wrong, and that he did put his money on the wrong horse, which creates the grandeur of the whole desperate business. If he were right, if the universe were really and truly composed in the manner he conceived it — why then, so far from his figure being a tragic one, he would present himself as a shrewd magician, who has found the "wonderful lamp" of the world's Aladdin's cave, and has entered upon inestimable treasures while disappearing into the darkness.

The sublimity of Pascal's vision depends upon its being illusive. The grandeur of his world-logic depends upon its being false. The beauty of his heroic character depends upon his philosophy being a lie.

If all that is left of this desperate dicer with eternity is a little dust and a strangely shaped skull, how magnificently dramatic, in the high classic sense, was his offering up of his intellect upon the altar of his faith!

In the wise psychology of the future — interesting itself in the historic aberrations of the human mind — it is likely that many chapters will be devoted to this strange "disease of desperation" full of such wild and fatal beauty.

The Spectacle of the world will lack much contrasting shadow when this thing passes away. A *certain deep crimson upon black* will be missing from the tapestry of human consciousness. There will be more sun-light but less Rembrantian chiaroscuro in the pigments of the great Picture. At any rate this is certain; by his tragic gambling in the darkness of the abyss between the unfathomed spaces, Pascal has drawn the perilous stuff of the great disease to a dramatic head. The thing can no longer diffuse itself like an attenuated evil humour through every vein of the world-body.

Customary piety, conventional religion, the thin security of self-satisfied morality, can now no more tease us with their sleek impertinence. In the presence of a venture of this high distinction, of a faith of this tragic intensity, such shabby counterfeits of the race's hope dwindle and pale and fade.

We now perceive what the alternative is, what the voice of "deep calling unto deep" really utters, as the constellation of Hercules draws the solar world toward it through the abysmal night. No more ethical foolery; no more pragmatic insolence; no more mystical rhetoric.

The prophets of optimism "lie in hell like sheep." The world yawns and quivers to its foundations. Jotunheim rushes upon Asgard. From the pleasant fields of sun-lit pagan doubt comes to our ears the piping of the undying Pan — older than all the "twilights" of all the "gods."

But for the rest the issue is now plain, the great dilemma clear. No more fooling with shadows when faith has lost its substance; no more walking on the road to Emmaus when the Master is transformed to a stream of tendency; no more liberal theology when Socrates is as divine as Jesus.

The “Thinking Reed” bows before the wind of the infinite spaces. It bows. It bends. It is broken.

Aut Christus aut Nihil!

VOLTAIRE

THE IMMENSE BULK of Voltaire's writings is profoundly uninteresting to me. I once saw — I think it must have been in Liverpool — a wonderful edition of his complete works published during the Revolution and with a duplicate copy of every illustrative print. I couldn't afford the price of the thing just then, amazingly low though it was, but in my devotion to that great name, I swore that, when I made my library, that noble edition should be in it.

I have never made any library and never intend to. The sight of classical authors in row upon row depresses me beyond words. Public Libraries are still worse. I have no wish to be helped "to get on in the world" by Mr. Carnegie. I resent the association between literature and "public benefactions." Does he propose to dole out the exquisite taste necessary to appreciate these rare things, on condition that our "home town" pay half the cost? Thank Heaven, a feeling for what is noble and distinguished in human thought is beyond the reach of any philanthropist. I mean beyond his power of giving or taking away, and I do not believe that those among the poor who really have this feeling are often found in libraries. They probably have their "Oxford Book of English Verse" — a gift from their gentlest acquaintance — just as I have; and, for the rest, they can sell their school prizes to buy Hardy and Henry James.

Except for "Candide" and a few excerpts from the "Philosophical Dictionary," I must confess I have no wish to turn over another page of Voltaire. It is simply incredible to me that human beings possessed of the same senses as ours could find satisfaction for their imagination in the sterile moralising, stilted sentiment, superficial wit, and tiresome persiflage of that queer generation. I suppose they didn’t really. I suppose they used to go off on the sly, and read Rabelais and Villon. I suppose it was only the preposterous “social world” of those days who enjoyed nothing in literature except pseudo-classic attitudes and gestures; just as it is only the preposterous “social world” with us who enjoy nothing but Gaelic mythology and Oriental Mysticism.

Those pseudo-classic writers of the eighteenth century, in England and France, have their admirers still. I confess such admiration excites in me as much wonder as the works themselves excite distaste. What can they find in them that is thrilling or exciting or large or luminous or magical? I would pile up the whole lot of them along with those books that are no books — biblia-a-biblia — of which Charles Lamb speaks so plaintively. Backgammon boards with lettering behind them should be their companions.

What a relief to turn from contemplation of the works of Voltaire to that bust of him by Houdon!

Ah! there we have him, there we apprehend him, there we catch his undying spirit! And what a man he was! As one looks at that face wherein a mockery more trenchant than the world is able to endure leers and wags the tongue, one feels certain that the soul of the eighteenth century was not really contented with its heroic sentimental mask. The look upon that face, with its aristocratic refinement, its deadly intellect, its beautiful cynicism, is worth all the sessions of the Academy and all the seasons of the Salons. It makes one think somehow of the gardens of Versailles. One seems to see it as a mocking fragment of heathen marble — some Priapian deity of shameless irreverence, peering forth in the moonlight from among the yew hedges and the fountains; watching the Pierrot of the Minute make love to Columbine, and the generations of men drift by like falling leaves.

Voltaire! — He was well advised to choose that name for himself; a name which sounds even now like the call of a trumpet. And a call it is; a call to the clear intelligences and the unclouded brains; a call to the generous hearts and the unperverted instincts; a call to sanity and sweetness and clarity and noble commonsense; to all that is free and brave and gay and friendly, to rally to the standard of true civilisation against the forces of stupidity, brutality and obscurantism!

Voltaire was one of those great men whose thoughts are armies and whose words are victories in the cause of the liberation of humanity. If we do not read his books, we look at his image and we read his life. We name his name and we seal ourselves of his tribe; the name and tribe of such as refuse to bow their knees to Baal, and if they worship in the house of Rimmon, worship with a large reservation!

Voltaire is much more than a man of letters. He is a prophet of the age to come, when the execrable superstitions of narrow minds shall no longer darken the sunlight, and the infamous compulsion of human manners, human intellects, human tastes, into the petty mould of oppressive public opinion shall be ended forever.

That bust in the Louvre and the sublime story of his life will outlast all but one of those half a hundred volumes of his which Mr. Carnegie's liberality has put at the disposal of our "home town."

We too, like the populace of Paris, on the day when he came back to his own, flock out to see the "saviour of the Calas." We too, like the passionate actresses who crowned his image in the great comedy-house while — as they say — he bowed his head so low that his forehead touched the front of his box, acclaim him still as the Messiah of the Liberty of the human intellect.

How admirable it is to come back to the spirit and temper of Voltaire from the fussy self-love and neurotic introspections of our modern egoists. The new fashionable doctrine among the “intellectuals” is that one is to live in one’s ivory tower and let the world go; live in one’s ivory tower while brutal and detestable people tyrannise over the gentle and sensitive; live in one’s ivory tower while the heavy hand of popular ignorance lies like a dead weight upon all that is fine and rare; live in one’s ivory tower while complacent well-paid optimism whispers acquiescence in the “best of all possible worlds.”

The great Voltaire was made in another mould. Few enjoyed the pleasures of life more than he; but the idea of the stupid brutality and ignorant tyranny from which in this world so many harmless people suffer filled him with fury. The Calas were only one — only the best known — of a long list of victims on whose behalf he entered the arena. In these campaigns of justice, he was tireless, inexhaustible, insatiable. He flooded Europe with pamphlets on behalf of his protégés. He defied Church and State in his crusades to defend them. His house at Ferney became a sort of universal refuge and sanctuary for the persecuted persons of the civilised world.

A great and good man! I sometimes think that of all the heroic champions of sensitiveness against insensitiveness, of weakness against strength, of the individual against public opinion, I would soonest call up the noble shade of Voltaire and kiss his pontifical hand!

The Pantheistic Carlyle grumbles at his levity and rails against his persiflage. One hopes there will always be a “persiflage” like that of Voltaire to clear the human stage of stupid tyranny and drive the mud-monsters of obscurantism back into their mid-night caverns. He was a queer kind of Apollo — this little great man with his old-fashioned wig and the fur-cloak “given him by Catherine of Russia” — but the flame which inspired him was the authentic fire, and the arrows with which he fought were dipped in the golden light of the sun.

I said there was one book of Voltaire’s to which the souls of honest people who love literature must constantly return. This, of course, is “Candide”; a work worthy to be bound up in royal vellum and stained in Tyrian dyes. If it were not for “Candide” — so stiff and stilted was the fashionable spirit of that age — there would be little in Voltaire’s huge shelf of volumes, little except stray flashes of his irrepressible gaiety, to arrest and to hold us. But into the pages of “Candide” he poured the full bright torrent of his immortal wit, and with this book in our hands we can feel him and savour him as he was.

One has only to glance over the face of Europe at this present hour to get the sting and Pythian poison of this planetary irony. It is like a Circean philtre of sweet sunbrewed wine, sparkling with rainbow bubbles and gleaming with the mockery of the deathless gods. Once for all in this scandalous and beautiful book, the lying optimism of the preachers receives its crushing blow. “Candide” is the final retort of all sane and generous spirits, full of magnanimity and laughter, to that morbid and shameful propitiation of the destinies which cries “peace when there is no peace.”

One feels when one reads it as if it were written by some wanton and gracious youth, in the marble courts of some happy palace of Utopia, commenting upon the mad delusions and diseased hypocrisies of the men of the old time when superstition still reigned. No book in the world has more spontaneous gaiety, more of the triumphant spirit of human boyishness in its blood. Certainly the great Voltaire was to the end of his life — and you can see that very thing in the old-young face of the famous bust — inspired by the immortal flame of youth. He never grew old. To the last his attitude toward life was the attitude of that exuberant and unbounded energy which takes nothing seriously and loves the contest with darkness and stupidity for the sake of the divine "sport" of the struggle. There is a certain sun-born sanity of *commonsense* about such natural youthfulness, which contradicts all popular fallacies.

It is the Mercutio spirit, striking up the swords of both Montagues and Capulets and fooling them all on their grey-haired obsessions. It comes into this solemn custom-ridden world, as if from some younger and gayer star, and makes wanton sport of its pious hypocrisies. It opens its astonished laughing eyes upon the meanness of men and the cruelties of men and the insane superstitions and illusions of men, and it mocks them all with mischievous delight. It refuses to bow its head before hoary idols. It refuses to go weeping and penitent and stricken with a sense of "sin" in the presence of natural fleshly instincts. It is absolutely irresponsible — what, in a world like this, should one be responsible for? — and it is shamelessly frivolous. Why not? Where the highest sanctities are so lamentably human, and where the phylacteries of the moralists are embroidered with such earth-spun threads, why go on tip-toe and with forlorn visage? It is outrageously indecent. Why not? Who made this portentous "decency" to be the rule of free-born life? Who put fig-leaves upon the sweet flesh of the immortals? Decency after all is a mere modern barbarism; the evocation of morbid vulgarity and a perverted heart.

The great classic civilisations included a poetic obscenity with easy nonchalance. They had a god to protect its interests, and its sun-burnt youthful wantonness penetrates all their art. This modern cult of "decency" — thrust down the throat of human joy by a set of Calvins and John Knoxes

— is only one of the indications in our wretched commercialised age of how far we have sunk from the laughter of the gods and the dancing of the morning stars.

To sit listening in the forlorn streets of a Puritan city — when for one day the cheating tradesmen leave their barbarous shops — to the wailing of unlovely hymns, empty of everything except a degraded sentimentality that would make an Athenian or a Roman slave blush with shame, is enough to cause one to regard the most scandalous levity of Voltaire as something positively sacred and holy.

One wonders that scholars are any longer allowed even to read Aristophanes — far less translate him. And cannot they see — these perverts of a purity that insults the sunshine — that *humour,* decent or indecent, is precisely the thing that puts sex properly in its place? Cannot they see that by substituting morbid sentiment for honest Rabelaisianism they are obsessing the minds of every one with a matter which after all is only one aspect of life?

The great terrible Aphrodite — ruler of gods and men — is not to be banished by conventicle or council. She will find her way back, though she has to tread strange paths, and the punishment for the elimination of natural wantonness is the appearance of hideous hypocrisy. Driven from the haunts of the Muses, expelled from the symposia of the wise and witty, the spirit of sexual irreverence takes refuge in the streets; and the scurrilous vulgarities of the tavern balance the mincing proprieties of the book-shop.

After all sex *is* a laughable thing. The tragedies connected with it, the high and thrilling pleasures connected with it, do not obliterate its original absurdity. And Voltaire — this sane sun-born child of the shameless intellect — never permits us for a moment to forget how ridiculous in the last resort all this fuss about the matter is.

Puritanical suppression and neurotic obsession are found invariably together. It is precisely in this way that the great goddess revenges herself upon those who disobey her laws. Voltaire, the least Puritanical of men, is also the least neurotic. The Satyrish laughter of his eternally youthful energy clears the air of the world.

Humour of all human things is the most transitory and changing in its moods. As a perambulating interpreter of literature, ancient as well as modern, this has especially been borne in upon me. I have been guilty, in that sickening academic way which makes one howl with shame in one's self-respecting moments, of "trying out" upon people the old stock humours of the standard authors.

I have dragged poor Bottom back to life and made the arms of the Cervantian wind-mill turn and the frogs of Aristophanes croak. But oh, shade of Yorick! how the sap, the ichor, the sharp authentic tang, that really tickles our sensibilities, has thinned out and fallen flat during the centuries. My hearers have smiled and tittered perhaps — with a pathetic wish to be kind, or a desire to show themselves not quite dull to these classic amenities — and between us we have, in a kind of chuckling pedantry, shuffled through the occasion; but it is not pleasant to recall such moments.

Of course a sly comedian could make anything amusing; but one cannot help feeling that if the humour of these famous scenes were really permanent it would force its way even through the frosty air of academic culture into our human nerves.

"We are not wood; we are not stones, but men" — and being men the essential spirit of outrageous humour ought surely to hit us, however poorly interpreted. And it does; only the proprieties and the decencies sheer us off from what is permanently appealing!

I recollect on one occasion, how, after making my hearers cry over the natural and permanent tragedy of Shylock, I asked the fatuous question, addressing it, as one does, to the vague air —

“What are we to say about Launcelot Gobbo?”

Now obviously any one but a professional interpreter of literature would know that there’s *nothing* to say about this harmless fool. Shakespeare threw him in as “a comic relief” and probably felt his strongest appeal to the native genius of the actor who impersonated him. But I can recall now, with that sense of humiliation which wrings one’s withers, the sweetly murmured tones of some tactful woman who answered — and the last thing one wants is an answer to these inanities —

“Oh, we must say that Launcelot Gobbo is charming!”

But Gobbo or no Gobbo, the fact remains that humour is one of the most delicate, the most evasive, and the most unstable of human qualities. I am myself inclined to hold that sheer outrageous ribaldry, especially if graced with an undertone of philosophic irony, is the only kind of humour which is really permanent. To give permanence to any human quality in literature, there must be an appeal to something which is beyond the power of time and change and fashion and custom and circumstance. And, as a matter of fact, nothing in the world except sex itself answers this requirement.

The absurdities of men are infinite, but they alter with every generation. What never alters or can alter, is the absurdity of being a man at all.

Where Shakespeare’s humour still touches us most nearly is precisely in those scenes which the superficial custom of our age finds least endurable. It is not in his Gobbos or in his frolicsome boy-girls, that his essential spirit must be looked for; but in his Falstaffs and Mercutios.

But Shakespeare’s humour is largely, after all, a lovely, dreamy, poetical thing. I doubt if it has the weight or the massive solidity of the humour of

Rabelais. I think the humour of Charles Lamb wears well; but that is probably because it has a most indisputable flavour of Rabelaisian roguery underlying its whimsical grace. Anatole France has the true classic spirit. His humour will remain fresh forever, because it is the humour of the eternal absurdity of sexual desire. Heine can never lose the sharpness of his bite, for his irreverence is the eternal irreverence of the soul that neither man nor God can scourge into solemn submission.

Humour to be really permanent and to outlast the changes of fashion must go plummet-like to the basic root of things. It is nothing less than extraordinary that Voltaire, living in the age of all ages the most obsessed with the modishness of the hour, should have written “Candide,” a book full of the old unalterable laughter. For “Candide” is not only a clever book, a witty book, a wise book. It is a book preposterously and outrageously funny. It tickles one’s liver and one’s gall; it relaxes one’s nerves; it vents the suppressed spleen of years in a shout of irrepressible amusement. Certain passages in it — and, as one would have suspected they are precisely the passages that cannot be quoted in a modern book — compel one to laugh aloud as one thinks of them.

Personally I hold the opinion that “Candide” is the most humorous piece of human writing in the world. And yet its ribaldry, its irreverence, is unbounded. It sticks at nothing. It says everything. It wags the philosophic tongue at every conceivable embodiment of popular superstition.

If the best books are the books which the authors of them have most enjoyed writing, the books that have the thrill of excellent pleasure on every page, then “Candide” certainly bears away the palm. One would like to have watched Voltaire’s countenance as he wrote it. The man’s superb audacity, his courage, his aplomb, his god-like shamelessness, appear in every sentence.

What an indictment of the human race! What an arraignment of the "insolence of office"! What a tract for the philanthropists! What a slap in the face for the philosophers! And all done with such imperturbable good temper, such magnanimity of fine malice.

Poor Candide! how loyally he struggled on, with Pangloss as his master and his ideal; and what shocks he experienced! I would sooner go down to posterity as the author of "Candide" than of any volume in the world except Goethe's "Faust."

There is something extraordinarily reassuring about the book. It reconciles one to life even at the moment it is piling up life's extravagant miseries. Its buoyant and resilient energy, full of the unconquerable irreverence and glorious shamelessness of youth, takes life fairly by the throat and mocks it and defies it to its face. It indicates courageous gaiety as the only victory, and ironical submission to what even gaiety cannot alter as the only wisdom.

There are few among us, I suppose, who in going to and fro in the world, have not come upon some much-persecuted, much-battered Candide, "cultivating his garden" after a thousand disillusions; and holding fast, in spite of all, to the doctrines of some amazing Pangloss. Such encounters with such invincible derelicts must put us most wholesomely to shame. Our neurotic peevishness, our imaginary grievances, our vanity and our pride, are shown up at such moments in their true light.

If complacent optimism appears an insolent falsifying of life's facts, a helpless pessimism appears a cowardly surrender to life's impertinence. Neither to gloss over the outrageous reality nor to lose our resistant obstinacy, whatever such reality may do to us, is the last word of noble commonsense. And it is a noble commonsense which, after all, is Voltaire's preeminent gift.

The Voltairian spirit refuses to be fooled by man or god. The universe may batter it and bruise it, but it cannot break it. The brutality of authority, the brutality of public opinion, may crush it to the earth; but from the earth it mocks still, mocks and mocks and mocks, with the eternal youthfulness of its wicked tongue!

Voltaire took the world as he found it. With the weapons of the world he fought the world; with the weapons of the world he overcame the world. The neurotic modern vulgarity which, misinterpreting the doctrines of Nietzsche, worships force and bows down in the dust before the great unscrupulous man, finds no support in Voltaire. Honest people, cultivating their gardens and keeping the prophets away from their backyards, find in the Voltairian spirit their perpetual refuge.

The old Horatian wisdom, clear-eyed, cynical and friendly, leaps up once again from the dust of the centuries, a clean bright flame, and brings joyousness and sanity back to the earth.

Voltaire could be kind and generous without calling to his aid the “immensities” and the “eternities.” He could strike fiercely on behalf of the weak and the oppressed without darkening the sunshine by any worship of “sorrow.” He could be thoroughly and most entirely “good,” while spitting forth his ribald irreverences against every pious dogma. He could be long-suffering and considerate and patient, to a degree hardly ever known among men of genius, while ruling Europe with his indomitable pen.

The name of Voltaire is more than a trumpet call of liberty for the oppressed artists and thinkers of the world; it is a challenge to the individual Candides of our harassed generation to rise above their own weaknesses and introspections and come forth into the sunshine.

The name of Voltaire is a living indictment of the madness of politicians and the insanity of parties and sects. It brings us back to the commonsense of honest men, who “care for none of these things.”

He was a queer Apollo of light and reason — this lean bewigged figure with cane and snuffbox and laced sleeves — but the powers of darkness fled from before his wit as they have not fled from before the wit of any other; for the wit of Voltaire is in harmony with the spirit of the human race, as it shakes itself free from superstition “and all uncharitableness.”

He was a materialist if you will, for his “deism” meant no more to him than a distant blue sky giving the world space and perspective and free air; but a materialism that renders men kind and courteous, urbane and sweet-tempered, honest and clear-headed, is better than a spirituality that leads to intolerance and madness.

He was a ribald and a scoffer in the presence of much that the world holds sacred; but the most sacred thing of all — the *sanity of human reason* — has never been more splendidly defended.

He mocked at the traditions of men; but he remains a champion of man’s highest prerogative. He turned the churches into indecent ridicule; but wherever an honest man strikes at tyrannous superstition, or a solitary “cultivator of his garden” strikes at stupid mob-rule, one stone the more is added to that great “ecclesia” of civilisation, which “Deo erexit Voltaire”; which Voltaire built — and builds — to God.

ROUSSEAU

Nothing is more clear than that the enjoyment of art and letters is forbidden, in any rich or subtle degree, to the apprehension of the moralist. It is also forbidden, for quite other reasons, to the apprehension of the extravagantly vicious.

The moralist is debarred from any free and passionate love of literature by the simple fact that all literature is created out of the vices of men of letters. The extravagantly vicious man is debarred from such a love by the still simpler fact that his own dominant obsession narrows down his interest to the particular writers who share his own vice.

When I encounter a catholic and impassioned lover of books — of many books and many authors — I know two things about him — I know that he is the opposite of a moralist, and I know that he is free from any maniacal vice. I might go further and say that I know he has a rooted hatred of moralists and a tolerant curiosity about every other form of human aberration.

When I say that literature is created out of the vices of men of letters, I use the word in a large and liberal sense. A vice is a pleasant sensation condemned by Puritans. It is an over-emphasis laid upon some normal reaction; or it is a perverse and morbid deviation from the normal path.

It would not require any fantastic stretch of psychological interpretation to show how all the great men of letters are driven forward along their various paths by some demoniac urge, some dynamic impulse, that has its sensual as well as its intellectual origin. The “psychology of genius” is still in its infancy. It seems a pity that so much of the critical interpretation of the great writers of the world should be in the hands of persons who — by the reason of their academic profession — are naturally more interested in the effect of such work upon youthful minds than in its intrinsic quality.

The barbaric vulgarity of our commercial age is largely responsible for the invidious slur cast upon any genuine critical psychology; upon any psychology which frankly recognises the enormous influence in literature exercised by normal or abnormal sexual impulses.

Criticism of literature which has nothing to say about the particular sexual impulse — natural or vicious, as it may happen — which drives a writer forward, becomes as dull and unenlightening as theology without the Real Presence.

Among the influences that obstruct such free criticism among us at present may be noted Puritan fanaticism, academic professionalism (with its cult of the “young person”), popular vulgarity, and that curious Anglo-Saxon uneasiness and reticence in these things which while in no sense a sign of purity of mind invokes an invincible prejudice against any sort of straightforward discussion.

It is for these reasons that the art of criticism in England and America is so childish and pedantic when compared with that of France. In France even the most reactionary of critics — persons like Léon Bloy, for instance — habitually use the boldest sexual psychology in elucidating the mysterious caprices of human genius; and one can only wish that the conventional inhibition that renders such freedom impossible with us could come to be seen in its true light, that is to say as itself one of the most curious examples of sexual morbidity ever produced by unnatural conditions.

Rousseau is perhaps of all great original geniuses the one most impossible to deal with without some sort of recognition of the sexual peculiarities which penetrated his passionate and restless spirit. No writer who has ever lived had so sensitive, so nervous, so vibrant a physiological constitution. Nothing that he achieved in literature or in the creation of a new atmosphere of feeling in Europe, can be understood without at least a passing reference to the impulses which pushed him forward on his wayward road.

As we watch him in his pleasures, his passions, his pilgrimages, his savage reactions, it is difficult to avoid the impression that certain kinds of genius are eminently and organically anti-social.

It is perhaps for this reason at bottom that the political-minded Anglo-Saxon race, with its sturdy "good citizen" ideals, feels so hostile and suspicious toward these great anarchists of the soul.

Rousseau is indeed, temperamentally considered, one of the most passionately anarchical minds in the history of the race. The citizen of Geneva, the lover of humanity, the advocate of liberty and equality, was so scandalous an individualist that there has come to breathe from the passage of his personality across the world an intoxicating savour of irresponsible independence.

The most ingrained pursuer of his own path, the most intransigeant "enemy of the people," would be able to derive encouragement in his obstinate loneliness from reading the works of this philanthropist who detested humanity; this reformer who fled from society; this advocate of domesticity who deserted his children; this pietist who worshipped the god of nature.

The man's intellect was so dominated by his sensualism that, even at the moment he is eloquently protesting in favour of a regenerated humanity living under enlightened laws, there emanates from the mere physical rhythm of his sentences an anti-social passion, a misanthropic self-worship, a panic terror of the crowd, which remains in the mind when all his social theories are forgotten.

He is the grand example of a writer whose sub-conscious intimate self contradicts his overt dogmas and creates a spiritual atmosphere in which his own reforming schemes wither and vanish.

Rousseau is, from any moral or social or national point of view, a force of much more disintegrating power than Nietzsche can ever be. And he is this for the very reason that his sensual and sentimental nature dominates him so completely.

From the austere Nietzschean watch-tower, this man's incorrigible weakness presents itself as intrinsically more dangerous to the race than any unscrupulous strength. The voluptuous femininity of his insidious eloquence lends itself, as Nietzsche saw, to every sort of crafty hypocrisy.

Rousseau's rich, subtle, melodious style — soft as a voice of a choir of women celebrating some Euripidean Dionysus — flows round the revolutionary figure of Liberty with an orgiastic passion worthy of the backward flung heads, bared breasts and streaming hair of a dance of Bassarids.

Other symbolic figures besides that of Liberty emerge above the stream of this impassioned "Return to Nature." The figure of justice is there and the figure of fraternity; while above them all the shadowy lineaments of some female personification of the Future of Humanity, crowned with the happy stars of the Age of Gold, looks down upon the rushing tide.

"Oh, Liberty!" one can hear the voice of many heroic souls protesting, "Oh, Liberty — what things are done in thy name!"

For it is of the essential nature of Rousseau's eloquence, as it is of the essential nature of his temperament, that any kind of sensual abandonment, slurred over by rich orchestral litanies of human freedom, should be more than tolerated.

This Religion of Liberty lends itself to strange hypocrisies when the torrent of his imaginative passion breaks upon the jagged rocks of reality. That is why — from Robespierre down to very modern persons — the eloquent use of such vague generalisations as Justice, Virtue, Simplicity, Nature, Humanity, Reason, excites profound suspicion in the psychological mind.

From the antinomian torrent of this voluptuous anarchy the spirits of Epicurus, of Spinoza, of Goethe, of Nietzsche, turn away in horror. This is indeed an insurrection from the depths; this is indeed a breaking loose of chaos; this is indeed a "return to Nature." For there is a perilous intoxication in all this, and, like chemical ingredients in some obsessing drug these great vague names work magically and wantonly upon us, giving scope to all our weaknesses and perversities.

If I were asked — taking all the great influences which have moulded human history together — what figure, what personality, I would set up as the antipodal antagonist of the influence of Nietzsche, I would retort with the name of Rousseau.

Here is an "immoralism" deeper and far more anti-social than any "beyond good and evil." Nietzsche hammered furiously at Christian ethics; but he did so with the sublime intention of substituting for what he destroyed a new ethical construction of his own.

Rousseau, using with stirring and caressing unction symbol after symbol, catch-word after catch-word, from the moral atmosphere of Christendom, draws us furiously after him, in a mad hysterical abandonment of all that every human symbol covers, toward a cataract of limitless and almost inhuman subjectivity.

To certain types of mind Rousseau appears as a noble prophet of what is permanent in evangelic “truth” and of what is desirable and lovely in the future of humanity. To other types — to the pronounced classical or Goethean type, for instance — he must appear as the most pernicious, the most disintegrating, the most poisonous, the most unhealthy influence that has ever been brought to bear upon the world. Such minds — confronting him with a genuine and logical anarchist, such as Max Stirner — would find him far more dangerous. For Rousseau’s anarchy is of an emotional, psychological, feminine kind; a kind that carries along upon the surface of its eloquence every sort of high-sounding abstraction; while, all the time, the sinuous waters of its world-sapping current filter through all the floodgates of human institution.

One cannot but be certain that Rousseau would have been one of those irresistible but most injurious persons whom, honorably crowned with fillets of well-spun wool and fresh-grown myrtle, Plato would have dismissed from the gates of the great Republic.

One asks oneself the question — and it is a question less often asked than one would expect — whether it is really possible that a man of immense genius and magnetic influence can actually, as the phrase runs, “do more harm than good” to the happiness of the human race. We are so absurdly sheep-like and conventional in these things that we permit our old-fashioned belief in a benignant providence turning all things to good, to transform itself into a vague optimistic trust in evolutionary progress; a progress which can never for one moment fail to make everything work out to the advantage of humanity.

We have such pathetic trust too in the inherent friendliness of the universe that it seems inconceivable to us that a great genius, inspired from hidden cosmic depths, should be actually a power of evil, dangerous to humanity. And yet, why not? Why should there not appear sometimes from the secret reservoirs of Being, powerful and fatal influences that, in the long result, are definitely baleful and malign in their effect upon the fortunes of the human race?

This was the underlying belief in the Middle Ages, and it led to the abominable persecution of persons who were obviously increasing the sum of human happiness. But may not there have been behind such unpardonable persecution, a legitimate instinct of self-protection — an instinct for which in these latter days of popular worship of “great names” there is no outlet of expression?

The uneasiness of the modern English-speaking world in the presence of free discussion of sex is, of course, quite a different matter. This objection is a mere childish prejudice reinforced by outworn superstitions. The religious terror excited by certain formidable free-thinkers and anti-social philosophers in earlier days went much deeper than this, and was quite free from that mere prurient itch of perverted sensuality which inspires the Puritans of our time.

This religious terror, barbarous and hideous as it was in many of its manifestations, may have been a legitimate expression of subconscious panic in the presence of something that, at least now and then, was really antagonistic to the general welfare.

Why should there not arise sometimes great demonic forces, incarnated in formidable personalities, who are really and truly “humani generis hostes,” enemies of the human race? The weird mediaeval dream of the anti-Christ, drawn from Apocalyptic literature, symbolises this occult possibility.

Because a writer has immense genius there is no earthly reason why his influence upon the world should be good. There is no reason why it should be for the happiness of the world, putting the moral question aside.

In the classic ages the State regulated literature. In the Middle Ages, the Church regulated it. In our own age it is not regulated at all; it is neglected by ignorance and expurgated by stupidity. The mob in our days cringes before great names, the journalist exploits great names, and the schoolmaster dishes them up for the young. No one seriously criticises them; no one seriously considers their influence upon the world.

The business man has a shrewd suspicion that they have no influence at all; or certainly none comparable with that of well placed advertisements. Meanwhile under the surface, from sensitive minds to sensitive minds, there run the electric currents of new intellectual ideas, setting in motion those psychic and spiritual forces which still, in spite of all our economic philosophers, upheave the world.

Was Rousseau, more than any one, more than Voltaire, more than Diderot, responsible for the French Revolution? I am inclined to hold that he was, and if so, according to the revolutionary instincts of all enemies of oppression, we are bound to regard his influence as “good”; unless by chance we are among those who consider the tyranny of the middle-class no less outrageous than the tyranny of the aristocracy. But Rousseau’s influence — so far stretching is the power of personal genius — does not stop with the French Revolution. It does not stop with the Commune or with any other outburst of popular indignation. It works subterraneanly in a thousand devious ways until the present hour. Wherever, under the impassioned enthusiasm of such words as Justice, Liberty, Equality, Reason, Nature, Love, self-idealising, self-worshipping, self-deceiving prophets of magnetic genius give way to their weaknesses, their perversities, their anti-social reactions, the vibrant nerves of the great citizen of Geneva may still be felt, quivering melodiously; touching us with the tremulousness of their anarchical revolt against everything hard and stern and strong.

Suppose for a moment that Rousseau were the equivocal pernicious influence, half-priest, half-pandar, half-charlatan, half-prophet of a world-disintegrating orgy of sentiment, should I for one, I am tempted to ask, close the gates of our platonic republic against him?

Not so! Let the world look to itself. Let the sheep-like crowd take the risks of its docility. Let the new bourgeois tyrants cuddle and cosset the serpent that shall bite them, as did the salon ladies of the old regime.

No! Let the world look to itself and let progress look to itself.

There seems something exhilarating about this possible appearance upon the earth of genuinely dangerous writers, of writers who exploit their vices, lay bare their weaknesses, brew intoxicating philtres of sweet poison out of their obsessions and lead humanity to the edge of the precipice! And there is something peculiarly stimulating to one's psychological intelligence when all this is done under the anaesthesia of humanitarian rhetoric and the lulling incantations of pastoral sentiment.

Rousseau is, in one very important sense, the pioneer of that art of delicate egoism in which the wisest epicureans of our day love to indulge. I refer to his mania for solitude, his self-conscious passion for nature. This feeling for nature was absolutely genuine in him and associates itself with all his amours and all his boldest speculations.

The interesting thing about it is that it takes the form of that vague, intimate magical rapport between our human souls and whatever mysterious soul lurks in the world around us, which has become in these recent days the predominant secret of imaginative poetry.

Not that Rousseau carries things as far as Wordsworth or Shelley. He is a born prose writer, not a poet. But for the very reason that he is writing prose, and writing it with a sentimental rather than a mystical bias, there are aspects of his work which have a simple natural *personal* appeal that the sublime imagination of the great spiritual poets must necessarily lack.

There is indeed about Rousseau's allusions to places and spots which had become dear to him from emotional association a lingering regretful tenderness, full of wistful memories and a vague tremulous yearning, which leaves upon the mind a feeling unlike that produced by any other writer. The subconscious music of his days seems at those times to rise from some hidden wells of emotion in him and overflow the world.

When he speaks of such places the mere admixture in his tone of the material sensuousness of the eighteenth century with something new and thrilling and different has itself an appealing charm. The blending of a self-conscious artificial, pastoral sentiment, redolent of the sophisticated Arcadias of Poussin and Watteau, and suggestive of the dairy-maid masquerades of Marie Antoinette in the gardens of Versailles, with a direct passionate simplicity almost worthy of some modern Russian, produces a unique and memorable effect upon a sympathetic spirit.

The mere fact that that incorrigible egoist and introspective epicurean, William Hazlitt, whose essays are themselves full of an ingratiating and engaging sensuousness, should have taken Rousseau as his special master and idealised him into a symbolic figure, is a proof of the presence in him of something subtle, arresting and unusual.

I always like to bring these recondite odours and intimations of delicate spiritual qualities down to the test of actual experience, and I am able to say that, through the help of Hazlitt's intuitive commentaries, the idea of Rousseau has twined itself around some of the pleasantest recollections of my life.

I can see at this moment as I pen these lines, a certain ditch-bordered path leading to a narrow foot-bridge across a river in Norfolk. I can recall the indescribable sensations which the purple spikes of loosestrife and the tall willow-herb, growing with green rushes, produced in my mind on a certain misty morning when the veiled future bowed toward me like a vision of promise and the dead past flew away over the fens like a flight of wild swans.

The image of Rousseau cherishing so tenderly every rose-tinged memory and every leafy oasis in his passionate pilgrimage, came to me then, as it comes to me now, a thing that no harsh blows of the world, no unkind turns of fate, no "coining of my soul for drachmas" can ever quite destroy.

There is, after all, a sort of spiritual second self, a sort of astral residuum left behind by a personality of this kind, which to certain natures becomes more sacred and suggestive than any of those tedious speculations or literary theories about which the historians may argue.

Most human beings — especially in these "centres of civilisation," which are more hideous than anything the sun has looked upon since it watched the mammoths tusking the frozen earth or the ichtheosauruses wallowing in the primeval mud — go through this life blindly, mechanically, unconsciously, fulfilling their duties, snatching at their pleasures, and shuddering at the thought of the end.

Few men and women seem really conscious of what it is to be alive, to be alive and endowed with imagination and memory, upon this time-battered planet. It needs perhaps the anti-social instincts of a true "philosophic anarchist" to detach oneself from the absorbing present and to win the larger perspective.

Rousseau was of so fluid, so irresponsible a temperament that he never could be brought to take seriously, to take as anything but as suggestive subjects for eloquent diatribes, the practical and domestic relations between human beings in organised society.

He played lightly with these relations, he laughed over them and wept over them, he wrote impassioned and dithyrambic orations upon them. But they were not his real life. His real life was the life he lived with his music and his botany and his love affairs, the life of his dreamy wanderings from refuge to refuge among the woods and chateaux of France; the life of his delicate memories and wistful regrets; the life of his thrilling indescribable thoughts, half sensual and half spiritual, as he drifted along the lonely roads and under the silent stars, or sat staring at the fire-light in his Paris attic while the city roared about him.

No lonely introspective spirit, withdrawn from the crowd and hating the voices of the world, can afford to lose touch with the secret of Rousseau; with what his self-centred and impassioned existence really meant.

We need not tease ourselves with his pious speculations, with his philanthropic oratory or his educational proposals. These can be left to those who are interested in such things. What we find arresting and suggestive in him, after this lapse of years, is a certain quality of personal passion, a certain vein of individual feeling, the touch of which still has a living power.

How interesting, for example, is that voluptuous desire of his to lay bare all his basest and meanest lusts, all his little tricks and devices and vanities and envies and jealousies. This mania for self-exposure, this frantic passion for self-laceration and self-humiliation is all of a piece with the manner in which he seemed to enjoy being ill-used and tyrannised over in his singular love-affairs.

More interesting still, and still more morbid, is that persecution mania which seized him in his later days — the mania that all the world loathed him and laughed at him and plotted to make a fool of him. Though betrayed into using the popular phrase, “persecution mania,” I am myself inclined to resent, on Rousseau’s behalf and on behalf of those who temperamentally resemble him, this cool assumption by the normal world that those whom it instinctively detests are “mad” when they grow aware of such detestation.

There seems no doubt that certain human beings appear at intervals on the world stage, whose sentient organisation, attuned to an abnormal receptivity, renders them alien and antagonistic to the masses of mankind.

They seem like creatures dropped upon the earth from some other planet, and, do what they may, they cannot grow “native and endued unto the element” of our terrestrial system. This difference in them is not only irritating to the normal herd; it is also provocative of bitter hostility in those among their contemporaries who are themselves possessed of genius.

These other wooers of posterity feel outraged and piqued to the limit of their endurance at having to contend in the same arena with an antagonist who seems to obey no human rules. “A conspiracy of silence” or of scandalous aspersions is almost instinctively set on foot.

Rousseau’s so-called mania of persecution can easily be explained. There was morbidity; there was neurotic unwisdom, in the manner in which he dealt with all these people. But he was probably perfectly right in assuming that they came to hate him.

In his Confessions he does his best to make posterity hate him; and in private life he must have been constantly, like one of those strange self-lacerating persons in Dostoievsky, bringing to the front, with shameless indecency, his vanities and jealousies, his weakness and his manias. When he couldn’t enjoy the society of some friendly lady — and his friends were nearly always uneasy under the infliction — he poured forth his childish petulances and his rare imaginations on the bosom, so to speak, of society in general; and society in general flung him back in wondering contempt.

His clever contemporaries would naturally, under the pressure of the moment, concentrate their critical attention upon the weakest part of his genius — that is to say upon his reforming theories and large world-shaking speculations — while the portion of him that interests us now would merely strike them as tiresome and irrelevant.

He grew more and more lonely as he neared his end. It might be said that he deserved this fate; he who refused to accept even the responsibility of paternity. But one cannot resist a certain satisfaction in noting how the high-placed society people who came to visit him as he sat in his attic, copying music for a livelihood, were driven from his door.

The great Sentimentalist must have had his exquisite memories, even then, as he sat brooding over his dull mechanical work, he whose burning eloquence about Liberty and Justice and Simplicity and Nature was already sowing the seed of the earthquake.

Queer memories he must have had of his early tramp life through the roads and villages of France; of his conversations with the sceptical Hume among the hills of Derbyshire; of his sweet romantic sojournings in old historic houses, and his strange passions and fatal loves. But the rarest of his memories must have been of those hours and days when, in the pastoral seclusion of some cherished hiding-place, he let the world go by and sank, among patient leaves and flowers that could not mock him, into his own soul and the soul of nature.

He has been hugely vituperated by evolutionary philosophers for his mania for the “age of gold” and his disbelief in progress.

One of his favourite themes that civilisation is a curse and not a blessing excited the derision of his best friends. Others said that he stole the idea.

But we may be sure that as he copied his daily portion of music with the civilisation of the Salons clamouring unheeded around him, his mind reverted rather to those exquisite moments when he had been happy alone, than to all the triumphs of his genius.

He was just the type that the world would naturally persecute. Devoid of any sparkling wit, devoid of any charm of manner, singularly devoid of the least sense of proportion, he lent himself to every sort of social rancour. He was one of those persons who take themselves seriously, and that, in his world as in the world of our own time, was an unpardonable fault.

He loved humanity better than men and women. He loved nature better than humanity.

He was a man with little sense of humour and with little interest in other men. He lived for his memories and his dreams, his glimpses and his visions.

Turning away from all dogmatic creeds, he yet sought God and prayed to him for his mercy.

Born into a world whose cleverness he dreaded, whose institutions he loathed, whose angers he provoked, whose authorities he scandalised, whose crowds he hated, he went aside "botanizing" and "copying music"; every now and then hurling forth from his interludes of sentimental journeying a rhythmical torrent of eloquent prophecy in which he himself only half believed and of which, quite often, "the idea was stolen."

In his abnormal receptivity, he was used as a reed for the invisible powers to blow their wild tunes through and to trouble the earth. He produced one great Revolution, and he may, through the medium of souls like his own, produce another; but all the time his real happiness was in his wanderings by field and hedge and road and lane, by canal side and by river bank, thinking the vague delicious thoughts of sensuous solitude and dreaming over the dumb quiescence of that mute inanimate background of our days into which, with his exasperated human nerves, he longed to sink and be at rest.

BALZAC

THE REAL VALUE of the creations of men of genius is to make richer and more complicated what might be called the imaginative margin of our normal life.

We all, as Goethe says, have to bear the burden of humanity — we have to plunge into the bitter waters of reality, so full of sharp rocks and blinding spray. We have to fight for our own hand. We have to forget that we so much as possess a soul as we tug and strain at the resistant elements out of which we live and help others to live.

It is nonsense to pretend that the insight of philosophers and the energy of artists help us very greatly in this bleak wrestling. They are there, these men of genius, securely lodged in the Elysian fields of large and free thoughts — and we are here, sweating and toiling in the dust of brutal facts.

The hollow idealism that pretends that the achievements of literature and thought enter profoundly into the diurnal necessity which prods us forward is a plausible and specious lie. We do not learn how to deal craftily and prosperously with the world from the Machiavels and Talleyrands. We do not learn how to love the world and savour it with exquisite joy from the Whitmans and Emersons. What we do is to struggle on, as best we may; living by custom, by prejudice, by hope, by fear, by envy and jealousy, by ambition, by vanity, by love.

They call it our "environment," this patched up and piecemeal panorama of mad chaotic blunderings, which pushes us hither and thither; and they call it our "heredity," this confused and twisted amalgam of greeds and lusts and conscience-stricken reactions, which drives us backward and forward from within. But there is more in the lives of the most wretched of us than this blind struggle.

There are those invaluable, unutterable moments, which we have *to ourselves,* free of the weight of the world. There are the moments — the door of our bedroom, of our attic, of our ship's cabin, of our monastic cell, of our tenement-flat, shut against the intruder — when we can enter the company of the great shadows and largely and freely converse with them to the forgetting of all vexation.

At such times, it is to the novelists, to the inventors of stories, that we most willingly turn for the poppied draught that we crave. The poets hurt us with the pang of too dear beauty. They remind us too pitifully of what we have missed. There is too much Rosemary which is "for remembrance" about their songs; too many dead violets between their leaves!

But on the large full tide of a great human romance, we can forget all our troubles. We can live in the lives of people who resemble ourselves and yet are not ourselves. We can put our own misguided life into the sweet distance, and see it — it also — as an invented story; a story that may yet have a fortunate ending!

The philosophers and even the poets are too anxious to convert us to their visions and their fancies. There is the fatal odour of the prophet in their perilous rhetoric, and they would fain lay their most noble fingers upon our personal matters. They want to make us moral or immoral. They want to thrust their mysticism, their materialism, their free love, or their imprisoned thoughts, down our reluctant throats.

But the great novelists are up to no such mischief; they are dreaming of no such outrage. They are telling their stories of the old eternal dilemmas; stories of love and hate and fear and wonder and madness; stories of life and death and strength and weakness and perversion; stories of loyalty and treachery, of angels and devils, of things seen and things unseen. The greatest novelists are not the ones that deal in sociological or ethical problems. They are the ones that make us forget sociological and ethical problems. They are the ones that deal with the beautiful, mad, capricious, reckless, tyrannous passions, which will outlast all social systems and are beyond the categories of all ethical theorising.

First of all the arts of the world was, they say, the art of dancing. The aboriginal cave-men, we are to believe, footed it in their long twilights to tunes played on the bones of mammoths. But I like to fancy, I who have no great love for this throwing abroad of legs and arms, that there were a few quiet souls, even in those days, who preferred to sit on their haunches and listen to some hoary greybeard tell stories, stories I suppose of what it was like in still earlier days, when those lumbering Diplodocuses were still snorting in the remoter marshes.

It was not, as a matter of fact, in any attic or ship's cabin that I read the larger number of Balzac's novels. I am not at all disinclined to explain exactly and precisely where it was, because I cannot help feeling that the way we poor slaves of work manage to snatch an hour's pleasure, and the little happy accidents of place and circumstance accompanying such pleasure, are a noteworthy part of the interest of our experience. It was, as it happens, in a cheerful bow-window in the Oxford High Street that I read most of Balzac; read him in the dreamy half-light of late summer afternoons while the coming on of evening seemed delayed by something golden in the drowsy air which was more than the mere sinking of the sun behind the historic roofs.

Oxford is not my Alma Mater. The less courtly atmosphere which rises above the willows and poplars of the Cam nourished my youthful dreams;

and I shall probably to my dying day never quite attain the high nonchalant aloofness from the common herd proper to a true scholar.

It was in the humbler capacity of a summer visitor that I found myself in those exclusive purlieus, and it amuses me now to recall how I associated, as one does in reading a great romance, the personages of the Human Comedy with what surrounded me then.

It is a far cry from the city of Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater to the city of Vautrin and Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré and Gobsec and Père Goriot and Diane de Maufrigneuse; and the great Balzacian world has the power of making every other milieu seem a little faded and pallid. But one got a delicious sense of contrast reading him just there in those golden evenings, and across the margin of one's mind floated rich and thrilling suggestions of the vast vistas of human life. One had the dreamy pleasure that some sequestered seminarist might have, who, on a sunny bench, under high monastic walls, reads of the gallantries and adventures of the great ungodly world outside.

Certainly the heavy avalanches of scoriac passion which rend their way through the pages of the Human Comedy make even the graceful blasphemies of the Oscar Wilde group, in those fastidious enclosures, seem a babyish pretence of naughtiness.

I remember how I used to return after long rambles through those fields and village lanes which one reads about in "Thyrsis," and linger in one of the cavernous book-shops which lie — like little Bodleians of liberal welcome — anywhere between New College and Balliol, hunting for Balzac in the original French. Since then I have not been able to endure to read him in any edition except in that very cheapest one, in dusty green paper, with the pages always so resistently uncut and tinted with a peculiar brownish tint such as I have not seemed to find in any other volumes. What an enormous number of that particular issue there must be in Paris, if one can find so many of them still, sun-bleached and weather-stained, in the old book-shops of Oxford!

Translations of Balzac, especially in those “editions de luxe” with dreadful interpretative prefaces by English professors, are odious to me. They seem the sort of thing one expects to find under glass-cases in the houses of cultured financiers. They are admirably adapted for wedding presents. And they have illustrations! That is really too much. A person who can endure to read Balzac, or any other great imaginative writer, in an edition with illustrations, is a person utterly outside the pale. It must be for barbarians of this sort that the custom has arisen of having handsome young women, representing feminine prettiness in general, put upon the covers of books in the way they put them upon chocolate boxes. I have seen even “Tess of the d’Urbervilles” prostituted in this manner. It is all on a par with every other aspect of modern life. Indeed it may be said that what chiefly distinguishes our age from previous ages is its habit of leaving nothing to the imagination.

On the whole, Balzac must still be regarded as the greatest novelist that ever lived. Not to love Balzac is not to love the art of fiction, not to love the huge restorative pleasure of wandering at large through a vast region of imaginary characters set in localities and scenes which may be verified and authenticated by contact with original places.

I would flatly refuse to two classes of persons, at any rate, any claim to be regarded as genuine lovers of fiction. The first class are those who want nothing but moral support and encouragement. These are still under the illusion that Balzac is a wicked writer. The second class are those who want nothing but neurotic excitement and tingling sensual thrills. These are under the illusion that Balzac is a dull writer.

There is yet a third class to whom I refuse the name of lovers of fiction. These are the intellectual and psychological maniacs who want nothing but elaborate social and personal problems, the elucidation of which may throw scientific light upon anthropological evolution. Well! We have George Eliot to supply the need of the first; the author of “Homo Sapiens” to supply the need of the second; and Paul Bourget to deal with the last.

It is difficult not to extend our refusal of the noble title of real Fiction-Lovers to the whole modern generation. The frivolous craze for short books and short stories is a proof of this.

The unfortunate illusion which has gone abroad of late that a thing to be “artistic” must be concise and condensed and to the point, encourages this heresy. I would add these “artistic” persons with their pedantry of condensation and the “exact phrase” to all the others who don’t really love this large and liberal art. To a genuine fiction-lover a book cannot be too long. What causes such true amorists of imaginative creation real suffering is when a book comes to an end. It can never be enjoyed again with quite the same relish, with quite the same glow and thrill and ecstasy.

To listen to certain fanatics of the principle of unity is to get the impression that these mysterious “artistic qualities” are things that may be thrust into a work from outside, after a careful perusal of, shall we say, Flaubert’s Letters to Madame Something-or-other, or a course of studies of the Short Story at Columbia University. Chop the thing quite clear of all “surplusage and irrelevancy”; chop it clear of all “unnecessary detail”; chop the descriptions and chop the incidents; chop the characters; “chop it and pat it and mark it with T,” as the nursery rhyme says, “and put it in the oven for Baby and me!” It is an impertinence, this theory, and an insult to natural human instincts.

Art is not a “hole and corner” thing, an affair of professional preciosities and discriminations, a set of tiresome rules to be learned by rote.

Art is the free play of generous and creative imaginations with the life-blood of the demiurgic forces of the universe in their veins. There is a large and noble joy in it, a magnanimous nonchalance and aplomb, a sap, an ichor, a surge of resilient suggestion, a rich ineffable magic, a royal liberality.

Devoid of the energy of a large and free imagination, art dwindles into an epicene odalisque, a faded minion of pleasure in a perfumed garden. It becomes the initiatory word of an exclusive Rosicrucian order. It becomes the amulet of an affected superiority, the signet ring of a masquerading conspiracy.

The habitation of the spirit of true art is the natural soul of man, as it has been from the beginning and as it will be to the end. The soul of man has depths which can only be fathomed by an art which breaks every rule of the formalists and transgresses every technical law.

The mere fact that the kind of scrupulous artistry advocated by these pedants of “style” is a kind that can be defined in words at all writes its own condemnation upon it. For the magical evocations of true genius are beyond definition.

As Goethe says the important thing in all great art is just what cannot be put in words. Those who would seek so to confine it are the bunglers who have missed the mark themselves, and “they like” — the great critic adds malignantly— “they like to be together.”

The so-called rules of technique are nothing when you come to analyse them but a purely empirical and pragmatic deduction from the actual practise of the masters. And every new master creates new laws and a new taste capable of appreciating these new laws. There is no science of art.

These modern critics, with their cult of “the unique phrase” and the “sharply defined image,” are just as intolerant as the old judicial authorities whose prestige they scout; just as intolerant and just as unilluminating.

It is to the *imagination* we must go for a living appreciation of genius, and many quite simple persons possess this, to whom the jargon of the studios is empty chatter.

No human person has a right to say “Balzac ought to have put more delicacy, more subtlety into his style,” or to say, “Balzac ought to have eliminated those long descriptions.” Balzac is Balzac; and that ends it. If you prefer the manner of Henry James, by all means read him and let the other alone.

There is such a thing as the mere absence of what the “little masters” call style being itself a quite definite style.

A certain large and colourless fluidity of manner is often the only medium through which a vision of the world can be expressed at all; a vision, that is to say, of a particular kind, with the passion of it carried to a particular intensity.

In America, at this present time, the work of Mr. Theodore Dreiser is an admirable example of this sort of thing. Mr. Dreiser, it must be admitted, goes even beyond Balzac in his contempt for the rules; but just as none of the literary goldsmiths of France convey to us the flavour of Paris as Balzac does, so none of the clever writers of America convey to us the flavour of America as Mr. Dreiser does.

Indeed I am ready to confess that I have derived much light in regard to my feeling for the demonic energy of the great Frenchman from watching the methods of this formidable American. I discern in Mr. Dreiser the same obstinate tenacity of purpose, the same occult perception of subterranean forces, the same upheaving, plough-like “drive” through the materials of life and character.

Balzac is undoubtedly the greatest purely creative genius that has ever dealt with the art of fiction. It is astonishing to realise how entirely the immense teeming world through which he leads us is the product of unalloyed imagination.

Experience has its place in the art of literature; it would be foolish to deny it; but the more one contemplates the career of Balzac the more evident does it become that his art is the extreme opposite of the art of the document-hunters and the chroniclers.

The life which he habitually and continually led was the life of the imagination. He lived in Paris. He knew its streets, its tradesmen, its artists, its adventurers, its aristocratic and its proletarian demi-monde.

He came from the country and he knew the country; its peasants, its farmers, its provincial magnates, its village tyrants, its priests, its doctors, its gentlemen of leisure.

But when one comes to calculate the enormous number of hours he spent over his desk, night after night, and day after day, one comes to see that there was really very scant margin left for the conscious collecting of material. The truth is he lived an abnormally sedentary life. Had he gone about a little more he would probably have lived much longer. The flame of his genius devoured him, powerful and titanic though his bodily appearance was, and unbounded though his physical energy. He *lived by the imagination* as hardly another writer has ever done and his reward is that, as long as human imagination interests itself in the panorama of human affairs, his stories will remain thrilling. How little it really matters whether this story or the other rounds itself off in the properly approved way!

Personally I love to regard all the stories of Balzac as one immense novel — of some forty volumes — dealing with the torrential life of the human race itself as it roars and eddies in its huge turbulency with France and Paris for a background. I am largely justified in this view of Balzac's work by his own catholic and comprehensive title — The Human Comedy — suggestive certainly of a sort of uniting thread running through the whole mass of his productions. I am also justified by his trick of introducing again and again the same personages; a device which I daresay is profoundly irritating to the modern artistic mind, but which is certainly most pleasing to the natural human instinct.

This alone, this habit of introducing the same people in book after book, is indicative of how Balzac belongs to the company of the great natural story-tellers. A real lover of a story wants it to go on forever; wants nobody in it ever to die; nobody in it ever to disappear; nobody in it ever to round things off or complete his life's apprenticeship, with a bow to the ethical authorities, in that annoying way of so many modern writers.

No wonder Oscar Wilde wept whenever he thought of the death of Lucien de Rubempré. Lucien should have been allowed at least one more "avatar." That is one of the things that pleases me so much in that old ten-penny paper edition published by the great Paris house. We have a list of the characters in the index, with all their other appearances on the stage; just exactly as if it were real life! It was all real enough at any rate to Balzac himself, according to that beautiful tale of how he turned away from some troublesome piece of personal gossip with the cry:

"Come back to actualities! Come back to my books!"

And in the old ideal platonic sense it *is* the true reality, this reproduction of life through the creative energy of the imagination.

The whole business of novel writing lies in two things; in the creating of exciting situations and imaginatively suggestive characters — and in making these situations and characters *seem real.*

They need not be dragged directly forth from personal experiences. One grows to resent the modern tendency to reduce everything to autobiographical reminiscence. These histories of free-thinking young men breaking loose from their father's authority and running amuck among Paris studios and Leicester Square actresses become tedious and banal after a time. Such sordid piling up of meticulous detail, drawn so obviously from the writer's own adventures, throws a kind of grey dust over one's interest in the narrative.

One's feeling simply is that it is all right and all true; that just in this casual chaotic sort of way the impact of life has struck oneself as one drifted along. But there is no more in it than a clever sort of intellectual photography, no more in it than a more or less moralised version of the ordinary facts of an average person's life-story.

One is tempted to feel that, after all, there is a certain underlying justification for the man in the street's objection to this kind of so-called "realism." We have a right after all to demand of art something more than a clever reproduction of the experiences we have undergone. We have a right to demand something creative, something exceptional, something imaginative, something that lifts us out of ourselves and our ordinary environments, something that has *deep holes* in it that go down into unfathomable mystery, something that has vistas, horizons, large and noble perspectives, breadth, sweep, and scope.

The truth is that these grey psychological histories of typical young persons, drearily revolting against dreary conventions, are, in a deep and inherent sense, false to the mystery of life.

One feels certain that even the clever people who write them have moods and impulses far more vivid and thrilling, far more abnormal and bizarre, than they have the audacity to put into their work. A sort of perverted Puritanism restrains them. They have the diseased conscience of modern art, and they think that nothing can be true which is not draggle-tailed and nothing can be real which is not petty and unstimulating. And all the while the maddest, beautifulest fantasticalest things are occurring every day, and every day the great drunken gods are tossing the crazy orb of our fate from hand to hand and making it shine with a thousand iridescent hues! The natural man takes refuge from these people's drab perversions of the outrageous reality, in the sham wonders of meretricious romances which are not real at all.

What we cry out for is something that shall have about it the liberating power of the imagination and yet be able to convince us of its reality. We need an imaginative realism. We need a romanticism which has its roots in the solid earth. We need, in fact, precisely what Balzac brings.

So far from finding anything tedious or irksome in the heavy massing up of animate and inanimate back-grounds which goes on all the while in Balzac's novels, I find these things most germane to the matter. What I ask from a book is precisely this huge weight of formidable verisimilitude which shall surround me on all sides and give firm ground for my feet to walk on. I love it when a novel is thick with the solid mass of earth-life, and when its passions spring up volcano-like from flaming pits and bleeding craters of torn and convulsed materials. I demand and must have in a book a four-square sense of life-illusion, a rich field for my imagination to wander in at large, a certain quantity of blank space, so to speak, filled with a huge litter of things that are not tiresomely pointing to the projected issue.

I hold the view that in the larger aspects of the creative imagination there is room for many free margins and for many materials that are not slavishly symbolic. I protest from my heart against this tyrannous “artistic conscience” which insists that every word “should tell” and every object and person referred to be of “vital importance” in the evolution of the “main theme.”

I maintain that in the broad canvas of a nobler, freer art there is ample space for every kind of digression and by-issue. I maintain that the mere absence of this self-conscious vibrating pressure upon one string gives to a book that amplitude, that nonchalance, that huge friendly discursiveness, which enables us to breathe and loiter and move around and see the characters from all sides — from behind as well as from in front! The constant playing upon that one string of a symbolic purpose or a philosophical formula seems to me to lead invariably to a certain attenuation and strain. The imagination grows weary under repeated blows upon the same spot. We long to debouch into some path that leads nowhere. We long to meet some one who is interesting in himself and does nothing to carry anything along.

Art of this tiresomely technical kind can be taught to any one. If this were all — if this were the one thing needful — we might well rush off en masse to the lecture-rooms and acquire the complete rules of the Short Story. Luckily for our pleasant hours there is still, in spite of everything, a certain place left for what we call genius in the manufacture of books; a place left for that sudden thrilling lift of the whole thing to a level where the point of the interest is not in the mere accidents of one particular plot but in the vast stream of the mystery of life itself.

Among the individual volumes of the Human Comedy, I am inclined to regard “Lost Illusions” — of which there are two volumes in that ten-penny edition — as the finest of all, and no one who has read that book can forget the portentous weight of realistic background with which it begins.

After “Lost Illusions” I would put “Cousin Bette” as Balzac’s masterpiece, and, after that, “A Bachelor’s Establishment.” But I lay no particular stress upon these preferences. With the exception of such books as “The Wild Ass’s Skin” and the “Alkahest” and “Seraphita,” the bulk of his work has a sort of continuous interest which one would expect in a single tremendous prose epic dealing with the France of his age.

Balzac’s most remarkable characteristic is a sort of exultant reveling in every kind of human passion, in every species of desire or greed or ambition or obsession which gives a dignity and a tragic grandeur to otherwise prosaic lives. There is a kind of subterranean torrent of blind primeval energy running through his books which focusses itself in a thick smouldering fuliginous eruption when the moment or the occasion arises. The “will to power,” or whatever else you may call it, has never been more terrifically exposed. I cannot but feel that as a portrayer of such a “will to power” among the obstinate, narrow, savage personages of small provincial towns, no one has approached Balzac.

Here, in his country scenes, he is a supreme master; and the tough, resistant fibre of his slow-moving, massively egotistic provincials, with their backgrounds of old houses full of wicked secrets and hoarded wealth, lends itself especially well to his brooding materialistic imagination, ready to kindle under provocation into crackling and licking flames.

His imagination has transformed, for me at least, the face of more than one country-side. Coming in on a windy November evening, through muddy lanes and sombre avenues of the outskirts of any country town, how richly, how magically, the lights in the scattered high walled houses and the faces seen at the windows, suggest the infinite possibilities of human life!

The sound of wheels upon cobblestones, as the street begins and as the spire of the church rises over the moaning branches of its leafless elm-trees has a meaning for me now, since I have read Balzac, different from what it had before. Is that muffled figure in the rumbling cart which passes me so swiftly the country doctor or the village priest, summoned to the death-bed of some notorious atheist? Is the slender white hand which closes those heavy shutters in that gloomy house the hand of some heart-broken Eugenie, desolately locking herself up once more, for another lonely night, with her sick hopes and her sacred memories?

I feel as though no one but Balzac has expressed the peculiar brutality, thick, impervious, knotted and fibrous like the roots of the tree-trunks at his gate, of the small provincial farmer in England as well as in France.

I am certain no one but Balzac — except it be some of the rougher, homelier Dutch painters — has caught the spirit of those mellow, sensual "interiors" of typical country houses, with their mixture of grossness and avarice and inveterate conservatism; where an odour of centuries of egotism emanates from every piece of furniture against the wall and from every gesture of every person seated over the fire! One is plunged indeed into the dim, sweet, brutal heart of reality here, and the imagination finds starting places for its wanderings from the mere gammons of dried bacon hanging from the smoky rafters and the least gross repartee and lewd satyrish jest of the rustic Grangousier and Gargamelle who quaff their amber-coloured cider under the flickering of candles.

If he did not pile up his descriptions of old furniture, old warehouses, old barns, old cellars, old shops, old orchards and old gardens, this thick human atmosphere — overlaid, generation after generation, by the sensual proclivities of the children of the earth — would never possess the unction of verisimilitude which it has.

If he were all the while fussing about his style in the exhausting Flaubert manner, the rich dim reek of all this time-mellowed humanity would never strike our senses as it does. Thus much one can see quite clearly from reading de Maupassant, Flaubert's pupil, whose stark and savage strokes of clean-cut visualisation never attain the imaginative atmosphere or Rabelaisian aplomb of Balzac's rural scenes.

But supreme as he is in his provincial towns and villages, one cannot help associating him even more intimately with the streets and squares and river banks of Paris.

I suppose Balzac has possessed himself of Paris and has ransacked and ravished its rare mysteries more completely than any other writer.

I once stayed in a hotel called the Louis le Grand in the Rue Louis le Grand, and I shall never forget the look of a certain old Parisian Banking-House, now altered into some other building, which was visible through the narrow window of my high-placed room. That very house is definitely mentioned somewhere in the Human Comedy; but mentioned or not, its peculiar Balzacian air, crowded round by sloping roofs and tall white houses, brought all the great desperate passionate scenes into my mind.

I saw old Goriot crying aloud upon his "unkind daughters." I saw Baron Hulot dragged away from the beseeching eyes and clinging arms of his last little inamorata to the bedside of his much wronged wife. I saw the Duchesse de Langeais, issuing forth from the chamber of her victim-victor, pale and tragic, and with love and despair in her heart.

It is the thing that pleases me most in the stories of Paul Bourget that he has continued the admirable Balzacian tradition of mentioning the Paris streets and localities by their historic names, and of giving circumstantial colour and body to his inventions by thus placing them in a milieu which one can traverse any hour of the day, recalling the imaginary scenes as if they were not imaginary, and reviving the dramatic issues as if they were those of real people.

A favourite objection to Balzac among aesthetic critics is that his aristocratic scenes are lacking in true refinement, lacking in the genuine air and grace of such fastidious circles. I do not give a fig for that criticism. To try and limit a great imaginative spirit, full of passionate fantasy and bizarre inventions, to the precise and petty reproduction of the tricks of any particular class seems to me a piece of impertinent pedantry. It might just as well be said that Shakespeare's lords and ladies were not euphuistic enough. I protest against this attempt to turn a Napoleonic superman of literature, with a head like that head which Rodin has so admirably recalled for us, into a bourgeois chronicler of bourgeois mediocrities.

Balzac's characters, to whatever class they belong, bear the royal and passionate stamp of their demiurgic creator. They all have a certain magnificence of gesture, a certain intensity of tone, a certain concentrated fury of movement.

There is something tremendous and awe-inspiring about the task Balzac set himself and the task he achieved.

One sees him drinking his black coffee in those early hours of the morning, wrapped in his dressing-gown, and with a sort of clouded Vulcanian grandeur about him, hammering at his population of colossal figures amid the smouldering images of his cavernous brain. He was wise to work in those hours when the cities of men sleep and the tides of life run low; at those hours when the sick find it easiest to die and the pulses of the world's heart are scarcely audible. There was little at such times to obstruct his imagination. He could work "in the void," and the spirit of his genius could brood over untroubled waters.

There was something formidable and noble in the way he drove all light and casual loves, the usual recreations of men of literary talent, away from his threshold. Like some primordial Prometheus, making men out of mud and fire, he kept the perilous worshippers of Aphrodite far-distant from the smoke of his smithy, and refused to interrupt his cosmic labour for the sake of dalliance.

That high imaginative love of his — itself like one of the great passions he depicts — which ended, in its unworthy fulfilment, by dragging him down to the earth, was only one other proof of how profoundly cerebral and psychic that demonic force was which drove the immense engine of his energy.

It is unlikely that, as the world progresses and the generations of the artists follow one another and go their way, there will be another like him.

Such primal force, capable of evoking a whole world of passionate living figures, comes only once or twice in the history of a race. There will be thousands of cleverer psychologists, thousands of more felicitous stylists, thousands of more exact copiers of reality.

There will never be another Balzac.

VICTOR HUGO

MY FIRST NOTIONS of Victor Hugo were associated with the sea. It was from the old Weymouth harbour that as a child I used to watch those Channel-Island steamers with red funnels setting forth on what seemed to me in those days a wondrous voyage of mystery and peril. I read “The Toilers of the Sea” at my inland school at Mr. Hardy’s Sherton Abbas; whither, it may be remembered, poor Giles Winterbourne set off with such trembling anxiety to fetch home his Grace.

I read it in what was probably a very quaint sort of translation. The book was bound in that old-fashioned “yellow back” style which at that time was considered in clergymen’s families as a symbol of all that was dissipated and dangerous; and on the outside of the yellow cover was a positively terrifying picture of the monstrous devilfish with which Gellert wrestled in that terrible sea-cavern.

Certain scenes in that romance lodged themselves in my brain with diabolic intensity. That scene, for instance, when the successful scoundrel, swimming in the water, “feels himself seized by one foot,” that scene where the man buys the revolver in the little gunsmith’s shop; that appalling scene at the end where Gellert drowns himself, watching the ship that bears his love away to happiness in the arms of another — all these held my imagination then, as indeed they hold it still, with the vividness of personal experience.

It was long after this, not more than five or six years ago in fact, that I read “Notre Dame de Paris.” This book I secured from the ship’s library of some transatlantic liner and the fantastic horrors it contains, carried to a point of almost intolerable melodrama, harmonised well enough with the nightly thud of the engines and the daylong staring at the heaving water.

"Notre Dame" is certainly an amazing book. If it were not for the presence of genius in it, that ineffable all-redeeming quality, it would be one of the most outrageous inventions of flagrant sensationalism ever indulged in by the morbidity of man. But genius pervades it from beginning to end; pervades even its most impossible scenes; and on the whole I think it is a much more arresting tale than, say, "The Count of Monte Cristo," or any of Dumas' works except "The Three Musketeers."

I have never, even as a child, cared greatly for Dumas, and I discern in the attitude of the persons who persist in preferring him to Victor Hugo the presence of a temperamental cult so alien to my own that I am tempted to regard it as no better than an affected pose.

Nowhere is Victor Hugo's genius more evident than in his invention of names. Esmeralda, Quasimodo, Gellert, Cosette, Fantine — they all have that indescribable ring of genuine romance about them which more than anything else restores to us the "long, long thoughts" of youth.

I think that Fantine is the most beautiful and imaginative name ever given to any woman. It is far more suggestive of wild and delicate mysteries than Fragoletta or Dolores or Charmian or Ianthe.

I am inclined to maintain that it is in the sphere of pure poetic imagination that Victor Hugo is greatest; though, like so many other foreigners, I find it difficult to read his formal poetry. It is, I fancy, this poetic imagination of his which makes it possible for him to throw his isolated scenes into such terrific relief that they lodge themselves in one's brain with such crushing force. In all his books it is the separate individual scenes of which one finds oneself thinking as one recalls the progress of this narrative or the other. And when he has struck out with a few vivid lightning-like flashes the original lineaments of one of his superb creations, it is rather in separate and detached scenes that he makes such a person’s indelible characteristics gleam forth from the surrounding darkness, than in any continuous psychological process of development.

His psychology is the psychology of a child; but none the worse perhaps for that; for it is remarkable how often the most exhaustive psychological analysis misses the real mystery of human character. Victor Hugo goes to work by illuminating flashes. He carries a flaring torch in his hand; and every now and then he plunges it into the caverns of the human heart, and one is conscious of vast stupendous Shadows, moving from midnight to midnight.

His method is gnomic, laconic, oracular; never persuasive or plausible. It is “Lo — here” and then again “Lo — there!” and we are either with him or not with him. There are no half measures, no slow evolutionary disclosures.

One of his most interesting literary devices, and it is an essentially poetic one, is the diffusion through the story of some particular background, a background which gathers to itself a sort of brooding personality as the tale proceeds, and often becomes before the book is finished far more arresting and important than any of the human characters whose drama it dominates.

Such is the sea itself, for instance, in “The Toilers.” Such is the historic cathedral in “Notre Dame.” Such is the great Revolution — certainly a kind of natural cataclysm — in “Ninety-three.” Such are the great sewers of Paris in “Les Misérables.” Such — though it is rather a symbol than a background — is the terrible fixed smile of the unfortunate hero in “L’Homme qui Rit.”

It is one of the most curious and interesting phenomena in the history of literature, this turning of a poet into a writer of romances, romances which have at least as much if not more of the poetic quality in them than the orthodox poetry of the same hand.

One is led to wonder what kind of stories Swinburne would have written had he debouched into this territory, or what would have been the novels conceived by Tennyson. Thomas Hardy began with poetry and has returned to poetry; and one cannot help feeling that it is more than anything else the absence of this quality in the autobiographical studies of sex and character which the younger writers of our day spin out that makes them after a time seem so sour and flat.

It is the extravagance of the poetic temper and its lack of proportion which leads to some of the most glaring of Victor Hugo's faults; and it is the oracular, prophetic, gnomic tone of his genius which causes those queer gaps and rents in his work and that fantastic arbitrariness which makes it difficult for him to evoke any rational or organic continuity.

It is an aspect of the poetic temper too, the queer tricks which the humour of Victor Hugo will condescend to play. I suppose he is by nature the least endowed with a sense of humour of all the men of genius who have ever lived. The poet Wordsworth had more. But like so many poetic natures, whose vivid imagination lends itself to every sort of human reaction, even to those not really indigenous, Victor Hugo cannot resist in indulging in freakish sallies of jocularity which sometimes become extraordinarily strained and forced, and even remind one now and then of the horrible mechanical smile on the countenance of the mutilated man in his own story.

Poet-like too is the portentous pedantry of his archaeological vein; the stupendous air of authority with which he raps out his classical quotations and his historic allusions. He is capable sometimes of producing upon the mind the effect of a hilarious school-master cracking his learned jokes to an audience only too willing to encourage him. At other times, so bizarre and out of all human proportion are his fantasies, one receives an impression as if one of the great granite effigies representing Liberty or Equality or the Rights of Man, from the portico of some solemn Palais de Justice, had suddenly yielded to the temptation of drink and was uttering the most amazing levities. Victor Hugo in his lighter vein is really, we must honestly confess, a somewhat disconcerting companion. One has such respect for the sublime imaginations which one knows are lurking behind “that cliff-like brow” that one struggles to find some sort of congruity in these strange gestures. It is as though when walking by the side of some revered prophet, one were suddenly conscious that the man was skipping or putting out his tongue. It is as though we caught Ajax masquerading as a mummer, or Aeschylus dressed up in cap and bells.

There are persons who interest themselves still in Victor Hugo’s political attitudes, in his orations on the balcony of the Hotel de Ville; in his theatrical visits to the barricades where “he could be shot, but could not shoot”; in his diatribes against Napoleon the Third; in his defence of the Commune from the safe remoteness of Brussels. There are persons who suffer real disillusion when they discover how much of a conservative and a courtier he was in his youth. There are persons who are thrilled to recall how he carried his solemn vengeance against his imperial enemy so far as to rebuke in stern language Queen Victoria for her friendliness towards the Empress.

I must confess I find it difficult to share these emotions. I seem to smell the foot-lights of the opera in these heroic declamations, and indeed poor Napoleon the Little was himself so much of an operatic hero that to exalt him into a classic tyrant seems little short of ridiculous.

We derive a much truer picture of Victor Hugo's antagonist from Disraeli's "Endymion" than we do from the poet's torrential invectives. I have a shrewd idea that the Emperor was a good deal more amiable, if not more philosophical, than his eloquent judge.

Victor Hugo was an impassioned lover of children. Who can forget those scenes in "Les Misérables" about little Cosette and the great wonderful doll which Valjean gave her? He loved children and — for all his lack of humour; sometimes I think because of it — he thoroughly understood them. He loved children and he was a child himself.

No one but a child would have behaved as he did on certain occasions. The grave naiveté of his attitude to the whole spectacle of life was like the solemnity of a child who takes very seriously every movement of the game which he is playing. A child is solemn when it is pretending to be an engine-driver or a pilot, and Victor Hugo was solemn when he pretended to be a saviour of society. No one but a person endowed with the perfect genius of childishness could have acted toward his mistress and his wife in the way he did, or have been so serenely blind to the irony of the world.

There is as little of the sensual in Victor Hugo's temperament as there is in the temperament of a pure-minded child; but like a child he finds a shuddering pleasure in approaching the edge of the precipice; like a child he loves to loiter in melancholy fields where the white moon-daisies are queerly stained with the old dark blood of weird and abnormal memories.

Irony of any kind, worldly or otherwise, never crossed so much as the margin of his consciousness. He is shamelessly, indecently, monstrously lacking in the ironic sense.

"What are we going to do?" he dramatically asked his sons when they had established themselves in their island home; and after they had each replied according to their respective tastes, “I,” he added, “am going to contemplate the ocean!”

I am ready to confess that I feel a certain shame in thus joining the company of the godless and making sport of my childhood’s hero. “He was a man, take him for all in all,” and *we* at any rate shall not live to see his like again.

There was something genuinely large and innocent and elemental in Victor Hugo. The austere simplicity of his life may have been perhaps too self-consciously flung at the world’s face; but it was a natural instinct in him. I hesitate to call him a charlatan. Was it Goethe who said “There is something of charlatanism in all genius”? Victor Hugo hardly deserves to have Goethe quoted in his favour, so ignorantly did he disparage, in his childish prejudice, the great German’s work; but what perhaps the world calls charlatanism in him is really only the reaction of genius when it comes into conflict with the brutal obstinacy of real life.

What is charlatanism? I am almost scared to look up the word in the dictionary for fear of discovering that I am myself no better than that opprobrious thing. But still, if Victor Hugo was really a charlatan, one can safely say one would sooner be damned with the author of “L’Homme qui Rit” than saved with many who have no charlatanism in them.

But what is charlatanism? Does it imply false and extravagant claims to qualities we do not possess? Or is there the spirit of the Mountebank in it? If one were a deliberate Machiavel of dissimulation, if one fooled the people thoroughly and consciously, would one be a charlatan? Or are charlatans simply harmless fools who are too embarrassed to confess their ignorance and too childish to stop pretending?

There is something nobly patriarchal about the idea of Victor Hugo in his old age. The man’s countenance has certainly extraordinary genius “writ large” there for all men to see. His head is like something that has been carved by Michelangelo. Looking at his face one realises where the secret of his peculiar genius lay. It lay in a certain tragic abandonment to a sublime struggle with the elements. When in his imagination he wrestled with the elements he forgot his politics, his prejudices, his moral bravado.

Whatever this mysterious weakness may have been which we call his “charlatanism,” it certainly dropped away from him like a mask when he confronted the wind or sea or such primitive forms of human tragedy as are elemental in their simple outlines. Probably for all his rhetoric Victor Hugo would have made an obstinate invincible sailor on the high seas. I discern in the shape of his head something of the look of weather-beaten mariners. I can fancy him holding fast the rudder of a ship flying before the fury of an Atlantic storm.

The sea-scenes in his books are unequalled in all prose literature. To match them you would have to go to the poets — to Shakespeare — to Swinburne. A single line of Hugo has more of the spirit of the sea, more of its savagery, its bitter strength, its tigerish leap and bite, than pages of Pierre Loti. Whether I am prejudiced by my childish associations I do not know, but no other writer makes me smell the sea-weed, catch the sharp salt tang, feel the buffeting of the waves, as Victor Hugo does. Yes, for all his panoramic evocations of sea-effects, Pierre Loti does not touch the old eternal mystery of the deep, with its answer of terror and strange yearning in the heart of man, in the way this other touches it. The great rhetorician found a rhetoric here that put his eloquence to silence and he responded to it with sentences as sharp, as brief, as broken, as abrupt, as stinging and wind-driven, as the rushing waves themselves pouring over a half drowned wreck.

And just as he deals with the sea, so he deals with the wind and rain and snow and vapour and fire. Those who love Victor Hugo will think of a hundred examples of what I mean, from the burning castle in “Ninety-three,” to the wind-rocked gibbet on the Isle of Portland, when the child hero of the “Man who Laughs” escapes from the storm.

When one tries to cast one’s critical plummet into the secret motive forces of Hugo’s genius, one is continually being baffled by the presence there of conflicting elements. For instance no one who has read “Notre Dame” can deny the presence of a certain savage delight in scenes of grotesque and exaggerated terror. No one who has read “Les Misérables” can deny the existence in him of a vein of lovely tenderness that, with a little tiny push over the edge, would degenerate into maudlin sentiment of the most lamentable kind.

The performances of the diabolical “archdeacon” in “Notre Dame” to the moment when Quasimodo watches him fall from the parapet, are just what one might expect to enjoy in some old-fashioned melodramatic theatre designed for such among the pure in heart as have a penchant for ghastliness. But one forgets all this in a moment when some extraordinary touch of illuminating imagination gets hold of one by the throat.

I do not think that Victor Hugo will go down to posterity honoured and applauded because of his love for the human race. I suspect those critics who hold him up as a grand example of democratic principles and libertarian ideals of not being great lovers of his stories. He is a name for them to conjure with and that is all.

Victor Hugo loved children and he loved the mothers of children, but he was too great a soul to spoil his colossal romance with any blatant humanitarianism. I do not say he was the high, sad, lonely, social exile he would have liked the world to believe him; for he was indeed of kind, simple, honest domestic habits and a man who got much happiness from quite little things. But when we come to consider what will be left of him in the future I feel sure that it will be rather by his imagination than by his social eloquence that he will touch our descendants. It is indeed not in the remotest degree as a rhetorician that he arrests us in these unique tales. It is by means of something quite different from eloquence.

His best effects are achieved in sudden striking images which seem to have in them a depth of fantastic diablerie worthy of the wreck-strewn “humming waters” whose secrets he loved to penetrate.

It is not sufficiently realised how much there was of the “macabre” about Victor Hugo. Like the prophet Ezekiel, he had strange visions from the power he served, and in the primordial valleys of his imagination there lie, strewn to the bleaching winds, the bones of men and of demons and of gods; and the breath that blows upon them and makes them live — live their weird phantasmal life of mediaeval goblins in some wild procession of madness — is the breath of the spirit of childhood’s fancies.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

TO READ FOR the first time, one of the short stories of Guy de Maupassant is to receive a staggering enlargement of one’s ideas as to what mere literature can do. They hardly seem like literature at all, these blocks from the quarry of life, flung into one’s face with so unerring an aim.

“If you prick them, they bleed. If you tickle them, they laugh.” The rough rain-smelling earth still clings to them; when you take them in your hands, the mud of the highway comes off upon your fingers. Is it really, one wonders, mere literary craft, mere cunning artfulness, which gives these sentences the weight of a guillotine-blade crashing down upon the prostrate neck of bound helpless reality?

Is it simply the art of a pupil of the euphonious Flaubert, this power of making written sentences march full-armed like living men, and fall, when their work is done, with a metallic ring of absolute finality— “as a dead body falls”?

As one reads Guy de Maupassant one breathes heavily as if it were oneself and not another upon whom the tension and the sweat of the crisis has come. One touches with one’s naked hand every object he describes. One feels the gasping breath of every person he brings forward. His images slap one’s cheeks till they tingle, and his situations wrestle with one to the ground.

Not for nothing was he a descendant of that race which, of all races except the Turks, has loved love better than literature and war better than love. Words are resounding blows and smacking kisses to Guy de Maupassant. He writes literature as a Norman baron, and when he rounds off a sentence it is as if he dug a spur into the flanks of a restless filly. There is nothing like his style in the world.

They never taught me Tacitus when I was at school. My Latinity stops short at Caesar and Cicero. One is, however, led to suppose that the great executioner of imperial reputations was a mighty pruner, in his day, of the "many, too many" words. But I am sure that this other "Great Latin," as Nietzsche calls him, cleans up his litter and chops off his surplusage quite as effectively as Tacitus, and I suspect that neither Tacitus nor any other classic writer hits the nail on the head with so straight, so steady, so effective a stroke.

I suppose it is the usual habit of destiny to rush into literary paths people who are essentially dreamers and theorists and Utopians; people who by instinct and temperament shrink away from contact with brute reality.

I suppose even the great imaginative writers, like Balzac, live, on the whole, sedentary and exclusive lives, making a great deal, as far as the materials for their work go, of a very little. Now and then, however, it happens that a man of action, a man of the world, a man of love and war and sport, enters the literary arena; and when that occurs, I have an idea that he hits about him with a more trenchant, more resolute, more crushing force than the others.

The art of literature has become perhaps too completely the monopoly of sedentary people — largely of the bourgeois class — who bring to their work the sedentary sensitiveness, the sedentary refinement, the sedentary lack of living experience, which are the natural characteristics of persons who work all day in studies and studios. That is why the appearance of a Walt Whitman or a Maxim Gorki is so wholesome and air-clearing an event.

But not less salutary is the appearance of a ferocious aristocrat from the class which has ridden rough-shod over the fields of submissive actuality for many tyrannous centuries.

In the hard shrewd blows of a Maxim Gorki, the monopolising tribes of sedentary dreamers receive their palpable hit, receive it from the factory and the furrow. In the deadly knocks of a Guy de Maupassant they get their “quietus” from the height, so to speak, of the saddle of a sporting gentleman.

Do what they can to get the sharp bitter tang of reality into their books, the bulk of these people, write they never so cleverly, seem somehow to miss it.

The smell of that crafty old skunk — the genuine truth of things — draws them forward through the reeds and rushes of the great dim forests’ edge, but they seldom touch the hide of the evasive animal; no, not so much as with the end of their barge-pole.

But Guy de Maupassant plunges into the thickets, gun in hand, and we soon hear the howl of the hunted.

A love of literature, a reverence and respect for the dignity of words, does not by any means imply a power of making them plastic before the pressure of truth. How often one is conscious of the intervention of “something else,” some alien material, marbly and shiny it may be, and with a beauty of its own, but obtruding quite opaquely between the thing said and the thing felt.

In reading Guy de Maupassant, it does not seem to be words at all which touch us. It seems to be things — things living or dead, things in motion or at rest. Words are there indeed; they must be there — but they are so hammered on the anvil of his hard purpose that they have become porous and transparent. Their one rôle now is to get themselves out of the way; or rather to turn themselves into thin air and clean water, through which the reality beyond can come at us with unblurred outlines.

It is a wonderful commentary, when one thinks of it, upon the malleability of human language that it can so take shape and colour from the pressure of a single temperament. The words in the dictionary are all there — all at the disposal of every one of us — but how miraculous a thing to make their choice and their arrangement expressive of nothing on earth but the peculiar turn of one particular mind!

The whole mystery of life is in this; this power of the unique and solitary soul to twist the universe into the shape of its vision.

Without any doubt Guy de Maupassant is the greatest realist that ever lived. All other realists seem idealists in comparison. Many of the situations he describes are situations doubtless in which he himself "had a hand." Others are situations which he came across, in his enterprising debouchings here and there, in curious by-alleys, and which he observed with a morose scowl of amusement, from outside. A few — very few — are situations which he evoked from the more recondite places of his own turbulent soul.

But one cannot read a page of him without feeling that he is a writer who writes from out of his own experiences, from out of the shocks and jolts and rough file-like edges of raw reality.

It is a huge encouragement to all literary ambitions, this immense achievement of his. The scope and sweep of a great creative imagination is given to few among us, and Guy de Maupassant was not one of these. His imagination was rigorously earth-bound, and not only earth-bound but bound to certain obvious and sensual aspects of earth-life. Except when he tore open the bleeding wounds of his own mutilated sensibility and wrote stories of his madness with a pen dipped in the evil humours of his diseased blood, he was a master of a certain brutal and sunburnt objectivity.

But how cheerful and encouraging it is for those among us who are engaged in literature, to see what this astonishing man was able to make of experiences which, in some measure, we must all have shared!

There is never any need to leave one's own town or village or city to get "copy." There is scarcely any need to leave one's own house. The physiological peculiarities of the people who jostle against us in the common routine of things will completely suffice. That is the whole point of de Maupassant's achievement.

The same thing, of course, is true of the great imaginative writers. *They* also are able to derive grist for their mill from the common occurrences; they also are free to remain at home. But their sphere is the sphere of the human soul; his was the sphere of the human body.

He was pre-eminently the master of physiology — the physiological writer. Bodies, not souls, were his "métier" — or souls only in so far as they are directly affected by bodies.

But bodies — bodies of men and women are everywhere; living ones on the earth; dead ones under the earth. One need not go to the antipodes to find the nerves and the tissues, the flesh and the blood, of these planetary evocations, of these microcosms of the universe. The great imaginative writers have the soul of man always under their hand, and Guy de Maupassant has the body of man always under his hand.

It is not the masters who are found journeying to remote regions to get inspiration for their work. Their "America," as Goethe puts it, lies close to their door.

It is singularly encouraging to us men of letters to contemplate what Guy de Maupassant could do with the natural animal instincts and gestures and mutterings and struggles of the bodies of men and women as their desires make them skip.

“Encouraging” did I say? Tantalizing rather, and provocative of helpless rage. For just as the spiritual insensitiveness of our bourgeois tyrants renders them dull and obtuse to the noble imaginations of great souls, so their moral bigotry and stupidity renders them obstinately averse to the freedom of the artist in dealing with the physical eccentricities of the grotesque human animal.

We must not deal at large with the spirit lest we weary the vulgar and the frivolous; we must not deal at large with the body, lest we infuriate the Puritanical and the squeamish.

It is absurd to rail at de Maupassant because of his “brutality.” One cannot help suspecting that those who do so have never recognised the absurd comedy of their own bodily activities and desires.

It is idle to protest against the outrageous excursions of his predatory humour. The raw bleeding pieces — each, as one almost feels, with its own peculiar cry — of the living body of the world, clawed as if by tiger claws, are strange morsels for the taste of some among us. But for others, there is an exultant pleasure in this great hunt, with the deep-mouthed hounds of veracity and sincerity, after the authentic truth.

One touches here — in this question of the brutality of Guy de Maupassant — upon a very deep matter; the matter namely of what our pleasure exactly consists, as we watch, in one of his more savage stories, the flesh of the world’s truth thus clawed at.

I think it is a pleasure composed of several different elements. The first of these is that deep and curious satisfaction which we derive from the exhibition in art of the essential grossness and unscrupulousness of life. We revenge ourselves in this way upon what makes us suffer. The clear presentation of an outrage, of an insult, of an indecency, is in itself a sort of vengeance upon the power that wrought it, and though it may sound ridiculous enough to speak of being avenged upon Nature, still the basic instinct is there, and we can, if we will, personify the immense malignity of things, and fancy that we are striking back at the gods and causing the gods some degree of perturbation; at least letting them know that we are not deceived by the illusions they dole out to us!

The quiet gods may well be imagined as quite as indifferent to our artistic vengeance as Nature herself, but at any rate, like the man in the Inferno who "makes the fig" at the Almighty, we have found vent for our human feelings. Another element in it is the pleasure we get — not perhaps a very Christian one, but Literature deviates from Christianity in several important ways — from having other people made fully aware, as we may be, of the grossness and unscrupulousness of life.

These other people may easily be assumed to be fidgety, meticulous, self-complacent purists; and as we read the short stories of Guy de Maupassant, we cannot resist calling up an imaginary company of such poor devils and forcing them to listen to a page of the great book of human judgment upon Nature's perversity.

Finally at the bottom of all there is a much more subtle cause for our pleasure; nothing less in fact than that old wild dark Dionysian embracing of fate, of fate however monstrous and bizarre, simply because it is there — an integral part of the universe — and we ourselves with something of that ingredient in our own heathen hearts.

An imaginary symposium of modern writers upon the causes of human pleasure in the grosser elements of art lends itself to very free speculation. Personally I must confess to very serious limitations in my own capacity for such enjoyment. I have a sneaking sympathy with tender nerves. I can relish de Maupassant up to a certain point — and that point is well this side of idolatry — but I fancy I relish him because I discern in him a certain vibrant nerve of revolt against the brutality of things, a certain quivering irony of savage protest. When you get the brutality represented without this revolt and with a certain unction of sympathetic zest, as you do in the great eighteenth century novelists in England, I confess it becomes more than I can endure.

This is a most grievous limitation and I apologise to the reader most humbly for it. It is indeed a lamentable confession of weakness. But since the limitations of critics are, consciously or unconsciously, part of their contribution to the problems at issue, I offer mine without further comment.

It is an odd thing that while I can relish and even hugely enjoy ribaldry in a Latin writer, I cannot so much as tolerate vulgarity in an English or Scotch one. Perhaps it is their own hidden consciousness that, if they once let themselves go, they would go unpleasantly far, which gives this morbid uneasiness to the strictures of the Puritans. Or is it that the English-speaking races are born between the deep sea of undiluted coarseness and the devil of a diseased conscience? Is this the reason why every artist in the world and every critic of art, feels himself essentially an exile everywhere except upon Latin soil?

Guy de Maupassant visualises human life as a thing completely and helplessly in the grip of animal appetites and instincts. He takes what we call lust, and makes of it the main motive force in his vivid and terrible sketches. It is perhaps for this very reason that his stories have such an air of appalling reality.

But it is not only lust or lechery which he exploits. He turns to his artistic purpose every kind of physiological desire, every sort of bodily craving. Many of these are quite innocent and harmless, and the denial of their satisfaction is in the deepest sense tragic. Perhaps it is in regard to what this word *tragic* implies that we find the difference between the brutality of Guy de Maupassant and the coarseness of the earlier English writers.

The very savagery in de Maupassant's humour is an indication of a clear intellectual consciousness of something monstrously, grotesquely, wrong; something mad and blind and devilish about the whole business, which we miss completely in all English writers except the great Jonathan Swift.

Guy de Maupassant had the easy magnanimity of the Latin races in regard to sex matters, but in regard to the sufferings of men and of animals from the denial of their right to every sort of natural joy, there smouldered in him a deep black rage — a *saeva indignatio* — which scorches his pages like a deadly acid.

In his constant preoccupation with the bodies of living creatures, it is natural enough that animals as well as men should come into the circle of his interest. He was a great huntsman and fisherman. He loved to wander over the frozen marshes, gun in hand, searching for strange wildfowl among the reeds and ditches. But though he slew these things in the savage passion of the chase as his ancestors had done for ages, between his own fierce senses and theirs there was a singular magnetic sympathy.

As may be often noticed in other cases, as we go through the world, there was between the primitive earth-instincts of this hunter of wild things and the desperate creatures he pursued, a far deeper bond of kinship than exists between sedentary humanitarians and the objects of their philanthropy. It is good that there should be such a writer as this in the world.

In the sophisticated subtleties of our varnished and velvet-carpeted civilisation, it is well that we should be brought back to the old essential candours which forever underlie the frills and frippery. It is well that the stark bones of the aboriginal skeleton with its raw “unaccommodated” flesh should peep out through the embroideries.

It is, after all, the “thing itself” which matters — the thing which “owes the worm no silk, the cat no perfume.” Forked straddling animals are we all, as the mad king says in the play, and it is mere effeminacy and affectation to cover up the truth.

Guy de Maupassant is never greater than when appealing to the primitive link of tragic affiliation that binds us to all living flesh and blood. A horse mercilessly starved in the fields; a wild bird wailing for its murdered mate; a tramp driven by hunger and primitive desire, and harried by the “insolence of office”; an old man denied the little luxuries of his senile greed; an old maid torn and rent in the flesh that is barren and the breasts that never gave suck; these are the natural subjects of his genius — the sort of “copy” that one certainly need not leave one’s “home town” to find.

One is inclined to feel that those who miss the tragic generosity at the heart of the brutality of Guy de Maupassant, are not really aware of the bitter cry of this mad planet. Let them content themselves, these people, with their pretty little touching stories, their nice blobs of cheerful “local colour” thrown in here and there, and their sweet impossible endings. Sunday school literature for Sunday school children; but let there be at least one writer who writes for those who know what the world is.

The question of the legitimacy in art of the kind of realism which Guy de Maupassant practised, goes incalculably deep. Consider yourself at this moment, gentle reader, lightly turning over — as doubtless you are doing — the harmless pages of this academic book, as you drink your tea from a well appointed tray in a sunny corner of some friendly cake-shop. You are at this moment — come, confess it — hiding up, perhaps from yourself but certainly from the world, some outrageous annoyance, some grotesque resolution, some fear, some memory, some suspicion, that has — as is natural and proper enough, for your father was a man, your mother a woman — its physiological origin. You turn to this elegant book of mine, with its mild and persuasive thoughts, as if you turned away from reality into some pleasant arbour of innocent recreation. It is a sort of little lullaby for you amid the troubles of this rough world.

But suppose instead of the soothing cadences of this harmless volume, you had just perused a short story of Guy de Maupassant; would not your feelings be different? Would you not have the sensation of being fortified in your courage, in your humour, in your brave embracing of the fantastic truth? Would you not contemplate the most grotesque matters lightly, wisely, sanely and with a magnanimous heart?

The perverted moral training to which we have been all of us subjected, has "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of a most evil scrupulousness our natural free enjoyment of the absurd contrasts and accidents and chances of life.

French humour may be savage — all the better — we need a humour with some gall in it to deal with the humour of the universe. But our humour, stopping short so timorously of stripping the world to its smock, is content to remain vulgar. That is the only definition of vulgarity that I recognise — a temptation to be coarse without the spiritual courage to be outrageous! Coarseness — our Anglo Saxon peculiarity — is due to temperamental insensitiveness. Outrageous grossness — with its ironical, beautiful blasphemy against the great mother's amazing tricks — is an intellectual and spiritual thing, worthy of all noble souls. The one is the rank breath of a bourgeois democracy, the other is the free laughter of civilised intelligences through all human history.

English and Americans find it difficult to understand each other’s humour. One can well understand this difficulty. No one finds any obstacle — except Puritan prejudice — in understanding French humour; because French humour is universal; the humour of the human spirit contemplating the tragic comedy of the human body.

One very interesting thing must be noted here in regard to the method of Guy de Maupassant’s writings; I mean the power of the short story to give a sense of the general stream of life which is denied to the long story.

Personally I prefer long stories; but that is only because I have an insatiable love of the story for its own sake, apart from its interpretation of life. I am not in the least ashamed to confess that when I read books, I do so to escape from the pinch of actual facts. I have a right to this little peculiarity as much as to any other as long as I don’t let it invade the clarity of my reason. But in the short story — and I have no scruple about admitting it — one seems to get the flavour of the writer’s general philosophy of life more completely than in any other literary form.

It is a snatch at the passing procession, a dip into the flowing stream, and one gets from it the sort of sudden illumination that one gets from catching a significant gesture under the street lamp, or meeting a swift tale-telling glance beneath a crowded doorway.

Bitterly inspired as he is by the irony of the physiological tragedy of human life, Guy de Maupassant is at his greatest when he deals with the bizarre accidents that happen to the body; greatest of all when he deals with the last bizarre accident of all, the accident of death.

The appalling grotesqueness of death, its brutal and impious levity, its crushing finality, have never been better written of. The savage ferocity with which he tears off the mask which the sentimental piety of generations has thrown over the features of their dead is no sign of frivolousness in him.

The gravity of the undertaker is not an indication of deep emotion; nor is the jesting of Hamlet, as he stands above Ophelia's grave, a sign of an inhuman heart.

The last insult of the scurrilous gods — their flinging us upon oblivion with so indecent, so lewd a disregard for every sort of seemliness — is answered in Guy de Maupassant by a ferocious irony almost equal to their own.

But it would be unfair to let this dark-browed Norman go, without at least a passing allusion to the large and friendly manner in which he rakes up, out of brothel, out of gutter, out of tenement, out of sweat-shop, out of circus-tent, out of wharf shanty, out of barge cabin, every kind and species of human derelict to immortalise their vagrant humanity in the amber of his flawless style.

There is a spacious hospitality about the man's genius which is a rare tonic to weary aesthetes, sick of the thin-spun theories of the schools. The sun-burnt humour of many queer tatterdemalions warms us, as we read him, into a fine indifference to nice points of human distinction. All manner of ragged nondescripts blink at us out of their tragic resignation and hint at a ribald reciprocity of nature, making the whole world kin.

In his ultimate view of life, he was a drastic pessimist, and what we call materialism receives from his hands the clinching fiat of a terrific imprimatur. And this is well; this is as it should be. There are always literary persons to uphold the banners of mysticism and morality, idealism and good hope. There will always be plenty of talent "on the side of the angels" in these days, when it has become a kind of intellectual cant to cry aloud, "I am no materialist! Materialism has been disproved by the latest scientific thinkers!"

To come back to the old, honest, downright, heathen recognition of the midnight, wherein all candles are put out, is quite a salutary experience. It is good that there should be a few great geniuses that are unmitigated materialists, and to whom the visible world is absolutely all there is. One is rendered more tolerant of the boisterousness of the players when one feels the play ends so finally and so soon. One is rendered less exacting towards the poor creatures of the earth when one recognises that their hour is so brief.

There will always be optimists in the countries where "the standards of living are high." There will always be writers — scientific or otherwise — to dispose of materialism. But meanwhile it is well that there should be at least one great modern among us for whom that *pulvis et umbra* is the last word. At least, one, if only for the sake of those whom we mourn most; so that, beholding their lives, like torch-flames against black darkness, we shall not stint them of their remembrance.

ANATOLE FRANCE

ANATOLE FRANCE IS probably the most disillusioned human intelligence which has ever appeared on the surface of this planet.

All the great civilised races tend to disillusion. Disillusion is the mark of civilised eras as opposed to barbaric ones and if the dream of the poets is ever realised and the Golden Age returns, such an age will be the supreme age of happy, triumphant disillusion.

This was seen long ago by Lucretius, who regarded the fear of the gods as the last illusion of the human race, and looked for its removal as the race’s entrance into the earthly paradise.

Nietzsche’s noble and austere call to seriousness and spiritual conflict is the sign of a temper quite opposite from this. Zarathustra frees himself from all other illusions, but he does not free himself from the most deadly one of all — the illusion namely, that the freeing oneself from illusion is a high and terrible duty.

The real disillusioned spirit is not the fierce Nietzschean one whose glacial laughter is an iconoclastic battle-cry and whose freedom is a freedom achieved anew every day by a strenuous and desperate struggle. The real disillusioned spirit plays with illusions, puts them on and takes them off, lightly, gaily, indifferently, just as it happens, just as the moment demands.

One feels that in spite of his cosmic persiflage and radiant attempt to Mediterraneanise into “sun-burnt mirth” the souls of the northern nations, Nietzsche was still at heart an ingrained hyperborean, still at heart a splendid and savage Goth.

As in every other instance, we may take it for granted that any popular idea which runs the gamut of the idealistic lecture-halls and pulpits of a modern democracy is false through and through. Among such false ideas is the almost universal one that what is called the decadence of a nation is a sign of something regrettable and deplorable. On the contrary, it is a sign of something admirable and excellent. Such “weakness,” in a deeper than a popular sense, is “strength”; such decadence is simply wisdom.

The new cult of the “will to power” which Nietzsche originated is nothing more than the old demiurgic life-illusion breaking loose again, as it broke loose in the grave ecstasies of the early Christians and in the Lutheran reformation. Nietzsche rent and tore at the morality of Christendom, but he did so with the full intention of substituting a morality of his own. One illusion for another illusion. A Roland for an Oliver!

Nietzsche praised with desperate laudation a classical equanimity which he was never able to reach. He would have us love fate and laugh and dance; but there were drops of scorching tears upon the page of his prophecy and the motif of his challenge was the terrible gravity of his own nature; though the conclusion of his seriousness was that we must renounce all seriousness. It is Nietzsche himself who teaches us that in estimating the value of a philosopher we have to consider the psychology of the motive-force which drove him.

The motive-force that drove Nietzsche was the old savage life-instinct, penetrated with illusion through and through, and praise as he might the classical urbanity, no temper that has ever existed was less urbane than his own.

The history of the human race upon this planet may be regarded — in so far as its spiritual eruptions are concerned — as the pressure upwards, from the abysmal depths, of one scoriae tempest after another, rending and tearing their way from the dark centre fires where Demogorgon turns himself over in his sleep, and becoming as soon as they reach the surface and harden into rock, the great monumental systems of human thought, the huge fetters of our imaginations. The central life-fire which thus forces its path at cataclysmic intervals to the devastated surface is certainly no illusion. It is the one terrific cosmic fact.

Where illusion enters is where we, poor slaves of traditional ratiocination, seek to turn these explosions of eternal lava into eternal systems. The lava of life pours forth forever, but the systems break and crumble; each one overwhelmed in its allotted time by a new outrushing of abysmal energy.

The reiterated eruptions from the fathomless depths make up the shifting material with which human civilisations build themselves their illusive homes; but the wisest civilisations are the ones that erect a hard, clear, bright wall of sceptical "suspension of judgment," from the face of which the raging flood of primordial energy may be flung back before it can petrify into any further mischief.

Such a protective wall from the eruptive madness of primordial barbarism, the scepticism of classical civilisation is forever polishing and fortifying. Through the pearl-like glass of its inviolable security we are able to mock the tempest-driven eagles and the swirling glacial storms. We can amuse ourselves with the illusions from which we are free. We can give the imagination unbounded scope and the fancy unrestricted licence. We have become happy children of our own self-created kingdom of heaven; the kingdom of heaven which is the kingdom of disillusion.

And of this kingdom, Anatole France is surely the reigning king. From the Olympian disenchantment of his tolerant urbanity, all eruptive seriousness foams back spray-tossed and scattered. And yet such a master of the art of “suspended judgment” was he, that he permits himself to dally very pleasantly with the most passionate illusions of the human race. He is too deep a sceptic even to remain at the point of taking seriously his own aesthetic epicureanism.

This is where he differs from Oscar Wilde, from Walter Pater, from Stendhal, from Remy de Gourmont, from Gabriele d’Annunzio. This is where he differs from Montaigne. These great men build up an egoism of grave subjectivity out of their suspicion of other people’s cults. They laugh at humanity but they do not laugh at themselves. With the help of metaphysic they destroy metaphysic; only to substitute for the gravity of idealism the gravity of Epicureanism.

But Anatole France has no gravity. He respects nothing; least of all himself. That is why there is something singularly winning about him which we miss in these others. There is something which palls upon us and grows heavy and tiresome after a while about this massive gravity in the cult of one’s own sensations.

Sensations? Well! We all know how subtle and pleasant they can be; but this perpetual religion of them, this ponderous worship of them, becomes at last something monstrous and inhuman, something which makes us cry aloud for air and space. Not only does it become inhuman and heavy — it becomes comic.

Every religion, even the religion of sensation, becomes comic when the sharp salt breath of intellectual sanity ceases to blow upon it. Its votaries seem to be going to and fro wrapped in sheep’s wool. The wool may be stained in Tyrian dyes; but it is wool for all that, and it tends ultimately to impede the steps of the wearer and to dull not a few of his natural perceptions.

If one imagines a symposium in the Elysian fields between Wilde and Pater and d'Annunzio, and the sudden entrance upon them of the great Voltaire, one cannot but believe that after a very short time this religion of aestheticism would prove as tiresome to the old ribald champion of a free humanity as any other ritual.

And in this respect Anatole France is with Voltaire. He has too humorous a soul to endure the solemnity of the cultivated senses. He would desert such a group of pious subjectivists to chat with Horace about the scandals of the imperial court or with Rabelais about the price of sausages.

Sceptical in other matters, egoists of the type I have mentioned are inclined to grow unconscionably grave when questions of sex are brought forward. This illusion at any rate — the illusion of sexual attraction — they would be most loth to destroy.

But Anatole France fools sex without stint. It affords him, just as it did Voltaire and Rabelais, his finest opportunities. He fools it up hill and down dale. He shakes it, he trundles it, he rattles it, he bangs it, he thumps it, he tumbles it in the mud, in the sand, in the earth — just as Diogenes did with his most noble tub. Fooling sex is the grand game of Anatole France's classic wit. The sport never wearies him. It seems an eternal perennial entertainment. Hardly one of his books but has this sex fooling as its principal theme.

It seems to his detached and speculative mind the most amusing and irresistible jest in the world that men and women should behave as they do; that matters should be arranged in just this manner.

What we arrive at once more in Anatole France is that humorous drawing back from the world, back into some high pitched observation-tower of the mind, from the philosophic seclusion of which the world scene can be easily imagined as different from what it is. Nothing is more salutary in the midst of the mad confusion of the world than these retirements. It is to no mere “ivory tower” of aesthetic superiority that we retreat. It is to a much higher and more spacious eminence. So high indeed do we withdraw that all the ivory towers of the world seem far beneath us; beneath us, and not more or less sacred than other secular erections.

It is from this point of observation that our humour is suddenly made aware of the startling absurdity of human institution; and not only of *human* institution; for it is made aware also of the absurdity of the whole fantastic scheme of this portentous universe. We regard the world in these high speculative moods much as children do when they suddenly enquire of their bewildered parents why it is that human beings have two legs and why it is that little girls are different from little boys.

It is one result of these withdrawings to the translunar empyrean that the life of a man of action upon this earth does not appear any more or any less remarkable or important than the life of a man of letters. All human activities from that celestial height are equal; and whether we plunge into politics or into pleasure, into science or into theology, seems a mere incidental chance, as indifferent in the great uncaring solar system as the movements of gnats around a lamp or midges around a candle.

The great historic revolutions, the great social reformations, ancient or modern, present themselves from this height as just as important — as just as unimportant — as the visions of saintly fanatics or the amours of besotted rakes.

Nothing is important and anything may be important. It is all a matter of the human point of view. It is all a matter of taste. Looking at the whole mad stream of things from this altitude, we see the world as if we were peering through an inverted telescope; or rather, shall we say, through an instrument called an “equi-scope” — whose peculiarity it is to make all things upon which it is turned *little and equal.*

The mental temper of Anatole France is essentially one which is interested in historic and contemporary events; interested in the outward actions and movements of men and in the fluctuations of political life. But it is interested in these things with a certain spacious reservation. It is interested in them simply because they are there, simply because they illustrate so ironically the weaknesses and caprices of human nature and the dramatic chances of ineluctable fate. It is not interested in them because they are inherently and absolutely important, but because they are important relatively and humorously as indicative of the absurd lengths to which human folly will go. It is interested in these things, as I have said, with an ample reservation, but it must emphatically be noted that it is a great deal more interested in them than in any works of art or letters or in any achievement of philosophy.

Anatole France seems indeed to take a certain delight in putting human thought into its place as essentially secondary and subordinate to human will. He delights to indicate, just as Montaigne used to do, the pathetic and laughable discrepancies between human thoughts and human actions.

He is more concerned with men and women as they actually live and move in the commerce of the world than in the wayward play of their speculative fancies, and it gives him an ironic satisfaction to show how the most heroic and ideal thoughts are affected by the little wanton tricks of circumstances and character.

This predominant concern with the natural humours and normal animal instincts of the human race, this refusal ever to leave the broad and beaten path of human frailty, gives a tone to his writings, even when he is dealing with art and literature, quite different from other aesthetes’.

He is not really an aesthete at all; he is too Voltairian for that. As a critic he is learned, scholarly, clear-sighted and acute; but his sense of the humorous inconsistencies of normal flesh and blood is too habitually present with him to admit of that complete abandonment to the spirit of his author, which, accompanied by interpretative subtlety, secures the most striking results.

His criticisms are wise and interesting, but they necessarily miss the sinuous clairvoyance of a writer like Remy de Gourmont who is able to give himself up completely and with no ironic reservation to the abnormalities of the temperament he is discussing. Remy de Gourmont's own temperament has something in it more receptive, more psychological, more supple than Anatole France's. He is in himself a far less original genius and for that very reason he can slide more reservedly into the bizarre nooks and crannies of abnormal minds.

Anatole France is one of those great men of genius to whom the gods have permitted an un-blurred vision of the eternal normalities of human weakness. This vision he can never forget. He takes his stand upon the ground which it covers, and from that ground he never deviates.

Man for him is always an amorous and fantastic animal, using his reason to justify his passions, and his imagination to justify his illusions. He is always the animal who can laugh, the animal who can cry, the animal who can beget or bear children. He is only in a quite secondary sense the animal who can philosophise.

It is because of his constant preoccupation with the normal eccentricities and pathetic follies of our race that he lays so much stress upon outward action.

The normal man is rather an animal who wills and acts than an animal who dreams and thinks; and it is with willing and acting, rather than with dreaming and thinking, that Anatole France is concerned. One of the main ironic devices of his humour is to show the active animal led astray by his illusions, and the contemplative animal driven into absurdity by his will.

With his outward-looking gaze fixed upon the eternal and pathetic normalities of the human situation, Anatole France has himself, like Voltaire, a constant tendency to gravitate towards politics and public affairs.

In this respect his temperament is most obstinately classical. Like Horace and all the ancient satirists, he feels himself invincibly attracted to "affairs of state," even while they excite his derision. One cannot read a page of his writing without becoming aware that one is in the presence of a mind cast in the true classic mould.

In the manner of the great classical writers of Athens and Rome he holds himself back from any emotional betrayal of his own feelings. He is the type of character most entirely opposite to what might be called the Rousseau-type.

He is un-modern in this and quite alone; for, in one form or another, the Rousseau-type with its enthusiastic neurotic mania for self-revelation dominates the entire literary field. One gets the impression of something massive and self-possessed, something serenely and almost inhumanly sane about him. One feels always that he is the "Grand Gentleman" of literature with whom no liberties may be taken. His tone is quiet, his manner equable, his air smiling, urbane, superior. His reserve is the reserve of the great races of antiquity. With a calm, inscrutable, benevolent malice, he looks out upon the world. There is a sense of much withheld, much unsaid, much that nothing would ever induce him to say.

His point of view is always objective. It might be maintained, though the thing sounds like a paradox, that his very temperament is objective.

Certainly it is a temperament averse to any outbursts of unbalanced enthusiasm.

His attitude toward what we call Nature is more classical than the classics. Virgil shows more vibrant emotion in the presence of the sublimities of the natural elements. His manner when dealing with the inanimate world is the manner of the Eighteenth Century touched with a certain airiness and charm that is perhaps more Hellenic than Latin. As one reads him one almost feels as though the human race detached itself from its surroundings and put between itself and Nature a certain clear and airy space, untroubled by any magnetic currents of spiritual reciprocity. One feels as though Nature were kept decisively and formally in her place and not permitted to obtrude herself upon the consciousness of civilised people except when they require some pleasant lawn or noble trees or smiling garden of roses to serve as a background for their metaphysical discussions or their wanton amorous play. What we have come to call the "magic" of Nature is never for a moment allowed to interrupt these self-possessed epicurean arguments of statesmen, politicians, amorists, theologians, philosophers and proconsuls.

Individual objects in Nature — a tree, a brook, the seashore, a bunch of flowers, a glade in the forest, a terrace in a garden, — are described in that clear, laconic, objective manner, which gives one the impression of being able to touch the thing in question with one's bare hand.

The plastic and tactile value of things is always indicated in Anatole France's writings with brief, clear cut, decisive touches, but "the murmurs and scents" of the great waters, the silences of the shadowy forests are not allowed to cross the threshold of his garden of Epicurus. Each single petal of a rose will have its curves, its colours, its tints; but the mysterious forces of subterranean life which bring the thing to birth are pushed back into the darkness. The marble-cold resistance of Anatole France’s classical mind offers a hard polished surface against which the vague elemental energies of the world beat in vain. He walks smilingly and pensively among the olive-trees of the Academia, plucking a rose here and an oleander there; but for the rest, the solemn wizardries of Nature are regarded with an urbane contempt.

His style is a thing over which the fastidious lovers of human language may ponder long and deep. The art of it is so restrained, so aristocratic, so exclusive, that even the smallest, simplest, most unimportant words take to themselves an emphatic significance.

Anatole France is able to tell us that Monsieur Bergeret made some naive remark, or the Abbé Jérôme Coignard uttered some unctuous sally, in so large and deliberate and courtly a way that the mere “he said” or “he began” falls upon us like a papal benediction or like the gesture of a benignant monarch.

There is no style in the world so deeply penetrated with the odour and savour of its author’s philosophy. And this philosophy, this atmosphere of mind, is so entirely French that every least idiomatic peculiarity in his native tongue seems willing to lend itself, to the last generous drop of the wine of its essential soul, to the tone and manner of his speech. All the refinements of the most consummate civilisation in the world, all its airy cynicism, all its laughing urbanity, all its whimsical friendliness, seem to concentrate themselves and reach their climax on every page of his books.

A delicate odour of incense and mockery, an odour of consecrated wine and a savour of heathen wit, rise up together from every sentence and disarm us with the insidiousness of their pleasant contrast. His style is so beautiful and characteristic that one cannot read the simplest passage of easy narration from his pen without becoming penetrated with his spirit, without feeling saner, wiser, kindlier, and more disenchanted and more humane.

I cannot resist quoting from the prologue to “Le Puits de Sainte Claire,” a certain passage which seems to me peculiarly adapted to the illustration of what I have just said. The writer is, or imagines himself to be, in the city of Siena.

“Sur la voie blanche, dans ces nuits transparentes, la seule recontre que je faisais était celle du R. P. Adone Doni, qui alors travaillait comme moi tout le jour dans l’ancienne académie *degli Intronati.* J’avais tout de suite aimé ce cordelier qui, blanchi dans l’étude, gardait l’humeur riante et facile d’un ignorant.

“Il causait volontiers. Je goûtais son parler suave, son beau langage, sa pensee docte et naïve, son air de vieux Silène purifié par les eaux baptismales, son instinct de mime accompli, le jeu de ses passions vives et fines, le génie étrange et charmant dont il etait possédé.

“Assidu à la bibliothèque, il fréquentait aussi le marché, s’arrêtant de préférence devant les contadines, qui vendent des pommes d’or, et prêtant l’oreille à leur libres propos.

Il apprenait d’elles, disait-il, la belle langue toscane.... Je crus m’aperçevoir en effet qu’il inclinait aux opinions singulières. Il avait de la religion et de la science, mais non sans bizarreries.... C’est sur le diable qu’il professait des opinions singulières. Il pensait que le diable était mauvais sans l’être absolument et que son imperfection naturelle l’empêcherait toujours d’atteindre à la perfection du mal. Il croyait aperçevoir quelques signes de bonté dans les actions obscures de Satan, et, sans trop l’oser dire, il en augurait la rédemption finale de l’archange méditatif, après la consommation des siècles.... Assis sur la margelle, les mains dans les manches de sa robe, il contemplait avec un paisible etonnement les choses de la nuit.

“Et l’ombre qui l’enveloppait laissait deviner encore dans ses yeux clairs et sur sa face camuse l’expressions d’audace craintive et de grâce moqueuse qui y etait profondement empreinte. Nous échangions d’abord des souhaits solennels de bonne santé, de paix et de contentement....

“Tandis qu’il parlait, la lumiere de la lune coulait sur sa barbe en ruisseau d’argent. Le grillon accompagnait du bruissement de ses élytres la voix du conteur, et parfois, aux sons de cette bouche, d’où sortait le plus doux des langages humains, répondait la plainte flutée du crapaud, qui, de l’autre côté de la route, écoutait, amical et craintif.”

The beautiful delicacy of that single touch “sur la voie blanche, dans ces nuits transparentes” is characteristic of a thousand others of a similar kind sprinkled among his books, where gentle and whimsical spirits discourse upon God and the Universe.

He has a most exquisite genius for these little chance-accompaniments of such human scenes. “L’Orme du Mail” is full of them; and so is “Les Opinions de M. Jérôme Coignard.”

In “Sur la Pierre Blanche” the impish humour of accidental encounter brings forward nothing less than the death of Stephen the Proto-Martyr, as an irrelevant interruption to the amorous pleasures of one of his least attractive philosophers.

Full of malicious interest as he is in all the outward events of nations and societies, it is always evident that what Anatole France really regards as worthy of tender consideration is the conversation of quaint minds and the “Humeur riante et facile” of wayward and fantastic souls.

His sense of the fundamental futility of the whole scheme of things is so absolute that what most modern writers would regard as the illogical dreams of superannuated eccentrics he is inclined to treat with smiling reverence and infinite sympathy. Where the whole terrestrial business is only a meaningless blur upon the face of nothingness, why should we not linger by the way, under elm trees, or upon broken fragments of old temples, or on sunny benches in cloistered gardens, and listen to the arbitrary fancies of unpractical and incompetent persons whose countenances express an “audace craintive” and a “grâce moqueuse,” and who look with mild wonder and peaceful astonishment at “les choses de la nuit”?

After perusing many volumes of Anatole France, one after another, we come to feel as though nothing in the world were important except the reading of unusual books, the conversation of unusual people, and the enjoyment of such philosophical pleasures as may be permitted by the gods and encouraged by the approbation of a friendly and tolerant conscience.

One always rises from the savouring of his excellent genius with a conviction that it is only the conversation of one’s friends, varied by such innocent pleasures of the senses as may be in harmony with the custom of one’s country, which renders in the last resort the madness of the world endurable.

He alone, of all modern writers, creates that leisurely atmosphere of noble and humorous dignity — familiar enough to lovers of the old masters — according to which every gesture and word of the most simple human being comes to be endowed with a kind of royal distinction. By the very presence in his thought of the essential meaninglessness of the world, he is enabled to throw into stronger relief the “quips and cranks and wanton wiles” of our pathetic humanity.

Human words — the words of the most crack-brained among us — take to themselves a weight and dignity from the presence behind them of this cosmic purposelessness. The less the universe matters, the more humanity matters. The less meaning there is in the macrocosm the more tenderly and humorously must every microcosm be treated.

It thus comes about that Anatole France, the most disillusioned and sceptical of writers, is also the writer whose books throw over the fancies and caprices of humanity the most large and liberal benediction.

To realise how essentially provincial English and American writers are, one has only to consider for a moment the absolute impossibility of such books as “L’Orme du Mail,” “Le Mannequin” or “Monsieur Bergeret à Paris” appearing in either of these countries.

This amiable and smiling scepticism, this profound scholarship, this subtle interest in theological problems, this ironical interest in political problems, this detachment of tone, this urbane humanism, make up an “ensemble” which one feels could only possibly appear in the land of Rabelais and Voltaire.

Think of the emergence of a book in London or New York bearing such quotations at the heads of the chapters as those which are to be found in “Le Puits de Sainte Claire”! The mere look of the first page of the volume, with its beautifully printed Greek sentence about τά φυσικά καί τά ηθικά καί τα μαθηματικά, lifts one suddenly and with a delicious thrill of pleasure, as if from the touch of a cool, strong, youthful hand, into that serene atmosphere of large speculations and unbounded vistas which is the inheritance of the great humane tradition: the tradition, older than all the dust of modern argument, and making every other mental temper seem, in comparison, vulgar, common, bourgeois and provincial.

The chapter headed “Saint Satyre” is prefaced by a beautiful hymn from the “Breviarum Romanum”; while the story named “Guido Cavalcanti” begins with a long quotation from “Il Decameron di Messer Giovanni

Boccaccio." I take the first instance that comes to my hand; but all his books are the same. And one who reads Anatole France for the sake of an exciting narrative, or for the sake of illuminating psychology, or for the sake of some proselytising theory, will be hugely disappointed. None of these things will he find; nor, indeed, anything else that is tiresomely and absurdly modern.

What he will find will be the old, sweet, laughing, mellow world of rich antique wisdom; a world where the poetry of the ancients blends harmoniously with the mystical learning of the fathers of the church; a world where books are loved better than theories and persons better than books; a world where the humours of the pathetic flesh and blood of the human race are given their true value, as more amusing than any philosophy and as the cause and origin of all the philosophies that have ever been!

Anatole France is incorrigibly pagan. The pleasures of the senses are described in all his books with a calm smiling assurance that ultimately these are the only things that matter!

I suppose that no author that ever lived is so irritating to strong-minded idealists. He does not give these people "the ghost of a chance." He serenely assumes that all ideals are of human, too human, origin, and that no ideals can stand up long against the shocks of life's ironic caprices.

And yet while so maliciously introducing, with laconic Voltairian gibes, the wanton pricking of human sensuality, he never forgets the church. In nothing is he more French; in nothing is he more civilised, than in his perpetual preoccupation with two things — the beauty and frailty of women and the beauty and inconsistency of Christianity.

The clever young men who write books in England and America seem possessed by a precisely opposite purpose; the purpose of showing that

Christianity is played out and the purpose of showing that women are no longer frail.

That sort of earnest-minded attempt to establish some kind of mystical substitute for the religion of our fathers, which one is continually meeting in modern books and which has so withering an effect both upon imagination and humour, is never encountered in Anatole France. He is interested in old tradition and he loves to mock at it. He is interested in human sensuality and he loves to mock at it; but apart from traditional piety struggling with natural passion, he finds nothing in the human soul that arrests him very deeply.

Man, to Anatole France, is a heathen animal who has been baptised; and the humour of his whole method depends upon our keeping a firm hold upon both these aspects of our mortal life.

In a world where men propagated themselves like plants or trees and where there was no organised religious tradition, the humour of Anatole France would beat its wings in the void in vain. He requires the sting of sensual desire and he requires an elaborate ecclesiastical system whose object is the restraint of sensual desire. With these two chords to play upon he can make sweet music. Take them both away and there could be no Anatole France.

The root of this great writer's genius is *irony.* His whole philosophy is summed up in that word, and all the magic of his unequalled style depends upon it.

Sometimes as we read him, we are stirred by a dim sense of indignation against his perpetual tone of smiling, patronising, disenchanted, Olympian pity. The word “pity” is one of his favourite words, and a certain kind of pity is certainly a profound element in his mocking heart.

But it is the pity of an Olympian god, a pity that cares little for what we call justice, a pity that refuses to take seriously the objects of his commiseration. His clear-sighted intelligence is often pleased to toy very plausibly with a certain species of revolutionary socialism. But, I suppose few socialists derive much satisfaction from that devastating piece of irony, the Isle of the Penguins; where everything moves in circles and all ends as it began.

The glacial smile of the yawning gulf of eternal futility flickers through all his pages. Everything is amusing. Nothing is important. Let us eat and drink; let us be urbane and tolerant; let us walk on the sunny side of the road; let us smell the roses on the sepulchres of the dead gods; let us pluck the violets from the sepulchres of our dead loves. All is equal — nothing matters. The wisest are they who play with illusions which no longer deceive them and with the pity that no longer hurts them. The wisest are they who answer the brutality of Nature with the irony of Humanity. The wisest are they who read old books, drink old wine, converse with old friends, and let the rest go.

And yet — and yet —

There is a poem of Paul Verlaine dedicated to Anatole France which speaks like one wounded well nigh past enduring by the voices of the scoffers.

Ah, les Voix, mourez done, mourantes que vous êtes
Sentences, mots en vain, metaphores mal faites,
Toute la rhétorique en fuite des péchés,
Ah, les Voix, mourez done, mourantes que vous êtes!
....
Mourez parmi la voix terrible de l’Amour!
....

PAUL VERLAINE

TO TURN SUDDENLY to the poetry of Paul Verlaine from the mass of modern verse is to experience something like that sensation so admirably described by Thoreau when he came upon a sentence in Latin or in Greek lying like a broken branch of lovely fresh greenery across the pages of some modern book.

Verlaine more than any other European poet is responsible for the huge revolution in poetry which has taken in recent times so many and so surprising shapes and has deviated so far from its originator's method.

There is little resemblance between the most striking modern experiments in what is called "free verse" and the manner in which Verlaine himself broke with the old tradition; but the spirit animating these more recent adventures is the spirit which Verlaine called up from the "vasty deep," and with all their divergence from his original manner these modern rebels have a perfect right to use the authority of his great name, "car son nom," as Coppée says, in his tenderly written preface to his "Choix de Poésies," "éveillera toujours le souvenir d'une poésie absolument nouvelle et qui a pris dans les lettres franchises l'importance d'une découverte."

The pleasure with which one returns to Verlaine from wandering here and there among our daring contemporaries is really nothing less than a tribute to the essential nature of all great poetry; I mean to the soul of music in the thing. Some of the most powerful and original of modern poets have been led so far away from this essential soul of their own great art as to treat the music of their works as quite subordinate to its intellectual or visual import.

As far as I am able to understand the theories of the so-called “imagists,” the idea is to lay the chief stress upon the evocation of clearly outlined shapes — images clean-cut and sharply defined, and, while personal in their choice, essentially objective in their rendering — and upon the absence of any traditional “beautiful words” which might blur this direct unvarnished impact of the poet’s immediate vision.

It might be maintained with some plausibility that Verlaine’s poetry takes its place in the “impressionistic” period, side by side with “impressionistic” work in the plastic arts, and that for this reason it is quite natural that the more modern poets, whose artistic contemporaries belong to the “post-impressionistic” school, should deviate from him in many essential ways. Personally I am extremely unwilling to permit Verlaine to be taken possession of by any modern tendency or made the war-cry of any modern camp.

Though by reason of his original genius he has become a potent creative spirit influencing all intelligent people who care about poetry at all, yet, while thus inspiring a whole generation — perhaps, considering the youth of many of our poetic contemporaries, we might say *two* generations — he belongs almost as deeply to certain great eras of the past. In several aspects of his temperament he carries us back to François Villon, and his own passionate heart is forever reverting to the Middle Ages as the true golden age of the spirit he represented.

He thus sweeps aside with a gesture the great seventeenth century so much admired by Nietzsche.

Non. Il fut gallican, ce siècle, et janséniste!
C’est vers le Moyen Age énorme et délicat,
Qu’il faudrait que mon coeur en panne naviguât,
Loin de nos jours d’esprit charnel et de chair triste.

But whatever may have been the spirit which animated Verlaine, the fact remains that when one takes up once more this “Choix de Poésies,” “avec un portrait de l’auteur par Eugene Carrière,” and glances, in passing, at that suggestive *cinquante-septième mille* indicating how many others besides ourselves have, in the midst of earthquakes and terrors, assuaged their thirst at this pure fount, one recognises once more that the thing that we miss in this modern welter of poetising is simply *music* — music, the first and last necessity, music, the only authentic seal of the eternal Muses.

Directly any theory of poetry puts the chief stress upon anything except music — whether it be the intellectual content of the verses or their image-creating vision or their colour or their tone — one has a right to grow suspicious.

The more subtly penetrated such music is by the magic of the poet’s personality, the richer it is in deep intimations of universal human feeling, the greater will be its appeal. But the music must be there; and since the thing to which it forever appeals is the unchanging human sensibility, there must be certain eternal laws of rhythm which no original experiments can afford to break without losing the immortal touch.

This is all that lovers of poetry need contend for as against these quaint and interesting modern theories. Let them prove their theories! Let them thrill us in the old authentic manner by their “free verse” and we will acknowledge them as true descendants of Catullus and Keats, of Villon and Verlaine!

But they must remember that the art of poetry is the art of heightening words by the magic of music. Colour, suggestion, philosophy, revelation, interpretation, realism, impressionism — all these qualities come and go as the fashion of our taste changes. One thing alone remains, as the essential and undying spirit of all true poetry; that it should have that “concord of sweet sounds" — let us say, rather, that concord of high, delicate, rare sounds — which melts us and enthralls us and liberates us, whatever the subject and whatever the manner or the method! Verse which is cramped and harsh and unmelodious may have its place in human history; it may have its place in human soothsaying and human interest; it has no place or lot in poetry. Individual phrases may have their magic; individual words may have their colour; individual thoughts may have their truth; individual sentences their noble rhetoric; — all this is well and right and full of profound interest. But all this is only the material, the atmosphere, the medium, the instrument. If the final result does not touch us, does not move us, does not rouse us, does not quiet us, as *music* to our ears and our souls — it may be the voice of the prophet; it may be the voice of the charmer; it is not the voice of the immortal god.

Verlaine uses the term *nuance* in his "ars poetica" to express the evasive quality in poetry which appeals to him most and of which he himself is certainly one of the most delicate exponents; but remembering the power over us of certain sublime simplicities, remembering the power over us of certain great plangent lines in Dante and Milton, where there is no "nuance" at all, one hesitates to make this a dogmatic doctrine.

But in what he says of music he is supremely right, and it is for the sake of his passionate authority on this matter — the authority of one who is certainly no formal traditionalist — that I am led to quote certain lines.

They occur in "Jadis et Naguère" and are placed, appropriately enough, in the centre of the volume of Selections which I have now before me.

De la musique avant toute chose,
 Et pour cela préfère l'Impair
 Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
 Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

Il faut aussi que tu n’ailles point
Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise:
Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise
Où l’Indécis au Précis se joint.

Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
Pas la Couleur, rien que la nuance!
Oh! la nuance seule fiance
Le rêve au rêve et la flûte au cor!

Fuis du plus loin la Pointe assassine,
L’Esprit cruel et le Rire impur,
Qui font pleurer les yeux de l’Azur,
Et tout cet ail de basse cuisine!

Prends l’éloquence et tords-lui sou cou!
Tu feras bien, en train d’énergie
De rendre un peu la Rime assagie
Si Ton n’y veille, elle ira jusqu’où?

....

De la musique encore et toujours!
Que ton vers soit la chose envolée
Qu’on sent qui fuit d’une âme allée
Vers d’autres cieux à d’autres amours.

Que ton vers soit la bonne aventure
Éparse au vent crispé du matin

Qui va fleurant la menthe et le thym...
Et tout le reste est littérature.

Yes; that is the sigh which goes up from one's heart, in these days when there is so much verse and so little poetry;— "et tout le reste est littérature"!

Clever imagery, humorous realism, philosophical thoughts, bizarre fancies and strange inventions — it is all vivid, all arresting, all remarkable, but it is only literature! This is a fine original image. That is a fine unexpected thought. Here indeed is a rare magical phrase. Good! We are grateful for these excellent things. But poetry? Ah! that is another matter.

This music of which I speak is a large and subtle thing. It is not only the music of syllables. It is the music of thoughts, of images, of memories, of associations, of spiritual intimations and far-drawn earth-murmurs. It is the music which is hidden in reality, in the heart of reality; it is the music which is the secret cause why things are as they are; the music which is their end and their beginning; it is the old deep Pythagorean mystery; it is the music of the flowing tides, of the drifting leaves, of the breath of the sleepers, of the passionate pulses of the lovers; it is the music of the rhythm of the universe, and its laws are the laws of sun and moon and night and day and birth and death and good and evil.

Such music is itself, in a certain deep and true sense, more instinct with the mystery of existence than any definite image or any definite thought can possibly be. It seems to contain in it the potentiality of all thoughts, and to stream in upon us from some Platonic "beyond-world" where the high secret archetypes of all created forms sleep in their primordial simplicity.

The rhythmic cadences of such music seem, if I dare so far to put such a matter into words, to exist independently of and previously to the actual thoughts and images in which they are finally incarnated.

One has the sense that what the poet first feels is the obscure beauty of this music, rising up wordless and formless from the unfathomable wells of being, and that it is only afterwards, in a mood of quiet recollection, that he fits the thing to its corresponding images and thoughts and words.

The subject is really nothing. This mysterious music may be said to have created the subject; just as the subject, when it is itself called into existence, creates its images and words and mental atmosphere. Except for the original out-welling of this hidden stream, pouring up from unknown depths, there would be no thought, no image, no words. A beautiful example of this is that poem entitled “Promenade Sentimentale,” which is one of the Paysages Tristes in the “Poèmes Saturniens.”

It is a slight and shadowy thing, of no elaborate construction, — simply a rendering of the impression produced upon the mind by sunset and water; by willows and water-fowl and water-lilies. A slight thing enough; but in some mysterious way it seems to blend with all those vague feelings which are half memories and half intimations of something beyond memory, which float round the margins of all human minds.

We have seen these shadowy willows, that dying sunset; we have heard the wail of those melancholy water-fowl; somewhere — far from here — in some previous incarnation perhaps, or in the “dim backward” of pre-natal dreaming. It all comes back to us as we give ourselves up to the whispered cadences of this faint sweet music; while those reiterated syllables about “the great water-lilies among the rushes” fall upon us like a dirge, like a requiem, like the wistful voice of what we have loved — once — long ago — touching us suddenly with a pang that is well-nigh more than we can bear.

Le couchant dardait ses rayons suprêmes
Et le vent berçait les nénuphars blêmes;

Les grands nénuphars entre les roseaux
Tristement luisaient sur les calmes eaux.
Moi, j'errais tout seul, promenant ma plaie
Au long de l'étang, parmi la saulaie
Où la brume vague évoquait un grand
Fantôme laiteux se désespérant
Et pleurant avec la voix des sarcelles
Qui se rappelaient en battant des ailes
Parmi la saulaie où j'errais tout seul
Promenant ma plaie; et l'épais linceul
Des ténèbres vint noyer les suprêmes
Rayons du couchant dans ses ondes blêmes
Et des nénuphars parmi les roseaux
Des grands nénuphars sur les calmes eaux.

Verlaine is one of those great original poets the thought of whose wistful evocations coming suddenly upon us when we are troubled and vexed by the howl of life's wolves, becomes an incredible mandragora of healing music.

I can remember drifting once, in one of those misty spring twilights, when even the streets of Paris leave one restless, dissatisfied and feverishly unquiet, into the gardens of the Luxembourg. There is a statue there of Verlaine accentuating all the extravagance of that extraordinary visage — the visage of a satyr-saint, a "ragamuffin angel," a tatterdemalion scholar, an inspired derelict, a scaramouch god, — and I recollect how, in its marble whiteness, the thing leered and peered at me with a look that seemed to have about it all the fragrance of all the lilac-blossoms in the world, mixed with all the piety of all our race's children and the wantonness of all old heathen dreams. It is like Socrates, that head; and like a gargoyle on the tower of Notre Dame.

He ought to have been one of those slaves of Joseph of Arimathea, who carried the body of Our Lord from the cross to the rich man's tomb — a slave with the physiognomy of the god Pan — shedding tears, like a broken-hearted child, over the wounded flesh of the Saviour.

There is an immense gulf — one feels it at once — between Paul Verlaine and all other modern French writers. What with them is an intellectual attitude, a deliberate aesthetic cult, is with him an absolutely spontaneous emotion.

His vibrating nerves respond, in a magnetic answer and with equal intensity, to the two great passions of the human race: its passion for beauty and its passion for God.

His association with the much more hard and self-possessed and sinister figure of Rimbaud was a mere incident in his life.

Rimbaud succeeded in breaking up the idyllic harmony of his half-domestic, half-arcadian ménage, and dragging him out into the world. But the influence over him of that formidable inhuman boy was not a deep, organic, predestined thing touching the roots of his being; it was an episode; an episode tragically grotesque indeed and full of a curious interest, but leaving the main current of his genius untouched and unchanged.

Paul Verlaine's response to the beauty of women is a thing worthy of the most patient analysis. Probably there has never lived any human person who has been more thrilled by the slightest caress. One is conscious of this in every page of his work. There is a vibrant spirituality, a nervous abandonment, about his poetry of passion, which separates it completely from the confessions of the great sensualists.

There was nothing heavy or material about Verlaine's response to erotic appeals. His nervous organisation was so finely strung that, when he loved, he loved with his whole nature, with body, soul and spirit, in a sort of quivering ecstasy of spiritual lust.

One is reminded here and there of Heine; in other places — a little — of William Blake; but even these resemblances are too vague to be pressed at all closely.

His nature was undoubtedly child-like to a degree amounting to positive abnormality. He hardly ever speaks of love without the indication of a relation between himself and the object of his passion which has in it an extraordinary resemblance to the perfectly pure feeling of a child for its mother.

It must have been almost always towards women possessed very strongly of the maternal instinct that he was attracted; and, in his attraction, the irresistible ecstasy of the senses seems always mingled with a craving to be petted, comforted, healed, soothed, consoled, assuaged.

In poem after poem it is the tenderness, the purity, the delicacy of women, which draws and allures him. Their more feline, more raptorial attributes are only alluded to in the verses where he is obviously objective and impersonal. In the excessive *gentleness* of his eroticism Verlaine becomes, among modern poets, strangely original; and one reads him with the added pleasure of enjoying something that has disappeared from the love-poetry of the race for many generations.

"By Gis and by saint Charity," as the mad girl in the play sings, there is too much violence in modern love! One grows weary of all this rending and tearing, of all this pantherish pouncing and serpentine clinging. One feels a reaction against this eternal savagery of earth-lust. It is a relief, like the coming suddenly from a hedge of wild white roses after wandering through tropical jungles, to pass into this tender wistful air full of the freshness of the dew of the morning.

No wonder Verlaine fell frequently into what his conscience told him was sin! His “sinning” has about it something so winning, so innocent, so childish, so entirely free from the predatory mood, that one can easily believe that his conscience was often betrayed into slumber. And yet, when it did awaken at last, the tears of his penitence ran down so pitifully over cheeks still wet with the tears of his passion, that the two great emotions may be almost said to have merged themselves in one another — the ecstasy of remorse in the ecstasy of the sin that caused the remorse.

The way a man “makes love” is always intimately associated with the way he approaches his gods, such as they may be; and one need not be in the least surprised to find that Verlaine’s attitude to his Creator has a marked resemblance to his attitude to those too-exquisite created beings whose beauty and sweet maternal tenderness so often betrayed him. He evidently enjoys a delicious childish emotion, almost a babyish emotion, in giving himself up into the hands of his Maker to be soothed and petted, healed and comforted. He calls upon his God to punish him just as a child might call upon his mother to punish him, in the certain knowledge that his tears will soon be kissed away by a tenderness as infinite as it is just. God, Christ, Our Lady, pass through the pages of his poems as through the cypress-terraces of some fantastic mediaeval picture. The “douceur” of their sweet pitifulness towards him runs like a quivering magnetic current through all the maddest fancies of his wayward imagination.

“De la douceur, de la douceur, de la douceur”! Even in the least pardonable of light loves he demands this tenderness — demands it from some poor “fille de joie” with the same sort of tearful craving with which he demands it from the Mother of God.

He has a pathetic mania for the consoling touch of tender, pitiful hands. All through his poetry we have reference to such hands. Sometimes they are only too human. Sometimes they are divine. But whether human or divine they bring with them that magnetic gift of healing for which, like a hurt and unhappy infant, he is always longing.

Les chères mains qui furent miennes
Toutes petites, toutes belles,
Après ces méprises mortelles
Et toutes ces choses païennes,

Après les rades et les grèves,
Et les pays et les provinces,
Royales mieux qu'au temps des princes
Les chères mains m'ouvrent les rêves.

....

Ment-elle, ma vision chaste,
D'affinité spirituelle,
De complicité maternelle,
D'affection étroite et vaste?

....

That collection of passionate cries to God which ends with a sort of rhapsody of pleading prayer, entitled "Sagesse," begins — and one does not feel that it is in the least inappropriate — with

Beauté des femmes, leur faiblesse, et ces mains pâles
Qui font souvent le bien et peuvent tout le mal.

It is very curious to note the subtle manner in which, for all his declarations about the Middle Ages, he is attracted irresistibly to that wonderful artificial fairy-land, associated for us for all time with the genius of Watteau, wherein pale roses and fountains and yew-hedges are the background for the fatal sweetness of Columbine and the dancing feet of Arlequino.

This Garden-of-Versailles cult, with its cold moonlight and its faint music has become, with the sad-gay Pierrot as its tutelary deity, one of the most appealing "motifs" in modern art.

Almost all of us have worshipped, at some time or another, at this wistful fairy shrine, and have laid our single white rose on its marble pavement, under the dark trees.

Yes; Verlaine may boast of his faithful loyalty to the "haute théologie et solide morale, guidé par la folie unique de la Croix" of that "Moyen Age énorme et délicat" which inspires his spirit. The fact remains that none — none among all the most infatuated frequenters of the perverse fairy-land of Watteau's exquisite dreams — gives himself up more wantonly to the artifice within artifice, to the mask below mask, of these dancers to tambourines amid the "boulingrins du pare aulique" of mock-classic fantasies. He gives himself up to this Watteau cult all the more easily because he himself has so infantile a heart. He is like a child who enters some elaborate masked ball in his own gala dress. It is natural to him to be perverse and wistful and tragically gay. It is natural to him to foot it in the moonlight along with the Marquis of Carabas.

That Nuit du Walpurgis classique of his, with its "jardin de Lenôtre, correct, ridicule et charmant," is one of the most delicate evocations of this *genre.* One sees these strange figures, "ces spectres agités," as if they were passing from twilight to twilight through the silvery mists of some pale

Corot-picture, passing into thin air, into the shadow of a shadow, into the dream of a dream, into nothingness and oblivion; but passing gaily and wantonly — to the music of mandolines, to the blowing of fairy horns!

N’importe! ils vont toujours, les fébriles fantômes,
Menant leur ronde vaste et morne, et tressautant
Comme dans un rayon de soleil des atomes,
Et s’évaporent a l’instant

Humide et blême où l’aube éteint l’un après l’autre
Les cors, en sorte qu’il ne reste absolument
Plus rien — absolument — qu’un jardin de Lenôtre
Correct, ridicule et charmant.

In the same vein, full of a diaphanous gaiety light as the flutter of dragon-fly wings, is that “caprice” in his Fêtes Galantes entitled Fantoches.

Scaramouche et Pucinella
Qu’un mauvais dessein rassembla
Gesticulent, noirs sur la lune.

Cependant l’excellent docteur
Bolonais cueille avec lenteur
Des simples parmi l’herbe brune.

Lors sa fille, piquant minois
Sous la charmille, en tapinois
Se glisse demi-nue, en quête

De son beau pirate espagnol
Dont un langoureux rossignol

Clame la détresse a tue-tête.

Is that not worthy of an illustration by Aubrey Beardsley? And yet has it not something more naive, more infantile, than most modern trifles of that sort? Does not it somehow suggest Grimm’s Fairy Stories?

There is one mood of Paul Verlaine, quite different from this, which is extremely interesting if only for its introduction into poetry of a certain impish malice which we do not as a rule associate with poetry at all.

Such is the poem called Les Indolents, with its ribald refrain, like the laughter of a light-footed Puck flitting across the moon-lit lawns, of

Hi! Hi! Hi! les amants bizarres!

....

Eurent l’inexpiable tort
D’ajourner une exquise mort.
Hi! Hi! Hi! les amants bizarres!

Such also are those extraordinary verses under the title Colloque Sentimental which trouble one’s imagination with so penetrating a chill of shivering disillusionment.

For some reason or other my own mind always associates these terrible lines with a particular corner of a public garden in Halifax, Yorkshire; where I seem to have seen two figures once; seen them with a glacial pang of pain that was like the stab of a dagger of ice frozen from a poisoned well.

Dans le vieux pare solitaire et glacé
Deux formes out tout à l’heure passé.

Leurs yeux sont morts et leurs lèvres sont molles
Et l’on entend à peine leurs paroles.

Dans le vieux pare solitaire et glacé
Deux spectres out évoqué le passé.

— Qu’il était bleu, le ciel, et grand l’espoir!
— L’espoir a fui, vaincu, vers le ciel noir.

I have omitted the bitter dialogue — as desolate and hollow in its frozen retorts as the echoes of iron heels in a granite sepulchre — but the whole piece has a petrified forlornness about it which somehow reminds one of certain verses of Mr. Thomas Hardy.

One of my own favourite poems of Verlaine is one whose weird and strange beauty will appeal, I fear, to few readers of these sketches; but if I could put into words the indescribable power which it exercises over my own mood I should be doing something to mitigate its remoteness from normal feelings. It is a wild mad thing, this poem — a fantasia upon a melancholy and terrible truth — but it has the power of launching one’s mind down long and perilous tides of speculation.

It is like a “nocturne” written by a musician who has wandered through all the cities of Europe with a company of beggar-players, playing masques of death to the occupants of all the cemeteries. He names the poem Grotesques; and it comes among the verses called Eaux-Fortes, dedicated to François Coppée.

C’est que, sur leurs aigres guitares
Crispant la main des libertés
Ils nasillent des chants bizarres,
Nostalgiques et révoltés;

C’est enfin que dans leurs prunelles
Rit et pleure — fastidieux —

L’amour des choses éternelles,
Des vieux morts et des anciens dieux!

....

Les juins brûlent et les décembres
Gèlent votre chair jusqu’aux os,
Et la fièvre envahit vos membres
Qui se déchirent aux roseaux.

Tout vous repousse et tout vous navre
Et quand la mort viendra pour vous
Maigre et froide, votre cadavre
Sera dédaigné par les loups!

I cannot resist the feeling that where the inmost essential genius of Verlaine is to be found is neither in his religious poems nor his love-poems; no, nor even in his singular fantasies.

I find it in certain little evasive verses, the fleeting magic of which evaporates, under any attempt to capture or define it, like the perfume from that broken alabaster box from which the woman anointed the feet of the Saviour. Such a poem is that strangely imaginative one, with a lovely silveriness of tone in its moth-like movements, and full of a mystery, soft, soothing and gentle, like the whisper of a child murmuring its happiness in its sleep, which is called Impression Fausse for some delicate reason that I, alas! lack the wit to fathom.

Dame souris trotte
Noire dans le gris du soir

Dame souris trotte
Grise dans le noir.

On sonne la cloche,
Dormez, les bons prisonniers,
On sonne la cloche:
Faut que vous dormiez,

.....

Dame souris trotte,
Rose dans les rayons bleus,
Dame souris trotte
Debout, paresseux!

Perhaps of all the poems he ever wrote the one most full of his peculiar and especial atmosphere — grey and sad and cool and deep and unlike anything else in the world — is that entitled Réversibilities; though here again I am out of my depths as to the full significance of this title.

Entends les pompes qui font
Le cri des chats.
Des sifflets viennent et vont
Comme en pourchas.
Ah, dans ces tristes décors
Les Déjàs sont les Encors!

O les vagues Angélus!
(Qui viennent d'où)
Vois s'allumer les Saluts

Du fond d’un trou.
Ah, dans ces mornes séjours
Les Jamais sont les Toujours!

Quels rêves épouvantes
Vous grands murs blancs!
Que de sanglots répétés,
Fous ou dolents!
Ah, dans ces piteux retraits
Les Toujours sont les Jamais!

Tu meurs doucereusement,
Obscurément,
Sans qu’on veille, O coeur aimant,
Sans testament!
Ah, dans ces deuils sans rachats
Les Encors sont les Déjàs!

It is perhaps because his essential kingdom is not bound by the time-limits of any century or age but has its place in that mysterious country beyond the margins of all change, where the dim vague feelings of humanity take to themselves shadowy and immortal forms and whisper and murmur of what except in music can never be uttered, that he appeals to us so much more than other recent poets.

In that twilight-land of delicate mystery, by those pale sea-banks dividing what we feel from what we dream, the silvery willows of indefinable memory bow themselves more sadly, the white poplars of faint hope shiver more tenderly, the far-off voices of past and future mingle with a more thrilling sweetness, than in the garish daylight of any circumscribed time or place.

In the twilight-country over which he rules, this fragile child of the clairvoyant senses, this uncrowned king of beggars and dreams, it may truly and indeed seem that “les jamais sont les toujours.”

His poetry is the poetry of water-colours. It is water seen through water. It is white painted upon white. It is sad with the whispers of falling rain. It is grey with the passage of softly-sliding mists. It is cool and fresh with the dews of morning and of evening.

Like a leaf whirling down from one of those tremulous poplar-trees that hang over the Seine between the Pont Neuf and the Quai Voltaire — whirling lightly and softly down, till it touches the flowing water and is borne away — each of these delicate filmy verses of his falls upon our consciousness; draws up from the depths its strange indescribable response; and is lost in the shadows.

One is persuaded by the poetry of Verlaine that the loveliest things are the most evasive things, the things which come most lightly and pass most swiftly. One realises from his poetry that the rarest intimations of life’s profound secret are just those that can only be expressed in hints, in gestures, in whispers, in airy touches and fleeting signs.

One comes to understand from it that the soul of poetry is and was and must always be no other thing than *music* — music not merely of the superficial sound of words, but of those deeper significances and those vaguer associations which words carry with them; music of the hidden spirit of words, the spirit which originally called them forth from the void and made them vehicles for the inchoate movements of man’s unuttered dreams.

Paul Verlaine — and not without reason — became a legend even while he lived; and now that he is dead he has become more than a legend. A legend and a symbol! Wherever the spirit of art finds itself misunderstood, mistrusted, disavowed, disinherited; driven into the taverns by the stupidity of those who dwell in “homes,” and into the arms of the submerged by the coldness and heartlessness of those who walk prosperously upon the surface; the figure of this fantastic child, this satyr-saint with the Socratic forehead, this tearful mummer among the armies of the outcasts, will rise up and write his prophecy upon the wall.

For the kingdom of art is as the kingdom of heaven. The clever ones, the wise ones, the shrewd ones, the ones that make themselves friends with Mammon, and build themselves houses of pleasure for their habitation, shall pass away and be forgotten forever.

The justice of the gods cancels the malice of the righteous, and the devoted gratitude of humanity tears up the contemptuous libels of the world.

He has come into his own, as all great poets must at last, in defiance of the puritan, in defiance of public opinion, and in spite of all aspersion. He has come into his own; and no one who loves poetry can afford to pass him by.

For while others may be more witty, more learned, more elaborate, none can be more melodious. His poetry is touched with the music that is beyond all argument. He lives by his sincerity. He lives by his imagination.

The things that pertain the deepest to humanity are not its fierce fleshly passions, its feverish ambitions, its proud reasonings, its tumultuous hopes. They are the things that belong to the hours when these obsessing forces fade and ebb and sink away. They are the things that rise up out of the twilight-margins of sleep and death; the things that come to us on softly stepping feet, like child-mothers with their first-born in their arms; the things that have the white mists of dawn about them and the cool breath of evening around them; the things that hint at something beyond passion and beyond reason; the things that sound to us like the sound of bells heard through clear deep water; for the secret of human life is not in its actions or its voices or its clamorous desires, but in the intervals between all these — when all these leave it for a moment at rest — and in the depths of the soul itself the music becomes audible, the music which is the silence of eternity.

REMY DE GOURMONT

THE DEATH OF Remy de Gourmont is one of the greatest losses that European literature has suffered since the death of Oscar Wilde. The supreme critic is as rare as the supreme artist, and de Gourmont's critical genius amounted to a miracle of clairvoyance.

He wrote of everything — from the etymological subtleties of the French language down to the chaste reluctances of female moles. He touched everything and he touched nothing that he did not adorn.

In America he is unfortunately far less well known than he deserves, though an admirable translation of "A Night in the Luxembourg," published in Boston, and a charming and illuminating essay by Mr. Robert Parker, have done something to remove this disgrace. As Mr. Parker truly observes, the essence of de Gourmont's genius is to be found in an insatiable curiosity which the absolute closing of any vista of knowledge by the final and authoritative discovery of truth would paralyse and petrify. He does not, as Mr. Parker justly says, seek for truth with any hope or even any particular wish, to find it. Truth found would be truth spoiled. He seeks it from sheer love of the pursuit. In this respect he is precisely of the stuff out of which great essayists are made. He is also placed in that special position from which the illusive phenomena of this challenging world are best caught, best analysed, and best interpreted, as we overtake them in their dreamy passage from mystery to mystery.

The mere fact of his basic assumption that final truth in any direction is undiscoverable — possibly undesirable also — sets him with the wisest and sanest of all the most interesting writers. It sets him "en rapport" with nature, too, in a very close and intimate affiliation. It sets him at one spring at the very parting of the ways where all the mysteries meet. Nature loves to reveal the most delicate side-lights and the most illuminating glimpses to those who take this attitude. Such disinterestedness brings its own reward.

To love truth for the sake of power or gain or pride or success is a contemptible prostitution; to love it for its own sake is a tragic foolishness. What is truth — in itself — that it should be loved? But to love it for the pleasure of pursuing it, that is the temper dear to the immortal gods. For this is indeed their own temper, the very way they themselves — the shrewd undying ones — regard the dream shadows of the great kaleidoscope.

It is a subtle and hard saying this, that truth must be played with lightly to be freely won, but it has a profound and infinite significance. Illuminating thoughts — thoughts with the bloom and gloss and dew of life itself upon them — do not come to the person who with puritanical austerity has grown lean in his wrestling. They come when we have ceased to care whether they come or not. They come when from the surface of the tide and under the indifferent stars we are content to drift and listen, without distress, to the humming waters.

As Goethe says, it is of little avail that we go forth with our screws and our levers. Tugged at so and mauled, the magic of the universe slips away from out of our very fingers. It is better to stroll negligently along the highways of the world careless of everything except "the pleasure which there is in life itself," and then, in Goethe's own phrase, "Such thoughts will come of themselves and cry like happy children— 'Here we are.'"

There is indeed required — and herein may be found the secret of Remy de Gourmont's evasive talent — a certain fundamental *irresponsibility,* if we are to become clairvoyant critics of life. As soon as we grow responsible, or become conscious of responsibility, something or other comes between us and the clear object of our curiosity, blurring its outline and confusing its colours. Moral scruples, for instance, as to how precisely this new fragment of knowledge or this new aspect of art is likely to affect the inclinations of the younger generation; religious scruples as to whether this particular angle of cosmic vision will redound to the glory of God or detract from it or diminish it; political or patriotic scruples as to whether this particular "truth" we have come to overtake will have a beneficial or injurious effect upon the fortunes of our nation; domestic scruples as to whether we are justified In emphasising some aspect of psychological discrimination that may be dangerous to those stately and ideal illusions upon which the more sacred of human institutions rest.

Looked at from this point of view it might seem as if it were almost impossible for a thoroughly responsible or earnest-minded man to become an ideal critic. Such a one keeps his mind so closely and gravely fixed upon his ethical "point d'appui," that when he jumps he misses the object altogether. In a certain sense every form of responsibility is obscurantism. We are concerned with something external to the actual thing under discussion; something to be gained or lost or betrayed or guarded; and between the pure image of what we are looking at and our own free souls, float a thousand distorting mists.

The whole philosophical attitude of Remy de Gourmont is full of interest and significance for those who are watching the deeper movements of European thought. At one, in a limited sense, with Bergson and William James in their protests against final or static "truth," de Gourmont's writings, when taken as a whole, form a most salutary and valuable counterpoise to the popular and vulgar implications of this modern mysticism. That dangerous and pernicious method of estimating the truth of things according to what James calls somewhere their "cash-value" receives blow after blow from his swift and ironic intelligence.

Things are what they are and their hidden causes are what they are, quite apart from whether they produce a pleasant or unpleasant effect upon individual lives. The sordid and utilitarian system of judging the value of thoughts and ideas in proportion to their efficiency in the world of practical exigencies does not appeal to this rational and classical mind.

The pragmatism of William James and the instinct-doctrines of Bergson have both been pounced upon by every kind of apologist for supernatural religion and categorical morality; while the method of appealing to the optimistic prejudices of shallow minds by the use of colloquial and mystical images has of recent years been introducing into European thought what might be called "Metaphysical Americanism."

Against this tendency, a tendency peculiarly and especially Anglo-Saxon, the ingrained *Latinity* of de Gourmont's mind indignantly revolts. His point of view is entirely and absolutely classical, in the old French sense of that suggestive word and in accordance with the great French traditions of Rabelais, Voltaire, Stendhal, Renan, and Anatole France.

The new pseudo-philosophy, so vague, so popular, so optimistic, so steeped in mystical morality, which one associates with the writings of so many modern Americans and which finds a certain degree of support in the work of Maeterlinck and Romain Rolland, leaves the intelligence of Remy de Gourmont entirely untouched. He comes to modern problems with the free, gay, mocking curiosity of a twentieth century Lucian. Completely out of his vein and remote from his method is that grave pedagogic tone which has become so popular a note in recent ethical writing, and which, for all his slang of the marketplace, underlies the psychological optimism of William James.

One has only to read a few pages of Remy de Gourmont to be conscious that one has entered once again the large, spacious, free, irresponsible, *heathen* atmosphere of the great writers of antiquity. The lapse of time since those classic ages, the superficial changes of human manners and speech, seem abolished, seem reduced to something that does not count at all. We have nothing here of that self-conscious modernity of tone, that fussy desire to be original and popular, which spoils the charm of so many vigorous writers of our age. It is as though some pleasant companion of Plato — some wise and gay Athenian from the side of Agathon or Phaedrus or Charmides — were risen from his tomb by the blue Ionian seas to discourse to us upon the eternal ironies of nature and human life under the lime trees and chestnuts of the Luxembourg gardens. It is as though some philosophic friend of Catullus or Propertius had returned from an age-long holiday within the olive groves of Sirmio to wander with clear-eyed humorous curiosity along the banks of the Seine or among the book-stalls of the Odéon.

Like a thick miasmic cloud, as we read this great pagan critic, all the fogs and vapours of turgid hyperborean superstition are driven away from the face of the warm sun. Once more what is permanent and interesting in this mad complicated comedy of human life emerges in bold and sharp relief.

Artists, novelists, poets, journalists, occultists, abnormalists, essayists, scientists and even theologians, are treated with that humorous and passionate curiosity, full of a spacious sense of the amplitude of and diversity of life’s possibilities, which we associate with the classic tradition.

Only in France is the appearance of a writer of this kind possible at all; because France alone of all the nations, and Paris alone of all the cities, of the modern world, has kept in complete and continuous touch with the "open secret" of the great civilisations.

There is no writer more required in America at this moment than Remy de Gourmont, and for that very reason no writer less likely to be received. Curiously enough, in spite of the huge influx of foreigners into the harbour reigned over by the Statue of Liberty, not even England itself is more enslaved by the dark fogs of puritanical superstition than the United States; for there is no place in the world where the brutal ignorance and complacent self-righteousness of the commercial middle classes rampage and revel and trample upon distinction and refinement more savagely than in America. The blame for this must fall entirely upon the English race and upon the descendants of the Puritans. Perhaps a time will come when all these Jews and Slavs and Italians will assert their *intellectual* as they are beginning to assert their *economic,* independence, and then no doubt led by the cities of the West — the ones furthest from Boston — there will be a Renaissance of European intelligence in this great daughter of Europe such as will astonish even Paris itself. But this event, as Sir Thomas More says so sadly of his Utopia, is rather to be hoped for than expected.

One hears so often from the mouths of middle-class apologists for the modern industrial system expressions of fear as to the loss of what they call "initiative" under any conceivable socialistic state. One is inclined to ask "initiative towards what"? Towards growing unscrupulously rich, it must be supposed; certainly not towards intellectual experiments and enterprises; for no possible revolutionary regime could be less sympathetic to these things than the one under which we live at present.

The Puritan rulers of America are very anxious to "educate" foreigners in the free "institutions" of their new home. One can only pray that the persons submitted to this process will find some opportunity of adding to their “education” some cursory acquaintance with their own classics; so that when the hour arrives and we wake to find ourselves under the rule of trade-unions or socialistic bureaucrats, our new authorities will know at least something of the “institution,” as Walt Whitman somewhere calls it, of intellectual toleration.

Remy de Gourmont himself is very far from being a socialist. He has imbibed with certain important differences, due to his incorrigible Latin temperament, many of the doctrines of Nietzsche; but Nietzsche himself could hardly be more inimical to any kind of mob-rule than this exponent of “subjective idealism.”

Remy de Gourmont does not interest himself greatly in political changes. He does not interest himself in political revolutions. Like Goethe, he considers the intellectual freedom of the artist and philosopher best secured under a government that is stable and lasting; better still under a government that confines itself rigidly to its own sphere and leaves manners and morals to the taste of the individual; best of all under that Utopian absence of any government, whether of the many or of the few, whereof all free spirits dream.

Remy de Gourmont has written one immortal philosophical romance in “A Night in the Luxembourg.” He has written some exquisite poetry full of a voluptuous and ironic charm; full of that remoteness from sordid reality which befits a lonely and epicurean spirit, a spirit pursuing its own way on the shadowy side of all human roads where the old men dream their most interesting dreams and the young maidens dance their most unreserved dances.

He has written many graceful and lovely prose poems — one hesitates to call them “short stories” — in which the reader is transported away beyond all modern surroundings into that delicate dream world so dear to lovers of

Watteau and Poussin, where the nymphs of Arcadia gather, wondering and wistful, about the feet of wandering saints, and where the symbols of Dionysian orgies blend with the symbols of the redemption of humanity.

He has written admirable and unsurpassed criticism upon almost all the contemporary figures of French literature — criticism which in many cases contains a wisdom and a delicacy of feeling quite beyond the reach of the particular figure that preoccupies him at the moment. He has done all this and done it as no one else in Europe could have done it. But in the last resort it does not seem as though his reputation would rest either upon his poetry or his prose poetry or even perhaps upon his "masks," as he calls them, of personal appreciation.

It rather seems as though his best work — putting "A Night in the Luxembourg" aside — were to be found in that long series of psychological studies which he entitles "Promenades Litteraires," "Promenades Philosophiques" and "Epilogues." If we add to these the volumes called "La culture des Idées," "Le chemin de Velours," and "Le Problème du style" we have a body of philosophical analysis and speculation the value of which it would be impossible to overrate in the present condition of European thought.

What we have offered to us in these illuminating essays is nothing less than an inestimable mass of interpretative suggestion, dealing with every kind of topic under the sun and throwing light upon every species of open question and every degree of human mystery.

When one endeavours to distil from all this erudite mass of criticism — of "criticism of life" in the true sense of that phrase — the fundamental and quintessential aspects of thought, one finds the attempt a much easier one than might be expected from the variety, and in many cases from the occasional and transitory nature, of the subjects discussed. It is this particular tone and temper of mind diffused at large through a discussion of so immense a variety of topics that in the last resort one feels is the man's real contribution to the art of living upon the earth. And when in pursuing the transformations of his protean intelligence through one critical metamorphosis after another we finally catch him in his native and original form, it is this form, with the features of the real Remy de Gourmont, which will remain in our mind when many of its incidental embodiments have ceased to interest us.

The man in his essential quality is precisely what our generation and our race requires as its antipodal corrective. He is the precise opposite of everything most characteristic of our puritan-souled and commercial-minded Democracy. He is all that we are not — and we are all that he is not.

For an average mind evolved by our system and subjected to our influence — the mind and influence of modern English-speaking America — the writings of Remy de Gourmont would be, if apprehended in any true measure according to their real content and significance, the most extreme intellectual and moral outrage that could be inflicted upon us. Properly understood, or even superficially understood, they would wound and shock and stagger and perplex every one of our most sacred prejudices. They would conflict with the whole method and aim of the education which we have received, an education of which the professed object is to fit us for an active, successful and energetic life in the sphere of industrial or commercial or technical enterprises, and to make of us moral, socially-minded, conventional and normal persons. Our education, I mean our American education — for they still teach the classics in a few schools in England — is, in true pragmatic manner, subordinate to what is called one's "life work"; to the turning, as profitably to ourselves as possible, of some well-oiled wheel in the industrial machine.

Such an education, though it may produce brilliant brokers and inspired financiers, with an efflorescence of preachers and base-ball players, certainly cannot produce “humanists” of the old, wise Epicurean type.

But it is not only our education which is at fault. Our whole spiritual atmosphere is alien and antagonistic to the spiritual atmosphere of Remy de Gourmont. He is serious where we are flippant, and we are serious where he is ironical.

Any young person among us who imbibed the mental and moral attitude of Remy de Gourmont would cause dismay and consternation in the hearts of his friends. He would probably have a library. He might even read Paul Claudel.

I speak lightly enough, but the point at issue is not a light one. It is indeed nothing less than a parting of the ways between two civilisations, or, shall we say, between a civilisation which has not lost touch with Athens and Rome and a commercial barbarism buttressed up with “modern improvements.”

Remy de Gourmont’s genius is in its essence an aristocratic one. He has the reserve of the aristocrat; the aristocratic contempt for the judgment of the common herd; the aristocrat’s haughty indifference to public opinion. Writing easily, urbanely, plausibly upon every aspect of human life, he continues the great literary tradition of the beautifully and appropriately named *“humanism”* of the “Revival of Letters.”

As Mr. Parker hints, he is one of those who refuse to bow to the intolerable mandate of the dry and sapless spirit of “specialisation.” He refuses to leave art to the artist, science to the scientist, religion to the theologian, or the delicate art of natural casuistry to the professional moralist. In the true humanistic temper he claims the right to deal with all these matters, and to deal with them lightly, freely, unscrupulously, irresponsibly, and with no “arrière pensée” but the simple pleasure of the discussion.

He makes us forget Herbert Spencer and makes us think of Plato. He is the wise sophist of our own age, unspoiled by any Socratic “conceptualism,” and ready, like Protagoras, to show us how man is the measure of all things and how the individual is the measure of man. The ardour of his intellectual curiosity burns with a clear smokeless flame. He brings back to the touchstone of a sort of distinguished common sense, free from every species of superstition, all those great metaphysical and moral problems which have been too often monopolised by the acrid and technical pedantry of the schools.

He reminds one of the old-fashioned “gentleman of leisure” of the eighteenth century, writing shrewdly and wisely upon every question relating to human life, from punctuation and grammar to the manner in which the monks of the Thebaid worshipped God. His attitude is always that of the great amateur, never of the little professional. He writes with suggestive imagination, not with exhaustive authority. He takes up one subject after another that has been, so to speak, closed and locked to the ordinary layman, and opens it up again with some original thrust of wholesome scepticism, and makes it flexible and porous. He indicates change and fluctuation and malleableness and the organic capriciousness of life, where the professors have shut themselves up in logical dilemmas. When it comes to the matter of his actual approach to these things it will be found that he plunges his hand boldly into the flowing stream, in the way of a true essayist dispensing with all the tedious logical paraphernalia of a writer of “serious treatises.”

His genius is not only aristocratic in quality; it is essentially what might be called, in a liberal use of the term, the genius of a sensualist.

Remy de Gourmont’s ultimate contribution to the art of criticism is the disentangling, from among the more purely rational vehicles of thought, of what we might regard as the sensual or sensuous elements of human receptivity. No one can read his writings with any degree of intelligence without becoming aware that, in his way of handling life, ideas become sensations and sensations become ideas.

More than any critic that ever lived, Remy de Gourmont has the power of interesting us in his psychological discoveries with that sort of thrilling vibrating interest which is almost like a physical touch.

The thing to note in regard to this evocation of a pleasurable shock of mental excitement is that in his case it does not seem produced so much by the sonority or euphonious fall of the actual words — as in the case of Oscar Wilde — or even by the subtler spiritual harmony of rhythmically arranged thought — as in the case of Walter Pater — as by the use of words to liberate and set free the underlying sensation which gives body to the idea, or, if you will, the underlying idea which gives soul to the sensation.

In reading him we seldom pause, as we do with Wilde or Pater, to caress with the tip of our intellectual tongue the insidious bloom and gloss and magical effluence of the actual phrases he uses. His phrases seem, so to speak, to clear themselves out of the way — to efface themselves and to retire in order that the sensational thought beneath them may leap forward unimpeded.

Words become indeed to this great student of the subtleties of human language mere talismans and entrance keys, by means of which we enter into the purlieus of that psychological borderland existing half way between the moving waters of sensibility and the human shores of mental appreciation. Playing this part in his work it becomes necessary that his words should divest themselves, as far as it is humanly possible for them to do so without losing their intelligible symbolic value, of all merely logical and abstract connotation. It is necessary that his words should be light-footed and airily winged, swift, sharp and sudden, so that they may throw the attention of the reader away from themselves upon the actual psychic and psychological thrill produced by each new and exciting idea. They must be fluid and flexible, these words of his, free from rigid or traditional fetters, and prepared at a moment's notice to take new colour and shape from some unexpected and original thought looming up in the twilight below.

They must be quick to turn green, blue, purple, violet — these words — like the flowing waters of some sunlit sea, in order that the mysterious reflections of the wonderful opalescent fish, swimming to and fro in the dim depths, may reach the surface unimpeded by any shadows.

But the chief point about the style of Remy de Gourmont is that it precisely reflects his main fundamental principle, the principle that ideas should strike us with the pleasurable shock of sensations, and that sensations should be porous to and penetrated by ideas.

"En littérature, comme en tout, il faut que cesse la regne des mots abstraits. Une ouvre d'art n'existe que par l'émotion qu'elle nous donne; il suffira de determiner et de caracteriser la nature de cette émotion; cela ira de la métaphysique à la sensualité, de l'idée pure au plaisir physique."

"La métaphysique à la sensualité; l'idée pure au plaisir physique"; it would be impossible to put more clearly than in those words the purpose and aim of this great writer's work.

Contemptuously aloof from the idols of the market-place, contemptuously indifferent to the tyranny of public opinion, with the fixed principle in his mind — almost his only fixed principle — that the majority is always wrong, Remy de Gourmont goes upon his way; passionately tasting, like a great satin-bodied humming bird, every exquisite flower in the garden of human ideas. The wings of his thoughts, as he hovers, beat so quickly as to be almost invisible; and thus it is that in reading him — great scholar of style as he is — we do not think of his words but only of his thought, or rather only of the sensation which his thought evokes.

When it comes to the actual philosophy of Remy de Gourmont we indeed arrive at something which may well cause our Puritan obscurants to open their mouths with amazement. He is perhaps the only perfectly frank and unmitigated "hedonist" which European literature at this hour offers.

He advocates pleasure as the legitimate and sole end of man's endeavours and aspirations upon this earth. Pleasure imaginatively dealt with indeed, and transformed from a purely physical into a cerebral emotion; but pleasure frankly, candidly, shamelessly accepted at its natural and obvious value.

Here, then, comes at last upon the scene a writer as free from the moralistic aftermath of two thousand years of criminalising of human instincts as he is free from the supernatural dogmas that have given support to this darkening of the sunshine.

Nietzsche, of course, was before him with his formidable philosophic hammer; but Nietzsche himself was by temperament too spiritual, too cold, too aloof from the common instincts of humanity to do more than hew out an opening through the gloomy thickets of the ascetic forest. He was himself too entirely intellectual, too high and icy and austere and imaginative ever to bring the actual feet of the dancers, and the lutes and flutes of the wanton singers into the sunlit path to which he pointed the way.

His cruel praise of the more predatory and rapacious among the emancipated spirits gives, too, a somewhat harsh and sinister aspect to the whole thing. The natural innocence of genuine pagan delight draws back instinctively from the savage excesses of the Nietzschean “blond beast.” The poor fauns and dryads of the free ancient world hesitate trembling and frightened on the very threshold of their liberty when this great Zarathustra offers them a choice between frozen Alpine peaks of heroic desolation and bloodstained jungles frequented by Borgian tigers.

In his own heart Nietzsche was much more of a mediaeval saint than a predatory “higher man,” but the natural human instinct of any sane and sun-loving pagan may well shrink back dismayed from any contact with this savage “will to power,” which, while destroying the quiet cloistered gardens of monastic seclusion, hurls us into the path of these new tyrants. The less rigorous “religious orders” of the faith of Christendom would seem to offer to these poor dismayed “revenants” from the ancient world a much quieter and happier habitation than the mountain tops where blows the frozen wind of “Eternal Recurrence,” or the smouldering desert sands where stalk the tawny lions of the “higher morality.” The “Rule of Benedict” would in this sense be a refuge for the timorous unbaptised, and the “Weeds of Dominic” a protection for the gentle infidel.

After reading Remy de Gourmont, with his wise, friendly ironic interest in every kind of human emotion, one is inclined to feel that, after all, in the large and tolerant courts of some less zealous traditional “order” there might be more pleasant air to breathe, more peaceful sunshine, more fresh and dewy rose-gardens, than in a world dominated by the Eagle and the Serpent of the Zarathustrian Overman.

Remy de Gourmont would free us from the rule of dogmatist and moralist, but he would free us from these without plunging us into a yet sterner ascesis. The tone and temper advocated by him is one eminently sane, peaceful, quiet, friendly and gay. He does not free us from a dark responsibility to God to plunge us under the yoke of a darker responsibility to posterity. He would free us from every kind of responsibility. He would reduce our life to a beautiful unrestricted "Abbey of Thelema," over the gates of which the great Pantagruelian motto "Fay ce que vouldray" would be written in letters of gold.

What one is brought to feel in reading Remy de Gourmont is that the liberty of the individual to follow his intellectual and psychological tastes unimpeded by any sort of external authority is much more important for civilisation at large and much more conducive to the interests of posterity than any inflexible rules, whether they be laid upon us by ecclesiastical tradition, by puritanical heretics or by prophetic supermen.

It is really *liberty* — first and last — in the full beautiful meaning of that great human word, that Remy de Gourmont claims for us; though he is perfectly aware that such liberty can never be enjoyed except by those whose genuine intellectual emancipation renders them fit to enjoy it. It is always for the liberty of *man* as an individual, never for *men* as a herd, that he contends; as his favourite phrase, "subjective idealism," constantly insists.

And, above all, it is perfect and untrammelled liberty for the artist that he demands. One of his most suggestive and interesting essays is upon the topic of the influence of the "young girl" upon contemporary literature.

This is indeed carrying the war into the enemy's camp; for if the "young girl" has interfered with the freedom of the artist in France, what has she done in England and America? "What are they doing here?" cried Goethe once, teased and fretted by the presence of this restricting influence. "Why don't they keep them in their convents?"

And it is this very cry, the cry of the impatient artist longing to deal freely and largely with every mortal aspect of human life, that Remy de Gourmont echoes.

It is indeed a serious and difficult problem; and it is one of the problems thrust inevitably upon us by the spread of education and the consequent cheapening and vulgarising of education under the influence of democracy.

But it can have only one answer, the great and memorable answer given to all scrupulous protectors of virtue by John Milton in his “Areopagitica.” It is better that this or the other person should come to harm by the bad use of a good book than that the life-blood of an immortal spirit, embalmed in any beautiful work of art, should be wasted upon the dust and never reach the verdict of posterity.

What are they doing here, these difficult young persons and their still more difficult guardians? This — this sacred Elysian garden of the great humanistic tradition of classic wisdom and classic art — must not be invaded by clamorous babes and agitated elders, must not be profaned either by the plaudits or the strictures of the unlettered mob. Somewhere in human life, and where should it be if not in the cloistered seclusion of noble literature? — there must be an escape from the importunities of such people and from the responsibilities of the ignorance they so jealously guard.

In the days when men wrote for men — and for women of the calibre of Aspasia or Margaret of Navarre — this problem did not emerge. It was not wise perhaps at Athens to abuse Cleon, though — heaven knows — that was often enough done; nor in Rome to satirise Caesar, though that too was now and again most prosperously achieved! It was dangerous in the time of Rabelais to throw doubt on the authority of the church. But this new tyranny, this new oppression of letters, this unfortunate cult of the susceptible “young person,” is far more deadly to the interests of civilisation than any interference by church or state. There was always to be found some wise and classic-minded cardinal to whom one could appeal, some dilettante Maecenas to whom one might dedicate one’s work.

But now the flood-gates are open; the dam is up; and the great tide of unmitigated philistinism, hounded on by dreadful protectors of dreadful “young persons,” invades the very citadel of civilisation itself, and pours its terrible “pure” scum and its popular sentimental mud over the altars of the defenceless immortals. No one asks that these tyrannical young people and their anxious guardians should read the classics or should read the works of such far-descended inheritors of the classical tradition who, like Remy de Gourmont, seek to keep the sacred fire alight. Let them hold their hands off! Let them go back to their schools and their presbyteries.

Democracy may be a great improvement upon the past, just as modern religion may be an improvement upon ancient religion. But one thing democracy must not be allowed to do; it must not be allowed to substitute the rule of a puritanical middle-class, led by pietistic sentimentalists, for the despotism of a Caesar or a Sforza or a Malatesta in the sphere of the intellect. The intellect of the race must be held sacred, must be held intact; and its artists and writers permitted to go their way and follow their “subjective idealism” as they please, without let or hindrance.

What would be the use of persecuting genius into absolute sterility if after years and years of suppression human instincts were left the same, only with no subtle criticism or free creative art to give them beauty, refinement, interpretation and the magic of a noble style?

Remy de Gourmont, like all the profoundest intelligences of our race, like the great Goethe himself, is a spiritual anarchist.

Standing apart from popular idols and popular catch-words he converses with the great withdrawn souls of his own and previous ages, and hands on to posterity the large, free, urbane atmosphere of humanistic wisdom.

On the whole perhaps it would be well to keep his writings out of the New World. They might stir up pessimistic feelings. They might make us dissatisfied with lecture rooms and moving picture shows. They might undermine our interest in politics.

“La métaphysique à la sensualité — l’idée pure au plaisir physique!” Such language has indeed a dangerous sound.

To be obsessed by a passionate and insatiable curiosity with regard to every sensation known to human senses; to be anxious to give this curiosity complete scope, so that nothing, literally nothing, shall escape it; to be endowed with the power of putting the results of these investigations into clear fascinating words, words that allure us into passing through them and beyond and behind them into the sensation of intellectual discovery which they conceal; this indeed, in our democratic age, is to be a very dubious, a very questionable writer!

For this shameless advocate of pleasure as the legitimate aim of the human race, sex and everything connected with sex comes naturally to be of paramount interest. Sex in every conceivable aspect, and religion in its best aspect — that is to say in its ritualistic one — are the things round which the cerebral passion of this versatile humanist hovers most continually.

In his prose poems and in his poetry these two interests are continually appearing, and, more often than not, they appear together fatally and indissolubly united.

“The Book of Litanies” is the title, for instance, he is pleased to give to one of his most characteristic experiments in verse; the one that contains that amazing poem addressed to the rose, with its melancholy and sinister refrain which troubles the memory like a swift wicked look from a beautiful countenance that ought to be pure and cold in death.

And how lovely and significant are those words “The Pilgrim of Silence,” which is the name he seems to select for his own wandering and insatiable soul.

The Pilgrim of Silence! Pilgrim moving, aloof from the clamours of men, from garden to garden of melancholy and sweet mystery; pilgrim passing night by night along moon-lit parterres of impossible roses; pilgrim seeking “wild sea-banks” where strange-leaved glaucous plants whisper their secrets to the sharp salt wind; pilgrim of silence, for whom the gentlest murmur of the troubled senses of feverish humanity has its absorbing interest, every quiver of those burning eyelids its secret intimation, every sigh of that tremulous breast its burden of delicate confession; pilgrim of silence moving aloof from the howls of the mob and the raucous voices of the preachers, moving from garden to garden, from sea-shore to sea-shore; cannot even you — oh pilgrim of the long, long quest — give us the word, the clue, the signal, that shall answer the riddle of our days, and make the twilight of our destiny roll back? Pilgrim of silence, have you only silence to offer us at the last, after all your litanies to all the gods living and dead? Is silence your last word too?

Thus we can imagine Simone, the tender companion of our wanderer, questioning him as they walk together over the dead memories of all the generations.

Ah yes! Simone may question her pilgrim — her pilgrim of silence — even as, in his own “Nuit au Luxembourg,” the youth to whom our Lord discoursed so strangely, questioned the Master as to the ultimate mystery and received so ambiguous a response.

And Simone likewise shall receive her answer, as we all — whether we be descendants of the Puritans, crossing Boston Common, or aliens of the sweat-shops of New York, crossing Washington Square, or unemployed in Hyde Park, or nursery-maids in the Jardin des Plantes — shall receive ours, as we walk over the dead leaves of the centuries.

Simone, aimes-tu le bruit des pas sur les feuilles mortes?

Quand le pied les écrase, elles pleurent comme des âmes,
Elle font un bruit d'ailes ou de robes de femme.

Simone, aimes-tu le bruit des pas sur les feuilles mortes?

Viens; nous serons un jour de pauvres feuilles mortes.
Viens; déjà la nuit tombe et le vent nous emporte.

Simone, aimes-tu le bruit des pas sur les feuilles mortes?

"Le bruit des pas sur les feuilles mortes" — such indeed must be, at the last, the wisdom of this great harvester of human passions and perversions.

"Feuilles mortes," and the sound of feet that go by; that go by and return not again!

Remy de Gourmont leaves in us a bitter after-sense that we have not altogether, or perhaps even nearly, sounded the stops of his mystery. "The rest is silence" not only because he is dead, but because it seems as if he mocked at us — he the Protean critic — until his last hour.

His remote epicurean life — the life of a passionate scholar of the Renaissance — baffles and evades our curiosity.

To analyse Remy de Gourmont one would have to be a Remy de Gourmont.

He is full of inconsistencies. Proudly individualistic, an intellectual anarchist free from every scruple, he displays an objective patience almost worthy of Goethe himself in his elaborate investigations into the mysteries of life and the mysteries of the art that expresses life.

Furiously enamoured of thrilling aesthetic sensations he can yet wander, as those who know his "Promenades" can testify, through all manner of intricate and technical details.

Capable in his poetry and prose-poems of giving himself up to every sort of ambiguous and abnormal caprice, he is yet in his calmer hours able to fall back upon a sane, serene and sun-lit wisdom, tolerant towards the superstitions of humanity, and full of the magic of the universe. Never for a single moment in all of his writings are we allowed to forget the essential wonder and mystery of sex. Sex, in all its caprices and eccentricities, in all its psychological masks and ritualistic symbols, interests him ultimately more than anything else. It is this which inspires even his critical work with a sort of physiological thrill, as though the encounter with a new creative intelligence were an encounter between lover and beloved.

Remy de Gourmont would have sex and sex-emotions put frankly into the fore-ground of everything, as far as art and letters are concerned. He would take the timid hyperborean Muse of the modern world and bathe her once more in the sun-lit waters of the Heliconian Spring. He would paganize, Latinize and Mediterraneanize the genius of Europe.

Much of his writing will fall into oblivion. It is too occasional, too topical, too fretted by the necessity of clearing away the half-gods so that the gods may arrive. But certain of his books will live forever; assured of that smiling and amiable immortality, beyond the reach of all vulgar malice, which the high invisible ones give to those who have learnt the sacramental secret that; only through the senses do we understand the soul, and only through the soul do we understand the senses.

WILLIAM BLAKE

THE STRANGE AND mysterious figure of William Blake seems continually to appear at the end of almost every vista of intellectual and aesthetic interest down which we move in these latter days.

The man's genius must have been of a unique kind; for while writers like Wordsworth and Byron seem now to have stiffened into dignified statues of venerated and achieved pre-eminence, he — the contemporary of William Cowper — exercises now, half way through the second decade of the twentieth century, an influence as fresh, as living, as organic, as palpable, as that of authors who have only just fallen upon silence.

His so-called "Prophetic Books" may be obscure and arbitrary in their fantastic mythology. I shall leave the interpretation of these works to those who are more versed in the occult sciences than I am, or than I should greatly care to be; but a prophet in the most true sense of that distinguished word, Blake certainly was — and to prove it one need not touch these Apocalyptic oracles.

Writing while Cowper was composing evangelical hymns under the influence of the Rev. Dr. Newton, and while Burns was celebrating his Highland Mary, Blake anticipates many of the profoundest thoughts of Nietzsche, and opens the "charmed magic casements" upon these perilous fairy seas, voyaged over by Verlaine and Hauptmann and Maeterlinck and Mallarmé.

When one considers the fact that he was actually writing poems and engraving pictures before the eighteenth century closed and before Edgar

Allan Poe was born, it is nothing short of staggering to realise how, not only in literature but in art, his astounding genius dominates our modern taste.

It might almost seem as if every single one of the poets and painters of our age — all these imagists and post-impressionists and symbolists and the rest — had done nothing during the sensitive years of their life but brood over the work of William Blake. Even in music, even in dancing — certainly in the symbolic dancing of Isadora Duncan — even in the stage decorations of our Little Theatres, one traces the mystical impulse he set in motion, and the austere lineaments, not exactly classical or mediaeval, but partaking of the nature of both, of his elemental evocations.

It were, of course, not really possible to suppose that all these people — all the most imaginative and interesting artists of our day — definitely subjected themselves to the influence of William Blake. The more rational way of accounting for the extraordinary resemblance is to conceive that Blake, by some premonitory inspiration of the world-spirit "brooding upon things to come," anticipated in an age more emotionally alien to our own than that of Apuleius or of St. Anselm, the very "body and pressure" of the dreams that were to dominate the earth.

When one considers how between the age of Blake and the one in which we now live, extend no less than three great epochs of intellectual taste, the thing becomes almost as strange as one of his own imaginations.

The age of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen, of Wordsworth and Byron, followed immediately upon his. Then we have the age of Thackeray and Tennyson and the great Mid-Victorians. Then finally at the end of the nineteenth century we have the epoch dominated in art by Aubrey Beardsley, and in literature by Swinburne and Oscar Wilde.

Now in our own age — an age that feels as though Wilde himself were growing a little old-fashioned — we find ourselves returning to William

Blake and discovering him to be more entirely in harmony with the instincts of our most secret souls than any single genius we could name actually working in our midst. It is as though to find our completest expression, the passionate and mystical soul of our materialistic age were driven back to an author who lived a hundred years ago. This phenomenon is by no means unknown in the history of the pilgrimage of the human spirit; but it has never presented itself in so emphatic a form as in the case of this extraordinary person.

In the early ages of the world, the result without doubt would be some weird deification of the clairvoyant prophet. William Blake would become a myth, a legend, an avatar of the divine Being, a Buddha, a Zoroaster, a wandering Dionysus. As it is, we are forced to confine ourselves to the fascinating pleasure of watching in individual cases, this or that modern soul, "touched to fine issues," meeting for the first time, as it may often happen, this century-buried incarnation of their own most evasive dreams.

I myself, who now jot down these fragmentary notes upon him, had the privilege once of witnessing the illumination — I can call it by no other name — produced upon the mind of the greatest novelist of America and the most incorrigibly realistic, by a chance encounter with the "Songs of Innocence."

One of the most obvious characteristics of our age is its cult of children. Here — in the passion of this cult — we separate ourselves altogether, both from our mediaeval ancestors who confined their devotion to the divine child, and from the classical ages, who kept children altogether in the background.

"When I became a man," says the apostle, "I put away childish things," and this "putting away of childish things" has always been a special note of the temper and attitude of orthodox Protestants for whom these other

Biblical words, spoken by a greater than St. Paul, about "becoming as little children," must seem a sort of pious rhetoric.

When one considers how this thrice accursed weight of Protestant Puritanism, the most odious and inhuman of all the perverted superstitions that have darkened man's history, a superstition which, though slowly dying, is not yet, owing to its joyless use as a "business asset," altogether dead, has, ever since it was spawned in Scotland and Geneva, made cruel war upon every childish instinct in us and oppressed with unspeakable dreariness the lives of generations of children, it must be regarded as one of the happiest signs of the times that the double renaissance of Catholic Faith and Pagan Freedom now abroad among us, has brought the "Child in the House" into the clear sunlight of an almost religious appreciation.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood. It would be a grievous and ludicrous mistake to associate the child-cult which runs like a thread of filmy star-light through the work of William Blake with the somewhat strained and fantastic attitude of child-worship which inspires such poetry as Francis Thompson's "Love in Dian's Lap," and gives a ridiculous and affected air to so many of our little ones themselves. The child of Blake's imagination is the immortal and undying child to be found in the heart of every man and every woman. It is the child spoken of in some of his most beautiful passages, by Nietzsche himself — the child who will come at the last, when the days of the Camel and the days of the Lion are over, and inaugurate the beginning of the "Great Noon."

"And there the lion's ruddy eyes
Shall flow with tears of gold
And pitying the tender cries
And walking round the fold,
Saying, 'Wrath by his weakness

And by his health sickness
Are driven away
From our immortal day.'"

Using boldly and freely, and with far more genuine worship than many orthodox believers, the figure and idea of Christ; it is not exactly the Christ we know in traditional Catholic piety, to whom in association with this image of the man-child, Blake's mind is constantly turning.

With a noble blasphemy — dearer, one may hope, to God, than the slavishness of many evangelical pietists — he treats the Christian legend with the same sort of freedom that the old Greek poets used in dealing with the gods of Nature.

The figure of Christ becomes under his hands, as we feel sometimes it does under the hands of the great painters of the Renaissance, a god among other gods; a power among other powers, but one possessed of a secret drawn from the hidden depths of the universe, which in the end is destined to prevail. So far does Blake stray from the barriers of traditional reverence, that we find him boldly associating this Christ of his — this man-child who is to redeem the race — with a temper the very opposite of an ascetic one.

What makes his philosophy so interesting and original is the fact that he entirely disentangles the phenomena of sexual love from any notion or idea of sin or shame. The man-child whose pitiful heart and whose tenderness toward the weak and unhappy are drawn from the Christ-Story, takes almost the form of a Pagan Eros — the full-grown, soft-limbed Eros of later Greek fancy — when the question of restraint or renunciation or ascetic chastity is brought forward.

What Blake has really done, be it said with all reverence, and far from profane ears — is to steal the Christ-child out of his cradle in the church of his worshippers and carry him into the chambers of the East, the chambers of the Sun, into the "Green fields and happy groves" of primitive Arcadian innocence, where the feet of the dancers are light upon the dew of the morning, and where the children of passion and of pleasure sport and play, as they did in the Golden Age.

In that wonderful picture of his representing the sons of God "shouting together" in the primal joy of creation, one has a vision of the large and noble harmony he strove after between an emancipated flesh and a free spirit. William Blake, in his Adamic innocence of "sin," has something in him that suggests Walt Whitman, but unlike Whitman he prefers to use the figure of Christ rather than any vague "ensemble" of nature-forces to symbolise the triumphant nuptials of soul and body.

Sometimes in his strange verses one has the impression that one is reading the fragmentary and broken utterances of some great ancient poet-philosopher — some Pythagoras or Empedocles — through whose gnomic oracles runs the rhythm of the winds and tides, and for whose ears the stars in their courses have a far-flung harmony.

He often seems to make use of the Bible and Biblical usages, very much as the ancient poets made use of Hesiod or of Homer, treating such writings with reverence, but subordinating what is borrowed from them to new and original purpose.

"Hear the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past and future sees,
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walked among the ancient trees.

"Calling the lapsed soul
And weeping in the evening dew,

That might control The starry pole
And fallen, fallen light renew!

“O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass!
    Night is worn
    And the Morn
Rises from the slumbrous mass.

“Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
    The starry floor
    The watery shore
Is given thee till break of day.”

If I were asked to name a writer whose work conveys to one’s mind, free of any admixture of rhetoric or of any alloy of cleverness, the very impact and shock of pure inspired genius, I would unhesitatingly name William Blake. One is strangely conscious in reading him of the presence of some great unuttered power — some vast demiurgic secret — struggling like a buried Titan just below the surface of his mind, and never quite finding vocal expression.

Dim shapes — vast inchoate shadows — like dreams of forgotten worlds and shadows of worlds as yet unborn, seem to pass backwards and forwards over the brooding waters of his spirit. There is no poet perhaps who gives such an impression of primordial creative force — force hewing at the roots of the world and weeping and laughing from sheer pleasure at the touch of that dream stuff whereof life is made. Above his head, as he laughs and weeps and sings, the branches of the trees of the forest of night stir and rustle under the immense spaces, and, floating above them, the planets and the stars flicker down upon him with friendly mysterious joy.

No poet gives one the impression of greater strength than William Blake; and this is emphasised by the very simplicity and childishness of his style. Only out of the strength of a lion could come such honeyed gentleness. And if he is one of the strongest among poets he is also one of the happiest.

Genuine happiness — happiness that is at the same time intellectual and spontaneous — is far rarer in poetry than one might suppose. Such happiness has nothing necessarily to do with an optimistic philosophy or even with faith in God. It has nothing at all to do with physical well-being or the mere animal sensations of eating and drinking and philandering. It is a thing of more mysterious import and of deeper issues than these. It may come lightly and go lightly, but the rhythm of eternity is in the beating of its wings, and deep calls to deep in the throbbing of its pulses.

As Blake himself puts it —

“He who bends to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity’s sun-rise.”

In the welling up, out of the world’s depths, of happiness like this, there is a sense of calm, of serenity, of immortal repose and full-brimmed ecstasy. It is the “energy without disturbance” which Aristotle indicates as the secret of the life of the eternal Being himself. It is beyond the ordinary pleasures of sex, as it is beyond the ordinary difference between good and evil. It is human and yet inhuman. It is the happiness of da Vinci, of Spinoza, of Goethe. It is the happiness towards which Nietzsche all his life long struggled desperately, and struggled in vain.

One touches the fringe of the very mystery of human symbols — of the uttermost secret of *words* in their power to express the soul of a writer — when one attempts to analyse the child-like simplicity of William Blake's style. How is it that he manages with so small, so limited a vocabulary, to capture the very "music of the spheres"? We all have the same words at our command; we all have the same rhymes; where then lies this strange power that can give the simplest syllables so original, so personal, a shape?

"What the hammer? What the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?"

Just because his materials are so simple and so few — and this applies to his plastic art as well as to his poetry — we are brought to pause more sharply and startlingly in his case than that of almost any other, before the primordial mystery of human expression and its malleableness under the impact of personality. Probably no poet ever lived who expressed his meaning by the use of such a limited number of words, or of words so simple and childish. It is as though William Blake had actually transformed himself into some living incarnation of his own Virgilian child-saviour, and were stammering his oracles to mankind through divine baby-lips.

What matter? It is the one and the same Urbs Beata, Calliopolis, Utopia, New Rome, New Atlantis, which these child-like syllables announce, trumpet heralded by the angels of the Revelation, chanted by the high-souled Mantuan, sung by David the King, or shouted "over the roofs of the world" by Walt Whitman.

It is the same mystery, the same hope for the human race.

“I will not cease from mental strife
Nor shall my sword sink from my hand
Till I have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant Land!”

One of the most curious and interesting things in Blake’s work is the value he places upon tears. All his noble mythological figures, gathering in verse after verse, for the great battle against brutality and materialism, come “weeping” to the help of their outraged little ones. Gods and beasts, lions and lambs, Christ and Lucifer, fairies and angels, all come “weeping” into the struggle with the forces of stupidity and tyranny.

He seems to imply that to have lost the power of shedding tears is to have dehumanized oneself and put oneself outside the pale. “A tear is an intellectual thing,” and those who still have the power of “weeping” have not quite lost the key to the wisdom of the eternal gods. It is not only the mysterious and foreordained congruity of rhyme that leads him to associate in poem after poem — until for the vulgar mind, the repetition becomes almost ludicrous — this symbolic “weeping” with the sweet sleep which it guards and which it brings.

The poet of the veiled child at the heart of the world is naturally a poet of the mystery of tears and the mystery of sleep. And William Blake becomes all this without the least tincture of sentimentality. That is where his genius is most characteristic and admirable. He can come chanting his strange gnomic tunes upon tears and upon sleep, upon the loveliness of children, upon life and death, upon the wonder of dews and clouds and rain and the soft petals of flowers which these nourish, without — even for one moment — falling into sentiment or pathos.

All through his strange and turbulent life he was possessed of the power of splendid and terrible anger. His invectives and vituperations bite and flay like steel whips. The “buyers and sellers” in the temple of his Lord are made to skip and dance. He was afraid of no man living — nor of any man’s god.

Working with his own hands, composing his poems, illustrating them, engraving them, printing them, and binding them in his own workshop, he was in a position to make Gargantuan sport of the “great” and the “little” vulgar.

He went his own way and lived as he pleased; having something about him of that shrewd, humorous, imperturbable “insouciance” which served Walt Whitman so well, and which is so much wiser, kindlier and more human a shield for an artist’s freedom, than the sarcasms of a Whistler or the insolence of a Wilde.

Careless and nonchalant, he “travelled the open road,” and gave all obscurantists and oppressors to ten million cart-loads of horned devils!

It is my privilege to live, on the South Coast, not so many miles from that village of Felpham where he once saw in his child-like fantasies, a fairy’s funeral. That funeral must have been followed after Blake’s death by many others; for there are no fairies in Felpham now. But Blake’s cottage is there still — to be seen by any who care to see it — and the sands by the sea’s edge are the “yellow sands,” flecked with white foam and bright green sea-weed of Ariel’s song; and on the sea-banks above grow tufts of Homeric Tamarisk.

It is astonishing to think that while the laconic George Crabbe, “Nature’s sternest painter,” was writing his rough couplets in the metre of Alexander Pope, and while Doctor Johnson was still tapping the posts of his London streets, as he went his way to buy oysters for his cat, William Blake — in mind and imagination a contemporary of Nietzsche and Whitman — should have been asserting the artist’s right (why should we not say the individual’s right, artist or no artist?) to live as he pleases, according to the morals, manners, tastes, inclination and caprices, of his own absolute humour and fancy.

This was more than one hundred years ago. What would William Blake think of our new world, — would it seem to him to resemble his New Jerusalem of child-like happiness and liberty? — our world where young ladies are fined five dollars if they go into the sea without their stockings? Well! at Felpham they do not tease them with stockings.

What makes the genius of William Blake so salutary a revolutionary influence is the fact that while contending so savagely against puritanical stupidity, he himself preserves to the end, his guilelessness and purity of heart.

There are admirable writers and philosophers, whose work on behalf of the liberation of humanity is rendered less disinterested by the fact that they are fighting for their personal inclinations rather than for the happiness of the world at large. This could never be said of William Blake. A more unselfish devotion to the spiritual interests of the race than that which inspired him from beginning to end could hardly be imagined. But he held it as axiomatic that the spiritual interests of the race can only be genuinely served by means of the intellectual and moral freedom of the individual. And certainly in his own work we have a beautiful and anarchical freedom.

No writer or artist ever succeeded in expressing more completely the texture and colour of his thoughts. Those strange flowing-haired old men who reappear so often in his engravings, like the “splendid and savage old men” of Walt Whitman’s fancy, seem to incorporate the very swing and sweep of his elemental earth-wrestling; while those long-limbed youths and maidens, almost suggestive of El Greco in the way their bodies are made, yearn and leap upwards towards the clear air and the cloudless blue sky, in a passion of tumultuous escape, in an ecstasy of resurrection.

It is extraordinary how Blake's peculiar use of very simple rhymes, with the same words repeated over and over again, enhances the power of his poetry — it does more than enhance it — it is the body of its soul. One approaches here the very mystery of style, in the poetic medium, and some of its deepest secrets. Just as that "metaphysic in sensuality" which is the dominant impulse in the genius of Remy de Gourmont expresses itself in constant echoes and reiterated liturgical repetitions — such as his famous "fleur hypocrite, fleur du silence" — until one feels that the "refrain" in poetry has become, in an especial sense, his predominant note, so these constantly recurring rhymes in the work of Blake, coming at the end of very short lines, convey, as nothing else could do, the child-like quality of the spirit transfused through them. They are childlike; and yet they could not have been written by any one but a grown man, and a man of formidable strength and character.

The psychology of the situation is doubtless the same as that which we remark in certain very modern artists — the ones whose work is most of all bewildering to those who, in their utter inability to become as "little children," are as completely shut out from the kingdom of art as they are from the kingdom of heaven.

The curious spell which these simple and in some cases infantile rhymes cast over us, ought to compel the more fanatical adherents of "free verse" to rearrange their ideas. Those who, without any prejudice one way or the other, are only anxious to enjoy to the full every subtle pleasure which the technique of art is able to give, cannot help finding in the unexpected thrill produced by these sweet, soft vibrations of verbal melody — like the sound of a golden bell rung far down under the humming waters — a direct revelation of the tender, strong soul behind them, for whose hidden passion they find a voice.

After all, it is in the final impression produced upon our senses and intellect by a great artist, and not in any particular quality of a particular work of art, that — unless we are pedantic virtuosos — we weigh and judge what we have gained. And what we have gained by William Blake cannot be over-estimated.

His poems seem to associate themselves with a thousand evanescent memories of days when we have been happy beyond the power of calamity or disappointment. They associate themselves with those half-physical, half-spiritual trances — when, suddenly in the outskirts of a great city perhaps, or on the banks of some inland river, we have remembered the long line of breaking surf, and the murmurs and the scents of the sea. They associate themselves with the dreamy indescribable moments when crossing the wet grass of secluded misty meadows, passing the drowsy cattle and the large cool early morning shadows thrown by the trees, we have suddenly come upon cuckoo flowers or marigolds, every petal of which seems burdened with a mystery almost intolerably sweet.

Like the delicate pictures of early Italian art, the poems of Blake indicate and suggest rather than exhaust or satiate. One is never oppressed by too heavy a weight of natural beauty. A single tree against the sky — a single shadow upon the pathway — a single petal fallen on the grass; these are enough to transport us to those fields of light and “chambers of the sun” where the mystic dance of creation still goes on; these are enough to lead us to the hushed dew-drenched lawns where the Lord God walks in the garden “in the cool of the day.”

One associates the poetry of William Blake, not with the mountain peaks and gorgeous foliage and rushing torrents of a landscape that clamours to be admired and would fain overpower us with its picturesque appeal, but with the quietest, gentlest, softest, least assuming background to that “going forth” to our work, “and our labour until the evening,” which is the normal destiny of man.

The pleasant fields of Felpham with their hawthorne hedges, the little woods of Hertfordshire or Surrey with their patches of bluebells, were all that he needed to set him among the company of the eternal gods.

For this is the prerogative of imagination, that it can reconcile us to life where life is simplest and least adorned; and this is the reluctance and timidity of imagination that it shrinks away into twilight and folds its wings, when the pressure of reality is too heavy, and the materials of beauty too oppressive and tyrannous.

BYRON

It is in a certain sense a lamentable indictment upon the sheepishness and inertness of the average crowd that a figure like that of Byron should have been so exceptional in his own day and should be so exceptional still. For, godlike rascal as he was, he was made of quite normal stuff.

There was nothing about him of that rare magical quality which separates such poets as Shelley or Edgar Allan Poe or Paul Verlaine from the mass of ordinary people. The Byronic type, as it is called, has acquired a certain legendary glamour; but it is nothing, when we come really to analyse it, but the universal type of vain, impetuous, passionate youth, asserting itself with royal and resplendent insolence in defiance of the cautious discretion of middle-aged conventions.

Youth is essentially Byronic when it is natural and fearless and strong; and it is a melancholy admission of something timid and sluggish in us all that we should speak "with bated breath and whispering humbleness" of this brilliant figure. A little more courage, a little less false modesty, a little more sincerity, and the lambs of our democratic age would all show something of that leonine splendour.

There is nothing in Byron so far above the commonplace that he is out of the reach of average humanity. He is made of the same clay as we all are made of. His vanity is our vanity, his pride our pride, his vices our vices.

We are on the common earth with him; on the natural ground of our normal human infirmities; and if he puts us to shame it is only because he has the physical force and the moral courage to be himself more audaciously and frankly than we dare to be.

His genius is no rare hot-house flower. It is no wild and delicate plant growing in a remote and inhuman soil. It is simply the intensification, to a point of fine poetic fury, of emotions and attitudes and gestures which we all share under the pressure of the spirit of youth.

It is for this reason — for the reason that he expressed so completely in his wayward and imperious manner the natural feelings of normal youthfulness — that he became in his own day so legendary and symbolic a personage, and that he has become in ours a sort of flaming myth. He would never have become all this; he would never have stirred the fancy of the masses of people as he has; if there were not in his temperament something essentially simple, human, and within the comprehension of quite ordinary minds.

It might indeed be maintained that what Oscar Wilde is to the rarer and more perverse minority, Byron is to the solid majority of downright simple philistines.

The average British or American "plain blunt man" regards, and always will regard, such writers as Shelley and Poe and Verlaine and Wilde with a certain uneasy suspicion. These great poets must always seem to him a little weird and morbid and apart from common flesh and blood. He will be tempted to the end to use in reference to them the ambiguous word "degenerate." They strike him as alien and remote. They seem to have no part or lot in the world in which he lives. He suspects them of being ingrained immoralists and free-lovers. Their names convey to his mind something very sinister, something dangerous to the foundations of society.

But the idea of Byron brings with it quite different associations. The sins of Byron seem only a splendid and poetic apotheosis of such a person's own sins. The rebelliousness of Byron seems a rebelliousness not so much deliberate and intellectual as instinctive and impulsive. It seems a normal revolt against normal restrictions. The ordinary man understands it and condones it, remembering the fires of his own youth.

Besides, Byron was a lord.

Goethe declared to Eckermann that what irritated many people against Byron was the power and pride of his personality — the fact that his personality stood out in so splendid and emphatic a way.

Goethe was right. The brilliance of Byron's personality is a thing which causes curious annoyance to certain types of mind. But these minds are not the normal ones of common intelligence. They are minds possessed of the sort of intellectual temper naturally antagonistic to reckless youth. They are the Carlyles and the Merediths of that spiritual and philosophical vision to which the impassioned normality of Byron with his school-boy ribaldry must always appear ridiculous.

I believe it will be found that those to whom the idea of Byron's brilliant and wayward personality brings exquisite pleasure are, in the first place, quite simple minds, and, in the second place, minds of a disillusioned and un-ethical order who have grown weary of "deep spiritual thinkers," and are ready to enjoy, as a refreshing return to the primitive emotions, this romantic swashbucklerism which proves so annoying to earnest modern thought.

How like a sudden reverberation of the old immortal spirit of romance, the breath of whose saddest melancholy seems sweeter than our happiness, is that clear-toned song of passion's exhaustion which begins

"We'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon"

and which contains that magnificent verse,

“For the sword outwears the sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.”

It is extraordinary the effect which poetry of this kind has upon us when we come upon it suddenly, after a long interval, in the crowded pages, say, of some little anthology.

I think the pleasure which it gives us is due to the fact that it is so entirely sane and normal and natural; so solidly and massively within the circle of our average apprehension; so expressive of what the common flesh and blood of our elemental humanity have come to feel as permanent in their passions and reactions. It gives us a thrilling shock of surprise when we come upon it unexpectedly — this kind of thing; the more so because the poetry we have grown accustomed to, in our generation, is so different from this; so mystical and subjective, so remote from the crowd, so dim with the trailing mists of fanciful ambiguity.

It is very unfortunate that one “learned by heart,” as a child, so much of Byron’s finest poetry.

I cannot imagine a more exciting experience than a sudden discovery at this present hour, with a mind quite new and fresh to its resounding grandeur, of that poem, in the Hebrew Melodies, about Sennacherib.

“And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.”

Have not those lines the very wonder and terror and largeness of ancient wars?

“And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
And thro’ it there rolled not the breath of his pride,
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf!”

Our modern poets dare not touch the sublime naïveté of poetry like that! Their impressionist, imagist, futurist theories make them too self-conscious. They say to themselves— “Is that word a ‘cliché’ word? Has that phrase been used several times before? Have I been carefully and precisely *original* in this? Is that image clear-cut enough? Have I reverted to the ‘magic’ of Verlaine and Mallarmé and Mr. Yeats? Do I suggest the ‘cosmic emotion’ of Walt Whitman’?”

It is this terror of what they call “cliché words” which utterly prevents them from writing poetry which goes straight to our heart like Byron’s; poetry which refreshes our jaded epicurean senses with a fine renaissance of youth.

Their art destroys them. Their art enslaves them. Their art lames and cripples them with a thousand meticulous scruples.

Think what it would be, in this age, suddenly to come upon a poet who could write largely and carelessly, and with a flaming divine fire, about the huge transactions of life; about love and war and the great throbbing pulses of the world’s historic events! They cannot do it — our poets — they cannot do it; and the reason of their inability is their over-intellectuality, their heavily burdened artistic conscience. They are sedentary people, too, most unhealthily sedentary, our moderns who write verse; sedentary young people, whose environment is the self-conscious Bohemia of artificial Latin Quarters. They are too clever, too artistic, too egotistic. They are too afraid of one another; too conscious of the derisive flapping of the goose-wings of the literary journal! They are not proud enough in their personal individuality to send the critics to the devil and go their way with a large contempt. They set themselves to propitiate the critics by the wit of technical novelty and to propitiate their fellow craftsmen by avoiding the inspiration of the past.

They do not write poetry for the pleasure of writing it. They write poetry in order that they may be called poets. They aim at originality instead of sweeping boldly ahead and being content to be themselves as God made them.

I am strongly of opinion that much of the admiration lavished on these versifiers is not due to our enjoyment of the poetry which they write — not, I mean, of the sheer poetic elements in it — but to our interest in the queer words they dig up out of the archives of philological bric-à-brac, to our astonishment at their erotic extravagances, to our satisfaction at being reminded of all the superior shibboleths of artistic slang, the use of which and the understanding of which prove us to be true initiates in the "creative world" and no poor forlorn snakes of outworn tradition.

Our modern poets cannot get our modern artists out of their heads. The insidious talk of these sly artists confuses the simplicity of their natural minds. They are dominated by art; whereas the real sister of the muse of poetry is not "art" at all, but music.

They do not see, these people, that the very carelessness of a great poet like Byron is the inevitable concomitant of his genius; I would go so far as to call his carelessness the mother of his genius and its guardian angel.

I cannot help thinking, too, that if the artistic self-consciousness of our generation spoils its free human pleasure in great poetry, the theories of the academic historians of literature do all they can to make us leave the poetry of the past in its deep grave. It seems to me that of all futile and uninteresting things what is called "the study of literature" is the very worst.

To meddle with such a preposterous matter at all damns a person, in my thinking, as a supreme fool. And yet this is, par excellence, the sort of tediousness in which devotees of culture complacently wallow. As if it mattered where Byron slips in "the great Renaissance of Wonder"; or where Rossetti drifts by, in the portentous "Pre-Raphaelite Movement"!

It is strange to me how boys and girls, brought up upon this "study of literature," can ever endure to see the look of a line of poetry again! Most of them, it seems, *can* hardly bear that shock; and be it far from me to blame them. I should surmise that the mere names of Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, etc. would fall upon their ears with a dreariness of memory like the tolling of chapel-bells.

They are queer birds, too, these writers of commentaries upon literature.

At one time in my life I myself absorbed such "critical literature" with a morbid avidity, as if it had been a drug; and a drug it is — a drug dulling one to all fine and fresh sensations — a drug from the effects of which I am only now, at this late hour, beginning slowly to recover. They set one upon a completely wrong track, bringing forward what is unessential and throwing what is essential into the background. Dear heavens! how well I recall those grey discriminations. Wordsworth was the fellow who hit upon the idea of the *anima mundi.* Shelley's "philosophy of life" differed from Wordsworth's in that *his* universal spirit was a thing of pure Love, whereas the other's was a matter of pure Thought.

Pure Love! Pure Thought! Was there ever such petrifying of the evasive flame? "Words! Words! Words!" I suspect that the book the sweet Prince was reading when he met Polonius in the passage was a book of essays on the poets.

The worst of this historical-comical-philosophical way of going to work is that it leaves one with the feeling that poetry is a sort of intellectual game, entirely removed from the jostling pressure of actual life, and that poets when once dead are shoved into their academic pigeon-holes to be labelled like things under glass cases. The person who can rattle off such descriptive labels the quickest is the person of culture. Thus history swallows up poetry; thus the "comparative method" swallows up history; and the whole business is snatched away from the magical flow of real life and turned into the dreariness of a mausoleum. How refreshing, how salutary, to turn from all thoughts as to what Byron's "place in literature" was to such thrilling poetry as

"She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies,
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes—"

or to such sonorous lines full of the reverberating echoes of pent-up passion as those which begin

"There is none of Beauty's daughters."

One has only to recall the way these simple careless outbursts have burned themselves in upon one's lips, when one's feelings were stirred to the old tune, to realise how great a poet Byron was.

"Fare thee well and, if forever,
Still forever fare thee well!"

Can such things ever grow "stale and rung-upon," however much the chilly hand of a pedantic psychology seeks to brush the bloom away from the wings of the bird of paradise?

Those poems to the mysterious Thyrza, can any modern eroticism equal them, for large and troubled abandonment; natural as gasping human speech and musical as the murmur of deep waters?

Byron is frankly and outrageously the poet of *sentiment.* This is good. This is what one craves for in vain in modern verse. The infernal seriousness of our grave youngsters and their precious psychological irony make them terrified of any approach to sentiment. They leave such matters with supreme contempt to the poor little devils who write verses for the local newspapers. They are too clever to descend to sentiment. It is their affair to show us the absurdity of sentiment.

And yet the world is full of this thing. It has the rising sap of a thousand springs in its heart. It has the "big rain" of the suppressed tears of a hundred generations in its sobbing music.

It is easy to say that Byron's sentiment was a pose.

The precise opposite of this is the truth. It is our poetic cleverness, our subjective imagery and cosmic irony, which is the pose; not his frank and boyish expression of direct emotion.

We write poetry for the sake of writing poetry. He wrote to give vent to the passions of his heart.

We compose a theme upon "love" and dedicate it to any suitable young woman the colour of whose eyes suits the turn of our metaphors. He loved first and wrote poetry afterwards — as the occasion demanded.

That is why his love-poetry is so full of vibrant sincerity, so rich in blood, so natural, so careless, so sentimental.

That is why there is a sort of conversational ease about his love-poetry, and here and there lapses into what, to an artistic sense, might seem bathos, absurdity, or rhetoric. Lovers are always a little absurd; and the fear of absurdity is not a sign of deep feeling but of the absence of all feeling.

Every one of Byron's most magnificent love-lyrics has its actual circumstantial cause and impulse in the adventures of his life. He does not spin out vague wordy platonic rhapsodies upon love-in-general. He addresses a particular person, just as Burns did — just as Shakespeare did — and his poems are, so to speak, thrilled with the excitement of the great moment's tumultuous pulses, scalded with the heat of its passionate tears.

These moments pass, of course. One need not be derisively cynical over that. Infatuation succeeds infatuation. Dream succeeds dream. The loyalty of a life-long love was not his. His life ended indeed before youth's desperate experiments were over, before the reaction set in. But the sterner mood had begun.

"Tread these reviving passions down,
Unworthy manhood. Unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
Of Beauty be."

And the lines end — his last — with that stoical resignation in the presence of a soldier's fate which gives to the close of his adventurous enterprise on behalf of an oppressed Hellenic world such a gallant dignity.

"Then look around and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest."

If these proud personal touches, of which there are so many scattered through his work, offend our artistic modern sense we must remember that the same tone, the same individual confession of quite personal emotion, is to be found in Dante and Milton and Goethe.

The itching mock-modesty of the intellectual altruist, ashamed to commit himself to the personal note, is not an indication of a great nature. It is rather a sign of a fussy self-consciousness under the eyes of impertinent criticism.

What drives the modern philosopher to jeer at Byron is really a sort of envy of his splendid and irresponsible personality, that personality whose demonic energy is so radiant with the beautiful glamour of youth.

And what superb strength and high romance there are in certain of his verses when the magnificent anger of the moment has its way with him!

Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!
On Suli’s rock and Parga’s shore
Exists the remnant of a line
Such as our Doric mothers bore —

No one can help confessing that poetry of this kind, “simple, sensuous and passionate” — to use the great Miltonic definition — possesses, for all its undeniable *rhetoric,* a large and high poetic value.

And at its best, the poetry of Byron is not mere rhetoric. Rhetoric undoubtedly is there. His mind was constantly, like most simple minds when touched to large issues, betrayed by the sweet treachery of rhetoric; but I feel confident that any really subtle critic of the delicate differences between one poetic vein and another, must feel, though he might not be able to express the fineness of the distinction, that there is something here — some breath, some tone, some air, some atmosphere, some royal and golden gesture — which is altogether beyond the reach of all mere eloquence, and sealed with the indescribable seal of poetry.

This real poetic element in Byron — I refer to something over and above his plangent rhetoric — arrests us with all the greater shock of sudden possession, for the very reason that it is so carelessly, so inartistically, so recklessly flung out.

He differs in this, more than in anything else, from our own poetic contemporaries. Our clever young poets know their business so appallingly well. They know all about the theories of poetry: they know what is to be said for Free Verse, for Imagism, for Post-Impressionism: they know how the unrhymed Greek chorus lends itself to the lyrical exigencies of certain moods: they know how wonderful the Japanese are, and how interesting certain Indian cadences may be: they know the importance of expressing the Ideal of Democracy, of Femininity, of Evolution, of Internationalism. There really is nothing in the whole field of poetic criticism which they do not know — except the way to persuade the gods to give us genius, when genius has been refused!

Byron, on the contrary, knows absolutely nothing of any of these things. “When he thinks he is a child”; when he criticises he is a child; when he philosophises, theorises, *mysticizes,* he is a hopeless child. A vast amount of his poetry, for all its swing and dash and rush, might have been written by a lamentably inferior hand.

We come across such stuff to-day; not among the literary circles, but in the poets’ corners of provincial magazines. What is called “Byronic sentiment,” so derided now by the clever young psychologists who terrorise our literature, has become the refuge of timid old-fashioned people, quite bewildered and staggered by new developments.

I sympathise with such old-fashioned people. The pathetic earnestness of an elderly commercial traveller I once met on the Père Marquette Railway who assured me that Byron was “some poet” remains in my mind as a much more touching tribute to the lordly roué than all the praise of your Arnolds and Swinburnes.

He is indeed “some poet.” He is the poet for people who feel the magic of music and the grandeur of imagination, without being able to lay their finger on the more recondite nuances of “creative work,” without so much as ever having heard of “imagism.”

I have spent whole evenings in passionate readings of “Childe Harold” and the “Poems to Thyrza” with gentle Quaker ladies and demure old maids descended from the Pilgrim Fathers, and I have always left such Apollonian prayer-meetings with a mind purged from the cant of cleverness; washed and refreshed in the authentic springs of the Muses.

So few lords — when you come to think of it — write poetry at all, that it is interesting to note the effect of aristocratic blood upon the style of a writer.

Personally I think its chief effect is to produce a certain magnanimous indifference to the meticulous niceties of the art. We say “drunk as a lord”; well — it is something to see what a person will do, who is descended from Robert Bruce’s Douglas, when it is a question of this more heavenly intoxication. Aristocratic blood shows itself in poetry by a kind of unscrupulous contempt for gravity. It refuses to take seriously the art which it practises.

It plays the part of the grand amateur. It is free from bourgeois earnestness. It is this, I suppose, which is so irritating to the professional critic. If you can write poetry, so to speak, with your left hand, in intervals of war and love and adventure, between rescuing girls from sacks destined for the waters of the Bosphorus and swimming the length of the Venetian Grand Canal and recruiting people to fight for Hellenic freedom, you are doing something that ought not to be allowed. If other men of action, if other sportsmen and pleasure-seekers and travellers and wandering free-lances were able to sit down in any cosmopolitan cafe in Cairo or Stamboul and knock off immortal verses in the style of Byron — verses with no “philosophy” for us to expound, no technique for us to analyse, no “message” for us to interpret, no aesthetic subtleties for us to unravel, no mystical orientation for us to track out, what is there left for a poor sedentary critic to do? Our occupation is gone. We must either enjoy romance for its own sake in a frank, honest, simple manner; confessing that Byron was "some poet" and letting it go at that; or we must explain to the world, as many of us do, that Byron was a thoroughly bad writer. A third way of dealing with this unconscionable boy, who scoffed at Wordsworth and Southey and insisted that Pope was a great genius, is the way some poor camp-followers of the Moral Ideal have been driven to follow; the way, namely, of making him out to be a great leader in the war of the liberation of humanity, and a great interpreter of the wild magic of nature.

I must confess I cannot see Byron in either of these lights. He scoffs at kings and priests, certainly; he scoffs at Napoleon; he scoffs at the pompous self-righteousness of his own race; he scoffs at religion and sex and morality in that humorous, careless, indifferent "public-school" way which is so salutary and refreshing; but when you ask for any serious devotion to the cause of Liberty, for any definite Utopian outlines of what is to be built up in the world's future, you get little or nothing, except resounding generalities and conventional rhetoric.

Nor are those critics very wise who insist on laying stress upon Byron's contributions to the interpretation of Nature.

He could write "How the big rain comes dancing to the earth!" and his flashing, fitful, sun-smouldering pictures of European rivers and plains and hills and historic cities have their large and generous charm.

But beyond this essentially human and romantic, attitude to Nature there is just nothing at all.

"Roll on, thou deep and dark-blue Ocean, roll!"

I confess I caught a keener thrill of pleasure from that all-too-famous line when I suddenly heard it uttered by one of those garrulous ghosts in

Mr. Masters’s Spoon River cemetery, than I ever did when in childhood they made me learn it.

But, for all that, though it is not an easy thing to put into words, there is a certain grandiose and sonorous beauty, fresh and free and utterly unaffected, about these verses, and many others in “Childe Harold.”

As for those long plays of Byron’s, and those still longer narrative poems, nothing will induce me to read a line of them again. They have a singularly dusty smell to me; and when I think of them even, I suffer just such a withering sensation of ineffable boredom as I used to experience waiting in a certain ante-room in Tunbridge Wells where lived an aged retired general. I associate them with illustrated travels in Palestine.

How Goethe could read “Manfred” with any pleasure passes my comprehension. “Cain” has a certain charm, I admit; but of all forms of all literature the thing which is called Poetic Drama seems to me the most dreary. If poets cannot write for the stage they had better confine themselves to honest straightforward odes and lyrics.

But it is no use complaining. There is a sort of fate which drives people into this arid path. I sometimes feel as though both Imagination and Humour fled away from the earth when a modern poet takes pen to compose Poetic Drama!

The thing is a refuge for those to whom the gods have given a “talent for literature,” and have stopped with that gift. The Poetic Drama flourishes in Anglo-Saxon Democracies. It lends itself to the babbling of extreme youth and to the pompous moralising of extreme middle-age.

The odious thing is an essentially modern creation; created, as it is, out of thin vapour, and moulded by melancholy rules of thumb. Drama was Religion to the Greeks, and in the old Elizabethan days great playwrights wrote great poetry.

I suppose if, by some fairy-miracle, *sheep* — the most modern of animals — were suddenly endowed with the privileges of culture, they would browse upon nothing else than Poetic Drama, from All Fools' Day to Candlemas.

But even Manfred cannot be blamed for this withering sterility, this dead-sea of ineptitude. There must be some form of literature found, loose and lax enough to express the Moral Idealism of the second-rate mind; and Poetic Drama lends itself beautifully to this.

Putting aside a few descriptive passages in "Childe Harold" and some score of superb lyrics sprinkled through the whole of the volume, what really is there in Byron at this hour — beyond the irresistible *idea* of his slashing and crimson-blooded figure — to arrest us and hold us, who can read over and over again Christopher Marlowe and John Keats? Very little — singularly little — almost nothing.

Nothing — except "Don Juan"! This indeed is something of a poem. This indeed has the old authentic fire about it and the sweet devilry of reckless youth.

How does one account for the power and authority over certain minds exercised by this surprising production? I do not think it is exactly the wit in it. The wit is often entirely superficial — a mere tricky playing with light resemblances and wordy jingles. I do not feel as though it were the humour in it; for Byron is not really a humorist at all. I think it is something deeper than the mere juxtaposition of burlesque-show jests with Sunday-evening sentimentality. I think it is the downright lashing out, left and right, up and down, of a powerful reckless spirit able "to lash out" for the mere pleasure of doing so. I think it is the pleasure we get from the spectacle of mere splendid energy and devil-may-care animal spirits let loose to run amuck as they please; while genius, like a lovely camp-follower tossed to and fro from hand to hand, throws a redeeming enchantment over the most ribald proceedings.

The people — I speak now of intelligent people — who love Don Juan, are those who, while timid and shrinking themselves, love to contemplate emphatic gestures, scandalous advances, Rabelaisian foolings, clownish tricks; those who love to watch the mad hurly-burly of life and see the resplendent fire-works go bang; those who love all huge jests, vituperative cursings, moonlit philanderings, scoffing mockeries, honest scurrilities, great rolling barrels of vulgarity, tuns and vats of ribaldry, and lovely, tender, gondola-songs upon sleeping waters.

The pleasure which such persons derive from Byron is the pleasure which the civilised Greeks derived from Aristophanes, the pleasure of seeing everything which we are wont to treat reverently treated irreverently, the pleasure, most especially, of seeing the pompous great ones of the world made to dance and skip like drunk puppets. The literary temperament is so fatally inclined to fall into a sort of aesthetic gravity, taking its “philosophy” and its “art” with such portentous self-respect, that it is extremely pleasant when a reckless young Alcibiades of a Byron breaks into the enchanted circle and clears the air with a few resounding blasts from his profane bassoon.

What happens really in this pantomimic history of Don Juan, with its huge nonchalance and audacious cynicism, is the invasion of the literary field by the godless rabble, the rabble who take no stock of the preserves of art, and go picnicking and rollicking and scattering their beer-bottles and their orange-peel in the very glades of the immortals. It is in fact the invasion of Parnassus by a horde of most unmitigated proletarians. But these sweet scamps are led by a real lord, a lord who, like most lords, is ready to out-philistine the philistines and out-blaspheme the blasphemers.

Don Juan would be a hotch-potch of indecency and sentimentality, if it were not for the presence of genius there, of genius which, like a lovely flood of shining sunlight, irradiates the whole thing.

It is nonsense to talk of the “Byronic pose” either with regard to the outrageousness of his cynical wit or with regard to his sentimental Satanism.

Blasphemous wit and Satanic sentiment are the natural reactions of all healthy youthfulness in the presence of the sickening contrasts and diabolic ironies of life.

Such a mood is not by any means a sign of degeneracy. Byron was as far from being a degenerate as he was far from being a saint. It is a sign of sturdy sanity and vigorous strength.

Not to relish the gay brutality of Byron is an indication of something degenerate in ourselves. There is a certain type of person — perhaps the most prurient and disagreeable of all human animals — who is accustomed to indulge in a kind of holy leer of disgust when “brought up sharp” by the Aristophanic lapses of gay and graceless youth. Such a person’s mind would be a fruitful study for Herr Freud; but the thought of its simmering cauldron of furtive naughtiness is not a pleasant thing to dwell on, for any but pathological philosophers.

After reading Don Juan one is compelled to recognise that Byron’s mind must have been abnormally sane and sound. No one who jests quite at this rate could possibly be a bad man. The bad men — a word to the wise — are those from whose mouth the gay wantonness of the youth of the world is condemned as evil. Such persons ought to be sent for a rest-cure to Cairo or Morocco or Pekin.

The innocence of youth should be protected from a morality which is far more morbid than the maddest Dionysian revel.

It is, to confess it freely, not the satyrishness of Byron at all, but his hard brutality, which, for myself, I find difficult to enjoy.

I seem to require something more mellow, more ironical, more subtle, more humane, in my literature of irreverence. But no doubt this is a racial prejudice. Some obstinate drop of Latin — or, for all I know, — Carthaginian blood in me, makes me reluctant to give myself up to the tough, sane, sturdy brutality of your Anglo-Scot.

I can relish every word of Rabelais and I am not in the least dismayed by Heine's impishness, but I have always found Fielding's and Smollett's grosser scenes difficult mouthfuls to swallow.

They tell me there is a magnanimous generosity and a large earthy sanity about these humorists. But to me there is too much horse-play, too much ruffianism and "bully-ragging." And something of the same quality offends me in Byron. I lack the steadiness of nerves to deal with a coarseness which hits you across the head, much as the old English clowns hit one another with strings of sausages.

But because I suffer from this psychological limitation; because I prefer Sterne to Fielding, and Lamb to Dickens; I should condemn myself as an un-catholic fanatic if I presumed to turn my personal lack of youthful aplomb and gallant insouciance into a grave artistic principle.

Live and let live! That must be our motto in literary criticism as it is our motto in other things. I am not going to let myself call Byron a blackguard because of something a little hard and insensitive in him which happens to get upon my own nerves. He was a fine genius. He wrote noble verses. He has a beautiful face.

Women are, as a rule, less sensitive than men in these matters of sexual brutality. It may be that they have learned by bitter experience that the Byrons of this world are not their worst enemies. Or perhaps they feel towards them a certain maternal tenderness; condoning, as mothers will do, with an understanding beyond the comprehension of any neurotic critic, these roughnesses and insensitivenesses in their darlings.

Yes — let us leave the reputation of this great man, as far as his sexual lapses are concerned, to the commonsense and tact of women.

He was the kind of man that women naturally love. Perhaps we who criticise him are not altogether forgetful of that fact when we put our finger upon his aristocratic selfishness and his garish brilliance.

And perhaps the women are right.

It is pleasant at any rate to think so; pleasant to think that one's refined and gentle aunts, living noble lives in cathedral close and country vicarage, still regard this great wayward poet as a dear spoilt child and feel nothing of that instinctive suspicion of him which they feel toward so many "Byrons de nos jours."

When I recall the peculiarly tender look that came into the face of one beautiful old lady — a true "grande dame" of the old-fashioned generation — to whom I mentioned his name, and associate it with the look of weary distaste with which she listened to my discourses upon more modern and more subtle rebels, I am tempted to conclude that what womanly women really admire in a man is a certain energy of action, a certain drastic force, brilliance and hardness, which is the very opposite of the nervous sensitiveness and receptive weakness which is the characteristic of most of us men of letters. I am tempted to go so far as to maintain that a profound atavistic instinct in normal women makes them really contemptuous in their hearts of any purely aesthetic or intellectual type. They prefer poets who are also men of action and men of the world. They prefer poets who "when they think are children." It is not hardness or selfishness or brutality which really alarms them. It is intellect, it is subtlety, it is, above all, *irony.* Byron's unique achievement as a poet is to have flung into poetry the essential brutality and the essential sentiment of the typical male animal, and, in so far as he has done this, all his large carelessness, all his cheap and superficial rhetoric, all his scornful cynicism, cannot hide from us something primitive and appealing about him which harmonises well enough with his beautiful face and his dramatic career.

Perhaps, as a matter of fact, our literary point of view in these later days has been at once over-subtilized and underfed. Perhaps we have grown morbidly fastidious in the matter of delicacies of style, and shrinkingly averse to the slashing energy of hard-hitting, action-loving, self-assertive worldliness.

It may be so; and yet, I am not sure. I can find it in me to dally with the morbid and very modern fancy that, after all, Byron has been a good deal overrated; that, after all, when we forget his personality and think only of his actual work, he cannot be compared for a moment, as an original genius, with such persons — so much less appealing to the world-obsessed feminine mind — as William Blake or Paul Verlaine!

Yes; let the truth be blurted out — even though it be a confession causing suffering to one’s pride — and the truth is that I, for one, though I can sit down and read Matthew Arnold and Remy de Gourmont and Paul Verlaine, for hours and hours, and though it is only because I have them all so thoroughly by heart that I don’t read the great Odes of Keats any more, shall *never again,* not even for the space of a quarter of an hour, not even as a psychological experiment, turn over the pages of a volume of Byron’s Poetical Works!

I think I discern what this reluctance means. It means that primarily and intrinsically what Byron did for the world was to bring into prominence and render beautiful and appealing a certain fierce rebellion against unctuous domesticity and solemn puritanism. His political propagandism of Liberty amounts to nothing now. What amounts to a great deal is that he magnificently and in an engaging, though somewhat brutal manner, broke the rules of a bourgeois social code.

As a meteoric rebel against the degrading servility of what we have come to call the "Nonconformist Conscience" Byron must always have his place in the tragically slow emancipation of the human spirit. The reluctance of an ordinary sensitive modern person, genuinely devoted to poetry, to spend any more time with Byron's verses than what those great familiar lyrics printed in all the anthologies exact, is merely a proof that he is not the poet that Shelley, for instance, is.

It is a melancholy commentary upon the "immortality of genius" and that "perishing only with the English language" of which conventional orators make so much, that the case should be so; but it is more important to be honest in the admission of our real feelings than to flatter the pride of the human race.

The world moves on. Manners, customs, habits, moralities, ideals, all change with changing of the times.

Style alone, the imaginative rendering in monumental words of the most personal secrets of our individuality, gives undying interest to what men write. Sappho and Catullus, Villon and Marlowe, are as vivid and fresh to-day as are Walter de la Mare or Edgar Lee Masters.

If Byron can only thrill us with half-a-dozen little songs his glory-loving ghost ought to be quite content.

To last in any form at all, as the generations pass and the face of the planet alters, is a great and lucky accident. To last so that men not only read you but love you when a century's dust covers your ashes is a high and royal privilege.

To leave a name which, whether men read your work or not, whether men love your memory or not, still conjures up an image of strength and joy and courage and beauty, is a great reward.

To leave a name which must be associated for all time with the human struggle to free itself from false idealism and false morality is something beyond any reward. It is to have entered into the creative forces of Nature herself. It is to have become a fatality. It is to have merged your human, individual, personal voice with the voices of *the elements which are beyond the elements*. It is to have become an eternally living portion of that unutterable central flame which, though the smoke of its burning may roll back upon us and darken our path, is forever recreating the world.

Much of Byron's work, while he lived, was of necessity destructive. Such destruction is part of the secret of life. In the world of moral ideals destroyers have their place side by side with creators. The destroyers of human thoughts are the winged ministers of the thoughts of Nature. Out of the graves of ideals something rises which is beyond any ideal. We are tossed to and fro, poets and men of action alike, by powers whose intentions are dark, by unknown forces whose faces no man may ever see. From darkness to darkness we stagger across a twilight-stage.

With no beginning that we can imagine, with no end that we can conceive, the mad procession moves forward. Only sometimes, at moments far, far apart, and in strange places, do we seem to catch the emergence, out of the storm in which we struggle, of something that no poet nor artist nor any other human voice has ever uttered, something that is as far beyond our virtue as it is beyond our evil, something terrible, beautiful, irrational, *mad* — which is the secret of the universe!

EMILY BRONTË

THE NAME OF Emily Brontë — why does it produce in one's mind so strange and startling a feeling, unlike that produced by any other famous writer?

It is not easy to answer such a question. Certain great souls seem to gather to themselves, as their work accumulates its destined momentum in its voyage down the years, a power of arousing our imagination to issues that seem larger than those which can naturally be explained as proceeding inevitably from their tangible work.

Our imagination is roused and our deepest soul stirred by the mention of such names without any palpable accompaniment of logical analysis, without any well-weighed or rational justification.

Such names touch some response in us which goes deeper than our critical faculties, however desperately they may struggle. Instinct takes the place of reason; and our soul, as if answering the appeal of some translunar chord of subliminal music, vibrates in response to a mood that baffles all analysis.

We all know the work of Emily's sister Charlotte; we know it and can return to it at will, fathoming easily and at leisure the fine qualities of it and its impassioned and romantic effect upon us.

But though we may have read over and over again that one amazing story— "Wuthering Heights" — and that handful of unforgettable poems which are all that Emily Brontë has bequeathed to the world, which of us can say that the full significance of these things has been ransacked and combed out by our conscious reason; which of us can say that we understand to the full all the mysterious stir and ferment, all the far-reaching and magical reactions, which such things have produced within us?

Who can put into words the secret of this extraordinary girl? Who can define, in the suave and plausible language of academic culture, the flitting shadows thrown from deep to deep in the unfathomable genius of her vision?

Perhaps not since Sappho has there been such a person. Certainly she makes the ghosts of de Staël and Georges Sand, of Eliot and Mrs. Browning, look singularly homely and sentimental.

I am inclined to think that the huge mystery of Emily Brontë's power lies in the fact that she expresses in her work — just as the Lesbian, did — the very soul of womanhood. It is not an easy thing to achieve, this. Women writers, clever and lively and subtle, abound in our time, as they have abounded in times past; but for some inscrutable reason they lack the demonic energy, the occult spiritual force, the instinctive fire, wherewith to give expression to the ultimate mystery of their own sex.

I am inclined to think that, of all poets, Walt Whitman is the only one who has drawn his reckless and chaotic inspiration straight from the uttermost spiritual depths of the sex-instincts of the male animal; and Emily Brontë has done for her sex what Walt Whitman did for his.

It is a strange and startling commentary upon the real significance of our sexual impulses that, when it comes to the final issue, it is not the beautiful ruffianism of a Byron, full of normal sex-instinct though that may be, or the eloquent sentiment of a Georges Sand, penetrated with passionate sensuality as that is, which really touch the indefinable secret. Emily Brontë, like Walt Whitman, sweeps us, by sheer force of inspired genius, into a realm where the mere *animalism* of sexuality, its voluptuousness, its lust, its lechery, are absolutely merged, lost, forgotten; fused by that burning flame of spiritual passion into something which is beyond all earthly desire.

Emily Brontë — and this is indicative of the difference between woman and man — goes even further than Walt Whitman in the spiritualising of this flame. In Whitman there is, as we all know, a vast mass of work, wherein, true and magical though it is, the earthly and bodily elements of the great passion are given enormous emphasis. It is only at rare moments — as happens with ordinary men in the normal experience of the world — that he is swept away beyond the reach of lust and voluptuousness. But Emily Brontë seems to dwell by natural predilection upon these high summits and in these unsounded depths. The flame of the passion in her burns at such quivering vibrant pressure that the fuel of it — the debris and rubble of our earth-instincts — is entirely absorbed and devoured. In her work the fire of life licks up, with its consuming tongue, every vestige of materiality in the thing upon which it feeds, and the lofty tremulous spires of its radiant burning ascend into the illimitable void.

It is of extraordinary interest, as a mere psychological phenomenon, to note the fact that when the passion of sex is driven forward by the flame of its conquering impulse beyond a certain point it becomes itself transmuted and loses the earthy texture of its original character.

Sex-passion when carried to a certain pitch of intensity loses its sexuality. It becomes pure flame; immaterial, unearthly, and with no sensual dross left in it.

It may even be said, by an enormous paradox, to become sexless. And this is precisely what one feels about the work of Emily Brontë. Sex-passion in her has been driven so far that it has come round “full circle” and has become sexless passion. It has become passion disembodied, passion absolute, passion divested of all human weakness. The “muddy vesture of decay" which "grossly closes in" our diviner principle has been burnt up and absorbed. It has been reduced to nothing; and in its place quivers up to heaven the clear white flame of the secret fountain of life.

But there is more in the matter than that. Emily Brontë's genius, by its abandonment to the passion of which I have been speaking, does not only burn up and destroy all the elements of clay in what, so to speak, is above the earth and on its surface; but it also, burning downwards, destroys and annihilates all dubious and obscure materials which surround the original and primordial human will. Round and about this lonely and inalienable will it makes a scorched and blackened plain of ashes and cinders. Ambiguous feelings are turned to ashes there; and so are doubts, hesitations, timidities, trepidations, cowardices. The aboriginal will of man, of the unconquerable individual, stands alone there in the twilight, under the grey desolate rain of the outer spaces. Four-square it stands, upon adamantine foundations, and nothing in heaven or earth is able to shake it or disquiet it.

It is this isolation, in desolate and forlorn integrity, of the individual human will, which is the deepest element in Emily Brontë's genius. Upon this all depends, and to this all returns. Between the will and the spirit deep and strange nuptials are celebrated; and from the immortality of the spirit a certain breath of life passes over into the mortality of the will, drawing it up into the celestial and invisible region which is beyond chance and change.

From this abysmal fusion of the "creator spiritus" with the human will rises that adamantine courage with which Emily Brontë was able to face the jagged edges of that crushing wheel of destiny which the malign powers of nature drive remorselessly over our poor flesh and blood. The uttermost spirit of the universe became in this manner *her* spirit, and the integral identity of the soul within her breast hardened into an undying resistance to all that would undermine it.

Thus she was able to endure tragedy upon tragedy without flinching. Thus she was able to assert herself against the power of pain as one wrestling invincibly with an exhausted giant.

Calamity after calamity fell upon her house, and the stark desolation of those melancholy Yorkshire hills became a suitable and congruous background for the loneliness of her strange life; but against all the pain which came upon her, against all the aching pangs of remorseless fate, this indomitable girl held grimly to her supreme vision.

No poet, no novelist who has ever lived has been so profoundly affected by the conditions of his life as was this invincible woman. But the conditions of her life — the scenery of sombre terror which surrounded her — only touched and affected the outward colour and rhythm of her unique style. In her deepest soul, in the courage of her tremendous vision, she possessed something that was not bounded by Yorkshire hills, or any other hills; something that was inhuman, eternal and universal, something that was outside the power of both time and space.

By that singular and forlorn scenery — the scenery of the Yorkshire moors round about her home — she was, however, in the more flexible portion of her curious nature inveterately influenced. She does not precisely describe this scenery — not at any rate at any length — either in her poems or in “Wuthering Heights”; but it sank so deeply into her that whatever she wrote was affected by it and bears its desolate and imaginative imprint.

It is impossible to read Emily Brontë anywhere without being transported to those Yorkshire moors. One smells the smell of burning furze, one tastes the resinous breath of pine-trees, one feels beneath one’s feet the tough fibrous stalks of the ling and the resistant stems and crumpled leaves of the bracken.

Dark against that pallid greenish light of a dead sunset, which is more than anything else characteristic of those unharvested fells, one can perceive always, as one reads her, the sombre form of some gigantic Scotch-fir stretching out its arms across the sky; while a flight of rooks, like enormous black leaves drifting on the wind, sail away into the sunset at our approach.

One is conscious, as one reads her, of lonely marsh-pools turning empty faces towards a grey heaven, while drop by drop upon their murky waters the autumn rain falls, sadly, wearily, without aim or purpose.

And most of all is one made aware of the terrible desolation — desolation only rendered more desolate by the presence of humanity — of those half-ruined farm-houses, approached by windy paths or deep-cut lanes, which seem to rise, like huge fungoid things, here and there over that sad land.

It is difficult to conceive they have not sprung — these dwellings of these Earnshaws and Lintons — actually out of the very soil, in slow organic growth leading to slow organic decay. One cannot conceive the human hands which *built* them; any more than one can conceive the human hands which planted those sombre hedges which have now become so completely part of the scenery that one thinks of them as quite as aboriginal to the place as the pine-trees or the gorse-bushes.

Of all shapes of all trees I think the shape of an old and twisted thorn-tree harmonises best with one’s impression of the “milieu” of Emily Brontë’s single tragic story; a thorn-tree distorted by the wind blowing from one particular quarter, and with its trunk blackened and hollowed; and in the hollow of it a little pool of rain-water and a few dead soaked leaves.

The extraordinary thing is that she can produce these impressions incidentally, and, as it were, unconsciously. They are so blent with her spirit, these things, that they convey themselves to one's mind indirectly and through a medium far more subtle than any eloquent description.

I cannot think of Emily Brontë's work without thinking of a certain tree I once saw against a pallid sky. A long way from Yorkshire it was where I saw this tree, and there were no limestone boulders scattered at its feet; but something in the impression it produced upon me — an impression I shall not lightly forget — weaves itself strangely in with all I feel about her, so that the peculiar look of wintry boughs, sad and silent against a fading west, accompanied by that natural human longing of people who are tired to be safely buried under the friendly earth and "free among the dead," has come to be most indelibly and deeply associated with her tragic figure.

Those who know those Yorkshire moors know the mysterious way in which the quiet country lanes suddenly emerge upon wide and desolate expanses; know how they lead us on, past ruined factories and deserted quarries, up the barren slopes of forlorn hills; know how, as one sees in front of one the long white road vanishing over the hill-top and losing itself in the grey sky, there comes across one's mind a strange, sad, exquisite feeling unlike any other feeling in the world; and we who love Emily Brontë know that this is the feeling, the mood, the atmosphere of the soul, into which her writings throw us.

The power of her great single story, "Wuthering Heights," is in a primary sense the power of romance, and none can care for this book for whom romance means nothing.

What is romance? I think it is the instinctive recognition of a certain poetic glamour which an especial kind of grouping of persons and things — of persons and things seen under a particular light — is able to produce. It does not always accompany the expression of passionate emotion or the narration of thrilling incidents. These may arrest and entertain us when there is no romance, in my sense at any rate of that great word, overshadowing the picture.

I think this quality of romance can only be evoked when the background of the story is heavily laden with old, rich, dim, pathetic, human associations. I think it can only emerge when there is an implication of thickly mingled traditions, full of sombre and terrible and beautiful suggestiveness, stimulating to the imagination like a draught of heavy red wine. I think there must be, in a story of which the flavour has the true romantic magic, something darkly and inexplicably fatal. I think it is necessary that one should hear the rush of the flight of the Valkyries and the wailing upon the wind of the voices of the Eumenides.

Fate — in such a story — must assume a half-human, half-personal shape, and must brood, obscurely and sombrely, over the incidents and the characters.

The characters themselves must be swayed and dominated by Fate; and not only by Fate. They must be penetrated through and through by the scenery which surrounds them and by the traditions, old and dark and superstitious and malign, of some particular spot upon the earth's surface.

The scenery which is the background of a tale which has the true romantic quality must gather itself together and concentrate itself in some kind of symbolic unity; and this symbolic unity — wherein the various elements of grandeur and mystery are merged — must present itself as something almost personal and as a dynamic "motif" in the development of the plot.

There can be no romance without some sort of appeal to that long-inherited and atavistic feeling in ordinary human hearts which is responsive to the spell and influence of old, unhappy, lovely, ancient things; things faded and falling, but with the mellowness of the centuries upon their faces.

In other words, nothing can be romantic which is *new.* Romance implies, above everything else, a long association with the human feelings of many generations. It implies an appeal to that background of our minds which is stirred to reciprocity by suggestions dealing with those old, dark, mysterious memories which belong, not so much to us as individuals, as to us as links in a great chain.

There are certain emotions in all of us which go much further and deeper than our mere personal feelings. Such are the emotions roused in us by contact with the mysterious forces of life and death and birth and the movements of the seasons; with the rising and setting of the sun, and the primordial labour of tilling the earth and gathering in the harvest. These things have been so long associated with our human hopes and fears, with the nerves and fibres of our inmost being, that any powerful presentment of them brings to the surface the accumulated feelings of hundreds of centuries.

New problems, new adventures, new social groupings, new philosophical catchwords, may all have their vivid and exciting interest. They cannot carry with them that sad, sweet breath of planetary romance which touches what might be called the "imagination of the race" in individual men and women.

"Wuthering Heights" is a great book, not only because of the intensity of the passions in it, but because these passions are penetrated so profoundly with the long, bitter, tragic, human associations of persons who have lived for generations upon the same spot and have behind them the weight of the burden of the sorrows of the dead.

It is a great book because the romance of it emerges into undisturbed amplitude of space, and asserts itself in large, grand, primitive forms unfretted by teasing irrelevancies.

The genius of a romantic novelist — indeed, the genius of all writers primarily concerned with the mystery of human character — consists in letting the basic differences between man and man, between man and woman, rise up, unimpeded by frivolous detail, from the fathomless depths of life itself.

The solitude in which Emily Brontë lived, and the austere simplicity of her granite-moulded character, made it possible for her to envisage life in larger, simpler, less blurred outlines than most of us are able to do. Thus her art has something of that mysterious and awe-inspiring simplicity that characterises the work of Michelangelo or William Blake.

No one who has ever read “Wuthering Heights” can forget the place and the time when he read it. As I write its name now, every reader of this page will recall, with a sudden heavy sigh at the passing of youth, the moment when the sweet tragic power of its deadly genius first took him by the throat.

For me the shadow of an old bowed acacia-tree, held together by iron bands, was over the history of Heathcliff; but the forms and shapes of that mad drama gathered to themselves the lineaments of all my wildest dreams.

I can well remember, too, how on a certain long straight road between Heathfield and Burwash, the eastern district of Sussex, my companion — the last of our English theologians — turned suddenly from his exposition of St. Thomas, and began quoting, as the white dust rose round us at the passing of a flock of sheep, the “vain are the thousand creeds — unutterably vain!” of that grand and absolute defiance, that last challenge of the unconquerable soul, which ends with the sublime cry to the eternal spark of godhead in us all —

“Thou, thou art being and breath;
And what thou art can never be destroyed!”

The art of Emily Brontë — if it can be called art, this spontaneous projection, in a shape rugged and savage, torn with the storms of fate, of her inmost identity — can be appreciated best if we realise with what skill we are plunged into the dark stream of the destiny of these people through the mediatory intervention of a comparative stranger. By this method, and also by the crafty manner in which she makes the old devoted servant of the house of Earnshaw utter a sort of Sophoclean commentary upon the events which take place, we are permitted to feel the magnitude of the thing in true relief and perspective.

By these devices we have borne in upon us, as in no other way could be done, the convincing sense which we require, to give weight and mass to the story, of the real continuity of life in those savage places.

By this method of narration we have the illusion of being suddenly initiated into a stream of events which are not merely imaginary. We have the illusion that these Earnshaws and Lintons are really, actually, palpably, undeniably, living — living somewhere, in their terrible isolation, as they have always lived — and that it is only by some lucky chance of casual discovery that we have been plunged into the mystery of their days.

One cannot help feeling aware, as we follow the story of Heathcliff, how Emily Brontë has torn and rent at her own soul in the creation of this appalling figure. Heathcliff, without father or mother, without even a Christian name, becomes for us a sort of personal embodiment of the suppressed fury of Emily Brontë’s own soul. The cautious prudence and hypocritical reserves of the discreet world of timid, kindly, compromising human beings has got upon the nerves of this formidable girl, and, as she goes tearing and rending at all the masks which cover our loves and our hates, she seems to utter wild discordant cries, cries like those of some she-wolf rushing through the herd of normal human sheep.

Heathcliff and Cathy, what a pair they are! What terrifying lovers! They seem to have arisen from some remote unfathomed past of the world's earlier and less civilised passions. And yet, one occasionally catches, as one goes through the world, the Heathcliff look upon the face of a man and the Cathy look upon the face of a woman.

In a writer of less genius than Emily Brontë Heathcliff would never have found his match; would never have found his mate, his equal, his twin-soul.

It needed the imagination of one who had both Heathcliff and Cathy in her to dig them both out of the same granite rock, covered with yellow gorse and purple ling, and to hurl them into one another's arms.

From the moment when they inscribed their initials upon the walls of that melancholy room, to the moment when, with a howl like a madman, Heathcliff drags her from her grave, their affiliation is desperate and absolute.

This is a love which passes far beyond all sensuality, far beyond all voluptuous pleasure. They get little good of their love, these two — little solace and small comfort.

But one cannot conceive their wishing to change their lot with any happier lovers. They are what they are, and they are prepared to endure what fate shall send them.

When Cathy admits to the old servant that she intends to marry Linton because Heathcliff was unworthy of her and would drag her down, "I love Linton," she says— "but *I am* Heathcliff!" And this *"I am* Heathcliff" rings in our ears as the final challenge to a chaotic pluralistic world full of cynical disillusionment, of the desperate spirit of which Emily Brontë was made.

The wild madness of such love — passing the love of men and women — may seem to many readers the mere folly of an insane dream.

Emily Brontë — as she was bound to do — tosses them forth, that inhuman pair, upon the voyaging homeless wind; tosses them forth, free of their desperation, to wander at large, ghosts of their own undying passions, over the face of the rainswept moors. But to most quiet and sceptical souls such an issue of the drama contradicts the laws of nature. To most patient slaves of destiny the end of the ashes of these fierce flames is to mingle placidly with the dark earth of those misty hills and find their release in nothing more tragic than the giving to the roots of the heather and the bracken a richer soil wherein to grow.

None of us know! None of us can ever know! It is enough that in this extraordinary story the wild strange link which once and again in the history of a generation binds so strangely two persons together, almost as though their association were the result of some aeon-old everlasting Recurrence, is once more thrown into tragic relief and given the tender beauty of an austere imagination.

Not every one can feel the spell of Emily Brontë or care for her work. To some she must always remain too ungracious, too savage, too uncompromising. But for those who have come to care for her, she is a wonderful and a lovely figure; a figure whose full significance has not even yet been sounded, a figure with whom we must come more and more to associate that liberation of what we call love from the mere animalism of sexual passion, which we feel sometimes, and in our rarer moments, to be one of the richest triumphs of the spirit over the flesh.

It may be that Emily Brontë is right. It may be that a point can be reached — perhaps is already being reached in the lives of certain individuals — where sexual passion is thus surpassed and transcended by the burning of a flame more intense than any which lust can produce.

It may be that the human race, as time goes on, will follow closer and closer this ferocious and spiritual girl in tearing aside the compromises of our hesitating timidity and plunging into the ice-cold waters of passions so keen and translunar as to have become chaste. It may be so — and, on the other hand, it may be that the old sly earth-gods will hold their indelible sway over us until the "baseless fabric" of this vision leaves "not a rack behind"! In any case, for our present purpose, the reading of Emily Brontë strengthens us in our recognition that the only wisdom of life consists in leaving all the doors of the universe open.

Cursed be they who close any doors! Let that be our literary as it is our philosophical motto.

Little have we gained from books, little from our passionate following in the steps of the great masters, if, after all, we only return once more to the narrow prejudices of our obstinate personal convictions.

From ourselves we cannot escape; but we can, unfortunately, hide ourselves from ourselves. We can hide ourselves "full-fathom-five" under our convictions and our principles. We can hide ourselves under our theories and our philosophies. It is only now and again, when, by some sudden devastating flash, some terrific burst of the thunder of the great gods, the real lineaments of what we are show up clearly for a moment in the dark mirror of our shaken consciousness.

It is well not to let the memory of those moments pass altogether away.

The reading of the great authors will have been a mere epicurean pastime if it has not made us recognise that what is important in our life is something that belongs more closely to us than any opinion we have inherited or any theory we have gained or any principle we have struggled for.

It will have been wasted if it has not made us recognise that in the moments when these outward things fall away, and the true self, beyond the power of these outward things, looks forth defiantly, tenderly, pitifully upon this huge strange world, there are intimations and whispers of something beyond all that the philosophers have ever dreamed, hidden in the reservoirs of being and ready to touch us with their breath.

Our reading of these noble writings will have been no more than a gracious entertainment if we have not come to see that the enormous differences of their verdicts prove conclusively that no one theory, no one principle, can cover the tremendous field. But such reading will have had but a poor effect if because of this radical opposition in the voices reaching us we give up our interest in the great quest.

For it is upon our retaining our interest that the birthright of our humanity depends.

We shall never find what we seek; that is certain enough. We should be gods, not men, if we found it. But we should be less than men, and beasts — if we gave up the interest of the search, the tremulous vibrating interest, which, like little waves of ether, hovers over the cross-roads where all the great ways part.

Something outside ourselves drives us on to seek it — this evasive solution of a riddle that seems eternal — and when, weary with the effort of refusing this or the other premature solution, weary with the effort of suspending our judgment and standing erect at that parting of the ways, we long in our hearts to drift at leisure down one of the many soothing streams, it is only the knowledge that it is not our intrinsic inmost self that so collapses and yields up the high prerogative of doubt, but some lesser self in us, some tired superficial self, which keeps us back from that betrayal.

The courage with which Emily Brontë faced life, the equanimity with which she faced death, were in her case closely associated with the quiet desolate landscape which surrounded her.

As my American poet says, it is only in the country that we can look upon these fatal necessities and see them as they are. To be born and to die fall into their place when we are living where the smell of the earth can reach us.

There will always be a difference between those who come from the country and those who come from the town; and if a time ever arrives when the cities of men so cover the earth that there will be room no longer for any country-bred persons in our midst, something will in that hour pass away forever from art and literature, and, I suspect, from philosophy too.

For you cannot acquire this quality by any pleasant trips through picturesque scenery. It is either in you or it is not in you. You either have the slow, tenacious, humorous, patient, imaginative instincts of the country-born; or you have the smart, quick, clever, witty, fanciful, lively, receptive, caustic turn of mind of those bred in the great cities.

We all come to the town, “some in rags and some in jags and some in velvet gowns”; but the country-born always recognises the country-born, and there is a natural affinity between them.

I suspect that those who have behind them no local, provincial traditions will find it difficult to understand Emily Brontë.

She did not deal in elaborate description; but the earth-mould smells sweet, and the roots of the reeds of the pond-rushes show wavering and dim in the dark water, and “through the hawthorn blows the cold wind,” and the white moon drifts over the sombre furze-covered hills; and all these things have passed into her style and have formed her style, and all these things are behind the tenacity with which she endures life, and behind the immense mysterious hope with which, while regarding all human creeds as “unutterably vain,” she falls back so fiercely upon that “amor intellectualis Dei” which is the burning fire in her own soul.

— “Thou, thou art being and breath;
And what thou art can never be destroyed!”

JOSEPH CONRAD

THE INHERENT GENIUS of a writer is usually a deeper and more ingrained thing than the obvious qualities for which the world commends him, and this is true in a very profound sense in Conrad's case.

We have only touched the fringe of the matter when we say that he has possessed himself of the secret of the sea more completely than any who write in English except Shakespeare and Swinburne.

We have only touched the fringe of the matter when we say he has sounded the ambiguous stops of that mysterious instrument, the heart of the white man exiled from his kind in the darkness of tropical solitudes.

These things are of immense interest, but the essence of Conrad's genius lies behind and beyond them; lies, in fact, if I am not mistaken, in a region where he has hardly a single rival.

This region is nothing more nor less than that strange margin of our minds, where memories gather which are deeper than memories, and where emotions float by and waver and hover and alight, like wild marsh-birds upon desolate sea-banks.

Conrad's genius, like the genius of all great writers who appeal to what is common and universal in us, to what unites the clever and the simple, the experienced and the inexperienced, is revealed in something much less accidental and arbitrary than the selection of any striking background, however significant, of ocean-mystery or jungle solitude.

The margin of the mind! Margin, mid-way between the known and the unknown! Do not the obscure images, called up by the feelings such words suggest, indicate far more intimately than any description of tropical rivers or Malay seas, the sort of spiritual atmosphere in which he darkly gives us many strange clues?

I seem to see this shadowy borderland, lying on the extreme “bank and shoal” of our human consciousness, as a place like that across which Childe Roland moved when he came to the “dark tower.”

I seem to visualise it as a sort of dim marshland, full of waving reeds and deep black pools. I seem to see it as a place where patches of dead grass whistle in a melancholy wind, and where half-buried trunks of rain-soaked trees lift distorted and menacing arms.

Others may image it in a different way, perhaps with happier symbols; but the region I have in my mind, crossed by the obscure shapes of dimly beckoning memories, is common to us all.

You can, if you like, call this region of faint rumours and misty intimations the proper sphere and true hunting-ground of the new psychology. As a matter of fact, psychologists rarely approach it with any clairvoyant intelligence. And the reason of that is, it is much further removed from the material reactions of the nerves and the senses than the favourite soil of these people’s explorations.

So thin and shadowy indeed is the link between the vague feelings which flit to and fro in this region and any actual sensual impression, that it almost seems as though this subconscious borderland were in contact with some animistic inner world — not exactly a supernatural world, but a world removed several stages back from the material one wherein our nerves and our senses function; a world wherein we might be permitted to fancy the platonic archetypes dwelling, archetypes of all material forms; or, if you will, the inherent “souls” of such forms, living their own strange inner life upon a plane of existence beyond our rational apprehension.

It is certain that there are many moments in the most naive people’s experience when, as they walk in solitude along some common highway, the shape of a certain tree or the look of a certain hovel, or the indescribable melancholy of a certain road-side pool, or the way the light happens to fall upon a heap of dead leaves, or the particular manner in which some knotted and twisted root protrudes itself from the bank, awakes quite suddenly, in this margin of the mind of which I speak, the strangest and subtlest feelings.

It is as though something in the material thing before us — some inexplicable “soul” of the inanimate — rushed forth to meet our soul, as if it had been *waiting* for us for long, long years.

I am moving, in this matter of the essential secret of Conrad, through a vague and obscure twilight. It is not easy to express these things; but what I have in my thoughts is certainly no mere fancy of mystical idealism, but a quite definite and actual experience, or series of experiences, in the “great valley” of the mind.

When Almayer, for instance, stares hopelessly and blankly at a floating log in his gloomy river; when the honest fellow in “Chance” who is relating the story watches the mud of the road outside the hotel where Captain Anthony and Flora de Barral are making their desperate arrangements; you get the sort of subconscious “expectancy” which is part of this strange phenomenon, and that curious sudden thrill, “I have been here before! I have seen and heard all this before!” which gives to so many scenes in Conrad that undertone of unfathomable mystery which is so true an aspect of life.

So often are we conscious of it as we read him! We are conscious of it — to give another instance — when Heyst and Lena are talking together in the loneliness of their island of escape, before the unseen enemies descend on them.

The same insight in him and the same extraordinary power of making words malleable to his purpose in dealing with these hidden things may be remarked in all those scenes in his books where men and women are drawn together by love.

Conrad takes no interest in social problems. His interest is only stirred by what is permanent and undying in the relations between men and women. These extraordinary scenes, where Gould and his wife, where Antonia Avellanos and her friend, where Willem and Aissa, where Nina and her Malay chief, where Flora and Anthony, Heyst and Lena, and many other lovers, meet and peer into the secret depths of one another's beings, are all scenes possessing that universal human element which no change or reform or revolution or improvement can touch or alter.

Without any theory about their "emancipation," Conrad has achieved for women, in these stories of his, an extraordinary triumph. Well does he name his latest book "Victory." The victory of women over force, over cunning, over stupidity, over brutality, is one of the main threads running through all his work.

And what women they are! I do not recall any that resemble them in all literature.

Less passionate than the women of Dostoievsky, less sentimental than the women of Balzac, less sensual than the women of de Maupassant, Conrad's women have a quality entirely their own, a quality which holds us spell-bound. It is much easier to feel this quality than to describe it. Something of the same element — and it is a thing the positivity of which we have to search out among many crafty negations — may be discerned in some of the women of Shakespeare and, in a lesser degree, in one or two of the young girls in the stories of Turgenief.

I think the secret of it is to be looked for in the amazing poise and self-possession of these women; a self-possession which is indicated in their moments of withdrawn and reserved silence.

They seem at these times to sink down into the very depths of their femininity, into the depths of some strange sex-secret of which they are themselves only dreamily conscious.

They seem to withdraw themselves from their own love, from their own drama, from their own personality, and to lie back upon life, upon the universal mystery of life and womanhood. This they do without, it might seem, knowing what they are doing.

They all, in these strange world-deep silences of theirs, carry upon their intent and sibylline faces something of that mysterious charm — expectant, consecrated, and holy — which the early painters have caught the shadow of in their pictures of the Annunciation.

There is something about them which makes us vaguely dream of the far-distant youth of the world; something that recalls the symbolic and poetic figures of Biblical and Mythological legend.

They tease and baffle us with the mystery of their emotions, with the magical and evasive depths of the feminine secret in them. They make us think of Rebecca at the well and Ruth in the corn-field; of Andromache on the walls of Troy and of Calypso, Brunhilda, Gwenevere, Iphigeneia, Medea, Salome, Lilith.

And all this is achieved by the most subtle and yet by the most simple means. It is brought about partly by an art of description which is unique among English novelists, an art of description which by a few fastidious and delicate touches can make the bodily appearance indicative of the hidden soul; and partly by the cunning insertion of long, treacherous, pregnant silences which reveal in some occult indirect manner the very integral quality of the soul thus betrayed.

The more voluble women of other novelists seem, even while they are expressing their most violent emotions, rather to blur and confuse the mysterious depths of their sex-life than to reveal it. Conrad's women, in a few broken words, in a stammered sentence, in a significant silence, have the power of revealing something more than the tragic emotion of one person. They have the power of revealing what might be called the subliminal sex-consciousness of the race itself. They have the power of merging the individuality of the particular speaker into something deeper and larger and wider, into something universal.

Reserve is the grand device by means of which this subconscious element is made evident, is hinted at and glimpsed so magically. When everything is expressed, nothing is expressed. A look, a gesture, a sigh, a whisper, in Conrad, is more significant of the ocean-deep mysteries of the soul than pages of eloquent psychology.

The deepest psychology — that is what one comes at last to feel — can only be expressed indirectly and by means of movements, pictures, symbols, signs. It can be revealed in words; but the words revealing it must ostensibly be concerned with something else.

For it is with the deepest things in human life as with the deepest things in nature; their way must be prepared for them, the mind must be alert to receive them, but they must not be snatched at in any direct attack. They will come; suddenly, sharply, crushingly, or softly as feathers on the wind; but they will only come if we turn away our faces. They will only come if we treat them with the reverence with which the ancients treated the mysterious fates, calling them "The Eumenides"; or the ultimate secret of the universe, calling it Demogorgon; with the reverence which wears the mask of superstition.

The reason why Conrad holds us all — old and young, subtle and simple — with so irresistible a spell, is because he has a clairvoyant intuition for the things which make up the hidden substratum of all our human days — the things which cause us those moments of sharp sweet happiness which come and go on sudden mysterious wings.

His style is a rare achievement; and it is so because he treats the language he uses with such scrupulous and austere reverence.

The mere fact that English was a foreign tongue to him seems to have intensified this quality; as though the hardness and steepness of its challenge forced the latent scholarship in him to stiffen its fibres to encounter it.

When he writes of ships he does not tease us with the pedantry of technical terms. He undertakes the much more human and the much more difficult task of conveying to us the thousand and one vague and delicate associations which bind the souls of seafarers to the vessels that carry them.

His fine imaginative mind — loving with a large receptive wisdom all the quaint idiosyncrasy of lonely and reserved people — naturally turns with a certain scornful contempt from modern steamships. That bastard romance, full of vulgar acclamation over mechanical achievements, which makes so much of the mere size and speed of a trans-Atlantic liner, is waved aside contemptuously by Conrad.

Like all great imaginative spirits, he realizes that for any inanimate object to wear the rich magic of the deep poetic things, it is necessary for it to have existed in the world long enough to have become intimately associated with the hopes and fears, the fancies and terrors, of many generations.

It is simply and solely their newness to human experience which makes it impossible for any of these modern inventions, however striking and sensational, to affect our imagination with the sense of intrinsic beauty in the way a sailing-ship does.

And it is not only — as one soon comes to feel in reading Conrad — that these old-fashioned ships, with their legendary associations carrying one back over the centuries, are beautiful in themselves. They diffuse the beauty of their identity through every detail of the lives of those who are connected with them. They bring the mystery and terror of the sea into every harbour where they anchor and into every port.

No great modern landing-stage for huge liners, from which the feverish crowds of fashionable tourists or bewildered immigrants disembark, can compare in poetic and imaginative suggestiveness, with any ramshackle dock, east or west, where brigs and schooners and trawlers put in; and real sailors — sailors who *sail* their ships — enter the little smoky taverns or drift homeward down the narrow streets.

The shallow, popular, journalistic writers whose vulgar superficial minds are impressed by the mere portentousness of machinery, are only making once more the old familiar blunder of mistaking size for dignity, and brutal energy for noble strength.

Conrad has done well in his treatment of ships and sailors to reduce these startling modern inventions to their proper place of emotional insignificance compared with the true seafaring tradition. What one thinks of when any allusion is made to a ship in Conrad's works is always a sailing-ship, a merchant ship, a ship about which from the very beginning there is something human, mellow, rich, traditional, idiosyncratic, characteristic, full of imaginative wistfulness and with an integral soul.

One always feels that a ship in Conrad has a *figure-head;* and is it possible to imagine a White Star liner, or a North German Lloyd steamer, with such an honourable and beautiful adornment? Liners are things entirely without souls. One only knows them apart by their paint, their tonnage, or the name of the particular set of financiers who monopolise them.

"Floating hotels" is the proud and inspiring term with which the awed journalistic mind contemplates these wonders.

Well! In Conrad's books we are not teased with "floating hotels." If a certain type of machine-loving person derives satisfaction from thinking how wonderfully these monsters have conquered the sea, let it be remembered that the sea has its *poetic* revenge upon them by absolutely concealing from those who travel in this way the real magic of its secret.

No one knows the sea — that, at any rate, Conrad makes quite clear — who has not voyaged over its waves in a sailing vessel.

Of the books which Mr. Conrad has so far written — one hopes that for many years each new Spring will bring a new work from his pen — my own favourites are "Chance" and "Lord Jim," and, after those two, "Victory."

I think the figure of Flora de Barral in "Chance" is one of the most arresting figures in all fiction. I cannot get that girl out of my mind. Her pale flesh, her peculiarly dark-tinted blue eyes, her white cheeks and scarlet mouth; above all, her broken pride, her deep humiliation, her shadowy and abysmal reserve — haunt me like a figure seen and loved in some previous incarnation.

I like to fancy that in the case of Flora, as in the case of Antonia and Nina and Lena and Aissa, Conrad has been enabled to convey, by means of an art far subtler than appears on the surface, a strange revival, in the case of every person who reads the book, of the intangible memories of the sweetness and mystery of such a person's first love.

I believe half the secret of this wonderful art of his, by which we are thus reminded of our first love, is the absolute elimination of the *sensual* from these evasive portraits. And not only of the sensual; of the sentimental as well. In the average popular books about love we have nowadays a sickening revel of sentimentality. Then again, as opposed to this vulgar sentimentality, with its false idealisation of women, we have the realistic sensuality of the younger cleverer writers playing upon every kind of neurotic obsession. I think the greatness of Conrad is to be found in the fact that he refuses to sacrifice the mysterious truth of passion either to sentiment or to sensuality. He keeps this great clear well of natural human feeling free from both these turbid and morbid streams.

A very curious psychological blunder made by many of our younger writers is the attributing to women of the particular kind of sex emotion which belongs essentially to men, an emotion penetrated by lust and darkened by feverish restlessness. From this blunder Conrad is most strangely free. His women love like women, not like vicious boys with the faces of women. They love like women and they hate like women; and they are most especially and most entirely womanlike in the extreme difficulty they evidently always experience in the defining with any clearness — even to themselves — of their own emotions.

It is just this mysterious inability to define their own emotions which renders women at once so annoying and so attractive; and the mere presence of something in them which refuses definition is a proof that they are beyond both sentiment and sensuality. For sentiment and sensuality lend themselves very willingly to the most exact and logical analysis. Sensualists love nothing better than the epicurean pleasure of dissecting their own emotions as soon as they are once assured of a discreet and sympathetic listener. The same is doubly true of sentimentalists. The women of Conrad — like the women of Shakespeare — while they may be garrulous enough and witty enough on other matters, grow tongue-tied and dumb when their great emotions call for overt expression.

It seems to me quite a natural thing that the writer who, of all others, has caught the mystery of ships should be the writer who, of all moderns, has caught the mystery of women. Women are very like ships: ships sailing over waters of whose depths they themselves know nothing; ships upon whose masts strange wild birds — thoughts wandering from island to island of remote enchantment — settle for a moment and then fly off forever; ships that can ride the maddest and most tragical storms in safety; ships that some hidden rock, unmarked on any earthly chart, may sink to the bottom without warning and without mercy!

Conrad reveals to us the significant fact that what the deepest love of women suffers from — the kind of storm which shakes it and troubles it — is not sensuality of any sort but a species of blind and fatal fury, hardly conscious of any definite cause, but directed desperately and passionately against the very object of this love itself. Conrad seems to indicate, if I read him correctly, that this mad, wild, desperate fury with which women hurl themselves against what they love best in a blind desire to hurt it, is nothing less than a savage protest against that deep and inviolable gulf which isolates every human being from every other human being.

Such a gulf men — in a measure — pass, or dream they pass, on the swift torrent of animal desire; but women are more clairvoyant in these things, and their love being more diffused, and, in a sense, more spiritual, is not so easily satisfied by mere physical possession.

They want to possess more. They want to possess body, soul and spirit. They want to share every thought of their beloved, every instinct, every wish, every ambition, every vision, every remotest dream.

That they are forbidden this complete reciprocity by a profound law of nature excites their savage fury, and they blindly wreak their anger upon the innocent cause of their bewildered un-happiness.

It is their maternal instinct which thus desires to take complete and absolute possession of the object of their love. The maternal instinct is always — as Conrad makes quite clear — at the bottom of the love-passion in the most normal types of women; and the maternal instinct is driven on by a mad relentless force to seek to destroy every vestige of separate independence, bodily, mental or spiritual, in the person it pursues.

Conrad shows with extraordinary subtlety how this basic craving in women, resulting in this irrational and, apparently, inexplicable anger, is invariably driven to cover its tracks by every kind of cunning subterfuge.

This loving anger of women will blaze up into flame at a thousand quite trivial causes. It may take the form of jealousy; but it is in reality much deeper than jealousy. It may take the form of protest against man's stupidity, man's greed, man's vanity, man's lust, man's thick-skinned selfishness; but it is in reality a protest against the law of nature which makes it impossible for a woman to share this stupidity, this vanity, this lust, this greed, and which holds her so cruelly confined to a selfishness which is her own and quite different from the selfishness of man.

One would only have to carry the psychological imagination of Conrad a very little further to recognise the fact that while man is inherently and completely satisfied with the difference between man and woman; satisfied with it and deriving his most thrilling pleasure from it; woman is always feverishly and frantically endeavouring to overcome and overreach this difference, endeavouring, in fact, to feel her way into every nerve and fibre of man's sensibility, so that he shall have nothing left that is a secret from her. That he should have any such secrets — that such secrets should be an inalienable and inevitable part of his essential difference from herself — excites in her unmitigated fury; and this is the hidden cause of those mysterious outbursts of apparently quite irrational anger which have fallen upon all lovers of women since the beginning of the world.

Man wishes woman to remain different from himself. It interests him that she should be different. He loves her for being different. His sensuality and his sentiment feed upon this difference and delight to accentuate it. Women seem in some subtle way to resent the division of the race into two sexes and to be always endeavouring to get rid of this division by possessing themselves of every thought and feeling and mood and gesture of the man they love. And when confronted by the impassable gulf, which love itself is incapable of bridging, a blind mad anger, like the anger of a creative deity balked of his purpose, possesses them body and soul.

Mr. Wilson Follet in his superb brochure upon Conrad, written in a manner so profoundly influenced by Henry James that as one reads it one feels that Henry James himself, writing upon Conrad, could not possibly have done better, lays great stress upon Conrad's complicated and elaborate manner of building up his stories.

Mr. Follet points out, for instance, how in "Chance" we have one layer of personal receptivity after another; each one, as in a sort of rich palimpsest of overlaid impressions, making the material under our hands thicker, fuller, more significant, more symbolic, more underscored and overscored with interesting personal values.

This is perfectly true, and it is a fine arresting method and worthy of all attention.

But for myself I am not in the least ashamed to say that I prefer the art of Conrad at those moments when the narrative becomes quite direct and when there is no waylaying medium, however interesting, between our magnetised minds and the clear straightforward story.

I like his manner best, and I do not scruple to admit it, when his Almayers and Ninas, his Anthonys and Floras, his Heysts and Lenas, are brought face to face in clear uncomplicated visualisation. I think he is always at his best when two passionate and troubled natures — not necessarily those of a man and woman; sometimes those of a man and man, like Lingard and Willem — are brought together in direct and tragic conflict. At such moments as these we get that true authentic thrill of immemorial romance — romance as old as the first stories ever told or sung — of the encounter of protagonist and antagonist; and from the hidden depths of life rise up, clear and terrible and strong, the austere voices of the adamantine fates.

But though he is at his greatest in these direct uncomplicated passionate scenes, I am quite at one with Mr. Wilson Follet in treasuring up as of incalculable value in the final effect of his art all those elaborate by-issues and thickly woven implications which give to the main threads of his dramas so rich, so suggestive, so mellow a background.

Except for a few insignificant passages when that sly old mariner Marlowe, of whom Conrad seems perhaps unduly fond, lights his pipe and passes the beer and utters breezy and bracing sentiments, I can enjoy with unmitigated delight all the convolutions and overlappings of his inverted method of narration — of those rambling “advances,” as Mr. Follet calls them, to already consummated “conclusions.” In the few occasional passages where Marlowe assumes a moralising tone and becomes bracing and strenuous I fancy I detect the influence of certain muscular, healthy-minded, worthy men, among our modern writers, who I daresay appeal to the Slavonic soul of this great Pole as something quite wonderfully and pathetically English.

With these exceptions I am unwavering in my adherence to his curious and intricate method. I love the way he pours his main narrative, like so much fruity port-wine, first through the sieve of one quaint person's mind and then of another; each one adding some new flavour, some new vein of body or bouquet or taste, to the original stream, until it becomes thick with all the juices of all the living fermentations in the world.

I think the pleasure I derive from Conrad is largely due to the fact that while he liberates us with a magnificent jerk from the tiresome monotonous sedentary life of ordinary civilised people, he does so without assuming that banal and bullying air of the adventurous swashbuckler, which is so exhausting; without letting his intellectual interests be swamped by these physiological violences and by these wanderings into savage regions.

Most of our English writers, so it appears to me, who leave the quiet haunts of unadventurous people and set off for remote continents, leave behind them, when they embark, all the fineness and subtlety of their intelligence, and become drastic and crude and journalistic and vulgar. They pile up local colour till your brain reels, and they assume a sort of man-of-the-wide-world "knowingness" which is extremely unpleasant.

Conrad may follow his tropical rivers into the dim dark heart of his Malay jungles, but he never forgets to carry with him his sensitiveness, his metaphysical subtlety, his delicate and elaborate art.

What gives one such extraordinary pleasure in his books is the fact that while he is writing of frontier-explorers and backwoods-peddlers, of ivory-traffickers and marooned seafarers, he never forgets that he is a philosopher and a psychologist.

This is the kind of writer one has been secretly craving for, for years and years; a writer who can liberate us from the outworn restrictions of civilised life, a writer who can initiate us into all the magical mysteries of dark continents and secret southern islands, without teasing us with the harsh sterilities of a brain devoid of all finer feelings.

This is the sort of writer one hardly dared to hope could ever appear; a writer capable of describing sheer physical beauty and savage elemental strength while remaining a subtle European philosopher. I suppose it would be impossible for a writer of English blood to attain such a distinction — to be as crafty as a Henry James, moving on velvety feline paws through the drawing-rooms of London and the gardens of Paris; and yet to be leading us through the shadows of primordial forests, cheek by jowl with monstrous idolatries and heathen passions.

But what renders the work of Conrad so extraordinarily rich in human value is not only that he can remain a philosopher in the deserted outposts of South-Pacific Islands, but that he can remain a tender and mellow lover of the innumerable little things, little stray memories and associations, which bind every wanderer from Europe, however far he may voyage, to the familiar places he has left behind in the land of his birth.

Here he is a true Slav, a true continental European. Here he is rather Russian — or French, shall I say — than an adopted child of Britain; for the colonising instinct of the British race renders its sentimental devotion to the country of its engendering less burdened with the passionate intimate sorrows of the exile than the nostalgia of the other races.

Conrad has indeed to a very high degree that tender imaginative feeling for the little casual associations of a person’s birthplace in town or country, which seems to be a peculiar inheritance of the Slavonic and Latin races, and which for all their sentimental play with the word “home” is not really natural to the tougher-minded Englishman or Scotchman.

One is conscious, all the while one reads of these luckless wanderers in forlorn places, of the very smell of the lanes and the very look of the fields and the actual sounds and stir of the quaint narrow streets and the warm interiors of little friendly taverns by wharfside and by harbour-mouth, of the far-off European homes where these people were born.

No modern English writer, except the great, the unequalled Mr. Hardy, has the power which Conrad has, of conveying to the mind that close indescribable intimacy between humanity’s passions and the little inanimate things which have surrounded us from childhood.

Conrad can convey this “home-feeling,” this warm secure turning of the human animal to the lair which it has made for itself, even into the heart of the tempestuous ocean. He can give us that curious half-psychic and half-physical thrill of being in mellow harmony with our material surroundings, even in the little cabin of some weather-battered captain of a storm-tossed merchant-ship; and not a sailor, in his books, and not a single ship in which his sailors voyage, but has a sort of dim background of long rests from toil in ancient harbour back-waters where the cobblestones on the wharf-edge are thick with weeds and moss, and where the November rain beats mistily and greyly, as in Russia and in England, upon the tiled roofs and the lamplit streets.

It is nothing less than just this human imagination in him, brooding so carefully over the intimate and sacred relations between our frail mortality and its material surroundings, that makes it possible for him to treat with such delicate reverence the ways and customs, the usages and legendary pieties, of the various half-savage tribes among whom his exiled Europeans wander.

I am not ashamed to admit that I find the emphasis laid in Conrad's books upon sheer physical violence a little hurtful to my pleasure in reading him. What is the cause of this mania for violence? It surely detracts from the charm of his writing, and it is difficult to see, from any psychological point of view, where the artistic necessity of it lies. I do not feel that the thing is an erotic perversion. There is a downright brutality in it which militates against any subtly voluptuous explanation. Can it be that he is simply and solely appealing here to what he is led to believe is the taste of his Anglo-Saxon readers? No — that, surely, were unworthy of him. That surely must be considered unthinkable! Is it that, being himself of an abnormally nervous and sensitive temperament, he forces himself by a kind of intellectual asceticism to rush upon the pricks of a physiological brutality as the sort of penance a conscientious writer has to pay; has to pay to the merciless cruelty of truth?

No; that does not seem to me quite to cover the case. It is an obscure matter, and I think, in our search for the true solution, we may easily stumble upon very interesting and deeply hidden aspects, not only of Conrad's temperament, but of the temperament of a great many artists and scholars. In all artistic work there is so much that goes on in the darkness, so much secret exploitation of the hidden forces of one's nature, that it is extremely difficult to put one's finger upon the real cause of any particular flaming outbreak.

I have observed this sudden and tempestuous "obsession of violence" in the moods of certain highly-strung and exquisitely wrought-upon women; and it is possible that the heavy, dull, thick, self-complacent brutality of Nature and average human nature is itself so hurting and rending a thing to the poignant susceptibilities of a noble spirit, that, out of a kind of desperate revenge upon it, it goes to the extreme limit itself and, so to speak, out-Tamberlaines Tamberlaine in bloody massacre.

What, however, really arrests and holds us in Conrad is not the melodramatic violence of these tempestuous scenes, but the remote psychological impulses at work behind them.

Where, in my opinion, he is supremely great, apart from his world-deep revelations of direct human feeling, is in his imaginative fusion of some particular spiritual or material motif through the whole fabric of a story.

Thus the desolate “hope against hope” of poor Almayer becomes a thing of almost bodily presence in that book; a thing built up, fragment by fragment, piece by piece, out of the very forlornness of his surroundings, out of the débris and litter of his half-ruined dwelling, out of the rotting branches of the dim misty forest, out of the stakes and piles of his broken-down wharf, out of the livid mud of his melancholy river.

Thus the sombre and tragic philosophy of Heyst’s father — that fatalism which is beyond hope and beyond pity — overshadows, like a ghastly image of doom seated upon a remote throne in the chill twilight of some far Ultima Thule, all the events, so curious, so ironic, so devastating, which happen to his lethargic and phlegmatic son. It is this imaginative element in his work which, in the final issue, really and truly counts. For it is a matter of small significance whether the scene of a writer’s choice be the uplands of Wessex or the jungles of the tropics, as long as that ironic and passionate consciousness of the astounding drama — of men and women being the baffled and broken things they are — rises into unmitigated relief and holds us spell-bound. And beyond and above this overshadowing in his stories of man’s fate by some particular burden of symbolic implication, Conrad flings the passionate flame of his imagination into the words of every single sentence.

That is why his style is a thing of such curious attraction. That is why it has such sudden surprises for us, such sharp revelations, such rare undertones. That is why after reading Conrad it is difficult to return to the younger English writers of the realistic school.

One enjoys, in savouring the style of Conrad, a delicious ravishing thrill in the mere look of the words, as we see them so carefully, so scrupulously laid side by side, each with its own burden of intellectual perfume, like precious vases full of incense on the steps of a marble altar. To write as delicately, as laboriously, as exquisitely as this, upon the stark, rough, raw materials of murder and suicide and madness and avarice and terror and desperation; to write as elaborately and richly as this, when dealing with the wild secrets of drunken sailors and the mad revenges of half-bestial savages, is great mastery. And it is more than mastery. It is a spiritual triumph. It is a proof that the soul of man, confronting the worst terrors that can come upon it, is still capable of turning all things into grist for its mill.

For Conrad, while he finds nothing except meaningless and purposeless chance in the ways of Nature, is inspired by a splendid tenacity of courage in resisting any desperate betrayal of human joy.

Like that amazing character in “Lord Jim,” who collects butterflies and keeps his affections simple and sweet in the presence of tragedy upon tragedy, he seems to indicate to us, in these stark and woeful stories, that since there is no help in heaven or earth for the persecuted child of man, it is the more necessary that in defiance of the elements, in defiance of chance, yea! in defiance of fate itself, man should sink into his own soul and find in the strength of his own isolated and exiled spirit a courage equal to all that can be laid upon it. Even this would be but a barren comfort if what we found when we sank down thus into ourselves were courage, and courage only. What one comes to feel from the reading of Conrad is that there is nothing in the world which has enduring value — nothing in the world which gives the mad convoluted hurly-burly any kind of dignity or beauty — except only love. And love like this, which is the forlorn hope of the race, is as far from lust as it is far from sentiment or indolent pity. It is the "high old Roman virtue." It is the spirit of comradeship defiant still, under the tottering pillars of a shaken earth.

"Man must abide his going hence, even as his coming hither. Ripeness is all."

.....

"Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense."

HENRY JAMES

THE GREATNESS OF a writer can be estimated by the gap which would yawn in our interpretation of life if we conceived for a moment the expurgation of his whole body of work from our minds.

And what a hole there would be, what a jagged, bleeding, horrible hole, if the books of Henry James — and it is a continuous satisfaction to a lover of literature to think how many of them there are — were flung upon oblivion.

How often as the days of our life drift by, growing constantly more crowded and difficult, do we find ourselves exclaiming, "Only Henry James could describe this! What a situation for Henry James!"

The man has come to get himself associated more — oh, far more — than any other writer of our day, with the actual stir and pressure of environment in which we habitually move. I say "we." By this I mean the great mass of educated people in Europe, England and America. Of the "Masses," as they are called; of the persons by whose labours our middle-class and upper-class life, with its comparative leisure and comfort, is made possible, Henry James has little to say.

He never or very rarely deals, as Balzac and de Maupassant and Hardy do, with the farmers and farm labourers on the land. He never or very rarely deals with the slums of our great cities, as did Dickens and Victor Hugo. He confines himself more rigorously than any other novelist of equal power to the ways and manners and entanglements of people who are "in society," or who could be in society if they wanted to, or are on the verge and edge of society.

When the “lower classes” — I use the convenient term; doubtless in the eyes of celestial hierarchies the situation is reversed — enter at all into the circle of Mr. James’ consciousness, they enter, either as interesting anarchists, like young Hyacinth, or as servants. Servants — especially butlers and valets — play a considerable part, and so do poor relations and impecunious dependents. For these latter of both sexes the great urbane author has a peculiar and tender consideration. It is not in the least that he is snobbish. Of that personal uneasiness in the presence of worldly greatness so unpleasantly prominent in Thackeray there is absolutely nothing. It is only that, conscientious artist as he is, he is unwilling to risk any sort of aesthetic “faux pas” by adventuring outside his natural sphere, the sphere to which he was born. Of gentlefolk who are poor and of artists and writers who are poor there are innumerable types strewn throughout his works.

It were quite unfair to say that he only writes of the idle rich. What he actually does is — as I have said — to write of our upper middle class life, with its aristocrats at the top and its luckless governesses and tutors and journalists at the bottom; as we, who are in it, know it and feel it and suffer from it, every day of our existence.

And, curiously enough, this is a very rare achievement. Of course there is a horde of second-rate writers, cheap hucksters of glittering sentimental wares for the half-educated, who write voluminously of the life of which I am speaking. There are others, more cultivated but endowed with less vivacity, who crowd their pages with grave personages from what are called “liberal professions.” But the more imaginative writers of our day are not to be looked for in the drawing-rooms of their wives and daughters.

Mr. Hardy confines himself to the meadows of Blackmoor and the highways and hedges of Dorset Uplands. Mr. Conrad sails down tropical rivers and among the islands of Southern seas. The American Mr. Dreiser ploughs his earth-upheaving path through the workshops of Chicago and the warehouses of Manhattan.

It is Henry James and Henry James alone, who unravels for us the tangled skein of our actual normal-abnormal life, as the destinies twist and knot it in the civilised chambers of our natural sojourning.

The curious thing is that even among our younger and most modern writers, no one, except John Galsworthy, really deals with the sort of life that I have in mind when I speak of the European "upper classes"; and one knows how Mr. Galsworthy's noble and chivalrous interest in social questions militates against the intellectual detachment of his curiosity.

The cleverer authors among our younger school almost invariably restrict their scope to what one feels are autobiographical histories of their own wanderings through the pseudo-Latin quarters of London and Paris. They flood their pages with struggling artists, emancipated seamstresses, demi-mondaine actresses, social reformers, and all the rag-tag and bob-tail of suburban semi-culture; whereas in some mysterious way — probably by reason of their not possessing imaginations strong enough to sweep them out of the circle of their own experiences — the more normal tide of ordinary "upper-class" civilisation passes them untouched.

It is imagination which is lacking, imagination which, as in the case of Balzac and Dostoievsky, can carry a writer beyond the sphere of his own personal adventures, into the great tides and currents of the human comedy, and into the larger air of the permanent life-forces. It is the universal element which one misses in these clever and interesting books, that universal element which in the work of Henry James is never absent, however slight and frivolous his immediate subject or however commonplace and conventional his characters.

Is it, after all, not they, — these younger philosophical realists — but he, the great urbane humanist, who restricts his scope, narrowing it down to oft-repeated types and familiar scenes, which, as the world swings forward, seem to present themselves over and over again as an integral and classic embodiment of the permanent forces of life? It might seem so sometimes; especially when one considers how little new or startling "action" there is in Henry James, how few romantic or outstanding figures there are to arrest us with the shock of sensational surprise. Or is it, when we get to the bottom of the difference — this difference which separates Henry James from the bulk of our younger novelists — not a matter of subject at all, but purely a matter of method and mental atmosphere?

May it not, perhaps, turn out that all those younger men are preoccupied with some purely personal philosophy of life, some definite scheme of things — like the pattern idea in "Human Bondage" — to which they are anxious to sacrifice their experiences and subordinate their imaginations? Are they not all, as a matter of fact, interested more deeply in hitting home some original philosophical nail, than in letting the vast human tragedy strike them out of a clear sky? But it matters little which way it is. The fact that concerns us now is to note that Henry James has still no rival, nor anything approaching a rival, in his universal treatment of European Society. None, even among our most cynical and disillusioned younger writers, are able to get as completely rid as he of any "a priori" system or able to envisage, as he did, in passionate colourless curiosity, the panorama of human characters drawn out along the common road of ordinary civilised life.

Putting Flaubert aside, Henry James is the only one of the great modern novelists to be absolutely free from any philosophical system. Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, Balzac, Hardy, de Maupassant, D'Annunzio — they all have their metaphysical or anti-metaphysical bias, their gesture of faith or denial.

Even Flaubert himself makes a kind of philosophic attitude out of his loathing for the common-place. Henry James alone confronts the universe with only one passion, with only one purpose, with only one obsession — the passion and the purpose of satisfying his insatiable curiosity upon the procession of human motives and the stream of human psychological reactions, which pass him by in their eternal flux.

This cold, calm, detached intellectual curiosity, free from any moral alloy, renders him an extraordinary and unique figure; a figure that would be almost inhuman, if it were not that the fury of his research is softened and mitigated by a deep and tender pity for every sort and condition of frail human creature subjected to his unwearied scrutiny.

This is one of the basic contradictions of Mr. James' fascinating personality, that he is able to retain the clear and Olympian detachment of his purely aesthetic curiosity and yet to betray a tenderness — why should one not say, in the best meaning of that excellent word, a goodness of heart? — in his relations with his characters, and with us, his unknown readers, who so easily might be his characters.

It is one of the profoundest secrets of art itself, this contradiction, and it reveals the fact that however carefully a great spirit may divest itself of philosophy and system there is a residuum of personal character left behind — of personal predilection and taste — which all the artistic objectivity in the world cannot overcome.

I am myself inclined to think that it is this very tenderness and friendliness in Henry James, this natural amiability of disposition which all his detachment and curiosity cannot kill, that makes him so much more attractive a figure than the sombre Flaubert whose passion for literary objectivism is touched by no such charm.

It is a matter of great interest to watch the little tricks and devices of a genius of this kind preparing the ground, as one might put it, for the peculiar harvest of impressions.

What Henry James aims at is a clear field for the psychological emotions of people who have, so to speak, time and leisure to indulge themselves in all the secondary reactions and subtle ramifications of their peculiar feelings.

The crude and intrusive details of any business or profession, the energy-absorbing toil of manual or otherwise exhausting labour, prevent, quite naturally, any constant preoccupation with one’s emotional experiences. A Maxim Gorky or a Thomas Hardy will turn the technical labours of his emotionally-stricken people into tragic accomplices of the human drama, making field or factory, as it may happen, dumb but significant participators in the fatal issue. But in their case, and in the case of so many other powerful modern writers, the emotions required are simple and direct, such as harmonise well with the work of men’s hands and the old eternal struggle with the elements.

It may be said, and with a great deal of plausibility, that this natural and simple toil adds a dignity and a grandeur to human emotions which must necessarily vanish with the vanishing of its heavy burdens. It may be said that the mere existence of an upper class more or less liberated from such labours and permitted the leisure to make so much of its passing sensations, is itself a grievous indictment of our present system. This also is a contention full of convincing force.

Oscar Wilde himself — the most sophisticated of hedonists — declares in his “Soul of Man” that the inequality of the present system, when one considers aesthetic values alone, is as injurious to the rich as it is pernicious to the poor. Almost every one of the great modern writers, not excluding even the courtly Turgenief, utters bitter and eloquent protests against the injustice of this difference.

Nietzsche alone maintains the necessity of a slave caste in order that the masters of civilisation may live largely, freely, nobly, as did the ancient aristocracies of the classic ages, without contact with the burden and tediousness of labour. And in this — in his habitual and arbitrary neglect of the toiling masses — Henry James is more in harmony with the Nietzschean doctrine than any other great novelist of our age. He is indeed, the only one — except perhaps Paul Bourget, and Bourget cannot in any sense be regarded as his intellectual equal — who relentlessly and unscrupulously rules out of his work every aspect of "the spirit of the revolution."

There is something almost terrifying and inhuman about this imperturbable stolidity of indifference to the sufferings and aspirations of the many too many. One could imagine any intellectual proletarian rising up from his perusal of these voluminous books with a howl of indignation against their urbane and incorrigible author.

I do not blush to confess that I have myself sometimes shared this righteous astonishment. Is it possible that the aloofness of this tenderhearted man from the burden of his age, is due to his American antecedents?

Rich people in America are far less responsible in their attitude towards the working classes, and far less troubled by pricks of conscience than in older countries, where some remote traces of the feudal system still do something towards bridging the gulf between class and class.

One must remember too that, after all, Henry James is a great *déraciné,* a passionate pilgrim from the new world making amorous advances toward the old. It is always difficult, in a country which is not one's own, to feel the sting of conscience with regard to social injustices as sharply as one feels it at home. Travelling in Egypt or Morocco, one seems to take it carelessly for granted that there should be scenes of miserable poverty sprinkled around the picturesque objects of our aesthetic tour.

Well! England and France and Italy are to Henry James like Egypt and Morocco; and as long as he finds us picturesquely and charmingly ourselves; set that is, in our proper setting, and with the picturesque background of local colour behind us — he naturally does not feel it incumbent upon him to worry himself very greatly over our social inequalities.

But there is probably more in it than that. These things — the presence or the absence of the revolutionary conscience — are matters, when one gets to the bottom of it, of individual temperament, and James, the kindest and most charitable of men in his personal life, was simply untouched by that particular spark of "saeva indignatio."

It was not out of stupidity or any lack of sensitiveness that he let it alone. Perhaps — who can tell? — he, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, overcame "the temptation of pity," and deliberately turned aside from the "ugliest man's" cries.

One feels in one's more ardent moments, when the wish to smite this accursed economic system some shattering blow becomes red-hot, a little chilled, it must be confessed, when one recalls that immense brow, heavy with brooding intellect, and those dreamy, full-orbed Shakespearian eyes. Was the man, one is tempted to wonder then, too great, too lonely, too wise, to believe in any beautiful desperate change in the tragic "pathos of distance" between man and man? Was indeed the whole mortal business of human life a sort of grand tour of "Egypt and Morocco" to him; a mere long-drawn-out search after aesthetic sensations and a patient satisfying of Olympian curiosity?

No novelist that has ever lived "shows his hand" so little, in the sense of coming before the foot-lights and making gestures to the crowd; but in a deeper implication, none shows it more constantly.

To have a style so marked and sealed, so stamped and dyed for one's own in the integral way James has it, a style so personal and unique that its peculiar flavour rises from every single sentence on the page, is indeed, in a deep sense, to betray one's hidden soul to the world.

This, at any rate, is the only kind of betrayal that we — the general public — are permitted to surprise him in; unless one counts as a personal revelation the grave portentous solemnity of his technical prefaces. Like that amiable girl in Wilhelm Meister who, when asked whether she had ever loved, replied "Never — or always!" Henry James may be said to have never "coined his soul" or always to have coined it.

This style of his — so dyed and ingrained with personality — becomes in his later books, a stumbling-block to many readers; to the readers who want their "story" and have no wish to be teased and distracted "en route." Certainly his style thickens and gathers in fuller intensity as well as diffuses itself in wider atmospheric attenuation as his later manner grows upon him. The thing becomes at once richer and more evasive. But this implies no violent or sudden change, such as might excite suspicion of any arbitrary "tour-de-force." The characteristic elements are there from the beginning. They are only emphasized and drawn out to their logical issues by the process of his development.

From the very start he possesses a style which has its own flavour. It is only that the perfume of it diffuses itself more insidiously, in proportion as its petals, so to speak, warmed by the sun of maturer experience and subtler imagination, open to the air.

The result of this natural and organic development is precisely what one would have anticipated. Lovers of simple story-telling prefer the earlier work with its Daisy Miller, Roderick Hudson, and The Portrait of a Lady.

Virtuosos of rare psychological achievements and of strange aesthetic experiments prefer his very latest writings, including such a difficult and complicated book as “The Golden Bowl” or the short stories in “The Finer Grain.”

On the other hand, those among us who are concerned with sheer beauty of form apart both from exciting subjects and psychological curiosities, hold by the intermediate period — the period extending, let us say, from the beginning of the last five years of the Nineteenth to the end of the first five years of the Twentieth century.

As a matter of fact, “The Golden Bowl,” one of his most elaborate and exhaustive masterpieces, was published in November, 1904; and “The Sacred Fount,” perhaps the most difficult as it is certainly one of the most characteristic of all his stories, appeared very much earlier. But taking his works as a whole, that epoch — from 1895 to 1905 — may be regarded as his apogee, as his “Great Noon.”

“The Awkward Age,” for instance, the book of all others for which initiated admirers have an insistent devotion, appeared in 1899, while the collection of stories entitled “The Better Sort,” which includes that masterpiece of tenderhearted malice “The Beldonald Holbein,” came out in 1903.

As I have hinted, the whole question of selecting the period of a great artist’s manner which contains his most significant work is largely a matter of taste; and the thing — as we have seen — is complicated by all sorts of overlappings, reversions, anticipations; but if I were myself pressed to suggest a brief list of books, which might be found to contain the quintessential qualities both of Henry James' attitude and his method, I should certainly include "The Tragic Muse," "The Spoils of Poynton," "What Maisie Knew," "The Ambassadors," "The Private Life" and "The Soft Side," whatever else it were difficult to omit.

Putting everything he wrote together, and letting these many-coloured opals and amethysts of intellectual imagination slide through our passionate fingers, I would perhaps select "The Great Good Place" as the best of all his short stories, and "The Tragic Muse" as the best of all his longer ones.

One sometimes, at unfortunately rare intervals, comes across a person who has really "collected" Henry James from the very beginning. Such persons are greatly to be envied. I think perhaps, they are the only bibliophiles for whom I have a tenderness; for they prove themselves so much more than bibliophiles; they prove themselves wise and prudent anticipators of the verdict of posterity.

It is impossible to enjoy the reprinted editions, in their tiresome monotony of luxurious bindings, as delicately as one enjoyed these first flowers of the author's genius, dewy with his authentic blessing. I am myself proud to recall the fact that, before the nineteenth century closed, I had secured a whole shelf of these sibylline volumes; buying most of them — I can recall the occasion — in one huge derelict pile from a certain friendly book-shop in Brighton; and leaving the precious parcel, promise of more than royal delights, in some little waiting-room on the sun-bathed Georgian front, while I walked the beach like a Grand Vizier who has received a present from the Sultan.

The only people who are to be more envied than those who have collected Henry James from the beginning — and these alas! are most of them grey-headed now — are the people who, possessed of the true interior unction, have by some accident of obstructing circumstance been debarred from this voluptuous pleasure until late in their experience. What ecstasies such persons have in store for them, what "linked sweetness long-drawn out" of sybaritish enjoyment!

But I was speaking of those secret and interesting preparations that every great artist makes before he gets to work; those clearings of his selected field of operations from the alien and irrelevant growths.

What Henry James requires before he can set his psychological machinery in motion is uninterrupted leisure for the persons of his emotional dramas. Leisure first, and after leisure a certain pleasant congruity of background.

Henry James is indeed the author "par excellence" of a leisured upper class who have time to think and feel, and to dwell at large upon their thoughts and feelings, undisturbed by the spade, the plough, the sword, the counter, the wheels of factories or the roar of traffic. It is amusing to watch the thousand and one devices by which he disentangles his people from the intrusive irrelevancy of work. They are either rich themselves — and it cannot be concealed that money, though not over-emphasised, is never quite eliminated from the field of action — or they are dependent upon rich relatives and friends.

It is for this reason perhaps that there are so few professional people in his books. The absence of lawyers is quite striking; so is the absence of doctors, — though a charming example of the latter profession does certainly appear in "The Wings of a Dove" as the medical attendant upon the dying girl in Venice. I cannot at this moment recall a single clergyman or priest. Is this because these spiritual guides of our race are too poor or too over-worked to serve his purpose, or do we perhaps, — in this regrettable “lacuna” — stumble upon one of the little smiling prejudices of our great conformist? He must have met some black coats, we are compelled to suppose, in the drawing-rooms of his country houses. Did he perhaps, like so many of his discreet and cautious young men, “conform” without “committing himself,” in these high places?

If I were asked what types of character — among men I mean — emerge as most characteristic of his interest and as best lending themselves to his method, I should put my finger upon those pathetic middle-aged persons, like Mr. Verver in “The Golden Bowl,” or Mr. Longdon in “The Awkward Age,” who, full of riches and sad experience, have retired completely from active life, only to exercise from the depths of their sumptuous houses and secluded gardens, a sort of fairy influence upon the fortunes of their younger friends.

In the second place, I would indicate, as characteristic of this author, those wealthy and amiable young men who, as a general rule from America, but sometimes from the country-houses of England, wander at large and with genial “artistic” sympathies through the picturesque cities of Europe, carrying their susceptible hearts and sound moral principles into “pension” and “studio” where they are permitted to encounter those other favourite “subjects” of this cosmopolitan author, the wandering poverty-stricken gentlewoman with her engaging daughters, or the ambiguous adventuress with her shadowy past. The only persons who seem allowed to work at their trade in Henry James, are the writers and artists. These labour continually and with most interesting results. Indeed no great novelist, not even Balzac himself, has written so well about authors and painters. Paul Bourget attempts it, but there is a certain pedantic air of a craftsman writing about craftsmen, a connoisseur writing about connoisseurs, in his treatment of such things, which detracts from the human interest. Paul Bourget lacks, too, that fine malice, that sly arch humour, which saves Henry James from ever making his artists "professional" or his writers prolix.

But if he describes fellow-labourers thus sympathetically, it must not be forgotten that by far the most fascinating "artistic" person in all his books, is that astonishing Gabriel Nash in "The Tragic Muse." And the rôle of Gabriel Nash is to do nothing at all. To do nothing; but to be perpetually and insidiously enticing others, out of the sphere of all practical duties, responsibilities and undertakings, to renounce everything for art. Anything more charming or characteristic than Gabriel Nash's final departure from the scene, it would be impossible to find. He does not depart. He "goes up" — and "out." He melts into thin air. He dissolves like an iridescent vapour. He is — and then again, he is not.

I sometimes seem to see the portentous Henry James himself, with his soft plump hands, heavy forehead and drooping-lidded eyes, flitting to and fro through the drawing-rooms of our fantastic civilisation, like some huge feathery-winged moth-owl, murmuring, just as Gabriel Nash used to do, wistful and whimsical protests against all this tiresome "business of life" which distracts people from psychology and beauty and amiable conversation!

Alas! he too has now "passed away"; vanishing as lightly and swiftly as this other, leaving behind him as the one drastic and spectacular action in a life of pure aesthetic creation, his definite renunciation of the world of his engendering and his formal reception into the more leisured atmosphere of the traditions of his adoption.

That he — of all men the most peaceful — should have taken such a step in the mid-torrent of the war, is a clinching proof of the value which he placed upon the sacred shrines of his passionate pilgrimage.

When we come to take up the actual threads of his peculiar style, and to examine them one by one, we cannot fail to note certain marked characteristics, which separate him entirely from other writers of our age.

One of the most interesting of these is his way of handling those innumerable colloquialisms and light “short-cuts” of speech, which — especially in their use by super-refined people — have a grace and charm quite their own. The literary value of the colloquialisms of upper-class people has never, except here and there in the plays of Oscar Wilde, been exploited as delightfully and effectively as in Henry James.

Just as Charles Lamb will make use of Milton or Sir Thomas Browne or the “Anatomy of Melancholy”; and endow his thefts with an originality all his own, making them seem different in the transposition, and in some mysterious way richer, so Henry James will take the airy levities of his aristocratic youths and the little provocative ejaculations of his well-bred maidens, and out of these weave a filmy, evasive, delicate essence, light as a gossamer-seed and bitter as coloquintida, which, mingled with his own graver and mellower tones, becomes an absolutely new medium in the history of human style.

The interesting thing to observe about all this is that the argot that he makes use of is not the slang of his own America, far less is it the more fantastic colloquialism of the English Public Schools. It is really a sort of sublimated and apotheosized “argot,” an “argot” of a kind of platonic archetypal drawing-room; such a drawing-room as has never existed perhaps, but to which all drawing-rooms or salons, if you will, of elegant conversation, perpetually approximate. It is indeed the light and airy speech, eminently natural and spontaneous, but at the same time profoundly sophisticated, of a sort of Utopian aristocracy, that will, in some such delicious hesitations, innuendoes and stammerings, express their “superficiality out of profundity,” in the gay, subtle, epicurean days which are to come.

It is only offensive to tiresome realistic people, void of humour as they are void of imagination, this sweet psychological persiflage. To such persons it may even seem a little ridiculous that *everybody* — from retired American Millionaires down to the quaintest of Hertfordshire old maids — should utter their sentiments in this same manner. But such objectors are too pig-headed and stupid to understand the rudimentary conventions of art, or those felicitous “illusions,” which, as Charles Lamb reminds us in speaking of some sophisticated old English actors, are a kind of pleasant challenge from the intelligent comedian to his intelligent audience.

One very delicate and dainty device of Henry James is his trick of placing “inverted commas” round even the most harmless of colloquialisms. This has a curiously distinguished and refined effect. It seems constantly to say to his readers.— “one knows very well, *we* know very well, how ridiculous and vulgar all this is; but there are certain things that cannot be otherwise expressed!” It creates a sort of scholarly “rapport” — this use of commas — between the gentility of the author and the assumed gentility of the reader, taking the latter into a kind of amiable partnership in ironic superiority.

I say “gentility” — but that is not exactly the word; for there is not the remotest trace of snobbishness in Henry James. It is rather that he indicates to a small inner circle of intellectually detached persons, his recognition of their fastidiousness and their prejudices, and his sly humorous consciousness of the gulf between their classical mode of speech and the casual lapses of ordinary human conversation.

In spite of all his detachment no novelist diffuses his personal temperament so completely through his work as Henry James does. In this sense — in the sense of temperamental style — he is far more personal than Balzac and incomparably more so than Turgenief.

One does not, in reading these great authors, savour the actual style on every page, in every sentence. We have large blank spaces, so to speak, of straightforward colourless narrative. But there are no "blank spaces" in Henry James. Every sentence is penetrated and heavy with the fragrance of his peculiar grace. One might almost say — so strong is this subjective element in the great objective aesthete — that James writes novels like an essayist, like some epicurean Walter Pater, suddenly grown interested in common humanity, and finding in the psychology of ordinary people a provocation and a stimulus as insidious and suggestive as in the lines and colours of mediaeval art. This *essayist attitude* accounts largely for those superior "inverted commas" which throw such a clear space of ironic detachment round his characters and his scenes.

On the other hand, what a man he is for concealing his *opinions!* Who can lay his finger on a single formal announcement of moral or philosophical partizanship in Henry James? Who can catch him for a moment declaring himself a conservative, a liberal, a Christian, a pagan, a pantheist, a pluralist, a socialist, a reactionary, a single taxer, a realist, a symbolist, an empiricist, a believer in ideals, a materialist, an advocate of New Thought, an esoteric Buddhist, an Hegelian, a Pragmatist, a Free Lover?

It would be possible to go over this formidable list of angles of human vision, and find evidence somewhere in his books sufficient to make him out an adherent of every one of them. Consider his use of the supernatural for instance. Hardly any modern writer makes so constant, so artistic a use of the machinery of the invisible world; and yet who would have the temerity to say that Henry James believed even so much as in ghosts?

I know nothing of Mr. James' formal religious views, or to what pious communion, if any, that brooding forehead and disillusioned eyes were wont to drift on days of devotion. But I cannot resist a secret fancy that it was to some old-fashioned and not too ritualistic Anglican church that he sometimes may have been met proceeding, in silk hat and well-polished shoes, at the close of a long Autumn afternoon, across the fallen leaves of Hyde Park!

There is an unction, a dreamy thrill about some of those descriptions of town and country churches in conventional England which would suggest that he had no secularistic aversion to these modest usages. Perhaps, like Charles Darwin, he would have answered impertinent questions about his faith by pointing to just such patient unexcluding shrines of drowsy controversy-hating piety.

I cannot see him listening to modernistic rhetoric. I cannot see him prostrated before ritualistic revivals. But I can see him sitting placid and still, like a great well-groomed visitor in "Egypt and Morocco," listening pensively to some old-fashioned clergyman, whose goodness of heart redeems the innocence of his brain; while the mellow sunshine falls through the high windows upon the fair hair of Nanda or Aggie, or Mamie or Nina or Maud, thinking quiet thoughts in front of him.

It is strange how difficult it is to forget the personal appearance of this great man when one reads his works. What a head he had; what weight of massive brooding bulk! When one thinks of the head of Henry James and the head of Oscar Wilde — both of them with something that suggests the classical ages in their flesh-heavy contours — one is inclined to agree with Shakespeare's Caesar in his suspicion of "lean men."

Think of the harassed and rat-like physiognomy of nearly all the younger writers of our day! Do their countenances suggest, as these of James and

Wilde, that their pens will “drop fatness”? Can one not discern the envious eye, the serpent’s tongue, the scowl of the aggressive dissenter, the leer of the street urchin?

How excellent it is, in this modern world, to come upon the “equinimitas” of the great ages! After all, in the confused noises of our human arena, it is something to encounter an author who preserves restraint and dignity and urbanity. It is something more to encounter one who has, in the very depths of his soul, the ancient virtue of magnanimity.

This American visitor to Europe brings back to us those “good manners of the soul” which we were in danger of forgetting; and the more we read the writings of Henry James, the more fully we become aware that there is only one origin of this spiritual charm, this aristocratic grace; and that is a sensitive and noble heart.

The movement of literature at the present time is all towards action and adventure. This is right and proper in its place, and a good antidote to the tedious moralising of the past generation.

The influence of Nietzsche upon the spiritual plane, and that of the war upon the emotional plane, have thrown us violently out of the sphere of aesthetic receptivity into the sphere of heroic and laconic wrestling.

Short stories, short poems, short speeches, short questions, short answers, short pity and short shrift, are the order of the day. Far and far have we been tossed from the dreamy purlieus of his “great good place,” with its long sunny hours under misty trees, and its interminable conversations upon smooth-cut lawns! The sweet psychology of terrace-walks is scattered, and the noise of the chariots and the horsemen breaks the magical stillness where lovers philosophised and philosophers loved.

But let none of the strenuous gentlemen, whose abrupt ways seem encouraged by this earthquake, congratulate themselves that refinement and beauty and distinction and toleration have left the world forever, for them to "bustle in." It is not for long. The sun does not stop shining or the dew cease falling or the fountains of rain dry up because of the cruelty of men. It is not for long. The "humanism" of Henry James, with its "still small voice," is bound to return. The stars in their courses fight for it. It is the pleasure of the consciousness of life itself; of the life that, whether with Washington Square, or Kensington Park, or the rosy campaniles of the Giudecca, or the minarets of Sacré-Coeur, or the roofs of Montmartre, or the herbaceous borders and shadowy terraces of English gardens, as its background, must flow and flow and flow, with its tender equivocations and its suppliance of wistful mystery, as long as men and women have any leisure to love or any intelligence to analyse their love!

He is an aristocrat, and he writes — better than any — of the aristocracy; and yet, in the long result, is it of his well-bred levities and of his pleasantly-housed, lightly-living people, that one comes to think? Is it not rather of those tragic and faded figures, figures of sensitive men and sensitive women for whom the world has no place, and of whom few — even among artists — speak or care to speak, with sympathy and understanding?

He has, just here, and in his own way, something of that sheer human pity for desolate and derelict spirits which breaks forth so savagely sometimes, and with so unexpected a passion, from amid the brutalities and sensualities of Guy de Maupassant.

No one who has ever lived has written more tenderly or beautifully of what Charles Lamb would call "superannuated people." Old bachelors, living in a sort of romantic exile, among mementoes of a remote past; old maids, living in an attenuated dream of "what might have been," and playing heart-breaking tricks with their forlorn fancies; no one has dealt more generously, more imaginatively with such as these. He is a little cruel to them sometimes, but with a fine caressing cruelty which is a far greater tribute than indifference; and is there not, after all, a certain element of cruelty in every species of tender love?

Though more than any one capable of discerning rare and complicated issues, where to the vulgar mind all would seem grey and dull and profitless, Henry James has, and it is absurd not to admit it, a "penchant" for the abnormal and the bizarre. This element appears more often in the short stories than the longer ones, but it is never very far away.

I sometimes think that many of the gentle and pure-souled people who read this amiable writer go on their way through his pages without discerning this quiver, this ripple, this vibration, of "miching mallecho." On softly-stepping feline feet, the great sleek panther of psychological curiosity glides into very perverse, very dubious paths. The exquisite tenuity and flexibility of his style, light as the flutter of a feather through the air, enable him to wander freely and at large where almost every other writer would trip and stumble in the mud. It is one of the most interesting phenomena in literature, this sly, quiet, half ironic dalliance with equivocal matters.

Henry James can say things that no one else could say, and approach subjects that no one else could approach, simply by reason of the grave whimsical playfulness of his manner and the extraordinary malleableness of his evasive style. It is because his style can be as simple and clear as sunlight, and yet as airy and impalpable as the invisible wind, that he manages to achieve these results. He uses little words, little harmless innocent words, but by the connotation he gives them, and the way in which he softly flings them out, one by one, like dandelion seeds upon swiftly-sliding water, one is being continually startled into sharp arrested attention, as if — in the silence that follows their utterance — somebody, as the phrase goes, "stepped over one's grave."

How dearly one grows to love all his dainty tricks of speech! That constant repetition of the word "wonderful" — of the word "beautiful" — how beautifully and wonderfully he works it up into a sort of tender chorus of little caressing cries over the astounding tapestry woven by the invisible fates! The charming way his people "drop" their little equivocal innocent-wicked retorts; "drop" them and "fling them out," and "sweetly hazard" them and "wonderfully wail" them, produces the same effect of balanced expectancy and suspended judgment that one derives from those ambiguous "so it might seems" of the wavering Platonic Dialogue.

The final impression left upon the mind after one closes one of these fascinating volumes is, it must be confessed, a little sad. So much ambiguity in human life — so much unnecessary suffering — so many mad, blind, wilful misunderstandings! A little sad — and yet, on the other hand, we remain fortified and sustained with a certain interior detachment.

After all, it is soon over — the whole motley farce — and, while it lasts, nothing in it matters so very greatly, or at any rate matters enough to disturb our amusement, our good-temper, our toleration. Nothing matters so very greatly. And yet everything — each of us, as we try to make our difficult meanings clear, the meanings of our hidden souls, and each of these meanings themselves as we stammer them forth to one another — matters so "wonderfully," so "beautifully"!

The tangled thread of our days may be knotted and twisted; but, after all, if we have the magnanimity to let off lightly those "who trespass against us" we have not learnt our aesthetic lesson of regarding the whole business of life as a complicated Henry James story, altogether in vain.

We have come to regard the world as a more or less amusing Spectacle, without forgetting to be decently considerate of the other shadows in the gilt-framed mirror!

Perhaps, in our final estimate of him, what emerges most definitely as Henry James' *doctrine* is the height and depth and breadth of the gulf which separates those who have taste and sensitiveness from those who have none. That is the “motif” of the “Spoils of Poynton,” and I do not know any one of all his books more instinct with his peculiar spiritual essence.

Below every other controversy and struggle in the world is the controversy between those who possess this secret of “The Finer Grain” and those who have it not. There can be no reconciliation, no truce, no “rapport” between these. At best there can be only mitigated hostility on the one side, and ironical submission on the other. The world is made after this fashion and after no other, and the best policy is to follow our great artists and turn the contrast between the two into a cause of aesthetic entertainment.

Duality rules the universe. If it were not for the fools there would be no wisdom. If it were not for those who could never understand him, there could be no Henry James.

One comes at any rate to see, from the exquisite success upon us of this author’s method, how futile it is, in this world whereof the beginning and the end are dreams, to bind an artist down to tedious and photographic reality.

People do not and perhaps never will — even in archetypal Platonic drawing-rooms — converse with one another quite so goldenly; or tell the amber-coloured beads of their secret psychology with quite so felicitous an unction. What matter? It is the prerogative of fine and great art to create, by its shaping and formative imagination, new and impossible worlds for our enjoyment.

And the world created by Henry James is like some classic Arcadia of psychological beauty — some universal Garden of Versailles unprofaned by the noises of the crowd — where among the terraces and fountains delicate Watteau-like figures move and whisper and make love in a soft artificial fairy moonlight dimmed and tinted with the shadows of passions and misty with the rain of tender regrets; human figures without name or place. For who remembers the names of these sweet phantoms or the titles of their “great good places” in this hospitable fairy-land of the harassed sensitive ones of the earth; where courtesy is the only law of existence and good taste the only moral code?

OSCAR WILDE

THE WORDS HE once used about himself— “I am a symbolic figure” — remain to this day the most significant thing that can be said of Oscar Wilde.

It is given to very few men of talent, this peculiar privilege — this privilege of being greater in what might be called the *shadow of their personality* than in any actual literary or artistic achievement — and Wilde possesses it in a degree second to none.

“My genius is in my life,” he said on another occasion, and the words are literally and most fatally true.

In the confused controversies of the present age it is difficult to disentangle the main issues; but it seems certain that side by side with political and economic divisions, there is a gulf growing wider and wider every day between the adherents of what might be called the Hellenic Renaissance and the inert, suspicious, unintelligent mob; that mob the mud of whose heavy traditions is capable of breeding, at one and the same time, the most crafty hypocrisy and the most stupid brutality.

It would be hardly a true statement to say that the Renaissance referred to — this modern Renaissance, not less formidable than the historic revolt which bears that name — is an insurrection of free spirits against Christianity. It is much rather a reversion to a humane and classic reasonableness as opposed to mob-stupidity and middle-class philistinism — things which only the blundering of centuries of popular misapprehension could associate with the sublime and the imaginative figure of Christ.

It is altogether a mistake to assume that in "De Profundis" Wilde retracted his classic protest and bowed his head once more in the house of Rimmon.

What he did was to salute, in the name of the aesthetic freedom he represented, those enduring elements of human loveliness and beauty in that figure which three hundred years of hypocritical puritanism have proved unable to tarnish. What creates the peculiar savagery of hatred which his name has still the power to conjure up among the enemies of civilisation has little to do with the ambiguous causes of his final downfall. These, of course, gave him up, bound hand and foot, into their hands. But these, though the overt excuse of their rancour, are far from being its real motive-force. To reach that we must look to the nature of the formidable weapon which it was his habit, in season and out of season, to use against this mob-rule — I mean his sense of humour.

The stupid middle-class obscurantism, so alien to all humane reasonableness, which, in our Anglo-Saxon communities, masquerades under the cloak of a passionate and imaginative religion, is more sensitive to ridicule than to any other form of attack, and Wilde attacked it mercilessly with a ridicule that cut to the bone.

They are not by any means of equal value, these epigrams of his, with which he defended intelligence against stupidity and classical light against Gothic darkness.

They are not as humorous as Voltaire's. They are not as philosophical as Goethe's. Compared with the aphorisms of these masters they are light and frivolous. But for this very reason perhaps, they serve the great cause — the cause of humane and enlightened civilisation — better in our age of vulgar mob-rule than more recondite "logoi."

They pierce the hide of the thickest and dullest; they startle and bewilder the brains of the most crass and the most insensitive. And it is just because they do this that Wilde is so cordially feared and hated. It was, one cannot help feeling, the presence in him of a shrewd vein of sheer boyish bravado, mingled — one might go even as far as that — with a dash of incorrigible worldliness in his own temper, that made his hits so effective and wounding.

It is interesting, with this in mind, to compare Wilde's witticisms with those of Matthew Arnold or Bernard Shaw. The reason that Wilde's lash cuts deeper than either of these other champions of rational humanism, is that he goes, with more classical clearness, straight to the root of the matter.

The author of "Thyrsis" was not himself free from a certain melancholy hankering after "categorical imperatives," and beneath the cap and bells of his theological fooling, Shaw is, of course, as gravely moralistic as any puritan could wish.

Neither of these — neither the ironical schoolmaster nor the farcical clown of our Renaissance of intelligence — could exchange ideas with Pericles, say, or Caesar, without betraying a puritanical fussiness that would grievously bewilder the lucid minds of those great men.

The philosophy of Wilde's aesthetic revolt against our degraded mob-ridden conscience was borrowed from Walter Pater, but whereas that shy and subtle spirit moved darkly and mysteriously aside from all contact with the vulgar herd, Wilde, full of gay and wanton pride in his sacred mission, lost no opportunity of flaunting his classic orthodoxy in the face of the heretical mob.

Since the death of Wilde, the brunt of the battle for the spiritual liberties of the race has been borne by the sterner and more formidable figure of Nietzsche; but the vein of high and terrible imagination in this great poet of the Superman sets him much closer to the company of the saints and mystics than to that of the instinctive children of the pagan ideal.

Oscar Wilde's name has become a sort of rallying cry to all those writers and artists who suffer, in one degree or another, from the persecution of the mob — of the mob goaded on to blind brutality by the crafty incentives of those conspirators of reaction whose interest lies in keeping the people enslaved. This has come about, in a large measure, as much by the renown of his defects as by reason of his fine quality.

The majority of men of talent lack the spirit and the gall to defy the enemy on equal terms. But Wilde while possessing nobler faculties had an undeniable vein in him of sheer youthful insolence. To the impertinence of society he could oppose the impertinence of the artist, and to the effrontery of the world he could offer the effrontery of genius.

The power of personality, transcending any actual literary achievement, is what remains in the mind when one has done reading him, and this very faculty — of communicating to us, who never saw him or heard him speak, the vivid impact of his overbearing presence — is itself evidence of a rare kind of genius. It is even a little ironical that he, above all men the punctilious and precious literary craftsman, should ultimately dominate us not so much by the magic of his art as by the spell of his wilful and wanton individuality, and the situation is heightened still further by the extraordinary variety of his works and their amazing perfection in their different spheres.

One might easily conceive an artist capable of producing so clean-cut and crystalline a comedy as "The Importance of Being Earnest," and so finished and flawless a tragedy as "Salome," disappearing quite out of sight, in the manner so commended by Flaubert, behind the shining objectivity of his flawless creations. But so far from disappearing, Oscar Wilde manages to emphasise himself and his imposing presence only the more startlingly and flagrantly, the more the gem-like images he projects harden and glitter.

Astoundingly versatile as he was — capable of producing in “Reading Gaol” the best tragic ballad since “The Ancient Mariner,” and in “Intentions” one of the best critical expositions of the open secret of art ever written at all — he never permits us for a second to lose touch with the wayward and resplendent figure, so full, for all its bravado, of a certain disarming childishness, of his own defiant personality.

And the fact remains that, perfect in their various kinds though these works of his are, they would never appeal to us as they do, and Oscar Wilde would never be to us what he is, if it were not for the predominance of this personal touch.

I sometimes catch myself wondering what my own feeling would be as to the value of these things — of the “Soul of Man,” for instance, or “Intentions,” or the Comedies, or the Poems — if the unthinkable thing could be done, and the emergence of this irresistible figure from behind it all could be drastically eliminated. I find myself conscious, at these times, of a faint disturbing doubt; as though after all, in spite of their jewel-like perfection, these wonderful and varied achievements were not quite the real thing, were not altogether in the “supreme manner.” There seems to me — at the moments when this doubt arises — something too self-consciously (how shall I put it?) *artistic* about these performances, something strained and forced and far-fetched, which separates them from the large inevitable utterances of classic genius.

I am ready to confess that I am not sure that this feeling is a matter of personal predilection or whether it has the larger and graver weight behind it of the traditional instincts of humanity, instincts out of which spring our only permanent judgments. What I feel at any rate is this: that there is an absence in Wilde's writings of that large cool spaciousness, produced by the magical influence of earth and sky and sea, of which one is always conscious in the greater masters.

"No gentleman," he is said to have remarked once, "ever looks out of the window"; and it is precisely this "never looking out of the window" that produces his most serious limitations.

In one respect I must acknowledge myself grateful to Wilde, even for this very avoidance of what might be called the "magical" element in things. His clear-cut palpable images, carved, as one so often feels, in ebony or ivory or gold, offer an admirable relief, like the laying of one's hand upon pieces of Hellenic statuary, after wandering among the vague mists and "beached margents."

Certainly if all that one saw when one "looked out of the window" were Irish fairies with dim hair drifting down pallid rivers, there would be some reason for drawing the curtains close and toying in the lamp-light with cameo-carved profiles of Antinous and Cleopatra!

But nature has more to give us than the elfish fantasies, charming as these may be, of Celtic legend — more to give us than those "brown fauns" and "hoofed Centaurs" and milk-white peacocks, which Wilde loves to paint with his Tiepolo-like brush. The dew of the morning does not fall less lightly because real autumns bring it, nor does the "wide aerial landscape" of our human wayfaring show less fair, or its ancient antagonist the "salt estranging sea" less terrible, because these require no legendary art to endow them with mystery.

Plausible and full of significance as these honeyed arguments in "Intentions" are — and fruitful as they are in affording us weapons wherewith to defend ourselves from the mob — it is still well, it is still necessary, to place against them the great Da Vinci saying, “Nature is the Mistress of the higher intelligences.”

Wilde must be held responsible — along with others of his epoch — for the encouragement of that deplorable modern heresy which finds in bric-à-brac and what are called “objets d’art” a disproportionate monopoly of the beauty and wonder of the world. One turns a little wearily at last from the silver mirrors and purple masks. One turns to the great winds that issue forth out of the caverns of the night. One turns to the sun and to the rain, which fall upon the common grass.

However! It is not a wise procedure to demand from a writer virtues and qualities completely out of his rôle. In our particular race there is far more danger of the beauty and significance of art — together with all its subtler and less normal symbols — perishing under crude and sentimental Nature-worship, than of their being granted too large a place in our crowded house of thought.

After all, the art which Wilde assures us adds so richly to Nature, “is an art which Nature makes.” They are not lovers of what is rarest and finest in our human civilisation who would suppress everything which deviates from the common track.

Who has given these people — these middle-class minds with their dull intelligences — the right to decide what is natural or unnatural in the presence of the vast tumultuous forces, wonderful and terrible, of the life-stream which surrounds us?

The mad smouldering lust which gives a sort of under-song of surging passion to the sophisticated sensuality of “Salome” is as much an evocation of Nature as the sad sweet wisdom of that sentence in “De Profundis”—“Behind joy and laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind sorrow there is always sorrow.”

What, beneath all his bravado and his paradoxes, Wilde really sought, was the enjoyment of passionate and absorbing emotion, and no one who hungers and thirsts after this — be he “as sensual as the brutish sting itself” — can fail in the end to touch, if only fleetingly with his lips, the waters of that river of passion which, by a miracle of faith if not by a supreme creation of art, Humanity has caused to issue forth from the wounded flesh of the ideal.

It is in his “Soul of Man” — perhaps the wisest and most eloquent revolutionary tract ever written — that Wilde frees himself most completely from the superficial eccentricities of his aesthetic pose, and indicates his recognition of a beauty in life, far transcending Tyrian dyes and carved cameos and frankincense and satin-wood and moon-stones and “Silks from Samarcand.”

It is impossible to read this noble defence of the natural distinction and high dignity of our human days when freed from the slavery of what is called “working for a living,” without feeling that the boyish bravado of his insolent wit is based upon a deep and universal emotion. What we note here is an affiliation in revolt between the artist and the masses. And this affiliation indicates that the hideousness of our industrial system is far more offensive than any ancient despotism or slave-owning tyranny to the natural passion for light and air and leisure and freedom in the heart of man.

That Oscar Wilde, the most extreme of individualists, the most unscrupulous of self-asserters, the pampered darling of every kind of sophisticated luxury, should thus lift up his voice on behalf of the wage-earners, is an indication that a state of society which seems proper and inevitable to dull and narrow minds is, when confronted, not with any mere abstract theory of Justice or Political rights, but with the natural human craving for life and beauty, found to be an outrage and an insult.

Oscar Wilde by pointing his derisive finger at what the gross intelligence of our commercial mob calls the "honourableness of work" has done more to clear our minds of cant than many revolutionary speeches.

An age which breeds a world of uninteresting people whose only purpose in life is working for their living is condemned on the face of it. And it is just here that the association between your artist and your "labouring man" becomes physiologically evident. The labourer shows quite clearly that he regards his labour as a degradation, a burden, an interruption to life, a necessary evil.

The rôle of the capitalist-hired preacher is to condemn him for this and to regret the departure from the scene of that imaginary and extremely ridiculous figure, the worker who "took pleasure in his work." If there ever have been such people, they ought, as Wilde says, to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Any person who enjoys being turned into a machine for the best part of his days and regards it with pride, is no better than a blackleg or a scab — not a "scab" in regard to a little company of strikers, but a "scab" in regard to the human race; for he is one who denies that life in itself, life with all its emotional, intellectual and imaginative possibilities, can be endured without the gross, coarsening, dulling "anaesthetic" of money-making toil.

This is the word that the social revolution wanted — the word so much more to the point than discourses upon justice and equality and charity. And it is precisely here that the wage-earners of our present system are in harmony with the "intellectuals."

The "wage-earners," or those among them who have in them something more than the souls of scabs, despise and loathe their enforced labour. The artist also despises the second-rate tasks set him by the stupidity and bad taste of his middle-class masters.

The only persons in the community who are really happy in their life's work, as they fantastically call it, are those commercial *ruffians* whose brutal, self-righteous, puritanical countenances one is swamped by — as if by a flood of suffocating mediocrity — in the streets of all our modern cities.

Oscar Wilde is perfectly right. We are living in an age when the world for the first time in its history is literally under the rule of the stupidest, dullest, least intelligent and least admirable of all the classes in the community. Wilde's "Soul of Man" is the condemnation — let us hope the effective condemnation — of this epoch in the journey of the race.

The odium which France — always the protector of civilisation — has stamped upon the word "bourgeois" is no mere passing levity of an irresponsible Latin Quarter. It is the judgment of classic taste — the taste of the great artists and poets of all ages — upon the worst type of person, the type most pernicious to true human happiness, that has ever yet appeared upon the planet. And it is this type, the commercial type, the type that loves the money-making toil it is engaged upon, which rules over us now with an absolute authority, and creates our religion, our morality, our pleasures, our pastimes, our literature and our art.

Oscar Wilde must be forgiven everything in his gay impertinence which may jar upon our more sensitive moments, when one considers what he has done in dragging this great issue into the light and making it clear. He shows that what we have against us is not so much a system of society or a set of laws, as a definite and contemptible type of human character.

Democracy may well appear the most hopeless and lamentable failure in the government of men that history has ever known — but this is only due to the fact that the working classes have until now meekly and mildly received from the commercial classes their notions as to what democracy means.

No one could suppose for a moment that such a thing as the puritanical censorship of art and letters which now hangs, like a leaden weight, round the neck of every writer of original power, would be thrust upon us by the victims of sweatshops and factories. It is thrust upon us, like everything else which is degrading and uncivilised in our present system, by the obstinate stupidity and silly sentiment of the self-righteous middle class, the opponents of everything that is joyous and interesting and subtle and imaginative. It is devoutly to be hoped that, when the revolution arrives, the human persons who force their way to the top and guide the volcanic eruption will be such persons as are absolutely free from every kind of middle-class scruple.

There are among us to-day vigorous and indignant minds who find in the ugliness and moral squalor of our situation, the unhappy influence of Christ and his saints. They are wrong. The history of Oscar Wilde's writings shows that they are wrong.

It is the self-satisfied moralist who stands in the way, not the mystic or the visionary. They spoil everything they touch, these people. They turn religion into a set of sentimental inhibitions that would make Marcus Aurelius blush. They turn faith into pietism, sanctity into morality, and righteousness into a reeking prurience.

After all, it is not on the strength of his opinions, wise and sound as these may be, that Wilde's reputation rests. It rests on the beauty, in its own way never equalled, of the style in which he wrote. His style, as he himself points out, is one which seems to compel its readers to utter its syllables aloud. Of that deeper and more recondite charm which lies, in a sense, outside the sphere of vocal articulation, of that rhythm of the very movements of thought itself which lovers of Walter Pater catch, or dream they catch, in those elaborate delicately modulated sentences, Wilde has little or nothing.

What he achieves is a certain crystalline lucidity, clear and pure as the ring of glass upon glass, and with a mellifluous after-tone or echo of vibration, which dies away upon the ear in a lingering fall — melancholy and voluptuous, or light and tender as the hour and the moment lead.

He is at his best, or at any rate his style shows itself at its best, not in the utterances of those golden epigrams, the gold of which, as days pass, comes in certain cases to look lamentably like gilt, but in his use of those far-descended legendary images gathered up into poetry and art again and again till they have acquired the very tone of time itself, and a lovely magic, sudden, swift and arresting, like the odour of “myrrh, aloes, and cassia.”

The style of Wilde is one of the simplest in existence, but its simplicity is the very apex and consummation of the artificial. He uses Biblical language with that self-conscious preciosity — like the movements of a person walking on tiptoe in the presence of the dead — which is so different from the sturdy directness of Bunyan or the restrained rhetoric of the Church of England prayers. There come moments when this premeditated innocence of tone — this lisping in liturgical monosyllables — irritates and annoys one. At such times the delicate unction of his naïveté strikes one, in despite of its gravity, as something a little comic; as though some very sophisticated and experienced person suddenly joined in a children’s game and began singing in a plaintive tenderly pitched voice —

“This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands —
This is the way we wash our hands,
On a cold and frosty morning!”

But it were absurd to press this point too far. Sophisticated though the simplicity of Wilde is, it does actually spring with all its ritualistic tiptoeing straight out of his natural character. He was born artificial, and he was born with more childishness than the great majority of children.

I like to picture him as a great Uranian baby, full of querulousness and peevishness, and eating greedily, with a sort of guileless wonder that anyone should scold him for it, every species of forbidden fruit that grows in the garden of life! How infantile really, when one thinks of it, and how humorously solemn the man's inordinate gravity over the touch of soft fabrics and the odour of rare perfumes! One seems to see him, a languid-limbed "revenant," with heavy-lidded drowsy eyes and voluptuous lips, emerging all swathed and wrapped in costly cerements out of the tomb of some Babylonian king.

After all, it remains a tremendous triumph of personality, the manner in which this portly modern Antinous has taken captive our imagination. His influence is everywhere, like an odour, like an atmosphere, like a diffused flame. We cannot escape from him.

In those ridiculous wit-contests with Whistler, from which he always emerged defeated, how much more generous and careless and noble he appears than the wasp-like artist who could rap out so smartly the appropriate retort! He seems like a great lazy king, at such times, caught off his guard by some skipping and clever knave of his spoilt retinue. Perhaps even now no small a portion of the amused and astonished wonder he excites is due to the fact that he really had, what so few of us have, a veritable passion for precious stuffs and woven fabrics and ivory and cedar wood and beads of amber and orchid-petals and pearl-tinted shells and lapis-lazuli and attar of roses.

It is open to doubt whether even among artists, there are many who share Wilde’s Hellenic ecstasy in these things. This at any rate was no pose. He posed as a man of the world. He posed as an immoralist. He posed as a paradoxist. He posed in a thousand perverse directions. But when it comes to the colour and texture and odour and shape of beautiful and rare things — there, in his voluptuous delight in these, he was undeniably sincere.

He was of course no learned virtuoso. But what does that matter? The real artist is seldom a patient collector or an encyclopedic authority. That is the rôle of Museum people and of compilers of hand-books. Many thoroughly uninteresting minds know more about Assyrian pottery and Chinese pictures than Oscar Wilde knew about wild flowers.

Knowledge, as he teaches us himself, and it is one of the profoundest of his doctrines, is nothing. Knowledge is external and incidental. The important thing is that one’s senses should be passionately alive and one’s imagination fearlessly far-reaching.

We can embrace all the treasures of the Herods and all the riches of the Caesars as we lay our fingers upon a little silver coin, if the divine flame is within us, and, if not, we may excavate a thousand buried cities and return learned and lean and empty. Well, people must make their own choice and go their own way. The world is wide, and Nature has at least this in common with Heaven, that it has many mansions.

The feverish passion for fair things which obsessed Oscar Wilde and carried him so far is not for all the sons of men; nor even, in every hour of their lives, for those who most ardently answer to it. That feverishness burns itself out; that smouldering fire turns to cold ashes. Life flows on, though Salome, daughter of Herodias, lies crushed under the piled-up shields, and though in all the prisons of the world “the damned grotesques make arabesques, like the wind upon the sand.”

Life flows on, and the quips and merry jests of Oscar Wilde, his artful artlessness, his insolence, his self-pity, his loyalty and fickleness, his sensuality and tenderness, only fill after all a small space in the heart's chamber of those who read him and stare at his plays and let him go.

But there are a few for whom the tragic wantonness of that strange countenance, with the heavy eyelids and pouting mouth, means something not easily forgotten, not easily put by.

To have seen Oscar Wilde and talked with him gives to such persons a strange significance, an almost religious value. One looks long at them, as if to catch some far-off reflection from the wit of the dead man. They do not seem to us quite like the rest. They have seen Oscar Wilde, and "They know what they have seen." For when all has been said against him that can be said it remains that Oscar Wilde, for good and for evil, in innocence and in excess, in orthodoxy and in rebellion, is a "symbolic figure."

It is indeed easy enough, when one is under the spell of the golden gaiety of his wit, to forget the essential and irresistible truth of so many of his utterances.

That profound association between the "Sorrow that endureth forever" and the "Pleasure that abideth for a moment," which he symbolises under the parable of the Image of Bronze, has its place throughout all his work.

It is a mistake to regard De Profundis as a recantation. It is a fulfilment, a completion, a rounding off. Like a black and a scarlet thread running through the whole tapestry of his tragic story are the two parallel "motifs," the passion of the beauty which leads to destruction and the passion of the beauty which leads to life.

It matters little whether he was or was not received into the Church before he died. In the larger sense he was always within those unexcluding walls, those spacious courts of the Ecclesia of humanity. There was no trace in him, for all his caprices, of that puritanism of denial which breaks the altars and shatters the idols at the bidding of scientific iconoclasm.

What the anonymous instinct of humanity has rendered beautiful by building into it the golden monuments of forlorn hopes and washing it with the salt tears of desperate chances remained beautiful to him. From the narcissus-flowers growing on the marble ledges of Parnassus, where Apollo still weeps for the death of Hyacinth and Pan still mourns the vanishing of Syrinx, to the passion-flowers growing on the slopes of Calvary, he, this lover of eidola and images, worships the white feet of the bearers of dead beauty, and finds in the tears of all the lovers of all the lost a revivifying rain that even in the midst of the dust of our degeneracy makes bloom once more, full of freshness and promise, the mystical red rose of the world's desire.

The wit of his "Golden lads and girls" in those superb comedies may soon fall a little faint and thin upon our ears. To the next generation it may seem as faded and old-fashioned as the wit of Congreve or Sheridan. Fashions of humour change more quickly than the fashions of manner or of dress. The only thing that gives immortality to human writing is the "eternal bronze" of a noble and imaginative style. Out of such divine material, with all his petulances and perversities, Oscar Wilde's style was hammered and beaten. For there is only one quarry of this most precious metal, and the same hand that shapes from it the "Sorrow that endureth forever" must shape from it the "Pleasure that abideth for a moment," and the identity of these two with that immortal bronze is the symbol of the mystery of our life.

The senses that are quickened by the knowledge of this mystery are not far from the ultimate secret. As with the thing sculptured, so with the sculptor.

Oscar Wilde is a symbolic figure.

SUSPENDED JUDGMENT

THE CONCLUSION OF any book which has tried to throw into momentary relief the great shadowy figures who have led and misled humanity must necessarily be no more than a new suspension of judgment; of judgment drawing its interest from the colour of the mind of the individual making it, of judgment guarded from the impertinence of judicial decision by its confessed implication of radical subjectivity.

The conclusion of any critical essay must in large measure be lame and halting; must indeed be a whispered warning to the reader to take what has gone before, however ardently expressed, with that wise pinch of true Attic salt which mitigates even a relative finality in these high things.

One comes to feel more and more, as one reads many books, that judicial decisions are laughable and useless in this rare atmosphere, and that the mere utterance of such platitudinous decrees sets the pronouncer of them outside the inner and exclusive pale.

One comes to feel more and more that all that any of us has a right to do is to set down as patiently and tenderly as he may the particular response, here or there, from this side or the other, as it chances to happen, that is aroused in his own soul by those historic works of art, which, whatever principle of selection it is that places them in our hands, have fallen somehow across our path.

It might seem that a direct, natural and spontaneous response, of the kind I have in my mind, to these famous works, were easy enough of attainment. Nothing, on the contrary, is more difficult to secure or more seldom secured.

One might almost hazard the paradox that the real art of criticism only begins when we shake ourselves free of all books and win access to that locked and sealed and uncut volume which is the book of our own feelings.

The art of self-culture — one learns just that when youth's outward-looking curiosity and passion begin to ebb — is the art of freeing oneself from the influence of books so that one may enjoy what one is destined to enjoy without pedantry or scruple. And yet, by the profound law of the system of things, when one has thus freed oneself from the tyranny of literary catchwords and the dead weight of cultivated public opinion, one comes back to the world of books with an added zest. It is then, and only then, that one reads with real unscrupulousness, thinking solely of the pleasure, and nothing of the rectitude or propriety or adequacy of what we take up.

And it is then that the great figures of the master-writers appear in their true light; the light — that is to say — in which we, and not another, have visualised them, felt them, and reacted from them.

It is wonderful what thrilling pleasures there are in store for us in literature when once we have cut ourselves adrift from all this superfluity of cultured opinion, and have given ourselves complete leave to love what we like and hate what we like and be indifferent to what we like, as the world swings round!

I think the secret of making an exquisite use of literature so that it shall colour and penetrate our days is only a small part of what the wisest epicureans among us are concerned with attaining. I think it is one of the most precious benefits conferred on us by every new writer that he flings us back more deeply than ever upon ourselves. We draw out of him his vision, his peculiar atmosphere, his especial quality of mental and emotional tone. We savour this and assimilate it and store it up, as something which we have made our own and which is there to fall back upon when we want it. But beyond our enjoyment of this new increment to our treasury of feeling, we are driven inwards once more in a kind of intellectual rivalry with the very thing we have just acquired, and in precise proportion as it has seemed to us exciting and original we are roused in the depths of our mind to substitute something else for it; and this something else is nothing less than the evocation of our own originality, called up out of the hidden caverns of our being to claim its own creative place in the communion between our soul and the world.

I can only speak for myself; but my own preference among writers will always be for those whose genius consists rather in creating a certain mental atmosphere than in hammering out isolated works of art, rounded and complete.

For a flawless work of art is a thing for a moment, while that more penetrating projection of an original personality which one calls a mental or aesthetic atmosphere, is a thing that floats and flows and drifts and wavers, far beyond the boundaries of any limited creation. Such an atmosphere, such a vague intellectual music, in the air about us, is the thing that really challenges the responsive spirit in ourselves; challenges it and rouses it to take the part which it has a right to take, the part which it alone *can* take, in recreating the world for us in accordance with our natural fatality.

It is only by the process of gradual disillusionment that we come at last to recognise what we ourselves — undistracted now by any external authority — need and require from the genius of the past. For my own part, looking over the great names included in the foregoing essays, I am at this moment drawn instinctively only to two among them all — to William Blake and to Paul Verlaine; and this is an indication to me that what my own soul requires is not philosophy or psychology or wit or sublimity, but a certain delicate transmutation of the little casual things that cross my way, and a certain faint, low, sweet music, rumouring from indistinguishable horizons, and bringing me vague rare thoughts, cool and quiet and deep and magical, such as have no concern with the clamour and brutality of the crowd.

The greater number of the writers who have dominated us, in the pages that go before, belong to the Latin race, and I cannot but feel that it is to this race that civilisation must come more and more to return in its search for the grandeur and pathos, the humanity and irony of that attitude of mind which serves our spirits best as we struggle on through the confusions and bewilderments of our way.

There is a tendency observable here and there — though the genuinely great minds who give their adherence to it are few and far between — to speak as though the race-element in literature were a thing better away, a thing whose place might be taken by a sort of attenuated idealistic amalgam of all the race-elements in the world, or by something which has no race-element in it at all — something inter-national, inter-racial, humanitarian and cosmopolitan.

People to whom this thin thing appeals often speak quite lightly of blending the traditions of East and West, of Saxon and Celt, of Latin and Teuton, of Scandinavian and Slav.

They do not see that you might as well speak of blending the temperaments of two opposite types of human personality. They do not see that the whole interest of life depends upon these contrasts. You cannot blend traditions in this academic way, any more than you can blend two human souls that are diametrically different, or two soils or climates which are mutually excluding. This ideal of a cosmopolitan literature that shall include all the local traditions and racial instincts is the sort of thing that appeals to the type of mind which remains essentially dull to the high qualities of a noble style.

No; it is not cosmopolitan literature that we want. It was not of cosmopolitan literature that Goethe was thinking when he used that term "I am a good European," which Nietzsche found so suggestive; it was of classical literature, of literature which, whatever its racial quality, has not lost touch with the civilised traditions of Athens and Rome.

In art, as in everything else, we must "worship our dead"; and the attempt to substitute a vague idealised cosmopolitanism for the living passionate localised traditions that spring like trees and flowers out of a particular soil, out of a soil made dear to us by the ashes of our fathers and consecrated by a thousand pious usages, is an attempt that can result in no great magical works.

Walt Whitman, for all his celebrations of the huge "ensemble" of the world, remains and must always remain profoundly and entirely American.

When Romain Rolland, the author of "Jean Christophe," — the book of all books most penetrated by the spirit of race distinctions — appalled by the atrocity of the war, calls upon us to substitute the Ideal of Humanity for the ideas of the various tribes of men, he is really (in re-action from the dreadful scenes around him) renouncing those flashes of prophetic insight which gave him such living visions of the diverse souls of the great races. Romain Rolland may speak rhetorically of the "Ideal of Humanity" to be realised in art and letters. The thing is a word, a name, a phrase, an illusion. What we actually have are individuals — individual artists, individual races — each with its own beautiful and tragical fatality.

And what is true of races is true of persons both in life and in criticism. All that is really interesting in us springs in the first place from the traditions of the race to which we belong, springs from the soil that gave us birth and from our sacred dead and the usages and customs and habits which bind us to the past; and in the second place from what is uniquely and peculiarly personal to ourselves, belonging to our intrinsic and integral character and refusing to be swamped by any vague cult of “humanity in general.”

To talk of literature becoming universal and planetary, becoming a logical synthesis of the traditions of races and the visions of individuals, is to talk of something that in its inherent nature is contrary to the fundamental spirit of art. It implies a confusion between the spheres of art and philosophy. The function of philosophy is to synthesise and unite. The function of art is to differentiate and distinguish. Philosophy and ethics are perfectly justified in concerning themselves with a “regenerated humanity” in which race-instincts and race-traditions are blotted out. Let them produce such a humanity if they can! But while there are any artists left in the world, or any lovers of art, it will always be to the old inalienable traditions that they will turn; to the old local customs, local pieties, local habits, local altars, and local gods.

To talk vaguely of cosmopolitan art uniting the nations, is to talk foolishly, and it is to talk irreverently. The people who deal in such theories are endeavouring to betray the dead of their own race and the noble pieties and desperate courage of those who made them what they are. It is a sacrilege, this speculation, and a sacrifice of beauty upon the altar of a logical morality.

What one comes more and more to feel is that everything which belongs to poetry and art belongs to the individual, to the individual nation and the individual person. The great modern democracies, with their cult of the average man and their suspicion of the exceptional man, are naturally only too ready to hail as ideal and wonderful any doctrine about literature which flatters their pride.

One of the most plausible forms of rhetorical cant is the cant about the soul of average humanity expressing itself in art, in an art which has sloughed off like an outworn skin all ancient race-instincts and all individual egoism.

There has never been such art in the history of the world as this average man's art, free from tradition and free from personal colour.

There will never be such art, unless it be the great, idealistic, humanitarian, cosmopolitan art of the Moving Picture Show.

But the idea sounds well in popular oratory, and it has a most soothing ointment for the souls of such artists as have neither reverence nor imagination.

It is quite possible that for the general comfort of the race at large — even if not for its happiness — it would be a good thing if philosophers and moralists between them could get rid of the imagination of races as well as the imagination of individuals.

The common crowd are naturally suspicious of imagination of any kind, as they are suspicious of genius of any kind; and this new doctrine of a literature largely and purely "human," wherein the general soul of humanity may find its expression, free from the colour of race-feeling and free from the waywardness of individual men of genius, is just the sort of thing to flatter the unthinking mob.

Why not have art and literature harnessed once and for all to the great rolling chariot of popular public opinion? Why not abolish all individualism at one stroke as a thing dangerous to the public welfare — a thing uncomfortable, undesirable, upsetting?

The same desperate, irrational, immoral imagination which inspires races with a strange madness, inspires individuals too with a strange madness.

Art and Literature are, after all, and there is little use denying it, the last refuge and sanctuary, in a world ruled by machinery and sentiment, of the free, wild, reckless, irresponsible, anarchical imagination of such as refuse to sacrifice their own dreams for the dreams — not less illusive — of the general herd.

We have to face the fact — bitter and melancholy though it may be — that in our great bourgeois-dominated democracies the majority of people would like to trample out the flame of genius altogether; trample it out as something inimical to their peace.

Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, were all completely aware of this instinctive hatred with which the mob of men regard what is exceptional and rare. The Hamlet-spirit of the author of Coriolanus must chuckle bitterly in that grave in Stratford-on-Avon when he learns that the new ideal is the ideal of cosmopolitan literature expressing the soul of the average man.

The clash is bound to come sooner or later between public opinion, concerned to preserve the comfort of its illusions, and the art of the individual artist playing, in noble irresponsibility, with all illusions.

It was his consciousness of this — of the natural antagonism of the mob and its leaders to all great literature — that made Goethe draw back so coldly and proudly from the popular tendencies of his time, and seek refuge among the great individualistic spirits of the classic civilisations. And what Goethe — the good European — did in his hour, the more classical among European writers of our own day do still.

The great style — the style which is like gold and bronze in an age of clay and rubble — remains as the only sure refuge we have from the howling vulgarities of our generation. If books were taken from us — the high, calm, beautiful, ironical books of classic tradition — how, in this age, could the more sensitive among us endure to live at all?

With brutality and insanity and ruffianism, with complacency and stupidity and sentimentalism, jostling us and hustling us on all sides, how could we live, if it were not for the great, calm, scornful anarchists of the soul, whose high inviolable imaginations perpetually refresh and re-create the world?

And we who find this refuge, we who have to win our liberty every day anew by bathing in these classic streams, we too will do well to remember that the most precious things in life are the things that the world can neither give nor take away.

We too — encouraged by these great individualists — have a right to fall back upon whatever individuality may have been left to us; and, resting upon that, sinking into the soul of that, to defy all that public opinion and the voice of the majority may be able to do.

And we shall be wise also if we recognise, before it is too late, that what is most intrinsic and inalienable in ourselves is just that very portion of us which has nothing to do with our work in life, nothing to do with our duty to the community.

We shall be wise if we recognise, before it is too late, that the thing most sacred in us is that strange margin of unoccupied receptivity, upon which settle, in their flight over land and sea, the beautiful wild birds of unsolicited dreams.

We shall be wise if, before we die, we learn a little of the art of suspending our judgment — the art of "waiting upon the spirit."

For it is only when we have suspended our judgment; it is only when we have suspended our convictions, our principles, our ideals, our moralities, that “the still small voice” of the music of the universe, sad and sweet and terrible and tender, drifts in upon us, over the face of the waters of the soul.

The essence of us, the hidden reality of us, is too rare and delicate a thing to bear the crude weight of these sturdy opinions, these vigorous convictions, these social ardours, without growing dulled and hardened.

We all have to bear the burden of humanity; and the artists among us may be thankful that the predatory curse resting upon the rich is very seldom ours: but the burden of humanity must not be allowed to press all joy, all originality, all waywardness, all interest, all imagination out of our lives.

It is not for long, at best or worst, that we know what it is to be conscious of being living children of the human race upon this strange planet.

The days pass quickly, and the seasons and the years. From the graves of the darlings of our souls there comes a voice and a cry. A voice bidding us sink into our own true selves before we too are numbered with the dead; a cry bidding us sacrifice everything before we sacrifice the prerogative of our inmost identity, the right to feel and think and dream as persons born into a high inheritance, the inheritance of the mind that has the right to question all things and to hold fast what pleases it in defiance of opinion and logic and probability and argument.

For it is only when we suspend our judgments and leave arguing and criticising, that the quiet gods of the moonlit shores of the world murmur their secrets in our ears.

They come without our seeking for them, these rare intimations; without our seeking for them, and, sometimes, without our desiring them; but when they come they come as revelations of something deeper in us than any mere soul of humanity. They come from a region that is as far beyond humanity as it is beyond nature. They come from the fairy-land of that mysterious country wherein dwell the dreams and the fancies of those lonely ones among the sons of men who have been possessed by imagination. They come from the unknown land where those inhabit who are, as the Psalmist says, “free among the dead.” They come from the land which we left when we were born, and to which we return when we die. And whether this is a land of nothingness and oblivion none knoweth; for none hath returned to tell us. Meanwhile we can imagine what we will; and we can suspend our last judgment until we ourselves are judged.

One Hundred Best Books (1916)

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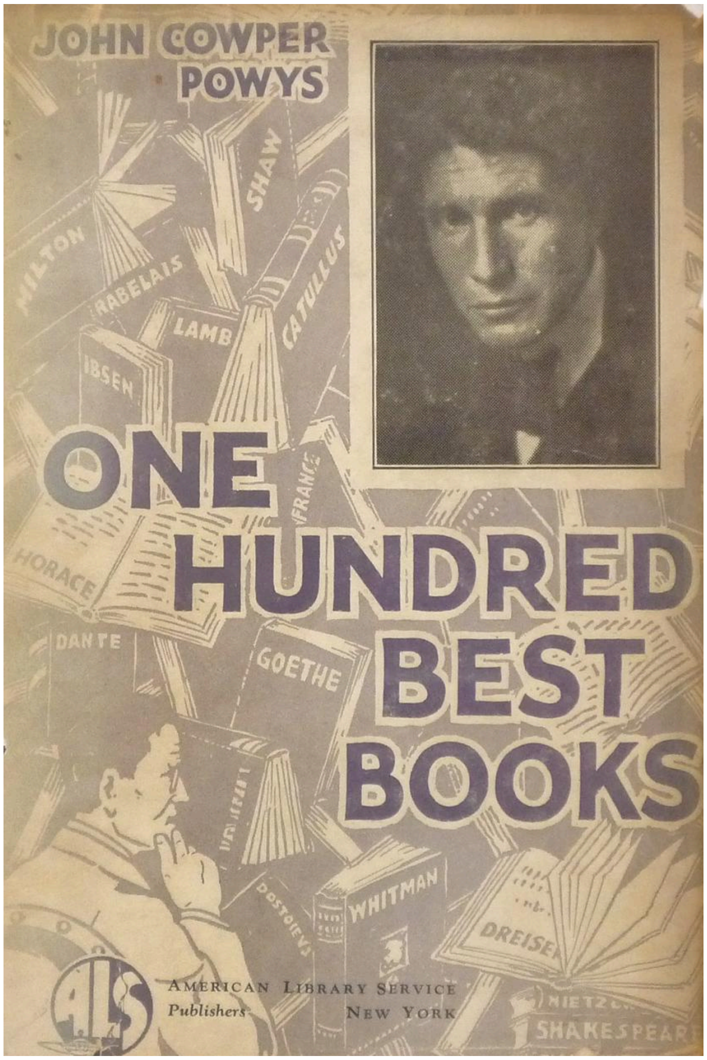
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The first edition

PREFACE

THIS SELECTION OF "One hundred best books" is made after a different method and with a different purpose from the selections already in existence. Those apparently are designed to stuff the minds of young persons with an accumulation of "standard learning" calculated to alarm and discourage the boldest. The following list is frankly subjective in its choice; being indeed the selection of one individual, wandering at large and in freedom through these "realms of gold."

The compiler holds the view that in expressing his own predilection, he is also supplying the need of kindred minds; minds that read purely for the pleasure of reading, and have no sinister wish to transform themselves by that process into what are called "cultivated persons." The compiler feels that any one who succeeds in reading, with reasonable receptivity, the books in this list, must become, at the end, a person with whom it would be a delight to share that most classic of all pleasurable arts — the art of intelligent conversation.

BOOKS AND READING

THERE IS SCARCELY any question, the sudden explosion of which out of a clear sky, excites more charming perturbation in the mind of a man — professionally, as they say, "of letters" — than the question, so often tossed disdainfully off from young and ardent lips, as to "what one should read," if one has — quite strangely and accidentally — read hitherto absolutely nothing at all.

To secure the privilege of being the purveyor of spiritual germination to such provocatively virgin soil, is for the moment so entirely exciting that all the great stiff images from the dusty museum of "standard authors," seem to swim in a sort of blurred mist before our eyes, and even, some of them at least, to nod and beckon and put out their tongues. After a while, however, the shock of first excitement diminishing, that solemn goblin Responsibility lifts up its head, and though we bang at it and shoo it away, and perhaps lock it up, the pure sweet pleasure of our seductive enterprise, the "native hue," as the poet says, of our "resolution" is henceforth "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," and the fine design robbed of its freshest dew.

As a matter of fact, much deeper contemplations and maturer ponderings, only tend, in the long run, to bring us back to our original starting-point. It is just this very bugbear of Responsibility which in the consciences and mouths of grown-up persons sends the bravest of our youth post-haste to confusion — so impinging and inexorable are the thing's portentous horns. It is indeed after these maturer considerations that we manage to hit upon the right key really capable of impounding the obtrusive animal; the idea, namely, of indicating to our youthful questioner the importance of aesthetic austerity in these regions — an austerity not only no less exclusive, but far more exclusive than any mandate drawn from the Decalogue.

The necessary matter, in other words, at the beginning of such a tremendous adventure as this blowing wind into the sails of a newly built little schooner, or sometimes even of a poor rain-soaked harbor-rotten brig, bound for the Fortunate Islands, is the inspiration of the right mood, the right tone, the right temper, for the splendid voyage. It is not enough simply to say "acquire aesthetic severity." With spoils so inexhaustible offered to us on every side, some more definite orientation is desirable. Such an orientation, limiting the enormous scope of the enterprise, within the sphere of the possible, can only be wisely found in a person's own individual taste; but since such a taste is, obviously, in a measure "acquired," the compiler of any list of books must endeavor, by a frank and almost shameless assertion of *his* taste, to rouse to a divergent reciprocity the latent taste, still embryotic, perhaps, and quite inchoate, of the young person anxious to make some sort of a start. Such a neophyte in the long voyage — a voyage not without its reefs and shoals — will be much more stirringly provoked to steer with a bold firm hand, even by the angry reaction he may feel from such suggestions, than by a dull academic chart — professing tedious judicial impartiality — of all the continents, promontories, and islands, marked on the official map.

One does not trust youth enough, that is in short what is the matter with our educational method, in this part of it at least, which concerns "what one is to read." One teases oneself too much, and one's infants, too, poor darlings, with what might be called the "scholastic-veneration-cult"; the cult, namely, of becoming a superior person by reading the best authors. It comes back, after all, to what your young person emphatically is, in himself, independent of all this acquiring. If he has the responsive chord, the answering vibration, he may well get more imaginative stimulus from reading “Alice in Wonderland,” than from all the Upanishads and Niebelungenlieds in the world. It is a matter of the imagination, and to the question “What is one to read?” the best reply must always be the most personal: “Whatever profoundly and permanently stimulates your imagination.” The list of books which follows in this volume constitutes in itself, in the mere perusal of the titles, such a potential stimulation. A reader who demands, for instance, why George Eliot is omitted, and Oliver Onions included; why Sophocles is excluded and Catullus admitted, is brought face to face with that essential right of personal choice in these high matters, which is not only the foundation of all thrilling interest in literature, but the very ground and soil of all-powerful literary creation. The secret of the art of literary taste, may it not be found to be nothing else than the secret of the art of life itself — I mean the capacity for discovering the real fatality, the real predestined direction of one’s intrinsic nature and the refusal, when this is found, to waste one’s energies in alien paths and irrelevant junketings?

A list of books of the kind appended here, becomes, by the very reason of its shameless subjectivity, a challenge to the intelligence perusing it — a challenge that is bound, in some degree or another, to fling such a reader back upon his own inveterate prejudices; to fling him back upon them with a sense that it is his affair reasonably to justify them.

From quite another point of view, however, might the appended list find its excuse — I mean as being a typical choice; in other words, the natural choice of a certain particular minority of minds, who, while disagreeing in most essentials, in this one important essential find themselves in singular harmony. And this minority of minds, of minds with the especial prejudices and predilections indicated in this list, undoubtedly has a real and definite existence; there are such people, and any list of books which they made would exclude the writers here excluded, and include the writers here included, though in particular instances, the motives of the choice might differ. For purely psychological reasons then — as a kind of human document in criticism, shall we say? — such a list comes to have its value; nor can the value be anything but enhanced by the obvious fact that in this particular company there are several quite prominent and popular writers, both ancient and modern, signalized, as it were, if not penalized, by their surprising absence. The niches of such venerated names do not exactly call aloud for occupancy, for they are emphatically filled by less popular figures; but they manifest a sufficient sense of incongruity to give the reader's critical conscience the sort of jolt that is so salutary a mental stimulus. A further value might be discovered for our exclusive catalogue, in the interest of noting — and this interest might well appeal to those who would themselves have selected quite a different list — the curious way certain books and writers have of hanging inevitably together, and necessarily implying one another.

Thus it appears that the type of mind — it would be presumptuous to call it the best type of mind — which prefers Euripides to Sophocles, and Heine to Schiller, prefers also Emily Brontë to Charlotte Brontë, and Oliver Onions to Compton Mackenzie. Given the mind that in compiling such a list would at once drag in The Odyssey and The Psalms, and run hastily on to Sir Thomas Browne and Charles Lamb, we are instinctively conscious that when it reaches, with its arbitrary divining rod, our own unlucky age, it will skip quite lightly over Thackeray; wave an ambiguous hand in the direction of Meredith, and sit solemnly down to make elaborate mention of all the published works of Walter Pater, Thomas Hardy and Mr. Henry James.

It seems to me that nothing is more necessary, in regard to the advice to be given to young and ardent people, in the matter of their reading, than some sort of communication of the idea — and it is not an easy idea to convey — that there is in this affair a subtle fusion desirable between one's natural indestructible prejudices, and a certain high authoritative standard; a standard which we may name, for want of a better word, "classical taste," and which itself is the resultant amalgam of all the finest personal reactions of all the finest critical senses, winnowed out, as it were, and austerely purged, by the washing of the waves of time. It will be found, as a matter of fact, that this latter element in the motives of our choice works as a rule negatively rather than positively, while the positive and active force in our appreciations remains, as it ought to remain, our own inviolable and quite personal bias. The winnowed taste of the ages, acquired by us as a sort of second nature, warns us what to avoid, while our own nerves and palate, stimulated to an ever deepening subtlety, as our choice narrows itself down, tells us what passionately and spontaneously we must snatch up and enjoy.

It will be noted that in what we have tried to indicate as the only possible starting-point for adventurous criticism, there has been a constant assumption of a common ground between sensitive people; a common sensual and psychic language, so to speak, to which appeals may be made, and through which intelligent tokens may be exchanged. This common ground is not necessarily — one is reluctant to introduce metaphysical speculation — any hidden "law of beauty" or "principle of spiritual harmony." It is, indeed, as far as we can ever know for certain, only "objective" in the sense of being essentially human; in the sense, that is, of being something that inevitably appeals to what, below temperamental differences, remains permanent and unchanging in us.

“Nature,” as Leonardo says, “is the mistress of the higher intelligences”; and Goethe, in his most oracular utterances, recalls us to the same truth. What imagination does, and what the personal vision of the individual artist does, is to deal successfully and masterfully with this “given,” this basic element. And this basic element, this permanent common ground, this universal human assumption, is just precisely what, in popular language, we call “Nature”; that substratum of objective reality in the appearances of things, which makes it possible for diversely constructed temperaments to make their differences effective and intelligible.

There could be no recognizable differences, no conversation, in fact, if, in the impossible hypothesis of the absence of any such common language, we all shouted at one another “in vacuo” and out of pure darkness. It is from their refusal to recognize the necessity for something at least relatively objective in what the individual imagination works upon, that certain among modern artists, if not among modern poets, bewilder and puzzle us. They have a right to make endless experiments — every original mind has that — but they cannot let go their hold on some sort of objective solidity without becoming inarticulate, without giving vent to such unrelated and incoherent cries as overtake one in the corridors of Bedlam. “Nature is the mistress of the higher intelligencies,” and though the individual imagination is at liberty to treat Nature with a certain creative contempt, it cannot afford to depart altogether from her, lest by relinquishing the common language between men and men, it should simply flap its wings in an enchanted circle, and utter sounds that are not so much different from other sounds, as outside the region where any sound carries an intelligible meaning.

The absurd idea that one gets wise by reading books is probably at the bottom of the abominable pedantry that thrusts so many tiresome pieces of antiquity down the throats of youth. There is no talisman for getting wise —

some of the wisest in the world never open a book, and yet their native wit, so heavenly-free from "culture," would serve to challenge Voltaire. Lovers of books, like other infatuated lovers, best know the account they find in their exquisite obsessions. None of the explanations they give seem to cover the field of their enjoyment. The thing is a passion; a sort of delicate madness, and like other passions, quite unintelligible to those who are outside. Persons who read for the purpose of making a success of their added erudition, or the better to adapt themselves — what a phrase! — to their "life's work," are, to my thinking, like the wretches who throw flowers into graves. What sacrilege, to trail the reluctances and coynesses, the shynesses and sweet reserves of these "furtivi amores" at the heels of a wretched ambition to be "cultivated" or learned, or to "get on" in the world!

Like the kingdom of heaven and all other high and sacred things, the choicest sorts of books only reveal the perfume of their rare essence to those who love them for themselves in pure disinterestedness. Of course they "mix in," these best-loved authors, with every experience we encounter; they throw around places, hours, situations, occasions, a quite special glamour of their own, just as one's more human devotions do; but though they float, like a diffused aroma, round every circumstance of our days, and may even make tolerable the otherwise intolerable hours of our impertinent "life's work," we do not love them because they help us here or help us there; or make us wiser or make us better; we love them because they are what they are, and we are what we are; we love them, in fact, for the beautiful reason which the author of that noble book — a book not in our present list, by the way, because of something obstinately tough and tedious in him — I mean Montaigne's Essays — loved his sweet friend Etienne.

Any other commerce between books and their readers smacks of Baconian “fruits” and University lectures. It is a prostitution of pleasure to profit.

As with all the rare things in life, the most delicate flavor of our pleasure is found not exactly and precisely in the actual taste of the author himself; not, I mean, in the snatching of huge bites out of him, but in the fragrance of anticipation; in the dreamy solicitations of indescribable afterthoughts; in those “airy tongues that syllable men’s names” on the “sands and shores” of the remote margins of our consciousness. How delicious a pleasure there is in carrying about with us wherever we go a new book or a new translation from the pen of our especial master! We need not open it; we need not read it for days; but it is there — there to be caressed and to caress — when everything is propitious, and the profane voices are hushed.

I suppose, to take an instance that has for myself a peculiar appeal, the present edition— “brought out” by the excellent house of Macmillan — of the great Dostoievsky, is producing even now in the sensibility of all sorts and conditions of queer readers, a thrilling series of recurrent pleasures, like the intermittent visits of one’s well-beloved.

Would to God the mortal days of geniuses like Dostoievsky could be so extended that for all the years of one’s life, one would have such works, still not quite finished, in one’s lucky hands!

I sometimes doubt whether these sticklers for “the art of condensation” are really lovers of books at all. For myself, I would class their cursed short stories with their teasing “economy of material,” as they call it, with those “books that are no books,” those checker boards and moral treatises which used to annoy Elia so.

Yes, I have a sneaking feeling that all this modern fuss about “art” and the “creative vision” and “the projection of visualized images,” is the itching vice of quite a different class of people, from those who, in the old, sweet, epicurean way, loved to loiter through huge digressive books, with the ample unpremeditated enjoyment of leisurely travelers wayfaring along a wonderful road. How many luckless innocents have teased and fretted their minds into a forced appreciation of that artistic ogre Flaubert, and his laborious pursuit of his precious "exact word," when they might have been pleasantly sailing down Rabelais' rich stream of immortal nectar, or sweetly hugging themselves over the lovely mischievousness of Tristram Shandy! But one must be tolerant; one must make allowances. The world of books is no puritanical bourgeois-ridden democracy; it is a large free country, a great Pantagruelian Utopia, ruled by noble kings.

Our "One Hundred Best Books" need not be yours, nor yours ours; the essential thing is that in this brief interval between darkness and darkness, which we call our life, we should be thrillingly and passionately amused; innocently, if so it can be arranged — and what better than books lends itself to that? — and harmlessly, too, let us hope, God help us, but at any rate, amused, for the only unpardonable sin is the sin of taking this passing world too gravely. Our treasure is not here; it is in the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of heaven is Imagination. Imagination! How all other ways of escape from what is mediocre in our tangled lives grow pale beside that high and burning star!

With Imagination to help us we can make something of our days, something of the drama of this confused turmoil, and perhaps, after all — who can tell? — there is more in it than mere "amusement." Once and again, as we pause in our reading, there comes a breath, a whisper, a rumor, of something else; of something over and above that "eternal now" which is the wisest preoccupation of our passion, but not wise are those who would seek to confine this fleeting intimation within the walls of reason or of system. It comes; it goes; it is; it is not. The Hundred Best Books did not bring it; the Hundred Best Books cannot take it away. Strangely and wonderfully it blends itself with those vague memories of what we have read, somewhere, sometime, and not always alone. Strangely and wonderfully it blends itself with those other moments when the best books in the world seem irrelevant, and all "culture" an impertinent intrusion; but however it comes and however it goes, it is the thing that makes our gravity ridiculous; our philosophy pedantic. It is the thing that gives to the "amusements" of the imagination that touch of burning fire; that breath of wider air; that taste of sharper salt, which, arriving when we least expect it, and least — heaven knows — deserve it, makes any final opinion upon the stuff of this world vain and false; and any condemnation of the opinions of others foolish and empty. It destroys our assurances as it alleviates our miseries, and in some unspeakable way, like a primrose growing on the edge of a sepulchre, it flings forth upon the heavy night, a fleeting signal, "Bon espoir y gist au fond!"

ONE HUNDRED BEST BOOKS

1. THE PSALMS OF DAVID.

THE PSALMS REMAIN, whether in the Latin version or in the authorized English translation, the most pathetic and poignant, as well as the most noble and dignified of all poetic literature. The rarest spirits of our race will always return to them at every epoch in their lives for consolation, for support and for repose.

2. HOMER. THE ODYSSEY. *Butcher and Lang's Prose Translation*.

The Odyssey must continue to appeal to adventurous persons more powerfully than any other of the ancient stories because, blent with the classic quality of its pure Greek style, there can be found in it that magical element of thrilling romance, which belongs not to one age, but to all time.

3. THE BACCHANALS. THE BACCHÆ OF EURIPIDES. *Translated by Professor Gilbert Murray*.

Euripides, the favourite poet of John Milton and Goethe, is the most modern in feeling, the most romantic in mood of all the Greek poets. One is conscious that in his work, as in the sculpture of Praxiteles, the calm beauty of the Apollonian temper is touched by the wilder rhythm of the perilous music of Dionysus.

4. HORACE. *Any selection in Latin of The Odes of Horace and complete prose translation published by Macmillan*.

Flawlessly hammered out, as if from eternal bronze— “aere perennius” — The Odes of Horace are the consummate expression of the pride, the reserve, the tragic playfulness, the epicurean calm, the absolute distinction of the Imperial Roman spirit. A few lines taken at random and learned by heart would act as a talisman in all hours to drive away the insolent pressure of the vulgar and common crowd.

5. CATULLUS. *Any Latin edition and the prose translation published by Macmillan bound up with Tibullus*.

Catullus, the contemporary of Julius Caesar, is, of all the ancient lyrical poets, the one most modern and neurotic in feeling. One discerns in his work, breathing through the ancient Roman reserve, the pressure of that passionate and rebellious reaction to life, which we enjoy in the most magical of all later poets from Villon to Verlaine.

6. DANTE ‘S DIVINE COMEDY. *Best edition the “Temple Classics,” in three small volumes, with the Italian original and English prose translation on opposite pages*.

Dante’s poetry can legitimately be enjoyed in single great passages, of which there are more in the “Inferno” than in the other sections of the poem. His peculiar quality is a certain blending of mordant realism with a high and penetrating beauty. There is no need in reading him to vex oneself with symbolic interpretations. He is at his best, when from behind his scholastic philosophy, bursts forth, in direct personal betrayal, his pride, his humility, his passion, and his disdain.

7. RABELAIS. *The English translation with the Doré illustrations*.

Rabelais is the philosopher's Bible and his book of outrageous jests. He is the recondite cult of wise and magnanimous spirits. He reconciles Nature with Art, Man with God, and religious piety with shameless enjoyment. His style restores to us our courage and our joy; and his noble buffoonery gives us back the sweet wantonness of our youth. Rabelais is the greatest intellect in literature. No one has ever had a humor so large; an imagination so creative, or a spirit so world-swallowing, so humane, so friendly.

8. CANDIDE. *Any French edition or English translation*.

Voltaire was a true man of action, a knight of the Holy Ghost. He plunged fiercely into the human arena, and fought through a laborious life, against obscurantism, stupidity and tyranny. He had a clear-cut, aristocratic mind. He hated mystical balderdash, clumsy barbarity, and stupid hypocrisy. Candide is not only a complete refutation of optimism; it is a book full of that mischievous humor, which has the power, more than anything else, of reconciling us to the business of enduring life.

9. SHAKESPEARE. *In the Temple edition*.

It is time Shakespeare was read for the beauty of his poetry, and enjoyed without pedantry and with some imagination. The less usual and more cynical of his plays, such as Troilus, and Cressida, Measure for Measure and Timon of Athens, will be found to contain some very interesting commentaries upon life.

The Shakespearean attitude of mind is quite a definite and articulate one, and one that can be, by slow degrees, acquired, even by persons who are not cultivated or clever. It is an attitude "compounded of many simples," and, like the melancholy of Jaques, it wraps us about "in a most humorous sadness." But the essential secret of Shakespeare's genius is best apprehended in the felicity of certain isolated passionate speeches, and in the magic of his songs.

10. MILTON. *Any edition.*

No epicurean lover of the subtler delicacies in poetic rhythm or of the more exalted and translunar harmonies in the imaginative suggestiveness of words, can afford to leave Milton untouched. In sheer felicity of beauty — the beauty of suggestive words, each one carrying “a perfume in the mention,” and together, by their arrangement in relation to one another, conveying a thrill of absolute and final satisfaction — no poem in our language surpasses Lycidas, and only the fine great odes of John Keats approach or equal it.

There are passages, too, in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, which, for calm, flowing, and immortal loveliness, are not surpassed in any poetry in the world.

Milton’s work witnesses to the value in art of what is ancient and traditional, but while he willingly uses every tradition of antiquity, he stamps all he writes with his own formidable image and superscription.

11. SIR THOMAS BROWNE. RELIGIO MEDICI AND URN BURIAL.

In the “Scott Library” Series.

The very spirit of ancient Norwich, the mellowest and most historic of all English cities, breathes in these sumptuous and aromatic pages. After Lamb and Pater, both of whom loved him well, Browne is the subtlest adept in the recondite mysteries of rhythmic prose who can be enjoyed in our language. Not to catch the cadences of his peculiar music is to confess oneself deaf to the finer harmonies of words.

12. GOETHE. FAUST, *translated in English Poetry by Bayard Taylor*. WILHELM MEISTER, *in Carlyle's translation*. GOETHE'S CONVERSATIONS WITH ECKERMAN, *translation in Bohn's Library*.

No other human name, except Da Vinci's, carries the high associations of oracular and occult wisdom as far as Goethe's does. He hears the voices of "the Mothers" more clearly than other men and in heathen loneliness he "builds up the pyramid of his existence."

The deep authority of his formidable insight can be best enjoyed, not without little side-lights of a laconic irony, in the "Conversations"; while in Wilhelm Meister we learn to become adepts in the art of living in the Beautiful and True, in Faust that abysmal doubt as to the whole mad business of life is undermined with a craft equal to his own in the delineation and defeat of "the queer son of Chaos."

15. NIETZSCHE. ZARATHUSTRA, THE JOYFUL WISDOM, AND ECCE HOMO *are all translated in the English edition of Foulis and published in America by Macmillan. Lichtenberger's exposition of his doctrines is in the same series. The most artistic life of him is by Daniel Halêvy, translated from the French*.

Nietzsche's writings when they fall into the hands of Philistines are more misunderstood than any others. To appreciate his noble and tragic distinction with the due pinch of Attic salt it is necessary to be possessed of more imagination than most persons are able to summon up. The dramatic grandeur of Nietzsche's extraordinary intellect overtops all the flashes of his psychological insight; and his terrific conclusions remain as mere foot-prints of his progress from height to height.

18. HEINE. HEINE’S PROSE WORKS WITH THE “CONFESSIONS,” *translated in the “Scott Library.” A good short life of Heine in the “Great Writers” Series*.

Heine’s genius remains unique. Full of dreamy attachment to Germany he lived and died in Paris, but his heart was always with the exiles of Israel. Mocker and ribald, he touches depths of sentimental tenderness sounded by none other. He fooled the philosophers, provoked the pious, and confused the minds of his free-thinking friends by outbursts of wilful reaction. He sticks the horns of satyrish “diablerie” on the lovely forehead of the most delicate romance; and he flings into his magical poems of love and the sea the naughty mud-pellets of an outrageous capriciousness.

19. SUDERMANN. SONG OF SONGS. *Translation into English published by Huebsch of New York*.

Sudermann is the most remarkable and characteristic of modern German writers. His massive and laborious realism, his firm and exhaustive exposition of turbulent and troubled hearts, his heavy sledge-hammer style, his comprehension of the shadowy background of the most ponderous sensuality, are all found at their best in this solemn and sordid and pitiable tale.

20. HAUPTMANN. THE FOOL IN CHRIST, *translation published by Huebsch, New York*.

Hauptmann seems, of all recent Teutonic authors, the one who has in the highest degree that tender imaginative sentiment mixed with rugged and humorous piety which one finds in the old German Protestant Mystics and in such works of art as the engravings of Albert Durer and the Wooden

Madonna of Nuremburg. “The Fool in Christ” — outside some of the characters in Dostoievsky — is the nearest modern approach to a literary interpretation of what remains timeless and permanent in the Christ-Idea.

21. IBSEN. *Any edition of Ibsen containing the* WILD DUCK.

Ibsen is still the most formidable of obstinate individualists. Absolute self-reliance is the note he constantly strikes. He is obsessed by the psychology of moral problems; but for him there are no universal ethical laws— “the golden rule is that there is no golden rule” — thus while in the Pillars of Society he advocates candid confession and honest revelation of the truth of things; in the “Wild Duck” he attacks the pig-headed meddler, who comes “dunning us with claims of the Ideal.” Ultimately, though absorbed in “matters of conscience,” it is as an artist rather than as a philosopher that he visualizes the world.

22. STRINDBERG. THE CONFESSIONS OF A FOOL.

Strindberg has obtained, because of his own neurotic and almost feminine clairvoyance, a diabolical insight into the perversities of the feminine character. This merciless insight manifested in all his works reaches its intensest degree in the “Confessions of a Fool,” where the woman implicated surpasses the perversities of the normal as greatly as the lashing energy with which he pursues her to her inmost retreats surpasses the vengeance of any ordinary lover.

23. EMERSON. *Routledge’s complete works of Emerson, or any other edition containing everything in one volume.*

The clear, chaste, remote and distinguished wisdom of Emerson with its shrewd preacher's wit and country-bred humor, will always be of stirring and tonic value to certain kindred minds. Others will prove him of little worth; but it is to be noted that Nietzsche found him a sane and noble influence principally on the ground of his serene detachment from the phenomena of sin and disease and death. He will always remain suggestive and stimulating to those who demand a spiritual interpretation of the Universe but reluct at committing themselves to any particular creed.

24. WALT WHITMAN. *The complete unexpurgated edition of all his poems, with his prose works and Mr. Traubel's books about him as a further elucidation*.

Walt Whitman is the only Optimist and perhaps the only prophet of Democracy one can read without shame. The magical beauty of his style at its best has not even yet received complete justice. He has the power of restoring us to courage and joy even under circumstances of aggravated gloom. He puts us in some indescribable manner "en rapport" with the large, cool, liquid spaces and with the immense and transparent depths.

More than any he is the poet of passionate friendship and the poet of all those exquisite evasive emotions which arise when our loves and our regrets are blended with the presence of Nature.

25. EDGAR LEE MASTERS. SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY, *published by Macmillan*.

After Whitman and Poe, Mr. Masters is by far the most original and interesting of American poets. There is something Chaucerian about the quizzical and whimsical manner in which he tells his brief and homely stories. His characters are penetrated with the bleak and yet cheerful tone of the “Middle West.” Something quaint, humorous and astringent emerges as their dominant note.

Mr. Masters has the massive ironical observation and the shrewd humane wit of the great English novelists of the eighteenth century. His dead people reveal “the true truth” of their sordid and troubled lives. The little chances, the unguessed-at accidents, the undeserved blows of a capricious destiny, which batter so many of us into helpless inertness, are the aspects of life which interest him most.

26. THEODORE DREISER. THE TITAN.

Of all modern novelists Theodore Dreiser most entirely catches the spirit of America. Here is the huge torrential stream of material energies. Here are the men and women, so pushed and driven and parched and bleached, by the enormous forces of industry and commerce, that all distinction in them seems to be reduced to a strange colorlessness; while the primordial animal cravings, greedy, earth-born, fumble after their aims across the sad and littered stage of sombre scenery.

There is something epic — something enormous and amorphous — like the body of an elemental giant — about each of these books. In the “Titan,” especially, the peculiar power of Dreiser’s massive, coulter-like impetus is evident. Here we realize how, between animal passion and material ambition, there is little room left in such a nature as Cooperwood’s for any complicated subtlety. All is simple, direct, hard and healthy — a very epitome and incarnation of the life-force, as it manifests itself in America.

27. CERVANTES. DON QUIXOTE. *In any translation except those vulgarized by eighteenth century taste.*

Cervantes' great, ironical, romantic story is written in a style so noble, so nervous, so humane, so branded with reality, that, as the wise critic has said, the mere touch and impact of it puts courage into our veins. It is not necessary to read every word of this old book. There are tedious passages. But not to have ever opened it; not to have caught the tone, the temper, the terrible courage, the infinite sadness of it, is to have missed being present at one of the "great gestures" of the undying, unconquerable spirit of humanity.

28. VICTOR HUGO. THE TOILERS OF THE SEA. *In any translation*.

Victor Hugo is the greatest of all incorrigible romanticists. Something between a prophet, a charlatan, a rhetorician, and a spoiled child, he believes in God, in democracy, in innocence, in justice, and he has a noble and unqualified devotion to human heroism and the depths of the dangerous sea. He has that arbitrary, maniacal inventive imagination which is very rare except in children — and in spite of his theatrical gestures he has the power of conjuring up scenes of incredible beauty and terror.

29. BALZAC. LOST ILLUSIONS. COUSIN BETTE. PÉRE GORIOT. HUMAN COMEDY, *in any translation. Saintsbury's is as good as any*.

Balzac's books create a complete world, which has many points of contact with reality; but, in a deep essential sense, is the projection of the novelist's own passionate imagination. A thundering tide of subterranean energy, furious and titanic, sweeps, with its weight of ponderous details, through every page of these dramatic volumes. Every character has its obsession, its secret vice, its spiritual drug. Even when, as in the case of Vautrin, he lets his demonic fancy carry him very far, there is a grandeur, an amplitude, a smouldering flame of passion, which redeem a thousand preposterous extravagances.

His dramatic psychology is often drowned in the tide of his creative energy; but though his world is not always the world of our experience, it is always a world in which we are magnetized to feel at home. It is consistent with its own amazing laws; the laws of the incredible Balzacian genius. Profoundly moral in its basic tendency, the "Human Comedy" seems to point, in its philosophical undercurrent, at the permanent need in our wayward and childish emotionalism, for wise and master-guides, both in the sphere of religion and in the sphere of politics.

32. GUY DE MAUPASSANT. LE MAISON TELLIER. MADAME TELLIER'S ESTABLISHMENT. *Any translation, preferably not one bound in paper or in an "Edition de Luxe."*

Guy de Maupassant's short stories remain, with those of Henry James and Joseph Conrad, the very best of their kind. After "Madame Tellier's Establishment" perhaps the stories called respectively "A Farm Girl" and "Love" are the best he wrote.

He has the eternal excellencies of savage humanity, savage sincerity, and savage brevity. His pessimism is deep, absolute, unshaken; — and the world, as we know it, deserves what he gives it of sensualized literary reactions, each one like the falling thud of the blade of a murderous axe.

His racking, scooping, combing insight, into the recesses of man's natural appetites will never be surpassed. How under the glance of his Norman anger, all manner of pretty subterfuges fade away; and "the real thing" stands out, as Nature and the Earth know it— "stark, bleak, terrible and lovely.” His subjects may not wander very far from the basic situations. He does not deal in spiritual subtleties. But when he hits, he hits the mark.

33. STENDHAL (HENRI BEYLE). LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR. *Either the original French or any translation, if possible with a preface; for the life of Stendhal is of extraordinary interest.*

Stendhal is one of those who, following Goethe and anticipating Nietzsche, has not hesitated to propound the psychological justifications for a life based upon pagan rather than Christian ethics. A shrewd and sly observer, with his own peculiar brand of the egoistic cult, Stendhal lived a life of desperately absorbing emotions, most of them intellectual and erotic. He made an æsthetic use of the Will to Power before even Nietzsche used that singular expression. In “Le Rouge et le Noir” the eternal sex-struggle with its fierce accompaniment of “Odi et Amo” is concentrated in the clash of opposing forms of pride; the pride of intellect against the pride of sex-vanity.

No writer has ever lived with more contempt for mere sedentary theories or a fiercer mania for the jagged and multifarious edges of life’s pluralistic eccentricity. For any reader teased and worried by idealistic perversion this obstinate materialistic sage will have untold value. And yet he knows, none better, the place of sentiment in life!

34. ANATOLE FRANCE. L’ORME DE MAIL. L’ABBE JEROME COIGNARD. LE LIVRE DE MON AMI. *Either in French or the authorized English translation.*

Anatole France, now translated into English, is the most classical, the most ironical, the most refined, of all modern European writers. He is also, of all others, the most antipathetic to the Anglo-Saxon type of mind. In a word he is a humanist of the great tradition — a civilized artist — a great and wise man. He is Rabelaisian and Voltairian, at the same time. His style has something of the urbanity, the unction, the fine malice, of Renan; but it has also a quality peculiar to its creator — a sort of transparent objectivity, lucid as rarified air, and contemptuously cold as a fragment of antique marble. Monsieur Bergeret, who appears in all four of the masterpieces devoted to Contemporary France, is a creation worthy, as some one has said, of the author of Tristram Shandy. One cannot forget that Anatole France spent his childhood among the bookshops on the South side of the Seine. We are conscious all the while in reading him of the wise, tender, pitiful detachment of a true scholar of the classics, contemplating the mad pell-mell of human life from a certain epicurean remoteness, and loving and mocking the sons and daughters of men, as if they were little children or comical small animals.

37. REMY DE GOURMONT. UNE NUIT AU LUXEMBOURG.

Translated with a preface by Arthur Ransome, published by Luce, Boston.

Remy de Gourmont’s death must be regretted by all lovers of the rare in art and the remote in character. As a poet his “Litany of the Rose” has that strange, ambiguous, sinister, and lovely appeal, the full appreciation of which is an initiation into all the “enclosed gardens” of the world.

He is a great critic — perhaps the greatest since Walter Pater — and as a philosopher his constant and frank advocacy of a noble and shameless Hedonism has helped to clear the air in the track of Nietzsche’s thunderbolts.

His audacity in placing an exposition of the very principles of Epicurean Hedonism, touched with Spinozistic equanimity, into the mouth of our Lord, wandering through the Luxembourg Gardens, may perhaps startle certain gentle souls, but the Dorian delicacy of what might for a moment appear blasphemous robs this charming Idyll of any gross or merely popular profanity. It is a book for those who have passed through more than one intellectual Renaissance. Like the “Golden Ass” of Apuleius it has a philosophical justification for its mythological audacity.

38. PAUL BOURGET. LE DISCIPLE.

“Le Disciple” is perhaps the best work of this voluminous and interesting writer. Devoid of irony, deficient in humor, lacking any large imaginative power, Paul Bourget holds, all the same, an unassailable place among French writers. Though a devoted adherent of Goethe and Stendhal, Bourget represents, along with Bordeaux, the conservative ethical reaction. He upholds Catholicism and the sacredness of the “home.” He is a master in plot and has a clear, vigorous and appealing style. A gravely portentous sentiment sometimes spoils his tragic effects; but every lover of Paris will enjoy the unctuous elaboration of the “backgrounds” of his stories, touched often with the most delicate and mellow evocations of that City’s atmosphere.

39. ROMAIN ROLLAND. JEAN CHRISTOPHE. *Translated by Gilbert Cannan.*

Rolland’s “Christophe” is without doubt the most remarkable book that has appeared in Europe since Nietzsche’s “Ecce Homo.”

It is a profoundly suggestive treatise upon the relations between art and life. It contains a deep and heroic philosophy — the philosophy of the worship of the mysterious life-force as God; and of the reaching out beyond the turmoil of good and evil towards some vast and dimly articulated reconciliation. Since “Wilhelm Meister” no book has been written more valuable as an intellectual ladder to the higher levels of æsthetic thought and feeling.

Massive and dramatic, powerful and suggestive, it magnetizes us into an acceptance of its daring and optimistic hopes for the world; of its noble suggestions of a spiritual synthesis of the opposing race-traditions of Europe. Of all the books mentioned in this list it is the one which the compiler would most strongly recommend to the notice of those anxious to win a firmer intellectual standing-ground.

40. GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO. THE FLAME OF LIFE. THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH. *Translated by Arthur Hornblow*.

D'Annunzio is the most truly Italian, the most inveterately Latin, of all recent writers. Without light and shade, without "nuance," without humor or irony, he compels our attention by the clear-cut, monumental images he projects, by the purple and scarlet splendor of his imperial dreams.

His philosophy, though lacking in the deep and tragic imagination of Nietzsche, has something of the Nietzschean intellectual fury. He teaches a shameless and antinomian hedonism, narrower, less humane, but more fervid and emotional, than that taught by Remy de Gourmont.

In "The Triumph of Death" we find a fierce smoldering voluptuousness, expressed with a hard and brutal realism which recalls the frescoes on the walls of ancient Pompeii. In "The Flame of Life" we have in superb rhetoric the most colored and ardent description of Venice to be found in all literature. Perhaps the finest passage he ever wrote is that account of the speech of the Master of Life in the Doge's Palace with its incomparable eulogy upon Veronese and its allusion to Pisanello's head of Sigismondo Malatesta.

42. DOSTOIEVSKY. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT. THE IDIOT. THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV. THE INSULTED AND INJURED. THE POSSESSED. *Translated by Constance Garnett and published by Macmillan. Other translations in Everyman's Library.*

Dostoievsky is the greatest and most racial of all Russian writers. He is the subtlest psychologist in fiction. As an artist he has a dark and sombre intensity and an imaginative vehemence only surpassed by Shakespeare. As a philosopher he anticipates Nietzsche in the direction of his insight, though in his conclusions he is diametrically opposite. He teaches that out of weakness, abnormality, perversity, foolishness, desperation, abandonment, and a morbid pleasure in humiliation, it is possible to arrive at high and unutterable levels of spiritual ecstasy. His ideal is sanctity — not morality — and his revelations of the impassioned and insane motives of human nature — its instinct towards self-destruction for instance — will never be surpassed for their terrible and convincing truth.

The strange Slavophil dream of the regeneration of the world by the power of the Russian soul and the magic of the "White Christ who comes out of Russia" could not be more arrestingly expressed than in these passionate and extraordinary works of art.

47. TURGENIEV. VIRGIN SOIL. A SPORTSMAN'S SKETCHES. *Translated by Constance Garnett. And "Lisa" in Everyman's Library.*

Turgeniev is by far the most "artistic" as he is the most disillusioned and ironical of Russian writers. With a tender poetical delicacy, almost worthy of Shakespeare, he sketches his appealing portraits of young girls. His style is clear — objective — winnowed and fastidious. He has certain charming old-fashioned weaknesses — as for instance his trick of over-emphasizing the differences between his bad and good characters; but there is a clear-cut distinction, and a lucid charm about his work that reminds one of certain old crayon drawings or certain delicate water-color sketches. His allusions to natural scenery are always introduced with peculiar appropriateness and are never permitted to dominate the dramatic element of the story as happens so often in other writers.

There is a sad and tender vein of unobtrusive moralizing running through his work but one is conscious that at bottom he is profoundly pessimistic and disenchanted. The gaiety of Turgeniev is winning and unforced; his sentiment natural and never “staled or rung upon.” The pensive detachment of a sensitive and yet not altogether unworldly spirit seems to be the final impression evoked by his books.

50. GORKI — FOMA GORDYEFF. *Translation published by Scribners.*

Maxim Gorki is one of the most interesting of Russian writers. His books have that flavour of the soil and that courageous spirit of vagabondage and social independence which is so rare and valuable a quality in literature.

“Foma Gordyeff” is, after Dostoievsky’s masterpieces, the most suggestive and arresting of Russian stories. That paralysis of the will which descends like an evil cloud upon Foma and at the same time seems to cause the ground to open under his feet and precipitate him into mysterious depths of nothingness, is at once tragically significant of certain aspects of the Russian soul and full of mysterious warnings to all those modern spirits in whom the power of action is “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.”

For those who have been “fooled to the top of their bent” by the stupidities and brutalities of the crowd there is a savage satisfaction in reading of Foma’s insane outbursts of misanthropy.

51. TCHEKOFF — SEAGULL. *Tchekoff's plays and short stories are published by Scribners in admirable translations.*

Tchekoff is one of the gentlest and sweetest tempered of Russian writers. There is in him a genuine graciousness, a politeness of soul, an innate delicacy, which is not touched — as such qualities often are in the work of Turgeniev — with any kind of self-conscious Olympianism. A doctor, a consumptive, and a passionate lover of children, there is a whimsical humanity about all that Tchekoff writes which has a singular and quite special appeal.

The "Seagull" is a play full of delicate subtleties and dreamy glimpses of shy humane wisdom. The manner in which outward things — the mere background and scenery of the play — are used to deepen and enhance the dramatic interest is a thing peculiarly characteristic of this author. Tchekoff has that kind of imaginative sensibility which makes every material object one encounters significant with spiritual intimations.

The mere business of plot — whether in his plays or stories — is not the important matter. The important matter is a certain sudden and pathetic illumination thrown upon the essential truth by some casual grouping of persons or of things — some emphatic or symbolic gesture — some significant movement among the silent "listeners."

52. ARTZIBASHEFF. SANINE, *translation published by Huebsch.*

Artzibasheff is an extremist. The suicidal "motif" in the "Breaking-point" is worked out with an appalling and devastating thoroughness.

Pessimism, in a superficial sense, could hardly go further; though compared with Dostoievsky's insight into the "infinite" in character, one is conscious of a certain closing of doors and narrowing of issues. "Sanine" himself is a sort of idealization of the sublimated common sense which seems to be this writer's selected virtue. Artzibasheff appears to advocate, as the wisest and sanest way of dealing with life, a certain robust and contemptuous self-assertion, kindly, genial, without baseness or malice; but free from any scruple and quite untroubled by remorse.

If regarded seriously — as he appears to be intended to be — as an approximate human ideal, one cannot help feeling that in spite of his humorous anarchism and subjective zest for life, Sanine has in him something sententious and tiresome. He is, so to speak, an immoral prig; nor do his vivacious spirits compensate us for the lack of delicacy and irony in him. On the other hand there is something direct, downright and "honest" about his clear-thinking, and his shameless eroticism which wins our liking and affection, if not our admiration. Artzibasheff is indeed one of the few writers who dare excite our sympathy not only for the seduced in this world but for the seducer.

53. STERNE — TRISTRAM SHANDY.

Sterne is a writer who less than any one else in the present list reveals the secrets of his manner and mind to the casual and hasty reader. "Tristram Shandy" and "The Sentimental Journey" are books to be enjoyed slowly and lingeringly, with many humorous after-thoughts and a certain Rabelaisian unction. A shrewd and ironical wisdom, gentle and light-fingered and redolent of evasive sentiment, is evoked from these digressive and wanton pages.

At his best Sterne is capable of an imaginative interpretation of character which for delicacy and subtlety has never been surpassed. For the Epicurean in literature, his unfailing charm will be found in his style — a style so baffling in the furtive beauty of its disarming simplicity that even the greatest of literary critics have been unable to analyze its peculiar flavour. There is a winnowed purity about it, and a kind of elfish grace; and with both these things there mixes, strangely enough, a certain homely, almost Dutch domesticity, quaint and mellow and a little wanton — like a picture by Jan Steen.

54. JONATHAN SWIFT. TALE OF A TUB.

Swift’s mysterious and saturnine character, his outbursts of terrible rage; his exquisite moments of tenderness; his sledge-hammer blows; his diabolical irony; form a dramatic and tragic spectacle which no psychologist can afford to miss.

With the “saeva indignatio” alluded to in his own epitaph, he puts his back, as it were, to the “flamantia moenia mundi” and hits out, insanely and blindly, at the human crowd he loathes. His secretive and desperate passion for Stella, his little girl pupil; his barbarous treatment of Vanessa — his savage championship of the Irish people against the Government — make up the dominant “notes” of a character so formidable that the terror of his personality strikes us with the force of an engine of destruction.

His misanthropy is like the misanthropy of Shakespeare’s Timon — his crushing sarcasms strike blow after blow at the poor flesh and blood he despises. The hatefulness of average humanity drives him to distraction and in his madness, like a wounded Titan, he spares nothing. To the whole human race he seems to utter the terrible words he puts into the mouth of God:

“I to such blockheads set my wit,
And damn you all — Go, go, you’re bit!”

55. CHARLES LAMB. THE ESSAYS OF ELIA.

Charles Lamb remains, of all English prose-writers, the one whose manner is the most beautiful. So rich, so delicate, so imaginative, so full of surprises, is the style of this seductive writer, that, for sheer magic and inspiration, his equals can only be found among the very greatest poets.

It is impossible to over-estimate the value of Charles Lamb's philosophy. He indicates in his delicate evasive way — not directly, but as it were, in little fragments and morsels and broken snatches — a deep and subtle reconciliation between the wisdom of Epicurus and the wisdom of Christ. And through and beyond all this, there may be felt, as with the great poets, an indescribable sense of something withdrawn, withheld, reserved, inscrutable — a sense of a secret, rather to be intimated to the initiated, than revealed to the vulgar — a sense of a clue to a sort of Pantagruelian serenity; a serenity produced by no crude optimism but by some happy inward knowledge of a neglected hope. The great Rabelaisian motto, "bon espoir y gist au fond!" seems to emanate from the most wistful and poignant of his pages. He pities the unpitied, he redeems the commonplace, he makes the ordinary as if it were not ordinary, and by the sheer genius of his imagination he throws an indescribable glamour over the "little things" of the darkest of our days.

Moving among old books, old houses, old streets, old acquaintances, old wines, old pictures, old memories, he is yet possessed of so original and personal a touch that his own wit seems as though it were the very soul and body of the qualities he so caressingly interprets.

56. SIR WALTER SCOTT. GUY MANNERING. BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR. HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN.

The large, easy, leisurely manner of Scott's writing, its digressiveness, its nonchalant carelessness, its indifference to artistic quality, has in some sort of way numbed and atrophied the interest in his work of those who have been caught up and waylaid by the modern spirit. And yet Scott's novels have ample and admirable excellencies. In his expansive and digressive fashion he can give his characters — especially the older and the more idiosyncratic among them — a surprising and convincing verisimilitude.

He can create a plot which, though not dramatically flawless, has movement and energy and stir. The sweetness and modesty of his disposition lends itself to his portrayal of the more gracious aspects of human life, especially as seen in the humours and oddities of very simple and naïve persons.

Under the stress of occasional emotion he can rise to quite noble heights of feeling and he is able to throw a startling glamour of romance over certain familiar and recurrent human situations. At his best there is a grandeur and simplicity of utterance about what his characters say and an ease and largeness of sympathy about his own commentaries upon them, which must win admiration even from those most avid of modern pathology. Without the passion of Balzac, or the insight of Dostoievsky, or the art of Turgeniev, there is yet, in the sweetness of Scott's own personality, and in the biblical grandeur of certain of the scenes he evokes, a quality and a charm which it would be at once foolish and arbitrary to neglect.

59. THACKERAY. THE HISTORY OF HENRY ESMOND.

Thackeray is a writer who occupies a curious and very interesting position. Devoid of the noble and romantic sympathies of Scott, and corrupted to the basic fibres of his being by Early Victorian snobbishness, he is yet — none can deny it — a powerful creator of living people and an accomplished and graceful stylist.

Without philosophy, without faith, without moral courage, the uneasy slave of conventional morality, and with a hopeless vein of sheer worldly philistinism in his book, Thackeray is yet able, by a certain unconquerable insight into the motives and impulses of mediocre people, and by a certain weight and mass of creative force, to give a convincing reality to his pictures of life, which is almost devastating in its sneering and sentimental accuracy.

The most winning and attractive thing about him is his devotion to the eighteenth century; a century whose manners he is able to depict in his large and gracious way without being disturbed by the pressure of that contemporary vulgarity which finds a too lively response in something bourgeois and snobbish in his own nature.

Dealing with the eighteenth century he escapes not only from his age but from himself.

60. CHARLES DICKENS. GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

The compiler has placed in this list only one of Dickens' books for a somewhat different reason from that which has influenced him in other cases. All Dickens' novels have a unique value, and such an equal value, that almost any one of them, chosen at random, can serve as an example of the rest.

Those who still are not prohibited, by temperamental difficulty or by some modern fashion, from enjoying the peculiar atmosphere of this astonishing person's work, will be found reverting to him constantly and indiscriminately. "Great Expectations" is perhaps, as a more "artistic" book than the rest, the most fitted of them all to entice towards a more sympathetic understanding of his mood, those who are held from reading him by some more or less accidental reason. The most characteristic thing about this great genius is the power he possesses of breathing palpable life into what is often called the inanimate. Like Hans Andersen, the writer of fairy-stories, and, in a measure, like all children, Dickens endows with fantastic spirituality the most apparently dead things in our ordinary environment.

His imagination plays superb tricks with such objects and things, touching the most dilapidated of them with a magic such as the genius of a great poet uses, when dealing with nature — only the "nature" of Dickens is made of less lovely matters than leaves and flowers.

The wild exaggerations of Dickens — his reckless contempt for realistic possibility — need not hinder us from enjoying, apart from his revelling humor and his too facile sentiment, those inspired outbursts of inevitable truth, wherein the inmost identity of his queer people stands revealed to us. His world may be a world of goblins and fairies, but there cross it sometimes figures of an arresting appeal and human voices of divine imagination.

61. JANE AUSTEN. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.

Jane Austen's delicate and ironic art will remain unassailable through all changes of taste and varieties of opinion. What she really possesses — what might be called the clue to her inimitable secret — is nothing less than the power of giving expression to that undying ironic detachment, touched with a fine malice but full of tender understanding, which all women, to some degree or other, share, and which all men, to some degree or other, suffer from; in other words, the terrible and beautiful insight of the maternal instinct. The clear charm of her unequalled style — a style quite classical in its economy of material and its dignified reserve — is a charm frequently caught in the wit and fine malice of one's unmarried aunts; but it is, none the less, the very epitome of maternal humor. As a creative realist, giving to her characters the very body and pressure of actual life, no writer, living or dead, has surpassed her. Without romance, without philosophy, without social theories, without pathological curiosity, without the remotest interest in “Nature,” she has yet managed to achieve a triumphant artistic success; and to leave an impression of serene wisdom such as no other woman writer has equaled or approached.

62. EMILY BRONTË. WÜTHERING HEIGHTS.

Of all the books of all the Brontës, this one is the supreme masterpiece. Charlotte has genius and imagination. She has passion too. But there is a certain demonic violence about Emily which carries her work into a region of high and desperate beauty forbidden to the gentler spirit of her sister. The love of Heathcliff and Catherine breaks the bonds of ordinary sensual or sentimental relationship and hurls itself into that darker, stranger, more unearthly air, wherein one hears the voices of the great lovers; and where Sappho and Michaelangelo and Swift and Shelley and Nietzsche gasp forth their imprecations and their terrible ecstasies. Crude and rough and jagged and pitiless, the style of this astounding book seems to rend and tear, like a broken saw, at the very roots of existence. In some curious way, as in Balzac and Dostoievsky, emotions and situations which have the tone and mood of quite gross melodrama are so driven inwards by sheer diabolical intensity, that they touch the granite substratum of what is eternal in human passion. The smell of rain-drenched moors, the crying of the wind in the Scotch firs, the long lines of black rooks drifting across the twilight, — these things become, in the savage style of this extraordinary girl, the very symbols and tokens of the power that rends her spirit.

63. GEORGE MEREDITH. HARRY RICHMOND.

“Harry Richmond” is at once the least Meredithian and the best of all Meredith’s books. Meredith, though to a much less degree than George Eliot, is one of those pseudo-philosophic, pseudo-ethical writers, who influence a generation or two and then stem to become antiquated and faded.

It is when he is least philosophical and least moralistic — as in the superbly imaginative figure of Richmond Roy — that he is at his greatest. There is, throughout his work, an unpleasing strain, like the vibration of a rope drawn out too tight, — a strain and a tug of intellectual intensity, that is not fulfilled by any corresponding intellectual wisdom. His descriptions of nature, in his poems, as well as in his prose works, have an original vigor and a pungent tang of their own; but the twisted violence of their introduction, full of queer jolts and jerks, prevents their impressing one with any sense of calm or finality. They are too aphoristic, these passages. They are too clever. They smell too much of the lamp. The same fault may be remarked in the rounding off of the Meredithian plots where one is so seldom conscious of the presence of the “inevitable” and so teased by the “obstinate questionings” of purely mental problems.

Reading Henry James one feels like a wisp of straw floating down a wide smooth river; reading Meredith one is flicked and flapped and beaten, as if beneath a hand with a flail.

64. HENRY JAMES. THE AMBASSADORS. THE TRAGIC MUSE. THE SOFT SIDE. THE BETTER SORT. THE WINGS OF THE DOVE. THE GOLDEN BOWL.

Henry James is the most purely "artistic" as he is the most profoundly "intellectual" of all the European writers of our age. His fame will steadily grow, and his extraordinary genius will more and more create that finer taste by which alone he can be appreciated.

No novelist who has ever lived has "taken art" so seriously. But it is art, and not life, he takes seriously; and, therefore, along with his methods of elaborate patience, one is conscious of a most delicate and whimsical playfulness — sparing literally nothing. In spite of his beautiful cosmopolitanism it must never be forgotten that at bottom Henry James is richly and wonderfully American. That tender and gracious "penchant" of his for pure-souled and modest-minded young men, for their high resolves, their noble renunciations, their touching faith, is an indication of how much he has exploited — in the completest aesthetic sense — the naive puritanism of his great nation.

In regard to his style one may remark three main divergent epochs; the first closing with the opening of the "nineties," and the third beginning about the year 1903. Of these the second seems to the present compiler the best; being, indeed, more intellectualized and subtle than the first and less mannered and obscure than the final one. The finest works he produced would thus be found to be those on one side or the other of the year 1900.

The subtlety of Henry James is a subtlety which is caused not by philosophical but by psychological distinctions and it is a subtlety which enlarges our sympathy for the average human nature of middle class people to a degree that must, in the very deepest sense of the word, be called moral.

The wisdom to be derived from him is all of a piece with the pleasure — both being the result of a fuller, richer, and more discriminating consciousness of the tragic complexity of quite little and unimportant characters. To a real lover of Henry James the greyest and least promising aspects of ordinary life seem to hold up to us infinite possibilities of delicate excitement. It is indeed out of excitement — partly intellectual and partly aesthetic, — that his great effects are produced. And yet the final effect is always one of resignation and calm — as with all the supreme masters.

70. THOMAS HARDY. TESS OF THE D’URBEVILLES. THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE. THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE. FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD. WESSEX POEMS.

Thomas Hardy remains the greatest poet and novelist of the England of our age. His poetry, Wessex Poems, Poems of Past and Present, Time’s Laughing-Stock, Satires of Circumstance, make up the most powerful and original contribution to modern verse, produced recently, either in England or America. Not to value Hardy’s poetry as highly as all but his very greatest prose is to betray oneself as having missed the full pregnancy of his bitter and lovely wisdom.

He has, like Henry James, three “manners” or styles — the first containing such lighter, friendlier work, as “Life’s Little Ironies,” “Under a Greenwood Tree,” and “The Trumpet Major” — the second being the period of the great tragedies which assume the place, in his work, of “Hamlet,” “Lear,” “Macbeth” and “Othello,” in the work of Shakespeare — the third, of curious and imaginative interest, expresses in quite a particular way, Mr. Hardy’s own peculiar point of view. The Well-Beloved, Jude the Obscure, and the later poems would belong to this epoch.

At his best Hardy is a novelist second to none. His style has a grandeur, a distinction, a concentration, which we find neither in Balzac nor Dostoievsky. Not to appreciate the power and beauty of his manner, when his real inspiration holds him, is to confess that the genuinely classical in style and the genuinely pagan in feeling has no meaning for you. No English writer, whether in prose or poetry, has ever caught so completely the magic of the earth and the quaint humors, tragical and laughable, of those who live inured to her moods; who live with her moroseness, her whimsicality, her vindictiveness, her austerity, her evasive grace.

Mr. Hardy's clairvoyant feeling for Nature is, however, only the background of his work. He is no idyllic posture-monger. The march of events as they drive forward the primitive earth-born men and women of Wessex, thrills one with the same weight of accumulated fatality, as — the comparison is tedious and pedantic — the fortunes of the ill-starred houses of Argos and Thebes. One peculiarity of Mr. Hardy's method must finally be mentioned, as giving their most characteristic quality to these formidable scenes — I mean his preference for form over color. Who can forget those desolately emphatic human protagonists silhouetted so austerely along the tops of hills and against the perspectives of long white roads?

75. JOSEPH CONRAD. CHANCE. LORD JIM. VICTORY. YOUTH. ALMAYER'S FOLLY. *Published by Doubleday Page & Co. with a critical monograph, so admirably written (it is given gratis) by Wilson Follet that one longs to see more criticism from such an accomplished hand.*

Conrad's work — and, considering his foreign origin and his late choice of English as a medium of expression, it is no less than an astounding achievement — is work of the very highest literary and psychological value. It is, indeed, as Mr. Follet says, only such criticism as is passionately anxious to prove for itself the true "romance of the intellect" that can hope to deal adequately with such an output. The background of Conrad's books is primarily the sea itself; and after the sea, ships. No one has indicated the extraordinary romance of ships in the way he has done — of ships in the open sea, in the harbour, at the wharf, or driven far up some perilous tropical river.

But it is neither the sea nor the tropical recesses nor the sun-scorched river-edges of his backgrounds that make up the essence of romance in the Conrad books. This is found in nothing less than the mysterious potencies for courage and for fear, for good and for evil, of human beings themselves — of human beings isolated by some external “diablerie” which throws every feature of them into terrible and baffling relief.

The finest and deepest effects of Conrad’s art are always found when, in the process of the story, some solitary man and woman encounter each other, far from civilization, and tearing off, as it were, the mask of one another’s souls, are confronted by a deeper and more inveterate mystery — the eternal mystery of difference, which separates all men born into the world and keeps us perpetually alone. In the case of Heyst and Lena — of Flora de Barral and her Captain Anthony — of Charles and Mrs. Gould — of Aissa and Willems — of Almayer’s daughter and her Malay lover, Mr. Conrad takes up the ancient planetary theme of the loves of men and women and throws upon it a sudden, original, and singularly stimulating light; a light, that like a lantern carried down into the very Cave of the “Mothers,” throws its flickering and ambiguous rays over the large, dumb, formless shapes — the primordial motives of human hearts — which grope and fumble in that thick darkness.

The style of Conrad, simpler than that of James, less monumental than that of Hardy, has nevertheless a certain forward-driving impetus hardly less effective than these more famous mediums of expression. “Lord Jim” is perhaps his masterpiece and may be regarded as the most interesting book written recently in our language with the exception of Henry James’ “Golden Bowl.” For sheer excitement and the thrilling sensation of delayed dénouement it must be conceded that not one of our classical novelists can touch Conrad. “Victory” remains an absorbing evidence of his power of concentrating at one and the same moment our dramatic and our psychological interest.

80. WALTER PATER. MARIUS THE EPICUREAN. STUDIES IN THE RENAISSANCE. IMAGINARY PORTRAITS. PLATO AND PLATONISM. GASTON DE LATOUR.

Walter Pater’s writings are more capable than any in our list of offering, if approached at the suitable hour and moment, new vistas and possibilities both intellectual and emotional. That wise and massive egoism taught by Goethe, that impassioned “living to oneself” indicated by Stendhal, find in Walter Pater a new qualification and a new sanction.

Himself a supreme master of the rare and exquisite in style, he becomes, for those who really understand him, something more penetrating and insidious than a mere personality. He becomes an atmosphere, an attitude, a tone, a temper — and one too which may serve us to most rich and recondite purpose, as we wander through the world seeking the excitement and consecration of impassioned cults and organized discriminations.

For this austere and elaborately constructed style of his is nothing less than the palpable expression of his own discriminating days; the wayfaring, so self-consciously and scrupulously guarded, of his own fastidious “hedonism,” seeking its elaborate satisfactions among the chance-offered occasions of hour, or person or of place.

Walter Pater remains, for those who are permitted to feel these things, the one who above all others has the subtlest and most stimulating method of approach with regard to all the great arts, and most especially with regard to the art of literature.

No one, after reading him, can remain gross, academic, vulgar, or indiscriminate. And, with the rest, we seem to be aware of a secret attitude not only towards art but towards life also, to miss the key to which would be to fail in that architecture of the soul and senses which is the object of the discipline not merely of the æsthetic but of the religious cult.

For the supreme initiation into which we are led by these elaborate and patient essays, is the initiation into the world of inner austerity, which makes its clear-cut and passionate distinctions in our emotional as well as in our intellectual life.

Everything, without exception, as we read Pater becomes “a matter of taste”; but the high and exclusive nature of this taste, to which no sensations but those which are vulgar and common are forbidden, is itself a guarantee of the gentleness and delicacy of the passions evoked. His ultimate philosophy seems to be that — as he himself has described it in “Marius,” — of Aristippus of Cyrene; but this “undermining of metaphysic by means of metaphysic” lands him in no mere arid agnosticism or weary emptiness of suspended judgment; but in a rich and imaginative region of infinite possibilities, from the shores of which he is able to launch forth at will; or to gather up at his pleasure the delicate shells strewn upon the sand.

85. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW. MAN AND SUPERMAN.

Mr. Shaw has found his role and his occupation very happily cut out for him in the unfailing stupidity, not untouched by a sense of humor, of our Anglo-Saxon democracy in England and America. In Germany, too, there seems naïveté and simplicity enough to be still entertained by these mischievously whimsical and yet portentously moral comedies. It appears however that the civilization for which Rabelais and Voltaire wrote, is less willing to acclaim as an extraordinary genius one who has the wit to pierce with a bodkin the idolatries and illusions of such pathetically simple people.

Bernard Shaw takes the Universe very seriously. By calling it the Life-Force he permits himself to address it in that heroic vein reserved, among more ordinary intelligencies, for anthropomorphic deities. Bernard Shaw's sense of the comic draws its spirit from the contrast between clever people and stupid people, and seems to appear at its best when engaged in upsetting the pseudo-historical, pseudo-philosophical illusions of Anglo-Saxons, in charmingly ridiculous pantomimes, which the redeeming humor of that patient race has just intelligence enough thoroughly to enjoy.

If he were himself less moralistically earnest the spice of the jest would disappear. His humor is not universal humor. It is topical humor; and topical humor derives its point from moral contrast, — the contrast in this case between the virtue of Mr. Shaw and the vices of modern society.

"Man and Superman" is undoubtedly his most interesting work from a philosophical point of view, but his later plays — such bewitching farces as "Fanny's First Play," "Androcles," and "Pygmalion" — seem to express more completely than anything else that rollicking combative roguishness which is his most characteristic quality.

86. GILBERT K. CHESTERTON. ORTHODOXY.

Mr. Chesterton may congratulate himself upon being the only man of letters in England who has had the originality or the insight or the temperamental courage to adopt a definitely reactionary philosophy; whereas in France we have Huysmans, Barrés, Bourget, Bordeaux, and many others, whose persuasive and romantic rôle it is to prop up tottering altars; in England we have only Mr. Chesterton.

That is doubtless why it is necessary for him to exaggerate his paradoxes so extravagantly; and also why he is so important and so dear to the hearts of intelligent clergymen.

Mr. Chesterton's grand philosophical "coup" is a simple and effective one — the turning of everything, complacently and hilariously, upside down. One has the salutary amusement in reading him of visualizing the Universe in the posture of a Gargantuan baby, "prepared" for a sound smacking. Mr. Chesterton himself is the chief actor in this performance and wonderful pyrotechnic stars leap into space as its happy result.

Mr. Chesterton has his own peculiar "religion" — a sort of Chelsea Embankment Catholicism, in which, in place of Pontifical Encyclicals, we have Punch and Judy jokes, and in place of Apostolic Doctrine we have umbrellas, lamp-posts, electric-signs and prestidigitating clerics.

Mr. Chesterton is never more entertaining, never more entirely at ease, than when turning one or other of the really noble and tragic figures of human intellect into preposterous "Aunt Sallies" at whose battered heads he can fling the turnips and potatoes of the Average Man's average suspicion, dipped for that purpose in a fiery sort of brandy of his own whimsical wit. If we don't become "like little children"; in other words like jovial, middle-aged swashbucklers, and protest our belief in Flying Pigs, Pusses in Boots, Jacks on the top of Beanstalks, Old Women who live in Shoes, Fairies, Fandangos, Prester Johns, and Blue Devils, there is no hope for us and we are condemned to a dreadful purgatory of pedantic and atheistic dullness, along with Li Hung Chang, George Eliot, Herbert Spencer and other heretics whose view of the Dogma of the Immortality of the Soul differs from that of Mr. Chesterton.

87. OSCAR WILDE. INTENTIONS. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST. DE PROFUNDIS.

“Intentions” is perhaps the most original of all Wilde’s remarkable works.

His supreme art, as he himself well knew, was, after all, the art of conversation. One might even put it that his greatest achievement in life was just the achievement of being brazenly and shamelessly what he naturally was — especially in conversation. To call him a “poseur” with the implication that he pretended or assumed a manner, were just as absurd as to call a tiger striped with the implication that the beast deliberately “put on” that mark of distinction.

If it is a pose to enjoy the sensation of one’s own spontaneous gestures, Wilde was indeed the worst of pretenders. But the stupid gravity of many generals, judges and archbishops is not more natural to them than his exquisite insolence was to him.

Below the wit and provocative persiflage of “Intentions” there is a deep and true conception of the nature of art — a conception which might well serve as the “philosophy” of much of the most interesting and arresting of modern work.

Wilde’s extraordinary charm largely depends upon something invincibly boyish and youthful in him. His personality, as he himself says, has become almost symbolic — symbolic, that is, of a certain shameless and beautiful defiance of the world, expressed in an unconquerable insolence worthy of the very spirit of hard, brave, flagrant youth.

“The Importance of Being Earnest” is perhaps the gayest, least responsible, and most adorably witty of all English comedies; just as “Salome” is the most richly colored and smoulderingly sensual of all modern tragedies. One actually touches with one’s fingers the feasting-cups of the Tetrarch; and the passion of the daughter of Herodias hangs round one like an exotic perfume.

In “De Profundis” we sound the sea-floor of a quite open secret; the secret namely of the invincible attraction of a certain type of artist and sensualist towards the “white Christ” who came forth from the tomb where he had been laid, with precious ointments about him, by the Arimathaean.

In “The Soul of Man” another symbolic reversion displays itself — that reversion namely of the soul of the true artist towards the revolutionary organization which, along with insensitiveness and brutality, proposes to abolish ugliness also.

The name of Oscar Wilde thus becomes a name “to conjure with” and a fantastic beacon-fire to which those “oppressed and humiliated” may repair and take new heart.

90. RUDYARD KIPLING. THE JUNGLE BOOK.

Whatever one may feel about Mr. Kipling’s other work, about his rampagious imperialism, his self-conscious swashbucklerism, his pipe-clay and his journalism, his moralistic breeziness and his patronage of the “white man’s burden,” one cannot help admitting that the Jungle-Book is one of the immortal children’s tales of the world.

In spite of the somewhat priggish introduction, even here, of what might be called his Anglo-Saxon propaganda, the Jungle-Book carries one further, it almost seems, and more convincingly, into the very heart and inwards of beast-life and wood-magic, than any other work ever written. The figures of these animals are quite Biblical in their emphatic picturesqueness, and never has the romance of these spotted and striped aboriginals, in their primordial struggles for food and water, been more thrillingly conveyed. Every scene, every situation, brands itself upon the memory as perhaps nothing else in literature does except the stories in the Old Testament. The best of all children’s books— “Grimm’s Fairy Tales” itself — takes no deeper hold upon the youthful mind. Mr. Kipling’s genius which in his other work is constantly “dropping bricks” as the expressive phrase has it, and running amuck through strenuous banalities, rises in the Jungle-Book to heights of poetic and imaginative suggestion which will give him an undying position among the great writers of our race.

91. CHARLES L. DODGSON. ALICE IN WONDERLAND. *The edition with the original illustrations*.

It would be ridiculous to compile a list of a hundred best books and leave out this one. Lack of space alone prevents us from including “Through the Looking Glass” too.

“Alice” is after all as much of a classic now and by the same right, the right of a universal appeal, to every type of child, as Mother Goose of the Nursery Rhymes. She had only to appear — this slender-legged, straight-haired, Early-Victorian little prude, to enter at once the inmost arcana of the temple of art. The book is a singular evidence of what the power of a desperate devotion can do — a devotion like this of Mr. Dodgson to all little girls — when a certain whimsical genius belongs to the possessed by it.

The creator of Alice has really done nothing but permit his absorbing worship of many demure little maids to focus and concentrate itself into an almost incredible transformation of what was the intrinsic nature of the writer into what was the intrinsic nature of the “written-about.”

The author of this book has indeed, so to speak, eluded the limitations of his own skin, and by the magic of his love for little girls has passed — carrying his grown-up cleverness with him — actually into the little girl’s inmost consciousness. The book might be quite as witty as it is and quite as amusing but it would not carry for us that peculiar “perfume in the mention,” that provocative enchantment, if it were not much more — Oh, so much more — than merely amusing. The thousand and one reactions, impressions, intimations, of a little girl's consciousness, are reproduced here with a faithfulness that is absolutely startling. What really makes the transformation complete is the absence in "Alice" of that half-comic sententious priggishness which, as soon as we have ceased to be children, we find so curiously irritating in Kingsley's "Water Babies."

92. JOHN GALSWORTHY. THE COUNTRY HOUSE. THE MAN OF PROPERTY. FRATERNITY.

John Galsworthy is almost alone among modern writers in the possession of a genius, which in the most exact sense of that admirable word, can only be described as the genius of a gentleman. It is a style singularly sensitive, a little vibrant perhaps sometimes, and so tense as to become attenuated, but of a most rare and wistful beauty. His humor which is his weakest point is a thing of almost feminine perceptions but quaintly pliable, as the sense of humor in women often is, to an odd strain of peevish extravagance.

The chivalrous nobility of Mr. Galsworthy's habitual mood is at once the cause of certain fragilities and betrayals in the mass and weight of his art and the cause of the indignant pity which evokes some of his finest touches.

It seems to irritate his nerves almost to frenzy to contemplate the shackles and fetters with which, whether in the domestic or social or legal world, the free spirits of men and women are bound down and imprisoned.

The touching figure of Mrs. Pendyce in the "Country House" — the tragic figure of Irene Soames Forsyte in the "Man of Property" — the pitiful figure of the little Model in "Fraternity" — have all something of the same quality.

95. W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM. OF HUMAN BONDAGE.

In this remarkable book Mr. W. Somerset Maugham surpasses by a long distance the average novels of recent appearance. The portion of the book which deals with Paris, especially with that mad poet there, who expounds the philosophy of the "Pattern," is as suggestive a piece of literature as any we have seen for half a dozen years.

The passage towards the end of the book on the subject of the genius of El Greco is also profoundly interesting; and the sentences which comment so gravely and beautifully upon the cry of the Christ, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," have a rare and most moving power.

96. GILBERT CANNAN. ROUND THE CORNER.

"Round the Corner" is perhaps Mr. Cannan's best book but "Young Earnest" and "Old Mole" are also curious and interesting volumes.

Mr. Cannan is as typical a modern writer as could be found anywhere. And yet modernity is not his only charm. He has genuine psychological insight and though this insight comes in flashes and is not continuous it often gives an original twist to his characters which helps to make them strangely convincing and appealing. "Round the Corner" is a genuine masterpiece. It is the history of the most charming and touching clergyman described in all English fiction since the Vicar of Wakefield; and the massive, solid manner in which the story is constructed, the vigor and reality of the interplay of the various members of Francis' family, the admirable portrait of the mother, the grand and solemn close of the book, make it one of the most powerful works of fiction England has produced during the last decade.

Now and again — and what praise could go further? — there are little touches of clear-cut realism, of that kind which has a mystical background, which actually suggest some of the lighter and more idyllic work of Goethe himself. The book has genuine wisdom in it, of a sort superior to any philosophical system, and one feels at the close the tonic and soothing effect of a powerful moral influence, sweetening and refining one's general reaction towards life.

97. VINCENT O'SULLIVAN. THE GOOD GIRL. *Published by Dutton & Co.*

This admirable work of art is not known as well as it deserves either in England or America. It is a work of genius in every sense of that word, and it produces on the mind that curious sense of completeness and finality which only such works produce.

Mr. L.U. Wilkinson — himself a writer of powerful achievement — says of "The Good Girl": "It does what I have always desired should be done; it reduces 'atmosphere' and 'nature' to their proper subordinate place. It wastes no energy. It focuses one's intellect and one's emotion. It creates characters who resemble none others in fiction. It is imaginative realism of the highest level of excellence."

The complex figure of Vendred, the hero of the story, the evasive provocative Mona Lisa-like portrait of Mrs. Dover, the extraordinary and stimulating art with which her husband is described, the agitating and tragic appeal made to us by Vendred's child-wife, the unfortunate Louise — all these together make up one of the most absorbing and unforgettable impressions we have received for many years.

Of Mr. and Mrs. Dover in their relation to one another the following passage reverberates through one's mind:— "They would sit opposite one another silently, criticising with a drastic pitiless criticism. This in itself showed where they had arrived; for faith has to be shaken before there is room for criticism, and if love survives the criticism of lovers, it is altogether different from the love they began with. Lovers can be almost anything they choose to each other and still be in love, but they cannot be critical. That is blighting."

Perhaps the most tragic thing in the book is the letter written by Louise to Vendred when the luckless child discovers her husband's intrigue with her mother:— "I came to you in the middle of the night last night because I was afraid of the wind. The fire was burning and I saw. I am gone, you will never see me again."

The last scenes of the unfortunate girl's life — indirectly described by the ruffian who got possession of her in Paris — produce on the mind that sickening sense of the wanton stupidity of the Universe which fills one with hopeless pity.

The author of this book must have a noble and formidable soul.

98. OLIVER ONIONS. THE STORY OF LOUIE.

"The Story of Louie" is the last and finest volume of an astonishing trilogy — the first two volumes of which are named respectively "In Accordance with the Evidence" and "The Debit Account."

The mere fact that in the midst of our contemptible hatred of "long books" this excellent trilogy should have appeared, is an indication of the daring and originality of Mr. Oliver Onions.

Mr. Onions is one of the few modern writers — along with Hardy, Conrad and James — who is entirely untouched by political or ethical propagandism. His trilogy is a genuinely creative work of a high and exclusive order. The manner in which, to quote Mr. L.U. Wilkinson again— "the whole prospect is, as it were, strained through the character of one or other of the leading persons is in itself a proof of this writer's fine artistic instinct.” The way in which all the leading persons in the book stand out in clear relief and indelibly print themselves on the mind is evidence of the value of this method. And what masterly irony in the contrast between “Evie” for instance as Jeffries sees her and “Evie” as she is seen by her rival Louie!

Nowhere in literature, except in Dostoievsky, has the ferocious struggle of two women over a man been so savagely and truly portrayed as in the great scene in “Louie” between that young woman and Evie when the latter visits her in her rooms.

Oliver Onions’ humor has that large and vigorous expansiveness, touched with something almost sardonic, which we associate with some of the very greatest writers. There is always present in his work a certain free sweep of imagination which deals masterfully and suggestively with all manner of sordid material.

99. ARNOLD BENNETT. CLAYHANGER.

“Clayhanger” with its sequels, “Hilda Lessways” and “These Twain,” makes up an imposing and convincing trilogy of middle-class life in the English Pottery Towns. To these books should be added “Old Wives’ Tale,” “Anna of the Five Towns” and all the others among this writer’s works which deal with these Pottery places he knows so superbly well.

Outside the Five Towns Mr. Bennett loses something of the power of his touch. He is an interesting example of a writer with a definite “milieu” out of whose happy security he is always ill-advised to stray.

But within his own region he is a powerful master. No one in modern English fiction has treated so creatively and illuminatingly the least interesting and least romantic strata of human society which is perhaps to be found in the whole world.

And yet he endows this paralyzing bourgeoisie with astonishing life. One turns back from much more exciting literature to these ignorant, conceited, restricted and undistinguished people.

One turns back to them because Mr. Bennett shows one the tragic humanity, eternally and mysteriously fascinating, to be found beneath these vulgar and unlovely exteriors. Nor when it comes to the problem of sex itself is this writer less of a master. Never has the undying conflict, the world-old struggle, between those who, in the Catullian phrase, “love and hate” at the same time, been more convincingly brought into the light than in the relations between these uninteresting but strangely appealing people.

Arnold Bennett’s knowledge of the Five Towns gives to his work a background of significant congruity whose interaction upon the characters of his plots has the same kind of weight and portentousness as the interaction of Nature in the books of Mr. Hardy.

Such a background may be in itself materialistic and sordid, but in the imaginative reaction it produces upon the characters it has the genuine poetic quality.

100. OXFORD BOOK OF ENGLISH VERSE.

This is by far the best anthology of English poetry, its only rival being the first series of Palgrave’s Golden Treasury. Those interested in the work of more recent poets and in the latest poetic “movements” in England and America would be wise to turn to Putnam’s “Georgian Poetry” — two series — and “The New Poetry” by Harriet Monroe, published by Macmillan. The compiler of this selection of books feels himself that the most poetical among the younger poets of our age is Walter de la Mare and of the poems which Mr. de la Mare has so far written, he finds the best to be those extraordinary and magical verses entitled “The Listeners” which seem to come nearer to giving a voice to the unutterable margin of our days than any others written within the last ten years.

The following pages contain an alphabetical list by author of the One Hundred Best Books, also the titles of other books recommended in the text by Mr. Powys. The numerals following the titles of the books refer to the number given the books in this list, while the prices attached thereto are the Publisher’s list prices. If sent by mail or express it is necessary to add the cost, which is usually about 10 per cent, of the price.

INDEX WITH PRICES OF RECOMMENDED EDITIONS OF JOHN COWPER POWYS' LIST OF ONE HUNDRED BEST BOOKS

And Other Books Mentioned In the Text

Binding and price

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THE END

The Complex Vision (1920)

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Powys, close to the time of publication

DEDICATED

TO

LITTLETON ALFRED

PROLOGUE

WHAT I AM anxious to attempt in this anticipatory summary of the contents of this book is a simple estimate of its final conclusions, in such a form as shall eliminate all technical terms and reduce the matter to a plain statement, intelligible as far as such a thing can be made intelligible, to the apprehension of such persons as have not had the luck, or the ill-luck, of a plunge into the ocean of metaphysic.

A large portion of the book deals with what might be called our *instrument of research;* in other words, with the problem of what particular powers of insight the human mind must use, if its vision of reality is to be of any deeper or more permanent value than the "passing on the wing," so to speak, of individual fancies and speculations.

This instrument of research I find to be the use, by the human person, of all the various energies of personality concentrated into one point; and the resultant spectacle of things or reality of things, which this concentrated vision makes clear, I call the original revelation of the complex vision of man.

Having analyzed in the earlier portions of the book the peculiar nature of our organ of research and the peculiar difficulties — amounting to a very elaborate work of art — which have to be overcome before this *concentration* takes place, I proceed in the later portions of the book to make as clear as I can what kind of reality it is that we actually do succeed in grasping, when this concentrating process has been achieved. I indicate incidentally that this desirable concentration of the energies of personality is so difficult a thing that we are compelled to resort to our memory of what we experienced in rare and fortunate moments in order to establish its results. I suggest that it is not to our average moments of insight that we have to appeal, but to our exceptional moments of insight; since it is only at rare moments in our lives that we are able to enter into what I call the *eternal vision*.

To what, then, does this conclusion amount, and what is this resultant reality, in as far as we are able to gather it up and articulate its nature from the vague records of our memory?

I have endeavoured to show that it amounts to the following series of results. What we are, in the first place, assured of is the existence within our own individual body of a real actual living thing composed of a mysterious substance wherein what we call mind and what we call matter are fused and intermingled. This is our real and self-conscious soul, the thing in us which says, "I am I," of which the physical body is only one expression, and of which all the bodily senses are only one gateway of receptivity.

The soul within us becomes aware of its own body simultaneously with its becoming aware of all the other bodies which fill the visible universe. It is then by an act of faith or imagination that the soul within us takes for granted and assumes that there must be a soul resembling our own soul within each one of those alien bodies, of which, simultaneously with its own, it becomes aware.

And since the living basis of our personality is this real soul within us, it follows that all those energies of personality, whose concentration is the supreme work of art, are the energies of this real soul. If, therefore, we assume that all the diverse physical bodies which fill the universe possess, each of them, an inner soul resembling our own soul, we are led to the conclusion that just as our own soul half-creates and half-discovers the general spectacle of things which it names "the universe," so all the alien souls in the world half-create and half-discover what they feel as *their* universe.

If our revelation stopped at this point we should have to admit that there was not one universe, but as many universes are there are living souls. It is at this point, however, that we become aware that all these souls are able, in some degree or other, to enter into communication. They are able to do this both by the bodily sounds and signs which constitute language and by certain immaterial vibrations which seem to make no use of the body at all. In this communication between different souls, as far as humanity is concerned, a very curious experience has to be recorded.

When two human beings dispute together upon any important problem of life, there is always an implicit appeal made by both of them to an invisible arbiter, or invisible standard of arbitration, in the heart of which both seem aware that the reality, upon which their opinions differ, is to be found in its eternal truth. What then is this invisible standard of arbitration? Whatever it is, we are compelled to assume that it satisfies and transcends the deepest and furthest reach of personal vision in all the souls that approach it. And what is the deepest and furthest reach of our individual soul? This seems to be a projection upon the material plane of the very stuff and substance of the soul's inmost nature.

This very "stuff" of the soul, this outflowing of the substance of the soul, I name "emotion"; and I find it to consist of two eternally conflicting elements; what I call the element of "love," and what I call the element of "malice." This emotion of love, which is the furthest reach of the soul, I find to be differentiated when it comes into contact with the material universe into three ultimate ways of taking life; namely, the way which we name the pursuit of beauty, the way which we name the pursuit of goodness, and the way which we name the pursuit of truth. But these three ways of taking life find always their unity and identity in that emotion of love which is the psychic substance of them all.

The invisible standard of arbitration, then, to which an appeal is always made, consciously or unconsciously, when two human beings dispute upon the mystery of life, is a standard of arbitration which concerns the real nature of love, and the real nature of what we call “the good” and “the true” and “the beautiful.”

And since we have found in personality the one thing in existence of which we are absolutely assured, because we are aware of it, *on the inside,* so to speak, in the depths of our own souls, it becomes necessary that in place of thinking of this invisible standard as any spiritual or chemical “law” in any stream of “life-force” we should think of it as being as personal as we ourselves are personal. For since what we call the universe has been already described as something which is half-created and half-discovered by the vision of some one soul in it or of all the souls in it, it is clear that we have no longer any right to think of these ultimate ideas as “suspended” in the universe, or as general “laws” of the universe. They are suspended in the individual soul, which half-creates and half-discovers the universe according to their influence.

Personality is the only permanent thing in life; and if truth, beauty, goodness, and love, are to have permanence they must depend for their permanence not upon some imaginary law in a universe half-created by personality but upon the indestructible nature of personality itself.

The human soul is aware of an invisible standard of beauty. To this invisible standard it is compelled to make an unconscious appeal in all matters of argument and discussion. This standard must therefore be rooted in a personal super-human vision and we are driven to the conclusion that some being or beings exist, superior to man, and yet in communication with man. And since what we see around us is a world of many human and sub-human personalities, it is, by analogy, a more natural supposition to suppose that these supernatural beings are many than that they are one.

What the human soul, therefore, together with all other souls, attains in its concentrated moments is “an eternal vision” wherein what is mortal in us merges itself in what is immortal.

But if what we call the universe is a thing made up of all the various universes of all the various souls in space and time, we are forbidden to find in this visible material universe, whose “reality” does not become “really real” until it has received the “hall-mark,” so to speak, of the eternal vision, any sort of medium or link which makes it possible for these various souls to communicate with one another.

This material universe, thus produced by the concentrated visions of all the souls entering into the eternal vision, is made up of all the physical bodies of all such souls, linked together by the medium of universal ether. But although the bodies which thus occupy different points of space are linked together by the universal ether, we are not permitted to find in this elemental ether, the medium which links the innumerable souls together. And we are not permitted this because in our original assumption such souls are themselves the half-creators, as well as the half-discoverers, of that universe whose empty spaces are thus filled. The material ether which links all bodies together cannot, since it is a portion of such an universe, be itself the medium from the midst of which these souls create that universe.

But if, following our method of regarding every material substance in the world as the body of some sort of soul, we regard this universal ether as itself the body of an universal or elemental soul, then we are justified in finding in this elemental omnipresent soul diffused through space, the very medium we need; out of the midst of which all the souls which exist project their various universes.

We are thus faced by a universe which is the half-creation and half-discovery of all living souls, a universe the truth and beauty of which depend upon the eternal vision, a universe whose material substance is entirely composed of the actual physical bodies of those very souls whose vision half-creates and half-discovers it.

We thus reach our conclusion that there is nothing in the world except personality. The material universe is entirely made up of personal bodies united by the personal body of the elemental ether. What we name the universe, therefore, is an enormous group of bodies joined together by the body of the ether; such bodies being the physical expression of a corresponding group of innumerable souls joined together by the soul of the ether.

In the portions of this book which deal with the creative energy of the soul I have constantly used the expression “objective mystery”; but in my concluding chapter I have rejected and eliminated this word as a mere step or stage in human thought which does not correspond to any final reality. When I use the term “objective mystery” I am referring to the original movement of the individual mind when it first stretches out to what is outside itself. What is outside itself consists in reality of nothing but an unfathomable group of bodies and souls joined together by the body and soul of the ether which fills space.

But since, in its first stretching out towards these things, all it is aware of is the presence of a plastic something which lends itself, under the universal curve of space, to the moulding and shaping and colouring of its creative vision, it is natural enough to look about for a name by which we can indicate this original “clay” or “matter” or “world-stuff” out of which the individual soul creates its vision of an universe. And the name "objective mystery" is the name by which, in the bulk of this book, I have indicated this mysterious world-stuff, by which the soul finds itself surrounded, both in regard to the matter of its own body and in regard to the still more alien matter of which all other bodies are composed.

But when by the use of the term objective mystery I have indicated that general and universal something, not itself, by which the soul is confronted, that something which, like a white screen, or a thick mass of darkness, waits the moving lamp of the soul to give it light and colour, it becomes clear that the name itself does not cover any actual reality other than the actual reality of all the bodies in the world joined together by the universal ether.

Is the term "objective mystery," therefore, no more than the name given to that first solid mass of external impression which the insight of the soul subsequently reduces to the shapes, colours, scents, sounds, and all the more subtle intimations springing from the innumerable bodies and souls which fill universal space? No. It is not quite this. It is a little deeper than this. It is, in fact, the mind's recognition that *behind* this first solid mass of external impression which the soul's own creative activity creates into its "universe" there must exist "something," some real substance, or matter, or world-stuff, in contact with which the soul half-creates and half-discovers the universe which it makes its own.

When, however, the soul has arrived at the knowledge that its own physical body is the outward expression of its inner self, and when by an act of faith or imagination it has extended this knowledge to every other bodily form in its universe, it ceases to be necessary to use the term "objective mystery"; since that something which the soul felt conscious of as existing behind the original solid mass of impressions is now known by the soul to be nothing else than an incredible number of living personalities, each with its own body.

And just as I make use in this book of the term “objective mystery,” and then discard it in my final conclusion, so I make an emphatic and elaborate use of the term “creative” and then discard it, or considerably modify it, in my final conclusion.

My sequence of thought, in this matter of the soul’s “creative” power, may thus be indicated. In the process of preparing the ground for those rare moments of illumination wherein we attain the eternal vision the soul is occupied, and the person attempting to think is occupied, with what I call “the difficult work of art” of concentrating its various energies and fusing them into one balanced point of rhythmic harmony. This effort of contemplative tension is a “creative effort” similar to that which all artists are compelled to make. In addition to this aspect of what I call “creation,” there also remains the fact that the individual soul modifies and changes that first half-real something which I name the objective mystery, until it becomes all the colours, shapes, sounds and so forth, produced by the impression upon the soul of all the other personalities brought into contract with it by the omnipresent personality of the universal ether.

The words “creation” and “creative” axe thus made descriptive in this book of the simple and undeniable fact that everything which the mind touches is modified and changed by the mind; and that ultimately the universe which any mind beholds is an universe half-created by the mood of the mind which beholds it. And since the mood of any mind which contemplates the universe is dependent upon the relative “overcoming” in that particular soul of the emotion of malice by love, or of the emotion of love by malice, it becomes true to say that any universe which comes into existence is necessarily “created” by the original struggle, in the depths of some soul or other, of the conflicting emotions of love and malice.

And since the ideal of the emotion of love is life, and the ideal of the emotion of hate is death, it becomes true to say that the emotion of love is identical with the creative energy in all souls, while the emotion of malice is identical with the force which resists creation in all souls.

Why then do I drop completely, or at least considerably modify, this stress upon the soul’s “creative” power in my final chapter? I am led to do so by the fact that such creative power in the soul is, after all, only a preparation for the eternal vision. Creative energy implies effort, tension, revolution, agitation, and the pain of birth. All these things have to do with preparing the ground for the eternal vision, and with the final gesture of the soul, by which it enters into that ultimate rhythm. But once having entered into that vision — and in these things time is nothing — the rhythm which results is a rhythm upon which the soul rests, even as music rests upon music, or life rests upon life.

And the eternal vision, thus momentarily attained, and hereafter gathered together from the deep cisterns of memory, liberates us, when we are under its influence, from that contemplative or creative tension whereby we reached it. It is then that the stoical pride of the soul, in the strength of which it has endured so much, undergoes the process of an immense relaxation and relief. An indescribable humility floods our being; and the mood with which we contemplate the spectacle of life and death ceases to be an individual mood and becomes an universal mood. The isolation, which was a necessary element in our advance to this point, melts away when we have reached it. It is not that we lose our personality, it is that we merge ourselves by the outflowing of love, in all the personalities to which the procession of time gives birth.

And the way we arrive at this identification of ourselves with all souls, living or dead or unborn, is by our love for that ideal symbolized in the figure of Christ in whom this identification has already been achieved. This, and nothing less than this, is the eternal vision. For the only "god" among all the arbiters of our destiny, with whom we are concerned, is Christ. To enter into his secret is to enter into their secret. To be aware of him is to be aware of everything in the world, mortality and immortality, the transitory and the eternal.

Life then, as I have struggled to interpret it in this book, seems to present itself as an unfathomable universe entirely made up of personalities. What we call inanimate substances are all of them the bodies, or portions of the bodies, of living personalities. The immense gulf, popularly made between the animate and the inanimate, thus turns out to be an unfounded illusion; and the whole universe reveals itself as an unfathomable series, or congeries, of living personalities, united by the presence of the omnipresent ether which fills universal space.

It is of little moment, the particular steps or stages of thought, by which one mind, among so many, arrives at this final conclusion. Other minds, following other tracks across the desert, might easily reach it. The important thing to note is that, once reached, such a conclusion seems to demand from us a very definite attitude toward life. For if life, if the universe, is entirely made up of personality, then our instinctive or acquired attitude toward personality becomes the path by which we approach truth.

To persons who have not been plunged, luckily or unluckily, in the troublesome sea of metaphysical phrases, the portions of this book which will be most tiresome are the portions which deal with those "half-realities" or logical abstractions of the human reason, when such reason "works" in isolation from the other attributes of the soul. Such reason, working in isolation, inevitably produces certain views of life; and these views of life, although unreal when compared with the reality produced by the full play of all our energies, cannot be completely disregarded if our research is to cover the whole field of humanity's reactions. Since there is always an irresistible return to these metaphysical views of life directly the soul loses the rhythm of its total being, it seems as if it were unwise to advance upon our road until we have discounted such views and placed them in their true perspective, as unreal but inevitable abstractions.

The particular views of life which this recurrent movement of the logical reason results in, are, first, the reduction of everything to an infinite stream of pure thought, outside both time and space, unconscious of itself as in any way personal; and, in the second place, the reduction of everything to one universal self-conscious spirit, in whose absolute and infinite being independent of space and time all separate existences lose themselves and are found to be illusions.

What I try to make clear in the metaphysical portion of this book is that these two views of life, while always liable to return upon us with every renewed movement of the isolated reason, are in truth unreal projections of man's imperious mind. When we subject them to an analysis based upon our complete organ of research they show themselves to be nothing but tyrannous phantoms, abstracted from the genuine reality of the soul as it exists *within* space and time.

What I seek to show throughout this book is that the world resolves itself into an immeasurable number of personalities held together by the personality of the universal ether and by the unity of one space and one time. Even of space and time themselves, since the only thing that really "fills them," so to speak, to the brim, is the universal ether, it might be said that they are the expression of this universal ether in its relation to all the objects which it contains.

Thus the conclusion to which I am driven is that the dome of space, out of which the sun shines by day and the stars by night, contains no vast gulfs of absolute nothingness into which the soul that hates life may flee away and be at rest. At the same time the soul that hates life need not despair. The chances, as we come to estimate them, for and against the soul's survival after death, seem so curiously even, that it may easily happen that the extreme longing of the soul for annihilation may prove in such a balancing of forces the final deciding stroke. And quite apart from death, I have tried to show in this book, how in the mere fact of the unfathomable depths into which all physical bodies as well as all immaterial souls recede there is an infinite opportunity for any soul to find a way of escape from life, either by sinking into the depths of its own physical being, or by sinking into the depths of its own spiritual substance.

The main purpose of the book reveals, however, the only escape from all the pain and misery of life which is worthy of the soul of man. And this is not so much an escape from life as a transfiguring of the nature of life by means of a newly born attitude toward it. This attitude toward life, of which I have tried to catch at least the general outlines, is the attitude which the soul struggles to maintain by gathering together all its diffused memories of those rare moments when it entered into the eternal vision.

And I have indicated as clearly as I could how it comes about that in the sphere of practical life the only natural and consistent realization of this attitude would be the carrying into actual effect of what I call "the idea of communism."

This "idea of communism," in which the human implications of the eternal vision become realized, is simply the conception of a system of human society founded upon the creative instinct, instead of upon the possessive instinct in humanity.

I endeavour to make clear that such a reorganization of society, upon such a basis does not imply any radical change in human nature. It only implies a liberation of a force that already exists, of the force in the human soul that is centrifugal, or outflowing, as opposed to the force that is centripetal, or indrawing. Such a force has always been active in the lives of individuals. It only remains to liberate that force until it reaches the general consciousness of the race, to make such a reconstruction of human society not only ideal, but actual and effective.

PREFACE

THE SPECULATIVE SYSTEM which I have entitled "The Philosophy of the Complex Vision" is an attempt to bring into prominence, in the sphere of definite and articulate thought, those scattered and chaotic intimations which hitherto have found expression rather in Art than in Philosophy.

It has come to be fatally clear to me that between the great metaphysical systems of rationalized purpose and the actual shocks, experiences, superstitions, illusions, disillusions, reactions, hope and despairs, of ordinary men and women there is a great gulf fixed. It has become clear to me that the real poignant personal drama in all our lives, together with those vague "marginal" feelings which overshadow all of us with a sense of something half-revealed and half withheld, has hardly any point of contact with these formidable edifices of pure logic.

On the other hand the tentative, hesitating, ambiguous hypotheses of Physical Science, transforming themselves afresh with every new discovery, seem, when the portentous mystery of Life's real secret confronts us, to be equally remote and elusive.

When in such a dilemma one turns to the vitalistic and pragmatic speculations of a Bergson or a William James there is an almost more hopeless revulsion. For in these pseudo-scientific, pseudo-psychological methods of thought something most profoundly human seems to us to be completely neglected. I refer to the high and passionate imperatives of the heroic, desperate, treasonable heart of man.

What we have come to demand is some intelligible system of *imaginative reason* which shall answer the exigencies not only of our more normal moods but of those moods into which we are thrown by the pressure upon us — apparently from outside the mechanical sequence of cause and effect — of certain mysterious Powers in the background of our experience, such as hitherto have only found symbolic and representative expression in the ritual of Art and Religion.

What we have come to demand is some flexible, malleable, rhythmic system which shall give an imaginative and yet a rational form to the sum total of those manifold and intricate impressions which make up the life of a real person upon a real earth.

What we have come to demand is that the centre of gravity in our interpretation of life should be restored to its natural point of vantage, namely, to the actual living consciousness of an actual living human being.

And it is precisely these demands that the philosophy of the complex vision attempts to satisfy. It seeks to satisfy them by using as its organ of research the balanced "ensemble" of man's whole nature. It seeks to satisfy them by using as its "material" the whole variegated and contradictory mass of feelings and reactions to feelings, which the natural human being with his superstitions, his sympathies, his antipathies, his loves and his hates, his surmises, his irrational intuitions, his hopes and fears, is of necessity bound to experience as he moves through the world.

It seeks, in fact, to envisage from within and without the confused hurly-burly of life's drama; and to give to this contradictory and complicated spectacle the aesthetic rationality or imaginative inevitableness of a rhythmic work of art.

In this attempt the philosophy of the complex vision is bound to recognize, and include in its *rational form,* much that remains mysterious, arbitrary, indetermined, organic, obstinately illogical. For the illogical is not necessarily the unintelligible, so long as the reason which we use is that same imaginative and clairvoyant reason, which, in its higher measure, sustains the vision of the poets and the artists.

By the use of this fuller, richer, more living, more concrete instrument of research, the conclusions we arrive at will have in them more of the magic of Nature, and will be closer to the actual palpable organic mystery of Life, than either the abstract conclusions of metaphysic or the cautious, impersonal hypotheses of experimental physical science.

CHAPTER I. THE COMPLEX VISION

A PHILOSOPHY IS known by its genuine starting-point. This is also its final conclusion, often very cunningly concealed. Such a conclusion may be presented to us as the logical result of a long train of reasoning, when really it was there all the while as one single vivid revelation of the complex vision.

Like travellers who have already found, by happy accident, the city of their desire, many crafty thinkers hasten hurriedly back to the particular point from which they intend to be regarded as having started; nor in making this secret journey are they forgetful to erase their footsteps from the sand, so that when they publicly set forth it shall appear to those who follow them that they are guided not by previous knowledge of the way but by the inevitable necessity of pure reason.

I also, like the rest, must begin with what will turn out to be the end; but unlike many I shall openly indicate this fact and not attempt to conceal it.

My starting-point is nothing less than what I call the original revelation of man's complex vision; and I regard this original revelation as something which is arrived at by the use of a certain synthetic activity of all the attributes of this vision. And this synthetic activity of the complex vision I call its apex-thought.

This revelation is of a peculiar nature, which must be grasped, at least in its general outlines, before we can advance a step further upon that journey which is also a return.

It might be maintained that before attempting to philosophize upon life, the question should be asked... "why philosophize at all?" And again...

"what are the motive-forces which drive us into this process which we call philosophizing?"

To philosophize is to articulate and express our personal reaction to the mystery which we call life, both with regard to the nature of that mystery and with regard to its meaning and purpose.

My answer to the question "Why do we philosophize?" is as follows. We philosophize for the same reason that we move and speak and laugh and eat and love. In other words, we philosophize because man is a philosophical animal. We breathe because we cannot help breathing and we philosophize because we cannot help philosophizing. We may be as sceptical as we please. Our very scepticism is the confession of an implicit philosophy. To suppress the activity of philosophizing is as impossible as to suppress the activity of breathing.

Assuming then that we *have* to philosophize, the question naturally arises... *how* have we to philosophize if our philosophy is to be an adequate expression of our complete reaction to life?

By the phrase "man's complex vision" I am trying to indicate the elaborate and intricate character of the organ of research which we have to use. All subsequent discoveries are rendered misleading if the total activity, at least in its general movement, of our instrument of research is not brought into focus. This instrument of research which I have named "man's complex vision" implies his possession, at the moment when he begins to philosophize, of certain basic attributes or energies.

The advance from infancy to maturity naturally means, when the difference between person and person is considered an unequal and diverse development of these basic energies. Nor even when the person is full grown will it be found that these energies exist in him in the same proportion as they exist in other persons. But if they existed in every person in precisely equal proportions we should not all, even then, have the same philosophy.

We should not have this, because though the basic activities were there in equal proportion, each living concrete person whose activities these were would necessarily colour the resultant vision with the stain or dye of his original difference from all the rest. For no two living entities in this extraordinary world are exactly the same.

What is left for us, then, it might be asked, but to “whisper our conclusions” and accept the fact that all “philosophies” must be different, as they are all the projection of different personalities? Nothing, as far as pure logic is concerned, is left for us but this. Yet it remains as an essential aspect of the process of philosophizing that we should endeavour to bring over to our vision as many other visions as we can succeed in influencing. For since we have the power of communicating our thought to one another and since it is of the very nature of the complex vision to be exquisitely sensitive to influences from outside, it is a matter of primordial necessity to us all that we should exercise this will to influence and this will to be influenced.

And just as in the case of persons sympathetic to ourselves the activity of philosophizing is attended by the emotion of love and the instinct of creation, so in the case of persons antagonistic to ourselves the activity of philosophizing is attended by the emotion of hate and the instinct of destruction. For philosophy being the final articulation of a personal reaction to life, is penetrated through and through with the basic energies of life.

On the one hand there is a “Come unto me, all ye...” and on the other there is a “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Just because the process of philosophizing is necessarily personal, it is evident that the primordial aspect of it which implies “the will to influence” must tally with some equally primordial reciprocity, implying “the will to be influenced.”

That it does so tally with this is proved by the existence of language.

This medium of expression between living things does not seem to be confined to the human race. Some reciprocal harmony of energy, corresponding to our complex vision, seems to have created many mysterious modes of communication by which myriads of sub-human beings, and probably also myriads of super-human beings, act and react on one another.

But the existence of language, though it excludes the possibility of absolute difference, does not, except by an act of faith, necessitate that any sensation we name by the same name is really identical with the sensation which another person feels. And this difficulty is much further complicated by the fact that words themselves tend in the process to harden and petrify, and in their hardening to form, as it were, solid blocks of accretion which resist and materially distort the subtle and evasive play of the human psychology behind them.

So that not only are we aware that the word which we use does not necessarily represent to another what it represents to ourself, but we are also aware that it does not, except in a hard and inflexible manner, represent what we ourselves feel. Words tend all too quickly to become symbolic; and it is often the chief importance of what we call “genius” that it takes these inflexible symbols into its hands and breaks them up into pieces and dips them in the wavering waters of experience and sensation.

Every philosopher should be at pains to avoid as far as possible the use of technical terms, whether ancient or modern, and should endeavour to evade and slip behind these terms. He should endeavour to indicate his vision of the world by means of words which have acquired no thick accretion of traditional crust but are fresh and supple and organic. He should use such words, in fact, as might be said to have the flexibility of life, and like living plants to possess leaves and sap. He should avoid as far as he can such metaphors and images as already carry with them the accumulated associations of traditional usage, and he should select his expressions so that they shall give the reader the definite impact and vivid shock of thoughts that leap up from immediate contact with sensation, like fish from the surface of a river.

Just because words, in their passage from generation to generation, tend to become so hard and opaque, it is advisable for any one attempting to philosophize to use indirect as well as direct means of expressing his thoughts. The object of philosophizing being to "carry over" into another person's consciousness one's personal reaction to things, it may well happen that a hint, a gesture, a signal, a sign, made indirectly and rather by the grouping of words and the tone of words than by their formal content, will reach the desired result more effectually than any direct argument.

It must be admitted, however, that this purely subjective view of philosophy, with its implied demand for a precise subjective colouring of the words, leaves some part of our philosophical motive-force unsatisfied and troubled by an obscure distress. No two minds can interchange ideas without some kind of appeal, often so faint and unconscious as to be quite unrecognized, to an invisible audience of hidden attendants upon the argument, who are tacitly assumed in some mysterious way to be the arbiters. These invisible companions seem to gather to themselves, as we are vaguely aware of them, the attributes of a company of overshadowing listeners. They present themselves to the half-conscious background of our mind as some pre-existent vision of "truth" towards which my subjective vision is one contribution and my interlocutor's subjective vision another contribution.

This vague consciousness which we both have, as we exchange our ideas, of some comprehensive vision of pre-existent reality, to which we are both appealing, does not destroy my passionate conviction that I am "nearer the truth" than my friend; nor does it destroy my latent feeling that in my friend's vision there is "something of the truth" which I am unable to grasp. I think the more constantly we encounter other minds in these philosophical disputes the more does there grow and take shape in our own mind the idea of some mysterious and invisible watchers whose purer vision, exquisitely harmonious and clairvoyant, remains a sort of test both of our own and of others' subjectivity; becomes, in fact, an objective standard or measure or pattern of those ideas which we discover within us all, and name truth, beauty, nobility.

This objective standard of the things which are most important and precious to us, this ideal pattern of all human values, attests and manifests its existence by the primordial necessity of the interchange of thoughts among us. I call this pattern or standard of ideas "the vision of the immortal companions." By the term "the immortal companions" I do not mean to indicate any "immanent" power or transcendental "over-soul." Nor do I mean to indicate that they are created by our desire that they should exist. Although I call them "companions" I wish to suggest that they exist quite independently of man and are not the origin of these ideas in man's soul but only the model, the pattern, the supreme realization of these ideas.

It is, however, to these tacit listeners, whose vision of the world is there in the background as the arbiter of our subjective encounters, that in our immense loneliness we find ourselves constantly turning. All our philosophy, all our struggle with life, falls into two aspects as we grow more and more aware of what we are doing. The whole strange drama takes the form, as we feel our way, of a creation which at present is non-existent and of a realization of something which at present is hidden.

Thus philosophy, as I have said, is at once a setting-forth and a return; a setting-forth to something that has never been reached, because to reach it we have to create it, and a return to something that has been with us from the beginning and is the very form and shape and image of the thing which we have set forth to create.

These hidden listeners, these tacit arbiters, these assumed and implied witnesses of our life, give value to every attempt we make at arriving at some unity amid our differences; and their vision seems, as the eternal duality presses upon us, to be at once the thing from which we start and the thing towards which, moulding the future as we go, we find ourselves moving. In the unfathomable depths of the past we are aware of a form, a shape, a principle, a premonition; and into the unfathomable depths of the future we project the fulfilled reality of this. We are as gods creating something out of nothing. But when we have created it... behold! it was there from the beginning; and the nothing out of which we have created it has receded into a second future from which it mocks and menaces us again.

The full significance of this ultimate duality would be rendered abortive if the future were determined in any more definite way than by the premonition, the hope, the dream, the passion, the prophecy, the vision, of those invisible companions whose existence is implied whenever two separate souls communicate their thoughts to one another.

It is by our will that the future is created; but around the will hover intermittently many unfathomable motives. And the pre-existent motive, which finally gives the shape to the future, holds the future already in its hand. And this surviving motive, ultimately selected by our will, is of necessity purged and tested by a continual comparison with that form, that idea, that dream, that vision, which is implied from the beginning and which I name “the vision of the invisible companions.”

The philosophical enquiry upon which we are engaged finds its starting point, then, in nothing less than that revelation of the complex vision which is also the goal of its journey. The complex vision, in the rhythmic play of its united attributes, makes use of a synthetic power which I call its apex-thought.

The supreme activity of this apex-thought is centred about those primordial ideas of truth, beauty and nobility which are the very stuff and texture of its being. In the ecstasy of its creative and receptive “rapport” with these it becomes aware of the presence of certain immortal companions whose vision is at once the objective standard of such ideas and the premonition of their fuller realization.

In thus attempting to articulate and clarify the main outlines of our starting point, a curious situation emerges. The actual *spectacle,* or mass of impressions to be dealt with, presents itself, we are forced to suppose, as more or less identical, in its general appearance, in every human consciousness. And this “general situation” is strange enough.

We find ourselves, motionless or moving, surrounded by earth and air and space. Impressions flow past us and flow through us. We ourselves seem at the same time able to move from point to point in this apparently real universe and able to remain, as invisible observers, outside all the phenomena of time and space. As the ultimate invisible spectator of the whole panorama, or, in the logical phrase, as the “a priori unity of apperception” our consciousness cannot be visualized in any concrete image.

But as the empirical personal self, able to move about within the circle of the objective universe, the soul is able to visualize itself pictorially and imaginatively, although not rationally or logically. These two revelations of the situation are simultaneously disclosed; and although the first-named of them — the "a priori unity of apperception" — might seem to claim, on the strength of this "a priori" a precedence over the second, it has no real right to make such a claim. The truth of the situation is indeed the reverse of this; and upon this truth, more than upon anything else, our whole method of enquiry depends. For the fact that we are unable to think of our integral personal self *as actually* being this "a priori" consciousness, and are not only able but are bound to think of our integral personal self as *actually being* this individual "soul" within time and space, we are driven to the conclusion that this "a priori" observer outside time and space is nothing more than an inevitable trick or law or aspect or play of our isolated logical reason.

Our logical reason is itself only one attribute of our real concrete self, the self which exists within time and space; and therefore we reach the conclusion that this "a priori unity," which seems outside time and space, is nothing but a necessary inevitable abstraction from the concrete reality of our personal self which is within time and space. There is no need to be startled at the apparent paradox of this, as though the lesser were including the larger or the part the whole, because when space and time are eliminated there can be no longer any large or small or whole or part. All are equal there because all are equally nothing there.

This "a priori" unity of consciousness, outside time and space, is only real in so far as it represents the inevitable manner in which reason has to work when it works in isolation, and therefore compared with the reality of the personal self, within time and space, it is unreal.

And it is obvious that an unreal thing cannot be larger than a real thing; nor can an unreal thing be a whole of which a real thing is a part.

The method therefore of philosophic enquiry, which I name “the philosophy of the complex vision,” depends upon the realization of the difference between what is only the inevitable play of reason, working in isolation, and what is the inevitable play of all the attributes of the human soul when they are held together by the synthetic activity of what I name the “apex-thought.” But this logical revelation of the “a priori” unity of consciousness outside of time and space is not the only result of the isolated play of some particular attribute of personality. Just as the isolated play of reason evokes this result, so the isolated play of self-consciousness evokes yet another result, which we have to recognize as intervening between this ultimate logical unity and the real personal self.

The abstraction evoked by the isolated play of self-consciousness is obviously nearer reality and less of an abstraction than the merely logical one above-named, because self-consciousness has more of the personal self in it than reason or logic can have. But though nearer reality and less of an abstraction than the other, this revelation of the inevitable play of self-consciousness, working by itself, is also unreal in relation to the revelation of the concrete personal individual soul. This revelation of self-consciousness, working in isolation, has as its result the conception of one universal “I am I” or cosmic self, which is nothing more or less than the whole universe, contemplating itself as its own object. To this conception are we driven, when in isolation from the soul’s other attributes our self-consciousness gives itself up to its own activity. The “I am I” which we then seek to articulate is an “I am I” reached by the negation or suppression of that primordial act of faith which is the work of the imagination. This act of faith, thus negated and suppressed in order that this unreal cosmic self may embrace the universe, is the act of faith by which we become aware of the existence of innumerable other "selves," besides our own self, filling the vast spaces of nature.

The difference between the sensation we have of our own body and the sensation we have of the rest of the universe ceases to exist when self-consciousness thus expands; and the conceptions we arrive at can only be described as the idea that the whole universe with all the bodies which it contains — including our own body — is nothing but one vast manifestation of one vast mind which is our own "I am I."

It must not be supposed that this abstraction evoked by the solitary activity of self-consciousness is any more a "whole," of which the real self is a "part," than the logical "a priori unity" is a whole, of which the real self is a part. Both are abstractions. Both are unreal. Both are shadowy projections from the true reality, which is the personal self existing side by side with "the immortal companions." Nor must it be supposed that these primordial aspects of life are of equal importance and that we have an equal right to make of any one of them the starting point of our enquiry. The starting point of our enquiry, and the end of our enquiry also, can be nothing else than the innumerable company of individual "souls," mortal and immortal, confronting the mystery of the universe.

The philosophy of the complex vision is not a mechanical philosophy; it is a creative philosophy. And as such it includes in it from the beginning a certain element of faith and a certain element which I can only describe as "the impossible." It may seem ridiculous to some minds that the conception of the "impossible" should be introduced into any philosophy at the very start. The complex vision is, however, essentially creative. The creation of something really new in the world is regarded by pure reason as impossible. Therefore the element of "the impossible" must exist in this philosophy from the very start. The act of faith must also exist in it; for the imagination is one of the primary aspects of the complex vision and the act of faith is one of the basic activities of the imagination.

The complex vision does not regard history as a progressive predetermined process. It regards history as the projection, by advance and retreat, of the creative and resistant power of individual souls. That the “invisible companions” should be in eternal contact with every living “soul” is a rational impossibility; and yet this impossibility is what the complex vision, using the faith of its creative imagination, reveals as the truth.

The imagination working in isolation is able, like reason and self-consciousness, to fall into curious distortions and aberrations.

One has only to survey the field of dogmatic religion to see how curiously astray it may be led. It is only by holding fast to the high rare moments when the apex-thought attains its consummation that we are able to keep such isolated acts of faith in their place and prevent the element of the “impossible” becoming the element of the absurd. The philosophy of the complex vision, though far more sympathetic to much that is called “materialism” than to much that is called “idealism,” certainly cannot itself be regarded as materialistic. And it cannot be so regarded because its central assumption and implication is the concrete basis of personality which we call the “soul.” And the “soul,” when we think of it as something real, must inevitably be associated with what might be called “the vanishing point of sensation.” In other words the soul must be thought of as having some kind of “matter” or “energy” or “form” as its ultimate life, and yet as having no kind of “matter” or “energy” or “form.” The soul must be regarded as “something” which is living and real and concrete, and which has a definite existence in time and space, and which is subject to annihilation; but the stuff out of which the soul is made is not capable of analysis, and can only be accepted by such an act of faith as that which believes in “the impossible.”

The fact that the philosophy of the complex vision assumes as its only axiom the concrete reality of the “soul” within us which is so difficult to touch or handle or describe and yet which we feel to be so much more real than our physical body, justifies us in making an experiment which to many minds will seem uncalled for and ridiculous. I mean the experiment of trying to visualize, by an arbitrary exercise of fancy, the sort of form or shape which this formless and shapeless thing may be imagined as possessing.

Metaphysical discussion tends so quickly to become thin and abstract and unreal; words themselves tend so quickly to become “dead wood” rather than living branches and leaves; that it seems advisable, from the point of view of getting nearer reality, to make use sometimes of a pictorial image, even though such an image be crudely and clumsily drawn.

Pictorial images are always treacherous and dangerous; but, as I have hinted, it is sometimes necessary, considering the intricate and delicately balanced character of man’s complex vision, to make a guarded and cautious use of them, so as to arrive at truth “sideways,” so to speak, and indirectly.

One of the curious psychological facts, in connection with the various ways in which various minds function, is the fact that when in these days we seek to visualize, in some pictorial manner, our ultimate view of life, the images which are called up are geometrical or chemical rather than anthropomorphic. It is probable that even the most rational and logical among us as soon as he begins to philosophize at all is compelled by the necessity of things to form in the mind some vague pictorial representation answering to his conception of the universe.

The real inherent nature of such a philosophy would be probably understood and appreciated far better, both by the philosopher himself and by his friends, if this vague pictorial projection could be actually represented, in words or in a picture.

Most minds see the universe of their mental conception as something quite different from the actual stellar universe upon which we all gaze. Even the most purely rational minds who find the universe in "pure thought" are driven against their rational will to visualize this "pure thought" and to give it body and form and shape and movement.

These hidden and subconscious representations, in terms of sensible imagery, of the conclusions of philosophic thought, are themselves of profound philosophical interest. We cannot afford to neglect them. They are at least proof of the inalienable part played, in the functioning of our complex vision, by *sensation* as an organ of research. But they have a further interest. They are an illuminating revelation of the inherent character and personal bias of the individual soul who is philosophizing. I suppose to a great many minds what we call "the universe" presents itself as a colossal circle, without any circumference, filled with an innumerable number of material objects floating in some thin attenuated ether. I suppose the centre of this circle with no circumference is generally assumed to be the "self" or "soul" of the person projecting this particular image.

Doubtless, in some cases, it is assumed to be such a person's physical body as it feels itself conscious of sensation and is aware of space and time.

As I myself use the expression "complex vision" I suppose I call up in the minds of my various readers an extraordinary variety of pictorial images. Without laying any undue stress upon this pictorial tendency, I should like to indicate the kind of projected image which I myself am conscious of, when I use the expression, "the complex vision."

I seem to visualize this thing as a wavering, moving mass of flames, taking the shape of what might be called a “horizontal pyramid,” the apex of which, where the flames are fused and lost in one another, is continually cleaving the darkness like the point of a fiery arrow, while the base of it remains continually invisible by reason of some magical power which confuses the senses whenever they seek to touch or to hold it.

Sometimes I seem to see this “base” or “spear handle” or “arrow shaft,” of my moving horizontal pyramid, as a kind of deeper darkness; sometimes as a vibration of air; sometimes as a cloud of impenetrable smoke. I am always conscious of the curious fact that, while I can most vividly see the apex-point of the thing, and while I know that this moving pyramid of fire has a base, there is for ever some drastic natural law or magical power at work that obscures my vision whenever I turn my eyes to the place where I know it exists.

I have not mentioned this particular pictorial image with any wish to lay undue stress upon it. In all rarified and subtle experiments of thought pictorial images are quite as likely to hinder us in our groping towards reality as they are to help us. If my image of a moving, horizontal pyramid with an apex-point of many names fused into one and a base of impenetrable invisibility seems to any reader of this passage a ridiculous and arbitrary fancy I would merely ask such an one to let it go, and to consider my description of the complex vision quite independently of it.

Sometimes to myself it appears ridiculous; and I only, as we put it, “throw it out” in order that, if it has the least illuminative value, such a value should not be quite lost. Any reader who regards my particular picture as absurd is perfectly at liberty to form his own pictorial image of what I am endeavouring to make clear. He may, if he pleases, visualize “the soul” as a sort of darkened planet from which the attributes of the complex vision radiate to the right or to the left, as the thing moves through immensity. All I ask is that these attributes should be thought of as converging to a point and as finding their “base” in some thing which is felt to exist but cannot be described.

Probably to a thorough-going empiricist, and certainly to a thorough-going materialist, it will appear quite unnecessary to translate the obvious spectacle of the world, with oneself as a physical body in the centre of it, into mental symbols and pictorial representations of the above character. Of such an one I would only ask, in what sort of manner he visualizes, when he thinks of it at all, the “soul” which he feels conscious of in his own body; and in the second place how he visualizes the connection between the will, the instinct, the reason and so forth, which animate his body and endow it with living purpose? It will be found much easier for critics to reject the particular image which has commended itself to me as suggestive of the mystery with which we have to deal, than for them to drive out and expel from their own thought the insidious human tendency towards pictorial representation.

I would commend to any sardonic psychologist whose “malice” leads him to derive pleasure from the little weaknesses of philosophers, to turn his attention to the ideal systems of supposedly “pure thought.” He will find infinite satisfaction for his spleen in the crafty manner in which “impure” thought — that is to say thought by means of pictorial images — passes itself off as “pure” and conceals its lapses.

Truth, as the complex vision clearly enough reveals to us, refuses to be dealt with by “pure” thought. To deal with truth one has to use “impure” thought, in other words thought that is dyed in the grain by taste, instinct, intuition, imagination. And every philosopher who attempts to round off his system by pure reason alone, and who refuses to recognize that the only adequate organ of research is the complex vision, is a philosopher who sooner or later will be caught red-handed in the unphilosophic act of covering his tracks.

No philosopher is on safe ground, no philosopher can offer us a massive organic concrete representation of reality who is shy of all pictorial images. They are dangerous and treacherous things; but it is better to be led astray by them than to avoid them altogether.

The mythological symbolism of antique thought was full of this pictorial tendency and even now the shrewdest of modern thinkers are compelled to use images drawn from antique mythology. Poetic thought may go astray. But it can never negate itself into quite the thin simulacrum of reality into which pure reason divorced from poetic imagery is capable of fading.

After all, the most obstinate and irreducible of all pictorial representations is the obvious one of the material universe with our physical body as the centre of it. But even this is not complete. In fact it is extremely far from complete, directly we think closely about it. For not only does such a picture omit the real centre, that indescribable "something" we call the "soul," it also loses itself in unthinkable darkness when it considers any one of its own unfathomable horizons.

It cannot be regarded as a very adequate picture when both the centre of it and the circumference of it baffle thought. The materialist or "objectivist" may be satisfied with such a result, but it is a result which does not answer the question of philosophy, but rather denies that any answer is possible. But though this obvious objective spectacle of the universe, with our bodily self as a part of it, cannot satisfy the demands of the complex vision, it is at least certain that no philosophy which does not include this and accept this and continually return to this, can satisfy these demands.

The complex vision requires the reality of this objective spectacle but it also requires recognition of certain basic assumptions, implicit in this spectacle, which the materialist refuses to consider.

And the most comprehensive of these assumptions is nothing less than the complex vision itself, with that “something,” which is the soul, as its inscrutable base. Thus I am permitted to retain, in spite of its arbitrary fantasy, my pictorial image of a pyramidal arrow of fire, moving from darkness to darkness. My picture were false to my conception if it did not depict the whole pyramid, with the soul itself as its base, moving, in its complete totality, from mystery to mystery.

It may move upwards, downwards, or, as I myself seem to see it, horizontally. But as long as it keeps its apex-point directed to the mystery in front of it, it matters little how we conceive of it as moving. That it should *move,* in some way or another, is the gist of my demand upon it; for, if it does not move, nothing moves; and life itself is swallowed up in nothingness.

This swallowing up of life in nothingness, this obliteration of life by nothingness is what the emotion of malice ultimately desires. The eternal conflict between love and malice is the eternal contest between life and death. And this contest is what the complex vision reveals, as it moves from darkness to darkness.

CHAPTER II. THE ASPECTS OF THE COMPLEX VISION

THE ASPECTS OF the complex vision may be separated from one another according to many systems of classifications. As long as, in the brief summary which follows, I include the more obvious and more important of these aspects, I shall be doing all that the philosophy of the complex vision demands.

The reader is quite at liberty to make a different classification from mine, if mine appears unconvincing to him. The general trend of my argument will not be in any serious way affected, as long as he admits that I have followed the tradition of ordinary human language, in the classification which I have preferred.

It seems to me, then, that the aspects of the complex vision are eleven in number; and that they may be summarized as consisting of reason, self-consciousness, will, the aesthetic sense, or "taste," imagination, memory, conscience, sensation, instinct, intuition and emotion.

These eleven aspects or attributes are not to be regarded as absolutely separate "functions," but rather as relatively separate "energies" of the one concrete soul-monad. The complex vision is the vision of an irreducible living entity which pours itself as a whole into every one of its various energizings. And though it pours itself as a whole into each one of these, and though each one of these contains the latent potentiality of all the rest, the nature of the complex vision is such that it necessarily takes colour and form from the particular aspect or attribute through which at the moment it is especially energizing.

It is precisely here that the danger of “disproportion” was found. For the complex vision with the whole weight of all its aspects behind it receives the colour and the form of only one of them. We can see the result of this from the tenacity — implying the presence of emotion and will — with which some philosopher of pure reason passionately and imaginatively defends his logical conclusion.

But we are ourselves proof of it in every moment of our lives. Confronted with some definite external situation, of a happy or unhappy character, we fling ourselves upon this new intrusion with the momentum of our whole being; and it becomes largely a matter of accident whether our reaction of the moment is coloured by reason or by will or by imagination or by taste. Immersed in the tide of experience, receiving shock after shock from alien and hostile forces, we struggle with the weight of our whole soul against each particular obstacle, not stopping to regulate the complicated machinery of our vision but just seizing upon the thing, or trying to avoid it, with whatever energy serves our purpose best at the moment.

This is especially true of small and occasional pleasures or small and occasional annoyances. A supreme pleasure or a supreme pain forces us to gather our complex vision together, forces us to make use of its apex-thought, so that we can embrace the ecstasy or fling ourselves upon the misery with a co-ordinated power. It is the little casual annoyances and reliefs of our normal days which are so hard to deal with in the spirit of philosophic art, because these little pleasures and pains while making a superficial appeal to the reason or the emotion or the will or the conscience, are not drastic or formidable enough to drive us into any concentration of the apex-thought which shall harmonize our confused energies.

The fatal ease with which the whole complex vision gets itself coloured by and obsessed by one of its own attributes may be proved by the history of philosophy itself. Individual philosophers have, over and over again, plunged with furious tenacity into the mystery of life with a complex vision distorted, deformed and over-balanced.

I seem to see the complex vision of such thinkers taking some grotesque shape whereby the apex-point of effective thought is blunted and broken. The loss and misery, or the yet more ignoble comfort, of such suppressions of the apex-thought, is however a personal matter. Those “invisible companions,” or immortal children of the universe, who are implicitly present as the background of all human discussion, grow constantly more definite and articulate the apprehension of the general human mind by reason of these personal aberrations.

It is perhaps rather to the great artists of our race than to any philosopher at all that these invisible ones reveal themselves, but in their gradual disclosure to the consciousness of the human race, they are certainly assisted by the most insane and unbalanced plunges into mystery, of this and the other abnormal individual. The paradox may indeed be hazarded that the madder and more abnormal are the individual’s attempts to dig himself into the very nerves and fibres of reality, the clearer and more definite as far as consciousness of the race is concerned, does the revelation of these invisible ones grow.

The abnormal individual whose complex vision is distorted almost out of human recognition by the predominance of some one attribute, is yet, in his madness and morbidity, a wonderful engine of research for the clairvoyance of humanity.

The vision of the immortals, as a background to all further discussion, is rendered richer and more rhythmical every day, or rather the hidden rhythm of their being is revealed more clearly every day, by the eccentricities and maladies, nay! by the insanities and desperations, of individual victims of life.

Thus it comes about that, while the supreme artists, whose approximation, to the vision of the invisible ones is closest, remain our unique masters, the lower crowd of moderately sane and moderately well-balanced persons are of less value to humanity than those abnormal and wayward ones whose psychic distortions are the world's perverted instruments of research.

A philosopher of this unbalanced kind is indeed a sort of living sacrifice or victim of self-vivisection, out of whose demonic discoveries — bizarre and fantastic though they may seem to the lower sanity of the mob — the true rhythmic vision of the immortals is made clearer and more articulate.

The kind of balance or sanity which such average persons, as are commonly called "men of the world," possess is in reality further removed from true vision than all the madness of these debauches of specialized research. For the consummation of the complex vision is a meeting place of desperate and violent extremes; extremes, not watered down nor modified nor even "reconciled," certainly not cancelled by one another, but held forcibly and deliberately together by an arbitrary act of the apex-thought of the human soul.

As I glance at these basic activities of the complex vision one by one, I would beg the reader to sink as far as he can into the recesses of his own identity; so that he may discover whether what he finds there agrees in substance — call it by what name he pleases and explain it how he pleases — with each particular energy I name, as I indicate such energies in my own way.

Consider the attitude of self-consciousness. That man is self-conscious is a basic and perhaps a tragic fact that surely requires no proof. The power of thinking “I am I” is an ultimate endowment of personality, outside of which, except by an act of primordial faith, we cannot pass. The phenomenon of human growth from infancy to maturity proves that it is possible for this self-consciousness — this power of saying “I am I” — to become clearer and more articulate from day to day. It seems as impossible to fix upon a definite moment in a child’s life where we can draw a line and say “*there* he was unconscious of himself and *here* he is conscious of himself” as it is impossible to observe as an actual visible movement the child’s growth in stature.

Between consciousness and self-consciousness the dividing line seems to be as difficult to define as it is difficult to define the line between sub-consciousness and consciousness. My existence as a self-conscious entity capable of thinking “I am I” is the basic assumption of all thought. And though it is possible for my thought to turn round upon itself and deny my own existence, such thought in the process of such a denial cuts the very ground away which is the leaping point of any further advance.

Philosophy by such drastic scepticism is reduced to complete silence. You cannot build up anything except illusion from a basis that is itself illusion. If I were not self-conscious there would be no centre or substratum or coherence or unity in any thought I had. If I were not self-conscious I should be unable to think.

Consider, then, the attribute of reason. That we possess reason is also a fact that carries with it its own evidence. It is reason which at this very moment — reason of some sort, at any rate — I am bound to use, in estimating the important place or the unimportant place which reason itself should occupy. You cannot derogate from the value of reason without using reason. You cannot put reason into an inferior category, when compared with will or instinct or emotion, without using reason itself to prove such an inferiority.

We may come to the conclusion that the universe is rather irrational than rational. We may come to the conclusion that the secret of life transcends and over-brims all rationality. But this very conclusion as to the irrational nature of the mystery with which reason is attempting to deal is itself a conclusion of the reason.

There is only one power which is able to put reason aside in its search for truth and that power is reason.

Consider, then, the attribute of will. That we possess a definite and distinct energy whose activity may be contrasted with the rest and may be legitimately named "the will" is certainly less self-evident than either of the two preceding propositions but is none the less implied in both of them. For in the act of articulating to ourself the definite thought "I am I" we are using our will. The motive-force may be anything. We may for instance will an answer to the implied question "*what* am I," and our self-consciousness may return the answer "I am I," leaving it to the reason to deal with this answer as best it can. The motive may be anything or nothing. Both consciousness and will are independent of motive.

For in all these primordial energizings of the complex vision everything that happens, happens simultaneously. With the consciousness "I am I" there comes simultaneously into existence the consciousness of an external universe which is, at one and the same time, included in the circle of the "I am I" and outside the circle. That is to say when we think the thought "I am I," we feel ourselves to be the whole universe thinking "I am I," and yet by a primordial contradiction, we feel ourselves to be an "I am I" opposed to the universe and contrasted with the universe.

But all this happens simultaneously; and the consciousness that we are ourselves implies, at one and the same time, the consciousness that we *are* the universe and the consciousness that we are *inside* the universe.

And precisely as the fact of self-consciousness implies the primordial duality and contradiction of being at once the whole universe and something inside the universe, so the original fact of our thinking at all, implies the activity of the will.

We think because we are "thinking animals" and we will because we are "willing animals." The presence of what we call motive is something that comes and goes intermittently and which may or may not be present from the first awakening of consciousness. We *may* think "I am I" at the very dawn of consciousness under the pressure of a vague motive of clearing up a confused situation. We *may* use our reason at the very dawn of consciousness under the pressure of a vague motive of alleviating the distress of disorder with the comfort of order. But, on the other hand, self-consciousness may play its part, reason may play its part and the will may play its part in the complete absence of any definite motive. There is such a thing — and this is the point I am anxious to make — as *motiveless* will. Certain thinkers have sought to eliminate the will altogether by substituting for it the direct impact or pressure of some motive or motive-force. But if the will can be proved to be a primordial energy of the complex vision and if the conception of a motiveless exertion of the will is a legitimate conception, then, although we must admit the intermittent appearance and disappearance of all manner of motives, we have no right to substitute motive for will. If we do make such a substitution, all we really achieve is simply a change of *name;* and our new motive is the old will "writ small."

Motives undoubtedly may come and go from the beginning of consciousness and the beginning of will. They may flutter like butterflies round both the consciousness and the will. For instance it is clear that I am not *always* articulating to myself the notable or troublesome thought “I am I.” I may be sometimes so lost and absorbed in sensation that I quite forget this interesting fact. But it may easily happen at such times that I definitely experience the *sensation of choice;* of choice between an intensification of self-consciousness and a continued blind enjoyment of this external preoccupation. And it is from this *sensation of choice* that we gather weight for our contention that the will is a basic attribute of the human soul.

It is certainly true that we are often able to detach ourselves from ourselves and to watch the struggle going on between two opposite motive-forces, quite unaware, it might seem, and almost indifferent, as to how the contest will end.

But this struggle between opposite motives does not obliterate our sensation of choice. It sometimes intensifies it to an extreme point of quite painful suspension. The opposite motives may be engaged in a struggle. But the field of the struggle is what we call the will. And it may even sometimes happen that the will intervenes between a weaker and stronger motive and, out of arbitrary pride and the pleasure of exertion for the sake of exertion, throws its weight on the weaker side.

It is a well-known psychological fact that the complex vision can energize, with vigorous spontaneity, through the will alone, just as it can energize through sensation alone. The will can, so to speak, stretch its muscles and gather itself together for attack or defence at a moment when there is no particular necessity for its use.

Some degree of self-consciousness is bound to accompany this “motiveless stretching” of the will, for the simple reason that it is not “will in the abstract” which makes such a movement but the totality of the complex vision, though in this case all other attributes of the complex vision, including self-consciousness and reason, are held in subordination to the will.

Man is a philosophical animal; and he philosophizes as inevitably as he breathes. He is also an animal possessed of will; and he uses his will as inevitably as, in the process of breathing, he uses his lungs or his throat. Around him, from the beginning, all manner of motives may flutter like birds on the wing. They may be completely different motives in the case of different personalities. But in all personalities there is consciousness, to grasp these motives; and in all personalities there is will, to accept or to reject these motives.

The question of the freedom of the will is a question which necessarily enters into our discussion.

The will feels itself — or rather consciousness feels the will to be — at once free and limited. The soul does not feel it is free to do anything it pleases. That at least is certain. For without some limitation, without something resistant to exert itself upon, the will could not be known. An absolutely free will is unthinkable. The very nature of the will implies a struggle with some sort of resistance.

The will is, therefore, by the terms of its original definition and by the original feeling which the soul experiences in regard to it, limited in its freedom. The problem resolves itself, therefore, if once we grant the existence of the will, into the question of how much freedom the will has or how far it is limited. Is it, for instance, when we know all the conditions of its activity, entirely limited? Is the freedom of the will an illusion?

It is just at this point that the logical reason makes a savage attempt to dominate the situation. The logical reason arrives step by step at the inevitable conclusion that the will has no freedom at all but is absolutely limited.

On the other hand emotion, instinct, imagination, intuition, and conscience, all assume that the limitation of the will is not absolute but that within certain boundaries, which themselves are by no means fixed or permanent, the will is free.

Consciousness itself must be added to this list. For whatever arguments may be used in the realm of thought, when the moment of choice arrives in the realm of action, we are always conscious of the will as free. If the reason is justified in regarding the freedom of the will as an illusion, we are justified in denying the existence of the will altogether. For a will with only an illusion of freedom is not a will at all. In that ease it were better to eliminate the will and regard the soul as a thing which acts and reacts under the stimuli of motives like a helpless automaton endowed with consciousness.

But the wiser course is to experiment with the will and let it prove its freedom to the sceptical reason by helping that same reason to retire into its proper place and associate itself with the apex-thought of the complex vision.

Leaving the will then, as a thing limited and yet free, let us pass to a consideration of what I call “taste.” This is the aesthetic sense, an original activity of the human soul, associated with that universal tendency in life and nature which we name the beautiful. I use the word “taste” at this moment in preference to “aesthetic sense,” because I feel that this particular original activity of the complex vision has a wider field than is commonly supposed. I regard it, in fact, as including much more than the mere sense of beauty. I regard it as a direct organ of research, comparable to instinct or intuition, but covering a different ground. I regard it as a mysterious clairvoyance of the soul, capable of discriminating between certain everlasting opposites, which together make up an eternal duality in the very depths of existence.

These opposites imply larger and more complicated issues than are implied in the words beautiful and ugly. The real and the unreal, the interesting and the uninteresting, the significant and the insignificant, the suggestive and the meaningless, the arresting and the commonplace, the exciting and the dull, the organic and the affected, the dramatic and the undramatic, are only some of the differences implied.

The fact that art is constantly using what we call the ugly as well as what we call the commonplace, and turning both these into new forms of beauty, is a fact that considerably complicates the situation. And what art, the culminating creative energy of the aesthetic sense, can do, the aesthetic sense itself can do with its critical and receptive power.

So that in the aesthetic sense, or in what I call "taste," we have an energy which is at once receptive and creative; at once capable of responding to this eternal duality, and of creating new forms of beauty and interest *out of* the ugly and uninteresting. A new name is really required for this thing. A name is required for it that conveys a more creative implication than the word "taste," a word which has an irresponsible, arbitrary, and even flippant sound, and a more passionate, religious, and ecstatic implication than the word "aesthetic," a word which suggests something calculated, cold, learned, and a little tame. I use the word "taste" at this particular moment because this word implies a certain challenge to both reason and conscience, and some such challenge it is necessary to insist upon, if this particular energy of the soul is to defend its basic integrity.

This ultimate attribute of personality, then, which I call "taste" reveals to us an aspect of the system of things quite different from those revealed by the other activities of the human soul. This aspect of the universe, or this "open secret" of the universe, loses itself, as all the others do in unfathomable abysses. It descends to the very roots of life. It springs from the original reservoirs of life. It has depths which no mental logic can sound; and it has horizons in the presence of which the mind stops baffled. When we use the term "the beautiful" to indicate the nature of what it reveals, we are easily misled; because in current superficial speech — and unless the word is used by a great artist — the term "beautiful" has a narrow and limited meaning. Dropping the term "taste" then, as having served its purpose, and reverting to the more academic phrase "aesthetic sense" we must note that the unfathomable duality revealed by this aesthetic sense covers, as I have hinted, much more ground than is covered by the narrow terms "beauty" and "ugliness."

It must be understood, moreover, that what is revealed by the aesthetic sense is a struggle, a conflict, a war, a contradiction, going on in the heart of things. The aesthetic sense does not only reveal loveliness and distinction; it also reveals the grotesque, the bizarre, the outrageous, the indecent and the diabolic. If we prefer to use the term "beauty" in a sense so comprehensive and vast as to include *both sides* of this eternal duality, then we shall be driven to regard as "beautiful" the entire panorama of life, with its ghastly contrasts, with its appalling evil, with its bitter pain, and with its intolerable dreariness.

The "beautiful" will then become nothing less than the whole dramatic vortex regarded from the aesthetic point of view. Life with all its contradictions, considered as an aesthetic spectacle, will become "beautiful" to us. This is undoubtedly one form which the aesthetic sense assumes; the form of justifying existence, in all its horror and loathsomeness as well as in all its magical attraction.

Another form the aesthetic sense may assume is the form of “taking sides” in this eternal struggle; of using its inspiration to destroy, or to make us forget, the brutality of things, by concentrating our attention upon what in the narrow sense we call the beautiful or the distinguished or the lovely. But there is yet a third form the aesthetic sense may assume. Not only can it visualize the whole chaotic struggle between beauty and hideousness as itself a beautiful drama; not only can it so concentrate upon beauty that we forget the hideousness; it is also able to see the world as a humorous spectacle.

When the aesthetic sense regards the whole universe as “beautiful” it must necessarily regard the whole universe as tragic; for the pain and dreariness and devilishness in the universe is so unspeakable that any “beauty” which includes such things must be a tragic beauty. Not to recognize this and to attempt to “accept” the universe as something which is not tragic, is to outrage and insult the aesthetic sense.

But we may regard the universe as tragic without regarding it as “beautiful” and yet remain under the power of the aesthetic energy. For there exists a primordial aspect of the aesthetic vision which is not concerned with the beautiful at all, or only with the beautiful in so wide a latitude as to transcend all ordinary usage, and this is our sense of humour.

The universe as the human soul perceives it, is horribly and most tragically humorous. Man is the laughing animal; and the “perilous stuff” which tickles his aesthetic sense with a revelation of outrageous comedy has its roots in the profoundest abyss. This humorous aspect of the system of things is just as primordial and intrinsic as what we call the “beautiful.” The human soul is able to pour the whole stream of its complex vision through this fantastic casement. It knows how to respond to the “diablerie” of the abysses with a reciprocal gesture. It is able to answer irony with irony; and to the appalling grotesqueness and indecency of the universe it has the power of retorting with an equally shameless leer.

But this sardonic aspect of human humour, though tallying truly enough with one eternal facet of the universe, does not exhaust the humorous potentiality of the aesthetic sense. There is a “good” irony as well as a “wicked” irony. Humour can be found in alliance with the emotion of love as well as with the emotion of hate. Humour can be kind as well as cruel; and there is no doubt that the aesthetic spectacle of the world is as profoundly humorous in a quite normal sense as it is beautiful or noble or horrible.

Turning now to that primeval attribute of the complex vision which we call emotion, we certainly enter the presence of something whose existence cannot be denied or explained away. Directly we grow conscious of ourselves, directly we use reason or instinct or the aesthetic sense, we are aware of an emotional reaction. This emotional reaction may be resolved into a basic duality, the activity of love and the activity of the opposite of love.

I say “the opposite of love” deliberately; because I am anxious to indicate, in regard to emotion, how difficult it is to find adequate words to cover the actual field of what we feel.

I should like to write even the word “love” with some such mark of hesitation. For, just because of the appalling importance of this ultimate duality, it is essential to be on our guard against the use of words which convey a narrow, crude, rough-and-ready, and superficial meaning. By the emotion of “love” I do not mean the amorous phenomenon which we call “being in love.” Nor do I mean the calmer emotion which we call “affection.” The passion of friendship, when friendship really becomes a passion, is nearer my meaning than any of these. And yet the emotion of love, conceived as one side of this eternal duality, is much more than the "passion of friendship"; because it is an emotion that can be felt in the presence of things and ideas as well as persons. Perhaps the emotion of love as symbolized in the figure of Christ, combined with the aesthetic and intellectual passion inherited from the Greek philosophers, comes nearest to what I have in mind; though even this, without some tangible and concrete embodiment, tends to escape us and evade analysis.

And if it is hard to define this "love" which is the protagonist, so to speak, in the world's emotional drama, it is still harder to define its opposite, its antagonist. I could name this by the name of "hate," the ordinary antithesis of love, but if I did so it would have to be with a very wide connotation.

The true opposite to the sort of "love" I have in my mind is not so much "hate" as a kind of dull and insensitive hostility, a kind of brutal malignity and callous aversion. Perhaps what we are looking for as the true opposite of love may be best defined as malice.

Malice seems to convey a more impersonal depth and a wider reach of activity than the word hate and has also a clearer suggestion of deliberate insensitiveness about it. The most concentrated and energetic opposite of love is not either hate or malice. It is *cruelty*; which is a thing that seems to draw its evil inspiration from the profoundest depths of conscious existence.

But cruelty must necessarily have for its "object" something living and sentient. A spiritual feeling, a work of art, an idea, a principle, a landscape, a theory, an inanimate group of things, could not be contemplated with an emotion of cruelty, though it could certainly be contemplated with an emotion of malice.

There is often, if not always, a strange admixture of sensuality in cruelty. Cruelty, profoundly evil as it is, has a living intensity which makes it less dull, less thick, less deliberately insensitive, less coldly hostile, than the pure emotion of malice, and therefore less adapted than malice to be regarded as the true opposite of love.

But the best indication of the distinction I want to make will be found in the contrast between the conceptions of creation and destruction. The dull, thick, insensitive callousness which we are conscious of in the opposite of love is an indication that while love is essentially creative the opposite of love is essentially *that which resists creation*.

The opposite of love is not destructive in the sense of being an active destructive force. Such an active destructive force must necessarily, by reason of the passionate energy in it, be a perversion of creative power, not the opposite of creative power.

Creative power, even in its unperverted activity, must always be capable of destroying. It must be capable of destroying what is in the way of further creation. Thus the true opposite of creation is not destruction, but the inert, heavy, thick, callous, brutal, insensitive "obscurantism" or "material opacity" which resists the pressure of the creative spirit.

By this analysis of the ultimate duality of emotion we are put in possession of a basic aspect of the complex vision, which must largely shape and determine its total activity. The soul within us, that mysterious "something" which is the living and concrete "person" whose vision the complex vision is, is a thing subject at the start to this unfathomable duality, the emotion of love and the emotion of malice.

The emotion of love is the life-begetting, life-conceiving force, the creator of beauty, the discoverer of truth, and the reconciler of eternal contradictions.

The emotion of malice, with its frozen sneer of sardonic denial, raises its "infernal fist" against the centrifugal outflowing of the emotion of love. It is impossible to conceive of self-consciousness without love and hatred; or, as I prefer to say, without love and malice. Self-consciousness implies from the start what we call the universe; and the universe cannot appear upon the scene without exciting in us the emotion of love and hate. Every man born into the world loves and hates directly he is conscious of the world. This is the ultimate duality. Attraction and repulsion is the material formula for this contradiction.

If everything in the world were illusion except one Universal Being, such a being must necessarily be thought of as experiencing the emotion of self-love and of self-hatred. A condition of absolute indifference is unthinkable. Such indifference could not last a moment without becoming either that faint hatred, which we call "boredom," or that faint love, which we call "interest." The contemplation of the universe with no emotional reaction of any kind is an inconceivable thing. An infant at its mother's breast displays love and malice. At one and the same moment it satisfies its thirst and beats upon the breast that feeds it.

The primordial process of philosophizing and the primal will to philosophize are both of them penetrated through and through, with this ultimate duality of love and malice. Love and malice in alternate impulse are found latent and potent in every philosophic effort. Behind every philosophy, if we have the love or the malice to seek for it, may be found the love or malice, or both of them, side by side, of the individual philosopher. That pure and unemotional desire for truth for its own sake which is the privilege of physical science cannot retain its simplicity when confronted with the deeper problems of philosophy. It cannot do so because the complex vision with which we philosophize contains emotion as one of its basic attributes.

To consider next, the attribute of imagination. Imagination seems, when we analyse it, to resolve itself into the half-creative, half-interpretative act by which the complex personality seizes upon, plunges into, and moulds to its purpose, that deeper unity in any group of things which gives such a group its larger and more penetrating significance.

Imagination differs from intuition in the fact that by its creative and interpretative power it dominates, possesses and moulds the material it works upon. Intuition is entirely receptive and it receives the illumination offered to it at one single indrawing, at one breath. Imagination may be regarded as a male attribute; intuition as a feminine one; although in a thousand individual cases the situation is actually reversed.

To realize the primary importance of imagination one has only to visualize reason, will, taste, sensation, and so forth, energizing in its absence. One becomes aware at once that such a limited activity does not cover the field of man's complex vision. Something — a power that creates, interprets, illumines, gathers up into large and flowing outlines — is absent from such an experience.

Consider, in the next place, that primordial attribute of the complex vision which we commonly name conscience. We are not concerned here with the world-old discussion as to the "origin" of conscience. Conscience, from the point of view we are now considering, is just as fundamental and axiomatic as will, or intuition, or sensation.

The philosophy of the complex vision retains, with regard to what is called "evolution," a completely suspended judgment. The process of historic evolution may or may not have resulted in the particular differentiation of species which we now behold. What we are now assuming is that, in whatever way the differentiation of actual living organisms has come about, every particular living organism, including the planetary and stellar bodies, must possess in some degree or other the organ of apprehension which we call the complex vision.

Our assumption, in fact, is that every living thing has personality; that personality implies the existence of a definite soul-monad; that where such a soul-monad exists there is a complex vision; and finally that, where there is a complex vision, there must be, in some rudimentary or embryotic state, the eleven attributes of such a vision, including the attribute which the human race has come to call "conscience" and which is, in reality, "the power of response" to the vision which we have named "immortal." When evolutionists retort to us that what we call personality is only a late and accidental phenomenon in the long process of evolution, our answer is that when they seek, according to such an assumption, to visualize the universe as it was *before personality appeared,* they really, only in a surreptitious and illegitimate manner, project their own conscious personality into "the vast backward and abysm of time," to be the invisible witness of this pre-personal universe.

Thus when evolutionists assure us that there was once a period in the history of the stellar system when nothing existed but masses of gaseous nebulae, our reply is that they have forgotten that invisible and shadowy projection of their own personality which is the pre-supposed watcher or witness of this "nothing-but-nebulae" state of things.

The doctrine or hypothesis of evolution does not in any degree explain the mystery of the universe. All it does is to offer us an hypothetical picture — true or false — of the manner in which the changes of organic and inorganic life succeeded one another in their historic creation. Evolutionists have to make their start somewhere, just as "personalists" have; and it is much more difficult for them to show how masses of utterly unconscious "nebulae" evoked the mystery of personality than it is for us to show how the primordial existence of personality demands at the very start some sort of material or bodily expression, whether of a nebular or of any other kind.

Evolutionists, forgetting the presence of that invisible “watcher” of their evolutionary process which they have themselves projected into the remote planetary past, assume as their axiomatic “data” that soulless unconscious chemical elements possess “within them” the miraculous power of producing living personalities. All one has to do is to pile up thousands upon thousands of years in which the miracle takes place.

But the philosophy of the complex vision would indicate that no amount of piling up of centuries upon centuries could possibly produce out of “unconscious matter” the perilous and curious “stuff” which we call “consciousness of life.” And we would further reply to the evolutionists that their initial assumption as to the objective existence, suspended in a vacuum, of masses of material chemistry is an assumption which has been abstracted and isolated from the total volume of those sense-impressions, which are the only actual reality we know, and which are the impressions made, in human experience, upon some living personality.

This criticism of the evolutionists’ inevitable attack upon us enters naturally at this point; because, while the average mind is willing enough to grant some sort of vague omnipresent “will to evolve” to the primordial “nebula” and even prepared to allow it such obscure consciousness as is implied in the phrase “life-force” or “élan vital,” it is startled and shocked to a supreme degree when we assert that such “nebula,” if it existed, was the outward body or form of a living “soul-monad” possessed, even as human beings are, of every attribute of the complex vision.

The average mind, in its vague and careless mood, is ready to accept our contention that some sort of will or reason or consciousness existed at the beginning of things. It is only when such a mind comes to realize that what we are predicating is actual personality, with all the implications of that, that it cries out in protest. The average mind can swallow our contention that reason and will existed from the beginning because the average mind has been penetrated for centuries by vague traditions of an “over-soul” or an universal “reason” or “will.” It is only when in our analysis of the attributes of personality we come bolt up against the especially anthropomorphic attribute of “conscience” that it staggers and gasps.

For the original “stellar gas” to be vaguely animated by some obscure “élan vital” seemed natural enough; but for it to be the “body” of some definite living soul seems almost humorous; and for such a living soul to possess the attribute of “conscience,” or the power of response to the vision of immortals, seems not only humorous but positively absurd.

The philosophy of the complex vision, however, in its analysis of the eternal elements of personality is not in the least afraid of reaching conclusions which appear “absurd” to the average intelligence. The philosophy of the complex vision accepts the element of the “absurd” or of the “outrageous” or of the “fantastic” in its primordial assumptions; for according to its contention this element of the “apparently impossible” is an essential ingredient in the whole system of things.

Life, according to this philosophy, is only one aspect of personality. Another aspect of personality is the apparently miraculous creation of “something” out of “nothing”; for the unfathomable creative power of personality extends beyond and below all the organic phenomena which we group vaguely together under the name of “life.”

Thus when in our analysis of the attributes of the complex vision we are confronted by the evolutionary question as to how such a thing, as the thing we call “conscience,” got itself lodged in the little cells of the human cranium, our answer is that the question stated in this manner does not touch the essential problem at all. The essential problem from the point of view of the philosophy of the complex vision is not how "conscience," or why other attribute of the soul, got itself lodged in the human skull, or expressed, shall we say, through the human skull, but how it is that the whole stream of sense-impressions, of which the hardness and thickness of the human skull is only one impression among many, and the original "star-dust" or "star-nebulae" only another impression among many, ever got itself unified and synthesized into the form of "impression" at all.

In other words the problem is not how the attributes of the soul arose from the chemistry of the brain and the nerves; but how the brain and the nerves together with the whole stream of material phenomena from the star-dust upwards, ever got themselves unified and focussed into any sort of intelligibility or system. The average human mind which feels a shock of distrust and suspicion directly we suggest that the thing we name "conscience," defined as the power of response to the ideal vision, is an inalienable aspect of what we call "the soul" wherever the soul exists, feels no sort of shock or surprise when we appeal to its own "conscience," or when it appeals to the "conscience" of its child or its dog or even of its cat, or when it displays anger with its trees or its flowers for their apparent wilfulness and errancy.

Kant found in the moral sense of humanity his door of escape from the fatal relativity of pure reason with its confounding antinomies. Huxley found in the moral sense of humanity a mysterious, unrelated phenomenon that refused to fall into line with the rest of the evolutionary-stream. But when, in one hold act of faith or of imagination, we project the content of our own individual soul into the circle of every other possible "soul," including the "souls" of such phenomenal vortices of matter as those from which historic evolution takes its start, this impossible gulf or "lacuna" dividing the human scene from all previous "scenes" is immediately bridged; and the whole stream of material sense-impression flows forward, in parallel and consonant congruity, with the underlying creative energy of all the complex visions of which it is the expression.

Therefore, there is no need for us, in our consideration of the basic attribute of the soul which we call conscience, to tease ourselves with the fabulous image of some prehistoric "cave-man" supposedly devoid of such a sense. To do this is to employ a trick of the isolated reason quite alien from our real human imagination.

Our own personality is so constructed that it is impossible for us to realize with any sort of intelligent sympathy what the feelings of this conscience-less cave-man would be. To contemplate his existence at all we have to resort to pure rationalistic speculation. We have to leave our actual human experience completely behind. But the philosophy of the complex vision is an attempt to interpret the mystery of the universe in terms of nothing else than actual human experience. So we are not only permitted but compelled to put out of court this conscience-less cave-man of pure speculation. It is true that we encounter certain eccentric human beings who deny that they possess this "moral sense"; but one has only to observe them for a little while under the pressure of actual life to find out how they deceive themselves.

Experience certainly indicates that every human being, however normal and "good," has somewhere in him a touch of insanity and a vein of anti-social aberration. But no human being, however abnormal or however "criminal," is born into the world without this invisible monitor we call "conscience."

The curious pathological experience which might be called "conscience-killing" is certainly not uncommon. But it is an experiment that has never been more than approximately successful. In precisely the same way we might practise “reason-killing” or “intuition-killing” or “taste-killing.” One may set out to hunt and try to kill any basic attribute of our complex vision; but the proof of the truth of our whole argument lies in the fact that these murderous campaigns are never completely successful. The “murdered” attribute refuses to remain quiet in its grave. It stretches out an arm from beneath the earth. It shakes the dust off and comes to life again.

When we leave the question as to the existence of conscience, and enquire what the precise and particular “command” of conscience may be in any individual case, we approach the edge of an altogether different problem.

The particular message or command of conscience is bound to differ in a thousand ways in the cases of different personalities. Only in its ultimate essence it cannot differ. Because, in its ultimate essence, the conscience of every individual is confronted by that eternal duality of love and malice which is the universal contradiction at the basis of every living soul.

But short of this there is room for an infinite variety of “categorical imperatives.” The conscience of one personality is able to accept as its “good” the very same thing that another personality is compelled to regard as its “evil.” Indeed it is conceivable that a moment might arise in the history of the race when one single solitary individual called that thing “good” or that thing “evil” which all the rest of the world regarded in the opposite sense. Not only so; but it might even happen that the genius and persuasiveness of such a person might change into its direct opposite the moral valuation of the whole of humanity. In many quite ordinary cases there may arise a clash between the conventional morality of the community and the verdict of an individual conscience. In such cases it would be towards what the community termed “immoral” that the conscience of the individual would point, and from the thing that the community termed “moral” that it would turn instinctively away.

A conscience of this kind would suffer the pain of remorse when in its weakness it let itself be swayed by the “community-morality” and it would experience the pleasure of relief when in absolute loneliness it defied the verdict of society.

Let us consider now an attribute of man’s complex vision which must instantaneously be accepted as basic and fundamental by every living person. I refer to what we call “sensation.” The impressions of the outward senses may be criticized. They may be corrected, modified, reduced to order, and supplemented by other considerations. Conclusions based upon them may be questioned. But whatever be done with them, or made by them, they must always remain an integral and inveterate aspect of man’s personality.

The sensations of pain and pleasure — who can deny the primordial and inescapable character of these? Not that the pursuit of pleasure or the avoidance of pain can be the unbroken motive-force even of the most hedonistic among us. Our complex vision frequently flings us passionately upon pain. We often embrace pain in an ecstasy of welcome. Nor is this fierce embracing of pain “motivated” by a deliberate desire to get pleasure out of pain. It seems in some strange way due to an attraction towards pain for its own sake — towards pain, as though pain were really beautiful and desirable in itself. One element in all this is undoubtedly due to the desire of the will to assert its freedom and the integrity of its being; in other words to the desire of the will towards the irrational, the capricious, the destructive, the chaotic.

It has been only the least imaginative of philosophers who have taken for granted that man invariably desires his own welfare. Man does not even invariably desire his own pleasure. He desires the reactive vibration of power; and very often this "power" is the power to rush blindly upon destruction. But, whether dominant or not as a motive affecting the will, it remains that our experience of pleasure and pain is a basic experience of the complex vision. And this experience of sensation is not only a passive experience. The attribute of sensation has its active, its energetic, its creative side. No one who has suffered extreme pain or enjoyed exquisite and thrilling pleasures, can deny the curious fact that these things take to themselves a kind of independent life within us and become something very like "entities" or living separate objects.

This phenomenon is due to the fact that our whole personality incarnates itself in the pain or in the pleasure of the moment. Such pain, such pleasure, is the quintessential attenuated "matter" with which our soul clothes itself. At such moments we *are* the pain; we *are* the pleasure. Our human identity seems merged, lost, annihilated. Our soul seems no longer *our* soul. It becomes the soul of the overpowering sensation. We ourselves at such moments become fiery molecules of pain, burning atoms of pleasure. Just as the logical reason can abstract itself from the other primal energies and perform strange and fantastic tricks, so the activity of sensation can so absorb, obsess and overpower the whole personality that the rhythm of existence is entirely broken.

Pain at the point of ecstasy, pleasure at the point of ecstasy, are both of them destructive of those rare moments when our complex vision resolves itself into music. Such music is indeed itself a kind of ecstasy; but it is an ecstasy intellectualized and consciously creative. Pain is present there and pleasure is present there; but they are there only as orchestral notes in a larger unity that has absorbed them and transmuted them.

When a work of art by reason of its sensational appeal reduces us to an ecstasy of pleasure or pain it renders impossible that supreme act of the complex vision by means of which the immortal calm of the ideal vision descends upon the unfathomable universe.

Sensation carried to its extreme limit becomes impersonal; for in its unconscious mechanism personality is devoured. But it does not become impersonal in that magical liberating sense in which the impersonal is an escape, bringing with it a feeling of large, cool, quiet, and unruffled space. It becomes impersonal in a thick, gross, opaque, mechanical manner.

There is brutality and outrage; there is bestiality and obscenity about both pain and pleasure when in their voracious maw they devour the magic of the unfathomable world. Thus it may be noted that most great and heroic souls hold their supreme pain at a distance from them, with a proud gesture of contempt, and go down at the last with their complex vision unruffled and unimpaired. There is indeed a still deeper "final moment" than this; but it is so rare as to be out of the reach of average humanity. I refer to an attitude like that of Jesus upon the cross; in whose mood towards his own suffering there was no element of "pride of will" but only an immense pity for the terrible sensitiveness of all life, and a supreme heightening of the emotion of love towards all life.

It will be noted that in my analysis of "sensation" I have said nothing of what are usually called "the five senses." These senses are obviously the material "feelers" or the gates of material sentiency by which the soul's attribute of sensation feeds itself from the objective world; but they are so penetrated and percolated, through and through, by the other basic activities of the soul, that it is extremely difficult to disentangle from our impressions of sight, of sound, of touch, of taste, and of smell, those interwoven threads of reason, imagination and so forth which so profoundly modify and transmute, even in the art of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling, the various manifestations of “the objective mystery” which we apprehend in our sensuous grasp.

By emphasizing the feelings of pleasure and pain as the primary characteristics of the attribute of sensation we are indicating the fact that every sensation we experience carries with it in some perceptible degree or other, the feeling of “well-being” or the feeling of distress.

We now come to consider that dim, obscure, but nevertheless powerful energy, which the universal tradition of language dignifies by the name of “instinct.” This “instinct” is the portion of the activity of the soul which works more blindly and less consciously than any other.

The French philosopher Bergson isolates and emphasizes this subterranean activity until it seems to him to hold in its grasp a deeper secret of life than any other energy which man possesses To secure for instinct this primary place in the panorama of life it is necessary to eliminate from the situation that silent witness which we call “the mind” or self-consciousness; that witness which from its invisible watch-tower looks forth upon the whole spectacle. It is necessary to take for granted the long historic stream of evolutionary development. It is necessary to regard this development in its organic totality as the sole reality with which we have to deal.

The invisible mental witness being eliminated, it becomes necessary, if instinct is to be thus made supreme, to regard the appearance of the soul as a mere stage in an evolutionary process, the driving-force of which is the power of instinct itself. Planets and plants, men and animals, are seen in this way to be all dominated by instinct; and instinct is found to be so much the most important element in evolution, that upon it, rather than upon anything else, the whole future of the universe may be said to depend.

Having made this initial plunge into shameless objectivity, having put completely out of court the invisible witness of it all, we find ourselves reduced to regarding this "blind" instinct as the galvanic battery which moves the world. Thus isolated from the other powers of the soul, this mysterious energy, this subterranean driving-force, has to bear the whole weight of everything that happens in space and time. A strange sort of "blindness" must its blindness be, when its devices can supply the place of the most passionate intellectual struggles of the mind!

If it is blind, it gropes its way, in its blindness, through the uttermost gulfs of space and into the nethermost abysses of life. If it is dumb, its silence is the irresistible silence of Fate, the silence of the eternal "Mothers."

But the "instinct" which is one of the basic attributes of the complex vision is not quite such an awe-inspiring thing as this. To raise it into such a position as this there has to be a vigorous suppression, as I have hinted, of many other attributes of the soul. Instinct may be defined as the pressure of obscure creative desire, drawn from the inscrutable recesses of the soul, malleable up to a certain point by reason and will, but beyond that point remaining unconscious, irrational, incalculable, elusive. That it plays an enormous part in the process of life cannot be denied; but the part it plays is not so isolated from consciousness as sometimes has been imagined.

There is in truth a strange reciprocity between instinct and self-consciousness, according to which they both play into each other's hands. This is above all true of great artists' work, which in a superficial sense might be called unconscious, but which in a deeper sense is profoundly conscious. It seems as though, in great works of art, a certain superficial reasoning is sacrificed to instinct, but in that very sacrifice a deeper level of reason is reached between which and instinct there is no longer anything but complete understanding.

To intellectualize instinct is one of the profoundest secrets of the art of life; and it is only when instinct is thus intellectualized, or brought into focus with the other aspects of the soul, that it is able to play its proper rhythmic part in the musical synthesis of the complex vision. But although we cannot allow to instinct the all-absorbing part in the world-play which Bergson claims for it, it remains that we have to regard it as one of the most mysterious and incalculable of the energies of the soul. It is instinct which brings all living entities into relation with something sub-conscious in their own nature.

Under the pressure of instinct man recognizes the animal in himself, the plant in himself, and even a strange affinity with the inorganic and the inanimate. It is instinct in us which attracts us so strangely to the earth under our feet. It is instinct which attracts certain individual souls to certain particular natural elements, such as air, fire, sand, mould, rain, wind, water, and the like; a kind of remote atavistic reciprocity in us stretching out towards that particular element. It is by means of instinct that we are able to sink into that mysterious sub-conscious world which underlies the conscious levels of every soul-monad. Under the groping and fumbling guidance of this strange power we seem to come into touch with the profoundest reservoirs of our personal identity.

Considering what fantastic and cruel tricks the lonely thinking power, the abstract reason, has been allowed to play us it is no wonder that this French philosopher has been tempted to turn away from reason and find in instinct the ultimate solution. Instinct, as we give ourselves up to it, seems to carry us into the very nerves and tissues and veins and pulses of life. Its verdicts seem to reach us with an absolute and unquestionable authority. They seem to bear upon them an “imprimatur” more powerful than any moral sanction. Potent and terrible, direct and final, instinct seems to rise up out of the depths and break every law.

It leaps forth from our inmost being like a second self more powerful than we are. It invades religion. It incarnates itself in lust. It obsesses taste. It masquerades as intuition. It triumphs over reason. With an irrationality, that seems at the same time terrible and beautiful, instinct moves straight to its goal. It follows its purpose with demonic tenacity, heedless of logic, contemptuous of consequences. It cares nothing for contradictions. It forces contradictions to lose themselves in one another according to some secret law of its own, unknown to the law of reason.

Such, then, is instinct, the sub-conscious fatality of Nature so difficult to control; whose unrestrained activity is capable of completely destroying the rhythm of the complex vision. Nothing but the power of the apex-thought of man’s whole concentrated being is able to dominate this thing. It may be detected lurking in the droop of the Sphinx’s eyelids and in the cruel smile upon her mouth. But the answer given to the challenge of this subterranean force is not, after all, any logical judgment of the pure reason. It is the answer of the vision of the artist, holding its treacherous material under his creative hand.

Let us turn now to the attribute of “intuition.” Intuition is a thing more clearly definable and more easily analysed than almost any other of the aspects of the soul. Intuition is the feminine counterpart of imagination; and, as compared with instinct, it is a power which acts in clearly denned, isolated, intermittent movements, each one of which has a definite beginning and a definite end. As compared with imagination, intuition is passive and receptive; as compared with instinct it does not fumble and grope forward, steadily and tenaciously, among the roots of things; but it suspends itself, mirror-like, upon the surface of the unfathomable waters, and suspended there reflects in swift sudden glimpses the mysterious movements of the great deep. In this process of reflecting, or apprehending in sudden, intermittent glimpses, the mysterious depths of the life of the soul, intuition is less affected by the reason or by the will than any other aspect of the complex vision.

Instinct, in secret sub-conscious alliance with the will, is a permanent automatic energy, working in the hidden darkness of the roots of things like an ever-flowing subterranean stream. The revelations of intuition, on the other hand, are not flowing and constant, but separate, isolated, distinct and detached. In the subject-matter of their revelations, too, intuition and instinct are very different. If the recesses of the soul be compared to a fortified castle, instinct is the active messenger of the place, continually issuing forth on secret errands concerning the real nature of which he is himself often quite ignorant. Intuition, on the contrary, is the little postern gate at the back of the building, set open at rare moments to the wide fields and magical forests which extend to the far-off horizon.

Instinct is always found in close contact with sensation, groping its ways through the midst of the mass of material impressions, acting and reacting as it fumbles among such impressions. Intuition seems to deal directly and absolutely with a clear and definite landscape behind the superficial landscape, with a truth behind truth, with a reality within reality.

To take an instance from common experience: a stranger, an unknown person, enters our circle. Instinct, working automatically and sensationally, may attract us powerfully towards such a person, with a steady, irresistible attraction. Intuition, on the contrary, uttering its revelation abruptly and with, so to speak, one sudden mysterious cry, may warn us of some dangerous quicksand or perilous jungle in such a stranger’s nature of which instinct was totally ignorant because the thing was what might be called a “spiritual quality” lying deeper than those sensational or magnetic levels through which instinct feels its way.

The instinct of animals or birds for instance warns them very quickly with regard to the presence of some natural enemy whose approach they apprehend through some mysterious sense-impression beyond the analysis of human reason. But when their enemy is the mental intention of a human being they are only too easily tricked.

To take quite a different instance. It may easily happen that while conscience has habitually driven us to a certain course of action against which instinct has never revolted because of its preoccupation with the senses, some sudden flash of intuition reaching us from the hidden substratum of our being changes our whole perspective and gives to conscience itself a completely opposite bias. What these intermittent revelations of intuition certainly do achieve is the preservation in the soul’s memory of the clear and deep and free and unfathomable margins of the ultimate mystery, those wavering sea-edges and twilight-shores of our being, which the austere categories of rational logic tend to shut out as if by impenetrable walls.

It remains to consider the attribute of memory. Memory is the name which we give to that intrinsic susceptibility, implying an intrinsic permanence or endurance in the material which displays susceptibility, such as makes it possible for what the soul feels or what the soul creates to write down its own record, so that it can be read at will, or if not “at will,” at least can be read, if the proper stimulus or shock be applied.

Memory is not the cause of the soul’s concrete identity. The soul’s concrete identity is the cause or natural ground of memory. Memory is the “passive-active” power by means of which the concrete identity of the soul grows richer, fuller, more articulate, more complex and more subtle.

In looking back over these eleven attributes of the “soul-monad,” what we have to remark is, that two of the number differ radically in their nature from the rest. The attribute of emotion differs from the rest in the sense that it is the living substantial unity or ultimate synthesis in which they all move. It is indeed more than this. For it is the actual “stuff” or “material” out of which they are all, so to speak, “made” or upon which they all, so to speak, inscribe their diverse creations.

The permanent “surface,” or identical susceptibility, of this ebbing and flowing stream of emotion is memory; but the emotion itself, divided into the positive and negative “pole,” as we say of love and malice, is an actual projection upon the objective universe of the intrinsic “stuff” or psycho-material “substance” of which the substratum of the soul is actually composed. The other aspects of the soul are, so to speak, the various “tongues” of diversely coloured flame with which the soul pierces the “objective mystery”; but the substance of all these flames is one and the same. It is the soul itself, projected upon the plane of material impression; and thus projected, becoming the conflicting duality to which I give the name of “emotion.”

The attribute of “will,” also, differs radically from the rest; in the sense that “will” is the power which the soul possesses of encouraging or suppressing, re-vivifying or letting fade, all the other attributes of the soul, including that attribute which is the substance and synthesis of them all and which I name “emotion.”

In regard to “emotion” the will can do three separate things. It can encourage the emotion of love and suppress that of malice. It can encourage the emotion of malice and suppress that of love. And finally it can use its energy in the effort, an effort which can never be totally successful, to suppress all emotion, of any kind at all.

Man’s complex vision then consists, in simple terms, of self-consciousness, reason, taste, imagination, conscience, instinct, sensation, intuition, will, memory, and emotion. These various activities, differentiated clearly enough in their separate energizing, must never be regarded as absolutely separate “faculties,” but rather as relatively separated “aspects.” Behind all of them and under all of them is the complex vision itself, felt by all of us in rare moments in its creative totality, but constantly being distorted and obscured as one or other of its primal energies invades the appropriate territory of some other.

The complex vision must not be regarded as the mere sum or accumulated agglomeration of all these. It is much more than this. It is more than a mere formal focussing of its own attributes. It is more than a mere logical unity suspended in a vacuum.

The complex vision is the vision of a living self, of an organic personality, of an actual soul-monad. It may be the vision of a man. It may be the vision of a plant or a planet or a god. It may be the vision of entities undreamed of and of existences inconceivable. It may be the vision, for example, of some strange “soul of space” or “soul of the ether” whose consciousness is extended throughout the visible universe and even throughout the “etherial medium” which binds all souls together.

But whether the vision of a plant, a man, or a god, the complex vision seems to bring with it its own immediate revelation that where there is any form of “matter,” however attenuated, such “matter” is the outward expression of some inward living soul whose energies have some mysterious correspondence to the eleven aspects of the soul of man.

CHAPTER III. THE SOUL'S APEX-THOUGHT

It now becomes necessary to discuss the connection between what I have named the soul's "apex-thought" and certain permanent aspects of life with which this "apex-thought" has to deal.

The "apex-thought" is the name I give to that synthetic and concentrating effort of the soul by means of which the various energies of the complex vision are brought into focus and fused with one another. In accordance with my favourite metaphorical image, the "apex-thought" is the extreme point of the arrow-head of the soul; the point with which it pierces its ways into eternity.

It is necessary that I should indicate the connection between the activity of this apex-point of the complex vision and the various perplexing human problems round which our controversies smoulder and burn. It is advisable that I should indicate the connection between the activity of this "apex-thought" and that thing which the world has agreed to call Religion.

It is advisable that I should indicate the relation of the "apex-thought" to those recurrent moods of profound human scepticism wherein we deny the attainability of any "truth" at all.

It is advisable that I should indicate the relation of the apex-thought to any possible "new organ of vision" with which some unforeseen experiment of the soul may suddenly endow us. And it is above all advisable that I should show the relation between this focussed synthesis of the soul's complexity and the actual physical body whose material senses are part of this complexity.

The whole problem of the art of life may be said to lie in the question of co-ordination. The actual process of coordination is the supreme and eternal difficulty. Only at rare moments do we individually approximate to its achievement. Only once or twice, it may be, in a whole life-time, do we actually achieve it. But it is by the power and insight of such fortunate moments that we attain whatever measure of permanent illumination adds dignity and courage to our days.

We live by the memory of such moments. We live by the hope of their return. In the meanwhile our luck or our ill luck, as living human beings, depends on no outward events or circumstances but on our success in the conscious effort of approximation to what, when it does arrive, seems to take the grace and ease and inevitable beauty of a free gift of the gods.

This fortunate rhythm of the primordial energies of the complex vision may be felt and realized without being expressed in words. The curse of what we call “cleverness” is that it hastens to find facile and fluent expression for what cannot be easily and fluently expressed. Education is too frequently a mere affair of words, a superficial encouragement of superficial expression. It is for this reason that many totally uneducated persons achieve, unknown to all except their most intimate friends, a far closer approach to this difficult co-ordination than others who are not only well-educated but are regarded by the world as famous leaders of modern thought.

It will be remarked that in my list of the primordial energies of the complex vision I do not mention religion. This is not because I do not recognize the passionate and formidable role played by religion in the history of the human race, nor because I regard the “religious instinct” as a thing outgrown and done with. I have not included it because I cannot regard it as a distinct and separate attribute, in the sense in which reason, conscience, intuition and so forth, are distinct and separate attributes, of the complex vision.

I regard it as a name given in common usage to certain premature and disproportioned efforts at co-ordination among these attributes, and I am well content to apply the word "religion" to that sacred ecstasy, at once passionate and calm, at once personal and impersonal, which suffuses our being with an unutterable happiness when the energies of the complex vision are brought into focus. I regard the word religion as a word that has drawn and attracted to itself, in its descent down the stream of time, so rich and so intricate a cargo of human feelings that it has come to mean too many things to be any longer of specific value in a philosophical analysis.

Any sort of reaction against the primeval fear with which man contemplates the unknown, is religion. The passionate craving of human beings for a love which changes not nor passes away, is religion.

The desperate longing to find an idea, a principle, a truth, a "cause," for the sake of which we can sacrifice our personal pleasure and our personal selfishness, is religion.

The craving for some unity, some synthesis, some universal meaning in the system of things, is religion. The desire for an "over-life" or an "over-world," in which the distress, disorder, misunderstandings and cruelties of our present existence are redeemed, is religion.

The desire to find something real and eternal behind the transient flow of appearance, is religion. The desire to force upon others by violence, by trickery, by fire, by sword, by persecution, by magic, by persuasion, by eloquence, by martyrdom, an idea which is more important to us than life itself, is religion.

It will be seen from this brief survey of the immense field which the word "religion" has come to cover, that I am justified in regarding it rather as a name given to the emotional thrill and ecstatic abandonment which accompanies any sort of co-ordination of the attributes of the complex vision, proportioned or disproportioned, than as a distinct and separate attribute in itself.

Only when the co-ordination of our human activities rises to the height of a supreme music, can we regard “religion” as the most beautiful and most important of all human experiences. And at the moment when it takes this form it resolves itself into nothing more than an unutterable feeling of ecstasy produced by the sense that we are in harmony with the rest of the universe. Religion, as I am compelled to think of it, resolves itself into that reaction of unspeakable happiness produced in us, when by any kind of synthetic movement, however crude, we are either saved from unreality or reconciled to reality.

Religion is, in fact, the name we give to the ecstasy in the heart of the complex vision, when, in any sort of coordination between our contradictory energies, we at once escape from ourselves and realize ourselves. We are forbidden to speak of the “religious sense” or the “religious instinct” because, truly interpreted, religion is not a single activity among other activities, but the emotional reaction upon our whole nature when that nature is functioning in its creative fulness.

Religion must therefore be regarded as the culminating ecstasy of the art of life, or as a premature snatching at such an ecstasy while the art of life is still discordant and inchoate. In the first instance it is the supreme reward of the creative act. In the second instance it is a tragic temptation to rest by the way in a unity which is an illusive unity and in a heaven from which “the sun of the morning” is excluded. It thus comes about that what we call religion is frequently a hindrance to the rhythm of the apex-thought. It may be a sentimental consolation. It may be an excuse for cruelty and obscurantism. There is always a danger when it is thus prematurely manifested, that it should darken, distort, deprave and obstruct the movement of creation.

At this point, an objection arises to our whole method of research which it is necessary to meet at once. This objection, a peculiarly modern one, is based upon the theory, handed about in modern literature as a kind of diploma of cleverness and repeated superficially by many who are not really sceptical at all, that it is impossible in this world to arrive, under any circumstances, at any kind of truth.

Persons who repeat this sceptical dogma are simply refusing to acknowledge the evidence of their own experience. However rare our high rhythmic moments may be, some sort of approximation to them, quite sufficient to destroy the validity of this absolute scepticism, must, if a person honestly confesses the truth, and does not dissimulate out of intellectual pride, have entered into the experience of every human being.

Let us, however, consider the kind of dogmatic language which these sceptics use. They speak of “life” as a thing which so perpetually changes, expands, diminishes, undulates, advances, recedes, evolves, revolves, explodes, precipitates, lightens, darkens, thins, thickens, hardens, softens, over-brims, concentrates, grows shallow, grows deep, that it were ridiculous even to attempt to create an equilibrium, or rhythmic “parting-of-the-ways,” out of such evasive and treacherous material.

My answer to this sceptical protest is a simple one. It is an appeal to human experience. I maintain that this modern tendency to talk dogmatically and vaguely about “the evasive fluidity of life” is nothing more than a crafty pathological retreat from the formidable challenge of life. It is indeed a kind of mental drug or spiritual opiate by the use of which many unheroic souls hide themselves from the sardonic stare of the eternal

Sphinx. It is a weakness comparable to the weakness of many premature religious syntheses; and it has the same soothing and disintegrating effect upon the creative energy of the mind.

What, as a matter of fact, hurts us all, much more than any tendency of life to be over-fluid and over-evasive, is the atrocious tendency of life to be inflexible, rigorous, implacable, harshly immobile. This vague dogmatic sentiment about "the fluidity of life," is one of the instinctive ways by which we try to pretend that our prison-walls are not walls at all, but only friendly and flowing vapour. None of the great works of art and poetry, the austere beauty of which reflects the real nature of the universe, could continue to exercise their magical power upon us, could continue to sustain us and comfort us, if those tragic ultimate realities were not ultimate realities.

The sublime ritual of art, which at its noblest has the character of religion, could not exist for a moment in a world as softly fluctuating and as dimly wavering as this modern scepticism would make it. Life is at once more beautiful and far more tragic. Though surrounded by mystery the grand outlines of the world remain austerely and sternly the same. The sun rises and sets. The moon draws the tides. Man goes forth to his work and his labour until the evening. Man is born; man loves and hates; man dies. And over him the same unfathomable spaces yawn. And under him the same unfathomable spaces yawn. Time, with its seasons, passes him in unalterable procession. From birth to death his soul wrestles with the universe; and the drama of which he is the protagonist lifts the sublime monotony of its scenery from the zenith to the nadir.

Let any man ask himself what it is that hurts him most in life and yet seems most real to him. He will be compelled to answer... "the atrocious regularity of things and their obscene necessity." The very persons who talk so glibly about the “fluidity” and “evasiveness” of life are persons in whose own flesh the wedge-like granite of fate has lodged itself with crushing finality. Life has indeed been too rigid and too stark for them; and in place of seizing it in an embrace as formidable as its own, they go aside muttering, “life is evasive; life is fluid; life brims over.”

This sceptical dogma of “evasiveness” is generally found in alliance with some vague modern “religion” whose chief object is to strip the world of the dignity of its real tragedy and endow it with the indignity of some pretended assurance. This is the role of that superficial optimism so inherently repugnant to the aesthetic sense.

Such apologists for a shallow and ignoble idealism are in the habit of declaring that “the tendency of modern thought” is to render “materialism” unthinkable; but when these people speak of materialism they are thinking of the austere limits of that vast objective spectacle into which we are all born. This spectacle is indeed mysterious. It is indeed staggering and awful. But it is irrevocably *there.* And no vague talk about the “evasiveness” and “over-brimmingness” of life can alter one jot or tittle of its eternal outlines.

From the sublime terror of this extraordinary drama such persons are anxious to escape, because the iron of it has entered into their souls. They do not see that the only “escape” offered by the reality of things is a change of attitude towards this spectacle, not an assertion that the form of this spectacle is unfixed and wavering. No psychological or mathematical speculation has the power to alter the essential outlines of this spectacle.

If such speculations could alter it, then the aesthetic sense of humanity would be driven to transform itself; and a new aesthetic sense, adapted to this new “evasiveness of life,” would have to take its place. Attempts are indeed being made at this very hour to “start fresh” with a new aesthetic sense and only the winnowing process of time and the pressure of personal experience can refute such attempts. Meanwhile all we can do is to note the rejection of such attempts by the verdict of the complex vision; a rejection which indicates that if such attempts are to be successful they must imply the substitution of a new complex vision for the one which humanity has used since the beginning.

In other words they must imply a radical change in the basic attributes of human nature. Humanity, to justify them, must become some sort of superhumanity; and a new world inhabited by a new race must take the place of the world we know. Such an attempt to substitute a new humanity for the old is already conscious of itself in those curious experiments of psychical research which are based upon the hypothesis that some completely new organs of sense are on the point of being discovered. Philosophers who believe in the inherent unchangeableness of our present instrument of research — the complex vision as it now exists — can only look on at these experiments with an attitude of critical detachment; and wait until time and experience have justified or refuted them.

Philosophers who believe in the unchangeableness of the complex vision are bound to recognize that the human will, which is a basic attribute of this vision, must in any case play a considerable part in the creation of the future. But from their point of view the will is, after all, only one of these basic attributes. There is also the aesthetic sense. And the aesthetic sense is totally averse to this new kind of humanity and this new kind of world. The eternal vision of those invisible "sons of the universe," the proof of whose existence is a deduction from the encounters of all actual souls with one another, would seem to be entirely irreconcilable with any new complex vision whose nature had been completely changed.

The visible spectacle of the world with its implied "eternal arbiters" would be transmuted and transfigured by such an upheaval. For as long as the human will, as we know it now, remains in association with the aesthetic sense as we know it now, the creation of the future — however yielding and indetermined — must depend upon the form, the shape, the principle, the prophecy, the premonition, existing from the beginning in the nature of things. And it is precisely this shape, this form, this principle, this hope, this dream, this essential motive of those sons of the universe whose existence is implied "when two and three are gathered together," which would be destroyed and annihilated, if the complex vision were transformed into something else and a new world took the place of the old.

It is the existence of these real "immortals" confronting this real universe which makes possible the feeling we have that in spite of all our differences, some accumulated stream of beauty, truth and goodness, does actually carry the past forward into the future, does actually create the future according to a premonition and a hope which have been there from the beginning.

This is the supreme act of faith of the complex vision. This is the supreme act of faith which saves us at once from our subjective isolation and from the will towards the acceptance of a premature "religion." This is what saves us from any psychological or mathematical or logical speculation, which would contradict this hope or destroy the reality of the universe from which this hope emerges.

When we come to a general consideration of the various attributes of the complex vision we are struck at once by the appalling power they each have, when not held in check, of cancelling one another's contribution. It is for this reason that my newly-coined word was unavoidable if we are to emphasize the synthetic energy of the complex vision when it exercises its control over these diverse attributes and resists their constant tendency to cancel one another. It was precisely to emphasize this synthetic energy of the soul that I have made use of the arbitrary expression “apex-thought.” For if we think of these various attributes as shooting forth like flames from the arrowhead of the individual soul, we must think of this coordinating energy as the power which continually draws these flames together when they deviate from their focussed intensity, and continually restores, from its inharmonious dispersion, the concentration of their arrows’ point. If we are permitted to use this image of a horizontal pyramid of flames it will be seen how important a part is played by this apex-thought in concentrating the energies of the complex vision so that it can “drive” or “burn” or “pierce” its way into the surrounding mystery.

For this image of an arrow-head of focussed flame which is in constant danger of being dispersed as the flames recede from one another and are blown backwards is only a symbolic way of indicating how difficult it is to pierce with our complicated instrument of research the vast mystery which surrounds us.

All this is mere pictorial metaphor; but in visualizing the human soul as a moving arrow-head, composed of flickering flames that only now and then combine into a sharp point, while at other times the wind drives them apart and bends them back, I am suggesting that the ultimate reality of things is a state of confused movement continually becoming a state of concentrated movement. I am suggesting that the secrets of life only yield themselves up to a movement of desperation. I am suggesting that the spirit of creation is also the spirit of destruction, and that the real object of the energy of creation is to pierce with its burning light the darkness of the objective mystery.

As proof of the necessity of keeping this apex-thought in constant poise, let me reiterate one or two of the philosophical disasters which result from a cessation of its rhythmic function. When the reason, for instance, usurps the whole field and acts in isolation from the imagination and the intuition, it tends to persuade us to deny the very existence of that deepest and most vivid reality of all, the handle of our spear-head, the base of our pyramid, the mysterious entity within us, which we have come, following the traditions of the centuries, to name the “soul.” And not only does the soul disappear when the reason thus isolates itself, but another primary revelation of the complex vision, I mean that half-created, half-discovered object of the senses popularly called “matter,” disappears with it.

Man’s self-consciousness is thus left suspended “in vacuo” with no concrete reality within it and no concrete reality outside it; and “thought-in-the-abstract” becomes the only truth.

But not only can reason thus set itself up in isolated usurpation against such other activities as imagination, intuition, will or taste; it can also divide itself against itself and emerge in completely contradictory functions. In the form of mathematical logic, for instance, it can dispose most drastically of that living organic world which in the form of experimental science it assumes to be the only truth. Again it may happen that reason will arbitrarily ally itself with one or the other of the other attributes and on the strength of such an alliance seek to obliterate all the rest. Thus while it is impossible to avoid the admission that of all these basic attributes reason is the most important, because without it all the rest would be inarticulate and dumb, it remains true that to hold reason in balanced relation to all the rest and to hold its own contradictory tendencies in balanced relation to one another is an undertaking of such extraordinary difficulty that if it were not for the complex vision’s possession of that co-ordinating power which I have named its apex-thought, one might well pardon the mood of those persons who use reason to drug reason and who steer their boat into some unruffled backwater of dogma or mysticism.

The necessity of such an infinitely delicate poise or balance or rhythm in these high matters, the necessity of keeping all these conflicting attributes at this exquisite point of suspense between abysses of contradiction, is a necessity which compels us to recognize that philosophy is nothing more or less than the supreme art, and the most difficult of all arts.

Certainly, it seems as though thought has to become in a profound sense rhythmical, has to take to itself the nature of music, before it can become the truth. For the truth does not seem to be a mere picture of the system of things, reflected in the mirror of the mind. The truth seems to be the very system of things itself, become conscious and volitional, changing, growing, living, destroying, creating. Thus it comes about that the thought which plunges into the universe must of necessity, even in that very act, remould and re-fashion the universe. Thus Nature perpetually recreates herself by the passion of her children and is forever re-born as the child of her own offspring.

But if the supreme difficulty of the art of life lies in the maintenance of this rhythm between these primary attributes, it must never be forgotten that these “attributes” are, after all, only *aspects* of the soul. The soul *is* each of them, not *in* each of them. They are not “faculties” through which the soul acts. They are never absolutely distinct from one another. There is something of each of them in every one of them, and every attempt which they make to establish themselves in an independent existence is only an attempt of the soul itself to live a perverted and a discordant, instead of a natural and a harmonious life.

The rarity and difficulty of that high art which brings all these orchestral players into harmony is sufficient cause to account for the scarcity of genuine philosophical thought in this confused world. The human soul, looking desperately round for some calm yet passionate light to save its hours from ruinous waste, turns away in bitter disillusion from the thin dust and the swollen vapour that are offered it.

Out of the logical laboratories of the abstract reason this thin dust is offered; and out of the ideal factories of the wish for superficial comfort this iridescent vapour is poured forth. That burning secret of life, that lovely and terrible reality for which the soul pines is not to be found in any mere outward fact or in any mere subjective intuition.

Such a fact may crumble to pieces and give place to another. Such an intuition may melt into air under the shock of experience. The craving of the soul is not satisfied by the discovery that "matter" resolves itself into "energy," nor is the misery of the heart assuaged by the theory that time is an attribute of fourth-dimensional space. The lamentable beating of blood-stained hands upon the ultimate walls does not cease when we learn that two straight lines can or cannot meet in infinity; nor does the knowledge that history is an "ideal evolution" heal the aching of the world-sorrow.

Could we know for certain that the dead were raised up, even that knowledge would not reduce to silence the bitter cry of the outraged generations. So poisonous and so deep is the pain of life that no kind of knowledge, not even the knowledge that annihilation must at last, sooner or later, end it all, can really heal it.

But truth is not knowledge. Truth is not the recognition of an external fact. Truth is a creative gesture. It is a ritual, a rhythmic poise, a balance deliberately sustained between eternal contradictions. It is the magical touch which reduces to harmony the quivering vibrations of many opposites. It is the dramatic movement of a supreme actor at the climax of an unfathomable drama. It is music resting upon itself; music so exquisite as to seem like silence, music so passionate as to have become calm.

The apex-thought of that pyramid of conflicting flames which we call the complex vision holds itself together at one concentrated point. And this point is the arrow point of our human soul; that soul which is shot across immensity in the eternal war between life and the opposite of life.

Although for the purpose of emphasizing and elucidating the essential nature of this apex-thought it has been found advisable to use such metaphorical and pictorial images as the one just indicated, it must be remembered that what we are actually and in direct experience confronted with is the mystery of a real human personality inhabiting a real human body.

This real personal soul inhabiting a real objective body and surrounded on all sides by a real unfathomable universe, is the original revelation of the complex vision from which there is no escape except by death.

The philosophy of the complex vision finds its starting point in an acceptance of this situation which is nothing more than an acceptance of the complex vision's own harmonious activity. An acceptance of the reality of the human body is an essential part of this harmonious activity because among the aspects of the complex vision are to be found certain attributes, such as sensation, instinct and imagination, which would be negated and rendered abortive if the human body were an illusion.

If the "starting point" of our philosophy demands recognition of the reality of the body, the "ideal" of our philosophy must have a place for the body also. Flesh and blood must therefore play their part in the resultant harmony at which we are all the while aiming; and no contempt for the body, no hatred of the body, no refusal to recognize the supreme beauty and sacredness of the body, can be allowed to distort or pervert our vision.

The activity of the apex-thought, though we have a right to use any metaphorical image we please about it in order to elucidate its nature, must always be considered as using the bodily senses in its resultant rhythm. It must always be considered as using that portion of the objective universe which we name the body as an inevitable "note" in its musical flight from darkness to darkness. It must always be conceived as following the attraction of an eternal vision, in which "the idea of the body" is an imperishable element.

This "eternal vision," which it is the rhythmic motive of the apex-thought to seek, carries with it the witness and "imprimatur" of the gods; and although no man has ever "beheld" the gods, and although the gods by reason of their omnipresent activity, cannot be thought of as being "incarnated," yet since they are living souls, even as we are, and since every living soul has, as the substratum of its identity, what might be called a "spiritual body," there is nothing in the revelation made to us through the activity of our complex vision to forbid our free and even fanciful speculation as to its use, by the very highest of superhuman personalities, even, let us say, by the Christ himself, of this mysterious energy of the soul which I have named the "apex-thought."

CHAPTER IV. THE REVELATION OF THE COMPLEX VISION

USING THEN, AS our instrument of research, that totality of attributes by which the soul in its rare moments of rhythmic consummation visualizes the world, the question arises — what, in plain untechnical terms, is the revelation made to us by this complex medium? Here, as before, I am anxious, before I venture upon such a hazardous undertaking as an answer to this question, to indicate clearly that what I am attempting to state is a revelation which is common to the experience of all souls, wherever such a thing as the soul exists. The question as to whether or not such an universal revelation is an illusion does not concern us. To call any universal experience "an illusion" is no more and no less illuminating than to call it "an ultimate truth." It is the only reality we are at present in possession of; and we must accept it, or remain in complete scepticism; which is only another name for complete chaos.

The first important discovery which the complex vision makes is the fact that the revelation, thus half-offered to it and half-created by it, is presented simultaneously in all its various aspects. It does not appear to us bit by bit or in succession but "en masse" and in its complete "ensemble." It is of course unavoidable that its aspects should be enumerated one by one and that in such an enumeration one aspect should be placed first and another last. Nevertheless, this "first" and "last" must not be regarded as of any reasonable importance; but as nothing more than an accident of arbitrary choice. All the aspects of this original revelation are linked together. All are dependent upon one another. Among them there is no "first" and "last." All are equally real. All are equally necessary. All are equally inescapable.

The activity of the complex vision, then, makes us aware that we have within us an integral irreducible self, the living personal substratum of our self-consciousness, the "I" of our primordial "I am I." This living personal self is the background of our complex vision. It is the personal "visionary" whose vision we are using. I say we have "within us" such a self. This "within us" is one of the inescapable original revelations. For though our consciousness will be found in its full circle to invade obscure shores and wavering margins, there must always be a return, however far it may wander, to this definite "something" within us which utters the happy or unhappy "I am I."

It is precisely here, in regard to the nature of this "I am I," that it is essential to let the totality of our complex vision speak, and not one or other of its attributes. Nowhere has the fantastic and desolating power of pure abstract reason left to itself done more to distort the general situation than in this matter. It has distorted it in two opposing ways.

It has distorted it metaphysically by completely eliminating this revelation of a personal self, "within us," and it has distorted it scientifically by reducing this personal self to an automatic mechanical phenomenon produced by the action and interaction of unconscious chemical "forces."

To the logic of metaphysical reason there is no concrete living self which can say "I am I" from that definite point in space and time which we indicate by the use of the phrase "within us." According to such logic our "I am I" becomes "an infinity of consciousness" with no local habitation. It becomes a consciousness which includes both the "within" and the "without," a consciousness in which our actual personal self is nothing but an illusory phenomenon, a consciousness which is outside both time and space, a consciousness whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere, a consciousness which is pure disembodied "thought," thought without any "thinker," thought contemplating itself as thought, thought in an absolutely empty void.

When to this ultimate "unity of apperception," suspended in a vacuum, consciousness of self is added; when this "consciousness-in-the-abstract" is regarded as an universal self-consciousness, the resultant "I am I" of such an omnipresent being becomes an infinite "I am I" which is nothing less than the unfathomable universe conscious of itself in its totality. Whether consciousness of self be added to this "consciousness-in-the-abstract" or not, it is hard to see how out of this unruffled ocean of identity the actual multifarious world which we feel around us, this world of plants and planets and birds and fishes and mortal men and immortal gods, ever succeeded in getting itself produced at all.

The vague metaphysical phrases about the One issuing forth into the Many, in order to make Itself more completely Itself than it was before, seem to us, when under the influence of our complex vision, no other than the meaningless playing with cosmic tennis balls of some insane universal Juggler.

The second way in which reason, left to itself, has distorted what the complex vision reveals to us about the "I am I," is the scientific or evolutionary way. According to this view which assumes that the objective process of evolution is our only knowable reality, the individual personal "I am I" finds itself resolved into a fatal automatic phenomenon of cause and effect; a phenomenon which has as its "cause" nothing, but the prehistoric chemical movements of "matter" or "energy." The personal self thus considered becomes a momentary vortex in a perpetually changing stream of “states of consciousness” or “ripples of sensation” to each of which vast anterior tides of atavistic forces have contributed their mechanical quota.

The chemical fatality of our nerve-tissues, the psychological fatality of our motive-impulses, leave no space, when they have all been summed up, for any free arbitrary action of an independent self.

And so, just as according to the metaphysical view, the soul disappears in a blur of ideal fatality, according to the scientific view the soul disappears in a nexus of mechanical determinism. As against both these errors, to the complex vision this “soul” within us appears to be something altogether different from the physical body. The experience we have of it, the feeling we have of it, is that it is a definite “something” dwelling “within” the physical body.

This revelation with regard to it is as unmistakable as it is difficult to analyze. That it is here, within us, we feel and know; but as soon as we attempt to subject it to any exact scrutiny it seems to melt away under our hands. The situation is indeed a kind of philosophical tragic-comedy; and is only too indicative of the baffling whimsicality of the whole system of things. Contradiction and paradox at the very basis of life mock our attempt to utter one intelligible word about the thing which is the most real of all things to us.

We are vividly aware of this mysterious personality within us, “the guest and companion of the body,” but directly we attempt to lay hold upon the actual substance of it it seems to vanish into thin air. But at least our complex vision, which is *its* complex vision, reveals to us the fact of its existence; and with its existence once acknowledged, however impossible analysis of it may be, we are able to give a plain and unequivocal denial to all the impersonal conclusions reached by metaphysic and science.

This categorical pronouncement of the complex vision with regard to the "I am I," namely that it is the voice of a living concrete soul within us, is supported historically by an immense weight of human tradition. Belief in the reality of the soul is older and more tenacious than any other human doctrine which our race has ever held. The use of the term "soul" is no more than a bare recognition that behind the consciousness which says "I am I" there is a living entity whose consciousness this is.

With this bare recognition the revelation of the complex vision abruptly stops. It stops with that peculiar and disconcerting suddenness with which it seems to be its nature to stop, whenever it reaches the limit of its scope in any direction. It stops here, with regard to the soul, just as it stops when confronted with the conception of limitlessness, both with regard to space and with regard to time. But the soul at least is ours; a fact that cannot be explained away.

And although we have no right to go a step beyond the bare recognition of its existence and although all words regarding it are misleading if used in any other than a symbolic sense, we must remember that since the complex vision is conscious of itself as a unity, whatever this "something" may be which is the centre and core of our living personality, it must at least be a definite irreducible "monad," "something" that cannot be resolved into anything else, or accounted for by anything else, or explained in terms of anything else, or "caused" by anything else; "something" that may, perhaps, at last be annihilated; but that while it lives must remain the vividest reality we know.

Insanity and disease may obstruct and cloud the soul. Outward circumstances may drive the soul back upon itself. But while it lives it lives in its totality and when it perishes, if it be its destiny to perish, it perishes in its totality.

While the soul lives we may sink into it and have no fear; and yet all the while we have no right to say anything about it except that it exists. Truly it is a tragic commentary upon the drama that we call our life, that we should find our ultimate "rest" and "peace" in so bare, so stark, so austere, so irrational a revelation as this!

But surrounded as we are by the menace of eternal nothingness it is at least something to have at the background of our life a living power of this kind, a power which can endure unafraid the very breaking point of disaster, a power which can contemplate the possibility of annihilation itself with equanimity and unperturbed calm.

It will be noted that I have been compelled to use once and again the term "eternal nothingness." This is indeed an inevitable aspect of what the soul visualizes as possible. For since the soul is the creator and discoverer of all life, when once the soul has ceased to exist, non-existence takes the place of existence, and nothingness takes the place of life.

Speculatively we have the right, although the complex vision is silent on that tremendous question, to dally with the idea of the survival of the soul after the death of the body. But this must for ever be an open question, not to be answered either negatively or affirmatively, not to be answered by the intelligence of any living man. All we can say is that it seems as if the death of the body destroyed the complex vision; and if the complex vision is destroyed it seems as though non-existence were bound to take the place of existence, and as though nothingness were bound to take the place of everything. The oriental conception of "Nirvana" is no more than a soothing opiate administered to a soul that has grown weary of its complex vision and weary of its irreducible personality. To imagine oneself freed from the burden of personal consciousness, and yet in some mysterious way conscious of being freed from consciousness, is a delicious and delicate dream of life-exhausted souls.

As a speculation it has a curious attraction; as a reality it has nothing that is intelligible. But though the tragedy of life to all sensitive spirits is outrageous and obscene, at least we may say that the worst conceivable possibility is not likely to occur. The worst conceivable possibility would be to be doomed to an immortal personal life without losing the restrictions and limitations of our present personal life. If the soul survives the body it must do so on the strength of its possession of some transforming energy which shall enable it to supply the place in its organic being which is at present occupied by the attribute of sensation. It is quite obvious that if the life of the soul depends upon the active functioning of all its attributes; and if one of its attributes, namely sensation, is entirely dependent for its active functioning upon the life of the body; the life of the soul itself must also depend upon the life of the body, unless, as I have hinted, it can transmute its attribute of sensation into some other attribute suitable to some unknown plane of spiritual existence.

There are indeed certain ecstatic moments when the soul feels as if such a power of liberation from the bodily senses were actually within its grasp; but it will inevitably be found, when the great rhythmic concentration of the apex-thought is brought to bear upon such a feeling as this, that it either melts completely away, or is relegated to unimportance and insignificance. Such a feeling, ecstatic and intense though it may have been, has been nothing more than a disproportioned activity of the attribute of intuition; intuition misled in favour of the immortality of the soul, even as the pure reason is often misled in the direction of the denial of the soul’s existence.

The revelation of the complex vision has no word to say, on either side, with regard to whether the soul does or does not survive the death of the body; but it has a very distinct word to say as to the importance of this whole question; and what it says in regard to this is — that it is not important at all! The revelation of the complex vision implies clearly enough that what man were wise to “assume” — leaving always the ultimate question as an open question — is that the individual soul and the individual body perish together.

This assumption is in direct harmony with what we actually *see*; even though it is in frequent collision with what we sometimes *feel.* But the essence of the matter is to be found in this, that our assumption as to the soul’s perishing, when the body perishes, is an assumption, untrue though it may turn out to be, which the soul itself, when under the power of its apex-thought, is compelled to make. And it is compelled to make this assumption by reason of the inherent nature of love. For it is of the nature of love when confronted by two alternatives one of which lays the stress upon personal advantage and the other *upon love itself* apart from any personal advantage, whether one’s own or another’s, to choose, as the assumption upon which it shall live, the latter of these two alternatives. For it is the nature of love to seek love and nothing else than love. And as long as the assumption which the soul makes is the assumption that it survives the death of the body, that emotion of love which is the soul’s creative essence is debarred from the full and complete integrity of its desire.

For the desire of love is not for immortality but for the eternal; and the eternal is not something that depends upon the survival of any individual soul, whether our own or another’s. The eternal is something which can be realized in one single moment; something which completely destroys in us any desire for survival after death; something which reconciles us to existence *considered in the light of love alone;* something that does not assume anything at all about the universe, except that love exists.

Thus we return to that assumption about the soul, which it is better — leaving the open question still an open question — for the mind to accept as its working assumption; namely that the soul uses the body in its own ends, is conscious of its existence through the senses of the body, lives *in* the body, and perishes when the body perishes. Nor is it only the emotion of love which rejects the dogma of the immortality of the soul. Were the soul proved beyond all possibility of doubt to be immortal, there would at once fall upon us a despair more appalling than any which we have known. For just as the idea of the eternal satisfies the very depths of our soul with an infinite peace, so the idea of immortality troubles the very depths of our soul with an infinite doubt. Something unutterable in our aesthetic sense demands that life should be surrounded by death and ended by death. Thus and not otherwise should we ourselves have created the world at the beginning. Thus and not otherwise by the rhythmic play of the complex vision, do we create the world.

But meanwhile, whatever happens, as long as we live we possess the reality of the soul. This is, and always has been, the rallying-ground of heroic and sensitive personalities, struggling with the demons of circumstance and chance. This is that unconquerable “mind-within-themselves” into which the great Stoics of Antiquity withdrew at their will, and were “happy,” beyond the reach of hope and fear. This is the citadel from the security of which all the martyrs for human liberty have mocked their tormentors. This is the fortress from which the supreme artists of the world have looked forth and moulded the outrage of life’s dilemma into monumental forms of imaginative beauty. This is the sanctuary from which all human personalities, however weak and helpless, have been permitted to endure the cruelty and pitilessness of fate.

After all, it does not so greatly matter that we are unable to do more than know that this thing, this indescribable “something,” really exists. Perhaps it is because its existence is more real than anything else that we are unable to define it. Perhaps we can only define those attributes which are the outward aspects of our real being. Perhaps it is simply because the soul is nothing less than our very self, that our analytical power stops, helpless, in its presence. *We* are what it is; and for this very cause it perpetually evades and escapes us.

The reality of the soul, therefore, is the first revelation of the complex vision. The second revelation is the objective reality of the outward visible universe. Left to itself, in its isolated activity, our logical reason is capable of throwing doubt upon this revelation also. For it is logically certain that what we are actually conscious of is no more than a unified stream of various mental impressions, reaching us through our senses, and never interrupted except in moments of unconscious sleep.

It is therefore quite easy for the logical reason, functioning in its isolation from the other attributes, to maintain that this stream of mental impressions *is all that there is,* and that we have no right to call the universe real and objective, except in the ambiguous sense of a sort of permanent illusion. But as soon as the complex vision, in its totality, contemplates the situation, the thing takes on a very different aspect. The pure reason may be as sceptical as it pleases about the static solidity of what is popularly called “matter.” It may use the term energy, or movement, or ether, or force, or electricity, or any other name to describe that *permanent sensation of outward reality* which our complex vision reveals.

But one thing it has no right to do. It has no right to utter the word “illusion” with regard to this objective universe. The apparent solidity of matter may be rationally resolved into energy or movement, just as the apparent objectivity of matter may be rationally resolved into a stream of mental impression. But the complex vision still persists in asserting that this *permanent sensation of outward reality,* which, except in dreamless sleep, is never normally interrupted, represents and bears witness to the real existence, outside ourselves, of "something" which corresponds to such a sensation. It is just at this point that the soul — helped by instinct, imagination, and intuition — makes its great inevitable plunge into the act of primordial faith.

This act of primordial faith is the active belief of the soul not only in an objective universe outside itself, but also in the objective existence of other individual souls. Without this primordial act of faith the individual soul can never escape from itself. For the pure reason not only reduces the whole universe to an idea in the mind; but it also reduces all *other* minds to ideas in *our* mind. In other words the logical reason imprisons us fatally and hopelessly in a sort of cosmic nut-shell of our own mentality.

And there would, actually, be no escape from this appalling imprisonment, according to which the individual soul becomes a solitary circle, the centre and circumference of all possible existence, if it were not that the soul possesses other organs of research, in addition to reason and self-consciousness. Directly we temper reason with these other activities the whole situation has a different look. It is a thing of small consequence what word we use to describe that external cause of the flowing stream of mental impressions. The important point is that we are compelled to assume, as representing a real outward fact, this permanent sense of objectivity from which there is no escape.

And as the existence of the objective universe is established by a primordial act of faith, so it is also established that these alien bodily personalities, whose outward appearance stands and falls with the objective universe, possess “souls,” or what we have come to name “complex visions,” comparable with our own. And this is the case not only with regard to other human beings, but with regard to all living entities whether human or non-human. As to how the “souls” of plants, birds, and animals, or of planets or stars, differ in their nature from human souls we can only vaguely conjecture. But to refuse some degree of consciousness, some measure of the complex vision, to any living thing, is to be false to that primordial act of faith into which the original revelation of the complex vision compels us to plunge.

The inevitableness of this act of faith may be perhaps more vividly realized when we remember that it includes in its revelation the objective reality of our own physical body. Our evidence for the real outward existence of our own body is no surer and no more secure than our evidence for the outward existence of other “bodies.”

They stand or fall together. If the universe is an illusion then our own physical body is an illusion also.

And precisely as the “stuff” out of which the universe is made may be named “energy” or “ether” or “force” or “electricity,” rather than “matter,” so also the “stuff” out of which the body is made may be named by any scientific term we please. The term used is of no importance as long as the thing represented by it is accepted as a permanent reality.

We are now able to advance a step further in regard to the revelation of the complex vision. Granting, as we are compelled to grant, that the other “souls” in the universe possess, each of them, its own “vision” of this same universe; and assuming that each “vision” is so coloured by the individuality of the “visionary” as to be, in a measure, different from all the rest, it becomes obvious that in a very important sense there is not only one universe, but many universes. These many universes, however, are "caused," or evoked, or created, or discovered, by the encounter of various individual souls with that one "objective mystery" which confronts them all.

What a naive confession it is of the limitation of the human mind that we should be driven, after all our struggles to articulate the secret of life, to accept, as our final estimate of such a secret just the mysterious "something" which is the substratum of our own soul, confronted by that other mysterious "something" which is the substratum of all possible universes! With the complex vision's revelation that the objective universe really exists comes the parallel revelation that time and space really exist. Here, for the third time, are we faced with critical protests from the isolated activity of the logical reason.

Metaphysic reduces both time and space to categories of the mind. Mathematical speculation hints at the existence of some mysterious fourth-dimensional space. Bergsonian dialectic regards ordinary "spatial" time as an inferior category; and finds the real movement of life in a species of time called "duration," which can only be detected by the interior feeling of intuition.

But while we listen with interest to all these curious speculations, the fact remains that for the general vision of the combined energies of the soul the world in which we find ourselves is a world entirely dependent upon what must be recognized as a *permanent sensation* of "ordinary" space and "ordinary" time. And as we have shown in the case of the objective existence of what we call Nature, when any mental impression reaches the level of becoming a *permanent sensation* of all living souls it ceases to be possible to speak of it as an illusion.

It is well that we should become clearly conscious of this "reality-destroying" tendency of the logical reason, so that whenever it obsesses us we can undermine its limited vision by an appeal to the complex vision. Shrewdly must we be on our guard against this double-edged trick of logic, which on the one hand seeks to destroy the basis of its own activity, by disintegrating the unity of the soul, and on the other hand seeks to destroy the material of its own activity by disintegrating the unity of the "objective mystery."

The original revelation of the complex vision not only puts us on our guard against this disintegrating tendency of the pure reason, but it also explains the motive-force behind this tendency. This motive-force is the emotion of malice, which naturally and inevitably seeks to hand us over to the menace of nothingness; in the first place of nothingness "within" us, and in the second place of nothingness "without" us. That the logic of the pure reason quickly becomes the slave of the emotion of malice may be proved by both introspection and observation. For we note, both in ourselves and others, a peculiar glow of malicious satisfaction when such logic strikes its deadliest blows at what it would persuade us to regard as the illusion of life.

Life, just because its deepest secret is not law, determined by fate, but personality struggling against fate, is always found to display a certain irrationality. And the complex vision becomes false to itself as soon as it loses touch with this world-deep irrationality.

We have now therefore reached the conception of reality as consisting of the individual soul confronted by the objective mystery. That this objective mystery would be *practically* the same as *nothing,* if there were no soul to apprehend it, must be admitted. But it would not be *really* the same as *nothing;* since as soon as any kind of soul reappeared upon the scene the inevitable material of the objective mystery would at once re-appear with it. The existence of the objective mystery as a permanent possibility of material for universe-building is a fact which surrounds every individual soul with a margin of unfathomable depth.

At its great illuminated moments the complex vision reduces the limitlessness of space to a realizable sensation of liberty, and the "flowingness" of time to an eternal now; but even at these moments it is conscious of an unfathomable background, one aspect of which is the immensity of space and the other the flowingness of time.

The revelation of the complex vision which I have thus attempted to indicate will be found identical with the natural conclusions of man in all the ages of his history. The primeval savage, the ancient Greek, the mediaeval saint, the eighteenth century philosopher, the modern psychologist, are all brought together here and are all compelled to confess the same situation.

That we are now living personalities, possessed of soul and body, and surrounded by an unfathomable universe, is a revelation about which all ages and all generations agree, whenever the complex vision is allowed its orchestral harmony. The primeval savage looking up at the sky above him might regard the sun and moon as living gods exercising their influence upon a fixed unmoving earth. In this view of the sun and the moon and the stars such a savage was perfectly within his right, because always along with it even to the most anthropomorphic, there came the vague sense of unfathomableness.

The natural Necessity of the ancient Greeks, the trinitarian God of the mediaeval school-man, the great First Cause of the eighteenth-century deist, the primordial Life-Force of the modern man of science, are all on common ground here in regard to the unfathomableness of the ultimate mystery.

But the revelation of the complex vision saves us from the logical boredom of the word "infinite." The idea of the infinite is merely a tedious mathematical formula, marking the psychological point where the mind finds its stopping-place. All that the complex vision can say about “infinite space” is that it is a real experience, and that we can neither imagine space with an end nor without an end.

The “Infinite” is the name which logic gives to this psychological phenomenon. The fact that the mind stops abruptly and breaks into irreconcilable contradictions when it is confronted with unfathomable space is simply a proof that space without an end is as unimaginable as space with an end. It is no proof that space is merely a subjective category of the human mind. One, thing, however, it is a proof of. It is a proof that the universe can never be satisfactorily explained on any materialistic hypothesis.

The fact that we all of us, at every hour of our common day, are surrounded by this unthinkable thing, space without end, is an eternal reminder that the forms, shapes and events of habitual occurrence, which we are inclined to take so easily for granted, are part of a staggering and inscrutable enigma.

The reality of this thing, actually there, above our heads and under our feet, lodges itself, like an ice cold wedge of annihilating scepticism, right in the heart of any facile explanation. We cannot interpret the world in terms of what we call “matter” when what we call “matter” has these unthinkable horizons. We may take into our hands a pebble or a shell or a grain of sand; and we may feel as though the universe were within our grasp. But when we remember that this little piece of the earth is part of a continuous unity which recedes in every direction, world without end, we are driven to admit that the universe is so little within our grasp that we have to regard it as something which breaks and baffles the mind as soon as the mind tries to take hold of it at all.

The reason does not advance one inch in explaining the universe when it utters the word “evolution” and it does not advance one thousandth part of an inch — indeed it gives up the task altogether — when it informs us that infinite space is a category of the human mind. We must regard it, then, as part of the original revelation of the complex vision, that we are separate personal souls surrounded by an unfathomable mystery whose margins recede into unthinkable remoteness.

The ancient dilemma of the One and the Many obtrudes itself at this point; and we are compelled to ask how the plurality of these separate souls can be reconciled with the unity of which they form a part. That they cannot be regarded as absolutely separate is clear from the fact that they can communicate with one another, not only in human language but in a thousand more direct ways. But granting this communication between them, does the mere existence of myriads of independent personalities, living side by side in a world common to all, justify us in speaking of the original system of things as being pluralistic rather than monistic?

Human language, at any rate, founded on the fact that these separate souls can communicate with one another, seems very reluctant to use any but monistic terms. We say “the system of things,” not “the systems of things.” And yet it is only by an act of faith that human language makes the grand assumption that the complex vision of all these myriad entities tells the same story.

We say “the universe”; yet may it not be that there are as many “universes” as there are conscious personalities in this unfathomable world? If there were no closer unity between the separate souls which fill the universe than the fact that they are able, after one primordial act of faith, to communicate with one another, these monistic assumptions of language might perhaps be disregarded and we might have a right to reject such expressions as “system of things” and “cosmos” and “universe” and “nature.”

But it still remains that they are connected, in space and in time, by the medium, whatever it may be, which fills the gulfs between the planets and the stars. As long as these separate souls are invariably associated as they are, with physical bodies, and as long as these physical bodies are composed of the same mysterious force which we may call earth, fire, water, air, ether, electricity, energy, vibration, or any other technical or popular name, so long will it be legitimate to use these monistic expressions with which human language is, so to speak, so deeply stained. As a matter of fact we are not left with only this limited measure of unity. There are also certain psychological experiences — experiences which I believe I have a right to regard as universal — which bring these separate souls into much closer connection.

Such experiences can be, and have been, ridiculously exaggerated. But the undeniable fact that they exist is sufficient to prove that in spite of the pluralistic appearance of things, there is still enough unity available to prevent the Many from completely devouring the One. The experiences to which I am referring are experiences which the complex vision owes to the intuition. And though this experience has been made unfair use of, by both mystics and metaphysicians, it cannot be calmly disregarded.

The intuition, which is, as I have already pointed out, the feminine counterpart to the imagination, is found, with regard to this particular problem, uttering so frequent and impressive an oracle that to neglect its voice, would be to nullify and negate the whole activity of the intuition and deny it its place among the ultimate energies of vision.

There is always more difficulty in putting into words a revelation which the complex vision owes to intuition than in regard to any other of its attributes. Reason in his matter, and sensation and imagination also, have an unfair advantage when it comes to *words.* For human language is compelled to draw its images from sensation and its logic from reason. But intuition — the peculiarly feminine attribute of the soul — finds itself dealing with what is barely intelligible and with what is profoundly irrational. Thus it naturally experiences a profound difficulty in getting itself expressed in words at all.

And, incidentally, we cannot avoid asking ourselves the curious question whether it may not be that language, which is so dependent upon the peculiarly masculine attributes of reason and sensation, has not become an inadequate medium for the expression of what might be called the feminine vision of the world? May we not indeed go so far as to hazard the suggestion that when this fact, of the masculine domination of language, has been adequately recognized, there will emerge upon the earth women-philosophers and women-artists who will throw completely new light upon many problems? The difficulty which women experience in getting expressed in definite terms, whether in philosophy or art, the co-ordinated rhythm of *their* complex vision, may it not be largely due to the fact that the attribute of intuition which is their most vital organ of research has remained so inarticulate? And may not the present wave of psychological "mysticism," which just now is so prominent a psychic phenomenon, be due to the vague and, in many cases, the clumsy attempt, which women are now making to get their intuitive contribution into line with the complex vision of the rest?

When the universe is referred to as "Nature," may it not be that it is this very element, this strange wisdom of the abysmal "Mothers," which humanity thinks of as struggling to utter its unutterable secret?

How, then, for the sake of its contribution to the ultimate rhythm, does the complex vision articulate this mysterious oracle from the feminine principle in life, as it brokenly and intermittently lifts up its voice?

One aspect of this oracle's voice is precisely what we are concerned with now. I mean the problem of the relation of the One to the Many. The merely logical conception of unity is misleading because the wavering mass of impression which makes up our life has a margin which recedes on every side into unfathomableness. This conception has two aspects. In the first place it implies *continuity,* by which I mean that everything in the world is in touch with everything else.

In the second place it implies *totality,* by which I mean that everything in the world can be considered as one rounded-off and complete "whole." According to this second aspect of the case, we think of the world as an integral One surrounded by nothingness, in the same way that the individual soul is surrounded by the universe.

The revelation of the complex vision finds the second of these two aspects entirely misleading. It accepts the conception of *continuity,* and rejects the conception of *totality.* It rejects the conception of "totality," because "totality," in this cosmic sense, is a thing of which it has no experience; and the revelation of the complex vision is entirely based on experience. The margins of the world, receding without limit in every direction, prevent us from ever arriving at the conception of "totality."

What right have we to regard the universe as a totality, when all we are conscious of is a mass of wavering impression continued unfathomable in every direction? In only one sense, therefore, have we a right to speak of the unity of the system of things; and that is in the sense of continuity. Since this mass of impression, which we name the universe, is on all sides lost in a margin of unfathomableness, it is, after all, only a limited portion of it which comes into the scope of our consciousness. It is one of the curious exaggerations of our logical reason that we should be tempted to "round off" this mystery. The combined voices of imagination and intuition protest against such an enclosed circle.

The same revelation of the complex vision which gives objective reality to what is outside our individual soul insists that this objective reality extends beyond the limited circle of our consciousness. The device by which the logical reason "rounds off" the conception of *continuity* by the conception of *totality* is the device of the mathematical formula of "infinity."

The imaginative movement by which the complex vision of the soul plunges into the abysses of stellar space, seeking to fathom, at least in a mental act, immensity beyond immensity, and gulf beyond gulf, is a definite human experience. It is the actual experience of the soul itself, dropping its plummet into immensity, and finding immensity unfathomable. But as soon as the logical reason dominates the situation, in place of this palpable plunge into a real concrete experience, with its accompanying sensation of appalling wonder and terrible freedom, we are offered nothing but a thin, dry, barren mathematical formula called "infinity," the mere mention of which freezes the imagination at its source.

What, in fact, the complex vision reveals to us is that all these arid formulae, such as infinity, the Absolute Being, and the Universal Cause, are conceptions projected into the real and palpable bosom of unfathomable life by the very enemy and antagonist of life, the aboriginal emotion of inert malice. This is why so often in the history of the human race the conception of "God" has been the worst enemy of the soul. The conception of "God" by its alliance with the depressing mathematical formula of "infinity" has indeed done more than any other human perversion to obliterate the beauty and truth of the emotional feeling which we name "religion."

The revelation of the complex vision makes it clear to us that the idea of "God," in alliance with the idea of "Infinity," is a projection, into religious experience, of the emotion of inert malice. As soon as the palpable unfathomableness of space is reduced to the barren notion of a mathematical "infinity" all the free and terrible beauty of life is lost. We have pressed our hands against our prison-gates and found them composed of a material more rigid than adamant, the material of "thought-in-the-abstract."

Now although our chief difficulty in regard to this insistent problem of the One and the Many has been got rid of by eliminating from the notion of the One all idea of totality, it is still true that something in us remains unsatisfied while our individual soul is thought of as absolutely isolated from all other souls. It is here, as I have already said, that the peculiarly feminine attribute of intuition comes to our rescue. The fact that we can communicate together by human and sub-human language, does not, though it implies a basic similarity in our complex vision, really satisfy us.

A strange unhappiness, a vague misery, a burden of unutterable nostalgia, troubles the loneliness of our soul. And yet it is not, this vague longing, a mere desire to break the isolating circle of the "I am I" and to invade, and mingle with, other personalities. It is something deeper than this, it is a desire to break the isolation of all personalities, and to enter, in company with all, some larger, fuller, freer level of life, where what we call "the limits of personality" are surpassed and transcended.

This underlying misery of the soul is, in fact, a constant recognition that by the isolated loneliness of our deepest self we are keeping at a distance something — some unutterable flow of happiness — which would destroy for us all fears and all weariness, and would end for ever the obscene and sickening burden of the commonplace. It is precisely at this point that the intuition comes to the rescue; supplying our complex vision with that peculiar “note,” or “strain of music,” without which the orchestral harmony must remain incomplete.

In seeking to recall those great moments when the “apex-thought” of the complex vision revealed to us the secret of things, we find ourselves remembering how, when in the presence of some supreme work of art, or of some action of heroic sacrifice, or of some magical effect of nature, or of some heart-breaking gesture of tragic emotion in some simple character, we have suddenly been transported out of the closed circle of our personal life into something that was at once personal and impersonal. At such a moment it seems as if we literally “died” to ourself, and became something “other” than ourself; and yet at the same time “found” ourself, as we had never “found” ourself before.

What the complex vision seems to reveal to us about this great human experience is that it is an initiation into an “eternal vision,” into a “vision of the immortals,” into a mood, a temper, a “music of the spheres,” wherein the creative mystery of the emotion of love finds its consummation. The peculiar opportunity of an experience of this kind, its temporal “occasion,” shall we say, seems to be more often supplied by the intuition, than by any other attribute of the complex vision.

Intuition having this power, it is not surprising that many souls should misuse and abuse this great gift. The temptation to allow the intuition to absorb the whole field of consciousness is to certain natures almost irresistible. And yet, when intuition is divorced from the other aspects of the rhythm of life, its tendency towards what might be called “the passion of identity” very easily lapses into a sort of spiritual sensuality, destructive to the creative freedom of the soul. Woe to the artist who falls into the quagmire of unbalanced intuition! It is as if he were drugged with a spiritual lust.

To escape from self-loathing, to escape from the odious monotony and the indecent realism of life — what a relief! How desirable to be confronted no longer by that impassable gulf between one's own soul and all other living souls! How desirable to cross the abyss which separates the "something" which is the substance of our being from the "something" which is the substance of the "objective mystery"!

And yet, according to the revelation of the complex vision, this "spiritual ecstasy" is a perversion of the true art of life. The true art of life finds in "the vision of the immortals," and in "the vision of the immortals" alone, its real escape from evil. This "passion of identity," offered us by the vice, by the madness of intuition, is not in harmony with the great moments of the soul. Its "identity" is but a gross, mystical, clotted "identity"; and its "heaven" is not the "heaven" of the Christ.

If the "ecstasy of identity," as the unbalanced attribute of intuition forces it upon us, were in very truth the purpose of life, how grotesque a thing life would be! It would then be the purpose of life to create personality, only in order to drown it in the impersonal. In other words it would be the purpose of life to create the "higher" in order that it should lose itself in the lower. At its very best this "ecstasy of identity" is the expression of what might be called the "lyrical" element in things. But the secret of life is not lyrical, as many of the prophets have supposed, but dramatic, as all the great artists have shown. For the essence of life is contradiction. And contradiction demands a "for" and an "against," a protagonist and an antagonist. What the revelation of the complex vision discloses is the inherent duality of all things. Pleasure and pain, night and day, man and woman, good and evil, summer and winter, life and death, personality and fate, love and malice, the soul and the objective mystery, these are the threads out of which the texture of existence is woven; and there is no escape from these, except in that eternal “*nothingness*” which itself is the “contradiction” or “opposite” of that “*all,*” which it reduces to chaos and annihilation. Thus runs the revelation of the complex vision.

This integral soul of ours, made of a stuff which for ever defies analysis; this objective mystery, made of a stuff which for ever defies analysis; these two things perpetually confront one another in a struggle that only annihilation can end. The vision of the eternal implies the passing of the transitory. For what cannot cease from being beautiful has no real beauty; and what cannot cease from being true has no real truth. The art of life according to the revelation of the complex vision, consists in giving to the transitory the form of the eternal. It is the art of creating a rhythm, a music, a harmony, so passionate and yet so calm, that the mere fact of having once or twice attained it is sufficient “to redeem all sorrows.”

The assumption that death ends it all, is an assumption which the very nature of love calls upon us to make; for, if we did not make it make it, something different from love would be the object and purpose of our life. But the revelation of the complex vision, in our supreme moments, discloses to us that love itself is the only justification for life; and therefore, by making the assumption that the soul perishes, we put once and for all out of our thought that formidable revival of love, the idea of personal immortality.

For the idea of personal immortality, like the idea of an Absolute God, is a projection of the aboriginal “inert” malice. It must be remembered that the revelation of the complex vision, by laying stress upon the creative energy of the soul in its grappling with the objective mystery, implies an element of *indeterminism,* or free choice, in regard to the ultimate nature of the world.

Man, in a very profound sense, perpetually creates the world according to his will and desire. Nor can he ever know at what point, in the struggle between personality and destiny, the latter is bound to win. Such a point may *seem* to be reached; until some astounding "act of faith" on the part of the soul flings that "point" into a yet further remoteness. And this creative power in the soul of man may apply in ways which at present our own race has hardly dared to contemplate. It may apply, for instance, to the idea of personal immortality.

Personal immortality may be a thing which the soul, by a concentrated act of creative will, can secure for itself, or can reject for itself. It may be, if we take the whole conscious and subconscious purpose of a man's life, a *matter of choice*.

But when a man makes a choice of such a kind, when a man concentrates his energy upon surviving the death of his body, he is deliberately selecting a "lower" purpose for his life in place of a "higher." In other words, instead of concentrating his will upon the evocation of the emotion of love, he is concentrating his will upon self-realization or self-continuance. What he is really doing is even worse than this. For since what we call "emotion" is an actual projection into the matrix of the objective mystery, of the very substance and stuff of the soul, when the will thus concentrates upon personal immortality, it takes the very substance of the soul and perverts it to the satisfaction of inert malice. In other words it actually transforms the stuff of the soul from its positive to its negative chemistry, and produces a relative victory of malice over love.

The soul's desires for personal immortality is one of the aspects of the soul's "possessive" instinct. The soul desires to "possess" itself — itself as it exactly is, itself in its precise and complete "status quo" — without interruption for ever. But love has a very different desire from this. Love is not concerned with time at all — for time has a “future”; and any contemplation of a “future” implies the activity of something in the soul which is different from love, implies something which is concerned with outward events and occurrences and chances. But love is not concerned with outward events, whether past or future. Love desires eternity and eternity alone. Or rather it does not “desire” eternity. It *is* eternity. It is an eternal Now, in which what *will* happen and what *has* happened are irrelevant and unimportant.

All this offers us an intelligible explanation of a very bewildering phenomenon in human life. I mean the instinctive disgust experienced by the aesthetic sense when men, who otherwise seem gentle and good, display an undue and unmeasured agitation about the fate of their souls.

Love never so much as even considers the question of the fate of the soul. Love finds, in the mere act of loving, a happiness so profound that all such problems seem tiresome and insignificant. The purpose of life is to attain the rhythmic ecstasy of all love’s intrinsic potentialities. This desire for personal immortality is not one of love’s intrinsic potentialities. When a human soul has lost by death the one person it has loved, the strength of its love is measured by the greater or less emphasis it places upon the problem of the lost one’s “survival.”

The disgust which the aesthetic sense experiences when it encounters a certain sort of mystical and psychic agitation over the question as to whether the lost one “lives still somewhere” is a disgust based upon our instinctive knowledge that this particular kind of inquiry would never occur to a supreme and self-forgetful love. For this enquiry, this agitation, this dabbling in “psychic evidences,” is a projection of the baser nature of the soul; is, in fact, a projection of the “possessive instinct,” which is only another name for the original inert malice.

In the “ave atque vale” of the Roman poet, there is much more of the absolute quality of great love than in all these psychic dabblings. For in the austere reserve of that passionate cry there is the ultimate acceptance, by Love itself, of the tragedy of having lived and loved at all. There is an acceptance of that aspect of the “vision of the immortals” which implies that the possessive instinct has no part or lot in the eternal.

The inhuman cruelties which have been practised by otherwise “good” men under the motive of “saving” other people’s souls, and the inhuman cruelties which have been practised by otherwise “good” men under the motive of saving their own souls, have, each of them, the same evil origin. Love sweeps aside, in one great wave of its own nature, all these doubts and ambiguities. It lifts the object of its love into its own eternity; and in its own eternity the ultimate tragedy of personal separation is but one chord of its unbroken rhythm.

The tragedy of personal separation is not a thing which love realizes for the first time when it loses the object of its love. It is a thing which is of the very nature of the eternity in which love habitually dwells. For the eternity in which love habitually dwells is its vision of the tragedy of all life.

This, then, is the original revelation of the complex vision. The soul is confronted by an ultimate duality which extends through the whole mass of its impressions. And because this duality extends through every aspect of the soul’s universe and can be changed and transformed by the soul’s will, it is inevitable that what the world has hitherto named “philosophy” and has regarded as the effort of “getting hold” of a reality which exists already, should be named by the complex vision the “art of life” and should be regarded as the effort of reducing to harmony the unruly impulses and energies which perpetually transform and change the world.

CHAPTER V. THE ULTIMATE DUALITY

WHAT WE ARE really, all of us, in search of, whether we know it or not, is some concrete and definite symbol of life and the “object” of life which shall gather up into one living image all the broken, thwarted, devious, and discordant impressions which make up our experience. What we crave is something that shall, in some permanent form and yet in a form that can grow and enrich itself, represent and embody the whole circle of the joy and pain of existence. What we crave is something into which we can throw our personal joys and sorrows, our individual sensations and ideas, and know of a certainty that thrown into that reservoir, they will blend with all the joys and sorrows of all the dead and all the living.

Such a symbol in order to give us what we need must represent the ultimate reach of insight to which humanity has attained. It must be something that, once having come into existence, remains independent of our momentary subjective fancies and our passing moods. It must be something of clearer outlines and more definite lineaments than those vague indistinct ecstasies, half-physiological and half-psychic, which the isolated intuition brings us.

Such a symbol must represent the concentrated struggle of the human soul with the bitterness of fate and the cruelty of fate, its long struggle with the deadly malice in itself and the deadly malice in nature.

There is only one symbol which serves this purpose; a symbol which has already by the slow process of anonymous creation and discovery established itself in the world. I mean the symbol of the figure of Christ.

This symbol would not have sufficed to satisfy the craving of which I speak if it were only a “discovery” of humanity. The “God-man” may be “discovered” in nature; but the “Man-god” must be “created” by man.

We find ourselves approaching this symbol from many points of view, but the point of view which especially concerns us is to note how it covers the whole field of human experience. In this symbol the ultimate duality receives its “eternal form” and becomes an everlasting standard or pattern of what is most natural and most rhythmic. As I advance in my analysis of the relation of the ultimate duality to this symbolic figure of Christ, it becomes necessary to review once more, in clear and concise order, the various stages of thought by means of which I prove the necessity of some sort of universal symbol, and the necessity of moulding this symbol to fit the drama of One ultimate duality.

A summary of the stages of thought through which we have already passed will thus be inevitable; but it will be a summary of the situation from the view-point of a different angle.

Philosophy then is an attempt to articulate more vividly the nature of reality than such “reality” can get itself articulated in the confused pell-mell of ordinary experience. The unfortunate thing is that in this process of articulating reality philosophy tends to create an artificial world of its own, which in the end gets so far away from reality that its conclusions when they are confronted with the pell-mell of ordinary experience appear remote, strange, fantastic, arbitrary, and even laughable.

This philosophical tendency to create an artificial world which when confronted with the real world appears strange and remote is due to the fact that philosophers, instead of using as their instrument of research the entire complex vision, use first one and then another of its isolated attributes. But there must come moments when, in the analysis of so intricate and elaborate a thing as “reality” by means of so intricate and elaborate an instrument, as the complex vision, the most genuine and the least artificial of philosophies must appear to be following a devious and serpentine path.

These moments of difficulty and obscurity are not, however — as long as such a philosophy attaches itself closely to “reality” and flows round “reality” like a tide flowing round submerged rocks or liquid metal flowing round the cavities of a mould — a sign that philosophy has deserted reality, but only a sign that the curves and contours and jagged edges of reality are so intricate and involved that only a very fluid element can follow their complicated shape. But these moments of difficulty and obscurity, these vague and impalpable links in the chain, are only to be found in the *process* by which we arrive at our conclusion. When our conclusion has been once reached it becomes suddenly manifest to us that it has been there, with us, all the while, implicit in our whole argument, the secret and hidden cause why the argument took the form it did rather than any other. The test of any philosophy is not that it should appeal immediately and directly to what is called “common-sense,” for common-sense is no better than a crude and premature synthesis of superficial experiences; a synthesis from which the supreme and culminating experiences of a person’s life have been excluded. For in our supreme and culminating experiences there is always an element of what might be called the “impossible” or of what must be recognized as a matter of faith or imagination. It is therefore quite to be expected that the conclusions of a philosophy like the philosophy of the complex vision, which derives its authority from the exceptional and supreme experiences of all souls, should strike us in our moments of “practical common-sense” as foolish, impossible, ridiculous and even insane. All desperate and formidable efforts towards creation have struck and will strike the mood of “practical common-sense” as ridiculous and insane. This is true of every creative idea that has ever emanated from the soul of man.

For the mood of “practical common-sense” is a projection of the baser instinct of self-preservation and is penetrated through and through with that power of inert malice which itself might be called the instinct of self-preservation of the enemy of life. “Practical common-sense” is the name we give to that superficial synthesis of our baser self-preservative instincts, which, when it is reinforced and inspired by “the will of malice” out of the evil depths of the soul, is the most deadly of all antagonists of new life.

We need suffer, therefore, no surprise or pain if we find the conclusions of the philosophy of the complex vision ridiculous and “impossible” to our mood of practical common-sense. If on the contrary they did not seem insane and foolish to such a mood we might well be profoundly suspicious of them. For although there are very few certainties in this world, one thing at least is certain, namely that for any truth or reality to satisfy the creative spirit in us it must present itself as something dangerous, destructive, ridiculous and insane to that instinct in us which resists creation.

But although “the appeal to common-sense” is no test of the truth of a philosophy, since common-sense is precisely the thing in us which has a malicious hostility to the creative spirit, yet no philosophy can afford to disregard an appeal to actual experience as long as actual experience includes the rare moments of our life as well as all the rest. Here is indeed a true and authentic test of philosophic validity. If we take our philosophical conclusions, so to speak, in our hands, and plunge with them into the very depths of actual experience, do they grow more organic, more palpable and more firm, or do they melt away into the flowing waters?

Who is not able to recall the distress of bitter disillusionment which has followed the collapse of some plausible system of “sweet reasonableness” under the granite-like impact of a rock of reality which has knocked the bottom out of it and left it a derelict upon the waves? This collapse of an ordered and reasonable system under the impact of some atrocious projection of “crass casuality” is a proof that if a philosophy has not got in it some “iron” of its own, if it has not got in it something formidable and unfathomable, something that can destroy as well as create, it is not of much avail against the winds and storms of destiny.

For a philosophy to be a true representation of reality, for it to be that reality itself, become conscious and articulate, it is necessary that it should prove most vivid and actual at those supreme moments when the soul of man is driven to the ultimate wall and is at the breaking-point.

The truth of a philosophy is not to be tested by what we feel about it in moods of practical common-sense; for in these moods we have, for some superficial reason, suppressed more than half of the attributes of our soul. The truth of a philosophy can only be tested in those moments when the soul, driven to the wall, gathers itself together for one supreme effort. But there is, even in less stark and drastic hours, an available test of a sound and organic philosophy which must not be forgotten. I refer to its capacity for being vividly and emphatically summed up and embodied in some concrete image or symbol.

If a philosophy is so rationalistic that it refuses to lend itself to a definite and concrete expression we are justified in being more than suspicious of it.

And we are suspicious of it not because its lack of simplicity makes it intricate and elaborate, for “reality” is intricate and elaborate; but because its inability to find expression for its intricacy in any concrete symbol is a proof that it is too simple. For the remote conclusions of a purely logical and rationalistic philosophy are made to appear much less simple than they really are by reason of their use of remote technical terms.

What the soul demands from philosophy is not simplicity but complexity, for the soul itself is the most complex thing we know. The thin, rigid, artificial outlines of purely rationalistic systems can never be expressed in ritual or symbol or drama, not because they are too intricate, but because they are not intricate enough.

A genuine symbol, or ritualistic image, is a concrete living organic thing carrying all manner of magical and subtle associations. It is an expression of reality which comes much nearer to reality than any rationalistic system can possibly do. A genuine symbolic or ritualistic image is a concrete expression of the complexity of life. It has the creative and destructive power of life. It has the formidable mysteriousness of life, and with all this it has the clear-cut directness of life's terrible and exquisite tangibility.

When suddenly confronted, then, in the mid-stream of life, by the necessity of expressing the starting-point, which is also the conclusion, of the philosophy of the complex vision, what synthetic image or symbol or ritualistic word are we to use in order to sum up its concrete reality?

The revelation of life, offered to us by the complex vision, is, as we have seen, no very simple or logical affair. We axe left with the spectacle of innumerable "souls," human, sub-human and super-human, held together by some indefinable "medium" which enables them to communicate with one another. Each one of these "souls" at once creates and discovers its own individual "universe" and then by an act of faith assumes that the various "universes" created and discovered by all other souls are identical with its own.

That they *are* identical with its own the soul is led to assume with more and more certainty in proportion as its communion with other souls grows more and more involved. This identity between the various "universes" of alien souls is rendered more secure and more objective by the fact that time and space are found to be essential peculiarities of all of them alike. For since time and space are found to enter into the original character of all these “universes,” it becomes a natural and legitimate conclusion that all these “universes” are in reality the same “universe.”

We are left, then, with the spectacle of innumerable souls confronting a “universe” which in their interaction with one another they have half-created and half-discovered. There is no escape from the implication of this phrase “half-discovered.” The creative activity of the complex vision perpetually modifies, clarifies and moulds the mystery which surrounds it; but that there is an objective mystery surrounding it, of which time and space are permanent aspects, cannot be denied.

The pure reason’s peculiar power of thinking time and space away, or of lodging itself outside of time and space, is an abstraction which leads us out of the sphere of reality; because, in its resultant conception, it omits the activity of the other attributes of the complex vision.

The complex vision reveals to us, therefore, three aspects of objective mystery. It reveals to us in the first place the presence of an objective “something” outside the soul, which the soul by its various energies moulds and clarifies and shapes. This is that “something” which the soul at one and the same moment “half-discovers” and “half-creates.” It reveals to us, in the second place, the presence of an indefinable objective “something” which is the medium that makes possible the communion of one soul with another and with “the invisible companions.”

This is the medium which holds all these separate personalities together while each of them half-creates and half-discovers his own “universe.”

In the third place it reveals to us the presence, in each individual soul, of a sort of “substratum of the soul” or something beyond analysis which is the “vanishing point of sensation” and the vortex-point or fusion-point where the movement which we call “matter” loses itself in the movement which we call “mind.”

In all these three aspects of objective mystery, revealed to us by the united activities of the complex vision, we are compelled, as has been shown, to use the vague and obscure word “something.” We are compelled to apply this unilluminating and tantalizing word to all these three aspects of “objective mystery,” because no other word really covers the complex vision’s actual experience.

The soul recognizes that there is “something” outside itself which is the “clay” upon which its energy works in creating its “universe,” but it cannot know anything about this “something” except that it is “there”; because, directly the soul discovers it, it inevitably moulds it and recreates it. There is not one minutest division of time between this “discovery” and this “creation”; so all that one can say is that the resultant objective “universe” is half-created and half-discovered; and that whatever this mysterious “something” may be, apart from the complex vision, it at any rate has the peculiarity of being forced to submit to the complex vision’s creative energy.

But not only are we compelled to apply the provoking and unilluminating word “something” to each of these three aspects of objective mystery which the complex vision reveals; we are also compelled to assume that each one of these is dominated by time and space.

This implication of “time and space” is necessitated in a different way in each of these three aspects of what was formerly called “matter.” In the first aspect of the thing we have time and space as essential characteristics of all the various “universes,” reduced by an act of faith to one “universe,” of the souls which fill the world.

In the second aspect of it we have time and space as essential characteristics of that indefinable "medium" which holds all these souls together, and which by holding them together makes it easier to regard their separate "universes" as "one universe," since they find their ground or base in one universal "medium."

In the third aspect of it we have time and space as essential characteristics of that "substratum of the soul" which is the vanishing-point of sensation and the fusion-point of "mind" and "matter."

We are thus inevitably led to a further conclusion; namely, that all these three aspects of objective reality, since they are all dominated by time and space, are all dominated by the *same* "time" and the same "space." And since it is unthinkable that three coexistent forms of objective reality should be all dominated by the same time and space and remain absolutely distinct from one another, it becomes evident that these three forms of objective mystery, these three indefinable "somethings," are not separate from one another but are in continual contact with one another.

Thus the fact that all these three aspects of objective reality are under the domination of the same time and space is a further confirmation of the truth which we have already assumed by an act of faith, namely that all the various "universes," half-discovered and half-created by all the souls in the world, are in reality "one universe."

The real active and objective existence of this "one universe" is made still more sure and is removed still further from all possibility of "illusion," by the fact that we are forced to regard it as being not only "our" universe but the universe also of those "invisible companions" whose vision half-creates it and half-discovers it, even as our own vision does. It is true that to certain types of mind, for whom the definite recognition of mystery is repugnant, it must seem absurd and ridiculous to be driven to the acknowledgment of a thing’s existence, while at the same time we have to confess complete inability to predicate anything at all about the thing except that it exists.

It must seem to such minds still more absurd and ridiculous that we should be driven to recognize no less than three aspects of this mysterious “something.”

But since they are included in the same time and space, and since, consequently, they are intimately connected with one another, it becomes inevitable that we should take the yet further step and regard them as three separate aspects of one and the same mystery. Thus we are once more confronted with the inescapable trinitarian nature of the system of things; and just as we have three ultimate aspects of reality in the monistic truth of “the one time and space,” in the pluralistic truth of the innumerable company of living souls and the dualistic truth of the contradictory nature of all existence; so we have three further ultimate aspects of reality, in the incomprehensible “something” which holds all souls together; in the incomprehensible “something” out of which all souls create the universe; and in the incomprehensible “something” which forms the substratum both of the souls of the invisible “companions of men” and of the soul of every individual thing.

The supreme unity, therefore, in this complicated world, thus revealed to us by the activity of the complex vision is the unity of time and space. This unity is eternally reborn and eternally re-discovered every time any living personality contemplates the system of things. And since “the sons of the universe” must be regarded as continually contemplating the system of things, struggling with it, moulding it, and changing it, according to their pre-existent ideal, we are compelled to assume that time and space are eternal aspects of reality and that their eternal necessity gives the system of things its supreme unity.

No isolated speculation of the logical reason, functioning apart from the other attributes of the complex vision, can undermine this supreme unity of time and space. The “a priori unity of apperception” is an unreality compared with this reality. The all-embracing cosmic “monad,” contemplating itself as its eternal object, is an unreality compared with this reality.

We are left with a pluralistic world of individual souls, finding their pattern and their ideal in the vision of the “immortal gods” and perpetually rediscovering and recreating together “a universe” which like themselves is dominated by time and space and which like themselves is for ever divided against itself in an eternal and unfathomable duality.

The ultimate truth of the system of things according to the revelation of the complex vision is thus found to consist in the mystery of personality confronting “something” which *seems* impersonal. Over both these things, over the personal soul and over the primordial “clay” or “energy” or “movement” or “matter” out of which the personal soul creates its “universe,” time and space are dominant. But since we can predicate nothing of this original “plasticity” except that it is “plastic” and that time and space rule over it, it is in a strict sense illegitimate to say that this primordial “clay” or “world stuff” is in itself divided into a duality. We know nothing, and can never know anything about it, beyond the bare fact of its existence. Its duality comes from the duality in us. It is we who create the contradiction upon which its life depends. It is from the unfathomable duality in the soul of the “companions of men” that the universe is brought forth.

The ultimate duality which perpetually creates the world is the ultimate duality in all living souls and in the souls of "the sons of the universe." But although it is we ourselves who in the primal act of envisaging the world endow it with this duality, it would be an untrue statement to say that this duality in the material universe is an "illusion." It is no more an illusion than the objective material world itself is an illusion. Both are created by the inter-action between the mystery of personality and the mystery of what seems the impersonal. Thus it remains perfectly true that what we sometimes call "brute matter" possesses an element of malignant inertness and malicious resistance to the power of creation. This malice of the impersonal, this malignant inertness of "matter," is an ultimate fact; and is not less a fact because it depends upon the existence of the same malice and the same inert resistance in our own souls.

Nor are we able to escape from the conclusion that this malignant element in the indefinable "world-stuff" exists independently of any human soul. It must be thought of as dependent upon the same duality in the souls of "the sons of the universe" as that which exists in the souls of men. For although the primordial ideas of truth and nobility and beauty, brought together by the emotion of love, are realized in the "gods" with an incredible and immortal intensity, yet the souls of the "gods" could not be souls at all if they were not subject to the same duality as that which struggles within ourselves.

It follows from this that we are forced to recognize the presence of a potentiality of evil or malice in the souls of "the sons of the universe." But although we cannot escape from the conclusion that evil or malice exists in the souls of the immortals as in all human souls, yet in their souls this evil or malice must be regarded as perpetually overcome by the energy of the power of love. This overcoming of malice by the power of love, or of evil by "good," in the souls of "the sons of the universe," must not be regarded as a thing once for all accomplished, but as a thing eternally re-attained as the result of an unceasing struggle, a struggle so desperate, so passionate and so unfathomable, that it surpasses all effort of the mind to realize or comprehend it.

It must not, moreover, be forgotten that what the complex vision reveals about this eternal struggle between love and malice in the souls of "the sons of the universe" and in the souls of all living things, is not that love and malice are vague independent elemental "forces" which obsess or possess or function *through* the soul which is their arena, but rather that they themselves *are* the very stuff and texture and essence of the individual soul itself.

Their duality is unfathomable because the soul is unfathomable. The struggle between them is unfathomable because the struggle between them is nothing less than the intrinsic nature of the soul. The soul is unthinkable without this unfathomable struggle in its inherent being between love and malice or between life and what resists life. We are therefore justified in saying that "the universe" is created by the perpetual struggle between love and malice or between life and what resists life. But when we say this we must remember that this is only true because "the universe" is half-discovered and half-created by the souls of "the sons of the universe" and by the souls of all living things which fill the universe. This unfathomable duality which perpetually re-creates Nature, does not exist in Nature apart from living things, although it does exist in nature apart from any individual living thing.

All those aspects of the objective universe which we usually call "inanimate," such as earth, water, air, fire, ether, electricity, energy, movement, matter and the like, including the stellar and planetary bodies and the chemical medium, whatever it may be, which unites them, must be regarded as sharing, in some inscrutable way, in this unfathomable struggle. We are unable to escape from this conception of them, as thus sharing in this struggle, because they are themselves the creation and discovery of the complex vision of the soul; and the soul is, as we have seen, dependent for its every existence upon this struggle.

In the same way, all those other aspects of the universe which are "animate" but sub-human, such as grass, moss, lichen, plants, sea-weed, trees, fish, birds, animals and the like, must be regarded as sharing in a still more intimate sense in this unfathomable struggle. This conception has a double element of truth. For not only do these things depend for their form and shape and reality upon the complex vision of the soul which contemplates them; but they are themselves, since they are things endowed with life, possessed of some measure or degree of the complex vision.

And if the souls of men and the Souls of the "sons of the universe" are inextricably made up of the very stuff of this unfathomable struggle, between life and what resists life, we cannot escape from the conclusion that the souls of plants and birds and animals and all other living things are inextricably made up of the stuff of the same unfathomable struggle. For where there is life there must be a soul possessed of life. Life, apart from some soul possessed with life, is an abstraction of the logical reason and a phantom of no more genuine reality than the "a priori unity of apperception" or "the universal self-conscious monad."

What we call reality, or the truth of the system of things, is nothing less than an innumerable company of personalities confronting an objective mystery; and while we are driven to regard the "inanimate," such as earth and air and water and fire, as the bodily expressions of certain living souls, so are we much more forcibly driven to regard the "animate," wherever it is found, as implying the existence of some measure of personality and some degree of consciousness.

Life, apart from a soul possessing life, is not life at all. It is an abstraction of the logical reason which we cannot appropriate to our instinct or imagination. A vague phrase, like the phrase “life-force,” conveys to us whose medium of research is the complex vision, simply no intelligible meaning at all. It is on a par with the “over-soul”; and, to the philosophy of the complex vision, both the “life-force” and the “over-soul” are vague, materialistic, metaphorical expressions which do not attain to the dignity of a legitimate symbolic image.

They do not attain to this, because a legitimate symbolic image must appeal to the imagination and the aesthetic sense by the possession of something concrete and intelligible.

Any individual personal soul is concrete and intelligible. The personal souls of “the sons of the universe” are concrete and intelligible. But the “over-soul” and the “life-force” are neither concrete nor intelligible and therefore cannot be regarded as legitimate symbols. One of the most important aspects of the method of philosophical enquiry which the philosophy of the complex vision adopts is this use of legitimate symbolic images in place of illegitimate metaphorical images.

This use of concrete, tangible, intelligible images is a thing which has to pay its price. And the price which it has to pay is the price of appearing childish, absurd and ridiculous to the type of mind which advocates the exclusive use of the logical reason as the sole instrument of philosophical research. This price of appearing naive, childish and ridiculous has to be paid shamelessly and in full.

The type of mind which exacts this price, which demands in fact that the concrete intelligible symbols of the philosophy of the complex vision should be regarded as childish and ridiculous, is precisely the type of mind for whom “truth” is a smoothly evolutionary affair, an affair of steady “progress,” and for whom, therefore, the mere fact of an idea being “a modern idea” implies that it is “true” and the mere fact of an idea being a classical idea or a mediaeval idea implies that it is crude and inadequate if not completely “false.”

To the philosophy of the complex vision “truth” does not present itself as an affair of smooth and steady historical evolution but as something quite different from this — as a work of art, in fact, dependent upon the struggle of the individual soul with itself, and upon the struggle of “the souls of the sons of the universe” with themselves. And although the struggle of the souls of “the sons of the universe” towards a fuller clarifying of the mystery of life must be regarded as having its concrete tangible history in time and space, yet this history is not at all synonymous with what is usually called “progress.”

An individual human soul, the apex-thought of whose complex vision has attained an extraordinary and unusual rhythm, must be regarded as having approached nearer to the vision of “the sons of the universe” although such an one may have lived in the days of the patriarchs or in the Greek days or in the days of mediaevalism or of the renaissance, than any modern rationalistic thinker who is obsessed by “the latest tendencies of modern thought.”

The souls of “the immortals” must certainly be regarded as developing and changing and as constantly advancing towards the realization of their hope and premonition. But this “advance” is also, as we have seen, in the profoundest sense a “return,” because it is a movement towards an idea which already is implicit and latent. And in the presence of this “advance,” which is also a "return," all historic ages of individual human souls are equal and co-existent.

All real symbols are "true," wherever and whenever they are invoked, because all real symbols are the expression of that rare unity of the complex vision which is man's deepest approximation to the mystery of life. The symbol of the cross, for instance, has far more truth in it than any vague metaphorical expression such as the "over-soul." The symbolic ritual of the Mass, for instance, has far more truth in it than any metaphorical expression such as the "life-force." And although both the Cross and the Mass are inadequate and imperfect symbols with regard to the vision of "the sons of the universe," because they are associated with the idea of an historic incarnation, yet in comparison with any modern rationalistic or chemical metaphor they are supremely true.

The philosophy of the complex vision, just because it is the philosophy of personality, must inevitably use images which appear to the rationalistic mind as naive and childish and ridiculous. But the philosophy of the complex vision prefers to express itself in terms which are concrete, tangible and intelligible, rather than in terms which are no more than vague projections of phantom logic abstracted from the concrete activity of real personality.

In completing this general picture of the starting point of the philosophy of the complex vision there is one further implication which ought to be brought fully into the light. I refer to a doctrine which certain ancient and mediaeval thinkers adopted, and which must always be constantly re-appearing in human thought because it is an inevitable projection of the human conscience when the human conscience functions in isolation and in disregard of the other attributes. I mean the doctrine of the essentially evil, character of that phenomenon which was formerly called “matter” but which I prefer to call the objective mystery.

According to this doctrine — which might be called the eternal heresy of puritanism — this objective mystery, this world-stuff, this eternal “energy” or “movement,” this “flesh and blood” through which the soul expresses itself and of which the physical body is made, is “evil”; and the opposite of this, that is to say “mind” or “thought” or “consciousness” or “spirit” is alone “good.”

According to this doctrine the world is a struggle between “the spirit” which is entirely good and “the flesh” which is entirely evil. To the philosophy of the complex vision this doctrine appears false and misleading. It detects in this doctrine, as I have hinted, an attempt of the conscience to arrogate to itself the whole field of experience and to negate all the other attributes, especially emotion and the aesthetic sense.

Such a doctrine negates the whole activity of the complex vision because it assumes the independent existence of “flesh and blood” as opposed to “mind.” But “flesh and blood” is a thing which has no existence apart from “mind,” because it is a thing “half-created” as well as “half-discovered” by “mind.”

It negates the aesthetic sense because the aesthetic sense requires the existence of “the body” or of “flesh and blood” or of what we call “matter,” and cannot exert its activity without the reality of this thing.

It negates emotion, because the emotion of love demands, for its full satisfaction, nothing less than “the eternal idea of flesh and blood.” And since love demands the “eternal idea of flesh and blood,” “flesh and blood” cannot be “evil.”

This doctrine of the evil nature of “matter” is obviously a perversion of what the complex vision reveals to us about the eternal duality. According to this doctrine, which I call the puritan heresy, the duality resolves itself into a struggle between the spirit and the flesh. But according to the revelation of the complex vision the true duality is quite different from this. In the true duality there is an evil aspect of "matter" and also an evil aspect of "mind."

In the true duality "spirit" is by no means necessarily good. For since the true duality lies in the depths of the soul itself, what we call "spirit" must very often be evil. According to the revelation of the complex vision, evil or malice is a positive force, of malignant inertness, resisting the power of creation or of love. It is, as we have seen, the primordial or chaotic weight which opposes itself to life.

But "flesh and blood" or any other definite form of "matter" has already in large measure submitted to the energy of creation and is therefore both "good" and "evil." That original shapeless "clay" or "objective mystery" out of which the complex vision creates the universe certainly cannot be regarded as "evil," for we can never know anything at all about it except that it exists and that it lends itself to the creative energy of the complex vision. And in so far as it lends itself to the creative energy of the complex vision it certainly cannot be regarded as entirely evil, but must obviously be both good and evil; even as the complex vision itself, being the vision of the soul, is both good and evil.

According to the philosophy of the complex vision then, what we call "mind" is both good and evil and what we call "matter" being intimately dependent upon "mind" is both good and evil. We are forced, therefore, to recognize the existence of both spiritual "evil" and spiritual "good" in the unfathomable depths of the soul. But just because personality is itself a relative triumph of good over evil it is possible to conceive of the existence of a personality in whom evil is perpetually overcome by good, while it is impossible to conceive of a personality in whom good is *perpetually* overcome by evil.

In other words, all personalities are relatively good; and some personalities namely those of “the immortals” are, as far as we are concerned, absolutely good. All personalities including even the personalities of “the immortals” have evil in them, but no personality can be the embodiment of evil, in the sense in which “the sons of the universe” are the embodiment of good.

I thus reach the conclusion of this complicated summary of the nature of the ultimate duality and the necessity of finding a clear and definite symbol for it.

CHAPTER VI. THE ULTIMATE IDEAS

IT NOW BECOMES necessary to consider in greater detail those primary human conceptions of truth, beauty, and goodness, which I have already referred to as the soul's "ultimate ideas." Let no one think that any magical waving of the wand of modern psychology can explain away these universal human experience. They may be named by different appellations; but considering the enormous weight of historical tradition behind these names it would seem absurd and pedantic to attempt to re-baptize them at this late hour.

Human nature, in its essentials, has undergone no material change since we have any record of it; and to use any other word than "beauty" for what we mean by beauty, or than "goodness" for what we mean by goodness, would seem a mere superstition of originality. The interpretation offered, in what follows, of the existence of these experiences is sufficiently startling to require no assistance from novelty of phrasing to give it interest and poignancy. That our souls are actually able to touch, in the darkness which surrounds us, the souls of super-human beings, and that the vision of such super-human beings is the "eternal vision" wherein the mystery of love is consummated, is a doctrine of such staggering implications that it seems wise, in making our way towards it, to use the simplest human words and to avoid any "stylistic" shocks.

It seems advisable also to advance with scrupulous leisureliness in this formidable matter and at certain intervals to turn round as it were, and survey the path by which we have come. The existence of super-human beings, immeasurably superior to man, is in itself a harmless and natural speculation. It is only when it presents itself as a necessary link in philosophical discussion that it appears startling. And the mere fact that it does appear startling when introduced into philosophy shows how, lamentably philosophy has got itself imprisoned in dull, mechanical, mathematical formulae; in formulae so arid and so divorced from life, that the conception of personality, applied to man or to the gods, seems to us as exciting as an incredible fairy story when brought into relation with them.

As the souls of men, then, each with its own complex vision, move side by side along the way, or across one another's path, they are driven by the necessity of things to exchange impressions with regard to the nature of life. In their communications with one another they become aware of the presence, at the back of their consciousness, of an invisible standard of truth, of beauty, of goodness. It is from this standard of beauty and truth and goodness, from this dream, this vision, this hope, that all these souls seem to themselves to draw their motive of movement. But though they seem to themselves to be "moving" into an indetermined future still to be created by their wills, they also seem to themselves to be "returning" towards the discovery of that invisible standard of beauty, truth and goodness, which has as their motive-impulse been with them from the beginning. This implicit standard, this invisible pattern and test and arbitrament of all philosophizing, is what I call "the vision of the immortals." Some minds, both philosophical and religious, seem driven to think of this invisible pattern, this standard of truth and beauty, as the *parent* of the universe rather than as its offspring. I cannot bring myself to take this view because of the fact that the ultimate revelation of the world as presented, to man's complex vision is essential and unfathomably *dualistic*.

A "parent" of the universe can only be thought of as a stopping-place of all thought. He can only be *imagined* — for strictly speaking he cannot be thought of at all — as some unutterable mystery out of which the universe originally sprang. From this unutterable mystery, to which we have no right to attribute either a monistic or a pluralistic character, we may, I suppose, imagine to emerge a perpetual torrent of duality.

Towards this unutterable mystery, about which even to say “it is” seems to be saying too much, it is impossible for the complex vision to have any attitude at all. It can neither love it nor hate it. It can neither reject it nor accept it. It can neither worship it nor revolt against it. It is only *imaginable* in the illegitimate sense of metaphor and analogy. It is simply the stopping-place of the complex vision; that stopping-place beyond which anything is possible and nothing is thinkable.

This thing, which is at once everything and nothing, this thing which is *no thing* but only the unutterable limit where all things pass beyond thought, cannot be accepted by the complex vision as the parent of the universe. The universe has therefore no parent, no origin, no cause, no creator. Eternally it re-creates itself and eternally it divides itself into that ultimate duality which makes creation possible.

That monistic tendency of human thought, which is itself a necessary projection of the monistic reality of the individual soul, cannot, except by an arbitrary act of faith, resolve this ultimate duality into unity. Such a primordial “act of faith” it can and must make with regard to the objective reality of other souls. But such an “act of faith” is not demanded with regard to the unutterable mystery behind the universe. We have not, strictly speaking, even the right to use the expression “an unutterable mystery.” All we have a right to do is just to titter the final judgment— “beyond this limit neither thought nor imagination can pass.”

What the complex vision definitely denies to us, therefore, is the right to regard this thing, which is *no* thing, with any emotion at all. The expression "unutterable mystery" is a misleading one because it appears to justify the emotions of awe and reverence. We have no right to regard this thin simulacrum, this mathematical formula, this stopping-place of thought, with any feelings of awe or reverence. We have not even a right to regard it with humorous contempt; for, being nothing at all, it is beneath contempt.

Humanity has a right to indulge in that peculiar emotional attitude which is called "worship" towards either side of the ultimate duality. It has a right to worship, if it pleases — though to do so several attitudes of the complex vision must be outraged and suppressed — the resistant power of malice. It has even a right to worship the universe, that turbulent arena of these primal antagonists. What it has no right to worship is the "unutterable mystery" *behind the universe;* for the simple reason that the universe is unfathomable.

Human thought has its stopping-place. The universe is unfathomable. Human thought has a definite limit. The universe has no limit. The universe is "unutterably mysterious"; and so also is the human soul; but as far as the soul's complex vision is concerned there can be no reality "behind the appearances of things" except the reality of the soul itself. Thus there is no "parent" of man and of the universe. But "the immortal companions" of men are implied from man's most intimate experiences of life. For if there were no invisible watchers, no arbiters, no standards, no tests, no patterns, no ideals; our complex vision, in regard to certain basic attributes, would be refuted and negated.

Every soul which exists must be thought of as possessing the attribute of "emotion" with its duality of love and malice, the attribute of "taste" with its duality of beauty and hideousness, of conscience with its duality of good and evil, and the attribute of "reason" with its duality of the true and the false. Every one of these basic attributes would be reduced to a suicidal confusion of absolute sceptical subjectivity if it could not have faith in some objective reality to which it can appeal.

Such an appeal, to such an objective reality, it does, as a matter of fact, continually make, whether it makes it consciously or sub-consciously. And just as the soul's basic attributes of emotion, taste, conscience, and reason indicate an implicit faith in the objective reality of the ideas of beauty and nobility and truth; so the soul's basic attribute of self-consciousness indicates an implicit demand that the objective reality of these ideas should be united and embodied in actual living and self-conscious "souls" external to other "souls."

The most dangerous mistake we can make, and the most deadly in its implications, is to reduce these "companions of men" to a monistic unity and to make this unity what the metaphysicians call "absolute" in its embodiment of these ultimate ideas.

In comparison with the fitful and moody subjectivity of our individual conceptions of these ideas the vision of the immortals may be thought of as embodying them absolutely. But in itself it certainly does not embody them absolutely; otherwise the whole movement of life would end. It is unthinkable that it should ever embody them absolutely. For it is in the inherent nature of such a vision that it should be growing, living, inexhaustible. The most withering and deadly of all conceivable dogmas is the dogma that there is such a thing as absolute truth, absolute beauty, absolute good and absolute love.

The attraction of such a dogma for the mind of man is undoubtedly due to the spirit of evil or of malice. For nothing offers a more frozen resistance to the creative power than such a faith. Compared with our human visions of these ideas the vision of these "companions of men" must be thought of as relatively complete. And complete it is, with regard to its general synthesis and orientation. But it is not really complete; and can never be so. For when we consider the nature of love alone, it becomes ridiculous to speak of an absolute or complete love. If the love of these “companions of men” became at any moment incapable of a deeper and wider manifestation, at that very moment the whole stream of life would cease, the malice of the adversary would prevail, and nothingness would swallow up the universe. It is because we are compelled to regard the complex vision, including all its basic attributes, as the vision of a personal soul, that it is a false and misleading conception to view these “companions of men” as a mere ideal.

An ideal is nothing if not expressed in personality. Subjectively every ideal is the ideal of “some one,” an ideal of a conscious, personal, and living entity. Objectively every ideal must be embodied in “some one”: and must be a standard, a measure, a rhythm, of various energies synthesized in a living soul. This is really the crux of the whole matter. Vaguely and obscurely do we all feel the pressure of these deep and secret impulses. Profoundly do we feel that these mysterious “ideas,” which give life its dramatic intensity, are part of the depths of our own soul and part of the depths of the souls of the immortals. And yet though they are so essentially part of us and part of the universe, they remain vague, obscure, contradictory, confused, inchoate; only gradually assuming coherent substance and form as the “rapport” between man and his invisible companions grows clearer and clearer.

We are confronted at this point by one of the most difficult of all dilemmas. If by reason of the fact that we are driven to regard personality as the most real thing in the universe we are compelled toward the act of faith which recognizes one side of the eternal duality of things as embodied in actual living souls, how is it that we are not equally compelled to a similar act of faith in relation to the other side of this duality? In simpler words, how is it that while we are compelled to an act of faith with regard to the existence of powers which embody the spirit of love, we are not compelled to an act of faith with regard to the existence of powers which embody the spirit of malice?

How is it that while we have a right to regard the ideas of truth, beauty, goodness as objectively embodied in living personalities we have no right to regard the ideas of falseness, hideousness, evil and malice, as objectively embodied in living personalities? To answer this question it is necessary to define more clearly the essential duality which we discover as the secret of the universe.

One side of this duality is the creative power of life, the other side is the resistant power which repels life. The emotion of love is the motive-force of the power of creation, a force which we have to recognize as containing in itself the power of destruction; for destruction is necessary to creation and is inspired by the creative energy.

The other side of the eternal duality is not a destructive force, but a resistant force. That is why it is necessary to define the opposite of love, not as hate — but as malice, which is a resistant thing. Thus it becomes clear why it is that we are not driven by the necessity of the situation to any act of faith with regard to the existence of living souls which embody evil and malice. We are not compelled towards this act of faith because the nature of the “other side” of the eternal duality is such that it cannot be embodied, in any complete or objective way, in a living personality. It can and it does appear in every personality that has ever existed. We are compelled to assume that it exists, though in a state of suppression, even in the souls of the immortals. If it did not exist, in some form or other, in the souls of the immortals, the ideas of truth, beauty, and goodness would be absolute in them, and the life of the universe would cease.

For the nature of this eternal duality is such that the life of the universe depends upon this unending struggle between what creates and what resists creation. The power that creates must be regarded as embodied in personality, for creation always implies personality. But the power that resists creation — though present in every living soul — cannot be embodied in personality because personality is the highest expression of creation.

Every soul born into life must possess the attributes of taste, reason, conscience and emotion. And each of these attributes implies this fundamental duality; being resolvable into a choice between hideousness, falsehood, evil, malice, and the opposites of these. But the soul itself, being a living and personal thing, can never, however deeply it plunges into evil, become the embodiment of evil, because by the mere fact of existing at all it has already defeated evil.

Any individual soul may give itself up to malice rather than to love, and may do its utmost to resist the creative power of love. But one thing it cannot do. It cannot become the embodiment of evil, because, by merely being alive, it is the eternal defiance of evil. Personality is the secret of the universe. The universe exists by reason of a struggle between what creates and what resists creation. Therefore personality exists by reason of a struggle between what creates and what resists creation. And the existence of personality, however desperate the struggle within itself may be, is a proof that the power of life is stronger than the power which resists life.

But we have to consider another and yet deeper dilemma. Since the existence of the universe depends upon the continuance of this unfathomable struggle and since the absolute victory of life over death, of love over malice, of truth over falsehood, of beauty over hideousness and of nobility over ignobility, would mean that the universe would end, are we therefore forced to the conclusion that evil is necessary to the fuller manifestation of good?

Undoubtedly we *are* forced to this conclusion. Not one of these primordial ideas, which find their synthesis in "the invisible companions of men," can be conceived without its opposite. And it is in the process of their unending struggle that the fuller realization of all of them is attained. And this struggle must inevitably assume a double character. It must assume the character of a struggle within the individual soul and of a struggle of the individual soul with other souls and with the universe. Such a struggle must be thought of as continually maintained in the soul of the "invisible companions of men" and maintained there with a depth of dramatic intensity at which we can only guess.

Only less false and dangerous than the dogma that the absolute victory of good over evil has already been achieved, is the dogma that these two eternal antagonists are in reality one and the same thing. They are only one and the same thing in the sense that neither is thinkable without the other; and in the sense that they create the universe by their conflict.

It is important in a matter as crucial as this matter, concerning "the invisible companions of men," not to advance a step beyond our starting-point till we have apprehended it from several different aspects and have gone over our ground again and again — even as builders of a bridge might test the solidity of their fabric stone by stone and arch by arch. By that "conscience in reason" which never allows us pleasantly to deceive ourselves, we are bound to touch, as it were with our very hands, every piece of stone work and every patch of cement which holds this desperate bridge together over the dark waters.

We have not, then, a right to say that every energy of the complex vision depends for its functioning upon the existence of these invisible companions. We have not a right to say— "if there were no such beings these energies could not function; but they do function; therefore there are such beings." What we have a right to say is simply this, that it is an actual experience that when two or more personalities come together and seek to express their various subjective impressions of these ultimate ideas there is always a tacit reference to some objective standard.

This objective standard cannot be thought of apart from personalities capable of embodying it. For these ultimate ideas are only real and living when embodied in personality. Apart from personality we are unable to grasp them; although we must recognize that the universe itself is composed of the very stuff of their contention. We have in the first place, then, completely eliminated from our discussion that "inscrutable mystery" behind the universe. In every direction we find the universe unfathomable; and though our power of thought stops abruptly at a certain limit, we have no reason to think that the universe stops there; and we have every reason to think that it continues — together with the unfathomable element in our souls — into impenetrably receding depths.

The universe, as we apprehend it, presents itself as a congeries of living souls united by some indefinable medium. These living souls are each possessed of that multiform activity which I have named the complex vision. Among the basic energies of this vision are some which in their functioning imply the pre-existence of certain primordial ideas.

These ideas are at once the eternally receding horizon and the eternally receding starting-point — the unfathomable past and the unfathomable future — of this procession of souls. The crux of the whole situation is found in the evasive and tantalizing problem of the real nature of these primordial ideas. Can “truth,” can “beauty,” can “goodness” be conceived of as existing in the universe apart from any individual soul?

They are clearly not completely exhausted or totally revealed by the vision of any individual human soul or of any number of human souls. The sense which we all have when we attempt to exchange our individual feelings with regard to these things is that we are appealing to some invisible standard or pattern which already exists and of which we each apprehend a particular facet or aspect.

All human intercourse depends upon this implicit assumption; of which language is the outward proof.

The existence of language goes a long way in itself to destroy that isolation of individual souls which in its extreme form would mean the impossibility of any objective truth or beauty or nobility. Language itself is founded upon that original act of faith by which we assume the independent existence of other souls. And the same act of faith which assumes the existence of other souls assumes also that the vision of other souls does not essentially differ from our own vision.

Once having got as far as this, the further fact that these other visions do vary considerably, though not essentially, differ from our own leads us by an inevitable, if not a logical, step to the assumption that all our different visions are the imperfect renderings of one vision, wherein the ideas of truth, beauty and nobility exist in a harmonious synthesis.

There is no reason why we should think of this objective synthesis of truth, beauty, and goodness as absolute or perfect. Indeed there is every reason why we should think of it as imperfect and relative. But it is imperfect and relative only in its relation to its own dream, its own hope, its own prophecy, its own premonition, its own struggle towards a richer and fuller manifestation. In its relation to our broken, baffled, and subjective visions it is already so complete as to be relatively absolute. To this objective ideal of our aesthetic and emotional values, I have given the name “the vision of the immortals” because we are unable to disassociate it from personality; and because, while the generations of man pass away, this vision does not pass away.

Have I, in giving to this natural human ideal, such a formidable name — a name with so many bold and startling implications — been merely tempted into an alluring metaphorical image, or have I been driven to make use of this expression by reason of the intrinsic nature of life itself?

I think that the latter of these two alternatives is the true one. The “logic” by which this conclusion is reached differs from the “logic” of the abstract reason in the sense of being the organic, dynamic, and creative “logic” of the complex vision itself, using the very apex-thought of its pyramidal activity in apprehending a mystery which is at once the secret of its own being and the secret of the unfathomable universe into the depths of which it forces its way.

The expression, then, “the vision of the immortals” is not a mere pictorial image but is the definite articulation of a profound reality from which there is no escape if certain attributes of the human soul are to be trusted at all. We cannot get rid of this dilemma, one of those dilemmas which offer alternative possibilities so appallingly opposite, that the choice between them seems like a choice between two eternities.

Is the vision of these immortals, the existence of which as a standard of all philosophical discussion seems to be implied by the very nature of man’s soul, to be regarded or not to be regarded as the vision of real and living personalities?

In other words, to put the case once more in its rigid outlines, is that objective vision of truth, beauty, and goodness of which our individual subjective visions are only imperfect representations, the real vision of actual living “gods” or only the projection, upon the evasive medium which holds all human souls together, of such beauty and such truth and such goodness as these souls find that they possess in common?

This is the crux of the whole human comedy. This is the throw of the dice between a world without hope and a world with hope. Philosophers are capable of treating this subject with quiet intellectual curiosity; but all living men and women — philosophers included — come, at moments, to a pitiless and adamantine “impasse” where the eternal “two ways” branch off in unfathomable perspective.

In our normal and superficial moods we are able to find a plausible excuse for our struggles with ourselves, in a simple acceptance of the ultimate duality.

It is enough for us, in these moods, that we have on the one hand a consciousness of “love” and on the other a consciousness of “malice.” It is enough for us, in these moods, that we have on the one hand a consciousness of truth and beauty and nobility; and on the other a consciousness of unreality, of hideousness, and of evil. But there come other, deeper, more desperate moods, when, out of intolerable and unspeakable loneliness our soul sinking back into its own depths refuses to be satisfied with a mere recognition of this ultimate duality.

At these moments the soul seems to rend and tear at the very roots of this duality. It takes these ideas of beauty and truth and goodness and subjects them to a savage and merciless analysis. It takes the emotion of love and the emotion of malice and tries to force its way behind them. It turns upon itself, in its insane trouble, and seeks to get itself out of its own way and to efface itself, so that “something” beyond itself may flow into its place.

At these moments the soul’s complex vision is roused to a supreme pitch of rhythmic energy. The apex-thought of its focussed attributes gathers itself together to pierce the mystery. Like a strain of indescribable music the apex-thought rests upon itself and brings each element of its being into harmony with every other.

This ultimate harmony of the complex vision may be compared to a music which is so intense that it becomes silence. And in this “silence,” wherein the apex-thought becomes at once a creator and a discoverer, the pain and distress of the struggle seems suddenly to disappear and an indescribable happiness flows in upon the soul. At this moment when this consummation is reached the soul’s complex vision becomes aware that the ideas of beauty, truth and goodness are not mental abstractions or material qualities or evolutionary by-products, but are the very purpose and meaning of life. It becomes aware that the emotion of love is not a mental abstraction or a psychological accident or a biological necessity but the secret of the whole struggle and the explanation of the whole drama.

It becomes aware that this truth, this beauty, this nobility find their unity and harmony in nothing less than in the emotion of love. It becomes aware that these three primordial “ideas” are only varying facets and aspects of one unfathomable secret which is the activity of love. It becomes aware that this activity of love is the creative principle of life itself; that it alone is life, and the force which resists it is the enemy of life.

Such, then, is the ultimate reality grasped in its main outlines by the rhythmic energy of the soul’s apex-thought when, in its desperate and savage struggle with itself, the complex vision reaches its consummation. And this reality, thus created and thus discovered by the apex-thought of the complex vision, demands and requires that very revelation, towards which we have been moving by so long a road.

It requires the revelation, namely, that the emotion of love of which we are conscious in the depths of our being, as an emotion flowing through us and obsessing us, should be conceived of as existing in a far greater completeness in these silent “watchers” and “companions” whom we name “the immortal gods.” It requires, therefore, that these immortal ones should be regarded as conscious and living “souls”; for the ultimate reach of the complex vision implies the idea of personality and cannot interpret life except in terms of personality.

As I said above, there come moments in all our lives, when, rending and tearing at the very roots of our own existence, we seek to extricate ourselves from ourselves and to get ourselves out of the way of ourselves, as if we were seeking to make room for some deeper personality within us which is ourself and yet not ourself. This is that impersonal element which the aesthetic sense demands in all supreme works of art so that the soul may find at once its realization of itself and its liberation from itself.

The “watchers” and “companions” of men must therefore be immortal and living “souls” existing side by side with our human “souls” and side by side with all other “souls,” super-human or sub-human, which the universal medium of the world holds together. In arriving at this conclusion which seems to me to be the consummation vouched for and attested by the rhythmic energy of the complex vision, I have refused to allow any particular attribute of this vision, such as the will or the intuition or the conscience, to claim for its isolated discoveries any universal assent.

The soul’s emotion of love passionately craves for the real existence of these “invisible companions.” The soul’s emotion of malice displays an abysmal resistance to such a reality. This is naturally a fact that we cannot afford to disregard. But in our final decision in so high and difficult a matter nothing can be allowed to claim an universal assent except the rhythmic activity of the soul's apex-thought in its supreme moments.

At this point in our argument it is advisable to glance backward over the way we have come; because the reality of this "eternal vision" depends, more than has as yet been understood, upon our whole attitude to the mystery of personality, and to the place of personality, as the secret of the world.

The feeling which we have about the emotion of love, as if it were a thing pouring through us from some unfathomable depth, does not imply that "the invisible companions" are themselves that depth. The "invisible companions" are not in any sense connected with the conception of an "over-soul." That "depth," from which the power of creative love pours forth, is not the "depth" of any "over-soul" but is the depth of our own unfathomable nature.

The introduction of "something behind the universe," the introduction of some "parent" or "first cause" of the universe, from which we have to suppose this secret of love as emerging, is as unnecessary as it is unbeautiful. It does nothing but fling the mystery one step further back without in the least elucidating it; and in thus throwing it back it thins it out and cheapens it. There is nothing which appeals to the aesthetic sense about this hypothesis of an "over-soul" from whose universal being the ideas of beauty and truth and goodness may be supposed to proceed. It is a clumsy and crude speculation, easy to be grasped by the superficial mind, and with an air of profundity which is entirely deceptive.

So far from being a spiritual conception, this conception of an over-soul, existing just behind the material universe and pouring forth indiscriminately its "truth," "beauty," "nobility" and "love," is an entirely materialistic one. It is a clumsy and crude metaphor or analogy drawn from the objective world and projected into that region of sheer unfathomableness which lies beyond human thought.

When the conception of the over-soul is submitted to analysis it is found to consist of nothing else than vague images drawn from material sensation. We think of the world for instance as a vast porous sponge continually penetrated by a flood of water or air or vapour drawn from some hidden cistern or reservoir or cosmic lake. The modern theological expression "immanent" has done harm in this direction. There is nothing profound about this conception of "immanence." It is an entirely materialistic conception drawn from sense analogy.

The same criticism applies to much of the vague speculation which is usually called "mysticism." Mysticism is not a spiritual attitude. It is often no more than the expression of thwarted sex-desire directed towards the universe instead of towards the person who has repulsed it. The basic motive of mysticism, although in the highest cases it springs from intuition, is very often only an extension into the unknown of physiological misery or of physiological well-being.

The word "spiritual" retains, by some instinctive wisdom in human language, a far nobler significance than the word "mystical."

It is, so to speak, a purer word, and has succeeded, in its progress down the ages, in keeping itself more clear of physiological associations than any other human word except the word "soul." It must, however, be recognized, when we submit the two words to analysis, that the word "spirit" is less free from metaphorical materialism than the word "soul."

The word "spirit" is a metaphorical word derived from the material phenomenon of breath. For the purest and least tangible of all natural phenomena, except perhaps "ether" or electricity, is obviously nothing less than the wind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," and this elementary "freedom of the wind," combined with our natural association of "breath" and "breathing" with all organic life, accounts for the traditional nobility of the word spirit.

"Spirit" and "life" have become almost interchangeable terms. The modern expression "the life-force" is only a metaphorical confusion of the idea conveyed by the word "spirit" or "breath" with the idea conveyed by the word "consciousness" when abstracted from any particular conscious soul. The use of the term "spirit" as applied to what metaphysical idealists name "the absolute" is the supreme example of this metaphorical confusion.

According to this use of the term "spirit" we have an arbitrary association of the ultimate fact of self-consciousness — a fact drawn from the necessity of thought — with that attenuated and etherial materialism implied in the words "breath" or "breathing" and in the elemental "freedom of the wind." The word "spiritual" is a purer and nobler word than the word "mystical" for the same reason that the word "soul" is a purer and nobler word than the word "spirit."

The historic fact must, however, be recognized that in the evolution of human thought and in the evolution of philosophical systems the word "spirit" has in large measure usurped the position that ought to belong to the word "soul" as the highest and purest expression of what is most essential and important in life.

The history of this usurpation is itself a curious psychological document. But I cannot help feeling that the moment has arrived for reinstating the word "soul" in its rightful place and altering this false valuation.

The word "soul" is the name given by the common consent of language to that original "monad" or concrete unity or living "self" which exists, according to universal experience, "within" the physical body and is the indescribable "substratum" of self-consciousness and the unutterable “something” which gives a real concrete permanence to what we call “personality.”

Here also we are confronted by the metaphorical danger, which is a danger springing from the necessity of thought itself; the necessity under which thought labours of being compelled to use sense-impressions if it is to function at all. But though thought cannot exist as thought without the use of sense-impressions it can at least concentrate its attention upon this primal necessity and be aware of it and cautious of it and hypercritical in its use. It can do more than this. It can throw back, so to speak, the whole weight of the mystery and drive it so rigorously to the ultimate wall, that the materialistic and metaphorical element is reduced to a mere gap or space or lacuna in the mind that only a material element can fill and yet that we cannot imagine being filled by any material element which we are able to define.

This is precisely what we have to do with regard to that “vanishing-point of sensation” which is the substratum of the soul. The situation resolves itself into this. The highest, deepest, most precious thing we know or can imagine is *personality.* Personality is and must be our ultimate synthesis, our final ideal, and the origin of all our ideals. Nothing can be conceived more true, more real, more spiritual than personality.

All conceptions, qualities, principles, forces, elements, thoughts, ideas, are things which we abstract from personality, and project into the space which surrounds us, as if they could be independent of the personal unity from which they have been taken. We are compelled by the inevitable necessity of thought itself, which cannot escape from the world of sense-impressions, to think of personality as possessing for its “substratum” “something” which gives it concrete reality. This “something” which is utterly indefinable, is the last gesture, so to speak, made by the sense-world before it vanishes away.

This "something" which is the substratum of the soul and the thing which gives unity and concreteness to the soul is the thinnest and remotest attenuation of the world of sense-impression. It is far thinner and more remote than the sense-element in our conception of spirit. Why, it may be asked, can we not get rid of this "something" which fills that gap or lacuna in the identity of the soul which can only be thought of in material terms?

We cannot get rid of it because directly we attempt to do so we are left with that vague idealistic abstraction upon our hands which we call "thought-in-the-abstract" — or "pure thought" or "pure self-consciousness." But it may be asked— "Why cannot the physical body serve this necessary purpose of giving personality a local and concrete identity?"

First — and this is the psychological reason — it cannot do so because our feeling of the soul as "something within" our physical body is an ultimate fact of experience which would then remain as an experience denied and contradicted.

Secondly — and this is the metaphysical reason — it cannot do so because our physical body is itself only a part of that objective universe of sense-impressions which the soul is conscious of as essentially distinct from its own inmost identity.

Metaphysical idealism seems to hold that the ultimate monad of self-consciousness is not this personal micro-cosmic monad which I am conscious of as the empirical self or "soul" but an impersonal macrocosmic monad or "unity of apperception" which underlies the whole field of impressions and is unable, by reason of its inherent nature, to contemplate itself as an "object" at all.

What the complex vision seems to me to disclose, is a revelation which includes at one and the same moment "the universal monad" and the "personal monad"; but it indicates clearly enough that the former is an abstraction from the latter. My thought can certainly think of the whole universe, including time and space, as one enormous mass of impressions or ideals presenting itself inside the circle of my mind.

Of this mass of impressions, including time and space, my thought, thus abstracted from my personal soul, becomes the circumference. Outside my thought there is nothing at all. Inside my thought there is all that is. The metaphysical reason insists that this all-comprehensive thought or all-embracing consciousness cannot contemplate itself as an object but is compelled to remain an universal subject whose object can only be the mass of impressions which it contains.

If it is possible to speak of this "a priori" background of all possible perception as a "monad" at all, it is a monad which certainly lacks the essential power of the individual monad which we know as our real self, for this latter can and does contemplate itself as an object.

But as I have hinted before, the complex vision's attribute of self-consciousness projects a second abstraction, which takes its place between this ultimate monad which is pure "subject" and our real personal self which is so much more than subject and object together.

This second abstraction, "thrown off" by our pure self-consciousness just as the first one is "thrown off" by our pure reason, becomes therefore an intervening monad which exists midway between the monad which is pure "subject" — if that can be called a monad at all — and the actual individual soul which is the living reality of both these thought-projections.

The whole question resolves itself into a critical statement of the peculiar play of thought when thought is considered in its own inherent nature apart from concrete objects of thought. This original play of thought, apart from what it may think, can result in nothing better than isolated abstractions; because thought, apart from concrete objects of thought, is itself nothing more than one attribute of the complex vision, groping about in a vacuum and finding nothing. We are, however, bound by the "conscience of reason," and by what might be called reason's sense of honour to articulate as clearly as we can all these movements of pure thought working in the void; but we certainly are forbidden by the original revelation of the complex vision to accept them as the starting point of our philosophical enquiry. And we cannot accept them as a starting point, because the complex vision includes much more than self-consciousness and reason. It includes indeed so much more than these, that these, when indulging in their isolated conjuring-tricks, seem like irrelevant and tiresome clowns who insist upon interrupting with their fantastic pedantry the great tragic-comedy wherein the soul of man wrestles with its fate.

As I have already indicated, it is necessary in dealing with a matter as dramatic and fatal as this whole question of ultimate reality, to risk the annoyance of repetition. It is important to go over our tracks again so that no crevice should be left in this perilous bridge hung across the gulf. Reason, then, working in isolation, provides us with the recognition of an ultimate universal "subject" or, in metaphysical language, with an "a priori unity of apperception." Simultaneously with this recognition, self-consciousness, also working in isolation, provides us with the recognition of an universal self-conscious "monad" or "cosmic self" which is not only able but is compelled to think of itself as its own object.

Both these recognitions imply a consciousness which is outside time and space; but while the first, the outer edge of thought, can only be regarded as "pure subject," the second can be regarded as nothing else than the whole universe contemplating itself as its own object.

In the third place the complex vision, working with all its attributes together, provides us with the recognition of a personal or empirical self which is the real "I am I" of our integral soul. This personal self, or actual living soul, must be thought of as possessing some "substratum" or "vanishing point of sensation" as the implication of its permanence and continuous identity. This "vanishing point of sensation," or in other words this attenuated form of "matter" or "energy" or "movement," must not be allowed to disappear from our conception of the soul. If it *were* allowed to disappear, one of the basic attributes of the soul's complex vision, namely its attribute of sensation, would be negated and suppressed.

Directly we regarded the "I am I" within us as independent of such a "vanishing point of sensation" and as being entirely free from any, even from the most attenuated form, of what is usually called "matter," then, at that very moment, the complex vision's revelation would be falsified. Then, at that very moment, the integrity of the soul would dissolve away, and we should be reduced to a stream of sensations with nothing to give them coherence and unity, or to that figment of abstract self-consciousness, "thought-in-itself," apart from both the thing "thinking" and the thing "thought." The soul, therefore, must be conceived if we are to be true to the original revelation of the complex vision, as having an indefinable "something" as its substratum or implication of identity. And this something, although impossible to be analysed, must be regarded as existing within that mysterious medium which is the uniting force of the universe. The soul must, in fact, be thought of as possessing some sort of "spiritual body" which is the centre of its complex vision and which, therefore, expresses itself in reason, self-consciousness, will, sensation, instinct, intuition, memory, emotion, conscience, taste, and imagination. All this must necessarily imply that the soul is within, and not outside, time and space. It must further imply that although the physical body, which the soul uses at its will, is only one portion of the objective universe which confronts it, this physical body is more immediately connected with the soul's complex vision and more directly under the influence of it than any other portion of the external universe.

The question then arises, can it be said that this "vanishing point of sensation," this "substratum" composed of "something" which we are only able to define as the limit where the ultimate attenuation of what we call "matter" or "energy" passes into unfathomableness, this centre of the soul, this "spiritual body," this invisible "pyramid base" of the complex vision, is also, just as the physical body is, a definite portion of that objective universe which we apprehend through our senses?

The physical body is entirely and in all its aspects a portion of this objective universe. Is the substratum of the soul a portion of it also? I think the answer to this question is that it *is* and also *is not* a portion of this universe. This "spiritual body," this "vanishing point of sensation," which is the principle of permanence and continuity and identity in the soul, is obviously the very centre and core of reality. Being this, it must necessarily be a portion of that objective world whose reality, after the reality of the soul itself, is the most vivid reality which we know.

The complex vision demands and exacts the reality of the objective world. The whole drama of its life depends upon this. Without this the complex vision would not exist. And just as the complex vision could not exist without the reality of the objective world, so the objective world could not exist without the reality of the complex vision. These two depend upon one another and perpetually recreate one another.

Any metaphysical system which denies the existence of the objective world, or uses the expression “illusion” with regard to it, is a system based, not upon the complex vision in its entirety, but upon some isolated attribute of it. The “substratum” of the soul, then, must be a portion of the objective world so as to give validity, so to speak, and assurance that this objective world with its mysterious medium crowded with living bodies and inanimate objects is not a mere illusion. But the “substratum” of the soul must be something else in addition to this. Being the essential meeting-point between what we call thought on the one hand, and what we call “matter” or “energy” on the other, the “substratum” of the soul must be a point of perpetual movement where the life of thought passes into the life of sensation.

The “substratum” of the soul must be regarded as the ultimate attenuation of “matter” on the one hand, and on the other as perpetually passing into “mind.” For since it is the centre-point of life it must be composed of a stuff woven, so to speak, out all the threads of life. That is to say it must be the very centre and vortex of all the contradictions in the universe.

Since the “substratum” or “spiritual body” of the soul is the most real thing in the universe it must, in its own nature, partake of every kind of reality which exists in the universe. It must therefore be, quite definitely, a portion of the objective world existing within time and space. But it must also be the ultimate unity of “the life of thought.” And since, as we have seen, it is within the power of reason and self-consciousness to isolate themselves from the other attributes of the soul and to project themselves outside of space and time, it must be the perpetual fatality of the “substratum” of the soul to recall these wanderers back to the true reality of things, which does not lie outside of space and time but within space and time, and which must justify time and space as something very different from illusion.

But because, within time and space, the universe is unfathomable, and because, also within time and space, personality is unfathomable, the "substratum" of the soul, which is the point where the known and the unknown meet, must be unfathomable also, and hence must sink away beyond the limit of our thought and beyond the limit of our sensation.

Since it does this, since it sinks away beyond the limit of our thought, it must be regarded as "something" whose reality is partly known and partly unknown. Thus it is true to say that the "substratum" of the soul *is* and *is not* a portion of the objective universe. The substratum of the soul is, in fact, the essential and ultimate reality, where all that we know loses itself in all that we do not know. Because we are compelled to admit that only one aspect of the "substratum" of the soul is a portion of the objective universe as we know it, this does not justify us in asserting that the "substratum" of the soul is at once within space and time and outside of space and time.

Nothing is outside of space and time. This conception of "outside" is, as we have seen, an abstraction evoked by the isolated activity of the logical reason. The fact that only one aspect of the "substratum" of the soul — and even that one with the barest limit of definition — can be regarded as a portion of the objective universe does not give the soul any advantage over the universe. For the universe, like the soul, has also its unfathomable depths. That indefinable medium, for instance, which we are compelled to think of as making it possible that various souls should touch one another and communicate with one another, is in precisely the same position as regards any ultimate analysis as is the soul itself. It also sinks away into unfathomableness. It also becomes a portion of that part of reality which we do *not* know.

At this point in our enquiry it is not difficult to imagine some materialistic objector asking the question how we can conceive such a vaguely denned entity as the soul possessing such very definite attributes as those which make up the complex vision.

Is it not, such an one might ask, a fantastic and ridiculous assumption to endow so obscure a thing as this "soul" with such very definite powers as reason, instinct, will, intuition, imagination, and the rest? Surely, such an one might protest, it is in the physical body that these find their unity? Surely, if we must have a meeting-place where thought and the objects of thought lose themselves in one another, such a meeting-place can be nothing else than the cells of the brain?

The answer to this objection seems to me quite a final one. The physical body cannot supply us with the true meeting-place between "the life of thought" and "the life of sensation" because the physical body does not *in itself* sink away into unfathomablenesss as does the substratum of the soul. The physical body can only be regarded as unfathomable when definitely included in the whole physical universe. But the substratum of the soul is doubly unfathomable. It is unfathomable as being the quintessence or vanishing-point of "matter" or "energy," and it is unfathomable as being the quintessence of that personal self which confronts not only the objective universe but the physical body also as part of that universe. It is undoubtedly true that this real self which is the centre of its own universe is bound to contemplate itself as occupying a definite point in space and time.

This is one of its eternal contradictions; that it should be at the same time the creator of its universe and an unfathomable portion of the very universe it creates. The answer which the philosophy of the complex vision makes to the materialistic questioner who points to the "little cells of the brain" may be briefly be put thus.

The soul functions through the physical body and through the cells of the brain. The soul is so closely and so intimately associated with the physical body that it is more than possible that the death of the physical body implies the annihilation of the soul. But when it comes to the question as to where we are to look for the essential self in us which is able to say “I am I” it is found to be much more fantastic and ridiculous to look for it in the “little cells of the brain” than in some obscure “something,” or “vanishing point of sensation,” where mind and matter are fused together. That this “something” which is able to say “I am I” should possess instinct, reason, will, intuition, conscience and the rest, may be hard to imagine. But that the “little cells of the brain” should possess these is not only hard to imagine — it is unimaginable. The mysterious relation which exists between our soul and our body lends itself to endless speculation; and much of this speculation tends to become far more fantastic and ridiculous than any analysis of the attributes of the soul. Experiment and experience alone can teach us how far the body is actually malleable by the soul and amenable to the soul’s purpose.

The arbitrary symbol which I have made use of to indicate the nature of the soul’s essential reality, the image of a pyramidal wedge of flames, is certainly felt to be but a thin and rigid fancy when we consider how in the actual play of life the soul expresses itself through the body.

As I have already indicated, the original revelation of the complex vision accepts without scruple the whole spectacle of natural life. The philosophy of the complex vision insists that no rationalistic necessity of pure logic gives it the right to reject this natural objective spectacle. The philosophy of the complex vision insists that this obvious, solid, external, so-called “materialistic” spectacle of common life, be accepted, included and continually returned to. It insists that the word “illusion” be no more used about this spectacle. It insists that this vast unfathomable universe of time and space be recognized as an ultimate reality, and that all these projected images of the pure reason, all these circles, cubes, squares and straight lines, all these "unities of apperception," universal "monads" and the like, be recognized as by-products of the abstracting energy of human logic and as entirely without reality when compared with this objective spectacle. My own symbolic or pictorial image of the activity of the complex vision, this pyramidal wedge or arrow-head of concentrated and focussed flames, must be recognized as no more adequate or satisfactory than any of these.

The complex vision, with its rhythmic apex-thought, is not really a "pyramid" or a "wedge of flame" any more than it is a circle or a cube or a square or an "a priori synthetic unity of apperception" or "an universal self-conscious monad." It is the vision of a living personality, surrounded by an unfathomable universe.

To keep our thoughts firmly and harmoniously fixed on the real objective spectacle of life and on the real subjective "soul," or personality, contemplating this spectacle, it is advisable to revert to the magical and mysterious associations called up by the classical word *Nature.* The mere utterance of the word "Nature" serves to bring us back to the things which are essential and organic, and to put into their proper place of comparative unreality all these "unities" and circles, all these pyramids and "monads." When we think of the astounding beauty and intricacy of the actual human body; when we think of the astounding beauty and intricacy of the actual living soul which animates this body, and when we think of the magical universe which surrounds them both, we are compelled to recognize that in the last resort Nature herself is the great mystery. The word "Nature" conveys a more living and less metaphysical connotation than the word "universe," and may be regarded as implying more of that in-determined future of all living souls, which is still in the process of creation.

The "universe" is a static conception. Nature is a dynamic conception. When we speak of Nature we think of the whole struggle towards a fuller life of all the living entities which the indefinable medium of the universe contains. Nature from this point of view becomes the whole unfathomable spectacle, seen as something living and growing and changing.

The "invisible companions" of men who supply the pattern and standard of all human ideas, become in this way the immortal children of Nature. The creative energy of the complex vision is itself an integral portion of the creative energy of Nature; for "Nature" is no more than the beautiful and classical word which recalls us to the objective spectacle which is the ultimate revelation of the complex vision. Nature is the supreme artist; but the apex-point of her artistry is nothing less than the apex-point of the artistry of the immortal gods.

The artistry of the human soul, when its rhythm is most harmonious and complete, implies the magical artistry of Nature, for "Nature" is nothing more than the whole objective spectacle finding its myriad creative centres of new life in all living souls. The value of the word Nature, the value of the conception of Nature, is that it reminds us that, held together by the indefinable medium which fills the universe, there are innumerable entities both subhuman and super-human, all of whom, in their various degrees, possess living souls.

Nature's supreme art is nothing more than the natural impulses of all these, as they are thus held together, and to "return to Nature" is nothing more than to return to the objective spectacle of real life, and to the objective ideal of real life as it is embodied in "the invisible companions."

These “invisible companions” just because they are the most “natural” of all living personalities, are the supreme manifestation of the secret of Nature. It is because the objective spectacle of life, the spectacle which includes the stars, the planets, plants, trees, grass, moss, lichen, earth, birds, fish, animals, is a spectacle continually shifting and changing under the pressure of innumerable conscious and sub-conscious souls, that we find ourselves turning to these invisible companions whose supreme “naturalness” is the test and pattern of all Nature.

And it is because our physical bodies in their magical mysteriousness are so much more real than any rationalistic symbols, such as circles, cubes, squares, wedges, pyramids, and the like, that when we seek to visualize the actual appearance of these “invisible companions,” it seems much more appropriate to image their souls as clothed, like the souls of plants, trees, grass, planets, animals and men, in some tangibleness of physical form, than in nothing but the insubstantial stuff of air or wind or vapour, or “spirit.”

But since all that we call “Nature” continually changes, passes away in dissolution and is reborn again in other forms; and since no physical body is exempted from death, it is apparent that if the “immortals” possessed physical bodies such as our own, they also would be subject to this law along with the rest of the universe. But the generations of mankind come and go and the “invisible companions” of men remain; therefore the “invisible companions” cannot be supposed, except pictorially and in a symbolic sense, to be subject to the laws which govern our mortal bodies.

It is this freedom from the laws which govern the physical body and from all the intimate and intricate relations which exist between our human soul and our human body, which makes it possible for these companions of men to remain in perpetual contact with every living soul born into the world. The difficulty we experience in realizing the nearness to our individual souls of these invisible companions, is due to a false and exaggerated emphasis laid upon the material spectacle of nature.

This spectacle of the objective universe is undoubtedly one of the ultimate realities revealed to us by the complex vision; but it is only one of these ultimate realities. The complex vision is itself another one of these; and the real existence of the soul is implied in the activity of the complex vision. The reality of the external universe, the reality of Nature, is so closely associated with the activity of the soul that it is impossible to think of the one apart from the other.

The soul's attribute of sensation is alone responsible for the greater portion of this objective spectacle; for apprehended through any other senses than the ones we possess the whole universe would be transformed. It is only when the soul's essential part in the creation of Nature is fully realized that we see how false and exaggerated an emphasis we are placing upon this "externality" when we permit it to hinder our recognition of the nearness of the immortal gods.

The laws which govern the physical body and "the thousand ills that flesh is heir to" obstruct, confuse, conceal, and distort the soul and hold the gods at a distance. But although the brain and the senses may be tortured, atrophied, perverted; and although the soul may be driven back into its unfathomable depths and held there as if in prison; and although madness intervene between the soul's vision and the world, and sleep may fling it into oblivion, and death may destroy it utterly; tortured or perverted or atrophied or semi-conscious or unconscious, while the soul *lives,* the "invisible companions of men" remain nearer to it than any outward accident, chance, circumstance, fatality or destiny, and are still the arbiters of its hope.

Retracing once more our steps over this perilous bridge of ultimate thought, we may thus indicate the situation. Our starting-point cannot be the “a priori synthetic unity of apperception,” because this is an abstraction of the pure reason, and if accepted as a real fact would contradict and negate all the other attributes of the soul.

Our starting-point cannot be the universal “monad” of self-consciousness, because this is an abstraction of the “I am I” and if accepted as a real fact would negate and suppress every attribute of the soul except the attributes of self-consciousness and emotion.

Our starting-point cannot be the objective world, considered in its evolutionary externality, because this external world depends for its very existence upon the attributes of the soul, especially upon the attribute of sensation.

Our starting-point can therefore be nothing less than the complex vision, which on the one hand implies the reality of the soul and on the other the reality of the external world, and which itself is the vision of a real concrete personality. The individual is thus disclosed as something more than the universal, the microcosm as something more than the macrocosm, and any living personality as something more than any conceivable absolute being.

By an original act of faith, towards which we are helped by the soul’s attribute of imagination, we are compelled to conceive of every other soul in the world as being the centre of a universe more or less identical in character with the universe of which our own soul is the centre. These separate universes we have to conceive as being subjective impressions of the same objective reality, the beauty, truth, and goodness of which are guaranteed for us by those “invisible companions of men” in whose eternal vision they find their synthesis.

The tragedy of our life consists in the fact that it is only in rare exalted moments, when the rhythmic harmony of the complex vision is most intense and yet most calm, that the individual soul feels the presence of those supreme companions whose real and personal existence I have attempted to indicate. These ideal and yet most real companions of humanity make their presence felt by the soul in just the same immediate, direct and equivocal way in which we feel the influence of a friend or lover whose spirit, in his bodily absence, is concentrated upon our spirit, even as ours is upon his.

To the larger vision of these “invisible companions” we find ourselves consciously and sub-consciously turning whenever the burden of our flesh oppresses us more than we can bear. We are compelled to turn to them by reason of the profound instinct in us which recognizes that our ideas of truth, of beauty, and goodness are not mere subjective fancies but are actual objective realities. These ideas do not spring from these “companions” or find their origin and cause in them, any more than they spring from some imaginary “parent” of the universe and find their origin and cause in something “behind life.” They do not “spring” from anything at all; but are the very stuff and texture of our own unfathomable souls, just as they are the very stuff and texture of the unfathomable souls of the immortal gods. What we are conscious of, when our complex vision gathers itself together, is the fact that the inevitable element of subjectivity in our individual feeling about these things is transcended and supplemented by an invisible pattern or standard or ideal in which these things are reconciled and fused together at a higher pitch of harmony than we individually, or even in contact with one another, are capable of attaining.

The vision of these “invisible companions” — absolute enough in relation to our own tragic relativity — is itself relative to its own hope, its own dream, its own prophecy, its own premonition. The real evolution of the world, the real movement of life, takes therefore a double form. It takes the form of an individual *return* to the fulness of ideas which have always been implicit and latent in our individual souls. And it takes the form of a co-operative *advance* towards the fulness of ideas which are foreshadowed and prophesied in the vision of these immortals' companions. Thus for us, as well as for them, the eternal movement is at once an advance and a return. Thus for us, as well as for them, the eternal inspiration is at once a hope and a reminiscence.

It will be seen from what I have said that this philosophy of the complex vision finds a place for all the nobler and more desperate struggles of the human race towards a solution of the mystery of life. It accepts fully the fact that the human reason playing isolated games with itself, is driven by its own nature to reduce "all objects of all thought" to the circle of one "synthetic unity" which is the implied "a priori" background of all actual vision. It accepts fully the fact that human self-consciousness, playing isolated games with itself, is driven by the necessity of its own nature to reduce all separate "selves" to one all embracing "world self" which is the universe conscious of itself as the universe.

It accepts fully the fact that we have to regard the apparent objectivity of the external universe, with its historic process, as an essential and unalterable aspect of reality, so grounded in truth that to call it an "illusion" is a misuse of language. But although it accepts both the extreme "materialistic" view and the extreme "idealistic" view as inevitable revelations of reality, it does not regard either of them as the true starting-point of enquiry, because it regards both these extremes as the result of the isolated play of one or the other of the complex vision's attributes.

The philosophy of the complex vision refuses to accept as its starting-point any “synthetic unity” other than the synthetic unity of personality; because any other than this it is compelled to regard as abstracted from this by the isolated play of some particular attribute of the mind. The philosophy of the complex vision refuses to accept as its starting-point any attenuated materialistic hypothesis, such as may be indicated by the arbitrary words “life” or “movement” or “ether” or “force” or “energy” or “atoms” or “molecules” or “electrons” or “vortices” or “evolutionary progress,” because it recognizes that all these hypothetical origins of life are only projected and abstracted aspects of the central reality of life, which is, and always must be, personality.

But what is the relation of the philosophy of the complex vision to that modern tendency of thought which calls itself “pragmatism” and which also finds in personality its starting-point and centre? The philosophy of the complex vision seems to detect in the pragmatic attitude something which is profoundly unpleasing to its taste. Its own view of the art of life is that it is before everything else a matter of rhythm and harmony and it cannot help discerning in “pragmatism” something piece-meal, pell-mell and “hand-to-mouth.” It seems conscious of a certain outrage to its aesthetic sense in the method and the attitude of this philosophy. The pragmatic attitude, though it would be unfair to call it superficial, does not appeal to the philosophy of the complex vision as being one of the supreme, desperate struggles of the human race to overcome the resistance of the Sphinx. The philosophy of the complex vision implies the difficult attainment of an elaborate harmony. It regards “philosophy” as the most difficult of all “works of art.” What it seems to be suspicious of in pragmatism is a tendency to seek mediocrity rather than beauty, and a certain humorous opportunism rather than the quiet of an eternal vision. It seems to look in vain in “Pragmatism” for that element of the *impossible,* for that strain of Quixotic faith, in which no high work of art is found to be lacking. It seems unable to discover in the pragmatic attitude that "note of tragedy" which the fatality of human life demands.

It certainly shares with the pragmatic philosophy a tendency to lay more stress upon the freedom of the will than is usual among philosophies. But the "will" of the complex vision moves in closer association with the aesthetic sense than does the "will" of pragmatism. It is perhaps as a matter of "taste" that pragmatism proves most unsatisfactory to it. It seems to be conscious of something in pragmatism, which, though itself perhaps not precisely "commercial," seems curiously well adapted to a commercial age. It is aware, in fine, that certain high and passionate intimations are roused to unmitigated hostility by the whole pragmatic attitude. And it refuses to outrage these intimations for the sake of any psychological contentment.

In regard to the particular kind of "truth" championed by pragmatists, the "truth" namely which gives one on the whole the greatest amount of practical efficiency, the philosophy of the complex vision remains unconvinced. The pragmatic philosophy judges the value of any "truth" by its effective application to ordinary moments. The philosophy of the complex vision judges the value of any "truth" by its relation to that rare and difficult harmony which can be obtained only in extraordinary moments. To the pragmatic philosopher a shrewd, efficient and healthy-minded person, with a good "working" religion, would seem the lucky one, while to the philosophy of the complex vision some desperate, unhappy suicidal wastrel, who by the grace of the immortals was allowed some high unutterable moment, might approach much more closely to the vision of those "sons of the universe" who are the pattern of us all.

This comparison of the method we are endeavouring to follow with the method of "pragmatism" helps to throw a clear light upon what the complex vision reveals about these "ultimate ideas" in the flow of an indiscriminate mass of mental impression.

To the passing fashion of modern thought there is something stiff, scholastic, archaic, rigid, and even Byzantine, about the words "truth," "beauty," "goodness," thus pedestalled side by side. But just as with the old-fashioned word "matter" and the old-fashioned word "soul," we must not be misled by a mere "superstition of novelty" in these things.

Modern psychology has not been able, and never can be able, to escape from the universal human experiences which these old-fashioned words cover; and as long as the experiences are recognized as real, it surely does not make much difference what *names* we give to them. It seems, indeed, in a point so human and dramatic as this, far better to use words that have already acquired a clear traditional and natural connotation than to invent new words according to one's own arbitrary fancy. It would not be difficult to invent such words. In place of "truth" one could say "the objective reality of things" rhythmically apprehended by the complex vision. Instead of "beauty" one could say "the world seen under the light of a peculiar creative power in the soul which reveals a secret aspect of things otherwise concealed from us." Instead of "goodness" one could say "the power of the conscious and living *will,* when directed towards love." And in place of "love" itself one could say "the projection of the essence of the soul upon the objective plane; when such an essence is directed towards life."

But it would be futile to continue this "fancy-work," of definition by an individual temperament. The general traditional meaning of these words is clear and unmistakable; though there may be infinite minute shades of difference between one person's interpretation of such a meaning and another's. What it all really amounts to is this. No philosophic or scientific interpretation of life, which does not include the verdict of life's own most concentrated moments, can possibly be adequate.

Human nature can perfectly well philosophize about its normal stream of impressions in "cold blood," so to speak, and according to a method that discounts all emotional vision. But the resultant conclusions of such philosophizing, with their easy-going assumption that what we call "beauty" and "goodness" have no connection with what we call "truth," are conclusions so unsatisfying to more than half of our being that they carry their refutation on the face of them.

To be an "interpretation of life" a philosophical theory cannot afford to disregard the whole turbulent desperate dramatic content of emotional experience. It cannot disregard the fact, for instance, that certain moments of our lives bring to us certain reconciliations and revelations that change the whole perspective of our days. To "interpret life" from the material offered by the uninspired unconcentrated unrhythmical "average" moods of the soul is like trying to interpret the play of "Hamlet" from a version out of which every one of Hamlet's own speeches have been carefully removed. Or, to take a different metaphor, such pseudo-psychological philosophy is like an attempt to analyse the nature of fire by a summary of the various sorts of fuel which have been flung into the flame.

The act of faith by which these ultimate ideas are reduced to the vision of living personalities is a legitimate matter for critical scepticism. But that there are such ultimate ideas and that life cannot be interpreted without considering them is not a matter for any sort of scepticism. It is a basic assumption, without which there could be no adequate philosophy at all. It is the only intelligible assumption which covers the undeniable human experience which gathers itself together in these traditional words.

CHAPTER VII. THE NATURE OF ART

THE ONLY ADEQUATE clue to the historic mystery of that thing which the human race has come to call "beauty," and that other thing — the re-creation of this through individual human minds — which we have come to call "art" — is found, if the complex vision is to be trusted at all, in the contact of the emotion of love with the "objective mystery," and its consequent dispersion, as the other aspects of the soul are brought to bear upon it, into the three primordial ideas of goodness, beauty, and truth.

The reason why this one particular aspect of the soul which we call emotion is found to be the synthesis of what is discovered by all the other aspects of the soul functioning together is that the nature of emotion differs radically from reason, conscience, will, imagination, taste, and the rest, in that it is not only a clarifying, directing and discriminating activity but is also — as none of these others are — an actual mood, or temper, or state of the soul, possessing certain definite vibrations of energy and a certain sort of psychic fluidity or outflowing which seems perpetually to spring up from an unfathomable depth.

This synthetic role played by emotion in unifying the other activities of the complex vision and preparing the psychic material for the final activity of the apex-thought may perhaps be understood better if we think of emotion as being an actual outflowing of the soul itself, springing up from unfathomable depths. Thinking of it in this way we may conceive the actual size or volume of the "soul monad" to be increased by this centrifugal expansion.

By such an increase of the soul's volume we do not mean an actual increase; because the depths of all souls are equally unfathomable when their recession inwards is considered. By such an increase we refer to the forth-flowing of the soul as it manifests itself through the physical body. Thus our theory brings us back, as all theories must if they are consonant with experience, to the traditional language of the human race. For in ordinary language there is nothing strange about the expression "a great soul." Such an expression simply refers to the volume of the soul's outflowing through the body. And this outflowing is the fulness, more or less, of the soul's well-spring of emotion.

A "great soul" is thus a soul whereof the outflowing emotion — on both sides of its inherent duality — is larger in volume as it manifests itself through the body than in normal cases; and a "small soul" is a soul whose volume of outflowing emotion is less than in normal cases.

It must be remembered, however, when we speak of the outflowing emotion of the soul that we do not mean that there *pours through* the soul from some exterior source a stream of emotion distinct from the integral being of the soul itself. What we mean is that the soul itself finds itself divided against itself in an eternal contradiction which may be compared to the positive and negative pole of electricity.

This outflowing of emotion is not, therefore, the outflowing of something which emerges from the soul but is the outflowing, or the expansion and dilation through the body, or the soul itself. What we are now indicating, as to the less or greater degree of volume in the soul's manifestation through the body, is borne witness to in the curious fact that the bodies of persons under strong emotion — whether it be the emotion of love or the emotion of malice — do actually seem to dilate in bulk and stature.

All that we have been saying has a clear bearing upon the problem of the relation between the emotional aspect of the soul and the other aspects. The emotion of the soul is the outflowing of the soul itself, on one side or other of its inherent duality; while the other aspects of the soul — such as will, taste, imagination, reason, and so forth — are the directing, selecting, clarifying, interpreting activities of the soul as it flings itself upon the objective mystery. Thus, while it is by means of that activity of the soul which we call conscience that we distinguish between good and evil; and by means of that activity called the aesthetic sense that we distinguish between beauty and hideousness; and by means of that activity called reason that we distinguish between reality and unreality; it is all the while from its own emotional outflowing that the soul directed and guided by these critical energies, creates the universe which becomes its own, and then discovers that the universe which it has created is also the universe of the immortals.

It is because this emotional duality of love and malice is the inherent "psychic stuff" of all living souls whether mortal or immortal that the soul of man comes at last to comprehend that those primordial ideas of goodness, beauty and truth, out of which the universe is half-created and half-discovered, draw, so to speak the sanction of their objective reality from the eternal vision of the immortals.

The distinction we have thus insisted upon between the nature of emotion and the nature of the other aspects of the soul makes it now clear how it is that we are compelled to regard these three primordial ideas of beauty, truth and goodness as finding their unity and their original identity in the emotion of love.

It has been necessary to consider these ultimate movements of the soul in order that we may be in a position to understand the general nature of this mysterious thing we call "art," and be able to track its river-bed, so to speak, up to the original source. From a consideration of the fact that the outflowing of the soul takes the form of emotion, and that this emotion is at perpetual war within itself and is for ever contradicting itself, we arrive at our first axiomatic principle with regard to art, namely that art is, and must always be, penetrated through and through by the spirit of contradiction. Whatever else art may become, then, one thing we can predicate for certain with regard to it, namely that it springs from an eternal conflict between two irreconcilable opposites.

We are, further than this, able to define the nature of these opposites as the everlasting conflict between creation and what resists creation, or between love and malice. It is just here, in regard to the character of these opposites, that the philosophy of the complex vision differs from the Bergsonian philosophy of the "élan vital."

According to Bergson's monistic system the only genuine reality is the flux of spirit The spirit of some primordial self-expansion projects what we call "matter" as its secondary manifestation and then is condemned to an unending and exhausting struggle with what it has projected.

Spirit, therefore, is pure energy and movement and matter is pure heaviness and resistance. Out of the necessity of this conflict emerge all those rigid logical concepts and mathematical formulae, of which space and time, in the ordinary sense of those words, are the ultimate generalization.

Our criticism of this theory is that both these things — this "spirit" and this spirit-evoked "matter" — are themselves meaningless concepts, concepts which, in spite of Bergson's contempt for ordinary metaphysic, are in reality entirely metaphysical, being in fact, like the old-fashioned entities whose place they occupy, nothing but empty bodiless generalizations abstracted from the concrete living reality of the soul. But quite apart from our criticism of the Bergsonian "spirit" and "matter" on the ground of their being unreal conceptions illegitimately abstracted from real personality we are compelled to note a second vivid difference between our point of view and his in regard to this matter of opposites and their contradiction. Bergson’s monism, as we have seen, resolves itself into a duality which may be defined as conscious activity confronted by unconscious inertness.

Our duality, on the contrary, which has behind it, not monism, but pluralism, may be denned as conscious creation, or conscious love, confronted by conscious resistance to creation, or conscious inert malice. Thus while Bergson finds his ultimate axiomatic “data” in philosophical abstractions, we find our ultimate axiomatic “data” in the realities of human experiences. Bergson seeks to interpret human life in terms of the universe. We seek to interpret the universe in terms of human life. And we contend that we are justified in doing this since what we call “the universe,” as soon as it is submitted to analysis, turns out to be nothing but an act of faith according to which an immense plurality of separate personal universes find a single universe of inspiration and hope in the vision of the immortal gods.

The ultimate duality revealed by the complex vision is a duality on both sides of which we have unfathomable abysses of consciousness. On the one side this consciousness is eternally creative. On the other side this consciousness is eternally malicious, in its deliberate inert resistance to creation. It is natural enough, therefore, that while Bergson’s “creative evolution” resolves itself into a series of forward-movements which are as easy and organic as the growth of leaves on a tree, our advance toward the real future which is also a return to the ideal past, resolves itself in a series of supremely difficult rhythms, wherein eternally conscious “good” overcomes eternally conscious “evil.”

Our philosophy, therefore, may, in the strictest sense, be called a “human” philosophy in contra-distinction to a “cosmic” philosophy; or, if you please, it may be called a “dramatic” philosophy in contra-distinction to a “lyric” philosophy. From all this it will be clearly seen that it would be impossible for us to hypostasize a super-moral or sub-moral universe in complete disregard of the primordial conscience of the human soul. It will be equally clearly seen that it would be impossible for us to project a theoretical universe made up of “cosmic streams of tendency,” whether “spiritual” or “material,” in complete disregard of the soul’s primordial aesthetic sense.

The logical scrupulosity and rationalistic passion which drive a cosmic philosopher forward, in his attempt to construct a universe in disregard of the human conscience and the human aesthetic sense, are themselves evidence that while he has suppressed in himself the first two of the three primordial ideas of which we speak, he has become an all-or-nothing slave of the last of these three ideas — namely, the idea of truth. He has sacrificed his conscience and his taste to this isolated and abstracted “truth,” the quest of pure reason alone, and, as a result of this fanaticism, the real “true truth,” that is to say the complete rhythmic vision of the totality of man’s nature, has been suppressed and destroyed.

It must be fully admitted at this point that the fanaticism of the so-called “pure saint” and the so-called “pure artist” who suppress, the one for the sake of “goodness” and the other for the sake of “beauty,” the third great primordial idea which we have called “truth,” is a fanaticism just as one sided and just as destructive of the complete harmonious vision as those other kinds.

That this is the case can easily be proved by recalling how thin, how strained, how morbid, how ungracious, how inhuman, those so-called “saints” and “artists” become, when, in their neglect of reason and truth, they persist in following their capricious, subjective, fantastic, individual dreams, out of all concrete relation to the actual world we live in.

We arrive, therefore, at a point from which we are able to detect the true inner spirit of the nature of art; and what we discover may thus be stated. Art is the expression, through the medium of an individual temperament, of a beauty which is one of the primordial aspects of this pluralistic world. The eternal duality of things implies that this beauty is always manifested as something in perpetual conflict with its opposite, namely with that antagonistic aspect of the universe which we name the hideous or the ugly.

This duality exists as the eternal condition of each one of the three primordial ideas out of which the universe is evoked. Each of these three ideas is only known to us as the result of a relative victory over its opposite. Beauty is known to us as a relative victory over hideousness. Goodness is known to us as a relative victory over evil. Truth is known to us as a relative victory over the false and the unreal. The fact that each of these ideas can only be known in a condition of conflict with its opposite and in a condition of relative victory over its opposite is due to the fact that all three of them are in their own nature only clarifying, selecting, and value-giving activities; whereas the actual material upon which they have to work, as well as the energy from which they derive their motive-power, is nothing else but that mysterious outflowing of the soul itself which we call emotion.

For since emotion is eternally divided against itself into love and malice, the three primordial ideas which deal this emotion are also eternally divided against themselves, into beauty and hideousness, into goodness and evil, into reality and unreality. And since the very existence of emotion depends upon the struggle between love and malice, in the same way the very existence of our aesthetic sense depends upon the struggle between beauty and hideousness; and the very existence of reason depends upon the struggle between reality and unreality. The only love we can possibly have to deal with is a love which is for ever overcoming malice. The only beauty we can possibly have to deal with is a beauty which is for ever overcoming hideousness.

And the same assertion must be made both with regard to goodness and with regard to truth. If any one of them absolutely overcame the other, so as completely to destroy it, the ebb and flow of life would at that moment cease.

A world where all minds could apprehend all truth without any illusion or admixture of unreality, would not be a world at all, as we know the world. It would be the colourless dream of an immobile plurality of absolutes. As far as we are concerned it would be synonymous with death. Thus the ultimate nature of the world is found to be unfathomably dualistic. A sharp dividing line of irreconcilable duality intersects every living soul; and the secret of life turns out to be the relatively victorious struggle of personality with the thing that in itself resists its fuller life.

This verdict of the complex vision is in unison with the natural feeling of ordinary humanity and it is also in unison with the supreme illuminated moments when we seem to apprehend the vision of the gods. When once we have apprehended the inherent nature of beauty, we are in a position to understand what the spirit of art must be, whose business it is to re-create this beauty in terms of personality. The idea of beauty itself is profoundly personal even before art touches it, since it is one of the three primordial ideas with which every conscious soul sets forth.

But it is not only personal. It is also objective and impersonal. For it is not only the reaction of a particular soul to its own universe; it is also felt, in the rare moments when the apex-thought of the complex vision is creating its world rhythm, to be nothing less than the vision of the immortals.

Art, therefore, which is the representation in terms of some particular personal temperament, of that sense of beauty which is the inheritance of all souls born into the world, must be profoundly penetrated by the victorious struggle of the emotion of love with the emotion of malice. For although the human sense of the beauty of the world, which may be called the objective sense of the beauty of the world, since the vision of the immortals lies behind it, is the thing which art expresses, it must be remembered that this sense is not an actual substance or concrete entity, but is only a principle of selection or a process of mental reaction, in regard to life.

The thing which may be called an actual substance is that outflowing of the soul itself in centrifugal waves of positive and negative vibration which we have chosen to name by the name “emotion.” This may indeed be called an actual concrete extension of the psychic-stuff of the substantial soul. None of the three primordial ideas resemble it in this. They are all attitudes of the soul; not conscious enlargements or lessenings of the very stuff; of the soul.

The idea of beauty is a particular reaction to the universe. The idea of truth is a particular reaction to the universe. The idea of goodness is a particular act of the will with regard to our relation to the universe. But the emotion of love, in its struggle with the emotion of malice, is much more than this. It is the actual outflowing of the soul itself; and it offers, as such, the very stuff and material out of which truth and beauty and goodness are distinguished and discerned.

Some clear hints and intimations as to the nature of art may be arrived at from these considerations. We at any rate reach a general criterion, applicable to all instances, as to the presence or absence in any particular case of the authentic and objective “note” of true art. This “note” is the presence in a work of art of the decisive relative victory of love over malice. When, on the contrary, in any work of art, the original struggle of love with malice issues in a relative overcoming of love by malice, then such a work of art belongs, ipso facto, to an inferior order of excellence.

This criterion is one of easy intuitive application, although any exact analysis of it, in a particular case, may be difficult and obscure. Roughly and generally expressed it amounts to this. In the great works of art of the world, wherein the subjective vision of the artist expresses itself in mysterious reciprocity with the objective vision of the immortals, there is always found a certain large “humanity.” This humanity, wherein an infinite pity never for a moment degenerates into weak sentiment, reduces the co-existence of cruelty and malice to the lowest possible minimum, consonant with the ebb and flow of life.

Some residuum of such malice and cruelty there must be, even in the supremest work of art, else the eternal contradictions upon which life depends would be destroyed. But the emotion of love, in such works, will always be found to have its fingers, as it were, firmly upon the throat of its antagonist, so that the resultant rhythm shall be felt to be the ultimate rhythm of life itself, wherein the eternal struggle of love with malice issues in the relative overcoming of the latter by the former.

It would be invidious perhaps to name, in this place, any particular works of art in which the predominant element is malice rather than love. But such works of art exist in considerable number, and the lacerated and distorted beauty of them remains as a perpetual witness to what they have missed. In speaking of these inferior works of art the aesthetic psychologist must be on his guard against the confusion of such moods as the creative instinct of destruction or the creative instinct of simple sensuality with the inert malice we are considering.

The instinct of destruction is essentially connected with the instinct of creation and indeed must be regarded as an indirect expression of that instinct; for, as one can clearly understand, almost every creative undertaking implies some kind of destructive or at least some kind of suppressive or renunciant act which renders such an undertaking possible.

In the same way it is not difficult to see that the simple impulse of natural sensuality, or direct animal lust, is profoundly connected with the creative instinct, and is indeed the expression of the creative instinct on the plane of purely material energy. But it must be understood, however, that neither the will to destruction nor the will to sensuality are by any means always as innocent as the forms of them I have indicated above.

It often happens indeed that this destructive instinct is profoundly penetrated by malice and derives the thrill of its activity from malice; and this may easily be observed in certain famous but not supreme works of art. It must also be understood that the impulse to sensuality or lust is not always the direct simple animal instinct to which I have referred. What has come to be called “Sadism” is an instance of this aberration of an innocent impulse.

The instinct of “sadism,” or the deriving of voluptuous pleasure from sensual cruelty, has its origin in the legitimate association of the impulse to destroy with the impulse to create, as these things are inseparably linked together in the normal “possession” of a woman by a man. In such “possession” the active masculine principle has to exercise a certain minimum of destruction with a view to a certain maximum of creation; and the normal resistance of the female is the mental corollary of this.

The normal resistance of the artist's medium to the activity of his energy is a sort of aesthetic parallel to this situation; and it is easy to see how, in the creation of a work of art, this aesthetic overcoming of resistance may get itself mentally associated with the parallel sensation experienced on the sensual plane. The point we have to make is this: that while in normal cases the impulse to sensuality is perfectly direct, innocent, animal, and earth-born; in other cases it becomes vitiated by the presence in it of a larger amount of destructive energy than can be accounted for by the original necessity.

Thus in a great many quite famous works of art there will be found an element of sadism. But it will always remain that in the supreme works of art this sadistic element has been overcome and transformed by the pressure upon it of the emotion of love. There exists, however, other instances, when the work of art in question is obviously inferior, in which we are confronted by something much more evil than the mere presence of the sadistic impulse. What I refer to is a very subtle and complicated mood wherein the simple sadistic impulse to derive sensual pleasure from the contemplation of cruelty has been seized upon and taken possession of by the emotion of malice.

The complicated mood resulting from this association of sadistic cruelty with inert malice is perhaps the most powerful engine of evil that exists in the world; although a pure unmitigated condition of unsensualized, unimpassioned, motiveless malice is, in its inmost self, more essentially and profoundly evil. For while the energy of sadism renders the actual destructive power of malice much more formidable, we must remember that what really constitutes the essence of evil is never the energy of destruction but always the malicious inertness of resistance to creation. We have thus arrived at some measure of insight as to the nature of art and we find that whatever else it may be it must be penetrated through and through by the overcoming of malice by love. It must, in other words, have the actual outflowing of the soul as the instrument of its expression and as the psycho-material medium with which it inscribes its vision upon the objective mystery that confronts it.

We have at least arrived at this point in our search for a definite criterion: that when in any work of art a vein of excessive cruelty or, worse still, a vein of sneering and vindictive malice, dominates the emotional atmosphere, such a work of art, however admirable it may be in other respects, falls below the level of the most excellent. The relation between the idea of beauty as expressed by the aesthetic sense and those other ideas, namely of truth and goodness, which complete the circle of human vision, is a relation which may be suggested thus.

Since all three of these primordial ideas are unified by the emotion of love it is clear that the emotion of love is the element in which each of them severally moves. And since it is impossible that love should be antagonistic to itself we must conclude that the love which is the element or substratum of beauty is the same love that is the element or substratum of goodness and truth. And since all these three elements are in reality one element, which is indeed nothing less than the dominant outflowing of the soul itself, it follows that those portions of the soul's outflowing which have been directed by reason and by conscience, which we call the idea of truth and the idea of goodness, must have an ultimate identity with that portion of the soul's outflowing which has been directed by the aesthetic sense and which we call the idea of beauty.

This identity between truth and goodness on the one hand and beauty on the other cannot be regarded as an absolute identity. The idea of truth continues to represent one facet of the universe, the idea of goodness another, and the idea of beauty another or a third. What we mean by the use of the term “identity” is simply this: that the universe revealed by each one of these three ideas is the same universe as is revealed by the others, and the emotional outflowing of the individual soul, which reveals each of these separate facets or aspects of the universe, is the same in each of the three ideas which govern its direction.

It is, however, only at their supreme point, when they are fused together by the apex-thought of the complex vision, that the activity of these separate ideas is found to be in complete harmony. Short of this extreme limit they tend to deviate from each other and to utter contradictory oracles. We may therefore lay it down as an unalterable law of their activity that when any one of these ideas contradicts another it does so because of a weakness and imperfection in its own intensity or in the intensity of the idea it contradicts.

Thus if an idea of goodness is found irreconcilable with an idea of beauty, something is wrong with one or the other of these ideas, or perhaps with both of them. And we are not only able to say that something is wrong with such ideas when they contradict one another, we are able to predicate with certainty as to what precisely is wrong. For the “something wrong” which leads to this contradiction, the “something wrong” which stands in the way of the rhythmic activity of the soul’s apex-thought, will invariably be found to be a weakening of the outflowing of the emotion of love in one or other or perhaps all three of the implicated ideas.

For the outflowing of the soul’s emotion is not only the life of the root of this “tree of knowledge”; it is also the life of the sap of the uttermost branches; it is the force that makes the fragrance of each topmost leaf mingle with that of all the rest, in that unified breath of the whole tree which loses itself in the air.

Thus we arrive at our final conclusion as to the nature of art. And when we apply our criterion to any of the supreme works of art of the world we find it does not fail us. The figure of Christ, for instance, remains the supreme incarnation of the idea of goodness in the world; and few will deny that the figure of Christ represents not only the idea of goodness but the ideas of truth and beauty also. If one contemplates many another famous "good man" of history, such as easily may be called to mind, one is at once conscious that the "goodness" of these admirable persons is a thing not altogether pleasing to the aesthetic taste, and a thing which in some curious way seems to obscure our vision of the real truth of life.

A great work of art, such as Leonardo's "Virgin of the Rocks," or Dostoievsky's "Idiot," is intuitively recognized as being not only entirely satisfying to the aesthetic sense but also entirely satisfying to our craving for truth and our longing for the inmost secret of goodness. Every great work of art is the concentrated essence of a man's ultimate reaction to the universe. It has an undertone of immense tragedy; but in the depths of this tragedy there is no despair, because an infinite pity accompanies the infinite sorrow, and in such pity love finds itself stronger than fate. No work of art, however appealing or magical, can carry the full weight of what it means to be an inheritor of human tradition, of what it means to be a living soul, until it has arrived at that rhythm of the apex-thought which is a fusion of what we call the "good" with what we call the "beautiful" and the "true."

It is only when our notion of what *is* good and what is true falls short of the austere demands of the aesthetic sense that a certain uneasiness and suspicion enters into a discussion of this kind. And such an uneasiness is justified by reason of the fact that the popular notion both of goodness and truth does so often fall lamentably short of such demands. The moral conscience of average humanity is a thing of such dull sensibility, of such narrow and limited vision, that it is inevitable that its “goodness” should clash with so exacting a censor as the aesthetic sense.

The rational conscience of average humanity is a thing of such dense and rigid and unimaginative vision that it is inevitable that its “truth” should clash with the secrets revealed by the aesthetic sense. The cause, why the aesthetic sense seems to come on the scene with an apparatus of valuation so much more advanced and refined than that possessed by the conscience or by the reason, is that both conscience and reason are continually being applied to action, to conduct, to the manipulation of practical affairs, and are bound in this commerce with superficial circumstance to grow a little blunt and gross and to lose something of their fine edge.

Conscience and reason, in the hurly-burly and pell-mell of life, are driven to compromise, to half-measures, to the second-best.

Conscience is compelled to be satisfied with something less than its own rigid demands. Reason is compelled to accept something less than its own rigid demands. Both of these things tend to become, under the pressure of the play of circumstance, pragmatical, time-serving, and opportunist. But the aesthetic sense, although in itself it has always room for infinite growth, is in its inherent nature unable to compromise; unable to bend this way and that; unable to dally with half-measures.

Any action, in a world of this kind, necessarily implies compromise; and since goodness is so largely a matter of action, goodness is necessarily penetrated by a spirit of compromise. Indeed it may be said that a certain measure of common-sense is of the very essence of goodness. But what has common-sense to do with art? Common-sense has never been able, and never will be able, to understand even the rudiments of art. For art is the half-discovery of something that must always seem an impossibility to common-sense; and it is the half-creation of something that must always render common-sense irrelevant and unimportant. Truth, again, in a world of so infinite a complication, must frequently have to remain an open question, a suspended judgment, an antinomy of opposites. The agnostic attitude — as, for instance, in the matter of the immortality of the soul — may in certain cases come to be the ultimate gesture of what we call the truth.

But with the aesthetic sense there can never be any suspension of judgment, never any open question, never any antinomy of opposites, never the least shadow of the pragmatic, or "working" test. It is therefore natural enough that when persons possessed of any degree of cultivated taste hear other persons speak of "goodness" or "truth" they grow distrustful and suspicious, they feel uneasy and very much on guard. For they know well that the conscience of the ordinary person is but a blunt and clumsy instrument, quite as likely to distort and pervert the essential spirit of "goodness" as to reveal it, and they know well that the "truth" of the ordinary person's reason is a sorry compound of logical rigidity and practical opportunism; with but small space left in it for the vision of imagination.

It is because of their primary importance in the sphere of practical action that the conscience and the reason have been developed out of all proportion to the aesthetic sense. And it is because the deplorable environment of our present commercial system has emphasized action and conduct, out of all proportion to contemplation and insight, that it is so difficult to restore the balance. The tyranny of machinery has done untold evil in increasing this lack of proportion; because machinery, by placing an unmalleable and inflexible material — a material that refuses to be humanized — between man's fingers and the actual element he works in, has interrupted that instinctive aesthetic movement of the human hands, which, even in the midst of the most utter clumsiness and grossness, can never fail to introduce some touch of beauty into what it creates.

We have thus arrived at a definite point of view from which we are able to observe the actual play of man's aesthetic sense as, in its mysterious fusion with the energy of reason and conscience, it interprets the pervading beauty of the system of things, according to the temperament of the individual. It remains to note how in the supreme works of art this human temperamental vision is caught up and transcended in the high objectivity of a greater and more universal vision; a vision which is still personal, because everything true and beautiful in the universe is personal, but which, by the rhythm of the apex-thought, has attained a sort of impersonal personality or, in other words, has been brought into harmony with the vision of the immortals.

The material upon which the artist works is that original "objective mystery," confronting every individual soul, out of which every individual soul creates its universe. The medium by means of which the artist works is that outflowing of the very substance of the soul itself which we name by the name of emotion. This actual passing of the substantial substance of the soul into whatever form or shape of objective mystery the soul's vision has half-discovered and half-created is the true secret of what happens both in the case of the original creation of the artist and in case of the reciprocal re-creation of the person enjoying the work of art.

For Benedetto Croce, the Italian philosopher, is surely right when he asserts that no one can enter into the true spirit of a work of art without exercising upon it something of the same creative impulse as that by the power of which it originally came into existence. In the contemplation of a statue or a picture or a piece of bric-a-brac, in the enjoyment of a poem or an exquisite passage of prose, just as much as in the hearing of music, the soul of the recipient is projected beyond its normal limitation in the same way as the soul of the creator was projected beyond its normal limitation.

The soul which thus gives itself up to Beauty is actually extended in a living ecstasy of vibration until it flows into, and through, and around, the thing it loves. But even this is an inadequate expression of what happens; for this outflowing of the soul is the very force and energy which actually is engaged in re-creating this thing out of what at present I confine myself to calling the "objective mystery."

The emotion of the soul plays therefore a double part. It half-discovers and half-creates the pervading beauty of things; and it also loses itself in receptive ecstasy, in embracing what it has half-created and half-found.

We have now reached a point from which we are able to advance yet another step.

Since what we call beauty is the evocation of these two confronted existences, the existing thing which we call the soul and the existing thing which we call the objective mystery, it follows that there resides, as a potentiality, in the nature of the objective mystery, the capacity for being converted into Beauty at the touch of the soul. There is thus a three-fold complication of reality in this thing we call the beauty of the universe.

There is the individual, human, subjective reality of it, dependent upon the temperament of the observer. There is the universal potential reality of it, existing in the objective mystery. And finally there is the ideal reality of it, objective and absolute as far as we are concerned, in the vision that I have called "the vision of the immortals." If it be asked why, in all these ultimate problems, it is necessary to introduce the vision of the immortals, my answer is that the highest human experience demands and requires it.

At those rare moments when the "apex-thought" reaches its rhythmic consummation the soul is conscious that its subjective vision of Truth and

Beauty merges itself and loses itself in an objective vision which carries the “imprimatur” of eternity. This is a definite universal experience which few introspective minds will dare to deny.

But since, as we have already proved, the ultimate reality of things is personality, or, to be more exact, is personality, confronting the objective mystery, it is clear that if the subjective vision of the soul is to correspond with an objective reality outside the soul, that objective reality outside the soul must itself be the vision of personality. It may be asked, at this point, why it is that the potentiality or the capacity for being turned into beauty at the touch of the soul, which resides in the objective mystery is not enough to explain this recognition by the soul of an eternal objective validity in its ultimate ideas.

It is not enough to explain it, because this potentiality remains entirely unrecognized until it is touched by personality, and it is therefore quite as much a potentiality of inferior beauty, inadequate truth, and second-rate goodness, as it is a potentiality of the rarest of these things.

The objective mystery by itself cannot explain the soul’s experience of an eternal validity in its deepest ideas because the objective mystery in its role of pure potentiality is capable of being moulded into the form of *any* ideas, whether deep or shallow. Thus our proof of the real existence of “the vision of the immortals” depends upon two facts.

It depends upon the fact that the soul experiences an intuitive assurance of objective reality in its ideas. And it depends upon the fact that there is no other reality in the world, with any definite form or outline, except the reality of personality. For an idea to be eternal, therefore, it must be the idea of a personality, or of many personalities, which themselves are eternal; and since we have no evidence that the human soul is eternal and does not perish with the body we are compelled to assume that somewhere in the universe there must exist beings whose personality is able to resist death and whose vision is an immortal vision.

It might be objected at this point, by such as follow the philosophy of Epicurus, that, even though such beings exist, we have no right to assume that they have any regard for us. My answer to this is that in such moments as I have attempted to describe, when the rhythmic activity of the soul is at its highest, we become directly and intuitively conscious of an immense unutterable harmony pervading all forms of life, whether mortal or immortal; a harmony which could not be felt if there were not some mysterious link binding all living souls together.

We become aware at such moments that not only are all living souls thus bound together but that all are bound together by the fact that the ideal vision of them all is one and the same. This is not only my answer to such as maintain that though there may be Beings in the system of things superior to man, such Beings have no necessary connection with man; it is also my answer to the question as to how, considering the capricious subjectivity of our human vision, we can be assured that the ideal vision of the immortals does not vary in the same way among themselves. We are assured against both these possibilities; against the possibility of the immortals being indifferent to humanity, and against the possibility of the immortals being divided among themselves, by the fact that, according to the very basic revelation of the complex vision, wherever there is a living soul, that living soul is dependent for its continued existence upon the overcoming of malice by love.

This duality is so much the essence of what we call personality that we cannot conceive of personality without it. If, therefore, the immortals are possessed of personality they must be subject to this duality; and the fact that they are subject to it puts them necessarily in at least a potential "rapport" with all other living souls, since the essence of every living soul is to be found in the same unfathomable struggle.

But granting that there *are* superior Beings, worthy to be called Gods, who in their essential nature resemble humanity, how can we be assured that there is any contact between them and humanity? We are assured of this in the intuitive revelation of a most definite human experience, an experience which few philosophers have been sceptical enough to deny, although their explanations of it may have been different from mine.

William James, for instance, whose psychological investigations into the phenomena of religious feeling are so thorough and original, describes the sense we have of the presence of these unseen Powers in a very interesting and curious way. He points out that the feeling we experience at such moments is that there exists below the level of our ordinary consciousness a deep and limitless reservoir or cistern containing "more" of the same stream of spiritual emotion which we are conscious of as being our very inmost self or soul of our soul.

On the waves of this subconscious ocean of deeper life we are, so to speak, able to "ride"; if once, in a sudden revolution of absolute humility, we can give ourselves up to it.

It is needless to indicate how the Ideas of Plato, the "sub specie aeternitatis" of Spinoza, the "Liberation" from "the Will" of Schopenhauer, the "Beatific Vision" of the Catholic saints are all analogues and parallels, expressed under different symbols, of the same universal feeling. The difference between these philosophic statements of the situation and mine, is that, whereas these are content, with the doubtful exception of Plato, to eliminate from this subconscious "more" of what is "best" in our own soul, every trace and element of personality, I am unable to escape from the conviction that compared with personality no power in the universe, whether it be called “Idea” or “Substance” or a “Will to annihilate Will” or “Life Force” or “Stream of consciousness” or any other name, is worthy to be regarded as the cause and origin of that intimation of “something more” by which our soul comes into contact with the secret of the system of things.

To assume that the vision of unutterable truth which is reached in the supreme works of art is anything less than the vision of super-human Personality is to assume that something other than Peripety is the secret of life. And how can man, who feels so profoundly conscious that his own personal “I am I” is the inmost essence of his being, when it comes to the question of the cause of his sensation of “riding on the waves” of this something “more,” be content to find the cause in mere abstractions from personality, such as “streams of consciousness” or “life-force” or “Absolute Substance”?

What we *know for certain,* in this strange imbroglio, is that what we call Beauty is a complex of two mysteries, the mystery of our own “I am I” and the mystery of the “objective something” which this “I am I” confronts. And if, as is the case, our most intense and passionate experience, when the rhythm of our nature is at the fullest, is the intuition of some world-deep authority or sanction giving an eternal validity to our ideas, this authority or sanction cannot be interpreted in mere metaphors or similes abstracted from personality, or in any material substance without a mind, or in any “stream of thought” without a thinker: but can only be interpreted in terms of what alone we have an inside consciousness of, namely in terms of personality itself.

To some temperaments it might seem as though this reduction of the immense unfathomable universe to a congeries of living souls were a strangling limitation. There are certain human temperaments, and my own is one of them, whose aesthetic sense demands the existence of vast interminable spaces of air, of water, of earth, of fire, or even of blank emptiness. To such a temperament it might seem as though to be jostled throughout eternity by other living souls were to be shut up in an unescapable prison. And when to this unending population of fellow-denizens of space we add this doctrine that our deepest ideas of Beauty remain subjective and ephemeral until they have received the "imprimatur" of some mysterious superhuman Being or Beings, such rebellious temperaments as I am speaking of might conceivably cry aloud for the Psalmist's "wings of a dove."

But the aspect of things which I have just suggested is after all only a superficial aspect of the situation. Those hollow spaces of unplumbed darkness, those gulfs filled with primordial nothingness, those caverns of midnight where the hoary chemistry of matter swirls and ferments in eternal formlessness; these indeed *are* taken away from us. But as I have indicated again and again, no movement of human logic, no energy of human reason, can destroy the unfathomableness of Nature. The immense spectacle of the material universe, with its perpetually receding background of objective mystery, is a thing that cannot be destroyed. Those among us who reluct at every human explanation of this panorama of shadows, are only too easily able to "flee away and be at rest" in the bottomless gulf they crave.

The fact that man's apex-thought reveals the presence of an unending procession of living souls, each of whose creative energy moulds this mystery to its own vision, does not remove the unfathomableness of the world-stuff whereof they mould it. As we have already seen, this aboriginal world-stuff, so impenetrable to all analysis, assumes as far as we are concerned a three-fold form. It assumes the form of the material element in that fusion of matter and consciousness which makes up the substance of the soul. It assumes the form of the universal medium which binds all souls together. And it assumes the form of the objective mystery which confronts the vision of all souls. Over these three forms of the “world-stuff” hangs irrevocably the great “world-curve” or “world-circle” of omnipresent Space, which gives the final and ultimate unity to all possible universes.

The temperamental revolt, however, which I am endeavouring to describe, against our doctrine of personality, does not stop with a demand for de-humanized air and space. It has a passionate “penchant” for the projection of such vague imaginative images as “spirit” and “life.” Forgetful that no man has ever seen or touched this “spirit,” apart from a personal soul, or this “life,” apart from some living thing, the temperament I am thinking of loves to make imaginative excursions into what it supposes to be vast receding abysses of pure “spirit” and of impersonal inhuman “life.”

It gains thus a sense of liberation from the boundaries of its own personality and a sense of liberation from the boundaries of all personality. The doctrine, therefore, that the visible universe is a mysterious complex of many concentrated mortal visions, stamped, so to speak, with the “imprimatur” of an ideal immortal vision, is a doctrine that seems to impede and oppose such a temperament in this abysmal plunge into the ocean of existence. But my answer to the protest of this temperament — and it is an answer that has a certain measure of authority, since this temperament is no other than my own — is that this feeling of “imprisonment” is due to a superficial understanding of the doctrine against which it protests. It is superficial because it does not recognize that around, above, beneath, within, every form of personality that the “curve of space” covers, there is present the aboriginal “world-stuff,” unfathomable and inexplicable, out of which all souls draw the material element of their being, in which all souls come into contact with one another, and from which all souls half-create and half-discover their personal universe.

It was necessary to introduce this question of temperamental reaction just here, because in any conclusion as to the nature of Beauty it is above all things important to give complete satisfaction to every great recurrent exigency of human desire. And this desire for liberation from the bonds of personality is one of the profoundest instincts of personality.

We have now arrived at a point of vantage from which it is possible to survey the outlines of our final problem; the problem, namely as to what it really is which renders one object in nature more beautiful than another object, and one work of art more beautiful than another work of art. We know that in the intuitive judgment which affixes these relative valuations there must be the three elements of mortal subjective vision, of immortal objective vision, and of the original "world-stuff" out of which all visions are made.

But upon what criteria, by what rules and standards, do we become aware that one tree is more beautiful than another tree, one landscape than another landscape, one poem or person or picture than another of the same kind? The question has already been lifted out of the sphere of pure subjective taste by what has been said with regard to the eternal Ideal vision. But are there any permanent laws of Beauty by which we may analyse the verdict of this objective vision? Or are we made aware of it, in each individual case, by a pure intuitive apprehension?

I think there *are* such laws. But I think the "science," so to say, of the aesthetic judgment remains at present in so rudimentary a stage that we are not in a position to do more than indicate their general outline. The following principles seem, as far as I am able to lay hold upon this evasive problem, of more comprehensive application than any others.

A thing to be beautiful must form an organic totality, even though in some other sense it is only a portion of a larger totality.

It must carry with it the impression, illusive or otherwise, that it is the outward form or shape of a living personal soul.

It must satisfy, at least by symbolic association, the physical desires of the body.

It must obey certain hidden laws of rhythm, proportion, balance, and harmony, both with regard to colour and form, and with regard to magical suggestiveness.

It must answer, in some degree, the craving of the human mind for some symbolic expression of the fatality of human experience.

It must have a double effect upon us. It must arouse the excitement of a passion of attention, and it must quiet us with a sense of eternal rest.

It must thrill us with a happiness which goes beyond the pleasure of a passing physical sensation.

It must convey the impression of something unique and yet representative; and it must carry the mind through and beyond itself, to the very brink and margin of the ultimate objective mystery.

It must suggest inevitableness, spontaneity, a certain monumental ease, and a general feeling of expansion and liberation.

It must, if it belong to nature, convey that magical and world-deep sadness which springs from an inarticulate appeal; or, if it belong to art, that wistful loneliness which springs from the creation of immortality by the hands of mortality.

The above principles are not offered as in any way exhaustive. They are outlined as a temporary starting point and suggestion for the more penetrating analysis which the future will surely provide. And I have temporally excluded from them, as can be seen, all references to those auxiliary elements drawn from reason and conscience which, according to the philosophy of the complex vision, must be included in the body of art, if art is to be the final expression of human experience.

But after gathering together all we have accumulated among these various paths leading to the edge of the mystery of art, what we are compelled to recognize, when we confront the palpable thing itself, is that, in each unique embodiment of it, it arrests and entrances us, as with a sudden transformation of our entire universe.

Out of the abysses of personality — human or super-human — every new original work of art draws us, by an irresistible magnetism, into itself, until we are compelled to become *what it is,* until we are actually transformed into its inmost identity.

What hitherto has seemed to us mere refuse and litter and dreariness and debris — all the shards and ashes and flints and excrement of the margins of our universe — take upon themselves, as they are thus caught up and transfigured, a new and ineffable meaning.

The terrible, the ghastly, the atrocious, the abominable, the apparently meaningless and dead, suddenly gather themselves together and take on strange and monumental significance.

What has hitherto seemed to us floating jetsom and blind wreckage, what has hitherto seemed to us mere brutal lumps of primeval clay tossed to and fro by the giant hands of chaos, what has hitherto seemed to us slabs of inhuman chemistry, suddenly assumes under the pressure of this great power out of the abyss a strange and lovely and terrible expressiveness.

Deep calls to Deep; and the mysterious oceans of Personality move and stir in a terrific reciprocity.

The unfathomable gulfs of the eternal duality within us are roused to undreamed-of response in answer to this abysmal stirring of the powers that create the world.

What is good in us is enlarged and heightened; what is evil in us is enlarged and deepened; while, under the increasing pressure of this new wave of the perilous stuff “of emotion,” slowly, little by little, as we give ourselves up to the ecstasy of contemplation, the intensified “good” overcomes the intensified “evil.”

It is then that what has begun in agitation and disturbance sinks by degrees into an infinite peace; as, without any apparent change or confusion, the waves roll in, one after another, upon our human shore, and we are lifted up and carried out on that vast tide into the great spaces, beneath the morning and the evening, where the eternal vision awaits us with its undescribable calm.

Let art be as bizarre, as weird, as strange, as rare, as fantastic, as you please, if it be true art it must spring from the aboriginal duality in the human soul and thus must remain indestructibly personal. But since the two elements of personality wrestle together in every artist’s soul, the more personal a work of art becomes the more comprehensive is its impersonality.

For art, by means of the personal and the particular, attains the impersonal and the universal. By means of sinking down into the transitory and the ephemeral, by means of moulding chance and accident to its will, it is enabled to touch the eternal and the eternally fatal.

From agitation to peace; from sound to silence; from creation to contemplation; from birth and death to that which is immortal; from movement to that which is at rest — such is the wayfaring of this primordial power.

It is from the vantage-ground of this perception that we are able to discern how the mysterious beauty revealed in apparently “inhuman” arrangements of line and colour and light and shade is really a thing springing from the depths of some personal and individual vision.

The controversy as to the superior claims of an art that is just “art,” with an appeal entirely limited to texture and colour and line and pure sound, and an art that is imagistic, symbolic, representative, religious, philosophical, or prophetic, is rendered irrelevant and meaningless when we perceive that all art, whether it be a thing of pure line and colour or a thing of passionate human content, must inevitably spring from the depths of some particular personal vision and must inevitably attain, by stressing this personal element to the limit, that universal impersonality which is implied in the fact that every living soul is composed of the same elements.

It may require no little subtlety of vision to detect in the pure beauty of line, colour, and texture that compose, say, some lovely piece of bric-a-brac, the hidden presence of that primordial duality out of which all forms of beauty emerge, but the metaphysical significance latent in the phrase “the sense of difficulty overcome” points us towards just this very interpretation. The circumstantial and the sexual “motifs” in art, so appealing to the mob, may or may not play an aesthetic part in the resultant rhythm. If they do, they do so because such “interest” and such “eroticism” were an integral portion of the original vision that gave unity to the work in question. If they do not, but are merely dragged in by the un-aesthetic observer, it is easy enough for the genuine virtuoso to disregard such temptation and to put “story,” “message,” “sentiment,” and “sex-appeal” rigidly aside, as he seeks to respond to the primordial vision of an “unstoried” non-sexual beauty springing from those deeper levels of the soul where “story,” “sentiment,” and sex have no longer any place.

More dangerous, however, to art, than any popular craving for “human interest” or for the comfort of amorous voluptuousness, is the unpardonable stupidity of puritanical censorship. Such censorship, in its crass impertinence, assumes that its miserable and hypocritical negations represent that deep, fierce, terrible “imperative” uttered by the soul’s primordial conscience.

They represent nothing of the sort.

The drastic revelations of “conscience” are, as I have pointed out again and again, fused and blended in their supreme moments with the equally drastic revelations of reason and the aesthetic sense.

They are inevitably blended with these, because, as we have proved, they are all three nothing less than divergent aspects of the one irresistible projection of the soul itself which I have named “creative love.”

Thus it comes about that in the great, terrible moments of tragic art there may be an apparent catastrophic despair, which in our normal moods seems hopeless, final, absolute.

It is only when the complex rhythm of the apex-thought is brought to bear upon these *moments of midnight* that a strange and unutterable healing emerges from them, a shy, half-hinted whisper or something deeper than hope, a magical effluence, a “still, small voice” from beneath the disastrous eclipse, which not only “purges our passions by pity and terror” but evokes an assured horizon, beyond truth, beyond beauty, beyond goodness, where the mystery of love, in its withdrawn and secret essence, transforms all things into its own likeness.

The nature of art is thus found to be intimately associated with the universal essence of every personal life. Art is not, therefore, a thing for the “coteries” and the “cliques”; nor is it a thing for the exclusive leisure of any privileged class. It is a thing springing from the eternal “stuff of the soul,” of every conceivable soul, whether human, sub-human, or super-human.

Art is nearer than “philosophy” or “morality” to the creative energy; because, while it is impossible to think of art as “philosophy” or “morality,” it is inevitable that we should think of both of these as being themselves forms and manifestations of art.

All that the will does, in gathering together its impressions of life and its reactions to life, must, even in regard to the most vague, shadowy, faint and obscure filcherings of contemplation, be regarded as a kind of intimate “work of art,” with the soul as the “artist” and the flow of life as the artist’s material.

Every personal soul, however “inartistic,” is an artist in this sense; and every personal life thus considered is an effective or ineffective “work of art.”

The primal importance of what in the narrow and restricted sense we have come to call “art” can only be fully realized when we think of such “art” as concentrating upon a definite material medium the creative energy which is for ever changing the world in the process of changing our attitude to the world.

The deadly enemy of art — the power that has succeeded, in these commercial days, in reducing art to a pastime for the leisured and wealthy — is the original inert malice of the abyss.

This inert malice assumes, directly it comes in contact with practical affairs, the form of the possessive instinct. And the attitude towards art of the “collector” or the leisured “epicurean,” for whom it is merely a pleasant sensation among other sensations, is an attitude which undermines the basis of its life. The very essence of art is that it should be a thing common to all, within the reach of all, expressive of the inherent and universal nature of all. And that this is the nature of art is proved by the fact that art is the personal expression of the personal centrifugal tendency in all living souls; an expression which, when it goes far enough, becomes *impersonal,* because, by expressing what is common to all, it reaches the point where the particular becomes the universal.

It thus becomes manifest that the true nature of art will only be incidentally and occasionally manifested, and manifested among us with great difficulty and against obstinate resistance, until the hour comes when, to an extent as yet hardly imaginable, the centripetal tendency of the possessive instinct in the race shall have relinquished something of its malicious resistance to the outflowing force which I have named “love.” And this yielding of the centripetal power to that which we call centrifugal can only take place in a condition of human society where the idea of communism has been accepted as the ideal and, in some effective measure, realized in fact.

For every work of art which exists is the rhythmic articulation, in terms of any medium, of some personal vision of life. And the more entirely “original” such a vision is, the more closely — such is the ultimate *paradox* of things — will it be found to approximate to a re-creation, in this particular medium, of that “eternal vision” wherein all souls have their share.

CHAPTER VIII. THE NATURE OF LOVE

THE SECRET OF the universe, as by slow degrees it reveals itself to us, turns out to be personality. When we consider, further, the form under which personality realizes, itself, we find it to consist in the struggle of personality to grapple with the objective mystery. When, in a still further movement of analysis, we examine the nature of this struggle between the soul and the mystery which surrounds the soul, we find it complicated by the fact that the soul's encounter with this mystery reveals the existence, in the depths of the soul itself, of two conflicting emotions, the emotion of love and the emotion of malice.

The word "love" has been used so indiscriminately in its surprising history that it becomes necessary to elucidate a little the particular meaning I give to it in connection with this ultimate duality. A strange and grotesque commentary upon human life, these various contradictory feelings that have covered their "multitude of sins" under this historic name!

The lust of the satyr, the affectionate glow of the domestic habitué, the rare exalted passion of the lover, the cold, clear attraction of the intellectual platonist, the will to possession of the sex-maniac, the will to voluptuous cruelty of the sex-pervert, the maternal instinct, the race-instinct, the instinct towards fetish-worship, the instinct towards art, towards nature, towards the ultimate mystery — all these things have been called "love" that we should follow them and pursue them; all these things have been called "love" that we should avoid them and fly from them.

The emotion of love in which we seem to detect the ultimate creative force is not precisely any of these things. Of all normal human emotions it comes nearest to passionate sympathy. But it is much more than this. The emotion of love is not a simple nor an easily defined thing. How should it be that, when it is one aspect of the outpouring of the very stuff of the soul itself? How should it be that when it is the projection, into the heart of the objective mystery, of the soul's manifold and complicated essence?

The best definition of love is that it is the creative apprehension of life, or of the objective mystery, under the form of an eternal vision. At first sight this definition might seem but a cold and intellectual account of love; an account that has omitted all feeling, all passion, all ecstasy.

But when we remember that what we call "the eternal vision" is nothing less than the answer of love to love, nothing less than the reciprocal rhythm of all souls, in so far as they have overcome malice, with one another and with the mystery which surrounds them, it will be seen that the thing is something in which what we call "intellect" and what we call "feeling" are both transcended. Love, in this sense, is an ecstasy; but it is an ecstasy from which all troubling, agitating, individual exactions have been obliterated. It is an ecstasy completely purged of the possessive instinct. It is an ecstasy that brings to us a feeling of indescribable peace and calm. It is an ecstasy in which our personal self, in the fullest realization of its inmost identity, loses itself, even at the moment of such realization, in something which cannot be put into words. At one moment our human soul finds itself harassed by a thousand vexations, outraged by a thousand miseries. Physical pain torments it, spiritual pain torments it; and a great darkness of thick, heavy, poisonous obscurity wraps it round like a grave-cloth. Then, in a sudden movement of the will, the soul cries aloud upon love; and in one swift turn of the ultimate wheel, the whole situation is transformed.

The physical pain seems to have no longer any hold upon the soul. The mental misery and trouble falls away from it like an unstrapped load. And a deep, cool, tide — calm and still and full of infinite murmurs — rolls up around it, and pours through it, and brings it healing and peace. The emotion of love in which personality, and therefore in which the universe, finds the secret of its life, has not the remotest connection with sex. Sexual passion has its place in the world'; but it is only when sexual passion merges itself in the sort of love we are now considering that it becomes an instrument of real clairvoyance.

There is a savage instinct of cruel and searching illumination in sexual passion, but such an instinct is directed towards death rather than towards life, because it is dominated, through all its masks and disguises, by the passion of possession.

Like the passion of hate, to which it is so closely allied, sexual passion has a kind of furious intensity which is able to reveal many deep levels of human obliquity. But one thing it cannot reveal, because of the strain of malice it carries with it, and that is the spring of genuine love. "Like unto like" is the key to the situation; and the deeper the clairvoyance of malice digs into the subterranean poison of life, the more poison it finds. For in finding poison it creates poison, and in finding malice it doubles malice.

The great works of art are not motivated by the clairvoyance of malice; they are motivated by the clairvoyance of love. It is only in the inferior levels of art that malice is the dominant note; and even there it is only effective because, mixed with it, there is an element of destructive hatred springing from some perversion of the sexual instinct. Whatever difficulty we may experience in finding words wherewith to define this emotion of love, there is not one of us, however sceptical and malign, who does not recognize it when it appears in the flesh. Malice displays its recognition of it by a passion of furious hatred; but even this hatred cannot last for ever, because in every personality that exists there must be a hidden love which answers to the appeal of love.

The feeling which love has, at its supreme moments, is the feeling of “unity in difference” with all forms of life. Love may concentrate itself with a special concentration upon one person or upon more than one; but what it does when it so concentrates itself is not to make an alliance of “attack and defence” with the person it loves, but to flow outwards, through them and beyond them, until it includes every living thing. Let it not, however, be for a moment supposed that the emotion of love resembles that vague “emotion of humanity” which is able to satisfy itself in its own remote sensationalism without any contact with the baffling and difficult mystery of real flesh and blood.

The emotion of love holds firmly and tightly to the pieces and fragments of humanity which destiny has thrown in its way. It does not ask that these should be different from what they are, except in so far as love inevitably makes them different. It accepts them as its “universe,” even as it accepts, without ascetic dismay, the weakness of the particular “form of humanity” in which it finds *itself* “incarnated.”

By gradual degrees it subdues these weaknesses of the flesh, whether in its own “form” or in the “form” of others; but it is quite contrary to the emotion of love to react against such weaknesses of the flesh with austere or cruel contempt. It is humorously indulgent to them in the form of its own individual “incarnation” and it is tenderly indulgent to them in the form of the “incarnation” of other souls.

The emotion of love does not shrink back into itself because in the confused pell-mell of human life the alien souls which destiny has chosen for its companions do not satisfy, in this detail or the other detail, the desire of its heart. The emotion of love is always centrifugal, always outflowing. It concentrates itself upon this person or the other person, as the unaccountable attractions of likeness and difference dictate or as destiny dictates; but the deepest loyalty of love is always directed to the eternal vision; for in the eternal vision it not only becomes one with all living souls but it also becomes one — though this is a high and difficult mystery — with all the dead that have ever loved and with all the unborn that will ever love. For the apprehension of the eternal vision is at once the supreme creation and the supreme discovery of the soul of man; and not of the soul of man alone, but of all souls, whether of beasts or plants or demi-gods or gods, who fill the unfathomable circle of space.

The secret of this kind of love, when it comes to the matter of human relationships, may perhaps best be expressed in those words of William Blake which imply the difficulty which love finds in overcoming the murderous exactions of the possessive instinct and the cruel clairvoyance of malice. "And throughout all eternity, I forgive you: you forgive me: As our dear Redeemer said — This is the wine: this is the bread."

This "forgiveness" of love does not imply that love, as the old saying runs, is "blind." Love sees deeper than malice; for malice can only recognize its own likeness in everything it approaches. It must be remembered too that this process of laying bare the faults of others is not a pure process of discovery. Like all other forms of apprehension it is also a reproduction of itself. The situation, in fact, is never a static one. These "faults" which malice, in its reproductive "discoveries" lays bare, are not fixed, immobile, dead. They are organic and psychic conditions of a living soul. They are themselves in a perpetual state of change, of growth, of increase, of withering, of fading. They are affected at every moment by the will and by the emotion of the subject of them. They project themselves; they withdraw themselves. They dilate; they diminish. Thus it happens that at the very touch of this "discovering," the malice which is thus "discovered" dilates with immediate reciprocity to meet its "discoverer"; and this can occur — such is the curious telepathic vibration between living things — without any articulate act of consciousness.

The art of psychological investigation is therefore a very dangerous organ of research in the hands of the malicious; for it goes like a reproductive scavenger through the field of human consciousness increasing the evil which it is its purpose to collect. The apostolic definition of "charity" as the thing which "thinketh no evil" is hereby completely justified; and the profound Goethean maxim, that the way to enlarge the capacities of human beings is to "assume" that such capacities are larger than they really are, is justified also.

Malice naturally assumes that the "faults" of people are "static," immobile, and unchanging. It assumes this even in the very act of increasing these faults. For the I static and unchanging is precisely what malice desires and seeks to find; for death is its ideal; and, short of pure nothingness, death is the most static thing we know.

Love is not blind or fooled or deluded when it waives aside the faults of a person and plunges into the unknown depths of such a person's soul. It is not blind, when, in the energy of the creative vision, such faults subside and fall away and cease to exist. It is completely justified in its declaration that what it sees and feels in such a person is a hidden reservoir of unsatisfied good. It does see this; it does feel this; because there arises, in answer to its approach, an upward-flowing wave of its own likeness; because in such a person's inmost soul love, after all, remains the creative impulse which is the life of that soul and the very substance of that soul's personality.

The struggle between the emotion of love and the emotion of malice goes on perpetually, in the depths of life, below a thousand shifting masks and disguises. What we call the “universe” is nothing but a congeries of innumerable “souls,” manifested in innumerable “bodies,” each one confronted by the objective mystery, each one surrounded by an indescribable ethereal “medium.”

What we call the emotion of love is the outflowing of any one of these souls towards the body and soul of any other, or again, in a still wider sense, towards all bodies and souls covered by the unfathomable circle of space.

I will give a concrete example of what I mean. Suppose a man to be seated in the yard of a house with a few patches of grass in front of him and the trunk of a solitary tree. The slanting sunshine, we will suppose, throws the shadows of the leaves of the tree and the shadows of the grass-blades upon a forlorn piece of trodden earth-mould or dusty sand which lies at his feet. Something about the light movement of these shadows and their delicate play upon the ground thrills him with a sudden thrill; and he finds he “loves” this barren piece of earth, these grass-blades, and this tree. He does not only love their outward shape and colour. He loves the “soul” behind them, the “soul” that makes them what they are. He loves the “soul” of the grass, the “soul” of the tree, and that dim, mysterious, far-off “soul” of the planet, of whose “body” this barren patch of earth is a living portion.

What does this “love” of his actually imply? It implies an outflowing of the very stuff and substance of his own towards the thing he loves. It implies, by a mysterious vibration of reciprocity, an indescribable response to his love from the “soul” of the tree, the plant, and the earth. Let an animal enter upon the scene, or a bird, or a windblown butterfly, or a flickering flight of midges or gnats, their small bodies illumined by the sun. These new comers he also loves; and is obscurely conscious that between their “souls” and his own there vibrates a strange reciprocity. Let a human being enter, familiar or unfamiliar, and if his will be set upon “love,” the same phenomenon will repeat itself, only with a more conscious interchange.

But what of "malice" all this time? Well! It is not difficult to indicate what "malice" will seek to do. Malice will seek to find its account in some physical or mental annoyance produced in us by each of these living things. This annoyance, this jerk or jolt to our physical or mental well-being, will be what to ourselves we name the "fault" of the offending object.

The shadows will tease us by their incessant movement. The tree will vex us by the swaying of its branches. The grass will present itself to us as an untidy intruder. The barren patch of earth will fill us with a profound depression owing to its desolate lack of life and beauty. The dog will worry us by its fuss, its solicitation, its desire to be petted. The gnats or midges will stir in us an indignant hostility; since their tribe have been known to poison the blood of man. The human invader, above all; how loud and unpleasing his voice is! The eternal malice in the depths of our soul pounces upon this tendency of grass to be "a common weed," of gnats to bite, of dogs to bark, of shadows to flicker, of a man to have an evil temper, of a woman to have an atrocious shrewishness, or an appalling sluttishness; and out of these annoyances or "faults" it feeds its desire; it satisfies its necrophilistic lust; and it rouses in the grass, in the earth, in the tree, in the dog, in the human intruder, strange and mysterious vibrations of response which add to the general poison of the world. But the example I have selected of the activity of emotion may be carried further than this. All these individual "souls" of human, animal, vegetable, planetary embodiment, are confronted by the same objective mystery and surrounded by the same ethereal "medium."

By projecting a vision poisoned by malice into the matrix of the objective mystery, the resultant "universe" becomes itself a poisoned thing, a thing penetrated by the spirit of evil. It is because the universe is always penetrated by the malice of the various visions whose “universe” it is, that we suffer so cruelly from its ironic “diablerie.” A universe entirely composed of the bodies and souls of beings whose primordial emotion is so largely made up of malice is naturally a malicious universe. The age-old tradition of the witchery and devilry of malignant Nature is a proof as to how deep this impression of the system of things has sunk. Certain great masters of fiction draw the “motive” of their art from this unhappy truth.

And just as the universe is penetrated through and through by the malice of those whose universe it is, so we may suppose that the ethereal “medium” which surrounds all souls, before they have visioned their various “universes” and found them to be one, is a thing which also may be affected by malice. It is an open question and one which, in the words of Sir Thomas Browne, “admits a wide solution,” whether or not this ethereal “medium,” which in a sense is of one stuff both with the objective mystery and with the substratum of the soul, is itself the “elemental body,” as it were, of a living ubiquitous soul.

If this should be the case — and it is no fantastic hypothesis — we are then provided with an explanation of the curious malignant impishness of those so-called “elementals” who tease, with their enigmatic oracles, the minds of unwise dabblers in “psychic manifestations.”

But what we are concerned with noting now is that just as the primordial malice of all the souls it contains continually poisons the universe, so the primordial love of all the souls it contains continually redeems and transforms the universe. In other words it is no exaggeration to say that the unfathomable universe is continually undergoing the same ebb and flow between love and malice, as are the souls and bodies of all the living things whereof it is composed.

And what precisely is the attitude of love towards the physical body? Does it despise the physical body? Does its activity imply an ascetic or a puritanical attitude towards the body and the appetites of the body? The truth is quite the contrary of this. What the revelation of the complex vision indicates is that this loathing of the body, this revulsion against the body, this craving to escape from the body, is a mood which springs up out of the eternal malice. It is from the emotion of love in its attitude to the body that we arrive at the idea of the sacredness of the body and at the idea of what might be called "the eternal reality of the body."

This idea of the eternal reality of the body springs directly from those ideas of truth, beauty and goodness which are pre-existent in the universe and therefore springs directly from that emotion of love which is the synthesis of these.

The forms and shapes of stars and plants and rivers and hills are all realized and consummated in the form and shape of the human body. The magic of the elements, the mystery of earth and air and water and fire, are incarnated in this miracle of flesh and blood. In the countenance of a human child, in the countenance of a man or a woman, the whole unfathomable drama of life is expressed. The most evil of the children of men, asleep or dead, has in his face something more tragic and more beautiful than all the waters and all the land.

Not to "love" flesh and blood, not to will the eternal existence of flesh and blood, is not to know "love" at all. To loathe flesh and blood, to will the annihilation of flesh and blood, is to be a victim of that original "motiveless malignity" which opposes itself to the creative force.

This insistence upon "the eternal idea of the body" does not necessarily limit "the idea of the body" to the idea of the human body; but practically it does so. And it practically does so because the human body evidently incarnates the beauty and the nobility of all other forms and shapes and appearances which make up our existing universe.

There may be other and different bodies in the unfathomable spaces of the world; but for those among us who are content to deal with the actual experiences which we have, the human body, summing up the magical qualities of all other terrestrial forms and shapes, must, as far as we are concerned, remain our permanent standard of truth and beauty.

The substitution in art, in philosophy, and in religion, of other symbols, for this natural and eternal symbol of the human body is always a sign of a weakening of the creative impulse. It is a sign of a relative disintegration of the power of "love" and a relative concentration of the power of "malice." Thus when, by an abuse of the metaphysical reason, "thought-in-the-abstract" assumes the rights of a personality the principle of love is outraged, because the eternal idea of the body is denied.

And when, by an abuse of the psychological reason, the other activities of the soul are so stressed and emphasized that the attribute of sensation is forgotten, the principle of love is outraged, because the eternal idea of the body is denied. The principle of love, by the necessity of its own nature, demands that the physiological aspect of reality should retain its validity.

When, therefore, we come to consider the relation of this "eternal idea of the body" to those invisible "sons of the universe" whose power of love is inconceivably greater than our own, we are compelled, by the necessity of the complex vision, to encounter one of those ultimate dilemmas from which there appears to be no escape. The dilemma to which we are thus led may be defined in the following manner.

Because the secret of the universe and the ultimate harmony between the pre-existent ideas by which all souls must live can be nothing less than what, in this rarified and heightened sense, we have named "love" and because the objective pattern and standard of this love is the creative energy of those personal souls we have named “the sons of the universe,” therefore “the sons of the universe” must be regarded as directing their desire and their will towards what satisfies the inherent nature of such love. And because the inherent nature of such love demands nothing less than the eternalizing of the idea of flesh and blood, therefore the “sons of the universe” must be regarded as directing their desire and their will towards the eternalizing of the idea of flesh and blood.

And just as the will and desire of these “invisible companions of men” must be regarded as directed towards the eternalizing of this idea whose magical “stuff of dreams” is one of the objects of their love, so the will and desire of all living souls must be directed towards the eternalizing of this same reality. And because the love of all living souls remains restless and unsatisfied when directed to any object except the “eternal vision” and because when directed to the “eternal vision” such love loses the misery of its craving and becomes satisfied, therefore the “eternal vision” must be regarded as the only object which can ultimately and really satisfy the eternal restlessness of the love of all living souls.

But the inherent nature of love demands, as we have seen, the permanent reality of the physiological aspect of the universe. That is to say, the inherent desire of the love of all living souls is directed towards the eternalizing of the idea of flesh and blood. From this it follows that since the “eternal vision” satisfies the desire of love “the eternal vision” must include within it the eternal idea of the body.

Both “the sons of the universe,” therefore, and all other living souls are compelled, in so far as they give themselves up to the creative energy, to direct their will towards the eternalization of this idea. But is there not an inevitable frustration and negation of this desire and this will?

Are not both the “companions of men” and men themselves denied by the very nature of things the realization of this idea? Is not the love of man for “the sons of the universe” frustrated in its desire in so far as “the sons of the universe” cannot be embodied in flesh and blood? And is not the love of “the sons of the universe” for man frustrated in its desire in so far as the physical form of each individual soul is destroyed by death?

It seems to me that this dilemma cannot be avoided. Love insists on the eternity of the idea of the body. Therefore every soul who loves “the sons of the universe” desires their incarnation. But if “the sons of the universe” could appear in flesh and blood for the satisfaction of any one of their lovers, all other souls in the wide world would lose them as their invisible companions. But although this dilemma cannot in its literal outlines be avoided, it seems that the same inherent nature of love which leads to this dilemma leads also to the vanishing point or gap or lacuna in thought where the solution, although never actually realized, may conceivably exist.

What love desires is the eternalizing of the idea of flesh and blood. It desires this because the idea of flesh and blood is a necessary aspect of the fulness and completeness of personality. But though the idea of flesh and blood is a necessary aspect of personality, every actual incarnation of personality leaves us aware that the particular soul we love has something more of beauty and nobility than is expressed.

This “something more” is not a mere hypothetical quality but is an actual and real quality which we must assume to exist in the very stuff and texture of the soul. It exists, therefore, in that “vanishing-point of sensation,” as I called it, which we have to think of, although we cannot define it, as constituting the soul’s essential self. Those pre-existed ideas which find their synthesis in the emotion of love are undoubtedly part of the unfathomable universe. But they are this only because they are interwoven with the unfathomable soul which exists in each of us. The “something,” therefore, which is the substratum of the soul and its centre of identity is a thing woven out of the very stuff of these ideas.

This is the “vanishing point of sensation” to which I have referred, the point namely where what we call “mind” blends indissolubly with what we call “matter.” The emotion of love which desires the eternalization of the idea of flesh and blood would be on the way to satisfaction, even if it never altogether reached it, if it were able to feel that this beauty and nobility and reality which exist in this “vanishing point of sensation” which is the very self of the soul were actually the living essence of flesh and blood, were, in fact, a real “spiritual body,” of which the material body was the visible expression.

It is the inherent nature of love itself, with its craving for reality, which leads us to the verge of this conception; and although this conception can never, as we have seen, become more than a “vanishing-point of sensation” we have at least the satisfaction of knowing that if we were able to define the thing more clearly it would cease at once to be the object of love; because it would cease to be that mysterious fusion of “mind” and “matter” which it is the nature of love to crave.

Without the necessity then that these immortal ones whom I call the “sons of the universe” should satisfy the love of human souls by any physical incarnation, they may be considered as leading such love upon the true way by simply being what they are; that is by being living souls. For, as living souls, they also must possess as the centre of their being, a “spiritual body,” or fusion-point of “mind” and “matter,” which is the inner reality of flesh and blood.

This “spiritual body” of “the gods” or the “sons of the universe” must necessarily be more noble and more beautiful than any visible embodiment of them could possibly be; though human imagination and human art have a profound right to attempt to visualize such an impossible embodiment; and the purest and most natural form of “religion” would be the form which struggled most successfully to appropriate such a visualization.

And just as the human soul can satisfy something, though not all, of its desire for the eternalizing of flesh and blood in the “spiritual bodies” of these “invisible companions,” so the gods can themselves satisfy something, though not all, of their love for the individual soul in the reality of the soul’s “spiritual body.”

All this may carry to certain minds an ambiguous and even distasteful association; but I think it will only do so to such minds as are reluctant to analyse, to the furthest limit, their own capacity for the kind of “love” I have attempted to describe; and possibly also such minds as are debarred, by some sub-conscious element of “malice” in them, from even desiring to develop such a capacity.

The ambiguity and unsatisfactory vagueness in what I have been attempting to indicate may perhaps be in a measure dissipated by a direct appeal to concrete experience. When one analyses this emotion of love in relation to any actual human object I think it becomes clear that in our attitude to the physical body of the person we love there is a profound element of pity.

The sexual emotion may destroy this pity; and any emotion which is sensual as well as sexual may not only destroy it but turn it into a very different kind of pity; into the “pity,” namely, of a torturer for his victim. But I feel I am not wrong in my analysis of the kind of “love” I have in my mind, when I say that the element of pity enters profoundly into our attitude towards the body of the person we love.

It enters into it for this reason; namely because the physical body of the person we love does so inadequately and so imperfectedly express the beauty of such a person's soul. "Love is not love" when the blemishes and defects and maladies of the physical form of the person loved interfere with our love and cause it to diminish. And such blemishes and defects and maladies *would* interfere with love if love were not in its essence profoundly penetrated by pity.

It may be asked— "how can love, which is naturally associated with beauty and nobility, endure for a moment in the presence of such lamentable hideousness and repulsiveness and offensiveness, as exists in some degree in the physiological aspects of us all?" It is able to endure because in the presence of this what it desires is, as I have said, not so much the actual physical body of the object of its love as the "eternal idea" of such a body.

When the individual soul allows itself to demand with too desperate a craving the actual incarnation of these "sons of the universe" it is in reality false to its desire for the "eternal idea of the body," because no actual incarnation of these immortal ones could realize in any complete sense this "eternal idea."

In the same way when we feel the emotion of love towards any human soul, our attitude towards the physical form of such a soul must of necessity be profoundly penetrated by pity and by a tender and humorous recognition that such a physical form only expresses a very limited portion of the unfathomable soul which we love.

If, with a desperate craving to contradict the essential nature of love, we insist upon regarding the physical body as the complete expression of the soul, we fall into the same fatal weakness as that into which those fall who demand a physical incarnation of the "companions of men," and along with such as these we are false to love’s true craving for the “eternal idea of flesh and blood.”

In other words, this craving of love for “the eternal idea of the body” does not imply that we are false to love when we are unable to change our natural repugnance in the presence of the repulsive and the offensive into attraction to these things. Love certainly does not mean a morbid attraction to what is unattractive. The sexual emotion, the emotion which we call “being in love,” does sometimes include this morbidity, just because, by reason of its physiological origin, it tends to remain the slave of the physiological. But although love does not imply a morbid attraction to the repulsive and the offensive, and although the presence of the repulsive and offensive in connection with those we love is a proof to us that “the eternal idea of the body,” is not realized in the actual body, it is clear that “love is not love” when it allows itself to be diminished or destroyed by the presence of these things.

What love really demands, both with regard to the universe and with regard to any individual soul in the universe, is not so much the retention of the physiological aspect of these things, *as we know them now,* but of the physiological aspect of them implied in such a phrase as “the eternal idea of matter” or “the eternal idea of flesh and blood.”

It may be put still more simply by saying that what love demands is the existence of something in what we call “matter” or the “body” which guarantees the eternal reality of these aspects of life. It does not demand that we should love the repulsive, the offensive, the false, or the evil, because these exist in the bodies and the souls of those we love.

Everything in the universe partakes of the eternal duality. The hideous, the false and the evil are not confined to what we call “mind” but exist in what we call “matter” also. Consequently love, when in its craving for complete reality it demands “the eternal idea of the body” does not demand that this eternal idea should be realized in any actual body.

When a demand of this kind is made, it is not made by love but by the sexual instinct, and it is invariably doomed to a ghastly disillusion. For it is just this very craving, namely that in some actual human body “the eternal idea of the body” should be realized, that the sweet and terrible madness of sexual love continually implies. But real love, the love which is the supreme synthesis of those ideas which represent the creative power in the ultimate duality, can never be disillusioned.

And it cannot be disillusioned because it is able to see, beneath the chaotic litter and unessential debris of “matter,” the eternal idea of “matter” and because it is able to see, under the lamentable repulsiveness and offensiveness of so much actual flesh and blood, “the eternal idea of flesh and blood.”

Love’s attitude toward this element of litter and chaos in the universe is sometimes an attitude of humorous toleration and sometimes an attitude of destructive fire. Love’s attitude towards the repulsive and the offensive in human souls and bodies is sometimes an attitude of humorous toleration and sometimes an attitude of destructive fire.

But along with this passion of destruction, which is so essential a part of the passion of creation, and along with this humorous indulgence, there necessarily mingles, where human beings are concerned, an element of profound pity. The best concrete example of the mood I am trying to indicate is the emotion which any one would naturally feel in the presence of some torturer or tyrant whom he had slain, or even whom he had surprised asleep. For the prerogative of both sleep and death is that they obliterate the repulsive elements of flesh and blood and set free its eternal idea.

And this is true of death even after the ghastly process of chemical dissolution has actually begun. A loathing of matter as matter, a hatred and contempt for the body as the body, is therefore a manifestation not of love but of the opposite of love. Such a loathing of the physiological is a sign of a weakening of the creative energy. It is also a sign of the stiffening of the resistant "malice," or "motiveless malignity," which opposes creation. What the energy of love directs its desire and its will towards, is first the "eternal idea of the soul," the idea of the rhythmic harmony of "mind" and "matter" fused and lost in one another, and then "the eternal idea of the body," the idea of the rhythmic projection of this invisible harmony upon the visible fabric of the world.

Thus we arrive at the only definition of the nature of love which is satisfactory to the deepest moments of feeling experienced by the human soul. In such moments the soul gathers itself together on the verge and brink of the unknown. Something beyond the power of our will takes possession then of all that we are. In our momentary and transitory movement of the complex vision we are permitted to pass across the ultimate threshold.

We enter then that mysterious rhythm which I have called "The Eternal Vision"; and in place of our desire for personal immortality, in place of our desire for the possession of any person or thing, in place of our contemplation of "forces" and "energies" and "evolution" or "dissolution," in place of our struggle for "existence" or for "power," we become suddenly aware that in the outflowing and reciprocal inter-action of the emotion of love there is something that reduces all these to insignificance, something that out of the very depths of the poisonous misery of the world and the irony of the world and the madness of the world utters its defiant Rabelaisian signal, "Bon espoir y gist au fond."

CHAPTER IX. THE NATURE OF THE GODS

WE MUST NOW return to our original definition of the true philosophical instrument of research in order to see if we can secure from it a clearer notion as to the nature of the Gods. Such an instrument is, as we have seen, the apex-thought of the complex vision using all its attributes in rhythmic unison. For the complex vision using all its attributes in unison is only another name for the soul using the body and using something more than the body.

If the soul could use no attributes except those given to it by the body, it might, or it might not, arrive at the idea of the "sons of the universe." It certainly could not enter into any relation with such immortal beings. But since it has arrived at such a conception "it is impossible for it ever to fall entirely away from what it has reached." For the same unfathomable duality which gave birth to the sons of the universe has given birth to men; and between these two, between the ideal figures who cannot perish and the generations of souls who for ever appear and for ever pass away there is an eternal understanding. And the understanding between these two depends upon the fact that they are both children of the same unfathomable duality.

But this duality which is the cause why the universe is the universe and not something other than the universe, must remain as great a mystery to the souls of the "companions of men" as it is to all the souls in the world who recognize them as their ideal.

We cannot escape the impression that this complex vision of ours, which is our instrument of research and which leaves us in the presence of an unfathomable duality, finds a parallel in the complex vision of the sons of the universe which is their instrument of research and which leaves them also in the presence of an unfathomable duality. We cannot escape from the impression that to these children of the eternal duality the mystery of this duality is as dark as it is to ourselves.

They find themselves struggling to overcome malice with love, even as we find ourselves struggling to overcome malice with love. They find themselves driven to creation and destruction. The complex vision, which is their instrument of research, is baffled in the same way as the complex vision which is our instrument of research.

If, therefore, in our desperate struggle with the unfathomable nature of this duality, we demand why it is that the gods have failed, in spite of their love, to give us any clue to some ultimate reconciliation, the answer must be that such an ultimate reconciliation is as much beyond the reach of their vision as it is beyond the reach of ours. The attainment of such a reconciliation would seem to mean the absolute end of life as we know it and of creation as we know it. Such a reconciliation would seem to mean nothing less than the swallowing up of the universe in unthinkable nothingness.

The truth is that in this ultimate revelation of the complex vision we are confronted with an inevitable triad, or trinity, of primordial aspects. We are compelled to think of a plurality of living souls of which our own is one; of certain ideal companions of all souls whose vision gives to our vision its objective value; and of an external universe which is the creation of this vision.

What the complex vision indicates, therefore, is a system of things which has a monistic aspect, for there is only one space and only one succession of time; a pluralistic aspect, for the system of things gives birth continually to innumerable individual souls; and a dualistic aspect, for the universe itself is created by the struggle between love and malice.

What the complex vision does not indicate is any ultimate principle which reduces this complex system of things to the unbroken mass of one integral unity. The nearest approach to such an unbroken, integral unity is to be found in that indefinable “medium” which makes it possible for the innumerable souls which compose the universe to communicate with one another and with their invisible pre-existent companions. It is only the existence of this indefinable medium which makes it possible for us to speak of a universe at all. For this medium is the objective ground, or basis, so to say, from the midst of which each individual vision creates its own universe, always appealing as it does so to that objective standard or pattern of truth offered by the vision of man’s invisible companions. What we roughly and loosely call “the universe” or “nature” is therefore an accumulated projection or creation of all the souls which exist, held together by this pervading medium which enables them to communicate with one another. In this eternal process of creating the universe by their united visions, all these souls must inevitably appeal, consciously or unconsciously, to the vision of their pre-existent companions.

The best justification which can be offered for the expression *sons* of the universe as applied to these invisible companions is to be found in the inevitable anthropomorphism of all human thought. The breaking point, so to speak, of man’s vision, that ecstasy of comprehension which I call his apex-thought, is the moment which makes him aware of these companions’ existence. And, at this ecstatic moment, all individual souls find their personality deepened to such a point that they feel themselves possessed of the very secret of the ultimate duality, feel themselves to be, in fact, unfathomable personifications of that duality. And their intimation or vision with regard to the gods presents itself to them at that moment as the very nature and true being of the gods. Yet it must be remembered that this intimation is a thing which we reach only by pain and exquisite effort; is a thing, in fact, which is the culminating point of an elaborate and difficult “work of art” requiring a rhythm and a harmony in our nature attained by no easy road.

Since, therefore, the reality of these invisible companions though implied in all our intercourse with one another, is only visualized as actual and authentic when our subjective vision is at its highest point, and since when our subjective vision is at its highest point it conveys the sensation, rightly or wrongly, that what we call our “universe” is *their* universe also, it is not without justification that we use the anthropomorphic expression “the sons of the universe” to describe these invisible companions.

This expression, the sons of the universe, this idea of an objective standard of all ideas, is something that we attain with difficulty and not something that we just pick up as we go along. The “objective,” in this sense, is the supreme attainment of the “subjective.” And although when we have found these companions they become real and actual, we must not forget that, in the long process of escaping from the subjectivity of ourselves into the objectivity of their existence, it was our own subjective vision with the rhythmic ecstasy of its apex-thought which led us to the brink of this discovery. Thus the expression “the sons of the universe” finds its justification. For they are the objective discovery, as well as the objective implication, of all our human and subjective visions. We and they together create the universe and together become the “children” of the world we create.

And although the universe when thus created remains the creation of man, assisted by the gods, it now presents itself to us, in its acquired and attained objectivity, as a pre-existent thing which is rather our parent than our creation. This objective reality of it, with the inevitable implication that it existed before we came on the scene at all, and will exist after we have disappeared from the scene, is a truth towards which our subjective vision has led us, but which, when once we reach it, seems to become independent of our subjective vision.

Here again, therefore, in connection with the universe as in connection with the gods, the creation of our subjectivity is found to be something independent of our subjectivity and something that, all the while, has been implicit in the energy of our subjective vision. And precisely as the subjective vision of man creates the companions of men and then discovers them to be an objective reality, so the subjective vision of man creates the universe and then discovers the universe to be an objective reality. And in both cases this discovering finds its justification in a recognition that the idea of this resultant objectivity was implicit in the subjective energy from the beginning. But the universe once created or discovered, is found to be the eternal manifestation of that ultimate duality which is the essence of our own souls and of the souls of the immortals.

In no other way can we think of the objectivity of the universe; for in no other way can we think of ourselves. And because it is the evocation of that ultimate duality which is the very stuff and texture of our creative vision, the universe becomes naturally the parent of man's invisible companions as it becomes the parent of man himself. And thus are we justified in speaking of these mysterious ones as the "sons of the universe."

It is out of pain and grief that we arrive at the conception of the nature of the gods. "Those who have not eaten their bread with tears, they know them not, the Heavenly Powers!" Pain and sorrow, both physical and mental, seem to soften the porous shell, so to speak, of the human intelligence, seem to throw back certain shutter-like shards or scales with which it protects its malignant ignorance.

It is when our loneliness becomes intolerable, it is when the poisonous teeth of the eternal malice in Nature have us by the throat, it is when our malice rises up, in the miserable torture of hatred, to answer the malice of the system of things, that, out of the depths, we cry to the darkness which surrounds us for some voice or some signal that shall give us an intimation of help. Merely to know that our wretched pain is known to some one besides ourselves is an incredible relief. Merely to know that some sort of superhuman being, even without special preoccupation with human fate, can turn an amused or an indulgent clairvoyance towards our wretchedness, can "note" it with dispassionate sympathy, as we note the hurts of animals or plants, is a sort of consolation. It is a relief to know that what we feel when we are hurt to the breaking-point is not absolutely wasted and lost in the void, but is stored up in an immortal memory along with many other pains of the same kind. That cry, "Only He do know what I do suffer" of the Wessex peasant is a cry natural to the whole human race. It is not that we ask to be confronted and healed by our immortal friend. We ask merely that our sorrows should not be altogether drowned in the abyss as though they had never been. There is a certain outrage about this annihilation of the very memory of pain against which humanity protests.

But it is necessary at this point to beware of the old pathetic fallacy of human thought, the fallacy of assuming that to be true, which we desire to be true. What our complex vision reveals as to the nature of the gods does not satisfy in any obvious or facile manner this bitter need of humanity. If it did so satisfy it, then for some profound and mysterious reason man's own aesthetic sense would revolt against it, would indignantly reject it, as too smooth an answer to life's mystery.

For man’s aesthetic sense seems in some strange way to be in league with a certain inveterate tragedy in things, which no facile optimism can ever cajole or melt.

That the gods are aware of our existence can hardly be doubted. That they feel pity for us, in this or that significant hour, can easily be imagined. That the evil in us draws towards us what is evil in them seems likewise a not unnatural possibility. That the love in us draws towards us the love in them is a thing in complete accordance with our own relation to forms of life lower than ourselves. That even at certain moments the gods may, by a kind of celestial vampirizing, use the bodily senses of men to “fill out,” as it were, what is lacking in their own materiality, is a conceivable speculation.

But it is not in any definite relation between the individual soul of man and the individual soul of any one of the immortals that our hope lies. If this were all that we could look for, our condition would be as miserable as the condition of those unhappy ones who seek intermittent and fantastic relief in attempted intercourse with the psychic and the occult.

Our hope lies in that immemorial and traditional human gesture which has, in the unique figure of Christ, gathered up and focused, as it were, all the vague and floating intimations of super-human sympathy, all the shadowy rumours and intimations of super-human help, which move to and fro in the background of our apprehension.

The figure of Christ has thus become something more than a mere name arbitrarily given by us to some nameless god. The figure of Christ has become a symbol, an intermediary, a kind of cosmic high-priest, standing between all that is mortal and all that is immortal in the world, and by means of the love and pity that is in him partaking of the nature of every living thing.

When, therefore, out of the bitterness of our fate we cry aloud upon the Unknown, the answer to our cry comes from the heart of Christ. In other words it comes from the epitome and personification of all the love in the universe. For to the figure of Christ has been brought, down the long ages of the world, all the baffled, thwarted, broken, unsatisfied love in every soul that has ever lived. It is in the heart of Christ that all the nameless sorrows and miseries, of the innumerable lives that Nature gives birth to, are stored up and remembered. Not one single pang, felt by plant or animal or bird or fish or man or planet, but is embalmed for ever in that mysterious storehouse of the universal pity. Thus, if there were no other superhuman Beings in the world and if apart from the creative energy of all souls Christ would never have existed, as it is now He *does* exist because He *has* been created by the creative power of all souls.

But while in one sense the figure of Christ is the supreme work of art of the world, the culminating achievement of the anonymous creative energy of all souls, the turning of the transitory into the eternal, of the mortal into the immortal, of the human into the divine; in another sense the figure of Christ is a real and living personality, the one personality among the gods, whose nature we may indeed assume that we understand and know.

How should we not understand it, when it has been in so large a measure created by our sorrow and our desire?

But the fact that the anonymous striving of humanity with the objective mystery has in a sense created the figure of Christ does not reduce the figure of Christ to a mere Ideal. As we have seen with regard to the primordial ideas of truth, beauty, and goodness, nothing can be an Ideal which has not already, in the eternal system of things, existed as a reality.

What we call the pursuit of truth, or the creation of truth, what we call the pursuit of beauty or the creation of beauty, is always a *return* to something which has been latent in the eternal nature of the system of things. In other words, in all creation there is a rediscovery, just as in all discovery there is creation.

The figure of Christ, therefore, the everlasting intermediary between mortality and immortality, has been at once created and discovered by humanity. When any living soul approaches the figure of Christ, or cries aloud upon Christ out of the depths of its misery, it cries aloud upon all the love that has ever existed in the world. It enters at such a moment into definite communion with all the suffering of all the dead and with all the suffering of all the unborn.

For in the heart of Christ all the dead are gathered up into immortality, and all their pain remembered. In the heart of Christ all the unborn live already, in their pain and in their joy; for such pain and such joy are latent in the ultimate duality of love and malice, and in the heart of Christ this ultimate duality struggles with such terrible concentration that all the antagonisms which the procession of time evokes, all the "moments" of this abysmal drama, in the past, in the present, in the future, are summed up and comprehended in what that heart feels.

The ancient human doctrine of "vicarious suffering," the doctrine that upon the person of Christ all the sins and sorrows of the world are laid, is not a mere logical conclusion of a certain set of theological axioms; but is a real and true secret of life, discovered by our most intimate experience.

The profoundest of all the oracles, uttered out of the depths, is that saying of Jesus about the "losing" of life to "save" it. This "losing of life" for Christ's sake is that ultimate act of the will by which the lusts of the flesh, the pride of life, the possessive instinct, the hatred of the body, the malice which resists creation, the power of pride, are all renounced, in order that the soul may enter into that supreme vision of Christ, wherein by a mysterious movement of sympathy, all the struggles of all living things are comprehended and shared.

Thus it is true to say that the object of life for all living souls is the eternal vision. Towards the attainment of the eternal vision the love in all living souls perpetually struggles; and against the attainment of the eternal vision the malice in all living souls perpetually struggles. We arrive, therefore, at the only adequate conception of the nature of the gods which the complex vision permits us.

The nature of the gods, or of the immortals, or, as I have preferred to call them, the sons of the universe, is a nature which corresponds to our nature, even as our nature corresponds to the nature of animals or of plants. The ultimate duality is embodied in the nature of the gods more richly, more beautifully, more terribly, in a more dramatic and articulate concentration, than it is embodied in our nature. Between us and the gods there must be a reciprocal vibration, as there is a reciprocal vibration between us and plants and beasts and oceans and hills. The precise nature of such reciprocity may well be left a matter for vague and unphilosophical speculation; because the important aspect of it, in regard to the mystery of life and the object of life, is not the method or manner of its functioning but the issue and the result of its functioning. And this issue and result of the reciprocity between mortal and immortal, between man and his invisible companions, is the eternal vision which they both share, the vision in which love attains its object.

And the eternal vision, which was, and is, and is to come, is the vision in which Christ, the Intermediary between the transitory and the permanent, contemplates the spectacle of the unfathomable world; and is able to endure that spectacle, by reason of the creative power of love.

CHAPTER X. THE FIGURE OF CHRIST

IN CONSIDERING THE figure of that great Intermediary between mortality and immortality whom we have come to name Christ, the question arises, in view of the historic existence of other world-saviours, such as the Indian Buddha, whether it would not be better to invent, out of our arbitrary fancy, some completely new symbol for the eternal vision which should be entirely free from those merely geographical associations which have limited the acceptance of this Figure to so much less than one-half of the inhabitants of our planet.

The question arises — can there be invented any concrete, tangible symbol which shall appeal to every attribute of the complex vision and be an accumulated image of that side of the unfathomable duality from which we draw our ideas of truth, beauty, and goodness?

For the complex vision itself I have projected my own arbitrary image of an arrow-head of many concentrated flames; but when we approach a matter as important as the choice of a symbolic image for the expression of the ultimate synthesis of the good as contrasted with the evil something very different from a mere subjective fancy is required.

If it were possible for me, the present writer, to give myself up so completely to the creative spirit as to become suddenly inspired with the true idea of such a symbolic image, even then my image would remain detached, remote and individualistic. If it were possible for me to gather up, as it were, and to bring into focus all the symbolic images used by all the supreme prophets and artists and poets of the world, my synthetic symbol, including all these different symbols, would still remain remote and distant from the feelings and experiences of the mass of humanity.

But the ideas of truth, beauty, goodness, together with that emotion of love which is their synthesis, are not confined to the great artists and prophets of the world. They are felt and experienced by the common mass of humanity. They have indeed an even wider scope than this, since they exist in the depths of the souls of the sons of the universe, and in the depths of that unfathomable universe whose objective reality depends upon their energy. They have the widest scope which it is possible for the complex vision to grasp. Wherever time and space are, they are; and, as we have seen, time and space make up the ultimate unity within whose limits the drama of life proceeds.

Although the universe depends for its objective reality upon the vision of the immortals and incidentally upon all the visions of all the souls born into the world, it is not true to say that either the vision of the immortals or the visions of all souls, or even both of these together, exhaust the possibilities of the universe and sound the depths of its unfathomableness. The complex vision of man stops at a certain point; but the unfathomable nature of the universe goes on beyond that point. The complex vision, of the immortals stops at a definite point; but the unfathomable nature of the universe goes on beyond that point.

If it be asked, “how can it be said that an universe, which depends for its objective reality upon the complex vision, goes on beyond the point where the complex vision stops?” I would answer that the complex vision does not only create reality; it discovers reality. There is always the primordial objective mystery outside the complex vision; that objective mystery, or world-stuff, or world-clay, out of which, in its process of half-creation and half-discovery, the complex vision evokes the universe.

And although apart from the activity of the complex vision this primordial world-clay or objective mystery is almost nothing because it is only of its bare existence that we are aware, yet it is not altogether nothing, because it is, in a sense, the origin of everything we discover. When, therefore, we speak of the unfathomable as receding into depths beyond the point where the vision of man stops and beyond the point where the vision of the immortals stops, we do not contradict the statement that the vision of man and the vision of the immortals create the universe. They create the universe in so far as they discover the universe; but the universe must be thought of as always capable of being further discovered and further created. Perhaps the most adequate way of putting the situation would be to image the objective mystery as a kind of colourless screen across which a coloured picture is slowly moved. This coloured picture is the universe as we know it. Without the white screen as a background there could be no picture. All the colours of the picture are latent and potential in the whiteness of the screen; but they require the focussed lime-light of the magic-lantern to call them forth. The lantern from which the light comes, half-creates, so to speak, and half-discovers the resultant colours.

When we say, therefore, that the universe, although created by the complex vision, recedes into unfathomable depths beyond the reach of the complex vision, what we mean is that the boundary line between the moving colour-picture, which is the universe, and the original whiteness of the screen across which the picture is moved, which is the objective mystery, is capable of endless recession. The blank whiteness of the part of the screen over which the picture has not yet moved is capable of revealing every kind of colour as soon as the focussed lime-light of the complex vision reaches it. The colours are in the whiteness of the screen as well as in the lime-light which is thrown upon the screen; but neither the lantern which throws the light nor the screen upon which the light is thrown, can, in isolation from one another, produce colour.

The universe, therefore, is half-created and half-discovered by the complex vision; and it may be said to go on beyond the point where the complex vision stops, although strictly speaking what goes on beyond the stopping place of the complex vision is not the universe as we know it but a potential universe as we may come to know it; a universe, in fact, which is at present held in suspense in the unfathomable depths of the objective mystery.

This potential universe, this universe which will come into existence as soon as the complex vision discovers it and creates it, this universe across which gathers already the moving shadow of the complex vision, is not a new universe but only an extension into a further depth of the objective mystery, of the universe which we already know.

We are not justified in saying of this objective mystery or of this white screen across which the colours will presently flow, that it is outside time and space. We are not justified in saying anything at all about it, except that it exists and that it lends itself to the advance of the complex vision. If in place of a white screen we could figure to ourselves this objective mystery as a mass of impenetrable darkness, we should thus be able to envisage the complex vision as I have tried to envisage it, namely as a moving arrow-head of focussed flames with the point of it, or what I have named the apex-thought of it, illuminating that mass of darkness with all the colours of life.

But, as I have said, none of these subjective images can serve as the sort of symbol we are in search of, because by reason of their being arbitrary and individualistic they lack the organic and magical associations which cling round such symbols as have become objective and historical. We can content ourselves with such fanciful symbols as white screens and arrow-heads and pyramids of fire in regard to the organ of our research and the original protoplasmic stuff out of which this organ of research creates the world; but when it comes to the purpose of life and the meaning of life, when it comes to that unfathomable duality which is the essence of life, we require for our symbol something that has already gathered about it the whole desperate stream of life's tears and blood and dreams and ecstasies and memories and hopes.

We can find no symbol for the adversary of life, no symbol for the malignant obscurantism and the sneering malice that resist creation. To endow this thing which is in the way, this unfathomable depth of spiritual evil, with the vivid and imaginative life of a symbolic image would be to change its inherent nature. No adequate symbol can be found for evil, any more than a complete embodiment can be found for evil. Directly evil becomes personal it ceases to be evil, because personality is the supreme achievement of life. And directly evil is expressed in a living, objective, historic, mythological image it ceases to be evil, because such an image instantaneously gathers to itself some potency of creative energy. Evil is a positive thing, a spiritual thing, an eternal thing; but it is positive only in its opposition to creation, in its corruption of the soul, and in its subtle undermining of the divine moments of the soul by the power of eternal dreariness and disillusion.

What we need above everything is a symbolic image which shall represent the creative energy of life, the creative power of love, and those eternal ideas of truth and beauty and nobility which seem in some mysterious way derogated from, rendered less formidable and unfathomable, by being named “the good.”

The desire for a symbol of this kind, which shall gather together all the tribes and nations of men and all conflicting ideals of humanity, is a desire so deep and universal as to be perhaps the supreme desire of the human race. No symbol arbitrarily invented by any one man, even though he were the greatest genius that ever lived, could supply this want or satisfy this desire. And it could not do so because it would lack the organic weathering and bleaching, so to speak, of the long panorama of time. An individual genius might hit upon a better symbolic image, an image more comprehensive, more inclusive, more appealing to the entire nature of the complex vision; but without having been subjected to the sun and rain of actual human experience, without having endured the passion of the passing of the generations, such an image would remain, for all its appropriateness, remote, intellectual and barren of magical suggestiveness.

I do not mean to indicate that there is necessarily any determined or fatalistic process of natural selection in these things by which one symbol rather than another gathers about it the hopes and fears of the generations. Chance no doubt plays a strange part in all this. But the concrete necessities of living human souls play a greater part than chance; and without believing in any steady evolutionary process or even in any law of natural selection among the evocations of human desire, it must still remain that the symbol which survives will be the symbol adapted to the deepest instincts of complicated souls and at the same time palpable and tangible to the touch of the crudest and most simple.

It cannot be denied that there are serious difficulties in the way of the acceptance of any historic symbol, the anonymous evocation of the generations of men. Just because it has a definite place in history such a symbol will necessarily have gathered to itself much that is false and much that is accidental and unessential. It will have entered into bitter controversies. It will have been hardened and narrowed by the ferocious logic of rationalistic definition. It will have been made the rallying cry of savage intolerances and the mask for strange perversions. Evil will naturally have attached itself to it and malice will have left its sinister stain upon it. Because chance and accident and even evil have had much to do with its survival, it may easily happen that some primary attribute of the complex vision, such for instance as the aesthetic sense with its innate awareness of the humorous and the grotesque, will have been forgotten altogether in the stuff out of which it is made.

Considering such things, considering above all this final fact that it may not satisfy every attribute of the complex vision, and may even completely suppress and negate some essential attribute, it remains still a perilous question whether it were not, after all, better to invent a new symbol that shall be deliberately adapted to the entire complex vision, than to accept an already existing symbol, which in the shocks and jolts and casualties, of history has been narrowed, limited and stiffened by the malice of attack and defence.

This narrowing and hardening process by which such a symbol, the anonymous creation of humanity under the shocks of circumstance, becomes limited and inadequate, is a process frequently assisted by those premature and violent syntheses of the ultimate contradiction which we name dogmatic religions. To make such a symbol once more fluid and flexible, to restore it to its place in the organic life of the soul, it is necessary to extricate it from the clutch of any dogmatic religion. I do not say that it is necessary to extricate it from religion, or even from every aspect of dogma; for it is of the very essence of such symbol to be a stimulus to the religious ecstasy and there are many dogmas which are full of imaginative poetry.

But it is necessary to extricate it from dogmatic religion because dogmatic religion may be defined as a premature metaphysical synthesis, masquerading beneath a system of imaginative ritual. The truth of religion is in its ritual and the truth of dogma is in its poetry. Where a dogmatic religion becomes dangerous to any human symbol is when it tries to rationalize it and interpret it according to a premature metaphysical synthesis. In so far as it remains purely symbolic and does not attempt to rationalize its symbolism, a dogmatic religion must always contain within the circle of its creed many profound and illuminating secrets. The false and ephemeral portion of a dogmatic religion is its metaphysical aspect, because the whole science of metaphysics is an ambiguity from the start, since it is a projection of one isolated attribute of the complex vision.

What the apex-thought of the complex vision does is to undermine metaphysic; not by the use of metaphysic but by the use of the rhythmic totality of all the attributes of the soul. The philosophy of the complex vision has its metaphysical, as it has its psychological and its physiological aspect, but its real starting point must transcend all these, because it must emanate from personality. And personality is something super-metaphysical; as it is something super-psychological, and super-physiological.

The creed of a dogmatic religion is not to be condemned because it calls upon us to believe the impossible. Some sort of belief in the impossible, some primordial act of faith is an essential part of the process of life and, without it, life could not continue. It is where dogmatic religion attempts to justify its belief in the impossible by the use of metaphysical reason that we must regard it as an enemy of the truth of its own symbolism.

The supreme example of the evil and dangerous influence of metaphysic upon religion is to be found in connection with that inscrutable nothingness behind the universe, and also behind the objective mystery out of which the soul creates the universe. I refer to that ambiguous and unbeautiful phantom, which has acquired for itself the name of “the absolute,” or the parent or first cause of life.

That the conception of “the sons of the universe,” to which certain basic facts and experiences in regard to the intercourse between living human souls has led humanity, is not a metaphysical conception, is proved by the fact that it is a conception of a reality existing inside and not outside the ultimate unity of time and space. Any pure metaphysical conception must, as we have seen, remain outside the categories of time and space, and remaining there bear perpetual witness to its essential unreality.

The sons of the universe are living personal souls; and being this, they must be, as all personalities are, super-metaphysical, super-psychological, and super-physiological.

The perilous choice between the invention of an arbitrary symbol which shall represent in its full complexity this idea of the sons of the universe, and the acceptance of a symbol already supplied by that chaotic mixture of accident and human purpose which we call history is a choice upon which more than we can imagine or surmise may ultimately depend. It is necessary in all matters of this kind, wherein the rhythmic totality of the complex vision is involved, to remain rigorous in our suppression of any particular usurpation of the whole field by any isolated attribute of the soul. It is a most evil usurpation, for instance, an usurpation of which the sinister history of dogmatic religion is full, when the conscience is allowed to introduce the conception of a “duty,” of an “ought,” of a “categorical” imperative, into such a choice as this. There is no ought in philosophy. There is no ought in faith. And there can be, in no possible way, any ought of the usurping conscience, in regard to this choice of an appropriate symbol which shall represent a thing so entirely beyond the conception of any single attribute, as this eternal protagonist of the ultimate struggle. The risk of choosing for our symbol a mere arbitrary invention is that it should remain thin and cold and unappealing.

The risk of choosing for our symbol a form, a figure, a gesture, a name, offered us by history, is that it should carry with it too many of the false accretions of accident, chance, the passions of controversy and the hypocrisies of malice. But after all the anonymous creative spirit of the generations is so full of the wisdom of the earth and so involved with the rhythmic inspiration of innumerable souls, that it would seem better to risk the presence of certain sinister accretions, than to risk the loss of so much magical suggestiveness.

If we do select for our symbol such a form, such a shape, such a gesture and such a name, as history may offer, we shall at any rate be always free to keep it fluid and malleable and organic. We shall be free to plunge it, so to speak, again and again into the living reality which it has been selected to represent. We shall be free to extricate it completely from all its accretions of chance and circumstance and material events. We shall be free to extricate it from all premature metaphysical syntheses. We shall be free to draw it from the clutches of dogmatic religion. We shall be free to make it, as all such symbols should be made, poetical and mythological and, in the aesthetic sense, shamelessly anthropomorphic. Above all we shall be completely free, since it represents for us those sons of the universe who are the embodiment of the creative energy, to associate it with every aspect of the life of the soul. We shall be free to associate it with those aspects of the soul which in the process of its slow invention by the generations have, it may be, been disassociated from it and separated from it. We shall be free to use it as a symbol for the fuller, complete life of the future, and for every kind of revolt, into which the spirit of creation may drive us, against the evil obscurantism and malicious inertness which resist the power of love. The conclusion to which we are thus led, the choice which we are thus compelled to make, is one that has been anticipated from the beginning. No other name except the name of Christ, no other figure except the figure of Christ, can possibly serve, if we are to make any use of history at all, as our symbol for the sons of the universe.

The choice of Christ as our symbol for these invisible companions does not imply that we are forced to accept in their entirety the scriptural accounts of the life of Jesus, or even that we are forced to assume that the historic Jesus ever lived at all. The desire which the soul experiences for the incarnation of Christ does not prove that Christ has already been incarnated, or ever will be incarnated. And it does not prove this because, in the greater, nobler, and more spiritual moods of the soul, there is no need for the incarnation of Christ. In these rare and indescribable moments, when the past and future seem annihilated and we experience the sensation of eternity, Christ is felt to be so close to us that no material incarnation could make him any closer.

The association of Christ with the figure of Jesus is a sublime accident which has had more influence upon the human soul than any other historic event; and it must be confessed that the idea of Christ has been profoundly affected by this association. It has been so deepened and enlarged and clarified by it that the substitution of the religion of Jesus for the religion of Christ has been an almost entirely fortunate event, since it has furnished the soul with a criterion of the true nature of love which otherwise it might never have gained.

Jesus undoubtedly came so much nearer than any other to the understanding of the nature of love, and consequently of the nature of “the immortals,” that the idea of the incarnation — that beautiful concession to the weakness of the flesh — emanated with an almost inevitable naturalness from their association. Jesus himself felt in his own soul the presence of the invisible companions; although he was led, by reason of his peculiar religious bent, and by reason of the influences that surrounded him, to speak of these companions as a "heavenly father."

But the words of Jesus which carry with them the very magic of truth are not the words in which he speaks of his "father," but the words in which he speaks of himself as if he were the very incarnation of Love itself. There is no doubt that the sons of the universe found in Jesus a soul so uniquely harmonious with their own that there existed between them a sympathy and an understanding without parallel in the history of humanity.

It is this sympathy which is the origin of those unequalled words used by the son of Mary in which he speaks as if he were himself in very truth an incarnation of the vision of the immortals. The whole situation is one which need have little mystery for those who understand the nature of love. In moment after moment of supreme ecstasy Jesus felt himself so given up to the will of the invisible companions that this own identity became lost. In speaking for himself he spoke for them; in suffering for himself he suffered for them, and in the great hours of his tragic wayfaring he felt himself so close to them that, by reason of his love, he knew himself able to speak of the secret of life even as the immortals themselves would speak.

We are permitted indeed in reading the divine narrative to distinguish between two moods in the soul of Jesus. In one of these moods he refers to his "father" as if his father were distinct and separate from him and even very distant. In the other mood he speaks as if he himself were in very truth a god; and were able, without any appeal to any other authority, to heal the wounds of the world and to reveal to mankind the infinite pity of the love which is beyond analysis.

It is towards the words and gestures of the son of Mary, when he spoke of himself rather than of his "father" that we are inevitably drawn, in our search for an adequate symbol for the eternal vision. It is when he speaks with authority as if he himself were an immortal god, as if he himself were one of the invisible companions, that his words and gestures carry the very breath and fragrance of truth.

As the drama of his life unfolds itself before us we seem to grow more and more aware of these two aspects of his soul. It was his reason, brooding upon the traditions of his race, that led him into that confusion of the invisible witnesses with the jealous tribal God of his father David. It was the rhythmic harmony of his soul, rising up out of the depths of his struggle with himself, that led him, in his passionate submission to the will of his invisible friends, to feel as if he were identical with those friends, as if he were himself the "son of man" and the incarnation of man's supreme hope.

It is the emphasis laid by Jesus upon his identity with his "father" which has produced the tragic results we know. For although this was the personal conception of the noblest of all human souls, it remains a proof of how much even the soul of Jesus was limited and restricted by the malicious power which opposes itself to love.

The living companions of men are as we have seen a necessary answer to the craving of the complex vision for some objective standard of beauty and reality, which shall give these things an eternal unity and purpose. Such a vision is an answer to our desire that the spirit of creative love, which is one side of the unfathomable duality, should be embodied in personality.

And we have a right to use the name of Christ in this sense; and to associate it with all that immortal anonymous company, so beautiful, so pitiful, so terrible, which the name of "*the gods*" has, in its turbulent and dramatic history, gathered about itself.

The idea of Christ is older than the life of Jesus; nor does the life of Jesus, as it has come down to us in ecclesiastical tradition, exhaust or fulfil all the potentialities latent in the idea of Christ. What the complex vision seems to demand is that the invisible companions of men should be regarded as immortal gods. If, therefore, we throw all hesitancy and scruple aside and risk the application of the name of Christ to this vision of the sons of the universe, then we shall be compelled to regard Christ as an immortal God.

The fact that there must be some objective standard which shall satisfy all the passionate demands of the complex vision is the path by which we reach this conception of Christ. But once having reached him he ceases to be a mere conception of the intellect, and becomes an objective reality which we can touch and appeal to with our emotion, our imagination, and our aesthetic sense. But although Christ as our symbolic image of the invisible companions, must be assumed to be the objective standard of all our ideas of truth, it is obvious that we cannot escape from subjectivity in our individual interpretation of his deeper and truer vision.

Thus there are two parallel streams of growth and change. There is growth and change in the soul of Christ as he continually approximates nearer and nearer to his eternally receding ideal. And there is growth and change in the accumulated harmony of our individual ideas about his ideal, as each human soul and each generation of human souls restates this ideal in terms of its own limited vision.

Each new restatement of this accumulated interpretation of the ideal of the son of man brings necessarily with it an innate conviction of its truth because it finds an immediate response in every individual soul in so far as such individual souls are able to overcome their intrinsic evil or malice.

What Jesus did for the universe was to recognize in it the peculiar nature of that love which is its essential life. He would have done yet more for it had he been able to disassociate his vision from the conception of an imaginary father of the universe and from his traditional interest in the tribal god of his ancestors. But Jesus remains the one human soul who has revealed to us in his own subjective vision the essential secret of the vision of the immortals. And that he has done so is proved by the fact that all his words and actions have come to be inextricably associated with the Christ-idea.

In this way Jesus remains the profoundest of all human philosophers and the subtlest of all human psychologists; and although we have the right to disassociate the Christ-idea from the sublime illusion of Jesus which led him to confuse the invisible companions of humanity with the tribal God of the Hebrews, we are compelled to recognize that Jesus has done so much for humanity by the depth of his psychological insight that we do not experience any shock when in the ritual of the Church the name of the son of David becomes identical with the name of Christ.

The essential thing to establish is that there are greater depths in the Christ-idea than even Jesus was able to fathom; and that compared with the soul of Jesus or with the soul of any other man or god or spiritual entity, the figure of Christ has come now at last to be for humanity the only god we need; for he is the only god whose love for all living things is beyond question and dispute, and whose existence is assumed and implied when any soul in the universe loves any other soul.

It is necessary then to do two things. To accept without reserve the vision which Jesus had as to the secret of love; because to nothing less than this does the love which we possess in our own souls respond. And in the second place to be merciless and drastic, even at the risk of pain to the weakness of our human flesh, in separating the personality of Christ, the immortal god, from the historic figure of the traditional Jesus. By doing these two things, and by this alone, we establish what the complex vision desires, upon a firm ground. For we retain what the vision of Jesus has revealed to us as to the inherent nature of the invisible companions and we are saved from all controversy as to the historic reality of the life of Jesus.

It does not matter to us whether Jesus “really lived”; or whether, like other great figures, his personality has been created by the anonymous instinct of humanity. What matters to us is that humanity itself, using the vision of Jesus as its organ of research or as the focus point of its own passionate clairvoyance has in some way or another recognized that the secret of the universe is to be found in the unfathomable duality of love and malice. From this point, now it has been once reached, the intrinsic nature of all human souls makes sure that humanity cannot go back. And it is because, either by his own sublime insight or by the accident and chance of history, the figure of Jesus has become associated with the reality of the immortal gods that we are justified in using for our symbol of these sons of the universe no other name than the name of Christ.

We shall, however, be doing wrong to our conception of Christ, if, while recognizing that the kind of love, of which Jesus revealed the secret, is the essence of Christ’s soul, we refuse to find in him also many aspects and attributes of life which occupy but little place or no place at all in the traditional figure of Jesus.

All that is most beautiful and profound, all that is most magical and subtle, in the gods of the ancient world, must be recognized as existent in the soul of Christ who is our true “Son of the Morning.” The earth-magic of the ancient gods must be in him; and the Titanic spirit which revolted against such gods must be in him also. The mystery of the elements must be interwoven with the very stuff of his being and the unfathomable depths of Nature must be a path for his feet. In him all mythologies and all religions must meet and be transcended. He is Prometheus and Dionysus. He is Osiris and Balder. He is the great god Pan. “All that we have been, all that we are, and all that we hope to be, is centred in him alone.” His spirit is the creative spirit which moves for ever upon the face of the waters. In him all living souls find the object of their love. Against him the unfathomable power of evil struggles with eternal demonic malice. In his own soul it struggles against him; and in the universe which confronts him it struggles against him. His inmost being is made up of the duality of this struggle even as is the inmost being of all that exists. If it were not for the presence of evil in him his passion of love would be as nothing. For without evil there can be no good, and without malice there cannot be love. His soul and our human souls remain the ultimate reality. These alone are concrete, definite, actual and personal. All except these is ambiguous, half-real and unstable as water. These and the universe which they create are the true truth; and compared with these every other “truth” is dubious, shadowy and unsubstantial.

These are the true truth, because these are personal; and we know nothing in life, and can know nothing, with the interior completeness with which we know personality. And the essence of that interior knowledge with which we know personality is our recognition of the unfathomable duality within ourselves. We cannot imagine the good in us as existing without the evil in us; and we cannot imagine the evil in us as existing without the good in us.

And this ultimate essence of reality must apply to the soul of Christ. And this duality has no reconciliation except the reconciliation that it is a duality in ourselves and a duality in him. For both the good and the evil in us recede into unfathomable depths. So that the ultimate reality of the universe is to be found in the two eternal emotions which perpetually contradict and oppose one another; of which the only unity and reconciliation is to be found in the fact that they both belong to every separate soul; and are the motive power which brings the universe into existence; and in bringing the universe into existence find themselves under the domination of time and space.

Every individual soul in the world is composed of two unfathomable abysses. From the limitless depths of each of these emanates an emotion which is able to obsess and preoccupy the whole field of consciousness. Every individual soul has depths, therefore, which descend into unfathomable recesses; and we are forced into the conclusion that the unfathomable recesses in the soul of Christ are subject to the same eternal duality as the souls of men.

Every movement of thought implies an evocation of the opposing passion of these two emotions. For no movement of thought can take place without the activity of the complex vision; and since one of the basic attributes of the complex vision is divided into these two primary emotions, we are compelled to conclude that it is impossible to think any thought at all without some evocation of the emotion of love and some evocation of the emotion of malice.

The emotion of love is the power that brings together and synthesizes those eternal ideas of truth and beauty and nobility which find their objective standard in the soul of Christ. The emotion of malice is the power that brings together and synthesizes and harmonizes those eternal ideas of unreality and hideousness and evil with which the love of Christ struggles desperately in the unfathomable depths of his soul. It matters to us little or nothing that we have no name to give to any among the gods except to this god; for in this god, in this companion of men, in this immortal helper, the complex vision of man finds all it needs, the embodiment of Love itself.

We arrive, therefore, at the very symbol we desire, at the symbol which in tangible and creative power satisfies the needs of the soul. We owe this symbol to nothing less than the free gift of the gods themselves; and to the anonymous strivings of the generations. And once having reached this symbol, this name of Christ, the same phenomenon occurs as occurs in the establishment of the real existence of the external universe. *That,* like this, was at first only a daring hypothesis, only a supreme act of faith, reached by the subjective effort of the innumerable individual souls. But once having been reached, it became, as this has become, a definite objective fact, whose reality turns out to have been implicit from the beginning.

Thus the name, the word, which we arrive at as the only possible symbol of our hope is found to be, as soon as we reach it, no longer merely a symbol but the outward sign of an invisible and eternal truth. And thus although it remains that we are forced to recognize that the world is full of gods and that the Person we name Christ is only one of an innumerable company of invisible companions to whom in our loneliness we have a right to turn, yet just because the vision of humanity has found in Christ a completer, subtler, more beautiful, more revolutionary figure upon which to fix its hope than it has found in Buddha or Confucius or Mahomet, or any other name, the figure of Christ has become the supreme and solitary embodiment of the Ideal to which we look, and about this figure has come to gather itself and focus itself all the hopeless longing with which the soul of man turns to the souls of the immortals.

These divine people of the abyss, these sons of the universe, are for us henceforth and must be now for us for ever summed up and embodied in this one figure, the only one among them all whose nature and being has been drawn so near to us that we can appropriate it to ourselves.

It remains that the unity of time and space contains an immeasurable company of immortals; but of these immortals only one has been articulated and outlined, and so to speak "touched with the hand," by the troubled passion of humanity. Henceforth, therefore, while the necessity of the complex vision compels us to think of the invisible company of the sons of the universe as a vast hierarchy of supernatural beings, the necessity of the complex vision compels us also to recognize, that of this company, only one — only one until the end of time — can be the true symbol of what our heart desires.

It is better to think of the evocation of this figure as due to the pity of the gods themselves and to the anonymous craving of humanity than to think of him as dependent upon the historic evidence as to the personality of Jesus. The soul requires something more certain than historic evidence upon which to base its faith. It requires something closer and more certain even than the divine "logoi" attributed to the historic Jesus. It requires a living and a personal soul for ever present to the depths of its own nature. It requires a living and a personal soul for ever ready to answer the cry of its love. The misery and unhappiness, the restlessness and pain of all our human "loves," is due to the fact that the only eternal response to Love as it beats its hands against the barriers set up against it, is the embodiment of Love itself as we feel it present with us in the figure of Christ.

The love which draws two human souls together can only become eternal and indestructible when it passes beyond the love of the two for one another into the love of both of them for the Lover who is immortal. This merging of the love of human lovers into the love of the immortal Lover does not imply the lessening or diminishing of the love which draws them together. The nature of this love cries out against their separation, cries out that they two shall become one. And yet if they actually and in very truth became one, that unity in difference which is the very essence of love would be destroyed. But though they know this well enough there still remains the desperate craving of the two that they should become one; and this is of the very nature of love itself. Thus it may be seen that the only path by which human lovers can be satisfied is by merging their love for one another into their love for Christ. In this way, in a sense profounder than mortal flesh can know, they actually do become one. They become so completely one that no power on earth or above the earth can ever separate them. For they are bound together by no mortal link but by the eternal love of a soul beyond the reach of death. Thus when one of them comes to die the love which was of the essence of that soul lives on in the soul of Christ; and when both of them are dead it can never be as though their love had not been, for in the eternal memory of Christ their love lives on, increasing the love of Christ for others like themselves and continually drawing the transitory and the mortal nearer to the eternal and the immortal.

It therefore becomes evident why it is that the vision of the invisible companions which remains our standard of reality and of beauty is not broken up into innumerable subjective visions but is fixed and permanent and sure. All the unfathomable souls of the world, and all souls are unfathomable whether they are the souls of plants or animals or planets or gods or men, are found, the closer they approach one another, to be in possession of the same vision. For this immortal vision, in which what we name beauty, and what we name “reality,” finds its synthesis, is found to be nothing less than the secret love. And while the great company of the immortal companions are only known to us by the figure of one among them, namely by the figure of Christ, this figure alone is sufficient to contain all that we require of life; for being the embodiment of love this figure is the embodiment of life, of which love is the creator and the sustainer.

Thus what the apex-thought of man’s complex vision reveals is not only the existence of the gods but the fact that the vision of the gods is not broken up and divided but is one and the same; and is yet for ever growing and deepening. And the only measure of the vision of the gods which we possess is the figure of Christ; for it has come about by reason of the anonymous instinct of humanity, by reason of the compassion of the immortals, and by reason of the divine insight of Jesus, that the figure of Christ contains within it every one of those primordial ideas from which and towards which, in a perpetual advance which is also a perpetual return, the souls of all living things are for ever journeying.

Whether the souls of men and of beasts, of plants and of planetary spheres survive in any form after they are dead we know not and can never know. But this at least the revelation of the complex vision makes clear, that the secret of the whole process is to be found in the mystery of love; and to the mystery of love we can, at the worst, constantly appeal; for the mystery of love has been at last embodied for us in a living figure over whom Death has no control.

CHAPTER XI. THE ILLUSION OF DEAD MATTER

THE PHILOSOPHY OF the complex vision is based, as I have shown, upon nothing less than the whole personality of man become conscious of itself in the totality of its rhythmic functioning. This personality, although capable of being analysed in its constituent elements, is an integral and unfathomable reality. And just because it is such a reality it descends and expands on every side into immeasurable depths and immeasurable horizons.

We know nothing as intimately and vividly as we know personality and every knowledge that we have is either a spiritual or a material abstraction from this supreme knowledge. This knowledge of personality which is our ultimate truth, implies a belief in the integral and real existence of what we call the soul. And because personality implies the soul and because we have no ultimate conception of any other reality in the world except the reality of personality, therefore we are compelled to assume that every separate external object in Nature is possessed of a soul.

The peculiar psychological melancholy which sometimes seizes us in the presence of inanimate natural objects, such as earth and water and sand and dust and rain and vapour, objects whose existence may superficially appear to be entirely chemical or material, is accounted for by the fact that the soul in us is baffled and discouraged and repulsed by these things because by reason of their superficial appearance they convey the impression of complete soullessness. In the presence of plants and animals and all animate things we are also vaguely conscious of a strange psychological melancholy. But this latter melancholy is of a less poignant character than the former because what we seem superficially conscious of is not "soullessness" but a psychic life which is alien from our life, and therefore baffling and obscure.

In both of these cases, however, as soon as we are bold enough to apply the conclusions we have arrived at from the analysis of the knowledge which is most vivid and real to us, namely, the knowledge of our own soul, this peculiar psychological melancholy is driven away. It is a melancholy which descends upon us when in any disintegrated moment the creative energy in us, the energy of love in us, is overcome by the evil and inertness of the aboriginal malice. Under the influence of this inert malice, which takes advantage of some lapse or ebb of the creative energy in us, the rhythmic activity of our complex vision breaks down; and we visualize the world through the attributes of reason and sensation alone. And the world, visualized through reason and sensation alone, becomes a world of uniform, and homogeneous monotony, made up either of one all-embracing material substance, or of one all-embracing spiritual substance. In either case that living plurality of real separate "souls" which correspond to our own soul vanishes away, and a dreary and devastating oneness, whether spiritual or chemical, fills the whole field. The world which is the emanation of this atrophied and distorted vision is a world of crushing dreariness; but it is an unreal world because the only vivid and unfathomable reality we know is the reality of innumerable souls. The curious thing about this world of superficial chemical or spiritual uniformity is that it seems the same *identical* world in the case of all separate souls whose complex vision is thus distorted by the prevalence of that which opposes itself to creation and by the consequent ebb and weakening of the energy of love. It is impossible to be assured that this is the case; but all evidence of language points towards such an *identity of desolation* between the innumerable separate "universes" of the souls which fill the world, when such souls visualize existence through reason and sensation alone.

This also is a portion of the same "illusion of impersonality" into which the inert malice of the ultimate "resistance" betrays us with demonic cunning. What man is there among us who does not recall some moment of visionary disintegration, when, in the presence of both these mysteries, an unspeakable depression of this kind has overtaken him? He has stood, perhaps, on some wet autumn evening, watching the soulless reflection of a dead moon in a pond of dead water; while above him the motionless distorted trunk of some goblinish tree mocks him with its desolate remoteness from his own life.

At that moment, with his abortive and atrophied complex vision, all he sees is the eternal soullessness and deadness of matter; dead moonlight, dead water, dead mud and slime and refuse, dead mist and vapour, dead earth-mould and dead leaves. And while the desolate chemistry of nothingness grips him with its dead fingers and he turns hopelessly to the silent tree-trunk at his side, that also repels him with the chill breath of psychic remoteness; and it seems to him that that also is strange and impersonal and unconscious; that that also is only a blind pre-determined portion of some huge planetary life-process that has no place for a living soul, but only a place for automatic impersonal chemistry. Brooding in this way, with the eternal malice of the system of things conquering the creative impulse in the depths of his soul, he becomes obsessed with the idea that not only these isolated portions of Nature, but the whole of Nature, is thus alien and remote and thus given up to a desolate and soulless uniformity. Unutterable loneliness takes possession of him and he feels himself to be an exile in a dark and hostile assemblage of elemental forces. If at such a moment by means of some passionate invocation of the immortal gods, or by means of some desperate sinking into his own soul and gathering together of the creative energy in him, he is able to resist this desolation, how strange and sudden a shifting of mood occurs! He then, by a bold movement of imagination, restores the balance of his complex vision; and in a moment the spectacle is transfigured.

The apparently dead pond takes to itself the lineaments of some indescribable living soul, of which that particular portion of elemental being is the outward expression. The apparently dead moonlight becomes the magical influence of some mysterious “lunar soul” of which the earth’s silent companions is the external form. The apparently dead mud of the pond’s edge becomes a living portion of that earth-body which is the visible manifestation of the soul of the earth. The motionless tree-trunk at his side seems no longer the desolate embodiment of some vague “psychic life” utterly alien from his own life but reveals to him the immediate magical presence of a real soul there, whose personality, though not conscious in the precise manner in which he is conscious, has yet its own measure of complex vision and is mutely struggling with the cruel inertness and resistance which blocks the path of the energy of life. When once, by the bold synthesis of reason and sensation with those other attributes of the complex vision which we name instinct, imagination, intuition, and the like, the soul itself comes to be regarded as the substratum of personal existence, that desolating separation between humanity and Nature ceases to baffle us. As long as the substratum of personal life is regarded as the physical body there must always be this desolating difference and this remoteness.

For in such a case the stress is inevitably laid upon the physiological and biological difference between the body of a man and the body of the earth or the moon or the sun or any plant or animal. But as soon as the substratum of personal life is regarded not as the body but as the sour it ceases to be necessary to lay so merciless a stress upon the difference between man's elaborate physiological constitution and the simpler chemical constitution of organic or inorganic objects.

If the complex vision is the vision of the soul, if the soul uses its bodily sensation as only one among its other instruments of contact with life, then it is obvious that between the soul of a man and the soul of a planet or a plant there need be no such appalling and desolating gulf as that which fills us with such profound melancholy when we refuse to let the complex vision have its complete rhythmic play and insist on sacrificing the revelations made by instinct and intuition to the falsifying conclusions of reason and sensation, energizing in arbitrary solitude.

The "mort-main" or "dead-hand" of that aboriginal malice which resists life is directly responsible for this illusion of "unconscious matter" through the midst of which we grope like outlawed exiles. Reason and the bodily senses, conspiring together, are perpetually tempting us to believe in the reality of this desolate phantom-world of blind material elements; but the unreality of this corpse-life becomes evident directly we consider the revelation of the complex vision.

For the complex vision reveals to us that what we call "the universe" is a thing which is for ever coming newly and freshly into life, for ever being re-born and re-constituted by the interplay between the individual soul and the "objective mystery." Of the objective mystery itself, apart from the individual soul, we are able to say nothing. But since the "universe" is the discovery and creation of the individual soul, there must be as many different "universes" as there are living souls.

Our belief in "one universe," whose characteristics are relatively identical in the case of all the souls which contemplate it, is a belief which in part results from an original act of faith and in part results from an implicit appeal to those “invisible companions” whose concentrated will towards “reality” and “beauty” and “nobility” offers us our only objective standard of these ideas. From the ground, therefore, of this trinity of incomprehensible substances, namely the substance which is the substratum of the individual soul, the substance which is “the objective mystery” out of which the individual soul creates its universe, and the substance which is the “medium” or “link” which enables these individual souls to communicate with one another, emerge the only realities which we can know. And since this trinity of incomprehensible substances, thus divided one from another, must be thought of as dominated by the same unity of time and space, it is inconceivable that they should be anything else than three aspects of one and the same incomprehensible substance. From this it follows that from the ground of one incomprehensible substance which in its first aspect is the substratum of the soul, in its second aspect is the objective mystery confronting the soul, in its third aspect is the medium which holds all souls together, there must be evoked all the reality which we can conceive.

And this reality must, from the conclusions we have already reached, take two forms. It must take the form of a plurality of subjective “universes” answering to the plurality of living souls. And it must take the form of one objective “universe,” answering to the objective standard of truth, beauty, and nobility, together with the opposites of these, which is implied in the tacit appeal of all individual souls to their “invisible companions.”

In this double reality; the reality of one objective universe identical in its appearance to all souls but dependent for its identity upon an implicit reference to the “invisible companions,” and the reality of as many subjective universes as there are living souls; in this double reality there is obviously no place at all for that phantom-world of unconscious “matter,” which in the form of soulless elements, or soulless organic automata, fills the human mind with such devastating melancholy.

The dead pond with its dead moonlight, with its dead mud and its dead snow, is therefore no better than a ghastly illusion when considered in isolation from the soul or the souls which look forth from it. To the soul of which those elements are the “body” neither mud nor water nor rain nor earth-mould can appear desolate or dead. To the soul which contemplates these things there can be no other way of regarding them, as long as the rhythm of its vision is unimpeded, than as the outward manifestation of a personal life, or of many personal lives, similar in creative energy to its own.

Between the soul, or the souls, of the elements of the earth, and the soul of the human spectator there must be, if our conclusions are to be held good at all, a natural and profound reciprocity. The apparent “deadness,” the apparent automatism of “matter,” which projects itself between these two and resists with corpse-like opacity their reciprocal understanding, must be one of the ghastly illusions with which the sinister side of the eternal duality undermines the magic of life.

But although in its objective isolation, as an absolute entity, this “material deadness” of earth and water and rain and snow and of all disintegrated organic chemistry must be regarded as an “illusion,” it would be a falsifying of the reality of things to deny that it is an “illusion” to which the visions of all souls are miserably subject. They are for ever subject to it because it is precisely this “illusion” which the unfathomable power hostile to life for ever evokes.

Nor must we for a moment suppose that this material objectivity, this pond, these leaves, this mud, this snow, are altogether unreal. Their reality is demanded by the complex vision and to deny their reality would be the gesture of madness. They are only unreal, they are only an “illusion,” when they are considered as existing independently of the “souls” of which they are the “body.” As the expression and manifestation of such “souls” they are entirely real. They are indeed, in this sense, as real as our own human body.

The human soul, when it suffers from that malignant power which has its positive and external existence in the soul itself, feels itself to be absolutely alone in the midst of a dark chaotic welter of monstrous elemental forces. In a mood of this kind the thought of the huge volumes of soulless water which we call “oceans” and “seas” crushes us with a devastating melancholy. The thought of the interminable deserts of “dead” sand and the vast polar ice fields and the monstrous excrescences that we call “mountains” have the same effect. But the supreme example of the kind of material ghastliness which I am trying to indicate, is, as may easily be surmised, nothing less than the appalling thought of the unfathomable spatial gulfs through which our whole stellar system moves. Here also, in this supreme insistence of objective “deadness,” the situation is relieved when we realize that this unthinkable space is nothing more than the material expression of that indefinable “medium” which holds all souls together.

Moreover we must remember that these stellar gulfs cannot be thought of except as the habitation of innumerable living souls, each one of which is using this very “space” as the ground of its creation of the many-coloured impassioned “universe” which is its own dwelling. In all these instances of “objective deadness,” whether great or small, we must not forget that the thing which desolates us and fills us with so intolerable a nostalgia is a thing only half real, a thing whose full reality depends upon the soul which contemplates it and upon the soul’s implicit assumption that its truth is the truth of those “invisible companions” who supply us with our perpetually renewed and reconstituted standard of what is “good” and what is “evil.”

There is an abominably vivid example of the kind of melancholy I have in my mind, which, although obviously less common to normal human experience than the forms of it I have so far attempted to suggest, is as a rule even more crushing in its cruelty. I refer to the sight of a dead human body; and in a less degree to the sight of a dead animal or a dead plant.

A human corpse laid out in its coffin, or nailed down in its coffin, how exactly does the particular attitude towards life, which for convenience sake I name the philosophy of the complex vision, find itself regarding *that?* Such a body, deserted by its living soul, is obviously no longer the immediate and integral expression of a personal life. Is it therefore no more than a shred or shard or husk or remnant of inconceivably soulless matter? The gods forbid! Certainly and most assuredly it is more than that.

An isolated heterogeneous mass of dead chemistry is a monstrous illusion which only exists for us when the weakness of our creative energy and the power of the original malice in the soul destroys our vision. This dead body lying in its wooden coffin is certainly possessed of no more life than the inanimate boards of the coffin in which it lies. But the inanimate boards of the coffin, together with the inanimate furniture of the house or room that contains it, and the bricks and stones and mortar of such a house, are themselves nothing less than inevitable portions of the vast earth-body of our planetary globe.

And this planetary globe, this earth upon which we live, cannot under any conceivable kind of reasoning to which imagination has contributed its share, be regarded as a dead or a soulless thing. In its isolated integrity, as a separate integral personality, the soul has deserted the body and left it “dead.” But it is only “dead” when considered in isolation from the surrounding chemistry of planetary life. And to consider it in this way is to consider it falsely. For from the moment it ceases to be the expression of the life of an individual human soul, it becomes the expression — through every single phase of its chemical dissolution — of the life of the planet.

In so far as the human soul, which has deserted it, is concerned it is assuredly no better than a dead husk; but in so far as the soul of the planet is concerned it is an essential portion of that planet's living body and in this sense is not dead at all.

Its chemical elements, as they resolve themselves slowly back into their planetary accomplices, are part and parcel of that general "body of the earth" which is in a state of constant movement, and which has the "soul of the earth" as its animating principle of personality. And just as the human corpse, when the soul has deserted it, becomes a portion of those chemical elements which are the body of the planet's "personal soul," so do the dead bodies of animals and plants and trees become portions of the same terrestrial bodies.

Thus strictly speaking there is no single moment when any material form or body can be called "dead." Instantaneously with the departure of its own individual soul it is at once "possessed" by the soul of that planetary globe from whose chemistry it drew its elemental life and from whose chemistry, although the form of it has changed, it still draws its life. For it is no fantastic speculation to affirm that every living thing whether human or otherwise plays, while it lives, a triple part upon the world stage.

It is in the first place the vehicle of the individual soul. It is in the second place the medium of the "spiritual vampirizing" of the invisible planetary spirits. And it is in the third place a living portion of that organic elemental chemistry which is the body of the terrestrial soul. Thus it becomes manifest that that "illusion of dead matter" which fills the human soul with so profound a melancholy is no more than an everlasting trick of the malice of the abyss.

And the despair which sometimes results from it is a despair which issues from no “dead matter” but from the terrible living depths of the soul itself. It is from a consideration of the especial kind of melancholy evoked in us by the illusion of “objective deadness” that we are enabled to analyse those peculiar imaginative feelings which sometime or another affect us all. I refer to the extraordinary tenacity with which we cling to our bodily form, however grotesque it may be, and the difficulty we experience in disassociating our living soul from its particular envelope or habitation; and the tendency which we have, in spite of this, to imagine ourselves transferred to an alien body. For the soul in us has the power of “thinking itself” into any other body it may please to select.

And there is no reason why we should be alarmed at such an imaginative power; or even associate its fantastic realization with any terror of madness. The invisible entity within us which says “I am I” can easily be conceived as suddenly awakening out of sleep and discovering, to its astonishment, that its visible body has suffered a bewildering transformation.

Such a transformation can be conceived as almost unlimited in its humorous and disconcerting possibilities. But no such transformation of the external envelope of the soul, whether into the form of an animal or a plant or a god, need be conceived of as necessarily driving us into insanity. The “I am I” would remain the same in regard to its imagination, instinct, intuition, emotion, self-consciousness and the rest. It would be only “changed” in regard to sensation, which is a thing immediately dependent upon the particular and special senses of the human body.

This is a truth to the reality of which the wandering fancies of every human child bear ample witness; not to speak of the dreams of those childlike tribes of the race, who in our progressive insolence we are pleased to name "uncivilized." The deeper we dig into the tissue of convoluted impressions that make up our universe the more vividly do we become aware that our only redemption from sheer insanity lies in "knowing ourselves"; in other words, in keeping a drastic and desperate hold upon what, in the midst of ambiguity and treachery, we are definitely assured of.

And the only thing we are definitely assured of, the only thing which we really know "on the inner side," and with the kind of knowledge which is unassailable, is the reality of our soul. We know this with a vividness completely different from the vividness of any other knowledge because this is not what we feel or see or imagine or think but what we *are.* And all feeling, all seeing, all imagining and all thinking are only attributes of this mysterious "something" which is our integral self.

To the superficial judgment there is always something weird and arbitrary about this belief in our own soul. And this apparent weirdness arises from the fact that our superficial judgments are the work of reason and sensation arrogating to themselves the whole field of consciousness.

But directly we bring to bear upon this mass of impressions which is our "universe" the full rhythmic play of our complete identity this weirdness and arbitrariness disappear and we realize that we *are,* not this thought or this sensation or even this stream of thoughts and sensations, but the definite living "monad" which gives these things their only link of continuity and permanence. And it is better to accept experience, even though it refuses to resolve itself into any rational unity, rather than to leave experience in the distance and permit our reason to evolve its desired unity out of its own rules and limitations.

We must readily admit that to take all the attributes of personality and to make them adhere in the mysterious substratum of the soul rather than in the little cells of the brain, seems to the superficial judgment a weird and arbitrary act. But the more closely we think of what we are doing when we make this assumption the more inevitable does such an assumption appear.

We are driven by the necessity of the case to find some "point," or at least some "gap" in thought and the system of things, where mind and matter meet and are fused with one another. Absolute consciousness does not help us to explain the facts of experience; because "facing" absolute consciousness, directly it isolates itself, we are compelled to recognize the presence of "something else," which is the material or object of which absolute consciousness is conscious.

And what we do when we assume the little cells of the physical brain to be the point in space or "the gap in thought" where mind and matter meet and become one is simply to place these two worlds in close juxtaposition and then assert that they are one. But this placing them side by side and asserting that they are one does not make them one. They are just as far apart as ever. The cells of the brain remain material and the phenomenon of consciousness remains immaterial and they are still as remote from one another and as "unfused" as if consciousness were outside of time and space altogether.

It is only when we come to regard the "fusion-point" of these two things as being itself a living and personal thing; it is only when we come to regard the substratum of the soul as a mysterious "something" which is, at one and the same time, both what we call "mind" and what we call "matter," that the difficulty I have described disappears. For in this case we are dealing with something which, unlike the little cells of the brain, is totally invisible and totally beyond all scientific analysis; and yet with something which, because it is affected by bodily sensations and because it is under the sway of time and space, cannot be regarded as utterly outside the realm of material substance. We are in fact, in this case, dealing with something which we feel to be the integral and ultimate reality of ourselves, as we certainly do not feel the little cells of the brain to be; and we are dealing with something that is no mere stream of impressions, but is the concrete permanent reality which gives to all impressions, whether material or immaterial, their unity and coherence.

When once we are put into possession of this, when once we come to recognize our invisible soul as the reality which is our true self, it is found to be no longer ridiculous and arbitrary to endow this soul with all those various attributes, which, after all, are only various aspects of that unique personality which is the personality of the soul. To say “the soul has imagination,” or “the soul has instinct,” or “the soul has an aesthetic sense,” has only a ridiculous sound when under the pressure of the abysmal malice which opposes itself to life we fall into the habits of permitting those usurping accomplices, pure reason and pure sensation, to destroy the rhythmic harmony of the complex vision.

When once we are in full possession of our own soul it is no mere fanciful speculation but an inevitable act of faith which compels us to envisage the universe as a thing crowded with invisible souls, who in some degree or other resemble our own. If this is “anthropomorphism,” though strictly speaking it ought to be called “pan-psychism,” then it is impossible for us to be too anthropomorphic. For in this way we are doing the only philosophical thing we have a right to do — namely, interpreting the less known in the terms of the more known.

When we seek to interpret the soul, which we vividly know, in terms of chemical or spiritual abstractions of which we have no direct knowledge but which are merely rationalized symbols, we are proceeding in an illegitimate and unphilosophical manner to interpret the more known in terms of the less known, which is in the true sense ridiculous.

The only escape from that profound melancholy so easily engulfed in sheer insanity, which is the result of submission to "the illusion of dead matter," lies in this tenacious hold upon the concrete identity of the soul. So closely are we linked, by reason of the chemistry of our mortal body, to every material-element; that it is only too easy for us to merge our personal life by a perverted use of the imagination in that phantom-world of supposedly "dead matter" which is the illusive projection of the abysmal malice.

Thus just as the soul is driven by extreme physical pain to relinquish its identity and to become "an incarnate sensation," so the soul is driven by the power of malice to relinquish its centrifugal force and to become the very mud and slime and excremental debris which it has endowed with an illusive soullessness.

The clue to the secret pathology of these moods, to whose brink reason and sensation have led us and into whose abyss perverted imagination has plunged us, is therefore to be found in the unfathomable duality of good and evil. If it seems to the kind of mind that demands "rational unity" at all costs, even at the cost of truth to experience, that this duality cannot be left unreconciled, the answer which the philosophy of the complex vision must make, is that any reconciliation of such a sort, any reduction to monistic unity of the eternal adversaries out of whose struggle life itself springs, would bring life itself back to nothingness.

The argument that because, in the eternal process of destruction and creation, life or love or what we call "the good" depends for its activity upon death or malice or what we call "evil," these opposites are one and the same, is shown to be utterly false when one thinks of the analogy of the struggle between the sexes. Because the activity of the male depends upon the existence of the female, that is no reason for concluding that the male and the female are one and the same thing.

Because “good” becomes more “good” out of its conflict with “evil,” that does not mean that “good” is responsible for the existence of “evil”; any more than because “evil” becomes more “evil” out of its conflict with “good” does it mean that “evil” is responsible for the existence of “good.” Neither is responsible for the existence of the other. They are both positive and real and they are both eternal. They are both unfathomable elements in every personal individual soul, whether of man or plant or animal or god or demi-god that has ever existed or will ever come to exist.

The prevalent idea that because good “in the long run” and over vast spaces of time shows itself to be a little — just a little — more powerful than evil, evil must be regarded as only a form of good or a necessary negation of good is a fallacy derived from the illusion that life is the creation of a “parent” of the universe whose nature is absolutely “good.” Such a fallacy takes for granted that somewhere and somehow “Good” will finally triumph over “evil.”

The revelation of the complex vision destroys this fallacy. Such a complete triumph of “good” over “evil” would mean the end of everything that exists because everything that exists depends upon this abysmal struggle. But for personalities who are able to recognize that the mere fact of their being alive is already a considerable victory of “good” over “evil,” there is nothing overwhelming in the thought that “good” can never completely overcome “evil.” It is enough that life has given them life; and that in the perpetually renewed struggle between love and malice they find at the rare moments when love overcomes malice a flood of happiness which, brings with it “the sensation of eternity.”

For such souls eternity is here and now; and no anticipated absolute triumph of the "good" in the world over the "evil" can compare for a moment with the indescribable happiness which this "sensation of eternity" brings. It is this happiness, evoked by the rhythmic play of the soul's apex-thought in its supreme hours, which alone, even in memory, can destroy "the illusion of dead matter."

The psychological situation brought about by the fact that this illusion is a perpetually recurrent one and a thing that is always liable to return whenever reason and sensation are driven to isolate themselves is a situation a good deal more complicated than I have so far indicated. It is complicated by the fact that although in certain moods the contemplation of "the illusion of dead matter" produces profound melancholy, in other moods it produces a kind of demonic joy. It seems as though the melancholy mood, which carried to an extreme limit borders on absolute despair, comes about when the creative energy in our soul, although under the momentary dominance of what resists creation, is still, so to speak, the master of our will.

Under such circumstances the will, still resolutely turned towards life, is confronted by what appears to be the very embodiment of death. Under these conditions the will is baffled, perplexed, defeated and outraged. It beats in vain against the "inert mass" which malice has projected; and feels itself powerless to overcome it. It then turns furiously round upon the very substratum of the soul and rends and tears at that, in a mad effort to reach the secret of a phantom-world which seems to hold no secret. If some sort of relief does not come, such relief for instance as physical sleep, the inert misery of the submission of the will, following upon such a desperate struggle, may easily drift into a deadly apathy, may easily approach the borders of insanity.

But there is another condition under which the soul may confront “the illusion of dead matter.” This condition comes about when the will, instead of being turned towards creation, is definitely turned towards the opposite of creation. It is impossible for the will to remain in this condition for more than a limited time. Some outward or inward shock, some drastic swing of the psychic pendulum, must sooner or later restore the balance and bring the will back to that wavering and indecisive state — poised like the point of a compass between the two extremes — which seems to be its normal attitude.

Any human will unchangeably directed towards “the good” would be the will of a soul that in its inherent depths were already “absolutely good”; and this, as we have seen, is an impossible phenomenon. The utmost reach of “wickedness” that any soul, whether it be the soul of a man or of a god, can attain to, is a recurrent concentration of the will upon evil and a recurrent overcoming, for relatively increasing spaces of time, of the power of love. This incomplete and constantly interrupted concentration upon evil is the nearest approach to “the worship of Satan” which any will is able to reach. The exquisite pleasure, therefore, culminating in a kind of insane ecstasy, which the soul can enjoy when, in the passion of its evil will, it leaps to welcome “the illusion of dead matter,” is a pleasure that in the nature of things cannot last. And the condition of inert malignant apathy which follows such an “ecstasy of evil” is perhaps the nearest approach to a consciousness of “eternal death” which the soul can know.

And it is in this malignant apathy, rather than in the demonic exultation of the mood that preceded it, that the extreme opposite of love finds its culmination. For in its hour of demonic exultation, when the will to evil buries itself with insane joy in “the illusion of dead matter,” it is drawing savagely upon the energy of life. It corrupts such energy as it draws upon it and distorts it from its natural functions; but the energy itself, although "possessed" by the abysmal malice, is living and intense; and therefore cannot be regarded as so entirely the opposite of love as that inert condition of malignant lifelessness which inevitably succeeds it.

The demonic ecstasy, full of invincible magnetism, which looks forth from the countenance of a soul obsessed with, evil, has much more in common with the magnetic exultation of a soul possessed with love than has that ghastly inertness, with its insane malignant attraction to death. For out of the countenance of this latter looks forth everything that is hostile to life; and its expression has in it the obscene cunning, mixed with frozen despair, of a corpse which has become utterly dehumanized.

It is frequently a matter of surprise to minds whose view of what is "good" has excluded the concept of energy that persons obviously under the obsession of "evil" are able to display such immense reserves of inexhaustible power. But this surprise disappears when it is realized that such "worshippers of Satan" are drawing upon the creative energy and corrupting it, in the process of drawing upon it, by the malignant power which resists creation.

The "illusion of dead matter" conceived as we have conceived it, as a thing made up of unconscious chemical elements, is after all only one aspect of the phantom-world of illusive soullessness which the abysmal malice delights to project. It is only to particular sensitive natures that this peculiar "despair of the inanimate" takes the form of mud or sand or refuse or water or dead planetary bodies or empty space.

To other natures it may take the form of those innumerable off-shoots of economic necessity, which are not themselves necessary either to human life or human welfare but which are the arbitrary creations of economic avarice divorced from necessity and indulged in out of an inert hatred of what is beautiful and real. Any labour, whether mental or physical, which directly satisfies the economic needs of humanity carries with it the unfathomable thrill of creative happiness. But when we come to consider those innumerable forms of financial and commercial enterprise which in no way satisfy human needs but exist only for the sake of exploitation we find ourselves confronted by a weight of unreal soulless hideousness which by reason of the fact that it is deliberately protected by organized society is a more devastating example of “the thing which is in the way” than any amount of mud and litter and refuse and excremental debris. For this unproductive commercialism, this “unreal reality” projected by the malignant power which resists creation, is not only an obscene outrage to the aesthetic sense; it is actually an assassination of life. When, therefore, a philosopher who uses the complex vision of the soul as his organ of research is asked the question, “where are we to look for the type of human being most entirely evil?” the answer which he is compelled to give is not a little surprising to many minds.

For there are many minds whose physiological timidity corrupts their judgment, and who lack the clairvoyance to unmask with infallible certainty that look of sneering apathy which is the pure expression of malice. And to such minds some wretched devil of a criminal, driven to crime by an insane perversion of the creative instinct — for creation and destruction are not the true opposites — might easily seem the ultimate embodiment of evil.

Whereas the particular type of human being from whom the philosopher of the complex vision would draw his standard of evil would be a type very different from any perverted type even from those whose mania might take the form of erotic cruelty. It would be a type whose recurrent “evil” would take the form of a sneering and malignant inertness, the form of a cold and sarcastic disparagement of all intense feeling. It would be a type entirely obsessed by “the illusion of dead matter”; not so much the “illusion of dead matter” where Nature is concerned, but where the economic struggle has resulted in some unnecessary and purely commercial activity, altogether divorced from the basic necessities of human life. A person of this type would, in his evil moods, be more completely dominated by a malignant resistance to every movement of the creative spirit than any other type, unless it were perhaps one whom the heavy brutality of “officialdom” had blunted into inhuman callousness.

Compared with persons such as these, by whom no actual positive “wickedness” may have ever been perpetrated, the confessed criminal or the acknowledged pervert remains far less committed to the depths of evil. For in persons who have habitually lent themselves to “the illusion of dead matter,” whether in regard to Nature or in regard to commercial or financial exploitation, there occurs a kind of “death-in-life” which gives the sneering malignity of the abyss its supreme opportunity, whereas in the souls of those who have committed “crimes,” or have been guilty of passionate cruelty, there may easily remain a vivid and sensitive response to some form of reality or beauty, or self-annihilating love.

For “the illusion of dead matter” is the most formidable expression of evil which we know; and it can only be destroyed by the magic of that creative spirit whose true “opposite” is not hatred or cruelty or violence or destruction, but the motiveless power of a deadly obscurantism.

CHAPTER XII. PAIN AND PLEASURE

SINCE NEITHER PLEASURE nor pain can be experienced without consciousness; and since consciousness finds its substratum not in the body but in the soul; we are driven to the conclusion that what we call the capacity of the body for pleasure and pain is really the capacity of the soul for pleasure and pain. But the capacity of the soul for pleasure and pain is not confined to its functioning through the body. Sensation, that is to say, the use of the bodily senses, gives the soul one particular form of pain and one particular form of pleasure; but that the soul possesses other forms of pleasure and pain independently of the body is proved by the psychological fact that intense bodily pain is sometimes accompanied by intense spiritual pleasure and intense bodily pleasure is sometimes accompanied by intense spiritual pain.

What is called "the pursuit of pleasure," that rationalistic abstraction from our real psychological experience, that abstraction which has been made the basis of the false philosophy called "hedonism," cannot stand for a moment against the revelation of the complex vision. Under certain rare and morbid conditions, when reason and sensation, in their conspiracy of assassination, have usurped for a while the whole field of consciousness, such a "pursuit of pleasure" may become a dominant motive. But even under these conditions there often comes a shifting of the stage according to which the pleasure-seeker, sick to death of pleasure, deliberately "pursues" pain.

If it be said that this change is no real change because what is then pursued is the pleasure of "contrast" or even "the pleasure of pain," the retort to such reasoning can only be that in this case the whole hedonistic theory has been given up; for what is really then “pursued” is neither pleasure nor pain but the sensation of novelty or the sensation of new experience.

Pleasure and pain are emotionalized sensations accompanying various physical and mental states. The psychological truth about their “pursuit” is simply that we “pursue” certain objects or conditions because of their immediate attractiveness or “attractive terribleness,” and that the accompanying pleasure becomes first a kind of orchestral background to our pursuit; and then, later, becomes, by the action of the law of association, part and parcel of the thing’s attractiveness or “attractive terribleness.” Thus what really occurs is precisely opposite to the hedonist’s contention. For the thing “pursued” swallows up and appropriates to itself the pleasure and pain of the pursuit; and, by the law of association, becomes more vividly, even than at the start the motive force which lures us.

The most ghastly, the most obscene, the most intolerable thing in the world is when the pain of pure sensation, the pain of the body, is accentuated to such a pitch of atrocious suffering that the other attributes of the soul are annihilated; and the humanity of the person thus suffering is temporarily destroyed; so that what “lives” at such a moment is not a person at all but an incarnate pain.

That this ultimate ghastliness, this dehumanization by pain, can only occur where the aboriginal malice of the soul has previously weakened the soul’s independent life, is proved by the fact that the most atrocious tortures have been successfully endured, even unto the point of death, by such as have been martyrs for an idea. And the reason of this endurance, the reason why, in the case of such martyrizing, the victim has been able to resist dehumanization is found in the fact that the soul’s creative energy or the power of love has been so great that it has been able to assert its independence of bodily torment, even to the last moment of human identity.

Since pain and pleasure, although so often the direct evocation of the soul’s attribute of bodily sensation, are always composed of the primordial “stuff” of emotion; and since emotion is a projection of the soul independently of the body, it is natural that the soul should, in the reverse manner, colour its emotion with the memory of sensation. Thus it follows that although it is possible for the soul, when its emotional feeling is outraged or excited, to experience pain or pleasure apart from sensation, there is usually present in such an emotional pain or pleasure a residual element of sensation; for the soul is not a thing which simply “possesses” certain functions; but a thing which is present in some degree or other in all its various aspects of energy.

What we call “memory” is nothing more than the plastic consciousness of personal identity and continuity. And when once the pain or pleasure of a bodily sensation has been lodged in the soul, that pain or pleasure becomes an integral portion of the soul’s life, to be worked upon and appropriated for good or evil by the soul’s intrinsic duality.

Thus although the creative energy in the soul, emerging from fathomless abysses, can enable the soul to endure until death the most infernal torments, the fact remains that since the attribute of sensation, which depends entirely upon the existence of the bodily senses, is one of the soul’s basic attributes and has its ground in the very substratum of the soul, the sensations of pain and pleasure whether coloured by emotion and imagination or left “pure” in the clear element of consciousness, are sensations from which the soul cannot escape.

From this we are forced to conclude that to affirm that the soul can remain wholly untouched and unaffected by bodily pain or pleasure is ridiculous. Bodily pain and pleasure are the soul’s pain and pleasure; because the attribute of sensation, through which the bodily senses feed the soul, is not the body’s attribute of sensation but the soul’s attribute of sensation.

To say, therefore, that the soul can “conquer” the body or be “indifferent” to the body is as ridiculous as to say that the body can “conquer” the soul or be “indifferent” to the soul. The fact that the attribute of sensation is a basic attribute of the soul and that the attribute of sensation is dependent upon the bodily senses must inevitably imply that the pressure or impact of the bodily senses descend to the profoundest depths of the soul.

The thing that “conquers” pain in the invincible martyr is love, or “the energy of creation,” in the soul. The abysmal struggle is not between the soul and the body or between the flesh and the spirit, but between the power of life and love, in the body and the soul together, and the power of death or malice, in the body and the soul together.

What we are compelled to assume with regard to those “sons of the universe,” whose existence affords a basis for the objectivity of the “ultimate ideas,” is that, with them, what I have called “the eternal idea of the body” takes the place in their complex vision of our actual physical body. Their complex vision must be regarded, if our philosophy is to remain boldly and shamelessly anthropomorphic, as possessing, even as our own, the basic attribute of sensation.

But since their essential invisibility, and consequent upon this their ubiquity under the dominant categories of time and place, precludes any possibility of their incarnation, we are compelled to postulate that their complex vision’s attribute of sensation, in the absence of any bodily senses, finds its contact with “the objective mystery” and with the objective “universe” in some definite and permanent “intermediary” which serves in their case the same primal necessity as is served in our case by the human body.

If no such "intermediary" existed for them, we should be compelled to relinquish the idea that they possessed a complex vision at all, for not only the attribute of sensation, but the attribute of emotion also, demands for its activity something that shall represent the human body and occupy in their objective "universe" the place occupied by our physical bodies in our "universe."

As we have already shown, this primary demand for the "eternalizing of flesh and blood" is a demand which springs from the profoundest depths of the soul, for it is a demand which springs from the creative energy itself, the eternal protagonist in the world-drama. We must conclude, therefore, that although these super-human children of Nature cannot in the ordinary sense incarnate themselves in flesh and blood they can and do appropriate to themselves out of the surrounding body of the ether, and out of the body of any other living thing they approach, a certain attenuated essence of flesh and blood which, though invisible to us, supplies with them the place of our human body. This, therefore, is the "intermediary" which, in the "invisible companions" of our planetary struggle, occupies the place which is occupied by the physical element in our human life. And this is evoked by nothing less than that "eternal idea of the body," or "that eternal idea of flesh and blood," which the creative energy of love demands. A very curious and interesting possibility follows from this assumption; namely, that by a process which might be called a process of "spiritual vampirizing" the same creative passion which demands satisfaction in the eternalizing of "the idea of the body" actually suffers, by means of its vivid sympathy with living bodies, the very pains and pleasures through which these bodies pass.

The possibility that “the invisible companions,” or in more traditional language that the “immortal gods,” should be driven by the passion of their creative love, to suffer vicarious pain and pleasure through the living bodies of all organic existences, is a possibility that derives a certain support from two considerations, both of which are drawn directly from human experiences. It is certainly a matter of common human experience to be conscious, for good and for evil, of a kind of obsession of one’s body by some sort of spiritual power. We may regard these moments of obsession, with their consequent exhilaration or profound gloom, as due purely to the activity of our own soul; and doubtless very often this is the explanation of them. But it is conceivable also that such obsessions are actually due to the presence near us and around us of the “high immortal ones.”

That when we experience this “spiritual vampirizing” of our mortal bodies by immortal companions, such an obsession is not necessarily “for good,” is a thing inevitably implied in our primary conception of personality. For although a purely demonic personality is an impossibility, owing to the fact that personality is, in itself, an achieved triumph over evil, it must still remain true that the eternal duality of creation and “what resists creation” must find an arena in the soul of an “immortal” even as it finds an arena in the soul of a “mortal.”

Therefore we are driven to regard it as no fantastic speculation but as only too reasonable a possibility, that when a physical depression takes possession of us it is due to this “spiritual vampirizing,” in an evil sense, by the power of some immortal whose “malice” at that particular moment has overcome “love.” But just as the power of physical pain may be dominated and overcome by the energy of love arising from the depths of our own soul, so this vampirizing by the malice of an “invisible companion,” may be dominated and overcome by the energy of love from the depths of our own soul.

It may indeed be regarded as certain that it is when the malice in our own soul is in the ascendant, rather than the love, that we fall victims to this kind of obsession. For evil eternally attracts evil; and it is no wild nor erratic fancy to maintain that the malice in the human soul naturally draws to itself by an inevitable and tragic reciprocity the malice in the souls of the “immortal companions.”

The second consideration derived from human experience which supports this view of the vicarious pain and pleasure experienced by the gods through the bodies of all organic entities is the psychological fact of our own attitude towards plants and animals. Any sensitive person among us will not hesitate to admit that in watching animals suffer, he has suffered *with* such animals; or again, that in watching a branch torn from its trunk, leaving an open wound out of which the sap oozes, he has suffered *with* the suffering of the tree. And just as the phenomenon of bodily obsession by some immortal god may be either “for good” or “for evil” as our own soul dictates, so the sympathy which we feel for plants and animals may be either “for good” or “for evil.”

And this also applies to the relation between these bodiless “immortals” and the bodies of all organic planetary life. According to the revelation of the complex vision, with its emphasis upon the ultimate duality as the supreme secret of life, both pain and pleasure are instruments, in the hands of love, for rousing the soul out of that sleep of death or semi-death which is the abysmal enemy.

The philosophies which oppose pain to pleasure, and insist upon the “good” of pain and the “evil” of pleasure, are no less misleading than the philosophies which oppose flesh to spirit, or matter to mind, calling the one “good” and the other “evil.” Such philosophies have permitted that basic attribute of the complex vision which we call conscience to usurp the place occupied, in the total rhythm, by imagination; with the result of a complete falsifying of the essential values.

In a question of such deadly import as this, we have, more than ever, to make our appeal to those rare moments of illumination which we have attained when the rhythmic intensity of the arrow-point of thought was most concentrated and piercing. And the testimony of these moments is given with no uncertain sound. In the great hours of our life, and I think all human experiences justify this statement, both pain and pleasure are transcended and flung into a subordinate and irrelevant place. Something which it is very difficult to describe, a kind of emotion which resembles happiness, flows through us; so that pain and pleasure seem to come and go almost unremarked, like dark and light shadows flung upon some tremendous water-fall.

What we are compelled to recognize, therefore, is that pain and pleasure are both instruments of the creative power of life. They only become evil or are used for purposes of evil, when, by reason of some fatal weakening in the other attributes of the soul, the purely sensational element in them dominates the emotional and they become something most horribly like living entities — entities with bodies composed of the vibrations of torment and souls composed of the substance of torment — and succeed in annihilating the very features of humanity.

Pain and pleasure are not identical with the unfathomable duality which descends into the abyss; for pain and pleasure are definitely and quite unmistakenly fathomable; though, as the gods know well, few enough of the sons of mortals reach the limit of them. They are fathomable; for carried to a certain pitch of intensity they end in ecstasy or they end in death. They are fathomable; for even in the souls of “the immortals” they are only instruments of life warring against death. They are fathomable; because they have one identical root; and this root is the ecstasy of the rhythm of the complex vision which transcends and surpasses them both.

The hideous symbol of “hell” is the creation of the false philosophy which makes the eternal duality resolve itself into flesh and spirit or into soul and body. The power of love renders this symbol meaningless and abortive; for personality is the supreme victory of life over what resists life; and consequently where personality exists “hell” cannot exist; for personality is the scope and boundary of all we know. The symbol of “Satan” also is rendered meaningless by the philosophy of the complex vision; unless such a symbol is used to express those appalling moments when the evil in the soul attracts to itself and associates with itself the evil in the soul of some immortal god.

But just as no mortal can be more evil than good, so also no immortal can be more evil than good, that is to say intrinsically and over a vast space of time. Momentarily and for a limited space of time it is obvious that the human soul can be more evil than good; and by a reasonable analogy it is only too probable that the same thing applies to the invisible sons of the universe. But the philosophy of the complex vision has no place for devils or demons in its world; for the simple reason that at the very moment any soul did become intrinsically and unchangeably evil, at that same moment it would vanish into nothingness, since existence is the product of the struggle between good and evil.

If any soul, whether mortal or immortal, became entirely and absolutely good, it would instantaneously vanish into nothingness. For the life of no kind of living soul is thinkable or conceivable apart from the unfathomable duality. The false philosophy which finds its ideal in an imaginary “parent” of the universe whose goodness is absolute is a philosophy conceived under the furtive influence of the power of evil. For the essence of the power of evil is opposition to the movement of life; and no false ideal has ever done so much injury to the free expansion of life as has been done by this conception of a "parent" of the universe who is a spirit of "absolute goodness."

It is entirely in accordance with the unfathomable cunning of the power of malice that the supreme historic obstacle to the power of love in the human soul should be this conception of a "parent" of the universe, possessed of absolute goodness. In the deepest and most subtle way does this conception oppose itself to the creative energy of love. The creative energy of love demands an indetermined and malleable future. It demands an enemy with which to struggle. It demands the freedom of the individual will. Directly that ancient and treacherous phantom, the "inscrutable mystery" *behind* the "universe," is allowed to become an object of thought; directly this mystery is allowed to take the shape of a "parent of things" who is to be regarded as "absolutely good," then, at that very moment, the eternal duality ceases to be "eternal" and ceases to be a "duality."

Good and evil become the manifestations of the same inscrutable power. Love and malice become interchangeable names of little meaning. Satan becomes as significant a figure as Christ. All distinctions are then blurred and blotted out. The aesthetic sense is made of no account; or becomes a matter of accidental fancy. Imagination is left with nothing to work upon. The rhythm of the complex vision is broken to pieces. All is permitted. Nothing is forbidden. The universe is reduced to an indiscriminate and formless mass of excremental substance. Indiscriminately we have to swallow the "universe" or indiscriminately we have to let the "universe" alone. There is no longer a protagonist in the great drama, for there is no longer an antagonist. Indeed there is no longer any drama. Tragedy is at an end; and Comedy is at an end. All is equal. Nothing matters. Everything is at once good and evil, beautiful and hideous, true and false. Or rather nothing is beautiful, nothing is true. The “parent of the universe” has satisfied his absolute “goodness” by swallowing up the universe; and there is nothing left for the miserable company of mortal souls to do but to bow their resigned heads and cry “Om! Om!” out of the belly of that unutterable “universal,” which by becoming “everything” has become nothing.

This conception of a universal being of “absolute goodness” looms like a colossal corpse in front of all living movement. If instead of “absolute goodness” we say “absolute love,” the falseness and deadliness of this conception appears even more unmistakable. For love is the prerogative of personality alone. Apart from personality we cannot conceive of love. And we cannot conceive of personality without the struggle between love and malice. “Absolute love” is a contradiction in terms; for it is the nature of love to be perpetually overcoming malignant opposition; and, in this overcoming, to be perpetually approximating to a far-off ideal which can never be completely reached.

Devils and demons, or elemental entities of unredeemed evil, are unreal enough; and in their unreality dangerous enough to the creative spirit; but far more unreal and far more dangerous than any devil, is this conception of an absolute being whose “goodness” is of so spurious a nature that it obliterates all distinction. This conception of “a parent of the universe” who is responsible for the “eternal duality,” but in whom the “eternal duality” is reconciled, blots out all hope for mortal or immortal souls. Between the soul of a man and the soul of an immortal god, as for instance between the soul of a man and the soul of Christ, there may be passionate and enduring love. But between the soul of a man, in whom love is desperately struggling with malice, and this monstrous being in whom love and malice have arrived at some unthinkable reconciliation, there can be no love. There can be nothing but indignant unbelief alternating with profound aversion. Towards any being in whose nature love has been reconciled to malice, the true to the false, the beautiful to the hideous, the good to the evil, there can be no alternative to unbelief, except unmitigated hostility.

It is especially in connection with the atrocious cruelty of physical pain that our conscience and our tastes — unless perverted by some premature metaphysical synthesis or by some morbid religious emotion — reluct at the conception of a “parent” of the universe. Personal love, since it is continually being roused to activity by pain and is continually being expressed through pain and in spite of pain, has come to find in pain, perhaps even more than in pleasure, its natural accomplice. Through the radiant well-being which results from pleasure, love pours forth its influence with a sun-like sweetness and profusion. But from the profound depths of pain, love rises like silence out of a deep sea; and no path of moonlight upon any ocean reaches so far an horizon.

And it is because of this intimate association of love with pain that it is found to be impossible to love any living being who has not experienced pain. Pain can be entirely sensational; and in this case it needs a very passion of love to prevent it becoming obscene and humiliating. But it also can be entirely emotional; in which case it results directly from the struggle of malice with love. When pain is a matter of sensation or of sensationalized emotion, it depends for its existence upon the body. But when pain is entirely emotional it is independent of the body and is a condition of the soul.

As a condition of the soul pain is inevitably associated with the struggle between love and malice. For in proportion as love overcomes malice, pain ceases, and in proportion as malice overcomes love, pain ceases. A human being entirely free from emotional pain is a human being in whom love has for the moment completely triumphed; or a human being in whom malice has for the moment completely triumphed. There is an exultation of love which fills the soul with irresistible magnetic power, so that it can redeem the universe. There is also an exultation of malice which fills the soul with irresistible magnetic power, so that it can corrupt the universe. In both these extreme cases — and they are cases of no unfrequent occurrence in all deep souls — emotional pain ceases to exist.

Emotional pain is the normal condition of the human soul; because the normal condition of the human soul is a wavering and uncertain struggle between love and malice; but although love may overcome malice, or malice may overcome love, with relative completeness, they neither of them can overcome the other with absolute completeness. There must always remain in the depths of the soul a living potentiality; which is the love or the malice which has been for the moment relatively overcome by its opposite. And just as pain can be both emotional and sensational so pleasure can be both emotional and sensational. Pleasure, like pain, can be a thing of bodily sensation alone; in which case it tends to become a thing of degrading and humiliating reality. A human entity entirely obsessed by physical pleasure is a revolting and obscene spectacle. Even with animals it is only when their sensation of pleasure is in some degree emotionalized that we can endure to contemplate it with sympathy.

The soul of an animal is capable of being “de-animalized” in just as horrible a way by a pure sensation as the soul of a man is capable of being “de-humanized” by a pure sensation. The sexual sensation of pleasure carried to the extreme limit “de-animalizes” animals as it “de-humanizes” human beings; because it drowns the consciousness of personality. There is an ecstasy when personality loses itself and finds itself again in a deeper personality. There is also an ecstasy where personality loses itself in pure sensation. In the region of sexual sensation, just as in the region of sexual emotion, it is love alone which is able to hold fast to personality in the midst of ecstasy; or which is able to merge personality in a deeper personality.

It is because of love's intimate association with pain that we are unable, except under the morbid pressure of some metaphysical or religious illusion, to regard the imaginary "parent of the universe" with anything but hostility. Both pain and pleasure are associated with the unfathomable duality. And although the unfathomable duality descends into abysses beyond the reach of both of these, yet we cannot conceive of either of them existing apart from this struggle.

But there can be no duality, as there can be no struggle, in the soul of a being in whom love has absolutely overcome malice. Therefore in such a soul there can be no pain. And for a soul incapable of feeling pain we can feel no love. It is of course obvious that this whole problem is an imaginary one. We are not really confronted with the alternative of loving or hating the unruffled soul of this absolute one. And we are not confronted with this problem for the simple reason that such a soul does not exist. And it does not exist because every soul, together with the "universe" created by every soul, depends for its existence upon this ultimate struggle.

It is from a consideration of the nature of pain and pleasure that we attain the clue to the ultimate duality. Pain and pleasure are conditions of the soul; conditions which have a definite and quite fathomable limit. Malice and love are conditions of the soul; conditions which have no definite limit, but which descend into unfathomable depths. Extremity of malice sinks down to an abyss where pain and pleasure are lost and merged in one another.

Extremity of love sinks down to an abyss where pain and pleasure are lost and merged in one another. But just as, apart from the individual soul which is their possessor, pain and pleasure have no existence at all; so, apart from the individual soul which is the arena of their struggle, malice and love have no existence at all. Because we speak of pain and pleasure as if they were "things in themselves" and of malice and love as if they were "things in themselves" this can never mean more than that they are eternal conditions of the soul which is their habitation.

Apart from a personal soul, "love" has no meaning and cannot be said to exist. Apart from a personal soul, "life" has no meaning and cannot be said to exist. There is no such thing as the "love-force" or the "life-force," any more than there is such a thing as the "malice-force" or the "death-force," apart from some personal soul. The "life-force" is a condition of the soul which carried to an extreme limit results in ecstasy. The "death-force" is a condition of the soul which carried to an extreme limit results in ecstasy. Beyond these two ecstasies there is nothing but total annihilation; which would simply mean that the soul had become absolutely "good" or absolutely "evil."

What we call the "death-force" in the soul does not imply real death, until it has reached a limit beyond ecstasy. It implies a malignant resistance to life which may be carried to a point of indescribable exultation. As I have already hinted there is a profound association between the duality of love and malice and the duality of pain and pleasure. But it would be false to our deepest experience to say that love implies pleasure and that malice implies pain. As a matter of fact, they both imply a thrilling and ecstatic pleasure, in proportion as the equilibrium between them, the balance of the wavering struggle between them, is interrupted by the relative victory of either the one or the other.

The relative victory of malice or of the “death-force” over love or over the “life-force” is attended by exquisite and poignant pleasure, a pleasure which culminates in unutterable ecstasy. The shallow ethical thinkers who regard “evil” as a negation are obviously thinkers whose consciousness has never penetrated into the depths of their own souls. Pain and pleasure for such thinkers must be entirely sensationalized. They cannot have experienced, to any profound depth, the kind of pain and pleasure which are purely emotional.

The condition of the soul which gives itself up to the “death-force” or to the malignant power which resists creation may be sometimes a condition of thrilling and exultant pleasure. As we have already indicated, the normal condition of the soul, wavering and hesitating between good and evil, is liable to be changed into a profound melancholy, when it is confronted by the “illusion of dead matter.” But, as we have also discovered, if, in the soul thus contemplating the “illusion of dead matter,” evil is more potent than good, there may be a thrilling and exquisite pleasure.

The “death-force” in our own soul leaps in exultation to welcome the “death illusion” in material objects. Upon this illusion, which it has itself projected, it rejoices to feed. There is a “sweet pain” in the melancholy it thus evokes; a “sweet pain” that is more delicate than any pleasure; and it is a mistake to assume that even the insanity which this aberration may result in is necessarily an insanity of distress. It may be an insanity of ecstasy. All this is profoundly associated with the aesthetic sense; and we may note that the diabolical exultation with which many great artists and writers fling themselves upon the obscene, the atrocious, the cruel and the abominable, and derive exquisite pleasure from representing these things is not an example of the love in them overcoming the malice but an example of the “death-force” in them leaping to respond to the death-force in the universe.

It is just here that we touch one of the profoundest secrets of the aesthetic sense. I refer to that condition of the soul when the creative energy which is life and love, suffers an insidious corruption by the power which resists creation and which is malice and death. This psychological secret, although assuming an aesthetic form, is closely associated with the sexual instinct.

The sexual instinct, which is primarily creative, may easily, by the insidious corruption of the power which resists creation, become a vampirizing force of destruction. It may indeed become something worse than destruction. It may become an abysmal and unutterable "death-in-life." That voluptuous "pleasure in cruelty" which is an intrinsic element of the sexual instinct may attach itself to "the pleasure in death" which is the intrinsic emotion of the aboriginal inert malice; or rather the "pleasure in death" of the adversary of creation may insidiously associate itself with the "pleasure in cruelty" of the sexual instinct and make of "this energy of cruelty" a new and terrible emotion which is at once cruel and inert.

All this were mere fantastic speculation if it lacked touch with direct experience. But direct experience, if we have any psycho-clairvoyance at all, bears unmistakable witness to what I have been saying. If one glances at the expression in the countenance of any human soul who is deriving pleasure from the spectacle of suffering and who, under the pressure of this queer fusion of the aesthetic sense with the abysmal malice, is engaged in vampirizing the victim of such suffering one will observe a very curious and very illuminating series of revelations.

One will observe, for instance, the presence of demonic energy and of magnetic dominance in such a countenance; but parallel with this and simultaneously with this, one will observe an expression of unutterable sadness, a sadness which is inert and death-like, a sadness which has the soulless rigidity and the frozen immobility of a corpse. We are thus justified, by an impression of direct experience, in our contention that the peculiar pleasure which many artists derive from the contemplation of suffering and from the contemplation of what is atrocious, obscene, monstrous and revolting, is the result of a corruption of both the sexual instinct and the aesthetic sense by the abysmal malice.

For the pleasure which such souls derive from the contemplation of suffering is identical with the pleasure they derive from contemplating the "illusion of dead matter." Philosophers who give themselves up to the profoundest pessimism do not do so, as a rule, under the influence of love. The only exceptions to this are rare cases when preoccupation with suffering does not spring from a furtive enjoyment of the spectacle of suffering but from an incurable pity for the victims of suffering. Such exceptions are far more rare than is usually supposed, because the self-preservative hypocrisy of most pessimists enables them to conceal their voluptuousness under the mask of pity.

Nor must we hide from ourselves the fact that even pity, which in its pure form is the very incarnation of love, has a perverted form in which it lends itself to every kind of subterranean cruelty. Our psychological insight does not amount to very much if it does not recognize that there is a form of pity which enhances the pleasure of cruelty. There may indeed be discovered, when we dig deep enough into the abysses of the soul, an aspect of pity which thrills us with a most delicate sensation of tenderness and yet which remains an aspect of pity by no means incompatible with the fact that we continue the process of causing pain to the object of such tenderness.

Of all human emotions the emotion of pity is capable of the most divergent subtleties. The only kind of pity which is entirely free from the ambiguous element of "pleasure in cruelty" is the pity which is only another name for love, when love is confronted by suffering. There is such a thing as a suppressed envy of “the pleasure of cruelty” manifested in the form of moral indignation against the perpetrator of such cruelty.

Such moral indignation, with its secret impulse of suppressed unconscious jealousy, is a very frequent phenomenon when any sexual element enters into the cruelty in question. But the psychologist who has learnt his art from the profoundest of all psychologists — I mean the Christ of the gospels — is not deceived by this moral gesture. He is able to detect the infinite yearning of the satyr under the righteous fury of the moral avenger.

And he has an infallible test at hand by which to ascertain whether the emotion he feels is pure or impure pity; whether in other words it is merely a process of delicate vampirizing, or whether it is the creative sympathy of love. And the test which he has at his disposal is nothing less than his attitude towards the perpetrator of the particular cruelty under discussion. If his attitude is one of implacable revenge he may be sure that his pity is something else than the emotion of love. If his attitude is one which implies pity not only for the victim but also for the victim’s torturer — who without question has more need for pity — then he may be sure that his attitude is an attitude of genuine love.

The mood of implacable revenge need not necessarily imply a suppressed jealousy or envy; but it certainly implies the presence of an element which has its origin in the sinister side of the great duality. The pleasure which certain minds derive from a contemplation of the “deadness of matter” is closely associated with the voluptuousness of cruelty drawn from the recesses of the sexual instinct. Such cruelty finds one of its most insidious incentives in the phenomenon of humiliation; and when the philosopher contemplates the “deadness of matter” with exquisite satisfaction, the pleasure which he experiences, or the “sweet pain” which he experiences, is very closely connected with the cruel idea of humiliating the pride of the human soul.

The duality of pleasure and pain helps us to understand the nature of the duality of good and evil, for it helps us to realize that good and evil are not separate independent existences; but are — like pleasure and pain — emotional conditions of the soul. Thus when we say that the ultimate duality of good and evil, or of creation and what resists creation, is the thing upon which the whole universe depends, we must not for a moment be supposed to mean that the ultimate reality of the universe consists of two opposed “forces” who, like blind chemical energies, struggle with one another in unconscious darkness.

The ultimate reality of the universe is personality, or rather, let us say, is the existence of an innumerable company of personal souls, visible and invisible, each of whom half-creates and half-discovers his own universe; each of whom finds, sooner or later, in the objective validity of the “eternal ideas,” a universe which is common to them all. The unfathomable duality upon which this objective world, common to them all, depends for its existence is a duality which exists in every separate soul. Without such a duality it is impossible to conceive any soul existing. And directly such a duality were resolved into unity such a soul would cease to exist. But because, without the presence of evil, good would cease to exist, we have no right to say that evil is an aspect of good. We have no right to say this because, if good is dependent for its existence upon evil, it is equally true that evil is dependent for its existence upon good.

The whole question of ultimate issues is a purely speculative one and one that does not touch the real situation. The real situation, the real fact of our personal experience — which is the only experience worth anything —

lies undoubtedly in this impression of unfathomable duality. It cannot be regarded as a reconciliation between love and malice merely to recognize that love and malice are not independent "forces," such as can be compared to chemical "forces," but are states of the soul.

It is true that they both exist within the soul, just as the soul exists within time and space; but since the soul is unfathomable these two conditions of the soul are also unfathomable. The struggle upon which the universe depends is a struggle which goes on within the circle of personality; but since personality is unthinkable without this struggle, it may truly be said that the existence of personality "depends" upon the existence of this struggle. When we speak of pain and pleasure as if they were independent entities we are forgetting that it is merely as "states of the soul" that pain and pleasure exist. When we speak of love and malice as independent entities we are forgetting that it is merely as "states of the soul" that love and malice exist. Love and malice, the life-force and the death-force, these are merely abstractions when separated from the soul which is their arena.

It is certainly not in harmony with the revelation of the complex vision to seek to imagine some vague "beginning of things"; when some inscrutable chemical or spiritual "energy," called "life," rushed into objective existence and proceeded to create living personalities through which it might be able to function.

The revelation of the complex vision is a revelation of a world made up of unfathomable personalities. Of this world, of these unfathomable personalities, we are unable to postulate any "beginning." They have always existed. They seem likely to remain always in existence. Our knowledge stops at that point; because our knowledge is the knowledge of personality. The revelation of the complex vision is constantly warning us against any tendency to evade the whole question of the original mystery by the use of meaningless abstractions.

The word “energy” is such an abstraction. So also is the word “movement.” So also are those logical formulae of the pure reason, such as the “a priori unity of apperception” and the “absolute spirit.” Apart from personality, apart from the complex vision of the individual soul, there is no such thing as “energy” or “movement” or “transcendental unity” or “absolute spirit.” In the same way we are compelled to recognize that apart from personality the unfathomable duality has no meaning. But in so far as it represents the eternal struggle between life and death which goes on all the while in every living soul, the unfathomable duality is the permanent condition of our deepest knowledge.

It is just here that the mystery of pain and pleasure helps us to understand the mystery of love and malice, the same insensitiveness in certain souls that prevents their feeling any vivid pain or any vivid pleasure, also prevents their feeling any intense malice. But this insensitiveness which prevents their feeling any intense malice is, more than anything else, the especial evocation of the power of malice. For intensity, even in malice, is a proof that malice has been appropriating to its use the energy of life. The real opposite of intense love is not intense malice but inert malice.

For malignant inertness is the true adversary of creation. From this it necessarily follows that the soul which is insensitive to pain and pleasure and to malice and love is a soul in whom the profound opposite of love has already won a relative victory. It is certainly possible, as we have seen, for the victory of malice over love to be accompanied by thrilling pleasure; but, when this happens malice has lost something of its “inertness” by drawing to itself and corrupting for its own use the dynamic energy of love. When malice displays itself in an intense and vivid activity of destruction it is less “evil” and less purely “malignant” than when it remains insensitive and inert. For this reason it is undeniably true that an insensitive person, although he may cause much less positive pain than a passionately cruel person, is in reality a more complete incarnation of the power of “evil” than the latter; for the latter, in the very violence of his passion, has appropriated to himself something of the creative energy. It is true that in appropriating this he has corrupted it, and it is true that by the use of it he can cause far more immediate pain; but it remains that in himself he is less purely “evil” than the person whose chief characteristic is a malignant insensitiveness.

CHAPTER XIII. THE REALITY OF THE SOUL IN RELATION TO MODERN THOUGHT

IT OUGHT NOT to be forgotten, as at least an important historical fact, in regard to what we have asserted as the revelation of the complex vision concerning the reality of the soul, that the two most influential modern philosophers deny this reality altogether. I refer to Bergson and William James.

In the systems of thought of both these writers there is no place left for that concrete, real, actual "monad," with its semi-mental, semi-material substratum of unknown hyper-physical, hyper-psychic substance, which is what we mean, in philosophical as well as in popular language when we talk of the "soul."

According to the revelation of man's complex vision this hyper-physical, hyper-psychic "something," which is the concrete centre of will and consciousness and energy, is also the invisible core or base of what we term personality, and, without its real existence, personality can have no permanence. Without the assumption of its real existence personality cannot hold its own or remain integral and identical in the midst of the process of life.

This then being the nature and character of the soul, what weight is there in the arguments used against the soul's concrete existence by such thinkers as James and Bergson? The position of the American philosopher in regard to this matter seems less plausible and less consistent than that of his French master.

James is prepared to give his adherence to a belief in a soul of the earth and in planetary souls and stellar souls. He quotes with approval on this point the writings of Gustav Theodor Fechner, the Leipzig chemist. He is also prepared to find a place in his pluralistic world for at least one quite personal and quite finite god.

If he is not merely exercising his philosophical fancy in all this, but is actually prepared to assume the real concrete existence of an earth-soul and of planetary souls and of at least one beneficent and quite personal god, why should he find himself unable to accept the same sort of real concrete soul in living human beings? Why should he find himself compelled to say — "the notion of the substantial soul, so freely used by common men and the more popular philosophers has fallen upon evil days and has no prestige in the eyes of critical thinkers... like the word 'cause' the word 'soul' is but a theoretic stop-gap... it marks a place and claims it for a future explanation to occupy... let us leave out the soul, then, and confront the original dilemma"?

This scepticism of the pragmatic philosophy in regard to the "substantial soul" is surely an unpardonable inconsistency. For in all other problems the fact of an idea being "freely used by common men" is, according to pragmatic principles, an enormous piece of evidence in its favour. The further fact that all the great "a priori" metaphysical systems have been driven by their pure logic to discredit the "substantiality" of the soul, just as they have been driven to discredit the personality of God, ought, one would think, where "radical empiricism" is concerned, to be a still stronger piece of evidence on the soul's side.

James has told us that he has found it necessary to throw away "pure reason" and to assume an inherent "irrationality" in the system of things.

Why then, when it comes to this particular axiom of irrational common-sense, does he balk and sheer off?

One cannot resist the temptation of thinking that just here the great Pragmatist has been led astray by that very philosophical pride he condemns in the metaphysicians. One cannot help suspecting that it is nothing less than the fact of the soul's appeal to ordinary common-sense that has prejudiced this philosopher of common-sense so profoundly against it.

What James does not seem to see is that his pseudo-scientific reduction of the integral soul-monad into a wavering and fitful series of compounded vortex-consciousness is really a falling back from the empirical data of human reality into the thin abstracted air of conceptual truth. The concrete substantial soul, just because it is the permanent basis of personality and the only basis of personality which common sense can apprehend, is precisely one of those obstinate original particular "data" of consciousness which it is the proud role of conceptual and intellectual logic to explain away, and to explain away in favour of attenuated rationalistic theories which are themselves "abstracted" or, shall we say, pruned and shaved off from the very thing they are supposed to explain.

All these "flowing streams," and "pulses of consciousness" and multiple "compoundings of consciousness" and overlappings of sub-consciousness are in reality, for all their pseudo-scientific air, nothing more or less than the old-fashioned metaphysical conceptions, such as "being" and "becoming," under a new name.

Nor is the new "irrational reason" by which the pragmatist arrives at these plausible theories really in the least different from the imaginative personal vision which, as James himself clearly shows, was at the back of all that old-fashioned dialectic.

The human mind has not changed its inherent texture; nor can it change it. We may talk of substituting intuition for reason. But the “new intuition,” with its arrogant claims of getting upon the “inner side” of reality, is after all only “the old reason” functioning with a franker admission of its reliance upon that immediate personal vision and with less regard for the logical rules.

It is not, in fact, because of any rule of “logical identity with itself” that the human mind clings so tenaciously to the notion of an integral soul-monad. It is because of its own inmost consciousness that such a monad, that such a substantial integral soul, is in the deepest sense its very self, and a denial of it a denial of its very self.

The attitude of Bergson in this matter is much more consistent than that of James. Bergson is frankly and confessedly not a pluralist at all, but a spiritual monist. As a spiritual monist he is compelled to regard what we call “matter,” including in this term the mechanical or chemical resistance of body and brain, as something which is produced or evolved or “thrown off” by spirit and as something which, when once it has been evolved, spirit has to penetrate, permeate, and render porous and submissive.

The complexity of Bergson’s speculations with regard to memory and the “élan vital,” with regard above all to the “true time,” has done much to distract popular attention away from his real attitude towards the soul. But Bergson’s attitude towards the existence of a substantial soul-monad is consistently and inevitably hostile.

It could not be anything else as long as the original personal “fling” into life which gives each one of us his peculiar angle of vision remained with him a question of one unified *spirit*— “a continuum of eternal shooting-forth” — which functioned through the brain and through all personal life and perpetually created a new unforeseen universe.

In the flux of this one universal "spirit," whereof "duration," in the mysterious Bergsonian sense, is the functional activity, there can obviously be no place for an actual substantial soul. "The consciousness we have of our own self in its continual flux introduces us to the interior of a reality on the model of which we must represent other realities. All reality, therefore, is a tendency, if we agree to mean by tendency an incipient change in any direction." And when we enquire as to the nature of this "continual flux" of which the positive and integral thing we have come to call the soul is but a ripple, or swirling whirlpool of centripetal ripples, the answer which Bergson gives is definite enough. "We approach a duration which *strains,* contracts, and intensifies itself more and more; at the limit would be eternity. No longer conceptual eternity, which is an eternity of death, but an eternity of life. A living, and therefore still moving eternity in which our own particular duration would be included, as the vibrations are in light; an eternity which would be the concentration of all duration, as materiality is its dispersion. Between these two extreme limits intuition moves, and this movement is the very essence of metaphysics."

Thus according to Bergson the essential secret of life is to be found in some peculiar movement of what he calls spirit; a movement which takes place in some unutterable medium, or upon some indescribable plane, the name of which is "pure time" or "duration."

And listening to all this we cannot resist a sigh of dismay. For here, in these vague de-humanized terms— "tendency," "flux," "eternity," "vibration," "duration," "dispersion" — we are once more, only with a different set of concepts, following the old metaphysical method, that very method which Bergson himself sets out to confine to its inferior place. "Tendency" or "flux" or "duration" is just as much a metaphysical concept as "being" or "not being" or "becoming."

The only way in which we can really escape from the rigid conceptualism of rational logic is to accept the judgment of the totality of man's nature. And the judgment of the totality of man's nature points unmistakably to the existence of a real substantial soul. Such a soul is the indispensable implication of personality. And the most interior and intimate knowledge that we are in possession of, or shall ever be in possession of, is the knowledge of personality.

Bergson is perfectly right when he asserts that "the consciousness which we have of our own self" introduces us "to the interior of a reality, on the model of which we must represent other realities." But Bergson is surely departing both from the normal facts of ordinary introspection and from the exceptional facts of abnormal illumination when he appends to the words "the consciousness which we have of our own self" the further words in its continual "flux." For in our normal moods of human introspection, as well as in our abnormal moods of superhuman illumination, what we are conscious of most of all is a sense of integral continuity in the midst of change, and of identical permanence in the midst of ebb and flow.

The flux of things does most assuredly rush swiftly by us; and we, in our inmost selves, are conscious of life's incessant flow. But how could we be conscious of any of this turbulent movement across the prow of our voyaging ship, if the ship itself — the substantial base of our living consciousness — were not an organized and integral reality, of psycho-chemical material, able to exert will and to make use of memory and reason in its difficult struggle with the waves and winds?

The revelation of man's complex vision with regard to the personality of the soul is a thing of far-reaching issues and implications. One of these implications is that while we have the right to the term "the eternal flux" in regard to the changing waves of sensations and ideas that pass across the horizon of the soul’s vision we have no right to think of this “eternal flux” as anything else than the pressure upon us of the universe of our own vision and the pressure upon us of the universe of other visions, as they seem, for this or that passing moment, to be different from our own.

The kind of world to which we are thus committed is a world crowded with living personalities. Each of these personalities brings with it its own separate universe. But the fact that all these separate universes find their ideal synthesis or teleological orientation in “the vision of the immortals,” justifies us in assuming that in a certain eternal sense all these apparently conflicting universes are in reality one. This unity of ideas, with its predominant aesthetic idea — the idea of beauty — and its predominant emotional idea — the idea of love — helps us towards a synthesis which is after all only a dynamic one, a thing of movement, growth and creation.

Such a teleological unity, forever advancing to a consummation never entirely to be attained, demands however some sort of static “milieu” as well as some sort of static “material” in the midst of which and out of which it moulds its premeditated future. It is precisely this static “milieu” or “medium,” and this static “material” or formless “objective mystery,” which Bergson’s philosophy, of the *“élan vital” of pure spirit,* spreading out into a totally indetermined future, denies and eliminates.

In order to justify this double elimination — the elimination of an universal “medium” and the elimination of a formless “thing-in-itself” — Bergson is compelled to reduce *space* to a quite secondary and merely logical conception and to substitute for our ordinary stream of time, measurable in terms of space, an altogether new conception of time, measurable in terms of feeling.

When however we come to analyse this new Bergsonian time, or as he prefers to call it “intuitively-felt duration,” we cannot avoid observing that it is merely a new “mysterious something” introduced into the midst of the system of things, in order to enable us to escape from those older traditional “mysterious somethings” which we have to recognize as the “immediate data” of human consciousness.

It might be argued that Bergson’s monistic “spirit,” functioning in a mysterious indefinable “time,” demands neither more nor less of an irrational act of faith than our mysterious psycho-material “soul” surrounded by a mysterious hyper-chemical “medium” and creating its future out of an inexplicable “objective mystery.”

Where however the philosophy of the complex vision has the advantage over the philosophy of the “élan vital” is in the fact that even on Bergson’s own admission what the human consciousness most intensely *knows* is not “pure spirit,” whether shaped like a fan or shaped like a sheaf, but simply its own integral identity. And this integral identity of consciousness can only be visualized or felt in the mind itself under the form of a living concrete monad.

It will be seen, however, when it comes to a “showing up” of what might be called the “trump cards” of axiomatic mystery, that the complex vision has in reality fewer of these ultimate irrational “data” than has the philosophy of the élan vital.

Space itself, whether we regard it as objective or subjective, is certainly not an irrational axiom but an entirely rational and indeed an entirely inevitable assumption. And what the complex vision reveals is that the trinity of “mysterious somethings” with which we are compelled to start our enquiry, namely the “something” which is the substratum of the soul, the “something” which is the “medium” binding all souls together, and the “something” which is the “objective mystery” out of which all souls create their universe, is, in fact, a genuine trinity in the pure theological sense; in other words is a real “three-in-one.” And it is a “three-in-one” not only because it is unthinkable that three “incomprehensible substances” should exist in touch with one another without being in organic relation, but also because all three of them are dominated, in so far as we can say anything about them at all, by the same universal space.

It is true that the unappropriated mass of “objective mystery” upon which no shadow of the creative energy of any soul has yet been thrown must be considered as utterly “formless and void” and thus in a sense beyond space and time, yet since immediately we try to *imagine* or *visualize* this mystery, as well as just logically “consider” it, we are compelled to extend over it our conception of time and space, it is in a practical sense, although not in a logical sense, under the real dominion of these.

When therefore the philosophy of the complex vision places its trump-cards of axiomatic mystery over against the similar cards of the philosophy of the “élan vital” it will be found that in actual number Bergson has one more “card” than we have. For Bergson has not only his “pure spirit” and his “intuitively-felt time,” but has also — for he cannot really escape from that by just asserting that his “spirit” produces it — the opposing obstinate principle of “matter” or “solid bodies” or “mechanical brains” upon which his pure spirit has to work.

It is indeed out of its difficulties with “matter,” that is to say with bodies and brains, that Bergson’s “spirit” is forced to forego its natural element of “intuitive duration” and project itself into the rigid rationalistic conceptualism of ordinary science and metaphysic.

The point of our argument in this place is that since the whole purpose of philosophy is articulation or clarification and since in this process of clarification the fewer “axiomatic incomprehensibles” we start with the better; it is decidedly to the advantage of any philosophy that it should require at the start nothing more than the mystery of the individual soul confronting the mystery of the world around it. And it is to the disadvantage of Bergson's philosophy that it should require at the start, in addition to "pure spirit" with its assumption of memory and will, and "pure matter" with its assumption of ordinary space and ordinary time, a still further axiomatic trump-card, in the theory of intuitive "durational" time, in which the real process of the life-flow transcends all reason and logic.

Putting aside however the cosmological aspect of our controversy with the "radical empirical" school of thought, we still have left unconsidered our most serious divergence from their position. This consists in the fact that both Bergson and James have entirely omitted from their original instrument of research that inalienable aspect of the human soul which we call the aesthetic sense.

With only a few exceptions — notably that of Spinoza — all the great European philosophers from Plato to Nietzsche have begun their philosophizing from a starting-point which implied, as an essential part of their "organum" of enquiry, the possession by the human soul of some sort of aesthetic vision.

To these thinkers, whether rationalistic or mystic, no interpretation of the world seemed possible that did not start with the aesthetic sense, both as an instrument of research and as a test of what research discovered.

The complete absence of any discussion of the aesthetic sense in Bergson and James is probably an historic confession of the tyranny of commercialism and physical science over the present generation. It may also be a spiritual reflection, in the sphere of philosophy, of the rise to political and social power of that bourgeois class which, of all classes, is the least interested in aesthetic speculation.

The philosophy of the complex vision may have to wait for its hour of influence until the proletariat comes into its own. And it does indeed seem as if between the triumph of the proletariat and the triumph of the aesthetic sense there were an intimate association. It is precisely because these two philosophers have so completely neglected the aesthetic sense that their speculations seem to have so little hold upon the imagination. When once it is allowed that the true instrument of research into the secret of the universe is the rhythmic activity of man's complete nature, and not merely the activity of his reason or the activity of his intuition working in isolation, it then becomes obvious that the universal revelations of the aesthetic sense, if they can be genuinely disentangled from mere subjective caprices, are an essential part of what we have to work with if we are to approach the truth.

The philosophy of the complex vision bases its entire system upon its faith in the validity of these revelations; and, as we have already shown, it secures an objective weight and force for this ideal vision by its faith in certain unseen companions of humanity, whom it claims the right to name "the immortals."

This is really the place where we part company with Bergson and James. We agree with the former in his distrust of the old metaphysic. We agree with the latter in many of his pluralistic speculations. But we feel that any philosophy which refuses to take account, at the very beginning, of those regions of human consciousness which are summed up by the words "beauty" and "art," is a philosophy that in undertaking to explain life has begun by eliminating from life one of its most characteristic products.

In Bergson's interpretation of life the stress is laid upon "spirit" and "intuition." In James' interpretation of life the stress is laid upon those practical changes in the world and in human nature which any new idea must produce if it is to prove itself true.

In the view of life we are now trying to make clear, philosophy is so closely dependent upon the activity of the aesthetic sense that it might itself be called an art, the most difficult and the most comprehensive of all the arts, the art of retaining the rhythmic balance of all man's contradictory energies. What this rhythmic balance of man's concentrated energies seems to make clear is the primary importance of the process of discrimination and valuation.

From the profoundest depths of the soul rises the consciousness of the power of choice; and this power of choice to which we give, by common consent, the name of "will," finds itself confronted at the start by the eternal duality of the impulse to create and the impulse to resist creation. The impulse to create we find, by experience, to be identical with the emotion of love. And the impulse to resist creation we find, by experience, to be identical with the emotion of malice.

But experience carries us further than this. The impulse to create, or the emotion of love, is found, as soon as it begins a function, to be itself a living synthesis of three primordial reactions to life, which, in philosophic language, we name "ideas." These three primordial ideas may be summed up as follows: The idea of beauty, which is the revelation of the aesthetic sense. The idea of goodness or nobility, which is the revelation of conscience. The idea of truth, or the mind's apprehension of reality, which is the revelation of reason, intuition, instinct, and imagination, functioning in sympathic harmony. Now it is true that by laying so much stress upon the "élan vital" or flowing tide of creative energy, Bergson has indicated his acceptance of one side of the ultimate duality. But for Bergson this creative impulse is not confronted by evil or by malice as its opposite, but simply by the natural inertness of mechanical "matter."

And once having assumed his “continuum” of pure spirit, he deals no further with the problem of good and evil or with the problem of the aesthetic sense.

From our point of view he is axiomatically unable to deal with these problems for the simple reason that his élan vital or flux of pure spirit, being itself a mere metaphysical abstraction from living personality, can never, however hard you squeeze it, produce either the human conscience or the human aesthetic sense.

These things can only be produced from the concrete activity of a real living individual soul. In the same way it is true that William James, by his emphasis upon conduct and action and practical efficiency as the tests of truth, is bound to lay enormous stress at the very start upon the ethical problem.

What a person believes about the universe becomes itself an ethical problem by the introduction on the one hand of the efficiency of the will to believe and on the other of the assumption that a person “ought” to believe that which it is “useful” to him to believe, as long as it does not conflict with other desirable truths. But this ethical element in the pragmatic doctrine, though it is so dominant as almost to reduce philosophy itself to a sub-division of ethics, is not, when one examines it, at all the same thing as what the philosophy of the complex vision means by the revelation of conscience.

Ethics with William James swallows up philosophy and in swallowing up philosophy the nature of Ethics is changed and becomes something different from the clear unqualified mandate of the human conscience. With the philosophy of the complex vision the revelations of conscience are intimately associated with the revelations of the aesthetic sense; and these again, in the rhythmic totality of man’s nature, with the revelations of emotion, instinct, intuition, imagination.

Thus when it comes to conduct and the question of choice the kind of “imperative” issued by conscience has been already profoundly changed. It is still the mandate of conscience. But it is the mandate of a conscience whose search-light has been taken possession of by the aesthetic sense and has been fed by imagination, instinct and intuition.

It must be understood when we speak of these various “aspects” or “attributes” of the human soul we do not imply that they exist as separable faculties independently of the unity of the soul which possesses them.

The soul is an integral and indivisible monad and throws its whole strength along each of these lines of contact with the world. As will, the soul flings itself upon the world in the form of choice between opposite valuations. As conscience, it flings itself upon the world in the form of motive force of opposite valuations. As the aesthetic sense, it flings itself upon the world in the form of yet another motive-force of opposite valuations. As imagination, it half-creates and half-discovers the atmospheric climate, so to speak, of this valuation. As intuition, it feels itself to be in possession of a super-terrestrial, super-human authority which gives objective definiteness and security to this valuation. As instinct, it feels its way by an innate clairvoyance into the organic or biological vibrations of this valuation.

Thus we return to the point from which we started, namely that the whole problem of philosophy is the problem of valuation. And this is the same thing as saying that philosophy, considered in its essential nature, is nothing less than art — the art of flinging itself upon the world with all the potentialities of the soul functioning in rhythmic harmony.

When Bergson talks of the “élan vital” and suggests that the acts of choice of the human personality are made as naturally and inevitably, under the pressure of the “shooting out” of the spirit, as leaves grow upon the tree, he is falling into the old traditional blunder of all pantheistic and monistic thinkers, the blunder namely of attributing to a universal “God” or “life-force” or “stream of tendency” the actual personal achievements of individual souls.

Bergson’s “apologia” for free-will is therefore rendered ineffective by reason of the fact that it does not really leave the individual free. The only “free” thing is the aboriginal “spirit,” pouring forth in its “durational” stream, and moulding bodies and brains as it goes along.

The philosophy of the complex vision does not believe in “spirit” or “life-force” or “durational streams of tendency.” Starting with personality it is not incumbent upon it to show how personality has been evolved. It is no more incumbent upon it to show how personality has been evolved than it is incumbent upon pantheistic idealism to show how God or how the Absolute has been evolved. Personality with its implication of separate concrete psycho-material soul-monads is indeed our Absolute or at any rate is as much of an Absolute as we can ever get while we continue to recognize the independent existence of one universal space, of one universal ethereal medium, and of on universal objective mystery.

Perhaps the correct metaphysical statement of our philosophic position would be that our Absolute is a duality from the very start — a duality made up on one side of innumerable soul-monads and on the other side of an incomprehensible formless mass of plastic material, itself subdivided into the two aspects of a medium binding the soul-monads together, and an objective mystery into which they pierce their way.

When the evolutionists tell us that personality is a thing of late appearance in the system of things and a thing of which we are able to note the historic or prehistoric development, out of the “lower” forms of life, our answer is that we have no right to assume that the life of the earth and of the other planetary and stellar bodies is a “lower” form of life.

If to this the astronomer answer that he is able to carry the history of evolution further back than any planet or star, as far back as a vast floating mass of homogeneous fiery vapour, even then we should still maintain that this original nebular mass of fire was the material “body” of an integral soul-monad; and that in surrounding immensities of space there were other similar masses of nebular fire — possibly innumerable others — who in their turn were the bodily manifestations of integral soul-monads.

When evolutionists argue that personality is a late and accidental appearance on the world scene, they are only thinking of human personalities; and our contention is that while man has a right to interpret the universe in terms of his soul, he has no right to interpret the universe in terms of his body; and that it is therefore quite possible to maintain that the “body” of the earth has been from the beginning animated by a soul-monad whose life can in no sense be called “lower” than the life of the soul-monad which at present animates the human body. And in support of our contention just here we are able to quote not only the authority of Fechner but the authority of Professor James himself approving of Fechner.

What the philosophy of the complex vision really does is to take life just as it is — the ordinary multifarious spectacle presented to our senses and interpreted by our imagination — and regard this, and nothing more recondite than this, as the ultimate Absolute, or as near an Absolute as we are ever likely to get.

From our point of view it seems quite uncalled for to summon up vague and remote entities, like streams of consciousness and shootings forth of spirit, in order to interpret this immediate spectacle. Such streams of consciousness and shootings forth of spirit seem to us just as much abstractions and just as much conceptual substitutions for reality as do the old-fashioned metaphysical entities of “being” and “becoming.”

No one has ever *seen* a life-stream or a life-force. No one has ever *seen* a compounded congeries of conscious states. But every one of us has seen a living human soul looking out of a living human body; and most of us have seen a living soul looking out of the mysterious countenance of earth, water, air and fire.

The philosophy of the soul-monad has at any rate this advantage over every other: namely, that it definitely represents human experience and can always be verified by human experience. Any human being can try the experiment of sinking into the depths of his own identity. Let the reader of this passage try such an experiment here and now; and let him, in the light of what he finds, decide this question. Does he find himself flowing mysteriously forth, along some indescribable “durational” stream, and, as he flows, feeling himself to be that stream? Or does he feel himself to be a definite concrete actual “I am I,” “the guest and companion of his body” and, as far as the mortal weakness of flesh allows, the motive-principle of that body?

If the philosophy of the complex vision is able to make an appeal of this kind with a certain degree of assurance as to the answer, it is able to make a yet more convincing appeal, when — the soul’s existence once admitted — it becomes a question as to that soul’s inherent quality. No human being, unless in the grasp of some megalomania of virtue, can deny the existence, in the depths of his nature, of a struggle between the emotion of love and the emotion of malice.

Out of this ultimate duality under the pressure of the forms and shapes of life and the reaction against these of the imagination and the aesthetic sense, spring into existence those primordial ideas of truth and beauty and goodness which, are the very stuff and texture of our fate. But these ideas, primordial though they are, are so confused and distorted by their contact with circumstances and accident, that it may well be that no clear image of them is found in the recesses of the soul when the soul turns its glance inward.

No soul, however, can turn its glance inward without recognizing in its deepest being this ultimate struggle between love and malice. How then can any philosophy be regarded as a transcript and reflection of reality when at the very start it refuses to take cognizance of this fact? If the only knowledge, which is in any sense certain, is our knowledge of ourselves, and if our knowledge of ourselves implies our knowledge of a definite "soul-monad" for ever divided against itself in this abysmal struggle, how then may a philosophy be regarded as covering the facts of experience, when in place of this personal contradiction it predicates, as its explanation of the system of things, some remote, thin, abstract tendency, such as the "shooting forth of spirit" or the compounding of states of consciousness?

The whole matter may be thus summed up. The modern tendencies of thought which we have been considering, get rid of the old metaphysical notion of the logical Absolute only to substitute vague psychological "states of consciousness" in its place. But what philosophy requires if the facts of introspective experience are to be trusted is neither an Absolute in whose identity all difference is lost nor a stream of "states of consciousness" which is suspended, as it were, in a vacuum.

What philosophy requires is the recognition of real actual persons whose original revelation of the secret of life implies that abysmal duality of good and evil beyond the margin of which no living soul has ever passed. Whether or not this concrete “monad” or living substratum of personality survives the death of the body is quite a different question; is in fact a question to which the philosophy of the complex vision can make no definite response. In this matter all we can say is that those supreme moments of rhythmic ecstasy, whose musical equilibrium I have indicated in the expression “apex-thought,” establish for us a conclusive certainty as to the eternal continuance, beyond the scope of all deaths, of that indestructible aspect of personality we have come to name the struggle between love and malice.

With the conclusive consciousness of this there necessarily arises a certain attitude of mind which is singularly difficult to describe but which I can hint at in the following manner. In the very act of recognition, in the act by which we apprehend the secret of the universe to consist in this abysmal struggle of the emotion of love with the emotion of malice, there is an implication of a complete acceptance of whatever the emotion of love or the principle of love is found to demand, as the terms of its relative victory over its antagonist. Whether this demand of love, or to put it more exactly this demand of “all souls” in whom love is dominant, actually issues in a personal survival after death we are not permitted to feel with any certainty. But what we feel with certainty, when the apex-thought of the complex vision reaches its consummation, is that we find our full personal self-realization and happiness in a complete acceptance of whatever the demand of love may be. And this is the case because the ultimate happiness and fulfilment of personality does not depend upon what may have happened to personality in the past or upon what may happen to personality in the future but solely and exclusively upon what personality demands here and now in the apprehension of the unassailable moment.

This suspension of judgment therefore in regard to the question of the immortality of the soul is a suspension of judgment implicit in the very nature of love itself. For if there were anything in the world nearer the secret of the world than is this duality of love and malice, then that alien thing, however we thought of it, would be the true object of the soul's desire and the victory of love over malice would fall into the second place.

If instead of the soul's desire being simply the victory of love over malice it were, so to speak, the "material fruit" of such a victory — namely, the survival of personality after death — then, in place of the struggle between love and malice, we should be compelled to regard *personality in itself,* apart from the nature of that personality, as the secret of the universe. But as we have repeatedly shown, it is impossible to think of any living personality apart from this abysmal dualism, the ebb and flow of which, with the relative victory of love over malice, is our ultimate definition of what living personality *is.* The emotion of love abstracted from personality is not the secret of the universe, because personality in its concrete living activity is the secret of the universe. It is this very abstraction of love, isolated from any person who loves, and projected as an abstract into the void, that has done so much to undermine religious thought, just as that other absolute of "pure being" has done so much to undermine philosophic thought.

Love and malice are unthinkable apart from personality; but personality divorced from the struggle between love and malice is something worse than unthinkable. It is something most tragically thinkable. It is in fact the plain reality of death. A dead body is a body in which the struggle between love and malice has completely ceased. A dead planet would be a planet in which the struggle between love and malice had ceased. We cannot speak of a “dead soul” because the soul is, according to our original definition, the very fusion-point and vortex-point where not only consciousness and energy meet but where love and malice meet and wage their eternal struggle.

Strictly speaking it is not true to say that the ultimate secret of the universe is the emotion of love. The emotion of love, just because it is an *emotion,* is the emotion of a personality. It is personality, not the emotion of love, which is the secret of the universe, which is, in fact, the very universe itself. But it is personality considered in its true concrete life, not as a mere abstraction devoid of all characteristics, which is this basic thing. And personality thus considered is, as we have seen, a living battleground of two ultimate emotions. The complete triumph of love over malice would mean the extinction of personality and following from this the extinction of the universe.

Thus what the soul’s desire really amounts to, in those rhythmic moments when its diverse aspects are reduced to harmonious energy, is not the complete victory of love over malice but only a relative victory. What it really desires is that malice should still exist, but that it should exist in subordination to love.

The ideal of the soul therefore in its creative moments is *the process of the overcoming of malice,* not the completion of this process. In order to be perpetually overcome by love, malice must remain existent, must remain “still there.” If it ceased to be there, there would be nothing left for love to overcome; and the ebb and flow of the universe, its eternal contradictions, would be at an end. The soul’s desire, according to this view, is not a life after death where malice, shall we say, is completely overcome and “good” completely triumphant. The soul’s desire is that malice, or evil, should continue to exist; but should continue to exist under the triumphant hand of love. The desire of the soul, in such ultimate moments, has nothing to do with the survival of the soul after death. It has to do with an acceptance of the demand of love. And what love demands is not that malice should disappear; but that it should for ever exist, in order that love should for ever be overcoming it. And the ecstasy of this process, of this “overcoming,” is a thing of single moments, moments which, as they pass, not only reduce both past and future to an eternal “now” but annihilate everything else but this eternal “now.” This annihilation of the past does not mean the extinction of memory or the extinction of hope. It only means that the profoundest of our memories are “brought over” as it were from the past into the present. It only means that a formless horizon of immense hope, indefinite and vague, hovers above the present, to give it spaciousness and freedom.

The revelation of the complex vision does not therefore answer the question of the immortality of the soul. What it does is to indicate the degree of importance of any answer to this question. And this degree of importance is much smaller than in our less harmonious moments we are inclined to suppose. At certain complacent moments the soul finds itself praying for some final assurance of personal survival. At certain other moments the soul is tempted to pray for complete annihilation. But at the moments when it is most entirely itself it neither prays for annihilation nor for immortality. It does not pray for itself at all. It prays that the will of the gods may be done. It prays that the power of love in every soul in the universe may hold the power of malice in subjection.

The soul therefore, revealed as a real substantial living thing by the complex vision, is not revealed as a thing necessarily exempt from death, but as a thing whose deepest activity renders it free from the fear of death.

In considering the nature of the contrast between the philosophy of the complex vision and the most dominant philosophic tendencies of the present time it is important to make clear what our attitude is towards that hypothetical assumption usually known as the Theory of Evolution.

If what is called Evolution means simply *change,* then we have not the least objection to the word. The universe obviously changes. It is undergoing a perpetual series of violent and revolutionary changes. But it does not necessarily improve or progress. On the contrary during enormous periods of time it deteriorates. Both progress and deterioration are of course purely human valuations. But according to our valuation of good and evil it may be said that during those epochs when the malicious, the predatory, the centripetal tendency in life predominates over the creative and centrifugal tendency, there is deterioration and degeneracy; and during the epochs when the latter overcomes the former there is growth and improvement.

It is quite obvious that from our point of view, there is no such thing as inanimate chemical substance, no such isolated evolutionary *phases* of "matter," such as the movements from "solids" to "liquids," from "liquids" to "gases," from "gases" to "ether," from "ether" to "electro-magnetism." All these apparent changes must be regarded as nothing less than the living organic changes taking place in the living bodies of actual personal souls.

According to our view the real and important variations in the multiform spectacle of the universe are the variations brought about by the perpetual struggle between life and death, in other words between the personal energy of creation and the personal resistance of malice.

For us the universe of bodies and souls is perpetually re-creating itself by the mysterious process of birth, perpetually destroying itself by the mysterious process of death.

It is this eternal struggle between the impulse to create new life and the impulse to resist the creation of life, and to destroy or to petrify life, which actually causes all movement in things and all change; movement sometimes forward and sometimes backward as the great pendulum and rhythm of existence swings one way or the other.

And even this generalization does not really cover what we regard as the facts of the case, because this backward or forward movement, though capable of being weighed and estimated “en masse” in the erratic and violent changes of history, is in reality a thing of particular and individual instances, a thing that ultimately affects nothing but individuals and personalities, in as much as it is the weighing and balancing of a struggle which takes place nowhere else except in the arena of concrete separate and personal souls.

What is usually called Evolution then, and what may just as reasonably be called Deterioration, is as far as we are concerned just a matter of perpetual movement and change.

The living personalities that fill the circle of space are perpetually reproducing themselves in a series of organic births, and perpetually passing away in the process of death.

We have also to remember that every living organism whether such an organism resemble that of a planet or a human being, is itself the dwelling-place of innumerable other living organisms dependent on it and drawing their life from it, precisely as their parent organism depends on, and draws its life from, the omnipresent universal ether.

What the philosophy of the complex vision denies and refutes is the modern tendency to escape from the real mystery of existence by the use of such vague hypothetical metaphors, all of them really profoundly anthropomorphic, such as “life-force” or “hyper-space” or “magnetic energy” or “streams of sub-consciousness.”

The philosophy of the complex vision drives these pseudo-philosophers to the wall and compels them to confess that ultimately all they are aware of is the inner personal activity of their own individual souls; compels them to confess that when it comes to the final analysis their “life-force” and “pure thought” and “hyper-space” and “radio-magnetic activity” are all nothing but one-sided hypothetical abstractions taken from the concrete movements of concrete individual bodies and souls which by an inevitable act of the imagination we assume to reproduce in their interior reactions what we ourselves experience in ours.

To introduce such a conception as that of those mysterious super human beings, whom I have named “the gods,” into a serious philosophic system, may well appear to many modern scientific minds the very height of absurdity.

But the whole method of the philosophy of the complex vision is based upon direct human experience; and from my point of view the obscure and problematic existence of some such beings has behind it the whole formidable weight of universal human feeling — a weight which is not made less valid by the arrogant use of mere phrases of rationalistic contempt such as that which is implied in the word “superstition.”

From our point of view a philosophy which does not include and subsume and embody that universal human experience covered by the term “superstition” is a philosophy that has eliminated from its consideration one great slice of actual living fact. And it is in this aspect of the problem more than in any other that the philosophy of the complex vision represents a return to certain revelations of human truth — call them mythological if you please — which modern philosophy seems to have deliberately suppressed.

In the final result it may well be that we have to choose, as our clue to the mystery of life, either “mathematica” or “mythology.”

The philosophy of the complex vision is compelled by the very nature of its organ of research to choose, in this dilemma, the latter rather than the former. And the universe which it thus dares to predicate is at least a universe that lends itself, as so many “scientific” universes do not, to that synthetic activity of the *imaginative reason* which in the long run alone satisfies the soul. And such a universe satisfies the soul, as these others cannot, because it reflects, in its objective spectacle of things, the profoundest interior consciousness of the actual living self which the soul in its deepest moments of introspection is able to grasp.

Modern science, under the rhetorical spell of this talismanic word “evolution,” seems to imply that it can explain the multiform shapes and appearances of organic life by deducing them, in all their vivid heterogeneity, from some hypothetical monistic substance which it boldly endows with the mysterious energy called the “life-force” and which it then permits to project out of itself, by some sort of automatic volition, the whole long historic procession of living organisms.

This purely imaginative assumption gives it, in the popular mind, a sort of vague right to make the astounding claim that it has “explained” the origin of things. Little further arrogance is needed to give it, in the popular mind, the still more astounding right to claim that it has indicated not only the nature of the “beginning” of things but the nature of their “end” also; this “end” being nothing less than some purely hypothetical “equilibrium” when the movement of “advance,” coming full circle, rounds itself off into the movement of “reversion.”

The philosophy of the complex vision makes no claim to deal either with the beginning of things or with the end of things. It recognizes that "beginnings" and "ends" are not things with which we can intelligibly deal; are, on the contrary, things which are completely unthinkable.

What we actually see, feel, divine, imagine, love, hate, detest, desire, dream, create and destroy — these living, dying, struggling, relaxing, advancing and retreating things — this space, this ether, these stars and suns, these animals, fishes, birds, plants, this earth and moon, these men and these trees and flowers, these high and unchanging eternal ideas of the beautiful and the good, these transitory perishing mortal lives and these dimly discerned immortal figures that we name "gods," all these, as far as we are concerned, have for ever existed, all these, as far as we are concerned, must for ever exist.

In the immense procession of deaths and births, it is indeed certain that the soul and body of the Earth have given birth to all the souls and bodies which struggle for existence upon her living flesh and draw so much of their love and their malice from the unfathomable depths of her spirit. But when once we accept as our basic axiom that where the "soul-monad" exists, whether such a "monad" be human, sub-human, or super-human, it exists in actual concrete organic personal integrity, we are saved from the necessity of explaining how, and by what particular series of births and deaths and change and variation, the living spectacle of things, as we visualize it today, has "evolved" or has "deteriorated" out of the remote past.

It is in fact by their constant preoccupation with the immediate and material causes of such organic changes, that men of science have been distracted from the real mystery. This real mystery does not limit itself to the comparatively unimportant "How," but is constantly calling upon us to deal with the terrible and essential questions, the two grim interrogations of the old Sphinx, the "*What*" and the "*Wherefore.*"

It is by its power to deal with these more essential riddles that any philosophy must be weighed and judged; and it is just because what we name Science stops helplessly at this unimportant “How,” that it can never be said to have answered Life’s uttermost challenge.

Materialistic and Evolutionary Hypotheses must always, however far they may go in reducing so-called “matter” to so-called “spirit,” remain outside the real problem. No attenuation of “matter” into movement or energy or magnetic radio-activity can reach the impregnable citadel of life. For the citadel of life is to be found in nothing less than the complex of personality — whether such personality be that of a planet or a plant or an animal or a man or a god — must always be recognized as inherent in an actual living soul-monad, divided against itself in the everlasting duality.

Although the most formidable support to our theory of an “eternal vision,” wherein all the living entities that fill space under the vibration of an unspeakable cosmic rhythm and brought into focus by one supreme act of contemplative “love,” is drawn from the rare creative moments of what I have called the “apex-thought,” it still remains that for the normal man in his most normal hours the purely scientific view is completely unsatisfying.

I do not mean that it is unsatisfying because, with its mechanical determinism, it does not satisfy his desires. I mean that it does not satisfy his imagination, his instinct, his intuition, his emotion, his aesthetic sense; and in being unable to satisfy these, it proves itself, “ipso-facto,” false and equivocal.

It is equally true that, except for certain rare and privileged natures, the orthodox systems of religion are equally unsatisfying.

What is required is some philosophic system which is bold enough to include the element of so-called “superstition” and at the same time contradicts neither reason nor the aesthetic sense.

Such a system, we contend, is supplied by the philosophy of the complex vision; a philosophy which, while remaining frankly anthropomorphic and mythological, does not, in any narrow or impudent or complacent manner, slur over the bitter ironies of this cruel world, or love the clear outlines of all drastic issues in a vague, unintelligible, unaesthetic idealism.

What our philosophy insists upon is that the modern tendency to reduce everything to some single monistic "substance," which, by the blind process of "evolution," becomes all this passionate drama that we see, is a tendency utterly false and misleading. For us the universe is a much larger, freer, stranger, deeper, more complicated affair than that.

For us the universe contains possibilities of real ghastly, incredible *evil*, descending into spiritual depths, before which the normal mind may well shudder and turn dismayed away.

For us the universe contains possibilities of divine, magical, miraculous *good*, ascending into spiritual heights and associating itself with immortal super-human beings, before which the mind of the merely logical intelligence may well pause, baffled, puzzled, and obscurely indignant.

The "fulcrum" upon which the whole issue depends, the "pivot" upon which it turns, is the existence of actual living souls filling the immense spaces of nature.

If there is no "soul" in any living thing, then our whole system crumbles to pieces. If there are living "souls" in every living thing, then the universe, as revealed by the complex vision, is more real than the universe as revealed by the chief exponents of modern thought.

CHAPTER XIV. THE IDEA OF COMMUNISM

THE PHILOSOPHY OF the complex vision inevitably issues, when it is applied to political and economic conditions, in the idea of communism. The idea of communism is inherent in it from the beginning; and in communism, and in communism alone, does it find its objective and external expression.

The philosophy of the complex vision reveals, as we have seen, a certain kind of ultimate duality as the secret of life. This ultimate duality remains eternally unreconciled; for it is a duality within the circle of every personal soul; and the fact that every personal soul is surrounded by an incomprehensible substance under the dominion of time and space, does not reconcile these eternal antagonists; because these eternal antagonists are for ever unfathomable, even as the personal soul, of which they are the conflicting conditions, is itself for ever unfathomable.

It is therefore a perpetual witness to the truth that the idea of communism is the inevitable expression of the complex vision that this idea should, more than other idea in the world, divide the souls of men into opposite camps. If the idea of communism were not the inevitable expression of the philosophy of the complex vision as applied to human life it would be an idea with regard to which all human souls would hold infinitely various opinions.

But this is not the case. In regard to the idea of communism we do not find this infinite variety of opinion. We find, on the contrary, a definite and irreconcilable duality of thought. Human souls are divided on this matter not, as they are on other matters, into a motley variety of convictions but into two opposite and irreconcilable convictions, unfathomably hostile to one another.

There is no other question, no other issue, about which the souls of men are divided so clearly and definitely into two opposite camps. The question of the existence of a "parent of the universe" does not divide them so clearly; because it always remains possible for any unbeliever in a spiritual unity of this absolute kind to use the term "parent," if he pleases, for that incomprehensible "substance" under the dominion of space and time which takes the triple form of the "substance" out of which the substratum of the soul is made, the "substance" out of which the "objective mystery" is made, and the substance out of which is made the surrounding "medium" which holds all personal souls together.

The question of the mortality or the immortality of the soul does not divide them so clearly; because such a question is entirely insoluble; and a vivid consciousness of its insolubility accompanies all argument. The question of race does not divide them so clearly; because both with regard to race and with regard to class the division is very largely a superficial thing, dependent upon public opinion and upon group-consciousness and leaving many individuals on each side entirely unaffected.

The question of sex does not divide them so clearly; because there are always innumerable examples of noble and ignoble treachery to the sex-instinct; not to speak of a certain intellectual neutrality which refuses to be biased. The idea of communism is on the contrary so profoundly associated with the original revelation of the complex vision that it must be regarded as the inevitable expression of all the attributes of this vision when such attributes are reduced to a rhythmic harmony.

That this is no speculative hypothesis but a real fact of experience can be proved by any sincere act of personal introspection.

The philosophy of the complex vision is based upon those rare and supreme moments when the soul's "apex-thought" quivers like an arrow in the very heart of the surrounding darkness. By any honest act of introspection we can recall to memory the world-deep revelations which are thus obtained. And among these revelations the one most vivid and irrefutable, as far as human association is concerned, is the revelation of the idea of communism.

So vivid and so dominant is this idea, that it may be said that no motive which drives or obsesses the will in the sphere of external relations can approach or rival it in importance. And that this is so can be proved by the fact that the opposite of this idea, namely the idea of private property, is found when we analyse the content of our profoundest instincts to be in perpetual conflict with the idea of communism.

And the inevitableness of the world-deep struggle between these two ideas is proved by the fact that in no other way, as soon as the objective world is introduced at all, can we conceive of love and malice as expressing themselves. Love must naturally express itself in the desire to "have all things in common"; and malice must naturally express itself in the desire to have as little as possible in common and as much as possible for ourselves alone.

The "possessive instinct," although it may often be found accompanying like an evil shadow some of the purest movements of love, must be recognized as eternally arising out of the depths of the power opposed to love. If we have any psychological clairvoyance we can disentangle this base element from some of the most passionate forms of the sexual instinct and from some of the most passionate forms of the maternal instinct. It is undeniable that the possessive instinct does accompany both these emotions and we are compelled to recognize that, whenever or wherever it appears, it is the expression of the direct opposite of love.

So inevitably does the complex vision manifest itself in the idea of communism that it would be legitimate to say that the main object of human life as we know it at present is the realization of the ideas of truth and beauty and nobility in a world-wide communistic state.

As far as the human soul in our present knowledge of it is concerned there is no other synthesis possible except this synthesis. And there is no other synthesis possible except this, because this and this alone realizes the ideal which the abysmal power of love implies. And the power of love implies this ideal because the power of love is the only unity which fuses together the ideas of reality and beauty and nobility; and because it is impossible to conceive the power of love as embodying itself in these ideas except in a world-wide communistic state.

We are able to prove that this is no speculative hypothesis but a fact based upon experience, by a consideration of the opposite ideal. For evil, as we have hinted in many places, *has* its ideal. The ideal of evil, or of what I call "malice," is the annihilation of the will to creation. This ideal of malice is in fact an obstinate and continuous resistance to the power of creation; a resistance carried so far as to reduce everything that exists to eternal non-existence. The profoundest experience of the human soul is to be found in the unfathomable struggle that goes on in the depths between "the ideal of evil" which is universal death and "the ideal of love" which is universal life.

Reason and sensation are used in turn by this abysmal malice of the soul, to establish and make objective "the idea of nothingness." Thus reason, driven on by the power of malice, derives exquisite satisfaction from the theory of the automatism of the will.

The theory of the automatism of the will, the theory that the will is only an illusive name for a pre-determined congeries of irresistible motives, is a theory that lends itself to the ideal of universal death. It is a theory that diminishes, and reduces to a minimum, the identity of the personal soul. And therefore it is a theory which the isolated reason, divorced from imagination and instinct, fastens upon and exults in.

The isolated reason, in league with pure sensation and divorced from instinct, becomes very quickly a slave of the abysmal power of malice; and the pleasure which it derives from the contemplation of a mechanical universe predestined and pre-determined, a universe out of which the personal soul has been completely expurgated, is a pleasure derived directly from the power of malice, exulting in the idea of eternal death.

Philosophers are very crafty in these things; and it is necessary to discriminate between that genuine passion for reality which derived from the power of love and that exultant pleasure in a "frightful" reality which is derived from intellectual sadism and from the unfathomable malice of the soul.

Between a philosophic pessimism which springs from a genuine passion for reality and from a pure "pity" for tortured sentient things, and a philosophic pessimism which springs from a cruel pleasure in atrocious situations and an ambiguous "pity" for tortured sentient things there is an eternity of difference.

It needs however something almost like a clairvoyance to recognize this difference; and such a clairvoyance can only be obtained when, as in the case of Christ, the soul becomes aware of its own unfathomable possibilities of good and evil.

A careful and implacable analysis of the two camps of opinion into which the idea of communism divides the world reveals to us the fact that the philosophical advocates of private property draw a certain malignant pleasure from insisting that the possessive instinct is the strongest instinct in humanity.

This is tantamount to saying that the power of malice is the strongest instinct in humanity; whereas, if the power of malice had not already been relatively overcome by the power of love there would be no "humanity" at all. But the philosophical advocates of private property do not confine themselves to this malign insistence upon the basic greediness of human nature. They are in the habit of twisting their arguments completely around and speaking of the "rights" of property and of the "wholesome" value of the "natural instinct" to possess property.

This "natural instinct to possess property" becomes, when they so defend it, something which we assume to be "good" and "noble," and not something which we are compelled to recognize as "evil" and "base."

It is necessary to keep these two arguments quite separate in our minds and not to allow the philosophical advocates of private property to confuse them. If the assumption is that the instinct to possess property is a "good" instinct, an instinct springing from the power of love in the human soul, then what we have to do is to subject this "good instinct" to an inflexible analysis; under the process of which such "goodness" will be found to transform itself into the extreme opposite of goodness.

If the assumption is that the instinct to possess property is an evil instinct, but an instinct which is the strongest of all human instincts and therefore one which it is insane to attempt to resist, then what we have to do is to prove that the instinct or the emotion of love is stronger than the instinct or the emotion of malice and so essential to the life of the soul that if it had not already relatively overcome the emotion of malice, the personal soul would never have become what it has become; in fact would never have existed at all, since its mere existence depends upon the relative victory of love over malice.

In dealing with the former of these two arguments, namely that the instinct to possess property is a “good” instinct, it is advisable to search for some test of “goodness” which shall carry a stronger conviction to the mind of such biassed philosophers than any appeal to the conscience or even to the aesthetic sense. The conscience and the aesthetic sense speak with uncompromising finality upon this subject and condemn the possessive instinct or the instinct to possess property with an unwavering voice. As eternal aspects of the complex vision, both conscience and the aesthetic sense, when their power is exercised in harmony with all the other aspects of the soul, indicate with an oracular clearness that the possessive instinct is not good but evil.

The person obsessed by the idea of “nobility” and the person obsessed by the idea of “beauty” are both of them found to be extraordinarily suspicious of the possessive instinct and fiercely anxious to destroy its power. But the test more likely to appeal to the type of philosopher whose business it is to defend the institution of private property is the simple test of reality. Reality or “truth,” much more than nobility or beauty, is the idea in the soul which is outraged by the illusion of the value of private property.

For the illusion of the value of private property is like the “illusion of dead matter.” It is a half-truth projected by the power of malice. The inherent unreality of the illusion of the value of private property can be proved by the simplest examination of the facts. The illusion draws its strength from a false appeal to the genuine and basic necessities of the human mind and the human body.

These necessities demand adequate food, adequate clothing, adequate shelter and adequate leisure. They also demand freedom, beauty, happiness, a considerable degree of solitude, and final relief from the intolerable fear of poverty. But the economic and intellectual resources of the human race are perfectly capable of providing all these things for all human beings within the limits of a communistic society. These things and the legitimate demand for these things must not be confused with the illusion of the value of private property. Nor must the illusion of the value of private property be permitted to fortify its insecure position by a false appeal to these real values.

The astounding achievements of modern science have brought to light two things. They have brought to light the fact that no human or social unit short of the international unit of the whole race can adequately deal with the resources of the planet. And they have brought to light the fact that this inevitable internationalizing of economic production must be accompanied by a co-operative internationalizing of economic distribution, if murderous chaotic conflict is to be avoided.

The real values of sufficient food, clothing, shelter, leisure, and solitude can be secured for every human being inhabiting this planet, under *a far from perfect* organization of world-production and world-distribution. The astounding achievements of modern science have made this possible. It only requires a reasonable and not by any means an ideal co-operation to make it actual.

The achievements of modern science, especially in the sphere of industrial machinery, have made it possible for every human being to have sufficient food, clothing, shelter, leisure and solitude. Man, in this sense, has already conquered Nature; and has secured for his progeny however indefinitely increased, and for the frail and incompetent ones of his race, however indefinitely increased, a more than sufficient supply of these primal necessities.

The extraordinary power of international co-operation has been recently displayed during the years of the war in the production of engines of destruction. Far less cooperation applied to the problems of production could secure for an indefinitely multiplied population, including all derelicts and all incompetents, such primal necessities of life as normal persons demand. The resources of this planet, as long as scientific distribution follows close upon scientific production, are sufficient to maintain in food, in shelter, in clothing, in leisure, in reasonable comfort, any human progeny.

What then is the principal cause why, as things are now, such lamentable poverty and such huge fear of lamentable poverty dominate the human situation? The cause is not far to seek. It lies in the very root and ground of our existing commercial and industrial system. It lies in the fact that economic production by reason of the illusive value of private enterprise, is directed not towards the satisfaction of such universal and primary necessities as food, shelter, clothing, leisure and reasonable comfort, but towards the creation of unnecessary luxury and artificial frippery, towards the piling up, by means of advertisement, monopoly, exploitation and every kind of chicanery of unproductive accumulation of private property.

Our present commercial and industrial system is based upon what is called "free competition." In other words it is based upon the right of private individuals to make use of the resources of nature and the energy of labour to produce unnecessary wealth, wealth which does little or nothing to increase the food, shelter, clothing, leisure and comfort of the masses of mankind, wealth which is artificially maintained by artificial values and by the fantastic process of advertisement.

In order to make clear and irrefutable the statement that the illusive value of private property is, like "the illusion of dead matter," a thing conceived, projected and maintained by the aboriginal power of evil, it is necessary to prove two things. It is necessary to prove in the first place that the idea of private property is neither beautiful nor noble nor real. And it is necessary to prove in the second place that the defence of the idea of private property arouses the most evil and most malignant passions which it is possible for the human soul to feel.

That private property is neither beautiful nor noble can be deduced from the fact that in proportion as human souls become attuned to finer, more distinguished, and more intellectual levels they become more and more indifferent to the "sensation of ownership." That private property is an unreal thing can be deduced from the fact that no human being can actually "possess," in a definite, positive, and exhaustive manner, more than he can eat or drink or wear or otherwise personally enjoy.

His "sensation of ownership," over lands, houses, gardens, pictures, statues, books, animals and human beings, is really and actually restricted to the immediate and direct enjoyment which he is able in person to derive from such things. Beyond this immediate and personal enjoyment the extension of his "sensation of ownership" can do no more than increase his general sense of conventional power and importance. His real "possession" of his land is actually restricted to his capacity for appreciating its beauty. His real "possession" of his books is actually restricted to his personal capacity for entering into the living secrets of these things. Without such capacity, though he may call himself the "possessor" or "owner," he is really no better than an official "care-taker," whose province it is to preserve certain objects for other people to enjoy, or, shall we say, for the permanent prevention of any people ever enjoying them. And just as the "sensation of ownership" or "the idea of private property" is unreal and illusive with regard to land, houses, pictures, books, and the like so it is unreal and illusive with regard to human beings. No one, however maliciously he may hug to himself his possessive instinct, can ever actually and truly “possess” another living person.

One’s wife, one’s paramour, one’s child, one’s slave, are only apparently and by a conventional illusion of language one’s real and actual “possession.” That this is the case can be proved by the fact that any of these “human possessions” has only to commit suicide, to escape for ever from such bondage.

The illusion of private property derives its vigour and its obstinate vividness from two things; from the apparent increase of power and importance which accompanies it, and from its association with that necessary minimum of food, shelter, clothing, leisure, comfort, freedom, solitude, and happiness, which is certainly real, essential and indispensable.

The universal wisdom of the ages bears witness to the fact that a “moderate poverty” or a “moderate competence” is the ideal outward state for a man to find himself in. And this “moderate enjoyment” of food, shelter, clothing, comfort, leisure and emotional happiness, is a thing which, in a scientifically organized communistic society, would be within the reach of even the least efficient.

The gloomy and melancholy argument brought forward by the enemies of “communism” that under such a condition “the incentive of private initiative would disappear” and that no other motive could take its place, is an argument based upon the assumption that human nature derives more inspiration from the idea of dishonourable greed than it derives from the idea of honourable and useful labour; which is an assumption so wholly opposed to true psychology that it has only to be nakedly stated to be seen in its complete absurdity.

What the psychologist, interested in this abysmal struggle between the idea of communism and the idea of private property, has to note is the nature and character of the particular individual who brings forward this argument of the “incentive of greed” or the “initiative” produced by greed. Such an individual will never be found to be a great man of science, or a great artist or scholar or craftsman, or a first-rate engineer, or a highly trained artisan or farmer or builder.

The individual bringing forward this argument of the “initiative of greed” will invariably be found to be a member of what might be called the “parasitic class.” He will either be an intellectually second-rate minister or politician or lawyer or professor, or he will be a commercial and financial “middleman,” whose activities are entirely absorbed in the art of exploitation and who has never experienced the sensation of creative work.

If he does not himself belong to the unproductive and parasitic class it will be easy to detect in him the unmistakable presence of the emotion of malice. Nowhere is the emotion of malice more entirely in harmony with itself than when it is engaged in attributing base and sordid motives to the energy of human nature.

This monstrous doctrine that human beings *require* “the incentive of greed” and that without that incentive or “initiative” no one would engage in any kind of creative work, is a doctrine springing directly from the aboriginal malice of the soul; and a doctrine which is refuted every day by every honest, healthy and honourable man and woman.

But all these are, after all, only negative proofs of the inevitable rise, out of the very necessity of love’s nature, of the idea of communism. Of all mortal instincts, the possessive instinct is the most insidious and most evil. Love is for ever being perverted and polluted by this thing, and turned from its true essence into something other than itself. This is equally true of love whether such love is directed towards persons or towards ideas or things.

The possessive instinct springing directly from the aboriginal malice is perpetually deceiving itself. Apparently and superficially what it aims at is the eternally "static." In other words what it aims at is the retention in everlasting immobility of the person or the idea or the thing into which it has dug its claws.

Thus the maternal instinct, in its evil mood, aims at petrifying and rendering immobile that helpless youthfulness in its offspring which the possessive passion finds so provocative and exciting. Thus the lover in his evil mood, desires that the object of his love should remain in everlasting immobility, an odalisque of eternal reciprocity. That this evil desire takes the form of a longing that the object of his love should eternally escape and eternally be recaptured makes no difference in the basic feeling.

Thus the collector of "works of art" — a being divided from the real lover of art by an impassable gulf — derives no pleasure from the beauty of anything until it has become *his,* until he has hidden it away from all the rest of the world. Thus the lover of "nature," in his evil mood, derives no pleasure from the fitful magic of grass and bowers and trees, until he feels happy in the mad illusion that the very body of the earth, even to the centre of the planet, where these things grow, is his "private" property and is something fixed, permanent, static, unchanging. But all this desire for the eternally "static" is superficial and self-deceiving.

Analysed down to its very depth, what this evil possessive instinct desires is what all malice desires, namely the annihilation of life. Pretending to itself that it desires to hug to itself, in eternal immobility, the thing it loves, what in its secret essence it really desires is that thing's absolute annihilation. It wants to hug that thing so tightly to itself that the independence of the thing completely vanishes. It wants to destroy all separation between itself and the thing, and all liberty and freedom for the thing. It wants “to eat the thing up” and draw the thing into its own being.

Its evil desire can never find complete satisfaction until it has “killed the thing it loves” and buried it within its own identity. It is this evil possessive element in sexual love, whether of a man for a woman or a woman for a man, which is the real evil in the sexual passion. It is this possessive instinct in maternal love which is the evil element in the love of a mother for a child. Both these evil emotions tend to make war upon life.

The mother, in her secret sub-conscious passion, desires to draw back her infant into her womb, and restore it to its pre-natal physiological unity with herself. The lover in his secret evil sub-consciousness, desires to draw his beloved into ever-increasing unity with himself, until the separation between them is at an end and her identity is lost in his identity.

The final issue, therefore, of this evil instinct of possession, this evil instinct of private property, can never be anything else than death. Death is what the ultimate emotion of malice desires; and death is an actual result of the instinct of possession carried to an extreme limit.

The static immobility and complete “unchangeableness” which the possessive instinct pretends to itself is all it desires is really therefore nothing but a mask for its desire to destroy. The possessive instinct is, in its profoundest abyss, an amorist of death. What it secretly loves is the dead; for the dead alone can never defraud it of its satisfaction. Wherever love exercises its creative energy the possessive instinct relaxes its hold. Love expands and diffuses itself. Love projects itself and merges itself The creative impulse is always centrifugal. The indrawing movement, the centripetal movement, is a sign of the presence of that inert malice which would reduce all life to nothingness.

The creative energy of love issues inevitably in the idea of communism. The idea of communism implies the complete abolition of private property; because private property, whether it be property in persons or in things, is essentially evil, is indeed the natural expression of the primordial inert malice, in its hostility to life. Under any realization, in actual existence, of the idea of communism the creative energy finds itself free to expand and dilate. All that heavy clogging burden of “the personally possessed” being shaken off, the natural fresh shoots of living beauty rise to the surface like the new green growths of spring when the winter’s rubble has been washed away by the rain.

The accursed system of private property, rooted in the abysmal malice of the human heart, lies like a dead weight upon every creative impulse. Everything is weighed and judged, everything is valued and measured, in relation to this.

Modern Law is the system of restriction by which we protect private property.

Modern religion is the system of compensation by which we soften the difference between inequalities in private property. Modern politics is the system of compromise by which public opinion registers its devotion to private property. Modern morality is the system of artificial inhibitions by which the human conscience is perverted into regarding private property as the supreme good.

Modern science is the system by which private property is increased and the uses of it made more complicated. Modern “truth” is the system of traditional opinion by which the illusion of private property is established as “responsible” thinking, and “serious” thinking, and “ethical” thinking.

Modern art is the system by which what is most gross and vulgar in the popular taste is pandered to in the interests of private property.

The creative energy in modern life is therefore restricted and opposed at almost every point by the evil instinct to possess. Of every new idea the question is asked, “does it conflict with private property?”

Of every new aesthetic judgment the question is asked, “does it conflict with private property?”

Of every new moral valuation the question is asked, “does it conflict with private property?” And the instinct which puts these questions to every new movement of the creative energy is the instinct of inert malice. The object of life can be regarded as nothing less than the realization of the vision of the Immortals; and it is only under a communistic state that the vision of the Immortals can be realized; because only in such a state is that petrified illusion of inert malice which we name “private property” thoroughly got rid of and destroyed.

CONCLUSION

No attempted articulation of the mystery, life, can be worthy of being named a "philosophy" unless it has a definite bearing upon what, in the midst of that confused "manifold" through which we move, we call the problem of conduct.

The mass of complicated impression, which from our first dawn of consciousness presses upon us, falls into two main divisions — the portion of it which comes under the power of our will and the portion of it which is supplied by destiny or circumstance, and over which our will is impotent.

Superficially speaking what we call conduct only applies to action; but in a deeper sense it applies to that whole division of our sensations, emotions, ideas, and energies, whether it take the form of action or not, which comes in any measure under the power of the will. Such acts of the mind therefore, as are purely intellectual or emotional — as for instance what we call "acts of faith" — are as much to be considered forms of conduct as those outer visible material gestures which manifest themselves in action.

This is no fantastic or extravagant fancy. It is the old classical and catholic doctrine, to which not only such thinkers as Plato and Spinoza have affixed their seal, but which is at the root of the deepest instincts of Buddhists, Christians, Epicureans, Stoics, and the mystics of all ages. It may be summed up by the statement that life is an art towards which the will must be directed; and that the larger portion of life manifests itself in interior contemplation and only the smaller part of it in overt action.

In both these spheres, in the sphere of contemplation as much as in the sphere of action, there exists that "given element" of destiny or circumstance, in the presence of which the will is powerless. But in regard to this given element it must be remembered that no individual soul can ever, to the end of time, be absolutely certain that in any particular case, whether his own or another's, he has finally arrived at this irreducible fatality.

The extraordinary phenomenon of what religious people call "conversion," a phenomenon which implies a change of heart so unexpected and startling as to seem miraculous, is a proof of how unwise it is to be in any particular case rigidly dogmatic as to where the sunken rock of destiny really begins. So many appearances have taken the shape of this finality, so many mirages of "false fate" have paralysed our will, that it is wisest to believe to the very end of our days that our attitude to destiny can change and modify destiny.

Assuming then that the articulation of the mystery of life which has been outlined in this book, under the name of "the philosophy of the complex vision," must remain the barest of intellectual hypotheses until it has manifested itself in "conduct"; and assuming further that this "conduct" includes the whole of that portion of life, whether contemplative or active, which can be reduced to a fine art by the effort of the will; the question emerges — what kind of effort must the will make, both interiorally and exteriorally, if it desire to respond, by a rhythmic reciprocity, to the vision which the intellect has accepted?

It must be remembered that the vision upon which this philosophy depends and from which it derives its primordial assumptions is not the normal vision of the human soul. The philosophy of the complex vision rejects the normal vision of the human soul on behalf of the abnormal vision of the human soul. Its point of view, in this matter, is that the human soul only arrives at the secret of the universe in those exalted, heightened, exceptional and rare moments, when all the multiform activities of the soul's life achieve a musical consummation. Its point of view is that since philosophy, at its deepest and highest, necessarily becomes art; and since art is a rare and difficult thing requiring infinite adjustments and reconciliations; what philosophy has really to use, in formulating any sort of adequate system, is the memory of such rare moments after they have passed away. The point of view from which we have made all our basic assumptions is the point of view that the secret of the universe is only revealed to man in rare moments of ecstasy; and that what man's reason has to do is to gather together in memory the broken and scattered fragments of these moments and out of this residuum build up and round off, as best it may, some coherent interpretation of life.

From all this it follows that the first rhythmic reply of the human will to the vision to serve is a passionate act of what might be called "contemplative tension," in the direction of the reviving of such memories, and in the direction of preparing the ground for the return of another "moment of vision" similar in nature to those that have gone before.

The secret of this act of inward contemplative tension we have already analysed. We have found it to consist in a "complex" of all the primordial energies of the soul, focussed and concentrated into what we have compared to a pyramidal apex-point by the power of a certain synthetic movement of the soul itself which we have named the apex-thought.

The reply of the will, therefore, to the vision it desires to serve consists of a gathering together of all the energies of the soul into a rhythmic harmony. It may well be that this premeditated and deliberately constructed harmony will have to wait for many days and years without experiencing the magic touch of the soul's apex-thought. For though we may passionately desire the touch of this — aye, and pray for it with a most desperate prayer!

— it is of the very nature of this mysterious thing to require for the moment of its activity something else than the contemplative tension which has prepared the ground for its appearance. For this synthetic apex-thought, which is the soul's highest power, is only in a very limited sense within the power of the will.

The whole matter is obscure and perhaps inexplicable; but it seems as if a place were required here for some philosophic equivalent of that free gift of the Gods which, in theological language, goes by the name of "grace." Long and long may the soul wait — with the hardly won rhythm of its multiform "complex" poised in vibrant expectation — before the moment arrives in which the apex-thought can strike its note of ecstasy.

In the time and place of such a moment, in the accumulation of conditions which render such a moment eternal, chance and circumstance may play a prominent part. There is, however, an inveterate instinct in humanity — not perhaps to be altogether disregarded — according to the voice of which this unaccountable element of chance and circumstance, or, shall we say, of destiny, is itself the result of the interposed influence of the invisible companions. But whether this be so or not, the fact remains that some alien element of indeterminable chance or circumstance or destiny does frequently enter into that accumulation of obscure conditions which seem to be necessary before the magic of the apex-thought is roused.

This preparing of the ground, this deliberate concentration of the soul's energies, is the first movement of the will in answer to the attraction of the eternal vision discerned so far only as a remote ideal. The second movement of the will has been already implied in the first, and is only a lifting into clear consciousness of what led the soul to make its initial effort. I speak of the part played by the will in the abysmal struggle between love and malice. This struggle was really implicit, in the beginning, in the effort the will made to focus the multiform energies of the complex vision. But directly some measure of insight into the secret of life has followed upon this effort, or directly, if the soul's good fortune has been exceptional, its great illuminative moment has been reached, the will finds itself irresistibly plunged into this struggle, finds itself inevitably ranged, on one side or the other, of the ultimate duality.

That the first effort of the will was largely what might be called an intellectual one, though its purpose was to make use of all the soul's attributes together, is proved by the fact that it is possible for human souls to be possessed of formidable insight into the secret of life and yet to use that insight for evil rather than for good.

But the second movement of the will, of which I am now speaking, reveals without a shadow of ambiguity on which side of the eternal contest the personality in question has resolved to throw its weight. If, in this second movement, the will answers, with a reciprocal gathering of itself together, the now far clearer attraction of the vision attained by its original effort, it will be found to range itself on the side of love against the power of malice.

If, on the contrary, having made use of its original vision to understand the secret of this struggle, it allies itself with the power of malice against love, it will be found to produce the spectacle of a soul of illuminated intellectual insight deliberately concentrated on evil rather than good.

But once irrevocably committed to the power of that creative energy which we call love, the will, though it may have innumerable lapses and moments of troubled darkness, never ceases from its abysmal struggle. For this is the conclusion of the whole matter. When we speak of the eternal duality as consisting in a struggle between love and malice, what we really mean is that the human soul, concentrated into the magnet-point of a passionately conscious will, is found varying and quivering between the pole of love and the pole of malice.

The whole drama is contained within the circle of personality; and it would be of a similar nature if the personality in question were confronted by no other thing in the universe except the objective mystery. I mean that the soul would be committed to a struggle between its creative energy and its inert malice even if there were no other living persons in the world towards whom this love and this malice could be directed.

I have compared the substance of the soul to an arrowhead of concentrated flames, the shaft of which is wrapped in impenetrable darkness while the point of it pierces the objective mystery. From within the impenetrable darkness of this invisible arrow-shaft the very substance of the soul is projected; and in its projection it assumes the form of these flames; and the name I have given to this mysterious outpouring of the soul is *emotion,* whereof the opposing poles of contending force are respectively love and malice. The psycho-material substance of the invisible soul-monad is itself divided into this eternally alternating duality, of which the projected "flames," or manifested "energies" are the constant expression. Each of these energies has as its concrete "material," so to speak, the one projected substance of the soul; and is thus composed of the very stuff of emotion.

The eternal duality of this emotion takes various forms in these various manifestations of its one substance. Thus the energy or flame of the aesthetic sense resolves itself into the opposed vibrations of the beautiful and the hideous. Thus the energy, or flame, of the pure reason resolves itself into the opposed vibrations of the true and the false. Thus the energy, or flame, of conscience resolves itself into the opposed vibrations of the good and the evil.

Although the remaining energies of the soul, beyond those I have just named — such as instinct, intuition, imagination, and the like — are less definitely divided up among those three “primordial ideas” which we discern as “truth,” “beauty,” and “goodness,” they are subject, nevertheless, since their substance is the stuff of emotion, to the same duality of love and malice.

It is not difficult to see how this duality turns upon itself in human instinct, in human imagination, and in human intuition for the creative impulse in all these energies finds itself opposed by the impulse to resist creation. It is when the will is in question that we are compelled to notice a difference. For the will, although itself a primal energy or projection of the soul, is in its inherent nature set apart from the other activities of the soul.

The will is that particular aspect of the soul-monad by means of which it consciously intensifies or relaxes the outward pressure of emotion. From the point of view of the complex vision, the will, although easily differentiated from both consciousness and emotion, cannot be imagined as existing apart from these.

Every living organism possesses consciousness in some degree, emotion in some degree, and will in some degree; and the part played by the will in the complicated “nexus” of the soul’s life may be compared to that of a mechanical spring in some kind of a machine. In this case, however, the spring of the machine is fed by the oil of consciousness and releases its force upon the cogs and wheels of contradictory emotion.

No theory of psychology which attempts to eliminate the will by the substitution of pure “motive” playing upon pure “action” is acceptable to us. And such an elimination is unacceptable, because, in the ultimate insight of the complex vision turned round upon itself, the soul is aware of a definite recognizable phenomenon which although present to consciousness is different from consciousness, and although intensifying and lessoning emotion is different from emotion.

In regard to this "problem of conduct," which I refuse to interpret as anything short of the whole art of life, contemplative as well as active, the will, being, so to say, the main-spring of the soul, naturally plays the most important part. The prominence given, in moral tradition, to the struggle of the will with sexual desire is one of the melancholy evidences as to how seldom the complex vision of the soul has been allowed full play.

What is called "asceticism" or "puritanism" is the result of an over-balanced concentration of the will upon the phenomena of sensation alone. Whereas in the rhythmic balance of the soul's complete faculties, what the ideal vision calls upon the will to do, is not to concentrate upon repressing sensation but to concentrate upon repressing malice and intensifying love.

Sensation is only, after all, one of the energies, or projected flames, of the soul, in its reaction to the objective mystery. But emotion is, as we have seen, the very soul itself, poured forth in its profoundest essence, and eternally divided against itself in the ultimate duality. Emotion is the psychic element which is the real substratum of sensation, just as it is the real substratum of reason and taste. So that when the will concentrates itself, as it has so often done and so often been commended for doing, upon sensation alone, it is neglecting and betraying its main function, which is the repressing of malice and the liberation of love.

The deliberate repression of sensation does, it is true, sometimes destroy our response to sensation; but it more often intensifies the soul's sensational life. It is only when the will is concentrated upon the intensifying of love and the suppression of malice that sensation falls into its right place in the resultant rhythm. There is then no question of either suppressing it or of indulging it. It comes and goes as naturally, as easily, as inevitably, as the rain or the snow.

When the will is concentrated upon the suppression of malice and the intensifying of love all those cults of sensation which we call vice naturally relinquish their hold upon us. The fact that women so rarely indulge in the worst excesses of these cults is due to the fact that in their closeness to nature they follow more easily the rhythmic flow of life and are less easily tempted to isolate and detach from the rest any particular feeling. But women pay the penalty for this advantage when it comes to the question of the illuminative moments of the apex-thought. For in these high, rare and abnormal moments, the ordinary ebb and flow of life is interrupted; and something emerges which resembles the final effluence of a work of art that has touched eternity. The rhythmic movement of the apex-thought, when under such exceptional conditions it evokes this effluence, rises for a moment out of the flux of nature and gathers itself into a monumental vision, calm and quiet and immortal. It is more difficult for women to attain this vision than for men; because, while under normal conditions the play of their energies is better balanced and more harmonious than man’s, it is harder for them to detach themselves from the ebb and flow of nature’s chemistry, harder for them to attain the personal isolation which lends itself to the supreme creative act. But while such exceptional moments seem to come more frequently to men than to women, and while a greater number of the supreme artists and prophets of the world are of the male sex, it cannot be denied that the average woman, in every generation, leads a more human and a more dignified life than the average man. And she does this because the special labours which occupy her, such as the matter of food, of cleanliness, of the making and mending of clothes, of the care of children and animals and flowers, of the handling of animate and inanimate things with a view to the increase of life and beauty upon the earth, are labours which have gathered about them, during their long descent of the centuries, a certain symbolic and poetic distinction which nothing but immemorial association with mankind's primal necessities is able to give.

The same dignity of immemorial association hangs, it is true, about such masculine labours as are connected with the tilling of the earth and the sailing of the sea. Certain ancient and eternally necessary handicrafts, such as cannot be superseded by machinery, take their place with these. But since man's particular power of separating himself from Nature and dominating Nature by means of logical reason, physical science and mechanical devices, puts him in the position of continuity breaking up those usages of the ages upon which the ritualistic element in life depends, he has come, by inevitable evolution, to be much more the child of the new and the arbitrary than woman is; and in his divorce from immemorial necessity has lost much of that symbolic distinction which the life of woman retains.

It may thus be said that while the determining will in the soul of the average woman ought to be directed towards that exceptional creative energy which lifts the soul out of the flux of Nature and gives it a glimpse of the vision of the immortals, the determining will in the soul of the average man ought to be directed towards the heightening of his ordinary consciousness so as to bring this up to the level of the flux of nature and to penetrate it with the memory of the creative moments which he has had.

In both cases the material with which the will has to work is the emotions of love and of malice; but in the case of man this malice tends to destroy the poetry of common life, while in the case of woman it tends to obstruct and embarrass her soul when the magic of the apex-thought stirs within her and an opportunity arises for that creative act which puts the complex vision in touch with the vision of the Gods.

The philosophy of the complex vision does not discover in its examination of the psycho-material organism of the soul any differentiated “faculties” which can be paralleled by the differentiated “members” of the human body. The organic unity of the soul is retained, in undissipated concentration, throughout whatever movement or action or stress of energy it is led to make. The totality of the soul becomes will, or the totality of the soul becomes reason, or the totality of the soul becomes intuition, in the same way as a falling body of water, or the projected stream of a fountain *becomes* whatever dominant colour of sky or air or atmosphere penetrates it and transforms it. What we have called emotion, made up of the duality of love and malice, is something much more integral than this. For the totality of the soul, which *becomes* reason, consciousness, intuition, conscience, and the like, is always composed of the very stuff and matter of emotion. When we say “the totality of the soul becomes imagination or intuition” it is the same thing as though we said “the emotion of the soul becomes imagination or intuition.”

Emotion is our name, in fact, for the psycho-material “stuff” out of which the organic substratum of the soul is made. And since this “stuff” is eternally divided against itself into a positive and a negative “pole” we are compelled to assert that our ultimate analysis of the system of things is dualistic, in spite of the fact that the whole drama takes place under the one comprehensive unity of space.

When we say that the totality of the soul becomes will, reason, imagination, conscience, intuition and so forth, we do not mean that by becoming any one of these single things it is prevented from becoming others. We are confronted here by a phenomenon of organic life which, however inexplicable, is of frequent occurrence in human experience. The ecclesiastical dogma of the Trinity is no fantastic invention of this or the other theologian. It is an inevitable definition of a certain body of human experience to which it affords a plausible explanation.

What the philosophy of the complex vision attempts to do is to analyse into its component parts that confused mass of contradictory impressions to which the soul awakens as soon as it becomes conscious of itself at all. The older philosophers begin their adventurous journey by the discovery and proclamation of some particular clue, or catchword, or general principle, out of the rational necessity of whose content they seek to evoke that living and breathing universe which impinges upon us all. Modern philosophy tends to reject these Absolute "clues," these simplifying "secrets" of the system of things; but in rejecting these it either substitutes its own hypothetical generalizations, such as "spirit," "life-force," or "cosmic energy," or it contents itself with noting, as William James does, the more objective grouping of states of consciousness, as they weave their pattern on the face of the swirling waters, without regard to any "substantial soul" whose background of organic life gives these "states" their concrete unity.

The philosophy of the complex vision differs from the older philosophies in that it frankly and confessedly starts with that general situation which is also its goal. Its movement is therefore a perpetual setting-forth and a perpetual return; a setting forth towards a newly created vision of the world, and a return to that ideal of such a vision which has been implicit from the beginning. And this general situation from which it starts and to which it returns is nothing less than the huge spectacle of the visible universe confronting the individual soul and implying the kindred existence of innumerable other souls. The fact that what the complex vision reveals is the primary importance of personality does not detract in the least degree from the unfathomable mysteriousness of the objective universe And it does not detract from this because the unfathomableness of the universe is not a rational deduction drawn from the logical idea of what an objective universe would be like if it existed, but is a direct human experience verified at every movement of the soul. The universe revealed to us by the complex vision is a universe compounded of the concentrated visions of all the souls that compose it, a universe which in its eternal beauty and hideousness has received the “imprimatur of the immortal Gods.”

The fact that such a universe is in part a creation of the mind, and in part a discovery made by the mind when it flings itself upon the unknown, does not lessen or diminish the strangeness or unfathomableness of life. The fact that the ultimate reality of such a universe is to be found in the psycho-material substratum — where mind and matter become one — of the individual soul, does not lessen or diminish the magical beauty or cruel terribleness of life.

What we name by the name of “matter” is not less a permanent human experience, because apart from the creative energy of some personal soul we are not able to conceive of its existence.

The philosophy of the complex vision reduces everything that exists to an eternal action and re-action between the individual soul and the objective mystery. This action and reaction is itself reproduced in the eternal duality, or ebb and flow, which constitutes the living soul itself. And because the psycho-material substance of the soul must be considered as identical, on its psychic side, with the “spiritual substance” of the universe “medium” through which all souls come into contact with one another, and identical on its material side with the objective mystery which is expressed in all bodies, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the individual personality is surrounded by an elemental and universal “something” similar to itself, dominated as itself is dominated by the omnipresent circle of Space.

This universal "something" must be regarded, in spite of its double nature, as one and the same, since it is dominated by one and the same space. The fact that the material aspect of this psycho-material element is constantly plastic to the creative energy of the soul does not reduce it to the level of an "illusion." The mind recreates everything it touches; but the mind cannot work in a vacuum. There must be something for the mind to "touch." What the soul touches, therefore, as soon as it becomes conscious of itself is, in the first place, the "material element" of its own inmost nature; in the second place the "material element" which makes it possible for all bodies to come in contact with one another; and in the third place the "material element" which is the original potentiality of all universes and which has been named "the objective mystery."

To call this universal material element, thus manifested in a three-fold form, an illusion of the human mind is to destroy the integrity of language. Nothing can justly be called an illusion which is a permanent and universal human experience. The name we select for this experience is of no importance. We can name it *matter*, or we can name it *energy,* or *movement*, or *force*. The experience remains the same, by whatever name we indicate it to one another.

The philosophy of the complex vision opposes itself to all materialistic systems by its recognition of personality as the ultimate basis of life; and it opposes itself to all idealistic systems by its recognition of an irreducible "material element" which is the object of all thought but which is also, in the substratum of the soul-monad, fused and blended with thought itself.

We now arrive at the conclusion of our philosophical journey; and we find it to be the identical point or situation from which we originally started. Once and for all we are compelled to ask ourselves the question, whether since personality is the ultimate secret of life and since all individual personalities, whether human, sub-human, or super-human, are confronted by one "material element" dominated by one universal material space, it is not probable that this "material element" should itself be, as it were, the "outward body" of one "elemental soul"? Such an elemental soul would have no connexion with the "Absolute Being" of the great metaphysical systems. For in those systems the Absolute Being is essentially impersonal, and can in no sense be regarded as having anything corresponding to a body.

But this hypothetical soul of the ethereal element would be just as definitely expressed in a bodily form as are the personalities of men, beasts, plants and stars. It is impossible to avoid, now we are at the end of our philosophic journey, one swift glance backward over the travelled road; and it is impossible to avoid asking ourselves the question whether this universal material element which confronts every individual soul and surrounds every individual body may not itself be the body of an universal living personality? Is such a question, so presented to us for the last time, as we look back over our long journey, a kind of faint and despairing gesture made by the phantom of "the idea of God," or is it the obscure stirring of such an idea, from beneath the weight of all our argument, as it refuses to remain buried? It seems to me much more than this.

The complex vision seems to indicate in this matter that we have a right to make the hypothetical outlines of this thing as clear and emphatic as we can; as clear and emphatic, and also, by a rigid method of limitation, as little overstressed and as little overpowering as we can.

The question that presses upon us, therefore, as we glance backward over our travelled road, is whether or not, by the logic of our doctrine of personality, we are bound to predicate some sort of "elemental soul" as the indwelling personal monad belonging to the universal material element even as any other soul belongs to its body.

Does it not, we might ask, seem unthinkable that any portion of this universal element should remain suspended in a vacuum without the indwelling presence of a definite personality of which it is the expression? Are we not led to the conclusion that the whole mass and volume of this material element, namely the material element in every living soul, the material element which binds all bodies together, and the material element which composes the objective mystery, must make up in its total weight and pressure the *body,* so to speak, of some sort of universal elemental soul?

And because no personality, whether universal or individual, can be regarded as absolute, since perpetual creation is the essence of life, must it not follow that this elemental personality must itself eternally confront and be confronted by an unfathomable depth of objective mystery which it perpetually invades with its creative energy but which it can never exhaust, or touch the limit of? The body of this being would be in fact its own "objective mystery," while our "objective mystery" would be recognized as disappearing in the same reality. Does this hypothesis reduce the tragedy of life to a negligible quantity, or afford a basis upon which any easy optimism could be reared? It does not appear so. Wherever personality existed, there the ultimate duality would inevitably reign. And just as with "the invisible companions" what is evil and malicious in us attracts towards us what is evil and malicious in them so with the elemental personality, whatever were evil and malicious in us would attract towards us whatever were evil and malicious in it. The elemental personality would not necessarily be better, or nobler, or wiser than we are. There would be no particular reason why we should worship it, or give it praise. For if it really existed it could no more help being what it is than we can help being what we are, or the immortal gods can help being what they are.

That such an elemental personality would have to be regarded as a kind of demi-god can hardly be denied; but there would be no reason for asserting that our highest moments of inspiration were due to its love for us. As with the rest of the "immortals" it would be sometimes possessed by love and sometimes possessed by malice, and we should have not the least authority for saying that our supreme moments of insight were due to its inspiration. Sometimes they would be so. On the other hand sometimes our most baffled, clouded, inert, moribund, and wretched moments would be due to its influence. Such an elemental personality would have no advantage over any other personality, except in the fact of being elemental; and this would give it no absolute advantage, since its universality would be eternally challenged by the unfathomable element in its own being. The "body" of such an elemental personality would have to be regarded as the actual objective mystery which confronts both men and gods. It would have to be regarded as possessing a complex vision even as every other personality possesses it; and its soul-monad would have to be as concrete, actual, and real, as every other soul monad. An ethereal Being of this kind, whose body were composed of the whole mass of the material element which binds all bodies together, would have no closer connexion with the soul of man than any other invisible companion. The soul of man could be drawn to it in love or could be repelled from it by malice, just as it can be drawn to any other living thing or repelled by any other living thing.

That the human race should have sometimes made the attempt to associate such an universal personality with the ideal figure of Christ is natural enough. But such an association wins no sanction or authority from the revelation of the complex vision. In one sense the figure of Christ, as the life of Jesus reveals it, is a pure symbol. In another sense, as we become aware of his love in the depths of our own soul, he is the most real and actual of all living beings. But neither as a symbol of the immortal vision, nor as himself an immortal God, have we any right to regard Christ as identical with this elemental personality. Christ is far more important to us and precious to us than such a being could possibly be.

And just as this hypothetical personality, whose body is the material element which binds all bodies together, must not be confused with the figure of Christ, so also it is not to be confused with either of those primordial projections of pure reason, working in isolation, which we have noted as the "synthetic unity of apperception" and the "universal self," The elemental personality, if it existed, would be something quite different from the universal self of the logical reason. For the universal self of the logical reason includes and transcends all the other selves, whereas the elemental personality which has the whole weight of the world's material element as its body could not transcend, or in any way "subsume" the least of individual things except in so far as the material element which is its body would surround all living things and bring them into contact with one another.

The elemental personality could in no sense be called an over-soul, because, so far from being an universal self made up of particular individual selves, it would be a completely detached soul, only related to other souls in the sense that all other souls come into contact with one another through the medium of its spiritual substance.

According to the revelation of the complex vision the question of the existence or non-existence of an elemental soul of this kind has no relation to the problem of human conduct. For the material element in the individual soul is fused in individual consciousness; and therefore the spiritual medium which surrounds the individual soul cannot impinge upon or penetrate the soul which it surrounds. And this conclusion is borne witness to in all manner of common human experience. For although we all feel dimly aware of vast gulfs of spiritual evil and vast gulfs of spiritual beauty in the world about us, this knowledge only becomes definite and concrete when we think of such gifts as being entirely made up of personal moods, the moods of mortal men, of immortal gods, and the moods, it may be, of this elemental personality.

But the problem of conduct is not the problem of getting into harmony with any particular individual soul. It is the problem of getting into harmony with the creative vision in our own soul, which when attained turns out to be identical with the creative vision of every other soul in the universe. The conception of the elemental personality does not depend, as does the existence of the immortals, upon our consciousness of something objective and eternal in our primordial ideas. It depends upon our suspicion that no extended mass of what we call matter, however attenuated and ethereal, can exist suspended in soulless space.

Some attenuated form of matter our universe demands, as the universal medium by means of which all separate bodies come into touch with each other; but it is hard to imagine an universal medium hung, as it were, in an enormous vacuum. Such a medium would seem to demand, as a reason for its existence, some living centre of energy such as that which a personal soul can alone supply. It is in this way we arrive at the hypothetical conception of the elemental soul.

And our hypothesis is borne out by one very curious human experience. I mean the experience which certain natures have of a demonic or magnetic force in life which can be drawn upon either for good or for evil, and which seems in some strange sense to be diffused round us in the universal air.

Goethe frequently refers to this demonic element; and others, besides Goethe, have had experience of it. If our hypothetical, elemental personality is to be regarded as a sort of demi-god, lower than the immortals and perhaps lower than man, we may associate it with those vague intimations of a sub-human life around us which seems in some weird sense distinct from the life of any particular thing we know.

The elemental personality, in this case, would be the cause of those various “psychic manifestations” which have sometimes been fantastically accounted for as the work of so-called “elementals.”

But the supreme moments of human consciousness, when the apex-thought of the complex vision is shooting its arrows of flame into the darkness, are but slightly concerned with the demonic sub-human life of hypothetical elemental personalities. They are concerned with the large, deep, magical spectacle of the great cosmic drama as it unrolls itself in infinite perspective. They are concerned with the unfathomable struggle, more terrible, more beautiful, more real, than anything else in life, between the resistant power of malice and the creative power of love. Nor do they see, these moments, the end of this long drama. The soul creates and is baffled in its creations. The soul loves and is baffled in its loving. Good and evil grow strangely mingled as they wrestle in the bottomless abyss. And ever, above us and beneath us, the same immense space spreads out its encircling arms. And ever, out of the invisible, the beckoning of immortal beauty leads us forward. Pain turns into pleasure; and pleasure turns into pain. Misery, deep as the world, troubles the roots of our being. Happiness, deep as the world, floods us with a flood like the waves of the ocean. All our philosophy is like the holding up of a little candle against a great wind. Soon, soon the candle is blown out: and the immense Perhaps rolls its waters above our heads.

The aboriginal malice against which the Gods struggle is never overcome. But who can resist asking the question — supposing that drama once ended, that eternal duality once reconciled, would annihilation be the last word or would something else, something undreamed of, something unguessed at, something "impossible," irrational, contrary to every philosophy that has ever sprung from the human brain, take the place of what we call life and substitute some new organ of research for the vision which we have called complex?

Who can say? The world is still young and the immortal Gods are still young; and our business at present is with life rather than beyond-life. Confused and difficult are the ways of our mortality; and after much philosophizing we seem to be only more conscious than ever that the secret of the world is in something else than wisdom.

The secret of the world is not in something that one can hold in one's hand, or about which one can say "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" The secret of the world is in the whole spectacle of the world, seen under the emotion of one single moment. But the memory of such a moment may be diffused over all the chances and accidents of our life and may be restored to us in a thousand faint and shadowy intimations. It may be restored to us in broken glimpses, in little stirrings and ripples on the face of the water, in rumours and whispers among the margin-reeds, in sighings of the wind across the sea-bank. It may be restored to us in sudden flickerings of unearthly light thrown upon common and familiar things. It may be restored to us when the shadow of death falls upon the path we have to follow. It may be restored to us when the common ritual and the ordinary usages of life gather to themselves a sudden dignity from the presence of great joy or of tragic grief. For the stream of life flows deeper than any among us realize or know; deeper, and with more tragic import; deeper, and with more secret hope. We are all born, even the most lucky among us, under a disastrous eclipse. We all contain something of that perilous ingredient which belongs to the unplumbed depths. Deep calls unto deep within us; and in the circle of our mortal personality an immortal drama unrolls itself. Waves of unredeemed chaos roll upward from the abysses of our souls, and like a brackish tide contend with the water-springs of life.

Over the landscape of our vision lies a shadow, a rarely lifted shadow, the shadow of our own malice. But the human race has not been destined to carry on the unending struggle alone. Its subjective human vision has touched in the darkness a subjective super-human vision; and the symbol of the encounter of these two is the lonely figure of Christ.

Looking backward, as we thus reach our conclusion, we see how such a conclusion was implicit all the while in the first movement with which we started. For since the truth we seek is not a thing we just put out our hand and take, but is a mood, an attitude, a gesture of our whole being, it follows that whenever, and by whatever means, we reach it, this “truth” will always be the same, and will not be affected, when once it is reached, by the slowness or the speed of the method with which we approach it. Nor will it be changed or transformed by the vision that finally grasps it as it would necessarily be if it were an objective fact which we could each of us take into our hands. Such an objective fact or series of facts would, of necessity, “look differently” to every individual vision that seized upon it. But by making our truth, down to the very depths, a gesture, an attitude, a mood, we have already anticipated and discounted that fatal relativity which inserts itself like a wedge of distorting vapour, between any objective fact and any subjective mind.

“Truth” cannot get blurred and distorted by the subjective mind when truth is regarded as that subjective mind’s own creation. According to the conclusion we have reached, every subjective mind in the universe, when it is rhythmically energizing, attains the same truth. For when subjectivity is carried to the furthest possible limit of rhythm and harmony, it transforms itself, of necessity, into objectivity. The subjective vision of all mortal minds, thus rendered objective by the intensity of the creative energy, is nothing less than the eternal vision. For as soon as the rhythmic harmony of the creative act has thus projected such a truth, such a truth receives the “imprimatur of the Gods” and turns out to be the truth which was implicit in us from the beginning.

Thus, the reality which we apprehend is found to be identical with the pursuit of the ideal which we seek; for what we name beauty and truth and goodness are of the essence of the mystery of life, and it is of *their* essence that they should ever advance and grow.

The eternal vision includes in its own inmost rhythm the idea and spectacle of inexhaustible growth; for, although it beholds all things “under the form of eternity,” its own nature is the nature of a creative gesture, of a supreme “work of art,” whereby it approximates to the ideal even in the midst of the real. The “form of eternity” under which it visualizes the world is not a dead or static eternity but an eternity of living growth. The peace and quiet which it attains is not the peace and quiet of the equilibrium which means “nothingness” but the peace and quiet of the equilibrium which means the rhythmic movement of life. The truth which it creates is a truth which lends itself to infinite development upon lines already laid down from the beginning. The beauty which it creates is a beauty which lends itself to infinite development upon lines laid down from the beginning.

And this truth, this beauty, this goodness, are all of them nothing less than the projection of the soul itself — of all the souls which constitute the system of things — in the mysterious outflowing of the ultimate duality. And when we make use of the expression "from the beginning" we are using a mere metaphorical sign-post. There is no beginning of the system of things and there is no end. "From the beginning" means nothing except "from eternity"; and in the immortal figure of Christ the beginning and the end are one.

In my analysis of the ultimate duality which is the secret of the soul I have said little about sex. The modern tendency is to over-emphasize the importance of this thing and to seek its influence in regions it can never enter. Many attributes of the soul are sexless; and since only one attribute of the soul, namely sensation, is entirely devoted to the body and unable to function except through the body, it is ridiculous and unphilosophical to make sex the profoundest aspect of truth which we know. The tendency to lay stress upon sex, at the expense of all sexless aspects of the soul, is a tendency which springs directly from the inert malice of the abyss What the instinct of sex secretly desires is that the very fountains of life should be invaded by sex and penetrated by sex. But the fountains of life can never be invaded by sex; because the fountains of life sink into that eternal vision which transcends all sex and reduces sex to its proper place as one single element in the rhythm of the universe.

It is only by associating itself with love and malice — it is only by getting itself transformed into love and malice that the sexual instinct is able to lift itself up, or to sink itself down, into the subtler levels of the soul's vision. The secret of life lies far deeper than the obvious bodily phenomena of sex. The fountains from which life springs *may flow through that channel* but they flow from a depth far below these physical or magnetic agitations. And it is only the abysmal cunning of the inert malice, which opposes itself to creation that tempts philosophers and artists to lay such a disproportionate stress upon this thing. The great artists are always known by their power to transcend sex and to reduce sex to its relative insignificance. In the greatest of all sculpture, in the greatest of all music, in the greatest of all poetry, the difference between the sexes disappears.

The inert malice delights to emphasize this thing, because its normal functioning implies the most desperate exertion of the possessive instinct known to humanity. The sexual instinct unless transfigured by love, tends towards death; because the sexual instinct desires to petrify into everlasting immobility what the creative instinct would change and transform. What the sexual instinct secretly desires is the eternal death of the object of its passion. It would strike its victim if it could into everlasting immobility so that it could satiate its lust of possession upon it without limit and without end. Any object of sexual desire, untransformed by love, is, for the purposes of such desire, already turned into a living corpse.

But although, according to the method we have been following, the difference between men and women is but of small account in the real life of the soul, it remains that humanity has absurdly and outrageously neglected the especial vision of the woman, as, in her bodily senses and her magnetic instincts, she differs from man we may well hope that with the economic independence of women, which is so great and desirable a revolution in our age, individual women of genius will arise, able to present, in philosophy and art, the peculiar and especial reaction to the universe which women possess as women we may well desire such a consummation in view of the fact that all except the very greatest of men have permitted their vision of the world to be perverted and distorted by their sex-instinct.

Could women of genius arise in sufficient numbers to counteract this tendency, such sex-obsessed masculine artists would be shamed into recognizing the narrowness of their perverted outlook. As it is, what normal women of talent do is simply to copy and imitate, in a diluted form, the sex-distortions of man's narrower vision. Sex-obsessed male artists have seduced the natural intelligence of the most talented women to their own narrow and limited view of life.

But it still remains that what the true artists of the world for ever seek — whether they be male or female — is not the partial and distorted vision of man as *a man,* or of woman *as a woman,* but the rhythmic and harmonious vision of, the human soul as it allies itself with the vision of the immortals. Women in private life, and in private conversation, disentangle themselves from the prejudices of men, but, as soon as they touch philosophy and art, they tend to deny their natural instincts and imitate the sex-obsessed instincts of man. But this tendency is already beginning to collapse under the freer atmosphere of economic independence; and in the future we may expect such a fierce conflict between the sex-vision of woman and the sex-vision of man, that the human soul will revolt against both such partialities and seek the "ampler ether and diviner air" of a vision that has altogether transcended the difference of sex.

As we look back over the travelled road of our attempt to articulate the ultimate secret, there arises one last stupendous question, not to meet which would be to shirk the heaviest weight of the problem. We have reached the conclusion that the secret of Nature is to be found in personality. We have reached the further conclusion that personality demands, for the integrity of its inmost self, an actual "soul-monad." We are faced with a "universe," then, made up entirely of living souls, manifested in so-called animate, or so-called inanimate bodies. Everything that our individual mind apprehends is therefore the body of a soul, or a portion of the body of a soul, or the presence of a soul that needs no incarnation. The soul itself is composed of a mysterious substance wherein what we call mind and what we call matter are fused and merged. What I have named throughout this book by the name of the *objective mystery* is therefore, when we come to realize the uttermost implications of our method, nothing more than the appearance of all the bodies of all the souls in the world *before* the creative act of our own particular soul has visualized such a spectacle. We can never see the objective mystery as *it is,* because directly we have seen it, that is to say, the appearance of all the adjacent bodies of all the souls within our reach, it ceases to be the objective mystery and becomes the universe we know.

The objective mystery is therefore no real thing at all, but only the potentiality of all real things, before the “real thing” which is our individual soul comes upon the scene to create the universe. It is only the potentiality of the “universe” which we have thus named, only the idea of the general spectacle of such an universe, *before* any universe has actually appeared.

And since the final conclusion of our attempt at articulation should rigorously eliminate from our picture everything that is relatively unreal, in favour of what is relatively real, it becomes necessary, now at the end, to eliminate from our vision of reality any substantial basis for this, “potentiality of all universes,” and to see how our actual universe appears when this thing has been withdrawn as nothing but an unreal thing. The substantial basis for what we actually see becomes therefore no mere potential universe, or objective mystery, but something much more definite than either of these. The spectacle of Nature, as we behold it, becomes nothing else than the spectacle of all the living bodies that compose the universe, each one of them with its corresponding invisible soul-monad.

The movement of thought to which I have throughout this book given the name of “the struggle with the objective mystery” remains the same. In these cases, *names* are of small account. But since it is a movement of thought which itself culminates in the elimination of the “objective mystery,” it becomes necessary to “think through” the stage of thought which this term covered, and articulate the actual cause of this movement of the mind.

The cause of the spectacle of the universe, as it presents itself to us in its manifold variety, is the presence of innumerable visible bodies which are themselves the manifestation of innumerable invisible souls. Everything that we see and touch and taste and smell and hear is a portion of some material body, which is the expression of some spiritual soul.

The universe is an immense congeries of bodies, moved and sustained by an immense congeries of souls. But it remains that these souls, inhabiting these bodies, are linked together by some mysterious medium which makes it possible for them to communicate with one another. What is this mysterious medium? What we have already indicated, here and there in this book, leads us at this point to our natural conclusion. Such a medium may well be nothing less than that elemental soul, with the universal ether as its bodily expression, the existence of which we have already suggested as a more than probable hypothesis. If the omnipresent body of this elemental soul is the material atmosphere or medium which unites all material bodies, surely we are justified in assuming that the invisible primordial medium which binds all souls together, which hypothetically binds them together even *before* they have, by the interaction of their different visions, created the universe, is this universal “soul of the elements.” Only a spiritual substance is able to unite spiritual substances. And only a material substance is able to unite material substances. Thus we are justified in assuming that while the medium which unites all bodies is the universal body of the elemental soul, the medium which unites all souls is the omnipresent soul-monad of this elemental being. It must however be remembered that this uniting does not imply any sort of spiritual *including* or subsuming of the souls thus united. They communicate with one another by means of this medium; but the integrity of the medium which unites them does not impinge at any point upon their integrity.

Thus, at the end of our journey, we are able, by this final process of drastic elimination, to reduce the world in which we live to a congeries of living souls. Some of these souls possess what we name animate bodies, others possess what we name inanimate bodies. For us, these words, animate and inanimate, convey but slight difference in meaning. Between a stone, which is part of the body of the earth, and a leaf which is part of the body of a plant, and a lock of hair which is part of the body of a man, there may be certain unimportant chemical differences, justifying us in using the terms animate and inanimate. But the essential fact remains that all we see and taste and touch and smell and hear, all, in fact, that makes up the objective universe which surrounds us, is a portion of some sort of living body, corresponding to some sort of living soul.

Our individual soul-monad, then, able to communicate with other soul-monads, whether mortal or immortal, through the medium of omnipresent soul-monads of the universal ether finds itself dominated, as all the rest are dominated, by one inescapable circle of unfathomable space. Under the curve of this space we all of us live, and under the curve of this space those that are mortal among us, die. When we die, if it be our destiny not to survive death, our souls vanish into nothingness; and our bodies become a portion of the body of the earth. But if we have entered into the eternal vision we have lost all fear of death; for we have come to see that the thing which is most precious to us, the fact that love remains undying in the heart of the universe, does not vanish with our vanishing. Once having attained, by means of the creative vision of humanity and by means of the grace of the immortals, even a faint glimpse into this mystery, we are no longer inclined to lay the credit of our philosophizing upon the creative spirit in our individual soul. The apex-thought of the complex vision has given us our illuminated moments. But the eternal vision to which those moments led us has filled us with an immense humility.

And in the last resort, when we turn round upon the amazing spectacle of life it is of the free gift of the gods, or of the magical love hidden in the mystery of nature, that we are led to think, rather than of any creative activity in ourselves. The word “creative” like the word “objective mystery,” has served our purpose well in the preceding pages. But now, as we seek to simplify our conclusion to the uttermost, it becomes necessary to reject much of the manifold connotation which hangs about this word; although in this case also, the stage of thought which it covers is a real movement of the mind.

But the creative activity in the apex-thought of our complex vision is, after all, only a means, a method, a gesture which puts us into possession of the eternal vision. When once the eternal vision has been ours, the memory of it does not associate itself with any energy of our own. The memory of these eternal moments associates itself with a mood in which the creative energy rests upon its own equipoise, upon its own rhythm; a mood in which the spectacle of the universe, the magic of Nature, the love in all living souls, the contact of mortality with immortality, become things which blend themselves together; a mood in which what is most self-assertive in our personality seems to lose itself in what is least self-assertive, and yet in thus losing itself is not rendered utterly void.

For all action, even the ultimate act of faith, must issue in contemplation; and this is the law of life, that what we contemplate, *that* we become. He who contemplates malice becomes malicious. He who contemplates hideousness becomes hideous. He who contemplates unreality becomes unreal.

If the universe is nothing but a congeries of souls and bodies, united by the soul and the body which fill universal space, then it follows that “the art of philosophy” consists in the attempt to attain the sort of “contemplation” which can by the power of its love enter into the joy and the suffering of all these living things.

Thus in reaching a conclusion which tallies with our rarest moments of super-normal insight we discover that we have reached a conclusion which tallies with our moments of profoundest self-abasement. In these recurrent moods of humiliation it seems ridiculous to speak of the creative or the destructive energy of the mind. What presents itself to us in such moods is a world of forms and shapes that we can neither modify nor obliterate. All we can do is to reflect their impact upon us and to note the pleasure of it or the pain. But when even in the depths of our weakness we come to recognize that these forms and shapes are, all of them, the bodily expressions of souls resembling our own, the nostalgia of the great darkness is perceptibly lifted and a strange hope is born, full of a significance which cannot be put into words. The world-stuff, or the objective mystery, out of which the eternal vision has been created is now seen to be the very flesh and blood of a vast company of living organisms; and it has become impossible to contemplate anything in the world without the emotion of malice or the emotion of love. If ever the universe, as we know it now, is dissolved into nothingness, such an end of things will be brought about either by the complete victory of malice or by the complete victory of love.

THE END

The Art of Happiness (1935)

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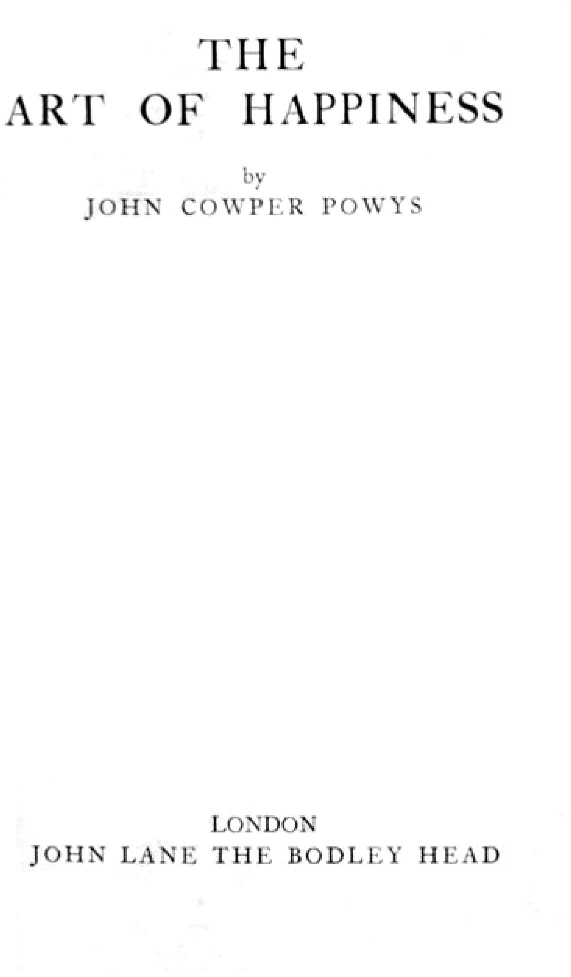

THE
ART OF HAPPINESS

by
JOHN COWPER POWYS

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD

The first edition

CHAPTER ONE. THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

ANY DISCUSSION ABOUT what is the purpose of life, or about what is the good life, or about what is the ideal life, carries a rather hollow sound in these reckless and cynical times; but, after all, such questions *are* being dealt with, at least in minor issues, by the individual conscience every day, and if a writer has the gall to bring up this ancient problem, and the wit to apply it to modern conditions, I cannot see that he is beating the air. No amount of cynicism seems to save our individual conscience from distressing struggles; and in these struggles, whatever our philosophy may be, the value we place on Happiness and the meaning we attach to Happiness must play a part.

Happiness differs from Pleasure in this very thing, namely that the idea of *quality,* the idea of something mental and emotional, of something intellectual and what used to be called "spiritual," is added, in it, to the more sensual feeling. A man could be happy while he was in the act of sacrificing his life, whereas we should scruple about using the word pleasure in this connection.

I must confess it is hard for me to see how what we call Happiness, and I think the word has come to mean that particular glow of well-being that arises when something deep in us is being satisfied and fulfilled, can take any place but the highest place in our estimate of life's highest good.

Try to substitute any other *summum bonum* for this one, and you will see how many difficulties you get into! What religious person for instance would make the aim of life the process of knowing God, and becoming one with God, if this conscious harmony with the spirit underlying the system of things did not imply personal happiness?

And it would seem a weird and unnatural thing for a man to pursue what is called “Truth,” either by strictly scientific, or by the more imaginative philosophical method if this pursuit were not in itself attended by happiness or at least presumed to result in happiness. And the same thing applies to that mysterious relation, between what is half-created by the mind and what is half-discovered in Nature, which we call Beauty. If artists and poets and story-tellers and their audiences didn’t find happiness in this particular human activity, it would surely never have become the mighty urge that it has become.

And what applies to Truth and Beauty applies to what we have come to call Goodness too. If to be good didn’t mean both to be happy and to be a cause of happiness, there surely could never have arisen in the world this great “stream of tendency making for righteousness” such as we cannot help — for all our reversions to barbarity — being aware of in ourselves and in history.

And the same thing holds in the matter of practical work. It is all very well for Carlyle to harp upon work, as against happiness, as the purpose of life. But we are men; we are not machines. It is not work *in itself*, any more than it is God in Himself, or truth in itself, or beauty in itself, that keeps us going. It is the happiness that we get from work, or give by work, either immediately or in the long run, that drives us forward.

There does seem to be a widespread notion, however, that although in reality all these great “purposes” of life, God, Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Work, are precious to us because they alone, in the long run, bring us happiness, we can only obtain this happiness, or create this happiness, by treating these things *as ends in themselves* and by letting the happiness they bring, their *by-product,* come and go as it will.

But is not this attitude of mind, when you really analyse it, a pathological superstition? Does not its prevalence prove, not the sacredness of God, Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Work, but the sacredness of the feeling of happiness, a feeling so precious, so rare, so sacred in fact that we all are secretly afraid — as the ancients were in regard to those Avenging Deities that they called the Eumenides — to so much as name in our hearts what we know to be the feeling that really keeps us going and keeps the world going.

This work is therefore an experiment, an experiment for both writer and reader, to see what effect it has upon the mind if we habitually destroy this happiness-taboo and aim at building up for ourselves — and incidentally for others — a premeditated system or art of personal happiness out of the various orderly and disorderly elements that the fatality of our character and the accidents of our environment and our experience offer as our destined and chance-given material.

The only axiom I must beg the reader to accept at the start — even if he be rationally committed to some system of fatalism or determinism — is the basic axiom that our thoughts at least are more or less under our control.

This is really the root of the matter. If you refuse to allow that the human mind has any control over its thoughts I cannot see what good you can possibly get — except the satisfaction of studying a fellow-dupe's illusions — from a book of this kind. It must appear to you mere pretentious gabble. But if you grant this one single axiom, that the mind has at least a partial control over its thoughts, I think I can deduce, though with no exact or mathematical inevitableness, but still with a measure of convinciveness a good many important conclusions.

Granting, first of all, then, that the mind *has* some control over its thoughts, let us for a moment examine the nature of this control.

What do we mean by the controlling “mind,” and what do we mean by the controlled “thoughts”?

At this point it is necessary — in spite of the technical objections that professional psychologists will raise — to use the old simple natural human words for those natural, if not simple, movements of the mind, feelings of the ego, and conscious sensations of the inner self which accompany all mental acts.

The “mind” is *the self when it thinks to itself;* and its “thoughts” are *what it thinks.* The self, as a mind thinking, has the power of detaching itself from all its bodily feelings and sensations. It can even detach itself from its consciousness of itself as a mind with certain particular thoughts. I mean that it can — and I think this is a universal human experience — stand, so to speak, *beside itself,* and say to itself, “That is you, you old Identity, thinking the same troublesome worrying thoughts as usual!”

The more we consider this matter of the mind’s control — of even its partial control — over its thoughts, the more we are compelled to recognise that these thoughts are intimately associated with the fact of our being happy or unhappy. Thoughts have the power of making us feel happy even while our body is suffering; and as we all know they very often have the power of making us profoundly unhappy when our body is completely at ease and even enjoying pleasant sensations.

My own mind dwells so constantly on the verge of certain terrible manias that it can speak with peculiar authority upon a pathological subject like this.

What I want to make clear is simple enough. When we talk of “the mind controlling its thoughts” what we are especially thinking of is the mind’s power of making us feel happy by calling up certain thoughts while it dismisses certain other thoughts.

Most of us, I suppose, even if we are what are called "healthy-minded," have some peculiar dreads, apprehensions, fears, loathings, horrors, to dwell upon which is extremely painful to us and to forget which is a heavenly relief. I doubt whether we can prevent these thought's first appearances but the mind has the power of either dwelling on them or of forcing itself to forget them; and what I myself have discovered, from examining the behaviour of my own mind, is that there is a cruel demon hidden in it that derives sadistic pleasure from trying to force me to think of the very things that especially make me shudder. And the happier I feel — and the pleasanter, in other respects, the moment is — the more energetically does this demon under my own helmet call to my attention what I particularly loathe to think about.

Whether there is such a thing as a "faculty" of the mind exactly corresponding to what we popularly mean by the word "will" does not affect what I am saying. It is fashionable nowadays to dislike the idea of "faculties of the mind" and it is also fashionable nowadays to especially dislike the notion of a mental activity called "the use of the will" but it surely remains that there is some movement of our deepest self, some psychic experience common to us, which, whether you call it by the word "will" or by some other name, is an important aspect of all human psychology.

What I mean is that there is something in the actual working of our minds, which, if you are too pedantic to call it by the popular monosyllable "will," you will have to designate by *some* word when you wish to express a universal subjective feeling that we all have whether it be an illusion or not.

But at this point it is necessary for me to use a word still more unfashionable than the word "will" and with even a worse odour of archaic superstition — I refer to the word "faith." For as a matter of fact what you really experience in your mind is the power of transmitting a positive or a negative vibration to yourself in regard to your thoughts, selecting, rejecting, encouraging, dismissing, suppressing, as your mood decides.

It is to this decisive motion within your consciousness that the use-and-wont of popular speech gives the name "will" and when you transmit this order to think further, or *not* to think further, along a particular line, or to summon up, or *not* to summon up a particular image, you are doing what is usually called — and we must give *some* name to this familiar process— "using your will."

And it is just here, it seems to me, that it is legitimate to use the word "faith." What you have, in fact, before you make this motion of your will, is the faith that it will prove effective; and that the "thought" in question, which may well have come into your head without your volition, will obey your command, and either remain and emphasise itself or vanish away.

Supposing that you have got into the habit of indulging in a fatalistic way of feeling about the mystery of consciousness this "faith" in your power over your thoughts may be extremely weak, and though you may feebly transmit your command and say to yourself, "But I won't think any more about *that*!" there is no formidable battery of faith behind the vibration you transmit to give you assurance that your interference with your thoughts will be obeyed. It is for this reason that I have come to feel — and my feeling has been justified by repeated subjective experiences — that at the root of the whole matter lies what you might call *the necessity for faith*, for faith in your power to regulate your own thoughts, for faith in the power of your subjective will.

We have reached the point then of being in a position — granting the validity of this faith in our power to select between our thoughts — to maintain the proposition that it lies in our power to encourage the thoughts that bring us happiness and to suppress the others.

But what kind of a thing is this “happiness” we are considering? That is the next matter to be discussed. We all know roughly what the words Happiness and Unhappiness mean, but like all human names for important reactions to life they seem to indicate states of feeling that quickly tend to blend with, and lose themselves in, other states of feeling, for which there have been found, by the selective instinct of our particular tribe, quite different names.

Joy, ecstasy, rapture, delight, satisfaction, enchantment, peace, contentment, enjoyment, blessedness, pleasure — all these indicate conditions of human feeling that cannot be rigidly separated off from what we call Happiness. Pleasure, I suppose comes on the whole nearest to it in our ordinary speech and the antithesis Pleasure — Pain corresponds roughly, in most of our minds, with the antithesis Happiness — Unhappiness.

Pain, however, though applicable as we all know to mental suffering, strictly belongs to the physical side of things, while even *Pleasure,* the other member of this great rival antithesis, though less consistently than *Pain,* has like it a physical implication.

There is always a considerable margin, a sort of obscure twilight-nimbus, left vague and indetermined around every great human word, as it descends the stream of the generations, and certain important nuances of meaning are constantly being added, while others are being taken away, without the possibility of any individual mind in one lifetime catching the drift of the change.

Personally I like the sound of the word “pleasure” a good deal better than the sound of the word “happiness.” There seems to me something at once more fluid and more organic about it; while the word “pain” is certainly more expressive than the word “unhappiness.” The syllables “happy” have something jaunty about them, something brisk and bouncing. They suggest an element less dignified, less poetical, than the psychic overtone conveyed in the syllables “pleasure.” Take for instance that characteristic line of Wordsworth’s: “The pleasure which there is in life itself,” and substitute the word “happiness.” It would not be only the scansion of the verse that would be broken. There would be a loss of some deep organic quality in the meaning.

Nevertheless, in spite of the annoying jauntiness, and even the bouncing babyishness, of the word “happy,” it is hard to see how it can be avoided. What it possesses, that the more poetical word “pleasure” lacks, is an overtone of mental volition. You can will to be happy — you cannot evoke the mystery of pleasure by any willing.

It seems indeed as though happiness might be considered as the subjective counterpart to pleasure. I mean that while it would be natural to say: “Be happy or die!” there would be something strained, something even violent, about the expression: “Get pleasure or die!” The more you concentrate on the difference between these words the more clearly does it appear that while pleasure is something that comes to you from outside, happiness is something that, though it may often be “roused to reciprocity” by pleasure, is intrinsically a mental, or even a moral state. You could also, I think, maintain without contradiction that there is an implication of lastingness about happiness, whereas the idea of pleasure suggests something not only more physical but much more transitory.

Having thus dealt with the meaning of our word I want now to dig down if I can to the basic root-psychology of the feeling, or sensation, or emotion which the word conveys.

I think we find, as with most things in the world, an unmistakable duality in the nature of happiness itself, quite irrespective of its basic opposition to its antagonist in the happy — unhappy antithesis. The thing can be a passive state or it can be an active state. At its best in its passive condition it gives you the feeling of a certain lying back in delicious receptivity upon the life-stream whose waves rock you and whose flood bears you up.

At its best in its active state it gives you the feeling of a vibrant energy, of a strong, tense self-creation, a feeling full of the glow of battle and of the exultation of wrestling with a formidable opponent.

Now since there exists this basic difference between the passive feeling of happiness, when a person lies back upon life, and the active feeling, when he wrestles with life, the crucial question arises, upon which of these two moods — granting, as in practical life we have to grant, that what we call our "will" represents a vital mental process in our living organism — is it better to concentrate? I mean if we do really have power over our thought-processes, is it wiser to aim at the active state of happiness, or at the passive? I would say most strongly in answer to this that the wise course is to aim for both. Nor can they altogether be separated; for both require *some* measure of deliberate effort. The tense, the strung-up, the creative side of the feeling of happiness is not completely absent, at least at the start, from the other mood. For the yielded, passive, relaxed, abandoned state, though it does fall to the lot of certain people to enjoy it by pure good luck, can be made much more continuous by intensifying what we may possess of the tense, alert, self-conscious, and "gathered-up," attitude.

We are all familiar with the expression, “Pull yourself together.” Well! that expression, better than any other, describes the psychological movement by which in our deepest soul we put on, as Homer would say, “our harness,” and wrestle with the world.

But the point is that the relaxed and passive kind of happiness, when you float on the ocean of the exterior cosmos and allow its magical currents to flow through you, is a kind of happiness that can be reached deliberately and enjoyed deliberately when once you have acquired the trick of “pulling yourself together.”

Such magical, abandoned moods *do* come — it would be absurd to deny it — to the most casual, the most natural, the most unconscious people; but they come to the conscious, philosophical ones — it is certainly safe to say *that* much — in proportion as these latter clear the way the more intensely and the more craftily for their reception.

The truth is that when once we have arrived, as so many of us have, at a point where we cannot escape being conscious of every flicker of our sensuous and mental life, it is ridiculous to tell us to be natural and simple and unaffected without allowing us the right, or even the possibility, of consciously struggling after this simplicity, this naturalness, this unaffectedness. The clue to the whole life-history of the human mind from the beginning until this day lies in those threefold spiral curves, so beautifully indicated by Hegel, wherein we begin with the religious simplicity of children, advance to the cynical rationalism of youth, and then return — only with a difference — to the old childish wonder, in our mellowest and most inspired maturity.

But granting that we have a right to make a cult of personal happiness and to make as simple a cult and as childish a cult of it as we please, the point arises, how is it that among all the other ideals put forward at the great historic epochs of the world for the human race to follow, the cult of personal happiness hardly appears at all?

What are the reasons why so few human beings dare deliberately, even to themselves, make their personal happiness their main purpose of their lives? Is it all due to that curious taboo on the matter about which I have already spoken? I think another cause of it is that there is a great evolutional pressure focussed just now upon the human race. The lower animals have slipped aside from this terrible pressure. They have stereotyped themselves into a happy stagnation; and even the plants, save when meddled with by man, have fallen into the peaceful recurrence of what is outside *the fearful intention* of evolution.

But luckless man — made to be a pot for the creative fire by the mysterious master-force — feels driving, burning, scorching, fermenting, seething through him the same dreadful urge to self-lacerating progress which at the beginning forced our ancestors out of their sprawlings and stretchings and baskings into the tyranny of mind.

It is, I think, this terrific evolutionary pressure springing out of the power behind Nature, rather than any superstitious guilt-sense derived from the sin-rituals of savage antiquity, that mainly accounts for the fact that among all our historic moral systems there is no widespread or profoundly influential cult advocating personal happiness as the chief purpose of human life. The Epicurean philosophy itself was, it’ seems in reality, not *quite* this; and as for the doctrines of Aristippus, which do seem to have amounted to this, they can have been scarcely known beyond an Athenian circle of progressive minds and beyond the ardent youth of a few Ionian Islands.

In China no doubt, in Arabia Felix and in Persia, such a theory found its advocates, but I question whether among the metaphysical intellects of

India it ever gained much hearing.

The modern Western tendency, both among Communists and Fascists, is so furiously social that all types of individualistic thought are under a ban, tarred with the invidious brush of bourgeois liberalism.

And yet when you “come down to brass tacks” there surely must arise, every day of their devoted lives, in these young people — for these violent Western ideals seem especially to answer the needs of generous youth — moments when they feel that in this one single terrestial experience of a living soul, “between two eternities,” it is a queer thing to be thinking of nothing but the material wellbeing of future generations.

What I am trying to suggest here is that a stoical resolve to endure life happily, without abating a jot of the gathering-up of the resources of our spirit, is not an unworthy human ideal.

Why should the integration, the self-realisation of our human ego, the gathering together in a deliberate tension of our life-forces, be, for a whole epoch of human history, so entirely absorbed in external activity that the inner life of the individual, his sensuous and mystical response to life, is reduced to the minimum?

Surely a person can be an honourable citizen of his country and yet feel that the one thing needful, since after all he *is* a personal “ego” and not just a cog in a machine or an ant in an ant-heap, is to enrich and simplify his own private response to the universe.

It was faith in a personal religion that so often gave our ancestors the spirit to endure life with stoical calm and enjoy life with unflinching zest. *Their* ideal was an individual life and to this they adapted themselves by the stately practice of their old-fashioned mental and spiritual “yoga,” a “yoga” that after all possessed its own imaginative stir and its own psychological excitement.

I cannot see why the devotion to a communistic or fascist state, any more than a devotion to business or games, should be allowed to absorb all our superfluous energy — that *marginal energy of mankind* the disposal of which is so intimate a problem — or to exploit to social purpose minds that are made for a response to the cosmos.

In throwing overboard the old-fashioned religious life, which, after all, held the clue to deep psychological responses to the universe, we have permitted political and social idealism to usurp a place in the life of our solitary soul for which they are entirely unfitted; with the result that since these aggressive invaders cannot fill up these spacious rooms, nor feel comfortable in these stately presence-chambers, there are forlorn spaces left, spaces completely untenanted through which unhappy phantoms stalk and maniac-abortions gibber.

The human soul has a long history. It carries about it high mysterious memories, that, like night-winds fluttering the faded arras of an ancestral chamber, throw into momentary relief dim motions of forgotten figures whose terrible beauty once transformed our life. No human soul is really satisfied through all of its being by an existence devoted to what is called the "Service of Humanity," still less by the Service of the State. It demands more than these things; and to bind it down to these things is to prepare for terrible and insane reversions to lost idolatries.

Driven as we are by the urge of economic necessity, hemmed in as we are by the fatality of our material environment, there is a margin in all our lives when, whether we like it or not, our thoughts and emotions wander from the matter in hand, and our imagination finds itself confronted by mysteries beyond the improvement of any human society.

Futile as it may be to fancy we can discover in life, or invent for life, any universal "purpose" or underlying "meaning," there yet remains something in us — call it by what name you will — that relucts at subsiding into the rôle of patient labourers for the good of posterity. Eliminate all superstition, all "other worldliness," all sense of "sin," be as sceptical as you please about God and Immortality, there still exists, in the most regimented and docile ego, an intellectual restlessness, a stirring of the imagination, a troubling of the waters, a terrible and dangerous questioning that cannot be allayed by any national or even by any international preoccupation.

The soul within us is a microcosm, not a micropolis; and is born for the happiness that flows from a cosmic, not a political or economic life. There is a craving in us, felt by men and women of every colour and every race, that neither the passion for communal improvement nor the passion for communal applause can distract from its organic unrest.

We are men; and it is the destiny of men to detach themselves from the universe in order to enjoy the universe. Action, however exciting, labour however absorbing, penury however exacting, love and hate, however obsessing, leave a yawning gap in the circumference of our life. You may beat this exigency down; you may starve it out, you may crowd it away; the thing refuses to be altogether killed! A devoted existence is not enough. Virtue is not enough. Heroic self-sacrifice is not enough. The soul of man can only be fed at the breasts of the universal.

And this remains true even if, as some insist, we reduce the "soul" to a mere name for the unifying vital principle of our bodily organism.

Personally, like Malvolio, I think highly of the soul; but if it were no more than the focus-point of our magnetic energy, it would still refuse to content itself with mere work and mere play.

Against all our instincts for comfort and security this trouble in the soul stirs us up and drives us on, to "gather our forces together" and wrestle with the mystery of life and death. I think it is partly because of this spiritual restlessness in us that the idea of the pursuit of personal happiness as an adepuate "purpose of life" strikes us as uninspiring and unworthy. As a matter of fact it ceases to be uninspiring and unworthy when we concentrate on the *quality* of the happiness we seek. No one would dare to call the happiness of a lover, of a saint, of an artist, of a mystic, uninspiring. Indeed in regard to the quality of the happiness we are discussing I come bolt up against the real crux of the whole matter. The soul remains as much unsatisfied by a life of ordinary labour as it does by a life of heroic devotion to some communal cause. It demands, and it has a right to demand, deep draughts of a particular kind of magical happiness such as do not necessarily follow from any self-sacrifice.

It demands a happiness flowing into it straight from the elements, straight from the universe, straight from the basic mystery of life and death. If you are not able to force yourself to feel this sort of thing for some moments of time every day of your life you are being defrauded of your birthright as an offspring of the cosmos. None but a madman would deny that extreme cold, extreme hunger, extreme pain, are things that can bring down all but the sublimest characters. So also, if you care greatly for another living person, that person's prostration under these extreme evils will probably break you down.

But the point is that there always remains the hope that these intolerable evils will pass. Many and many a suicide would be alive still if he could only have waited till some particular accumulation of evils had passed, as everything does pass in the casuality of time.

But even if there were more unbearable pain in the world than there is, *that* were no reason for rejecting these magical sensations or for refusing to struggle after them.

The evolutionary force in the universe having once issued in personality, nothing short of such moods, some attitudes, such exultations in our personal life is worthy of our cosmic origin.

It is indeed likely enough, in spite of the modern tendency to lay all the stress upon the material world, that the highest part of our personality is already in touch, *is already part of,* a higher dimension of life than is supplied by the phenomena of the astronomical universe.

Metaphysicians tend to speak of this higher level of our identity as something impersonal; but they are just as likely to be wrong as to be right in this misanthropic assertion. It may well be, on the contrary, that this “higher,” or “deeper,” or more “comprehensive” aspect of our ego is the most intensely personal thing about us! The sublime and startling dogma of the Catholic Church in the matter of the Incarnation *may* be representative of a tremendous cosmic secret.

But whether this is so or not, whether there be or not a level of life outside the phenomenal world to which the apex, so to speak, of our living organism pierces its way, what I want to insist upon now is that the effort we make to gather our forces together “to be happy or die” is an effort not only able to satisfy that restless soul within us which remains unsatisfied by benevolence and righteousness, but is an effort that automatically forces our nature into unity with itself, bringing our senses into relation with our intellect, and both of these into relation with that mysterious apex of our personality that loses itself in the unknown.

My own experience is that Heraclitus was right when he said, “*Life is War*”; but this experience does not preclude that in the nobler human society of the future such war will be purely between the soul and the universe. I only mean that I have discovered that by the use of a certain strain and a certain tension, as if you were engaged in a struggle against a powerful antagonist, it is possible to force the senses to respond to the magic of the elements at the same moment as you force the intellect into an awareness of our cosmic predicament.

And thus I come to what is really the root-matter in this ticklish discussion. Since the evolutionary pressure in the universe, working through the vital instincts of living organisms, has produced, as the most complicated result we are as yet certain of, the conscious intelligences of individual men and women, and since it seems as though at the present moment the driving force of this evolutionary pressure, its apex-point of advance, *is through the human intelligence*, it surely becomes probable that whatever "the purpose of life" may be from an ultimate cosmic viewpoint, as far as we are concerned it has to do with personality and with the nature and quality of personal life.

What is popularly known as "Egoism" is therefore a mental attitude, not only lawful, but inescapable and inevitable, if we are to be in harmony with the main pressure of the cosmic tide; whereas what is popularly known as "egotism," or in plainer speech "selfishness," is simply the abuse of egoism, or egoism exerting itself in an unintelligent, clumsy, and insensitive way.

But we can go much further in this distinction between the commendable instinct we call egoism and its abuse in selfishness.

Although the cosmic purpose, relative to our human intelligence, seems now to be concerned with the development of personality, man remains historically and practically a creature dependent on others, nourished by others, attracted and repelled by others, and under the dominance of the economic customs of the place of his birth.

The arena of our struggle is therefore complicated for most of us by being composed of not only natural elements but of very touchy and very jumpy human beings.

Interrupting the direct contact of our individual soul with the cosmos, we have to cope with a number of neighbour-souls who are also struggling to realise their identities under the impact of our common environment.

It is in the blending of our relations with our neighbours and with the universe, or, to use the old language, with “Man” and with “God,” that the quality of our egoism becomes apparent. You can have the egoism of a seagull or, the egoism of a hedgehog and be justified in both; whereas there is a certain kind of selfishness that leaves your personality withered, colourless, sapless and neutral, just as there is a certain kind of unselfishness that produces these disagreeable effects. To be a supremely successful egoist it is necessary to combine a devilish cunning with a sublime unscrupulousness and both these things with the detachment of a saint, but fortunately Nature is more merciful as well as more cruel than most philosophers upon happiness realise, and without aspiring to attain this extreme mixture of Machiavellism and Spinozaism a person may pick up a good number of windfalls of the most subtle happiness every day of his life if he will follow a few of the ancient ritual-tricks, in this art, that I am now fumbling to express.

I have called this first chapter “The Root of the Matter” and I want to reveal now, without more ado, what I have found in my own experience to be the best ritual-trick or habitual motion of the mind, wherewith not only to bear up against the pressure of external evils, or against that “whoreson lethargy” in a person’s soul which comes both from mental weariness and bodily weakness, but actually, though the sense of it may be faint, to rouse in the heart the spring of happiness.

I shall enlarge later on this subject, but it must suffice now to indicate in general terms what I have in my head. It has to do with a motion of the mind that I call the *Ichthian act* because it bears a remote resemblance to the leap of a fish out of the water, into the air, and back again into the water.

The cause of so many vague feelings of unhappiness, apart from acute physical distress, is almost always the pressure upon us of some mental worry, or nervous depression, or what one might describe as "the illusion of the commonplace."

The great thing is to take our cue from Heraclitus and regard the gloomy moment as a challenge to our spirit, a challenge to close with the invisible enemy in a life-and-death struggle.

Shake off the pessimistic assumption that to be unhappy is inevitable. To encounter such evil and oppressive moments is certainly inevitable. But it is no cause for crying, "Just like my luck!" or for sighing, "Pity poor me again!" It is the fortune of war. It is one of the terms on which we wrestle with this chaotic world.

What I mean by the "Ichthian act" is a swift lumping together of all the evils of your life — as if you turned them into one element that completely surrounds you — followed by a fierce leap up of your inmost identity, a leap that takes you, if only for a second, into the freer air.

In this second you plunge through, and leap out of, the lumped-together evil of life, not in the strength of any outward change of conditions, or of any hope of such a change, but solely in a spasmodic revolt against them, a revolt wherein the indestructible spirit at the bottom of your soul refuses to yield.

I have taken the expression "Ichthian" from the Greek word because of its Early Christian use, meaning Christ the Saviour. In this case the "saviour" is our own spirit of ultimate defiance; but so seldom do we draw upon this spirit in us that, when we do, it seems like the aid of a supernatural presence.

There come moments, however, when this self-evoked leap of resistance is impossible for us because of our weakness and our melancholy; and for such occasions, while I am touching upon this “Root of the Matter,” I want to hint at a different and less violent spiritual procedure. For this also I have a presumptuous and arbitrary name — I call it the act of “De-carnation.” Just as by Incarnation we mean the mystic fusion of the spirit with the flesh, so by “de-carnation” I mean the separation of the spirit in us *from* our flesh.

The act of “de-carnation” is a much easier one than what I call the “Ichthian” act. It consists in thinking of your soul as something separate from your body, something that exists in the air — that free air into which the Ichthian leap carries your whole identity — by the side of your oppressed and persecuted body.

Within this soul, thus separated from your body — and the play of imagination required for this mental act is an old and very simple one, known in some degree to us all — dwells now the main part of your consciousness; and from this vantage-point it surveys and overlooks your persecuted and weighed-down body.

In no circumstance does this act of “de-carnation” help you more completely than when, confronted by some other person who is being a trial to you, you are tempted to pit your egoism, your desire for happiness at his or her expense, against the similar desire in this trying person. But when, hovering in the free air apart from both the self-asserting ones, you envisage yourself and this other as if you were a third person at the encounter, you are in a position to experience an extraordinary liberation of spirit and a curiously indulgent attitude, both towards the troublesome intruder on your peace and towards your own agitated and egoistic organism. You are aloof from both, and, as it were, watching both from your airy vantage-ground.

Your soul is still *the centre of your awareness*, but no longer the centre of your touchy animal identity.

As contrasted with this temporary "de-carnation" what I am trying to indicate by what I call the "Ichthian" act is a resolute motion of subjective energy within the ego by means of which our spirit rises up from the depths of our being and shaking off both physical lethargy and mental discomfort plunges into the mystery of life, considered as one great stream, and into the mystery of death, considered as a positive element surrounding it.

In either case the soul's existence, as Heraclitus says, is a state of war, war down to the roots of things; but you can either fight this abysmal battle by the act of aloofness which I have indicated in the word "de-carnation," or by the act of intense integration to which I have given the name "Ichthian."

The truth is we submit far too much and far too humbly to the pressure of the daily miseries implied in our ordinary life. When not ourselves in extreme pain, when not sharing by the sympathy of our nerves the extreme pain of another, who is there shall dare to put limits to what the human mind, fortified by a practised will, can achieve in the evoking of happiness and peace?

We stand indeed between two extremes. On the one hand we can pursue what is popularly called "pleasure," grossly, heedlessly, selfishly, at the expense of all finer considerations. On the other hand we can let our personal life go and give ourselves up to some absorbing Cause which becomes more to us than soul or body.

Neither of these is the way suggested in this book; for the clutching at external pleasure puts the spirit within us and the happiness within us at the mercy of accident, while the heroic sacrificing of our personal life on the altar of a cause that may or may not benefit future generations leaves the great evolutionary tide that has culminated in our life, thwarted, perverted, dissipated, squandered, offered up to a future that after all may never be moulded according to our ideal.

In laying stress upon the gathering together of the forces of the soul in this “fish-like” leap of primordial desperation I feel I am describing an universal psychological experience. Where it is not recognised as such, I would say that the person in question is in some way sub-normal, sub-vital, sub-magnetic.

I call it “the Ichthian act” because I want to suggest by the analogy of the fish leaping into the air out of the water an act of the soul that is the most comprehensive act the soul can make, an act that includes not only an embrace of the mystery of life, but an embrace of the mystery of death, considered as something positive. The swimming in the water is like our soul in its practical absorption in the diurnal routine of its existence; but when it leaps into the air, to fall back again with that familiar sound which is one of the most poetical sounds in Nature, it leaves for the moment its proper element and invades a super-element, an element which might well be compared with the *other-dimensional* mystery which surrounds our mortal existence. The leaping fish does in fact — for the air into which it leaps would be its death if it couldn’t sink back into water — represent the soul embracing both life and death in a moment of predetermined intensity. Montaigne seems to imply that all wise men meditate on the *nothingness* of death and thus escape the fear of it. Goethe seems anxious on the contrary to have us put the thought of death completely out of our minds. Neither of these methods of dealing with this circumference of our life seems to me satisfactory. Montaigne’s brooding on it and reiterated self-reassurings about it come at last to resemble the uneasy fidgetings of a life-worshipper confronted with his grand antagonist, whereas Goethe’s habitual way of shying off the whole subject, as for instance, in that “Think of Living” written over Mignon’s tomb, seems no more than a child-like turning from the dark.

The best way to take death as far as I can see, is not to avoid all thought of it, though there is more to be said for that method than for brooding on its annihilating negations, but to think of it in some *positive* way, as possessing, equally with life, some tremendous withheld secret.

This way of thinking of it need not be very distinct — it obviously cannot be, where we are in such absolute ignorance — but it *can* be positive and it can be hopeful. We have an equal right, as far as the “truth” of this dark matter goes, to be hopeful as to be despairing, for our ignorance is complete; but since there is really a half-chance that the mind’s attitude counts for something — I mean that a life-long concentration on the idea of surviving death might be an element in our surviving it — it does not seem the part of wisdom to brood obstinately and dogmatically upon annihilation; unless annihilation, as may easily happen, *is what you want.*

The wisest course it seems to me, since no one can deny that both these issues, survival and annihilation, are equally possible, is to combine them in some vague way, and formulate in your mind an imaginative conception of death, or even an imaginative image of death, that shall allow for the feeling of annihilation, of *something* annihilated, as well as for the feeling of survival, of *something* surviving.

This cannot be so very hard to do, since both annihilation and survival are matters of daily experience in regard to other things than ourselves. Each of my abysmal motions of the soul when it finds itself “up against it,” this Ichthian act and this de-carnating act, have something in them of both living and dying.

When certain vigorous people die — and our best tragic actors are aware of this — there is a spasm, a convulsion, a magnetic shock, a shudder, like that of a tense-drawn bow-string let go; and although my “Ichthian” act by which we plunge into a life-and-death exultation is not so spasmodic or so convulsed as this, there is the same “inbreathing” and “outbreathing,” the same pressing down of a spring, the same releasing of a string, the same plunge from element into element, the same intensification of identity and dispersing of identity.

And just as this particular human gesture — so general as to be practically universal — has something in common with a fish’s leap into the air, so it has something in common with culmination of the erotic act. There is the same complete shaking off of all ordinary pre-occupation, the same complete abandonment to a super-sensation, the same half-creation and half-discovery of a cosmic focus-point.

It does not need any catastrophic calamity, any overwhelming tragedy, to drive us poor mortals to desperation. You have to be an unusually well-constituted person to be able to get through a single day of human life without a threat upon your peace by some kind of devilish misery. It is at these moments that the test comes as to whether our philosophy is worth its salt or not.

Well! There you are, a conscious human soul in a tired and distressed body, menaced by some sort of horrid darkening of the lamp of your vital spirit of resistance; and what are you going to do? You can of course, get through it — we generally do *somehow* — with a lamentable sigh, or a doleful curse, or with bitter tears; but the point I want to make now is that it is possible by a mental movement that in time becomes automatic, to defeat and drive back this mood of misery, and even attain, under the very horns and stench of this palpable devil, a tolerable modicum of defiant happiness.

My own procedure under these conditions is to try the “Ichthian” plunge first, if I have energy enough; but, if not, to fling myself into the aloofness of the de-carnation trick. Force your soul to leap up from the depths of your being. Force it to make of the material pressure round you a typical specimen of the hardness and prickliness and scaliness and dreariness of the devilish side of life.

Lump the evils together, the physical ones, the mental ones, and the whole damned “outfit.” Then pulling *yourself* together, wrestle with the accumulated mass selecting out of it one or two of its more tolerable aspects upon which you can concentrate without especial loathing; or, if there are no redeeming features in it at all, concentrating on the chemical constituents of your “cul-de-sac,” on the elements of air and water and earth and fire, which must in *some* form be present, if only in the shape of dirty boards, darkened stones, misty windows, and a dripping faucet.

Don’t, whatever you do, begin to pity yourself; still less begin to curse your fate or the day of your birth. Avoid, like the devil, any comparison between your luck and other people’s luck. Say to yourself, “This is life and I am a child of life; and what I’ve got to do is to wrestle with this loathsome-lovely mother of mine as long as I’ve got any breath in my body and any consciousness in my mind!”

But not content with wrestling in this desperate way with life and crying out to it, “Thou *shalt* bless me! Thou *shalt* bless me!” as you force some wretched simulacra of the planetary elements to supply the place of earth and sky and air and sea, it is a good trick to think of the whole innumerable company of the dead that these elements have gendered and have swallowed up; and to think of the round earth, floating in space, as bulging and brimming with death, just as it is heaving and quivering with life.

Thinking so, as your soul struggles with the evil of that moment, there is no force in the world that can prevent your recognition that there is some mystery behind it all; and that this planetary world spawning life and filling up mortuaries and ossuaries of death is only one dimension of the unfathomable secret of what is.

All minor miseries have a viaduct, a drain, a channel, a canal, a culvert, running into the bottomless lake of universal death; and down this channel it is good to travel as often as we may! If we imagined ourselves dead more often, dead with the overpowering weight of all the dead, it would so press against the partition of this next dimension that we should hear the mathematical wall crack.

And if with the violence of the "Ichthian" act you can plunge, when you are miserable, into the great world-substratum of death and press through this into the unknown dimension beyond, you can stand apart from the whole process by the act of "de-carnation" and turn yourself into a pure disembodied consciousness, a consciousness that can hover not only outside the sensitised organism of your own bodily identity, but sufficiently apart from the whole astronomical spectacle as to be able to regard it with a measure of detachment.

It seems a pecularity of human nature that we can bear up better under sudden tragic disasters than under the normal pressure of the dreary, the squalid, the futile, the commonplace; and it is in resistance to these things and against these things that it is necessary to acquire the habit of these two mental devices, the one giving us strength to plunge deeper into the reality of life and death, and the other enabling us to contemplate them both as it were from outside and with a certain curious aloofness.

To make all this clearer and more concrete for the reader of this book let me at this point suggest an only too possible actual situation. Allow me to assume that you are following a forlorn road in some district of some town where the houses are unappealing and where the shops and pavements have given place to that peculiar shoddiness that is only not quite so forbidding as the vulgarest kinds of suburban trimness.

As you advance you grow aware of that particular kind of dreariness hanging like a sour breath over all you see, that would be impossible alike in the heart of a town and in the heart of the country. The vulgar neatness of prosperous new villas might be worse, but in that case your nature would be roused to an angry distaste which at least would give you the satisfaction of something to hate. But here all is merely depressing, merely dreary, merely negligible and neutral.

Human life in this place with all its surroundings has an air of something reduced to so low an emphasis that it is like the languid movement of flies on a discoloured window-pane. What can a soul, sensitive to external impressions, do to cope with the weight of desolation that weighs it down in such a spot? and suppose, in addition to these surroundings you are weary with the labour of some distasteful job, you have been unkindly treated by the companion of your life, your neighbours have been casting malicious aspersions upon you, and you have been only recently jeered at by someone or other. You are, let us presume, a kind of philosopher after your own fashion. At least you are not one to take your present misery for granted, or to give way to futile self-pity and useless repining. You feel in the last resort that everything happens to you only happens because you yourself by reason of the weakness of your mind, *let it happen.* What then are you to do? Well! this particularly wretched moment, perhaps more wretched because you cannot *hate* your life-companion or your neighbours, or the children who jeered at you, or this lack-lustre neutral spot, or even the weary tedium of your job is a moment that lends itself beautifully to this fierce gathering-together of your deepest soul for what I call the “Ichthian” act.

But you are so weary, so sick to death of the daily struggle that though you have managed to grub along somehow, as indeed you *have* to do whether you like it or not if you are to avoid the breadline, it seems more than you can compass to invoke any spirit of enjoyment and as for plunging into some other “dimension,” it is all you can do not to raise up your hands and cry to the burden of the one around you, “Hold, enough!”

Well! never mind about the “Ichthian” act. Perhaps such a thing *is* only for those to whom Nature has given by temperament a certain kind of defiant energy. But, listen! We all have our own poor modicum of what people call intelligence. Let us see what can be done with that. Here you are, “fairly landed” in a network of fatality; and though ill luck has certainly played its part, the unwisdom of your decisions, the weakness of your will, have played their part too.

Well! tired and sick of the whole business as you are, it does remain that you’re not yet prepared to commit suicide. Even in your weariness, potent though the devil is in such conditions, you don’t feel like ending it. Something, some natural human instinct, holds you back from the thought of killing yourself, and, besides, at the very bottom of your organism stirs still that holy spawn of the last ditch that mortals call hope. But what of the great philosophers? Can *they* help at this juncture?

The worst of the great philosophers is that they each offer their particular nostrum as if it were the only way. Life is so manifold that in reality there are many ways of salvation! Secretly, in their own private life, we may suspect that Socrates and Epicurus and Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, and even the formidable Spinoza, had recourse when they were harassed by circumstances to all sorts of mental devices quite other than the particular panacea they publicly recommend. With all moralists and philosophers there enters a special kind of egoism which commits them to a particular line of argument. What inspires their books is really the angel-demon of their temperamental fatality. This is their initial and original vision; and their superiority consists in the depth of this flash of primary insight, an insight generally reached, as William James hints, in one superb movement of imaginative reason. But such is the massive and sturdy egoism of these powerful brains that having once snatched at their one inspired aperçu, they proceed for all the rest of their lives to prop it up and thicken it out by logical reason. And reason, being the thing it is, never as wise as mother-wit, never as inspired as imagination, sees to it that having once committed themselves to their particular cosmic clue, these thinkers keep on to the end, justifying it, defending it; scared above everything of confessing that their original vision of things might possible have grown *into something completely different* had their experience of life found them with a more flexible mind.

What, in personal experience, makes us wise is a certain steadiness of temper combined with a certain daring of thought, a daring that is prepared to practise any number of *volte-faces.*

It is for this reason that wayward spirits like Kwang-Tze, or inspired soothsayers like Heraclitus, or great imaginative intellects like Dostoievsky, convey in their casual utterances so much more of the vital sap of the secret of life than all the rational rounders-off of logical systems. Behind each of the great philosophic systems, as William James so wonderfully hints, lies the personal "will to believe" of the particular thinker, a "will to believe" that very likely had its origin in precisely the sort of desperate struggle against depression upon which you are now engaged.

At this moment, if you are a reader, you will probably catch yourself suppressing some rebellious or wayward or paradoxical thought of your own, and trying pathetically to force the situation into the perspective of some Nietzschean or Goethean vision of things, which does not fit the occasion.

When, therefore, you feel too weary of life to resist your misery I am not going to suggest that my own private panacea is the *only* way out. Like that poor preacher whom Matthew Arnold met in Bethnal Green when all seemed hopeless, there are persons still to-day who can pull themselves up from the pit with a sublime jerk, as if by their own belts, in the thought of "Christ, the living Bread." Well! If *this* magic is possible to you, for heaven's sake use it!

To confess the truth I have myself once and again — and not so long ago either — pulled myself out of the Slough of Despond by the old religious incantations. I only allude to this as an indication that from my own point of view the more conjuring tricks we have in our pilgrim's wallet the better, and that I have no fanatical preference for *my* favourite magic over all the rest.

I am anxious however in this first chapter to reduce my subject to its most stripped and primordial terms; and brought down thus to the bed-rock of human experience, what we are all confronted with is the necessity for *some* magic of the mind if we are to escape the pressure upon us of these dark hours when the burden of our normal existence seems more than we can endure. And where what I call the "Ichthian" act — though there are doubtless many other restorative tricks of the persecuted spirit — has the advantage is in its trick of gathering into one grand cloud of evil *all* our mental and physical discomfort. And this it does by stripping the situation of all particular causes of worry and pain, until what we have left is the individual soul confronted by a world composed *in the lump* of suffering-bringing elements. A few of the worst of these must be simply "forgotten" — and the forgetting power within the soul is the gods' greatest gift to man — but the bulk of them must simply be lumped together.

It is certainly advisable to recall the precept, "In the destructive element immerse!" only we must recall it with deep reservations, for it is not given to any mortal man to face *all* and live.

Let me recapitulate a little so as to make each step of this particular technique as clear as I can. The unlucky person I have had in mind all this while as a typical example of our common lot finds himself, or herself as I have said, confronted by objects of almost unredeemed forlornness, not desolate enough to reach what might be called the sublime of desolation, but so dreary, miserable meaningless and commonplace, as to dry up the soul with a sick revulsion from the whole business of being alive.

The person in question has been hurt by the unkindness or driven to the end of his tether by the unhappiness, of his nearest and dearest. He has been outraged by his neighbours. He has been jeered at by the heartlessness of the young. He has come to loathe his job. He finds himself spiritless and exhausted; all the magnetism in him drained away, all his energy, all his resistance, gone.

As I suggested above, it is likely enough at such a moment that if he thinks of the words of moralists and philosophers at all he will either repeat to himself some ponderous tag against the weight of which all that is original in him rises in rebellion or he gives it up and allows the waves of depression to sweep over him at their will.

But, instead of this, let him "lump" all his evils together and contemplate them in the mass. Here he sees, in his spiritless apathy, a lumped-together world, composed of a mass of hurting reality and a few flickering will-o'-the-wisps of barely conceivable enjoyment.

It is into this mingled world-mass, into this compound of much wretchedness and a few oases of pleasure that the soul plunges, in what I call the "Ichthian" act; plunges into it, and then, with a terrific leap, plunges into the unknown dimension above it and around it.

But as I say if you have lost your zest for living how can you "plunge" anywhere? You lack the spirit. You can only rest where you are in sullen protest. If you were not driven from your bed at this moment, what would suit you best would be to lie there for ever, with your eyes shut, without thought, or power, or memory, or aim, enjoying the pleasure of death without the shock of dying.

But— "whoever you are," as Walt Whitman used to say, though I will not raise my voice to his disquieting pitch — what I am recommending to you now is my second redemptive trick, the one I have named "de-carnation." Project your soul from your troubled brain, *or pretend to yourself that you project it,* and from its new position in the air by your side let it watch you and your misery!

I entirely agree with you that most spiritual efforts by which we either give up our will or exert our will, either pull ourselves together, or relax ourselves completely, are anything but easy to achieve. They require constant practice, over long periods of time, and they require, just as my "Ichthian" act does, a certain elasticity of mind if not a certain resistance of vitality. We have to "have the heart" for such experiments before we can make them; and what you feel at this second of time is no heart for anything. Nevertheless, wearily and inertly, using no effort except the mere movement of thought, you can at least lump your many worries and your many miseries together; and when you have done so pretend to project your soul into the air at your side. From this aloofness to it all, then, and still as wearily as you please — for, there is a faint, weird element of self-pleasing in all inertness — contemplate this pain-causing lumped-together universe.

Here is your soul, like a broken-winged Space-Bird, watching cursorily this bubble of an earth-life; watching it without love, without hate, without curiosity — just watching it in weary detachment. Watch it a little longer now, O persecuted soul, just one second longer, and you will perceive, if I am not mistaken, a mysterious feeling, slowly, very slowly, beginning to take possession of you. It is as though a strange sort of trance were stealing over your senses, a waking-trance that will soon become, if you continue staring at this lumped-together world, a sensation as if you were waiting along with the whole universe for some withheld clue.

Suddenly — without realising that you have already escaped from the worst of your personal misery — you will feel aware that this piled-up cosmic mass in front of you shares your plight. As you go on watching it, it will seem to be, this whole inanimate world, in as sad a case as your own. You have hypnotised yourself in fact by staring at this lumped-together world with its implication of dumb expectancy, till you feel as if in your own trance-like state you were in touch with some strange universal endurance which is mutely appealing to you; appealing to you to share its sadness, and to share, with its sadness, its faint dim hope.

There is a line in Wordsworth— “The pleasure which there is in life itself” — which, if I may confess a personal secret, has been of singular value to me in moments of misery, but which I only use after I have made in it an extremely drastic change.

The line, as I have come to use it, runs as follows now, “The pleasure which there is in life and death”; and these words have been of an almost magical value to me in this altered form. I think it has conveyed to me a most important clue to the mysterious appeal which the inanimate has for you when you are unhappy. Compared with our own life-feeling, even in its saddest and most inert moods, the inanimate world of the non-human has a tragic helplessness which to us appears like a kind of death. And as we brood upon this mute *sub-life*, which to us seems so near to death, there arises in us a strange awe in the presence of its patience, of its dumb endurance.

Now it is from this particular kind of awe, when we are enduring these desolate moments, that I feel we can extract our comfort. In this mood we share the death-element in the world, that element out of which we come and into which, as far as our bodies are concerned, we sink, without having to make any nerve-shaking plunge. In the kind of waking-trance I have attempted to describe we approach by the mere numbness produced by our personal miseries this vast *sub-life* of the world, and feel already, without shock or strain a state of being resembling the semi-death of the inanimate.

The state I am thinking of is, if you will, allied to despair; for like despair it throws into one huge tide of desolation all our lesser worries and discomforts, but it is unlike despair in the fact that while it numbs us and dulls us it does not close for us the gates of hope. We, like the vast "sub-life" of the inanimate are waiting some clue to the mysterious illness of the world. Mute, helpless and silent, we await what has been awaited for so many unthinkable millions of years; and though no clue is given we at least feel we are sharing the "rooted sorrow" in the bones of life itself and are already dwelling in that strange "no-man's land" that lies beneath all human consciousness.

What we touch, as from this vantage-ground of our detached soul we contemplate life and death, is the universal ingredient in all human wretchedness, I mean in such wretchedness as stops short of extreme pain or of direct sympathy with extreme pain; and I feel as if I find what I am looking for in an amalgam of three evil things, all ending in the letter “y,” Misery, Apathy, Worry. It is this devil’s trinity, with this long-tailed she-demon of a “why” at the end of each member, that we have to attack at the root.

Stronger measures than any I have the power to tell of are naturally our resource when in extreme pain; but in this misery, in this worry, in this apathy, I do feel I may be able to suggest something that might work the desired end; and that, too, without resorting to the more energetic technique of what I call the “Ichthian” act.

The particular human attitude I am now suggesting resembles that of a patient beast with its rump against the weather, but with its conscious soul watching both the weather and its misery from a certain distance. I am imagining you, reader, in this woeful state, surrounded by all the sights which evoke the atmospheric condition known as “dreariness” and with all your private griefs thick upon you. Your spirit is so low that you wish you were dead, though you lack the heart to commit suicide.

If you had your desire it would be to lie down upon some solitary bed, away from every living person, and forget who you are or what you are, or that you have ever lived!

Well! In place of seeking such a bed of oblivion just try the experiment of “lumping together” — I have to keep repeating this clumsy expression — all your worry, misery, apathy in one evil mass of detestation and then from a detached soul watch both it and yourself with a curious eye.

You — a living human creature — produced by Nature and the First Cause — find yourself, by the blundering wickedness and careless weakness of humanity, stupefied with misery, dumb with apathy, paralysed with worry. But as you stand still for a moment and out of the air by your side allow your detached soul to stare at this amalgam of Troubles, and to stare at the forlorn objects about you you will find that these things when “lumped-together” are a completely different matter than they were in their separateness. The horrid separate objects dissolve into earth and air and water and fire, while your separate distresses dissolve into one single burden of distress; and as you watch this process you feel that something in your detached consciousness is outside it all and defiant of it all.

“This is you,” as those staring advertisements of bright young men, pointing admonitory fingers, delight to remind us, “This is you.” And indeed you might easily be standing now at this very second of time on some crowded pavement in Soho, on some East-Side Avenue in Manhattan, on some railway platform of the “Loop” in Chicago, in some forlorn suburb of London, or by the blackened edge of the old canal-river at Manchester. Yes, you might easily be going through this misery in any of these places, and as you stare at the oily water, at the soot-darkened boards, at the blackened stones, at the glaring advertisements, at the hard asphalt, at the hell-pavement of adamantine concrete, it may well happen that just because what is observing all this is nothing else than your *mind*, the creator and destroyer of the world, all this will “suffer a sea-change.”

It is not, as we might have hoped, that all this will grow less substantial, or begin to vanish away under the detached scrutiny of your uncommitted consciousness. Rather will all this as your mind detaches itself from it grow more and more real. But it will grow real with the reality of earth, air, water, fire, as these elements emphasise themselves and swallow up the dreariness.

And as in your weakness and your melancholy you still observe these things, these blackened boards, this oily water, these dirty windows, these sad chimneys, this harsh cement, you will feel in them only the ancient hardness of the earth, only the ancient emptiness of the air, only the ancient washing of the tides, only the ancient burning of the sun, and there will come over you the grand and sombre tragedy of all human life confronted by these things and of all these things confronted by human life from the very beginning of the story.

And you will feel your own life with all that long procession of lives before it, and you will feel your own death with all that long procession of deaths before it, and by degress these two awarenesses will blend in an emphasis you have never felt before, while the impress of the inanimate things about you, their forbidding *alienness* confronted by this pitiful oblong bundle of nerves which is yourself, will take on a different character.

Balanced thus in a perpendicular position among these things, your unhappy organism, shaped like a sausage, tied at the neck and at the waist with string, will feel through its fibres as your soul watches it the dim faint stir of an emotion that is not an altogether unhappy one!

The sense of a nobler, a more serious drama going on than you had guessed at is upon you now, and your future moments of misery will come to you with a difference. While you are watching your own lumped-together miseries and the lumped-together inanimates of desolation around you, you touched the bed-rock bottom of the world. On that dark glass — harder than despair itself — you tapped with your forehead and though there was no answer to your tapping, simply to have tapped was something.

“The Pleasure which there is in life and death” flowed through you at that moment, and a curious awareness of something in your mind outside the whole game.

Though you lacked the spirit to make the “Ichthian leap,” you did manage the act of “decarnation”; and as you hovered and wavered in your humming sea of misery — apathy — worry, watching your perpendicular self, like a poor drowned sausage tied at the neck and the waist with string, bobbing up and down, you clutched a shell of pure mother-of-pearl, the pleasure which there is in Life and Death at the very bottom of the world!

CHAPTER TWO. LET CONSCIENCE SPEAK

THERE COME MOMENTS in all our lives when we say to ourselves, "What does it matter whether I feel happy or not?" Now this mood is of all moods the most insidious and dangerous. The next step is to say to ourselves, "I will, I will, I *will* be unhappy!" And it is then that we begin giving ourselves up to that dark under-flow of *the will to destruction*, which, if it does not exist in the nature of the First Cause — as it sometimes seems to do — certainly exists, as an appalling and most real element, in the nature of all men and women.

The moment our relations with other souls enters the arena what we call our "conscience" becomes active enough. It is when we are alone that this particular danger arises, the danger of being obsessed by the Power of Self-Destruction.

So deep is the mandate of conscience, do what we can in every human heart, that in all matters of external behaviour few things play a more fatal part, but a great many people allow themselves to go on being miserable simply because, while they use their conscience in other relations of life, something prevents their using it in this crucial personal sense.

I am introducing this question thus early in my book because I feel that everything else is of secondary importance in the art of happiness compared with this fundamental matter. Our conscience is always forcing us to make the necessary efforts to get through our work, to behave decently to others, to avoid cruelty, greediness, laziness, treachery and lying, but somehow it seems to require some startling shock, such as the menace of insanity, to rouse us to the recognition that at the root of our whole response to life there lies the question, “Why do we let ourselves go on being miserable when it is in the power of our mind to alter our state?” In matters of conscience it is always harder to strike down to the buried secrets of our feeling than to obey the impulse to *do* something; and as to this matter of cultivating, or refusing to cultivate, a living spring of happiness in our deeper nature, it seems as if most of us were quite prepared to let the whole thing go, as long as we get through life and get through our work somehow.

Thus we drift on, living a higgledy-piggledy, hell-for-leather sort of existence, or just one of those dreary lives of monotonous necessity, when the mind gets so dyed-in-the-grain by petty cares, and so stupified by taking such a state for granted, that it lacks even the intermittent glow of relief of not being, at the actual moment, in pain or cold or hunger.

Heraclitus was right. Life is war, down to the very bottom. And that is why it is a treacherous and devilish argument to say to the enemies of military war that the masses need stirring up to heroism. The majority of human beings on this earth — not only women bearing and looking after children, but men at their most ordinary and most monotonous jobs — have all the scope any hero needs, any saint needs, for rising to spiritual heights of sublime intensity.

This thing called “conscience,” that is such a tormentor to us all, may, as I have hinted, be the edge-of-the-wedge of the terrible force of Evolution, pressed with a burning electric spear-head against our vitals, to compel us to bestir ourselves and live vitally and intensely from the focus-point of our nature.

But whatever our conscience may be I think we would all have to confess that it changes its imperatives as it comes under new influences. The conscience grows as other living things grow, and it can be blighted and withered as they can; and what I would like to point out here is that in all the great spiritual teachers from Laotze to Spinoza the chief stress is laid upon what you are feeling in the secret depths of your own soul rather than upon exterior actions.

The greatest among the mediæval saints always laid this same stress on the feelings of the soul as against any outward manifestation and the whole quarrel between Laotze's interpreter, the wayward and wind-loving Kwang-Tze and the ritualistic Confucius, was because the former insisted that nothing mattered in this question of virtue but the flowing water and the wavering air of the soul's own secret life.

There is indeed, all the way down the ages, a secret freemasonry, passed from mouth to mouth among certain great teachers, laying this same stress upon the inner feelings of the soul as against outward actions.

Some philosophers even go so far as to hold the view that if you habitually indulge in deep secret malicious thoughts with regard to a particular person you can seriously injure that person; but if the mood of your deepest soul is on the side of evil when it indulges in hate, it is equally on the side of evil when it indulges in what the mediæval schoolmen called "acedia," that destructive self-malice which pours poison into the wellspring of our own soul.

There are two ways in which the magic of life can be brought low. It can be beaten down from outside by brutal tyranny; and it can be weakened at the root by this soft and melancholy worm of self-malice. There is no doubt that psychic vibrations of some kind emanate from all our moods. Not even the most rigid materialist can gainsay this. And when a person allows himself to be unhappy day after day and year after year, what he is really doing is helping the spirit of evil.

Can it be that there is a vein of this self-destructive *unhappiness* in the nature of the First Cause itself? Is it *this* that is behind that look of unspeakable self-pity that you catch sometimes upon the face of inanimate things? What else is that solemn sadness of old trees, old hill-sides, old twisted rain-beaten thorns, old grassy slopes, old pond-sides, old desolate valleys unvisited by birds or cattle?

There is a strange connection between us and the life of the planet that gave us birth and when we give way hour by hour and day by day to the misery of futility we betray our ancient accomplices in the mysterious drama. We drag down the confederate spirit in stones and trees. We burden the wind, we darken the sun, we trouble the air, we deepen the moan of the sea.

And if there is a link between us and these primordial existences, how much more between us and the mass of our fellows? Them also, those we touch, those we pass by, those even we know nothing of, we help by our hopelessness to drag down! They feel our inertness, our secret misery, our burden of futility, and for them too, because of our existence, the weight of life grows heavier, the dawns rise more darkly, the twilights fall more sadly, the night-winds are more desolate and lost.

There is undoubtedly something, in our abandonment to misery, of an evil and destructive satisfaction. It is a dark, negative satisfaction. It is scarcely pleasure! But undoubtedly there are vibrations of despair, auras of life-hatred, atmospheres of dissolution, motions of destruction, abroad upon our air, the air that has been breathed for so many thousands of years by men like ourselves and when a soul gives itself to misery it is not isolated, it is not alone. Dark destructive forces, spiritual as well as chemical, are there to be tapped and drawn upon.

We all live our life amid powers dimly discerned, amid presences and influences that hang about our path and dog our steps. Once give way to a certain kind of misery and you draw these influences to yourself. You go about like one obsessed, and you *are* obsessed. We are all Dramatis Personæ in a vast deep tragical Play, of which we know neither the beginning nor the end. We all live in an invisible as well as a visible world and between these worlds there are more communications than we guess. The whole cosmos, visible and invisible, is a battleground of warring spirits. Nature herself has something in her of inexplicable evil, something in her that drags downward, that feeds on dissolution, something lemur-like and wraith-like that lives on the dead. And this unfathomable battlefield is full of ancient arenas of disaster. Terrible waste-lands and ghastly no-man's lands are there, with old milestones of defeats, old stakes of death, old rags of lost and discoloured banners drooping over pits of the forgotten slain.

No man knows the issue of it. None have seen the "High Command" on either side. There seems no "High Command" at all. There only seems on one hand a blind dim multitudinous stirring and heaving towards the light, and on the other a wild chaotic panic-rout, drifting towards the darkness.

And this battlefield of the unfathomable cosmos is composed of minds, of thoughts, of the inner life of nerves. What we call the objective Universe, what we call Nature, are things quite as much *created* by the innumerable minds that throng them as they are things discovered by these.

Nature to man is one thing. To a beast, to a fish, to a bird it is another thing. To an elemental of the air it is yet another thing! And who shall say which is the reality? Yes, the cosmic battlefield is a battlefield of mental forces, clashing upon mental levels. No two human beings see the same "real universe." There is no real universe. There are as many "universes" as there are minds. Something, some mysterious "field of intercourse," holds all these separate universes together, and this "field of intercourse," this meeting-ground of mental worlds, is the battlefield of our life. A battleground? It is a phantom-ground of inexplicable mystery, across which old terrible death-cries of defeat, and old terrible exultation-cries of victory go tossing and wailing by on eternally recurrent winds.

The new conquest of the air in our generation, in this beginning of what our astrologers call "the Aquarian Age," is a material symbol of the communication that has always been taking place — though only realised by a few soothsayers and poets — between all the bewildered offspring of our doomed planet. There have always been "wireless" interchanges, as the battle between the forces of destruction and the forces of creation ebbed and flowed, between all the "poor creatures of earth." We need no St. Paul to tell us that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together" until now. There have always been sun-obsessed souls and moon-obsessed souls, always been human entities ridden by the forces of destruction, inspired by the forces of creation. There have always been human entities closer to the earth, closer to the inanimate, both for good and evil, than others. This outward world of the five senses is a thing upon which the inner world of conscious minds is for ever working miracles.

War? Not a second of our days passes when we are not in a state of life-and-death struggle, when we are not being depressed by the down-drag of defeat or inspired by the electricity of victory.

What we call our "conscience" is the sentinel at the gate of the dark tower of the soul's besieged fortress. There is treachery within the gate, there is a traitor within the walls, when we regard our unhappiness as our destiny.

If our "conscience" does not rise up in indignation at our submission to our misery it is a devil-ridden and evil-mastered conscience. Every time you make the required effort and force yourself to be happy rather than unhappy you are helping to create the world. Every time you refuse this effort and hug your misery in that mood of dark complicated self-malice you are helping to destroy the world.

Let no man say it matters nothing whether you are happy or not as long as you labour for the cause of your country or the cause of your humanity. It is a lie! It is the devil speaking, though he speak “with the tongues of angels.”

The cause of your country and the cause of humanity are nothing compared with *the cause of the cosmos.* There are forces at war here far deeper, far more important, than whether communism overcomes capitalism or fascism overcomes democracy.

The old religious people were perfectly right in making the individual soul a microcosm of the whole. Let your soul be such a microcosm, not a micropolis, not a necropolis!

Every time you gather the powers of your soul together and force yourself to be interiorly happy in the face of overpowering evils you are fighting the battle of creation against destruction.

No matter that none sees you, that none knows what is happening. The greatest struggles in the long tragic history of humanity, all down the ages, have been in spite of what “fame” may say, *invisible struggles*, “known only,” as the old religious people used to say, “to yourself and God.”

What is not sufficiently realised is that the whole drama of life goes on in individual minds, and is independent of outward actions and outward events. Our life is lived in a *mental world* whereof the material background is for ever changing according to the mood of the individual mind.

And this does not only apply to imaginative or intellectual people. It applies to everyone! We may present the appearance of “forked radishes,” or of sausages tied at the neck and waist, or of scare-crows on perambulating sticks, or of fancy dolls, or of phantom-masks of tragedy.

From the round knobs on the top of us there look forth upon the world those terrible holes into eternity that we call human eyes and what you see at the bottom of these holes is the world of mind, a world full of pits that go down into hell and of corridors leading to paradise.

It is one of the conceited illusions of intellectual people that they alone live an imaginative life. Everyone lives an imaginative life in the sense that everyone half-creates by his peculiar nerves and temperament the constitution of the material world he confronts.

It is extraordinary, when you really think of it, how few people there are who make any habitual effort to deal deliberately and intensely with their secret reactions to life. We live in a perpetual pathetic hope that things are going to be "better," which means outwardly nicer and outwardly pleasanter for us. We lavish our energy on plans to improve our condition but seldom concentrate it on heightening our mental reaction to the moment as it passes.

And yet everything else is of minor importance to this. Even our conscience — that formidable tyrant of our *actions* — is slack and feeble when it comes to our thoughts. The innumerable hours we spend on self-pity or on building castles in the air wherein to enjoy ourselves is a proof of this.

We ought to get it lodged in our conscience that the noblest, greatest, highest, deepest obligation we have, our one grand piety, our supreme return to the cosmos for giving us consciousness, is to heighten our mental life from moment to moment. And the heightening of our mental life means rousing up of our whole nature to defy and to enjoy, to defy the evil things, to enjoy the good things, to act as a destroyer and a creator in our secret consciousness. When you do this, when your soul gathers itself together to force your surroundings to respond to its resolute will it puts itself in sympathy with the whole creative life-tide and in opposition to the Ancient Antagonist. Is not this a thing worthy of the human conscience?

When you realise that the whole drama is a mental drama, and that the whole poignancy of it and tragic grandeur of it lies in these secret mental struggles with the demons of worry, misery, apathy, you realise that you are an important "Persona" — as important as any other living soul — in the great eternal tragic play. And what is more, you not only tap the invisible life-stream, as against the death-pull downwards, you feel yourself in a strange magnetic contact with the life-aura of uncountable numbers of fellow-creatures, dead and forgotten before you were born to carry on the torch, fellow-creatures who in their day wrestled with apathy, misery and worry, and whose magnetic energy lives still in the elements around you.

Every time when in dreary and depressing conditions you refuse to yield to the death-pull you associate yourself with a multitudinous army of stout hearts, most of whom have borne worse things that you will ever have to bear.

Not a moment of your life, when, from the magic of those mysterious aspects of the universe which appeal to your particular human senses your soul has roused itself to snatch its secret joy, is lost in futility. The great secret tragic play of the mental world of our race lies behind this moment's triumph giving it an eternal significance. Because of this rousing of your inmost identity to defy the death-pull and to enjoy the unfathomable pleasure which your soul half-creates and half-discovers, you have added something to the reality of existence *which will always remain.*

Vibrations will pass from it, are even now passing from it, that will long outlive you.

The mental life of the whole human race resembles the accumulative invisible Novel of a super-Dostoievsky, heavy with an unfathomable burden of good and evil; and every moment of which your soul rises up from the depths of its being and defies these accursed devils of misery, worry and apathy, you add something that helps to determine the grand invisible drift of this cosmic work of art. What we call reality has many layers of various and differing degrees of intensity. The visible world, since it changes according to the eye or according to the mood that regards it, is less "real" than our intense inner life of thought, while our inner life of thought is itself less "real" than the unknown dimension that surrounds and includes it.

What I have called the "Ichthian" act is a desperate mental gesture, like the leap of a fish into the air, carrying us for an infinitesimal second beyond our normal self into that portion of our identity that remains at least sufficiently outside the astronomical universe to make us know for certain that *this is not all there is.*

What I have called "the act of de-carnation" is another desperate gesture of the mind by which we project, or intensely pretend that we project, our conscious soul "to a place in space at our side," from which we can survey in curious detachment our agitated physical organism and all its troubles.

Now, however, I have reached a point when I must strain my reader's patience to the uttermost by begging him to let me make use of a third invented name to emphasise a less desperate and more normal movement of the soul. I have no doubt that the use of these fancy words will be peculiarly irritating to the type of human mind always inimical to my own; but this book is nothing if it isn't an attempt to hand over to others the particular mental tricks that at a pinch have best served my own turn, and I have always found the opinion of the old magicians to be true, that you get an advantage over a thing — whether angelic or demonic — the moment you can name it. Where would psycho-analysis be, for instance, without its curious language?

In Shakespeare's time you often had to invent words for certain poetical feelings. In our time; in this beginning of the "Aquarian age," you have to invent words for psychological feelings.

Well, the word I am going to use for this calmer and less desperate gathering together of the forces of the soul is the word "Panergic," and I use this word not only because of its richly satisfying sound but because just as with "Ichthian" I brought in a Catacomb-Christian allusion, and with "de-carnation" a breath of those old Gnostic Heresies that have always fascinated me, so with "Panergic" I remind myself of that mysteriously alluring and most significant expression of Aristotle's, which, though applied by him to the nature of the Deity, can I think without presumption be applied to all living minds.

It would be a great disappointment to me if this small treatise on what, after all, is the most important personal matter in human life, were only to appeal to that exclusive minority — not by any means always the wisest among us — that we have come to call the "Intelligentsia," and so I hope to be able to make clear what I mean by the "Panergic act" without having recourse to any elaborate metaphysical justification of the term. It is a beautiful word and a pleasant-sounding word; and, if I can make plain what I am driving at in using it, it will have served my turn well enough.

The truth is that the simplest of us know how often we are vexed and ashamed by the pettiness and tiresomeness of our thoughts when we are not engaged in absorbing labour or distracting play. A worker or a peasant who has spent unfairly long hours at his job has the best excuse for allowing his thoughts to fall into a series of irrelevant wanderings, giving him no pleasure, doing him no good, not even — for they keep hovering round a thousand grievances and a thousand vexations, resting or relaxing his tired brain.

But if your working hours are reasonable, whether you work with head or hand, so that you are not dog-tired when they’re over, it does, when you come to think of it, seem preposterous that you go on day by day letting them debouch here and there at random. I beg the readers of this book just to keep an eye on their thoughts to-day, as they go to work and return from work, or as they let their hands drop from their machine, or their tool, or their pen, or their needle, or their typewriter, in intervals of their labour, and I believe they will, like myself as I take my exercise, be shocked by the silliness and vanity of the things round which these random thoughts keep hovering.

Why is it that after all these long centuries of human experience of earth-life while we have learnt to be such adepts at everything else we are still so helpless and babyish in the management of the most important thing of all, the working of our own mind?

I think it is because, while we have put *the imperative of conscience* behind everything else, we have left our thoughts to their own stupid and tiresome devices.

What a thing the mind of a living person is — the miracle of miracles, the god of gods! But into this thrice-precious, this thrice-holy vessel we allow the very litter and debris and offscouring of the world to drift as it will, carried there by every wind that blows.

And my secret impression is that we are all alike in this, the ones with clever brains equally with the most simple-minded. I believe we would be singularly ashamed of most of our “great men” to-day, if we could watch the bits of rubbish, the windblown straws of unmitigated silliness, that pass unrebuked in and out of those famous heads.

And it is not as if we were really “relaxing,” as people call it, or resting our exhausted energies, when we make no attempt to stop these dung-beetle larvæ, these flying ashes from the everlasting dustcart, these prickly burrs, these fumes of the prison-house, these meaningless midges of memory, to find harbourage in a mind that has taken millions of galaxies of burning constellations, millions of miracles of chance and fatality to call into being. Many of the “thoughts” — what a word for these contemptible invaders! — that in our weakness we dally with are anything but soothing or peaceful. Very often we catch ourselves quite unconsciously if I may use so gross a comparison, scratching our minds when they itch under these midgets.

Constantly we find ourselves wincing under the affliction. But most often we just give a sigh of shame when we discover the number of minutes that we have allowed ourselves to pick the wretchedest scraps of memory to pieces, or to build up the most meaningless mud-pies out of the wastelands of random observation. Heaven knows we become the slaves of our consciences in other things. Why can’t we put into these terrible angels’ heads to start one of their remorseless taboos, one of their ferocious campaigns, in regard to our random thoughts? Everybody knows how soon, how fatally soon, *a conscientious habit*, full of ridiculous exactions, gets complete mastery over us. When you consider that the real underlying drama of life, that tragic drama which is heavier with doom and richer with triumphant consummations than all our external historic events, takes place on the invisible mental plane, whereof the stage is the secret consciousness of men and women, does it not seem as though we were indeed under some inherited curse that we keep our conscience for what we *do* rather than for what we *think*?

Our religious ancestors had an advantage over us in that they believed in a Heavenly Eye that followed all their thoughts. But this advantage was spoilt for them by the extreme stupidity and narrow-minded jealousy of the brain behind this Eye. They felt, for instance, overwhelmed with shame if it caught them thinking lecherous thoughts; whereas of all classes of thoughts, if they are not of a sadistic character, that a sensible conscience would encourage rather than condemn, thoughts of an amorous or erotic character would rank second to few.

Our pious ancestors, feeling themselves under the All-seeing Eye, prided themselves on forcing their scattered thoughts to concentrate on God. I can well recall, in my father's Somersetshire village, listening to the eloquent and extempore invocations at many a "Prayer-meeting," as they used to be named, of our aged parish clerk, Mr. Childs. How the old man's uplifted hands used to shake, and what tears of emotion would roll down his bearded cheeks, as he prayed that "each and every one of us should think of high and heavenly things"!

This meant no doubt that this aged servant of God had it on his conscience in his moments of leisure to think of such matters as his redemption by Christ and his assurance of seeing his Redeemer with his own eyes after death.

Somewhat different, but not less remote from the visible world, are those "high and heavenly things" that mystics and idealists of all ages have been compelled by their consciences to ponder on, and to call on their disciples to ponder on. What were the thoughts of Socrates, when he fell into one of his famous trances, now on the battlefield, now in the streets of Athens, now on the threshold of some lively symposium with his intellectual young men? What did his "conscience" call upon him to brood on beyond the beauty of Alcibiades? No doubt upon that super-dimension of loveliness and reality that he felt to be the abiding essence of the transitory glories of this mortal world.

And what for the great Plato were these "high and heavenly things," corresponding to the old Montacute clerk's meditations on his Redemption through Christ? What were, in actual fact, the mental images that this greatest of idealists felt upon his conscience to summon up as he walked home to his treasured collection of the "sayings" of Parmenides from his own lectures in the Academia? Vague poetical essences, may we not suppose they were, wherein, under the form of "ideas," fairer rivers than the waters of the Ilyssus, lovelier divinities than looked down on him from the Parthenon, more gracious youths than ever listened to his teaching in the Academia, revealed to his imaginative reason what, especially for those fortunate souls who had been purified in the "Mysteries," the Beyond-Life held of unspeakable perfection?

"So much poppycock!" the sturdy tribe of Lucretius will exclaim, "all Moonshine, all Midsummer Madness!"

Personally I take a different view. I hold that although our aged clerk's homely thoughts of his redemption by the Blood of the Lamb are not *exactly* corresponded to by any secret cosmic truth, and although Plato's "Back-of-the-World," full of invisible archetypes a thousand times more fair than their broken and mirrored images in our present experience, does not exactly answer to the truth of things, yet there is an element of genuine correspondency in them both, representing something at variance with the science of any Lucretius and yet a real aspect of life.

But what I am now suggesting as the kind of subjects upon which our modern conscience, changed a little from both the metaphysical conscience of Plato and the evangelical conscience of Mr. Childs, would do well to command us to think, for I am as frightened, in the presence of the censorship of modern enlightenment, of referring to St. Paul's words upon this subject as St. Paul himself was of mentioning fornication, are matters much less ideal.

What my idea of the "Panergic act" amounts to in fact, if you can only get your conscience into the habit of commanding it, is an emphatic gathering up before your mind of those little-great compensating pleasures which make your existence bearable.

There are naturally occasions when it seems a kind of mockery to try to think of such things; and if you are, let us suppose, a harassed woman with, many children, an overworked charwoman, say, driven to the end of your tether by worry and anxiety, it is likely enough that all you can possibly do is to get through each day, as it comes, as stoically as you can. The same thing must, I fear, apply often in these times to many a man without work watching helplessly some child or wife of his, in worse health perhaps than himself, struggling against desperate odds to keep some job which undermines both body and spirit.

It is obvious that all a person can do in a book like this is to suggest certain mental tricks and palliatives for those luckier people who are not yet quite at the end of their tether, and who, while grimly holding on with all the strength they have, do still possess some measure of mental detachment wherewith to contemplate their state.

It is clear that if you are an over-burdened charwoman, just able to support the children you already have and now threatened with another, or if you are a man out-of-work whose child, who *has* a job, is suddenly menaced with consumption as the result of this job, you may well enquire bitterly enough, "What is the cosmos to me? What is Conscience to me? What is all this talk about 'Ichthian' acts and 'Panergic' acts to me?"

Well, I must confess that under these extreme conditions just as under the pressure of extreme pain, all human panaceas tend to seem an ironical mockery, an adding of insult to injury.

Probably at such times, unless you are a superhuman philosopher, your mental shifts and devices will have to suspend operations until chance, or death, or the aid of someone, more practical if not more Christian than any philosopher, comes to your rescue. Till then the utmost you can do is to hold on without getting drunk or committing suicide.

But let me assume that your case is not quite so bad as this, not so bad, at any rate, for it to be a ghastly mockery for anyone to mention happiness in your presence.

Let me assume that you are dreading some particular interview with someone on the subject of money, an interview upon which you feel your fate depends, but which is, of all things in the world, the hardest for your peculiar disposition to face.

Or let me assume that you are preparing to undertake some responsible task the accomplishment of which seems to you insecure, uncertain, doubtful; some task in which you will have to keep your wits about you if you are not to be miserably humiliated, some task which, if you fail to carry it off, will bring about the loss of your berth, some task in which you will be forced to “bluff,” but will be in devilish danger of having your bluff exposed!

Of course it would be possible to go on for ever giving examples of the agitating crises that are always occurring, even in the most uneventful lives; but, whatever they may be, it is in view of the nervous misery of such situations as these, easy perhaps for others, but well-nigh intolerable to us, that a few crafty mental tricks might well be called on, to apply a modicum of soothing ointment to our spirit.

And in my opinion the mental gesture of intensely envisaging and holding tight to the particular great little pleasures that have most heightened your life is of the utmost value here, though I feel you have to think of these things in a rather especial way. Let me give you a concrete example of what I mean. You are, let us suppose, even now walking to the place where you have to face your doom, one way or the other, in this miserable responsibility. Dark and wet with rain are the grass-patches you pass and and the smoke-blackened hedges have those sticky, little leaves on them that so thrilled Ivan Karamazov. And your human mind, that it has taken millions of constellations to bring to birth, and which, once born, may never, according to the great Pantagruel, "be cut off by Atropos' scissors," is so miserably occupied by nervous fears that for its dear life it cannot inhale a moiety of healing dew from this rain-dark grass or snatch the least flicker of joy from those sticky leaves magical as the spittle of Jesus.

But come now! Drive your mind deeper and further than this frightful immediate responsibility that so hangs over you. Treat it *as if it were much worse than it is.* Treat it as if it might kill you. Look at these wet grass-blades as if for the last time. Yes, you are going to die, going to lie dead and cold with everything over.

Well! when you *do* die, as a result of facing this business, just remember these sticky leaf-buds! Look at them closely now, so as to have them in your mind when this affair finishes you off.

I tell you the foundation-stone of all human happiness is the thought of death. Gather your thoughts together therefore as you would do if you were going to your execution. In one swift motion of your mind think of all the things that have meant most to you. Face to face with your imaginary death you mentally clutch tight at the person you really love the most, seize for the last time, the poignancy, and pathos of this person's existence, and then you snatch with a terribly swift snatch all this magic of earth and air and sunlight and rain that you are leaving.

And still moving forward to the place of your humiliation and death you now proceed to bid an everlasting farewell to all those little homely pleasures that have made life tolerable to you, all those moments when you have been happy over your book, happy over your food, happy over your fire, happy over your drink, happy as you smoked and read your paper, happy as you dug in your garden, happy as you turned over to sleep in your bed! Swiftly — for thought is swifter than light — you make an inevitable selection from these things, and, as you make this selection, all these things, your one great love and your little pleasures, will take on that tragic heightening that the approach of death alone can give.

And holding your death vividly in your consciousness gather your spirit together to face this appalling crisis.

It is a grotesque weakness at the very moment when you are holding death itself back at arm's length, *as we all are*, to be in such a plight because of a situation that at the worst will not do worse than humble you to the dust. This "Panergic" act of mine is not any desperate leap into some unknown dimension. It is no frantic escape of your consciousness from your body. I will tell you what it is. It is the supreme gesture of your bed-rock sense of proportion as to the relation between worry and death.

The great thing is to bring your conscience to bear on this whole matter. The human conscience is already, at least among a large minority, issuing its imperatives to us to refine upon our sense of beauty, to pursue truth, to cultivate kindliness and goodness, but it has not yet, except in a kind of intermittent accidental way here and there, taken upon itself to command us *to force ourselves to be happier than we are* especially in crucial and difficult circumstances.

What we call pleasure comes and goes but the Panergic act implies a recognition that all the living organisms of our race are struggling against vicious odds. Every moment you force yourself to be happy in spite of all you let loose upon the invisible world of human minds a current of magnetic force upon which — whether you know it or not or whether *they* know it or not — others instinctively draw.

The truth is, happiness of this kind has not yet been properly defined. It is as spiritual as it is sensuous, as intellectual as it is nervous. It is an acceptance of both life and death as things that culminate in a mental war, a war against misery, apathy, worry and futility. It is a movement of the mind by which you isolate the things that most especially thrill you out of all the rest, and hold them up, as it were before you, and clutch them to your spirit.

The ground of this Panergic embrace of the things that you are born to enjoy, things like food and drink and love and sleep, and the magic of the elements and reading of exciting books and the fitful expressions on the face of Nature, and the motley spectacle of the streets of towns, is your sense of the weight of the multitudes of the dead behind you, calling upon you to fill up the quota of such as overcome futility.

We all have sooner or later to face the ultimate question, “How have any of us a right to be happy at all, still less to make an art of happiness when so many fellow-organisms, both human and animal, are enduring unthinkable anguish?” And this question goes, I fully admit it, to the deep root of our whole problem. There are times when we feel so appalled by the atrocities of life that we feel as if the only possible existence for a sensitive spirit were to be a monk or a nun.

But you must remember you are after all a man, a woman, with a temperament organised by Nature to fight for happiness.

Goethe hints somewhere that Nature herself feels and is conscious through our individual minds; but it is not so much that we, to use a malicious and un-Goethean image, are like the happiness-feelers of the great cosmic cuttlefish, as that we are an organic portion of the old familiar planet that gave us birth.

Between us and the living body of our mother the earth there often seems to stir strange reciprocities and it may easily be that our happiest moments come when between our human magnetism and the earth-magnetism there is established a mysterious harmony.

But though it sometimes seems as if our happiness drew us near to the earth, our pain seems to separate us from her.

If at any moment a sensitive person were made fully conscious of the appalling pain in the world he would go mad and die howling. The creative force, however, has taken effective measures that this should not happen and we are protected from it by our selfishness and stupidity. Indeed the wonder is not so much that we can go on living and being happy with all these atrocious sufferings around us as that there should ever have entered this world at all the sympathetic nerve by which we suffer with those that we see suffering.

On the other hand there comes a point when it is necessary to fall back upon our natural egoism if we are to live at all. What is the use of shirking the plain fact that, save in the cases of a few devoted lovers and mates, and a few devoted parents and children, we are all bound to be, intended to be, allowed to be, privileged to be, *and cannot help beings*, lonely and self-centred egoists?

In all these ultimate partings-of-the-ways there is something a little shocking and ghastly about an attempt to carry things to logical extremes. Life over-brims logic in every direction but we cannot escape facing this matter of the desirability of forcing ourselves to feel sensations of happiness while people we know, and people we see, and people we read about, are suffering abominably.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that although insensitive and stupid people have to be startled out of their selfishness the more sympathetic your nerves are and the more vivid your imagination is, the more necessary is it for you to have it on your conscience to force yourself to be happy against the grain of your nature if you are not to slide into a hopeless despair. For if we are not permitted to be thus happy, either by the tender indulgence of the great poppy-strewing mother of us all or by our own mental effort, it becomes a logical impossibility for any child of Adam to be happy at all, *even for one single second*. For at every moment when someone is being happy — and this alas! is not a fantasy but an unquestionable fact — someone else is enduring an anguish that we shrink from imagining.

Most of us never grow quite callous. We do something. We lift a finger; we give a penny; but Nature herself sees to it that we do not have to struggle very hard to remain sturdily selfish! But here we are, with the evil in the universe pressing down on all of us, on some devilishly, on some heavily, on all a little. No external event is completely under our control. Few are under our control at all. And as we go from our room to our work, or from our bed to our kitchen-grate we find ourself surrounded by all the contrarieties of the cosmos.

On every side are sights that are grotesque, ironical, monstrous, meaningless, harsh, ugly, infinitely sad, infinitely heart-breaking, and yet touched, all of them, now and again by a magical beauty. Most of these things of whatever kind they are, are beyond our power of altering. What is there that we *can* alter or control? Certainly not, it would seem, the character of our mate, of the companion of our bed and board! His or her secret thoughts escape us completely even as our own escape his.

What can we do that is beyond the power of man, or god, or chance or fate, to stop our doing? What can we do that will be our inmost private personal response to the mysterious cosmos that has given us our life?

Well, *we can be unhappy*. We can be unselfishly unhappy, brooding in our imagination and in our nerves on the anguish felt at this moment by someone else, and we can be selfishly unhappy, brooding upon our own miseries, apathies, worries, upon our own grievances and ailments, upon our own wrongs; or *we can force ourselves to be happy*. These alternatives are within our power when nothing else is within our power. And it seems to me that it is sheer madness to let our conscience go on compelling us to do things in our own interest or in that of others, while it remains — this interior imperative — absolutely indifferent to what we are thinking or feeling!

There, opposing us, is the great chaotic world pressing in on all sides with its pains and pleasures; and *here*, within us, is our secret personal mind, able to think what thoughts it pleases. And yet no imperative decree of our conscience commands us to be happy in spite of all, and to cease encouraging ourselves in our unhappiness.

The odd thing is that by some weird psychological law we do derive a perverse satisfaction — not happiness, but a self-pleasing sensation of malicious destruction and self-laceration — from encouraging ourselves in our black mood. It is a queer mystery, this psychology of self-pity that is the cause of so much misery in the world! It almost seems as if some evil demon in us were always hunting about for some new reason why we should feel wretched.

If it cannot find outward circumstances adapted to its purpose it rakes up other annoyances. I think sometimes we actually have a vague childish notion that we are revenging ourselves upon life and upon the universe by insisting on hugging our misery. As though the universe cared! What suffers from it is that vast invisible world of other conscious minds whose struggles with themselves make up the great tragic drama of human life. This invisible world of countless human intelligences, linked together by magnetic vibrations, receives a downward pull from the obstinate unhappiness of any single human soul.

Thus it works out that you *do* revenge yourself upon something! What one feels, however, is that it is hardly the part of a magnanimous mind to revenge itself upon the human race who are not in the least responsible, in order to punish an unsympathetic universe, or god, or fate, or evil chance, that *is* responsible.

Still more childish does it seem to go on hugging your unhappiness in order to punish some particular class in the community, some particular set of people, or even some particular person who has done you harm, when from your own showing, this class, this set of people, this particular person, cares not a jot about it! It is no punishment to *them*. If they felt anything at all about the matter they might even feel a mild satisfaction that you were unhappy. To be unhappy in order to punish! That really does seem an human instinct. But how pathetically absurd! It is like that grave outraged, indignant look we are all in the habit of turning upon the thing when something in our path trips us up. We swing solemnly round to glare at this wrong-doing inanimate, even if it be no more than an uneven stone; and our expression at that moment has a portentous severity that is ridiculous.

It is our punishing expression, and it is to be hoped it does us good, for it is certain that the object of our wrath remains unaffected. What I mean, therefore, by "the Panergic act of the mind" is the gesture, sometimes a really heroic gesture, by which in spite of everything we insist on forcing ourselves to feel happy. What this act of the mind does is to concentrate — always with a back-consciousness that we're lucky not to be dying in extreme pain — upon a compressed essence of all the simple aspects of life that give us our chief pleasure. It is not exactly that we think to ourselves, “Well! I shall at any rate be soon pulling the bedclothes under my chin and turning over to sleep”; or that we think to ourselves, “I shall soon be sitting down to a cup of tea”; or that we think to ourselves, “I shall soon be alone and walking along that path where there’s no traffic”! or that we think to ourselves, “I shall soon be getting back to my book”; or that we think to ourselves “I shall soon be talking to my girl, or to my man, over the fire;” for it is rather a sensation called up by the mind than a definite thought.

But as you enjoy in your imagination a sort of thought-essence of these simple things you associate them in your mind with something sweeter, vaguer, more intangible still, with that diffused sensation of well-being which Wordsworth was thinking when he spoke of “the pleasure which there is in life itself.”

I have myself sometimes experienced a most extraordinary thrill in connection with this “Panergic act” in another and further overtone. I refer to a curious sharing of your life-sensation with the life-sensation of the generations of the dead. These men of old times as they went about their affairs had just the same vague, sweet, intangible indirect sensations as we have. And over all these “little things” upon which we concentrate now, over all these small material sensations that keep alive our cosmic wellbeing hovers the consciousness that we are all “in the same box,” all on the same familiar high-road of mischances, all between the same inn-fire of sweet love and the same gibbet on the blasted heath.

At the bottom of everything, below love and work and beauty and good and evil, lies this tragic alternative, this abysmal parting of the ways. Are we going to force our spirit to create the feeling of happiness within us, or are we going to yield to the demon of destruction? What, as a matter of fact, we come to feel, as we practise this “Panergic” gesture, is that we are doing it not only for ourselves but for *something else*: and this "something else" for which we are doing it is nothing less than the whole upward spring of the creative force in the universe.

It is not as though this happiness were an easy thing or an inevitable thing. It is not only the grand *tour-de-force* of our doomed mortality, it is the act by which, ere it resolves itself into the dust, *through* our mortality, strange intimations of a possible immortality reach us.

And there is a way of thinking of death from which you can get pleasure. For there is a positive something in death, just as there is in life, which has nothing to do with the pain of dying or with the decomposition of the body. No one cries out, "I wish I were in pain!" but there are many people who cry out, "I wish I were dead!" and when they do this is there not an under-consciousness about it, that implies a feeling for death beyond the mere negative of the misery of life?

This mysterious positive pleasure that it is possible to associate with death quite apart from the desirability of escaping the pain of life corresponds in a measure to the delicious moment of going to sleep, which is indeed its earthly simulacrum.

Now all these primordial sensations, produced by sun and fire and food and drink and air, make up, with the sense of sleep, and with our movements between earth and sky, what might be called *the diurnal continuum* of "the pleasure which there is life and death," and we have a right to enjoy them, as Homer so often reminds us, even at the moments of our greatest sorrows.

To turn away from the presence of tragic suffering with a burst of facetiousness — unless it were the facetiousness of a Swift or Dante, or the humour of a Shakespeare or Rabelais — would be a monstrous thing and against the grain of all natural human instinct, but to eat bread, to feel the sun, to bend over the fire, to breathe the air, to walk across the face of the earth, are sensations for which we have the plenary indulgence of Nature herself, even at our most tragic moments, as the world goes round!

For into these ancient compensations of our tragic life death has already entered. It has touched our bread with its own terrible and magical consecration. It has entered into the flame of our hearth-fire. It has mingled with the grass we walk on, with the earth-mould into which our feet sink. It has passed into the flowing of the waters, into the substance of the sands on the shore. The taste of the bread, the breath of the air, the feeling of movement, the sense of sleep, have already become, in their long association with human life an actual part of the high invisible tragic drama in which all mental life is involved.

Daily we eat and drink and breathe our dead; nightly we are gathered to our dead in sleep. In the feelings derived from these things we become one with that great mysterious tide of Being, wherein all grief resolves itself, and which is already, since in these things the material is taken up into the immaterial, something more than mortality. With its transitory and its temporal it touches that portion of our human soul which is already outside "the body of our death."

What therefore I am struggling to describe as the "Panergic" act is that interior resistance of the soul, not only to misery, apathy, worry, but to the more tragic sorrows of life.

It is the basic resistance of all souls to futility and destruction, a resistance whereby we force ourselves to be happy *in spite of all*, recognising that as long as the spirit in us is thus unconquered we are obeying the deepest imperative there is, not only the imperative of our individual conscience, but the imperative of that super-conscience of mankind as a whole that carries with it the invisible pressure of all the living and all the dead!

It seems natural enough for new-born lambs to leap and skip, but when you watch the way a human infant behaves, how long and inconsolable are its sorrows, it begins to dawn upon you that though happiness may be something to which beasts and birds are born, it is something that man — alone in this in all creation — has to win for himself by a constant effort.

Happiness for human beings *is an artificial thing*. Man has been separated from happiness in some mysterious cosmic "fall" and his whole life is a struggle to regain what he has lost.

The "Panergic act of the mind" is, according to my idea, one of the ways by which we can achieve this end. It is an inward motion of our whole being in which we gather our forces together in a magnetic resistance to that profound unhappiness which is natural to our transition-state between beast and god.

What we must aim at is a conscious fusion of all our bodily senses *in thought* rather than any definite thoughts. Mix the spirit with the senses, the god in us with the beast in us and thus grasp the pain-giving cosmos and wrestle with it! When our soul and our senses are thus fused together it is as if from the pit of our stomach, from our navel, from our organ of generation, as well as from some unifying force, deep within us, deeper down in our identity than our reason, there emerged an unconquerable power of resistance to suffering, a power that feeds upon sensation rather than upon thought, but a power that can hardly be called material, since it seems to flow *through* us from some buried nadir of life which is ours and yet more than ours.

My "Ichthian act of the mind" is a desperate leap of the soul into what for us must remain the absolute darkness of the unknown dimension that surrounds our astronomical world.

My "act of de-carnation" is a pretended projection of our centre of consciousness into the air at our side, from which detached vantage-ground it can view the limitations of our own organism, and of the organisms of others.

But the "Panergic act" I am now describing is both a more natural and a more simple tool of our will to happiness than either of these. In making it we draw our consciousness and our energy out of our thought-process and concentrate them on our sensation-process.

Our spirit heaves itself up out of the depths of our being, armoured, as it were, in our most familiar sensations, and thus armoured confronts the pain-giving world. The sensations that seem to serve us best at these times are our simplest reactions to air, water, earth and fire. But every soul, thus heaving up in defiance of its worries, apathies, miseries, will gather about it its own particular essences of familiar feelings.

For myself I find that my feeling for the earth under my feet, especially when it is plough-land or grass, is my chief restoration. Second to that I would put the feeling of firelight; and then the feeling of sunlight. Then I would place the look of flowing water and the feel of the blowing wind. Finally I would name among these primary sensations, wherein my soul armours itself as it heaves itself up, the pleasure I get from reading a line or two of Homer, which to me is a form of work.

This last point I want especially to emphasise, because I am sure that most human souls, when thus turning at bay, tend to revert to their favourite *sensation of work*; for in the sensation of work that we enjoy a certain part of the weight of our human destiny is lifted, as it is by nothing else. This "work" may be a thing very different from looking out words in a lexicon. If you are a man in your garden, it may be digging, if you are a woman it may be sewing; but, whatever it is, it must be the thing that in itself, apart from any ulterior purpose, gives you most of the over-tones and under-tones that belong to the “pleasure which there is in life itself.”

CHAPTER THREE. WOMAN WITH MAN

HAVING DEALT WITH those aspects of the individual's happiness that lie at the root of our separate conscious lives, I now proceed to deal with the matters that pertain to our happiness in relation to others, particularly in relation to our sex-mate.

I will try to cope first with the more difficult of the two chief tasks before me; that is to say with the tricks and devices, the arts and the habits, that I would recommend to a woman, so that she can retain her individual happiness even in the trying process of living with a man.

The state of "being in love" is not only a state quite independent of affection or pity, or tenderness, or of the reverse of these things, such as hate, cruelty, callousness; it is also independent of our own will. For a philosopher to lay down laws to lovers *as* lovers is as futile as for a king to command the tides; but no man or woman is only a lover, certainly not only a lover all the time, and many quite faithful and devoted mates are able to contemplate their man or their woman with a calm and critical detachment totally alien from that excited vision which heightens every aspect of our frail mortality.

The following remarks then are addressed to the type of woman who, though she and her mate still love each other in the sense of affection and respect, is no longer under the spell cast by that radiant condition called "being in love."

When the exalted happiness produced by that early state has faded away under the pressure of use and wont, there are liable to recur for such a woman moments of peculiar sadness and disillusionment, moments that fall upon her when the absorption of her work or the distraction of caring for her children slide for any brief period into abeyance.

Till now Nature has done everything without much aid from her own will or wisdom. Nature made her fall in love. Chance gave her a mate to love. Nature absorbed all the nervous energy she had in the bearing of her first child and in the care lavished upon it.

But all this is over now, and with or without children, with or without a job of her own, mysterious and indeed abysmal difficulties begin to heave up, threatening, and sometimes even shattering, the basis of her life's happiness.

Whence arise these troubles? Some of them of course are economic; some of them are connected with the passion of jealousy, some have to do with that sense of failure and futility that comes to so many people when the springtide of the senses begins to ebb and youth's idealism loses its vital resilience.

But beyond and beneath all these there is something else, something different from money-worries or physical ailments or the shattering of your faith, something that has to do with the stark primordial situation in which she now finds herself, she, a feminine creature, bound inexorably in bed and board to a masculine creature.

And she still wants, more than anything else, to be happy — simply to be happy! Indeed she wants this more intensely than she has ever wanted it since her childish days when she was heart-free and irresponsible.

What is wrong with her? What is wrong with her life? These are the questions that, if she has any intelligence, she keeps asking herself. Of course she is often tempted — and the more she lacks intelligence the more tempted she will be — to put the question in a different form and say to herself, and not always to herself, "What is wrong with *him*?" But the intelligent woman knows better than any philosopher can tell her that at these junctures in human life it is oneself, and not the other, who is primarily amenable to some mental change.

She turns her gaze inward, therefore, not outward, and asks herself, first *what she wants* in order to feel happy with conscious awareness, as she used to feel happy under a blind obedience to Nature's tutelage; and next how to get what she wants. And it is then, I think, that she will find two separate deep desires within her, and find too, it may well be, that it is in some mysterious clash between these two desires that her happiness is perishing. She wants to assert herself, to taste to the full her feminine personality independently of her man; but she also wants to enjoy, possess, absorb into herself, and completely make her own this alien, foreign stranger to whom she is bound by a thousand invisible links of shared associations.

It will not be so necessary to insist to a woman as it would be to a man that in all these ultimate things the human soul has to go behind the normal moral code of the race and to take some of its weapons from what is called "the good" and some of its weapons from what is called "the bad." No human soul in the lonely depths of its life-struggle can afford to be meticulously exacting about the weapons it uses, or to let itself suffer from remorse when it finds itself tampering with the moral code of its race. Such a code for instance will tell it to be absolutely "honest" whereas any experience of life will make it plain that over and over again such absolute honesty is fatal and that to preserve our secret integrity with ourselves it is often necessary to deceive others.

Why is it that, of all people, the ones who blurt out every thought that comes into their heads and every feeling they have are the ones that tend to whittle away and thin out into pallid indistinction the rich compactness of the soul within them? In the process of their impulsive self-assertion, in the indulgence of their dear honesty, they cease to want anything very deeply or intensely. The integrity of their desire dilutes itself in the witless honesty of its expression. What are called, in the particular moral code of our race at any time, “the good” and “the bad” are only rough-and-ready generalisations of old experience, and there are always arriving occasions when it is not only expedient, but advisable and necessary, to be “bad” as well as “good” in our management of life.

A woman, therefore, who feels that her happiness depends on the assertion of certain aspects of her personality which are independent of anything within the scope of her masculine companion has, I feel, a deep right to make use of all her feminine craft and tact to get what her nature craves.

As Dorothy Richardson so penetratingly shows every woman is an artist in the atmosphere she creates in her dwelling even if it be no more than a single room and in the pursuit of this “atmosphere” created by a thousand indescribable touches she will often find herself working with effects to which her mate is totally blind. From this instinctive labour, renewed every day, sometimes with delight and often with weariness, he will be perpetually dragging her to engage in purposes and undertakings and mental interests of his own and it will only be by a thousand repeated escapes into her own world, escapes conducted with infinite tact and cunning that she will be able to build up over his blind head and about his blunt senses the delicate fabric of her creation.

How pitiful are those *ménages* where the instinctive artist in the woman has been slowly murdered by the heavy-handed meddling obstinacy of the man! To be happy in the creation of this atmospheric work of art — often totally invisible to the man who inhabits it — a woman must be penetrating enough to recognise the fact that men and women are totally different in their sense-perceptions, and courageous and unscrupulous enough to go on with what she is doing without her man’s knowledge or understanding.

The same thing applies to her books, her bric-à brac, her sewing, her flowers, her little sensuous relaxations, into all of which she has a right to escape at the price of a thousand devices.

A discerning stranger will quickly detect something almost raw, crude, shocking, even indecent, about a couple’s life where the woman’s atmospheric cocoon-weaving — those subtle golden threads — have been frayed and torn and discoloured by the meddling of masculine obtuseness or the harsh fanaticism of masculine asceticism.

The same thing applies to her clothes. It is pure unwisdom in a woman to spoil the nature-given happiness that comes to her from the inner feeling that she “looks nice,” out of a proud contempt for feminine wiles. The grating bitterness of a shrew, the dingy carelessness of a slut, are the dolorous alternatives she brings down — one or the other and not unfrequently both — upon their devoted heads by her indulgence in this intellectual whim.

The stupidest of mistakes that a woman can indulge in to spoil her happiness is not to recognise once for all that her world is totally different from her man’s, and that it is waste of time to struggle and fight in a vain attempt to drag him over his boundary into hers. Her world and his are separate crystal spheres that only really touch at one point, the point of their enjoyment of each other, an enjoyment which would lose its zest if what touched were two flat boards and not a magnetic point on the curve of a living planetary circle.

The reason why you see so often such a tragic strain in the eyes of the feminine partner in a life-covenant is that this particular woman has let herself be dragged so often over the No Man’s Land between their separate orbits. She has indeed ceased to revolve as an independent world with her own private feminine pleasures, and has become a dusty and bedraggled fly, clinging to the turning wheel of his taste, his peculiarities, his manias, his opinions, his conceit of himself.

But the same applies to her attempt to drag him over the line into her domain. Many men have been completely destroyed by this. Women savour deeply and mysteriously, beyond any conception of men, the general spectacle of the world. They relish with an indescribable glow, in spite of all they suffer from it, this motley procession of sights and sounds and changing human moods, as the “fitful fever” of life foams and ferments about them.

They are so much closer to Nature than men that they have the power of enjoying turbulent things and distressing things even while they are hurt by them. This sub-aqueous pleasure of theirs in the chaotic motion of the life-stream belongs to the inmost nerves of their being; and only the wisest of them, those whose consciousness, like that of Dorothy Richardson, can plumb this under-tide at will, are aware of the nature of their deepest happines. But, aware of it or not, they all enjoy it, they all draw their miraculous endurance from it, they are all mediums of its occulted revelations. Every woman is a sea-shell, within whose hollow curves the great ocean of life murmurs its hidden secrets; and it is this mystic realism of theirs that evokes that indescribable smile that so often crosses their faces when they listen to man — man the abstractor of essences, man the projector of theories, man the creator of ideas, man the discoverer of laws — droning on, like a great metaphysical bumble-bee, on the high shore, “of the many-sounding deep.”

As I have hinted, when an intelligent woman looks inward she finds two conflicting desires, the first driving her on to escape into her own world, that world built up out of the instincts of her body, that coral-reef world of her own hourly, daily, yearly occult creation, beneath and around whose filmy filigree walls the wild tides of life's under-sea are for ever flowing; and the second driving her on to invade the life of her man, to cover her man's body with her body, to wrap herself, "skin for skin" about her man, as a glittering boa-constrictor wraps itself about the beast it swallows, as shining phosphorus covers a drowning plank, or gleaming leprosy the limbs it has doomed to die.

Upon *some* measure of satisfaction for these two desires a woman's life-happiness depends, when the enchanted state of being-in-love fails her and the drugged beatitude of bearing and caring for children has passed away or is diminished by repetition.

Let us continue then in our consideration of the craft she must use to satisfy the first of these desires. Of course in her real life she will often find herself satisfying both of them together. I have watched an elderly woman rise from her comfortable chair by the fire and lay down her knitting in order to make some infinitesimal change in the furniture, the china, the drapery, the crockery, the flowers of her room. I have seen her approach the figure of her man, as he sits absorbed in his book, and bend over him, in order to touch his head with her lips.

Into that light breath, into that flickering moth's caress, there passed, as I curiously watched this scene of "eternal recurrence," a current of electric possessiveness so soft, so steady, so remorseless, so implacable, so *infinite* that my profane spirit shuddered to behold it, as you would shudder to behold an animal disappearing into the distended skin, the skin's mouth oozy with voluptuous foam, of a possession-drugged python! What the man himself felt under this man-swallowing kiss I cannot of course be sure; but my impression was that he experienced at that moment a reaction from this particular form of "love" so intense as to amount to a nervous spasm.

Nothing causes a nastier twinge, or a more tickling itch of irritation, to the free, lonely happiness of the soul than this cannibalistic, pythonish "love" when it is expressed unctuously, shamelessly, indecently, and in cold blood. It makes a person feel as if he were a final tit-bit on a plate flickered over by a well-satisfied tongue. It is a totally different matter when this possessive love is expressed fiercely, passionately, tragically. It may be dangerous at such times and even terrifying, but a sensitive person feels awe, respect, pity in its presence, not irritation, not restless rebellion, not nervous anger.

But putting aside the feelings of the man in this particular scene which I recall watching with such curious and wicked interest, I have seldom beheld a human countenance more radiantly happy than that of this life-satisfied lady, as in her python's kiss she turned herself in a Shirt of Nessus that licked up to the very bone her mate's bent form. She was a happy woman then; and I think it was the contact of her rosy mouth with the ivory smoothness of her man's bald head that gave me such a funny feeling. But the real truth of the situation went much deeper.

It is the fact of a woman's "possessive love," though equally shameless, being so much more diffused than a man's "possessive lust," that enables her to indulge it so much more constantly and publicly than he can indulge his. Women are very lucky in this. Their tactile sense is so much more polymorphic than man's that they have the power of "feeling all over" at the least touch. Psychically they are far less sensitive than men, as can be seen in the way they can get beside themselves with fury, hiss forth the most deadly things, and a few minutes later, be as cheerful and normal as if their outburst of furious temper, which has left their men wounded and upset for half a day, were the merest scud of sea-foam as the life-wave rolls on; but their whole skin, thicker as well as softer than a man's, is so charged with diffused erotic magnetism, that it is wonderful what deep satisfaction their possessive love can get from the least contact of fingers or lips.

What I wanted to cry out to that woman when she kissed *in that way* the white skull-smooth surface of her man's head was, "For God's sake, madam, wait till you are in bed!" But to have expressed even by a glance that gross, ribald, caddish, bawdy, lecherous, brutal, masculine thought would have been unpardonably unkind to this excellent woman, who was after all only letting herself be at that moment supremely happy in the shameless indulgence of her heart's desire. It "amuses me," as the spiteful ladies say when they mean "I get wicked pleasure," when the same women who find the Rabelaisian element in a man's books unpleasantly indecent indulge in public orgies of possessive love. What they really feel — because of the magnetic conductorship of their lively skins — is just as "indecent" as anything that a man does; in other words it is a normal, natural, inevitable feeling, and one that, like the satisfaction of all innocent lust, is a legitimate part of the fulfilment of human happiness; but my lady must forgive me if I retain my view that this particular sensual basis of our happiness gains rather than loses by a certain proud and crafty secrecy.

But what finally impressed me, as I peered so curiously at this harmless scene out of the hollow slits in my Paleolithic skull, was that when my good woman finally returned to her chair and resumed her knitting a look of beatitude even beyond the radiance evoked by that sensual kiss took possession of her and I recognised that her eyes as they casually lifted from her needles rested on that little alteration she had made among the flower-vases on the mantelshelf, which was her last touch to her coral "pleasure-dome” built in the depths of the fabulous Gulf-stream of life; and what entered my prying head was that the happiness she got when her man was relegated to the background of her life — I don’t mean separated from her even for a day but backgrounded into agreeable harmlessness — was a happiness more enjoyable as well as more desirable than the sensation that gave her that look of tipsy delight as she kissed the ivory-white skull.

But she couldn’t have had those lovely feelings and she couldn’t have floated in such exquisite contentment on the mere flowing of the life-stream, without asking for anything, without thinking of past or future, if it had not been for the presence in the background of that egg-smooth ivory-polished cranium. Oh, how often I have watched women by themselves and women with their men and noted the different psychic “tempo” of their moods in those two conditions! My private conclusion has been that the path to happiness for a woman lies in making her man comfortable in his background, and then leaving him alone there, while she enjoys herself in her own way and after her own secretive humming-bird-moth fashion, either in her thoughts and feelings while she works and ponders on alterations in her room, or as she drifts down the street, past the shop-windows or through the booths of the Fair, pondering on alterations in the adornment of her own person.

Escape, escape, escape! That is what every woman should aim at. Escape from her man, from her children, from her friends, and above all from her parents. Not necessarily by running away — though she always has that as a last resource — but escape by a thousand crafty wiles of her mother-wit. The enchanted state of being-in-love is in itself a super-escape, but one in which both she and her lover are lifted up by Nature into a world where, while it lasts, the woman’s desire and the man’s desire find identical fulfilment.

Into this earthly paradise it is hard to enter again, when the pressure of common life and custom and recurrence have once closed those magic gates. Faint glimpses of it a woman gets now and again, more often, I think, than does her mate; but it is only when by reason of their catching together some gleam of the mystic light, cast brokenly for a second on some object, some idea, some fancy, and moving them equally and simultaneously, they are caught out of themselves, that there is a real mutual revisiting of that lost Eden.

When I experienced that curious shock, as of something indecent, by seeing that woman I spoke of just now kissing with the calm kiss of possessive sensuality her partner’s polished skull I certainly did not feel any breath of Eden in what I saw; and why not? Because that caress proceeded from what in a woman corresponds to dispassionate lust in a man. It was a *kiss from the demesne below the waist*, a kiss unshared, a reducing kiss. Many maternal kisses are of this kind, as children know too well, and what they really do, such kisses, is to reduce and bring low the object which is their prey. There is a tinge of something akin to a placid sub-sadism in such kisses. To the deadly eye of a really penetrating clairvoyance there appears a vision of the victim of them growing palpably smaller and smaller beneath them, until he dwindles into helpless and idiotic babyhood.

I am of course thinking now of the effect upon the man’s happiness of this indulgence in possessive lust by his woman; but it still remains that if a woman is to be happy in her life there must be found place and scope for this kind of thing. It goes too deep with her to be left in abeyance. The truth is that between a man and a woman when their state of being-in-love no longer lifts them out of themselves into that magic mutual world created by the super-senses of the ideal man-woman, there must be, if they are both to be happy, a fair and equal exchange of patient passivity. The woman, who no longer responds to the man’s lust as they lie side by side, must be wise and generous to feelings beyond her reach, while the man must, in justice to her, be equally prepared to feel himself dwindling into a preposterous babyhood under her pseudo-maternity. It is only in the state of being-in-love that both the male-lust and the female-lust are caught up, transported, illuminated, spiritualised, identified, unified, but this does not mean, when a couple are kind to each other, that their basic desires must be unsatisfied.

But the first fulfilment of a woman’s secret desire, when use and wont have blunted the passion of love and turned it into affection and tenderness, must always lie in one grand escape, an escape into her own separate individual world, a world into which it is a grievous mistake, and one attended by inevitable unhappiness, to try to drag her mate and her offspring. This is indeed a thing that a true feminine instinct will always warn her from attempting; but it is a thing for which she has a beautiful substitute. Every woman carries about with her her own inviolably precious world, but if certain of the fabrics out of which it is woven are the reduced-to-babyhood or the reduced-to-dollhood state of her children and their father, the delicacy and subtlety of her art will consist in the fact that these living fabrics of her airy creation are totally unconscious of what is done with them and made of them.

The question, “What is she doing all this time while we are at work and at play?” is a question that must often in a dumb, blind fashion cross the minds of her offspring and her mate. And what *is* she doing? Well! she is escaping into her own world of sensation and creation, a world that links her girlhood with her womanhood, a world which all other women, save her own daughters, can make shiver to its foundations, but to which no man from the beginning of history has the faint clue!

The unhappy women in our world are not the poor, the sick, the unadmired, the unappreciated. They are the ones who have not acquired the art to be the creators of a concrete yet infinite atmosphere. Worries and cares are the lot of all, and most women bear their marks on their faces; but who has not been astonished, as if in the presence of a miracle, by the well-spring of happiness that radiates from below these anxiety-scars and these sorrow-scars in the faces of even the most calamitous?

These are they who make use of their nearness to Nature, make use of their immersion in Reality, make use of their gusto for the Drama of Life, to create an atmospheric crystal-globe about them wherein they can live and move independently of chance and fate and destiny.

It were irrelevant in a discussion of human happiness to say more of the too quickly passing state of being-in-love than that by fusing together as it does the diverse sense-reactions and imaginative response to life of the male and female a super-vision of things is attained which in its richness and strangeness surpasses all other felicity.

What men and women have separately to do when first love is gone is to recover in stray flashes and glimpses that heightened vision of the world which can never come again. It came because of the fusion of the man’s response to the life-stream with the woman’s and their subsequent life is an attempt to reach, on their different paths, this lost vision. I say on their *different* paths; for many couples make themselves bitterly unhappy by obstinately struggling to go on seeing the world as a unit when the time of this is past. What happens when they go on struggling for this against the flow of the life-tide is that they are only able to unite on a lower plane, a plane which, instead of lifting their natures up to a more thrilling happiness, is for ever bringing it down to a level of the ordinary and the normal that neither of their souls if left to itself could endure for a moment.

And they bank up each other in this narrow and limited vision until any outside soul approaching them soon recognises the hopelessness of persuading either of them to break new and original ground. By slow degrees their two independent spirits have come to this lamentable pass, that they prefer comfort to adventure, and unillumined security to the dangerous excitement of mental growth.

Even when this does not happen there is a danger of their propping each other up in all manner of unworthy and narrow prejudices; prejudices and mental limitations, that, if they had not been protected and defended, each by the other, could never have resisted the wholesome shocks and violences of circumstance.

The kind of human happiness I am concerned with in this book is, as I have tried to indicate, something more than the mere resisting of disagreeable shocks, it is a growing and a positive thing with a quality of intensity; and it is this quality of intensity so deeply charged with vital force when the two magnetic sex-poles were functioning together as a unit under the spell of the state of being-in-love that must now be won again in the separate secret life of each individual soul. The living together of two souls no longer fused by the fire of their first passion is a serious menace to any exalted happiness; but on the other hand the mere resistance to this danger, if both the man and the woman rise to the occasion, has in it potentialities of a subtle tension, out of which a richer measure of happiness can be attained by both of them, than would be possible had they missed this associated experience.

The "escape" of each of them into a deeper, an intenser level of individual life is now the goal, but who can escape if there is nothing to escape from? And compared with the "jumping-off-ground" of this intimate relation between two souls, thus inextricably bound together, the irresponsible ups and downs of casual light-of-loves offer nothing solid enough to be an effective “point d’appui” for any integrated human happiness.

One of the most interesting and complicated of all possible psychological situations arises in the case of men and women who still go on living together, bound by a thousand emotional and economic ties when the glamour of passionate love has faded. When there is no deep temperamental clash — or even when there *is*, and custom and self-control has bridged it over — such a couple may grow so close together as actually to come to resemble each other in certain physical ways. Sharing day by day endless little pre-occupations, endless little hardships and reliefs, there is evoked on the surface of their two natures an identical crust of resistance to discomfort, an identical “sensitive plate” of enjoyment of comfort, which at once grows more opaque as against the outer world, and sinks down deeper into the yielding substance of their separate beings, as their association continues. To the casual stranger crossing their path, these Darbys and Joans, these Williams and Margarets, and Johns and Jennies, seem like two branches of the same tree, two heads of the same dragon, two flames of the same hearth, two clock-figures of the same automatic time-piece and their associated identity produces in such a stranger a peculiar and special sense of pleasure, a pleasure which draws its poignance from all the obstacles to such an adjustment that he has experienced in his own life and from that curious satisfaction, half-moral and half-æsthetic, that even the most wilful and inartistic person derives when some immemorial human yearning, like the yearning after an ideal unity between men and women, has apparently, in one case at least, been fulfilled.

But genuine and deep though this mysterious human pleasure may be in the contemplation of our well-mated John and Joan, there are, for any searching and exacting mind, many serious after-thoughts with regard to the spiritual quality of this peaceful and comfortable association. It is a marriage of kindred feelings, of kindred enjoyments, it is a marriage that has evoked a common “sensitive plate” of little comforts and securities, but, for all that, a real philosopher of happiness will hesitate to pronounce it a “marriage of true minds.”

The penetrating Dutch novelist, Couperus, has gone so far as to pillory one couple of this type in the complacent and self-indulgent figures of Karel and Kateau, a couple who certainly relish the particular “happiness” they have reached by converting their private selfishness into a double-charged unit of common selfishness, but whose “happiness” is lacking in all elements of imagination, intellect, or spirit.

And there is always a danger that this superficial encrustation of mutual sensual enjoyment, when all shocks or disturbing vibrations from the outer world are muffled and padded away, shall grow into something most deadly and destructive to all the more thrilling and exultant inspirations. Any adequate art of happiness keeps its eye upon quality as well as upon quantity, and balances the positive thrilling moments against the merely negative avoidance of discomfort and annoyance. The danger of this common encrustation of a united response to small sensual comforts is that it can so often only be attained by both the parties giving up what is most characteristic and spirited and illuminating in their different sexes. The subtlest instincts of a woman’s soul are not the same as the subtlest instincts of a man’s soul, and yet here they both are converting the proud and obstinate questionings of two mysterious living souls into perpetual fussing about keeping out draughts, winding their clocks, cosetting their digestions, trimming their lamps, mixing their drinks, dealing their cards, while the wind in the chimney is calling to her, and the rain on the window is calling to him, in wild, intermittent, desperate reminders that the cosmic mystery which men call happiness is not to be gained by a conspiracy of clinging bodies, but by the fraternisation of proud and lonely intelligencies.

The real deep reward of any life *à deux* is not gained by toning down the eternal *woman* in her and the eternal *man* in him to a sub-human skill in avoiding draughts and damp and rats and indigestion and economic worry and by a sub-human fastidiousness in the pleasures of the table, but by both of them carrying the high, proud, subtle, separate peculiarities of their sex to the most exultant limit. Let Jack Sprat and his wife "lick their platter clean," there is a spiritual "fat" and a spiritual "lean" in the stream of life adapted to far greater differences between the two than these felicitous divergencies of palate.

As a matter of fact an intelligent stranger will often detect in these "happy" marriages, where, apparently, two selfishnesses have become one selfishness, that the whole thing is a successful masquerade. It is not, and never was, two selfishnesses! It is one selfishness; but a selfishness so crafty as to have the power, like certain low forms of marine life, of splitting itself into two, and incarnating this second self in the body of the partner of its life.

What makes the test of a really happy partnership between a man and a woman, a partnership with the full creative flow of Nature's "intention" behind it, is the retention by each of them of the full flavour, not only of their separate sex-peculiarities, but of their separate personal peculiarities. The more different they are and the more different they remain the better!

How can such a delicate thing, such an intricately built-up thing and such an *artificial* thing, as the happiness of intelligent persons in this tragic world, afford to neglect the great natural up-welling of magnetic vitality that comes when a woman gives herself up to being a woman and a man gives himself up to being a man? To neglect the power of sex in any question of this sort is like trying to make bricks without straw.

To return, therefore, to those two profound feminine desires which, if even partially satisfied, make a woman happy, as we have already hinted the satisfaction of the first of these has to do with her own secret life as an individual feminine person totally apart from both her mate and her offspring, while the second has to do with her devouring and swallowing up, like an insanely possessive python, both her offspring and her mate.

Now it must be understood once and for all that the roots of every individual's happiness descends below the level of life where what we call good and evil begin to differentiate themselves. So that to say that a woman *ought not* to have these possessive feelings is as absurd as to say that water ought not to flow, or fire burn, or ice freeze.

The whole point is, how is she going to control these feelings of possessiveness, this desire to absorb those she loves into the substance of her flesh, so that it should be the cause of intense happiness to herself, and not unpleasant to her mate and her children? Fortunately, by the compensatory law of balance in these matters, her man too, *as* a man has a profound desire of his own which is quite as "wicked" and rooted quite as deep in that substratum below the dividing line of good and evil, as is her all-swallowing love.

I refer to his impersonal masculine lust. This impersonal lust, for all its familiar association with one feminine body, remains as non-human, as untender, as uncivilised, as satyrish and paleolithic, as it often became — sometimes to her astonishment — in the first days of their love-making.

Not far from where I write these lines in an ancient walled town where Cæsar's legionaries worshipped Venus, there stands, for all to see, the phallic image of what is called the Cerne Giant. Now there is a "Cerne

Giant” in every man, and a “Cerne Giant” quite as wicked in *his* way as the all-swallowing Python in every woman is wicked in *hers*, a “Cerne Giant” who wants to make love to his woman *as if to a strange woman*, as if to *any* woman, as if to *womanhood in the abstract*, as if to the depersonalised essence of femininity, temporally incarnated in the familiar body at his side, and a “Cerne Giant’” too who, if he had not learned in his long life-history a certain moderation, would be as destructive, on his side, to the object of his attraction as the Python in woman might be to the object of hers.

It was the purring hiss of this Lamia-Demon in every woman that I must have been conscious of, when I shrank away in disgust from those clinging lips pressed against that ivory-white skull; but woe to the man who ever dares to show irritation when his woman suddenly kisses him.

“When women kiss,” might be the title of a very profound novel, and no doubt there are a thousand aspects to this psychological problem, but reverting to that particular case and to many other parallel ones, it has gradually become clear to me that what fills a woman with a sudden irresistible desire to kiss her man is neither admiration nor pity. It is an over-powering thrill at seeing his dignity, his self-possession, his powerfulness, his masterfulness, his self-importance, brought down and the man’s unfledged, unfrocked, undefended, un-armoured, naked identity *exposed.*

She kisses him with a sudden spasm of melting tenderness when she sees him grown small, grown helpless, grown naked, ready to be rocked and lulled and comforted and fed, at her breast and on her lap.

So often must she have kissed with just such a sudden spasm of tenderness an angry and screaming infant, that a faint tinge of diffused sadism clings about this kiss of hers, the immemorial Python kiss, with which she gathers her coils like those of the mythological world-snake, about the foolish idol of her deep heart, reduced to something stripped, helpless, exposed, but at the same time to something *by no means contemptible.*

I know I am fumbling towards a very deep mystery in this; but I believe that what attracts a woman so irresistibly at such moments is not at all an unworthy or ignoble aspect of her man. It may be the diffused sadism of the doll-loving maternalism in her nerves that is her dominant urge but the uncompromising realism of her sex has much to do with it too. I think it is always at the moments when her man is most unconscious of himself, most disarmed of what you might call his masculine philosophical detachment that she feels this wave of irresistible emotion, this stir of a feeling in her which corresponds, on the feminine plane, to what in men is called lust.

It is when he is absorbed rather in what he is doing than in what he is feeling or thinking, so that his essential identity, stripped of all mental overtones, stripped of all pride, vanity and conceit, is *caught off-guard*, without mask or sword or wig, and found to resemble a touchingly pre-occupied animal lost in its immediate business, that his woman thus leaps upon him with her irresistible python-kiss. While she is in the state of being-in-love she gets her thrill of happiness from idealising her man, but when her "being-in-love" has changed to "loving" this idealising ceases and its place is taken by what would seem to the man, if he only knew about it, a pitiless and terrible realism. But this is the nature of "love" in a woman; that love which not only outlasts "being-in-love" but outlasts the most savage and deadly quarrels. For it seems that when women love at all they love a man's inalienable self, that self which his dignity, his pride, his masterfulness, his grandiose gestures, as well as his lust and his weakness, conceal, and conceal too not only from the world but from himself. This is the self in him that his woman loves when she has ceased to be in love and sometimes *before she has ceased to be in love*, and although it is a self that lacks all intellectual grandeur and all picturesque charm, though it is, in a sense, a stripped, reduced and exposed self, it is not a contemptible self, for after all it is the self of a man, a unique living man, "among such as eat bread upon the earth."

Little girls do exactly this very thing with the doll they love best, a doll that indeed often looks, when a stranger sets eyes on it, as if it had very little beauty left. There is as a matter of fact a kind of outrage, a kind of impiety and sacrilege, when a man-thinker attempts as I am attempting now, to indicate the tricks and devices by which a woman can be happy. A woman's happiness is rarely a mental thing, rarely a self-conscious thing. It is so close to the ebb and flow of Nature's most intimate tides that is a thing much more difficult to make subject to the rational will or even to the imaginative reason than the happiness of a man.

It is indeed, at its deepest and most natural, just that very "pleasure which there is in life itself" of which Wordsworth speaks, who for all his formalities and pedantries got closer to the essential life of young girls and to the essential life of girl-mothers, than any other writer. The one generalisation about feminine happiness that I do feel safe in registering, is that, whatever it is, it is neither made nor marred by the changes that take place in morals, in attire, or even in the fashions of the toilet. A woman sticking faithfully to one love, a woman rushing about between a dozen loves, a woman with short skirts, a woman with long skirts, a woman with her eyelashes and eyelids and lips and cheeks and tresses left as Nature made them, a woman with these mortal appendages transformed out of all recognition, has the same deep sensational under-life of happiness or unhappiness. Some old-fashioned women are happy, others deeply unhappy.

Some modern girls are nervous wrecks; others are sane, practical and sturdy, and full of lively joy.

Many good women are perfectly miserable, many “bad” women are radiantly content. So that all a philosophical adviser of these strange Beings can do, Beings between whose mysterious knees the human generations are born and die, is to offer to their consideration certain mental tricks and turns and attitudes such as might conduce to their secret happiness whether they decide to run away from their husbands, or to stay with their husbands, whether they decide to take a couple of new lovers or to renounce all lovers, whether they decide to cut off their hair and paint their lips and pluck out their eyebrows or to preserve their “innocence” à la Greuze, or their dignity à la Raphael.

Some masculine philosophers express the view that there is something delicate and tender and virginal, a sort of imponderable vegetative bloom and magical quietness about the natural state of women which is preserved better by the old-fashioned fidelity to one hulking fool rather than by the newfangled picking and choosing between a score of hulking fools, but the luck or ill-luck in this alternative depends so much upon individual peculiarities that it seems very rash to dogmatise about it.

It is true that the new liberty has made many young women profoundly unhappy. You see on many faces a hunted, harassed reckless, lacerated, forced gaiety, as lamentable as the endearments of a worn-out whore; but it is better to be reckless and alive than resigned and dead, and this modern lacerated look, wherein the virginal bloom of a woman’s instinctive charm has been harrowed by a thousand plough-shares, is nothing to the despairing “tied-to-the-stake” expression of so many old-fashioned wives.

But as I am trying so hard to make clear, first from one point of view and then from another, the best way for a woman to be happy is to let her whole nature flow like water — in spite of all obstacles and in defiance of all moral codes — along the two main channels of her instinctive heart's desire. This desire — and I am sure most women will agree with me in this — is to have what is called "a life of her own," a life in which she can escape into herself and into her most secret personal sensations and also seize upon, and possess, and flow round and about, and enjoy, as a little girl enjoys a funny-looking battered doll, some skipping male whose personality she has idealised at first sight, and is therefore condemned to contemplate for ever and to subject for ever to all her furies and execrations, in his stripped essence of unadorned reality.

Yes, for a man to be made happy, the desirable situation is comparatively simple. He wants his pride satisfied, his lust satisfied, his conscience satisfied, his love of work and his love of play satisfied.

But making a woman happy is a much more complicated business. Conscience has nothing to do with it, pride very little, lust hardly anything, and neither work in the ordinary sense nor play in the ordinary sense, emerge as of primary importance. She must have scope *to live to herself* which means the building up out of herself and the house she lives in of a subtle and highly "stylised" work of art, a work of art which surrounds her like a mother-of-pearl shell, and is the projection in material form of her essential soul; and she must also be so treated by her man that she has peace and quiet enough in his company to reduce her ideal of him to a reality, and yet to a reality which, for all its unconscious helplessness, is full of the touching pathos of simple human integrity. She will be wise it seems to me to go to work in both these pursuits with a complete indifference to considerations of good and evil.

I would like this little work to be a Devil's Handbook for young women, or if you prefer, a Machiavelli's Breviary on the topic of "How to be happy without having to be good," for it seems harder for most of the people I encounter to escape the unfair demands made upon them by their consciences than to resist monstrous and inhuman temptations. Most of the people whose paths I cross are perpetually being ordered by their conscience to put up at all costs with what makes them unhappy. What I am aiming at as the Devil's advocate in this book is to persuade their consciences that they owe it to the mystery of the universe and to the mystery of life to be happy at all costs, *if possible without running away*, but at any rate to be happy.

Nor need any woman exact of her man that he should notice the nice touches she puts to her house and to her person. Short of robbing him of food and fire and tobacco, short of getting him into debt, it is "very meet and right" as the prayer-book says, that she should spend his money on this wonderful private work of art; but she must do it *for herself alone.* A man pays for it. That is enough. In paying for it he pays for the privilege of not having to notice it.

Of course when the pair are still in the exalted state of being-in-love everything that the woman has touched becomes an enchanted mystery to the man; but even in these days she, much more than he, continued living her own life and seeing things in her own realistic way totally independent of her lover's fervent imagination.

But now that their mystical attempt to respond to the universe as one unit is at an end, now that they are — what it is not less interesting to be — a man enjoying himself in *his* way and a woman enjoying herself in *her* way, if she wants to be happy she must be quite unscrupulous about escaping into herself. The more she escapes into herself the better for both of them and it is much easier to do it with only her mate and her children at her side than to do it with her mother at her side! A mother has far more power over a daughter than over a son, and almost always an evil power, a power that most subtly reduces a daughter's happiness. The mother does not *wish* to do this, but it is clear enough that if you have two creators of the same work of art under the same roof one of the two will have no occupation; and this one naturally will be the younger.

A girl is happier living with almost any man who does not get drunk and beat her than with the best of mothers. There is a deep and sinister mystery about the relation between a mother and a daughter. One feels as if there were something evil, some subtle outrage to Nature, about their living together at all. A girl would be always wise to choose to live next door to her man's mother rather than under the same roof with her own, for it is better to quarrel openly and flagrantly than to be covertly and unconsciously vampirised at the very root of your identity. The mother gave. The mother taketh away. But both in this giving and this taking what is good for a son, adding to his egoism and detracting from his egoism, is deadly and fatal to a girl. The only good mothers for girls are the mothers who have the power of *letting go their hold.*

The way for a woman to be happy is to enjoy her identity as a woman to the extremest limit. Let her derive all the most subtle sensations she can from her room, from her house, from her own body and from what she wears. Let her read, not what she feels she *ought* to read but what she enjoys reading. Let her live boldly for all those little things that really thrill her; for her fabrics, her garden, her window-plants, her curtains, her china, her favourite actors, comedians, musicians, preachers.

Let her make a great deal of the view from her windows, especially from her kitchen window. If she cannot enjoy these little pleasures openly and easily let her enjoy them surreptitiously, evasively, indirectly. Her life is *her* life, not her man's, just as his life is *his* and not hers. It is one of the ultimate secrets of happiness for a man and woman, who want to go on living together when the early romance of their passion has been modified by habit, that they should drastically give up the attempt to share all their pleasures. They will only lose one thing to gain another thing; and this new thing that they will gain will be ten thousand times more evocative of happiness than the attempt to feel in cold-blood, when they have fallen back into their separate identities, the old united sensations, which, as far as the woman was concerned, were never quite as fused as the good simple male lover imagined them to be.

She is a woman. He is a man. They are not, they never can really be, “one flesh,” still less one soul. Nothing is so deadly to a woman’s real natural, secret happiness — except life with her mother — than a devoted attempt to become the perfect help-mate. Why should she become the help-mate rather than he? His work, his life, his sensations are those of a man; hers those of a woman. At many points they naturally meet, and their achievements then have all the greater power because they bring to bear on those critical issues the combined magnetic force of two separate parallel streams.

What interferes with a woman’s happiness more than anything else is the constant pressure of two sets of worries, her own and her man’s. He, if he be wise, is always escaping into his own world. Let her do the same. Let her humour him, flatter him, encourage him, console him; but there is one thing she must never sacrifice to him, her private secret enjoyment of her own feminine sensations.

As a matter of fact she lives much nearer to Nature than he does. The thousand and one moods of weather, the effects of daylight, of firelight, of lamp-light, of cold and heat, of the expressive shapes, groupings, atmospheres, colours and forms of the inanimate world of *things*, evoke hourly responses in her to which he is totally oblivious.

Let her never be betrayed into growing callous and indifferent to all these delicate appeals of atmosphere, to all these fitful beckonings of forms and colours, to all these wavering impressions of air and light that make up a woman's deepest awareness. Whatever her worries and his worries may be, let her make it a point of æsthetic conscience to drive them all away at certain moments and to force her troubled mind into harmony with her relaxed senses. She will then, as she gives way to some "blessed mood" over her sewing, over her book, over whatever it may be in her mechanical housework that allows her a kind of half-leisure, find herself thrilled by the obscure stirring within her of all those vague marginal feelings that compose the sub-tide of her feminine life.

But if she claims the right to escape, however furtively, into these passing essences of her especial inanimate world, she must on her side be indulgent to *his* escape from their common worries into *his* private little pleasures. And she must remember that chief among these pleasures is his attraction to her own body. Towards these feelings of his, however reluctant she may be, a wise and generous woman — so long as the birth-control problem has been settled — would not wish to be anything but docile and kind, remembering that what is called "lust" in a man has its parallel in those more diffused but probably no less sensual feelings which come over her sometimes with such a rush when she catches his essential identity so stripped so disarmed, so "boyish," in his moments of preoccupied absorption.

But it cannot be insisted upon too often that for a woman to be happy when the glamour of being-in-love has ebbed it is above all things necessary for her to be spiritually independent and emotionally self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency, however, does not at all mean that she ceases to think about her body or about the pleasure-giving power of her body. The pleasurable feeling that she "looks nice" is a pleasure primarily for herself alone. The feeling that her body is a desirable body, a body provocative, wherever she carries it, to the sensuality of men, is a *secondary* consideration. A woman subtle in the art of happiness makes the utmost of all the "narcissism" all the self-love, she can possibly summon up. This is the deepest secret of all. To be profoundly happy according to Nature's intention, a woman has to feel — how shall I put it? — as if the furniture of her room were in love with her, as if all the walls and floors were enamoured of her, as if the very candle on her table "bowed towards her," as the poet says, to "under-peep her eyelids"; she has to feel as if the sunlight on her window-sill were her lover, as if the rain on the roof were her suitor, as if the wind in the chimney were sighing to caress her; she has to feel as if the impalpable pulse of the solid earth outside, the imponderable pressure of the divine ether above it, were both drawn in a delicious confederacy of planetary attraction towards their daughter and their darling.

What she must get into her head is — and let her pretend it if she doesn't believe it! — that every woman in the world has something *physically desirable* about her. As a matter of fact there would be no "pretence" about it, if it were not for that self-lacerating demon, in the heart of an unhappy woman, who refuses to leave her the least semblance of desirability.

But ask Papa Karamazov about this, he who found that poor deformed village-idiot, the mother of Smerdyakov, so sweet a morsel for his wicked joy. Papa Karamazov found in fact *something desirable* about every woman in the world. It was his grand discovery, and for all his rascality it made him a happy man.

It is sheer madness and morbidity in any woman, however plain, not to give herself the thrill of feeling that she is desirable — and desirable for her body too; for the women who try to base their secret happiness on their mental gifts neither understand Nature nor themselves. Let a woman cultivate her mental gifts by all means, but when it comes to this delicious, imponderable, inexpressible happiness, which — in spite of all her worries, and all her man's worries, and all the burden of their offspring — is for her "the pleasure which there is in life itself" it is her body that must give it to her, not her mind.

There is a "Papa Karamazov" in the earth, in the sun, in the air, in the walls of her house, in her garden; there is a "Papa Karamazov" in the Creator who made her, in the Evolutionary Mystery that desires to use her for its purpose, as well as, actually or potentially, in the personality of every man she meets.

A woman who has any skill at all in the art of happiness will keep enough independence of mind, and enough consciousness of the desirability of her body, *to remain her man's mistress* in spite of the fact that she is bearing his children.

But this deep consciousness of the desirability of her body — however poorly clothed and overworked and under-nourished — must not be confined to being her man's mistress. She must feel desirable with every man she meets — and not only with every man! I touch here upon a secret of life that the psycho-analysts have completely neglected. I mean the particular kind of attraction that women, who are not Lesbians at all, feel for each other. To be happy with that deep, fluid, pervasive, I might almost say *chemical* happiness, that is only waiting to brim over from the sacred fount and invade every nerve and fibre, a woman ought to feel her desirability first with regard to the elements, that is to say with regard to the cosmos, then with regard to herself, then with regard to other women, then with regard to her particular man.

However harassed and poor and haggard and ill-dressed any woman may be no day should pass without her letting herself love herself and feel soft and delicious and lovely *for* herself. She may be mending stockings, washing at the sink, digging in the garden, baking bread in the oven, suckling her child, lighting the fire, laying the table, but if she has not allowed all the magic of life to drain away from her by misuse and abuse, she ought to be able to yield herself up to that mysterious embrace of the universe, in which she feels that she loves everything in the world and is loved by everything in the world. Those extraordinary feelings of rapturous happiness that come sometimes to women, when, thinking of "something else," they suddenly see their whole life in a new perspective and feel as if it were overpoweringly lovely, have to do, not with her mind at all, but with an elemental reciprocity that exists between life itself and the feminine senses.

And let her extend this voluptuous secret life of the senses, wherein she loves herself and feels herself loved by inanimate things, into all her human encounters, whether with men or women. Every woman ought to be a bride of the universe in that same mystic sense with which nuns — who with all they renounce never renounce their essential femininity — are brides of the Mystery behind the universe; and this mystical radiance, this emanation of magical happiness that she draws from life — and in a sense from death too, for every woman is a Persephone caught up between life and death — she ought to have the power of transmitting in the subtle chthonian smile with which she greets everyone who approaches her.

A woman who understands the art of arts, the art of being a woman, will never have need to cuckold her mate with any particular man. There is not a human being who looks her in the face to whom she does not give a life-restoring drop from the sacred fount, to whom, in a psychic sense, she does not offer herself. She offers herself in her smile. She offers herself in her expression. She offers herself with every movement and with every rest from movement.

And what above all this woman offers, this woman who has learnt the oldest of all arts, the art subtler than literature, more magical than poetry, the art the lack of which in the Creator of our cosmos "brought death into the world and all our woe, with loss of Eden," is the gift of being happy after past tragedy, with the possibility of future tragedy, and while tragedy is going on around.

This is that Nepenthe that Helen of Troy brought back from Egypt. This is also that morsel of Pomegranate tasted by Persephone in the Kingdom of Dis.

For the ultimate meaning of that feminine smile that bewildered Homer, maddened Dante, and tantalised Leonardo, that smile of a woman who apparently understands what men do not understand, has to do with death as well as life, and whatever else it is, it not only takes something from life and appropriates it to death, but takes something from death and appropriates it to life. It is hard to tell what women are thinking of when they smile this particular smile, this smile of Persephone, but they certainly are not thinking of unhappiness, though *something* tragic, that does not at the same time imply misery or despair, is not far off.

Whatever this mystic-tragic but not unhappy smile may be that seems to express the secretest depth of women's happiness in life and possibly her sense of "the pleasure which there is in life and death," it is clear that men have no form of expression corresponding to it; and its isolated existence seems to be a yet further proof that the way to be happy for a woman living with a man is to live to herself, to the universe, to God, and only now and again cling to her mate with her pythonish kiss. This proud spiritual isolation — which I am certain is the only way for a couple to live happily together when they are no longer in love — does not mean that they don't contemplate each other's lives with humorous, tender, and infinitely indulgent relish.

I am revealing one of the basic paradoxes and contradictions at the root of life; but the truth is that the more deeply a woman lives to herself and retreats into her own world of sensations the more generous and indulgent she can be to her man and the happier she can make him. It is the petulant, jealous and corroding strain of trying to trail after him and cling to him when he debouches into *his* secret world that gives her the unhappy look you see on so many women's faces. Let her find her pride satisfied in each separate moment that she can snatch from the passing of time, as she sits sewing at her window, or by her fire, with her book on her lap, with the vague sensuousness of the mysterious wellbeing of a woman at rest buoying her up, like a calmly-rocking wave in an infinite sea.

The great thing to avoid is the blurting out of her terrible woman's insight into her man's weaknesses. Deceive him, deceive him, deceive him in all the great spiritual essentials, but be honest about the little things; above all about money. In the greater things duplicity is the word. By this I mean never let him guess how far you see round him, how deep you see through him, and how disillusioned you are with regard to his pathetic masculine conceit. Such "duplicity" in reality — such is the irony of life — comes much nearer the truth than any angry outbursts you might make in merciless condemnation of his weaknesses. You are nearer to Nature than he is. Nature is feminine, just as you are and is for ever whispering her secrets into your ear. You must remember that it was men and not women who invented language, who invented the words you have to use, words that as soon as you utter them distort your feminine meaning. Your flattery of him, your humouring of him, your constant spiritual deception of him is the price he has to pay for wanting to live with a being of a different race, and then insisting that this being should talk to him in *his* tongue rather than her own. There is no need for you, either, to unburden yourself to another woman, still less to betray him to another man. Sink deep down into your own soul, and analyse not your love. Live in your own sensations. All women belong to a race far older than the race of man, and a race who have known for thousands of years what he is only beginning now to articulate with his blundering reason.

To argue with him is pure insanity. Humour him, agree with him, and think your own thoughts! It is only a desperately foolish woman, and one devoid of all pride, who goes chattering to other women about her man. Satisfy your superiority, not in trying to prove to him that you are cleverer than he is, but in seeing how far you can go in concealing from him your deeper insight. Nature has made you "loving" enough. Nature will deal with the continuance of your "love." Learn from Nature another lesson, a more difficult lesson. Learn to live a double life: *the life with him*, which, if you have any penetration, must be a life of a thousand spiritual deceptions, *and the life with yourself,* to which, in the nature of things, he has no clue.

Let him go on thinking in his folly that you love him for his intellect, for his character, for his strength, for his humour, for his imagination, for his good looks. What you really love him for it is wisest never to reveal to him. Nature and yourself know what it is, that stripped, pre-occupied, heartbreakingly simple man-doll, whom you catch off-guard sometimes and nearly give yourself away to him by the poignance of what you feel. But you must not give yourself away; for what he wants, unless he happens to have more of the woman in his own soul than is usual with his tribe, is not just to be loved, least of all just to be loved for his pathetic, reduced, poignant, tragic-comic identity, but to be loved with wonder and awe and reverence and admiration, feelings that come easily to you in the initial state of being-in-love, but which you are now surprised to find have extremely little to do with what makes you go on loving him.

Nor is it altogether a maternal feeling that you have come to feel for him. In those perilously sweet pythonish kisses of yours there is a vein no doubt of diffused maternal sadism. But what you feel for him day in, day out, the feeling for him that runs parallel to your own private world, parallel to that "pleasure which there is in life and death," is something more than any maternal love. It is something for which there is no name save that tragically simple name "the love of women" which the Psalmist declares was "surpassed" — but peradventure he knew not what he said! — by the love of his friend.

Down at the bottom of all the "happiness" of both of them, when these two completely different creatures live together there lies this ultimate mystery, this mystery that is guarded by the woman's sacred duplicity, the fact that she loves him with a love for which there is no name, though all passion is dead, loves him, in spite of himself, for himself, but for a self of which he does not, in his masculine pride, even suspect the existence.

CHAPTER FOUR. MAN WITH WOMAN

IT APPEARS THAT it is easier for a man to live with a woman of whom he is fond, after the glamour of first love has faded, than it is for a woman to live with a man; and this seems to be because men are more detached from Nature than women, less involved in the little things of daily life, and much more pre-occupied with matters that have nothing to do with emotional association. It must be remembered that this work is more concerned with the problem of how to be happy than with the problem as to whether we have a right, in a world like this, to be happy at all.

I have tried to touch upon this other problem — our right to be happy in an unhappy world — in my chapter about conscience, where I sought to prove that not only have we a right to be so, but a mystical obligation to be so; but just as in Machiavelli's "Prince" the moral aspects of tyranny are deliberately subordinated to the practical problem of how to be a successful tyrant, so in this book, if it is once granted that we have a right, and even an obligation, to be happy in spite of the miseries of other entities, the discussion, based on this assumed right, cannot be repeatedly tinkering at its moral foundation. It must go ahead shamelessly with the edifice it is erecting, treating personal happiness as the supremely desirable thing, and concerned solely with the technique of attaining it and with its quality when attained.

This matter of the right of an individual soul at least to *struggle* to be happy, when cases of unhappiness are constantly in its presence, is particularly applicable to the problem now before us by reason of the mysterious ways — at least from the viewpoint of the masculine consciousness — in which women, for causes obscure to the intelligence of man, seem often to cherish and foster their unhappiness as if it were a suckling babe.

But even in cases where a man’s affection for his partner is deep and tender the soul within him is just as solitary a Being as the soul within her and has, apart from anything her soul may be feeling, its own private and secret relation with the universe and with the mystery behind the universe. The solemn words of Jesus to his parents remain as an eternal protest on behalf of the ultimate independence of the individual soul and they are words that bear a peculiar significance when you consider what an intense temptation it is to a woman to invade, like the in-rushing of an ocean-wave, every cranny of her man’s nature, until the very centre of his inmost being seems in danger of being surrounded by the swallowing tide.

I wonder how far women realise the part played in a man’s consciousness by the Fear of Life. There are of course justifications for the traditional view that women are more nervous and more fearful than men; and experience bears witness to the little obvious particular fears in a feminine existence, but what might be called the *fear-skin* of humanity is really much thinner with men than with these soft bodies and troubled nerves at their side! The dullest man for instance has in him a thousand imaginative fears quite unknown to women. I would go so far as to say that with their realism and their never-ceasing sense of the underlying tragedy of things women are a great deal braver than men.

Men down at the bottom of their hearts *are afraid of life itself.* I suspect that they often have an obscure feeling quite unknown to women, of belonging to a world of ideas and theories and purposes altogether outside the dark chaotic swirl of Nature’s life-stream. With their human “fear-skin” so much thinner than women’s men are forced to surround themselves with all manner of mental swaddling-bands. Like Cæsar Augustus, who we learn from Suetonius had to swathe his body, beneath his grand armour, with rolls of flannel, every man instinctively uses his theories, his purposes, his hobbies, his ideals, down to his inmost life-illusion, as wrappings against this reality-terror which never quite leaves him.

It is this that gives a woman such power over her man; for she quickly becomes aware not only of the cracks in his world-armour, but of the ragged places in his interior swaddling-bands; and when she wants to hurt him, as she does in her moments of nervous anger, she can turn on these weak spots not only her own devastating insight but a thin black jet out of the recesses of the cosmos. Moving like a phosphorescent fish in the subaqueous tides of Nature she possesses a fatal power of squirting between the seams of his diver's dress this terrible fear-fluid sucked up from the ocean-floor.

As Shakespeare shows in *Macbeth* men are less prone to nervous troubles than women, but much more prone to imaginative troubles.

More women commit suicide from emotional despair than men; but it is almost always some black jet of imaginative terror squirted between the joints of their rational harness that drives men to kill themselves.

Our atrocious English custom of flogging prisoners in extreme cases has, at the moment I am writing, caused one convict to hang himself with his shirt and another to swallow a fork, whereas women condemned to a similar torture would have been spared these imaginative spasms partly because their fear-skin is less thin and they never pad themselves with so much protective reasoning, and partly because they abide with, and seldom altogether forget, the basic atrocities of life itself.

Why is it that blunter, cruder, more obtuse men seem able to be happier in living with a woman than their more subtle brothers? Is it not because a certain vein of rough, crude brutality in their nature gives a woman the feeling — sometimes quite an erroneous feeling — that it were useless to turn upon an animal as rough-and-ready as this her deadly jet of ocean-floor secretion?

The more imaginative a man is — and all men are more imaginative than women — the more complicated will he find his life with anyone of them. In one sense his imagination gives him — as far as his personal happiness is concerned — a tremendous advantage. I refer to his power to live a double life.

Now by "living a double life" I do not mean keeping hidden up another woman. I mean keeping hidden up *another mental life.* The more imaginative he is the more vivid this other mental life will be and the more complete escape it will be.

What hypocritical lies are passed round among us about the power of love! It may be wrong to be happy in a world like this except with the kind of sideways happiness that comes to a saint, or at any rate to someone for ever occupied in alleviating pain, but if we *have* decided to aim at happiness, it is moral cowardice not to face the situation in its starkest form.

To an extremely imaginative man — for we will drop the word "sensitive," since in matters of money and vanity and hunger and desire we are all "sensitive" and indeed we invariably notice that it is the most selfish people who talk most of their "sensitiveness" — the anger of women is more terrifying than women realise. It is like an explosion from that awful sub-world of Reality against which we men are always padding ourselves like the White Knight in "Alice through the Looking Glass," or like Cæsar Augustus going to war.

And of course the more dreadful to an imaginative man is that sight of the Valkyrie storm-flash in a woman's face, that Pantherish darkening of the pupils, that Babylonian narrowing of the eyelids, the more often will he be exposed to it. And this will be brought about not because she is essentially cruel, but because the mere sight of his fear has an irritating effect upon her nerves.

Women are so close to Nature that they are far more belligerent than men. This is simply because they are more emotional; and, life being what it is, their emotions are naturally those of battle. Every woman is for ever egging on her too-easily pacified mate to fight more fiercely for his own hand. And this eternal belligerency in the woman is by no means confined to clashes with other women, or even to clashes with other human beings. If you watch the animation of a woman's face when she is talking you will find that it radiates its intensest joy of life when she is loving something or hating something.

A man talks to show off, to cover his retreat, to save his face, to insert another cushion of rational argument between himself and the pricks of life. But talk from a woman is not an escape or a protection, or a palliative. It is an organic necessity. It is using her fins and her tail in life's ocean-stream. What she really does is to add her own terrifying reality to the reality of Nature, Actresses though they are, you will be astonished to note when you listen to a woman telling a story how passionately scrupulous she is about adherence to every smallest detail.

Here indeed is a significant revelation as to what interests them in life. Just simply Reality! They are reality-addicts, reality-inebriates. And you can prove this by encouraging any woman to let herself go on telling a tale. What thrills them so is that things should be as they are, people as they are, Life as it is. That sublime point to which Nietzsche rose with an effort that broke his brain, the point of not only enduring fate but "loving" fate —

amor fati — is the natural and normal temperature of a woman's being. They *love* fate! They hate it too. They love it and hate it at the same time.

That a person's fate is his own character is what at the bottom of his heart the veriest ninny of a man takes for granted. That is why most successful men are so pompous and touchy. They think they've done it themselves. But no woman thinks she's done it herself. How can she, when she has responded with so much love and so much hate to the process of chance or destiny doing it?

Deeper down by far than anything else, in this question as to how a man is to be happy with a woman, when the state of being-in-love is over, is the matter of a man's life-fear which so naturally turns into his woman-fear.

When he listens to the outpouring of her love-hate upon every detail in life, when he contemplates the intensity of her *amor-odium fati* over what to him seem the merest bagatelles, when he recognises in himself the heavy-witted, bewildered absent-mindedness, from which, like the denizen of a world of fantasy descending from a buoyant airship into wet salt waves, he makes his idiotic comments upon her reality, he feels as if she were confusing *him* with the wrong-doing fate she is denouncing so fiercely! It is at such times that he wonders to himself whether they would not both of them be happier if he could be her woman-friend by day, and her lover only at night.

The truth is that every woman has in her the makings of a realistic novelist, but a novelist with the imaginative art of selection left out. But why, indeed, should she select, when everything, simply *because it is there* is a matter of absorbing and infinite interest to her?

It is the same in all classes of life. You have to go to a woman if you want to get the actual pressure of some event that has transpired or is transpiring, in the full pell-mell of all its chaotic details, whereas it is to a man you go if you want that selective imaginative touch, which, by a process of selection, gives the event its æsthetic impressiveness.

It is for this reason that when a man is telling you anything his woman will be for ever interrupting him; for it is an actual pain to her to hear him leave out so many of the details in his artistic desire to make a hit.

But to come to the main issue of this chapter, how best can a man, the maker and defender of illusions, be happy in sharing bed and board day in, day out, with such an excoriating passionist of Reality. First let me hasten to say this. There are ways by which the imaginative power of men, even of the most simple men, can undermine a woman's passion for the flow of separate things with the more naked and more austere "truth" of what you might call the abstract human situation. What I mean is this. When your woman is in a mood for pricking the bubble of your illusions with the bodkin of her reality, instead of defending your opinions, instead of making yourself responsible for the drifting fragments of your rational ark, instead of trying in your portentous way to save your floating cargo from the flood, say to yourself, "Here are we, two doomed flesh-covered skeletons, wasting precious moments in useless argument, while at any second one or both of us may be seized with some intolerable pain, crushed in some appalling accident, laid bare in some unspeakable exposure, hurled to an annihilation so absolute that it will be the same, as far as we are concerned, as if we had never lived!"

By considerations of this drastic and ultimate kind, by the turning, that is to say, of your imaginative reason upon the abstract human situation, you will undermine the devastating procession of chaotic details with which she is overpowering your well-rounded theories, and you will do it by a bed-rock pessimism so stark and austere that all these "details" of hers become irrelevant.

I don’t for a moment mean that you should reveal to her this grim glance of yours at the bed-rock human situation, thus abstracted from the distracting play of circumstance, for its appropriateness to the occasion would be totally missed, and in her way of reducing everything to a personal reaction she would simply accuse you of being in a gloomy mood. But the value of this mental dive of yours down to the bed-rock of the world, below the swish of her mermaid’s tail, below the glittering phosphorus of her darting motions, will lie in the restoration of your philosophic *amour-propre.* Women are themselves completely devoid of this inner necessity to feel profound, but they know by instinct how important it is to a man; and the way for a man to retain it under her attacks is to let her think she has pricked his conceit of it, while all the while he is lying *perdu* in a pessimistic vision of things so stark and ultimate that nothing can reach him. To grow increasingly happier in life a man *must* hug the pride of his mental stoicism; but the closer he can get this abstract virtue into some relation with reality the better for him.

To be happy in this hard world he *must* think of himself as a stoical philosopher whose virtue looks for no recognition beyond the inner glow which he gets from it; but he had better keep a weather-eye open, while he indulges in this secret pride, for various revelations about life that reach him through his woman.

Bewildered though he may be by her terrible insight into that life-flood of devastating details, he must keep his head enough to be able to gratify her by looking more of the unmasked fool, to which in her nervous irritation with his complacency she wishes to reduce him, than he actually feels, though he does not feel *quite* comfortable. But under her troublesome details, that seem to him to contradict all philosophy, the best thing he can do is to sink down through “reality” into what might be called “truth.”

Reality is what appears. Truth is what our reason assures us lies behind appearances. I have recommended a pessimistic view of “truth” as more conducive to a man’s pride of thought than an optimistic “truth,” but as long as he keeps his thoughts to himself this latter will also serve.

Behind the philosophy of every masculine thinker, and this applies as much to the ones who write books as to the ones who only patronise their women in conversation lies, as my brother Theodore always says, the glory of pride.

Those who regard such pride of thought — even the pride of an extremely pessimistic view of things — as a masculine weakness and set themselves to destroy it in themselves, are taking a great risk. They usually end in a very unhappy state of mind. Now it is true that such an unhappy state of mind *may,* in a spiritual sense, be nobler than the proudest and most austere stoicism, but, as I have repeatedly hinted, what I am concerned with here is happiness, not nobility: happiness, I admit, of a certain *quality,* but still happiness in preference to unhappiness.

Thus if it turns out, as I think it does, that in a world of petty miseries like ours a masculine nature — devoid of the feminine passion for appearances — must, to struggle on at all, derive an inward glow from feeling its stoical self-control grow more and more effective, it will be madness in him to try to destroy this ancient classic pride.

But perhaps he *is* mad compared with other men! Perhaps he feels driven on by some spiritual urge to attack this simple stoical pride of his at its very root.

Well! let me for the last time gravely warn him of the terrible danger to his happiness along this path. He is acting contrary, or I should say feeling contrary, to the essential nature of a man. But on the other hand, if he is subtle enough, the thing is possible. A man *can* relinquish his natural pride, and the subtlest of the Chinese sages — namely the great Taoists — supply us with a crafty technique for this very thing, without suffering unhappiness, but the process is such an evasive one, and such an elusively spiritual one, that only very rare souls can follow it without losing everything.

But the Tao does not offer the *only* path to this difficult secret. There is also the Christian "way," by which I mean the way, not of Bunyan's Pilgrims, for *their* virtue is made up of fear and pride, but of certain among the older Catholic saints.

But since my immediate problem is how a man can be happy while he eats and sleeps with so strangely constituted a creature as a woman, and since when a saint becomes a saint he gives up living with women, it becomes necessary to use a technique that has no formal religious precedent.

Women it is true have a "penchant" for saints, but they also have an irresistible urge to disturb their sanctity; and the best and most modern thing to aim at, it seems to me, if you are really resolved to give up your inmost pride, is something more on the lines of Dostoievsky's Idiot, or, if you prefer, of Alyosha Karamazov. The Idiot certainly succeeded in killing his inmost pride. What at the bottom of his nature, then, really was his life-illusion? This is a hard question but it is spiritually of the greatest importance to us just here, when we are making a desperate struggle to acquire a life-illusion of our own that goes against the whole grain of our masculine nature.

The attempt we are making now is indeed one of the most perilous that a masculine soul could possibly make, as far as his happiness is concerned, and yet I do not think it would be correct to call the Idiot an unhappy person.

It were certainly easier for a man, in these sceptical times, to follow the spiritual path of the Idiot, than to make the wild and desperate clutch after Christian humility described with such tragic and beautiful passion by St. Paul in the words, “Not I — but Christ in me.”

What you get in the Idiot is such an abysmal sense of “the equality of all souls” in the presence of the terrible and beautiful mystery of life, that this feeling of being “a Superior Man” as the Chinese say, or of being at any rate a much-enduring stoical man, which is what most men are conscious of, is struck by lightning at its root. What penetrated the soul of the Idiot was a constant vivid awareness of the tragic beauty of every human soul he encountered; and when, as on the occasion of that fashionable party when he broke the vase, any human group behaved in the remotest way decently he was stirred to the profoundest depths of his soul. What the Idiot seems to have felt was *a sensation of identity* between his soul and the souls of others, so that he both rejoiced with them and suffered with them, and when his two women, Nastasya and Aglaia quarrelled so violently over him, he had no choice but to take the side of the one he loved with pity against the one he loved with love because the nerve of your pity goes further in self-identification with the object than does the more normal feeling of amorous attraction.

Spengler speaks mysteriously of some new religious sense, just born into the world, which he associates with the Fourth Gospel and with the character of Alyosha Karamazov; but most seekers after new spiritual methods of making life more tolerable, particularly life *à deux,* will I think agree with me that it is easier to grasp what the Idiot is feeling in the depths of his heart and the method he is following than it is to get any definite philosophic notion of Alyosha’s system of life. I feel about Alyosha as if he were one of those super-sturdy, super-practical, naturally affectionate angels that you see in so many early Italian pictures, nor can I feel that Alyosha has as deep an understanding of the evil that surrounds him as the Idiot has.

We are wandering in deep waters here in our masculine search for some thaumaturgic clue — like Faust's key to the subterranean dwelling of "the Mothers" — that will initiate us into a life-illusion that can dispense with moral and mental pride, and the great danger is that the moment a man relinquishes his sturdy, heathen, self-righteous, self-centred stoicism, and allows the feelings of alien souls to disturb him to the depths, in the way the Idiot did, he will find that at a crisis he is neither a self-contained stoic, nor a tragically sympathetic-medium for the Love of Christ; but simply a poor wandering "nebula" of bewildered human consciousness, *sans* centre, *sans* circumference, *sans* background, *sans* all steady and integral continuity.

I fully admit that even in this fluid and formless state his soul may — though unknown to itself — gain some deep and mystic *rapport* with the rank and file of humanity. Indeed the feeling of being lost amid the tossed and troubled waves in the great sea of tragic human life, *may* bring with it some strange unlooked-for ecstasy of *identification with All Souls* and with their pitiful destiny, just as Alyosha fell down with rapturous sobs and kissed the earth, in spite of the fact that his friend's corpse has begun to stink; but in spite of such isolated moments of chance-sent rapture there is a serious danger that you will soon just begin to drift at random through life, trusting to your inspired moments to thrill you and keep you going, and then suddenly find yourself, a besotted slave of some mania, some madness, some vice, some drug, some obsession, followed by misery and unhappiness, to which if you had retained your moral pride, and had been still practising your self-righteous stoicism, you would never have submitted.

But since we are considering the problem as to how a man can live most happily with a woman why should we not ask the question: “Why can’t he imitate women’s attitude to life?” Women very rarely indulge themselves in pride of thought or in pride of stoical self-control. They often pity themselves as the victims of chance or fate or of some malignant and selfish man; but they seldom think themselves with complacency as philosophic stoics.

And this freedom from the pride of virtue saves them from the misery of remorse. They don’t feel remorse, because they are not concerned with the building up of an interior mental philosophy, the disturbance of which causes pain.

But if the Idiot’s freedom from moral pride and Alyosha’s freedom from moral pride are deep spiritual secrets, why should not women’s freedom from this particular kind of egoism be an equally subtle clue? I think it *is* such a clue; only it is extraordinarily difficult for a man to make use of more than a very little of it, and even that only intermittently.

If you watch women closely you will notice how they fling themselves “entire” and “all-of-a-piece” into the particular emotion they are expressing. They have their reserves of course; and they are, by inescapable necessity, actresses and deceivers; but what they reserve is only *more of the same emotion* that they express, or some hidden store of a directly opposite emotion. Their reserve is in fact a reserve of themselves — of *more* of themselves — not, as with men, the reserve of an ego that is lying back on the pride of its moral values and on the superiority of its mental vision.

But what would be the effect upon a woman if a man really did set himself to destroy his secret masculine pride of thought? It is hard to say — certainly such a course, whether he followed the way of the saints, or the way of the Tao, or the way of Dostoievsky’s Idiot would take from her her greatest weapon for making him unhappy; but on the other hand if he removed her power of making him unhappy, he would also be denying her the greatest relief and release she has for her tense and vibrant nervous irritation.

This irritation really comes from the fact that deep in her heart she wants from you *the companionship of a woman* combined with the stimulus and security of your being a man.

On the whole, for you *are* a man, it is safest, since you are more anxious to be happy than to make subtle spiritual experiments to get as much comfort as you can out of your stoical pride of thought. After all it is this pride of thought that lies behind most of the progress, such as it is, that our race has won in its struggle with Nature. Women, being so intimate a part of nature are indeed a microcosm of the great mysterious ocean over which a man is steering his raft; and it may well be that the Christian and Taoistic tricks of throwing overboard his pride of reason and his pride of stoical morality is a kind of cosmic betrayal of man's proper destiny.

It is certainly a giving up of that essential detachment, that isolation in the fortress of his lonely thinking-power, which has made him all the way down history the grand Observer of Nature, and the grand Meddler with Nature, Granting then, that if you want to be happy with a woman it is safer to remain the egoistic philosopher and moralist you were born, and that Heraclitus and Socrates and Epictetus and Epicurus and Goethe and Nietzsche were born, rather than to play any subtle Oriental tricks with some dark inhuman secret of humility. But all the same it does still remain that the deeper you force your pride of thought and your pride of virtue to sink down out of sight into your soul the less you will suffer unhappiness and the less you will quarrel with your woman.

But the man is unwise who — because he is struck by the tidal recurrences and reversions of his woman's loves and hates and because he finds in her no sort of moral standards resembling his own — comes to the conclusion that women have nothing in them that corresponds to his morality. He has forgotten that beautiful Athenian word for an intellectual paramour which is the feminine counterpart of the Homeric word comrade. Women's natures are not, as various masculine philosophers have erroneously argued, composed entirely of maternal psychology and courtesan psychology. There is still in all of them an indestructible element of brooding romance, or rather of that unconscious passivity, hushed, inscrutable, virginal, inarticulate, that their first lover, moving like the creative spirit "on the face of the waters," troubled with the reciprocity of love.

It is this same mystic element in their nature, only with a new quality added, that returns upon them, deep as life itself, when they are nursing their first child.

But though men catch the virginal romance of this feminine mystery in the face of the young girl they love, and again in face of the mother of their child, there is something in this thing that is different from mere innocence and different from mere maternity. It partakes of the mystery of that strange brooding expectancy that we are aware of sometimes in Nature, when we seem to catch certain aspects of her life unawares and offguard.

Now there exists something of this hushed submental passivity, where you feel that her thoughts are as vague and obscure, and as deep too, as physical feelings, in every woman, and it is from this unfading element in her, the very thing that so roused his romantic interest at the first, that a man, who wishes to get the full intense flavour of his privilege of spending days and nights with this strange Being, must draw the living water of his life. For there is a mystery here more evasive than all her courtesan provocations and all her maternal obsessions. And it is the thing in her that neither her momentary angers can touch, nor her possessiveness dispel. It is something which the passing of the years has no power to diminish.

But it is a sacred thing, perhaps the most sacred of all, and it has always to be approached by the man who recognises it over a bridge as narrow and enchanted as that which led to the Castle of the Grail.

But this mystic passivity, which is the cause of all sexual romance, and which, for a man with any willpower in his imagination, can never lose its appeal, is not the only quality in women that belongs neither to the courtesan nor the mother. There is also a woman's psychic sympathy. This is that large, calm, soothing restorative power, like the cool stone rim of a fairy fountain, for the sake of which men in all times have come to a certain type of woman. And they have always found what they sought, were she a cup-bearer serving drinks or a wrinkled crone stirring a pot on the fire or a bayadere at rest after her dance, or an Aspasia pondering on the secrets of human life. They have found the woman who can be a companion. A man is aware of this mystery, this sympathy as deep as Nature herself, in the most unlikely quarters. He can feel it in the face of a barmaid at the counter, in the face of a beggar on the street, in the look of a patient shop-girl, in the presence of a great lady weary with the handling of huge assemblies of guests, in the hushed quiescence of an overworked charwoman.

It is not the response of the courtesan, nor is it the response of the mother. It is something deeper, more organically feminine than either of these. An old maid can display it, who is totally devoid of amorous provocation and entirely free from maternal emotion. It is the sympathy of the eternal Companion, of the undying Helper, of the everlasting *Hetaira.* It is the thing that makes a man call a casually-encountered woman "sister." In a certain sense it *is* the sister-quality, but the sister-quality with something added. Almost all nuns possess it and so do almost all prostitutes.

And when a man comes, for understanding and for clairvoyant insight into his special needs, to a woman in this mood it would be absurd to say she is devoid of "morality." She is devoid of his pompous logical morality but she has something deeper, more flexible, more instinctive and far more precious. She has her own special system — though it is not at all what a man means by a "system" — of deep social values. It would be giving this quality a too pedantic air to call it the quality of a teacher; and yet there does adhere to it a deep touch of the teacher — shall I say of the sibyl — and happy are the men who have the wisdom to put themselves to school in this informal sibyllic "academia"!

Now a man who lives with the woman he has been in love with will, if he cares for his happiness at all, exploit this element in his companion to the uttermost. And he will find that a woman playing the part of a real companion is no more devoid of something corresponding to his "reason" than she is devoid of something corresponding to his "morality." She may turn away to her sewing, or to her market-basket, or to her curtains or her china, or even to her game of Patience, when she listens to the duller, the more logical aspects of her man's reiterated thoughts; but when by any chance his ideas touch the intense and quivering magnet-needle of a real encounter of electric currents her whole nature vibrates in response.

Who are the human souls who answer with alert intelligence to every great new mystic and æsthetic idea? The souls of women. Not only Jesus and Mahomet and Confucius and Buddha, but Henry James and Joyce and Proust and Dorothy Richardson will be found to have their first disciples among women. The more purely logical systems of thought from Spinoza to Einstein may suit men better than women, but I doubt if any men-disciples were quicker to catch the significance of such explorers of new territory as Goethe and Wordsworth and Blake and Carlyle and Nietzsche, than these great men's mothers and sisters and wives and sweethearts.

Women may be less on the alert about new schools of sculpture and architecture and painting, but it seems to me that they make up by far the larger part of the audiences for new literature and new music.

And who are the people ready to listen most intently to any really exciting and critical illuminations that average men have? Always women! And this is because each particular man with any originality is far too self-centred to have leisure for the thoughts of other men.

Any man really concerned with his deeper mental happiness must constantly make a clean sweep of all the little pin-pricks of his life with his mate and concentrate on those impersonal issues, to do with life in general, where his reactions will be quite different from hers, and where to analyse hers will be for him like the reading of a thrilling book; for compared with the life of a bachelor the life of a man who lives with a woman is twice as rich, twice as complicated, twice as interesting. "More interest, more suffering," you will say, and this is true; but the suffering in question, if the torture of jealousy does not enter, is nothing compared with the imaginative terrors and morbid manias that a man escapes when between him and the fearfulness of the cosmos there revolves this *other* disturbing and distracting stellar system. All life is a battle, full of victories and defeats. How much better to have your victories and defeats *under your hand* than at this ghastly long range, where you confront without a shield the horrors of the infinite. Nothing makes for the happiness of a man with a woman more effectively than for him to understand the abysmal difference between his bursts of anger and hers, and why it is essential for him to keep his temper, *but not for her.*

A man's anger springs from his sense of justice. It arises when he feels that he is suffering from injustice, from some outrage to his code, to his bargain, to what is right and fair and according to the bond between them. It is an accumulative anger, "looking before and after," and covering in its scope a long reach of time.

A woman's anger, on the contrary, has to do with nerves, not reason, and, if you rule out jealousy, and jealousy will not arise if he confesses every lapse as it occurs save where his deception of her has been so complete that there is no chance of discovery, it springs primarily from her woman's irritation at his masculine limitations.

And, strange as this may seem, it is intimately connected with her love for him. In fact we could hazard the paradox that her bursts of anger *are Part of the actual expression of her love.*

A man is simply a fool, and devoid of all insight, who takes seriously the wild and whirling words of his woman's anger, and solemnly places them at the bar of his sense of justice. She will say anything at such moments, anything that will hurt him; and she knows well — who better? — what will hurt him most. "You don't think I *meant* that?" she will say later, and it is true that she did not mean it in *his* sense; and he ought to have had the wit to understand this, but few men have. And so he makes himself unhappy, pondering on the injustice of her *thought,* when he ought to congratulate himself on this curious proof of the security and confidence of her love.

I have already indicated three mental acts which are of great use to a human soul when the misery of the "outward" assails it. The plunge into the darkness of the mystery behind life was the first of these and I named it the Ichthian act.

The second, which I named the act of De-carnation, was the trick by which you imagine your soul as something separate from your body, holding your body as if by a leash; while the third of these mental processes, which I called the Panergic act was a vigorous grasping by the mind of all those primitive elemental pleasures which make life most tolerable to you.

But when your woman, as is bound to happen sometimes, when her nerves are on edge, sets herself to make you unhappy, or to pulverise your happiness with her unhappiness, I have yet another psychic device up my sleeve which may serve your turn better than any of the foregoing. This I call the “In-spite-of” act; and if you get into the habit of forcing yourself to make it when things are at the worst you will get great help and comfort.

The “In-spite-of” act is a desperate up-springing of your inmost soul, as if from the very pit of your stomach, by which you challenge the evils that surround you, including in this case your partner’s bitter tongue, and defy them, in the strength of a Being possessing an auto-creative power.

This interior Being, in spite of what it is suffering, can still cry, “I am happy,” while its world of familiar sensations cracks and sways and topples. It is a spiritual battle-cry, this “in-spite-of” act, rising up from your solitary navel. You utter it as if — and this is eminently satisfactory to your deepest self-respect — you were actually the ideal stoic philosopher who can abide *“impavidus”* while the *orbis terrarum* crashes about him. “The In-spite-of” act asks nothing, desires nothing, hopes nothing. It just asserts your own solitary willpower, bent on resistance and resolved to be cheerful at all cost. The best of this proud act of the soul is that it dispenses altogether with everything “outward.” It does not remind you of your little pleasures, it does not separate your soul from your body; it utters its *de profundis* cry, its solitary “Let there be Happiness!” as if it was itself the centre and circumference of everything that is.

But since, even while you are engaged on this desperate act of the soul, you behold your annoyed and annoying partner before you, and are forced to listen to her scathing words, it is best to yield completely to her in outward semblance. Yield, I say, and again yield! Give her the satisfaction — why not? — of thinking that she has hurt you to the heart, that you are wounded and defenceless, that you are humiliated, stripped, exposed.

The pleasure you derive from deceiving her in this — for your humiliation from your own secret point of view covers a thaumaturgic triumph — will give you such an interior glow that you will feel an intense wave of tenderness towards her. She also will feel the glow of victory, will feel that she has punished her boy-philosopher sufficiently and this feeling will evoke in her a corresponding rush of tenderness for you.

Thus the trouble between you will melt away and a lovely harmony will ensue, a harmony that, like so many other forms of human happiness, will be rooted and grounded in deception.

Stern advocates of what is called "truth at all costs" will utter a violent protest at the line I am taking; but it must be remembered that in a world like ours — a world so largely created by the various human thought-bubbles that we name "life-illusions" — it often happens that a deception leaves us really closer to the essential truth of things than this ferocious and misleading honesty.

The truth at all costs is desirable enough in Science where human nature is not involved, but in human relations, especially in the relations between men and women, it is better, and even in a profound sense more "honest," to accept certain deceptions as inevitable.

For a man to be happy with a woman, he must get clearly into his head at the start that she cares nothing for his particular kind of morality and nothing for his particular kind of reason. When she is good it is because *her* emotions and *her* values are involved, and when she is bad it is because yours are involved.

But, you will say, why is it that there are so many quiet, patient, docile, submissive and long-suffering wives? I am afraid that the answer to this lies in the single word “fear.”

Now the fear of women for men is a very different thing from the fear of men for women because it has a subtle pleasure in it. The physical hurt in the original sexual act from which such complicated mental ripples of masochism and sadism radiate to infinity, plays its part in this subtle pleasure, and there is also the satisfaction that *any* submission when touched with a vein of irony is able to produce. But however much pleasure may be mingled with a woman’s fear of her man, the point is that good, docile wives are still actuated by secret emotions and values totally different from a man’s reasonable concept of right and wrong.

And it is her susceptibility to emotion that a man who wants to be happy with her must constantly exploit. It is the only way to get round her, the only way to make her behave decently. It is uselss for him to try to understand *her* inner system of values. A man must either excite in her the emotion of fear — an emotion often pleasurable to her — or he must appeal to her emotion of love.

To try to excite her pity is a mistake; and here I touch upon a blunder that men are constantly making. They themselves are led to be very tender to their woman when they pity her, for pity is the most reasonable of all human feelings, in fact the inverse side of justice; but there is something annoying to a woman’s nerves to be forced to pity the man she lives with, and this annoyance increases rather than diminishes her bad humour.

No, if you want to be happy with her the only way is to excite her emotion of fear — which is a much pleasanter thing *than your fear of her*

— or to excite her emotion of love.

Never try to move her to pity, that inverse of justice, and never appeal to your own idea of the difference between right and wrong. Arnold Bennett says no man ever made himself and his woman happy by trying to base their life on justice, and I say it is almost as great a mistake to base it on pity.

Appeal to love or appeal to fear; for these are the motive-forces she understands. Like the black ashes of a burnt ledger-book she will fling to the winds all other considerations; and you will find that you have only made matters worse by introducing such irrelevancies.

And when I say "appeal to her love" I don't mean make cold-blooded rational speeches about it, for *that* will annoy her worst of all, as an appeal translated into *your* language and therefore becoming totally false.

You must, even in the midst of your sulkiness and her anger, "make the motion" of love, whether you feel it or not, and in "broken speech and your whole function suiting in form to this conceit" implore her to forgive you and be friends again.

The reason why women who have quarrelled with their men and left them feel themselves tempted to a vindictiveness more cruel than the grave, is because in that place within their flesh and blood where they "possessed" you, and loved and hated their "possession," there is now a ghastly and hurting emptiness. They can no longer feel pulsing within them what they love and what they fear. They can only feel undying vindictiveness towards that emptiness in themselves which is now *all that you are.*

All men feel that it is absurd of women to have such contempt for men's pride of morality and pride of philosophical stoicism, for they feel that women have no idea to what brutal and callous lengths men *could* go if this pride of virtue in them did not hold them back!

And what mood is it that these stoical men do sometimes allow themselves as a substitute for the physical violence that their morality forbids. Well! *they sulk.* Now it is clear that no philosopher dealing with the problem of happiness can deny that women get a definite pleasure out of the expression of anger— “Anger,” says the masculine proverb, “is short madness”; but to women it is a balm, a nepenthe, a release, a relief, a divine comfort to their nerves and a consummation of all their suppressed feelings.

It is a sign of a happy life! A really unhappy woman is beyond the panacea of getting angry. But a man’s sulking is a very different thing. He derives no pleasure from it; it is a release of nothing; it is a balm for nothing. To sulk is one of the meanest of all masculine ways. It plagues your woman much more than an outburst of anger; but you must not suppose it puzzles her or is calculated to bring her round; for it is on a precise par with the behaviour of that simple boy-child to whose mental proportions she loves reducing you.

But there is, I believe, no effort of the will that man, the great Moralist, can possibly make, equal to the effort of breaking the ice of his own sulkiness before it has become solid enough to bear his weight. It is in matters like this that a philosopher really can do something to increase the happiness of his woman and himself. Never argue with her, unless in the spirit of a chess champion playing with a beautiful savage. And never sulk, when — as you ought to have foreseen would inevitably happen — she gets the better of you and humiliates you.

The great thing on both sides, if a man and a woman are to be happy together, is for them each to be themselves to the limit. So many of our modern intellectual *ménages,* if an association can be called a *ménage* that is as hugger-mugger as a circus-camp, are rendered unhappy because the man thinks that it is unintellectual to be masculine, and the woman thinks it is unintellectual to be feminine. They struggle to be the distorted victims of intellectual modernity and intellectual sincerity, when all that is needed to make them happy is a taste of Helen of Troy's Egyptian Nepenthe — in other words a drop of that primeval Duplicity which Nature herself pours like a blessed oil upon her sexes.

Let the woman therefore give way freely to all those furious tempers that she calls her "nerves" and that are the tax humanity has to pay for the complicated organism that brings it into being. And let the man indulge himself without scruple or hesitation in his pride of being crafty and much enduring.

Let every woman, in other words, be the natural Penelope *she* is, and every man the natural Odysseus *he* is.

I hinted in my last chapter that a woman's happiness in life depends first on her creative atmosphere making and secondly on her success in the delicate art of swallowing her mate whole; and I suggested at the same time that if a man is cunning enough to slip off into his own secret mental world when this swallowing process is going on he will not mind the feeling of being reduced to boyhood again in order to be small enough to vanish within that Lamia-skin.

I have often thought what a pity it is that the penetrating ideas of D. H. Lawrence about the relations between men and women should be confined to their state when they are still in the first condition of "being-in-love." My own problem in this book is quite different; for I have to indicate the technique by which Lady Chatterley and her *tour de force* Lover can be happy together when those first bewildering adjustments are over. With regard to that early state of "being-in love" I hold my peace, for a super-happiness enters into *that,* which is totally beyond philosophic analysis.

Even Socrates, in Plato's famous Symposium, needed the word of the sibyl before he could describe that mystic union.

I have a notion, however, that certain portions of my technique will have their value for young people who are "keeping company" but have not yet risked the plunge; and I am the bolder in saying this because I feel that *something,* a little anyway of the ideal unity the boy is conscious of is not as completely shared by his more realistic companion as he imagines. She instinctively takes her colour and her cue from his ideas and she is not less preoccupied and bemused than he; but being a woman she "keeps her head," as Shakespeare makes Juliet do, and never quite loses her grasp upon the practical aspect of affairs.

If a man has not the airy conscience of a Don Juan — and the ironical thing is that almost all women deep in their hearts, owing I suppose to their innate lack of masculine morality, have a secret admiration for this irresponsible rogue — he may well regard it as a tragic thing that his natural lust for the sweetness of femininity should thus land him in a situation so fraught with perils to his happiness. To be attracted by the exquisite delight of making love to the incredible yieldingness of an enchanted body, only to discover — when he comes to live with this body — that he has landed himself with a personality ten times more belligerent than he is, is a startling shock to most young men.

What he loved was girlhood in the abstract, or beauty in the abstract, but what is now bent on possessing him, body and soul, is a mysterious and strange Being, whose ways are not *his* ways, neither her thoughts *his* thoughts.

Let modern methods of liberation go as far as they may, there is one thing they cannot liberate a girl from, and that is her woman's nature; and just as this nature exists under the most fashionable and courtly attire, so does it exist under the most Bohemian disarray.

Had Bill Sikes not murdered his Nancy, had he been a little less of a callous brute, that young lady would not have confined her possession of him to the possession of a few of his trade secrets.

What then is the "possessed" male to do? *That* is the rub. The greatest obstacle to a man's happiness with a woman is the accumulated weight of all the little *contre-temps* of everyday life, for, since a woman takes these things twice as hard as a man, he not only has to bear whatever weight of vexation they would cause him if he lived alone, but a good share of the far heavier weight they bring down upon her.

Well! the only thing for him to do is to repress all real deep anxious concern over her special feminine tribulations. If he yielded to this his own life-happiness would not be worth an owl's pellet. Nor in his wretchedness would his woman pity him because since she has the power of being worried to death one moment and full of radiant good spirits the next, she instinctively feels that rage against the little worries of life and a lively zest for the little pleasures of life are both of the essence of life; and certainly the cosmos would not pity him. In fact he would have crossed the No Man's Land from his own emotional trench to the woman's only to lose *his* protective weapons and not be able to use hers.

Next to the little daily annoyances, what is most disturbing to a man's happiness under these conditions is the problem of other people — particularly of other women. He is jumpy and suspicious about her attitude to these other women, whether relatives or otherwise, and she observing his suspiciousness grows, by natural contrariness, more recklessly herself than before. Watching her in his furtive ambassadorial way, he will be tempted to bring to bear upon her least nervous reaction, her least emotional spasm, the whole camel’s load of men’s grievances against women since the beginning of the world. He will mutter to himself, “They must have blood; they must and *will* have blood!” And he will watch her so closely that all her free spontaneous sallies, for and against these other women — sallies which it is her nature to utter “for and against” everything in the world — appear to him in the sinister light of a demand for blood.

But what is he to do? She *does* seem to him to be coaxing out of him every detail she can get about these other women, their looks, their ways, their habits, their weaknesses. She seems driven on by that mysterious psychic yearning that Dostoievsky disclosed in his Aglaia; *to get as near as possible* to these women; to get to the point of embracing them; to get to the point of flowing like a mist round their inmost identity.

Well! what is his attitude to be towards these feminine peculiarities? Is he to hunt them down, as Strindberg did, shooting his malicious arrows at them before their white tails can vanish into their burrows?

Or is it conducive to his happiness to take the larger, more generous, more indulgent attitude, the attitude, in fact, that might be called Shakespearean? It seems to me that he will be rewarded for this magnanimous view of things — even at the risk, as Pascal might put it, of sprinkling himself with holy water till he gets stupid, by not only feeling tenderer towards her than is possible when he is watching her like an inspired bed-bug, but by remaining sensitive to that magical charm of her femininity which the particular insight I have alluded to tends to underrate.

What we must recognise is that this Being at his side has burnt her ships in committing herself to him in a more tragic sense than he has any conception of. He must realise that she has given herself to him — below all their quarrels — to an extent that has a terrible finality, a finality far beyond the implication of anything she says or does. He must realise that the miraculous power within her of bringing children out of Limbo into mortal existence is something that — whether she uses it or not — sinks their relation to each other *as far as she is concerned* into an under-tide of startling and dreadful mystery, wherein, as if through a crack in a great weir, the waters of death mingle with the waters of life. And thus it comes about that if she finds he is deceiving her with another woman something happens in the under-world of her secret life to which he can never get the real clue; no! not if he reason with her for a thousand years!

She may be as "modern" as you can please in the rational ideas of our scientific age. Something there is in the mystery of Nature that refuses to be modernised; and to that something she is closer than all the philosophers in the world.

It is not his desire for another woman that will ruin their happiness. It is not even his possession of another woman. It is her discovery that he has deceived *her.* For these reasons if he wishes to go on living with her and retain his happiness there is only one thing to do and that is to confess. It is natural and right that he should deceive her in a thousand ways; but he runs a terrible risk if he deceives her over another woman.

It is, after all, the Strindberg in him, not the Shakespeare, the malicious half-feminine man, not the indulgent imaginative man, who now says to himself, "she must have blood!" But whether it be "blood" or lavender-water, if you want to be happy with your One-of-all you must offer up something to her that belongs to the other woman; not necessarily her whole wardrobe, but a ribbon or two, a shoe-lace, a safety-pin, a powder-box, a glove. You will feel remorse. You will feel a scoundrel. You will also feel a fool. But it is better to be a shameless fool in Paradise than a discreet and honourable gentleman in Hell.

I would not bid you to offer on the altar even this little pin-prick of the other woman's life unless it were absolutely essential for your happiness to do so. But after all what the other woman loses is only this thimbleful of pride, whereas if you go on letting your mate feel you are deceiving her you are doing something to her soul in a dimension of terrible mystery totally beyond your plumb-line's fathoming. It is curious to note the impersonal malice that men feel towards women and what intense malicious joy they take in dissecting their frailties; and if you analyse to the bottom your scrupulous protection of one woman from another woman I believe you will find that it often springs not from a sense of honour at all but from pure maliciousness. It isn't that you love this other woman so much; but that you derive a wicked joy from *not* giving your girl the witch's pleasure of sticking pins into the wax image of her rival!

There is a vague notion in most men's minds that it removes personal bitterness and makes things happier all round if they mentally vent their spleen on *Women in General* when their mate torments them. As a student of the greatest of all arts I regard this method as a grave mistake. By far the better way is to allow yourself in your mind to indulge in a savage orgy of thinking of your woman as the worst and wickedest of all women.

Give yourself up to thinking of everything about her that annoys you most. And then — when you have gone to the limit — swing round to the opposite extreme and think of her as you love her best, as you admire her most, all her faults forgotten. By indulging yourself in the first of these extreme views you will satisfy your suppressed indignation and you will feel a delicious reaction in her favour just as if you had struck her into insensibility. And then when you build up her image again out of all the elements you love best in her, it will be as if she had died and come to life. The great thing is to assume in the depths of your mind that it is impossible for her to change but always possible for *you* to change. Be an absolute fatalist about her, and a believer in absolute free will in regard to yourself. This is a secret attitude that will cause a warm proud glow to irradiate your stoic mind, and it will make you as indulgent to her as if she were some elemental force of Nature that must be accepted without question.

And as day follows day never let yourself cease to be vividly aware of all the little material adjustments she makes that are so necessary to your comfort.

I will not go so far as to say that the orderly smoothness and rhythmic harmony of all these little things are what give a man's mind the necessary leisure wherein to enjoy the pride of his detachment, for there are plenty of hermit-bachelors who do their own housework after their fashion, and do it, too, with a fresh and child-like zest that makes of these things a religious ritual, a ritual that enhances rather than lessens the detached pleasure of thought.

Though women get such a deep creative satisfaction from their "atmospheric" effects, they are too involved in the whole thing to be able to derive that particular childish pride in what they are doing that men enjoy. They do these things in such a "grown-up" manner and they take them so much for granted that a man is led to wonder in amazement at the sight of what to him seems mere ritual and mere play being made into such an organic necessity.

But if he is to be happy in the presence of all this, if he is to keep his self-respect in the presence of all this, the only thing for him to do is to sink deeper and deeper into his own secret world.

And she herself, her innate femininity contemplated from the detached standpoint of his free mind, becomes one of the chief elements in this secret world!

Their first rapturous epoch of love-making over, if the man is to be happy he must aim at increasing, quickening, and for ever stimulating that magical lust, half-sensual and half-psychic, which a woman's body and the flickering expressions on a woman's face have the power of exciting in him.

It is a great mistake to suppress in his secret mind his attraction to the other women he casually encounters. The thing to do is to use every passing glimpse he may snatch of these other longed-for caskets of mystery to enhance diffused satisfaction in the one at his side. She is his "bird in the hand," and he is a poor philosopher, and one with a miserably weak imagination, who cannot day after day, and night after night, enjoy this "bird in the hand" as a living embodiment of all the infinite allurements which so attract him.

For the grand secret of a man's continuous happiness with a woman is to keep his imaginative sensuality vividly alert and alive. For her sake he has isolated himself from his relatives and friends, for her sake he has compromised with his morality, with his philanthropy, with his pathetic fumblings after mystical sanctity.

But if he is a master of himself and his feelings he now has his reward. He has got this Microcosm of Nature at his disposal, at his mercy, at his pleasure, and for the infinite enjoyment of his imaginative senses.

This immodest book is, if you will, a Devil's Hand-book of Happiness, and Machiavelli's Breviary of the Passing Hours. Let a man, therefore, see to it that when he makes love to his mate he finds a substitute for the old rapture of Platonic fusion in a new rapture of satyrish divergence. To get the full happiness of dallying with her and enjoying her he were wise to merge the identity of the form he knows so well into an impersonal "Imago" of the Eternal Feminine. He has suffered from her lack of *his* kind of morality; let him now take full advantage of this. His innate idealism has always been a trouble to her, disturbing the practical sagacity of her life.

Well! Let him cast away this idealism where he makes love to her and exploit her abysmal indifference to these niceties. He may be sure of one thing. It is only in books that the best of women are shocked by satyrish sensuality. The best of women offer their bodies with sympathetic indifference as a sweet sacrifice to every kind of sensuality in their mate.

And no triumph of the life-spirit over the death-spirit is greater than for a couple who have once been lovers to remain satyr and oread right on to the verge of old age.

A man for whom his “old girl” when her youthful bloom is gone is still “Girlhood in the Abstract,” is the master-adept in the Eleusinian Mysteries of love.

But I have left the uttermost secret of a man’s happiness with his woman to the end of this chapter. Parallel with those feelings in her when she reduces his tall form to a size that she can hold between her hands and possess with her lips and her breasts and her whole physical being, is the unutterable tenderness that suffuses the man’s nature when he sees her familiar form and face under certain particular aspects. Especially is this true of the moments when he catches her asleep. Indeed many times when he detects upon her face a certain wistful and virginal expression he feels towards her *as if she were asleep.* In other words he catches the frail pulse-beat of her essential and heart-breaking femininity as if it hovered between life and death, as if this incalculable and equivocal changeling of Nature were suspended between the poignance of what the loss of her would be and the poignance of her strange impossible livingness!

In this whole matter of a man’s happiness *à deux* when the state of “being-in-love” is over, the strangest thing is the obscure and unconscious depth of his hidden dependence upon her. This dependence upon her resembles the dependence of all the men "who eat bread upon the earth" on the elements that feed them.

It is something that gives to a man's conscious happiness a deep unconscious foundation.

Against this background his happiness grows and flourishes, but the tragedy is that his awareness of it so often does not come *till he loses her.* To be fully happy with her, then, he had better constantly imagine what life would be without her. For without being aware of it the tendrils and fibres, the stalks and filaments of his organic life have sunk so deep into that soft, tender, sympathetic, but at the same time disturbing and troubling soil, that they have rooted themselves there.

His real feeling for her has become so all-penetrating and all-diffused as to be unrecognisable. One of the most profoundly pessimistic things ever uttered by a poet was uttered by Matthew Arnold in speaking of the divine concealment of what might conceivably be the secret of our life.

"The guide of our dark steps a triple veil
Between our senses and our sorrow keeps,
Has sown with thousand passages the tale
Of grief, and eased us with a thousand sleeps."

And this exactly answers to what I am now saying; for if we were not distracted by the thousand and one little stabs we get from her diurnal tongue how should we not realise more often that terrible possibility underlying it all that one day this soft strange earth into which our roots have sunk may be taken from us by death?

Nor is it any wonder that, as time goes on, our conscious happiness grows to be more and more dependent on the unconscious happiness of having this woman at our side.

As I have hinted a man is strangely detached from Nature; and deep in his heart lies a fear of Life beyond the comprehension of any woman.

But holding a woman by night and by day *between him and Life,* he is protected from this underlying fear. He is like a frightened infant who has got back into the snug “cowry-shell” of inviolable safety from which he was driven forth at the cutting of his navel-string. He is free to be happy now in all the ways most natural to him.

Although sublimely unaware of this, his proud detached thoughts can take their restorative flights, can make what I have pedantically called his Ichthian and Panergic acts of resistance to misery, in beautiful freedom from the assaults of the Fear of Life which so troubled his solitary youthful days. And all that he endures from her sharp tongue is an essential part of his protection! He will say, “Life is more real to me now. It was only half-real before.” And what he means is that the fear of Life which dogged his bachelor steps with unspeakable horrors, just because of his mental detachment from Nature, has now been warded off from him in some inscrutable way.

He thinks to himself, “I was lured on by her satiny limbs to take this creature to my bosom; and now I am scourged by her serpent tongue and sucked down alive into her Lamia-maw,” but even while such thoughts cross his mind he finds it pleasanter, easier, more natural to him to think his proud thoughts, to live in his proud secret world, than it was before he met her.

And this is because he is no longer face to face in his helpless masculine detachment, with the chaotic ocean of Life.

That satiny body, those tender ways, that terrible tongue, are now between him and Life. And his protection is the more assured because this Being who now lies between him and Nature is herself a microcosm of

Nature, armed with Nature’s cruellest claws, as well as dowered with her most magical allurements.

Our “Pilgrim and Sojourner” is therefore free to think his sublime thoughts and nourish his moral pride and indulge his moral scruples and practise — as long as it does not mean giving away money — his ascetic ideals; but he is only free to do this in the large magnanimous leisure of his liberated soul because between him and Nature there is now *another Nature,* because between him and the Battle of Life there is now a Battalion of Belligerency, ten times more courageous, than he is.

But all this advantage to the man in question is not attained without loss to someone. One of the wickedest laws of Nature seems to be that it is hard for one soul to gain even a spiritual advantage without some measure of loss incurred by another.

And who are they who pay the price of this new freedom for the man to assert himself and realise his identity? They are his friends! Nothing is more noticeable than the way a man’s personality and his glowing conceit of it grow and increase after he has lived for some time with his woman. She may attack him fiercely when they are alone, but in relation to the external world — especially in relation to his friends — she pumps pride into him from a boundless ocean of magnetic sympathy till he acquires a power to assert his humours, his opinions, his tastes, that sometimes becomes preposterous.

And his old cronies don’t know what to make of it; and even his family learn at last to treat him with becoming respect. He was airily egoistic before, but now his friends find his egoism a much graver, heavier and more solidly rooted thing. He had his happy and unhappy moods before, but now he seems to assert his personality from the hidden ground of some reserve of force that renders him, not pompous perhaps, but inviolably assured.

All his little personal ways and peculiarities, all his quirks and his crochets, seem to have received some sort of authoritative seal that renders them sacred; and whereas before he had to take the world as it came, the world has now to take *him* as he comes.

Aspects of his nature that he had never dared to display before he now not only boldly displays, but obviously glories in them. It is as if he walked and talked from above the support of an invisible body beneath him. And there *is* an invisible body beneath him. Under him is the everlasting lap! His mental pride in his opinions, that profound and perpetual cause of happiness to him, is doubled. And yet these are the very opinions that daily melt into thin air under the touch of the realistic tongue at his side.

His friends can no longer afford to treat him in the old way as a half-man, to be made little of, to be pushed casually about, to be fooled and disregarded and laughed at. “There is no arguing with him,” they say. “He is changed. He thinks he is Someone now. She has spoiled him.”

But what in reality has happened is this. For the first time in his life the poor man has been given the privilege to round off his personality to its full circle. With her between him and the great outer chaos he has been allowed to circle at leisure on his orbit until he has taken to himself the form of a round opaque impregnable world.

It was a woman who gave him his first birth. It is a woman who has given him his second birth. He is now a twice-born man.

In conclusion let me say this. What any man, finding his life difficult with a woman, were wise to do, if he cares for his happiness or hers, is to use to the limit all the measure of moral pride that Nature has given him. Let him put aside all spiritual experiments in humility, whether Christian or otherwise, till the waters are less stormy. What the waves need just now is the oil of his masculine pride of self-control!

For, whatever happens, he must never under any circumstances get angry with her. It is true that his anger is what, consciously or unconsciously, she longs to excite, and it is true that if the explosion did come there might possibly follow a warm and tearful reconciliation; but what she gains in this, and what they both gain in the resultant reconciliation, are not worth the risk of his giving up the particular thing in his deepest soul that in the long run establishes their happiness on its firmest foundation.

The reader must remember that this book is concerned with the technique of human happiness rather than with the problem of how to be nobler and more spiritual than we are; and what I feel is, that in the creation of such a technique while it is necessary to take many weapons from the armoury of God, it is also necessary to take a few from the armoury of the Devil. In other words if you want to be happy with a girl you must, at the very bottom of your soul, reconcile your conscience to be being both good and bad.

The moral unction in a man that helps him to keep his temper and answer gently when his woman is scolding, is not a wholly noble thing. It is an ambiguous quincunx, compounded of one part pity, one part reason, and three parts pride.

But, such as it is, it is in harmony with his nature just as for her to give full rein to her anger and full rein to her love, is in harmony with hers.

Secretly they will often both yearn to change each other's nature or to get back to that mystical fusion which existed, or at least which they imagined existed, when they were first in love; and, of the twain, I think it is usually the woman who makes the most violent efforts to change the inmost identity of the other. But it is all wrong! The whole meaning, interest, and reward, the whole glory and tragedy of their association, is now that he should be a man to the limit, and that she should be a woman to the limit, but a man and a woman whose happiness is for ever being renewed by the building of eternally new bridges over an everlasting gulf.

CHAPTER FIVE. WORKS AND DAYS

I WOULD LIKE THIS little book on the “Art of Happiness” to be of such a nature that its main gist could be understood by a person who existed three thousand years ago and also by a person who will exist three thousand years hence; nor is this a fantastic or presumptuous desire.

It is a legitimate philosophic implication, a hope that I have, for good or ill, got down to some eternal recurrence in our human situation.

Consider for example a line that with trifling modifications returns again and again throughout Homer’s Odyssey:

“Glad to have escaped death, though we had lost our dear companions.”

Now this simple and deep sigh of relief is expressive of what should be, and what generally is, apart from some morbid twist of the mind in the direction of despairing futility, the natural resilience of the vital principle at the bottom of our being.

Not to be dead yet, not to be quite dead yet, is our ultimate human cause of self-congratulatory satisfaction. The irrevocable blow has fallen upon someone near and dear to us, is at this moment falling upon many of our human brothers and sisters, but we, we have “sailed on,” still prepared to wrestle with life, still prepared to make that fierce “in-spite-of-all” act of the defiant mind.

Well then, what interests me now is to wonder and speculate as to what the mental attitude of a person will be three thousand years hence. Will people, under conditions totally beyond our present imagination, when scientific inventions and social adjustments have rendered the life-struggle inconceivably easier than it is to-day still think of their personal happiness as important, still feel "glad to have escaped death though they have lost their dear companions"?

Or will they have acquired some totally new mental attitude in which personal "gladness" has become negligible?

It is hard for me to believe in this latter possibility. It is hard for me to believe that, even after three thousand years of scientific experiments and three thousand years of communistic or anarchistic readjustments, the basic urge of a living personal soul will be different from what it is to-day and what it was in Homer's time. The more intense communal consciousness of our western world at the present hour, combined with the industrial fashion that we name "mass-production" and combined too with the modern tendency to nationalistic dictatorship is just at present charging our psychic atmosphere with social *as against individual life-consciousness.*

But it seems to me that it would be a great psychological blunder to regard the present disintegration of the old stoical cults of the individual mind confronting the Cosmos as something final.

"Everything," as Heraclitus says, "flows away," except the battle of the Everlasting Opposites, and among these warring opposites no battle is more deep-rooted than that between the individual and all that hinders his self-realisation.

There is a feeling among us to-day, a feeling that runs like hypnotic electricity from person to person, that since the Universe is totally without purpose, totally without meaning, totally without guidance, totally without reason, or justice, or mercy, or pity, and with absolutely nothing left but the hugger-mugger, hurly-burly, ramshackle beauty of litter and chance and chaos, there is no cause why we should take anything seriously, make any effort to philosophise seriously about anything; but every cause why we should drift along recklessly and carelessly, always jesting, always unhappy, always ironically simple and simply ironical, not grandiloquently bitter in the old solemn, Satanic way, but Puckishly indifferent, too indifferent to be anything but humorous and harmless, despairing and well-meaning, addicted to drink, but adverse to crime, and for all our mania for bagatelles really more well-behaved *than the Universe deserves.*

It will be doubtless from this particular kind of airy despair, less witty and more chaotic than the elegant futility before the French Revolution, that our time will receive its especial spiritual stamp among the ages, and there will very likely always be individual souls who will return to this, just as there will always be some who will return to the Middle Ages and some who will return to the Classic world.

But whatever the peculiar value of this age of spiritual futility and de-personalised despair may be, it cannot be regarded as an age from which a philosopher of happiness can draw much help for his technique. He must, however, at least make sure that the chemicals he uses for his mental soap-bubbles contain enough of the authentic rainbow tints of human happiness to survive the critical air of this ambiguous time.

It is interesting to speculate upon a possible History of Human Happiness that would indicate at what particular epochs the individual suffered most and was — apart from famine, pestilence, and war — most unhappy.

I think the Puritan Age, particularly in its effect on women and children, must have been a thousand times more deadly to our natural gladness in “sailing on, still alive, though we have lost our dear companions,” than this age of our own, with its cult of de-personalised futility. It is better to jest under the empty eye-sockets of Nothingness than to weep and howl under the blood-sucking glare of Jehovah.

And this brings us to the crucial question as to whether it were wise to introduce religion at all into such a basic technique of happiness as ours.

I may be a Stone-Worshipper and you may be an Icon-Worshipper, but for the purposes of this book it will I think be an advantage to pretend, both of us, to be advocates of a dogmatic materialistic atheism. Such a pretence will not be altogether easy; for we are so involved with our own past and with the long past of our race that it is a struggle to free our minds, even yet, from all idea of some intelligent purpose in the universe; but since there are many men and women who *have* thus freed their minds, even though to the rest their freedom may seem a desolate and fanatical laceration, I am anxious to make my present technique such an inclusive system that it can appeal to the most austere rejector of religious drugs.

Well then, as Whitman would say, "whoever you are," think of yourself as absolutely alone in an unfathomable universe. As to these other selves, these people of your most intimate life, you will have to make them also part and parcel of this blind, purposeless, godless chaos that surrounds you on every side.

And over what, in this terrifying welter or alien things, have you got control? Over one thing alone, over yourself! This is the power of which Socrates made so much, and of which millions of "superior men" in China still make so much. This is the philosophy underlying that rather tiresome "cheerio!" attitude of so many average Englishmen.

And after all it is the deepest religious act possible to the soul of man. It is in fact the worship of Life itself, whereof the eternal Litany is:

"Though thou tormentest me, yet will I rejoice in thee!"

But granting we have established this basic point in our technique, granting that we have suggested the wisest procedure in the problem of sex-relationship, the next step is to suggest the craftiest method of making use of the little daily relaxations and pleasures that intersperse our life's work. Nature comes first among these, and the great point in regard to our interest in Nature is that it should not be confined to her more grandiose and startling phenomena but concentrated upon those aspects of her appearance which are attainable by us all and familiar to us all.

Among these appearances I would put first the traditional Four Elements. These are those mysterious presences that it is better as far as our happiness is concerned to regard, as Spengler says Goethe did, with the *physiognomic eye,* the eye through which they reveal themselves to our senses, rather than with the scientific eye, the eye through which they appear as electronic vibrations.

We ought to be always on the look-out for some sort of living substitutes for that religious awe in the presence of life which our race has cultivated so long. To cut down on the religious sense in the wholesale manner advocated by Lucretius seems a sorry neglect of a natural, if monstrously perverted, instinct. And our attitude to the four great elements, to the earth, to the divine ether, to the sea and all the waters, to the sun and the moon and all the stellar bodies, to the wind and to the rain and the frost and the dew, to the motions of the clouds and the processions of the seasons, to darkness itself as it mingles with the mystery of the two twilights, ought to be an attitude containing all the actual feelings implied in the word "worship," ought to be, in fact, a real substitute for religion, the only substitute perhaps, except an inspired pity for flesh and blood, that the scepticisms of our age allow us.

And second to this feeling for the primal elements, this response to every aspect of earth and sun and wind and water that filters through to us between the crevices of our practical concerns, I think by far our most important awareness is the indescribable thrill that comes to us from certain chance effects of the spectacle of life, certain casual groupings of people and things, not necessarily beautiful at all but giving to our existence a sudden magical heightening.

With this heightening there often comes the strange feeling that we have been stirred by these very things in some other, different life. This may well be an illusion and the thrilling happiness we feel may be simply a stirred-up memory of the experiences of our early years.

But whatever this subtle emotion may be, it is something that "redeems all sorrows" and brings us a wondrous moment of *recognition,* as if, though pilgrims from far away, we have followed this road before.

But I would like to give a few more concrete details of these evasive feelings that I regard as so important.

One sensation that I always feel to be especially fraught with this emotion is the curious *metallic whiteness* of water just before nightfall. There is something about this particular whiteness that suggests all the mystic recoveries that have ever been, from all the lost battles and all the lost causes that have ever been, in the long procession of men's lives.

Another phenomenon that I always feel stirs up something "rich and strange" in the depths of our soul is the particular look of any ancient time-worn object that is associated with humanity when caught against a wide-stretching background. This might be a post, or a group of posts for instance washed by water and standing with its long mystic endurance against some receding skyline, or water-line, or horizon-line, that draws our spirit towards the infinite. Of the nature of such an infinite this old worm-eaten object, this old post it may be, comes to partake in an unconscious affinity of congruity; those elements "that themselves are old" answering to the character of this forlorn Inanimate and for ever summoning it to share their immunity from annihilation.

Another casual sight within the scope of everyone and full of a singular power of stirring the imagination is any fragment of roof-top or wall-coping when you catch it in the yellow light of the rising or descending sun. Thus transfigured, the mere fact of the thing resting there, in its immobility, with the immense gulfs of air sinking away into illimitable space behind it, evokes, as it lies back upon the calm mystery of dawn or of evening, the feeling that it is the golden threshold of some land of enchantment into which our soul can enter and find a solution of all the paradoxes of life.

There are a thousand other such things in the dreariest neighbourhood; only we cannot catch their secret until we have learned to ask from Nature, not so much beauty or picturesqueness, as a certain poetic *suggestiveness* that can start our mind on a long vista of vague brooding.

Yet another aspect of Nature *where the familiar suddenly becomes unfamiliar* — which is the chief cause of those sudden unaccountable waves of happiness that carry us on such strange voyages towards the receding shores of the land of heart's desire — is the sight of a single wide-stretching branch of a distant tree, that, as we gaze on it, seems to be floating on a mystic sea of air, of air so liquid, so transparent, so far-receding, that it is as if the branch that rests upon it were drawing to itself, out of that immensity, the very secret of life and death. I say "of life and death," for those who wish to know what real happiness is before they die will do well to make the utmost of that feeling that comes upon us all sometimes, it may be in the presence of the faintest weft of rose-tinged vapour floating in the west when all the rest of the sky is dark, or it may be from some other omen of the way, a feeling as if we were on the very verge of bringing life and death so close to each other that they flow together and mingle, and as if the terror of death, no longer isolated, would in another minute be transmuted into *something else.*

What we feel at these times is more significant than any occasion for our feeling, but it is also something that it is easy enough to discount in our cynical moods.

What it seems to carry with it, this deep recurrent feeling, so closely connected with all manner of transitory effects of light and darkness, is an instinct that life and death are not absolute opposites but are fatally involved with each other; are indeed the double-edged manifestation of some *third thing* beyond the power of our reasoning to conceive.

At the bottom of all lasting happiness is an accumulative reservoir of these particular moments and their value is proved by the fact that when we recall any long epoch of our past the worries and discomforts sink quite out of sight, and certain floating impressions of an evasive sensuous character remain, as if they were the essence of all those years! And they *are* the essence of those years and of all the years of our life, and if there is any planetary memory in our ancient earth, storing up, long after we are dead, what we have felt, these moments will be the abiding essence of that too, our individual contribution to the tellurian consciousness! The thing to do is to use your will to force the passing moment to become a medium for the eternal.

Never compare the present with the past. Never anticipate the future. Pull yourself up the second you begin pitying yourself for being *here* rather than *there.*

Too much has been made of hope. The better a philosopher you are the less will you hope. To hope is the most unphilosophical of all mental acts, for it implies that you are failing in the supreme achievement of turning the present into the eternal.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” To the devil with it then!

And instead of calling up imaginary changes in your life or hoping for this or that, the moment you have any time for awareness, the second you are able to look round you and take stock of things, make a resolute effort to convert what you see, be it the dreariest collection of objects, into what has *some* poetic significance. The great thing is cultivate the power of obliterating what displeases you among these objects and of *making it invisible*, and then of concentrating on what has some kind of a remote appeal to your imagination, if not to your senses.

Force these objects round you, however alien, to yield to your defiant resolve to assert yourself through them and against them. Get hold of the moment by the throat. Do not submit to the weakness of waiting for a change. *Create a change* by calling up the spiritual force from the depths of your being. This is an attitude of mind that you can turn into an automatic habit by doing it again and again. Rape the moment as it passes. It can never pass again; and for all you know its very drabness may prove a loophole into the eternal if you press against it hard enough.

Never wait for the future; never regret the past; make the present serve as past and future together. And if the moment is one of complete misery, lift up your head still, as even the wicked Macbeth had the heart to do, and say to yourself, “Though Birnam Wood *be* come to Dunsinane and *thou* opposed — —”

But suppose you are watching the raindrops on your window, or the straight line of a roof against a grey sky, or a wavering column of ascending smoke, or the edge of a dark cloud tinged with fire, or a sea-groin patched with green seaweed, or rooks following a plough, the pleasure you can get from these simple things is not entirely simple, as you force yourself to isolate and enjoy their poetic significance. For with this moment of your feeling there mingles the feeling of all your fathers before you, they who in their day and hour looked at the same things.

It is true that what, in the past of all your progenitors' lives, you are fusing with the pressure of your immediate present is no definite thing, no series of definite things. It is only a vague sense that the feeling of life which you are now experiencing in this moment of detachment from your activity is rich with the memories of all the generations behind you.

The streams of all our lives' consciousness run with a double flow, the salt water of action and the fresh water of contemplation, and no man's days are complete without an awareness of both. Fortunate is the man who, when he is at rest for a single second, indoors or out, in the course of his day's experience possesses the power of sinking back, back and away from the pressure of his immediate concern, and of gazing calmly at whatever surrounds him, however grotesque and unappealing it may be, and of saying to himself, "Well! Here am I, a living consciousness still, and there is *that*; and by simply looking at *that* and isolating myself with *that,* and using *that* as the temporary, casual, accidental, incongruous *surrounding of my undefeated spirit,* I lift that with me, for this single unassailable moment, into another dimension, lift it with me, for all its grotesqueness, and set it among the eternal things in the memory of the cosmic consciousness!"

This momentary sinking away from the whole world of action into a complete relaxation of body and mind, and into an hypnotic stare upon any little object within sight, can become, when you set to work to cultivate it, not only an important act of awareness of the deeper life-flow, but a most comforting and healing refreshment.

For its essence is both philosophical and nonmoral and because of its absolute detachment from all practical concerns it is wholly irresponsible.

In that “eternal moment” the self in you faces the not-self, making use of any little inanimate thing near you as a symbol of the whole universe.

Immersed in a thousand absorbing activities of work and play we tend to forget the continuity of our inner consciousness of life; we tend to forget our absolute and *accumulative* loneliness. These “eternal moments” of lying back upon the soul and of letting ourselves become nothing but pure awareness, nothing but a conscious mind face-to-face with any fragment of the inanimate that happens to be near us, are moments which, if we want to be happy and to live long, we ought to snatch from the flowing of time. Snatch them in buses, in waiting-rooms, in railway-trains, on park-seats, in hall-ways, in the entrances of hotels and theatres, in public lavatories, on ferry-boats, in taxis, in carriers’ carts, in churches, on your bed, on a chair in your kitchen, on the steps of your house, over the fence of your garden; snatch them whenever and wherever you can!

The essence of these moments is that you sink down for a perceptible breathing-space into absolute *irresponsibility.*

This is the only way to be increasingly happy, and the only way to save our nerves from being worn out. Infants have this power, and very old people have it; and we are throwing away the Nectar of Life when we refuse, in the heat of the day, to reproduce the beatitude of its beginning and its end.

You will find it advisable to conceal from your friends these daily immersions into the Sacred Fount of Irresponsibility. Nothing is more irritating to a companion, all agitated and wrought up over some transitory mishap or some threatening crisis, than to catch you thus floating at ease, detached in this deep underflow of the world; but if you refuse to cultivate this divine secret, woe to your happiness in life!

What you really do in these moments of heavenly irresponsibility is not only deliberately to assert the blessed privilege of infancy and old age, but at once to revert to some vegetation-epoch of the past and to anticipate some god-like condition of the future. The technique of any real happiness has much more to do with what is absurdly called a person’s humdrum, work-a-day life, than with the great crises of his days. But all these phrases such as work-a-day, hum-drum, commonplace, ordinary, dull, monotonous, are words invented by silly and frivolous weaklings.

Life is life; and it is the business of the individual to be happy in *life itself,* not to require perpetual “bonnes-bouches” from Fate, and gala-days from Chance, and grand high festivals from Destiny.

But the great trick is to make it your deepest religion and your starkest morality to force yourself to be happy and to concentrate yourself on growing steadily happier. The whole secret lies in this continuity of stoical habit; and if you aim at it constantly you will find that you begin to take a grim satisfaction in the harsh occasions when your philosophy is put to the test.

And when the important question arises how far you are wise, in regard to your permanent happiness, to sacrifice pleasure to culture, it is this necessity of continuity and growth that has to be specially considered. The best way is to compromise. There are certain universal pleasures like going to the Movies, like reading the daily papers, or absorbing yourself in melodramatic fiction, that are so sweet and delicious to our common human nature that it would seem absurd to give them up.

But it is a still greater mistake to have no other relaxation-string or contemplative-string to the bow of our happiness than these popular distractions.

What everyone needs is some irresponsible undertaking that is at once capable of infinite development and has nothing to do with our regular life’s-work or with public success in the world. Some substitute for what we English call a “Hobby” is what *all* human beings require. An “Untouchable” in Calcutta, a beggar in Benares, a gypsy in New York, a composer of fiction for the mob in London, a retired gentleman in Dorset, an emancipated Hareem-Queen in Istanbul, we all, if we are to enjoy any *continuity of happiness,* must hit upon some queer personal enterprise, if it be only watching dung-beetles, or learning Latin, or collecting fossils, or playing the Jews’ harp, or making patch-work quilts, or cutting walking-sticks, or studying botany, or adding to our ancestral songs and legends, the mere thought of which, when we wake in the morning, gives us that peculiar glow which only a love-affair or a person’s private secret play-passion is able to evoke.

The whole art of happiness is rooted and grounded in two things, *in will-power and in routine.* If I annoy you by saying this you must remember that I am talking about the “art” of this thing. *Some* airy-winged waftures of voyaging happiness come to us all, independent of any philosophical methods, but what this book is concerned with its technique alone, technique whether moral or immoral, whether hard or easy.

All happiness depends on a *certain quantity of something and no more;* and it is to limit ourselves to this “certain quantity” — and not to go on indulging in the thing till it smells like a blown-out candle in a chilly dawn — that we have to use our will.

If you have a mania for cigarettes, for instance, you ought always to postpone your “next” till you have read so much, or written so much, or walked so far, or looked at the clock for so long. You are deliberately murdering the enchanted Houris of sensual delight that live in cigarette-smoke when you let yourself smoke as much as you feel inclined without any sort of restraint. And every time you put off your "next" the least little longer you are increasing not only your pleasure in smoking but your happiness in life.

A person who smokes *sans cesse* reduces himself to the level of a person who doesn't smoke at all; indeed he becomes like those who take warmth and food and shelter *for granted,* which is a blasphemy against your whole life upon earth, and is the chief reason why the rich man finds it so hard to enter the "kingdom."

But returning to the crucial question of pleasure *versus* culture, as I hinted above, the best thing to do is to compromise. To give up the absorbed delight that a man takes in his daily paper and that a woman takes in her story-book because there exist vistas of more intellectual satisfaction in other things seems a self-denying ordinance that goes too far. It is better to think deep "asides" while we read superficialities, than to think superficial "asides" while we read profundities! It is what goes on in the mind that matters.

There is no better example of the solemn hypocrisy of most of us men than the grave manner in which we read our newspaper, furtively revelling in the murders and the advertisements, but assuming the air of so many Mr. Gladstones pondering over high affairs of State. So hypnotic is our moral gravity that we have got it firmly established that a man reading his paper is a sacred sight in the eyes of God, whereas a woman reading her novel is quite a different matter.

But sacred or frivolous, pious or impious, these heavenly oases of irresponsibility when we lose ourselves in the honeyed anonymity of "A Person Reading," ought not to be rejected. These divine interludes are like

Blessed Interments to our tired bodies, like Heavenly Requiems to our fevered souls. We rest, we forget, and for a while are happy.

An epicure in newspaper-reading naturally fights shy of evening papers unless he has no time to read the morning one; and, except out of consideration for those who sell them, it seems as if to purchase the morning's news at midnight were like assisting at a ghastly premature birth.

As far as his solid happiness goes I think that a passion for fiction-reading, so good for a girl, is bad for a young man. A young man's neurotic detachment from Reality makes fiction for him — unless it be attended by an intellectual effort — a perilous and disintegrating drug; whereas for a girl, whose life is already more immersed in Reality than her nerves can bear, the reading of fiction is a legitimate escape into that inner world of reverie and brooding fancy which ought, *all her life long,* to be the undertide of her soul's existence.

A young man is already so much in himself "a work of fiction" that if he gets a mania for second-rate or third-rate novels he will lose what power he already possesses for polishing up his weapons of attack and defence in his struggle with life.

But thrice-blessed are these writers of fiction, first-rate as well as fifth-rate, that can so ensorcerise a woman that for a while she can forget this accursed Reality to which every fibre in her being so fatally responds!

There is nothing in Nature, except swallows dipping into a stream, so eminently harmonious as the sight of a woman lost in a book; and the best thing every girl can possibly do for her happiness in life is to acquire as soon as possible, and indulge to the limit, a passion for fiction-reading.

Such fiction can never corrupt her taste or hurt her culture, because in the pedantic, æsthetic, and philosophical sense she does not give herself up to it or "take it hard" as a man would do. I do not mean that she tosses the “style” and the “philosophy” aside, as she would toss aside the supererogatory portions of a man’s conversation, for she has no philosophical conceit, rendering her supercilious to her author’s musings; but what really concerns her are the characters and the plot, and upon these — and with some justification — she concentrates, and lets the rest go by.

The truth is that women are so much more porous to what you might call *unofficial culture* than men that it does not hurt them to read things that cannot be called classical; nor does such reading hinder the growth of their originality.

But with men it is totally different. When “successful” men begin, as they often do — and it is a sure sign of the peculiar degeneracy that comes from “success” — to read the worthless trash that alone amuses them, and to be supercilious to any poor devil they catch trying to improve his mind, what they are doing is displaying a dangerous contempt for that “good of the intellect” without which, according to Dante, our end must be Hell.

When a successful man relaxes his enterprising intelligence over a detective-story he resembles a monkey gravely pre-occupied in catching lice; whereas when a hard-working woman snatches a moment to absorb herself in a second-rate romance it is as if she were indulging in some restorative, fecund, vegetative process, like that of a cow chewing the cud.

However this may be, there is no doubt that our daily happiness is immeasurably heightened by the undertaking of some intellectual task totally disassociated from our work. The advantage for instance to be got from the slow acquiring of a foreign language, and the gradual mastery, be it of only *one* single favourite classic, is of incalculable value.

But for this sort of thing it is imperative that a person should choose a really great book, a book saturated with the essential tragedy and comedy of things, the same thousands of years ago as today.

And at this point it is worth pausing to note that the books which permanently add to a person’s mellowest wisdom are not the startling intellectual works that bring us a new and exciting “aperçu” upon life, but the old humanistic works that carry with them the sort of massive, simple, epicurean stoicism that reduces to a few large noble outlines the chaotic pell-mell of our existence.

It certainly does not require any exceptionable linguistic aptitude to make use of a laconic phrase such as “æquam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem” when your worries thicken about you; and verses like these — the sublime commonplaces of good sense — are not the worse for having been mixed with the ups and downs of human life for a few thousand years.

And now we arrive at the crucial problem of the effect, upon the over-tones and under-tones of our life, of our actual daily work.

All our days must of necessity be in a large part days of action; and the spirit in which we carry through this diurnal labour counts for more than the nature of the labour itself.

It is all relative. The most miserably incompetent human being can derive a certain degree of satisfaction from an uncongenial job, if he accepts it without too much self-pity and makes the utmost of every little advance in efficiency he can compass.

The best mental trick is to think of jobs that are *worse* than our own, rather than of those that are more agreeable; and if our job *is* really the worst possible to us and devoid of the least grain of compensation, there still remains our dogged reserve of will-power to keep us going till the accursed hours have come to an end.

We can, so to speak, shut our eyes and harden our heart till the moment arrives for release. “Be the day weary, be the day long, at length it ringeth to evensong"; and the Devil himself must be in it if, when our daily release comes, we cannot relax our senses in a paradisic felicity, quite unknown to the lucky workers whose jobs have *some* dregs of interest! Many victims of this sort, because of their resentment at what our economic system has done to them, naturally turn communist.

The Communistic Credo seems to have something of that psychic power of objectifying personal sufferings in an outward historic movement that the worship of a God of Suffering was wont in former times to possess, but the average man who is at the end of his tether is as a rule more prone to "eat his own heart," as Homer says, in solitary despair, than to sink his individual wretchedness in either the religion of the proletariat or that of the Man of Sorrows.

It does indeed remain a sardonic commentary upon the social arrangements of our mortal life that into so many hearts the iron has sunk so deep that for a writer to discuss happiness at all seems a ghastly joke.

With regard to this joke Christ still has something to say, and Communism still has something to say, while an honest philosopher — like Marcus Aurelius in his imperial seat at the Gladiatorial Circus — when he beholds certain things can only hold his tongue.

There is such an experience, however, as being *shamed into happiness,* shamed out of one's silly manias, shamed out of one's fastidiousness, shamed out of one's querulousness, by the thought of what some human creatures, no less sensitive than oneself, have to endure. This is no complacent satisfaction at being more lucky; it is the acquiring of what might be called a *tragic sense of proportion.*

But I must approach now a very ticklish part of my subject. Our power of enduring life without breaking down is made a more formidable thing when we throw into it a little of the "bad" in us as well as of the "good."

And the reason for this goes deep. Our evolutionary growth, through unthinkable ages, into the sensitised ego we now are, has implied all the way down the centuries a desperate struggle between the self and the not-self. Into this struggle the endless semi-conscious "selves" of the lower organisms flung their whole life-force, a force including much of what to our further developed moral sense appears "bad."

And into this reservoir of "bad," into this "Old Adam," as the Bible calls it, of our lonely *fighting-for-our-own-hand,* it is necessary to lower our spiritual buckets now and again, cautiously so and reservedly so, but still shamelessly and boldly, if we are to nourish our happiness upon its natural sustenance.

That is the whole point. By reason of some mysterious urge from the mystery behind Nature we are developing, in pain and grief, a conscience so sensitive and withal so easily perverted — that it takes very little to turn it into an intermittent torment destroying all chance of steady happiness.

I do not mean that we must be violent or ruthless or greedy or cruel in order to be happy; but there *are* elements of the "bad" in us that we have got boldly to make use of, if we are anxious not to slip into hopeless nervous misery.

It is a curious thing, for instance, that men at any rate, feel more spirit and courage to deal with the shocks and discomforts of life when they are stirred by erotic lust.

And this leads me to a further and a more subtle point. What we call sadism is one of the worst forms of evil in the world and any actual practice of it is an abominable crime; and yet I am almost tempted to suggest that the only way in which the First Cause manages to endure the spectacle of the universe is by means of a certain modicum of what you might call *diffused sadism. Our* "diffused sadism," as we face the blood-stained arena of life, can afford to be much more diluted with pity than that of the First Cause; but it does remain that there is a certain battle-lust, a certain Mars-and-Venus mood of sublimated erotic energy, that gives us courage to face the Jungle of the World without being rendered too unhappy.

To call up this mood, as far as men are concerned — and I dare say in the case of women too — it is necessary to deliberately make the most of our natural sensuality and of our natural attraction to the opposite sex. It seems ridiculous to leave to the bold bad unscrupulous people all the old reckless love-making spirit that has so often made timorous souls brave.

Let "men of good will" exploit at least enough of this dare-devilry of the "bad" to get what you might call the recklessness of Nature on their side. Nietzsche goes too far with his "blond-beast" talk; but an ounce of the sexual urge makes us braver than the "logoi" of many sages.

Yes, if we are honest with ourselves we must admit that there is no escape from the necessity of being deliberately, consciously, and wilfully "bad" as well as "good."

We must leave to saints and to the few real Christians left, the desperate privilege of aiming only at being good.

And there is something else necessary too, and whether you regard this as good or bad will depend on your particular philosophy. We must, if we are to have any secure happiness in this world, and this cannot be emphasised too often, for all depends on it, realise what might be called our cosmic loneliness in Time and Space. We must habitually think of ourselves as complete strangers to this earth, strangers who have been flung into life and have been given a father and mother and brothers and sisters and a mate and children and boy-friends and girl-friends, but *strangers* from the beginning to the end.

And if on the strength of this ultimate feeling of loneliness we can manage to cultivate the power of looking at our daily companions, at our mate, at our parent, at our child, at our brother or sister, and of saying to ourself, “So *you* are the Image, *you* are the Mask, that I have been catapulted against from out of the infinite Unknown!” it will be better for them and for us too. For in this way, by the obliteration of superficial grievances, we shall feel a great wave of pity surging up within us— “you too,” we shall think, “you *other* strangers from the Unknown, you too are ‘pestered in this pinfold here.’”

And since both of us are what they call *landed,* let us be as decent to each other as we can and for as long as we can!

I don’t think men who are unhappy in their life with their women suffer anything like the misery that women do who are unhappy with their men, but I think an unmarried girl living with her parents is the creature who suffers most *from fellow-creatures* in the whole world.

These sufferings — the sufferings of the unmarried daughter — are far worse in England than in America; in fact they are so cruel that if this impious little book has the effect of helping any young woman in England to endure her life with her parents it would completely justify its existence.

What a pity that Shakespeare did not live to write a sequel to *King Lear*, in which some noble daughter of Edgar or Albany were hounded to death in a tragic attempt to rebel against her righteous father!

It is far more difficult in these days, though it is easier in America than in England, for a girl to assert herself against her mother, than against her father, but great external Revolutions in History imply less spiritual rending and tearing and emotional bloodshed than are implied in these intimate insurrections.

I expect one cause of unhappiness in the lives of all of us are those tremendous commandments, in both the Old and the New Testament, commanding us to love instead of commanding us to be at peace in our own souls. When you think of the piteous and lamentable attempts young people have made *to love per-force* it makes you realise that any honest Handbook of Happiness must strike its operating knife to the heart of this ambiguous doctrine.

What a liberating flood of planetary happiness pours through us when we experience that great moment of Conversion, turning us from love to peace! It is then that we realise that we can be free and happy and honourable and pitiful and kind *and yet not have to love anybody.*

The great thing is to sink so deep into your individual loneliness that you can look at every single person in your life and say to yourself, "Oh, so *that's* you, is it? Well, *you* didn't ask to be born any more than I asked to be born. Let us, therefore, be indulgent and tender to each other to the limit; and as for that Starlight and Nothingness that they call love — —"

Certainly we owe an incalculable debt to Freud and his followers in ridding us of the vicious idealism of the Christian idea that sensual pleasure is wicked; but this does not mean that we need spoil the romance of our erotic life by accepting all the Freudian catchwords. We human beings suffer so miserably, both in our daily work and in our passive moments, because we represent a transitional period — God knows it is a long enough period! — between the happy half-consciousness of animals and the full self-consciousness of the super-men of the future.

In this, transitional epoch our minds are conscious. but we have not trained ourselves to regulate the thoughts *of which* they are conscious. We resemble therefore conscious automata; and this resemblance is increased by the accursed false philosophy of the age from which we are only now just emerging, the bastard philosophy of behaviouristic determinism, which has so grossly discredited the power of the human soul.

But for the most incompetent worker at the most mechanical and uninspiring job there is hope of happiness if he can become the master of his thoughts. For after all there is no form of work on earth in which an unpractical person whose will is set upon the task cannot derive *some* pleasure from *some* increased facility in what he is doing. Efficient he can probably never be. But all is relative; and if he improves even a little, *that,* for him, is a sort of Napoleonic victory.

And, after all, Nature sees no difference, the Universe sees no difference, God if there be a God, sees no difference, between a poor devil doing a little better in his work and Napoleon winning the Battle of Austerlitz. The mind is the mind, the supreme miracle. And the battlefield within the most anonymous non-entity, the battlefield of Mr. Nobody's weakness *versus* Mr. Nobody's will, is as important to the Universe, *if the Universe cares for anything at all,* as the greatest outward event ever recorded.

And when it comes to the matter of happiness in your work, the grand trick is to "make the fig" at your employer, "make the fig" at your own advancement, and just enjoy with proud satisfaction your own private victories under the eyes of that great Taskmaster, yourself.

But you must be a wise taskmaster and never forget that you work to live, not live to work. A true philosopher who sets eyes on an overworked shop-girl snatching a moment's release from her job in some romantic novelette will stand in awe before such sacred abstraction and regard the place where she turns those enchanted pages as holy ground. In the presence of such a triumph of the mind over matter he will think in his heart, "Culture may go hang! This girl is within the gates of Paradise!"

A story is a story; and in the poorest story there are airy bridges by which a human soul — for all we know an immortal soul — wins a release from Reality.

Potentially all Shakespeare and all Dostoievsky lie like pressed rose-leaves between the pages of the simplest story. The poorest tale that brings release for the imagination and oblivion from responsibility is nearer the secret of the universe, than the pestilent Organisation for which we are labouring. *Its* best justification, its only justification, is that it enables a few living sentient minds to be free from care for a few minutes. For what else do all the great economic concerns exist, save to fill the bellies and liberate the spirits of conscious human souls?

Eulogists of efficiency as if it were an end in itself, psychologists of success, as if success could bring happiness, are the false prophets of an age that has lost the true values. There is only one "successful" person in the world and that is the person who in spite of appalling afflictions remains unconquered in the depths of his soul.

A tramp who possesses his soul in unshaken peace is a nobler product of this mysterious universe than a querulous philosopher.

When I said that if we were to grow steadily happier as we got older we must acquire some particular ritualistic awareness in our enjoyment of food, what I meant was not so much our natural enjoyment of palatable food, as a particular and special satisfaction in certain very simple symbolic foods, such as rolls and coffee, or bread and tea. Influenced by Walter Pater I have at various times made much of the "sacramental" aspect of these simpler ways of satisfying our hunger; but what I mean in this connection is something rather different from this.

What I feel is that our secret struggle to get our life under control and to retain an undefeated spirit requires some sort of symbolic milestones along the difficult way. Religion, with its diurnal introspections and its constant tapping of a supernatural reservoir of support, afforded this kind of mental Log-Book; but for our present purpose, since faith in these things has slipped away, some *secular ritual* becomes necessary, some simple substitute for religion that we can use as a rallying point in our struggle with our melancholy.

What better secular “Introibo ad altare” could we find than the traditional one of “breaking bread”? To this may be added the act of bending over a fire, and the moment, more inevitable still, when we put out our light and turn over on our pillow.

It seems strange that so few of us, considering the difficult and tragic hours we all have to endure, are content to drift on in so hugger-mugger and casual a fashion, refusing to make the least attempt to give an interior continuity to our days. Over external events we have slight control, but it seems a pity that what *is* within our power, a conscious continuity of some sort of philosophical life, should so often never even have been attempted when we come to die.

The point I am trying to make is that although pleasurable feelings at any given moment may be denied us, there is that which no evil situation can altogether prevent, namely our power of resistance, and of *watching ourselves resist.*

And, even while we are suffering, there is a mysterious force in the mere fact that our mind is still detached from our suffering, and watching our resistance to it. Now although at the moment there may be no gleam of happiness in our grim detachment from what we are undergoing, the mind will discover later that its capacity for happiness under difficulties has been mysteriously increased. Any trial less acute than the one we have resisted without a gleam of happiness it will be now in our power to resist with an unmistakable glow of mental satisfaction.

And we are led on from this to the real doctrine of Epicurus — a doctrine considerably different from the attitude associated with his name — namely that the *negative element* in any wise happiness is more important than the positive element.

How is it that people don't automatically, when they are suffering, remind themselves of such horrible possibilities as death by torture or death by some especially frightful accident?

This is the real Epicurean attitude, the feeling that every moment we are not in extreme pain and those we love are not in extreme pain is precious and heavenly dispensation.

And what I mean by making our daily breaking of bread, our daily kindling of fire, our nightly sinking down on our pillow, into substitutes for the old religious symbols, is that we come to associate such acts with the long series of reliefs from suffering that make up our life. These acts become like old told-over beads binding our days together; beads that cannot always gleam with an interior radiance, but that always retain a certain power of reflecting sunlight and candlelight.

But these simple symbolic moments, these milestone-memorabilia of our struggle with life, can be made into something yet greater. The thing that murders our happiness more than anything else is *worry,* not tragic concern over matters of life and death, but simply one miserable little *worry* after another: worry over what "she said," and what "he said," and what "they *may* say"; worry over the rent, over debts, over dentists, doctors, lawyers, employers, over house-repairs, dress-repairs, house-utensils repairs, over people coining that we don't want to come, and over people going that we don't want to go, over frustrations to our self-assertion, failures in our work, anxiety about health, attacks of indigestion, neuralgia, tooth-ache, ear-ache, head-ache, colds, “nerves” and so forth.

Such are the diurnal tribulations — and the list has no end — that, like flying squads of locust-demons, with horns and claws, drop on us, out of the air, and scrabble at our hearts’ ease.

Now I am convinced that by following both the true Epicurean and the true Stoical method, by making more of the negative art of forgetting our trials than of the positive art of adding to our felicity we can best cope with these devils. Nature and our Senses see to it that the moment *worry* is removed “the pleasure which there is in life itself” begins to flow through us again. Not quite unimpeded though! For there is still another ghastly Enemy of happiness that sometimes takes the opportunity of lifting up its horrible featureless face when the magic of life is trying to stir again — I refer to that feeling of abysmal futility, as if nothing in life were interesting or exciting, from which young people especially so often suffer. This feeling of cosmic futility — which frequently has a sexual origin — is a totally different thing from what is known as “boredom.” A feeling of universal futility is a philosophical weakness, the infirmity of a noble mind, whereas to boast that you are “bored” is to betray the silly superciliousness of a fool and a snob.

Polite persons feel instructive aversion when they hear certain foul-mouthed Anglo-Saxon words — such as that familiar one which boys delight to inscribe on walls, but which the discreet editors of the great Oxford Dictionary have thought best to exclude from the English language — but the utterance from human lips of the words “Boring, Boredom, Bored” is a far more unworthy piece of blasphemy upon life upon this mad Hurly-Burly that contains things so obscene, things so loathsome, things so unspeakably horrible, things so touched with infinite beauty, things so riddled with infinite disgust, things so radiant, things so transfigured, things with such livid roots going down to hell, things with such flaming wing-points scorching heaven, than any use of the worst monosyllabic ribaldry that Lady Chatterley's lover in his virtuous downrightness might feel would do his mistress good!

The people whose supercilious mouths seem moulded to utter the word "bored" resemble that absurd Mrs. General, in the Dorrit family, with her "prunes and prism."

Such victims of Boredom are the flea-bite enemies of their own and of other people's happiness, and although so frivolous they can be villainously troublesome. You may take it as an absolute rule that no man or woman of character ever uses the word "bored," nor do I care to meditate on the fate of these enemies of happiness when they reach Dante's Inferno. "Non ragionam di lor: regarda e passa!" is the best comment on their destiny.

Boredom? In this tragic battle for happiness, upon which we are all engaged, there is not much leisure for that! The thing to do when you begin to feel overpowered by your worries is to say to yourself, "Damn it! I'm still alive; and *some* I love are still alive. Hell! *What then?*" And having said this the next thing to do is fling your spirit against the pricks. I do not mean by this against the images that torment you. I mean against the particular material objects that *surround* you. If you are within four walls, fling your spirit against the iron of the grate, against the iron of the stove, against the hard angles and opaque surfaces of the furniture! If you are in the open, fling your spirit against the rough edges of masonry, against the trunks of trees, against rocks and stones and hedges, against the blind wind and the empty air! Do not wait for the shapes and the chemistry of these Inanimates around you to grow beautiful or attractive. Fling your spirit *against the pricks!* Fling it against the heedless elements, against the indifferent walls.

This very gesture of the soul in its desperation is a sort of *momentary suicide* and the relief and release you will get from it is indescribable. It is a kind of daylight turning of your face to the wall. It is a momentary death. Death, death, death. These five letters of our alphabet are a great weight in some people's lives.

The best way to dissolve their evil-smelling smoke when it does trouble you is to contemplate steadily the only two alternatives. Either you are totally annihilated, which is only carrying on indefinitely what often happens to you when you fall asleep; or you start fresh in another dimension the fate of all mortality and are not confronting any weird or unique exception to the system of things. There are plenty of people who, save for the physical shock of dying, would prefer to be dead than live; and while there are life-lovers to whom this is the worse that can happen, their very interest in life keeps death in its place.

But the best way is to struggle to get it *both ways,* and to cultivate all our days a certain power Nature gives us of sinking so deep below the superficial distractions that we really taste something of "the pleasure which there is in life *and* death."

But it is Worry and Futility, not death, that are the two worst enemies of our peace; and whether we are actively working, or passively resting, or even trying to enjoy ourselves, these two devilish *Phork-yads* are always at it, scrabbling to reach the chamber of our secret delight and dig their filthy witch-nails into its heart.

And how best can this everlasting worrying over little things, alternating with this sickening sense that the whole plot of our life is futile and its whole a failure, be circumvented and undermined?

By sinking down — oh, such a little way down! — below the bitter salt tide of circumstance, into the deep fresh flowing of the life-and-death flood.

This is the secret. Once get lodged in your head that there will be worries of *some* kind — not your present ones perhaps, but others no less distracting — to the end of your days; once get lodged in your head that whatever worldly successes you may have that old sense of Futility will for ever be there in the background — for it is the-other-side-of-the-Moon in every mind, and is co-existent with consciousness itself, with the consciousness of the gods, if there *are* gods — and you will come to see how absurd it is to go on day after day, year after year, never realising that the tremendous drama of your being a living soul at all in this great Mystery-Play is the thing to wonder at.

You worry over these things because you take the mysterious grandeur and the dark sublimity of existence *for granted.* You are digestion-conscious, and money-conscious and vanity-conscious; but you refuse to be Life-Conscious.

You are always aiming at the wrong thing — you aim at getting rid of worry by worrying, and at getting rid of the futility-sense by plunging into more futility; whereas if you got into the habit of imagining yourself actually dead — as at any second you may be — you will acquire that secret irresponsibility which is the diving-board of all living joy.

The thing to do is to imagine yourself suddenly flung into life from some unthinkable distance, jerked up into life from some unthinkable Limbo. You look round, you take stock of your surroundings, of your situation. What is the worst that could happen to you? Simply to be back whence you came again!

But you will say, “It is life I suffer from, not death.” No, no, it is not life that hurts you so. It is the *events* of life. It is your refusal to see the wood for the trees! Small blame to you for wishing you were dead when you are the victim of an interminable procession of devastating details. But these details are not life. The death you desire is much more like life than they are. In fact in comparison with these things it is a part of life, the eternal *other side* of life.

What we all need, what if we possess any imagination at all we can all get, is the grand release and escape of plunging into *death-in-life.* If you were really dead these things would not be so important. Your loved ones would either die too, or they would somehow survive and struggle on. When your ailment returns, when the rent-collector knocks, when your self-esteem is outraged, when your headache begins again, when your day's work has been a failure, *kill yourself.* It is the best thing you can do. Kill yourself in your imagination! And then when you are dead and the coffee, or the tea, is put on the table — even if it is unpaid for — you will have the privilege of suddenly *coming to life* and doing so with a deep sigh of content.

It is incredible what a number of escapes and rescues and refuges really lie between the most miserable of us and the actual bread-line.

Here sit you, here sit your companions. You have been flung into this scene from Nothingness; and, after a succession of such scenes, it won't be the bread-line or the poor-house — in all probability — but the same Nothingness that will await you again. The curious thing is that it is not the extremely poor, living from hand to mouth, who suffer most from worry and futility, but we of the bourgeois class, who have so many refuges and barriers and railings between ourselves and starvation.

What are called practical people — and dumb idiots they mostly are — have a way of assuring us that if we worked a little harder we shouldn't have time to worry. Yes, and we shouldn't have time to live either! The Lord deliver us from the oracles of practical people!

The thing to do is to pause often in your work and think and imagine, and say to yourself, “Well, it will soon be over, and I shall be sipping my tea, and stretching my legs, and thanking fate I am not yet in the poor-house.”

A wise man or a wise woman is the person who, if work is tiring — and *all* work, including what Homer calls “the work of love,” grows tiring sometimes — calls to mind the few really relaxed moments that fate allows, the cup of tea, the cup of coffee, the glass of beer, the seat by the fire, the bench in the sun, and above all the incredible relief of pulling the sheet under the chin when the head sinks on the pillow. For, when you really think of it, the moments in all our lives when, in the midst of our work, we suddenly get one of those unaccountable thrills of happiness that seem to arise for no reason at all, are the moments that make life worth living.

Well, if these good moments for all our wily technique, are so rare, their best substitute, and this *is* within our power, are these conscious anticipations of release from toil, when we sip our coffee or tea, and smoke in peace, or finally pull the bedclothes over us and invoke the honey-sweet embrace of the younger sister of death.

I do not mean that in acquiring the trick of dealing with our worries by sinking into that larger aspect of things which underlies their turbulent surface we should cease to take practical measures to cope with these difficulties. I mean that even *while we are dealing with them*, even while we are tinkering at them and plotting and planning to get them under control, it is good to remember that at the worst our life will “go,” as the negroes say, “inching along” somehow, and the world will not come to an end.

Take what practical measures you can; but always keep in touch, underneath each pre-occupation, with that detached ether of absolute irresponsibility which is the element of real life and real death. This, it is true, is much easier for a man than a woman; but on the other hand a woman's pre-occupation with any particular worry ought to be so modified, by her being so much more involved than he is with *the whole field of worry* that this especial thing does not tower up, out of all proportion, as in the man's imagination it tends to do.

One class of worries ought summarily to be dealt with by a drastic gesture of the mind. I refer to the good opinion of others.

It is one of the worst curses of a certain type of sensitive nature, with a mania for being liked and respected, that it should always be brooding, like the luckless Macbeth, upon the "golden opinions" of other people. But those who suffer from this must make one crushing, rending, violent motion of the mind and force themselves to face the rough, jagged bed-rock reality, namely that we are all absolutely alone, and that the only ultimate censor of one's behaviour is oneself. There is an important further fact in this connection, namely that our friends are much less concerned with us, whether for good or ill, whether to our praise or to our dispraise, than we are liable to imagine.

And you will be astonished how people come to accept your stubborn independence and your indifference to what they think of you, when once you begin boldly and decisively to go your own way.

We cherish the illusion that our friends are thinking of us all the time, either in praise or dispraise, whereas we ought to know, from our own thoughts of *them,* that they are far too occupied with their own affairs to give us, for either good or ill, more than the most casual concern.

This sensitiveness to the good opinion of others, even of our nearest intimates, is one of the "last infirmities" of a noble mind, but it is also the foster-nurse of endless hypocrisies. Make one crushing, crashing, confounding motion of your mind, and appoint yourself sole judge of your own behaviour.

I do not mean by this that it is not wise to yield — if you are a man — to the practical wishes of your particular woman; but, even with her, if you are to possess your soul in peace, it is best not to base your happiness upon her opinion of you. Base your happiness upon no opinion outside your own conscience; and, as I have repeated all along, you must beget a sort of *sub-conscience,* even below that, which will tell you that there are times when it is right to be deliberately *bad*, as well as deliberately good!

Hitherto I have been dealing with the definite worries that spoil our happiness in both our active and our passive hours; but now it is necessary to face that deeper and subtler enemy, the vague feeling of futility that comes over us, taking the heart out of everything, futility in ourselves, futility in Nature, futility in life.

A Machievellian Handbook like this must suggest more ways than one of dealing with the various demons that torment us. From some of these demons it is certainly best to escape by flight, and the worst of them can only be escaped by that sort of absolute flight that resembles death, I mean the absolute obliteration from our mind of what it is madness to remember; but with regard to this Demon of Futility, though no two victims of it will use the same weapons, one desperate mode of attack, if we have enough vitality to make it, is to draw in upon ourselves from our immediate surroundings, gather our spirits together, like a crouching animal about to spring, and then, like the animal when it *does* spring, to plunge with a spiritual leap forward, into the vast rondure of the Cosmos about us. Our body meanwhile, in its world-weariness, remains absolutely immobile. But our spirit, “Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,” plunges into the hard resistant curves and angles and planes and cubic-substances, into the colours, bright or drab, garish or dingy, that surround you, into the very bodies and faces of the people who surround us, into the atmosphere that overhangs it all, into the opaque body of the earth that underprops it all, and, on, on, through these, and beyond these, into the receding hollowness and unthinkable emptiness of interstellar space!

But our own plunge into the cosmos must not stop here. Arrived at the ultimate black gulf between the stellar systems we will suddenly find ourselves at the mental limit of that *false infinity*, that mathematical infinity composed of circles and boundlessness, which is the circumference and the No-Man's-Land of our particular life-dimension. Here we have reached the very Viper's throat of the *rational insanity* that is at the heart of our futility-torment.

You are now at the boundary of human thought, at the point where human consciousness cannot go further *without cracking.* You have reached this point without a movement of your body. You have reached it through all obstacles, through the walls that shut you in if you are indoors, through the air that surrounds you if you are out of doors.

And now what do you find? You find that there is something in your mind, some integral portion of your mind, some innermost background of your mind, that remains — since it has the power of envisaging this ultimate barrier of thought — *outside what it envisages.* This rational thought-barrier is the cause of your feeling of futility; it is itself this futility. It is the futility in you, in Nature, in life. It is the grand Antagonist in the drama of your struggle to be yourself. But you have now discovered by making this thought-voyage from centre to circumference, that both centre *and* circumference are included in your own mind. You are in the system of things but you also are outside the system of things. By plunging to the limit into the ultimate futility you have come out on the other side. The futility that paralysed you has turned out to be an inevitable recoil of your reason when concentrated upon life; but you have become aware, by facing things to the uttermost, that this recoil itself has taken place *within* yourself and therefore does not represent the whole of yourself. It is your logical power, that terrible and insane instrument of your mind, evolved to measure futility and working with the paradoxes of futility, that has betrayed you.

When a human mind thus turns at bay against a universe which it condemns as futile, and against a self which condemns itself as futile, it has only to carry this revolt far enough, till it strikes the ultimate barrier, to know that by its mere *recognition of that barrier* it is already outside it.

A mind that was entirely futile, in a universe entirely futile, would be unable to recognise futility. Real futility would be unconscious of futility. It is because we are *not* this thing that this thing drives us to despair!

It is not our struggle to be happy that is mistaken; it is our false idea that we can find happiness anywhere but in ourselves.

Pleasure can come and go at random and by chance for it depends on outward things; but happiness does not depend on outward things. It is born of the mind, it is nourished by the mind, it is what rises, like breath in a frosty air, from the mind's wrestling with its fate. We are not born to be happy. We are born to struggle for happiness. We are born because of pleasure, but we are born in pain. We are surrounded by pain, and we are lucky if our end is painless. But deep within us is a sacred fount, from whose channel, by a resolute habit of the will, we can clear away the litter that obstructs the water of life. Not in what we possess, not in what we achieve, not in the opinion of others, not in hope, not in admiration, not in love, not in anything below or above the sun, is the secret of happiness to be found. It is only to be found in ourselves.

The essential nature of it who can tell? Some possess it whose lives appear as one long tragedy to others; and many lack it who have in appearance everything to bring it into being.

There are those whose lives are full of moments of distracting pleasure who have never been and never will be happy.

And there are failures, derelicts, fools, abjects, idiots, simpletons, paupers, weaklings, dolts, from whose souls, do what Society can, do what the Universe can, there flows, in spite of everything, this undefiled and undefeated spring!

It is a great mystery; but of this we may be sure; there is none born of woman without the fountain-source of this divine element in his being. The only question is, is our will directed resolutely to its evocation or is it not?

We can all love, we can all hate, we can all possess, we can all pity ourselves, we can all condemn ourselves, we can all admire ourselves, we can all be selfish, we can all be unselfish. But below these things there is *something else.* There is a deep strange, unaccountable response within us to the mystery of life and the mystery of death; and this response subsists below grief and pain and misery and disappointment, below all care and all futility.

And the startling thing about this response is, that it is independent of love, independent of pleasure, independent of hope, and can continue, as long as we remain true to ourselves, in spite of all reason, to the end of our days.

The Autobiography

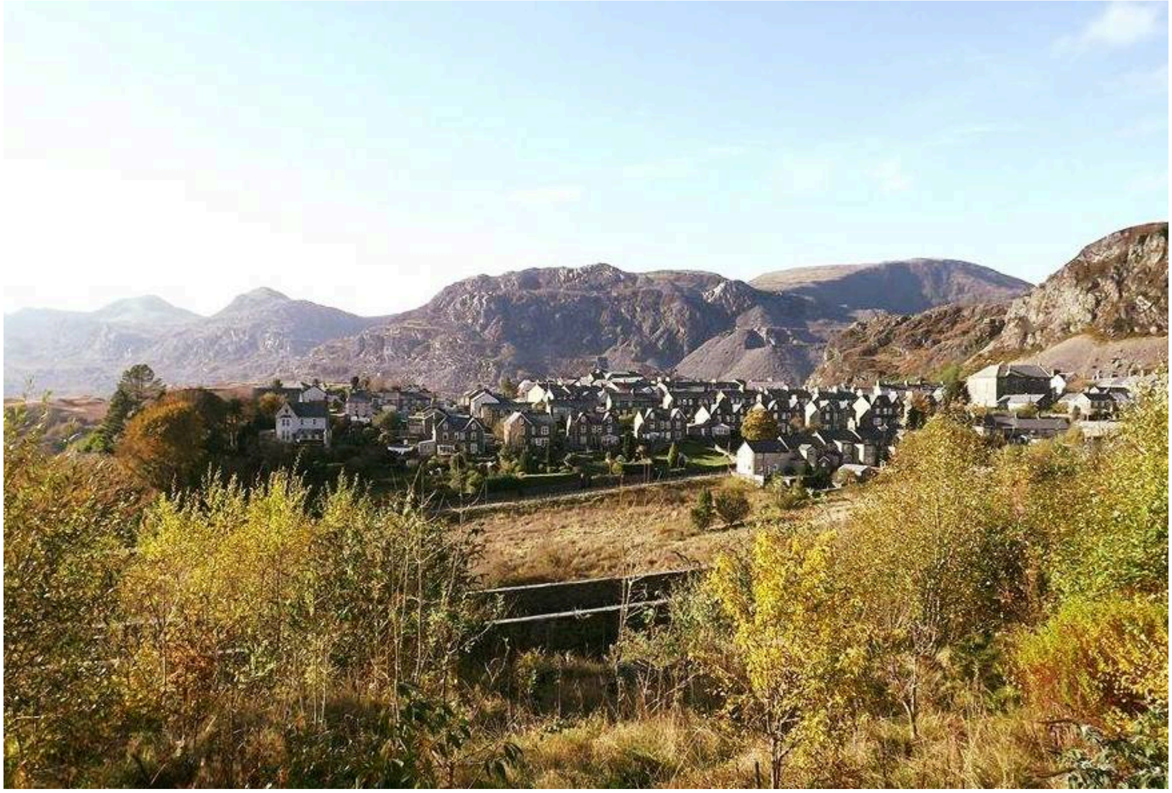

Blaenau Ffestiniog, a town in Gwynedd, Wales — Powys' last home, where he moved to in 1955.

Waterloo Cottage, Blaenau Ffestiniog — Powys' home for nine years

Autobiography (1934)

Powys’ *Autobiography* was first published by John Lane of The Bodley Head in the UK in 1934. He dedicated the book to his mother Mary, who had literary heritage as a distant relative of the renowned poet John Donne. She was also the granddaughter of John Johnson, a poet, clergyman and editor and the cousin and close friend of writer William Cowper. Powys’ father, Reverend Francis Powys, is depicted by his son as a vibrant man, proud of his life and deeply engaged with the world. The author recalls Francis’ immense love of nature: he describes the sheer sense of wonder and excitement his father experienced picking wildflowers during a country walk or collecting shells and rocks from trips to the beach.

In his memoir, Powys traces his childhood days from his earliest memories in Shirley, Derbyshire, where he lived for the first seven years of his life through to his time spent at Weymouth and Dorchester to his experiences at Sherborne School. Powys was the eldest of eleven children and maintained close relationships with his siblings into adulthood. Two of his brothers, Llewelyn and Theodore were distinguished and well-known writers, and his sister Philippa was a poet. *Autobiography* is remarkably frank in describing certain aspects of his life and psychology, but one topic which he studiously avoids is his romantic relationships with women. He also, despite dedicating the book to her, barely mentions his mother or his sisters while writing in detail about his father and brothers.

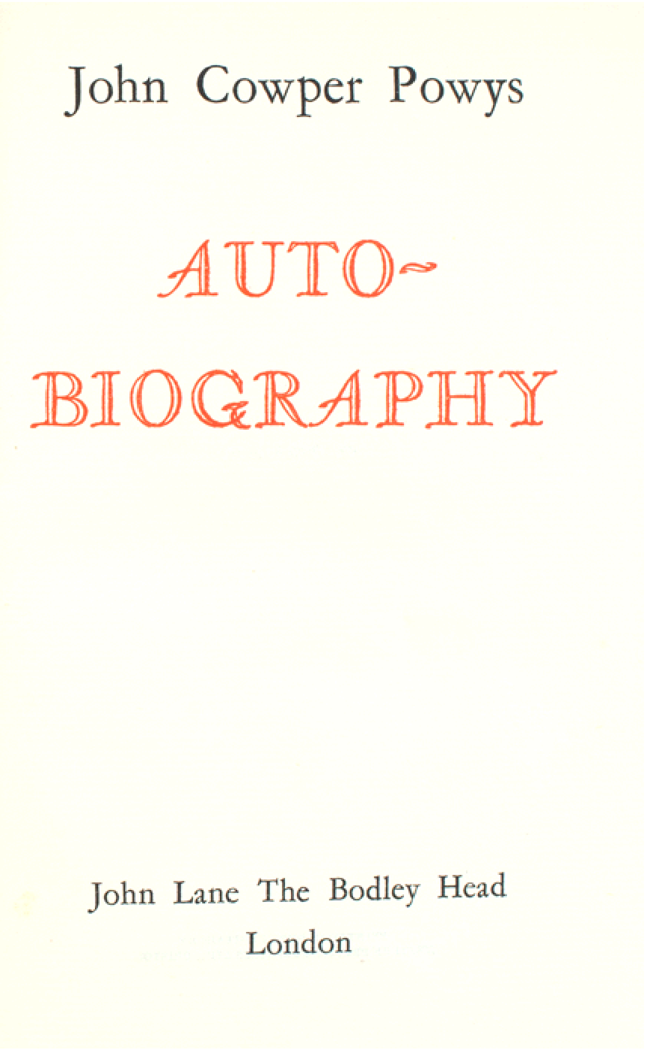

John Cowper Powys

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

John Lane The Bodley Head
London

The first edition's title page

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Powys, 1925

DEDICATED TO

MARY COWPER POWYS

CHAPTER ONE. SHIRLEY

THE PART OF Derbyshire which centres round the Peak is like the boss of a shield. Dovedale must be included in the circumference of this Omphalos of England; and with some largess of extension, like the elaborate margin of a Homeric shield, the little pastoral villages around the country-town of Ashbourne might be regarded as coming into this formidable circle.

Swift and furious are the waters of the Dove; and rough and wild are the rocks and shallows, the rapids and the falls over which its rain-swollen torrents run. The steep and very often cavernous precipices that mount up on both sides of this swift stream, a stream that might be compared to a falcon in dove's feathers, arrive at a greater measure of the tremendous and the awe-inspiring than the comparatively confined limits of this particular stretch of scenery might at first glance have seemed to imply.

At any rate to the eyes of a small child the rocky valley of the Dove was nothing short of a *Tremendum Mysterium*. One of my earliest memories was the dim feeling of *immensity* produced by that grassy hill — to my mind now, for I have not seen it for more than fifty years, resembling a conical tumulus — which rose, and I presume rises still, in the neighbourhood of Dovedale. How magically sagacious is childhood in its power of arriving at boundless effects through insignificant means! For though this eminence — and its name was Mount Cloud — can certainly have been no towering Alp it will always remain to me synonymous with sublimity. Many aspects of children's days are silly enough; but how often the whole course of our subsequent history becomes an attempt to regain this sorcery, this power of finding the infinitely great in the materially small!

Since the overwhelmingly larger number of the things that come back to me from those early years are shameful, destructive, and grotesque, I am inclined to make the utmost of the one solitary constructive activity I can remember, which was a passion for erecting, at the edge of the shrubbery by the drive, numerous replicas of "Mount Cloud," composed of damp earth-mould covered over with moss.

It is a criminal blunder of our maturer years that we so tamely, and without frantic and habitual struggles to retain it, allow *the ecstasy of the unbounded* to slip away out of our lives. Another idolatrous fetish that became a medium for an oceanic in-pouring of this "unbounded" and has left an even greater dent in my mind than the construction of all those microcosmic "Mount Clouds" was a wooden axe made for me by my father out of the trunk of an ancient laurel-bush. Well do I remember the cutting of those laurels from which this enchanter's weapon fell into my hands. I had been absorbed all the morning in the most wicked pleasure then known to me, although not the wickedest *possible* to me, of transferring tadpoles from the pond in the field to the puddles left by the rain at the side of the drive. Now my father always followed, in all moral and casuistical problems, certain primitive rules that had descended to him from *his* father: such as, for instance, when you took birds' eggs out of a nest, to add to your collection, *always to leave two*; or when you caught a fish with a hook never to let it remain flapping and gasping on the bank, but always *to put it out of its misery*.

But that an offspring of his should derive God knows what perverse satisfaction from taking the inhabitants — luckily tadpoles were all the little boy could catch — of a dark, cool, deep pond and placing them in shallow puddles, was something so outside his experience that he had no mandate on the matter. It was therefore the merest coincidence that by noon that day, when he had so strewn the paths of the little spinney at the end of the garden with cloven laurel-boughs that a sweet savour of aromatic wood, in this cruel hewing and wounding, was carried across the lawn, my father should have been moved by a natural desire that his son should behold these deeds of devastation and glory in his begetter's skill and strength.

Thus the tall figure of the Vicar of Shirley, in black trousers and grey flannel shirt-sleeves, might have been seen that day dragging his protesting son away from his puddle-colonies and conveying him by force to his own devastated spinney. Oh, how hard it is to live in Arcadia and not meddle with *some* species or other of autochthonous aboriginals! But aye! that axe of laurel, whose blade and handle were both of the same sweet-smelling wood, and from whose whole entity emanated such a glamour of fairy-story enchantment, that long after, when I was a boy with catapult, butterfly-net and fishing-rod, it often used to come over me that I had lost — for ever and for ever lost — a mystery that would have guarded me all my days. To get back that laurel-axe from that garden spinney at Shirley would now be to get back the full magic power of that timeless fetish-worship by the strength of which the quaintest, most ordinary object — a tree-stump, a pile of stones, a pool by the roadside, an ancient chimney-stack — can become an Ark of the Covenant, evocative of the music of the spheres!

The country immediately round Shirley was pastoral and undulating, not wild or terrific like that Vale of the Dove. At the same time it was as far removed from any influence of town or city as if it had been "among the furthest Hebrides." The little village of Shirley was reached by a narrow lane leading due East, if I am not mistaken, out of the broad highway that ran between Ashbourne and Derby, and it lay, so I have always imagined, just about the point where Charles Stuart's army of picturesque rebels turned back to Scotland, back to their lamentable defeat at Culloden, in place of advancing boldly upon London.

Between the Derby Road and the Vicarage drive-gate, for our house was the first human dwelling reached by this lane, grew a tall pine-tree, one of the sort which my father was in the habit of teaching us to call "Scotch Firs." Near this tree, which offered an appropriate objective to many a nursery walk, was a small stile, leading by a short-cut across the fields to the historic highway, as it swept on, where the Highlanders had relucted to follow it, towards the valley-built town of Ash bourne.

Our house itself, as I recall it now, was a square whitish-yellow building surrounded by shrubberies and closely-mown grass. It was comfortable, rather than pretentious, but in the light of later acquired feelings about such contrasts, it was an absurdly big place to house a man in, even a man who was the father, as he became before we left, of five children — considering that the village, of which he was the parish priest, never in his time exceeded two hundred souls.

Since I was born here, and lived here till I was seven, it is singular that I have absolutely no recollection of the parish church. As far as my memory goes my father might have been a tall, powerful man in black clothes who did nothing but trim laurel-bushes, traverse hills, valleys, woods, lanes, spinneys, copses, at an incredible speed, and tell my two brothers and me, as we sat beside him after tea on the dining-room sofa, an interminable story about two mythic personages called Giant Grumble and Fairy Sprightly. All I can remember now of this never-completed tale was that its villain, the devil of the piece, was always a scientific pedant, called by the narrator *"the Professor,"* whose sinister activities required all the arts of both Giant and Fairy to circumvent and neutralize.

But although my father's labours as a parish priest and indeed every image connected with the little grey church in the midst of the village about half a mile away have been completely obliterated by time, the lineaments of the man himself come back to me as vividly from that early time as they do from all the later periods of my life. Enormous emotional and magnetic explosiveness, held rigidly under an almost military control, was the most characteristic thing that emanated from Charles Francis Powys. Born at Stalbridge Rectory in Dorset he had imbibed from his Wessex childhood certain West Country words and intonations which he would occasionally make use of, not so much in moments of excitement as upon occasions when solemn or poetical issues were involved. The greatness of my father as a personality was first manifested to me not as a priest, not even as a trimmer of laurels, but as the possessor of boots *with enormously thick soles.* If I could capture now the real significance of the soles of my father's boots I should be master of one of the great clues to the secret of the cosmos. Was it purely a matter of the wonder of contrasted size — the difference between the thickness of *my* boots and those of my father — that so enraptured me? No, there was something else! Those great boot-soles as I saw them in a row in a little back room near the kitchen must, I really believe, have become significant to me, in that mysterious way in which all through my life certain inanimate objects have become significant, by gathering into themselves that element in life that might be called *inscrutable ecstasy.*

Even when I think of my father's boot-soles in *these* days, when I am nearly thirty years older than *he* was then, I am conscious of some wonderful secret of happiness. This secret I have clutched at again and again, but always just missed it. Is it some very ancient magical formula that revives in me? Is it some subconscious awareness of all the Derbyshire mud and Derbyshire moss and grass and rubble that those thick soles had trodden upon? No! The stimulus that my imagination drew from my father's boot-soles, the thrill of psychic release and mysterious joy that I experience even now when I think of them in a certain way, have nothing in the least to do with what the man stepped on as he walked over hill and dale. They have to do, these feelings, with that under-tide of life-reaction which by degrees reveals, to a mind that learns to watch for its revelations, a secret of awareness which cannot be overrated. The fact that they *were* boot-soles, and their *raison d'être* the pressure of the earth under the legs of a man of my father's volcanic intensity of earth-feeling, is doubtless a significant symbol, but it by no means explains this singular childish emotion nor the yet more mysterious sense of something "far more deeply interfused" which still tantalizes me in regard to it.

My earliest impulses of a morbid or anti-social kind must belong to my third year of life upon this freak-bearing planet. I recollect very clearly the panic I felt when, playing the role of a hangman with the great bell-rope — I suppose it originally was used to summon people from garden or stable — that hung in the passage at the top of the stairs, I remarked that my brother Littleton's face had suddenly assumed a swollen and purple aspect. My screams brought assistance quickly enough and no doubt I was soundly slapped; but it is the terror of *having gone too far in a life-and-death game* that remained in my mind. The punishment left no memory.

My father must have been totally devoid of the least trace of sadism — that aberration of which I was doomed as I grew older to become so fatally familiar — for the only way he ever punished us, me and my two brothers, was by suddenly and without a second's warning, giving us one single rather violent box on the ear, the kind of blow that the Dorset labourers in his own childhood would have described as "a clip over the ear-hole."

That there is a vast chaotic element in life must be admitted, and that one of the most powerful among the Immortals who preside over our fortunes is the great Goddess Chance cannot be denied, but there is also a curious pressure among the experiences that befall us, experiences that our character moulds in their occasion, which, for all this play of Chance, has an underlying tendency, a verifiable direction, a motion, a drive, through all the twists and turns of accident, towards some implied fulfilment in accordance with some deeply-involved entelechy.

In the light of what I am now at sixty, taking this ambiguous "what I am" as an entirely subjective vision — for who with all his efforts can see himself objectively — such a destined direction, steered by the interior life-urge in its moulding of circumstance, takes the form of a half-conscious self-creation. And what shape, as I regard myself now, myself and what I have come to call my life-illusion, does this character-destiny assume? Unless all my self-analysis is superficial it assumes the shape of a compound, less self-contradictory than it used to be, but not even yet entirely harmonized, of five rather discordant elements. I will name them in the order in which, at the present moment, I feel them to be more or less dominant. They resolve themselves into — a desire to enjoy the Cosmos, a desire to appease my Conscience, a desire to play the part of a Magician, a desire to play the part of a Helper, and finally a desire to satisfy my Viciousness.

Now it is clear that among the other four only the Magician-wish really lent itself, and that not altogether, to an enjoyment, half-mystical and half-sensual, of this bewildering Universe. For by degrees I discovered that the *kind* of enjoyment of life I wanted was what might be called an *imaginative sensuality,* a sensuality that required for its satisfaction a fluctuating margin of vague memory, of memory that, as I was dimly aware of it, seemed to recede, if I may say so, into the human lives that went before me, lives that had experienced the same feelings I was experiencing, only in an unrealizable past. Now it will be clear, I think, that the desire to be a Magician, that is to say to exercise a certain supernatural control over my destiny and that of others, did not completely coincide with the pure, unadulterated enjoyment of sensuous feelings surrounded by an aura of obscure memories. Sometimes it coincided with the cult of such feelings; but sometimes, especially in hard times, it derived an independent pleasure of its own from a certain attitude of formidable and stoical endurance. And if the rôle of a Magician — with its implication of personal pride — did not always harmonize with the imaginative sensuality that was my dominant urge, the remaining elements fell often into disturbing conflict with it.

Conscience for instance! I cannot remember a time when Conscience was not a trouble to me, ordering me to do what I didn't want to do and to refrain from doing what I wanted to do. In fact it may be said at once that the grand struggle of my life has been between my Conscience and my impulse to live a life made up solely and entirely of sensual-mystical sensations.

I indicate my desire to play the part of a Helper as something distinct from Conscience, not only because it has often happened that this desire has conflicted with the more humdrum mandates of Conscience, but because it would undoubtedly have been strongly operative in me — by reason of those imaginative nerves which compel us to identify our own feelings with those of an alien existence, human or otherwise — even had I no Conscience at all.

Clearest of all, I fancy, to understand is the difficulty I have had in harmonizing my Viciousness with a life of sensuous contemplation. It is unfortunately evident enough that any sort of Viciousness, by the mere fact of its insatiable exclusiveness and savage intensity, militates against any subtler, more continuous, more comprehensive form of happiness.

Without any question, from earliest childhood up to the present hour, my dominant vice has been the most dangerous of all vices. I refer to Sadism. I cannot remember a time — so early did this tendency show itself — when sadistic thoughts and images did not disturb and intoxicate me. One of my picture-books, when I could not have been more than three years old, contained a picture of an eagle seizing upon a lamb; and from the age of three, that is to say from the year — for I was born in — till about the year, when I was fifty, this deadly vice transported and obsessed me. As a boy and as a young man it had greediness for its rival, and much longer than that it had a more normal, though never altogether normal, attraction to young women as its companion-vice; but it was not till I was fifty; and that date remains very clear in my mind, that I entirely overcame it. By "overcoming" it I mean never allowing myself to derive pleasure even for a moment in those sadistic thoughts which were my bosom-houris, the attendants at my pillow, for nearly half a century!

For the last ten years my Conscience — finding no doubt the temptation more within its power to resist — has been so rigid with me that it has compelled me even to skip those passages in modern books, and they are many, which play upon the sadistic nerve. I doubt if there is any reader of books in England or America with a more infallible wand than I for detecting the various degrees of sadism in a writer. I could name authors who deliberately indulge themselves in it — and I can catch the precise quiver of the evil nerve as they do so — whereas in Dostoievsky to whom it was obviously a temptation but who, as obviously, completely conquered it, every single trace of it in his books — not excluding "Stavrogin's

Confession,” deleted from *The Possessed* — has been sublimated and purified by the power of the spirit.

Whatever tricks I may play with my Conscience in other matters, in this matter — just because it *is* my dominant temptation — I am as honest as the most exacting and super-subtle casuist. I am *more* than moral in my avoidance of the thing. Even the faintest projection of sadistic pleasure in reading or in writing — not to speak of thinking — is nipped, and nipped rigidly in the bud. In fact it is nipped in its embryo protoplasm, much earlier than any bud! My Conscience in this particular has indeed become so powerful that it has habituated my consciousness to act automatically, until all sadistic situations — that is to say where the practise of cruelty has any “ricochet” of voluptuousness — are mentally expurgated, so to speak, in advance! This does not — any more than with Dostoievsky — mean that I am not “allowed” to write of sadists. What I am not “allowed,” is to write of sadists in such a way as to give to myself, *and to other sadists* this ambiguous thrill.

There is not one flicker, for instance, of this ambiguous thrill to be derived from *A Glastonbury Romance;* and yet in this book I describe in detail the pathology of a well-nigh hopeless sadist. But I achieve this — and with infinite care — without once striking the sensitive responsive chord. So inflexible is my Conscience in this matter that I would ten thousand times sooner spoil the “art” of a book by keeping this deadly shiver out of it altogether than run the risk of providing fuel for this sinister flame. In this point I am in complete agreement — and I think Dostoievsky would be too — with the old ladies of the lending-libraries who think that certain modern books come straight from the Devil. The old ladies are not in error. That *is* precisely whence they come! But except for Dante — where I *do* detect it — how few of the really great writers have the remotest trace of it! None in

Homer, in Aristophanes, in Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. None in Rabelais, in Montaigne, in Shakespeare, in Cervantes, in Goethe. But the truth of the matter is the general public can be fed with this sweet poison, and enjoy it too, without having the remotest idea as to the devil's-dam-dugs from which the sweetness comes.

One curious and interesting thing about my moral history is this, that throughout all the fifty years I gave myself up to the pleasure of sadistic thoughts I was intermittently struggling against perfectly legitimate and perfectly commendable sensuality. Since I grew to be fifty I have totally emancipated myself from the unfortunate notion that sensual pleasure *as such,* or sex pleasure *as such,* is wrong and I think that if in my youth I had had more completely free love affairs this peculiar viciousness would have had far less influence over me. I don't say it would not have always been a tendency of mine, for it is quite clearly an inalienable fatality of my nature, but I have always found that by far the best alleviation of my kind of cerebral sadism was to absorb myself in more normal sensuality.

It is therefore a curious thing that while my Conscience — in this matter I think in complete error — forced me to struggle against all sex-pleasure as essentially evil, I was constantly indulging in sadistic thoughts; whereas, when I stopped allowing myself the least flicker of a sadistic thought, I became convinced that every kind of sensual thrill that did not imply cruelty was wholly and entirely justifiable. And that is where I stand to-day. It is not that I ever practised — no! not in the smallest degree — the sadistic actions that I was always thinking about and telling myself stories about. I shall have occasion presently to confess in detail practically every one of my sadistic acts; for they all occurred in my boyhood and they could all be counted on the fingers of my two hands, possibly on those of one hand. No, it is in my thoughts that I have devoured — to dark ecstasy after dark ecstasy — this sweet, abominable Dead-Sea fruit.

“But to whom does that do any harm?”

I will tell you, my cynical friend. You may, if you please, be as uncompromising a believer in destruction and futility as you like, you must nevertheless admit that from any intense and concentrated cult continued night after night and year after year with intense absorption over a long period of time there must emanate magnetic vibrations of some sort permeating the surrounding air and leaving an evil impress that only gradually dies away. Thoughts, as Paracelsus taught, when they are visualized and brooded on for a long while, *tend to become entities.*

A person with a severe Conscience like mine, and a mind like mine, far too sceptical to be fooled by the dogmas of modern science, naturally relucts at the idea of creating elementals of cruelty and letting them loose on the air.

It is strange to me that I should have lived at Shirley till I was seven, and yet can retain so few recollections of my life during that time. I remember there was some sort of a summer-house in the garden in our day and I recall how once I made a hell-broth in a rusty iron cauldron in this secluded place, mixing in among other ingredients — none of which were as sinister as those mentioned in Macbeth — a little of the urine of both of us. If the most disgusting thing I ever did, or the most resembling the arts of Black Magic, was to mingle my urine in a cauldron with that of my brother Littleton, I have not incurred any very heavy retribution from “the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts”; but it is evident to me that though pushed on to break the routine of decency by mixing my urine with my brother’s I had a reaction against the whole episode; for as it comes back to me now I am conscious of a sort of queer puckering in my mouth and a movement of saliva from one part of it to another which is a sign of a faint “rising of the gorge.”

Our uncle Littleton, my father’s elder brother who was a captain in the army, came to stay with us at Shirley, a dignified, bearded man, with a square forehead. Our notion was that being a soldier he was necessarily braver than other men — braver for instance than Heber Dale, the postman, who was a hydrocephalic dwarf, braver even than “Stephen,” the gardener, who with my father’s help cut and carried the heavy Derbyshire hay in the glebe-field. I recollect well the vicious pleasure I got when seated on his knee in the evening, he permitted me to pound his bearded face with my fists to test the courage of this officer of the Queen.

No, I can remember nothing of the church at the foot of the hill; but of the narrow lane between high hedges leading down to the church I recall to this day, and it is one of my vividest memories, the exultation that poured through me like quicksilver, when walking once a little ahead of the perambulator, which carried my brother Littleton, I turned to the nurse-maid who was pushing it and announced triumphantly that I was “the Lord of Hosts.” A still earlier articulate speech of mine, uttered before I experienced what it felt like to be “the Lord of Hosts,” fell from my lips in our day-nursery, as I sat in my high chair with my brother opposite me and Theodore — the baby then — on the nurse’s lap, had to do with the respective sizes of two crumbs of bread to which I called the attention of the world, indicating that the large crumb was myself and the smaller one Littleton. Thus did the Principle of Relativity present itself to my intelligence.

It can, however, be well believed by any reader who can divine what opposite pole of emotion awaited the swing of a pendulum that could tilt as high as mine did that day in the lane, what an abyss of humiliating terror such an infant was challenging. Most children, as Dickens is always reminding us, are liable to appalling secret terrors. My whole life — yes! up to this very day, when in my hiding-place in the New York hills I recall these things! — has been one long struggle with Fear, self-created fantastical Fear. The shape which this Fear took in those Shirley days was one that has recurred, humorously enough, since I have lived in America, though from the age of seven to the age of fifty I have pretty well escaped it. I mean fear of the police. We had been taken to a private lake in the middle of Osmaston Park, a grand estate which was at that time passing into new hands; and after our picnic in this secluded spot I had flung into the water a considerable-sized dead branch! Oh! how that unfortunate branch — no more really than an old rotten stick — came to torture my mind! One of the grown-up persons of our small picnic party uttered, as foolish grown-up people will, the senseless remark that Johnny had better look out. The police would have him for throwing things into the pretty lake! Alas, poor Johnny! He not only "looked out," but he looked round, night after night, after night, from his cot opposite Littleton's cot, thinking to himself:

"They'll come for me. They'll come and take me away."

And such is, as always, the nature of Fear — that Proteus of a million masks — that not a word durst Johnny breathe of all this to a living mortal. Does any "immortal" ear ever listen to the heart's cry, to the wordless heart's-pulse cry, of the human soul cherishing in its bosom a Fear it must not reveal? It requires faith to believe it! Certainly when Bishop Ken's beautiful evening hymn … "Keep me, O keep me, King of Kings, beneath Thine own almighty wings" … was recited over my pillowed head, it brought only a temporary relief from that dark unrevealed, unspoken terror.

Well! Such is the nature of mortal life upon earth. Few of us but have, hidden away deep down in our nerves, some secret Fear which we are not “allowed” to speak of, even to our dearest. I suppose there *have* been cures by these ambiguous and dangerous psychoanalytical methods; but for myself I am inclined to think that it is better “to leave well,” though it is not exactly well, “alone.” It is certainly alone we are, and must ever be in the last resort; and it seems to me that it is the wisest and safest course to carry our “madness,” our hidden Fear, about with us, and allow it to change, as it will, its outward form according to the age we have reached. The great thing is to have faith in our power of forgetting, faith in that magical reservoir of Lethe which we all cherish in our being at a deeper level even than our torment. If anyone asked me what is the most precious gift that Nature has given us, I — worshipper of Memorv — would reply; “the art of forgetting!”

When I now look back over my life I would certainly never say that my childhood, from birth to seven years, was a happy one. If it was, I certainly do not remember it as being so, and if that accursed stick, flung into that water, was the first shape that this Fear-Proteus took it must be remembered that the divine art of forgetting takes long to develop. May it be developed completely before I drink the cold, all-obliterating forgetfulness of the grave!

One thing those seven years at Shirley did. They bound my life with the life of my brother Littleton in so fast a knot that death alone — and perhaps not even that — can ever loosen it. Oh, my old, old friend, whose hair at this late day is so much whiter than your despotic Johnny’s, how have I ever managed to withstand the buffets of Time and Chance since Fate swept us so far from each other? Far in space but not in heart or understanding! For though I no longer strangle you with bell-ropes, or hang you by your belt out of windows, that childish urine that we mingled in our youthful witches’ cauldron has mixed more than the chemistry of natures.

When I summon up my rather scanty memories of my Derbyshire birthplace, it comes over me as a singular thing what a difference there is between the more superficial alarms of life. Some of these, as I now think of them, carry a delicious shiver, a sweet imaginative tremor with them. But others, though equally external to the deeper motions of my soul, seem steeped in a bitter, harsh, acrid, evil juice.

There was a pond near Shirley, in some farmer's field, that we used to hear tales about, and that several times I was taken to gaze upon from the bank and wonder at. Once — and the priceless holy terror of that occasion is with me still — I beheld a great circle of ripples rise and expand in the centre of those mud-obscured depths. For months afterwards I kept working myself into self-hugging paroxysms of sweet dismay over that circle of mysterious ripples. It must have been some kind of a fish — probably a perch — but that circle of ripples grew and grew, until to my infant imagination, fed by a desperate desire for disturbing marvels, they became a manifestation of some huge pike, of preternatural dimensions, that had lived there in solitary grandeur for half a century!

My earliest impressions of my father never changed: nor did he change. He was a man who derived more thrilling pleasure — a deep, massive, volcanic pleasure — from little natural things than anyone I have ever known. My father's personal pride was stupendous, but it was nourished upon a simplicity that was equally majestic. As I think of him now it seems to me that he was more childlike than any of his eleven children. And we were all childlike to an unparalleled degree; and have ever remained so! Yes, it is clear to me now — and how well his children came to understand him! — that he used to derive a proud, emotional glory from the simple fact of being able to walk at all, with long steady strides, over the face of the round earth. But this touching pride of his, rising up from the atavistic depths of his broad *homo sapiens* chest, gleaming from beneath his corrugated brows, making his long shaven upper lip quiver and protrude, causing him to rub his bony hands together in silent ecstasies, always culminated when in his walks he found a rare flower or caught sight of a rare bird or butterfly. He was in no sense a scientific naturalist, you must understand. Few and far between were the botanical or entomological names he knew; but he was able to give the common English name, and I dare say it was often some primitive Dorset nickname, to these specimens of Derbyshire life, while Littleton and I watched with wonder how he came back with his discovery from the bottom of a ditch or the top of a bank. Seldom did he return home from his walks without a small bunch of wild-flowers in his hand; but his grand pride was his collection of birds' eggs, a really formidable collection, the remnants of which, sadly diminished by accidents in moving-vans, my brother Llewelyn still retains in his Dorset cottage. How proudly he used to talk — they were among some of his happiest moments — about his dangerous climbs, up trees, up walls of ruined castles, up sea-cliffs, down the sides of quarries, among precipitous rocks. Stories, too, of great rowing adventures, he would relate with flashing eyes, for he was an unwearied oarsman; and long before I had seen anything of the Weymouth coast except the wet and dry sand by the bathing machines, all the well-known sea-marks there, Redcliff Bay, the White Nose, Sandsfoot Castle, were imprinted on my imagination through a mythological haze of enchanted wonder.

For our life at Shirley was varied by yearly visits, by way of Derby and Bristol, to Brunswick Terrace at Weymouth, from whose sands and sea-banks he was always increasing his collection of shells. How few visitors to seaside resorts make any attempt to know the names of the shells that strew our stormy shores! But my father's volcanic pride, sustained by an inaccessible reticence, communicated to his offspring from their earliest years an abysmal contempt for worldly frivolity as compared with a certain grave, majestic, simple passion for natural history. But even this passion, the moment it took a more recondite *scientific* form became to him in a curious way absurd and ridiculous! It began to border upon the foolishness of that imaginary *bête noir* of his, “the Professor” who was always the villain in his never-ended fairy story.

He was followed as a matter of fact, in his position as Vicar of Shirley, when we left in my seventh year, by Mr. Linton, a nephew of his by marriage, who was a scientific botanist; but whenever science entered the field of his amateur natural history my father retreated into volcanic depths of contempt. The truth was, his interest in Nature was part of his passionate — but totally subjective — romance of life. Never have I known, and never shall know, a man with a more childlike sense of the incredible romance of his own existence upon earth. In this he was Homeric rather than Biblical. Every person of his life, every place he had ever lived in, took on for him the importance of something tremendous and mythological! His pride and his egoism in this ultimate matter were absolute. He had only to link up any human being, any place, with the experiences of his own life, and that person and that place assumed a curious fairy-like quality, *beyond normal reality.*

The man’s force of character was so deep, so formidable, so majestic — and incidentally so restrained — that in a thousand little things which touched his life he was *liable* to burst out with an intensity of emotion that was terrifying. That he did not more often “burst out” — it is the only way such a mountainous explosion can be characterized — was due to his really astounding self-control. Never once — no! not once — have I known him to indulge in physical violence. He never struck us when he was angry. That boxing of our ears — which he gave up when we left Shirley — was done "for our good," quite judicially, and in cold blood. I doubt if Theodore can recall it. Probably Littleton can. But I am not sure even of that.

Our periodic journeys from Shirley to Weymouth were, as may be imagined, great events for me. And yet such a bad memory have I — the result, I fancy, of my imaginative sensuality which at once devoured and forgot! — that I can recall very little of these momentous excursions. The *colour* of the railway engines was one thing that transported me with excitement. That the Great Northern engines should be green, and the Great Western engines a different shade of green; that the Midland engines should be of a muddy purplish tint, so it seems to me now, while the Great Eastern engines were black — these things thrilled me through and through. And again with the railway stations! The *length* of the station at Bristol, for instance, was a phenomenon that fascinated me. But it was in the actual movement of these trains that the particular thing obsessed my mind that has returned to me since *sans cesse* in travelling, and never without giving me the same curious and complicated sensation. I refer to the manner in which if you fix your eyes on the telegraph wires that accompany the railway-line you will notice them rising and rising and rising — till they are brought down with a jerk by the next telegraph-post. Wires mounting up and being jerked down, only to mount up again! And with the jerk that brought them down there occurred — I record the exact nature of my sensation — a curious kind of whirring sound like the throwing of a spear, combined with a humming and drumming in my ears, as if the spear had transfixed me. Was it the monotony and simplicity of our life at home that filled these rising and falling telegraph-wires with some ineffable secret? Or was it that the mere movement up, up, up, up — and then *down*, with a vertiginous shriek — was in some subtle way so significant of the whole secret of life that it cried aloud to some kindred, tragic, and perhaps equally resigned rhythm in my human pulses?

I think the thoughts and prejudices of our family have been profoundly influenced by what they ate and drank in childhood. My father never touched alcohol except as a priest at the altar, and he ate only the smallest quantities of meat and fish. He never even — to our astonishment as we grew into boyhood — had more than one egg at a meal! His chief food was bread and butter, varied by bread and treacle, for he never mingled these luxuries, or by bread and Dundee marmalade. His sole drink except water, which he did not enjoy, was tea. All eleven of us, while I was at Cambridge, and all ten of us to-day are still regarded by our friends as peasant-like and even cattle-like, in the delight with which we willingly devour slice after slice of thick-cut bread, enriched by jam, honey, or marmalade. The aged relative, to whose house at the end of Brunswick Terrace we used to go when those Posts of Destiny between Derby and Weymouth had fulfilled their appointed toll of dragged down wires, was in the habit of relating that the first infant lips that came to greet her from Shirley did so in the unexpected and not very polite fashion by uttering the imperious words: "Make tea!" Such was certainly not the refreshment indicated in Rabelais as proper for philosophical travellers; but no Pantagruelist has ever got a richer ecstasy, even from drinking of that Sibylline Fount which uttered the word "Trinc," than we have got, as a family, from drinking tea.

But Penn House, Brunswick Terrace, brings back to me many sensations besides tea-drinking. The bow windows of the drawing-room opened straight on the Esplanade — which was very narrow just there — and on the pebbled bank of the sea, across whose surface to the West you saw Portland, and to the East the White Nose and St. Alban's Head, but it was not these grander features of the view that I remember from those early visits. It was the contents of a curious room that you entered through folding doors from the drawing-room. This room might have been a studied and carefully selected exhibit of Early Victorian bric-a-brac, and its peculiar smell — where no lively tea-drinking disturbed the wistful Sylphs who hover over mother-of-pearl boxes and inlaid lacquer-work trays — that pathetic and beautiful smell of old fragrant carved wood — was wont to mingle with the smells of seaweed and fish and sun-warmed pebbles that came in through those large bow windows. This little room was really an ante-room; but it was an ante-room that was behind, instead of in front of, the room to which it was attached.

In those early visits to Brunswick Terrace it was a considerable event to be taken as far as the "dry" sand, where the donkey-stand was, and it was a gala-day to be allowed to play in the "wet" sand, out by the bathing-machines. For it must be understood — such is the variety of marine phenomena at Weymouth — that the seashore opposite Brunswick Terrace was entirely composed of shelving banks of pebbles, and it was here, because the water grew so quickly deep, that the fishermen drew in their nets and it was here — beyond "the red post" that later made such an impression on my brother Llewelyn's mind — that men were allowed to bathe without bathing-clothes.

It must have been in one of these visits, when I was five and Littleton four, that my father first took us across the ferry near the mouth of the old harbour. I cannot describe to you, and you would find it difficult to believe it if you had not seen it, the primordial pride — like a Neanderthal parent guiding his progeny along untraversed shores — with which my father would help us down the slippery stone steps covered with green slime into the rocking boat below! The whole occasion was an exciting one, for you had to select your ferryman from quite a number of boat-owners, and I can remember well the peculiar sense of somewhat ambiguous power I derived, in begging my father to choose *this* one and reject that one. Ayel but how he would expatiate on the art of “feathering” when we had ascended the steps on the Nothe shore and were sufficiently out of distance of the boatman! I can see him now in his long black coat, sitting by Littleton’s side, with the massive gold seals hanging from his watch-chain and a little streak of green slime on his sleeve. When he was happy and at peace he had a peculiarly strong resemblance to one of the larger carnivores; a resemblance that was not only due to the squareness of his face but to his low forehead and his long, quivering upper lip.

I expect before I was seven he had conveyed me by boat — himself using a pair of skulls without assistance — as far as Redcliff Bay; and without doubt before we left Derbyshire he had taken Littleton and me across the ferry, round the Nothe Fort, as far as Sandsfoot Castle. Here in the rock pools he made us acquainted with sea anemones.

“They are very sensitive creatures, Johnny,” he would say, as at the approach of my hand their tendrils closed up.

He would show us cowry-shells too, holding them with exquisite care in one of his broad palms and saying with intense pride: “My brother tells me they use cowries as money in India.” It was one of my father’s Homeric peculiarities — those grave ritualistic ways of his that did so much to enhance for us the whole dignity of life — never to say “Uncle Littleton,” when he spoke to us of the Captain, but always, with a respect in which awe seemed to swallow up familiarity, “*my brother*.”

Oh, how can I describe the peculiar smell that used to intoxicate my childish senses, unconsciously at first, but gradually quite consciously, when after any sort of an outing the inner door of Penn House porch was opened — the outer door, blistered by long hours of morning sunshine was never closed — of the interior of the little passage that was then revealed to us! Whether it smelt like that all the year round I cannot say; but the dominant element in it, though mingled with a vague sense of curios, larger than cowry-shells, brought home in his furloughs by “my brother” from India, was undoubtedly our own buckets and spades that stood there together with trailing riband-seaweeds hanging from the wall. To my childish senses there was a constant interpenetration between the whole seashore and the interior of this house; the spray and the foam and the jelly-fish and the starfish floating in and floating out all the while, and carrying my consciousness backwards and forwards with them between objects of art from India and the enchanted sands beyond the donkey-stand.

But we had other relatives to visit, during my seven years at Shirley, who lived in a very different part of the country from Weymouth. My maternal grandfather was at that time the Rector of Yaxham in Norfolk; and upon my simple and sensuous, if not passionate nature, another and very different landscape imprinted itself. In this country, lying almost at sea-level, and where nothing but poplars and alders and willows obstruct the rising and sinking of the sun, I remember at an age when my stature made it hard for me to see over the tops of the ears of full-grown wheat-fields, being transported with delight in a road near the railway-line by the feeling of absolute and unbounded power I got from grasping a stick by the middle so that the two ends protruded in front and at back pretending to be one of those Great Eastern Railway engines that in their black colour interested me so profoundly, after the green Great Western ones.

Many men when they come to be sixty can, I take it, recall the pleasure they derived from playing trains. Can they recall as I do, with the most vivid clearness, the precise *feelings* that accounted for the pleasure they got? I mean the sense that Johnny Powys, staying with his grandfather at

Yaxham, was really occupied with some transaction of a vaguely grandiose character that placed him in a position where others watched him, clung to him, depended on him, awaited his will, submitted to his caprices, and wondered at his wayward and mysterious purpose.

Of all mortal creatures one of the most desirable and enviable is the eft, or water-lizard, or newt, especially the black-backed orange-bellied newt; and I know that the intense ecstasy I derived from "playing trains" on that road near the Yaxham railway bridge, was balanced by the miserable disappointment I had when I found that the village pond at Yaxham — a pond in the meadows not far from the Norwich and East Dereham Railway — contained no newts, contained at the time I fished in it not even a tadpole. Theodore must have been three years old, Littleton four, and myself five at the epoch of our later visits to Yaxham. For I remember it was for the benefit of, but not in concurrence *with,* these younger ones, that I transformed myself, by a subjective metempsychosis, into a black locomotive; and in my rage when my net brought up from that muddy water nothing but a peculiar species of large water-snail — I can see the things now! They were in their right world at the bottom of a pond; but as a substitute for an orange-bellied newt, floating, floating, its feet outstretched, as it sinks voluptuously down, without a movement of its tail. they were decidedly unappealing — I cannot recall that my feeling was comprehended by my fellow-infants.

I have already named as one of my dominant life characteristics a desire to be a magician. But along with this desire appears a much less commendable one, a desire to be recognized as the possessor of noble sentiments! A pitiable example of this latter tendency, which I am afraid must be sternly differentiated from a desire to feel noble sentiments, occurred when the news reached us, while we were staying at Yaxham, of the sudden death from cholera, of my father's brother Littleton, the soldier, whose face I had so perversely enjoyed striking with my fists. I can remember the exact look of the rain, making little pyramids of water as it fell in the puddles by the side of the avenue that led to my grandfather's house, while my heart expanded with pride while I explained to my relatives how impossible it was for either Littleton aged four, or Theodore aged three, to feel this event in the manner in which I felt it.

But to return to our life at Shirley. Here too, as at Penn House, there was an ante-room connected with the drawing-room, but this ante-room had to be traversed before the drawing-room could be entered. Rooms in a house where a child spends its infancy take sometimes their lasting character from the most curious accidents. This ante-room at Shirley remains in my mind to-day as a place of execution! I had overheard my father retail aloud from his reading of *The Standard,* the conservative daily paper by which he regulated his very simple political ideas, an account of the execution of some unlucky member of our uncle's military profession. With a lurid interest I had followed every detail of this tragedy: how the unfortunate man had been compelled to dig his own grave into which he finally fell backwards under the bullets of the firing-squad. On this occasion both Littleton and Theodore were dragooned by their elder brother into assisting at a court martial in the ante-room. Who it was who fired the volley, who it was who fell into the grave I have forgotten; but among all the games we must have played together in those days the only one I can remember with any distinctness was this of "the Traitor's Execution" carried through with such realistic verisimilitude in that colourless apartment.

The life-long detestation of what is called "Society" — the ingrained anti-social tendency in me — was clearly manifested on one occasion at Shirley which even now gives me a little shiver of revolt when I recall it. It was, if I am not mistaken, when some of our kin from Norfolk were staying with us, that I was taken, Littleton and Theodore being too young to participate in such an event, to a large garden party at Osmaston Park. I fancy this must have been one of the first entertainments given by new owners of this old estate and I dare say there was an atmosphere of new-fangled ways about it all, very different from what we would have found in the domain, for instance, of old Mr. Oakover of Oakover, another squire of the neighbourhood, whose ancestors without a break went back to Saxon times.

We were all assembled in the pleasant June weather on the sloping lawns of the big house, and the scene must have assumed that particular look of an English Fête Champêtre so dear to Henry James, when some brisk fantastical pedant — an embodiment no doubt of all the qualities of my father's detested "Professor" — skipped up to us with the request for a party of children to hunt about for some rare specimens of feathered grasses, then in their hey-day of flowering, which he was anxious — or made out he was — to add to his "Herborium." Our hosts insisted that little Johnny Powys — sulky, miserable, rebellious, distracted — should join this accursed botanical fashionable search-party; and I now recall the helpless misanthropy with which I made my lugubrious way through those feathery growths, too cowardly to leave my companions in a desperate retreat, but resolute not to pick a single grass blade in the interests of science.

Precisely the same sort of situation arose long after — on what was called "Flower Sunday" at Sherborne School, when all the boys in their tall silk hats were sent forth in gregarious charity to pick flowers for a hospital — and Powys Major once again neither joined in, nor heroically absconded.

How often in my life there have come such moments when I have turned away in sullen apathy from the tribal activity into which I have been flung!

I can recall the feelings so well with which at such times I have hunted round in my recalcitrant mind for a fellow-Ishmael, or Ishmaeless, and found none. I can remember once ever so much later — when we lived at Montacute — feeling aggrieved with every member of our large family — and walking alone up the lane, beyond Mr. Marsh's farm, in the direction of Thorn Cross, searching for this unknown fellow-outcast.

I never found out the trick of reading to myself till after we had left Shirley, when I was seven years old. This I know for a certainty; though seven seems a very late epoch in a person's life for such a momentous discovery. But as a family we were all extremely slow in mental development and such achievements as we subsequently arrived at were the achievements of invincible childishness prolonged into mature days. Yes, I know for a certainty that when we left Shirley, in my seventh year, I had not yet learnt the trick of *reading to myself.* Let me anticipate a little to make this point clear. It was just after we were settled in Rothesay House, Dorchester, that I spent the whole of one very wet afternoon reading to myself in my father's study. My father was absent, visiting the poor in this ancient town, for he had become curate then to Mr. Knipe of St. Peter's Church; and seated in his high-backed arm-chair — I forget which of us possesses that chair now, but it was the object against which we all used to kneel by his side in preparation for every important crisis in our lives — I read with intense, prolonged, and spell-bound absorption *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Equally with *Alice in Wonderland* which must have been read aloud to me, this book was at once completely metamorphosed to the purposes of the Powys family. We treated the facetious, the jocular aspects of it *as if they did not exist.* We took the literal words of it; and solemnly proceeded to render them grave, serious, realistic, and mythological! And as

I did this with the creations of this fantastical-brained mathematician *I did it with the whole of life.*

As I have insisted from the start, my dominant life-illusion was that I was, or at least would eventually be, a magician; and what is a magician if not one who converts God's "reality" into his own "reality," God's world into his own world, and God's nature into his own nature?

But what impression, if any, had I received of the magic of *literature* before we left Derbyshire for Wessex? I will tell you; for this is as clearly remembered by me as was that first occasion at Rothesay House when I read *Alice Through the Looking Glass.* It happened in the dining-room at Shirley, where often, instead of in the drawing-room, we used to gather round the mahogany table after tea. The whereabouts of this table at the present hour I believe I *do* know. I think it has crossed the East African jungle from Mobasa to Nunyuki, and now occupies the sheepman's house of my youngest brother Willy. It was at this table, then, under the lamp, and I fancy it was in winter, for the great green curtains with red-embroidered tassels covered the windows, that my father read to Littleton and me — Theodore being asleep in his crib upstairs — a warlike poem called "The Passage of the Rhine." He chose this poem, for reasons of his own, out of a big illustrated quarto we had of Aytoun's *Scottish Cavaliers.* The German river was crossed on that occasion by exiled Highlanders, in the service — I suppose, of the King of France. Whether he read any of the much more thrilling poems in that volume I cannot say, such as "Dundee" and "Flodden," but the important point — at least to me — is that I received my first impression of the enchantment of literature in connection with exiles, and with exiles whose own cause seemed irretrievably lost.

It was however the illustrations of Aytoun's book that influenced me most. Take it all in all, no book — no, not any! — has had an effect upon me equal to this one. Aytoun's verses did a lot, but the illustrator of this grand edition did much more, to turn me once and for all into an obstinate, incurable romanticist. Nor did the influence of this book stop there. It was not towards any merely *vague* romantic world that it set my heart groping and fumbling. Aytoun's *Scottish Cavaliers* stirred up, down deep in the central pit of my stomach where the umbilical cord must have been, that peculiar Celtic emotion — Matthew Arnold describes it beautifully, nor is it important whether he describes it correctly — which, like the spirit of Wales itself, is always returning, like water seeking its level, to its own proud, evasive, ingrown, interior being.

My father's eyes used to burn with a fire that was at once secretive and blazing, like the fire in the eyes of long discrowned king, when he told us how we were descended from the ancient Welsh Princes of Powysland. From an old Welsh family long ago established in the town of Ludlow in Shropshire in what were formerly called the Welsh "Marches" we undoubtedly did — Princes or no Princes — as the genealogies put it, "deduce our lineage"; and I am inclined to think that there has seldom been a mortal soul — certainly no modern one — more obstinately Cymric than my own. I am quite prepared to admit that the Cymric tribes were not the aboriginals of Wales. But whatever they were, even though they made use of legends and traditions belonging to the conquered, who in *their* turn probably made use of the yet earlier legends of the men who carried out of Wales the "foreign" stones wherewith to build Stonehenge, they seem to have been, to use Jung's phrase, the most "introverted" of all races. Possibly the men before them in that remote and mountainous principality were "introverts" too! Probably the oldest wisdom in Wales was that wisest and most ancient of all human wisdom; namely that it is within the power of the will and the imagination to destroy and recreate the world. Yes, it was perhaps more the illustrations of this particular edition that stirred up this old Welsh temper in me than the verses themselves; and yet I soon came to know one of these verses, “The Burial of Dundee” so literally by heart that the emotion it contains, mingling with what I inherited from my father of secret, furtive, reticent pride, and mingling with the general “aura” of these romantic illustrations, has affected deeper than I could possibly make you believe, the actual feelings I have when I catch sight of certain rocks and stones and trees and rivers and wooded hills.

It was at this same dining-room table one winter evening that Littleton and Theodore and I were shown a very queer book — but I am certain that they have both forgotten it — which takes its place for me side by side with that laurel-wood axe in its supernatural importance. *People do not understand how imaginative a child’s life is.* When we grow up we ourselves forget. So it comes about that whole symbolic worlds, full of the strangest marvels, vanish into an annihilation so deep that it is hard to conceive it. This book in appearance was as big as a folio but it was a new book and not an old one, and it was as thin as a wraith. It was a real book, some kind of an illustrated fairy-story — in fact it is conceivable that it was one of the more fantastic of Shakespeare’s fairy-plays. Even as I write I see it under the lamp on that bare mahogany table — and, mark you, reader! I have never, as well be the case again and again in this present work, breathed a word to a living soul about this incident — but it had that same effect on me that the laurel-axe had. It seemed to be something more than ordinary, *natural* enjoyment! It was as though in that wooden axe and in this enormous book, so large, and at the same time *so thin and frail* that I feel now as if it had only a paper binding. I touched some incredible secret of happiness; some of the sort of happiness that elementals know, or beings who are exempt from the infirmities of human flesh.

Where children have the grand advantage over grown-up people is in their freedom from the weight of authority and tradition. They are forced to behave properly at meals and lessons and never to make themselves a nuisance; but in their play-time, which is of course the bulk of their time, the majority of children, even *only* children, are left to invent their own "games" as they are called. Now this use of the word "games" for the great purposes of children's life is extremely misleading. Older boys and girls play games of course; and as they play them they accept them as games; and the younger children are often cajoled or bullied into learning the arbitrary rules of these pastimes. But the passionately intense *inner life* of children, that imaginative existence which is to them the whole purpose and vital interest of their days *is not a game.* It seems a game to the grown-up people around them. But so far from envying the grown-up reality of these older person's life, or admiring it, or thinking how to imitate, children have a permanent underlying contempt for it as lacking in the one thing important.

This one thing important is *magic.* Children are unable to explain this! They do not know what the word means. I confess I am not perfectly clear about that myself. But whatever it is, it implies two things. It implies the feeling of a living power over matter and over nature. And it implies a great gap in space, a pure clear void in this whole system of things, where absolutely new reactions to life rise, like fairy bubbles, and go floating off into the unknown! It implies a lot else besides. But the great point is that the most thrilling moments of happiness with a child are *secret and magical* and come from *a level of reality* which is completely different from the level of reality of grown-up people. Children do not play ordinary conventional games unless they are encouraged to do so by the older boys and girls. Children's "games," strictly speaking, are not games at all. They are the child’s inmost reality! They are the child’s life-illusion. They turn back to them with a sigh of relief from the impertinent intrusive activities of grown-up people.

The truth is, children are not half-men and half-women, or half-boys and half-girls. They are a race *sui generis.* They are a race of beings to themselves. And it is in the power of this curious race of beings to plunge into the secret of life more deeply than all other mortals. More deeply? Ah! The whole problem of the blunder of our Western civilization is implicit here; for it concerns the nature of what we call reality.

Real reality is entirely of the mind. It is partly good and partly evil. But it holds the *lower reality* — that mere plastic agglomeration of matter and material force — in subjection. It creates and it destroys this *lower reality* at its wilful and arbitrary pleasure. This is why it is only vulgar and ill-bred people who give their children expensive toys. To a real child *anything* will serve as a toy. Cheap toys do no harm; and they give these unique beings incalculable pleasure. But it is always their old toys, however cheap, that children cling to. Why? Because they are no longer simply *toys.* They have become the mediums, the bridges, the ladders, the trap-doors, the magic carpets, by which they enter the kingdom of heaven; enter, in other words, the rainbow-land of their own imagination!

Fumbling about, as my imperfect memory is doing now, among the scanty impressions of those Shirley days I ask myself what dominant urges of my after-life can be traced as far back as this and what cannot. The desire to be a magician is there without any question! When I was suddenly transported with rapture in that little lane going down the hill to the village, as I stumbled along the muddy ruts in front of Littleton’s perambulator, pretending to be “The Lord of Hosts,” it was a desire for some obscure magical power that inspired me.

What I cannot find in my memory, do all I can to find it, is the faintest evidence of that conscious embracing of Nature with a psychic-sensuous ecstasy in which I came to experience later my deepest sense of the purpose of life. I am convinced that many people looking back on their childhood before the age of seven can recall moments in which they cried aloud with entrancement: “Oh, I am so happy! Oh, I am so happy!” simply and solely from their conscious awareness of what Wordsworth calls “the pleasure which there is in life itself.”

Such moments I can remember well in other places and later in my life. For instance at Penn House in Weymouth, when I must have been about fifteen an ecstasy came to me, morning after morning, as I saw the sun glittering on the sea. The glitter of the sun upon water has since that time become one of my recurrent symbols of the enchantment with which the self can fling itself upon the not-self in a spasm of mystical sensuality. But not a single one of such moments can I remember at Shirley Vicarage! I will tell you the nearest approach to such a thing that I can recall; but I regard this memory as entirely different from those glimpses of the sun on Weymouth Bay because it was not accompanied by any conscious awareness of its relation to the happiness of life, an awareness that *could* be disentangled, if you cared to make the distinction, from the particular phenomenon that called it up at the moment. The experience I am now thinking about might be called a purely æsthetic one, though it had to do with Nature.

We always had prayers at eight in the morning, and breakfast afterwards; and on winter mornings, although if I am not in error our dining-room looked East, my father had to read the Bible by candlelight. One morning, between prayers and breakfast, I recollect perfectly well being thrilled by seeing the sky assume a greenish tint. I must have seen many a red sky during that winter and during earlier winters — for I take it that I was six when this occurred — but I had never seen this peculiar tinge of green covering the whole expanse of the Eastern sky, and it made a tremendous impression on me. I suppose the near approach of the cottage loaf of brown bread and the enormous pat of butter from which my father loved to dole out every helping we had, enhanced my pleasure in this green sky, but as I think of it now it was the marvellousness of the sky being *green* that made such an impression upon me. It is certain that I have retained, ever since that day, a curious lust for that green colour in the sky, and a delight in it that has remained what I am inclined to call a purely æsthetic pleasure. Other effects of sunrise or sunset — for instance the more usual one of bars of massy gold, or of blood-red streaks against a watery-gold background — have often filled me with that vague spiritual nostalgia which seems one of our universal human feelings; but the feeling that a *green sky* gives me is quite different. It has no mysticism of any sort about it. The surprise of there being a green colour at all up there in the sky seems to preclude mystical emotions; and with me at any rate that peculiar green tint is so intensely, so physically satisfying that like the cottage loaf and the home-made butter, it is complete in itself and has no margin for afterthoughts.

There was another natural phenomenon at Shirley that made an indelible impression on my mind, but, like the green sky, an æsthetic rather than a mystical one, and that was a widely spreading Pirus Japonica that clambered up the front of the house. This oddly enough is the only garden flower I can recall from those days; and I never see a specimen of this beautiful shrub without thinking of my infancy. It too, I think, like the unusual sky, has something about it that surprises the mind. A person does not — at least I did not — expect a fruit-tree to bear blossoms so extremely red! The only wild-flower that I can remember at Shirley — except when cowslips were made into “cowslip-tea” or into a “cowslip-ball” — had an effect upon me, *and still has,* totally different from the green sky or the red fruit-blossoms. I am speaking of cuckoo flowers. It comes over me now as I think of these unequalled growths and summon back the tall dewy grasses in the midst of which their lavender-coloured, light-blowing petals waved, that they are by far the most poetical of all our English wild plants. Yes, from the very earliest dawn of my consciousness of Nature I think of cuckoo flowers as fleeting and fitful, appearing shyly for a while, when the grasses, mosses, fern-fronds, are still full of new, fresh sap, fading all too soon, but while they last always growing where the dews are heaviest and where the streams are over-brimming their banks. Born of chilly dawns in wild wet places cuckoo flowers are the coldest, chastest, least luxurious, most hyperborean, most pale, most Gothic, most Ophelia-like of all our island flowers. Once and once only have I fancied I’ve caught sight of some of these “cold maids” in my adopted America. It was once when I was “on the road” with Padraic Colum, and he too thought that what we saw were cuckoo flowers — but I don’t know! I doubt it; and with the malicious home-sickness of the psalmist in Babylon I am tempted to wish that they grew nowhere else than in our grey rainy England.

I think it must have been the tone with which my father always spoke of cuckoo flowers, rather than anything he said in praise of them, that made these pale growths the very epitome of romantic poetry for me. He must have spoken of his native Stour and how they grew by its banks in such a tone that, as a dog understands things by the inflexion of the voice, so I must have understood that there was a fleeting magic about those particular flowers that made all others — those richly blue wild forget-me-nots, for instance, that grew by the banks of the Dove — seem arrogant and even fashionable! Pride, pride, pride! Yes, it was by a thousand slight touches, and sideway thrusts, and casual hints, and inarticulate indirections, that my father, in the manner of an exiled wolf or imprisoned fox, would indicate *the absolute inferiority* — a thing to be felt and known rather than argued about — of Derbyshire ways, scenery, people, customs, dialect, flora and fauna, to those of his native Wessex.

It was this fierce, inarticulate, irrational loyalty *to his own,* to all the old things, the old ways, the old people, the old battle-cries, the old causes, the old customs, that my father had the power of communicating to me without direct speech of any kind. A savage intensity of emotion, rising up perhaps — who can tell? — from some submerged level of Cymric *pride in defeat* that flowed down to him, from "battles long ago," through all the numberless generations wherein his ancestors had mingled with the invader, would be often stirred up over some little negligible occasion, some occasion ridiculously slight in itself, but in connection with which it was possible to pit the old, the artless, the quiet, the natural, the dignified against the showy, the artificial, the luxurious, the scientific, the modern!

In all matters connected with domestic economy, in all matters connected with domestic furniture, in all matters connected with the management of his garden, just as much as with regard to religion and morality, my father's strongest word of reprobation was "new-fangled," his strongest word of praise "old-fashioned." His egoism as I have hinted projected itself over its own past with such imaginative tenacity that without his making the least effort to do so he endowed everything in the least connected with the old Dorsetshire ways, with a superiority so infallible that to challenge it was to betray yourself as vulgar and new-fangled.

It must, I presume, have become known to my father at a very early epoch of my Shirley life that I was in the habit night by night of making my little cot shake with the feverish intensity of my infantile eroticism. I recollect well that I would be asked every morning if I had been "doing that"; and as I was then — as, judging from some reactions to my writings I am still — gravely and most solemnly honest in such little matters, I always answered with pathetic truthfulness; and since it invariably happened that I *had* "done that" I was accordingly punished, and had the fever of my childish viciousness cooled, by having ice-cold water poured over me. So strong was my tendency to premature perversity however, that when the night came the discomforting thought of this ice-cold water to be endured in the morning was as nothing to the dark, secret immediate satisfaction of my forbidden indulgence. And these intense orgies that — in my excited mind — shook not only my guilty bed, but all the pillars of my whole small cosmos, were without exception free from every sort of sensuality except pure sadism! Sadistic imaginations, and these alone, from my first awakenings of consciousness till I must have been about seventeen were able really to excite my abnormal eroticism.

I can well remember when we were driving one day into Ashbourne — my father had a tall dog-cart in those days and he would drive into the cobbled court-yard of the "Saracen's Head" with the gravest punctiliousness and order I-don't-know-what for his horse's comfort before he went out to do his business in the town — as we passed a little stuccoed cottage — ah! how long a memory our vices have! — that stood alone on the left hand of the great hill that goes down into Ashbourne, I caught sight of an old woman through the window holding a young woman — as it seemed to me — by the throat. The young woman's head was leaning back in a position that looked extremely unnatural, and the blood rushed to *my* head — but my father drove on, and the vision left this world. But though leaving this world it was not annihilated. On the contrary it transferred itself to that invisible "Book of Perdition" the nightly turning of whose pages condemned me, though without their self-imposed impulse of penitence, to the freezing cure for such temptations welcomed by the ancient Saints of the Thebaid.

Yes, below all the great systems of philosophic thought, behind all the great systems of mystical redemption, stir these ultimate personal reactions to the terrible urge of sex. It has been a wonder to me in later life, as I have listened to the wholesale attacks upon normal sex-delight made by puritan fanatics and to the wholesale defence of such pleasures made by sweet-natured sun-born pagans like my brother Llewelyn, how little, aye! how little, either of these indignant crusaders realize the maniacal intensity of the force they are quarrelling about. To my brother Llewelyn the word "sex" seems always to mean lovely poetic dalliance with warm-blooded friendly wenches under hay-smelling hedges. To the puritan it seems to mean a hatred of bare limbs, flushed cheeks, shining eyes and dancing feet. But to my less normal moon-struck nature it means a desperate insane obsession, completely abstracted from the poetry of the elements and having no connection at all with the æsthetic beauty of bare limbs, bright eyes, warm breasts and floating hair.

My own subjective definition of the power of sex would always be *vice,* that is to say an abstract impersonal sterile lust, entirely divorced from what is called "love" and selecting the objects of its desire without regard for either beauty or mental sympathy. Nothing has ever seemed to me so irrelevant as the championship of sex as something under the godlike auspices of earth and sun, a beautiful creative force full of life and joy. To me it has — until by infinite cunning I have steered it, purged it, sublimated it, narrowed it, concentrated it, diffused it — been always a world of intense absorption, a world of maniacal exclusiveness, of delirious exaction, of insane pursuit, a world existing parallel to the ordinary world of normal human activity, a world into which, when once you enter, and graze like a mad Nebuchadnezzar upon its fatal grass, the ordinary world appears completely dull, “stale, flat and unprofitable,” without lustre and without purpose.

There have been occasions — I can recall two such out of my American travels, one as I walked along a squalid interminable slum-street in Cleveland, and one as I sat eating buttered toast in a dingy little café in Scranton, Pennsylvania — when I have emerged through my demonic postern-gate into the world of normal reality and normal solidity to find this natural home of the human senses a place of intoxicating sweetness and charm. What I felt on those two occasions I have never forgotten. It was a unique feeling, a new birth! It was like that escape from “The Will to Live” described by Schopenhauer. Every desolate roof and forlorn mud-patch along that Cleveland road was radiant with a beckoning enchantment, every gleam on the sordid counter of that little tea-shop was a ladder leading to paradise. I had turned from my dead-sea with its apples of ashes and those terrible mirages in the unreal sands back to the sweet securities of the homely chemistry of de-sorcerized matter!

Llewelyn himself tells us how shocked he was by those symbols of pure lust on the sinister brick-red walls of the scoriac streets of ancient Pompeii; and you have only to enter one of the little Byzantine churches in the Rome we know to-day to realize what a rainy dew of cuckoo flower freshness must have fallen upon the jaded sexuality of the ancient world when — just as I did in that long street in Cleveland — it turned away from the slavery — *not* of the flesh, for had not the Word been made flesh? — but of the remorseless, unmitigated erotic nerve.

The word “sensuality” covers a great deal. I have now come myself to use it for a certain sort of *concentrated sensuousness* penetrated by something more intense, more ecstatic, than is usually associated with what we call by that name. But it has been by the path of a deliberate and concentrated sensuality that I have at last found a working substitute in our natural world for that terrible *other world* of purely vicious — and with me always sadistic — mirages of fatal obsession. Where the fantastical puritans make their mistake is in their abuse of these harmless words “carnal,” “fleshly,” “sensual,” and all that these represent. It isn’t the senses that lead us astray, it is the one terrible nerve. It isn’t the general amorous instincts that are at fault, it is the one solitary sex-nerve, isolated from the rest of life, and projecting a demonic insatiable fever of its own, *a land of fever*, whose purlieus and borders are the ghastliest of all “Terres Gastées.” This isolated sex-nerve in each of us resembles my own heretical and I dare say unphilosophical and illogical conception of the first cause. Its energy can be used to create and sustain a world, or it can be used to blight and destroy a world.

Human personality has other possibilities of cruelty. Brutality, violence, exploitation, oppression, insensitive thoughtlessness and anger and malice are not I suppose necessarily sadistic. Sometimes I seem to suspect that there may be found in all these evils a faint sadistic tincture; but I certainly do encounter plenty of malicious, brutal and cruel people whom it is very difficult to accuse of sadism. In fact much of the cruelty in the world appears to me to spring from mere thoughtlessness and a lack of imagination; whereas sadism is, in its inherent nature, aware, and imaginatively aware, of what it is doing.

Looking back over my life at Shirley then — those first seven years of my existence as a *homo sapiens* — I am struck, as I recall that remote past, by the complete absence of any memories implying either sensuality or sensuousness. These enchanted gateways into the mystery of life, these paradisic embracings of the elements which have done so much to mould my later days seem absolutely non-existent in those childish years. I cannot recall — I who later was so obsessed by greediness — one single instance of a thrilling moment produced by food of any kind. I cannot recall — I who have made such awareness into a religious cult — one single instance of ecstatic enjoyment of life for its own sake!

As far as my memories of these seven years at Shirley are concerned my whole psychic-sensual response to Nature appears a deliberate intellectual achievement, something *into which I have willed myself,* knowing it to be the true Tao, or Path of Deepest Wisdom. And yet I do not feel as if the little Johnny Powys of those seven years was not completely realized by me now and remembered by me now. He is clearly there, that little boy! I can see him; I can feel him; I *am he.* And yet he is so startingly different, in so many ways, from what I am now! But I know him — oh, I know him so well in the things where this little "Johnny," and the later "Jack" too, fuse themselves with the still later "John"!

Forgive me, reader, if once more I enumerate the particular experiences in those days that I share at this very moment, as I write this, lying on my couch at the window in "Up-state" New York. As I write this I am certainly that same Johnny-Jack-John who could be made to shiver and shake by the sight of a girl with her head thrown back, if that scene were brooded upon in connection with sadistic thoughts. I am certainly the same Johnny-Jack-John who can stare entranced at a green sunset or hunt for cuckoo flowers in tall wet grass. I am, oh most certainly! the same who has to struggle day by day, week by week, year by year, to forget, to annihilate by forgetting, the presence of this or that not-to-be-revealed fear. I am the same, too, as that little boy who cried aloud to the Universe in Shirley Lane that he was "The Lord of Hosts."

But there the likeness ends! With the little Johnny who wanted to mingle his urine with his brother’s urine, I, John, feel as though I had nothing in common. From the “Johnny” who takes tadpoles from ponds to put them into puddles I have become the not less meddling but less murderous “John” who takes fish from shallow pools to put them into deep pools. Although I no longer try to hang my brother Littleton, or “strangle him with my fingers long and lean,” or even — as I did at the “Powys Major” epoch of our life — want to roll him in a ditch, or run him down a steep hill into iron railings, I *do* sometimes feel an inclination, as I did one afternoon, when we were together only four years ago, on the road to Harrod’s Mill at Northwold, to dig my horny, antiquated chin into him, and burst out into a totally uncalled for Defence of Immorality!

There is one tragic thing about all these childish memories that I note however. If John has the advantage over Johnny in the matter of behaviour to tadpoles, Johnny has the advantage over John — and over Jack and “Powys Major” too! — in the matter of the laurel-bough axe. I still know what fetish worship is. I have a fetish worship to this day, for instance, for all three of my walking-sticks, and though I have never actually put them at the window, in my travels, so that they could share my view of the world, I do catch myself treating them as if they were demi-semi-animate. I also know what it is to be transported into a Seventh Heaven of rapture by the sight of some particular inanimate object or of some peculiar grouping of inanimate objects. I can recall a tattered purplish-bound volume of Euclid that gave me one of the most intense transports of my life. I can recall the sudden sight of my pipe — for I smoked pipes in my early days — lying upon the *Poetical Works of Wordsworth.* I can recall a certain fir-tree bough that always seemed to me, as I watched it from the dressing-room window which was my Montacute bedroom, to be floating upon an emanation of its own soul, which hovered like a blue vapour about it in those quiet autumn evenings, as I washed my hands with Pear's soap before going down to tea.

Such things and many similar to them I can recall throughout my life. But I can recall nothing approaching the emotion I experienced over that axe of laurel which my father cut for me in the Shirley shrubbery. And it hovers in the air when I think of it — not like Macbeth's weapon of blood — but like some magical Excalibur, brought arbitrarily from some world of enchantment and carried arbitrarily away again, out of my sight for ever. It is not merely my rapturous delight in this laurel axe that I recall. I recall the nature of that delight. In fact — mad though it may sound to say so — I feel the same *kind of delight* when even now, I think of that axe as I did when my father cut it and trimmed it with his knife! It may have been connected with those romantic illustrations of Aytoun. But it may — as Wordsworth hints of similar feelings in his "Intimations of Immortality" — represent something much deeper and more tremendous. The point about it that seems to me tragic — as it really did to Wordsworth, though he made the best of it in his sturdy stoical manner — is the fact that these ecstasies occur at rarer and rarer intervals as we get older. But after all this mystical advantage of childhood over manhood — of every Johnny over every John — is more than compensated for.

I, for one, would sooner have almost any continuous seven years of my life, perhaps even — grim though those were — the seven years, from ten to seventeen, of my time at school — than have my early childhood over again. I would never say I had a happy childhood. And, in this matter, nothing in heaven or earth — not even if my father had been God, or had been able to walk from Mount Cloud to Osmaston Park in Seven-League Boots — could have reassured me.

"The mind, the mind, Master Shallow!"

I should under all conceivable circumstances, being the person I am, have suffered from Fear. It might not have been Fear because of a stick thrown into a pond; but Fear of some sort it would have been; and a magician not yet seven is able to call up but few protecting spirits from "the vasty deep."

It is all a great mystery, this passage from being a helpless neurotic Johnny to being a crafty neurotic John; but I sometimes feel as I survey my turbulent life that a human soul resembles a fountain whose native spring is choked up by every kind of rubble and constantly invaded by a tidal estuary from the salt sea. Not until the fountain has banked itself up with great stones against this dead-sea invasion, not until it has pushed the sticks and leaves and gravel and roots and funguses and mud and cattle dung out of its way, can it draw upon the deep granite wells of its predestined flow. To look back to that Shirley childhood of mine is to look back to a convulsed mudpool of Chaos. In the midst of that Chaos a wavering human soul is gradually taking shape, gathering to itself curious and conflicting signs and symbols and tokens of what its blind urge is driving it towards. From the beginning madness and fear beset us, vice enthrals us, humiliation benumbs us, pride intoxicates us. It may be hard to be a man; it is much harder to be a child; and if the Lord said: "Of theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," he must have said it of a childhood that one child at any rate has completely forgotten!

CHAPTER TWO. WEYMOUTH AND DORCHESTER

IT WAS NOT only to thoughts of things that without any malicious puritanism must really be called "wicked," that I used, when left alone in my darkened bedroom in my eighth year, to close my eyes. I had found out a wonderful trick in connection with this shutting of eyes, which at a touch, and quite an innocent one this time, transported me into Elysium. I used to press my knuckles against my closed eyelids and in that manner stare entranced into the Void. And lo and behold! The Void presently gave birth to a lovely kaleidoscope of incredible patterns and colours! It is Keats who somewhere talks of the "spangly" gloom thus evoked; but my visions of these rainbow spirits, when to-day I take off my spectacles and try to call them up, do not come as they were wont to do.

In those days, however, they were much more than "spangly." It was like some pre-cosmic panorama, imprinted on the aboriginal retina of chaos, of all the Iris-tints, of all the butterfly stains and tints and dyes, of the "dome of coloured glass" of the unborn world. It is not only that I've lost the trick of conjuring up out of squeezed eyelids a colour-orgy. I have no longer any wish to do it! Isn't it a queer thing how the main urge of a person's inmost being changes? I lack the least desire now to behold the dance of those Euclidian Rainbows! And yet, just as I did then, I live for sensation. It is strange! I suppose I have some sort of æsthetic conscience now which censors my sensations and insists that I should only make a cult of such among them as, as have got — how shall I put it? — a poetical and elemental value.

But it certainly becomes clearer and clearer to me as I ponder over these early years of my life that there is some secret, and a secret far more valuable than the revelation of that impersonal-personal Eternal Being which came to Proust, to be found in the feelings of a young boy as to the nature of the Universe. This queer expression, "having an ecstasy," what does it really mean? What are the ingredients that compose them, the atmosphere out of which such ecstasies arise? The following is my own analysis of these precious moments. I think they always come, just as everything living does, *out of duality*, (out of the energizing of opposite poles of existence, poles of substance, poles of being, poles of electricity, if you prefer that scientific word. I think these moments of ecstasy are apt to come when, as you contemplate some particular scene or object, you suddenly recall some *other* deep cause of satisfaction in your life, but a cause totally independent of the one you are now regarding *and not in the same plane of feeling.*

For instance, I am looking at a patch of moss on a greenish marbly rock and I am aware of a deep sensual pleasure. But there suddenly comes into my mind the thought of a coal fire and of the light of candles, and of a chess-board, with the men all arranged for the game, and of old leather-bound Homeric Lexicon. Now either for a game of chess or for the looking out of Greek words the mind has to be active, whereas in drinking up the deliciousness of this dark wet green surface of stone, matted with moss, the mind is in a state of concentrated passivity. And my idea is that it is the sudden impact of the thought of pleasurable activity upon a mind concentrated upon pleasurable passivity that brings that tingling up-flow of exultation which is named "ecstasy." Had the mind in contemplating this dark rain-dripping surface and these emerald-green spores been led away to think of the earth mould of a damp flower-bed strewn with rain-wet petals, there would almost certainly have been no increase in the sensual pleasure already being enjoyed. If however the mind had summoned up a spade or a fork left sticking in the border of this flower-bed it is very possible that an ecstasy of the same sort as that called up by the image of the chess-board or by the image of the Homeric Lexicon would have resulted.

It is in fact *contrast,* contrast first and last, that plays the major part in what we call ecstasy; and this appears natural enough to a person who has come to hold as I have that the First Cause Itself is of a dualistic nature.

Well! I must hurry on now to the end of our Shirley life. This was brought about by a rapidly conceived and rapidly executed move to Dorset. My father seems to have felt, after his only brother's death, that it behoved him to reside within call of that bow-windowed house in Weymouth where our aged relative lived. So he accepted — a rather unworldly move in a young priest's life — the subordinate position of a small-town curate, after having enjoyed for seven years the sweets of an authority that was practically despotic; for there was no squire in Shirley Village. My father became then the hard-worked curate of the Rector of St. Peter's, the chief parish church, though there were others in the place, of the old Roman town of Dorchester.

With a characteristic gesture, just as when shopping in Ashbourne he had always bought good solid and surprisingly large objects, he now took, on some sort of a lease, an enormously large dwelling in an extensive garden, quite heedless of the fact that the house was still being built and the garden still being dug. This was Rothesay House, the birthplace of three more of his eleven children. It was, I think, one of the Mayors of Casterbridge, the excellent Mr. Gregory, who let Rothesay House to my father; and Mr. Knipe, the elderly rector, used to point out to his amazed friends this brick-and-mortar castle arising so near the South Walk for the lodging of a curate.

Poor Mr. Knipe! He must have felt sometimes that it was his destiny — good, easy man — to be the clerical superior to a veritable "Giant Grumble" whose disturbing pretensions were only matched by his astounding and disconcerting simplicity!

While the Mayor of Casterbridge was building us this surprising house in Dorchester, we lodged in no very grand manner in Weymouth, in a lodging to the rear of Brunswick Terrace.

It was at this time that our aged relative in Penn House gave me an infinitesimal cedarwood cabinet of tiny black and gilt drawers and with a paradisic smell. This little object contained only five drawers and was really of dolls' house proportions, but it became a fetish of mine and it makes me feel a little sad now to think how completely it has disappeared. There ought to be a "Fairy Sprightly" whose chief purpose in life is to guard from neglect and destruction the inanimate things into which human souls have been flung! There were pieces of my soul — and some of these pieces sold to the Devil too! — in every drawer of this little black and gold object. I kept in it a picture of the second little girl I ever seriously thought about. I am compelled in strict veracity to say "the second"; but the first only manifested herself like a figure in an artificial Pastoral-Picture while I sat with Littleton near my grandfather's fish-pond at Northwold. We were like a couple of childish Machiavels then, talking about fish-hooks and fish-kettles and artificial flies, but touching lightly too upon the love of women.

Littleton in this, as in all else, far more *efficient* than I was, had already made a little girl-friend; and it was my rôle in these talks by the fish-pond to try to *think up* another one that would do for me! I can well remember — for it was not till some twenty years later that I linked any idea of women with my sadistic vice — the vague, vague, *vague* sense of something remotely desirable about long silky hair and a soft form. Nor was this “second” lady-love of mine much more than a proud little statue, upon whom to hang these vague, vague, vague sentiments which in those days were totally unconnected with “the brutish sting” of my vice. Once and once only when this “second” young girl was sitting on my knee, did I experience in connection with her anything approaching to a sensual feeling; and by this time I was an undergraduate at Cambridge.

But it was always a characteristic of mine — for I was not only a born actor, as they say, but what might be named an impassioned “metamorphosist” — to bring to bear upon these vague, vague, vague attractions an overwhelming and most literally *creative* imagination. Fetish worshipper as I was, magician as I conceived myself to be, indurated romanticist as I have proved first and last, it was my delight to pretend to be “in love” and then to buttress up this pretence with a concentrated mythological will-power that was really terrific and abnormal.

I suppose, if the truth were confessed, I got ten times more pleasure from sealing up this young woman’s countenance — I can see it now *as it looked in that little picture* — in about twenty paper wrappings, all carefully fastened with sealing-wax, than I ever got from converse with its original! No girl’s face has ever been wrapped up — whether living or dead — in so many cerements, and only on very ritualistic occasions did I so much as open this sacred drawer and contemplate the outside wrapping!

In another drawer of this cabinet I preserved certain scriptures of my own, very ambiguous, although extremely decent writings, dealing with various never-to-be-indulged caresses; caresses whose object was no woman, caresses that were far beyond the power of achievement by such a cowardly pilgarlick as I was, between the sun and moon!

It was a wonderful day for me when once walking with my teacher — who loved Littleton and detested Johnny — along the hot Weymouth pavement in front of that noble row of eighteenth-century houses called Belvedere, and I recollect exactly how I felt at that moment, I experienced the first conscious "ecstasy" of my life, at any rate the first conscious ecstasy that I can remember. And, mark you, this ecstasy came to me under quite unpromising conditions. I was not a *persona grata* with my teacher. I wanted — *that* goes without saying — to be down by the sea, digging in the wet sand, not advancing rapidly along Belvedere towards St. Thomas' Street. But as I walked I skipped for joy, like the "little hills" in the Psalms of David. Such a flood of happiness raced through me that I did not scruple to invite the confidence of my teacher. No shame had I, nor any scruple. I whistled every consideration of a sense of fitness to the winds. My teacher was Littleton's friend but not mine; therefore my enemy! Such was my psychology. And oh, what voluptuous joy — so it seems to me now, but I may be exaggerating — to cry out shamelessly to my enemy just those very aspects of my feelings which would most of all excite contempt! Then it was that I put my ecstasy into a riddle, as I dare say the Sphynx did in *her* childhood, and I bade my teacher guess why I felt so happy. My teacher of course — and what a priggish, incalculable, unlovable little boy I must have seemed! — murmured some reply that indicated complete indifference to whether I was happy or not. But, as Blake says, "damn" braces while "bless" only relaxes; and this rebuff, though I still can recall it, by no means stopped my mouth; and I proceeded to explain, and my feelings must have been overpowering, for I recall the very spot where I expressed them, that I was happy, first because I was, at the moment, "good," and second because I hoped that it would shortly occur to my aged relative to present me with *another* black and gold cabinet, twice as large as the one I possessed!

This other cabinet I never did receive; but the original one remained in my possession, its sacred drawers packed with the proud and furtive secrets of my under-life for five years at least after I was happily married. I think it was on the occasion of my son’s birth that I buried its contents in other than Wessex soil, and my impression is that the precious cabinet itself fell to pieces. Oh, little secret chest-of-drawers, companion of a restless heart’s revolt against all that *was*, in the strength of all that *was not,* where are you now? Has the passing of half a century left not at least one tiny broken fragment of you, lying even yet perhaps — oh I know not where! — but keeping a trace, a savour, a lingering, clinging, ghostly revenant-breath, where you lie, of the bitter sweetness that was a boy’s whole fancy-world?

How many forms of stress, of strain, of tension there are in life that have no relation at all to a person’s main life-purpose! It sometimes seems as if we all move for years — sometimes for half a lifetime — through a perfectly meaningless chaos of irrelevant events, events that gather themselves together like bubbles on a stream — only they obstruct our boat more than any bubbles could — and then vanish into absolute nothingness! Man seems more subject to this tossing welter of irrelevance than anything else in Nature. What could be more beautifully *fatal* in the movement of its significant destiny than the life of a cow or the life of a tree? The truth is we each of us have to *invent* our own destiny out of the confusion and pell-mell around us, and it is because we are so long in deciding what destiny to invent that so many completely meaningless, insignificant, irrelevant episodes follow one another in our life, unconnected with any general “stream of tendency,” springing from nothing, returning to nothing. Chance, not destiny, rules us, swirling the litter and the debris into endless insignificant patterns that form and re-form, only to dissolve even as we gaze at them.

But it is not merely the person who has been lucky enough to find some main purpose for his earthly days that these silly, little, empty occurrences jolt, shake, prod and infuriate. They hurt us and tease us with their meaninglessness, long ere we have found any sort of *raison d'être* for our days equal to what chewing the cud is for a cow or being rained upon for a tree. Who in looking back over their early life can escape being put to shame and utterly confounded by the things that occurred, things for which you feel later nothing but a slowly fading disgust accompanied by a sort of gaping curiosity and base inquisitiveness, and a low, morbid, egotistical interest, a staring bestial interest that it was to you yourself and not another that they happened, an interest comparable to that with which infants contemplate their own excrement.

It is this element of self-love, in totally irrelevant happenings, that accounts for the indescribable tediousness of so many autobiographies and, to speak the honest truth, of so much human conversation. What excites our more intelligent interest *is a story*, that is to say the struggle of a soul, conscious or half conscious, with the obstacles that hinder its living growth, that obstruct the lilt of its pulse and joggle to left or right its integral continuity. The only interest in events, devoid of the negative significance of being obstacles in our path, is a symbolic one. It *is* possible for detached and isolated and even very unpleasant events to be pathetically significant symbols in the course of a life; but it is claiming too much to suppose that everything that happens to us is *intended* to be part of our particular story by an omnipotent artist. Interest, drama, meaning, purpose are qualities given to events by the individual mind. We are ourselves the gods who create the values of our life — what is essential, what is symbolic — and it is left to chance to provide the occasions for the application of these meanings and purposes.

How totally without meaning, for instance, unless along with other vices I have the destiny of a miser in my bones, is the vivid memory I have of watching, with perhaps unworthy pride and awe, my Norfolk grandfather, when he visited us on Dorset coast, take out of his trouser pockets a handful of half-crowns, florins, shillings, sixpences and threepenny bits! My father kept his money in a leather purse, as I myself have always done, doubtless esteeming it, as I still do, a sort of rapscallion insult to the preciousness of metals carrying our sovereign's head upon them, to be rattled about against your groin, along, it may well be, with nuts and string and tobacco and dice and pocket-fluff. This can hardly have been my first acquaintance with money, but it was certainly the first time I can remember feeling an inflation of pride in being related to a man who kept several half-crowns in his trouser pocket. So profoundly did that handful of silver affect me that it threw such a memory search-light over all that surrounded it that I can recall minutely the whole occasion.

It was on the deck of the first British man-of-war — the fleet was always coming into Portland Harbour — to be built with a turret for its guns. To me who retained such an exalted memory of the stupendous length of that noble steamship, the *Great Eastern*, as we had seen it from the windows of Penn House, this round, squat gun-turret was completely unimpressive. My miser-like interest in all that shining silver, emerging from a pocket actually related to me, is indeed the only cause of my recalling the *Thunderer*. Nor was my father, I am sure, one bit more impressed by all this scientific armament than I was. It was the work of professors, this great new Engine of Destruction, and it certainly was "new-fangled"; whereas the turf-covered bastions of the Nothe fortress which had been familiar to him from boyhood — alas! the noble old fort, together with the red coats who paraded its defences, must be totally superannuated now! — had a kind of sacred Battle of Trafalgar dignity.

Long before we actually moved into that grand new house, being built for us by the mayor, my father had begun almost daily excursions to Dorchester. Indeed, I suppose his laborious curate's work was in full swing before we left that lodging behind Brunswick Terrace.

I must now record an episode which left an indelible impression on my mind. Encouraged by the example of my father who would frequently walk the eight miles to Rothesay House from Penn House, across the Downs, Littleton and I — we must have been respectively nine and eight when we made this resolve; for it was before we went to school, and he was only just nine then — decided to undertake this enterprise. We skirted Lodmoor and ascended the Downs to the west of the famous White Horse, passing, I take it, the small hill hamlet which is the scene of Hardy's *Trumpet Major.* We advanced sturdily enough till we were about half-way up the main ascent of the high, grassy, tumulus-crowned ridge, and then quite suddenly my heart and strength failed me and I sat down on the sunburnt, thyme-scented grass, and hopelessly indifferent to the familiar butterflies, "Marble Whites" and "Clifton Blues," that fluttered round, gave myself up to despair. We had gone so far that to return seemed as impossible as to advance, and that kind of "whoreson lethargy" that attends on mortal weakness, when heart and legs collapse together, reduced me to brutish inertness. It was then that Littleton showed "the rock from which he had been hewn and the pit from which he had been dug" by doing what anyone would have supposed absolutely impossible. He took the collapsed "Johnny" upon his small unconquerable back and actually staggered under this burden *up* the remaining portion of the ascent!

Thus it came to pass that my first crossing of the South Downs was not upon my own feet but upon the feet of my younger brother. Aye! how often in my subsequent life, when my spirit has failed me and my bones have melted within me have I cried out for this strong aid; nor ever cried in vain, until three thousand miles of salt-water came to roll between us! Littleton's physical courage and endurance were always putting me to shame in those days.

I remember how my father loved to take us both, our weariness of the way forgotten as we followed the adventures of that unwearied Giant and Fairy, past Lodmoor Hut, past the coastguard cottages, to the little beach where Preston brook ran, and I suppose still runs, into the sea. There was one place here where a spirited boy could just succeed in jumping over this small stream; and this feat Littleton invariably accomplished. As invariably, and without one single redeeming exception, I used to make frantic and desperate runs to the challenging spot, but always pulled up at the last second, fearful of the leap into the air.

At such times both Littleton and my father, whose "rapport" in such matters was as deep as it was silent, received my discomforture with grave indulgence, sorry for me but feeling that the honour of the family had been sufficiently upheld without my aid. It was curious how early in our life that singular relation was established between Littleton and me which lasted on until I went to Cambridge. The essence of this relation was that while in all practical, physical, and worldly situations Littleton surpassed me, defended me, championed me, in things of pure fantasy I retained my primogenital prerogative. I say in things of the fantasy rather than of the mind; for in many mental achievements, especially where scholarship was concerned, he was always ahead of me. Indeed I have never known any man more thoroughly conversant with the groundwork of Greek and Latin than he eventually became.

When we quarrelled — need I tell you? — it was always my fault. I had a devilish love of teasing! Indeed, I often recall the prophetic voice that said to me once:

“One day, Johnny, it will be *you* who will be teased.”

But that day did not arrive till long afterwards; not indeed until Destiny had put the ocean between Littleton and my serpent’s tongue. But in those days I even had the presumption — limb of Satan that I was! — to want to tease my father! It was a little later that I did this, but I always *wanted* to do it, just as I always wanted to tease my younger brothers and sisters. But it was a little later in our life that in the drawing-room at Montacute — knowing perfectly well how it would annoy him — I expatiated at exhaustive length upon the *Seven Principles of Man*, as interpreted by Annie Besant. I went on till he lifted up his head from his netting — he used to make our lawn tennis nets then — and burst out, trembling with fury:

“She is a Demon … John … a Demon! *The woman is a Demon!*”

Well, I must have teased Littleton into some similar paroxysm of anger that got him into serious trouble, for I recall very well how one day — seized with bitter remorse — I decided to do something for him that would counterbalance this piece of cruelty. Littleton collected fossils and butterflies; while it fell to my rôle to collect birds’ eggs; for it was of course unthinkable that a son of my father should collect nothing. No doubt it was for precisely this reason that Theodore, always so terrifyingly original, did actually collect nothing. Perhaps it was from this Nothing he collected that there emerged later his extraordinary works of genius!

It was long before we left Dorchester that I reached a quite peculiar understanding with Theodore, an understanding of a totally different kind from any I have ever had with Littleton, and one that may be said to have consisted in a fantastical “rapport” between our most extreme and least communicable personal peculiarities. At this time of our living in

Weymouth lodgings all I can recall of the future hermit of East Chaldon was his tendency — not to fall asleep as one might have expected of so young a child during family prayers — *but to faint*, and fainting slide down upon the floor! This was the beginning of a long series of not always very considerate compulsions, into which the little Theodore — like a unicorn in a lion's den — was dragged here and there by my father and me. With Littleton his relations were of a peculiar and special nature, consisting of a hand-to-mouth exchange of an especial kind of badinage quaintly charged with all the little humorous details of their daily life. But Littleton never tried to force him — as my father and I were prone to do — to enter paths that were outside his grooves and against the grain. My father's tyrannies were confined however to dragging him for great walks, longer than his strength could endure, whereas I used to find in his imagination a quick response to some of my most devilish games and some of my most scandalous experiments. But oh dear! how well I can see little Theodore, white in the face and with great forlorn eyes like an overdriven animal, as he was dragged along some dusty road where the very flies joined forces to persecute him!

But to return to my remorse over getting Littleton into trouble. Some startling and spectacular deed I felt must be done, and done at once, which would overwhelm him with amazement at my penitence. Brooding upon this, and full of the deepest contrition, I set off alone — we had from a very early age been allowed the most incredible liberty — to a spot somewhere beyond the coastguard cottages, where I had noted on a previous occasion an enormous stone fossil. It was a colossal ammonite, embedded I think, though I may be mistaken in this, in a geological substance known, or at least known to my father, as "Blue Lias." For all his contempt for science, and his preference for traditional pastoral lore, he was wont to utter such proud phrases as:

"I am glad you have noticed that formation, my boy. It is Blue Lias," or "Here is something, Johnny, that is worth seeing, a piece of Kimmeridge Clay!"

He would say this just as he would say "The Cormorant is the greediest of all birds," or "My brother once stared into a tiger's eyes till he put the brute out of countenance."

Every phenomenon he referred to, whether animate or inanimate, became a sacrosanct thing, a privileged object like those objects in fairy-tales that travellers carried to work magic with. I think it materially increased his appreciation of any landscape he was traversing when he could gravely refer to "Purbeck Marble," or say, "Do 'ee see, me boy, how uneven the 'Rock Formation' is, in those cliffs over there? Such a peculiar strata" — he would use the word as if it were a feminine singular word, but use it with so much authority and weight that as with a great many expressions he used, like the syllable "goss," for instance, in place of "gorze," his repeated misnomer finally became an organic entity with far more substance in it than most dictionary words could claim. Well, my great ammonite was embedded in the cliff's edge, whatever the cliff may have been made of, and this small repentant Prester John was soon occupied in gouging it out with his fingers. But the grand act of penance, for it was twice as large as a human skull, was to go staggering under the weight of this terrific fossil all the way home. Past Lodmoor Hut I had to go, past the clipped evergreen hedges of Victoria Gardens, and along that sandy pavement beneath the pebbly wall that enclosed the garden of the turreted stucco house where the great Doctor Smith lived, who attended upon the invalids of Brunswick Terrace with a deportment that combined the Divine with the Physician. I forget exactly how Littleton received my offering; but I know that all the years his collection was preserved at Rothesay House this penitential ammonite could be seen. Did it go to Montacute and after staying there for thirty years come back to Weymouth when my father returned to his own again?

One of the ghastliest of the lesser pities of life is the way so many precious symbolic objects disappear forever. Such forlorn Inanimates have no Limbo to go to, no kindly funeral-blazes. They remain the same as they have always been; but they are cast out upon the world's rubbish-heap; and no Redeemer can ever come that shall restore *them* to honour. Blessed shall the man or the woman be in the Day of Judgment who has rescued even one of these castaways and saved it from the Scavenger's Cart!

The grand delight of those months in lodging at Weymouth — and this delight returned every time we visited the place afterwards — was digging with a wooden spade in the wet sand near the sea's edge. Oh, how deep a pleasure, oh, how quivering and trembling a pleasure it was to watch the salt-water flow into an estuary that you yourself had prepared for it! What a commentary it is upon the ways of mortal life that such a proverbially vain thing, such an ultimate example of useless activity, as digging in sea-sand should be attended with such ravishing transports of happiness, while upon the useful and the enduring work of our hands, performed in labour and sorrow, we can scarcely bear so much as to look! But that incredible sensation when the sea at last really rushes in and our sandbanks grow paler and whiter, as the long ripples reach them; till they begin to yield and to sink and to flatten out, and their edges are overpoweringly smoothed away and rounded off and silted into indistinction; and the sand we have piled up comes sliding down, sinking, sinking, sinking; till finally there is nothing left but the smooth sea-floor, just as it has been for a thousand years —

what can describe the mystery of it? It is a sensation wherein the depths of some profound cosmic consciousness are shared by us. Creation, destruction … destruction, creation…. It is the ecstatic in-breathing and out-breathing of Brahma! I certainly feel, looking back on my life, that few pleasures I have known have excelled digging with a wooden spade in wet sand. The permeating presence of sun and sea, the complete isolation and delicious solitariness of the pursuit, if you are of an unsociable turn of mind, the immediate response to your human effort of such a vast force as the incoming tide — think of a child of seven choosing the direction, like a little deity, that an estuary of the great moon-drawn antagonist of the whole earth should take, *this* way rather than *that* way! — these things, combined with the heavenly absence of nurse or governess, make up an "ensemble" of beatitude rarely experienced, I fear, on this planetary globe. I cannot believe that I was still — at seven and eight and nine — totally unconscious of what has now come to be my most obstinate cult, I mean the conscious drinking up of all the various sense-impressions which the Self receives as it embraces the Not-Self; but I confess, much as it annoys me to do so, and much as it spoils what might be called *the logic of temperamental destiny* in my life, that I haven't one scrap, one faintest flicker of memory about any such feeling!

"Isn't it sad," as the Chinese Sage Kwang-Tze always exclaims, in his whimsical-wistful way, that wicked, vicious, troubling memories remain so much more vivid than good, satisfying, soothing memories? To confess the truth, though I well recall the diffused pleasure of these long days on the wet sand, I cannot remember — no! not sharply or vividly — any one single occasion when I was thus so happy! But with abominable clarity can I recall how once, during the annual Weymouth Regatta, when we were watching the yachts racing across the bay, I saw a middle-aged man in one boat — the spectator’s boats were all crowded close together — tormenting with the most devilish malignity, a youth in another boat who was beside himself with impotent fury. Being “a tease” myself, the scene had a morbid interest for me; but it frightened me a good deal too. It comes back to me now as a grim vignette from the worst passions of the Inferno; and I think it gave me a pretty ghastly inkling of the *infiniteness* of evil. It burnt itself anyway into the most sensitized portion of my nerves.

Another unpleasant memory returns to me of this epoch; but this one has to do with our first few nights in Rothesay House. The windows of my room — I always had a room to myself then, and on the wall of this room, both at Dorchester and at Montacute, I used to have a small, oval, coloured print of the Duke of Wellington, which for some queer reason gave me extreme satisfaction — opened on the South Walk whose tall, thick, horse chestnut-trees were visible across our newly-laid-out garden. Dorchester, as Hardy, whose own house was only half a mile across the fields to the East of the East Walk, explains in the *Mayor of Casterbridge*, is singularly like an ancient city in its freedom from suburbs. It had been a walled town in the Roman times, some of the Roman masonry serving this purpose even yet, as it has done for nigh two thousand years, but these umbrageous avenues of thick horse chestnuts had come, since the Napoleonic Wars, to take the place of walls. I can remember with the utmost distinctness seeing the aged William Barnes, Thomas Hardy’s ancient friend, whose statue now stands, and a fine one it is, outside St. Peter’s Church, walking slowly down the South Walk under these chestnut-trees, dressed, in the style of a hundred years ago, in knee-breeches, black stockings, and silver-buckled shoes. But it was no aged poet I beheld on this occasion as I tried to go to sleep in my room through the long, slow-fading midsummer twilight — but a fantastic procession of phantoms, who moved like mechanical images up and down the South Walk! Were they the ghosts of the old French prisoners who originally planted these noble trees? No! they were just the ordinary passers-by; but by some mirage-like trick of distance they presented themselves to my startled eyes as ghosts, and not only ghosts, but ghosts who had the power of automaton-like progression, without a movement of legs or feet!

I have always been one to expect, and to accept, marvels and wonders, as part of what might be called the natural “chaoticism” of the world. To be a Pluralist rather than a Monist, is as much of an instinct with me as it is to every East Indian to be obsessed by Unity. The world was then — *and is so still* for in this matter my reason has only defended my instinct — an incalculable welter of criss-cross forces, each one of which has its own particular measure of consciousness or demi-semi-quaver consciousness. I am thus less liable to supernatural shocks than people whose minds are less credulous than mine, or if you will, for it comes to the same thing, less sceptical than mine as to all that they call scientific truth. If I actually did behold a ghost or a phantom, or some inexplicable phenomenon of magical origin, I should undoubtedly be bothered, and up to a certain point startled, as I was by the sight of these images in the South Walk, but I should not be paralysed or panic-stricken, because I should not be profoundly *surprised.* Every living organism — it is the fatality of our identity — has its own peculiar universe, not quite like any other — and my world remains a world under the sway of inscrutable mystery. In plain speech I still feel wholly convinced that the cause of every natural phenomenon is personal — the exertion of energy by a conscious, or at any rate a half-conscious *will.*

It is for this reason that no arguments anyone can use are able to convince me that the First Cause is not responsible for the pain of the world. The First Cause is for ever pleading its cause with me by contending that without free will no happiness is possible, and that free will *once given,* pain becomes inevitable; but my reply to Its argument seems to me a conclusive one:

"Who made free will to be fatally inseparable from pain?" and if It retorts: "The Nature of Things, my child," I should merely repeat: "Who made the Nature of Things to be like that?"

My own feeling is — it may be a rooted insanity but I do not think so — that the only profoundly philosophical way of taking life is a threefold act of the intellect. First to accept our sense impressions of the world as the world's true reality, against all electronic reduction. Secondly, to accept what interiorly we feel of our consciousness and will as our deepest hint as to what causes the nature of this reality to be as it is. Thirdly, to force ourselves to enjoy in a particular way this self-made universe that we are for ever destroying and recreating.

It was during my eighth and ninth years of human experience that we found ourselves fully established in Rothesay House, Dorchester, just-south of the South Walk. In my own memory these particular two years, after I had ceased to be a child, but had not yet gone to school, are the most important, most significant, and certainly most happy of my whole life. In pure happiness I consider these years to be rivalled by only two epochs in my whole life; the first of these consisting of several intermittent fragments of flawless felicity, namely, my visits to Northwold in Norfolk; and the second consisting of my quite recent retreat, after giving up lecturing, to the peaceful seclusion of these New York hills. I won't say I cannot imagine greater happiness than I experience now, or than I experienced at the age of eight and nine, but, taking my life as a whole, these three epochs, are the happiest periods I have so far known and the ones for which I shall utter my "Vixi!" when I come to die.

While I am dealing with this subject why should I not indicate in the same clear terms what I consider the most *unhappy* epochs in my life? Without doubt I should say the three years between the ages of fourteen and seventeen and the particular year of grace, it was I think, when I was forty-five. The first three unhappy years came upon me when I left the Preparatory School at Sherborne and entered the Big School there, and this other unhappy year came to me before my second Major Operation, and culminated during the summer months; when, having let my city room to Padraic Colum I roamed these Eastern States like a veritable lost soul seeking rest and finding none.

Yes, my eighth and ninth years, when we were settled at Dorchester and before I went to school were years of extraordinary and exultant satisfaction. And yet I have no memory — and that I have none makes me feel a disappointed anger with this fortunate era — of experiencing that Wordsworthian "Pleasure which there is in Life itself," which is now my dominant cult. The absence of even the faintest, obscurest, vaguest memory of that kind makes me almost feel as if when the Johnny of those days turned into the Jack of the later time, some completely different spirit had entered into me; and this is a feeling extremely distasteful to me!

Littleton and I used to go to a small private Dame's School, situated near the Great Western station, to reach which we daily made our way along that portion of the South Walk which continues beyond the thoroughfare where South Street ends and the Weymouth Road begins. This continuation of South Walk is a very secluded place and few people frequent it. The general stream of human movement flowing down South Street follows a parallel approach to the Great Western Station or makes its way across the open square to the Weymouth Road. But no human movement enters the precincts of this continuation of South Walk. It is one of the most secluded spots in the town. Its umbrageous solitude is protected even from children's perambulators by certain ancient and venerable posts. Against these posts lovers can lean by day and by night in a peace which is rarely interrupted, and once having pushed your way through them you breathe that peculiar atmosphere of mellow security, as gracious in winter as in summer, where the exclusion of wheeled vehicles and the sense of old paths, old walls, old trees, old grass, evokes a feeling of collegiate if not of monastic retirement. Along this avenue of undisturbed seclusion we used to observe, making her way to *her* school, a grave, self-possessed little girl. The repeated sight of this small dignified figure — I can recall nothing of her but her composure and her demure preoccupation with her own affairs–must have roused the very devil in me. It has all receded now into hopeless obscurity; but I can remember how disappointed and aggrieved I was when weary of these encounters with such an odious little boy, as I must have seemed to her, she took a different road to her school or went to a different school. Were my persecutions confined to making faces, or did I attempt to utter challenging words? I cannot remember. My impression is that I attempted to interest Littleton in this secret obliquity but quite in vain. Littleton himself at that time had struck up a dumb, romantic friendship with one of the little choir-boys in St. Peter's Church, to whom he would discreetly refer as "the brown-coated choir-boy"; but the difference between us was made clear enough, in the fact that while his interest was tender, sentimental, and very personal, mine was perverse, unsympathetic, and totally impersonal.

Oh, what a number of queer memories come back as I think of those chestnut walks of Dorchester! It was in this same secluded South Walk that we used often to overtake a fellow pupil at our own Dame's School, whose father was none other than the Governor of the County Prison. This little boy was always escorted by a nurse-maid, and, as it happened, by a nurse-maid of Spanish origin. What must my imp of darkness put into my head to do but to start a long persecution — I dare say to revenge myself for the disappearance of the little girl — of this unfortunate foreign servant! Littleton I am afraid was dragged willy-nilly into this roguery; and we used to hide behind the chestnut-trees and rush out like a pair of unconscionable "gamins" shouting in our shrill young voices: "Spanish maiden! Spanish maiden! Spanish maiden!" My behaviour on this occasion *did* lead — for this harmless pair were unable to change either their route or their destination — to discovery and disgrace. For the "Spanish maiden" complained to her mistress, the Governor's lady, and Master Johnny — though he did not go to prison — was put to bitter shame and something like public ignominy.

But it would not be only stories of misconduct that those great chestnut-trees, if they could murmur like the oaks of Dodona, would relate. Once I was caught — and here I am sure I was in the right and my accuser unjust — red-handed in the act of throwing flint stones with all my might at the heads of a group of town boys. It was the august personality of Mr. B. ——, the High Street haberdasher, whose beard reached to his navel — who came down on me on this occasion, making a great todo, I recall, of my being the son of the curate. Sharp and enduring is a boy's memory of injustice; and I hasten to assure *you* at any rate, impartial reader, that I had been protecting our own "maiden" — not a Spanish one, but a fellow subject from Berkshire — against the insults of the rabble.

But if the South Walk, leading to our daily lessons, was linked up with ambiguous and questionable doings, the East Walk, on the Fordington side of Dorchester, can have rarely witnessed greater human happiness than ours was, as, with our butterfly-nets transmuted into fishing-nets and with watering cans to hold our captures, we took our way to those felicitous water meadows — veritable Elysian fields, though vulgarly named Stinsford Ditches — where we caught the minnows wherewith we stocked our aquarium.

This aquarium was an intense and unique pleasure to me. I think it satisfied in some profound manner my desire to be God, or at least *a* god, and there is undoubtedly something about watching the movements of these restless beings, as they swim in and out of the stones and weeds from which you have *created their world*, that gives you a mysterious feeling of excitement. Yes, it is as if you "possessed" in the way I fancy the First Cause must possess *his* aquarium, these darting, silvery, rose-tinged aboriginals of our human organism. My satisfaction lay very much in the thought of what a complicated world of hills and forests and glades and gorges I had made for these fish, and how large and infinite it must seem to them — while to me it was so small, and every plant and pebble so carefully chosen! My conscience in these matters has grown very touchy within the last forty years. How could I endure for a moment not taking back a sick minnow to those Stinsford Brooks as soon as it began to go round and round at the top of the water, gasping with piteous little gasps at our thinner air, as if in its extremity it would fain change its element?

The more I ponder upon my memories of my early life the more I am convinced of two things. *First* that there are abysses of Being and Reality totally outside this astronomical "pinfold," in which, as Milton says, we are "confined and pestered." *Second*, that all the great urges of our spirit come nearest to the secret of the Universe when they enjoy Nature with the detachment of a Pilgrim rather than analyse her with the curiosity of a Scientist.

But what is forever escaping me as I look back on these days is what might be called my normal mood. I cannot recall any average, ordinary, commonplace, humdrum mood, whether cheerful or the reverse, to which I awaked every day and upon which I relapsed from my moments of unnatural excitement. What I feel now is that *all* my moments were moments of unnatural excitement! In fact I feel almost tempted to go a step further and to maintain that the whole conception of the normal, the average, the commonplace, is due to a specific mental disease. To call a thing "commonplace" becomes therefore just the same as if you confided to your friend the fact that you felt sick or insane. I believe the most unphilosophical, irreligious and immoral word in the English language is the word "commonplace."

If there was ever a saying of any sage that pierced to the heart of things it was that word of Jesus that we must become as children to enter heaven; and when St. Paul says we must "cast away childish things" I believe he is speaking of those annoying conventionalities, those teasing, bullying silly social fashions which boys and girls indulge in as they grow older. For what does it mean to become "as children"? It means that to be what is called "bored" — by anything but the society of these young people who so worried St. Paul — is *henceforth impossible.* Children are never bored; because the state of boredom is so appalling to them that they scent its approach afar off, and either run away, or fall into a tragic fit of blind despair.

Green gravel, sea-sand castles, submarine forests in an aquarium, blue beads strung on a string, toy pistols in a lathe-and-plaster roof, the stalks of artichokes used as spears — from one point of view all these things are childs' play; but from another point of view they are the sublime and mystical "Gleichnis" of our whole Faustian Quest.

No words can describe what I am now trying to approach — hovering around it and about it but perpetually prohibited from seizing it by that troublesome law of Nature which makes it impossible to express a living truth except by suggestion and indirection. All I can do is to indicate, by one clumsy analogy after another, the gap, the lacuna, the niche in our daily psychology where this mystery dwells like an unseen picture in a magic crystal. And there is an emanation from the thing's presence, which is as disturbing to our human consciousness as the presence of the black poodle was to Faust, and as corrosive to worldly ambition too, as a secret chest of sea-sunk treasure might be to a fisherman. The hatred it excites among clever people is like the fury of flame-touched adders; for it is a revelation of the Eternal totally unknown to mathematics and logic. If at nine years old I felt it to be something "whose course," as Scott says of Arthur's Wain, "doth roll in utter darkness round the pole," it is to me now as I fumble towards it far less definable than any polar darkness.

But whatever it is it endows the sands of the sea and the grasses of the field with an enchanted light, and it reveals this world as a place where lobworms and newts have souls, and where the Inanimate has a disturbing porousness and transparency.

In one thing I know well the neurotic John of sixty is identical with the neurotic Johnny of nine, and that is in being born, so to speak, *fresh every day*. I certainly woke up every morning with a tremendous life energy pulsing through me and with a feeling that I could *flow through* every material object I looked at in a rapture of identification. I think — though confound it all! this is just what I do not remember! — that I expected daily to come upon some magical object, made of earth or of sea-sand or of moss, like that laid upon the top of my miniature Mount Cloud, which would immediately thrust into the world of grown-up people's reality a wedge of *my* reality, so that it would be forced to come to terms with it! I am convinced that I *knew,* without question or doubt, that my world — the world in which I was a magician — was a great deal more than mere pretending.

I wish I could communicate in intelligible speech what I really felt myself to be — I will not say what I really was — in those days at Rothesay House. I believe I can recall exact inner feeling on many separate highly-pitched occasions. What I cannot reproduce in my mind are my less agitated, less excited, less troubled moments. But perhaps there were no such moments! Perhaps, except when I was asleep, I lived such a nervous, strung-up life that my only relapses were changes from one kind of tension to another. I believe I *am* able, in a manner that I fancy must be rare among men or women of sixty, to feel the actual, identical feelings that I used to have at particular moments in those days. I certainly lived in a constant repetition of gestures of extreme psychic intensity. My head was always full of some fantastical transaction that broke up the normal world.

I touch here upon what is to me one of the profoundest philosophical mysteries: I mean the power of the individual mind to create its own world, not in complete independence of what is called "the objective world," but in a steadily growing independence of the attitude of other minds *towards* this world. For what people call the objective world is really a most fluid, flexible, malleable thing. It is like the wine of the Priestess Bacbuc in *Rabelais*. It tastes differently; it *is* a different cosmos, to every man, woman, and child. To analyse this "objective world" is all very well, as long as you don't forget that the power to rebuild it by emphasis and rejection is synonymous with your being alive.

It must have been in my ninth year that I established — like a young Mussolini — what I called the "Volentiā Army." This organization played an overwhelming part in my life at that time; and, such was my hypnotic energy, I forced it upon every one of my fellow pupils at that Dame's

School near the Great Western Station. What led me to the use of the word "Volentiā" I don't know, but I know it had to be pronounced "Volentiā," the final "a" like the syllable "aye." Oh! with what an incredible sense of importance, as the enchanted chief of an occult revolutionary régime, I used to sit in the lathe-and-plaster "roof-room" — it was not really a "room" at all — that the workmen employed by Mayor Gregory had left half-boarded under the slates of Rothesay House! I dragged — I presume with Littleton's help — a little table up there, and on this table I placed two lit candles — it is extraordinary what amount of licence I was allowed in these enterprises! — and there I sat, in exultant state, feeling like a re-incarnation of Owen Glendower, a toy pistol, loaded with real explosive "caps" *in both hands*, and the ferocious scowl of a dealer-out of life and death on my misanthropic countenance, while our noble, imaginative, high-spirited, sympathetic, much-enduring, but totally un-Spanish "maiden" from Berkshire would be brought as a captive before me.

It must have been about this time — before this enchanted ninth year of my life passed into its fatal tenth — that Theodore, then aged six, began to play a more prominent part in my life. My impression is that while Littleton always regarded the activities of the "Volentiā Army" with certain shrewd reservations the small Theodore gave himself wholly up to them. But even that could not have been altogether the case, because I recall that somewhere, in one of the very immature shrubberies of our newly laid-out garden, beneath a curious pink blossoming bush that bore seeds which *popped* when a person touched them, Theodore established, entirely for himself, a solitary retreat — a kind of infantile "Beth-Car" — to which he gave the name of "Bushes' Home." And just as the "Volentiā Army" had to draw in its horns and vanish when it found Littleton seated at the dining-room table, drawing ships, so it never dared to intrude upon the sacred precincts of Theodore's "Bushes' Home."

But it must never be supposed that my "Volentiā Army" was a mere game of robbers, or pirates. I surrounded it on every side by the *mythological!* It was really a sort of secret Rosicrucian, or Thaumaturgic society, of which I — a young Prester John — was the head

Now there was at that time a newly made road that led southward across the South Western Railway towards the high downs, and upon the surface of this road, during the early period of its construction, had been sprinkled gravel of a very peculiar kind — gravel such as I have never seen before or since. It was as a matter of fact of an intermittent *green.* Now green is a colour that has always come to me with a pleasurable shock; especially when it has come — so to speak — in the wrong place! That green sky during prayers at Shirley was an example of this; but for a road to be green struck me as more curious than for the sky to be green.

"Green gravel, green gravel, the grass is so green!
The fairest young lady that ever was seen!"

But this particular "green gravel" led me, while our unwearied Berkshire friend pushed the big perambulator over all impediments, to things that were much more exciting than any "young lady." For this new road under the railway, leaving Fordington at the point where you go North towards Mr. Hardy's house, ended in a field-path across Fordington Great Field that led to the top of the Downs. These Downs were surmounted, as Mr. Hardy himself pointed out to me long afterwards, by no less than fifty tumuli above old dead chieftains' graves. At the spot towards which this path ascended there were several of these tumuli — high grassy mounds exactly like those that bore the bonfires on their summits in the first chapter of the *Return of the Native*.

By this time my longing to possess supernatural powers had become a perfectly conscious and clearly articulated thing; and now on the strength of it I set to work, bit by bit, fragment by fragment, to invent a mythology! I did this with a thoroughness that showed I had not forgotten my father's interminable fairy-story; only this was not a "story." This was a way of life. Most of my mythology I have forgotten now, but I can remember the names of certain terrific beings that lived in those pre-historic mounds and what I used to call them. I used to call them "Dromonds." And in addition to the "Dromonds" I called into existence a whole tribe of extremely powerful but rather dwarfish men, called "Escrawaldons," whose rôle was to be the official enemies, in my History of the World, of the "Volentiā Army." The "Volentiā Army" became in fact a sort of multiple Logos, standing midway between the visible and the invisible. In its realistic aspect it entered constantly into my daily life whereas in its ideal aspect it became part of an imaginary history that had no counterpart in reality. In this connection I still can feel the exact and identical thrill which I set to work, with several half-penny note-books before me, to compose a language for the "Volentiā Army."

The satisfaction I got came, I suppose, from arbitrarily inventing words that other people — presumably — would subsequently have to use. Indeed the pleasure I derived from all this must have been more akin to the sense of power in an Arch-Medicine-Man, or a Super-High-Priest, who invents a ritual for subsequent generations to follow than to anything merely scholarly. Indeed, I am sure it had nothing of the feeling of scholarship in it, any more than my mania to-day for looking out words in a Homeric Lexicon has to do with scholarship. It is the magic significance of words and the proud feeling of dealing with secrets known to very few that pleases me so much to-day. And I think this is the kind of thing I felt when I created the Volentiā syllables destined to perplex the wits of future generations of Escrawaldons. I think too that words, the magic of words, is a deep and occult part of the mystery of life. Gibberish — the inventing of nonsense — is an irrepressible tendency of mine, and to me it is never comic or facetious or amusing. It is more tragic, more grave, more religious than intelligibility is! What is in my mind about this baffles me and escapes me, but I feel that I am on the track here of something possessed of a curious importance. The giant Nimrod, on the road to the Ninth Circle of Dante's Inferno, utters tremendous and most awe-inspiring gibberish: "Rafel mai amech Zabi almi!" — and this is no doubt the reason why, though I am far too unscholarly to understand a single word of it, I get such extraordinary pleasure from reading aloud *A Work in Progress* by James Joyce.

A totally different pleasure, however, from inventing a language, was the pleasure I got from hearing Scott's *Ivanhoe* read aloud in the evenings, and soon afterwards, in the same year of grace, *The Talisman*. These romances, and indeed the whole of Scott's works, of which I must have read all except *Count Robert of Paris*, were in those days, and remain now, by far the most powerful literary influence of my life. That massive solidity, that slow-moving convincingness, that leisurely, friendly, whimsical humour, that Homeric nobility, that cheerful endurance of the buffets of fate, was even capable of doing something to counteract the natural weakness, waywardness, cowardice, morbidity, selfishness, of my furtive and evasive character. And this impassioned reading of Scott encouraged me — though recalling the fate of Norna of the Fitful Head it perhaps ought not to have done so — in my living a life that was almost purely a life of playing at magic. Why not? What I feel now, and with what seems to me to be my very deepest intellect, is that any imaginative illusion by which a person half lives, any mythology in which a person half believes, is truer, "in the only sense in which truth matters," than the most authenticated scientific facts.

But *what was I after* in this rebelliously individualistic ninth year of my life, the last year of real liberty I had till I went to Cambridge? I can tell you exactly — oh! to a nicety what I was after. For in every important essential — with the single exception of my cult of the senses — my nature is the same now as it was then. What I wanted was that kind of romantic struggle with things and people, things and people always yielding as I advanced, *but not too easily,* a struggle which takes place in an ideal region, hewn out of reality and constantly touching but never quite identified with reality, such as might be most conveniently described by the expression, *a Quest*.

The kind of "Quest," however, that I wanted was not a simple one. To satisfy me it had to take place in a world that was at once the real world and yet a world of marvels. Thus it might perhaps be best defined as a Magical Quest, a Quest undertaken by a young neophite in magic. The end or purpose of the Quest was not definable; *was not even considered*. It was enough that it went on and on. But though indefinable, there was Something ahead of me, Something rich and strange, Something mysteriously satisfying, a sort of Beatific Vision, composed of a synthesis not so much of sensations as of exultant emotions. Our aquarium, given to us I think by that maternal grandfather in Norfolk whose pocketful of loose silver had so impressed me on the deck of H.M.S. *Thunderer*, was in a curious way an integral part of this Magic Quest, for these inquisitive minnows exploring the miniature submarine forest we prepared for them were so many darting and fluttering projections of myself swimming through a world of dim under-water marvels!

That new road to Fordington Great Field, sprinkled with green gravel — could this gravel have been broken fragments of *fire-touched flint?* —

leading to those tumuli on the ridge, that we always spoke of as "The Humps," was only one among many paths along which I pursued this Quest. Another one was a field-path leading out of the Weymouth Road before you came to the hamlet of Monkton, where was a big fallen willow-tree. Whatever may have been the vague, rich, dim Vision at the end of this Faustian Quest of mine, it was certainly approached by a variety of circuitous ways! This great fallen willow was perhaps of all these ways the one that had the most mysterious charm. We always spoke of it as the "Herringstone Tree," but what kind of a place Herringstone was, to this day I have not the least idea. It was the tree that led me on; and I shrewdly suspect that tree held something, in its moss-grown, massive, fallen branches, that brought back the enchanted laurel-axe of the Shirley shrubbery.

My Quest took one rather quaint and even in a sense, when you try to envisage an odd-looking, untidy, surreptitious little boy, in muddy knickerbockers and navy-blue jersey, putting on an expression that he believed as ethereal and Ariel-like, rather pathetic form. Our aged Penn House relative had given me a small musical box, no bigger than a half-penny bun; and with this in my possession, turning the handle with one hand while I held it, as I supposed, in an airy feminine manner in the other, I used to hurry on tiptoe from room to room of Rothe say House, I will not say "pretending to be," for my transformations were more than pretence, but *being* for the nonce, a supernatural agent.

I wish I could recall the half-indulgent, half-scared expression with which Littleton, at the dining-room table, industriously drawing ships, for he was loth to rouse Johnny's irrational anger, and yet found it difficult to see the despotic Head of the "Volentiā Army" in the light of a butterfly-winged Ariel, must have turned to greet my perambulating tinkle of sweet sound.

It must have been at the beginning of my tenth year — that year that saw Littleton and myself deposited in the Preparatory School at Sherborne — that I composed my first poem. I find it impossible to remember whether this, or a fragment of a prose romance entitled, *The Knight of the Festoon* was my earliest literary inspiration, but I cannot resist transcribing the verses, which were written after we had all been for a visit to Corfe Castle….

“At Corfe Castle when the light
Has vanished and the shades of night
Steal o’er the ruins grey
There is a dungeon from light of day
Where now a grisly Spectre holds his sway.
Among the shadowy ruins groping creeps he
And when he hears a fearful shriek up leaps he
And sees another Spectre of the night
A Bogy that surpasses him in height.
Then there commences such a fearful fray
As was ne’er seen by the broad light of day.
Then morning breaks and both dissolve in air
And nothing’s left but the old castle fair!”

I am so little of an artist — real artists willingly return to their past works, over every detail of which they are ready to pore, just as they have laboured over them to the full extent of their power — that when I have once finished, for I am afraid I cannot use the word “completed” any work, I never want to hear of it, to see it, or even to think of it again. These verses therefore must be considered, from this point of view, the sole work of art, which I have produced from ten years old to sixty: for from the moment of writing them I knew them by heart, and it was indeed on the strength of reciting them, in the wildest and most terrifying manner, when I was fifteen years old, and in the Big School, that I proved my claim *to be out of my mind*, a claim that got me placed at night in the housekeeper's room, which was the escape, from a certain cruel bully that I above all desired.

My nightly orgies of sadistic imagination were never for long intermitted; but it was only in this strictly cerebral and extremely impersonal manner that I was ever cruel unless you can call my pleasure in teasing by this name. The occasions upon which I have actually *practised* sadism, or even tried to practise it, I shall confess in the fullest detail as my story continues. At this age I can only recall one episode that might be so interpreted, but even this returned to me now — though this may be self-delusive — as done for some other motive. But I *do* remember killing a collection of live beetles which I kept in a box by pouring boiling water over them; but this, I recollect, was quite unaccompanied, either in the anticipation, or in the performance, by any emotion except those of shame and disgust.

I remember so well one day, when Littleton was not with me, meeting a girl, a little older than I was, who had been to our house; meeting her in fact in the narrow alley at the west end of the South Walk, where the public gardens now begin, and actually telling her about my nightly orgies and about the particular images that I called up to cause myself these inebriating sensations. But this young person disappointed me. What I told her seemed evidently in no way startling to her nor in the least degree engaging or provocative. She was neither shocked nor excited. To my bewildered surprise, my revelations of the intoxicating sweetness of my wicked paradise seemed negligible, nay! *even dull,* to this sophisticated feminine intelligence. It must be remembered that except for being rude to the Spanish maiden and that little person of the South Walk with her demure look and her straight hair, whose self-possession so excited my maliciousness, girls were not girls to me at all — they were only quiet ineffective boys — until I was nearly of an age to go to Cambridge.

It may be that my teasing was always due rather to maliciousness than to sadism. Some of it certainly was. And what a strange thing, when you come to think of it, such malice is. It is not, I am quite sure of that, the same as sadism; and I wish I could analyse it! I *ought* to be able to; for I believe there has never lived a human being so addicted to it as I am. Is it perhaps connected with that tickling irritation, that itching sweetness of fidgety tantalization, we feel sometimes in the presence of personalities who are what is called "cute"? Let me narrow down the possible objects of *my* particular kind of malice; which, I admit, may easily turn out to be *sui generis*. Strong, fierce, formidable people never excite this feeling in me. Very wicked people never excite it in me. Extremely ugly, deformed, crippled people never arouse it. I was on the point of saying that grave, dull, conceited people never do; but I remember a pale, red-haired, neatly-dressed boy at the Preparatory School, whom I used to force to the ground by a turn of my wrists — my wrists have always been as strong as a murderer's — who could not in any conceivable way, either in the spirit or in the flesh, have been called "cute." There *was* a boy, on the contrary in the same school against whom I behaved abominably: it is one of my very worst actions; and *he* might, with certain reservations, have been called "cute"; but the other could have but excited my malice, if that *is* the word for it, only by his annoying neatness, tidiness, primness — for he was otherwise at the extreme opposite pole from anything seductive.

What then is the true nature of this feeling that I am in the habit of calling my “maliciousness”? My friends laugh at me when I use this word. *They* think of me as touchingly artless, harmless, well-meaning! I think that what it really and truly is, is misanthropy. I think it is an *anti-man grimace*, a desire to escape being surrounded by men and women. That this is a true analysis of the feeling is borne out by the fact that towards extremely wicked, extremely formidable, extremely ugly, extremely intellectual, extremely degraded persons, I never experience this sensation. These are already super-human or sub-human; but I suppose the demureness and composure of that South Walk girl and the primness and neatness and self-satisfaction of this Westbury House boy may be regarded as essentially “human-too-human.” Yes, the more I think of it the more I feel that it is the absence of strength and formidable ness combined with a certain unruffled self-importance that excites this devilishness in me. The feeling differs completely from sadism in the fact that all my malice wants to do is to disturb, or see disturbed, the equilibrium of these worthy people in some rough or violent manner. Sadism is something entirely different from this.

I must not forget another of these magic “apercus,” these glimpses into that enchanted land, towards which, without knowing where I was going, I directed my boyish pilgrimage. This was a visit we paid to Ventnor and Shanklin in the Isle of Wight. That we ever went to these places I know was due to the fact that some old servant of my father’s youth was living there as a pensioner. His faithfulness to his personal past, his heightening of it till it resembled one of those poetical autobiographies that the Homeric heroes delight to indulge in before they slay each other or exchange arms, was, as I have hinted, one of his most marked characteristics.

But in the sands along this island shore could be discovered in those days certain small, hard crystals, called Isle of Wight diamonds. These diamonds were to be purchased in the shops; but it was a great hobby among the visitors at that time to collect them for themselves and become amateur misers. This hunting for crystals — or whatever they may have been — in the sea-drenched shingle, which was just there neither ordinary pebblestones nor yet sand, was an intense and rapturous pleasure to me. To sit on a sea-beach forever and collect Isle of Wight diamonds seemed to me all that any heart could wish. I, at any rate, required no more. Curse it! What is it that we all lose as we get older? It is something in life itself. Yes, it is *in* life; but it is a much deeper thing — no! not exactly deeper; I mean it is of a more precious substance — than what we think of as "life" as we grow older. Now I am inclined to think that to a quite unusual extent I have retained to my sixtieth year the attitude of my early boyhood; and such being the case I am tempted to hold the view that the more obstinately I exploit this childishness and take my stand on this childishness the wiser — if the less human — my mature life will be.

It was while bathing at Ventnor out of a bathing-machine that I had my first experience of being what they call "ducked," in other words having my head thrust forcibly under water. This "ducking" was one of the things I disliked most at school, and I record here and now that older people bathing with children are greatly to be blamed for resorting to this practice. Let them scoop up the water, if they must, in their own hands and drench their children's heads, but this "ducking" business should be stopped. It is an abominable shock to be ducked, not only to our nerves, but to our personal self-respect. Whether from exposure to the sun as I hunted for "diamonds" or whether from this accursed "ducking," it was in the Isle of Wight that I had an attack of something uncommonly like an epileptic fit. Of this fact I have all my life been extremely proud, having discovered in my reading that such fits have been, throughout history, the peculiar “sacred sickness” of persons endowed with messages from the gods.

Returning to our Dorchester life, which must altogether have lasted about seven years, I want to set on record the passionate delight I used to take in stringing together small coloured beads upon cotton thread and making them into rings and bracelets. I can now recall the exquisite pleasure I got in choosing particular colours for this craft. Colour has always played a part in my life about twenty times greater than form. Perhaps Blake was right when he uttered the words that my friend John William Williams, the Roman Catholic apologist, used to repeat with such prelatical austerity:

“He who does not prefer Form to Colour is a Coward!”

Certainly the art of painting has ever been far more important to me than the art of sculpture, towards which, along with music and every sort of bric-a-brac, I have been, following my father’s indurated limitations, obstinately cold. I can see now with incredible vividness certain particular ones among these little beads — dark bottle-blue ones coming back to me with the clearest delight. *Colour!* What a thing to have appeared at all under the sun! To anyone who like myself is not only a coward but a confirmed sensualist, this phenomenon of colour is like a vast number of entrancingly delicious fragrances *grown visible*. No it is more than that. It is like a human body with which you are infatuated. It is at any rate something you touch, taste, feel, and embrace with your whole soul. It is something *you sink into* and enjoy like the revelation of an erotic Fourth Dimension. It was at Shirley in my very earliest infancy that I used to press my knuckles against my closed eyelids and watch with intense delight the marvellous kaleidoscope of colours which then formed and re-formed before me. And I never see pansies without remembering how once I was shown a collection of them

— I would protest indignantly *now* against such a proceeding — pressed under a glass frame, as if they formed the contents of a framed picture.

One definite purpose I have in view in the calling up of all these memories is the confirmation and defence of certain habits of thought and feeling — I would almost say a philosophy of life — which is largely the deliberate and shameless adaptation to mature experience of the dominant instincts of childishness. But I must not let myself dodge — for the sake of giving my life the sort of fulfilled entelechy for which one's maturer life-illusion clamours — those disturbing eruptions of pure wanton mischief, those explosions of caprice, wherein the aboriginal chaos revenges itself upon our rational gravity.

One of my greatest joys was to pour mustard and water down the holes of lobworms. What an interest it had for me to observe these indignant earth dwellers, great lubberly sons of darkness, come sprawling into the daylight, thinking doubtless that the end of the world had come since the sky rained brimstone. Another absorbing pleasure was the making of man-traps. We had an aged gardener then, called Mr. Curme, whose laborious life had bent him double, "head and feet," as Wordsworth says, "coming together in life's pilgrimage." I used to inveigle Littleton and Theodore into helping me dig deep holes in the earth where the artichokes grew, those English artichokes that resemble pinkish-white bulbs, and whose tall stalks used to supply the "Volentiā Army" with some of its deadliest weapons. These holes we covered with sticks, then with rhubarb leaves and lastly with earth mould. I am glad to report that I cannot recall Mr. Curme falling into these holes; but I expect this was because in our eagerness to see them in action we deliberately plunged into them ourselves.

Those were days when, as the eldest of the family, my primogenital despotism exercised unruffled sway. Littleton's natural gifts for athletic sports were, I can assure you, not allowed the ghost of a chance to develop under my dictatorship. His only revolt always took the same form, that of settling himself down at the dining-room table to the quiet task of drawing ships. Theodore, to my tyrannical satisfaction, showed no inclination to draw ships. There was something bizarre, even then, in *his* nature, which lent itself, when I could decoy him out of his “Bushes’ Home” to my most erratic undertakings. Yes, orthodox games were as alien to me in those days as they are now. I can remember well the sensation of shivering uneasiness, like a gipsy child peering at soldiers drilling, with which I watched our cousins, who were then at Winchester, playing with a football.

To sum up my experiences of this terrestial incarnation during these three years from seven to ten, I felt working in me a passionate desire to exercise a very especial kind of power, a power that was above everything else secret and anti-social. In the pursuit of this power I was distracted by obscure and mysterious fits of inexplicable delight in certain wonders and marvels — like those blue beads and that green gravel and those Isle of Wight “diamonds” and those pansy petals under glass, and the glimmering movements of the minnows in our aquarium. But I can well recall waking up one morning in my room looking out on the South Walk and thinking to myself that I must and would bring into my real life those fancies about being a magician, like Merlin or at least like Norna of the Fitful Head which were for ever hovering in my brain. Causing lobworms to come out of their underworld did not satisfy me. I wanted to call up demons. Digging holes for Mr. Curme to fall into did not satisfy me. I wanted to entrap “Dromonds” and to overwhelm “Escrawaldons.” To be the General of the “Volentiā Army” was in the ordinary day’s work: I still had obscure intimations of what it felt like to be a ruler over invisible angels. My desires were certainly disconnected and irreconcilable. My sadistic thoughts were totally unconnected with my yearning for supernatural power; so also was a tendency to greediness which I now began to develop especially with regard to raspberry vinegar and Huntley and Palmer's oaten biscuits.

I have already mentioned how I used to listen with entranced absorption to the reading of the *Waverley Novels* and how these books encouraged my dominant obsession. But better even than these were Scott's romantic poems. How I used to repeat to myself under those overarching chestnuts, as I lay in wait to leap out upon the "Spanish Maiden":

"Glimmering faint and distant far
Shimmers thro' mist each planet-star!
Well may I read their high decree!"

And I have no doubt that the description of Michael Scott, holding in his dead hands in Melrose Abbey his Book of Magic, was one of the influences that effected my whole earthly vision of human and inhuman possibility.

Night by night as I took off my clothes I must have felt like one moving down the aisle of a darkened cathedral, under the torn emblazoned banners of the world's oldest superstitions. But once snugly in bed, Oh how I would give wild rein to my wicked thoughts! There were many times however when the Arch-Devil Fear, that enemy of mankind, not nowadays taking the shape of a stick floating in a lake, but taking *some form*, you may be sure, totally incommensurate with the enormity of its abominable menace, would make me shudder. And it was then that I would seek assuagement in the sweetly solemn stanzas of Bishop Ken's Evening Hymn, that hymn of hymns for the soothing of human nerves. But not unfrequently it would come to pass that even this gentle "Glory to Thee, my God, this night" — would fail of its purpose. It might serve to quell the hot fevers of unsanctified thought, but it proved totally ineffectual in driving away Fear.

And so I used to have recourse to a less literary incantation. No, it was not to the majestic Michael Scott in his unhallowed cerements, that the little Johnny, in his white night-shirt, cried aloud when Fear glared at him. None others than Messrs. Moody and Sankey — I must confess it — were in those days my Ministers of Grace and my final defence; and hugging my thin knees to my thinner chest, crouching in fact in the very posture in which people were still finding the buried bones of the great Legionaries who guarded Dorchester from the Barbarians, I would forget sadism and minnows and lobworms and green gravel and traps for Mr. Curme and the terrible death of the wicked Front-de-Bœuf, and whisper hurriedly into the stormy Wessex night:

"Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His tender breast!"

CHAPTER THREE. PREP. SCHOOL

INDELIBLY IS IT branded on my mind the day when my father took Littleton and me to Sherborne and left us at the Preparatory School. How well we subsequently came to know that journey from Dorchester to Sherborne! Leaving the Great Western Station the train emerges from a tunnel near the barracks and passes between "Pummery," an ancient encampment, and the flat water-meadows in which stands the Elizabethan house belonging to the Banks family. Many a time had we been taken by our Berkshire maiden down the West Walk, under the remains of the Roman wall, past the barracks' gate, to these open slopes of "Pummery." Five years ago, leaving my companion at the "Antelope," I slipped off to renew with these turfy ramparts an acquaintance interrupted then for more than forty years, and I found the place completely unchanged.

With what thoughts did little Johnny and little Littleton, sitting opposite their broad-shouldered progenitor, gaze at that familiar spot as the train increased its speed? Into the Great World they were now plunging, plunging indeed — as everyone knows who knows anything of school life — into stresses and tensions, shocks and endurances, the like of which, unless they went to war or became penniless outcasts, they would never again have to experience till the day of their death.

Passing Frampton, Maiden Newton, Evershot and Yetminster we reached Yeovil Pen Mill, and there we had to change our train. There are three stations in this busy town on the borders of Dorset and Somerset; and changing again at what is called the Town Station it was not till we reached Yeovil Junction that we were able to establish ourselves in the South-

Western express that runs from Plymouth to London; where the first stop we were to make would be at Sherborne. Close to the noble tower of Bradford Abbas Church the train would gather speed, and following the banks of the muddy Yeo would not utter its shrill whistle again till it ran parallel with the Big School cricket-field; parallel too with a certain row of dingy cottages, whose long line of pensive chimneys any wretched boy, trying in vain to enjoy cricket, might distract himself by counting, till the Day of Judgment saved him for ever from compulsory games.

Characteristically enough my father was all impatience to escape the social amenities offered to the parent of two new boys, and you may be sure his sons shared this feeling. So, having deposited our luggage in the care of the school matron, and having been shown by Mr. Blake himself the dormitory we were to share with three other boys, my father hurriedly carried us off for one of his dearly-loved walks. You can believe I shall never forget this walk! All the rest of my time at school I remembered it. I would take that same pleasant field-path across the stately Sherborne Park simply because it was here he came with us that day.

Since the manor was snatched from Sir Walter Raleigh by King James this unrivalled house and park, with the ruins of the older castle, has remained in the hands of the Digbys, another famous Elizabethan family. Not a park in England, no! not even that charming one at Montacute, do I know so well, or admire so much, as this one at Sherborne! Even in my unhappiest years at the Big School I admired it and though it is not free of shameful memories it is I think a proof of the kindly obliterating power of Nature that happy recollections of it, of its sweeping vistas, its beds of deep bracken, its oaks reverting back to the days when the King murdered Raleigh, are what have finally come to possess my mind.

I cannot remember, I fortunately have forgotten, the actual moment when we saw that tall dignified figure take leave of us and depart for his train; but I *can* remember my sensations in the evening as one by one the other new boys entered the schoolroom and we all gathered round the fire. Our Preparatory School terms opened on Tuesdays, just as those of the Regular School did, but I seem to recall that the new boys were established in the house before their initiated colleagues returned. It *may* be therefore that the new boys arrived on Monday. There was a little boy called Mansel — one of the nicest, and, as I now see him in retrospect, one of the best-bred of us all — who came I think from Ireland, though Mansel is a Dorsetshire name — and what must I do, in my nervous volubility and eager impertinence, but begin trying to "tease" this child, after my accustomed manner, by pressing him with challenging questions as to whether he was a *Fenian*, a word that in my father's newspaper was synonymous with the Devil. I cannot recollect the sequel of this silly waggery, but my impression is that Mansel, without resorting to fisticuffs, made a complete fool of me. I should not have recalled the incident at all or the words of a thoughtless remark made by me at the age of ten, if it had not been the cause of a hot blush. How strange it is that what bites most deeply into our consciousness and lasts the longest in memory should be neither great pleasure nor great pain — but simply *shame,* some intolerable hurt to our self-respect! I wish I could, for the sake of pressing home this point, recall how Mansel *did* retort when, on my first night in the Great World I tried to tease an Irishman in the same heavy-handed way I had teased the Spanish maiden; for I expect it would have taken its place at the head of that list of cheek-burning rebuffs which no waters of Lethe will ever wash out.

But well-merited reproofs for ill-placed jests, however long they may last in a boy's mind, do not *at the moment,* rival the terrible force with which physical persecution hits him. When Mr. W. H. Blake showed my father the bedroom we would occupy he told him we should be under the care of a steady, quiet, reliable boy, called W ——. Now I fully believe that W —— *was* a steady and reliable boy in relation to obeying the rules which were hung up in each dormitory, such as: "No talking after 'Lights Out'," but I am compelled to believe he shared with me the vice of deriving a lively sensual emotion from being the cause of certain kinds of suffering. Of course there are — there must be — people who inflict sufferings on others without any of these sensual stirrings; but I must confess my own feeling is that these virtuous dispensers of punishment are very few, and that most people who deal in it, unless they are in a wholesome fit of fury, find in so doing their own somewhat questionable account.

How well I remember waking up in the grey dawn on our first morning in the Prep. and staring at Littleton's calm sleep in wonder, till at last, under my stare, his eyes opened too, and then, oh! what great, round, *slow* tears I saw rolling down his manful cheeks! Littleton's bed and mine were side by side; while W — — 's bed was just opposite mine, on the other side of the room. W —— did, I confess, display in one respect what most authorities would have regarded as praiseworthy "reliability"; for when in the hushed hours of the night there came the smallest movement from my bed that could be interpreted as "sinful" he would send one of his heavy slippers flying at my head. It was indeed a perfect case of that irony of moral blame referred to so bitterly by the mad king in the play:

"Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;
Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp'st her."

It was with more than one instrument of torture that W —— exercised his ambiguous authority. But however hard I try I cannot recall his countenance with any clearness. I know he had a high forehead like that of a bishop or a statesman; but his expression was not ingratiating. It was indeed singularly sullen. Speaking of torture, I confess I did at a later time in the Prep. *play* at being a Grand Inquisitor and get the same sort of pleasure from it as I got when with a toy pistol in each hand I ruled my robber-band in the roof-room at home; but I have no recollection of *really* hurting anyone at such games.

The Preparatory School at that time occupied a house which as far as I know, still stands in that same spot. It fronts a street leading from the almshouses to the school cricket-field; but its back premises open upon that broad and cheerful approach to the abbey from the railway station that runs in front of the Digby Hotel. Opposite the hotel are now the town's public gardens; but when we went to "Westbury House," as it was called, there was a pleasant smooth meadow with railings round it where these gardens are now.

Yes, the first letter I ever received from my father must have been addressed to Westbury House. He had a morbidly careful hand — the hand of a person so inherently averse to writing and so reticent in what he wrote, that he would form each separate letter by a separate act of his conscious intelligence! But though my father's hand was neat and firm and clear, it suggested in some way that, as he held his well-trimmed quill pen between his thumb and his first and second fingers, it was *from his thumb* rather than from his fingers that the dominant pressure came. My own thumbs resemble my father's, which were I think as characteristic of the man as anything about him, being very thin and very flat and very broad and very spatulate. But I when I form *my* letters — alas! not with a quill-pen — must, I fancy, exert the chief pressure with my index finger. At any rate the kind of arrogance with which I used to scrawl in my school books: “Powys Ma, Westbury House, Sherborne, Dorset, England, Europe, the Eastern Hemisphere, the World,” seemed to draw its nervous energy from a totally different zodiacal sign from any in my father’s horoscope. But aye! how familiar that handwriting of his has become to us all! It has a look like the smooth roots of a beech or like the smell of Herb-Robert. How well we knew the sort of way it imprinted his whole character on each reticent page! He would write his sermons in black ink on paper of a blue colour, as he stood at a standing-desk in his study, and then before taking them into the church he would put them into a binding of black velvet, suitable, as he thought, to the dignity and decorum of Divine Service according to the rites of the Established Church. Were I to expect now any letter from my father I should be prepared to feel towards it the sort of feeling I would have towards the Sign-Manuals of old unsophisticated warrior kings.

My father had given me a football to take to school and well do I remember how on our very first afternoon in the Preparatory playing-ground, which in those far-off days was a field behind the music-and-science departments, this football of mine came to its end. As the General of the “Volentiā Army” and the inventor of magic formulae for controlling “Dromonds” I had no conception of the etiquette of football. I was an individualist, though somewhat of a dictatorial one, and I fancied that in giving this football to *me* rather than to anyone else my father dedicated it to my private enjoyment. I hugged it as I carried it. And as I walked gravely along the road — now so familiar! — past the abbey, past the little postern-entrance to the school, past the entrance to the fives courts and the bath, past the entrance to the gymnasium — I left a thrill of elation. With a bold step corresponding to what I was carrying I followed the crowd of little boys, led by Mr. Hawkins, the usher, and as I went I hugged my football. No doubt Littleton, even then, could have told me that a football is not an individualistic toy to be enjoyed in solitude, but he was running along with the rest, for he could not *always* be taking care of his elder brother. Thus, with my football in my arms I entered the Preparatory playing-field. The sequel I need hardly relate. In the first place the ball was not the right kind of a ball. It was round; but a Rugby ball, like the earth, is not round. It was a ball; but it was not a Rugby ball. Indeed, for all I know, it may have been that perverse and heretical object, an Association ball. But whatever it was when it entered that field in Powys Ma's arms when it came out it was a crumpled-up, indistinct mass of shapeless bladderlessness. It was no longer any kind of ball. It had been kicked, and so would Powys Ma have been kicked had he interfered, from one to another of the biggest boys in the Prep. till it had no more air left in it or leather left on it. Such was the ignoble end of my father's careful purchase at Mr. Pouncey's, the saddler's in South Street. He had bird-nested so much in the past when he was himself at school at Kennilworth that he thought a Rugby ball was as like an Association ball as one heron's egg is like another.

W. H. Blake, our head master, was a tall, powerful man, a great fisherman and a fellow of a formidable and unyielding, but very gentlemanly personality. We were all afraid of him, and he unbent very little; but he had a certain "penchant" for literature and I remember once he set us as a task the writing of an essay called, in imitation of the French classic with that name, "A Voyage round my Chamber." My first public literary triumph was my response to this with a rambling description of our own drawing-room; and I remember his praise of my allusion to the sharp edges of my father's arm-chair in that room, against which, I averred, we often painfully collided in our more violent games. What occurs to me in connection with this is the difficulty that I have always found in avoiding, when I have a pen in my hand, a certain facile obviousness, an obviousness which springs from thinking of what would be the nice, friendly, unctuous, appropriate, human thing to say, rather than what had the teeth-marks of reality in it.

But Blake very soon made me the "librarian" of the little Prep. library, which was kept behind glass doors — and I dare say now, after fifty years, is still kept there — in the large play-room. Showing me these books and listening with a good deal of indulgence to my extremely priggish strictures upon some of them, he asked me what I thought of Charlotte Yonge's *Little Duke* and commended me warmly — and it was my first triumph as a critic — when I expressed my admiration for this work.

We used to receive on every Saturday afternoon what was called an "allowance," fourpence for the older boys and threepence for the younger, and with this in our pockets we would hurry off as soon as possible, for we had full liberty to walk where we liked, to the little bake-shop and sweet-shop kept by the Tuffin family, which was snugly ensconced amid mellow old buildings of Ham Hill stone just opposite the armorial entrance to the school house. A savage greed for sweetmeats quickly became now one of the most important things in my life. It became a vice. It grew so intense — I had almost said so passionate — as to supersede in considerable measure my erotic musings. There does seem to be something in greed as a vice that can mitigate sexual self-indulgence. But as I grew older and the violence of my erotic obsession increased, this lust for sweetmeats completely lost its hold upon me. I remember well, however, what form its final out-cropping took; nothing less, in fact, than a passion for plum-cake when I first went to Corpus! I had, oddly enough, an economic mania in those days, almost amounting to miserliness, though its origin was to please my father. This was certainly a queer tendency in a young collegian and one by no means appreciated by friends. Thus this passion for plum-cake, and it is not a very gracious memory, was confined to devouring it at the expense of others. I never even bought it on those rare occasions when I gave what I regarded as a festive entertainment. After those days, when together with my erotic instincts my tendency to ulcers gave me trouble, plum-cake vanished from among my temptations. I am at the present time, though poetically fastidious in my diet, as free from greediness as a hunting dog.

What I used to like best at Tuffin's was Cadbury's chocolate-cream, which I would buy in great bars, and sucking off the chocolate in a disgusting manner keep the cream till the last. I had a furious fondness too for a sweetmeat called apricot paté, which was always enclosed in silver paper, and for a delicacy known as raspberry "noyau" which was wrapped in a gauzy edible film. In regard to these precious condiments, into the mastication of which I flung the solemn intensity of my sensual nature, I was selfish to a revolting pitch. It was an unthinkable wrench to part with the least morsel of them. Indeed, I cannot recall, in those Prep, days, one single occasion when I gave away so much as a bite of apricot paté, or so much as a lick of raspberry "noyau."

It must be understood that the Prep, customs were modelled — and I think it was an excellent thing — upon those of the Big School itself, and on half-holidays, of which there were more than one in the week in addition to the splendid freedom of the long Sunday afternoons, we were often let off the compulsory games and allowed to wander about the country at our will. In all this Mr. Blake was a very wise head master; indeed in the matter of letting us off games he went a good deal further than most of the authorities in the Big School.

It was not long before I found out, and on Sundays I used to enjoy this pleasure with Littleton, certain steep banks — more than mere banks they were; indeed, I might describe them as precipices, overgrown with brushwood — that rose on either side of a narrow road at the top of what were called “The Slopes,” a road which bore the amiable appellation of Lovers’ Lane. So steep were these overgrown banks hanging precipitously above Lovers’ Lane, that it was for me an enterprise of quite lively interest to climb along the edge of them near the top, where you were entirely hidden from the path below and were driven to cling tight, as you made your way along, to various protruding roots and emergent sapling-trunks that grew in the slippery clay.

Deep in my nature — inherited directly from my father — was a longing to escape from organized society and find a temporary home for myself, a private, secret domain of my own, where no one could intrude, where it was indeed almost impossible for anyone to intrude! This instinct — and I like to fancy it was an atavism going back to the times when our Welsh ancestors hid themselves in their mountain fastnesses — was composed of two kindred impulses, one to escape into the wilds, and the other to make a home of your own, a lair, a retreat, an embattled fortress, into which you could retire and defy society.

My dominant desire during the whole of my school life — whether in the Prep. or in the Big School — was to lead a double existence, and while just “getting by” in the School Dimension, to find my real happiness in a secret subjective Dimension where I was “monarch of all I surveyed.” Littleton was only moderately captivated by these proceedings. They would have suited Theodore much better. But the whole question of the deep and complicated pleasure I got from these overgrown banks above Lovers’ Lane is an obscure and subtle one. Some would say it had to do with that deep-rooted longing in human hearts to return to the security of the maternal womb, but I think it was more closely allied with a desire to substitute a secret reality of my own for the reality created by humanity. A longing for a lair, for a cave, for a fortress, for any hidden domain, which cannot be disturbed, is still deep in my nature, It is doubtless for this reason that I have always wanted to live in narrow quarters, a *little* house in the country or in a *single* room in the city, and that I have a positive detestation of large houses. The feeling of being safe and snug in a hidden retreat, while the world passes by outside and cannot reach you, is very dear to me. I have always loved that passage in Scott's poem about the hunted stag:

"There, close-couched, while thickets shed
Cold dews and wild flowers on his head,
He heard the baffled dogs in vain
Rave through the hollow pass amain
Chiding the rocks…."

As soon as Littleton and I had escaped the "steady" and "reliable" W——, and were happily dormitoried with boys of our own age, I invented the childish and singular pastime of creeping down under the bedclothes to the very bottom of our beds. Such was the hypnotic power I possessed of extending the domination of my manias that if Mr. Blake had entered our room after "lights out" he might on occasion have found the whole six of us entirely concealed from view, as we turned our bedclothes into rabbit-burrows; but what does seem odd is that even now, as I approach my sixty-first birthday, I can exactly reproduce the mystic ecstasy with which I thus burrowed — as some would say — in search of pre-natal concealment, but certainly to escape the real world. While I am upon the subject of hypnotizing others with my manias I cannot help recalling how towards the close of my life at the Prep. I actually persuaded all the bigger boys to form themselves into two hostile bands and play-act a sham battle, a battle full of ambuscades, hiding-places, fortresses, retreats, and circuitous flanking movements, among certain old quarries that border what is called the Bristol Road.

I like to think that it was with a successful escape from the conventionalities of school-life that I brought to a close my time at the Prep. just as it was with my famous oration at Wildman's supper table that I ended my much less happy life at the Big School. For I must put on record that thanks to the excellent liberty granted us by W. H. Blake I was often extremely happy at the Preparatory. Some of this happiness was doubtless due to a more complete escape from the real world than could be found above Lovers' Lane or among those quarries on the Bristol Road. I refer to books. Hour by hour I used to sit at the table in the Prep. play-room reading Jules Verne. What I liked far best in this lively author were the stories relating to "Captain Nemo," beginning with "Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea." In that incredible *Nautilus* — and it has never interested me in the least to know how far modern inventions have succeeded in imitating the imagination of this fine author — I got a full measure of the sensation of being snug and safe and secluded and unapproachable. Where, as a matter of fact, could anyone be better hidden than at the bottom of the deep sea? And so seated at that table in the play-room, with the library to which I had the key opposite me, I read indiscriminately! The first book of European celebrity I enjoyed, however, apart from Scott, was *The Three Musketeers,* and this was not in our library. It was lent to me by my closest Prep. friend, a little boy of grave literary tastes, whom later I used to name by the feminine name "Tetine." *The Three Musketeers* was one of the first books out of which I derived the least morsel of fuel for my wicked imagination but I do not think I cared for it in other respects very much. Swashbucklers and toss-pots have never allured me.

As I say, my chief preoccupation at school — whether in the Prep. or the Big School — was to live *as if I were at home and not at school*; and in this, considering the difficulties I encountered, I was really wonderfully successful. I think that we all tend to overrate the power of the world; I mean of the hard, brutal, practical element in social life. As a matter of fact before a very little audacity and a very little mother-wit the power of the world crumples up. I found one magical way of retaining the identity of my life for which I shall be grateful to the end of my days. This was offered me by the admirable custom which obtained equally in the Prep. and in the school of devoting Sunday afternoons to long country walks. Littleton and I, for in this matter so clannish were we that it would never have entered our heads to spend these precious afternoons apart from each other, used to wander to every point of the compass till for miles round we knew that countryside with the knowledge of poachers or gamekeepers. North, south, east and west we used to go until it came about that to this day I know the lanes and fields for miles round Sherborne better than I know the landscape of any other terrestial spot. Our favourite direction in the final issue was to what we used to call "The Trent Lanes." These were really a very singular phenomenon in that part of the country where Dorset and Somerset touched. They were quite a network of narrow grassy lanes between high hedges separating the Yeovil Road from the little village of Trent. It was from a woody eminence above this village that we used to be able to see the tree-topped summit of Montacute Hill, and this fact when Montacute became our home was enough in itself to draw our footsteps here. There was a "bottomless" pond between Trent Village and the park-like slope where the lanes converged, and this particular region possessed enchanted vistas for my imagination.

Oh how I can to-day smell the damp earthy smell of the cold clay mixed with rotting apples into which our feet would sink in those leafy purlieus of that "bottomless" pond! Oh how I can feel the rainy wind drive through those orchard hedges in the autumn equinox! I used to get angry with Littleton when it rained in those days and threaten to "beat him like a dog." He was a great one for telling the weather-signs; but his predictions did not always come true.

We were very hungry on these occasions; but the few apples and blackberries we got hold of satisfied much more than our physical craving. They made us forget — at least they made *me* forget — that we were at school at all. I can well remember when nibbling at the sweet-bitter outer rind of the hips and haws how disagreeable it was when those little straw-coloured filaments inside got into your throat! I can well remember a particular treasure-trove of cider apples that we found on the grass by the edge of a lane not far from Marston Magna. Sherborne is really in a wonderful position as far as the romantic and fruit-bearing valleys of Wessex are concerned. On one hand it has the Blackmore Vale, and on the other the beginning of the Great Somerset Plain that very soon becomes the fen-lands of Sedgemoor.

Another of our favourite walks was to the Corton Downs, at the end of which is no less a place than the original site of the walls and towers of Camelot. This is unquestionably vouched for by the fact that the word Camel is used in those parts both for a stream and for the hamlets built along the stream; while at the foot of Cadbury Camp above Queen's Camel there is to this day a spring called Arthur's Well. We were always assured by local antiquaries that Arthur and his Knights were playing chess in the heart of Cadbury Hill until the Day of Judgment.

It was pathetic to see how our walks invariably showed a tendency to direct themselves towards that quarter of the horizon where our home was; and this resulted, before we left Dorchester, in our selecting the park, and the Long Burton Road, and the Honeycomb Woods, rather than Cadbury Camp or the Trent lanes for our walks. Beyond the Honeycomb Woods we discovered, not far from the roadside, some small ponds of singularly unmuddied water in which there used to live a number of orange-bellied newts. These ponds were holy places to me. Here I really could forget school. They reminded me of our aquarium. On the way to these ponds above Honeycomb Woods there were, as soon as you had crossed the railway and the "Bog Stream," some extremely pleasant meadow-lands with a right-of-way footpath leading through them. In a thick-set hedge near this path grew — and I hope grows still — a magnificent oak-tree. It was a tree worthy of the Druids, though not, I suppose, to be compared with its venerable brethren in the park. Into the branches of this refuge Littleton and I used to climb. Indeed, we made of this tree a kind of medieval keep in which we could hide in security, untroubled by the battle-cries of any "Escrawaldons."

My readings in Jules Verne soon launched me upon an enterprise that was full of intense excitement — namely the concealment of "Treasure," and the composition of an elaborate clue to its hiding-place in the form of a cryptogram. In such undertakings and indeed in many others of a less childish character, I was forever being fooled — and so it is still — by my own blunderings when it came to practical details. There is a curse upon my hands! My hands, powerful though they would be in strangling an assailant, fail me hopelessly when anything requiring skill is required. It was in the drawing of the maps for the clue to my hidden treasure — which consisted, I have no doubt, of several weeks' "allowance" — that I got so fooled; and in the end I was ignominously compelled to accompany the searchers. But, as happens in the poppied oblivions of life, all these misadventures fell away at last like troublesome vapours from the landscape of my mind; and for the rest of my school days — yes! until I was in the Sixth Form of the Big School — all these fields on the way to the Honeycomb Woods remained transformed by the mystic light emanating from these three-penny bits hid in a tree-stump.

As I grew older and passed my eleventh and twelfth birthdays the bullying I suffered in the daytime — though Littleton and I, thanks to our escape from "Old Reliable" were free from it at night — increased rather than diminished. I can see now the countenances, but I must not put the "evil eye" upon men who may now be grandfathers, of B —— and of H —— and of a robust young devil whom I will not even name by an initial letter, as they looked when they were repeating their well-aimed blows — technically entitled "poops" — upon a portion of the arm they were twisting. I can recall the unsympathetic appearance too of the French window at Westbury, leading into the yard where once these gentlemen — for I cannot think of them as boys of thirteen or fourteen — directed very vigorously towards my nose the most excruciating prods with the end of an old billiard-cue.

When I think of these things my one regret is that I had not the spirit to burst into a frenzy of anger and hit out fast and loose. If I had *always* fought, even if I had been badly mauled once or twice, all would have been well! As it was, all this contemptible submission left my own evil tendencies "unbled," so to say, of their bad humours. Indeed, I became by degrees, on the strength of my murderous wrists something of a bully myself; but I am afraid a very mean one. I became a solemn bully, a bully who was totally devoid of the frolicsome humour of converting a human nose into a billiard-ball.

I remember with shame, and it is the one solitary instance of my life when I *practised* my sadistic tendency upon a human being, how I engineered, with a cunning only equalled by its infernal cowardice, an ambush for a little red-faced boy whose tears at a touch were wont to gush from his eyes and pour down his rosy cheeks as if he had been the Cupid of a fountain. Cowardly devil as I was, I put into the head of some rough-handed idiot that this child had "cheeked" him, and then proceeded to look on with the most sinister feelings while this unamiable Roderigo, skipping out from behind a door, slapped the little boy in the face. The Erinnyes for once did not prove oblivious of this dastardly behaviour; but I doubt whether, when a few years later Powys Ma. found himself standing in unspeakable misery and shame, his hands tied behind his back, in a public road, opposite a row of workmen's cottages, calling upon "the Slopes" to cover him and upon the abbey tower to fall on him, he remembered the smarting cheeks of that fountain-Cupid.

Of all spots on the surface of the terraqueous globe I suppose the great school bath, one of the largest bathing-places in England, built of solid stone and cement, is the one most vividly engraved on my mind. Aye! what I did go through in this magnificent swimming-pool! W. H. Blake and his usher endeavoured to teach us all the swim by dangling us at the end of a cord, like miserable little fishes at the end of a line, from a solid wooden bridge which crossed this enormous volume of greenish-grey water where it was about six feet deep. We must often have appeared more like newts than fishes for we often used our arms, not to swim, but to cling frantically to the cord at the end of which we dangled. Littleton learned to swim in this peculiar manner almost at once; and before he had left the Prep. he had won what was called his "Doubles" which meant that he had swum up and down the whole enormous length of the bath some nine times. We wore bathing-drawers of distinguishing dyes to denote how near to the "Deep End" we were allowed to go. Those who could not swim a stroke were called "Muds" and were compelled to conceal their nakedness in drawers of rainbow hue. Such "Muds" however as reached the minor distinction of being able to jump in at the deep end and swim to the shallow end were promoted to be "Reds", and thus escaped the penalty of wearing the school colours round their loins. I think it was at the very end of my Prep. time that "I got my Reds," and beyond this I never progressed. The manner in which I taught myself to swim was a disgrace; and I have only to think of it, among a thousand other humiliating experiences, to bring down completely any physical pride I might have left. I held my nose with one of my hands, and with my face completely under water struck out with my free arm and my two legs, and thus acquired by slow degrees a certain trust in the buoying-up capacity of that Sherborne bath.

"I would never wish a son of mine" — but what am I saying? For the son I *have* got, when he was ten, *insisted* on going to Sherborne, holding that the glory of a noble and ancient tradition outweighs a host of physical discomforts.

But is it not a strange thing, how, if you are an Englishman of the upper-middle class, you suffer the greatest hardships of your life before you are twelve years old? School in England — the Public School system — has a hundred times a greater influence over you than Oxford or Cambridge or any other University. My own brothers differ greatly between themselves over this question of the Public School system. Littleton, who greatly enjoyed it, upholding it steadily, and Llewelyn, who also enjoyed it, attacking it fiercely. My own attitude is, I fancy, not very different from the attitude of many ex-soldiers. I would not like to condemn others to such experiences; but I am proud, in a sense, to have gone through them myself!

In a certain way I think the cricket-field — for football was never such an ordeal for me, and after all it only lasted an hour — was even a worse purgatory than that terrible bathing-place. Cricket it was impossible to escape — whereas for one term I did persuade my father to give me a kind of ticket-of-leave off bathing, on general medical grounds; but "O Poppoi!" I have never in my whole life felt such shame as when *with a dry head* I slouched, cringed, crouched and sneaked back alone, during the grand rush to the bath, feeling like a leper, a pariah, an untouchable. But, as I say, in one sense this accursed cricket was worse than the bath. Not worse perhaps than being ducked; but Littleton so often would come with a rush and a dive to my rescue there and *duck the ducker* whereas on this Field of Desolation Littleton was always far away; and not all the protective instinct in the world could lure a successful batsman away from the wicket where he was making his hundred. Besides what could he have done? To make his brother Johnny into a cricketer would have been like making his father into an actor. Oh! those interminable hours when I stood fielding, never being allowed to bowl a single "over" and finally when my innings came round, always out for nothing! I well remember — but this was in the Big School, after I had missed a catch at "long-leg" — saying to myself in bitter degradation and complete misery:

"O Lord take away my life, for I am not worthy to live!"

It is that cricket-field that in all the sharp and bitter moments of life as they come to me now, gives me a sense of wholesome proportion: "At least I am not playing cricket!" I can say to myself and, on the strength of that, become like the much-enduring Ulysses.

How I came to envy the old almshouse men who sometimes used to watch our games! I would even envy the very weeds that I used to find on the outskirts of the level "pitch" when I hurried after a boundary. They at least had escaped the scythe, the mowing-machine, the roller, and all the other appurtenances of a national sport. Yes, for all misfits, and "funny ones" in this world Nature is the only refuge. She may give the tiger his claws and the cobra his poison, but she looks with a very wanton mischievous eye — an irresponsible *Ionian* eye, you might say! — upon all the severe rules and disciplines of "lovely Lacedæmon."

I liked the winters at school better than the summers. In one of our first winters in the Big School, Wildman's yard was invaded by a mob of town boys armed with snow-balls; and it was a proud moment, and no forlorn desperation, to find myself, on this occasion, shut out, as the chances of battle ebbed and flowed, alone with the enemy! I confess my heart sank a little, when the whole school, including the Sixth Form who had a right to carry canes, set off *en masse* along the Bristol Road in order to toboggan down a particularly steep hill. But the younger among us carried metal trays to slide down upon; and I am still proud of the fact that I got quite definite delight, as I went bumping down this precipice on my belly, with a smaller boy seated on my back, both of us every now and then tossed up into the air as we flew, like the Dolphin and Arion, when they were tossed upon the crests of the slippery waves.

If I had become priggish or arrogant in my ninth year, I certainly had little left of these mental faults after I had been a year at the Big School. I recollect how a boy called B ——, one of my worst enemies at Wildman's turned once to Stodger A ——, when, as one of the older boys himself, that potentate was supervising our evening preparation.

"Can I speak, Stodger?" he said.

“Yes,” that magnate replied, “if you can speak quietly. What is it?”

“Do look Stodger, *do* look! Did you ever see such an ugly mug in all your days, as Powys Ma.’s mug?”

A conceit of my personal appearance had never been a peculiarity of mine. Our earliest teachers in Weymouth and Dorchester always fell in love with Littleton, as who indeed could help doing, and felt an instinctive distrust of me.

“You have a prejudice against me!” I remember crying out once with intense emotion when I was only six or seven; and my general attitude was that all competent, effective people of the world had a prejudice against me. They were certainly in the right of it if they had; for the abysmal misanthropy with which at Dorchester as Johnny and at Sherborne as Moony I regarded the well-constituted persons who derided me was a hell-broth as “thick and slab” as that which I concocted out of our urine in the Shirley garden. I never showed anger and I never forgave. In this I resembled an elephant. But my physical and athletic disabilities at school must have made a dent on my mind from which I shall never recover. I got it thoroughly lodged in my brain that I was an awkward fool, a clumsy fool, a blundering fool, a cowardly fool, an idiotic fool, an impossible fool, a pitiful fool, a graceless fool, a windy fool, a complete fool, an untidy fool, a master fool, an absent-minded fool, a vicious, sneaking, ungainly fool, a greedy-gut fool, an ugly-mug fool, a nondescript fool, a mad fool, an inexplicable fool.

Why, at Wildman’s, my unpopularity grew and grew to such a pitch that it ended in what amounted to a Powys Ma. outlawing, a Powys Ma. baiting. They said that I ate my very food, in some gross, sub-human, sub-animal way, chewing it with my front teeth instead of with my grinders! I was not unhappy at the Prep. but I was not liked by the other boys. When my wrists became so strong that it was recorded in my report, “A decided tendency to bully,” I remember being cordially and with but single exception universally disliked. Although a bully, as far as my power of putting people on the ground with the strength of my wrists is concerned, I went in deadly fear of several much smaller boys. One of these little demons who was bent on fooling me received one evening a laconic warning from Powys Minor, who signed himself with classic brevity:

“From one who *can* lick you.”

Aye! How there comes back to me now one autumn afternoon in that Westbury House yard, when we were all gathered at the big gates that opened on the Station Road. We were waiting to start upon a paper-chase, the two foxes already gone, Mr. Blake and Mr. Hawkins already gone, Mr. Blake’s short-legged, long-haired poodle gone, only the unfortunate hounds who had to follow the sprinkled bits of paper over hedges and ditches, left there in their chilly football clothes, till the moment came to set off. Blake, with his inquisitive poodle, had been informed of some particular spot, several miles away, which the boys who acted as the quarry in this chase had arranged to pass; while, from the bags they carried, a thin paper-trail, leading to every thickest hedge, to every deepest pool, to every densest covert that their desperate escape could find, fluttered down upon the ground.

I can recall — and it was doubtless a premonition of those gastric ulcers that afterwards, in our unscientific family, were accepted as an act of God and laconically known as *Jack’s pain* — a queer, sickening dead-sea taste in the pit of my stomach, as I stood there shivering, summoning all the endurance I had. How it comes back to me too, the sight of old Blake waiting for us at some remote lane’s turning, with his broad shoulders and military moustache, and that ubiquitous little dog at his feet.

“Well, Powys Ma.” he would cry, as panting and breathless I trailed past him, bitterly envying that complacent poodle at his feet, “Well, Powys Ma. no spurt left in you, I see!”

No spurt indeed! It was a wonder that I managed to call up enough of what was known as the “second wind” to get back to that yard before darkness descended on the Blackmore Vale. To walk any distance, and to surmount most obstacles, my father *had* taught me; but never in my life had I seen him run; and this running at such a sustained speed for three or four miles was totally beyond me.

Only once were Littleton or I *caned* by Blake in that little study of his at Westbury. I don’t think he had — honest country squire as he really was at heart — the faintest touch of *my* vice. But his pride of domination was tremendous and it made him a terrific disciplinarian. And he had a villainous collection of canes. Any boy who had been caned was wont at night, before “lights out,” to hold a sort of court of honour in his dormitory, at which he would proudly display the black and blue stripes, often tinged with blood, that had brought him to heel, bruises that seemed, curiously enough, to redound both to his own glory and the glory of the master! What were we caned for? Both of us, oddly enough, for the same thing. We were caned for introducing caning into art! Since it was not a matter of ships, Littleton probably got the idea from me; and so difficult are the technicalities of perspective that Blake mistook what were really drops of blood for a Bewick-like insistence upon a less cruel but a good deal grosser effect of the rod.

It must have been early in the ‘eighties when Blake began building the New Preparatory. This spacious erection arose on the edge of the open fields towards the Yeovil Road and I can recall well how one Saturday afternoon, my pockets full of apricot paté and raspberry “noyau,” I imitated

Romulus and Remus by jumping over these embryo walls. It must not be supposed that I was unable to get *any* normal pleasure from games. I was not quite as sub-human as that. Indeed, when we were at Wildman's House in the Big School, a house situated near the cricket-field — though it is I believe at the present time some sort of convent — Littleton and I were wont to betake ourselves in the summer evenings, alone of the whole school, to the outskirts of this field where we would bowl at each other with excited interest. Our life-long friend and well-loved master, the Reverend Mr. King — *eheu! non est qualis erat!* — actually took this proceeding of ours as a memorable illustration of a proper spirit in such matters. It was an illustration of an *unconventional* spirit anyway; and as a matter of fact it was a proof of a contention that I have always upheld, namely that in this affair of games it is your amateur rather than your professional who gets the absorbing marrow of the sport. And, as for football, before I left the Prep. yes! and afterwards too in the Big School, I used to derive great satisfaction from an amateurish form of diversion that obtained on the football-field, to which boys could casually drift in, on their way to or from any sort of country stroll without having to assume the orthodox football attire. This custom consisted in kicking the ball just as your whim dictated — either by the process of "placing" or of "punting" or of "dropping," when once you had made it your own; and you made it your own — and the scrambling for it was always courteous and amiable — by pursuing it when it fell and "touching it down," or by catching it before it reached the ground. This harmless and peaceful sport was entitled "Punt-about," and it was a wonder to see the subtle mixture of nostalgia for old conditions and pride in new conditions with which ex-Prep. boys, who had just entered the Big School, would casually gravitate towards "Punt-about" with their former cronies.

They would appear with a lethargic, nonchalant air, as if, though on their way to unintelligible privileges, they might, just as well as not, look in at the old place for a moment, and please the kids by a kick or two at their ball! Not that we ever spoke of our late companions, or of any other Sherborne boys, as "kids." We would always say "people."

"Do any of you people want some chocolate? Are any of you people coming to see the match?"

I fancy that not even the Chinese themselves are more touchy about their personal dignity or more preoccupied with "saving their face," than are boys at school in relation to one another. They *have* to be. The whole system inculcates it. I suppose no human expression is more natural to an Englishman — whether he be a little boy, a big boy, or a master — than a certain selfconscious complacent satisfaction as he permits his eyes to follow a cricket-ball or a football that he has projected through the air to a considerable distance. Then, especially if it is a "boundary" and other people are running after it, you will see a smile of infinite contentment on his face, which will quickly change however — as his self-consciousness returns — into a look that says: "Pshaw! That's nothing. *That's all in the day's work!*"

The actual change from Westbury House to Acreman House made no impression of any kind on my mind. Important event as it must have been to W. H. Blake, it was a bagatelle to Powys Ma. The only thing that impressed me about this vast erection — the first of so many new buildings in Sherborne — was the way we had now to go to reach the school chapel. We Prep. boys had our own seats there and used to run the gauntlet on Sundays between rows of quizzical lads who enjoyed knocking our tall silk hats over our eyes. But to get there from Acreman House we had to pass some extremely old-fashioned labouring men's cottages which stood back above the road. Do you know, I really believe that a great deal of my mania — for it is no less — for contemplating peaceful human homes, especially little ones, where unknown personalities are transacting all those simple, domestic, routine affairs that have to be done under the sun, has one of its origins in the sight of these little houses.

It was always there at the back of my mind, this incredible luck of the grown-up persons who were not at school. To *take in the milk* in the morning while you observed what the weather was going to be from the doorstep of your own house, was not this the height of human felicity? To go in and go out of natural rooms — not necessarily with as much furniture in them as I had described in my "Voyage round my Chamber" but at least free of the desolation of desks and blackboards — from a garden where the crocuses and cabbages knew nothing of school etiquette, seemed like coming forth from Malebolge and "re-beholding the stars." It was in the Lenty meadows that Theodore and I decided — he was in the Prep. and I was in the School — as we watched some navvies working on the line, that it would be far better to be a navvy on the railway track than be at school.

But it was the women I envied most, for not only were they *not at school*, but they did not have to go to war, or to go to sea, or to go to work anywhere *under discipline*. They did what they liked. In my idealization of home-life it never occurred to me that in these very houses there were probably women who — like Eustacia in *The Return of the Native* — were pining to listen to the military band at Dorchester or to attend the Pier Theatre at Weymouth, and to gain those ends would have worked at any mortal job under any sort of discipline. But the envy which I felt for the happy women who opened their own house doors *to take in the milk* did not end with my life at school. I felt it at college. I even felt it when, as a lecturer in the Brighton girls' schools, I lived a bachelor life over Mr. Pollard's grocery shop, in the town of Southwick.

Well I can recall on a certain dark autumn afternoon watching a peaceful delivery of evening milk at the door of a little house in Rottingdean, on the other side of Brighton; and this incident has remained in my mind as the living symbol of a certain deep-rooted nostalgia in me for a life of primitive routine in a very small house! There is some magical and mystical secret to be found in this, I feel sure, a secret profoundly subtle, and in no way connected with the crude generalizations of psycho-analysis. Passing these cottages to get to the school chapel we also had to follow a little private alley that led between the north wall of the bath and the head master's garden.

This wall is consecrated to the massive link that binds — and will ever bind — Littleton and me together; for it was over this that I leaned once, when I had the liberty of the sick-house — oh how lucky you were when you were ill in those days! — to hand to him a branch of dogwood with caterpillars on it. I had found these caterpillars down by our favourite oak-tree, and you can see from this episode that natural history collecting was not discouraged at school; but all the same I can now behold with my eyes the kestrel hawk's egg — I can see the brown blotches on the pale ground, like rusty blood-drops on a fungus — which some meddlesome boy broke and which I mended with stamp-stuff, weeping despairing tears. Collecting eggs was a passion that both Littleton and I shared with my father; but when I began collecting postage stamps my father had a very odd look on his face. I think he regarded a philatelist as next door to a professor.

School life made it very difficult for me to pursue my secret mythological ways. It is not easy to be a magician at school. Nor was that tendency to fetish worship, which is so strong a thing in me able to find much scope. Dormitories and schoolrooms and cricket-fields do not lend themselves to the cult of the inanimate. All the same when some revolutionary day-boy dared to introduce — they were soon suppressed by orders from the Big School and some well-bred thief appropriated to himself the whole lot — marbles and tops, those playthings of the streets — into Westbury House, I had an opportunity to cherish at least one inanimate object with primitive veneration. I can well remember a black top I had at that time — they were only very little tops we played with, to be spun with the fingers — and I can see the small entity now and the spirited personality with which I endowed it.

Walking-sticks we were not allowed to carry at school till we got into the Sixth. I can remember the first stick I ever had as a small child. It was of a reddish colour and had a horn handle. This was when I was nine, I think; for I can remember walking with it to the Roman Amphitheatre at Dorchester feeling like a young Lictor or a young Pro-praetor taking the air. I can remember another important stick in my life, the one I bought when I got at last — Littleton was there, I expect, already — into "The Sixth." This stick had a curious knobby handle, like a club, and was of a sandy yellow tint. Take it all in all, walking-sticks have usurped the same prominence in my life as swords did in the medieval life. I have had my present hickory stick since while my witch-hazel stick has only been about six years in my possession, being given to me, in Patchin Place, by Mr. Gilman, at the haughty command of the incomparable Miss Rowe. But the most important stick, so far, I ever had — though Llewelyn has given me a serpent stick of marble-wood, that affords me immense satisfaction — was a round-handled oak-stick which I had all the time I was at college. This stick I named "Sacred"; and sacred it indeed was, in the true antique and superstitious sense of that word, being an accomplice of mysteries and an intimate of manias.

I suffered in those days from the well-known mania of always wanting to wash my hands. I used to have to call out to people to open doors for me out of fear lest I should dirty my fingers by touching door-knobs. I may notice in passing that the happier I am and the more my inborn nature has its free fling, the more I tend to indulge in superstitious, animistic rites and ceremonies! I always used to wash the handle of “Sacred” in the puddles in the road when my hand sweated at all, and it is a matter of grave importance to me even now where each of my particular sticks will “like” to stand, while it is awaiting its turn to be taken out. Yes, this animistic superstition of mine has grown much stronger the happier I have grown, and as a wise voice out of the air once said to me:

“Learn from this that it is better not to try to be *too* sane.”

I confess, for all my anti-social tendency, I always got an exultant thrill at the school commemoration. Blake used to give us all a button-hole for this occasion from the garden under the high wall at Westbury. Well can I remember my pleasure in receiving a pink rose bud from this formidable man’s great fist! Sherborne School commemoration, praying for the souls, so to speak, of all its ancient saints and kings, took my hero-worshipping mind back to St. Aldhelm and King Alfred; took it back to the boy king Edward VI, that prodigy of the Renaissance, took it back to the days when our grandfather — he of the silver coins — came down by coach from Norfolk, and to the days when our Uncle Littleton, dead and buried in India, won glory such as we should never gain, for his rare skylarkings and devilries.

I keep struggling to remember some occasion at the Prep. when my present-day cult of a life of sensation rather than of thought could be said to have originated. But in vain! Hopelessly do I struggle to recall anything in the least resembling what is my chief preoccupation to-day. This inability annoys me. I wonder it does not give me a sort of spiritual vertigo. And yet I feel myself the same person! I *am* the same person. The moment I get out of the control of my own will, the moment my thoughts wander as they please, I become again the Johnny of Rothesay House and the "Moony" of Westbury House. But I always refuse to let them get out of my control, these thoughts which are my life, these thoughts that are me. "They shall march" — as Captain Toby Shandy said to the corporal— "they *shall* march!"

No, in these days I never let my mind wander when I can help it; but the worst of this volitional inner life is that it sets itself to fling, into the sort of annihilation that we feel befalls gnats and midges, the far-away Johnny who used to dig pits for Mr. Curme and the still farther away Powys Ma. who had a passion for apricot paté and a weakness for "punt-about."

Yes, the most teasing discovery I make now as I fumble in the twilight of my memory about these days, is that the only mental unity I can lay hold on, the *string,* so to speak, on which the beads of my impressions are strung, is simply a nervous imaginative ego, driven here and there by temporary manias and obsessions and totally lacking in any inner formula of resistance to life. A young boy cannot be expected to be a philosopher or even a conscious devotee of cosmic sensations, but that I should have been so absorbed in the drama of the moment as to be totally lacking in any moments of thought about life as a whole is a blow to my self-respect to-day.

An opportunity for such a feeling might well have been those fleeting moments when as a "Forward," in Rugby football I waited, bent double and locked closely between the panting forms of my fellows, the signal for the "scrimmage" or the "grovel" to get underway, but I would be guilty of a gross insincerity if I tried to pretend, after all these years, that I made at such moments the least approach to such a mental gesture. I can remember once saying to myself in the thick of this football "grovel" that I was made for reading romances and not for butting like a bull; but out of the whole course of my life I can name only two definite occasions when my present "philosophy of resistance" rose in my consciousness as a clinching necessity, an ultimate standing-at-bay.

The first was nearly thirty years ago when with my son, then a child of three or four, I was staying in my relatives' house in the Close in Norwich. In my wayward restlessness and my longing "for more exciting bread than is made from wheat" I was feeling ungrateful to the calm, rich, settled background of that consecrated enclosure, ungrateful even — as I lay in the most comfortable bed in the world — to the precious memorials of the poet Cowper that surrounded me, such as his dark-blue washing-basin and jug and chamber-pot; until in my graceless rebelliousness I became aware of a queer ultimate release to be got *from lying in a particular position*, a position in which a muscular relaxation in my limbs did actually give me the feeling I am now trying to indicate, the feeling of being a conscious entity, able on the strength of certain private sensations to isolate itself from the pressure of historic humanity. The other occasion was in the rather desolate privy at No. Patchin Place, New York, about eight years ago, when without any reason I can explain, as I was calling upon the spirit of ultimate resistance to tribulation, I was suddenly inspired with the idea of a black-ribbed, brass-handled *chest!* This object I mentally lifted on high; and for several years the image of this black chest became a symbol to me of my residual powers of resistance to the impinging cosmos. The truth is I am so made that my imagination inevitably converts every mental process which is at all important to me into a ritualistic symbol. Such symbols and such conscious image-creating acts of the imaginative reason have become an incalculable help to my secret mental life; and I confess it now seems to me nothing short of amazing that I had the courage — like an unfledged soul in a state of helpless nakedness — to endure all the shocks, all the alarums and excursions, that came to me at that tender age.

Hockey, played with almost any sort of an amateur stick, was a game we used to indulge in in that big new yard at Acreman House; and I recollect I played it again in the yard of Wildman's House in just the same informal manner. These games of hockey were indeed an incredible comfort to me; and in the heat of them I could forget my "ugly mug," my worse than incompetence at cricket, my unhappy way of chewing my food, my dread of being "ducked" and my inability to compose Greek verses.

Meanwhile, that sickening tormentor of the human soul, Fear, Fear the Arch-Demon, was always waiting to make me long to bury myself at the bottom of the sea. I am speaking now of the sort of Fear a person never, or *hardly* ever, reveals; and indeed I am against attempts to reveal it. Better, far better, carry about with you your own torment and sprinkle it with your own sluice-pipe of Lethe water!

We are all mad; and the best thing is to learn to forget our madness. Forget it! Never fight against it. But it must not be supposed that I was uninspired, while at the Prep. by those moods of mysterious emotional exultation that by the indulgence of great creative Nature come at times to all men born. I remember well one night going out under the stars through the new yard of Acreman House to visit the urinal; and as I gazed upward, dazed from reading Bulwer Lytton, at that time a new discovery to me, making a vow to those flickering, glittering points of white light and to the starlit roof of the latrine towards which I was directing my steps, that what I would be, when I grew up, was a poet. The transporting ecstasy that thrilled through me then must have been of an unusual violence, else I could hardly remember it, as I do now, after nearly half a century. It had to do with the stars; and never again have the stars seemed quite so friendly as they did that night! What a special, and what a curious page in a person's life is the history of his relation to those glittering points of white fire that redeem the dizziness of black space. It always strikes me as strange and unnatural when modern writers speak of the stars as "indifferent" or "unsympathetic." They seem to me not the least more indifferent than great mountains, or the stormy sea, or the face of the dark earth herself. On the other hand they never, as they apparently did with Kant, turn my mind to the grandeur of their opposing miracle — the towering moral sense in man.

No, it is not with my conscience that I get these candles of the Infinite under control and fixed in appreciable sconces. It is with my intelligence. Size, distance, boundlessness never worry me much. I regard them as a mathematical trick — almost an illusion — not to be compared with the expansiveness of the mystery of thought, thought which grasps them, encloses them, surmounts them.

But now I must allude to an aspect of my feelings when I was at the Prep. that sprang, and still springs, from one of the deepest currents in my being. I refer to hero-worship. No set of personalities will ever impress me with the grandeur of *homo sapeins*, or with the same awe and reverence as did those great "Shepherds of the People," as Homer would say, the athletic heroes of Sherborne School. How I knew them — every turn and glance of their unique physiognomies, every movement of their incomparable frames! In the chapel on Sundays I would gaze at them with awe as they came in; and when the school played her desperate football matches with outsiders and we all rushed up and down the field, wild with excitement, I became far more intimately acquainted with the old Roman emotion of corporate piety than I have ever been since over any cause.

But beyond even these football matches, in this rousing of my Homeric hero-worship, were the annual school steeplechases. How I used to recognize and salute each well-known figure, as they came panting, leaping, stumbling, falling, recovering, hurling themselves over hurdles, over thick-set hedges, over dykes and ditches, over walls, fences, and swamps, until they passed finally through the very “Bog-Stream” itself! We all had our special heroes among these champions. Mine — and do you think I have forgotten him? — was *Perch Ma.* I have a vague impression that there was a Perch Mi. too, but *his* lineaments remain obscure to me. Perch Ma. was my Achilles, my swift-footed child of the immortals. And aye! what a pure unalloyed rapture it was when your bones melted within you at the sight of the triumph of your particular darling of the gods! As Goethe so profoundly says — probably when he was putting the worthy Ackermann’s carpings in their place— “Love alone renders us able to endure superiority in others!”

I am inclined to think that before I left the Prep. I had already become acquainted with the works of George MacDonald. This writer must have found me a morbid savage and left me a moralistic prig. But this man’s books, with all their crudities do really possess some special vein of poetic sentiment, and they did much to thicken out my life-illusion. I cajoled Littleton himself into reading one of them, which was about a lovely young woman called Euphrasia. Most interesting it is to me now to note the difference between us in these matters. To the mystical superiorities that made *me* feel — as I said I felt to my unsympathetic teacher that day on the Weymouth pavement — so exceptionally “good,” Littleton was totally impervious. They ran off his sound nature like water off a duck’s back. But when it came to sentiment — from which my “occulted” vice was destined to protect me — Littleton threw up his hands. Oh that sweet, soft, flexible, beguiling "Euphra," how she did bring the tears to his suceptible eyes! He so rarely read a story, that when he *did* read one it dominated him day and night. I can tell you I did not leave him and his Euphra alone. I teased him as he *loved* to be teased on such a topic. But although armoured by my vice against normal sentiment, I can clearly detect — and I am proud to record it — a subtle instinct in me, even in those Prep. days, for a certain kind of amorous *romance.*

There was a boy I was very fond of then, a grave rather womanish child, who had, in another boy, a friend more purely passionate than I ever was, whether to man or woman. This boy had picked up somewhere the piquant balladish expression, "Tetine and Thomas Bedlam," and had promptly applied it to his friendship with my friend. This phrase enchanted me; and it gave me the most complicated pleasure to tease these two — for the drama of the situation robbed it of all jealous pangs — by repeating like an incantation "Tetine and Thomas Bedlam … Tetine and Thomas Bedlam" … till they were forced to flee from me in confusion. I seem to find in this "Tetine and Thomas Bedlam" episode thus enjoyed vicariously, the clue to almost everything that I later became. A message eventually reached the Prep. from some boy high up in the Big School, who knew my friend's friend, that Powys Ma. would be wise to keep his mouth shut. I am afraid this is not the only occasion in my life when from "higher up" such a message has reached me.

CHAPTER FOUR. SHERBORNE

LITTLETON AND I entered the school together; and just as every detail of our first day at the Prep. is branded on my mind, so is it in this case, save that it is *bitten in* even more deeply.

As in the other case the new boys had to turn up before the rest, and how we were impressed by the grown-up airs and the *light clothes* of the habitués, as they began drifting in on that memorable afternoon! At school of course everyone had to wear modestly dark and quiet clothes; but apparently it was the custom for all the older boys to make their appearance in man's attire, with Norfolk jackets and turned up collars.

Littleton and I, who knew already by sight and reputation the famous figures in Wildman's, became more and more awed as the younger boys, asking us the usual arrogant questions, began revealing terrifying stories of the reckless deeds of these mighty ones. We were shown for instance with bated breath the dandified figure of G.W. whose legend actually included an affair with a factory girl, one of the very girls whom we often saw at work in the small silk-weaving establishment near the bridge over the "Bog-Stream." The mingling of a vague mysterious sweetness with a sense of something startling and shocking that this unrealizable factory girl cast round the tweed-coated figure of G.W. was a queer element to encounter in your first day at school; but another surprise awaited us in the disturbing remoteness, from all our ideas of what a school house-master would be like, of the unique personality of Mr. Wildman.

"Come back," I might cry now, "in the heyday of thy fancy, life like a fiery column before thee, William Beauchamp Wildman, philologist, antiquary, scholar!”

Mr. Wildman was indeed a remarkable character. He was a bachelor in those days and the inexhaustible and wayward high spirits of his pantagruelian soul had not yet been tempered by responsibility. What a Latinist and Hellenist he was; and what a rare eccentric! His real interests were all intellectual. He was a first rate form-master, but I think he never “cottoned,” as the saying is, to being responsible for a houseful of turbulent boys. Not one of us knew how to take him. In many ways, like a true scholar, he was as simple-minded as a child; and then again he would make it quite clear even to the most unfledged intelligence that he was, in regard to religious and moral tradition, emancipated to a degree that bewildered and disturbed. Nor could you ever know how he would behave! When angry he fell into a blind fury; but not into a schoolmaster’s fury; into a child’s fury. Indeed, considering the really powerful intelligence it put to rout, it was a pathetic fury! I always admired and liked Mr. Wildman; though I never understood him. Few did, I fancy; whether among the boys or the masters. His chief friend and crony was our deaf music-master, Mr. Louis N. Parker, who, with his famous Sherborne Pageant actually inaugurated that form of historic panorama, and who subsequently became a considerable playwright. No, you never could predict how Mr. Wildman would react to any mortal event. This unpredictableness endeared him to all except the stupid and dull; but it was a disconcerting trait in a schoolmaster.

I remember an occasion when he had some ladies with him at our midday meal. And, fool that I was, without thinking what I was doing, I made a pellet of a bit of bread at my side, and flicked it from me with my finger and thumb. As ill luck would have it, this unfortunate missile, cast upon the air, struck, or came near striking, one of Wildman’s lady visitors! He was beside himself. It was, I fancy, solely at the intercession of the lady in question — whose magnanimity was only equalled by her beauty — that I was not dragged out of the room and flogged then and there. As it was I received "five hundred lines"; which was an excessive punishment, and meant that I got no fresh air at all for the whole day.

But now for and example of Mr. Wildman's clemency. Years after this — two or three years anyway — when I was in his own form, which was the one just below the Sixth, he suddenly, as we used to say, "Put me on" — I mean stood me up to translate. It was a passage in some Greek poet, which I had not, in my unscrupulousness, so much as glanced over. But there was no going back. I simply had to undertake a desperate and miserable struggle, making frantic guesses and appalling blunders, and hoping against hope that some miracle would interfere. Never, to my dying day, shall I forget the feeling I had as I started at those indecipherable hieroglyphs and plunged from one wild conjecture to another. In the end, after helping me through with it himself, he made me sit down. "Execrable!" he exclaimed; and that is the only occasion in my life when I have heard the word "execrable" uttered whether applied to myself or to anyone else. To me it is — with the word estimable — a combination of syllables that some peculiarity in my gullet makes it impossible to pronounce.

But, passionate scholar as he was, in his rôle as housemaster he just left us alone! His Sixth Form boys too followed his examples and left us alone. One of them was H. B. the well-known popular writer. Another, nearer our own age, was the International Mile-Race Champion, the famous W. E. Lutyens. Lutyens was as good and kind as he was great; and it was an honour to have him as friend.

Our house was all the sane a chaotic democracy rather than a constitutional monarchy: and it tended to get more and more into the hands of demagogues and gangsters. As God willed it, one of the new boys of our own time of entry proved himself the worst bully I have ever known. My indignation against this person, whenever I think of him, is so great that if I met him now — both of us over sixty — I would willingly plunge into physical contest with him. Among the more primitive forms of satisfaction left me at this late day, I cannot imagine many I would like better than to try my strength against this other elderly gentleman, and *to get him down!* "That," I would say, "is for ——; and *that*" — hitting him again "is for ——" And even after punishing him in that way — so much do I resemble God — I would put him in the lowest circle of Malebolge when I write my Inferno. I offer these sentiments as a modest contribution to what might be called pathological ethics; insisting only that it is not a question of *personal* revenge; since the brute I am thinking about never laid a finger upon *me.*

I was always much better at examinations than at ordinary classes; thus it came about, to our equal astonishment, that I was placed straight away in the Lower Third Form, while Littleton had to start at the very bottom of the school! But I can tell it was quick work for him to overtake me; and during the larger part of our life at Sherborne, Powys Ma. was at least one form below Powys Mi.

Well do I recall the singular individual who was the form-master of the Lower Third at that time, and well do I recall also the skill with which he managed his classes, classes which, in those days, were held in the great central hall of the school. This imposing structure was hung round, and is so still, with awe-inspiring honour lists and it was with his back to one of these that this man sat. His name, if I am not mistaken, was Griffiths; and I rather fancy he may really have been Welsh; for he had a drooping yellow moustache like those in the pictures one sees of the ancient Britons. I liked him. He took the profession of schoolmastering with more than a pinch of salt. He used to announce to us at frequent intervals, "I am the Fountain of

Justice"; and the way he uttered this phrase added a sort of puckish unreality to that historic school hall. I am sure some of the learned personages on those portentious honour lists must have looked down with deep suspicion upon this whimsical Celtic teacher thus snugly ensconced in their grave Saxon foundation.

But it must have been in the Upper Third where Littleton overtook me. This form was presided over — I use the word designedly — by the amiable and good-natured ruler of Wilson's House, and I am convinced that for warmth of heart and geniality of temper Mr. Wilson had few rivals in the school. He was a cricketer too, and a most sociable person. But alas! "Tommy" Wilson, as he was always called by those who loved him, was not born to do justice to the eldest son of C. F. Powys. He allowed himself a certain easy, conventional latitude in the matter of teaching which was fatal to me. In that old monastic classroom of his, reached through the medieval dimness of Norman cloisters, I was contemptuously neglected and rebuffed. Mr. Wilson must have esteemed the art of "Drawing from Still Life" as one of the most important aspects of culture; and with this view I no more agreed then than I do to-day. He made us "take places" as it is called, entirely on the strength of these weekly art lessons; which, I can assure you, were very rowdy and casual affairs. Oxford and Cambridge scholars who had been trained to keep order, tended to fight shy in those days of teaching art. This was in "The 'Eighties," you must understand. But I doubt if anyone, hardly Ruskin himself, could have taught art to the Upper Third at Sherborne. For the truth is that art, beginning it as we were beginning it with "Drawing from Still Life," had none of the weight of the National Ethos of England behind it. Latin and Greek and mathematics breathed, smacked, tasted of this. Even Shakespeare — that irresponsible rebel — was made to attune his "native wood-notes wild" to the Dorian strain.

The "mores" of a public school in those days — and I doubt if things have changed much to-day — were an intensification, within rigid limits, of this National Ethos. And neither these "mores" nor this "ethos," built up upon the heathen Roman tradition, favoured the only sort of "art" that we were likely to be taught. As a matter of fact — I speak not for myself, reader, for I have always been a fish out of water in such things — we at Sherborne did in our own fashion represent Plato's ideal Sparta. The worst bullies were excrescences, ugly ogre-like figures that took advantage of the subtle unwritten laws by which we lived — such for instance as never, *under any conceivable condition,* to appeal to a master — to pursue their ingrained brutality. Yes, serious bullying was an excrescence on the system; and yet in almost every one of the out-houses it existed. And as for the school-house, there flourished in our time there, as the heroic Godfrey Carey himself, enemy of all cruelty, bears me witness from the grave, one of the very worst of these bloodthirsty ogres. The unhappy victim of the particular monster of this species that we had in Wildman's died, if I remember right, of some illness in the holidays and thus escaped; but there must be many boys who lived to be men who carried the pathological marks of such treatment to their graves.

Psycho-pathological science is still in its infancy, and its dogmatizing will, we may hope, grow more subtle as time goes on; but I should like to suggest at this point that some other word, quite different from "sadism," ought to be used for the heavy-handed insensate brutality, thoughtless and stupid, and sometimes malignant, which was characteristic of the worst cases I knew. I am no neophite, as I have confessed, in the appalling psychology of what is called "sadism," which is, of course, an erotic perversion; and it is my profound conviction that the worst cruelties I saw at school were not sadistic at all. They were either thoughtless brutality or they were malignant vindictiveness.

My own experience of life has taught me that when Jesus prayed that His tormentors might be forgiven because they knew not what they did, He prayed for the most wicked and dangerous people in the world. *Not to know* what they do is indeed their sin — and it is the unpardonable sin. These “not-knowing” ones are worse than any devils.

I cannot tell you how I disliked the French language in those days. I dislike it still; but with reservations in favour of Rabelais, Verlaine, Proust. I am afraid, according to the “national ethos” which dominated our Public School system, French ranked with “Drawing from Still Life.” Our French lessons, taught us by a master who evidently disliked French almost as much as he disliked boys, were held in a room near the old Prep. cricket-field in the midst of the music and science reservations. They were attended by riots almost as flagrant as those that attended the drawing classes.

But I used myself to forget the annoying French accent and the general misery and indignity of those lessons when I heard the strains of the new school song practised a few doors off. This song thrills me now as much as it did then. I think it must easily be the best of all school songs. It is in Latin, the only suitable language for scholastic patriotism, and it is free from all those puerile references to cricket and football that make other school songs so ineffably silly. It was written by E. M. Young, the head master, a cultured and liberal-minded gentleman who was persecuted by all the bully boys of the place and finally compelled to resign; while the music was composed by Mr. Louis N. Parker. I cannot refrain from quoting the first stanza of it.

“Olim fuit monachorum,
Schola nostra sedes,

Puer regius illorum
Fecit nos heredes;
Hoc in posteros amoris
Grande dedit signum;
Sonat ergo fundatoris
Nomen laude dignum!"

And it ended with a chorus of "vivats" to the memory of Edwardus Sextus.

There was at that time in the school-house a boy quite as delicately beautiful as our royal founder himself, and I think it is a credit to my emotion in the presence of such loveliness that merely to be within sight of this boy made me brave as Socrates. You will hardly believe it, reader, when I tell you that this wretched Powys Ma. — with his incredible depths of funk, with his inability to catch the easiest "catch," or to tackle the feeblest "half-back," with his feeling that the gymnasium was a place of grotesque and monstrous engines of torture, and the bath a kind of icy Giudecca — was wont each day, the moment when the Lower School was bathing, to select his place of undressing and drying *next* to this notoriously beautiful person. My delight in this boy's loveliness was so intense that when I stole timorous, nervous, furtive, and yet ardently satyrish glances at him, as having undressed at my side he stood for a moment in his bathing-drawers meditating his plunge into those blue-green waters, I was totally lost to the world. The boy himself was completely oblivious of me. I never in my life spoke to him, though I must have undressed by his side a hundred times. But it was so delicious a paradise to me merely to snatch quick glances at his lovely form that I altogether forgot that such an unpleasant phenomenon as "ducking" existed anywhere on the earth.

It is really extraordinary that the miseries I went through at Sherborne have not made me shrink from that quiet Wessex town as a Spanish Jew might have shrunk from the city of Torquemada. Such however is not at all the case; and as a matter of fact conditions at school have probably changed from what they were then. Once I could not see the straw hat of a Sherborne boy without a sensation as if I were a Helot watching a young Spartan go by! But I have outgrown this feeling; and just as many victims of the war must have settled down peacefully in a landscape, full for them of frightful images, so I would willingly spend my declining years at Sherborne; though I should always glance anxiously at the walls of all the "houses" and utter an invocation on behalf of any little "Johnny," turned into a contemptible "Moony," who might be crying in vain to heaven for a drop of pity as small as a wren's eye.

I think it must have been about the time Littleton and I entered Wildman's that Mr. W. R. Phelips, owner of one of the most spacious Elizabethan houses in the country, appointed my father, as his vicar, to the large and ancient village of Montacute in Somerset. Here my father was still within reach of Brunswick Terrace; for Montacute was only one station away from Yeovil, on the Taunton line, and you could get from Yeovil to Weymouth in an hour. I can well remember walking home with him one evening from a walk to Ham Hill and remarking, as the drive-gate swung behind us with its familiar clatter and final click, how much I admired the umbrageous approach to our new domicile and the curve of the drive beneath Mr. Cole's railings. He was extremely gratified — for his eldest son did not often praise his undertakings — and rubbing his hands together and protruding his upper lip, after his fashion when he suddenly felt happy, he replied with infinite pride:

"I'm very glad, John, my boy, that you appreciate the home I have provided for you!"

I sometimes think that no one who has ever lived has had intenser moments of happiness in life than my father. His personality was so massive, so monumental, that he seemed to have a power of enjoyment, in mere weight and volume, about double that of ordinary human beings. And since his pride and his reserve hindered him from displaying this emotion in public, he hardly ever started down that vicarage drive, to set out upon one of those parochial excursions which were an excuse for the long walks he loved, without at some moment — between front door and drive gate — quickening his steps in this silent ecstasy which was his worship of life. This is really — as my brother Llewelyn has said, and said much more to the purpose than I can — what all his eleven children owe to him: the power of falling into an ungovernable transport, in the midst of the most ordinary doings.

I can so well recall one of my first nights at Montacute; for we went to see a Christmas-tree at Montacute House. Mr. Phelips was always very friendly to me and his personality and peculiarities of manner and speech made a great impression on my mind. Whether he was like a Grand Seigneur of the old times I cannot tell; but he certainly was a very learned and even, to some extent, an eccentric gentleman of the new times. He was the first person I ever heard utter the words "By Jove!" "By Jove," he said, "this tree will soon be in a blaze!" I recollect too how he took us in his carriage, driven by his coachman, Fred Montacute — always a good friend of ours and in later days our gardener — to Brympton House, the home of the Ponsonbys. Stray expressions of this unusual squire remain in my mind as if they were words from royal lips at court.

"We are being chaffed by the populace!" he remarked, as some boys raised a lively shout while our ponderous vehicle — this was before the day of motor-cars — lumbered through "The Borough."

At Brympton, a far less magnificent but not less picturesque edifice than the great Elizabethan house we had started from, they must have kept up Christmas in the most traditional manner for when we finally passed down the entrance hall, on our departure, it was beneath an arch of extended sword-blades! Coming to Montacute from the Roman remains of Dorchester was like plunging into the earth-mould of medieval romance. A portion of the Holy Road itself had once been found on the top of Montacute Hill, and from the high ground above the village could clearly be seen the conical shape of Glastonbury Tor rising over the Sedgemoor marshes. The fief had belonged to the Nevils in ancient times; and there were still Nevils among Mr. Phelips' "populace," tall, stately labouring men, with the gaunt frames and hooked noses of the Bayeaux Tapestry. The richest farm in the place had for its farm-house all that was left of the famous medieval abbey, destroyed by the Tudor king whose courtier the first Phelips was. Of this farm the high-spirited tenants in our time were the Harding family, and many a substantial and hospitable meal did we boys enjoy in that medieval structure. With Montacute House itself, as magnificent as a palace, with Brympton a mile or two away, and with this noble abbey standing behind our church, we were in a position to disregard not only the country houses of the neighbourhood but the country parsons too. These were — it must be confessed — with the redoubtable exception of Mr. Roland of Stoke-sub-Ham — no very inspiring group of hedge-priests. But into the rich soil of Montacute itself, that history-charged, mystical clay of Somerset, my mythological imagination sank at once like a plummet of privileged lead.

What a life we had, what a rare happy life, in that old rambling Early-Victorian vicarage! To see the eleven of us, for the last three of my father's progenv were born here, grouped round the great mahogany table in the dining-room, was a sight none of us will ever forget. Llewelyn has described it all incomparably in his *Skin for Skin;* but Llewelyn was at this time a very small child, his life-loving heavy-lidded eyes only just beginning to take in that marvel of being conscious upon the earth, about which he has been — shall we say by the Providence he loves to flout? — preserved to make such an unequalled ado! Yes, Llewelyn was a small child then, with a "penchant" for bread — a great deal of bread — soaked in very weak, sweet tea. I teased him once shamefully, in my devilish way, when I discovered among the presents hung on our Christmas-tree in the big, damp, fire-lit room — that was alternately named the servants' hall and the schoolroom — one parcel inscribed in all gravity: "Lulu from Lulu." I remember his figure too, when he was still a very young boy and I was at college, as he looked in at the open drawing-room window, where I was reading, and watched me a long while in intense puzzled earnestness; anxious apparently to learn the secret of such absorption. I can see his face now, and his warm, radiant, little body in its flannel suit, standing upright there, like "the angel that John saw in the Sun."

One of our greatest delights in the winter holidays at Montacute, when the ice would "bear," was to set out for a day's skating excursion. Following our father's example we never fooled with the outer edge of our skates or with any fancy tricks, but just ploughed forward at top speed, as far as the available ice extended! Vagg Pond was one place we would go to, and the floods towards Ilchester another; and since these excursions meant that he would have to give up too much time, my father let us go alone. For pure enjoyment of food — of the simple act of satisfying extreme hunger — I cannot recall any occasions equal to these, when, returning home before or after the family's regular tea, we had a royal banquet all to ourselves!

I have forgotten what book I was so absorbed in, the day when the little Llewelyn, with the hot sun all about him, peeped in upon me with such quizzical wonder; but I well remember how my erotic obsession drove me to search through all the the *Addisonian Spectators* in that drawing-room. I can now see the delicate rosewood of the bureau where these volumes stood, as I hunted feverishly for fuel for the fever that consumed me. I can recall some particular passage now, two or three of them, to which I would turn; but I will let those of my readers who possess these volumes pursue their own quest! Certainly some of the happiest hours of my whole life — and when I think of the tenuous atmosphere of enchanted glamour that suffused them I cannot find it in me to be ashamed — have been occupied in this cult of cerebral eroticism.

Very, very slowly in those days I was learning to get pleasure from the exposed limbs of young women as well as of lovely boys; but, so far, this was confined to their representation in pictures. Descriptions of ordinary amorous scenes I disliked. They left me, and still do, cold and disgusted. And as for the least approach to gross or lewd bawdiness — such things froze, like the touch of ice, the very roots of lechery in me! These were the days of that fantastical publication, known as *Ally Sloper,* and although the comic portions of this periodical were abhorrent to me, I soon found that it contained daintily sketched outlines of the feminine form most perfectly adapted to satisfy my exacting senses. These *Ally Sloper* young ladies I would cut out with trembling hands and carry about with me in my pocket. Is it not strange how moralists forget their own early feelings in such matters, how entrancing, and also how harmless, they were! My own feelings, I know, were touched with a kind of quivering poetry of lust, a soft, melting, ravishing, spring-like tenderness of lust, that was at the extreme opposite pole from all indecency. I can remember exactly how I felt when, during my first visit to London, staying with a most friendly clergyman there who was my father's closest friend at Corpus, I was taken to the Covent Garden Pantomime, and beheld a whole galaxy — so it seemed to my dazzled and swimming eyes — of girl-angels straight from the well-loved section of my egregious periodical.

It was always a surprise to me, and is so still, that people can find it in them to introduce the element of the gross, of the humorous, of the obscene, of the indecent, into any pleasant pandering to our legitimate desire for the satisfaction of the lust of the eye. Panders in this kind are messengers of the gods; and let them remember the sacredness of their mission! Personally I was always very touchy about the backgrounds of my erotic musings. I liked these to be poetical. I liked them to be pure and noble and lovely and of good report; and I here and now utter my strongest protest against these foul-minded moralists who persist in linking up the intense delights of pure lust— "engendering," as Plato says in his *Banquet,* at the mere sight of beautiful forms and shapes — with the obscene, the disgusting, the repulsive.

I like myself always to separate entirely the Rabelaisian element in life — which has its own purgative and cosmic value — from the feelings excited by lovely forms. What I call lust is an intense, ecstatic contemplation of beauty. It is disinterested. It is impersonal. It seeks no advantage beyond to look and to enjoy! What matter if these enchanting figures that I so feverishly cut out and so religiously preserved were torn from the ridiculous and vulgar pages of *Ally Sloper*? Why! I can recall the exact spot, near a grocery shop and opposite a seedman's, where the road from the station widens out at the foot of Sherborne Abbey, where I wished, in that intense way that often makes our wishes come true, that I might have a whole bound volume of *Ally Sloper*, a volume as big as my *Boys' Own Annual*, wherewith to feed my furious fancies! What has always been so annoying to me in my course through life is the tendency that most men have — it is essentially a masculine tendency; for the laughter-loving Aphrodite grows serious when laughter begins to kill desire — to turn lust into comedy! Rabelaisian obscenity may have its place; though I confess I prefer the Rabelaisian dung-hill; but what has always annoyed me is this confounded linking up of humour with lust. When you contemplate a bed of cuckoo flowers, do you go and proceed to spoil it by dragging in something facetious? Why should you feel that it is your manly duty when you are absorbed in delight at the contemplation of a young woman's limbs to be funny about it? I suspect that this linking up of sensuality with the comic has some deep pathological cause. Probably it springs from the normal man's instinct of self-preservation when he finds himself caught out of himself! But where normal men grow humorous, your moralists grow malignant and obscene. Away with them!

"You beastly-looking fellows,
Reason doth plainly tell us,
That we should not
To you allot
Room here, but at the Gallows,
You beastly-looking fellows."

Let it be clearly understood that I am not defending any aspect — even the most apparently harmless — of sadism here! I certainly think it is preferable to read sadistic books and brood over sadistic pictures rather than to *practise* this wickedness in the slightest degree — as I have done at least twice in my life; once over that little fountain-cupid in the Prep. and once by killing worms with a knife in the Northwold garden — but I think it is wrong even to read anything of a sadistic nature, or to think sadistic thoughts; for may there not be invisible "eidola" of such imaginations, which, projected into the air, might affect other minds? But on the contrary I am in favour of reading provocative passages or looking at pictures that excite your erotic feelings. Why not, when the emotion is so deep a part of the original movement of creation?

In one particular, during our holidays at Montacute, I fell back upon my old tyrannical ways; for I hypnotized Littleton and cajoled Theodore into acting some of the tragedies of Shakespeare. The Phelips children were persuaded without difficulty — in spite of their Ponsonby grandfather being Her Majesty's Censor of Plays — to make part of the cast for these performances which indeed brought the squire himself into our schoolroom, where the good man must have gazed with wonder at the ancestral Welsh dragon painted in red and gold above the fire-place. You can believe how it fell to the lot of "Johnny-Moony" to play Hamlet in his own person; and I fancy this whole idea of Shakespeare-acting was an expression of something in my nature that went very deep. Into the moods of Shakespeare, particularly the tragic ones, and among the tragic ones those especially where the feeling is expressed in sardonic gibberish, my whole nature flung itself.

I think that down at the bottom of my being has been concealed from pretty early days a deep distrust and a shrewd suspicion of that solidity of the objective world that most people take for granted. I was always superstitious — at one time I even believed in Hell — but I am pretty sure that the more I became true to my subtler instincts the more I regarded the whole astronomical universe with a certain detachment, regarded it in fact as the mere *material stage* for playing whatever romantic, picturesque, or fantastical rôle a person's life-illusion might arbitrarily select. It has always appealed to me — that legendary last word of Cæsar Augustus:

"Have I not played the Farce well? Put out the lights: ring down the curtain! Plaudite et vale!"

Deep, deep, deep must have sunken into my soul that grandiose acting in the presence of the gods and of Fate, of those classic Greeks and Romans! My mania for the sceptical Shakespeare, who like his own more sceptical master Montaigne, had a passion for these consummate actors, encouraged this predilection in me. Oh, how I revelled in every line of his *Julius Cæsar*; and how startled I was when, in reading Dante, I found Brutus and Cassius thrust down to the bottom of Hell!

At a very early age somebody read to me Church's *Stories from Homer,* and I found out that those more primeval and more elemental heroes were just as addicted to this vision of themselves as acting a spectacular part before gods and men, whether in exultation or desperation, as were the Greeks and Romans of the historical times. Thus I learned at a very early age what a consolation in life it is to enjoy things and to endure things as an actor; that is to say, not *hugger-mugger,* and in brute unconsciousness, but as though in default of any god or even of any fellow mortal, you could play out your part before your own awareness, and be to the end both performer and audience!

Had I *any* happy hours at Sherborne School? A few. It was for example an enchanted pleasure to me, on certain Sunday afternoons, to sit for hours in the school library, a lovely, old, medieval building, with deep window seats that had leather cushions, searching through all manner of ancient and modern volumes, if so be that I might find some paradisic passages of sweet immorality. O books, O book-shops, O libraries, how, all my long life, have ye, like great Nature herself, fed the desires and nourished the feelings that the stupid brutality of a false morality would fain stamp out! No wonder every tyranny that has ever existed has suppressed, censured and burned books! For in books, and in books alone, save for the indulgent solitudes of Nature, can the individual soul disport itself in sweet security, and laugh at the moral censor. No bullies ever came near this noble and ancient school library. It was, no doubt, to perpetuate and eternalize a sanctuary of this very kind, that the young bookish Tudor — Vivat Rex Edwardus Sextus! — re-endowed the old monastic institution of St. Aldhelm. In this mellow retreat I was as much secluded in a fabulous castle of my own as when I was hidden in the branches of that Druid oak-tree, or climbing amid the precipitous tree-roots above Lovers' Lane. The sun might fall in warm slanting rays through the mullioned windows, or the rain might stream down the diamonded panes, I was ensconced here in an oasis of happiness where no enemy could find me, where no barking dogs could leap at me and where the loud laugh of the tormentor was reduced to silence.

I used to hurry over to a particular shelf, where I had discovered a volume of the *Plays of Massinger*, inscribe my name with trembling hand in the great book on the refectory table, and then shuffle off to find a retired window-seat where I could be alone. I recollect getting great erotic satisfaction too from old bound editions of *Punch!* In the pages of the oldest among these volumes I had discovered certain oval-faced, delicate-limbed sylphs that the early Victorian artists used to amuse themselves by tossing with a certain elfin mischief into their marginal spaces. This sylphid type of feminine loveliness, evasive, aerial, characterless as flowing water, soon came to be the type that appealed most to my intense, if sterile desire. I have always had a tenderness for those shadowy beings known in the history of magic as elementals; and have invariably preferred the society of an Undine to that of a Thais. It does indeed seem as though Christianity, with all her spiritual subtilizing of our life, has not yet inspired us with the wisest and noblest attitude towards these things; else how could it have been that we boys were in perpetual danger of being birched or expelled for a fault that would have merely amused Socrates, while these accursed bullies went on with their infernal cruelties in complete immunity? But our authorities, like most authorities, were so preoccupied with the suppression of immorality that they never set themselves to stamp out cruelty; while our own boyish public opinion — which would have been the only effective deterrent — remained completely indifferent, only concerned with keeping both bullying and immorality from the knowledge of the masters.

If all the persons who wrote autobiographies would dare to put down the things that in their life have actually caused them their most intense misery, it would be a much greater boon than all these testy justifications of public actions. I am myself tempted to say that what really caused me my greatest sufferings at school was the trouble I had with regard to the simple and natural function of making water. I was nervous — and am still — of doing this in public. In fact when, during the recent war, I had to offer myself for enlistment, what secretly worried me the most was my knowledge of my absurd nervousness in this personal matter. I used to steal out of bed five or six times in our dormitory when the others were going to sleep; and I remember distinctly how it became one of the things I looked forward to at the approach of the holidays that I would be able to urinate happily in private! What a human being *can* survive, and live to tell the tale! No doubt in the Middle Ages many persons went about, quite serenely, with scars of the rack and of other deliberately-inflicted tortures upon their bodies. The powers of recovery from physical and nervous stress which we human beings have is astonishing; but animals, of course, especially wild animals, surpass even our resuscitations in this kind.

Littleton and I used to achieve one glorious triumph over destiny. We actually discovered that it was possible, on certain Sunday afternoons in the Summer Term, *to run home to Montacute* in the afternoon! We achieved this between our regular school dinner which was over before two, and our regular school tea which did not begin till six. Twenty miles — ten each way — did our nostalgic legs carry us on these occasions, running or walking, as the intervening hills went up or down! How gaily we trotted down Babylon Hill into Yeovil! How sturdily we breasted the final deep grass and muddy paths that led to the edge of Mr. Phelips' Park! And how our hearts beat as we skirted the precincts of that palatial house and crossed Cole's orchard to the railings of the vicarage garden! I recollect that we took care to select the particular Sundays for these exploits that happened to fall in the season of strawberries. Aye! how many a plateful of this fruit, squashed up, after our buccolic fashion, with milk and sugar, did we dispose of, ere the moment arrived for our start on the return run! I do not remember that we allowed longer time for this retracing of the way, even with Babylon Hill to be stoically *ascended* instead of lightly *descended,* than we allowed for our first run, but I have no recollection of ever being late for our bread and butter tea at Wildman's.

And what books did I solace myself with in these days? Well, my favourite volume of all was at this time La Motte Fouqué's *Theodoric the Icelander;* and I can clearly remember the indescribable transport that this fantastical tale of the Varangian Guard in Constantinople excited in me. But at school I used to devour voraciously, in those days, the works of Harrison Ainsworth. These lurid tales — *Herne the Hunter, The Tower of London, The Lancashire Witches* — I used to enjoy in very small print, in wretched paper editions procured I know not how; but I had a fervent, secretive way of hiding them under my pillow, and then, waking up in the early dawn, I would hold them close to my eyes and read and read, while the sleeping dormitory about me faded, dissolved, and vanished away, and I floated in space with these grotesque and bloodcurdling inventions!

In our dormitory on the third floor we kept hearing horrid rumours of the cruelties practised by that devilish brute — I cannot, *even now,* cry "God forgive him!" — in the dormitory on the second floor; and it once occured to some of my worst enemies in *our* room to compel "Powys Ma." to take a certain big sponge belonging to one of them, and descending in his night-shirt to the floor below enter the bully's room and fling this missile at his head! Do you think I have forgotten the sick terror that this command sent shivering through my bones? What *was* I to do? To obey was hell. To disobey was hell. It was then that great creative Nature put it into my inventive skull — why had not the brute's victim, down below there, thought of such an escape? — *to pretend to be mad*. I therefore began — with that fatal sponge in my hand — to dance a Bedlam dance, while I chanted in shrill and piercing tones my childish lines about Corfe Castle. My reputation as a half-witted Loony was by this time so well established, that not one of the dozen boys in our big dormitory questioned my pretence, or doubted for a minute the fact that Powys Ma. had quite lost whatever feeble intelligence he once had; and the result was that somebody fetched the matron and I was transferred for nearly a week to a room by myself. Whether the worthy matron ever whispered a word to Mr. Wildman about one of his boys having gone off his head I do not know. Probably not. At any rate I went on with my school routine exactly the same, and even managed to refrain from reciting "Corfe Castle" in the presence of any of the form-masters. I did, however, renew my escape-dance when confronted by the "Trapeze," or the "Horizontal Bars," in the gymnasium; but, even there, our puzzled sergeant only made me "fall out" until the exercises were over. Save for this command to “fall out” in the “gym,” not one of the constituted authorities showed the least sign of being aware that the elder of the Powys brothers had gone mad. Thus it was made evident to my slowly unfolding intellitence that if you have the gall to carry the very weakness for which you have suffered to its fantasticalest extreme you may come out safely on the other side!

It must have been from the age of fourteen to that of nineteen as far as I can work it out, that I remained at Sherborne; and there is no doubt that my school life made a far deeper dent on my imagination than my subsequent brief three years at college. In America, young lads get the external style and stamp of their character from Yale or Harvard or Princeton; but in England it is the school that works this ambiguous magic. Oxford or Cambridge add very little. What is known as “the Oxford manner” is as superficial and unimportant, as far as an Englishman’s real character goes, as the few tricks of speech or affectations of tone that he might pick up on the race-course, or on the hunting-field. His “mores,” his “ethos,” his attitude towards fortune or disaster, has been formed long before he went to the university. It is school that makes him what he is.

I must now relate to you one of the most important moments in my whole life. While still in that unconscionable “Upper Third” presided over by the amiable cricketer, “Tommy” Wilson, I used to have my mathematical lessons in another of those very old monastic chambers; in the classroom, in fact, of Mr. Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead, like nearly all the Sherborne masters in those days, was a dignified middle-aged gentleman who lived his own private life and regarded schoolboys much as a medieval monarch regarded his subjects. Without boys there could be no school, and without a school there could be no schoolmaster! But there were only two masters that I encountered in my experience of Sherborne who shared with their pupils a real living, thrilling interest in the subject they taught, and one of these was Mr. Wildman. Wildman was really an impassioned philologist; and I can recall well a private lesson I had from him once in Greek grammar that turned the very tendons, fibres and bones of that intricate language into things as lovely and provocative as coral or sea-shells.

It may well be that had our Mr. Whitehead exploited mathematics, as his namesake of to-day exploits it, namely as an open sesame to the golden candelabra of an exciting philosophy, he might have endowed the study of Euclid, even for that form, with a different kind of glamour from what it had; but it is of the glamour that it *did* come to have for me that I must now speak. The truth is my mathematical lessons with Mr. Whitehead were an oasis of peace and quiet in my tumultuous life; not because I learnt from him the Platonic secrets of some supra-mundane world into which I could escape from the ramshackle litter of reality, but because his manner of teaching was such that while he preserved perfect order and suppressed all confusion; he demanded less mental effort of his pupils than I should have supposed it was possible for any-older person locked up for a couple of hours with a lot of boys to demand, if only out of self-protection. But the wise Mr. Whitehead — as if he had been Laotze himself — demanded nothing; and if there be in mathematics such a thing as *less than nothing,* this would have been the limit of Mr. Whitehead’s demands! Thus when we were weary of digging out of the woodwork of the immemorial desks in front of us little tiny slips of inscribed paper — posthumous pellets of ribaldry for posterity — that might have laid buried there for a couple of generations, we used to solace ourselves, as the abbey clock kept striking the quarters and the rain kept beating upon the panes, by falling into long reveries; reveries that concerned matters such as needed no *quod erat demonstrandum* to prove their perfection. Well do I recall the floating, fluctuating, dissolving fantasies all too exquisitely sweet, with which I would open in thought that second drawer of my black-and-gold treasure box and tear open the score of enswathing swaddling-bands that made a mummy of the face of my Love.

We were not yet old enough to have a study — or it may well be that Littleton alone was in the Fifth Form and had a study — when one morning, leaving the day-room to get my books out of my locker, I suddenly remembered it was Tuesday or Thursday. Oh, heavenliest days in the week, how my Sherborne life has touched you with a mystery that makes you transcend all the rest! Tuesday and Thursday; it was Sherborne and not any ancient god that made you holy to me for ever! Yes, it was Sherborne and Mr. Whitehead's lessons. For even as I said to myself: "It is Thursday," and took up my little, worn-to-pieces, plum-coloured edition of Euclid, such a great wave of ecstasy rushed over me that I can recall its subtlest essence even unto this hour. This little, ragged, plum-coloured Euclid — Ailinon! Ailinon! That I should have ever lost that book! — became at that moment, if I may say so without irreverence, a sort of consecrated wafer, into which every lovely sensation I had ever had, had miraculously gathered itself. It is really possible that that moment was the most important of my whole life! We have to live a long time to know what *are* the important moments. We think, at the time, they are the days when we change continents, or hemispheres, or nationalities, or religions, or infatuations, but they do not as a rule turn out to be these great lumbering events. They turn out to be some little, tiny, infinitesimal *sensation* — like Proust's "*Madeleine*" dipped in camomile tea — that reveals to us the clue to our life. And what actually *did* that Euclid, picked up there in that leather-stinking, rotten-apple-reeking lobby, where stood our lockers and play-boxes, reveal to me? It revealed to me something much more precious that that Eternal Being of Proust's, reaching him purely by chance and doing him, when it did reach him, no particular good. This tattered Euclid revealed to me that it is possible, even when the bulk of your days and the larger number of your hours are full of discomfort, to embrace a thousand essences of life. The limbs of the loveliest of women, the flanks of the noblest of hills, the mosses upon the most marbly rocks, the clearest waterfalls, the freshest of ploughed-up fields, the blackest of rooks feeding in the furrows, the whitest dust rising up from the most ancient of classic roads, the gleam of glittering sea-pebbles, the faint music of the dying away of the burdens of old ballads, the taste of newly baked bread, the feel of the mystery of things as you muse over your tea — to enjoy such presences and such essences of life, and to do so in the scope of some negligible fragment of matter, this and nothing less is what I found I could compass under the spell of this little plum-coloured Euclid! Yes, I learnt from this moment in that littered lobby, smelling of acrid leather, sour sweat, and rotten apples, that our deepest pleasure strew behind them — even when at the time they are not consciously enjoyed — leaves of delight that become enchanted with the passing of time, like petals gathered in an ancient *pot pourri.*

And if they are always there in that storehouse, why cannot they be summoned up at will? *And they can!* Proust, with his impersonal Eternal Being, stops short at this point, leaving it all to the accidents of our way But when I think *now* of that Euclid something comes back! Not in any thrilling tush does it comes. It comes quietly and *prepense*. But something does actually comes from where that book lies in my mind.

Certainly Mr. Whitehead’s classroom, old and dark and like a Norman crypt under the shadow of the abbey’s buttresses, was something that redeemed many sorrows in my life at Sherborne. As I have hinted, in all the forms I passed through there was only one other master beside Mr.

Wildman whose interest in matters of scholarship and learning communicated to me any answering thrill. This was the Reverend Mr. King, commonly known as "Crusoe." One after another, as we followed each other into his form, which was the Upper Fourth, we Powys brothers came under the influence of this remarkable man and loved him well. Mr. King was friendly to me from the very start! I well remember when the man was ill once, in his bachelor days, how astonished and profoundly touched I was at a roundabout message I received from him, that he would like a visit from me! Nobody else in Sherborne, young or old, had ever expressed a desire to see Powys Ma. when they could have escaped seeing him, and I can behold Mr. King now, with his great grizzled moustache and his weather-beaten North Country features, brooding and humorous and reserved and Wordsworthian, as he talked to me from his bed. "*He was a man*," this Crusoe King, "take him for all in all," and we shall surely never look upon his like again. Of all the masters, it seems to me, Mr. King's love for the school was by far the deepest, and his benefactions, both material and spiritual, far the greatest. He was one of those men who by some massive instinct of their whole being gather up as they go about the world the lasting essences of life and savour them with a calm and constant satisfaction. Mr. King was profoundly English. Old English books he would enjoy and linger over, like an athletic Epicurean; and in the manner of Montaigne he had the wisdom to intersperse certain deliberate hardships among his solid satisfactions thereby to relish these more fully. I remember seeing him at the beginning of the autumn term bathing quite alone in the famous bath; and rumour said he frequently plunged into those chilly waters in the middle of the winter.

The master of the Lower Fifth was at that time the handsome and scholarly James Rhoades, the poetical translator of *Vergil.* Mr. Rhoades always gave me a peculiar thrill of pleasure at the school concerts on the last night of each term, not by anything he did or said, but by his elegant appearance, with his pale, courtly, clean-shaven countenance, and his immaculate evening-dress. But between this distinguished-looking translator of *Vergil* and the Powys brothers there never was any love lost. He was too super-refined for us and too addicted to sarcasm; and he lacked the impulsive heathen earthiness of Mr. Wildman and that Montaignesque zest for life of Mr. King.

How queer they are, these intangible vibrations of attraction and the reverse that arise between human skeletons! One after another, as we went to Sherborne, we made friends with Mr. King; and as for Mr. Wildman, who was still teaching the Upper Fifth when my own son — another Littleton — was in the school, that impetuous Rabelaisian scholar lived to win *his* heart too — the heart of the next generation — in addition to ours!

By the time I was in Mr. King's form Littleton and I had a study of our own. How well I recall choosing our first flowers for our window-box! These were, to my recollection, those blue cornflowers, said to be the favourite flower of the Kaiser; but Littleton is of the opinion that they were dwarf convolvuluses. Certainly I *have* some curious far-off emotion about these latter flowers which would bear him out. It may be believed what a comfort it was to me to have this little private cell — small as it was — alone with Littleton. My father let us have *his* brother Littleton's East Indian low chair; and to make this chair more comfortable we brought away to this academic retreat one of the most heavily embroidered of all our drawing-room cushions! This cushion was bordered with dark-green velvet, if I am not mistaken; and I well recall how, when an overpowering desire to embrace beautiful human limbs seized upon me like a fever, I used to lean desperately against the window-sill and hug this velvet-fringed cushion, in a forlorn spasm of unsatisfied longing. On the wall of our study I hung up my little black and gold chest-of-drawers, into the sacred recesses of which, I need hardly tell you, Littleton was forbidden to gaze. We bought a rubber pipe and a little iron tripod; and with this apparatus, by the aid of a gas jet, we used to heat up Epp's, or Van Houten's, cocoa; and sweeten it with condensed milk out of a tin. Every night as we worked at preparing the next day's lessons we used to enjoy cups of cocoa for our refreshment; and as a rule we had a pot of home-made rhubarb jam to go with it, which we used to spread with a spoon upon Osborne biscuits. Hampers from Montacute would arrive in the rainy autumn term, full of walnuts from the tree in our field and of a variety of apples from our orchard. These edibles with an occasional sponge-cake, we kept in our study, where their sweet fragrance sustained us; and we shared them most scrupulously; not forgetting, when we used to meet the melancholy figure of the little Theodore, who was by this time in the Prep. waiting for us at the end of the lane, where later they built Richmond Villa, to fill our pockets for his benefit.

I recollect perfectly how one night after some quarrel with Littleton, and when, too, I was burning with an erotic fever that none of the treasures in my gold and ebony chest could assuage, I tried to overcome the two most formidable of human passions — anger and desire — by abandonment to the vice of pure gluttony. In that one night I ravenously devoured a whole sponge-cake.

I seem for some deep inborn reason — perhaps connected with the fact that I first saw the light in October — to recall our Sunday walks in the autumn term more vividly than any others. On one particular walk — and Littleton will smile as he reads this passage — we got nearly as far as the top of the high ridge between Sherborne and Dorchester, the ridge that overlooks Cerne where the great Phallic Giant contemplates the valley of the Frome. Here it began to rain. Now I am afraid I was often cruel to Littleton; not always with sadistic pleasure as when I once ran him down "The Slopes" in front of me till we collided — or rather Littleton collided — with the iron rails at the bottom, rendering him breathless and speechless and white-cheeked; but with a kind of arbitrary capriciousness and fantasticalness. It was in this latter mood that I would threaten to "beat him like a dog" — which must have been a phrase picked up in my readings of Harrison Ainsworth — if he allowed it, or God allowed it, *to rain!* Like my father I had an extreme hatred in those days of rain and mud, an unpoetic attitude which I am proud to say I subsequently outgrew; and it was my custom at the beginning of these long walks, where the meadows, the lanes, the copses, the rabbit-holes, the slow-worms, the ploughed fields, the yellow bracken, the stubble, the clamorous rooks, the peewits and yellow-hammers and starlings, all lost their charm for me if my clothes were getting wet, to demand imperatively of Littleton — like some touchy Nebuchadnezzar of his chief astrologer — whether it would rain or not; and then, if he said *not,* and the heavens in their wantonness refuted this prediction, I was accustomed to behave towards him as savages behave towards their medicine-men. Thus, as in the streaming rain Powys Mi. fled from the fury of Powys Ma. down the long hill this side of High Stoy, the elder brother tripped over a grotesque umbrella it was his wont to carry, before he was allowed to carry a stick, and fell heavily on the wet road. If Littleton was treated like a dog when it rained, he was menaced with a wrestling-bout in the ditch if he so much as looked at his brother when that blunderer fell on his face, as he was wont frequently to do when descending a hill; so on this occasion he took to his heels and fairly buggered off; a proceeding which by no means allayed the smart of my indignity and pain.

Ailinon! Ailinon! What shameful episodes a person does stumble upon when he retreads the far-off roads of the past!

But I must now indicate to you how that same tendency to passionate and even medieval penitence which made me carry that huge ammonite from the coastguards to our lodging seized me by the hair of my head for this day's cruelty to Littleton; and this time I punished myself — for our autumn hamper had just arrived — by resolving that I would hand it over just as it was to my younger brother, This I did; and to the last refused to touch so much as a slice of a tangerine, or a morsel of a crushed walnut. Yes, Littleton can bear me witness, even unto this day, that I kept my vow to the uttermost.

Oh how we talked about home on these heavenly Sunday walks and how we counted the days to the end of the term! Sometimes we would follow the Yeovil Road till we reached a little spinney — I can see it now — just at the spot where the road to Nether Compton branches off, close to the railings of Squire Gooden's park. Here between two branches, in this small wayside coppice, we were accustomed to place, early in the term, a consecrated stone — the freedom stone — which we were not allowed, by our own felicitous superstition, to do more than glance at till the last Sunday of the term, *when we threw the stone away*. On my soul I think there can be few ancient mythological rituals mentioned in *The Golden Bough* that did not find some sort of representation in our queer fetishistic goings on. Yes, there is no doubt that my happiest times and my most characteristic times too — I mean when I was most my real self — as far as my time at school was concerned, were when I was walking with Littleton all these miles and miles round Sherborne. Deep has that West Dorset countryside sunk into my soul! Nature has conquered in the end and overcome all the miseries I suffered in that place; so that when I go back there, it is only of my walks with Littleton that I think. We would tell ourselves stories of the future when we should be no longer at school, but grown-up and out in an easy, friendly, malleable world. We realized I think clearly enough, at least *I* did, that we were enduring stresses and tensions then, *very then,* far more crucial than anything, save an actual battlefield, that we could possibly encounter in the future.

Well do I recall our conversation one Sunday afternoon as we were walking towards the village of Milborne Port, and I had been contemplating a queer little medieval chapel that stands in a field close to the road. At this time of my life I was beginning to display certain curious debouchings into forms of learning not catered for in a public school. For instance I "took up" Gothic architecture. Someone — very likely at Penn House, or it may have come from Northwold Rectory — presented me with an illustrated manual of this historic art. My formidable architectural brother, Albert Reginald, would certainly peer quizzically at me now under his pulled-down cap and over his sardonically-held pipe, if he could have heard me discourse to Littleton on the differences between the Early English and the Decorated styles, and then again between this latter and the epoch known as Perpendicular. I certainly had plenty of opportunity to practise this erudition at Sherborne; and I now recall how excited I was to discover that particular kind of zigzag ornament, which so pleased the childish minds of the Normans, in the abbey porch which I had to pass twice a day. But on this occasion at Milborne Port — and what a queer thing it is, these old conversations, that come back to the mind after forty years, with every emotion revived too that you experienced at that far-off time — we told ourselves a story as to how I would be a country curate near some river like the Wissey at Northwold, and how Littleton would come and visit me and enjoy the fishing. Well! I did not become a country curate, or any other kind of curate; and now that I *have* got a river near me — not the Wissey, but the Agawamuk — three thousand miles of water are rolling and tossing between us.

Priggishness is, of all human faults, the most pardonable in a selfconscious boy. I don't feel the least twinge of shame in recording the gross examples of it that were displayed in my own life.

My mania for acting Shakespeare in those Montacute holidays, was but the most overt sign of my inveterate tendency to be what I like to think of as *a philosophic actor*. My deepest instinct to this hour justifies this tendency; for what are the great dramatic philosophies themselves — Plato's, Spinoza's, Schopenhauer's, Nietzsche's, Spengler's — but the gestures of the play-acting ego as it gathers up within itself its most exciting life-illusion, to heighten the intensity of its normal life-experience? Metaphysical system-making, for which I have always had a passion, can co-exist, I have found, with the most fluid, the most far-reaching, the most Pyrrhonean scepticism. I have never let myself be betrayed by heavy-witted dogmatic people into turning my instinctive prejudices into rational convictions. I have always been an actor in ideas — a charlatan if you will — and I am prepared to justify it; for is not Nature herself the nursing mother of all Mimes and Mummers, of all Pierrots, Petrushkas, and Punchinellos? The truth is that the majority of our cautious, objective-minded "truth-seekers" are really unconscious hypocrites of the deepest dye. Rogues too they are. Half their *real* feelings they seek craftily to suppress, in order to present a grave face of stolid common sense to the mad freakishness of real reality.

I can well recall the solemn pleasure I got one evening in our Montacute dining-room, when, playing at bagatelle with my brothers, I kept glancing at Young's *Night Thoughts*. I can see this little leather-bound volume now; and

I can recall exactly what it felt like to be the kind of person who, even while he played at bagatelle, must solace his deeper nature with thoughts of eternity.

I was no natural scholar. My dramatic nature relucted at the laboriousness of philological niceties. Well do I remember scurvily dodging our common task in that tiny study, while Littleton and W. E. Lutyens — the great mile runner, now an Anglican priest — turned over the pages of the Greek Lexicon and gave me the translation. At Greek versees too I was anything but a dab. Thus it usually worked out that Littleton had to compose two separate versions in this kind, one for himself and one for his elder brother. Through Mr. King's wisdom and indulgence I was at last permitted to "take up" practical chemistry in place of Greek verse, and aye! what a Faustian pride I had in mixing the elements in these astonishing "retorts," in making celestrial greens and blues out of nothing, and causing golden rains to be precipitated in crystalline water! I spent a sovereign in buying a collection of chemicals at the end of one term; and there in our apple-loft, where my various bottles— "Jack's chemistry" — remained for years, I would play at being an alchemist, gravely mixing this and that, and warning the inquisitive Llewelyn not to meddle with my oil of vitriol. All this while I lacked the faintest rudiments of scientific curiosity. It was only that I liked the sensation of playing with these strange constituents of our planet's flesh and blood. It was the sensation of magic I was after, not scientific knowledge; and, besides, was it not a new way of pressing my knuckles against my eyelids, as I had done at Shirley, and contemplating yet more remarkable greens and blues?

But meanwhile my indurated sadistic vice was always seething in the background of my nerves. I recollect wandering alone on more than one occasion over hill and dale near Sherborne looking for something to tear to pieces. I never revealed, you may be sure, these devilish tendencies to Littleton, who would be at such times intently following the languid course of the Yeo, in the earnest hope of catching a glimpse of the smallest fish's fin amid those muddy waters. Aye! but I can see now the particular expression his eyes would assume under his frowning forehead, as he pushed his way through the purple loosestrife and meadowsweet of those Lenty meadows!

I can only once — and that very obscurely — remember really practising my sadism in those days. Was it only my wicked wish on that occasion? No! I believe I did actually offer up to my raging Demon a whole nestful of unfledged little birds in one of those quarries on the Bristol Road. We had catapults in those years, and it was pure "sportsmanship" — O dastard word! — but at least there *was* no sadism in it, when once, on that same Bristol Road — out there towards Corton Downs and Cadbury Camp — I actually succeeded with my catapult in slaughtering a yellow-hammer. I can only hope that that loveliest of the Buntings whose eggs my father had taught us so much to admire, with their mystic hieroglyphs, died without suffering the sharp pang *we* used to suffer, when our backsides felt the leaden shot from the catapults of B —— and of H —— those lively bullies of our early Prep. days!

Colour — different colours — gave me, and give me still, mysterious initiations into the Unknowable. Even the very colours on the ribbons round our straw hats — hats bought at Mr. Lemon's shop in High Street — were symbols to me of so much! Price's house colours were dark blue. I never could do any justice to Mr. Price himself, who was a big terrifying man, and incidentally the grand enemy of that admired head master whose sermons I used so much to enjoy and who was so fine a poet in Latin. A light-blue ribbon, on the other hand, adorned the hats of the boys of Blanch's house.

Providence did not endow me with insight enough to do honour to Mr. Blanch either, who, when long afterwards I was telling him I lived "in Sussex," remarked: "What? All of it?" Mr. Blanch taught mathematics; and it was in his classroom — oh, I can see those unpleasantly new desks! — that I used to shut my eyes, and call up with intense vividness the wet pebbles and the tossing foam of the beach outside Penn House. He was a heavily-bearded man and like other bearded persons I have known seemed immune to any untoward shocks of fate. But "all the same for that," as Homer would say, his end was a tragic one.

Heaven pardon all! You never can tell what sufferings are going on behind another man's spectacles. But it was an important discovery that I made, in Mr. Blanch's well-appointed classroom, that it was possible by a concentrated effort of the will to imagine yourself so vividly in a particular spot that you could touch it with your hand. Does the spirit at such times leave the body? Could a clairvoyant eye have seen a shadowy eidolon of Powys Ma. — pale and tenuous as the cast-off skin of a newt — pursuing its blameless way over the roofs of the abbey, over "The Slopes," over the park, over the Cerne Giant, over Mr. Hardy's house by Fordington, till it reached, like the pitiful thoughts of poor Eustacia on Egdon Heath, the esplanade of its desire. It was this same trick that I was driven to practise during my first major operation in a London nursing-home; but it was a Sussex scene I called up then, not Weymouth beach.

To Weymouth, however, in the flesh I often went, in the holidays of those schooldays. I went into lodgings alone there once, as a convalescent from our Sherborne sick-house. One of the most beautiful boys in the school had been with me in that sick-house — not the young Charmides of those rapt occasions at the bath, but a scarcely less lovely boy — and he, with another companion of a less winning appearance but much more flirtatious, had been sent to a country cottage to recruit, not far from the Coastguards.

I had a passion at that time for collecting seaweeds — *there* indeed were colours to ravish anyone; but alas! their gleaming mysteries faded when you took them out of their native pools. But the truth is I have, ever since that time, linked together the scent of salt-water, the swirl of in-rushing waves among jagged rocks, the upheaving swell of a full tide, not only with crimson seaweeds, but with the greenish-black eyes and foam-white skin of this young invader of my native haunts!

It is interesting to note that my superstitious belief in a flaming Hell for wilful sensualists, which troubled me till I went to college, never prevented me from indulging my attraction to beautiful boys as long as I did not actually embrace them. Indeed, as I never *did* embrace them, save in those scribbled *perdita erotica* which I kept in my treasure-box, I had no anticipation of any final payment for these clinging glances in the bonfire of a jealous deity.

But in my lonely convalescence at Weymouth, for, as Nietzsche says, it is in convalescence that we are especially porous to the magic of life, the green-black eyes of B —— Minor were not my only temptation. Twice in that epoch of my life I actually knelt down on the ground to wrestle with my desire to gaze at young people’s beautiful legs. I remember the two precise spots where the knees of the General of the “Volentiā Army” were thus bent before his feudal overlord. One was in Redcliff Bay and one was upon Dartmoor. And I said to myself that it was better not to stare at lovely forms, or to embrace velvet-embroidered cushions or pillows dressed up in my own vests, as long as by such abstinence I escaped being boiled alive like a Lodmoor eel in eternal Hell. It was therefore with knees that trembled and shook — have you, reader, ever experienced that breath-catching feeling? — that I would furtively enter that well-known Weymouth Railway Station and casually glancing — or so I trusted it might seem — at the contents of the bookstall, absent-mindedly possess myself of the Summer Number of *Ally Sloper,* and gravely lay down my penny, as if I had been my father himself buying the *Standard.* But far more romantic, though not, I confess, quite so provocative, as the long legs of the Houris in Sloper's Paradise, were the illustrations in certain works of Rider Haggard that I found in a bookshop library behind the statue of George III. How little would authors like it if they knew all the reasons for which their books are taken out of libraries! In my longing to immortalize these tiny little vignettes of classical charm, I even went so far as to *trace*, upon a slip of transparent tissue-paper, their divine outlines, and I can well recall the heavenly security and luxurious leisure with which, in my high-ceilinged eighteenth-century front-room, under the large illuminated candalabra, and safe from all interruption, my pencil followed those delicate curves.

My relations with Theodore had grown closer of late, though while we still were at Wildman's, he had been transferred to the Wilkinson School at Aldeburgh, in Suffolk, on the strength of some old family friendship. But so close had I drawn to Theodore by this time — though our link was of a somewhat eccentric nature — that I began a romance about smugglers of which he was the chief. This story was my first real attempt to do what is called "draw character"; and Theodore was my first model. May the devil take me — all the same — if I have not totally forgotten, the one thing I would like *now* to recall, namely what Theodore's comments were when in the dining-room I read this first chapter to him.

But in all the earlier years of my school life the nearest fulfilment of that passionate vow I had made in the Prep. yard, between the stars and the urinal, did not appear in my vapid and extremely imitative verse, but in those of my *letters*— “Jack’s descriptive letters” was the satirical name they went by at home — where I discoursed freely and at large, and with all my natural play-action, upon things in general. How well I recall being at Penn House one summer when both Littleton and Theodore were at Northwold. This was the first occasion when “Jack’s descriptive letters” were something that I deliberately and with abounding self-confidence poured forth. Did I write them to Littleton or to Theodore? That is a nice point. But from what I have already hinted of the queer fantastical link that now began to be forged between my most original brother and myself, we may *suspect* it was to Theodore.

But I well recall the snobbish pride with which I wrote the grandiose word “Canon” before my Norfolk grandfather’s name! Here was a second occasion when this eloquent priest of God, with his hair white and curly as the vision in the Apocalypse, betrayed me into ignoble weakness. What would my father have felt had the Bishop of Bath and Wells made *him* a canon? He would have felt, I think, much as his Giant Grumble would have felt if he had been addressed as Archdeacon Grumble. He would have gone down to the terrace-walk, no doubt, and rubbed his hands in an ecstasy — whether his fifth son were hid in the laurels or his sixth son were even then entering the world — but it would have been merely a moment’s childishness. Being written to as a canon by Mr. Phelips would never have given him the thrill that it gave him, on choir-supper nights in the servants’ hall, to announce to Charles Childs, and Charlie Blake, and Mr. Pippard, and Mr. Rogers, that he was descended from Roderic Mawr, King of All Wales. Had he announced to them that he was descended from Mohammed Ben Ali, King of All Arabia, Mr. Geard of “The Borough” would have inclined his dignified old head with no less tactful respect.

But I have never beep able to extinguish my snobbish feelings as effectively as my father did, though I am, just as he was, thrilled to the very midriff by the more romantic forms of personal pride. Not one of those old ladies in Cranford could possibly feel her heart beat faster than mine has done when I have had to encounter titled persons. And solely and simply because of their titles; not because of any personal merit in the holders of them. Not that I don't distinguish among these gentry. I can greet a baronet without a tremor; and I have got away without a blush from an encounter with a baron. It is your earls and marquesses who give me these ambiguous feelings. Dukes — though generally regarded as greatest of all — have always had for me a smack of something, not exactly vulgar, but certainly unpoetical. In Shakespeare for instance his earls have always seemed to me much more romantic than his dukes. It is perhaps my historic sense that betrays me; but the word "earl" seems as full of the long embattled history of England as painted church windows or ancient illuminated missals or the Bodleian Library.

My snobbishness has however another side. The great working class, the class-conscious proletariate, is more awe-inspiring to me than any peer of the realm. Nor when it comes to officials and to political magnates am I much less obsequious. The truth is I have never in my life known anyone more troubled, more put about, more generally metagrabolized than I am by encounters with *any* specimens of human beings! I fall at once, in the case of almost all the men I meet into a vein of idiotic obsequiousness and half-crazy flattery. The human eye disturbs me to the depths of my being. I seem aware, much more vividly than others are, of the dangerousness of these bone-cracking wolves in woolly sheeps' clothing, that we see in all our looking-glasses.

I have, Heaven forgive me, a passion for being *liked* — I will not say for being admired, for I am not exacting about that — by every child of Adam I meet! The bottom of it is, I suppose, simply Fear. I must resemble a cowardly dog in my conviction that the most negligible person, any sort of a poor devil, *could* be terribly dangerous. What I expect them to do to me I am sure I don't know, but when I meet their eyes — the eye of a peddler, of an organ-grinder, of a grocer's assistant, of a waiter, of a cab-driver, of the forlornest beggar — I feel as if I could not flatter this ferocious and terrifying being humbly enough, or get away quickly enough! Yes *that* is what it is. It is just *fear.* My life would have been different at every point, not only at school but long afterwards, *now* in fact, if I only had the power to stand up to people and speak out, or strike out, boldly. I am in fact the worst coward in this particular that has ever disgraced the perpendicular form of *homo sapiens.* There were occasions at Wildman's when the least flash of normal pugnacity would have saved me from endless misery. If only I could have got angry! But I couldn't. I have a long memory for insults, but I cannot flare up and hit back! It is this combination of a cold and even deadly analytical judgment with a perfect terror of scenes, contradictions, clashes, man-to-man challenges, that does the harm.

And Destiny has given me my chance to redeem myself again and again. Our dormitory opened upon another one; and one night, when I was at the height of my later unpopularity, the door between us was thrown wide open, and a well-directed boot, while I was quietly perusing *The Lancashire Witches* made it plain to all that here was a challenge for Powys Ma. to be something different from himself. The faintest show of fight would have done the trick. No prolonged fisticuffs would have been necessary. But not a finger had I the gall to raise! I must have excited the sort of disgusted distrust that country boys feel for a grass-snake when they stone it to death.

Another time and this was the final catastrophe of the comedy, all my enemies were gathered in a mob outside our study and once more the door was flung open, and with it the door of fate. Did I take advantage even then of this ultimate opportunity? Not a bit of it! And, what is worse, on this particular occasion my cowardice was so hypnotic that it effected even Littleton; so that in all its history that Powys family has never been so betrayed. To strike a good, straight, honest, violent blow, in simple, open self-defence seemed to be impossible to me. And it is so still! Elderly gentlemen of three-score years are not any longer called upon to knock people down; but they *are* called upon, in ordinary decency, not to allow themselves to present the appearance of a circus-freak of sub-humanity. Even the philosophic Chinese — the least belligerent of all mortals — could teach me something. I would anyway learn from them how, as the phrase is, to "save my face." A person who *cannot get angry* except with his nearest and dearest — and only with considerable difficulty then — is a fish out of water in this contentious world. He is a sort of anti-human, a male "Aunt Sally," and it is only a matter of time before even his friends begin to fight shy of him, and to shirk dealing with a fish so queer that if you prick him he doesn't bleed and if you tickle him he doesn't laugh.

It is always easy for me, as I have hinted, to act out to the limit any spiritual gesture that has come to appeal to my particular life-illusion; but my dislike of social facetiousness is no spiritual gesture. The *normal humour* of the human race has always been one of the greatest trials of my life. I have my own humour; and I can assure you that it is very often in full activity when I am standing gravely agape among flying repartees like a Hallowe'en turnip head. But the genial jocosities that are the recognized wit of our lively world chill me to the bone. They fill me with an icy distaste; and I am always at a loss how to respond to them. I look at such times as I feel; a fool, a zany, a bewildered, drivelling, drooling "ambassador from the Moon."

On the other hand Nature has endowed me, as a sort of protective colouring, with a Protean cleverness of my own. Sub-human though I am, I am devilishly shrewd. It is one of my most marked peculiarities. I am a regular Machiavel among idiots. What was it but an infernal cleverness that helped me at the two great crises of my life at Wildman's; once when I pretended to be mad to avoid being made to throw B — — 's great sponge at that torturer in the room below. — Would I had had the guts to fly to the rescue of his victim, and get my lean fingers on his bull's throat! — and once, as I shall presently relate, when I was being mobbed by the whole house. My character was forming, rapidly forming, during those years at Sherborne. For one thing clever though I could be at a crisis when I was forced to use my wits, I was too ego-centric, too obstinately committed to my own furtive way of life, too devoted to my sub-human or anti-human sensations, *to want to assert myself*, as a general rule. People who pity me for being "put upon" by self-seekers do not understand me at all. I am a grotesque individual and at times a wretched one, but I am never pitiable; because I have been able, *if I had wanted to,* to escape from almost any imbroglio. But as a rule I did not want to do this, since I was all the while, after my own secretive fashion— "like water seeking its level," as Llewelyn says — getting by hook or by crook the sensations that I required. Thus for all my extreme cowardice I never was a whimperer or self-pitier. I doubt if anyone has ever lived who pities himself less than I do! I always have the rooted conviction that if I am miserable it is my own fault.

Yes, in those letters from Penn House to Northwold, addressed in such a proud hand to the care of "the Canon" and I expect written to Theodore, I used my imagination freely upon the events of each separate day. Each *separate* day! Yes, great, unjust, careless, indiscriminate Nature has certainly given me all my life the power of living *afresh* every twenty-four hours. I retain this, at least, of my forgotten Shirley childhood that I automatically engender a great wave of Lethe that rolls over me every night and enables me to wake up every morning like the Titan Antæus when he touched the sod.

I was extraordinarily happy that time at Penn House. Do you know I can feel, almost as vividly as I feel this "up-state" air at this moment, how it was when I came out of my bedroom at the back of the house, which looked upon St. John's Spire, and walked slowly, step by step, down the stairs to the drawing-room, in a perfect ecstasy of delight. Out of the drawing-room window I then used, in stealthy quietness — for Penn House was the house of an invalid — to gaze at the dancing, glittering, dazzling sun-path on the waters of the bay. Sun upon water, element upon element, and both of them in radiant spasms of white glory — such phenomena simply rapt me away in those days, in an indescribable Nirvana. This was the moment on the stage of my life when the good-evil, irresponsible Lord of my Destiny uttered the significant words: "Enter Llewelyn!"

My brother, Bertie, always characteristicaly known as "A.R.P." had entered my life-stage before this time. I remember so well being once at Penn House with him, when, with the most massive and temperamental calm he listened to my murmurs of erotic frustration as I paced backwards and forwards from the bow-window to that interior ante-room — I can smell those spicy East Indian perfumes still, like a *potpourri* of old lotus-leaves — and made no audilbe comment upon my groans but *looked* a deep, rational faintly sardonic, indulgent disapproval of his unbalanced elder brother, when he heard me repeat the word "ennui" over and over again. I had just discovered this expressive phrase; and I well remember how I repeated it, tagged with my own translation, “Ennui — Sick-of-Everything” …”Ennui — Sick-of-Everything!” Such were the words that Uncle Littleton’s pearls and tusks and cedar-boxes and tiger-claws and jewelled daggers heard with oriental aloofness from the mouth of the world-weary Johnny. How clear is my memory of that particular day! For, like Schopenhauer’s universal man, I now proceeded, on that same grey morning, to lurch spontaneously from the Horn, Boredom, to the Horn, Unsatisfied Desire, of the World-Dilemma imposed on us by the Will to Live.

From the window of the drawing-room it was given me to perceive, at that very moment, a young lady, who in spite of the cloudy weather was meditating a modest advance, at least up to her knees, into that unpromising sea! Do you know this was the first of the *only three occasions,* up to the present hour, when my Saxon-Celtic soul has understood what that confounded French word “ennui” means; and I warrant there is no word at all in that lecherous, critical tongue to describe the Nordic sea-wave of mystical romance and predatory longing that swept over me as I saw that solitary unknown girl! The author of *Undine* would have understood my feeling, just then, better than the author of *Madame Bovary.*

Yes, my brother Bertie — at this time well established in the Prep. — gave me during that epoch my first volume of the poetry of Coleridge. Shelley I had received from the head master as a school prize. Wordsworth — if I mistake not — I had bought for myself. There was one poet I never needed to buy, or to be given; and *that* was Tennyson. Yes, of all volumes of all poets, second to that illustrated Aytoun, the green and Moxon edition of Tennyson’s early poems dominated my poetic vision. But Coleridge — that thwarted, baffled, verbose, moribund, fish-cold phantasmalest and maudlindismalest of our poets — had never, until then, materialized for me out of his West Country fog.

I took the book — for all the squally gales that were then blowing — to the near-by public gardens. It also, like the Moxon Tennyson, was bound in green and gold. I must say I am still a heretic over our modern chaste, smooth bindings. I share the Early Victorian notion that *the dirt of wear* shows best and looks most mellow upon royal gilt and emblazoned tooling.

But, as I have said, it was at this time that Llewelyn, as an imposing personality, began to impinge on my consciousness. I made a deep dent recently on his physiological life-consciousness when I told him that it was at Penn House that I had held him first in my arms, *before his baby skull had closed.* He alludes to this in one of his books in his unequalled manner; and I can see that it profoundly arrested his attention. If I could have told him that I had heard his first cry — for "When we are born we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools" — he would have bent the familiar brows, so wrinkled *then*, so corrugated *now*, with grave and absorbed interest as to the exact accents of that struggled-for sound uttered in a Rothesay house bedroom. Certainly Llewelyn's humour has proved itself to be more innately indued to the spirit of the earth than any humour I have so far met in my wayfaring. And where was the Chiron who taught him what old honey-dropping trees in our literary forest would best serve the turn of his unique style?

He was still a very little boy when I took him, along with the other younger ones, on an excursion to Portland — I forget if he ever refers to this in his writings — and as we waited for the incoming train that was, with reversed engine, to take us back to Weymouth, we were all pushed by the surging crowd to the platform's edge, and as the train came in Llewelyn was flung down upon the stepping-board of one of the moving compartments and carried along with it as the train slowly drew up. I am sure he changed not a jot of his inquisitive serenity when someone who was sitting in the train lifted him up and lugged him in! He was the first of us to enter that train, as he has been the first of us to follow the long lines of far-away camels that sink into the sands where the winds cover the footprints of Jesus. Nothing that belongs to the fate of man upon the earth is alien to this child of the "South Walk," born, I have no doubt, simultaneously with innumerable little badgers, foxes, hedgehogs, hares, weasels, squirrels, otters, stoats, not to mention billions of rats and mice "and such small deer," who must have all chattered, chattered, clicked, whiffled, lapped, gurgled, yelped, barked, squealed, whined, grunted, gasped, yawned, gabbled, squalled, whickered, wailed, gurked, gibbered, groaned, whistled, screamed, growled, sighed, panted, and squeaked this same thirteenth of August, but who have all gone by now into an oblivion too absolute, as Hardy suggests somewhere, for any mind to grasp. Well! Those other mouths and eyes and ears and paws and pricks, of that far-off birthday, are all turned to dust ages ago; but Master Lulu still licks up his quota of honey, still pulls on his Seven-League Boots, still takes his stick, and having done his business in the backyard sets off to see if the tide is coming in, or going out, and if the swallows have come, or gone.

But to return to those early holidays at Weymouth. Just not to be at school and to have Littleton as my companion was enough for me; and troublesome though I must often have been to this great cricketer and football player, he was always one to be thrilled by the varying sights of land and water, and was indeed, in natural history, as learned as my father and in some things *more* learned. How we loved to row ourselves out beyond the little Weymouth Breakwater! I do not recall however that we ever ventured — as father told us *he* did once, and with his first-born baby on board too — as far as Redcliff Bay. Once we were taken on a day’s fishing excursion almost out of sight of land, and well do I remember the dog-fish and jelly-fish that were hauled into that boat; but I remember too that the whole thing was spoilt for me before the end by a frantic desire to urinate. “Water, water everywhere,” but Johnny, with bursting bladder, and fixed, staring eyes, was forced to contain! How *can* people have the gall to call their autobiographies the truth about themselves while they make no mention of these things? It presents itself to me as a *sine qua non* of any honest, recital in this kind that it should at least not totally rule out the intimate miseries and reliefs of this diurnal passing of matter through the body.

Two things there are, it seems to me, that make a deeper impression on our whole consciousness and more completely paralyse both our mind and our soul, than any of the more tragic events of our lives. The first is when, for any reason, we have had to put off for an unconscionable time either of our natural evacuations; and the second is when the pride below all pride within us, the self-respect that is the very keel of the vessel, has been hit to the heart by some deliberately poisonous rebuff. The sickening and intolerable suffering of the first has a mental effect that convulses our whole being, and makes us indifferent — like a sort of paralytic stroke — to everything else; while the second makes a person feel, as I felt that day when I missed the catch on the cricket-field, that it would have been better had he never been born. Both these things seem to me worse than any bullying I have ever known, except perhaps the treatment of that little boy in the room below ours at Wildman’s.

It was a strange compensation in my dualistic history that during the very years when I was most unhappy at Sherborne I should have been so intensely happy in our visits to North-wold. Never, I dare swear, in any human life has boyhood, in everything it loves best — in everything ours did anyway — been as beautifully catered for, as it was in the case of Littleton and me at Northwold Rectory. Just four years ago, after a lapse of forty years, Littleton and I went back there; and for a whole week were the sole lords of that familiar house, that garden, and that "little river" and were left completely to ourselves! But stirred to the soul though we were by the experience, and unspeakably happy as we were to be together, we mutely and silently knew well that it was doubtful if we should ever come to Northwold again. Over the gulf of those forty years the now white-headed Littleton and the now invalidish Johnny exchanged worldless signals with those two little boys whose whole life in those enchanting purlieus and with those incomparable people had been one scarce broken paradise; and in a sense it was our farewell to those little boys! Back together they receded from this momentary re-incarnation, back hand-in-hand, little Johnny and little Littleton, till they faded into the branches of the cedar on the lawn, into the bushes by the fish-pond, into the poplars along the river, into the alders of Alder Dyke. Shall we ever be able to summon them back again, those little wraiths of the past, as we did during that week? Have they retreated now for ever into an oblivion as deep as if they had been buried, side by side with "The Canon," under that tall flint tower?

Well! at any rate they were not, those two, like Elia's Dream-Children, *always* insubstantial. In their day they bustled about in their small world, lively enough, threw their lines into Dye's Hole, watched the great salmon-trout in Harrod's Mill-pond, found greenfinches nests in the rose-garden with eggs in August, caught pike with their butterfly-nets and butterflies with their caps, saw a breath-taking vision, at least one of them did, of the almost extinct "Large Copper" in the fields by Oxborough Ferry, swung the old Venetian print that hung above their bed till its corners cracked holes in the ceiling, plunged with a submerging splash, at least one of them did, into the round lily-pond among the frightened frogs, devoured green gooseberries, and pink strawberries, got their boat from "little river" into "big river," found plums in unknown trees and dab-chicks where they looked for water-rats, learned to say "Sir" to retired captains, "How is my Joy?" to retiring maidens, carried live perch in fish-kettles and dead dace on withy-twigs, and even stole his handcuffs from the village policeman. Yes, in their day, they were substantial enough and different enough from dream-children; *but where are they now?* The persons we have been are lost rather than fulfilled in what we become, and many who labour for bread in a penurious manhood carry within them the ghosts of children who had cake for the asking.

But — *dum loquimur*, *fugerit invida œtas* — those days, whether any parcel of them survive or not, were ineffably happy; and it may be that there really is some planetary consciousness in the old earth under our feet that gathers into itself these vibrations of supreme happiness; gathers them up into some precious granary of such feelings, where, if not eternal, they can at least last as long as she herself does.

Epochs were always arising in the lives of Littleton and me when the sturdiness of his character displayed itself in commanding contrast to the weakness of mine. In getting our boat from the "little river" to the "big river," for instance, it was frequently necessary to push it under bridges that were so low that they nearly touched the surface of the water. At these times it always fell to Littleton's lot to remain in the boat. He used to stretch himself out on his back at full length within it, and thus, with its rowlocks and its rudder carefully removed, propel it, by the pressure of his upturned hands against the under-beams of the bridge, till it emerged into the light and into the vision of his elder brother. This elder brother, prone on his face on the top of the bridge had nothing to do but to watch, with excited expectation first the prow, then the basket of provisions, then the scooper for bailing, floating in bilge-water, then the tin of fishing-bait and finally the head of Littleton himself, with an expression of concentrated intensity upon his countenance, his brows puckered, his eyes screwed up, his lips quivering.

About this time, perhaps when I was in the Upper Fourth and dabbling in chemistry to escape Greek verses, I began to grow conscious of a more definite response to different kinds of natural scenery. My father made so much of these differences, implying rather than asseverating the advantages of his native Wessex over all others, that it was natural enough for the varying quality of landscapes to become as important to us as silks to haberdashers, skins to furriers, wines to dotards and cynics. He brought us up to note every undulation, every upland, every spinney, every ridge, every fen and the effect produced upon all these by every variety of season or weather.

My experience even up to the point when I left school for college had been very varied in its scenery. From Derbyshire I had taken nothing but what was purely imaginary; the memory of Mount Cloud as a towering mountain, and of the image of the pond in somebody's meadow as a lake with supernatural fish; but every aspect of the Weymouth coast sunk into my mind with such a transubstantiating magic that it might be said that when I think now of certain things I think *with* St. John's spire and the Nothe, and the old Backwater, and the Harbour Bridge, and the stone groins, and the green pier-posts, and the dead seaweed and the windrow-flotsam, and the stranded star-fish! Yes, it is through the medium of these things that I envisage all the experiences of my life; and so it will be to the end.

Second to the influence of the sea at Weymouth, which, mind you, was not the open sea of the skimming flights of the cormorant, but the marginal sea of the hoverings of the herring-gull, it is Sherborne scenery that has left the deepest impression on my mind. This Sherborne landscape is on the very border between Dorset and Somerset and combines the pastoral expansiveness of the one with the vaporous umbrageousness of the other. As a matter of fact Blackmore Vale, in the heart of which my father, like Tess of the D'Urbervilles, first saw the light, bears many resemblances to Somerset. His arrival at Montacute must, therefore, have been a very different thing from his Derbyshire exile, for indeed, as he was constantly pointing out to us during his thirty years as a vicar here, you can see the same tower of King Alfred from the uplands above the Dorset Rectory where he was born that you can see from the uplands above the Somerset churchyard where he longed to be, and now is, buried.

My life at Sherborne came to an end, as I have already hinted, in a somewhat dramatic way. There arrived a day, when in some temporary absence of Mr. Wildman, the management of supper and prayers fell to our friend Lutyens, the great runner; a personage who, as is shown by the semi-monastic retirement in which he now lives, has never been one to seek, or even to exert when thrust upon him, what is called worldly authority. It was a Sunday afternoon; and after tea, before setting off to chapel, as Littleton and I amused ourselves in our study, he with his artificial trout-flies, upon which he was composing in the manner of Viscount Grey, a fisherman's manual, and I with *Robinson's History of the Church,* which, as I gravely followed the Great Heresies, was my introduction to philosophy, there were obvious indications of an *emeute* in the passage outside. As Mr. Phelips would have put it, "we were being chaffed by the Populace." Finally our sacred study-door itself was thrown open; and the mob outside, full of both malice and fear began pushing one another in. To my everlasting disgrace — and I still have this panic dread of mobs — I became paralysed with terror. Before a malevolence, which in reality was probably only skin-deep, I became as a dead man. My fear affected Littleton, who opened his grey eyes very wide and closed his *Manual of Fishing.* It was the moment for me to have made use of the traditional characteristics of the county of my birth.

“Derbyshire born, Derbyshire bred,
Strong in the arm, weak in the head!”

One single honest blow with the full force of my bony fist at the handsome, derisive countenance of D —— Ma. would have done the trick. But in place of such an air-clearing gesture, a contemptible scene followed that still makes me, as Rabelais says, “blush like any black dog,” even after four and forty years. Haverings and hoverings ensued, blows that were no blows, hits that were no hits, abuse that did not dare to rise to effective vituperation, combined with a confused barging and hustling and jostling and threatening. Heavens! the holy religious women who took possession of Wildman’s house at a later time and turned our studies into cells would have made a better show of it. But our athletic head of the house, whose Achillean feet had probably taken him to Melbury Bub and back that afternoon, intervened at last, and we all drifted off ignobly enough to prepare for evening chapel.

Up the town we were soon hurrying, past Westbury, past the abbey porch with its zigzag ornament, past the outside wall of Mr. Wildman’s own classroom, till, entering the school cloisters by the little postern gate, we ascended the chapel steps. Here, scattered in our different places, we prepared to worship the God of our fathers, or to think our own thoughts in peace. But my mind and my nerves were all in a mad whirl. My inability to strike a decent blow in self-defence, my inability to get humanly angry, my inability to come off without shame from a crisis that only needed a little natural spirit — all of these things upset me as I had never been upset before. Mechanically I followed the familiar rubric, made the familiar responses.

“O Lord show thy mercy upon us;

“And grant us thy salvation.

“O Lord, save the Queen.

“And mercifully hear us when we call upon thee.

“Endue thy ministers with righteousness.

“And make thy chosen people joyful.

“Give peace in our time, O Lord.

“Because there is none other that fighteth for us,
but only thou, O God.”

And then it came about as the service proceeded that a strange and startling resolution took possession of me, so that the heart within me was stirred to its depths. I was unable to use my Derbyshire fists, why should I not use my Welsh tongue?

“For there is none other that fighteth for us, save
only — —”

Yes, this was what I would do! This very night I would utter to the whole of Wildman’s house my accumulated and long-smouldering apologia! The idea burned like a fire within me. I already began forming passionate sentences, rounding off reverberating Ciceronian declamationsl Not for nothing had I composed that Latin thesis — zealously modelled on the great orator’s terrific eloquence — that had won the Fifth Form prize. Yes, yes, I would defend myself, justify myself, redeem myself, with my tongue! It is likely enough that Cicero himself would have shunned fisticuffs if Cataline had “gone for him.” But I had found my weapon. I was ready.

“Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night — —”

I overtook Lutyens, for all his mile-runner’s stride, near, I dare say, those very windows at Westbury House by which we had stood, when my father walked away on our first night in Sherborne. This was to be my last official night in that Saxon school. And before I left why should I not imitate Owen Glendower and “call up spirits from the vasty deep?” Thus my request I made to “Podas okus” Lutyens; and he — bless his swift feet and kind heart! — agreed at once to my astonishing proposition. It was decided between us that as soon as supper was over — a supper consisting entirely of beer and bread and cheese — he was to rise and announce that Powys Ma. “had something to say.” I cannot recall how these proceedings struck Littleton. His expressive countenance must have assumed, I think, a look I knew very well, the look it wore when I once recited Tennyson’s “Revenge” at an impromptu school concert.

Well, the moment came; and I stood up. The extraordinary, nay! the unique nature of this revolution held all the boys spell-bound. You could have heard, as they say, a pin drop. And then, beginning lamely enough, but quickly catching my cue, I poured forth a flood of tumultuous speech. Out of my foolishness it came, out of my humiliation, out of my inverted pride. It came literally *de profundis.* I had prayed in the chapel: “And take not thy Holy Spirit from us!” but whether the torrent of self-accusations, of self-incriminations, of wild self-mockery, proceeded from the Creator Spiritus, or from the Devil, I cannot tell. I dragged in every single detail they derided me for, I exposed my lacerations, my shames, my idiocies. “Moony” was talking at last out of the madness of the mistress of his horoscope! I referred to the great delapidated umbrella I placed such stock in. I referred to my obscene fashion of chewing my food with my front teeth. I stripped myself naked before them. Taliessin himself could not have prophesied to such a tune when he celebrated the procession of his planetary metamorphoses.

When I sat down there was a moment's dead silence. I did not dare to look at Littleton. But I had not failed. A hullabaloo of applause, puzzled, bewildered, stupefied, confounded, rose up around me. Lutyens whispered something to Littleton before he made the sign for us to kneel down for the accustomed evening Collect. Next morning I was in the sick-room with an attack of my gastric trouble; and it turned out that only once again was I destined to appear in public as a boy at Sherborne School. This was when, driven from my long convalescence at Montacute in Mr. Phelips' great state carriage — he was a governor of the school — I went there on the last day of the term to recite my Prize English Poem. The very morning after that eventful supper at Wildman's, when I made my shame to be my glory, my handsome enemy D —— Ma. brought me — coming shyly into the sick-room — a bunch of violets!

"No cloud," I wrote, in my tame and conventional prize poem, whose subject was "Corinth" — and there certainly was no "Holy Spirit," or any other kind of spirit, about this feeble and uninspired performance— "no cloud," I wrote, "obscures the brightness of the sky."

"Superbly huge, majestically steep.
The Citadel looks down with steadfast eye;
About its base the careless seagulls fly,
Seeking their rocky homes secure from harm;
While over sea and land there reigns a deathless calm."

The gods had let me keep my vow, made between the stars and the urinal. I *had* become a poet; but the subject of my poetry had been something different from “Corinth.”

CHAPTER FIVE. CAMBRIDGE

THE SUMMER WHICH I passed between the end of my school life and the beginning of my college life, was largely spent in learning to translate at sight the *Ion* of Euripides, the designated text that year for what is — or was then — known as the "Little-Go." I have never read this play since that summer, in the only way I ever read the classics now, that is to say with a Loeb translation on the opposite page; but the figure of that young neophyte, a sort of Greek Marius the Epicurean, "at his priest-like task of pure ablution" in that quiet temple, has always remained in my mind. I think of that boy's figure now in connection with my son at Oxford; but before my son entered the service of *his* Immortal, I used to think of it in connection with two large bare mahogany tables, the one in the dining-room at Montacute, and the one in the dining-room at Northwold! It must have been in an indulgent concession to a morbid dislike of certain stuffs and fabrics that began to manifest itself in me, that I was thus allowed to spread out my pen and ink and papers and books on these smooth, precious, polished surfaces!

But how devious, how subterranean Nature is, and how crafty and subtle are the impulses of one's own mind in this matter of the getting of wisdom! Yes, the acquisition, little by little, of what subsequently we come to regard as the conjuring trick by which life can be adequately handled, does not arrive by any steady or rational development. It comes by airy, evasive, indirect, intermittent approaches, and then by occasional violent earthquake shocks! It saves us from evil very much as my father's Giant and Fairy used, between them, to save their prétegé's from "the professor."

Wisdom, this miraculous talisman, of which all of us are privileged to steal a modicum before we die, is no rational *quod erat demonstrandum.* On the contrary it is made up of paradoxes and contradictions, of shifts, compromises, transformations, adaptations, adjustments, balancings, calculated blindness, artful avoidances, premeditated foolishnesses, cultivated simplicities! It is made up of the suppressions of curiosity, of the suppressions of cleverness, of narrowings down, diggings in, bankings up, not to speak of a cautious, guarded, tentative, gingerly use of reason.

What do I recall of those moments when I worked at the *Ion* with Lexicon and notes and "Crib" spread out on those two smooth mahogany tables, from one of which I could look forth on our huge *laurestinus,* and on Mr. Cole's meadow, and from the other on my grandfather's drive and the shrubbery where the fish-pond was? I recall nothing! Nothing, that is, but a vague sense of undisturbed well-being and a peace like that of an unruffled sea. I was alone with those calm classical figures each of whom was acting out its own grandiose rôle, with its own dignity in anger, in joy, in sorrow, and all in the presence of Fate and of the immortals. There I was, with my school life over and my college life unknown; but I took no stock, I made no vow, I interpreted, conjectured, resolved, decided nothing. Such is the life of a man! From epoch to epoch we stumble and slide, and it is as if the great goddess, whom in our tongue we call *Chance*, grudged that we should attribute to reason, or will, or religion, or philosophy, or the influence of the stars, or even to Destiny itself, what she regards as her indisputable arbitrary prerogative.

My father himself took me up to Cambridge. I wish I could remember our interviews with the authorities there; for they must have been full of touching subtleties. I am sure they treated my father as Mr. Wildman would in a few years be treating me, and I am sure they treated me as that fiery philologist would in a few years be treating my son! For these Cambridge "dons" were extraordinarily like our Sherborne masters, just as I have a shrewd inkling that the "dons" of to-day must be like the masters of to-day; and how different, in both cases, from what they were in my time! Wherein lieth this difference? Read Charles Lamb's *Essay on the New and Old Schoolmaster.* These things must come in cycles. In my time our authorities were middle-aged men, preoccupied with their own well-established lives, and only impinging on the younger life around them when, as in the case of Mr. Wildman's passion for philology, or Mr. King's delight in literature and amicitia, we shared the same interests.

But it is all different now! Both masters and dons, for good and for evil — for it is hard to imagine that it doesn't "cut both ways" — feel it on their conscience to *influence the lives* of the young persons about them. It is impossible for me to imagine Mr. Fanshawe, or Mr. Charles Moule, still less the Master of Corpus, who at that time was an old gentleman called Dr. Perowne, meddling with my private life, any more than I can imagine Mr. Wildman doing such a thing to me when I was in his House. Just as with Mr. Wildman, what any of us picked up from contact with the exquisite sensitivity of Mr. Moule, or with the robust, humorous country-squire character of Mr. Fanshawe — who used to walk four or five miles, into and out of Cambridge, every day — we could use to our advantage; but otherwise, for good and for evil, these wise and excellent men *let us alone.* Mr. Fanshawe was a connection of my father's by marriage; and Mr. Moule, whenever he went home, went to *his* home and *our* home; for the Moules came from Dorchester, and knew Wessex better than we did; but neither of these very intimate links meant that these reserved Nature-loving scholars felt it incumbent upon them — as long as I obeyed the rules — to meddle with my morals, my taste, my religion, my habits.

What I can very clearly recall of my father's taking me to Corpus were our expeditions to the shops in the town, and the particular type of purchases he made, wherewith to start me in my first experience of housekeeping. They were such objects as seemed to me to bring all Stalbridge Rectory — from which *his* father had taken *him* to Corpus — into my room. And I have no doubt that this yet older gentleman had been himself in his day brought by *his* parent to this college of the generations from yet another rectory!

By the time my son went to Corpus, however, old Dr. Perowne had long been in his grave, and Dr. Pearce, my son's uncle by marriage, was in the lodge; so that there was no necessity for me to carry any further that ancient tradition and no doubt, in consequence, my son's rooms were more æsthetically, they could hardly have been more substantially, furnished, from those kindly Cambridge shops.

The rooms I myself finally succeeded in occupying, though they were entered from the New Court, *looked out* on the Old, and were indeed part and parcel of one of the most romantic relics of medieval scholasticism that I have ever seen. If I had needed a rather priggish study of Gothic architecture to interest me in the old buildings at Sherborne, at Corpus I studied nothing. I hardly realized what I was enjoying as I swam about in this bottomless pond of antiquity. The Corpus Old Court had the look — especially before they removed the ivy, which my father always averred *his* father had planted — of some enchanted ruin in a fairy-like forest of old romance. After they had scraped off the ivy it looked exactly as it must have done in the days when Christopher Marlowe had his rooms there! It was upon a great beam running across the ceiling of my chamber that Llewelyn, years later — well! I suppose exactly a dozen years later — discovered the words: 'Pray for the Soul of John Cowper Powys." My soul still looks about her in this mortal world, and Llewelyn, in a manner that would delight Christopher Marlowe, has done doughty work in lambasting such holy gestures, but it gave him a queer feeling all the same to see those words in that place.

It was a notable experience to me when I first “dined in hall.” It was wonderful to be eating my meal in so medieval a manner, and as my predecessors before me had done for five hundred years. It was thrilling to glance up at the pictures of the Old Worthies hung round the panelled walls and at the painted windows that “blushed with the blood of kings and queens”; and if my skull allowed certain wild and indeed mad thoughts a temporary lodgment, between those stately courses, it was only as if a few of Mabinogion ravens had flown in and flown out at a primitive feast. I can hear still that hastily mumbled Latin grace; ending up with the words “per Jesum Christum, Dominum Nostrum”: and how different this “Jesum Christum” sounded in its secular resonance and with all the turbulent history of the Church behind it, from that “Safe in the arms of Jesus” which I used to mutter into my pillow when the night-nursery candles were blown out!

Over the ancient roofs of the interior of the Old Court there rose a church tower that was older than William the Conqueror, that was in fact that extremely rare thing — as I had already learnt — a *Saxon tower.* I looked at this square erection with infinite interest. The romance of race! Is there anything in existence that is more poignant than that? Well! I suppose the peculiar vibration, the deep “pit-of-the-stomach” feeling, I have about such things comes from my impassioned readings of Sir Walter Scott and from those amazing illustrations of the quarto edition of *Aytoun*, but perhaps it comes, all down the long centuries, from my drop of proud Celtic blood! I had a daily occasion to contemplate this tower; for the Corpus privies were close beneath it. Here it was the custom to leave the door open while you were at stool, and I am afraid that this was one of the customs of my ancestors, along with others of a more religious nature, against which I was driven, by the weakness of my nature, to revolt. I used, timidly at first but afterwards more boldly, to push *to* these doors, so that I could make my evacuations in at least a semi-retirement.

I may have been bold in this matter, but the timorous conservatism of my deepest character has never been better illustrated than by the fact that simply and solely because all my days I had heard my father tell stories of his rowing, and of how he had persuaded *his* father to allow him to "stay up" longer than usual, in order that he might have the satisfaction of rowing in the Corpus *second* boat, I also must needs enter upon this activity. Could anything have revealed better not only my own inherent stupidity but the stupidity of our common human nature? Had I not already suffered miserably enough from compulsory cricket at school, that I should go and put myself under the yoke again? Why the devil didn't I tell these impertinent young men — full of chat about "serving the college" — that those also "served" who only stood and waited? I might have done this and come off triumphantly! For as a matter of fact this was before the days when, both at Sherborne and Corpus, athletics were made a moral duty and indeed were vehemently encouraged by the authorities, to keep our hands out of plackets and our feet out of brothels!

But unfortunately, at Corpus in those days there were three completely separate groups of people. There was the fast set, who, on the whole, gave athletics to the Devil. There was the pietistic evangelical set, some of whom actually preached, to any who would listen, on that rather desolate expanse towards the railway station known as Parker's Piece. And finally, there was the athletic set, divided again among themselves into those who favoured football and those who favoured rowing.

I fell into the hands of the rowing ones. It was a ridiculous thing. What good did I do to the college or anything else? I certainly did not save myself from immorality; for I well recall that it was in the very bloom and flower of the rowing season that I used to go for walks with the most profoundly immoral man in Cambridge, a man whose personality exuded a morbid sensuality that was pathetic. This rather unhappy individual's advances — they were not carried very far — evoked the only occasion in my life when I was erotically excited *without the least accompaniment of pleasure*; an occasion which I resolved should never be repeated, for it was extremely disagreeable to me.

It was during my first year at Cambridge that a vein in my nature that had long been threatening to give me trouble began to assert itself. *I refer to asceticism.* I have got in me a vein of the most obstinate asceticism, that is always ordering me about and curtailing my freedom. I accept its commands with a docility that is slavishl I yield to it as I yield to all my other quite innocent, but sometimes most annoying peculiarities. I yield to it as I certainly have never allowed myself to yield to my sadistic tendencies. Llewelyn has come to believe that this ascetic element in me *is* itself a sort of auto-sadism. Possibly. But for my own part I tend to regard it as a purely *æsthetic* peculiarity! Yes, I tend to explain my asceticism as an eccentric form of *astheticism;* and I believe I am not wrong in this solution. The thing had begun before I went to Corpus. I can remember the delight — a kind of rapturous orgy of priggish unction — with which, in one of my walks with Littleton, I think on the road to Long Burton, I gave what amounted to almost a shilling — and think what a shilling's-worth of apricot paté would have been — to a respectable young woman who was drawing water at a well. I rather fancy she thought at first that this ungainly schoolboy was regarding her as a light-of-love. But reassured by my foolish gravity and by the fantastical rigmarole I uttered, she finally came to the correct conclusion, namely, that I was a boy from Sherborne School acting the part of a bestower of alms.

My asceticism at Corpus on the contrary took the form of extreme parsimoniousness. I have always had an incurable itch to be regarded as good and noble, a desire that my convoluted sensuality combined with my extreme timorousness renders difficult of attainment. But my awe of my father was so great that above everything else I wanted to be in his good graces; and I knew that one of the shortest cuts to this end was to live more economically than even he had supposed was possible! Thus, following his own example, for in spite of his powerful frame he was more abstemious in his diet than any man I have ever known — stewed pears and rice pudding being his only temptation to excess — I never had more than one egg for breakfast, and when I made porridge on my fire, and it tasted especially delicious, I would deliberately leave it in the pot for the delectation of the servant who cleaned my room. I have already referred to my passion for plum-cake and the indirect manner in which I gratified it; but I carried my self-persecutions much further than this.

I would choose, for instance, as the companions of my walks, the particular young persons of my acquaintance who were the least esteemed in the college, and who inevitably took the lowest seats; and when, by reason of something hypnotic about my disturbing personality, I *did* make friends with popular people, I fawned upon them and furiously flattered them; not, you must really believe me here, from the remotest desire for social advancement, but solely because a kind of young girl hero-worship concealed itself in my clumsy frame.

Just as with the new boys at Sherborne, the freshmen at Corpus appeared on the scene a day or so before the others; and it was then that I heard the most astonishing rumours about the behaviour of the rowdier members of the fast set, and how they were liable to burst into a newcomer's rooms and throw his possessions out of the window! I had, however, made up my mind long before I came to Corpus that I was not going to endure any repetition of my school experiences. There did exist, I had pondered, weapons of defence that made the weakest and the most cowardly the equal of the strongest and the bravest. In conspiracy with Theodore therefore, who by this time had left the Wilkinson School in Suffolk, and had gone, as a pupil in farming, to a village in that same county, I bought a revolver. Theodore and I used to climb out of the "end room" at Montacute by the aid of a rope, and in addition to this fooling with fire-arms, for which no two youths could have been less adapted, we had by this time launched into the smoking of tobacco. I can remember the fear and excitement I felt as we walked through Stoke Wood in the middle of the night and I can remember the measureless satisfaction with which I felt that we resembled these Dutch pirates in *Guy Mannering.* I longed to hear Theodore say, "Douse the Glim!" and to reply, "Donner and Blitzen!" and as we two demoniac outlaws advanced towards Stoke Church I felt that I could say to the ghost of King Stephen: "I do not set my life at a pin's fee!"

All the while, therefore, that my father was making the sort of purchases in Cambridge for me that *his* father had made for him, I would be fumbling in my coat pocket to make sure that my loaded revolver was still safe. Did it lie between my brand-new pocket-book there, and my last illustration of feminine charms out of *Ally Sloper*? But when those drunken rowdies eventually materialized — and they actually did visit me — I can assure you it was only necessary to cause the mouth of this formidable weapon, bought at Petter’s, ironmonger, Yeovil, to emerge a brief distance from its hiding-place. And the result was that not only was my room not gutted, but a warning was spread through the place that it would be unwise to attempt any ragging of a freshman who might resort to fire-arms.

But with what awe I regarded these notorious Third Year rapscallions, as at the beginning of our chapel services — these were compulsory then — they lounged in, swollen with insolence, pale with dissipation, brimming over, in fact, with what Homer calls “hybris,” and with the barest relics of their undergraduate gowns hanging in weary effrontery from their drooping shoulders! When I think of my tremulous obeisance before a set of preposterous asses, as most of these fellows were — though they were harmless, I can assure you, compared with the bullies at Sherborne — I wonder to myself if the respect which most of us feel towards the historic ruffians of our race is not made of the same stuff. I think there must be some subtle *æsthetic* instinct at work here though, else why should we feel such peculiar annoyance when Mr. Wells, in his famous history, sets to work to disparage these picturesque cutthroats?

How one’s life does revolve in cycles! How it does keep on repeating itself! Before my first term was over I had taken upon myself to invite anyone who liked to turn up to come to my rooms and listen to a weird prophetic denunciation I had composed, entitled “Corpus Unveiled.” The fast men came to this in the hope of a sensation, and the anonymous Pariahs, despised by all, came to this as if to hear the voice of some Corpus Danton. There was even a sprinkling of athletes; though why *they* came, heaven alone knows! One pious evangelical, of those who preached on Parker’s Piece turned up, partly because he was a rowing person, and partly because, being profoundly simple, he anticipated some kind of sermon. Why was I not more tender to this evangelical piety? I might at least have refrained from egging on these bully boys to badger this young oarsman. I can see his simple face now. But no! I hated his co-religionists too deeply! For a certain kind of sleek, self-satisfied, *redeemed* look, these men were unequalled. They were not ascetics, let me hasten to assure you. Not one of them! If they did not, like Epistemon at Orleans, play the whore-master, they gulli-gutted most filthily upon the buttered toast that old Mr. Dobs, the most gentlemanly of butlers, provided from the college kitchen.

But where — you will say — thinking of Christopher Marlowe, where were the imaginative, the poetical, the intellectual sons of Corpus? Where were the young Phædruses, the young Mirandolas? Alas! There were none. Not one single one!

I had to beat up out of my own crazy wits, out of a skull that, as you have detected, was like the skull of an hysterical Petrushka, all the poetical idealism that I craved. All manner of inchoate ideas were at that time surging in my brain, and leaping up and down like the fish in Harrod's Mill-pool! I remember well how once walking out of Cambridge on a road that started — I never could master the compass — in the opposite direction from Byron's Pool, along with a brisk, neutral-minded lad whom the great Goddess Chance had made to be of a clay so different from my own that not one single vibration of comprehension could possibly pass between us, I launched out into a metaphysical defence of the Trinity, that comes back to me now as having been a tirade of torrential inspiration — not, I admit, as comprehensive as Sir Thomas Browne's discourse on the Quincunx; but a good deal livelier than anything that Coleridge — that subtle mystogogue — has left behind him on the Number Three. The truth is that first year at Corpus was one grand outpouring of seething, surging, whirling ideas; varied by fits of fawning, wheedling, almost girlish cajoleries as I indulged my admirations and attractions.

I will not say that I got nothing from my vain efforts to become an oarsman; but what I got from my daily walks to where the rowing took place, which is a long way from Corpus, had nothing at all to do with boats. I could not help, as in autumn and in spring, I walked this mile or two, snatching a thousand opportunities to enjoy those fleeting, fluctuating, purely contemplative feelings, which I have now come to regard as the essence of my life. Yes, I am ready to bless that Cambridge river and the lively custom of boat-racing on it; but only for the indirect and subsidiary benefits I received therefrom. And it has been the same all my life.

By slow degrees it has made itself manifest to me that the purpose of my life was to dodge — when I could get leave of absence from my exacting conscience — all obligations to humanity, and to cultivate certain totally useless, purposeless, unprofitable feelings. These feelings, which to me have come to be precious beyond any power of description, are regarded by many as pathetically colourless and sapless, by others as a kind of wilful insanity, by a few as a damnable affectation! But to most of my acquaintances at Corpus at that time my manias were taken for granted, exactly as was "Jack's pain"; and my long walks alone, or with "chandala" companions, became to these lads the same sort of thing as my habit when at home of bending my body across gates, of rolling on the sympathetic ground, and of persuading the little Llewelyn to use my stomach as a seat.

I think it must have been in these crazy monologues — bearing a certain resemblance to those of Coleridge at his Blue Coat School, only much less erudite — that I first began to develop my gift for pierrot-like oratory, an oratory into which I flung the wild grotesqueries of my being, and at the same time played with ideas; for though I took part in the Corpus Debating Society my formal speeches, like my written poetry, were lame, clumsy and inept. I remember well composing a poem in which the line: "suns and suns of sad and soulless seeming” occurred, and being amazed when someone protested that this was not poetry at all.

My three years at Corpus were years when my sadistic vice remained in complete abeyance. Why this should have been so I have no idea! And not only did that deepest and most congenital vice vanish during that epoch, but my more normal, but not entirely normal mania for pictures of young women with long slender legs, receded too. Was I becoming attracted to men? Not to my knowledge! As I look back on my time at Cambridge it presents itself to me as a period of pure idealism; and I really think it must have been by far the most idealistic epoch of my life. Religion played absolutely no part in it. I might dally fancifully with the metaphysics of the Trinity; but neither the idea of God nor the idea of the figure of Christ had the faintest interest for me. And yet I certainly was, during those three Cambridge years, more moral — in the special sense of being more chaste — than I have ever been before or since. I cannot recall one single lapse from this impeccable virtue!

As a pilgrim and sojourner at Corpus I was indeed a good man, “as all my fathers were”! But I certainly was eccentric. It was with me at Cambridge, just as it was at Sherborne, and just as it is now in New York State. I danced my own dance and sang my own song. My grand object was to get off for lonely walks in the country. All my life I have been like this. I have always regarded my existing domicile, whether it was an institution, or my father’s house, or a house of my own, or a hotel in Rome, Washington, Montreal, Florence, or San Diego, as a resting-place from which I could walk *into the country*. It is for this reason that I shall probably never go to Venice again. A city of gondolas is not at all the place for a person of my peculiarities. But Cambridge *was* an ideal place! I could follow those long, straight, flat monotonous roads for miles and miles, north, south, east and west.

What curious thoughts I had, as I followed these unpicturesque unromantic highways and used to see, far off, as I drew homeward, the familiar form of King's Chapel outlined against the sky! My thoughts were not of my particular studies, which very soon assumed an historical bent. Nor were they of my relatives at home. And they certainly were not of the affairs of Her Majesty's Empire. What I am revealing to you now is the deepest and most essential secret of my life. My thoughts were lost in my sensations; and my sensations were of a kind so difficult to describe that I could write a volume upon them and still not really have put them down. But the field-dung upon my boots, the ditch-mud plastered thick, with little bits of dead grass in it, against the turned-up ends of my trousers, the feel of my oak-stick "Sacred" whose every indentation and corrugation and curve and knot and grain I knew as well as those on my hand, the salty taste of half-dried sweat upon my lips, the delicious swollenness of my fingers, the sullen sweet weariness of my legs, the indescribable happiness of my calm, dazed, lulled, wind-drugged, air-drunk spirit, were all, after their kind, a sort of thinking, though of *exactly what*, it would be very hard for me to explain. Did I share at such times the sub-thoughts, or over-thoughts, that the old earth herself has, as she turns upon her axis, or that the vast volume of the ocean has, as his tide gathers along his beaches or draws back hoarsely into his gulfs?

They were at any rate what might be called sensation-thoughts. They had to do with the impact of the wind on my face and with all those vague, obscure half-memories that the wind can bring with it, full of half-realized impressions from days far off, days perhaps *so* far-off that they actually belong to previous reincarnations. As I write these lines now, there comes back to me — simply from the mechanical obliteration of all those tiresome rational thoughts and worrying practical thoughts that spoil one's life — one scene after another from those lonely roads. Even as I try to seize upon them they dissolve and melt away; but in their vanishing they leave a lovely residue, a mysterious satisfaction, that seems to well up from the inner being of old posts, old heaps of stones, old haystacks thatched with straw. From glimpses of white roads, appearing and disappearing in the twilight, these feelings spring; from wayside ditches, desolate ponds, solitary trees, windmills caught against the sky! What I would like to emphasize just here is that the pleasure I got from these things of my solitary walks did not present itself to me as an *æsthetic* pleasure, nor did it call up in my mind the idea of beauty. What gave me these sensations seemed to be some mysterious "rapport" between myself and these things. It was like a sudden recognition of some obscure link, some remote identity, between myself and these objects. Posts, palings, hedges, heaps of stones — they were part of my very soul.

But the mere movement of walking, the mere contact with earth and air and the breath of the free wind as I left the town behind, always seemed able to engender in me a mood in which the present took to itself a sort of winnowed essence of similar memories from the past and thus became a continuity of half-forgotten feelings that welled up in my consciousness and reduced the future to complete non-existence. I thus became on these lonely walks like one who has found the clue to the obliteration of the future; and although I did not feel as though I touched the Eternal, I certainly felt as though I ceased to want anything or wish for anything that I did not already possess. What I possessed was in fact — if I may put it so — a sort of *half-eternity*, made up of a fusion of past and present, with the future, and all its wants and wishes, totally annihilated.

I had proof enough at Cambridge how unnatural to my real instincts had been that priggish attempt to "take up" Gothic architecture; for I left the place without having so much as even stepped inside some of the most beautiful and famous of the courts, halls, chapels, libraries, gardens that are its glory. But it has been just the same in other towns and cities of old renown. Engaged in the study of history though I was, I had as little of the antiquary in me as I had of the scientist; and if Goethe shocks me in his "Travel Sketches" by the bland imperviousness with which he turns away from so many famous works of art in order to visit botanical gardens, I am afraid I should incur that great man's rebuke by the shameless way in which, when surrounded by historic buildings I invariably sneaked off to find the nearest lane, or tow-path, or cattle-drove, where I could be alone with the elements.

Certainly my three years at Cambridge were years of an unbalanced and chaotic idealism. I remember I was constantly formulating in my mind the wildest and most arbitrary rules for my intimate life. In my poetical, or at least what I supposed to be my poetical fastidiousness I relucted at committing these fantastic rules to paper! Rules, do I say? They were formulations of a series of sublime purposes of life. But in my unwillingness to write them down and in my natural tendency to start fresh each day as if I had been newly born, I was sorely put to it to remember what my last rule of life, my last purpose of life, was. It was then I had recourse to the stars. In my egoism I used the stars as a philosophical index. As I have hinted before, I have seldom suffered from Pascal's sublime "frisson" at the spectacle of these glittering punctuations in the enormity of the inscrutable. My tendency has been as with everything else in Nature, to accept them with what Spengler calls the "physiognomic eye"; in other words to wonder at them *in their precise visible appearance*, eliminating from my consciounsess all those bewildering astronomical and mathematical calculations with regard to their size and distance, their origin and destination. What has always arrested me are the actual configurations of the stars; so many astounding twists and twirls and spirals up there in the Boundless. And even more than by their actual pattern have I been fascinated by the legendary mythology of the stars, their astrological influences. I accept them, in fact, *at their face value* as the imperishable companions and fatal accomplices of our tragic human drama.

"Many a night," as Tennyson would say, from the edge of that well-kept lawn, forbidden to the feet of undergraduates, that separates the porter's office from the master's lodge, "did I look on Great Orion, sloping slowly to the West."

And as I contemplated all those celestial marks and scrawls, all those illuminated scribbles, so arbitrarily fantastical — here an index, there a codex, here a gloss, there a colophon — I proudly suspended my latest solution of life's riddle on the horns of some Babylonian mystery, or on the heraldic tail of some Zodiacal monster. For I pondered thus:

"Whenever I see yon heavenly curlecue, made upon the shores of Immensity by the walking-stick of the Demiurge, I shall say to myself: 'the object of life is to pursue the True, the Good and the Beautiful': or I shall say to myself: 'the object of life is to evoke the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number': or I shall say to myself: 'the object of life is to develop the spirit at the expense of the body': or I shall say to myself: 'the object of life is to find my alter-ego, my eternally-destined True-Love'!"

Thus pondering I would hang my latest ideal gonfalon, torn from the pages of *Hereward the Wake* or *Sartor Resartus*, upon the belt of Orion or round the neck of Cygnus, and then go off perfectly well-satisfied, to visit my private tutor in the snug precincts of Selwyn.

In spite of my violent prejudice against science I did have one scientific friend. His name was Rowland and he was the eldest son of one of our nicest Somersetshire neighbours, the friendly if somewhat cynical Vicar of Stoke-sub-Ham. Rowland belonged to Downing, a foundation for which I soon came to have a special predilection. I savoured so fully those wide expanses of grass that separate its mellow buildings and I relished too something that seemed to me almost pastoral about its architecture. Sidney Rowland was a man who "with Epicurus denied the immortality of the soul" and with Democritus *il mondo a caso pone;* but although such doctrines were as tedious to me as the drawing-class at Sherborne, they interfered little — for was not my latest revelation ready to brandish its oriflamme, the moment the stars came out — with my respect and liking for this most honest infidel. I think it showed that I was at least *honest* myself; or I am sure Sidney Rowland would have bowed me downstairs; for he was not one to be fooled.

Take it all in all there were very few people I knew at Cambridge; and I did not desire to know more. My suspicion of the great world, and of those who ascend to eminence therein, was as powerful then as it is to-day. Ambitious young men were sealed books to me. I could make, as they say, neither head nor tail of such goings on. Deep in every fibre of my being stirred my father's towering and solitary pride, a pride that needed, I can assure you, neither applause from the world, nor a place of authority in the world.

My long apprenticeship at Sherborne, from my tenth to my nineteenth year, had established in my mind once and for all that secret that I had discovered when I was only eight and nine, namely that it is possible to find your life-cult and pursue your life-cult in complete independence of the community in which you have been thrown. Thus at Corpus while I felt a puzzled contempt for ambitious men, I simply did not recognize the existence of society ladies. As my tastes hardened and clarified I found that I derived from the acquaintance of girls-of-the-street and of other equally uneducated and equally easy-going young women, all the idealistic and romantic thrills that I wanted. Not that my commerce — slight and intermittent as it has been — with girls of joy ever satisfied my sensual cravings. It was my moral sense, my spirit, my soul, my æsthetic feelings, my imagination, my longing for romance, my tenderness for ideal femininity that these courageous and kind-hearted wenches fulfilled. And — odd though it may sound — what I especially valued in them was their chastity. But of course any one not a fool could have foreseen that I would find them that! It seems indeed to be a congenital peculiarity of mine that the girls who appeal to me should possess the chastity of whores.

It is I suppose what might be called the Platonic idea of girlhood that attracts me. Certainly my instinctive attitude to women is a mixture of impersonal and extremely fastidious lust with a romantic tenderness. It must have been about the time of my entrance to Corpus that I first cajoled a young woman into my bed. This was not a bed, you may be assured, within those monastic precincts; but it was my own bed, and I anticipated the moment of sharing it with a feminine shape with heart-beating eagerness. But it was not a success! I found my companion sadly different from those slim sylphs whose pictures filled the lower drawer of my treasure-box. Her appearance in her long white night-gown, her grave be-ribboned tresses, her stillness and passivity, all this was heaven to me; but my experience suggests either that most women are singularly ignorant of the perversities that Nature loves to strew in her path, or that Providence has fooled them into thinking that the seduction of any close contact with them must be irresistible. But alas! such contact has generally proved in my case only too easy to resist; and yet my bedfellow on this occasion would merely have had to stand once more at the mirror and tie the ribbon round her locks again, to restore that Platonic image of femininity which contact with her destroyed. But such young persons never — or very, very rarely — have the wit to realize this; or am I to suppose — and perhaps this *is* nearer the truth — that the mixture of impersonal idealism and fastidious lust with which I regard them is of all things the most antipathetic to a girl's nature?

My friends at Cambridge, as I have hinted, were very few compared with those of most men of my age. Thomas Henry Lyon, of whose striking personality rumours came to me the minute I set foot in Corpus, soon became, not only the most intimate, but certainly the most beguiling, of these. I wonder if the famous Thomas Henry, whose destiny has caused him to play such a dominant rôle in the lives of so many nervous, eccentric, and imaginative people, can feel himself back into that young Henry Lyon whose unequalled charms held me spellbound? I dare say he can, for his awareness of his own remarkable identity was always exceptionally vivid. His companionship was certainly more eagerly sought and more passionately prized than that of any person of either sex that it has been my lot to meet in my whole life. In after years, when we had become more closely linked together, for Thomas Henry is my son's uncle, we had a way of entangling ourselves in such long, intricate, and I might say furious arguments, that the delicate charm, full of all manner of chivalrous nuances, of our earlier contact was bruised, as these things so often are, by the merciless buffets of the implacable reasoning faculty. Heaven forgive us! We certainly allowed our fantastical opinions, neither of us, I fear, being very Socratic in his logic or even prepared to meet the other a quarter of the way, to bully into quiescence, and finally into exhausted apathy, one of the most promising friendships that ever beat — within those Corpus walls — against life's implacable retiences.

But what a man Thomas Henry Lyon was, and must be still! What sardonic wit illuminated in those days his Voltairean countenance! What flickerings of convoluted emotion crossed and recrossed his Prince-of-the-Church profile! His humour was savage, his gall triumphant, his heart tender, his fancy fertile, his energy insatiable, his contempt for the hypocrisies of the world unbounded. But he was, and probably remains, one of those intransigent despots whose zeal for righteousness is only equalled by their inability to leave the righteous in peace, their passion for truth only equalled by their terrific preference for their own path thereto.

But if he was tyrannical towards me, I was cruel towards him. I remember once going so far as to say — and what a thing to say to a friend! ——

"Do you think I would really reveal to you the depths of my heart?"

And I remember once in a lonely spot on his native moor actually *giving him the slip* and returning home alone, for no reason at all except my selfish desire to enjoy my private sensations uninterrupted by human companionship.

At his worst, the brains of Harry Lyon resembled a bitter walnut encased in a steel helmet; whereas, at *my* worst, *my* brains became like a miasmic mist hovering over a churchyard. The difference between us was extraordinary. I think the man is essentially a Norman; but a Norman whose compact skull turned its terrific volition away from tournaments and battles to the lists of art! And it was art *à outrance;* it was art carried to the limit. His artistic manias expressed with ferocious intensity, kept riding, like men-at-arms with sword and spear, into the devious fastnesses of my Welsh imagination. I can recall so clearly an actual spot, on the road from Arundel to Burpham in Sussex, where he could not contain himself at my lack of aesthetic — or indeed any other— “convictions.” I remember mumbling and muttering something about my secret life of pure sensation, concentrated upon Nature; but this only added fuel to his Dantesque flame. “Nature!” he would cry; and once more that scoriating artillery, fed with the very brimstone of “creative art” would blaze about my head. But willy-nilly I must have picked up *some* æsthetic standards from the words of this furious crusader. But art-principles seem to be as varied as scientific hypotheses; and I was soon to encounter an almost completely reverse set of æsthetic axioms in the more measured, but hardly less implacable opinions of my own brother Bertie.

But I dare say it helped us both — Harry Lyon and me — thus to batter at each other’s heads; helped us, not so much in the direction of modifying our basic assurances as of clarifying them to ourselves. He would announce to his disciples: “Jack Powys is a man without a soul!” and I, in the privacy of my own nondescript circle, would retort: “Harry Lyon has the soul of Saint Augustine!” Peace be unto thee, O strange friend of my youth! When we next meet it will very likely be as doddering, querulous old gentlemen, more anxious about the effect of the weather on our rheumatism than as to how man can, or cannot, scrape through life without putting Rubens above Titian.

But an older friend of mine at Corpus, though I lost touch completely with him after we went into the world, was Constantine Koelle. Koelle was some years, I should say ten years, older, and this naturally led to his becoming a kind of psychological master to me. If my arithmetic is not wrong the dear man must be over seventy to-day. Think of Koelle over seventy! It gives me that weird shock that Proust so incomparably describes in those last two volumes of his masterpiece.

If with Thomas Henry, save at the very start, when his good looks and brilliant humour overawed me, I was on fairly equal terms, with Koelle I gave full vent to that element of almost girlish hero-worship which has so many times since won me a particular kind of favour with powerful people. Looking back on that time now, I confess that the character of this chosen mentor of mine seems a little obscure. This is doubtless due to the fact of the difference in our ages. But I cannot refrain from thinking it must be also due to a certain cautious reticence in my friend. Personally I am one who discourses with shameless freedom to younger people; not to only people ten years but twenty, nay forty years younger than I am! Koelle certainly cannot have been like that! But how good he was to me, how sweet, how tactful, how gracious, how affectionate and considerate! I warrant it added a lot to my prestige in Corpus, and softened the asperity of many harsh judgments about me, that a man of Koelle's knowledge of the world should have made a crony of such a queer one. There was indeed no earthly reason why he *should* unbosom himself to me! How could he know that in the matter of confidences I was deep as the grave? But if I became cruelly reticent towards Harry Lyon, Koelle became what might be called amiably reticent towards me. As an example of this, it was not till a day or two before we separated forever, that my friend announced to me that he was going to be married. God help me! When *my* time to marry drew near, as it did pretty soon after this, who was there among my circle who did not give me every possible kind of advice. They all spoke up; though they did not all say the same things. But the astute Koelle wisely dodged all this. I suspect that he agreed with Robert Browning in that virile sentiment about keeping one side of your nature — or was it one side of your soul? — hidden from all the world so as to be able to reveal it to the woman of your choice. Personally I am cantankerous and disconcerting in this matter. It gives me a curious pleasure to hold my secrets away from my closest intimates, and then to publish them, as the Scripture says, “from the house-top.”

No doubt it was to Koelle that I owed my dip into the work of Browning, that, for exactly three years — when I was twenty, twenty-one and twenty-two — delighted and obsessed me. Then I turned from it in fastidious detestation; and I have never gone back to it! Browning remains in fact the one single *great* author for whom I cherish a venomous and malignant hostility. My feeling is personal, *and physical.* I feel towards him as a woman might feel towards a man who has made unprovoked and unpleasant advances to her. In fact I feel as if in his super-masculinity Browning makes such advances to all his readers. It is this virility of his that I find so objectionable. I am indeed as touchy over what I *divine to be* the physical characteristics of my authors, their nerves, their *kind* of sensuality, the temper of their blood, as I am about similar peculiarities in my friends! If I like a person — be it man, woman or child — I like such an one *physically.* Am I that opprobrious thing a “polymorphous pervert”? Possibly I am. The astute reader is doubtless already on the look-out! But my own deep personal instinct is always warning me that psycho-analytical pigeon-holes must be accepted with extreme caution. Even as far as they go at present these theories by no means cover the field; and we may be sure that another generation will invent a completely new set of ocean-plummets for sounding the heart of our mystery.

Why do I hate Browning so to-day, when I fell so completely under his spell when Koelle brought him to my notice at Corpus? Walt Whitman is equally sensual, equally gross, equally optimistic; and I remain a devoted lover of Walt Whitman! It is queer. But I believe what I have come to fight shy of in Browning is the exact replica of those normal and virile instincts in Koelle himself which led us to drift apart. What Koelle and Browning felt is a vein of emotion that neither resembles my pure satyrish lust, nor my ideal magical romance. It is “human, too human.” It is what Browning himself would call, “the way of a man with a woman.”

Yes, I expect the real secret of Koelle’s drifting, as a girl would say, “out of my life,” was what he correctly felt to be my sub-humanity. I made him jumpy. I gave him the sensation that he was listening to the cracking of hyperborean ice forever receding and receding! I made him feel as if he were in danger of being embarrassed by the chilly breath of such a merman-disciple, come inquisitively up to learn of his kindly nuptials from the frozen ooze where they neither marry nor are given in marriage.

One of the links between us was the unsophisticated awe with which I listened to his stories of Anglo-Indian regions, where he had been a planter, almost a Conrad character, before he decided upon being a clergyman. He visited us at Montacute in the days before we both left Corpus; and I remember talking to my father once in the park about him — near the idyllic spot where Mr. Phelips allowed the village cricket-team to practise — and in a vein of boastfulness, anxious to impress my father with my friend’s knowledge of the world, I explained how Koelle had steered clear of those amorous relations with black women which was so lively a temptation in those parts. My father remaining silent, I continued my discourse on the various temptations of young men, hinting that there were other “primrose-paths” at a place like Cambridge, for all its lack of dark-skinned Houris, which might lead a person to the everlasting bonfire. The pleasure of boasting about the perils of the world became greater and greater to me at that moment, under those familiar trees, and I was surprised that my father continued silent.

Piqued a little at the small effect of my words, I was led on to indicate that although I had at present encountered few loose women near the gates of Corpus, there had been grave cases of alcoholism of late in his Alma Mater, and that I myself had more than once found the power of our famous college port insidiously attractive. My father continued silent. And under the weight of that silence we advanced gloomily enough along the path by the edge of the Montacute House garden. I was racking my brains for further revelations and was just, like Lot's wife, looking towards the Cities of the Plain, when at last he broke the uncomfortable silence.

"John," he remarked. "I should be glad if you would read the Lessons for me to-morrow morning. It's a real help to me, my boy, during this season of long gospels."

Thus did my father prove to me that he understood some aspects of his eldest son's character.

Another friend, if that is not too intimate a term for our relations, that I made at that time, was none other than the well-known author, G. P. Gooch. If I made dear old Koelle jumpy by my queer ways, the companionship of Gooch, who was attending the historical lectures with me — he was I think at Trinity then — would have given anyone except myself a kind of metaphysical goose-flesh. I am prepared to confess that even my tendency to Boswellian adoration was strained to the uttermost in Gooch's company. He had an astounding brain. His learning was unbelievable and he possessed an indomitable will. He was not a humorist like Johnson or Porson or Bentley, but in his own quiet way he was very formidable. His intellectual nature was keyed up to a pitch that was awe-inspiring. He was entirely devoted to the most recondite historical pursuits. A prodigy of learning, he had the calmest way of mapping out his own future career, which was to be dedicated, as indeed it subsequently was, to the service of humanity and the bettering of his mind. He told me he would be in Parliament. And he *was* in Parliament. He told me — but it was not what he “told” that mattered. It was his *way* of telling things. He had a predilection for darkness. Light hurt his eyes; and he had, quite obviously, to save his eyes. So hour by hour, in those rooms of mine, overlooking the Old Court, he would sit by my side, his hand laid upon *my* hand, discoursing at large on all the most subtle and difficult points in history, in philosphy, in politics, in political science. My Corpus friends were terrified of him, as well they might have been; for he moved in a sphere of intellectual interests that, except in the archives of Archbishop Parker’s library, were unknown among us. The man’s learning was something monstrous. It shocked and startled like a sea-serpent. There was indeed something about it that was morbid and unnatural.

It certainly betrays the earth-bound proclivity of my own temperament and a certain lack of interest in the *things of the mind* that I did not afterwards follow up Gooch’s life’s work. I followed up at Cambridge though. In my naiveté I would ask him so many silly questions that he was moved once to remark that my intellectual curiosity resembled that of extremely small children who persist in enquiring whether two bears would be a match for one tiger, or whether, if it came to the scratch, a lion could overcome a rhinoceros. When I think of the womanlike attention, rapt and spellbound, with which I listened to Gooch, it occurs to me that I must have displayed with regard to him that particular kind of self-abasing humility, with which I have so often misled the men I have admired into completely underrating my real mental independence, and, if I may say so without conceit, my real mental qualities.

I have never known what Gooch really thought of me. He was not only very learned; he was also, I gathered, very rich. But in some mysterious way both his learning and his wealth were “dedicated.” He might have belonged to that weird Pedagogic Society, in *Wilhelm Meister,* whose activities involved the mystical training of ardent but wayward spirits like my own. He *had* a picture of Goethe in his pleasant rooms, opposite the entrance to King's College, and it was to him that I owed my first introduction to those wonderful *Conversations with Eckermann.* I was myself, however, a good deal more like the sly, though impulsive Boswell, than I was like the worthy Weimar disciple and I have a notion that Gooch regarded me towards the close of our brief acquaintanceship as something between a fraud and a fool.

I don't think he did me justice; but it were unfair to blame him for this since it had already become a second nature with me to assume a good deal more pliability and impressionableness than I really possessed. I admired; I listened; I asked intelligent questions, not always "how many bears could overcome a tiger," but mentally I went my own way; and such reserves are not calculated to win favour with one's cultural master.

If Gooch introduced me to Goethe, Koelle not only quoted Browning to me; he frequently, when smoking his pipe in his big East Indian lounge-chair, would garnish his allusions to the ways of the great world by snatches from the alliterative melodies of Swinburne. It is queer to think that it was not until I left Cambridge — and this alone indicates the kind of cultural lacunae which existed in our circle — that I so much as even *heard* of Walter Pater, or Henry James, or Thomas Hardy. Matthew Arnold's poetry must have begun, however, to gather significance for me at that time and to thrust back Tennyson.

It was during the visits Littleton and I used to pay to Wyaston House in Oxford, where our Shirley cousins then lived, that Ralph Shirley began to take an interet in me. *His* interest took the very best shape possible and I shall always be grateful to him for it. It first took the form of reciting to me, in a manner that was itself a revelation of the magic of poetry, passages from Matthew Arnold, and then, soon after I left Cambridge, of actually getting published, through his connection with Ryder and Company, my own first two volumes of verse.

Our holiday visits to Oxford — it was on the Isis that I first learnt to skate — come back very pleasantly to my mind. Cousin Ralph, then an undergraduate at New College, gave me access to the University library, and though the books I took from those weighty shelves were of a simple nature — mostly the works of Jules Verne — Oxford came to mean for me long snowy days of reading by warm fires, varied by happy excursions with Littleton on a frozen river. A noble figure of a man Ralph Shirley was, with his spacious forehead, Viking moustache, and pure Saxon eyes — eyes that "melted in love and kindled in war" — but he was the only person I knew, *and remains so still!* to whom the enjoyment of poetry is a kind of physical necessity, like smoking tobacco or drinking tea.

Llewelyn indeed runs him close in this; and so, in his different fashion, does Littleton himself; but Ralph's enjoyment of poetry was a kind of absolute. It was unexclusive, catholic, all-embracing. Homer was not too elemental for him, nor Ernest Dowson too sentimental; but I have a notion that he loved Matthew Arnold best of all.

Thus it was in her more artless moods that the Oxford of the Anatomy of Melancholy and of Marius the Epicurean had her effect upon me. As for her cynicisms and affectations, my Wordsworthian simplicity rendered me immune; and such are the limitations of my sub-human intelligence that I find it hard even at this time of day so much as to know what they mean by the "Oxford manner." I go obstinately forward on my mythological way, protected by my father's spirit, oblivious alike of the sciences of the Cam and of the sophistries of the Isis.

In reading for the Historical Tripos — in which I ultimately obtained a very moderate Second Class — I must confess I was only once really thrilled by any of the university teachers. This was by Professor Seeley, a far-sighted and indeed a rather Goethean person who was certainly a different sort of bird from the sinister antagonist of my father's fairy-tale. Seeley was already failing in health, and I think he died soon after; but I shall never forget — as he gave one particular lecture upon the Athenian view of life — the reverberating unction with which from his seat on the dais, for he was too weak to stand, he uttered the word "Ecclesia."

Take it all in all, the university *as* a university had not the least influence upon my taste, my intelligence, my philosophy or my character! All these things had been created at Shirley, enlarged at Weymouth and Dorchester; and then had been finally branded into me — by harrowing necessity — at Sherborne. As for Corpus and its authorities — except for my pleasure in walking over to visit the Fanshawes at their country house, the best I can say for them is that they never meddled with me nor I with them. I obeyed their rules, I "kept" my chapels, I passed my examinations, I took my degree. I was studious. I was quiet. No Proctor ever had to pursue me. No Dean ever had to interview me. I slipped into the place, and I slipped out of the place, totally uninfluenced. Corpus leaving me thus intact, and the university, in its larger aspects, barely impinging upon my consciousness, it would be the rough truth to say that *socially*, which is the grand motive — and damned close it is to the worst kind of snobbishness — of most Englishmen's going there at all, I gained little or nothing, from my college life. This was owing to my secretive, backyard ways of conducting myself.

But if I did not gain much from Cambridge I gained all the world from Cambridgeshire! Oh how can I express my deep, my indurated, my passionate, my unforgettable, my *eternal* debt, to that dull, flat, monotonous, tedious, unpicturesque Cambridgeshire landscape? How those roads out of Cambridge — and it seems as if all my most heavenly roads have been out of, rather than into somewhere — come back to my mind now! Those absurd little eminences known as the Gog and Magog hills: that long interminable road that leads to some pastoral churchyard that once claimed precedence of Stoke Pogis as the site of the Elegy: that more beguiling, but not *very* beguiling road that led in the Ely direction, past the place where my father's father, when a fellow of Corpus, used to go courting: those meadows towards Grandchester where there is that particular massive and wistful effect about the poplars and willows that always makes me think of Northwold: these are my masters, my fellows, my libraries, my lecture-halls; these are my Gothic shrines! And-not only these in their large aspects, but every swamp-pool, every rushy brook, every weedy estuary, every turnip-field, every grey milestone, every desolate haystack became part of my spirit.

I inherited from my father, though with him it was inarticulate, that Wordsworthian reverence and awe, a sort of mystical awe, that totally explodes and disperses all snobbish bourgeois airs of superiority, in the presence of manual labourers. Secretly my father only reverenced three kinds of men in the whole world, workers with their hands and soldiers and sailors! From the bottom of my soul the sort of life that would best suit my life-illusion, that would nearest fulfil the classic *actor's* rôle that hits my humour, would be some primitive labour, requiring no skill, but that had an ancient and poetical tradition behind it. I would have nearly all I wanted if I could link this up with the reading of the old classics and with the writing of new romances! My ideal life would be to do *some* manual work every day and some reading of Homer with a crib and to spend the rest of the time either walking or writing or making love. I do not "cotton" to financiers of any kind; but *small* shopkeepers I hold in high esteem, and I have always found that the small shopkeeper in a village is the nicest and kindest person in the place. The sympathy I feel with labourers in the fields is no mere ideal emotion; it is a profound poetical reverence that goes down to the very bottom of my soul. It is mingled with the very life and stuff of my whole sensuous and imaginative being.

As I walked by myself in that monotonous Cambridge country I used to practise what I practised in my walks at Sherborne, a metamorphosic partaking of — or vicarious participation in — the supposed feelings of lonely persons labouring by land and sea. Of course a weak, cowardly, fastidious degenerate like myself cannot *really* enter into the feelings of a peasant, or a factory hand, or a sailor; and of course I am always unspeakably grateful to the great goddess Chance for having made me lucky enough to be able to earn my living by my voice and by my pen; but I *have* the power, say what you please, of a certain direct man-to-man comprehension and *feeling with* such persons so that although *you* may call me a humbug, these labourers do not. The truth is I have a monkish conscience rather than any bourgeois complacency in the presence of those who work, and I always regard it as much harder to work with your hands than with your brain.

Thus in place of those convictions which Harry Lyon held so essential, and in place of that "Self-realization for Public Ends," advocated by G. P. Gooch, my own secret life of imaginatized and poetized sensations was for ever fumbling to fill itself out and round itself off by a sort of devotional transmigration of soul into the lives of soldiers and sailors and peasants and factory hands.

I hear at this point an indignant murmur in a familiar voice: "Hypocritical Charlatan! Sentimental Humbug! Bastard of Jean-Jacques

Rousseau!” Yes; I know what you are saying my good friend. But I could not go on drinking my tea and eating my toast and humming and drumming over these hills, like a caricature of Taliessin, if there were not something in the vast inanimate about me, something between this gleaming hawk-rock and that far-off Arthur’s wain, that does not disapprove of my antics, that lends me at least a dumb encouragement as my nature hardens in its destined mould. Heaven forbid however, that as I recall the persons who were kind to me when the mould of my fate was still fluid, I should give the impression of ingratitude. It has never been a fault of mine to allow difference or distance to make me forget what I have been given. From my cousin Ralph, for instance, I learned the inestimable value of that kind of humorous detachment in adversity, when the mind pushes back its burden, which is, I think, one of the greatest gifts of the Saxon race, and one too that does not come very easily to the irritable Celtic temper.

I often find myself recalling, as in their native region, I observe the quaint proceedings of the animals known as woodchucks, how my cousin would suddenly enquire, when I took life too hard: “How much wood, Cousin Jack, does a woodchuck chuck, when a woodchuck would chuck wood?” And then to my angry gravity he would blandly continue: “A woodchuck would chuck all the wood it could chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood; and a woodchuck *would* chuck wood, if a woodchuck *could* chuck wood!”

Littleton came up to Corpus when I was beginning my second year. He came up with a tremendous athletic reputation, which he increased still further at Cambridge. It must have been this, combined I dare say with his dread of finding me closetted in the dark while I listened to Gooch’s discourses on Spinoza, that brought it about that I saw very little of him while we were undergraduates at Cambridge.

I had picked up from Ralph Shirley, who soon became one of the Argonauts of Occultism in London, an interest in theosophical doctrines; and I well remember how once, as I ittleton and I were walking together over those forlorn flats that lead to the wider reaches of the Cam, I priggishly reproached him for his absorbing interest in cricket. His pleasure in fishing I had shared too deeply at Northwold for me to have the indecency to drag that in. *That* was always a kind of sacred thing between us. But I remember that I went so far, on this occasion, in my patronizing animadversions upon his prowess at cricket, as even to express a fear that in our next incarnation we should not meet unless he mended his ways; Powys Ma. in this ascent, being likely to be promoted to some spiritual "Five A," while Powys Mi. was still in "Three B."

It was during my first summer vacation, when Littleton had left Sherborne and was preparing to go to the university, that we stayed together in Weymouth. The Penn House days, alas! were already at an end; but we stayed very contentedly in a quaint lodging in the inland part of the town, not very far indeed from the old Backwater, that water-mark, if I may say so, of some of our earliest memories. "Invicta House" was the name of this new abode; and our windows looked out, if I remember correctly, upon a small grassy square. It was the sort of spot, only not so trim or white-washed, that Betsy Trotwood must have lived in, in her Kentish watering-place; and happy indeed was our time together there.

That teasing vein of asceticism which has always plagued me, with its fussy, phariasaic exactions, was particularly active during this "Invicta House" epoch. I can recall, during one of our walks — and as always with these notable occasions when I made a fool of myself I can see the very spot where I made the remark — gravely observing, after half an hour's intense silence, that I thought I might continue to allow myself *one egg* for breakfast. To such a conclusion as this — and there were not a few of them — Littleton would always reply by the same indulgent and not in the least quizzical stare, opening his mouth a little and his large grey-blue eyes a good deal, and wrinkling his forehead. On another occasion — and this I recall was on the hilly side of Lodmoor — we were suddenly arrested by the appearance of an unusually perfect rainbow. "Ah!" I cried, for it was after another of my long silences, "*That* is a good omen for me!" This time Littleton *did* speak, and I can remember to this day the faint, very faint tone of reproach in his patient voice, when he protested that he saw no reason, this being so comprehensive a sign in the heavens, why it should not be a good omen for him too! When I consider how he had come to "Invicta House" — which at its best was no Burdon Hotel — to be put upon by such fantasies, straight from his authoritative position as captain of his "Eleven," if not of his "Fifteen" too, it is wonderful to me to recall his sweetness of temper. It was an extremely wily old tramp, whom I insisted on hauling in to share our tea one day, who did come nigh to being the last straw; but even to him, such was this unusual athlete's good nature, he remained gracious and friendly.

Lutyens, our constant ally, then at Cambridge with me, and now on the point of representing the university on the race track, was tutoring with some people who lived between Chickerel and Wyke Regis, somewhere near the western reaches of Chesil Beach. Him we used to meet, in the late August afternoon, when our day's reading was over, at the old bridge across the Fleet, and I enjoyed these encounters right well — until it entered our swift-footed one's head — a head as immune to misanthropy as it was to ambition — to introduce us to his pupils' relations.

It was about this time that my father, who always conveyed his family to some seaside place on his brief annual holiday, took Littleton and Theodore and me, along with the others, to Barmouth in Wales. I had never been to Wales, and this visit ought to have been a memorable one. A *notable* one, in a sense, it did become; but it by no means returns to my memory with any feeling of pleasure. Littleton and Theodore and I slept in a room suspended, you might almost call it, above Barmouth Estuary, and I can see now the cold and rather terrifying motion of this tidal inlet, as the moonlight brought those waters, swelling them and brimming them till they seemed — as their nocturnal volume gathered and grew — about to flood the actual masonry out of which our window looked.

There had been one point, while Littleton and I were at "Invicta House," when he had really revolted against my psychic overbearingness and egoism. This was on a certain occasion when we were together in a pleasant little coppice, somewhere between Lodmoor and the Dorchester Road. It was a warm day and Littleton laid himself down on the fragrant moss under the trees and prepared to enjoy a summer's afternoon trance. To this timely repose Nature persuaded, the gods were acquiescent, the hour was propitious; but not so the athlete's elder brother. For all my mania for the elements I have the greatest difficulty in making myself sit down in the middle of a walk. A demoniac restlessness urges me forward. I fancy this works upon me much in the manner in which Wordsworth describes his own mood, when he says:

"And his own mind did like a tempest strong
Come to him thus and drove the weary wight along."

The truth is, it is as a rule only by constant physical movement, even when alone with Nature, that I can escape those self-created, self-torturing incarnations of Fear, which, like that luckless stick thrown into the lake in Derbyshire, rise up from Hell to torment me. But Littleton's mind was like the lake *before the stick was thrown into it;* and it was more than he could endure to be persecuted into walking when he felt like “trancing,” He became angry. I also lost my temper; and in that quiet spinney a physical wrestling-bout took place, the conclusion of which was that Littleton, for the first time in our life, proved himself my master. He overthrew me. He even, in a literal sense, sat upon me; and I learned at last the power of those sturdy muscles that had kicked so many goals for Sherborne and had hit so many boundaries.

I was reading Stubbs’s *Constitutional History of England* then; and now at Barmouth in that bedroom above those moon-drawn volumes of gathering water I was still reading that laborious account of our complicated liberties. But in Wales I took care to avoid physical contests with a Rugby football captain.

When weary of using the worthy Bishop’s researches as jumping-off places for my extremely unhistoric thoughts, I sought in Theodore’s companionship the greatest contrast I could find! Theodore was certainly very different from Bishop Stubbs. *His* Magna Carta was shortly to take the form of acquiring, with my father’s help, a small farm of his own at Sweffling in Suffolk; and it presented itself to our restless minds, as these fitful lanterns revolved in search of excitement, that it would be behoveful to both of us to practise a little horseback riding. To this end we procured two ponies — the more sagacious Littleton remaining aloof from the whole transaction — and endeavoured to ride into the mountains. I don’t think we tried to ascend to the top of Cader Idris; and I seem to remember that we more often dragged our recalcitrant steeds by their bridles than rode on their backs; but it all ended — *that* I do clearly recollect — by my pony falling down a waterfall.

I must have been a grievous trial to my father during that Welsh visit, with all my manias and carryings on. I well remember explaining to him once at considerable length — perhaps it was after my misadventure with the pony — that I detested mountains and that the only scenery in which I felt really happy was the fen-country of Norfolk. I can hear now his accents of grave expostulation:

“It’s a pity you came with us then, John, my son!”

But in his massive, reserved fashion he was touchingly indulgent to me. He even endured it in silence when I insisted upon confining my diet, during that holiday, to bread and treacle, on the austere grounds that no one ought to eat what everyone could not get. The fact that his own diet was always far simpler than that of most clerics — I am sure Bishop Stubbs would have scorned his rice puddings — must have made this particular gesture of mine appear peculiarly priggish.

Finally Littleton, Theodore and I were packed off by him — and glad, I dare say, he was to get rid of us! — on a few days’ independent excursion to climb to the top of Snowden. This was, I regret to say, anything but an harmonious adventure. Following my usual rigid economy — for, like Judas, I kept the purse — I clashed all the time with Littleton’s more generous notions of what was proper on such a trip; while Theodore, whose health was never as robust as ours, not only found the climbing hard and the weather trying, but was barely allowed a sip of brandy to help him along. If it did not come to Littleton’s having to carry both his brothers up the last half-mile of our ancestral mountain, it came to something near it; but you can believe it was not Littleton but Theodore and I who decided what the three Powys brothers were to write in the *Climber’s Book* which was kept — and for all I know may be kept still — in the hut upon the summit. What we finally did write up there were the lofty but somewhat rung-upon words: “Love Never Dies”; and since, on our return journey, I conspired with the Devil to start Littleton and Theodore actually fighting, it seems hard to believe that no ironic spirit of the mountains I had maligned had dictated these audacious words.

It must have been before I left Cambridge that Theodore really was established in that farm of his at Sweffling. Many a time, later, did I stay with him there, and contemplated with wonder his courage in giving orders to those difficult East-Anglian peasants. I think this courage — fortified though it was by nocturnal readings of the works of Nietzsche, whom he discovered and appreciated long before I did — was not attained without a considerable nervous strain; for it soon became — as Llewelyn, now beginning to watch the proceedings of his grown-up brothers with characteristic sagacity, has not failed to indicate — a sort of symbol of ultimate desolation among us, to think of Theodore, of a windy November afternoon, making his way, like Christian with his forlorn pack, to his weekly purgatory at Saxmundham Market.

It is remarkable that I cannot recall one single, solitary occasion, in all my three years at Corpus, when I indulged in those sadistic thoughts that *alone seem to stir my erotic feelings to their depths.* I do not speak, mark, you, of practising any *actual* sadism; for the few times in my life when I have done this — such as running Littleton down "The Slopes," such as causing that fountain Cupid in the Prep. to be suddenly smitten, such as cutting worms to pieces in the arbour at Northwold, such as killing those young birds, if I *really* did do so, in the quarries on the Bristol Road — did not give me, *while I did it,* the least pulse-beat of pleasure, nor, in the memory of it, the least quiver of re-awakened temptation. Whereas my wicked thoughts, confined entirely to my own brain, have simply intoxicated me; and I have only to think of certain wicked books in this unspeakable *genre* to feel the liveliest shiverings in the perverted nerve.

I would like to know how deeply a priest would condemn me, if *now,* and for the rest of my mortal days, I hesitated not to indulge myself in such abominable books; and yet, in real life, never hurt a fly? Well, whatever the priest said, I should condemn myself, because to the end of my existence I shall believe that our thoughts are of the utmost importance, and have the power of projecting impalpable *eidola* such as can fatally influence the thoughts of others: yes! and actually start them upon crime.

But why was it that in these years of my life, from nineteen to twenty-one, I was suddenly relieved entirely from my fiendish vice, as if an actual indwelling Devil had gone out of me? Was it the constant contact with young men of my own age? Was it the rumbling thunder of my thaumaturgic obsession with the elements, which, and for the first time, was consciously awakening within me? Or was it that I was beginning to become conscious of the real existence of living young women, as rivals to that fair-skinned, fair-haired little idol, that I had thought of even before I left Sherborne, and who still lived in my black-and-gold cabinet of Eros?

I recollect two frightful shocks that I received at Corpus. One was when one of my fellow collegians informed me with lurid realism of the hemorrhages that women have to suffer from in the revolutions of the moon; and the other was when somebody — Koelle I think it was — told me about vivisection. This latter piece of information, revealing the existence of an abominable crime against the only morality that is worth a fig, a crime committed not only against animals, but against everything that is noblest in ourselves, outraged — and continues to outrage — something in my deepest being. No excuse, make it as plausible as you please, justifies vivisection, especially the vivisection of dogs; and that governments are not forced to put a stop to it shows that the cruel curiosity of science is more artful in pulling wool over our eyes than our righteous indignation is passionate in its protest.

Recently there has been founded in New York, at, Lexington Avenue, the first Library of Vivisection Investigation. This is certainly a move in the right direction.

Another peculiarity that ceased to agitate me while I was at Corpus was my infinite nervousness and selfconsciousness in the presence of other people. At Corpus I lost all fear of people. I said the boldest things. I did the boldest things. And if I made no use of this absence of shyness as a ladder offered to young ambition at least I knew what it was, for three years of my life, to be free from one of my greatest afflictions. What explanation can account for this? Why, for just three brief years, did I lose all my lifelong terror of the human eye? This boldness of mine — or was it insensitiveness or egoistic imperviousness? — lasted on, though to a diminished degree, after I left the university; lasted on some while, in fact, after I was married.

Not that I was free from Fear — that primordial curse, that blight which I always fancy weighs most heavy upon the eldest born — but I seemed to lost, *pro tem,* my dread of facing people. *But then,* shock by shock, episode by eposode, shiver by shiver, it began coming back, so that at the present time my nervousness about going into the City to transact business resembles the nervousness I used to feel as a boy at Montacute when I would pause to collect my thoughts under the kitchen garden wall, in miserable anxiety because I had to go to dinner that night at Montacute House. But, Heaven be praised, when one gets to be over three score, one’s dread of facing one’s fellow-freaks in the fair is a bit more under the control of the philosophy — such as it is — that one has scraped together.

In my hurried sneakings forth into those long, weary, muddy roads leading out of Cambridge; in my desire — bold as I was in those years! —

to escape without meeting anyone I knew, I used to snatch furtive glances at occasional fragments and groupings, under particular weather conditions, of the ancient buildings of the place. But these glances were shy, exclusive, arbitrary, wilful, and were almost always directed to those particular spaces in the old walls where the forces of Nature — rain or moss or lichen, or frost, or sun, or river water — had added something, added the artistry I suppose, of the only artist that I could thoroughly appreciate, to these Early English, Decorated, Tudor, Jacobean, Queen Anne designs!

But the real discovery that I made while I was at Corpus was so important to me as to be alone quite sufficient to explain the vanishing of sadism, and the vanishing with it of so many dreads. For it was while I was there, that I consciously came to realize that mysterious thing, the thing which, after that became the secret within the secret, the essence within the essence, of my whole life.

Gooch used frequently to express to me the spiritual difficulty he had in realizing the Pantheistic Absolute which was the object of Spinoza's singular love. I can see his long white face and curious mouth and unhappy intellectual eyes as he said: "I can't catch the thing, Powys. I can't catch the thing!" and he uttered the words just as if the Absolute were a sort of "Questing Beast" and he was Sir Pallenure. Isn't it Walter Pater, that grave Pyrrhonian monk of God, the man whom these mathematical Cantabs took damned good care to hide away from me, who says somewhere that one curve of a solitary rose-petal is worth the whole of the Spinozistic Absolute? But it was not the flawless, æsthetic beauty of the rose-leaf I was after. No! not that; not *that* at all! Like poor Gooch under his favourite trees by the river-bank, in the wide spaces of King's, I too am sorely put to it; I too am fain to fumble and grope, and to hum and drum for want of words in a most disconcerting manner. How *can* I catch that stir, that rustle, that indrawn sigh, that indescribable *silence* which emanates from the passing of my voyaging soul over all these little, casual chance-groupings of the Inanimate? How can I find the right expression for the feelings that came to me in those days when the wind blew in a certain way as I followed some muddy grass-track along the edge of the Ely Road or the London Road? How can I describe the feeling I got, as if all the scarce-noticed sensations that had come lightly and incidentally to long generations of my ancestors, when they met the rain, or felt the sun, or heard the calling of rooks or the twittering of sparrows, or saw the smoke rising from human hearths, were rushing over me, in a hardly bearable flood of ecstatic happiness, simply because, on that undistinguished road to the railway station, I heard some patient shop assistant mowing his scrap of grass behind a privet-hedge?

I know perfectly well that everybody born into the world has the feelings I am describing, is visited by these indescribable and apparently causeless transports. I am not in the least suggesting that I am peculiar in this. But why, in the Devil's name, then, do we go on making a cult of everything else except these? Why must politics, religion, philosophy, ambition, revolution, reaction, business, pleasure — all be considered intensely important, and these rare magical feelings not to be considered at all?

"Because, my good John," you will answer, "these feelings come of themselves, and go of themselves, and don't leave us any wiser or cleverer or kinder or richer!"

You have said it. It is because they *are* different from these things; it is because they represent something totally beyond these things, that such feelings are so precious! A time will come when these feelings will no longer be the monopoly of women and babies and lovers and saints and mystics and idiots!

When I went up to Corpus it was with the idea of becoming a clergyman. I use the word advisedly; because these, you must remember, were the days when only a few very daring individuals in the English Church had the spirit to think of themselves as "priests" or to call themselves "father." *My* father would have far more easily thought of himself as a mole-catcher than a priest. "I don't like all this 'bowing and scraping'," he used to say; and he made this remark so often and in such a tone of contemptuous disgust, that it finally got lodged in the minds of all his children that the act of genuflection is an act more proper to an ape than to a man. Perhaps it is for this very reason — for it may be dangerous to suppress the human instinct for prostration — that I, his eldest son, am forever "bowing and scraping," and that not always to *his* God either.

But I had proved myself in the holidays at Montacute so good at reading the Lessons and so clever at playing my part in the extremely Evangelical adult school, that it was taken for granted that as the grandson of two clergymen, and the great-grandson of at least two more, I should, as the phrase ran, "enter into Orders." So I began attending classes in Hebrew, a language which I soon discovered to be much more difficult even than my ancestral Welsh; and it shows how very casually and lightly I took the whole subject of the choice of a profession that I cannot even remember how or when I told my father that I had decided against the Church. With his accustomed indulgence he made not the faintest protest; and I went calmly on at Corpus, without the problem of my future career receiving a thought from anyone.

It was, I think in my very last term, just before I took my degree, that one evening I conceived the notion of addressing a letter to the celebrated journalist, W. T. Stead, to ask his advice on what profession to choose. Mr. Phelips, I remembered, had enquired, at one of my recent dinners at

Montacute House, whether I had thought of being “Called to the Bar.” That our philosophical squire regarded me as a possible Queen’s Counsel made this letter to Mr. Stead seem a mere wave of the hand. It was therefore one of the bitter humiliations of my life — one of those humiliations that bite into the very bone of a person’s life-illusion — when I received his answer. I had, I think, alluded to the possibility of my doing a little journalistic work, till something of a more weighty character offered itself; and I can tell you that old wainscotted room of mine grew suddenly unreal and queer, shaky and wavering, like Faust’s cell when he conjured up the Devil, when I read Mr. Stead’s words. My reader will smile — especially if he is an American — and make nothing of it. But it was not nothing to me. Mr. Stead recommended me to study the advice tendered to somebody or something in Mark Twain’s “Jumping Frog” Series.

Another shock to something very deep in my personal pride — and I am sure my father would have felt the same; only he would have been too cautious to get caught in such a way — occurred in connection with my encounter with an Italian seller of terra-cotta statuary. Here was something wherein I could satisfy at one and the same time my feverish desire to contemplate young ladies’ limbs, and my ideal passion for classic mythology. I bought seven or eight quite large and entirely nude terra-cotta divinities from this astonished tradesman.

It pleased me rather than otherwise, when one of the authorities told me during a visit from the Corpus Mission in London, that these Apollos and Aphrodites might be misunderstood; but it hurt me, like one of those devilish blows on a person’s twisted arm that the bullies in the Prep. so delighted in, when one of my own intimates, of whom I was foolish enough to ask *which* of the world-famous Apollos one among these figures was, leered like the father of all goblins and roared out: “Call it Budge-Fudge and have done with it!”

This vulgar explosion was peculiarly disagreeable to me; but I have noticed that there is something about my intense and shameless naiveté that excites an almost sadistic annoyance even in good and sensible people. I fancy this is largely caused by the fact that I have such a power of keeping my own malevolence out of reach, that all that can be seen of me is an ardent, impulsive, unsophisticated, rather foolish enthusiasm; an enthusiasm so subjective that its justification — as in the case of this terra-cotta statuary — is left obscure to any ordinary intelligence.

I received several very unpleasant, and to me quite inexplicable shocks of this kind in those days. In my childishness I was always discounting the average person’s sense of humour; while, in my intense desire to be liked — I say *liked*, mind you, not admired — I was continually carrying my impulsive propitations to an extent that was evidently both distasteful and humiliating. I can recall how, for instance, as I lingered with my friends one evening over our meal, in that Corpus dining-hall under the richly-escutcheoned windows, feeling a wave of spontaneous warmth towards one of the most striking and noble looking of these young men; and in my anxiety lest he should break up this felicitous moment — for he had begun displaying signs of restlessness — I offered to rush off to his rooms and fetch anything on earth that he was in need of. “My tooth-pick!” he cried savagely; but I was already on my feet, and it had to be explained to me by someone else, as if to an idiot totally devoid of all sense of proportion that he was only jesting. On my soul, I was on my feet, ready to fetch that chap’s tooth-pick; and it was not with the least thought of playing the saint.

But a far greater shock than this did I receive a little later; and this was in a communication from a much closer friend than the gentleman of the dining-hall. Totally unaware that I was going too far in my devotion, I must have allowed my pen to carry me away in some impulsive piece of flattery that struck my friend as fulsome and unbecoming to us both.

"Don't —— my a —— e so 'ard, 'Arry," he wrote, in gross Cockney vein, "it 'urts!"

I fancy some characteristic element of non-human obtuseness showed itself in me in those days, which my Sherborne punishments had been too physical to beat out of me; but which a better knowledge would eventually teach me to conceal. This obtuseness was always rendering me oblivious to what might be called the decencies of established social ritual.

My final departure from Corpus, after I had taken my degree, was a flagrant example of this. I had received an invitation from a pretty person in London to go to the theatre with her — the old Haymarket Theatre I think it was. I was expecting a letter from my father containing money wherewith to pay my college bills, and instead of waiting till this came, what must I do in my impulsive recklessness but give instructions to the college porter to open this letter and disburse its contents. Then giving orders to have my luggage sent after me, I left Corpus forever, and taking the afternoon train to town arrayed in full evening-dress I kept my assignation. It was in the same costume that I appeared next morning, for I had nothing else to wear, at the breakfast-table of an elderly relative in Kensington; not even a relative of my own I fear; a relative in fact of Thomas Henry Lyon. Yes, it was Harry's elderly relative who was destined to pour out tea for this deboshed-looking Petrushka, and to feel, I have little doubt, very much as Littleton felt at "Invicta House" when it was his lot to entertain that lewd old wayfarer.

What wild feelings had been mine the night before! I can clearly remember making a vow to myself, as I clutched "Sacred," my magic stick, between my knees, that one day it would be to see a play of my own that I would thus sit under glittering lights before a tremulous curtain and with a still more tremulous companion! This aspiration has remained unfulfilled.

I wish, however, that I could recall what my father's words were when I reached home. Harry Lyon's clothes could not possibly have fitted me, so how I was attired when I finally emerged from the train at Montacute as a Bachelor of Arts I have no idea. I know I felt, after such a whirl of Balzacian events, as if I had taken my degree in evening-dress.

I ought not to fail to record, before I leave the subject of Cambridge, the exceptional kindness I always received from one of the younger Corpus dons. This was Mr. Pollock. It was Mr. Pollock's admirable method not to interfere with my eccentric ways; but he was the only one of all the authorities who steadily displayed a sympathetic interest in me. Others did kind things on my behalf; but Mr. Pollock was really interested in me and took me seriously and was prepared to listen to me. I can see his heavy, dark ironical countenance now, with the whole head always drooping a little to one side and his eyelids weighed down with all manner of subtle equivocations. He had a deliciously whimsical and evasive smile, a little sad, but full of flickering benevolence; and I always felt in my heart that Mr. Pollock was a rebel, though a somewhat languid one, against the ways of God to Man.

How little we realize at the time the difference between the events in our life that are of importance and those that are completely trivial! The greatest event in my life at Cambridge was a very quiet event, an event totally different from the lively manner in which I made my undignified and ridiculous exit. There was a lad at Corpus whose parent was a local novelist; and one afternoon this son of a writer invited me to tea at their house. I can recall nothing of the event itself beyond a vague impression that the personage I had tea with was of a satiric turn. The important thing was of a much more personal kind. It was indeed a sort of Vision on the Road to Damascus. I remember the exact spot where it took place. Not far from Trumpington Mill — somewhere in the umbrageous purlieus to the rear of the Fitzwilliam Museum — there stands an ancient wall; and as I drifted along to visit my lively satirist, I observed, growing upon this wall, certain patches of grass and green moss and yellow stone-crop. Something about the look of these small growths, secluded there in a place seldom passed, and more seldom noticed, seized upon me and caught me up into a sort of Seventh Heaven.

A few seconds ago, before touching my pen to tell you what kind of Seventh Heaven it was into which, leaning upon the handle of "Sacred," I was transported, I felt all that I have ever felt, of the burden of this extraordinary moment. It certainly penetrated every recess of my being. I would call it a *beyond sensation*, and it lies in my consciousness now, like a sunken ship, full of fathom-deep treasure. But the touch of my pen — and I suppose it will always be so — breaks the spell I can tell you nothing! It has, however, whatever its fluctuating mystery may be, a power upon me that is like the power of a hidden Mass, celebrated by no human hands. It is impossible for me to describe it! And yet I never see the least patch of lichen, or moss, or grass, in the veinings of an ancient rock but something of the same feeling returns. Not, however, quite the same; for *that* impression, that vision of "Living Bread," that mysterious meeting-point of animate with inanimate, had to do with some secret underlying world of rich magic and strange romance. In fact I actually regarded it as a prophetic idea of the sort of stories that I myself might come to write; stories that should have as their background the indescribable peace and gentleness of the substance we name grass in contact with the substance we name stone.

It was the fact that I was on my way to visit my first novelist that put all this in my head; and it was my reaction from the sort of novelist I expected to encounter, and *did* encounter, that made the event so significant.

Yes, how different is the real fatality of a person's life from the stupid blunders and impulsive idiocies that he outwardly commits! When I rushed off so madly in evening-dress to a London theatre leaving the college porter to pay my bills I sorely outraged the feelings of old Koelle, who had chosen this very day — my last at Corpus — to arrange for me to meet his fiancée; and I learned afterwards that he and Gooch had shaken their heads sadly over my unreliable character.

"A clever man," they said to each other; "but lacking in all moral scruple!"

Ah me! thus began those comical and grotesque misunderstandings of my nature which have sprouted up into monstrous mushrooms all my days! *Clever?* Good God! What is such a thing as that? *Moral scruple?* I am convinced that in the most meticulous and burdensome performances of moral efforts, both "pro" and "con," I was more scrupulous than all the Corpus dons put together! Had old Koelle ever worried the life out of his fiancée by the problem as to whether it was lawful to have more than one egg to his breakfast? No, no! Of course the real matter with me went far deeper than social irresponsibility. As Harry Lyon said — and it is true — I was, and am still, totally unable to understand the meaning of the word "conviction." My knowledge that the practise of vivisection, for example, is a crime against everything that is noblest in our race, is not a conviction, *it is my life.* Goethe cursed Eckermann once for asking him what was the main "idea" in Faust.

Do you suppose," he cried, "that a work into which I've put *my life,* would condescend to so poor a category of living value as a mere idea?"

And I would say the same when peoole ask me for proof that these miserable dogs suffer.

"With my whole being I *know*," I answer them, "that the vivisecting of dogs is evil!"

That is really how we all know that all evil is evil. You can find reasons to defend anything.

But not only was I without human convictions, I was without a human heart. What Gooch ought to have said, was not, "Powys is unscrupulous." He ought to have said: "That poor, fussy, pharasaic, over-scrupulous Powys is lacking in every natural human feeling." And what Harry Lyon ought to have said, instead of saying, "Jack has no soul," was, "Jack has no heart." To this accusation — in many people's view a far more serious one — I should simply plead guilty; protesting however that there *are* people in the world so queer that they would prefer to live with a person without a heart than with a person without — but let it go! You'll be saying presently that it was not for nothing that my father's ancestors, on the distaff side, came from Geneva.

No, what I carried off from Cambridge was nothing that I got from that ancient university always so much more beautiful to me than Oxford, nor was it anything that I got from my friends, none of them really very intimate except the brilliant Harry, and even from him *I ran away*, nor was it anything I got from books, for I did not read a single volume of the least importance to me all the while I was there, nor was it anything I got from trying to write, for what I wrote was prose like "Corpus Unveiled," or poetry like "Suns and Suns of Sad and Soulless Seeming." What I carried off when, as the phrase runs, "I went down," was — strangely as it may sound in view of my impulsive ardours and my emotional Boswellisms — a most formidable mental power of hiding up my real identity until I could get away alone, and then of pouring forth my whole soul — that soul of which the Voltairean art-priest with whom I had made friends could find no trace — into such inanimate or such lowly-animate things as I could encounter along the most desolate country road. Yes! wherever I go I shall carry with me to the end what I learnt from Cambridgeshire while I was at Cambridge.

CHAPTER SIX. SOUTHWICK

I HAD NOT the least idea when I left Cambridge how I was going to earn my living. My father, doing exactly what *his* father had done for him, which was always his deepest test of what was proper and fitting, declared his intention of giving me sixty pounds a year as an allowance. It would have been possible, with this sum, to cross the channel and actually to live for a while in France, learning that language which I had been led to despise at Sherborne, and satisfying my cerebral vices without let or hindrance! Heavens! What would the pictures in *Ally Sloper* have been to the much more provocative incitements that I could thus have obtained? But — true son of my father as I was — it was as inconceivable to me to live on this allowance *without working* as it would have been to become a tramp. It never once crossed the threshold of my consciousness that I might have gone — as I could easily have gone in those days — not only to Paris but, if I cared to do so, to Rome.

Under that same scrupulous conscience, that had forbidden me to order even so much as buttered toast from the college buttery, and that had forced me to leave untouched my nicest achievements in porridge-making as a *bon-bouche* for the two individuals known as “the Bedder” and “the Help” — I can see the pair of ’em now — who no doubt gave it to their cats, I was forced, compelled, driven, dragooned into becoming *financially independent* without a moment’s loss of time.

My mind has always had a tendency to be what might be called “a Foreground Mind,” that is to say a mind absorbed in the present and totally unconcerned about the future, and this turn of character I had, as you have seen, cultivated to the top of my bent. Thus — save in pure fantasy, as for example when I read the stories of Disraeli, for which I soon came to have a lively "penchant," and imagined myself an eloquent demagogue, or told myself stories about being a master-writer, visited in my retreat by other master-writers — I assure you I never gave one serious thought to my future career. I lived then, just as I have done ever since, in the particular philosophy and in the particular sensations which occupied me *at the moment*.

I still held vaguely to that inspiration of mine in the yard of the new Prep. between the urinal and the stars, that I would be a poet, but I never went so far as to conceive of poetry as a profession. I did compete at the end of my Cambridge time for the University Prize Poem, which that year was upon the Lake District, but this prize went not to me but to that clever contemporary of mine, Mr. Masterman. I wish I could recall a specimen of the patient banality of what I wrote; for I am sure the brilliant prize-winner never took half the pains I did.

I went with an unequalled companion to Ullswater — my father willingly providing the expense to give "dear John" his opportunity — but a certain tiny little yellow flower, adapted to rockeries, and triumphantly planted at the end of our terrace walk, was the best thing I brought back. That and a memory of those singular prefaces written by Wordsworth, which, for the print bothered me, my companion read aloud, are all that remain of this academic tour. Well! not quite all; for I never see a pink stock — whose smell is perhaps my favourite of all smells — without thinking of a small plant of this flower that grew in the garden of the cottage where we stayed. The contrast between the wild, bare, Ullswater mountains and the sweet security of this heavily scented flower struck deep into my being.

The memory too of a certain particular kind of shame comes back to me from that trip, a shame that I have only quite recently learned the trick of disposing of. I left my companion with the intention of climbing alone to the top of Helvellyn; but about a mile from the top fear seized me and I came pelting down like a frightened beast. All the way home, to the shores of the lake where our cottage was, my oak stick, my magic stick "Sacred," seemed to utter speech, as I grasped it by its curved handle. It kept repeating at every step I took "Recreant … recreant … recreant!" And my impression now is — or my fancy, if you will — that it departed after that and removed itself from me, so that I saw it no more! Whether it vanished in the bosom of some mountain tarn, or whether, as a counter-talisman to that fatal stick in the Shirley lake, it still floats, like the "rod and staff" of the heavenly shepherd, in some fairy limbo of the spirit, I know not. I only know that it was *before* this trip that I can remember propping it up against a privy-wall in Crewkerne, and plodding with it in the twilight, tap, tap, tap, along the Stoke Road. After my *gran rifiuto*, in refusing to carry it to the summit of Helvellyn, "Sacred" disappears.

Like almost all second-class and third-class graduates of our universities at that epoch who found themselves in want of work I hurried up to town, and turned my conscientous but reluctant steps to the famous offices of "Gabbitas and Thring" — what Dickensian names! — who stood, I think near Waterloo Bridge, but I may be wrong about that, as intermediaries between head masters of preparatory schools and their lucky — or unlucky — assistants. I certainly had no thought of becoming an assistant master. Nor had I any thought of becoming a tutor. What *did* I have in my cat-head — for so Padraic Colum says my particular shaped cranium should be named — as a possible job that Gabbitas and Thring might offer me?

Heaven knows! But my guardian angel, or one of my “angels” in that black-and-gold cedar-scented drawer, brought it about that no sooner had Mr. Gabbitas, if he it were, set eyes upon me — did I look like a young Wilhelm Meister? — than he informed me that he had just heard of the sudden death at West Brighton of the German professor who lectured at all the girls’ schools there! I could hardly credit my ears. This was something I had never thought of. Girls’ school? *Schools* of girls! I saw them like gleaming porpoises; shoals and shoals and shoals of them, waiting for their new professor at West Brighton. Were all those invisible lovelinesses, that I had so often told myself stories about, going to incarnate themselves at this crisis in my life, going to call upon me to lead, guide, teach, instruct, inspire, encorcerize them?

I thanked Mr. Gabbitas with the gravest discretion — my pulses beating furiously — and taking a hansom to London Bridge caught the next train to Brighton. What did I feel as in the mid-rush of traffic I looked down upon the Thames, looked towards Southwark where old Gower lies, and where the Globe Theatre was, and where, maybe, on some wild night in a garret near the bear garden, an actual mortal hand, with fingers like my own, made those hurried scrawls upon paper — black upon white — that are now *King Lear!* Dickens is the one for describing the emotions of young men setting out on these reckless quests, with all their lives before them, and he would certainly have described to a nicety all that I saw and heard from London Bridge that afternoon. But I am afraid it would only have been in his uneasy, scimble-scamble, comic-sketch vein that he would have described the feelings of this impatient successor of the dead German.

Schools of girls … shoals of girls … flocks and flurries of girls … what a thing, what an incomprehensible thing for my destiny to evoke! The very word “girl,” especially if pronounced, as some of my relatives pronounced it, not to rhyme with “pearl,” but to rhyme with “there’ll,” even as you would say it in the sentence: “there’ll be gairls,” thrilled me at that time of my life in a manner impossible to describe. It conveyed to my mind a sort of fleeting, floating, fluttering fantasy of femininity, a kind of Platonic essence of sylph-hood, not exactly virginal sylphid-ness, but the state of being-a-Sylph carried to such a limit of tenuity as almost to cease to have any of the ordinary feminine attributes. This incarnation of airy tantalization was all that the word “girl” evoked for me, however pronounced. It always conveyed the idea to me of an impressionability, under an embrace, so flexible, so yielding, as to bear a resemblance to that ethereal vaporousness of the Homeric shades in *Hades*, that could not be felt at all as you embraced them! Thus the word “girl” almost ceased for me to have the least connection with the living personalities of real girls. When I saw a real girl I saw a feminine person, almost a feminine man; but these “girls” of my imagination, or rather I ought to say of my desire, could all have stood, thousands of them together, like those jeered-at angels of scholasticism on the narrow apex of my winnowed, purged, and three-times-over-refined fastidiousness.

For the truth is, what I am so intensely attracted to, what I worshipped in those days to a point of idolatrous aberration, are hardly of the feminine sex at all! It is as if I had been born into this world from another planet — certainly not Venus: Saturn possibly! — where there was a different sex altogether from the masculine and feminine that we know. It is of this sex, of this Saturnian sex, that I must think when in the secret chambers of my mind I utter the syllable “girl.” I suppose women are more like these elfin sylphs, these fleeting elementals, than most men are; but I am not perfectly sure even about this! The maternal instinct in women, so realistic, so formidable, so wise, so indulgent, is more remote from, and destructive of, the sylph-nature — the nature of these girls who are more girlish than girls — than the spirit of Hercules himself. I think that the inmost flame of my soul, the vital leap of my life-force, must be as fragile and tenuous as it is formidable and fierce; and that it is this brittleness and fineness in this interior flame which makes it flee, as if from cartloads of horned devils, at the faintest approach of any warm maternal lovingness, as if such lovingness would bury it under a thousand bushels, like the scriptural candle.

I cannot believe that a person's sex-emotions exist in some disconnected by-alley of his being without affecting the whole of his nature. My attitude to everything I worship, to the sea, to the mountains, to the earth, to the sun, to the moon, to Homer, to Shakespeare, to Rabelais, to Don Quixote, to lichen growing upon tree-stumps, to moss growing upon stones, to smoke rising from a cottage chimney, must be of this same fine, tenuous intensity; an intensity terribly shy of large, warm, human normality, and always flickering round and about the magic candles of the exceptional.

In my most thrillingly happy moments I feel as if my nature were essentially light, volatile, porous, transparent. I seem to float at such time on waves of a quivering ether, an ether vibrant as the hovering heat-waves over an August cornfield. And it is on such an air-tide of quivering vibrations that I seem to be floating, when for a brief moment, *in any real woman*, I catch some faint resemblance to my sylphid ideal. It is pure impersonal lust; it is lust without the faintest mixture of anything that from the moralist's point of view could be called "redeeming." And yet I am prepared to justify it without scruple or shame! It is my religion, my beatific vision, my rapturous initiation into the mysteries.

But whatever this intense inner life-flame of mine may be in relation to sex, one thing is true of it — as true of it *then*, when for the first time in my life I beheld that East Sussex landscape, as it is true of it *to-day*, as I glance out upon these frozen American hills — namely that it withdraws and recedes with a shrinking of its whole nature from contact with ordinary, normal, natural sex-expression. Any sort of sex-jesting, any kind of bawdy stories are unspeakably revolting to me. They make me doubly sick: sick, as a blasphemous parody upon the magical loveliness of my own secret lusts; and sick, as the monstrous sex-antics of a race of beings as alien to me as hippopotami.

I ought to have mentioned that after my visit to London to stay with the clergyman who took me to my first pantomime — a veritable orgy of sylphs — I stayed there a second time as the guest of a boy I was very fond of, and used constantly to go about with, called Hugh Hill Bell. Hugh Hill Bell was a most humorous and gallant elf, a daring heroic elf, and I adored him, from some very deep ice-crack in my boreal heart. But it was when I was in his company somewhere in town, that we beheld — like Caliban and Ariel peering at the loves of mortal men — a normal pair of infatuated megalopolitans, and I have not yet forgotten the austere distaste with which I turned away.

"One third-class single to Brighton, if you please!"

What fatal words these casual ministers of destiny, to whom we speak through these little apertures in stations, convey to our ears — unwitting, and we unwitting!

What a feather's weight of chance it was that led me to make Sussex— "all of it?" said the jesting Mr. Blanch — my home for thirty years and the birth-place and bringing-up place of my son! Thirty years is a long time. Thirty years is nearly half a normal person's whole life; and it *might* have been Anglesea, or Inverness, or Padstow, or Carlisle, or Caerleon-upon-Usk where that German professor had died and whither Gabbitas and Thring were now packing me off. I think it was ten shillings a lesson I was to receive from each of these schools and I was to give two lessons every week; so this did mean that I was already — if they accepted me — a semi-independent person; and even if my father cut off that sixty pounds a year I would not be quite penniless.

Sussex scenery, as I now looked out on it from my third-class smoking-carriage, was certainly different from any scenery I had ever seen. Those huge Sussex barns whose vast sloping roofs were encrusted with orange-coloured lichen that was as strange to me as were the "orange-tipped" butterflies I saw on the railroad banks, in place of our Dorset "marble-whites," those mellow Sussex cottages where old dark woodwork was so cunningly mixed in with brickwork and flintwork, those Sussex bricks themselves that were so much brighter and gayer than the red bricks of my native Midlands and gave a look to the whole scene so much warmer and sunnier than the Dorset thatch or the Somerset stone, those enormous Sussex wagons, painted blue and scarlet, and of a size so large that they would have astonished a Somerset farmer, the trim, neat, picturesque Sussex villages themselves, where it seemed as though everyone was so much more well-to-do than in the West Country, all these things struck me, sank into me, and abode with me, as to some literary person, who has been reading Sir Thomas Browne and Thomas Hardy, it would be if he suddenly discovered a volume of Water Pater. It was not my country, this warm, mellow, gracious, tender-soiled Sussex, just as they were not my people, these blue-eyed South-Saxons, but there was something about the place that was profoundly English; more English, in the narrowest sense of that word, than any other county in the kingdom. Yes, I liked the look of the scenery more and more as the train made its way through the hollows of the Sussex

Downs, downs so much higher, wider, steeper, and in every way more formidable than the downs of my father's Dorset.

"Lewes! All change for Eastbourne!"

This particular cry, on this particular platform, how well I was to know it in later years! It was accompanied by the shrill voices of the newspaper boys selling Brighton papers, voices that had a distinct Cockney flavour, for the Sussex dialect has some ancient affiliation, which I am not enough of a philologist to analyse, with the manner of speech of England's Metropolis.

Perhaps it is this accessibility of Sussex to London, together with something at once warmly gay and comfortably homelike — the "aura," in fact of rose-coloured bricks flecked with golden lichen — that gives to this picturesque, and reassuring county its peculiar quality. The great downs themselves, like huge waves solidified into chalk and turf are never as desolate as their wide sheep-cropped undulations would lead you to expect. Something about their wind-swept clumps of beeches, something about their gorse-patches and beds of thyme and harebells and milkwort, softens their austerity; and from every point along their highest ridges you can see the glittering waters of the English Channel to the south, and to the north the vaporous blue haze of the great wooded Weald. Steep to ascend though these Sussex Downs are, the chalk tracks that lead down from their summits plunge a wayfarer with surprising celerity into the snug and homely villages that nestle in the hollows beneath them; while even the straggling little seaside places on their Channel side — between Brighton and Worthing — Portslade, Southwick, Shoreham, Lansing, have, for all their rather ramshackle dinginess, a certain friendly and human look, suggestive of the presence of quaint Dickensian characters dwelling in those rows of little stucco houses.

Brighton, itself, as I soon discovered, has many old-fashioned alleys and time-mellowed retreats, snugly protected and sequestered, and quite as redolent of the regency and of the whole Georgian era as its more fantastically rococo pavilion. Blustering, free-blowing winds, smelling of the salt sea, and in summer-time whirling up the thick dust in raw, scorching, sun-warmed clouds, give to the dingiest and most squalid quarters of the great sprawling town a certain curiously invigorating character. These heady Brighton winds seem to play the part of a sort of *aerial ale*, of a nature so profoundly English that they cause satisfaction rather than perturbation to the crowds of London visitors who contemplate from the wet pebbles and asphalt parades the redoubtable excursion-boats and excursion-yachts — in my day the latter seemed all called *Skylark* — which vociferating "captains," often in dripping tarpaulin, were for ever pushing out and dragging in. White dust, white glare, white houses, white sea-foam alternated with the rolling bottle-green breakers and with the motley crowds of jostling, lively, good-humoured people, moving from pier-head to pier-head and from brass-band to brass-band, it was all certainly as unlike Weymouth as a famous circus is unlike a rural county fair, and after my semi-monastic life at Cambridge it was as bewildering as it was novel; but I very soon — like a pond-duck among wild ducks — began to find my own account in it, and you can believe that it came eventually to enlarge the narrow boundaries of my furtive obsessions.

The school authorities seemed just a little taken aback by my youthful appearance; but I must have gathered up all that "cleverness" which old Koelle and Gooch had discovered in me, and it was not long before everything was arranged. Then, however, came the grand question — for me — as to where I was to live. I can well recall one day at Montacute, a little before this, when, walking back from Yeovil with Littleton, I discoursed to him at that spot, just beyond the hamlet of Preston, where there grew periwinkles in the hedge, about my future career. This discourse, characteristically enough, limited itself to a resolute vow that however big the town might be where I found a job I would be at pains to obtain a lodging in the country. With my job secure, this is what I now set about doing. So ignorant was I of the exigencies and possible satisfactions of my vague erotic desires that it never entered my simple head to hunt up — as any other young man in my situation would have done — a lodging in Brighton itself.

West Brighton — then just beginning to be entitled Hove — was to be the scene of my activities as a lecturer to these heavenly beings, whom I thought of as neither “gurls” nor “gairls,” but as entities of a purer element than these ale-tasting Brighton airs; and I decided without delay to walk out westward from the stately West Brighton terraces in search of rural seclusion. I kept so close to the coast however — for the bare inland downs just there looked uninviting and inhospitable — that I found nothing for what seemed miles and miles but rather desolate expanses. Portslade did not attract me — I speak, you must remember, of nearly forty years ago — and I was getting weary of stretches of bare ground, with nothing but gasworks between the road and the sea, when I reached the little town of Southwick.

Here there was a harbour — which pleased me for the same reason that Shakespeare’s Fluellen was pleased by the word “Monmouth,” for it reminded me of home. It made me think of the Weymouth Harbour. No two harbours could be more different. For this one at Southwick — and oh how hard it was to row against its tide! — had neither ancient wharfs, nor antique houses, nor any old stone bridge. It was simply a terrific volume of salt water, entering at top speed a long narrow backwater between the road and the beach and retreating in its allotted hour as it came in. But

Southwick *had* a harbour. It had also a backwater. I therefore decided that Southwick should be my home! There was a high-roofed, rather sorrowful-looking dissenting chapel in the middle of the main street, no very startling thoroughfare, and next door to the chapel was a grocer's shop with a bow window protruding from the upper floor. The name over the shop was "Pollard." In the dust and heat the place smelt of sardines; but I went in, was shown this upper room by Mr. Pollard, and a small bedroom besides, and without delay came to terms. I think I only paid a pound a week for lodging and attendance, which was cheap enough. Whether it included food too I cannot recall, but I had all my meals there. O, so vividly does the view out of that window return to me now … the open sea, the harbour, the backwater, a boat-builder's yard and the unimposing little street! Here I speedily settled down and began my lectures at those two schools. They really *were* lectures rather than lessons; although my sylphids wrote essays for me, upon which it was my business to comment.

Thus I began — Johnny — Moony — Jack — John — that career as a lecturer which was not only to outlast my life in both East Sussex and West Sussex, but to outlast too a whole quarter of a century of my life in America. How smoothly, lightly, easily, unthinkingly I slid at that time, not realizing what was happening, into a business, or an "art," if you will, from which, at sixty, helter-skelter, and as impulsively as I went in, I have now at last come out.

But what of those mirages of rare delight, these "linkèd sweetnesses," those laughing and yielding sylphs, who, like a *fata morgana* of pantomimic forms, had led me into my destined career? As I look back at it all now — all those years when I lectured at such schools — I can only recall one solitary maiden in the whole long procession who excited the least stir of erotic emotion in me. She was in a school in Eastbourne, a school I only went to for about a year, nor can I now remember anything about her except that she was fatherless and motherless. God send her grace, the one single Leontion or Ternissa, that I can recall from all those reiterated labours!

The bigger ships, if I recall correctly, and there were quite a number of them, mostly Danish and Swedish and Dutch and Norwegian, used to anchor outside this Southwick Harbour; and it was the affair of Mr. Pollard to race out in a rowing-boat, contending with other grocers, in order to be the first to obtain each ship's business as it anchored. He was a small lively brown-eyed man with a pointed beard and something of a gipsy air. He was a kindly man, and considering that he had me at his mercy he was certainly no cheat. His bills were not exorbitant; and though everything I ate tasted strongly of the shop I was pleasantly ensconced in that upper room. Mr. Pollard's eyes were as lively as a squirrel's, and how they lit up one day when he confided to me that the only thing he needed to complete the happiness of his life was a gold ring. This remark sounded very natural to me. It gave me the feeling that I might be listening to Little Claus, in the fairy-tale. He had an afflicted son, deaf, dumb, and deficient in wit, whose name, like mine, was Jack. We two Jacks would communicate with each other by various grimaces. He was a wonderfully good boy, considering what his life was and what his highest hopes had to be.

I used to devote an hour to walking into Hove on my lecturing days. It was the best part of four miles; but it was totally against my nature to take the train or the bus. Thus I must have always arrived at my classes hot, untidy, dusty, and very tired. The road as I have already hinted, skirting Portslade and a little place called Fishersgate, ran through melancholy open spaces and desolate building-plots — I expect there are trim villas there to-day — and was separated from the sea by acres of dinginess and, if I recall correctly, a few gas-tanks. The particular road I finally selected to traverse was newly made and totally unfrequented, so that I had already snatched for myself out of the lap of the fates one of my chief life-exigencies, the possibility of walking where I could meet few of my fellow-men, when destiny brought it about that a mad woman who also preferred a lonely road chose the very days and the very hours of my peregrinations to take the same way. She was wont to carry a heavy basket and whether I had the decency to help her with this object I cannot recall but I used to enter into conversation with her.

Solitary women carrying baskets have played a sort of symbolic part in my life. If I were to add a card to the mystic tarot-pack, I would add, between "the Hanged Man" and "the Man with Three Staves," "the Woman with the Basket." This particular basket-carrier, who is now linked for me, as long as I live, with that stretch of desolation between Southwick and Portslade, explained to me the precise terms of a very close and singular relationship that existed between herself and the sun. I cannot recall all the details, but the influence of the sun made her very happy and very unhappy, according to some secret reciprocity between them. My readings in Greek poetry had been very limited up to that moment, though I still possess the little Oxford edition of the *Iliad* with "Powys Ma. care of W. B. Wildman, Sherborne, Dorset, England, Europe," written in its flyleaf, which Mr. Young, that head master who was so bullied by the school conservatives and who wrote *Olim fuit monachorum*, made use of when he taught the Sixth Form; but I am now in a position to see that my "Woman with a Basket" resembled the unfortunate Cassandra who was at once loved and hated by Apollo. She had a large head, and an enormous figure with a bare throat; and she used, at intervals in our conversation, to point to this bare throat, which was of a livid ashen-grey, explaining the feelings in her nature which her relations with the sun excited.

All this I took absolutely for gospel truth, and in the light of the instinctive attitude towards the cosmos which to-day has become a kind of revelation in my bones I was completely justified. What I blindly felt then, and what I still blindly feel, is that what is called dead matter, or inorganic matter, or inanimate matter, is in reality *the organic body of some sort of living being*; and it is this refusal to believe that there is any fragment of matter which is not part of the body of something or that there is any "body" of anything without its corresponding "soul," which has given me my grand clue to the essential truth of all the ancient mythologies. Personally I have a shrewd inkling that this instinct of mine could be justified — if I were a cleverer thinker than I am — by a subtle train of reasoning; but I am content to assume it without bothering about proving it.

I got comfort, too, from talking to this "Woman with the Basket," because of the satisfaction it gave to my man-to-man sense, or my man-to-woman sense, of the equality of all souls, a feeling that might be described as the inverse side of the emotion at the back of communism.

I used to lecture at one school in the morning and another in the afternoon and I used to have my lunch, which always consisted of tea and bread and butter and boiled eggs and some kind of jam, in a little bakery upon Church Road near the Hove Town Hall. Here I tried my Rousseauish, equality-of-all-souls feeling upon a youth of my own age — that is to say twenty-one — who also used to have his tea-lunch in that little pastry-shop. I would probably amuse you a great deal if I could recall what we talked about, when once in my propitiatory manner I had broken the ice, but, as usual, all I can remember of this youth is the physical impression I got from him which was unappealing and unattractive to a degree that was distressing to me. What, I wonder, was his corresponding physical reaction to me? Possibly much the same! He was very pale, very long, and very boneless and soft, and he had a narrow bird-like head; whereas I was very ruddy, very gaunt and very angular, and had a "cat-head." I know one thing! We did not reveal to each other — no, not by one smallest hint — whence we came or what our job was. We probably hovered gingerly round politics and alluded cautiously to the danger of a war with the Boers.

We were the extreme opposite of Prince Myskuin and Rogozhin, talking in their railway carriage in Russia. I did not like the way he ate, I did not want him to be there at all. How annoying that I should see him still so clearly, when I have forgotten the hundreds and hundreds of beautiful girls I taught, and the hundreds and hundreds of beautiful girls I stared at as they bathed in the sea or as they lay prone for my delight upon the beach!

I very soon became queerer than ever in my diet. I used to persuade the Pollards to provide me with great bowls of bread and milk. For some reason these tasted less of the grocery shop than anything else; and indeed they excited the desire of Cousin Ralph, when he came to stay with me and found nothing but groceries placed before him.

"May I, cousin, *might* I, cousin," he begged, in his most Hymettian tones, while his Saxon-Thane eyes gleamed like those of Harold Godwinson, "have some bread and milk too?"

What were these years at Southwick, and my subsequent years at Court House near Lewes, most remarkable for in my growing consciousness? My years at Dorchester, before I went to the Prep. were remarkable for the untrammelled expression of every side of my nature. My years at the Prep were years of alternate happiness and misery. My years at Wildman's were riddled, as if by rifle-shot, by the accursed presence of that torturer in the dormitory below mine. My years at Corpus were remarkable for unmitigated idealism, free of all vice, and for the complete disappearance of every form of erotic excitement. Well, these years I am now beginning to describe, years which included my marriage, and my first lecture-tours, years that lasted till I moved to Burpham in West Sussex; are the years in the whole course of my life up to this moment when I came nearest to insanity. I had *played* at insanity to escape that Tiberius in the dormitory below mine — would that I had struck at least one blow on behalf of his victim! — but in these nine years of my life, and *that* is, when you think of it, a long epoch in a person's days, I gave complete rein to so many manias and aberrations that those who knew me best must often have wondered how far in the direction of a really unbalanced mind I was destined to go.

At Cambridge I had been eccentric; but my eccentricities had taken forms that have been consecrated, so to speak, by the ages, as noble and worthy peculiarities; whereas now, living by myself first at Southwick, and then at Court House before my marriage — I became a tiny bit better *after* that, but very little — I gave myself up to neurotic aberrations which must constantly have wavered and toppled on the verge of madness. My nervous *power*, however, and the vitality of my constitution were so terrific that I never had the remotest danger of what is called a nervous breakdown. I have always been the kind of person whose spirit is so defiant, whose will so obstinate, whose pulse so steady, that he can *go on carrying*, as a camel carries its load, a vast orb of neurotic manias without any of them being able to break the rational balance of his brain. If anyone asked me whether I had ever been mad I would answer as Natalia did in *Wilhelm Meister* when asked if she had ever loved: “Never or always!”

It was not till some while after my marriage that I discovered what pleasure I could get from lying down on Brighton Beach beside some prostrate young woman, and either exchanging erotic glances with her, or gloating like a satyr, fevered with the heady juices of Cyprian berries, upon any aspects of her legs or knees or ankles that the felicity of chance, or the auspiciousness of the occasion, caused to be revealed.

Eventually I came to be familiar with every portion of this vast pebbled beach, up which the Channel waves roll with a large primeval heave of deep-sea waters, unbroken by any obstruction; for Brighton, as Londoners know so well, has a more elemental exposure than any other seaside resort. I came to know its pier-piles, its stone groins, its shelters, its sea-walls. I came to know each spot along its colossal front, where between beach and parade, the sweet-sellers, the cockles-mussels-and winkles-sellers, the minstrels with blackened faces, the Punch-and-Judy shows, the comic-singers, the preachers, the toy-vendors, the fish-dealers, the photographers, the fruits-and-nuts pedlars, the toy-balloon men, the "captains" of the yachts *Skylark*, the fishermen, the pleasure-boat men, were all wont to be found. In and out of these motley scenes I would follow my maniacal quest for provocative feminine forms basking in that blazing sunshine and amid the smells of seaweed and fish and tar and sweat and sandwiches and rope and paint and cheap perfumes and foam-drenched petticoats and bilge-water and beer. I ultimately became aware of certain other men — and their eyes, eyes that had almost lost all human expression, shocked me and terrified me — who had evidently reached a point of obsession far beyond my own. No heartless seducers of women, no neurotic perverts, that I have ever encountered have had such a look of being hopelessly *damned* as these elderly gentlemen betrayed in their curiously high-coloured faces, as if they lived on the hearts' blood of women, as they hunted and stared and eternally stared and hunted! Did the people they stared at ever grow conscious of the eyes of these spiritual hyænas? I doubt it! My own impression is that few women have the remotest idea of the insane impersonality of masculine lust when it runs amok at these deadly and sterile tangents!

The question arises would a love affair have saved me at that epoch? *Hardly!* I was at that very time on the point of being happily married, and this maniacal pursuit of the sensations of impersonal lust increased rather than diminished after my marriage. If I had become a Turk of the old regime, and had been given a harem of Houris, would this mad desire to stare and stare at women, at the way the gods have moulded them, so differently from men, have come to an end? I doubt it. The curse laid upon lust is not only its maniacal craving for novelty. There is something else. I fancy that even Solomon "in all his glory," must frequently have left his harem of hundreds to prowl in disguise about the environs of Jerusalem where another generation of forbidden Bathshebas might be glimpsed through cedar-trees and casements and lattices.

A cynic might enquire of me: "What is all this fuss about? Where lies the evil in what you are describing?" The only answer to this question is Shakespeare's at the end of *Lear*. Regan and Goneril must have had *that look* as they hunted for eternally new "Edmunds"; and yet Cordelia, with her very different expression, came to the same end. But the mind that cries "the same!" because of this same end, turns from the whole tragedy, the whole mystery, the whole exultation. Without this difference — granting that same end! — futility scrawls her name from zenith to nadir.

Yes, I was neurotic to the extreme limit in those days; and yet in the interims and interludes of my obsessions I found myself sensitive in a most transparent manner to certain impressions. For instance — strange as it may seem — I have never felt the poignant magic of the spring more exultingly than I did when I lived over Mr. Pollard's grocery and confronted that forlorn backwater and those littered boat-building yards. I remember the emotion, just like a tremulous breath quivering through my stomach and heart and bowels, that the first buds and the first shoots of emerald green produced in me. It was in those places that I first had that feeling that young girls seem to have, of *smelling violets* under the dead leaves. This is no mere phrase. I remember in my wretched back bedroom, and in my bow-window looking out on little else but salt water, receiving an impression many a time as if there were green banks of cowslips and violets in the sailing clouds.

I can clearly remember after all these forty years how as I walked those four miles into Hove rather than be condemned to take train or bus, I used to repeat to myself certain passages from the poets, using them, as a nun might use the syllables of her breviary as a key to the kiss of the Spouse. Clearly can I recall particular places and not picturesque places either, where especial lines enthralled me. I link up for instance that unequalled couplet: “Mid hushed cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed, blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian” with the reek of a chemical factory, with ashes smelling of horse-piss, with palings creaking in their desolation, and with dust-heaps sighing to dust-heaps. And I link up the lament for Fidele: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun, nor the furious winter’s rages,” with a certain arid and empty enclosure, just behind the Hove railway station, near which — it is forty years ago, reader! — used to stand a most melancholy little ginger-pop booth in which I used to refresh myself. When I say I had an ecstasy in the entrance of this forlorn shanty at the back of Hove Station as I told over, like holy beads, this Fidele dirge, I am not exaggerating. I can recall the little volume in which I found it; for sometimes, in spite of all that the cultured say, you get more of a thrill out of a casual quotation than out of the original in its proper setting. The volume was Dodd’s *Beauties of Shakespeare* and I got almost equal pleasure from “Come away, come away, Death,” and from “How shall I your true love know from another one? By his cockle-hat and staff, and his sandal-shoon!”

I have told you how deep the instinct of acting goes with me, and how I always feel towards the spiritual gestures it calls upon me to make as if they were religious *acts of grace*, and how I justify it by identifying it with the grandiose rôles played by the people of Homer, and how I feel as if it were the abandonment of this dramatic heightening of one's personal life-illusion that has produced the widespread sense of futility in our time. Well! I had, during these crazy years, another thrilling experience, when an ecstasy of happiness came over me so intoxicating that it was as if I trod upon air. This happened when I was walking somewhere beyond Old Shoreham and Lancing and was following a path across some fields that seemed to be leading — and did eventually lead — to one of the most picturesque of East Sussex villages. The path passed the gate of a tiny cottage with a rambling garden where a girl was gathering sweet-peas. I wish I could recall what this girl said to this half-mad Bachelor of Arts trying to forget the fatal loveliness of her sex's legs, as he used his own to walk on and on and on into the sunset; but I can clearly remember the issue of our encounter, which is where the point lies. She gave me a bunch of flowers; not sweet-peas, for what she gave me had very long stalks and very large blossoms. Could they have been lilies? Are there any kinds of lilies that bloom while sweet-peas are out? I can't recall! But this I do know: these long-stalked flowers, whatever they were, filled me with a most singular rapture. Was I experiencing, in honest-to-God reality, that fantastical frenzy over a beautiful object that Oscar Wilde — poor devil, he was on the edge of the precipice in that year! — was wont to make such to-do about? Not a bit of it. If I know anything of myself what gave me that ecstasy was partly the kindness of the donor, partly a sort of ritualistic feeling, as if I were a priest carrying the pyx, and partly the purged and proud sensation of feeling myself an erect biped — anthropos something-or-other — trudging over the surface of the earth, holding by their cool, fresh stalks a handful of its loveliest children. I had already acquired my lifelong mania against picking flowers; and the fact that I was thus compelled to enjoy the breaking of this law by somebody else added no doubt to the uniqueness of my pleasure.

What in fact I enjoyed was the performance of an act that seemed at once symbolic and pious, pious in the old heathen sense. And, while I am speaking of this, I can well recall a similar thrill of curious satisfaction that suffused my whole being, when once, after my marriage, when I was living at Court House, I had to go to a near-by gamekeeper's cottage with a wicker basket to get some fresh eggs. These episodes may seem ridiculously trivial; but my concern just now is simply with the history of my strongest feelings, not with a defence of the adequacy of what called them forth. Just as I had not heard of Walter Pater before I left Corpus, my rustic ignorance was so great that it was only in this year that I learnt of the existence of Oscar Wilde; learnt of it just at the moment when everyone in England was on the verge of hearing of his catastrophic downfall.

How was it that with my eccentric mania for imaginary sylphs, so much less substantial than any real feminine persons, I would tire myself out searching public gardens, public beaches, public parks and village greens to catch those glimpses of real women that thrilled me so? The answer to this is that I made a fetish of the limbs and ankles of women, to the complete neglect of their other charms. When their knees and ankles pleased me I found no difficulty in assimilating the rest of their persons to the particular form of ethereal loveliness I craved.

So completely cerebral was the whole thing with me, that I remember once on the Brighton front coming to the austere conclusion that it was a purer, higher and nobler thing to make a cult of the beauty of young men rather than that of young women. Vividly can I recall the complete desolation that fell at that moment upon land and sea! The light went out; the air grew chill; and I realized that though no real girls equalled the pictures of them in my mind, life became as grey and sinister and weird, as if under an eclipse of the sun, when the feminine principle was expurgated.

It was while I lived over Mr. Pollard's grocery that a friend presented me with a beautiful high-bred bitch retriever. I kept her with me by night and day and took her for walks over the downs. But trouble soon followed. After long meditation I named her "Thora." This I did because in my intense and self-tormenting fastidiousness I wanted to find a name that only certain races could pronounce. But it was not long ere the companionship of Thora made me sick and faint with a very strange revulsion. My Corpus idealism had now turned into a thousand frantic and misery-causing manias. I was for ever struggling to make my real life correspond to a mental and sensual fastidiousness that was an appalling tyranny. My chief suffering came from the accursed way one set of images — beautiful ones — kept linking themselves up with other images that were comic, grotesque, or revolting. I had in one portion of my being a diabolical sense of savage and even brutal humour. This sense, constantly suppressed, would sometimes revolt and cause me severe mental shocks! For instance I used to cross with a peculiar and romantic satisfaction a low bridge that crossed the backwater near the Southwick Harbour. I liked to think that I had at my disposal, near my room, so symbolic and sympathetic an edifice as a bridge.

But one day, for these little necessities of nature, just because I desired to imagine a life entirely free from them and was for ever trying to *think them away*, were always impinging irrelevantly upon me, I had occasion — for the place was an unfrequented one — to urinate as I paused upon this structure. That simple occurrence made the whole view from my window accursed. I had wished to name this bridge and what must the suppressed demon in me do but insist that instead of some name like “Thora,” which only certain ancient races could pronounce, I should call it, in gross Saxon speech, the “P —— g Bridge!”

But what happened to me over Thora was much worse. I had occasion ere long, as may be believed, to realize that the companion of my walks belonged to the feminine sex, that fatal sex with whose existence, when I tried under the influence of Plato to obliterate it, the sun and the moon had gone out, and the realization that until this dog’s death all my walks upon the surface of the grain-bearing earth were to be, so to speak, “feminized” caused me an epoch of extraordinary suffering! A gulf of femininity opened beneath my feet. It made me shudder with a singular revulsion. Everything I looked at in Nature — well can I remember one particular walk when this happened — presented itself to me as a repetition of the feminineness of Thora! I could no longer enjoy the singing of the birds. They might be feminine birds! I loathed the thought that so many of the trees and the flowers possessed feminine organs. The thing went so far with me that I became panic-stricken lest I myself should develop feminine breasts, breasts with nipples, resembling the dugs of Thora. It was unpleasant to me even to encounter the harmless little hedge-flower that my father would never fail to remind me was named “Nipple-Wort.” For several years — and, mark, you, this continued for a long while after my marriage — I used to be at the most careful pains to arrange my knife and fork on my plate so *that they should not point at my breast*. Having come with such imaginative intensity to visualize my provocative sylphs as beings who yielded so completely to my embraces that there was no solidity left in them, I began to feel as if there were no longer any real solidity left in Nature, as if, whichever way I turned, the firm substance of the earth would “go in.”

Another worry I had at this time was the constant necessity I felt under of forever washing my hands. I became a perambulating Pilate. I would stand outside doors calling to people to open them for me lest by contact with the handle I should make my hands dirty. And much worse than this, as far as the actual effect it had upon me was concerned, was my steadily growing aversion to certain fabrics. Things made of cotton were my bane. I couldn't touch a tablecloth, *or eat off* a tablecloth. It was hateful to me — for in my ignorance I confused linen with cotton — to touch a sheet. Handkerchiefs were my abomination, unless they were made of silk. To see a woman hold a handkerchief in her hand was intolerable to me.

But what was worst of all to me was the idea of the reproductive sexual processes. No one has ever lived who more devoutly wished that children were born from trees, or, like the warriors of Cadmus, out of dragon's teeth sown in the earth. I made friends with a gipsy-man who kept an old curiosity shop in a remote part of Brighton and I can recall how when I was with him once in Brighton Station and he made some casual allusion to the seed out of which our race is engendered, I became so staggering sick that he had to lead me into the refreshment bar where I could recover myself by swallowing brandy.

It was while I was at Southwick that Ralph Shirley, through Ryder and Company, Limited, published my first book of verse. Very conventional these were, and very imitative; but you can imagine the emotion with which I surveyed my first "galley-sheets" when I got the proof! I carried these "galley-sheets" into Hove; and I remember reading them seated on the beach by the side of one of the great stone groins that they've built there to break the force of the waves. One of these verses was addressed to W. B. Yeats, who wrote me a lengthy and most exciting letter in acknowledgment, a far more interesting letter than the contents of the volume justified. I have unluckily lost this letter but I remember how he told me that I was lucky to be still in the stage of "free imagination" before "the mill of character" ground me down to a particular shape. I am afraid it has been only too easy for me to fight shy of *that* menace. I dare say my old friend Thomas Henry would say I am still in the stage of "free imagination!"

My discovery of the poems of W. B. Yeats was a notable event in my life. It was in North's Book-shop on what I think was called the Western Road that I found the volume and I think it must have been the first collected edition. It was an ornamental, yellowish work, with some striking symbolic figure on its ivory-coloured cover and the purchase of it and the possession of it enchanted me. I read it with passionate delight, from beginning to end. I especially liked: "There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend; and he, of his high comrade Sorrow dreaming, went walking with slow steps along the gleaming and humming sands, where windy surges wend." It was I fancy, after Wordsworth, the very first volume of poetry I had ever bought! I carried it about with me. I came to know many of its poems by heart. It satisfied a certain aspect of my nature down to the ground. I liked: "Tossing their milk-white arms in the air; shaking their milk-white feet in a ring; for they hear the winds laugh and murmur and sing of a land where even the old are fair … and I heard a reed of Killarney say — —" I can even recall the figure of Mr. North himself, who sold it to me, a lean, reserved little man with a coal-black beard.

It was in Hove too, that I got my first volume of Thomas Hardy. Little did I realize what a stone circle of monoliths and trilithons, grey with the lichen of centuries of English tradition, I was entering, when I chanced on this volume; or what a memorable influence, calm, austere, noble — just the influence needed by a coward who loved colour more than form — I was submitting to when I got hold of this book. It was "Far From the

Madding Crowd." It was a small, plain, brown volume in a very simple binding. I recollect reading nearly half of it in one single walk; and, as with all the books I have loved best, its actual substance cardboard, paper, print, and the words "by Thomas Hardy," passed and repassed into the gates against which I leaned, into the tree roots under which I sat, into the pond willows on whose branches I laid my hand, into the road-dust that blew up in my face as I moved forward step by step, turning pages that seemed to me — so full of ironies and pities were they — not pages of a book at all, but wind-shaken oak-leaves in some oracular grove of Dodona!

When I got the "galley-proofs" of my copy-cat verses— "Odes and Other Poems" was its proud title — I certainly felt a wonderful delight. But I was not deceived. I knew them — who if not I? — for what they were! Had not a certain little girl, not long laid in the cold ground, given me "The Poetical Works of John Keats"? Yes, I knew I was a mere imitating copy-cat, repeating, repeating, repeating the rhythms of men of genius. But though there was nothing in "Odes and Other Poems" to justify it, and though "Odes and Other Poems" might have remained even unto this day my sole printed claim to originality, I knew then, just as I knew twenty years later, when I had not published anything else, that I *was*, in some way impossible to prove, a great and for all my cringings and propitiations a terrifyingly formidable genius!

On what did I base this opinion, or conceit, if your prefer? *On nothing*. I mean on nothing outside the silence of my own thoughts and feelings. I had been secretly conscious, ever since in that lane at Shirley I pretended to be "The Lord of Hosts," that I had the power of tapping some deep reservoir of magnetism that could be used — when I was driven to the wall — to blow the wall up, to lay it flat, like the walls of Jericho. The issue has always been a perfectly simple one. I regard myself as a voice crying in the wilderness, an individual with a devilish shrewd inkling as to the hidden tricks of the creative and destructive forces of the cosmos, and with something more than an inkling as to the craftiest, foxiest, and wisest way of seeking happiness for myself and of giving happiness to the entities I encounter.

Powys Ma. alias Moony, “claims,” in fact, as our cynical Americans say of every human statement, that he is in possession of a “Way” of life, to which the instinct of self-preservation in the human race must ere long bring a great many people, whether they be Communists or Fascists or simply Englishmen. But this “claim” of mine is naturally regarded by my enemies as one of the most megalomaniacal follies that have ever obsessed the barber-college brain of a bowing and scraping dancing-master in a young ladies’ academy and by my enemy-friends as a lovable weakness in a windy oracle, whom yet one cannot help liking.

Finding the real satisfaction of my pride therefore in a secret sense of power that did not *need* to prove itself to the world by any overt evidence, feeling myself, in plain words, to be — in spite of all evidence — a great magician, it was nothing to me that “Odes and Other Poems” was so thin a thing. I lived then, as I live now, *entirely in the present*. I had no ambition. I did not make — I have never made — one single move to forward my career. Stop though! *Once* I did make such a move, and quite recently too. This occurred indeed only five years ago, when in great eagerness to get “Wolf Solent” accepted by Simon and Schuster, I carried the opening pages of this story out to Sea Cliff on Long Island and there read them to the extremely sympathetic ears of Mr. Schuster’s mother.

Glancing at “Odes and Other Poems” now in its gold and apple-green binding I do think I am dimly aware, though it may be an illusion, of a certain faint feeling of the spring that emanates from it. It may well do so, even after the lapse of forty years; for I have never responded with my whole nature so thrillingly as in those days to the miracle of the rising of the sap. When the snow melts in these New York State hills I still feel on the air something that goes back, not so much to the cowslips of Derbyshire, or to the primroses of Wessex, as to those barren, littered, ramshackle rows of little stucco houses with grass-patches by the side of bill-boardings among which I would stand, and where I would feel, stealing over the treeless downs like a supernatural presence, drifting along the sea-margins like a divine breath, stirring in the grass between the whitewashed stones like the scent of hidden violets, the eternal recurrence of the birth of life.

"O Daughter of Demeter," murmured then, with a pathetic sincerity of emotion behind the prim phraseology, my poor muse's thin scrannel-pipe, "O Daughter of Demeter, yet once more I touch my lute to hymn those virgin tears, shed while the wailing of thy sweet compeers proclaimed thee born to Pluto's sullen shore — —"

It is curious how my nature has always — I dare say it is some far-drawn Welsh strain — found its sincerest inspiration in the contrasts of exile. Here was I, so far removed from the "verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways" of my father's West Country, here was I, lodged over Mr. Pollard's shop between the roof of a dissenting chapel and a salt-bitten backwater, yet feeling the spring, as I tried to tell in my formal precise manner, imitating the imitators, more rapturously than I have ever felt it before or since!

It was during my vacation at Montacute that I received a post card from the great Thomas Hardy himself, thanking me for the poem I had addressed to him in this apple-green volume and inviting me to pay him a visit. It was a moment of moments for me when I obeyed this summons and set off, passing through Yeovil and Yetminster and Evershot and Maiden Newton and Grimstone and Frampton, to the familiar Roman town. It is likely enough, though I had often been through it to Weymouth, that I had never got out at that well-known Great Western Station, in the waiting-room of which my father had once described to me the Martyrdom of Archbishop Latimer, since those days, a dozen years ago now, when we lived at Rothesay House. Did I think, as I made my way down the old South Walk, of my persecuted "Spanish maiden" or of that other little maid, with long straight fair hair, whom I teased so rudely? I don't remember. But I do remember, as if it were yesterday, every sensation I had as I walked along the path by the railings of Fordington Great Field, thus approaching the famous "Max Gate" for the first time!

I gathered up my spirit within me and resolved to be worthy of the summons I was now obeying. Nothing could have been kinder than Hardy's reception of me. He took me into his study, the chief glory of which was, though it was yet unfinished, the great new *Oxford Dictionary*. He showed me the manuscript of *Tess*. He presented me with a paper edition of the same book. He gave me tea on his lawn. I remember telling him how I detected in his work that same portentous and solemn power of dealing with those abstract-concrete phenomena, such as dawn, and noon, and twilight, and midnight, that Wordsworth displayed in his poetry. He accepted the comparison, I remember, as a just one, but he proceeded to animadvert in no measured terms upon Wordsworth's pious optimism. He called my attention to Edgar Alan Poe's "Ulalume" as a powerful and extraordinary poem. In those days I had never read this sinister masterpiece, but following up Hardy's hint I soon drew from it a formidable influence in the direction of the romantically bizarre. I invited Mr. and Mrs. Hardy to visit us at Montacute, an invitation which, to my delighted surprise, they accepted; and I enjoyed a second red-letter day in taking him to our church and to the

Abbey Farm; though it was left to the son and heir of the squire himself to show these notable visitors over Montacute House.

It was on this occasion that Hardy explained to me how the ancient builders of our church had deliberately left the chancel a little askew in order to represent the manner in which the Redeemer's head sank upon one side as he gave up the ghost; but I well recall how, as we issued forth from these symbolic meditations amid the tombs of Mr. Phelip's ancestors, and I pointed out to our visitors the house where the most beautiful girl in our village lived, he gave a curious little start.

"We get back to humanity, back, back to humanity, Powys!" he chuckled.

It happened that there were imperceptible frost-marks that day in the road, making those odd little creases and criss-cross wrinkles in the mud that my father always loved to see, and these minute tokens of the processes *he* knew so well, were not missed, though I had missed them, by the hawk's eye of this other Dorset-born noticer of such things.

The longer I fix my mind upon this far-off day the more vividly it all comes back to me. That morning I remember announcing to my father and to all the family that the greatest writer *then living on this earth* was coming to visit us! All the while my father was praying, in that noble deliberate way he had, using naturally, easily, and quite *extempore*, the very language and accent of the old Tudor founders of our Church, the very tone and style of that "human, too human" Archbishop Latimer, whose heroic and yet passionately-shirked death he had described to me in the waiting-room at Dorchester, I was saying to myself: "He is coming! He, *He* is coming!" just as though I were Homenas talking to Pantagruel about the great one, the unique one, the Pope-God. All the while my father, with the whole-wheat brown loaves from Stoke-sub-Ham and the great pat of yellow butter from Mr. Cole's dairy before him, was filling the nine mouths left to him — one of his progeny no longer needing earthly food, and Littleton and Theodore away — I was thinking to myself with beating heart: "He will be here at our next meal, *He* will be here!"

And when in its slow, smooth, majestic manner the train belonging to the Great Western — monarch surely of all railways — finally drew up, and he, with the first Mrs. Hardy at his side stepped out, what did I not feel! Do you think I have forgotten even what he wore that great day? Oh most carefully was he dressed, consonant, in his Dorset-bred mind, with a formal visit to a Somerset vicar. He wore a light tweed suit, with knickerbockers to match, and he had thin black stockings on, almost like those in which I had seen his friend, William Barnes, walking so stately down South Walk. Llewelyn, after his fashion, and in a manner that even I — John, the arch-imitator — cannot copy, has told how, when we took him down to the Robbers' Castle under the high garden-wall, and called upon him to write his name in the band's archives, he wrote, in that clear classic hand I had seen in the manuscript of *Tess*, "Thomas Hardy, *a Wayfarer*."

I was already worrying in those days about the slaughter of animals for human food; and I remember, when I laid my scruples before him, how he said that in his opinion only very big animals ought to be killed, as in this way the flesh upon their bones would go farther.

Frail as an elf Mr. Hardy was, but his hands were the hands of a master-craftsman and his great greenish-black eyes, dark as those of Leo XIII, gleamed forth like the eyes of a ger-falcon over his hooked nose and military moustache. Such were the impressions, such was the "contact," as they say in America, that I received as my reward for my first published book!

When I was not taking Thora — that poor beast whose dugs took away the very solidity of the earth from under my feet and made me feel as if anything I touched *went in* — for walks over the bare downs behind Southwick, and when I was not hunting for some sylph-like figure recumbent on Brighton beach, at whose knees and ankles I could glare like a mad ogre, while I forgot that there were such things as breasts in the world at all, I got into the habit of frequenting the old curiosity shops. These I would scour through in a sort of frenzy looking for one treasure only — a print representing some great man! "Great men" took the place in my disordered mind that they take in those ridiculous little children's books, written by old-fashioned ladies, and entitled *Boyhood of Great Men*. By degrees I collected a terrific number of these prints representing "great men" — poor devils, they looked, many of them, as if they suffered from manias and megalomanias as badly as I did! — of whose names I had at least heard mention. What a lot of French "great men" there seem to have been in history, and how fond they were — these particular ones — of dressing up like the ancient Romans! I cannot say I received much personal inspiration from contemplating the formal countenances of Vauvenargue and La Rochefoucauld, of Marmontel and Fontenelle; but I derived unspeakable satisfaction from filling every empty space on every wall of Mr. Pollard's upper room with these be-wigged and be-laureled heads.

All the antique shops I entered in this quest were not run by such kind shopmen as my gipsy friend. The ones in Hove were not nearly as friendly as the ones in Brighton. In one place — and I blush recalling my humiliation still — a rude smart devil, when I went out, after turning over at least a dozen portfolios without even finding a print of Boileau or an engraving of Bossuet, and murmured wistfully, "I'll come back again soon," replied to me with a sneer: "Oh, we'll send for you, *when we want you*." As I write these lines the peculiar smell of those old portraits of classical worthies comes upon me, and the peculiar yellow look of their ornamental margins with iron-mould stains and little worm-holes.

If I only had contented myself with a few cheap, normal, simple stage-appurtenances for my exciting rôle as a kindred spirit of Calderon and Manzoni and Lope de Vega and Novalis, these solemn spectres whose resounding names were my only knowledge of them, all would have been well But what must I do but get into my half-crazy head that I ought to "study" the ancient Norse Sagas. This was no doubt the influence of *Theodoric the Icelander* coming back! It was also those perpetual allusions to "sagas" in Sir Walter Scott. If I had seen in the book-catalogues *Fragments from the Runes* recited by Norna of the Fitful Head, or advertisements of the *Enchantments* used by Michael Scott, or *Selections from Hermes Trismegistus* or the *Prophetic Books of Prester John*, I should at once have ordered them. It was my first experience of that easy fatality with which young men, with their names on the university books can run up bills at Cambridge.

My "Sagas" arrived and I found myself turning their pages with a chill dismay. It came over me then, as if for the first time, that Providence had not endowed me with what people call "A Gift for Languages." I had dallied with Hebrew and I was to dally with Welsh; but at the language of the Norsemen I only gave one hopeless glance. But this one glance meant that I cut many valuable pages too roughly; and there was no sending them back. I think it was eventually as much as my year's allowance that my father had to pay for my interest in Norse mythology.

I held in my impatient fingers *Marius the Epicurean* during this time, but the devil a word of it could I grasp. It was not as bad as the "Sagas"; but the loveliness of it went completely over my head. I suppose I expected an exciting story; not quite in the style of *Quo Vadis* perhaps, but full of refined scenes of heathen wantonness. No one at Cambridge — neither Koelle nor Gooch and least of all Dr. Perowne — had helped me to understand what beauty of style meant. I came to this secret at last — I presume in the course of my own voracious readings in the "Great Writers" Series and the "English Men of Letters" Series — but I can tell you when I *had* enlightened myself, I took a passionate care that the young Llewelyn, at that time still at Sherborne, should not grow up in my ignorance. He certainly did not! When *was* there a time when this young rogue of a born master didn't know what the words "a noble style" convey to the responsive intelligence?

And now I come to one of the most extraordinary episodes in my life — an episode that must have lasted nearly ten years — my intimate friendship with the poet Alfred de —— I owe this high privilege, one of the happiest chances of my life, to none other than my enterprising host. Mr. Pollard must have had an eye for the exceptional in human nature, as he had for gold in a ring.

"There's a man you would admire, Mr. Powys," he remarked one day, glancing respectfully at my portrait gallery, "who lives at Portslade. I am going to take the liberty of introducing you two gentlemen to each other."

It did not at the moment present itself to me as likely that Portslade, a place I passed through daily, could produce, after the fashion of Mantua or Cockermouth, the kind of "great man" I admired, but I gave Mr. Pollard the benefit of the doubt and expressed my willingness to meet Mr. de ——. It did not take more than one encounter to link me and my womanish hero-worship with hoops of steel to the astonishing personality who soon presented himself. Alfred de —— must have been over seventy when I first met him and I remained his devoted henchman for nearly ten years. It was only his final retirement to London under the care of his son who was always kind to him that separated us at last. I never learnt the circumstances of his death nor do I know where he was buried. I served him well, and the last time I saw him he declared in such thundering tones, in the big restaurant at Victoria Station, that my son was like a Greek God, that he covered the child with confusion.

He was very tall and very thin. His mouth and chin were covered with scanty grey hairs; his deep-set handsome eyes never needed glasses; his wrinkled forehead resembled that of Schopenhauer. His clothes were always as ragged, and to confess the truth as ancient and disregarded, as those in which Ulysses disguised him as a beggar. His stomach — very different from that of his devoted Boswell — must have had a lining of cast-iron. He could live — and did actually live at a pinch — on crusts and scrapings, but he also had the greatest power of swallowing raw spirits that I have met in anyone before or since. I would, after my fashion, treat him to tea in our numerous excursions along those Sussex highways but no tea I could procure, or make, was ever strong enough for him. In the middle of our conversations he would suddenly stretch out his lean hand and long bare wrist — he seemed to wear no underclothes at all — and snatching up the slop-basin would pour its contents at a gulp down his iron throat. His lean Don Quixote legs would always be displayed in their nakedness when he crossed his knees, and his boots seldom had laces. In spite of all this Mr. de —— was unmistakably the great gentleman. He came of a noble family. He was himself by rights, I believe, a baron; and I can assure you that under certain conditions his manner and tone were more than baronial. But he prided himself — such was his humour — upon being a shrewd manipulator of human weakness in high places.

"Powys," he would say, with a flickering smile and shrug of his thin shoulders, "Powys we must propitiate Magnates."

I never myself beheld in him much of this propitiation of “Magnates.” It fell to me, as a matter of fact, to do the propitiating, when I eventually made my grand efforts to get him the public recognition which he deserved. I have never put myself out so much in all my days as I did for Mr. de ——.I was his disciple, his faithful lieutenant, his equerry, his man-at-arms, the bearer of his shield, the purveyor of his cap of maintenance. I tried for long to conceal from him the fact that I ever wrote poetry myself. I even suppressed *Odes and Other Poems* as if it were some obscene or indecent publication. My friend’s confidence in me was sublime. When I took to giving public lectures it was incredible to him that anyone but himself should be their subject. I did, as a matter of fact, and indeed do still, think highly of a certain sombre and simple power that his verses possessed. Let me try to remember some of them.

“I seek the Deity. I wrestle most,
I who sit scorned outside the Temple-gate.
In vigils of the night I keep my post.
Others are sure. I only watch and wait.
I supplicate. Who answereth my prayer?
He doth — in murmuring waves, or not at all!
In clouds He is transfigured in the air:
Thro’ the dense forest echoes His footfall.
The amazing stars — each is a heavenly sphere:
The ineffable surrounds each mountain height.
In the vast universe, or far or near,
Throbs the great Heart of all, by day and night!”

We used to meet and talk, both of us in very loud voices, in every kind of queer place. All the shabbier and more out-of-the-way taverns between

Shoreham and Brighton knew us, and we would extend our pilgrimages in a great many directions beyond that coastline.

Mr. de —— had composed a poem called “A Walk to Poynings” before I knew him; and he and I shared ruminative, almost mystical “walks” of this old-fashioned Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* kind along all sorts of side-tracks and bypaths of that district. He was acquainted with many picturesque Sussex villages, lying in their secluded beech-groves in the folds of the bare downs, and he behaved in all these sea-coast hamlets as if he were some infidel Don Quixote expounding in sombre rhetoric, among these homely Christian monuments, stern Lucretian doctrines about a desolate God-forsaken cosmos. He and I were very much alike in our complete lack of any sense of social nuance or historic proportion. Our excited voices, the voices of an aquiline-nosed lean old man and an aquiline-nosed lean young man rose and fell as we stood among the patient tombs and under the echoing porches of these quiet purlieus of rural piety, denouncing the consolatory assuagements of the faith of our fathers and prophesying planetary catastrophies and universal overthrows.

Sometimes with an ineffably sweet smile illuminating his wrinkled face Mr. de —— would recite to me his favourite lines from the older poets, lines that *smelt*, if I may say so, like those old pieces of furniture in Penn House ante-room.

“On her white breast,” he would quote, “a sparkling cross she wore, that Jews might kiss and infidels adore!” And then he would suddenly burst out — taking not the least notice of the astonished passers-by on some Brighton pavement, or of the bewildered landlord in some Shoreham inn— “Old as I am, for ladies’ love unfit, the power of beauty I remember yet; which once inflamed my heart — and still inspires my wit!”

But he would deal in matters sometimes that were nearer home.

“Powys,” he would say, “you cannot live with a woman for forty years without loving her!”

And then he would narrate to me astonishing episodes from his early life, how he suffered from a sunstroke once when a young officer in the service of the Old East Indian Company in the days before Disraeli made the Queen an Empress, and how his father was an ambassador of some European country, at the Court of Lisbon.

As we wandered along some darkening road between the downs and the sea with the sun setting in the west and the moon rising in the east, the old man would compose such lines as these.

“O Moon, O Sun, ye dual agents, say
What is this world between ye that ye share,
Adam and Eve of fearful Night and Day,
Ah! why so speechless in the trembling air?”

The very day we first met under the auspices of the lively Mr. Pollard he recited to me a singular set of verses he had composed long ago when he had his sunstroke in India, and as I write the words I can hear his reverberating voice and see his formidable gesticulations, like some aged actor in the days when a London town-crier might be calling out in the clattering streets. “The great poet, Mr. John Dryden, lies a-dying in his lodgings in Soho!”

I often repeat to myself these vigorous exhortations to the Inanimate:

“Rocks, stony Rocks, that lie around in silence,
Brooding thro’ ages, solemn and sublime,
Let us emerge from lethargy with violence!
Let us adore the Author of all Time!”

I have never given to any work of my own the indomitable labour I lavished, day in and day out, on the polishing and revising of Mr. de ——

poems. Two separate volumes of them I actually managed to get published before I had done. I journeyed to the country house of Mr. Fisher Unwin. I even carried Mr. de —— himself up to London and in the studio of Mortimer Menpes, full of chat about Whistler, I compelled two countesses and I don't know how many baronesses to acknowledge his genius. One of these grand ladies whispered to another on this occasion that I resembled a gladiator. I certainly felt like Pursuivant with a brazen trumpet. The first of Mr. de — — 's books we called *Ultima Verba*; and since it was impossible to go *further* than that, when it came to the second one I named it, with the help of my old *School Dictionary, Noctis Susurri, Sighs of the Night*.

Implacable atheist as my old friend was in his public harangues — how his voice used to resound along the dusty walls of the old waiting-rooms in the Brighton Station! — I used, in the dead watches of the night, as I lay in some adjoining chamber, to hear him praying earnestly and passionately, and almost as loudly as when in the daylight he denounced such paltry superstitions! I feel a certain shame about telling this, as if I were betraying my master, but his career — the career of a man between seventy and eighty — and the name of some ancient love of his, used to be referred to again and again in this secret colloquy with the First Cause.

All this time I was hunting about for a house wherein to settle when the day, now not far off, of my marriage came. Houses have always had a peculiar and quite special fascination for me — houses of a certain kind! I was indeed as particular about my houses as I was about my girls and in precisely the same way. That is to say it was an ideal house I hunted for — not a house "Not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" — but the Platonic idea of a house, the Entelecheia, or preordained blossoming-forth, of this primordial necessity.

It will become clearer, as I try to articulate what I felt, why it is that I have taken, during all my days, not the remotest interest in my career. Mr. de —— at least during his midnight hours — took more interest in this thing, in one's success, in one's future, in one's prestige, than I did. In fact I have sometimes been guilty of a certain deliberate *malice* in this direction. It is as though I nourished some weird Saturnian contempt for the judgments of men, and appealed to some higher court against the verdict of the inhabitants of this planet. I took quite seriously those words in *Lycidas*: "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil, or in the glistering foil set-off to the world or in broad rumour lies."

It is most important in writing the tale of one's days not to try to give them the unity they possess for oneself in later life. A human story, to bear any resemblance to the truth, must advance and retreat erratically, must flicker and flutter here and there, must debouch at a thousand tangents. But it is quite clear, and borne out in a thousand cases and incidents, that I lived so completely in the present all along that what is called ambition had no room or time to sprout. Ambitious people are forced — as one learns from reading their lives — to cut down rigidly upon their contemplative tendencies, to harden themselves *against* their momentary sensations. I *lived* for sensations; and have always, in my deepest heart regarded such a life as the only adequate return we can make to Nature for giving us birth!

Human sensations are Nature's self-expression. They are the earth's awareness of herself. They are like the blossoming of flowers — the only way in which the rooted life of the organism can realize itself and *be* itself. Besides, as long as I had enough to eat and drink, enough to purchase a certain measure of privacy, enough to buy tobacco and cigarettes, enough to take me where I could turn upon the ankles of women my idolatrous and ravished stare, enough to save me from working in a school or an office or a barber’s shop or a factory or a farm or a mine or on ship-board, enough in plain words to dodge, avoid, shirk, run away from, sneak out of that *manual labour* upon which — and don’t you suppose I didn’t always know it! — we other men are privileged and petted parasites, what on earth did I want a career for? You will say — putting one’s duty to humanity aside— “for the sake of winning reputation, approval, respect, honour, renown!” But, my good friend, you are forgetting “the rock whence I was hewn and the pit whence I was digged.” You are forgetting my father! I inherited from him, and was strengthened and fortified in, by watching him and listening to him, an abysmal personal pride that was sufficient to itself under all conceivable conditions.

When that Hove tradesman was so rude to me, in a way that a Brighton tradesman would never have been, it humiliated me where I was most sensitive of all; that is to say in my dignity *as man to man*. I then learnt what it was that led my father to prefer the company of the most disreputable and drunken members of his parish to the company of smart, clever, new-fangled persons. Such persons were always ready to mock and to sneer at his old-fashioned ways and indulge in those debased forms of facetiousness which made my father feel a fool, just as they make me feel a fool; whereas the village atheists and drunkards he met, or old Nancy Cooper the witch-wife, or the circus-men when they came with their whirligigs, or some tattooed ex-sailor-tramp on the Yeovil Road, would make my father go off in a spasm of well-being, rubbing his hands, protruding his upper lip, and full of the feeling that he had conducted himself as *his* father would have conducted himself, in a manner worthy of a countryman and a gentleman.

You will say that it is easy for a man in a long black coat and with an account at Stuckey’s Bank to come off triumphantly from an encounter with

Nancy Cooper, or a tipsy mole-catcher, or a foul-tongued hawker of rabbit-skins. I am not so sure. It is not quite as simple as all that. There are moments, when the human eye meets the human eye, that it recognizes a certain basic reciprocity, and there are moments when it does not! At least it is very certain that the average worldly person would not have felt transported with pride at having acquitted himself so well. He would not have given the thing a second thought. It was in his simple and majestic rapture over such occurrences that my father was so great.

Great or not, I learnt from him to ground my pride upon a certain basic human dignity that had nothing to do with success in the world, and that a tramp could have as much as a clergyman, and a poacher as much as a grave-digger. And I learnt moreover — and here I went beyond my father, who had at least an eye to what the weather would be on the morrow, and to what the Afghans or the Zulus, or the Boers might take into their heads to do — to live each day, as the old evangelical hymns say, *as if it were my last*.

But "all the same for that," I got extraordinary satisfaction at this epoch in looking for a house to settle down in. And Mr. Pollard — putting both Danish schooners and gold rings out of his head — was all "alive-o" to assist me in this search. And so one day I fetched the little man from his counter and led him off to give me his opinion about a house I had found in Southwick itself. Never shall I forget, no! not if I forgot Mr. Pollard and the backwater and the bridge and the ships with Scandinavian flags, the impression this house made upon me! It was very near the railway-line. You could see it from the train as you left Southwick. It had large airy rooms with tall French windows opening upon a leafy garden. I have an obscure notion that it must have been a French-looking house; and a French-looking garden too. I can only tell you that the emerald-green lawn winding in and out of its tall trees, was greener, softer, more enchanted, and yet more dim and enclosed, than any grassy expanse I have ever seen. With Mr. Pollard at my elbow I paced this magical enclosure. It was hidden from all the rest of the world, but revealed to the railway passengers who travelled, and there were not few of them, between Worthing and Brighton. But the very nearness of these passing trains seemed to make the grass greener and the tree-trunks more rooted and still.

The place satisfied a desire in me that had a curious resemblance to what I felt when after striding up and down the whole length of Brighton beach with eyes like the eyes of a ger-falcon I settled down at last by some soft, receptive feminine form whose ankles I could at least pretend belonged to a sylph-like body. I always used to fancy I could get the same indescribable feeling from the way the gods have moulded a woman's body if I were alone with her in a bedroom, but I never could! I slept at different times with three sisters of the same family, and I did experience some queer romantic emotions then; and intermittent feelings, too, of a tremulous tenderness as far as one of the three was concerned, whom in a room in a disreputable back-alley I used to watch strumming on a cracked piano, while the old workhouse-man, employed as a doorkeeper, would replenish our pair of guttering candles. For long afterwards whenever I was left alone in any room with a miserable piano I would try to reproduce that particular wistful little tune. It was to the accompaniment of that tune that I had sought something from women, which I knew well only the strange, inhuman chastity of street-girls could ever come near satisfying.

You must not suppose that these wanderings of mine were unattended by risks and dangers. I remember on the ground-floor of a Brighton house being spied upon once by an indignant cabman, who ceased not from his troublesome activities till my landlady turned out my companion and myself into the street, A scandalous person, and yet with a certain Mrs. Quickly turn of humour was the mother of my particular Doll Tearsheet. The saying that was most often upon her lips — and remembering my inauspicious cabman I rather appreciated such a sentiment — was: “I never do and never did like onlookers.”

But though I derived plenty of romantic and sentimental overtones from being with these street-girls I got hardly any erotic pleasure. My desire, directly I became friendly with the girl herself, changed into a sort of ideal attachment. It was as if I were “in love,” as they call it, with each one of these sweet baggages. My feeling had all the romantic respect, all the exaggerated deference, all the ideal tenderness, that are supposed to be the sign of a normal love-affair. I was an extremely young man then but I behaved with these wenches like an aged, infatuated dotard. I would buy my favourite one clothes; but being very poor and not being able to send *these* bills — as I had done over the “Sagas” — to my father, and, moreover, having not the remotest idea of what clothes were suitable for these ladies’ particular profession, I made sad mistakes. I recollect buying my friend one costume, that I saw in a shop window and admired extremely, which she indignantly declared would have suited a postman! No doubt it had stiff braid, or shiny buttons, or something that didn’t harmonize with the softness of feminine taste. I probably thought it looked like the attire of one of those enchanting boy-girls, or girl-boys, in Shakespeare’s comedies.

I suppose there never has been anyone less of a Don Juan than I was. But that has always been my difficulty with respectable women. Respectable women *want* Don Juans, not fantastic-brained idealists who have perverse manias for people’s ankles; whereas these Brighton wenches had minds very much like my own, and nerves very much like my own. What is called "passion" had no existence for them, or for me. They were permeated with manias and riddled with superstitions, and so was I. They were profoundly coarse, but withal excessively fastidious, and such, I have a shrewd notion, is my own character.

One of them used to tell me that what she disliked most was to sleep with a man with a wooden leg; an experience which she described in detail exactly as I would have described it, whereas her ideal in men, an ideal she hesitated not to picture to me very often and very eloquently, was, point by point, a masculine counterpart of my own imaginary sylph. I was obviously not her ideal, any more than she was mine; but we had pleasant times together. Lust and lasciviousness had nothing at all to do with my feeling for these kind girls; not, at any rate, after the initial impulse that led me to pursue them. My attitude towards them was an ideal one. It was the worship of the eternal feminine in the only form I could worship it *where my manias made no difference*. It gradually became apparent to me that if I wished to satisfy my impersonal lust it was no good going into shabby bedrooms with girls for whom I felt nothing but a romantic tenderness. I soon decided it was wiser for me to stay in the open and indulge my obsession by staring at what I considered desirable forms, as they lay prone or supine on the pebbles of the beach.

I discovered, however, at that time a new manner of satisfying my frenzied eye-lust. There were theatres at the ends of all the bigger Brighton piers and in the winters there would be given certain small travelling pantomimes in these places. At one of these — I forget on which pier it was — I beheld at last, actually in the flesh, a real, living incarnation of my ideal sylph. It is impossible for me to describe to you the loveliness of this figure. She was an extremely quiet girl, grave and self-possessed, and of a very dark complexion. She had præter-naturally long legs, very long slender thighs, narrow boyish hips, upright, rather square shoulders, and ankles of a ravishing perfection. I suppose she was a sort of supernumerary ornament, like a lovely figure on a Grecian urn, for she did nothing during the whole performance but simply stand there. She did not even turn round: so I had no way of telling whether her flanks were as divinely moulded as the rest of her body. But of course they must have been. They must, they must! For she was the sylph of all my long, straining, yearning, desperate desires, and I could see that she was perfect.

I had so well learnt my lesson under those guttering candles of my old workhouse-doorkeeper that you can believe I made no attempt to speak to her or to approach nearer to her. I did not even catch her eye. I expect she never guessed that such an idolatrous, abandoned, sacramental worship of her body could ever possibly occur. She was just an awkward supernumerary and would always remain so. Probably she supported a tipsy father and an invalid mother. Or she may have lived in Brighton, and just hired herself out, to stand in the wings of Christmas pantomimes, in order to earn money to buy presents for her younger brothers and sisters.

I walked in from Southwick to every single performance while her pantomime was being played, and sank down into my seat each time with a deep-drawn sigh, to give myself up to an ecstasy that never failed me. Finally I came one day to find this heavenly entertainment flown away and some wretched earthly melodrama being solemnly played in its stead. I used to think in those days, and for many, many years afterwards, when with trembling eagerness I bought my ticket at various box-offices, or made my way between the recumbent figures at various seaside resorts, how miserable, how dull, how wretched, how pitiable, how drab, how tedious, how dreary, how intolerable, and how totally without interest, must the lives be of people who were not engaged, as I was, in this delirious and enthralling hunt after eternally anonymous human limbs. Yes, it was evidently only at pantomimes or where I could find young ladies lying on soft grass, or on warm pebble-stones, or on pleasant sand, that I could enjoy my real fetish-worship, my intense religious idolatry, of those aspects of the feminine shape — I could never admire it all in all — which so enraptured me.

But in this house and garden under that high railway-bank at Southwick it seemed to me that I found a parallel in the realm of the non-human for the sort of ecstasy I got from my desperate anonymous quest. I thought of myself as worshipping the sun and the moon from this enclosed garden. I thought of myself as going in and out in summer bringing with me the feeling of leaves and grass and earth-mould, and of sitting in winter over the fire, reading — in translations however — the stories of Norse Mythology. But none of these *definite* thoughts touched the real heart of what I felt! As I paced that lawn, and kept going in and out of that French window, I felt that my real soul, below all these outward movements, was experiencing some extraordinary pleasure, a pleasure that was sexual and yet not sexual, that had to do with women, and yet had not the faintest connection with women. What I kept reverting to was the thought of *how long* I would live in this house, and how I would know the way every wind blew there, and where exactly the suns and moons in their seasons would appear and disappear there.

Mr. Pollard said that he thought he could share this house with me when I was married, keeping his grocery shop as it was, but paying me, if I were the one to deal with the rent, for the garden produce. He felt, just as I did, that it was a shame that such a place should remain untenanted a moment longer.

I cannot quite tell how it happened, possibly during a visit from cousin Ralph or from Littleton, but the idea of taking this house by the railway — whether in collaboration with Mr. Pollard or not — melted into the air as rapidly as it had risen out of the air. I suddenly decided that even if my father did raise my allowance from sixty pounds to a hundred pounds, as he said he would do, I ought to put myself in the way of making more money before I married. Money, rather than enchanted gardens, ought I decided just now to be my objective.

So I journeyed to Eastbourne; and indefatigably dragging myself round that elegant resort, in less than a couple of exhausting days I had called upon nearly a score of girls' schools. Of these — for I must have had nothing less than a miraculous power with these excellent ladies — I actually obtained five wherein to lecture and at least double the price that I was earning in Hove! I got five Eastbourne girls' schools; and from each, for an hour's lesson I received a pound.

After this I used to travel to Eastbourne regularly once a week, and on no more nourishment than a cup of tea and an oatmeal biscuit, and intermittently scraped and harrowed and scoured and raked out and bent double with the ulcers in my stomach, I used to give all the whole five lectures and earn *in that one day* what I considered — with my other sources of income — enough to marry on.

I felt however — now that I had found out that the number of sylphs educated in schools was very limited — that I would enjoy lecturing on a larger scale; giving in fact public lectures. It had been my destiny every day to pass the entrance to Hove Town Hall and it was now my destiny every day to pass the entrance to Eastbourne Town Hall. I decided to hire both these edifices. And this project turned out to be easy. Not "all of them," as Mr. Blanch would have jested, but a very large hall in both of them I had no difficulty in obtaining; and for less, I believe, certainly not for more, than a pound a-piece.

Mr. de —— took a great interest in these proceedings even though the topic of my first public lecture, which was in the Hove Town Hall, was not entirely confined to him and his work. It spread out in fact, I think, over three or four centuries of English literature. Mr. Pollard too took an interest in the project, and indeed turned out an indispensable aid; for he got, if I remember right, my bills printed for me, and was on the spot to collect, if I am not mistaken, the box-office receipts with his own hands. These, all in all, amounted to three shillings and sixpence. For my audience consisted of three women and one child; the child being let in for the sixpence. I can see Mr. de — — 's quixotic figure now seated in the front row, nodding a little when I spoke of the prefaces of Wordsworth but sitting up very straight, and assuming the expression of a stern but not unpersuadable connoisseur, when I quoted from the unpublished pages of *Ultima Verba.*

You can believe how thrilling it was to me when Littleton came to visit me at Mr. Pollard's. Here was that old story coming true that we had told each other on the road to Milborne Port, that he would stay with me when I should be earning my living where there was water to fish in! The water at Southwick was the deep salt sea, and the fishing was not in Littleton's style; but we were together, and my happiness, at any rate, was complete. We used to walk far over the downs; Thora with us, her femininity, *pro tem*. happily forgotten. I never talked to Littleton about my vices — I do not do *that* to-day — but you need not think we lacked topics of conversation. He was reading Catullus then for pure pleasure and without a "crib," for he was always a scholar, and lying on the thymy turf of those chalk hills — for I had no desire to disturb his passivity when he was in his Catullus mood — I would watch, as he read, the "meadow browns" and the "clouded yellows" and the “azure blues” and the “gate-keepers” and the “painted-ladies” just as if we were back again in the old Dorchester times and were prone at the bottom of one of the trenches of Maiden Castle. Ah! to the end of my days when I think of Catullus, I shall hear Littleton’s voice, lingering out the rhythmic sounds, as if they were circles on water when a fish has risen, and ever and anon lifting his ruddy face and turning his grey eyes upon me to make sure I miss nothing of it, just as he used to do when he first learnt the trick of making perfect rings of tobacco-smoke!

We had one startling experience which I confess did not show us up very heroically. We were drifting composedly along the summit of the hills, observing the darting white rumps of one kind of down-bird and the rosy marks upon the feathers of another, when suddenly we were confronted by a thin wire fence on the other side of which a pack of ferocious bloodhounds, or were they mastiffs, rose on their hind legs, and with open jaws and terrifying leaps tried desperately to get at us. Theodore would, I fancy, have chuckled not a little could he have witnessed his two elder brothers beating a hurried and not very dignified retreat. It is seldom in this world that it is permitted to human beings to preserve a mood of unruffled sentiment for very long. Had that fence been a few feet lower I don’t like to think what might have happened. Or would the presence of Thora have preserved us alive?

Having decided against that house under the railway-line I set out one day with Littleton for a very extended search for what I wanted. I was a vegetarian then, and I think I astonished my athletic companion by my capacity for walking. As we started along the Brighton front — full of memories for me that I dare say Catullus would have comprehended more readily than his translator — I remember discoursing to Littleton upon my method of lecturing. I told him I had invented a new art, the art of

“Dithyrambic Analysis.” We skirted the very portion of the town where the inventor of “Dithyrambic Analysis” had found his perverse desires so often turned — as if by sorcery — into ideal sentiment, and striking inland, straight across the Downs, came down into the valley of the Sussex Ouse, within a mile or two of the town of Lewes. Here we explored the little village of Rodmell — I think that was its name — where there was a farmhouse to let. We returned however without my having committed myself to anything; but I had received a very favourable impression of the environs of Lewes as a landscape wherein to bide; and after Littleton had left me I made other explorations in this direction.

I think it was the couple of miles’ walk from Lewes to that farm by the banks of the Ouse that deterred me from settling there; but it had got lodged in my mind now that a farmhouse, if I could only discover one not too far from a railway, would suit me better than anything else as a permanent abode. With my five new schools at Eastbourne, as well as my allowance of a hundred pounds a year, I felt myself to be a man of substance. Perhaps a small but very ancient Castle might present itself.

Such was my mood, when, at last, after a few more excursions, I found what suited me. It was not a Castle, not even a little one; nor was it an Abbey, nor a Priory, nor a moated Grange. But it *was* a farmhouse; and I got it for the modest sum of forty pounds a year. It was however a sufficiently romantic place and possessed an historical name; for it was called “Court House,” and it went back — not the actual building, but some earlier edifice — to the days of Henry III, and was reputed to be the spot where the King held his Court after the Battle of Lewes. It was on the outskirts of the hamlet of Offham, near the spacious eighteenth-century dwelling of Sir George Shiffner, Bart. a sturdy, ruddy-cheeked old gentleman, who was both the squire and parson. It lay in a fold of the high Downs, behind which the sun vanished early in the winter days, the hill just above it being called Mount Harry, after the father of Edward Longshanks, and the Downs beyond it rising to a height of nearly a thousand feet at an eminence called Ditchling Beacon. Court House was only about half a mile from the little station of Cooksbridge, on the line between Lewes and Hayward's Heath; and I recollect how when I emerged from the train at Cooksbridge I was considerably bothered in my idealistic mind by what I felt to be the commonness, even the *lowness* of this name! I had inherited from my father a proud contempt — like that of some old rice-eating Samurai — for all culinary excesses, and it irked me to think of settling down near a place dedicated to cooks. You must remember that I had not yet idealized this noble profession by reading the Chitterling chapter in Rabelais.

Consoling myself as well as I could over this frying-pan name, I made my way along a pleasant avenue of trees towards my destination. How well did I come to know this avenue in later days! It was under these goodly trees that I had to pass every time I visited the little Offham Post Office, where an ex-butler of Sir George Shiffner acted as postmaster.

"Sir George has asked me," this worthy man was destined soon to remark, "about the new tenant at Court House. Sir George wanted to know if you had brought your servants with you."

But it was more in connection with my own inner life that this leafy avenue became lodged in my mind than with anything that Sir George said or thought. It was the tops of these branches that I gazed at one day presently as they made a delicate tracery against the sky and derived from the sight one of those strange mysterious ecstasies to which I was subject. It was after turning the illustrated pages of an history of Early Italian painting that this vision — if so it can be called — transported me; and what it really amounted to was a sudden revelation of the magical loveliness of twigs and leaves when they make a sharply-cut filigree, an intricately delicate pattern, against a grey sky.

It was here too that I was destined to be tormented by that Demon within me that took a fiendish pleasure in calling up revolting images. I lived, just then, under such a terrific strain of poetical idealism — using my will to obliterate unpleasant things and to concentrate upon lovely things — that this very strain gave a deadly aid to this filthy-minded Devil. It was, by some fatality, in connection with the poetry of Cowper that I came to be most plaguily tormented at that time. As I have already hinted it has taken me something like forty years — wretched magician as I am! — to deal adequately with this Devil's tricks; that is to say to sprinkle the Holy Water of Lethe over objects that he has tried to spoil for me by plastering them with his Devil's dung.

It was not long now before the filthy rogue would never let me so much as summon up in my mind the idea of poor Cowper without strewing the road before me — this road that I had thought was exactly the sort of thing that would have pleased this poet — with what do you suppose? With bullock's blood and black snails! If any reader of this passage — for *all* readers cannot be sound and sane — recognizes a mental affliction of his own in what I am narrating, let him take comfort.

I have — and without the aid of any psychiatrist either — found out various mental tricks wherewith to *wash* my thoughts. The will to forget! Have faith that your will *can* get the trick of forgetting and in the end it will be all right. We are all in secret fighting for our sanity. The great thing is to have more than one string to our bow.

It was along this road too when Littleton came to stay with me at Court House that I once — I blush to relate such doings — insisted that he should walk all the way to Offham a few paces behind me. I explained that I *wanted to think* and that his breathing got on my nerves. "*Let us think!*" I would cry out in those days to anyone walking by my side. It was here, too, that Littleton and I had a fierce quarrel about Home Rule for Ireland. I was in favour of it. He was doubtful of its wisdom. It was the *tone* in which he was doubtful that annoyed me, however, not the doubt itself; and taking him by surprise I rushed at him like a madman and flung him into the ditch. Here we continued to struggle, much to the consternation of some worthy stranger who was coming blamelessly along at that moment. It was when we grew aware, from the depths of our ditch, that this good man had climbed over the opposite hedge in terror, that our fury abated, and clambering back into the road we loudly hummed a reassuring tune, lest the runaway, now half across the field, should summon Sir George's game-keeper.

On this, the first occasion of my seeing Court House, I stopped at a labourer's cottage nearby to ask for the keys. There was no one there but the woman of the cottage who willingly enough came along with me. As we went up the drive, with outhouses on one side and stables on the other, my companion laid her hand on my arm. "The other way, the other way, the other way!" she cried, and made a bolt for some bushes that grew behind the house. I followed her without difficulty for she was a heavy woman. But it did strike me as singular that she should find it necessary to make her way through these bushes on all-fours. She expressed herself, however, as anxious that my first view of Court House should be from the hillside behind it. She was right. Its brick-and-flint walls and yellow lichened tiled roof *did* look more picturesque from the back; for its façade had been cemented.

But the woman told me her story, before she unlocked the door, and it was not a pretty one. She explained to me quite frankly, using the plain words, that in a day or two she intended to retire to the County Lunatic Asylum. Thus did the inventor of the art of “Dithyrambic Analysis” enter his first Sussex home.

CHAPTER SEVEN. COURT HOUSE

IT WAS THE Pollards who helped me to settle into Court House; but whom do you suppose I succeeded in getting as my housekeeper till I should be married? No other than Mrs. Curme, whose husband had been my father's gardener at Rothesay House! Yes, Mrs. Curme herself — *née* Bellamy — the widow of that aged man, bent nearly double, with a countenance like Sir Joshua Reynold's picture of St. Joseph, for whom I dug such craftily-concealed pits in that new Dorchester garden! Mrs. Curme was an old woman then; but she remained extremely handsome, and her manners were those rather of a lady-in-waiting than a servant. She was just the person for me at that juncture, when in my crazy folly I was carrying half the milder aberrations, mentioned in "Kraft-Ebbing," on my obstinate shoulders. In those days I would not have any meat in the house, no! not so much as a rasher of bacon; but Mrs. Curme consoled herself by drinking hot beer, beer heated on the kitchen-stove. This, with the unpalatable carrots and turnips provided by the husband of the woman who had first shown me over Court House, was the poor lady's sole diet, all the while she looked after me.

The handsome old woman was lonely at first — when I was away lecturing in Brighton and Eastbourne — but she very quickly made friends with the daughter of Sir George's game-keeper who used frequently to drop in, of an afternoon, to keep her company. At such times Mrs. Curme's spirits rose to a high pitch; and as she moved about so stately in her spotless apron and big lace cap adorned with purple ribbons she would suddenly be seized by a mood of daring revelry.

"Dash my cap and whiskers!" she would then sing out. "Katie, my dear, let's have a cup of tea!"

I took all my meals in the kitchen, waited on by Mrs. Curme; and I can well remember one evening, as we sat together over the fire, talking, as we almost always did — for in her youth she had served the family of our austere Governor of St. Helena — about Napoleon, how I said to her:

"Wouldn't you like me to read a little poetry to you, Mrs. Curme?"

I must have said this in exactly the tone in which my father, when some bedridden old woman wanted to go on telling him about her ailments, would say:

"Wouldn't you like me *to read a few words?*"

And without waiting for an answer I hurried off to my "study" and came back with the works of Swinburne, from which I read — in thundering tones, more adapted to the Hove Town Hall than a peaceful kitchen — such resounding infidel rhetoric as:

"Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, the world has grown grey with thy breath!"

After some twenty minutes of such reverberating rhodo montade I laid the book down and enquired how my hearer liked it.

"Mr. John," said Mrs. Curme gravely; "I do thank 'ee, Mr. John, from my poor heart. It does me good to hear the dear Lord's name mentioned so frequent!"

It was Mrs. Curme's way, part of the courtly manners that were a second nature with her, never to turn her back to me. On leaving my study — for I had a study at Court House — she would always walk a few steps backward, making as she did so not exactly a curtsy, but a sort of obeisance of her whole aged frame. But she would not even present herself before me — this refined old lady upon whom I ought to have been waiting hand and foot — without knocking first and asking for permission to address me. This ritual would regularly occur every night. I would be reading Colonel Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* or Mrs. Besant's *Seven Principles of Man,* when there would come her knock on the door.

"May I come in, Master John?"

"Yes, Mrs. Curme."

And when she had carefully shut the door behind her, and was standing there, so old and so handsome, before me:

"May I," she would enquire, "say good night, Master John?"

"Yes, Mrs. Curme."

"*Good* night, Master John!"

And with that she would walk backwards to the door and let herself out.

One of my manias was for changing my shirt and all my underclothes *every day*; and Mrs. Curme fooled me beautifully over this. She would remove my clothes at night, and having just simply *ironed* them on the kitchen-table, bring them up again next morning with my can of hot water. On these occasions she would just knock on the door and hurry downstairs again without a word. Experience had taught her that men, young or old, are often in a touchy frame of mind when they first wake up.

The husband of the lady who took refuge in the lunatic asylum after introducing me to Court House was the most typical South Saxon labourer I have ever seen. A long silky grey beard he had, and cold steely blue eyes. Since it was clear that his wife intended to remain in the asylum this blue-eyed Gurth got a person to look after him, out of the Lewes workhouse.

This "grave housewife," as Homer would have called her, was what Rabelais would have named an "old trot." Her most casual observations were rich in philosophical plaintiveness. Her favourite saying was: "We be all born; but we bain't all dead yet," an observation that might have been a translation of an aphorism of Sophocles. This singular person went by the name of “Aunt Stone” and her dearest crony was an aged tramp called “Happy Mary.”

Happy Mary was a round-faced woman of incredible age whose visage was tanned by weather into a rich mahogany and who lived on the road all the year round; having an especial clientele of back-doors and her favourite set of workhouses. I am glad to be able to record that for several years after my marriage Happy Mary used to keep Christmas in Court House kitchen; and here she and Aunt Stone would celebrate a kind of Witches’ Sabbath, the most startling feature of which was a performance that these lively old beldames were wont to describe as “The Candlestick Dance.” This dance must have been a very ancient one, and certainly was of a heathen character; more adapted in fact to the rites of Hecate than the birth of our Saviour. In the course of it this pair of old wives hitched up their “cutty-sarks” and proceeded to skip, in abandoned eldritch glee, over an array of candles disposed at convenient distances along our kitchen floor.

Under Mrs. Curme’s regime, however, there were no greater revels than the sipping of Lewes ale, kept warm upon the stove, and readings from the Dionysian poet who makes “Galilean” rhyme with “Lethean” and “God” with “rod.”

It was at this time, my father having presented me with two hundred pounds for the furnishing of Court House, that I stopped buying prints of great men and began to buy their works. These I especially delighted to purchase when they took the shape of leather-bound quartos and worm-eaten folios. Such bookish treasures were unbelievably cheap at the end of the last century.

There was an amazing second-hand shop for instance in those days in the very heart of Brighton, within a few hundred yards of the Regent’s famous

Pavilion. It was kept by a dignified little man called “Mr. Smith,” whose chief assistant was a huge black-bearded fellow, resembling the ogres in fairy-tales but with one of the mildest and most Early-Christian countenances I have ever seen. Here I purchased a folio of Sir Thomas Browne, two folios of Dryden’s Plays, a folio of Beaumont and Fletcher — the very one that Lamb describes buying and “collating,” late one night, with sister’s help — Baskerville’s Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius, bound in plum-coloured morocco, Fuller’s *Holy State*, Bentley’s famous edition of *Paradise Lost*, in quarto, with a lovely *youthful* picture of the author on the title-page, and the vast illustrated first edition of Dryden’s *Vergil* with pictures of all the contemporary magnates — as Mr. de —— would have called them — who subscribed for its printing.

There was another second-hand bookshop, in those days, not far from the back-alley retreat where I learnt — or *should* have learnt — that bedrooms hired at eighteen pence “for a short time” had a sedative rather than a provocative effect upon my amorous propensities. Here — in the bookshop I mean — there used to sit upon a high stool, which always made me think of the seat Eli the Prophet used, a sort of venerable image of a book-collector, of apoplectic proportions, and with a heavy hydrocephalic head. The type of books *he* kept were both more expensive and more recondite than those in the “Smith” shop. They were indeed totally beyond my means and absolutely beyond my book knowledge. But the white-faced idol on the high stool was an incorrigible controversialist and full of the most erudite heresies. Argument he placed above cash; and with him I would argue by the hour upon the “Baconian Theory,” he defending it, I attacking it; till one day in the heat of discussion I roundly warned my gentleman that persons who “moved the bones,” even in a spiritual sense, of the Man of Stratford, were in danger of falling under the curse of that great known Unknown. My heated words, as chance would have it, were grimly fulfilled; for, a few days after this particular argument, on reaching my friend's shop I found the shutters closed, and a little card affixed to the entrance announcing *the death of the proprietor*.

No prophetic voice came, however, to my own ears just then, warning me that young men who frequented bookshops to gather fuel for their lascivious thoughts are in danger of bolts from heaven. As youthful opinions go, I was orthodox enough in those days both about God and about Shakespeare. It was only after I had lectured in Germany, and made friends with German professors, that serious divergencies from received human opinions began to sprout up in my rustic mind. Meanwhile, as has happened before in human psychology, correct opinions continued to run parallel with secret vices.

I found a small bookshop in Eastbourne, whose proprietor — almost as youthful as myself and by no means confined to a high stool — dealt in a sort of private lending library of fantastical "erotica." The chief peculiarity of this young man — who by the way must have saved many perverse persons from putting thoughts into actions — was the muted whispers in which it was his custom to speak. He gave me the impression of being a priest — a somewhat ambiguous young Ion — of the worship of the mother of Eros. Never once did I hear his voice raised above this sacrosanct murmur. From him I procured much dubious printed matter, which with trembling hands and shaking knees — for "wicked" books, have always seduced me far more than "wicked" persons — I would carry back by train to Cooksbridge and carefully conceal when Mrs. Curme came to say good night.

It was, however, from the Brighton shop that I bought in French the *Memoirs of Casanova*, and I may say at once that it was more for the sake of my vice than for the sake of my culture that I learnt this “language of civilization” as they call it.

I was indeed torn in two directions as far as books were concerned. I soon acquired a mania for reading Guy de Maupassant. This was not, I can assure you, due to any love for his “art”; for I held then, as I hold now, that that kind of tricky brevity is the very lowest form of literature. Nor was it due to any respect for his ideas; for the materialism of this Norman sportsman, whom Nietzsche so guilelessly calls “that great Latin” never had the least appeal for me. I was one who on the one hand remained an obstinate idealist, and on the other hand remained a desperate pursuer of cerebral lusts. But this cult for Guy de Maupassant’s works most fatally conflicted with my passion for old quartos and folios.

I actually went so far as to carry in my arms — it was as heavy as half a sack of flour — that colossal first edition of Dryden’s *Vergil*. I carried it over the Downs to the train at Lewes, scrambling up Mount Harry like a maniac, glowering down like a demon at Sir George’s umbrageous domain, hurrying past the racecourse, and not resting till I had exchanged my burden for I know not how many paper-backed volumes of the French Realist. But no sooner had I scrambled through these books — and I devoured them day and night — than all I wanted in the world was to get back my *Vergil*! This, by means of drawing still deeper on my domestic exchequer, I eventually did; and though I doubt if my dear son will ever want, any more than I ever wanted, to *read Vergil* in that un-Vergilian translation, he will, I hope, be pleased to see this stately tome ornamenting his shelf for many a long year. It will at any rate be a “cloudy trophy” of the intermittent character of his progenitor’s aberrations.

No member of my extremely inartistic family has less of an artist’s feelings than I. My father has managed, in his majestic and silent way, to instil into me the feeling that it is undignified, affected, effeminate, and even fashionable, to take the least interest in bric-à-brac, or what they call "objects of art." Thus I can well recall — and I am to-day thoroughly ashamed of this, for my father would never have done such a thing — habitually tearing out the fly-leaves of my books to use as "spills" to light my pipe. I was a destructive idiot in this; but it was a different thing from when once as a child I beat off the heads of a quantity of daisies with a stick, because two girls were insisting on amusing themselves with each other and ignoring me — I can remember the furious life-hatred — it was in a meadow at Upwey near the Wishing-Well — that filled my heart as I murdered those daisies.

And yet parallel with this boorish brutality I would carry my insane fastidiousness so far as never to allow my masculine guests to touch a book on my shelves after visiting my privy until they had washed their hands. I can remember once when Theodore came from his Suffolk farm to stay with me at Court House being rebuked by him for this lapse from gentlemanly behaviour in terms so extreme that I never erred in *that* manner again! But I erred in much worse ways.

That is the curse upon anyone who has once got the gad-fly grubs of neurosis under the skin. These devils have no sooner been driven from sucking blood out of one part of you, than behold! they are trying it again at another. All I can say is — for the comfort of any kindred sufferers who may read these lines — that it *is* possible, by the crafty use of certain habitual mental tricks, without having to retire whither my poor guide to Court House retired, to go on living in the world and having moments too of thrilling enjoyment, while you remain perfectly aware that you are *not wholly sane*. Let me indeed breathe this in your ears. There is a deep and subtle pleasure, that only we madmen know, in outwitting these psychiatrists by never being driven to the point of having to undergo their treatment, or if you *have* to undergo it, in making them believe you are cured, when you know perfectly well you are *not* cured! And let me add, that, just as I saved myself from my worst suffering at Sherborne by pretending to be mad, it is possible to save yourself, *the other way round*, by pretending to be sane!

Well, to continue my story. It was about this epoch that I suddenly became obsessed by a terror of being killed in a railway accident! This fear I overcame in the most shameful way; a way which I kept secret from everyone. Littleton, Llewelyn, my *other* Littleton — they are all now hearing of this, with the rest of my readers, for the first time! *I secretly always travelled first-class*. I now can remember the queer sense of shame — feeling my father's majestic eye upon me in unspeakable reproach — with which, at the little aperture in that Cooks-bridge station I used to receive my *white ticket*. "First-class return to Eastbourne, if you please," I would murmur, in as natural a voice as I could assume; and there was the white ticket, handed out to me quite simply, as if I had been Sir George himself. That bit of cardboard used to burn in my pocket as if it had been the "yellow ticket" that poor Sonia had to get in *Crime and Punishment*; and once how covered with confusion was I, when an easy-going acquaintance of mine, passing along the platform at Lewes, perceived, crouching in that padded interior behind the carefully curtained window and those cushiony supports for languid wrists, the familiar hooked-nosed profile and protruding upper-lip of his crony, the tenant of Court House! I got the notion, you see, that first-class passengers did not appear so frequently in the lists of the dead in railway accidents as did those who travelled third-class; and I suspect I was not far wrong in that conjecture.

It must not be supposed that because, with my stomach seething with acids struck from the rock of my nerves by the rod of my vice, I would give my five Eastbourne lectures upon a glass of milk and an oaten biscuit, that I had outgrown that greediness which transformed Powys Major into a demon, who at Tuffin's pastry-shop would gorge itself on apricot paté, and at Wildman's tea-table would devour plateful after plateful of stickily-new bread and butter, using its front teeth like a famished rodent.

I had my mania for bread and milk all the while I lived at Court House, and I found a bakery in Brighton where they sold a particular kind of whole-wheat bread, very sweet and very thick and fragrant, which, melting in the milk, formed a gruel as "thick and slab" as an ogreish heart could wish. The same Lewes acquaintance who caught me in that first-class carriage caught me once running breathlessly up the hill from the Brighton front to the Brighton station, with my arms full, not of classical folios, but of naked loaves of bread, which according to my notion of what was poetical, I would insist on hugging to my breast without any paper covering.

My conscience was just as active, however, as my vices; and though the gastric acids induced by my activities used to pour out over my ulcers like sea-water over sea-anemones nothing could induce me to relinquish my exhausting editorship of *Ultima Verba* and *Noctis Susurri*, or my eternal assignations with Mr. de ——. Towards this old gentleman indeed I acted more like a devoted young woman than like a fellow-poet.

But a great event came into my life at this time, namely my first encounter with Bernard Price O'Neill, my best and life-long friend. I owe my friendship with Dr. O'Neill entirely to my marriage. Without my marriage I should never have known this man of unique genius. A double-dyed Celt, born of a mingling of Irish and Welsh blood, Bernie O'Neill has been not only my best friend but the best friend our family as a whole has ever had, or is ever likely to have. It has been his custom for years — and long may it remain so! — to visit every one of my father's offspring in faithful sequence during his summer vacation from his London practice. We all tickle his comprehensive humour in one way or another; and without betraying a single confidence — for his discretion is as deep as his comprehension is wide — he has acquired a particular and separate understanding with each one of us. How it has come about that such comprehensive sympathy is possible — for all of us *feel* as if we were divided from one another by fathomless gulfs — it is impossible for me to say.

Though Bernie is an admirable physician, I cannot think that his comprehensive human instincts are scientific. I think they are what Spengler, speaking of Goethe's mental processes, calls physiognomic. They betray an æsthetic as well as a mystical relish for the fact that people's characters are as fabulous as they are. They penetrate and enjoy, these instincts of his, as if everyone he met were a precious plum-coloured morocco-bound volume, printed by Baskerville.

What have we not, we Neanderthal-skulled Powyses, learnt from this soft-voiced humorist, this whimsical connoisseur of the Daedalean Palimpsest! His very expressions have been dipped again and again in the dyeing vats of each of our separate styles of living, of thinking, of speaking, of writing. He had, he *has*, the hall-mark of the true humorist, that trick of using the same imaginative tag, like the refrain of an old magic song, again and again, applying its point, its tang, its prosperity, to the contrasting chances of the moment. His goodness is the goodness of Nature herself, something easy, inevitable, spontaneous, non-moral, beyond the ordinary distinctions of right and wrong. His quaint aphorisms, no! not aphorisms, his fantastic oracles, no! not oracles, his rare commentaries, all these had a mellowness and a lustre from mere repetition that thickened out for us our lives, so that when we came together we quoted him without quoting him, and felt over again, in a kind of secular transubstantiation, the rich strangeness of his unique reactions! He supplied our Powysian life-cult — so rustic, so earth-bound — with overtones and undertones drawn from the erudition we suspected, the popular slang we avoided, the art we despised. He secretly fed his own fantastical imagination with revelations from the circus, the vaudeville, the argot of the market-place, the broadsheets of the whole mad Beggar's Opera of the great city. He was an adept in the extremist pages of all the Cagliostros of modern literature. He knew every drawing of Beardsley, every quip of Whistler, every paradox of Wilde. But below these, while he seemed for ever rolling upon his tongue some Shandean extravagance, it was Rabelais who garnished his most characteristic accents with the full body of their idiomatic savour.

What had Bernie done, felt, thought, said; how had Bernie behaved, reacted, *looked*, under the maddest conjunction of surprising circumstances — thus we were always reporting to each other.

Slight but plump; frail but solid, daring but retiring, wayward as an Aegripan in the train of Silenus, yet meticulous as an illuminator of ancient missals, Bernie was then, and is still, one of those unequalled personalities who appear sometimes upon the earth as if to put what are called "creative artists" to complete shame. For his unrivalled genius must e'en perish with the memory of us who know him as he is; unless, which is possible, he is destined to survive us all! For Dr. O'Neill can never grow old. Like an elfin being, drawing nourishment from some celestial fountain of youth, "age cannot wither him, nor custom stale."

His nose is thin, his lips full, his brow spacious, his eyes shining with a mixture of animal furtiveness and divine intelligence. His clothes seem always to hang heavily upon him, as if in his unobtrusive personality some court physician of field-mice, marmosets, and wombats had assumed human attire. An impassioned virtuoso under his lamp and among his books, his prints, and his thousand whim-whams of recondite inspiration, he is yet even more himself when running hastily forward, his pinched nose, grey moustache, shining eyes, perspiring forehead, protruding, like his arms, from his bundled attire, until falling down on his knees before the object that has excited his attention, some fairy-ring, some caterpillar, some fungus, some flower, some beetle, some moth, some slow-worm, some feather, some gossamer-seed, some bit of moss or lichen, some queerly-marked leaf, or oak-apple, or rose-blight, or cuckoo-spit-grub, he examines his treasure with the ardour of an obsessed naturalist.

Heaven forbid I should annoy him, as Coleridge annoyed Lamb, by the over-unctuous tone of my words. I would fain describe my friend as Suetonius would describe a Cæsar. But certainly to see him advancing along the middle of a country lane in his woolly vestments, peeping, peering, pondering, pillaging and for ever making little violent rushes, like a Pantagruelian humming-bird, from hedge to hedge, is to see a human being for whom no single leaf’s tracery, no single butterfly’s wing, no scratch, no mole, no stain, no scurf, no wrinkle, no blot, no dye, no freckle, upon the smallest spore of organic life, lacks or is without the occult signature of the Absolute. And the same intense microscopic interest in life, half-scientific, half-mystical, that gives Bernie such a radiant look as he turns the pages of his drawings from the old Masters, and causes him to run so eagerly into fens and bogs and swamps and spinneys and forest-glades, hunting for white violets, or snakes’ skins, or silver-washed fritillaries, or hawks’ feathers, or fairy-cups, or golden-eyed toads, gives to his intercourse with all feminine persons, young and old, pretty and plain, a mysterious enchantment that is hypnotic. In spite of a congenital deafness that prevents him hearing everything that these “sweet-natured wenches” — for such all women seem to him and probably *are* under his clairvoyant comprehension — murmur in his ear, he behaves to them in a manner as gentle as Chiron the Centaur when he carried Argive Helen across the flood.

Indescribably happy were the days — always too short and too rare — that I was permitted to spend with Dr. O’Neill. We used to make spasmodic excursions together in many directions, although it was left to Theodore to have the crowning interest of accompanying this Celtic Rondibilis to the shrine of the Holy Bottle in Chinon on the Vienne. But I have stayed with him in one of those historic narrow streets near the British Museum, for it was in a bookshop there that we bought together the three volumes of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea* translated by Haldane; and I have stayed with him in Brighton, for I have been in his company when I was meeting the young woman who scolded me so for trying to dress her up like a postman.

But it was at Weymouth — Weymouth, always the centre of the circumference of my mortal life — that the disordered fandangos of my obsessions received their most memorable “imprimatur” from this Physician of the Bona Robas of Hammersmith. Do you recall, my dear friend, how we once stayed at the Gloucester Hotel and talked so late into the night on that moonlit balcony looking out over the glittering sands and the statue of George III? I dare say I have often, in my cat-head manner, missed some delicate irony of your invention, but I have an impression that it was at once the oracular gravity and the undeniable wisdom of some moonlit talk between Goethe and Jacobi that was the theme of your fancy that particular night. And have you forgotten all that I said to you about some anonymous daughter of Nereus, who may have been Glauce, or

Thaleia, or Cymodoce, or Thoe, or ox-eyed Halie, or Limnoreia, or Lacra, or Doto, or Proto, or Callia neira, or glorious Galatea, or Orithyia, or fair-tressed Amatheia, and whose loveliness I courted, after my cerebral fashion, while you were resting for a while, out of the burning sun? It was on that visit to Weymouth that we used to dodge the grand tables of the royal hostelry where we slept and have all our meals in a little tea-shop where the eggs used to be poached with an especial delicacy and laid upon the buttered toast with a peculiar daintiness by a young woman who was far gone in her pregnancy.

It was in a tea-shop like this, perhaps in this very one, that Hardy once told me he had caught a vision of the original of his Tess, long after he had told her story; and it was of Tess that Bernie and I thought as that friendly girl waited upon us.

Theodore — who had by this time got rid of his Suffolk farm, and was staying at Studland in Dorset, not far from where he finally settled down — came on a steamer to meet us during that visit, and spent several days with us in the rooms of a Mrs. Fancy near the old backwater. I shall not easily forget the striking impression I got of this strange brother of mine as he waved to us from that incoming steamer as we stood on the pier-end. His visage could look sometimes as stern as an ancient stone circle; but at other times it would crumple up into a fathomless chuckle of amusement, when, under his heavy moustache, for he wore a moustache in those days, and often against his will, his mouth would twitch, in tune with the flickering droop of his tragic eyelids. I can well recall on one occasion during this *à trois* visit to Weymouth, how Theodore and I — drawn together by some funny ineradicable feeling for that tract of salt-marshes known as Lodmoor, by crossing which any child of my father must of necessity feel the bony fingers of the dead past grope at his vitals — left Bernie on the pebbles beyond the sea-wall, to watch whether a net, being then pulled in, had a mermaid in it, and made our way across this singular expanse, going even as far — led on by that indescribable bond, or covenant, or understanding between us — as a rather desolate copse of sea-bitten, wind-shrivelled trees, where once, *long ago*, at least so it seemed to us then, we had exchanged various romantic secrets, secrets in which certain occult symbols, such as "The Dagger and the Primrose," kept repeating themselves; secrets that were, I can assure you, far too ambiguous and bizarre to be more than hinted at to Littleton.

Theodore's attitude to Lodmoor, as well as to that thick ever-green hedge between the Public Gardens and Preston Road, along the dusty length of which we used to trail, so wearily very often, on our way home, as well as to that great stone house, which I used to think must be the biggest house in the world, as well as to that stucco house with a tower, where Dr. Smith used to live, under whose jurisdiction Penn House survived so long to be our family-refuge, Theodore's attitude, I say, to all these things, must have been very much the same as mine; full of queer, odd, not always pleasant or always pretty flotsam-tags of memory, funny feelings, that seem to be at once as sacred as those fantastical objects the Israelites kept in the Ark of the Covenant, and as negligible as the falling snowflakes upon the drive at Montacute, that Rogers used to sweep away even while they were falling.

To me all these re-visitings of Weymouth were attended with thoughts that, as Wordsworth says of the weight of custom, were "heavy as frost, and deep, almost, as life." There were certain moments when those pebbles opposite Brunswick Terrace seemed to contain a mystery that pressed upon my brain, they and the deep greenish-grey volume of inrolling waves that were so deep just there until I felt as though they belonged *to a life within life*. Hard round wet pebbles and transparent depths of water — what was the secret they held; and what was it that made their conjunction just there so peculiarly significant? And the smell there used to be between the *outer* door of Penn House and the *inner* door — a smell that had sand in it, and faint, just discernible fish-scales in it, and riband-seaweed in it, and wet linen in it — why did that particular smell, full of sensations totally distinct from any I was feeling at this later time, always come stealing over me again?

It was the same when, with Bernie and Theodore, I crossed the ferry over the Weymouth Harbour, from the stone wharf near the entrance to the pier to the slippery stone steps at the foot of the old turf-covered Nothe. As I dipped my hand in the flowing tide and watched the short easy strokes of the boatmen, those strokes where the oar was scarcely ever turned in the "feathering" twist of the wrist which my father always used so conscientiously, my mind would be struggling to bring together three quite different strata of emotion. I wanted to give myself up to the soft, faint half-sad feeling of my escaping past. I wanted to savour to the full the rich fantastical humours of my two original companions, humours which always grew more and more divergent, as the accidents of wayfaring and the bizarre shocks of chance encounters roused them into life. And finally — and this third urge of mine was fatally disturbing to the ease of mind required for the other two — I would be all strung up with the expectation of some chance of satisfying my absorbing desire to gaze undisturbed at those feminine charms, *teretesque suras*, that at this epoch could make the world a paradise to me.

I could always confide quite freely in Bernie about such matters. He was invariably sympathetic with the most convoluted turns and twists of my perversities, and would often willingly, at a word, separate himself from me when I desired for my wicked purposes to be free and alone. But how often when our excursions were over and I had lavished long precious unreturning hours on my exhausting and barren quest did I curse myself as an insane fool for preferring such a sterile search to the divine glow of his companionship! Of course on the rare occasions when my fastidious eroticism was satisfied I did not regret it; but much more often did it happen that I sacrificed my invaluable hours with Bernie and at the same time was cheated of any reward for this treachery.

Bernie and his family were accustomed, after my marriage, to stay near us at Court House; either hard-by, or in the outskirts of the village of Plumpton which lay in the direction of Ditchling Beacon. And it happened that there came, before long, to stay with Bernie, at Plumpton, just as my old friend Harry Lyon would come to stay with me, a new and most resplendent invader of my life. This was Louis Umfraville Wilkinson, in whose parents' school in Suffolk Theodore always says he was treated as boys *should* be treated at school. It was in their boyhood that Theodore made friends with Louis Wilkinson; but it was at this time, when he came to stay with Bernie at Plumpton, that I first met him. And what a resplendent personage he was! A good deal over six feet, of a frame at once powerful and soft, his locks bronzy-gold, his nose masterful, his mouth formidable, his cheeks quick to blush a bewitching carmine, Louis, fresh from Oxford, full of an irresponsible and heathen zest for adventure, was certainly a startling apparition on the twilit stage of my furtive and gingerly-stepped *pas seul* round the maypole of life.

Theodore had, in his own curious manner, prepared me for this resplendent apparition. He had, after his fashion, named Louis Wilkinson "the Archangel," and having once established this awe-inspiring appellation he would treat the word in as familiar and homely manner as if he had called his friend Golden-Locks. He would say: "This Archangel likes his meat under-done”; or he would say: “This Archangel is afraid of cows”; or he would say: “This Archangel wears a belly-band round his waist.” Once when he remarked: “This Archangel is a good-looking dog,” his interlocutor indignantly burst out: “Good-looking, say you? He is beautiful in mind and beautiful in body!”

Below all his exterior imposingness, however, and for all his Oxonian intransigence, our handsome Louis had many innocent and charming characteristics. He had a way of blushing scarlet, like a tall girl, at any word that put him to shame, till the blush, suffusing his manly cheeks, went burning down his soft neck till you felt that it reached his very bosom. Under the surface of his antinomian humours he was — what am I saying? he *is* — of a solid sweet-natured un-malicious disposition. He is even, under the surface, profoundly domestic, if not monogamistic, and his real essential egoism — for egoistic he certainly is — is rather that of the Mid-Victorian era than of our present disconcerting epoch. With his deep-rolling resonant voice he was born to be an orator just as I was born to be a comic actor, and I am proud to recall that I was the one who first persuaded him to stalk forth, like Mark Antony in an Oxford gown, upon the University Extension platform.

It has been one of the most revealing things in my life, the peculiar nature of my friendship with Louis. He was always, and with touching fidelity, one of Theodore’s staunchest friends. He liked, admired, and respected Theodore much more than he ever has done me. With Llewelyn, however, he was the most at ease; and many a time have I listened to one irrepressible laughing-fit after another, as if from a couple of Prep-boys, while these two healthy-minded lovers of Helios Hyperion were together. I will not go so far as to say that Louis’s attitude to me came to resemble the downright attitude of D. H. Lawrence to the sophisticated Middleton Murry, for Louis has absolutely nothing in common with the author of *The Rainbow*; but all those ambiguous margins and fluctuating windrows of my nature — to which even Llewelyn has referred ere now as “John’s spiritual insincerity” — were to Louis unmitigated vexation. When they seemed to him authentic he found them morbid; but as a rule they struck him as riddled through and through with a perverse and sickly falsity that revolted him.

As for me I felt sometimes affectionate to him, sometimes jealous of him, but always so completely different from him that I would soon lose interest in any attempt to justify myself. The more strongly did he express his opinion of my mental and spiritual trickery, pointing out that I was betraying all the hardly-won values of the life of reason, the more my masochistic and malicious humility would lead him on to misunderstand me and lambast me further and further. At such times he resembled a great healthy-natured male unicorn, in the midst of a garden of fragrant white roses, who suddenly shows by his tossings and tramplings and rearings that a serpent has got through the picket-fence.

When we were both lecturing in America he expressed most beautifully his mixed feelings towards me in that admirable story, *The Buffoon*; and from this book the discerning reader can see how genuinely fond of me he was, but, at the same time — aye! how hurt and irritated!

The last time we met, and years ago *that* seems to me now, Louis discoursed to me, with extraordinary eloquence, on his ideas about the art of Satire, a form of literature which he insisted upon rating extremely high; in fact as high as any. The truth is that Louis, at his best, belongs to the school of Aristophanes, while I, at *my* best, try to combine the somewhat contradictory characteristics of Socrates and Euripides! I merely mention this, the latest of our many dissensions, to indicate the fascinating intellectual gulf that divided us. For of course to my mind — save for the accursed art of the short story — satire is about as abhorrent as anything I can think of! It is true I enjoy, in my convoluted masochism, being the *subject* of satire; but the satiric element in my favourite classics, in Rabelais, for instance, or in Don Quixote, I treat just as I used to treat as a child the sophisticated fooling in *Alice in Wonderland*. I take it gravely and literally! I pretend to myself by one of those lying tricks that my friend takes exception to, that it is *pure fantastic narrative*. Louis, I suppose, could catch me out over Swift, for it is hard to see how you could take *The Tale of a Tub* in this premeditatedly literal manner, but it is true I have always preferred to read *about* Swift than to read Swift; though I have, all the same, a shrewd inkling that the particular kind of madness revealed in his terrible and revolting verses is a morbidity more familiar to me than to "this Archangel."

In those Court House days, Bernie and Louis were extremely intimate not only with me but also with Harry Lyon. There was a time when Bernie lived under the same roof with Harry Lyon, just as there was a time when he took part in the publishing business with Ralph Shirley; but these epochs were transitory. Between such a double-dyed Celt as Bernie and my formidable Saxon-Thane cousin there could not be any permanent intimacy; and, as for Harry, it only needed the conversion of this excitable Norman to the Christian religion to fling down a reverberating bomb-shell in our midst.

It was after a voyage he made to Australia that Thomas Henry actually became a practising Anglo-Catholic, and this event brought down on his devoted Bayeux Tapestry skull, not only the satiric wit of "this Archangel" but a great outburst of sheer schoolboy ribaldry from all of us except myself.

Another new friend who, as women say, “came into my life” at that epoch was, just then, steadily, year by year, leading me towards the Church of Rome; and thus, though my arguments with Harry went on with redoubled fury I was hardly in a position to make fun of him. Our earnest high-pitched ringing tones used to rise night after night from that lonely little farmhouse. I can well remember once seeing the form of a very large fox outlined against the sky on the hill above. Perhaps the strident tones of theological argument have an attraction for foxes. At any rate I remember how the beast — and it looked like a wolf — lifted up its head and barked. I let Thora out to deal with it. But Thora was reluctant to ascend such a steep redoubt in the face of the enemy.

Llewelyn was still a schoolboy at that time; but he soon went to Corpus and soon after that made friends with Louis; and then it was brought about that Suffolk country-ways— “I’ll larn ‘ee to be a twoad!” — and Dorset country-ways joined hands, if I may say so, in the rude heathen dance that was danced round the passionate convertite that Harry had now become. These honeysuckle rogues even composed a ditty of derision about him which they would chant in unison together, like a pair of young cannibals at a blood-feast. You might have supposed that this youthful extravagance at the expense of my ancient bosom crony would have roused me to his defence, especially as I was myself hovering round the idea of becoming a Roman Catholic; but not at all! I had suffered so much from this hard-hitting proselyte’s sardonic sense of humour that I took an evil pleasure in seeing him baited. Nor will the observant reader forget the occasion at the Prep when I peeped out from my ambush by the latrine wall to see a small boy beaten by my minion. To derive a secret and malicious delight from such vicarious sport came only too easily into the circle of my deep-rooted vice.

The religious emotion is an emotion very closely connected with sex; and the feeling it excites very quickly gathers that dangerous quiver in the tone of its expression that implies some stimulated sex-nerve. Miss Weston, in her book *From Ritual to Romance*, has shown how the images of the spear and the grail in the ancient cults were a sexual symbolism converted into a religious and romantic one.

Pondering on all this now I have a notion that my platonic Idealism, running parallel with my cerebral perversity, was secretly more annoying to Harry Lyon — as heresy is always more annoying than infidelity — than all the downright pagan naughtiness of Louis and Llewelyn.

My brother Bertie formally entered at this time, as my own son did, a score of years later, his remarkable architectural office which was then in High Street, Kensington. Here the unwearied Harry Lyon would revolve, like a human searchlight, in his velvet jacket and his elegant shoes round his great table of drawings, biting furiously at the stem of his pipe, as if it were the mazzard of an enemy, and ever and anon flashing forth, from his quivering Cardinal Newman lineaments, sword-thrust after sword-thrust at those who refused to bow down before Jesus. Assuredly out of this young man's commanding mouth "there went forth," as the Scripture says, "a sharp two-edged sword!"

It was an extraordinary moment in my life when I brought pressure to bear on my father to allow Bertie to enter Harry Lyon's office. Deep down, in the pit of my stomach, below every argument I was using, there kept tugging, as if my father's long fingers had laid hold of my navel-string, that same deep proud exclusive old Welsh prejudice against this familiarity with the papistical "House of Rimmon," which he himself was feeling! It was my father in me that all along had reserved a scoriated "Terre Gastée" at the bottom of my heart, where no lively camerado could cultivate a civilized garden.

"Up to a certain point, up to a certain point, John!" he kept repeating, when I asked him whether we ought not to have confidence in our fellow-creatures.

I can remember, too, the actual spot, at Burpham in Sussex, a few years later — at the foot of Wepham hill it was — where Harry Lyon said indignantly to me "I would like to talk to your father, *man to man*."

Ah! Thomas Henry, I am afraid you are not the only human being who would have liked to talk "man to man" with the Vicar of Montacute! No, no! Why should there not be one solitary, individual left in this lively world who is reserved with all mortal persons, "beyond a certain point, John"?

What an unfair advantage the eloquent has over the inarticulate if the inarticulate does not sometimes keep, as they say in Dorset, "his wone self *to* his wone self"!

Bernie, on the contrary, never found my father's proud reserve in the least annoying. It was the chain-armoured crusader in Thomas Henry, I think, that felt so sure that Christian humility should *be carried by force* into the remotest fastnesses of heathen pride. Bernie, being even more Celtic than my father, understood perfectly these basic withdrawings. Bernie himself is unfathomably reserved. Here are we … three writers … Llewelyn, Theodore and John; and the devil a one of us has Bernie ever taken into his confidence as to what he thinks of our writings! He, from whom I first heard of Dostoievsky, Theodore of Nietzsche, Llewelyn of Montaigne, has never, no! not once through all these years, betrayed by a single word how our books strike him! The truth is, the more I think of Bernie, the more I come to recognize that the gift of expression, whether in speech, or in writing, or in any art at all, is totally and entirely inferior to a certain indescribable genius for life.

My own genius for life in those days was shockingly crude. It is extraordinary what violent contrasts of selfishness and unselfishness there were in my habits. I would leave everybody, leave everything, leave my duties, my responsibilities, my affections, my own mental interests, in order to rush off to my weird and not very human pleasures at Brighton! Certainly my peculiar vice did — for good or for evil — help to de-humanize me, even beyond my natural and, so to say, my congenital inhumanity. To get to Brighton, by hook or by crook, became for me what his particular drug is to some hopeless drug addict. I would have gone there from a bedside, from a death-bed. I *did* go there from one death-bed. With this mania dragging at my accursed imagination I would make any tricky excuse to any mortal person. I acquired that sinister cunning that corpses sometimes look as if they were endowed with, and that madmen — with much more extreme forms of madness than mine — so often reveal!

While I was on my way to Brighton I trod upon air, I smelt stocks and pinks and lilies-of-the-valley. I resembled a magician's puppet come to life. I ran down the slopes of the hills. I imagined myself on the way to some incredible paradise of sylphs. All this was not — you may be sure — for the sake of any real sylph, any more than Don Quixote's feelings for his imaginary Dulcinea were a real lover's feelings. It was for the sake of *anonymous ankles*, that I rushed over those miles and miles of downs, ankles whose accompanying human personalities I could not have put up with for half a day!

All this while my gastric ulcers used periodically to seize upon me and make me press myself upon railings and lean over gates and jab my knuckles in desperation into the pit of my stomach. My nervous excitements used to cause the most deadly acids to pour forth within me, and trickle, like drops of some fermenting devil’s brew, upon the raw places they constantly aggravated. I used to tell myself as a sort of comfort — and I still hold it to be the truth — that I was lucky to have these sufferings in a portion of my body so far removed from my brain. What I always regarded — and still do — as the worst kind of suffering is pain in the head, pain caused by neuralgia or by earache or toothache. My ulcers were often intensified by spasms of villainous dyspepsia, and they would wake me up at night, and I would roll from side to side, in sharp distress. These nightly attacks were always what I dreaded most. In the daytime — though I used to twist about on the floor sometimes, as Llewelyn noted later, like an injured wasp — I always seemed able to keep up my high spirits. I frequently felt happy and strong within my soul even while I was writhing like a wounded slow-worm.

Following the example of my father, I used at that time to bathe in the sea with a grim and stoical joy. I never did this at Brighton, for I grudged the waste of precious minutes that could be more excitingly spent, but I always bathed at Wey mouth whenever a chance offered. I had never won more than my “Reds” at Sherborne, which meant that I could not swim very far; and I wonder now to think of the courage with which — coward as I was — I would swim out into the sea beyond my depth and then turn and swim back. When I turned to go back I had to concentrate my whole nature upon my intention to get into my depth again. These occasions when I swam, even a short distance, out of my depth, often come back to me now! I used to get a thrilling pleasure when with my head elongated above the waves, and feeling as primeval as an ichthyosaurus, I would stare at that noble line of cliffs, Redcliff and White Nose and the rest, stretching away towards St. Alban’s Head!

By the way I always think of that monumental promontory under the name of St. Alban's Head, though they now tell me it should be "St. Aldhelm's" after the Saxon saint who founded Sherborne School. But my father thought nothing of St. Aldhelm. He had a childish difficulty in pronouncing certain words; and when this difficulty arose he either *made them his own* by mispronouncing them, or he relegated them to a limbo of artistic and fashionable affectations.

My own malicious hostility to both fashionable and affected people finds a deep and I dare say a misanthropic satisfaction in saying "St. Albans" when I know it is "St. Aldhelms"; and I fancy this obstinacy of mine is an illuminating psychological illustration of the amount of malice and black bile that is so often mixed in with the poetical and romantic element in all Conservatism. The truth is I am a born *reactionary*; and so I think is the Devil. It is God who enjoys stirring things up and forcing the past to lose itself in the future. The Devil has a romantic passion for the past; and when you carry the past far enough back it becomes the chaos out of which our energetic and lively world scrambled into being. But, mark ye, I am not so conceited as to think that life would be tolerable or even possible if left to the Devil. It is at some compromise with God and his evolutionary methods that we ought to aim.

But to return to these occasions when I stared at St. Alban's Head as I was swimming, with considerable trepidation, out of my depth. It has now become a kind of religious rite with me, like muttering a Latin Psalm, to revive the feelings with which I swam out of my depth. I turn it into a mood in which, with the pride of the devil, I defy the world! I am at bottom a sort of three-in-one, like a Welsh Triad! I am a Punchinello, a Proteus, and an extremely fussy old woman. And this Punchinello-Proteus, old-Miss-Betsy soul of mine can change its triadic skin like a snake. And it can work the most curious conjuring tricks. It can for example derive extraordinary pleasure from feeling itself to be *a young girl.* This girlish metempsychosis is the one that I enjoy toying with in my imagination most of all. And this is exactly — if you are a real psychological critic — what you would expect a Words worthian like me to feel. Of course I often enjoy feeling myself to be an extremely old Punchinello-Puppet, but when I change from this into the part of a young girl, in the complicated cosmic play of which I am the protagonist — aye! but what a thrill I get! It has always been a singular satisfaction to me to indulge in this curious imagination. I derive a quaint sort of genuine erotic pleasure from turning my withered elderly shanks into girlish limbs.

Indeed my own view of all this pathological theorizing that Freud has started — my own sympathies are very much in favour of Jung — is that our present psycho-analytical dogmas break down when they deal with a person who, like me, has both an abnormally powerful imagination and an abnormally strong will. For myself I disagree with this whole modern tendency to disparage the will and the imagination in favour of *letting yourself go*. My theory is that it is with the reason that we attain the irrational, with the will that we change our character, and with the imagination that we re-create the world!

If for instance I were to announce to an orthodox psychiatrist that I derive extraordinary pleasure from imagining myself a young girl, especially with a young girl in love with another young girl, his stupidly rigid pigeon-holes of thought compel him to think of me as — well! you know the sort of jargon he would use in the effort to turn me into some fixed, definite, finally-labelled victon of abnormal eroticism. Not at all! A person can be childish without having infantile fixation. A person can be influenced by his father without having the opposite of the Œdipean

Complex. What I would say of myself is that I have a morbid fastidiousness, a super-refined, almost *maidenly* detestation of the grosser aspects of normal sexuality. It seems quite simple to me. In my non-human cult for impossibly slender sylphs I resolve myself — like all true contemplative ecstatics — *into the element I contemplate*.

When I write my essay about my great master Wordsworth I shall show how his cerebral mystical passion for young women is intimately bound up with his abnormally sensual sensitiveness to the elements. *He wanted his girl to be an Elemental.* And in his poetry — where people betray their deepest souls — he loved, above all, to *imagine himself a girl.* I myself idolize the particular type of a girl I call a sylph to such a tune that I want to destroy everything that is not sylph-hood. But I still want to make love to what attracts me! And so, refining upon flesh-and-blood and winnowing flesh-and-blood, till it becomes purified if not beyond Nature certainly beyond normal *human* nature, I contemplate my sylph as if I were another sylph, or, if you prefer it, as if I were a salamander contemplating the ravishing limbs of an undine. It is extraordinary to me, considering the abnormal strength of my constitution and the demonic force of my will, how brittle, how fragile, how attenuated, how purged, thinned-out and transparent, how like a quivering candle-flame, all my intensest responses to life are. When I am peaceful and content or when I am struggling with obstacles I feel perfectly solid and opaque; but the minute a thrilling wave of happiness transports me, I feel as if I turned into air, into fire, into water! I actually experience the physical sensations of floating, of flaming, of flowing. Who knows if a certain kind of happiness does not dehumanize me and restore me to my natural birthright of Elementalism?

It was certainly towards the non-human condition of floatingness and flowingness that I struggled, when, by swimming out beyond my depth, I felt as if I resolved myself into air and sky and sea! One of the most daring things I ever did — and Dr. O'Neill can bear witness to it, for I was with him when I did it — was to swim out into the deep sea from Chesil Beach! I had heard my father speak of doing this, and so I must needs do it too, although Bernie himself, a very good swimmer, refused to swim so far. Indeed I have never in my life seen any mortal person bathing off Chesil Beach.

And now I must turn to quite a different matter. I have. always had a very strong, an almost hurtingly strong sympathy with tramps. I would identify myself, in a sort of imaginative projection of my spirit, with these strange wayfarers. There is an awareness that has been the accompaniment of all my days; namely an intense realization of the privilege of having a roof over my head, a blanket over my bed, dry boots on my feet, a good fire to warm my shins, and a dish of bread and milk in front of me! Never have I taken for granted the inestimable privilege of being assured of the necessities of life. It is the one point where I drop my touchy individualism and grow humanly and most humbly thankful. I feel grateful not only to Chance, but to the actual human race, whose "collective" activities in this great twenty-five thousand years "Plan" of theirs, have given me protection from these elements I am always praising so! I remember well picking up a drunken tramp once, near that ditch where I fought with Littleton when he sneered at the Irish Party in Parliament, and helping this troublesome companion along the road so that he might sleep in my empty stable; and I was astonished at the haughty distaste with which my old friend, Mr. de ——, advised me to let the fellow alone.

"He belongs to the rabble, Powys," he kept muttering as the tramp lurched against us. "He is devoid of intelligence."

And then irritably avoiding the man’s staggerings, Mr. de —— would continue quoting Lucretius to me, and demonstrating from the Milky Way above our heads, the absurdity of yielding *our* intelligence to the superstitions of the vulgar herd.

As I say, I owe the friendship of Bernie entirely to my marriage, which was a singularly happy one; and I owe to my marriage too my chance of developing and deepening another intimate friendship I made at this time. I refer to my relations with John William Williams. J.W.W. was the first real *Papist* — that race of beings regarded by my father as in some especially close conspiracy with the Devil — whom I had ever spoken to in my whole life; and I was simply spell-bound by a *wisdom* that seemed like a deep rich earth full of divine nourishment where grow the multitudinous roots of the things — so many of them! — that I had come obscurely, and in my own fumbling and clumsy and rustic way, to value.

My nature at that time simply craved this kind of nourishment — something with a real tradition behind it, where the myths I loved, and the ballad-poetry I loved, went down deep into the soil of history. I was a born clown, a born zany, with senses porous to the mysterious magnetism of the Cosmos, and with the rooted gravity of a dedicated Simple Simon. That passage in Matthew Arnold’s poetry that uses the extravagant phrase: “And through his lovely mien let pierce the magic of the Universe!” would at that time have applied to me, if, in place of “lovely mien” you used my old appellation at school. “And through his ugly mug let pierce the magic of the Universe!” The intermittent hurting, from my gastric ulcers, did a great deal to keep me in a state of nervous jumpiness and touchiness; and at the same time this sharp distress, in the very centre of my magnetic vitality, seemed to increase the devouring intensity of my peculiar vice. The sharpness of the discomfort caused by my ulcers seemed to have the power of transforming itself into lust. Out of these recurrent spasms of vicious hurting a sensitized and electrified *fluid* seemed generated, that was always forcing its way up from the depths of my being! And this devil's fluid in my occulted midriff seemed to be a "conducting" rather than a "non-conducting" element, and through it, as through an intensifying medium, certain thrilling waves of magnetic vitality, coming from what seemed like some underlying planetary reservoir, kept pouring, keeping my spirits up in spite of my physical suffering. This suffering, you must understand was not a perpetual accompaniment of my days. Sometimes for weeks I would be free from it; and then it would return. It was recurrent and intermittent; and I dealt with it as I had done since it first attacked me at school, where it was intensified by those heavy sodden masses of new bread and butter that I hungrily swallowed twice a day, and by my orgies at Tuffins' pastry-shop. At the Prep the butter had been — to my taste — so unpleasant, that, just as Llewelyn used to do at home, where the butter was perfect, I would make a "sop" of it in endless cups of strong sweet tea. Now, in place of this, I had bowls of bread and milk. These I used to prepare with a great ritual for myself. I would crumble up the new loaves of whole-wheat bread that I carried home from Brighton, hugging them, as if they were girls, in their pristine nakedness, against my throbbing stomach, and then greedily devour them the minute I had got back to Court House and had washed my hands and put my head into a basin of water. On the day of lecturing at Eastbourne, where I gave five lectures in about seven hours, I never had anything but a glass of milk. Aye! how well do I recall the sensation of pressing my knuckles into my stomach while I spat forth drops of burning acid upon pavements, upon station-floors, upon railway-carriage-floors, and even on the steps of the grand houses where my lectures were given!

This hurting in my stomach went on steadily, getting worse rather than better, for some ten years after my marriage. What I remember most vividly, out of all my years of travelling about England, for I am now approaching the beginning of my "University Extension" epoch, are of course in the first place the shifts I was put to, the miserable, exhausting, pitiful shifts — rewarded by oh! such rare oases of satisfaction — to fulfil my maniacal erotic quest on these journeys, but in the second place the sickening moments of dead-sea desolation that came to me from my ulcerated stomach. I can remember now exactly, when walking in the twilight, for I have always been thrifty about taking cabs, and like my father have always preferred to walk where it was humanly possible— "I like to be *independent*, John, my boy!" — when walking, I say, through the darkening streets of some Midland factory-town, on my way from the railway station to where my host lived, how it felt to be driven to put down my bag on the kerbstone, and, thrusting my fingers down my throat in sublime disregard of the passers-by, to struggle to retch up some of the cruel burningness in my vitals. I can recall how once when I was doing this, certain artificial teeth, what nowadays they call a "plate," fell out into the gutter, and how I groped for them in the obscurity and how gratefully I pressed them back, all muddied, into my mouth and taking up my bag hurried forward once more.

Louis Wilkinson, when we were together in America, slyly observing "his old College pal" — such was his own jest, a jest that summed up one of the most complicated relationships that ever existed between two men — emerging from his train and waving the porters off, was wont in his humorous manner to observe that my expression at those times resembled the expression of a person who was "taking up" not his *grip* — for into this savage-sounding object my travelling-bag was by this time transformed — but his cross! It was, I remember, as my train was coming into Rochdale one afternoon, that the man sitting opposite me in my third-class carriage, for I can promise you that that first-class grandeur of mine did not last long, remarked, in concern at my irrepressible gyrations: “Do th’ a feel *teerible* sick, young fellow?”

By the time that I met John William Williams whose ancestors were far more Welsh than mine — and he was a friend I owe entirely to my Eastbourne lectures — what I craved to enjoy in the nature of sylphhood had become cruelly limited. So seldom, oh, so seldom, did I find what I wanted, and I only wanted to look and look, that the upshot of it was that my chief interest consisted in seeing how much I could make of the smallest cantle of “sylphishness” in young ladies. I doted on women’s limbs and on their ankles, and on their necks and on the backs of their heads, but I could only enjoy what I adored when I purged — so to speak — their femininity of all those attributes that were not only irrelevant, from my point of view, but actually forbidding. There was, for me, in the regions of possibility a ravishing feminine loveliness that I desired with a lust that absorbed my whole being. But apart from this I shrank away from them. Apart from this they filled me with a singular distaste.

By degrees, however, I came to discover that I could dally with the minds of women with extraordinary advantage to my insight into life. I came to find almost all women possessed of absorbing mental interest for me. They seemed, all of them, with the single exception of *society women*, whom I loathed from the very bottom of my heart and whom I regarded as poisoners, perverters, spoilers, degraders, ruiners, destroyers, of all the dignity and poetry of human life, to be far more interested in the sort of generalizations about the universe that interested me than men *ever* were! Indeed I am ready to confess, for all my shrinking from certain aspects of femininity and my blind fury when I found directed towards myself the least movement, the least stirring, of most kinds of feminine love, I used to find the conversation of the average men I knew a heavy effort — exciting in a way, but oh, such an effort! — after the conversation of my women-friends.

But returning to “The Catholic,” for so I got into the habit of calling him, I wish I could describe to you, as these mortal adjuncts and appendages of this divine spirit struck my attention, how my friend’s soft black-brown hair, how his nobly rounded forehead, how his deep hazel eyes, eyes that had the peculiarity of turning black, yes! of shooting forth *black fire,* when he got excited, made such a characteristic “ensemble” with his proudly compressed yet sensual underlip, his prominent and frequently unshaven chin, his thin classical nose, his frail body. “The Catholic” had been trained to be a priest and though he had never taken the final orders, it was an instinct with him to wear the dark clothes and assume many of the external manifestations of a man set apart to ponder day and night upon God and Immortality.

On the one memorable occasion when my old Sherborne friend W. E. Lutyens, the great mile-runner, met “The Catholic” he was horrified by the greenish tinge, as of certain kinds of cavern-mosses, that had come in the passing of time, to adhere to some of these pseudo-priestly garments. Lutyens — bless his mile-runner’s heart! — even went so far as to use the expression “shabby-genteel” with regard to my friend. But then our Lutyens has a shrewd smack of Teutonic blood; and it seems difficult for that great and well-drilled branch of the Undying Aryan to detect the aristocratic quality in certain types of shocking attire! Lutyens was engaged at that time in composing a poem on the Children’s Crusade into which he threw all the childlike purity of his nature; but it took more than a childlike Monk of God with the feet of an Achilles to pluck the heart out of J. W. W.’s mystery!

As for Littleton, when *he* met "The Catholic," all he would say, when commenting upon the occasion, was, "Poor little man!" repeated in the peculiarly tender, and yet faintly patronizing tone that the good-natured Giant in a Country Fair might use for the irascible Dwarf.

But Bernie appreciated "The Catholic," though with less humorous unction, I think, than he displayed in the case of Mr. de ——. But with what subtle prelatical relish did "The Catholic" himself report to me his first interview with Bernie. It was in a wayside tavern, on some road out of Eastbourne, that he talked to me about him. Here this great scholiast loved to philosophize, by the hour, while the little barmaid of the place watched his extraordinary profile with as much kindness and wonder as the good Maritornes used sometimes to show, in *her* hostelry, when erudite matters were under discussion. "He told me he was an Individualist," the Theologian remarked, sipping his port wine and answering the barmaid's warm gaze with the glowing courtesy of a seraphic doctor, "but I think he felt that it was very important for him to make his position clear to me at the start."

J. W. W. was at the time I knew him writing that convoluted piece of sophisticated argument which was later published under the title: "Pascal, Newman, Loisy, and the Catholic Church." How it all comes back to me, his meticulously small handwriting in the manuscript of this book and the intense passionate eloquence of his complicated reasoning! His favourite word — long before Einstein — for you must remember I am describing events that took place ere the nineteenth century was over — was the word "Relative." By the help of this magic word J. W. W. would evoke a body of rich and subtle thought that served as a sort of covered bridge between conservative orthodoxy and the most rebellious modernism.

I am not perfectly sure to this day how far I advanced with my pragmatical, pluralistical, mythological mind, in understanding his system. A system it was, however; and it was as carefully worked out as the Hegelian System itself. I think what it really did was to project a defence — anticipating some of the subtlest tendencies in Neo-Thomism — for the traditional scholastic position which cut the ground under the feet of the very cleverest modernists; not so much by "stealing their thunder," as by proving that in the circle of orthodoxy itself every basic doubt they proclaimed had already, in some profound Hegelian way, had taken up, included, subsumed, accounted for. I cannot tell you what happiness I derived from listening to "The Catholic's" expositions. His mind had an astonishingly comprehensive, as well as an extremely picturesque and dramatic scope. All my old passion for the great gnostic heresies — which have always been to me, and are still, far more exciting than any modern science — were revived as I listened to him. Here was a living Marcion, but of course, really, he was a living Athanasius, who gave me the same thaumaturgic thrill that I used to get from Robertson's *History of the Church,* as I read it in that monastic library at Sherborne, in the intervals between gazing at slender-ankled girls in the margins of old editions of *Punch.* Although the various barmaid-friends of my erudite teacher can scarcely be said to have caused me the lively feelings of those dainty ballet-dancers in *Punch,* they did, along with the port and the sherry my friend drank, give me a lovely sensation of being at last in a world where the intellect and the senses could fulfil themselves together and by their contact enhance each other.

There were moments when our two natures — this great scholastic thinker's and my own — fused themselves together in an exquisite and even rapturous flame of excitement. This generally happened in regard to certain single lines in Shakespeare, in Homer, in Dante, in Milton. I have never met anyone — no! not even Cousin Ralph, though his knowledge of poetry was more comprehensive and his enjoyment of it more continuous — who caught the full imaginative "body," so to say, of a great inspired line in the way my friend caught it. And in prose it was the same, only here "The Catholic" had fewer rivals; for before meeting him, I had never met anyone who had an imaginative passion for Pascal or a subtle and humorous appreciation of Bolingbroke. What black lambent light used to flash from my friend's eyes as he lifted his wineglass from the little round tables of a score of Saracen's Heads and King's Arms, and Lord Nelsons, and Red Lions and Antelopes, and White Harts and George and Dragons to share with me the magical effluence — indescribable, unutterable! — transporting us both and quivering through us as if with the sweet pangs of Love himself, as we exchanged quotations from Milton! The drastically suppressed but never *quite* extinguished tendency to proselytize in "The Catholic" enhanced and intensified both the original raciness and the scholarly nicety of his critical appreciations; and indeed the mere fact that he was for ever trying to include all the rich workings of the unfathomable Cosmos within the rational-irrational circle of the Church's doctrines gave a constant excitement, like the excitement of the Quest of the Holy Grail to our discussions of our favourite authors from Rabelais down to Dickens.

I would meet "The Catholic" regularly on the days I lectured at Eastbourne, and he would come for prolonged periods to stay at Court House, where he soon became as much of a *persona grata* as Bernie himself.

There was always a certain tendency to a deep temperamental clash between Harry Lyon and "The Catholic," due to the fact that the Norman's debouchings into the sanctuary were at once more arbitrary and more emotional than the Welshman's. I well recall in the Station Inn at Cooksbridge once, making the remark, when "The Catholic" was qualifying, with rather over-elaborate caution, some wild Swift-like outburst of Thomas Henry's, that it was like Machiavelli taking upon himself to tutor Cæsar Borgia.

It was from Court House that I set off one summer to give my first trial lecture at Oxford before the University Extension authorities. Incidentally I had to speak before a considerable audience; but this audience had no idea that the speaker was on his trial, and this ignorance made everything easier. By some occult destiny, resembling the kind of destiny that Spengler gropes after in the events of history, I was called upon by Mr. Marriott, then the head of the Oxford Extension Society to lecture upon the Arthurian Legend. For this lecture it was only necessary for me to buy *one book,* namely the work on the subject published by the Professor of Celtic Literature, the Welshman, Sir John Rhys. Rhys's book, however, did not *then* give me the extraordinary mystical pleasure, I might almost say the sacerdotal excitement, that I derived from it thirty years later, when I read it over and over again on ship-board and even learnt passages out of it by heart; but it was, even at that time, a significant though a very obscure and rather puzzling book. I had already read Lady Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion,* and I think we possessed in our own shelves, or at least our relations did in theirs, the green-covered "Globe Edition" of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*; while *The Idylls of the King,* almost as familiar to me as Longfellow's *Hiawatha,* stood always in the Montacute drawing-room, on that old rosewood chiffonier from Penn House where they had to submit for more than a quarter of a century to the glittering effrontery of our gilded school prizes.

I cannot remember one single original point that I made in this, my first "Extension" lecture, but although ignorant then, as indeed the subtlest of our existing scholars were, of those deep erotic mysteries subsequently discovered in the *Grail Tradition* by the great Miss Weston, I must have known enough, from the *Mabinogion* and from Malory to clear away a vast amount of Tennysonian moralizing from what Spengler would call the dew-wet roots of our Faustian "culture." Anyway, Mr. Marriott, for so this energetic parliamentarian called himself in those days, accepted me very soon into the inner circle of "Extension" lecturers, and it was not long before I was travelling all over England, giving, for both Oxford and Cambridge and even sometimes for the University of London, the particular type of "Extension" lectures that were to prove so acceptible to the average intelligent public, and so contemptible to all conservative academicians.

I well recollect in the unsympathetic reviews of Hardy's tragic tale, *Jude the Obscure,* how poor little Sue's attitude to intellectual matters, and even Jude's own, were held up to scorn as branded with the unscholarly brand of "University Extension." Personally I have always been prepared to arise fiercely in defence of this sort of popular culture. You will, I believe, find on its side such great imaginative spirits as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plotinus, the Gnostic Heretics, the Scholastic Heretics, Montaigne, Goethe, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, William James; whereas, from Aristotle to Scaliger, and from Scaliger to the classical Paul Valérie, this sort of loose, irresponsible, careless, imaginative handling of philosophy has been regarded with contempt.

I had no sooner begun my life of peripatetic philosophizing than the cry "Charlatan! Charlatan!" went up. This is the particular type of abusive word, as when women call a man a *cad,* calculated, and indeed *intended,* to hurt some deep *amour propre* in the masculine bosom. But these people caught a Tartar when they called me as they have always done, and do still, by this opprobrious name; for instead of trying to ward off this unpleasant appellation, I accept it and glory in it! I am indeed, with regard to "charlatanism," what Nietzsche became in regard to morality. The persons who use this term against me are exactly the type of persons who all the way down history have been the enemies of everything I value most in life. They hate, distrust, and despise imagination. Like Charles Lamb's typical Scotchman, they have no notion what the word irony means, and their only conception of humour is the sneering facetiousness of worldly common sense. Above all they distrust, out of their respectable and pompous prudence, what is a second nature to me, the dramatic gestures of a born actor! My most spontaneous and childlike feelings, feelings that spring straight from my blood, my nerves, my soul, seem to these sagacious worldlings, with their eye on the sense of proportion of our established habits of thought, a set of fantastical poses and uncalled-for outbursts of naïve idolatry.

When they cry "Charlatan!" what they really mean is: "How dare this fellow talk about Dostoievsky's Christ, and about Plato's Eros, and about Goethe's 'Mothers,' and about Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*, and about the 'art' of Henry James, and about the 'critical values' of Walter Pater, and about the 'cosmic emotion' of Walt Whitman, as if these recondite subjects, complicated enough to fill the whole span of several real scholars' life-work, could possibly be lugged into an address to working-men and tradesmen's assistants!" These natural enemies of mine, these "Philistines" of Culture, as Nietzsche calls them, *dare not,* for the life of them, bring Christ and the Mothers and the Grail and the Over-Soul and the secret of Jesus and eternal recurrence and being-and-not-being and the monochronos hedoné of Aristippus and the pleasure-which-there-is-in-life-itself of Wordsworth and the absolute of Spinoza and the mystery of the Tao and Fechner's planetary spirits and the mythical elements of Empedocles and the natural magic of Shakespeare's poetry into an interpretation of the Sleeping Beauty or of the Castle of Carbonek. These are very special products of evolutionary thought, they would argue; they are questions for the erudition of scholars. They have to be studied in connection with the study of history and of sociology.

To parade such topics before an unacademic audience is to give yourself away as no better than a vulgar conjurer. Thus would speak my father's ancient enemy, the scientific professor; and I, with my father's good flannel shirt round my loins and a strip of my father's Stalbridge blanket serving me for a scarf, am still prepared not only to call St. Aldhelm's Head St. Alban's Head but to regard the magic of the *Mabinogion* as a nearer approach to the secret of Nature than anything you could learn by vivisecting dogs.

Does my agitation seem to you not only extravagant but extremely affected? Well! if it *is* affected it cannot be an interesting case of paronoia, megalomania, and maniac elation! Or do you want to regard me as both a humbug and a madman? Personally for myself, I would define this vein of "charlatanism" in me which you are so afraid of as the clown-element, or the comic-actor element, *in the essence of all psychic truth.* Without this element — which is the perilous drop of the aboriginal berry-juice of old Saturn's blood — the pursuit of truth would resemble something between a four hours' speech by Mr. Gladstone and a four weeks' visit to some scientific retreat, where they investigate dogs' saliva through slits in their necks. In plain words truth would be, as it is to these haters of "charlatans," something at once portentously pontifical and shamelessly cruel.

According to the admirable system of University Extension the lecturer was always entertained in private houses; and thus it came to be my destiny to become exceptionally familiar, not only with all parts of England, but with all manner of types of English family-life. I have a shrewd suspicion that this perpetual living among strangers, this perpetual talking to strangers, helped to deepen my congenital ego-centric isolation, just as I fancy it did in the case of Matthew Arnold for whom I have so many instinctive sympathies. He, it is true, was not a University Extension lecturer; but his labours as an Inspector of Nonconformist schools must have brought him into contact with very much the same strata of English life as that amid which I spent this long decade of my existence. Such a life sent the fastidious Matthew Arnold racing off to Celtic myths and Homeric poetry, to get the taste of all that gregarious facetiousness out of his mouth; and it must have been the tediousness of so much of this human back-chat, even at Oxford, that made Walter Pater flee to the country, flee to London, flee to Ancient Rome, flee to the Cloister, flee to the Urbs Beata of his imagination.

What is left to me now at this distance, beyond my angry revolt against so much of it, of all those ten years of travelling from one end of England to the other? That last sentence expresses nothing less than the literal truth. There was one weekly or fortnightly round among these lectures that caused me to leave Newcastle-on-Tyne before six in the morning when I used to see the sun rise over the bleak Northumberland hills, lecture in Lewes, after I had seen the sun set over the South Downs, and get to my home in West Sussex that same night. But what do I remember of all this? What did all this add to my own secret mental and æsthetic development? I will answer you in a sentence. As in the case of my three years at college, these years of travelling about England stored my mind with a heterogeneous chaotic mass of fragmentary impressions; impressions, not of people, for they, with a very few exceptions, have passed almost entirely out of my mind, but of various aspects of the Inanimate. These are the sunken treasures, heaved up from the deep-sea bottom of my inconstant memory, by a thousand little daily chances, that I owe to my ten or fifteen years, whatever it may have been, wandering about my native land! Yes, they come into my head these fleeting pictures by what seems pure chance. I am crossing, shall we suppose the great “flat lot” here, for in “up-state” New York they call what *we* call fields “lots”, and I will suddenly feel myself leaning over a grey river-bridge at Tewkesbury, or sitting under a hedge near the outskirts of Stafford, reading Henry James, or making my way along a pastoral field-path, between the town of Huntingdon and some little village in those parts, where certain Swiss relatives of my father, from Rousseau’s Geneva, used to live, or entering, in my brother Bertie’s affectionate and quizzical company, some quaint little town on the river Trent where he was mending the church steeple, or finally, shall I say, walking by the river at York. York — *old* York — has so many occult and mysterious memories for me that it is no wonder that in my exile I have settled in New York.

I acquired a queer fondness for that city. I like its rambling un-antiquarian ancient walls. I liked the way you could get so quickly out of the place and into such lovely and romantic country. I liked the narrow streets and the second-hand bookshops. I liked the painted glass windows in the cathedral. There was one spot near the river at York where I once experienced a very extraordinary sensation. This was that sort of sensation that seems, when you first feel it, to be an absolute proof of the doctrine of pre-and re-incarnation; but which later strikes you as being something even subtler and more significant than that. In fact what it really comes to be is a feeling as if all such similar experiences in the lives of your ancestors were linked with yours and as if there were innumerable separate living souls within, so to speak, the consciousness of our earth, that kept on brooding for ever upon the miraculous wonder of inanimate things being like *what they are like* when you come upon them with a meditative, contemplative mind!

This experience must have taken place when I was in my early thirties; but again in my early forties, during the War, I was in York with Bertie. He was then in uniform, and at night those narrow streets had to be made pitch-dark, for York is uncomfortably close to the North Sea; but the walk I took with him this time, teasingly interrupted, though it was, by the perpetual salutes he was always returning, and though it was in a quite different direction, conveys to my mind at this distance the impression of a weir, and of an ancient dam and of a footpath through deep green grass, and of *some* kind — I am not clear about *what* kind — of tall flowers in a muddy ditch. These may very easily have been specimens of that curious plant known as "Comfrey." If so, I am sure that John the Lecturer, preparing for America, and Lieutenant A. R. P. preparing for France, exchanged a word about their progenitor; for my father never passed a ditch without — and proud was he to be able to do it — naming Comfrey Comfrey, Water-Veronica Water-Veronica, and Meadow-Sweet Meadow-Sweet!

Gloucester too was a city I got especially familiar with; and to this day I think of it as fulfilling some deep craving in my nature, a craving that I would be hard put to it to define. Something about those particular ancient streets, those ancient bridges, those ancient cloisters, those old inn-yards, those romantic up-raised stone footpaths under Gothic masonry, used to give me again and again as I returned from my afternoon walks a certain vague obscure delicious feeling, quite impossible to put into words, but of extraordinary value in my secret life. How can I so much as approach a definition of it? It was clearly not directly concerned with any æsthetic loveliness; for when I call up now, after all these years, what pleased me most in those walks it is not of the precincts of the cathedral that I think. I think of a somewhat dilapidated entrance to this old city, a lingering twilight-darkened highway, leading up from certain vague, misty wide-stretching water-meadows. This highway, I remember, as it approached the region where in old days the city walls must have been, crossed an ancient stone bridge. Beyond this bridge, in that obscure evening light in which I always see it, the road trailed upward, *itself lingering,* so I almost feel now, as if it were loth to leave the river-mists and to face the traffic, till it led me into the heart of the town. And there was an intermediate region, between the bridge and the town, where this entrance into Gloucester seemed really, in some obscure way, enchanted. Between straw-smelling stables the road went, where, amid darkened shapes of great wagons, lanterns seemed to be moving of their own volition. Under rain-washed sign-boards and weather-stained roof-eaves it led me on; and it seemed to be always passing cavernous warehouses and mediæval-looking shops in the dark interiors of which there seemed to be flickering candles.

Was it that the thrills of mysterious delight that always ran quivering through me as I came up at nightfall from those chilly water-meadows were the resuscitation of far-away pre-natal memories, or even, further-drawn still, memories that descended to me from my ancestors? If this latter were the explanation it was natural enough that this most purely Celtic of all our English cities, this place of enchantments, co-aeval with Caerleon and Camelot, should have stirred up these sensations in me! But in my secret heart I think my emotions went yet further back and yet wider afield. What I think did actually arise in me at such times, and arises still when those visions recur, was a re-birth of the more vague, the more intangible, the less ponderable feelings of the human race itself; not merely of certain Welsh ancestors, not merely of *my* ancestors, but of *all* our ancestors; roused up in me just at this moment by some predetermined reciprocity between my personal nerves and this coming up into the warm Gloucester streets from the chilly river-mists!

It must not be supposed that these delicious memory-vignettes snatched from out the abysm of time from my ten years of travelling about England, and coming upon me now with such indescribable enchantment, were confined to what I saw on my travels. Many of them revert directly to Sussex itself.

As I have already explained, Court House was an isolated farmhouse on the north side of the high downs, just under Mount Harry, and not far from Ditchling Beacon. On this inland side of these steep downs there lies that lovely track of wooded and pastoral country known as the Weald. Here, not very far from the Ditchling Road, were several dedicated haunts for anyone who like myself resembled a wandering wild-duck in his mania for lonely rushy meres and the solitary pond-waters of moated granges!

But I had not to go as far as these romantic spots to find a place where I could enjoy my misanthropic solitude. Just below Court House, on the outskirts of the Weald, there was a wonderful wood, of oaks and hazels and elms and beeches, called by the Walter-de-la-Mare name of "Waringore." To this wood I would almost daily repair, and penetrating into the centre of it walk up and down a narrow mossy path, strewn with rubble and fallen twigs and old dead leaves, and sprinkled in autumn by crimson toadstools and in spring by white violets. Perhaps the most ideal of all daily walks to my taste would be a narrow path through a hazel wood *on perfectly flat ground* that went on and on for three or four miles! I remember perfectly well thinking to myself as I trod this path through Waringore, that, whatever was happening to me in life, just to be able to stare at this green moss, at these fallen twigs, at these blood-stained funguses, was sufficient reward for having been born upon this cruelty-blasted planet!

But, as I say, within a few miles of us, were even more romantic spots than Waringore Wood. Of course when I make an effort to conjure up all these spirit-memories what I get back are simply certain imaginative and visual impressions. I completely forget names! There was one extraordinary old place — half manor-house, half ancient mill — that we used often to visit, quite near the Ditchling Road but I rather think on the other side of Plumpton, whose name totally escapes me. There was an ancient church, too, with an enormous yew-tree, that always had an unusual number of red fairy yew-berries on it, somewhere, it seems to me by the side of a large pond in the middle of wide-stretching woods.

Before we left Court House we made several very exciting expeditions into various neighbouring villages — anywhere within a radius of five or six miles — with a vague idea of changing our abode; for it was an unsatisfactory sensation, you must understand, never to set eyes on the orb of the sun, no! not in the height of the summer, after two o'clock in the afternoon! Some of the most vivid of all my mysterious, floating, drifting, suddenly-appearing, suddenly-vanishing islands of memory come back to me from these wayfarings. Aerial fragments of scenery, they are, *landscape-revenants,* materialized for a second, and then withdrawn whence they came! Images they are of half-seen roadways, parcels of woodland, portions of wagon-rutted lanes descending between primrose banks, isolated patches of village-greens, with muddv duck-ponds, angry geese, croaking frogs.… All these visions come floating along the airways of my mind in clear distinctness, not like aquarelles or pastels, not like ancient oil-paintings. Nor are their margins blurred, nor are their roots, in those mental air-spaces, left trailing, nor are their edges vague or their shapes ruffled; and yet all their horizons are so dark, so dark, that when they vanish, they vanish without leaving a trace behind!

It was to my marriage I owed my first trip abroad. This was nothing less than an excursion to Rome! I had never left Great Britain before; and you can imagine my excited response to the blue-smocked porters at Dieppe and the strange ivory-tinted foreign houses along the quay. We left from Newhaven and there was a terrible storm in the Channel that day; so that the first thing I saw when I struggled to reach the deck from amid the crowds of seasick people were the masts of a ship that had just been sunk outside Dieppe harbour! We had brought the first two volumes of Gibbon with us, as a prelude to seeing Rome, and one of these volumes was lost for ever in the dizzy confusion of that unfortunate crossing. So exhausted were we indeed, after those long hours of relentless tossing, that we remained for that night unambitiously in Dieppe. The next night, however, we were safe in Paris, and for several days we stayed at a little hotel called the Hotel Louis-le-Grand, Rue Louis-le-Grand, quite close to the Opera, a place that I afterwards found referred to in some story of Balzac.

My cerebral inhumanity displayed itself in unnatural and spasmodic debouchings into solitude during this trip. How my companions and my relations ever tolerated my erratic and wayward humours in those days is more than I can understand. I wonder now that with one accord they didn’t dismiss me in disgust from their over-strained indulgence and send me to the devil, to live, if I wanted to, for ever and a day, in some dingy lodging near my alluring, lust-drugging erotic bookshops.

Willy O’Neill, Bernie’s younger brother, was with us on this occasion, a scholarly reserved man, with hollow eye-sockets, out of which looked a pair of the most melancholy grey eyes I have ever seen, and it was under his hyper-æsthetic and rather sardonic guidance that we turned our innocent rural gaze upon such things as the Mona Lisa and the Venus of Milo.

My attitude to the historic works of art presented to me then was composed in equal parts of an indiscriminate idealism, derived entirely from books, for my artistic appreciation was small and my artistic knowledge nil, and a fantastical life-illusion of myself as a sort of Derbyshire-born Goethe. Goethe's *Travels* I carried with me, at least their translation in the Bohn Library Edition, and every now and then I would scribble in my note-book certain verses of my own composition, verses that gave me a curious pleasure to write, not because they expressed one single thing that I really felt, but because, while I wrote them, I felt that I was acting out my ideal of myself, as *John Powys visiting the Fountains of Rome.*

What I was really doing all this while was groping after a double fulfilment of my erotic desires and my intellectual desires. And yet this is not altogether true; for I moved blindly, desperately, and with a certain abandoned recklessness, along my obscure "Glouceśter Road" of lonely personal sensations. How do I justify such behaviour? How do I justify — do you mean — my being "the soulless monster of selfishness" that some have called me? Indirectly, my friend, I do this, indirectly, indirectly; for I am too wise an antediluvian monster to argue with you in *your* language. But the truth is the transports of thrilling delight that these indescribable sensations of mine give me, these feelings that I would describe as the *marginal sensations* of the human race itself, seem to me so valuable a thing to come to consciousness in this world at all, that I — as this thing's "medium," or hollow reed — am entirely justified in being as I am.

It was, as I say, owing to my marriage that this miracle of my father's eldest son being in Rome came about; but I must confess I often acted badly and ungratefully during this noble adventure. I did however eke out our funds a little by giving lectures in one of the Roman hotels to an exhausted group of young ladies from Eastbourne. Willy O'Neill's patience came to an end once, when I insisted upon giving I know not what number of cigarettes to one of those boy-flower-sellers, dressed in what comes back to me now as moss-green velvet, who at that time haunted the steps of the Piazza del Spagna. We did not quite come to fisticuffs on that occasion but to something very near it; and I remember using the excuse of our altercation to absent myself for several solitary hours.

So rusticated was I, for all my lecture-journeys, that it was in Rome that I first saw that mode of popular conveyance by electricity called in England a "tram" and in America a "trolley"; and to this day I never hear the curious tinkle of these crowded vehicles without smelling that unique smell of sun-baked horse-dung and garlic which mingled so indissolubly with my Roman impressions. It was the look of those astonishing classical viaducts, as our train drew near the city in the twilight, that gave me my first real thrill; but this selfish and indeed unkind mania of mine for seeing things alone woke me up early that first morning in our little Pension and drove me out, hurrying down the street, hunting desperately for I knew not what. What I *did,* by some chance light upon, and it was my first monument of antiquity, was the Victory Column of none other than that arch-despiser of victory, Marcus Aurelius. By this time I *had* learnt to appreciate Pater's "Marius," and it was with those magical periods of the great Sophist, periods like the eloquence of his own Apuleius rolling through my head, with all their rich philosophic fancies and all their honeyed semi-erotic affectations— "like painted flowers, Marius thought" — that I stood entranced before this pictured column, rather than with any desire to become a Stoic. I am sure I don't know by what philosophic name to name the supreme ecstasy that I had in Rome. It came to me half-way up those stately steps from the Piazza del Spagna to the Pincian Hill — I think our Pension must have been hard-by that spot — and just about opposite the house where Keats died. I remember distinctly the emotion I had at that moment; and it was one that I have never had since, from that day to this. I do not think its implication of the presence, in this blasted and blighted globe, of "a stream of tendency" to something so magically beautiful as to be a kind of Eternal Thing could be called an epicurean idea or a stoic idea. Perhaps it is an idea to be found in the old Welsh Triads!

The warm sun, the golden dust, those broad *short* steps, that seemed to us constructed so that these proud Romans should go up and down without a movement that was inelegant or undignified, the thought of the unapproachable genius of young Keats, dying but living for ever, those little boys in their moss-green velvet, the stones of Rome themselves, soft yet perdurable, like everlasting Time, the zephyr-stirred trees of the Pincian Hill, the murmur of the great smouldering city below, the far-off Dome of St. Peter's "semper eadem … securus judicat orbis terrarum," all these things at any rate struck my Celtic mind, just as their architypes must, ages ago, have struck the invading Gauls, as if here indeed was the Urbs Beata, the Urbs Calipolis, the imperishable Stone Circle, the undying Navel, of our poor Gothridden Corpus Mundi, Corpus Delicti! And within the straw-stuffed interior of the jerky Puppet-Idealist that I was, there formed the words of a strangely impassioned prayer: "May all this go on just as it is!" I prayed. "Let me pass, let me and my crazy obsessions pass — but let Rome abide for ever!"

Perhaps it was immediately after my silly burst of fury with Willy O'Neill that I rushed off by myself into a flower-shop and bought a laurel wreath so enormous that I was much put to it, even with the voluble driver's help, to get it into the vehicle. Clinging to the rim of this Olympian offering I was driven in triumph to Keats’ grave where I proudly placed it — and more than a whole year later a traveller assured me that its remnants, embronzed leaves and twisted wire, were still to be seen.

I think the most harmonious and the most perfectly felicitous of our united experiences in Rome was once when from our hiding-place in a deliciously sunny and secluded spot on the Palatine, safely removed from the sinister ruins of the imperial palaces and close to the altar of that gentle unknown god — perhaps, for all divinities sooner or later came to Rome, an altar to Ceridwen, the Cymric Demeter — we implored our sardonic and disillusioned friend to fetch us a bottle of wine. Never have I — no! not in any land — tasted such flower-fragrant and honey-sweet wine as that with which our melancholy epicurean ally returned! In what treasure-cave of the “deep-delvèd earth” he discovered it I cannot tell; but its effect was beyond the effect of mortal grapes. It was like that Nepenthe, given to Argive Helen in Egypt, wherewith she caused both yellow-haired Menelaus and young Telemachus to forget their griefs, as they sat ensorcerized beside her, watching the purple woollen threads pass to and fro, to and fro, across the lap wherein the head of Paris had lain!

How rarely out of a person’s life do moments return to the mind that are like that royal death-robe of Jesus, woven of one seam, flawless, absolute, without a single knot or wrinkle or crease to destroy its smooth perfection! Well! such was this radiant hour on the Palatine Hill; and it was with a combined gesture of deep religious feeling that we emptied that bottle’s last drops to our tutelary neighbour, that gentle unknown god! It is a curious and significant thing — for before very long these lively vandals within my iron frame, my cursed ulcers, succeeded in making both wine and cake totally impossible for me — that just as in Rome Willy O’Neill fetched us that divine bottle so on our way back, before he left us at Marseilles, he conjured up an extremely aged and decrepit Frenchman, who in the middle of the night, when we were faint from want of food, offered us large slices, light, crumbly, honey-tasting, of the most miraculous home-made cake I shall ever know again. The scent of damask roses was mingled with the sharp salt airs that came in to us from the darkness outside; and as we ate that cake, rushing through the night along the shores of the Mediterranean, it seemed to me that having drunk the blood, I was now permitted to devour the flesh, of some anonymous "Numen inest," some "unknown god" of my remote Cymric ancestors, that I might — and again might not — call upon at a crisis. Or does it happen that at certain particularly sacramental moments in your life you are permitted to enter into some mysterious conscious relation with the spirit of the earth itself?

I used almost always to walk the four miles to Lewes when I made my professional starts in the mornings, and I generally went by the road through Offham rather than over the downs. This I did because I had my gown to carry and my elusive sylphids' essays, as well as the books, sometimes heavy ones that I had to quote from. Luckily I was not bothered with note-books, for as was the case with the old biblical teachers, the Lord, the God of my Father, always put it into my head what I was to speak. It came to pass however that after that miraculous trip to Rome which my undeservedly fortunate marriage brought me I used to suffer extreme pangs of gloomy rebellion from the sight of the quiet and harmless tradesmen's villas at Lewes, and at the sight of the quiet and harmless tradesmen themselves, blamelessly pursuing their lawful avocations. It was one of my crusading friend Harry Lyon's foibles to denounce in round terms what he called "the lower middle-classes." *We*, I suppose, were to be regarded as belonging to the upper middle-class, if not, God help us! to a niche that was higher still; but all the stupidities, meannesses, and moral hypocrisies of our land were attributed — and I listened to it all without a murmur of protest — to these unfortunate trading-classes. Looking back now upon the whole thing with a mind schooled by listening to Americans and to Communists I am amazed that I didn't speak up for these small clerks and shopkeepers and factory managers and commercial travellers and pawnbrokers and office-assistants; for after all this is the whimsical and idiosyncratic class from whose ranks our great imaginative novelists have filled the ideal world with their unequalled creations.

But my mind was really occupied with other matters; and so I submitted without protest. But looking back now on those days I am afraid any Communist, not to speak of any Middle-Western American, would have regarded the life then led by myself and by Bernie and by Louis Wilkinson and by "The Catholic" — all of us with a small unearned income — as the real cause of our gravest faults and our most serious neuroses. Bernie knew this, with an infallible instinct.

I remember well the austere glee with which Harry Lyon who always kept his own nerves in order by desperately hard work, told me that our friend had announced: "What Jack needs is *a good sound flogging every morning!*" Well! I have learnt since then the art of inflicting this flogging on myself every morning; and Doctor Rondibilis was perfectly right.

But it seems extraordinary to me now why, when thus carrying my gown in what the late T. Oatley Bennett used to call my "ferret-bag," and hugging against my stomach all those books and papers, I didn't feel a glow of warm, secure, Charles-Lamb-like peace, and humorous life-unction, from making my way into this old country-town. In place of this I felt constant waves of angry revolt! I had at that time a mania for Hazlitt, whose peculiar kind of self-conscious egoism I can see now was an important landmark in my intellectual development; “but,” I thought to myself, “Hazlitt was a sort of scholar-gipsy, wandering about the world as he pleased, and completely selfish in all the ordinary human relations. Why am I forced to live a virtuous and settled life?” And then I would quote to myself some of Hazlitt’s most ego-eccentric and sentimental passages with an inward glow of admiration and envy. I tried to get hold of his *Liber Amoris* for I always fancied that I should find in that book something parallel to my own maniacal preoccupation with anonymous femininity. But of course Hazlitt’s girl was anything but anonymous! I can see now, so clearly, the olive-green cover of my *Selections from William Hazlitt,* though subsequently I bought all his essays in certain separate little books that had paper covers. But with the exception of Wordsworth and Walt Whitman, I got a deeper psychic-sensuous thrill from the mere look of that Hazlitt cover than I have got *from any other book.* Peace be to his ashes! I am glad that great Nature ordained that the last words of this ragamuffin egoist, whose defiant radicalism nobody could “square,” were the surprising ones “Well! I’ve had a happy life!”

But certain essays of Hazlitt — certain passages in certain essays — I would in those years read over and over again. They became as it were *incantations* to me, incantations summoning up my soul to be true to its inmost destiny! And what was this inmost destiny that I had the wit to recognize, though so obscurely, and, like a faint submarine light detected through fathoms of deep greenish-coloured water, the grace to follow after throughout my days? Well, I would define it as the pursuit of a certain particular type and sort and kind — it is necessary to winnow it down, through all the three dimensions, to something very quintessential — of *purged sensation,* the sort, the kind, and the type of sensation that is at once very sensual and very psychic! You see it was really something that pointed me towards this non-human road, where a self-centred egoist chews the cud of universal human experiences that I found in the touchy and cantankerous Hazlitt. Oh, how I used to repeat the lines — and I can see them now as they looked on the actual page, and the way the margin looked, and the way the capital T looked!— "Wave on, wave on, ye woods of Tudder ley! Wave your tall tops!" and so forth: and it was from these sentimental-selfish ramblings, combined with the fact that the testy, dark-browed rogue was always on the side of the angels and had a mania for metaphysics, that led me to be interested in *his* ideal author — the author he evidently treated exactly as I treated him — Jean Jacques Rousseau.

How well I remember watching out the turn of the centuries — the nineteenth becoming the twentieth — in the little dining-room at Court House, a room decorated in the particular neo-William-Morris style which at that epoch was affected by Harry Lyon. I can remember absolutely nothing about my feelings at this momentous historic hour, except that I was conscious that Something much bigger than a year was dying, Something that, compared with a year was like a sturgeon compared with a stickleback.

My son, who was born in the new century, will, I suppose, hardly live long enough — though, of course, he *could!* — to see the figures written on the newspapers, the London "Izvestias" and "Pravdas," of those days; and it is strange to me to think that before his birth, and before the birth of so many personable young men who are now my dear friends, I was watching in the pitch-black midnight under Mount Harry, the dying of this monster of time. "Wave on, wave on, ye woods of Tudderley!" It has been of interest to my son to pay a visit to Court House of late; and I do not wonder. From what shore of Limbo was he waving his arms to me then?

It was during the Boer War while we were still at Court House that I obtained the exciting job of giving a set of English lectures, under the official ægis of the Free City of Hamburg. I hurried to Hamburg, by way of Rotterdam and Amsterdam; but I had no Willy O'Neill to help me to understand the genius of Rembrandt and Ruysdael and Hobbima as I had learnt to appreciate Watteau and Fragonard. But I clearly remember feeling vividly that an Englishman was by no means a *persona grata* in Holland during the Boer War. I doubt very much that if I had even explained to those "lower-middle-class" Dutchmen, as Harry Lyon would have called them, that I shared the opinions of my fellow-Welshman, Lloyd George, and was entirely hostile to that imperial Trinity, Rhodes, Chamberlain, Kipling, it would have made any difference.

I had hit upon an unfortunate moment for my visit. But aye! what pleasure I have slowly, very, very slowly, come to derive from painting! It is the only art, outside literature, that will ever *deeply* appeal to me; and even this within rather narrow limits. But I have needed no Willy O'Neill to initiate me into my instinctive preferences among painters. My deepest favourites I discovered for myself and I am very proud of it. Domenico Theotocopolos, El Greco, I discovered for myself. Niccolas Poussin I discovered for myself. Ruysdael and Hobbima and the landscapes of Gainsborough I discovered for myself. For Giorgione and Watteau, though, I learnt to appreciate them through Walter Pater I soon found I had, if I may say so without boasting, a certain measure of natural affinity.

Angels and ministers of grace! but what an escape, what a divine escape, certain wonderful — though pseudo-classic and pseudo-artificial! — landscapes have been to me in different epochs of my life! I must hasten to confess to a "penchant" for the disparaged creations of Salvator Rosa. I like wind-torn jagged tree-branches, and I like ancient mossy tree-stumps, and I like roads winding under colossal viaducts with goats and sheep and herdsmen resting in the shade and cavalcades advancing along far-away ridges towards remote rock-built castles! I sometimes am even tempted to dally with the notion that I — the son of Charles Francis Powys — have in me some of the instincts of a landscape painter! Landscape pictures have certainly played a part in my life that I sometimes think goes down to the very bottom of my soul. *Old* landscape pictures I mean! These are the only ones that have affected my secret life, though my friends can give me their clues to the modern ones, in occasional flashes. But I need no one, I *want* no one, to teach me the magical enchantment of old faded landscape paintings! This is the purged and winnowed world of humanized Nature that my non-human passion for certain essences of human life is so deep in love with! This is the world of old bridges, old tree-stumps, old walls, old terraces, old avenues, old turrets, old rivers, old causeways, old roads, winding over historic hills towards more historic seas! This is in fact the world of that ideal "Road to Gloucester" that in the secret depths of my being I am seeking for for ever, seeking for *sans cesse,* for in it, and in it alone, is the Inanimate — an Inanimate rendered holy and fetish-like by its contact with humanity — disentangled from the vulgarity of the passing moment.

Yes, while I looked at those Rembrandts in Amsterdam the world had reached that particular sequence of months when the Dutchmen in South Africa were making it extremely uncomfortable for our Empire, and I was reminded of these public events by the immense satisfaction with which the waiters in the hotels where I stayed used to lay beside my plate at every meal newspaper headlines that grew daily more and more derogatory to the dignity of an English traveller.

Fortunately Providence has withheld from me, as it had withheld from my father any gift for foreign languages, and until I got to Hamburg and was confronted by the only too obvious, and indeed gross humour of “Simplicissimus,” depicting my Sovereign, and that in the last month of her long life, in anything but a dignified position, I only realized by the gestures of derision and distaste which I underwent how intensely we were hated on the Continent of Europe.

Very distinct to this day remain my impressions of Hamburg. Those verdigris-green roofs of sombre Lutheran churches, those dark deep canals bordered by huge over-toppling sombre warehouses, that sense of something at once monstrous and fairy-story-like, that feeling as though certain kinds of commerce and trade — trade especially in such commodities as coffee and molasses and cinnamon and nutmeg and rare lumber and extravagant wines and precious perfumes and spices — had gone on in these places for a thousand years, that feeling that there had been great plagues in these tall Gothic houses, and that all these black-stained piles against which this sombre phantasmal canal water gurgled and lapped, were brushed night by night by the passing to and fro, to and fro, of grave black-gowned, grey-bearded ghosts, all these things made an indelible impression on one who was now sucking the dugs of the round world very much as he had sucked apricot paté in the yard of the Prep.

But I was not to escape without having a vision of loathsomeness and sickening disgust. The especial Demon, in the lunatic asylum which I kept locked up in my cat-head, whose pleasure to vex me with disgusting imaginations was so lively and obstinate, the same Demon, who had strewn the avenue to Court House with bullock’s blood and black snails, now bestirred himself to attack my peace and to sap my energy.

It was in Hamburg amid all those great sloping roofs and those massive warehouses and those dark canal wharves covered with snow that I had one of my miserablest occasions of wanting desperately to find a close-stool and not finding one. So deep an impression did this devilish experience make on me that even to-day, when I see snow on the ground, I am liable to feel a twitching in my nether gut as if I were holding back the excrement of weeks. But unforgettable though this experience was — and I have noticed that priests and ministers and clergymen, and doubtless their sons too, have more difficulty with their natural evacuations than other men — my mind was more ruffled, although my whole personality was not so paralysed, by a certain coloured picture that appeared in a popular, possibly a *comic* German paper.

It was a picture that had a woman's breasts in it and in some way connected with these breasts a great deal of blood. But this blood, at least to my morbid imagination, was not ordinary blood. It was very pale, but it was also very vivid. Indeed it must have been due to a triumph of art in the colour-printing of that prosperous epoch that even from across the road this blood was visible. It seemed to have the power of leaping from the page and of splashing over my face; yes! even into my mouth and down my throat. Nor did this blood-stained Milky Way stop at my throat. It sank into me until it reached some deep-buried "loathing-nerve" that licked it up with frenzy; licked it up as fast as those centuries-blackened wharf piles licked up the plague-spotted waters of those canals! In regard to physical impressions *of a certain kind* I have, I am sure, nothing less than the Devil's own imagination. I *know* I am not being silly or conceited when I say that in certain directions I have as powerful an imagination as Swift.

In certain directions too — and with regard to certain unpleasant impressions — I am as one who goes to and fro *without a skin.* This morbid and indeed almost monstrous sensibility is something that you pay a heavy price for; nor, if you express it in writing, do you always, as Mr. de —— would say, “win favour with magnates.” Magnates tend as a rule to feel as if you were saying to them: “Go, go; you’re bit!” like Swift when he damns our cruelties and stupidities. Nor does a person with a terrible imagination get much pity. I know well what I am talking about; for my vitality is so terrific, my constitution so adamantine, my will so strong, that it is difficult for people to believe that so galvanized a Jack-in-the-Box, making such lively gesticulations should be completely skinless and raw under its motley jacket. Yes! I was followed about by those breasts and that blood. I used to go down to those black canals and those cinnamon-scented warehouses with hurried and eager steps, trying, as I trudged through the discoloured snow to avoid, if possible, all the innumerable shops, and book-stands and paper-stalls which made me feel as if from the paps of the whole round world issued forth milk and blood!

I was lecturing at Bremen — in English, you must understand, always in English — when our great Queen died. “We will not let ourselves,” so I was told she had said, “be killed by Mr. Kruger.” But she had been forced — that most arbitrary and most womanly of all great Queens — to “let herself be killed” by *something,* and dead she lay. Wept for bitterly she was by all those “lower middle-classes” denounced by Harry Lyon, and with her went the age of Dickens and Tennyson and Matthew Arnold and Darwin and Carlyle and Ruskin and Disraeli; and with the crowning of her son came in the age of Mr. Wells and Mr. Bennett and Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Kipling. I was, as it chanced, lecturing on Byron in some old Bremen edifice when Victoria died and having broken short my exposition of the art of “dithyrambic analysis,” I was taken to the historic wine-cellar. Here the rule was that if you entered before midnight — an admirable rule for such a place — you could stay as long as you liked. Was it of Byron that I thought as my student friends entertained me with their praise of the latest deterministic philosophers, or was it of the dead Queen?

Alack! It was of neither of these! ’Twas of Heine I thought, and of those strange verses of his composed in this very place, and of his weird love-affair with the executioner’s daughter, and of his curious “penchant” for puppets and puppet-shows. I can well remember how, in my hotel bedroom, that next day, the windows of which opened on the buttresses and pinnacles of some mediæval-looking building, as I composed one of “Jack’s descriptive letters” to be read aloud at Montacute to my father, I was seized with a real flood of inspiration. This event made a terrific impression on my mind; for it was really the first time in my life that I had known what literary inspiration meant, or had felt its peculiar and recondite thrill. It was all lavished upon one of “Jack’s descriptive letters,” and I am certain that my father fidgeted and even groaned before it came to end, longing to go out into the garden and stretch his legs in the terrace-walk before his morning’s work in his study.

It is quaint that all I can recall of it now is a single phrase, in a long reverberating sentence, a little in the style of De Quincey. The words that come to me now are: “painted sign-boards swinging,” but I have a vague sense that it represented a secret special delight that I took in thinking of the way an old historic town like Bremen could fade off on all sides, without the mediation of suburbs, into fields and lanes and moors and forests. I imagined the old barns and the old inns and the old churches, and the old burying-places, and the old village-shops, and how different they looked, according to whether you were entering or were leaving the walled-in city! Thoughts such as these, bringing to my mind what Matthew Arnold calls "the murmur of a thousand years" were always the ultimate winnowings of my happiest moments.

Nothing gave me a greater thrill than when my personal sensations — especially of this rich-charged romantic tinge, as of the entering or the leaving of an ancient city — lost the narrowness of their merely personal quality and became the anonymous deposit of all the generations of my race, yes! of all the men and women, who went in and went out, in the diurnal ritual of their days!

I have all my life been very well treated by Jews; and have always, as I think is generally the case with Englishmen, found all my lodgements within the tents of Israel extremely lucky for me. In Hamburg I received a great deal of hospitality from Jews. They all spoke English, and were indeed people of a most mellow and erudite culture. I recollect well coming as near, in one inspired conversation with some rabbinical Talmudish Johann Cohen, to an explanation of the mystery of fate and free will, as I have ever come to in my life. In some very deep sense these wise and courtly refugees seemed congruous with the historic atmosphere of Hamburg. Perhaps all this trading by sea in these coffees and teas and rare lumber and rarer spices, gave to the transactions of commerce something romantic, something "rich and strange," which garnished the character as well as the purses of those who took part in them.

The truth was, I got from my visit to Hamburg — but oh, how I longed for the day of my return home! — a sort of accentuation of my secret life-cult, which made me, after this experience, more deeply aware of what I was doing and where I was going. There was, in the house where I stayed, a shrill-voiced canary; and whenever I think of the place this canary's full-throated long-drawn twitterings come to me with a nostalgic pang for home and the feeling of black canals, white snow, verdigris-covered roofs and a stream of blood from a woman's livid breasts.

Back once more at Court House I began the twentieth century, just as I had ended the nineteenth, by the concentrated search as I travelled these long distances up and down the country, for the two master-sensations of my life, the sensation of enjoying protracted ecstasies of saurian lust, as if I had been a cerebral "voyeur" among ichthyosauruses, from gloating over the anonymous and if possible the *unconscious* bodies of feminine representatives of my race, and the sensation of enjoying, from the wanderings of stray gusts of evening-wind, from the glimpses of stray columns of dawn-smoke, from the motionlessness of old barges beside old weirs, from the flowing of grey waters under gothic bridges, from the groaning of demon-branches by desolate cross-roads, a purged and yet an universalized essence of all those marginal experiences that fill the poetry-books and the ballad-books.

Those were the days when in my travels about England I greatly enjoyed two other things — the pleasure of eating enormous quantities of raw sweet chocolate, instead of anything more varied, for my daily lunches, and the pleasure of reading insatiably volume after volume, all the novels I could lay hold of, of Dickens and Thomas Hardy. I used religiously to force myself to ponder, as I travelled, upon some confounded, never to be written romance of my own; and aye! the sweet, the voluptuous relief, when, after these accursed attempts to fix my mind upon imaginary scenes and persons, I used to sink down in my third-class seat, with my back to the engine, while through the window came the varying scents of half the countrysides of England, and luxuriously turn the pages of these enchanting books. I can recall sitting on a bench in the autumn, in some public park at Southampton, absolutely absorbed in a trance of delight in "*Little Dorrit*," and all the while voraciously devouring "plain chocolate," much in the same way I used to nibble chocolate creams at Westbury House, while lost in the excitement of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*! And just as even to-day I rarely see the sun going down without recalling how Captain Nemo from the deck of the *Nautilus* uttered the words: "Descend thou radiant Orb!" so it is hard to see a dwindling hill-road without thinking of Hardy or a grotesque chimney-pot against a lowering sky without thinking of Dickens. For myself it is a certain picturesque expanse near some wharf steps with all manner of congested barges and other small craft in the very heart of Bristol that I mingle now most clearly with my memories of these chocolate feasts. How I used to be "divided, this way and that, in the swift mind," between swallowing all, all, *all* of what I purchased, and handing a scrap, a morsel, a moiety, to some youthful passer-by!

There was one large and sombre house in Arnold Bennett's *Five Towns* where I used to stay, that had a curious and convoluted interest for me and not a few temptations. At a later date, when Llewelyn was thinking of coming to America with me we came together to this house. Indeed we journeyed together round the whole fortnight's circle of my far distant lecture-places, beginning, and I think ending, with Manchester. He conjured up however in his whimsies, his flights, his penetrations, and his final judgments, such scandalous names for my various hosts and hostesses, that for fear any of them or of their offspring should ever glance at these pages I dare not reveal them! While he amused himself in this manner I was trying to force him to read *The Prelude* as a way of preparing himself for crossing the Atlantic, but in the stir and the back-chat and the human encounters of those days he did not read very far.

It was in one of the most characteristic of these Arnold Bennett *Five Towns* — a place where I even went so far, when I was in one of my "divine," as I was wont to say, rather than one of my "devilish" moods, as to design a Pantagruelian amphora for my son, now soon to be born, upon which I caused to be engraved the words: "bon espoir y gist au fond" — that this old large dark house was, where the devil used to whisper in my ear as I went in and out. But my nights always ended innocently in this place; for I would retire at an early hour and find a noble great fire blazing on my hearth; and for hours and hours I would sit up reading *The Return of the Native* or *Far from the Madding Crowd* or *The Woodlanders* or *Jude the Obscure,* while all the while voluptuously and luxuriously, more after the manner of a young woman than a young man, I would take piece after piece of chocolate out of my bag and nibble it in my absorption; till by degrees as I listened to the wind in the chimney the genius of Hardy would drive my demon away and some formidable Spirit from Stonehenge would come rushing out of the Magic West into this dark house and my whole inner being would change. Then I would sit with my bony knees close to the red coals and feel myself to be as formidable and as powerful as that south-west wind itself! I would feel myself to be what the great Magician Merlin was before he met his "Belle Dame Sans Merci."

I was still living at Court House when, leaving "The Catholic" — even as one would leave one's Father Confessor — to guard my castle in my absence I set out alone with Bernie, to spend a fortnight in Paris. "The Catholic" told me afterwards that he was singularly tickled by the extreme naïveté of my letters home, extracts from which were daily read to him. I would, it seems, always close my oratorical account of some famous picture in the Louvre by such quaintly blunt words as: "The colours are red, pink, green, and a peculiar purple. The shadows are dark-red, dark-pink, dark-green, dark-purple, and in some cases nearly black. There are some curious blue and silvery spaces in this picture."

The pathetic thing about my pursuit of my erotic vices at this time was my ignorance of the various devices by which Nature — even with a fastidious maniac like me — could have side-tracked it into satisfaction. As it was, this desperate, exhausting quest of mine, instead of leading me to any satisfying "Grail," whether Christian or Pagan, led me, like the restless Sir Pellenore, into a hunt after a quarry that was itself a "Questing Beast." And oh, how nauseated and sickened and disillusioned and seized with a deep loathing I was, during that visit to Paris! Bernie, like all wise, humorous imaginative persons dealing with a fanatical idiot, often went his own way, leaving me — for he had his own affairs to attend to — to shift for myself. I went therefore — just as any simple-minded East-Anglian on Theodore's Suffolk farm would have been led to go, had he been in Paris; though on my life I think any bellringer at Montacute would have known better — to one of those gala-night places adapted to the grossest Anglo-Saxon taste.

How different from one another are the wandering erotic desires of mortal men! I suppose there may have been a certain number among the boys in Wildman's House, whose "amorous propensities," as Dr. Johnson would say, might have been excited by this particular resort. Perhaps it would have appealed to the blue-eyed old gentleman whom "Aunt Stone" looked after when his wife retired into obscurity. But to see a person and a fairly good-looking person, belonging, or apparently belonging, to the same sex as the most ravishing of my sylphids, tossing up a flurry of petticoats and displaying a flurry of under-garments and then drumming on her rump with her fist, while she screamed: "Bon face! Bon face! Bon face!" in the very tone that Punch, on the donkey-stand at Weymouth, used to cry "Toby! Toby! Toby!" was a spectacle, as far as I was concerned, calculated to freeze into Arctic ice every lecherous impulse in the human frame. In the end I set out alone for Rouen in order that I might enjoy — while I struggled to get that obscene cry, “Bon face! Bon face! Bon face!” out of my head — Ruskin’s favourite façade of St. Ouen. It’s a wonder, however, that I didn’t behold, poised above those flamboyant buttresses and battlements and pinnacles, some colossal Gargamellian rump, pedestalled on that heaven-aspiring pile!

But what did come upon me in Rouen — making me forget both the puritan eloquence of Ruskin and the civilized amusements of Paris — was a diabolical attack of my gastric ulceration. Oh, how I twisted and writhed on my bed in that little Rouen hotel; and how I cursed, from the very bottom of my nauseated heart those pestilent French cooks before whom the epicurean Heine, after visiting London, fell on his knees in religious adoration. To confess the truth French cooking had the same vertiginous effect upon me as the antics of French harlots.

I am anxious however to revert to the characters of my four chief *male* friends of that epoch. I knew very few girls who were acquainted with all four of them; but it certainly would have revealed their subtlest peculiarities most beautifully, and in a manner worthy — if such a paradox may be hazarded — at once of Henry James and Dostoievsky, if one of my girl-friends *had* encountered, freely and without restraint, these four remarkable persons. I can visualize, like a map, the situation that would then inevitably have ensued! Harry Lyon would have talked to the girl, while she was with him, with the utmost tenderness and consideration. He would have entered into many of her most feminine problems with the gravity and astuteness of a family lawyer or a family physician. She would have felt that here was a practical-minded elder brother upon whom she could entirely rely; a brother who, quite naturally, was immune to her charms, but who “liked her,” as girls say, “for herself, and *not for that*.” So the incident would have passed, and Thomas Henry's Cardinal Newman profile, with its Voltairian grimace, would have received an unqualified benediction from the angel who records such things, had it not been that the very moment the rustle of petticoats had died away a torrent of furious Swift-like invective upon all the historic frailties of womanhood would almost certainly have burst from his lips.

Our radiant Louis, on the other hand, "this Archangel," would have, without beating about the bush, taken time by the forelock, her friends by surprise, the wench by storm, the recording angel nodding, and Heaven itself, one might almost think, in a complaisant, relaxed, Mohammedan mood!

And what of Bernie? I trow well, at the bottom of her heart, the maid I speak of would have preferred Bernie's attitude to that of all the rest. For without — indeed very much to the contrary! — taking a fraternal tone, Bernie would have hastened to point out to her some red-veined fungus, some green-veined moth, some blue-veined kingfisher's feather, some fanciful flake of pellucid pollen dust on the corolla-cradle of an infinitesimal water-buttercup, and all with such tremulously whimsical, such humorously intense concentration upon herself, that the girl would have imagined that in some subtle way she was as responsible for the fungus-vein, the moth-vein, the feather-vein, the corolla-vein, as she was — or as she must have felt she was — for the blue-veins in her own soft skin!

And what of "The Catholic"? Here I can answer with a more absolute assurance and from a more direct observation and experience even than in Bernie's case. "The Catholic," if it were summer-time, would suggest to the girl that they should both take off their shoes and stockings, and walk side by side over the thymy turf of the downs. Meanwhile he would alternately quote to her the poetry of William Blake and explain to her various recondite points in the doctrines of St. Thomas. If it were winter-time, however, he would sit on the sofa by her side as she sewed, or stand by her side at the sink as she washed up, and with wave after wave of the most formidable magnetism pouring forth from the dark-gleaming pupils of his green-black eyes, he would explain to her the paradisal emotions she would feel, the thrilling revelations she would win, the self-control and yet the delicious self-release she would attain, if she could only "relatively" — for the greatest philosophers could do no more — approach the System of Things along the lines that the exigencies of our universal human nature had proved to be, for us at any rate, in a certain sense infallible.

Although it seems a curious thing to do, to aim at the devoted sensibility of one young person all the intensest characteristics of my Pantagruelian cronies, it is in accordance with my deepest understanding of that mysterious Grail, whose first acquaintance I made, in a literary sense, when I lectured at Oxford, that I should cajole my valued companions to reveal what the *Mabinogion* calls their "peculiarities" from contact with a friendly girl. If you were to press me, in my turn, to indicate how I would behave in this particular case, I would answer: "in exactly the opposite way from Harry Lyon!" It is true I would disregard her beauty as much as he, but in place of giving her any wise and practical counsel I would pick her brains; and when she was gone I would say to myself that I had never thought of *that* before, or of that or of that, or of that!

It was at Court House that I got published, with the combined aid of my father and of Cousin Ralph, a second little book of imitative poems, all covered over, like the first, with golden fleur-de-lys. Perhaps the neatest poem in this gilded Book of Imitation, will at least indicate to a discerning reader that I had already begun to follow Theodore in acquiring a taste for Nietzsche's writings.

"A parrot to an eagle came,

And boasted that he knew
The language and the ways of men,
And things both old and new.
The eagle looked him up and down
With eyes of burning coal:
‘Fly with me then towards the sun
And hear the thunders roll!’
‘I am afraid,’ the parrot said.
The eagle laughed full high:
‘That is a word I have not read
In earth, or sea, or sky.
Back to your perch! These lonely heights
Were not for parrots made.
I would not leave my eagle flights
To learn to be afraid!’”

But perhaps the least conventional poem in this small collection is one addressed to the throbbing of my gastric ulcers, a poem beginning with the words, “O Pain” and expressing the hope that in the Resurrection there would be no revival of the Spirit of Pain, whatever else might rise from the dead.

It is not to Harry nor to Bernie, nor to Louis, nor to Ralph, nor to any of my brothers, that I owe my first definite encouragement to write the sort of mystic-humorous, Pantagruelian, Shandean, Quixotic Romance that is now the chief ambition of my three score years. This encouragement I owe entirely to “The Catholic.” It was my pleasure and my fantasy, while I lived at Court House, in this most reprehensible and irresponsible epoch of my life, to compose an interminable and totally unpublishable story, a story in which I let myself go to the extreme limit. The two chief protagonists of this crazy rigmarole of imaginative monstrosities were “The Catholic” himself and Mr. de ——. Mr. de —— unwilling to cast upon his noble European relatives the faintest disrepute by his many desolate eccentricities, chose about this time to change his historic name to that of “Carlyle.” Heaven knows what put it into my old friend’s head to select “Carlyle” but that is what he did. I am sure he knew less about Carlyle than about Pope or Dryden, but for some reason the sound of the syllables hit his fancy.

In my unpublishable Work without a Name I called Mr. de —— Mr. de Woztnak, and “The Catholic” Cousin Taxater. John William Williams pondered over this crazy book with the utmost seriousness. As oblivious to its profanity and its obscenity as he was to the manias of its author, he had a Goethean power of making all human aberrations venial, and all human intentions divine. For J. W. W. the Devil had had his claws so pared and his tail so clipped that he was a pitiful rather than an opprobrious object. Good, to this profound thinker, was the grand “Absolute,” Evil the grand “Relative.” Alas! this is a doctrine that my own knowledge of the workings of my own heart makes very hard of acceptance! But my friend’s taking so seriously this Bedlam composition gave me the utmost delight. I went on writing it for him alone. I sometimes think I could write huge folios for One Person alone, if it were the right person.

I began to bring all my friends into this book, inventing a gesticulating procession of these disreputable puppets and trailing them up and down that Limbo-Strand of my wildest abortions of fantasy, the Esplanade at Brighton! I eased my heart, and more than my heart, in this debauched bundle of shreds and patches that I would unpack for “The Catholic” wherever we could find a fire and a table and an incurious barmaid.

Meanwhile, of course, time was passing; and I was entering my thirtieth year. And absolutely nothing had been accomplished! Think how few there are among the writers of our time who at thirty have done nothing! At twenty-nine I had neither written a book, nor begotten a son. I had done nothing, except to get Mr. de — — ‘s poems published. There must have been many who considered that I was wasting my life and would never come to anything and deserved never to come to anything.

But all this while in my own secret heart I knew there was one person who did not think I was wasting my life, one person who was as totally devoid of ambition for me as he was devoid of ambition for himself, one person who considered that if you earned an honest living and could enjoy your walks and coming home to your tea, all was well, all was as God intended. This was my father! It was in complete harmony with my father’s ways — though he would have been angry at what I was writing — to throw my energy into a composition that was as remote from any chance of “propitiating magnates” as it was from forwarding any conceivable career. And so I wrote on and on, about Cousin Taxater and Mr. de Woztnak, for the benefit of “The Catholic” alone. It appeared as if I were destined to be as ego-centric in my writings as I was abnormal in my eroticism and diseased in my conscience.

And yet, for all that, if I had died at the end of my Court House time, I would certainly have cried out, in the manner of my admired Hazlitt: “*Well, I’ve had a happy five years!*”

CHAPTER EIGHT. BURPHAM

IT WAS HARRY Lyon, with the help of the Reverend S. who was at that time the Curate-in-charge of our new home, who helped us to leave Court House — where the downs separated us so much from the sunshine — and settle at Burpham near Arundel in West Sussex. We had often admired from the train as we travelled from Brighton to Portsmouth, “en route” for Salisbury and Wessex, this particular tract of country and I think I must secretly have “willed” that I should settle here. My father, however, had evidently some deep obscure prejudice against it. At any rate, in a manner rather unusual for him, he refused me any financial help.

It fell therefore to the destiny of Mr. S. our benevolent parish-priest, to produce the necessary loan; and for the expenditure of five hundred pounds I found myself the sole owner, for nine hundred and ninety-nine years of the little walled-in cottage and garden known at that time as “Bankside” and later as “Warre House.” Thus I became the third one of my father’s family, since before the days of my great-grandfather, to own in fee-simple, or whatever it is called, a parcel of England, from the surface of the chalky soil to the unknown, and possibly fiery centre of our terrestrial globe.

And at once — for however far removed from quarrels over land and houses a person’s dominant impulses may be this business of owning property carries its troubles — I found myself in the midst of bicketings and contentions. When Harry Lyon first brought us to visit his friend, Mr. S. I looked with sympathetic interest at the village boys and girls playing catch-as-catch-can along the top of the great pre-historic embankment that enclosed one side of our small garden. This Arcadian scene cast such a tender light upon the whole spot that as we proceeded along the little path leading to the chalk-carved, flint-embattled church I was suddenly transported by a burst of indecorous excitement, and in the excess of my feeling I flung my stick, the successor of “Sacred,” against the wall of the school-mistress’ thatched cottage. Harry Lyon severely rebuked me for this childish behaviour, indicating that for a man of thirty entering upon a new phase of his career, such boisterous manifestations were unseemly.

I soon found that they were not only unseemly but somewhat premature; for to be looked down upon by a number of children as I paced my trim lawn was an aspect of affairs I had not counted on. Like my ambiguous Brighton friend I did not appreciate “on-lookers.” Thus, as time went on, being resolved at all costs to have the privacy of my small retreat kept intact, I caused a gigantic board, inscribed “Trespassers will be Prosecuted,” to be erected on the top of our fortification. The village of Burpham awoke one morning therefore to find its historic rampart transformed overnight into the private property of an impecunious lecturer. The indignant natives acted at once. Certain among their bolder spirits, leaving their beer-mugs at the “George and Dragon,” which was conveniently hard-by, transferred my board to a neighbouring ditch, where its threats of prosecution could be innocuously addressed to snails and slugs and field-mice. Once more was it replaced; only to be once more removed to the ditch.

Thus matters went, till one day I remarked a Personage standing on this debateable eminence, who was clearly not of the village. He was dressed in a dark suit, rather in the manner of my friend “The Catholic,” and there was something about his heavy-browed, tragically-lined, dark-bearded countenance that made me think at once of a Titian portrait of a Renaissance despot. He remained there for some while, apparently surveying with ironic curiosity my Trespassers’ Board, and then, without a word or a gesture, climbed slowly down the bank and strode off across the field. It was not till he was well out of sight that I learned his identity. He was the owner of the quarrelled-over embankment! He was in fact our Sovereign's hereditary Grand Marshal, the first in rank of all the peers of England, Henry Howard, Duke of Norfolk.

Most of that part of the country, except for isolated little patches like this one that I had just purchased belonged to the Duke of Norfolk, and on the other side of the tidal river there stretched away for miles, with its sweeping uplands, its beech clumps, its wild deer, its bracken, its rare beds of Atropa Belladonna, his famous Arundel Park. No English castle, except perhaps Windsor itself, looks as impressive from a distance as Arundel Castle. You see it standing on the edge of its park, above its river, with the silvery gleam of the Channel a few miles behind it, and you feel that Sussex can boast her "melancholy seignorial woods" as well as any chateau on the Loire.

The downs above Burpham — and here, you must understand, we were south of their high range — sloped up very gradually to their highest summit from amid cornfields and clover. On their north, where Amberley Castle was, the downs sank into the valley as precipitously as they had done at Court House, but on the seaward-looking side, they sloped up so gently as to be under cultivation till they almost reached the top.

The Duke of Norfolk owned, as I say, the bulk of all the land you could see from these chalk hills, but he rented it out to large tenant-farmers, who had enormous tracts under their control. The two big tenant-farmers in Burpham were Mr. Collyer of Peppering, and Mr. Graburn of Wepham, both of them "magnates" as old de —— would say, and both of them blest with lively and charming families. Nothing could have been kinder, nothing could have been more hospitable than were these amiable families to us. We even stayed at Peppering while our cottage was being made ready for our reception; and, though beyond the fact that we were anxious to settle in the place and were vouched for, as it were, by Mr. S. we had no claim of any sort on these people, they accepted us in the heartiest old-world style.

The man I became personally most intimate with in the village, apart from Mr. S. was a retiring but not unsuccessful writer. He had already written one or two books when I first met him, and while we lived in the village he wrote several more. This was Mr. Ticknor Edwardes. In those early days Mr. Edwardes lived in what was called the Red Cottage, a house on the main street of our village, though he had a retreat for his literary work in a smaller cottage nearby. Not only used he to compose nature sketches for the London periodicals, but he used to write with professional authority on the subject of bees. He kept bees himself, and being exceptionally skilful with his hands could, if my memory fails me not, make his own hives. It was soon after the War, I think, that he decided to take Holy Orders. At any rate the last time I saw him he was not only a clergyman but had recently been appointed Vicar of Burpham. Mr. Edwardes was a man of meticulous nicety in his literary art. I recollect being confounded by the elaborate craftsmanship with which he laboured; pondering on words, taking words up, as it were, and laying them down, just as he did with the materials of his hives! May his ministerial utterances, under that ancient Norman arch, carved in chalk at the top of the little aisle, be as full of the sweetness of the Word as his carefully constructed hives were full of honey!

I always liked Mr. Edwardes uncommonly well. I liked the tough-wood texture of his bodily presence! The truth is I have always had a tendency to select my particular friends on purely physical grounds. This tendency jumps with my whole inner nature, with my peculiar talents, with my gift for "dithyrambic analysis." It is the way I always go to work in literary criticism, and it gives me the power, I will not say of *becoming* the personality I am dealing with, but at least of diffusing my identity through its identity and of realizing myself through the medium of its sensibility. The thing in its essence is a kind of spiritual eroticism and in my case it is intimately connected with my vice as a *voyeur.* Does not all literary penetration spring from some subtle sublimation of our deepest vice? From a *voyeur* I become a *clair-voyeur.* What I really do is to plunge down, below the external "bricks" that my friend, or my author, "drops," below his lapses, his "heavy weather," his superficial egotisms and vanities and irritablenesses. I flow like a magnetic current through the substance of his nature, penetrating with my spirit the stuff out of which his flesh is made, following the vibrations of his nerves, tracking his being's effluence as this volatile breath rises up like steam from the thawing ice of his identity.

Yes, at bottom the thing is physical. My literary likes and dislikes are physical, quite as much as my personal ones. And this applies to the dead equally with the living. I like and can understand, for example, the physical quality of Wordsworth's flesh and blood, while I instinctively shrink from that of — Browning, let us say! Now Mr. Edwardes' physical presence had an appeal for me beyond the wisest remark the honest man might make. His long nose, his opaque, ivory-parchment skin, his tree-root neck, his shy, nervous, wild-animal brown eyes, all these manifestations of his personality were revelations to me of the essential goodness and soundness of his solitary soul. He possessed that grave, solid, imperturbable reserve, that stiff pride, mixed with disarming spasms of humility, that have characterized so many of the old-fashioned interpreters of English piety. Can I put it better than to say that Mr. Edwardes represented for me that soothing and quiet sense of "protected" well-being which emanates from certain of the Collects in our Book of Common Prayer? Take the Collect, for instance, for the

Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity. Could anything give a person a better sense of security in a chaotic world than these words? “Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve thee with a quiet mind.” Such a tone, such a calm assumption, may be as different from the mystical ecstasies of other interpretations of the faith as our downs are different from the desert; and the words may be only, if you must have it so, translations of the piety of Christendom; but they are translations sealed with the stamp of our English nature. It was in the strength of this “quiet mind” and this “pardon and peace” that my father was enabled to control the dangerous cataclysms of his Cymric inheritance.

And what characters there were in those days in our village for Mr. Edwardes to contemplate with his patient and reverent observation! Some of them live still. Others are dead; dead, and buried between the sloping roof of the old church and the field-path leading up to the downs. What a man was Mr. Budd the blacksmith, Mr. Goodyear the carpenter, George West the landlord of the “George and Dragon”!

I feel ashamed that I did not get to know more intimately our actual farm-labourers. But they were reserved South Saxons, I suspect, not at all inclined to wear their hearts on their sleeves, for philosophic daws to peck at. One old man, however, I did get to know pretty well — I think he must have been the grandfather of a beautiful little invalid boy I used to see standing in a garden where our tidal river washed the ruins of a very ancient malt-house. Round and ruddy-gold as the full moon when it first rises, was this aged man’s countenance; but the long seasons of tilling the fields had so constricted his lower limbs that, as he stumbled about, the space between his legs resembled the curve of an ogival Gothic arch.

But it was the same at Montacute, and the same at Court House! I have been much less able to make friends with real men of the soil than my father was; far less than my brothers have been. Why is this? I think it is because my maniacal pursuit, of what seems to flee from me in ever-narrowing perspective, causes me to turn a lack-lustre and not *deeply-involved* eye upon these Hesiodic figures, the poetry of whose life gives me such ideal pleasure. Theodore can get what he requires in a glance, in a pause, in a silence; for the wandering airs of his disturbing inspiration have fed upon the atmosphere of these lives. Llewelyn can do it by his gift for exciting confidence and by his swift genius for grasping earth-bound essentials. Our youngest brother, Willy, who became, while I was still at Burpham, a Somerset farmer himself and learnt to speak the dialect, could make friends with any carter, any ditcher, any shepherd, as naturally and easily as I could make friends with a priest.

But I could not do it. The thing made me nervous, made me as cowardly and obsequious, as if I were dealing with so many Dukes of Norfolk! And yet I *feel* as if I were behaving to every labouring man I meet in a perfectly direct man-to-man way. It would outrage my life-illusion to the very roots, *not* to feel this. And the queer thing is that in my encounters with working men I tend to put myself out much more than Llewelyn ever does. I will stand “on one leg,” as they say, nodding and wagging my head in the presence of some old fellow’s ramblings, while Llewelyn, having maintained both his own integrity and the man’s would bid him “God-den, Mr. Tup!” and bugger off.

No, I don’t believe I excite a quarter of the confidence that Llewelyn does. Human beings — even the simplest — are quick to catch these nuances of character. People know that my nervous flatteries and lively propitiations cover up a touchy wild-animal yearning to be off and away. In a certain sense it might be said that it is the ridiculous impulsiveness and the transparent abandonment of my manner with people that accounts for this curious lack in my life of friendships with men of the soil. I puzzle them, I agitate them, I embarrass them, just as certain kinds of highly-strung women disconcert me.

Llewelyn in his dealings with them never for a second tries to slough off the country gentleman's tone, the tone of an honest, earth-loving, warm-hearted squire, talking to a shepherd, a gamekeeper, a carter, a stone-breaker. But I have so de-classed myself in my own mind that in place of this dignified, decorous tone, that shows decent respect both to my interlocutor and myself, I throw all sense of proportion to the winds and proceed to talk to Thomas Tup, as I might talk — save for a more quickly beating pulse — to Thomas Hardy. And this sort of thing does not please people. The only people I have ever known it to please are old family servants who understand it as ducks understand water and *tramps* who regard it as revealing a kindred divergence from the tone of established position in this world.

I must add to this brief list two more human types and with them the roll of those who like my method is complete. Negroes understand it, and all priests understand it, and these latter inclusions alone make me reluctant to give it up. With priests I am always entirely at my ease. I understand them as I do *not* understand a shepherd, a fisherman, a ploughman, a mason, a plumber, a miner. And they understand me. Nuns, monks, and friars, priests, hedge-priests, half-priests, all understand me and seem to like me! By the Roman Church I have always been treated with the most miraculous clairvoyance. She seems to know, this ancient nurse of wayward humanity, that my constant mutterings about "angels" and "devils" and about "Divine" moods and "Devilish" moods, is anything but a pose or an affectation. She knows by instinct that it is the revelation of a soul that has somehow blundered into a consciousness of something outside the astronomical universe.

I have often wondered how I would get on in Soviet Russia to which I feel as much attracted as I do to the Catholic Church. I am so simple in my tastes, and so unambitious, that as long as I had the smallest room to myself and enough kopecks to keep me in bread and tea and cigarettes, and as long as I had a road, or even a path across a common, where I could walk alone, I believe I could be happy there. Only I should be always wanting to share the contents of my samovar with some mystical Father Zosima. I fully agree that I ought to be forced by a Communistic State to share the burden of manual labour. But, when I've done my share, I want to be free *to turn from the State altogether*, and from all tedious mundane concerns, free to discuss God and Freedom and Immortality with learned and pious men! Yes, I agree altogether with my Communistic friends that I ought to be forced to do some sort of manual labour. But I do not agree with them that it is a waste of time to discuss God. It is not that I myself ever want to go to church. I never feel the remotest desire to do so; and when I pray, as I weary myself with doing, I pray to idols and fetishes and images, to sticks and stones, to the Sun and the Moon and the Earth.

Sometimes I pray to a saint, like St. Thérèse, and sometimes to Jesus; but never to His Mother and never to God. Nor is it that I am scared to pray to God for fear of having to give up my erotic sensuality, or having only to smoke ten cigarettes a day; for I know perfectly well that my conscience as the voice of my secret life-illusion is as much of a worry now as it would be if I regarded it as the voice of God. It is the sufferings, the atrocities in the world, that have made me come to feel hostile to God, just as that terrible picture of the pain of Christ, referred to in *The Idiot*, tempted Rogozhin, if not the Prince himself, to plunge into atheism, so as to be revenged on a First Cause that allows such things.

If the downs at Court House prevented the sunshine reaching us till the afternoon, all day long at Burpham there poured in upon us with the full flood of sunshine the voices of children, the bleating of sheep, the lowing of oxen, the ringing of bells, the stamping of horses, the tinkling of anvils, the sawing of timber, together with the most cheerful voices from the George and Dragon. We had so much sunshine in fact and such lively sounds in every direction that it seems strange that my proud and vicious loneliness was not melted, humanized, precipitated, made into a sweet savour of humility. Watching me like a Hawk of God, as I turned this way and that way in this blaze of sunshine and friendliness, for I must have appeared to him like a polar bear in a zoo of cheerful Christian beasts, Harry Lyon would try, try sometimes with bitter tears, to break the proud spirit of my isolation. I can see his ascetic countenance now between the jasmine flowers outside my study window, concorted, as was the countenance of the poet Dante, when in that boat in the livid swamp, under the crimson battlements of Dis, he saw his enemy "well soused" by the demons. I can hear now his prophetic voice warning me that if I refused to be human and humble or to change, like Pharaoh, my hard heart, I would suffer the earthly hell, at any rate, of having to smile and smile and smile while my wolfish heart devoured itself amid the sunshine and the sheep.

Looking back on it all now I can see that much in my evasive and tricky character deserved such reprobation; but on the other hand the instinct in me that revolted against feeling myself dragged like a submissive Paynim, by this hard-hitting Knight of the Red Cross, to a compulsory baptism in the waters of humility, seems still a justifiable one. "The Catholic" always used to uphold the doctrine that it was very wrong to attack *the essential nature* of a person, his inmost temper, his life-illusion about himself. This to J.W.W.'s Thomistic mind was the sin against the Holy Ghost. "The Catholic" himself always followed the Goethean method of assuming that a person's character *was already* what the reformer wished it to be, and what he wished it to be was ever in accordance with the person's temperamental fatality. *My* St. Thomas on the contrary was wont to tilt armed cap-a-pie, hell-for-leather, straight into the inmost fortress of a person's temperamental fate. And yet what a noble figure he was, like some chain-armour Brother of the Templars or of the Hospitallers of St. John, as he flashed out so devilishly on the side of the angels! He certainly never bowed down in the House of Rimmon, and I fancy his bitterest and most sardonic outbursts only burst into flame when the live coal in his heart spat and hissed under the impact of my hyperboreal ways.

My misanthropic avoidance of my fellow-creatures was not, all the same, nor is it now, entirely due to inhumanity. It is partly due to the extreme opposite of this; to an unhealthy consciousness of the formidableness, the overpoweringness, of human personality. How I used to sneak out of that little enclosed garden, between the George and Dragon and the carpenter's shop, and thread my way furtively among the graves of the churchyard, in order to reach the downs without having to salute anyone or to speak to anyone! It was almost impossible to do this; and everyone I did meet was so nice that it was hard to pass by with just a nod. I was like a Pelican of the Wilderness lodged in the most picturesque of murmuring dove-cotes! As my indignant Knight Templar never ceased from warning me, my refusal to grow humble and loving threatened to make me eat out my heart in motiveless malignity. How I used to dread meeting those charming and innocent people! I did sometimes summon up enough courage to converse with the plough-boys and shepherd-boys; but they showed signs of being as afraid of me as I was of them; and of the older farm-hands I was as shy as Theodore used to be of the people on his own farm. And yet I reverenced each one of them from the bottom of my heart!

In *that* point not the most austere Communist could find any fault in me. As I have hinted before, every human being of the class of "workers and peasants," has always filled me with exactly the same sort of disturbing awe that I feel in the presence of great lords. To tell you the truth apart from priests and tramps and old family servants, I fancy the class of persons I felt most at my ease with was that very class of clerks and small tradesmen so austerely animadverted upon by Harry Lyon.

Everyone at Burpham, who could afford it, had a boat on the river, which ran at the foot of the hill on which the village stands. It was a tidal river and the boats were fastened to high stakes in such a way as to enable them to rise and fall with the tides. The difference between low tide and high tide was astonishing, fifteen feet at least I should think, and at low tide the mud was an ugly spectacle save under certain effects of light. At high tide, however, the surface of the river, brimming and smooth, became surprisingly beautiful. I soon bought a strong sea-boat at the river-mouth, which was at Littlehampton, a few miles south of Arundel; and it became a passion to me to row this boat, sometimes towards Arundel and Littlehampton, sometimes towards the little villages of South Stoke and North Stoke where the river ran deep and dangerous under the stately wooded slopes of the enormous park. Once, when Bernie was with me, and once when my brother Bertie was with me, both sturdy oarsmen, I got as far down-stream as Amberley, where another castle rose straight out of the water meadows. I remember bathing by starlight in this river with Bertie once; and, on another occasion, when Bertie was in a mood for fooling, I remember sinking with him for so long under the swift tide that our companions grew anxious.

This River Arun, especially an estuary of it, called the Old River, along which there ran a secluded tow-path and where the tide was obstructed by immensely tall reeds full of the harsh cries of invisible reed-warblers, made a deep impression on my mind. When my passion for rowing began to wane, I got into the habit — and this custom lasted for several years — of pacing up and down this secluded tow-path by the edge of the Old River. Quantities of *yellow* loosestrife — many varieties of which it amazes me to find here in New York State, on the banks of the Agawamuk — grew by this hidden tow-path, not to speak of the better-known purple variety, "that our rude shepherds call a grosser name, but our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them," together with meadow-sweet and willow-herb and hemp-agrimony.

But the River Arun, take it all in all, never made a wholly satisfactory impression on my mind. The truth is I do not like tidal rivers. To me they are always a little sinister. In their strange double nature they resemble some monstrous offspring of an unnatural mating! Sea-fish mingled with river-fish in the waters of the Arun, but this only made me long for the glittering fresh-water dace of the Norfolk Wissey. What shocked me most to see were floating bits of ancient seaweed, carried for ever backwards and forwards, forwards and backwards, as the recurrent tides rose and fell. There was something infinitely sorrowful to my nature about this incessant ebb and flow. These irreversible tides took to themselves the character of some ghastly Eternal Recurrence, and there came to be for me a singular desolation about those doomed pieces of seaweed.

During my earlier years at Burpham, when I was always rowing myself up and down that river and feeling so proud to take my friends with me, I decided to stop writing my huge unprintable book, and begin upon a proper, a normal — or as normal as I could make it — Romance. Well, do I recall certain passages from this work, which never was finished, and, as far as I remember never read to anyone. One was about a priest — how my mind ran on priests! — who was pictured by me as sitting at a window of a certain old inn I used to frequent with "The Catholic," whose walls rose directly out of the water, close to the bridge into the main street of the town. Another was concerned with the river under the little chalk-cliff at Burpham; and in this passage I remember describing, luridly and vividly, the gurglings, the suckings, the moanings, the lappings, the grumblings of the tidal water as it sank back into the phosphorescent mud.

Burpham certainly offered several quite startling varieties of landscape. The one that appeals to my son the most, in this birthplace of his, is the wilder portion of the downs. North-east of the village a very ancient chalk-path — probably mediæval, for it is called the Leper's Path and there is a Leper's Window in the church — leads over the bare open hills to a little remote hamlet, lying away from all the world, called Lee Farm. The people of this place, by reason of their isolation from the influences of modern life, possess a poetical naturalness rare in Sussex, though common enough in Wessex. This is the landscape that my son loves best of all, and I used to love it too and frequently visit it while he was still an infant. But what I used to love myself even better, for it was still more lonely, was the heart of what were called "the Gibbet Woods." Here they hanged a man once who robbed the Royal Mail, and this unfortunate young man's indignant spirit seemed to keep people away from the spot! Never in all the years that Burpham was my home did I meet a living soul in those Gibbet Woods. I used to love the margin too — I have always been one for margins, for edges, borders and thresholds — between woodland and downland where the Gibbet Woods mingled with the open downs. This, even more than that hidden tow-path by the Old River, was my favourite walk for a decade. I must have come here a hundred times a year for about ten years, which must mean that I have skirted that margin between woods and downs no less than a thousand times! It was a lovely place, a place exactly adapted to my nature.

It was here one summer that I encountered a great number of White Admiral butterflies, and it was here that I murdered, for the benefit of my son's "collection," a perfect specimen of the rare butterfly called a Hairstreak.

But between the edge of the Gibbet Woods and the hill above the Leper's Path was an eminence on the top of the downs from which the sea, some half a dozen miles away, was clearly visible. This particular eminence was of extraordinary interest to me. It was called by the surprising name of "Friday's Church," and what it really was, was the site of an ancient Norse shrine belonging to the goddess Freya. There existed on that spot in my day — I think it is all gone now — the relics of a lightning-struck thorn-tree. A fragment of this tree's blackened root I profanely and sacrilegiously tore up — avenge it if you must, great nordic goddess! — and placed on the top of my bookcase.

It was within a few months' time after our arrival at Burpham — and indeed we had only just got ourselves snugly settled in when the event occurred — that my son was born. Like Goethe he was born in August — the month of the favoured of men — but unlike Goethe he had a heathen godfather to his christening! Mr. S. performed the ceremony; but Littleton Alfred's sponsor and representative in the historic religion of his race was none other than my atheistical old friend, Mr. de ——! It was a pretty sight to see this aged Lucretius clasping in his shaky fingers, the wrong side uppermost, a neat version of the Book of Common Prayer as he stood at our Burpham font; and it was a charming poem you may be sure, in the old-fashioned courtly style, that he composed to celebrate that day.

Littlehampton was not so far, not nearly so far, from Burpham, as Brighton had been from Court House; but although the birth of my son did not, for all my happiness in it, transform the magnetic current of my vice, I never had the same incentive to rush to Littlehampton as I had in the other case. But all the same I did, and that not unfrequently, make my wayto this seaside town; and when I did so it was, according to my wont, on foot rather than by train. I derived considerable pleasure from the sea at Littlehampton, quite apart from my eternally disappointed quest, and the long walk itself was always a delight to me. The centre portion of my way lay across wide-stretching meadows; and at one point, near a very ancient church in the open fields, I had to pass a curious pond where was a great bed of watercress.

This pond was of immemorial antiquity; and in ancient days it was reported to be the abode of a fabulous monster known as an "Avanc." I did not ive much thought to this Avanc, but there was something about that field-path, and even about the desolate little stucco houses that I passed as I drew near to Littlehampton, which stirred in me all those strange feelings, feelings that seem to reach me from similar human experiences undergone centuries ago, that certain wayside gates and palings and barns and hedges and old walls and old tree-stumps have the power of evoking. What always gave me a special thrill at Littlehampton itself was a particular kind of emerald-green seaweed that covered the older pier-posts there; but in all the visits I paid to those far-stretching, glimmering sea-sands and that swirling river-mouth I never once, to the best of my recollection, was vouchsafed a glimpse of any of the embodiments of immortal loveliness that my fancy used to conjure up as I passed that watercress bed of the Avanc.

"The Catholic" used frequently to visit us at Burpham, and so near to the Roman Church had his convoluted metaphysic brought me, that once, when at Littlehampton in his company, I actually left him reading Pascal in an out-of-the-way tavern, while I took the drastic and apparently fatal step of calling upon the local priest! I can remember now the uncomfortable sensation that seized me, as if I were an actor who had suddenly discovered that his imaginary rôle was turning into formidable reality, as I waited outside that priest's door. But the man was out; and I took his absence as a deciding omen. Theodore's laconic commentary upon this action of mine was a characteristic one.

"Of course," he wrote, "we know you do it to annoy your father."

I am always prepared, to allow for the presence of some drop of black bile, some "dram of eale" behind my most plausible doings; but if it were my father that I had wanted to "annoy" by these antics I certainly was worsted at my own game. For my crafty begetter, doubtless knowing his first-born's weaknesses through and through, assumed, like any wise old Dorset shepherd dealing with a tricky black ram, a gesture even more dramatic than my own.

"How," he said to me, as we hugged our bony knees side by side over the drawing-room fire, while from the Holy Ikon brought from Russia by Uncle Cowper two pairs of almond-shaped Byzantine eyes watched our Welsh ways, "how can you give me a blow like this, John, in my old age?"

This was enough for me. I capitulated at once, glad enough I dare say of the excuse for doing so, but when my father went on and said: "You will write to Mr. Williams at once then?" I bade him good night.

As a matter of fact in the profound psychic intelligence of “The Catholic” the truth had already grown clear; namely that, after that unpropitious call on the Littlehampton priest, though I might be led to the water, I would always dodge the drinking. I think he realized too that what my nature craved in the Roman Church *was* precisely what my father suspected, a metaphysical justification for my inherent and irrational mania for fetish-worship? What I wanted was to be allowed to worship a magical Christ without having to take up my cross and follow Jesus, to be allowed to worship sticks and stones and idols and images and the sun and the moon and the earth and the morning-star. I wanted, in fact to do exactly the very thing that my father suspected I wanted to do: “to bow and scrape,” as he would always phrase it, lifting, like a war-horse among the trumpets, his proud “Ha! ha!” in answer to the tinkling of the Mass bell.

But if my father got the better of me over the affair of my becoming a Roman Catholic I got the better of him over the affair of his making Littleton, in place of his eldest son, the executor of his Will. At least I thought I did! In his heart of hearts my father was divided in his attitude to me. He was at once tender and protective towards me, but always — and not altogether without reason — distrustful of me. I had so often wilfully and wickedly teased him, baiting him, as Bertie always maintains, though I cannot quite credit this part of his story, as I used to bait the *bulls* in our vicinity, and I think, though he was much more worried, as indeed, everyone seems to be more worried, by Llewelyn’s disapproval than by mine— “Why are you looking so grave at me?” he once demanded of that fifth son of his when he was in a bad mood — he was always a little nervous as to what his first-born might *say* to him. Upon Littleton, on the contrary he tended to lean, just as I did myself, and in him — and he had good reason — he felt complete confidence.

We were walking together through "Stoke Wood" at Montacute, the scene of so many dramatic crises in all our lives, when he fell into my hands over this matter of his Will. His Will must have been a problem of deep concern to him; for his distrust of lawyers resembled the distrust that old Pippard, his aged sexton, had of "they Members of Parliament." Whenever he had an interview with a lawyer he would take the precaution of *sitting down* upon the most important document in question, lest it should be spirited away or changed into something else beneath his very nose. With the main issue snug and safe under his lean hindquarters he felt prepared to cope with matters. But he was nervous now, as we walked together side by side through Stoke Wood, for it was not a case of sitting upon his Will but of justifying his will.

"I have been making my Will, John, my boy," he said, "and I have decided to make — —"

Here he paused as Littleton himself used to pause before he jumped over Preston Brook— "to make *Littleton*," he emphasized the name, and that was *his* jump across that brook I always shirked, "my executor!"

I think it was an entirely unexpected thing to my father when I did not receive this news with my usual equanimity. I grumbled and hummed-and-hawed disconcertingly as we passed the tall beech-trunk inscribed with so many love-knots and sweetheart's initials, and this so disturbed my father that he uttered an astonishing remark as a commentary upon my lack of urbanity.

"No one, John," he said, "likes to be thwarted!"

I boasted just now that I got the better of my father over this matter; but really I am not at all sure that I did. What on earth did he mean by using that word "thwarted"? I might have been some subtle conspiring younger son, some crafty Jacob, who for years had been plotting to steal Littleton's birthright, and had now been found out at my tricks! As a matter of fact I believe the truth was that my father used the word “thwart,” just as he did so many other words, in a peculiar sense of his own. What he really meant to say was:

“Of course, John, I can understand you don’t like this. No one *likes* it when another is preferred above him.”

I can so well remember announcing the first news of my son’s birth to Bertie and Llewelyn — both of them then in Wilson’s House — as I walked with them along the Yeovil Road, that road along which Littleton and I used to run home from Wildman’s. Following the example of my father I always made important communications in the open air and if possible during a walk. I have always felt safer, like the Titan Antaeus, when I can draw on the magnetism of the earth. It is not that I necessarily become more honest. I become a more successful diplomatist. I avoid betraying myself by the use of such a word as “thwart”! Well do I recall an earlier epoch than this, when staying with old Littleton at his first assistant-mastership at Bruton, I woke up one morning in “Plox House” where he lodged and listened to “the sweet of the morning.”

I was reading *Sense and Sensibility* then, and like all our family I read Jane Austen purely for the *romance* of the tale; that very thing that the mature young wit was always scoffing at; and, as the scents of Somerset, the breath of damp moss and of faint primroses, came in through the window, together with the thought of celandines, still lustrous amid their shining leaves, the idea of that leather-bound old volume I was half-way through mingled with the thrilling sense that Littleton and I were going to walk that Sunday all the way to King Arthur’s Camelot, there to meet the young Llewelyn and the yet younger Willy, hurrying at top speed from Sherborne.

How well I recall seeing those two little boys in their Eton jackets, their white collars, and their tall rather battered silk hats. Aye! in spite of all I endured at Sherborne the thought of silk hats and white collars always brings primroses and celandines and pink campions and dog-violets back to my mind. But, oh dear! I can see now the very field-gate below Corton Down where we had to announce to them the catastrophic news — so peculiarly shocking to us all — that the Squire was beginning to cut down the trees on the top of Montacute Hill.

It must not be supposed, though I was a University Extension Lecturer now and had given up my schools, that I never went to Brighton from Burpham. I did still go to that Paradise of imaginary sylphs, but I used to get out at Angmering station on my way back and walk the five miles to Burpham through the heart of those Gibbet Woods. With all my fussy conscientiousness in so many matters, this was an epoch in my life, between thirty and thirty-five, when I never experienced one single prick of remorse over my secretive vicious pursuits! Did my cerebral sensuality conflict with the far-drawn imponderable ecstasies that came to me — oh, from what obscure horizons! — as I made my way through those hazel woods? Not for a moment! As I hurried along those narrow mossy paths I would dig the end of "Sacred's" successor deeply into the yielding mud, and glory in the *double good* of my tortuous life. I was like a drug-addict, I suppose; who can live a happy and decent existence, as long as he is not altogether forbidden his "one thing needful." But I did not deceive myself or act the hypocrite to myself. I would have always admitted that compared with the healthy paganism of Llewelyn my peculiar saurian lust, so insatiable and so impersonal, was more like a mad specialized craving than like the natural bubbling-over of the great amorous instinct that makes the world go round.

It was in those earlier Burpham days, after my son was born, thirty years later than my own birth and sixty years later than my father’s, that I suddenly acquired a passion for everything Welsh. I bought Welsh grammars, Welsh dictionaries, Welsh modern poetry. I bought an elaborate Welsh Genealogy, called “Powys-Fadoc,” and mightily chagrined was I when I found no mention of my father’s ancestors in it! I bought everything I could lay hands on that had to do with Wales and with the Welsh people. Alas! I had not learnt yet, in spite of my folly over those unlucky Sagas, that Providence had deprived me of the least tincture of philology. I soon gave up trying to learn Welsh. But the *idea* of Wales and the *idea* of Welsh mythology went drumming on like an incantation through my tantalized soul. I had no vision so far — *that* was still to come — of myself as a restorer of the hidden planetary secrets of these mystical introverts of the world, but the gods having made me, instead of a conscientious scholar, an imaginative charlatan, I resolved to realize with my whole spiritual force what it meant to be descended — to the devil with “Powys-Fadoc” — from those ancient Druidic chieftains!

Hovering one sultry August afternoon after my fashion, like a famished ger-falcon, up and down Brighton front, and I recall to this day the peculiar smell of cockles and mussels mixed with great heaps of dead seaweed that tasted at that moment so salt-sick to my palate, I wondered whether I had the gall to give up “Warre House,” to *sell it*, why not, to the good-natured Mr. S. and wander off with my family and my folios to some remote hiding-place in Mid-Wales! But the older my son grew the more impossible of realization became this wild scheme.

And yet it may be that I was doing, in some deep sense, for all my dislike of leaving Brighton, a wrong to the romantic basis of my nature, in not following this craving! Perhaps I *should* have managed to learn Welsh;

perhaps the mysterious Invisible Presences of that land of enchantment would have helped me to renew and transform my being, like Taliessin, in that immortality-giving Cauldron of Ceridwen, not so much purging me of my vice as fulfilling and satisfying my vice, so that my cerebral quest might be brought to an end, not by suppression or self-denial, but by "subsuming" it in some "Monochronos Hedoné," in a sylphishness, shall I say, that should no longer be selfishness! But in this matter of Welsh mythology I became besotted! There is one portion of my puppet-show personality that might be said to resemble a puppet Don Quixote. Quite in the manner of Don Quixote I kept telling myself stories of how all the friends I ever quarrelled with, or had serious differences with, or imaginary grievances against, would be totally "confounded," as the National Anthem says, in all their "politics and knavish tricks." by my retreat to Wales.

Two battle cries, so to speak, kept sounding on in the background of my misanthropic heart. One was: "I have a son, a son, a *son*, who, as he grows up, will take my side against the world." The other was: "I have Wales, Wales, *Wales*, to take refuge in, where I can send my enemies to the Devil and possess my soul in peace."

And all the while, as was the case with Don Quixote I had no real enemies at all! Samson Carrasco was a friend in disguise; so was the worthy barber, so was the curate, so were the bewildered women-folk. But I was in an agitating quandary. My ghost of a human soul hammered, like a goblin with a drum, upon my ghost of a human heart. Should I, or should I not, leave Sussex and go to Wales? The salt-sick, bilge-water smell of that particular spot where I stood on that sweltering August day to commune with my heart, my feet upon the stones of a sort of fish-market, slippery with scales and blood, how it comes back to me now, mixed with the poignance of that difficult dilemma! It is curious to think of such a thing, but I verily believe those broken claymores and those heroic gestures of the clansmen in Aytoun's Lays rose up from amid fish-scales and sweat and dust and blood and seaweed and menaced my craven hesitation! But those broken claymores pointed in vain to the land of my fathers. I never did take refuge in Wales.

It was at that time that I had an amusing encounter with the new Corpus authorities, who no longer, like Mr. Moule and Mr. Fanshawe and Dr. Perowne, fled from the undergraduates into their studies. I took upon myself to deliver a discourse, in Louis Wilkinson's room in John's, upon what has always interested me more than any other subject, the relation between sex sensuality, in all its confused aberrations, and religious ritual. Louis' room was crowded with the more independent spirits of the Cambridge æsthetic circles. I commenced in the highest feather, and the art of "dithyrambic Analysis" became so extravagant as I went on, largely due to the whimsical encouragement of a Chinaman, who had a seat just below where Louis had made me stand, that a moment arrived when another foreign undergraduate became so upset that he wrote little notes to Louis to have me stopped.

Louis had friends of every complexion in those days and of every extravagance of opinion. In his imperturbable East-Anglian sang-froid he was less frightened of fantastical human masks and of monstrous antinomian gestures than any person, man or woman, I have ever known. Had he been present when Ivan Karamazov entertained Satan, Louis would have serenely joined in, tasted the infernal haschish, brought elaborate logical strictures to bear upon Ivan's spiritual ambiguities, and finally indicated in no half-terms to the equivocal Devil that the world is *much less complicated* than he and his tricky Russian friend were trying to make out.

It was an East-Indian who was so particularly upset by those words of mine that made the Chinaman clap his hands; but I can assure you there was someone else there who was even more upset than the student from the Ganges! This was, for these were days you must remember before the appearance of Miss Weston's *From Ritual to Romance,* a trembling emissary from the Corpus High Table, the very Table, by the way, in all *its* ritual, where I had myself been a guest that same night, drinking that famous wine — little did I understand about wines! — before shogging off to the precincts of John's. In my subsequent trouble over this Pythagorean speech, in which I displayed my "golden thigh," it was against the better judgment of "The Catholic" that I answered the authorities in the manner in which I did.

"The Catholic" who had himself been at Corpus, and indeed was converted to the Roman Church while there, though subsequently he had to flee to Oxford, was indignant with me for the way I answered, and I do not wonder. For I replied to this official warning from the College of my father and grandfather in a strain of masochistic humiliation. My reply was indeed either a revelation of ironical malice or was a shocking exhibition of panic-terror, or was a most singular example of Christian forbearance. Let my reader decide for himself which of these impulses was my dominant motive; I declared to my correspondent that I had behaved in a most ungentlemanly way. I said nothing about the despatching of a sheep in wolf's clothing to the rooms of my friend. I swore that it was unpardonable in me to drink that sacred Corpus wine at the High Table and incontinently to rush off to discourse to Chinamen and Hindus in a vein more resembling that of Lucius Apuleius than of a graduate in an English Foundation. I added that it was my full intention to explain, in a less excitable and more seemly tone, the real gist of my views upon the erotic element in religion, in a public lecture in Cambridge, entirely open — if they cared to come — not only to frightened emissaries from High Tables, but to Deans, Masters, Fellows and Tutors.

It was in vain that "The Catholic" demonstrated to me, with arguments drawn from both the "Realists" and the "Nominalists" of the Mediæval Schools, that whatever *my* sins were I had a perfect right to indicate in what particular points my accusers fell short of the Thomist ideal of perfection. It was "The Catholic" himself who had encouraged me to study the psychology of sanctity and he must have felt at that moment as if he had converted a gesticulating Punchinello who, having got into his wooden pate that a "saint" never defended himself, derived an exquisite sensual pleasure from falling flat on his face and letting people walk over him.

My own view now is, looking back from the standpoint of sixty at my character at thirty, that this cringing before the reproach I received, although it may have had something of masochism, something of ironical malice, something of cowardice, was in essence the expression — though I doubt if I shall get many readers to believe this — of a naïve and, without boasting, an embryo-saintly desire, to return blessing for cursing. I was in fact coy about using weapons in my defence, and I am so still, that might make my antagonist uncomfortable; for at the very bottom of my soul, below all my dramatic gestures and below all my protean metempsychoses, there lies a vein of abysmally simple childish goodwill, reluctant to hurt the feelings of man or beast.

Odd though it may sound, I really do think I come nearer to "loving" my enemies — though I confess it is rather a fussy anxiety that their quaint life-illusions should not be hurt than any warmth towards them — than anyone I have known, except "The Catholic" himself. In plain words — say what you please — I *know* that in certain subterranean motions of my spirit I am much more like the “Idiot” of Dostoievsky than I am like Cagliostro! I daresay I have a touch of Ivan Karamazov in me too; that I do not deny; but in this particular case I am pretty sure that mingled with my masochism and my ironical malice and my pure cowardice there was also, quite distinct and definite, a well-meaning wish that these worthy authorities, who so totally misunderstood me, should continue in their feeling that they were on the side of the angels! Down at the bottom of my nature I seem to discern the presence of a quite special and curious “goodwill towards men.” I really believe that it is the presence of this unusual kind of “goodwill” that is the cause of the most fantastical misunderstandings in regard to my character.

I am afraid you could not call this “goodwill” by the name of love; certainly not love in the ordinary human sense, implying warmth, sympathy, affection. And yet when I read the famous list of attributes, given by St. Paul — with whose personality I have many points of extreme sympathy — to that mysterious *Agape* he makes so much of, I find that this funny species of “goodwill” in me does seem to worm its profane way into very theological company! It has, in fact, always fascinated me to wonder into what precise psychological elements this mystical “love of the saints,” of which one hears so much, actually resolves itself.

Let me for a moment be blasphemous enough to steal St. Paul’s *Agape,* and call it “charity” once more as our proper old version has it. The truth is these conceited modernists, with their broad-church stupidity, totally lack the imaginative subtlety of the great old translators. Damn them, they ought never to have been allowed to cheapen the subtle Christian religion, that only idiots and poets and saints and angels and devils understand, to their own level of commonplace morality. Every fool, but a modernistic explainer-away of the magical power of old words, knows perfectly well that “charity” in this particular place means something different from bestowing alms on the poor. Those old writers knew by instinct how the word “love” would be sentimentalized and prostituted, exactly as it has been.

However! Whatever sort of a mysterious feeling it was that this singular word implied, I would greatly like now to bring the whole question into the free and clear arena of imaginative discussion. My own secret feeling is that D. H. Lawrence, in his admirable attacks upon “spiritual love,” has lacked the serpentine penetration to discover the true psychic mystery concealed under the syllables “*Agape*.” Whatever occult, Magian, thaumaturgic meaning this *Agape* may have had it would seem at any rate to be something completely different from Dante’s terrible inferno-creating “Amore.”

Let me return, however, to the bottom of my own soul where I am on safer ground! I do admit, for I am not anxious to fall too deeply into Jean Jacques Rousseau’s way of justifying himself, that the amber-tinted drop of “good-will” I am talking about is not a warm, glowing, affectionate attraction. But, such as it is, it is *exactly the same* when it is directed towards people as when it is directed towards animals. It is in fact an amber-coloured bubble-drop composed of the very stuff of my bowels of compassion! Do I bewilder you, reader, with all this rigmarole? Let me make it clear. When I rescue a fly drowning in a pool with the end of my stick I am obeying exactly the same impulse that made me — against “The Catholic’s” opinion — prostrate myself flat on my stomach before the Corpus authorities. I wanted them to feel that they were in the right! Of course I do not deny that I was rewarded for this gesture towards these authorities by a delicious surging wave of masochistic emotion! But what *is* any subtle virtue if not something that rewards everybody concerned? Llewelyn, had he been old enough then to play the rôle he played later in my life, would have roundly denounced my behaviour. But he would have denounced it on more direct grounds than "The Catholic." He would have plainly said that I was in the right and the authorities were in the wrong; and that in a world like this when people act contrary to the "sweet reasonableness" of attic wisdom they ought to be *stood up to*. Thus would Llewelyn have defended honesty and sincerity in this blown bubble of a world irridescent with illusion!

Yes, even if my amber-tinted drop of "good-will" so child-like in its incorrigible naïveté and resembling what Dostoievsky's "Idiot" displayed when he was least inspired, has no connection with the mystery of the "love of the saints," it certainly exists independently of the less equivocal human virtues! It never for a second occurred to me, as I thus cringed and cringed in the presence of what was obscure, that "I owed it to myself" to get the truth threshed out. "By Gis and by St. Charity," the minds of sensible men are not devised, formed, adapted, adjusted, constructed, or even intended, to jump at one leap into a thing as subtle as this psychic-sensuous Tao, or "way," to the brink of which, on the strength of that Corpus Christi wine, I had unthinkingly blundered.

No wonder the Chinaman enjoyed the spectacle of my "spirit-led" inspiration, and no wonder the East-Indian was so agitated! What, in my childishness, in my cerebral viciousness, in my Punchinello gesticulations, in my naïveté, I had stumbled on, was a Tremendum Mysterium of the first water. Like Peredur, in the Welsh myth, my Simple Simon foolishness had led me on to the very edge of catching a glimpse of that Marriage of Psyche and Eros towards which so many mystics have groped. I have always been one for borderlands and no-man's lands and what children call Tom Tiddler's grounds; but I had no rational notion, no notion at all, at that time, where I was going. But you can see, all the same, that having been understood by no one except a Chinaman in my roundabout approach to the Tao, it was appropriate enough that I should reply to the magnates of my father's College, in a sort of Chinese.

But they accepted my equivocal "apologia" in a friendly spirit and I *did* give that public lecture in Cambridge. I made the occasion of giving it, in fact, an opportunity for an exciting meeting of all my most intimate friends. Llewelyn had just come up to Corpus; and he and Louis found lodgings for them all. Bernie was there and "The Catholic" and Cousin Ralph. It was a wonder that I did not "realize" a scene out of my unprintable work and bring Mr. de —— too! I recollect how we all had lunch at an inn not far from the old Trumpington Mill. But the lecture fell flat. The Chinaman came, but was grievously disappointed! I had bowed down in the House of Rimmon. My vision had departed.

It amuses me now to recall the fact that many years after this failure at Cambridge I gave my final lecture at Oxford under similar conditions. Here again I collected my friends together for one of these dramatic "symposia" for which I had such a passion. At Oxford, however, it was upon Rabelais I lectured and though my new friend Tom Jones, was there, and my brother Bertie, and both Bernie and Louis, "The Catholic" could not be persuaded to come. The Oxford he had known had been that of Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, and I expect he felt he could not endure to see the new generation. But my lecture was as much of a failure as my public one at Cambridge had been. It was not outspoken enough for my friends, and it was too outspoken for the authorities!

The last of these grown-up "Volentiā Teas," at which I played both the wilful magician and the romantic master of ceremonies, took place in London, at a small hostelry on the river near Billingsgate. This time Bertie, for a very sufficient reason, was the important guest, but Bernie was there too, and I got “The Catholic” to come by going myself to fetch him from where he was then living at Reigate. “The Catholic” had always a deep burning passion — I can call it no less — for Spain. It is indeed one of the tragic things, in a life that always moved on the edge of tragedy, that this man was destined to die without once seeing the country he loved. He made it a kind of desperate secret cult to “prepare” himself for seeing Spain. He was reluctant to go till he felt himself “ready.” But he never went. He died in France. Spain, however, was in my mind as I saw him sitting there, drinking what I fear must have been the very poor wines I had provided, and in my blundering puppet-showman way I compelled them all, as we looked down on the sunlit tide of Spenser’s river, “to drink to Spain.”

I was in a wild and extravagant mood. Yes, I was in a very high-pitched temper that day, for I had with me — and they all accepted her most graciously — a little street-girl called Lily, with whom I had made friends, and in whose company I had just gone on a “Sentimental Journey” to the grave of Dan Leno, the famous clown. What with the influence of this dead Yorrick, and Lily’s presence, I seemed unable to restrain my high spirits. Well do I remember the first night I spent with Lily. She became suddenly frightened of the view from the battlemented window of the room we had taken which looked out over the river near Waterloo Bridge, for it was near the wharfs on the southern side of the Thames. In my naïve manner I confided in Mr. de —— about her nervousness and I was astonished at the tone, like that of some rakish eighteenth-century Lord Mohun, of the aged poet’s comment.

“What an engaging situation, Powys!” he exclaimed; and then smiled and sighed wistfully.

This girl, Lily, created in me, or I suppose I should say my life-illusion encountering *her* life-illusion created in me, a most delicate and complicated happiness. Of course she fooled me a good deal. I fancy she had a “beau” of some sort — what in that particular profession is known as a “bully” — who probably kept himself in liquor and cigarettes by my periodic “presents”; but what was always striking me most about her was innate respectability. She was the most respectable girl I have ever known; and this in spite of the fact that she shocked me when she first took off her clothes by the way she padded herself, especially round her emaciated little hips, in order to look plumper than she was. As had happened with my Brighton girl, I had hardly known her a week before every vicious feeling I had towards her sublimated itself into pity and tenderness, into a romantic ideal sentiment that gave me delicious transports.

Being under “The Catholic’s” influence at that time my whole nature was stirred to its depths by the magical richness, palimpsest upon palimpsest, as it seemed to me then, and indeed does still, of the poetic religiousness of the generations, that was revealed in the cadences of the Roman liturgy. My brothers and I — it was what we all had in common — had acquired, out of our readings from earliest childhood a deep earthy response to the Authorized Version of the Bible. But this mediæval Latin, this liturgical Latin, endowed those well-known images and metaphors with a strange and novel glamour. The fact that it was all ritual too, and in a profound sense all *acting*, satisfied my dramatic nature as nothing had ever done before. The occult mysteriousness of these holy syllables, the way in which the passion of the Psalms and the sensuous beauty of the “Song of Songs” were forever repeating themselves, caused me to go about in a sort of drugged beatitude.

“Vadam ad montem myrrhae, et ad collem thuris.
Dilectus meus candidus, et rubicundus, comae
Capitis ejus sicut purpura Regis vincta

canalibus. Quo abiit dilectus tuus, O pulcherrima
mulierum? Quo dilectus tuus declinavit?
Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter
ubera mea commorabitur. Fulcite me floribus,
stipate me malis, quia amore langueo."

What I realized at that time was indeed nothing less than the very thing I had so delighted that Chinaman, as I fumbled towards it, drunk with Corpus wine, by *just* touching — the mystic marriage of Psyche and Eros!

Tough-minded clever people would have gazed with humorous disgust at my antics under the combined spell of Lily and the Roman liturgy. "Hypocritical loathsome sentimentality!" they would have thought. But I am prepared now, after thirty years, to defend my raptures to the uttermost! You can't sponge a powerful emotion such as I had then off the slate by repeating "disgusting sentimentality." The fragrance from the personality of Lily — though the cheap scents she used were worse than the pieces of felt with which she padded her little body — cast a glamour round whole districts of London for me! It was in "the Borough" I used generally to meet her. How well I came to know all those streets that led southward, past the old Elephant and Castle! I used sometimes to cross London Bridge to reach this district, and sometimes Waterloo Bridge. The words "The New Cut" come drifting back to me in connection with those happy days. But though the names grow faint that belong to the great City, her spirit does not, nor her divine courage, nor her infinite relish for life, nor her subtleties in enjoying it! Country-born and country-bred as I was, my quest for the magic that women alone can work endeared London for ever to me! In Paris I found pornography enough, enough to satisfy the trembling knees and the shaking fingers, but in London, always, always, I found poetry and romance! If I did not quite reach the point of crying with Elia: "O City abounding in whores, for thee may Rainbarrow and Bullbarrow, Pilsden and Polden, Alfred’s Tower and Shaston Camp go hang!” it is certain that the girlish magic which emanated from the consumptive chest, padded hips, and false jewellery of Lily gave to London, especially on *Shakespeare’s side* of the Thames, a deep rich intoxicating glory, like one of those quivering sketches of Turner, where the thick smoke clings about funnels and masts and bridges and warehouses, like the desire of a lover about the limbs of his mistress!

It was in some dark, sombre warehouse-shop, just the sort of place that Dickens, after Scott and Hardy always my favourite novelist, would turn into a circus-tent of angels and demons, that I bought a little leather-bound Roman Psalmody. Do you think I refrained from making Lily write her name— “With love from Lily” — in the title-page of this book? I can well remember the very spot where I made her do this in a street near Kennington but she scolded me, like the ultra-conventional girl she was, for “attracting attention” by writing in a book in a place “where it might make anyone wonder.”

I am sure I am not deceiving myself when I say that Lily never had any particular affection for me. I was continually shocking her respectable susceptibilities; nor was her attitude, when this happened, always as “engaging” as her alarm at that high window. Her extreme propriety and, for all *I* could see, her rigid chastity, encouraged me in the end to begin introducing her to my more respectable friends. But, old-maidish as this street-girl was, she was either too faithful to her “beau” or too habituated to the routine of her profession, which has its conventions as well as another, to lend herself to that sort of moralistic aid which we of the upper-middle class, when we are not exploiting them, tend to extend to women of her type. Bernie was the one I think who caught the final glimpse that any of us had of Lily, and his bulletin was that the young woman had grown plump. So perhaps her escape had been very complete; and she had got rid of her “beau,” her admirer, and her saviours, all at one fling.

But the epoch of my life I have now arrived at, when I was about thirty-two or thirty-three, is an epoch memorable to me for ever as representing the real beginning of my lifelong intimacy — for it was closer than ordinary friendship — with my brother Llewelyn. Llewelyn is twelve years younger than I am, so that it was during his vacations while he was at Corpus and during his holidays, while he was an usher and a tutor, that we used to go about together. Our happiest times were at Montacute. Day after day we would start off in the morning and walk north, south, east and west. Day after day we would start off in the afternoon and walk, God knows how far, again. We went to Tintinhull and Ilchester, to Odcombe and Yeovil, to Ham Hill and Ilminster, to Norton and One Tree Hill. There were few lanes, few cattle droves, few sheep tracks, I might almost say few foxes’ paths, that we did not know.

I can remember so well how once after what might be described as a “Command” tennis game at Montacute House, we set off in the radiant high spirits of an escape from good behaviour, across Tintinhull Great Field into the Fosse Way, across the Ilchester flats, into Ilchester, where we actually got a boat at the inn and rowed upon the river there; as we rowed we quoted poetry to each other without end, or limit, or pause, *read* poetry to each other, felt so much in harmony with each other that our souls within us broke in waves of happiness; each soul against the soul of the other. Our intimacy seemed to imply that what we felt, we felt not as two entities but as one entity.

We used to love to linger at the village of Tintinhull. This was, I think, our favourite place of all, where the old stocks stood yet under the trees, and where Llewelyn liked to pretend, to enhance the blessedness of being alive, like Montaigne causing himself to be waked up in the night the better to enjoy the pleasure of repose, that his brother John, lay stiff and stark, with what he himself often declared was natural to him, *the cunning of a corpse*, in the "morningless and unawakening sleep," between church and tavern.

It was while we were entering Tintinhull one day that we met a tramp who after staring for a long time in a trance of admiration at the beauty of Llewelyn, who smiled back at him like an angel, cried aloud in his rude excitement:

"O Woman's Mouth! O Woman's Mouth!"

Did I, as we went on in the glimmering August haze, quote the beginning of the great Shakespearean sonnet:

"A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion."

Indeed I might well have done so, considering the bond and the sacred covenant between us. And I might have concluded too with the final lines:

"But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure."

Llewelyn was certainly, during those years he was at Cambridge, more full of the abounding magnetism of life than any human being I have ever known. He literally radiated the sun-born exultation that mounted up with immortal exuberance within him. Everything he touched turned to imaginative gold. His humour, his high spirits, seemed inexhaustible. He drank of Life till he reeled into the morning-mists of Creation. He became one of those Sons of the Morning that William Blake imagined. Alas! it was only a few years of this super-human radiance that the Powers allowed him. Mortal men — even such as are born in August — are forbidden to become as gods, knowing good and evil. Too soon the thunderbolt fell that doomed him to a prolonged struggle with tuberculosis. But, as all who know him are aware, even this crippling of his strength, even this sapping of his vitality, left his sturdy zest for earthly existence — existence on any terms — unimpaired, and his “natural force” unabated. He “steered right onward” with his flag mast-high, even though his top-gallant sail swung in tatters and his rigging was lying over the side.

Llewelyn’s compassionate regard for me will remain, until I die, one of those things in the world to be set up against life’s abominations. He has always seemed just as pleased over any success of mine as over his own. And in the profoundest sense of the word, for all his whimsical Narcissism, he has a humility that often makes me jump.

We are just the opposite in *this*. He has the humility of a real artist, whereas I am too proud to take my work seriously, save where it gives me some particular thrilling sensation. As a writer I am even more abandoned to sensations than I am in real life. But how often have I heard Llewelyn cry out, when his writings have brought him some especial triumph:

“You see, John, I am not a dizzard after all!”

No, he certainly is not a dizzard; but in a purely *academic* sense, though more cautious than I am, he can be almost as childish.

Theodore’s genius, for all the simplicity and purity of his style, is much more disillusioned, in a sense much more sophisticated, than anything possible to us. But Llewelyn is in reality something different from just a writer. He belongs to that rare company of Englishmen who — after our great poets and our great humorists — remain the peculiar and special glory of our race. He is a man of action; but a man of action of a very special type, the type *who act in order to feel,* not the type who lose themselves in action. His real peers are such rare formidable personages as Doughty and Clifford and Cunninghame Graham; and like Doughty he naturally and instinctively expresses himself in poetical archaisms. In his notions about politics and public affairs he tends to resemble Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. His favourite books remain always the same, the old wily, shrewd, quaint writers, full of mellow wisdom and wanton whimsies, like Thomas Burton and Montaigne, but I think, beyond prose-writers of any kind, what has the greatest effect upon his inveterate habits of feeling is the ancient ballad poetry of England and Scotland.

I have had the privilege of watching his growth from the beginning into that rich *idiosyncrasy* which now distinguishes him; and I confess that in my conceit of my superior cleverness I was stupidly slow, much slower than I was with Theodore, to recognize where he was a better writer than I. He too was slow to recognize this; and he has always tended to overrate my intellectual influence upon him. This has seldom been more than what a fast-moving restless theoretical intelligence can exert over a banked-up, earth-bound nature. What I really did for him was what Mr. Blake, Mr. Wildman, Mr. King, old Koelle, G. P. Gooch, and, as far as "art" is concerned, Thomas Henry Lyon, did, if you roll all these very different persons into one, for me. He listened to me, watched me reverently, wondered at me critically, took warning by me, and went his own way.

As a little boy his idol was Littleton, who returned his love with a warmth of which my "cold planetary heart" was incapable. Faithful and infinitely tender to Theodore he has always been, and I noticed that when, grown to man's estate, he became Theodore's companion. Theodore would relax, unbend, utter quips and jibes, chuckle and feel happy, nay! be impishly merry with him, in a way he never felt able to be with Littleton or with me; no! not since those early days at Sherborne, when in his Prep, straw-hat and his Eton jacket he would await us at the top of the hill for our Sunday afternoon walk till we came hurrying out of Wildman's yard.

If I suffered when I first went to school what must Theodore, so much more predisposed to suffering, have gone through? It comes back to me now what a relief it was when he went to Louis Wilkinson's people at Aldeburgh where I could tell from his letters how much happier he was. When I think of those mournful grey eyes, under that straw hat, that used to turn to us as we came hurrying up that hill, when I think of the same forlorn gaze fixed so hopelessly on the weary stretch of the road to Saxmundham market, it does my heart good to envisage the formidable grey head that now nods over the fire, chuckling at Llewelyn's stories.

Had my father stopped begetting children before his fifth son was born a certain relaxed and untrammelled humour in Theodore might never have enjoyed itself, nor certain sardonic comments aimed at life found their responsive billet. I am myself, I fancy, at once too impulsively innocent and too wickedly self-absorbed to be the perfect companion for him that Llewelyn is. In earlier days, before certain funny ways and funnier fancies we both indulged in had been beaten smooth by life, it was quite different. But how quaint it is to think that my youngest brother Willy is the only one of whom I have ever been seriously jealous as far as Llewelyn is concerned! I never was jealous of his intimate link with Bertie. But I did — and I can recall my emotion with precise vividness — burst out savagely once over Willy. It was when we were all together one afternoon, seated in the terrace-walk at Montacute, that this, to me, soul-shaking event occurred. Llewelyn was always something of a tease — he has a faint touch of my own sadistic tendency, but *so* faint that he can afford, as he can with every other perversity, for he is the least suppressed person ever born, to give it entire vent — and on this sunny afternoon he set himself to tease me. This would have been perfectly all right if he had not brought Willy into it, for he had teased me quite remorselessly many times before, as for example when he described with terrifying gusto the manner in which an old gentleman we knew had gone raving mad and become what Llewelyn called a "Ramper," and as when he described a half-slaughtered sheep, its wool grown scarlet with its own blood, as when he described in detail the contents of a pornographical book of the sort most kindling to my vicious imagination; but his bringing Willy into it set me off. Willy, powerful and silent as he was, and singularly well-pleased to be alone, was always one for certain irrepressible giggling fits when any pompousness, or priggishness, or unnecessary spasm of nerves, presented itself in an elder brother.

But to be the subject of a humorous attack from Llewelyn, accompanied by spurts of suppressed amusement from Willy, was too much for me. I got up trembling and shaking from head to foot, extended my arm to its full length, and my long index-finger to *its* full length, and cried in a shrill high-pitched voice, like the voice of old Meg Merrilies or Norna of the Fitful Head:

"*Young man*, I'll never forgive you for this!"

I have often been furiously angry with Littleton, but never without plunging at once into a physical contest, which, even when I got the worst of it, mightily relieved my feelings. But this anger was a very different thing! This was the sort of wrath, with that dangerous pit-of-the-stomach quiver in it, that as a rule only women have the power of exciting in me. This event took place on that terrace-walk at Montacute which has become to us like the Rialto at Venice, or like the Forum at Rome, a place dedicated to oracular and memorable remarks. It was on the terrace-walk that I confided in Llewelyn and Louis about the Fear that needed so much skill, and so many wiles and devices, to keep in subjection and reduce to oblivion. I was even then far too crafty a ruler of my unruly mind to confide in them the nature of the existing "avatar" of this Demon of many

Incarnations; and if you force me, reader, to tell you the precise truth, I was astonished at the cool way these two young blades received this hint of my underlying insanity.

But the heart alone knoweth its own aberrations. It was in the terrace-walk too, and in the presence of Llewelyn and Bertie, that I cried out once: “Oh, for something really startling to happen!” And you may believe I remembered that dangerous speech a little later, when the War came bolt upon us. It was in the terrace-walk that Theodore, when he had an unusual mood of felicitous well-being, heaved a great sigh and exclaimed to our surprise: “I feel like Southey in Portugal!”

It is extraordinary how united in our life Llewelyn and I became, considering the enormous gulf between our temperaments. We have been friends in the old Homeric sense. I only hope I did not bring down his consumption on him when I stretched out my bony finger towards his chest in that threatening manner. As a matter of fact, looking back at my life from the foot of this wooded hill in New York State, I am struck by the fact that, for some reason or other, I have seldom laid a curse on anyone — and for this reason I have come of late to restrain my maledictions — but some crushing catastrophe, very often death itself, has fallen on the person. I could give you instance after instance, and Littleton can bear me out in the earlier cases, of persons who have insulted, ill-used, maltreated, attacked, disparaged, maligned me, meeting with some overwhelming if not some fatal disaster! Is it possible, I ask myself, is it conceivable, that I who from that far-off afternoon in the lane at Shirley when I played at being the “Lord of Hosts,” have been always imagining myself a magician should really be possessed of a certain fatal power over my enemies? The *coincidence*, anyway, if such it be, has happened so often that I have given up allowing myself to indulge in feelings of hatred.

Llewelyn will lift his eyebrows when he comes to this passage. His assurance is certainly definite enough that the visible world is made up of a checkable verifiable palpable material substance that will go on its way for ever, through what, to me, is an unthinkable void of Not-Being, even though all minds, including that of the Demiurge, were to dissolve into air; but I note in him a curious indulgence to many of my superstitions! The truth is, he'll be indulgent to any of them and even go half-way, as long as they remain honestly and primitively *heathen*, but the second they approach Christianity, as a system of Truth, they stink in his nostrils, and he casts them from him with angry contempt.

I think the vast difference between Llewelyn and myself can be best realized in our attitude to ourselves. I am far more elusive, far less solid, far more trickily neurotic than he in my attitude to myself. I use myself for the sensations I can get out of myself, but I never cast a tender eye upon myself. But you can see at a glance how Llewelyn's attitude to himself perforates his flesh and blood; how it flows outward like an immortal stain or dye, how it characterizes his accent, his gestures, the least lifting of his eyebrows, the least clouding of his forehead.

For all *my* propitiations and for all *his* sun-born sweetness I doubt if either of us really ever forget a deep outrage to our life-illusion. How far we *forgive* — I really do not quite know! I think I am more likely to go out of my way to be nice to persons of whose character and tone and temper I disapprove than he is. Llewelyn says I am a spreader of carpets. He says I spread carpet after carpet before people, leading them on and on and on, till finally they discover they have crossed a kind of pit — like those pits I dug for old Curme in the potato-garden — and at *that* point, when they can't step back, I fall upon them, bursting out in one of my quivering rages and denouncing them for things which *at the time they did them* I passed off with the utmost affability.

But if I am what might be called an extreme type of anti-narcissism, Theodore, in the convolutions of his terrifying originality, goes further still. Let us take, since I am now talking of grown-up men, our characteristic ways of dealing with our beards! One of my dominating manias is a dislike of the thought of dipping a hirsute face into a cup or bowl or flagon; and it sets my teeth terribly on edge even to think of wiping my mouth with a napkin, a thing I always do with the back of my hand. My hatred of handkerchiefs is so great that I invariably turn my eyes away when my interlocutor is using one; and how people can use their handkerchiefs, while they keep their eyes fixed upon you, is a wonder to me. The almost universal human trick of looking into your handkerchief after you have blown your nose, seems to my finicking punctilio a reversion to the ways of dogs. The more than complaisance, in fact, with which so many persons regard their excretions is a mystery to me. I get pleasure from doing what, in imitation of our good Squire, I will call “pumping-ship”; but I take no pleasure in beholding what I have done. I am certainly no *voyeur* there! I am a Manichean, the son of a Manichean, and it is in my fastidiousness as much as anything else that I resemble my father.

“This egg is so messy!” he would indignantly declare, looking hopelessly at our preoccupied faces, till once more, his long spatulate fingers holding the tiny silver spoon, he fell to struggling with that tricky protoplasm.

But to return to our beards. How queer it is to think of our smooth boy-faces, as we passed up our plates for more of Mr. Cole’s butter, or of that unequalled brown bread that came from a baker in Stoke, and cajoled our father into telling us for the thousandth time how he was wont to use "climbing-irons," when he hunted for hawks' eggs, wearing beards at all! Littleton has, I believe, a football champion's objection to growing a beard. Llewelyn, I know, always grows a great defiant buccaneer beard when his illness makes a special effort to compel him to "cave in," and I think it gives him a mighty comfort at such times to feel like a Dutch sea-captain. Bertie has grown a beard of late and has trimmed it and pointed it. Its effect with him, I think, is to intensify a certain quizzical air he has that always makes me feel as if I were an appealing Liliputian in the presence of an affectionate Gulliver. I felt this once, I remember, in the London Tube; and I seemed to be growing so rapidly smaller and smaller and smaller under his affectionate gaze that my voice sounded in my own ears like the voice of Alice in Wonderland. Bertie is like my father's Giant Grumble. Dr. O'Neill once remarked that every member of our particular offshoot of the Powys family was like a separate branch of one single tree-trunk. If this *is* the case, the branch represented by the initials *A. R. P.* is the one most conscious of this unity! Without question Bertie does, of all of us, most closely resemble my father, and, like my father, his undemonstrative feelings have roots that go straight down, like the deep-burrowing root of a dock-plant.

But I have not yet referred to the beard that Theodore at one time wore. He was wearing it I think when he wrote his *Soliloquy of a Hermit.* I am sure it got on Theodore's nerves to feel himself one of a clamorous, boisterous, self-complacent, optimistic crowd, as I am afraid we sometimes must have seemed to him when we gathered round him at his remote retreat, drawn by the magnet of his personality. I have often noticed — and I think I understand his feeling — that when we moved about around him, in our awkward innocence, he would shrink into himself, and grow physically frailer and slighter, and even move and speak in an indrawn muted manner, as if he were only disguised for the nonce in our Powysian flesh and blood and would very willingly put it off. At such times, as he withdrew himself into himself, an expression of stricken, smitten, *terrible* melancholy would rise up, like an ice-cold film from the silt at the bottom of the sea and diffuse itself over his grey eyes. His eyes at such times would grow very much larger, and in some alarming way closer together, and would curiously darken.

But the Demon that tormented him never allowed him to betray its great buggerly horns at such times, but would force him to brood over some wretched little nuisance or some teasing little worry. He was like a tragic Prometheus whom the vulture that gnawed his liver forced to complain to the sympathetic Io about the cold snail-slime upon that promontory, or to the pitying Oceanides about the gnats in the wild currant-bushes up there.

Of course in a sense all we mortal men are the same in this matter. The First Cause has got his lasso round the "funny bone" of each of us, and loves to give it a twitch now and again, to show who's the master, while what we *tell* one another is that our porridge is cold, or that our door lets in the draught, or that "something's bitten us." Yes, in his inspired directness, over the little realistic details that pinch and prod and tickle and scratch us all, Theodore has, for all his eccentricity, a stark universality that resembles that of Dürer. Certain scenes in his books seem to me unsurpassed in their humour, though I confess there *are* passages here and there that I invariably skip, just as I have skipped, since I was in the Prep. Dickens' description of the murdering of Nancy. If this is a weakness in me from an æsthetic point of view, I can only declare, like an obstinate old woman, that while there are many unspeakable things done and endured in this ghastly world it is painful to me when one of my favourite writers refuses to leave to God his monopoly in holy terror.

As I say, I think I can understand something, though no doubt not all, of the withdrawing-mood that made Theodore tread so gingerly where we were apt to go ramping and rough-shod. I can even follow afar off the feeling in him that always led him to speak of our begetter, not, as I am doing in this book, as *my* father, but as "*your* father." Thus in an unmistakable manner he removed himself by at least one remove from all tincture of sentimental clannishness.

When I call myself an *anti-narcissist* I mean that I have a morbid dislike of thinking of my physical appearance. The only portions of myself that I ever dwell upon with any complacency are my knees and my hands. But if I am an anti-narcissist, what, I ask you, was Theodore when on an occasion when it was imperative for him to refer to his beard, instead of speaking of it as "my beard" he spoke of it as "*this* beard"? Had he been a Mohammedan his version of the oath, "By the Beard of the Prophet," would have been, "By *that* Beard of *your* Prophet." It was in a similar mood that he would detach himself even from his favourite writers, always referring to Nietzsche, for instance, as "*that* German."

Nothing could be farther from Theodore's ways than my own convoluted habit, when people are vexing me, of luring them on to do it more and more and more, as if just to see how far they will go, my tendency in fact of revenging myself on them by encouraging them to victimize me. Even when my dog annoys me, by prolonged and head-splitting barking, never a finger will I lift, never a word will I breathe to stop him. I hate a barking dog too much for that! And my cat I will let sit on my chest, as I lie on my back writing, while its tail jerks my pen. In this passivity my motives are two-fold. I really do hate to destroy even a moment's pleasure in any living organism; but I also feel too furiously indignant with the beast to push her away!

Do I ever burst out, where Theodore is concerned, in those fits of blind rage that I have displayed at times towards Littleton and Llewelyn? *Me genoito!* Never, never! And why is that? I think it is because I have seen a degree of suffering in Theodore's face that I have never seen in either of theirs. How can I burst out, though no one knows better than he how to catch a person "on the hop," when I see him wearing those fearful scars of thunder? You can't be wicked towards someone, however his *bon mots* may hit the weak spot in your armour, upon whom the First Cause sends his "urchins" to "exercise."

By slow degrees during these first five years at Burpham, after my son's birth, I did begin to get better control over my nerves. Did my approach to Roman Catholicism help me in this? I cannot tell; but I think the sense of my son's being in the world did something. On the other hand I had deep moods of rebellion against all responsibility, against everything that interfered with my being a free-booter, like William of Deloraine, with my stick — the successor of "Sacred" — as my spear, and with those third-class carriages, whirling me all over England, as my "dapple-grey steed." I well recall a visit we paid with my son to Norwich, to the kindest relatives that a man ever possessed. Looking back on that visit now what would I not give to enjoy that drawing-room — all the wonderful Northwold pictures and furniture, the gilded Louis Quatorze chairs, the portrait of William Cowper, yes, even that very picture of Venice which used to hang where those blossoms of the magnolia grew outside, all, all, all gathered in that old house in the Close — and to drink to the dregs the delicious cup of remembrance, remembrance of those days when I was so happy by the banks of the Wissey and with Littleton!

But the terribly deep urge in my restless nature for a satisfaction of that double exigency within me, desire for a certain kind of erotic thrill and desire to be a magician, drove a villainous and heartless wedge between my triumph in my son, my happiness in taking him to the edge of that Norwich river, and all those passionate memories of Northwold. I wandered about the old castle grounds, like a lost soul, hunting for any kind of fleeting satisfaction for that queer vice that obsessed me; and, in the enforced intervals of this, I pondered a monstrous epic poem, to be entitled "The Death of God." Of this poem I *did* write no less than six little exercise books full. I must have written from five hundred to a thousand lines! I remember one extravagant passage towards the end — or rather towards where I broke off and left it — that introduced in some wild scene "out of space, out of time," a distorted phantom of St. Paul, and I remember winning a rare word of commendation from Louis Wilkinson himself, when I read this passage to him, one day on the terrace-walk!

It is curious how late any sort of moral sense within me with regard to my vice came into being. There was no trace of such a thing in those days! Nor did I realize in the least the difficulties, the obstacles, the practical hindrances that make it so hard even for the most detached person to find complete satisfaction for his erotic cravings in this world. It was not till I had visited America and found there, in so many deliberately provocative performances on the burlesque stage, a satisfaction that I have never found before, that my conscience — so active in other directions — began to bestir itself. This new disturbance was partly due I believe to my fastidious reactions against these burlesque shows. At any rate when I came back from America it became a by-word in my little circle, the way I would refer to my "divine" mood and my "devilish" mood. Indeed I used to make frantic struggles at that later date, when I was about thirty-five, to shake off this erotic obsession altogether; but as far as I can recall now, in those earlier years at Burpham, I was impregnable to the stirrings of conscience where my *voyeur* mania was concerned. To be the nympholept, or "sylpholept" I then was, seemed to me so absolutely inevitable that it never crossed the threshold of my consciousness — not even when I approached the Roman Church — that I could struggle against it. The mere sound of the syllable "girl," as I have already hinted, whether you rhymed it with "pearl" or not, opened such a Paradise to me that everything else in life became negligible. I seriously think it is very likely that since those vision-tormented Monks of the Thebaid no mortal brain has realized the magical desirableness of girls to the extent I did!

My epic poem, "The Death of God," was modelled on the blank verse of Milton, Keats, and Tennyson. It was an extremely imitative poem, but since it was after all, a narration, I was compelled to be more original in it than I had ever been before in my verses. There are, in fact, several passages in it — I possess my long-hand fair-copy still — that really *have* a certain inventive, and even a flickering poetic, merit.

And what did I feel, instinctively, intuitively, and with what Matthew Arnold calls "the Imaginative Reason," about the secret of the cosmos at that time? I will tell you. I felt exactly as I have felt all my life! My father's faith in Evangelical Christianity was the single thing about him that never affected me one jot. Harry Lyon's Anglican conversion did not affect me; and, as you have seen, the least touch of my father's crafty *argumentum ad hominem* was enough to blow "The Catholic's" influence off the chess-board. Harry Lyon's final conclusion, "Jack has no soul," does not, however, *inevitably* follow from my refusal to accept the Anglo-Catholic faith, or even the Roman Catholic faith. It certainly does not follow from my inability to accept my father's evangelical faith.

On the other hand I have never been able to feel assured, as Llewelyn does, in the rooted solidity of this visible world, and the poppycock-insubstantiality of everything else. The game I played in that lane at Shirley when I felt myself to be the Demiurge, the game I played at Dorchester when I became a magician calling up Escrawaldons and Dromonds from the abyss, the game I played at Sherborne, when I hid in the oak-tree below the Honeycomb Woods, the game I played at Cambridge when I refused to be converted to Science by Sidney Roland, remained the same game that I played at Burpham, as, suffering from my ulcers, I watched from my deck-chair my son climb up and down the laburnum to that high bank. The background of my game was the certainty — not a rational theory, mind you, but a certainty grasped with that "illative sense" of which Cardinal Newman speaks — that this astronomical world apprehended by our senses is only one mental bubble, real as far as it goes, but only one little drop, among endless other cosmic bubbles of similar *mental stuff*, bubbles of solution and dissolution, from the innumerable centres to the innumerable circumferences of which move the thoughts that create and destroy them.

I have always believed that the imagination and the will have a creative power. What a person wills and what a person imagines become a mysterious part of *what is*. It is madness to spend your days trying to eliminate what your own will and spirit and imagination are perpetually adding to the mystery of life. I have always known — ever since my father brought it about, as we walked to Preston Brook at Weymouth, or across the fields to the Ashbourne Road at Shirley, or home, with our watering-pots full of minnows, from the Stinsford Brooks at Dorchester, that his giant and his fairy should overcome *The Professor* — that the most vain and treacherous of all pursuits was the pursuit of truth. Socrates is right. What we need is more wisdom. We have got enough knowledge! The greatest word ever uttered on earth about truth was when Jesus said: "I am the truth." However wrong His ideas may have been about God and Sin and

Judgment, He was surely right in His main point, namely that the ultimate "truth" in this world of mental bubbles is a living organism.

These electric forces are only real, just as the old "matter" was only real, when they are considered as portions of a living Being. I assure you I cannot remember the time when I did not feel the universe to be *a congeries of living organisms*. Some of these are visible, some are invisible, but when Llewelyn talks to me of a checked-up, verifyable, solid-block monistic universe, I cannot take him seriously enough even to get angry. Good God! Why the wildest fancies of a madman have more of *the real reality*, the creative reality of life in them, than the whole of this tricky objective mirage that people nowadays call "space-time." What I had *not* realized in those days and indeed have only realized during this last decade is that it is possible to use all these old theological conceptions, covered by such expressions as Morality, God, Immortality, the Freedom of the Will, Prayer, Redemption, and so forth, to serve your own private secret purpose, while you drop their superficial ordinary meaning.

Why should we allow the old-fashioned religious people to have such an advantage over us? They certainly *do* have an advantage over us in many important ways. Why not steal their crafty devices and use them for secular ends? For example, according to religious people you ought at every moment to make mental efforts to be loving and humble. Very good! I agree entirely with this method; I agree with these constant efforts! But since lovingness and humility are not what I am most in need of just now I feel completely justified in substituting a *different effort*, an equally sturdy one I hope, but a *different* one. Thus I steal the psychological devices of my father and my grandfather and use them to my own ends.

Carlyle was so delighted to discover that ancient monkish saying: *laborare est orare*, "to work is to pray." What I have been led to substitute for this aphorism, according to my “Philosophy of Representation,” is a motto that would run: “To endure is to pray”; or to go a step further: “To endure joyfully is to see God.” What I mean is that our modern pseudo-science and pseudo-realism tend to corrupt the up-mounting spring of life-acceptance in us, which keeps us going in spite the “urchins” of the First Cause. The old religious faith gave our forefathers the stoical habit of drawing their life-energy not from external conditions but from within. That they called this power, welling up from inside themselves by the name of “God” had an historical justification which is lacking to-day. But *that* is no reason for deserting the living well-spring of mysterious magic within us. Never mind the name! The point is that we *have* the power of re-creating the universe from the depths of ourselves. In doing so we share the creative force that started the whole process. It is personality, the out-rushing energy of living organisms, that underlies all the criss-cross currents of the world. Every time a living being gathers itself grimly together, and draws on its inmost vitality to be happy *in spite of all*, it is doing what our sturdy ancestors called “praying.”

By degrees I got very attached to certain among the Burpham inhabitants. The generous-hearted Mr. S. married and moved away, but with Mr. Edwardes I continued to enjoy a pleasant literary friendship and never failed to admire the quiet gravity of his character.

The great event of the year at Burpham was the sheep-washing which took place in a narrow estuary of the river. Early in the morning a vast continuous stream of woolly sheep would pour down the lane past our house, filling the whole space between the walls, and making a peculiar sound unlike anything else. Mr. Edwardes in his rôle as a writer of nature sketches was always on the scene. So was the handsome bearded blacksmith, Mr. Budd, leaving his formidable sons to work at the anvil. So was Mr. Goodyear the brown-eyed genial carpenter, and George West, the shy, gentlemanly innkeeper, whose father had had the George and Dragon before him. Mr. Goodyear was always a good friend of mine, though I vaguely mixed up his name with a terrifying passage in *King Lear*. I astonished him, when first we met, by my quick recognition of the magnetic quality in his jovial countenance.

Nor was there missing at that sheep-washing the youthful shop-keeper of our village, George Roadnight. The respect we had for this incomparable young man remains with me still as a most happy memory. With a smooth high forehead and a large ruddy clean-shaven face, with a choice and even meticulous manner of speech, George Roadnight played the part of a benevolent Home Secretary to our small hamlet. A Liberal in politics he seemed to stand as the mediating focus-point between all the clashing and contradictory forces of our little community. We all came to him; we all leaned on him; we all trusted him. I have never known in my life any human being so dedicated to take the right path in troubled waters! The side upon which George Roadnight was was always the right side; and Mr. Mais, the vicar, who resembled a saintly sea-captain, had the sagacity to support him.

Contrary to what often happens in energetic families, the sons of Mr. Collyer and Mr. Graburn, our two squire-farmers, for the Duke of Norfolk obliterated all ordinary distinctions, stuck to their parents' homes, and finally took their parents' places. They were youths of good parts and of charming presence but they were almost as shy of me as I was of them.

All these persons used to meet by the river's edge during that sheep-washing time. But personally I only went once, and then only for five minutes; for I am frightened of even the nicest people when they are together in a crowd. I can remember coming bolt up against the whole band of Mr. Graburn's men, eating their meal in the harvest-field, and I was so terrified that in dead silence I shuffled past them as if I had been a deaf-mute.

It was during my northerly travels, in those earlier Burpham days, that I first met another important addition to my inner circle of friends. Louis Wilkinson used to laugh at me for the way I insisted on calling it a "circle," as if we were I know not what kind of a group on the left bank of the Seine. But it *was* a circle; and contrasted with it my group of intimate American friends, Mr. Dreiser, Mr. Masters, Colonel C. E. S. Wood, Mr. A. D. Ficke, Mr. Robert Bright, certainly do not make a circle! Mr. Bright, my oldest American friend of all, does not even know these others that I have mentioned! This final addition to the inner circle of the people of my life — for it is hard to make intimate and familiar friendships after forty — was Tom Jones. Like "The Catholic," though his departure from this world was a much sadder one, Tom Jones has been dead for several years.

Before he died — some half a dozen or more years ago — he wrote me a five-page letter, in his well-known clerkly hand, relating the wretched misfortunes of the final years of his life. He was a super-skilled clerk in an old Anglo-American House of cotton importers, and in the service of this firm, in the Cotton Exchange at Liverpool, he lavished his life's energy and his extraordinary mathematical gifts. It was the War and the subsequent Depression that produced the events that ended in Tom Jones's death. He had lived in lodging-houses all his life on one bank or the other of the Mersey and he died in a lodging-house in Birkenhead. I cannot say that our English world treated this noble, passionate and secretive Welshman as his brain, or his spirit, or his heart, deserved. Woeful was his end. He came to London to spend, as was his wont, his Christmas with Bernie, but his departure was a forlorn one, and as he got into the familiar train, to take his solitary way back to Birkenhead they tell me he remarked to Louis who saw him off, that he had had enough of his life on the terms offered him then by destiny. A few days after that visit his landlady found him dead in his bed. With a single exception the death of Tom Jones affected me more than any death I have as yet known.

How often have I slept with him in those Mersey lodging-houses! Curiously enough he was, except for Llewelyn and Bernie, the only grown man I have ever slept with. On my soul I cannot even imagine myself sleeping with any other man. I loved Tom Jones. Louis used to maintain that I only loved him because of the incalculable advantages I got out of him; out of staying with him in his various places, out of being treated by him to endless teas and coffees in those sumptuous Kardomah cafés, and, above everything else, out of enjoying the privilege of knowing his innumerable girl-friends. My exultation and my rapturous happiness during my visits to Tom Jones in Liverpool were indeed unparalleled. Louis is right there. But I can swear across my heart that I loved the man *for himself*, as girls say, apart from the aura, the radiation, the delicious glamour, that of necessity hung about him! Those periodic visits to Liverpool certainly remain among the happiest times of my whole life. And why? Because, for once I lived in a classic atmosphere of complete freedom as far as sex is concerned! It has never happened to me again.

I have had love affairs at other epochs. I have had romantic infatuations at other epochs. These Liverpool experiences were neither love affairs nor infatuations. They were, purely and simply, friendly erotic encounters between men and women. They were enjoyed with no afterthoughts of emotional agitation, no complicated responsibilities, no tragic jealousies. They were experiences of perfectly simple, honourable, delicious pleasure on both sides. They were Arcadias of idyllic felicity. They were an eternal recurrence of the Golden Age. I had never met such girls before. I have never met such girls since. They were mostly, I fancy, women of that “lower middle-class,” so denounced by Harry Lyon. But I dare say if even Harry Lyon, for such monkish knights are not always unkind to the ungodly, could have followed Tom Jones and myself through one of our long adventurous days on those Mersey banks he would have moderated his opinion. For Harry Lyon, as I trust I have already indicated, in my turgid struggles to delineate his unique character, has nothing of the snob in him.

Possibly he would have tried to prove that “Tom Jones’s girls,” as I used to call these sweet-natured women, belonged to the proletariate. They certainly were different from the Bohemians of New York. I have never properly mixed with the livelier denizens of Greenwich village; but must not the intellectual and æsthetic jealousies of young people who are setting out to do what in America is called “creative work,” militate considerably against the pure enjoyment of men and women in each other? But perhaps they *were* proletarians, these wonderful Liverpool girls. Perhaps they were what all our women-folk will become in a few hundred years! Or perhaps the real explanation is that they were Welsh, like Tom himself. I do vaguely feel that I have read somewhere in Sir John Rhys’s writings, of a charming Welsh custom called “bundling,” according to which young men and young women could indulge in all the dalliance they liked, short of the final consummation. Yes, I suspect they *were* Welsh; for after all Liverpool is our biggest city in the immediate neighbourhood of Wales. It is very doubtful, I fear, if any of you lovely daughters of the Mersey get a chance of reading these lines. But if you do, discreet elderly persons as ye must be now in your Cheshire homes, please try and remember me! *Can’t* you recall that funny-looking friend of Tom Jones who was always reciting Milton?

Those Liverpool visits were so exciting to me that I cannot remember so much as one single time in that city when I suffered from the hurting of my ulcers. Life in Liverpool, with Tom and his friends, seemed to have a magic power of curing ulcers.

Oh, how intensely it all comes back to me! One girl, the daughter of a seafaring family, had limbs that were so slippery-smooth as to be hardly human. This pleased me well; for the Undine type has always had a maddeningly provocative effect upon me. But with one of the most charming and beguiling of all these people I had an experience similar to the one that so shocked my Brighton friend; but I was not shocked a bit. I doubt if I should have been shocked if she had been changed into a wooden image. Another among them made things more piquant for herself by constantly talking about Hell. Of course I knew that if considerations of that kind were to come up, I was the natural candidate for the flames. For there I was, using all the advantages I had from my sacred Corpus Christi education to win favour with these honest people; playing Cagliostro in fact! But who knows? Putting fears of Hell aside, I dare say the exchange was fair enough! They were certainly thrilled when Tom made me recite "Lycidas" or the "Ode to a Grecian Urn" or that poem of Landor's which begins:

"Artimadora, Gods invisible,
Whilst thou wast lying faint along the couch,
Have tied the sandals to thy veined feet,
And stand beside thee, ready to convey
Thy weary steps where other rivers flow — —"

And if they got pleasure from my recitations, a pleasure which proves how the simplest women can be brought to respond to real poetry, it can be believed how I was transported when they let me take them on my lap and caress them. As for Tom Jones, that descendant of Welsh Bards, it was a wonder to see how he would watch us, glowing and chuckling with satisfaction, just as if he had been the master of a successful puppet-show.

How different certain situations in life are, between the way you know them to be yourself, and the way they might appear to an unsympathetic onlooker! To most sophisticated people, I suppose, these encounters of ours would have appeared at once rather childish and rather maudlin, lacking in all elements of the picturesque and the piquant; yet to me they were of an intoxicating charm! Aye, but how I would like to cajole my readers to see, hear, feel, touch, taste the full physical and psychic situations of these events; so that even if they cannot restrain their dislike of the protagonist, at least they must say to themselves:

"This clown is a fine excuser of his rascalities; but the rogue is such a *naturalist* that we now hold the documents in our own hands, and can judge him as he deserves!"

Many a time I used to sit at eleven o'clock in the morning — for those Liverpool firms seemed to allow intervals for coffee at that hour, as well as for lunch at one, and for tea at four — at the "Kardomah Café," discussing with Tom his ideas of Nietzsche, for he possessed all "That German's" works, and listening to his own philosophy, which to my constant surprise seemed entirely drawn from the poetry of Keats. I can remember when he first told me, quite calmly and rationally, that in his opinion the deepest and subtlest philosophy of life that we could attain existed in poetry, and especially in that of Keats. By degrees however I came to see what he meant, and it was a striking enough conclusion for a man to have arrived at, whose whole life had been spent in office-work in a city like Liverpool. But I can tell you I made use of Tom's ideas a little later, when I wrote, for Methuen, an exhaustive work on Keats. This work was never published, because, in my absurd pride, I refused to change its more patent extravagances, but its composition forced me to clear up many problems in my own mind.

It was in this "Kardomah Café," enjoying the only palatable coffee I have ever tasted in Europe, I heard for the first time the strains of Sousa's "Stars and Stripes." Aye! but how those exultant, reckless, cynical, devil-may-care strains delighted me. I derived from them a notion of the character of the American spirit which still seems to me, after all these years, no unworthy interpretation!

When evening came we would always return to Tom's lodging — for he was meticulously careful to be a regular and considerate lodger — to partake of the usual tea-supper with the family. Oh, how impatient I used to grow, as I listened to my friend's sagacious propitiations of these various home-circles, for he changed his abode many times, and how I would tremble with excitement when very quietly and deliberately and in the most matter-of-fact way, he put off his slippers and put on his boots — all his landladies seemed to let him make these changes by their parlour hearth — and announced casually that it was time for us to be going out! It often occupied my mind — but I kept my thoughts to myself — *where* it was that these worthy family-circles supposed that their discreet lodger was taking his friend from the South. Did they think that we went to the theatre *every* night? And what excuse did Tom make — that was another problem to me; but it seemed a deep part of my friend's life-illusion to arrange these important matters without talking about it — when from some particular house we frequented he would come back alone.

I humoured this peculiarity of his to the full. I remained completely docile and passive in his hands; but it can be believed how my heart would beat, when, as sometimes happened, I found myself waiting in dead silence in some completely strange and darkened “front-room,” till certain formalities had been gone through, or until certain respectable and unsuspecting persons had “gone upstairs,” and the coast — the coast to my “Embarkation for Cythera” — was clear.

I have no doubt that in the intervals of my reciting “Lycidas,” or “Intimations of Immortality,” or “Tintern Abbey,” Tom Jones found time to whisper his laconic reassurances into fair ears as to the harmlessness, as far as “getting people into trouble” went, of his eloquent guest; for in the curious “milieu,” at once eminently respectable and sublimely non-moral, in which he moved, I had to beat only one really ignominious retreat. And even *that* was due to a fit of ill-timed drunkenness on the part of someone, rendering my recitation of “Intimations of Immortality” less opportune than it usually seemed.

When I consider my rôle of poetry-reciter in those quaint places, alternating with my more formal art of “dithyrambic analysis,” I see myself more and more distinctly as a sort of vagabond play-actor wandering through the world with a Jew’s harp under my Master of Arts gown and acting like one of those gipsy-tinkers at a fair who hangs behind with the rustic wives.

Tom Jones was really a remarkable-looking person. He suffered, all the while I knew him, and it seems to have grown worse before he died, from some cruel injury to one of his feet, the ligaments of which had been clumsily operated on, causing him much discomfort and making him limp. This lame foot must often have hurt him abominably. He would frequently fall silent as we walked together; and well I knew what that meant! He was a small man, but much more powerful than he appeared. At a crisis he was very formidable. Many a time he extricated himself from some appalling predicament by the air of a desperate and dangerous duellist. His countenance was singularly like some of the statue-busts of Julius Cæsar; though his mouth, at once morbidly sensitive and morbidly mobile, betrayed his Cymric origin. It will always be on my conscience that I didn't get him over to America at the last. He would have made a wonderful accountant. Forgive me, forgive me, Tom! Thus, at this late day I talk, I who have not taken one single step to find out even where they have laid my friend's bones. No wonder Theodore used to say of me, quoting Blake, "My brother John, the evil one, in a black cloud making his moan!"

When we woke up side by side, Tom and I, in those various lodging-house bedrooms, he would always scramble out of bed, limp to the window, pull the muslin curtain aside, and then, in his old-fashioned long white night-shirt, his Cæsarian nose snuffing up the promise of the day, light a Gold Flake cigarette. His fingers were yellow with cigarette smoking. It was his Balm of Gilead as he dealt in "markets" and "futures," his Mandragora under the blows of fate. Did he wake up at dawn that day when the woman of the house found him, while some pale window in Wallasey grew "a glimmering square"? What were his last conscious thoughts? To which of his girls did his spirit turn? He told me in that long letter that he "saw nobody any more." He asked me about his chances of getting on in America. Why didn't I wire him the means to sail at once? If I hadn't the cash I could surely have borrowed it. He must in his time have spent double the cost of such a voyage on me. No! I put down plenty of sympathetic words — little black marks on white paper signed "Jack" — but I did not wire him his passage money.

He often used to leave his slippers downstairs, as well as his boots, when his foot hurt him— "Mr. Jones's slippers" moved carefully aside when some little "Marchioness" cleaned the shining fender — and limp upstairs in his socks. I can feel so clearly the warmth of his body, as we would turn round, after saying good night, to go to sleep with our spines touching, two middle-aged, masculine skeletons, back to back, and curved as children are in the womb! He does not have any friendly spine to warm him in his sleep now, in that chilly Birkenhead cemetery.

"Tom's a' cold" now, till the end of the world.

Though my ulcers were hypnotized into complete non-existence the second I got out of that familiar London and North-Western station at Liverpool and saw Tom's long nose and blue eyes under his bowler-hat, or heard him give his faint embarrassed whistle — he always uttered this plaintive little sound, like a starving bird, when he felt uncomfortable — it was on my way to Liverpool that I had the first of my queer fits of unconsciousness, when I would suddenly fall like a log. The Devil, or, if you like, God, must have meant me to fall on the track in front of the train at the junction in Gloucestershire were I collapsed. But my tutelary angel caused me to fall on the edge of the platform instead. As these fits repeated themselves — but, all in all, I don't fancy I've had more than four of them — they acquired the power of obliterating my memory for as long as half an hour, and sometimes for more, both *before* and *after* I fell.

Thus at Burpham, during one of my holidays, I remember standing on that fortress-bank underneath our Notice, whose threats to trespassers were by that time signed, "Estate Office, Arundel," and picking some white roses that had gone trailing and trespassing there from our south wall, when, like a bolt from the blue, darkness covered my eyes; nor did I regain my consciousness till I found myself lying in my bed. To this refuge I had it seemed *unconsciously* walked!

The same thing, save that my unconsciousness lasted much longer, happened to me at Sneedon's Landing, New York, opposite Dobb's Ferry. I was alone at the time, and had walked some distance, at least a mile and a half, along the lonely Alpine road, and had plunged into those thickly-grown woods which border it on both sides. I can just remember leaving the road, when the bolt of blackness fell; and when, so to speak, I woke up, and I must have walked at least a mile and a half in total unconsciousness, I found myself in that house by the river from which I had started. And I awoke to consciousness to discover myself caked in mud from head to foot, as if I had been rolling in a ditch, while I was dismayed to discover that the worst part of the mud was my own excrement. It was then that I came near ruining Llewelyn's beautiful new overcoat which he had lent me, wherein to make a fair showing when I came to New York. That was the epoch when my Western and Eastern lecture-managers, due to a hasty Jack-in-the-Box antic of my own, were having a lively tug-of-war over me, and I fancy the agitation of this may have had something to do with my seizure.

The last of these curious collapses occurred about eight years ago in New York City itself. It was in fact from a spot in Hudson Street that my soul paid a temporary visit to the "powerless heads of the dead." Since then, with the attainment of a more peaceful life, my fits of unconsciousness have been confined, thank the Lord, to my pillow. In those days, however, my ulcers grew steadily worse and worse; and there at last came a crisis, when having stopped in pretty wretched suffering at Malvern and being off again I forget whither, I threw up the sponge at Worcester, and, causing myself to be driven to a hotel, took a room, sent for a doctor, drank the poppied syrup he brought me, and fell into a wondrous trance of irresponsible peace.

Who should come hurrying to my aid at this juncture but my touchy old crony, Harry Lyon! Leaving his blue pencil drawings in his Kensington office, taking the Great Western express from Paddington, lo! here he was, by the bedside of his Punchinello brother-in-law, in whose sawdust interior some important, and, as far as we knew, some vital spring had been broken at last. For several days T. H. L. was with me in Worcester, where he scolded me roundly — in his irrational angry affection — for being such an unsympathetic companion! The truth was that as the opiate which the doctor gave me wore off I was singularly reluctant to return to the hard struggle of life. I was in the mood of Tom Brown in the old school-story when he had been half-killed by the bully Flashman; or to use a more poetical comparison I felt like those comrades of Odysseus who had tasted the Lotus.

But Harry Lyon had tasted of no Lotus; and, like the Greek hero, his ears were filled with wax so that he could hear no siren-songs. He enthusiastically informed me that in the cathedral in this busy town he had stumbled upon the grave of none other than King John, "poisoned ill-fare, forsook, cast-off," poor caitiff-brother of Cœur de Lion. How well I remember Thomas Henry's indignant remonstrance, because in my lotus-drugged state, I didn't display an active enough sympathy with his burning interest in Worcester Cathedral. But I was as quiescent, and docile as a lamb in his hands, and not exactly ungrateful either, but with a spirit that longed only to drink "a deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill."

On arriving at Paddington we drove to the London specialist whom the Worcester doctor had recommended. He barely looked at me — my Punchinello countenance must have been a repulsive ashen-grey — before giving me a card of admission to the London Hospital. I think he thought I was done for. However, after a week or two in the London Hospital, I recovered my interest in life. I read — thinking of Tom Jones and his philosophy — the Letters of John Keats. And I watched the death of a young man whose bed was close to mine. What is there so peculiarly shocking about those "screens" they put round the dying in hospitals and through which only the relations and the nurses and the priest are allowed to pass? It was the custom in that place for those patients who were able to get out of bed to help a little in looking after the others. This was a new experience for me; but before I got well enough to get up I used to lie on my back and pray. I prayed in accordance with an original device I invented at that time, and which I still practise, though with certain small differences. I have always been a believer in *some* magic power possessed by prayer though I have never been particular in what name, or to what power, I uttered my invocations.

In the London Hospital, where, in my large public ward, there were many sufferers, I invented the trick of concentrating my mind on *variously coloured angels*. I directed the attention of one set of coloured angels, purple ones let us say, to one sufferer, and those of another, vermeil-tinctured ones perhaps, to another sufferer. In this way, as I lay in this great White Ship of Suffering, I felt I was not altogether wasting my time.

The person destined to come and take me out of the hospital when I was well enough to leave was my father's chosen executor. How striking did Littleton look in his tweed suit as his athletic form appeared in that ward! We went by train to Burpham, and I can now remember the greedy relish with which I partook, the second I got home, of a mighty bowl — much larger than was advisable — of my favourite bread and milk.

I soon found that I was not a bit better for my three weeks in the London Hospital. A relative of Harry Lyon's came to nurse me; and I used to lie out all day, for it was summer-time then, in that small garden under the great fortress bank. I was peaceful and happy, but by no means recovering. In fact the exit from my stomach into my bowels had become infinitesimal by reason of the growth of my ulcers. Finally one evening, to my own immense relief, but to the dismay of my attendant, I began to vomit. It seems to me now inconceivable how I had survived so long with what at that time came from my unlucky stomach! I must have vomited a whole bucketful — forgive me, reader! — of the foulest excremental stuff possible to be conceived. It must have been accumulating there for years. "An ounce of civet, good apothecary!" It was of a dusky sepia tint, a colour I had not so far hit upon for any of my tutelary angels

The spectacle of that bucket, which was duly kept for his inspection, decided our doctor, a tall Irish friend of ours called D'Olier, to pack me off, in all haste, back to London. Here I entered a nursing-home near Harley Street and was very speedily operated on — being an incredible number of hours on the table. For some reason, however, the surgeon hesitated to go so far as "gasterenterostomy," and confined himself to various local cuttings and temporary graftings. The anæsthetic art at that epoch had not reached its present acme of perfection; and I cannot express to you the Dead Sea of revolting nausea to which I awoke that evening. They soon gave me a cup of pretty strong tea, however, according to the excellent custom in English nursing-homes, and I quickly recovered from the worst. But for what seemed whole days after that I was allowed no water; and I can remember begging my nurse to let me have within my vision a glass of water, so that I could practise my *voyeur* aptitude upon this pure element.

Llewelyn came to visit me in that nursing-home; and I was profoundly struck by his look of concern. How well I have come to know that disturbance in his rugged and sensitive countenance, contorting its features, even as a sweet water-spring disarranges the rubble of a mountain rock! Over his own illness — when it fell upon him — his face would cloud and grow grave; but it never *contracted* with quite the same spasm of concern as over this collapse of mine. Llewelyn's attachment to me remains a source of continued wonder to my mind. Littleton's I understand, for it is like mine for him; but Llewelyn’s has something else in it, like a trouble in the Sun at some chasm appearing in the rondure of the Moon.

I had acquired a mania for Walt Whitman in those days; and I used to lie at dawn, for I woke early in that place, looking out over the roofs of London, and trying to cope with the impressions of life in the way he did. But I soon found that it was impossible for me to “accept” the cosmos — all these loathsome abominations, all these shifting Masks of Fear — in Walt Whitman’s *tout ensemble* style. For a long time the clue to any master-word for myself was obscure; but as the years passed I finally discovered this magic sign, this thaumaturgic gesture, in the word “forget.” Perhaps Walt Whitman really *was* the one man in the world who actually could envisage all and accept all. But I was different. Or did I see more than he saw? *Were things worse than he knew?* These are questions no man can answer! The nerves of the tortured alone know the torment. But I found by degrees that for me the clue lay in having faith in my power of “forgetting” what I could *not* accept. Thus below all my energy and ebullience of spirit and Pangloss-like insistence on the best rather than the worst, at bottom I am a pessimist. How can I be anything else as long as there are entities in the world — human or sub-human — who are doomed to endure such unendurable things? I have enough imagination to *become*, although in a faint indirect half-and-half way, these children of perdition, these little ones “offended” by the First Cause, these lynched negroes, these victims of cancer, these animals in traps, these vivisected dogs.

But I am no saint. My primal affair is the difficult one of keeping “Number One” happy. Have I told you yet, by the way, that one of the words my father found it impossible to pronounce was the word “difficult”? He always pronounced it, even in his sermons, “diffi*cut*,” leaving out completely the letter “l.” But though I am no saint, and though I fight in my own devious fashion for my own hand, I refuse to be "squared" by any tricks of the First Cause. I won't say I am not grateful to *something* — for gratitude is a strong impulse with me — that I am not the victim of American policemen, or of Chinese bandits, or of an Alabama mob, that I am not a Jew in the hands of Hitler, or a dog in the hands of a vivisector, or a foundling in one of our old-fashioned English workhouses, but I tend to lavish this gratitude upon some special guardian angel rather than upon Providence. To thank God for sparing you, when He so delights in tormenting others, has always seemed to me a questionable proceeding.

I don't mind being "archaic," as the Russians say, with regard to other feelings, but when it comes to this one I confess I am a modern of the moderns. It seems odd that the son, grandson, and great-grandson of a clergyman, not to speak of the father of one, or of a priest, as *he* would prefer me to say, should presume to change the names of the two Greatest Commandments. But I cannot do less than plead guilty to this impertinence. In place of: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," I would substitute: "Thou shalt force thyself to be happy in thine own soul"; and in place of: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," I would substitute: "Thou shalt be merciful and pitiful and considerate *to all living organisms*."

For what, in the name of Jesus does this biblical "love" mean? That's what puzzles me! I can understand D. H. Lawrence's "dark gods," which are simply erotic attractions and repulsions; and I can understand perfectly the Chinese reverence for parents. And I can understand tenderness and pity and wonder and awe in the presence of *any* human being. It is this business of "lovingness" that puzzles me, and, to speak quite plainly does not altogether please me. I have seen, now and again, a look in the eyes of this "love" that gives me a very queasy feeling. Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence are undoubtedly right. There *is* something "funny" about this Christian "love." At any rate it needs a thorough heathen analysis. Dostoievsky who understood it to its fathomless depths was himself doubtful about it. And it is not as if I hadn't in my own nerves a devilishly meticulous conscience. But my conscience has *never*, not in all my life, commanded me to "love." Perhaps this is not anyway the business of your conscience. But I don't think I exactly "love" *myself*, though I exploit my sensibilities to get the particular sensations my nature requires. No! the character I admire is a character that is a rod of iron to itself and a well-spring of tenderness and pity for others; a character that forces itself to be happy in itself, blames no one but itself, and compels itself to clear away obstacles from the path to happiness for every organism it encounters.

While I was in the nursing-home I had a stomach pump administered to me. I shall never forget my feelings as I was compelled to open my mouth — like the mouth of a tragic mask imitating a little bird — while my nurse held towards me a capacious rubber tube, and waggled the end of it, indicating that it was my rôle to swallow it. What we poor mortals do go through! But I think I would prefer to have the stomach pump again rather than to have that delicate little instrument whose name begins with a "C" thrust into my bladder by the narrow path of what the poet calls a man's "brutish sting." This mechanical relief was one of my chief trials when I finally submitted to "gasterenterostomy" in New York; but except for having my "enemas" given me by an "orderly" in place of a nurse, a refinement no doubt due to trans-Atlantic respect for womanhood, I suffered much less in the Post Graduate Hospital under Dr. Erdmann, than in that London nursing-home.

Soon after my operation I was taken, in company with my little son, to Bognor. Here I enjoyed a lengthy convalescence; and Nietzsche is absolutely right about convalescence being the most purged, the most sensitized, the most rapturous condition into which a human personality, at any rate when it is not "at Liverpool," can possibly fall. I was pretty weak then, and I shuffled about leaning on a stick; but aye! I did enjoy such rare and winnowed sensations! All my satyrishness vanished *pro tem.* I never went down to the beach save as the invalid protector of a little boy. But I used to drift off on some heavenly rambles by myself in that curious flat country, formerly the bottom of the sea, across which you can now catch sight of the spire of Chichester Cathedral. I visited William Blake's Felpham and walked like a sentinel round the actual cottage, heavily thatched and close to the sea's edge, where he saw some of his most poetical visions and where his fight with that arrogant soldier got him before a Chichester Judge. Blake resembled Nietzsche in the way he turned any grotesque episode of his real life into a mystic symbol of the whole trend of his intellectual destiny. This is the function of the creative imagination that it can find a marriage of Heaven and Hell in the most grotesque, humiliating, sordid, and apparently trivial event.

But the feelings that came to me as I shuffled feebly about these rural environs of Bognor, were more precious, more evasive, more universal than anything I got from Blake's cottage! They hovered about me, they beckoned me, they led me on, while I was reading in our pleasant lodging a work less conducive to delicate and spiritual thoughts than any book I can think of. This was not my *Memoirs of Casanova*; for *that* I had already sold, for thirty shillings, to the very East-Indian who had tried to stop my discourse on "Religion and Sensuality"; and with this sum, obtained by selling vicarious lechery, we had bought an arm-chair, worthy of an abbot, in which my son still sits. No, it was John Morley's life of Gladstone; and for the lack of everything that makes human character exciting and human history interesting, those two typical English statesmen, thus harnessed up together, were at once the epitome and the apogee.

I certainly should not have remembered this book, and I might not even have remembered Blake's cottage, if it had not been that those solitary invalidish walks round Bognor were filled with some of the most entrancing over-tones and under-tones, wafted on the most arbitrary of winds, that I have ever known in my life.

I can recall a greater number of the mysterious feelings that are for me the very essence of existence in connection with this little seaside place than in connection with any other town I know except Weymouth. And they were not particularly remarkable, these lanes, these hedges, these ditches near Bognor. They were the reverse of remarkable! But they were unfamiliar to me. That accounted for part of what I felt. They were like those scenes you look at out of a train window. They were like the backgrounds in those pictures of landscapes that you glance at and pass by in a gallery. I saw them for a moment, these roadside tree-stumps, these grey fragments of old walls, these little spinneys at cross-roads, these ragged thorn-bushes with hollows underneath them scooped out by rabbits and dogs and children and suggesting long, hot, idle Sunday afternoons and the far-off twilight songs of blackbirds. I saw most of these field-paths, these wayside heaps of stones, these hawthorn stumps, these wind-blown tamarisk-bushes, these dung-heaps by old cattle-barns, these cart-ruts going down to the sea, once only, for I was always exploring in new directions, but for that very reason, in my sensitized state, they became more than just hedges and ditches round the town of Bognor!

Not that they were transformed, not that they became picturesque or "artistic." But I saw them as they had entered, and as they had left, the consciousness of men and women, going about their affairs, seeing them without seeing them, as they followed their purposes and their desires. But I saw them as they were — no! as they were when they had passed through the half-conscious consciousness of all these human minds. I saw them as you see the designs round the illuminated letters in old breviaries. From being "minute particulars" they became "universals," each one an enchanted "gleichnis," or symbol, of that secret burden of unspoken knowledge under which all those inanimate things that are the background of our life, droop, stiffen, or hold their breath when you catch them off-guard.

As I look back on these successive epochs, in my long-drawn-out days, I find it hard to follow the spiral curves of the hidden continuity. But this I *do* know that before I met Tom Jones, or learnt from him to diffuse my impersonal craving over the thousand and one little *accompaniments* of erotic desire, I went through many desperate and rather ghastly experiences. There were times during my travels, especially when I visited the great factory towns of my native Midlands, when my "nympholeptism," if that is the word for it, became so famished that I would walk for miles through the most wretched and sordid streets hunting for little squalid newspaper-shops, that sometimes contained provocative, if not pornographical pictures in their windows. These desperate lust-starved walks may have been good exercise. They certainly resulted in many abominable moments of exhausted, arid, ashen disappointment. I was always being offered the obscene, when what I wanted was a drop — oh, only one little drop! — of the contents of the mystic Heathen Grail!

I can well remember an experience I had in one desolate factory town and it interested me, now that I have grown acquainted with the doctrines of Communism, to visualize myself simply as an historic psychological illustration walking like a restless demon through these wretched streets, not with the idea of changing the evils of capitalism, but solely with the idea of finding some miserable picture in a miserable window of a girl's long legs. This particular town, I fancy, was in my native Midlands. I had entered a theatre of some kind in the desperate hope — I was always so pitifully hopeful — that I *might* stumble on a pantomime such as I had seen on that Brighton Pier and perhaps even behold again that Sylph of Sylphs whose limbs I shall idolize till I die!

In place of a pantomime, however, I was confronted when I settled myself in a front seat, by an intolerably tedious acrobatic performance. The stony unmoved stare with which I regarded the only performers of this desolate spectacle — a middle-aged man and his wife — evoked such an access of professional indignation in their hard-worked breasts that they actually whispered together and glared at me like a couple of assassins. So deadly indeed was the hatred I excited in these two poor mimes, for except for me all the front rows were empty, and indeed there was only a handful of people in the whole place, that a point came when the tension grew frightening. I felt as if the whole thing were becoming some monstrous and insubstantial evocation of my own perverse desire, mocking me in a ghastly mirage that smelt of "poisonous brass and metal sick." I felt as if I had lost my sanity. I staggered out I remember, dazed, frightened, shocked, sickened, my lust turned into cold cinders; and as I squeezed my way between the dusty evil-smelling seats to get out of the place I can recall experiencing a sharp stab in my side, so sharp that for the moment I thought I had been stabbed by some unseen steel instrument! The whole incident always came back to me as having something really queer about it, something taking place on that perilous edge between spirit and matter where we have to gather up all our forces not to feel dizzy and sick.

That tearing stab I felt, as I squeezed myself between those evil-smelling seats in that empty Theatre of the Damned, did it come from one single focussed, concentrated, *supernatural* vibration of hatred from those two acrobats? If it did, you will no doubt consider that I heartily deserved it! But you must remember, reader, that I had been lecturing *sans cesse* for months, tearing at my very vitals in my crazy inspirations, spending all my free hours, walking, walking through interminable and desolate streets: and when, for once, I had found a theatre open, open in an hour when I was free, was it any wonder that I turned a stony stare upon these luckless performers?

But, oh dear! You may be right that I deserved this thrust of a poisoned bodkin for my brazen inhumanity. The truth is that those outraged performers, in their silvery bangles and tights, whose savage curse caused this queer spasm to arrest their stony-eyed scarecrow auditor as he took his way between those mephitic cushions had no idea that they were putting their evil wish upon one who was already half-mad.

But you will say to me, were there no brothels I could go to? Brothels! I had not the remotest notion as to how to go about it to find such places. As a matter of fact to this day I have never entered a brothel; and I think it is pretty certain that I shall die without having known that almost universal masculine privilege. But what, you will say, of harlots who have their own private rooms? Could I not, as I had done at Brighton, as I had done in the case of Lily, make friends with someone of *that* type, in Manchester, in Derby, in Coventry, in Leeds, in Birmingham, in Halifax, in Sheffield, whom I could intermittently meet, as my pilgrimage of dithyrambic culture circled upon itself? Well! I did try that once; but oh! it was such a desolate failure.

It was in Birmingham I tried it. For a wonder, while I was staying in that town, I put up not in a private house, but at a hotel, and after my lecture I roamed the streets of that stronghold of Joseph Chamberlain, like a "stygian soul" groaning and gibbering "for waftage." At last the event I had been hoping for really happened. Very late at night I was accosted by a friendly young woman. She was evidently of the very poorest class of street-girls; but she had a friendly look, and something about her reassured and pleased me. I had not read a word of Dostoievsky in those days or I am sure she would have reminded me at once of Sonia. I dared not give her a liberal sum of money, for I was at the beginning of my "round"; and though no doubt a young lecturer in Periclean times could have charged to his "School" at Athens such an expense under the general head of "entertainment," I did not, at the beginning of the twentieth century, feel like appealing to the authorities at Oxford.

Well, we bargained, that young woman and I, in the deserted midnight street in the completest affability, and she consented to take what I could afford to give her. She took me to her house which was a very poor one. In the downstairs room there were several children asleep; and a man, my Sonia's father, only he was less loquacious than that precious rascal, sat by the fire cleaning harness, a great pile of which, as if for more than one horse, lay heaped upon the floor. The fellow greeted me with a nod, made some casual reference to the weather, and I followed the girl up a flight of narrow attic-steps to a room above. There were only two rooms there; and I was led to the inner one, which was evidently the girl's own bed-chamber. This room was clean but extremely bare. My companion closed the door, put down the flickering candle which she held, and immediately, without speaking a word — and it was clear that the man downstairs would have heard any word she *did* speak — and without taking off a shred of clothing or even unlacing her muddy shoes, lay down on the bed.

I had made, before she had time to do this, a feeble little motion in the direction of a timid caress, and I would willingly have sat down on the only chair I could see and taken her on my lap; but this automatic rush of hers to the bed, as if we were a pair of wound-up manikins, forced to go through a set of mechanical gestures, filled me with dismay. Were her other clients — and I don't know whether to hope or not that these weren't very numerous — habituated to go through this mystery of mysteries, this ritual of rituals, in such an automatic manner?

The girl on the bed looked at me and then looked at the flickering candle and then shut her eyes. A long silence ensued, during which the man below must have continued patiently polishing his harness. At length she opened her eyes and we stared nervously and rather reproachfully at each other. Meanwhile our silence was unbroken, not only because the man could hear every word; but because our talk might awaken those children. Finally she scrambled to her feet and gave her skirts a vigorous shake. The moment was an extremely uncomfortable one to me; and she, I think, felt a little scared as well as more than a little cross. To ease the awkwardness of our mutual embarrassment, I hurriedly produced the money upon which we had agreed.

Then, still in unbroken silence, she picked up her candle, opened the door of the room and led me downstairs. Was she deeply hurt in her *amour propre* I wondered. Had my perverse ways roused the same indignation in her as they had roused in those two acrobats? Or was she, after all, rather relieved to be let off in this way, and without the loss of a penny? I have no idea! Women *are* very conservative in erotic matters, and a girl who was eking out the family livelihood in this particular way felt she had a right, I have no doubt, not to be bothered with psychological niceties.

“You pay me for a definite thing,” I suppose she would have said to me, “and why should I trouble myself any further? You buy and I sell, but this wretched money of yours which my poverty accepts cannot purchase from me one jot of interest in your personal peculiarities.”

The man in the room below bade me good night without lifting his eyes.

From what I have been trying to make clear of my perverse cravings and of their famished desolation as I trailed across England on my voluble mission it can easily be understood what an oasis of paradisic happiness “Tom Jones’s girls” brought to me. It was not that they really changed my attitude to these things. But my impersonal desire diffused itself, under the influence of Tom, over the charming receptivity and friendly understanding of these honest girls. I have never encountered again such a group, or such a “stratum,” I might almost put it, of feminine possibility. How was it they should *all* have been so nice? It must have been the genius of Tom! He must have combed the highways and byways of Liverpool for sweet-natured, imaginative femininity.

In my convalescence at Bognor I became as free from all these obsessions as I had been during my idealistic years at Corpus; and, as had happened in that case, what I enjoyed in my escape from both my sadistic thoughts and my crazy nympholeptism was no “intellectual love of God” but a quiet animistic waiting; a waiting, as I shuffled about between those low sea-banks and those wide ploughed fields, till first one intermittent rumour and then another, blown lightly upon wandering sea-airs, came to me from the withheld secret, that secret which can never reach us save momently, faintly, fitfully; and then only when we are detached from the worries of the world.

CHAPTER NINE. EUROPE

MY ULCERS SOON began to plague me again, aggravated, as before, by those devilish acids whose ferocious activity is denoted by the guileless word "dyspepsia." It was Louis Wilkinson, during one of those pleasant visits he used to pay to us in the holidays at Montacute, who boldly and daringly put it into my head to ask my father to give me the money to visit Italy. I can remember leaving Louis on the landing, between the nursery and my father's dressing-room, while with beating heart I knocked at the study door. I can remember the almost too exciting emotion with which I came flying upstairs to communicate to him and to Llewelyn that my father had agreed to produce this money! None of us would have dared even to *think* of asking for money to visit Italy with no better excuse than ill-health; but such was the pragmatic influence of Louis' golden-good-looks, combined with his gusto for perilous encounters, that I not only carried the "study" by storm but won my amazing request.

Behold me, therefore, established in a small lodging-house in Florence, along with the best possible of companions, and with money enough to stay there for several weeks. And what effect did Florence have on me? I am not enough of a traveller to be certain about such things, but in those days I used to say that there was something in my nature that adapted itself to life in Italy more easily than to life in France. This may, of course, have had to do with the food; for Italian food certainly does suit me a lot better than French food; better even than German food. Spanish food, when finally I reached "The Catholic's" ideal land, prostrated me with spasms of withering dyspepsia. But in Italy I enjoyed all I got to eat, I enjoyed the goats’ milk: I seemed always able to procure fresh eggs and decent tea; and as for spaghetti, my lacerated stomach yielded to that national dish and adapted itself to it as if I were a native.

And the moral influence of Florence seemed as good for my manias — if you call it “good” to be lulled to sleep — as Bognor had been, and as, in earlier days, Corpus had been. With my fair companion I really did “study”; most painstakingly, the pictures in those palatial galleries. In sculpture and architecture I took much less interest, to confess the real truth, hardly any; but the feeling of the rose-scented, garlic-scented, grape-skin-scented, dust-scented sunshine, as I sat down on any sun-warmed stone or on any fragment of marble, and leant my back against a pillar or a porch, filtered through me like some precious unguent, fragrant as balsam, and of the colour — for it seemed to me to possess a colour — of ancient, mellow, gold-brown sherry wine, and made the whole of human life seem in some mystic way *redeemed*; I will not say redeemed of evil, but certainly of the dark, morbid, hyperborean evil, by which *my* nature was threatened. Thus my life in that cheap Florentine lodging turned to the sun, turned like that classic plant that Milton talks about, the plant Moly, that could produce a golden flower, *but not in this soil*.

The only book I can remember reading during all the weeks I was in Florence was Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo*. High in the hills above Settignano, if my memory does not fail me, the sun-warmed slope lay, where I gave myself up to this nobly-maniacal book and pretended to myself that I too, in my day and hour, would be a proclaimer of planetary secrets. While I toyed with these imaginings and felt stirring within me my old magical power, my companion made a rough bird’s eye sketch of the outlines of Florence — the Duomo, the Tower, and all the rest — as these storied shapes smouldered and quivered beneath us in the hot afternoon sun.

Dull though I was, dull as a sun-drugged lizard in the crevices of a Fiesole convent, to the intellectual and æsthetic values of architecture, I had the power of plunging my very soul into the sun-baked marbles and stones of Florence as long as I could feel them and enjoy them simply as so much inanimate substance in the ancient habitation of the human spirit. It is this power of being thrilled through and through by the simpler, vaguer, more generalized aspects of a famous object that has so often brought the charge of charlatanism against me. It is an old charge. I had even a relative who called me by this opprobrious name before I left college. But I hope I shall always be proud of this charge!

Charlatanism, at least the brand I cultivate of this disreputable commodity, consists in being so transported by the large, general, simple aspects of something exciting in life, or nature, or books, or history, or psychology, that *without waiting to get the details correct,* or the passage verified by exact scholarship, you just rely on your private taste, prejudice, imagination, inspiration, and abandon your whole being to the delight of brooding over what you see and feel. The impulsive communication of your feelings in this matter to others is the gesture which brings down on your head this term of abuse. Judged by the standard of the professional persons who dare not even *feel* a reaction to anything wonderful and magical in Nature or Art without being sure of all the evidence and without congratulating themselves on their credentials as adepts and on their documents as experts, why! some of the most illuminating writers in the world would have to be labelled by this disparaging word.

But I — thank the Lord! — am not only a “charlatan” in regard to *others*. My most secret, personal, and intimate moments of happiness are of this kind. I suppose the greatest literary pleasure I enjoy now, second to thinking and talking about Dostoievsky, is the thrill I get from reading

Homer, in the "Loeb Classics" edition, with the Greek on one side of the page and the English on the other. The "Loeb Classics" are indeed my charlatan's Bible. I can brood over a couple of lines in any of these four wonderful volumes with incredible pleasure. Personally I prefer a great deal Professor A. T. Murray's translation of the Iliad and Odyssey to the more popular ones of Lang, Butcher, Myers and Leaf. I love to do with my scanty scholarship in Homer what Whitman did with his primitive and simple objects in nature, I remain at the starting-point. I "loaf and invite my soul" in the presence of the baldest and briefest passages.

Take, for instance the line about Achilles and his immortal horses, Zanthus and Balius. After he has declared to Zanthus, the one who astounded him by predicting his approaching death, that he knew his fate perfectly well, after he has uttered his proud "alla kai empes," "but all the same for that," he plunges, without a word more, into the mêlée. This plunge of a man who *knows his fate* is expressed by the poet in a line that gathers our nerves together, tuned and taut, as if they were the very reins seized by Antomedon, the hero's charioteer! Over the surging rush of the final line I cannot dwell long enough. I know the line by heart. Many a time it has steadied me in some "alla kai empes" situation of my own. And yet — hunt through the pages of my Homeric Lexicon as I may — I've never been able to discover the meaning of the two short words, one consisting of a single unaspirated long "e," and the other of an aspirated "r" and an "a," with which this line, the last of Book Nineteen, ends!

What I call my "charlatanism," and in it lies the secret, not only of whatever inspiration I may have as a writer and speaker, but of my deepest personal happiness, is the fact that I can repeat this line to myself, *and to others,* with exactly the same thrill, without knowing what two of its words mean, as if I knew their meaning with the completeness of a philologist as scholarly and thorough as the author of *Ecce Homo* himself! The extreme slowness of my development as a writer no doubt came from this peculiarity in me; for in speaking you can conceal your ignorances more deftly than in writing. Besides, this very habit of mine of obstinately beating time with what I might call my "imaginatized sensations" militates against the labour required to communicate these feelings to other minds. I had for so long to satisfy my pride, which for all my superficial humility is fathomless, by my own secret knowledge, or — if you quarrel with that as too bold a brag — with my own secret idea, of the value and depth of my imaginative perception.

But when I recall those weeks in Florence, and all I drank in of the magic of life in such a place, I feel wretchedly ashamed of the silly tempers I would fly into over any small mishap or misadventure. I feel bitterly remorseful for instance when I recall how once we set out to go to a theatre and arriving at the box-office discovered that in our rustic caution we had forgotten to remove our common purse from under some loose board or matting in our room, where — just as my father would have done — we had secreted it from thieves. I was so ill-bred, I remember, in my foolish petulance with my companion, who was of course no more responsible than I was for our blunder, that not a word would I utter, as we walked back, when a sudden unexpected vision of Giotto's Tower evoked from the person at my side an impulsive cry of delight. As far as pictures are concerned it was not Giotto, with his fresh and spring-like grace, but the more Byzantine Cimabue that made the greater impression on my mind. How well do I recall going to that particular church at the end of what now comes back to me as some long dusty street in the direction of the railway station, where that immense non-human almond-eyed apparition from the age of ikons stares forth from the eternal immobility of her sacred Not-Being into the transitory confusion of our unholy Being.

It was somewhere on the street leading to this Santa Maria of Eternalized Symbolism that we used to go every afternoon to get our tea. My heroic companion would convey on my behalf to this humble retreat, for I can assure you it was no “Kardomah Café,” a bottle of the salutary pick-me-up known as “Sanatogen”; and I can vividly recall the sensual satisfaction with which resting my hawk-beaked “cat-head,” like an Egyptian idol, against the frescoed wall of the cheapest tea-shop in Florence, I sipped this beverage and devoured one after another, just as I can imagine that bird-beast idol doing, certain delicious little buns that the place provided. My companion gave my private preoccupations a fine jolt one day as we sat in that dark retreat watching the golden atmosphere outside settle down, like a veritable Danaae shower, on the faded oleanders and dusty laurels, by nudging my elbow and pointing out to me a young madman who sat at a near-by table. Subsequently we came to speak of this startling figure as “the Dostoievsky-man.” Whether he was actually an insane person we never discovered; but as with intense gravity he played draughts with himself and every now and then glanced furtively round and muttered some furious malediction, he seemed to bring into that place a psychic aura that was even more alien to Italy than our own. He too, just as ourselves did, lacked that indescribable wholesomeness of sun-burnt classic blood, a wholesomeness that while it evidently flourishes on garlic and spaghetti evokes the feeling that it draws its strength from contact with hot dusty marbles and crumbling masonry perforated with sunshine.

I forget how many weeks we stayed in Florence; but long enough for me to yearn to escape, even from the Uffizi and the Pitti, and get away into the “country”! This accordingly we tried to do. But my father’s dislike, nay!

malignant hatred, of trams and buses, influencing us even in this far-off country we set out on foot. And misery, nothing short of forlorn misery, was our reward. For in place of struggling boldly up the hills above the city what must we do but take a road into the level Tuscan plain; and this road we pursued till devastation overwhelmed us. Never have I seen so many vineyards — all inaccessible! Never have I seen such beautiful gardens — all fortified by impenetrable railings! Never has the effluvia from human excrement found so congenial an abiding-place as between those interminable walls. In my companion's case a sort of miasmic fever was the result of this "getting into the country," while in my own I became the victim, as I always did when I was on the Continent, of the most villainous constipation. Oh, the cruel discomfort of this most evil, and, when you think of it realistically, perfectly disgusting complaint! It got worse in Venice. I put it down to the sour wines, among which, in agreement with Mr. Ford Madox Ford, I feel especially suspicious of the *white* variety.

But if you ask me what I got out of Florence towards the intensification of my identity, or towards the acquisition of cunning craftiness in my wrestling with life I think I would say, "a certain way of absorbing the actual substance of weather-stained marbles and stones, and a certain way of absorbing the sun-scented road-dust on the steps of old churches, old monasteries, old bridges, so that I could feel the eternal solace of a rich antiquity without bothering my head about the niceties of æsthetic distinctions or teasing my wits about the accuracies of historic conclusions."

As a matter of fact I was singularly lucky in my companion, who was a rapid worker at her art; so that when we finally went on to the Adriatic, there were no long hours of fidgety revisions of unfinished sketches, and she moved boldly forward to the capture of the Venetian spectacle. But we were both pathetically rustic and simple-minded in our patient obedience to what the books said — not only Baedeker but the more literary authorities.

Fatally bookish I was in those days as far as art was concerned. I could enjoy a delicious sense of well-being from ancient buildings, especially, if I may say so, from certain particular materials in the fabric of these buildings, as long as I stayed in the open air; but once inside one of these historic edifices, though in indiscriminate devotion not the most un-Sitwellian tourist could possibly have surpassed me, my bookish predilections made it hard for me to try to find out what it was that I really and truly felt. What I did enjoy, or tried to enjoy, was always the literary atmosphere thrown over things by my favourite writers. And this worked negatively as well as positively. Because at that time I was growing weary of Ruskin I forced myself to dislike his admired Tintoretto. Because at that time I was reading D'Annunzio I hunted everywhere for specimens of the work of Paolo Veronese. Finally, by reason of that incomparable essay of Walter Pater's, the genius of Giorgione ran, like the sound of water along marble steps, through all my reactions to the palatial doorways and the opalescent flights of steps as the sky brightened or darkened, and the canals grew green and blue and black.

Our limited funds made it necessary to husband every penny of our resources. We discovered very humble lodgings by the aid of a waiter we made friends with, but our room looked out on a little canal and I can now remember the rich colours of a picture my companion made of a gondola just under our very window, that glowed in the hot noon-sun under a piled-up load of fruit.

Contrary to most human experience that engraving above the bed at Northwold where Littleton and I used to sleep, tha engraving we used to swing as we discussed our fishing exploits till it made holes in the ceiling, had not indicated half of the wonder of these fairy-story palaces that rose about me now "like exhalations" out of the lapping water. But all the while, between my real sharp, shameless, unequivocal impressions of this unique place, this place that alone of all mortal places answers to the vision that precedes realization, the thickly-charged atmosphere of the coiners of phrases, the atmosphere projected by the scribblers on paper, kept forming and re-forming, like those yellow-tinged vapours of drifting cloud that come between the moon and the eyes that regard her.

Venice to me, however, has always been much more the Venice of the equivocal Henry James than of the lusty Byron. It is a shame that my wretched physical state, during those precious weeks, should have made, but such is the truth, a deeper impression on my mind than the pink feet of the pigeons of St. Mark or the tables of that hospitable café past which all the idlers of Europe drift. St. Marks might waver before me like a temple built by the children of Nereus out of the iridescent half-lights of the shifting sea. In vain! In vain! My mind was perpetually revolving the problem — for I could get no help in any shop — as to whether I dared attempt an entrance into a hospital, solely for the benefit of a clyster.

Our funds would have come to an end long before this, and we would have been forced to return, if it had not been that Llewelyn, then helping Littleton, who by this time stood in Mr. Blake's shoes as headmaster of the Sherborne Prep, sent us money to keep us where we were. But this proved to be the last sum of money that Llewelyn could fling away for many a year; for when we finally reached Paris, on our way back, we learnt that he had been attacked by tuberculosis and was prostrate on his back in one of those small houses between the cricket field and the football field, in the very place where the sad little figure of Theodore used to await us as we came hurrying up the hill from Wildman's.

I recall it now as a singularly good example of the total lack of proportion, restraint, tact, balance, decency, dignity, that my mind sometimes displayed, that after visiting Llewelyn at Richmond Villa and arranging to accompany him to Switzerland as soon as he could travel, I despatched a letter-card to him in the familiar Yeovil Post Office — I can smell the peculiar smell of the place now as I moistened the edges of this pale-blue missive that was itself its own envelope — in which I quoted those lines in Marlowe's *Faust*.

"See where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!"

Llewelyn's hæmorrhages had stopped before I saw him; and his undiminished humour was shamelessly heathen; but it was one of my peculiarities to link up the emotional feelings I had for the men and the women I liked best with some desperate dramatic passage or some resplendent historic gesture. My emotion doubled itself in this curious way. It was as though I was so inhuman that the tears only rushed to the back of my eyes — and that was as far as they ever came except by reason of a woman's kindness or cruelty — when some tragic aspect of a friend's life could be linked with the death of Cæsar or Socrates or Christ, or when some proud imperiousness in a friend's endurance could be linked with Napoleon at St. Helena, with William Blake at Felpham, or with Swift in Dublin. My emotional response, in fact, to the poetic and dramatic in human history is so deep and intense that I have only to make, in casual conversation, a passing generalization about the Homeric Greeks or about the Spaniards or about the Russians or about the ancient Welsh, and lo! at the back of my eye-sockets there gather excited tears. The same is true when I recite, or when I comment upon certain magical single lines in poetry. But it is odd that *more* than a single line, taken in one dose, has no tendency to make me cry. It *has* to be that ineffable touch of genius which in the nature of things cannot be kept up. Certainly in the line: “See where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!” that I wrote in my boldest and most violent handwriting inside that little bit of blue paper whose fastening up with spittle made the tips of my fingers twitch, there is an extraordinary dramatic power as well as beauty.

I dare say the boy from my father’s dentist and the girl from the cashier at his bank, entering at that moment to despatch telegrams to their clients and fumbling with the sharp pencils at the end of long strings that the Yeovil postmaster supplies, wondered what was making this hook-nosed ruddy-faced man, while he licked his fingers so meticulously and jabbed down the edges of his letter-card so thoroughly, stare at nothing, as if he “saw more devils than vast hell could hold.”

But Llewelyn never minded these large grandiose inaccurate gestures of mine. “John in his translunar mood,” or “John in his planetary mood,” he would say to himself, reverencing me in his hero-worship; when really it was “Sawney John,” the King’s jester, at his familiar antics, paying himself with the tinkle of his own gold, and feeding himself with the smell of his own goose.

But what a journey it was when I finally set out with Llewelyn! We stayed one night at Newhaven because of the bad weather, and I know we went to Paris first. From Paris we took a train that passed through Laon; and in this fairy-tale Gothic city, for so it seemed to our fevered eyes, we spent one of the most curious nights of my life. Llewelyn could walk, but he walked bent over, stooping forward like an extremely aged man, and as he walked he clutched with his fingers the bosom of his waistcoat just above his heart. He did this so constantly that by degrees his waistcoat came to resemble one of those tattered military flags that hang from the roofs of churches. But his passion for travel, for experience, for the bivouac shocks of adventure, was so insatiable, and my own delight at being with him, for he turned everything we encountered into grist for his mill, was so reckless that we neither of us could resist the temptation of plucking out the heart of Laon's mystery.

The inn where we stopped was a most romantic one and filled me with memories of Sir Walter Scott's novels, while the room they gave us had an ancient fireplace, where a huge wood-fire was burning. Here a bottle of native wine was brought to us, called for by the younger "Monsieur," and after drinking it, we made our way, Llewelyn bending low as he walked, almost as low as old Mr. Curme used to bend, and never ceasing to clutch at that fatal spot in his waistcoat, through narrow cobble-stoned streets, till we arrived at the Cathedral.

The next day we went on; and if I didn't knock a hole in our carriage window to let in the air, I certainly came near doing it before we reached Basle. Here once more we broke our journey, and I remember well how in my thoughts of this being the place where Nietzsche taught Greek I displayed so much indifference to an accident that Llewelyn had to one of his teeth — losing it in fact as we stared at the river — that we had quite an angry quarrel. But we reached the little Swiss town of Clavadel at last, not very far from Davos-Platz; and Llewelyn was put to bed. His cure proved a slow and ticklish one, its worse set-back being the result of a mad walk which he undertook — for his guardian angel has been put to it all his days to save him from the upshot of such doings — over some famous mountain-pass.

But I went to see him again before he left that place, and in my own secret life this second visit to the Swiss mountains was a momentous one. My head was as full of the hyperborean breath of Nietzsche's imaginations as that "nipping and eager air" was full of frost. I was busy with my unpublished *Life of Keats*; and I well remember my exultation as I trod that glittering snow under those dark pines and allowed my spirit to dally with the notion that it would be my destiny one day to give to the world a philosophy as startling and new as that of the author of *Ecce Homo*.

How well I recall my arrival at Clavadel on that occasion! I had stopped in Paris on my way through, and had nourished my worst fancies — not my sylphid ones, but *the others* — by the perusal of certain unspeakable books. I found Llewelyn's corrugated head buzzing with what he called, in his serious but smiling way, his "social preoccupations." These seemed indeed extremely thick upon him up there; for from what he told me the affairs of the heart, or shall I say of the exasperated nerves, of these stricken people, were not less than astounding. He told me that one of them had just shot himself "for love"; but the disease he suffered from having *moved his heart* he was on the road to recover from this peevish gesture. I had to submit, the moment I arrived, to being attired in evening dress, but even this was not enough; for with his own hands my young Lord must needs wash, comb, and brush his bewildered elder brother into an appearance befitting "a relation from home." It was all surprisingly like Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*; but I can now see Llewelyn's look of shame and disgust as he snatched from me one of my abominable books and flung it into a mountain stream.

It was during this epoch of my life — the reader must forgive my wretched memory for exact dates — that I was invited, in my rôle of Oxford Extension Lecturer, to give a set of talks on English and American literature at Dresden. Never shall I forget my protracted visits, for I went more than once, to this beautiful eighteenth-century capital of Saxony. Here too, I was meditating my *Life of Keats,* the undercurrents of which had been furnished me by Tom Jones, but here again I was tormented by a damnable recrudescence of my worst vice. In fact my Dresden experience was one in which all the contending elements of my tumultuous inner nature seemed to rise up from the depths and contend for mastery.

In my romantic way I began by rejecting the obvious *English Pension* and landed myself in a weird room, looking down on the tops of red-flowering chestnuts in the older part of the city. My landlady resembled the witch of the Brocken in Faust. Storks might have built in her chimney and there was a smell of something repulsively like mortality itself, in the place where I slept. That smell was really an awe-inspiring thing. It came up from the boards. It was as if I had to retire every night not only to a mausoleum but to the hideous embrace of Dissolution, the thought of which so terrified little Juliet in the play. Moreover it was impossible to reach the quarter of the house to which American refinement has given the appellation of “toilet,” without passing a suspicious and very surly dog, a dog of small proportions but of pronounced Anglophobe views, whose agitation was terrific every time I gingerly stole down that passage. This domestic obstacle did not, as you may surmise, conduce to the normal working of my bowels, and it soon turned out that my life in Germany was no easier in that intimate sense than had been my life in Italy. Week after week this accursed constipation acted like a blight upon my days. Finally, after eking out a little external comfort by borrowing a tin bath, so that I could at least appear before the Royal Highnesses who listened to my lectures outwardly clean, I sacrificed my idealism and fled to the *English Pension* where I ought to have gone at first.

But that chamber of mine looking out on the flowering chestnuts and reeking of dead men’s bones served me well as a satanic sanctuary in the seclusion of which I could devour those frightful books, which I still kept shamefully buying. My great trouble lay in disposing of the wretched things when I had hurled myself through them, which I always did with beating heart, fevered pulses, and trembling knees. Once I left a pile of them behind me, as if I had been some monstrous Stygian bird whose excrement was the literature of Hell, in a public lavatory. Another time I hurried for miles along the further bank of that noble Dresden river, into which in the end I flung one particular volume that I had found too obscene for my taste. For you must remember, reader that I retained my fastidiousness even in my worst vice. It was only the most purged and winnowed allusions to sex that I could endure, and the least reference to normal sex functions turned my stomach. Savagery and blood I could not tolerate for a moment. It was the *idea* of sadism, an idea that had to flit and float and hover, like those tenuous heat-waves that you watch sometimes above the surface of a field, that alone excited me. I was the very opposite of the type I have heard described as "the human panther." Yes, in the very torrent and tempest of my trembling wickedness I could only really enjoy a book — strange though this may sound — that "ended happily."

In that Northwold rose-garden, with its lily-pond in the centre, where, when Littleton was fishing in the "big" pond in the shrubbery, and I had to keep calling to him to get the reassuring sound of his voice in answer, for it frightened me to think of *coming suddenly* upon him, I remember once catching a frog and thinking of using him as that cold-blooded wretch, Izaak Walton, teaches you to do, as a bait for fish; but do you think I could bring myself to put a hook into him? *Jamais de la vie!* As I say, I only *practised* sadism about three times in all my days; on those worms in the Northwold summer-house, on those newly-hatched little birds in the Sherborne quarry — and even of *that* incident I am doubtful — and on those beetles I once killed at Rothesay House with scalding water. Never has any cerebral vice been as exacting, as exclusive, as limited in its scope, as mine. The merest approach to normal sex behaviour quelled my excited desire like blocks of ice, froze it dead, like that cold water that my nurse used to throw over me at Shirley, when in my innocence I tried to tell her about my feelings. But those epochs I spent in Germany in those two successive years were crucial times for me in every respect. All my most indigenous feelings whirled up to the surface during those months and there struggled with one another for the mastery.

I remember writing to Louis Wilkinson, who was burgeoning and basking, like some great Theodoric the Ostro-Goth, between sun and sea at Sorrento, how my imagination was more deeply satisfied by the massive castles, the Brocken Heights, the fairy forests of the hyperborean North than by all his olives and citrons and marbles and roses of the South.

One of my Shirley cousins, as dear to me as Ralph himself, and who, like Ralph always "believed in Cousin Jack" suddenly appeared at Dresden, and though immensely amused at the spectacle of my harangues before Prince Johann George, carried me off for a holiday to Weimar. Never, I fancy, has Goethe received such adoration from an introverted Celt as I offered to him then; and by my cousin's influence I actually was invited by Frau Foster Nietzsche to take tea with her in Nietzsche's own house. Imagine what I felt when this devoted lady showed me the dead man's books, his editions of those "Great Latins" he so ridiculously overrated, De Maupassant, Merimée and so forth! There was, I remember, a certain modern French idealist among these books, an author I had never heard of; but against some eloquent passage of his, in praise of "the resolute pursuit of the higher truth," Nietzsche had written in pencil in the margin, several times over, the words: "in vain" … "in vain" … "in vain."

The Saxon Professors whose rôle it was to arrange these lectures were the most charming of learned men. They gave me delicious beer-soup in their own homes, they took me for endless excursions into the mountains; once as far as the Bohemian border, where I proudly sent postcards home to Montacute with the imperial Austrian stamps on them. They took me to the Opera to hear *Carmen*, to the theatre where a Shakespearean company arranged its plays to fit in with the lectures I was giving, and finally, before I went away, they allowed me to choose, in the great warehouse-rooms of the Meisen China factory, whatever piece of china I liked the best! I chose an amazingly beautiful table-centre, composed of a score of shepherds and shepherdesses and standing about three feet high. I shall never forget the pride with which I unpacked this royal donation, on the little lawn at Burpham, with the crossed swords of Meisen china on the outside of the case, and wisps of the softest mountain-moss spread round the delicate figurines within!

I never left Germany in a hurry after my lectures were over, for I found I got on splendidly with Germans wherever I went. I walked through the foothills of the Black Forest. I went to Heidelberg. I stayed at Nuremberg. I visited a friend in Mannheim. But do not think as I rattle off these grand names that I am not aware of a floating crowd of half-forgotten wayside “eidola” of German country-life that are far more precious to me and far more *germane* to the matter, than any wooden Madonnas or any crag-built castles on the Rhine. Yes, amid those other dominant passions of my nature which the occult and mystical sympathy I felt for that country stirred up in me, my supreme mania — the only one that rivals my “sylpholeptism” and my winnowed sadism — for wandering along narrow roads and deserted cattle-tracks, past barns and sheds and windmills and water-mills, past church yards and ancient inns, over time-worn bridges, by the edge of old canals, through ancestral parks and along the borders of lakes, up forest-paths among fern-grown rocks and across smooth levels of pine-needles, down by the margins of reedy swamps and the dusty outskirts of market-towns; my mania, I say, for wandering among scenes such as these, scenes that come with a fresh shock to me when I think of them now and that I shall probably never see again, was satisfied in Germany as it has seldom been satisfied anywhere else in the world! Often and often since then, "amid the din of towns and cities I have owed to them, in hours of weariness, sensations sweet, felt in the blood and felt along the heart, and passing even — —" but since you, reader, are neither Tom Jones, nor one of "Tom Jones' girls," I will quote no further.

It was after one of these spiritual and cerebral debauches in this land for which I felt such mystic attraction that on returning to Burpham I found that in the exigencies of domestic purgations, as Mr. Micawber might express it, in other words in "Spring Cleaning," a full-length plaster figure of the Venus of Milo and a full-size bust of the Apollo Belvedere, objects, that in my crazy idealism I had cherished since the earliest Court House days but which had descended, in worse and worse decrepitude, from study to tool-house, from tool-house to out-house, steadily receding, as *my artistic taste improved*, till they crumbled away to nothing, had been carried off by the dustman. This event would have been more of a shock to me than it was if it had not been that at that time I was in the throes of one of those feverish obsessions I had come to call my "devilish moods," but, as it was, I had very unpleasant qualms. I am more, or worse if you will, than a sentimentalist, when it comes to the Inanimate, especially to any inanimate object that could possibly, by the furthest reach of the imagination, be regarded as an idol, or totem, or fetish or sacred stick or stone.

As Llewelyn loves to hint, with my pre-historic "cat-head," my Horus beak, my mouth like that of an Aztec idol, I resemble some archaic doll-demon, out of whose gargoylian lips water might eternally pour, or into whose equine nostrils incense might eternally rise! Thus it is always with an instinctive *fellow*-feeling that I am, as I say, a good deal worse then sentimental about inanimate things. Something breathed the breath of life into Powys Major's "ugly mug," and why should Powys Major not have the power of breathing the breath of life into a plaster statue of the Venus of Milo? Suffer as I have done, and am doing, and doubtless *shall* do from this fatal "animism," that forces me to walk as delicately as Agag all the days of my life, and believing in this idolatry of mine, amid the clash of chances and possibilities, only to the tune of about one to ninety-nine, I feel that it is essential that *someone* should lift up his voice in these days, when the head of Science is as swollen with arrogance as the head of Nero, and timidly and faintly, but still obstinately, suggest that the magical view of life has as much right to "rise again" as the Lord Himself.

As soon as my lectures began to be successful on the other side of the Atlantic and I had some pocket-money I began to treat my younger brothers to various excursions. I remember there was quite a council of state held over me in our ancient forum, the terrace-walk, when Louis Wilkinson brought back word how extravagant I had become in my tips to waiters and porters! It was severely pointed out to me on this occasion that it was a disgrace to "throw away money" purely for my own self-indulgence, when "honest cods" of my own flesh and blood had to live deprived of so many things. It only needed this hint, for I can assure you the verdict was as emphatic as it was unanimous, for me to begin reforming in this matter. I treated Bertie to a visit to Rome, and Llewelyn — alas! still with uncured lungs — to a trip to Venice.

Aye! but I got, as they say, "my own back" with double and treble interest in both these instances! Shall I ever forget the heart-beating excitement of the early morning in Rome, for I had got there first from another direction when I met Bertie’s train. Nobody but A. R. P. would have had the wit to discover that he arrived at dawn, or the still greater wit to communicate with me by telegram to that effect. But there he was; and if I did not show off my Roman knowledge by taking him into the “Term Museum” straight from his train — for it was but a step — it was only because I wanted to show off my discovery of something even more desirable to Bertie, just then, than lovely marbles in a garden of roses, namely a real Roman Bath with shining classical tiles! But after breakfast, and I can remember it all as if it were yesterday, my childish excitement kept mounting and mounting. How could it else when I felt like the Chief of the “Volentia Army,” introducing the bravest of my robber band to the unequalled treasure I had discovered? I wanted Bertie to set his eyes first in Rome upon something that would be much more symbolic for him and much more charged with his proper destiny, than was my own first view of that singular “Victory Column” of Marcus Aurelius. So I took him by a roundabout approach, circling through various narrow streets, but always getting nearer and nearer to my objective which was nothing less than the Pantheon.

I knew that next to organic, massive, soil-suggested buildings, what the heart of this fourth son of my father loved the best was red wine, especially when he could drink it straight from where it had been “cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth.” I had previously noted a small underground warehouse devoted to local vintages just out of sight of the entrance to the Pantheon, and in front of this place, seated on a bench in the sunshine, I watched with delight, like a woman watching her warrior — for with A. R. P. I always felt weak and frail and feminine — my companion’s Roman profile grow genial, if not jovial. Then, and not till then, did I lead him round the intervening buildings and we came bolt up against the famous portico. There it was — the temple to all the gods in the City of all the gods!

"Agrippa. Cos. Fecit," we read; and the responsive gravity of my laconic brother contented me to the bottom of my heart. His silence was as expressive, in this first decade of the twentieth century, as was that of the historian Gibbon in *his* moment of time, as he stood at gaze on that spot. And how like an ancient Roman A. R. P. looked, when, a little later, I saw him take possession of the Baths of Caracalla as if he pondered how they might be restored to a proper use. I was well rewarded for plotting this occasion.

What might be called the structural inevitabilities of architecture, the austere pleasure to be derived from the fatality of materials in this pragmatic art, was never more deeply revealed to me than when I watched the way his interest gathered, intensified, or ebbed. But there it is! In spite of all Harry Lyon's attempts to make an art-lover of me, to the bottom of my soul *I am no artist*. "In vain, in vain, in vain!" as Nietzsche wrote in the margin of that French sermon. My way of taking life is poetic, imaginative, sentimental, *never* æsthetic! That is why I felt so ashamed and so sad when my great plaster Aphrodite went to the limbo of broken dolls. I loved her as a poetic symbol! What did I care if she were a botched and bungled toy? The truth is that all the authentic emotions I got in Rome were poetic, and, in my own childish sense, philosophical. They were profoundly un-æsthetic. Even my fondness for Goethe's travel-diaries failed to enable me to get any solid gain for the real life of my soul from Michael Angelo or Raphael or the famous fragments of Greek sculpture. Up and down those galleries I wandered, as I had done on that earlier occasion, and as I was to do again, but never once was I really arrested, ensorcerized, carried out of myself. Pathetically did I stare into those bulging, lidless eyes of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitol Hill. “In vain, in vain, in vain!” the imperial disillusionist seemed to say to me.

“You are what you are; and your escape from the Transitory into the Eternal will never be through the plastic arts.”

How quaint and humiliating is the real truth about these curious matters, in the changes and chances of a person’s life, when he actually dares to blurt it out! My whole life can be divided in two halves; the first up to the time I was forty; and the second *after* the time I was forty. During the first half I struggled desperately to evoke and to arrange my feelings according to what I admired in my favourite books; but during the second half I struggled to find out what my real feelings were and to refine upon them and to balance them and to harmonize them, according to no one’s method but my own. But it does remain lamentable how little I got from the world-city. Think what Rome holds of the accumulated art, in statuary and painting, of all our western world! Think of the famous Greek statues that are in the Vatican Museum alone, from that amazing torso of a man’s back near the entrance, over which they tell us Michael Angelo would mutter and grope, fumbling with his fingers after the Vulcanian tricks of the demiurge, to the stately “Diadunemos” at the end of the long corridor. Think of that Sistine Chapel, under the dizzy ceiling of which the middle-aged Goethe, like a great blue-bottle fly, managed to clamber. I used to glance at that exalted foothold, among those gigantic pictured shapes, and feel absolutely sick at the thought of being up there.

But if you ask me from what, in these visits to Rome, I remember deriving any real, natural, and purely personal pleasure, among all these wonders, I would answer from the grey-blue hills and the thin, tall cypresses, rising in some of the backgrounds of the paintings of

Pintoricchio. Such at least is my impression to-day; but I may easily be confusing Pintoricchio with some other painter.

The truth is, though it seems a queer thing for the person to say who once overheard himself, at the trial of the *Little Review* in New York for publishing *Ulysses*, described by one spectator to another as "The English degenerate, John Powys," I have always been of the opinion that certain simple nobilities in personal character are serious rivals, merely as planetary phenomena, to the greatest work of art in the world. I confess I hesitate a little when it comes to literature; for I feel as if *King Lear* and *The Idiot* and *The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov* resembled, in a closer way than these other arts can ever do, the heroic grandeur possible to a real human person.

Well! it was to Llewelyn that I went now, in whose character, little as he knows it, exist these particular heroic qualities that however much you may detract from the freedom of the will seem to me as great as any possible work of art. Yes, to Llewelyn I went now, when I was about thirty-six or thirty-seven, and carried him off to Venice. It was at this time, owing to the success of my lectures, that I told my father he could stop giving me the allowance of a hundred pounds a year which it was his principle to give his sons when they married. As often happens, however, in gestures of this sort, I was not totally pleased at the ease and promptness with which this hint was acted on!

Oh, how well I remember Llewelyn's excitement when I announced to him that I was going to take him to Venice. It was in the potato garden, near the crumbling wall of Ham Hill Stone across which lay Cole's orchard where we used to shoot at cole-tits and marsh-tits with our catapults, and he was lying in his deck-chair amid the tangle of nettles and ground-ivy and stone-crop, listening to a thrush breaking a snail's armour upon a stone; and when I told him he positively cried aloud with joy, so that Willy, hidden in the laurel-bushes, came out to learn the news. He had grown weary of his long sickness, and the idea of this daring excursion thrilled him through and through.

But I received a very stern letter from A. R. P. on this occasion which brought down by several pegs the pitch of our high spirits. I intended to travel to Venice by that express from Paris that the hero of Proust's book must have taken on the occasion when he felt that famous unevenness in the paving-stones of St. Mark's, which, like that mouthful of the Madeleine dipt in camomile-tea, gave him one of his immortality-proving ecstasies; but we were going to meet a very spirited and beautiful girl in Venice and we were also to meet there that resplendent habitué of historic Europe, our brilliant friend Louis. It was the fact that I was smuggling Llewelyn off to encounter such provocative persons in such a provocative place that troubled Bertie. He accused me of acting "as I always did"; of sacrificing others with reckless unscrupulousness to my lust for dramatic excitement.

His psychological if not his moral insight proved, I regret to say, completely justified. John *was* at his old dramatic tricks again. John *was* at his old trade of a cerebral Pandarus. Well! on this occasion John was fairly "caught on the hop."

At Milan, on our way home, Llewelyn fell seriously ill, and we had to remain for weeks and weeks in a hotel in this city till he could move on again. But this was afterwards. This was when we had supped full on the forbidden fruit. For that Venetian visit was a unique experience in both our lives. If Llewelyn paid for it at Milan with hæmorrhages and kidney stones he enjoyed it at the time hardly less than I did. It was lucky we had Louis with us, for he, as he always did, kept his head whereas Llewelyn and I worked ourselves up to such a pitch in our jealous contest for the favours of the beautiful girl who was with us that *our* heads were completely turned. She insisted on dressing up as a boy; and we would accompany her in her gondola in this attire to the remotest possible spots where gondolas could be propelled! If Louis had not kept intact his East-Anglian sang-froid heaven knows into what wild events Llewelyn and I, in our mounting rivalry might have been led.

What I call my heart was hit as it has not been often hit. Though this organ does not change its physical position like that one at Clavadel it is by no means what you would call a passionate heart. But whatever kind of a heart it may be it was certainly pierced through and through by one of the arrows in *that* quiver! It was in fact in a state of such wild imaginative elation that all my insanest mystical impulses whirled up to the surface while all my passion for dramatic gestures responded with kindred motions. The feelings that this beautiful girl in boy's clothes excited in me rose like flames that were as many-coloured in their flashing sword-points as those angels I had prayed to in the London Hospital.

There was some small kind of a war going on at that epoch between Italy and some other country; and I dare say our appearance when we escorted this girl about Venice was odd and striking. At any rate we were disembarking from our gondola one day not far from the Bridge of Sighs when we found ourselves surrounded by an imposing band of officials. It was explained to us that we were under arrest. "This," they said, indicating our friend, "is a feminine one; yes? no?"

Llewelyn whispered to me that it was just as if they had caught a hatfull of trespassing butterflies and discovered among them, by the markings under her wings, a fine female specimen. This is the only occasion so far in my life when I have been in the hands of the police; and really when we were all led into some upper-chamber, and made to stand in a row before a grave personage at a table, I felt as if the chief of the "Volentia Army" were being treated as he had so often treated our little nurse from Berkshire, in that robber's roof-attic at Rothesay House!

Our Venetian address was carefully taken down — an hotel on the Lido — and then came the question of our home address. Not one of us had a "card" except Llewelyn, and he had, by some chance, one of my father's. Never had those familiar words: "Rev. C. F. Powys, Montacute Vicarage, Somerset" sounded so out of place; but the Venetian official chuckled a good deal and handed the card to one of his subordinates. We caught the word "padre" exchanged between them accompanied by what no doubt was a sly commentary on the progenitive capacity of priests in England. An official at once hurried off to the Lido to verify our story, and once again Llewelyn saved us; for, after his fashion, he had so courted, cajoled, caressed, and generally bewitched our landlady, that the woman led the emissary to think that our social position at home, in spite of the padre's card, was a tremendous one, and that we were only behaving in our accustomed manner, like so many Milords Byron.

But my excitement during those wild Venetian days rose to a pitch that I have never known before or since. I remember going alone to Verona one day and being so elated by the thought of Juliet in her tomb, by the vast stone Amphitheatre, and by that gondola-loving boy-girl, that like Faust I could have cried out to the moment, even if it brought the Judgment Day with it "O stay! Thou art so fair!" There were clouds without water sweeping across the Verona sky; and their ominous appearance, together with an extraordinary revelation of lightning without thunder, had driven everybody out of the Amphitheatre. And as I sat in that vast semi-cirque — but what was its vulgar Roman antiquity really, compared with the mystic stone-circles of my own land? — my whole nature seemed transformed. I cannot recall now whether or not that boy-girl was actually seated by my side. She was certainly enthroned in my insane imagination; but sometimes it comes back to me that she *was* with me under that lightning without thunder, and sometimes that I was alone that day.

Undoubtedly there do come occasions in a person's life when the underlying fatality of his identity gathers itself together and rises up from the fluctuating waves of his nature like a crested sea-serpent from the bottomless silt. At such moments, whatever stains are on his conscience a person feels able to shriek out, like Macbeth: "Though Birnam Wood *be* come to Dunsinane; and *thou* opposed, being of no woman born; *yet* I will try the last!"

Alone in that Roman circle, under those clouds from which no drop of rain fell, the thaumaturgic element in my nature rose to such a pitch that I felt, as I have only done once or twice since, that I really *was* endowed with some sort of supernatural power. To what end had the gods thus dedicated me? Merely to indulge in "dithyrambic analysis" before bewildered, puzzled, derisive audiences? I refused to believe it! I refuse to believe it still. What I felt at that moment in the Verona Amphitheatre was the very thing I had been obscurely fumbling my way towards through all my lusts and my obsessions. I felt it again, only five years ago, when I visited Stonehenge with Littleton on our way from Sherborne to Northwold. The feeling that comes over me at such times is one of most formidable power. It makes me conscious that below all the maudlin silliness of my gaping countenance — and I willingly confess that, even more accurately than the word "zany" or "punchinello," the word "maudlin" exactly describes the wool-gathering, absent-minded foolishness in my face — I conceal a demonic formidableness of my own, of which my enemies were well advised to beware! As I have hinted before, no amount of "manic elation," or “paranoia,” or “megalomania,” can explain the fact that I am the most unlucky person in the world to insult or malign. The evidence of this — of my being able, I mean, and quite unconsciously too, to exercise some kind of “evil eye,” on people who have injured me — has so piled up upon me all my life that it has become a habit with me to pray to my gods anxiously and hurriedly for each new enemy!

But it is not only at great moments like this one at Verona, when all the symbolic figures of my unbalanced fancy, the good and the evil ones together, a whole invisible galaxy of Christs, Merlins, Pythagorases, Laotzes, Goethes, Blakes and Nietzsches whirl up about me, that this monstrous and almost non-human sense of power possesses me. I have had this same feeling quite recently when walking alone over these free hills in “up-state” New York where the most romantic thing I can hope to see is a stone wall without mortar, surmounted by a wooden fence without nails.

At these times I am aware of my skeleton going to and fro over the surface of this round earth; but, accompanying my perambulatory skeleton, I feel the presence of a spiritual power emanating from my bones, and dominating my bones, that moves with me as I move “like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.” My friends and neighbours, I willingly confess can hardly be expected to see any evidence of this. What is apparent is an excessively polite, indeed a fawningly friendly person, with a face of foolish intensity, and a perfect passion for “drawing people out.”

It is curious too how little this supernatural power of mine, that I was so conscious of in connection with our boy-girl of the Venetian canals, does me any good in the direction of making me rich or famous. It saves me — I do think it has done as much as that — from worrying about the lack of money. But in its formidable simplicity it is linked to a veritable serpent of convoluted maliciousness which rejoices in behaving absurdly as long as it can disconcert the children of this world. This serpent of malice, of which no one would guess the existence from observing my maudlin expression of foolish eagerness, is weighing and judging my various interlocutors all the time and encouraging my imagination to rove and stray in the most bizarre, monstrous, and to confess the truth *shocking* directions. I will, for instance, be listening with flattering attention to some pretty society woman, when at that very moment, I am imagining a monstrous and hideous *tail* untwining itself from under her, or a revolting and unthinkable *horn* growing up between her shoulder blades! Or I will be listening to some potentate of this world — one of Mr. de — — 's "magnates" — while he explains to me the way to handle my life, and behold! I will see this good, easy man's figure stark naked, and not only naked, but as if he were upon a dissecting-table, where his "viscera" — of which my scientific knowledge is, I confess, somewhat shaky — as well as what Rabelais calls his "bum-gut," assume a prominence altogether disproportionate to his human cranium.

But this convoluted malice turns itself most willingly upon my own reputation for gravity and respectability. No sooner do I detect the remotest sign that some honest man regards me as an arch-humbug, than I dance my best malice-dance, for his benefit, and trick myself up, for I am a veritable Proteus among Punchinellos, in my most extreme Cagliostro cloak.

A very teasing mental weakness of mine caused me acute distress during these Venetian days. There must be a veritable Demon of Auto-Sadism dwelling within me; for the more thrilled I became with the ambiguous beauty of our boy-girl companion the more rigorously did this Demon within me set himself to spoil my. pleasure. Do you know what this Demon used to compel me to do in my perverted mind? And it was clearly a mental proceeding that could only be regarded as sadistic *towards myself.* He used to compel me to smear her beautiful form from head to foot with some grotesque sticky substance, such as marmalade or treacle! Analyse this trick of the poor human brain for me, reader, if you need a problem in psychiatry! My triumphant delight in this beautiful boy-girl no doubt seemed to her own proud intelligence to be doing her secret original identity only a very dubious kind of honour. It was as if she had succeeded in turning the head of some super-puppet, some Quixotic man-doll, who had been taught to say "Christ," and "El Greco," and "Dostoievsky," during the epochs when he was the companion of these magicians, but who now could only repeat *her* name. It was even as if, in his erotic delirium, he was forever mixing her up with all the other thaumaturgistic figures who had made him dance and gesticulate and utter his cries, all the way down the ages! But if I did "sing such a song," as Llewelyn would say, I was without any doubt as completely enslaved by this boy-girl's beauty as far as my peculiar type of heart, the heart of a cerebral idolator, *could* be enslaved by a human woman. I was so enslaved that in my jealous desire not to break one link of this enchanted spell — and no doubt our white-admiral's flutterings, now in the direction of Llewelyn, and now in that of Louis, helped to bind it the faster — that I completely lost, on one curious occasion, my usual affable politeness.

Somewhere down by the Rialto, in a very crowded and very narrow canal, we encountered, as we were propelled through the water, a floating equipage that resembled the barge of Cleopatra, or perhaps I ought rather to say that ship, so often delineated in Greek vast paintings, that carried the great god Dionysus on his triumphant voyage. This other gondola, whose high ornamental poop collided with our own, was actually covered with the most wonderful skins of leopards and lynxes and it was handled by a Being who might very well have passed for the Faun of Praxiteles. In the stern, lying on a leopard's skin, was a personage who, as I learnt later, was one of the most whimsical writers and one of the most beguiling men of the great world.

Blinded by the spell I was under and furious at this contact with fashionable society, I lifted my voice, the moment I heard the Baron — for it was none other than the famous Baron Corvo — begin enquiring whether we were engaged for the rest of that week, and in a shriek more worthy of Lancelot Gobbo than of Signior Antonio I screamed ferociously: “Up to the hilt! Up to the hilt! Up to the hilt!” It was much more as if I were ordering some hired assassin to plunge a dagger into the Baron’s heart than as if I were answering an invitation to a Venetian palace and I am afraid the gentleman missed nothing of its stridency. He looked appealingly at Louis as much as to say: “Protect me from this savage.”

Llewelyn’s collapse at Milan did not endear that place to me. Indeed it was hard for me to link up this active city, with the glittering pinnacles of its grandiose church with Leonardo and his “girl-boy” pupils. I use that expression purposely, for *our* boy-girl of Venice was for ever murmuring broken and incoherent praise of this mysterious artist of whom I knew nothing except those sentences in Pater about his passion for the flowing of many waters and for the inscrutable smiling of one particular woman. Evidently in some sharp and intimate sense, totally beyond the comprehension of my unscientific mind, this girl had caught the artist-enchanter in the very act of performing one of his strange other-side-of-the-moon conjuring tricks with Nature. And Goethe, it seemed, agreed with this girl in the matter of Leonardo.

But just as I had attempted in vain to follow the simple-subtle utterances of my great master among the marbles and pictures of Rome; just as I had stood at the Lido on the very spot where he had for the first time seen the sea and seen nothing but a tiny little sea-horse that Llewelyn found, so it was in vain that I tried to capture the thrill he got from Leonardo's "Last Supper." I could not do it! It still remains that the only artists I have ever really appropriated to my authentic inner life — and Goethe himself says that if you don't do *that* it is of no avail that you rush through these treasure-houses — are El Greco, Nicholas Poussin, and certain particular and rather conventional landscape-painters, like Ruysdael, Gainsborough, and Ruskin's *bête noir*, Salvator Rosa. As for those marble pinnacles of the cathedral in Milan I viewed them with positive distaste. What could I, who had so often seen the majestic earth-bastioned towers of Ely rise up out of the fens, get for my spirit from this fantasia of civic elegance?

The truth is that what alone among these things really satisfies me, what alone I can rest upon and contemplate in a gallery for any length of time, is a landscape painting. I forget names so shamefully; but I know that Gainsborough and Ruysdael are only two among a number of painters any smallest specimen of whose work it would be a sensual delight to me to possess. And the kind of landscape I love so deeply and understand so well is the commonest kind of all in any old picture-gallery. Of modern pictures I am maliciously ignorant. I cannot describe to you the haste with which I hurry past them to reach one of these old, mellow, time-worn canvases of poetized and conventionalized scenery such as my soul loveth. The older and more famous works of art I have been clever enough with the help of books, to grasp intellectually, up to a certain point, but there is a type of conventional, poetical, *romantic* landscape, usually somewhat dusky and mellow and blurred with age, a type of picture that, I fancy, must belong to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, that I need no Harry Lyon, no Brother Bertie, no boy-girl authority on Leonardo, to interpret for me.

As I write now, lying at my American window, watching the chickadees in the frozen snow steal the crumbs from my favourite flock of starlings, I can call up a vivid "imago" of the sort of picture I always look for in these galleries, and to tell the truth seldom experience any difficulty in finding! It will have a ragged tree-trunk in the foreground with a good space of rough ground round it containing moss, lichen, twigs, straw, loose stones, and a few anonymous weeds. It will have a few unobtrusive figures tending cattle, and beyond these an old stone bridge with a man or a woman driving sheep across it, the animals following one another with that curious sense of something that goes on for ever, something lifted out of time into eternity, such as Keats suggests as belonging to the figures on a "Grecian Urn." And my picture will show in its further perspective some huge fragment of crumbling masonry, a portion perhaps of a fallen temple or the remains of some gigantic aqueduct. Delicate grasses and the trailing tendrils of wild plants will be seen growing between the stones of this ruin and the mere existence of our doubt as to its original nature will enhance the value of what might be called the *abstract idea* of ancient masonry, making it a symbol of the work of the generations, sinking slowly down into the earth from which it arose. And then beyond this majestic fragment would be seen the wide-stretching branch of a great tree, dusky and dim and of a brownish-green colour, like one of those branches that stretch forth in so monumental a way in the "Fête Champetre" of Giorgione. Behind this branch will be seen long lines of dark rolling clouds, alternating with a receding distance of pale green ether. But the massive ruin to which I have referred will be broken at one particular point; and there the eye will catch a vague uncertain glimpse of distant water; a river perhaps, or a river-mouth, widening into the sea. At any rate there will be faint silvery gleams upon that distant water, gleams that will lead the mind on and on and on, till it loses itself in the boundless.

My Venetian boy-girl whose feelings towards Leonardo must have closely resembled those of Luini or Beltrafio, though I dare say they anticipated many of the now famous opinions of Paul Valéry, could not, for all her passionate scorn, destroy my love of these old, mellow, conventional eighteenth-century landscapes.

"What do you *exactly see* when you look at these conventional pictures?" she would indignantly ask, in the true Paul Valéry manner of trying fiercely to reach the unappeasable objective of perception, tearing away the subjective as if it were some sort of clinging bindweed.

"I see what pleases me in Nature," I would reply, "only *more* of it; and with the rest left out."

"But what do you *feel*?" my boy-girl would insist.

"I'll tell you in two words, my dear." I would answer. "I feel *sensual lust*. My contemplation of these old tree-stumps, of these bits of broken wall, of that ancient bridge, with the sheep crossing it for ever and for ever, of that far-away silvery gleam on the distant sea, gives me the same sensation that I get when I contemplate you yourself; at least when I contemplate you when you are in a placid mood or, better still, fast asleep! Yes, what I feel when I gaze in such deep satisfaction at these eighteenth-century landscapes, is a definite psychic sensuality. It is much more than the physical sensation of eating and drinking. It is exactly like what I feel, when you, my beautiful one, allow me to hold you on my lap!"

After endless discussions between Llewelyn and me, excitedly conducted at his bedside, in the intervals of his bodily anguish over the pain of a kidney-stone and his mental tension over the state of his lungs, it was arranged that our Venetian boy-girl should be with us at Genoa, from which harbour it was decided we should take a Dutch ship to Southampton. As if it were a picture from a life in some different age I can remember a particular scene on a high balcony, at early dawn, overlooking the harbour at Genoa. Red geraniums, endless red geraniums, come back to my mind in connection with it, and the particular way the ripples of a calm sea catch the white light of dawn as Dante has noted in the beginning of the Purgatorio. And I can see Llewelyn's troubled forehead and that "woman's mouth," that so stirred the Tintinhull tramp, as he leans forward, still in that kind of old-fashioned white night-shirt that used to be so carefully inscribed "Ll. Powys" in indelible marking-ink for the benefit of his Sherborne or Cambridge washer-woman, supporting himself against a marble pillar on this Genoese balcony, tantalized by the cruelty of the handicap of his illness.

The Dutch ship on which we sailed for home strikes me in retrospect as a sort of "Flying Dutchman"; for she came, I believe, from Java, and she stopped at every port, so it seems to me now, from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. At the Lisbon harbour, where we finally touched, I bought for myself an immense Spanish cloak which for a long while was the passionate envy of every woman I knew. *Some* particular woman got hold of it in the end; for like the seamless garment of the Lord it could not be divided. But those Arab cities of the North African coast, on the brink of the authentic desert, went into my feverish head and out of it again as if they had been pictures on a screen. I *was* faintly jerked into an awareness of Algiers by being forced to ride a beast of some kind — I know it was not a camel; and I can scarcely believe it was a horse; probably it was an ass — and I was thrilled to see "dark faces with white silken turbans wreathed," and to take off my boots in a mosque, and to watch water-sellers carrying water in skins, and to see loaves of bread exactly identical with those I had just seen in Leonardo's picture, touched by Christ's own fingers.

I have never been hated in any company to the tune in which I was hated by officers, crew, and fellow-passengers, on board that ship from Java! Llewelyn's consumption seemed the last straw in the account they held against me. He *looked* by this time, you see, as ill as he really was; a thing which seldom happens with him, and I can recall one of these officers shaking his fist in my face and crying out in broken English: "Don't you dare ever again to bring that brother of yours on a Dutch ship!"

My next foreign excursion was to Spain. I saw "The Catholic" before I set off to the land of his heart's desire. I suppose that Council on the terrace-walk which had a tendency to regulate my money matters would have strongly protested against my taking "The Catholic" with me! He was settled at Reigate at that time, and there I went to his house, and stayed alone with him. Up and down the streets of Reigate I walked with "The Catholic." It was, I think, the town of his birth; so that he not only knew every picturesque old hostelry in the place but every stick and stone in the environs. Well do I recall being grievously irked by the firmness with which "The Catholic" carried me, one afternoon, out of the public gardens, where I would fain have lingered indefinitely. But we had only had a week together, and after all he *was* half a priest; so I suppose it was natural enough that he relucted to take himself off, as Bernie would have done, leaving me to glare, like the Head of Medusa, at some solitary young woman who sat with crossed legs upon a bench.

It was of Bolingbroke's writings that my friend talked as we drank our port and sherry in those Reigate taverns; for always, with what was probably the instinctive impulse of a monk or a holy man, "The Catholic" fled from whatever secular house, even if it was his own, he might have been dwelling in, and hurried off to the erudite anonymity of a friendly tavern. He always said he thought better as well as wrote better in some inn-parlour. That singular book of his, that book which anticipated, as well as refuted some of the subtlest reasonings of Modernism, *Pascal, Newman, Loisy and the Catholic Church*, was no doubt largely written in inn-parlours. I can boast the honour of having decoyed him to write a *little* of it at Burpham; but that may have been because his friend Father Tyrrel, the famous Jesuit, was actually borrowing from me — during his final unhappy controversy with the Vatican — certain works of Newman that he could not find at Storrington just across our downs, where he lived till his death.

Of Pascal "The Catholic" never failed to talk to me. He talked passionately, even wildly and with a gathered-up intensity of feeling that amounted to the sort of heroic desperation which so often appears in Miguel Unamuno. Unamuno was, I think, one of J. W. W.'s religious correspondents, as was certainly Père Brèmond in France, and the Baron Von Hügel in Germany; but I know this: that none of the Neo-Thomists of a later day, not even the learned and eloquent Maritain, catch that tragic, mystic exultation, with a flash in it like the point of Balin's fatal spear, with which my friend used to utter his convoluted "apologia," both for himself and for his hero, Pascal.

It is when I think of the intensity of emotion, and of tragic emotion too, not mere sentimental feeling, with which "The Catholic" used to defend the Religion of the Saints, that I find it difficult to refrain from being a little puzzled when I contemplate such formidable-brooding foreheads as Darrow's in America and my own Llewelyn's in England, setting themselves so indignantly against these things. But I suspect, as often happens in other spheres, that the intense feelings at both ends of the scale are really nearer each other than the *laissez-faire* attitude of those who are "neither for God nor for His enemies" is near to either of them.

I snatched the opportunity — how disgusted with me would "The Catholic" have been had he known! — of remaining a day or two in Paris in order to rush, like the madman I was, through an orgy of my forbidden books. But I must relate in this connection a very queer psychopathic phenomenon, namely the fact that after racing through a collection of these evil books, I found myself, at the end of a magical spring afternoon, with the horizontal sun falling on these unspeakable volumes tossed about on the floor of my hotel bedroom and the balmy Paris air full of the scent of lilacs and lilies of the valley and horses' dung — for the *fiacre* had not yet given way to the "taxi" — floating in through my window, with my erotic desire still wholly unsatisfied and all exciting power gone from these works. So carrying my books, some of which I had barely skimmed to the nearest square that had a dustbin where I could get rid of them — for I was not so scrupulous in Paris as in Dresden — I set out to some sort of a vaudeville performance the advertisements of which attracted me.

But there is something about the French stage with its artistic provocations and extravagant indecencies that seems always to freeze my wicked thoughts into a chastity as cold as death; so I was left to that old miserable condition from which only Tom and "Tom's girls" had ever saved me, the condition of burning with the desire of a *voyeur* but finding all I looked at turn to dust and ashes. I was reduced to that bitter knowledge that my frantic eroticism will I suppose learn "in vain, in vain," throughout eternity, that since the real essence of all desirableness exists in the activity of the imagination, it is better to force yourself to be thrilled by what you have got — for to the imagination, *as to God*, all is possible, and reality and unreality *are the same thing* — than to hunt through half the dustbins of Paris, to try to find what you have thrown away.

Well, I finally took the train for the South; and you may believe that my excitement to get a glimpse of Touraine, the land of Balzac and Rabelais, and possibly even a sight of those “melancholy seignorial woods of Blois,” described by Pater in *Gaston*, soon made me forget those Paris dustbins.

How long and luscious and green the meadow-grass was along the banks of the Loire! I have seen green grass in my time; seen it in the Shirley meadows, in the Stinsford meadows near Dorchester, in the dairy-fields at Montacute; but on my soul I’ve never seen pastures as green as these were that that southern express rushed through. All too soon for me was the landscape swallowed up by darkness; but in the morning I forgot there were such things in the world as green fields. All was yellow and brown and golden and burnt umber.

I was in Spain. You can believe how the figure of “The Catholic” and his tragic and terrific resolve “to hold,” as he always used to say, “religion by the hair” rose up and stood by my side as I got out of the train at Madrid. I had been mocked ere I clambered into my berth for the night by a group of fashionable young Frenchmen and I can tell you it was with relief I saw these young sparks enter a grander hotel than I could afford.

It is most remarkable how I excite either strong feelings of derisive hatred as I go about or strong feelings of exaggerated respect. And this is especially true of young men. I’ve got on wonderfully well with young Americans, young Germans, young Jews, and young Englishmen — never with a young Frenchman! This I think is due to the fact that my type of imagination, my type of humour — if you can call it humour, and, after all, there *are* precedents for it — and my type of intelligence, are all exactly opposite to the dominant French types of these things. One Frenchman alone, my honourable and dear friend, Monsieur D'Aoust, has put himself out to be gracious to me; and the delicious savour of his appreciation has been so penetrating that it makes the fact that it *is* such an exception all the more emphatic.

But to be alone in Madrid was a pleasure far beyond anything I had anticipated! Walking up and down that sun-baked little garden at the entrance to the blood-tinted Prado, gazing at the royal Palace through iron bars, desperately trying to appropriate to my imagination the scoriac backgrounds of Spanish pictures with their tawny dust, their abject vegetation, their desolate crags, their leafless demon-twisted branches, walking along narrow stone terraces poised above echoing thoroughfares, drinking cup after cup of a coffee that seemed to me less agreeable than any liquid I had ever poured down my throat, I had that delicious sensation that I am always struggling to feel, of being a real stranger to the whole of our planet — a stranger from Saturn, say! — wandering up and down the earth, and observing without hatred, without curiosity, without envy, without love, without disgust, the customs of the tribes of men as if they were the ways offish in an aquarium.

But one of the most exciting events of my whole life was now to take place. I had prepared myself, you must understand, for this pilgrimage to Spain, though not as scrupulously as "The Catholic" would have done. But I had practised reading Spanish till I could read easy novels — not *Don Quixote*, but books like those of Blasco Ibanez — and among other works of this voluminous author I had read with thrilling delight the one about the cathedral at Toledo. This book pleased me even more than Hugo's *Notre Dame* and it is in any case a *genre* for which I have a strong predilection, just as I have for books about certain legendary places where in the very soil there linger vestiges of the old local magic, books, I mean like that little masterpiece by Maurice Barrès, called the *Sacred Hill*.

I had been stumbling through these Spanish stories, guessing and skipping grossly, but getting enough out of them to keep me going, for at least a year, so that I was not totally in the dark about Spain, not, that is, from any ordinary point of view; but I *was* totally in the dark about her, a mere epicurean literary amateur, like Barrès himself, from the point of view of Unamuno, or of "The Catholic," or of the ghost of that wry-faced king of all tragical puppets who had certainly come either on Rosinante, or in the head of his creator, to this part of Castile.

Well, anyway, I started for Toledo, that city of cities, leaving Madrid as early as I could in the morning. The train I went by stopped at every little station; and indeed I might say at every little hamlet. It was, in a most literal sense, what Americans call *an accommodation train.* Once it stopped where there was a group of gipsies travelling to Toledo who had lost an amazingly coloured cockatoo which had flown into a tree where from the windows of the train we could all observe it, bowing its great beak and flaming crest up and down, as if in worship of some super-parrot in that burning sky. Whether the engine driver, or the guard, of this "accommodation" train was the one destined in the end to bring the bird down from its tree of prayer I cannot tell, nor can I remember that the gipsies showed any particular emotion, of either pleasure or vexation, when, with resounding gasps of steam, our benevolent locomotive resumed its journey.

I can remember every detail of my stay in Toledo as if it were no more than a year ago. Following my father's habitual custom— "I always like to be independent, John, my boy" — I walked from the station to the town. I was astonished to see what looked to me like the granite boulders of some wild tract in Dartmoor, bordering the outer bank of the river, which rolled, yellow as a lion’s skin, at the bottom of a precipitous gorge. I seem to remember the ancient bridge, which I crossed to get into the city, as an extraordinarily narrow one; and unless during all these years, I have beguiled myself with curious inventions I remember seeing the words, “in this city it is forbidden to beg or to blaspheme,” inscribed on the bridge-head. But it was the narrowest of bridges and it spanned the wildest of streams; and if I think of it in connection with that desperate Eel-Bridge that had to be crossed in the Grail legend before you reached the Castle of Carbonek, you must remember that to be entering Toledo entirely alone, save for the phantasmal figure of “The Catholic” at my side, was one of those occasions in a person’s life when the most insignificant “omens of the way” became charged with unutterable mysteries.

For so long had I watched my friend’s dark, desperate, passionate, *tragic* attempt to clutch Religion by the hair of her head that to be now in the heart of that very Spain to enter which he still regarded himself as unworthy, seemed an incredible, almost a sacrilegious thing; at any rate seemed a thing that it would be a sin against the Holy Ghost to treat casually, lightly, and in an “artistic” manner. I really had managed to pick up enough Spanish to read Blasco Ibanez’s *Cathedral* with some idea of what was going on in that picturesque tale; and now when, under the guidance of a lad who resembled a Nicholas Poussin shepherd-boy, I visited the enormous edifice it was with an extraordinary satisfaction that I clung to the iron rails of that strange central altar. Toledo seemed full of iron bars, iron bars that *had* to be clung to, as some old magic law in Malory might have insisted, before you could even get a glimpse of these thaumaturgic successors of El Graco’s ecstatics!

My Nicholas Poussin shepherd-boy led me at one point to one of the most sombre houses in one of the most stony streets in the whole town, and there we waited outside a postern that might have led into Count Orguz's burying-place, until a man in a black cassock opened an iron gate, a man to whom providence had given the most unsmiling, un-humorous, devilish face I have ever beheld, to lead us into the little church where the El Greco's picture of the Interrment of Count Orguz was to be seen. "Seen," do I say? Approached on your knees rather; peered at, while your forehead — and your soul too — was pressed against iron bars!

If the huge and cavernous interior of Toledo cathedral with its vast incrustations of labyrinthine complexity satisfied me with that curious satisfaction that I felt among the roots and rabbit-holes of those high banks above "Lover's Lane" at Sherborne and that I felt in the lath-and-plaster "under-roof" at Rothesay House, and that I must have felt *when I came back* from my first infantile exposure to the dangerous out-of-doors world at Shirley, it was scarcely less of a satisfaction to my whole nature when my boy took me — I was thankful to escape from that other terrifying *psycho-pompos,* or guide of the damned — into what they call "The House" of El Greco. I am in the habit of declaring, when I dare say it would be better to hold my tongue, that I am not only ignorant in matters of art but maliciously hostile to the "artistic" point of view. This is true. But I suspect it comes from my old furious battles with Harry Lyon, to whose superior knowledge I had to bow, while my deepest vitals pulsed with the desire to confute and confound him.

But in the matter of El Greco — whose peculiar genius I found out entirely for myself, and then lived long enough to watch him grow into a cult among the very æsthetes I so wrangled with — it was just as it was when I first got hold of Dostoievsky. Indeed I think there is something in common between El Greco and Dostoievsky. When, for instance, I recall the figure of my own namesake John, though it is John the Evangelist and not John the Baptist, I can remember now how it seemed to me as if the great mystical colours of the soul, the noble Pantagruelian colours, blue and white, were projected through its flesh and blood, along with the flame of the sun and the greenness of the grass, until the very stuff of its human consistence seemed to become porous to the creative breath, not only in regard to its form but in regard to that even deeper mystery that underlies what we know as "colour." I had always instinctively revolted against that saying of Blake's, that "The Catholic" used to quote with such approval, "He who does not prefer form to colour is a coward," but my ignorance of the technique of the arts prevented me from justifying this obscure protest. But here in this flame-colour and in this grass-colour, *piercing* the flesh of St. John from the very soul, you might say, of the First Cause, was an energy not a wit less spiritual than that manifested in the Blake-like power of El Greco's drawing.

It was a shame that I could not stay longer by myself in Toledo. It was my accursed gastric trouble that soon blighted my Spanish adventure. I could cope all right with their cigarettes; and, fool though I am at foreign languages, I got further with Spanish than I had ever done with Welsh; but their food and their coffee destroyed me. I can remember now drinking cup after cup of Spanish coffee in a gloomy eating-house of some kind looking out on a sort of market-square near the inn where Cervantes, or Don Quixote, for it was hard for me to separate the movements of the two, was wont to put up. And though my stomach was seething with this cursed coffee — and in my recklessness I imbibed *white wine*, always the worst of poisons to me, on the top of the coffee — my incorrigible romanticism, heedless of scientific accuracy, so long as I got the thrill I wanted, discovered in certain Castilian peasants just come in for marketing an overwhelming resemblance to the grave, dry-humoured, taciturn north-countrymen, described in the Waverley novels!

How indeed did I — for a man's secret psychology is better revealed when he is travelling alone than in any other situation — compare, as I went about Toledo, with the kind of figure that most young, bookish, academic Englishmen, sons of parents of the upper-middle class, would have presented in my situation? I think I was different from most of these by having begun to learn even then the tremendous secret, the great Homeric secret, of having the courage of my limitations! Candour with yourself, save when you are deliberately forcing yourself to forget the thoughts wherewith you torment yourself, is the one thing needful; and after that, to be unashamed of your ignorance and childishness. My whole intellectual history could be summed up as a struggle to harness my magnetic vitality, which is so terrific, to the plough, not of my cleverness, but of my simplicity. And my guardian angels have helped me in this by saving me from all shame over the matter of inconsistency. This acceptance of inconsistency — a most essential thing in anyone's experience — has been made easy for me because of my habit of living out my life from the basis of what might be called a *pluralistic world*, like the world of Homer, where everything around you, air, water, earth, fire, is the living body of a living spirit.

As I went about Toledo, therefore, I was totally shameless in my rustic English ways, and recklessly shameless in my rapturous delight at all the Spanish ways which were so different from everything I knew at home. It has always been a characteristic of mine to take a malicious pleasure in displaying all my ignorances and simplicities in the presence of the type of people who are proud of their knowledge of the world. This I am especially addicted to in the presence of sophisticated persons who indulge in that particular *savoir-faire* tone, or “know-all” tone, which travellers of all countries tend to assume. From persons of this breed I used to turn with relief to the thought of my friend “The Catholic,” whose religious and imaginative life went so deep, and who was, for all his intellectual subtlety, so passionately simple in all the great emotional issues.

But this *spiritual malice* of mine is one of the dominant elements of my life and it is all the deeper and more formidable because in my dealings with people I invariably conceal it. I am revealing this secret now under the inspiration of my memories of Spain, but it is so little understood by my friends that “The Archangel” cannot resist giving way, when he deals with my character, and even with my facial expression, to that particular kind of irritation which we all feel in the presence of what strikes us as affectation, while another old friend, but she has not suffered from my weaknesses as deeply as “The Archangel,” declares that this “malice” of mine, to which I am always making dark and lurid allusions, is a pure invention! But it is *not* invention, any more than my excessive and shameless expression of what I feel is an affectation.

I am a born actor; but my “acting” takes place in a dimension of life beyond the level of the theatrical, a dimension of life where even to half-believe, or, if you will to half *make* believe, is to share in the creative secrets of that eternal blower of magic bubbles, Nature herself.

This “malice” that I am trying to analyse, as I recall the shameless simplicity of my feelings as a traveller, is, as I have hinted, a deeply misanthropic thing. In the depths of my being I feel simple, natural, childish, direct. In the presence of things and people that I dislike I feel transparently hostile, but my impulse is either to escape by running away, or to escape by turning my inmost identity into an untouchable pebble-stone. I have a strong vein of the belligerent in me; but this I instinctively suppress till the occasion that excited it has passed away. I have acquired, in this particular, a self-control that acts so spontaneously and so automatically that it has become almost impossible for me to fly into a rage. So hard indeed has it become for me to show anger in the presence of people who are injuring me, that sometimes, to produce a desirable effect, I have to *pretend* to feel, on the surface, the emotion which I really *do* feel in the depths, but which, in the middle-stratum, so to say, of my nature, I have already automatically suppressed!

But towards things and people who attract me my feelings resemble those of an enthusiastic young girl. I am often secretly amused, in my analytical mind, by observing the kind of person I become at such times; for I become so eager and impulsive, so transparently and whole-heartedly elated and excited, that my whole being, all my flesh and blood, all my nerves, all my muscles and fibres, suddenly feel as if they were porous and transparent. My soul gets so excited that it feels as if it were pouring itself, like water or air, through my body, and taking my body up into itself, and perforating my body with its emotion. I feel, at these times, light as air; and the greater my exultation the more frail, slight, weak, brittle becomes my body! Yes, it is a strange and curious thing that the more transported with happiness I am in the presence of a person or a thing, the more do I feel as if I were a young girl. When my bones melt with delight in the presence of an expression, a look, a glance, a word, a gesture, in a person I like, or in the presence of *some single line* out of the poetry of Milton, or Dante, or Homer, or Keats, or Shakespeare, for the sensation of tears which arises then at the back of my eye-sockets never comes from suffering but always from happiness, I have an extreme awareness of feminine fragility, feminine eagerness, and what might even be called feminine abandonment, towards the person or object in question!

I am not a homo sexualist — I would shamelessly confess it to you, reader, if I were! — and I am the extreme opposite of a narcissist or exhibitionist, but when I am attracted to something rugged, massive, primordial in men, men like my father, or my youngest brother Will, or Theodore Dreiser, I feel as if my emotion were exactly like that of a young girl, tremulous with hero-worship. The quaint and grotesque thing is that even while this girlish feeling dominates me my own *appearance* remains almost as rugged and formidable — in some cases *more* rugged and formidable — than the person whose primeval simplicity I am idealizing!

You will perhaps wonder how it is possible that any sadistic tendency can co-exist with this impulsive girlish abandonment; but the curious thing about my sadism is that it is the sadism in almost every particular of a woman. Deep, deep in my nature lies the vice of a sadistic woman, and that, no doubt, is the reason why I abhor all forms of cruel sport, and shrink instinctively from all bloodshed and brutality. It destroys my pleasure when, in a sadistic book, in fact I skip page after page with shrinking disgust, bloodshed is described.

But to return to my "malice." What I feel so deeply is that — as "The Catholic" used to say — no one has a right to force his æsthetic and moral values upon the spirit of another. A person's life-illusion ought to be as sacred as his skin. Thus while I struggle to be unworldly and unambitious and unfashionable and unclever, as I have a perfect right to do, just as religious people have a perfect right to try to be *good*, it fills me with an indescribable maliciousness when I meet people who in their insensitiveness to the subtleties and ironies and diabolical complexities of human character feel a crude contempt for the childish and eccentric. I do not feel malice towards people like "this Archangel," who get indignant with me as "affected," or towards devoted friends, like her who thinks that my “maliciousness” is a fantastic invention. The people I feel malicious towards are the worldly, fashionable, rich, society people, or the clever sophisticated academic people, who are not merely annoyed, like “the Archangel,” by what they consider my affectation, but who conceal their discomfiture at my insight into their essential stupidity by abusing me as a sensualist. But in both cases, in the case of “the Archangel” as well as in the case of these others I shall always carry my peculiarities in their presence to the extreme limit. I suppose to many people, quite different from those I have mentioned, the idea that a grown-up person who has lived in this world for more than half a century of completely conscious life can deliberately struggle to make himself as simple, as natural, as childish as he can, and as eagerly and impulsively spontaneous as he can, is a repulsive idea, and has even something *indecent* about it.

I, therefore, who, if I know myself at all, am the extreme opposite of a “narcissist” and the extreme opposite of an “exhibitionist,” am driven on by my malice to become more and more innocent, naive, artless, childish and even foolish! Yes, few things give me a greater thrill, a thrill that *is* actually sensual, a delight that might easily be accompanied — though I do not say it is! — by feelings of erotic excitement, than making a fool of myself in the presence of people who cannot endure to see the decorous surface of life ruffled in any way.

Strange though it may sound in your ears, reader, after all my scandalous confessions, I am perfectly certain that there exists, twisted in with other threads in the fabric of my nature, a curious moral sensitivity that has been found ere now in the “foolishness” of saints! My malice, however, can hardly, I fear, be regarded as a saintly characteristic, and this element in me tends to grow especially erotic and sensual, though never sadistic, when I encounter people — and in these days there are so many of them — who are clever without being original, smart without being subtle, intelligent without being intellectual, and who, above all, are always talking about these thrice-tedious "complexes." Have they *no* intellect, *no* philosophy, *no* insight? Can't they see that all chatter about "complexes" is destined to pass away in a few years and be superseded by a completely new set of clue-words?

The truth is that down at the very bottom my malice is not only misanthropic; it is also philosophical! What makes me feel more malicious than anything else is this cock-sure conceit of the importance of modern science. I have gained something like everybody else, from modern machinery, modern inventions, modern philosophical ideas. But it remains that in my opinion the two greatest utterances in the world are Pilate's question: "What *is* Truth?" and Jesus' unscientific and super-personal saying: "*I* am the Truth." These two remarks together cover the whole field. In fact there is in reality no such thing as scientific *truth*. There are scientific methods, scientific hypotheses, scientific guesses, and scientific inventions; but "truth" is something that in its inherent nature — simply because it is alive — for ever must baffle science. Science can torture and kill the possessors of truth, but truth itself will always escape; and it will escape because it is never totally without consciousness, never totally without free-will, never totally without the god-like power of destruction and creation.

Another human type that excites this sensual malice in me is the expert-type, the virtuoso-type, the type whose professional *savoir-faire* — is made stupid by pure conceit. I have been attacked and derided by this teasing type all my life. I am a standing annoyance and a standing threat to these professional mandarins. When I am in their company I cannot describe to you the voluptuous pleasure I derive from struggling to be a greater fool than Nature has made me! What it really is that makes these people so angry is that my deliberate simplicity and artlessness drags down their ambition, makes futile their pretensions, and reduces to nothing their whole life-illusion. For them the purpose of life lies in competition; for me in contemplation. For them the urge of life is towards being successful and being heard of. For me the urge of life is towards enjoying the mystery of the elements and the magic of erotic sensuality.

My whole philosophy is based upon my father's monumental simplicity; and towards this I strive as Christians strive towards Jesus. Fortunately, though my nature is subtle as the devil in certain serpentine directions, it is also almost morbidly childish; and so it has not been difficult for me, though hampered by the derision of both friends and enemies, to get pretty far in this life-long struggle to simplify my routine of living.

It is possible that I should have remained longer in Toledo if I had not imbibed the disagreeable notion that the inn where I stayed had been built above its own cesspool. So I went back to Madrid and the next day took the train for Seville. "The Catholic" was perfectly right in making his passionate protest against the average sophisticated traveller. I remember a book on Toledo by Barrès which bore upon its cover a picture of himself, of this clever, cultivated Alsatian, looking down on El Greco's city from a neighbouring eminence, as he might have looked down on a fantastic Spanish play from the balcony of his French theatre.

In the feeling that I was representing my passionate friend — the friend of Unamuno, but hardly of fortune — by treating this country he would never see in a mood different from mere literary appreciation, I did my utmost to miss nothing of the qualities of the place, when I did finally reach Seville. Here I met Louis and a lady we both knew well, and I can remember how the obstinate way in which I pursued my various superstitious cults proved a bit too much for these two friends of mine. Indeed it is very seldom that I meet anyone prepared to put up with *all* my various manias.

Llewelyn is indulgent to most of them; though even he does not like waiting at pillar-boxes while I thrust my fingers down the orifice to make certain my letters do not stick. Differences of temperament leap up, however, with extreme violence when you are with your friends in an alien land. I told you how Lulu himself got angry with me in Basle, on our way to Clavadel, because, in the fuss I was making about Nietzsche's having taught Greek there, I was unsympathetic when one of his teeth fell out. With Bertie in Rome I had an angry dispute, but A. R. P.'s quizzical dogmatism would make a saint lose his self-control, about the wording of a certain telegram to Paris. Bertie wanted to make it laconic and cheap; I insisted on its being voluble arid expensive. "Is it not sad," as the philosopher Kwang always says when dealing with the pathetic stupidity of mortal men, that I can't think of Rome without thinking of this row with Bertie; nor of Seville without thinking how I annoyed the "Archangel." I can see the scene now, as if it were only a month ago; see myself climbing down a long flight of steps to the banks of the Guadelquiver in order that I might baptize the handle of the hickory stick, which was "Sacred's" successor then, in those Andalusian waters. This was a fixed habit of mine, this dipping my stick in all the historic streams I encountered. I did the same thing five years ago, in the river Test at Horsebridge; but on that occasion my stick was plucked out of my hand by a great mill-wheel, and actually carried round with it, so that when it was finally picked up out of the river it was several hundreds of yards down-stream and I felt as if a miracle had been performed.

But sentimental antics of this sort always disgusted Louis Wilkinson, who was one for keeping a sound mind in a sound body when on his travels: while our lady-friend, who despised us both as fussy egoists, came to the conclusion that my kind of selfishness was more troublesome than his. Perhaps she was right. You must not forget, reader, that even our wise Dr. O'Neill exclaimed once that what "Jack's manias" needed was a sound flogging every morning. I expect the sight of "Signore Jack," as they had called me in Italy, throwing all decency to the winds as he bent over that river made my friends feel a spasm of positive hatred for me. Not the same kind of hatred: for the girl must have seen how authentic my morbidity was, while Louis must have felt that I was deliberately trying to pretend I was some kind of mystical mediæval pilgrim, bent on "acquiring merit." Anyway the upshot was that when I came up out of the Guadalquiver, for this stick-baptizing could not be done hugger-mugger, it had to be done ritualistically, I could see the distinguished figures of my indignant friends receding into the remote distance.

But as day followed day and Louis tried to make me get some notion of the quality of Moorish civilization, my mania for everything connected with Nietzsche came upon me and drove me to admire the walls of the tobacco-factory more than either Moorish towers or Moorish gardens. For it was this tobacco-factory that plays such an important rôle in the opera *Carmen*; and it had not escaped me that Nietzsche, to revenge himself on Wagner for *Parsifal*, had gone fifteen times to listen to Bizet's music. I have no doubt that my turning the wall of the Seville tobacco-factory into a symbol of the clash of such vast immemorial ideals, as those represented by *Sieg fried* on the one hand and *Parsifal* on the other, was one of the most deeply authentic, deeply felt, and fully realized gestures of my life. If I had approached that wall to touch it with the handle of my stick, though it might not have struck my companions as quite as tiresome as my conduct on the banks of the river, I expect our girl-friend would have said to herself: "If

Signore Jack had the spirit to throw himself into the Bull-Ring it *would* be something," while "The Archangel" would have thought: "Does the old idiot suppose that these damned 'Ideas' of his fight like spitting pussy-cats?"

But I am prepared even now to enter into a lively defence of my dramatic awareness of the clash of human ideas, which I maintain *do* fight, not like pussy-cats, but like angels and devils. What really I did see as I stared at those factory-walls, was the *Apollonian* cult of Goethe and Nietzsche, struggling not so much against Wagner, who was the inspired medium, as against my own Cymric Imagination, which was the real Dionysus, and of whom Wagner's *Parsifal* was merely the Holy Bacchanal.

When I think of the subtle and tremulous intensity of our Welsh legends, all this Nietzschean laudation of hot, violent, Southern Toreador-passion, rouses me to a tense pitch of contrariety. It is just here that I would quarrel with all my æsthetic friends. They say they find the beauty of the world so poignant that they can't bother with mystical Gladiator-Shows. But to me the difference between the ideas of Nietzsche and those, say, of Dostoievsky, has the same sort of vibrant magic in it as the difference between sunlight and moonlight. My mind is too restless and too impatient to give itself up for days on end to analysing the effect of Moorish art upon Gothic art.

Did not "The Catholic" himself glory in the dramatic excitement of metaphysical conflict? Why! I remember his telling me that once in a Papal College at Rome the only thing he could think about was Martin Luther! What I like about Germans is that they *take ideas seriously*, and regard the conflict of ideas as the most deeply stirring drama upon this planet, as in my opinion it most certainly is; and though the æsthetic type of traveller who takes nothing seriously but certain recondite "auras" and. "atmospheres," and who hates everything that belongs to the mental drama of the human spirit, looks upon these *romanticists of ideas* with weary disdain, it seems to me that the pleasure of indulging in half-poetic, half-philosophic generalizations about the history of human ideas, such as was so dear to Goethe and Nietzsche, is one of the most entrancing delights there is, and one that carries with it an intoxication second only to the intoxication of erotic ecstasy.

It is the fidgety, uneasy awe with which so many people regard every theory advanced by modern science that takes the heart out of the real drama and the real romance of great ideas. Most people are not sceptical enough. If you are sceptical enough about all human hypotheses, clear down to the very bottom of the abyss, then, and then only, and not till then, are you in a position to enjoy the significance, not merely of the spiritual atmosphere of the countries through which you travel, but of the great romantic drama of races, cults, religions and philosophies concerning which almost every stone in these historic places has its own particular palimpsest.

But if my friends got annoyed with me for my manias, in Seville, they were very tender to me over my gastric trouble, which now most evilly invaded me if it did not altogether engulf me. They shared my shrinking from the bull-ring; at least the girl did, and I *think* Louis did too. But we went to a cinema of a bull-fight, where a toreador was badly wounded, if not killed. But how many of the horses in this performance were disembowelled I cannot say, for, as though I had been the “Archangel’s” young daughter rather than a man ten years his senior, I kept my eyes tight shut all the time. I confess I was amazed during our time in Seville at my friend’s power of dealing with people and with events and with our enemies.

He was, and is — witness *his* autobiography — a lover of fighting for fighting's sake. I have never in my life seen anyone who stood up to officials better than Louis. I can see his tall form and his golden hair and his flushed cheeks now, as he bandied words with these — to me — absolutely terrifying persons. He packed us all into some kind of private conveyance, and proceeded to guide us — after much study of road-maps — from Seville to that ferry from the mainland that crosses over to Gibraltar. I was in high spirits during this trip. I recollect how once when we had left our conveyance in order to explore an enchanted path under some gloomy pine-trees, we came upon a host of tall blue irises. Another time I remember astonishing my companions by a vein of bragging bravura. It was no doubt the presence of the lady that led to this cock-crowing. But at one point I flatly refused to leave our conveyance when to our consternation the driver insisted on crossing a bridge that seemed suspended by a filament over a whirling stream.

We caught some ship or other at Gibraltar, and left "The Catholic's" sacred country without seeing Granada, and I have never again set foot on Spanish soil.

Is it, do you suppose, a deadly and treacherous betrayal of a person's character, the sort of details he recalls from his pleasure-trips of long ago? Well! I take it that a great many considerations enter into this, but I can certainly say with truth that the details which evidently bit the deepest into me were connected with three particular aspects of my life: with my vice, in regard to the buying of those wicked books; with my stomach and bowels in regard to my ulcers and my constipation; and finally with those rare indescribable ecstasies that came to me from old fragments of masonry mingled with certain aspects of Nature. These usually occurred when there was suddenly conveyed to me from the outside of some old building — any building that blent itself with the elements — a magical sense *of having been there before*, of having felt these feelings *hundreds of years before*. And it was when this sensation used to go thrilling through me that I tasted an unforgettable psychic taste in my mouth. Yes it was at those times that an immortal taste on the palate of my spirit used to transport me; a taste which, I suppose, issuing forth from some little transitory impression, becomes the under-sea essence behind all our great mystical words, behind "immortality," behind "eternity," behind "destiny," behind the very "elements" in the worship of Christ.

It was about this time in my life — I cannot get these events in perfect chronological sequence — that I treated my youngest brother Willy to a few days in Paris. Our "dear companion" on that occasion was the same painter with whom I lived those long happy weeks in Italy; but neither she nor I was the sort of person to overpower a young lad with sophisticated matters. We all three in fact were as naïve in our enjoyment as if we were at the circus in Ilchester. But we had a devastating time in finding adequate lodgings. Without the belligerent "Archangel" to act as cicerone, and with a knowledge of French so infantile that we were sore put to it to discover anything we wanted, our pleasure in the adventure was qualified by interludes of villainous discomfort. Our perpetual *Voulez-vous* and *Avez-vous* must have sounded like the voices of the rooks on Montacute Hill for all the effect they had. The first lodging we secured turned out to be an especial kind of a bawdy-house; while in the second, which was situated on the island near Notre Dame, we were incommoded by an agitation far more disturbing than illicit loves. For our lavatory was flooded, both by day and by night, an inch deep in water. For all I know this may have been caused by some incursion of the Seine, which certainly flowed hard-by; or it may have been a French custom; but whatever its cause it proved a distracting worry to the visitors from Montacute Vicarage. To “do our business” we had to wade ankle-deep in an eddying stream, a situation which was anything but calculated to soothe and flatter a person’s touchy interiors.

But we finally took refuge in a heavenly retreat, in a very different region, a beautifully clean little hotel, called “Hotel des Grands Hommes,” which I heartily trust still flourishes. This was situated quite close to the Pantheon and was largely occupied by university students, and here we were almost as much at ease as if we had been at the “Three Choughs” at Yeovil.

But I remember how, when wandering with Willy in the neighbourhood of Les Halles, down in some narrow streets among tall, ancient, very Gothic-looking houses, houses that had that dim, rich, massive, *intricate* appearance, which, of all things in an old historic city fascinates me the most, we both looked up, just as a couple of Pantagruelians, and caught sight of a lovely sylph-like figure looking down upon us with intense interest from a mediæval casement high up above our heads. This vision, I recollect, was as disturbing to William as it was to John, but whether it was John or William who made the gesture that caused the figure to disappear I cannot tell. Its vanishing was clearly not followed by any descent to the street-door; and, though we could not help lingering there a while, she never came back to that high mediæval window. Even now, as I think of this incident, an indescribable sensation, like that of some old romance of a thousand years ago, steals over me. If you cannot follow me, reader, in this, I have no more to say: but I am certain that my own secretest happiness, as I go about the world, comes from certain revelations of this kind to which I am porous, and to which I am continually struggling to make myself more porous.

These revelations have to do with precisely such recurrent human situations as the one in this case, of two men watching from the pavement of a street a solitary girl in a high window. You may laugh at me, as I am accustomed to being laughed at, but I cannot tell you how strongly I feel that the kind of imagination which the gods have given me is *more* than imagination! In fact almost all the power we *call* “imagination” may come from an actual tapping of some great reservoir of planetary, if not of cosmic, experience. As I write about this episode now, the whole thing comes over me as if from the touch of a magic wand! It is because of these revelations of the eternally recurrent moments of human life, moments which, like this one of two men looking at a girl in a window, must have repeated themselves for thousands of years, that I feel such a nostalgic preference for ancient buildings over modern ones.

To get this sense of “eternal recurrence” which is to my mind the secret of the most significant poetry of our race and a feeling far more important than any scientific “law,” you must have *something* old in the background. Nature is always old, and therefore Nature can always serve this purpose; but, if you are flung into the midst of a city, what you *must* have is the presence somewhere or other of buildings old enough to give you this sense of the continuity of the generations. To the modern æsthete all that I am saying now will sound literary, sentimental, *affected*. But it is these moderns themselves, not I, who are the “affected” ones. *They are shutting off the magnetic current* between themselves and the accumulated poetic feeling of our race’s long history.

No, this emotion of mine, which always returns to me when I think of that figure at the high Gothic window, amid a dim intricacy of balconied masonry, must have, whatever its secret may be, a mysterious connection with the organic link that binds together the human generations. We inherit other things from our remote ancestors; *why should we not inherit particular memories?* Why should we not inherit, buried fathom-deep in the soul, certain intensely vivid moments of awareness, moments that were experienced by the men of old time hundreds, even thousands of years, before we were born? But even if what we inherit is only the capacity for response, or the groove of response, to such heightened moments, it is certain that, just as we add something of our own experience to the great familiar works of art, like *Hamlet* or *Faust*, so we are all of us allowed to re-experience in our own lives emotions and gestures that have recurred again and again down the ages. A girl at a high battlemented window in the midst of a dim confusion of balconies and roofs, is, I admit, a simple enough image and no unusual one, but by having recurred through so many ages and by having gathered to itself the feelings of so many generations, it comes to be something symbolic and mysterious. This actual girl may have been a silly little good-for-nothing, a wanton hussy, a selfish baggage; but that is only what she was *superficially*. In essentials — though she were the most frivolous girl in the town — she answered to the gathered-up poetic emotion of thousands and thousands of years!

But whatever may have been the nature of my feelings, when Willy and I looked up at this tall house in the neighbourhood of *Les Halles*, it is certain that this was the one solitary occasion in all my passings through this city — for I have never stayed there longer than a fortnight — that I experienced what you might call a *romantic* sensation.

Out of this same epoch of my past too, as I think of the Paris I explored in those days — though on this occasion I was with the friend who will be the hero of my next chapter — there floats in upon me the agitating episode of my buying Sarah. I have always been interested in parrots. It has taken half a century to conquer the parrot-tricks in myself; and under the influence of this always fantastic new friend of mine — who soon became, and remains still, a sort of adopted younger brother to me — I sneaked into a bird-shop before I left him in Paris and bought, not only Sarah herself, but her gigantic cage. Never shall I forget my crossing alone from Dieppe to Newhaven with this voluble, but to me entirely incomprehensible, companion. My ignorance of French, as it is spoken by both parrot-sellers and parrots, was so extreme, that the personal refreshments that I shared with my prisoner must have been extremely tentative.

But the tenacity with which I embraced that enormous cage knew not a minute's lapse. Wherever I went, between Paris and Burpham, Sarah went too. Had all the beguiling forms that tempted St. Anthony come dancing round me, I still would have hugged that cage. To journey with Sarah was like journeying with an Abbess. Straight home I went in spite of the fact that we had to change at Brighton. Sarah and her great cage would have kept Casanova in the path of virtue. When we finally arrived at Burpham her language found better interpretation. But it seemed to *my* ears that all she did was to repeat over and over and over again: "Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear!"

CHAPTER TEN. AMERICA

I AM SO bad at dates that I forget the exact year in which I first “set sail,” as we say, for America; but it was in the winter — *that* I do know — and it was on board the old Cunard vessel, the *Ivernia,* that was later lost in the War.

Tom Jones saw me off from Liverpool, and you can believe how the strains of that gay and reckless “Stars and Stripes” of Sousa’s, heard through the coffee-fumes of the Kardomah drummed in my head.

“They will be a daring and cynical lot over there,” I thought, “if that wild tune does really hit them off.”

And when old Tom, with his long nose, tormented mouth, and blue eyes, all under the familiar bowler hat, had gone off to his office, and I was left waiting for the second-class gangway to descend, you can believe with what nervous feelings, for this was my first deep-sea voyage, I peered into the countenances of my fellow-travellers.

Very soon, indeed as soon as “we” — that significant “we” of a chance-flung group of strangers — had got into the Irish Channel, I began to feel, mounting up from the deepest gulfs of my nature, an emotion that was to seize upon me intermittently during the whole voyage. This was an emotion — you must forgive me reader, but I *must* confess my moments of pride equally with my moments of humiliation — of the queerest and the most grandiose kind. As I stood by the rail of the second-class lower deck, which must have extended further than in many ships, and watched the foam-flecked, marble-streaked mass of water move — for so it appeared to me to do — in one vast flowing volume towards the land I was leaving, the notion came to me that I was bound on some occult mysterious errand, an errand of tremendous importance in the spiritual history of this planet. How *can* I describe exactly what I felt as again and again, by day and by night, when I found myself alone, I gazed at that flowing water and at those floating patterns of white foam? The feeling I speak of, though deep and intense, was not very articulate. But what it amounted to, I suppose, was a vague sense of some portentous inspiration, coming, if I may put it so, from immortal presences, and to be delivered, as if I were a mouthpiece of Camelot and Carbonek and Stonehenge and Paladour, to the people on the further side of the ocean.

The odd thing was that, when I cast about in my mind to discover the nature of this oracle that I, like Taliessin in some new incarnation was destined to reveal to America, I could not think of so much as a single opinion or idea! As Harry Lyon used to predict would surely happen to me as a punishment for my lack of principle, I was as devoid of any conviction in religion, morality, politics, æsthetics and all philosophical problems, as my old friend, Aunt Stone.

"We be all born; but we bain't all dead yet." Aunt Stone used to say, and such really seemed, when I sounded my brain on this matter, about all that I could reveal to these far-off hordes of "articulate-speaking" Americans.

But destiny had decreed that however I might leave what I had to say to the inspiration of the gods, I was to be supplied, as far as Fate could supply such a thing, with the most perfect stage-manager that I could have invented in my wildest fancies. This was no other than G. Arnold Shaw, who, after a year at Oxford, had been sent by destiny to seek his fortune in Canada. But the "sealed orders" of Arnold's stars were more powerful than any horoscopic intention, and it was not till a quarter of a century later that my friend paid his first visit to Canada.

And now I will reveal to you a curious psychological fact. I can remember, after this lapse of twenty-five years, about half a dozen of my fellow-travellers on the *Ivernia,* while between that first voyage and my last, that is to say out of a total of some fifty crossings, for I used at first to go home twice a year, I can with difficulty recall the personalities of two or three. It is just the same in other connections. The boys in the Prep. and the boys at Wildman's I can remember by the score! I can see their faces now, exactly as they were, the little angels and the little devils. But of the men at Corpus I can only recall one or two; and out of two decades of lecturing in America it is deplorable how thin a procession of remembered figures passes across my mental stage.

What does this imply? I think it implies that when you are plunged into something not only new and strange but of a restricted scope and without offering much chance of escape, human personalities double the piercingness of their pressure. But Americans had such a huge background that personalities lost themselves in it. If I end up in prison or in a lunatic asylum, I shall have round my death-bed a set of even more vivid images of my fellow-creatures than I saw when I disembarked from the *Ivernia.*

There was a young man from New Orleans, who had a French name beginning with "G". This young man had a thin long face of calm and classical dignity. He wore, in place of a collar, a black silk scarf, which enhanced his resemblance to those French "Great Men" — those Fontenelles and Rochefoucaulds and Vauvenargues — with whose portraits, in Roman guise, I used to awe Mr. Pollard. I frequented the society of young Mr. G. more assiduously than that of anyone else on the ship. As I have already hinted, my childish, or perhaps I should say my young-girlish passion for the romance of history, a passion which has lent itself to the most fantastic idealizations, leapt up like a flame at the idea of New Orleans and *the Creoles.* I don't suppose for a moment that Mr. G. was a Creole; but I had read about such people in some book of Charles Kingsley's, and the word was magic in my ears. Mr. G. certainly did come from New Orleans and I felt that my voyage to America gathered to itself an additional glory from being able to talk, as freely as I might have talked to a man from Littlehampton, to a personage from such a place.

It was Mr. G.'s portentous silence that chiefly impressed me. He was the ideal companion to lean over the side with, watching for whales or dolphins or flying fish or sea-serpents. I could gaze for hours at the blue-black water, which certainly did not rush by below me at any terrific speed, for we took, if I am not mistaken, a whole fortnight to cross, and then, should any touch of nostalgia disturb me I could soothe myself by staring at this young man's classic profile. But once, I remember, after we had walked up and down that deck in deep silence and for an interminable time — for it appeared that Mr. G. and I resembled each other in our reluctance to spend a dollar upon a deck-chair — pausing to lean against our favourite rail the man from New Orleans surveyed the horizon. Suddenly I became conscious that his perfectly modelled lips were making those tentative quiverings that very silent people sometimes make before they can bring themselves to utter words. Would the remark about to fall from those beautiful and melancholy lips, as the young man's eyes fixed themselves upon that infinity of sea convey to me some omen, some clue, some augury of what awaited me over there?

"Cats," he began. "Cats, Mr. Powys," he repeated — and the curious thing was that nothing had led up to this announcement— "are afraid of dogs. They *are!* Cats are afraid of dogs."

I have never known such a voyage, as that first one of mine, for the unadulterated simplicity of a small group of English, Irish and Americans.

Do *all* voyagers, on all liners, tend to become distressingly simple? I fancy they do. I fancy the explanation is that men and women in their domestic homes are persecuted by one another to such a tune that a thousand simple sillinesses and innocent follies to which they would love to give way are cruelly suppressed. This is much more the case I believe with women than with men. Men let off the steam of their silliness in their "pubs," their "saloons," their "clubs." In any case a man's silliness takes as a rule a more sober form than a woman's. I am speaking of older people; for I do think when it comes to boys and girls that the silliness of boys has a certain maudlin brutality in it that is far more unpleasant than the giggling and showing off of girls.

But I think on the whole that women really do behave in a more silly way on board a big liner than men do. Cards and drink keep so many men occupied, not to speak of their interminable bragging conversations. But women on ship-board, if they are not sick, get queerly restless, get seized with a feverish longing for distraction. Sometimes I have even felt, as I watched the exuberant spirits and the lively gamboling of all these worthy ladies, as if men must still be the grave kill-joys in every gay harem. But I dare say it's their houses as much as their men, perhaps even in some cases their children, that hold them in this gloomy subjection. But whatever it is, it has struck me again and again in my trips across the ocean as a singularly touching and pathetic thing, to see all these middle-aged women worked up to such a fever of giggling and tom-foolery. I have come to the conclusion that voyaging matrons were really much more like children than young girls; for there is as a rule a seriousness about young girls even when they are most deeply thrilled, and a shyness and reticence, that restrain them from becoming the mænads of a voyage.

Aye! but how well I at last came to know what might be called “the psychology of the second-class saloon.” Here indeed were human traits that repeated themselves *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseam.* For instance I always remarked that there were two or three young men on every ship who seemed *born* to be second-class passengers on a liner just as some of us are born to be poets, or baseball players, or acrobats.

On a second-class deck these young men really *lived.* Here they burgeoned, here they flourished, here they radiated shining auras of high spirits. I suspect — if the truth were known — that these young men were all unsuccessful at their jobs, all unsuccessful with women, all liable to be fooled by their friends, all liable to be pitched into by their enemies. They all possessed that particular kind of glittering eye and wiry frame that generally go with prominent veins in lean necks and heads that recede at the back. I knew them infallibly on the very first day when we trooped in procession into the dining-room to be allotted our seats. I knew them by their eye. Out of their eye gleamed an unholy energy; and I noticed that every woman and girl on board always shared my own uneasiness and distaste in the presence of this energy. For it was the very reverse of a sensual energy. It was the sap of life gone into the cords of the neck, and into the muscles of the arms and the legs, rather than into the brain or the senses or the imagination.

I used to call them to myself the “Shuffle-Board Boys”; for it was always an impassioned joy to them to cause those round wooden counters to shoot forward over the smooth deck till they stopped at some particular chalked number. Wet or fine, rough or calm, windy or still, in cloud or in sunshine, these “shuffle-board boys” would disport themselves. Their energy — this life-force gone into the cords of the neck and into the muscles of legs and arms — gave them and gave everyone near them no rest. They never sat still. They could not resign themselves to the real rhythm of the ship, moving through this vast mass of water. They opposed themselves to this elemental rhythm all the while with muscular contortions of arms and legs. When they weren’t pushing those round objects about, they were walking round and round and round the deck. On these occasions they would pick up some young woman, whom they delighted to propel as if she were one of their favourite discs. She was generally some young athletic woman proud of not being seasick and anxious to show off how fast she could go. But once released by her shuffle-boy all her feminine instincts forced her to sheer off. She saw that the gleam in those shining eyes was not the gleam of response to the ruffled feathers of a fluttering mate, but the gleam of a demented muscularity.

And among the shuffle-board players I noticed that on every ship there was a particular predestined youth, who in addition to being a “deck walker” had been endowed by Providence with a passion for executive work; and no one on the ship, no! not even the poor escaped house-wives, get such satisfaction out of a voyage as this young man. Sometimes there was a pair of them but not often, for such super-activity is not born every day. But oh! with what sinking in my heart, as, hidden away in the smoking-room or on one of those stationary top-deck benches — for I was always miserly about deck-chairs, though I used to steal a rest in one now and again — I would observe advancing towards me, with his double-shuffle eye and his executive step, this organizer of concerts, this promoter of sports, this arranger of sweepstakes!

I have a notion that the typical second-class set of trans-Atlantic passengers is far more gregarious than either the steerage, where difference of language keeps the races apart or the first class where the chilly presence of a few prodigious celebrities keeps these human-too-human traits from breaking out. Well! Well! If I could escape from the shufflers and steer clear of the sports, and subscribe to the concert without having to attend it, in brief if I could be the Loch Ness monster that I was, there were many aspects of these innumerable crossings that I enjoyed hugely.

I enjoyed the idea of the captain reading divine service on Sundays. I enjoyed the exciting catacomb way, as if it really were a *tremendum mysterium* causing a crack to yawn in the laws of cause and effect, in which any Roman Catholic priest who might chance to be on board celebrated Mass. I enjoyed watching for the spouting of whales and I never leaned on any ship's rail but I imagined the sea-serpent rising up out there before me, incredible, mountainous, with the hoary slime of the unthinkable gulfs trickling from his blind-worm's beard!

The *Mauretania* was, and will always be, my favourite liner. I derived extraordinary satisfaction from going forward once, to the extremest prow of this splendid ship, and watching the way it cut the water like a horizontal guillotine.

The only time I was badly seasick was when Llewelyn crossed over with me. We both were miserable on that occasion and remained long in our cabin, he in the lower berth and I in the upper one. It was on this trip, which must have been about my tenth crossing, that I made my first acquaintance with Dostoievsky. I can see now that old tattered second-hand edition of Vizetelly's translation of *Crime and Punishment* that I was reading while Llewelyn kept murmuring in his misery the word "ginger-pop." Under the title of the book the publisher had added the descriptive words, "a realistic novel," presumably to give the reader an idea of something out of the ordinary. But it was not for its "realism" that *I knew my Master* the moment I got into this work. It was for the extreme opposite of "realism." It was for the overpowering intimation that you do not have to go outside the mind in order to find God and the Devil.

But to return to the *Ivernia.* It was on this ship, and on this voyage, that I met for the first time, met as a complete stranger, my life-long friend and bosom-crony, Mr. G. Arnold Shaw. Arnold Shaw has had a greater effect upon my life than almost any other person. He remains, for I am thankful to say when I recently visited him on Staten Island he was just the same, the most unmalicious, unvindictive, and, in many ways, *unselfish* character I have ever known. But I must be careful what I say; for the bed-rock of his character resembles my own. That is to say in the depths of his being he is sceptical about everything that exists, or subsists, or that is *said* to exist or subsist. Yes, at the deepest bottom of his heart he is sceptical. He is indeed — just as I am — a natural-born disciple of the greatest of all philosophers. I refer of course to the philosopher, Pyrrho, who when asked, at the end, whether he was alive or dead, replied, “I do not know.”

But now I am going to initiate you, reader, into an important psychological secret, which, like all the deepest secrets of our contradictory human nature, sounds at first like a paradox. As Heraclitus long ago taught — and the indestructible *livingness,* as even Goethe was forced to allow, of certain aspects of the Christian faith bears out his teaching — the magnetic energy of the system of things is dualistic, and depends upon the coming together of opposites and of contraries. Arnold was, and no doubt is still, a born doubter; and as for myself there is much I cannot believe. But, and here lies the paradox, so far from this profound scepticism in Arnold and myself lending itself to the bad sides of our character, we have invariably found that the more we indulged it the nearer did certain aspects of our eccentricity approach to what — queer fish though we were — belonged to the realm of Simon-pure sanctity.

Of all attitudes of the pure intellect the most utter scepticism is the one — out of some paradox in the occult nature of the cosmos — that lends itself, when you come really to consider it, to the life and to the condition of being a saint. I am, as I tell you, both an anti-narcissist and an anti-exhibitionist. I would blush, as Rabelais says, "like any black dog," to catch myself approaching the verge of these aberrations. But I cannot help often recalling a certain family-group picture that shows me as such a hopeless Ninny, as such an imbecile-idealist, that I always summon it up before me when I desire, for purposes of my own, to identify myself with extreme foolishness.

To believe in nothing, to be a Pyrrhonian sceptic down to the very bottom of your nature, and yet to put into practice — if not actually to feel — many of the most subtle emotions which have been from time immemorial linked up with the idea of a saint, does not that strike your mind, reader, as having in it not only something for which *irony,* with all its nuances, is only a rough-and-tumble synonym, but something which marks a real step forward in that planetary *casuistry* with the difficulties of which all higher intelligences are forever struggling?

And what I was in my pantomimic clown-manner, my friend Arnold was in his humorous Yorkshire manner. We were in fact — lecturer and manager — what people call "a fair pair." I was the clown of our circus, and Arnold was the ringmaster, the fellow with the smooth forehead, the bland smile, and the long whip. How roguishly he would crack this whip when his poor Cagliostro was despatched on a tour half across the Continent!

"A *mean jump* for you, John!" he would say with a chuckle.

But how sweet he was to me, how unbelievably unselfish and disinterested and ungrasping and considerate, in private life! We never went a step but he used to look after me as if I had been a china doll rather than the toughest member of the toughest family in England. I can even remember once — and it was a beautiful saying and Arnold little realized *how* beautiful — his suddenly remarking, when I was harassed by all sorts of nervous and emotional worries:

"Put it all on me, John."

Never has there been any one at once so childishly honest and so shamelessly contemptuous of the grave pose of respectful honesty as Arnold was. O how well we suited each other! We were both more than a little anti-human, more than a little malicious to the solemnities and respectabilities of the academic and even of the pseudo-academic world. Arnold never had one ounce more worldly wisdom, or one ounce more worldly ambition, than I had. In fact when he first became my manager I only gave him *twenty per cent.* which, considering the usual relations between manager and lecturer, was a good deal too little. Our attitude to the art of lecturing was identical. We both regarded it as a public entertainment, and we both relucted at the idea of its being turned into a "cultural stunt." Our attitude to our audiences was the attitude of Catholic priests, not that of Protestant ministers. We rebuked the mighty and exalted the leper.

For all our Pyrrhonian scepticism we had very strong prejudices and antipathies. We both favoured the Flesh and the Devil; but were full of malicious hatred of the world. Even more than moral pomposity we disliked a certain type of patronizing intellectualism. Our grand advertisement always was:

"If our circus is not *enthralling* — to the Devil with it!"

Now it was not very long before the eccentricities in our show began to have various disconcerting effects. We came to be heartily suspected, feared, disliked, detested, by the usual type of ethical person, male or the reverse, who by natural proficiency and suitability for such a rôle, was the type who organized our various provincial lectures. Our career therefore was constantly being exploded by violent altercations; not with the people in the audience for these would turn up in their biggest crowds just after the worst kind of misunderstanding, but with those whose business it was to get the people together and to pay the bill. These persons, preoccupied with the idea of helping the cultural interests of the community, used sometimes to *smell a fox*; in other words to get a faint whiff of the humorous detachment with which this mountebank and his manager regarded the whole business of lecturing. To both of us I was, I fancy, a mixture of a comic Dan Leno and a prophetic Savonarola.

Arnold himself was almost equally delighted by my inspired "grotesqueries" and my wild prophetic incantations. Like Owen Glendower I "called up spirits"; and the more devilish and startling these denizens of the "vasty deep" were, the more Arnold chuckled. He would always sacrifice "the box-office end of it" to God knows what Aristophanic and Swift-like contortions.

It was the daring and always belligerent "Archangel" who first got Arnold to start lecture-managing; and I myself only sneaked into the benefit of it when all was in working order. As Louis most justly observes in *Swans' Milk* — his own autobiography in his own "genre" — he was in certain respects a better lecturer than I was. This is true. Louis had it in him to become, with certain quite conscious improvements that he acquired by practise, one of the best of all possible lecturers. I never was that. I indulged in constant violences to good taste. I yielded to outbursts of intoxicated malice and infernal spleen. I worked myself up into such ecstasies of anger against the whole well-constituted and well-ordered half of society, that I babbled, burbled, bubbled, blurted my very soul out, in spasms and spouts of bloody foam. I was as one possessed.

It was really *a great new art.* By getting rid of all "highbrow" solemnity, of all academic "correctness" and "documentation," under the Rabelaisian encouragement of my unique circus-manager, I succeeded eventually in *hollowing myself out,* like an elder-stalk with the sap removed, so that my whole personality, every least movement I made, and every least sound I made, and every flicker, wrinkle, and quiver of my face, became expressive of the particular subject I was interpreting. I was "the Reed shaken by the Wind" that the people *did* go forth into the desert to see; but the fact that Arnold and I had the same schoolboy contempt for every species of pretentiousness made me in the end a sort of deboshed John the Baptist. I became in fact the kind of Jokanaan that a Salome might really have loved before she cut off his head.

My "dithyrambic analysis" began, under Arnold's sympathetic management, to change into something that I seriously consider — now that I have given it up — to have been an extraordinary phenomenon in the world. In the calmest and coldest blood I would like seriously to say, as I look back at it from this distance, that I regard what was called my "lecturing" as a thing in the history of the platform — if not of the stage — that will not soon occur again.

Although despised, or only very condescendingly patronized by the Gentile intelligentzia of New York, I found profoundly appreciative audiences among the Jews and the Communists. The Roman Catholics, too, invariably supported me through thick and thin. Did these profound psychologists recognize by instinct how passionately devoted I was to the idea of the saints? Did they recognize me as a mad but infatuated Jongleur de Notre Dame? Certainly of all my audiences throughout my twenty-five years of lecturing in America, and Arnold would bear me out in this, those who liked me best were Jews, Communists and Catholics. Of course I must confess that the presence of rich people, especially of rich *society people,* in my audience, always had the effect of making me say wild, reckless, and sometimes unpardonable things.

When I lectured, as I often did, in a Catholic convent, or in a Jewish synagogue, my romantic sense of the historic significance of these ancient religions was so great that I felt a proud awe at being allowed to speak at all in such places. But not all of the writers of America treated my performances with the studied contempt of the clever megalopolitans.

Both Dreiser and Masters appreciated me at the very start. Masters, I know, was derided for his interest in me. It was treated as a sign of some pastoral lack of sophistication in him that he could tolerate such a charlatan. I am sure I don't know whether people laughed at Clarence Darrow for it, but he too had a decided "penchant" for my oratorical Punch-and-Judy show. As for the poet A. D. Ficke, a much younger man, he composed, long before we became the close friends we are to-day, a most humorous and really imaginative poem about my lecturing.

In California I had the honour to become a protégé, and a friend too, of that noble old Poseidon of the Pacific, Charles Erskine Scott Wood, while the poet George Sterling always went out of his way to be nice to me. I can see now, so clearly, that amazing profile of George Sterling's, sometimes like Hermes Argeiphontes, and sometimes like a cameo portrait of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini! He certainly struck me as having all the characteristics of all the poets I had ever read of; yes, down even to his trick of carrying his works on his person, and being prepared to recite them at any second, proudly and humbly, to king or beggar. He used, in the gentlest kindness of his heart, to take me to his club, and I pray to God I had the wit, as I am sure I had the decency, to conceal from him the venom of my attitude to all social groups except those among rustics and proletarians. And cannot I see too, and shall I not always see, the white-bearded, Walt-Whitman-like figure of Colonel Wood, as he made his way, stepping nimbly as a young man, with his arms full of queer parcels, from Chinatown, past Santa Maria of Guadaloupe and up to the top of Russian Hill?

It was at the colonel's house on Russian Hill that I had my only encounter with that great American poet, Vachel Lindsay, in whose interpretation of religion I always detected something that reminded me of William Blake. I felt very friendly to him and he must have been quick to catch my feeling, for he asked me to go down to the station with him and see him off to Los Angeles. This I felt I ought not to do just then, as it was the colonel's birthday, and I fancied he wanted me to stay. But it was my one sole chance of making friends with this remarkable man and I have been uneasy about it since on the grounds that I might have made things nicer for him by going with him; for I can be as wise as a woman with a poet that I venerate as much as I did Lindsay.

As for Edwin Arlington Robinson, I met *him* very early in my American life and nothing could have exceeded his courtesy to me ox my respect for him. It was the clever Megalopolitans of New York who got it lodged in their heads that I was at once a tiresome poseur, full of silly affectations, and a long-winded, tedious rhapsodist, interminably praising the ancient classics.

The truth is I am at once too much of a demented satyr and too much of a fanatical saint to deal adequately with this problem of enemies. When I observe myself, while I shave, I am often startled by the look I have of positively maudlin unworldliness! Not a line, not a wrinkle, not a curve in my countenance expresses that worldly shrewdness, that look of being a slick one in a crafty pack, that practically every normal human being possesses.

But it is not only my satyrishness and my mediæval tricks as a novice in mystical sanctity that prevent my getting angry with people or advancing my career at the expense of people. I have a vein of malice in me of a very curious kind. This malice makes me lead people on to misunderstand and to disparage me. It belongs to the very depths of my nature. It belongs to an instinct in me that always wants to confess the very worst, *so that I shall not be found out.* It is the same instinct that, in the garden at Northwold, used to make me shout to Littleton, so that I should hear his answer and *not come upon him suddenly* in the way.

I can analyse every pathological move in my own nerves in this queer chess-game of the soul. Something or other has hurt me and jarred my nerves. Aggravated by this vibration I turn upon life and madly mock and jibe at it, with blood spurting out of my private hurt, as if from the neck of a decapitated fowl. I seem to get a sensual satisfaction from jerking my headless neck-stump up and down at life. Thus when I have been totally misunderstood, the hurt I feel at being misunderstood drives me on to be worse understood! And the curious thing is that at these times when my nerves are twanging their devil's tune, and I am deliberately exaggerating my foolishness, I suddenly grow aware of a definite sexual excitement. Like the unlucky young man in one of Dostoievsky's shorter stories I have lashed myself up into such a frenzy of zanyism that I feel as if I were making love to some eternal zanyishness in the heart of the cosmos. It is a very odd thing that it should give a person sensual pleasure to go on and on and on exaggerating some peculiarity that has led to some monstrous misunderstanding! But such certainly is the case with me. And against what object, I ask you, is this malice-jig of my decapitated pride, directing its frenzy?

Not entirely against myself: not entirely against my enemies: against the first cause, the first cause! Yes! it is wonderful to chant a litany of gibberish in the face of the Emperor of the Universe! Dante knew as much as that, and no poet has ever indentified himself so completely with the cat-calls of the damned.

I certainly am a funny one in my dislike of competition. But there is no danger that others will follow me here. I do not see the least sign that any of my enemies will be tempted to imitate this peculiarity. In fact the more I hold back from playing leap-frog with them the more they play leap-frog with me! When I make it a point of secret honour with myself to lose in arguments, in discussions, in controversies, my rivals in the world's colosseum, simply think that they have won. But, mark you, *I* never feel I am in the wrong! I cannot exaggerate to you my rooted conviction, on the contrary, that I am in the right! And yet I yield, and yield, and yield, and yield; and I do so with a kind of sensual ecstasy.

The truth is that the roots of Hell and Heaven are very close; but shall I agree with Blake that the prismatic bubbles of truth which rise the most beautifully, and float on the air the lightest, come from the consummation of the marriage of these antipodes? *I am not sure.* The oldest part of my mental belfry is always ringing with a tintinnabulation of silver bells, and "I am not sure!" "I am not sure!" "I am not sure," is what they say. But what I am going to confess to you now is really very curious; but I get the same pleasure from yielding up my egotism with people as I get from the malice with which I play the zany! Everybody I meet seems to want to assert their ego. "I! I! I!" they cry. No one seems to get the depraved pleasure I get from turning my “I” into thin air and helping my friend’s “I” to swell and swell till it’s a regular balloon.

My progress and track through Life can be easily followed by all the wonderful balloons that go sailing up to the sky; balloons that formerly were little miserable soap-bubbles! No one — not even my intimate friends — can possibly realize the shifts, the subterfuges, the evasions, the devices, the serpentine coilings, the mole-like burrowings, to which I am always resorting, purely and solely to ward off some hurt to their pride, some blow to their life-illusion, some loss to their self-esteem — and this with practically every person I meet! It is interesting that I should have thus been inspired to discover a way of “acquiring merit” unknown to any Christian cult. Perhaps it is really some trick, derived — if there were by remote chance *anything* in my pretence that I am a re-incarnation of Taliessin — from the ancient Druids.

But it really is curious why I should have come to have such a deep superstitious mania for trying to make every living entity I encounter think more highly of itself. That is what I do! I flatter the life-illusion of birds, fishes, beasts — especially dogs and cats, to whom, without any “love” for animals, I quickly become a slave — and of every man, woman and child I meet. And I carry this mania into my very prayers, for I am always praying to *some* idol or angel or daimon, to the absurd and crazy length of praying five or six times a day for someone whose felicity I envy, and for someone else whose physical nature is antipathetic to me. I used to regularly pray for one of my worst enemies — no, not at all that he should see the error of ways! — simply and solely that he should be happy and prosperous.

Of course I am Pharisaic to boast of these matters to this tune; but I can’t help that. If I am a Pharisee, I *am* a Pharisee! And even under the gaze of the Great Magician who cursed them I suppose I should continue boasting after their fashion. “I fast twice a day. I give alms of all that I possess …” etc. etc. etc. The truth is I have, I think, really a more religious than mystical nature; and though I get a humorous and even malicious delight when my favourite Kwang-Tze attacks Confucius and jeers at his “Benevolence and Righteousness” I am sure I would have made a receptive disciple to that fussy ritualist.

But I expect my unscrupulous mania for causing momentary happiness — at whatever cost to the discipline of their character! — to every entity within my reach, would have been condemned by both Laotze and Confucius; and I am sure it would have been denounced by Jesus. But in this matter I am incorrigible, whether I got it from the Druids, or from African negroes. With the exception of the Southern Americans who try to justify the lynching of these negroes from whom I derive so much of my spiritual culture, I always feel that people are *as they are,* and were born *as they are* and that the best I can do for them is to flatter their vanity and “jolly them along”! Yes, I must make the utmost of my “Pharisaism”; for it is clear that that is what at bottom, if you can be a superficial thing at “bottom,” I am. What I really feel is a sickening pity for every sentient thing, victimized, as we all are, by the great sadist who created the world.

Certainly this fussy anxiety of mine about making human beings, along with wasps and wood-lice and little fishes, as happy as I can make them by flatteries and lies, whatever kind of Druidic cult it may be, must certainly be an un-Christian line to take, for I don’t find many English, or Americans either, who share this unscrupulous peculiarity.

Once or twice after contemplating my own malicious attacks on my own worldly career I have wondered what it would feel like for such a hybrid as I am between a saint and something worse than a satyr to be conveyed to platforms in Vienna or Paris or Madrid or Moscow or Prague or Berlin, there to dance my world-zany's dance? The feeling of power and glory I would have thus obtained would no doubt have pleased me well. But I should have needed to be as Shakespearian as Charlie Chaplin, and much more saintly than Gandhi, to carry out such a programme and keep my soul intact.

But short of that kind of arbitrary and wilful glory I worked — under my friend Arnold — in exactly the way that suited me best, and that was the best for the development of my peculiar inspiration. Roman Catholics, Communists and Jews! How deeply have all these appreciated me! Why should that be so, do you suppose? I will tell you why! Because all these three are in essence *intensely religious,* for even the doctrinal atheism and official materialism of Communist theory have most strangely to do with the controlling religious nerve. All these three are "international" too, in the way a Welshman can understand that word. When however I hear certain unpoetic and unromantic people use the word "international" it fills me with such weariness and with such a sense of all the life-sap being taken out of human history that I begin to think about the maddest undertakings, such as starting a movement for an autonomous Wales; but when I see a Catholic or a Communist defying some despotic state for the sake of Christ or the proletariat, my blood surges up in sympathy.

Yes, it was because such deep layers of sacred mythological passion were stirred up in me whenever I referred to the Jews or to Communism or the Roman Catholic Church, that these three supported me so fiercely against all my enemies during my twenty-five years of life in America. And it was just because my best audiences were proletarian that I was encouraged to despise more and more all the ordinary conventions of lecturing. To these people I tore my heart to pieces. For these people I gouged out my most sensitive nerves with my own finger-nails and wrote with them in blood upon the throbbing air.

My performances before my East-side audiences ceased to have any connection with ordinary lectures. With these subtly intellectual and extremely nervous Jews it was no longer necessary for me to restrain myself. And I gave up restraining myself. I let myself go to the extreme limit! I became a sort of lacerated and yet mystically-sensual Dionysus — a Dionysus of East Fourteenth Street. And not only of Fourteenth Street. For under Arnold's encouragement, and often guided by an enterprising personage called Mr. Gould, I was conducted to such remote little radical halls that it took hours of exhausting wayfaring to reach them.

But whenever I *did* reach them I poured out my whole soul to these responsive and sympathetic children of Israel. You can well understand, reader, what I felt when as a champion of Jews, Communists, Catholics and Negroes I used to hear of the activities of certain patriotic Americans who without daring to let you see their faces were wont to waylay and torture precisely such an Englishman as I was! I certainly do hold that the noblest death a self-respecting person could die would be to be killed trying to rescue a negro from these miscreants; and as I travelled in the South — though when the point came I expect I would have funked it — I used to tell myself stories of how when I finally reached the side of their victim and was lynched with him I would die giving this base rabble "a piece of my mind."

In all these lectures, that were so much more than lectures, I worked myself up to such a pitch that I *became* the figure I was analysing. Such was my young-girl-like receptivity that just as Wordsworth's young women give themselves up to the elements so I gave myself up to the spirit of my particular man of genius. And it was with almost an erotic emotion, as if I were indulging myself in some kind of perverted love affair, that I entered the nerves of Dickens or Paul Verlaine or Henry James or Dostoievsky or Keats or Blake! I well remember, in one East-side hall, while an acrobat friend of mine sold my books how I ceased to interpret my author, who was Gorki that day, by words at all, but interpreted him, like Thaumast in Rabelais by physical movements. You see my whole idea of *criticism* was different from the academic idea. What I aimed at was a sort of transmigration of my soul, till, like a demon possessing a person, I serpentined myself into the skeleton of my author, and expounded his most eccentric reactions to life from the actual nerve-centres where these reactions originated.

There is no use trying to conceal the fact that Nature from the start had made me an actor. My brother Littleton could bear me out in this. Oh, how he has suffered from my acting! In my extreme infancy at Shirley I acted the part of my father in the pulpit, although I cannot remember ever seeing him in that Shirley pulpit. And on these occasions Littleton had to represent not only the whole of the congregation, but the clerk repeating the responses. In those happy years at Dorchester before I went to school I acted two parts, that of the general of the “Volentiā Army” and that of the scholar magician — a sort of Michael Scott — who invented a mythology and a language which were to be forced upon the unfortunate “Escrawaldons.” At Wildman’s I acted — to escape that fiendish bully in the dormitory below — the easiest of all rôles for me, that of a madman. At Corpus I acted the part of a guileless Wilhelm Meister, a Boswellian disciple, insatiable of great sages and their recondite idealisms; and it was an intrinsic part of this acting to make old Koelle, and the terrifyingly learned G. P. Gooch, into what the Buddhists call my “Gurus.” They were quaint enough “Gurus,” in all conscience, this pair; but Harry Lyon was too "artistic," besides I knew him too well, to serve in that rôle, and my strongest imagination could not see Mr. Fanshawe or Dr. Perowne or even the ironic Mr. Pollock in the light of a "Guru."

I had found it a little difficult to hit upon any appropriate mask wherein to trick out my protean life-illusion while I lived at Burpham. I was, was in every sense of that word, too *exposed* there. Between the Knoll and the Gables, between the inn and the saw-pit, between the school and the Duke of Norfolk's fortress-bank, I found it difficult to be anything but the rather absurd, rather suspicious, extremely good-natured *Mr. Powys.* Probably the wisest thing I did during that long decade of my life was to buy for my son, at a shop in Arundel, the human bear called "William," who subsequently met with such extraordinary favour in my household that he was supplied with a special "governante," in the person of a certain "Miss Welsh," whose more limited intellect, but better-balanced character, he was wont to startle by his daring speculations.

But for myself it was not clear to me in those days in what direction my restless life-illusion *could* enlarge and expand. My enemies will probably lean to the view that I was getting what I deserved; in other words that I was a paranoiac fox, fairly run to earth. My son preferred watching moles and mice on our debatable bank to going for exhausting walks over the downs. Thora, in her old age, I had myself destroyed with chloroform. My statue of the Venus of Milo was broken and lost. Methuen and Co. found my *Life of Keats* too eccentric. I myself found my *Death of God* too conventional. I remember very well how as I used to survey these tremendous sheep-washings, where the bearded Mr. Budd, the brown-eyed Mr. Goodyear, the courtly Mr. West were all so busy helping Mr. Collyer's or Graburn's shepherds, while George Roadnight would be taking photographs to be turned into picture-post-cards, I would feel as though I were neither fish, nor flesh, nor fowl. I would grow nervous and jumpy. I would feel as if I were some fantastical idol, dug up in that old fort. I would feel as if everybody present at that sheep-washing when I appeared on the scene must be saying to themselves:

“God! I’d like to give that crazy ninny a good healthy ducking, along with these ’ere ewes!”

And even in my Oxford extension tours I had been forced “to mind my P’s and Q’s,” forced to remember that many of my audience wrote essays for me and received university certificates. Why, on one occasion the Oxford authorities actually decided that I must never lecture on any historical subject again, because the examiner of my students reported that the only notion these poor people had of the Roman emperors was the “personal equation” — I had never heard that expression before and it greatly alarmed me, as though inadvertently I had been guilty of something that was at once indecent and mathematical — derived from the scandalous gossip of the mischievous Suetonius.

Nothing could have been a better index of my inherent “charlatanism” than this perverse substitution of the most morbid details about the Cæsars for an adequate study of the great historians. But I was in America now, America the ideal country for mystagogues, demagogues, thaumaturgic preachers, theosophic illuminants, occultists, conjurers, table-turners, mediums, Chatauqua-culturists, Utopians, Shakers, Mormons, Second Adventists, East Indian Yogists, Red Indian “Controls,” worshippers of Quetzacoatle, worshippers of Mumbo Jumbo, new-thoughtists, psychists, psycho-analysts, psychiatrists, psycho-careerists, not to speak of teleportists, telepathists and televisionists. And not only was I in the land where only the maddest of egoists scrambled to shore after the submerging of the Lost Atlantis, but as I quickly discovered, I was in the land — just as

Sousa's music had predicted to me in that Liverpool café — of the most cynical and sardonic irresponsibility that the human race has ever evoked! In other words I was in a land exactly suited to my medicine-man character. As my dear Louis laments, in a distressed and almost querulous tone, I "loved it."

And the beauty of the paradox — which alone is sufficient proof of what terrific misunderstandings go about the world and become the historic truth of a deluded posterity — is that precisely what I "loved" in America was *the escape from humbug.* "This Archangel" — as others ere now have done — got hold of the stick by the wrong end.

Quixote puppet as I am, prophetic scarecrow as I am, draggle-tailed hermit-whore as I am, it had seemed to me that a certain type of mock-virile, mock-downright, mock-simple, mock-honest, mock-humorous, mock-modest psychological element in England was far more dangerous to what Aristotle or someone calls the "Good Life" than the most double-dyed hypocrisy that there has ever been in the world. This particular attitude seemed all the worse because with "honest, honest" Iago, it concealed its hostility to the "Good Life" under the guise of a bluff "cheerio, carry-on" manner.

And what did my charlatanism, and the charlatanism of my friend Arnold, really amount to, as he composed, and I accomplished, all these "mean jumps"? Bah! it didn't go more than skin-deep; whereas my academic enemies — on both sides of the Atlantic — are not honest enough *to be* charlatans; for their pretentiousness is so propped-up and buttressed-up by layers of conventionality, by fold upon fold and crease upon crease of false values, that nothing could induce it to make a fool of itself *lest it should lose all!* That is where the essential honesty of my charlatanism and Arnold's lay. *We* could make fools of ourselves to the uttermost, we could be zanys and mountebanks, to the extreme limit, and yet keep our essential integrity; whereas one single lapse from their worldly caution, in these sly magnates, one little stumble in the direction of looking an ass, and there is a ghastly possibility of a complete unmasking.

And the point is that the bravado and boasting and business-slickness of Americans does not invade their souls to the extent that conventional traditions and all their worldly pompous humbug invade the souls of certain types of Englishmen. Honest Englishmen have the advantage over honest Americans by reason of their richer sensuous nature; but of the two types of humbug the American type is less hurtful because it is more superficial. And what a comfort it was to me, what a breath of fresh air, to escape the complicated system of English snobbishness! As a matter of fact in a *social* sense — which is of course the only important one — America is a real and most authentic democracy. Socially it is hardly less democratic than Soviet Russia; and as the Russians have clearly seen, for they “love it” in just the way I do, the mass of Americans, whatever bourgeois ideas they may have, work with their hands, for pay, for love, for necessity, just as if they were proletarians.

We English judge Americans by the “travelling rich” who are the repulsive fungoid excrescences, parallel with our own worst vulgarities, of their free, unexclusive, chaotic democracy.

It is quaint that I can remember absolutely nothing of my first impression of the New York skyscrapers! Perhaps this was because I was so full of the idea that I had come to America, like some wand-bearing Argiephontes, with a message from the gods, that I was too absentminded to see them! Like that vision of Charles Lamb’s of the Lake Country *without its mountains,* I looked at New York City, and the skyscrapers were gone.

I was met, however, by Mr. Miles, the President of the Philadelphia Lecture Society, and he was incredibly kind to me. Conducted by him to Philadelphia I was handed over to the directorship of Mr. Charles Atkins, now the head of the enormous Brooklyn Institute, who was not less friendly, and who remains a person for whom I have retained, for nearly thirty years, quite an especial respect and affection. Mr. Charles Atkins, in spite of his responsible position, is a man who long ago took Dr. Johnson's advice and "cleared *his mind* of cant." Austere and competent steward as he is of this terrific institution there is a look in his eye, and in these matters I have the infallible penetration of an psychological adept, that reveals a man who does not deceive himself.

I know it must have been the winter — though of what year I have no idea — when I arrived in New York along with Arnold Shaw on the *Ivernia,* for Mr. Miles met me at the docks with a hired sledge with tinkling bells and took me straight off — he was a spirited little old man who was always smoking enormous cigars — for a ride through Central Park.

My first American lecture was, I think, addressed to the Ladies' Club of Madison, New Jersey, my second, I know, was delivered before that great, unique, proletarian audience, by far the most exciting audience in America, which comes together on so many nights in the week in the huge Rotunda of *Cooper Union.* On this Cooper Union platform, the site of my second lecture in this country, I think I indicated pretty clearly that I was no mere Pierrot of Culture, but had in me "something dangerous." My subject was "The Republic of the Future" and I well remember that I predicted the coming into being of a state of things not all unlike what has happened in Russia.

Before very long I found that I could summon up in my lectures something that resembled that Druidic *hypnotism of speech* which in my

Glastonbury Romance I have attributed to Mr. Geard. And what, when you really come down to it, *was* the nature of this magic message, from the gods of the old world to the market-places of the new, that had exulted within me as I played "Twirly-whirly-twill" and "hunt the slipper" with my companions on the *Ivernia*? Something it was, from those far-off "sacred hills," from Glastonbury Tor, from Cadbury Camp, from Shaston, from that peak of Snowden, where, quarrelling with Littleton and Theodore, I had written *Love Never Dies,* that I found I could call upon, so as to make the proletarian sages of Cooper Union "sit up." I remember so well how my conclusion that the republic of the future would be state socialism was criticized by the Anarchists present. As I had just sworn on landing that I was neither an Anarchist nor Polygamist I was surprised by the eloquence with which I was now instructed in Anarchist doctrines.

When thinking my thoughts, while the man from New Orleans told me about cats being afraid of dogs, I had not included these daring and congenial notions in what I had expected of America. The bold thoughts of my audience at Cooper Union must have found kindred soil in my Celtic nature for I remember a little later in Chicago refusing at the last moment to address an audience whose authorities had cancelled a lecture by some famous anarchist.

But in spite of my temperamental sympathy with anarchists I stuck steadily to what was really more like Bolshevism than anything else in my calmer moments. Some kind of state socialism was the stain or dye, if I may say so, of the perpetually unrolling scroll that came out of my mouth! Such a scroll — as you see them, in old mediæval illuminations, issuing from the mouth of an angel or demon — was in my case, as I howled and whimpered and chanted and burbled and danced like a dervish, inscribed with the insignia and heraldry of State Socialism.

What I was always indicating was the brutality, the vulgarity even, of the sort of optimism that has never recognized the monstrous grotesqueries and appalling cruelties of life. It was not that I ever denied that we all had, somehow or other, to forget these unspeakable things, to forget the pain that conscious sentiencies were enduring every second by reason of the basic world-arrangements of the First Cause, but the hieroglyphs inscribed on the mediæval scroll that unrolled itself from my demonic mouth pleaded and jeered and wept and shrieked against the sort of bastard comfort which so many eloquent but unimaginative preachers in America were always advocating.

What happiness from life we can attain, what revelations about life we can reach, what beauty in life we can respond to, must always have as their background — so, in my desperation I argued — an awareness of the terrible necessity of forgetting the unthinkable things which the cruelty of the First Cause has prepared both for those who accept Him and those who reject Him. What I endeavoured to indicate was that though we all had to forget so much, there was no reason why we should pretend there was nothing to forget, or nothing beyond what a sturdy nature was able to face.

It was, I think, this realization of the appalling cruelty of life and the unspeakable depths of wickedness in human beings, that made my lectures more acceptable to Catholics and Communists and Jews than to any others. The mediæval universe, as we know from Dante, had as its very foundation those eternal sufferings for which *Divino Amore* has created a cosmic "locale" from the beginning, and in the Catholic liturgy we pray — just as Unanumo and my friend J. W. Williams were always praying— "O deliver us from Eternal Death! O deliver us from Eternal Death!"

There was always a sort of under-tide in my lectures indicating that however much moralists tried to put the onus of the unspeakable abominations in the world, and of all the sufferings of animals and children in the world, upon our power of free will, it still remains, as St. Paul says, that “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together”; and I must have felt as I tried to make this clear that the terrible *lacrimae rerum* in the System of Things was *allowed for* more thoroughly in the Catholic temper than in the more boisterous “aura” of Protestant ministers or ethical preachers. It was allowed for — so it seemed to me — at every point in the Catholic cult, not only in the idea of the Inferno, but in the Wounds of Christ, in the Sword that pierces His Mother’s heart, and in all the wild desperate ritual-cries that are so full of that planetary “groaning and travailing.” Then again the mere Cult of the Mother of God seems to hint at a certain element of irrational pity behind the universe, to which those of us who suffer from its judicial cruelty can turn for relief.

It was natural enough, coming as I did from such places in the old world that I should find it inevitable to lay stress on the magical element in life. My idea of the relief and the release to be got from religion has always been quite as magical as it has been poetical, and as far as my secret personal life was concerned the particular kind of self-control I aimed at, and the particular kind of mental concentration I aimed at, had more of the stain and tincture of mediæval sanctity, or, if you like, of Tibetan sanctity, than of any natural heathen goodness.

And meanwhile my whole instinctive reaction was always in favour of believing — if I had to believe — the impossible in preference to the improbable. I think it was Oscar Wilde who said something about this; but anyway Tertullian’s cry, “I believe *because* it’s impossible,” has always aroused a kind of savage sympathy in me.

“And why,” I asked myself, “should I not be what I was born to be in my deep heart?”

Was it not the whole secret of personal life to find out what your innate nervous and mental fatality was, and then to drag it into your sorcerer's cell and work magic on it, and make of it your peculiar apparatus for testing your "truth" among all the "truths" of which the universe is crowded? Born as I was to be a pluralist, a totemist, a fetishist, a mythologist, a polytheist, and even a "chaoticist," with a conscience about which there was always something fussy, fanatic, casuistic, Pharisaic, I am sure if I did ever acquire any scraps of mediæval or Taoistic wisdom or advanced any distance along what they call in Tibet "the short path" it must have come about by reason of the power and self-control I attained by forcing myself every day to go through an unbelievable number of exhausting ritualistic performances! I had my own secret road to Camelot; but I always had a sneaking fondness for the common highway thither, full of a scaramouch company of judicial astrologers, Tarot-card diviners, Cabbalists and Thaumaturgists, together with a procession of catch-penny sorcerers and all the helter-skelter tag-rag of pitiful invokers of idols! Indeed, though I prefer to protect my hiding-place from such scatterbrains, and have a mania of my own *against knowing the future,* I can see no reason why we should not at least investigate the dangers with which our own character threatens us by the use of any one of those occult divinations, which Her Trippa, with a tamarisk-branch in his hand, recommends so eloquently; such as Geomancy, Chiromancy and Ceromancy, not to speak of Tephromancy, Sicomancy and Icthiomancy.

Indeed I soon began to perceive, as I went about America, even without the aid of Chiromancy or Sicomancy, what tendencies in my nature were likely to be dominant, when once I was released from the traditions and conventions of my native land! I perceived from the alms that I felt compelled to distribute to beggars, just as at school I was compelled to give

Littleton the whole of our hamper and hand over my week’s allowance to the astonished young woman at Longburton, as well as from the way I would force myself to pick up leaves and sprays of vegetation out of the city gutters or from under people’s feet on the hot pavements, that I had at least a few of the hallmarks of a candidate for sanctity.

But I had yet another and a far more subtle way of “acquiring merit” and that was the manner in which I refrained from any attempt to change the characters of the new friends I made or to bully them into the values that I held. Some deep instinct put it into my head to believe that all sentient living things can have a right to their own personal identity and their own personal pleasures. I had come to recognize that in conversation with people it is silly to try to force them to embrace *your* values, *your* disgust, *your* excitements, and that it is a *splendide mendax,* a meritorious treachery, to flatter them into self-complacency and well-being. I felt with all my imagination, as I have already hinted, that every organism in the world ought to be fed, comforted and “jollied along,” and that as long as you could give their poor forlorn nerves a few thrills of ecstasy in this bitter and unfeeling world, any number of “lies” were lawful.

Thus, down at the very bottom of my nature, I had pity for every sentient organism, and not even content with this I was always endowing *inanimate things* with feeling too, and putting myself to the most irksome detours and debouchings in order to increase the well-being of these children of Limbo. What in fact had begun to get itself lodged in my mind was the idea that I ought to feel as if no living being, except myself, could help itself from acting and feeling exactly as it *did* act and feel, and that therefore to be angry with it for its ways and peculiarities was unthinkable.

Most tough rogues and shrewd rascals, and even many healthy-minded “honest cods” regarded such feelings of mine as the worst kind of priggishness. But it was not priggishness. I was so hustled and rattled and distracted by my own manias that these mediæval and mystical intimations came much more nearly to resemble insanity than any airs of unctuous self-righteousness. Even when I was aware at the bottom of my heart of a deep, cold, malicious condemnation of the ways of my acquaintances I always concealed this feeling, and never displayed anything but an eager, vibrant, and almost gushing appreciation of their good qualities.

But it was not only in such "saintly," or, if you *must* have it so, such priggish directions — though I assure you that no one who had undergone what I had at school could possibly be priggish — that my nature began putting forth curious and startling shoots.

In regard to my vicious under-life, America gave me as lively an encouragement with her burlesque shows as Paris had done with her wicked books. If some pleasure-hating, Mephistophelean ecclesiastic, searching about for a weapon with which to persecute that sweet, natural, lovable sensuality of normal clippings and claspings under haystacks and hedges and "where not, why not," advocated so eloquently in the works of Llewelyn Powys, I greatly fear he could derive only too plausible arguments from this confession of Brother John. Too many of the erotic emotions that have overwhelmed and transported me, with that sort of obsession that renders *nothing else in the world important,* are of so abnormal a character that Llewelyn would find it hard to be indulgent to them.

Yes, my ecclesiastical Torquemada would, I fear, be encouraged by my revelations, to argue that such picturesque and beautiful light-o'-loves imply a sweet-natured and healthy normality that is as rare as genius itself. Life being as perverse as it is, the great god Eros, when reflected in the mirrors of our monstrous aberrations, no longer retains that darling appearance whose “sweet usage” little Psyche so grievously lamented, but assumes a Baal-like, Dagon-like, or Baphomet-like aspect. Once give *carte blanche* to the “brutish sting” in you and you may find yourself, before you’re done, confronted with temptations that would sicken Tiberius. Once heave up the sluice-gates of lust to the limit, such an ecclesiastic might argue, and you will find that Ivan Karamazov knows more about this job than any poet save Cousin Swift. To enjoy as much sensuality as we can without causing grief to anyone is certainly the safest rule, but where you least expect it Demogorgon will leap up and you’ll find yourself projecting thought-eidola such as you hesitate to confess to a living soul. The truth is, to make sure that the seed of our race doesn’t dry up, the First Cause has taken measures far more dangerous than was necessary.

Very soon after I reached America and had found my headquarters in Philadelphia I had to make long journeys about the country. On these travels I soon began hunting desperately for means of satisfying my Voyeur’s vice. I well remember lecturing at Newhaven where Yale University is; not however under the auspices of that university. I have never been invited by the real authorities of any of the big American universities to speak under their auspices, except the University of California; and even there the personage who introduced me was in such a sour temper that he apologized to my audience for not being able to say anything reliable about me because my name was not in the British *Who’s Who*.

But the contempt with which I have been treated — I who have been such an unwearied peripatetic philosopher to the American people for so long — by the big fashionable universities has been more than made up for by the way I have been welcomed by the small colleges and the remoter state colleges. The pathetic thing is that these excellent little places never realized what a complete free-lance I was! They supposed they were hiring "a typical Englishman from Oxford." They always were deceived in the gown I used to wear and took it for an Oxford gown; and it tickled my fancy and made me think how it would have tickled old Fanshaw's fancy when I was asked whether Cambridge "was not a private school for Oxford."

But it would be absurd in me to let my vanity grow really touchy when I think how all my passionate discourses on Homer and Dante and Goethe and Dostoievsky went for nothing at Harvard and Yale. They went for almost nothing at Oxford and Cambridge. The real truth is that to have had any dealings with any of these exclusive places would have terrified me and awed me to a point of misery. I was at ease and happy with my girl schools and normal schools and far-away state colleges. I was not at all alarmed by women's clubs. I was thrilled by lecturing to nuns and novices. Most of all I was entirely and freely myself in synagogues. The sight of those great words about "the unity of God" always excited me and called up the romance and the grandeur of the long history of Israel to my imagination. No matter if I were myself a fairy-tale Welshman. I liked to make my bow, now and again, to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It was at Newhaven, as I hunted about for fuel for my smouldering flame, that I remember once finding some wretched little provocative periodical that gave a miserable and forlorn caress to my woebegone craving. At that time I did not know a single American woman to speak to; though it would have made little difference *if I had* unless she had been a very queer sort of woman, for the last thing I wanted was a solid, living-and-loving jealous bedfellow. What I wanted were naughty puppets, incarnations of response to lust and *nothing else*; delicate, heartless, subhuman beings, such as those maddeningly-teasing Undines and

Salamanders, created out of the elements by the old philosophers. Alack the day! I dare say many of these old philosophers were, in their time as frightened of the professors of Salamanca and Padua as I was by the professors of Harvard and Yale. But as a matter of fact not a living American woman did I know till after I had tapped many other desperate resources of the hunted and demon-ridden human soul!

One great discovery of mine was nothing less than those sordid-looking penny-in-the-slot machines that used to stand in rows, if you knew where to find them, in the New York of thirty years ago. They used to stand on either side of certain narrow hall-ways; hall-ways that always had a ghastly, sepulchral, and quite special kind of daylight in them, as if the cold codfish-eye of all the *two o'clocks* that have ever taken the heart out of a living day had been recaptured and imprisoned there. By turning the handles of these desolate machines and peering through a little spy-hole — when I had disposed of a nickle — I was privileged to play Peeping-Tom while certain extremely unsylph-like ladies, of plump and matronly aspect, gravely, and with no sign of coyness, removed their outer garments. Here were peep-holes indeed, just as if they had been invented for the special benefit of a rusty-minded cerebralist in a foreign land!

But, alas, my taste in these matters had been so refined upon by all those slender figures in pantomime costume that I used to enjoy in the pages of *Ally Sloper,* that I cannot recall that these machine-manikinesses of New York ever gave me *one single second* of real satisfaction. The *idea* of them, however — and I remained a true Platonist, even in the matter of penny-in-slot machines — kept my hopes on the *qui vive,* I "never *was,* but always. *to be* blest."

I had heard wild tales on the *Ivernia* of exciting scenes to be witnessed in the Bowery; and thus it was not long, as I passed through New York on various “mean jumps” from Philadelphia, before I found my way — always on foot, like my father at Shirley, but not, like him, looking for hedge-sparrow’s eggs — into this dare-devil quarter. Here indeed were a great many of these Caves of Venus-Mechanistica; and I shudder still to recall — for what we poor mortals are ready to go through when the Devil drives is past belief — the peculiar *smell,* quite literally “a savour of poisonous brass and metal sick” which assailed my nostrils in these places.

It certainly must be allowed that though America did eventually satisfy my ambiguous cravings more completely than they have been satisfied anywhere else, save by the reading of those wicked French books, she also, if you can call such a continent a “she,” shocked and outraged the finicking refinement of my vice almost as grossly as Paris had done.

Alas! when my brother keeps on linking together this cult of the terrible goddess with cowslips and cornfields I laugh the devil’s own laugh, like a hideous hobgoblin, thinking of the sort of things to which, so far removed from cowslips and cuckoo-flowers, *my* “primrose-path” led. Lucky, yea! thrice lucky, are those whose æsthetic taste, whether cultivated by Pater or by Proust, can look with complacence on the predicaments into which their lechery leads them!

Many people will think that it shows a monstrous lack of a sense of proportion in me to write of picture-machines in the Bowery as an important aspect of my life in America. But what on earth would be the use of my writing my life at all if I did not try to get to the heart of the matter? But there *were* other things that interested me beside this pathetic quest. I well recall, for instance, a most exciting party, of all the American poets that could be collected at a moment’s notice, to meet this “Oxford lecturer,” this lecturer who had never lectured to an undergraduate in his life except when he was drunk, a party at which I clung desperately to Edwin Arlington

Robinson, whose personality has always attracted me as much as his singular genius. He took me later to his room up-town, and I remember what a gleam of real Apollonian radiance illuminated that simple retreat, when, after his fashion, he spoke with a proud and noble reticence of his poetic purposes. I pleased him by my obviously honest pleasure in those poems about odd, quaint, derelict men meeting in the basement of the Brevoort Hotel; and I delighted him by my enjoyment of the phrase: "Come out, you laelaps and inhale the night; and so he went away with Clavering!" I told him about seeing a picture of a laelaps — which is in Homer a storm-wave but in later ages a monster like the one they have found recently on the French coast — in a book shown us as children by Mr. Knipe, my father's rector, and the poet was pleased by my unsophisticated enthusiasm. I expect he thought to himself: "Can all Oxford lecturers be as artless as this excellent young man?"

The worst of all these *Musées* — and some of them really were "Hell Museums" in the first years of this century — was one I got into somehow in a low-down district in Chicago. Here the poet might indeed have cried to me,

"Come out, you laelaps, and inhale the night!"

Some kind of a *danse d'enfer* was announced to be going to take place later on, and you must remember, reader, that what was forever alluring me and leading me into these places, places that in themselves always filled me with pure fright and cold repulsion, was the Platonic idea of slender sylphid forms, forms with little oval heads, and hips like those of delicate boys, and with ankles as fragile as wild anemones, such as I used to pore over in prolonged ecstasy — and I can recall the feel of those window-seats now — in the old school library at Sherborne.

I waited and waited in this indescribable place, and the fact that it was below the level of the road brought all the Balzacian tales of Chicago's underworld into my childish mind. What I really was was a well-meaning bookworm with an indescribable craving to stare for hours, without let or hindrance, at the limbs of boyish girls who would smile back at me. This laudable and legitimate longing had so far been denied me, whether by destiny or chance or the wisdom of my guardian angel; but as on this occasion, every time I saw an announcement of any performance of this sort, all the Houris of Mohammed's paradise floated before me! On this occasion I was completely alone in this place save for a man in a cage and a monkey at liberty. The man returned me no answer when I timidly asked him about the performance; and, as time went on I came to the conclusion — not very willingly, for I had murmured at intervals to him some of my most propitiatory remarks — that he was made of wax. The monkey, however, was made as I was made, and as I watched him an obscure unease began to grow upon me, the elements of which, at this distance of time, I cannot distinctly summon back.

Did there arise some really rather ghastly and sub-human reciprocity between the agitated nerves of a sex-starved he-ape and of an abnormally excited lecturer, both of them waiting, waiting, waiting, till this procession of Houris that we saw advertised before us should actually enter? But in vain did that monkey and I, like the disguised knight in *The Talisman* and the hermit of Engeddi, wait for the appearance of the impossible. In *The Talisman* the girls did at least *appear,* and they even sprinkled roses, though it was a cave in the midst of the desert; but in this Chicago basement no girls appeared, and the waxwork man, and the monkey and the "Oxford lecturer" grew less and less satisfied with one another's looks. But still we waited on, we three entities, two existent and one subsistent, waited, as all the world waits, for some mirage of its heart's desire, and all the while *my* heart kept pounding its devil's tattoo, not only from erotic anticipation, but from nervous alarm, for I had been told in Philadelphia that two mysterious Demiurges, called respectively "Bath-House John" and "Hinky-Dink" had power, like the dread Baphomet in Cabalistical Magic, to bind and unbind all who descended below the level of the lake in that city to which Walt Whitman raised "the perpendicular hand" and saluted as "Chicago, the great city"!

But I had to return to Philadelphia. And there — even in Philadelphia itself — it came to pass that I found something that really did — at least in idea — cause my satyr's heart to leap up. As with the quest after Lilith, the demon-angel, whom you hunt for in far-off countries, while all the while she is — to quote Walt Whitman again— "installed amid the kitchen ware," it was in the Quaker City that I found my miraculous discovery. I found a place in fact where there was a penny-in-the-slot machine containing real, not merely pictured, ladies! I only visited this machine once; so it is clear that the aura of the spot could not have been very seductive; but I thought of it long afterwards when I was in England, and — such is my extraordinary disposition — this *and this alone,* this penny-in-the-slot with the human ladies, decided me to resume my lecture-work in America, at a moment when, for the sake of my ulcers, which were devilishly bad just then, Llewelyn was trying to make me give up lecturing altogether!

My slot-machine ladies who, I presume, could see nothing of their admirer except a pair of frantic eyes, responded, it must be confessed, very casually and indifferently to the tinkle of my silver pieces falling at their feet. They were two middle-aged women, seated in a not uncomfortable little tent, and in spite of that furious pair of scoriac eyes that saw "Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt" they continued calmly conversing with each other about their children and what they would cook for supper, and what was the price of certain hats they had seen for sale on Market Street. Of the eyes that were straining at them through those brazen apertures they thought no more than they thought about the eyes of their Creator.

I was quite a long time in America before I discovered this country's grand vent and outlet for the repressions of a puritanical public opinion. I refer to the burlesque shows. For the benefit of such of my fellow-countrymen as are unacquainted with this stage performance I must tell you that the burlesque show — at least this was the case thirty years ago — was attended almost entirely by men. They were extraordinary performances — at least so it seemed to me — and it was almost unbelievable to me that such heavenly sights could be permitted to be seen at all in a world like ours, "rigged in the eclipse and built with curses dark." There was very little plot in the burlesque show in my day and what plot there was was concerned with the knock-about adventures of a couple of clowns, one generally masquerading as a Jew and the other as an Irishman. Very often, no doubt, they *were* a Jew and an Irishman; but whatever they were, the brutality of their words and of their jests and gestures was simply astounding to me. Compared with these burlesque jokers, Charlie Chaplin was as refined as Charles Dickens; and as for my old friend Dan Leno, he was like a fool from Shakespeare!

I remember what struck me as especially shocking was the sardonic and savage derision of tramps and hobos. I suppose the bulk of these audiences were travelling salesmen, what in England we call "commercial travellers." Anyway most of them, I take it, belonged to what Harry Lyon used to call the "lower middle class"; and I suppose it did not jar on their nerves, as I am sure it would have jarred on the nerves of almost any aristocracy, to see tramps and beggars and cripples and imbeciles — all the derelicts, in fact, in the great struggle "to make good" — held up to ferocious mockery. But to my mind — with sympathies fed by Sterne and Lamb and Scott and Dickens in whose works these innocents are treated as almost sacrosanct — to behold rags and crutches and the gibberings of idiocy *made sport of* was extremely startling.

I suddenly seemed to envisage millions, and millions of terrifyingly competent, smartly dressed young men, indulging in paroxysms of laughter, while they pointed their well-manicured index-fingers in vibrant derision, both at myself and at all those great and imaginative intellects I had loved best in life, such as Mr. de —— and "the Catholic" — yes, and Dostoievsky himself. What I beheld in these places was, in fact, all the basic instincts of the bourgeois nature allowed, for once in the history of the human race, unfettered expression. In the old civilizations it has been either the aristocracy, brought up upon Greek and Latin, where beggars are often of course *gods in disguise* and where the step from your king to your tramp is very small, or it is the mob, whose blood-lust must have bull-baiting, cock-fighting, and gladiatorial butchery, who have given the dominant tone to public entertainments. But, seated in these places, I was permitted to perceive what kind of amusement best tickled the senses of Harry Lyon's "Lower Middle Class."

And I discovered that apart from the burlesque portion of it and the making sport of tramps, this bourgeois entertainment pleased me uncommonly well! Did it carry back my æsthetic taste to a certain ancestor of mine who was a tanner? I certainly have never derived from any theatrical entertainment the intoxicating pleasure I got from these shows. I detest the movies. I care very little for plays. Indeed, except for English pantomimes and a certain queer Russian-Jewish play called *The Dybbuk*, I have never received one single thrill, either in mind or soul or senses, from anything on the stage except these queer entertainments. I don't go so far as to say that I despise *all* acted plays, or that my loathing of the movies is without a *single* exception, for I sometimes have felt myself, when I was lecturing, to be acting like Sir Henry Irving, and I have an almost religious idolatry for Charlie Chaplin, but, speaking roughly, it is certainly true that the American burlesque represents the only art of the stage, if it *be* an art, from which I have got thrilling delight.

But if I am justified in regarding these entertainments as providing something that satisfied all those ribald, Rabelaisian humours, gross and fantastical and brutal, such as the refinement of their women-folk was wont to suppress in American men, yon would suppose I must have resembled them! Was it, in fact, the tanner coming out? By that good man's memory I am sorely tempted to swear black and blue to you, reader, that I enjoyed these comedians intensely. For the truth is I am shrewd enough to know intellectually, and with that "artistic taste" which Harry Lyon bludgeoned into me, that these comic portions of American burlesque *are* a humorous art of exceptionally high order. There are aspects of them that rival Joyce's *Ulysses.* There is a lot in them that resembles the "Satyricon" of Petronius. I can very well imagine the morbidly fastidious Nietzsche *forcing himself* to like this sort of farce, and calling it "brave Aristophanic truth."

But alas! what I am occupied with here is a picture of myself as I really do feel myself to be, not as it would be so wonderful if I were. And the lamentable truth is that I did not enjoy this Aristophanic comedy at all! I suffered from it. I tried not to see it. Had I dared I would have shut my eyes while it went on! Unfortunately I remembered too well that pair of avenging acrobats in the Midlands; and besides, *sometimes,* if I kept a sharp look-out, I could see some ravishing form in the wings. I certainly shut my eyes, and my ears, too, *mentally;* and just waited, like a sulky dog in church, till this

Aristophanic shower of inspired patter, if that is what it was, was over. But some things I couldn't help seeing. For instance it was characteristic of a certain basic brutality in this humour — like the brutality of Panurge to Ding-Dong — that when some smart young springald wished to show his contempt for a cripple or a tramp or an idiot, what he did was to press his hand palm outwards against the wastrel's naked face, forcing it against his nose, eyes, mouth, lips, chin, with a certain *bed-rock indecency of outrage* to all that is most sacred and touchy in a human person which I did eventually come as a psychologist to recognize as one of the least pleasant aspects of American humour. Humour of this kind — but of course, like other national traits, American humour has many different facets — is in reality the first phase of the lynching process. When you have stimulated your aversion to a person who dresses like a scarecrow, and is in all probability a "degenerate," by pressing your fingers against his mouth and lips and cheeks and forehead and nose and eyes, the natural sequence of your line of approach, if you are a clean, bright, upstanding lad, with the intelligence of a "high-pressure salesman," will be to "treat him rough"; in other words to put a rope round his neck.

No, although I was not unaware of the "Aristophanic" power, gross though it might be, of the clowning in these burlesques, it was not that which so enthralled me. Once having accepted my peculiar life-long vice, once having allowed for the indestructible nympholeptism of my nature, it will surely not be surprising to you, reader, that, save when these feminine choruses were entirely composed of persons of my own age, my head used to be completely turned by what I saw. But oh, how brief, how cruelly brief, seemed to me those heavenly interludes! And often they danced so thick and fast that I was unable to take my delight in any single one of them. Once, however, I recollect observing one girl, in some interlude when their rapid movement had a breathing-space, quietly take a comb from her hair and proceed to comb her tresses as nonchalantly as if she had been alone before a mirror! It was this kind of little natural gesture that, in moments of memory, would always return to melt my bones. I would say to myself, at such times:

“How *can* this be sinister and dark and wicked, when the thrill I get is so full of an enchanting, irresistible sweetness?”

For in connection with these burlesque shows I have now to confess a very peculiar phenomenon. For the first time in my life this craving of mine for contemplating the limbs of women began to appear to my conscience as wicked. How this came about, or why it came about, I cannot tell. Perhaps it was the presence of these almost entirely masculine audiences that affected me so. Or was it that my growing tendency to the *ascetic,* my growing tendency to try to mould my life — you must not laugh, at me — upon the lives of the mediæval saints, made *all* sensual pleasure seem an evil thing?

But perhaps you, reader, are a person of intellectual interests and you are prepared to say that you don’t give a damn what I felt under these conditions. You are impatiently waiting for me to tell you what my attitude was to the philosophical movements of the beginning of this century, such as Pragmatism, Neo-Realism, Determinism, Vitalism. Or you are wondering how I was reacting to the socialistic propaganda that was always crossing my path. Well, the truth is I *was* reading at this time many philosophical books that arrested me profoundly but only a few of these were recent ones. Hegel, though I found him very difficult and obscure, always fascinated me. I can recall at this very epoch — in a holiday at Burpham, for in those days I used to return to England twice a year — reading Wallace’s translation of *The Logic* of Hegel in what was called “War Field,” the great meadow so often waving with Mr. Collyer’s wheat and sprinkled not only with scarlet poppies, but with rose-coloured fumitory, tiny wild pansies and the curious parasite called broom-rape, and I can recall the intoxicating and in some queer way almost voluptuous feeling, deep and obscure and mystical that seized on me on that particular occasion. I had a mania — and I have it still — for every sort of metaphysical system. My Protean nature, so singularly fluid, seemed able to wind itself, like a vaporous serpent, through the intricacies of any philosophy that was bold enough to recreate the malleable and receptive world for me. I had what was undoubtedly a strong erotic desire to embrace the magical loveliness of the world, just as if that vast mysterious Presence were a feminine being. I will not boast that I fully comprehended what I read; but I comprehended a good deal, as is proved — or seemed to *me* to be proved — by my power of embodying and contrasting these great systems as if they were contending persons in a high tragic drama. But my nature was always flinging itself into these systems as if with the intensity of a physical love affair. It was indeed because I demanded certain real, concrete, almost sensual feelings from a system of metaphysics that I got so much more pleasure from Hegel and Schopenhauer than from Kant.

What they really were to me, these systems, was so many burlesque shows. I skipped the mathematics just as I shut my eyes and ears to the patter, and I enjoyed the spacious curves of cosmic truth as I enjoyed the noble flanks of these friendly women. But the pleasure of metaphysic was not only like the pleasure of looking at dancing-girls, it was also like what I felt for those artificial romanticized landscapes which appealed so strongly to my nature. What I found in the fragmentary “logoi” of the old Greek thinkers, for instance, a sort of poetic and dramatic mysticism, I found diffused, like a penetrating incense through Hegel and Schopenhauer. Bergson, though people soon explained to me his main ideas and I appropriated them craftily enough, for they suited my most casuistical moods, *I could never read.* He was too wire-spun, too French, too — what shall I say? — too *elegant* for my taste.

But aye! how I used to sink into, Hegel's thaumaturgic convolutions! How I used to swallow, with this old sea-serpent of thought, the shining pebbles of all the rims and margins and windrows in the world. I remember reading a book on Hegel by an American called Harris in the train between Philadelphia and Lancaster, and getting an ecstasy of sensual satisfaction as I mixed up in my mind Harris and Hegel and the little green shoots of wheat — if it was wheat — coming up in those rich arable lands!

But William James was a startling delight to me, too, for all his roguish jibes at Hegel. I responded with a lively Cymric reciprocity to his Pluralistic ideas, which, in my fluid and incorrigibly sceptical mind, seemed quite as *conceivable* a vision of things as any self-evolving, self-dividing, self-reconciling absolute. I can recall one occasion, when I was heading for Trenton where I was to give a lecture, being so absorbed in William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* that I permitted my train to stop at the station and to leave the station in complete oblivion of my purpose.

What I am aiming at in this book is a living portrait of myself, both as I was, and as I gradually became, and for this reason you must not grow impatient, reader, as I limn my picture, line upon line, and tint upon tint, by what you may regard as an over-emphasis upon the erotic aspects of existence. If it has happened, by the will of fate, that in *your* life the erotic element has not played the dominant part that it has played in mine, you are at once luckier than I have been and less lucky! You have escaped a great deal of grotesque tragic-comedy, but you have been deprived of many thrilling and rapturous expectations and perhaps also a few paradisic fulfilments. As I have pointed out, the tremulous and thrilling ecstasy, sometimes of an intensity that made the passing moment seem to touch the Eternal, that I got from the contemplation of these girls' limbs in these burlesque shows was of a sweetness that, as I look back upon it now, I certainly find it hard to regard as evil or blameworthy. Indeed from my present point of view I heartily commend it.

What I do *not* commend now — and I need not tell you how I loathed it *then!* — is precisely the so-called "man-of-the-world" tone, the tone that refers so grossly, coarsely, obscenely, and again so flippantly and facetiously, to the spectacle of women displaying what the old writers used to call their "charms." These "charms" were objects of such ensorcerized worship to me that to say that I did not feel "reverence for womanhood" as I gazed at them, with my soul shooting forth lambent fire from my eye-sockets, would be ridiculous.

That old lecherous wretch, Father Karamazov, was murdered and damned *not* because he found something idolatrously exciting about the body of every woman he came near, but because he was heartlessly cruel to Alyosha's mother. And is not this a curious thing — I have never got anything but the austerest discomfort from bare legs on the stage. I agree with Dr. Johnson when he told his friend Garrick that it was the *silk stockings* of his actresses that excited his amorous propensities. I was always seized with a certain shy aversion when these women appeared with bare legs; and as for the presence of women completely undressed, such as is a favourite amusement with the French, I would be ashamed — out of my devotion to their provocative sweetness when they've *got their stockings on* — to confess the extreme distaste I would feel. I would feel exactly like a fastidious old spinster. Why, the mere bringing together of the word "woman" and the word "naked" a conjunction which is apparently a temptation to many, always fills me with a cold and sickening aversion.

And I am prepared to defend this feeling of mine as natural. It is Nature herself who puts these arts and caprices and whimsies and reticencies, these "sweet reluctant amorous delays" into human sensibility. The charm, the magic, the loveliness of women are increased a thousand-fold when they put at least some clothes on. Can it be that the reason why I feel so malignantly hostile to the French stage and am so completely seduced by American burlesque is that in Puritan countries you have been so accustomed to getting your pleasure in small, sideways, imaginative trespassings, and from making *a great deal of a very little,* that what you have actually come to think of as the Platonic essence of womanhood and its overpowering sweetness is an evasive and delicate nuance entirely composed of imaginative suggestion and liable to be destroyed in a moment by the bare truth?

It is at any rate fully in harmony with my own philosophical *subjectivism,* fully in harmony with my fierce determination to live all my days in the power of the imagination that I felt as I did in this matter. I have always selected from reality rather than worshipped reality. I have spent my life enjoying the margins and horizons and windrows of life rather than its grosser bulk. Is it not natural, then, that I should get a thrilling pleasure when my idols wore stockings but shrink away in dismay when they wore none? And is it not. above all characteristic of my preference for faces in mirrors, suns in mists, and moons behind clouds, that I should have derived such tantalized transports from the way these provocative beings danced in and out in the intervals of the clowns' patter?

The key to my whole character, not only to its difference from the bulk of the men who crowded to these shows but to its difference from the cynical minority who were sprinkled among them, could have been detected in a moment, I am sure, by anyone who looked at my expression. I must have had a look that was, in regard to the lower part of my face, like that of a guileless idiot, an idiot whose one idea of heaven was to stare at women forever, but that was, in regard to the upper part of my face, its smouldering concentration, its hooded forehead, its sparrow-hawk beak, like the look of some ambushed Neanderthal watching the gambols of a group of Cro-Magnon girls. It would have been seen from both my formidable glare and my gibbering mouth that I was completely devoid, I will not say of humour, but of that particular sense of the ludicrous that accompanies a society-conscious or custom-conscious intelligence. It would have been clear from my face at those times that while I was hopelessly abandoned to some kind of desperate feeling I had too much in common with an Inanimate Puppet to be likely to do any harm to the sweet beings I glared at.

But, as I have hinted, for reasons which are not very hard to understand I was cruelly persecuted from the time I was forty to the time I was fifty by a steadily increasing asceticism. The truth is I had now begun, for the first time in my life, to get it into my head *that erotic delight was evil.* Now it is easy to see how it was that this blasphemous error entered my brain. Erotic delight for me has always meant lust, and lust alone; and it was simply because of the extraordinary part played by this impersonal, anonymous lust in my own life that I conceived the notion of its being evil.

I myself had noted in the case of my brother Llewelyn, that champion of natural joy, how horrified he was when he saw those unspeakable volumes in the French language that I brought to Clavadel. The only rule I seem able to reach about it all is that *when no one is hurt by it,* any sort of lust is permissible. But so deep is my superstitious notion that erotic feeling *in itself* is evil, that it will only be by a considerable effort of the will that I shall ever allow myself to read again — if ever I *do* allow myself — those sadistic books that melt the marrow in my bones! I have, moreover, been often troubled by the occult East-Indian fancy that to call up sadistic images, whether by reading or by thinking, is a dangerous and wicked thing, on the ground that it projects certain *eidola* upon the air, which, by working on the brains of passers-by might drive a half-crazy person into abominable crime.

Pittsburgh is one place that has burnt itself in upon my mind. I used to go continually to lecture in Pittsburgh, sometimes at the ladies' club there, where for long I was a great *persona grata* and sometimes at the Carnegie Museum, where the Diplodocus impressed me more than I have ever impressed any audience. The Diplodocus indeed made the deepest impression on my mind of any entity, not in human shape, that I have ever seen; and I think of it still as a curious symbol of that epoch of my life. It was, as I say, at Pittsburgh that I went through my most dramatic struggles with my ascetic, and, to confess the truth, my morbidly rampant conscience.

It was a Catholic audience who used to come drifting past the Diplodocus to hear me in this singular spot. How faithful to me, how profoundly comprehending the Roman Catholics of the United States have always been! The aged Mother Superior of "Notre Dame" at Baltimore prayed religiously for me, and sent me some holy magic talisman too, when I suffered the operation they call "gasterenterostomy"; so that even that awful-sounding piece of surgery proved harmless. Indeed, though the greatest of living surgeons, Dr. John Erdman, knew nothing of the prayers of Sister Meletia it had something to do with these as well as with the great man's skill that my pulse remained absolutely normal throughout this experience. Harry Lyon, who was in America at that time, sardonically commented on what the nurses told him when he came to see me in that Post-Graduate Hospital. He said he found them murmuring among themselves in regard to this Welsh Rasputin under their care:

“This is no man: this is some god or devil!”

The truth is there undoubtedly does exist, in the case of every great religion, what you might describe as a foreordained temperament. And this predestination of taste is a chemical, a physical, a material tendency, working as negatively in anyone’s *dislikes* as it works positively in anyone’s *likes.* This Catholic audience, under the very nose, as you might say, of the dragon, came instinctively, and as if drawn by a magnet, to hear the modern Cagliostro, as he disparaged Robert Browning and exalted Dante.

But certainly to the end of my days I shall remember the terrific moral struggles I underwent in the “down-town section” of Pittsburgh. Except for Philadelphia and New York I know Pittsburgh better than any other city in America. Every street in Pittsburgh, every bridge across her rivers — for she is, as you are aware, almost an island, an island of iron, such as might have been built by Hephaestus — has had the Inferno-Purgatorio-Paradiso scoriatings, brandings, embalmings of the divine farce of an arch-puppet’s battle with himself inscribed in bloody tokens all over its pavements and over all the lintels of its doors. You see I used to stay at the old Fort Pitt, an hotel to which I became very attached; and from this retreat it was but a short distance to the nearest burlesque show. Every inch of the pavements between these two places was inscribed with the bloodstains of those “divine” and “devilish” moods which seemed such preposterous folly to the well-balanced mind of Louis Wilkinson. I used sometimes, when the limbs of the chorus were too plump for my fancy, or when too many beggars and cripples were “treated rough” by smart young men, to rush out of the theatre long before the performance was over — for, as I have told you, the clowns’ Aristophanic patter, though from an æsthetic point of view the best fooling in the world, could not mitigate my fever — and walk up and down one or the other of those terrific iron bridges; where as I watched the blocks of ice, or the red and green barge-lights in the water, I would vow desperately to myself, by various solemn oaths, by the sun and the moon and the earth and the styx, that from this particular afternoon November th,, let us say, to the end of my life, I would never go to a burlesque show again!

You do not turn the key to the final turret of my nature, reader, until you realize the immense weight of the anti-social maliciousness, inherited from my father, with which — not less then than now — I confront the conventional and vulgar facetiousness of the crowd-conscious mind. What always thrills me so much about the minds of women is that they never indulge in these gross jibes of *bawdy conventionality.* But men of the world, as they love to think of themselves, take these magical occasions, that to an excitable nature — and to an intellectual nature, too, by God! for I am not going to allow that these sneering catchpoles pierce deeper into the mystery of life than Homer and Dante and Plato and Dostoievsky — are beautiful and tragic and purgatorial and paradisic, as flippantly as they take the comic page in their daily paper! It is in fact perfectly amazing to me to watch these worldly-minded proppers-up of social custom, who obviously are using the crowd's most conventional humour, which is the extreme opposite of real humour, trying to drag down the heavenly delights that less perverted people know. Yes, pardie! It is these facetious worldlings who with their shallow jokes are the real perverts; and they are perverts too, if I may use such an expression, *against the Holy Ghost.*

But they never have been able, at least not for very long, to disconcert or discountenance a son of *my* Father; a son of that man in whom so gigantic a childlikeness was balanced by so gigantic a pride! And so I continued to stare at the lines and curves of the forms of these burlesque show women — when, at least, they were not *all* proportioned like Gargamelle — with an emotion in which, as I look back to it now, I cannot detect the least touch of evil. The only way I *can* now see a possible loophole for evil would have been if, in my thoughts, I had pretended that these women were ashamed at my staring at them! But I am sure they were not. And if they *had* been, I was far too ravished by the simple contemplation of their anonymous “charms” to have been aware of it. I would however deeply like to know, now, exactly what these women *do* feel. I wonder if they feel what men dancers would feel if *their* forms were being gazed at in rapture by an audience of women?

But I must implore you, reader, to try to realize what it meant to me that these exquisite beings, beings capable of giving a poor wayfaring wretch such raptures of delight, could actually be persuaded to put on these boys’ clothes and dance in and out in the midst of such clowning. Just consider what a thing it was, that without any danger of being beaten, or abused, or sneered at, or jibed at, or hooted at, or flogged into insensibility by moral gangsters or ethical assassins, it was possible for a morbidly timid person like myself to share the delight of the immortal gods when they first stumbled upon the idea of a woman’s form!

I suppose, calm reader, it is impossible for you to imagine the emotions that quivered through me, every time, seated as near the orchestra as I could, I heard the deafening overtures to these entertainments? The actual music was of course nothing and less than nothing to me. I tell you if the musicians had been the greatest in the world I would still have waited in trembling impatience till their preluding was over. These burlesque show people little guessed what a hermit they were converting. I cared nothing for drama, nothing for vaudeville, nothing for the opera, nothing for the circus. I was in New York the whole time the Russian Ballet was there and I never went once to it. I was occupied with something more planetary, more poetical, more magical, more satisfying, than music or dancing or the arts of design!

Why, if I only went to a sufficient number of these burlesque shows I might find myself staring at a woman, at a girl, at a sylph, like that one I saw on the pier at Brighton, saw for seven days of heaven, and lost forever and ever! One thing was quite certain. I should not see that Brighton girl, or anyone even remotely resembling her, if I went to the Russian Ballet at the Metropolitan Opera every single night for the whole season. And doesn't the mere word "season" when considered in connection with the sullen Neanderthal malice that it used to rouse in me, reveal the insane anti-social lengths to which my nature could go when it allowed itself the full swing of its monstrous prehistoric simplicity? No! This solitary, anti-social, romantic, *poetic lechery* of mine as it enjoyed some single unknown feminine form, was supported by such a weight of pride that it took upon itself in its huge arrogance to despise the whole of the Balzacian tittle-tattle and glittering fashionable "réclame" that rose and fell, like the ripples of an enchanted sea, round the bizarre performances of the famous ballet.

It would not be correct to use the word "desire," and it would certainly be totally misleading to use the expression "lust after" for what I felt on the rare occasions when I could concentrate my contemplation on a form that really satisfied me. This form then became to me the whole secret of the pleasure of life. I wanted nothing beyond what I had already. I cried to the moment, like Faust:

"Oh, stay! Thou art so fair!"

The truth is I had inherited from my father an anti-social, anti-fashionable malevolence that knew no bounds. I had only to hear current talk — and you know how art circles do talk! — to revert with malicious fury to the life of a Thebaid anchorite. I *was* an anchorite, surrounded by all the sweet feminine forms of an anchorite's cell! But in my relations with all the actual people I encountered I was an angel of consideration. I set myself to acquire, by constantly training my will, a terrific self-control and a punctilious courtesy that was super-human. Between forty and forty-five, when I was tearing my soul to pieces for American audiences, I approached everyone I met with a tender deference and subtle flattery that you would have supposed would have bewildered them. But it did not bewilder them. Sub-consciously they must have recognized that I really had an intense desire to give them a thrill of happiness.

"We all," as my brother Theodore says, "like to be praised"; and I would add that most of us like to be extravagantly praised. Well! Why should I not have been appointed by Providence the "praising medicine-man" to the much-enduring human race? I have always been one for considering people's feelings, one for trying desperately to give them a glow of self-satisfaction; and though, I confess, there have been cases when I have gone too far, take it all in all my intense, eager, appreciative way of listening and agreeing has, I believe, perceptibly increased the happiness of my small world-circle. Just as my own idea of Paradise would be an eternal burlesque show, from which all burlesque had been eliminated, so my idea of making people happy was to create for them an atmosphere from which all criticism was eliminated.

I got more and more attached to Arnold Shaw as my lecture-scope widened. He had then — and indeed has still — the most unwrinkled forehead, the clearest blue eyes, the most childlike mouth, of any man I have ever known. He was one of the most original and — to me at least — one of the most enchanting of men. He had no intimate friends. "John the Fizzle," was all the friends he wanted; and even with me he was a queer mixture of Rabelaisian openness and tactful reserve. Like myself he never went to theatres, or to movies, or to concerts, or indeed to any entertainments, other than those given by his own lecturers. Unlike me he was never a vegetarian. But I am tolerant in such things. His childish delight in a good dinner was as a matter of fact an irresistible sight. I have never seen in my life anyone eat steak and onions with greater gusto. Arnold had a Gargantuan laugh. He would throw back his head and open his mouth as he laughed, until he looked exactly like one of Doré's pictures of Carpalim or Epistemon.

From his constant reading of Rabelais he acquired the habit of always using the word "paunch" in place of stomach or belly. Indeed he used this word as a kind of magic formula wherewith to exorcize the gloomy demons of puritanism. By fits and starts he was a brilliant lecture-manager. New and always very imaginative schemes were forever emerging from his fertile brain. He was not a great reader; but, when at last he really read Rabelais, he took to it like a beetle to dung, a cat to milk, a duck to water, a moth to a candle, a dog to carrion, a malt-worm to beer, and a Yorkshire child to its mother's breast. After this epoch-making reading his conversation was always garnished with Rabelaisian tags. Released by the genius of the Curé of Meudon a kindred genius leapt up from the magnanimous and unworldly "paunch" of this guileless man.

Together we treated the whole business of a lecturer's profession in the most irreverent, wanton, fantastical, and cavalier manner. When things went from bad to worse in any of our less lucky epochs — for though in our good days I used to make, under Arnold, as much as a thousand pounds a year, at other times my income would sink alarmingly low — Arnold and I would sit opposite each other at "The Village Kitchen" on Greenwich Avenue, or at "The Two Steps Down" on Eighth Street, or at "Child's" at Fourteenth Street, or at the old French Pastry Shop, now "The Rochambeau," or at

Halloran's on Sixth Avenue, and the Rabelaisian-manager would turn upon the charlatan-lecturer a countenance of such childlike despair that I used to wonder to myself what would actually happen when I had not one single audience left. For I had no trade, no strength to dig, no knowledge of business. I was totally ignorant of mathematics. I couldn't work a typewriter. I couldn't wait at table. I couldn't drive a car. I had no notion how to deal with cows or horses. I had already tried taking Littleton's lower form at the Prep. and I couldn't keep order for three consecutive minutes! My only possible refuge, I suppose, would have been to get myself, by hook or by crook, into a theological college and there aimed at being ordained, as my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had been ordained before me.

It was only our incorrigible and childlike hopefulness that kept up our hearts in these bad days. There were times, you must understand, when I had only two lectures a week, on one of which Arnold was supporting *his* family, and on the other I was supporting *mine.* At such times our fees became very low. We jumped at anything, Cagliostro and his circus-manager had to live. But there was infinite "give" and "yield" between us; and always fathomless reserves of generosity, buoyancy, and good-nature on Arnold's side. Once when I only had one lecture a week for a whole season in New York — a lecture at a girls' school at Greenwich for which I received thirty dollars — Arnold found for the nonce some other way of supporting *his* family, and allowed me to divide the whole of that thirty dollars between myself and *my* family.

Under the kindly and dominant influence of Colonel C. E. S. Wood, the author of *The Poet in the Desert,* I did on one occasion betray my friendship for Arnold by signing a contract to lecture indefinitely under another management on the Pacific; but no sooner was I back in New York than I became as eager as Arnold was to compromise things with the Pacific and renew our ancient alliance. I am afraid my erratic nature was by no means a soothing influence for my friend; for our life together ended sadly enough, ended indeed in Arnold's suffering a complete nervous collapse and a serious illness. On his recovery from this illness he was forced to take a less nerve-shaking job than the management of John the Fizzle; but no external separation has altered in the least our lifelong affection for each other and I still believe I am the only man in the world who understands Arnold's unique character or does full justice to his unusual gifts.

That he has flashes of genius in business, and not only in the lecture-business, must be clear to many; but I believe I am not boasting when I say that I alone realize the endurances and magnanimities of his inner nature. My brother Llewelyn did not always do full justice to Arnold and he has confessed to me that he would listen with blank amazement when, after some indiscretion of mine that made it hard to find me any engagements, Arnold would smile blandly at him and remark cheerfully:

"John's a Fizzle."

In Louis Wilkinson's curious book about himself entitled *Swan's Milk* he misses a fine opportunity for bringing to bear his satiric pen upon the figures of Arnold and myself in our relation to each other. The truth is that Arnold had a way, I will not say of bullying Louis, for that was not an easy thing to do, but of treating him without that consideration for an Archangel's radiant life-illusion which he always displayed in connection with my convoluted *amour propre.* "Our Doc" he used to call him; and Louis' European aplomb would sometimes emerge with its beautiful mallard-feathers not a little ruffled and awry out of that singular office in the Grand Central where Arnold concocted his lecturers' "mean jumps."

Louis was indeed the stately and nostalgic Harlequin of our little circus in which the deboshed Welsh Clown had wormed his way into some mysterious “rapport” with the Man with the Cracking Whip. It has always been a bewilderment to me that Llewelyn should regard Louis” frankly expressed satire at my expense as unkind. I think it is, on the contrary, one of the tenderest and most affectionate compliments I have ever received. He wrote the “Buffoon” about our relations and a gay and entertaining book it was, but I am sure no one reading it would accuse him of any malicious intent. You might as well say that Arnold himself, while eagerly basting, like one of those merry human maggots engendered by the Curé’s god-like and cheese-like brain, his goose upon his spit, was malicious when he used his favourite schoolboy words to describe the calamities that threatened the head of his friend.

You can see how quickly, reader, I am tempted to transform what I have to say about America into a minute description of my personal friendship with another Englishman. The queer thing is — and I fancy that both Dreiser and Masters will agree with me in this — American men are not adepts at the delicate art of friendship. I am not talking about homosexual relations. These exist here of course as everywhere else. But I am talking now about friendship, as Montaigne describes it, in that passionate passage referring to his own friendship with Etienne. The number of friendships between men that I have seen going on in America are extraordinarily few, considering that I have spent, over a quarter of a century in this country.

Nor is it that men are more intimate with their women than Europeans are with theirs. Indeed I think that fewer love-affairs, fewer marriages, in America, develop into intimate and intellectual friendships between the sexes than in England. Men and women are divided from each other in America as they are among what we call the working classes in the old world. Women have their own work at home, their own jobs in office, or factory, or store; and they have their own circle of friends, too, just as the man has his circle of Dicks, Charleys, Teds and Freds, that he greets so familiarly. I do not think that American men confide in their wives, though there are exceptions to this of course, as completely as Englishmen do. The truth is they do not confide — in the deep sense of the word — in anybody! These Dicks and Charleys *talk* freely enough of their personal affairs to one another; and as a seasoned traveller in this country I can assure you that they talk freely about themselves, their wives and children, their parents, their job, their church, their pastimes, to any stranger who will listen to them.

But their real soul, their inmost soul, *they keep entirely to themselves.* And I do not think it is from reserve or reticence that they do this. They do it for the same reason that they would find it impossible to refer to their secret sexual life. They are unaware of so much as the existence of this inner Being of theirs, this Eternal Being who has such strange raptures! Yes, I know I am on the right track here. The spiritual life, the erotic life, the intellectual life, the life of the awareness of our subtler senses, is simply non-existent to most American men. Mind ye, I don't say it is not there. It *must* be there. But they are innocently unconscious of it. How they find anything to talk about with one another is a mystery to me. They are fond of bawdy stories and humorous anecdotes but when these come to an end unless you plunge into the technique of machinery or the management of your business it is hard to keep things from falling flat.

American women on the other hand are as sensitive to the mystical-sensual aspects of life as women in the old world, and in mental restlessness and general intellectual acquisitiveness I think they have a passionate curiosity beyond that of the old world.

But American men are most assuredly a race by themselves among all the men on the face of the earth. There are no men like them. I know *where*

I am with a Negro, with a Chinaman, with a Mohammedan, with a Spaniard, with a Russian, with a New Zealander, with a Hungarian, with a German, with a Turk. But I don't know where I am with an American. I do not say that he embarrasses me or makes me feel shy, or that I lack gratitude to him for his benevolence; but I cannot relax in his presence, or let myself go, or speak my mind. He is frank where I would be secretive; and again he is reserved where I chatter like a magpie. It would be difficult to be in the company of an Englishman of my own class for five minutes without giving myself away in a manner that would make all but my oldest American friends think I had gone off my head.

I don't necessarily mean give myself away in erotic things. I mean in whimsies, caprices, fantasies, manias, humours, oddities, idiosyncracies, apathies, antipathies, sympathies, prejudices, the whole paraphernalia of that pyschic-sensuous margin of life which is the most precious thing in the world. No, I don't mean obvious erotic things, or obvious obscene things! These I *have* heard talked about in America, either when men were alone or when men and women of the intelligentsia were getting drunk together. I am not referring to things that are shocking or outrageous or scandalous. I am referring to things that are evasive and subtle, things of atmosphere, things of religion, things belonging to those floating, drifting mysterious over-tones and under-tones of life which are in reality overtaking us all the time, but of which if I spoke to an American man he would look as uncomfortable as if I had turned before his very eyes into what they call a "fairy" or into what they call a "cake-eater."

As Henry James said, that master of atmosphere, when he was fleeing from the sensuous sterility of his fellow-countrymen,

"American women are the aristocracy of America!"

It is an almost terrifying thing, this impenetrable spiritual reserve of American men, I have dallied with the idea that it comes from the soil and the climate and was a characteristic of the Red Indians. But this may be a pure fantasy. Certainly it is hard for the simpler type of American man to "get the idea" of what you mean by enjoying intellectual pleasures as if they were of sensual pleasures. I think it is the imaginative element in intellectual pleasure that they find most difficult to appreciate. It is when the imaginative reason begins to play upon life that such teasing distinctions as the characteristic American one between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" begins to grow blurred; and a slow, ignorant, imaginative person is felt to be of a higher intellectual type than a clever, lively, smart one.

Some Europeans have quarrelled with the kindness of Americans. Far off from me be such ingratitude! I here and now protest to all the recording angels in the occult universe that I have received more unalloyed and disinterested kindness in one year in America than in ten in my own country! What are the dominant American virtues? *Kindness and humility!* No unchristian virtues these, eh? as Mr. Pecksniff might opine. But it is true; and these two holy cardinal virtues form the largest components of that simple heathen goodness which Sir Walter Scott with his last breath told his son-in-law "was all that mattered."

American men are tragic without knowing that they are tragic. They are tragic, by reason of the desolate thinness and forlorn narrowness of their sensual and mystical contacts. Mysticism and sensuality are the things that most of all redeem life. Let the workers march to triumph, singing the International. But when you *have* marched, when you *have* reorganized society when you *have* given the people bread and the circus, the question comes, *what next?* It is then that we want to commune with angels and demons; it is then that we want to worship the elements; it is then that we want to return to the imaginative and poetic life that Science has for so long been destroying.

Let the cause of the workers come first; but while the workers are overcoming their enemies, there is no reason why their friends should not tap this old planetary rock to draw forth new psychic and sensual nourishment. Man is *an enjoyer* as well as a destroyer and a creator; and these are days when, more than ever before, humanity needs to sink back into contemplation. Not all the heroic appeals of the noblest cause in the world can turn the unconquerable Faustian "I," the old Homeric and Biblical "I," into a permanent cog in an impersonal machine. This impersonalization, this thinning down of the life-pulses, the life-nerves, the life-senses, the life-imagination of human beings has been achieved in America without the least restriction upon unbounded capitalism. The phrase "rugged individualism" has grown to be the catch phrase to describe the life-destroying condition of this old state of affairs. Individuals became "rugged" — though such "ruggedness" looked repulsively *sleek* to the naked eye — by hardening their hearts against all the things in life that can be described as poetical or philosophical. Our unfortunate human nature has never been subjected to conditions quite so anti-pathetic to all the most interesting stimuli to poetic human feeling since the beginning of the world, as it has been subjected to in America. One can only hope now that the great Mr. Roosevelt, by some inspired conjuring-trick, may be able to change the actual tempo of human psychology in this amazing country in at least *some* important ways.

And yet I know well how greatly I shall miss, when I leave America, certain free and noble aspects of life there. When I think of our English social distinctions, and of our deep-rooted snobbishness, that evil vice from which we all, without exception suffer, when I think how afraid of each other we all are, how abominably self-conscious about these wretched little differences, how nervously patronizing to those “below,” how nervously obsequious to those “above,” when I think how many levels and sub-levels of social life we possess, to be struggled into, or dropped out of, when I think of all the conventional bird-lime there is to be washed off, before we can de-class ourselves out of “upper class” or “middle-class” or “working-class,” *into intelligent and indulgent humanity,* I can make a shrewd guess at what I shall miss.

There *is* real democracy in America; and in spite of all the wicked power of money you feel it all the time. A man is a man in America, and a woman a woman, though the former *may* be called a “guy” and the latter be ever so “emancipated” and “highbrow.” That he is a de-personalized man, pathetically anxious to conform to type, heart breakingly averse to developing anything idiosyncratic or original, does not un-man him; or that she feels towards him a double charge of feminine contempt for the male’s lack of subtlety does not divest *her* of her womanhood.

Vaguely conscious of the psychic and sensual sterility of his native air the American’s attitude to Old World values is shown in his troubled, half humorous, half bewildered restlessness. Seeking he knows not what, he rushes about in ever-improving automobiles, drugging himself, distracting himself, exhausting himself, in a blind sub-conscious struggle to find that psychic-sensuous Absolute of human satisfaction which the basic conditions of his life deny him. As long as he can be a pioneer, all is well! Any primeval wrestling with Nature solaces him while it numbs and atrophies him. But the tragedy of an American begins when his pioneer-psychology has no further outlet. Desperately then does he hunt the wind, recklessly then does he rake the dust! To say he worships the dollar is a preposterous lie. It is we who worship *me money,* as Sexton Truggins puts it in

Theodore’s book. What the American worships is not even power. It is some will-o’-the-wisp *idea* of power, bringing with it the prestige, the reputation, the glow the glory of being the one who has “huffed” the other, in the great cosmic game. What the American cannot grasp, and what gives him a vertiginous and ghastly sense of a yawning gulf, is the planetary law of Nature that all human action is only a means to contemplation.

But how often, if I leave this country, will the wild, free, boundless *chaos* of it all come back to my mind! For a certain kind of cosmic picturesqueness, at once shocking and liberateing, as if among the engines and the machines and the well-appointed “homes” you kept stumbling upon rock-ribs of scoriac lava, this vast continent has no parallel. The bleak prehistoric bones of the aboriginal planet, as it was before man appeared on it at all, seem always ready to stick out amid this hurry-scurry of “modern improvements.” And *that look,* the look of a *homo sapiens* perpetually confronted by cosmogonic insecurity, by the presence of catastrophic and cataclysmic matter — the original elements of a world prior to man’s world — such as we see in the faces of the grim aboriginals of this land, is constantly to be caught on the most spry, the most clever, the most modernized of American men’s countenances.

If I have learnt anything from my life in America it is a certain lonely and perhaps rather desperate stoicism, a certain stark endurance of one’s fate in the presence of air and water and fire and the basic rock-structures of this earth. You must remember that every American man is a Jack of all Trades. In the midst of his towering cities, in the forlorn and woefully standardized “residential-sections” he has built for himself, you find this cheerful, nervous, restless, humble-minded person, without mental recreations, without æsthetic interests, without spiritual or sensuous contemplation, hammering, sawing, chopping, brushing, cleaning, polishing, improving, pulling down, building up, like a competent, shrewd, cynical, kindly, but quite mad, super-artisan. He may be a manipulator of half the railroads of the country, or he may be a furnace-stoker in a flimsy apartment-house, put him on his back underneath a broken motor-car, and you will see a man who can be happy — and perhaps only entirely happy — when he is tinkering at the bolts and screws and pistons that he, or others like him, have caused to take shape from the bowels of a gouged-out planet! It is this competent grasp of the essentials of machinery, of tools and engines, of inventions and the art of running inventions, this restless concentration on the industrial exploitation of Nature, combined with an absence of all aristocratic airs, that creates the yearning and wistful admiration with which our Russian friends — since their upheaval — tend to regard Americans.

It is hard to worship Demeter in America. I cannot conceive of any expression less appropriate in this country than the expression "our Mother, the Earth." The Earth is *not* a mother to an American. She is a tool-shed, a smithy, a tank, a malevolent but sublime volcano, out of which so much horse-power calculated in terms of so many dynamos or kilowatts is forced to erupt.

It is curious the way a person can adapt himself to a life apparently completely alien to that for which he was born! This whole long epoch of my life, from the time when I was forty till the time when I was fifty-five, I spent almost entirely in trains and hotels. It was a queer existence. Anyone would have supposed that it would have so scraped and combed and twitched and raked and harrowed and rattled and jarred the little cells of my brain and the nerves that connect them with the vital centres of my being that I would have soon become a victim of some disease like St. Vitus's dance. But it did not work out like this. In the first place I have a constitution, if not a frame, of iron. In the second place I have acquired some mystical, perhaps even Tibetan trick, of sinking back upon the Cosmos or upon the Mystery of the Tao behind the Cosmos, which I can always make use of at a pinch. However cynical and materialistic you are, my good calm reader, you cannot very well, if you are anything of a psychologist, deny that my spiritual attitude to myself as, I won't say a re-incarnated Taliessin, but as a formidable Argeiphontes, or messenger of the gods, was an attitude calculated to have a very vital effect on my fund of nervous strength. I acquired the power — indeed it came very naturally to me — of giving myself up completely to the little sensuous pleasures of the passing moment.

My nature is so extravagantly simple and childlike — this is why crafty worldly people cannot understand me and take me for an arch-poseur — and I defend this simplicity with so much malicious hatred of the clever sophistries of the world, that I was in a very strong position for enjoying — in despite of my more worldly fellow-travellers — every single one of the little pleasures afforded by the conditions of travelling. I enjoyed all these little things with spasms of delicious happiness, just as a child — especially a young girl — enjoys herself, when she feels the simple delight of skipping down a road on a fine day, or of kicking up the leaves in the gutter on a gloomy day. The expression *enjoys herself* exactly expresses the simple subtlety of what I am trying to say.

It was always a pleasure to me to lie in my lower berth, when I had a long morning of travelling before me, and there was nobody in the upper berth, and listen to the milk-cans rattle on the platforms of the smaller stations, and to all the vague village sounds that were penetrating enough to reach the interior of the train. And how I enjoyed it when I had, as often happened, the wash-room entirely to myself! And how satisfactory it was when “The Diner” — that all-hallowed word to travellers — was the very next car to where I slept! How well I can recall feeling about in the darkness behind those heavy green curtains for the book I was reading — some new volume of Conrad, perhaps, which I had propped up on the rack — and then carrying it in my hand with a sense of ritualistic well-being, just to have it as a companion, for I rarely read at meals, where I sat down by some window in “The Diner” to enjoy a leisurely breakfast!

Although I always felt a little nervous about the effect of coffee, I often used to have it, and it always acted upon me like some miraculous haschish. To sip my third cup, for when I *did* allow myself this luxury I went to the limit, and, with my thumb in the page where Dona Rita pursued by that stone-throwing cousin is saved by “Monsieur George,” and with my eye on the shack-littered banks of the Mississippi or the “Blood of Christ” mountains of New Mexico, or the Osage hedges of Kansas, or the huge red barns with their stately silo-towers of Wisconsin, while my cigarette smoke ascended in blue spirals and some sweet-natured African, whose cosmic benevolence surrounded me like a golden mist, bowed low over the silver on the tray, to think to myself, “Will Llewelyn be able to meet me at the station when at last I get back to New York?” were experiences that must have sunk down into the deepest levels of my consciousness. Those were certainly exciting times when Llewelyn really was with me in America.

Mr. Atkins thought it appropriate that we should wear our tall silk hats, bought either at Damon’s in Yeovil or at Lemon’s in Sherborne, as we went about Philadelphia, and I can recall one occasion when we were hooted if not pelted by a gang of boys, as we pursued our blameless way — Powys Major and Powys Quintus in their Sunday attire — to try to find the zoo in the public park. It was on that very occasion — and doubled up with “Jack’s pain” I remember I was just then — that I first discovered El Greco; for there was an astonishing picture of his in a gallery out there representing Our Lord's Passion and with what looked like a background of livid icebergs behind His wrestlings with the First Cause.

It was in that first visit of his to America that Llewelyn got his consumption. He was only twenty-five then, who is fifty to-day; but I wish I could hold myself entirely free from the responsibility of his life having been accompanied so wickedly by the Danse Macabre of those little white bacilli. For the truth is I did not look after my younger brother or take care of him on that first visit as I ought to have done. I am sure it was in some awful place in New York City that he caught the germ of the thing, when he was being hunted, harassed, and bullied by certain unsympathetic audiences that were very different from my East-Side Jews.

But to return to my own affairs at a much later date I began to grow aware as I went about this continent that I was really performing a definite rôle in America, a rôle where I had no rival. I mean I was attracting to myself like a magnet all the neurotic unhappy ones, all the lonely ones, all the *misfits,* in the whole country. I became the acknowledged enemy, and I hope I shall always remain so, of all the well-constituted and successful, as these opposed themselves to the failures and the abjects and the ill-adjusted. Thinking of the words on the arch in Washington Square, "Let us raise a Standard to which the wise may repair; the Event is in the hands of God," I feel tempted to say, "Let *me* raise a Standard — *Vexilla Regis prodeunt Inferni!* — to which the 'morons' and degenerates and imbeciles and poets and idiots may repair: the event is in the hands of Chance."

For just as you are able to find in the vast stretches of prairie-grass in Oklahoma and Texas little delicate flowers of a beauty almost incredible, so, in the appalling stretches of the dusty moral normality of this country you come, here and there upon characters of the most unbelievable originality and brittle charm! And the point is that living where they did these unfortunates had never had one drop of encouragement or one breath of sympathy — not one! — until I, the Quixotic champion of the immoral against the moral, of the religious against the conventional, of the poetical against the worldly, of happiness against success, came trailing and drifting past, ironically "bowing and scraping" to their intolerable magnates, but tipping them themselves the sign, the token, the password, of the freemasonry of all intellectual souls! What I really did was to bring to these victims of the unbelievable "Wasteland" the healing sense that all the noble spirits of antiquity and the Middle Ages, all the subtle and penetrating intellects of the human race, were *on their side* and lifting their voices to them, all the way through the centuries; assuring them that they might bow down as low as they pleased in the House of Rimmon, as long as in secret they served the true God!

Yes, my twenty-five years of lecturing in America cannot have been wasted. Incessantly, never varying, by irony, by rhetoric, by sardonic malice, by diabolic bitterness, by Dickensian humour, by passionate poetry, by all the "natural magic" of my Welsh ancestors, I made myself a Voice crying in the Wilderness, *Ego phonè boontos en te eremo!*" Gravely, quietly, gently, and in a tone far too serious to be boastful, I am prepared to say that while I was lecturing between these two American oceans thousands and thousands of imaginative and sensitive men and women who had no other hope — the megalopolitan Smart Alecs can always take care of themselves — were never without a passionate interpreter.

"And what," as my American chairmen always used to say, "was my message?"

Well, I am inclined to think that that old well-known Goethean tag, that I dare say my erudite "Guru" at Cambridge, Mr. G. P. Gooch, was the first to repeat to me, would best express the quintessence of what I shrieked and danced and yelled and roared and whispered and wept for the sake of all these lonely ones and funny ones:

"*Im Ganzen*, *Guten*, *Schonen*, *resolut zu leben!*" "Resolve to live in the Whole, in the Good, and in the Beautiful!"

With how quaint, old-fashioned and almost pathetic a sound must those proud Teutonic words strike the ears of the young swashbucklering disillusionists of our time! And I dare say I myself have long seemed to these same sturdy realists even as Stepan Trophimovitch in *The Possessed* seemed to his son Peter Stepanovitch, not much better than a doddering windbag. Windbag as I may be, no one will ever know the strangeness of the singular incidents, of the miraculous chances, that occurred to me as I went on these journeys. But I myself shall remember these things for ever in England or in France; and while I hear the peevish whistlings of *our* trains, che great booming mastodon-bellow of the locomotives of America will drift over me and bring it all back.

I shall see the face of an old negro whose shanty I came upon in a country walk in the heart of Georgia, and who, when I told him I was a lecturer, refused to believe such a thing of so dusty, so untidy a person, and a person so obviously *not* "a Southern Gentleman," until he had despatched Sarah his wife for a copy of Cæsar's *Gallic Wars.* And so terribly severe a Latinist the old man turned out to be that when I left him, after my stumblings through a paragraph or two, and went my way, he seemed still unconvinced as to my business in life. We parted good friends however; for I had remembered enough of my lessons in the Prep. to make it clear that I did full justice to the old gentleman's own scholarship, even though I did not share it.

And I shall see again that extraordinary scene at the end of a very exciting lecture on some philosophical subject at the Hebrew Institute in St. Louis, when a tall, majestic, wild-looking man suddenly got up at the back of the hall and in a clear authoritative voice demanded if the lecturer could tell him "whether King Arthur would ever really come back to his people"? I shook hands with this man afterwards; and he was even more remarkable-looking near at hand that at a distance. His name was Rhys. Doubtless he was of the blood of the Princes of South Wales. I never got his address and I never saw him again.

And I shall see the coffin of my kind and courteous friend, the translator of Cicero's *De Senectute* in the Loeb classics. It was at the State University of Arkansas at Fayetteville that I met this wise, gentle, retiring, and learned man. He was so courteous and kind to me! I went several times to this little town, in such lovely pastoral country, not so far from the unfrequented Ozark Mountains. Arkansas is one of my favourite states. The poorer people here, like those near Joplin, Missouri, and Galena, Kansas, are in a sense my *ideal Americans*. This district of this vast country — this South-western portion of the Middle-West — seems quite different from the rest. The weather is warm and relaxed here, though subject to wild typhoons and to great winds coming across Texas from the Gulf, and it is easy to pick up a casual, scanty, careless, squatter's livelihood, varied, on the border of Oklahoma, by fabulous strokes of luck, when the poorest person *strikes oil* on his scrap of land. All men are equal here, in the deepest sense of that word, all are carefree, all are worshippers of the great goddess Chance! No one in this Arcadian land feels any respect for rich men, or for thrifty men, or for great commercial magnates. Oil or zinc can be obtained by the poorest in the easiest way, and may, at the turn of a wrist, make such a person rich as Little Claus in the fairy-tale! Poor though so many people are, and ramshackle though their dwellings may be, there is a sense of easy, relaxed contentment in this district, totally different from the hard struggle "to make good" in other portions of the United States.

I am not the only Englishman who has discovered the "beauties" of Arkansas. I had not long been ensconced in a perfectly charming little hotel on the edge of the town, a place from which I could wander out into what seemed an infinitely undulating and umbrageous park stretching to the horizon, when I was called down to see a visitor. I was amazed to find in the hotel parlour a stocky, powerfully-built, ruddy-faced compatriot, looking like an ex-sea captain straight from his ship off the Bristol Channel! This friendly fellow-countryman led me to his house, situated, as it seemed, in the midst of a noble park-land, over which, to my nostalgic joy, floated an enormous Union Jack. Here his good lady prepared for our refreshment a stately fish, so admirably cooked upon a wooden platter that I was fain to put aside for that day my vegetarian principles. Have you guessed, reader, who my friend was? None other than the famous Mr. Finger, full of exciting stories of the not less famous Mr. Cunningham Graham!

But Judge Falconer was no less good to me than Mr. Finger, and I soon discovered that his admirable translation of Cicero had been originally made to comfort, in extreme old age, a near relative of his own. You can therefore imagine what I felt when on my next visit to Fayetteville, after preparing as classical a discourse on "The Art of True Culture" as I could think up in the train, I found, in the vestibule of the hall where I was to speak, nothing less than the actual coffin of my Arkansas Cicero. Dead and cold he lay; nor could the best-turned of my periods, so carefully composed to please him, reach that quiet head. Were the sad words of Catullus the only requiem for this fine scholar:

"Soles occidere et redire possunt;

Nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux,
Nox est perpetua una dormienda!"

or when I said to myself:

"I *know* — beyond all reason — that we share a life outside this whole astronomical spectacle!" was I but a false oracle over the body of this translator of *De Divinatione*"?

But my recognition *had* pleased this elderly scholar; and there were thousands of other Americans, old and young, scattered about this country to whom — and it is no vain brag — my scarecrow apparition and wild and whirling words must have been as rain to transplanted roots! For the megalopolitans might mock me as they pleased as a bastard Chautauqua-chatterer, and I did really speak once at the original Chautauqua in a great open-air tent on the "Idylls of the King" and made that touching crowd listen to, "So all day long the noise of battle rolled, among the mountains by the winter sea," and they might mock my friend Masters for thinking that there was anything to get from such a windbag, but the truth is that below all my mountebank-malice, below all my naughty passion for tearing my own repute to tatters, I always treated these audiences of grave, simple men and women *on equal terms*. I thought aloud in their presence, thus doing them the greatest courtesy that one man can do to other men! I reverenced from my heart — and they knew it and saw it — this wistful craving for real culture that these damned megalopolitans mocked at.

My Oxford gown, which was really a Cambridge gown, "got it over" with the sleek magnates who were paying for these Sops to Cerberus, and it was not till I had skipped off and was well on my road to fresh fields that these sly rogues, who thought they were turning the people away from dangerous thoughts, discovered the spiritual dynamite I had scattered!

What I really was doing for this quarter of a century was undermining the clever fashionable Herods of America and like that other John — so impervious to Salome— "preparing the way of the Lord." In other words I was holding my Ciceronian brief, up and down this land, for an essential Renaissance of Life, as against the jangling and the jargoning, and all the tricky obscurantisms, of the passing hour. I can only pray that *now* — when I have nothing but my pen wherewith to carry on the fight — I am reaching these same lost misfits, these "morons" as they are called, who like myself, but without my Legions of Devils, are being constantly oppressed. But the new President — that man after my own heart — has his eye on all this, as on much else in this land, and my belief is that the change he is occupied in bringing about is a much deeper, a much more psychic one, than most people realize. For nearly thirty years I have been praying that such a man might dominate this great country. More power to him!

It would be a gross misunderstanding of my attitude to America if any European person supposed I under-rated all the good I've got from my life over here. It infuriates me to listen to ignorant, irresponsible "summer-butterflies" traducing America! They know as little about the platonic "essences" of this extraordinary land as they do about Russia, *with which it has so much in common.*

I would like to record here and now, on the eve of my return — if the gods are propitious — to my native land, that at least one European, if an Englishman *is* a European, feels that he owes more, in the matter of his inmost spiritual growth, to America, than to all the cathedrals and all the castles, and all the writers too — except Homer and Dostoievsky — of the historic Old World.

During all this travelling I suffered at intervals, not constantly, but at pretty frequent intervals, from my accursed ulcers and from that evil acid dyspepsia which stirred them up. I never touched meat — for I was a vegetarian on principle now — but for the bulk of these fifteen travelling years I did not by any means always eat vegetables. This I think was partly for the sake of economy; for I was so extravagant in my tips to waiters and so fastidious about the hotels I went to, that I should certainly have wasted my substance *en route* if I had not been extremely parsimonious over my diet. My gastric trouble, or so I conceived, dictated this economy, while a vein of almost rustic miserliness, encouraged it; but, in addition to these motives, this simplicity in diet *suited my taste.* At one time when my ulcers were at the worst I lived entirely on "hominy," which is a species of cereal, on ice-cream, on raw eggs, and on milk. But as a rule for every meal I would have the same things, tea, dry toast, fried eggs, and guava jelly. Mr. Blake, when at the Prep. he had us in to dessert, used to give us guava jelly.

I was still very greedy over what I liked; and just as I had devoured apricot-paté bought at "Tuffins" and new, brown bread-and-butter at Wildman's, eagerly masticating these things, as a water-rat does, with my front teeth, so now I rolled against my palate three times a day what were called "individual" jars of guava jelly. If this greediness of mine makes your gorge rise, reader, I must hasten to swear to you, across my heart, that *for the last five years*, since I have lived upon milk in these New York hills, I have lost completely all trace of this furious vice. I get a faint satisfaction from taking *thin* bread-and-butter to my tea; and I enjoy the feeling of drinking milk. But that is all! If I could outgrow my other vices as I have outgrown this one, I would yet approach, before I died, that mediæval, or, if you prefer it, Tibetan ideal of life, which all my days has beckoned me and allured me.

My beautiful but critical friend Louis quarrels with me for liking America. "He *loves* it!" he cries in dismay, just as if to "love" America were enough in itself to prove a person’s degradation. Well, I must plead guilty to this charge. I must indeed pile up my guilt; for I have not only loved *America*; I have greatly, and most faithfully, and for more than twenty years, loved American *women.*

But listen, Louis; listen, you supercilious Archangel: let me give you some practical, material, physical, pragmatic reasons for this weakness of mine. In the first place it would not have been possible “to keep Burpham going,” and to give my son the education, at Sherborne and Corpus, that my great-grandfather had given my grandfather, and yet to leave a little over for my personal pleasures — such as visiting Venice in company with yourself — had I confined my services to the Extension work at home. In the second place my life in trains and hotels — though you may have once caught *that look* on my face — was a grand escape from all those worries in English social life to which — being, as you so naughtily tease me with being, such a sensitive — I was peculiarly alive. My temperament is at once so fussily, superstitiously, maniacally *altruistic,* and at the same time so fluidly and sinuously *egoistic* that my best chance for living that life of psychic-sensuousness which I have deliberately selected for myself is to flee as far as I possibly can from all human responsibilities. And not only from responsibilities — from possessions too! For I have in me a vein of unbalanced miserliness. I have in fact an almost crazy possessive instinct. How I hugged that absurd football my father gave me at the Prep.! I would have hid it *inside my ribs* if I could have saved it from desecration. How I cherished — beyond all rational proportion — my ridiculous umbrella at Wildman’s; for which I was so savagely derided by C. Minor and D. Major! How intoxicated with the lust of a landowner I was when Mr. S. lent me the money to buy that tiny freehold overlooked by the Duke of Norfolk’s bank!

And think, my dear Louis, what my freedom was during these fifteen years of travelling about America. I had no cares or responsibilities. *I had no work*; for my lectures themselves were the most pure "inspiration" that has ever flowed, *through a human reed,* from the gods "who hold broad heaven." All I had to do was to sit in Pullman cars, gaze out at the passing scenery and read romantic fiction. It was the ideal life for a sentimental servant-girl; and I have a good deal of such a girl in me.

But I have not yet touched upon the most important blessing in this nomadic life of mine. I had escaped from Englishmen altogether. I had *almost* escaped from American men; for you can believe how I avoided the smoking-rooms and smoked my own cigarettes only when they were empty. And now, in place of English and Americans, I found myself in contact with a race of human beings who are as superior to the rest of humanity, in all the qualities that I, as a philosopher, have come most to admire, as moss is superior to lichen. I refer of course to the American negro.

Slavery, with its appalling slave-ships navigated by so many sea-dogs of English birth, has at least, this worst crime of our race, resulted in the emergence of a divine and incomparable breed of men and women. The cruelty of the Southerners — and by no means only of what are called White Trash — to this noble race, I must leave to the Jesus Christ of Michael Angelo's Judgment, that Jesus whose coming these Africans themselves await with such passionate and perhaps not ineffective faith. I always think of that Christ with His hand raised to smite as being the Judge — and a Jewish one too! — before whom these cruel devils will one day have to stand. Meanwhile these Americanized Africans, the only imaginative Christians left on earth, except for a few far scattered Catholics, "go *inching along,* like the pore inch-worm, waiting for Jesus to come!"

He will come, my friends. *He will come.* I found *that* out during those fifteen years of travelling in American trains and staying in American hotels. Jesus Christ will come, King Arthur will come. And it will not be a day of rejoicing *for all.* When He said "they know not what they do," He was speaking of what such persons were doing to Himself, not to what they would soon be doing to His sheep.

Yes, the American negroes, regarded by White Trash — and not only by White Trash — as an inferior race, are in all the qualities that, as a peripatetic philosopher, I have come to admire most, one of the greatest races of the world. It certainly does make a person's heart sick to see how our superior cleverness and our superior machinery put a race of this sort so completely at our mercy. How this black race did redeem humanity for me as I moved about their adopted home! I found them on all sides. I found them while I was lecturing in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, Boston, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Buffalo, San Francisco, Milwaukee, Washington, Newark, Cincinnati, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Jersey City, Rochester, Portland, Denver, Toledo, Providence, Columbus, Louisville, St. Paul, Oakland, Atlanta, Omaha, Worcester, Birmingham, Syracuse, Richmond, New Haven, Memphis, Dallas, Dayton, Bridgeport, Hartford, Scranton, Grand Rapids, Paterson, Youngstown, Springfield, Des Moines, New Bedford, Fall River, Trenton, Nashville, Camden, Norfolk, Albany, Lowel, Wilmington, Cambridge, Reading, Yonkers, Duluth, Elizabeth, Lawrence, Utica, Waterbury, Oklahoma City, Schenectady, Fort Wayne, Evansville, St. Joseph, Knoxville, Bayonne, Peoria, Harrisburg, San Diego, Wilkes Barre, Allentown, Wichita, Troy, Hoboken, and in hundreds of little out-of-the-way places whose names escape me now; and I came to look forward to every "Diner" because of its African waiter and to every night-coach because of its African porter. The mere sound of these people's voices — musical with a music that springs from a soul at once mellow and childlike — was enough to heal all the wounds and all the outrages that owing to being such a "sensitive" and owing to having such old-fashioned ideas I was bound to suffer among the lively populations of these busy cities.

The religion of the American negro is the most poetical, and therefore the most *religious* religion to be found in the United States. Is it any wonder that I felt so drawn to this noble persecuted race, with their Roses-of-Shiraz voices, their sacred endurance, their infinite childishness, their "Numen in est" sense of the holiness of all that lives?

Every kind of religion touches me to the heart except those modernistic forms of it where ethics take the place of angels and where the First Cause takes the place of Christ. I am as susceptible to religion as I am to the beautiful limbs of women. Communism appeals to me just because it excites the religious emotion. Catholicism appeals to me for the same reason; and for the same reason do all the traditional Hebraizings of the Hebrew race.

The average American is essentially moral, *but essentially irreligious.* And I think this is largely due to his lack of poetic imagination.

Not only did I escape all human responsibility, all work, all serious contact with people, all anxiety, all care, by spending my life for fifteen years in trains; but I could afford to give my son that feeling for the gods of a particular spot, that feeling for the old customs together with the old walls, old plants, old trees, old hedges, old brooks, old spinneys, old lanes of a particular spot, that is perhaps the most important thing that a parent can give to a child. It is wicked to whirl children about the world and to lodge them in hotels and transitory hostelries. Do you know what you become when you do that? You become a *god-killer*, you sprinkle the poison-gas of your vulgar novelty-hunting on the heads of all those little gods that are children’s best guardian-angels. And you atrophy for life their power of imaginative play; you murder their power of vegetative contemplation, while at the same time you exhaust and tire out for life that precociously-developed reason which you so much admire.

Thus while I escaped from the world in railway trains, a mode of travelling for which I have a particular penchant, I enabled my son — as he watched his cat “Barney” catch moles and his clog “Whisker” catch rats — to sink his soul into those folded hills, till it hid itself like an otter by the “Old River,” till it came forth like the Thyme by the Lepers’ Path, till it hovered like a kestrel in the infinite blue air.

Of course I had, during all these long years, times when my nerves moved a peg or two in the wrong direction. I can well recall one such occasion in the Middle-West. I was in the Claypool Hotel at Indianapolis; and I can now see the leather chairs of the old writing-room there and the deep capacious inkpots on the long tables at which the unwearied drummers wrote to their buyers, their employers, and their girls. I was reading at that time a volume by Andryev, published I think by Knopf; for those were the days, in the early part of this century, when translations from the Russian, more than any other books, were influencing the unperverted taste of the American public. Sologub’s *Little Demon* and *The Breaking Point* by Artzibasheff, I particularly remember, for I depended very much upon fiction in those days and was wont to read romance after romance. I recall well how when I had exhausted these Russians and had read the Polish *Homo Sapiens* and the German *Song of Songs*, both, I fancy, published by Huebsch, there was nothing else in any of the bookshops or any of the railway-counters of the least interest. I used to wander desolately between the book tables of these shops, and never find anything I cared to read! I well recall to what profane lengths I was driven in Chicago by sheer miserable necessity.

Then, all of a sudden, came a great influx of semi-autobiographical novels out of England. *Of Human Bondage* appeared and *Sinister Street* and *Carnival*, and *Jacob Stahl*, and *Clayhanger*, and the *Stucco House* and *Fortitude*, and *The Man of Property*, and *Demetrius Road.* And very soon after this — miracle of miracles! — the yearly appearance began of one or other of Conrad’s romances. But it was the Russians more than anything else — more I think than even Mr. Mencken or Mr. Cabell — for Dreiser had a long while yet to wait for *his* mighty influence to begin its march — who really broke up the rural simplicity of American taste at the turn of the century.

The recondite art, sublime in its devoted remoteness from the vulgar, of Henry James, never seemed to reach the book-shops at all! I recollect searching steadily once, in the first decade of the present century, and this, you must remember, was *after* the publication of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Ambassadors,* through every single bookshop in the city of Baltimore, *and all in vain.* The finest quintessence of Henry James’s genius appeared, I always think, in that you might call his *middle* style, that is in the five years *before* and in the five years *after* that date; but if these volumes were not to be found in Baltimore they were hardly likely to be picked up in Omaha, or Iowa City, or Denver, or Fargo, or Needles, or Joplin, or San Antonio.

But to return to the Claypool Hotel. This was an occasion when other nerves than those in my duodenum began to twitch. On this occasion I can well recall how all the grey madness of decomposition moaning to itself as it washed to and fro and “floated the measureless float,” surged up around me and left me numb and inert. I didn’t need the spasmodic Andreyev to throw me into cold sweats, but I do remember feeling that his tale about

Judas Iscariot was not the right food for a person on the verge of some weird nervous collapse. A queer paralysis took possession of me. The air was full of nameless dread, but I could see no escape, nor could I lift a finger. I still felt this devilish quiescence, as if the life-force were draining away from my veins, when I reached Chicago, where I used always to stop at the old Stratford on Michigan Avenue.

Louis was somewhere in the city at that time, but I had not the spirit to call him up. Like an Incubus embracing a Succubus, Inert Misery and I sat cheek by jowl on the unmade bed of our room in the Hotel Stratford. Loving moments did we spend, lacing up arid unlacing our boots, flattening our hooked noses against the window, staring at the grey horizon of the lake, reading the word "Gideon" upon the cover of the Black Bible, and looking at the word "Principessa" on my ancient bag, bought long ago in Verona for ten lira, which the bell-hop with sportive tact had chosen to place close to the spitoon.

But these bad moments were very rare. And would Louis have been justified, I wonder, in taking exception to one aspect of my life in these places, which certainly did make me "love it"? I refer to the fact that not only did I escape all real contact with my fellow-creatures, except in the case of a few young ladies, whose kindness may the Mother of God reward, but whenever I did come into contact with the human race it was always as *my audience* or as *my attendants!* The fact is that though for ever in trains and hotels I was really for many years largely alone, never uttering a single word except when in the company of some kind girl, or tearing my soul to bits in my "paper-chase" lectures.

In my first American visits I always used to stay with my most hospitable American friend, Mr. Robert S. Bright, the eloquent Philadelphian lawyer. Mr. Bright is a Virginian and a strong Jeffersonian; so that I imbibed from him, at a very early date, a pretty shrewd notion of how far America had seceded from her original democracy. Later, however, I lived, along with an ideal companion of my own blood, in very tall but very tiny rooms, looking out across the grassy lawn of the First Presbyterian Church, upon the lower portion of Fifth Avenue. Then there came a time when I had no fixed abode anywhere, not even in New York, and I began to "feel," as they say, "the draught"; but this was ended when I found myself established, along with two other children of my father, in rooms looking out on the Theological College in what is called the Chelsea district of the city.

I have often lived in the district known as "Greenwich Village" but I never really — any more than Llewelyn did — shared the Bohemian life of that Latin Quarter of New York. Where I lived what really *was* a Bohemian life was in Chicago. Chicago became my headquarters for some four or five months in certain successive years; and here I had rooms alongside of my famous compatriot, Maurice Browne, and the bulk of his Little Theatre company. This was a very happy and a very exciting epoch in my life. I was constantly travelling to Kansas City and other places — Davenport, Iowa, among them — but I spent long enough in Chicago to become the only privileged outsider in this remarkable Little Theatre group. Maurice Browne became my intimate friend, and my Impressario too, for he used to trick out his Little Theatre in the Fine Art Building with consummate skill for my orations *and according to my subject*, and as he himself chose these subjects, they were sufficiently startling; and here, for the one and only time in my life, I was destined to play the Intellectual Pierrot against an appropriate *Yellow-Book* background. And I enjoyed all this. I felt, under Maurice's influence, like a gravely comic character in Wilhelm Meister! I felt as if I had become a privileged Initiate in some heavenly Alsatia, some

Thelemic Cloister of Art, where the ritualistic and symbolic elements in my performances, that had hitherto only been recognized by the devoted instinct of Nuns and Communists met with a subtle æsthetic response. I've never been more like an inspired Pantaloon, in a setting designed by Aubrey Beardsley, and a Libretto composed by Ernest Dowson, than I was then; and here, while against some background put up by Raymond Jonson I interpreted such writers as Wilde and Verlaine and Heine and Blake and Walter Pater, I danced my dance before dancers, and played my acts before actors.

How well I can now see Maurice's expressive physiognomy quivering with vibrant reciprocity as it responded to my sallies, until, like a holy stag in a mediæval tapestry when the wind shakes the arras, he would toss his Mephistophelean baton into the air and dissolve the enchantment he had called up.

But think what an oasis it was in my lecturing life — and with no shred of responsibility either, for poor Maurice had to do all the worrying — when I could sit for hours at their rehearsals in this secluded place, like a centaur drunk with berry-juice in a fairy-ring, looking, and you may believe I did not weary of these vigils, at the lithe and lissom figures of Maurice Browne's young ladies, as they practised the chorus of some unending play, perhaps of Euripides, perhaps of Yeats, perhaps of Maurice himself. How these devoted young women used to work! And how Maurice Browne, his vivid features convulsed with æsthetic passion, would skip up to the stage in a frenzy of excitement and then rush back again to his seat, where he would sit crouching, sphinx-like and glowering, with an expression like that of Kubla Khan, when, between "sunny dome" and "caves of ice," he heard the "ancestral voices."

Most of the young ladies of the Chicago Little Theatre married — for you can believe how pretty they were! — and ceased to be nymphs and fairies and Trojan women; but, as I followed their lives and the lives of others like them, it was borne in upon me that the particular and special charm of American woman — this aristocracy of America — springs from the fact that they *create themselves.* Yes, these young people choose, select, design, plan, sketch, execute, and finally clothe, in this bewitching flesh and blood of their own invention, some private and quite original idea of what it would be exciting for a girl to be.

All Maurice had to do to supply his Little Theatre with novices was to go out "into the by-ways and hedges"; in plain words into the buses and trolley-cars. All American girls are potential actresses. They can "make themselves up" for any mortal rôle on earth, from that of a Grand Duchess to that of a strolling gipsy. They actually decide upon what kind of accent and intonation they fancy will suit them best; and having decided on one that matches, let us say, their eyes and their hair, or the droop of their head, or the slenderness of their waist, or the warm depth of their bosom, they just *invent it* and then practise it till they are perfect in it. And this really is what they do with their whole character, their tastes, their tricks of manner, their ways of behaviour. All American women are, in fact, *made and not born.*

But since the essential being of women and their inmost nature cannot be altogether made over, cannot be made *not to be feminine*, a most charming and piquant situation arises, which is — or at any rate has proved to be to me — peculiarly provocative. The delicate arrest we get when women dress up like boys, a transformation that has always been singularly appealing, undergoes in this case a kind of spiritual sublimation. American women, in other words, "dress up like boys" in their souls! Thus while they carry by necessity their feminine nature about with them, the contrast between it and the brave mental bravura, the “doublet and hose” of their self-creation, has a disarming awkwardness far more appealing than any possible masquerade of ordinary women.

Women of other countries let their womanliness alone. They refuse to meddle with it. But American women are meddling with it all the time; and though they cannot, as I say, make it *not to be feminine*, they are for ever putting it into situations where its own feeling of strangeness gives it a special appeal. It is not so much that American women carry the harem with them while they play their open-air boy’s rôle, or their intellectual student rôle, though I *have* heard them accused of just that. It is much more as if they were constantly saying to their lovers:

“It’s amusing, isn’t it, what we women are like? But it’s much nicer being a woman than you guess!”

But American women were my luxury, my holiday, my rarely enjoyed oasis. As I have hinted, my real message was to the oddities and queer ones and half-mad ones with whom I was always making friends. These were my inevitable cronies, my natural camerados, my instinctive affinities among the tribes of men. The deepest emotion I have is my malice against the well-constituted as compared with the ill-constituted. Dwarfs, morons, idiots, imbeciles, hunchbacks, degenerates, perverts, paranoiacs, neurasthenics, every type of individual upon whom the world looked down, I loved, respected, admired, reverenced, *and imitated*.

I expect I still think of that well-constituted torturer, in the dormitory below ours at Wildman’s, and of his ill-constituted victim. That bully was a strong, handsome, brave fellow, “a fine, clean, up-standing youth,” his victim was weak, timid, and anything but striking in appearance; and every night we used to hear it going on. Do you think I’ll ever cease to pray that somehow, somewhere, there may be a punishment for such things? I tell you if they "know not what they do" it only makes their crime the worse.

Well, at any rate my own particular kind of pity has turned, because of long suppression, and because I have never exercised my formidable fingers on a fellow of this type, into what undoubtedly is the noblest emotion I possess, a prophetic anger against all scientists who vivisect dogs, all Southerners who lynch negroes, and all men and women who ill-use children. And I think I am a more dangerous enemy than is usually realized. As I tell you, without my *consciously* doing anything about it, there's not a bully-boy who has ever crossed my path who has not come to serious grief!

And I have a curious power too of identifying myself with those morons, these idiots, these imbeciles, these degenerates, against whose bare faces, as I used to observe in my favourite shows, the well-constituted pressed their hands; so that it may be that as I go through the world I really do possess a curious "evil eye" for those who torment these "little ones." I sometimes think that, as in Dostoievsky's case, a sublimated sadistic tendency is an organ of insight of which the oppressor may well beware! O ye cohorts of queer ones, of "half-born" and "funny" ones, ye whose secret endurances I alone know, I shall not soon forget you! There are so many of you in America; and you suffer all the worse because there are no groups, no classes, no barriers to protect you from the brutality of the normal. But if I have had ere now any occult potency in the avenging of my own wrongs may I have the same, and much more, in the avenging of yours!

It can easily be believed in my wanderings through America that I took good care to have time to go for a walk of some sort every day. Yes, I have "gone for walks" in every state in the Union except those of South Dakota, Arizona, Nevada, Wyoming, Washington and Utah! I lived for half a year in Hollywood, not I can assure you, in connection with the Movies, but because I was lecturing in Los Angeles and wanted to live in the country. The hills near Hollywood exactly suited me for walking; and I found an incredibly cheap hotel there, and an excellent little teashop. I also had tea in the famous studio, while he was directing and rehearsing "The Pilgrim," with none other than Charlie Chaplin himself.

Most eloquently did this great genius describe to me a certain ideal performance, at once profoundly humorous and profoundly tragic, that at intervals kept teasing his imagination. He was dressed, when we had this conversation, in his most characteristic make-up, and I noted how unbelievably beautiful his hands were! After I had listened to him for a while, his brother went out and came back with a tea-tray; and, except in one solitary case, I can tell you this was the only really *thin* bread-and-butter I ever had in America.

My hotels, of course, were often in the very centre of their cities, and so I was frequently pretty exhausted — for I never would take trolleys — by the time I returned from these walks. But such was my power of enjoying the most delapidated specimens of grass, or moss, or plants, or trees, or shrubs, or old walls, or vistas of roadway, or bridges over rivers, or wharf-sides, or tow-paths, or cobble-stones, or stables, or chimneys with smoke coming out of them, that I often used, after my fashion, to be really quite happy as I explored the most unpromising environs. I was, of course, laying up for myself a rich treasury of sharply cut sensuous images, fragmentary vignettes of the inanimate, essences of the past, that would grow the more rich and the more magical, the longer they lay in the sepulchre of my mind, till the time came for their resurrection.

As you can imagine I had my favourite cities, my favourite hotels, and my favourite walks. Of all the towns I visited it is, I think, Springfield, Ohio that comes back to me with the kindest aura of memory, though I went to no show there, and made love to no woman there. But I went to the cemetery by that pleasant river and made love to its dead; and I let my soul drift off, far off, till of those peaceful Ohio pastures I built an airy causeway of suggestion, across which I could call up my memories and intimations, so that the tow-paths and hazel spinneys and cattle sheds and toll-pikes of my own land mingled with white-washed houses and sun-bathed damask roses and huge red barns of these Ohio farms. It was at the Bancroft Hotel that I used to stay when I was in Springfield and I can recall every step of the road I used to follow to get out into the fields. Fargo, North Dakota, was another place where I enjoyed myself and where I was able very quickly to escape from the town.

And then how vividly I remember my long visits to the two chief college towns of Oklahoma! They treated me in both these places with peculiar consideration and I came to know extraordinarily well the cries of those plaintive birds called “kill-deer,” and the heavenly green of the rustling cotton-trees that grew along the yellow streams with their blood-red banks. Lancaster, Pennsylvania, too I shall never, never forget. I feel a curious tenderness whenever I think of the Women’s Club there, a club called “The Iris Club,” where they allowed me to lecture on Hegel and Spinoza and Schopenhauer, in spite of the fact that they were nearly all the wives and the mothers of professors in a learned College. Nor did those kind “Iris Club” women ever protest, though my lectures always went on for an hour and a half.

I often found it *impossible to stop.* That was my worst fault as a lecturer. I used to *try* to stop; and even begin my peroration; but something, some delicate nuance, some metaphysical nicety, would come sliding into my brain, and I would go whirling on again in my spiral dance, like that mad storm god in Hiawatha. There were even times when I would lecture without a pause and in a constant mounting crescendo for no less than two hours! Cagliostro as I was, it seemed beyond even my juggler's art to bowl Hegel out in the wretched sixty minutes usually allotted to lecturers.

As far as the architecture of American towns went I had a particular fondness for that in New York State. Not the faintest intimation did I have that a time would come when I should settle down for five quiet years in New York State, for I took it for granted that my destiny was to go on lecturing till I died. But I got to know Utica and Troy and Syracuse and Albany so especially well. I was calmly and quietly happy in these gracious Dutch places. I derived a sensuous satisfaction, difficult to describe, from the very unevenness, brought about no doubt by the mellowing influences of time, of the bricks in those old pavements. Mellow brick paths seemed to be perpetually leading up and down hills but always above them hung enormous branches of historic trees, looking even older than the bricks, branches that, as they rested upon that sunlit air, seemed for ever waiting for the return of their proud Van Rensaeller "Patroons," and meanwhile lying back, as those dignified old Dutchmen did, upon grave and statesman-like speculations!

I lectured many times in New Orleans and used to walk, till I was worn out, up and down those unique old streets, with their fairy-story courtyards, wrought-iron trellis work, romantic balconies, and Spanish-looking casements. I got an entrance somehow into one real Creole garden — the only really "enclosed" garden I have ever seen — and you can believe how it satisfied my craving for continuity in this dynamic land when the elegant old ladies who lived there gravely and discreetly encouraged me to "bow and scrape," as my father would have called it, before the holy images among their fantastic flower-beds, and finally confided in me that they had never, in the whole of their long lives, crossed the broad street that separates old New Orleans from the modern town. It would sound more appropriate in this chronicle of my life if I could assure you that I always left New Orleans with reluctance. But the truth is I always left it with alacrity and relief! Why was this? Well! I will tell you. To me to whom the worst devils that dwell in mortal nerves are not unknown it was enough to hear one single story of *what was possible* where the institution of slavery was unchallenged, to make me feel I were better in Kansas City, in Denver, in Des Moines, in Omaha, than in this lovely hot-house of ambiguous legends.

My roguish manager Arnold would be always announcing to me, “John, I’ve got a mean jump for you *now*!” and one of the very worst of these jaunty trips was when he acquired the habit of sending me into Canada. I forget where it was, but I can vividly recall a certain wayside junction where, from midnight till two or three, I used every week to lie stretched out on a bench. Canada and the Canadians puzzled me. I do not yet understand them. They are certainly very different from Americans. Perhaps they *are* “more English than the English.” If so, I can understand my difficulty in “getting,” as Americans say, “their number”; for what might be called *extremely English* persons have always puzzled me. I feel no hostility towards them. I don’t think I feel rebellion against them. I am only superficially afraid of them. But there it is! They remain baffling and mysterious to me.

I certainly have derived immense satisfaction from prowling round the walls of the convents in Montreal. What queer feelings of attraction, pity, dismay, I used to experience towards these harmless dedicated persons! The fact is I have a mania for nuns. It is true that I instinctively revere all priests — for I always feel a romantic and superstitious tremor of credulity in the presence of what, after all, *may* be a definite creative magnetism, evoked by the anonymous intention of generations of human faith. But towards any nun I feel an emotion that combines superstitious reverence with something else. This "something else" is not, as my clever psycho-analytical friends will at once jump to the conclusion it is, a tremor of convoluted sadism. I believe it is connected very intimately with what the ancients felt for Demeter and Persephone.

Just as the mystery of femininity is carried by most American women with a certain charming awkwardness as if they were girls, dressed up as boys, so, in the case of nuns, while they remain women in one sense, they are women who have passed through such a desperate ordeal that their nature has undergone some subtle change. No, it does not excite any-sadistic feeling in me. It excites awe and terror. I would think it my duty to exert all the influence I had to stop a daughter of mine from becoming a nun. And yet I have an odd feeling that I should very quickly, if I saw much of any nun, kneel on the ground before her, put my horny forehead against her knees, and howl like a hypnotized wolf!

And what would have been my feelings in those days, if, by some mad chance, I *had,* really and truly, sobbed my heart out at the knees of a Montreal nun! I think this woman would have become for me — I speak with all reverence — exactly as if she had been Demeter herself sitting by the wayside. I mean that here would have been a woman, a woman who *could* have borne children, but whose unborn Persephone has become instead an embodiment of the Mystery of Death. She has gone through, this woman, such a tragic ordeal, that no normal birth-pangs are anything to what she has endured.

Well! there it is. As William Blake say, "*Bless* relaxes; *Damn* braces"; and it probably would do me no harm at all to have a friend like Louis Wilkinson always hidden in the bushes when I am at the knees of Demeter. My love of truth however compels me to set this down that something desperate in both their fates, something rendered chaste by a terrifying ordeal full of what Unamuno calls “The tragic sense of life,” brings close together for me the fate of a woman who belongs to all men and the fate of one who belongs to God alone. But I am not only a devotee — though afar off — of nuns and harlots.

There is yet another class of childless woman to whom I feel unbounded reverence and attraction. I refer to those rare and sensitive Beings usually called Old Maids. I could very happily spend my days, and nights too, with an Old Maid. I understand them through and through and they understand me through and through! Old maids always confide in me and trust me; and although I do not wholly and in a literal sense tell them *everything*, I tell them much more than my friend Louis would regard as conceivable, or, if conceivable, as either “indicated” or discreet.

I am not indulging in any spasm of vanity nor am I deluded by any fixed idea of conceit, when I say that there has never been before and never will be again any self-revelation as passionate and dramatic as my lectures up and down America soon became under the encouragement of Arnold Shaw. I gave vent to all my feelings, all my prejudices, all my instincts, intuitions, clairvoyances, adorations and loathings. Optimists of every sort came in for my subtlest and most serpentine disparagements! I have myself become something of a battered Pangloss since that time; but it is a Pangloss *who has seen what he has seen*, and has only acquired in his old age the trick of “cultivating his garden.”

My intermittent stabs at the abominable wickedness of vivisection were, let us hope, not less effective for their spasmodic delivery or from the fact that I always listen politely to the talk — diplomatically adopted to laymen — that these crafty torturers indulge in about anæsthetics. In the same way I trust that my contempt for the shallowness of moralists was not rendered futile by my distrust of psychoanalytical psychiatry. My whole art of self-expression in lecturing was as a matter of fact based upon a certain kind of mental independence, an independence which I was always desperately trying to convey to others, for I regarded it — and do still regard it — as one of the most important elements in human happiness and by no means exclusive of the devotion of a scholar to the Past.

This cosmic pride of mine — you can call it "comic" if you like, but mine will be the last laugh in our altercation — implied a mental process by which I thought of my "ego," the inmost "self" within me, as independent of the accident of being born a man, or of being born a man upon this earth! To look at human life with the eyes of a stranger, as if I had suddenly been projected out of space — as indeed in a sense I had — into this particular society, was the attitude which I sought to assume as my final spiritual refuge; for this and this only could offer me a real escape from all the teasing frets and fevers, all the worrying envies and jealousies and competitions and comparisons, of the ambitions of the world.

The curious thing was that I derived renewed strength, vitality, magnetism, electric force, and even some kind of mysterious planetary energy, by giving a lecture. Instead of being vampirized by my audience, I vampirized *them.* I was always in my highest spirits after a lecture, especially after one before a *mixed audience*, for in this way I renewed my life-sap by drinking the blood, and I do not speak altogether figuratively, of older men and women as well as of young men and young women!

Just as if I had been one of Mr. Charles Fort's disconcerting cosmic visitors, what really paid me for lecturing was not the fees I shared with Arnold, but the actual *sensation* I got from it and the life-energy I imbibed from it. Such sucking up of crowd-magnetism I found to be one of the most marvellous of human restoratives. When I stopped, after lecturing for an hour and a half, or even sometimes for two hours, I felt light, airy, frivolous, gay and butterfly-like; whereas my audience were so wilted, so drooping, so exhausted, so wrung-out, that they were like people who had spent a night of the extremest form of erotic debauch! As a matter of fact I used sometimes to come to the lecture-hall absolutely exhausted. I had been, let us say, for one of my long walks into the environs of the town, hunting for those natural objects whose society I generally preferred to that of my own race, and I had probably stopped *pro tem*. the hurting of my ulcers with tea and toast and guava jelly. At such times I used to squat down on anything that was available behind the stage and proceed with deliberate Tibetan craft to make my mind a blank. This I generally had no difficulty in doing, and with my mind in this condition I could sink and sink into I know not what fathomless depths of sub-Being. Then, when the appearance of my chairman broke in on my repose, I would implore the good man to make a long speech.

But American chairmen, from my experience of twenty years, are the most laconic of all chairmen. An airy allusion to some story about a negro, an even airier allusion to a similar story about an Irishman, a list of the lecturer’s works, in the compilation of which a daughter’s book-learning had clearly been called upon, and the good man, as a general rule, made haste to hurry down from the platform. But in pleading whispers I would beg him to prolong his speech, not out of any wish to be praised, not in order that I should have time to observe the audience, though I did, I confess, sometimes glance hurriedly over it, in search of some exciting young man or young woman, not, least of all, to think about my subject, for *that* I always left till the Lord should tell me what I should say, but solely that I might go on practising, even on the platform itself, my restorative trick of sinking to the bottom of the world.

If the chairman was unselfish — and he often was — I could return from Nonentity, or from the condition of the Inanimate, in good time to stretch myself out and lick my lips like a cat at the milkman’s knock, and feel a thrill of sensual satisfaction in the presence of the great reservoir of human magnetism into which I was now going to dip my ladle!

This sounds as if, in the detachment of my misanthropy, I really was becoming a monster, a kind of were-wolf; but to counter this sinister impression you must remember that not a day passed but — as a boy-scout vows to do — I used to put myself out to try to enhance the well-being of *some* poor sentient devil. The happier I was in my erotic vice the more burdens of this sort I laid on myself. Lucky, yea! thrice lucky, were all the beggars who encountered this obsessed philanthropist, as he hurried along, far too agitated to care what he had for lunch, on his way from his hotel to the burlesque show!

I was reading Dostoievsky in these days; and with the exception of Dorothy Richardson I feel that I owe a greater debt to Constance Garnett than to any other woman writer of our time. Her translations of Dostoievsky are superb, just what I feel translations from the Russian should be; that is to say they do *not* attempt the silly and vain task of substituting *our* ways of speech for that of the extraordinary people of these books; but they allow the English words to retain, hovering about them, something that is strange and stiff and queer and *foreign*, so that, even in their English disguise, you can still smell the original Russian. I need hardly say that I regard Dostoievsky as being as much greater than *all* other novelists as Shakespeare is greater than all other dramatists. This extraordinary man’s passionate sounding of all the neurotic abysses of the human heart not only goes infinitely deeper than that of the cleverest psychiatrists of our day, but as an imaginative artist he seems to me to surpass all the rest.

Whenever I got the chance I felt it was "laid upon me" to lecture on Dostoievsky; though, of course, in doing so I had to make of my spirit a sort of desperate goose-quill wherewith to write on the bodiless air. But often, as you can guess, I would be enormously relieved when some particular audience asked to have a discourse on Tennyson, or Carlyle, or Ruskin, or Emerson! If they *let me choose* I felt it was only due to the "funny ones" in my audience to choose Dostoievsky; but I never deviated from what the audience chose, even if it were an author not as yet on my printed list. Nor must you assume that my audience *always* sat patient and passive while I played my tricks upon them! There were very often persons present who smelt the fox, or, if you like, the wolf from another planet, and became bristly and snarling. I think it has always been "one up for me," in my method of lecturing, that I managed to divide my audiences into two opposite camps, one of agitated lovers, and one of implacable enemies.

I was at Youngstown once when I was lecturing on Dostoievsky and I stirred up a fine row. Never again was I invited there.

You have already understood, I expect, that from the start I was sympathetic to the Bolsheviki? I recall lecturing at Clinton, in Massachusetts, at the very moment when the Bolsheviki were struggling for supreme power, with their cry, "The Soviets!" and I soon felt that I was dividing *that* audience into two beautifully hostile camps. This arousing of conflicting currents of psychic chemistry in my silent "reservoirs of magnetism" was never, as you may suppose, displeasing to my misanthropic guile. But I did, quite seriously, sympathize with the Bolsheviki, sympathize instinctively and honestly with them; and so, when I gratified my Jacobin instincts, by annoying instead of propitiating the "magnates," my attitude was an honest one though it did incidentally gratify my personal spleen.

But I suppose my temperament is really that of a Jacobin, a Jacobin influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau, and with not a few anarchistic leanings, rather than that of an orthodox Marxist. All the same I certainly do feel that all we artists and poets and novelists and philosophers and play-actors are crafty parasites, just as the bankers are, upon those who work with their hands, and that *only those who do work with their hands* can possibly hope to have a perfectly clear conscience in this bitter world.

But it was an exciting night, that night at Youngstown. What upset these good people was not any revolutionary attitude in me, but my obstinate persistence — even in Youngstown — in trying to be a mediæval saint! Dostoievsky that night worked like a firebrand upon all the dangerous explosive in my nature. The black flame in Dostoievsky's dead and buried eyes burst out, demonic and angelic, between the furnaces of Youngstown, and blew this poor audience sky-high.

Feeling from head to foot a curious trembling, and making little movements with my shoulders just as my father used to do, I began to tell these people that most characteristic of all his shorter tales, the one that in the French translation is entitled *L'Esprit Souterrain.* It is about a young man who with terrible eloquence changes the heart of a prostitute, and then turns wickedly upon her, only to call her back at the last when she leaves him in disgust, not however calling after her as loudly as he *could* have done. In no story of equal brevity does Dostoievsky sound so tragically the perversity at the bottom of our troubled hearts. I think it was the first time that these busy employers of foreign labour and their hard-working wives had ever had the lid taken off from the terrors of our human soul, and that this should have been done to them in a "worth-while programme" as they must have regarded this discourse of the man in the "Oxford gown," made them feel betrayed. In place of the "worth-while," behold! they were being pushed towards a cranny in the floor out of which came sulphur and brimstone!

There was a tremendous hullaballoo. The lady who was responsible for the coming to town of this wolf in sheep’s clothing burst into indignant tears. I have found in America that while you can jeer at Omnipotence with perfect impunity, it is very dangerous even so much as to make use of the word “prostitute.” One of the prominent local clergymen there, I think he was a Presbyterian, rose from his seat in the front row and austerely withdrew, not however without banging the door behind him as an aggrieved child might have done.

If I have any psychic power at all it is a power of melting God and the Devil into One person, and then of letting this person loose and making Him run amok among moralists. As I have already hinted, the protean fluidity of my nature is such that I could give myself up so completely to the author I was analysing that I *became that author*. This was agreeable to my audience when the author was Ruskin or Tennyson; but it was disagreeable when it was Swift or James Joyce.

I think myself that my best lectures were on the Tragedies of Shakespeare; for in these I could indulge to the limit my actor’s vein *and yet* be dealing with what Nietzsche calls “first and last things.” I fancy I often caught, in my emphasis upon the tragic gibberish that Shakespeare loves so well something of that emotional-sardonic rattling of the tin cans of the world’s rubbish-heap that you get in T. S. Eliot’s *Wasteland.* The truth is the lecture-platform to me was always a return to my real essential self after tiresome practical debouchings and after hypocritical encounters with acquaintances and friends. One day I hope to lecture “for love,” every Sunday, in some available barn or chapel, to which misfits and “funny ones,” persecuted by normal civilization, can make their cockle-shell pilgrimage over hill and dale.

My respectful awe in the presence of Communism is due to two quite personal things: first to my conviction that I am a parasite upon those who labour with their hands, and second to the miserable incompetence I display whenever I try to use my hands myself! Yes, the platform has been everything to me. It has been the bed of my erotic joys. It has been the battlefield of my fiercest struggles. It has been the gibbet of my execution. It has been the post of my scourging. It has been my throne. It has been my close-stool It has been my grave. It has been my resurrection. On the platform I have expressed by a whisper, by a silence, by a gesture, by a bow, by a leer, by a leap, by a skip, by the howl of a wolf, by the scream of a woman in travail, certain inspirations concerning the secrets of life that, without any vain boasting, I do not think have been expressed very often in this world.

My enemies, and those worse than enemies, my patronizing admirers, who are even now skimming this excitable work, will doubtless affix many semi-scientific labels to my aberrations, have indeed probably already rushed to their psychopathic text-books to find out what I can possibly be up to, when I refer to my power of experiencing the emotions of women and girls. But the more I soak myself in the work of Shakespeare and Dostoievsky the more I recognize that both these men have the magic power of *becoming women. That* is the point. *That* is where the intelligencies of our modern critics are so dull. They do not understand what the meaning of the word “Imagination” is.

But it was not only into women I could transform myself when the old Druidic spirit, the spirit of Taliessin of the many incarnations, took possession of me! I could become inanimate objects. I could feel myself into the lonely identity of a pier-post, of a tree-stump, of a monolith in a stone-circle; and when I did this I *looked* like this post, this stump, this stone.

My "lecturing" really was — only there were so few who heard me that had the wit to grasp such subtleties — a sort of focussing, through one single twisting, leaping, shuffling, skipping, bowing and scraping human figure, of some special comic-tragic vein in the planetary consciousness. But when I say there were few who caught the importance of what I did, these few, I am proud to say, were personalities to conjure with. Both Dreiser and Masters always recognized me for what I was. From those great men, each after his own peculiar fashion, I drank up all the glory I needed. Isadora Duncan too "got my number," even as I most assuredly got hers! Maurice Browne was like a cousin to me. We knew each other just as cousins know each other, understanding each other in many cases only too well; but always finding it a little difficult to get the exact focus about each other or to see each other in that proper and perfect proportion in which we shall both appear one day before the Judgment Seat of God.

Between Colonel C. E. S. Wood and myself there was something of the same mixture of solid affection mingled with temperamental reservations as might have existed between a touchy nephew and a formidable uncle, only in the case of this remarkable old man our relations were complicated by the fact that he was so much more in a position to help me than I was in a position to do anything for him. We were, as I have often told him, like Zarathrustra's eagle and serpent — I of course being the latter. He used to dominate me, for my good, by his formidable blue eye; and then, when I dodged and wavered and hummed-and-hawed and evaded and turned into vapour, he would suddenly say:

"John, what *is* it? What *is* the matter with you?"

But of course “the matter” simply was that I was feeling as Proteus felt when he was clutched tight, through all his transformations, by yellow-haired Menalaus. The truth is I didn’t like being influenced, no! not by the noblest and dearest. No, I have never liked being held, not even by the wisest and most affectionate of human hands. I am like the wind. I have to blow *where I list.* Perhaps this is one of my feminine characteristics. Or is it the devil in me and pure misanthropic malice? I don’t know what it is; but at a hint of being held down to *any* course of action — off I sheer, with a cry like the cry of the cuckoo.

Colonel Wood and Llewelyn between them got me to decide to try a new and a feminine manager on the Pacific Coast and to give Arnold the go-by. Maurice Browne was “on the Coast” at that time and he had authority of some sort and in connection with my new manager over an enormous theatre. I was full of eagerness to write a play for this theatre, since it was entirely in the control of my personal friends, and I did compose a tragic and rather Strindberg-like play about Chesil Beach which I entitled *Paddock Calls.* This play was actually advertised as “soon to appear” but it was never even rehearsed; and since then I have sheered away more than ever from the stage. It was not long, as you may believe, in those Pacific days, before I began to pine for Arnold Shaw. I longed to be back again on my own private “stages,” namely the familiar platforms of Cooper Union and Labour Temple. But I am anticipating; for it was war-time now and when *Poetry* accepted a poem of mine — and I herewith beg Miss Monroe’s leave to quote a little of it — it appeared among sorrowful requiems to dead soldiers. It will show you, reader, that I had not changed my imagery very much, or the instinctive bias of my supernatural cogitations, since I wrote about that Demon of Corfe Castle when I was ten years old.

“The hope I hold
The leering demon-days
Deride, and reason plays,
Snug as a raven on a gallows tree
Its ancient game with me,
Flapping its wings and lewdly gibbering
‘Life is a humorous thing!’
But on I fare, clutching ——
It is not gold,
The hope I hold.
“The hope I hold
Nature herself with glee
Derides. And destiny
With evil goblin laughter indicates
The adamantine gates,
And with a maniac-chuckle rallies me,
‘That way is closed, you see!’
But I fare on, clutching ——
It is not gold,
The hope I hold.
“O hope, whose face in madness I have kissed,
O hope, that art a mirage and a mist,
Shall I destroy thee now, and laugh thereat? ——
It is too late for that.”

Before I got away, however, from this alien Pacific, back to my more familiar Atlantic, I chanced to give, in this same monstrous theatre — and really it was of prodigious size — a morning lecture on Strindberg which turned out, totally against my wish, to be the best lecture I have ever given in my whole life. There were, I think, ten to fifteen persons present; while a couple of theatrical retainers whose echoing footsteps sounded like those of aged pew-openers in an empty cathedral creaked about in the rear of the vast enclosure.

But the mere fact that I was "up against it," the mere fact that I was reacting in my heart against "the Coast," the mere fact that I was secretly pining, in this grand foreign edifice, for the dear, delapidated "John's-a-Fizzle" circus, stirred up within me that formidable daimon which, as I have hinted to you before, *can* be reached somewhere in my nature, and which when it *is* reached has the Devil's own force. Absent-mindedly I looked at those ten devoted society women sitting alone in the stalls and at the immeasurable space above their heads, rising and rising tier above tier, gallery above gallery and I became aware, more vividly aware than I had ever been, that the secret of life consists in sharing the madness of God. By sharing the madness of God I mean the power of rousing a peculiar exultation in yourself as you confront the Inanimate, an exultation which is really a cosmic eroticism, however much the Prince of this World may deride it, for it means the finding of "the eternal feminine" in Matter itself.

But whatever effect it may have been that this vast empty theatre had upon me, I was allowed by my daimon to become Strindberg as completely as any critic has ever become any author. And for some reason it seemed to suit this resuscitated Strindberg to tower up there above those ten society women like a gigantic Loki. Perhaps he was prophesying a crack in the System of Things and the emergence, as we swept forward towards the constellation of Hercules, of new dragon-slayers as well as of new sea-serpents.

It is quaint to think how impossible it was for me actually to make friends with one of the chorus-girls in those burlesque shows. But if it had *not* been so, if I had been a little less of a helpless bookworm in such matters, how I would have liked to hear from the lips of such an one exactly what it really felt like to be gazed at as I used to gaze at these delicious beings. It is a curious thing to say, but I have a shrewd idea that such a girl would understand far better than any man — except perhaps a village idiot if he could speak — what a mysterious Grail, though I suppose I must say a *heathen* Grail, her unequalled form was, as it rested for a moment in her dancing and suffered my soul to swirl and eddy about it, like the sea-tide about a marble column.

Well, I had had many happy days with Llewelyn on the Pacific, and it was by the side of this far-off ocean that he finally gathered his forces together in a drastic decision to earn his living as a writer in New York. No one who does not know him as I know him can have the remotest notion of the nobility and unconquerable charm of Llewelyn's personality. Most of us are made up of so many conflicting and widely separated passions that we are often a distressing and displeasing spectacle as these forces obsess us. It is not only my own violent anti-narcissism that makes the contemplation of my life often so extremely disagreeable to me. It is the fact that my life *has* been, over and over again, though redeemed by its crazy draggle-tailed intensity, decidedly un-æsthetic. But Llewelyn's life has been sound throughout, clean to the kernel, like a good hazelnut. When he sways in the wind, he sways altogether! You can sharpen your teeth upon him *and no harm done.* You can taste him, and he is firm and sweet to the core. We all seem to have some maggot in the head except Llewelyn! But it looks as if the little white gentlemen in his lungs have brooked no psychic, no pathological rivals. No worm i' the bud from a spiritual or nervous ambush has been able to make its "bed of crimson joy" in the heart of this fifth son of my father.

And, what is more, he has the power to throw his genius into his life, into his least word! Theodore can do this too. I look at them both with wonder. All that I, "brother John the evil one," seem capable of is an alternate response, like a reed shaken by the wind, to obsessions by good and evil spirits. Theodore and Llewelyn seem made of solid wood, one of blackthorn, one of hawthorn, whereas I feel as if the invisible powers had squeezed all the pith out of me — the bitter elder-pith — so that they might be able to blow long eldritch calls to one another from Deep to Deep. And when they're *not* doing that — well! you have seen the weak, brittle, trampled, hedge-gap appearance of a torn elder-bough!

You must remember, that between the age of forty and of fifty-five, as I went about America, it was incumbent upon me to reconcile myself as best I might to the fact that Llewelyn stood, as a writer, as much higher than I did, with competent judges in America, as Theodore stood with competent judges in England. They were both recognized authors while I was still "John, the Talker." How well I recall the puzzled and commiserating expression upon my brother Littleton's face as we spoke of this once in those Angmering Woods at Burpham when the bluebells were out. He looked frowningly at the bluebells, frowningly at the pink campions, frowningly at the wood-orchids. He allowed a chiff-chaff to repeat its name unheeded. He let what might have been a wood-argus flutter by. "But — —" he murmured; and in that "but" were all those old study-days at school when he did my Greek verses for me at Wildman's! The truth is it had been not a little difficult for Littleton to get into his head how inferior to what Theodore and Llewelyn could show of real originality and striking style my windy "art of dithyrambic analysis" was, *when it was written down!*

It was lucky for me perhaps during those years, when Theodore and Llewelyn, the one in England and the other in America, had left me so far behind, that certain very personal considerations would have made it a monstrous thing if I had let myself suffer jealousy. One consideration was Theodore's self-laceration, which in itself, even if I hadn't been disarmed by his genius, would have nipt such feelings in the bud, and the other was that Llewelyn's personality was conveyed so completely to his writing that if you had enjoyed the one it was impossible to feel envious of the other. As Goethe puts it:

"Love alone-overcomes our jealousy of what surpasses us."

But I don't want to make myself out *too* perfect! I well remember once hearing in a town in Iowa about a very philosophical, very gentlemanly, and very learned recluse, whose favourite writer was "Powys." I wonder if Theodore and Llewelyn have the same odd sensation when they hear or see the word "Powys," and learn that it does not refer to themselves? I think members of very few writing families feel so rarely "funny feelings" in the pits of their stomachs over the successes of the other members, as we do; but on *this* occasion, not so much that Theodore was put so high, but that, as Theodore would himself say, this fellow "turned his thumbs down so low" on me, I certainly did feel something not very nice! And my informant saw quickly enough that he had aroused my interest, for he hurriedly went on:

"He says *you* are only a milk-and-water writer. It's Theodore he likes. It's Theodore who knows what life is."

I would certainly have supposed I was enough of an admirer of my brother's genius, to accept this verdict with equanimity — but not at all! Sometimes the devil loves to cause a self-respecting philosopher to hop like a flea. There were plenty of occasions when I really was able to conquer every flicker of jealousy over the recognition, in so many revered quarters, of Theodore's genius. It would have been a sorry thing if this had not been so; for hadn't I known for years the unique value of what had lain so long stored up behind those tragic grey eyes? I had not done all I might have done; I had left undone so much — we all had — in the clearing away of obstacles from his road. It had been left to a young wayfarer from Oxford to seek him out; it had been left to the Garnet family, those fearless explorers of the Terræ Incognitæ of Genius, to make straight his path. But I had responded — as who has not among those who read? — to this new and strange vibration. “All the same for that,” as Homer says, it did need no little effort on the part of my better angel to take for granted one particular triumph his gifts won over mine.

This was when I was living in Patchin Place in New York and the famous Clarence Darrow came to see me. Since Daniel Webster’s, no human skull can have appeared on this continent with such “deep scars of thunder entrenched” as this singular man’s. From very early days Darrow had supported me, just as Masters and Dreiser have done, though I have never been as intimate with him as with these others, his rivals, though not quite his contemporaries, for he is several years older, in the wonder and awe of my own generation of great Americans. On several occasions he expressed himself as willing to debate with me — he and I were both pretty deadly debaters — not so much for the interest of it, as out of his desire to give a friendly lift to my back-sliding career — but neither of us felt any strong urge to the encounter; and so in the end, like Glaucus and Diomed in the Illiad, we left the religious Trojans and the sceptical Greek to the other’s respective spears. This business of debating bulked often quite large in my life.

The only time I ever met Bertrand Russell was when he convinced a thousand and ten people, at a hall in New York, that the institution of Marriage had passed its zenith, as against the nine hundred and ninety who responded to my mediæval defence of the *raison d’être* of this “tragic tension.” It was Will Durant though with whom I really *enjoyed* debating, true and noble philosopher as he is, and I enjoyed it just as a mischievous sharp-tongued woman, free to hit at her sweet pleasure *below the belt*, would enjoy having a tussle with the much-enduring Socrates. I have spoken of my freedom from jealous bitterness in all these clashes between rival intelligencies, but I was nothing to Durant! I have never seen, and never shall see, as long as I live, such sublime patience, or an irony so unfailingly sweet-tempered.

But to return to Darrow and Patchin Place. I naturally regarded the visit of this great Lawyer for the Defence, this smouldering and inspired Devil’s Advocate, this champion of all Dogs with a Bad Name, as a high compliment, and mingled with my Boswellian respect for the man was, I have no doubt, an element of pride that I was the person thus honoured. Theodore certainly would have noted this element in the nervous agitation of his elder brother. But, after a while, not being one for what they call light conversation, Darrow asked if I wouldn’t “read him something.” I was on the point of explaining that my works were out of print and that just then I possessed none of them worthy of his notice, when — not exactly with a blush but with a certain burning sensation in my cheek-bones — I came to understand that it was not from *my* works that the great man wanted me to read. Indeed it soon appeared as I threw myself — heart-whole now — into my reading from *Mr. Weston’s Good Wine* that this savage enemy of illusions regarded both Llewelyn and me as simply not in the running with Theodore. Here too, as in Iowa, I heard those words:

“*It’s Theodore* who knows what life is!”

But on this Iowa occasion no awe for a great Advocate was there to keep my pride in its place. I expect I had been so often called by the young journalists of New York what they considered — though as a philosopher I differed from them there — as the most contemptible thing, second to a conjurer, that anyone could be, a “lecturer to ladies,” that this connoisseur’s milk-and-water struck a bruised spot in my secret pride. Anyway what must I do, in the middle of my lecture that night, but suddenly burst out, *à propos* of nothing,

“*Some* people call other people ‘milk-and-water.’ They don’t realize that this is the highest praise! The Milky Way itself spouted from the breasts of Juno; and water poured forth from the side of Jesus!”

People who think that Llewelyn has nothing but praise for my ways know little about either him or me. The most merciless criticisms I have ever had have come from Llewelyn. “You are spiritually insincere,” he told me once. The truth is that what he finds most difficult to tolerate in me is my trick of *living up* to my poetical mythology. By this I mean my way of behaving as if the imaginations of the ancient poets concealed more than mere subjective fancies.

A characteristic example of this difference between us has occurred only to-day when I open a letter from him, written from his Dorsetshire sick-bed and with his hurt eyesight, telling me of his impressions of my seaside tale as Alyse Gregory reads that book to him. My poor Magnus “havering” over the image of his beautiful Curly evidently strikes this bedridden Odysseus as beyond contempt: but he turns from this to animadvert in disgust at the way in *Glastonbury* I make my John kneel down at Stonehenge *and pray to the Stone*, uttering as he does so, the words:

“Please make Mary Crow happy.”

The use of the word “Please” in this invocation seems especially to annoy Llewelyn and he roundly lambasts my incorrigible John for it, calling him “a Prize Ninny” Now I am especially anxious to publish these strictures of Llewelyn’s, because of the totally mistaken notion, that some of his girl-friends have spread about, that he suffers from a maudlin devotion, amounting to a "complex" for his eldest brother. *He suffers from nothing of the kind.* He loves me, but, like the Lord, he chastises the most where he loves the most. At the same time I will neither yield one jot, nor abate one tittle, of this vein of "Ninny-ism."

In the first place what is the deepest, secretest purpose of my life? I can answer categorically: "To enjoy the sensations that I like enjoying, when I am most entirely and shamelessly myself." Now I *know*, not only from looking in the looking-glass when I shave, but from certain realistic photographs, that there is an unmistakable ninny-look or zany-look in my face. This look answers to what I feel, and to what I let myself feel, and to what I maliciously encourage myself to feel! *And why not?* Why should I devote myself to feeling and expressing only noble, monumental and dignified sentiments? It is natural to Llewelyn to be dignified. It is *not* natural to me. I can be formidable as the Devil at a pinch, and, as Louis deplores so sadly, a certain scoriated and long-suffering expression, resembling that of an actor playing Christ, often appears spontaneously on my countenance when I am alone. But why need I have laid upon my shifty, Protean, unfrocked hedge-priest shoulders the necessity of being dignified? You will remember how St. Paul refers to the sensuality of heathen? "It is a shame even to speak of what they do in secret." Well this, I take it, implies that certain vicious doings are not altogether dignified. But "let the galled jade wince; my withers are unwrung." Being as you know, not one for the normal rites of love, and being totally unashamed of this peculiarity, there is really hardly any aspect of my secret life that I would hesitate about revealing to the exacting Apostle.

"I too," I would tell him, "am a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee; but if I enjoy the voluptuous sensation of making a ninny of myself, *why not?*

You are not the only one, Oh great Magian, who can skip before Dionysus! Did you never read in Euripides, a psychopath like yourself, about the soothsayer, Teiresias? And Teiresias, even among the dead, was still a prophet! You tend to put your thumb down on the Church, Llewelyn, and you think as little of Dostoievsky as of St. Paul. But I swear to you, my friend, that there were elements of the Christian madness, of this "pernicious" Christian superstition thousands and thousands and thousands of years before the historic Jesus. And deep, deep among the psychopathic elements of this wild madness lie the intoxicating sweetnesses of ninny-ism and zany-ism.

A ninny I fancy is a person who feels and looks like an undignified fool, while a zany is one who carries this peculiar cult into his *behaviour* and even makes an art of it. Cannot you see that there is a deep and subtle *irony* in all this, and a perfect awareness as to how it strikes the "daughters of Saul," when I gird up my loins and dance before the Ark, like David or Dan Leno? Cannot you see it is the profoundest of all religious gestures, and far the oldest? None of your conventional Archdeacons would dare to give themselves away to this tune, and it would horrify them to see me do it, as some have been scandalized to see the priests play ball in the cathedral of Seville. What would some quiet George Herbert, even, feel if he came upon me tapping the altar-stone of Stonehenge with my head?

But on the contrary if one of those pre-historic skulls that are named from the places where they dig them up, could rise from the dead I am sure you would behold *it* joining me in my prostrations, and using without a blush as many "pleases" as it could mutter! Don't you see there is a malicious *sub-irony* in the very use of this baby-word, breathed between my horny Neanderthal pate and the hard surface of such a stone! For God's sake let these poor Archdeacons go! Nature will right herself. *She* knows that these worthy men have to earn their living as everybody else; and she knows that you and I don’t work with our hands any more than they do! Separate in your mind this wild, mad, “Christian” neurosis — which sees so deeply into certain particular secrets of life — from the transitory and conventional morals of to-day.

This ninny-ism of mine is not quite as unintelligently sentimental as it appears. As a matter of fact it is a bubble from the very abyss. It is at once an arraignment of the unsympathetic First Cause, a propitiation of the mysterious magnetic entities concealed under the mask of what we call Matter, and a malicious challenge to the parrot-like cynicism of all this pseudo-science of the modern world. It is moreover an act of the kind of “faith” which springs from a scepticism far more devastating than that of any cocksure materialism. It is the “I believe in the Incomprehensible” of the one Creed, that, in its historic continuity, links the religion of the cave-man with the religion of the philosopher. In my ninny-ism the swamp-dragon of the beginning of things protests against the shallow rationality of the hour and “swindges the scaly horrour of its foulded tail” in defence of the inexplicable. In my ninny-ism the madness of the mystics of all ages rises up, and goes “inching along like the pore inch-worm” of the Jesus-crazy negro, muttering about “still small voices” from the East and “small rain down-raining” from the West.

When you get really down to the bottom of this, Llewelyn, all that I am asking is the liberty to feel what I like to feel and to express it as best I can. Is this allowed in your pagan kingdom or is it not allowed? *Not* allowed! Very well. Where then does your kingdom differ from this kingdom of this world? In being more beautiful, you say. So be it. Yours is an æsthetic tyranny, theirs a moral one; but the sweet bitch, “Fay que ce Vouldray” — if I get the old Rabelaisian French correctly — must to kennel under both your whips! The upshot of it is — here stands Powys Major, trying to give to his fellow-men, what has been attempted so often without much success, a real honest self-portrait; and if this ninny-arch of my hurriedly sketched eyebrows displeases you, and you feel you could hit it off more to the life with a Mephistophelean down-slant, so be it.

“We know what we are; but we know not what we may be.”

Pondering so often upon their experiment in Russia, I often find myself playing with all sorts of conjectures as to how I should get on in that amazing country. Like that unfortunate man in *The Possessed*, who was persuaded to shoot himself to prove that his will was beyond the difference life and death, I should certainly be always drinking tea. There seems a tendency there, too, just now to do the very thing that for nearly thirty years I have been calling on Americans to do — to read the Classics. So maybe I should be allowed to lecture on Homer; and even if I persisted in saying “Please! Please!” to stone-circles in Novgorod and “I want! I want!” to the crescent of the moon in Kief, they would only think of me as “archaic”; not as deserving of punishment, not as a candidate for an asylum, but as one who, which indeed is the case, does more harm to himself than to anyone else by his grotesque superstitions.

You see this lecturing life of mine encouraged my tendency to live entirely in my own self-created world, a world composed of my response to books and my reactions against an energetic capitalistic society. And it made me profoundly subtle too in what I might call the art of “indirect reaction”; as for example when I would convert my malicious hatred of the commercial hurly-burly around me into a passionate eulogy of the saints and mystics of the past. This kind of thing I was always doing. Some accidental concatenation of place and people, some situation where my nerves had been outraged, would pile up the black bile within me, until, safe on my platform, I would revenge myself upon every aspect of our mismanaged human life, as if I had been in reality — what they call those curious freaks in “Barnum and Bailey” — an Ambassador from Mars.

Back again in the Eastern States, I found that certain particular audiences seemed created to respond to me by some inexplicable element in the occult conditions of the spot. Thus at Rochester, New York, I was always encouraged to have my full fling, partly by the presence there of my sagacious ally, Mr. Claude Bragdon, who from his calm hieratic plane of higher dimensional insight delighted to see me toss my bauble and rattle my bells as the court fool to Lucifer, but also, I have sometimes thought, from the “aura” left still in those regions by the spiritual magic of the Indians.

Always faithful to me, too, was my old impressario Mr. Charles Atkins, and under his auspices I had *and kept* — which was not the case with Philadelphia — an audience in Brooklyn that seemed prepared to listen to me till the day of doom. The surprising fidelity of these Brooklyn Institute people has sometimes been a puzzle to me. Finally I came to attribute it to the Germanic atmosphere there. It was a thoroughly bourgeois gathering, and, on the whole, composed of well-to-do people; but I shall always remember it as by far my best Gentile audience. I put this down to that mystical craving for “cosmic emotion” which seems so deep a thing in the German spirit.

I think I am as susceptible to the subtler emanations of race as I am to the overtones of religious tradition; and I have always found that where there was a large German element in my audience I grew less malicious, less fantastic, less wilful, finding everything in this Passing Show to be but a symbol and I myself bent resolutely to live, *im Ganzen, Guten*, *Schonen!*

It is not easy to sum up, even in as long a chapter as this, the abiding “essence” of life in America as I came to feel it; but I must say, here and now, that I have never gone back on the prophetic instinct I felt when, sitting by the side of Tom Jones in that “Kardomah Café” in Liverpool, I listened to Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes.” Such a wild, cynical, sentimental chaos! And yet, with it all, such far-drawn, infinitely wistful vibrations on the air! Further from the earth, than for us at home, was that hard, clear azure sky, brighter than with us that cruel, scorching sun, and yet, as I moved among the polyglot crowds of this strange nation, I felt always that I had escaped from something much more insidious than grey skies or drifting rain. I had escaped from the necessity of too much loving and too much hating among human personalities and human institutions.

“Melange, my own! The seen and unseen;
Mysterious Ocean, where the streams empty!”

CHAPTER ELEVEN. THE WAR

THE YEAR IN America seemed the crest of a wave of passionate idealism among young people, and of passionate selfishness among middle-aged people. The idealism showed itself principally in two ways; in liberal humanitarian propaganda, and in such an outburst of poetry as no nation had seen since the Elizabethan age in England. Upon both these lovely and gracious growths the cloven hoof of the war crushed down with exterminating violence.

Both as a lover of poetry and as a Parlour Bolshevik, I took a lively share in these spiritual uprisings. I felt in both the moral and æsthetic aspects of this new creative wave a return to the spirit of Walt Whitman. And here I was at home; for something in the poetry of Walt Whitman had satisfied the cravings of my peculiar nature in a way no other poetry had ever satisfied them. What I especially responded to in him was the pluralism of his triumphant mythology.

I must confess that the extravagance of his optimism often seemed to me a little "too thick"; but I liked the bold individualism of it, and if I could have *willed* the System of Things to fall out according to my own pluralistic and polytheistic notions I would have *willed* it to be very like the imagined universe of Walt Whitman. And suppose he *was* a real oracle — a real Incarnation of some demiurgic Son of the Morning? He *may* have been! But I confess much of his hope — that "Larger Hope" that Llewelyn always laughs at — seems to me too good to be true. But *it is what I like* — that universal host of sentient entities, all possessed of immortal souls, all struggling unconquerably with the obstacles of matter, all following, not "One God," but "after the Great Companions"!

One of his executors — I cannot now recall his name — gave me those two strongly-bound volumes of that private edition of his poetry that he sold to the English for ten dollars and that was well understood by *so many* of our poets. We English are the only race in the world that put happiness before everything else — we *un-æsthetic people!* — and Walt Whitman's gigantic sense of well-being suited us from the start. We are rooted and grounded in this cult of "happiness" in a way Americans are not. Too restless are they, too nervously tense, too buoyantly brittle, too easily worn out, and too soon ready to collapse into premature old age. It must be confessed, however, that they are more spontaneously concerned about the "other person" than we are; and their whole self-love, with its wild fumblings of telepathic antennae, is in a thousand subtle ways different from our more crafty, more deeply entrenched egoism.

This became plain to me in the extraordinary kindness I received from the Paul Jordan Smiths in California. I stayed a great deal under the hospitable roof of this learned young editor of the *Anatomy of Melancholy* and his magnanimous partner; and I certainly learned there the noble lengths to which American unselfishness, so gallant and unassuming, is able to go.

It was my old crony Maurice Browne, that scoriated dragonfly of so many spiritual Colosseums, whose own egoistic weaknesses are so like my own that I find it impossible to get any perspective on them, who introduced me to one of the most interesting Americans I know. This is Mr. James Abell, in whose lineage both the violent pioneer element of the South-West, and the easy-going aristocratic element of Virginia, meet and clash, to the fascination of a fellow-philosopher, though not invariably to the happiness of their possessor. Abell is indeed always making me think of a Conrad character; and what higher praise for picturesqueness and enigmatic attractiveness, could there be than that? His actual frame — the bony structure of his body — expresses his "psyche" more than I have ever seen a human body express a human character! He seems to be entirely devoid of the important human organ which the famous passage in Rabelais declares to be the ruler of the world! Yes, Jim Abell's stomach remains pure skeleton, while the rest of his body, even to his high, spare and drooping shoulders, is decently covered.

"The Catholic," as I still call him, whether alive in life or alive in death, would have appreciated my friend Abell; for the man's brain possesses just those rare metaphysical, psychical feelers in the cloudy borderland between religion and realism which Balzac had in a worldly sense and Unamuno in an unworldly sense, and which find their rational expression in the subtleties of St. Thomas. Abell's curiously metaphysical attitude to literature for example has been of considerable value to me in the writing of my latest novels, for he has encouraged me to rebel against that Henry James rule of "straining" the whole thing through one character's consciousness.

It is by a much older friend than Abell, however, that the name "James" has been appropriated for ever in my catalogue of bosom-cronies. It is indeed a quarter of a century ago that I first met Mr. James Henderson of Germantown, Philadelphia. I had met Mr. Robert Bright himself only a short time before; met him at the same Germantown lectures; and Germantown has come to mean something very special to me in my long American life. Aye! how well I came to know every single step of that beautiful, mellow, historic Germantown Avenue! I used often to walk all the way up to Mount Airy, where Mr. Bright's house is, from Wayne Junction

Railway Station, and I used to tell myself stories as I walked, tapping the old-fashioned bricks with my stick, stories such as I have told myself all over this vast continent, from San Rafael, Marin County, to Staten Island, New York, from San Diego, California, to Portland, Maine, from Joplin, Missouri, to Providence Rhode Island, stories about how wonderful it would be to live with my brother Llewelyn in a very small house of our own! The number of such small houses, from Canada to the Gulf, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in front of which I have paused in my walks, and tapped their railings or their doorstep with my stick, thinking of this imaginary life with Llewelyn, you would hardly believe. The truth is it has been a constant pleasure, in all my debouchings to try to think out what we really *would* feel, if we lived thus together! Such imaginings have been, I suppose, one of the most efficacious among the mental restoratives by which I have warded off the various small miseries of a prolonged nomad life; and it has been rather sad to me that only very briefly on "the Coast," and still more briefly in New York, has this mirage ever solidified into reality.

I think Germantown, where James Henderson was born, and where no doubt his father and grandfather were born before him, remains in its calmness, its peacefulness, its obscure pieties, its natural sagacities, very like James Henderson himself. Here and now as I think of "James," for as "James" all the world thinks of him — not out of familiarity but out of affectionate véneration as we think of the apostles by their "first" names — and as I call up the image of his great naked portentous skull and smouldering brown eyes and imperturbable equanimity, for never in all my twenty-eight years' acquaintance have I known James to be so much as once disturbed, after that manner which we so expressively call "being rattled," by the shocks of circumstance, and as I call up those James-like purlieus of Philadelphia, so indolent, so mellow, so sagacious, so deep, and yet so involved with concrete, circumstantial *reality,* exactly as the Hegelian "idea," according to James's own favourite philosopher Croce, is so obscurely and bafflingly involved with history — I am deliberately imitating in this serpentine sentence the style of my Hegelian — Crocean — Philadelphian "calamus-root" crony — I feel compelled to try to make clear, once for all, something of the unique beauty I have found from time to time in America.

I think I have, after my fashion, and carrying a little further those Sousa strains that I heard in the "Kardomah Café" in Liverpool, really caught something of the double-edged essence of life in the United States, its brutal cynical youthfulness, its heroic reckless unselfishness. What makes so many European visitors, if they are not themselves "healthy, wealthy and wise," that is to say pretty tough, pretty complacent, and pretty prosperous, feel such unkind and bitter feelings and express such wickedly unfair opinions about America, is the dominance of youth. Young American voices are strident, young American shoulders broad, young American flanks well-fleshed, young American legs long, and we all know how the exuberance of youth seems noisy and blustering to the unsympathetic touchiness of old age. American youth often *is* insensitive and un-subtle in addition to being idealistic and gallant and candid, and of course the impact of these noisy high spirits on our shaky nerves tends to make us bitter, prejudiced, unkind, and akin to poor old Scrooge, when thrust into the presence of such riotous well-being.

What this exuberant American youthfulness wants when it is riotously rather than exquisitely happy — what it "wishes," in fact in that significant Americanism in which "want" and "wish" are identical — are strength, health, glitter, glory, bloom, splendour and dazzle. *And why not?* After all, this is what the youth of the ancient world in its day “wished”; it is what the Borgian youth in *its* day “wished”; and the sneering trepidation of neurotic and testy Modern Europeans in its presence is nothing less than that evil *resentment,* masquerading as spirituality, upon which Nietzsche animadverts so searchingly. In the old world of to-day we make it rather a point of gentility to go about in shabby or at least in well-worn clothes. But the mediæval lads must have glittered and swaggered in glimmering-new plumes and shiny feathers, until they “won their spurs”; and sometimes even after that sobering event.

Of course I was, and am still, for all my Derbyshire rusticity and Welsh “elementalism,” as neurotic as D. H. Lawrence himself; and although I do my best, by perpetually reading Homer with a crib, to suppress the Sitwell sophistication and the Gertrude Stein eccentricity when these tendencies crop up in me, there have been moments in my life when an undiluted maliciousness and a morbid “resentment,” in the very worst sense that Nietzsche diagnosed, have made me try to be as mincingly aristocratic in my revenge “upon the hand that fed me” as the great sluices of good middle-class blood in my veins allowed.

As a matter of fact, the only person I’ve ever met, except perhaps Cousin Ralph and Cousin Warwick, whose aristocratic manner seemed to me careless and charming instead of a morbid revenge upon life, was Ford Madox Ford. I had tea with him once in Patchin Place, and although he is no reader of mine and I am no reader of his, I confess I greatly “cottoned” to his noble, stately, and altogether gallant personality. I felt a curious and quite especial sympathy for him, the kind of sympathy that a penetrating woman would feel for a royal personage in disguise, out of whose battered skull all the “nonsense” has been knocked by the buffets of fate; and I could see that Ford Madox Ford had a real "penchant" for America, just as I have had myself.

No doubt there will be times in my old age when I shall remember America with melting tenderness. But it won't be of her ice-water, or of her ice-cream, or of her sanitary plumbing, that I shall think in those days; it will be of certain indescribable Sunday mornings in Patchin Place when New York lay in deep gulfs of ethereal silence. Never have I known in all my life such a heavenly silence as that was! It was a silence that seemed as if it were being gently washed by mysterious subaqueous tides at the bottom of the world. It was a silence that made you feel as if the very pulse of the Absolute had been turned to stone. And I shall doubtless think too of certain walks I took in Arkansas and Kansas and Oklahoma and Southern Missouri, that particular south-west "Middle-West" which has long been my "Ideal America," and where I found such relaxed, reckless and fairy-story fabulousness in the people and their ways that I could not feel that I was in the heart of the "New" World. Yes I shall think of that absolute stillness, that stillness of the great white bare, world-debutante actually asleep at last; and then I shall think of how in those other regions I used to follow some nut-gatherer's trail through the brushwood and tangled undergrowth in the environs of Coffeeville, or Neosha, or Carthage, where every squatter I met looked as if he possessed some secret entrance to Aladdin's Cave but was letting it go, letting it all go, from sheer whimsicality and fairy-story improvidence!

After all, the testy Europeans who say such nasty things about America have only been over there for a few months; whereas I have been over there *for thirty years* and when I haven't been in trains or on platforms I have been walking, walking, walking, all over the continent! Sometimes I pretend to myself, that I, who have always aimed at being a "magician" beyond every other aim in life, have really learnt a few occult secrets from the spirits of the Red Indians, this most original and formidable race among all the children of men.

I still regard Longfellow's *Hiawatha* as an exciting and thrilling poem; and I differ completely from D. H. Lawrence in my choice among Indians. *My* Indians are the Red Indians of the East, not the Indians of New Mexico, or Old Mexico, or any other Mexico. It is an inconsistency in me, being the idol-worshipper that I am, but all the same when it comes to Indians I prefer heroes who worship, as my father taught me to do, a Great Spirit whose breath bloweth like the wind, to artistic tribes who worship Quetzacoatle and his feathery snake.

But as I imagine myself now wandering slowly up Germantown Avenue, with the intention of visiting my friend Robert Bright or of meeting James Henderson, I want to digress a little to tell you about my encounters with Theodore Dreiser and Edgar Lee Masters. I met Dreiser first and indeed it was owing to Dreiser that I got hold of the unpublished galley-sheets of *Spoon River* for a lecture in Guthrie's Church on modern poetry. I did my best to do justice to this great poem, the most original single volume of modern poetry that it has ever been my luck to find; and that really I must have done pretty well with it was evidenced by a man in the audience remarking that he "knew personally" *a certain cow* referred to by the poet and faithfully commented on by the poet's interpreter. I am a great worshipper of cows, and to this Spoon River cow I devoted much eloquence.

But it was some little time after this, probably in, that I first met Masters himself. This was in Chicago, where I went to see him in his law office. The poet Ridgely Torrence, whose own personality struck me as too fragile, too delicate, too highly-strung, to cope at all with the ferocious mêlée of

American life, told me how he had recently visited Mr. Masters and been taken by him for several strolls about his terrifying city. He said he noted how Mr. Masters had a "mythology" of his own, into the circle of which, as if they had been more than merely ordinary men and women, every character he had known over a certain number of years was incorporated. He also commented very ably on the peculiar genius, rare among poets, that Mr. Masters has for significant names.

It was an important moment in my life when I first set eyes on the author of *Spoon River*. I had never known, save in the case of Thomas Hardy, an original poet of first-rate philosophic weight and power, and I gazed with intense respect upon this one. I felt at once, the moment I set eyes on him in that unpoetical place, that I was in the presence not merely of a formidable genius, but of a formidable man. Never I suppose has there been seen, outside the ranks of Generals of Divisions and Admirals of Fleets, such a granite *chin* as the one above which these genial and even Thackeray-like eyes gave me through their spectacles "the once over" and summed up the resources of my spirit. But I need not have been frightened. The most striking feature of Edgar Lee's character is his unwearied glow and radiant good spirits in the presence of less than normally clever men and women. If these are sympathetic people he will treat them as if they were miracles of intelligent response, and even if they are very stupid he will still talk to them as if he were talking to Shakespeare. He is the most un-snobbish great man I ever met; for instead of changing his manner of conversation when dealing with simple people I have frequently remarked that he seems in better spirits in their company and more entirely himself with them than in the case of persons of importance. I don't mean that he is brusque or unkind to the sort of people Mr. de —— would call "magnates," but the central glow of his humanity burns less brightly in their presence — unless they happen to be women!

Towards brilliant women of the world Mr. Masters does not show the malicious distaste, mingled with panic terror, that is my own attitude. He more nearly resembles Doctor Johnson; who, as you will remember, was prepared to permit the prettiest of such butterflies to sit upon his knee. But he is more of a man's man I would say than a woman's, and in this, again, he resembles one of the great coffee-house poets of the eighteenth century in England. I can see him in his wig and buckled shoes, and with his stick and his snuff-box, seated in the Ranelagh Gardens, or on my Lord Bolingbroke's Terrace, hob-nobbing with Swift or exchanging Rabelaisian jests with Gay. And yet no one, not even Dreiser, is so profoundly American as Edgar Lee Masters. His erudition in the history of his country is both comprehensive and exact, and no one has done more to dispel the sentimental humbug which the predatory miscreants who exploit the masses over here have woven like a phosphorescent cocoon around the figure of Lincoln.

Thomas Jefferson is Mr. Master's hero; and nothing has ever pleased him more than to see the great gentleman who now occupies the White House acting as he feels Jefferson would act were he brought back to cope with our imbroglio. I have compared Masters with Chaucer; but there are passages in Master's poetry, when he speaks of the basic griefs and terrible bewilderments in the simple annuals of the poor, and of the tragic recurrences of human sorrow everywhere, with its final eternal rest for all who are weary, that are much more than Chaucerian. They have something of the consolatory dignity of his own favourite Sophocles, only tuned to the more pitiful and more humble pathos of the "Terzie Potters" of our forlorn procession.

For lack of all affectation, for treating poetry as gravely and simply as the old monks treated their art of illumination, as a thing done in the simple honour of the Lord of Life, Edgar Lee Masters will not soon find his equal. His generous and whole-hearted admiration for Vachel Lindsay has always impressed me a good deal; for Mr. Masters is a born fighter, and willing enough to fall to fisticuffs with the Devil himself, and Lindsay moreover came from his own part of the country; but never once in my long friendship with him, that goes back, as I say, to, have I ever heard him do anything but fiercely champion this mystical rival of his.

How clearly I recall my first introduction to Theodore Dreiser! It was when he lived on West th Street; where his couple of large old rooms on the ground-floor, with big open fires, receded from the front to the extreme back of the house. He was that day attired in a blue over-all smock, such as French workmen wear, and to find a desk suitable to his colossal manuscripts he had made a writing-table out of a grand piano. It was interesting to me to note how much more like Walt Whitman than like Edgar Lee Masters, Dreiser was in the matter of his feeling for clothes. Masters wants merely to pass in the crowd and to feel comfortable; otherwise *his* attitude to clothes is that of your typical scholar, un-bothered, unconscious, indifferent.

But Dreiser, ever since I first met him, which must have been in I think, struck me as a Being, as an Entity, who was as profoundly conscious of his own body, and *of what he put against his skin*, as he was conscious of the Corpus Terraqueous, and wherewithal *it* was fain to cover its cosmogonic bones. Dreiser struck me, in fact, as what you might call Matter-conscious or Chemistry-conscious, to a degree that was almost non-human. He and Masters have one thing in common, however, which strikes me as a credit to their country, I mean their lack of self-conscious “side,” as we call it in

England, in their dealings with the world. But this does not mean that, like Masters, Dreiser is unconscious of his body or unaware of every pulse in his body.

Masters, when he talks of Letters or writes of Letters, behaves as Dryden or Swift or Fielding would behave, smokes his pipe, shuffles about, has an occasional drink, and then forgets that he is anything but an active skull working a typewriter. But with Dreiser I feel as if I were dealing with a form of life in no way resembling that of your historic human scholar. In the first place he doesn't smoke, which in itself de-humanizes anyone. In the second place he is fantastic, queer, and as erratic in his diet, subject to alternations of wilful sensuousness with wilful abstemiousness, as he is over his clothes. Nothing with him follows any tradition. All is abnormal, sub-normal, super-normal. He is a German who admires Russia. He is a realist who admires Mr. Charles Fort. He is a ruler of men who is happiest with women. Yet I have heard women railing fiercely at him, cursing him as more *this* and more *that,* than anyone's dainty reserve can possibly tolerate!

My own personal feelings towards these two great Americans are curiously different. Towards Masters I feel warmth, sympathy, defensive indignation, and a certain Boswellian desire to track down, to all their imaginative beginnings, the workings of his genius. With Masters I feel like a heart warming to a heart, and like a bibliophile avariciously increasing a rich collection. I never think of Master's body or what he is wearing. It is true I look with infinite satisfaction now and again *at his chin,* thinking to myself, "these damned megalopolitans will have to skip a bit, if they are going to make this old mandarin worry!"

But with Dreiser it is totally different. I want to embrace him, to pummel him, to wrestle with him, to stroke him, to cause him some physical jolt. It gave me a wicked pleasure to see him receive the shock of that extremely chilly water with his bare skin when he once bathed in our Columbia County Grotto, whereas when Masters did this my only anxiety was lest he should catch pneumonia. I always used to tempt Dreiser to play that curious schoolboy game that I used to be so formidable at with my strong wrists and fingers when I was in the Prep. Do you know the game I refer to? You stand up opposite your opponent, entwine your fingers with *his* fingers, press the palms of your hands against the palms of *his* hands; and then, as both of you clench your hands, you each struggle to force the other down on his knees! To this bout I loved to tempt Dreiser; and we used to stagger round the room with our hands upraised and our faces getting more and more distorted and pale, till our friends intervened. But neither of us ever made the other kneel!

I used to be aware — I always am aware — of surging waves of magnetic attraction between Dreiser and myself, waves which certainly are not homosexual, for neither of us have the remotest homosexual tendency, but which seem super-chemical and due to the diffusion of some mysterious occult force through the material envelopes of our physical frames. The truth is Dreiser and I are both Magicians. We are two Lamas, who, while understanding black magic and the ways of black magicians, prefer for reasons rather to be concealed than revealed, to practise white magic. We both have morbidly active consciences. Problems of right and wrong are far more important to us both than problems of æsthetics. Of course there are endless intellectual and moral fields where he leaves me far behind, such as knowledge of economics, appreciation of music, courage in standing up to personal enemies, courage in defying brutal and stupid authorities, freedom from the vice of flattery, integrity of *speech* as well as of mind. But I think the most important item, speaking as a fellow-lama or fellow-guru, where I beat Dreiser at our spiritual “game of wrists” is my power of escaping from the world. But on the other hand since my tendency to escape from the world is very largely composed *of fear of the world* and Dreiser's tendency to stay in the world is very largely mingled with a desire to fight for "the insulted and injured" of the world, I am not in a position to take much moral unction to myself concerning this advantage.

What makes Dreiser the genius he is, and the power he is, is the deep mingling of the magnetic, the psychic, the mystic, the occult, with such tremendous realism and such terrific *practical* force, things in which I am as much of a helpless outsider, as much of a timid book-worm, as if I were really the "dear Archdeacon" that Llewelyn calls me. Certainly Dreiser is a man of strange opposites and contradictions. As I explained to an admirable author of a first-rate book on his personality and his times, for all the man's cosmic feelings and planetary feelings, and for all the vein of primordial savagery in him, he can exercise, when he is moved to do so, a tenderness not only "as subtle as a woman's," but a good deal more subtle than most women I have known.

The whole of Dreiser's nature was roused to come to my aid when in I had the operation they call *gasterenterostomy* under the miraculous hands of Dr. John Erdman. He took me himself to the Post-Graduate Hospital; and the next morning, when I had the anæsthetic, the last thing I can remember was seeing him dressed in the white overalls of a doctor, talking to the anæsthetist. He described the whole thing to me later and told me that he actually held in his hand at one moment some important portion of my guts.

All my life I shall at intervals call up the fascinating personalities of Dreiser and Masters, and bless my stars that it has been my destiny to know such men and name myself their friend. I chuckle to myself when I speak in this way, for nothing is more revealing both of the superficial "slickness" in useful publicity, and the inarticulate loneliness and reticence underlying it, of American men, that it should be a phrase you are always hearing: "Oh yes! So and so" — naming some prominent banker or promoter of companies— "*is a warm personal friend of mine.*" Well! When *I* boast, in the Red Lion at Dolgelley, of being a "warm personal friend" of the two greatest Americans of our time, may it be with my last breath!

But when you sweep aside the absence in both these men of the convoluted snobbishness of English writers, so double-charged with touchy self-consciousness, first as artists, *then* as — if that is what they are — gentlemen and scholars, Dreiser and Masters are as different from each other as two men of genius could well be. I differentiated my most intimate English friends, Bernie and "The Catholic" and Tom Jones and Louis Wilkinson and Harry Lyon by imagining their several attitudes to some strange but not necessarily pretty girl, brought suddenly into contact with them. May I be allowed to differentiate Dreiser and Masters in the same way? What Dreiser would do would be to fix a concentrated eye on this bewildered woman; and, while he hummed a mechanically tuneless tune, like a botanist examining a plant at his leisure, seek to draw out — sympathetically, you must understand, rather than unsympathetically — but yet with a kind of soul-ravishing violence, the deepest life-secrets of her essential being. Nothing that the girl might say, to this "Eye of God" fixed upon her, would pass disregarded, no affectation, no narcissism, no feminine weakness, no feminine subterfuge. All would be treated with the same intently-interested super-curiosity.

Fortunately for my imaginary lady, nothing in the world, except when a man plays the helpless baby with them, "goes down" better than this kind of passionate philosophical interest. No wonder Dreiser has been lucky! The woman in question has the wit to see — as indeed is quite literally the case — that *for the time* this formidable Being is, as we say, "wrapped up in her." Nothing exists at that moment for this mountainous personality, for his imagination, his instinct, his clutch, his intuition, his pounce, his intellect, his paws, his spirit, his infinite tenderness, his savage cannibalism, his wistful pity, his insatiable curiosity, his astonished wonder, except the inmost "little me" of this particular daughter of Eve. And, as I say, save when it's their vice to be spiritual nursing-mothers to the strong-brought-low, nothing seduces them more than this.

And now, I am going to turn my fortunate lady over to Edgar Lee Masters. What a difference! It is now, so to speak, entirely "up to" the girl herself. If I had been prompting her at these two interviews I would have told her that with Dreiser it really didn't matter what she did! She could be naughty, she could be haughty, she could be bad, she could be mad, she could be a chatterbox, she could be an alabaster box, she could be a flirt, she could be a nun, she could be a Lamia, she could be an Hypatia, she could be a blue-stocking, she could be a baggage. But prompting her with Masters I would say: "You must, above everything else, be *humorous.* Be provocative, be docile, be sweet, be intellectual, be sympathetic, but whatever you are be humorous and clairvoyantly responsive to humour." And if my lady enquired "what kind of humour"; and whether irony would do, or archness, or playfulness, or satire, I would reply: "Not only will these *not* do, but, if I know anything of Mr. Masters, they will annoy him as much as they'd annoy me! Both Mr. Masters and I want you to be sensible. We want to discover not your character, but your ideas, your opinions, your conclusions, your generalizations upon life. But at *this* point we differ a little. For I want you to remain very grave the whole time, whereas Mr. Masters wants you to be really humorous."

"But, but, but — —" my lady will stammer; and then I shall come out with the whole truth.

"If you want, my dear, as a woman, to hold the attention of Edgar Lee Masters, you had better stop reading the Bible, and read Aristophanes and Rabelais."

But I have been digressing all this time, as I stroll slowly up Germantown Avenue, of all American thoroughfares the one I know best and feel most at home in. For just as women, whether "philosophical" as I like them, or "humorous" as Masters likes them, or "anyhow" as Dreiser takes them, are at home in their house and allow their minds to wander passively and at ease in a thousand careless directions, so *I am at home* on some well-known road, letting my mind wander in all directions as I glance at each familiar doorstep, or shutter, or rail, or area, or stable, or garden, or hedge, or grass-plot, or dog-kennel, or flower-pot, or muslin curtain, or fragment of stucco-wall. Oh how indescribably happy I am walking alone along any mortal street, or road, or avenue, as long as there is a brick side-walk, instead of one of these accursed pavements!

As I write these lines now, in the attic of my little "up-state" Dutch house, listening to the murmur of the flooded Agawamuk, I begin to let my mind wander amid a thousand fantastic psychological by-paths just as I would be doing if I were really at this moment drifting up, or drifting down, the slow peaceful length of that lovely old Germantown Avenue. Yes, it was in a lecture-hall opening straight upon this American "Hammersmith Road" that I first met my life-long friend, James Henderson. James is certainly one of the inmost of that "inner circle" of mine by boasting about which I used so to annoy Harry Lyon. James is one of the profoundest and certainly without exception the subtlest of all the philosophers I know. He is more obscure than my *other* James, Mr. Abell, and, I think, less interested in religion and more interested in moral casuistry; but it is with the best of philosophers, as with the nicest of women, the deeper their inspiration goes the less you need fuss about its limitations.

Putting Dreiser and Masters aside, who of course *are* famous men, I have been singularly fortunate in having for my friends both in England and America men who have been too wise to attain publicity. But I have known what I have known about them. Personally my misanthropic malice has been of enormous help in keeping in check my childish credulity about "great men" and restraining the womanish excesses of my Boswellian hero-worship. When I was young I had a mania for reading all those little lives of "Great Men," such as the "English Men of Letters" series and the "Great Writers" series, and I used to study with feverish interest the various "histories" of English literature. These works of laudation and discrimination cluttered up my hero-worshipping mind with what nowadays people call *clichés,* of every conceivable kind, moral clichés, religious clichés, irreligious clichés, æsthetic clichés, ironical clichés, disillusion clichés, cynical clichés, psychic clichés, occult clichés, grammatical clichés, verbal clichés, and even paragraphical clichés.

But by degrees I have outgrown this innocence. I now see that it is Chance, and not merit, that decides who shall be famous at any given epoch, and I have learnt not only to discount the applause of the vulgar; but also, which is a good deal harder, the intellectual and fashionable suffrages of the damned "illuminati." I have come to recognize as a basic fact in life, as indeed a sort of spiritual law, that the subtlest intellects and the rarest imaginations, in every age, are "too proud to fight," and are consequently never heard of! I have found out that merely to *be* successful, merely to *be* known, humanity being as it is, is an invariable sign, not of superiority, but of vitality. Such "glory" among men — yes! even this posthumous "fame" about which the great, deluded, innocent poets make such a to-do —

requires for its attainment more energy than genius, more liveliness than sensitiveness, more brute force than imagination, and more *luck* than anything else!

But I have got, mixed in with my mystical cult of Tibetan sanctity, a vein of terribly corrosive *black bile* with which I take a wicked delight in levelling the great ones with the little ones. Thus, both as a white magician, insisting that all life is holy, and as a black magician, rejoicing in destruction, I am one who, as Our Lady sang in the Magnificat, "brings down the Mighty from their seats and exalts the humble and meek." But this spiritual malice in me is mingled with a capacity for deadly moral indignation. Sometimes when I am praying on the hill-top to the invisible powers to punish vivisectionists and lynchers, this wrath of God seizes me like a whirlwind and I spin round like a dervish in my emotion. It seizes upon me, this wrath, for all my "dear Archdeacon" ways, just as it seized upon some of the more savage Hebrew prophets, or upon the indignant Savonarola, whose voluble profile my own so closely resembles, as if it were an actual vibration of that far-travelling ice-cold magnetism, of which Dreiser has sometimes talked to me, altogether outside the *warm* magnetism of our planetary world.

I seriously have come to feel — from a thousand queer experiences — that I really have some uncanny power of laying a curse upon those whose evil behaviour has roused me, especially upon vivisectionists and lynchers; and it is perhaps for this very reason that as a rule I am so indulgent, so tolerant, I might almost say so fluid and de-personalized, with wicked people. I let them alone, I am humble and even obsequious with them; and then suddenly, when they least expect it, I call upon the Cloud-Gatherer and behold! the thunderbolt falls!

Dreiser has told me that in ordinary argument I resemble a *sack of feathers,* feathers that you can shoot at, or hit at, without making any impression! As a cloud of vapour these feathers yield, separate, accept the blow; and then, when the missile has pierced them, close up again, just as they were before. Dreiser himself is much more solid than I am, but I don't think he is much more human! I will retort on him for his "feathers" by saying that he is like a rumbling volcano, on the sides of which the goats and conies gambol and the cicada chirps — and then, all of a sudden — lo! brimstone and fire, and a torrent of smoking lava!

No! I think you can roundly assert that the majority of extremely successful men, such as the vulgar call "great," are successful because they want *just that* above everything else. Mistakes of course do happen, as when quiet mathematicians are suddenly hurled, like meteoric projectiles, into notoriety. But as a rule it is those with energy and will and desire to be at the top who *are* at the top! But it is a very interesting psychological problem to analyse the effect of notoriety and success upon a person of literary talent. It is generally fatal! Hardy himself told me how careful he had to be not to let his megalopolitan admirers kill his genius; how he had to stick to his "home town," as they call it in America, where such dangerous glory is mitigated by the malice of neighbourhood. But it does seem to me a sorrowful commentary on human nature how snobbish, how exclusive, how supercilious any literary clique tends to become.

And this is, I think, truer of England than anywhere else. Even that convoluted spiritualizer of his own snobbishness, that sublimater of his own social prejudices, Henry James himself, makes this sort of treachery again and again a "motif" in his stories. In France, where artistic passions run so high, I doubt if there is anything like the same danger. It really is perfectly appalling in England when you get clique-snobbishness, æsthetic-snobbishness, *and* social snobbishness all mixed together in one person! But — for I am on the brink of wronging my fellow-countrymen in my Pro-Americanism — there are free spirits still in England. For instance I cannot imagine Walter De-La-Mare — to my way of thinking by far the greatest of our poets — condescending to such social niceties. And I *know,* from the long epistolary correspondence I have recently had with him, that J. D. Beresford equals even my American friends in his heroic detachment from this teasing superciliousness. I have completely lost touch with England of late but I confess when I beguiled Mr. Orage to come to tea with me in our ramshackle alley all my terrified fancies about English snobbishness seemed to melt away. This subtle critic struck me as one, who might have been wearing a friar's cord under his discreet dress.

Well, after all this is my life and not an analysis of our national weakness, but if you have any wit, reader, you will have already detected that I am myself sensitive to an unhealthy extent to every possible form of snobbishness. But I am also *bent on acquiring merit*; and so I struggle with a kind of ferocity to annihilate my snobbishness. If this only means that I am an "inverted snob," so be it. But I have always thought that this modern stunt of calling unselfishness "only a subtler form of selfishness" is a most tiresome trick. I really do think that it isn't a vain brag when I say that by perpetually struggling, in my skimble-skamble charlatan manner, using "cribs" all the time, with my classical school-books, I keep a bone-tight clutch on the tragic-comic essentials of human life. What I mean is, and I notice exactly the same thing in Mr. Masters who is always reading the Classics, and I expect this is what Bertrand Russell is driving at when he says it's a shame to let Greek drop, that by reading these old authors, you detach yourself from the itch for crowd-prestige while you enjoy the legitimate pride of a poetical self-reverence. If I — who am the most morbid of pseudo-Christian madmen and a regular demon towards my own dignity — have learnt the unction of my pride from Homer, you may take it that there is something in what I am saying!

And I find the old classic books, especially the Iliad and the Odyssey, are not only the best defence you can have against what is vulgar and garish in the present but the best help you can have in your stoical epicureanism. What I have been solacing myself with, all these long thirty years of life in trains and hotels, are the little sensuous natural pleasures to which these old poems give such a beautiful edge and such a noble heightening. Life in an American train, where the high-backed compartments create little oases of complete isolation, lends itself to epicurean tranquillity; and to novel-reading too. As I gazed out of all those thousands and thousands of train windows I generally kept my thumb in the pages of some exciting novel. How I used to look forward to my breakfast cups of strong coffee, and how I used to enjoy shaving in the empty wash-room, while I listened to the sounds of the morning tuned to the sweet-throated voices of African porters!

It is hard to acquire such philosophy; but if one only *could* become a real obsessed sensation-lover and give ambition to the devil, what a thrilling life one would have! I have an idea that while American writers are more superficially affected by success than ours are, *spiritually* they are much less affected by it. If I am correct in this, could we not surmise that it springs from the beautiful influence of chaos as against cosmos, and of chance as against destiny? Americans feel that their success must be credited, partly to chance, which, if it wanted to, could make anyone triumphant, and partly to a desperate effort of their own which others *might* have made but didn’t. Whereas, on the contrary, the attitude of your successful Englishman is that there is something about his natural, passive, lying-back state, which, without his lifting a finger, has made fate love and admire him and select him as the recipient of honour.

Gertrude Stein tells us in her autobiography that Henry McBride after long warning her against public fame, is now prepared to allow her to enjoy this sweet poison in thimblefuls. I too, like Miss Stein, have the power of making a little glory go a long way; and like the same remarkable lady I am capable of getting a good deal more pleasure than anyone would guess from difficult and sophisticated writers. I have in my time, “honest as I am,” got lovely satisfaction from the delicate works of Sacheverell and Osbert Sitwell and I have read with pleasure, even if I have not read with understanding, Joyce’s *Work in Progress.* I like to keep, as William James did towards the Occult, an “open mind” in these matters; and though I try not to pretend, as some do, that they can follow what we know perfectly well they can’t, I do take a lively pleasure in the Sitwell wilfulness and I certainly derive authentic satisfaction from reading aloud to my friends passages from *A Work in Progress,* although the meaning of these passages remains totally obscure to me. There must be some kind of sorcery in the mere sound of these fantastical paragraphs. In this matter of “glory,” however, my own small dose — Mr. McBride’s thimbleful — tastes — I speak with all humility — different from the Canary Sack of Charlie Chaplin, the Malmsey-wine of the Sitwells, or the Pantagruelian Argot-of-paradise of Joyce.

My small sip of glory as a lecturer, or, as I liked to think of myself, as a sort of wandering troubadour of the Classics, was *in its inherent nature* of the sort that the average connoisseur of intellectual values regards with suspicion, if not with contempt. There is a scholastical, pedantical, canonical, pontifical common-room-class-room convention, that to be a lecturer to feminine persons makes you into something midway between a woman’s tailor and a woman’s riding-master! Well, I have had nearly forty years of this ambiguous occupation, since I first went down to Brighton, and so far from its having injured my character or hurt my culture I have a shrewd notion that it is the exercise upon me of all this searching feminine criticism for all these years — for *they* are the ones to bring down a person’s conceit and encourage his real originality — which has helped me to turn myself, I so fatally flexible and fluid, from seeking my level only in the form of water into seeking it in the form of the more dangerous elements of air and fire.

But no doubt the mere fact that for all these years I have been trailing this not very reputable, not very respectable, not always very decent Excelsior-Banner of an unscholastic culture, like a tattered Salvation Army flag, over this chaste, cruel and chaotic land, has winnowed every shred of priggishness out of me that was not already squeezed and pinched and twisted and jeered out of me at Wildman’s House at Sherborne.

But I certainly have met people after my own heart as I went up and down this crazy, paradoxical land. One such — for as the discerning reader must already have detected I am struggling in this chronicle, just as if I really *were* a Tibetan monk, to confine myself to masculine examples of my genius as a discoverer — one such was my friend Dr. Walter Schott. I cannot describe to you what pleasure I have taken in Dr. Schott’s society. We have been much together on the Pacific where I stayed in his house when I was terribly short of money, and once he visited me in Patchin Place on his Way back from the funeral of Anatole France. On this occasion he left in my room two curious objects, resembling stage-lanterns in a Shakespearian play, which he explained had been purchased by himself from the sextons who in the dark of a Paris evening had dug Anatole France’s grave. This visit of his synchronized with very drastic changes in my friend’s domestic affairs; but in spite of his affliction Dr. Schott was full of amazing and bewildering speculations concerning certain very extraordinary antiquities connected with the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

These speculations which were more curious than pious, he subsequently embodied in a privately printed work that will remain, for the bibliophiles of posterity, one of the curiosities of literature. But it was for himself rather than for any particular idea, though he had many and they were all original, that I loved him; and I loved him passing well. The man is a born genius. Some *achieve* genius — I think I have done so myself with a certain amount of help from women — but some are born geniuses, and of such is Dr. Schott. His father was German and his mother English; so that he could call at will upon the metaphysical naïveté of the former race, and the shrewd, eccentric, independent humour of the latter.

And what was this fantastical Platonist like, this gnomic comedian, whose favourite book was the Book of Job? Well! Dr. Schott has arched eyebrows. I have long ago discovered that of all aspects of a person’s *native* disposition — those peculiarities given us by nature — it is our eyebrows that are the most significant of our character. Dr. Schott’s eyebrows, appearing under his high sallow forehead, which itself is always surmounted by a bifurcated bush of towselled hair, are the serenely arched eyebrows of a cosmic enquirer “devoid of all guile.” The great Einstein’s comically innocent and bewildered countenance displays this same insignia of harmlessness. No banker, no financier, no lyncher, no vivisectionist, ever has arched eyebrows.

And Dr. Schott suited me down to the ground in another peculiarity. He combined scepticism of everything with credulity about everything; and I am convinced this is the true Shakespearean way wherewith to take life. Incidentally he was a first-rate dentist; and I would like to ask you, reader, why do many real philosophers become dentists? Dr. Schott is a dentist still, on Mission Street in San Francisco. Happy, yea! thrice happy are those who sit in *that* chair of philosophical novocaine.

It was not till after the War that I met my friend Reginald Hunter who succeeded me in my "top-floor front" in Patchin Place. Mr. Hunter, who as a matter of fact comes from New Zealand, is one of those Englishmen who always make me feel proud of my fellow-countrymen. Tall, lean, and so delicately fragile as to look sometimes almost *transparent,* Rex Hunter is one of those rare beings who, in the profoundest psychological sense, chooses once for all "the better path," and never thereafter — no! not for any worldly temptation — turns aside from it. In the midst of the most modern and "improved" city in the world he has cut his coat to suit his cloth to such a spiritual and practical nicety that he can live to himself and to his own humorous, and picturesque "vignettes," selected from all the insanities around him, without even so much as making the formal obeisance of "Naaman the Syrian" in the great brazen temple of Rimmon! I could not have borne to have as my successor anyone less harmonious than Reginald Hunter. And not only did he take over my rooms! Who else but this detached and whimsical spectator would have welcomed without displeasure or embarrassment the appearance of "Patrick" on his third-floor threshold?

Llewelyn's "companion" I think it was who first discovered Patrick, or I should say was first discovered by Patrick; but he and Llewelyn had only to meet once for it to be evident how they suited each other down to the ground. Patrick and I did not get on so well as Patrick and Llewelyn. He had a tendency I will not say to *bully* me, but to demand from me very often more propitiation, more patience, more "standing," as we say, "on one leg," than comes to me without a certain effort. But after all, he demanded no more of me than I am bestowing all the time on bustling persons who take much better care of themselves than ever Patrick did. He was and I pray to the Mother of God he *is*, a tall, thin, heavily-moustached Irishman, of the type formerly so familiar to me among the old Red-Coats in His Majesty's Forces, and he has certainly added to my vocabulary several expressions as fanciful and Celtic as I could desire. Besides all this, Patrick was wise in the most essential and important wisdom there is, the wisdom of adjusting your God-given peculiarities to your chance-given environment, with the least possible disturbance to both.

The "dear man," as old ladies say of Henry James, had one whimsy that I really did find trying, and that would have driven a touchy spinster — if that is what I had been instead of a frequenter of burlesque shows — out of her head. He had a way of using the big box for "kindling" which I kept outside the door, for I depended for warmth on an open fire, as a boot-cupboard and clothes-closet, as well as a larder. He was always mysterious as to where he slept at night; but it was clear that wherever it was it was not adapted for the preservation of private property; whereas my wood-box, usually half-empty, was admirably suited to this purpose. "I'll come for them to-morrow," he would always say when I threatened to dispose of this jackdaw-like collection.

Llewelyn and his "dear companion" were at once kinder and firmer to Patrick than I could be. They used to let him come into their room and sit by their fire. They even have been known to fry eggs for him. I was weaker as well as more selfish. I did make tea for him until he got into the habit of coming almost every day at tea-time. Then I rebelled. I decided that the particular way he used to rattle the door-handle, instead of knocking, would have worn out "the merit-acquiring" patience of the most spiritual of Lamas. Finally when I heard that noise I would take him out his cup of tea

— this tea that was such a heaven to me that it seemed brutal to refuse it to Patrick — and make him sit down on his clothes-closet and drink it. In tea our tastes were identical. We both liked it, as Nietzsche says *he* did, very strong and very sweet and very hot. Our philosophy of life, though not quite as identical as our taste in tea, was almost the same, and no doubt is still, if Patrick is alive, as I hope and expect he is, except that he was a practising Catholic, and I was an unpractising one.

Our mutual philosophy amounted to a vivid Nietzschean recognition of the "pathos of difference" in the world. Both of us held the view that the rock-bottom of human wisdom is to be thankful for small mercies. I never woke up without thanking my guardian angel that I had, as my daily rigmarole runs, "clean food, clean shelter, clean bedding, and tobacco or cigarettes." My attitude to these windfalls of chance is one of never-ceasing nervous recognition; and my conscience is always prodding me to write better books so as — as I heard my friend Will Durant say once— "to fit my behaviour to my fortune."

And Patrick completely shared this attitude of mine. He was constantly congratulating himself on some "let up" in weather conditions, or in the difficulties thrown in his way before he could get hold of any liquor. This restorative he always spoke of as "refreshment." Nor did Patrick ever fail any more than did my old friend Aunt Stone to meditate with complacency on the fact that "though we be all born, we bain't all dead yet." Instead of the word "death" however he always made use of the euphemism, to *cave in.*

"There were a lot of them caved in," he would say with extraordinary satisfaction, "at the hospital last night."

Another mutual friend of Llewelyn and mine in Patchin Place, though I fancy I was a good deal more intimate with him than Llewelyn was, was

Mr. Hans Kessler. Mr. Kessler is a philosopher of a very different kidney from Dr. Schott, whose encounter with him Llewelyn has so humorously described in *The Verdict of Bridlegoose.* Mr. Kessler always assumed the rôle of the sort of ferocious and savage realist who is a "holy terror," to use another of Patrick's expressions, to all affected windbags. As a matter of fact he had one of the tenderest and most affectionate hearts in the world. But his pet phrase to describe the soft-headed idealistic chatter he so held in contempt was "pretty-pretty barber-college monkey-shines"; and many a long evening have I spent in his company struggling desperately to steer clear of this opprobrium.

He was at that time in his life collecting books, and he had a very large number of every sort of historical and philosophical work piled up in his lodging. His relations with me were really quite singular and would make an absorbingly interesting psychological study. In his heart of hearts I think he shared the opinion of those cynical New Yorkers who regarded me as a pretentious ass exploiting the innocence of ladies' clubs; but he certainly did not "look forward to a Memorial Edition of my works." Indeed in a certain way he felt a protective instinct towards me and he was far too kind and tender-hearted a man to want me to find out what his real opinion of my intellectual value was. Now and then, however, he would make in my direction an alarming overture, like an unconscious hand drawn across a violin, of that executioner's "face" he was wont to assume, a terrifying grimace of condemnation without reprieve, before his lips formed the syllables "barber-college."

Hans Kessler undoubtedly has real imaginative power. His stories of his adventures were always full of striking original flights; and it was like watching a great actor to watch the fleeting expressions upon his caustic, and sometimes convulsed countenance, as he told of his experiences. But he felt it was only courteous in our rather awkward relation of a disillusioned cynic who had seen life and a lecturing idealist who admired Walter Pater, to confine the conversation to Culture. Naturally I would have greatly preferred to listen to his stories about himself, so full of picturesque touches, rather than be asked what I thought about John Stuart Mill, *his* favourite author, or about Mrs. Humphrey Ward who might easily have passed for mine. I shrewdly suspect that Mr. Kessler and I would have made a much more poignant picture, as we thus discoursed, if we could have fallen into the hands, say, of the great Gogol, than either of us in our hyperborean skulls had any idea of, for while I was propitiating a bibliophile, I was secretly admiring a traveller, and while he was propitiating a lecturer, he was secretly pitying a cake-eater.

I cannot remember whether in any of his equinoctial visits to New York, as the Literary Editor of the famous Chicago *Evening Post,* my well-loved colleague Llewelyn Jones ever met Hans Kessler. Llewelyn Jones is the only Manxman I have known, and I have discovered this; that if a Welshman wants to be defended from a formidable realist who regards his mythology as "balone" he cannot do better than appeal to a Manxman. Llewelyn Jones has the most comprehensive and the most scholarly knowledge of modern poetry of any man in America. I would never have gone on writing verse over here if it had not been for his encouragement; and I expect many another battered and way-worn troubadour would say the same. "Llewelyn Jones will settle him" would be the word, when some falsifier of poetry tried to put over a bastard coinage.

Another exponent of a culture that even Mr. Kessler could not have called "monkey-shines" had been a friend of Llewelyn when we lived together on Waverley Place and used to come faithfully to see me long after Llewelyn had gone back to Europe. This was Paul Piel, the sculptor, the inventor, and the faithful pupil of the philosopher Santayana. But it was not in any of these lights that he presented himself to me. He used to run up my stairs, two steps at a time, fresh as the morning and always *in* the morning, pass with a free, careless swing and a lightly-drummed tune, the sacred door of the poet E. E. Cummings — by which most of my visitors stole in timorous stealth, as if the Devil might burst out — and present himself before me with shining face, shining eyes, bare head, corduroy knickerbockers, black stockings, and some torrential outburst of real, noble, Goethean, Germanic Culture! I would welcome him — it would indeed have seemed natural enough if I had embraced him — and he would sit down on my creaking bed, cross his massive legs in their black stockings, and wipe his capacious forehead.

Then I would behave to him in all serious intent, exactly as Mr. Kessler, in the ambiguity of his kind heart, used to behave to me. I would ask him questions about all those cultural matters in which he was such an eloquent authority. But between Paul Piel and me all was open, all was clear, all was above-board. Paul Piel has a child-like simplicity and a natural goodness. *I* have a child-like simplicity and a natural wickedness. We suited each other as the pendulum suits the hammer in a grandfather's clock. For Llewelyn he naturally felt the more affection. Who doesn't? As a matter of fact several of our mutual friends completely stopped visiting me when Llewelyn went away. But I suspect Paul Piel must have felt that I had more use for his theories about Greek Art than Llewelyn had. Aye! but the man was eloquent!

I was often reminded of those wonderful "conversations" of Goethe, as I played a responsive Echerman to Paul Piel; for there was solid wisdom behind that goodly forehead, and some of his utterances had the kind of majestic clarity which makes the idea seem so much less subtle than it really is. He used to illustrate his theories by various engaging motions of his own sturdy and powerful frame, particularly of his thighs, in their tight corduroys, and of his calves, in their tight black stockings. I must have thickened out my æsthetic culture, more than I had done since the exciting Harry Lyon days, in these lively talks. Brought up — so to speak — among architects, to encounter a passionate theoretical sculptor was a new experience for me; and I dare say I embraced a good many of Paul Piel's ideas without realizing what I was doing.

It would be strange after all these years if I did not know New York far better than any other city in the world. But you must remember that I instinctively selected from this towering panorama certain quaint simple aspects which harmonized with my obstinately rustic and obstinately Gothic nature. I used to go to Washington Square from Patchin Place, either by way of Tenth Street, where I made a fetish — or even a totem — of a poplar-tree that grew by the pavement's edge, or by way of Eleventh Street, where I always stopped to talk to Rachel Phillips, who about the time I was being born at Shirley was being buried in this little Portuguese-Hebrew burying-ground, and to whose gentle bones I acquired by degrees a faithful and almost romantic attachment. Once in Washington Square I did my best not to be hypnotized by two famous inscriptions that are set up so high in that leafy enclosure, the one where Washington allows "The Event" to be in the hands of God; and the other where the University makes so much of the "usefulness" — utilitas, utilitatis — of education. Dodging both usefulness and the event, I would gaze with a curious fascination at a certain cock and sphinx which adorned the door-steps of one of those big red houses on the north side of the square, objects towards which Henry James himself must often have turned his ruminative head, pondering on the tragic ambiguity that underlies such patient inanimates.

My final objective in the square, however, was always the same, namely the path, just under the park-rails and opposite that inscription about “utility”, which was the least-frequent promenade in the whole enclosure. Here I used to meet one of those emblematic, and, to my mind, with its persistent search for “omens of the way,” mystical figures, messengers of the Grail you might almost call them, that all my days have at intervals crossed my path. Such was the madwoman I used to encounter by those Portslade gasworks, as I walked from Southwick to West Brighton, on my way to the first professional lectures of my life. Such was the madwoman who took me to Court House before the arrival on the scene of Mrs. Curme or of Aunt Stone. But the messenger of the Grail I used to meet in Washington Square was not mad. Nor was she an ordinary beggar. She was an Ideal Beggar. By that I mean that there hung about her that noble air of tattered distinction which you are conscious of in the Choregi of certain Greek plays. Her rags were symbolical, not a mere accompaniment of penury. They were her insignia, her scutcheon, her proud heraldic quarterings. She carried them with a certain furtive hauteur, as if they were a disguise out of which at any moment she might slip. Whenever we met, however, she fixed me with her eye as if she looked at me through her disguise.

She always walked very slowly, and, as she walked, she held in front of her a flat wooden box. I never once saw her soliciting alms. It was as if from that box she could distribute keys to the Invisible, such as the key that Mephistopheles gave to Faust when he called up Helen. Her ancient bonnet used to be gaily trimmed with artificial flowers that varied with the season, but for all that, when her lambent eyes looked at me it was like being hailed by Tisiphone, or Lachesis, or even Medusa. But I was never frightened of her. I felt that though she might be sinister in the eyes of many, she brought nothing but good luck to me. Her English was terribly broken; and it was perhaps well that this was so; for in one or two of our conversations I gathered that she really could give me a “key” from her mystic tray which would unlock — for a nice-spoken discreet gentleman — enclosed gardens that were much better left closed.

The windows of “the top-floor front” at Patchin Place looking out upon that picturesque little alley, had the boughs of an Ailanthus in front of them, that Tree of Heaven referred to by Kwang Tze, that tree so devoid of “utilitas” and yet so perfect, that tree which the great God of Rubbish-Heaps has conjured up out of the dust to be his paramour in New York.

For ten years of my American life I had no bathroom except when I was travelling. But this was natural and familiar to me. Where was the bathroom in Shirley Vicarage? Where was the bathroom in Montacute Vicarage? Where was the bathroom even in that grand villa built for us by the Mayor of Casterbridge? But I had plenty of fresh air and plenty of walking. I used to walk up and down for prolonged intervals that eastern side-walk of Washington Square, dodging the inquisitive dogs who with uplifted leg were perpetually keeping some elegant lady, fastened to them by a strap or a chain in humble and docile quiescence, while they voided their erotic if not ecstatic urine in places of attraction. I have noticed, since I have had a dog of my own, that these “places of attraction” can be artificially created by human attention. It has become necessary for me to avoid a particular stone or stump of which I may be enamoured lest, by noticing my absorption in it and thinking that it must be a “place of attraction” for me, my dog should incontinently make water against it.

Llewelyn and I made friends with a tiny specimen of the Dock genus, “*in* Dock, *out* Nettle,” under those iron rails, and it was sad for me when after Llewelyn’s departure that dock, like so many of our mutual friends, vanished away. It is a tragic thing — when considered properly — the actual destiny, in Time and Space, of a plant, of a stone, of an old glove, of a cast-off boutonnière, of a pencil, of a hairpin, of a boot-lace, of a broken walking-stick, that has played its rôle of divine interposition in some great crisis of our life and now is for ever lost.

At the entrance of Patchin Place sitting upon a crate, or leaning against the wall, was usually to be found, and I hope will long be found, the Shakespearian presence of Mr. Gilman. Mr. Gilman was a particular crony of mine; and in our time, like Ajax and Hector, we have exchanged many utensils of human use. Mr. Gilman's peculiarities and mine had much in common. We both, like the Ailanthus Tree, had a tenderness for the discarded and a predilection for limbo. We used to exchange these outcasts of the wasteland. Old chairs, old pictures, old walking-sticks were always passing between us. One beautiful hazel-stick, the root of whose handle has a curve like the snout of a rhinoceros, came from the most romantic of all the dwellers in Patchin Place, namely the Mistress of the Cat Narcissus; but I would never have got hold of it save through the mediation of Mr. Gilman.

Even in my earlier Twelfth Street days, when with a Sorcerer of my own blood I looked out on that First Presbyterian grass-plot, I used to live chiefly on milk and eggs. I would go to the old Jefferson Market — now the Women's Prison, but I hope not the Bridewell, of New York — and come away carrying a "Grade A" quart bottle, which I refused to allow the milkman to place in the usual paper-bag. I got an æsthetic and theatrical pleasure from carrying these goodly bottles, in all their cool, slippery, life-restoring bountifulness. I used to carry them past the grave of Rachel Phillips — dead before I was born — or past that small poplar-tree, that has now got a yet smaller companion, as if I could share their life-restoring qualities, but when I had mounted the staircase of our Presbyterian retreat and found myself in our minute lodgement, I forgot both the dead woman and the pavement-growing tree, in my enjoyment of this white "refreshment."

On the strength of these Jefferson Market bottles, I often walked much further than several times round the whole of Washington Square. I used to walk down Seventh Avenue, that street which Llewelyn, in his poetic sentiment for Wessex, always called "The Fosse-Way," or down Hudson Street, often nearly to its end, or sometimes I would debouch to the river front and find some little space or gap, from which it was possible to get a restricted glimpse of the river. But that river front, for all its masts and hulls and flags and funnels, was only tantalizing to me, tantalizing and terrifying, for once or twice I met most sinister people down there and I always imagined endless weird possibilities. You see I was at once a finicking fastidious coward and a romantic sentimentalist! It suited my life-illusion to see myself wandering about dangerous sailor-frequented quarters and sitting on old dock-wharf steps watching waves over which a seagull could fly, without leaving the surface of the water, straight to the White Nose; but at the same time I was as terrified of gangsters and drunken brawls as if I had been an old lady in Salisbury close.

The youthful street-gangs used to mock me sometimes, shouting out opprobrious names after me, such as "Napoleon," or "Shakespeare." Why they did this I have no idea; for I must have looked with my old green-black ulster, my torn "sneakers," my hooked nose and preposterous walking-stick, more like a deboshed Doctor Faustus than either of those formidable great men.

The truth is that the only deviation from the norm of a bank clerk or a truck driver that was recognized by the populace of New York was that of an "artist." "He's an artist," I've heard them cry of many of my companions. But these lads showed some perspicuity. I certainly was not Napoleon; but they were right not to shout “artist” after me. It is a shame there was no Dickens going about that quarter to note what a “sight” I must have looked as I would leap back like a startled horse from the sight of a dog’s turd, for for years dogs’ excrement has outraged me as much as that of my own race, or from the sight of some dead horse, a very common object in those days, or from the neighbourhood of a dangerous looking dog, or from the presence of a building that gave me the idea that they practised vivisection inside it. On these occasions I would suddenly strike my stick violently into the ground, open my mouth like the mouth of a classic mask, extend the fingers of my free hand till they stuck out like the spokes of a wheel, and stride off as if a mob of lynchers was after me.

My attitude to New York City is a microcosm of my attitude to the whole of America. I regard it, just as those strains in the “Kardomah Café” prophesied I should do, as a terrifying chaos in which by the use of a certain crafty sagacity and a few magic tricks you can build a transient nest, the nest of a “Crane of Ibycus,” under the iron girders of a steel bridge or against a blackening tree in a death-swamp. Even in these towering cities, the stark elements of the abyss heave up their heads. You peep out of an apartment house to behold a convulsed glacial rock or a distorted scoriac rock, and these inanimates leer back at you with a ghastly reciprocity of inhumanity. What Nature does have to put up with in America! But she can stand it; for nowhere else is she herself more *in extremis.* What is called an “amusement park” is one of the most terrifying things in this country; but this artificial Empusa-Monster is generally placed where primeval rocks or vast desolate sea-beaches are capable of putting it into its place as our European scenery would be puzzled to do. It is a wonder to see so many smart, brisk “apartments” each surrounded by its own cinders and ashes and every kind of litter, and yet confronted by Nature in her most awe-inspiring mood.

But after all I really do *know* New York better than I know any other city. Have I not had it as my headquarters for thirty years? Have I not come to feel for it that curious use-and-wont feeling, which is not the same as affection or admiration, but at the same time has a kind of cautious familiarity, a sort of reserved friendliness, which is very far removed from hatred? But if Americans with all their heroic simplicity, are sometimes devilishly cruel to eccentric and neurotic persons, and, in sudden spasms, fiendishly cruel to negroes, they do not confine such violence to these alien types. They turn on themselves! They especially turn on those mouthpieces of themselves, their own American men of genius.

America is the land of experiment, of novelty, and above all of youth, with its own especial kind of savage novelty-passion. America is a paradise for young women, a purgatory for old men — who indeed if they are to survive at all must be very tough and not very sensitive — and an inferno for imaginative American writers.

Expatriated Englishmen — and there are several of us here; some, like myself, with the recognized status of Resident Aliens — get on better than American writers of imagination. The mere fact that we *are* Englishmen helps us a lot; for though Americans have a contempt for “Wops” and “Dagos” of Mediterranean blood, they have an uneasy and sometimes rather a pathetic respect for Englishmen. When I think for instance, how much better I have been treated for these last thirty years than such native geniuses as Masters and Lindsay, the latchet of whose shoes, as a poet anyway, I am unworthy to unloose, it does fill me with anger against this youth-ridden, youth-fooled, youth-besotted nation.

We English, I confess, err in the other direction. Our island is a sort of earthly paradise for old men. In England we wait till the reassuring tokens of dotage begin to appear, and then with pious ardour we do more than justice to a genius that is waning. But if Masters or Vachel Lindsay had been Englishmen, their position — when they outgrew their youth — would have been assured, and would have increased in honour as their vitality abated. With us Masters would have been Poet Laureate — he certainly *ought* to be Poet Laureate of America — while Lindsay would at least have been Sir Vachel. But it was just the same in the earlier time. It was with us, on the other side, that Walt Whitman, except for Emerson's brave word, got his first deep recognition; and the contemporary neglect of Melville's *Moby Dick* was as deep a disgrace to the perception of Americans as was the way they treated Poe.

Clever young men and daring young women are the honeysuckle rascals adored by the American public; and by God! these sweet rogues know how to make hay while the sun shines, in the Hollywood clover-fields!

Dreiser is a special case in this connection. Dreiser is one of those formidable Men of Destiny who seem able to tap some planetary reservoir of cosmic magnetism which renders it of secondary importance to them what branch of mortal activity they engage in. For once in human history the exploiters of genius have met their match in Dreiser. He can give as good as he takes, and a little more. But Dreiser is a much more remarkable being than you would get any idea of from his books. Without exception he is the most astounding personality it has been my lot — or *will* be my lot — to encounter in this mortal pilgrimage. I regard Maxim Gorki as the greatest writer now alive in the world; but I am convinced that, if they were put face to face, the personality of the atonishing American would overpower even this mighty Russian.

I would not like you to think, wise reader, that these thirty years of American travelling have been all honey for “Mr. Powg,” as a New York firm used obstinately to name me, or for “Mr. Cow-Pat,” as I was once called in the South, when I dare say they smelled out that I was a “nigger-lover.” I will not say the thought, but most certainly the image, of suicide, rose up twice before me. The first time this occurred was on that confounded “Coast,” as they call it; and its outward sign was a rigid paralysed staring over the side of a ferry-boat. The second time was in New York City, where its outward sign was a much briefer concentration upon those grim shining rails inside the Seventh Avenue Subway. You needn’t think, either, that Comrade Fear, that Gorgonian hoverer over the background of my life, took himself off, because my other and more normal miseries made Pacific waves and New York rails want to have a word with me!

What this devilish Proteus, thus persecuting his poor brother-Proteus, would like me to do now would be to enumerate for you, well-balanced reader, every one of his metamorphoses. Nothing shall induce me to do so! Even such an autobiographist as I am cannot tell *all.* One little neglible trifling mask that he assumed however I would like to report; and this was my perfect terror of falling out of a high window. It was my crazy custom — when I could not get a room at least in the second or third storey of one of those monstrous hotels — to surround the window with all the furniture in the room before I went to bed. I made booby-traps in fact for myself *between my bed and the window* with as much serious thought as when I made pits in the potato-garden at Rothesay House for old Mr. Curme. And often, when I came home to the third-floor-front in Patchin Place, after having been as I thdught contemptuously outraged— “rudely strumpeted” you might almost say, using the word for the spiritual ravishing of some as yet virginal level of my soul — by something or someone, I would mutter to myself aloud, repeating the words like a protective talisman, and oh! with what seething venom of indescribable maliciousness, some of those magical and yet in a sense *mincing* lines — and that *is* where the revenge lay — always so dear to me, from “Thyrsis” or the “Scholar Gipsy.” Oh, the “miching mallecho” of calling up those “Cumnor Cowslips,” those “jasmin-muffled lattices,” those “white-blossomed thorn-trees,” those “bluebells trembling by the forest-ways,” as I made my cringing way from iron post to iron post under the resounding Sixth Avenue “El”!

The truth is that I have inherited from my Welsh ancestors a peculiar power — with something almost Jewish in it — of gathering, intellectually and imaginatively, all the beautiful *essences* of the country I am living in, while at the same time, rising up from the pit of my stomach, my “Emanation,” as William Blake would say, weeps for Zion as it tries to sing the Lord’s Song in a strange land.

At one epoch in my New York life Public Opinion, that wantonest of despots, decreed that on a particular day straw hats *must* be worn and on another date *must* be discarded. This led, as you can imagine, to a good deal of horse-play in the streets, and was an example of a certain crude alliance, which I have noticed cropping up now and again in America, between big business and the mob, a thing that always struck me as a peculiarly barbarous and dangerous sign, an alliance in fact between the noisy enemies and the insidious enemies of the dignity and decency of life.

Mr. Roosevelt has worked genuine psychic magic in getting rid of certain shocking phenomena in this country which are the direct result of climatic and geographical conditions. I find it difficult to imagine for instance a renewal of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, activities which carried with them that peculiar ghastliness, that sort of *phantasmagoric* horror which is a unique accompaniment of physical brutality in America. This peculiar horror, which is really, to the imaginative nature, about the most repulsive phenomenon that the mind can conceive, found only one of its cruder manifestations in the Ku Klux Klan. I have noted it in a thousand directions, directions in which I fear, even a good president cannot quite clear the air! It comes, I believe, from the dominance of the big city over the country, and the triumph of youth over age. Average youth does not feel the appallingness of the particular horror I am talking about, the congenital American horror. But it is absurd to say there are no youthful Americans who feel it. I expect those who feel it the most simply go mad, and that those who feel it next most commit suicide, and that those who feel it with only a moderate degree of desperation "do," as we used to say at the Prep. a "bunk"; in plainer words bugger off for Europe, as Henry James did!

For it is very hard to escape *the American horror*; and quite impossible, I suppose, to explain to those who don't see what it is that the victims of it see. The horror can be very big. But it can also be very small. Most things of this sort can be detected by their smell; and I think this particular horror is usually found — like the inside of an American coffin after the embalming process has run its course — to smell of a mixture of desolate varnish and unspeakable decomposition. The curious thing about it is that it is a horror that can only be felt by imaginative people. It is more than a mere negation of all that is mellow, lovely, harmonious, peaceful, organic, satisfying. It is not a negation at all! It is a terrifying positive. I think at its heart lies a sort of lemur-like violence of gruesome vulgarity. It certainly loves to dance a sort of "danse macabre" of frantic self-assertion. It has something that is antagonistic to the very essence of what the old cultures have been training us to for ten thousand years.

But it is, mark you, a thing of opposite extremes. *Litter* — litter for its own sake — plays a large part in it; but so also does a certain terrifying kind of soulless cleanliness! I think inanity, futility, and a certain ghastly "gimcrackism," are elements in it too. I think what is so especially shocking about it is that it is so palpable and yet so phantasmal. It is like a monstrous Guy Fawkes mask, appearing at a séance, with no human head inside it!

What are called "the Residential Sections" of the big cities reek and stink of this terrifying Presence. But you can find it too, as I have hinted, on any amusement beach, or in any amusement park. It has a wraith-like quality, it has a death-like quality, it has about it some queer ultimate desolation of emptiness, but with all this, and here lies the paradox of its shuddering horribleness, it is brand-new, spick-and-span, and strident. It is as if some hollow phantom from the last stages of human dissolution came miming and mowing up to us with a shrill concertina in its hands! It is indeed a composite Mon strum Horrendum.

Take the peculiar element in the work of Joyce that strikes our fastidious English gentility as "caddish." I don't mean the merely shocking. I mean something much more disturbing and disconcerting, something that carries a "hard-boiled" eye and a "treat-'em-rough" skin down to the very bottom of the pond. Take all this and add to it the most vividly realized spiritual desolation of T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland* and then add to *that* the tough, callous and brutal *veneer*, shiny surface over stale perspiration, of a rich "Summer Resort," and you will get *some* idea of the atmosphere I am trying to indicate, wherein all that is standardized and dispiriting groans with a rocker, flaps with an awning, sways with rusty-dusty evergreens, and gapes with a million empty garages! But, even then, you will not get all that this atmosphere means. For none of these desolations, as I pile up their physical unpleasantness, can convey a tithe of the mysterious *meaninglessness,* the absence of all that in human life is reassuring, satisfying, symbolic, that this thing presents.

I don’t think that you feel “the American Horror” nearly as much among the poor as you do among the rich. I don’t think you feel it at all in the real slums, though Heaven knows these places are bad enough! I *have* felt it faintly, now and again, in quarters of comfortable wage-earning people; but never anywhere as when it rushes over you, sterilizing, blighting, paralysing in these unspeakable “Residential Sections.”

But to come to the War. I was in England, indeed I was at Montacute, when War was declared. I can remember hearing the trampling of the horses’ feet of the local Yeomanry in the early dawn, as they passed down the road between the “Allotments” and the Vicarage hedge, and I had to be driven by Mr. Montacute, once the Squire’s coachman and at that time living independently in the village, as I believe he still does, through Yeovil, and up Babylon Hill to Sherborne, where, from the Prep. I was to take my son home to Sussex. Never shall I forget my conversation with Mr. Montacute as we walked by his horse’s head side by side up Babylon Hill. This kind-hearted heraldic supporter of Squire and Parson in turn spoke with courteous tact of other matters than the War as we mounted that strangely-named hill, for he knew as well as I knew with what that summer air was charged, as the preparations for the gala-day of the village gathered and gathered upon our house.

But later, that fatal summer, none other than “The Catholic” came to stay with us at the Vicarage, thus bringing it about that these two formidable spiritual influences in my life, he and my father, actually encountered each other in the flesh. It was while sitting with “The Catholic” in various neighbouring pubs, for although he hesitated not to enter the King’s Arms and the Phelip’s Arms in our own village I feared the wrath of my father far too much to go with him there, that fragments of that curious rumour used to reach us about the enormous Russian Army passing surreptitiously through England! The villages in our part of the country were in fact stirring with the maddest stories of Russian coins and scraps of Russian clothing left behind in the carriages of our familiar Great Western Railway.

But this book is only a history of humanity in so far as the confession of any one human soul *must* be that, and I hasten to return to my own experiences during these years. I crossed the Atlantic as usual during and; but it was at this epoch that Arnold Shaw suddenly decided, "overnight," as they say, *to become a Publisher.* This decision was a momentous one for me; for just as my father always took precautions to preserve his personal self-respect and dignity from the rough-and-tumble of the world so it was essential for me to have an intimate friend like Arnold, a brother-in-arms, who shared my anti-social manias, but yet was not handicapped by them, to stand between me and the blood-and-iron mêlée. My cowardice in regard to ordinary matters of business is simply incredible. To stand up to anyone, to assert myself, in a business affair with anyone, means with me a greater moral effort than it would take to give five lectures in one day!

It is for this reason that I regarded it as nothing less than providential when Arnold one night, after a happy supper at "Halloran's," decided to be a publisher. This bold departure in the Powys-Shaw Vaudeville was eagerly embraced by its chief clown. I was just about forty years old; I had been lecturing in America since; I had not yet taken sanctuary in those rooms near the First Presbyterian church, that I subsequently sub-letted to Padraic Collum. I had only glanced into Patchin Place, where, they told me, though not exactly with bated breath and whispering humbleness, still survived the airy perch upon which the first butterfly-flight of Ezra Pound had rested its gauzy wing.

But the War, though I still went about my business, did have on me two very drastic psychological effects. It started me off at a break-neck pace writing books, for you must remember that before I turned forty the only things I had ever printed were those two little booklets of copy-cat verse that Cousin Ralph published in London. And it caused me to make a vow to give up all erotic pleasure — cerebral, voyeurish, or such as burlesque shows excited — until the War was over. This ascetic resolution did not occur at the very beginning of the War. Indeed I recall very well how once, when pacing up and down my favourite tow-path by the Arun at Burpham, I cursed the War from the bottom of my vice, because it separated me so indefinitely from those wicked French books! But back in America, and the whole business of war growing worse, this sacrifice of my vice became Powys Major's most serious offering on the slaughter-stone; the vow, namely, that I would abide as chaste as ice till the thing was over!

This turned out in a double way a greater sacrifice than I calculated on, for not only did the War make all the sylphs I knew reckless and adventurous, but it made so many new opportunities for the "Sweets of Sin." Balzac always maintained that the refraining from amorous pleasure was a great incentive to literary creation; and I expect we do make much more out of our suppressions than out of our fulfilments; but of course the real reason for my becoming an author was simply that Arnold had become a publisher.

It was in, if I remember right, that with my West Twelfth Street companion I stayed in Vermont for late spring and summer, instead of going home. I felt obscurely uneasy in my mind while I was thus running away from the defence of my country; but I was considerably consoled by the fact that this was the first spring and summer I had ever spent in New England. I was indeed thrilled to make the acquaintance of Adder's Tongue, Mountain Laurel, Blood-Roots, Triliums, Spring Beauties and Arbutus.

My personal attitude to the War was a very simple and a very natural one. Perhaps it was somewhat of a feminine one too and *therefore* singularly close to Nature; though I certainly did not experience any of those ambiguous feminine emotions which seemed to delight in sending off handsome young men to the battlefield. I read Romain Rolland's *Above the Battle* and I read Russell's *Why Men Fight*; but these books had no more real effect upon me than had my habitual quotation in my lecture on Milton, from the passage in *Comus* beginning "So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity," when I had just been to a burlesque show.

With my vivid consciousness of the horror of what physical anguish could mean, with my morbidly imaginative nerves, with my mediæval conscience, I regarded the War as one single great cock-pit of suffering, to enter which was brave and noble, and to dodge which was base and ignoble. In the depths of my heart this was the view I took. All who went to the Front, or made desperate efforts to go to the Front were heroic. All who did not make desperate efforts to go to the Front were unheroic. I did not enter into the question of the absurdity and the wickedness of this War in particular, and of all war in general, for this seemed only too evident; nor did I really, at the very bottom of my heart, regard anyone responsible except the leaders of the people, and these leaders struck me as not so very different from the rest of humanity! My knife-like, masculine-feminine intelligence cut clean down through all these moral, political and rational arguments to two great prongs of the Devil's pitchfork. All war was crazy. This war, however, was not only crazy but mean and revolting, considering that it was made by cool-headed old men and cool-headed middle-aged men for the torment of hot-headed young men.

But the thing was in full blast. The young men were straining at the leash. And the mothers of men were already paying the piper. The nearer the trenches, therefore, that any middle-aged man of my age could smuggle himself, the nobler it seemed to me that middle-aged man was, quite regardless of the merits of the War. Here was a hideous cataclysm, a great burning fiery furnace. Never mind *who* started it, or *why* its victims were murdering each other! Persons of spirit hurried to get *as close to the flames* as they could. Cowardly persons hurried to get as far away from the flames as they could.

Don't "go away with the idea," gallant reader, that I didn't consider the most precious and sacred thing in the Universe to be personal life. Personal life I held then, and hold now, far more precious than any Cause, or any Faith, or any Country. Personal life and the intensifying and subtilizing of personal life is, as far as I am concerned, the only intelligible purpose of the Cosmos. Nor do I not recognize that my own personal cowardice, with its unheroic tendency to dodge the risks of war, if it could only be spread among other men, as quickly as "patriotism" and "nationalism" are spread, might result in a universal coward's strike or life-lover's strike, that might defeat the militarists. We who place our personal life above everything else, might even be worked up to defy these other men — so very like ourselves — who incite the masses to war.

But the truth is — and that is the fatal paradox — we mortals are so pathetically heroic that it will-have to be made clear to us that it is more heroic to fight against fighting than to fight, before we have the guts to defy these leaders who, after all, are only ourselves turned into prime ministers and dictators. I think that the best proof offered us now of this pathetic heroism of the human race is the rise of dictatorships, whether Fascist or Communist. The situation is indeed most unfortunately clear. You can rouse men to mass-heroism when you cannot rouse them to individual heroism; for, as Voltaire said, “nothing is more unpleasant than to be *obscurely hanged”* Like all life-and-death issues the thing is a terrible paradox. If you could only get all the artists and lovers and saints and philosophers and life-worshippers and mystics and stoics and epicureans on one side and the patriots and lynchers and vivisectionists on the other, there *would* be a war worth fighting. But, as it is, the situation is a good deal more complicated.

Personally I regard Communism with a kind of puzzled awe, and Fascism with a kind of puzzled prejudice, and of the two I am far more attracted to Communism; but it is as hard to be a coward and a Christian as to be a coward and a Communist! Communism and cowardice do not mix — at least not in these early stages of the revolution. And I am afraid my theory that a brave man would want to get as near as he could to “the burning crater” led to only lukewarm attempts to get near it myself. Even these attempts were postponed, not only till conscription in England reached well over my age, but until I had gone to the hospital to have “gasterenterostomy”; but after I was recovered from this, I did feebly bestir myself. I well recall the voice of a man in the British Propaganda Bureau in New York addressing over the telephone a man in the British Recruiting Office in the same city and declaring:

“Well! We’ve got a lusty recruit for you to-day!”

And how in my imagination I saw myself as I plunged into these places imploring my sergeant, on some future march, for leave to drop out to make water! *That* was my real secret terror, the difficulty of urinating and of voiding my excrement when I was in the ranks. I asked one friend of mine about this who assured me that it was “as easy as pot”; but I remembered all I had suffered at Wildman’s from my neurosis over this matter, and I did not believe him. In the recruiting-room I was looked over just in the way D. H.

Lawrence in *Kangaroo* so indignantly describes himself as being, but as I have almost as deep a feminine “penchant” for doctors as I have for priests I did not mind it at all!

Oddly enough I was not rejected on this occasion by reason of the fresh scar in my stomach, but by reason of some very old, and to me totally unrealized scar in one of my lungs. After this extremely feeble gesture to get nearer to the “burning crater” there happened to be a surcease of lecturing in the East, so I went once more to “the Coast.” But it was not long before my conscience began to persecute me again; and presently, taking the advice of the wise old soldier, Colonel Wood, I returned incontinently to New York and sailed for England.

It was a curious experience, this voyage, for I went in a regular fleet of eleven great liners, all sailing near one another, just like the old sea-pictures of a battle-fleet; only these were steamers and had no sails. I was the only civilian on board the one I took, except for certain Y.M.C.A. officials in uniform whose muscular Christianity disgusted me, and whose discourses to the soldiers were very unpleasant to hear. A sort of sleek brutality characterized their utterances. They were a revolting parody upon all the more seductive aspects of patriotism.

The troops I was with — this must have been pretty early in, when the Germans were getting ready for their final desperate attack — came mostly from Indiana, and I was always expecting them to burst out with “On the Banks of the Wabash,” by Dreiser’s brother Paul. But they were occupied with other matters. I well recall how one anxious lad, standing erect in his accoutrements in a boat projecting over the ship’s side implored me to tell him what these things were like that he was scanning the waters so earnestly for. Being more familiar with the sea than this lad from Indianapolis I did what I could to describe the appearance of a submarine;

but it must have been a very rough description; and I have no doubt it was a wonder that we two innocents, staring at those unruffled waters, escaped a more realistic knowledge.

The official medical examination for Sussex candidates under the new conscription was held, oddly enough, in the infants' school at Brighton. So here I was destined once more to visit my ancient foray-ground; once more to see "The Yacht *Skylark*" launched from that sunny beach, once more to breathe that memorially amorous air. Many a time had I passed that particular infants' school without a suspicion that a day would come when I should skip about naked as a frog within those walls while I was tested for serving my Sovereign.

Women and girls did, as a rule, in those days exercise a definitely warlike influence over their devotees; and this they did without having to carry actual "white feathers" for distribution. Colonel Wood, with his drastic-blue eagle-eye, had deemed it best for me to obey the un-ease of my conscience and hurry from "the Coast" straight to my native land. But I had written to Llewelyn in Africa, who, as a consumptive, had enabled my brother Willy to go to war by taking his place, expressing these conscientious scruples in so grandiose a manner that I blush to think of it.

Those were days when everyone who was not struggling hard to get into the firing line felt called upon to justify himself and explain in detail the importance of the various ties that interfered with his natural desire to be shot. I wrote to Llewelyn that I didn't at all like the idea of the Germans actually crossing the Channel and entering Dorset, even doing the goose-step perhaps between our Upwey Wishing Well and Maiden Castle. "Je suis gentilhomme," I wrote to him, like a tragic pierrot whistling "Malbrook s'en va t'en guerre," but what must the rogue do — and in all innocence too, for where "John" is concerned that level head grows dizzy — but yield to the quirk of showing my letter to the Elizabethan Irishman he was helping at that time, who doubtless made the devil's own face at this indecorous Pistol-like bluster.

But I was treated with extraordinary tenderness by the military examiners at that Brighton infants' school. And why *was* that? The other candidates for the trenches, who were a good deal less competent than I was, although not in any sense bullied, were not handled like brittle china. But that is precisely how I *was* handled. There were cubicles for us to undress in, I remember, each of which was designed for the accommodation of two persons.

"With whom would *you* like to undress?" the official asked me, indicating my fellow-conscripts.

I replied that it would be perfectly agreeable to me to undress "with any of these gentlemen." And so the officer selected Mr. Boom as my fellow-undresser. Mr. Boom was a very decent chap but custom had rendered it unusual for him to wash his knees. Thus ever since that day in the Brighton infants' school I have myself scrubbed my knees, whenever I've got a chance, with extreme violence, fearful lest, one of these days, I might be exposed as poor Mr. Boom was exposed. My own psychological explanation of the tenderness with which I was treated in this recruiting station is first that conscription is so alien to the English that those who employ it have a subconscious feeling of uneasy shame, and secondly that these medical officers felt that all gentlemen who were real "gentilhommes" had so long ago plunged into the "burning crater" that those who were left, along with the pacific Mr. Boom and a few half-witted tramps picked up between Brighton and London, must be so pathetically degenerate that it would be like torturing an animal to be harsh to them.

In any case I am certain that nothing is more contrary to the profoundest nature of the English race than the “military spirit,” at any rate as our Continental neighbours display it and understand it. It is not from lack of endurance, but from lack of taking for granted that the military profession means bullying and being bullied, that we fail in the right temper. All our soldiership, except when the Irish come into it, is an amateur affair, a kind of sporting *tour de force.* Perhaps the sufferings we undergo at school kill the warlike spirit in us. Certainly my own experience has been that the worst bullies at school belonged, as I did myself, to the “Celtic Fringe.” They were British rather than English.

So anxious were these good-tempered English that a cowardly Celtic neurotic like myself should not be sent to the War that they tracked down that ridiculous old shadow-scar in my lungs, that I had never known anything about, and sent me to a specialist in Chichester for further examination! You can believe how I thought of Keats’ “Eve of St. Mark” as I wandered about the Cathedral Close after visiting this doctor. Well! The end of it was that I was exempted from service and given *carte blanche* to go back to America. I was anxious to see a little. more of my relatives, however, before I left and so I decided to give lectures up and down the country for Mr. Lloyd George’s especial “Bureau of War Aims.”

Judging from the Versailles Treaty my “War Aims” differed in several respects from those of the Prime Minister but no one interfered with me; no one gave me any instructions; and at the Government’s expense I lectured — or rather made soap-box speeches, for these addresses were always in the open air — upon my own personal ideas as to what the War was about and how it ought to end. I made a fine fool of myself in one of these rhapsodies on the future of war and peace.

This was in Wales; but I did not realize that it was in a region of Wales where the bulk of the natives, as Scott describes in *The Betrothed,* were Flemings. I encountered, of course, many Belgian refugees from modern Flanders; but this particular group was descended from the old Flemings. Ignorant of the ethnological nature of this audience, which was an extremely Teutonic-looking one and incidentally a profoundly lethargic one, I launched out on an impassioned palinode in honour of the Cymric branch of the Celts and its immemorial mythology. You can imagine what I felt when, as soon as it was over, the political agent of that district gave me a weary rebuke.

But it was a queer affair, this business of delivering “War Aims” lectures, without instructions, up and down my native land! The more I think of it, and indeed of all my experiences in England during that epoch, the more I respect my fellow-countrymen. I forget now to what particular persons I had to go, to get my credentials; but I know I went to a house actually next door to Number Ten Downing Street, and I know in the course of my wanderings I drifted through the gates of the War Office. In all these peregrinations I remember being extraordinarily impressed by the amateur, unofficial, unmilitary, unbullying air, with such an incredible amount of “yield” and “give” in it, that characterized everything I encountered!

I remember for instance how in front of the War Office, instead of generals in plumed hats I found a group of children playing marbles, and instead of mounted policemen a couple of small boys with hoops. Another example of the sort of thing that pleased me so much in England, and made me feel so proud of my fellow-countrymen, was the easy, amateur way these “War Aim” lectures were conducted. The local political agents, taken casually from both the big parties, were made responsible for all the practical arrangements; and, on my soul, these arrangements were sometimes as quaint as if we had still been in the time of Charles Dickens. One worthy gentleman, evidently disagreeing with both the Celtic Prime Minister and the Celtic Lecturer as to the value of the "spoken word" when the country was at war, made use of his trip with me to a remote portion of his county to collect eggs. In a dog-cart stuffed with eggs we sought out the particular village-green where I hoped to increase Mr. Wilson's fourteen points from fourteen to forty.

I always began my mystical discourses in the same way. "I have just come over from America," I used to shout, addressing the mothers and sisters and sweethearts of the youths that our European nationalism was slaughtering by millions, "with fifty thousand invincible young men from the Middle-West!"

At one town where I had to speak — and this curious "War Aims" tour, in which my country's authorities trusted me to such a tune, was crowded with side-lights upon the rooted individualism of our race even at such a deadly crisis — my colleagues and myself were interrupted by a meeting of Socialists which overlapped with ours. For a moment I forgot I was no longer in wartime America, and I looked nervously round for the appearance of the familiar hundred-per-cent. lynchers or the prompt emergence of Irish policemen armed with clubs, but in place of these sinister apparitions one of my colleagues, a shell-shocked soldier from the front, took out his watch.

"Powys," he said, just as if we were in a college debating society, "give these fellows five minutes on our platform, and then we'll try to answer them."

To "answer" them was indeed easier to "try" than to achieve, for true to our national characteristics, there were more allusions to the Pope and the House of Lords and the Land-Owning Dukes, than to any Marxian reasonings about capitalistic wars. I can assure you that my vow of cerebral chastity had to endure many serious and most tantalizing temptations during these tours, for many of my open-air speeches were made on sunny esplanades and beguiling sea-fronts, crowded with excitable young women made reckless by the desperation of the War.

I held to it rigidly, however; for, without bragging, I was enough of a Tibetan adept by this time to have a fairly adamantine control over what Dr. Johnson would call “my amorous propensities.” I well recall how, in one inn where I stayed, this quixotic offering to the “burning crater” I was dodging had a very unexpected result in making me the favoured confidant of the prettiest barmaid I have ever seen! Nothing is more seductive to youthful womanhood than iron virtue concealing intense susceptibility; and I can now hear the groan of a disappointed rival:

“You’re the one she likes, damn you; though *I did* give her a lecherous kiss!”

I must confess that there were a few “embusqués” I encountered here and there in my erratic journeys, who gave me an uncomfortable sensation. I found that my “life-illusion,” as I call it, that innermost daimon, whose attitude to one’s proceedings is the compass-needle of one’s self-respect, while it felt perfectly at ease in the presence of men who had been and would be again, in the “burning crater,” was made decidedly jumpy when I was with people more or less in my own position. I was too proud, and by nature too ferocious in self-laceration, to condescend to any “rationalizations,” or to any discriminations among us “Artful Dodgers” of the Inferno. With those who were “in it” I felt weak, brittle, humble, *womanish* even; but in the company of these others, the malicious devil at the bottom of my nature kept asking:

“What are *you* doing, ‘dans cette galère’?”

My young son, taking for granted that his voluble progenitor wanted to be as close to the "burning crater" as possible, suggested that I should apply for a job as a Y.M.C.A. "entertainer" at the Front, and my neighbour Sir Harry Johnston who himself had been invalided home from an excursion of this sort gave me a letter of introduction to the office that arranged such things. But, as it happened, my visit to this office was made simultaneously with a sudden intensification of activity on both the enemies' part and our own, and I was told that all permits for this kind of thing had been cancelled. Twice during this visit to England I was seized with an unholy and purely animal sense of immense relief: once when I received from Brighton my card of exemption from service and now again when I found that it was impossible for me to imitate Sir Harry Johnston and go to France as a civilian.

I finally determined, since I could not support my family on my "War Aims" discourses, to return to America. With a view to this I wrote an extraordinary letter to the authorities for whom I had been speaking, in which I announced to them that I had "decided to reside in California." At this distance of time I find it impossible to tell why I used this astonishing phrase. I don't think it was meant humorously. I don't think it was flung out in a spasm of masochistic auto-malice. But it certainly makes me blush to think of it now. It was as if, during a monstrous conflagration, when all the world was carrying buckets, I had informed the chief of the fire department that I must hand *my* bucket over to someone else, as I had to go home to take a Turkish bath!

There was a derelict from the American Army, or at any rate some unfortunate soldier who was returning to America to be punished, on the ship with me, when Tom Jones — neither of us aware that this was the last time we should meet — saw me off at Liverpool, and I used to drink tea with this forlorn wretch and promise to help him by writing letters on his behalf. But he was a singularly unappealing individual, sulky and scurvy-spirited, and when I thought of all the heroic, generous, sweet-natured young men tortured and murdered by our patriotic madness, it seemed a poor thing to be devoting my energy to the composition of letters on behalf of this one poor, sullen cross-patch, who under a normal condition could hardly have been more than a disobliging "bel-l-hop." But there it was! The poor devil could bleed if you pricked him, and could lap up a can of ship's tea with scarcely less gusto than I myself.

In those days I used to think quite a lot about this business of Pacifism and Pacifists. The ones that were cruelly treated and badly beaten up I did feel sympathic with, but there were others that in my devilish self-knowledge I deeply suspected of using their perfectly rational principles to dodge the irrational plunge into the "burning crater." What would really have happened, I asked myself, if a nation, like this great formidable German nation — that alone was so nearly a match for the whole Orbis Terrarum — *had* found all the other races prepared to be invaded and dominated and exploited and trodden upon, because of their principles of pacifism and of philosophical spirituality? Would it have resulted in the sort of Passive Resistance that Gandhi organized, to bewilder our own Empire in India?

But I had the wit to see that if any League of Nations was to be able to suppress such an over-riding nation, the very moment it invaded another country, it would have to be a genuine International Super-State, with an irresistible army and navy that could be transported in a few weeks to the uttermost ends of the earth! And I also had the wit to see that nothing short of the sheer force of such an International Super-State could deter a newly-organized nation, waking to intense race-consciousness only to find the globe already dominated, from its natural tendency to break out.

Profoundly feminine as my intelligence is I was aware — just as all women are secretly aware — of the irresistible power of women *were they to use it.* And it often came over me that, as Aristophanes suggested in *his* burlesque show, the best solution would be for the implicit matriarchy of the human race to become an explicit matriarchy, and for "the women of all nations" — to twist a little the famous Communist Manifesto— "to unite" in one world-wide strike to put an end to this patriotic insanity.

Personally the year, in spite of my anxiety over my brother Bertie's fate — for he had been taken prisoner in that last terrific German drive — was a much happier one than. was the worst year of my whole life, after my years in Wildman's House at school. I put down my nervous misery during that year to the magnetic vibrations of anguish — like a sort of psychic "wireless" — that kept crossing the Atlantic from Europe. My time in the hospital, when I had that "gasterenterostomy" operation whose grand name I am so proud of, was really a pleasant time compared with the rest of that terrible year. I came nearer to insanity during this epoch than I had ever done before, though of course I know, and I dare say my reader will willingly bear me out in this, that I am — all the while — never *wholly sane*. But I certainly had such misery during in America that my fantastic "War Aims" discourses, when Lloyd George's belief in the value of "the word" let me loose on my native land, were paradisic in comparison.

My old undying Worm of secret Fear — and how absurd to think that by naming fear "phobia" you can diminish its devastation? — wagged its ghastly head at me, as if the Loch Ness Monster should be confronted by another monster— "a bogy," to quote my old Corfe Castle poem, "that surpassed it in height." Indeed the thing wagged its head at me as it had never wagged it before. I was still established in that old Presbyterian Church-House looking out on Fifth Avenue, but when the summer grew warmer we rented or “let,” as we English say, these two little rooms, each of them so much taller than they were wide, to Padraic Collum.

I have always loved and admired Padraic Collum, second to few, and I have the greatest respect, and to confess the truth a little envy, of the wise and yet artless way he copes with the difficulties of life. Thus it was a pleasure to think of him in my rooms. But ailinon! ailinon! how I came to regret that I had let them go! Without those rooms I wandered about America like a monkey in a huge garden composed entirely of those prickly trees they call monkey-puzzlers.

I clung to Arnold and his family for a while, but Arnold was a swimmer and a tennis-player, so that he chose somewhat gregarious places, and my neurotic loathing of summer life in America grew to a shrieking point. Oh, how I came to hate the mere sight of men’s bare bodies that year! I hated that bronzy tint they were so proud of! I hated the everlasting bathing-*suits,* rather than bathing-*drawers,* that they wore. I suppose what it really amounted to was this. Being the particular kind of perverse nympholept, I was, attracted to women much more as a Lesbian is attracted to them than as a man is attracted to them, and, in addition to this, deriving my greatest thrills from my *voyeur* tendencies — if that is the right word for it — than from any sense of touch, it was a perpetual aggravation to me, a sort of “adding insult to injury” in the erotic sense, to be surrounded by these tall strong lusty lively brown-skinned young men!

And these “summer-lads” of America terrified me by their morality as much as by their muscularity. Their very perspiration had a *moral smell* that made me feel desolate and lonely and homesick. They seemed to me like a different race from the human race that I knew and that I was always reading about in the classic authors. Beholding their worse than innocent nakedness at these unspeakable resorts I began to realize what extraordinary originality, what *mad* originality, American men and women, who *are* original at all, must possess, to deal with this tidal-wave of catastrophically normal humanity. Could it be, I asked myself, as I surveyed these summer-lads in their trim bathing-suits, that it was about these super-normal pillars of society that Walt Whitman wrote his lovely and passionate “Calamus” poems? It seemed unbelievable, But it only made me the more convinced that to be a genius in America is twice as difficult as elsewhere; and that when you *are* a genius, like Whitman, or Melville, or Masters, or Dreiser, or Vachel Lindsay, or Isadora Duncan, or Edna Millay, you’ve got to develop a sort of protective chain armour or you’ll soon be driven to suicide.

Deserting my devoted friend Arnold, because of his love of bathing and playing tennis, I fled down into Virginia, and tried to hide myself there, but almost at once my terror, encouraged by all those aspects of the South that are peculiarly dreadful to me, drove me forth again. Then I fled to Cooper’s-Town in upper New York, thinking to myself, “Surely by the grave of Fenimore Cooper I shall find peace!” But while Fenimore Cooper’s grave was all right, and I could escape beautifully there from the summer-lads and their dashing débutantes, I was not in a position quite yet to find lodgings in a churchyard.

So my blood-crony and I hired a little new unpainted shanty on the very edge of Fenimore Cooper’s glittering lake. But it was perfect misery. My companion struggled gallantly for a while with my wretched nerves, but to no avail! I think my time in that appalling newly put-up wooden box by the edge of those lapping waters was almost as bad as what I suffered during the bathing-hour in that old school bath. Then a motor-boat began to frequent that portion of the lake; and to me the resounding “ticking” of a motor-boat is without exception the most unpleasant of all sounds. Twenty, nay! fifty “elevated” railways would be nothing to the ferocious malignity of this hard, unfeeling noise.

“Tick — damn you! — *tick!* — blast you! — *tick!* — may the devil carry you away! Tick! tick! tick!”

My kind familiar spirit, who loved hot weather and heavy foliage like a lioness, enjoyed the American summers. But to me, who for all my “cat-head” am more like a polar-bear, they have always been a complicated misery. Even here, in this cool “up-state” valley, I find the triumphant leafage of the summers more than I can endure. Too tropical, too tropical it is for my taste! Yes, even here, where in the preceding winters the temperature may have gone down to thirty below zero, these burning summers harrow my soul. In that raw and blistering shanty of ours the sun drew sticky drops out of the woodwork while the motor-boat ticked, and the lake lapped like the devil’s dam. The privy was a replica of the shanty, save that its door was of such new wood that it refused to shut and the sun blazed down upon it with even more brazen publicity than upon the hovel. Finally, I used to flee inland, across the lively motor-road where the automobiles glittered in the burning sun, and hurry across the ploughed-fields till I found a cowshed. To this retreat I would carry my pen and papers.

But even from this cowshed the vibrations of anguish from the War drove me forth. I left my dark sorceress to her fate at the very moment when Rollo Peters, the loveliest and most loyal of all our younger friends, was on the point of arriving. This alone shows what a hunted and half-crazy state I was in, for I love Rollo well; but the devil himself was tugging at my navel-string, and I fled to New York. Padraic was still occupying my room, so, in my growing derangement, I took refuge with the best of all family doctors, our unequalled Dr. Thomas, whose skill was soon to bring my beautiful nephew, Peter Grey, into the world, and the Thomases with infinite tact and kindness installed a bed for me in a neighbouring house, a big house, that was completely empty.

I cannot describe to you how *Summer in America* terrified me that awful. Everything in the whole world that appealed to me seemed to have been scorched by the sun into non-existence. But what was left was not the burning lonely sands of any Arabian desert, but the growth of a luxuriant foliage, amid which, like beautifully modelled fashionable statues, super-normal, super-naked humanity disported itself with noisy chastity. The truth is I am myself so vicious that I loathe chaste nakedness as much as I loathe tropical foliage. I am just exactly like a mediæval monk who in his rocky retreat can only tolerate bare limbs when they belong to the most provocative of she-devils, against whose wiles it is his profession to struggle.

How well in that dreadful time I can recall walking round and round and round that old railed-in reservoir in the centre of Central Park! Of all parks I detest Central Park the most. I detest it as much as I love that beautiful German-designed park in Brooklyn. Central Park always seems to me far more spoiled by the selfishness of the rich than any royal or ducal park I have ever seen. If I were the Mayor of New York I would close Central Park to motor-cars; open it only in the mornings to horsemen and horsewomen, and allow every man, woman, and child, to wander about in it wherever and whenever they like, make love in it as much as they like, and sleep in it without let or hindrance.

When you are half-crazy you have the Devil's own genius of minute observation. A curiously little thing I can recall so well of that house of which the Thomases got me the key; and that was the singular effect of hot water emerging from a bath faucet in a big completely empty mansion. It felt like being inside a huge sacred tank, of which I was the solitary crocodile-god, for it was a bathroom of which it was quite unnecessary to close the door! I can now see exactly how a certain little wisp of dust-fluff looked, as it floated in this tank-bath; that bit of dust-fluff and I being alone in an aquarium that was also a Necropolis.

The Thomases *were* good to me in that awful time! They were far too sensible to do anything but quietly assume that I was *merely fretting* until I could go back to my Twelfth Street flat or until my familiar spirit returned to the city. I was not a stranger to the part of the city where the Thomases lived. In fact it was in this district, so near Central Park, that I had bought from a little umbrella-shop close to the Natural History Museum the oldest of the four walking-sticks that I now possess. It is a hickory-stick with a round handle, and I bought it from a quiet little German in that quarter, who, the very second he laid hands on it, became a ferocious huntsman of wild animals. While I was inspecting it I heard him muttering to himself. “I didn’t catch,” I began, “I didn’t catch what you said.”

“I killed her,” he repeated, “with one blow.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“With one blow; and I’m telling you she was no ordinary hare!”

But to return to my return from England, where the nearest I had ventured to the “burning crater” (*burning, burning, burning!*) was when I carried, at my young son’s suggestion, Sir Harry’s letter to the office for supplying entertainers at the Front. I did not at once — indeed I cannot remember just when I did — enter upon “my residence in California.” All the events of my life in and seem to have taken place in a sort of phantasmagoric mist. I can well remember the date when America entered the War, for I was having my supper in the old Louisiana Café in New Orleans, and I recall that, in the maliciousness of my heart, instead of singing “My Country, ’tis of thee,” I sang, “Confound their politics; frustrate their knavish tricks,” including in my philosophic misanthropy all the nations of the world.

And I can remember the day when prohibition began, and how I bought, and this *was* on “the Coast,” a colossal stone jar, like one of those jars mentioned at the Marriage at Cana in Galilee containing the only alcoholic drink I really care for, namely very strong, very cheap, very fiery, very raw whisky. I can remember too — and they come floating in upon me like pictures in a witch’s crystal — the night of both the *false* Armistice day, in New York, and the *real* Armistice day. On this latter occasion I had my evening meal in the Brevoort. Now it was in the Brevoort that the great Dr. Erdman, like Our Lord in Oscar Wilde’s story, had spoken to me, after my operation, when he saw me supping there, side by side with the goldenest of golden heads, and it was indeed in the Brevoort that all the most exciting events of my American life never failed to have some kind of repercussion.

On this Armistice night, however, I must confess to feeling a fiercer and more fermenting surge of malicious hatred for my well-to-do bourgeois compeers than I have ever felt before or since. The sight of such patriots, none of whom had probably even smelt from afar the fumes of the “burning crater,” was one of those sights — for I am afraid my malice is even stronger than my pity — that gave me a further jerk along the hard and narrow road that leadeth to Communism. But if my spleen at that moment turned upon my bourgeois Americans it was grossly unfair. Had I forgotten those unworthy scenes in our own London during the Boer War? But only once did I grow as ferocious in Manhattan as I did on various occasions in Boston.

Except at Ford Hall, or when encouraged by such a kindly radical as Longfellow’s grandson, Dr. Dana, or by my friend Mr. Freshel, I have seemed fated to get into violent rows in Boston. Philadelphia, always my favourite city in this whole continent, preserved an attitude to my cerebral antics that was at once superciliously aloof and affectionately amused. Philadelphians are conservative and a little cynical, but they are profoundly indulgent and always on the look-out for "entertainment." But in Boston I came up against sheer hostility, hostility as bitter as my own diatribes. This atmospheric and I might almost say astrological clash between myself and the Bostonians was modified for me by the fact that I so greatly enjoyed staying at the Tourraine Hotel, the only hotel I have ever known that possessed a comfortable library.

This amazing library always had a blazing fire and contained in its shelves all the works of Henry James. I was also mollified during my Boston visits by the pleasure I derived, which was a very intense one, from visiting my first cousin, John Hamilton Cowper Johnson, among his brother "Cowley Fathers" at the monastic church of St. John in Bowdoin Street. Cousin Hamilton and I have more things in common than I have time to enumerate here, and his astonishing knowledge of Latin has often helped to thicken out my cursory but very authentic enjoyment of Cicero and Horace. Our natures "except for these bonds," as St. Paul would say, by which I mean my own secular vices, not my cousin's priesthood, are singularly harmonious. In some things I can only say I *hope* he understands me better than I understand myself, for he will, I know, feel strongly that in this book I have made myself out at once more of a sinner and more of a fool than I really am. Well! it is not often that one's Father Confessor — though Hamilton is only this in a secular sense — regards one as a much better person than one regards oneself. Certainly if, as out of my profound scepticism of modern science I consider very possible, the Christian doctrines, *relaxed a little on the erotic side*, are representative of deep cosmic secrets, I could not wish for any more penetrating champion of my ambiguous character before the jury of the saints than this more than blood-relation.

It is queer that I should have had to come to America to get to know, putting Cousin Ralph aside, my two favourite cousins; for not only have I made a lifelong friend of Hamilton, whom, as a child at Northwold, I remember throwing into a bed of nettles, but on a lecture tour in New Mexico I discovered Warwick Powys. It is true I can only claim fifth-cousinship with Cousin Warwick, but we have twice lived very complacently together as bachelors; and have not quarrelled — which is still rarer — when in the *other* condition! Like myself, Cousin Warwick is almost superstitiously credulous about our ancestral connection with the ancient Powys-Land of Mid-Wales and I note, through all the dividing medium of Fifth-Cousinship, many curious resemblances in our emotional feelings.

But to return to my troubles in Boston. I remember speaking once before the City Club there largely composed of professional men, upon some topic connected with education, and I well recall the bitter anger I provoked when I brought out my well-worn tag about culture in America being entirely in the hands of women and carrying visibly upon it the unmistakable imprints of its maternity. I did not, as I might have done, quote the gentle lines, “My country, ’tis of thee, sweet Land of Liberty,” compared with “Confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks” of our own most masculine invocation, but I did have something to throw out about the quaint hiatus between American culture, as it was in those days, and all that — well! all that Rabelais may be said to represent in the sphere of literary bawdiness.

But what a turn of the wheel we behold to-day! Everything is reversed. It is like a miracle. Joyce’s *Ulysses,* that tragic piece of imaginative realism, has not only been "released," but has actually become a best seller, and there is no doubt that to-day America is far ahead of England in its freedom from "moral" censorship. But America has always been the favoured land of what you might call the Swinging Pendulum, and so violently has the pendulum been swinging lately that it will soon be difficult for the younger generation to even imagine the sort of attacks that a book like Dreiser's *Genius* was subject to, so brief a time ago. For myself I have such a categorical imperative, of late, against reading sadistic books, and have always shrunk so much from other sorts of realism that I find myself going back to Henry James!

But it was not only with the City Club in Boston that I became the opposite of a *persona grata.* I will now tell you how it came about that I lost my audience there of select society ladies. This was due to one of those ill-considered outbursts that so often led to a temporary "residence in California." These "residences" were sometimes merely a sign that Arnold's fertile brain was undergoing a period of exhaustion, but they were more often due to indiscretions of my own. It was in a very fashionable Boston house that I had to speak to a fashionable Boston audience. My friend Mr. Freshel — secure above all fashion — was not there to defend me and I was asked point-blank by a lady-patriot the not — as I admitted to myself — quite irrelevant question, what I, a native of England, was doing in America, while we were fighting for our life on the other side. I have so often had to blush to record my sorry lapses from dignity and decency that it is a relief to be able to put on record at least one occasion when the Lord of Hosts inspired me with my answer. I told the patriotic lady quite frankly why I had not, by hook or by crook, got to the Front. Of course if I had been *absolutely* accurate I should have said that my worst secret fear of the great bonfire had to do with my difficulty of urinating in public; but I think even my honestest critic will absolve me from mentioning urine before such ladies. So I confined my confession under this feminine “turn of the screw” to my more normal fear of German bayonets; but *that* was quite enough. Never again did the disgraced Shaw-Circus receive a Bostonian invitation.

Psychopathologists who deal in erotic matters will not be surprised to learn that although I did not celebrate the Armistice by enjoying myself at the Brevoort, I *did* celebrate it by drawing up the dam from my suppressed wickedness. I had a learned friend in America whose humour it had been for some while to make a collection of the particular books that I found so perilous and it was not long ere I came hurrying back from his library with my precious Verona “grip,” bought in the Capulet-Montagu city the day of that tremendous thunderstorm without rain, literally weighed down with the brimstone of hell.

But just as always happened — and it shows how childishly short-sighted I am in such cerebral passions — a few frantic hours were enough to swing the needle of my psychic compass completely round! Off I must bolt — and I recall that particular night so well, for it was pouring with floods of tropical rain — to the nearest burlesque show. Printed provocation lost its magic so soon; whereas the real feminine form was inexhaustible. Well! Not quite inexhaustible! For from even this I have turned away, longing for a real sylph nearer than on the stage.

I am inclined to think, in fact, that the worst result of my release from my sacrifice to “the burning crater,” was this same longing to find the sylph-hood I so intensely adored *closer* at hand. I was so sub-human that what I really wanted was not a woman with normal feelings, for such a woman I was dedicated to hurt, but some kind of an Undine or Elemental, entirely devoid of the natural instincts of womankind. I was indeed a fatally dangerous sort of monster, a satyr-monk, a wicked mystic; and any woman who risked getting fond of me risked a great deal. Deep in my heart I knew well that if I wanted to keep a clear conscience in the matter of women's feelings the only thing to do was to cut down at the very start upon every sort of amorous dalliance.

Yes, if I were to obey my Socratic daimon what I would have to do would be to endure the tyranny of my cerebral lust until I should discover — if such Beings *were* to be discovered — some fanciful and elemental sylphid as peculiar and perverse as myself! Luckily for me the larger number of my "fair friends," as Sir Walter would put it, were deep in love with some upstanding young springald of their own dimension; and, as you may well conceive, few rôles in life have suited me better than that of a detached but not puritanical Epicurus, discoursing in his garden, as Landor loved to imagine him, with Leontion and Ternissa.

But my maniacal desire to give a true picture of my character and my life as I really see them — and for all Father Johnson's instinct to the contrary I feel that I see them more as his God would see them than as he does himself — compels me to confess that between the ages of forty and sixty I have done as much harm as I have done good to these exquisite beings that I worship so intensely and so perversely. But, as my Crocean friend, James Henderson, says very wisely, unless remorse waters the seedlings of a real *vita nuova* it is unphilosophical to sorrow over the harm we have done. Any convoluted and even hypocritical philosophizing against the stabs of remorse I can perfectly understand and am prepared to practise; but what I cannot understand is all this tough, smart, cynical modern talk, by means of which the values that I hold, the subtleties that I discern, and the responsibility in which I believe, are reduced to the tedious level of a futile nothingness. They are *not* nothing. What *is* nothing is this or that transitory scientific theory about atoms or electrons or vibratory rays. The imaginative will of men — *that* is not nothing!

How queer it is how our dearest lovers know us not! I am perfectly aware how indignant — on my behalf — my closest friends will be over this autobiography of mine. But fortunately if "truth is to be served" I have an invaluable organ of research in myself which is more powerful than any scientific microscope. I refer to *my sacred and holy malice,* my wicked and creative-destructive joy in bringing down the dignified "John" in me and exalting the living pierrot of my soul. And what, when you really come down to it, is the use of these clever sophisticated "Memoirs" of tedious dignitaries, who never once let you see the shivering, jerking, scratching, crying, groaning, God-alone-sees-me nerve of their central "Libido"?

And you need not think that I affect my ridiculous childishness because of my curious pride in emphasizing the feminine element in my nature. Women, I know, love to excuse their naughtiness by telling you that it is "childishness." The truth is they *are* childish, but not at all where they pretend to be. Men, heaven knows, are childish enough too where they least realize it, and the more they are so, the better pleased is the deep maternal instinct in women to reduce masculine pretensions.

Now where my own spiritual sincerity comes in, is that part of my soul follows close behind my "childishness," close behind all my manias, all my superstitions, all my peculiarities, like an exultant demon-falcon, shrieking and fluttering, and deriving a voluptuous pleasure from catching myself acting like a sentimentalist or an idiot. I even think sometimes, when I consider how my deepest impulses are neither exactly sadistic nor masochistic or mystical or theatrical or quite sane or quite mad, that there ought to be coined a completely new formula for what I am; *and perhaps this is true of every separate living soul*. In fact I would modestly offer to students of abnormality the word “Cowperist” to describe what I am, a word taken from my second name. I am not a masochist, or even a zoophilist: I am a Cowperist. But this I do at least know of myself: I combine an extremely quick and mercurial intelligence with a lean, primordial, bony, gaunt neanderthal simplicity. My nimble wit is in fact the Ariel-like slave of my Caliban primitiveness and its deadly and thaumaturgic champion against the world.

CHAPTER TWELVE. “THERE’S A MOHAWK IN THE SKY!”

THERE CAME A time when Arnold began a yet further extension of his activities as a lecture-manager. The late Mr. George, the well-known English novelist, had a tour under him, and the famous English preacher, Maud Royden, had a very successful visit to America under his auspices. But the strain of all this required tougher nerves than my friend possessed. The old Shaw-Powys Circus had rattled its ramshackle caravan wheels, paying “scot and lot” as it went, and taking in easy parts the ups and downs of the show business, but when it became a matter of leaving “the road,” of deserting our old careless life “under canvas” and of hiring great mega lopolitan halls in New York, even Arnold’s Yorkshire constitution collapsed.

He had so severe an illness that on his recovery he decided to enter a completely different field of activity and to hand his ageing acrobat over to one of the professional and official firms of lecture-management. He selected the well-known “Lee Keedick Bureau” for this purpose. What largely influenced him in this choice was his personal regard — a regard which I soon came heartily to share — for Mr. Keedick’s experienced subordinate, Mr. Glass, who was the one who managed the “travelling end” of this bureau’s concerns.

Mr. Glass was the brother-in-law of the famous Major Pond; and Arnold always assured me that no one understood the lecture-field better than he. Mr. Glass certainly was in the old tradition of lecture-management in America. He had travelled from coast to coast with Stanley, the explorer; he had arranged lectures for the dialect-poet Whitcomb Riley; he told humorous stories about Jerome K. Jerome. He was a Scotsman; and he had a look as if he might have been Seneschal of Glamis Castle. He was a very big man. He was the only man I have ever known who wore boots of "size twelve." It is true that I never went down on my knees to measure Mr. Glass's boots; but I came incidentally to learn their prodigious size when their owner assisted me in enlarging Patrick's intermittent wardrobe, kept in my top-floor wood-box. Mr. Glass's face was "large as that of Memphian Sphinx"; and his hands were in proportion. He was like one of those faithful, unsophisticated, whimsical old clerks in that House of Business described by Charles Lamb. His loyalty to the Bureau was touching. Not the rack itself could have induced Mr. Glass to waver for a second in his allegiance.

And his attitude to me was exactly what suited me best. He treated me as if I had been a sea-lion or a pet elephant. After my unconventional life under Arnold I could not have endured any other treatment! The kind of "ideal bluff" which some lecture-organizations indulged in would have made me sick. Such hypocrisy found no lodgement in the massive, quizzical, realistic cranium of this old-world impressario of public entertainers. But I believe in his own way Mr. Glass "got my number" very thoroughly and appreciated both my merits and my weaknesses. I know he put his hand into his pocket to help me out when I needed to be helped out; and he did what touched my heart even more than this, he spent one of the sacred anniversaries of his birthday — I expect he was a good deal older than he allowed us to guess — sitting patiently and indulgently — I can see him now! — in one of the back rows of the Labour Temple on Fourteenth Street, watching me frantically act *Macbeth* and furiously comment upon *Macbeth* for two whole hours.

Just like a true Dickens character this giant-like gentleman showman had endless anecdotes of old days, anecdotes about forgotten New York clubs, about ancient hotels, about encounters with Mark Twain; and these stories he would relate from the beginning every time he took tea with me in Patchin Place and I would know that he knew that I knew that I had heard them before! He had all sorts of wise old soothing proverbs in the front-office of his massive brain, and these he would utter as the pen fell from his gigantic fingers. These he would utter when his lecturer was quivering with agitation as he confronted some sudden journey to Colorado, or New Mexico, or Texas, or Oklahoma.

"Half the world," Mr. Glass would say with a look of genial abstraction, "doesn't know how the other half lives."

And I would find myself, when I was tempted to worry about how I was going to get down to Florida from New Orleans, or whether it was worth my while to go there at all for one single lecture, hearing him repeat the soundest of all his proverbs, a proverb that I confess I have constantly been trying, ever since Mr. Glass died, to put into practice:

"Don't cross the bridge until you get to it!"

I had been working for several years under the auspices of the "Lee Keedick Bureau" when I began to realize that my gastric ulcers had moved from the pit of my stomach and pitched their tents in my "duodenum." From this new position they proceeded to carry on a series of virulent attacks on my peace and comfort. Our wise and benevolent Dr. Thomas, who had come to my rescue in, came to my rescue again and sent me to the stomach-specialist Dr. Einhorn. In this learned man's serene presence I felt like a desperate St. Sebastian in a mediæval picture appealing to an unruffled angelic doctor. But this devilish hurting in my side, under my right ribs, grew worse and worse until I finally decided — since by this time

I had begun to be known as a writer as well as a lecturer — to make the grand plunge, “burn my ships,” as we say, and try to earn my living by my pen.

I was, however, not a little nervous of the country, in America, as opposed to the town. I knew that many of my ideas were both revolutionary and extremely reactionary; were in fact all that was most contrary to the average American spirit, and although the presence of my allies the Jews and the Communists helped me to carry this off in the big cities the fatal divergence would be only too evident when once I was dragged out of my Patchin Place Alley and “exposed” in a toll-pike cottage on a dirt road!

I had read stories in the papers, when one set of the Ku Klux Klan was quarrelling over money with another set, of such appalling cruelties committed by these people, and committed on persons who apparently were *exactly* my particular type, that I did not realize how much the prevalence of such lynchings and floggings depended upon the character of the Governor of the particular State. New York State, when I was hesitating where to settle, was governed by the present President of the United States, whose enlightened attitude to all these matters had already done incalculable good, and *had* been governed by “Al” Smith, a sympathetic Roman Catholic. I had, moreover, in many early lecture-tours, got particularly attached to Albany and Troy and Utica and Syracuse and Rochester, lovely old “Holland-Dutch” cities, whose only rivals in my affection in the whole country, were the old “Pennsylvania-Dutch” cities of Reading and York and Lancaster.

But it was neither my love of these Holland-Dutch towns, nor my admiration for the Hudson River, which I had already come to know pretty well, since my blood-crony and familiar spirit had bought with my father’s money actual landed property near its banks, nor my confidence in a good

Governor, that gave me the final push, or pull, that got me my “up-state” cottage. It was my long friendship with Arthur Ficke, the poet. Arthur Ficke is much more to me than what in this country is so quaintly called “a warm personal friend.” He has been for years much more than “a warm personal friend” of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Eugene Boissevain. I mean he has been our friend in the European sense of sharing and exchanging sad, cheerful, whimsical, bitter, pure, impure, refined, gross, simple, sophisticated, highbrow, lowbrow, *generalizations* upon the stream of life as it flows!

The Millay-Boissevains have always been closer to Llewelyn than to me. This was inevitable. As in so many other cases, after contact with the warm sun-born, earth-rooted nature of my father’s fifth son, my own “cold planetary heart” as Llewelyn loves to call it, not to speak of that devious, fluid, evasive, Taoistic element in me, that Llewelyn names my “spiritual insincerity,” but which I name my magical divination, is bound to strike most high-spirited people as the falling upon them of a cold, thin, frozen, inhuman rain, drifting, drifting, drifting, in the pallid track of a fast-hurrying moon. But in spite of these chilly peculiarities I have enjoyed over and over again feelings of thrilling delight merely from watching one expression after another expression crossing the countenances of these two princely creatures. They exercise a diverse, and yet in some mysterious way a kindred enchantment; and to this enchantment I willingly yield.

But I fear they are both too sensitive not to obscurely detect in me, after basking in the radiant sun-warmth of Llewelyn’s personality — and do I not detect it in myself? — the deadly non-human “Algol,” or “Demon’s Eye,” which always coldly watches, save when it is obscured by its own emotion over some yet colder melody of Milton, the warmest and most impulsive gestures of beautiful souls in beautiful bodies!

But nothing of this embarrassment, or of this mysterious ambiguity, exists between myself and the Ficke domain. Following my rigid rule, however, which I've only broken on behalf of "Messengers of the Grail," I must confine my remarks to the male element in this felicitous partnership. I believe I understand Arthur Ficke as very few, even among his greatest admirers, understand him. If I had his own genius of painting portraits in poetry — a very charming "genre," that has died out in these modern times — I would soon hit off his baffling personality. You must remember that I used to see him in his native Iowa, fifteen or twenty years ago; so that I really *am* in a position, if only I had the talent, to limn this poet's psychic lineaments, as I have observed them taking shape, under the passage of so many years.

I have a peculiar and natural sympathy with Arthur, because he, like myself, has long been dominated by a formidable begetter, whose personality excited in his son a mixture of respect, awe, furious rebellion, and inarticulate affection. Arthur certainly possesses one of the tallest, stateliest and most elegant figures among all the poets I have known. He is in fact better-looking than poets ought to be allowed to be, and I think, take his life as a whole, his imposing beauty has done him more harm than ever the War did in giving him consumption. I think it has led — for Ficke's good looks have been made yet more dangerous to his genius by being combined with the veritablest "grand manner" in society — to his getting pleasure in the way, of all others, that a poet ought not to be allowed to get pleasure, I mean from enjoying life with fascinated and fascinating friends! Love affairs are all right for a poet, except those desperate and obsessing ones, when, like Keats with his Fanny, we cannot think, speak, talk, eat, taste, touch, hope, fear, move, breathe, without dragging in some reference to this Lamia, this Lilith, this sorceress; but enjoying yourself with your friends *is fatal*.

If Arthur Ficke wasn't such a damned fine figure of a poet his poems would include among them a majestic "Epic." This unwritten Epic I am never long with him without seeing, hanging in the air behind his magnificently poised head, looming up like a "cloudy trophy" on the drooping arras of his spirit. But to write a majestic epic you have to be ugly or distorted, you have to be blind, like Homer, or be tormented by your daughters and blind too, like Milton. Even to write a great Prose-Epic you have to spend ten years of your life with convicts, and live in exile, and see your child die of undernourishment, like Dostoievsky, or be in perpetual danger of actual insanity like Nietzsche. It is useless to remind me how sane and well-balanced we are taught to regard Shakespeare as being. It is not true! If you rely, as I do, purely on the plays themselves it is impossible to see how these crafty moralists patched up their misleading lie at all, about this desperate spirit's equanimity.

Arthur himself may feel tempted to protest that to have been given tuberculosis by a war like this was a sufficient offering to the Far-Darter. Offering enough to make a stately sonnet-writer, a delicate refiner of infinitely tender lyrics full of sad mature wisdom, but not enough to tear out of your brooding Norse skull, as it lifts itself above your great column-like Siegfried throat, a valkyrie-inspired saga.

Why are you not thinking, my Teutonic Arthur, of nothing else in the world but of ploughing on where Mathew Arnold left off in his magical "Tristram and Iseult"? Or of driving forward where Keats himself, the idol of us all, left off in "Hyperion"? The truth is, deep in your deepest heart, my friend, you have not the courage or the noble simplicity, the heroic romance, of the shameless Germanic sentiment, which you find there, hanging like torn cathedral banners from the Gothic arches of your inmost soul! The truth is that with an appearance worthy of being compared to that of the "divine minstrel" in the halls of Alcinous, making the stranger sob so bitterly beneath his up-gathered cloak, Arthur's spontaneous river of deep Teutonic feeling has, in some subtle way been deflected, and divided, and broken into tributaries, by that most insidious of sirens the fatal culture of the Orient.

An exquisite adept, not only in Japanese Prints, of which he has written such penetrating prose and delicate poetry, but in what might be called "the art of disillusioned equilibrium," it is tragic to me to observe his self-controlled mask of courtly reserve quiver and tremble sometimes under the pressure of the old Nordic stirrings! He has in him that formidable urge towards a life of heroic action which is an element in all real poets of love and war: and, mark you, by "war," I do not mean wearing either an ancient or a modern helmet, I mean "pulling up the dam" from the basic streams of passionate love and wrath.

Naturally lacking, like all true poets, in the superficial cleverness of the nimble children of Hermes, his towering modesty has forbidden him the use of that sly, obstinate, malicious self-confidence which the earth-gods have never ceased to offer him. Without any doubt this courtly man of the world conceals, below his air of stately ceremony, the shy self-distrust of a nervous child; but it is his unhappy ability of "carrying things off" by his personal charm and his dangerous culture that prevents him, in his fatal humility, from letting the suppressed "child," in him feel defeated, sulky, angry, desperate, which is the condition out of which volcanos erupt.

But after all it is a scurvy return to my deeply-loved friend to underrate the pleasure I have had from his "occasional poems," some of the latest of which, like the one called "The Hour-Glass," have taken on, in their wistful maturity, a kind of Landorian weight. And when it comes to what might be called "social ethics," my own Stone-Age unscrupulousness has learnt much from my friend. In one thing this poet is unique, and the quality shines out nobly amid our touchy resentments. I have never known Arthur — and he is rare among Americans as a man of many deep friendships — *to give away one friend to another*. To the end of my life I've vowed to imitate him in this; for it is a noble and a classic virtue. Why, the man must be a treasure-house of State Secrets! But with the consummate art of a master-diplomatist — did he learn *this* in Cambodia? — he skates over the most dangerous "cat-ice" between his indiscreet friends and nobody would guess what a Recording Angel he really is! What I have learnt from Ficke in this difficult art of keeping one's friends in "water-tight compartments" — for it is indeed the only thing to do — has been made easier for me by my curious maliciousness. With him, however, it springs from a different source, springs indeed from the "Sacred Fount" itself; whereas I, especially in dealing with women's attitude to women, experience a purely malicious desire to prevent them from enjoying the taste of each other's blood! May my love prove a real talisman to guard Arthur Ficke from all evil.

Anyway my mania for obeying the Apostle's injunction to avoid telling tales has been mightily fortified by my friend's example. Quite apart, however, from the influence of Ficke's method in this matter, I have it in me to display a fanatical loyalty, deep, ingrown, romantic, and full of introverted malice, in the case of the posthumous wishes of the dead.

In the difficult problem of old letters I am obsessed with a superstitious loyalty. I have more than once denied myself the pleasure of reading such letters that have naturally and inevitably fallen into my hands, because I know so well how little the writer of them would wish them to be read. On this point I have had at least one angry quarrel with Llewelyn, to whose earth-rooted, sun-sweetened humour, with its passionate interest in the quirks and crochets of those who have been dear to him, such side-stepping, dark-gliding, wrong-side-of-the-moon worship seems like an evil religious vice.

Well, I must get on; for I was then, as I contemplated my farewell to the lecture-platform, nearing fifty-seven. Soon I should be sixty. As a matter of fact as I write these lines I am sixty-one, and when comes it will be exactly thirty years since, from the deck of the *Ivernia*, to the strains of Sousa's "Stars and Stripes," the notation of which I beg my musical friends to insert in the proper place, I saw disappearing from view the familiar bowler-hat of Tom Jones. My last lecture but one was in the Extension Department of Columbia University, and it was on "Faust"; and this lecture both Dreiser and Masters attended, faithful to the end. My last of all was in the Labour Temple on Fourteenth Street, and to this came, not only that ironical and secular saint, Will Durant, and my daring publishers, Max Schuster and Richard Simon, but none other than Arnold Shaw himself. The next lecture in that familiar place that had to do with the superannuated clown of the old Shaw Circus was not *by* me, but *on* me. This is the first time in my life I have been lectured upon, and perhaps it will be the last. I need hardly say, remembering my happy days in Saxony, that it was by a German. In plain words it was by Dr. Beck, Durant's original successor at the Labour Temple. Durant, in the manner of Ferney, had fed me when I was penniless. Beck, in the manner of Weimar, interpreted my legend. Durant is the wisest of the few Frenchmen I have loved. Beck is the most original of the many Germans I have loved.

It was a sad blow to me, not long after Dr. Thomas had sent me to Dr. Einhorn about my duodenal ulcer, to learn from Mr. Keedick, who misses him even more than I, of the sudden death of our friend Mr. Glass. Well, let's hope this grand old impressario for so many varied "talents," as they are named on our mortal circuit, is now explaining to the "talents" of a better Dimension than ours that it is wise "not to cross a bridge until you come to it."

As I am writing now it was at this very season a little more than four years ago that I finally settled down "up-state" in this best-governed of all American commonwealths. Even in the city I never regarded "Tammany" with the distaste which most "scholars and gentlemen" are supposed to feel. In certain ways I've always had an instinct that Tammany was more indulgent to the poor man than many conventional Governments are; but I confess I am prejudiced against the Police of New York City. This, however, is because I wholly disapprove of the American custom of allowing policemen to take upon themselves to punish offenders before they appear before a magistrate. In some ways, no doubt, there is more "yield" and "give" in an American prison than in an English one; but I cannot help feeling there is also more opportunity for individual sadism.

Take it all in all my four years among these American farmers of Dutch ancestry have been very nearly the happiest of my life. In the first place, for the first time in my conscious life, for my erotic viciousness began in my early infancy, and, with the exception of those later war years when my conscience used the ointment of asceticism to soothe its prickings, continued *sans cesse* ever since, I was free from vice. Yes, with my retirement to the country of the Mohawks something that seemed to me like a veritable miracle occurred, and the Devil, like that one named "Legion," was actually exorcized! Had the great god Eros himself done this? Was it the work of an Elemental? Nature undoubtedly helped. I do not put down the change to Nature, because I have not infrequently suffered from my most desperate obsessions when in the very heart of Nature; but she undoubtedly helped. And perhaps the occupation of writing books is a better sedative for wandering lusts than the more electric, more magnetic, and much more concentrated occupation of speaking. But whatever it may have been, Eros himself, or an Elemental sent by Eros, or this incredibly beautiful “up-state” scenery, or the fact that I was earning my living for the first time in my life by writing books, or, as certain not very psychological cynics will interject, *because I was growing old,* the fact remains that these unbelievably happy four years, spent, except for a very few days, entirely in one little house by the side of the road, have been, as far as my vices are concerned, an epoch of paradisic peace.

The interesting thing is that even my sadistic tendency seems to have sunk down into some abysmal Tartarus in my soul. I am not talking, of course, of any *practice* of sadism; for, as I have already told you, since my days at school I have never hurt anything out of wicked pleasure. I am talking about sadistic thoughts. Twice, and only twice, as a matter of fact, has this most dangerous of all demons come swimming up from the depths, as Dante describes that classical devil of his Malebolge doing, on whose back Vergil and he were to dive down; and both these occasions had to do with the idea of forbidden books. The first time this happened I was walking across a bare grassy hill less than a mile from my house, and it was as if the demon-image of one of these books rushed at me like a frantic harpy, out of the air and almost carried me off to its terrible ærie. The second time the devil *did* take me off to its ærie; for it came at night when I was writing at my window with such vividness that my pulses inside my wrists *began to tick* as if I were wearing two wrist-watches.

Sappho has described the physical effects of passion, the dizziness, the fainting, the sweating, the sinking of the stomach, the knocking together of the knees; but what I experienced at that moment was the trembling of pure wickedness. If I were a gospel-preacher, like the bible-woman with whom the dying Trophimovitch fell in love at the end of *The Possessed*, I should invent the verse:

“The wicked tremble because of their delight in wickedness. Yea, they shiver and shake with the thought thereof. But when they have eaten the fruit, behold! they shake yet more; for the Lord cometh upon them.”

On this particular occasion there were three noticeable stages in my struggle with Apollyon. First, half-hearted but violent resistance. Then, a sort of drunken yielding, ending in a calmly rational compromise. Finally, after several days had passed, the whole thing dropped away, leaving not even a smell of brimstone behind, leaving not even the faintest wish for the crafty compromise I had patched up previously with the Devil. This last occurrence happened quite recently, indeed a few weeks ago; so it is a comfort to me that I do not seem destined — if things go well — to be discovered by Llewelyn reading books that make him cry out aloud:

“John, John! I would be ashamed to be caught with such stuff!”

But I am a fool to boast like this; for I know well my devil is not dead. But I really have been singularly happy during this retreat “up-state.” Policemen have certainly been unlucky apparitions in my life — and I dare say there are those who share this feeling even more strongly — but ever since I was tortured for throwing that stick, as if in some ill-starred ithyphallic gesture, into the lake near Shirley, I have been absurdly afraid of these guardians of the law. Does this perhaps explain the curious sympathy, amounting to a nervous identification of myself with them, that I feel for tramps? But one singular thing has been done for me by America. The policemen over here are so fond of using their clubs in what seems to my English mind an extremely premature system of punishment and the American public is inclined to tolerate so placidly the use of torture to extract evidence, that I now feel that when I return home I shall have completely lost my fear of our own policemen.

Possibly if I were sent to Devil's Island I should never dare to lift up my eyes above the shoe-strings of any Frenchman again; but until that day arrives it is rather in the presence of Irishmen that I feel uneasy, remembering all the Irish names that I have noted in the New York City police. Perhaps, however, the worst of these illegal punishments are inflicted by what they call the "Scotch-Irish." As a Celt I hope so. But the absence of policemen in this "up-state" hiding-place of mine is not its only advantage.

The country here has the very look of the old romances that I love best. Those who love tapestry say its hills offer the same enchanted vistas as did the mediæval backgrounds to the castles of the Gothic North. It is more like England, this district of upper New York, than any landscape I have yet seen in the whole of America. It is like Shropshire. It even makes me think of my native Derbyshire. Thus has the wheel come full circle and I am at Shirley again! In every direction narrow lonely "dirt roads" wind through far-away valleys and over remote hill-tops, leaving behind them, as their perspectives diminish, that peculiar thrill that seems to come down to us from the generations, but which is so peculiarly hard to define. It is an impression that has to do with horsemen journeying, inn-lights beckoning, journeys' ends coming to lovers, to tramps, to hunters, to camp-followers, to adventurers, to the life-weary Dead. It is an impression that has to do with all those mystic omens of the way that they are driven off like hunted wild-geese by such things as "filling stations," sign-boards, cement highways, ginger-pop stalls, and "residential sections."

And, moreover, this vague sense of old-world romance, which I am trying to describe, is a completely different thing from the startling natural grandeur of virgin forests, great prairies, vast deserts and towering mountains. It can only appear under particular conditions in the history of any landscape and it requires a particular kind of landscape for it to reveal itself at all. These conditions are precisely fulfilled in the hilly regions of “up-state” New York of which I am speaking. The hills are not too high, the woods are not too continuous. Grassy slopes, park-like reaches, winding rivers, pastoral valleys, old walls, old water-mills, old farmsteads, old bridges, old burying-grounds give to the contemplative imagination that poetic sense of *human continuity*, of the generations following each other in slow religious succession, which is what the mind pines for, if it is to feel the full sense of its mortal inheritance. Where, moreover, by an incredible piece of luck I was allowed to settle, the actual earth-strata is peculiarly harmonious to my exacting taste. Grey slaty boulders lie in every direction, covered with the loveliest mosses and lichens, and intersected where the pines and hemlocks and birches grow by rich black earth-mould where the most delicate of wild flowers and ferns appear in their seasons.

The rocks of this countryside too, for the region lends itself to cattle and sheep rather than to grain-cultivation, have a peculiar and special beauty of their own, in that, along with their dark slaty masses, they present at intervals large fragments of a marble-like substance, white and glistening, where actual pieces of crystal can be detached, and where sometimes the most unimaginable green lichens spot the white surface. Nowhere, nol not in England itself, does the spring, when she comes at last, after the terrific, snow-bound, zero-frozen winters, bring with her a more fragile, a more miraculous enchantment than in this region.

I have come to know by heart, like the lovely lines of some unequalled poet, the familiar order of the appearing of these delicate tokens. First come the hepaticas, shy and dainty from within their dusky calixes, their brittle-drooping stalks covered with minute downy hairs: then the blood-roots, their white water-lily flowers protected so tenderly by their large enfolding leaves: then the orchid-leafed yellow adder-tongues: then the golden marsh-marigolds called, for some odd reason, “cowslips” in America; then the triliums, or wake-robins, purple-brimmed, like sacramental wine, and illustrating the doctrine of the Trinity before even Easter has come round: then, first of all the flowering shrubs, the white blossoms of the shadblow. The red flowers of one particular kind of maple are the earliest sign among the bigger trees: but when they have fallen on the grass there follow the yellow-green flower-tassels — washed with an indescribable “chinese-white” as you catch them against the blue of the sky — of the other maples. After the blood-roots and the adder-tongues are over it is possible to find rare patches of “bluets” in remote upland grass-swards and with the unfolding of fern-fronds on the outskirts of the woods come the airplane-shaped, vermeil-coloured polygala, a species of wild cyclamen. But I feel as if most vividly of all the flowers that Proserpina “let fall from Dis’s wagon,” there will return to my mind, waving in the warm wind against the grey rocks, when I am far from here, the nodding clusters of wild red columbine.

I have often told myself stories about my father visiting me in my American retreat; but ——

“He is dead and gone, lady, he is dead and gone.”

It was while I was hidden in a back-room in New York, a more ramshackle place than any in Patchin Place, that they buried him in the Montacute churchyard by the side of his dead. I was at the lowest ebb of my fortunes then, and was living on one single lecture given every week at a school in Greenwich. No longer could I write to him — as we all did at a pinch and never in vain — for help in my need.

“He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.”

Yes, I could “cast away moan,” quickly enough, but as long as I live I shall feel that he has not altogether died. *Non omnis mortuus est,* to twist Horace’s phrase. And why should his spirit not be as indulgent now to his eldest born’s weaknesses as he was that day in Mr. Phelip’s park when I boasted of my grand temptations, and all he said was that it would be “a help to me, John, if you would read the lessons again next Sunday.”

But how I would have been thrilled to show him these American “chickadees” that I fed every winter.

“They are a species of cole tit, John,” he would say.

And then he would explain where you found their nests at Stalbridge. These little wild hepaticas would certainly have reminded him of that birthplace of his, to which he actually made his way at the last, like a dumb death-hunted animal, only to find strangers in his native covert. On the other hand how astonished he would have been to see the care that has to be bestowed in *this* little garden upon one single plant of real primroses, primroses that he saw everywhere in those Black more Vale hedges. And how excited he would have been to have caught sight of the magnificent “Camberwell Beauty” I saw only yesterday among these spring flowers, a butterfly that Dr. Frink, my faithfullest and almost only winter visitor, declared has been known to be seen even when snow was on the ground. And how he would have been interested in the nest of the “Chewink” that I found last year, with eggs in it, eggs marked with lovely irregular hieroglyphics, a little like our own yellow-hammer’s!

Over his grave at Montacute the rooks fly, as they always have done with clamorous evening cawings; but I have come to find a singular satisfaction in the harsher, wilder, and more abrupt noises that their cousins the crows make as I carry my garbage to the skunks.

I did once, and not long ago either, write to my brother Littleton, reminding him of our passionately-conceived plan, concocted one Sunday afternoon at school, as in our tall silk hats we walked along the road to Milbourne Port, about his coming to stay with me in my Curacy, which would be near a trout-stream. I reminded him of this and heartily invited him to cross the Atlantic and visit my Curacy — such as it is — on the banks of our Mohawk stream, but with the best of intentions he could not compass it. My brother Willy, however, flying from East Africa to London over the Pyramids, crossed the ocean for a couple of brief weeks to see his expatriated kith and kin. *He* did actually stay with me by this frozen river with its Indian name, and, although he got chilblains *in the face* by such tricks, insisted on making sketches after the delicate manner of Penn House and our Geneva ancestors.

I fell on his neck, like the sly Joseph on the neck of Benjamin, and a great bond sprang up between us. Twenty years! Yes it was no less than that since I had seen him last as a youth at Burpham. I had left him a simple boy, and I found him a formidable and mature man. Not only so, but I found him to combine with this massive strength an unselfishness beyond the unselfishness of women, and, along with this, that curious kind of smouldering unconscious heroism, such as distinguishes the most enigmatic and baffling characters in Conrad. How irrelevant a thing it seemed to me, as I watched him, and tried in vain to get from him any hint of the desperations that had marked his face, all my own wordy “dithyrambs” of pyschological analysis! Art? Rhetoric? Criticism? Why here before me, in the face and figure of this man of my own blood, this sixth son of my father, was actually present, realized in the flesh, all that heroic poetry I was for ever gathering up in my struggles with Homer!

By the way, speaking of Homer, I am anxious to record again that in my view of such things the prose translation of the Iliad and Odyssey, in the Loeb Classics, by Professor A. T. Murray of Stanford University, is the best that has ever been made of this greatest of poets. It is a translation worthy to be compared with Sir Thomas Urquhart's version of Rabelais, and is far simpler and less precious in its choice of words than the famous Lang and Leaf one. My own private feeling is that these two supreme poems are the work of two quite different hands; the Odyssey being several centuries later and written, if not by a woman, at least by a poet whose sympathy with, and understanding of, women, went pretty far. As to the notion that a sequence of wandering minstrels could possibly have composed these integral works of art, such a thought seems to me on a par with the idea that a sequence of clever theologians could have concocted the Figure and the Sayings of Jesus.

But to return to these precious four years of mine, isolated from the world, in these "up-state" hills. One of the peculiarities of this region that so appealed to me is the number of old stone walls dividing the fields, walls built without mortar and bearing on the top of them sturdy beams of wood, laid cross-wise, without the use of nails. Around these ancient walls and around these tumbledown wooden fences have grown up, by the work of Nature rather than of man, tall hedges of chokeberry, thorn, and other white-blossoming bushes; and the presence of both stone walls and hedges gives this landscape, combined with the bare grassy uplands between the wooded hills, a look sometimes, especially in the autumn, that stirs up in me feelings that must revert to far-away impressions of my Salopian ancestors of the Welsh Marches.

Walking over these hills I have tried to strip myself of any pride in my lecturing and my writing. I have tried to imagine myself as an eccentric “Old Man of the Hills,” called by my first name with some grotesque addition. I think it is a pity that nowadays we leave all expressive nicknames to gangsters and gunmen. It is part and parcel of the de-personalizing, de-individualizing of an unimaginative age. In my lonely walks in these hills I tried to think of myself as “Loony John” and to keep my life-illusion free of literary self-consciousness. There is a deep wisdom in the affectionate and wanton nicknames that the proletariate loves to use! It and the jesters and chroniclers of the old time have the same poetic instinct.

The worst insult you can give to a man is to turn him into a number, and this is what Society loves to do in its institutions. Even in prison if you are still Jack Straw, it is something. Nothing will come of nothing; but it would keep up a person’s spirits to feel that he passed in the world as Jack o’ Lantern.

The grand secret of enjoying yourself with a free heart is to get rid of ambition, rid of even the most trifling competitions with other poor devils. But we must have our pride; and we must have a very deep pride. We must have a pride in simply being ourselves outside and beyond any conceivable competition. Luckily for me I have inherited from my father a towering pride; but not a pride in anything in particular.

This is the subject I used to meditate upon more than upon anything else as I walked and walked over these saxifrage-covered hills. There is no “trespassing” here as there is with us in England. These isolated “up-state” farmers are of a mixed Holland-Dutch, German-Dutch, and English descent, but their methods, though in *some* respects they might be called “Kulaks,” are singularly Communistic. They use the same machinery, taking it round from farm to farm, as in the Russian "Collectives," and they exchange a still more precious commodity; they exchange labour. And so while they own their farms and have substantial savings in the banks they are the extreme opposite of English farmers. I can walk in this region if I can overcome the physical obstacles, in any direction, all round the compass! And my neighbours don't get in the least annoyed when they see me forcing myself over or under their fences. For the first time in my life I could, starting from my door-step, walk on my two feet *wherever I pleased*. And this applies to these people's houses, paddocks, gardens, bartons, enclosures, chicken-yards, farm-yards, door-yards. Just imagine what it would have been like at Burpham if I had suddenly inaugurated the custom of walking into people's yards and across people's gardens! In America there is not only a most real "democracy," there is the latent psychology of a good many aspects of Communism. The Russians are perfectly right in making love to America.

For myself I am always thinking how I would get on in a Communistic State. It would be nothing to me to give up private property as long as I was freed from worry. Nor do I see why I could not work honestly for a Communistic State and yet live ultimately for my own secret sensations and for my own unbounded secret pride in my sensations! Oh, I have pondered on these things so much, walking about these hills! Suppose machinery *does* extend its sway, suppose science in the hands of minority-dictators *does* more and more dominate us, suppose the great battle of the future, with its own particular "good and evil," comes to be the struggle of the individual to be himself against the struggle of society to prevent him being himself, what we shall have to do will only be what the saints, lovers, artists, mystics have always done, namely *sink into ourselves and into Nature* and find our pleasure in the most simple, stripped, austere and meagre sensations.

I am entirely in favour of following Communism in getting rid of external dignities and external pomposities and external class-differences. I think that it is a weakness in me to want to be cosseted and petted and protected as “Mr. Powys, the Writer,” or “Mr. Powys, the Lecturer.” At the same time I could no more be an engineer or a farm-labourer or a miner, those persons upon whose labours I live, than I could turn into a horse.

What I would admire in myself would be the courage to live like a tramp, or at any rate if I *had* to have a roof over my head, like Wordsworth’s leech-gatherer, or like that sly old peddlar, the hero of the “Excursion.” What I have been doing in my walks for these last four years has been to imagine myself a solitary elderly man, regarded as half-crazy by his neighbours, who has escaped the workhouse, or “poor-house,” as they call it in America, by means of some infinitesimal relief, or dole, upon which he can just manage to live. “Mad John of Rats’ Barn” I would be then, and if I couldn’t sell leeches I could at least look at newts. And at the girls too, maybe, “come Sunday,” when they had their print frocks on; and who knows but now and again some Molly or Dolly or Polly would come mimsy-limsy along, when Mad John was peering over the gate. For I saw myself, while I walked over these hills, and sought to shake off and toss away every rag of exterior reputation, as at once a saintly old man and a lecherous old man; an old man who loved to warm his bones over the fire, an old man who never opened his door of a morning without tapping his head on the ground in worship of the divine ether or of Helios the Sun, and yet an old man for whom the mere fact that Providence had endowed girls with legs at all, instead of making them “all of a piece” like leeches, or with fishes’ tails like mermaids, was the most blessed miracle in the world.

Independence! Independence! That is the secret of all philosophy. To be independent of the opinions of your neighbours, of your relations, of your friends; to be independent of this ridiculous itch for “being heard of”; to take the neck of your desire to compete and wring it; and then, when it becomes a question of pride, to let your pride tower up like a wavering, fluctuating, gigantic Genie from the smoke bottle of your own magical soul!

Mind you I don’t want to be “mad John of Rats’ Barn” till I have written a shelf-ful of first-rate romances. But just as Montaigne who was a master life-lover is perpetually gathering himself together to cope with Death, so, though I am driven on by a terrific “libido” to write book after book, I feel uneasy and uncomfortable if I am not making constant efforts to adjust my life-illusion and my pride to a situation starker and more simplified than I have yet known. It is towards this that I have been constantly struggling during these four years of isolation. The mind — heaven help us all! — has always to be surmounting obstacles to its peace; and what I have come to feel is that since, as Heraclitus says, “all life is war” peace of mind is something that must be perpetually fought for and held with a grim clutch. I have come of late to use the phrase “premeditated ecstasy” and I would try to explain what I am aiming at in this daring expression. When our inmost self gathers up its battle-mood and *en protois iachon eche monuchos hippous!*” … “and into the mêlée drives with a cry its single-hooved horses,” it attains an interior calm underneath the turmoil of its gesture; and this interior calm offers itself, like a clear mirror beneath confusion, to all those restorative elements, in the impinging weight of the surrounding cosmos, which are the cause of human ecstasy. In reality both the initial peace of mind and its exultant response to these elements *are creative acts of the mind itself*, of the mind using what is called “the will” and “the imagination” — whatever mysterious activities these may be — to force itself to be strong and exultant in the midst of an opposing turmoil and in the face of a catastrophic menace.

As I have hinted before — and what I say about myself applies, with a difference, to every soul in its ultimate struggle with the cosmos — these sharply-cut pathological "formulæ," such as sadist, masochist, zo-ophilist, misanthropist, extravert, introvert, homosexualist, cerebralist, heterosexualist and so forth, are too neatly scientific to cope with the mysterious impulses of a living soul. Grant life, and you have *some* form of consciousness. Grant *any* degree of consciousness, and you have an unpredictable and indeterminable element of creative will.

Just to amuse you, reader, and. to arouse your analysis of your own particular mental processes, which I am convinced will escape these tedious pathological categories just as mine do, let me employ the word "Cowperism" for the particular disposition described in this book. You may not be a practising masochist, any more than I am; your sadistic tendencies may be as purely cerebral as mine are; you may loathe exhibitionism and narcissism as much as I do; and yet you may feel yourself constantly driven by what I call "sacred malice" to tear away the portentous mask of comic dignity which conceals the tragic dignity of every human soul. It is then, to the pathological activity of this "sacred malice" that I would, in my humour, give the name "Cowperism." For instance when I glory in the feminine aspects of my character, instead of slurring them over, it is this "sacred malice" that drives me on. For of course I am well aware of the vulgar pride in what is called "upstanding manliness" that such an emphasis tends to upset.

It is in fact this "sacred malice" of asserting your real identity against the "human, too-human" mask, which, like the single eye and the single tooth of the Phorkyads, we all keep handing around, that I call being a "Cowperist," a name which, by the way, if I may give a hint to my American friends, must be pronounced "Cooperist." To a considerable extent, this book of mine, the “Autobiography” of a tatterdemalion Taliessin from his third to his sixtieth year, is the history of the “de-classing” of a bourgeois-born personality, and its fluctuating and wavering approach to the Communistic system of social justice: not however to the Communistic philosophy: for I feel that the deepest thing in life is the soul’s individual struggle to reach an exultant peace in relation to more cosmic forces than *any* social system, just or unjust, can cope with or compass.

What is wrong with so many clever people to-day is the fatal distrust lodged in their minds — and lodged there by a superstitious awe in the presence of transitory scientific theories — of the power in their own souls. What we need — and the key to it lies in ourselves — is a bold return to the *magical* view of life. I don’t mean to the magic of Madame Blavatsky, but to that kind of faith in the potentialities of the ego, with which all great poetry and all great philosophy has been concerned. That feeling of exultant liberation from the immediate pressure of practical life, which any “logos” from the arena of Goethe, or Spinoza, or Leonardo, or Plato, or Heraclitus, or Epictetus, or the old Chinese Taoists conveys, is what we need.

Science has not changed the human soul. Science has not changed the basic relations between the human soul and the mystery surrounding it. We are still potential magicians as long as we have faith in the power within us to create and to destroy. Social justice is one thing. The free life of the individual soul *under any system* is another thing. What we do is important; but it is less important than what we feel; for it is our feeling that alone is under the control of our will. In action we may be weak and clumsy blunderers, or on the other hand sometimes incompetent and sometimes competent. All this is largely beyond our control. What is *not* beyond our control is our *feeling* about it.

“I am a cowardly, blundering, incompetent worm.”

Very good. So be it. But it is in my power to be a worm with a deep, calm, resolute cheerfulness, if not with a magical exultation.

But to return to my four years in "up-state" New York. It is certainly my opinion that a man could not — go where he might — find kinder, more considerate, more indulgent neighbours than I have found in this region. As I have made clear, I have travelled over this vast country from north to south and from east to west; but I have never found any Americans equal to these Americans. They have, in these four years, completely changed my ideas as to what the American character can be. They come of "good stock" as people say in this country; but it must be partly the climate, with its deadly winters and comparatively cool summers, and partly some curious psychic quality arising from the peculiar blending of races among them — the German with the Dutch, and the English with the Dutch, for instance — that makes them, to my thinking, so much nicer than either the thoroughgoing puritanical Yankees or the negro-lynching Southerners. The people of what I have hitherto styled my "Ideal America," that is to say Kansas, Arkansas, Southern Missouri and Oklahoma, have, it is true, one advantage over my friends here in being poorer, more haphazard, more happy-go-lucky, more consciously devoted to the great Goddess Chance, less conservative, less respectful towards the rich, less awed by banks and bankers.

But neither the South-West nor the nearer Middle-West can boast the old-world charm, the mellow continuity, of one generation following another in the same tradition of dignified simplicity and arduous labour, which characterizes the people I have been so intimate with, for these four important years of my life.

What a change this isolation in the country has been! No more do I meet that queer old organ-grinder whose creaked-out wistful "tavern music" used to set me thinking, as Sir Thomas Browne says such tunes did him, of "the music of the spheres," that organ-grinder who could speak no syllable of English, but who used *in sua favella,* "in *his* tongue," to moan and groan over unintelligible wrongs, as he held my hand, like one who acted the part of a beggared Oedipus, persecuted alike by gods and men. No more do I see the Buddha-like face of the Jewish ironmonger across the street, no more shuffle in my slippers over Llewelyn's "Fosse-way," that great resounding Seventh Avenue, till I reach the French bakery in Sheridan Square, to buy "Croissants" and "Kitten Rolls," no more watch the Dickens-reading fishmonger, himself a Dickens character if ever there was one, hand over my purchase to his assistant to be disembowelled, while he himself put my silver in his box and gave me the best of his *l'esprit de poissonerie*, no more could I carry my creased and dusty lecture suit down Greenwich Avenue, past the laundry whose proprietor I had selected because of some crazy likeness in his face to our redoubtable Mr. Montacute of Montacute, he who drove me up Babylon Hill, that fatal day in, when I knew I was losing my home, till I come to the little shop of the heroic Mr. A. whose son, like the great King, was named Saul. All these forms and shapes, together with the eternal litter of those places, and the great steam-shovel with "Marion, Ohio," on it, that seemed for ever scooping at the bowles of Manhattan, are now vaguely fading away, plaintive, bodiless "eidola," gliding, like the thin phantom of Patroclus, in and out of the gates of Hades!

But whatever familiar things of my old life were vanishing — Rachel Philips, in her Portuguese plot, with no one to visit her — it is certainly true that I have never, no! not since those years when I was eight and nine at Dorchester, realized to the full limit, my identity, my native peculiarities, my cherished manias, my sweet superstitions. Yes, I have had, in "up-state" New York, what is seldom allowed to mortal man upon this earth — I have had the full unhindered swing of my personality. I expect it is for no other reason than to get this very "swing" that so many of us individualistic Englishmen leave the island, whose bones are in *our* bones, and settle down in such far-off alien spots. We carry our ways with us, our turns of speech, Our traditional routine, our rock-bound prejudices. We are all so eccentric that penned up close together we lack space wherein to expand. And so we sail away, to have our fling among less crowded, less furiously egoistic, less obstinate, less self-righteous, less adventurous natives!

How could I expand freely, how could I be the unmitigated, unqualified, unconscionable "Cowperist" I wanted to be, when I had all round me the class-distinctions, the class-prejudices, the back-bitings, the obsequiousnesses, the superciliousnesses, the superiorities, the perpetual psychic question, "*Is* he a gentleman? *Has* he been to a decent school?"

It must have been a considerable moment in my youthful life for instance, when hidden once behind the laurel-hedge above the road to the station we heard Mr. Phelips say to some guest at Montacute House:

"Yes, that's the Vicarage; Powys is the name; a very good family."

But here in these hills, with an "aura" around me of Mohawk chiefs, as formidable as any Owen Glendower, these hard-working descendants of old Dutch "Patroons" and old German and English settlers take me at my face value. I don't need to hide behind any un-mortar'd wall, or any criss-cross fence, to learn what my status is among such as eat bread upon the earth. *I am a man.* In the city I confess I fall below that level, and become a "guy." But here in "up-state" New York I feel I can say, even as the Lord of Hosts said to his questioner, "I am *that* I am."

Yes, I certainly have realized my identity in these New York hills. But there it is! I suppose there are always risks of one sort or another when people let themselves go to the limit in the attempt to be themselves. One of my chief risks has come from my mania for endowing every form of the Inanimate with life, and then worshipping it as some kind of a little god. This was indeed that very mania for "bowing and scraping" to idols that my father so especially reprobated. But a much worse risk than this was the trick I fell into in my solitary walks of acting God in my own person. In this extraordinary obsession I was bringing back with a vengeance my ancient past; for this is exactly what I had done in that lane at Shirley. In fact I gave myself up to an orgy of acting God during these four years.

When we philosophers are alone we naturally tend, as Heine says, to deify ourselves; but in my obsession I went further than the innocent *auto-theocracy* that Heine so wittily repudiates. For I got into the habit, in these long lonely walks, of pretending to myself that I had trillions of trillions of "spirits from the vasty deep" at my disposal, ready to obey my indignant "white magic." These armies of "angels and ministers of grace" I thought of as *variously coloured;* and I always despatched the same squadron of them upon the same errand. I was only reverting, in this, to the method I had used in the London hospital, before my first operation, so as to feel I was of *some* use in that rocking ship of suffering; but in these hills I concentrated on sending supernatural relief to the particular victims of our damned race whose sufferings especially troubled me. I say I "pretended" to myself that I had the power to cause these entities to materialize and obey my commands. But it must have been really a little more than "pretending," or it could hardly have become the irresistible imperative it soon did become, just as if I had been a Catholic priest, who for humanity's sake and his own sake *dare not* intermit any of his miracle-working Masses.

I have in my time been foolishly prejudiced — it would take too long to explain just why — against the subtle metaphysical minds of the various Hindus I have met. I expect something in my fierce, poetical, Celtic temperament grows instinctively angry at the bland assumption of intellectual superiority which these sages adopt. I prefer the more humorous, less metaphysical Chinamen; though I confess I have had spasmodic moods of interest in Theosophy, which is I suppose based upon Hindu ideas. But the Chinese sages are the only ones who seem able to contemplate the Absolute with a sense of humour. How grave a teacher the Indian Buddha is for instance! Any allusion to Tibet however has always excited me; so has anything I could lay my hand on about the difference between White Magic and Black Magic; but something far deeper than all this is stirred in the depths of my being by stories of the Mediæval Catholic Saints. Why, the mere idea of the early Scholastic Theologians, the vivid images I have of them, the instinctive knowledge I have of the way they felt, and of their excitement in purely mystical and purely intellectual things, is something that has "thickened out," as William James would say, the possibilities of life for me.

When I contemplate the remorseless organization of our modern nations in their deliberate preparation for more frightful wars than this last one, and when I think of the blood-and-iron industrialism, which seems, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, to resemble a kind of daily war, there does seem something infinitely desirable about the passionate mystical, scholarly retirement from the world of these laborious thinkers. I feel as if I could understand much better the sort of intellectual, mystical, and imaginative life that Pelagius lived, or Marcion, or even the metaphysical Duns Scotus, than I can grasp the temperamental mentality of a modern "Behaviourist." But of course I know perfectly well that behind *every* human "formula" of life — even behind these apparently purely "scientific" attitudes — there is a will to believe.

You can't escape it! the "personal equation" follows, like an inevitable skin, every curve, every angle, of the most mathematical thinker's system. This is profoundly true of Bertrand Russell. It is true of Whitehead. It was true, as Nietzsche pointed out, of Spinoza himself. All comes back — whatever they say — to the *person* behind the thought. I do not know much about Paracelsus, who must have been half-mystic, half-thaumaturge, but one idea of his, which jumps with what I have gathered, by ambiguous hints here and there, of Tibetan adepts, has sunk deep into my mind. This is the idea that our intensely-concentrated thoughts can become "elementals," faintly-living entities, that is to say, whose dimly-vitalized shapes, once projected from the creative energy of a person's imaginative will, can go on existing and acting in some etheric dimension of that psychic plane in which all so-called "matter" floats.

It has been under the obsession of this idea during these semi-anchorite years that I have got into the habit of projecting the thought-images that I name my "angels," sending them over the face of the earth to alleviate those particular sufferings, such as the suffering caused by vivisection, lynching, trapping, the sufferings of prisoners and captives, the sufferings of "women labouring with child," the sufferings of misused children and of all victims of sadism, that have lodged themselves most deeply in my consciousness.

I have said that I was "pretending to be God"; but this does not really quite describe what I have been up to. I once read somewhere a passage from some English ex-soldier, who had dabbled in these mystical matters, in which there emerged the singular idea that what we call "God" is a magnetic, ubiquitous, vibratory force, of a sub-conscious rather than of a super-conscious character, corresponding on a very practical plane with Dr. Buck's "Cosmic Consciousness," and a force, moreover, which, in place of *praying to,* you were in a position to *command!* This queer notion of “commanding” the psychic creative force instead of invoking it arrested my deepest interest; and for these four years of retirement from the world that is what I have been trying to do.

It will not be hard for you to see, reader, if you have read this book with any penetration, that in this obsession, or superstition in the order of “white magic,” I realized, in a peculiarly natural manner, though it has tended to become a most trying burden, certain very deep and far-back-rooted impulses of my identity. To tell you the truth it has needed a serious effort to my will to throw off this queer mania, thus increasingly indulged for four important years; but I *have*, and that quite recently, thrown it off, not altogether or in every respect, but very considerably and fairly suddenly. Let me, as hastily as I can, indicate to you how in these years — only leaving this place for a couple of nights twice a year — I actually arranged my days.

I would compel myself to get up any time between six-thirty and seven-thirty. This was always an effort; for I would feel extremely exhausted both in mind and body when I first got up. And at these times my whole soul seemed as it were exposed in its totality and *risen to the surface!* It was like a pool of clear hardly-flowing river water then. It was, if I may say so, *all surface.* Gradually certain thought-ripples, as I put on my clothes, appeared as if by chance, like straws or leaves or twigs — sometimes like a deadly twig — ruffling the surface of this hurtingly clear mirror. It was indeed with a kind of distressing shock, like the hurt of rape to a virgin, that, as I put on my clothes, I faced the light of the sun. The same hurtingly sensitive receptivity — just as if my soul really were a girl being ravished — would characterize my first reaction to all I chanced to see out of my window.

There is something about my soul so primordially childish, so freshly-born every day, that when it wakes it suffers a kind of birth-spasm as it issues forth from the womb of Not-Being into the jarring dissonance of Being. And so virginal is it, that it is not only hurt by the rays of the sun, or by the rocks and stones and trees or houses or walls that first strike upon it. It is hurt, *and raped*, as you might put it, by its own *accidental thoughts.* And some of these thoughts, these ripples across the diurnal virginity of my mind, are wicked, and some are good. The thought of some passage in one of my "forbidden books" will for instance ruffle my consciousness, a thought whose every ripple goes on enlarging and enlarging, as if it were off on a journey to eternity! Then the thought, the good, careful, anxious, meticulous thought, will cross my mirror, like a sudden breath of journeying wind, that I must take my net, before I do anything else this day, and make another attempt to rescue some little fish in a drying-up pool and transport them to a deeper one and one that shows signs of surviving the drought.

This matter of saving fish in my small river was constantly on my conscience all these years, and I used sometimes to have to walk as far as a mile carrying a pail of them, till I found an adequate pool for their reception. Once I was rewarded for my untiring fussiness by seeing a strange sight. I actually saw a procession of small fish working their way across a strip of bare earth from under a rock where the water had deserted them to the pool from which I was catching the others. It is not everybody who has actually seen a number of little fish crossing the dry land. It is true it was only a very short distance and it is true they were desperate for water; but you would have supposed they would have flopped aimlessly about till they perished, instead of taking this direct course.

Then my troublesome impulsion to meddle with the fate of my fellow-creatures would, if it were the summer, inflict on my virginal consciousness the thought of the necessity of catching some blue-bottle fly or some common house-fly that had got into a tight place and of carrying it downstairs to let it out of my front door. Then another wicked ripple from a different “forbidden book” would cross my mind, driven by a dark evil wind, rising from nowhere.

Once dressed, the first thing I would do was to lay my finger on a little sacred talisman from the tomb of St. Therese of Lisieux, and to pray for Llewelyn’s health. It greatly annoys Llewelyn that I should do this. But I take a malicious joy in so annoying him! If I don’t mind teasing the godly by worshipping the moon why should I mind teasing the ungodly by praying to St. Therese?

Then I move to a window looking towards the North and utter prayers for, or *command* benedictions for, the people buried in a graveyard in that direction; nor do I fail to make particular mention of a certain American “Aunt Stone,” a mighty maker of quilts, whose coffin I helped to lower into the grave. Then by name, image, and personality, “briefly but carefully,” as Gabbitas and Thring directed me to write my applications to my first girl schools, I summon up, in a sort of providential roll-call, all the members of an extremely extensive family the roof of whose house is from that position just discernible. Then I invoke, under the name of “Ichthus” the holy fish, a particularly lovely trout which in one of my walks I found in a pool. “Ichthus, the Fish!” I chant in a sort of gabbled plain-song, “may he swim between the knees of a most beautiful lady!”

Coming down from the attic I used to be greeted by my two superb white cats — both of which I have recently caused to be assassinated by the vet — and then, while I did every mortal thing that had to be done, in the way of what Americans call “chores,” both outside and inside the house, I continued my ritualistic rigmaroles. I had invented a most satisfactory way of disposing of my garbage, by conveying it to the slope of a wooded hill, where it was devoured by crows and skunks, and like “Mr. Geard of

Glastonbury" I always used to add to this largesse a piece of fresh white bread that I cut from my loaf and pressed to my lips as I mounted the hill, muttering to myself,

"Christ, the living bread! Christ, the living bread!"

Then, leaving this flesh of the Saviour to the crows — but I always placed it at a certain distance from the garbage, and a most religious crow used to sit in a tree croaking for me to be off — I left my garbage-pail beside an old apple-tree that I named "Polutlas" or "the much-enduring," because it had endured so much and yet bore fruit from its aged boughs, and made my way towards one of the large flat stones of this region that lay at the bottom of a thickly-wooded eminence. At the top of this hill, which must have been about the height of Montacute Hill, was an avenue of large heaps of heavy stones, which I hoped were the grave-mounds of old Indian Chiefs, Mohawk chiefs, for the Mohawks were my favourite nation; and at certain seasons during these four years, at the two equinoxes and at other pivotal days, I used to climb to this wooded summit and walk up and down this "death-avenue," as I liked to call it, kneeling in front of each pile of stones and invoking these dead Indians.

But every day I would go to this low-lying stone in the grass, this grey stone spotted with lichen, and crouching before it I would tap my head against it, uttering words "rather to be concealed than revealed"; but incidentally calling upon the souls of the dead Indians to cure Llewelyn of all his troubles, whether they were of mind or body.

Before washing or shaving, for I had not touched soap and water as yet, I now would return to the house and call my black spaniel "Peter" — as coal-black as Faust's poodle — to come out from under my couch and have his leash put on. I had found it suited my duodenal ulcer to lie on my back all day as I worked, and so, for all these four years, I wrote with a board propped against my knees and my paper on the board; and it was under this couch that Peter — a dog who had attained cerebral peculiarities exactly like those of his master — hid himself from the world. The presence of young women was in fact as agitating to Peter as it was to me and sometimes when their clear voices reached us from far away he would tremble like a little black aspen-bush from nose to tail. Peter felt that it was incumbent upon him to warn his master when these dangerous beings approached the house. Not that he was *never* known to bark at men; but it was a perfunctory, official barking, not the bark of the ulterior danger-point, not the bark that comes from the centre of our complexes.

Peter and I understand each other through and through. He is, though of a much smaller breed — thus does History repeat itself — not unlike Thora in appearance; only Thora was a woman and Peter is a cerebralist who worships Eros with his nerves rather than by propagating his species. But his faithfulness to me is extraordinary. On certain occasions when I shut myself away from him by the whole space of two rooms and two closed doors I always find him standing sentry when I emerge. These are the only occasions, except when I am in bed, that I do separate myself from him and I do it then in order to have an enema.

For two or three years I have not had one single *natural* action of the bowels; but I have come greatly to prefer this artificial method to the natural one! For one thing it has forced me to read those great old-world books that alone have the strength, the gall, the spirit, the comprehensiveness, the heroic grossness, to *go decently* with the process of spending a whole hour at stool. In this way I have read nearly every word of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Tristam Shandy and Rabelais. Two volumes of Montaigne in the old French, I read too, in this way, though with some difficulty, and more than half of *Don Quixote*.

But to return to my dog. It often needed more than the sign of the Pentagon or the Hexagon to get this Mephistophelean Spaniel out from under my couch. When he was in his worst fit of agoraphobia, feeling just as I feel sometimes, it became necessary to lift up the edge of the couch. I am afraid Peter will soon forget his real name; for I generally speak of him as “The Black”, and when I call to him on our walks my own private name for him is the “Very Old”, because, being now in his seventh year, he is growing perceptibly grey under his chin. I have fallen into a peculiar kind of chant when I call to him across these hills.

“Coom … along,” the crows hear me intone in my particular rendering of the Dorset dialect, “Coom … along … *Very* old!”

In fact when Dreiser first stayed with me out here he got the idea, or pretended to get the idea, that the “Very Old’s” actual name was “Coom-Along”.

I bought “The Black” — and I had to pay heavily for him, for he has more ancestors in his pedigree than many of my friends possess — at some kennels on the great Highway between Poughkeepsie and Albany — when he was already three years old. This fact accounts for one of his most curious eccentricities. The singular link between us — the link between two “Degenerates” who can name their eight grandparents — is of a special kind. The “Very Old” knows nothing of the tradition or convention about “master and dog.” In his doting simplicity he thinks we are just *equal friends*. I take him on the leash along the road, because of our mutual fear of automobiles, and only let him go when we debouch across country. As long as we are advancing, he always stays close to me. Sometimes, gambolling, sometimes rolling on his back, sometimes wriggling on his belly, and at these times his short uplifted tail reveals the degree of his good spirits just as, on his retirements under my couch, his well-known receding rump, with the tail pressed tight down, becomes a symbol of panic-stricken introversion. Happily and naturally does the “Very Old” caracol round me, or shoot off on the scent of birds, for he displays not the least interest in rabbits or woodchucks, and so it goes till we reach the limit of our walk; but the moment I turn to go home, this untraditional dog takes it as a sort of exciting game to see which of us can get home first! The “Very Old”, having four legs to my two, is always the one who wins in this game; and I perceive, from half a mile away, that small black shape scurrying across the hills.

Such is my deep-rooted asceticism, that the mere fact of my feeling so happy in these hills at having escaped from the tumult of cities automatically sets me upon my heavy burden of playing at God. While “The Black” is safe at home waiting for me on the porch my own return is now delayed by prolonged pauses, during which I shut my eyes and project my various-coloured and yet invisible sprites upon their airy campaigns of rescue. It has been curious to me to discover that in these antics, during which I make spasmodic motions of my body, parallel to what the old puritans must have done when they “wrestled with the Lord in prayer”, I have come to do exactly what the occult “masters” hint at as the proper method in such proceedings.

I act the Trinity in fact; for I project my waves of magnetic force from the three centres of my being; from my brain, from the pit of my stomach, and from the centre of my erotic energy. I won’t weary you with a detailed description of the armies of magnetically-created spirits that I thus send forth. But I will hurriedly give you, ere I leave this subject, a laconic summary of the various victims of the cruelty of our race which these spirits are despatched, either to rescue, or, if there is no other way, to put out of their suffering.

To the victims of prison, of sadism, of vivisection, of traps, of cancer, of Americans in Georgia, in Mississippi, in Alabama, of child-ravishers in India, of child-labour all over the world, I despatched my motley-coloured and yet invisible angels. The thing was by no means a mere game to me. That it was serious was proved by the immense number of pleasant walks whose free happiness was mercilessly curtailed by these performances. And it was not that if I left out any of these rigmaroles I felt that I should *myself* suffer from it. It was in no sense an obligatory penance. What I felt was that since human beings have believed in prayer for some twenty-five thousand years who was I — on the strength of a few scientific discoveries and a few scientific theories only a few hundred years old — to intermit an immemorial custom, with which my race had mitigated, or fancied it had mitigated, the horrors of life for that vast tract of time? I had at least conceded something to science — though to a somewhat unconventional and mystical science — by turning the great wheel round, and instead of praying to Buddha or Christ or Confucius or Zoroaster or any of *their* Gods, commanding my own private hosts of created entities, to do something to relieve these atrocious sufferings.

Of course you will say it was just a crafty trick, by means of which, without having to visit the hospitals, or the prisons, or the laboratories, without having to watch vivisection, without having to live in Georgia, I could get ease for my troubled conscience. But I cannot think that it was altogether such a trick; and I cannot think so, because, out of the abysses of my scepticism with regard to the assumptions of Science, I did seriously hold that “there might be something” in such doings. And if there was one chance in a million that my fiercely-willed waves of magnetic vibration *did* bring relief to some negro in Georgia, some prisoner in Devil’s Island, some man or woman dying of cancer, some dog under the hands of vivisectors, was it not a gross and callous selfishness not to make use of any psychic power that I might possess, especially if everyone did not possess it, so as to give this one chance in a million its opportunity?

The public in America has been kept in the dark, even more than the public in England, about this matter of vivisection. There has never been upon *any* human subject so much crafty and deliberately misleading propaganda as that which the vivisectors have used to pull wool over the eyes of the world. The "sentimentality" in this matter is to be found, not in those who oppose themselves to this monstrous crime, but in the ridiculously emotional awe with which the average person, hypnotized by these crafty scientists and their sycophantic press, regards the whole problem. *Totally unnecessary cruelty* on a scale that the general public has no conception of, is going on all the while. The word "science" covers every kind of atrocity; and the issue is perfectly clear. My opposition to vivisection, particularly to the vivisection of dogs, is based upon an argument that is unanswerable. This wickedness contradicts and cancels the one single advantage that our race has got from what is called evolution, namely the development of *our sense of right and wrong*. If vivisection, as it is increasingly practised by these unscrupulous, pitiless, unphilosophical scientists, is allowed to go on unchecked — and it will go on unchecked until people feel as strongly about it as women did about women's suffrage — something that the mysterious forces of the Universe have themselves developed in us will soon have its spiritual throat cut to the bone. In other words certain forms of sickening and unthinkable cruelty that hitherto, when perpetrated by individuals, have been stopped at once, condemned by both moral opinion and law, are now — as long as we *vaguely* assume it is done for the advantage of science — tolerated as an unfortunate but inescapable necessity.

Vivisection is the new superstition, the new tyranny, the new incarnation of the powers of evil. Like all abominable wickedness that has once got into the saddle, this vivisecting science has now begun to brand as “sentimental,” as “emotional,” as “idealistic,” as “unpractical” the deep honest realistic human instinct which it is deliberately seeking to kill. What science — using vivisection, for the obtaining of what is often entirely irrelevant knowledge, and simply because vivisection is an *interesting thing in itself* — what science, I say, is really doing, is nothing less than *suggesting to the conscience of our race,* this conscience that evolution itself has produced, that it is a sign of superior intellect to be completely devoid of natural goodness, of natural pity, and of all natural sensitiveness. And the ironical thing is that while this abominable vivisection is perpetrating worse and worse, and more and more useless cruelties, all manner of very simple and even unphilosophical people are working fantastical and unbelievable cures *by purely psychic and mental methods!*

Well, to return to these four years of country life in America, years in which I have had a greater chance to realize my identity than I have ever had before in my life; it is really extraordinary to what mad lengths my mania for invoking the psychic powers on behalf of my friends was carried. I began praying for the most remote persons! I included every single individual I knew at all well; and some most hostile to me, alien to me, and critical of me. Take Louis Wilkinson for instance. Of course Louis isn’t “hostile” to me, for he has, in his way, a good deal of affection for me, but he is certainly extremely critical of me; not so much of my writings as of my character. Well, it tickles my fancy down to the ground, and satisfies a certain particular kind of perverse humour, which is an element in me so strong that I regard it as the distillation of the very essence of my attitude to life, that I should have added “This Archangel’s” name to that list of the inmost darlings of my soul for whose sake I invoke the invisible powers.

The truth is that my enemies — I am not thinking of Louis now but of those who feel suspicious of my “Cowperism” afar off — don’t realize that my mania for acting the zany, together with the “sacred malice” from which it springs, contains, just as does my contradictory blending of sanctity and satyrishness, a quite definite philosophy of life, and a philosophy, moreover, that combines reaction with revolution in a way in harmony with Nature’s own devious and yet magical method of going to work. But it has been a singular experience to be allowed, once in my life, what may be called a “free temperamental fling”. Blake says, “Excess is the path to Wisdom”; and though I have already — now that I have decided to leave America and return to my native land — cut down drastically on the bulk of these singular performances I am doing so out of no “rational” quarrel with these superstitions considered in themselves, but simply from a feeling that I have been lavishing so much of my magnetic energy upon them that I begin to suspect that with my advancing years I may be tapping the psychic vitality necessary for the writing of my books.

In blunter language I fancy that what within me now is rebelling against all these thaumaturgic rigmaroles is simply the life-spring of healthy selfishness. But in my ferocious auto-malice I refuse to allow this healthy selfishness to fool me into any pompous self-deception by using the old familiar argument about “my duty to my art”. To the devil with “art”! I am too old a fox in the “Park Coverts” of the Cosmos to be led by the nose by any braggadocio of that kind. My writings — novels and all — are simply so much propaganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life. It is the prophecy and poetry of an organism that feels itself in possession of certain magical secrets that it enjoys communicating. And, by the way, I certainly feel conscious of conveying much more of the cubic solidity of my vision of things in fiction than it is possible to do in any sort of non-fiction.

It is for this reason that my instinct has led me in this “Autobiography” to treat myself as if I were one of my own fictional characters, even at the risk of making myself out more of a rascal and more of a fool than my friends have supposed me to be. *Caricaturing* is the master-trick! And that is why the discreet, dignified, plausible autobiographies are so insipid and unconvincing. A touch of caricature is what we *must* have, if we are to compete, even in this analytic job, with the beautiful madness of Nature.

I wish to the devil that this book of mine would be translated into Chinese. That Chinaman, who listened to my crazy discourse, when, shrewdly stimulated by “Mr. Weston’s Good Wine” at the Corpus High Table, I indicated the mystical connection between cosmic awe and the erotic urge, would be the one to get the esoteric drift of this present work! A Taoist is what I really am; but a Taoist uninfluenced by that later Buddhistic element, that indifference to pleasure and pain, which is such an un-Homeric treachery to our life’s Trojan War.

I suppose one of the most exacting demands of my life-illusion is that I should feel as well as act in a *poetical* way. Thus though many of my deliberately *forced* feelings and gestures might be called “affected,” though really they are no more affected than the feelings and gestures of a monk who wishes to live the saintly life, no one could say that the urge behind them, the urge that drives me to them, is anything but the deepest impulse of my nature. One of the least burdensome among these poetic obligations laid on me by my life-illusion was the concentrated piety with which I have got into the habit of praying for my dead relations. I have been as Roman in this as “Marius the Epicurean” and as Chinese as Confucius himself.

I have never passed that much-enduring apple-tree that I call "Polutlas," in my early morning disposals of my garbage, without uttering a prayer for the "rising to immortality and intense happiness" of that grandfather of mine on the distaff side whose possession of so much loose silver in his trouser-pockets impressed me as a child. And every day when I put my head in the basin — for it has entertained me from my childhood to see how long I can hold my head under water — I pray for my father's father in his grave in the Blackmore Vale.

"May old L.C.P." I burble and splutter from under the water, "rise to immortality and intense happiness!"

It amuses me not a little to notice how this "rise to immortality" prayer of mine goes so much further and is so much more daring than the quiet "May he rest in peace" of the Church. But as for my father, every morning as I stop to stare at the foaming torrent of our spring-and-autumn stream, as it swirls round the rocks within a bow-shot of this little garden, I cry aloud, to the astonishment of my friend "Sis," the unruly hornless cow, upon whose milk I live and between whom and me there is such a singular understanding, "*It's not so cold*, *John, my boy!*" For I envisage at these times the majestic form of my progenitor standing stark naked in this swirling stream, encouraging me to face all the Preston Brooks of the world, and finally the deep West Bay of death itself.

I have got a curious satisfaction in my wanderings about these Shopshire-looking hills from my passion for giving names to the anonymous. Wordsworth was a great one for this exciting trick of scrawling our poor human signatures, like so many lover's tokens upon the many-breasted mother of men; and I too have derived no small comfort from it. "Merlin's grave," a great mossy natural knoll, covered in the spring with the carmine flowers of the wild cyclamen, finally became so real to me that I fell into the habit of burying my face in its damp rubble and invoking the great magician, as if, while awaiting his deliverance from his mysterious “esplumeoir,” he had been really present here. For this I was rewarded in a most practical way; for never have I smelt such indescribable fragrance, as if from the deep-zoned bosom of Ceridwen herself, the immortal inspirer of Taliessin, as I used to inhale from that bed of moss!

Another spot, with a wider landscape about it, I named “Tintern Abbey,” not so much because I thought of the real Tintern Abbey, as in memory of a particular hill-ridge, above a wood near Montacute, to which we used to give this name as we rested there on our way home to tea.

Here, in this New York “Tintern Abbey,” there lay a gigantic floor of rock, “whose peculiarity was,” as it says in the Mabinogion, the causing of an especially sharp pain to any knees that knelt upon it! It pleased my mediæval nature to see whether I could endure kneeling on this penitential rock long enough not only to pray for my son, but also for Llewelyn — whether he liked it or not! — and finally for that satirical heathen “The Archangel,” who would most especially be outraged by it.

My brother Will brought me a magnificent oak-cudgel, cut by himself from an oak-tree in Hampshire and so heavy that it needs my abnormally strong wrists to walk with it at all. This stick has been one of the greatest pleasures I have had since my father cut me that laurel-wood dagger at Shirley! But it must be a Druidical cudgel, endowed with singular psychic potentialities, for as I have walked with it of late it has inspired me with the most deadly insight into my character, especially into that vein of romantic weakness which is mingled with my greatest strength. But under the influence of this stick I plunge into this weakness, joyously embracing it and yielding to it to the limit! Carrying this great stick I grow supernaturally aware of the feminine fragility, the naïve softness, the artless timidity of my nature. All my fussy oldwomanishness, all my silly fears of fierce dogs and drunken men, all my meticulous anxieties and hypochondrias, seem to pulverize me as I walk past one or other of my familiar grave yards — for I live between two of them — where I pause to "command" the joyful resurrection of these invisible bones.

But then it is that from beneath all this weakness, a weakness which grows upon me till I feel as if this great giant's club were stalking along of its own volition, dragging a nervous "Rural Dean" in tow, there suddenly rises up, from within my ribs, from a dimension, as it were, within the very marrow of my skeleton, a towering and invincible Something, that, like a terrible *Genie* from a cracked bottle of smoke, seems able to grasp this mighty stick as if it were a straw!

And now, as I prepare for my departure for my native land, it comes over me to wonder exactly what I *have* gained from my semi-anchorite life in these hills. I certainly carry with me from my toll-pike cottage on this "up-state" dirt-road, a memory of the best neighbours that I have ever had, or ever shall have. Oh, I shall never forget them! No, not until it comes about that over my own ashes some other "affected charlatan," some other scarcecrow Don Quixote with the faint heart of Sancho, pauses, as he is dragged along by his eager-snuffing dog, to gabble some rigmarole about that "immortal life" upon which the vivisectionists and behaviourists have put their final quietus, will these magnanimous neighbours of mine be forgotten!

It has been most interesting to me to note during these years, when, under the "aura" of the last of the Mohawks, I let my inmost impulses have their free swing, how my nature craves for palpable symbols, even in the most disembodied regions. For instance whenever I use my sponge I go through a most complicated mental ritual. Perhaps without being aware of it, for I know nothing about this particular occult tradition, I am really a Rosicrucian. At any rate the Comte de Gabalis himself could hardly have made more fuss as he used his sponge, as if it were I know not what kind of sacred object, than I make with mine. I find that I often repeat certain mental images until they become of *equal importance* in my litany with the original supplication; and indeed in certain cases — and I expect just this very thing occurs in the history of the human race — I would almost say they become of *more* importance than the original supplication. Every day while I hold my sponge in my hands, I become like a priest. I become a profane and secular version of what my son now is, who though still my child according to the flesh is my spiritual "father" according to the Church.

I like to think of the piety of our nature, thus binding me to my son and thus binding my father to me, as I squeeze my sponge. With the gesture of Pilate I wash my hands free of the letter of the law, while I enjoy its fantastical spirit to the limit. But it does so interest me to note the way in which these mental rituals of our race originate, develop, harden, crystallize, and finally — though in my case with one grand fling I have flung most of it away — crumble into a poetic memory. I imagine, as I squeeze my sponge, my father buying *The Spectator* at that newspaper-stall in Weymouth Station where I used to buy *Ally Sloper*. Then I imagine him leaving the station with this periodical, folded in a neat roll, in his hand. At this point in my profane Matins I always mutter the words:

"Burdon bus rumble back to the Burdon! Gloucester bus rumble back to the Gloucester!"

I first used the image of these two familiar horse vehicles from the old days before motor-cars, in order to call up that black-coated figure proceeding by the by-alleys he preferred to the Esplanade, to make his way to Penn House. But after a while the image of the two buses detached itself from its link with the station or with my father leaving the station and became an aerial equipage, "The Burdon bus" and "The Gloucester bus," bowling along in phantom "tandem," through the ethereal spaces of thought.

Then I would visualize my father standing on the pebbles outside Penn House holding *The Spectator* in a tight roll in his hand; and I would think of *The Spectator* as containing — as it might easily have done in those days — an essay on the difference between Dr. Hort's view of the Second Person of the Trinity and Bishop Westcott's. Then I would see my father leaving *The Spectator* in the Penn House drawing-room and emerging again with muffler and stick to walk to "The Coastguards." At this point, as I squeezed my sponge, my image would take the shape of a certain little mother-of-pearl shell that he used to find in the rock-pools out there. Then, making him glance hurriedly at the clouds over Hardy's Monument, I get him safe back to Penn House, and into his bedroom looking out on St. John's Spire, to wash his hands. Finally my mental image sees him seated at a solitary meal, with *The Spectator* on the table beside him, a glimpse of "The Nothe" accompanying every mouthful he takes, and a vision of Portland every sip of tea.

My favourite before-breakfast walk in this "up-state" home of mine was along the river by the edge of a spinney about half a mile from my house. To reach this I had to scramble along a little bank whose twisted tree-roots, emerging from the mud, reminded me of that higher bank at Sherborne above Lovers' Lane where I used to climb with Littleton. It pleased me to think that the skill I had acquired at eleven, in clinging to tree-roots on a sloping declivity, had remained with me to be used at sixty-one; but this was nothing to the pleasure I got when, walking along this river's edge, looking for trout or for the little fishes called "shiners," I suddenly thought of the Wissey and of the intense eagerness with which Littleton and I followed its windings looking for roach and dace. The sight of caddis-worms — those inch-long bundles of minute sticks animated by an invisible organism — always thrilled me with delight as I stared at this stream, and so did the reflections at its clear bottom of the long-legged water-flies. These reflections represented, like the mystical beasts in the Apocalypse, six legs, or rather four legs and two feelers, and at the end of each leg and at the end of each feeler there moved, as the creature moved, a dark moon rimmed with a silver rim.

As I shuffled along this river-path I used to listen to a little bird I privately named "Sir Witchit", for those were the exact syllables I heard this bird utter. The successor to my little house here, a man after my own heart, told me in a second what my "Sir Witchit" bird was. It was the yellow-throated Maryland warbler. It is a great handicap to, me with birds, this unmusical ear of mine. I cannot fix their notes on my mind so as to recall them. Why, one afternoon when I lived at Burpham, I had no less than thirty different bird-notes interpreted to me as belonging to thirty different birds, whereas, beyond those of the blackbird and the thrush, all these sounds were just "birds in the bushes" to my ridiculous ignorance.

How do I differ from what I was twenty-nine years ago, when in I first sailed for America? Well, I think the chief difference, if I may say so, is a decided improvement in my character; not a brilliant one, not one that can be observed at the first glance, but still an improvement. Consider what I was when I contemplated with such deep astonishment the passionate absorption of Maurice Browne over the smallest æsthetic details in his presentation of *The Trojan Women.* I was more reckless, more sophisticated in those days, more dramatic and theatrical, than I am now. My Chicago Little Theatre life was indeed one continuous performance of the Actor in me. And what an exciting time it was! Everyone came to Maurice's Pedagogic Province. Floyd Dell brought Dreiser. Dreiser brought Masters, and I lectured upon them all, to them all! Arthur Ficke was always coming up from his "home-town," often bringing Witter Bynner with him, and Llewelyn Jones was constantly there. Maurice must have had a real genius for gathering people about him. But the Maurice I knew when I first met him, and perhaps the later Maurice too, but I cannot tell about that, were different from the Maurice of the Little Theatre time. The Maurice of the Little Theatre was a maniacal Messiah of theatrical art. In fact in this whole business of art — always to my rustic Arcadian nature a very ambiguous business — two persons alone have made really deep dents on my rough Derbyshire consciousness, Harry Lyon and Maurice Browne.

Both these people were fiery impassioned crusaders and both of them became, at certain epochs of my life, as far as *æsthetics* went, almost my whole world of environment and experience.

But the improvement in my character which I am now hoping to carry back to my native land has nothing to do with æsthetics. Neither the Renaissance countenance of Maurice Browne, nor the Bayeaux Tapestry countenance of Harry Lyon will gleam, I fear, with responsive ardour in the presence of the patient heraldry of my new Gonfalon. Of all men ever born into the world my father was the proudest, the most egoistic, and also the least interested in art, in literature, in philosophy! But, with all this, he was, as Hardy's Martie says of her Giles, "a good man and one who did good things." With a nature like mine in which a magnetic fluidity, that is neither "good" nor "bad," is forever taking new shapes under the pressure of circumstance — taking new shapes and then again, as Kwang makes Confucius complain of Laotze, "shooting up like a dragon" — it is not easy to weigh or measure any change in the core of character. All the same I *am* inclined to think that I have gained not a little by these long years of sojourn in America. I think it is to the advantage of most Englishmen to be forced out of the traditional grooves of their native life, and be compelled to cope with alien conditions in a foreign land. And in my case I think this prolonged experience has had the effect of forcing me back upon those rooted and simple elements of my father's character which made him, in spite of his obstinate egoism, a benevolent and righteous man.

But taking my life as a whole and hovering with the flight of a hawk over its variegated landscape, I believe that I detect certain quite definite "streams of tendency" in that unrolled map, moving towards the unknown future. For one thing, I fancy that the manner in which I have allowed my natural impulses towards romance and mysticism to dominate me has led to the formation of a curious gap or "lacuna," between the innate and almost savage realism, which after all *is* an element in my nature, and the imaginative, poetical cult, whereby I have romanticized and idealized my life. There *is* a vein of ferocious realism in me; into which, across the neutral No Man's Land of my suspended judgment, my soul at certain moments sinks headlong. And in this realistic mood of mine I am always grimly and starkly aware of the possibility that there is no such thing at all as this "rising to immortality and intense happiness" about which, following the cosmic instinct of Goethe, the Christian instinct of Dostoievsky, and *most of all* the secret tradition of the ancient Mysteries, I am forever muttering and gesticulating.

In this realistic mood I recognize with a grim animal acceptance that it is indeed likely enough that the "soul" perishes everlastingly with the death of the body. But what this realistic mood, into which my mind falls like a plummet through the neutral zone of its balanced doubt, never for one single beat of time can shake or disturb is my *certain knowledge*, derived from the "Complex Vision" of everything in me, that the whole astronomical universe, however illimitable, is only-one part and parcel of the Mystery of Life. Of this I am *as certain as I am certain that I am I.* The astronomical universe is *not* all there is; but whether this certainty implies the survival of any portion or any degree of my own consciousness after death is a very different matter; and of this, I confess, I am *not* certain.

I derive an extraordinary satisfaction, not untouched by my curious "sacred malice" — in this case directed against the dogmatism of the Church as well as against the dogmatism of Science — from praying definitely to the Earth-Spirit under her ancient names of Demeter and Cybele. Every morning — and this I still continue, in spite of having suppressed so many of my practises — I pray to Demeter on behalf of Llewelyn, and also on behalf of all down-and-out persons in London; and I pray to Cybele on behalf of the two Littletons, and also on behalf of all down-and-out persons in New York. In this second prayer I never fail to add, thinking of Homer in connection with the negroes in Harlem, "for the sake of the blameless Ethiopians."

Now there is a path along the edge of the small stream flowing near this house where there grows an enormous and very ancient willow. To this aged tree I have given the mystic name of the "Saviour-Tree," and here and now I recommend to all harassed and worried people who can find in their neighbourhood such a tree — and it needn't necessarily be a willow — to use it as I do this one. For the peculiarity of this tree is that you can transfer by a touch to its earth-bound trunk *all* your most neurotic troubles! These troubles of yours the tree accepts, and absorbs them into its own magnetic life; so that henceforth they lose their devilish power of tormenting you. Of course we all of us only manage to live at all by means of our power of forgetting. This is Nature's supreme gift. To "live according to Nature" is to possess the power to forget. No “Saviour-Tree” can ever take the place of the precious Fountain of Lethe in ourselves; into which we can acquire the power of flinging our neurotic troubles; but, as I am hinting, a tree of this kind can at least serve as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”

Another thing I have come to feel, as the result of my life-experiences in Weymouth, in Dorchester, in Sherborne, in Sussex, in America; and that is, that we must protect our imaginative individuality by every kind of cunning craftiness; and protect it too even while we are cultivating certain depersonalized primordial feelings that enable us to lose our superficial worries in what might be called the *poetic continuity* of the life of our race.

When, on that great flight of steps at Rome leading up from the Piazza del Spagna to the Pincian Hill, I suddenly got an ecstasy of mysterious exultation, in which I said to myself, “Let *me* pass and perish, as long as this magical stream of life, so noble in its heroic continuity, still goes on!” What I really did was to sink my own solitary personality in the innumerable personalities of all the men and women who for generations had gone up and down those historic steps. But this feeling has come over me, though in a less degree, in much humbler places. It has come over me in narrow lanes opening out suddenly upon the ancient peace of secluded hamlets; it has come over me as I have descended from the foothills of the Black Forest among old sloping-roofed German homesteads; it has come over me as I walked through the cobble-stone markets of Dieppe or gazed at the flying-buttresses of St. Ouen in Rouen; it has come over me as I followed the cliff-path from Brighton to Rottingdean, or the road from Cambridge to Shelford, or paused with Llewelyn by the time-worn “Stocks” under the century-polished elm-boles of Tintinhull, or followed some clover-scented cattle-track between Bognor and William Blake’s Felpham.

Looking back over these fifty years, since the days when I jeered so rudely at that "Spanish Maiden" in the chestnut-walk at Dorchester, I am inclined to think that the two great electric currents of my life, the currents that have gathered and gathered their momentum beneath all the changes and chances of circumstance have been first the gradual discovering and the gradual strengthening of my inmost identity, till it can flow like water and petrify like a stone; and second the magic trick of losing myself in the continuity of the human generations. By this continuity I mean the way in which from father to son our life-sensations are handed down from the past, creating a sort of "eternal recurrence" of the poetic mystery of the *little-great* ritual, the daily acts by which we all must live.

These immemorial recurrences I have learnt how to appropriate to myself, just as if my soul had the actual trick of passing into the lives of the uncounted generations.

My father was an inarticulate man. I am an only too voluble one. My father was a man of rock. I am a worshipper of the wind. But now when from this resting-place, this ledge, this slab of stone, in the wavering Indian trail of my migrations and reversions, I look back at the path behind me and the path before me it seems as if it had taken me half a century merely to learn with what weapons, and with what surrender of weapons, *I am to begin to live my life*.

The astronomical world is *not* all there is. We are in touch with other dimensions, other levels of life. And from among the powers that spring from these *other levels* there rises up one Power, all the more terrible because it refuses to practise cruelty, a Power that is neither Capitalist, nor Communist, nor Fascist, nor Democratic, nor Nazi, a Power *not of this world at all,* but capable of inspiring the individual soul with the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove.

And thus it comes to pass, even while we are still in life, that when our soul loses itself in the long continuity of kindred lives, it does not lose itself in any power less gentle, less magical, less universal than itself, or less the enemy of cruelty; for what it finds is what it brings, and what it sees is what it is; and though the First Cause may be both good and evil, a Power has risen out of it against which all the evil in it and all the unthinkable atrocities it brings to pass are fighting a losing battle.

THE END

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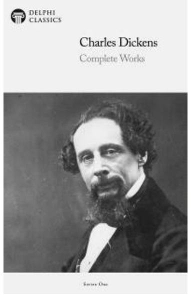

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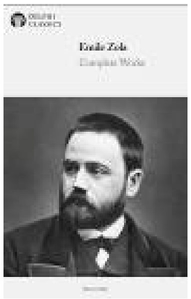

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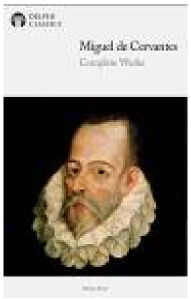

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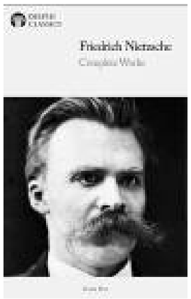
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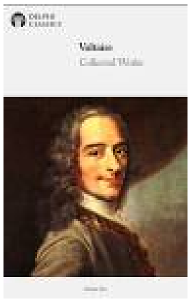

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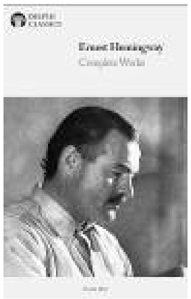

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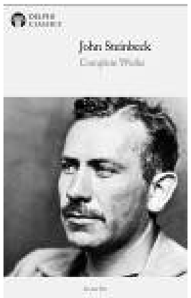

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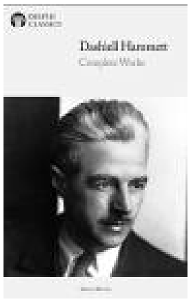

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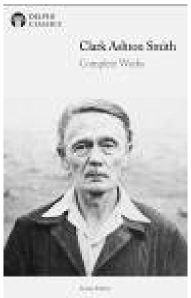

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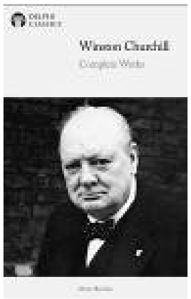

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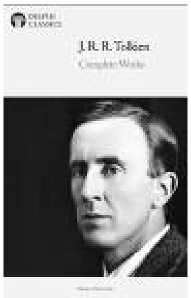

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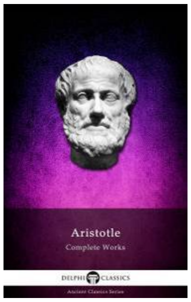
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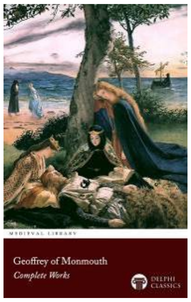
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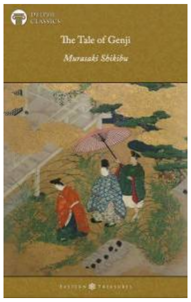
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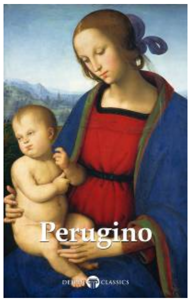

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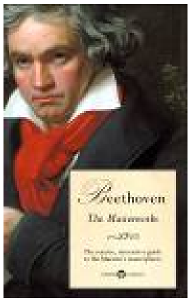

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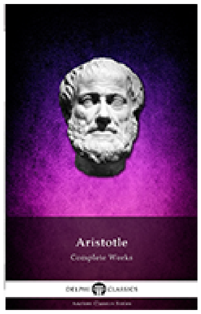
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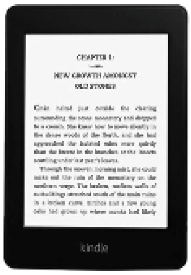

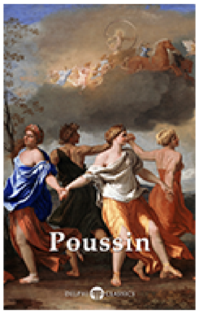

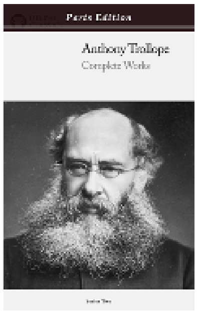
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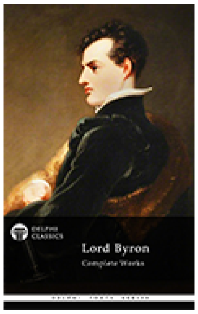
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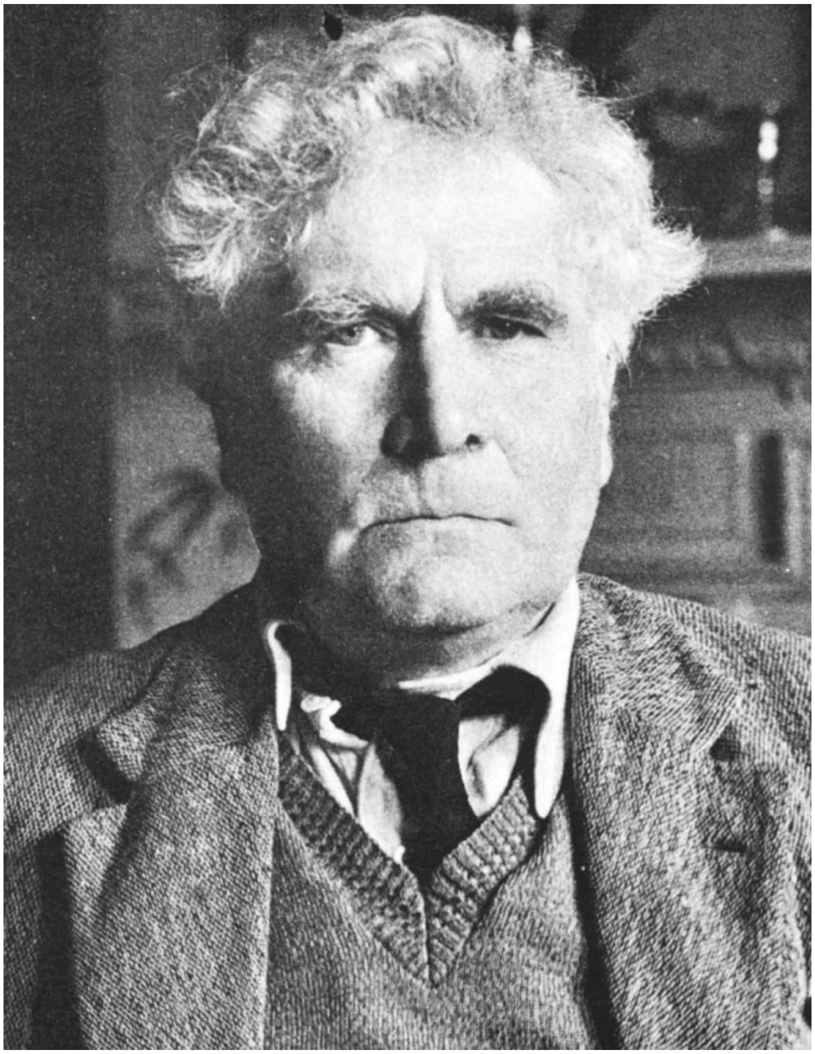

Powys in later years. During his final reclusive years in the slate-quarrying Welsh town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, he lived mainly on raw eggs and two bottles of milk a day. He worked on what he called a Freudian paraphrase of 'The Iliad'. In his late eighties, he grew gradually weaker, stopped writing and died quietly in the local hospital, aged 90.

Powys was cremated and his ashes were scattered in the sea at Chesil Beach in Dorset.